David Vigorito

Playing the Najdorf

A Practical Repertoire

QUALITY CHESS

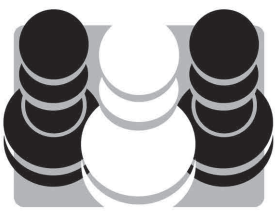
A Practical Repertoire

Playing the Najdorf

By

David Vigorito

For Zoe & Gavin and Clara & Jack



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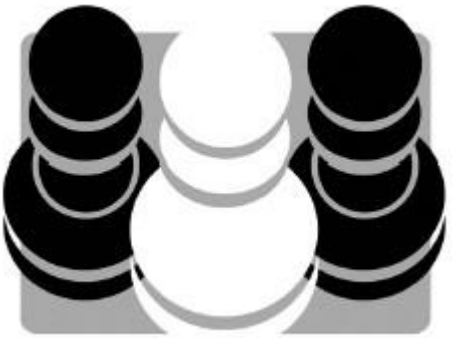

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Key to symbols used

² White is slightly better
³ Black is slightly better
± White is better
µ Black is better
+– White has a decisive advantage
–+ Black has a decisive advantage
= equality
© with compensation
„ with counterplay
ƒ with an initiative
÷ unclear
? a weak move
?? a blunder
! a good move
!! an excellent move
!? a move worth considering
?! a move of doubtful value
™ only move
mate

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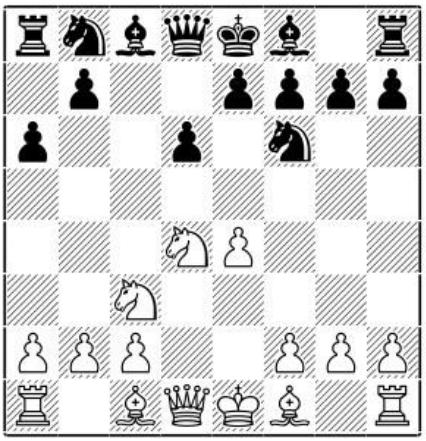
Introduction

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6



The purpose of this book is to *teach you how to play the Najdorf*. Of course a lot of theory will be discussed, but there will always come a point where we are 'out of book' – be it move 25 or move 10 – and then we have to understand what we are doing.

I have been playing the Najdorf for about twenty-five years and teaching it for about a decade. Despite the fact that it has a reputation for being fantastically complicated and theoretical, I believe that at its heart it is a strategic opening, and that players of different styles can enjoy playing it and improve their chess while doing so. I have found that positional players adopting the Najdorf improve their tactical ability and feel for the initiative. Conversely, tactical players can develop their strategic play because there are so many recurring themes that arise from the typical pawn structures that one must master in order to successfully play the Najdorf.

When I was younger, I played the Sicilian Dragon for a long time, and it is still an opening that I have a strong attachment to. One advantage of the Dragon is that it is relatively simple to understand strategically. However, the drawback is that the strategy is also easy for your opponents! Everyone knows Fischer's saying, "Open the h-file, sac, sac, mate." So, if you are trying to outplay a lower-rated opponent, you may well have to achieve your objective tactically, because the strategic plans are so easily understood. Another disadvantage is that there are certain main lines (notably the Yugoslav Attack with 9.0-0-0) where Black is basically just trying to prove a draw.

Then along came the Najdorf. More specifically, along came Danny King's *Winning with the Najdorf*. This book explained the Najdorf conceptually and helped me to realize that it was not all about the Poisoned Pawn Variation. Sometimes I will tell students, only half-jokingly, that I used to play the Dragon until it was time to 'grow up', at which point I switched to the Najdorf and never looked back. I will admit that my years of playing the Dragon gave me a useful head start, as I was already pretty well versed in the various Anti-Sicilians, especially as I was playing 2...d6. Although King's *Winning with the Najdorf* is from 1993, it is still a great read if you can find an old copy. So thanks Danny – and I hope that you find this book a worthy tribute to your 26-year-old book!

I am not going to present a bunch of 'typical examples' here in the introduction, as there will be plenty of instructive games throughout the book. I do, however, want to start with one famous game, as it does not fit so well with modern theory, yet it remains a classic example of a thematic pawn structure which every Najdorf player should know. Today many of the world's best players employ the Najdorf: Carlsen, Nakamura, Anand, Vachier-Lagrave, Ding Liren, Grischuk, Nepomniachtchi, Karjakin, Topalov, Navara, Shankland and Wojtaszek have all incorporated it into their repertoires to varying degrees. Kasparov also played the Najdorf throughout his career – and before him, there was Robert James Fischer.

Wolfgang Unzicker – Robert Fischer

Varna 1962

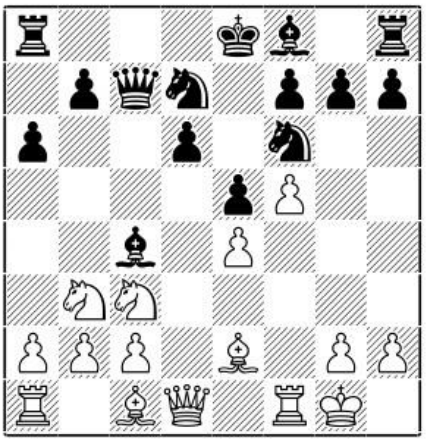
1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Be2 e5 7.Nb3

Our first three chapters will cover this classical line.

7...Be6?!

Fischer makes a move which was popular in the 1960s. However, in Chapter 1 we will see that 7...Be7! is more accurate.

8.0-0 Nbd7 9.f4 Qc7!? 10.f5 Bc4



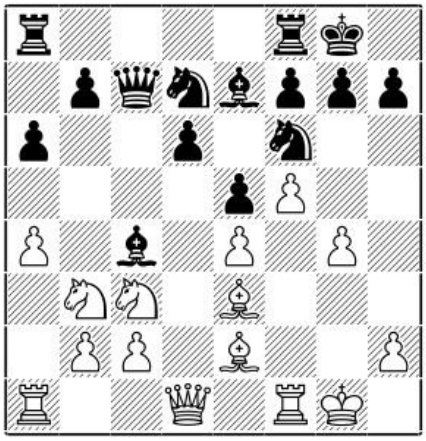
This is an important pawn structure. When I first saw this game, I was horrified that Black could allow his 'good' bishop to be traded off like this. I was sure that the 'bad' dark-squared bishop and weak d5-square would be the end of Black. However, there are counter-chances to be found on the queenside, especially the c-file, and White's e4-pawn is also a target – a consequence of White's early f4-f5.

11.a4

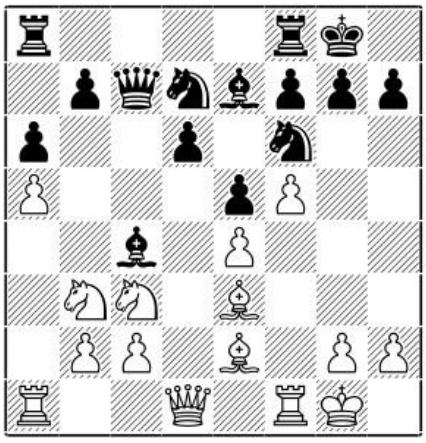
This restrains Black's ...b5 advance.

11...Be7 12.Be3 0-0 13.a5

After 13.g4!? White is not only looking to attack, but also to conquer the centre by driving away the f6-knight.



Black *must* play: 13...d5! (or at least the similar 13...h6 14.h4 d5!) 14.exd5 (14.Nxd5?! Nxd5 15.exd5 Nf6 wins back the pawn) 14...Bb4,, Fighting for the central squares, with excellent counterplay.

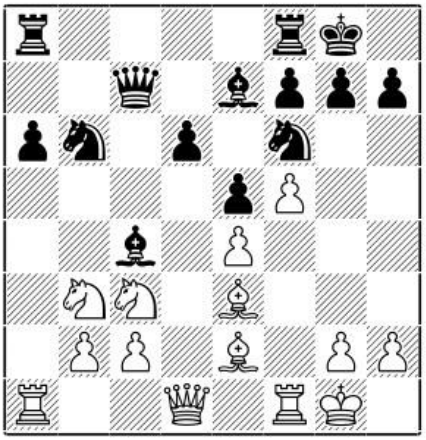


13...b5!

This also came as a surprise to me in my younger days. Black does not mind the en passant capture as he needs to open the queenside. A similar occurrence happens all of the time in the Modern Benoni.

14.axb6 Nxb6

The knight sizes up the c4- and d5-squares.



15.Bxb6

15.Kh1 is more flexible, after which 15...Rfc8 reaches a position which was popular in the early 1970s. Black has good counterplay, for instance: 16.Bxb6 Qxb6 17.Bxc4 Rxc4 18.Qe2 Rac8 19.Ra2 Bd8! 20.Rfa1 Qb7 21.Ra4 Rxa4 22.Rxa4 Rc6 (22...a5,, has also scored well) 23.Qd3 g6 With chances for both sides. A couple of classic games are Scholl – Ivkov, Amsterdam 1971, and Karpov – Stoica, Graz 1972.

15...Qxb6† 16.Kh1 Bb5!?

Black is hoping to get in ...Bc6.

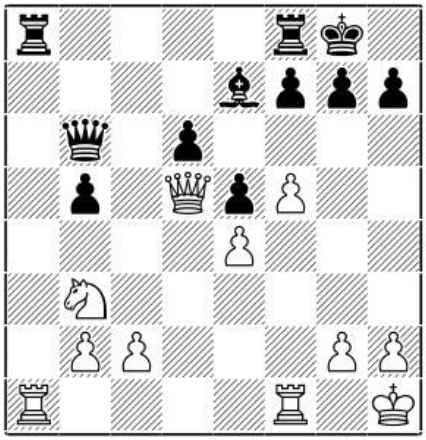
17.Bxb5

Black is doing well after 17.Nxb5 axb5 18.Qd3 b4³.

The safest choice for White was 17.Bd3! with equality.

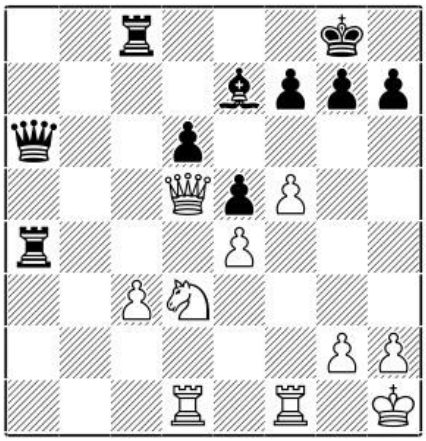
17...axb5 18.Nd5 Nxd5 19.Qxd5

Now we have a classic knight vs. bad bishop. Or do we? Again, the knight cannot get to the d5-square. With his next move Fischer grabs the initiative.



19...Ra4! 20.c3 Qa6 21.h3

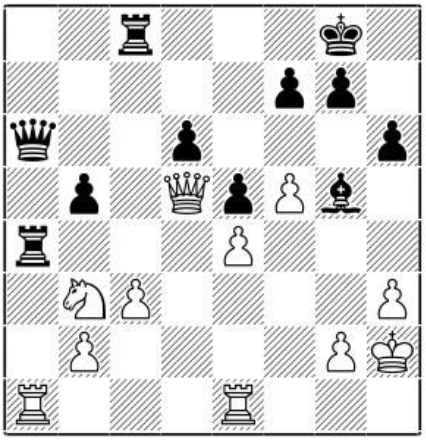
This move deviates from a game played earlier the same year, in which Fischer had the very same position against none other than Mikhail Tal. That game had continued: 21.Rad1 Rc8 22.Nc1 b4 23.Nd3 bxc3 24.bxc3



In Tal – Fischer, Curacao 1962, Black could have fought for the advantage with 24...Rxc3! because 25.Nxe5? dxe5 26.Qxe5 (26.Qd8† Bf8–+) does not work after 26...Bb4! and if 27.Qxc3 Qxf1†! Black wins.

21...Rc8 22.Rfe1 h6 23.Kh2 Bg5

Maybe Black's bishop is not so bad after all! White's ambitious f4-f5 has a downside, as his kingside is weakened. When you gain space like this, you have to be careful if the enemy pieces get behind the pawn shield to the soft underbelly of your position. This is what over-extension looks like.



24.g3?

White is trying to prepare h3-h4, in the hope of covering some dark squares and hiding his king on h3. He simply does not have time for it though. He needed to play 24.Qd3, when both 24...Qa7³ and 24...h5³ (intending ...h4) maintain some pressure for Black.

24...Qa7!µ

Threatening a nasty check on f2.

25.Kg2 Ra2! 26.Kf1?

This loses immediately, but 26.Qd3 Rxb2† 27.Re2 Rxe2† 28.Qxe2 Qc7µ would be ultimately hopeless as well.

26...Rxc3!

0–1

Despite the age of this game, it remains as instructive as ever – not just for understanding the Najdorf, but also as a lesson in strategic play.

Overall Approach and Structure of the Book

I recommended the specific lines in this book because I have studied, played and taught them all for many years. In general, we will play 6...e5 when we can, to get a 'true' Najdorf structure. The main exceptions are 6.Bc4 and 6.Bg5, as these moves immediately influence the critical d5-square, rendering a quick ...e5 virtually unplayable. In these cases, we will play 6...e6 and gain some exposure to a different kind of structure.

I have used both the 'complete games' and 'variation tree' formats in my previous books, and I believe there are pros and cons to both. In this book I wanted to teach the Najdorf the way I learned it, and that was by going over a lot of games. In some lines, however, it is not so easy to find a nice model game. I also wanted to avoid analysing long endgames in what is an opening/middlegame book. Therefore I finally decided on a mixed structure involving a combination of illustrative games and variation trees, hopefully offering the best of both worlds.

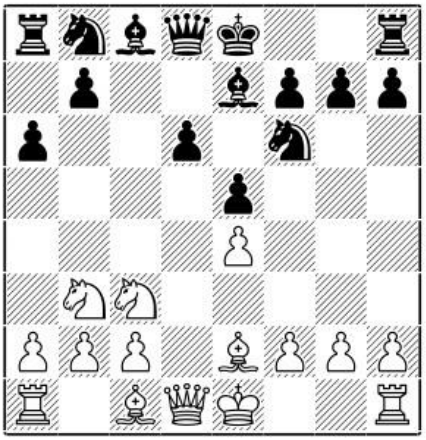
While I have included a lot of modern games, I also chose many older games which made a strong impression on me. In many cases, they are simply the best games. They are older by necessity, as they illustrated Black's best play against certain set-ups, thus forcing White players to move on to different schemes. In any case, these games taught me the Najdorf and I have, in turn, used them to teach others after me.

Repertoire Choices

The book is split into five subsections, each comprising a certain number of chapters. Here is a short summary of each of them, with an outline of my recommended solutions for Black.

6.Be2

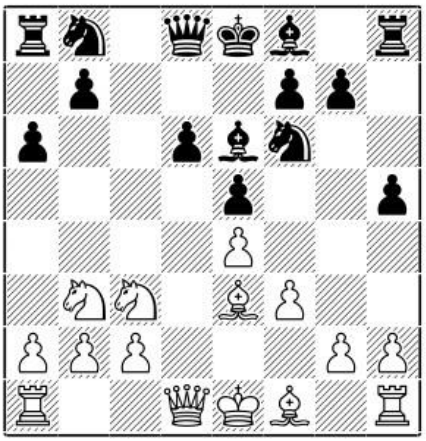
The choice against this move is easy enough, as 6...e5 is well known to be a good move and it fits with our theme of playing ...e5 whenever possible. After 7.Nb3 Be7 we get a perfect example of the Classical Najdorf structure:



There will be a lot of discussion of this structure and its various permutations in the first three chapters.

6.Be3

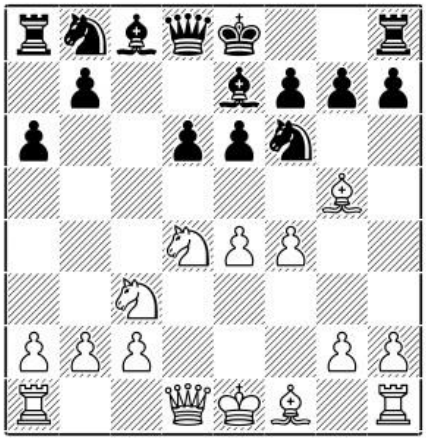
Here too, I recommend 6...e5, and after 7.Nb3 (the more positional 7.Nf3 is Chapter 5) 7...Be6 8.f3 we will go for the modern 8...h5:



I have tried a *lot* of different lines against the English Attack. This system is both modern and fashionable, but those are not the real reasons that I chose it.

6.Bg5

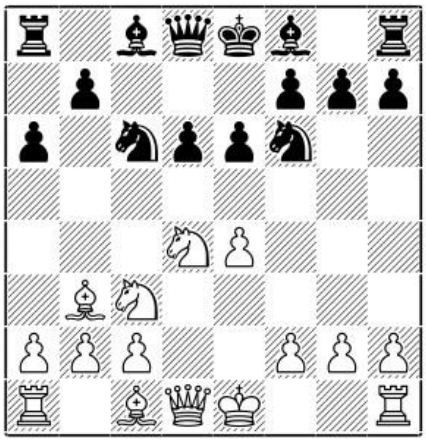
As mentioned earlier, we will meet this move with 6...e6. Then after the sharpest option of 7.f4, I will admit that the Poisoned Pawn with 7...Qb6 may ultimately be 'best', but it is not the most practical choice for most players. Therefore I am sticking to my roots and going for the classical 7...Be7.



This system has had its ups and downs, but it is looking quite sound right now.

6.Bc4

This is the Sozin Variation and my choice against it may seem controversial to some. After 6...e6 7.Bb3 I am proposing 7...Nc6!?:

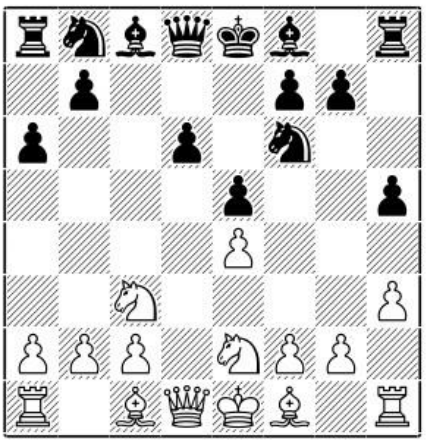


Many will contend that this transposes to the Classical Sicilian, but allow me to point out that even the 'Najdorf' moves 7...b5 and 7...Nbd7 are classified as a Sozin (B86-89) under the ECO classification. One might even claim that 7...Nc6 is 'closer' to the Najdorf's B90-99 because its ECO code is B88-89, compared to B86-87 for the traditional moves which are covered in most books. More importantly though, I believe it is simply a good move, and I hope you will agree after checking out Chapters 11-13.

David Vigorito
Andover, Massachusetts
November 2019

Other Lines

Many years ago, 6.h3 was just a sideline whose main pedigree was that Fischer occasionally used it as a surprise weapon. Nowadays, it is one of White's most popular choices! This discouraged me at first: Black already has enough on his plate dealing with the theory of 6.Be3, 6.Bg5 and so on, but now I have to worry about 6.h3 too? All right, such is life – and it is not the end of the world. Black has various ways to respond, but we will stick with the thematic 6...e5 7.Nde2 (7.Nb3 Be6 is the other possible direction) before going with a modern interpretation of the Najdorf: 7...h5!?

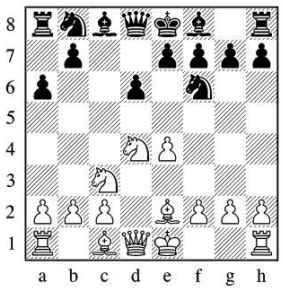


See Chapters 14-15 for more details about this.

Against the other 'quiet' moves such as 6.g3, 6.f4, and 6.a4, we will also go for 6...e5. Other moves, headlined by the recent 'nothing' moves 6.Nb3 and 6.a3, and the crazy-looking 6.h4!? are covered in Chapter 18. Finally, although Anti-Sicilian lines are outside the main topic of the book, I will offer some ideas and advice about dealing with them in an Appendix.

I have a few people to thank: Jacob Aagaard and John Shaw, for welcoming back the prodigal son; Andrew Greet, for the probably torturous work of editing this beast; Nikolaos Ntirlis for his analysis and for keeping me in touch with various modern ideas; Mika, Nithin, and Arshaq – the Najdorf students who I also learned from myself; and finally Zoe and Gavin and especially Heather, simply for always being there.

Chapter 1



6.♗e2

Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.♗e2 e5!

A) 7.Nf3!? 13

B) 7.Nb3 Be7! 16

B1) 8.Bg5 Be6 9.Bxf6 Bxf6 10.Qd3 Be7 16

B11) 11.0-0-0 17

B12) 11.Nd5 *Game 1* 20

B2) 8.Be3 Be6! 25

B21) 9.Nd5 26

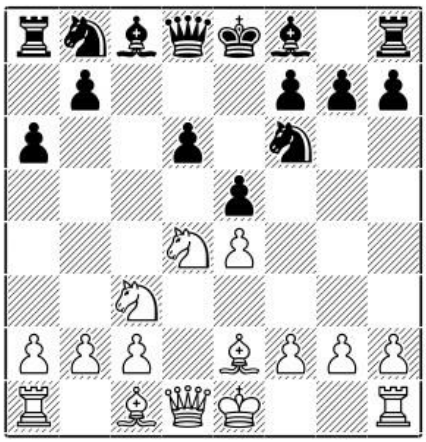
B22) 9.f4!? *Game 2* 30

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Be2

This positional move, which was favoured by Karpov, is a good starting point when getting to know the Najdorf.

6...e5!

I have always favoured this traditional Najdorf move. In *Grandmaster Repertoire 6 – The Sicilian Defence,* Ftacnik preferred 6...e6 with a transposition to the Scheveningen. With the text move Black fixes the pawn structure to some degree, but his position is still flexible enough and various transformations can occur. Developing an understanding of these structures will allow Black to face other lines in the Najdorf with greater confidence.



First we will look at **A)** 7.Nf3!?, an older move that became trendy after being revived by Carlsen in 2017, before focusing on the main line of **B)** 7.Nb3.

We should also check the following rash advance:

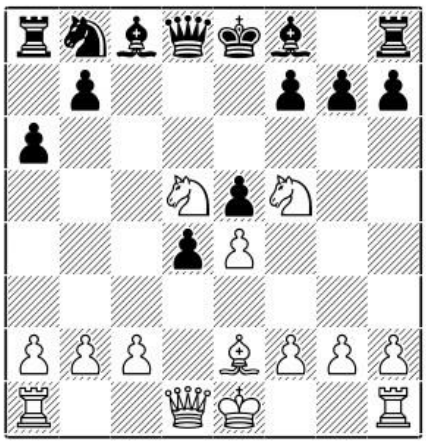
7.Nf5

This move is playable but Black should be able to claim at least equality with correct play.

7...d5! 8.Bg5 d4 9.Bxf6 Qxf6 10.Nd5 Qd8

This has long been considered to be

pleasant for Black, as he has the bishop pair and can deal with the strong knight on d5 by either playing around it or exchanging it off. There are, however, a couple of tricks to be aware of, as I found out myself.



11.c4

11.Bf3 sets a trap that I was kind enough to fall into: 11...g6? 12.Nxd4!± was rather embarrassing in Velasquez Martinez – Vigorito, Cambridge 2016, although I somehow managed to draw. Instead, 11...Nc6!³ first is correct, planning ...g6. I had some illusion that 12.Qd2 with the idea of 12...g6 13.Nh6 would be annoying, but Black can play 12...h5! instead, intending ...g6 and ...Bh6 with an excellent position.

11.Bc4 is also harmless, as long as Black reacts sensibly with: 11...Nc6! (once again Black must avoid 11...g6? 12.Nxd4! as in Dubov – Grischuk, Moscow [blitz] 2014) 12.a3 g6 13.Ng3 Bg7 14.0-0 0-0³ Meszaros – Palkovi, Zalakaros 1998.

11...g6!

11...Nc6 12.0-0 g6 is also fine but the text move sets a small trap.

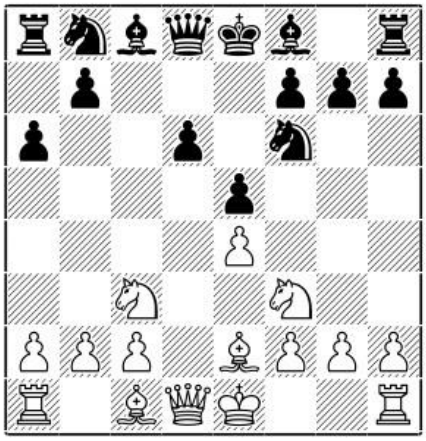
12.Ng3

12.Nxd4? does not work here, since after 12...exd4 13.Qxd4 Black has 13...Bb4†! 14.Kf1 0-0!Nµ when White does not have much compensation for the piece.

12...Bg7

Black has a comfortable game.

A) 7.Nf3!?



This retreat has generally been considered inferior, but its recent adoption by Carlsen (if only in rapid and blitz) means it has to be taken seriously. The World Champion created enough difficulties in a couple of games against Vachier-Lagrave that the Frenchman decided to use this line in the decisive game of the 2017 Sinquefield Cup against Nepomniachtchi, and went on to earn a victory which won him the tournament.

Theory has generally painted a rosy picture of this line for Black, but can having the knight on f3 instead of b3 really be so wrong for White? The knight blocks the f-pawn but, as we shall see later, there are a great many lines after 7.Nb3 where White has no interest in pushing this pawn. I still think that Black can equalize pretty easily, but Carlsen realized that White's set-up is not completely without venom.

7...Be7

I believe that this natural move is best.

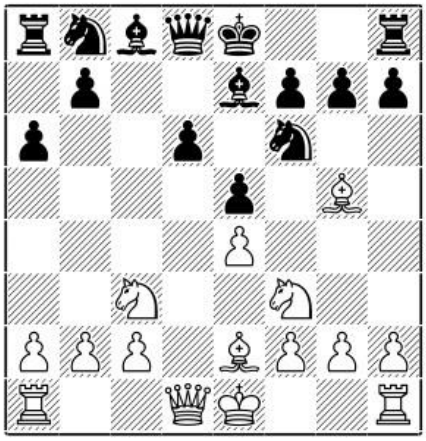
7...h6 has often been recommended, but I have always harboured some scepticism concerning its value. The idea does make some sense, as in this structure White often tries to fight for the d5-square with Bc4 and/or Bg5 (to take a knight on f6). Here White has already played Be2, making the Bc4 plan less attractive, so Black invests a tempo to prevent Bg5. We will discuss a similar train of thought in Chapter 4 after 6.Be3 e5 7.Nf3. However, 7...h6 has some drawbacks: it costs a tempo, and the weakening of g6 means that ideas with Nh4 carry more weight. Carlsen replied with: 8.Nd2!? Intending to manoeuvre the knight to the e3-square, where it clamps down on d5. After 8...b5 Carlsen kept the knight on track with

9.Nf1, utilizing the fact that White has not castled, and obtained some advantage in Carlsen – Vachier-Lagrave, Paris (blitz) 2017. Black has also tried 8...Be7 and 8...Be6, but I still prefer not to spend a tempo on ...h6 in this line.

8.Bg5

8.0-0 is not so ambitious. After 8...0-0 White should try to get back to the main line with 9.Bg5 Be6 10.Bxf6 Bxf6. Instead, 9.a4?! Nc6 10.Re1 Nb4 11.h3 Be6 12.Bf1 Rc8 13.a5 d5³ occurred in Zapata – De Firmian, Moscow 1989, an oft-quoted game that made 7.Nf3 look like a poor choice.

The text move is critical, as White immediately fights for control of d5.

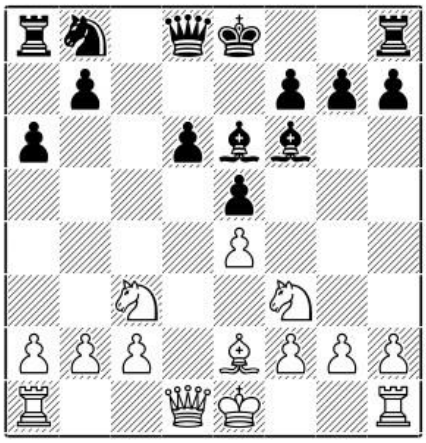


8...Be6!

The natural 8...Nbd7 keeps a knight's grip on the d5-square, but after 9.a4! a couple of high-level games have shown that Black's position is not so easy to handle: 9...0-0 (9...b6 10.Nd2 h6 was Carlsen – Vachier-Lagrave, Paris [rapid] 2017, when White took on f6, but I would prefer 11.Bh4 Bb7 12.Nc4² with an edge) 10.Nd2 Nc5? (10...h6 is a better try) 11.Bxf6! Bxf6 12.Nc4 Be7 13.a5! Rb8 14.Nb6 Nd7 15.Ncd5 Nxb6 16.Nxb6 Be6 17.Bc4 Qc7 18.Qd3 Bd8 19.c3 Qc6 20.Bd5 Qe8 21.Bxe6 Qxe6 22.Nd5 with a Najdorf 'knightmare' for Black in Vachier-Lagrave – Nepomniachtchi, Saint Louis 2017.

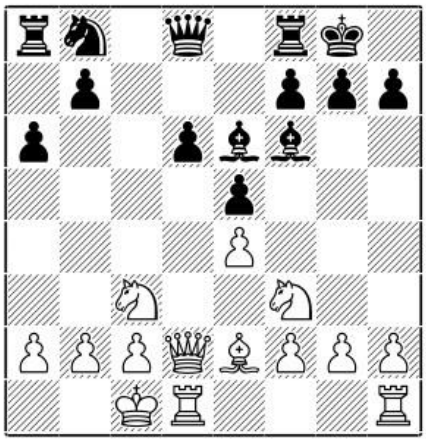
After the text move Black is ready to play ...Nbd7 with total harmony, so White should disrupt this plan. This is similar to the 7.Nb3 Be7 8.Bg5 line, but here the white knight is on f3 instead of b3. If the knight goes to d2, the lines could easily transpose.

9.Bxf6 Bxf6



10.0-0

10.Qd2 0-0 11.0-0-0!? (11.0-0 transposes to 11.Qd2 in the notes to the main line below) is a quirky idea. A good reply is:

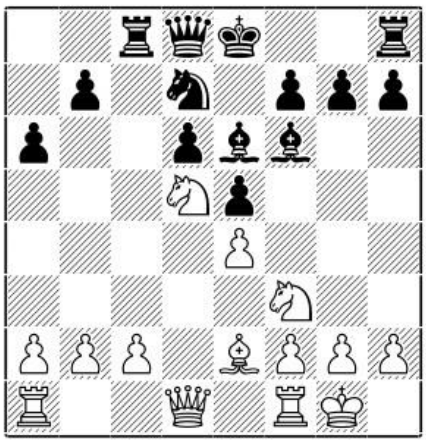


11...Qb6! Hitting f2. (11...Nc6 12.Kb1 Qb6 13.Qe3 was unclear in Ni Hua – Li Shilong, Xinghua 2010) Now if 12.Qe3 Qxe3† 13.fxe3 Be7 Black has an improved version of the above game as his knight has not committed itself to the suboptimal c6-square, so 14.Nd5 can conveniently be met by 14...Bxd5 15.exd5 f5³ (or 15...Nd7) with a one-sided endgame.

A harmless alternative is:
10.Nd5 Nd7 11.0-0
11.Bc4 0-0 12.0-0 transposes to our main line.

White's move order gives Black a useful extra option of preventing Bc4 as follows:
11...Rc8!

Now it is not so easy to find a good plan for White. A good example continued:

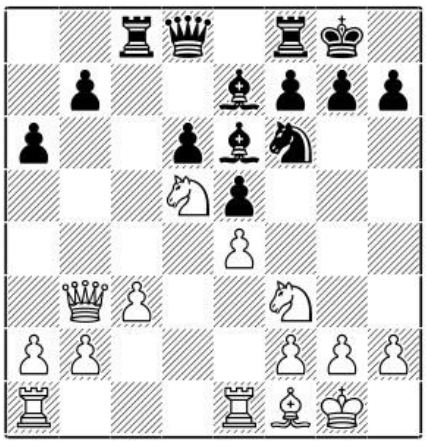


12.Re1

After 12.Nd2?! Bxd5 13.exd5 0-0 Black has good chances with the unbalanced pawn structure. 14.c3 Bg5 15.Ne4 occurred in Haring – Bjerre, Rymanow-Zdroj 2017, when 15...Be7N³ followed by ...f5 would have favoured Black.

12...0-0 13.c3 Be7 14.Bf1 Nf6 15.Qb3?!

White should have preferred 15.Nxe7† or 15.Nxf6† with equality in either case.



15...Nxd5 16.exd5 Bg4 17.Nd2

17.Qxb7?! is a risky pawn grab, and 17...Bxf3 18.gxf3 a5!? followed by ...Bg5-f4 looks excellent for Black.

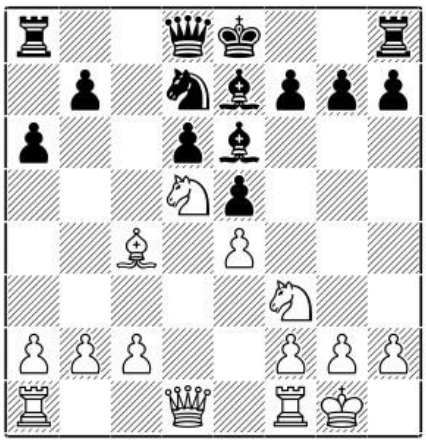
17...Rb8

Black stood well in Tari – Ding Liren, Antalya 2017, with the bishop pair and a mobile kingside pawn majority.

10...0-0

Black has also tried 10...Be7 to reinforce the d6-pawn. This looks like a viable alternative and we will see the same idea in variation B1.

After 11.Nd5 Nd7 12.Bc4 I suggest the following rare move:



12...b5! (Grischuk and Areshchenko preferred 12...Rc8 13.Qe2 Nb6 14.Nxb6 Qxb6 15.Bb3 0-0 16.Rfd1 which is solid enough for Black, but the position is still easier for White and both of these strong grandmasters went on to lose) 13.Bb3 0-0 14.Re1 Nc5 Black had a good position and subsequently scored a nice upset in Kovalenko – Salomon, Internet (rapid) 2018.

11.Nd5

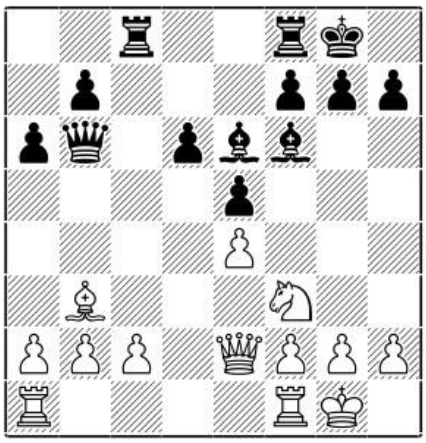
White can also delay this move with: 11.Qd2 Qc7 12.Rfd1 (12.Nd5 Bxd5 13.Qxd5 Nd7 14.c3 Be7 was fine for Black in Zhao Jun – Gao Rui, China 2017) 12...Be7 13.Nd5 Bxd5 14.Qxd5 Nd7 15.Nd2 b5 16.c4 b4 Black had good prospects on the dark squares in J. van Foreest – Fedoseev, Hoogeveen (6) 2018.

11...Nd7 12.Bc4 Rc8 13.Qe2 Nb6

Black fights for the d5-square.

14.Nxb6 Qxb6 15.Bb3

Neither side really wants to initiate the exchange of bishops, as doing so would help the opponent to control the critical d5-square.



15...Qc6!

This looks best. Black continues fighting for the d5-square while also casting a glance at the c2-pawn.

I played the natural 15...Rc5 16.Rad1 Rfc8 but after 17.Rd2 Be7 18.Rfd1 White's position was slightly more pleasant in V. Shen – Vigorito, Parsippany 2018.

White also kept a tiny edge after 15...a5 16.Rfd1 a4 17.Bxe6 fxe6 18.Rab1 Be7 19.c4 in Fedorchuk – Saric, Bastia 2018.

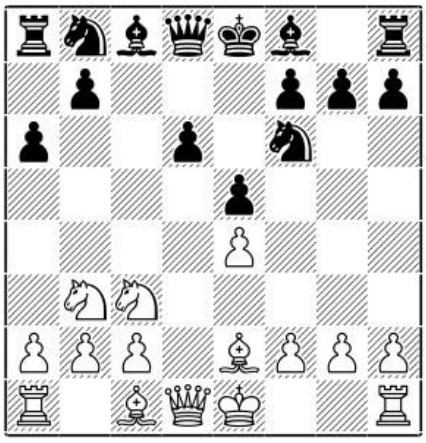
16.c3

16.Rfd1 Rfd8 is similar.

16...Rfd8 17.Rfd1 Bxb3 18.axb3 d5=

Black was fine in Kurmann – Georgiadis, Switzerland 2017.

B) 7.Nb3



This position has occurred in thousands of games. Even though the ensuing play is generally not overly tactical, White has many different plans available, so there is a lot to cover. Understanding the move orders and different plans with the resulting pawn structures is more important than memorization. I am always quite happy to play these lines with Black because strategic mastery will be the decisive factor – it is unlikely that a single misstep will cost either side the game.

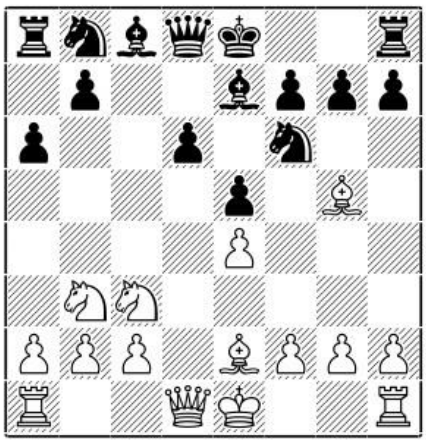
7...Be7!

In the Introduction, when commenting on the Unzicker – Fischer game, I mentioned that 7...Be6?! is inaccurate. One way for White to take advantage of this move is with the immediate 8.f4!. Then 8...exf4 9.Bxf4 would leave White a tempo up on lines where he plays Be3 and f2-f4, and 8...Qc7 9.g4! has also scored excellently for White.

After the text move White usually continues with the natural 8.0-0, which will be the subject of the next two chapters.

Before then, we will consider some lines where White delays making a decision on where to put his king. One such option is **B1)** 8.Bg5, immediately fighting for the d5-square. Then we will look at the sneaky **B2)** 8.Be3.

B1) 8.Bg5



In playing this move it looks as though White is mixing up his systems, but it had a burst of popularity after Kramnik reintroduced it into practice during his brief stint as a 1.e4 player.

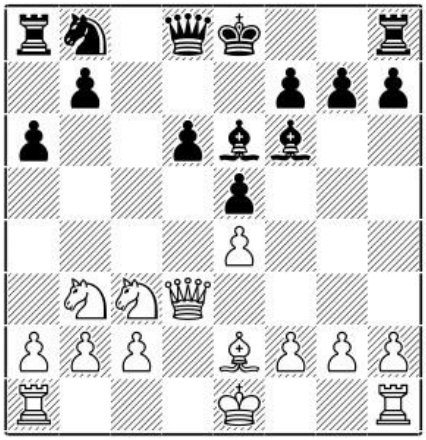
White may castle on either side in this line. Strangely enough, it can also transpose to the 7.Nf3 line that we looked at earlier, in the event that White manoeuvres his knight via d2.

8...Be6

This is the main line and the move I am recommending, although 8...Nc6!? is a reasonable alternative which was adopted by Carlsen.

9.Bxf6 Bxf6 10.Qd3

This is the big idea. White may castle long or simply bring his rook to d1 to pressure the d6-pawn.



10...Be7

Black has also tried the natural 10...0-0, while 10...Bg5 has the virtue of preventing White from castling queenside. 10...Nc6 has been the most popular move of all.

Although the above options are all fine, the text move is both flexible and combative. Black protects the d6-pawn to prepare ...Nd7. From there, the knight can go to f6 or b6 to fight for the important d5-square. This idea was not very popular at first but, having been adopted by the likes of Giri, MVL and Wojtaszek, it clearly has a serious pedigree.

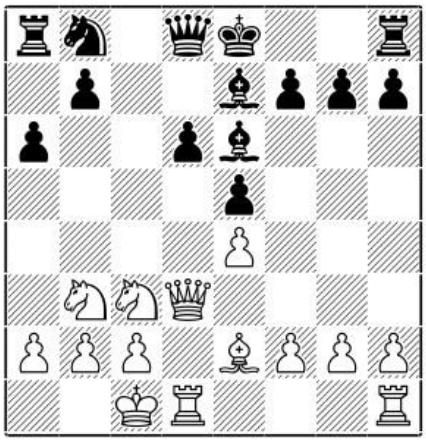
White has to make a decision about where his king will end up. We will analyse **B11)** 11.0-0-0 followed by **B12)** 11.Nd5. The latter variation may transpose to the former after a subsequent 0-0-0, but for our purposes we take variation B2 as the move order which implies White will castle kingside.

11.Rd1 Nd7 12.Nd5 is just another way of reaching variation B12 below.

White rarely castles on the kingside immediately, even though 11.0-0 with the idea of bringing the f-rook to d1 seems quite reasonable – especially as we will see that White sometimes moves his queen's rook from d1 back to a1. However, the drawback is that Black is quick to control the d5-square after 11...Nd7 12.Rfd1 Rc8, when Black intends ...Nf6 next, and if 13.Nd5N 13...Bg5! Black has an excellent position.

B11) 11.0-0-0

This move is ambitious but rather risky.



11...Nd7 12.Nd5

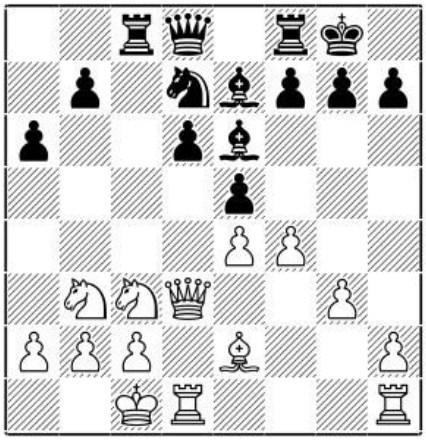
This position can also be reached via the move order 11.Nd5 Nd7 12.0-0-0.

12.g3!?

This method of preparing f4-f5 has been favoured by Haba.

12...0-0 13.f4 Rc8!

White was better after 13...Nb6 14.f5 Bxb3 15.axb3 in Haba – Dobes, Marianske Lazne 2016.



14.f5 Bc4 15.Qf3 Bxe2!

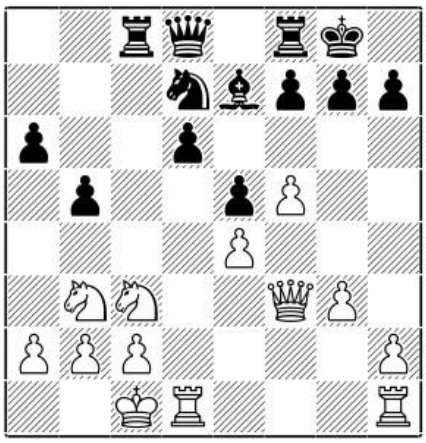
After 15...b5 16.Bxc4 Rxc4 17.Kb1 Nb6 18.Nd2 Rc8 19.Nd5² White kept control in Haba – Ott, Germany 2016.

16.Nxe2

16.Qxe2 Rxc3! 17.bxc3 Qc7© gives Black a lot of play for the exchange.

16...b5 17.Nc3

This occurred in Binas – Weber, corr. 2017. Here I suggest:



17...a5!N 18.Kb1

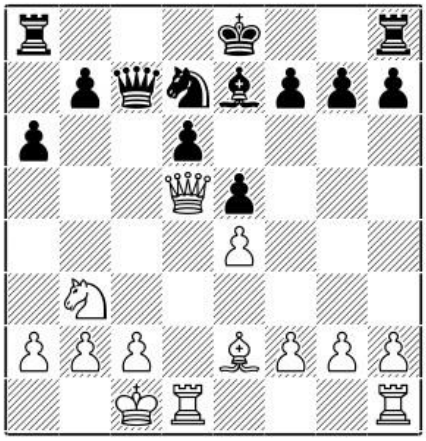
Or 18.Nxb5 a4 19.Nd2 Qa5 with promising play for the pawn.

18...a4 19.Nc1 a3

Black has sufficient counterplay.

12...Bxd5 13.Qxd5 Qc7

Black has a full share of the chances; in fact, his position looks slightly easier to handle.



14.Kb1

This typical move is the most flexible.

14.Bc4?! looks tempting but the bishop is not stable. After 14...0-0 15.Qd3 Rac8 (or 15...Rfc8 16.Bd5 Nf6) 16.Bd5 a5 Black was doing well in Amrutha – Gu Xiaobing, Teheran 2007. White has no play on the kingside while Black's queenside initiative flows easily.

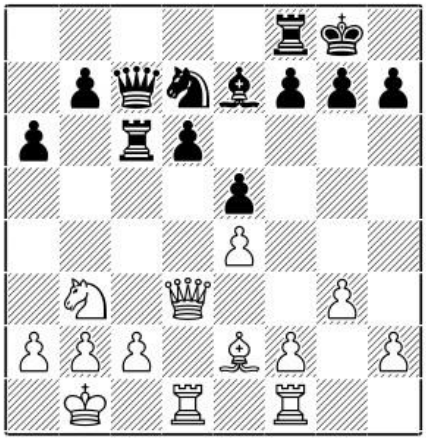
14.Qc4 can be met by 14...Qb6 when a good example continued: 15.Bg4?! (15.Rhf1 would be safer) 15...Nf6 16.f3 Nxg4 17.fxg4 0-0 18.Rhf1 Rac8 19.Qd5 a5 20.a3 a4 21.Na1 Rc5µ Harikrishna – Papaioannou, Greece 2014.

14...0-0 15.h4

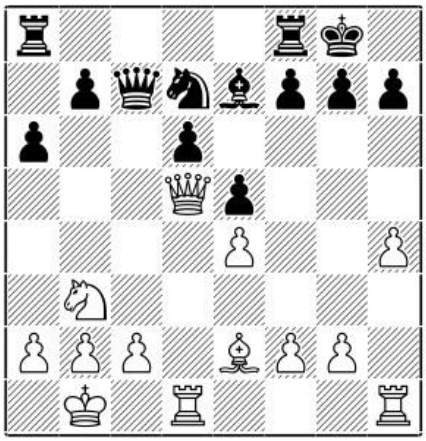
This is the most common continuation but Black has more than one good response. The alternatives are not very threatening either:

15.Nd2 b5 16.Nf1 Nb6 17.Qd3 was Perez Olarte – Hevia Alejano, Bogota 2012. Here I like: 17...Rfd8N 18.Ne3 b4 With good prospects on the queenside.

Another game continued: 15.Qc4 Qb6 16.Rhf1 Rac8 17.Qd3 Rc6 18.g3 Qc7



19.f4 Rd8 20.c3 b5 21.Bg4 Nf6 (21...Nc5 and 21...Nb6 are valid alternatives) 22.Bf3 This was Bernadskiy – Ter Sahakyan, Taleigao 2018, and now 22...Rb8!?N gives Black good counterplay.



15...b5

Another logical continuation is 15...Nf6 16.Qd3 Qc6 17.Nd2 b5 18.g4 Nd7 19.g5 Nc5 20.Qe3 Ne6 21.Rdg1 Rac8 22.Bd3 as played in Needleman – Delgado Ramirez, Sao Paulo 2004, and here I like 22...Bd8!N to reroute the bishop.

16.Qd3

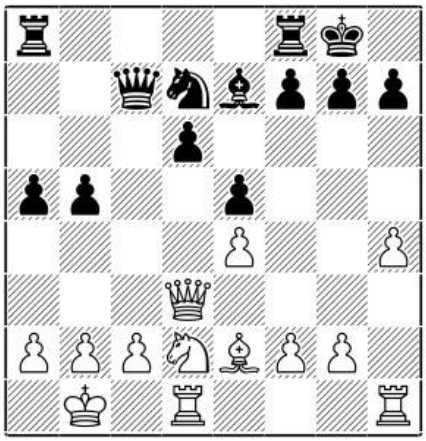
White intends to manoeuvre with Nd2-f1-e3.

16...a5!

White achieved his goal after 16...Nb6 17.Nd2 b4?! 18.Nf1 a5 19.Ne3² in Zajic – A. Kovacevic, Palic 2014.

17.Nd2

17.Qxb5 would be met by 17...Rfc8 followed by ...Rab8, with good attacking chances. After the text move, I propose an improvement:



17...Rab8!N

After 17...a4 18.a3! the positional threat of c2-c3 prompted the rather speculative 18...b4 in Zajic – Szuhanek, Palic 2014. Black should also avoid playing ...b4 too quickly, as this would give White access to the c4-square. The text move avoids these problems and enables Black to play more flexibly.

18.Nf1 a4

Black intends ...b4-b3 with good prospects on the queenside; and note that White cannot play 19.Ne3? yet because of 19...Nc5.

B12) 11.Nd5

This move will be analysed under our first illustrative game.

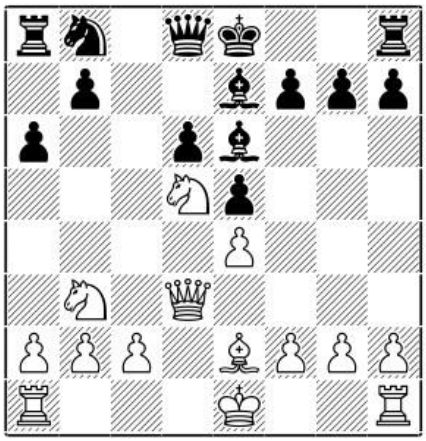
GAME 1

Vladimir Onischuk – Maxime Vachier-Lagrave

Bastia (2.2–rapid) 2016

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Be2 e5 7.Nb3 Be7 8.Bg5 Be6 9.Bxf6 Bxf6 10.Qd3 Be7 11.Nd5

The play in this line is similar to variation A with 7.Nf3. Here the knight is on b3 instead of f3, which brings pros and cons for both sides. White is deprived of the option of Bc4-b3, but perhaps the bishop will find a role on the kingside via g4 or f3, while the knight has some other manoeuvring options via b3, as we will see.



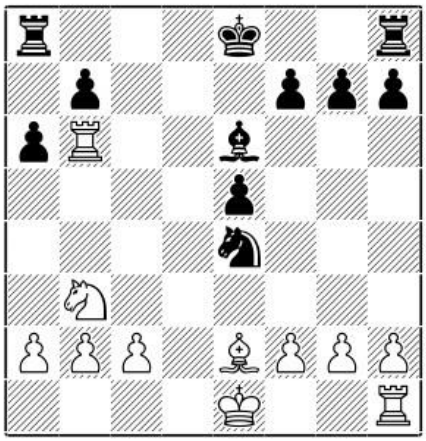
11...Nd7

Black should not be in a hurry to take the knight, as 11...Bxd5?! 12.Qxd5 Qc7 allows 13.Bc4 0-0 14.c3 Nd7 15.Qd3² when White was better in Navara – Gallagher, Pula 2003.

12.Rd1

White can, of course, play 12.0-0-0 which leads back to variation B11 above.

Exchanging with 12.Nxe7 Qxe7 13.Rd1 leads nowhere special after 13...Nf6 14.Qxd6 (or 14.0-0 Rd8=) 14...Qxd6 15.Rxd6 Nxe4 16.Rb6 when Black has a choice:

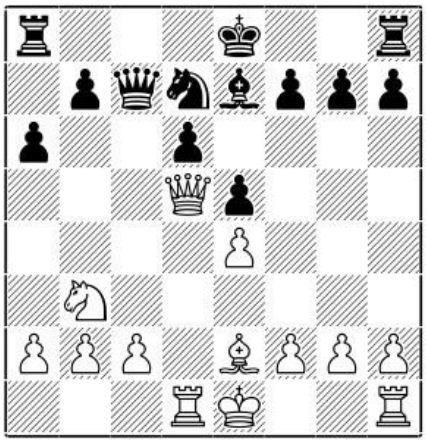


16...0-0-0!? 17.Na5 Rd7 18.Nxb7 Rxb7 19.Bxa6 Nc5 was playable but rather messy in Ganguly – Gopal, New Delhi 2006. Instead, 16...Bxb3 17.Rxb3 Nd6= is a simpler solution.

After the text move White really is threatening to take on e7 and then d6, so it is time to trade.

12...Bxd5 13.Qxd5 Qc7

Recently Giri went for 13...b5!? 14.Bg4 Nf6, not fearing 15.Qc6† Kf8 16.Bh3 g6 17.0-0 Kg7 when Black is fine. After the further 18.Rfe1 Ra7! 19.Qc3 Qb6 20.Qe3 Qxe3 21.Rxe3 a5 22.a3 Rb8 Black had taken over the initiative in Nisipeanu – Giri, Dortmund 2018.



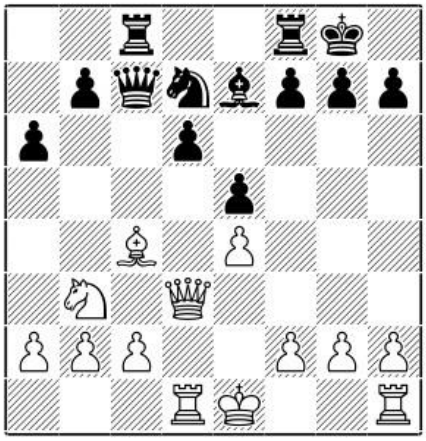
We have reached an interesting middlegame with an unbalanced pawn structure and opposite-coloured bishops. At first it looks somewhat more promising for White because of the backward d6-pawn and the weak d5-square. However, the d-pawn is practically impossible to attack, and I think Black's half-open c-file is more useful than White's d-file.

14.c3

White immediately secures the c-pawn, figuring this will be necessary sooner or later.

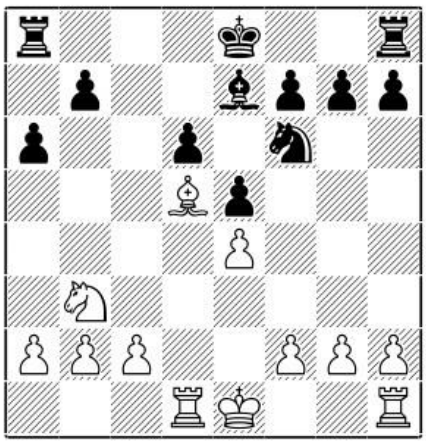
14.Nd2 0-0 15.0-0 b5 16.c3 is also possible, with a transposition to the 16.Nd2 line given in the notes to Black's 14th move below; this was the actual move order of the Carlsen – Giri game quoted there.

At first 14.Bc4 0-0 15.Qd3?! (15.Nd2N is better although 15...b5 16.Bb3 Nc5 is still fine for Black) looks nice for White, but after 15...Rac8! he is knocked off balance. For example:

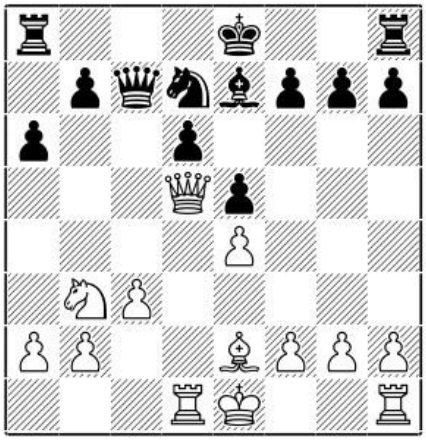


16.Bd5 (16.Nd2 b5 17.Bb3 Nc5 18.Qe3 Nxb3 19.cxb3 Qa5! 20.a3 Rc2µ) 16...Qxc2!N (16...b5?! enabled White to consolidate with 17.c3 in Sengupta – Grover, New Delhi 2007) 17.Bxb7 Qxd3 18.Rxd3 Rc7 19.Bd5 (19.Bxa6? Ra8µ) 19...Rc2 (19...Nf6 looks good too) 20.Rd2 Rfc8 Black enjoys some initiative in the endgame.

White may also head for simplification with: 14.Qc4 Qxc4 (14...Qb6 looks reasonable too) 15.Bxc4 Nf6 16.Bd5 (or 16.f3 b5 17.Bd5 Nxd5 18.Rxd5 Rc8=)



16...Nxd5! This is possible because the white knight is miles from the d5-square. 17.Rxd5 Rc8 18.c3 g6 19.Ke2 Kd7 20.Rhd1 Ke6 21.Nd2 f5= Vachier-Lagrave – Wojtaszek, Biel 2014.



14...Nf6!?

This has been Vachier-Lagrave's preference recently, so it's tempting to assume for that reason alone that it must be best! It is a bit committal however, as sometimes ...Nb6 can be a good option too.

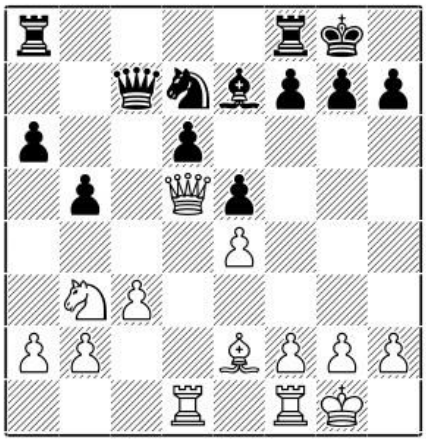
Black can also castle immediately:

14...0-0 15.0-0

Perhaps 15.Nd2 Nf6 16.Qb3!?N is the idea that MVL wanted to avoid.

15...b5

White has tried various plans in an effort to get his knight to d5.



16.Na1!?

A funny-looking move but it is not that unusual in this line – White intends to place the knight on c2, just like in the Sveshnikov, and later aim for the d5-square via b4 or e3. Two other possible continuations are:

16.Qd3 Nb6 17.Nd2 g6 18.Rfe1 Rad8 19.Bf3 d5! This is a thematic break which works beautifully here. 20.Qe2 (20.exd5 f5 gives Black great play) 20...Na4 (20...dxe4 21.Bxe4 f5 is also

promising) 21.Nb3 dxe4 22.Bxe4 Kg7 23.g3 f5 24.Bd5 Bf6³ Zhang Jilin – Zhao Xue, China 2008.

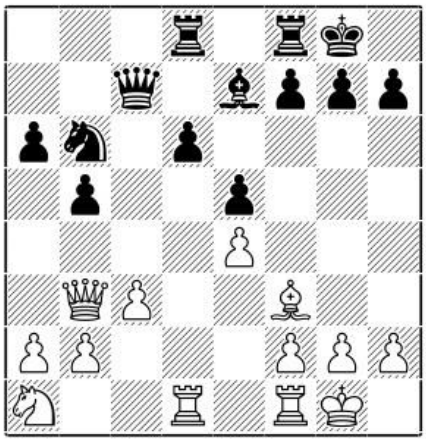
16.Nd2 has been tested at a high level. 16...g6!? (16...Rad8 also looked fine in Kokarev – Areshchenko, Olginka 2011) 17.a3 Rab8 18.Rfe1 Rfd8 19.Qa2 Nc5 20.Bf1 Bg5 21.Nb3 Qc6 22.Na5 Qc7 23.Nb3 Qc6 24.Rd5 Nd7 25.Rd3 Nc5 26.Rf3 Rd7 27.Na5 Qa8! Black maintains the pressure on e4 and supports the ...d5 break, which explains White's next move. 28.Qd5 Qxd5 29.exd5 e4 30.Rh3 f5,, Carlsen – Giri, Doha 2015.

16...Rad8!

White may achieve his goal after 16...Nb6 17.Qb3, so instead Black remains flexible by enabling the knight to move to f6, b6 or even c5 as required.

17.Bf3 Nb6 18.Qb3

After 18.Qd3 or 18.Qd2 Black can play 18...d5! 19.exd5 f5 with powerful compensation.



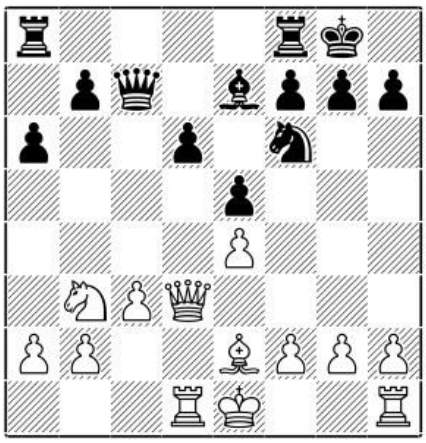
18...Nc4 19.Rd5

19.Nc2? is hit by 19...d5! with the threat of ...Na5! trapping the queen.

19...Kh8!? 20.Nc2 Nb6 21.Rdd1 d5!? 22.exd5 f5

Black had plenty of counterplay in Mozharov – Golichenko, Krakow 2012.

15.Qd3 0-0

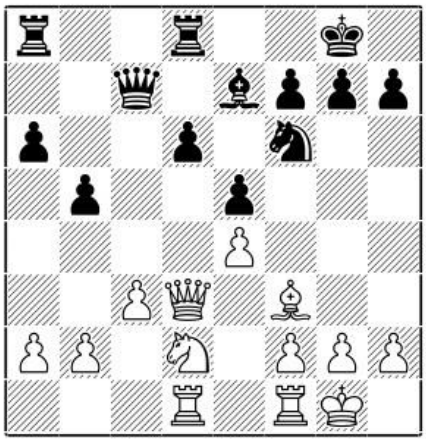


16.Nd2

From here the knight may manoeuvre to e3 via the c4- or f1-squares.

White can also play 16.0-0 immediately, when we once again have MVL to show the way: 16...b5! (after 16...Rfd8 17.Bf3 b5 it seems to be a good time for 18.Na1!? as Black is not ready to break in the centre) 17.Rfe1 (now 17.Na1 could be met with 17...d5!? 18.exd5 e4 followed by bringing a rook to the d-file) 17...Rfd8 18.Bf3 Rab8 19.Nd2 Nd7 20.Nf1 Nc5 21.Qe2 Bg5 22.Ne3 Bxe3 23.Qxe3 b4 Black had good queenside counterplay and he went on to win in A. Horvath – Vachier-Lagrave, Berlin 2018.

16...Rfd8 17.Bf3 b5 18.0-0



18...g6

This is often a useful little move. Black creates some *luft* and in the future the pawn may support the advance of Black's kingside with ...f5.

19.Ra1

It is clear that White is having trouble finding a plan. Presumably he was hoping to play a2-a4 at some point.

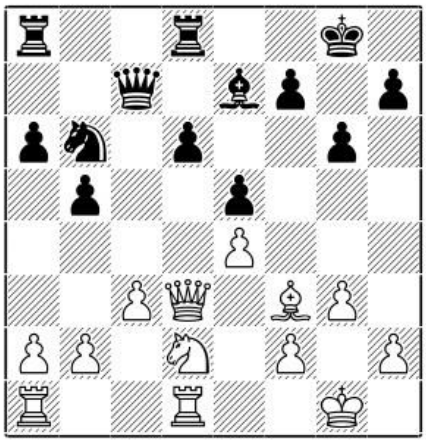
19...Nd7!?

The slow nature of the position allows Black to spend some time rerouting his knight.

20.Rfd1 Nb6

Conveniently stopping any a2-a4 ideas.

21.g3



21...d5!

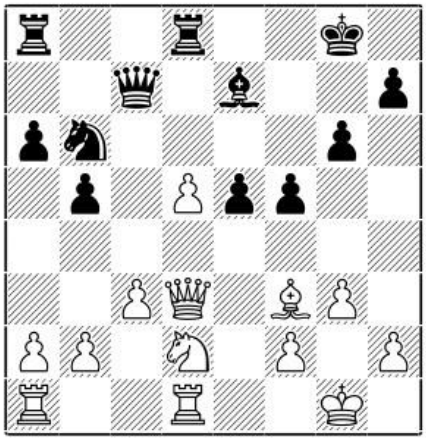
This thematic pawn sacrifice is a key idea to know in these positions.

22.exd5

It seems natural to take such a pawn, but it was safer to hunker down with 22.Qe2!? dxe4 (22...d4 23.cxd4 Rxd4 24.Rac1 Qd6 25.Nb3=) 23.Bxe4 Rab8 when Black is certainly happy, but White should be safe enough as well.

22...f5

Here we see the usefulness of the little ...g6 move. Black is ready to play ...e4 and round up the d5-pawn.



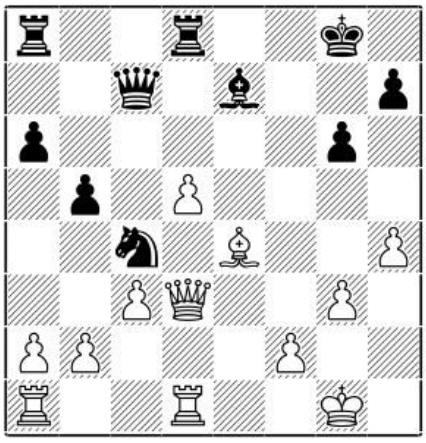
23.h4?!

Understandably, White does not like the way the game is trending, so he attempts to change the nature of the struggle by sacrificing a piece. This may work against a lesser player, but MVL is too good tactically.

A better continuation was 23.Bg2 e4 24.Qe2 Rxd5 25.Nb3 Re5!? (or simply 25...Rad8) when Black has the more active position but White is still very much in the game.

23...e4 24.Nxe4 fxe4 25.Bxe4 Nc4!µ

Not fearing any ghosts, MVL looks to seize the initiative with his extra piece. 25...Rd6 was safe enough.



26.Bxg6

In for a penny... but Black is ready.

26...Bc5!

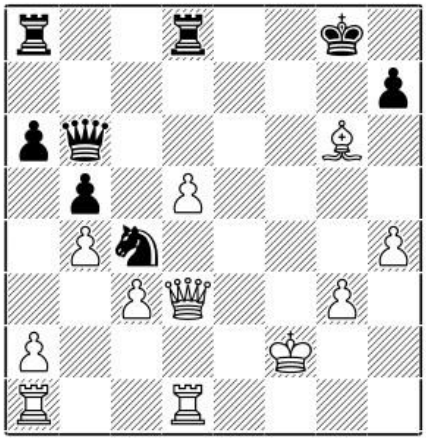
White now has four pawns for a piece, but

Black has a multitude of threats: taking on g6, ...Nxb2, and even ...Qxg3† if White takes his eye off that square.

27.d6?!

This accelerates the end; presumably White was making a last-ditch attempt to confuse his opponent in a rapid game.

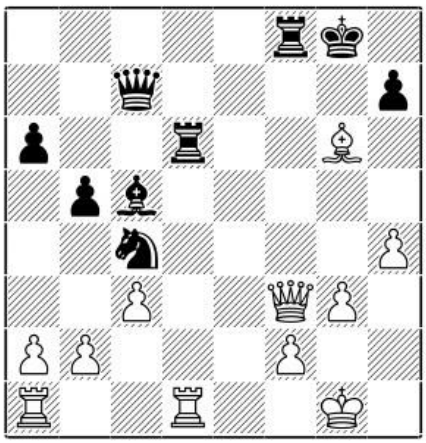
After: 27.b4 Bxf2† (27...Nb2!? also wins, provided that after 28.Bxh7† Kh8 29.Qf3 Black finds 29...Bxf2†!) 28.Kxf2 Qb6†



29.Kg2 Qxg6–+ White temporarily has three pawns for the piece, but several of them are weak and Black should win comfortably.

27...Rxd6 28.Qf3 Rf8

Or 28...Bxf2† 29.Kh1 (nothing changes after 29.Qxf2 Rxg6–+ or 29.Kxf2 Rf8 30.Bf5 Qc5†–+) 29...Rf8 and Black wins.

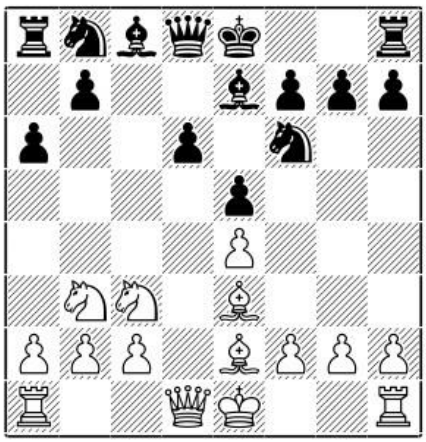


29.Bf5 Kh8

A good practical move, avoiding any possible bishop checks. The rest is easy.

30.b4 Rdf6 31.Rd5 Ne5 32.Qe2 Bxf2†! 33.Qxf2 Rxf5 34.Qc5 Qg7 0–1

B2) 8.Be3



Beware: with this move, White could be trying to trick us! He may still transpose to normal positions by castling kingside, but delaying castling gives him the option of playing more aggressively on the kingside. Black should follow suit with:

8...Be6!

Black's general strategy in these classical lines is to mirror White's developing moves. Thus, in response to 6.Be2 (after 6...e5 and a knight retreat to either f3 or b3) we play 7...Be7; whenever White castles kingside we do the same; and when Be3 is played, we answer with ...Be6.

8...0-0?! is well met by 9.g4! when White has scored well. One high-level example went 9...Be6 10.g5 Nfd7 11.h4 Nb6 12.Qd2 N8d7 13.f4 exf4 14.Bxf4 Ne5 15.0-0-0 Rc8 16.Kb1 Qc7 17.h5 and White's attack was faster in Carlsen – Nakamura, Wijk aan Zee 2011.

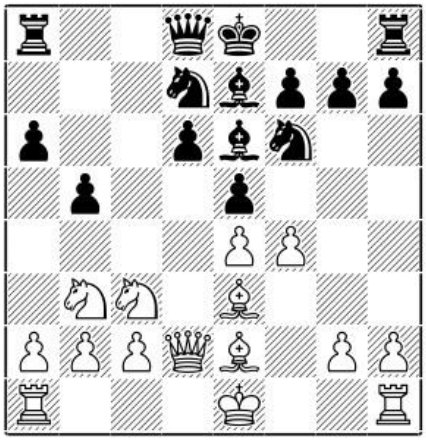
After the text move White has two main options. We will start by analysing **B21)** 9.Nd5, before turning to the aggressive **B22)** 9.f4!? in Game 2. Before addressing the two main moves, here are a few minor alternatives:

9.0-0 0-0 transposes to the main lines with 8.0-0 0-0 9.Be3 Be6, which will be covered in Chapter 2.

9.Qd3 is fairly common but it will generally transpose to another line after 9...Nbd7. For instance, 10.Nd5 reaches variation B21 below, while 10.0-0 0-0 11.Nd5 can be found in variation D of Chapter 2.

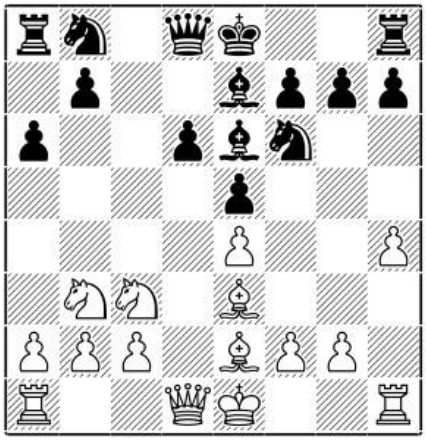
9.g4 is not so dangerous in view of 9...h6! 10.Bf3 (10.Nd5 Nbd7 is fine for Black) 10...Nc6!? (10...Nbd7 is also perfectly playable) 11.Qe2 Na5 12.0-0-0 Nc4,, with good play for Black, E. Hansen – Bruzon Batista, Montreal 2012.

9.Qd2 Nbd7 10.f4 (10.0-0 0-0 reaches a big main line – see variation C of Chapter 2 on page 44) 10...b5 gives Black no particular problems, for instance:

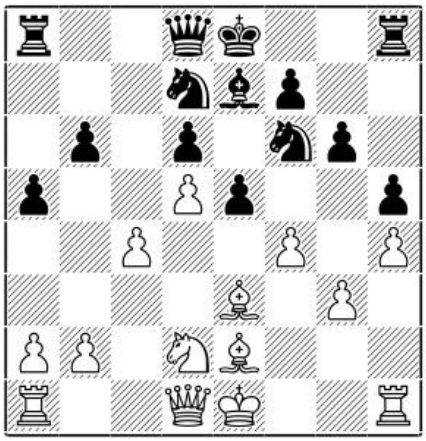


11.f5 (or 11.0-0-0 Rc8 with good prospects for counterplay) 11...Bc4 12.Bf3 (12.0-0N is safer although Black clearly has nothing to worry about; on the other hand, 12.Bxc4? bxc4 13.Nc1 Rb8 14.b3? d5!–+ gives Black a devastating initiative) 12...b4 (12...Rc8 is a good alternative, as is 12...0-0N, intending 13.g4 d5!) 13.Nd5 Nxd5 14.exd5 a5³ Dolmatov – Paunovic, Cetinje 1992.

9.h4!? is a weird-looking move that was introduced at the 2018 Olympiad by Wesley So. The game continued:

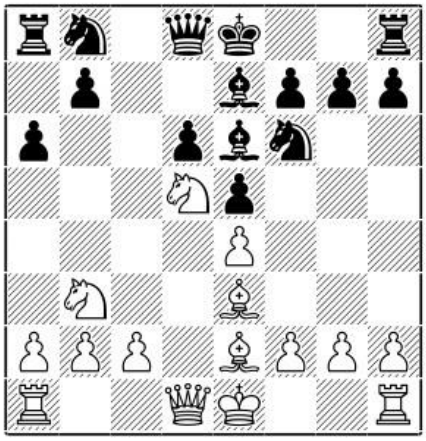


9...h5 (a good alternative is 9...0-0 intending 10.Bf3 [or 10.g4 d5!] 10...a5!? when Black had decent counterplay in Vavulin – Kokarev, Khanty-Mansiysk 2018) 10.Nd5 Bxd5 11.exd5 Nbd7 12.c4 g6 (12...Rc8 was tried the very next day in Tari – Papaioannou, Batumi [ol] 2018, but I don't think it's an improvement) 13.g3 b6 14.Nd2 a5 15.f4 Now in So – Bosiocic, Batumi (ol) 2018, Black should have continued:



15...exf4!N 16.Bxf4 (or 16.gxf4 0-0 17.f5 Ne5,,) 16...0-0 17.0-0,, Black has a solid structure and can reroute his bishop to the long diagonal, while his knights have plenty of potential outposts available.

B21) 9.Nd5



9...Nbd7

White was threatening Bb6 so there was no time to take the e4-pawn.

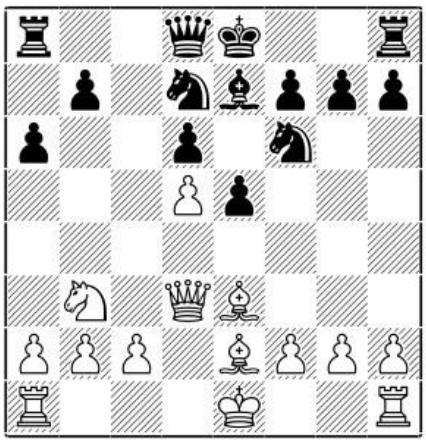
10.Qd3

White did not bring the knight to d5 merely to trade it for the passive bishop on e7. Thus, after 10.Nxe7 Qxe7 11.Bf3 (or 11.f3?! d5! when Black seizes the initiative in the centre) 11...0-0 Black has a comfortable game. He may play ...a5 next, or simply bring his rooks to the c- and d-files.

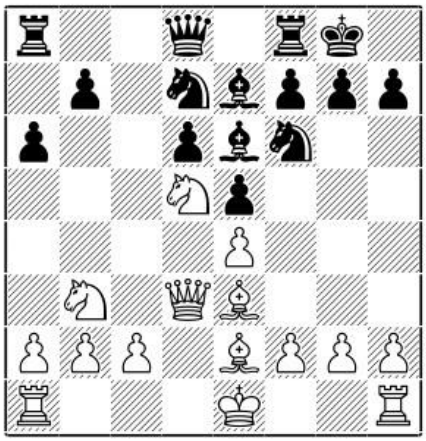
10...0-0!?

This is a principled move, inviting White to carry out his positional plan of c2-c4.

10...Bxd5 is perfectly playable, although after 11.exd5 it is important that Black delays castling:



11...Rc8! (11...0-0?! 12.g4! shows the advantage of White's move order, and after 12...Nc5 13.Nxc5 dxc5 14.0-0-0 e4 15.Qd2 Bd6 16.g5 Nd7 17.h4 White had good attacking chances in Khalifman – Gelfand, Las Vegas [4.3–rapid] 1999) 12.c4 0-0 (12...Nc5!? is an additional option available to Black via the present move order) 13.0-0 This position will be analysed in Game 7 of Chapter 2 starting on page 63, and the present move order was the sequence which occurred in Georgiadis – Mamedyarov – see page 64.



11.c4!?

This is an independent continuation. Instead 11.0-0 Bxd5 12.exd5 will be covered in Chapter 2: see page 55, where we see that Black can continue with 12...Nc5!? or 12...Rc8.

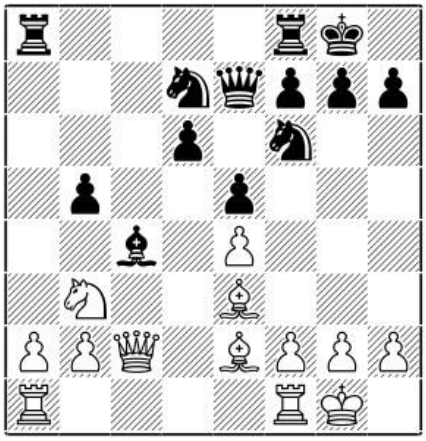
11...b5!

This is the only attempt to wrestle with White's grip on the centre, but it works.

12.cxb5

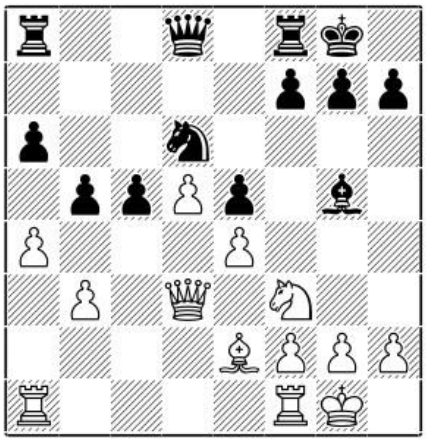
Accepting the challenge.

Once again, White should not initiate the exchange of his active knight. 12.Nxe7†?! Qxe7 13.cxb5 axb5 14.0-0 (14.Qxb5? Rfb8–+) 14...Bc4 15.Qc2 occurred in Eynullayev – Muradli, Baku 2017, when Black should have continued:



15...Bxe2N 16.Qxe2 Nxe4 17.Qxb5 Rfb8³/µ Black has active pieces and his strong central pawns are worth more than White's queenside duo.

12.Nd2 has also been tried. A good example continued: 12...Nc5 (12...Rc8 13.b4! is quite promising for White) 13.Bxc5 dxc5 14.b3 Bxd5 15.cxd5 Ne8 16.0-0 Nd6 17.a4 Bg5 18.Nf3

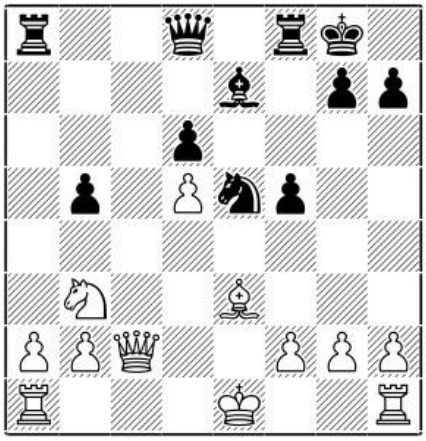


18...Bf4! 19.axb5 (19.g3 is well met by 19...f5!) Here Black initiated complications with 19...f5!? and went on to win in Anand – Vachier-Lagrave, London 2015.

12...axb5 13.0-0

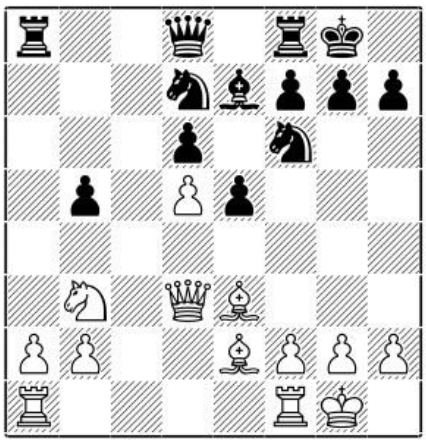
Taking the b-pawn would allow Black to take on e4.

13.Bf3? is a misguided attempt to reinforce the centre, allowing 13...Bxd5 14.exd5 e4! when Black seizes the initiative. Best play continues: 15.Bxe4 Ne5 16.Qb1 Nxe4 17.Qxe4 f5 18.Qc2



18...Rc8!N (The most accurate, although the game continuation is also promising: 18...f4 19.Bd4 f3 20.0-0 [20.g3 Qd7 is also good for Black] Now in Sebag – Xu Yuhua, Bled [ol] 2002, 20...fxg2N 21.Kxg2 Nf3µ would have been powerful.) 19.Qd2 f4 20.Bd4 f3µ Black has a great initiative for a mere pawn.

13...Bxd5 14.exd5



14...Nb6!

Black has also tried 14...b4, but the pawn is weak in any case so it is better to play as actively as possible.

15.Bxb6

Parting with the bishop to grab a pawn.

White has also tried: 15.Qxb5 Nbxd5 16.Bd2 Rb8 (16...Ra7!?N is also possible, intending ...Qa8 and ...Rb8) 17.Qd3 (17.Qa4 Qc8 also gave Black an active game in Asrian – Bu Xiangzhi, Taiyuan 2006) 17...Qd7 18.Rfd1 Nb4 19.Qg3 Ne4 20.Qf3 d5 21.Bxb4 Rxb4 22.a3 Ng5

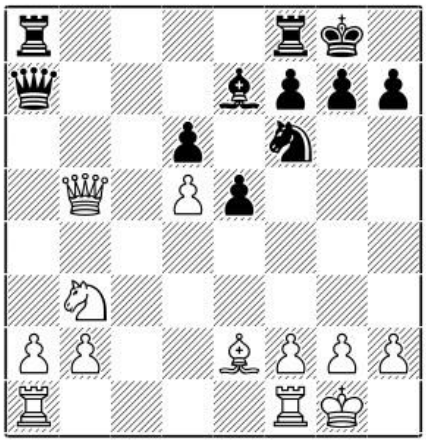
23.Qe3 Re4 24.Qd3 Rb8 Black took over the initiative in Atabayev – Cheparinov, Istanbul (ol) 2012.

15...Qxb6 16.Qxb5

The untried 16.Rfc1!?N should be met by 16...Ra4! 17.Rc6 (17.Qxb5 Qa7 is good for Black) 17...Qa7 18.a3 b4 with plenty of counterplay for Black.

16...Qa7

White has to decide how to handle the situation on the queenside.



17.Qd3?!

This has been the most popular choice but I suspect it is inferior.

17.a4 seems like a better try, even though it loosens the queenside pawns. Black obtains good counterplay after: 17...Rab8 18.Qa5 (or 18.Qd3 Rb4 19.a5 Rfb8 20.Ra3 e4 21.Qd1 e3,, Antal – Acs, Hungary 2003) 18...Qb7 19.Bc4 Rfc8 20.Qa6 Qxa6 21.Bxa6 Rc2,, Buscher – Versili, corr. 2009.

17...Rfb8

Black has more than enough play for the pawn, with Benko-like pressure on the queenside and a useful pawn majority on the kingside. White has two connected passers, but it does not look like they are going anywhere.

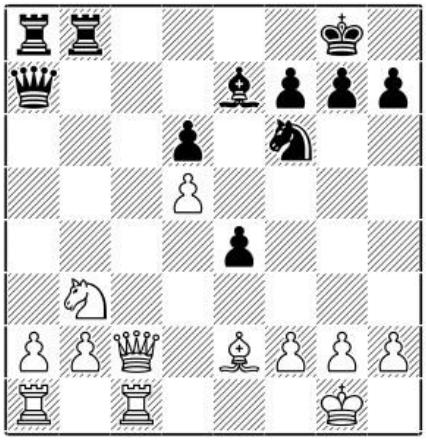
18.Kh1

It is not easy for White to find a plan.

18.Qd2 Bd8! is a thematic way to improve the bishop; after 19.Bc4 Black can either play 19...Bb6 immediately or activate his queen with 19...Qd7 intending ...Qf5, with good chances in either case.

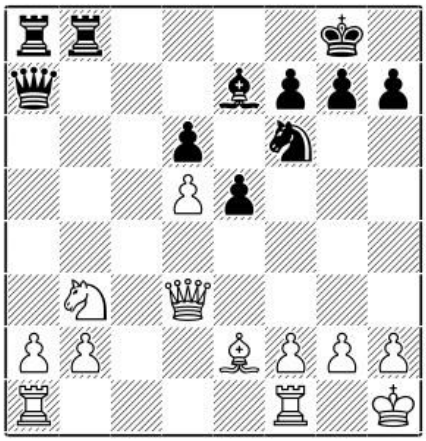
18.h3 Rb4 (18...Bd8³ is also good) 19.Rfd1?! (19.a3 Rb7 would leave White squishy on the b-file, but weakening f2 is even worse) 19...Bd8 20.a3 Too late! 20...Rf4µ Pogonina – Sebag, Elista 2004.

18.Rfc1 e4 19.Qc2



19...Bd8! 20.Bc4 Bb6 21.Qe2 Qe7 22.a4 Qe5 with a nice initiative for Black in Fargnoli – Maia, corr. 2005. This is a good example where Black can just play on the kingside.

The text move takes the king off the sensitive g1-a7 diagonal but it weakens f2.

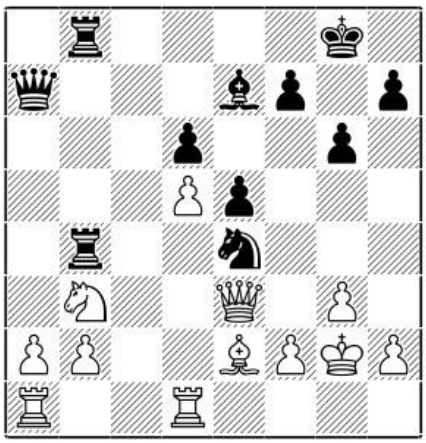


18...Rb4 19.g3

19.a3 Rb7 leaves the b-file softened up and the b3-knight loses its stability.

19...Rab8 20.Kg2 g6 21.Rfd1 Ne4 22.Qe3

We have been following Karim – Asis Gargatagli, Barcelona 2017. Black should have played:



22...Qxe3N

22...Qa8!?N is a good alternative.

23.fxe3 f5

23...Bg5 is also promising. In either case, Black has the upper hand as his positional advantages are worth more than White's extra pawn.

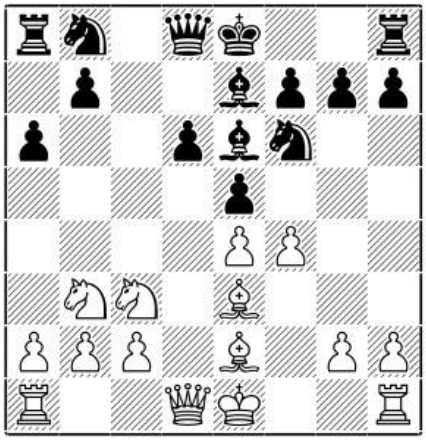
B22) 9.f4!?

GAME 2

Alexander Huzman – Nick de Firmian

Moscow 1989

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Be2 e5 7.Nb3 Be7 8.Be3 Be6! 9.f4!?



More trickery. This was played a lot by Dolmatov in the late 1980s, but Black gradually figured out how to handle it.

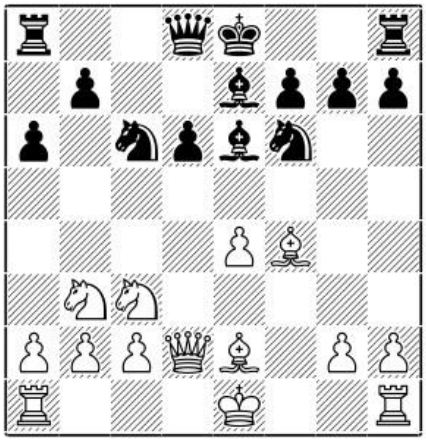
9...exf4

9...Qc7 10.f5 Bc4 is certainly playable but I find the text move more logical, as White's bishop will have to move again.

10.Bxf4 Nc6 11.Qd2

This is the idea – White intends to castle queenside.

Instead 11.0-0 0-0 transposes to variation A1 of Chapter 2 on page 39.



11...0-0!?

This is the fighting choice.

It is pretty well accepted that Black can safely equalize with:

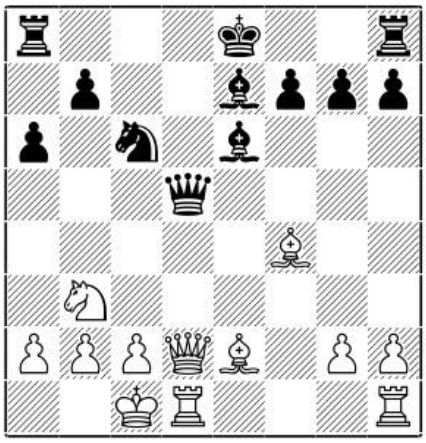
11...d5 12.exd5

After 12.e5?! Ne4 Black is already fighting

for the initiative.

12...Nxd5 13.Nxd5 Qxd5 14.0-0-0

14.Qxd5 Bxd5 15.0-0 0-0 16.Rad1 Be6 is equal.



14...Qe4!?

14...Nb4?! has been recommended, but I do not like it at all in view of 15.Qxd5! (the trickier 15.a3!? is good too) 15...Nxd5 16.Bd2² with a pleasant game for White.

14...Qxd2† 15.Rxd2 0-0 16.Bf3 Rac8= is the simplest route to equality.

15.Bf3 Qc4 16.Bxc6†

16.Be2?! Qa4! favours Black.

16...bxc6

16...Qxc6? 17.Nd4 obviously helps White.

17.Qd4 0-0 18.Qxc4 Bxc4

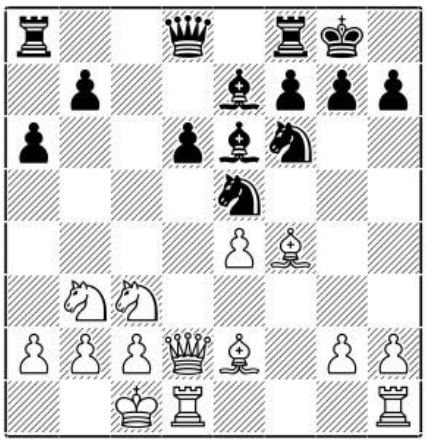
The position is more or less equal, but Black was able to utilize the bishop pair to squeeze out a win in R. Byrne – King, London 1991.

12.0-0-0

Again, 12.0-0 Rc8 is similar to variation A1 of Chapter 2 and could easily transpose.

12...Ne5

Later we will encounter a similar structure where Black can maintain a knight on c6 and carry out the desirable ...Nf6-d7 manoeuvre, later deciding which knight to play to e5 . Here there is no time for that because the d6-pawn is loose, but Black has another harmonious way to arrange his pieces.

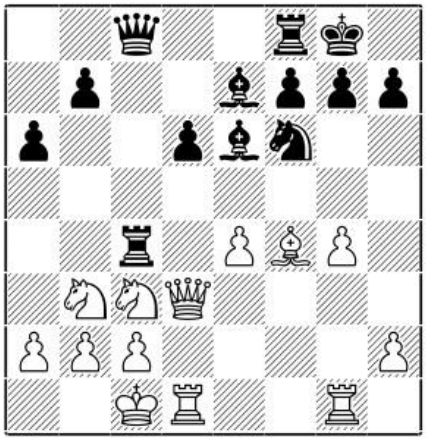


13.Nd4

This is a logical attempt to take advantage of Black's last move.

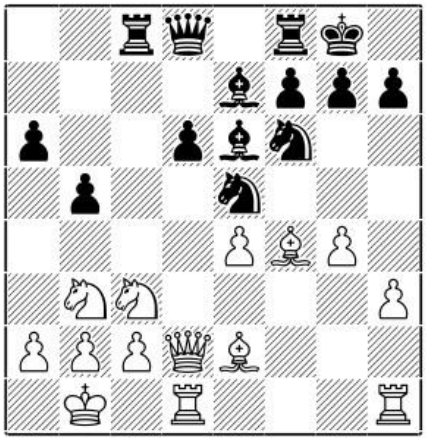
White can prepare to push his g-pawn in a few different ways. Firstly, 13.h3 Rc8 14.g4 b5 15.Kb1 transposes to the note on 13.Kb1 below.

13.Rhg1 is another idea, when a good example continued: 13...Rc8 14.g4 Nc4 15.Bxc4 Rxc4 16.Qd3 Qc8



Black's last move prepares a thematic ...Rxc3 exchange sacrifice. In the game White erred with 17.g5?, allowing a nice tactical sequence: 17...Nxe4! 18.Nxe4 d5 19.Nc3 (19.Nf6† Bxf6 20.gxf6 Bf5–+) 19...Rxf4 20.Nxd5 Bxd5 21.Qxd5 Rf5µ Bruzon Batista – Sakaev, Ubeda 2001.

Another natural continuation is:
13.Kb1 Rc8 14.h3 b5 15.g4



15...Qc7

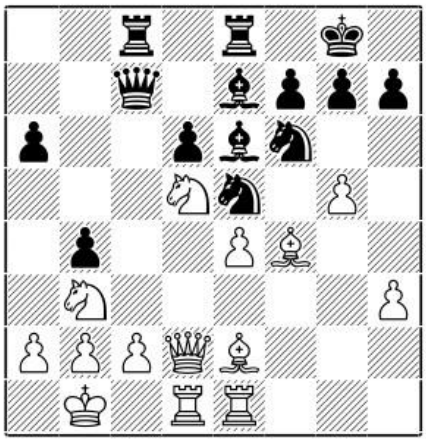
Black has also tried 15...Nc4 16.Bxc4 Rxc4 17.Bxd6 Bxd6 18.Qxd6 and now 18...Qc8? 19.Rd4± was good for White in Dolmatov – King, Reykjavik 1990, but 18...Qxd6!?N 19.Rxd6 b4 looks okay, for instance: 20.Nd5 (or 20.Ne2 Rxe4=) 20...Nxe4 21.Ne7† Kh8 22.Rxa6 Rc7 23.Nf5 Bxb3 24.axb3 Nd2†!= Winning back the pawn.

16.Rhe1

16.g5?! b4! 17.Nd5 Nxd5 18.exd5 occurred in Rogozenko – Dvoirys, Moscow 1991, and now 18...Bxd5!N 19.Qxd5 Qxc2† 20.Ka1 Qxe2 21.Nd4 Qc4 22.Nf5 Qc7 23.Nxd6 Bxd6 24.Qxd6 Qxd6 25.Rxd6 Ng6 would have favoured Black.

16...Rfe8 17.g5 b4 18.Nd5

We have been following Li Shilong – Sadvakasov, Hyderabad 2005. Black can maintain equal chances with the following forcing continuation:



18...Nxd5!N 19.exd5 Bxh3 20.Bxa6 Ra8 21.Bxe5

21.Bb5 Rec8 gives Black plenty of play.

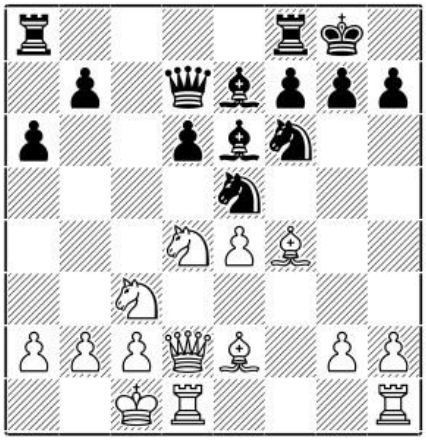
21...dxe5 22.d6 Qa7 23.dxe7 Qxa6 24.Qxb4 Qxa2† 25.Kc1 Be6 26.Rxe5 Bxb3 27.Qxb3 Qxb3 28.cxb3 f6 29.gxf6 Ra1† 30.Kc2 Rxd1 31.Kxd1 gxf6=

With an easily drawing rook endgame.

13...Qd7!

De Firmian hits upon the right set-up.

13...Rc8 is less accurate in view of 14.Nf5 Bxf5 15.exf5 Rc5 (15...b5 16.g4 also gave White the initiative in a few games) 16.g4 when White's attack looks scary, Illescas Cordoba – Ljubojevic, Linares 1988.



14.Nxe6

Avoiding this exchange leads nowhere for White. For instance, 14.Kb1 Rac8 15.h3 b5 16.Qe3 Qc7 (16...Qb7!?N may be even stronger) 17.Bd3 Nc4 18.Qe1 b4 19.Nce2 Qb6 20.Bc1 d5!? gave Black good counterplay in Simagin – Timoscenko, Podolsk 1990.

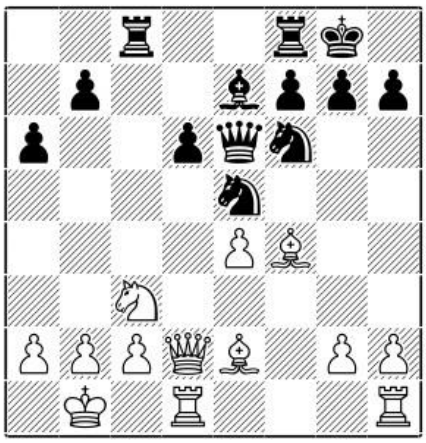
14...Qxe6

The queen is quite comfortable here.

15.Kb1

Black had no problems after 15.Rhe1 Rac8 16.Nd5 Nxd5 17.Qxd5 (17.exd5 Qg6) 17...Rc5! 18.Qxe6 fxe6= in Benjamin – Browne, USA 1990. Black is gaining a tempo on the loose f4-bishop – a typical consequence of the exchange on e6.

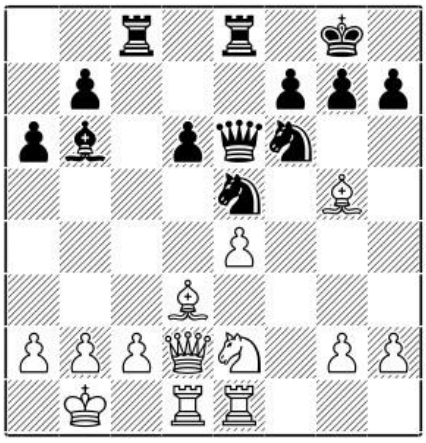
15...Rac8



16.Qd4

The passive 16.Bd3 can be met by 16...Bd8!? (or 16...Nc4 17.Qe1 b5 18.Ne2 d5 19.e5 as played in Dolmatov – Ubilava, Moscow 1989, when 19...Ne4!N,, looks sufficient) 17.Ne2 Nc4 18.Qe1 d5! 19.e5 Ne4 with excellent play for Black in Matkovic – A. Petrosian, Sibenik 1990.

Another natural idea is to centralize with:
16.Rhe1 Rfe8
16...Rc5 was successful in another match-up between the main advocate of White's position and an American veteran. 17.Bd3 was the continuation of Dolmatov – Browne, Reykjavik 1990, but 17.Nd5!?N looks more challenging.
17.Bd3 Bd8! 18.Ne2
18.Bxe5?! Qxe5³ was good for Black in Rivas Mongrut – Castro Salguero, corr. 2007.
18...Bb6 19.Bg5

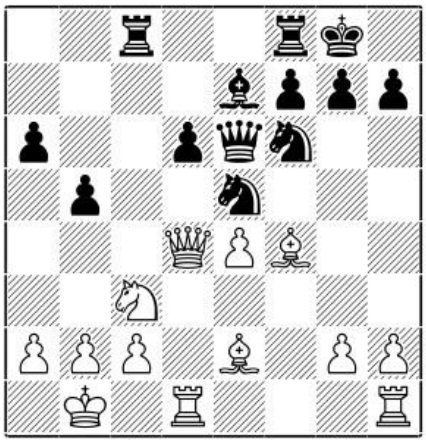


19...Nxe4!N
19...Nxd3 led to unclear play in both Dorfman – A. Petrosian, Palma de Mallorca 1989, and Arnason – King, Reykjavik 1990. The text move looks even better.

20.Bxe4 Nc4 21.Bxh7† Kxh7 22.Qd3† Kg8
Black has the more active game.

16...b5

A good alternative is:
16...Rc5!? 17.Rhe1
The forcing 17.Nd5?! Nxd5 18.exd5 Qf5³ looks quite nice for Black.
If White plays mechanically with 17.h3 Rfc8 18.g4? then Black's play is much faster after 18...Nc6 (or 18...Nc4µ) 19.Qd2 (19.Qa4? Rxc3!–+; 19.Qe3 Nb4! is also troublesome) 19...Nb4 with a strong attack.
The text move was played in Arakhamia-Grant – Peng Zhaoqin, Belgrade 1994. Black should have responded with:
17...Rfc8N
With a good game.

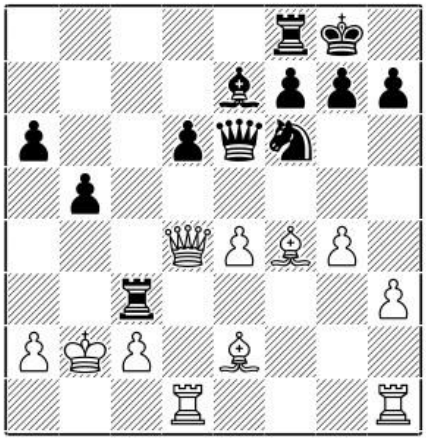


17.h3

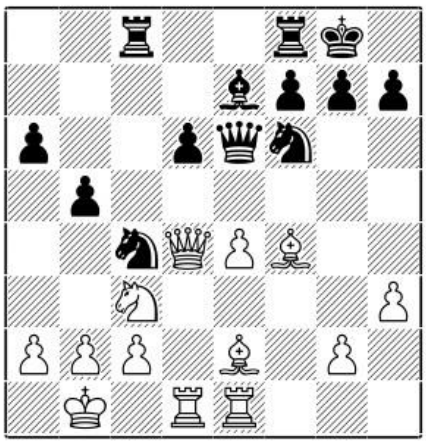
I also considered 17.Nd5N 17...Nxd5 (even 17...Rfe8!? 18.Nxe7† Qxe7 19.Qxd6 Qxd6 20.Rxd6 Ng6! is fine for Black) 18.Qxd5 (18.exd5 Qf5 is good for Black) 18...Rc5 19.Qxe6 fxe6 when the position is similar to the Benjamin – Browne game in the note to White's 15th move above.

17...Nc4 18.Rhe1

18.g4 is well met by: 18...Nxb2!? (De Firmian gives 18...b4 19.Nd5 Nxd5 20.Qxd5 Nxb2! 21.Kxb2 Qf6† 22.e5 Qxf4 23.exd6 Bf6† 24.Kb1 b3! 25.cxb3 Qb4 26.g5 Qc3 27.gxf6 Qc2† 28.Ka1 Qc3† with perpetual check) 19.Kxb2 Rxc3! White has to walk a tightrope in order to secure the draw:



20.Qxc3 (20.Kxc3 Nxe4† 21.Kd3 Rc8 22.Bf3 Rc3† 23.Ke2 Rc4 gives Black a strong initiative) 20...Nxe4 21.Qe3! Bf6† 22.Rd4! Rc8 23.Kc1 (23.Bd3!? is also playable, when 23...g5! secures equality) 23...Rxc2† 24.Kxc2 Qxa2†= With perpetual check.

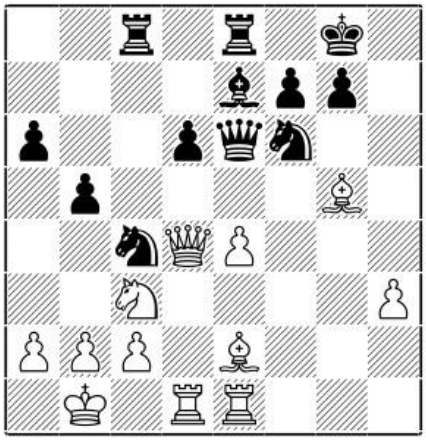


18...h6!

De Firmian shows good Najdorf intuition. Even today, this waiting move is the top choice of the engines. Instead, 18...Bd8 19.Bxd6 Nxd6 20.Qxd6 Nxe4 21.Nxe4 Qxe4 22.Bd3 Qc6 23.Be4 allows White to keep some initiative.

19.Nd5

After 19.g4 Rfe8 20.g5 hxg5 21.Bxg5 Black has a strong tactical shot:

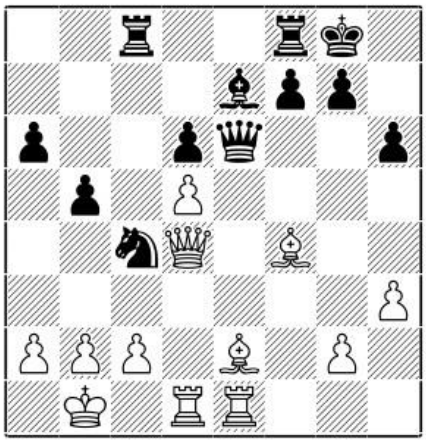


21...Na3†!? 22.bxa3 (22.Kc1 Qxa2!–+ is a nice detail) 22...Rxc3 23.Qxc3 Nxe4 Black has promising play, especially considering that 24.Qc6?! Bxg5! works out well, due to the fact that 25.Bg4? Nd2†! comes with check.

I think White's best idea is to switch to defensive mode for a moment with 19.Bc1!?N intending Nd5, although Black still looks fine after 19...Rc5.

19...Nxd5 20.exd5

20.Qxd5? runs into 20...Nxb2!µ intending 21.Qxe6 (or 21.Kxb2 Qf6†) 21...fxe6 and the f4-bishop is hanging.



20...Qd7

Now ...Bf6 is a serious threat.

21.Qe4

White is not helped by 21.Bg4? f5 with ...Bf6 coming next.

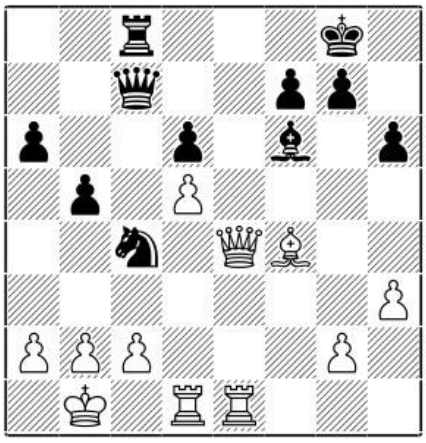
21.Bxc4 Rxc4 22.Qf2 Rfc8 also gives Black some initiative.

21...Bf6! 22.Bg4?

Grabbing the exchange proves to be too tempting, but 22.Bc1 was a better try.

22...Qc7 23.Bxc8 Rxc8µ

I love this position. Black has beautiful compensation for the exchange: with his two remaining minor pieces bearing down on the white king, the situation resembles a Sicilian Dragon.



24.c3

In the event of 24.Bc1? Na3†! 25.bxa3 Qc3 White loses quickly.

24...Na3†?!

This is not bad and it leads to some beautiful tactical motifs; I imagine De Firmian had already planned his 26th move.

However, the straightforward 24...Nxb2!N was winning, as was the silicon solution 24...b4!N.

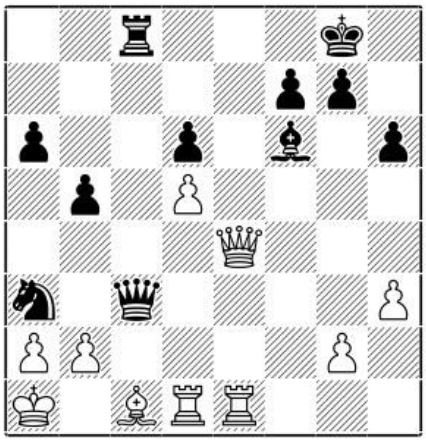
25.Ka1

White loses after 25.bxa3 Qxc3 or 25.Kc1 Bxc3.

25...Qxc3!

I imagine Dolmatov saw this coming, but Black's next move is the real killer.

26.Bc1



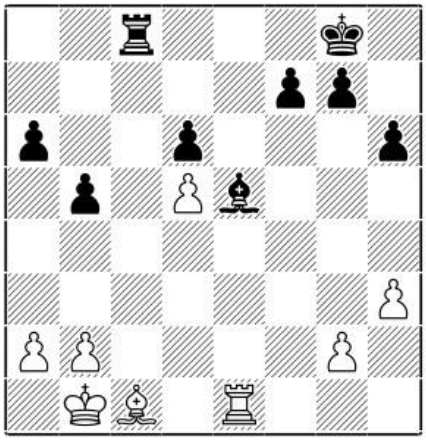
26...Qc2!

This quiet move places White in zugzwang!

27.Qxc2

Moving the kingside pawns does not change anything, and 27.Qd3? Qxd3 28.Rxd3 Nc2† wins a whole rook.

27...Nxc2† 28.Kb1 Nxe1 29.Rxe1 Be5µ



Black is a healthy pawn ahead with a better position. The rest of the game is not so relevant to our study of the opening, but Black eventually converts his advantage in a rook endgame.

30.b3 f6 31.Rd1 Rc3 32.Bb2 Rg3 33.Rd2 Kf7 34.Rc2 Rd3 35.Rc6 Rxd5 36.Rxa6 Ke6 37.g4 Rd3 38.Rb6 Rxh3 39.Bxe5 fxe5 40.Rxb5 g5 41.a4 h5 42.gxh5 Rxh5 43.Kc2 g4 44.Kd2 Rh2† 45.Ke1 d5 46.a5 Ra2 47.b4 d4 48.Rb6† Kd5 49.a6 Ke4 50.b5 Ke3 51.Kf1 d3

0–1

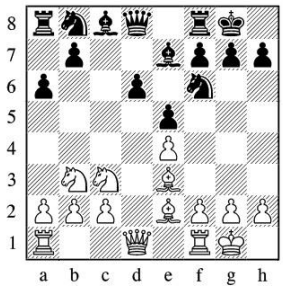
Conclusion

After 6.Be2 e5! the fashionable 7.Nf3!? is not nearly as innocuous as was once believed – Black has to take this line seriously. After 7...Be7 8.Bg5 Be6! 9.Bxf6 Bxf6 Black does not have too much to fear, as long as he remains alert. His remaining knight will go to d7, from where it can help fight for the d5-square, either directly via b6, or indirectly by going to c5, taking aim at the b3-bishop. The resulting positions can sometimes become a bit sterile, but there is not really a way around this, so one must be patient.

Moving on to the main line of 7.Nb3, we begin a 'mirroring' policy with 7...Be7!. Here 8.Bg5 is not so threatening – after 8...Be6 9.Bxf6 Bxf6 10.Qd3 Be7 the play is similar to the 7.Nf3 line, but White has plopped his queen down in front of his light-squared bishop, so there are no Bc4 ideas to worry about. Whichever way White castles, Black has a flexible game with good prospects.

If White plays 8.Be3, we should continue mirroring White's development with 8...Be6!. Then 9.Nd5 often transposes to other lines, but Black can deviate with 9...Nbd7 10.Qd3 0-0!? 11.c4!? b5! if he wishes. Finally, the Dolmatov line with 9.f4!? could prove unpleasant for the unprepared, but 9...exf4 10.Bxf4 reaches a pawn structure that we will have to get used to. After 10...Nc6 11.Qd2 0-0!? 12.0-0-0 Ne5 13.Nd4 it is useful to know the key idea of 13...Qd7!, as the black queen will be quite comfortable on the e6-square.

Chapter 2



9.♗e3

Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.♗e2 e5 7.♘b3 ♗e7 8.0–0 0–0 9.♗e3 ♗e6

A) 10.f4 exf4 38

A1) 11.Bxf4 39

A2) 11.Rxf4 40

B) 10.a4 *Game 3* 41

C) 10.Qd2 Nbd7 11.a4 44

C1) 11...Rc8 12.a5 Qc7 45

C11) 13.Rfc1 45

C12) 13.Rfd1 47

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D) 10.Nd5 Nbd7 11.Qd3 Bxd5 12.exd5 54

D1) 12...Nc5!? 55

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D12) 13.Nxc5 dxc5 58

D121) 14.Rfd1 *Game 6* 59

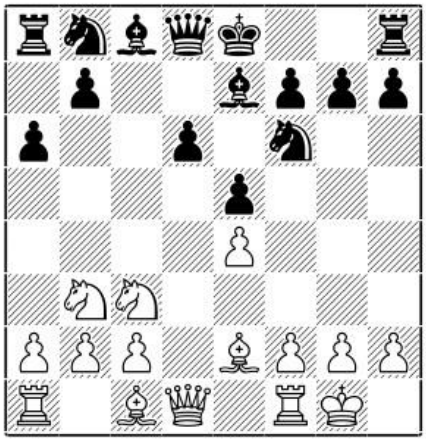
D122) 14.Bf3!? 61

D2) 12...Rc8 *Game 7* 63

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6

5.Nc3 a6 6.Be2 e5 7.Nb3 Be7 8.0-0

This is the most natural and common move. Our coverage of it will span this and the next chapter.



8...0-0!

Just as in the previous chapter, we copy White's moves. This may seem an obvious choice, but for a time Black frequently delayed castling with 8...Be6. However, it gradually became clear that 9.f4! is strong. A classic example continued: 9...Qc7 (9...exf4 10.Bxf4 Nc6 is safer; but then Black has lost a tempo compared to variation A1) 10.Kh1! 0-0 (10...Nbd7 11.a4 0-0 12.a5 Rac8

13.f5 Bc4 14.Bxc4 Qxc4 15.Ra4! Qc6 16.Qf3² reaches a position where Black lacks the counterplay we saw in Unzicker – Fischer) 11.f5 Bc4 12.g4! h6 (Black would like to play the thematic 12...d5 but after 13.g5! Nxe4 14.Nxe4 dxe4 15.f6 White has a strong attack) 13.g5 hxg5 14.Bxg5 Nbd7 15.Rg1 White had good attacking chances in Short – Gelfand, Amsterdam 1996.

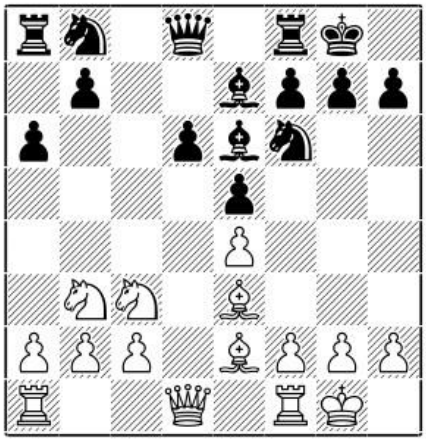
9.Be3

This natural developing move is the most common. We will look at other options in the next chapter.

9...Be6

As mentioned previously, we follow the 'copycat' strategy regarding both castling and the bishop development to e3/e6.

9...b5?! is premature in view of 10.a4! b4 (10...Bb7 11.axb5 axb5 12.Qd3 b4 13.Rxa8 Bxa8 14.Nd5² also favours White) 11.Nd5 when Black's queenside is weakened, and both 11...Nxd5?? 12.Qxd5 and 11...Nxe4?? 12.Bf3 lose material.



This is historically the main line of the 6.Be2 complex. White has a lot of options here and the play can be quite varied. We will analyse four main options, beginning with the relative sidelines of **A)** 10.f4 and **B)** 10.a4. Next we will consider **C)** 10.Qd2 which has historically been the most popular move; and finally **D)** 10.Nd5, which is the current trend.

10.Qd3 Nbd7 11.Nd5 is another possible route to variation D.

A) 10.f4

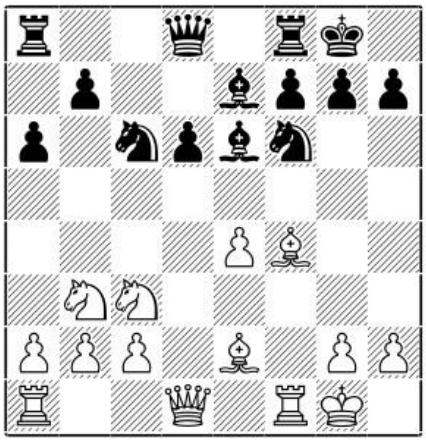
This looks aggressive but it is not too dangerous.

10...exf4

Black could also play in 'old style' with 10...Qc7, with a position similar to that in Unzicker – Fischer from the Introduction. However, I prefer taking on f4, which is the modern choice. White must choose between **A1)** 11.Bxf4, losing a tempo with the bishop, and **A2)** 11.Rxf4, which places the rook on a slightly odd square.

A1) 11.Bxf4 Nc6

This pawn structure made me uncomfortable when I was first learning the Najdorf. It was not so much that the d6-pawn was a source of worry, but rather that I could not see what Black was supposed to do. The plan we will see in action shortly will solve that problem.



12.Kh1

This will be necessary sooner or later.

12...Rc8

Black can also play 12...d5, which equalizes quite easily after 13.e5 Ne4 or 13.exd5 Nxd5 14.Nxd5 Qxd5, but this is rather sterile.

13.Qe1

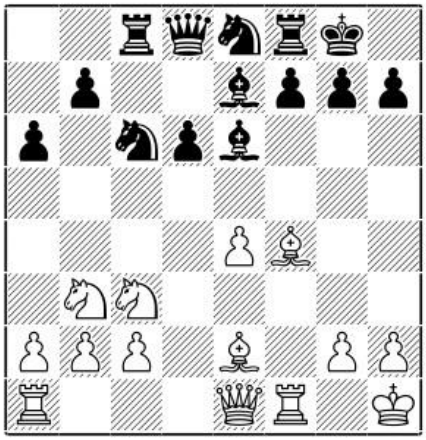
13.Qd2 Ne8 14.Rad1 Bf6 transposes to the main line, with one less move played.

13.Nd4 is playable although 13...Nxd4 14.Qxd4 Ne8 15.Rad1 Bf6 16.e5 dxe5 17.Qxd8 Rxd8 18.Rxd8 Bxd8 19.Bxe5 Bf6 20.Bxf6 Nxf6 is completely equal.

13...Ne8!

This is the Big Idea. Black overprotects the d6-pawn and prepares ...Bf6.

13...Nd7 followed by either knight to e5 is certainly playable, but I am less sure how to continue afterwards. The Portisch plan is clearer.



14.Rd1 Bh4!?

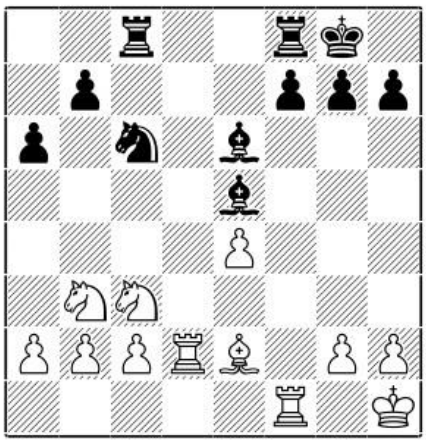
Black could also play 14...Bf6 immediately but it is worth going to h4 first. White does not want to exchange dark-squared bishops or weaken himself with g2-g3, so he has nothing better than moving his queen to d2, which removes some of the pressure exerted by the d1-rook against Black's queen.

15.Qd2 Bf6!

Black is bringing his formerly passive bishop towards a fine outpost on e5, after which the knight can hop back to f6.

16.Be3

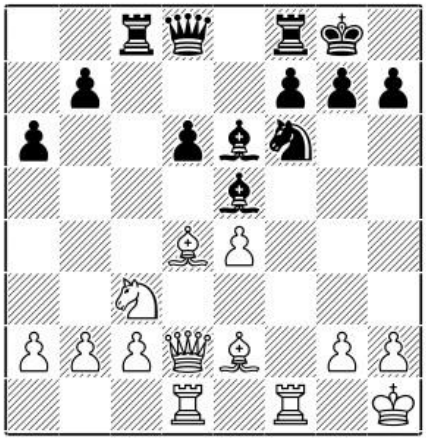
It is important to know that Black does not have to worry about the d6-pawn being taken, as becomes clear after: 16.Bxd6?! Nxd6 17.Qxd6 Qxd6 18.Rxd6 Be5 19.Rd2



19...Bxc3!N (19...Nb4 was played in Hold – Christ, Germany 2000. Sometimes this idea can be effective in similar situations, but on this occasion the simple exchange on c3 is stronger.) 20.bxc3 Ne5 Black has more than enough for the pawn.

16...Be5 17.Nd4 Nxd4 18.Bxd4 Nf6

Black has completed his regrouping, with the e7-bishop having 'teleported' to e5. You certainly don't need to know any more than this, but it is worth including the remaining moves of a game in which Black quickly took over.

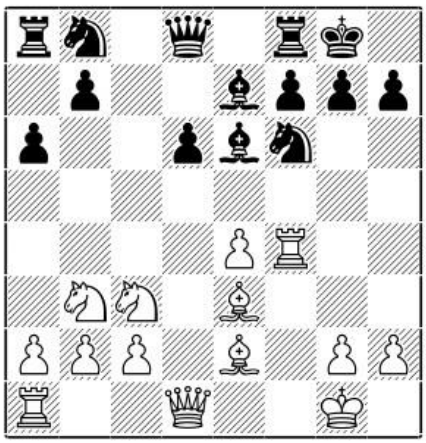


19.Bxe5 dxe5 20.Qg5 Nd7 21.Qg3 Qb6 22.Bg4 Bxg4 23.Qxg4 Nf6 24.Qg3 Qxb2 25.Rd3?

In Pritchett – Portisch, Malta (ol) 1980, White resigned here before Black could play 25...Rxc3, winning a piece.

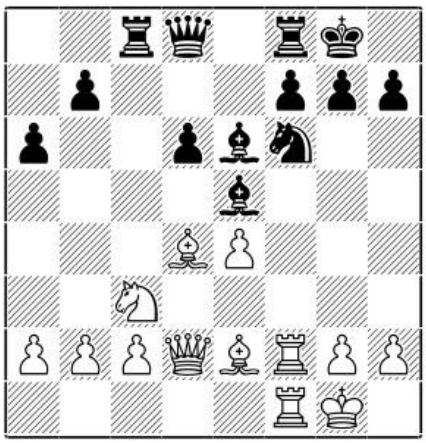
A2) 11.Rxf4

This is more ambitious than the previous option. The rook may look a little awkward but it is actually quite active – in fact, White may even use it on the queenside!



11...Nc6 12.Nd5

After 12.Nd4 Nxd4 13.Qxd4 I had a chance to carry out the regrouping plan recommended in the previous variation: 13...Ne8! 14.Rf2 Bf6 15.Qd2 Rc8 16.Bd4 Be5 17.Raf1 Nf6



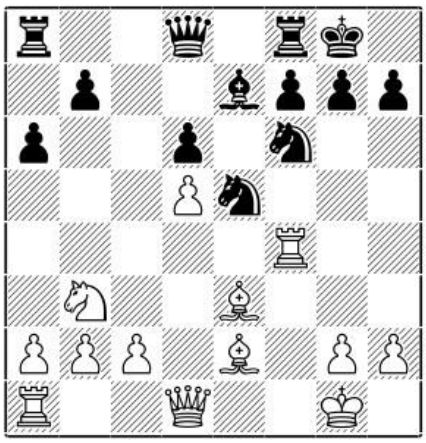
18.Bxe5 dxe5 19.Qg5? Rxc3–+ Black soon won in Elmore – Vigorito, Leominster 2011. All I had to do was follow the example of Portisch and take the tactical opportunity when it arose.

12...Bxd5

Black grants White the bishop pair but plugs the hole on d5.

13.exd5 Ne5

White has the bishop pair and some space, while Black has decent squares for his knights, a safe king and a compact pawn structure. Thus, White needs to come up with something.



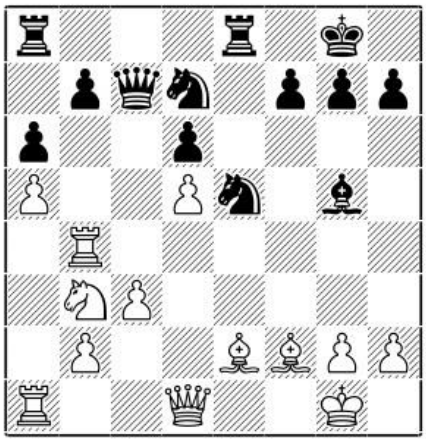
14.Rb4!?

White hopes to create pressure on Black's queenside pawns. It all seems a bit exotic to me though, and I like Black's central play.

14...Qc7 15.a4 Nfd7 16.a5 Rfe8 17.c3 Bf6 18.Bf2

This looks a bit passive and allows Black to activate his bishop. 18.Qd2 avoids this, although Black still gets a good game with 18...Re7, preparing to double rooks.

18...Bg5



19.Nd2

Another example went 19.Bf1 g6 20.Kh1 Re7 21.h3 Rae8[3] and Black had the more comfortable position in Khukhashvili – Cmilyte, Aviles 2000.

19...Nf6 20.Ne4 Nxe4 21.Rxe4

Karpov famously avoided playing the Sicilian throughout most of his career, with a few notable exceptions. On one such occasion, he reached this position with Black and continued 21...f5!? in Mortensen – Karpov, Plovdiv 1983. Black's last move activates the kingside pawn majority, but it was perfectly okay to play more flexibly and simply prepare to double rooks on the e-file with 21...Re7, as occurred in one subsequent game.

B) 10.a4

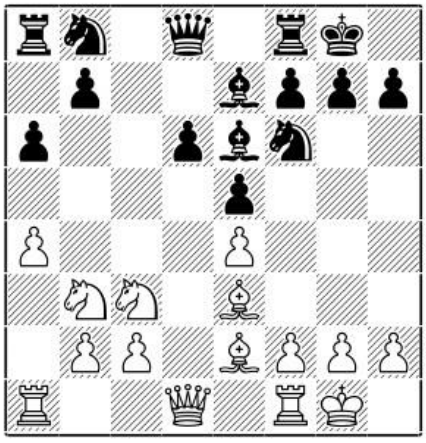
GAME 3

Eduard Roche Peris – Tomas Learte Pastor

Correspondence 2003

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Be2 e5 7.Nb3 Be7 8.0-0 0-0 9.Be3 Be6 10.a4

This move is not uncommon, even though ...b5 is not really a threat yet. Some White players like to prevent ...b5 anyway; but by playing doing so at this early stage, White gives Black an extra option.



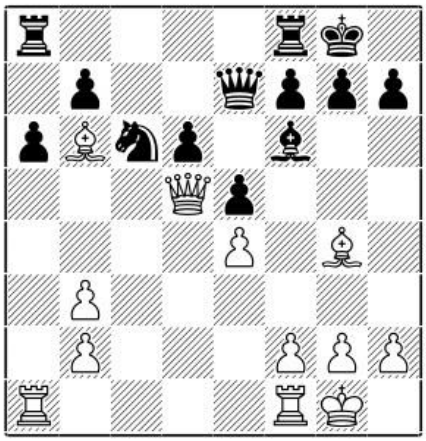
10...Nc6!?

Now that a2-a3 is not possible, the knight heads for b4 to contest the d5-square. Black can also play 10...Nbd7 when 11.a5 Rc8 12.Qd2 reaches variation C1, where the same position is reached via the move order 10.Qd2 Nbd7 11.a4 Rc8 12.a5. It is worth pointing out that if Black plays this way, he will have missed out on the option of meeting 10.Qd2 Nbd7 11.a4 with the modern 11...Nb6!?, as covered in Game 4.

11.Qd2

11.f4 exf4 will resemble variation A1 or A2 after 12.Bxf4 or 12.Rxf4 respectively; but in either case, Black has a comfortable version because White does not usually play a2-a4 so early in either of those lines.

11.a5!? is more consistent with White's previous move, although it does entail a pawn sacrifice: 11...Bxb3 (Black could also decline the offer with 11...Rc8 12.Bb6 Qd7 intending ...Bd8) 12.cxb3 Nxa5 13.Nd5 Nc6 14.Bb6 Qd7 15.Nxf6† Bxf6 16.Bg4 Qe7 17.Qd5 White has enough compensation for equality, but not for any advantage. A good example continued:



17...g6! 18.Rad1 h5 19.Be2?! (19.Bh3N was preferable) 19...Nd4 20.Bc4 Rac8 21.f4 Kg7[3] Marjanovic – De Firmian, Kolhapur 1987.

11...Nb4

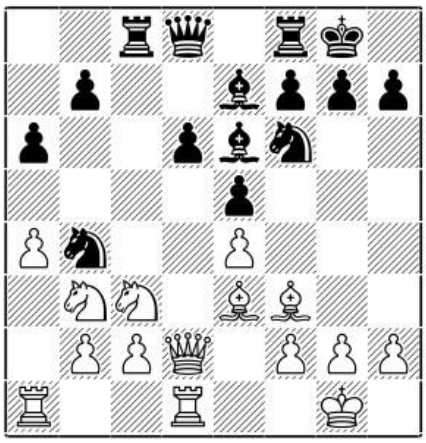
This is the most combative.

11...d5 is a slightly premature attempt to simplify. After 12.exd5 Nxd5 13.Nxd5 Qxd5 14.Qxd5 Bxd5 Black's position is certainly playable but White maintains slight pressure after 15.c4 Be6 16.Nc5. In general, Black should not rush to play ...d5 in this structure simply because he can – each position has to be assessed on its

own merits.

12.Rfd1 Rc8 13.Bf3

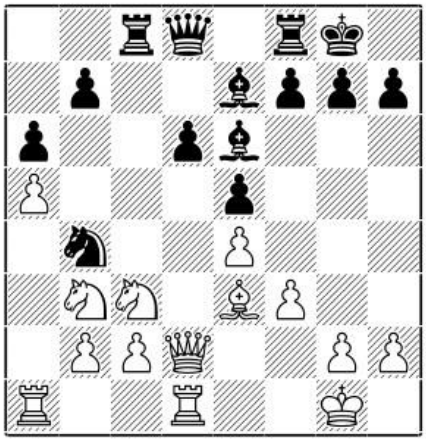
13.a5 allows Black to play 13...d5 under better conditions; after 14.Bb6 Qe8 15.exd5 Black can choose between 15...Nbxd5 16.Nxd5 Bxd5 and 15...Nfxd5 16.Nxd5 Bxd5, with no problems in either case.



13...Ng4

13...Bg4!? is a playable alternative but I like the text move the most – Black is playing for the bishop pair.

14.Bxg4 Bxg4 15.f3 Be6 16.a5



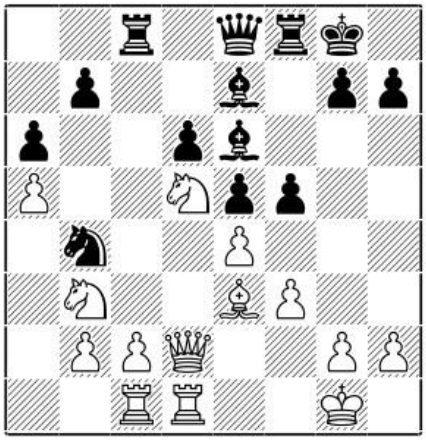
16...Qe8![3]

This smart move enables the black queen to look at both sides of the board along the weakened light squares. With the bishop pair and the d5-square under control, Black has scored very well here.

17.Rac1 f5!

Black immediately seizes the initiative with this pawn break.

18.Nd5



18...Bxd5!

After 18...Nxd5 19.exd5 White can look for counterplay with Qb4. The text move is simpler.

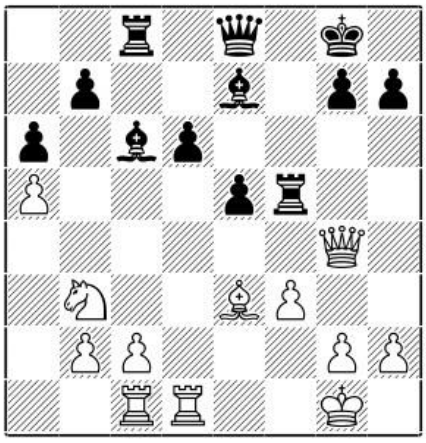
19.Qxb4

White would like to eliminate the bishop with 19.exd5 but after 19...Qb5!µ, threatening ...Nxc2, White is in big trouble.

19...Bc6 20.exf5

Black is also better after 20.Nd2 d5.

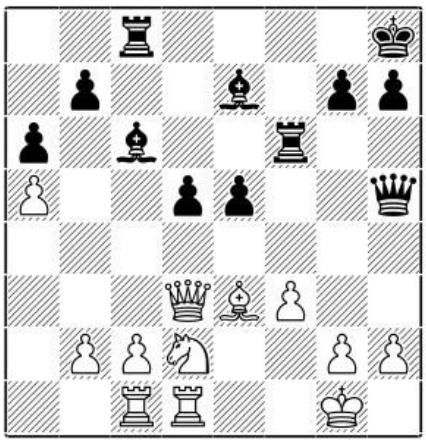
20...Rxf5 21.Qg4



21...Rf6

Another convincing example continued 21...Qf7 22.c4 h5! 23.Qh3 Ba4 24.Rc3 g6 25.Rdc1 Bxb3 26.Rxb3 Rxc4µ and Black went on to win in Strautins – Bokar, corr. 2006.

22.Qc4† Kh8 23.Qd3 Qh5 24.Nd2 d5



25.c4?

White tries to fight his way out of a clearly worse position, but he should have settled for 25.Nf1. The text move allows Black to break through on the kingside.

25...e4! 26.fxe4 Bd6 27.h3

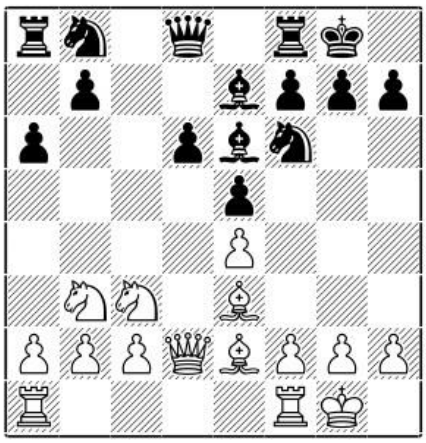
27.Nf1 Rxf1† 28.Kxf1 Rf8† wins quickly, while after 27.g3 dxe4–+ Black will soon break through.

27...Qe5 28.Nf3 Rxf3 29.gxf3 Qg3†

0–1

So far, we have seen that 10.f4 is a bit premature and 10.a4 is not yet necessary. The next option is more flexible.

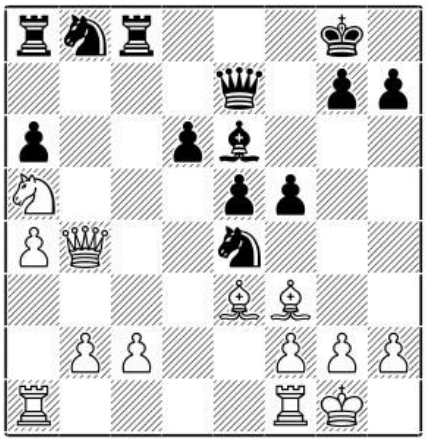
C) 10.Qd2



This is a natural choice to connect the rooks and complete development. White's classical plan of development is often attributed to Karpov, who won some nice strategic games in this line.

10...Nbd7

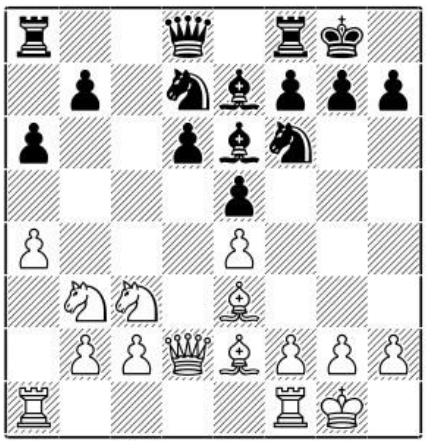
10...b5!? could be an interesting alternative for anyone looking for an unusual option. This move is generally considered to be premature because of 11.a4, but Black's position looks playable after: 11...b4 12.Nd5 Nxe4 13.Nxe7† (13.Qd3!? is interesting although it has hardly ever been played) 13...Qxe7 14.Qxb4 f5 15.Na5 Rc8 16.Bf3



16...Nc6! (White has scored well against the more common options of 16...Nbd7 and 16...Bd5, but the text move improves) 17.Nxc6 Rxc6 18.Bxe4 fxe4 19.Qxe4 Rac8 20.c3 This occurred in Doudon – Contini, corr. 1996, and now 20...Qb7!?N would be my choice, with reasonable counterplay for the sacrificed pawn. Still, the text move is more reliable.

11.a4

Black has brought all of his minor pieces into the game, so he was fully prepared for ...b5. For example, 11.Rfd1 b5 (11...Rc8 is fine too) 12.a4 b4 13.Nd5 Bxd5 14.exd5 Nb6 with equality.



Black has several playable options; we will analyse both the traditional **C1)** 11...Rc8 and the popular alternative **C2)** 11...Nb6!?.

11...Qc7 is another decent move. After the likely reply of 12.a5, Black has the option of transposing straight to variation C1 with 12...Rac8 if he wishes – but he could also experiment with the idea of leaving the rook on a8 to try to get in ...b5. Sometimes Black even plays the eccentric looking ...Rc8-a8 for this purpose.

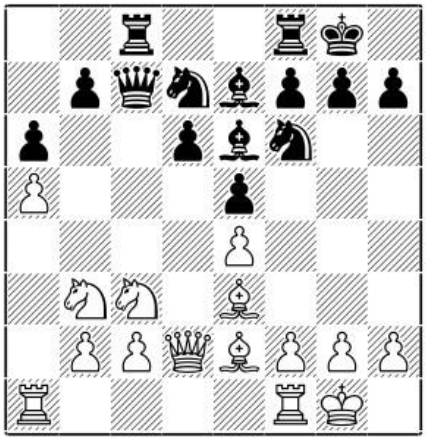
Another plan is 11...Nc5!?, which has evolved into a thematic idea. For example, 12.Nxc5 dxc5 13.Rfd1 (13.Qxd8 Rfxd8 should be safe enough for Black) 13...Qc7 14.Nd5 (14.f3 Rfd8 15.Qe1 c4 frees Black's dark squared-bishop) 14...Bxd5 15.exd5 Bd6 with the idea of ...e4. We will encounter this structure again in variation D12, and a lot of the themes from that section can be applied here.

C1) 11...Rc8 12.a5

White tries to fix the b6-square, but sometimes Black can break out anyway with ...b5.

12...Qc7

With this move Black puts pressure on the c-file, preventing White from playing Nd5 for the moment.



We will analyse two rook moves, **C11)** 13.Rfc1 and **C12)** 13.Rfd1, each of which implies a distinct strategy by White. The former guards the c-pawn, thus preparing a well-timed Nd5, followed by a thematic change in the pawn structure; and the latter intends the laborious manoeuvre of the b3-knight towards the d5-square.

C11) 13.Rfc1 Qc6!

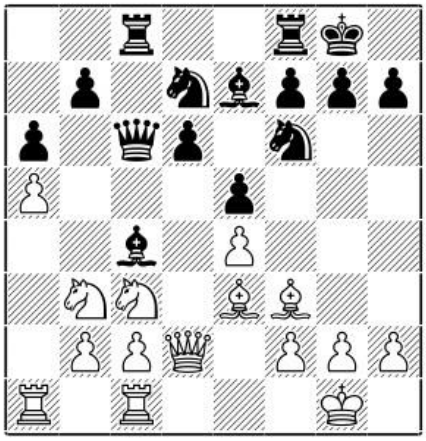
The 13...Nc5!? plan can also be considered, as 14.Nxc5 dxc5 leaves White's rook misplaced on c1.

14.Bf3

14.f3? d5![3] should obviously be avoided by White.

14...Bc4!

Black physically blocks the enemy c-pawn from advancing should White play Nd5 at some point.

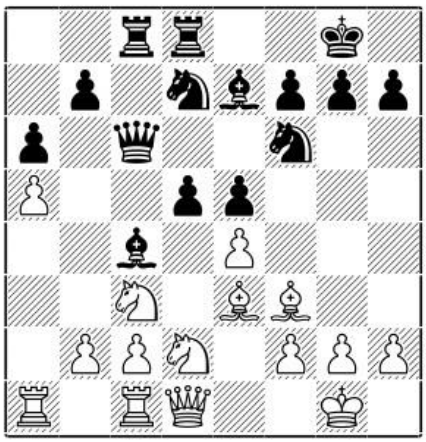


15.Ra4!?

This was Karpov's choice.

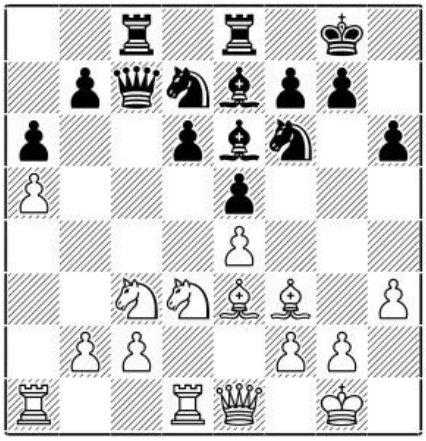
15.Nd5? is simply a mistake because of 15...Nxd5 16.exd5 Qb5µ.

15.Qd1 prepares Nd2 to dislodge the bishop, but 15...Rfd8 16.Nd2 d5!? (16...Be6 is also okay) gives Black interesting play. For instance:



17.exd5 (17.b3 d4 is fine for Black, and 17.Nxc4 dxc4,, has also proven perfectly reliable for the second player in several games) 17...Bxd5 18.Nxd5 Nxd5 ½–½ was Beliavsky – Ribli, Bugojno 1984.

15.Rd1 is another idea, reverting to the same manoeuvring plan as in variation C12 below. 15...Rfe8 16.Qe1 Be6 17.h3 h6 18.Nc1 Qc7 19.Nd3 has occurred in a few games, when an interesting improvement is:



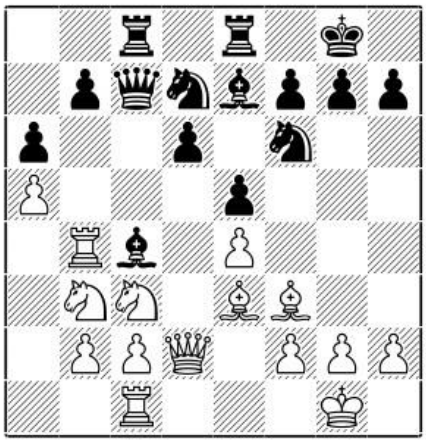
19...d5!?N This is a thematic pawn sacrifice: after 20.exd5 Bf5 Black has good play.

15...Rfe8!

The following game is an example of what Black should avoid: 15...Rfd8 16.Rb4 Qc7 17.Nd5 Nxd5 18.exd5 f5 19.Be2 Bxb3?! 20.Rxb3 f4 21.Bb6 Nxb6 22.Rxb6 Bg5 23.Bg4 Rb8 24.Re1 Qc5 25.Re4 Rf8 26.b4 Qc7 27.c4 White had an overwhelming advantage in Karpov – Portisch, London 1982.

16.Rb4 Qc7

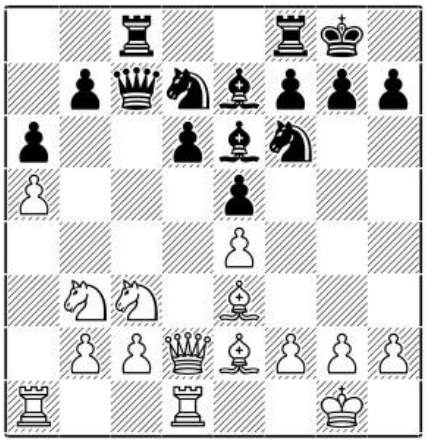
With the idea of ...d5.



17.Nd5 Nxd5 18.exd5

Black has scored well with both 18...Nf6,,, as seen in Zapata – Sunye Neto, Cienfuegos 1984, and 18...f5,,, as in Lukin – Hjartarson, Leningrad 1984. In both cases, compared to the Karpov – Portisch game, the rook is better on e8 than d8, as it supports a possible advance of the e-pawn and avoids being hit by a bishop landing on b6.

C12) 13.Rfd1



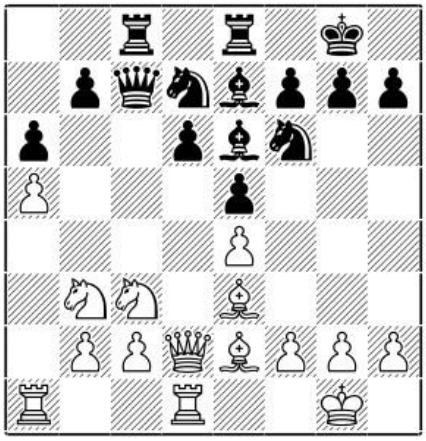
This is certainly a natural move. White is dreaming of conquering the d5-square with Nc1-d3/a2-b4 before finally landing a knight on that square. Matters are hardly that simple though, and White has not scored very well trying to execute this plan.

13...Rfe8!

According to my education, the rook belongs here rather than on d8.

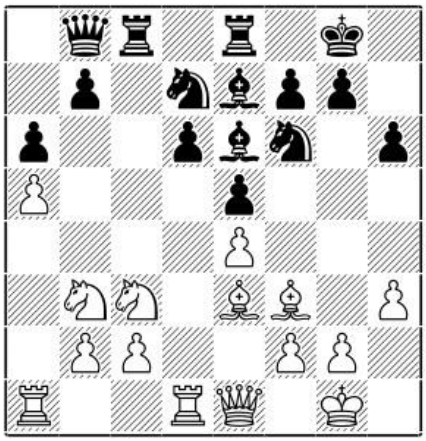
Black has tried several moves including 13...Qc6, 13...h6 and 13...Nc5, but the apparently more natural rook move 13...Rfd8 has been the most common choice of all. After 14.Qe1 Black can either change the structure with 14...Nc5 15.Nxc5 dxc5 16.Rxd8† Rxd8 17.f3 c4 or continue the shadowboxing. One such example went 14...Qc6 15.Bf3 Bc4 16.Nc1 h6 17.N1a2 Nc5?! 18.Nb4 Qe8 19.g3 Rc7 20.Bg2 Rdc8 21.b3 Be6 22.Ncd5 Nxd5 23.Nxd5 Bxd5 24.Rxd5 with a nice edge for White in Karpov – Nunn, Amsterdam 1985.

The reason why I prefer the text move is that the rook is not likely to be needed on d8. If White plays Nd5 the d-file will be blocked; and if White tries to manoeuvre his b3-knight, Black will often play ...d5 as a pawn sacrifice, after which the rook will be better placed on e8 to support the possible advance of Black's e-pawn.



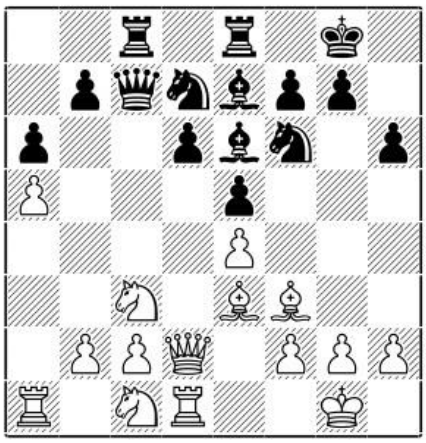
14.Qe1

White has also tried 14.h3 to prevent the knight excursion which occurs in our main line. Play may continue 14...h6 (14...Qc6 is another sensible idea) 15.Qe1 Qb8!? 16.Bf3 Here Svidler suggests an improvement:



16...Rc6!N (the game continued 16...Rc4 17.Nd2 Rc6 18.Nf1 when White was preparing to manoeuvre the knight to e3 in Adams – Svidler, Baku 2008) The text move appears to put the rook in the line of fire of White's knight manoeuvre to be; but after 17.Nc1 Rec8 18.Nd3 Rc4! Black prevents Nb4 and keeps a good position.

Another common continuation is:
14.Bf3 h6 15.Nc1
In such a position Black will never be able to carry out the ...d5 break unless as a sacrifice, which highlights the uselessness of having a rook on d8. In this particular position the ...d5 sacrifice does not work, but Black obtains a fine position with the help of another typical idea:



15...b5!

Remember that just because White has 'clamped down' with a4-a5, it does not mean we cannot consider this advance.

16.axb6

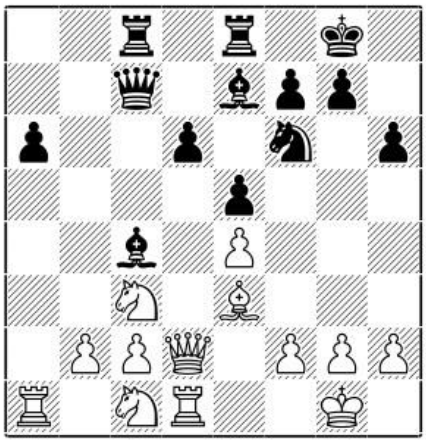
16.Nd3 was seen in Bashkov – Kaminski, Warsaw 1991, when 16...d5!N 17.exd5 Bf5³ would have been excellent for Black.

16...Nxb6 17.Be2

17.Bxb6 Qxb6³ favoured Black in Schubert – N. Robson, corr. 2002; and 17.Rxa6? Nc4µ would make things even worse for White.

17...Nc4 18.Bxc4 Bxc4³

Black is already better. He has the bishop pair and all of his pieces are ready for action in the centre.



19.N1a2!?N

19.f3?! is well met by: 19...d5! 20.Nxd5 (20.exd5 Red8µ) 20...Bxd5! (20...Nxd5?! is less convincing after 21.exd5 Bxd5 22.Qa5!„) 21.exd5 Nxd5 22.Bf2 (22.Qxd5? Rcd8–+) 22...Red8µ Loskutov – Zakhartsov, Alushta 2005.

19.Qe1 Qb7 20.b3 Be6 21.f3 d5! 22.exd5 Bxd5 (22...Bb4µ is also strong) 23.Nd3 e4 24.fxe4 Bxe4 25.Nxe4 Nxe4–+ Nevostrujev – Efimenko, St Petersburg 2004.

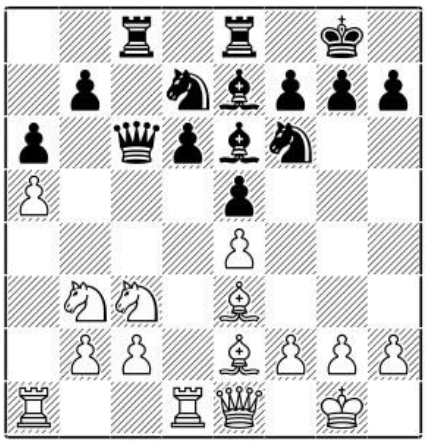
The text move seems like White's best attempt to reach an acceptable position, although Black is still doing well after:

19...Qb7 20.b3 Be6 21.f3 d5!

Yet again this central break is key.

22.Nxd5 Bxd5 23.exd5 Red8³

14...Qc6



15.Bf3 h6

Another decent continuation is:

15...Ng4!? 16.Ba7!?

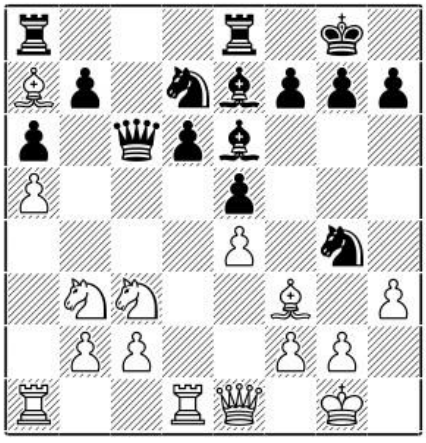
This looks strange, but White wants to lure Black's rook to a silly square.

16.Bxg4 Bxg4 17.f3 Be6 followed by ...f5 would give Black fine play.

If 16.Bd2 Black has tried 16...Bh4!? 17.g3 Bd8 to soften White's kingside slightly.

16.Bc1 can also be met with either 16...Bh4 with the same idea, or simply 16...Ngf6 to feel out White's intentions.

16...Ra8 17.h3



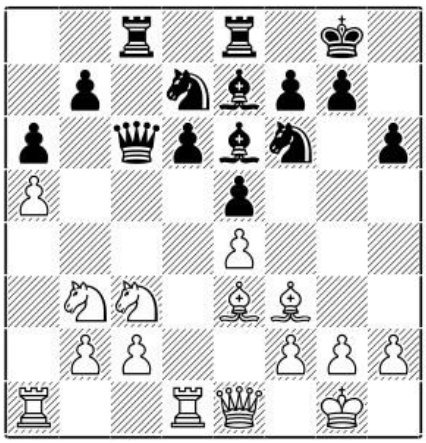
17...Nh2!?

In an echo of White's 16th move, Black seeks to misplace the enemy king.

17...Rxa7 18.Bxg4 Nf6 is also fine, and 19.Bxe6 fxe6 was equal in Hjorth – Morrow, corr. 2013.

18.Kxh2 Rxa7

Black had a good game in Kovchan – Saric, Biel 2016. His plans involve ...Nf6 to contest the d5-square, followed by bringing the a7-rook back into play.

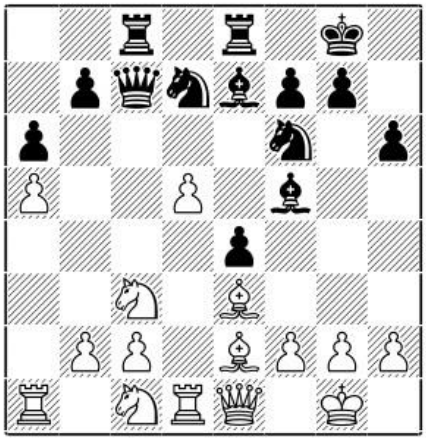


16.Nc1 Qc7 17.Nd3

White is all set to play Nb4 when he will be in full control. Thus, Black's next move is not only strong, but also virtually forced.

17...d5! 18.exd5 Bf5 19.Be2 e4 20.Nc1

This position has been reached a few times. Black has a lot of activity for the pawn, with several possible ways of handing the position.



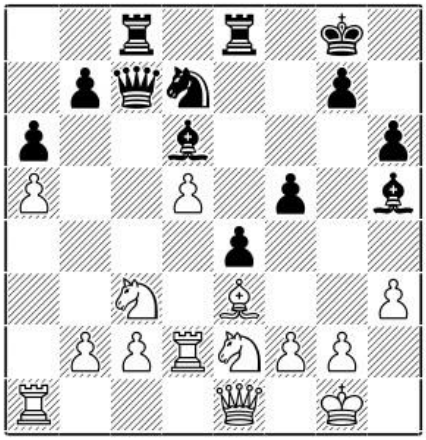
20...Ng4!?

20...Bb4 21.Nb3 Qe5 22.Qd2 Bd6 23.g3 Qe7 24.Re1 Ne5 25.Qd4 Bg6 also gave Black good play for the pawn in Nikel – Tsenkov, corr. 2005.

A later example continued 20...Qe5 21.Bd4 Qd6 22.Nb3 Ng4 23.Bxg4 Bxg4 24.Rdb1 Nf6 with two bishops and an active game for the pawn, Wosch – Fages, corr. 2009.

21.Bxg4 Bxg4 22.N1e2 Bd6 23.h3 Bh5 24.Rd2 f5„

We are following a well-played game, where Black went on to take control after:



25.Nd4 f4! 26.Ne6 fxe3 27.Nxc7 exd2 28.Qxd2 Rxc7³

Black's rook and two bishops were worth more than White's queen and pawns in Asrian – Kotsur, Dubai 2000.

C2) 11...Nb6!?

Although the previous variation is fully playable, the text move is equally good and the choice is mostly a matter of taste.

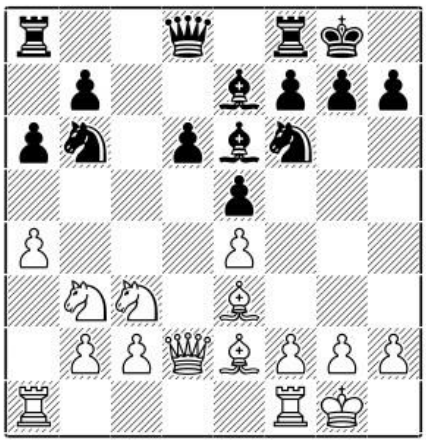
GAME 4

Jan Smeets – Anish Giri

Germany 2010

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Be2 e5 7.Nb3 Be7 8.0-0 0-0 9.Be3

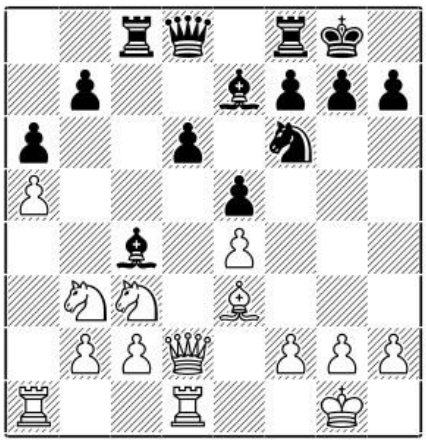
Be6 10.Qd2 Nbd7 11.a4 Nb6!?



This forcing continuation has been favoured by the top players over the last few years. Black is ready to play ...d5 so White must react.

12.a5 Nc4 13.Bxc4 Bxc4 14.Rfd1 Rc8

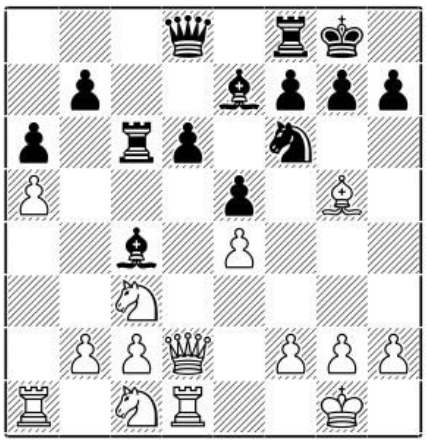
Black enjoys the bishop pair but sacrificed a few tempos to get his knight to c4.



15.Nc1

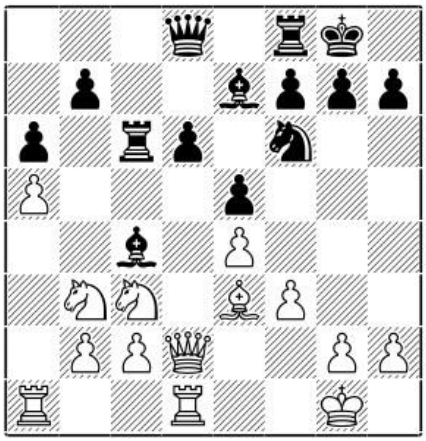
The knight seeks out a better future.

Playing for the d5-square with 15.Bg5 is not so dangerous, and Black has more than one good reply: 15...Rc6 (there is also 15...Be6!?N 16.Bxf6 [White should avoid 16.Nc1?! Rxc3!] 16...Bxf6 17.Qxd6 Qxd6 18.Rxd6 Rfd8 when Black's active rooks and bishop pair compensate for the missing pawn) 16.Nc1 (16.Bxf6 Bxf6 17.Nd5 Bg5 is good for Black; the knight on d5 looks pretty, but Black's bishops are active and he can play for ...f5) This occurred in Prathamesh – Patil, Nagpur 2008. Here I suggest:



16...Be6!N 17.Nd3 Rc4 18.f3 Qc7 Black is fine, with ...Rc8 and ...h6 on the way.

White can also aim for solidity with:
15.f3 Rc6!
Black prepares to pile up some heavy pieces on the c-file.



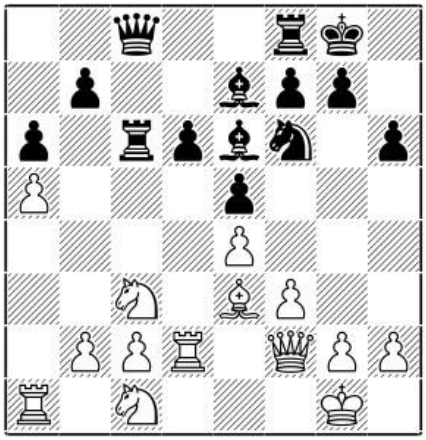
16.Bb6
Flicking in this bishop move is always tempting. I checked three other continuations:
a) One nice point to Black's last move is that 16.Nc1 can be met by 16...d5! 17.exd5 Nxd5 18.Nxd5 Bxd5 when the bishop is untouchable: 19.Qxd5?? Rd6–+
b) 16.Nd5?! proved to be poorly timed after 16...Nxd5 17.exd5 Rc8 18.Nc1 f5 19.b3 Bb5 20.c4 Bd7³ in Pourkashiyan – Gopal, Doha 2014. The unbalanced pawn structure often favours the bishop pair as they can participate in developments all over the board.
c) 16.Kh1 is a typical prophylactic move, when 16...Qc8! is a good reaction: Black brings the queen to the c-file while staying out of range of White's knight. 17.Rac1 Rd8 Now ...d5 is a real threat, so White's hand is forced. 18.Nd5 Bxd5

19.exd5 Rc4 20.Qd3 e4!? saw Black transform the pawn structure in order to activate his pieces in Jakovenko – Carlsen, Nanjing 2009. This tournament was Carlsen's 'coming out party' as he won this game as well as all five of his White games to seize the number-one rating in the world.

16...Qc8

After 16...Rxb6?! 17.axb6 Bxb3 18.cxb3 Qxb6† 19.Kh1 Qxb3 20.Rac1 Black did not have enough for the exchange in Leko – Shirov, Moscow 2008.

17.Qe1 Bd8 18.Be3 h6 19.Qf2 Be7 20.Nc1 Be6 21.Rd2



21...Rxc3!

This kind of sacrifice is highly thematic for the Najdorf, even if Black is unable to take the e4-pawn.

22.bxc3 d5!

And this is the typical follow-up. Activating the pieces is more important than capturing the c3-pawn.

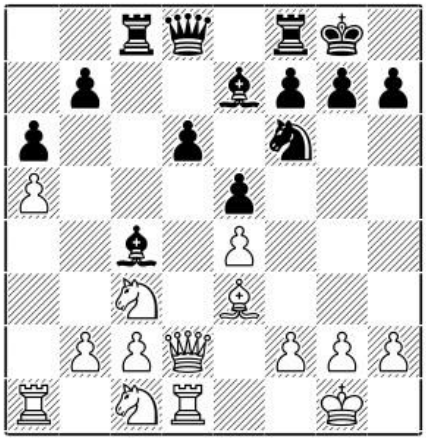
23.Nb3

This is forced.

After 23.exd5? Nxd5 there are too many threats, such as ...Qxc3, and ...Nxe3 followed by ...Bc5.

23...dxe4 24.Bc5 Bxc5 25.Nxc5 Bf5

Black had excellent compensation for the exchange in Loskutov – Sjugirov, Irkutsk 2010.



15...d5!?

This leads to interesting tactical play.

15...Qc7 and 15...Be6 are good positional alternatives which have also scored well in practice.

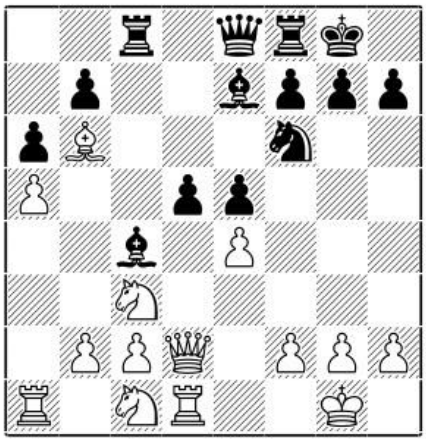
16.Bb6

16.exd5 Bb4 17.Bb6 Qe8 transposes to the 17.exd5 line in the notes below.

16.Nxd5?! is worse in view of 16...Nxe4 17.Nxe7† Qxe7 18.Qe1 Bb5 19.c3 Rfd8$^{\infty}$ when Black has the more active position.

16...Qe8!

It is important to go to this square for tactical reasons. Instead 16...Qd7? 17.b3 Bb4 18.bxc4 Nxe4 (or 18...d4 19.N1a2) loses to 19.Qxd5!+– when White keeps the extra piece.



17.Nxd5

Instead 17.b3? Bb4! 18.bxc4 Nxe4 now works for Black.

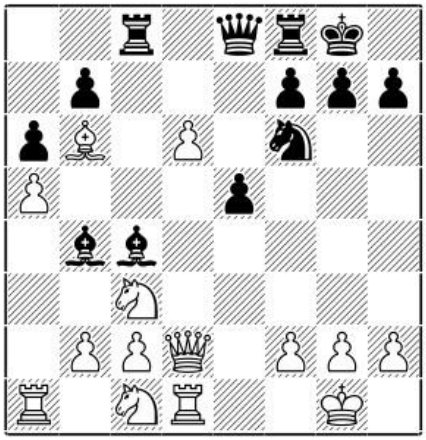
The alternative is:

17.exd5 Bb4

This usually leads to drawish simplifications.

18.d6

18.Nd3 Bxc3 19.Qxc3 Nxd5 20.Qxe5 Nxb6 21.Qxe8 Rfxe8 22.axb6 Bxd3 23.Rxd3 Rxc2 is level.



18...Qd7

18...Bxc3!? also looks satisfactory and it keeps a bit more play in the position. 19.bxc3 (after 19.Qxc3?! Be2 20.Nxe2 Rxc3 21.Nxc3 Nd7 Black has some winning chances) 19...Qd7= Black is poised to regain the pawn, for instance with ...Rc6 and ...Ne4.

19.Nd3 Bxd6!

19...Qxd6 20.Nxb4 Qxb4 21.Ne4 Qxd2 22.Nxf6† gxf6 23.Rxd2 Be6 left Black on the slightly unpleasant side of a draw in Leko – Shirov, Dortmund 2002. The text move is easier.

20.Nxe5

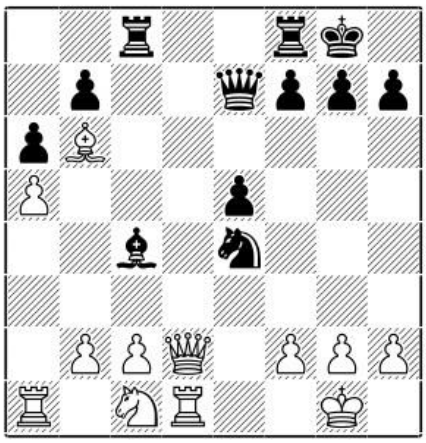
20.Nf4!? is possible, although 20...Rc6!N is a perfectly adequate reply.

20...Bxe5 21.Qxd7 Nxd7 22.Rxd7 Bxc3 23.bxc3 Bb5=

The endgame is an easy draw, as has been demonstrated in numerous games.

17...Nxe4 18.Nxe7† Qxe7

We have reached a middlegame with opposite-coloured bishops and a pawn majority for each side. Objectively it should be equal, but in practice Black has done well. The extra centre pawn and kingside play can easily lead to a dangerous attack.



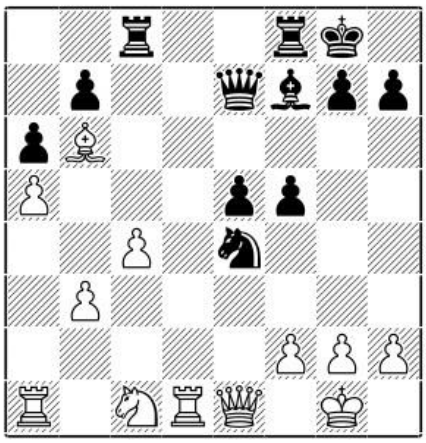
19.Qe1

19.Qe3 f5 20.Nd3 Rfe8 21.Re1 Qe6 22.Rad1 Bxd3 23.Qxd3 Nf6 also led to balanced play in Kriebel – Oparin, Pune 2014.

19...f5

Black protects the knight and makes room for his bishop.

20.b3 Bf7 21.c4



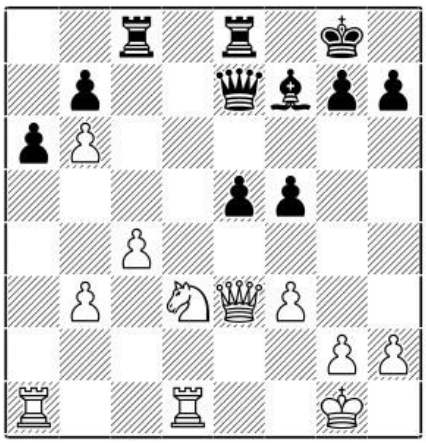
21...Rfe8!

This is a nice little prophylactic move.

21...Bh5 22.Rd5 (22.f3 Ng5,,) 22...Qg5?! (22...Bf7 would repeat the position) occurred in Hracek – Wojtaszek, Czech Republic 2007, when 23.Qe3!N would have been promising for White, as a queen exchange would dampen Black's attacking prospects.

22.Nd3

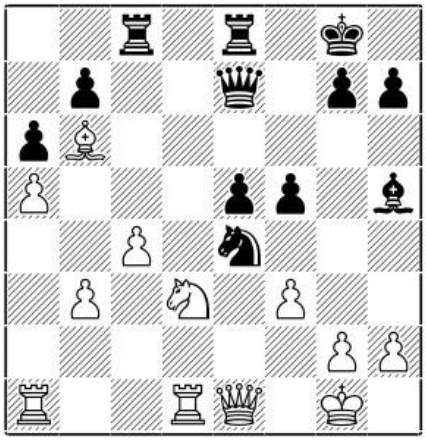
Another noteworthy game continued: 22.f3 Nc5 (22...Nf6 could easily transpose) 23.Qe3 Nd7 24.Nd3?! (24.Ba7N would have maintained the balance) 24...Nxb6 25.axb6



This occurred in Adams – Anand, London 2011, and now 25...Qf6!N would have given Black some initiative, with ideas of ...f4 and ...e4 in the air.

22...Bh5 23.f3

23.Rdc1 can be met by 23...Qg5 intending ...Rc6. The rook lift is a useful resource, as we shall see.



23...Ng5!

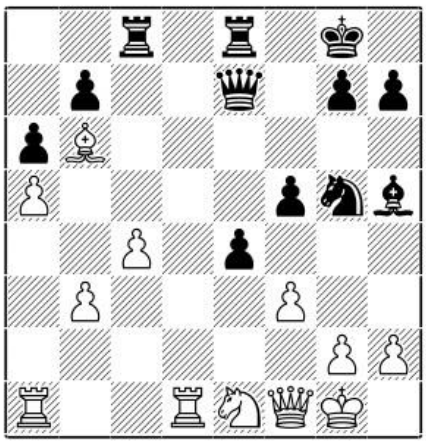
The storm clouds are gathering around the white king.

24.Qf1

24.h4 Nxf3†! 25.gxf3 Bxf3 gives Black a powerful attack, with ...Rc6 on the way.

24...e4! 25.Ne1

25.Nf4 Nxf3†! 26.gxf3 Qg5† 27.Qg2 (27.Ng2 exf3µ) 27...Qxf4 28.Rd7 Qh6 29.Bd4 Bf7 leaves Black with an extra pawn as well as the safer king.

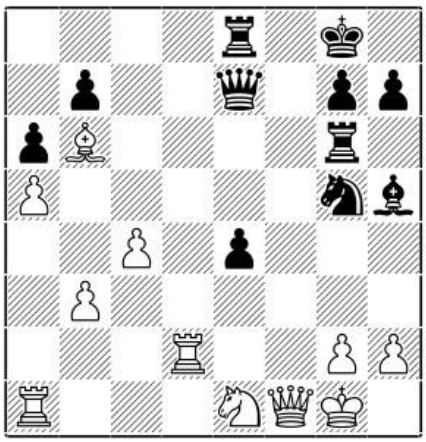


25...Rc6!

Black brings the last piece into play.

26.Rd2 Rg6 27.fxe4 fxe4

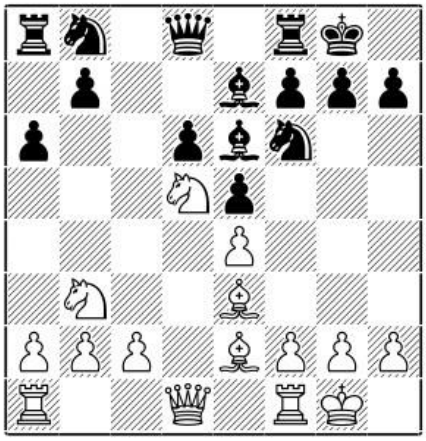
Black is attacking with everything. There is no defence, and Giri soon breaks through.



28.Qf5 Rf8 29.Qd5† Kh8 30.h4 Nh3† 31.Kh2 Qxh4 32.Qd8 Qg3† 33.Kh1 Rgf6 34.Nc2 h6 35.Bc7 Nf2† 36.Kg1 Qh4

0–1

D) 10.Nd5



This forcing move is White's main continuation these days. He controls the pace and heads for a thematic pawn structure.

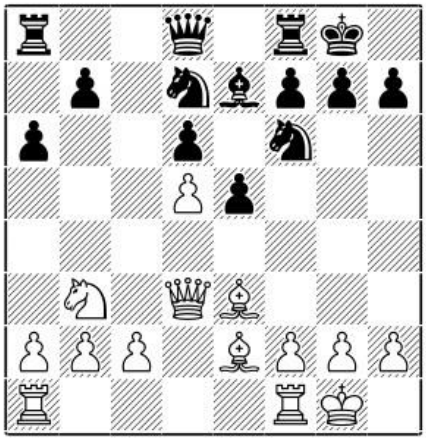
10...Nbd7

Capturing on d5 with the knight would lose time, while 10...Nxe4? loses the exchange for insufficient compensation after 11.Bb6 Qd7 12.Nc7 Nc6 13.Nxa8 Rxa8 14.c4. After the text move, White does have to protect the e4-pawn.

11.Qd3 Bxd5 12.exd5

As mentioned earlier on page 38, this position might also arise via the move order 10.Qd3 Nbd7 11.Nd5 Bxd5 12.exd5.

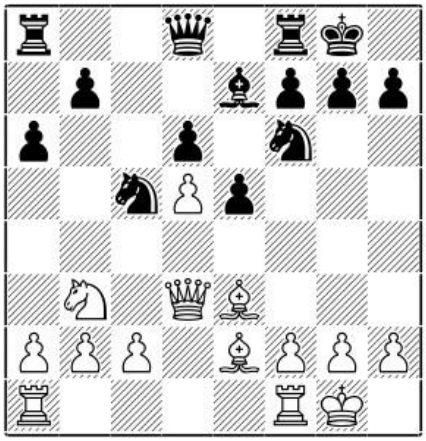
The resulting structure frequently arises in the Najdorf, so developing a good feeling for it is important for understanding the Najdorf in general. White's trumps are obvious: he has the bishop pair and a queenside pawn majority which can be mobilized in the long run. In return, Black has a healthy kingside pawn majority which can help him create play in the centre and on the kingside. He can usually find decent squares for his knights, and can take steps to make it harder for White to advance on the queenside.



This is an important variation, so I will once again cover two possibilities for Black. First we will investigate **D1)** 12...Nc5!?, which is an important option although not necessarily my top choice for our repertoire. By analysing it first, we will gain valuable insight into a thematic pawn structure, as well as into the way that the theory and understanding of these positions has evolved over time. We will then move on to the flexible **D2)** 12...Rc8.

12...Ne8 has actually been the most popular choice of all, while 12...Re8 has also been tried by some strong GMs. However, if Black does not wish to offer a change in the pawn structure with 12...Nc5, then 12...Rc8 is my preferred option, as it keeps things flexible and avoids committing any kingside pieces prematurely.

D1) 12...Nc5!?



Black attacks White's queen and dares him to change the pawn structure again. At first this looks like a radical idea, as White can immediately

create a passed d-pawn by capturing, but the concept has become quite popular. Even if you prefer variation D2 below, it is worth familiarizing yourself with this section in order to gain some insight into the thematic structure that may ensue.

White has two contrasting approaches: he may refuse the provocation with **D11)** 13.Qd2 or accept the invitation to change the structure with **D12)** 13.Nxc5.

D11) 13.Qd2

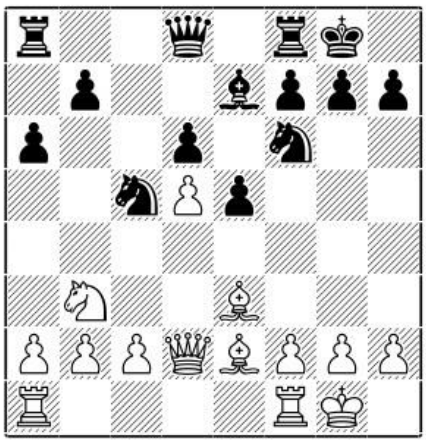
GAME 5

Peter Svidler – Judit Polgar

Dos Hermanas 1999

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Be2 e5 7.Nb3 Be7 8.0-0 0-0 9.Be3 Be6 10.Nd5 Nbd7 11.Qd3 Bxd5 12.exd5 Nc5 13.Qd2

After some early reversals that resulted from capturing on c5, White turned to this move for a while; although as we will see, the first option is more accurate when followed up correctly. Retreating to d1 would interfere with the coordination of the rooks, so the queen allows herself to be further poked around.



13...Nfe4 14.Qb4 a5

This comes with tempo and a subsequent ...a4 may gain even more time in the future. It does weaken the b5-square, however.

A flexible alternative is:

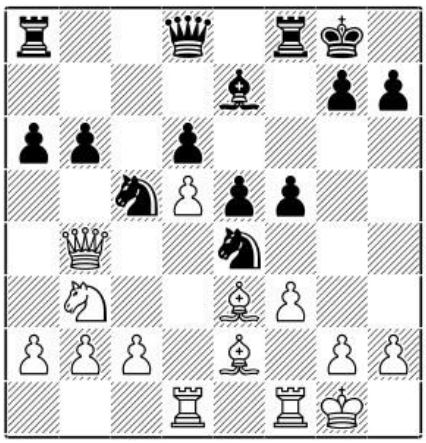
14...b6!?

This solidifies the queenside without committing to advancing the a-pawn just yet.

15.Rad1

15.f3 Nf6 16.Rad1 Nfd7 17.Qd2 occurred in Short – Efimenko, Wijk aan Zee 2009, when Black should have played 17...f5N, simply getting on with his kingside play.

15...f5 16.f3

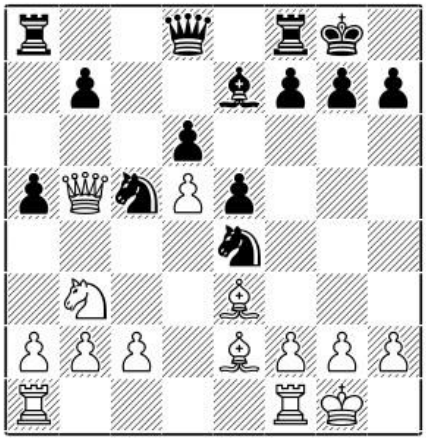


16...Bg5! 17.Bxg5 Nxg5 18.f4 Nxb3 19.axb3 exf4 20.Qxf4 g6 21.Ra1 a5 22.b4 Nf7 23.Kh1 Ne5³

The strong knight gave Black an obvious edge in Brodsky – Vigorito, Boston 2014.

15.Qb5

15.Qc4 Rc8 16.Qb5 hardly changes anything, and after 16...b6 17.f3 Nf6 Black was fine in Anand – Gelfand, Zurich (rapid) 2014.

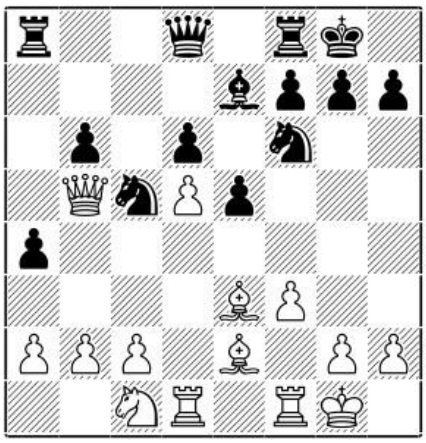


15...Qc7

This has been the most common, although in this and most other games, the queen goes back

to d8 soon.

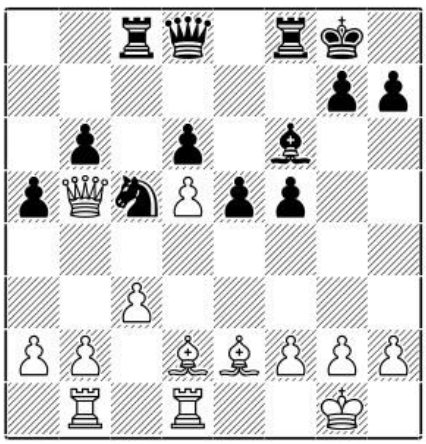
For that reason, the immediate 15...b6!? should be considered. 16.f3 Nf6 has occurred in a couple of games, with good results for Black so far. For example, 17.Rad1 a4 18.Nc1 (18.Nxc5 bxc5 also looks fine) and here I suggest:



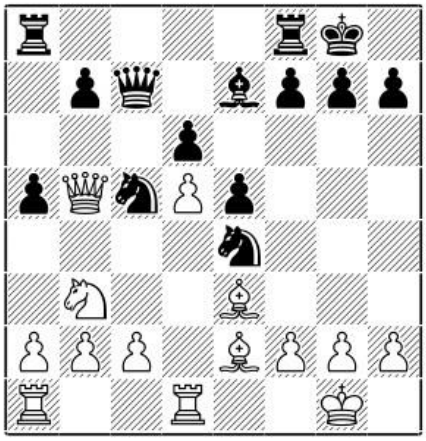
18...Nfd7N Black will create plenty of counterplay with ...Bg5 and ...f5. (18...Nh5 is another reasonable move which was played in Hoefer – Djoubi, corr. 2003.)

16.Rfd1

Another high-level game continued: 16.Qc4 Rac8 17.Rfd1 f5 18.c3 Qd8 19.Qb5 b6 20.Nd2 Nxd2 21.Bxd2 Bf6 22.Rab1



22...e4! 23.b4 Nd7 24.Rb3 Be5 Black obtained vigorous counterplay in Ponomariov – Anand, Wijk aan Zee 2011.



16...b6

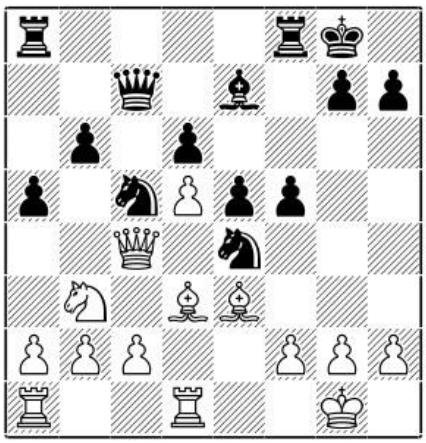
16...a4?! is inaccurate, and 17.Nxc5 Nxc5 18.Qc4 Rac8 19.b4 axb3 20.cxb3!? gave White some initiative in Svidler – Gelfand, Haifa (rapid) 1998.

However, the immediate 16...f5!? is a worthy alternative.

17.Qc4

An example of what Black should avoid is seen after: 17.f3 Nf6 18.Qc4 Qb7?! (this looks rather pointless; 18...a4 19.Nxc5 bxc5!?N would improve) 19.Nxc5 bxc5 20.Qb3 Qc7 21.Bb5 Nh5 (21...e4 would have been a better attempt to find counterplay) 22.Qc4 f5 23.c3 Rab8 24.b4 White had a useful queenside initiative in Areshchenko – Efimenko, Rivne 2005.

17...f5 18.Bd3



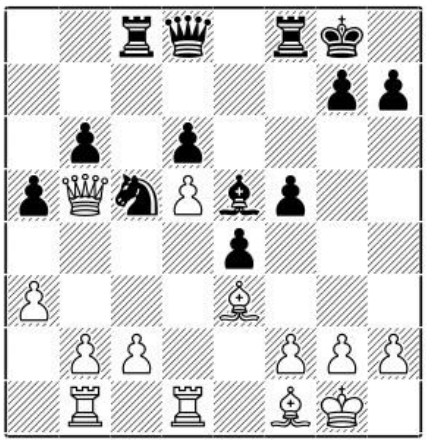
18...Qd8

Another instructive game went 18...Rac8

19.Nxc5 Nxc5 20.Be2 Qd8 21.Qb5 Rb8! intending ...Bg5 with a nice position for Black, Morais – Pezzica, corr. 2003.

19.Nxc5 Nxc5 20.a3 Rc8 21.Qb5 e4 22.Bf1 Bf6 23.Rab1 Be5

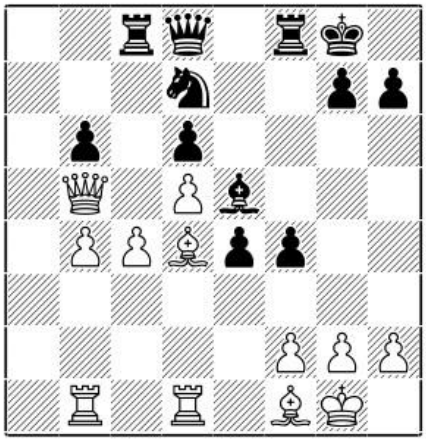
Black has excellent attacking prospects, with ...f4 on the cards.



24.b4 axb4 25.Rxb4!?

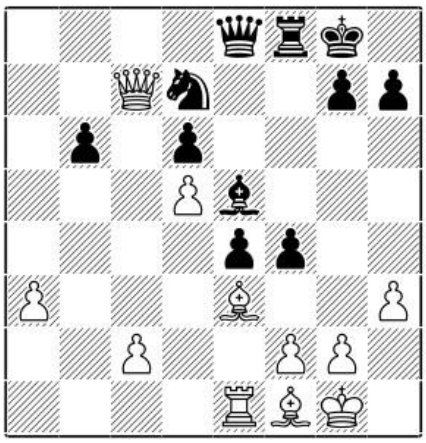
This looks counterintuitive, but it seems like the best attempt to distract Black from the kingside.

After 25.axb4 Nd7 White's position is extremely difficult. For instance: 26.c4 f4 27.Bd4



27...e3! 28.fxe3 fxe3 29.Bxe3 Qh4–+ White cannot keep his kingside together.

25...Nd7 26.Rc4 Rxc4 27.Qxc4 Qe8 28.Re1 Nf6 29.h3 Nd7 30.Qc7 f4



31.Bc1?!

For better or worse, White had to take on b6 in order to prolong the game.

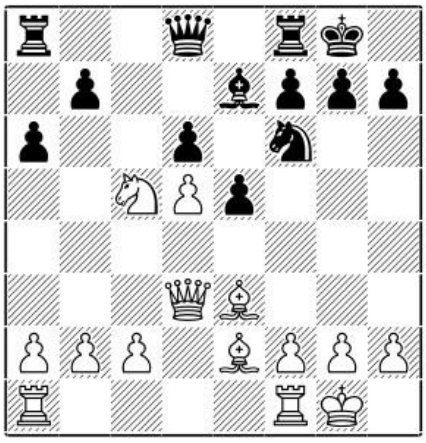
31...e3 32.Bb5

This loses immediately, but there was no defence anyway.

32...exf2† 33.Kxf2 f3!

0–1

D12) 13.Nxc5



This is the most natural move. White avoids losing time and creates a (protected, if he wishes) passed pawn in the centre.

13...dxc5

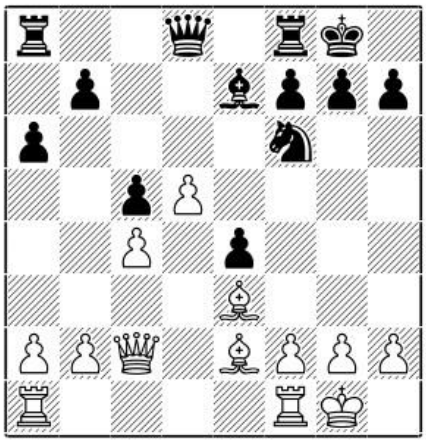
We have reached an important structure

which can arise in different guises via a number of variations. At first it simply looks good for White, as he has the bishop pair and a protected passed pawn. However, the pawn is easily blockaded and Black has a useful kingside pawn majority.

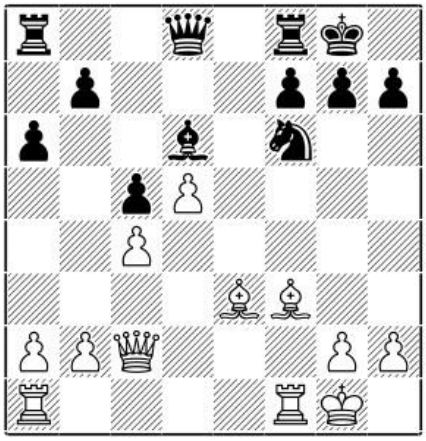
Our first main option will be **D121)** 14.Rfd1; not because it's a particularly good move, but because it was played in a classic game which I believe every Najdorf player should know. We will then move on to the prophylactic **D122)** 14.Bf3!?, which is one of White's more challenging options.

14.Rad1 is similar to variation D121. Black responds with 14...e4 followed by ...Bd6, with essentially the same strategy as in Game 6 below.

Another popular continuation is:
14.c4 e4 15.Qc2



15...Bd6
This looks most flexible.
15...Qc7 16.g3 (16.f4!? as played in Tarhon – Praggnanandhaa, London 2016, looks more testing; I think Black should capture en passant, as in the line below) 16...Rae8 17.Rad1 Bd6 18.Bd2 Nd7 19.Bc3 f5 20.f4 exf3 21.Bxf3 g6 22.Kg2 Ne5 23.Bxe5?! Bxe5 was a thematic example of Black's possibilities; he went on to win a good game in Robson – Sarkar, Connecticut 2007.
16.f4!? exf3 17.Bxf3



17...b5!?N
17...Nd7 looks thematic but after 18.Rae1 Qc7 19.g3 Rfe8 20.Kg2² White had some pressure in Kryvoruchko – Esen, Antalya 2013. Black has the e5-square, but little to do.
The text move seems more interesting to me. A possible continuation is:
18.b3 Re8 19.Rae1 Qd7
With interesting play over the whole board. Moves like ...Ng4 and ...h5 are possible, and an early g2-g3 could even be met by ...Qh3.

D121) 14.Rfd1

GAME 6

Daniel King – Walter Browne

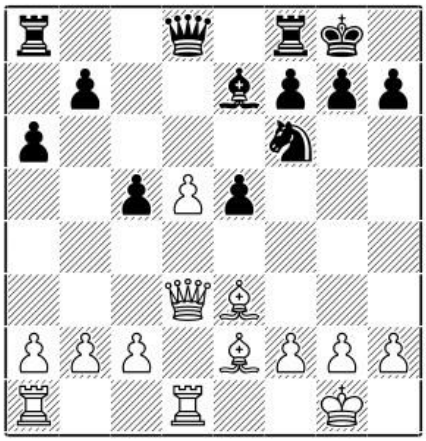
Reykjavik 1990

This is a classic game which greatly helped me to understand the pawn structure which arises after move 13. King's defeat clearly made an impression on the English GM, as he presented it as a model game for Black in his 1993 classic *Winning with the Najdorf.*

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Be2 e5 7.Nb3 Be7 8.0-0 0-0 9.Be3 Be6 10.Nd5 Nbd7 11.Qd3 Bxd5 12.exd5 Nc5 13.Nxc5 dxc5 14.Rfd1

According to the database, this was the very first game in which 12...Nc5 was played. It

took quite a few years for the variation to become popular, and even longer for White to figure out the most effective ways of dealing with it.

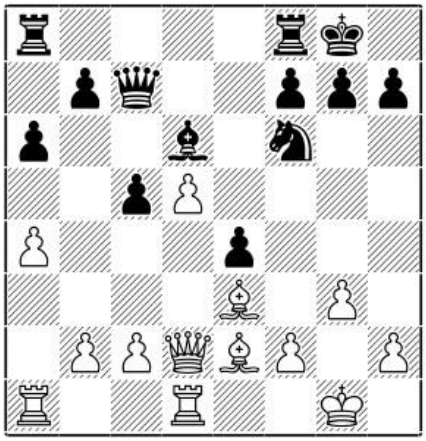


14...e4! 15.Qd2 Bd6

Though it may seem tempting to try and manoeuvre the knight to d6, to do so would be time-consuming and allow White to arrange b2-b4 and/or f2-f4. Instead Black activates his bishop and takes aim at White's kingside.

16.a4 Qc7 17.g3

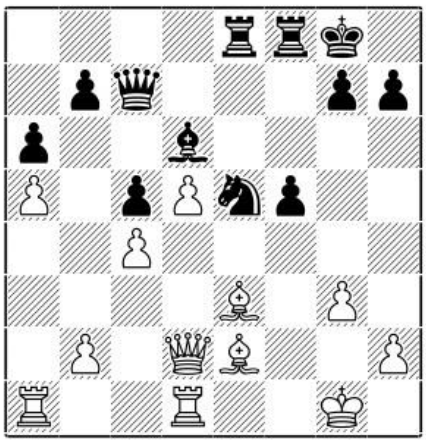
17.h3 can be met by 17...Nd7 intending ...f5-f4, when Black gets his kingside play rolling along. With the text move White hopes to slow things down.



17...Rae8 18.a5 Nd7 19.Bf4!

King finds a creative way to obstruct Black's kingside play.

After 19.c4 f5 20.f4? (20.Bf4! Ne5 transposes to the game) 20...exf3 21.Bxf3 Ne5! 22.Be2 Black has a pleasant choice:



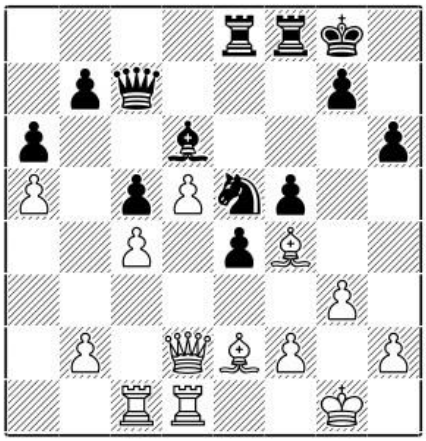
Browne offers 22...Ng4!, and after 23.Bxg4 fxg4 24.Bf2 Rf3 Black has some initiative. Another tempting idea is 22...Ng6! intending ...f4, while ...Bxg3 is in the air as well.

19...Ne5!

Browne correctly avoids 19...Bxf4? 20.Qxf4 Qxf4 21.gxf4 when the doubled pawns are of no consequence – but White's d-pawn is, and Ra3-b3 could also be annoying.

20.c4 f5 21.Rac1 h6

Black is clearly winding up for ...g5.



22.h4?

White panics.

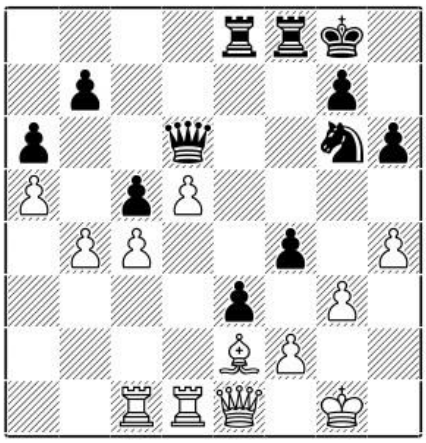
22.b4! was necessary. I still like Black after 22...Nd7!, but at least it is still a game. (Alternatively, 22...g5!? 23.bxc5 Bxc5 24.Be3 and 22...cxb4!? 23.c5 Nf3† 24.Bxf3 Bxf4 25.Qxf4 Qxf4 26.gxf4 exf3 27.c6 are both unclear.)

22...Ng6!

Now there is no stopping Black's kingside pawn avalanche, and he quickly crashes through.

23.Bxd6 Qxd6 24.b4 e3 25.Qe1 f4

Everything is falling apart. The rest of the game is a massacre.

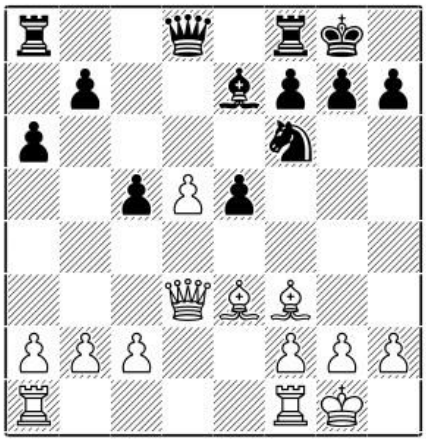


26.bxc5 Qxc5 27.f3 fxg3 28.Qxg3 Nf4 29.Kf1 Rd8 30.Bd3 Rd6 31.Rc2 Rdf6 32.Be4 e2† 33.Rxe2 Nxe2 34.Kxe2 Qxc4† 35.Rd3 Qa2† 36.Rd2 Qc4† 37.Rd3 Qa2† 38.Rd2 Qxa5 39.d6 Qb5†

0–1

This game remains among the most attractive and instructive examples of Black's chances in this variation, but eventually White came around to the following prophylactic move.

D122) 14.Bf3!?



White wants to prevent Black's typical plan of ...e4 and ...Bd6, followed by moves like ...Qc7, ...Nd7 and ...f5 as Browne played.

14...Qc7

This is the main line and it holds up okay theoretically.

Black can also try:

14...Bd6!? 15.Bg5

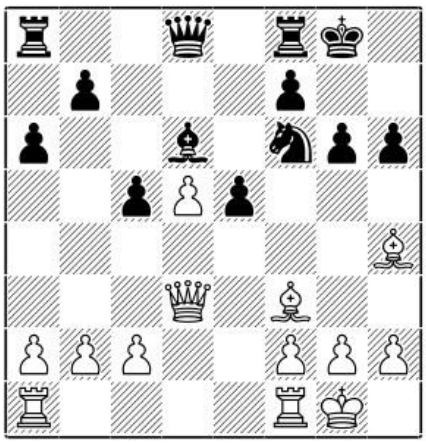
15.Rfe1 Ne8 16.g3 f5,, Stefansson – Papaioannou, Baku (ol) 2016.

15.g3 Qc7 16.Qf5 Nd7 17.c4 g6 18.Qc2 f5 also gave Black good play in Predke – Kokarev, Togliatti 2014.

The text move is more annoying, but hardly fatal.

15...h6 16.Bh4 g6!?

Black finds an interesting way of dealing with the pin.



17.Rae1

17.Be2 Kg7 18.Qf3 Re8 19.Bxf6† Qxf6 20.Qxf6† Kxf6 21.f3 Kg7 was equal in Kulaots – Bu Xiangzhi, Las Vegas 2014.

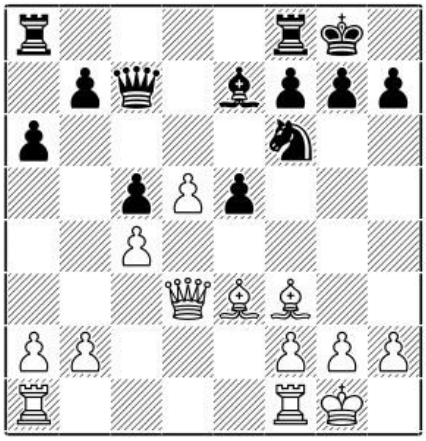
17...Kg7 18.Bd1 Qb6 19.c4

19.b3 g5 20.Bg3 e4 21.Qc3 Rae8 also gives Black reasonable play.

19...Qxb2 20.Re2 e4!

Black was fine in Hovhannisyan – Neverov, St Petersburg 2012. (However, 20...Qb6? would be too optimistic due to: 21.Bxf6† Kxf6 22.f4!+–)

15.c4



15...Bd6!

This is clearly best. It is worth checking a few other options to see the kinds of situations Black should avoid:

15...g6?! 16.Rae1 h5?! 17.Bg5 Ne8 is positionally well motivated but Black sacrifices too much coordination, and after 18.Bxe7 Qxe7 19.Qe3 Nd6 20.b3 White won a pawn in Nakamura – Topalov, Thessaloniki 2013.

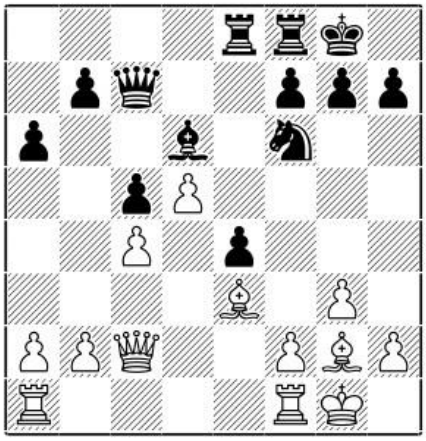
15...Ne8 16.Be4 g6 17.Bh6 Ng7 18.Rae1 Bd6 19.g3 f5 20.Bg2² was not so terrible in Rozenberg – Klemettinen, corr. 2012, but it would be a bit annoying to be left with the g7-knight stuck out of play.

Finally, after 15...Rfe8 16.g3 Bd6 17.Bg2 e4 18.Qc2 h6 19.Rae1 Re7 20.Re2 Rae8 21.Bc1 Qc8 22.Rfe1 Qg4 a draw was agreed in Boehme – Rovchakov, corr. 2010, but after 23.b3N I slightly prefer White.

16.g3

16.h3 Rae8 17.Be2 e4 gives Black the typical counterplay that he is seeking.

16...Rae8 17.Qc2 e4 18.Bg2



18...Ng4!

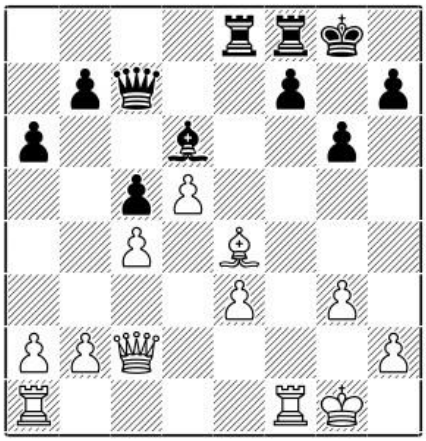
Black should act immediately.

Instead 18...Qe7 19.Bg5 is annoying, while 18...h6 19.Rae1 Re7 looks too slow after 20.Re2 intending Rfe1.

19.Bxe4

There is no point in declining the offer, as 19.Bd2?! f5 gives Black everything he wants.

19...Nxe3 20.fxe3 g6©



Black has a better pawn structure and more active bishop. However, Black's compensation is essentially of an equalizing or drawing nature, especially considering that the position is somewhat simplified and there are opposite-coloured bishops.

D2) 12...Rc8

GAME 7

Magnus Carlsen – Alexander Grischuk

Saint Louis 2015

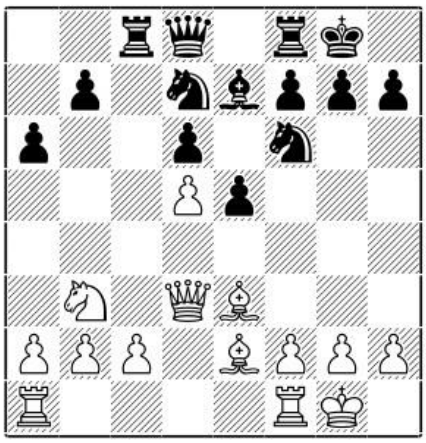
1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Be2 e5 7.Nb3 Be7 8.0-0

The actual move order was 8.Be3 Be6 9.Qd3 Nbd7 10.Nd5 0-0 11.0-0, but I have modified it for our purposes.

8...0-0 9.Be3 Be6 10.Nd5 Nbd7 11.Qd3

Having shuffled the moves a little, we will follow the game until the end.

11...Bxd5 12.exd5 Rc8



As mentioned earlier, this is my recommendation for players who prefer not to allow White to fix the pawn structure at this early stage.

13.c4

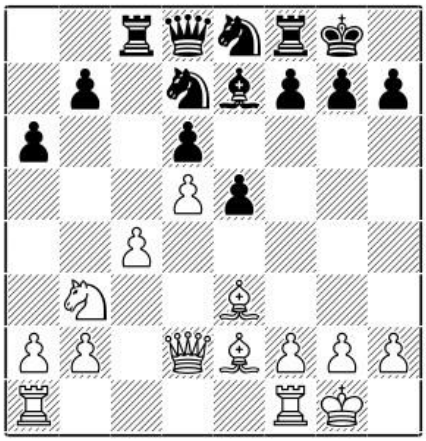
In the next chapter, we will see that after the move order of 8.Be3 Be6 9.Nd5 Nbd7 10.Qd3 Bxd5 11.exd5, Black does best to delay castling for a moment with 11...Rc8!, after which 12.c4 0-0 13.0-0 reaches the present position. So, even if you prefer to play variation D1 with 12...Nc5 when given the choice, it is worth knowing a bit about the present variation, in case it occurs via this transposition.

13...Ne8!

13...a5 has been tried by some strong players but I prefer the text move. Black prepares his kingside play while maintaining some flexibility with the queenside pawns, at least for the time being.

14.Qd2

It is worth knowing that 14.Bg4 can be met by 14...e4! 15.Qxe4 Nef6 16.Qf4 Nxg4 17.Qxg4 Ne5 followed by taking on c4, with at least equal chances.



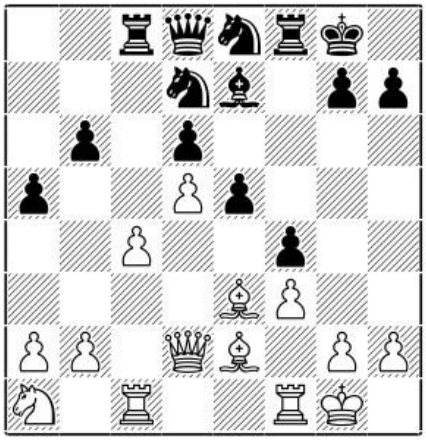
14...b6 15.Rac1 a5 16.Na1

This is a typical manoeuvre that we will see again. The knight clears the way for the b2-pawn and White may follow up with Nc2-a3-b5.

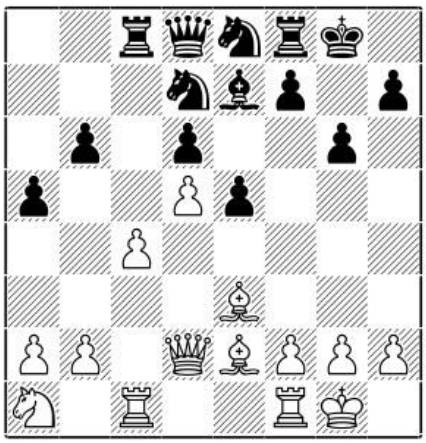
16...g6!?

Grischuk chooses the most flexible approach. He could play ...f5 at any time, but his knight may want the f5-square.

The immediate 16...f5 was played in a more recent game, which continued: 17.f3 (17.f4N seems a better try, when 17...Nef6 is a decent move, while Black could also consider 17...g6 followed by ...Bf6) 17...f4! An instructive moment – White's knight is miles away from the e4-square so Black seizes space on the kingside.



18.Bf2 Bh4 19.Bd3 (after 19.g3? Bg5 20.g4 Black could go back to h4 with the bishop, but 20...e4!µ is even stronger) 19...Bxf2† 20.Qxf2 Nc5 21.Bc2 g6! Black had excellent prospects in Georgiadis – Mamedyarov, Biel 2018, with ...Ng7-f5 coming up next.

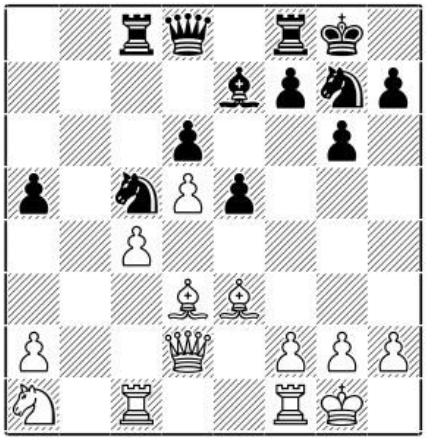


17.b4!?

Carlsen looks for an immediate conflict.

17.Nc2 is an obvious alternative, when 17...Ng7 18.Na3 Nf5 gives Black good counterplay.

17...Ng7 18.bxa5 bxa5 19.Bd3 Nc5„

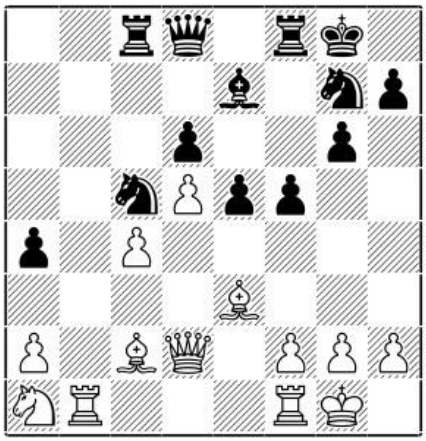


20.Bc2

Keeping the bishop pair while preventing ...Nf5.

20...a4 21.Rb1 e4?!

21...f5!N was more accurate. Play may continue:



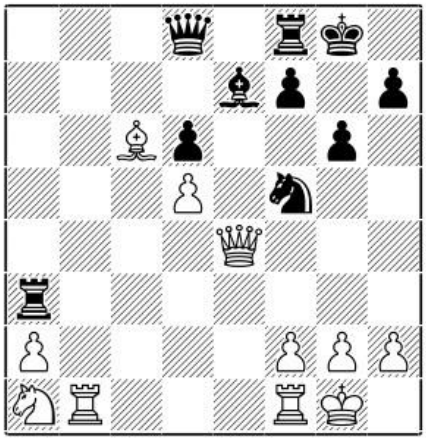
22.Rb4 (22.Rb5?! is well met by 22...Nd7! intending ...f4; 22.Bxc5 Rxc5 23.Bxa4 Rxc4 is also good for Black) 22...Qa5 23.Rd1 Bd8 With good counterplay.

22.Bxc5 Rxc5 23.Bxa4?!

White should throw in 23.Qe2! f5 (23...Qc7 24.Bxa4 Rxc4 25.Bb5 is good for White) and only now 24.Bxa4.

23...Rxc4 24.Bc6 Nf5!? 25.Qe2 Rc3 26.Qxe4 Ra3©

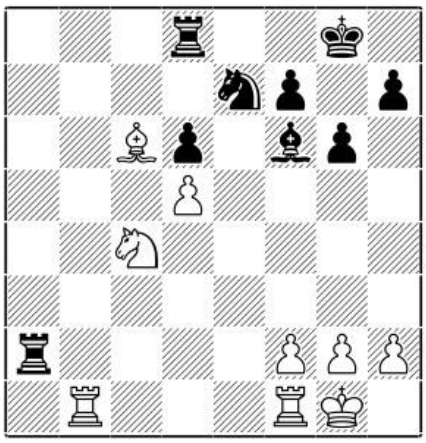
Black's activity makes up for the missing pawn.



27.Qe2

White could have considered returning the extra pawn to get the knight to the c6-square. For example: 27.Nc2 Rxa2 28.Nb4 Ra3 29.Bb5 Bf6 30.Nc6 Qb6 31.Be2 Qc5=

27...Bf6 28.Nb3 Qe7! 29.Qxe7 Nxe7 30.Nd2 Rxa2 31.Nc4 Rd8

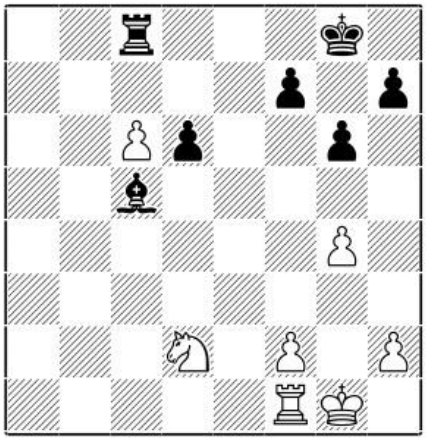


32.g4?!

32.Rfd1 was safer. The text move prevents ...Nf5 but allows the black bishop to get to its ideal diagonal.

32...Bd4! 33.Rbd1?! Bc5 34.Rd2 Rxd2 35.Nxd2 Nxc6 36.dxc6 Rc8³

Black picks up a pawn. White still has good chances to hold, but on this occasion the World Champion's technique failed him – a rare occurrence.



37.Ne4 Rxc6 38.Rd1 h6 39.h4 Kf8 40.Kg2 Ke7 41.Rc1 Rc8 42.Kf3 Ke6 43.Rc2 Rc7 44.h5 gxh5 45.gxh5 Bb6 46.Re2 Bd4 47.Kg3 d5 48.Nd2† Kf5 49.Kg2 Be5 50.Nf3 Bf6 51.Ra2 Rd7 52.Ne1 Rc7 53.Kf3 Bg5 54.Ra5 Ke5 55.Ke2 Ke4 56.Ra4† d4 57.f3† Kd5 58.Ra5† Kc4 59.Nd3 Re7† 60.Re5 Re6 61.f4 Bf6 62.Rxe6 fxe6 63.Nf2 Be7 64.Ng4 Kc3 65.f5 exf5 66.Nxh6 Kc2

0–1

Conclusion

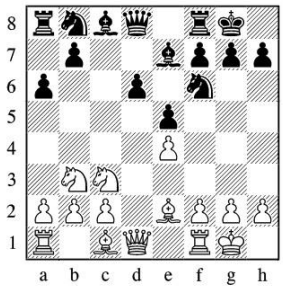
After 7.Nb3 Be7 8.0-0 0-0, the classical continuation is 9.Be3 Be6. Then 10.f4 looks aggressive, but 10...exf4 11.Bxf4 Nc6 gives us a completely reliable position. The key idea is the Portisch manoeuvre with ...Ne8! and ...Bf6-e5. This can usually be achieved even if White has pressure against the d6-pawn.

The somewhat premature prophylactic 10.a4 is well met with 10...Nc6. This is a typical motif in the Najdorf – the knight can safely head to the b4-square, where it contests the critical d5-point.

Next we moved on to the real main lines. 10.Qd2 was the main focal point for a long time, mainly due to Karpov's impressive handling of White's position. A lot of manoeuvring is likely to take place, and an understanding of the pawn structures and their potential transformations is key. An important idea to keep in mind is the possibility of ...d5 as a pawn sacrifice, meeting exd5 with ...Bf5. We will see similar ideas later in the book.

In the last decade or so, the forcing 10.Nd5 has emerged as the main line. After 10...Nbd7 11.Qd3 Bxd5 12.exd5 we reach one of the most important thematic pawn structures for the Najdorf. 12...Nc5!? can lead to different types of play depending on White's response, and all Najdorf players should know something about the pawn structure which can occur after 13.Nxc5 dxc5. Recently it has become trendier for Black to refrain from this move, in which case the flexible 12...Rc8 would be my suggestion. All of these lines are strategically rich, and a player with a superior understanding of the typical plans has great chances to play for a win with either colour.

Chapter 3



Other 9th Moves

Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.♗e2 e5 7.♘b3 ♗e7 8.0–0 0–0

A) 9.f4 68

B) 9.a4 70

C) 9.Qd3 Be6 71

C1) 10.Qg3 72

C2) 10.f4 74

C3) 10.Bd2!? 75

D) 9.Re1 Be6 78

D1) 10.Bf1 *Game 8* 78

D2) 10.Bf3 82

E) 9.Kh1 b6 89

E1) 10.f4?! *Game 9* 90

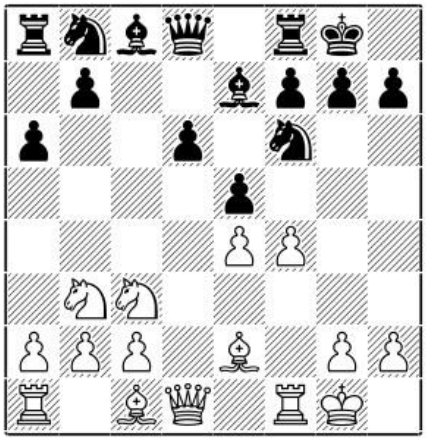
E2) 10.Be3 93

E3) 10.f3 *Game 10* 98

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Be2 e5 7.Nb3 Be7 8.0-0 0-0

In this chapter we will look at White's alternatives to 9.Be3. These range from the simple **A)** 9.f4 and **B)** 9.a4 to the more subtle **C)** 9.Qd3 and **D)** 9.Re1, and end with the flexible **E)** 9.Kh1.

A) 9.f4



This typical move is not as effective when there is no bishop on e6 to harass, so Black can happily ignore it.

9...b5!

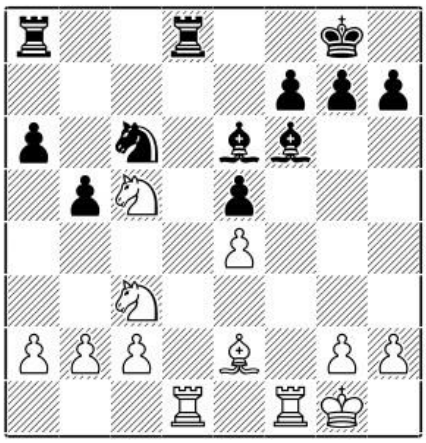
In many lines it would be premature to advance on the queenside so early, but White's last move weakened the e4-pawn (f2-f3 is no longer

possible) as well as the g1-a7 diagonal.

10.a3?!

This has been the most common reaction but it passes the initiative to Black.

One of my own games continued: 10.fxe5 dxe5 11.Qxd8 Rxd8 12.Bg5 Be6 (the bishop goes here rather than to b7 to avoid any Na5 ideas) 13.Bxf6 Bxf6 14.Rad1 (14.Nc5 Nc6! is similar) 14...Nc6 15.Nc5



15...Nd4 16.Nxe6 fxe6!³ is instructive. Black's initiative and control of the centre is more important that the optical weakness of the doubled pawns. After 17.Bd3 Rdc8! 18.a3 Be7 19.Rf2? Bxa3! Black was already winning in Slatin – Vigorito, Parsippany 2010.

10.a4!?

This is the only way to even try to challenge Black.

10...b4

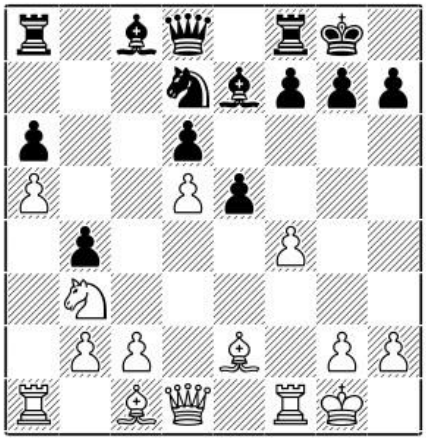
10...Bb7 is a playable alternative but it allows additional simplification.

11.Nd5 Nxd5 12.exd5

After 12.Qxd5?! Qb6† 13.Kh1 Bb7 Black is already better, for example: 14.Qd3 Nd7 15.Be3 Qc7³ Almagro Mazariegos – Ivanchuk, Villarrobledo (rapid) 2007.

12...Nd7 13.a5

This queenside structure can be a little tricky sometimes, as Black's b-pawn is separated from the rest of his army. Here, however, the advance of White's f-pawn gives Black ready-made counterplay.

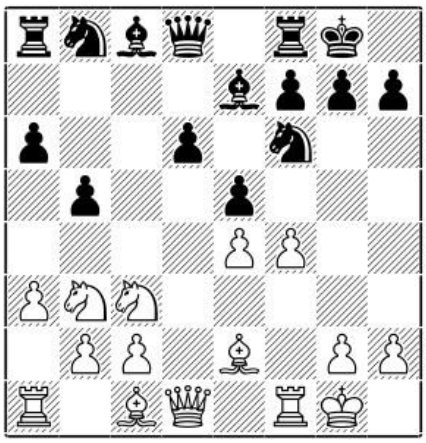


13...Bf6 14.Kh1 Re8 15.Ra4 Rb8 16.Bd2 Nc5 17.Nxc5?!

17.Rxb4N looks better although 17...Rxb4 18.Bxb4 Nxb3 19.cxb3 exf4,, offers Black plenty of play.

17...dxc5³

Black had an excellent position in A. Stein – De Firmian, Las Vegas 2005.



10...Bb7 11.Bf3

11.Bd3 Nbd7 is similar to the 11.Bd3 line mentioned on page 90 in the notes to Game 9.

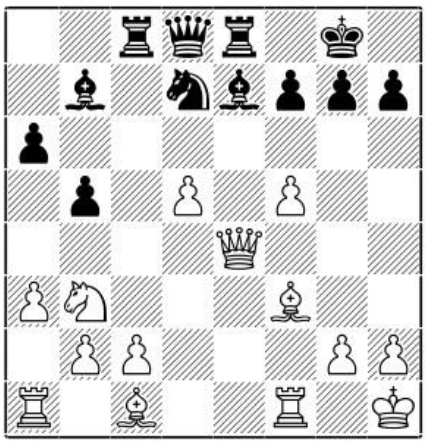
11...Nbd7³

This is an ideal set-up for Black. He has plenty of ways to improve his position, while it is difficult for White to come up with a plan.

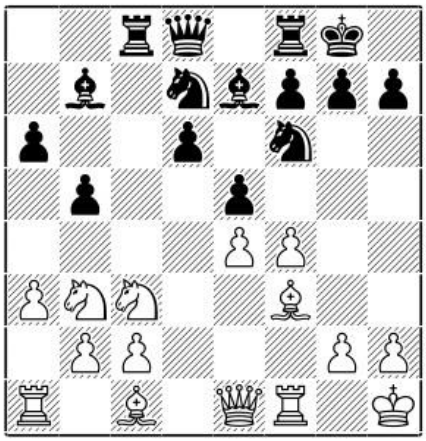
12.Kh1 Rc8 13.Qe1

The queen dreams of heading to the kingside for an 'attack', but it simply does not work.

13.Qe2 can be met in a similar way: 13...Re8! 14.f5 d5! (14...Nb6 is good too) 15.exd5 e4! 16.Nxe4 Nxe4! 17.Qxe4 This occurred in Sammut Briffa – Ziska, Luxembourg 2016, when Black should have continued:



17...Bf6!N 18.Qd3 Ne5 19.Qd1 Nxf3 20.Rxf3 Qxd5 Black has a winning initiative.



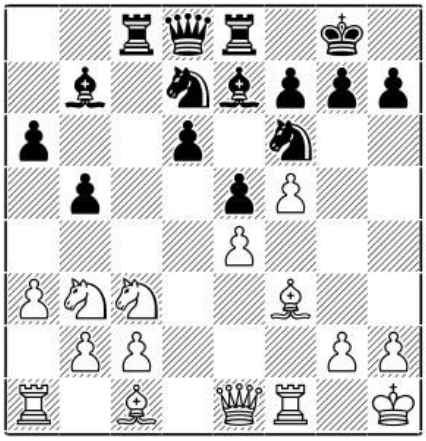
13...Re8!

Black wants to bring more pressure to the e4-pawn, which was forever weakened by White's 9th move. We will see something similar in the 6.f4 lines in Chapter 17.

14.f5

This is highly committal, but it is not easy to find a decent move. 14.Qg3 Rxc3! 15.bxc3 Nxe4 was great for Black in Taborov – Zaid, USSR 1979.

Do not be afraid of these kingside pawns! It is not a King's Indian – the centre is still fluid.



14...d5!

This is simplest, although Black has a pleasant choice. An excellent alternative is:

14...Nb6 15.Qg3

Flicking in 15.Na5?! Ba8 only makes things worse for White, as the knight is unstable. After 16.Be3 Na4!? (or 16...d5! 17.exd5 Nbxd5) 17.Nxa4 bxa4 18.Bg5 Rc5! Black won material in Takacs – Aczel, Balatonalmadi 2013.

15...Rxc3

This thematic exchange sacrifice can almost be played without thinking, but 15...Na4!N looks even stronger. This is another typical idea to fuel the initiative on the queenside.

16.bxc3 Bxe4!

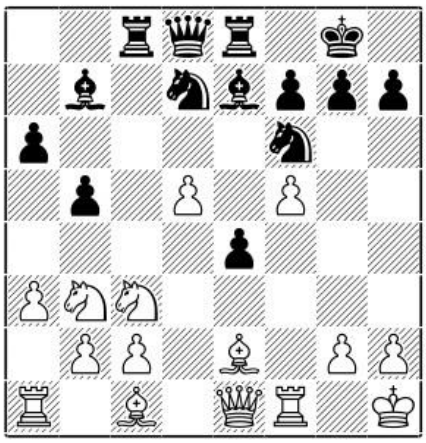
16...Nxe4 is slightly less accurate, although even here Black kept the upper hand after 17.Bxe4 Bxe4 18.Bh6 g6 in Perez Mitjans – Corrales Jimenez, Manresa 2007.

17.Bh6 Bf8µ

Black had more than enough play for the exchange in Martins – Elci, Rio de Janeiro 2015.

15.exd5 e4! 16.Be2

16.Nxe4 Nxe4 17.Qxe4 transposes to Sammut Briffa – Ziska above, where 17...Bf6!N would have led to a winning position for Black.



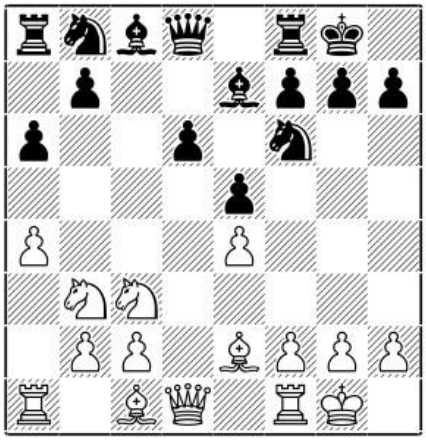
16...Nxd5 17.Nxd5

17.Nxe4? Bh4!–+ is a thematic trick.

17...Bxd5µ

Black was dominating in Flis – Staniszewski, Porabka 1986.

B) 9.a4



This is another typical move that some players will hurry to play, even though ...b5 was not a real threat yet.

9...Be6

There is no reason not to play this, even though it seems to make f2-f4 more tempting.

Black can also consider 9...Nc6!? – a typical reaction when the b4-square is available. 10.Bg5 would be a logical continuation, fighting for the d5-square.

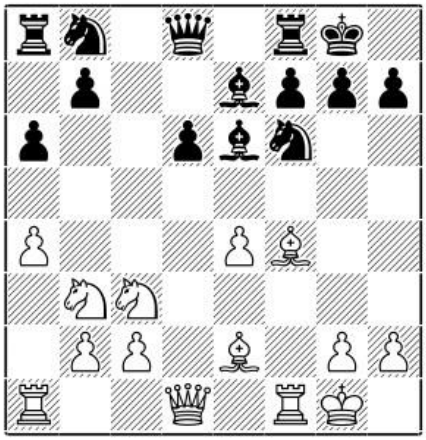
10.f4

10.Bg5 makes less sense here, as 10...Nbd7 enables Black to recapture on f6 with the knight.

White could play 10.Be3 transposing to Game 3, while 10.Bf3 Nbd7 11.Re1 transposes to variation D2 on page 82.

10...exf4 11.Bxf4

We saw an almost identical position in variation A1 of Chapter 2, but here White has gained the move a2-a4 ‘for free’. However, Black rarely looks to play ...b5 in such a structure, so White’s extra move may not be of the slightest benefit, and it may well end up leaving his queenside in a weakened state.



11...Nc6 12.Kh1 Rc8

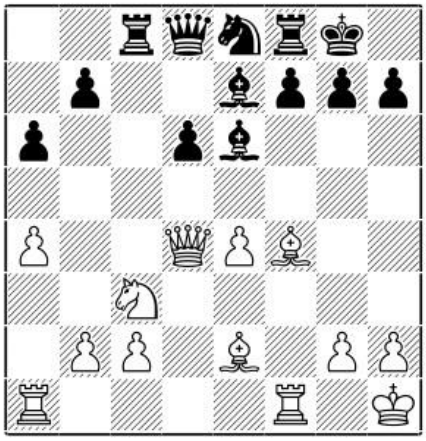
12...d5= is also possible but the text move keeps more tension in the position.

13.Nd4

This is the most common.

13.Qd2 and 13.Qe1 should both be met by the typical 13...Ne8!, exactly as we saw in the previous chapter on page 39.

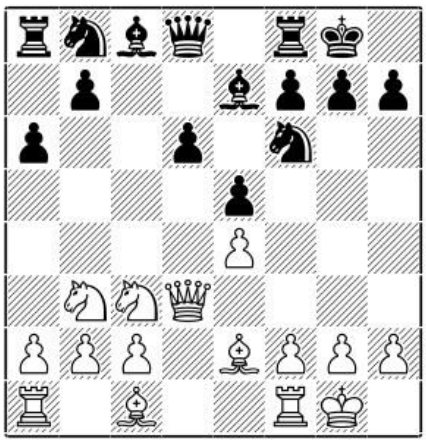
13...Nxd4 14.Qxd4 Ne8



15.Rad1 Bf6 16.e5 dxe5 17.Qxd8 Bxd8 18.Bxe5 Bf6=

Black has no problems at all.

C) 9.Qd3

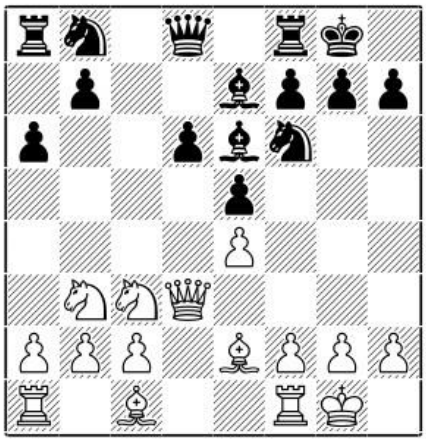


This move has regained some popularity in recent years. Originally White had designs to swing the queen over to g3 to take part in an attack. That idea was subsequently neutralized, after which 9.Qd3 was mostly used for transpositional purposes, with Be3 usually following. For a while I believed that the move had little independent significance, but my opinion changed after seeing some of the high-level games mentioned under variation C3 below.

9...Be6

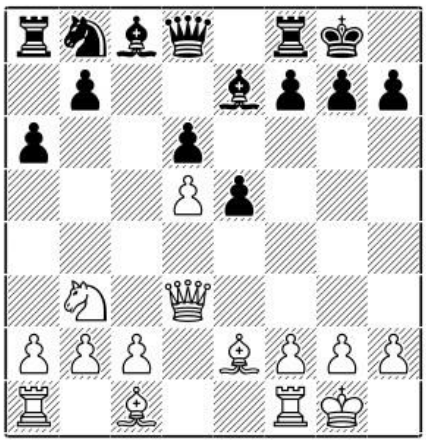
We will stick with this standard developing move.

9...Nc6 is also quite playable, although 10.a3!? is an interesting retort.



If White does not wish to transpose to the previous chapter (as occurs after 10.Be3 Nbd7 11.Nd5 – see variation D on page 54), he can play the aggressive-looking **C1)** 10.Qg3 or **C2)** 10.f4, or the modern **C3)** 10.Bd2!? which is more subtle.

The immediate 10.Nd5 is not too dangerous after 10...Nxd5 (avoiding 10...Bxd5 11.exd5 Nbd7 when 12.Bd2!? transposes to variation C3 below, but White also has some independent ways to continue) 11.exd5 Bc8 when Black has no problems. For example:



12.f4 Nd7 13.Kh1 (13.f5 b6 was fine for Black in Li Chao – Areshchenko, Germany 2015, and 13...Bg5N= looks even simpler) 13...Re8 14.Be3 Bf6 15.c3 exf4 16.Bxf4 Ne5 17.Qc2 Ng6 18.Bg3 Be5,, Buscher – Morais, corr. 2009.

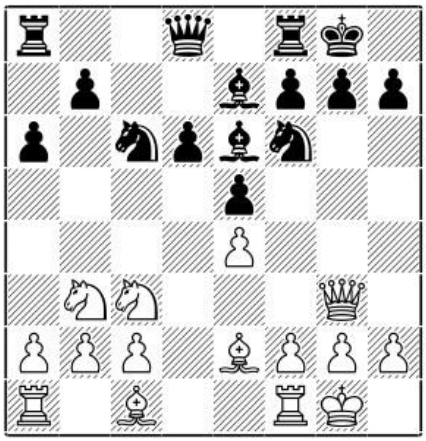
C1) 10.Qg3

This was one of the original ideas behind White's previous move, but Black has a

convincing antidote to it.

10...Nc6!

Black develops quickly and may go after the abandoned c2-pawn.

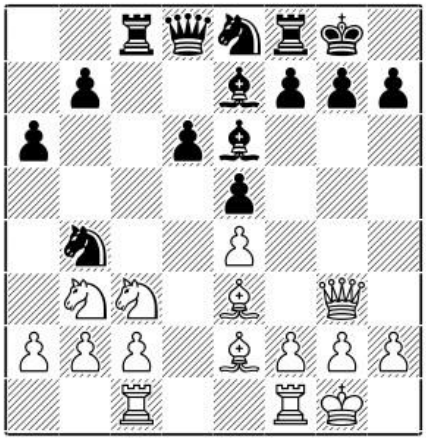


11.f4?!

Despite its natural appearance, this move is not much good.

11.Be3?! Nb4!„ has scored tremendously for Black, with ...Rc8 or ...d5 coming next.

11.Bh6 Ne8 12.Be3 gives White a slightly improved version of the above line, as Black's knight has been forced back to a less active square, but Black still has excellent prospects after 12...Nb4 13.Rac1 Rc8. For instance:



14.Bd2 (White gets into trouble quickly after 14.a3? Nxc2!µ or 14.f4? Rxc3! 15.bxc3 Nxa2 16.Ra1 Nxc3 17.Bd3 Nf6µ) 14...Bh4 15.Qf3 Bg5 16.Rfd1 b5„ Black is at least equal, as demonstrated in a number of correspondence games.

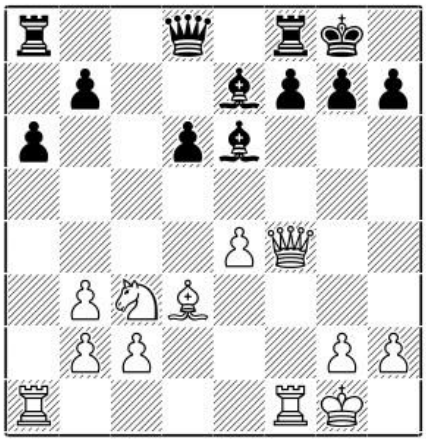
11...Nd4!

I am not alone in having played the less accurate 11...Kh8, as I did not feel like checking the possibilities of fxe5 or f4-f5 followed by Bh6 on every move. However, analysis demonstrates that these ideas are not dangerous, so the text move is stronger.

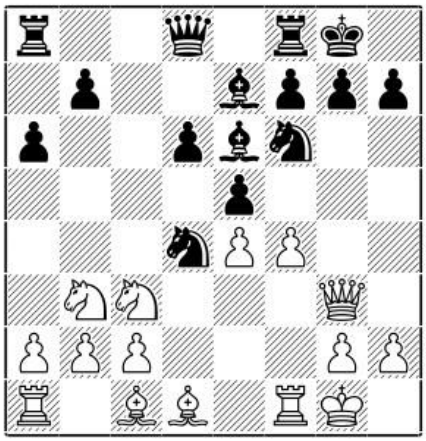
12.Bd1

White must avoid 12.Nxd4? exd4µ and 12.fxe5? Nxe4!µ.

During the aforementioned game, J. Li – Vigorito, Nashua 2017, I was concerned about: 12.Bd3 Nh5 13.Qf2 Nxb3 14.axb3 Nxf4 15.Bxf4 exf4 16.Qxf4



I thought that a subsequent Nd5 would be annoying, but after 16...Bf6!³ the knight hop is not possible due to the hanging b2-pawn. With ...Be5 coming next, Black stands better.



12...Nb5!N

This seems like the best of several good continuations.

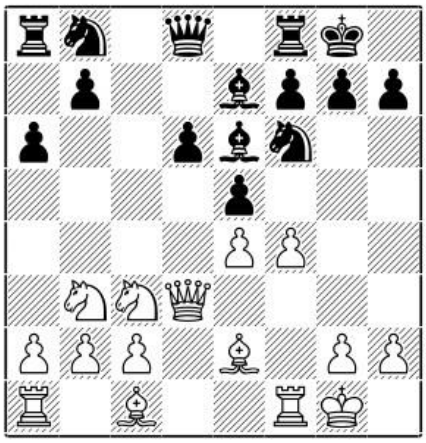
12...Bc4 13.Re1 occurred in Hübner – Armas, Germany 1990, when 13...Nb5!N would have given Black the initiative, albeit in a slightly less favourable setting than in our main line.

The simple 12...Rc8!? also offers Black a fine position.

13.Nxb5 axb5³

The doubled pawns are not really weak, and Black has an excellent position due to his active pieces and pressure against the e4-pawn.

C2) 10.f4



With this move White targets the bishop on e6, but the queen looks strange on d3.

10...Nc6!?

10...b5 was recommended in *The Sharpest Sicilian 2012* and is also satisfactory, but I prefer the text move.

I find the knight move to be a logical choice, as the queen on d3 is a convenient target. Black can consider ...Bxb3 followed by ...Nd4 or ...Nb4 in certain positions.

11.f5

This is the only move to have been tried in practice.

Perhaps White should consider a quieter move such as 12.Kh1N – but then why is the queen on d3?

11...Bxb3! 12.cxb3

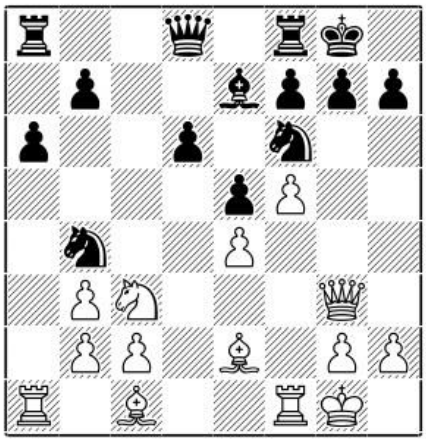
This is the best try.

12.axb3?!

The natural-looking move is a mistake, as the c2-pawn will be vulnerable.

12...Nb4 13.Qg3

13.Qd1 is well met by 13...d5! 14.exd5 (or 14.Nxd5 Nxe4 15.Nxe7† Qxe7 16.Be3 Rfd8 17.Qc1 Rac8³) 14...e4 with some initiative for Black.



13...d5!N

This is the most accurate move. It has two important purposes: clogging up the d5-square, and clearing the 6th rank.

Black must avoid 13...Nxc2? 14.Bh6 Ne8 15.Nd5 Kh8 (15...f6 16.Rac1 Nd4 17.Bh5+–) 16.f6! Bxf6 17.Rxf6! when White's attack breaks through.

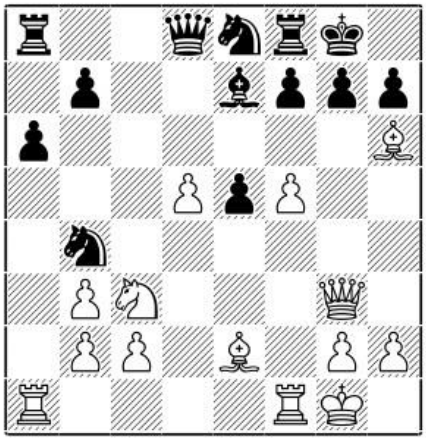
Black opted for 13...Kh8 14.Bd3 d5! and obtained a good game in Inarkiev – Salem, Moscow 2015, but the text move is even better.

14.Bh6

14.exd5 Nxc2 15.Bh6 Ne8 is the same thing.

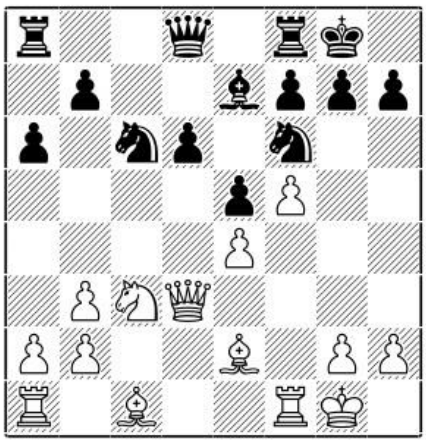
14...Ne8 15.exd5

15.Nxd5?? Nxd5 16.exd5 Bh4! wins the bishop on h6, as 17.Qg4? runs into 17...Qb6†; both here and in the main line below, this forking motif is a crucial point which shows the value of Black's 13th move.



15...Nxc2 16.Rac1 Qb6† 17.Kh1 Qxh6 18.Rxc2 Rd8

Black has a pleasant advantage.



12...d5!N

This does not have quite the same impact as 13...d5!N in the line above; but it is an excellent move nonetheless.

13.Nxd5

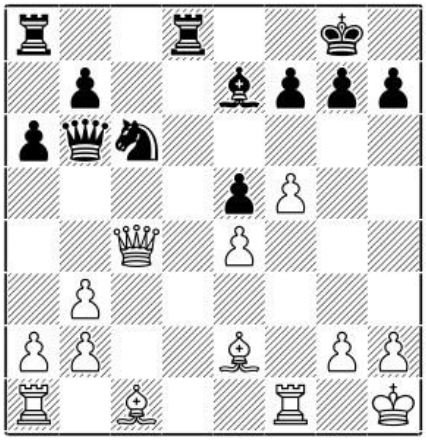
13.exd5 Nb4 14.Qg3 Nfxd5 offers good counterplay, especially taking into account that 15.Qxe5? Re8! is winning for Black.

13...Nxd5 14.Qxd5 Qb6†!?

A little finesse.

14...Qxd5 15.exd5 Nb4 16.Rd1 Rad8 17.Bf3 Bc5† 18.Kf1 Rfe8 19.Be4 Bd4 is also quite comfortable for Black.

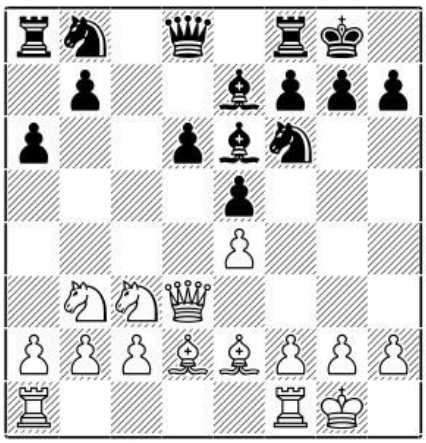
15.Kh1 Rfd8 16.Qc4



16...Nd4!©

Avoiding 16...Rac8? 17.Bh5!. After the text move ...Rac8 is coming, and 17.Bh5 makes less sense because 17...Qf6! defends conveniently, while White does not have an easy answer to the imminent arrival of the rook on the c-file.

C3) 10.Bd2!?



This has been tried by several leading players recently, so we should pay attention to it, even if most of those games were at faster time limits. Even though this quiet move looks rather insipid, there are a couple of rather sinister ideas to it.

10...Nbd7

Three other options are worth mentioning:

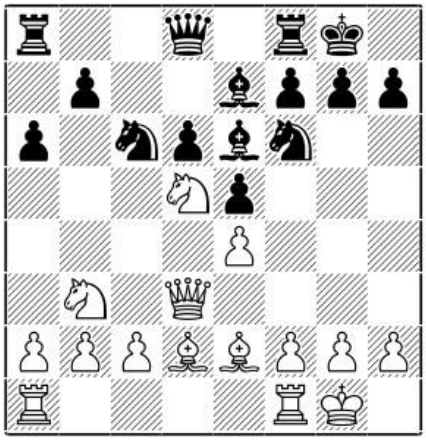
The straightforward 10...d5 11.exd5 Nxd5 12.Nxd5 Qxd5 13.Qxd5 Bxd5 looks close to equal, but White has a slight initiative and has scored well.

10...Nc6!?

As is often the case in these 9.Qd3 lines, this method of developing the knight is quite logical.

11.Nd5

11.a3 gives Black a pleasant choice. 11...d5= is an obvious way to get a more comfortable version of the note above, as the developing move ...Nc6 should be more useful than a2-a3. Alternatively, 11...Rc8 12.Nd5 Bxd5 13.exd5 e4 14.Qe3 Ne5 15.Rac1 Nc4 16.Bxc4 Rxc4 was fine for Black in Skripkin – Neborak, corr. 2013.



11...a5!

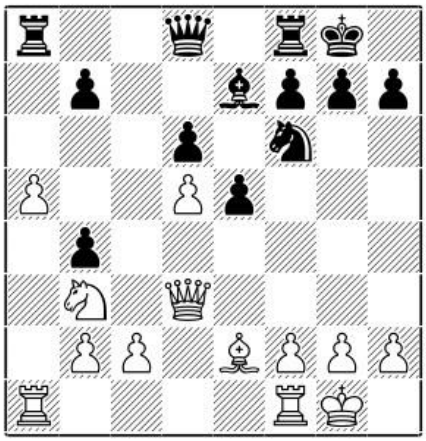
Before removing the strong knight, Black improves his situation on the queenside.

12.a4 Bxd5 13.exd5 Nb4 14.Bxb4

14.Qb5 Nxc2 15.Rac1 Nd4 16.Nxd4 exd4 17.Rc4 Ne4 18.Rxd4 Nxd2 19.Rxd2 Bf6 offers Black easy equality.

14...axb4 15.a5

White threatens Ra4, which explains Black's next move.



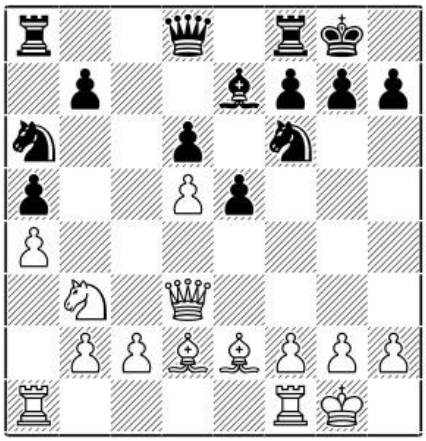
15...Qd7 16.Nd2 Qc7

Hitting the a5-pawn, since the knight has moved away.

17.Nc4 Qc5,,

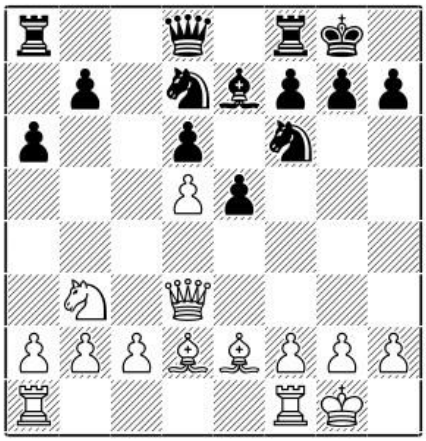
Both sides have weaknesses and Black has achieved a plus score in correspondence games.

Finally, 10...a5!? is a rare choice which held up well in a high-level game, which continued: 11.a4 Na6 12.Nd5 Bxd5 13.exd5



13...b6 (13...Nb4 would reach the note above) 14.Rfd1 Nc7 15.Bf3 Nd7 16.Bg4 Nf6 17.Bf3 The players soon agreed a draw in Nepomniachtchi – Grischuk, Sharjah 2017.

11.Nd5 Bxd5 12.exd5



12...Ne8!

I think this thematic move is Black's best.

Black should not delay the knight move. For instance, after something like 12...Rc8 13.c4 Ne8, the bishop on d2 enables White to play 14.Na5!. This is rather annoying if we compare the position to the Carlsen – Grischuk game on page 63.

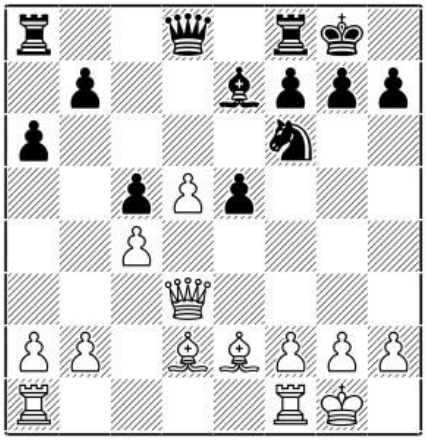
An instructive error would be:

12...Nc5?!

This is a standard plan, but it falls right in with White's intentions.

13.Nxc5 dxc5 14.c4

The pawn structure is the same as in Game 6, but White's bishop is on d2 instead of e3. This favours White, as his bishop can go to c3 and his queen can swing to the kingside with aggressive intentions.



14...Qc7

14...Bd6 is similar. 15.Qh3 e4 16.f4! exf3 17.Rxf3 (17.Bd3!? is also promising for White) 17...Qd7 18.Qh4 Be5 occurred in Nepomniachtchi – Karjakin, Saint Louis (rapid) 2017, and now 19.Bd3 Bd4† 20.Be3 Bxe3† 21.Rxe3 would have given White an annoying initiative on the kingside.

15.Rae1 Bd6 16.Qh3

16.Qf5!? also looks good.

16...Rfe8 17.Bc3 g6 18.Bd3±

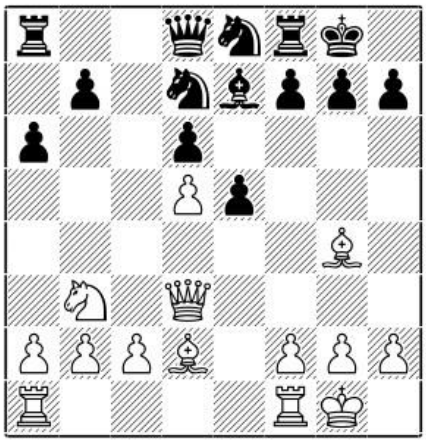
White had an excellent game in Nepomniachtchi – Gelfand, Zurich 2017. If we compare this to similar positions in variation D12 in the previous chapter, Black cannot get his kingside pawns in motion and White's bishops exert annoying pressure.

13.Bg4

13.Na5 is not so bothersome here. Black can respond with 13...Rb8, when he has not lost a tempo by going to c8 first, followed by ...f5 and ...Bg5.

13.c4 Bg5 14.Bxg5 Qxg5 15.Na5 b6 16.Nc6 a5 17.b3 f5,, also gave Black good prospects in Li Chao – Giri, Stavanger (blitz) 2016.

13.Qh3!? has also been tried in a few games although Black should be happy enough after 13...f5, with typical double-edged play.

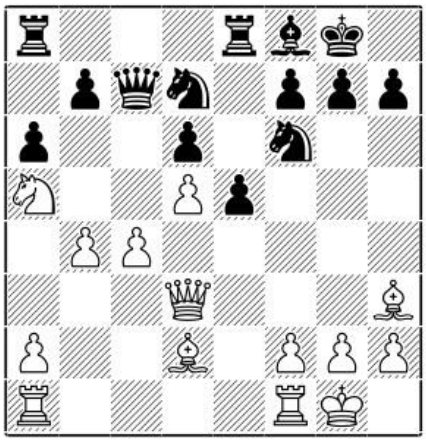


13...Nef6 14.Bh3

Other retreats can simply be met by 14...Ne8, so the text move is the only ambitious option.

14...Re8 15.c4 Bf8 16.Na5 Qc7 17.b4

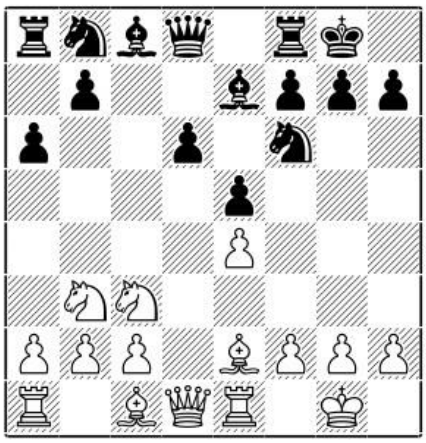
White is building up thematically on the queenside, but Black is ready to launch his counterplay.



17...e4 18.Qd4 Ne5 19.Bg5 Be7 20.Rad1? b6³

Black was better due to the loose c4-pawn in Wang Yue – Dominguez Perez, Huaian (blitz) 2016. Obviously White's 20th move was a mistake, but Black's position was fine anyway.

D) 9.Re1



This is a slow approach. The contours of the middlegame will mostly be determined by White's next move.

9...Be6

White's two main options are **D1)** 10.Bf1 and **D2)** 10.Bf3.

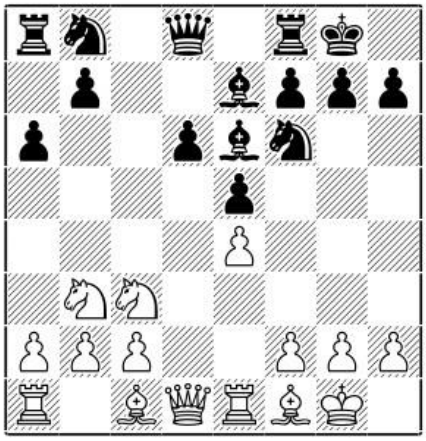
D1) 10.Bf1

GAME 8

Neuris Delgado – Leinier Dominguez Perez

Havana 2005

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Be2 e5 7.Nb3 Be7 8.0-0 0-0 9.Re1 Be6 10.Bf1

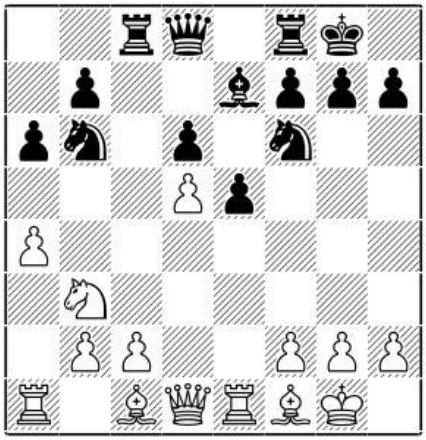


White tucks away the bishop. This quiet line has been favoured by GMs Fishbein and Spraggett, among others.

10...Nbd7 11.Nd5

This is the idea – White immediately changes the pawn structure.

11.a4 is slow and after 11...Rc8 Black has a good game, for instance: 12.Nd5 (or 12.a5 Qc7 13.f3 h6 14.Be3 Qc6 15.Qd2 d5 16.exd5 Nxd5 17.Nxd5 Bxd5[3] Castella Garcia – Arizmendi Martinez, Cullera 2004) 12...Bxd5 13.exd5 Nb6

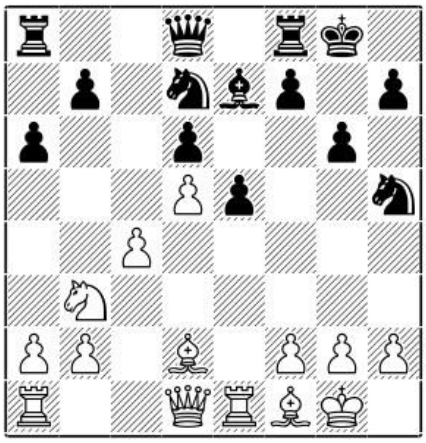


The weakness of the d5-pawn provoked the weakening 14.g4, when 14...h6 left Black with a nice position, and he eventually exploited White's kingside holes in Rowson – Gallagher, London 1994.

11...Nxd5

This is almost always played and it equalizes without much difficulty.

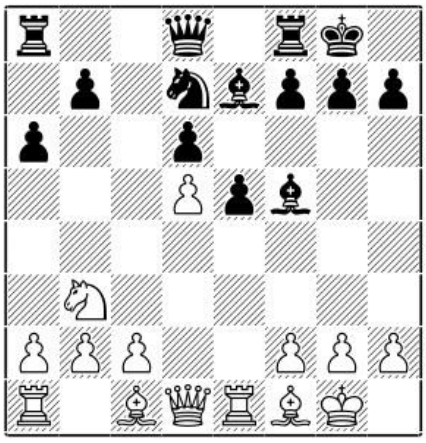
Black has generally hesitated to concede the bishop pair with 11...Bxd5 here, but it is still playable. After 12.exd5 g6 13.c4 Nh5 14.Bd2 Black should improve with:



14...b6!N With a typical double-edged game. (Instead after 14...Bg5?! 15.Na5! White's queenside pressure gave him the upper hand in Fishbein – Yeager, Philadelphia 2008.)

12.exd5 Bf5

We have reached another version of this thematic structure where each side has a pawn majority, but here there is no minor-piece imbalance.



13.a4

After 13.c4 Black can play the typical 13...a5 14.Be3 Bg5 (or 14...Bg6!?) with a promising position.

13.Bd2 should be met thematically with 13...a5!, preventing Na5.

13...Rc8

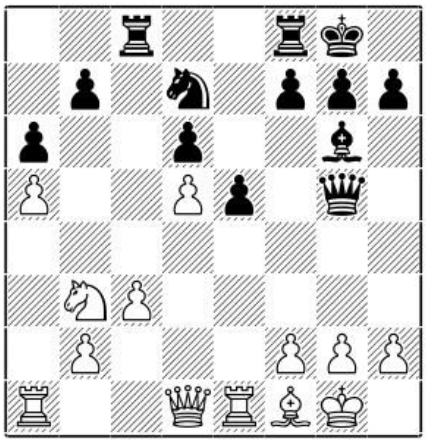
Black develops naturally and attacks the c2-pawn.

14.c3

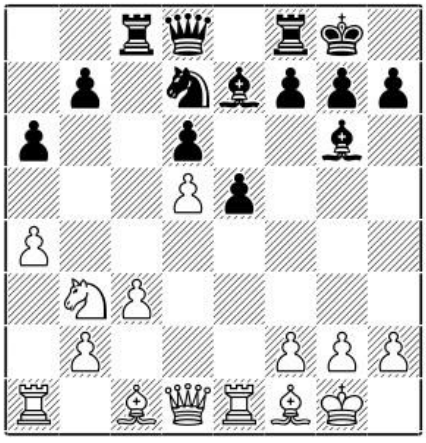
14.c4?! is worse in view of 14...a5![3] freezing the queenside, after which Black can enjoy his extra kingside pawn.

14...Bg6

14...Bg5 can also be played immediately. Then 15.Bxg5 Qxg5 16.a5 Bg6 reaches a position that Spraggett has had twice:



17.Ra4!? (17.Nd2 f5 18.Nc4 Rf6,, gave Black decent play in Spraggett – Zagrebelny, Istanbul [ol] 2000) 17...f5 18.Rb4 Rc7 19.f4!? exf4 20.Qd2 Bf7 21.Rxf4 Ne5 Black's strong knight ensured counterplay in Spraggett – Fressinet, France 2001.



15.a5 Bg5

Seeking an exchange of dark-squared bishops is normal, but Black can also try:

15...f5!? 16.f4

16.Ra4 Nf6 17.Rb4 Qd7 18.f3 occurred in Geller – Lutz, Dortmund 1991, when 18...f4! would have given Black good attacking chances, with ...Bf5 and ...g5 coming next.

16...Nf6!?

16...Bf6 17.Ra4 Nc5 18.Rb4 Nxb3 19.Rxb3 Qd7 20.Be3 Rfe8 21.Qd2 exf4 22.Bxf4 Rxe1 23.Qxe1 Re8 24.Qd2 Be5? 25.Rb6 gave White the upper hand in Spraggett – Gallagher, France 2001.

16...Bf7!? is another decent option, with ...Nf6 to follow.

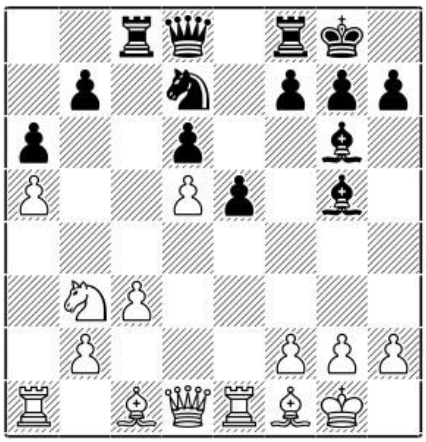
17.Be3

17.fxe5?! dxe5 18.Rxe5 Bd6 followed by ...Ng4 looks too dangerous for White.

The text move was played in Spraggett – Alshameary Puente, Lisbon 2019. A good, flexible continuation would have been:

17...Qd7N

Black is at least equal and has various ideas at his disposal, including ...Ng4, ...Bh5, ...Bf7 (to provoke c3-c4 when it helps Black), and perhaps playing on the e-file with ...exf4, ...Rfe8 and moving the dark-squared bishop to f6 or d8. The ...exf4 plan becomes more attractive when White has manoeuvred his knight away from b3, otherwise Nd4-e6 may prove annoying.

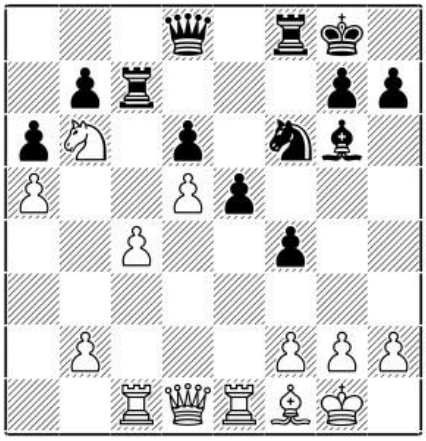


16.Nd2

This is more ambitious than 16.Bxg5 Qxg5, when Black has no problems.

16...Nc5

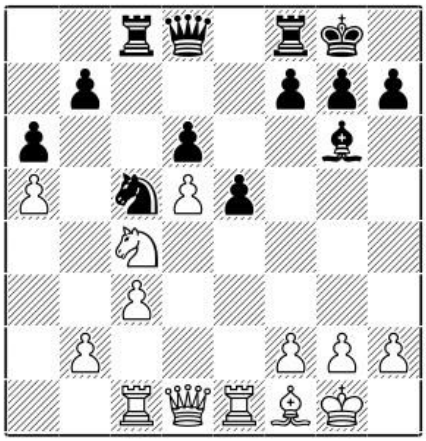
A good example of White achieving his goals can be seen after: 16...f5 17.Nc4 Bxc1 18.Rxc1 Nf6 19.Nb6 Rc7 20.c4 f4



Now in Gilles – Debnar, corr. 1995, White could have increased his advantage with the straightforward 21.b4!N± with c4-c5 to follow.

17.Nc4 Bxc1 18.Rxc1

White is ready to play b2-b4, Nb6 and c4-c5, just as in the example given above, so Black must act quickly.

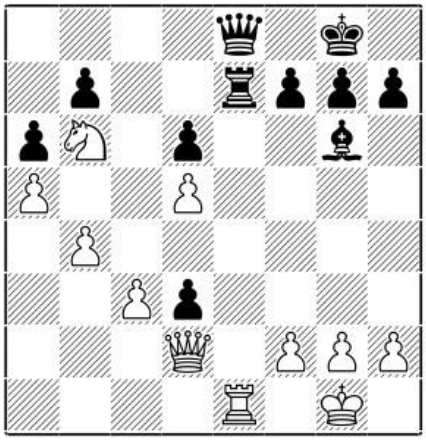


18...e4! 19.Nb6 Rc7 20.b4 Nd3 21.Bxd3 exd3

The well-protected passed pawn will guarantee Black counterplay.

22.Qd2 Re8 23.Rxe8† Qxe8 24.Re1 Re7

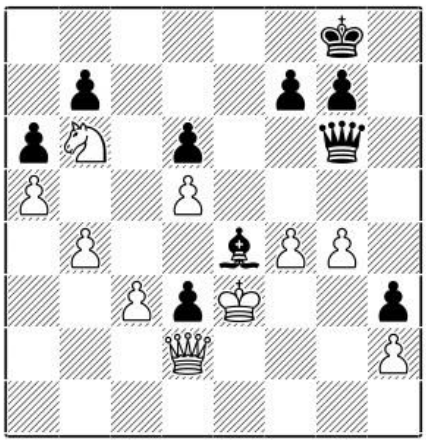
Both sides have played logically, and this position has been reached quite a few times in practice. The d3-pawn is quite safe and although it presents no immediate danger to White, the first player should not underestimate its potential.



25.Kf1 h5!? 26.h4

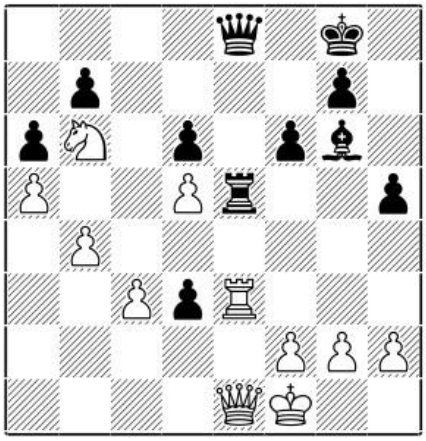
The American Grandmaster Alex Fishbein twice went in a different direction.

His first game continued: 26.f3 h4 27.Rxe7 Qxe7 28.Kf2 Qe5 29.g3 Qf6 30.g4 Be4 31.f4 h3 32.Ke3 Qg6



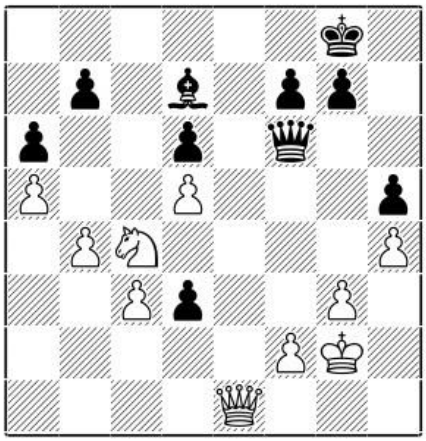
33.c4?? (33.g5 would have kept things equal) Now in Fishbein – Sarkar, Chicago 2004, 33...Qxg4!N would have been winning for Black, since after 34.Kxe4 Qe2† 35.Qe3 Qc2 (or 35...Qxh2 immediately) 36.Qxd3 Qxh2–+ the h-pawn decides.

The second game continued: 26.Re3 Re5 27.Qe1 f6



28.Rxe5 fxe5 29.Qe3 Qe7= The position remained balanced and a draw soon ensued in Fishbein – Yermolinsky, San Diego 2006.

26...Rxe1† 27.Qxe1 Qd8 28.g3 Qf6 29.Kg2 Bf5 30.Nc4 Bd7



31.Nb6?!

There is no good reason to decentralize the knight. It will be offside until the end of the game.

31...Bg4

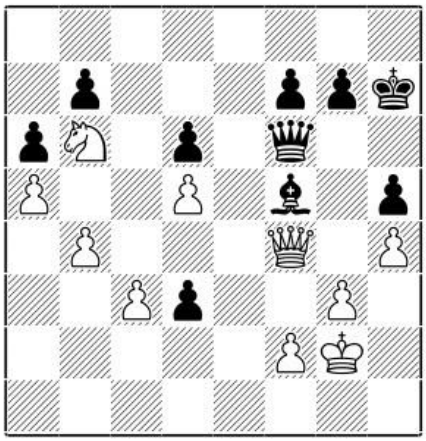
Black could play 31...Bh3†!? 32.Kxh3 Qf3, when the threat of ...Qe2 forces 33.Nc4 Qe2 34.Qd2 Qg4† 35.Kg2 Qxc4 with a drawish endgame, but he correctly goes for more.

32.Qe8†

Continuing down the wrong path. 32.f4 was safer.

32...Kh7 33.Qe4† Bf5 34.Qf4??

This loses, but even after the correct 34.Qe1 g5!µ White is facing big problems.



34...Bh3†! 35.Kf3

In the event of 35.Kxh3 Qxf4 36.gxf4 d2 Black simply queens the pawn.

35...Bg4† 36.Ke3 Qxc3 37.Qe4† g6 38.Qxd3

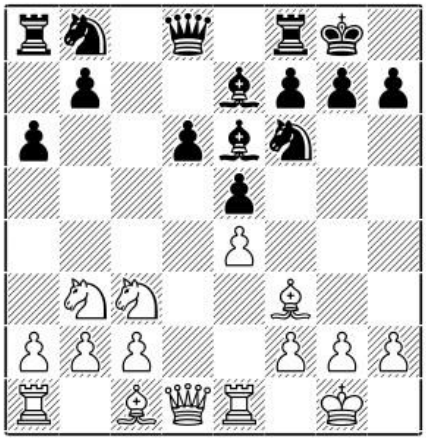
White has won the dangerous pawn but now disaster strikes from another direction.

38...Qe1† 39.Kd4 Qe5†

White resigned in view of 40.Kc4 Be2 when he loses his queen.

0–1

D2) 10.Bf3



This move looks more venomous than the previous option. From the f3-square, the bishop helps White keep a grip on d5. One typical plan is Nd2-f1-e3 to clamp down on the key central square, although it is rather time-consuming. White may also revert to the Nc3-d5 plan.

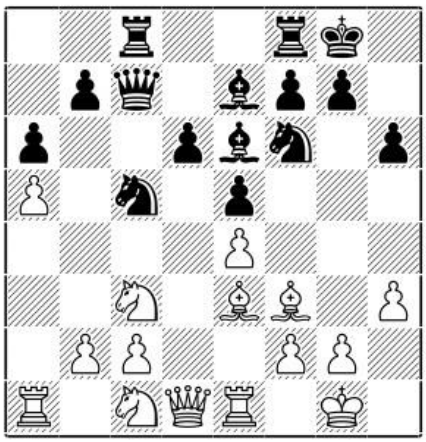
10...Nbd7 11.a4

We have reached a big tabiya which has not received much attention in Najdorf literature, despite having been tested in a lot of games. Although White's set-up looks rather slow, Black has to think carefully about where to put his pieces over the next few moves.

11...Qb8!?

This may seem a strange choice, but anything that Vachier-Lagrave has played deserves close attention. One idea of the queen move is to prepare ...Rc8. More importantly, Black anticipates the Nd2-f1-e3 manoeuvre and prepares to counter it with the somewhat exotic ...Bd8-a5. Before exploring this in more detail, it is worth checking a couple of other set-ups.

11...Rc8 looks natural, but having the rook here could make it difficult to carry out the ...b5 advance, because the a6-pawn will be left weak. In the following example I mishandled Black's position, but it gives some idea of what White is hoping to achieve: 12.a5! Qc7 13.Be3! (the immediate 13.Nd2 can be met by 13...Nb8!? 14.Nf1 Nc6 when Black cleverly attacks the a5-pawn) 13...Nc5 14.h3!? h6 15.Nc1



15...b6? It is not easy to create counterplay, but this is just bad. 16.axb6 Qxb6 17.Nd3 Black was clearly suffering in Fedorowicz – Vigorito, Tulsa 2008.

11...Qc7

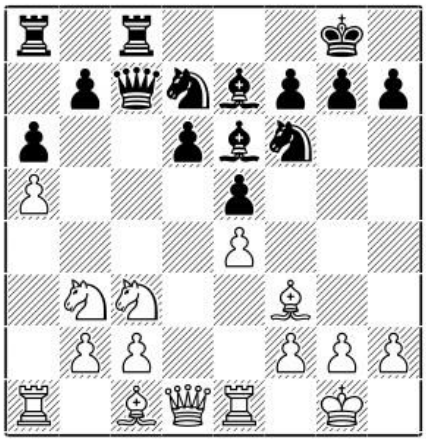
This move was endorsed by both Georgiev and Andriasyan, and I consider it the best alternative to our main line.

12.a5

12.Nd2 Rfc8 13.Nf1 Qc5! looks like a healthy set-up for Black.

12...Rfc8

12...b5 13.axb6 Nxb6 14.Na5 Nc4 15.Nxc4 Qxc4 16.Bd2 Rfc8 17.b3 Qc6 18.Ra2 Bd8 was okay for Black in Areshchenko – Sutovsky, Moscow 2005, but generally I consider this structure to be pleasant for White.



13.Be3 h6!? 14.h3 Qc6 15.Re2 Nf8!?

An interesting manoeuvre, directed against the bishop on f3.

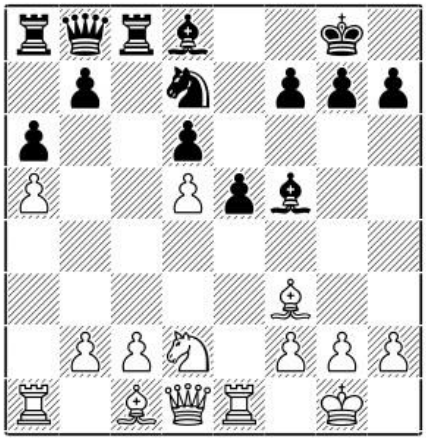
16.Rd2 Ng6 17.Nc1 Nh4,,

Black had good play in Areshchenko – Cheparinov, Burgas 2012.

12.Nd2

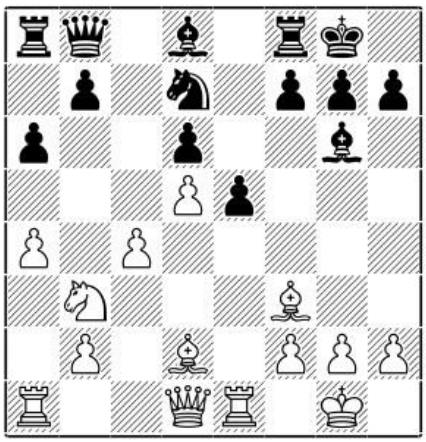
The knight begins its journey to e3. There are a number of alternatives worth checking:

12.a5 Rc8 13.Nd2 Bd8 14.Nd5 (14.Nf1?! Rc5! targets the a5-pawn) 14...Nxd5 15.exd5 Bf5



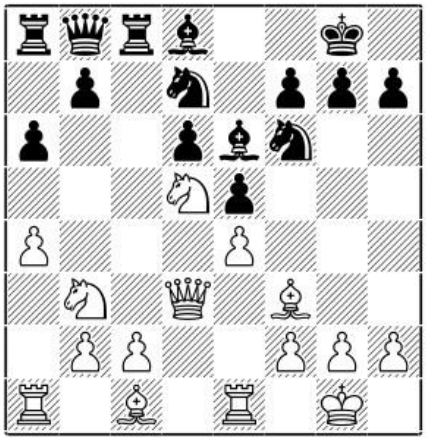
16.Be4 (16.c3 and 16.Ne4 can both be met by 16...Bg6,, intending ...f5) 16...Bxe4 17.Nxe4 This occurred in Pasiev – Swiercz, St Petersburg 2012, and now the natural 17...f5N would have given Black good play.

12.Nd5 should be met by 12...Nxd5 (12...Bxd5 13.exd5² is not so appealing with the queen on b8) 13.exd5 Bf5 when Black has a good game, for instance: 14.c4 (14.a5 Rc8 15.c3 Bd8 16.Be2 Bg6 was fine for Black in Fedorchuk – Brunner, Germany 2015, as he can play ...b5 or ...f5 next) 14...Bg6 15.Bd2 Bd8

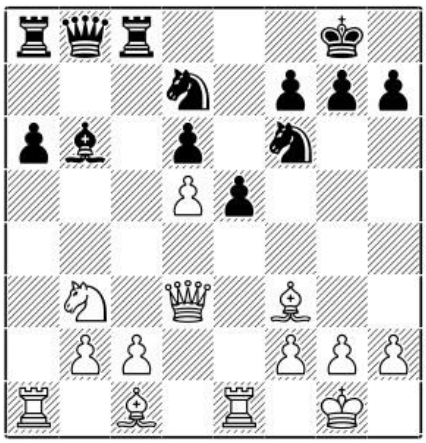


16.Bb4?! (16.a5N is better although 16...b6 still offers Black counterplay) 16...a5 17.Ba3 b6 Black was already better in Durarbayli – Naiditsch, Dubai 2014, due to the misplaced bishop on a3.

12.Qd3 covers the f5-square, thus preparing Nd5 when Black will be unable to trade knight for knight. However, Black has a convenient way of regrouping: 12...Rc8 13.Nd5 Bd8!

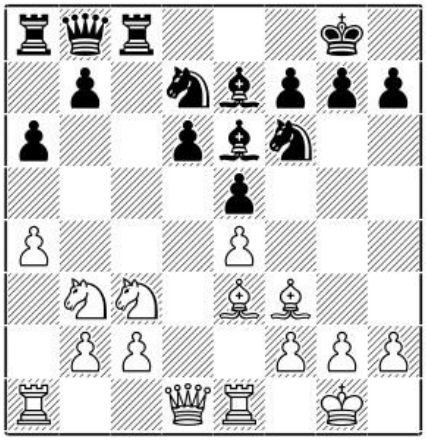


14.a5 (14.Be3?? was surprisingly losing on the spot after 14...Bxd5 15.exd5 e4! 16.Bxe4 Ne5–+ in Hua – Troff, Internet [rapid] 2017) 14...Bxd5!? 15.exd5 b5 (15...b6!N would have been more accurate) 16.axb6 (16.c3!?N was worth considering) 16...Bxb6



17.Bg5 (17.c4? allowed the familiar tactical motif of 17...e4! 18.Bxe4 Ne5µ in Vasova – Teplyi, Aarhus 2017) 17...a5 18.Ra4 Qc7 19.Re2 Rab8,, Durarbayli – Esen, Antalya 2013.

12.Be3 should be met with Black's familiar regrouping plan: 12...Rc8 (12...Bd8 is playable but I prefer not to invite 13.Qd2 with a quick doubling on the d-file)

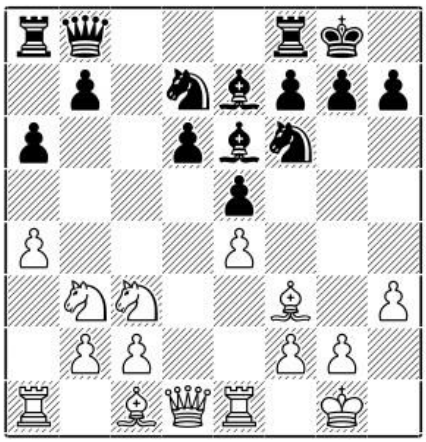


13.a5 (13.Qd2 b6!? [13...Bd8N 14.Red1 Rc6 also seems fine] 14.g3 Ra7 occurred in Duda – Swiercz, Maribor 2012. Black found an interesting way to double rooks, taking into account that the a6-pawn would not be hanging due to the position of the bishop on f3.) 13...Bd8 14.Qd2 b5 15.axb6 Bxb3!? (15...Bxb6=) 16.cxb3 Bxb6,, Lagno – Shankland, Gibraltar 2017.

Finally, a few strong players have tried the waiting move:

12.h3!?

Waiting for Black to commit his rook.



12...Rc8

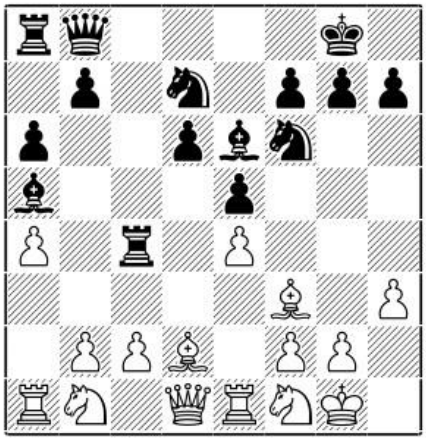
This seems fine, although 12...Bd8!?N could also be considered.

13.Nd2 Bd8 14.Nf1 Ba5

14...Bb6!? is a reasonable alternative which has scored well so far, although White's play can be improved.

15.Bd2 Rc4 16.Nb1

16.Nd5N 16...Bxd5 17.exd5 Bxd2 18.Nxd2 Rc8 is fine for Black, and he could even consider the more adventurous 18...Rh4!?.



16...Bxd2N

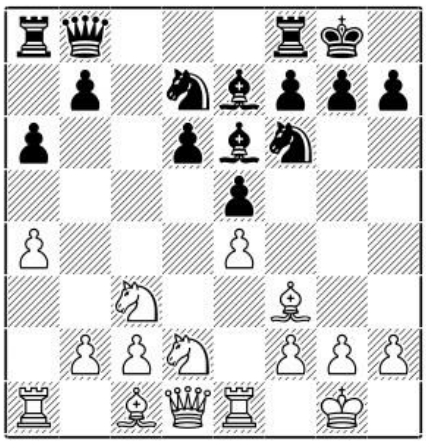
16...Qc7 gave Black a playable position in Areshchenko – Santos Ruiz, Sharjah 2017, but the text move is more straightforward.

17.Nbxd2 Rb4!?

17...Rc6= is fine of course.

18.b3 Qc7 19.c4 Nc5=

With mutual chances. Black's rook is strangely placed but it can always come back via b6-c6, while White's queenside pawns have lost their mobility.

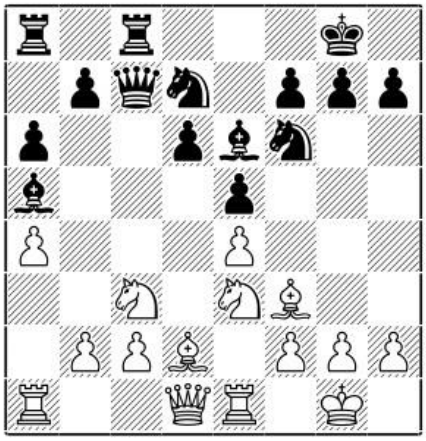


12...Bd8!?

An equally valid approach is to slide the rook to the queenside first:

12...Rc8 13.Nf1 Bd8 14.Ne3 Ba5 15.Bd2 Qc7

This position has been played a few times by Swiercz – with both colours.



16.Ncd5

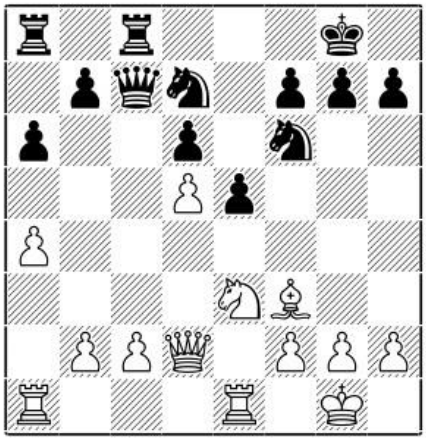
16.Qe2 Nb6 17.Red1 occurred in Swiercz – Yilmaz, Moscow 2012, when 17...Qc5!?N,, would have given Black good prospects.

16.Nf5 Nb6 17.g4?! Nc4 18.g5 was an overoptimistic attacking try, which should have been met by 18...Nxd2!N (rather than 18...Nxb2 19.Qc1 Ne8 20.Nd5! which turned out well for White in Matsenko – Troff, Budapest 2013) 19.Qxd2 (19.gxf6 Bxf5! 20.exf5 Bxc3µ) 19...Ne8µ when White has no attack and plenty of weaknesses.

16...Bxd5 17.exd5 Bxd2

Swiercz later deviated with 17...Bb6 but failed to equalize after 18.a5 Ba7 19.Nf5 Re8 20.Bb4 Bc5 21.Bxc5 Qxc5 22.Qd2 g6 23.b4 Qc7 24.Ne3 Rac8 25.c4² in Najer – Swiercz, Muelheim 2013.

18.Qxd2



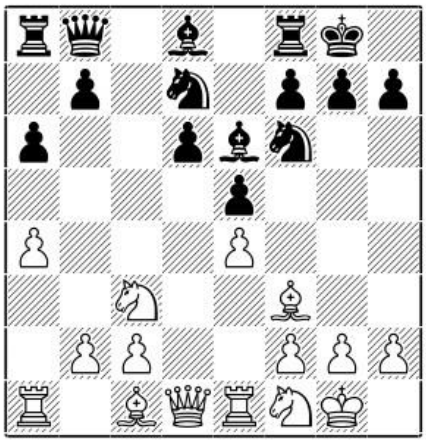
18...a5 19.Be2 Ne4 20.Qd1 g6 21.f3 Nec5=

Efimenko – Swiercz, Lublin 2012.

13.Nf1

Sticking to the plan.

13.a5 b6 14.axb6 Bxb6 15.Nf1 has been played several times by Saveliy Golubov, but both 15...Rc8 and 15...Bd4 are good responses.



13...Ba5

This looks the most consistent, but 13...Bb6 is also possible. Black had good play after 14.Ne3 (14.a5N would have been useful for White to toss in) 14...Qc7 15.g4 Bxe3 16.Bxe3 Nb6 17.Nd5 Nfxd5 18.exd5 Bc8!? 19.c4 f5,, in Viterbo Ferreira – Bruzon Batista, Tromso (ol) 2014.

14.Bd2 Qc7

Having completed the regrouping of his bishop, Black repositions his queen to connect the rooks.

15.Ne3

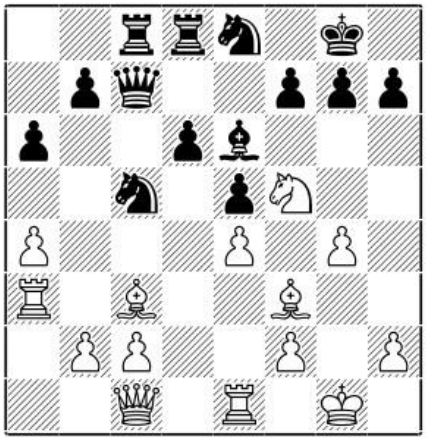
Black has some choice here.

15...Bxc3!?

This was strongly recommended by Gormally on ChessPublishing. At first the engines are excited, handing Black a pleasant advantage. It is a decent move, no doubt, but it is hardly decisive and is not the only sensible try.

The untried 15...Nb6!?N looks interesting.

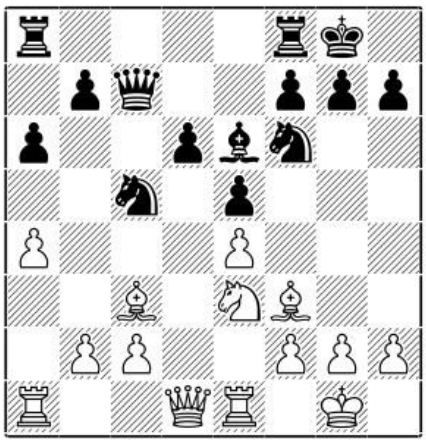
The main protagonist of 11...Qb8, Vachier-Lagrave, twice played 15...Rac8. After: 16.g4 Bxc3 17.Bxc3 Nc5 18.Nf5 Rfd8 19.Qc1 Ne8 20.Ra3



MVL won quickly with the risky 20...g6 in A. Vovk – Vachier-Lagrave, Doha 2014, but White's play can be significantly improved. Therefore I would prefer the more solid 20...f6!?N or 20...a5!?N.

16.Bxc3 Nc5

The justification for surrendering the bishop pair is that White has some problems with his e4-pawn.

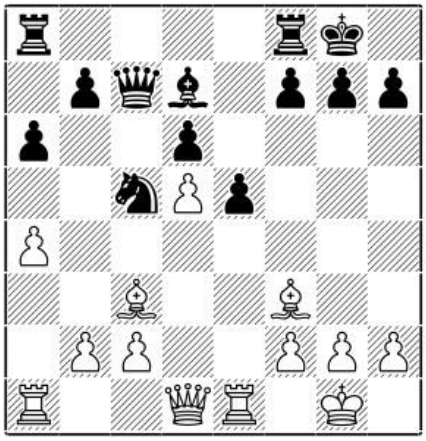


17.Nf5

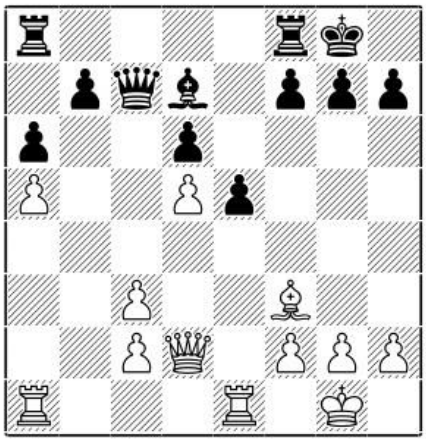
This looks like the best try.

17.Nf1?! is too passive. 17...Qc6 hits both the e4- and a4-pawns, and 18.Bb4 Rfd8³ is more than comfortable for Black.

17.Nd5 looks natural, but Black can seize the initiative with: 17...Nxd5 18.exd5 Bd7! (even stronger than 18...Bf5 19.a5 Bg6= as played in Vasova – Heinemann, Porto Carras 2015)

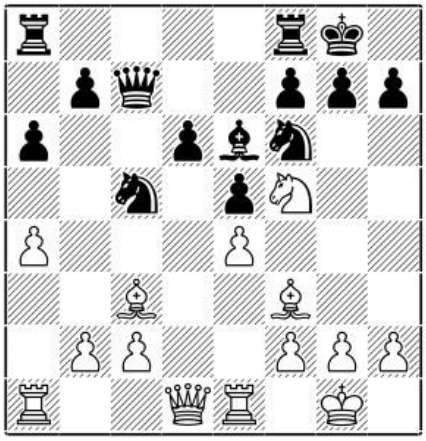


19.a5 (19.b3? Nxb3µ) 19...Na4 20.Qd2 (20.Re3 f5! is excellent for Black) 20...Nxc3 21.bxc3



Black has played well up to now, and securing the queenside with 21...Bb5!Nµ would have given him a great position. (In the game, he completely lost the thread after 21...f5 22.Be2 Rac8 23.c4 Qd8 24.Qb4 Qc7 25.Rab1± in Rodriguez Dominguez – Forgas Moreno, Cienfuegos 2016.)

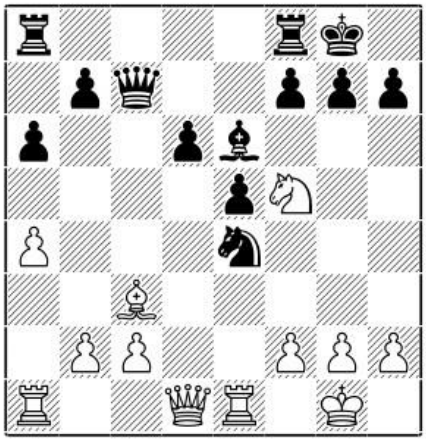
We have reached a critical position, but one where Black is rather spoiled for choice.



17...Bxf5!?

Opting for a tense middlegame with a pair of knights against White's bishops.

17...Nfxe4 looks strong at first, but after 18.Bxe4 Nxe4 White can fight back with:



19.Nxg7! (Gormally only considers the highly cooperative 19.Rxe4? Bxf5–+; the other desperado 19.Nh6† gxh6 20.Rxe4 f6³ would leave Black a pawn up, even if the h6-pawn is rather ugly) 19...Nxc3 (after 19...Nxf2 20.Qd2! White is not worse) 20.Nxe6 fxe6 21.bxc3 Rf4 Black has comfortable equality but nothing more than that.

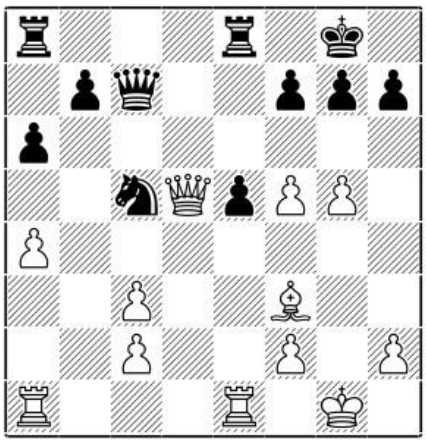
18.exf5 Rfe8

Protecting the e5-pawn to prepare ...d5. We will follow an illustrative game for a few more moves.

19.g4!?

A bit risky, but White did not want to concede the initiative without a fight.

19...d5 20.g5 Nfe4 21.Qxd5 Nxc3 22.bxc3

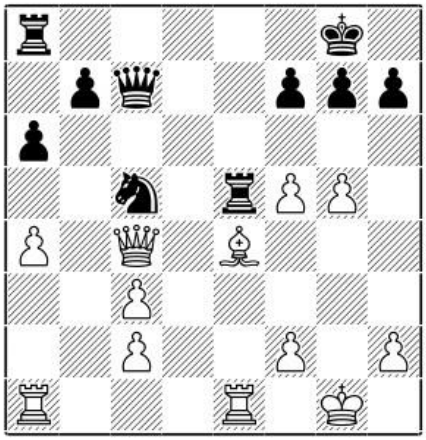


22...e4! 23.Bxe4?!

After 23.Bg2N 23...Re5 24.Qd2 Rae8 Black has the initiative, but this was still a better choice for White.

23...Re5 24.Qc4

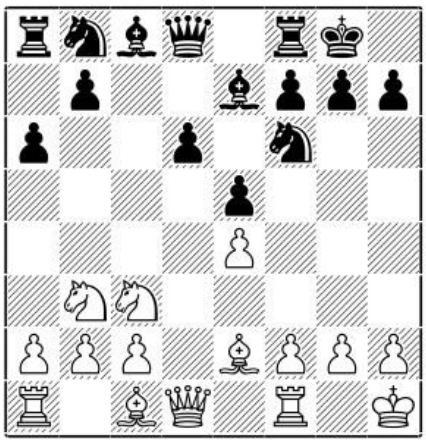
In Ruan Lufei – Ju Wenjun, Ankara 2012, Black should have continued:



24...Rae8!N 25.f3 g6!

Black has a big advantage as White is completely overextended. If 26.fxg6 then of course Black inserts 26...Rxg5† before recapturing with 27...hxg6µ.

E) 9.Kh1



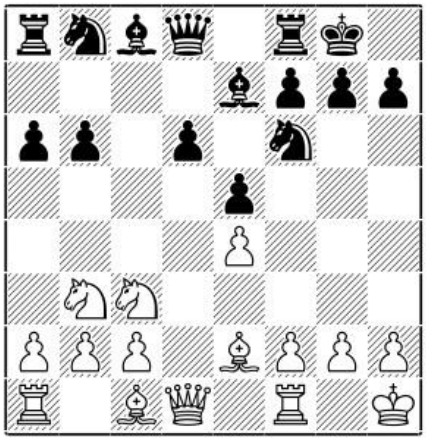
This flexible move was very popular from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s. White moves his king off the g1-a7 diagonal in anticipation of pushing the f2-pawn, while waiting for Black to commit himself.

9...b6

I like this old favourite of Gelfand. By making a 'half-step' with his b-pawn, Black prepares the fianchetto of his bishop while avoiding the immediate confrontation that follows 9...b5 10.a4. (Andriasyan recommends this for Black, but I think White gets the type of position that he wants.) After the text move, Black can follow up with ...b5 once he is better developed, if and when the circumstances are right.

White's main idea is revealed after 9...Be6 10.f4 when 10...exf4 11.Bxf4 gives White an extra tempo compared to similar situations where the bishop goes to e3 first.

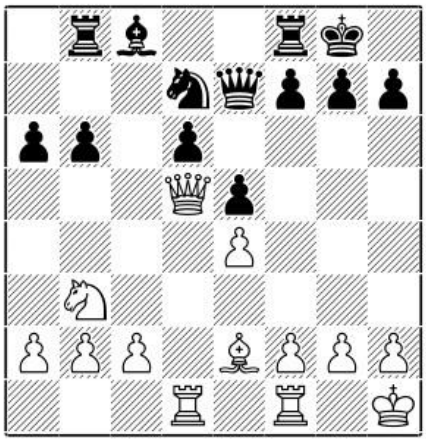
9...Nc6 was Georgiev's recommendation and I consider it the best of Black's alternatives to 9...b6.



We will start by considering the rather premature **E1)** 10.f4?!, before moving on to the more important options of **E2)** 10.Be3 and **E3)** 10.f3.

10.a4 Bb7 11.f3 transposes to variation E3.

The direct 10.Bg5 Nbd7 11.Nd5 Nxd5 12.Qxd5 Rb8 13.Bxe7 Qxe7 14.Rad1 has been shown to be harmless after:



14...Nf6 15.Qxd6 Qxd6 16.Rxd6 Nxe4 17.Rd5 f6 Black has no problems in the endgame and he went on to outplay his opponent and win in Sutovsky – Gelfand, Israel 1999.

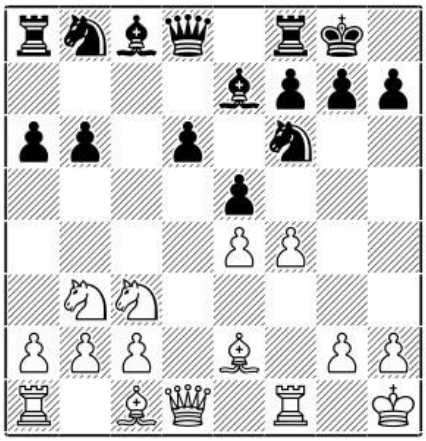
E1) 10.f4?!

GAME 9

Johann Hjartarson – Vidit Gujrathi

Reykjavik 2017

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Be2 e5 7.Nb3 Be7 8.0-0 0-0 9.Kh1 b6 10.f4?!



This direct move is similar to the 9.f4 b5! line which we saw in variation A on page 68. I do not rate it highly, and this game will show the potential of Black's position against such straightforward play.

10...Bb7 11.Bf3

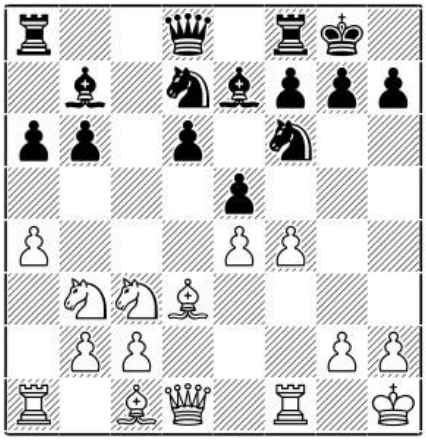
At least this move helps White to control the d5-square, unlike the following alternative:

11.Bd3 Nbd7

Black is comfortable and can already fight for the advantage.

12.a4

12.Be3 b5 13.a4?! (13.a3 Rc8³) 13...b4 14.Nd5 Nxd5 15.exd5 Nf6 gave White big problems with the d5-pawn in Larocca – Vigorito, Natick 2011.



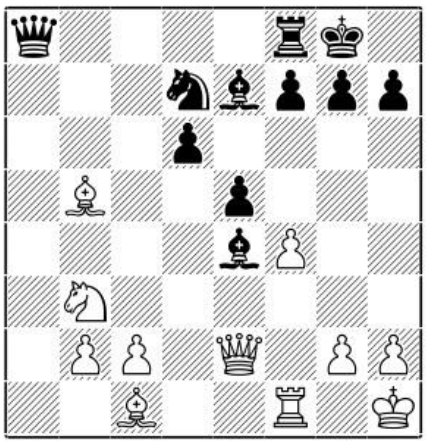
12...b5!

Forcing White to take a flank pawn in return for a central one.

13.axb5 axb5 14.Rxa8 Qxa8 15.Bxb5 Nxe4 16.Nxe4 Bxe4 17.Qe2

17.Bxd7? Bxg2† 18.Kg1 Bxf1 wins for Black after either 19.Qxf1 Qa7† or 19.Kxf1 Qh1† 20.Ke2 Qxh2†.

We have been following Shirov – Gelfand, Dos Hermanas 1997. Black should have continued:



17...Nf6!N³

With an edge, due to his central control and better-protected king.

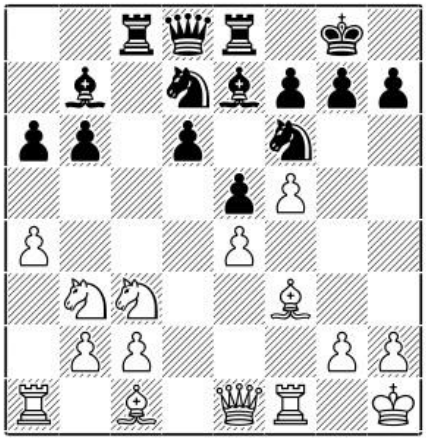
11...Nbd7

Black has a comfortable position; again, it is similar to the 9.f4 line which was covered in variation A. Here Black's pawn is less aggressive (for the moment) on b6, but it was worth it to avoid being hit by an early a2-a4.

12.Qe2

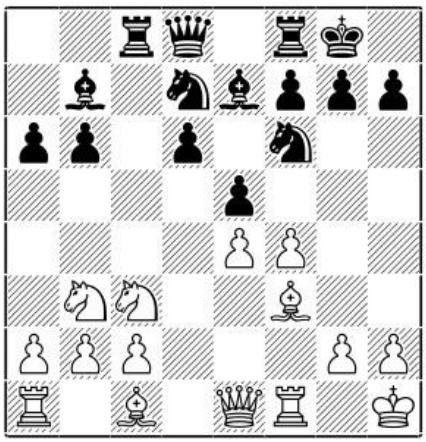
After 12.f5 b5³ Black is doing well, for example: 13.a3 (White achieves nothing with 13.a4?! b4 14.Nd5 Nxd5 15.exd5 Nf6µ) 13...Rc8 14.g4?! Rxc3 15.bxc3 Nxe4µ Ushenina – Karjakin, Sudak 2002.

12.a4 Rc8 13.Qe1 also leads nowhere good for White after: 13...Re8 (another idea is 13...Rc7!? intending ...Qa8) 14.f5

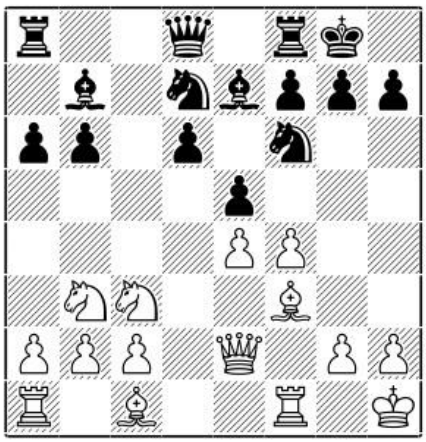


14...d5!µ 15.exd5 e4! 16.Nxe4 Bxd5µ Dvoirys – Wang Yue, Cappelle-la-Grande 2007.

12.Qe1 is the most common move but 12...Rc8 once again favours Black, for instance:



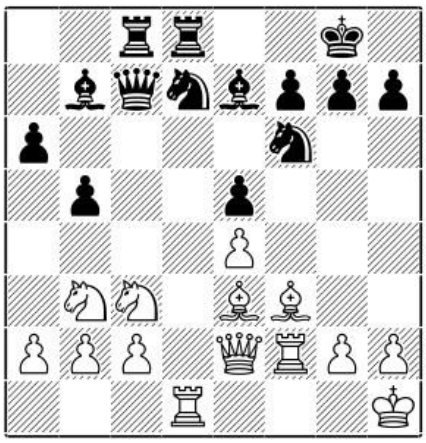
13.Be3 b5 14.a3 Re8 15.Rd1 Bf8³ Black had a fine position in J. Fernandez – Vigorito, Philadelphia 2004. (15...Qc7³ and even 15...d5!?N are good alternatives.)



12...b5

Again Black is spoiled for choice. She was also much better after 12...Re8 13.f5 b5 14.a3 in Pogonina – Sebag, Heraklio 2002, when 14...Rc8Nμ would have been simplest.

Another good example continued: 12...Rc8 13.Be3 b5 14.fxe5 dxe5 15.Rad1 Qc7 16.Rf2 Rfd8μ



17.g3 (17.a3 Bxa3! is a typical trick) 17...b4 18.Nd5 Nxd5 19.exd5 Nf6–+ Cabrera – Barrientos Chavarriaga, Alajuela 2014.

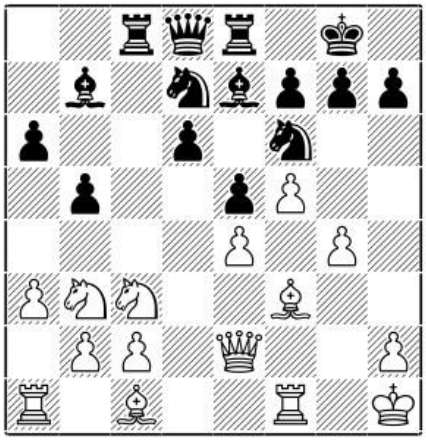
13.a3 Rc8 14.f5 Re8!?

A subtle move with devious intentions.

14...h6!?N is another good option, as is 14...Nb6, since 15.Na5 can be met by 15...Ba8.

15.g4?!

This is not good, but it is difficult to suggest a constructive plan for White. At least now we get to see how Black should react to such a pawn storm.

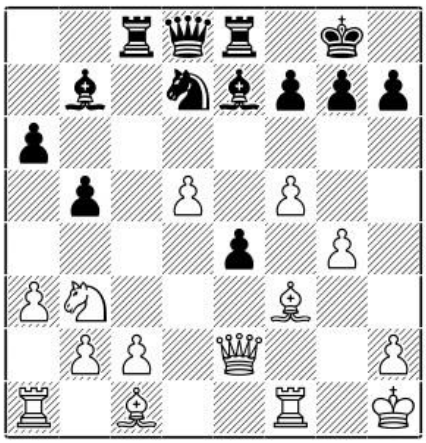


15...d5!μ

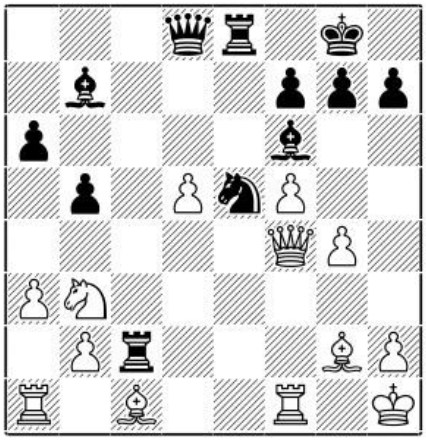
Completely thematic, as is 15...h6!?μ with ...d5 likely to follow.

16.exd5

Taking with the knight is no better:
16.Nxd5 Nxd5 17.exd5 e4!
White already has insurmountable problems.



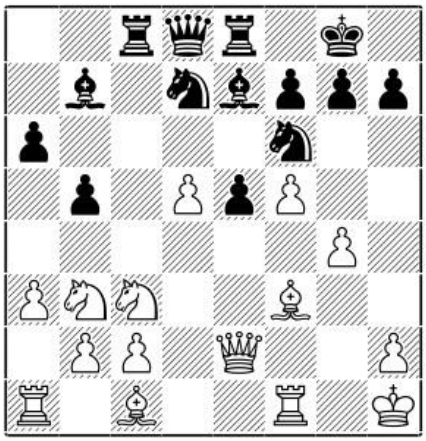
18.Qxe4
18.Bxe4 is refuted by 18...Bd6 19.Qg2 Rxe4! 20.Qxe4 Qh4 21.Bf4 (or 21.Qg2 Bxd5–+) 21...Nf6 and Black wins.
18.Bg2 is the only way to prolong the game, but 18...Bxd5μ is a strategic disaster for White.
18...Bf6 19.Qf4 Ne5 20.Bg2 Rxc2



White's position is collapsing everywhere. For instance:

21.g5 Qxd5!!

Winning in style.



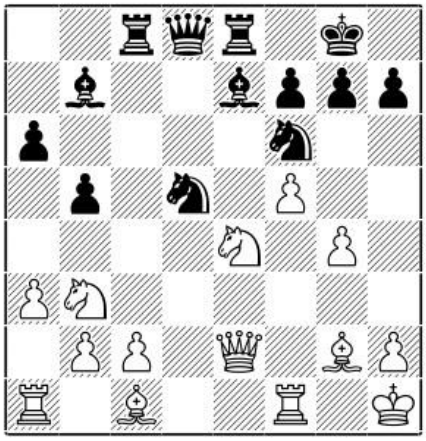
16...e4 17.Bg2

17.Nxe4 Nxe4 18.Bxe4 transposes to the 16.Nxd5 Nxd5 17.exd5 e4! 18.Bxe4 line noted above, where 18...Bd6 is crushing.

Also after 17.Bxe4 Bd6 White is completely busted.

17...Nxd5 18.Nxe4 N7f6

White is up by a useless pawn and his king is exposed, while Black is fully developed with a safe king. And just compare the activity of the rooks for each side...



19.c3?

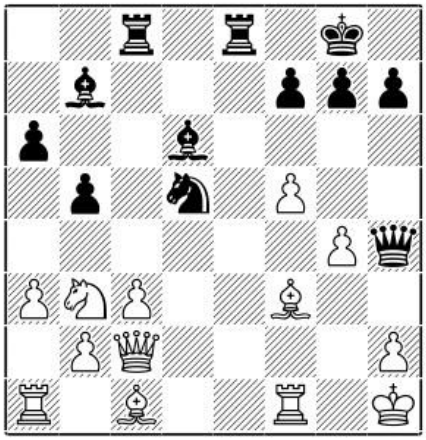
This loses quickly, but even the more resilient 19.Nxf6† Bxf6 20.Qd1 offers little hope of salvation after something like 20...Rc4!?–+.

19...Nxe4 20.Qxe4

20.Bxe4 Bd6–+ does not change anything.

20...Bd6! 21.Qc2 Qh4 22.Bf3

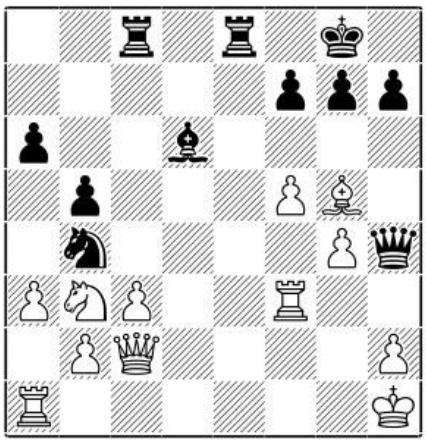
Black has many ways to win, and Vidit finds the most direct path.



22...Nb4! 23.Bg5

23.axb4 Bxf3† 24.Rxf3 Re1† 25.Kg2 Qxh2 is mate.

23...Bxf3† 24.Rxf3



24...Nxc2

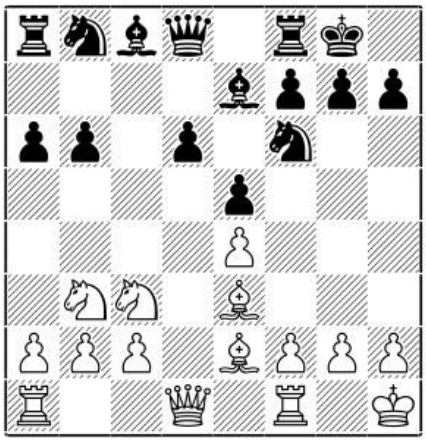
24...Qe1†!? 25.Rxe1 Rxe1† 26.Kg2 Nxc2 also does the trick.

25.Bxh4 Nxa1 26.Nxa1 Re2

If 27.Rf2 then 27...Re1† wins the sad knight, so White resigned.

0–1

E2) 10.Be3



White simply develops. This is the most common move in practice.

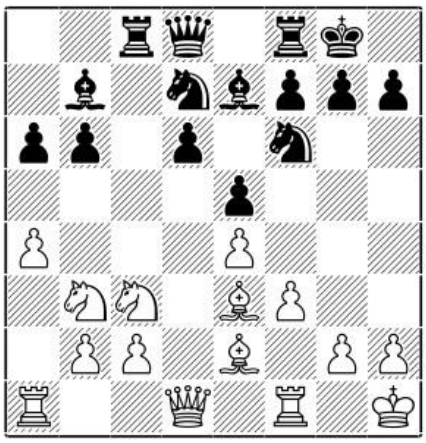
10...Bb7 11.f3

This position could also arise after 10.f3 Bb7 11.Be3. If we think about this move order, we see that White has a fundamental choice: he can restrain Black's queenside play with 11.a4, but this invites 11...Nc6 as we will see in Game 10; or he can ignore the queenside and develop as he does here.

11...b5!

White cannot have it both ways. This soon leads to an unusual queenside pawn structure in our main line.

I would have liked to recommend 11...Nbd7 but 12.a4! is a good reply. After 12...Rc8 we reach the following position:



I studied this position years ago and wanted to recommend it. Black's development looks natural and harmonious. For a long time I was enchanted by the following scheme: 13.Rf2 Rc7 14.Bf1 Qa8! Black's queen influences the long diagonal and makes way for the f8-rook. 15.Rd2 Rfc8 (similar play resulted after 15...h6 16.Nc1 Rxc3! 17.bxc3 d5 in Rohl – Leitao, San Felipe 1998) 16.Qe2 h6 17.Rad1 Rxc3! 18.bxc3 d5 Black had decent play for the exchange in Kulaots – Carlsen, Gausdal 2005. Although the future World Champion lost this game, I had the sense that Black's play was generally correct and that his defeat was caused by subsequent errors.

The problem from the diagram position is the simple 13.Qd2!, giving some extra protection to the c3-knight. A logical continuation is 13...Rc7 14.Rfd1 Qa8 15.Nc1 Rfc8 16.N1a2, as first played in Rodriguez Cespedes – Roeder, Mondariz 1996. Although Black's position looks nice, White has succeeded in preventing the exchange sacrifice while maintaining control over d5. As such, he can manoeuvre freely, while Black can do little except sit and wait.

12.a4

This is the most common choice and a thematic move for this line, hoping to prove that Black's queenside advance is premature.

A different approach is:

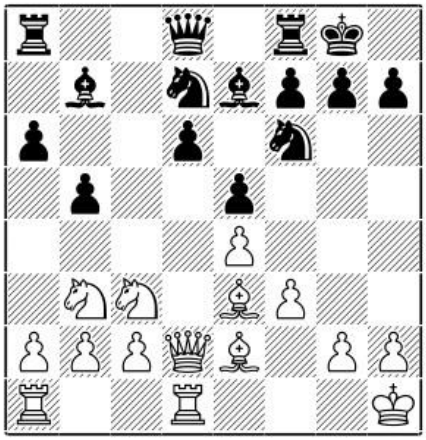
12.Qd2

Ganguly has played this a lot. It may appear too routine, but the Indian GM is not naïve, so we had better see what he is up to.

12...Nbd7 13.Rfd1!

After 13.Nd5 Nxd5 14.exd5 Rc8 White had some problems with the d5-pawn in Smeets – A. Zhigalko, Peniscola 2002.

White hopes to probe the queenside. I think the simplest way to handle the position is:



13...Qc7!

White's idea is seen after the natural-looking: 13...Rc8 14.a4 b4 15.Na2! (15.Nd5? Nxd5 16.exd5 Nf6 17.Qxb4 Nxd5 18.Qxb7 Nxe3 19.Rd2 Nxc2µ was an early misstep in Ganguly – Sasikiran, Qingdao 2002) 15...a5 (if 15...d5 16.exd5 Nxd5 then 17.Bxa6! picks up a pawn) 16.Bb5 Nb8?! 17.c3± The position opened to White's advantage in Ganguly – Paragua, Bled (ol) 2002.

Black can also play directly with 13...b4!? 14.Nd5 Nxd5 15.exd5 Nf6 16.Bc4 a5, but after 17.a3 he has to handle the queenside with a lot of care.

14.Rac1!?

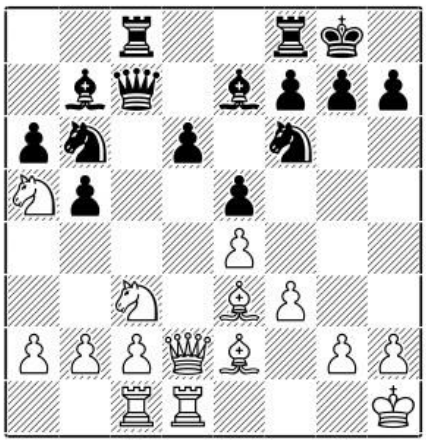
This is White's most sophisticated try.

14.a4?! is worse in view of 14...b4 15.Na2 when 15...d5! works.

14...Nb6!

14...Rfd8 15.Nd5 Bxd5 16.exd5 Rab8 17.c4 b4 18.f4 gave White the initiative in Ganguly – Pantsulaia, Nakhchivan 2003.

15.Na5 Rac8



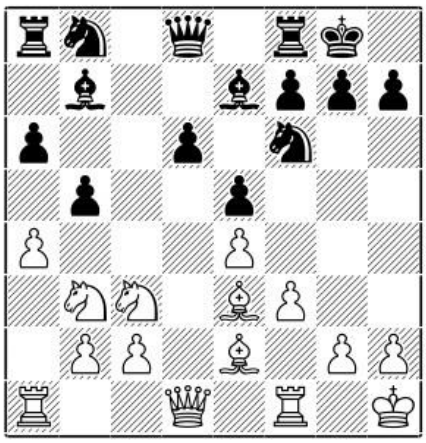
16.Bxb5?

Better was 16.Nxb7N 16...Qxb7 with equality.

The text move was played in Ganguly – Sriram, Mumbai 2003. White appears to have landed a nice tactic, but Black could have turned the tables with:

16...d5!Nµ

White is in trouble, since 17.exd5 Nbxd5 leaves him with too many pieces hanging.

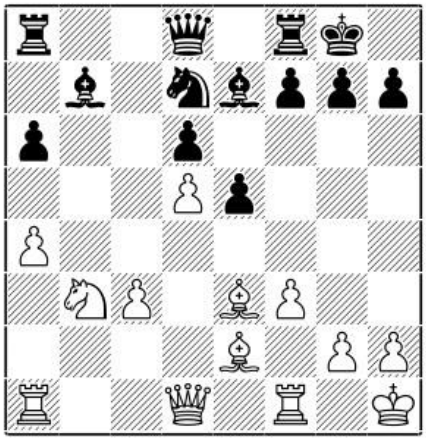


12...b4 13.Nd5 Nxd5 14.exd5 Nd7 15.c3

White does not have time for 15.a5?! in view of 15...Qc7, intending ...Nf6, when the d5-pawn is weak.

15...bxc3 16.bxc3

This is a tricky structure to understand. White's queenside pawns are split, but he has chances to build an initiative there. Black has a healthy kingside pawn majority, but the b7-bishop is passive.



16...Bg5

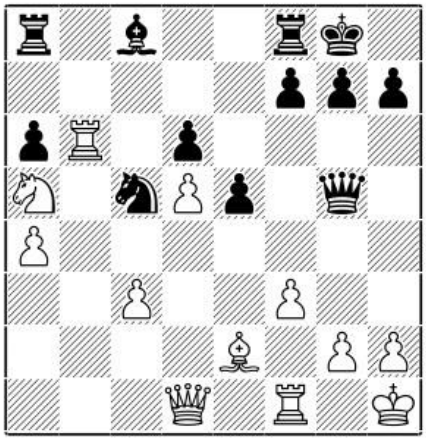
This is a good start. Black activates his other bishop and fights for the dark squares.

17.Bf2

17.Bg1 has also been played, for instance in Anand – Gelfand, Dos Hermanas 1997. However, I do not see any special point to this move, and play is likely to develop in much the same way as our main line.

Trading bishops is not dangerous:
17.Bxg5 Qxg5 18.Na5 Nc5 19.Rb1 Bc8 20.Rb6

20.Nc4 Qe7 21.Rb6 Bd7 22.a5 Na4! is a nice trick, as 23.Rxd6? Nxc3 24.Qd2 Nxe2 25.Qxe2 Bb5 wins for Black.



20...Bd7!

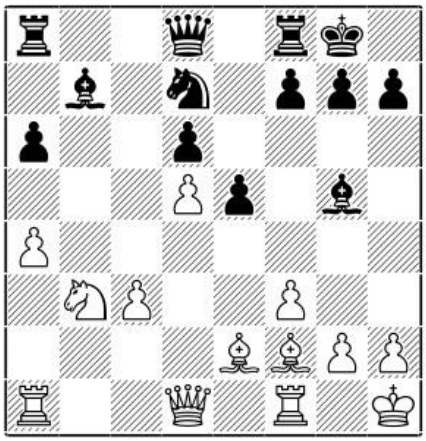
Here too, Black does not have to settle for a passive defence of the d6-pawn.

21.Rxd6 Bxa4 22.Qb1 Rfb8

Another good example continued: 22...e4!? 23.fxe4 Rab8 24.Rb6 Bc2 25.Qxc2 Rxb6³ Kirkov – Buczinski, corr. 2010.

23.Rb6 Qd8 24.Rb4 Rc8³

Ganguly – Sasikiran, Nagpur 2002.



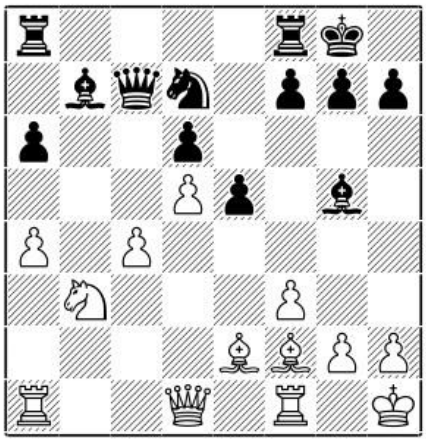
17...Qc7

This is the most common move and it looks best.

Georgiev recommends 17...Rc8, but 18.c4 Nb6 19.Nd2 Bxd2 20.Bxb6 Qxb6 21.Qxd2 offers White some initiative. After the further 21...Qc5 22.Rab1 Rc7 23.Qb4 Bc8 24.Qxc5 Rxc5 25.Rb6 Rd8 26.Kg1 Black was under serious pressure in Kuhne – Stephenson, corr. 2008.

18.c4

We have reached a critical position. Black has to consider White's cramping a4-a5 advance while also being wary of a tactical c4-c5 break. His usual approach has been to bring one of the rooks to b8, allowing a corresponding retreat by the b7-bishop to either a8 or c8.



18...Rab8!

This is the 'right rook.'

After 18...Rfb8 19.a5 Bc8 Black's rooks are jumbled in the corner so White is well positioned for: 20.c5! (better than 20.Qc2 Rb4 21.Bd3 g6 22.Rfb1 Rab8 with a good position for Black, Netzer – De Firmian, Stockholm 2003) 20...dxc5 (or 20...Nxc5 21.Nxc5 dxc5 22.d6 Qc6 23.Bd3*ƒ*) 21.d6 Qc6 22.Bc4 Nf6? (22...Bb7 23.Qd3©) 23.Nxc5± Jakovenko – Fedorowicz, Montreal 2005.

An ambitious alternative is:

18...a5!?

Black stops the a4-a5 advance and gives his passive bishop a square on a6. The b5-square is weakened, but we will see that this is not fatal.

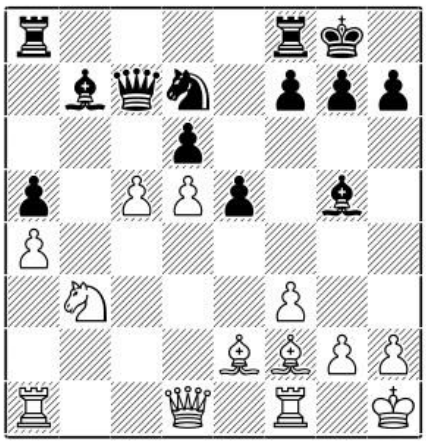
19.c5!?

Indecisive play such as 19.Qe1 Rfb8 20.Ra3?! gave Black a nice position after 20...g6³, with ideas like ...f5 or ...Bc8, in Zhang Zhong – Sasikiran, Hastings 2001/2.

The normal-looking 19.Rb1 enabled Black to execute his ideas with 19...Ba6! 20.Qc2 Rfb8 21.Nd2 f5 (another idea is 21...Bxd2!?N 22.Qxd2 Nc5³) 22.Bd3 g6³ in Massoni – Yilmaz, Porto Carras 2010.

White can also try 19.Nd2, intending to reroute the knight via b1-a3-b5. However, 19...Bxd2!? avoids any trouble with the knight by simply eliminating it. After the further 20.Qxd2 Ba6 21.Rab1 Rab8 22.Qc3 f5 23.Rfc1 Nc5 24.Be1 Rfc8 25.Rxb8 Rxb8 26.Qxa5 Qb7!? Black had good compensation for the pawn in A. Muzychuk – Ju Wenjun, Antakya 2010.

The text move is critical, and just seems to lead to a mess.



19...dxc5

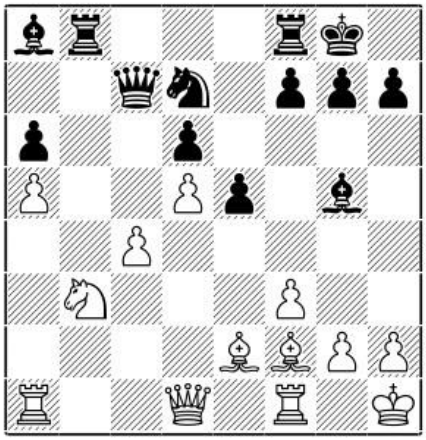
Another game continued: 19...Nxc5 20.Nxc5 dxc5 21.d6 Qd7 22.Bxc5 Bc6 23.Bc4 Bf6 24.Bd5 Rfc8 25.Bxc6 Rxc6 26.Qd5 Rac8 27.Ba3 h6 28.Qb5 Qe6 29.Rad1 Bd8 ½–½ Primakov – Trembecki, corr. 2012.

20.d6 Qc8 21.Bb5 c4 22.Nd2 Bd5 23.Nb1 Be6 24.Nc3 Rb8

The position remained unclear in Tikhiy – Reyhan, Azov 2010.

19.a5 Ba8

The bishop is very passive here, but the most important thing is to get out of the way for the rooks.



20.Rb1

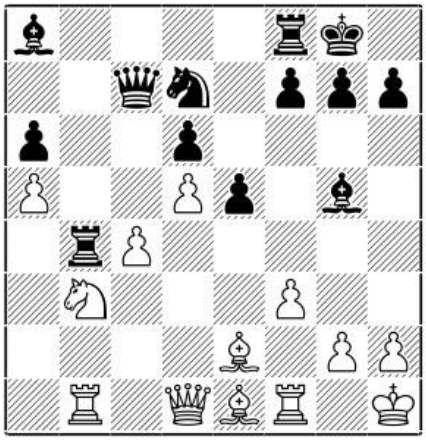
One advantage to Black's scheme is that 20.c5?! does not work after 20...dxc5 (but not 20...Nxc5? 21.Nxc5 dxc5 22.Bxa6±) 21.Bxa6 c4 22.Nd2 c3 23.Nc4 Rfd8³ when Black's formerly sleepy bishop is lined up nicely against the weakened d5-pawn.

White has also tried 20.Ra4 Qb7 21.Nc1, as in Nijboer – Vachier-Lagrave, Wijk aan Zee 2007. Black has several playable moves, including 21...f5!?N as recommended by Edouard.

20...Rb4! 21.Be1

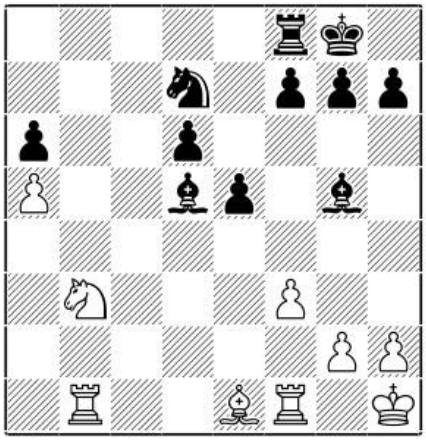
White chases the rook but misplaces her bishop.

Some other games have continued 21.Bd3 g6 22.Qc2 Rc8= when the threat of ...Bxd5 gains some time for Black and keeps things about level.



21...Rb7!?

The exchange sacrifice 21...Rxc4 22.Bxc4 Qxc4 23.Nd2 Qd3 24.Qb3 Qxb3 25.Nxb3 Bxd5 is also objectively fine for Black:

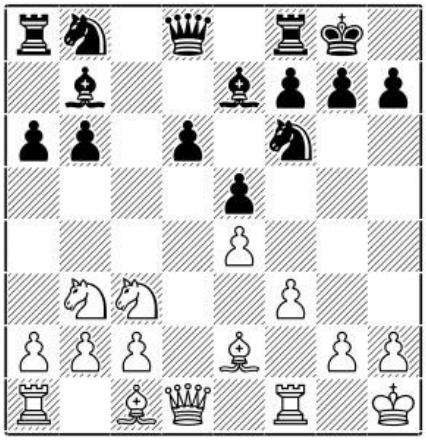


However, Edouard goes on to say that the position after 26.Bd2 Be7 27.Rfd1 would have been too drawish for his taste.

22.Bc3 Rfb8 23.Qc2 Be3 24.Bd3 g6 25.Rfe1 Ba7„

Black maintained a good position with interesting play in H. Hunt – Edouard, England 2013.

E3) 10.f3 Bb7



11.a4

Obviously 11.Be3 takes us back to variation E2 above.

Assuming White does not intend to transpose to the previous variation, the text move is his most important option. We will analyse it under the following game, which featured a different transposition.

GAME 10

Vassily Ivanchuk – Baskaran Adhiban

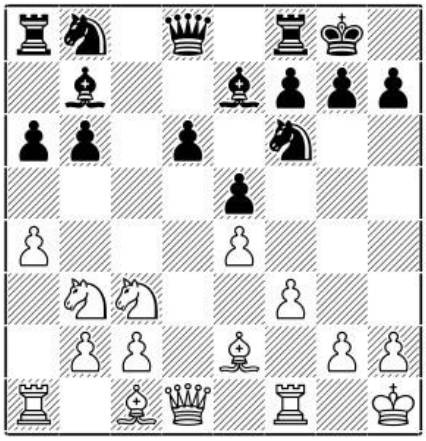
Zagreb 2018

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Be2 e5 7.Nb3 Be7 8.0-0 0-0 9.Kh1 b6 10.a4

This is a funny kind of move: Black has just played ...b6 instead of ...b5, yet White immediately takes steps to prevent ...b5 anyway. It makes no real difference though.

10...Bb7 11.f3

As noted above, this position could just as easily be reached via the 10.f3 Bb7 11.a4 move order. Now Black has to decide how to develop his queen's knight.



11...Nc6!

As we have already seen, this method of developing the knight is a tempting possibility in lines with an early a2-a4, because the knight can go to the b4-square.

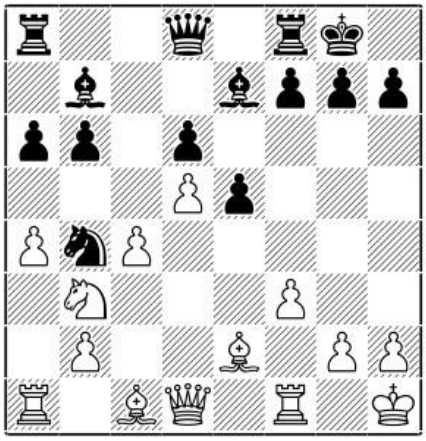
11...Nbd7 may seem like a natural choice but then 12.Be3 transposes to a position which I prefer to avoid, as discussed earlier on page 94.

12.Bg5

White should fight for the d5-square.

Superficial development with 12.Be3 enables Black to fight for an advantage already with 12...Nb4. For instance, after 13.a5 b5 14.Nb1 Qc8!? Black is ready for ...Qe6, ...Rfd8, and ...d5.

The direct 12.Nd5 is well met by: 12...Nxd5 13.exd5 Nb4 14.c4



14...a5! Fixing the queenside structure. After 15.Bd2 Na6 16.Bc3 Bg5 17.Bd3 Bc8[3] Black was well placed in Polgar – Topalov, Dos Hermanas 1999. He can play ...f5 at any time, and even the typical Sicilian manoeuvre ...Ra7!? is possible, with the idea of swinging over to the kingside.

12...Nb4

Arizmendi and Moreno have recommended:

12...Rc8!?

This indeed looks like a worthy alternative.

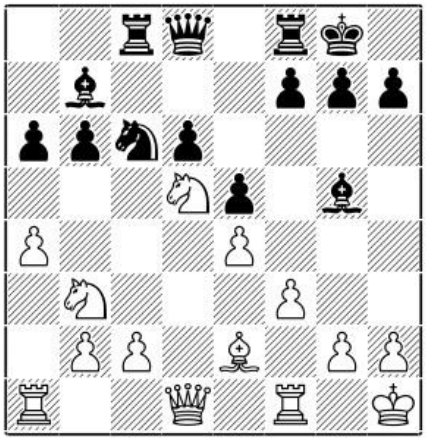
13.Bxf6

This unprovoked exchange seems to be White's best.

Note that after 13.Qd2 Nb4, unlike our main line below, White does not have the Nb1 manoeuvre available because the c2-pawn is hanging.

13...Bxf6 14.Nd5 Bg5

The position resembles a Sveshnikov Sicilian. The d5-knight may look imposing, but Black can trade it off with ...Ne7 at some point. The bishop pair is always a nice long-term asset to have.



15.Nd2

This makes a lot of sense, as the knight was poorly placed on b3. Other moves are not dangerous, for instance:

15.Bd3 Ne7 16.Nxe7† Qxe7 17.Qe2 a5 18.Rfd1 (18.Ba6?! Bxa6 19.Qxa6 Rxc2 wins a pawn) 18...Rfd8 19.c3 Qe6 20.Nd2 d5 was at least equal for Black in Asrian – Moreno Carnero, Ohrid 2001.

15.Qd3 Ne7 16.Nxe7† (Black is doing well after 16.c4 Nxd5 17.cxd5 a5!³, fixing the queenside) 16...Qxe7 17.c4 (17.a5 b5 is pleasant for Black) 17...a5! Black had a good game in Dervishi – Rowson, Turin (ol) 2006.

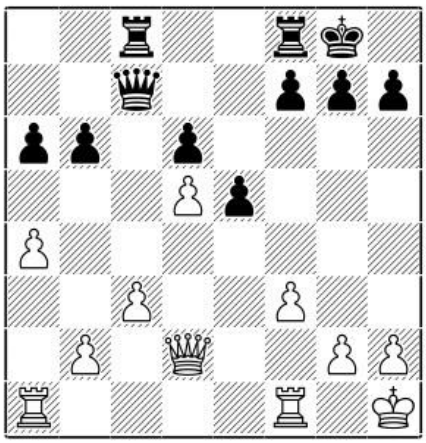
15...Nd4

15...Ne7!?N 16.Nxe7† Qxe7 17.Nc4 Qc7 is

also perfectly playable.

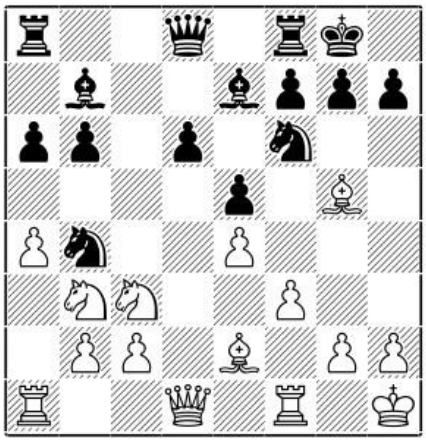
16.c3 Nxe2 17.Qxe2 Bxd5 18.exd5 Bxd2! 19.Qxd2 Qc7

Black has a comfortable position and soon took control in the following example:



20.Rfe1 Qb7 21.Qd3 b5 22.b4?! Rc4 23.axb5 axb5 24.Re4 Rfc8

Black was much better in Ott – Palladino, corr. 2016.



Returning to our main line, at first Black's position looks wonderful due to his control over the d5-square, but White has a clever resource.

13.Nb1!

White will kick the b4-knight away before rerouting his knight.

13...a5!?

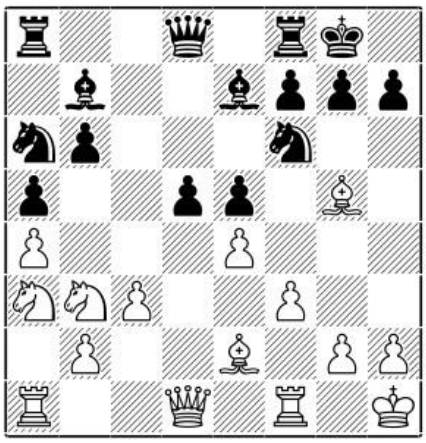
13...h6 and 13...Nh5!? are valid alternatives, but I like the text move which vacates a better retreat square for the knight.

14.Na3

Usually White flicks in 14.c3 Na6 first, after which 15.Na3 d5! transposes to the game.

14...d5! 15.c3 Na6

Black frees his position in the centre and obtains active prospects for his pieces, while the b5-outpost is not too important.



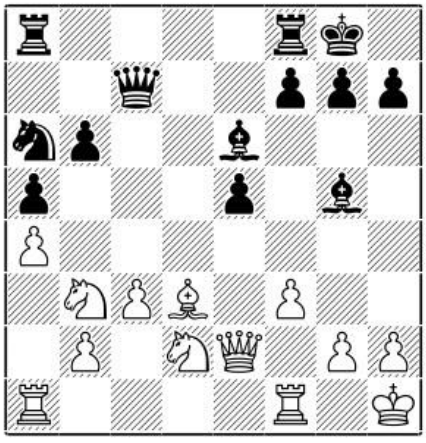
16.Bxf6 Bxf6 17.exd5 Bxd5 18.Nc4

Black also had a good position after 18.Bc4 Bc6 19.Nb5 Qe7 in Tseshkovsky – Khismatullin, Kazan 2005. The bishop pair is always a nice long-term asset to have.

18...Be6 19.Bd3

In the event of 19.Qxd8 Rfxd8 White cannot take the b6-pawn because the b3-knight hangs.

19...Qc7 20.Qe2 Bg5 21.Ncd2



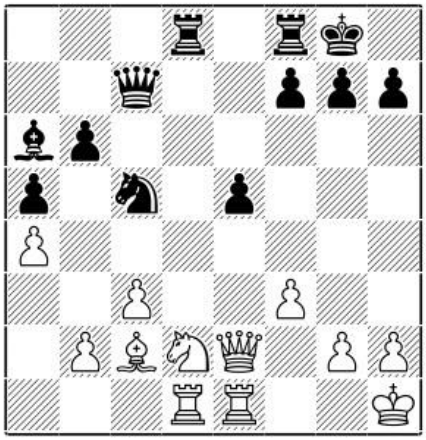
21...Bxd2!?

Black trades off one of his bishops in order to relieve any pressure that White had on the queenside.

22.Nxd2 Nc5 23.Bc2 Rad8

Black is a little better because his e5-pawn affords him superior central control, while both of his minor pieces are better than their counterparts.

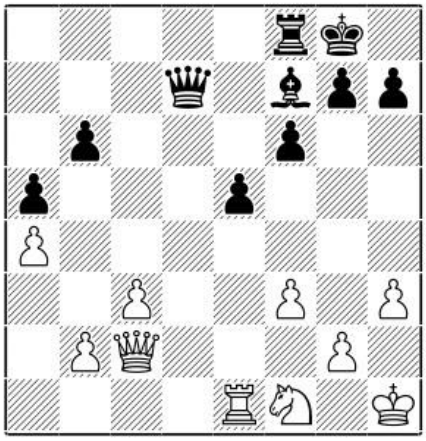
24.Rad1 Bc8! 25.Rfe1 Ba6



26.Qf2

After 26.Qxe5?! Qxe5 27.Rxe5 Nd3 28.Bxd3 Rxd3 the pressure along the d-file makes the position dangerous for White, while his extra pawn is not relevant at all.

26...Nd3 27.Bxd3 Bxd3 28.Nb3 Bc4 29.Qc2 f6 30.h3 Rd7 31.Rxd7 Qxd7 32.Nd2 Bf7 33.Nf1



33...Qe6?!

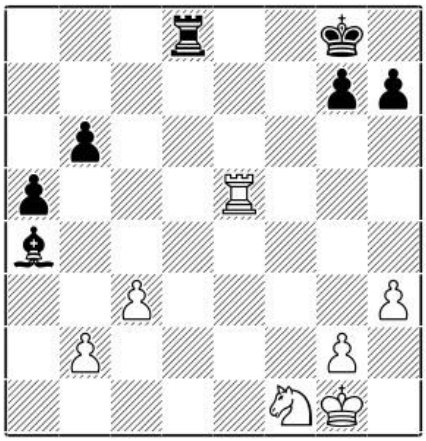
33...Qd5! would have prepared ...Qb3 without allowing the defensive resource played in the game.

34.f4!

Ivanchuk uses his chance to simplify.

34...Qb3 35.Qxb3 Bxb3 36.fxe5 fxe5 37.Kg1 Bxa4 38.Rxe5 Rd8

Black is still a tiny bit better but Ivanchuk holds without much trouble.



39.Re6 Bb3 40.Rxb6 a4 41.Kf2 Bc4 42.Nh2 Rd2† 43.Kg3 Bb3 44.Nf3 Rxb2 45.Nd4 Rb1 46.Nxb3 Rxb3 47.Rc6 a3 48.Kh2 Kf7 49.c4 a2 50.Ra6 Rb2 51.h4 Rc2 52.c5 Ke7 53.Ra7† Ke6 54.c6 h5 55.c7 Rxc7 56.Rxa2

½–½

Conclusion

The various 9th moves in this chapter vary from the naïve to the downright sneaky. The rash 9.f4 definitely falls into the former category; after 9...b5 Black is already thinking about an advantage in most lines. The premature 9.a4 is not so bad, but it fails to put any pressure on Black.

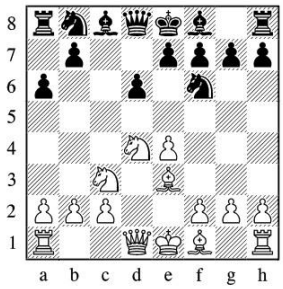
Many years ago, 9.Qd3 was often played with the idea of a kingside demonstration, but these ideas do not really work for White. After 9...Be6 the most dangerous try is 10.Bd2!?, which is more venomous than its quiet demeanour would

seem to indicate. The normal 10...Nbd7 is fine, but Black should not play too routinely. Both 10...Nc6!? and 10...a5!? are interesting alternatives in this relatively unexplored variation.

The quiet 9.Re1 is characteristic of the 6.Be2 system in general: quiet, but not to be taken lightly. After 9...Be6 the retreat 10.Bf1 is less dangerous than 10.Bf3. In the latter case several plans are available, but I like 11...Qb8!? with the idea of the typical Najdorf drop-back ...Bd8. The bishop manoeuvre may be played with or without first transferring the f8-rook to c8, depending on how White plays.

White's second-most-popular 9th move (after 9.Be3) is the prophylactic/waiting move 9.Kh1. We will meet it with the apparently modest 9...b6, a favourite option of Boris Gelfand. Then 10.f4?! is similar to 9.f4, which means Black can immediately fight for the advantage, so White generally opts for a more solid set-up involving f2-f3 in conjunction with a2-a4 or Be3. As is often the case, Black can react to an early a2-a4 with ...Nc6, when play resembles a comfortable version of a Sveshnikov for Black. If White avoids committing himself on the queenside, however, then Black can safely play ...Bb7 and ...b5, when a subsequent a2-a4 leads to a somewhat unusual structure where both sides have chances.

Chapter 4



6.♗e3

Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.♗e3 e5

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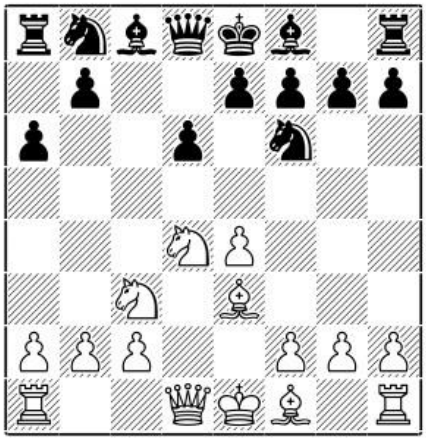
B4) 10.Re1!? *Game 12* 122

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Be3



It is hard to believe that this natural move was once considered an oddity. Its ECO classification is actually B90, which is kind of an 'unusual 6th moves' catch-all. In the 1980s and 90s, however, 6.Be3 became one of the main lines of the Najdorf. Several English players such as Short and Nunn began to play with the simple strategic plan of f2-f3, 0-0-0, g2-g4 and so on, and the plan quickly caught on.

6.f3 is another way of initiating the English Attack. I will say a bit more about this at the start of the next chapter on page 131, since the ensuing positions after 6...e5 7.Nb3 are likely to transpose to lines covered elsewhere in that chapter.

6...e5

We have no reason to refrain from taking space with this typical Najdorf move, which has always been my favourite.

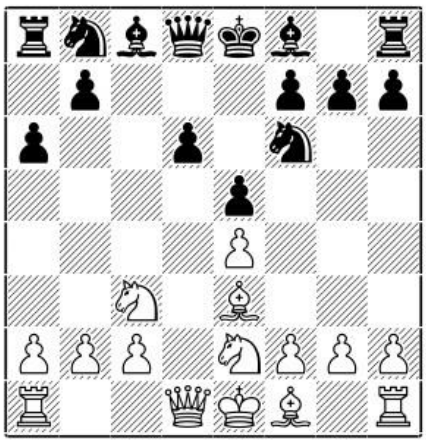
6...e6 is another story, which was covered in *Grandmaster Repertoire 6*.

6...Ng4!? is another interesting option, although fans of this move will still have to find another response to 6.f3.

White's most popular response to the text move has been 7.Nb3, which will be covered in the next three chapters. Before then, we will analyse two other knight retreats which give the game a different flavour: **A)** 7.Nde2!? and **B)**

7.Nf3.

A) 7.Nde2!?



Despite being a distant third choice behind the two main lines, this has been played in over 500 games. Several strong GMs have tried it, especially Nisipeanu, who played lots of games from 2006 to 2011, with quite positive results. Dropping the knight back to e2 is a common feature of some other lines, especially after 6.g3 e5 and 6.h3 e5, although in those lines White usually intends a quick development of his bishop to g2, which is not the case here.

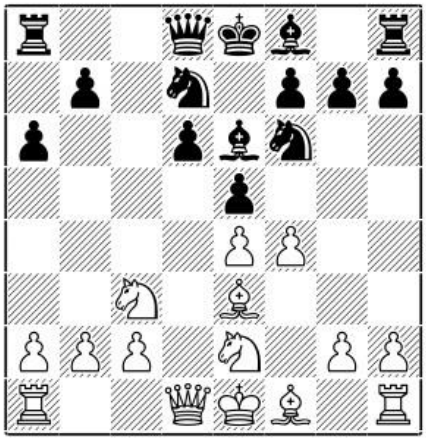
7...Be6 8.f4

This is White's usual idea.

8.Ng3 is not so challenging. 8...Nc6 (8...h5!? looks interesting) 9.Be2 Now Black has a pleasant choice between 9...g6!?, playing against the g3-knight with ...h5-h4 in mind, or 9...d5 10.exd5 Nxd5 11.Nxd5 Qxd5 12.Qxd5 Bxd5= with easy equality.

8...Nbd7

Several other moves have been tested but I am happy to provoke the following advance.



9.f5 Bc4 10.Nc1

White has tried two other moves, both of which look worse:

10.b3?!

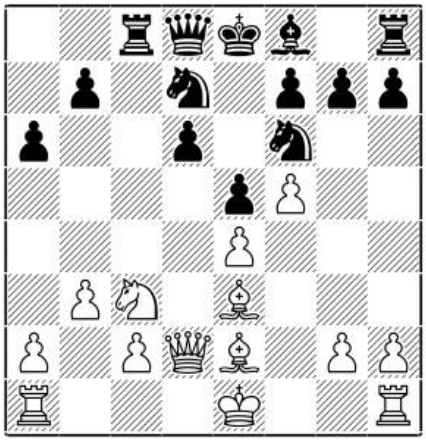
This may appear natural, but it weakens White's position on the c-file and e1-a5 diagonal.

10...Bxe2 11.Bxe2 Rc8

11...Qa5!?N is Ftacnik's suggestion, which also looks decent. For instance, 12.Bd2 Rc8 (12...Qb6!?) 13.Bc4 (or 13.Nd5 Qc5) 13...Qc5*ƒ* with good play for Black.

12.Qd2?

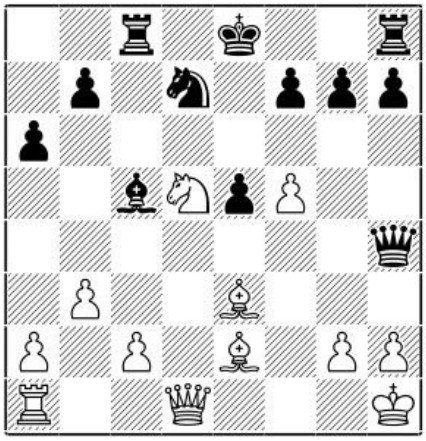
12.Qd3N was essential although 12...Be7 13.0-0 0-0 still gives Black the more pleasant game.



12...d5! 13.Nxd5

13.exd5 Bb4–+ would make White regret his 10th move.

13...Nxe4 14.Qd1 Qh4† 15.Kf1 Ng3† 16.Kg1 Nxh1 17.Kxh1 Bc5–+



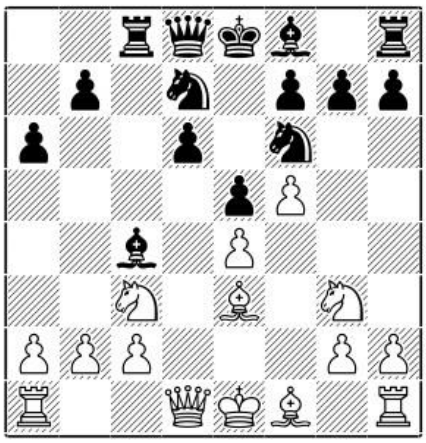
Todorovic – Aveskulov, Internet (blitz) 2006.

10.Ng3

This has the drawback of blocking the g-pawn.

10...Rc8

10...Bxf1 11.Rxf1 Be7 has the advantage of preventing White from castling on the kingside, but I slightly prefer to bring the rook into play.



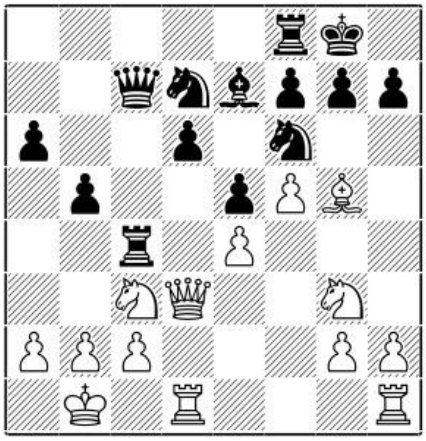
11.Bxc4 Rxc4 12.Qd3 Qc7

Black's c-file pressure is quite serious. White has tried castling on either side, but without success.

13.0-0-0

13.0-0 seems safer, although 13...Be7 14.Rac1 0-0 15.Nd5 Nxd5 16.exd5 Nf6 17.c3 Rc8³ gave Black strong queenside pressure in Van der Weide – Naiditsch, Belgium 2003.

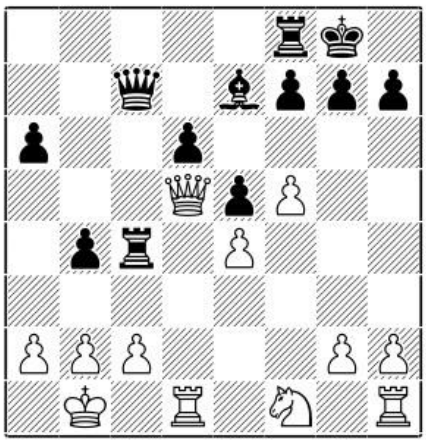
13...Be7 14.Bg5 b5 15.Kb1 0-0



16.Bxf6?!

White should have tried 16.Nh5, although 16...Nc5 17.Qe2 Ncxe4 18.Nxf6† Nxf6 19.Bxf6 Bxf6 20.Nd5 Qc6³ still favours Black.

16...Nxf6 17.Nf1 b4 18.Nd5 Nxd5 19.Qxd5

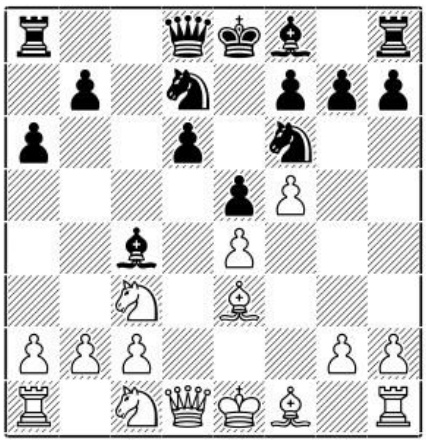


19...Bg5!

Hobbling White's knight.

20.h4 Bh6 21.Qd3 Rc8µ

Saric – Palac, Zagreb 2009.

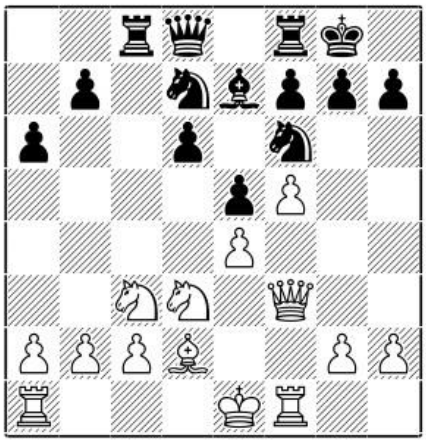


10...Bxf1

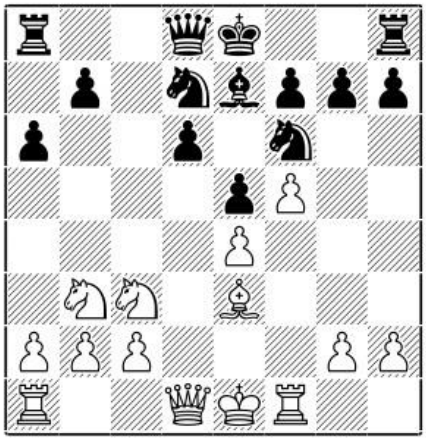
Black has tried various ways to blow things up with ...d5 at some point: for instance, 10...Qc7 and 10...d5!? could both be considered, but developing quickly looks better to me.

11.Rxf1 Be7! 12.Nb3

Another good example continued 12.Qf3?! Rc8 13.Nd3 0-0 when White was already in difficulties: 14.Bd2 (14.0-0-0? Rxc3 15.bxc3 Qa5 is crushing) Black was already clearly better in Hernaez Fernandez – Voiculescu, corr. 2011. Out of several promising continuations, the most energetic would have been:

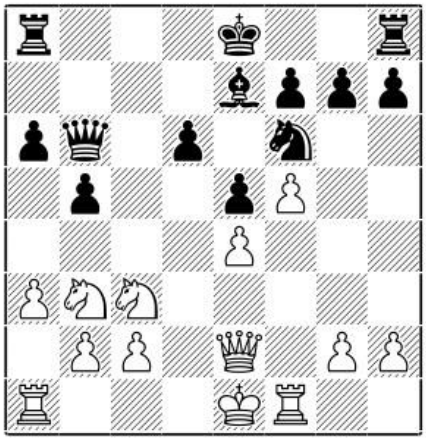


14...d5! 15.exd5 e4! (15...b5 is also good) 16.Nxe4 Nxe4 17.Qxe4 Rxc2 Black has a huge initiative for the pawn, with ...Nf6 the likely follow-up.



12...b5 13.a3 Nb6 14.Nd2

14.Bxb6 Qxb6 15.Qe2 occurred in another game, when Black should have continued:



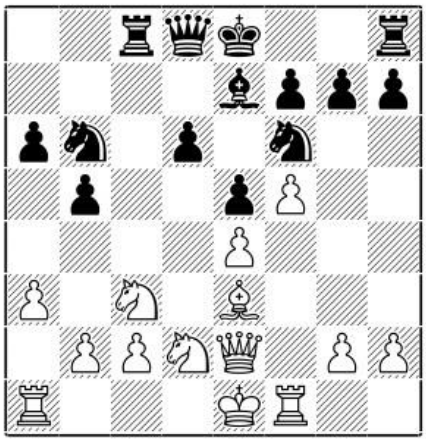
15...Rc8!N³ This is the most flexible move, activating the rook and setting up a possible exchange sac on c3, especially if White castles. (Instead 15...0-0?! 16.g4 gave White counterplay in Rook – Schneider, corr. 2011.)

14...Rc8

14...Rb8!? could be played with a similar follow-up in mind.

15.Qe2

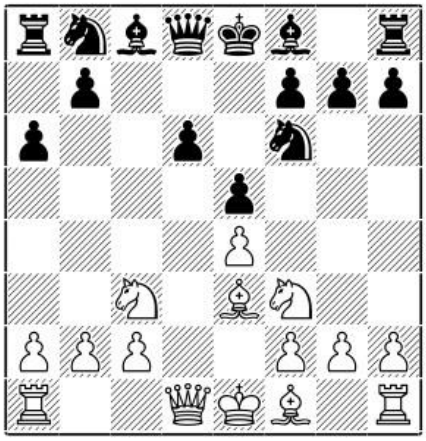
We have been following Hans – Semmelroth, corr. 2012. My suggestion would be:



15...Na4!?N 16.Nxa4 bxa4„

With good prospects on the queenside.

B) 7.Nf3

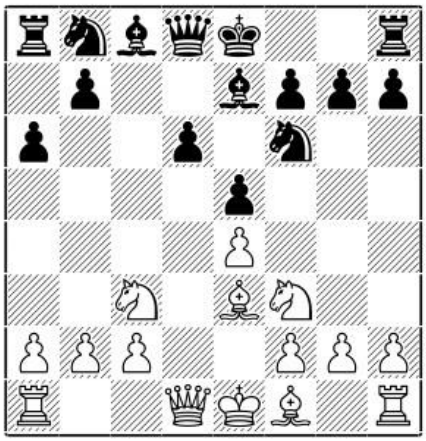


This is a positional line: White intends to castle kingside and play for control of the d5-square.

7...Be7

This is clearly the main move nowadays.

The main alternative is 7...Qc7 which prevents White's bishop from getting to c4. This was recommended in King's classic *Winning with the Najdorf* and was also the choice of Ftacnik in *Grandmaster Repertoire 6*. The approach is logical, as the other bishop move to help fight for the d5-square, Be3-g5, would cost White a tempo. This is a similar stance to the 6.Be2 e5 7.Nf3 line which we encountered in Chapter 1, where Black had the option of responding with 7...h6. However, as I mentioned in that section, I prefer not to spend a tempo on a non-developing move at this stage of the game, and the same applies here. And indeed, although 7...Qc7 remains a viable option, attention has gradually shifted away from it. After 8.a4 Be7 White can choose between 9.a5 0-0 10.Be2 and 9.Be2 0-0 10.0-0, with hopes for a slight edge in either case.



8.Bc4 0-0 9.0-0

We have reached another critical moment.

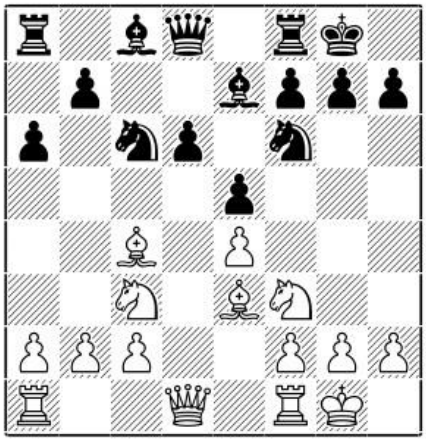
9...Nc6!?

This flexible move avoids certain flank attacks from White's minor pieces.

In the past I usually just went for 9...Be6, often transposing to our repertoire (specifically after 10.Bb3 Nc6, reaching variation B2 below). The main difference is that this move order allows White the interesting option of 10.Bxe6!? fxe6 11.Na4!, which garnered a lot of attention after Ivanchuk used it to beat Topalov in 2007. Georgiev and Kolev were happy to allow this in the first edition of *The Sharpest Sicilian*, but in their 2012 edition they went a different way. I do not think that it is terribly dangerous, and Andriasyan was happy to defend Black's side in his 2013 book. As we will see, the decision amounts to a trade-off, which is often the case when choosing between move orders in any opening.

The Sharpest Sicilian 2012 recommended 9...Qc7 10.Bb3 and only now 10...Be6. In recent years White has jumped on the other side of the board with 11.Nh4!? (11.Qe2 Nc6 reaches variation B2 again). This move has scored decently for White and I find it rather annoying, so I prefer to avoid it.

Having mentioned those other options, let's consider the position after our repertoire move:

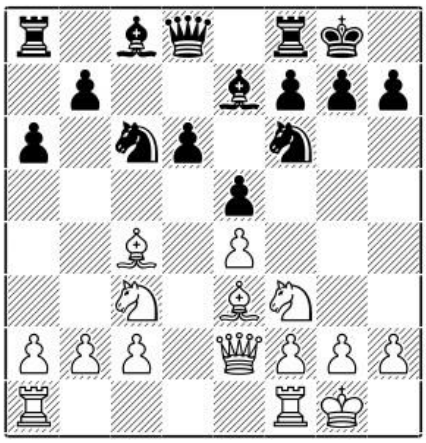


It is quite common to develop the knight to c6 in this variation, one idea being to target the enemy bishop with ...Na5. Even if Black had played

...Be6 first and White had responded with Bb3, the traditional Najdorf development with ...Nbd7 would not have been possible because of Bxe6 followed by Ng5, when the e6-pawn would fall.

After the text move White has a few different plans. We will consider **B1)** 10.Qe2, **B2)** 10.Bb3, **B3)** 10.Bg5 and **B4)** 10.Re1!?.

B1) 10.Qe2



This move is quite common but not too threatening, especially after Black's strong response:

10...Na5!

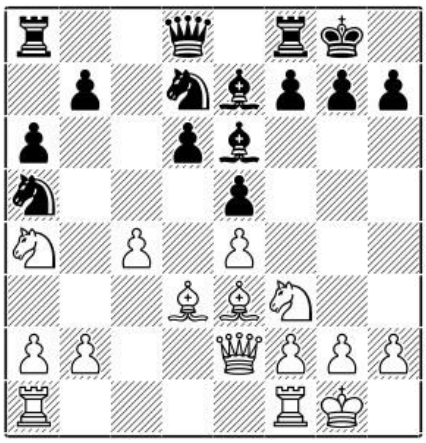
10...Be6 is a playable alternative, after which 11.Bb3 transposes to variation B2 below. White could deviate with 11.Rfd1 – but it's hardly relevant as I prefer the text move in any case.

The text move is a flexible choice which scores well. White has a choice of squares for the bishop.

11.Bd5!?

This has been tried by some strong players, but placing the bishop here always looks a bit artificial to me.

11.Bd3 keeps the bishop safe from exchange, but it is passively placed and has lost touch with the d5-square. Black responds with 11...Be6, when 12.Na4!? is the only serious attempt to justify White's play. Play may continue: 12...Nd7 (12...b5!? 13.Bb6 Qc8 14.Bxa5 bxa4,, is an interesting alternative which has yielded good results for Black) 13.c4



13...Nxc4!? (13...Rc8 14.b3 gives White the kind of position he wants, although Black has achieved pretty solid results here too) 14.Bxc4 Bxc4 15.Qxc4 b5 16.Qc6 bxa4 17.Qxa4 Nf6 Black is fine and has not come under the slightest pressure in the three correspondence games that reached this position.

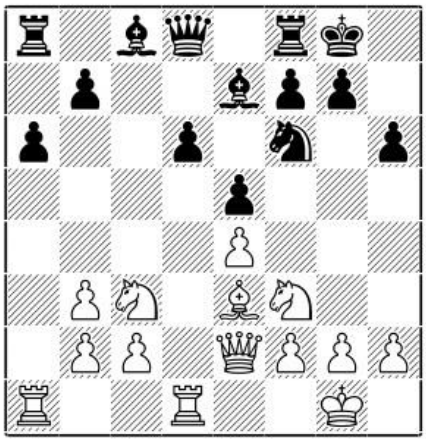
11.Bb3

This move looks natural although Black gets a pleasant game after:

11...h6!?

11...Be6 is a playable alternative which transposes to the 11...Na5 line in the notes to variation B2 below.

12.Rfd1 Nxb3 13.axb3



13...Qe8!?

13...Be6? 14.Nxe5 obviously should be avoided.

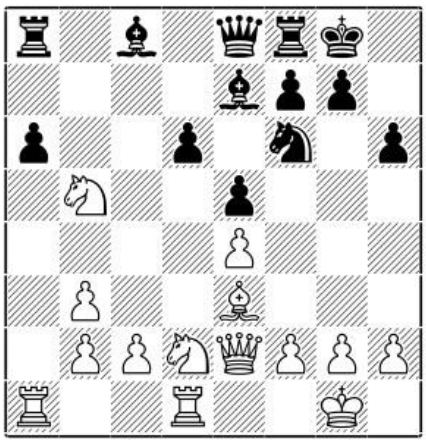
13...Qc7 and 13...Bd7 have also yielded good results for Black but the queen has some advantages on the unusual e8-square, as we will see.

14.Nd2

14.Na4?! Qc6 15.Nb6 Rb8 16.Ra4 Be6³ works out well for Black.

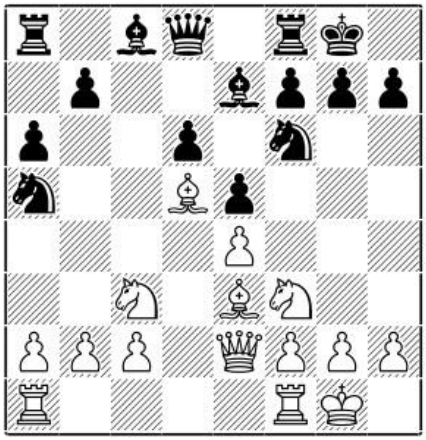
14...b5! 15.Nxb5

15.f3 Be6 16.b4 Qc6 17.Nb3 Rad8 18.Na5 Qa8= was fine for Black in Shashikant – Vishnu, New Delhi 2010.



15...Bg4 16.f3 Qxb5 17.Qxb5 axb5 18.fxg4 Nxg4 19.Nf1 Rxa1 20.Rxa1 Rc8 21.c3 Nf6 22.Ng3 d5!?

Black had good play in Lintchevski – Vitiugov, Novokuznetsk 2008.



11...Bd7!?

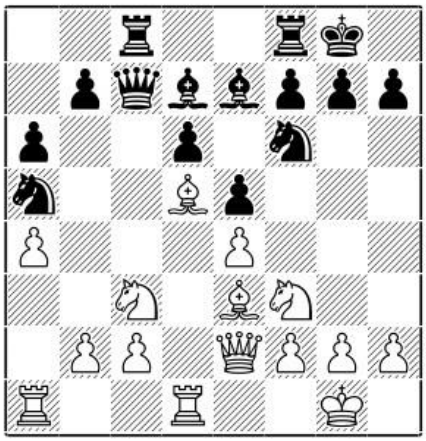
Once again we avoid 11...Be6, although that move is perfectly playable too.

12.Rfd1 Rc8 13.a4

13.h3 b5 14.a3 h6 15.Nh2 Nc4 16.Bxc4 Rxc4 17.f3 Be6 gave Black a good position in Andriasyan – Nepomniachtchi, Moscow 2010.

13...Qc7

13...h6 has almost always been played, but then 14.Ba2!? is slightly annoying. At first I thought that 14...Rxc3!?N 15.bxc3 Nxe4 offered good compensation for the exchange, but after the forcing 16.Bb6! Qxb6 17.Qxe4 White is somewhat better.



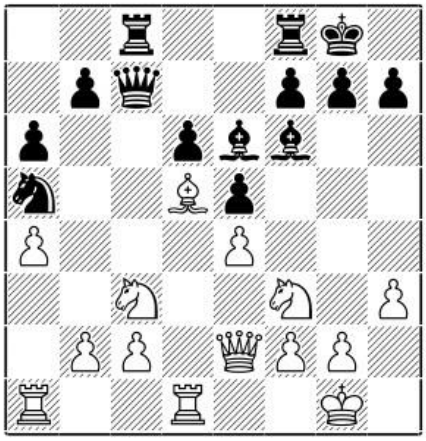
14.Bg5

Now 14.Ba2 can be met by 14...Be6 with no worries for Black.

14...Be6 15.Bxf6

15.h3 occurred in Spasov – S. Nikolov, Plovdiv 2009, when for some reason Black traded twice on d5, leaving White with some positional pressure. Instead 15...Rfd8N or 15...h6N would have kept a normal position.

15...Bxf6 16.h3

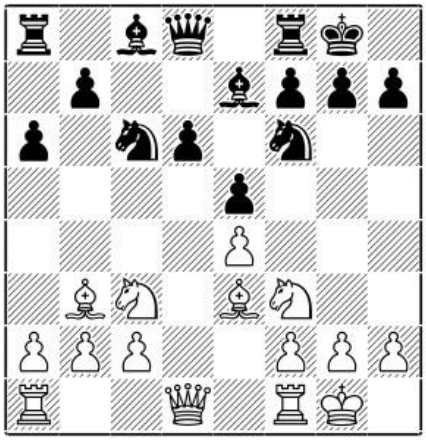


16...Rfd8 17.Nh2 Nc4,,

We have been following Lobzhanidze – Sprenger, Germany 2012. The situation is pretty

typical for these lines: Black has enough activity to make up for White's control over d5.

B2) 10.Bb3



10...Be6

This time we will refrain from 10...Na5 on account of 11.Bg5 Be6 12.Bxf6 Bxf6 13.Nd5 when White has a tiny edge, although Black's position is quite playable and was employed by Kasparov and Gelfand in the 1990s.

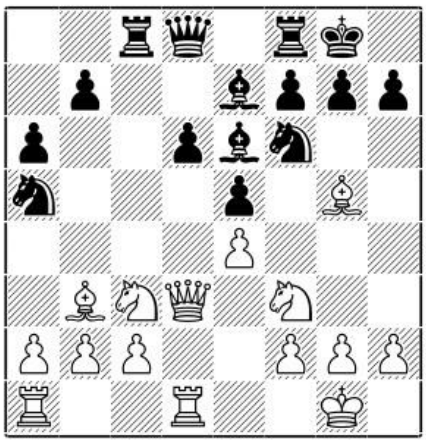
11.Qe2

White wants to be able to plonk a knight on d5 and recapture with a piece, without leaving the c2-pawn hanging after ...Rc8 or ...Qc7, so he prepares to bring a rook to the d-file while the queen monitors c2.

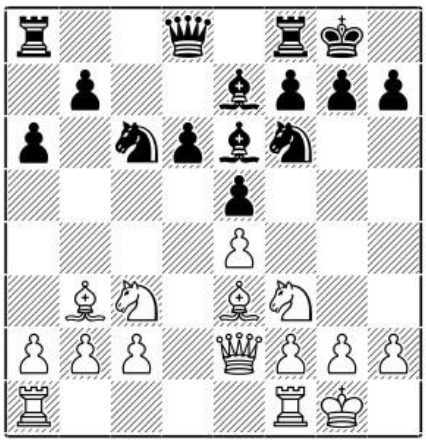
11.Bg5 transposes to Game 11 under variation B3 below.

11.Nh4!?N is not ridiculous although Black has a pleasant choice: 11...Qc8 (or 11...Qd7) is a good and solid choice, but there is also 11...Nxe4!? 12.Nxe4 d5 when the complications are not unfavourable to him.

White has occasionally played 11.Qd3 but it does not look too dangerous. A logical continuation is: 11...Rc8 12.Rfd1 Na5 13.Bg5



13...Nxb3 (Black can also consider 13...Ne8 14.Bxe7 Qxe7 15.Nd5 Bxd5 16.Bxd5 Nf6= as in Erdelyi – C. Varga, Hungary 2007) 14.axb3 Ne8 15.Bxe7 Qxe7= Palac – G. Arsovic, Bihac 2016.



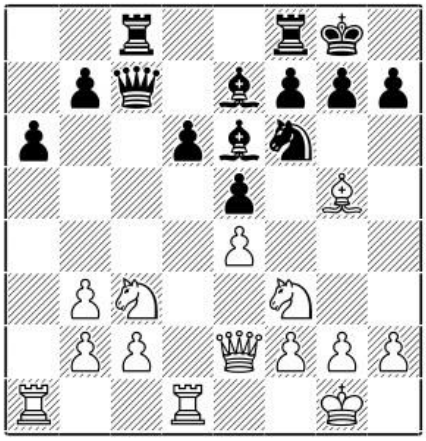
11...Qc7!?

I like the idea of delaying ...Na5 for a while, as sometimes the possibility of ...Nb4 comes into play.

Still, going after the bishop immediately with 11...Na5 is a reasonable possibility. After 12.Rfd1 Nxb3 both a) 13.axb3 and b) 13.cxb3!? are playable:

a) 13.axb3 Qc7 14.Bg5 Rac8

Black has also tried 14...Nh5, but after 15.Nxe5 Bxg5 16.Qxh5 Bf6 17.Nf3 Bxc3 18.bxc3 Qxc3 19.Nd4² we reach a quiet position where White can press for a win without much risk.



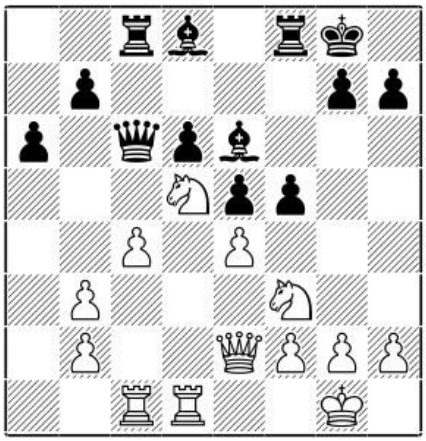
15.Bxf6 Bxf6 16.Rac1 Qc6

Black's position has proven to be reliable in a lot of correspondence games. One notable over-the-board game saw a double blunder after:

17.Nd5

Another possibility is 17.Qd3 Be7 18.Nd5 Bxd5 19.Qxd5 Qxd5 20.Rxd5 f5 when Black is fine.

17...Bd8 18.c4 f5„



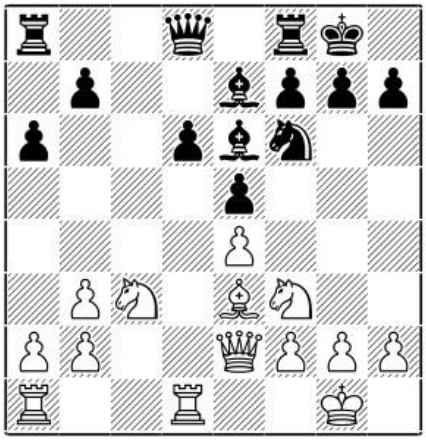
19.exf5??

After the correct 19.Rc3 fxe4 20.Qxe4 Qe8 the game remained dynamically balanced in H.G. Koch – J. Janssen, corr. 2008.

19...Bxf5??

A draw ensued in Kamsky – Gelfand, Kazan (2.6–rapid) 2011, but 19...Bxd5 would have won instantly. Such is the way of things in high-stakes rapid chess!

b) 13.cxb3!?



This was played a few times by a young Carlsen. White threatens Nxe5 and since the c-file no longer holds any appeal for Black's queen, his next move is a natural choice.

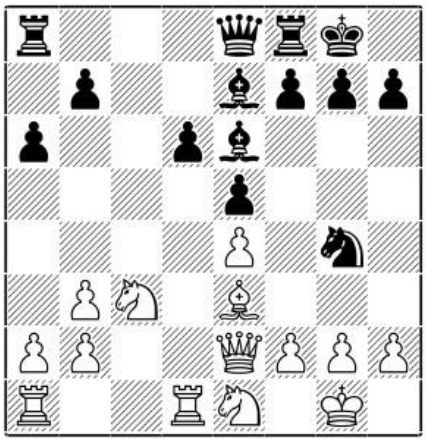
13...Qe8 14.Ne1

14.Bg5 meets with the typical 14...Nh5!.

14...Ng4!

Karjakin improves Black's play from just a few months prior.

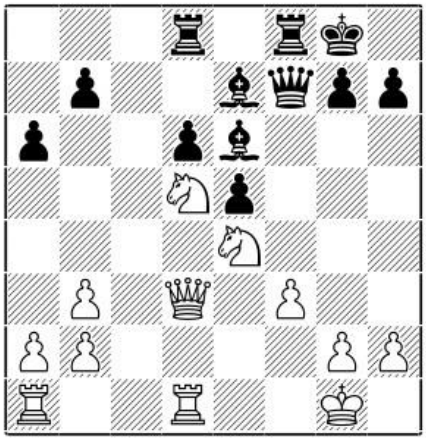
After 14...h6 15.Nc2 Qd7 16.Nb4 Rfc8 17.f3 Bd8 18.Rd3 a5 19.Nbd5 Nxd5 20.Nxd5 a4 21.bxa4 Rxa4 22.b3 Ra6 23.Rad1 White kept an annoying little something in Carlsen – Nunn, Amsterdam 2006.



15.Nc2 f5 16.f3 Nxe3 17.Nxe3 fxe4 18.Nxe4

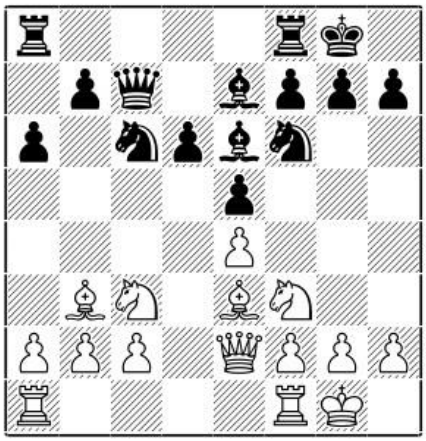
18.fxe4 Qg6 is also fine for Black. The d5-square makes a perfect outpost for a white knight, but only one of his knights can occupy it.

18...Rd8 19.Nd5 Qf7 20.Qd3



20...Bxd5! 21.Qxd5 Qxd5 22.Rxd5 Kf7 23.Rad1 Ke6=

Black was fine and eventually prevailed in Carlsen – Karjakin, Cap d'Agde (rapid) 2006.



12.Rfd1

White generally uses this rook because the c2-pawn may require attention.

12.Rad1 would still be met by 12...Rac8 13.Bg5 Na5.

12.Nh4?! does not really work out for White after 12...Nxe4! 13.Nxe4 Bxb3! followed by ...Bxh4.

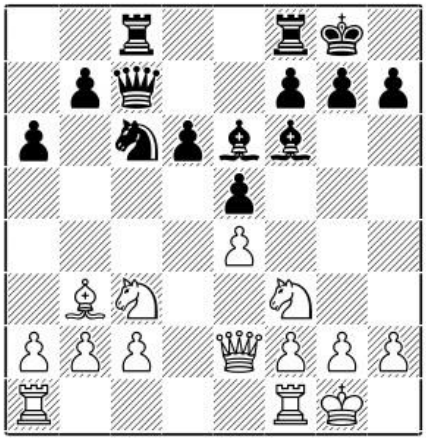
White may also try:

12.Bg5 Rac8 13.Bxf6

13.Rfd1 transposes to the main line below.

13...Bxf6

Black intends ...Ne7 to cover the d5-square. If White tries to get there first, he runs into tactical problems:



14.Nd5?!

White should settle for 14.Rac1 Ne7 with equality.

14...Bxd5! 15.Bxd5

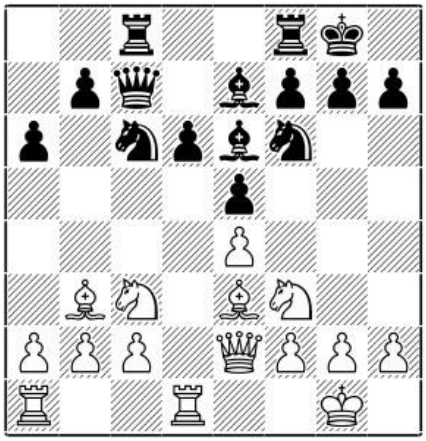
After 15.exd5 Na5³ Black will take the bishop and have a good pawn structure.

15...Nb4! 16.Bb3 Nxc2!

Black nets a pawn. White should accept this reality and grovel for a draw, since 17.Rac1? Nd4 18.Nxd4 Qxc1 19.Rxc1 Rxc1† 20.Bd1 exd4µ only makes matters worse for him.

12...Rac8

This is certainly better than 12...Na5?! 13.Nd5 Nxd5 14.Bxd5, reaching a sterile position that favours White.



13.Bg5

13.Rac1 Na5 leaves White with nothing better than transposing to our main line with 14.Bg5.

13.Nd5?! Bxd5 14.Bxd5 (14.exd5 Na5 also favours Black) 14...Nb4 puts White in an

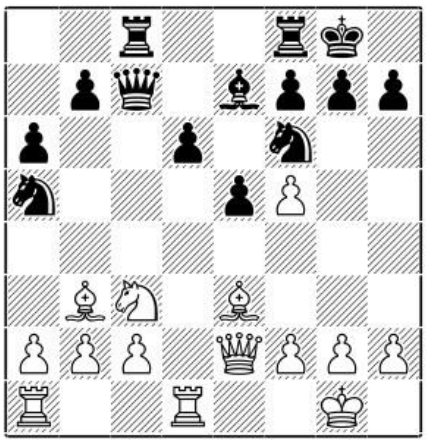
unenviable situation, as his only positionally desirable option of 15.Bb3 would drop the e4-pawn.

13.Na4?! b5 14.Nb6 Rb8 15.Nd5 Bxd5 16.Bxd5 Nb4 led to the exact same problem for White in Galdunts – Mainka, Bad Woerishofen 2007.

13.Nh4!?

This knight lunge, on the other hand, makes more sense.

13...Na5 14.Nf5 Bxf5 15.exf5



15...Nc4

White developed some attacking chances in her typical style after 15...Nxb3 16.cxb3 h6 17.g4!? in J. Polgar – Popovic, Novi Sad 1990.

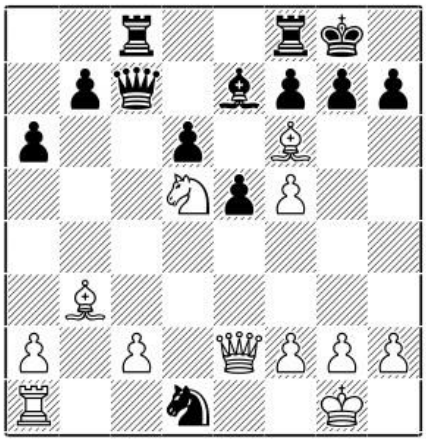
16.Bg5!?

16.Bc1N could be met by 16...h6 or 16...b5.

16...Nxb2!

This produces some fireworks leading to a forced draw.

17.Bxf6! Nxd1 18.Nd5



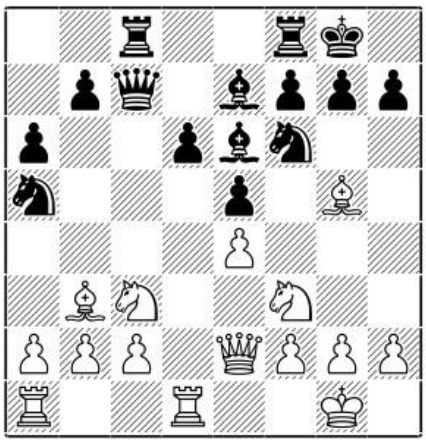
18...Nc3! 19.Qg4 Bxf6 20.Nxf6†

20.Nxc7?! Rxc7³ offers Black full material compensation for the queen and an excellent position.

20...Kh8 21.Nxh7 Kxh7

A draw was agreed in Metsemakers – Vegjeleki, corr. 2018, in view of 22.f6 gxf6 when White must take perpetual check.

13...Na5



14.Rac1

White develops his rook to ensure that the c-pawn will be defended after a subsequent Nd5.

He can also play:

14.Bxf6 Bxf6 15.Rac1

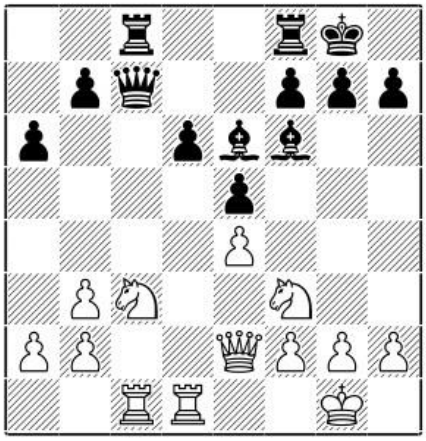
The direct 15.Nd5 Bxd5 16.Rxd5 Nxb3 17.cxb3 Be7 18.Rad1 gave Black good counterplay with 18...f5! in Balogh – Najer, Moscow 2006.

15...Nxb3

Both 15...b5 16.Nd5 Bxd5 17.Bxd5 Nc4 and 15...Qc5 16.Bd5 Bd8 are valid alternatives.

16.cxb3

16.axb3 transposes to the Kamsky – Gelfand game in the note to Black's 11th move above, with Black having avoided Carlsen's cxb3 idea.



16...Qd7

A logical continuation would be:

17.Nd5 Bxd5 18.Rxc8 Rxc8 19.Rxd5 Rc1† 20.Rd1 Qc6

Black stands well.

14...Nxb3 15.axb3

White still wants to play Nd5, since the c2-pawn has been secured.

With the rook already facing the black queen, White may also be tempted to try:

15.cxb3!? Qb6 16.Rd3

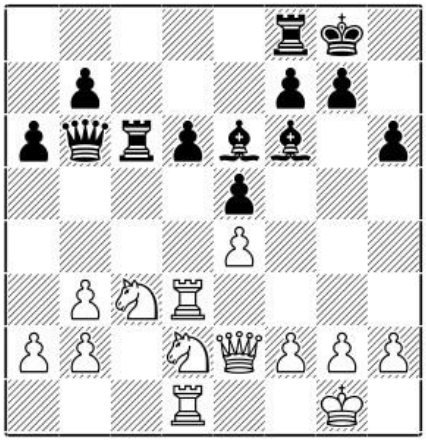
16.Nh4 gets nowhere after 16...Bg4.

16...h6 17.Bxf6 Bxf6 18.Rcd1 Rc6

It is not easy for White to manoeuvre the f3-knight towards d5.

19.Nd2

19.Nd5 Bxd5 20.Rxd5 Qc7 21.g3 Be7 22.Nd2 b5 was also fine for Black in Buecker – Cesetti, corr. 2012.

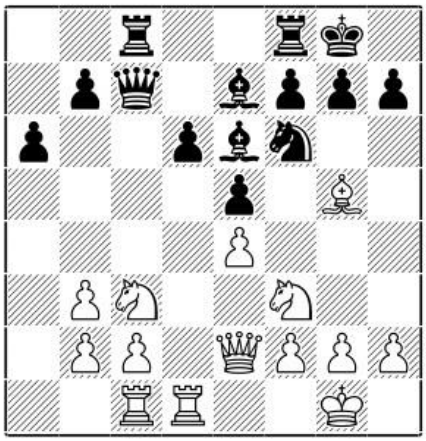


19...Bg5!N

This is a natural improvement over 19...Qa5 20.Nf1 Be7 21.Ne3 when White obtained his desired set-up in Krause – Kolanek, corr. 2014.

20.g3 Qc7 21.Nf1 f5!,,

With good play for Black.



15...Nh5!

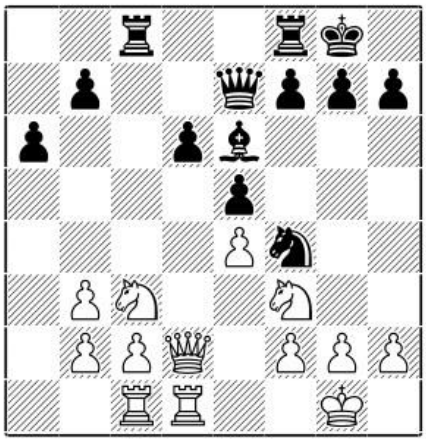
This is a nice idea which is worth remembering. The f4-square beckons.

16.Qd2

This does not lead to anything, but Black's position is fine in any case.

16.g3 led to a fairly sterile position after 16...Rfd8 (16...Bxg5 17.Nxg5 Nf6 18.Nxe6 fxe6 is also equal) 17.Bxe7 Qxe7 18.Nd5 Bxd5 19.Rxd5 Nf6 20.Rd2 Qc7= in Dauga – Oates, corr. 2013.

16.Bxe7 Nf4 (16...Qxe7N is also fine) 17.Qd2 Qxe7 is pleasant for Black, for instance:



18.Ne1 (18.Qxd6?? Qxd6 19.Rxd6 Rxc3!–+ is an important detail) 18...Rc6 19.Nd3 Nxd3 20.Qxd3 Qc7 21.Rd2 f5 Black had good counterplay in Valeriani – Nemchenko, corr. 2011.

16.Be3

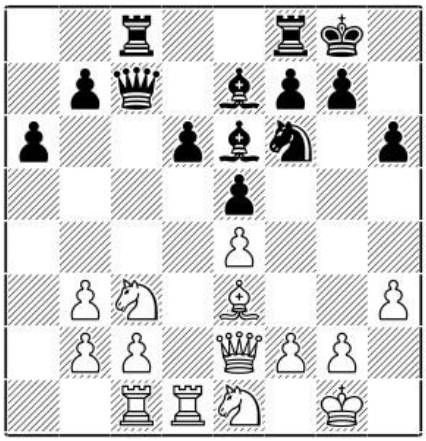
Black can meet this move with the simple retreat:

16...Nf6 17.h3

After 17.Bg5 Black can either repeat the position or venture 17...Ng4!?.

17...h6 18.Ne1

18.Nh2 b5 19.Ng4 was seen in Novik – Ljavdansky, St Petersburg 1992, when Black traded knights on g4. Instead I like the recommendation of Georgiev and Kolev: 19...Nd7!N White is unable to manoeuvre the g4-knight to e3 or otherwise exploit the d5-square. For instance: 20.Nd5?! (20.f3 is better although 20...Qb7 is fine for Black) 20...Bxd5 21.Rxd5 h5 Followed by ...Nf6 when Black is fighting for the advantage.

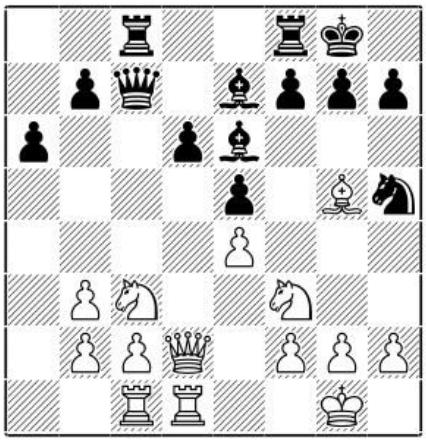


18...Rfd8 19.Qf3 b5 20.Qg3

20.Nd3 threatens Nb4-d5 but 20...d5! thwarts White's plan.

20...Kh7 21.Nd3 Qb7 22.f3 d5!?

Black had good play in Callow – Szava, corr. 2009, although pursuing the queenside play with 22...b4N or 22...a5N may have been even stronger.



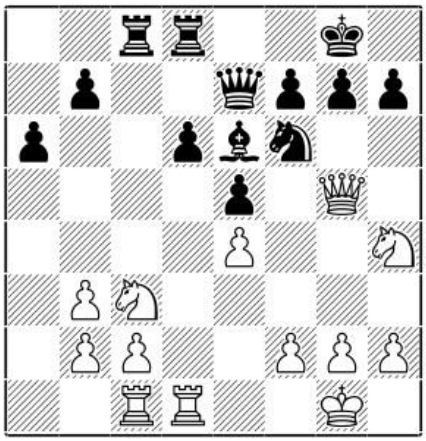
16...Rfd8 17.Bxe7 Qxe7

Black has a good position and you certainly don't need to learn this line any deeper. We will follow a game in which Black outplayed his opponent in instructive style.

18.Qg5

This does not achieve anything. Both 18.Ne1N and 18.Qe3N look more productive.

18...Nf6! 19.Nh4

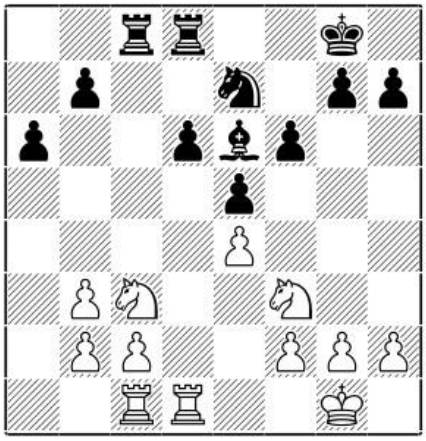


19...Nd5!

This small trick leads to a harmonious position for Black.

20.Qxe7 Nxe7 21.Nf3 f6

I really like this structure. Black has an extra central pawn and if he gets in ...d5 he will gain a lot of activity. Furthermore, having a bishop in this kind of endgame always gives long-term chances.



22.Rd2 b5 23.b4 Kf7 24.Rcd1 Nc6 25.Rxd6 Rxd6 26.Rxd6 Ke7 27.Rd2 Nxb4

Black had a slight but enduring initiative in Frolyanov – Karjakin, Sochi 2012.

B3) 10.Bg5

GAME 11

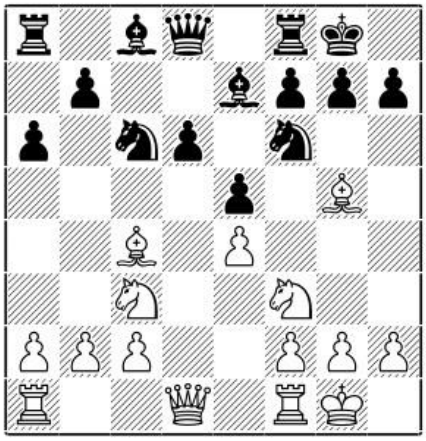
Zoltan Almasi – Ante Brkic

Sibenik 2008

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Be3 e5 7.Nf3 Be7 8.Bc4 0-0 9.0-0 Nc6

9...Be6 10.Bb3 Nc6 11.Bg5 was the actual move order of the game, but I have changed it to fit with our preferred sequence.

10.Bg5



This is perhaps White's most straightforward idea. He fights for the d5-square, and does not mind losing a tempo with his bishop.

10...Be6 11.Bb3

After the brief change of move order, we are back to the game.

11...Nd7

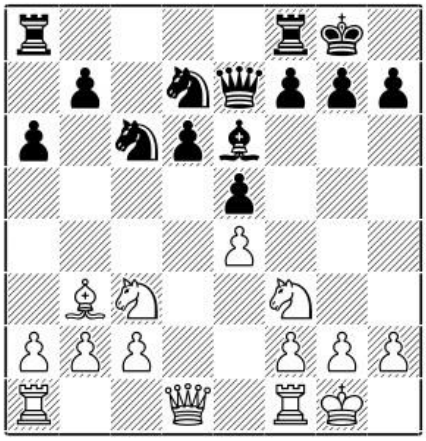
Black wishes to preserve his knight at the expense of his dark-squared bishop, as the latter cannot contest the light squares.

The alternative is 11...Na5, transposing to the note to Black's 10th move in variation B2 on page 111. As I mentioned there, Black's position is marginally worse yet quite playable, having been employed by Kasparov and Gelfand in the 1990s.

12.Bxe7

Retreating with the lame 12.Be3?! invites a repetition after 12...Nf6, but Black could also play 12...Na5 or 12...Rc8.

12...Qxe7



13.Nd5

White almost always goes for this, since 13.Bxe6N 13...fxe6= leaves Black active enough.

13...Qd8

In some games Black has traded on d5, but this is too compliant.

White has his d5-square, but Black has managed to trade off his inferior bishop. Black could use his minor pieces to fight for d5, but if there is too much simplification the only imbalance will be Black's weakened d6-pawn. Therefore, Black will play around the d5-square and use his own knights to generate counterplay.

14.Qe2

This is the usual move, connecting the rooks.

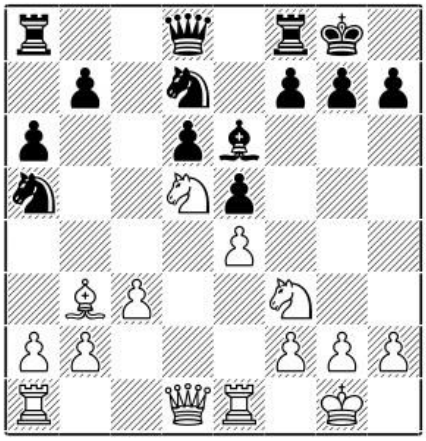
14.Qd2 has the same general idea but blocks the d-file for a rook. After 14...Nc5 15.Rfe1 Rc8 16.h3 Nxb3 17.axb3 Bxd5 18.exd5 (18.Qxd5? Nb4 wins material) 18...Nb8 19.c4 Nd7= Black had comfortable equality in Braeuer – J. van Foreest, Pardubice 2018.

14.c3

This is White's main alternative, creating an escape for the bishop. Black should still play:

14...Na5! 15.Re1

White achieved nothing after 15.Bc2 Nc4 16.b3 Na3 17.Ne3 Nxc2 18.Qxc2 Rc8 19.Rfd1 Rc6 20.Rac1 b5 when a draw was agreed in Carlsen – Anand, Wijk aan Zee 2007.



15...Rc8 16.h3

16.Ne3 Nxb3 17.axb3 Nc5 18.Nd5 a5!? was pleasant for Black in Salcedo Mederos – Arancibia Guzman, corr. 2011. The last move safeguards the knight against b3-b4 ideas, and a subsequent ...f5 will give Black good play.

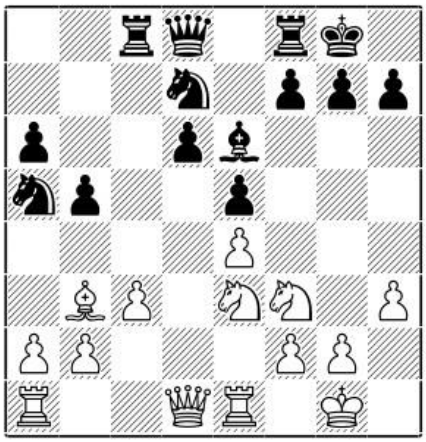
16...b5

16...Nc5 17.Bc2 Nc4 has proven to be a reliable alternative.

However, Black should avoid 16...Nb6?! in view of 17.Nxb6 Qxb6 18.Bxe6 fxe6 19.Re2 Rc6 20.Qd3 Qc7 21.Rd1 Nc4 22.b3 Nb6 23.c4² when White had a pleasant plus in Anand – Leko, Wijk aan Zee 2006.

17.Ne3

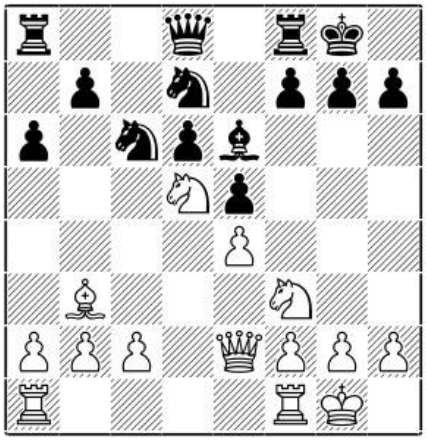
17.Nh2 Nc5 also seems fine.



17...Nb6 18.Re2

18.Bxe6 fxe6=

18...Qe7 19.Nd5 Bxd5 20.Bxd5 Rfd8= Brkic – Senff, Zagreb 2006.



14...Nc5

Black has also tried 14...Na5 15.Rad1 Rc8 but I prefer the text move.

15.Rad1

This rook move is much more common than 15.Rfd1, after which 15...Kh8! makes even more sense, as White could miss having a rook on the kingside with ...f5 coming.

15...Kh8!?

This is the most interesting try, preparing kingside counterplay.

15...Rc8 is more common, and also quite playable.

16.h3 f5 17.Nc3

In the event of 17.exf5 Bxf5,, Black is active enough.

17...fxe4

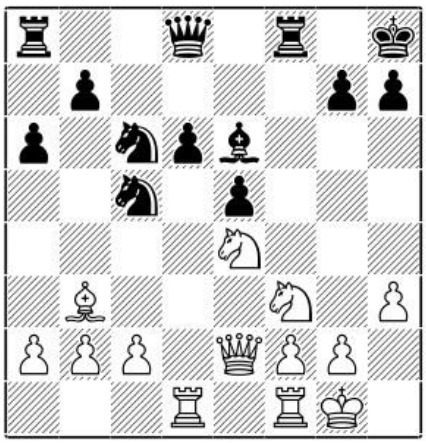
This was queried by Andriasyan, but I think it was only Black's follow-up that was mistaken.

17...Rc8?! is too superficial. 18.Bxe6 Nxe6 19.exf5 Rxf5 20.Qd3 causes Black problems, as shown in a couple of games: 20...Rf6 (or 20...Ncd4 21.Nxd4 Nxd4 22.Ne4!± Balogh – Kempinski, Warsaw 2008) 21.Qxd6 Qxd6 22.Rxd6 Ned4 23.Nxe5! Andriasyan – Sjugirov, Belgorod 2010.

I do not trust Black's position after 17...Bxb3 18.axb3 Qd7 19.Rd2 Ne6, when he will have to work hard to prove that his activity makes up for his structural defect. 20.Nd5 .Rae8 21.exf5 Rxf5 22.c3 e4! 23.Nh2 (23.Qxe4? Ng5) 23...Ned4! indeed gave Black counterplay in Swinkels – Paulet, Groningen 2008, but I think that Pavlovic's suggestions of 20.Qd1!? and 20.exf5N are more promising.

Andriasyan recommends 17...Nxb3 18.axb3 h6 when a couple of examples continued: 19.Qe3!? (19.Rfe1 Qe7 20.exf5 Bxf5 21.Nd5 Qf7 22.Ne3 Be4 ½–½ D. Petrosian – Andriasyan, Yerevan 2011) 19...Kg8 Perhaps Black can improve on this mysterious-looking move. 20.Rd2 Qe7 21.exf5 Bxf5 22.Ne4 Rad8 23.Rfd1 Bxe4 24.Qxe4 Rf6 25.c3² Orekhov – Salonen, corr. 2013.

18.Nxe4

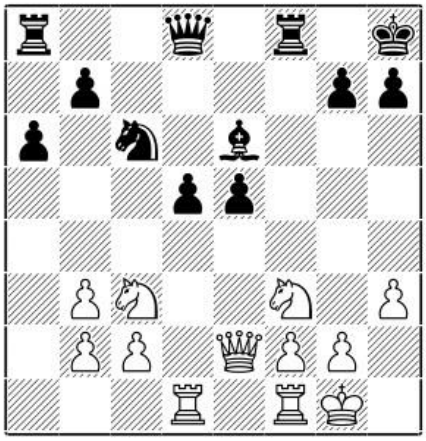


18...Nxb3

But not 18...Nxe4?! 19.Bxe6 Nc5 20.Bd5 when White is in control.

19.axb3 d5 20.Nc3

20.Nc5 can be met in a few ways, the simplest being 20...Qe7 21.Nxe6 Qxe6 with equal chances.



20...Qd6

I like this move, although Pavlovic's suggestion of 20...Re8!?N also looks good, intending ...Bf7 and perhaps ...Bh5. If 21.Nxe5 (21.Rfe1 is safer although after 21...Bf7 Black has no problems) 21...Nxe5 22.Qxe5 Bg4 23.Qf4 Bxd1 24.Rxd1 White will win a second pawn for the exchange, but there are plenty of open lines for the rooks and after 24...Rc8 it will be White who is trying to hold the balance.

21.Rfe1 Qc5?!

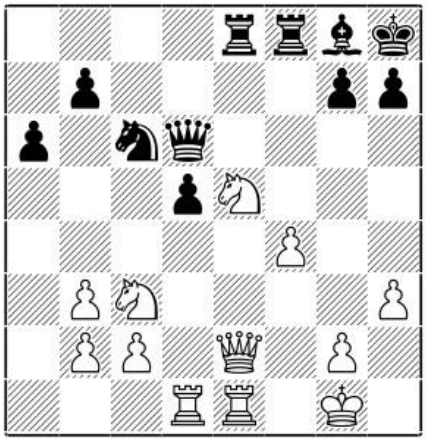
This is the real mistake. Instead Black should have continued:

21...Rae8!N

21...Bg8!? 22.Nxe5 Rae8 was the move order of the game quoted below, but it feels more natural to start by bringing the rook into play.

22.Nxe5 Bg8 23.f4

Now a significant improvement is:



23...Qc5†!N

23...g5?! was played in Ambarcumova – Romanko, Moscow 2009, when 24.Qd2!N 24...Rxf4 25.Nxc6 Rxe1† 26.Qxe1! bxc6 27.Ne4! would have been unpleasant for Black.

Note that Black must also avoid 23...Rxf4? when 24.Ng6† wins for White.

24.Kh2

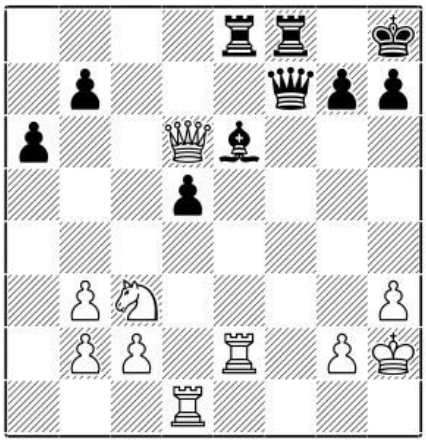
Both 24.Qe3?? d4 and 24.Qf2?? Qxf2† 25.Kxf2 Rxe5 lose a piece for White.

24...Nxe5 25.fxe5 Rf5=

Black is fine.

22.Nxe5 Nxe5 23.Qxe5 Qxf2† 24.Kh2 Rae8 25.Re2 Qf7 26.Qd6?!

This gives Black a chance to relieve the pressure. The simple 26.Qg3² was stronger.



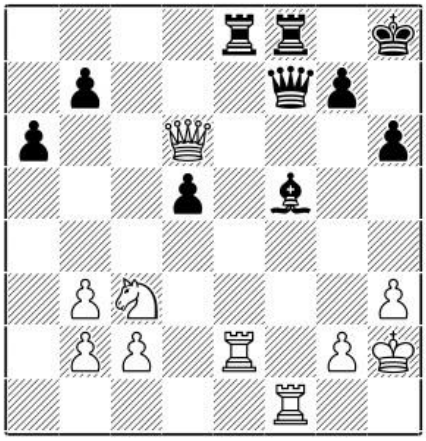
26...h6?

Black misses his chance: 26...Bxh3! 27.Rxe8! (27.Kxh3? Qh5† 28.Kg3 Rf6!–+; 27.gxh3? Rxe2† 28.Nxe2 Qf2†µ) 27...Rxe8= No matter how White takes the bishop, Black will have perpetual check.

27.Rde1?!

27.Rdd2! and 27.Rd4! were stronger.

27...Bf5 28.Rf1



28...Qg6?

Better chances were offered by 28...Rd8 or the tactical 28...d4! 29.Qxd4 Rxe2 30.Nxe2 Qe7,, hitting e2 and c2.

29.Qxg6 Bxg6 30.Rxf8† Rxf8 31.Nxd5±

Now White is just up a pawn for nothing, and Almasi has no trouble converting.

31...Rf1 32.Kg3 Rc1 33.Ne3 Kh7 34.Kf4 b5 35.b4 Ra1 36.Ke5 a5 37.bxa5 Rxa5 38.Kd4 Ra4† 39.Kc5

1–0

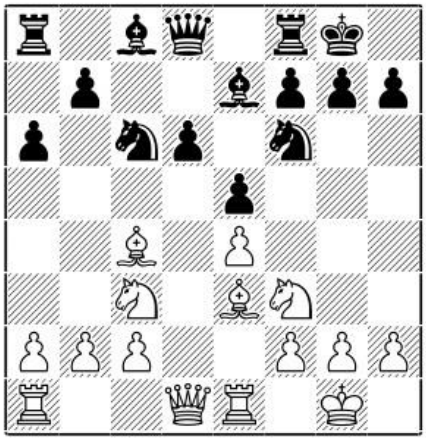
B4) 10.Re1!?

GAME 12

Anton Filippov – Bu Xiangzhi

Vishakapatnam 2008

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Be3 e5 7.Nf3 Be7 8.Bc4 0-0 9.0-0 Nc6 10.Re1!?



This somewhat mysterious-looking move is White's 'extra' option against our chosen move order with 9...Nc6 (as opposed to 9...Be6). It may look strange at first, but it is a flexible waiting move. White indirectly protects the e4-pawn in some cases, while creating a somewhat unlikely-looking retreat square for the bishop on f1. I say this because usually the bishop is all about fighting for the d5-square.

10...Be6!?

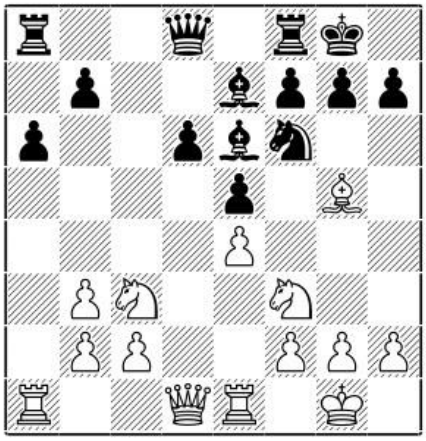
10...Na5 11.Bf1 Be6 12.Nd5 Bxd5 13.exd5² leaves White pleasantly better, as the a5-knight looks a bit silly.

10...b5 is a major alternative which has been almost twice as popular as the text move. 11.Bf1 is best and I analysed it in some detail. Although Black's position is certainly playable, I was not completely satisfied with his prospects in this line and so we will focus on my preferred option.

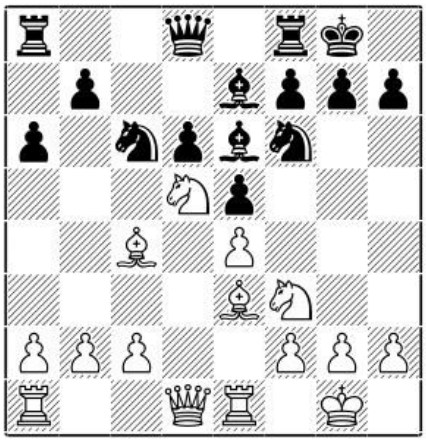
11.Nd5

The timid 11.Bf1 allows 11...d5 when Black is at least equal.

After 11.Bb3 Na5 the Re1 move has little meaning. Play may continue: 12.Bg5 Nxb3 13.axb3



13...Nd7 (or 13...Rc8 14.Bxf6 Bxf6 15.Re3 Be7 16.Rd3 Qe8 17.Nd5 Rc6 18.Nd2 f5= Nisipeanu – Giri, Batumi [ol] 2018) 14.Bxe7 Qxe7 15.Nd2 Nb6 16.Nf1 f5 17.exf5 Bxf5 18.f4 Bg6 19.fxe5 dxe5= Black's activity fully compensates for the isolated pawn, Short – Gashimov, Reggio Emilia 2010.



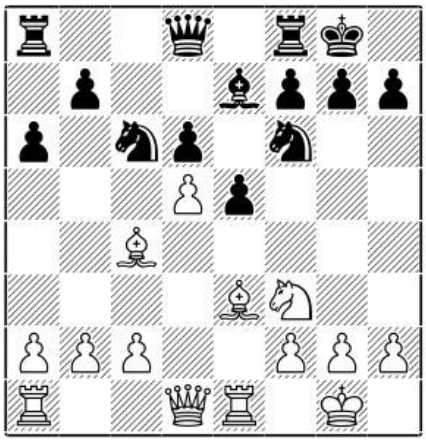
11...Bxd5

One tactical point of White's 10th move is revealed after 11...Nxe4?? 12.Bb6.

I also checked 11...b5?! but after 12.Nxf6† Bxf6 13.Bxe6 fxe6 14.Qd3² Black's position is rather passive.

12.exd5

12.Bxd5 Nb4! gives Black no problems, for instance: 13.Bxb7 (13.Bb3 Nxe4 is a safe pawn grab) 13...Rb8 14.a3 (14.Bd5 Nbxd5 15.exd5 Rxb2³ leaves Black with the better pawn structure) 14...Rxb7 15.axb4 Rxb4 16.Rxa6 Rxb2,, Several correspondence games have been drawn from here. Over the board though, I would prefer Black because of his sounder pawn structure.



12...b5!

In the event of 12...Na5 13.Bf1² we are back to the theme of the misplaced knight on a5.

Retreating with 12...Nb8 is playable, but White is somewhat better after 13.a4 (or 13.Bf1) 13...Nbd7 14.a5 with positions reminiscent of the 6.Be2 variation, but where Black has lost time with ...Nc6-b8 rather than playing ...Nbd7 in one move.

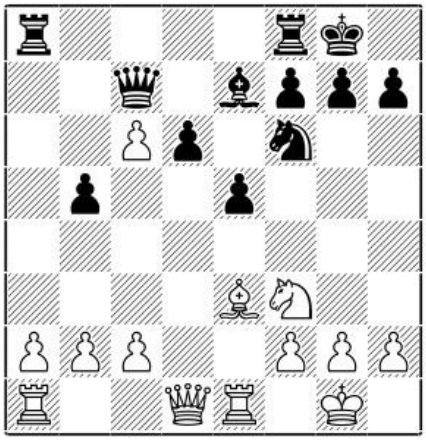
13.Bf1

This is White's best try, along with 13.Be2 Nb4 14.c4 bxc4 15.Bxc4 which merely transposes.

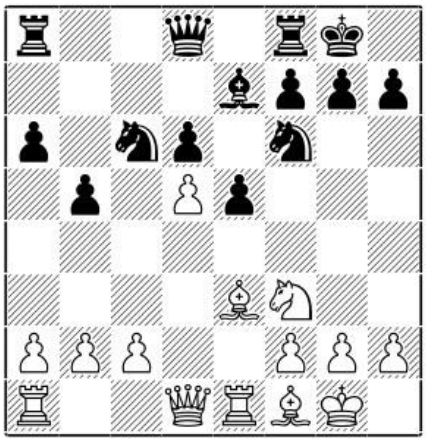
13.Bb3N is not completely stupid although 13...Na5= obviously makes Black's task simpler than the game continuation.

13.dxc6N 13...bxc4 14.Qe2 c3 15.b3 Qc7 16.Qc4 d5 is also fine for Black.

Lastly, Black equalized without difficulty after: 13.Bxb5 axb5 14.dxc6 Qc7



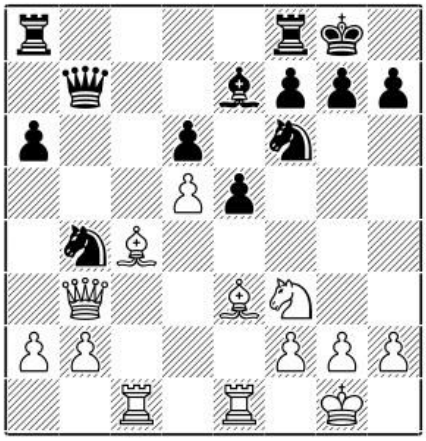
15.c3 (or 15.Qe2 Qxc6 16.a3 Nd5 17.c3 f5,, L.H.B. Hansen – Ilyin, corr. 2014) 15...Qxc6 16.Bg5 Rfe8= Kulaots – Dominguez Perez, Dresden (ol) 2008.



13...Nb4 14.c4 bxc4 15.Bxc4 Qa5!?

This is a principled move as Black goes right after the d5-pawn.

A more prudent way to do this is with 15...Qc7 16.Rc1 Qb7, even though this allows 17.Qb3 holding on to the pawn. Still, Black seems fine after:

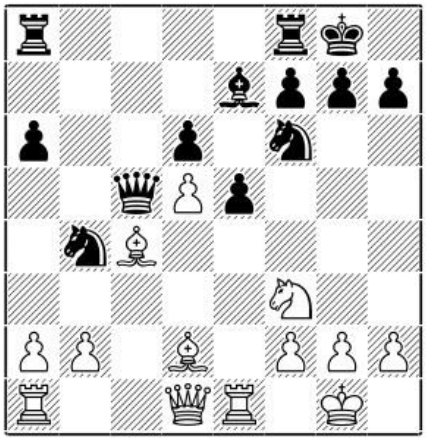


17...Rab8 (17...Rfb8 is also quite playable) 18.Red1 Qd7 19.Qc3 Qb7 20.Qd2 (20.Qb3 offers a repetition) 20...Ne4 21.Qe2 Nf6 22.b3 Nfxd5 23.a3 Nxe3 24.Qxe3 d5!= A bunch of correspondence games have resulted in draws from this position.

16.Bd2 Qc5

Black is committed to winning the pawn, or else provoking White's next move in the game.

16...Qb6N 17.Bg5 a5 18.a3 Na6 is a playable alternative but there is no need for us to deviate from the game continuation.



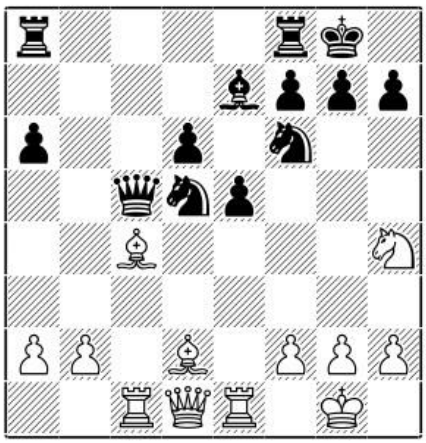
17.Bxb4?!

In a tense stare-down, White is first to blink.

Instead he should offer up the pawn with 17.Rc1! Nbxd5 (it is a bit late for 17...Qb6?! 18.Bg5 when, compared to 16...Qb6 above, White has been given the Rc1 move for free) when he can choose between a) 18.Nh4!? and b) 18.Bg5:

a) 18.Nh4!?

This was Pavlovic's suggestion in *The Cutting Edge – Sicilian Najdorf 6.*B*e3*. Since that book was published, the move has been tested in a correspondence game.



18...g6 19.Nf3

White intends to play 20.Bh6, followed by Ng5 or possibly Bg5 to cause problems.

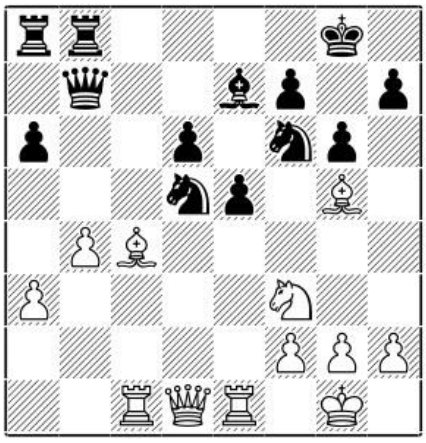
19...Rfb8

This held up in the game, although other options such as 19...Qc6!?N could also be investigated.

20.b4! Qc6

And not 20...Nxb4? 21.Bxf7†, obviously.

21.a3 Qb7 22.Bg5



22...Rc8!

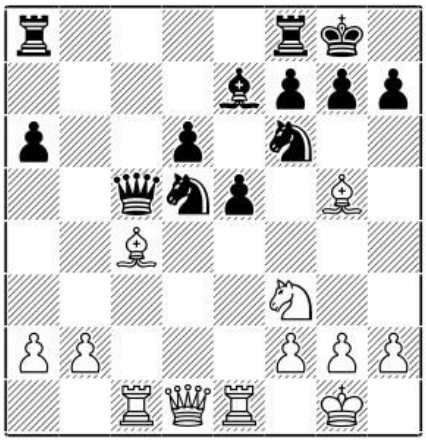
White has activated his pieces as best he could, but he could find nothing better than simplifying and regaining the sacrificed pawn with:

23.Bxd5 Qxd5 24.Bxf6 Qxd1 25.Rcxd1 Bxf6 26.Rxd6 Bg7=

Stubbs – Gulbis, corr. 2017.

b) 18.Bg5

This has been the usual choice.



18...Qa5 19.Nh4!?

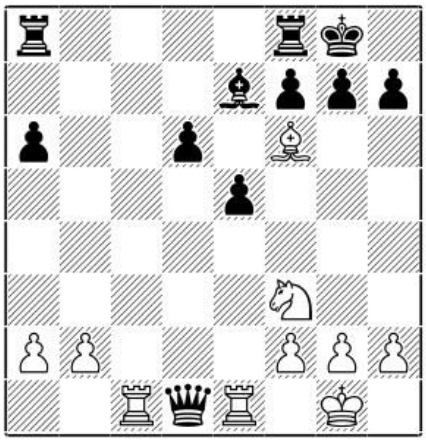
This was White's latest try, after he failed to find any advantage with other options:

19.a3 Nb6 was fine for Black, and he went on to win in Fedorchuk – Negi, Evry 2009.

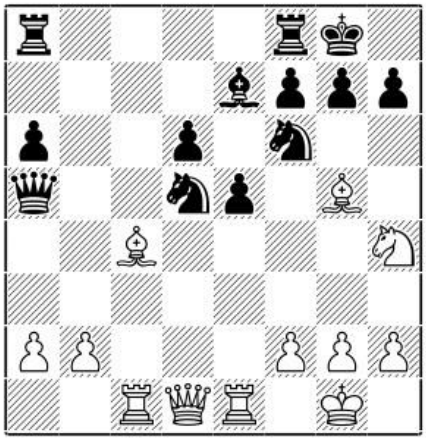
19.Nxe5!? is flashy but it only leads to simplifications after: 19...dxe5 20.Rxe5 Qb4 21.Bxd5 Nxd5 22.Rxd5 Bxg5 23.Rxg5 Qxb2= Frolyanov – Bu Xiangzhi, Moscow 2012.

19.b4!? is a fancy way of forcing a draw: 19...Nxb4 20.Bxf6 Bxf6 21.a3 (21.Qxd6?? Rad8–+) 21...Qxa3 22.Ra1 Qc3 23.Rc1 Qa3 24.Ra1 Qc3 25.Rc1 ½–½ Frolyanov – Kokarev, Sochi 2012.

19.Bxd5 Qxd5 20.Bxf6 Qxd1



21.Rcxd1 (better than 21.Rexd1?! Bxf6 22.Rxd6 e4 23.Nd2 Bxb2 24.Rb1 Ba3! when Black was better in Gao Rui – Negi, Subic Bay 2009) 21...Bxf6 (21...gxf6?! 22.Nh4© is best avoided) 22.Rxd6 Rfb8 23.b3 a5= Ma Qun – Wei Yi, Xinghua 2014.



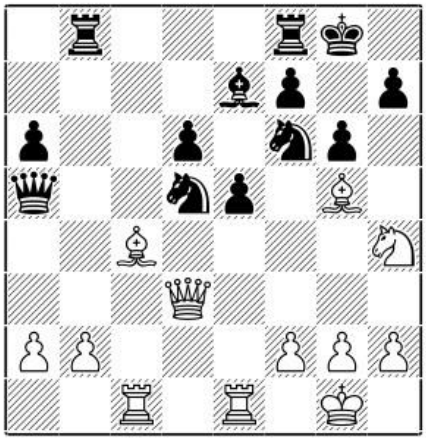
19...g6 20.Qd3

White has designs on the g6-pawn. I suggest improving Black's play with:

20...Rab8!?N

20...Rac8 turned out well after 21.Bd2?! Qb6 22.b3 Nb4 23.Qg3? in Ponkratov – Kokarev, Khanty-Mansiysk 2018, when 23...d5! would have been winning for Black. However, 21.Nf3!?N would be a better try, when 21...e4 22.Qd2 keeps things messy.

20...Nb4!?N is another possible direction for further investigation.

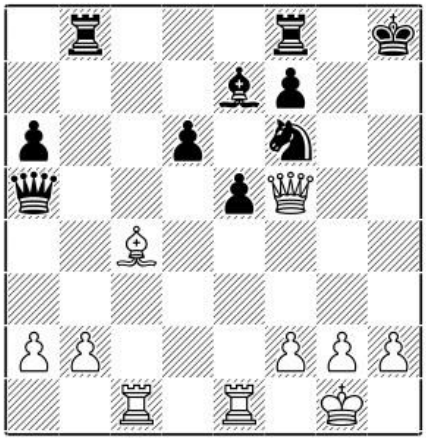


21.Bxf6

21.Bb3 Qb5 is safe enough for Black, as is 21.Bd2 Qb6 (or 21...Qd8!?).

21...Nxf6 22.Nxg6 hxg6 23.Qxg6† Kh8 24.Qf5

24.Bxf7?! Nh7 leaves White struggling to justify his material sacrifice.

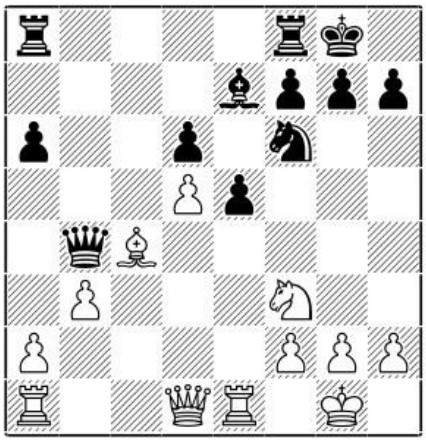


24...Rg8 25.Bxf7 Rg7 26.Qe6 Rf8 27.Qxe7 Rfxf7 28.Qxd6 e4÷

Both sides have their chances and a draw is surely the correct result; but in a practical game I would slightly prefer Black's knight over White's three extra pawns, as his king is slightly safer and the pawns are too far back to pose much of a promotion threat.

17...Qxb4 18.b3

We have seen this structure before. This is a pleasant version for Black as his bishop will be much stronger than its counterpart, as starts to become clear after his next move.



18...Bd8!

A familiar manoeuvre, which gradually becomes second nature for a Najdorf player.

19.Qd2 Qc5

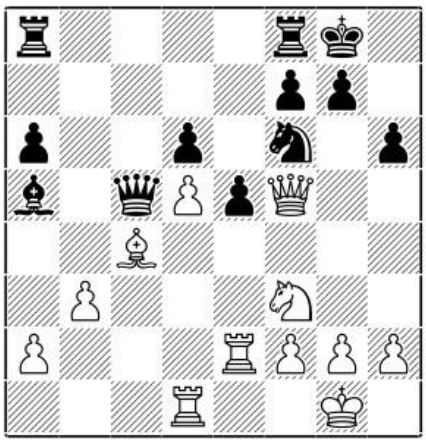
Black's kingside pawn majority has excellent potential in the middlegame, although most endgames should also be quite pleasant for

him.

20.Re2 Ba5 21.Qe3 Qc7 22.Qg5

This is a bit of a shot in the dark. 22.Rd1 looks more productive.

22...h6 23.Qf5 Qc5 24.Rd1



24...g6!

This is a typical move to slowly get the kingside going. Black 'makes it work' with simple tactics.

25.Qb1

Obviously 25.Qxf6?? Bd8 was the point, trapping the queen.

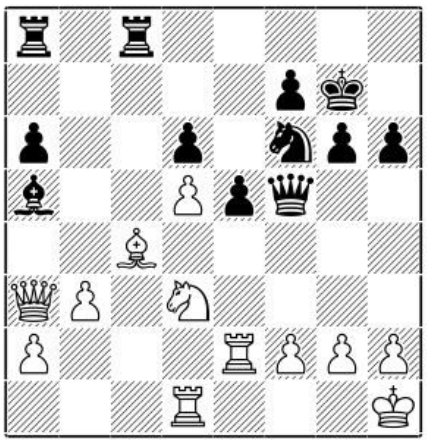
25...Kg7 26.Ne1 Rfc8

Black has a lot of flexibility regarding how to arrange his pieces. Another idea was 26...Qc8, with the idea of transferring to the kingside with ...Qg4 at some point. Black will do something similar soon enough.

27.Nd3 Qa7 28.Qb2 Qd7 29.Kh1 Qf5

Black would ideally like to transfer his bishop to the a7-g1 diagonal, but for the moment he avoids 29...Bb6 30.Nb4 when the knight comes to c6.

30.Qa3

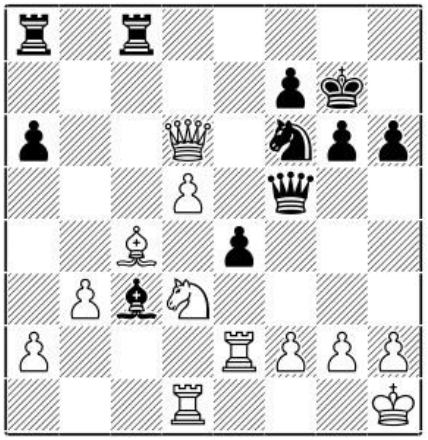


30...Bc3!?

Perhaps with time pressure looming, Black forces the pace. 30...Bc7 was also possible, because 31.Nb4 Ng4 creates a lot of threats.

31.f3

White does not take the bait, but it looks like he could, even though it is dangerous. After 31.Qxd6 e4 White can head into the belly of the beast with:

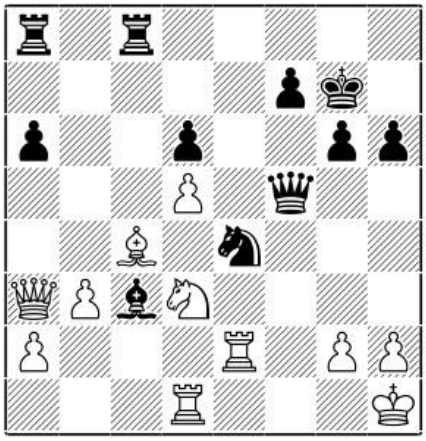


32.Nc5! (32.Nc1? is refuted by 32...Be5 33.Qb4 Ng4 34.g3 Qh5 [the engine points out that the patient 34...h5! is even stronger) 35.h4 Nxf2† when Black wins material) 32...Be5 33.Qe7 Re8 34.Qb7 Although Black clearly has some initiative for the pawn, there is nothing decisive yet.

31...e4!?

Again Black chooses to force matters.

32.fxe4 Nxe4



33.Re3?!

The queen is needed to help defend, so 33.Qc1 was a better try.

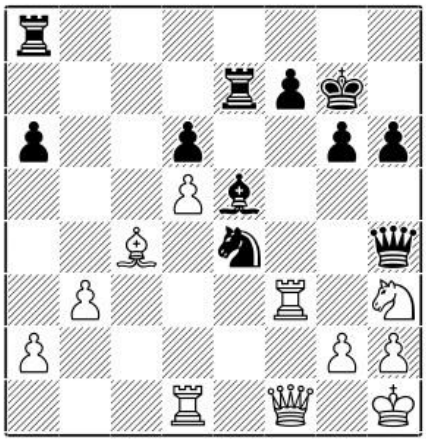
33...Bd4 34.Rf3 Qg5 35.Qb4 Rcb8

The funny prophylactic move 35...Kg8! was best, since 36.Bb5? then loses to 36...Rc2!.

36.Qe1

The surprising clearance shot 36.Bb5! would have kept White in the game.

36...Re8 37.Qf1 Re7 38.Nf4 Be5 39.Nh3 Qh4



40.Re3 f5

Another idea was 40...Rae8 41.Bxa6 Ra8 42.a4 Rxa6! 43.Rxe4 (43.Qxa6? Nf2† wins) 43...Qxe4 44.Qxa6 Rc7 with an enduring initiative.

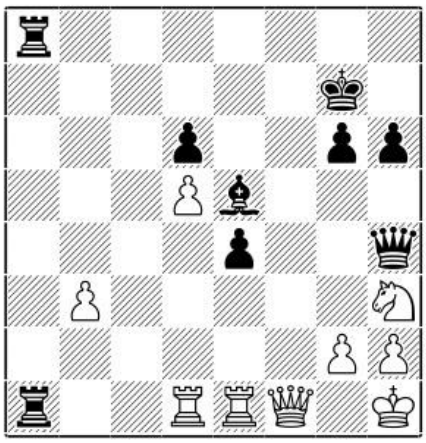
41.Bxa6

Grabbing the pawn. Challenging Black's queen with 41.Qe1 would have been safer.

41...Rea7 42.Bd3 Rxa2

Keeping the knight with 42...Nc3 was also strong.

43.Bxe4 fxe4 44.Re2 Ra1 45.Ree1



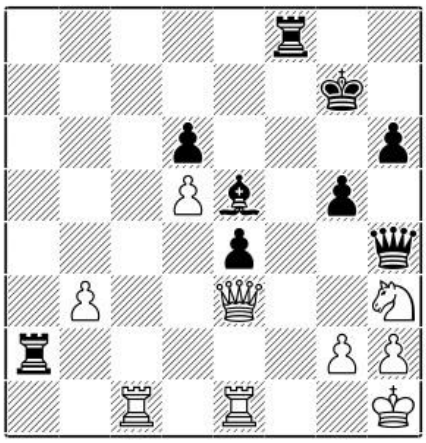
45...R1a2!?

This is a practical decision. The simplifying combination 45...Qxe1 46.Rxe1 Rxe1 47.Qxe1 Ra1 48.Qxa1 Bxa1 followed by ...Kf6-e5 is likely winning. Perhaps Black considered this, but it is hard to be sure if it is winning, and having the 'wrong rook pawn' is always in the back of one's mind in such endgames.

46.Rc1 Rf8 47.Qg1 g5 48.Qe3?

This loses instantly.

White had to try 48.Rf1 g4 49.Rxf8 Kxf8 and now 50.Qf1† Qf6 (50...Kg7?? loses to 50.Rc7†) 51.Qxf6† Bxf6 52.Nf4 would have held on.



48...Rf3!

The rook in untouchable because 49.gxf3 Rxh2† leads to mate, and if the queen moves Black takes the h3-knight with similar effect.

0–1

Conclusion

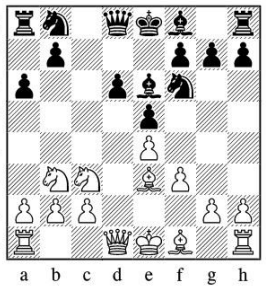
This chapter introduced the topic of 6.Be3 e5. We started with Nisipeanu's 7.Nde2!?, which it interesting but not too challenging to a well-prepared player. Black gets a good game by developing his pieces, ignoring the pawn when it arrives on f4, and aiming for queenside counterplay.

The positional system with 7.Nf3 is a solid choice for White. Out of a few playable options, I have chosen the flexible 7...Be7 8.Bc4 0-0 9.0-0 Nc6!? as our repertoire choice. There are some subtleties around the timing of certain typical moves. For example, 10.Qe2 is well met by 10...Na5!; but after 10.Bb3 it is more accurate to delay the knight move in favour of 10...Be6.

10.Bg5 is White's most direct way of fighting for the d5-square. After 10...Be6 11.Bb3 Black once again has to time his moves correctly with 11...Nd7 (11...Na5 is less accurate) 12.Bxe7 Qxe7 13.Nd5 Qd8 followed by either ...Na5 or ...Nc5. The resulting simplified position is pretty stable, and requires patience from both sides.

Eventually White came to 10.Re1!?. At first I thought this looked a bit pointless, but not so much is happening just yet, and it is a flexible waiting move. After 10...Be6!? (instead 10...b5 is met with the logical, if paradoxical, 11.Bf1) 11.Nd5 Bxd5 12.exd5 we saw that Black can obtain a satisfactory game with 12...b5!, when both sides must be ready for certain complications.

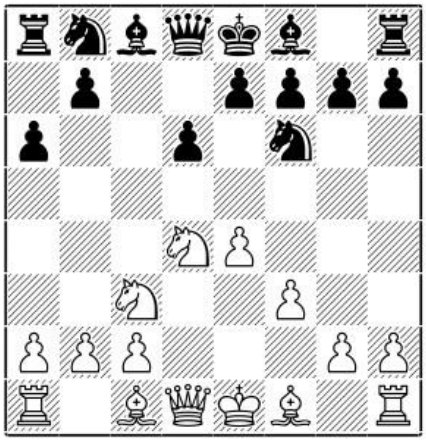
Chapter 5



The English Attack

Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.♗e3 e5 7.♘b3 ♗e6 8.f3 h5!



A) 9.Be2 *Game 13* 133

B) 9.Qd2 Nbd7 10.0-0-0 Be7 11.Kb1 Rc8 138

B1) 12.Bg5 140

B2) 12.Bd3 142

B3) 12.Nd5 *Game 14* 149

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Be3

Before tackling our main subject of 6...e5 7.Nb3 (rather than the alternative knight retreats from the previous chapter), we should briefly consider another possible move order:

6.f3

Sometimes White opts for this move as a means of avoiding the 6.Be3 Ng4 line. We will simply meet it with our standard reply:

6...e5 7.Nb3 Be6

The overwhelming majority of games continue with 8.Be3, transposing to the English Attack, as featured in this and the next chapter. Other moves are inferior, for instance:

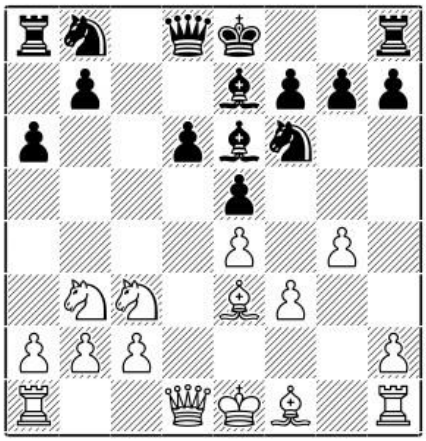
8.g4?!

8.Bg5?! Nbd7 9.Qd2 Be7 10.0-0-0 b5 leaves White's bishop misplaced. The advance g4-g5 is obstructed, and Nd5 will hardly be possible because ...Nxd5 will leave White's bishop hanging.

8...Be7! 9.Be3

9.g5 Nh5 leaves the g5-pawn attacked, and White does not have time to arrange a convenient defence with Be3 and Qd2. Play may continue 10.Nd5 (10.Rg1 Qb6!?³; 10.h4 Ng3³) 10...0-0 11.Rg1 Nc6³ when Black enjoys a lead in

development and may follow up with ...f6 or ...a5.



9...d5!

This has been played many times, usually after an earlier Be3 when Black meets the premature 9.g4?! with 9...d5!. The trick is revealed after:

10.g5

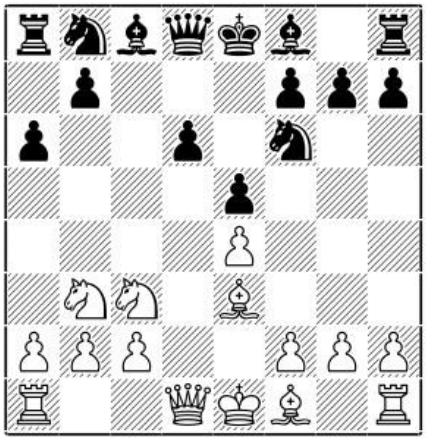
10.Bc5?! d4µ is obviously great for Black.

Objectively White should probably prefer 10.exd5 Nxd5³ although in that case it's obvious that the early g2-g4 was a mistake.

10...d4! 11.gxf6 Bxf6µ

At the minimum, Black will regain the piece with a clear advantage. On the other hand, I have had more than one blitz game conclude with 12.Bd2?? Bh4† 13.Ke2 Bc4 mate!

6...e5 7.Nb3



This is by far the main move. It is played about six times as often as 7.Nf3, and the number of games is even greater when factoring in the move order of 6.f3 e5 7.Nb3 followed by Be3.

7...Be6 8.f3

Other options do exist, and these will be discussed in Chapter 7.

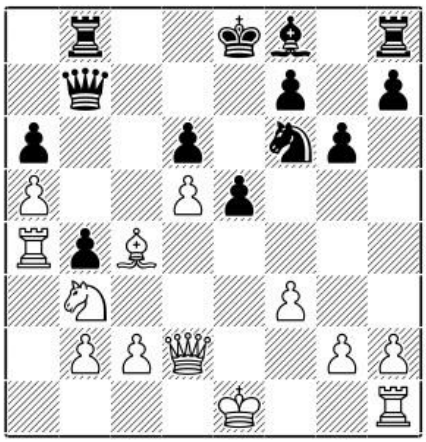
The text move introduces the English Attack, a popular choice at all levels. White's plans over the next few moves are straightforward and easy to understand: he intends some combination of Qd2, 0-0-0 and g2-g4 followed by a kingside attack. I have tried many different counterattacking systems myself, and I have no hesitation in recommending that we curtail White's kingside plans at once with the following modern solution.

8...h5!

This advance is not uncommon in the Najdorf nowadays. I remember long ago reading something attributing this move to Ljubojevic. According to my database, 'Ljubo' played 8...h5 in 1997, while Sakaev played it a few times in 1995-6. Nowadays the move is often associated with Topalov, as he has played the present position many times – with both Black and White.

Before going any further, here is a quick breakdown of Black's other main options and why I am avoiding them.

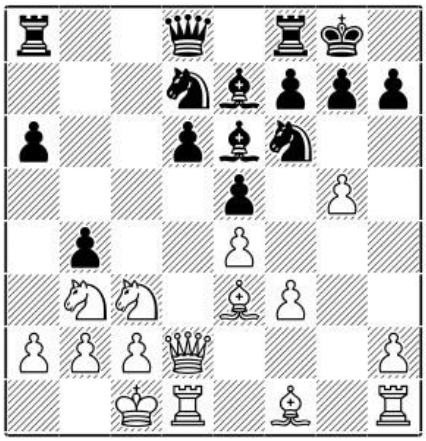
a) 8...Nbd7 9.Qd2 (there is also 9.g4, as recommended by Shaw) 9...b5 is a popular continuation but I never liked it because of: 10.a4 b4 11.Nd5 Bxd5 12.exd5 Nb6 13.Bxb6 Qxb6 14.a5 Qb7 15.Bc4 g6 16.Ra4 Rb8



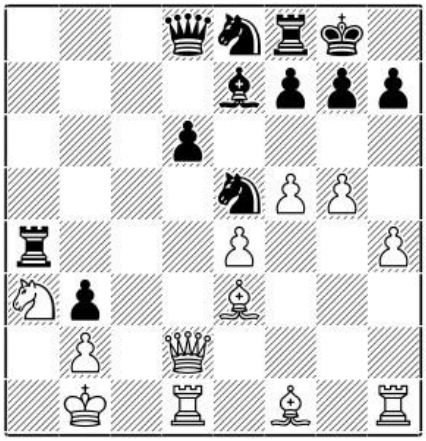
Now White can force a draw by repetition with 17.Qd3 Ra8 18.Qd2, should he wish to. There are a number sharp lines in the Najdorf (especially after 6.Bg5) where White can force a draw, but

most of them are quite detailed, whereas here White forces a repetition with minimal knowledge. There are other lines after 8...Nbd7 which I also consider problematic for Black, so it is not for me.

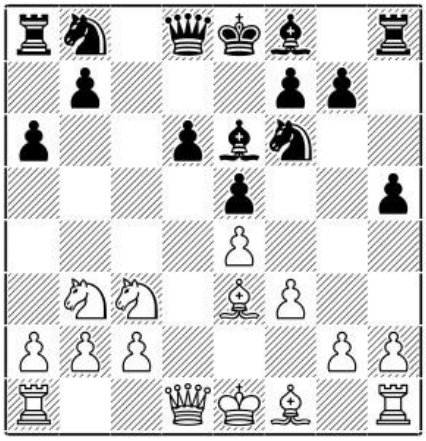
b) For a long time I played 8...Be7 9.Qd2 0-0 10.0-0-0 Nbd7 11.g4 b5 12.g5 b4 but, once again, there is more than one problem.



13.Ne2 (13.gxf6!? bxc3 14.Qxc3 Nxf6 15.Na5 was once considered harmless, but lately White has been scoring well and this is indeed Shaw's recommendation) 13...Ne8 14.f4 a5 15.f5 a4 (15...Bxb3 16.cxb3 a4 17.bxa4 Rxa4 18.Kb1 Rxa2!? is a lovely idea but the cool 19.Nc1! kills all of Black's fun) 16.Nbd4 exd4 17.Nxd4 b3 18.Kb1 bxc2† 19.Nxc2 Bb3 20.axb3 axb3 21.Na3 Ne5 22.h4 Ra4



Once upon a time this position used to be a fresh battleground with room for creativity. But once it became clear that there was a major theoretical branching between 23.Bd4, 23.Qg2 and 23.Rh3, I felt sick and realized that even if Black is objectively okay, it was time to move on.



With the text move Black avoids needing to memorize too much, yet the play is complex, both tactically and strategically. Black often has to play with his king in the centre for a while, but that is nothing too unusual in the Najdorf. Besides, I have learned that this has a positive side, as I lost a couple of games to much lower rated players in the English Attack when I castled, as White benefits from the clear strategic plan of g2-g4, h2-h4 and so on, whereas the present variation requires a more nuanced approach.

We can outline three different ways for White to play, with some variety thrown in to each set-up. With **A)** 9.Be2 White changes gears and treats the position something like a 6.Be2 line, but with f2-f3 and ...h5 thrown in. I (and most others) do not consider this to be dangerous at all. The more traditional English Attack treatment involves **B)** 9.Qd2 followed by 0-0-0.

The direct 9.Nd5! is the most important option of all, and we will consider it separately in the next chapter.

A) 9.Be2

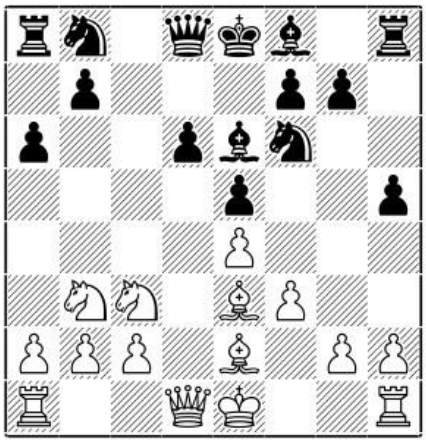
GAME 13

Anne Haast – Sam Shankland

Wijk aan Zee 2015

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Be3 e5 7.Nb3 Be6 8.f3 h5 9.Be2

White can also play 9.a4 first, or 9.Qd2 Nbd7 10.Be2. It is all pretty similar.



White plays a classical (6.Be2) set-up, hoping that ...h5 will prove to be a loss of time and/or a weakening move. However, I do not believe it actually harms Black, and sometimes the advance of the h-pawn can prove to be quite useful. Moreover, White's 'extra' move f2-f3 is just as likely to be useless or harmful.

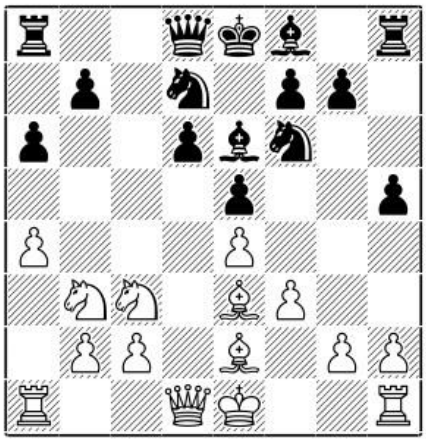
9...Nbd7

There is no reason not to develop the knight immediately. Compared to the 6.Be2 line, Black does not have to worry about a quick f4-f5 (White would lose a tempo), while g2-g4 is obviously ruled out by our h5-pawn.

10.a4

White stops ...b5. In the 6.Be2 lines this is not such a concern, but here 10.0-0 can be met by 10...b5!? (10...Rc8 is also perfectly playable) when 11.a4 b4 12.Nd5 Bxd5 13.exd5 Nb6 looks quite comfortable for Black.

White's objectively best approach is to change gears with 10.Nd5, when 10...Bxd5 11.exd5 g6 12.Qd2 reaches variation C of Chapter 6.



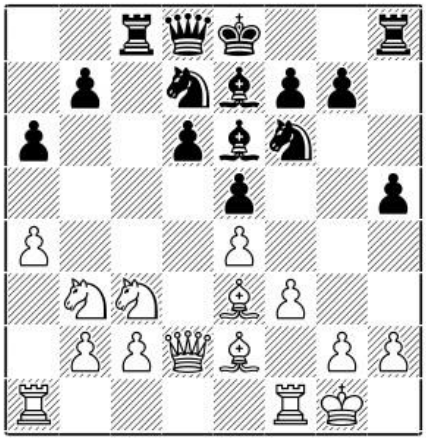
Black has a pleasant choice between two set-ups here. He can castle, when the 'extra' moves f2-f3 and ...h5 somewhat offset each other, or he can try to make use of the advance of the h-pawn and play ...g6 and ...Kf8-g7, often with ...h4 in mind.

10...Rc8

This is a flexible move. Black can also play 10...Be7 11.0-0 Qc7 12.Qd2 0-0 13.a5 Rac8 14.Rfd1 Rfd8 reaching a position that can occur from various move orders; Black looks fine here too.

11.a5

Another approach is:
11.0-0 Be7 12.Qd2
White tries to save time by omitting a4-a5, but Black can utilize the absence of that move by means of:



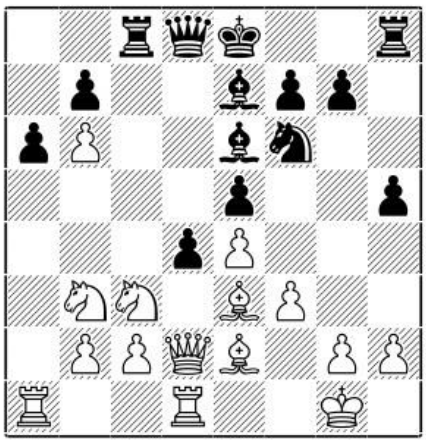
12...Nb6!?

12...g6, 12...h4 and 12...0-0 are all playable as well.

13.Rfd1

After 13.a5 Nc4 14.Bxc4 Rxc4 15.Qd3 Qc8 16.Na4?! Rxc2 17.Nb6 Qc7 18.Rfc1 Rxc1† 19.Rxc1 Qb8³ White did not have quite enough for the pawn in Polgar – Topalov, Vitoria Gasteiz 2007.

13...d5!? 14.a5 d4 15.axb6

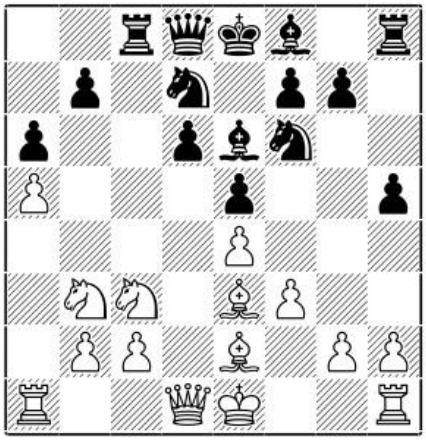


15...Bxb3! 16.cxb3 dxe3 17.Qxd8†

The point of exchanging on b3 is seen after 17.Qxe3?? Qxd1†!–+ followed by ...Bc5.

17...Rxd8=

Black was fine in Piccoli – Rizzardi, corr. 2011.



11...Be7 12.0-0 g6

Instead 12...0-0 13.Qd2 Qc7 transposes to 10...Be7 above, while 12...h4!? 13.Qd2 g6 is 13...h4!? below.

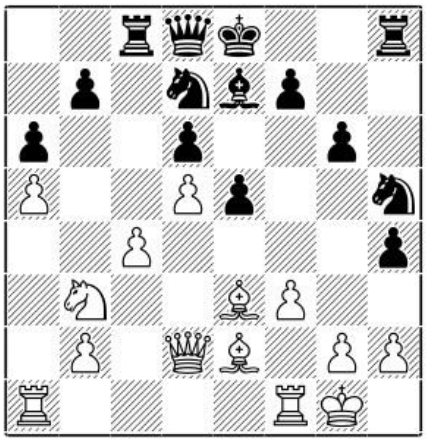
13.Qd2 Kf8

A fully playable alternative is:

13...h4!? 14.Nd5

14.Nc1 Qc7 15.Rd1 Kf8 16.Bf1 Kg7 led to unclear play in Morozevich – Sadler, Reykjavik 1999, an early success for Black which generated attention for 8...h5.

14...Bxd5 15.exd5 Nh5 16.c4



16...Kf8

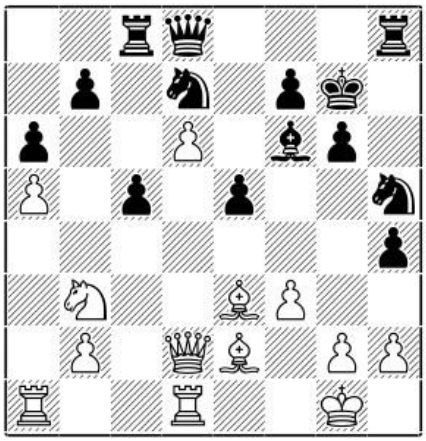
16...f5?! looks premature. 17.Rfd1 f4 18.Bf2 h3 occurred in Kosteniuk – Zhu Chen, Moscow 2001, when 19.g4!N 19...fxg3 20.hxg3 Bg5 21.Qd3 would have given White the upper hand.

16...Nf4!?N 17.Bxf4 exf4 18.Qxf4 0-0 is a computer suggestion. Black will always have counter-chances on the dark squares.

17.Rfd1 Kg7 18.c5!?

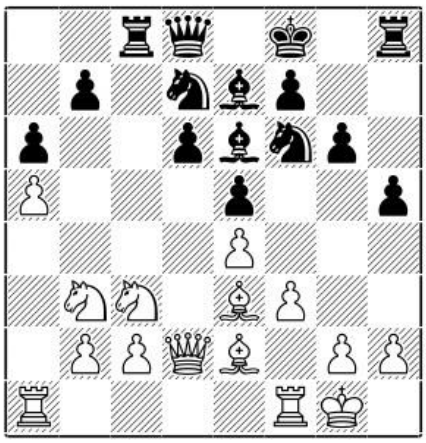
18.Rac1 transposes to the 16.c4 line in the notes to the main line below.

18...dxc5 19.d6 Bf6



20.Bc4 Nf4 21.Qc2?! Bg5 22.Qc3 Rc6 23.Nd2 Rxd6 24.Ne4 Rd4!µ

Black took control with this strong exchange sacrifice in Nijboer – Sadler, Arnhem 1999.



14.Nd5 Bxd5 15.exd5 Kg7

Instead 15...h4 16.c4 transposes to the next note below after 16...Kg7 (Black can also start with 16...Nh5).

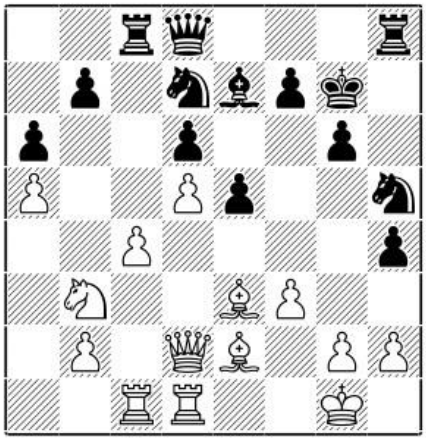
16.Ra4?!

This is a bit exotic, and the rook is immediately targeted.

A better plan is:

16.c4 h4 17.Rac1 Nh5 18.Rfd1

This position has been reached a few times in practice. As usual, Black has more than one decent continuation.



18...Nf4

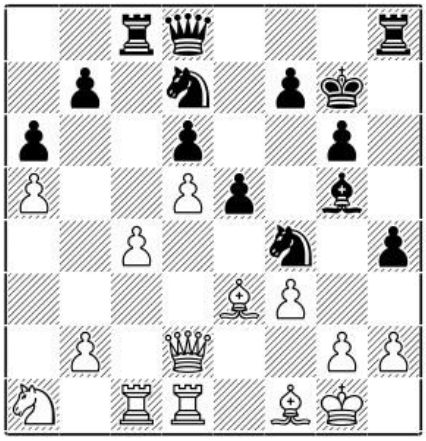
18...Bf6 has also done well for Black: 19.Na1 Nf4 20.Bf1 Bg5 21.b4 Nf6 (21...Qf6 22.Nb3 Rce8 23.Bd3? h3 24.g3 Nxd3 25.Bxg5 Qxf3 26.Rc3 e4µ was Wang Pin – Zhang Zhong, Shanghai 2000) 22.Nb3 This was Gadjily – Magerramov, Dubai 2000, and here Ftacnik points out the improvement 22...Qd7!N intending ...Qa4, and if 23.Ra1 Qf5„.

19.Bf1

After 19.Bxf4!? exf4 20.Qxf4 Black should avoid 20...Bg5?! 21.Qxd6 Bxc1 22.Nxc1², and instead play 20...Bf6! with good play for a pawn, e.g. 21.Rc2 Be5 22.Qd2 Qf6©.

19...Bg5 20.Na1

20.Rc3 Rh5!? gave Black interesting play in Feygin – Sadler, Netherlands 2000, and 20...Nf6N and 20...f5N were worth considering too.

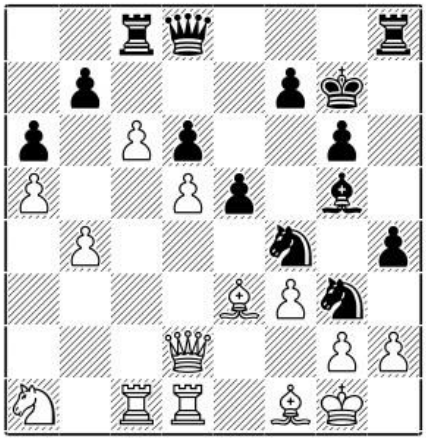


20...Nf6 21.b4 N6h5 22.c5?

22.Nb3 Ng3 23.Bd3 was necessary.

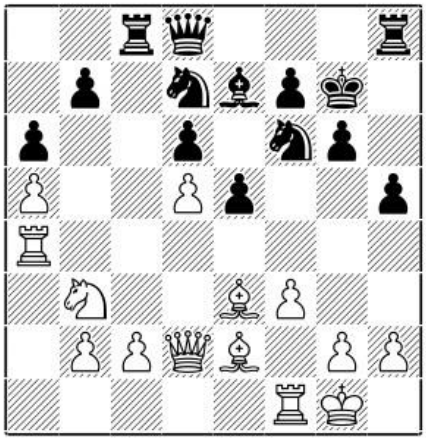
22...Ng3! 23.c6

White eventually prevailed in Erenburg – Nakamura, Reykjavik 2004, but things would have been different if Black had found:



23...Nf5!N 24.Bb6 Nh3† 25.gxh3 Bxd2 26.Bxd8 Bxc1–+

Black's extra exchange should decide.



16...b5! 17.Raa1

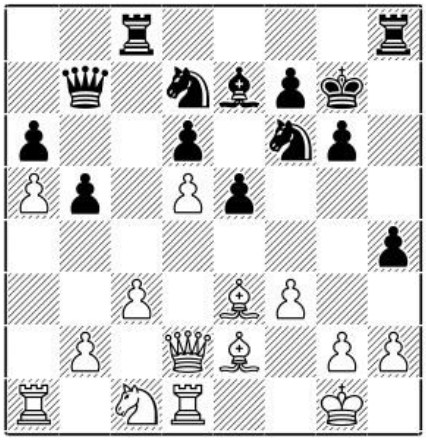
17.axb6 Nxb6 18.Rxa6 Nbxd5 is no problem for Black.

17...Qc7

17...h4!?N was also worth considering.

18.c3 Qb7 19.Rfd1 h4 20.Nc1

White hopes to play Na2-b4.



20...Bd8!

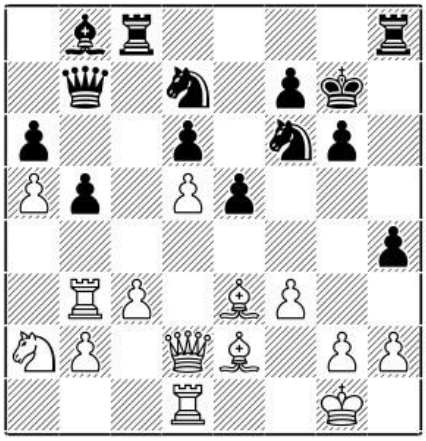
Shankland finds a way to bring the bishop into the action. The b6-square is not available, but there is another path to the desired diagonal. Moreover, the pressure on the a5-pawn conveniently slows down White's knight manoeuvre.

21.Ra3 Bc7!

The bishop snakes its way to the a7-g1 diagonal.

22.Na2 Bb8 23.Rb3

23.Nb4 Ba7 24.Nc6? allows 24...Bxe3† 25.Qxe3 Nxd5 26.Rxd5 Rxc6µ with a solid extra pawn.



23...Nc5!?

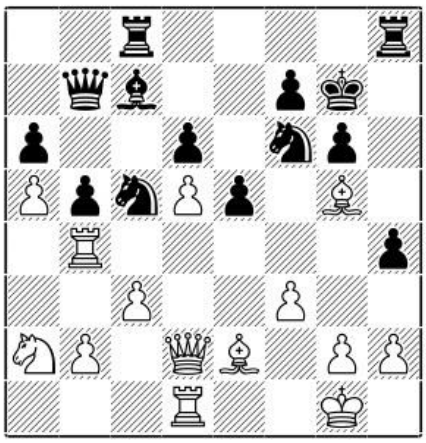
A good alternative is 23...Ba7 24.c4 Bxe3† 25.Qxe3 Nc5 26.Rb4 Qc7 27.cxb5 Qxa5 28.Qa3 Qxa3 29.bxa3 a5!? (or 29...axb5) 30.Rbb1 Nfd7 with a good ending for Black, who can follow up

with ...Nb6 and ...f5. The text move is more ambitious.

24.Rb4?!

24.Ra3 was better.

24...Bc7 25.Bg5

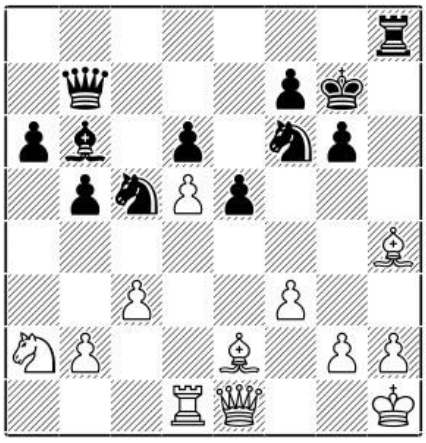


25...Bxa5

An interesting decision. Black could also flick in 25...h3!?µ.

26.Rxh4 Rxh4 27.Bxh4 Bb6 28.Kh1 Rh8 29.Qe1

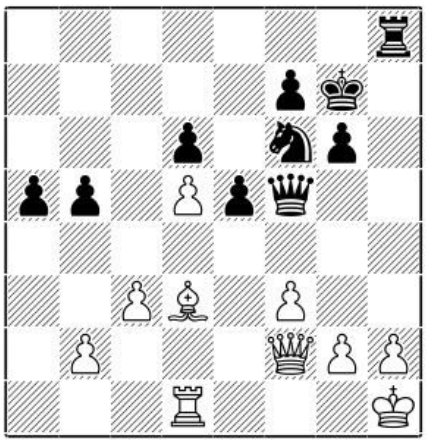
White does not gain anything from 29.Bxf6† Kxf6µ as the king will just slide back to g7.



29...Qd7 30.Nb4 Qf5 31.Bf2 a5 32.Nd3?

Walking into a little combination. Better was 32.Nc6.

32...Nxd3 33.Bxd3 Bxf2 34.Qxf2

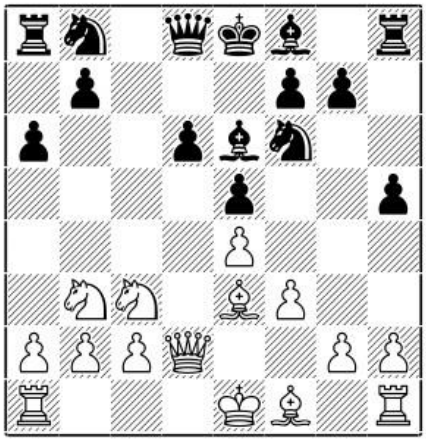


34...Rxh2†!

Not too complicated: Black wins the queen and the game.

35.Kxh2 Ng4† 36.Kg1 Nxf2 37.Kxf2 Qc8 38.Ke2 Qc5 39.b4 Qxc3 40.bxa5 Qxa5 41.Rb1 b4 42.Bc4 Qc5 43.Bb3 f5 44.Kf1 Qb5† 45.Kg1 Qd3 0–1

B) 9.Qd2



This is common and consistent. White will castle on the queenside before deciding on a subsequent plan.

9...Nbd7 10.0-0-0

10.Nd5 Bxd5 11.exd5 converts to the 9.Nd5 move order: see page 156 of the next

chapter.

This is by far the main move. White secures his king before proceeding and waits to see what Black will do.

10...Be7

10...b5?! is premature in view of 11.Nd5 Bxd5 12.exd5 Nb6 13.Qc3! as seen in Grischuk – Wang Hao, Beijing 2012.

Black can also play 10...Rc8 first, which will generally transpose to our main line after 11.Kb1 Be7.

11.Kb1

11.Nd5 Bxd5 12.exd5 can be met by 12...Rc8, when 13.Kb1 leads to variation B3 below.

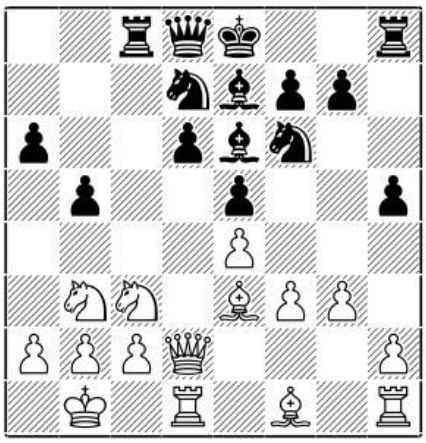
11.g3

This move is rather slow, but it was a typical reaction in the early days of the 8...h5 line.

11...Rc8 12.Kb1

12.Nd5 Bxd5 13.exd5 Nb6 14.Bxb6 Qxb6 15.Bh3 Rc7 16.Kb1 h4 17.Qe1 (17.f4? Ne4) 17...Kf8 18.f4 exf4 19.gxf4 Rh5 20.Bg2 Rc4 21.Rf1 Rf5 22.Qxh4 Nh5 23.Qh3 g6µ was Anand – Sadler, Tilburg 1998 – another early 8...h5 game from the British GM that grabbed my attention.

12...b5



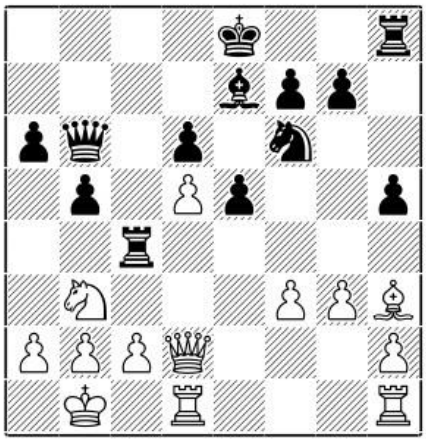
13.Nd5

13.Qf2? allowed 13...Rxc3! 14.bxc3 Qc7µ in Der Manuelian – Vigorito, Marlborough 2016; Black will follow with ...d5 and ...0-0 when the attack plays itself.

13...Bxd5 14.exd5 Nb6 15.Bxb6 Qxb6 16.Bh3

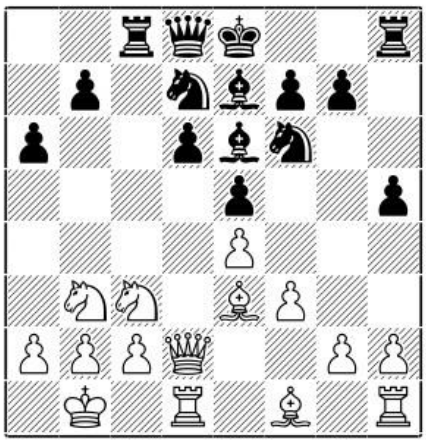
16.Na5?! Rc5 only helps Black.

16...Rc4



Black had a comfortable position in Mihok – Sagit, Stockholm 2013, and several other games.

11...Rc8



We have reached an important tabiya. White has tried several moves, and I decided to focus on three of them. **B1)** 12.Bg5 is a rare but interesting move which has been tested in some recent games. **B2)** 12.Bd3 is one of the main lines, developing the last minor piece in order to prepare a pawn break. Finally, White may force the pace with **B3)** 12.Nd5.

12.a3 b5 13.Bg5 0-0 transposes to variation B1 below (13...Qc7!? is also possible).

12.h3 b5 13.Bd3 transposes to variation B2 below.

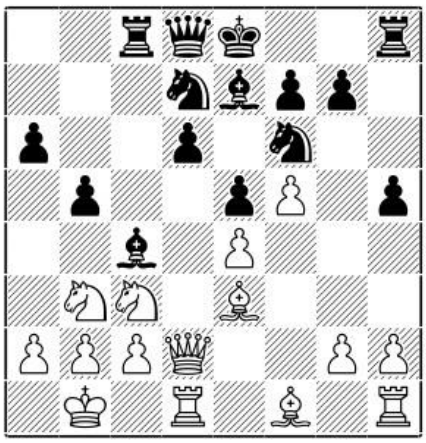
A minor alternative is:

12.f4 b5 13.f5

13.Bd3 leads to the 13.f4 line in the notes to variation B2 below.

13...Bc4

This resembles the lines without f2-f3 that we will examine later in variation A2 of Chapter 7. Here Black has been given the move ...h5 for free, since White has lost a tempo with f2-f3-f4.



14.Bg5?!

14.Bd3 Qc7 15.a3 0-0 16.g4!? has been tried in a couple of correspondence games, but Black has done well with 16...hxg4 17.h3 g3 intending ...Nh5.

14...b4

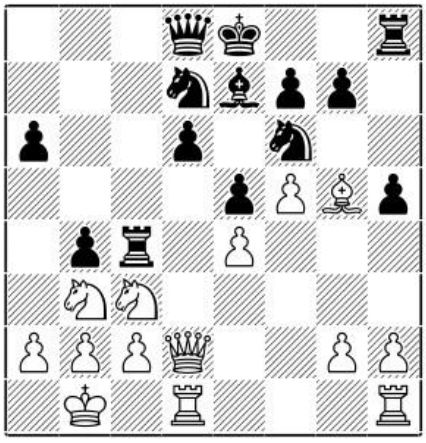
14...0-0!?N is also possible.

15.Bxc4N

White needs to do better than 15.Bxf6?! Nxf6 16.Nd5 Bxd5 17.exd5 Qb6µ when Black had a perfect position in Berescu – Cheparinov, Plovdiv 2013.

15...Rxc4

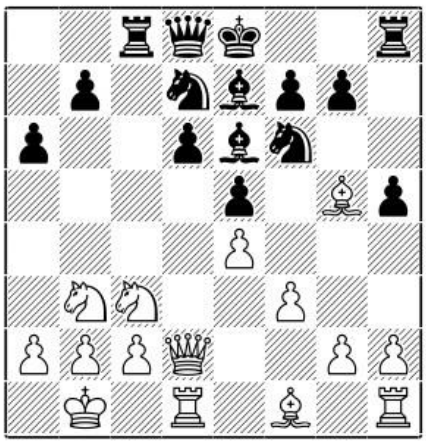
15...bxc3!? 16.Qe2 0-0 17.Bxa6 Rc7,, also deserves attention.



16.Bxf6 Nxf6 17.Nd5 Nxd5 18.Qxd5 Qc8,,

Black has good prospects on the queenside and White's knight is a long way from the d5-square.

B1) 12.Bg5



This has been tried by a few strong GMs and correspondence players.

12...b5 13.a3

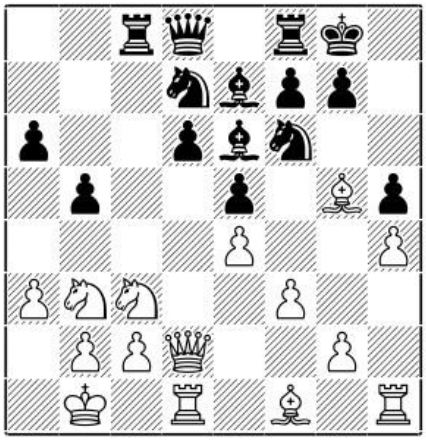
This position can be reached via a number of different move orders.

13...0-0!

One must always weight up the pros and cons of castling, especially after ...h5 has been played, but on this occasion it is the best decision.

13...Qc7 14.h4 Nb6 (14...0-0 transposes to 14...Qc7 in the note to the main line below) 15.Bxf6 gxf6 16.Na5 gave White good prospects and he went on to win a nice game in Demchenko – Areshchenko, Tbilisi 2017.

14.h4



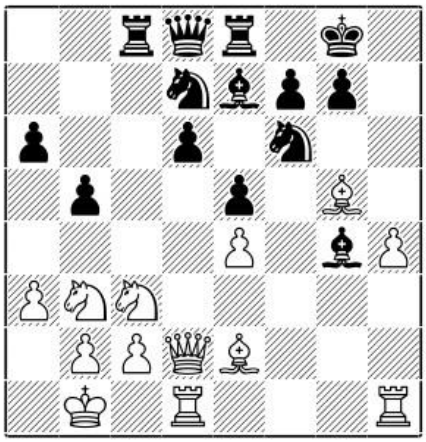
14...Re8!

With this clever waiting move, Black gives the e7-bishop extra protection while leaving the c-file open for the other rook.

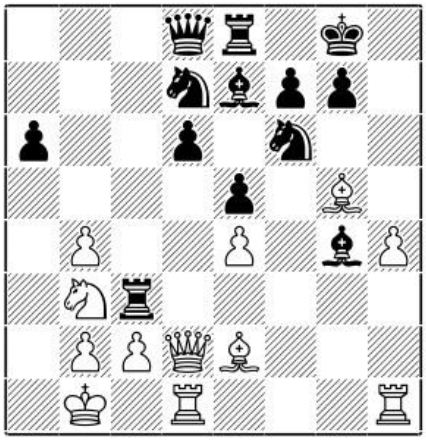
14...Qc7 is well met by 15.g4!, as after 15...hxg4 16.fxg4 Bxg4 17.Be2 White's kingside play looks fast, with Rdg1 coming next.

15.Bd3

Unlike the note above, 15.g4? does not work here because ...Rxc3 is in the air. After 15...hxg4 16.fxg4 Bxg4 17.Be2 Black's most precise continuation is:

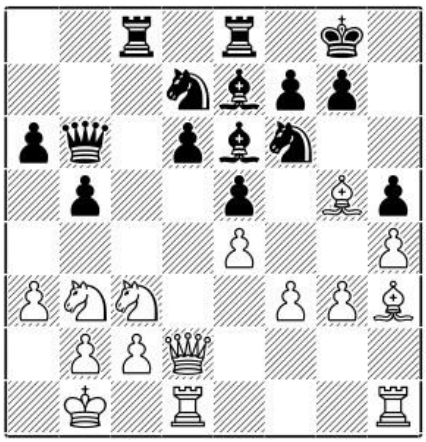


17...b4!! (17...Rxc3!? allows White to survive with 18.Bxg4! Rxb3 19.Qg2! when the rook is trapped, although 19...Rxb2† 20.Kxb2 Nb6 still gives Black more than enough for the exchange) 18.axb4 Rxc3!



19.bxc3 (19.Bxg4? Rxb3! 20.Qg2 Rxb4–+ is the point behind Black's 17th move) 19...Nxe4µ

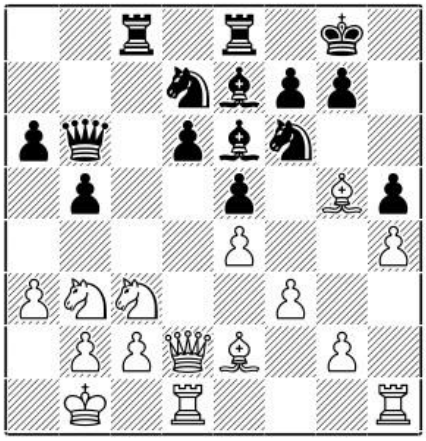
15.g3 is a more patient move which has been tested in a few games: 15...Qb6 16.Bh3 (16.Nd5 Nxd5 17.exd5 Bf5 18.Bd3 Bxd3 19.Qxd3 a5*ƒ* was also promising for Black in Mesquita – Figlio, corr. 2017)



16...Bxh3 17.Rxh3 b4 18.axb4 Qxb4*ƒ* Black had good prospects on the queenside in Klim – Verst, corr. 2012.

Finally, a couple of 2019 games have continued:

15.Be2 Qb6

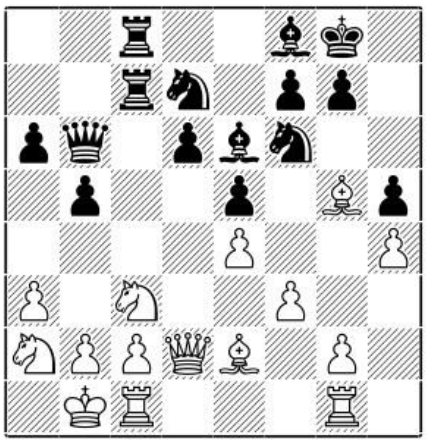


16.Rhg1

16.Be3 Qb8 17.Nd5 Bxd5 18.exd5 Nb6 19.Bxb6 Qxb6 20.Bd3 (20.Na5 runs into 20...Rc5! when the d5-pawn falls) 20...Nxd5 21.Bf5 Ne3µ was Garcia Ramos – Bobadilla Viera, Barbera del Valles 2019.

16...Bf8 17.Nc1 Rc7! 18.N1a2 Rec8 19.Rc1

Having built up a powerful position, Black could have made concrete gains with:



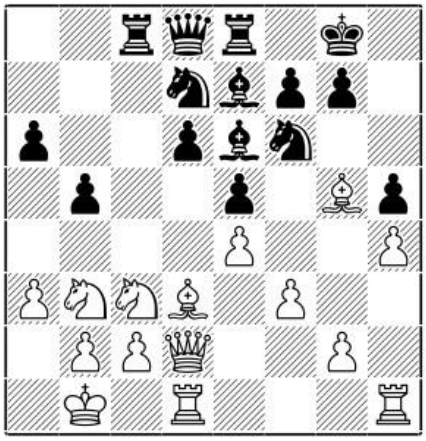
19...Bxa2†!N

19...Qb7³ still gave Black the more pleasant game in Inarkiev – Vidit, Danzhou 2019.

20.Nxa2

20.Kxa2? is of course refuted by 20...Rxc3 21.bxc3 d5 with an overwhelming initiative.

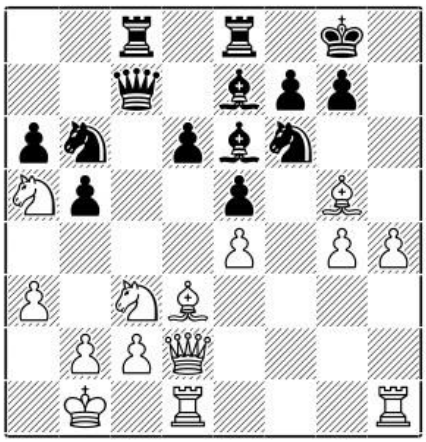
20...Rxc2 21.Rxc2 Rxc2 22.Kxc2 Qxg1µ



15...Nb6!

With ...d5 an ongoing possibility, Black has a pleasant position. In the following recent game, he quickly took over the initiative.

16.Na5?! Qc7 17.g4 hxg4 18.fxg4



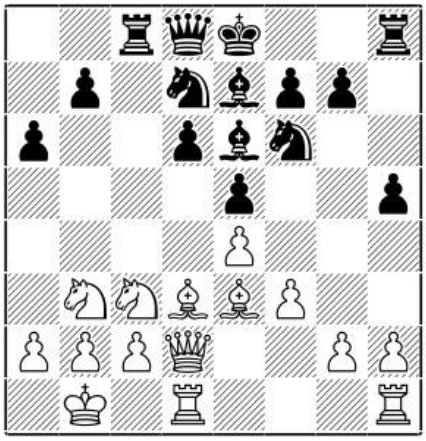
18...d5

18...Na4!?Nµ is also excellent for Black.

19.Bxf6 Bxf6 20.exd5 Nxd5µ

Asis Gargatagli – Vachier-Lagrave, Internet (rapid) 2019.

B2) 12.Bd3



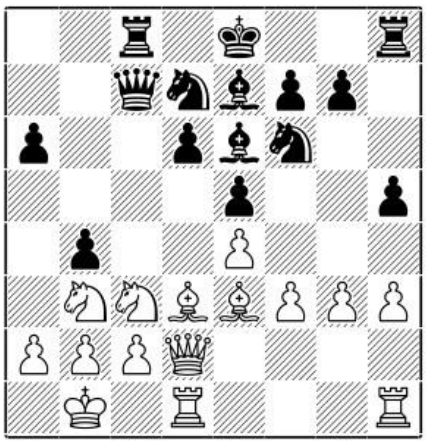
White develops another piece and prepares a pawn break.

12...b5 13.h3

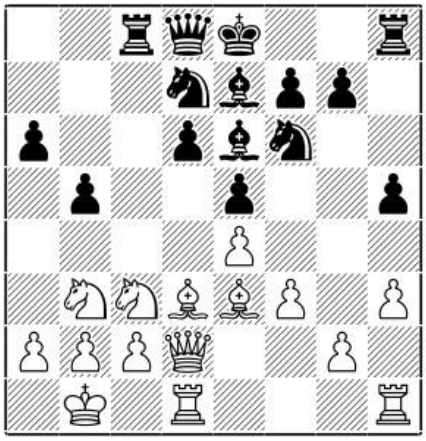
This move prepares both g2-g4 and f3-f4.

13.f4 Qc7 gives White nothing better than 14.h3, when 14...h4 transposes to the main line.

13.g3?! Qc7 14.h3? proves to be too slow after 14...b4, for example:



15.Nd5 (Black is also better after 15.Ne2 a5 16.g4 a4 17.Nbc1 a3 18.b3 d5 19.g5 dxe4 20.fxe4 Nh7) 15...Nxd5 16.exd5 Unlike the lines with ...b4 in the notes below, Black can play 16...Bxd5 because the f3-pawn is hanging.



13...h4

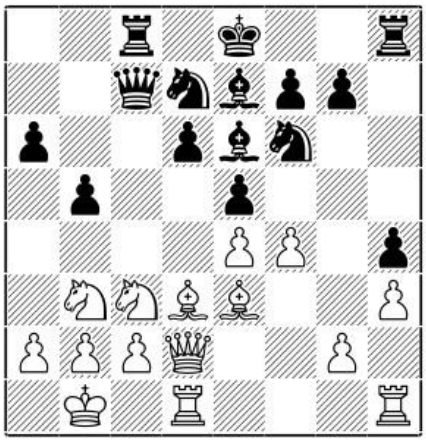
Black should prevent g2-g4, not so much because it will offer White a direct attack, but because g4-g5 will drive his knight from the centre.

13...b4?! does not work out tactically after 14.Nd5 Bxd5 15.exd5 Nxd5 16.Bxa6 when Black's position looks too loose. A good rule of thumb is to avoid ...b4 until ...Bc4 has been played, unless Black has a clear tactical reason. One reason for this is that with the bishop on c4, White's recapture exd5 will not attack it, so Black will have some extra options.

14.f4 Qc7

Flexible and best.

14...b4? 15.Nd5 again works out badly for Black, while 14...0-0?! looks premature in view of 15.Bf2!, immediately targeting the pawn.



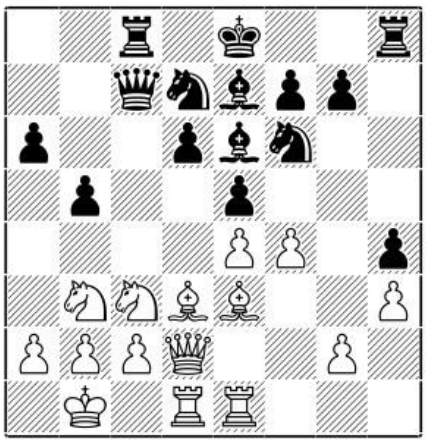
15.Rhe1

This centralizing move is almost universally played. In the last several years White players have mostly abandoned this set-up, but it could still be quite common in lower-level tournaments.

15.f5 Bc4 followed by ...b4 and ...a5 gives Black straightforward counterplay.

15.fxe5 was played in Firman – Areshchenko, Sudak 2002, when 15...dxe5!N 16.Nd5 Bxd5 17.exd5 Nxd5 18.Bf5 N5f6 19.Bg5 Rd8 looks at least equal for Black, who may continue with ...g6 to force White's hand.

15.a3!? is a typical move which we will encounter again. 15...Nb6!? looks like a logical reply, with decent prospects for Black. (15...0-0 has also been played although 16.f5!?N 16...Bc4 17.g4 hxg3 18.Rhg1 leads to a version of our main line where White has been given the a2-a3 move 'for free', as his rook has gone directly to g1 rather than stopping off at e1 first.)



15...0-0!

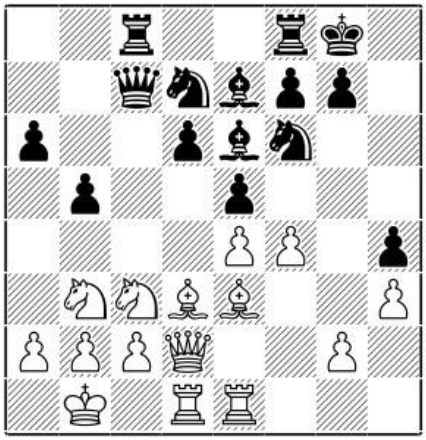
This was mentioned by Ftacnik and strongly recommended by Georgiev. One of the most important things when playing the 8...h5 line is to correctly judge when Black should castle. It is worth showing why Black's other options do not work so well:

15...b4? is too loosening: 16.Nd5 Nxd5 17.exd5 Bxd5 18.fxe5 dxe5 19.Bxa6±

15...g6?! 16.Qf2 Qb7 17.Na5 Qb8?! 18.f5 gxf5 19.exf5 Bc4 20.Nxc4 bxc4 21.Be4± left Black under pressure in Karjakin – Topalov, Wijk aan Zee 2007.

15...Nb6?! has been played many times, but after 16.Bxb6! Qxb6 17.Nd5 Bxd5 18.exd5 White clearly has the initiative. From White's perspective, he has an extremely favourably version of the positions we will see in Game 14.

15...Bc4 16.Bf2! is the move that worries me. (16.a3!? Rb8 17.Bf2 is what concerned Georgiev, but 17...0-0!?N could be considered with the idea 18.Bxh4 a5 with unclear play) 16...Bxd3 (Black has gone for 16...Kf8 in some correspondence games, but I am not excited by Black's prospects) 17.cxd3 b4 18.Ne2 Qb7 19.fxe5 dxe5 20.Ng1!± Parushev – Klauner, corr. 2011.

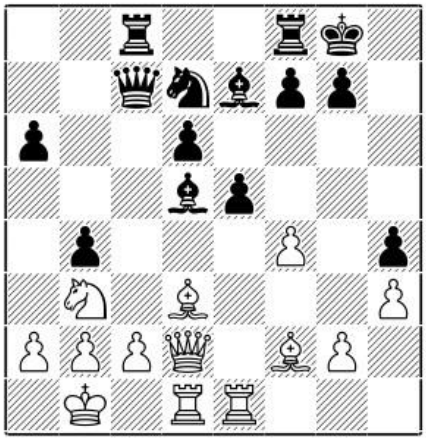


16.f5

This forces the pace, but White releases the tension in the centre. White has several alternatives:

16.fxe5?! dxe5 17.Bg5?! Nb6 (17...Bb4 also looks good) 18.Bxh4 Nc4 19.Bxc4 bxc4 20.Nc1 Rb8µ Ed. Andreev – Eggleston, Orlova 2014.

16.Bf2 is not dangerous after: 16...b4 (or 16...exf4 17.Nd4 Nc5 18.Qxf4 Nxd3 19.cxd3 Qa5 20.Nf5 Bd8 21.Nxg7 and a draw was agreed in Versili – Pierzak, corr. 2009) 17.Nd5 Nxd5N 18.exd5 Bxd5



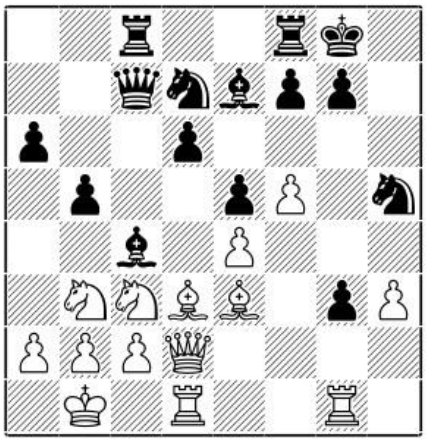
19.Bxa6 (or 19.Qxb4 Nc5,,) 19...Ra8,, As given by Georgiev and Kolev.

16.g4!?

16.g3 would be met in the same way.

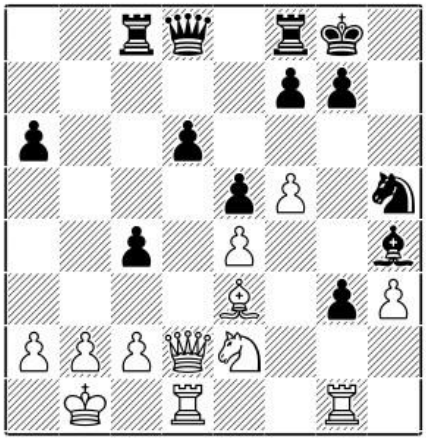
16...hxg3 17.Rg1 Nh5 18.f5 Bc4

White has the makings of a fierce attack along the g-file, but Black will look to reinforce the g3-pawn. The critical continuation is:



19.Bxc4 bxc4 20.Nd5 Qd8 21.Nc1 Ndf6 22.Nxf6† Bxf6 23.Ne2 Bh4

The position seems unclear at this stage although Black has won a couple of correspondence games:

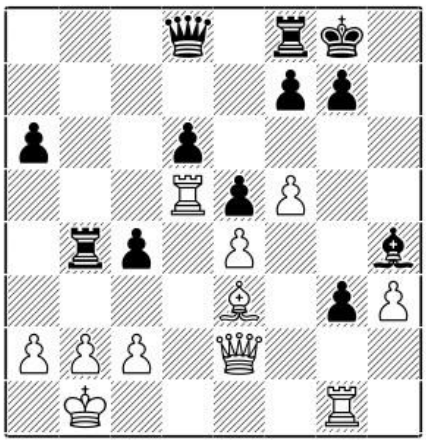


24.Nc3

24.Qxd6 Qxd6 25.Rxd6 Ra8 26.Rd5 g5!,, was Kahl – Pietrzak, corr. 2013. It is worth adding that 27.Rxe5?! would backfire after: 27...Rfe8 28.Rxe8† Rxe8 29.Nc3 Nf4µ

24...Rb8 25.Nd5 Nf6 26.Qe2 Nxd5 27.Rxd5 Rb4

Here White had to play:



28.Qg4!N

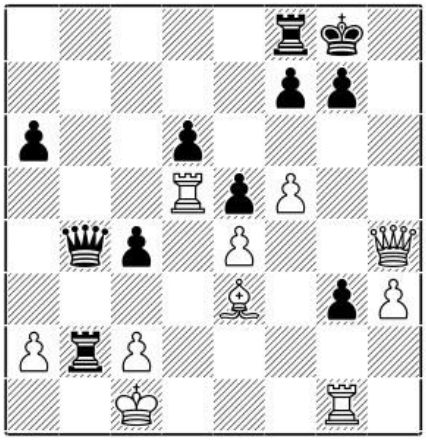
28.Ka1? lost quickly after 28...c3 29.b3 Rxe4 30.Qd3 Rf4 0–1 in Vera Ruiz – Guevara Pijoan, corr. 2012.

28...Qb8!

28...Qf6 29.c3 Rb5 30.Rxg3! is excellent for White, since 30...Bxg3? 31.Bg5 picks up the queen.

29.Qxh4 Rxb2† 30.Kc1 Qb4

Black's attack looks dangerous but White just gets away after:

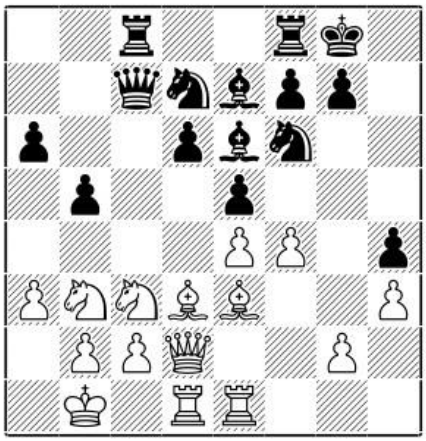


31.Kd1 Qc3 32.Ke2 Qxc2† 33.Bd2 c3 34.Rxg3 cxd2 35.Rxg7†=

With a perpetual.

16.a3!?

This has been the most popular move of all, although it has scored slightly less well than our main-line continuation. Black should respond with:



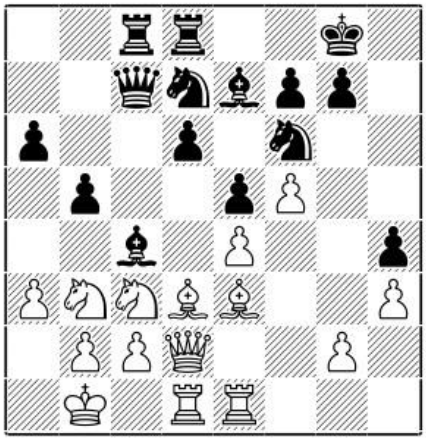
16...Rfd8!

Georgiev and Kolev also analyse 16...Rb8 at length, but playing in the centre looks better.

17.f5

After 17.Bf2 Nc5! 18.Nxc5 dxc5 the a2-a3 move shows its bad side: it gives Black a 'hook' to latch on to. 19.f5 Bd7 20.Nd5 (20.Bxh4N 20...Bc6 21.Bxf6 Bxf6© gives Black excellent play for a pawn) 20...Nxd5 21.exd5 Qd6 Black has good prospects on the queenside, and 22.Qc3?! only made matters worse after 22...c4! (Georgiev and Kolev offer 22...Bf6 23.Be4 b4 but the text move is even stronger) 23.Be4 Rb8 when Black had a strong attack brewing in Brunner – Roy Laguens, corr. 2013.

17...Bc4



Like many English Attack lines, this has been tested in several correspondence games.

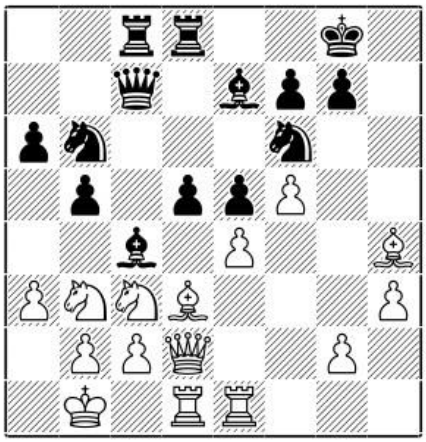
18.Bg5!?

Georgiev and Kolev do not consider this move, but it has emerged as White's main try.

18.Bf2 d5 19.exd5 Bxd5 20.Bxh4 (20.Nxd5?! Nxd5 21.Qc1 Nf4 22.Be4 Bg5 23.Qe3 Nf6 gave Black some initiative in Palm – Laffranchise, corr. 2013) 20...Bb7 21.Qe2 and now 21...Bxa3 gave Black decent play in Jorgensen – Laffranchise, corr. 2013, while Georgiev and Kolev's suggestion of 21...b4!?N,, also deserves attention.

18...Nb6 19.Bxh4 d5!

An important move, without which Black would be struggling.

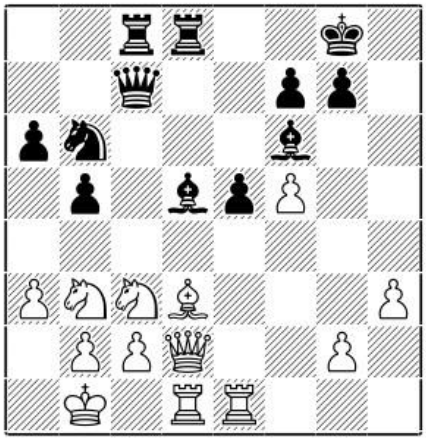


20.Bxf6

20.exd5 Nbxd5 21.Nxd5 Bxd5©

20...Bxf6 21.exd5 Bxd5!

Better than 21...Nxd5 22.Be4.

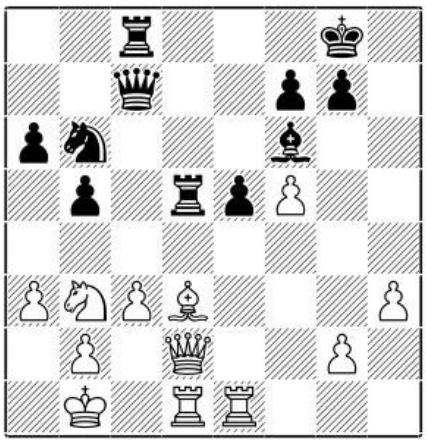


22.Nxd5

22.Ne4 Bxe4 23.Rxe4 Nc4 24.Qe2 Nd6! (24...a5,, was decent for Black in Llorach Gracia – Klengel, corr. 2012, but the text move is even better) 25.Rg4 e4! 26.Bxe4 Nc4 27.Rxd8† Rxd8 28.c3 Nxa3†! 29.Ka2 Nc4 30.Bf3 Qd7 31.Re4 a5 gave Black a strong attack in P. Walsh – Menendez Rodriguez, corr. 2017.

22...Rxd5 23.c3

23.Qe2 must be met by 23...e4! which may lead to a forced draw after: 24.Bxe4 (24.Qxe4? Rcd8 threatens ...Na4 and thus 25.c3 is forced, but 25...Bxc3!µ keeps Black on top) 24...Rxd1† 25.Rxd1 Bxb2 Other moves are playable but for theoretical purposes, this is the cleanest equalizer. 26.Kxb2 Qc3† 27.Kc1 Nc4 28.Rd4 Na5! 29.Nxa5 Qa1† ½–½ Freytag – Au Cardero, corr. 2012. It is worth adding that 30.Kd2 would be met by 30...Qc3†!= with a simple perpetual, rather than 30...Qxd4†?! 31.Qd3 when White keeps some winning chances alive.

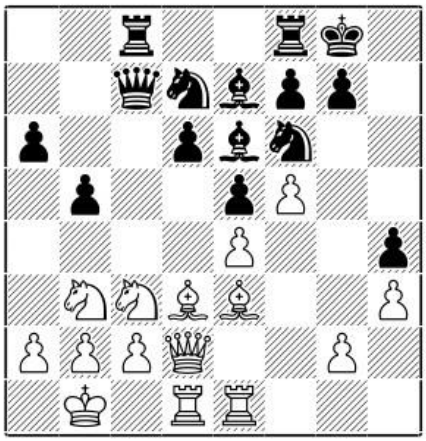


23...Rcd8 24.Qe2

After 24.Qc2 Nc4 25.Bxc4 Rxd1† 26.Rxd1 Rxd1† 27.Qxd1 Qxc4 28.g4 Qe4† 29.Ka2 Qc4 30.Qg1 e4 31.g5 Be7© Black's strong passed pawn and the pin on the enemy knight gave him at least enough play for the pawn in Tiemann – Barria, corr. 2013.

24...Na4 25.Be4 Rxd1† 26.Rxd1 Qxc3 27.Rxd8† Bxd8 28.Ka2 Qg3 29.Nd2 Qf4 30.g4 Bf6

In a balanced position, the players agreed a draw in Mesko – Ylonen, corr. 2015.



16...Bc4 17.g4

After 17.a3 Black has the thematic 17...d5! 18.exd5 Bxa3 when he is not worse at all.

After the text move White's attack looks imposing, but there is that *en passant* rule.

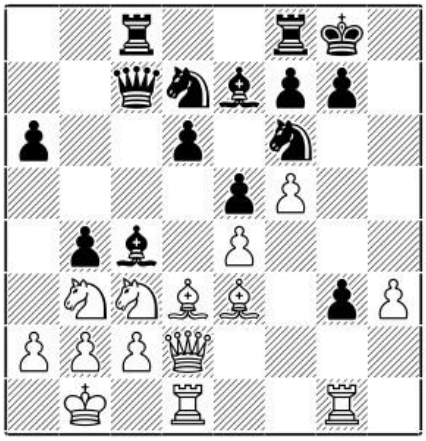
17...hxg3

This may look risky because it opens the g-file, but it does grab a pawn and White may not get it back so easily.

Instead after 17...b4? 18.Nd5 Bxd5 19.exd5 Nxd5 20.g5 Nxe3 21.Qxe3, White's attack was clearly faster in Shyam – Berg, Dubai 2011.

18.Rg1 b4!?

18...Nh5 is also completely viable, and it transposes to the 16.g4!? line in the notes above.



19.Nd5

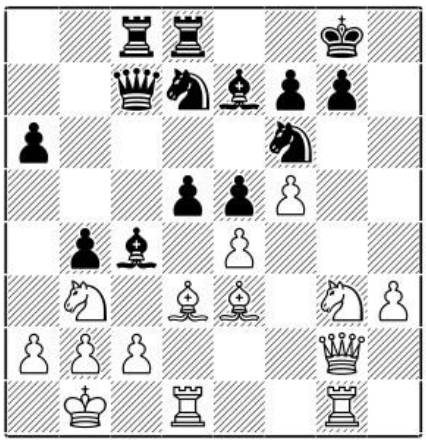
Moving forward is natural, but another reasonable continuation is:

19.Ne2!? d5! 20.Nxg3 Rfd8!

Black's king went the wrong way with 20...Kh8? in Korneev – Alonso Rosell, San Agustin 2012, when 21.Qe2!N± would have already brought Black to the brink of disaster.

21.Qg2

21.exd5 occurred in Sieber – Zsirai, Gyor 2014, when 21...Bxd5! 22.Bxa6 Ra8 23.Qe2 Kf8!?© would have given Black fine prospects.



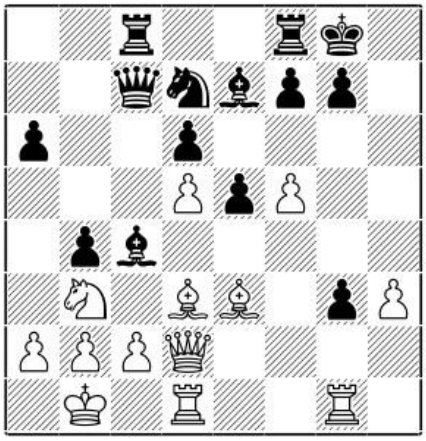
21...Kf8!

21...Bf8 22.Bg5 Qc6= was also reasonable in B. Shulman – Kozlov, corr. 2012, but I prefer the text move.

22.exd5 Bxd5 23.Ne4 Nxe4 24.Bxe4 Bxe4 25.Qxe4 a5,,

Seelig – Morozov, corr. 2017.

19...Nxd5 20.exd5



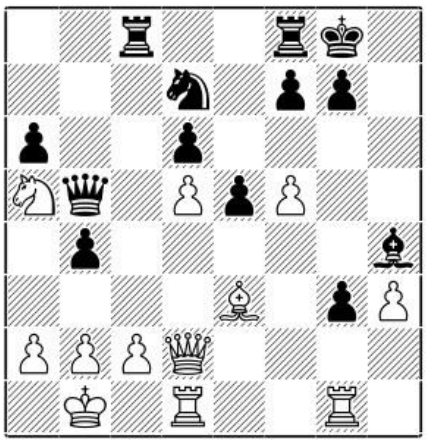
20...Bh4!

There is no reason for Black to make regaining the pawn easy.

21.Bxc4

Georgiev and Kolev give the line 21.Bg5N 21...Bxd3 22.cxd3 Bxg5 23.Qxg5 f6 24.Qxg3 Nb6 which is pretty similar.

21...Qxc4 22.Na5 Qb5



23.Bg5

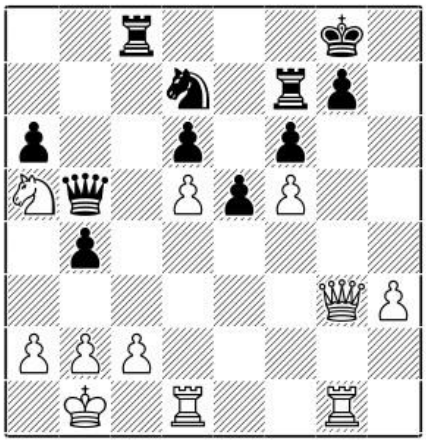
After 23.Nc6? Black has the strong exchange sacrifice 23...Nf6! 24.Ne7† Kh7 25.Nxc8 Rxc8µ when his ideas include ...Nh5 or simply ...a5 with further play on the queenside. Note that White cannot play 26.Bg5? due to 26...Ne4.

23...Bxg5 24.Qxg5 f6

But not 24...Qxa5? 25.Rxg3 when White

breaks through on the kingside.

25.Qxg3 Rf7=



We have been following Andriuschenko – Meiners, corr. 2012. This and a couple of subsequent correspondence games were subsequently drawn, although there is still a lot of play remaining.

B3) 12.Nd5

GAME 14

Thomas Hynes – Amar Djoudi

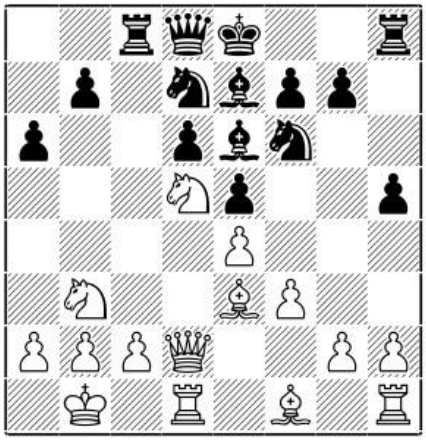
Correspondence 2003

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Be3 e5 7.Nb3 Be6 8.f3 h5 9.Qd2 Nbd7 10.0-0-0 Be7

The game actually continued 10...Rc8 11.Kb1 Be7 but I have changed it to remain consistent with our move order from the previous line – although there is not much to choose between them.

11.Kb1 Rc8 12.Nd5

Georgiev and Kolev call this move "innocuous" and only mention it in a note in *The Sharpest Sicilian 2012*. It has been played in a few hundred games however...



12...Bxd5

Black has also played 12...Nxd5 13.exd5 Bf5 14.Bd3 Bxd3 15.Qxd3 Bg5 in lots of games, but the text move creates more of an imbalance.

13.exd5 Nb6!

Black forces the pace and has scored well from here. Maybe the aforementioned authors were right after all.

14.Bxb6

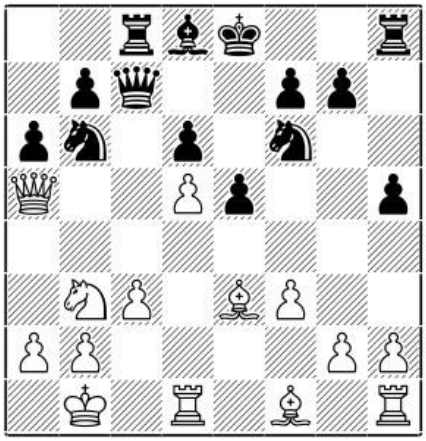
Black also does well after:

14.Qa5 Qc7!

14...Nc4 15.Bxc4 Rxc4 16.Qd2 Qd7 17.Qd3 Rc8 is solid enough, but less interesting.

15.c3 Bd8!

15...Nc4 16.Qxc7 Rxc7 17.Bxc4 Rxc4 18.Na5 Rc7 19.c4² was pleasant for White in Lejsek – Cuttica, corr. 2009.



16.Bxb6

16.g3 0-0 is also fine for Black, as 17.Bh3 can be met by 17...Nc4 18.Qxc7 Rxc7 with equal

play.

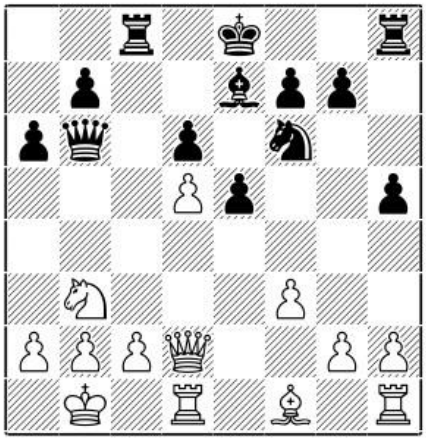
16...Qxb6 17.Qa4†

17.Qxb6 Bxb6³ leaves Black with the stronger bishop and the more useful pawn majority.

17...Kf8

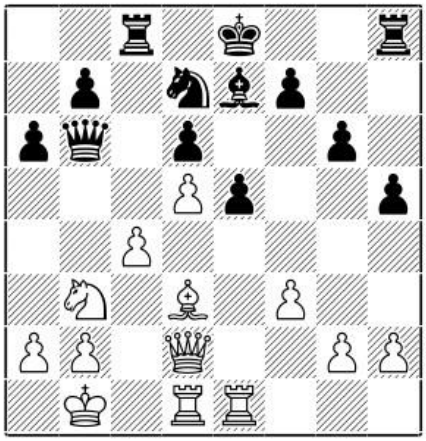
I like Black's position, with ...g6 and ...Kg7 coming next.

14...Qxb6

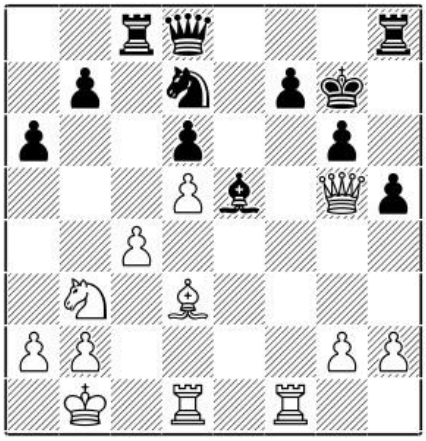


15.Bd3

It is too early to commit to 15.c4?!, for instance: 15...Nd7!? (Black can also play 15...0-0, when 16.Bd3 leads to 16.c4?! in the notes to the main game below) 16.Bd3 g6 17.Rhe1



17...Kf8 (better than 17...f5?! 18.g4! as seen in Tournier – Piceu, Condom 2007) 18.f4 Bf6 (avoiding 18...Kg7? 19.f5 g5 20.f6†!) 19.fxe5 (19.f5 g5³) 19...Bxe5 20.Rf1 Kg7 21.Qg5 Qd8

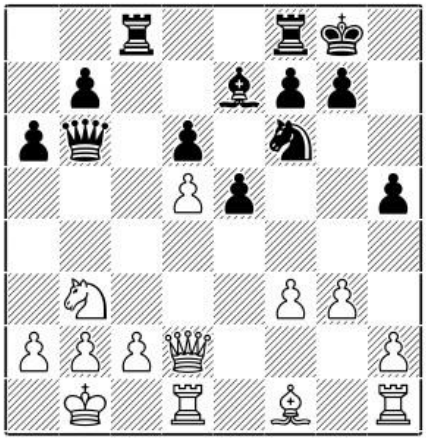


Now 22.Rxf7†? Kxf7–+ simply did not work for White in Bournival – Vigorito, Portsmouth (rapid) 2018, but even after the saner 22.Qxd8 Rhxd8 23.h3 b6 Black is clearly better.

White's other main way to develop his bishop is:

15.g3 0-0!

15...h4!? is also playable, though after 16.Bh3 Black should prefer 16...Rc7N which transposes to the Anand – Sadler game referred to on page 139, rather than 16...Rc4? which left the rook vulnerable in Shabalov – Vigorito, Las Vegas 2000.



16.Bh3 Rc7!

Black has also tried 16...Ra8 intending ...a5, but I prefer the more natural text move.

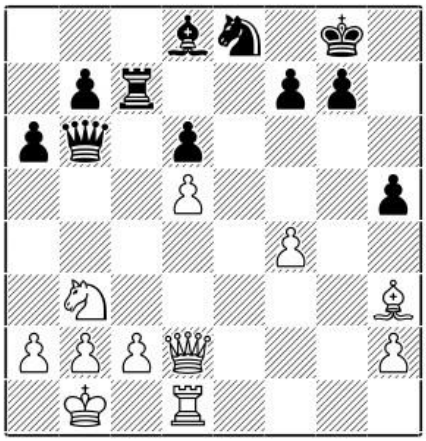
17.Rhe1 Re8 18.f4 exf4

Both 18...e4 19.Bg2 Bf8= (Liu Dede – Wu Shaobin, Singapore 1998) and 18...Bf8 19.fxe5 Rxe5 20.Rxe5 dxe5 21.d6 Rc6 22.d7 Rd6 23.Qe1 Rxd1† 24.Qxd1 Be7 (Moskalyov – Pietrzak, corr. 2013) are also fine.

19.gxf4 Bd8 20.Rxe8† Nxe8

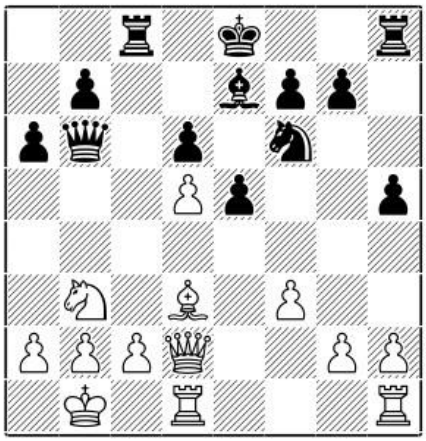
Black soon achieved ideal coordination in

the following game:



21.c3 Nf6 22.Bg2 Re7 23.Nd4 Qc5 24.Nf5 Re8 25.Bf3 Bb6³

Miletic – Cesetti, corr. 2009.



15...0-0!

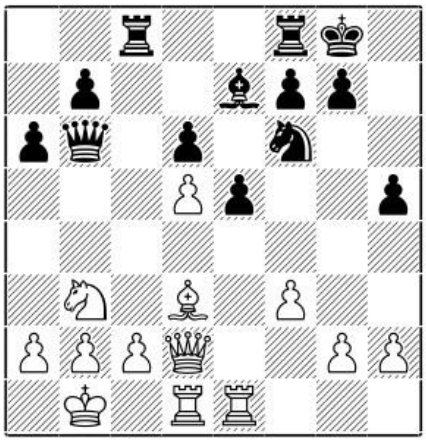
15...g6?! is inferior: 16.Rhe1 Nd7 17.g3 Kf8 (17...Kd8? proved to be even worse after 18.Re4! Nc5 19.Rb4 Qc7 20.Nxc5 dxc5 21.d6+– in Timman – De Firmian, Malmo 1999) 18.f4 Bf6 19.Re4 Nc5?! 20.Nxc5 Rxc5 21.Rf1 White had the initiative in Buraschi – Frostick, England 1999.

It took some time for Black players to realize that despite the early 8...h5, castling can still be the best move here. Black connects his rooks and the king is still relatively safe.

16.Rhe1

16.Bf5?! was played in Balcerak – Ftacnik, Germany 2001; after 16...Rc7³ Black is comfortable.

16.c4?! Rfe8 17.Rhe1 g6 18.f4 Bf8³ was also pleasant for Black in Elburg – Krueger, corr. 2004.



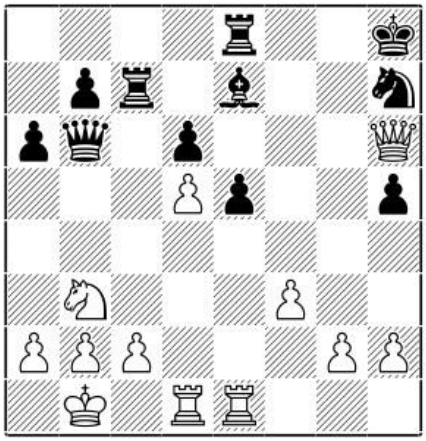
16...Rfe8!

This is a good, flexible move.

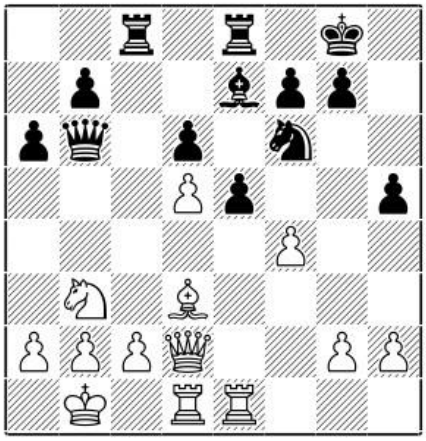
White is able to create more problems after 16...g6 17.f4 Nxd5 18.f5!?©; or 16...Bd8 17.f4! exf4 18.Qxf4 g6 19.h3 Nd7?! 20.g4± Yagupov – Rashkovsky, Ubeda 2000.

17.f4

After 17.Bf5 Rc7 18.Qd3 Black called White's bluff with 18...g6! 19.Bxg6 fxg6 20.Qxg6† Kh8 21.Qh6† Nh7 and soon won:



22.Qxh5 Rec8 23.Re2 a5 24.Nc1 Qb5 25.Nd3 Bf6 26.g4? e4! 27.fxe4 Bxb2 0–1 Malushko – Ankay, corr. 2013.

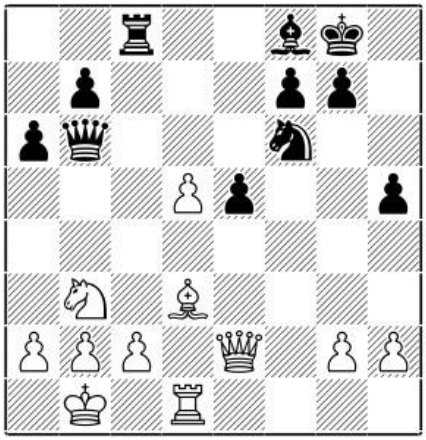


17...Bf8

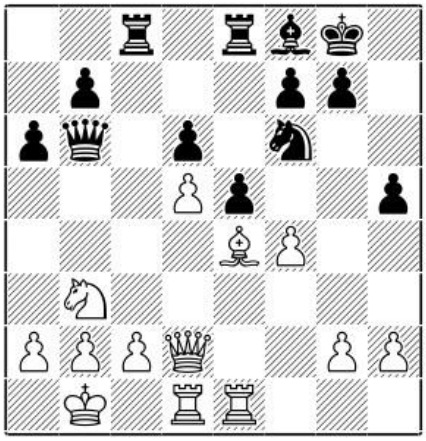
Georgiev and Kolev end their analysis here, claiming that Black has equalized. Nowadays we can see that the computers are already favouring Black. Both kings are pretty safe and Black's extra central pawn is a useful asset.

18.Be4

After 18.fxe5 Rxe5 19.Rxe5 dxe5³ Black stands well. His bishop has gained scope and his pawn majority is more dangerous that White's. A good illustrative game continued: 20.Qe2?



20...e4! 21.Bxe4 Re8 22.Rd4 Bd6 White is already in trouble. 23.a3 (after 23.g3 g6 24.a3 Rxe4 25.Rxe4 Nxe4 26.Qxe4 Qg1†µ Black takes on h2 next and it the clear favourite in the endgame) 23...Be5 24.Rb4 Qg1† 25.Ka2 Qxh2µ Black was much better in Sammut – Ilyasov, corr. 2012, since 26.Rxb7? was impossible due to 26...Bxb2!, ruining White's position.



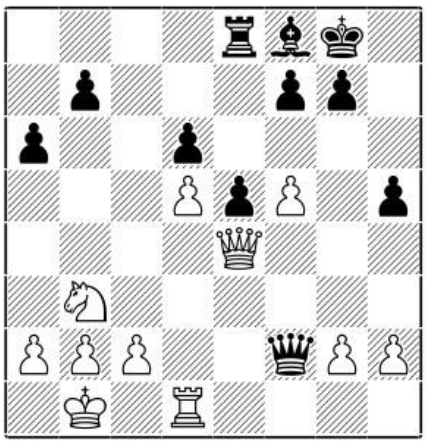
18...Rc4

Also good is: 18...exf4N 19.Qxf4 Re5 (or 19...Nxe4 20.Rxe4 g6³) 20.Bf3 Rce8³

19.Qd3 Rxe4 20.Rxe4 Nxe4 21.Qxe4 Qf2!

Penetrating into White's position.

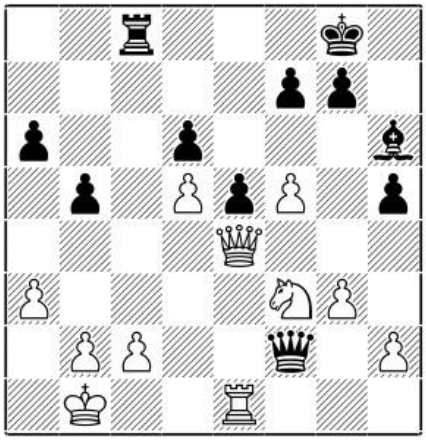
22.f5



22...Be7!

This kind of scenario is not uncommon in the Najdorf. Black's 'bad' bishop springs to life, while White's pawns are vulnerable.

23.Nd2 b5 24.a3 Bg5 25.Nf3 Bf4 26.g3 Bh6 27.Re1 Rc8



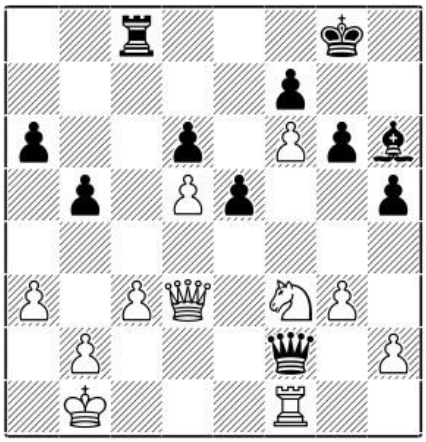
28.f6!?

Looking to drum up counterplay, but in a correspondence game it is easier to keep everything under control. White was struggling anyway though; for instance, 28.Re2 Qf1† 29.Ka2 (or 29.Re1 Rc4!) 29...Rc5 and Black is doing well.

28...Rc4 29.Qd3 g6 30.c3 Rc8!?

A deep decision, especially considering that there were attractive alternatives such as 30...Rc5 and 30...Kh7.

31.Rf1



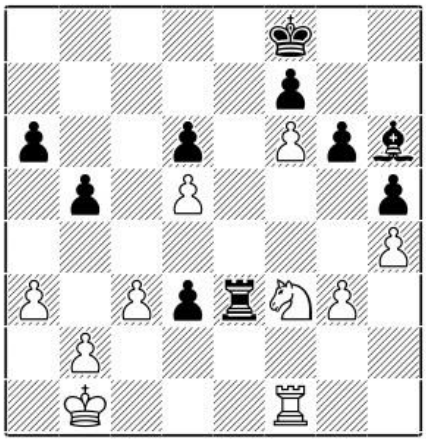
31...e4!

Black uses this tactical possibility to reach a winning endgame.

32.Rxf2 exd3 33.Rf1 Re8 34.h4

34.Rd1 Re3 35.Nd4 Bg5 picks up the f6-pawn, so White tries to restrict the enemy bishop.

34...Kf8 35.Rd1 Re3 36.Rf1



36...Re4! 37.Rd1 Rg4 38.Rxd3 Rxg3 39.Kc2 Rg2† 40.Kb3 Rg4 41.Rd4 Be3

White's pawns will soon drop off after lines such as 42.Rd1 Rf4 or 42.Rxg4 hxg4 43.Ne1 Bb6! followed by ...Bd8; therefore he resigned.

0–1

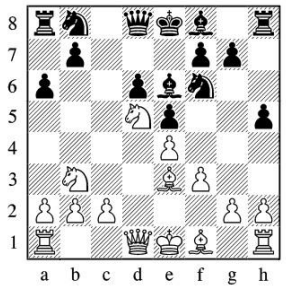
Conclusion

Black's 8...h5! is a justifiably popular choice nowadays. If White wants to switch gears and opt for a positional struggle with Be2, a2-a4 and 0-0, we will get a position resembling the 6.Be2 lines where Black should have few problems, as his ...h5 move is no less weakening and arguably more useful than White's f2-f3.

It is both natural and logical for White to 'continue what he started' and play 9.Qd2 Nbd7 10.0-0-0, when 10...Be7 11.Kb1 Rc8 reaches an important tabiya. One logical option for White is to continue his development with 12.Bd3 and play for an f3-f4 break, which leads to tense positions where Black has to balance defence and counterattack. An important point is the emergence of 15...0-0! in the main line. This has been well analysed but there is still room for new discoveries. Finally, White often forces the play and fixes the pawn structure with 12.Nd5, which was once the main line of the 8...h5 system. Here too, Black's well-timed 15...0-0! solves all of his opening problems and enables him to fight for the

initiative.

Chapter 6



9.♘d5

Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.♗e3 e5 7.♘b3 ♗e6 8.f3 h5 9.♘d5 ♗xd5 10.exd5 ♘bd7 11.♕d2 g6!

A) 12.Na5 156

B) 12.0-0-0 Nb6 164

B1) 13.Qa5 Bh6! 14.Bxh6 Rxh6 165

B11) 15.Qd2 166

B12) 15.Kb1 168

B2) 13.Kb1!? 171

B21) 13...Nfxd5! *Game 15* 171

B22) 13...Nbxd5!? 175

C) 12.Be2 Bg7! 13.0-0 b6! 14.c4 0-0 176

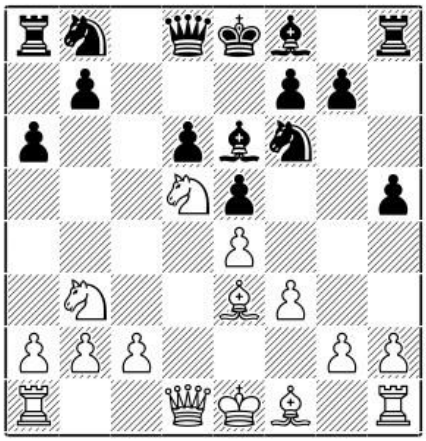
C1) 15.Rae1 180

C2) 15.Rac1 182

C21) 15...Kh7!? 184

C22) 15...Re8 *Game 16* 185

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Be3 e5 7.Nb3 Be6 8.f3 h5 9.Nd5



Very often in chess, we should strive to keep the tension, but here this forcing move looks the most dangerous.

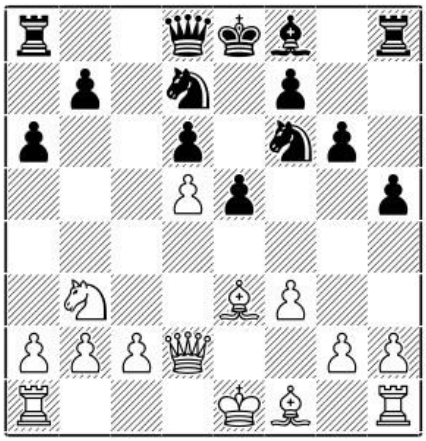
9...Bxd5 10.exd5 Nbd7 11.Qd2

Black has frequently played two different moves, but today the consensus is that one is clearly superior.

11...g6!

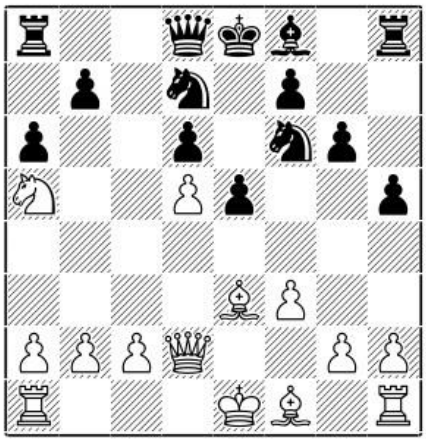
Black must avoid lazily playing 11...Be7?! 12.Be2 when White will castle short and play c2-c4. This is just not dynamic enough for Black.

11...Qc7 is the more serious alternative which used to be popular at high levels, and which Ftacnik recommended in *Grandmaster Repertoire 6*. Black ensures that Na5 will not come with gain of tempo, but apart from that the queen does not have much to do on c7. I think that 12.Rc1!? may be the smartest reply against it, but further details are not relevant for us. The main point is that developing the kingside immediately is more flexible. The same type of decision takes place later in the chapter, in variation C on page 177, and I will compare the two different approaches in more detail there.



White has three main options: he can move ahead on the queenside with **A)** 12.Na5, take an aggressive stance with **B)** 12.0-0-0, or prepare short castling with **C)** 12.Be2.

A) 12.Na5



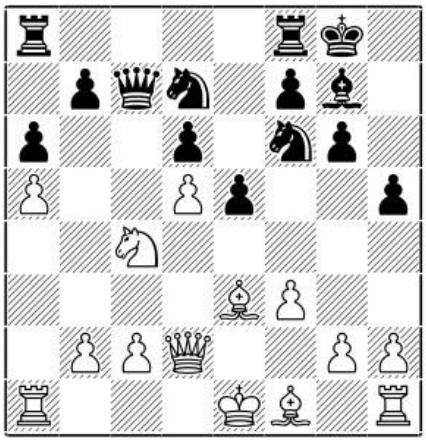
White attacks the b-pawn and prepares a queenside advance.

12...Qc7

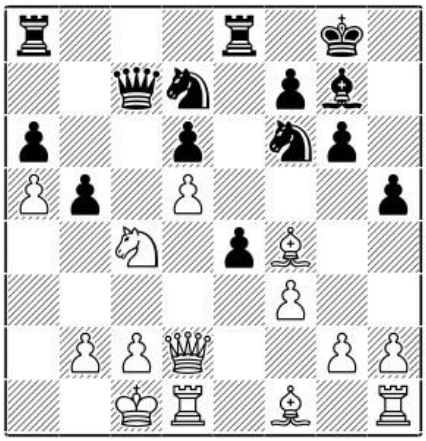
Black has to protect the b7-pawn.

13.Be2

Another possibility is:
13.a4 Bg7 14.Nc4 0-0 15.a5
This plan is a rarity in over-the-board praxis but it has seen action in correspondence play. Black's thematic route to counterplay is:



15...e4! 16.0-0-0 Rfe8 17.Bf4
And now we have a most surprising resource:
17...b5!
The passive 17...Bf8 has held up well, but the text move works perfectly.



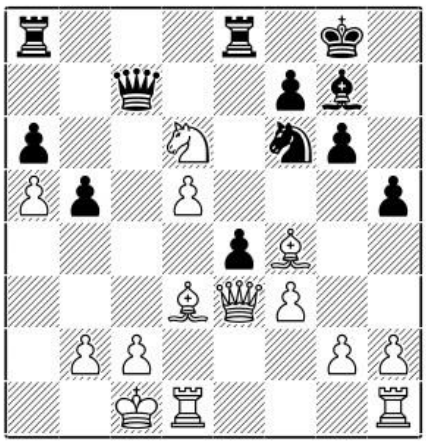
18.Nxd6
18.Bxd6? Qd8 19.Na3 (19.Ne3 exf3 20.gxf3 Bh6! 21.Re1 Ne5! is crushing) 19...e3 20.Qe1 Rc8 gives Black an overwhelming position.

18...Nc5 19.Qe3

19.Nxe8?? Nb3† will pick up the queen with check.

19...Nd3† 20.Bxd3

Now Black has a choice:



20...exd3!?

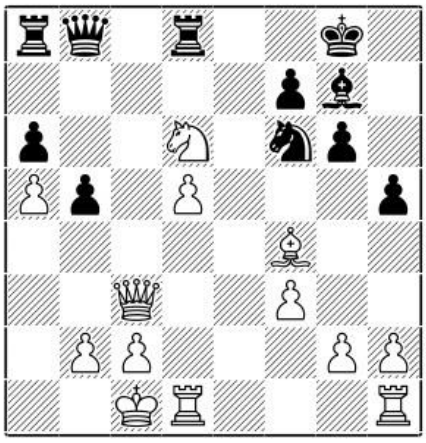
This is the fighting option.

20...Nxd5 21.Qd2 Nc3! forces a draw if Black wants it, for instance: 22.Nxe8 Qxa5 23.Qxc3!? (or 23.Qe3 Na2† 24.Kb1 Nc3†=) 23...Bxc3 24.bxc3 Black has various perpetuals but no more.

21.Qxd3

21.Nxe8?? Qxc2# Surprise!

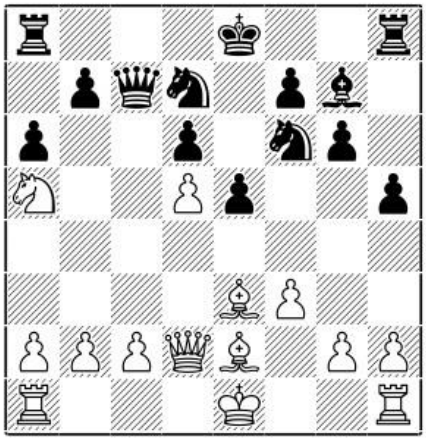
21...Red8 22.Qc3 Qb8



23.Rhe1 Rxd6 24.Bxd6 Qxd6 25.Qc6 Rd8 26.Qxd6 Rxd6

The endgame is balanced and two correspondence games have been drawn from this position, but in a practical game there would be chances for both sides.

13...Bg7



This position may also arise after 12.Be2 Bg7 13.Na5 Qc7. Regardless of how we get here, I would like to draw your attention to a vital point. In the great majority of games, White proceeds with c2-c4 and 0-0 in one order or another. Whichever move he starts with, Black should be sure to respond with 14...e4! to generate enough counterplay. If he delays it by castling, the moment will have passed, for reasons that will be explained.

14.c4

I will take this as the main line, simply because it has been played most frequently.

Changing gears with 14.0-0-0?! has been tried but it looks too risky after 14...Nb6! (rather than 14...Rc8 as in Anand – Kramnik, Dortmund 2004), and after 15.Bxb6 (or 15.Bg5 0-0³) 15...Qxb6³ Black is doing well.

An equally good move order is:

14.0-0

This should just transpose to our main line, although for some reason, in many games this move order has lulled Black into following suit and castling. Instead, he should of course play:

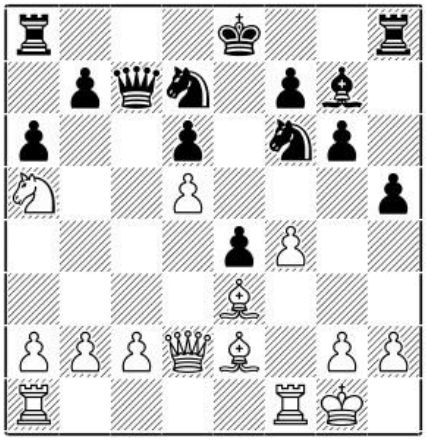
14...e4!

14...0-0?! 15.c4 is discussed under 14...0-0?! 15.0-0 in the notes to the main line below.

15.f4

Most games have continued 15.c4, transposing to our main line.

The text move should be met by:

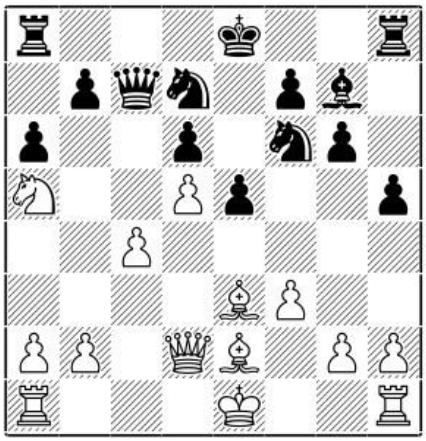


15...Ng4!N

Black castled in one game but, as stated previously, this is the wrong idea.

16.Bxg4 hxg4

To get the most out this structure, Black needs to have his rook on the h-file, hence the need to delay castling. After 17.c4 we transpose to the note to White's 15th move in the main line below, where the analysis continues.



14...e4!

If Black lazily plays 14...0-0?! 15.0-0 e4, then 16.f4! Ng4 17.Bxg4 hxg4 gives White a pleasant choice between 18.Rab1 and 18.Rad1, in both cases preparing b2-b4. Correspondence games have shown White's advantage here – Black does not have a rook on the open h-file and his counterplay is too slow.

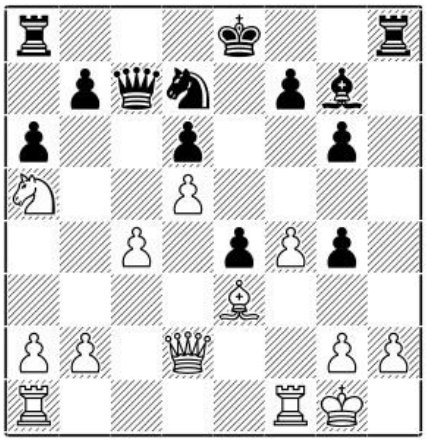
15.0-0

White has nothing better.

15.f4?!

As explained above, this should be met by:

15...Ng4! 16.Bxg4 hxg4 17.0-0



This is the natural place for White's king, but the open h-file has its benefits.

17...Nc5!

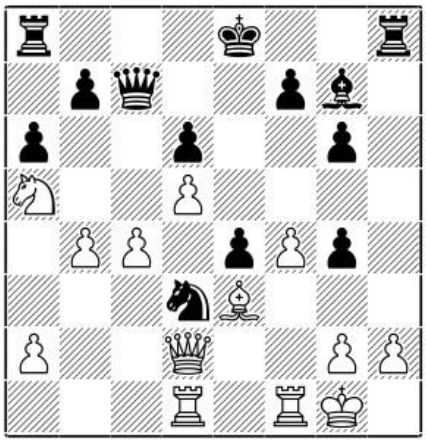
This looks better than 17...f5, after which 18.Rab1 Nc5 19.b4 Nd3 20.c5 Qf7 21.Nc4 was messy in Mamedov – Korobov, Moscow 2011.

18.Rad1N

18.f5 was tried in Mullick – Nigmatov, Sharjah 2019. Black has more than one good reply but my choice would be: 18...Be5!N 19.g3 gxf5 20.Rxf5 f6µ

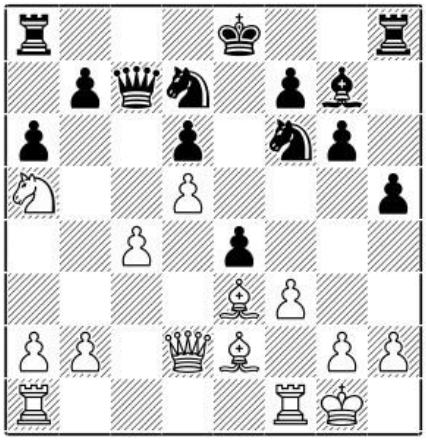
18...Nd3 19.b4

Up to now we have been following the analysis of Georgiev and Kolev. My improvement is:



19...Rh5!

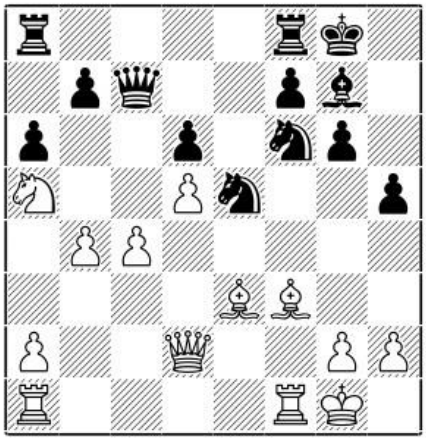
With a clear advantage. (The aforementioned authors offer 19...b5 20.c5 Rh5 as favouring Black, but it seems to me that 20.f5! Be5 21.g3 gxf5 22.Rxf5 f6 23.Qg2 Qh7 24.Rdf1 is not so clear.)



15...exf3 16.gxf3

This recapture enables White to keep more control of the centre at the cost of weakening his king's position.

The opposite is true after:
16.Bxf3 0-0 17.b4 Ne5



18.Rac1

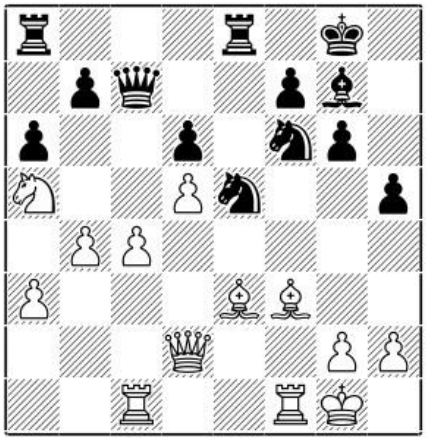
18.c5 Rae8 19.Rad1 Nxf3† 20.Rxf3 Ne4 21.Qc2 b6 22.Nc6 dxc5 23.bxc5 bxc5 24.Bxc5 Be5,, also gave Black plenty of play in Wegelin – Williamson, corr. 2010.

18...Rfe8

After 18...Nxf3† 19.Rxf3 Ng4 20.Bf4 Ne5 21.Bxe5 Bxe5 22.c5 dxc5 23.bxc5 Bxh2† 24.Kh1 White had more than enough for the pawn in Robson – Ruiz, Columbus 2017.

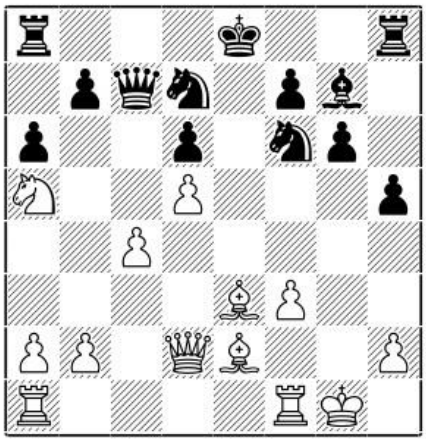
19.a3?!

19.Bd4 was better, although Black has counterplay after 19...Nxf3† 20.Rxf3 Ne4 21.Qd3 Bxd4† 22.Qxd4 Re5, and if 23.c5? dxc5 24.bxc5 Rd8µ it becomes clear that White is overextended.



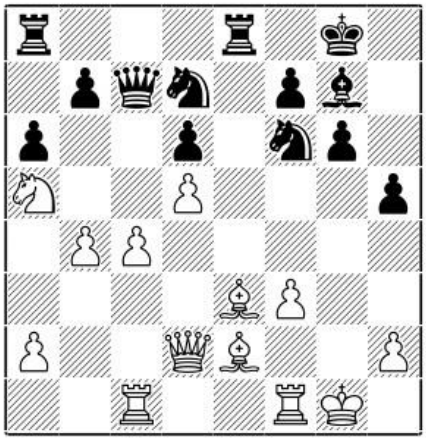
19...Nxf3† 20.Rxf3 Ng4 21.Bf4 Re4 22.c5 Rd4 23.Rd3 Rxf4! 24.Qxf4 Bh6 25.Qf1 b6!µ

White's pawn structure fell apart in Petrelli – Laube, corr. 2010.



16...0-0 17.Rac1 Rfe8 18.b4

White's plans are clear – he wants to roll on the queenside. Black's position looks quite healthy, but it is less obvious what he should do. In practice, Black has tried several different approaches.



18...Rxe3!?

This positional exchange sacrifice was brought into the limelight in 2014 by Gelfand in his game against Caruana, but it had been seen in a couple of correspondence games before that. Black will quickly activate his pieces and his strong bishop may cause problems on the c1-h6 diagonal.

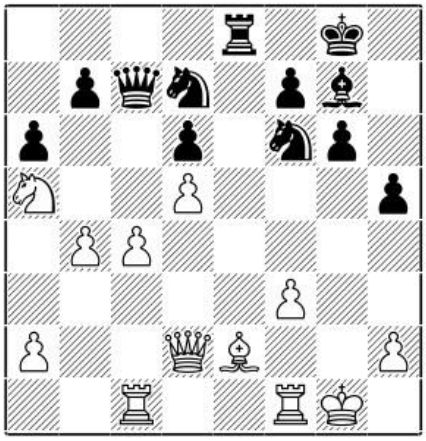
The direct 18...Re7!? 19.Rf2 Rae8 works well for Black after 20.Bd4? Ng4! (20...Kh7³ intending ...Bh6 was nice for Black in Bodek – Molner, Arlington 2013, but the text move is even stronger) 21.fxg4 Bxd4 22.Qxd4 Rxe2 23.Rxe2 Rxe2 24.gxh5 Ne5! 25.Rf1 gxh5–+, but 20.Bg5 and 20.Bf4 are significantly better tries.

Nowadays in correspondence games, 18...Ne5!? is the hot move. After 19.c5 Qd7 20.c6 bxc6 21.dxc6 Qe7 22.c7 Rac8÷ almost anything could happen, but Black has done well here too.

Various other options like 18...h4, 18...Rac8, and 18...Rad8 have also been tried.

19.Qxe3 Re8 20.Qd2

20.Qf2 is playable although 20...Bh6 21.f4 Re4 wins the f4-pawn immediately, as in Usmanoff – Susla, corr. 2014.

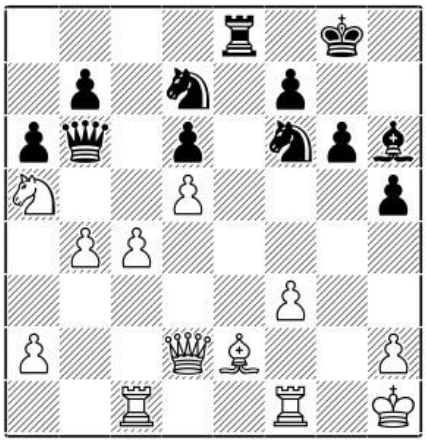


20...Bh6!?

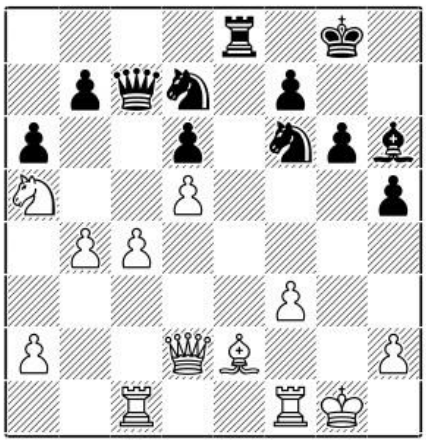
Black is willing to part with his prized bishop in order to penetrate into White's position with his rook and nimble knights.

Instead 20...Kh7?! is slow is view of 21.Kh1!N (rather than 21.Nb3 Bh6 22.f4 Ne4 23.Qe1 Ndf6 when Black had decent counterplay in Caruana – Gelfand, Baku 2014) 21...Bh6 22.f4 Ne4 23.Qc2 (or 23.Qd4) when Black's compensation is in question.

Black's most common choice has been 20...Qb6†?! but I believe it is better to hold this check in reserve. After 21.Kh1 Bh6 White does well with:



22.f4! (better than 22.Qxh6 Rxe2,, 23.a3? Qd4–+ 24.Qg5 Ng4! 25.Qh4 Qe5 0–1 Slovak – Pulpan, Ricany 201722...Ne4 23.Qe1 Nef6 24.Rc2! Other moves are possible but this is the most convincing. After 24...Ng4 25.c5 dxc5 26.Nc4 Qf6 27.Qg3 Qf5 28.Qd3 Qxd3 29.Bxd3 Black's counterplay is insufficient, as evidenced by his dismal score in correspondence games from this position.



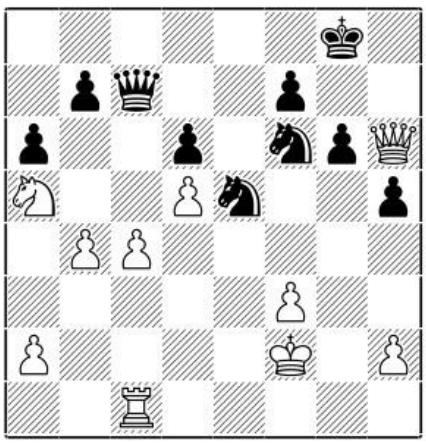
21.f4!?

White declines the invitation to trade bishops.

The alternative is:

21.Qxh6 Rxe2 22.Rf2 Rxf2 23.Kxf2 Ne5

At first the engines are not so happy about Black's position, but in correspondence games it has proven to be 'simply a draw'. Of course, in a practical game any result would still be possible. Note that Black's last move threatens to win White's queen with the pseudo-sac on g4. We will follow a couple of examples:



24.Qd2

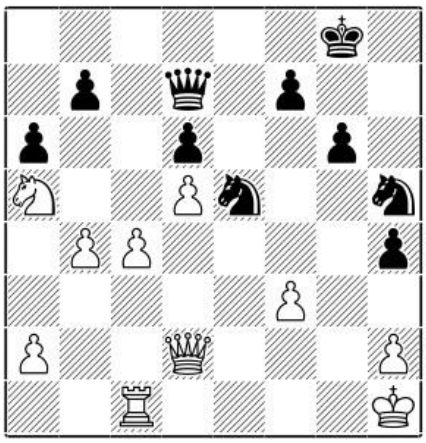
24.Ke2 is a very 'computery' move but it did not affect the outcome in the following game: 24...Qd7! Eyeing both the a4- and h3-squares. 25.Qf4 Kg7! 26.Qd4 Qh3 27.Rf1 Qxh2† 28.Rf2 Qg3 29.Nxb7 h4,, 30.Nxd6 h3 31.Rf1 h2 32.Qf2 Nh5 (32...Qf4N also looks good enough) The position remained tense yet balanced and a draw eventually ensued in Kazoks – Barkov, corr. 2016.

24...Qd7! 25.Kg2 h4

25...Qf5N 26.Rf1 h4 is also possible.

26.Kh1 Nh5

26...Nxf3? 27.Qf2 leaves Black in a mess.

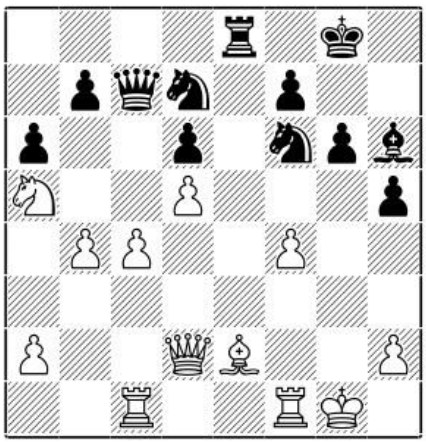


27.f4 Nxf4! 28.Qxf4 Nd3 29.Qg5 Nxc1 30.Qxc1 Qf5

Despite his extra piece, White has no winning chances. This is a typical theme: the a5-knight is too far west to participate and White cannot avoid perpetual check.

31.Qe3

½–½ Szczepankiewicz – Delizia, corr. 2017.

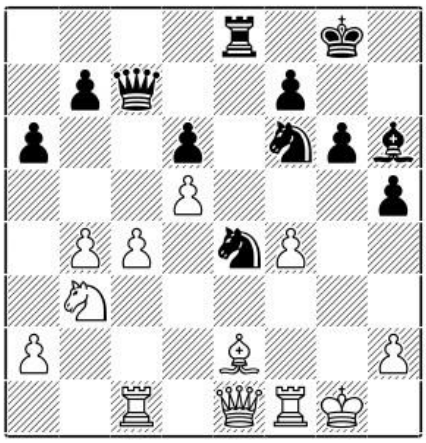


21...Ne4 22.Qe1

After the untried 22.Qd4N the switchback 22...Qd8!? looks like a good move, heading to the kingside.

22...Ndf6 23.Nb3

23.Bd3N 23...Nc5 24.Qd2 Nxd3 25.Qxd3 enables Black to snatch a pawn with 25...Qb6† 26.Kh1 (or 26.c5 dxc5 27.Nc4 Qa7) 26...Qxb4© while maintaining some initiative.



23...b5!?

An ambitious attempt to break up White's pawns. 23...Qd7© was also possible.

24.Kh1

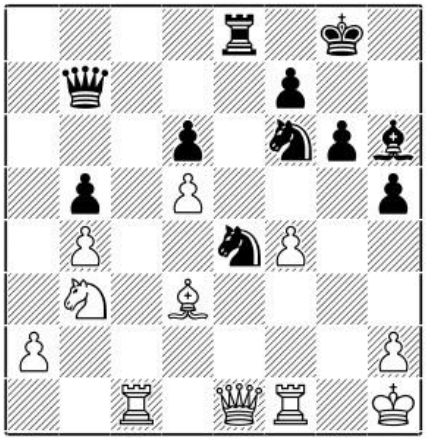
It would be risky for White to try:

24.cxb5?! Qb6† 25.Kh1 axb5

White's position remains playable but he could easily get into trouble.

26.Bd3 Qb7

26...Qa6!? 27.Na5 Qa8 28.Rc6 Qa7 29.Bxe4 Nxe4© is a valid alternative.



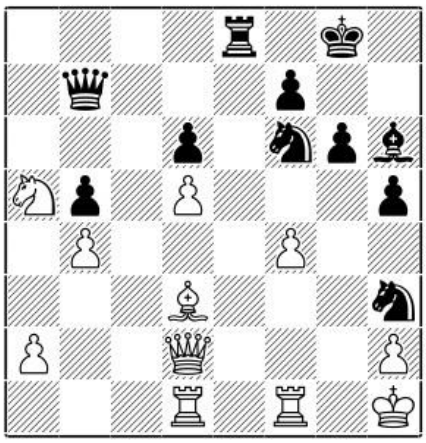
27.Rd1 Ng5!

27...Bxf4!? 28.Rxf4 Nc3! 29.Qxc3 Qxd5† 30.Kg1 Qg5† 31.Kh1 Qd5†= forces a draw if Black wants it.

28.Qd2

After 28.Qg3 h4! (but not 28...Qxd5†?! 29.Qg2) 29.Qg2 h3 30.Qf2 (30.Qg3? Qxd5† 31.Kg1 Re3!–+) 30...Ng4 31.Qg3 Qxd5† 32.Kg1 Ne3 the complications favour Black.

28...Nh3 29.Na5



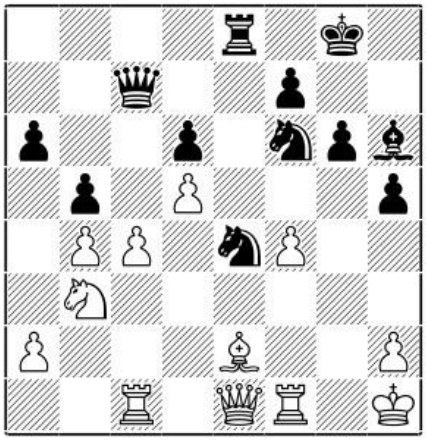
29...Qd7!µ

29...Qxd5† 30.Qg2 Qxg2† 31.Kxg2 Nxf4† 32.Kh1 Nxd3 33.Rxd3 Ne4 34.Nc6 is unclear.

The text move proves to be good for Black, although even the engines take a while to realize this. The a5-knight remains far from the action and there are all kinds of tricks on the kingside. For example:

30.Nc6?! Nxf4! 31.Rxf4 Nxd5–+

Perhaps the most prudent choice was 24.Qd1!?N 24...Qd7 25.Qd3 with unclear play.



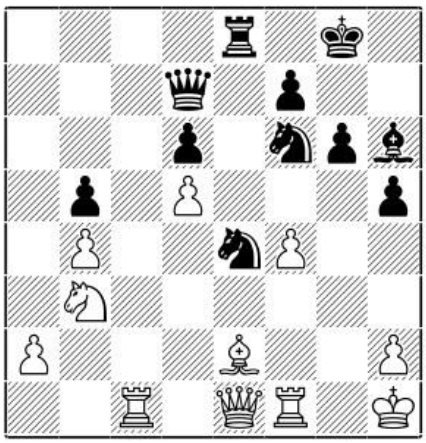
24...Qd7 25.cxb5

25.Qd1? would have allowed a quick kill: 25...Ng3†! 26.hxg3 Qh3† 27.Kg1 Qxg3† 28.Kh1 Re3–+

25...axb5!N

The game continued 25...Nxd5 and Black won after further adventures in Tomczak – Swiercz, Poznan 2016, but the d5-pawn is not so important.

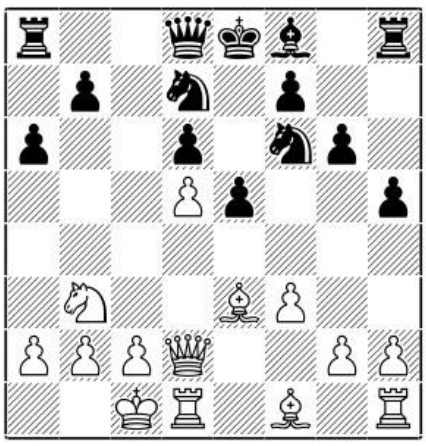
The text move is a simple but significant improvement. The position remains messy but Black has the safer king, which is more important than White's extra exchange. It is actually not so easy to find a move for White. For example:



26.Rf3 Ng4!

Intending ...Qa7, with threats from all angles.

B) 12.0-0-0



This move leads to a different type of struggle. White aims for sharp play with castling on opposite sides.

12...Nb6

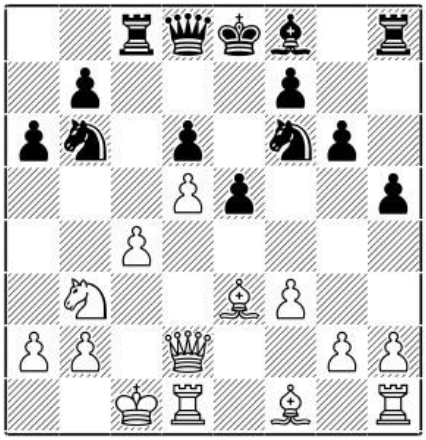
The natural-looking 12...Bg7?! 13.Kb1 0-0 proved to be too slow after 14.h3! e4 15.f4 b5 16.f5!± in Meulemans – Mueller Alves, corr. 2010.

The text move is a typical idea; Black looks to force the pace by attacking the d5-pawn. White used to automatically defend it with the straightforward **B1)** 13.Qa5, but more recently the gambit continuation **B2)** 13.Kb1!? has completely taken over as the main line.

White can also play:

13.c4 Rc8

13...Qc7!?N transposes to another game: after 14.Qa5 Bh6 15.Bxh6 Rxh6 16.Kb1 Nfd7 17.Qd2 Rh8 18.Rc1 Na4 Black had a pleasant position in Topalov – Wojtaszek, Rhodes 2013.

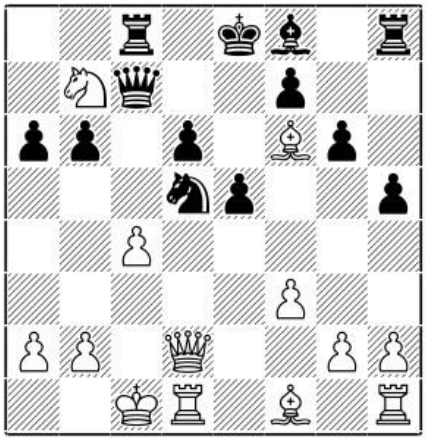


14.Na5 Nbxd5

I also checked 14...Nfxd5N but after 15.Bg5 Qxg5 16.Qxg5 Bh6 17.Qxh6 Rxh6 18.Nxb7 Kd7 19.Kb1!? Black still has to work to prove full equality.

15.Bg5 b6! 16.Nb7 Qc7 17.Bxf6

Black's most convincing equalizer is pointed out by Ftacnik:



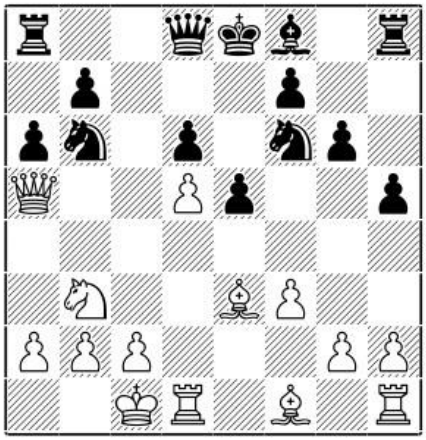
17...Bh6!N

17...Nxf6 18.Nxd6† Bxd6 19.Qxd6 Nd7 20.Be2 a5 certainly should have been tenable for Black in Dominguez Perez – Ponomariov, Dortmund 2016, but in the game White managed to maintain nagging pressure and eventually won.

18.Bg5 Bxg5 19.Qxg5 Qxb7 20.Kb1 Qe7 21.Qxe7† Nxe7 22.Rxd6 Rc6

Ftacnik ends the line here and calls it equal, which seems accurate.

B1) 13.Qa5



13...Bh6!

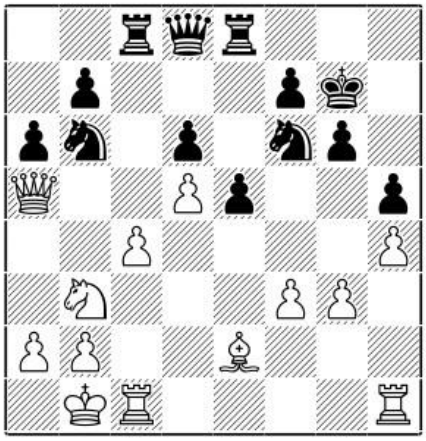
Black defends the knight by tactical means, while forcing the strategically desirable exchange of bishops.

14.Bxh6 Rxh6

We have another split between **B11)** 15.Qd2 and **B12)** 15.Kb1.

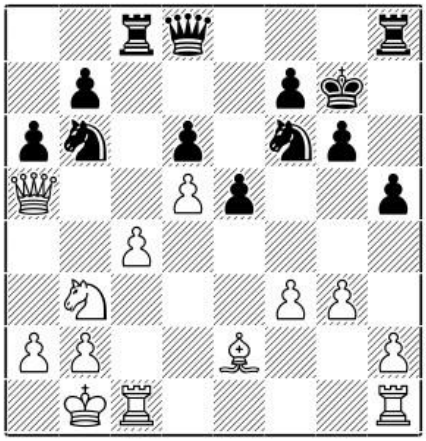
Here are a few brief examples of other moves:

15.h4 Kf8 16.g3 Kg7 17.Kb1 Rh8 18.c4 Re8 19.Be2 Rc8 20.Rc1



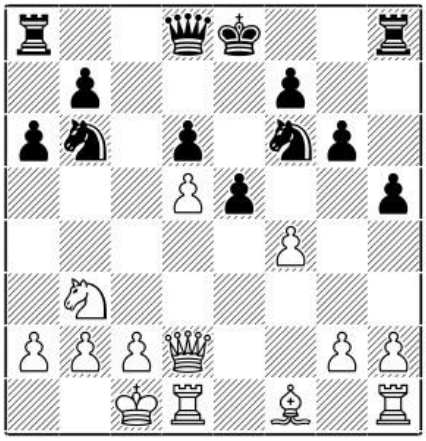
20...e4! 21.f4 e3 22.Rhg1 Ne4³ Black was doing well in Leko – Ivanchuk, Mukachevo (rapid) 2009.

15.g3 Kf8 16.Kb1 Kg7 (16...Nbd7!?N was worth considering) 17.Be2 Rh8 18.c4 Rc8 19.Rc1



19...Nbd7! Black was fine in Gulevich – Mercader Martinez, corr. 2016. (On the other hand, 19...Nfd7?! 20.Rhd1 Rc7 21.Qa3 Nc8 22.Nd2 gave White some pressure in Topalov – Wojtaszek, Skopje 2015.)

B11) 15.Qd2 Rh8 16.f4



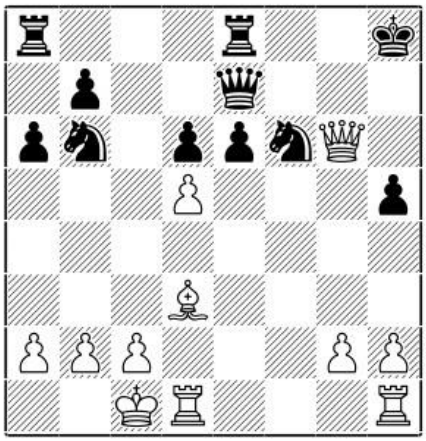
This direct approach can be tricky, but Black should be fine with accurate play.

16...exf4 17.Qxf4 Kf8 18.Bd3 Kg7

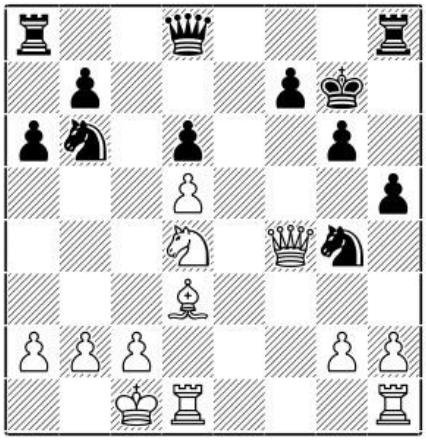
18...Nbxd5?! 19.Qg5 was unnecessarily risky for Black in Ponomariov – Wang Hao, Danzhou 2017.

19.Nd4 Ng4

19...Re8 seems playable as well although it gives White a bit too much freedom for my taste. Among other options, he can force the play with: 20.Ne6†!? fxe6 21.Qg5 Qe7 22.Qxg6† Kh8



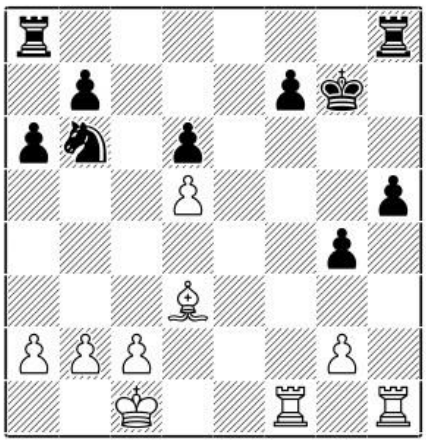
23.Rhf1 Nbxd5 24.c4 Qg7 25.cxd5 Rec8† 26.Kb1 Qxg6 27.Bxg6 Kg7 28.Bc2 Nxd5 with equality in Zaas – Biedermann, corr. 2013.



20.Rhf1

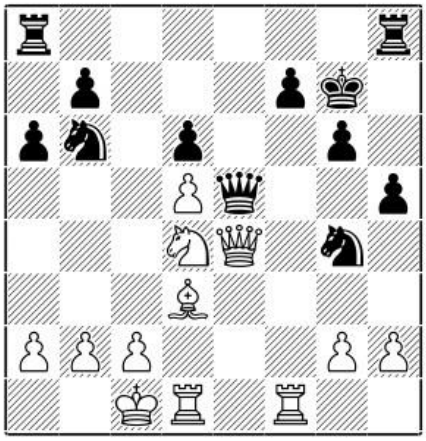
This seems best, which is hardly surprising, given that it has been the universal choice in correspondence games.

20.h3 gave Black no problems after: 20...Qf6! (20...Ne5 is playable but the text move is more convincing) 21.Nf5† gxf5 22.hxg4 fxg4 23.Qxf6† Kxf6 24.Rdf1† Kg7



25.Rf5 Nd7 26.Rg5† Kf6 27.Rgxh5 Rxh5 28.Rxh5 Ne5=/³ White managed to regain the pawn but still had slightly the worse of the endgame in Lei Tingjie – Wang Jue, China 2017.

20...Qf6 21.Qe4 Qe5



22.Ne6†!

Without this move, White would be much worse.

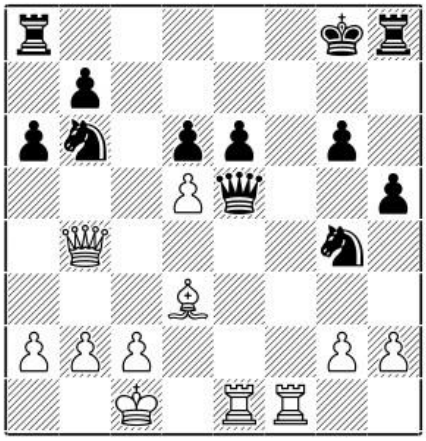
22...Kg8 23.Qb4 fxe6

Correspondence games have demonstrated that a draw is the correct outcome after accurate play.

24.Rde1

24.Qxb6?! Qe3† 25.Qxe3 Nxe3 wins the exchange, although White should still be able to hold after 26.dxe6.

24.dxe6 is conveniently met by 24...Qc5 25.Qxc5 dxc5, threatening ...Ne3, when White has enough compensation for the piece to hold the balance, but nothing more.



24...Qxd5!

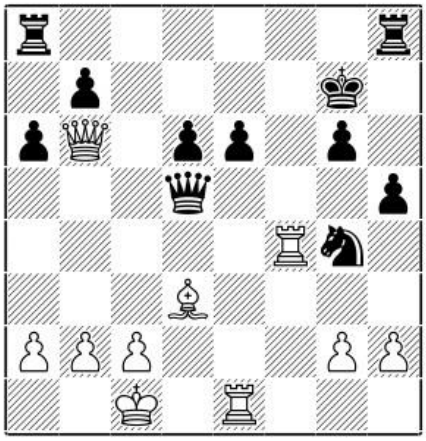
24...Qg5† should also draw, but I consider it slightly less accurate: 25.Kb1 Ne3 (25...Nxd5?! 26.Qxb7 Rf8 27.Rxf8† Kxf8 28.Rxe6 is too dangerous) Now White regained material with 26.h4! Qg3 (26...Qg4 27.Rf4 will lead to the same thing) 27.Rf3, and although a draw was soon agreed in Korze – De Oliveira, corr. 2011, Black would still have to be slightly careful in a practical game.

25.Qxb6 Kg7

Black has connected his rooks and still has an extra pawn. White has enough play to maintain the balance, but not for an advantage.

26.Rf4

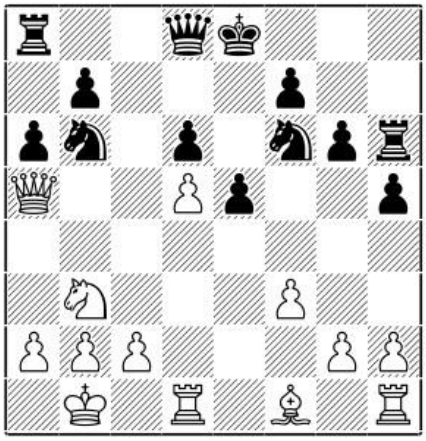
26.Be4 Qg5† 27.Kb1 Qe7 defends conveniently.



26...Ne5 27.Rd4 Qxg2 28.Rxd6 Nxd3† 29.Rxd3 Raf8=

A draw was soon agreed in Pinho – Kunzelmann, corr. 2012.

B12) 15.Kb1



As is often the case in these positions, improving his king is White's most popular and flexible continuation.

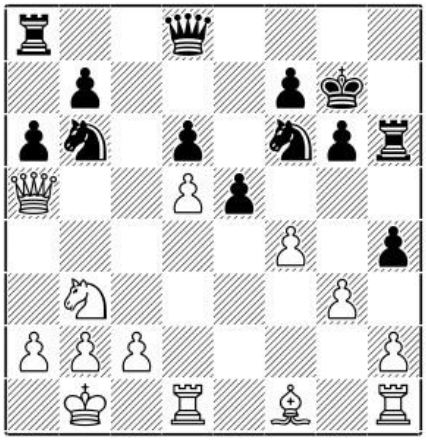
15...Kf8

Black tucks the king away. Both 15...Rc8 and 15...Nbd7!? are good alternatives.

16.c4

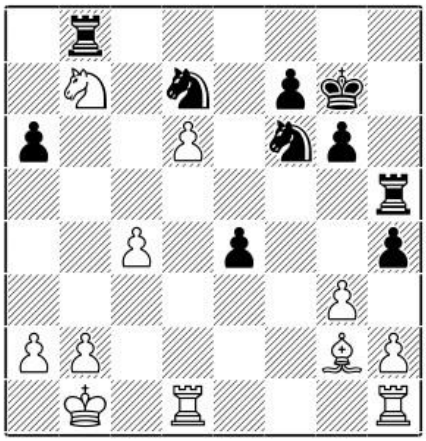
This is certainly an ambitious move although Black has done pretty well against it.

White can also play on the kingside with:
16.g3 Kg7 17.f4
Other moves will transpose elsewhere. For instance, 17.h4 is the Leko – Ivanchuk game referred to on page 165, and 17.Be2 is Topalov – Wojtaszek, Skopje 2015, also on page 165.
17...h4
17...Nbd7 is a valid alternative.
After the text move, several correspondence games have continued:



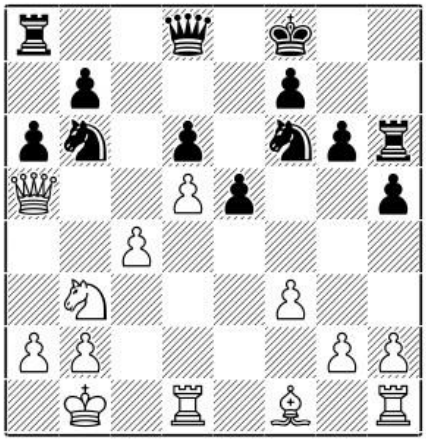
18.fxe5 dxe5 19.d6 Nbd7 20.Bg2 Qxa5 21.Nxa5 e4 22.Nxb7 Rh5 23.c4 Rb8

The only way for White to save his knight is by returning his extra pawn:



24.c5 Nxc5 25.Nxc5 Rxc5=

A draw ensued in Horvat – Serradimigni, corr. 2013, and several subsequent games.



16...Kg7 17.g3 Rh8 18.Rc1 Rc8!?

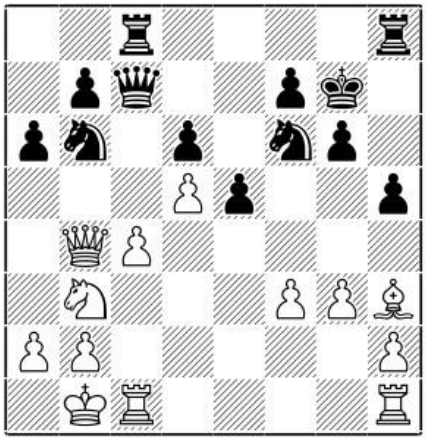
Georgiev and Kolev offer 18...Nbd7 as equal. This is certainly a solid choice as it restrains c4-c5, and the correspondence games have, as usual, been drawn.

The text move is more ambitious, as Black hopes that the knight will be more active where it stands.

19.Qb4 Qc7 20.Bh3

In the event of 20.Qd2N Black can improve his position with 20...Nbd7 or 20...Rhe8.

The text move gives Black the opportunity for an enterprising sacrifice.



20...Nxc4!?

This offers Black at least equal chances if followed up correctly.

If you prefer a quieter approach, you can also consider:

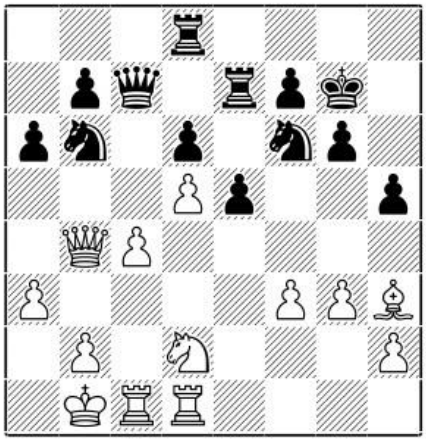
20...Rce8

This also looks quite playable, as the Anand – Topalov game quoted below is not the end of the world for Black.

21.Rhd1 Re7

21...e4?! was well met by 22.c5! Nbxd5 23.Rxd5 Nxd5 24.Qd4† Nf6 25.cxd6 and although Black was able to survive in Soares – Soberano, corr. 2010, the whole line is too risky for my taste.

22.a3 Rd8 23.Nd2



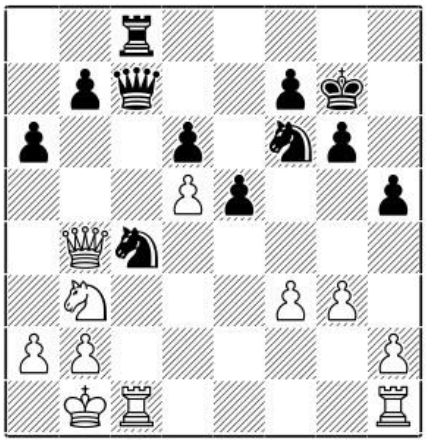
23...e4!

Improving over 23...Nbd7 24.Qc3 a5 25.Bxd7 Nxd7 26.f4! as played in the well-known game Anand – Topalov, Wijk aan Zee 2008, which heightened enthusiasm for White's strategy.

24.fxe4 Nxe4 25.Nxe4 Rxe4 26.Bg2 Re2 27.c5 dxc5 28.Rxc5 Qd6 29.Qd4† Kg8=

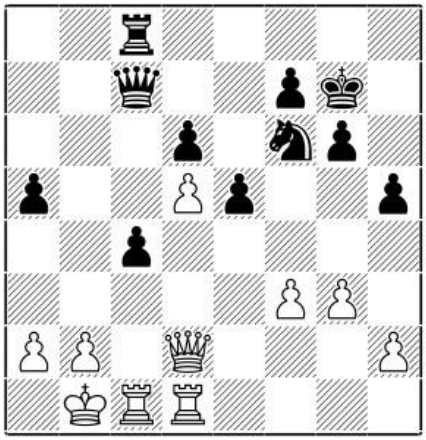
Black had no problems in Yeremenko – Schmidt, corr. 2009.

21.Bxc8 Rxc8

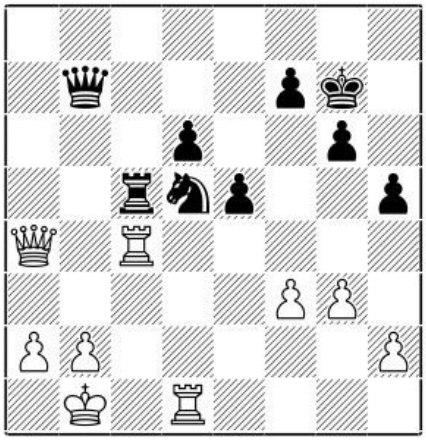


22.Na5

The debut of Black's exchange sacrifice saw 22.Nd2 b5 23.Nxc4 bxc4 when Black had enough compensation. Play continued 24.Rhd1 a5 25.Qd2 and now in Nijboer – Hillarp Persson, Wijk aan Zee 2009, the most precise continuation would have been:



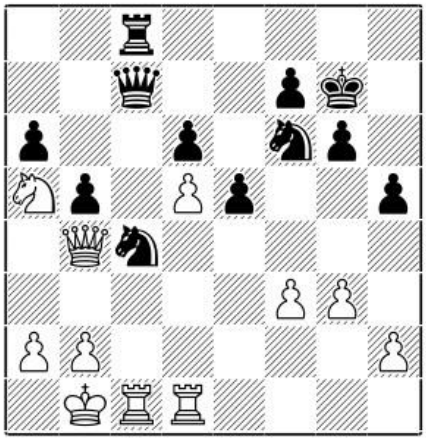
25...Qb7!N Black abandons the a5-pawn in order to target the more important d5-pawn, while also setting up tricks along the b-file. A logical continuation is: 26.Qxa5 Rc5 27.Qa4 Nxd5 (27...Qc7!? avoids simplifications while keeping the game unclear) 28.Rxc4



28...Nc3† (28...Rxc4 29.Qxc4 Ne3 30.Qd3 Nxd1 31.Qxd1 is also equal) 29.Rxc3 Rxc3 30.Qe4! Without this move, White would struggle to equalize. 30...Qb5= The endgame should be drawn, although there is enough complexity for a good technician to outplay the opponent from either side.

22...b5 23.Rhd1

23.Nxc4 bxc4 takes us back to the previous note.



23...Nxd5!

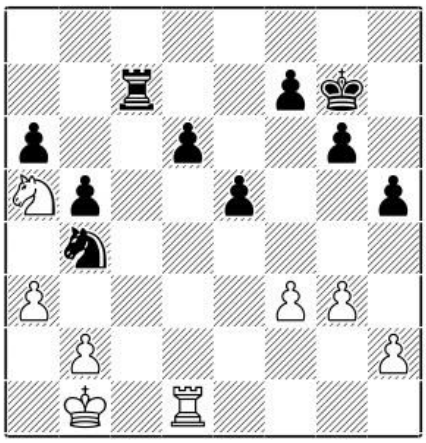
This move appears to be based on an elementary tactical possibility, but its real point is much deeper.

24.Rxc4

Of course not 24.Rxd5?? Na3† with mate next move.

24...Nxb4 25.Rxc7 Rxc7 26.a3

It looks like Black is in trouble, but now we see the justification for her 23rd move.



26...Rc2!

26...Nc6? 27.Rc1 Nxa5 28.Rxc7 Nb3 29.Rd7± would be much worse.

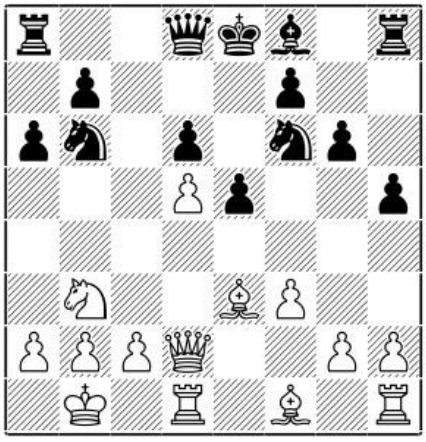
27.Rh1!

White should avoid 27.axb4? Rxh2, since after 28.Rxd6 Rg2µ the soon-to-be-passed h-pawn makes Black the clear favourite.

27...Rf2 28.axb4 Rxf3³

Black had three good pawns for the knight in Newrkla – Dambrauskaite, corr. 2011. Over the board all results are possible, but I would prefer Black's position. In the correspondence game, Black pressed hard but White held the draw with precise defence.

B2) 13.Kb1!?



This move has completely taken over as the main line at high levels. It is truly a product of the modern era. Instead of protecting the d5-pawn, White leaves it hanging. Why? Because the computer says it's alright to do so! Due to the level of sophistication of the whole idea, I would only expect to see it played by titled players or in correspondence games.

Black should certainly take the pawn, and he can do so with either knight. Both methods are playable and they lead to contrasting types of positions, so it is worth checking both of them. **B21)** 13...Nfxd5! is the safest option, and we will consider it as the main line. We will then have a brief look at **B22)** 13...Nbxd5!?, a riskier option which leads to a more complicated struggle.

13...Qc7?! fails tactically after 14.Qa5 Rc8 15.Bxa6!, connecting the rooks so that taking on c2 will not help Black. After 15...Nfxd5 16.Bb5† Ke7 17.Bxb6 Nxb6 18.Rhe1 Black is still in the game but his position is quite precarious, and he is not even ahead on material.

13...Rc8?! also proves to be insufficient after: 14.Qa5 Nfd7 (14...Qc7 leads to a passive ending for Black after 15.c3 Nc4 16.Qxc7 Rxc7 17.Bxc4 Rxc4 18.Na5 Rc7 19.Bb6 Rd7 20.c4²) 15.Qb4 Qc7 16.c3² Black's knights were awkwardly placed in Tahbaz – Idani, Rasht 2016.

B21) 13...Nfxd5!

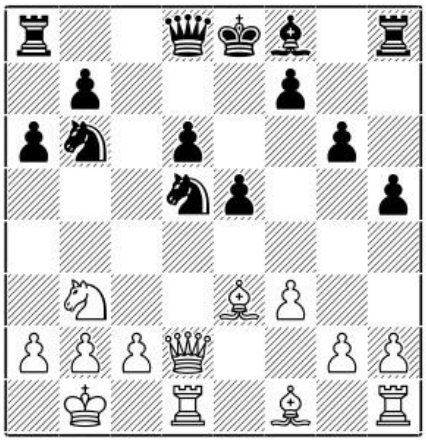
GAME 15

Vitaly Kurgansky – Anatoly Ilyasov

Correspondence 2012

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Be3 e5 7.Nb3 Be6 8.f3 h5 9.Nd5 Bxd5 10.exd5 Nbd7 11.Qd2 g6 12.0-0-0 Nb6 13.Kb1!? Nfxd5!

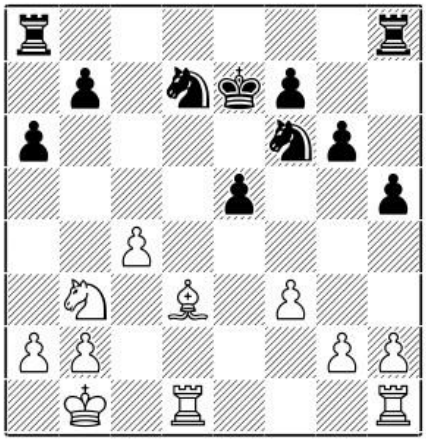
Assuming both sides play accurately from here, White will regain the sacrificed pawn but he will not be left with any advantage. The only drawback is that the resulting endgames may be a little dry.



14.Bf2

This is the most ambitious option, threatening to win material with Qa5.

14.Bg5 regains the pawn more quickly but takes most of the tension of the position. After 14...Be7 15.Bxe7 Qxe7 16.c4 Nf6 17.Qxd6 Qxd6 18.Rxd6 Nbd7 19.Rd1 Ke7 20.Bd3 Black can improve with:

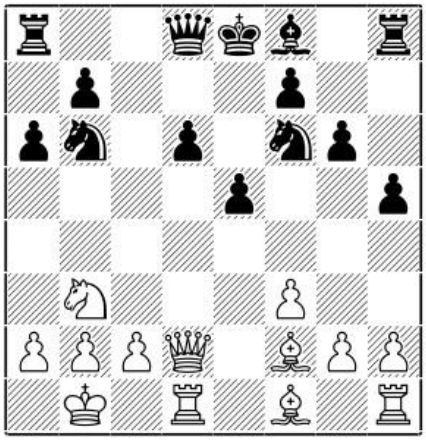


20...Rhd8!N (20...Rhc8 21.Rhe1 Kf8 22.Nd2 Rc7 23.Ne4 Nxe4 24.Bxe4 was a bit better for White in Leko – Aravindh, Isle of Man 2017) 21.Rhe1 Rac8= Black should be fine.

14...Nf6!

This is practically forced.

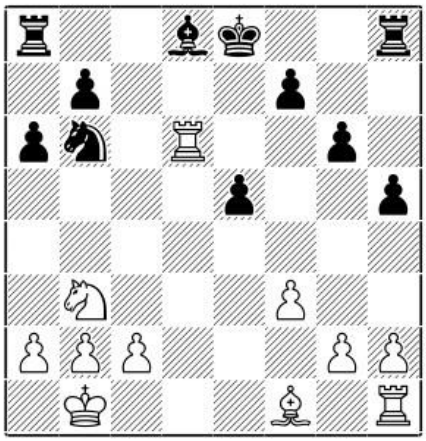
14...Bh6? is a mistake due to 15.Qe1! when the threat of c2-c4-c5 gave Black significant problems in Biliskov – Morgunov, Zadar 2017.



15.Na5!?

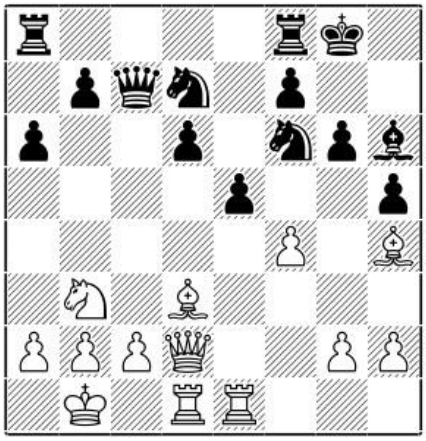
This leads to sharp play, but if Black reacts correctly it will all calm down soon.

White's most popular continuation has been to win back the pawn immediately with: 15.Bh4 Be7 16.Bxf6 Bxf6 17.Qxd6 Qxd6 18.Rxd6 Bd8=



The endgame is equal although plenty of play remains. There are just over fifty games on my database and almost all of them were drawn, but it is worth mentioning that Black has ground out three wins in correspondence games, without suffering a single defeat.

The nonchalant 15.Bd3!? has been a rare choice but I consider it the most interesting, playing for 'vague' compensation in the same spirit as will be seen in variation B22 below. Play may continue: 15...Nbd7 16.Rhe1 Qc7 (the untested 16...Bh6!?N 17.Qb4 Qc7 also deserves attention) 17.f4 Bh6 18.Bh4 0-0



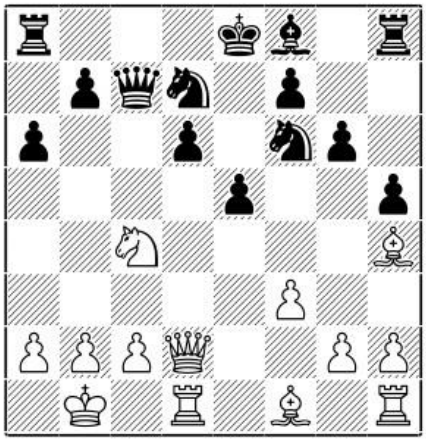
19.Bg5!?N (18.Bf1 Rc8 19.Qxd6 Qxd6 20.Rxd6 Bxf4 21.g3 Bg5 was fine for Black in Rhodes – Maguire, corr. 2016) 19...Bxg5 20.fxg5 Ne8 21.Be4 Roiz suggested this line as offering ongoing compensation for White. While he certainly has some play for the pawn, I find it hard to believe Black is worse after something like 21...Rc8, 21...Rd8 or even 21...a5!?.

15...Qc7 16.Bh4 Nbd7

Black has also tried 16...Nfd7!? 17.f4 Rc8 which leads to strange, complicated positions, and the usual high drawing ratio in correspondence play.

17.Nc4

White has manoeuvred his knight and is ready to win back the pawn, in which case his bishop pair and lead in development will count for something.

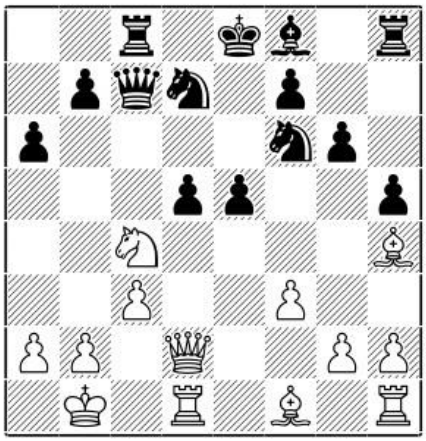


17...d5?

This would be an easy mistake to make

over the board – but in a correspondence game, even one from 2012, it is surprising.

The correct continuation is:
17...Rc8! 18.c3 d5!
Now, and only now!

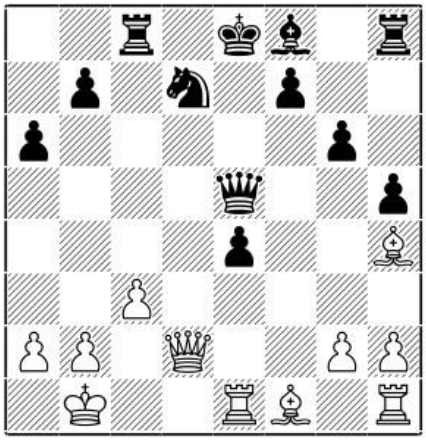


19.Nxe5
19.Bxf6 Nxf6 20.Nxe5 gives Black a pleasant game after either 20...Bd6 or 20...Bg7 followed by castling.

White can also win back the pawn with 19.Ne3 Be7 20.Bxf6 Nxf6 21.Nxd5 Nxd5 22.Qxd5, but 22...Rd8 23.Qb3 Rxd1† 24.Qxd1 0-0 is fine for Black.

The text move is more critical, but the inclusion of the moves ...Rc8 and c2-c3 helps Black a great deal, whereas in the game he is just busted.

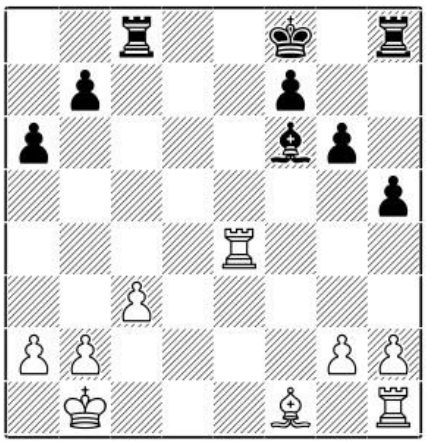
19...Qxe5 20.Re1 Ne4 21.fxe4 dxe4



22.Bg3
22.Rd1 can be met by 22...Qe6 23.Qd4 Rh7 which looks funny; but with ...f5 coming, Black will soon get coordinated.

22...Qe6 23.Qd4 Nf6 24.Bh4 Be7 25.Bxf6 Bxf6 26.Qxe4 Qxe4† 27.Rxe4† Kf8

The endgame is equal, although admittedly Black must take a little bit of care. With opposite-coloured bishops and a sound structure, Black just has to get his pieces out while making sure his queenside does not come under too much pressure.



28.Be2
Another game went 28.Rb4 Rc7 29.Kc2 Re7 30.Bc4 Kg7 31.Rd1 and now it mysteriously ended 1–0 in Fekih – Odeeva, corr. 2013, but the position is just equal.

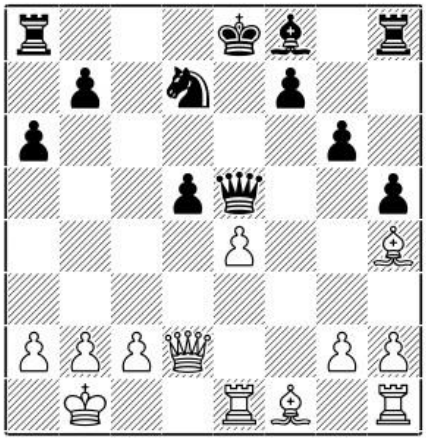
28...Kg7 29.Rb4 b5 30.Bf3 Rc7 31.Rd1 Rb8
Black could also play 31...Rd8N 32.Rxd8 Bxd8, intending 33.a4 Be7 or 33.Rd4 Be7, when he is out of trouble in either case.

32.a3
32.a4 Be7=
32...Rb6
White kept trying until a little over move 100, but it was a draw all the same in Tleptsok – Ilyasov, corr. 2012.

18.Nxe5!

Without the moves ...Rc8 and c2-c3 included, this works perfectly for White.

18...Qxe5 19.Re1 Ne4 20.fxe4



20...d4

This leaves Black in a bad position without any material edge to show for it, but 20...dxe4 21.Rd1! loses even more quickly for him. The key point is that 21...Qe6 is no good here due to 22.Bc4! (since there is no rook on c8) 22...Qc6 23.Qd4 when everything falls apart.

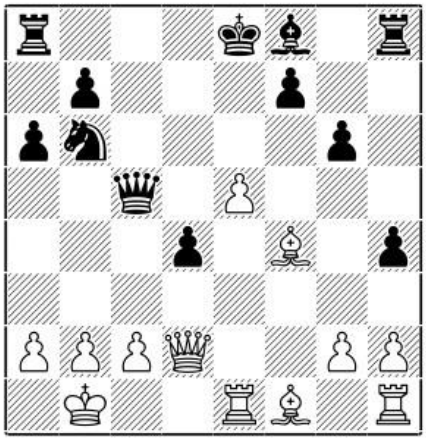
21.Bg3 Qc5 22.e5

Black will be hard pressed to avoid e5-e6, cracking everything open.

22...h4

22...Bh6 23.Qd3 Nf8 24.Qb3 Rc8 25.Bd3 wins quickly, for instance: 25...Rc7 26.e6+–

23.Bf4 Nb6



24.e6

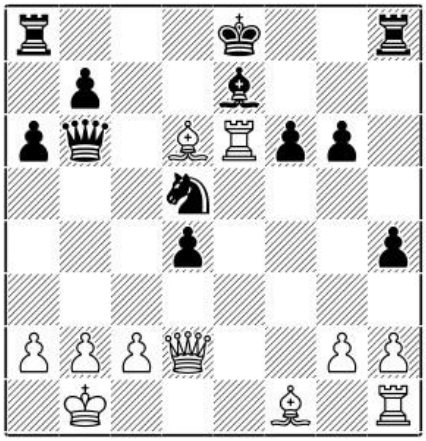
Crunch! Especially considering that this was a correspondence game, Black could already have resigned.

24...f6 25.e7! Bxe7 26.Re6 Nd5

26...0-0-0 27.b4! wins material.

27.Bd6 Qb6

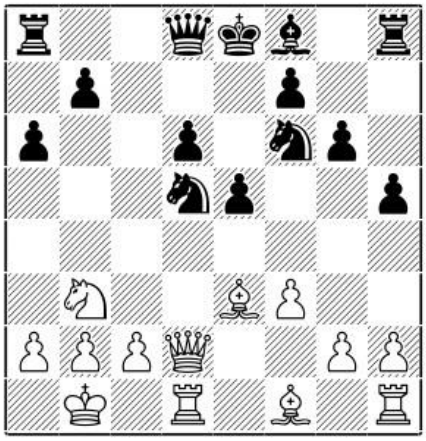
It may look as if Black is somehow holding on, but White's next move ends any illusions.



28.Qe1! Rh7 29.Bd3 Kd7 30.Bxg6 Ne3 31.Rxe7† Rxe7 32.Bxe7 Kxe7 33.Qxh4 Rf8 34.Qh6 Qd6 35.h4 Kd8 36.Bd3

1–0

B22) 13...Nbxd5!?



This is the sharpest and most ambitious move, but also risky and a bit tricky to understand.

14.Bg5 Be7

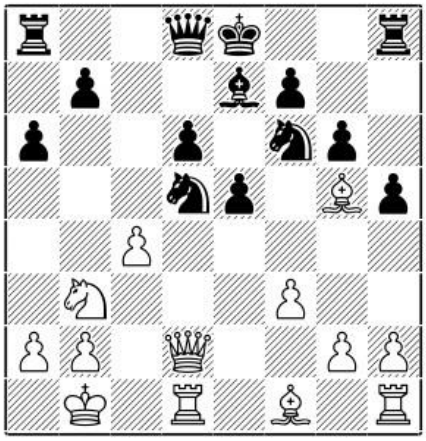
We have reached a rather unusual position. White has given up the d5-pawn (which would seem to be important!) but he has the bishop pair, a lead in development and a great deal of freedom when it comes to arranging his pieces. With all of this in mind, it is not surprising that this line has attracted the attention of various ambitious players on both sides.

Having already presented 13...Nfxd5! as a reliable equalizer, I will not analyse the present variation exhaustively. Rather, I will show a few interesting lines in order to serve as a starting point for you to do your own research, should this option be of interest.

15.c4!?

I will focus on this rare option which has scored quite well.

There is nothing concrete yet, so White has quite a bit of choice. Aside from the text move, 15.h4, 15.Bc4, 15.Bd3, 15.Na5 and 15.g3 have all been tried by grandmasters and/or correspondence players.



15...Nb6!?

This move seems simplest to me, conceptually at least.

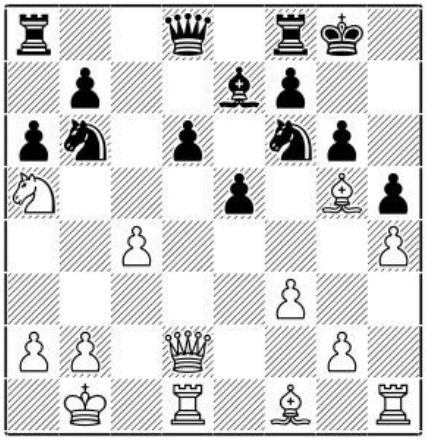
The lunge 15...Nf4!? was considered to be the best novelty of *Chess Informant* 135, but it may not even be the best move! After 16.Bxf4 exf4 17.Qxf4 0-0 18.h4 (18.g4!?N deserves attention) 18...d5! 19.g4 Bd6 20.Qc1 Rc8 the position was complicated in Inarkiev – Vachier-Lagrave, Baden-Baden 2017.

16.Na5

White can regain the pawn with 16.Bxf6 Bxf6 17.Qxd6 but then 17...Na4! 18.Be2 Qxd6 19.Rxd6 Ke7 20.c5 Rhc8 is unclear according to Arsovic.

16...0-0! 17.h4

White can win back the pawn immediately with 17.Nxb7, but 17...Qc7 gives Black enough counterplay.

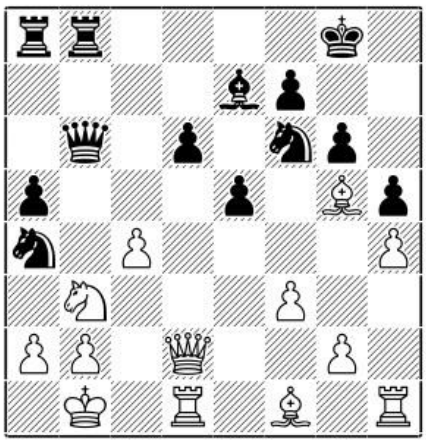


17...Na4!

17...Rb8 18.g4! looks dangerous for Black Kanmazalp – Yilmaz, Ankara 2018.

18.Nxb7 Qb6 19.Na5 Rfb8 20.Nb3 a5*f*

White has won his pawn back but Black's play is clearly further along, and ...Nxb2 is already a threat. A correspondence game continued:



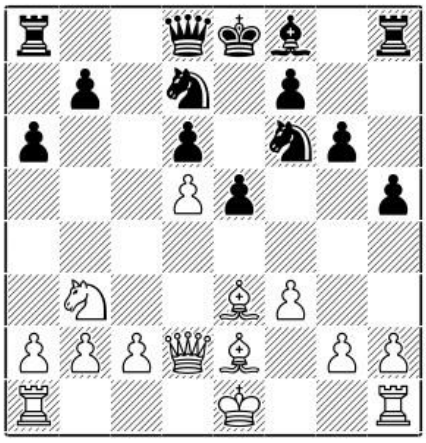
21.c5!?

White pitches a pawn to get some clarity, but it does not fully solve his problems.

21...Nxc5 22.Nxc5 Qxc5 23.Rc1 Qa7!?

Other queen moves also look good. Black held some initiative in Colin – Mende, corr. 2016, although White was able to hold.

C) 12.Be2

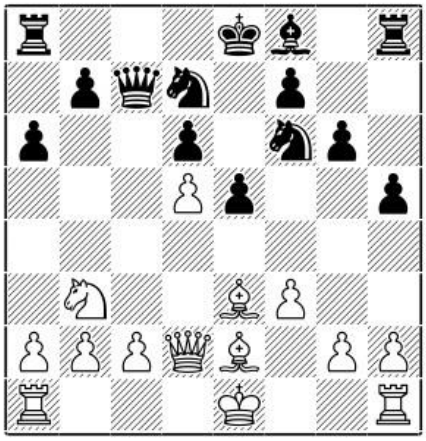


This leads to a different type of battle from the previous variation, as White's last move implies that he will castle short in the near future. This is an especially important position, as Black's next move will determine the entire course of the middlegame!

12...Bg7!

Though this may look like an automatic move, it takes some effort to understand why it is best.

To explain the decision, let us consider the alternative 12...Qc7, which was recommended by Georgiev and Kolev. It has been played by numerous strong GMs, especially Dominguez Perez, who has played it against several top opponents (although he did switch to 12...Bg7 in a 2019 game).



Black's last move is connected with an interesting plan. His idea is to play ...Nb6, when the d5-pawn cannot be defended and White will be forced to play the undesirable Bxb6. Unfortunately though, I think White has an effective way to counter this scheme. Examining what follows gives us an excellent example of modern opening evolution that extends beyond the computer's horizon at this stage.

First we will consider a) 13.c4, which was practically the only move White played for a long time. However, in later games, White came up with the subtle b) 13.Rc1!.

Instead 13.0-0?! Nb6 would force White to play 14.Bxb6 (14.c4? Nxc4 is a safe pawn grab) 14...Qxb6† when Black is simply better.

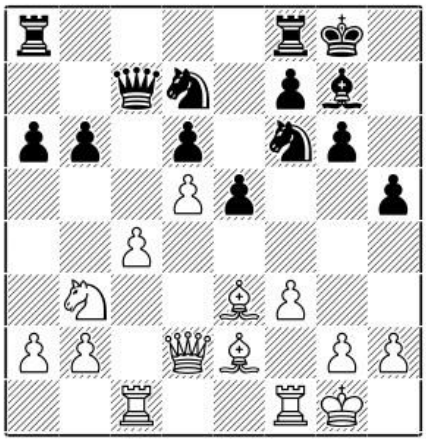
a) 13.c4 a5!

This is a nice idea and was a big part of the

attraction of Black's previous move. Black wants to kick the knight away from b3 before trading queens with ...Qa5 – but that is only the first phase of the plan.

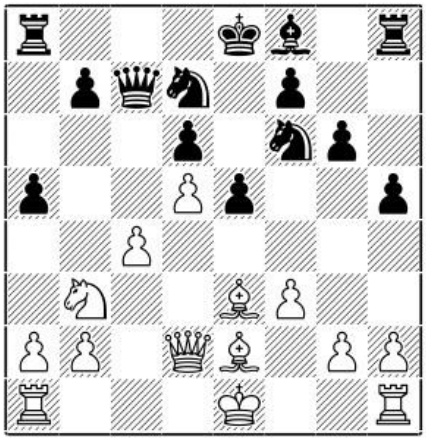
Obviously, 13...Nb6? would simply be met by 14.Rac1 when Black's knight looks foolish.

To really understand what is going on, let us consider normal-looking development with 13...Bg7?! 14.0-0 0-0 15.Rac1 b6. This thematic pawn structure is certainly not inherently bad for Black, but the ...Qc7 move is hardly necessary; in fact, one could argue that the queen would be just as well placed on its original square. Moreover, White has a nice manoeuvre beginning with:



16.Na1! The idea is to play b2-b4 and Nb3 before breaking through on the queenside. Another possible plan is Nc2-b4-c6. Black can stop both of those ideas with 16...a5, but then 17.Nc2 Nc5 18.Na3! reroutes the knight anyway – and note that when it lands on b5, it will gain a tempo by hitting the queen on c7. A model game continued 18...Qe7 19.Nb5 Nfd7 20.Rce1 Rfc8 21.b3 f5 22.Bd1 Nf6 23.Bc2 Kh7 24.h3 Rf8 25.a3 Rac8 26.b4 axb4 27.axb4 Ncd7 28.Bb3± and White was clearly on top in Bologan – Wang Hao, Biel 2012.

Returning to 13...a5!:



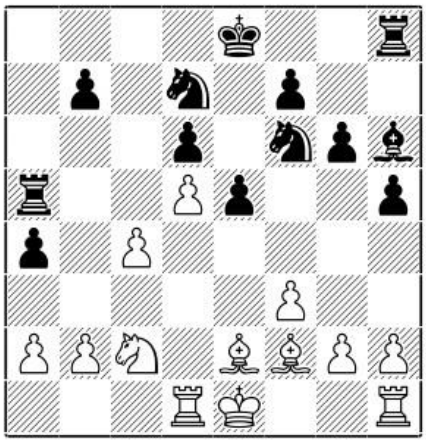
14.Rd1

After 14.0-0 a4 15.Nc1 Qa5! everything runs smoothly for Black.

White can stop Black's idea with 14.a4 but after 14...b6 15.0-0 Bg7 the queenside is mostly blocked and White's play will be much slower.

White has also tried 14.Rc1 a4 15.Na1 although Black can continue thematically with: 15...Qa5 (the same player later tried 15...Ng8!? intending a quick ...Bh6 in Aguera Naredo – Van Kampen, Basel 2013) 16.Qxa5 Rxa5 17.Nc2 Bh6 18.Bxh6 Rxh6 19.Na3 Nc5 20.Kd2 Rh8 21.Nb5 Kd7 22.Rhf1 h4 Black had excellent play in S. Kuipers – Van Kampen, Netherlands 2011.

14...a4 15.Na1 Qa5! 16.Qxa5 Rxa5 17.Nc2 Bh6! 18.Bf2



18...Nc5!

18...Ke7 was used by Dominguez Perez at Thessaloniki 2013 to defeat Caruana, who responded with 19.g3. However, White improved with 19.0-0! Nc5 20.Bh4 in some correspondence games, when the pin is a little annoying, although Black has yet to suffer defeat from here.

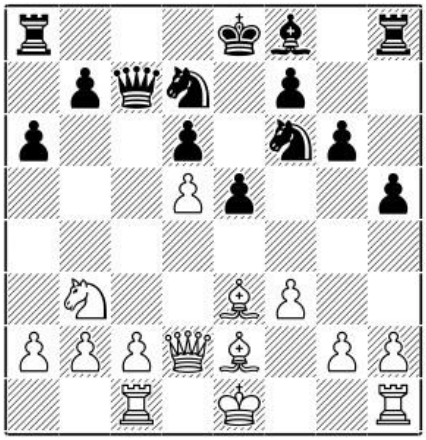
18...0-0!? is also quite playable.

19.0-0 Nfd7 20.Na3 Ke7 21.Nb5 Raa8

Black has done fine from here, going undefeated in more than twenty games and even sneaking a victory in one correspondence encounter. All these lines worked out nicely for Black, and we can see that this structure can lead to a pleasant endgame, whether Black trades off his dark-squared bishop or just activates it on the h6-c1 diagonal.

Having seen the positive side of 12...Qc7, it's time to show White's most challenging response:

b) 13.Rc1!



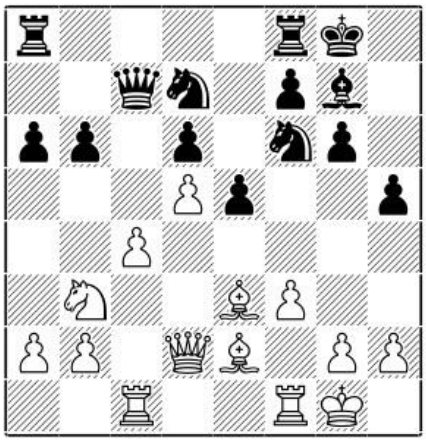
This clever semi-waiting move nullifies the ...a5 plan. In most games, Black has reverted to normal development with:

13...Bg7

Obviously 13...a5 can now be met by 14.a4! when the b5-square can be occupied and Black's queenside just looks weak.

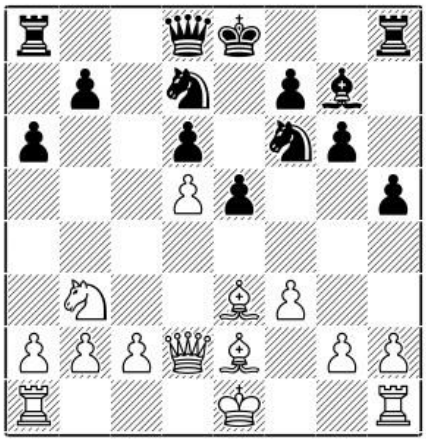
13...Ng8!? is the most principled attempt to make Black's strategy work, but I find it too risky.

14.0-0 0-0 15.c4 b6



Play has transposed to the Bologan – Wang Hao game quoted above, where we saw that 16.Na1! was favourable for White.

To summarize, at this stage the 13.Rc1! idea would deter me from choosing the 12...Qc7 plan, although some adventurous players may still be willing to take up the gauntlet. With that being said, let's return to my recommendation of 12...Bg7!.



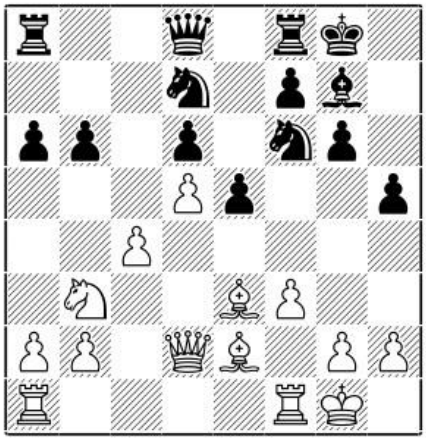
13.0-0

13.Na5 Qc7 leads back to variation A.

13...b6!

Black should not forget that 13...0-0 can be met with 14.Na5!, when 14...Qc7 reaches a position previously identified as one we should avoid, as explained in the note to Black's 14th move in variation A. To refresh your memory, the key point is that after 15.c4 e4 16.f4! Ng4 17.Bxg4 hxg4 White has a pleasant position, since Black needs his rook on the h-file in order to get the most out of this pawn structure.

14.c4 0-0



This is an important tabiya. With an asymmetrical pawn structure, unbalanced minor pieces and possibilities for both players on either side of the board, we can expect a great fight with mutual chances. That is about all one can ask for with the black pieces.

White has tried all kinds of options and it would be counterproductive to look at all of them. Instead we will analyse two popular rook moves: **C1)** 15.Rae1 and **C2)** 15.Rac1. The former implies that White will direct his attention towards the kingside; the latter, the queenside. After studying both options, you should be able to apply the same sort of ideas for Black against any other moves that you may encounter.

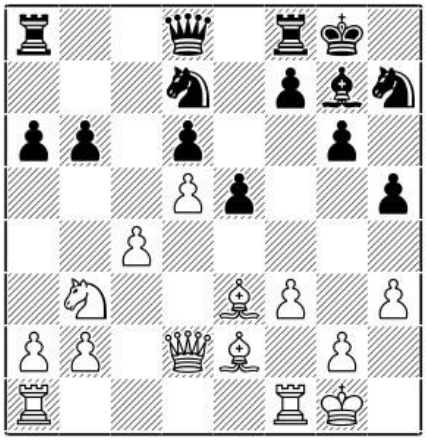
I will briefly mention one other idea, which at first looks surprising but has actually become quite popular:

15.h3!?

This not only covers the g4-square in anticipation of meeting a possible ...e4 with f3-f4, but also supports a possible g2-g4, fighting on the kingside. Even though Black has a pawn majority on that side of the board, White's light-squared bishop has a lot of potential in the event that the position opens up. Nevertheless, such pawn advances can also weaken White's position. An interesting reply is:

15...Nh7!?

15...Re8 has been much more popular but the text move is a typical idea, which we will see more of in some of the main lines below. The main idea is to prepare ...Bf6-g5, although Black may also opt for a quick ...f5.



16.Bd3

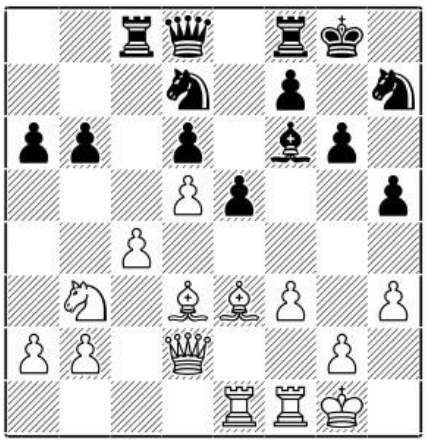
16.g4 is playable but somewhat hasty, and after 16...hxg4 17.hxg4 Bf6 (looking for an exchange of bishops, but 17...f5!? was also possible) 18.Kg2 Bg5 19.Rh1 Bxe3 20.Qxe3 Qg5= Black had no problems in So – Giri, Internet (blitz) 2017.

16...Bf6

16...Re8 also proved fine in Tinture – Sasikiran, corr. 2017.

17.Rae1 Rc8

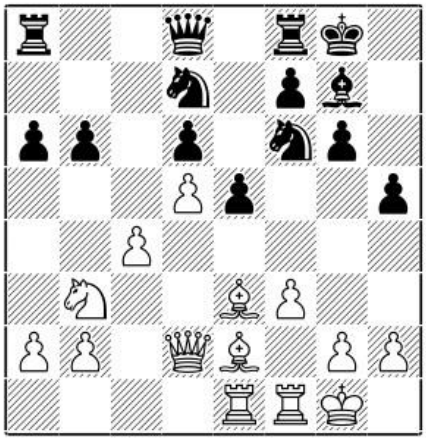
17...Bg5!?N 18.f4 exf4 19.Bxf4 Ne5 also seems decent enough.



18.f4 exf4 19.Bxf4 Be5 20.Re3 Qh4 21.Ref3 Rfe8=

Black was fine in Geana – Schlenther, corr. 2017.

C1) 15.Rae1



White centralizes his rook and awaits developments.

15...Re8

Black has tried various other moves but I like this flexible option, which happens to be the most popular.

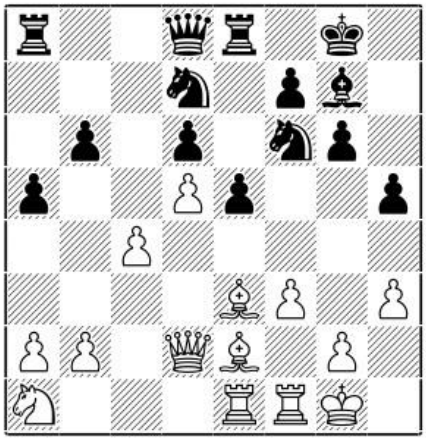
16.Kh1

This is the usual continuation, anticipating the possible opening of the kingside.

16.h3 a5 17.Na1

17.a4!?N 17...Nc5 18.Nxc5 bxc5 19.Bd1 is an interesting idea, when the position resembles the Bologan – Wojtaszek game in the note on 15...Nh7!? in variation C; see page 183 for further comments about this.

The text move is thematic for these positions, but here it allows an unusual blow.

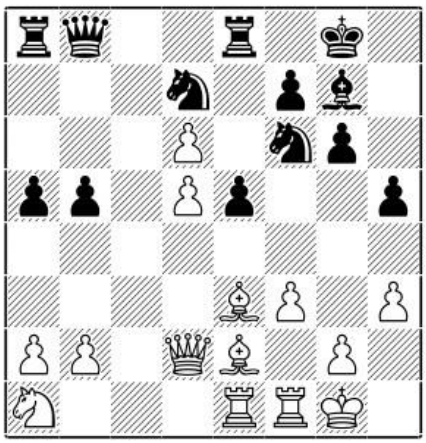


17...b5! 18.c5!?

18.cxb5 Nb6 hits the d5-pawn, and after 19.Bxb6 Qxb6† 20.Kh2 e4 Black's initiative on the dark squares is made more potent by the earlier h2-h3.

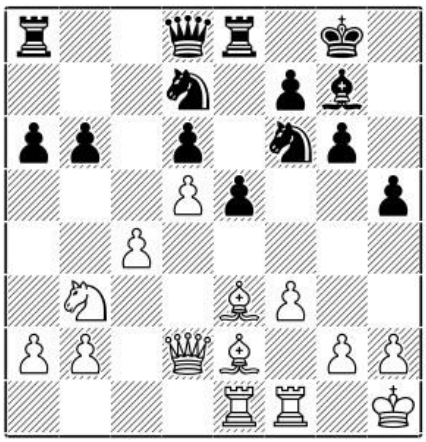
18...Qb8! 19.cxd6

19.c6 Nb6 20.Bxb6 Qxb6† 21.Kh2 h4 is dangerous for White, despite his nice-looking c6-pawn.



19...Rd8 20.Rc1 Nb6³

Bacrot – Areshchenko, Grosseto Prugna 2016.

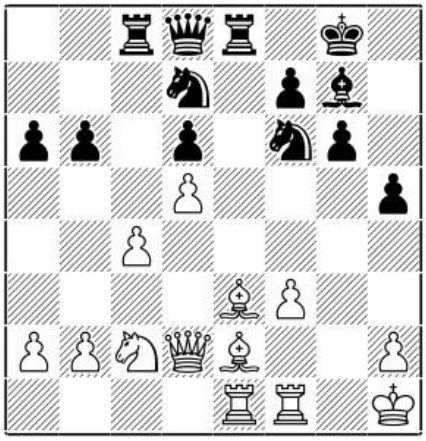


16...Rc8

The mysterious 16...Rb8 has been quite popular and 16...a5 also seems fine, but I am happy with the text move which seems simple and logical.

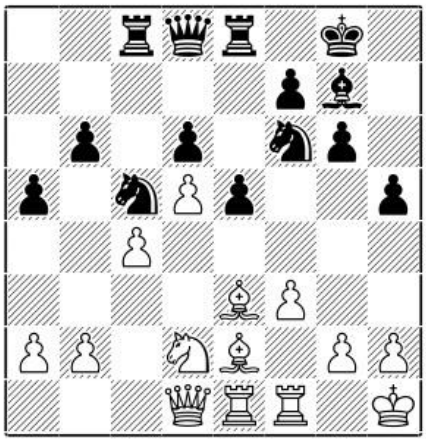
17.Qd1!?

17.Na1 is well met by 17...e4!, for instance: 18.Nc2 (or 18.f4 Ng4) 18...exf3 (the game quoted below actually continued with 18...b5!? followed by ...exf3; this seems equally valid, but somehow it feels more natural to take on f3 first before striking on the queenside) 19.gxf3



19...b5!,, 20.cxb5 Rxc2 21.Qxc2 Rxe3 22.bxa6 Kh7 In this double-edged situation, Black's strong minor pieces and attacking chances were worth at least as much as White's rook and queenside passers in Sutton – Sherwood, corr. 2016.

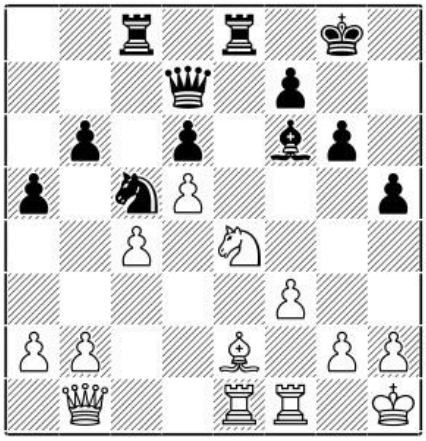
17...a5 18.Nd2 Nc5



19.Bg5

Rerouting the knight with 19.Nb1N is possible, although 19...Qd7 20.Nc3 e4,, offers Black plenty of play.

19...Qd7 20.Qb1!? e4 21.Bxf6 Bxf6 22.Nxe4



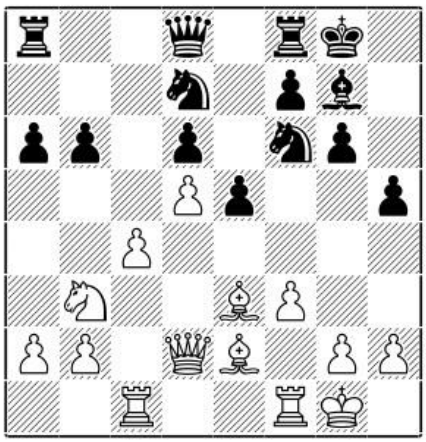
22...Nxe4

22...Bg7!? also seems okay.

23.fxe4 Be5

Black has full compensation for the pawn, as evidenced by the 100% drawing rate in correspondence games.

C2) 15.Rac1



This is another natural move. White revs up for the thematic Na1 plan and positions the rook to support a potential c4-c5 breakthrough. This also happens to be the position where we clash with John Shaw's *Playing 1.e4 – Sicilian Main Lines*, produced by a certain publisher. Since this is one of the most critical variations we can face in the English Attack, I once again decided to present two main options. **C21)** 15...Kh7!? is a rare but fully playable move, while **C22)** 15...Re8 is the established main line.

Here is a brief summary of the alternatives:

15...e4? is almost always mistimed with White's knight still on the b3-square because of 16.Nd4, quickly getting to the c6-outpost.

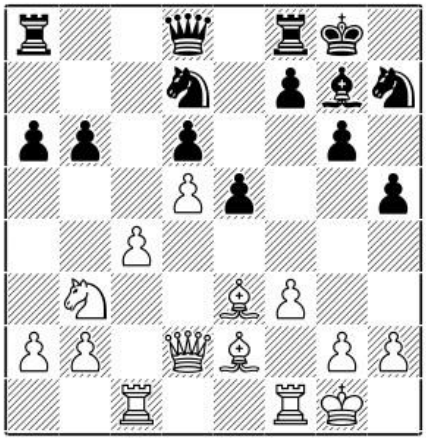
15...Qc7?! is hardly ever played in this position, but it immediately transposes to tons of games where Black started with 12...Qc7. The Bologan – Wang Hao game from page 177 is one of them, and Areshchenko – Salem (quoted in Shaw's book) is another. Incidentally, we will see that Areshchenko is one of the big experts on the black side of these positions. In any case, 16.Na1! scores heavily for White, and Black's queen is misplaced on c7, as explained earlier.

15...a5 has been played by Vachier-Lagrave among others, and is the only move mentioned by Shaw, who points out that 16.Na1 enables White to fight for an edge. After 16...Nc5 17.Nc2² White is a bit better, although Black is certainly in the game; the position resembles Bologan – Wang Hao, but Black is virtually a tempo up due to not having misplaced his queen. Nevertheless, 15...a5 would probably be my fourth(!) choice for Black.

A final interesting though rare option is:

15...Nh7!?

This is a decent move which is similar in some ways to variation C21 below. Here too, Black may trade bishops (this time with ...Bf6-g5) and again the path is cleared for the f-pawn.



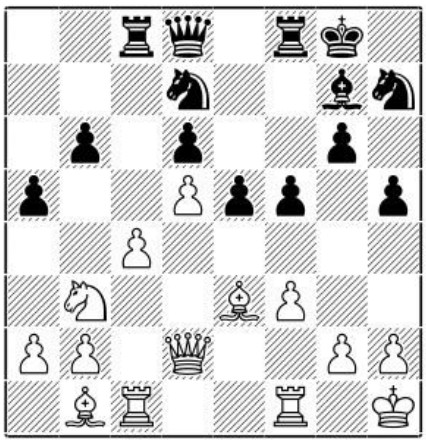
16.Bd3!?

16.f4 Bh6 17.fxe5 (17.f5N 17...Bxe3† 18.Qxe3 Qg5 is also fine for Black) 17...Bxe3† 18.Qxe3 Nxe5 was equal in Lukas – Garau, corr. 2017.

16.Na1 Bf6 17.Nc2 Bg5 18.Nb4 Bxe3† 19.Qxe3 occurred in Nolte – Turqueza, Olongapo City 2015, when 19...Qg5!N looks fine, as a knight on c6 will not have any targets.

The text move was played in an interesting game which featured a different kind of strategy from White.

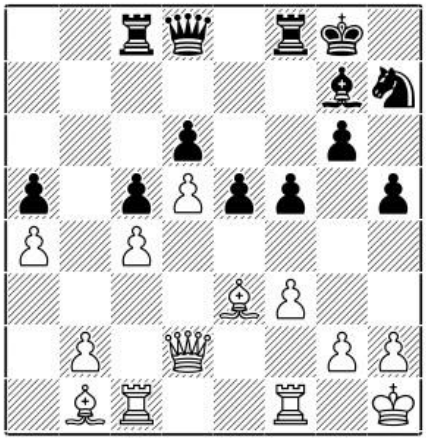
16...f5 17.Bb1 Rc8 18.Kh1 a5



19.a4!?

Bologan stated that this drastic-looking idea was inspired by a computer suggestion in a similar position. White is okay with locking up the queenside, as he seeks to break through on the kingside.

19...Nc5 20.Nxc5 bxc5



21.g4?!

This move is consistent with White's strategy, but premature.

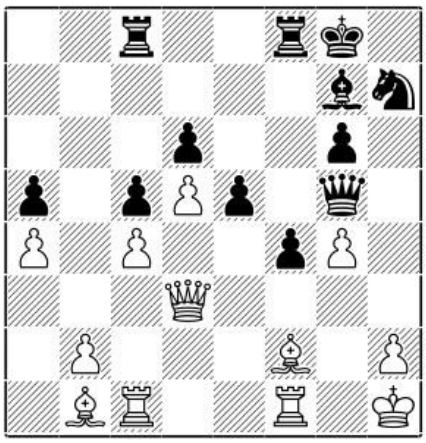
21.b3N was better, with an unclear game after something like 21...Bf6.

21...hxg4 22.fxg4 f4!N

Bologan was rewarded for his inspired play following 22...e4? 23.gxf5 gxf5 24.Rg1 Kh8 25.Rxg7! Kxg7 26.Qg2† Kh8 27.Bd2!± in Bologan – Wojtaszek, Reykjavik 2015. However, the Moldavian grandmaster pointed out in his

annotations that Black advanced the wrong pawn.

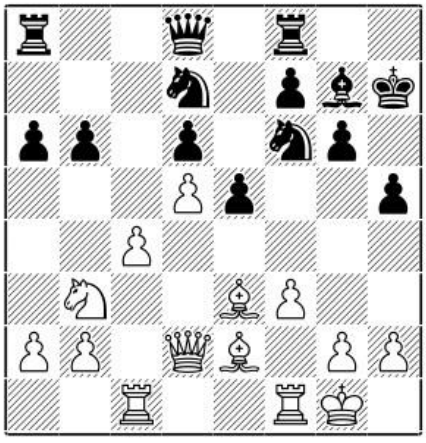
23.Bf2 Qg5 24.Qd3



24...Nf6! 25.Qxg6 Qxg6 26.Bxg6 Nxg4³

Bologan's analysis ends here, with the assessment that White must fight for a draw.

C21) 15...Kh7!?

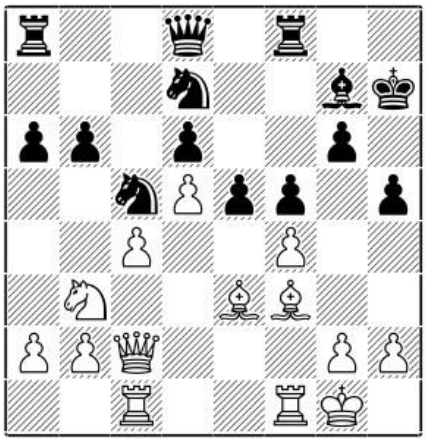


This king move is always an option to consider in such positions. Black intends ...Ng8 next, with ...Bh6 as the main idea – although he may also consider ...Ne7-f5 or simply ...f5.

16.Na1

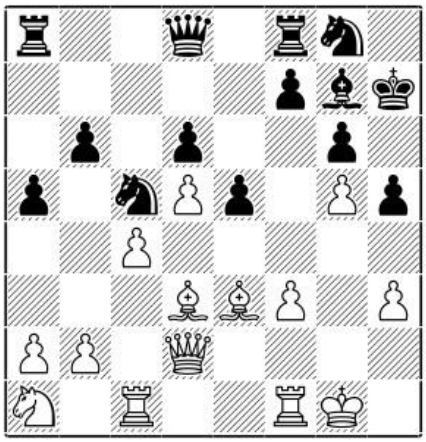
White continues thematically.

16.f4?! is too rash – now there is no need for the knight to go to g8! 16...Ne4 17.Qc2 f5 18.Bf3 Nec5



Black is clearly doing well, and after the further 19.fxe5 Nxb3 20.axb3 Bxe5 21.g3 Qf6 22.Rb1 a5µ he had a beautiful position in Vocaturo – Esen, Thessaloniki 2010.

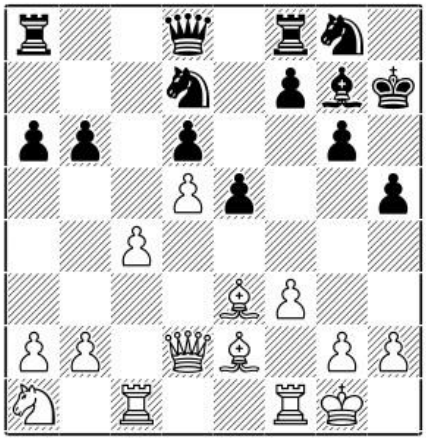
16.h3 a5 17.Na1 Ng8 18.g4 stops Black from trading bishops, but after 18...Bh6 19.g5 (19.gxh5 Qh4! is good for Black) 19...Bg7 20.Bd3 Nc5 Black still has good counterplay with the ...f-pawn break in reserve:



Now the panicked 21.Bxc5? bxc5 led to disaster for White after 22.Kh2 f5 23.gxf6 Bh6!µ in V. Petrov – Kovchan, Kavala 2015.

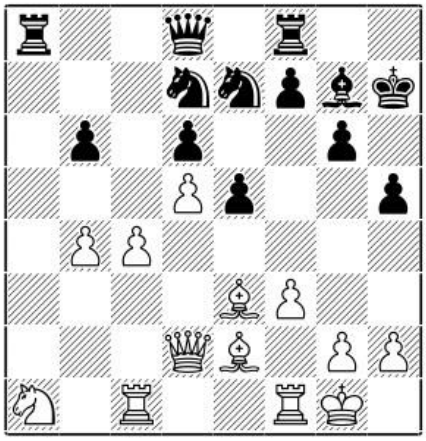
16...Ng8

Amusingly, White's knight manoeuvre is met by a 'counter-retreat'.



17.b4 a5 18.a3 axb4 19.axb4 Ne7!?

19...Bh6N is absolutely playable; perhaps Black wished to keep the position more complicated.



20.Bd3 Qc7 21.Nb3 Ra3,,

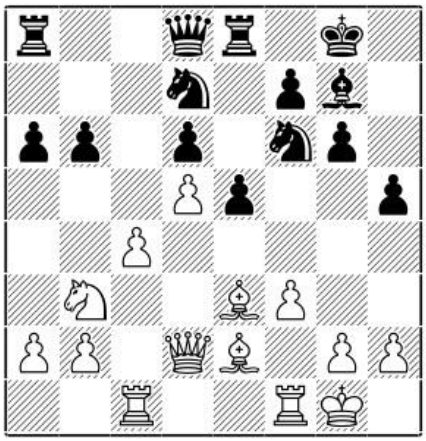
The position remained dynamically balanced in Pranav – Neverov, New Delhi 2015. It looks quite difficult for White to execute a c4-c5 break, because the d5-pawn can easily become weak – especially as ...Nd7-f6 is a possibility that Black holds in reserve.

C22) 15...Re8

GAME 16

Muhammad Lutfi Ali – Krishnan Sasikiran

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Be3 e5 7.Nb3 Be6 8.f3 h5 9.Nd5 Bxd5 10.exd5 Nbd7 11.Be2 g6 12.Qd2 Bg7 13.0-0 b6 14.c4 0-0 15.Rac1 Re8



I like this flexible move a lot. It has seen quite a bit of action in correspondence play, with Black generally holding his own. Black keeps all his options open, while adding strength to a future ...e4 advance, which could lead to a similar structure to that which we saw in some lines of variation A.

16.Rfd1

This is a somewhat natural move, but not the most purposeful. In this game White makes a lot of thematic moves but is somehow unable to get them to gel together. Let's look at some alternatives.

16.Na1

This standard move should be met by an equally thematic reply.

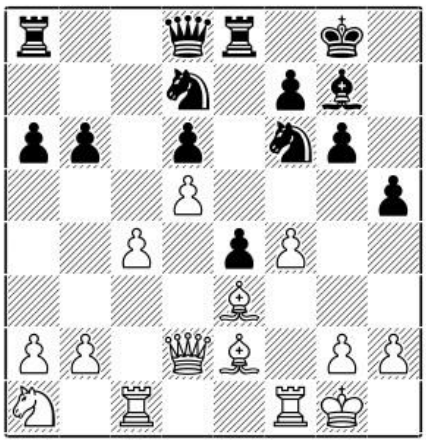
16...e4!

Note the correct timing of this move, after the knight has taken a step further away from the d4-square.

17.f4

17.Nc2 exf3 18.gxf3 (18.Bxf3 Ne4! gives Black good play) reaches a typical murky position. After 18...Nh7÷ White immediately blundered (especially if we consider it was a correspondence game) with 19.Nd4?? Rxe3! 20.Qxe3 Qg5†! and Black was winning in Dolzhikov – Cade, corr. 2017.

The text move is safer, but Black obtains good play after:



17...Ng4! 18.Bxg4 hxg4

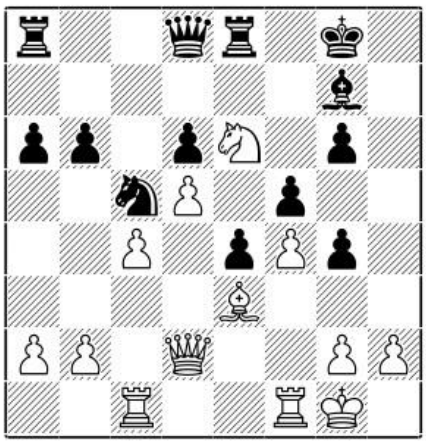
We examined a similar structure on page 158 in the notes to variation A, but there White's knight was on a5, not a1!

19.Nb3

19.f5 Ne5 gives Black plenty of activity.

19...f5 20.Nd4 Nc5 21.Ne6

21.b4 Bxd4! 22.Bxd4 Nd3 23.Rc3 b5! gives Black excellent counterplay.



21...Rxe6!?

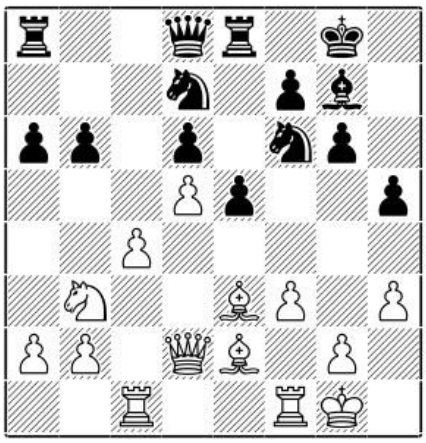
Black could also simply play 21...Nxe6 22.dxe6 Rxe6 23.Qd5 Qe8 24.Bxb6 Rb8 with at least equality.

22.dxe6 Nd3©

Vocaturo – Areshchenko, Germany 2015.

16.h3

This prevent any ...Ng4 stuff, but that is hardly Black's only idea.



16...Nh7

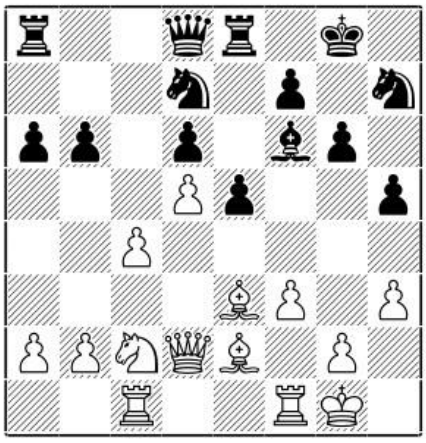
In correspondence play, Black has frequently tried a pawn sacrifice with 16...a5 17.Na1 h4!? 18.Bg5 e4÷ which leads to a different type of game but is equally playable.

17.Na1

17.a4 a5 18.Bd1 f5 19.Bc2 Bf6 20.Bb1?! h4 21.Kh1 Nc5 22.Nxc5 bxc5 23.b3 Bg5µ left White with a poor version of the 'Bologan structure' in Cuccumini – Gibas, corr. 2017.

17.Bd3 f5 18.Bc2 Bf6 19.Qb4?! sends the queen on a strange adventure. 19...Nc5 20.Bf2 a5 21.Qa3 h4 22.Rce1 Bg5 23.Nxc5 bxc5³ Moura – R. Mueller, corr. 2012.

17...Bf6 18.Nc2



18...Bg5!

This is better than 18...a5 19.Na3² when, if Black still wants to trade bishops, the d6-pawn will require protection.

19.Nb4 Bxe3† 20.Qxe3 a5 21.Nc6 Qh4,,

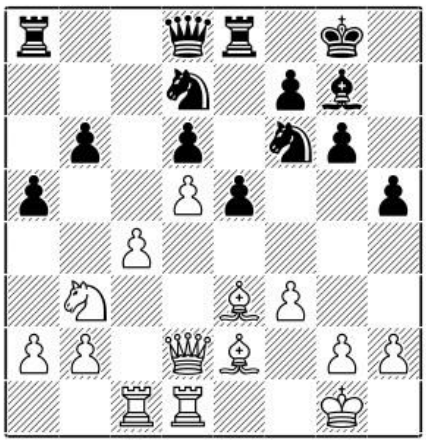
The c6-knight looks to be well placed, but it was only striking thin air in Sevian – Ruifeng Li, Dallas 2016.

Lastly, 16.Rc2 seems a strange choice to

me, as there is no Na1-c2 after this. I only mention it because it was played by one of the greatest experts on White's side – against a Black specialist. 16...h4!? (16...a5, 16...Nc5 and 16...Nh7 all look like worthy alternatives) 17.Bg5 h3 18.g3 a5 19.Be3 Nc5 20.Qd1 Nxb3 21.axb3 Nd7 22.Re1 Nc5= Inarkiev – Areshchenko, Germany 2016.

16...a5

Once again, 16...e4? should be avoided when the immediate 17.Nd4! is available.



17.h3

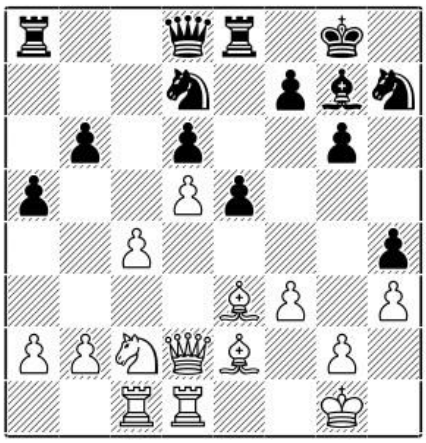
White seems unsure what to do.

17.Na1 is thematic of course, but then 17...e4! would work well.

17...Nh7!

White's last move prepared Na1, after which ...e4 could be met by f3-f4 without allowing ...Ng4. Therefore Black switches plans. and gets ready to play on the dark squares which were weakened by White's last move.

18.Na1 h4 19.Nc2



19...Ndf6!?

I like this move a lot. Black amasses his forces on the kingside, while avoiding any committal pawn moves.

19...f5 would weaken the e6-square, meaning that after a future ...e4, the potential reply of Nd4 will come with greater effect.

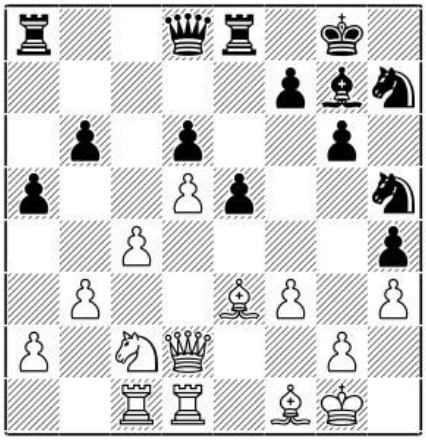
19...e4 is also premature in view of 20.f4! Bxb2 21.Rb1 when a subsequent f4-f5 will open the kingside to White's advantage.

19...Bf6!? followed by ...Bg5 looks like the most logical alternative, but Sasikiran decides to keep this plan in reserve.

20.Bf1?!

White is being too cautious. It was better to just get on with it by playing 20.Na3 Nh5 21.Nb5 or even 20.b4!?.

20...Nh5 21.b3

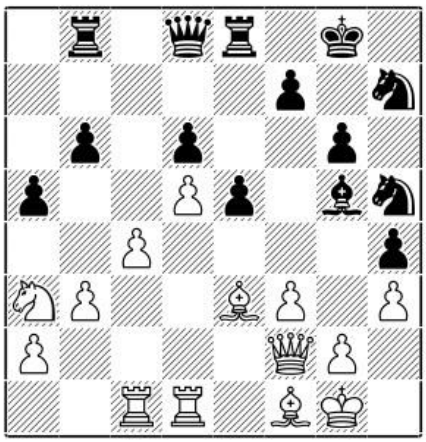


21...Bf6 22.Qf2

Hitting the b6-pawn. 22.Na3 Bg5 would be similar to the game.

22...Rb8 23.Na3 Bg5³

Black has clearly won the strategic battle so far, and in the next phase of the game his play flows easily.



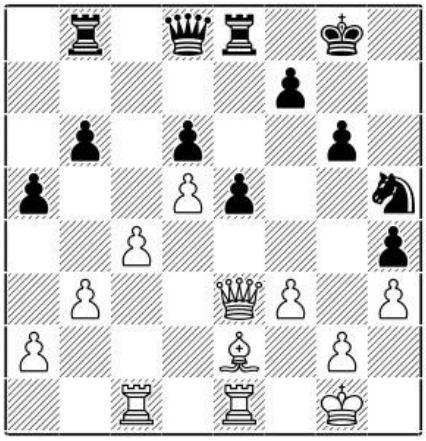
24.Nb5 Bxe3 25.Qxe3 Nf4 26.Re1

After 26.a3 Qg5 27.Kh1 Red8 28.b4 Nf6 followed by ...N6h5 it is hard to find a good plan for White. It is difficult to play c4-c5 because the d5-pawn will fall.

26...Nf6 27.Nc3

White switches to defence, but trading off Black's 'superfluous' knight will leave White with the inferior minor piece and no counterplay.

27...N6h5 28.Ne2 Nxe2† 29.Bxe2



29...Kg7

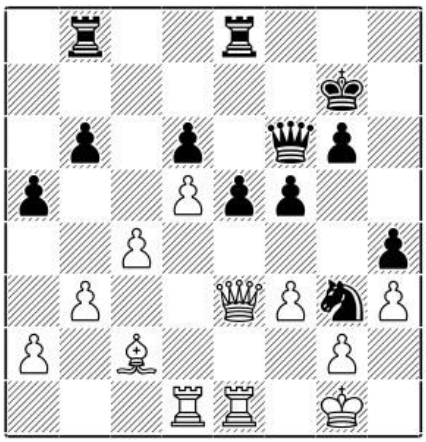
Another good idea was 29...Qc7µ followed by ...Qc5.

30.Bf1 Ng3 31.Bd3 f5

Only now!

32.Rcd1 Qf6 33.Bc2

Having achieved a dominant position, Black is ready to break through.

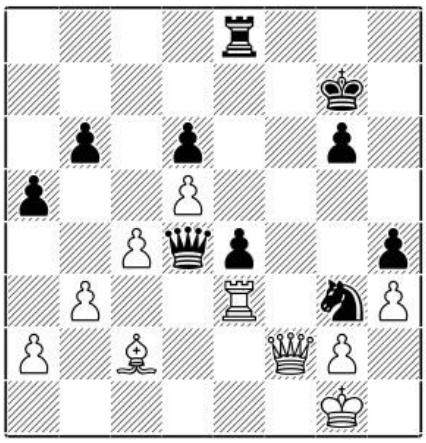


33...e4! 34.fxe4 fxe4 35.Rd2 Re5! 36.Rf2 Rf5 37.Qd2

37.Rxf5 gxf5 is crushing, with ...f4 coming next.

37...Re8 38.Qe3 Rxf2 39.Qxf2 Qc3 40.Re3 Qd4

Now Black threatens ...Rf8, so White must relinquish the blockade of the e4-pawn.



41.Re1

If White tries the desperate 41.Rxg3, the most accurate route to victory is: 41...Qa1†! 42.Kh2 (42.Qf1 Qxf1† 43.Kxf1 hxg3 is easily winning of course) 42...Qe5!–+

41...e3

The continued advance of this pawn is a good advertisement for 15...Re8.

42.Qf3 e2† 43.Kh2 Rf8 0–1

Conclusion

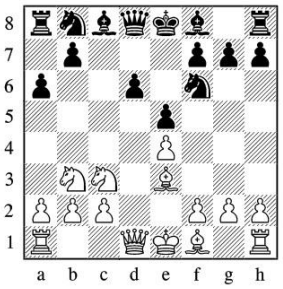
The direct 9.Nd5 has become the main battleground of the 8...h5 Najdorf. After 9...Bxd5 10.exd5 Nbd7 11.Qd2, the flexible 11...g6! is Black's most accurate reply. We then analysed three paths for White.

In the event of 12.Na5 Qc7 13.Be2 Bg7, Black must remember that after either 14.c4 or 14.0-0, he must play 14...e4! *before castling* in order to meet 15.f4 with 15...Ng4 16.Bxg4 hxg4, with a useful open h-file.

We then looked at 12.0-0-0 Nb6, when the forcing 13.Qa5 is well met by 13...Bh6!, trading the dark-squared bishops. Black has to take a little care restoring his coordination, but he stands well strategically. 13.Kb1!? is more dangerous, when both 13...Nfxd5! and 13...Nbxd5!? are possible, with the former being safer. Expect further developments in these lines.

Finally, the natural developing move 12.Be2 should be met by 12...Bg7! (rather than the overly clever 12...Qc7, to which 13.Rc1! is a good reply). An important tabiya arises after 13.0-0 b6! (avoiding 13...0-0 14.Na5!) 14.c4 0-0, with a rich position where both sides have a variety of plans.

Chapter 7



7.♘b3 without f2-f3

Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.♗e3 e5 7.♘b3 ♗e6

A) 8.Qd2 Nbd7 9.0-0-0 Be7 10.f4!? b5 11.f5 Bc4 191

A1) 12.g4 194

A2) 12.Kb1 195

B) 8.f4!? exf4 9.Bxf4 Nc6 199

B1) 10.Qd2 *Game 17* 207

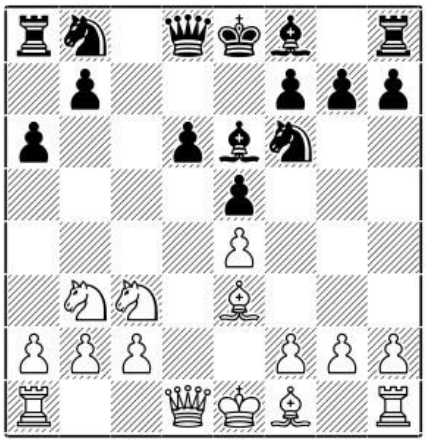
B2) 10.Qe2 Be7 11.h3 Nd7! 12.0-0-0 Nce5! 207

B21) 13.Nd5 209

B22) 13.Nd4 211

B23) 13.Kb1 *Game 18* 213

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Be3 e5 7.Nb3 Be6



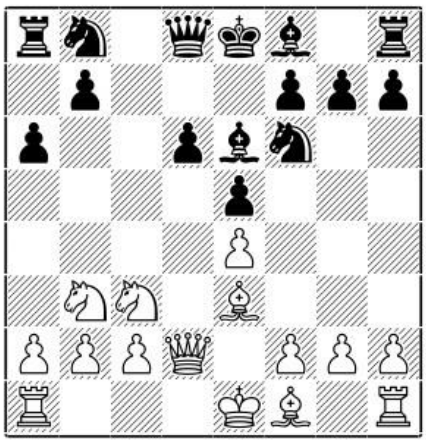
Having analysed 8.f3 quite thoroughly from Black's perspective in the previous two chapters, we should not forget to check White's other options, the most important of which are **A)** 8.Qd2 and **B)** 8.f4!?.

8.Be2 Be7 leads back to variation B2 of Chapter 1, while 8.h3 Be7 transposes to variation B of Chapter 14.

White has experimented with virtually every legal move at some point or another, but I will focus on the lines which I consider the most important. Once you understand the ideas in the

main lines, you should be able to apply that knowledge against most of the exotic tries that White may come up with.

A) 8.Qd2



With this move White masks his intentions, at least for the moment. For the purposes of this chapter we will focus on lines involving 0-0-0 and f2-f4. However, Black must always remember that White *can* still play f2-f3 at any moment, so we have to make sure we do not get 'move-ordered' out of our repertoire.

8...Nbd7

We need to play this move, since after 8...Be7 9.f3 we have been tricked out of the lines we want to play. For example, if 9...h5 we have committed our bishop to e7 too early – we have seen that there are several lines where ...g6 and ...Bg7 (or ...Bh6) is preferable.

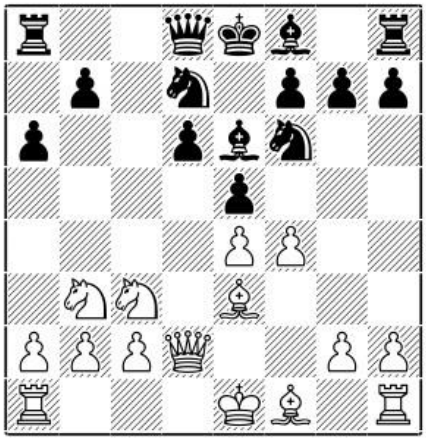
9.0-0-0

Of course 9.f3 is no problem now, since 9...h5 simply takes us back to variation B of Chapter 5.

Another possible move order is:

9.f4

This gives Black an extra option, although whether or not he should go for it is another matter for the reader to decide. The additional option is:



9...Rc8!?

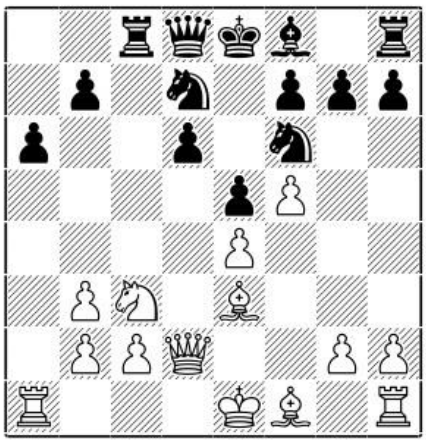
This is often recommended but, after playing it myself, I am not convinced that Black should bother.

Black should definitely avoid 9...exf4?! 10.Bxf4 when he has an inferior version of variation B, since his knight has gone to d7 instead of c6.

The simpler choice is 9...b5 10.f5 (or 10.0-0-0 Be7) 10...Bc4 11.0-0-0 Be7, transposing to the main line below.

10.f5 Bxb3 11.axb3

It is important for Black to follow up with:

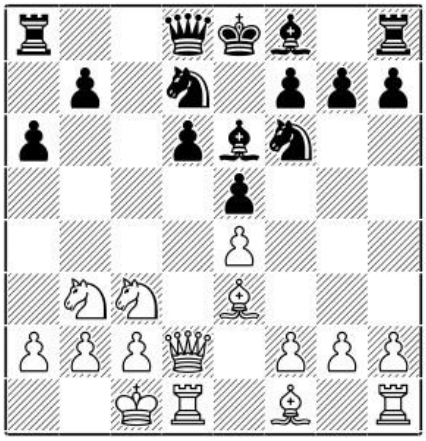


11...d5! 12.Nxd5

12.exd5? Bb4 gives Black great play.

12...Nxe4 13.Qe2 Nb6!

The key move. Black seems to be okay in all lines, although his chances should not be overestimated.



9...Be7

Different move orders are possible but I find this to be the most flexible.

9...b5 is certainly the wrong move order for us as 10.f3 would leave us tricked out of our repertoire, since 10...h5 11.Nd5 transposes to the Grischuk – Wang Hao game discussed on page 138.

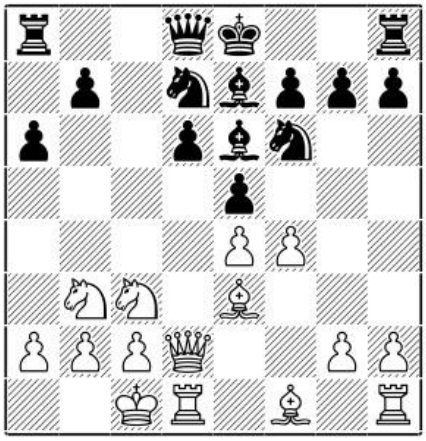
9...Rc8 is a decent alternative which was given by both Ftacnik and Georgiev/Kolev. There is nothing wrong with this move and it is quite likely to transpose to our repertoire after something like 10.f4 (10.f3 h5 11.Kb1 Be7 takes us back to variation B of Chapter 5) 10...b5 11.Kb1 (11.f5 Bc4 12.Kb1 Be7 is another path) 11...Be7 – see 11.Kb1!? Rc8 in the notes to our main line below.

With that being said, I slightly prefer the text move, as there are certain lines where the rook can stay on a8 to support an advance of the a-pawn – see variation A1 below for one example. By developing the dark-squared bishop to e7 first, we keep the rook flexible and give ourselves the option of castling at any time. The only downside I can think of is that the g7-pawn is not protected, but this is of little concern.

10.f4!?

Again, 10.f3 h5 stays within our repertoire – see variation B of Chapter 5 on page 138.

10.Kb1 Rc8 (10...b5 is also possible) 11.f4 b5 transposes to the note to White's 11th move below.



10...b5

Black has to be ready to meet f4-f5 with something more appetizing than trading on b3.

10...exf4 11.Bxf4 Ne5 may appear natural, but after 12.Nd4 we reach a position mentioned in the notes to variation B1 below, which I prefer to avoid.

10...Rc8 allows White to force us to recapture with the rook rather than the pawn on c4, as occurred after 11.f5 Bc4 12.Bxc4 Rxc4 13.Qd3 b5 14.Nd2 as seen in Svidler – Berg, Plovdiv 2010. This is by no means the end of the world, but I see no reason to give this option to White.

11.f5

This forcing move is the most common.

White can also keep the tension with:

11.Kb1!? Rc8

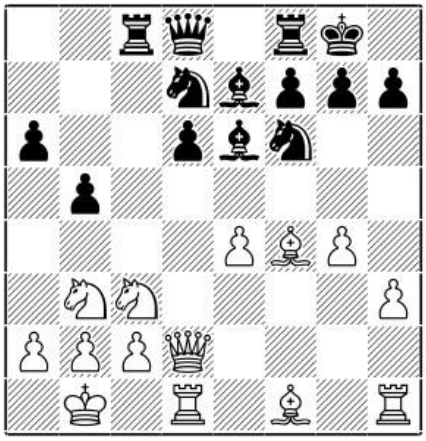
11...0-0!? 12.f5 Bc4 transposes to 12...0-0!? in the notes to variation A2 below, which is playable for Black, but not our repertoire choice.

12.h3 0-0

12...h5!? could also be considered.

13.g4 exf4 14.Bxf4

It may seem like White has a good version of the structure from variation B, but Black is okay as long as he immediately goes for counterplay with:



14...Nb6!

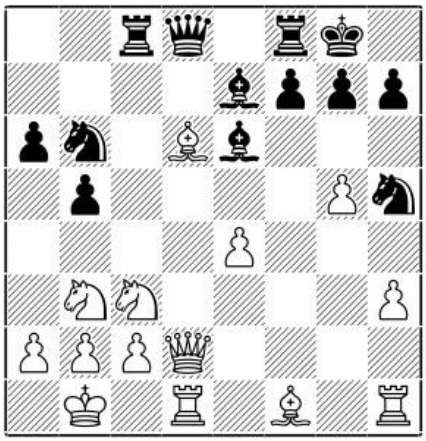
14...Ne5? would be a mistake in view of 15.g5 Nfd7 16.Nd5 when White dominates.

15.g5

15.Bd3 is met by 15...Nfd7 16.Nd5 Ne5,, when all of Black's pieces reach good squares.

15...Nh5 16.Bxd6

16.Be3 allows 16...Ng3, while if 16.Bh2 Bxg5 17.Qxd6 Qxd6 18.Rxd6 Bd8! Black is fine.

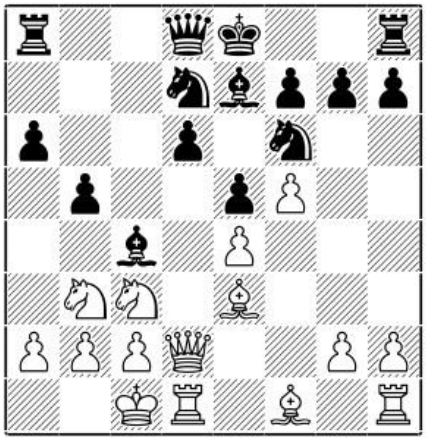


16...Na4! 17.Nxa4 bxa4 18.Bxe7 Qxe7 19.Nd4 Ng3,,

Black had good play in Forcen Esteban – Saric, Linares 2017.

11...Bc4

The battle lines are drawn. White will attack by advancing his g-pawn, either immediately or after suitable preparation, while Black will develop counterplay on the queenside. As usual, both sides must pay attention to the d5-square.



White can play for a quick attack with **A1)** 12.g4 or proceed more cautiously with **A2)** 12.Kb1.

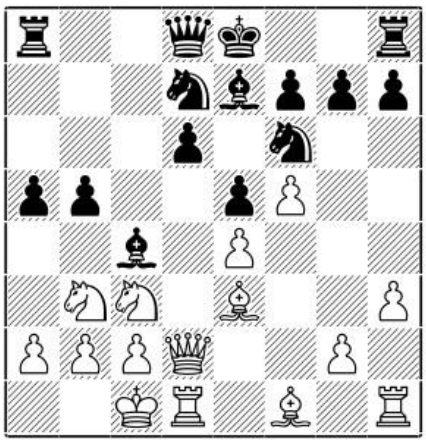
12.h3

This move is not only slow, but also weakens the g3-square. Black can play:

12...a5!?

Black was also doing well after 12...Rc8 13.g4 h6 in Goldenberg – Vigorito, Parsippany 2007.

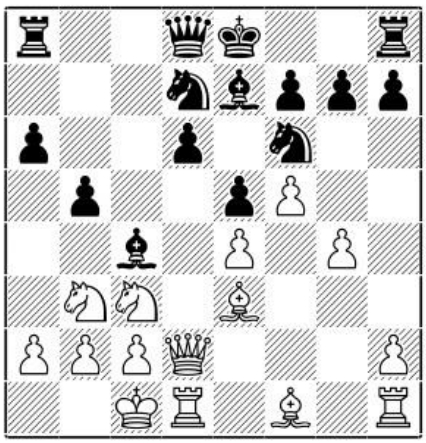
12...d5!?N seems like another good option, for instance: 13.Nxd5 (13.exd5 Bb4³) 13...Nxe4 14.Qe1 Bxd5 15.Rxd5 Qc7,,



13.Nxb5 Nxe4 14.Qe1 Bxf1 15.Rxf1 0-0 16.Nd2 Ndf6³

Black's central majority gave him an edge in Vaclav – Adelseck, corr. 2011.

A1) 12.g4



Sicilian players just have to get used to this move. A good reaction is:

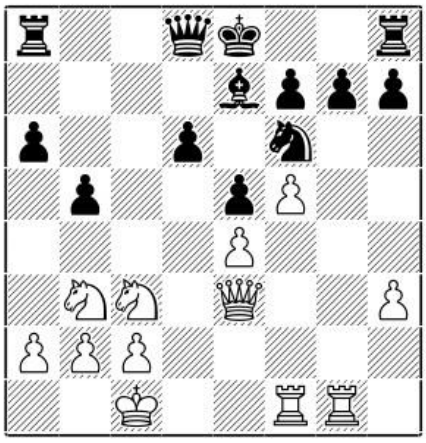
12...Nxg4! 13.Rg1 Ndf6

13...Nxe3 also scores well.

14.Bg5

White has tried three other moves:

14.h3?! Nxe3 15.Qxe3 Bxf1 16.Rdxf1 works out well for Black after:



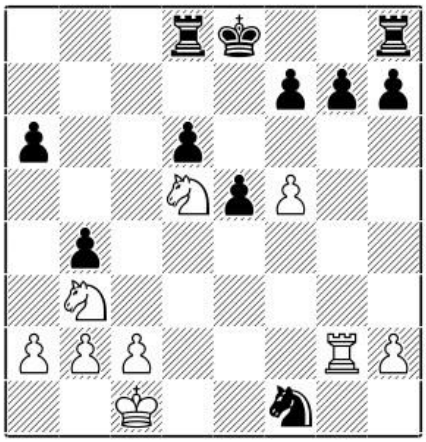
16...b4! 17.Nd5 Nxd5 18.exd5 Bf6³ De Carlos Arregui – Bennborn, corr. 2010.

14.Be2 Nxe3 15.Qxe3 Bxe2 16.Qxe2 0-0³ gave White insufficient play for the pawn in Nepomniachtchi – Najer, Novokuznetsk 2008.

14.Kb1 has been White's most popular choice and is similar to variation A2 below, but here Black enjoys greater flexibility as he has not yet committed his rook to c8. A logical continuation is: 14...Bxf1!? (14...Rc8N transposes to variation A2) 15.Rdxf1 Nxe3 16.Qxe3 b4 17.Nd5 Nxd5 18.exd5 Bf6 19.Nd2 a5 Black had a good position in Mercadal Benejam – Versili, corr. 2009.

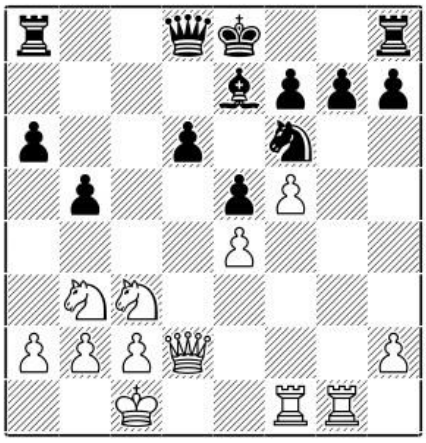
14...Bxf1 15.Bxf6

15.Rdxf1? does not work after: 15...b4 16.Nd5 Nxe4 17.Bxe7 Nxd2 18.Bxd8 Nxf1 19.Rxg4 Rxd8 20.Rg2



20...Rc8 (also good is 20...h5 21.Rf2 Nxh2 22.Rxh2 Rb8 23.Rh4 g5 24.fxg6 fxg6µ Ibarra Padron – Szczepankiewicz, corr. 2008) 21.Rf2 Nxh2 22.Rxh2 Rc4 23.Kd2 h5–+ Morozevich – Sakaev, Kazan (rapid) 2019.

15...Nxf6 16.Rdxf1



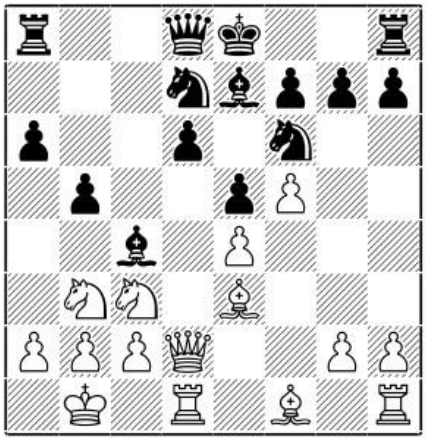
16...a5! 17.Qd3

17.Rxg7?! a4 forces the knight back to the pathetic a1-square.

17...b4 18.Nd5 0-0 19.Nxf6† Bxf6³

White did not have enough for the pawn in Necula – Scherer, corr. 2009.

A2) 12.Kb1



This is the normal move. It is useful to remove the king from the c1-h6 diagonal, and the text move also clears the c1-square for a possible rerouting of the b3-knight.

12...Rc8

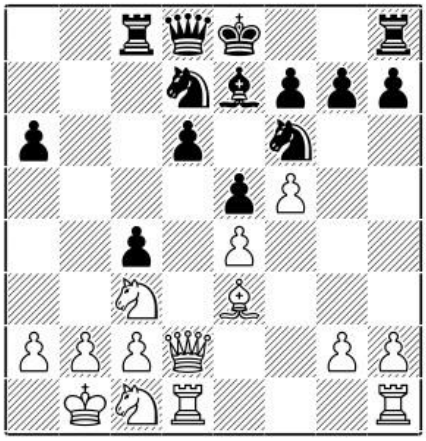
'Castling into it' with 12...0-0!? is another serious option, after which White will usually start attacking with either 13.Rg1 or 13.g4!?, but Black's counterplay is quite fast. I analysed this as well and found that Black is holding his own in all lines, but we will focus on the text move.

13.g4

This is the most popular continuation and the most direct attacking approach. Other options include:

13.Bd3 is rather passive. Black can either play 13...0-0 with a pleasant version of the line noted above, or 13...h5!?.

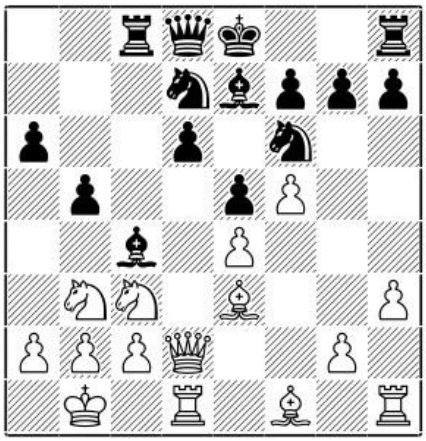
13.Bxc4 bxc4! (13...Rxc4 is conveniently met by 14.Qd3 intending Nd2) 14.Nc1 occurred in Bellaiche – Navara, Aix-les-Bains 2011. A logical continuation would have been:



14...Rb8!?N 15.g4 Qa5 Black has plenty of counterplay, especially since 16.g5?! allows 16...Qb4! 17.b3 cxb3 18.axb3 Nxe4.

13.h3

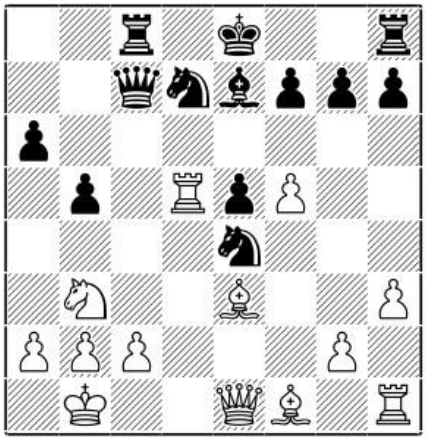
As always, this move is rather slow. A good reply is:



13...d5! 14.Nxd5

14.exd5 is well met by: 14...Bb4! 15.Bg5 Bxc3 (15...0-0!? was also good for Black in Wan Yunguo – Paragua, Manila 2013) 16.Bxf6 (16.bxc3? Bxd5 would be a positional disaster for White) 16...gxf6! (16...Nxf6? 17.Qxc3 hits the e5-pawn) 17.bxc3 Nb6 18.g4 (18.d6 Bd5µ; 18.Bxc4 bxc4 19.Nc1 Na4–+) 18...Bxd5µ Minchev – Murin, corr. 2008.

14...Nxe4 15.Qe1 Bxd5 16.Rxd5 Qc7

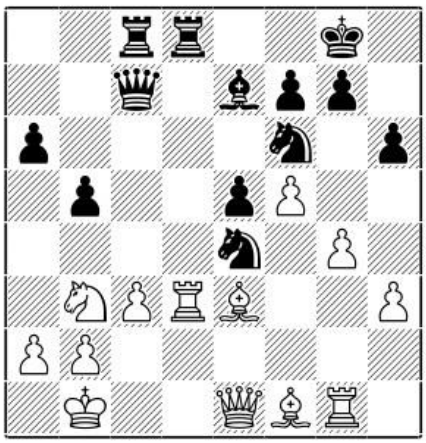


17.c3 0-0 18.g4

18.Rd1 b4! is good for Black in view of 19.cxb4? Bxb4!–+ or 19.c4 a5µ as in Simakov – Lebedev, corr. 2007.

18...Ndf6 19.Rd3 h6! 20.Rg1 Rfd8

20...a5!? also looks tempting.



21.Rxd8† Rxd8 22.Bc1 a5*ƒ*

Llompart Flexas – Santamaria Perez, corr. 2010.

A final option is:

13.Rg1

This is usually a better way to prepare the advance of the g-pawn.

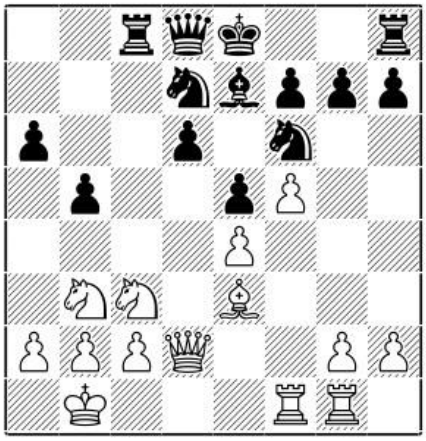
13...Bxf1!

A well-timed exchange, since either recapture will involve misplacing a rook.

13...Ng4!? also proved satisfactory after 14.h3 b4 15.Nd5 Bxd5 16.exd5 Nxe3 17.Qxe3 Ra8! 18.g4 Bg5 19.Qe4 Qb6= in Vegjeleki – Costa Trillo, corr. 2012.

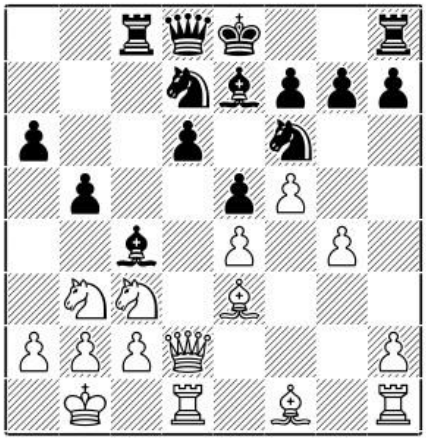
14.Rdxf1

14.Rgxf1 b4 15.Nd5 Nxd5 16.Qxd5 Qc7 was comfortable for Black in Buniy – Kaloumenos, corr. 2011.



14...b4 15.Nd5 a5 16.Nxe7 Kxe7!„/³

Black was starting to take over the initiative in A. Peters – Betker, corr. 2012.



13...Nxg4!?

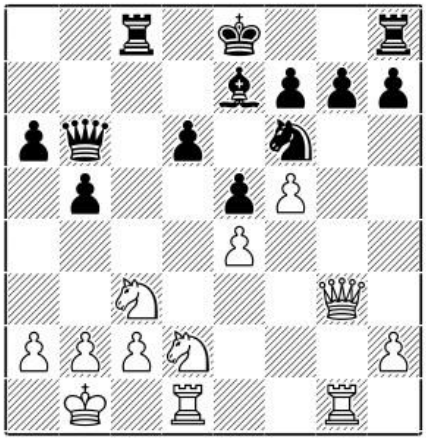
Let's eat!

Georgiev and Kolev prefer to decline the snack with 13...h6!?. I looked at this and concluded that the rare 14.Bxc4!? could be White's best: after the further 14...bxc4 15.Nc1 Nxg4 16.Rhg1 Nxe3 17.Qxe3 Bg5 18.Qh3 Nb6 19.Qh5 Kf8 20.N1e2© White had a decent initiative for the pawn in Probola – Staniszewski, corr. 2017.

14.Rg1 Ndf6!?

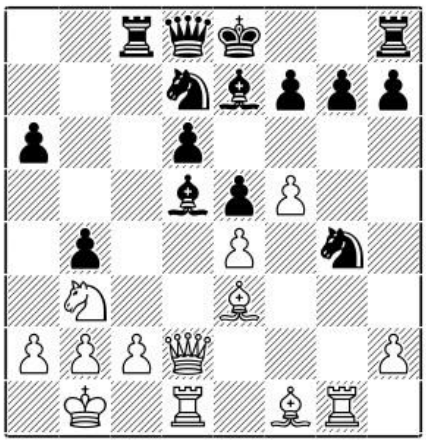
Black has a few options but I like the text move, maintaining the knight on g4 for now while regaining some control over the d5-square.

14...Nxe3 is the obvious move, but after 15.Qxe3 Qb6 16.Qg3 Nf6 17.Bxc4 Rxc4 18.Nd2 Rc8 White may be able to improve with:

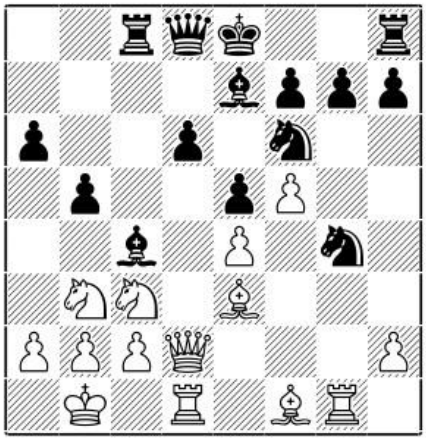


19.Qxg7!?N (19.Nd5 Nxd5 20.exd5 Bf6 21.Ne4 Ke7³ has occurred in a few games) 19...Rg8 20.Qxg8† Nxg8 21.Rxg8† Bf8 22.Nd5 Qf2 23.Rh8÷ With a strange kind of mess.

14...b4!? 15.Nd5 (but not 15.Bxc4? bxc3 16.Qd5 0-0 17.Rxg4 Nf6 18.Rxg7† Kxg7 19.Qd3 cxb2µ Bedard – Zemlyanov, corr. 2017) 15...Bxd5



16.exd5 (16.Rxg4?! Nf6 17.Rxg7 Bxe4³ was good for Black in Novikov – Oparin, Moscow 2015) 16...Nxe3 17.Qxe3 0-0 18.Bxa6 Rb8 The position was about equal in Kharlamov – Tiemann, corr. 2015.



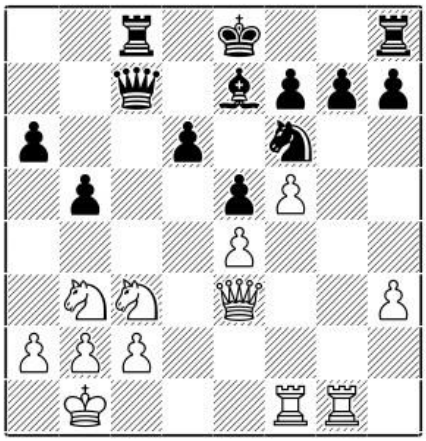
15.Bg5!?

This seems the most interesting continuation: White tries to demonstrate that Black's knights are in each other's way.

15.a3?! was played in Matsuura – Borges, Caioba 2016, when both 15...Bxf1N 16.Rdxf1 a5 and the immediate 15...a5!?N look more than sufficient for Black.

15.Bd3 has been tried once. Rather than hastily advancing with 15...b4 16.Na4, when White was pretty solid on the queenside in Sethuraman – Gomes, Kolkata 2012, I would try 15...g6!?N when White has to prove his compensation.

15.h3 is an obvious move to check, but this certainly makes Black's last move look smarter than 14...Nxe3. After 15...Nxe3 16.Qxe3 Bxf1 17.Rdxf1 Qc7 White struggles to find full compensation, for instance:



18.Rf2 (18.a3 a5 hardly helps White) 18...b4 19.Nd5 Nxd5 20.exd5 Bf6 Black had the upper

hand in Makarenko – Gabuzyan, Kazan 2013.

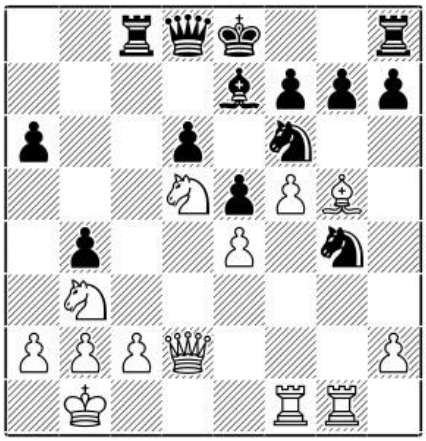
15...Bxf1!

Very often this simple capture is Black's best, as a white rook will have little to do on the f1-square.

Black was also successful with the immediate 15...b4 16.Bxf6?! bxc3 17.Bxe7 Kxe7µ in Chu Wei Chao – T. Antal, Kocaeli 2013, but the improvement 16.Bxc4!N 16...bxc3 17.Qe2 Nf2 18.Bxf6 Bxf6 19.Bxf7† Kxf7 20.Qxf2 would have left the game unclear.

16.Rdxf1 b4 17.Nd5

17.Bxf6? bxc3 18.Bxe7 Kxe7 19.bxc3 Nf6 20.Rxg7 Rc4µ turns out badly for White.

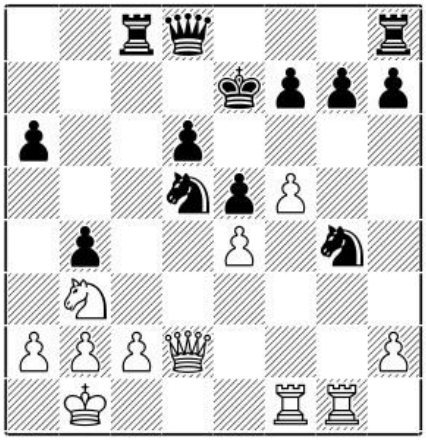


17...Nxd5 18.Bxe7!?

After 18.Rxg4N 18...Bxg5 19.Rxg5 Nf6 20.Rxg7 Qb6 Black is somewhat better, but not to the same extent as in the game, where he reached the same position but with the useful ...Ke7 thrown in for free. The text move is actually okay though; White's real mistake came later.

18...Kxe7!

18...Qxe7 is fine for Black but I like the text move: the king is quite safe and the rooks are now connected.



19.Rxg4?

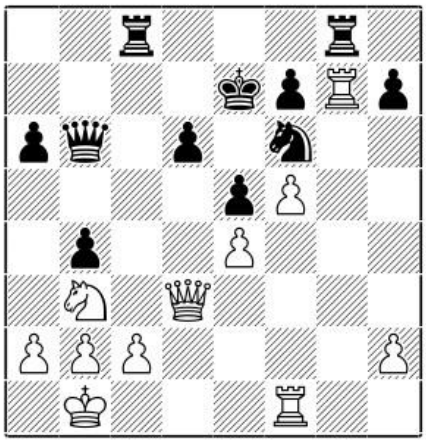
This seemingly tempting move leads to serious difficulties for White.

19.Qxd5? loses material after 19...Ne3µ.

White needed to play 19.exd5! when 19...Nf6 20.Qxb4 Qc7 offers chances for both sides.

19...Nf6 20.Rxg7 Qb6 21.Qd3 Rhg8µ

Black has the initiative all over the board. The position resembles a Rauzer Sicilian where things have gone badly awry for White.



22.Rg3

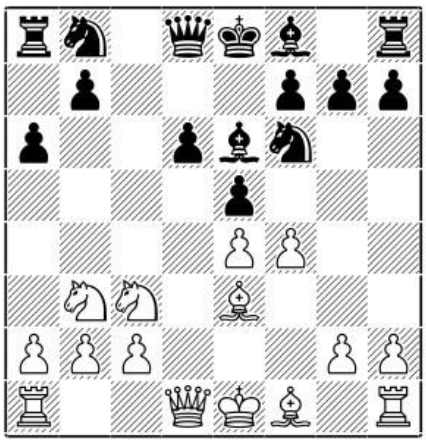
After 22.Rfg1? Qxg1† the rooks will dominate.

22...h5! 23.Nd2 h4 24.Rxg8 Rxg8 25.Nc4 Qd4!

The queen trade led to a near-decisive

endgame advantage for Black in Yu Yangyi – Zhou Jianchao, Las Vegas (2.2–rapid) 2014. (Had the endgame not been so favourable, 25...Qc5 26.Ne3 a5 would have kept full control with queens on the board.)

B) 8.f4!?



This move looks a bit odd at first, as White has only just developed his bishop. But the presence of the bishop on e6 makes f4-f5 a positional threat, so White gets his desired structure.

8...exf4 9.Bxf4

It seems strange that White has already lost a tempo with his bishop, having only developed it a few moves ago. Chess is not always simple though, and this line is actually quite tricky to meet if one is not well prepared.

9...Nc6

We reach a pawn structure that we saw earlier in variation A of Chapter 2. Here White is planning to castle queenside however, when there is pressure along the d-file and chances to attack on the kingside.

White has two main options: **B1)** 10.Qd2 and **B2)** 10.Qe2.

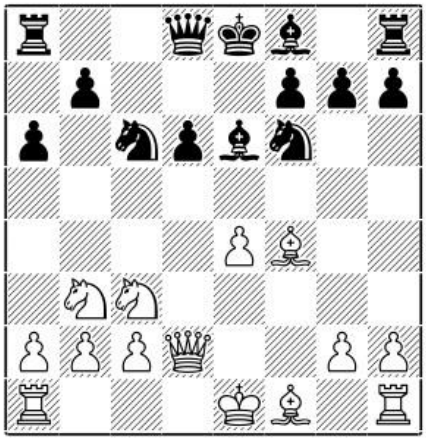
B1) 10.Qd2

GAME 17

Edwin Meiners – Hilmar Krueger

Correspondence 2009

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Be3 e5 7.Nb3 Be6 8.f4!? exf4 9.Bxf4 Nc6 10.Qd2



This looks like the natural square for the queen, but it is considered the less dangerous of the two options due to the effectiveness of Black's next move.

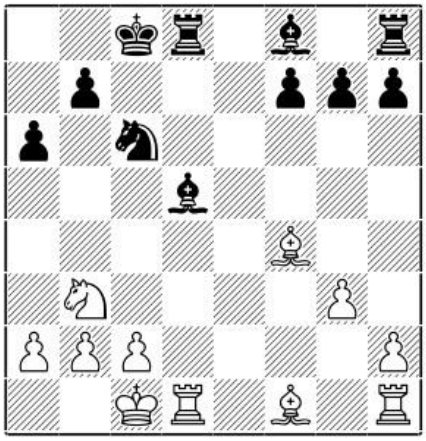
10...d5!

Black has also tried to do without this, but after 10...Be7 11.0-0-0 White has not had to spend time on h2-h3, and 11...Ne5 12.Nd4 0-0 13.Nf5 Bxf5 14.exf5 Qc8 15.h3! Qxf5 16.g4 Qg6 17.Bg2 gave White nice compensation for the pawn in Svidler – Topalov, Monte Carlo (rapid) 2006.

11.0-0-0

This is the only ambitious move.

Instead 11.exd5 Nxd5 12.Nxd5 Qxd5 13.Qxd5 (13.0-0-0 Qxd2† 14.Rxd2 Rd8= has also proven to be fine for Black in lots of games) 13...Bxd5 14.0-0-0 0-0-0 is no problem for Black. It is worth mentioning the possibility of 15.g3!? when the h1-rook is untouchable due to the threat of a check on h3. However, Black can solve all problems with:

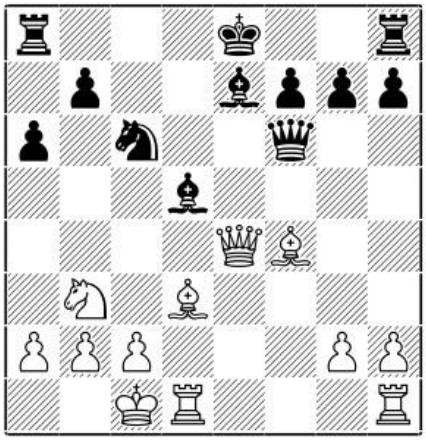


15...Bd6! Black was fine in Klovans – Dvoirys, Budapest 1992.

11...Bb4!?

This is the most interesting continuation and it scores well.

Georgiev and Kolev prefer the alternative 11...Nxe4 12.Nxe4 dxe4 13.Qe3 when Black has to be accurate: 13...Qf6! 14.Qxe4 (14.Nd2?! Bc5!) 14...Be7 15.Bd3 Bd5 (15...Nb4 has also been played but I think White keeps some initiative after 16.Be5 Qg5† 17.Kb1 Bd5 18.Qe1)



16.Qxd5 (The aforementioned authors only mention this move, but 16.Qe3!? Nb4 17.a3!? Nxd3† 18.Rxd3 is another possibility) 16...Qxf4† 17.Kb1 0-0 18.Qe4 Qxe4 19.Bxe4 Rfd8 Black should certainly hold, but White has the more pleasant side of equality and can choose between unbalancing things with 20.Bxc6 or simply maintaining a miniscule edge with 20.c3.

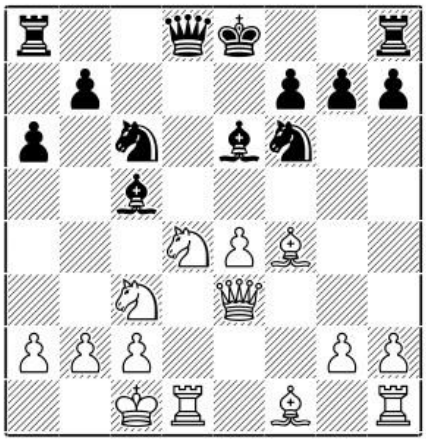
12.Qd3

A serious inaccuracy would be:

12.Qe3? d4!

In a couple of games Black has missed his opportunity and played 12...Bxc3?, which quickly transposes to the main game.

13.Nxd4 Bc5



14.Nce2

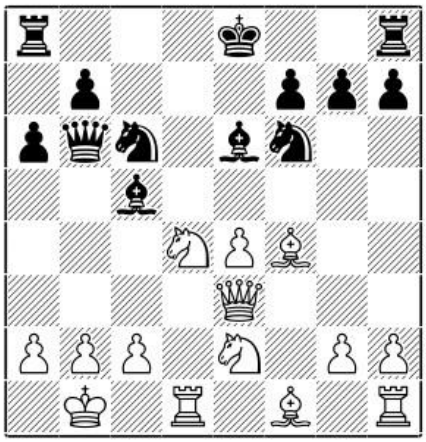
14.Nxe6N 14...Bxe3† 15.Bxe3 Qxd1† 16.Nxd1 fxe6 leaves White fighting for a draw in an endgame the exchange for a pawn down; yet this was the lesser evil.

14...Qb6µ

White's coordination is terrible.

15.Kb1

15.c3?! Bxa2 was already winning for Black in Nurkiewicz – Yilmaz, Graz 2017.

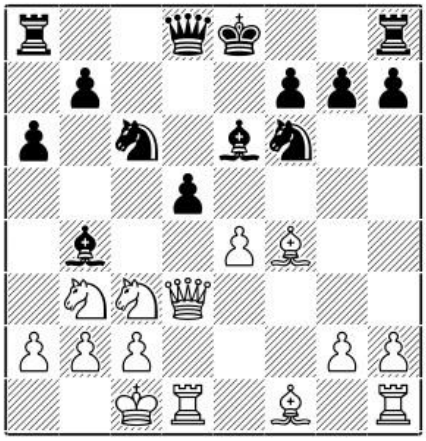


15...Ng4

Black is somewhat spoiled for choice, as 15...0-0N 16.c3 Rfe8 is also excellent for him.

16.Qg1 0-0 17.c3 Rfe8

Black had more than enough compensation for the pawn in Larduet Despaigne – Alonso Garcia, Colon 1993.



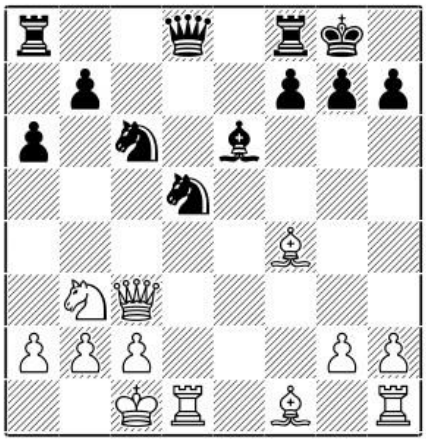
12...Bxc3 13.Qxc3 0-0

Georgiev and Kolev opine that White has a stable edge here, but I disagree. The pin on the d-file may look annoying, but Black is better developed and has a safer king.

14.exd5

14.e5 Ne4 15.Qe3 was pleasant for Black after 15...Rc8 (15...Re8N³ also looks good) in Kaminski – Baburin, Vienna 1995.

14...Nxd5



15.Qg3 Rc8

15...Ncb4!? looks interesting and has scored well, but one good option is enough.

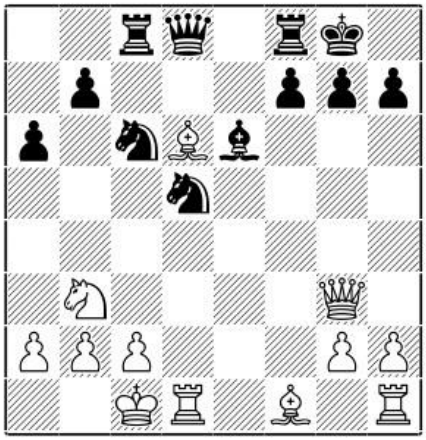
16.Bd6

This is by far the most common move and the computer's top choice, but the bishop is vulnerable here.

16.Bd3 Ncb4!? was an enterprising try in Scheider – A. Wagner, Dortmund 2013, but 16...Nxf4N 17.Qxf4 Qb6³ is simpler.

16.Bh6 Qf6 17.Bg5 Qg6 (Black could also try 17...Qe5!?N 18.Qxe5 Nxe5 19.Nd4 Bg4 with a level game) The game R. Mueller – Podgursky, corr. 2011, ended abruptly in a draw here. A likely continuation would be 18.Bd3 f5 when Black is at least equal.

16.a3 prevents Black's ...Ncb4 ideas, but 16...Nce7! equalized easily after 17.Rd2 Qb6 18.Nd4 Nxf4 19.Qxf4 Ng6 20.Qf2 Bd5 21.Be2 Rfe8 in Veselinov – Spasov, corr. 2017.



16...Re8

A tempting alternative is:

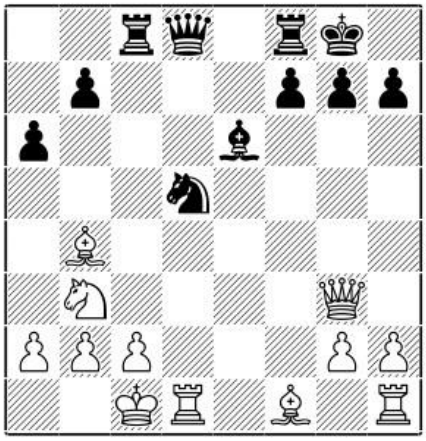
16...Ncb4!?

According to my analysis, White must walk a narrow path after this move – and even if he plays accurately, Black will have the option of forcing a draw.

17.Bxb4

This is forced.

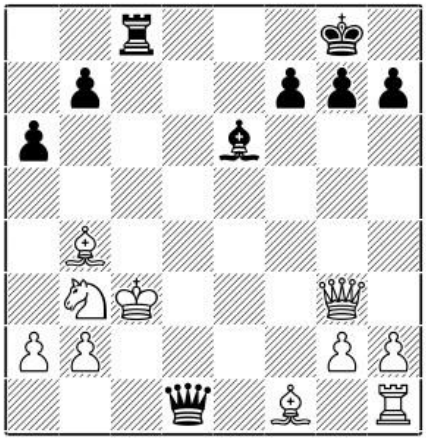
17.Rd2? led to victory for White in Iordachescu – Van Blitterswijk, Wijk aan Zee 2002, but the opposite result could have occurred if Black had found: 17...Nxa2†N 18.Kb1 Nac3†! 19.bxc3 Nxc3† 20.Kb2 Ne4 21.Qf4 Nxd2 22.Nxd2 (White will be crushed after 22.Qxd2 Qf6† 23.Qd4 Rxc2†! 24.Kxc2 Bxb3† 25.Kd3 Qg6† followed by ...Rd8) 22...Qb6† 23.Kc1 Rfd8 With a winning position.



17...Rxc2†! 18.Kb1

After 18.Kxc2? Nxb4† 19.Kc1 Qc8† 20.Kd2 Qc2† 21.Ke1 Bxb3–+ Black's rook comes to the e-file with deadly effect.

18...Nc3†! 19.Kxc2 Qxd1† 20.Kxc3 Rc8†

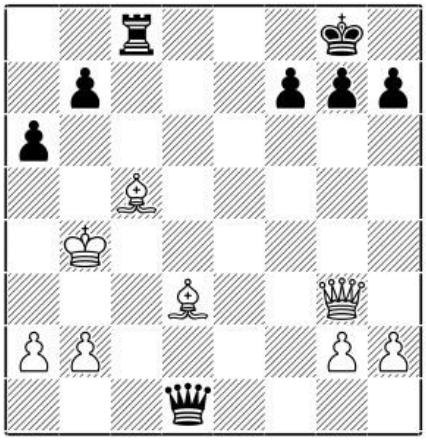


21.Bc5!

Another only move!

Instead after 21.Nc5? a5! 22.Ba3 Qc1† 23.Kd4 Qd2† White will not last long.

21...Bxb3 22.Bd3! Qxh1 23.Kxb3 Qd1† 24.Kb4

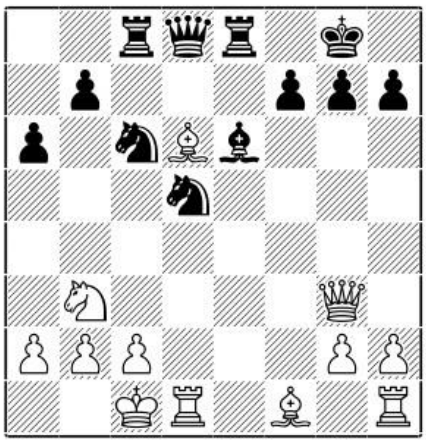


24...Rd8!?

24...Qd2† 25.Kb3 Qd1† forces an immediate draw if Black wants it. The text move is a winning attempt.

25.Bc4 Qd2† 26.Qc3 Qxg2 27.Bb6 Re8÷

A draw ensued in J. Fernandez – Czegledi, corr. 2013, although in a practical game any result would still be possible.

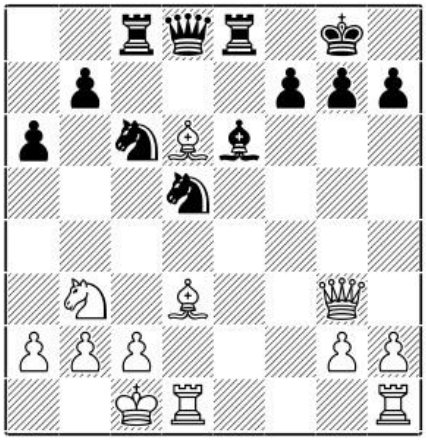


17.Bc4

The bishop is active here, although it looks rather exposed. I checked two other options:

17.Bd3

This developing move looks safe, but Black has a shocking response to grab the initiative.



17...h5!!N

What a move! White's queen needs to guard both the d6-bishop and the e3-square.

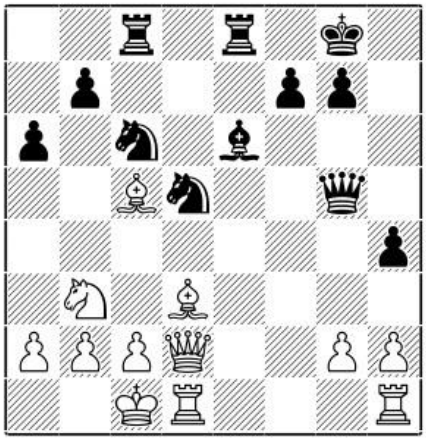
In Vavulin – Oparin, Kolomna 2016, Black played 17...Qf6 and eventually won, but he was 'only' comfortably equal at this stage.

18.Bc5

White has problems in all lines, for instance: 18.h3? h4 19.Qh2 Ne3 20.Rde1 Bxb3 21.axb3 Nb4–+; 18.h4 Bg4³; 18.Ba3 Qf6 19.Kb1 h4 20.Qf3 Ne5! 21.Qxf6 Nxf6³

18...h4 19.Qf2 Qg5† 20.Qd2

20.Kb1 is safer, though after 20...Ne5 Black clearly has the initiative.



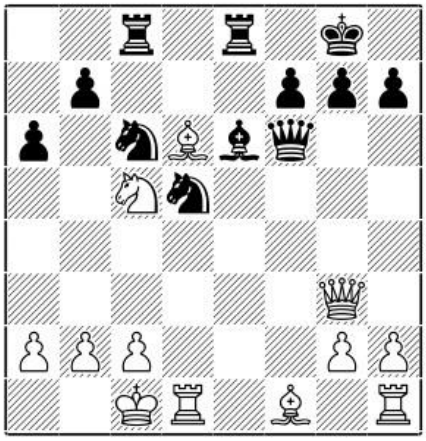
20...Nf4! 21.Kb1 Bxb3 22.axb3 Ne5µ

White's pawn structure is about to be wrecked. A nice additional point is that 23.Be3 can be met by 23...Nexd3 24.cxd3 Qxg2!, since 25.Bxf4 Re2 wins.

17.Nc5

This seems like the safest move, but even here White has to be accurate after:

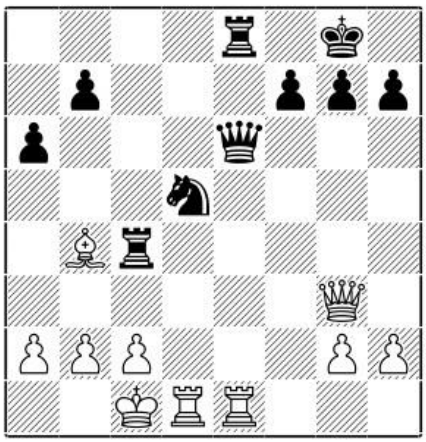
17...Qf6!



18.Nxe6

18.c4?! occurred in Dantas – Petkov, corr. 2006, when 18...Ncb4!N 19.Nxe6 (or 19.cxd5 Bf5!–+) 19...Nxa2† 20.Kc2 (20.Kb1 Nac3† 21.bxc3 Nxc3† 22.Kc2 Nxd1–+) 20...Nab4† 21.Kb1 Rxe6 would have been winning for Black.

18...Qxe6 19.Bc4 Ncb4 20.Bxb4 Rxc4 21.Rhe1



21...Re4

Another drawing line is 21...Rxc2†!?N 22.Kxc2 Nxb4† 23.Kc3 Nxa2† 24.Kc2 Nb4† with a perpetual.

22.Rxe4 Qxe4 23.Re1 Ne3

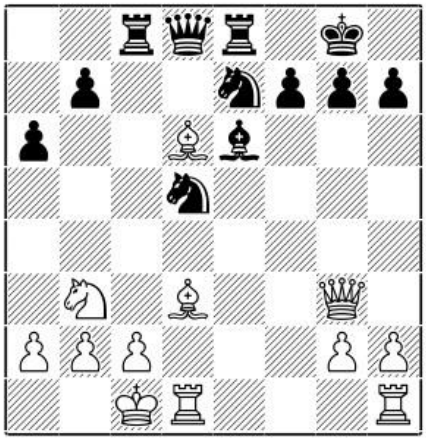
This threatens mate and forces everything off the board.

24.Qf2 Qxb4 25.Rxe3 Qb5 26.Rxe8†

½–½ Gilbert – Cacko, corr. 2011.

17...Ncb4

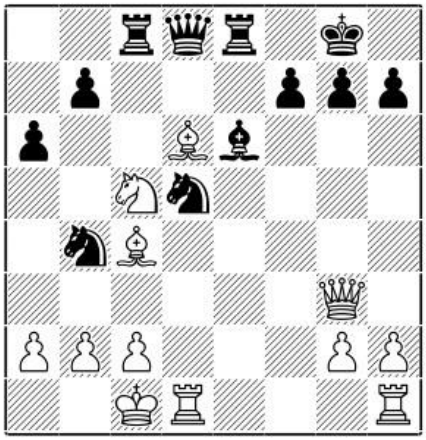
This is the most thematic move but 17...Nce7 is also possible, for instance: 18.Bd3



18...Nf5!?N (18...h5!? 19.Nd4 Bg4 20.Rde1 Nc6 21.h3 Rxe1† 22.Rxe1 Ndb4 23.Bxb4 ½–½ Pijl – Krakovsky, corr. 2011) The text move leads to complications after: 19.Bxf5 Bxf5 20.Rxd5 Rxc2† 21.Kd1 Be4 22.Rd2 Qc8 23.Nc5 Rxc5 24.Bxc5 Qxc5©

18.Nc5

White could try to avoid complications with 18.Bxd5 Nxd5, but only Black can be better here.



18...h5!

This idea again!

18...Bg4 19.Bxd5 Qg5† 20.Kb1 Nxd5 21.h3 Ne3 also held up okay in Tkachenko – Salzmann, corr. 2019, but Black is walking a bit of a tightrope here.

19.Bxd5

Equality resulted from 19.Nxe6 Rxe6 20.Bxb4 (20.Bxd5? is refuted by 20...Rxc2† 21.Kb1 Qf6! when the threat of mate on b2 is crushing) 20...Rxc4 21.Bc3 Rg4 22.Qf3 Rd6= in Kuta – Novak, corr. 2011.

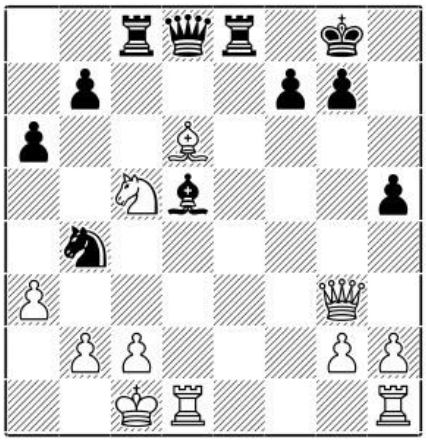
19...Bxd5!

Instead 19...Nxd5? 20.Nxe6 fxe6 21.Be5 just hands White the advantage.

The text move seems to leave Black's pieces hanging in the air, but he can keep it together tactically.

20.a3

This looks like trouble, but Black has a variety of resources.

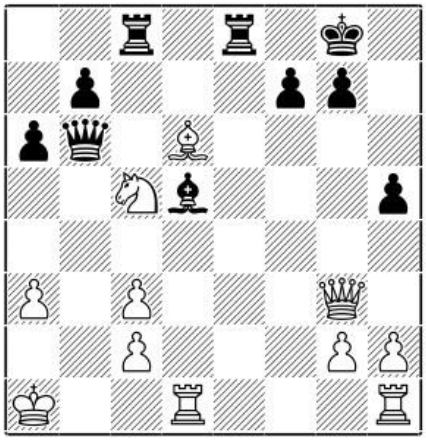


20...h4!

This h-pawn is a hero for Black in this line.

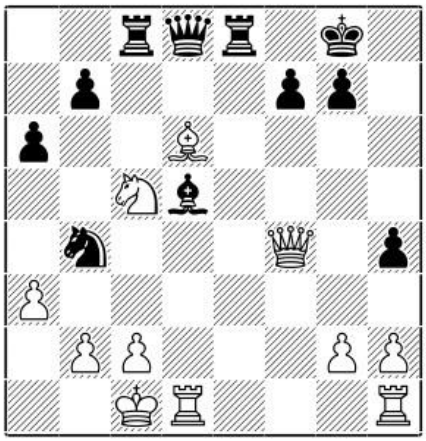
20...Nxc2 is playable, and 21.Rxd5 h4 22.Qf3 Ne3 23.Kb1! (23.Rd3? Rxc5†µ; 23.Rd4 b6³) 23...Nxd5 24.Qxd5 is unclear.

20...Na2†!? is a tempting alternative: 21.Kb1 Nc3† 22.bxc3 Qb6† 23.Ka1 (or 23.Kc1 Rxc5 24.Bxc5 Qxc5©)



23...Rxc5! White should bail out with 24.c4! (24.Bxc5 Qxc5³) 24...h4! 25.Bxc5 Qxc5 26.Rxd5 Qxd5 27.cxd5 hxg3 28.hxg3= with a drawn endgame.

21.Qf4

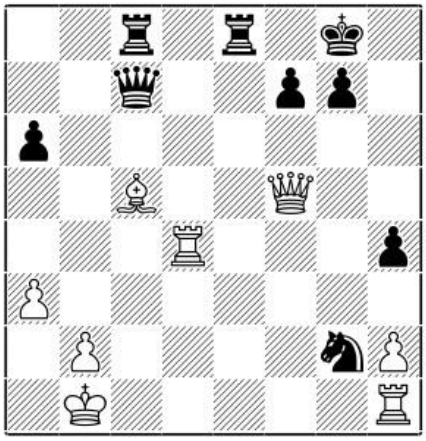


21...Nxc2!

Only now.

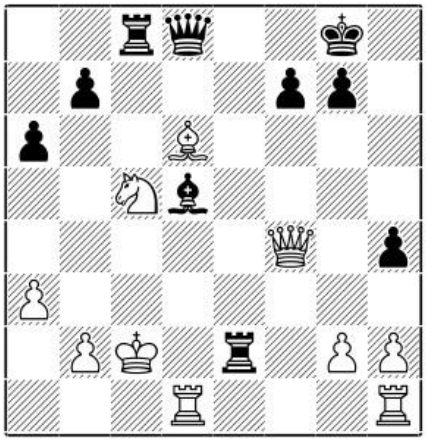
22.Kxc2

After 22.Rxd5 Ne3 the rook is not protected, and White remains under pressure after: 23.Rd4 b6 24.Kb1 bxc5 25.Bxc5 Nxg2 26.Qf5 Qc7



27.Rd7 Qf4 28.Rxf7 Rxc5 29.Qxf4 Nxf4 30.Rxf4 g5!? It should be a draw, but in a practical game Black could certainly keep playing.

22...Re2†



23.Kc1

White would ideally like to move his king off the c-file, but 23.Kb1? runs into 23...Qb6! when 24.b4 (24.Na4 Qb3 25.Rxd5 Qxd5µ) 24...Rxc5! 25.Bxc5 Qg6† mates.

23...Qb6 24.b4

Now White's pieces are all hanging together by a thread, but he does have an extra piece. For now, at least.

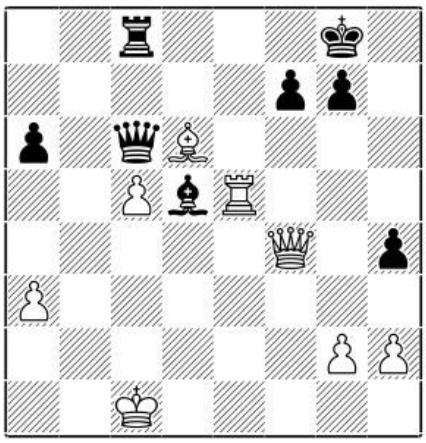
24...Qc6! 25.Rhe1!

25.Kb1? loses in more than one way: 25...h3!? is the engine's choice, but the simple 25...b6 regains the piece with a winning position.

White can hold on to his extra material with 25.Rd2 Rxd2 26.Kxd2, but after 26...Bxg2 27.Rg1 b6 28.Nd3 Qc3† 29.Ke2 Qb3 Black has two pawns for the piece and the attack continues.

25...Rxe1 26.Rxe1 b6 27.Re5 bxc5 28.bxc5

White's king may look dangerously exposed but material is limited, and in a correspondence game White can keep it all together.



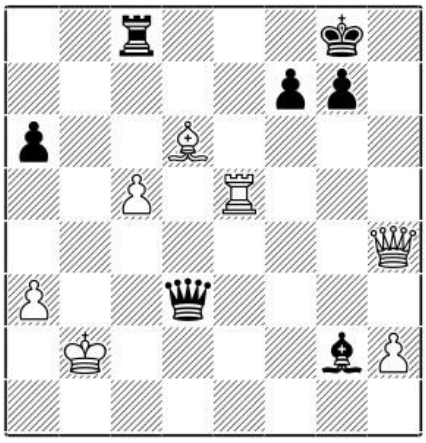
28...Bxg2

28...Re8!? 29.Rxe8† Qxe8 is another idea, but White is holding with 30.Kd2 (30.Qxh4? Qe3†) 30...Bxg2 31.Qxh4.

29.Qxh4 Qf3

29...g6 30.Rh5! gxh5 31.Qg5† also leads to a draw.

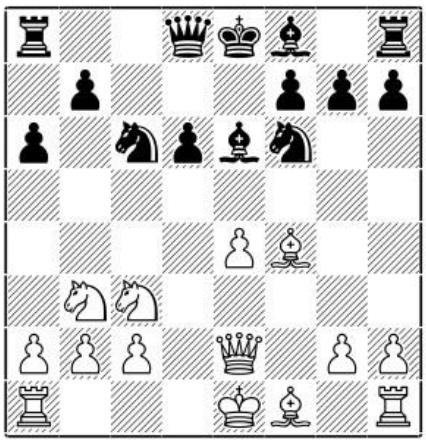
30.Kb2 Qd3



31.Rh5 Qd2† 32.Kb3 Bd5† 33.Ka4 Bc6†

½–½

B2) 10.Qe2



This is a more dangerous try than the previous variation. It may look strange to place the queen where it blocks in the f1-bishop, but the advantage is that it leaves the d-file open for White's rook.

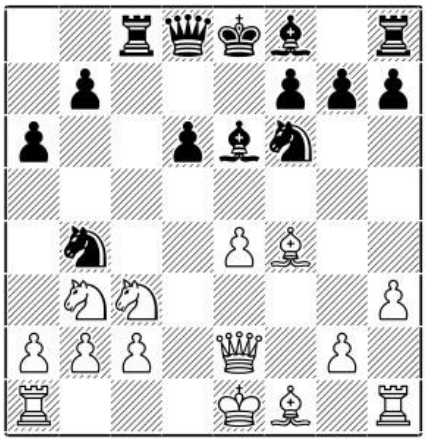
10...Be7

Black simply develops. Note that 10...d5? simply does not work here due to the pin after 11.0-0-0.

Black does, however, have another possibility that may appeal to some players:

10...Rc8 11.h3 Nb4!

This could be a clean theoretical equalizer for those who don't mind some memory work.



12.0-0-0

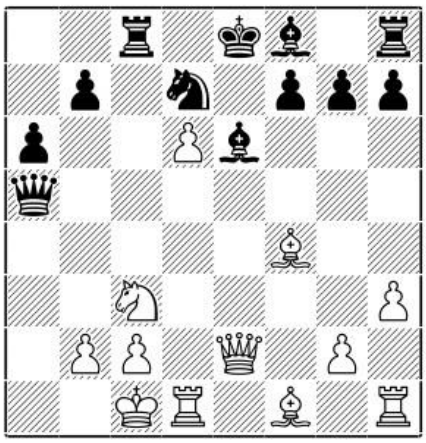
12.a3 Nh5! is one of the tactical

justifications for Black's knight lunge.

12...Nxa2†!?

12...Bxb3!? 13.axb3 Qa5 14.Kb1 Be7 15.e5 Rxc3 16.bxc3 Qa2† 17.Kc1 Nfd5 18.cxb4 Qa3† 19.Kd2 Qxb4† 20.Kc1 Qa3† is a relatively forcing route to a draw, which has occurred in a bunch of games.

13.Nxa2 Bxb3 14.Nc3 Be6 15.e5 Nd7 16.exd6 Qa5



17.Qe3

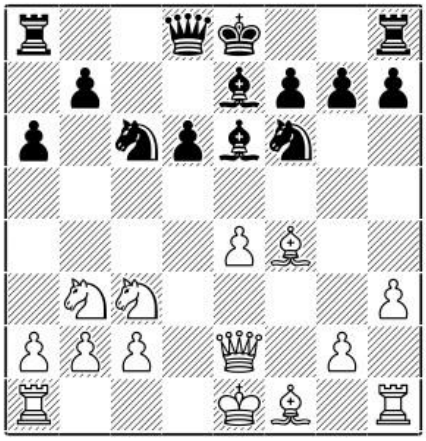
One of the justifications of Black's play is that 17.Qe4?! Qa1† 18.Nb1 is met by the ridiculous 18...Be7!! 19.dxe7 Nc5µ.

17...g5! 18.Bxg5 Bg7 19.Nd5 Qa1† 20.Kd2 Qa5†=

With a strange draw. The main reason I did not give this as the main recommendation is that there are all kinds of strange tactical points, so playing this way leaves Black completely dependent on memorization. The main line is sound, and learning and playing it also helps to develop our understanding of a thematic Najdorf structure. An additional point is that the position after White's next move in our main line can also arise via the 6.h3 e5 7.Nb3 move order.

11.h3

With the queen on e2, this is necessary because White cannot castle until ...Bg4 is prevented. After having played a few natural moves, we have reached an important moment where Black must make the correct decision.



11...Nd7!

This move is essential for Black to reach the optimal arrangement with his knights. In the event of 11...0-0 12.0-0-0 it is too late because the d6-pawn is under pressure.

12.0-0-0

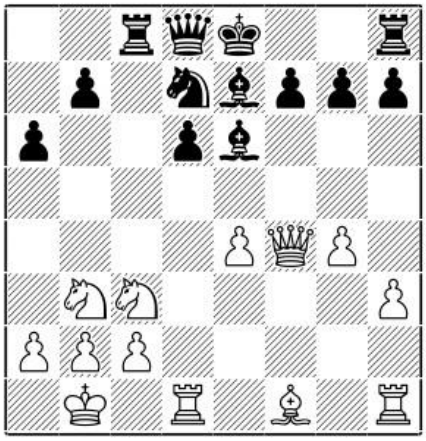
From here the moves Kb1, g2-g4, Nd4 and Nd5 are all on the cards for White, and they can be played in various orders.

12...Nce5!

This is definitely the correct knight. The c-file remains open for Black's rook, and the d7-knight may at some point move to b6. From there it contests the d5-square and may head to the attractive c4-outpost.

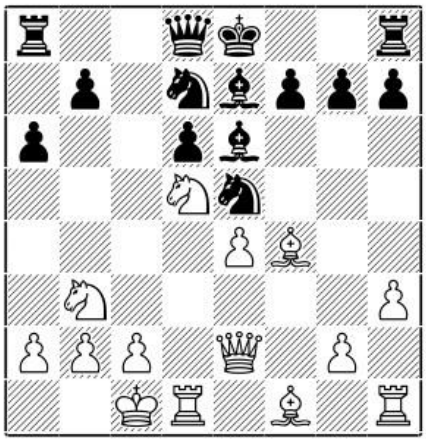
Now it is White's turn to make an important decision. His main options are **B21)** 13.Nd5, **B22)** 13.Nd4 and **B23)** 13.Kb1.

13.g4 seems a little cumbersome, and 13...Rc8 already threatens an exchange sac on c3. A good example continued 14.Qe3 Ng6! when White has to be wary of the c1-h6 diagonal. 15.Kb1 Nxf4 16.Qxf4 was the continuation of Abhishek – Neverov, New Delhi 2015, when Black missed a fine opportunity:



16...Rxc3!N 17.bxc3 Qc7 With superb play for the exchange.

B21) 13.Nd5



13...Bxd5 14.Rxd5

14.exd5 0-0 is pleasant for Black. White should generally aim to recapture with a piece on d5 in these positions, unless there is an especially good reason to favour the pawn.

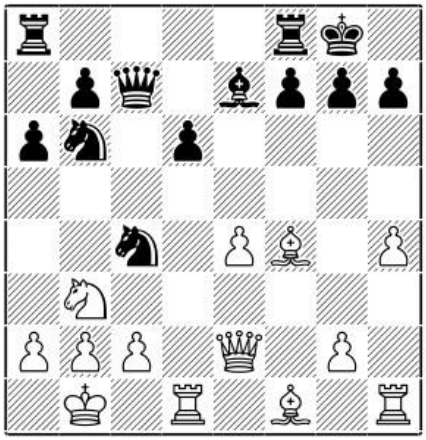
14...0-0

Black has achieved a heavy practical score from here, although the objective evaluation is still rather balanced.

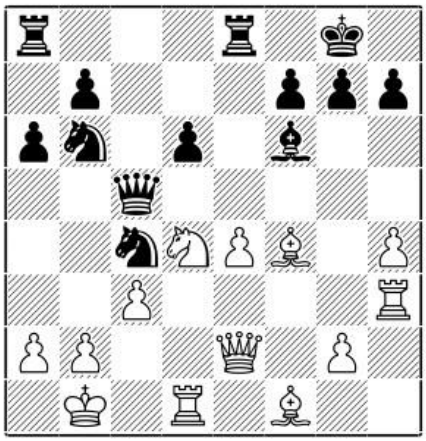
15.h4

This has been played in three of the five games thus far.

In a relatively recent high-level game, White deviated with: 15.Kb1 Qc7!? 16.Rd1 Nb6 17.h4 Nec4



18.Rh3 (18.Nd4N is also playable, when 18...Nxb2!? 19.Kxb2 Na4† 20.Kc1 Qc3 21.Nf5= is a possible finish with Black delivering perpetual check) 18...Bf6 19.c3 Rfe8 20.Nd4 Qc5



So far the position remains balanced, but 21.Nf5?! was an inaccuracy allowing Black to seize the initiative with 21...d5!³ in Topalov – Grischuk, Stavanger 2014.

15...Rc8

15...Nb6!?N 16.Rd1 Bf6 17.g4 Nec4 is also interesting but Black has no particular need for a new path.

16.g4 Bf6!N

I like this recommendation of Georgiev and Kolev, although the analysis has moved on a little since their 2012 book.

Black was successful after 16...Qc7 17.g5 in Shirov – Gelfand, Chalkidiki 1993, but White was better at this point.

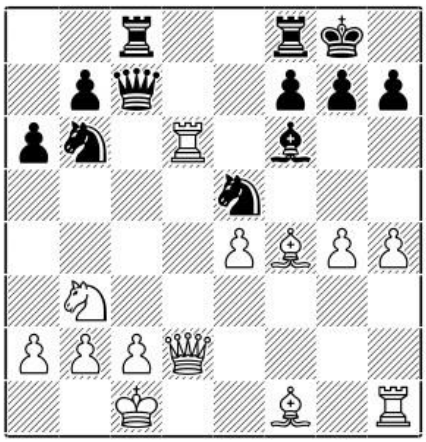
16...Bxh4!? is theoretically playable, and 17.Qh2 g5 18.Bxe5 dxe5 led to an eventual draw in Sartori – Caradonna, corr. 2008, but this does not seem like an attractive example for a practical player to follow.

17.c3!?

White must avoid 17.Rxd6? Nc4 of course.

After 17.g5 Black has the trick 17...Nc4! 18.c3 (18.gxf6? Qxf6 threatens both b2 and the f4-bishop) 18...Be5 with a fine position.

17.Qd2 is well met by 17...Nb6! 18.Rxd6 Qc7 when Black threatens to land a huge knight on c4. The critical continuation is:

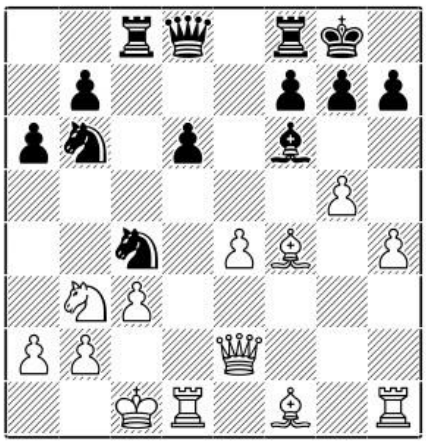


19.Rxf6 gxf6 20.g5 And now 20...f5!µ intending ...Rfd8 favours Black, as Georgiev and Kolev point out.

The text move was not considered by Georgiev and Kolev, but Illingworth suggested it for White in *New in Chess Yearbook* 110. Play continues:

17...Nb6 18.Rd1 Nec4 19.g5

Illingworth's line concludes with 19...Be5 20.Bxe5 Nxe5 21.Nd4 intending Nf5. I agree with his assessment that White stands better in the final position, but fortunately Black's play can be improved.



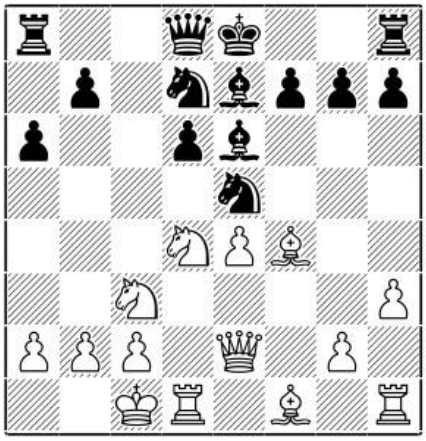
19...Nxb2! 20.Qxb2

20.gxf6? Nxd1 21.fxg7 Re8 22.Qxd1 Na4! is excellent for Black.

20...Bxc3 21.Qh2!

Without this move, White would be dead lost. As things stand, Black has no deadly discovered checks available but he can keep the tension with 21...a5!? or 21...Qe7!?, with two pawns plus some initiative for the piece. Any result is possible but White's position would appear practically more dangerous due to his exposed king.

B22) 13.Nd4



This is an important alternative, which was played

against me in 2014 by the Cuban Grandmaster Quesada Perez.

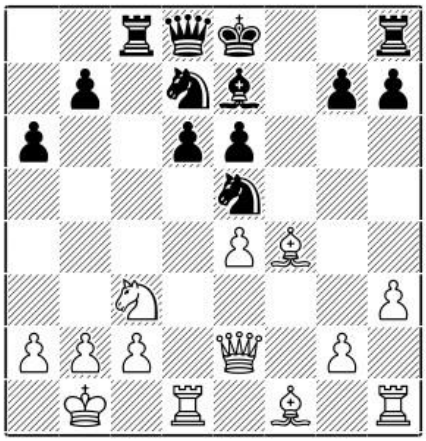
13...Rc8

I followed the recommendation from *The Sharpest Sicilian 2012*. Black threatens the typical exchange sac on c3.

14.Qe3!

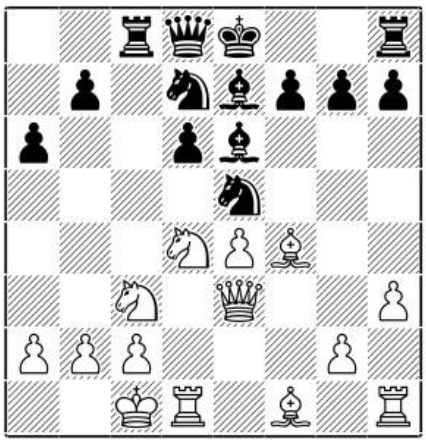
We will see that this move is thematic for White's set-up.

14.Nxe6 fxe6 15.Kb1 occurred in M. Klein – Titze, corr. 2003, when Black castled and went on to draw, but a natural improvement is:



15...Rxc3!N 16.bxc3 Qb6† 17.Ka1 Qc6 Black has more than enough play for the exchange.

Georgiev and Kolev only considered 14.Nd5 Bxd5 15.exd5 0-0 16.Kb1 (or 16.Nf5 Bg5) 16...Bf6 when Black can be satisfied.

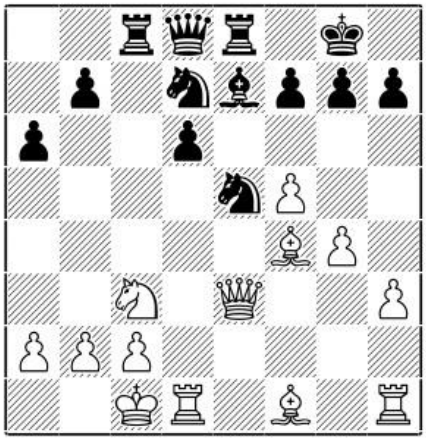


14...Bf6!?

This has been a popular choice in correspondence play, but the ideas associated with it can easily be understood by practical players: Black offers the d6-pawn in order to activate his pieces.

My reaction was poor: 14...Ng6?! 15.g3 0-0 16.h4 and everything soon fell apart after 16...Nb6? 17.Nxe6 fxe6 18.Bh3+– in Quesada Perez – Vigorito, Las Vegas 2014. My quick preparation before the game was not enough to get me in tune with the position.

14...0-0 is a fully playable alternative. Over the board I was afraid of: 15.Nf5 Bxf5 16.exf5 Re8 17.g4

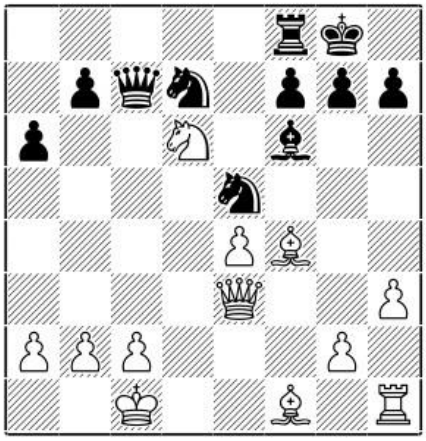


It seemed to me that White's control of the d5-square and long diagonal looked imposing. However, after 17...Qa5 18.Kb1, as played in Walter – Bashirli, Poprad 2016, the accurate 18...Nb6!N would have given Black counterplay. The knight contests the d5-square and White cannot seize the long diagonal without giving the c4-square to Black's knight.

15.Kb1!?

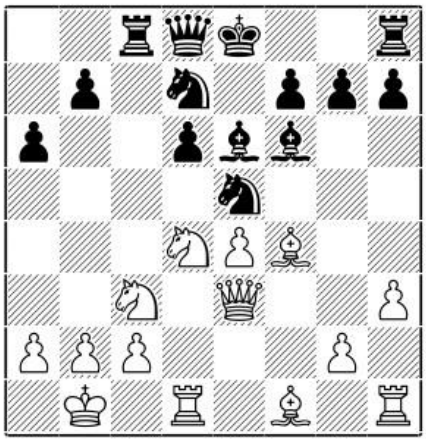
Pawn-grabbing with 15.Nxe6 fxe6 16.Rxd6 Qe7 17.Rd1 0-0© offers Black decent compensation; all of his pieces are active and he can develop his initiative on the queenside.

The same can be said after: 15.Nf5 0-0 16.Nd5 Bxd5 17.Rxd5 Rc6 18.Rxd6 Rxd6 19.Nxd6 Qc7



20.Nf5 Nc5 21.Kb1 Re8 22.g4 h6© Here too, Black has held his own in correspondence games.

The text move is less critical in a way, but also a natural choice for a human player, and it was tested in a high-level game a few years ago.

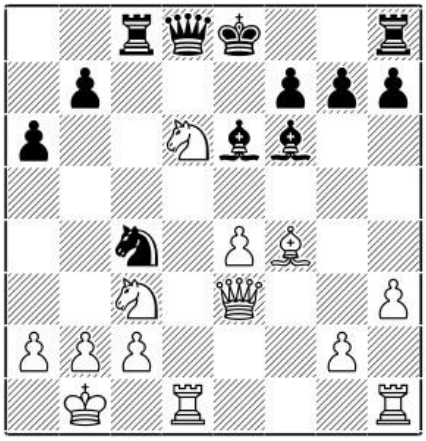


15...Nb6!

15...0-0 gave Black a satisfactory game in J. van Foreest – Naiditsch, Basel 2015, but the text move is more incisive.

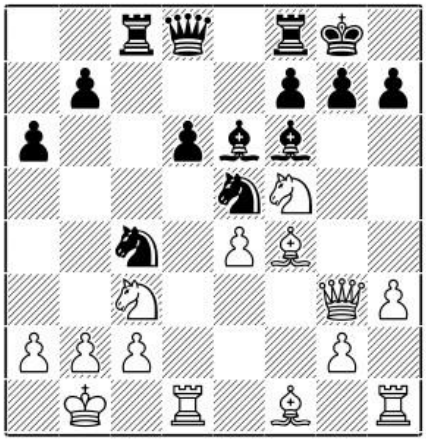
16.Nf5 Nbc4 17.Qg3

17.Bxc4 Nxc4 18.Nxd6† is of course met by:



18...Qxd6! 19.Rxd6 Nxe3 20.Bxe3 Bxc3 21.bxc3 Rxc3 22.Bd4 Rg3 Reaching an endgame where only Black can have any winning chances.

17...0-0



18.Nd5 Bxd5 19.Rxd5 Qc7 20.Bxc4 Nxc4„

Both sides had their chances in Castro – Destruels Moreno, corr. 2015, which was subsequently drawn.

B23) 13.Kb1

GAME 18

Bjorn Moller Ochsner – Simon Bekker-Jensen

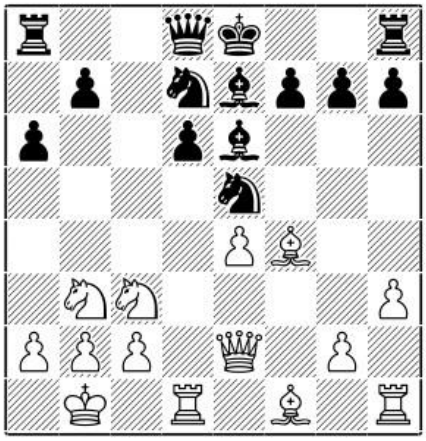
Svendborg 2016

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Be3 e5 7.Nb3 Be6 8.f4

The game actually proceeded with 8.h3 Be7 9.f4 exf4 10.Bxf4 Nc6 11.Qe2, but I have switched the move order to fit with our chapter.

8...exf4 9.Bxf4 Nc6 10.Qe2 Be7 11.h3 Nd7! 12.0-0-0 Nce5! 13.Kb1

This move is always useful, so it is hardly surprising that White's most popular continuation has been to play it first while keeping a variety of options open. As we have already seen, White's general ideas are to advance on the kingside and exert pressure in the centre with his knights.



13...Rc8

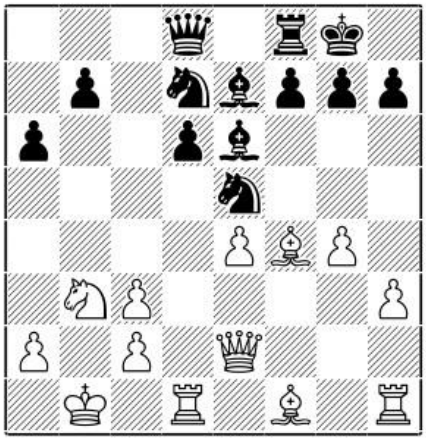
Once again I have shifted the move order to the sequence I would personally prefer. The game actually continued 13...0-0 14.Nd4 (14.g4 Rc8 15.Qe3 Re8 reaches our main line) 14...Re8 15.g4 Rc8 16.Qe3, reaching our main line below.

Although there is nothing really wrong with the game continuation as shown above, the text move is the most direct approach, threatening the usual exchange sac. Both Ftacnik and Georgiev/Kolev cover this line, but a lot has happened since then.

14.Qe3!

Naturally, White prevents the sacrifice.

Black should be happy to get 14.g4 Rxc3! 15.bxc3 0-0 on the board, for instance:

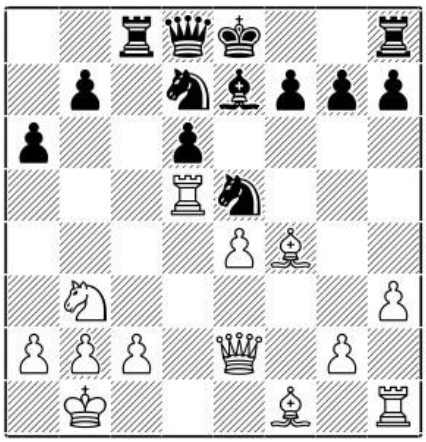


16.Qe3 Qc7 17.g5 Nb6 18.Qd4 Rc8 Black had excellent compensation in Heinrich – Kuhne, corr. 2010.

White may also avoid the exchange sac by moving his knight:

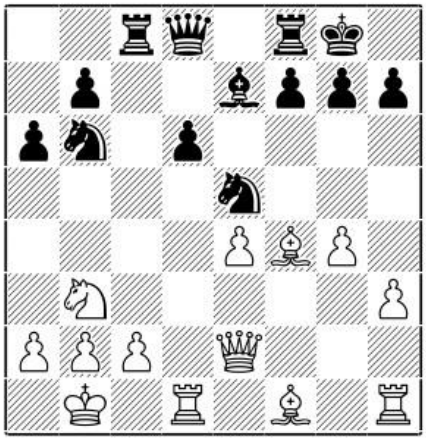
14.Nd5 Bxd5 15.Rxd5

As usual, 15.exd5 is less than critical: 15...0-0 16.g4 Bg5 (16...Re8 was also fine in Libiszewski – Sebag, Saint-Quentin 2014) 17.Bxe5 (17.Bg3?! Nc4³ Haring – Firouzja, Poprad 2016) 17...Re8! 18.h4 Rxe5 19.Qg2 Be3= Movsesian – Palac, Neum 2004.



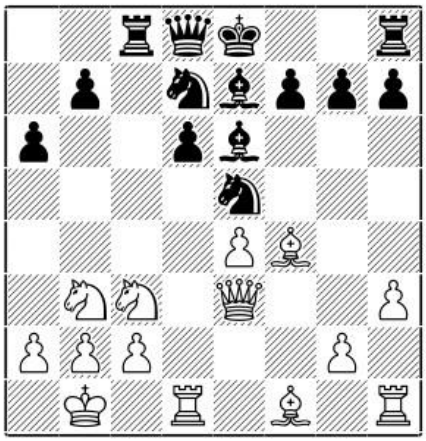
15...0-0 16.g4 Nb6 17.Rd1

17.Rd4 Nbc4 18.Qd1 occurred in Navara – Duda, Legnica 2013, when 18...Bf6!?N would have been simplest. Play may continue 19.Bxc4 Nxc4 20.e5 Bxe5 21.Bxe5 Nxe5 22.Rxd6 Qc7 with obvious equality.



17...Nec4!

Georgiev and Kolev offer 17...Nbc4 18.h4 a5 19.g5 a4 20.Nd4 Qb6 21.c3 Rfe8 22.Nf5 Bf8,, which seems playable enough. I prefer the text move though, as White must take into account ideas such as ...Na4 and ...Bf6, with all kinds of tactical threats on the queenside.



14...0-0

Castling is the most natural choice, keeping the option of ...Qa5 in the event that White moves his knight away from b3.

Nevertheless, Black has also done okay with 14...Qc7!?, removing the queen from the d-file in preparation for ...Nb6. (The same idea can be considered on Black's next move as well.)

15.g4

15.Nd4 Re8! 16.g4 is another possible move order.

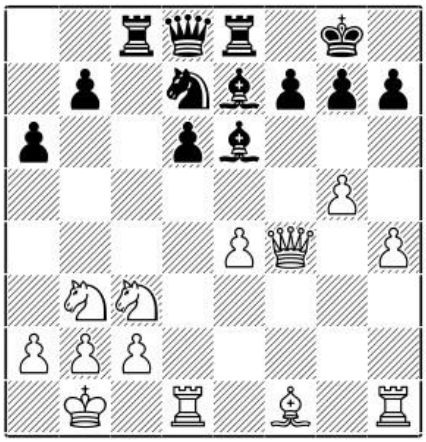
15...Re8

This move is generally useful. The rook eyes the white queen and makes room for a possible ...Bf8.

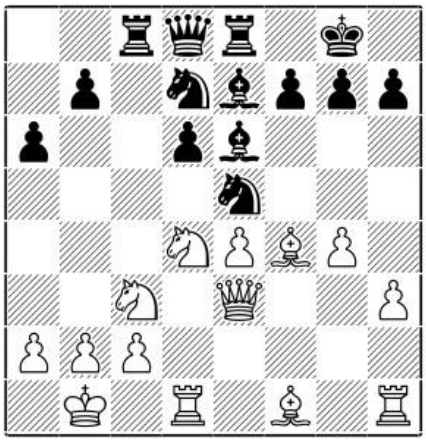
16.Nd4

With this move, we transpose back to the main game. Indeed, it is possible to get here from a variety of move orders.

In some correspondence games White has stubbornly refused to play this move, instead preferring 16.g5!?. Black cannot play ...Qa5 now, so most games have instead continued: 16...Ng6 17.h4 Nxf4 18.Qxf4



18...Rxc3! 19.bxc3 Ne5 Black has a decent initiative for the exchange after 20.Bh3 Bc4 or 20.Qg3 Qc7.



16...Qa5!

The queen is more active here than on c7, and it does not obstruct the c8-rook. There is already a threat of ...Rxc3 and ...Qxa2†.

17.a3

White secures his king.

17.Nxe6?! fxe6 already favours Black; both ...Nb6-c4 and ...Bf6 are in the air.

In a few games White has tried to get clever with:

17.Qe1!? Bf8

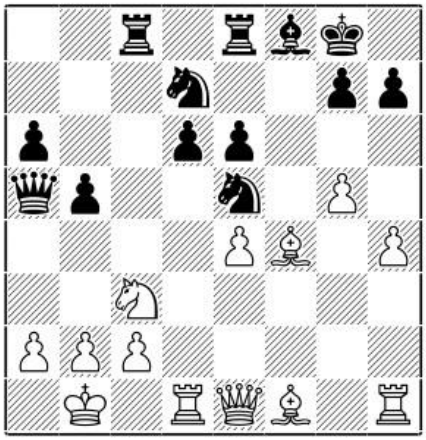
One of the points behind White's last move is that 17...Rxc3? does not attack the queen, so 18.Nxe6 wins material.

18.g5 b5

18...g6!?N also deserves attention.

19.Nxe6 fxe6 20.h4

Black has a choice of decent lines, the most interesting being:



20...b4

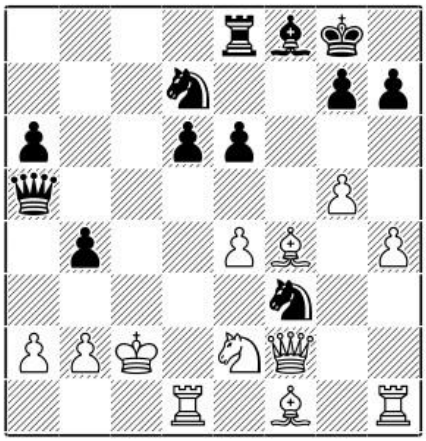
20...Nb6?! 21.Ne2! Qxe1 22.Rxe1 favoured White in Swiercz – Wojtaszek, Poznan 2016.

20...Nc5N is another valid option though, with double-edged play.

21.Ne2 Rxc2!?

This leads to razor-sharp play after:

22.Kxc2 Nf3! 23.Qf2

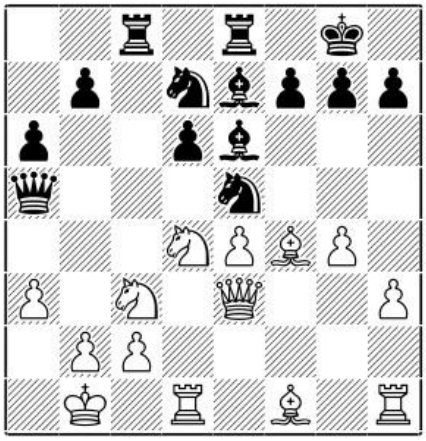


23...Qa4†! 24.Kb1!

White must give back the rook, as other moves would allow his king to be hunted down.

24...Qxd1† 25.Nc1 Nfe5=

Black's combination has netted a pawn, but White has enough activity to win it back in one way or another.



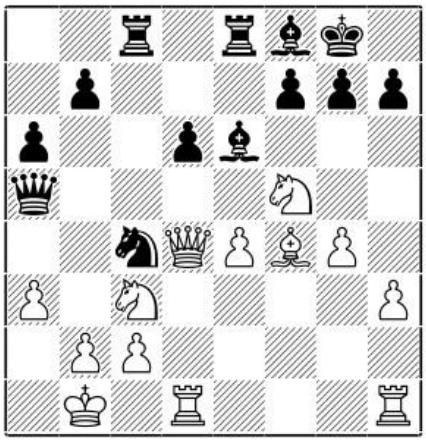
17...Bf8

This is a typical move which clears the e-file. Black may even be able to consider ...g6 to reroute the bishop to g7 in some lines.

17...b5 is another option, leading to sharp play after 18.Nf5 or 18.Nd5. I analysed this too, and found that Black is holding his own in all lines.

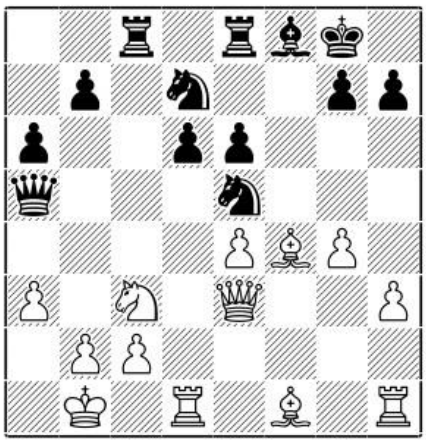
18.g5

The seemingly tempting 18.Nf5?! does not trouble Black, who can quickly seize the initiative with 18...Nb6! 19.Qd4 Nec4 20.Bxc4 Nxc4. In the following high-level game, White found nothing better than bailing out into a worse endgame with:



21.Nxd6 Nxa3†! 22.bxa3 Rxc3 23.Qb4 Qxb4† 24.axb4 Bxd6 25.Bxd6 Rec8 White had to grovel for nearly 70 more moves to hold the draw in Navara – So, Prague (1) 2015.

As is usually the case, 18.Nxe6N 18...fxe6 is not dangerous for Black when White cannot immediately target the e6-pawn. Play might continue:



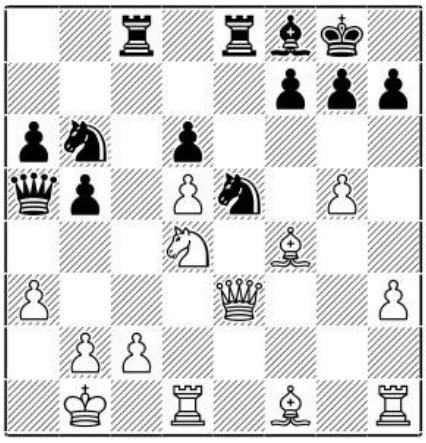
19.Be2 Nb6! 20.Bxe5 dxe5 Black's doubled pawns control several important squares, and he holds the initiative on the queenside.

18...b5 19.Nd5

After 19.Nxe6 fxe6 20.h4 b4 21.axb4 Qxb4 22.Rd4 Qb7 Black has good counterplay according to Roiz.

19...Bxd5 20.exd5 Nb6!

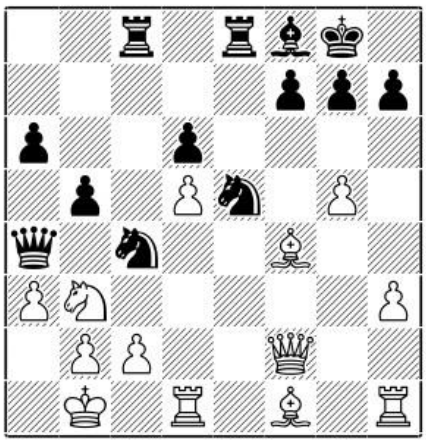
Seeing that Black's direct attacking tries such as 20...Nc4 21.Qf2 or 20...b4 21.Qd2 do not bring any immediate dividends, he simply improves his pieces.



21.Nb3 Qa4

The queen is safe enough here, and it also exerts some pressure along the 4th rank.

22.Qf2 Nbc4



23.h4?

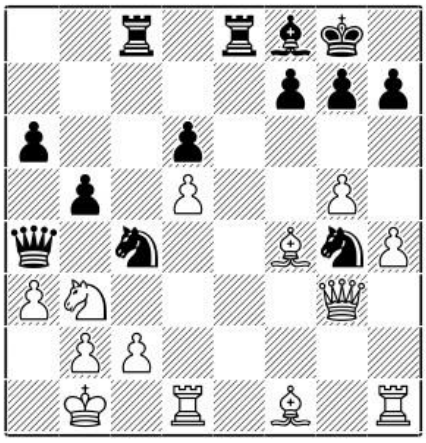
This careless move leads to trouble.

23.Be2N was preferable although both 23...b4 and 23...g6!? leave Black with some initiative.

23...Ng4 24.Qg3?!

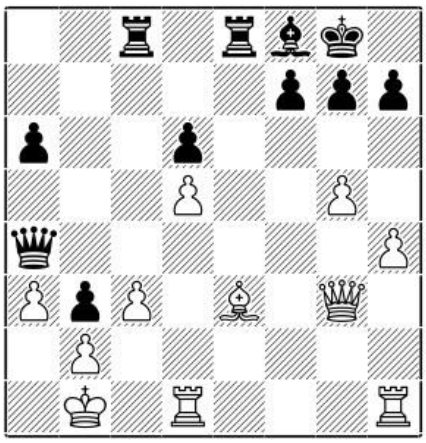
White is in great difficulties no matter what, but this move loses sight of the e4-square.

24.Qf3! was necessary, after which 24...Nge3 25.Bxc4 bxc4 26.Bxe3 cxb3 27.c3 Qe4† 28.Qxe4 Rxe4 gives Black a better ending, but the game goes on.



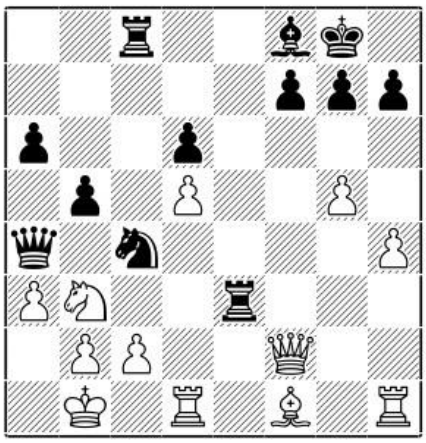
24...Nge3 25.Bxe3

The difference can be seen after 25.Bxc4 bxc4 26.Bxe3 cxb3 27.c3 when Black wins with:



27...Qe4† White is unable to trade queens. White could either resign here or play 28.Ka1, when Black can either take the bishop with a trivial win, or go for the flashy 28...Rxc3! 29.bxc3 Qc2 followed by mate.

25...Rxe3 26.Qf2



26...Nxa3†!

27.bxa3 Rxb3† 28.cxb3 Qxb3† 29.Qb2 Qxd1† wins the house, so White resigned.

0–1

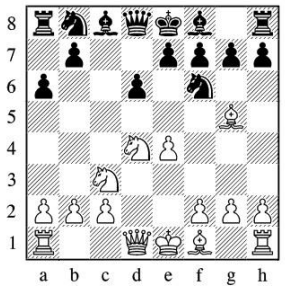
Conclusion

The lines after 6.Be3 e5 7.Nb3 where White refrains from a quick f2-f3 are a little tricky, because Black has to consider the possibility of f2-f3 on every move. After 7...Be6 White has two main ways to avoid the English Attack.

After 8.Qd2 Nbd7 (but not 8...Be7 9.f3 when we have moved out of our repertoire against the English Attack) 9.0-0-0 Be7 10.f4!? the play is very complicated. Just like in the English Attack, Black must correctly time when to castle. A big theme is the quick advance of the white g-pawn. Black generally has a choice of whether or not to capture it. In most cases both options are playable, although Black should pay close attention to central control rather than obsessing over keeping an extra pawn.

The direct 8.f4!? is a different beast altogether, and after 8...exf4 9.Bxf4 Nc6 there are two main paths. 10.Qd2 allows 10...d5, and after 11.0-0-0 we rejected the safe but dreary 11...Nxe4 in favour of the more interesting 11...Bb4!? when Black has good counterplay. Pay special attention to the unusual advances of the black h-pawn. More ambitious is 10.Qe2 Be7 11.h3, when 11...Nd7! 12.0-0-0 Nce5! is a key manoeuvre. This whole variation is quite tricky and requires careful study, as there are various move orders that White can try. The most important thing is to be familiar with Black's various ideas, such as ...Qa5, ...b5 and ...Nb6, while keeping an eye on White's kingside ambitions.

Chapter 8



6.♗g5

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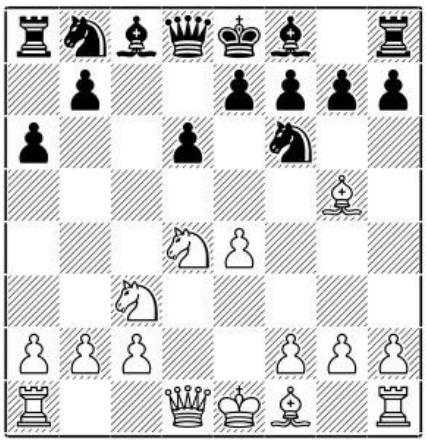
1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Bg5



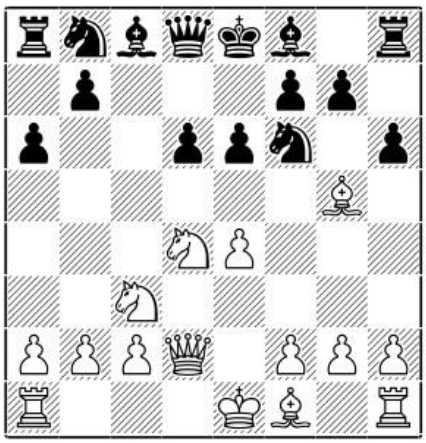
This is considered to be White's sharpest option against the Najdorf, and with good reason.

6...e6

This is the main move. In recent years there has been a lot of interest in 6...Nbd7!?, but that's another story.

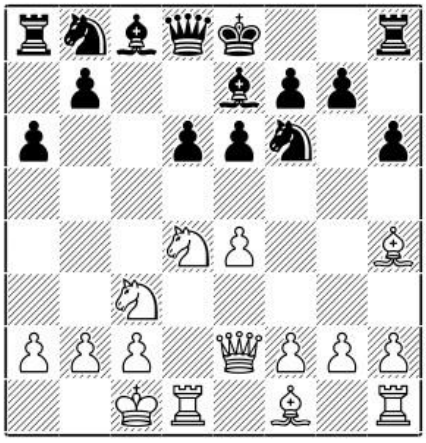
A) 7.Qf3 is an old line which one should be aware of, but **B)** 7.f4 is the main line by an overwhelming margin.

7.Qd2?! is a surprisingly common mistake (this is how White plays in the Rauzer after 5...Nc6 6.Bg5 e6, but things are different here). 7...h6!



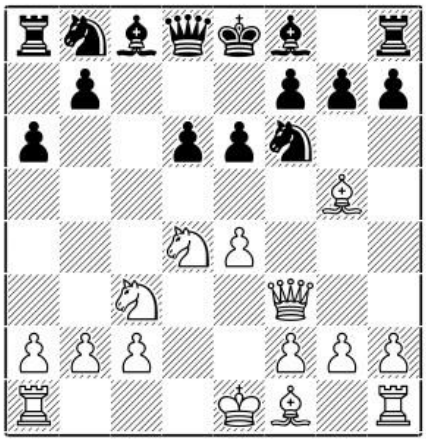
White's problem is that 8.Bh4? runs into the thematic trick 8...Nxe4! when Black wins a pawn, so instead White has to resort to giving up the bishop pair after 8.Bxf6 Qxf6 or 8.Be3 Ng4. In both cases, the game goes on but Black can already claim a slight advantage.

7.Qe2 looks unnatural but is slightly trickier. Nevertheless, Black gets a fine position by similar means: 7...h6! 8.Bh4 Be7 9.0-0-0 (9.f4 transposes to 8.Qe2 h6! 9.Bh4 in the notes to variation B below)



9...Nxe4! 10.Bxe7 Nxc3 11.Bxd8 (after 11.Qc4? Nxa2†–+ Black picked up a second extra pawn in Shabalov – Baklan, Khanty-Mansiysk 2009) 11...Nxe2† 12.Nxe2 Kxd8 13.Rxd6† Ke7 14.Rd2 b5 Black had clearly the more comfortable side of equality in Wirschell – Van Wely, Antwerp 1996.

A) 7.Qf3



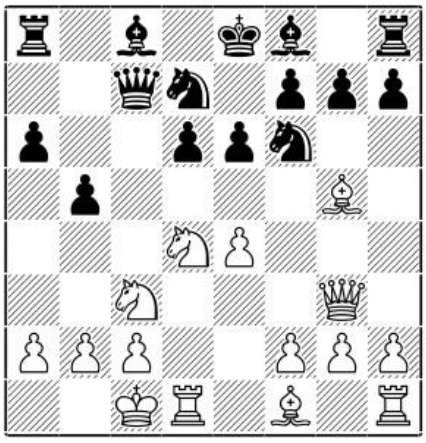
White prepares long castling; but unlike the main lines, he aims for active piece play without f2-f4.

7...Nbd7!?

7...Be7 is certainly playable, and normally we play this move before developing the b8-knight. However, in this particular variation I suggest making an exception. From White's perspective, one of the advantages of delaying f2-f4 is that his queen can exert pressure against the d6-pawn from g3, which means that ...b5 can often be met by Bxb5 followed by Ndxb5 and Nxd6†, trading a piece for three pawns. Thus, by delaying ...Be7, Black has the potential to save a tempo, as the bishop will have to exchange itself for the knight when it lands on d6.

8.0-0-0 Qc7 9.Qg3 b5

Black has tried several other moves, but I do not fear the sacrifice on b5.



10.Bxb5

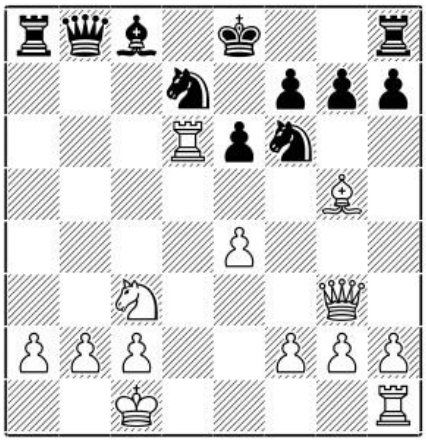
White has nothing better; ...b4 was threatened, and 10.a3 Rb8!,, only helps to develop Black's play.

10...axb5 11.Ndxb5 Qb8 12.Nxd6† Bxd6 13.Qxd6

This has been White's usual way of recapturing. I guess the thinking behind it is that, with three pawns for the piece, White has a better chance of making his passers count in the endgame.

13.Rxd6!?

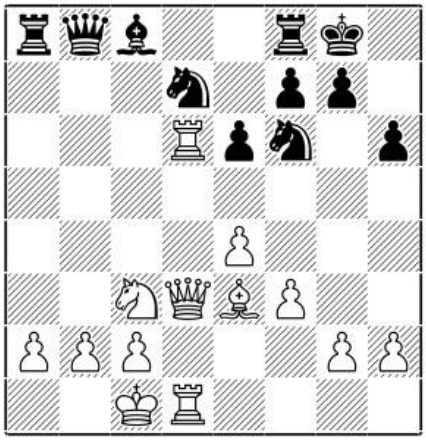
Despite being a rare choice, this is objectively just as good as the main line. Play may continue:



13...Nh5!?

13...0-0 is also playable, though after 14.Rhd1 our safest approach is to aim for a repetition with: 14...Nh5!?N (Black must certainly avoid 14...Qb7?, when 15.Rxd7! Nxd7 16.Rxd7 Qxd7 17.Bf6 g6 18.Qg5 was winning for White in Alvarez Calzadilla – Duarte Napoles, Sancti Spiritus 2018; 14...Ra5 was not so terrible in Brkic – Mandekic, Schwarzach 2018, although 15.e5!N would have given White chances to press) 15.Qh4 Nhf6 16.Qg3= The last move is obviously not forced, but White has no route to an advantage.

14.Qd3 h6 15.Be3 Nhf6 16.Rd1 0-0 17.f3

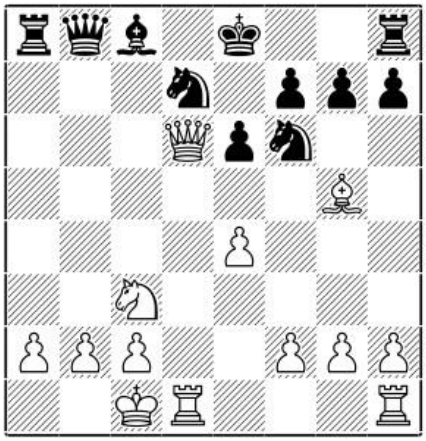


This double-edged middlegame holds various possibilities for both sides. For instance:

17...Ne5!?N

17...Rd8 is also playable, and led to an eventual draw in B. Benko – Matusek, corr. 2019.

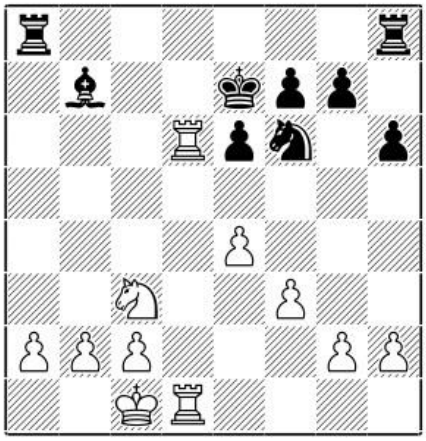
18.Qd4 Ng6,,



13...Qxd6 14.Rxd6 h6 15.Bd2

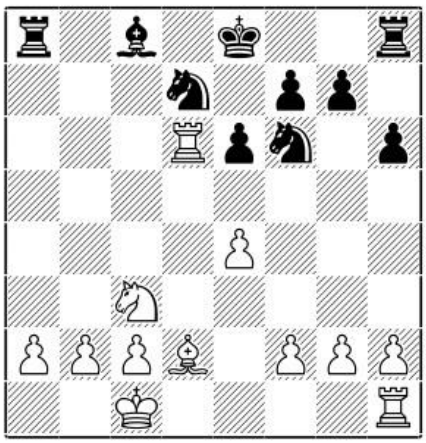
15.Bf4?! g5 16.Bg3 Nh5 17.a4 Nxg3 18.hxg3 Ke7 19.Rhd1 Ne5³ was more pleasant for Black in Boychuk – Cipolli, corr. 2007.

15.Bxf6 Nxf6 (15...gxf6!? is also perfectly playable) 16.Rhd1 Bb7 17.f3 Ke7 is decent for Black, for instance:



18.Rb6 (e4-e5 can always be met by ...Nd5) 18...Rhb8 Black was at least equal in Fichtl – Dolezal, Prague 1954, and 18...Ba6!?N also deserved consideration.

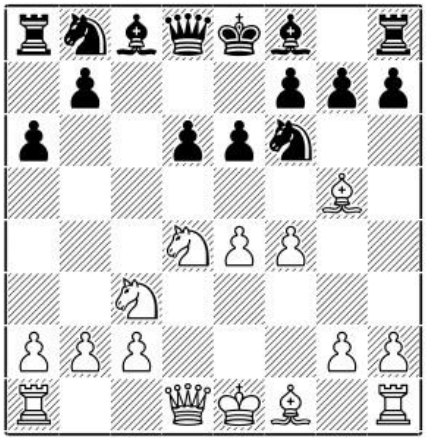
GM Leonid Milov has played the text move three times. His results have been good, but I think this had more to do with his ability to outplay his lower-rated opponents than with the objective strength of White's position. A logical continuation is:



15...Ke7 16.Rd4 Ba6!?„

Black will complete development with ...Rhc8, with a full share of the chances.

B) 7.f4



7...Be7

This is the classical move, but it has lost some of its popularity over the past couple of decades. Fischer played this line before moving over to the Poisoned Pawn. I learned it primarily from studying the games of Fischer, Browne and De Firmian. It was also recommended by Danny King, both in his 1993 book and his more recent ChessBase DVD. Black's set-up has had its ups and downs, but I believe that it should be sound. One advantage of this classical system is that one can learn to play it without memorizing reams of theory. As King explained: "Every move counts, so you have to know what you're doing. But don't worry; there is a logic to the moves, and it is more a question of learning what one can, and can't, get away with."

Having played and taught this system for over twenty years, I will say I agree with this statement completely. Sure, issues will come up, as they always do in sharp lines, but if the line is fundamentally sound then repairs will be possible.

What about all of Black's other possibilities? Here is a quick summary of the pros and cons of them.

a) I will admit that the Poisoned Pawn 7...Qb6 may well be 'best', but it is rather impractical for most tournament players. There are numerous forced draws in the Poisoned Pawn, and while I am not so terrified of that (if an opponent knows that much theory, then a draw with Black against them is probably not such a bad outcome), I find that there are a great number of irrational positions that require tremendous calculating ability.

b) Later we will come around to 7...h6, which I prefer not to play too early in these classical lines. Nowadays this move is mostly made with a view to entering the Deferred Poisoned Pawn after 8.Bh4 Qb6. This may be simpler to learn than 7...Qb6, but there are still a lot of minefields. Dig up the game Caruana – Nakamura, London 2016, for an example where both sides blitzed out their preparation and Black was soon lost due to a deeply prepared queen sacrifice in a crazy position.

c) The Gelfand Variation with 7...Nbd7 has some similarities to our classical line. I am confident that it is sound, but it can lead to a lot of dangerous, irrational positions.

d) The Polugaevsky Variation with 7...b5!? is fascinating but extremely risky, and Black is always hanging by a thread theoretically.

e) 7...Qc7 was favoured by Kasparov before he converted to the Poisoned Pawn. 8.Bxf6 gxf6 9.Qd2 Nc6 10.0-0-0 Bd7 is a logical continuation, reaching a version of a Rauzer that should give White a slight edge.

f) Finally, 7...Nc6!? is a modern line which is interesting to analyse, but theoretically speaking it tends to move in and out of trouble.

8.Qf3

This is almost universally played.

8.Qd2?! is a standard move in the Rauzer, but here it leaves the e4-pawn insufficiently defended. 8...b5 is one good move, when White already has to worry about ...b4 or simply ...Bb7.

Some strong players have tried:

8.Qe2

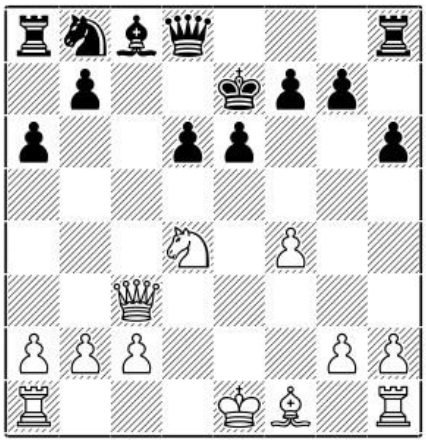
The move is a serious option against the Gelfand Variation but it is less dangerous here. An important difference is that the f6-knight is not pinned here, so yet again the ...Nxe4 tactic is a useful resource.

8...h6! 9.Bh4

9.Bxf6 Bxf6 10.0-0-0 Qc7 is pleasant for Black, since 11.Ndb5? axb5 12.Nxb5 Qb6 13.Nxd6† Kf8µ leads nowhere for White.

9...Nxe4! 10.Bxe7 Nxc3 11.Qc4 Kxe7 12.Qxc3

At first glance it seems that White has sacrificed a pawn for not much, but matters are not so simple. I suggest:



12...Bd7!

12...Re8 13.0-0-0 Kf8 has been much more common, but 14.Be2 Qb6 15.Nf3 d5 16.g4 gave White serious attacking chances in Shabalov – Bryant, Las Vegas 2008.

13.0-0-0

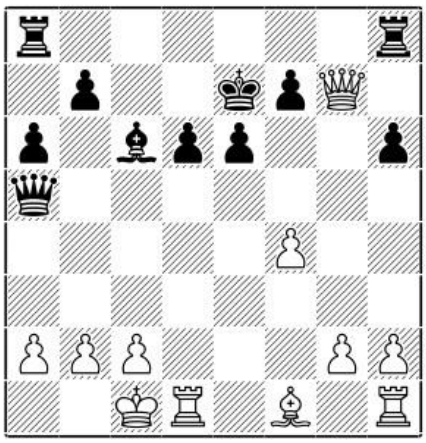
Georgiev and Kolev offer some good advice about this position: “Do not defend the g7-pawn; Do not play ...d6-d5.”

13...Nc6

Returning the extra pawn in order to speed up development.

Black could also consider 13...Qb6!? which has achieved good results.

14.Nxc6† Bxc6 15.Qxg7 Qa5



Black is well developed and his prospects are at least equal. A good example continued:

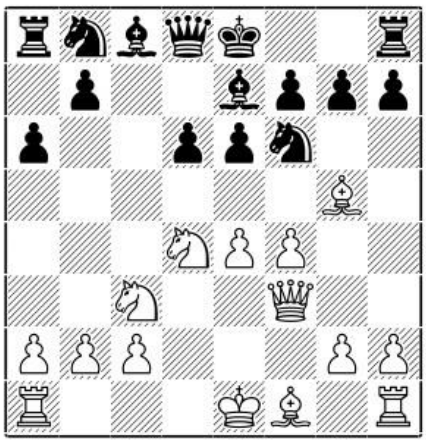
16.Qd4 Qc5 17.Qd2 Qd5

17...Rhg8N makes a lot of sense.

18.Qb4 Qc5 19.Qe1 Rag8 20.Qh4† f6³

Ziatdinov – Browne, Los Angeles 2001.

Black is active and his king is safe enough. All endgames will be pleasant for him as well.



8...Qc7

This is the main line and is my recommendation.

This is a good moment to consider:

8...h6

We will see in the next chapter that this move works well when White commits his bishop to d3. However, it is less attractive when the bishop can move directly to e2. I think the main argument for playing it here is to avoid the dangerous 10.g4 of Chapter 10, but the cost is high.

9.Bh4 Qc7

This is the same as our classical way of playing, except for the inclusion of ...h6 and Bh4.

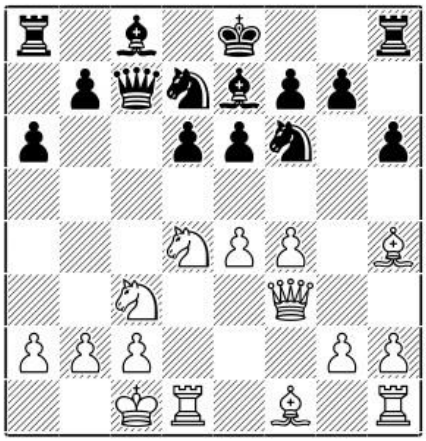
The 9...g5 thrust is one of the typical ideas behind this early ...h6 business. Playing it here gives us the famous Gothenburg Variation. After 10.fxg5 Nfd7 White has a choice:

a) 11.Nxe6 enables White to force a draw, but maybe no more. Play continues 11...fxe6 12.Qh5† Kf8 13.Bb5! when I believe that Black is holding, but it is still not the most practical choice, as you have to remember everything while White has perpetual check whenever he wants it. Even so, once upon a time I considered adding this line to my repertoire – but I quickly changed my mind when I realized there was an additional problem.

b) 11.Qh5! Ne5 12.Bg3 was the real problem, when I discovered that things were not so easy for Black. Negi agrees with this, so overall there are a few reasons why 9...g5 is not an appealing choice.

10.0-0-0 Nbd7

This is the point where White can profit from the inclusion of ...h6 and Bh4.



11.Be2!

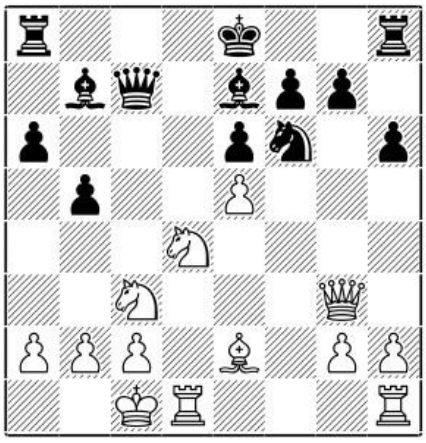
This is the problem, although Ftacnik tried to show that the line was playable in *Grandmaster Repertoire 6*.

11...b5

In the event of 11...g5 12.fxg5 Ne5 13.Qe3! Black struggles to find counterplay because White's e2-bishop controls the g4- and h5-squares. Compare this to the analogous position with the bishop on d3, as found in variation C2 of the next chapter on page 263.

12.Bxf6 Nxf6 13.e5 Bb7 14.Qg3 dxe5 15.fxe5

Again the position resembles part of our repertoire – see variation B32 of the present chapter on page 238. The only difference is that here Black's pawn is on h6 instead of h7.

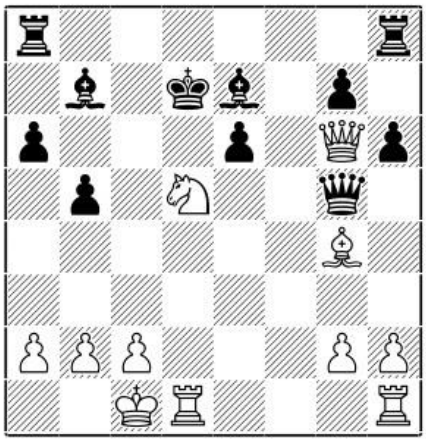


15...Nd5

We will see later that 15...Nd7? is a good move with the pawn on h7, but here it allows 16.Nxe6! with a devastating attack. The text move is better, but White can still take advantage of the weakened kingside.

16.Nxe6! fxe6 17.Qg6† Kd7 18.Bg4 Qxe5

19.Nxd5 Qg5†



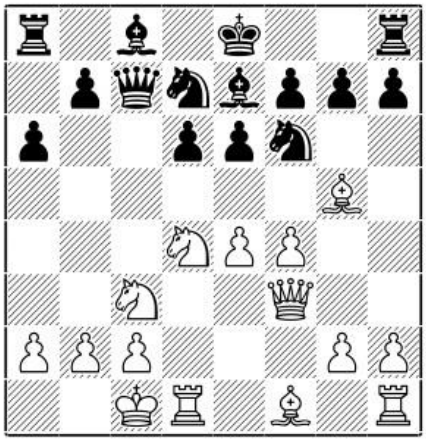
20.Qxg5

Even 20.Ne3†!? Kc7 21.Qxe6 is possible, for instance: 21...Bc5 22.Rd7† Kb8 23.Rxb7†! Kxb7 24.Re1 Kb8 25.b4! Bxe3† 26.Rxe3 Qf6 27.Qxf6 gxf6 28.Bf3 Ra7 29.Re6 a5 I had all of this in a blitz game where I was following Ftacnik, but after 30.a4! bxa4 31.b5² Black is suffering.

20...Bxg5† 21.Kb1 Bxd5 22.Rxd5† Kc7 23.Rc5†! Kb6 24.Re5 Rhe8 25.Rhe1²

This now 'famous' endgame was reached in Robson – Le Quang Liem, Lubbock 2011, and several other games. Ftacnik nobly tried to show that Black should hold, while Negi and the rest of the world consider White to have good winning chances. In any case, we are not playing the Najdorf to defend a miserable pawn-down endgame. Thus, we may conclude that Black should refrain from ...h6, at least for now.

9.0-0-0 Nbd7

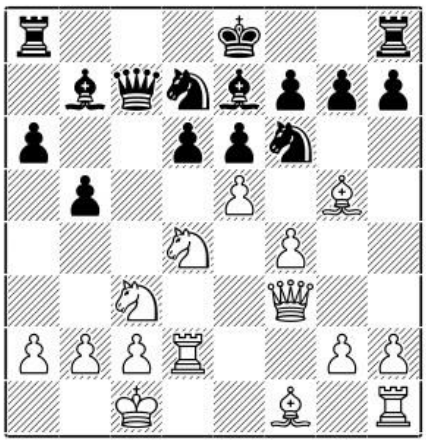


This will be our main tabiya for the 6.Bg5 system. If Black is left to his own devices, he will play ...b5 followed by some combination of ...Bb7, ...Nc5 and ...b4, with massive pressure on the e4-pawn. Of course, White is not going to sit still. The most common moves are 10.Bd3 and 10.g4, and we will tackle them in Chapters 9 and 10 respectively.

Before then, White has various other options that we must consider. **B1)** 10.f5!? was revived to some degree by Negi, while **B2)** 10.Qg3 was favoured by Kevin Goh Wei Ming. Lastly, Keres' **B3)** 10.Be2 is also important, at least for historical reasons.

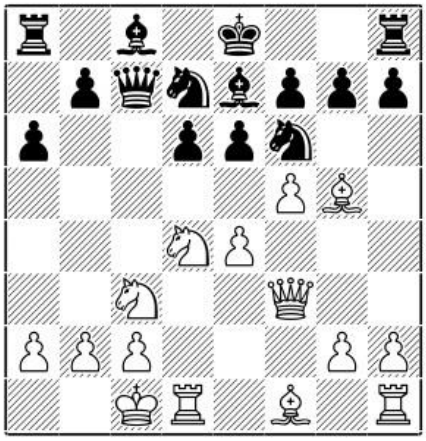
Other moves will generally just be met with ...b5. For example, 10.Bxf6 Nxf6 11.g4 b5 transposes to Chapter 10, while 10.Kb1?! is hardly a priority at this stage, and 10...b5 already enables Black to seize the initiative.

One silly (but tricky!) move I used to face in blitz is 10.Rd2?!, the main point of which is that the rook will not be hanging after White's coming queen sacrifice: 10...b5 11.e5 Bb7



12.exf6!? Objectively this sacrifice is dubious, but if White does not play it then his previous move has no purpose. 12...Bxf3 13.fxe7 If White had time to play Ndxb5 he would be winning, but 13...Bd5! blocks the d-file. 14.Nxd5 exd5 15.Nf5 f6µ Black may look inconvenienced but White does not have any real threats. Eventually, Black's material advantage of queen versus two minor pieces should tell.

B1) 10.f5!?

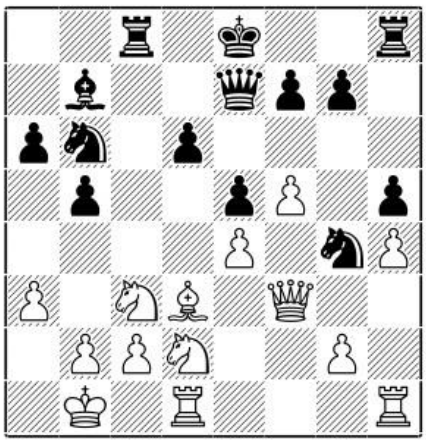


Negi gave this underrated move as a secondary option for White. It is actually a bit annoying, especially as the computers tend to evaluate the ensuing positions too optimistically for Black.

10...e5 11.Nde2

White's idea is to transfer the knight to g3 and e4 (or h5).

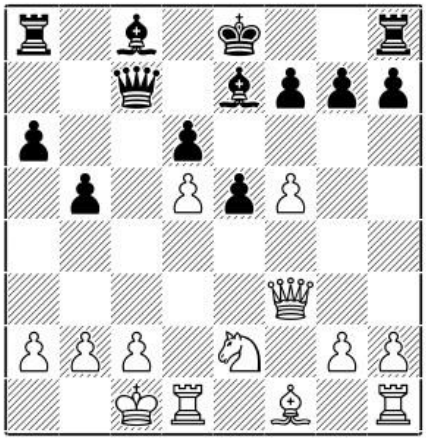
11.Nb3?! leaves the knight passively placed. A classic game continued: 11...b5 12.a3 Bb7 13.h4 Rc8 14.Bd3 h5 15.Kb1 Nb6 16.Nd2 Ng4 17.Bxe7 Qxe7



18.Nf1? Rxc3 19.bxc3 d5–+ Black had a winning attack in Ader Hausman – Fischer, Santiago 1959.

11...b5 12.Bxf6 Nxf6 13.Nd5 Nxd5 14.exd5

After a series of natural moves, we have reached an important position.



14...b4!?

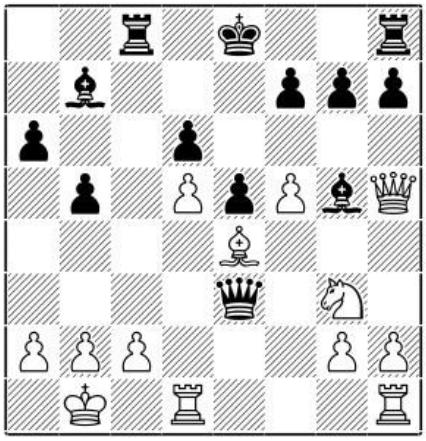
This is questioned by Negi, but I think it is the right idea! Black needs to push these pawns at some point to create counterplay.

14...Bb7?!

This has been the most popular continuation but I think it is wrong. There is no real pressure on the d5-pawn, so the bishop should not to rush to b7.

15.Ng3 Rc8 16.Bd3 Qc5 17.Be4 Bg5† 18.Kb1 Qe3 19.Qh5

Negi ended his analysis here, noting that White intends Rd3 and h2-h4 to drive the enemy pieces away. The computers still like Black's position but White's play is easier, and the engines may simply be incorrect in their assessments. We will follow a few more moves of a game involving my (and Negi's) editor, which was subsequently documented on the Quality Chess blog.



19...Bh6?!

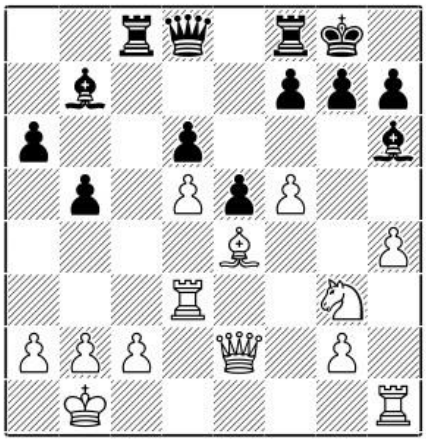
19...Bf6 was tried the following year, but Black soon got into trouble after 20.Rd3 Qg5 21.Qe2! Ke7? 22.h4 Qh6 23.Nh5+– threatening

g2-g4-g5 in Nastase – Ileana, Calimanesti Caciulata 2016.

Perhaps 19...Qf4N 20.Rd3 Qh4 is Black's best try, but 21.Qe2 still looks awkward for him.

20.Rd3 Qg5 21.Qe2 0-0 22.h4 Qd8

Look at that silly bishop on b7. Where is the counterplay? Meanwhile, White has a lot of things pointed at Black's kingside.

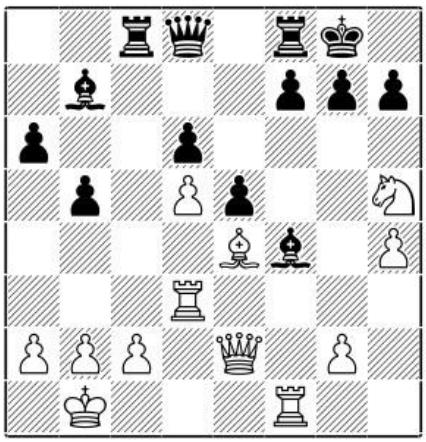


23.f6!

Qxf6 24.Rf1 Bf4 25.Nh5 Qd8?

25...Qh6 26.g4 f6 was necessary, but White is doing well after 27.Bf5©.

In Greet – A. Hunt, England 2015, White overlooked:



26.Nxg7!N

Already a death blow, due to:

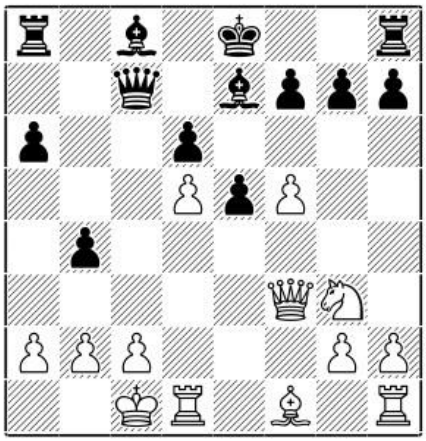
26...Kxg7 27.Qg4† Kh8 28.Qf5

Game over.

14...0-0!? seems like a decent alternative, after which 15.Ng3 b4 (rather than the strange 15...Qd7 16.Bd3 f6 17.Nh5 Bd8, as analysed by Negi) transposes to our main line below.

15.Ng3

Negi evaluates this position as good for White, based on the notion that Black faces the same type of problems as in the 14...Bb7?! line analysed above. However, Black should be able to benefit from not having committed his light-squared bishop prematurely.



15...0-0!

15...Bb7?! occurred in B. Grabarczyk – Matuszewski, Grodzisk Mazowiecki 2007, but we have already ascertained that this is the wrong idea.

After the text move Black will generally continue with ...f6, ...a5 and ...Bd7. Even ...Ra7 is possible if the kingside needs additional support.

16.Bd3

This is a natural developing move.

White could also consider:

16.Kb1

16.Ne4 could lead to the same thing after 16...f6 17.Kb1.

There are only a couple of examples from correspondence play where unfortunately the games were not allowed to reach a climax.

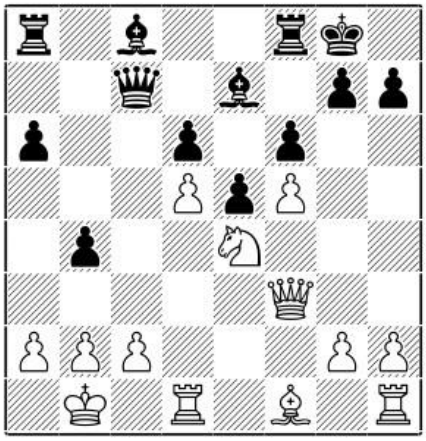
16...f6!?N

16...a5 17.Bb5! is best avoided.

16...Bd7 17.Ne4!?N (17.Bd3 a5 18.Ne4 f6 19.g4 a4 gave Black his share of the play in Relyea – Taras, corr. 2016) 17...f6 18.g4 a5 19.b3!? a4 20.Bc4 is an interesting way for White to keep his queenside together, the idea bring to meet ...axb3 with cxb3 with a lateral defence of a2.

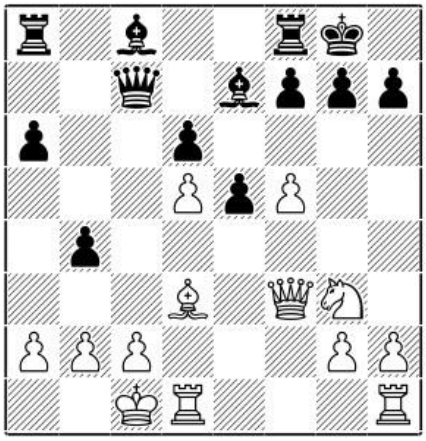
17.Ne4

This transposes to another correspondence game, which continued:



17...Bd7 18.Rg1 a5 19.g4 a4 20.Bd3 Kh8 21.g5 fxg5 22.Nxg5 Bxg5 23.Rxg5 g6 24.f6 b3,,

Black had enough counterplay, and the players soon simplified into a level endgame in Dorn – Waller, corr. 2016.

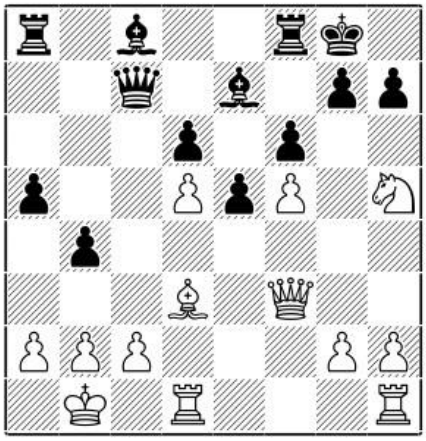


16...a5 17.Kb1 f6

Perhaps 17...Bd7 is a touch more accurate. The engines love Black, but I think they overestimate his position. Nevertheless, Black's queenside play should give him sufficient chances.

18.Nh5?!

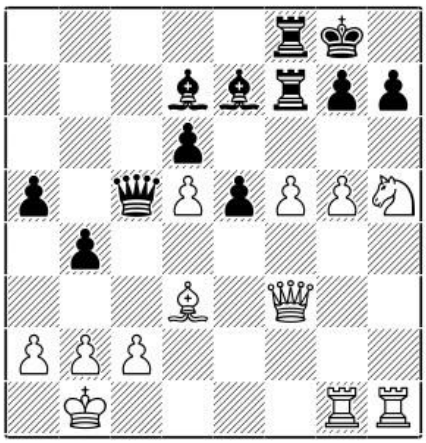
This looks misguided. White should prefer 18.Ne4N with positions similar those in the note to White's 16th move above.



18...Bd7!N

This looks most accurate.

18...Rf7 was played in the game. Even though I would not recommend following it exactly, it is worth following for a few more moves: 19.g4 (19.Bb5!?N looks more annoying, trying to utilize the c6-square) 19...Bd7 20.h4 Raf8 Black is playing defensively, but it is not easy for White to achieve anything. 21.Rdg1 Qc5 22.g5 fxg5 23.hxg5

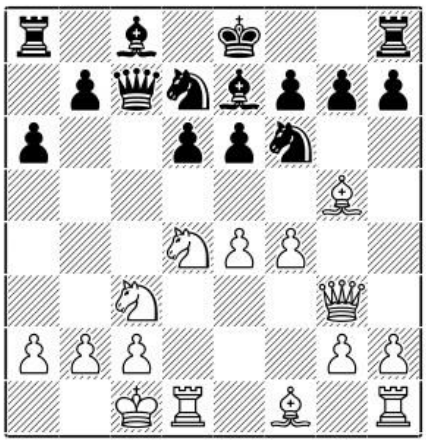


23...Rxf5! (but not 23...Bxf5 24.Nf6†!) 24.Bxf5 Rxf5 Black had excellent compensation for the exchange in Bian – Brattain, Saint Louis 2018.

19.g4 a4,,

Black has promising play on the queenside. It is hard to make a clear assessment while the 10.f5 line is still developing, but I believe that avoiding the premature ...Bb7 is the right way to combat White's set-up.

B2) 10.Qg3



This tricky move was recommended for White in *Chess Developments: The Sicilian Najdorf 6* B*g5* by Kevin Goh Wei Ming. This line has always been a bit under the radar and was not even mentioned in King's *Winning with the Najdorf*.

Bringing the queen to g3 helps support an e4-e5 advance and the queen also casts a glance at the g7-pawn. There is also a little point that a future ...Ne5 will not come with tempo.

10...h6

I decided to recommend this typical advance, which will serve as an introduction to the Browne System, named after the American GM who did a lot to popularize it. There does not seem to be a universally recognized definition of the Browne System, but I regard it as a main-line Najdorf with ...Be7, ...Qc7 and ...Nbd7, where Black follows up with ...h6, meeting Bh4 with ...g5. We will see the same thing in the next chapter, where White plays 10.Bd3.

Note that the Browne System is quite distinct from the Gothenburg Variation as referred to on page 224, where it was noted that the early ...h6 and ...g5 leads to a lot of concrete tactics and threats against Black's king, which is not what we want. It is also worth mentioning that Walter Browne played the 8...h6 9.Bh4 Qc7 version from time to time. However, as we discovered on pages 224-225, committing to ...h6 works less well when White has the option of Be2 rather than Bd3.

Before moving on, I will just mention that the most natural alternative to the text move is:

10...b5 11.Bxf6

Now Black must make an important choice.

11...Nxf6!

11...gxf6?! 12.a3 gives White easy play, with f4-f5 and Qg7 coming soon.

11...Bxf6 prevents e4-e5 but allows the typical tactical device: 12.Bxb5! axb5 (12...0-0!? is an interesting counter) 13.Ndxb5 Qc5 14.Nxd6† Kf8 15.e5 Be7 16.a3 White has three pawns for the piece and arguably the easier position to play. I tend to avoid allowing these tactics on the b5-square, unless analysis shows that it is clearly insufficient for White.

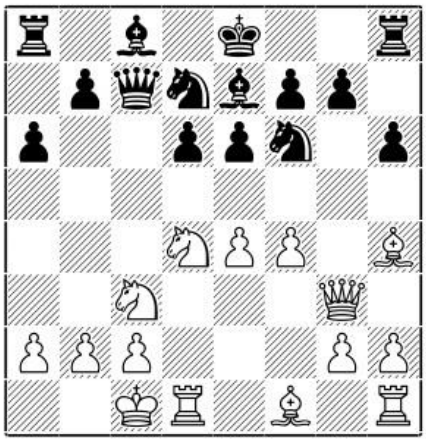
The text move looks best, although it still allows the same type of piece sac in a slightly different setting.

12.e5 dxe5 13.fxe5 Nd7 14.Bxb5 axb5 15.Ndxb5 Qc5 16.Qxg7 Rf8

The position remains unclear.

11.Bh4

There is little point to 11.Bxf6? Bxf6, when the absence of a pawn on b5 prevents the tactical trick from the note above. After 12.Be2 0-0³ Black will soon play ...b5 and get on with his queenside play, while White has blocked his g-pawn with his queen.



11...g5!

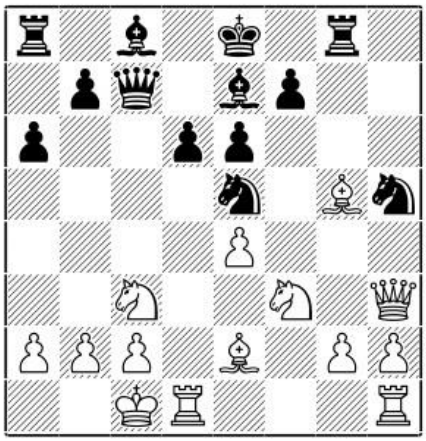
This is the big idea which works well against certain set-ups. We will see more of it in the next chapter.

12.fxg5 Nh5

This looks best to me.

Some strong players have preferred to pin the pawn with 12...Rg8. One line that put me off

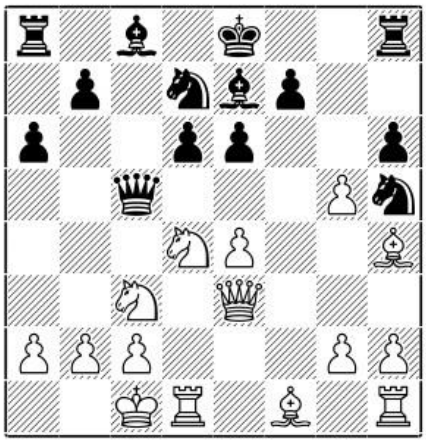
this approach was: 13.Be2 Ne5 14.Nf3 hxg5 15.Bxg5 Nh5 (15...Nh7?? runs into 16.Bxe7! Rxg3 17.Bxd6+–) 16.Qh3



16...Rxg5! The best try, but it does not fully solve Black's problems after: 17.Nxe5 Nf4 18.Qh8† Bf8 19.Nd3 Nxe2† 20.Nxe2 e5 21.Nb4 Be6 22.Nd5 Bxd5 23.Rxd5 Rxg2 24.Nc3 Qd7 25.Rdd1² Overgaard – Noth, corr. 2013. Black managed to draw this game but the position does not look like any fun to me, and I could not find any attractive alternatives along the way.

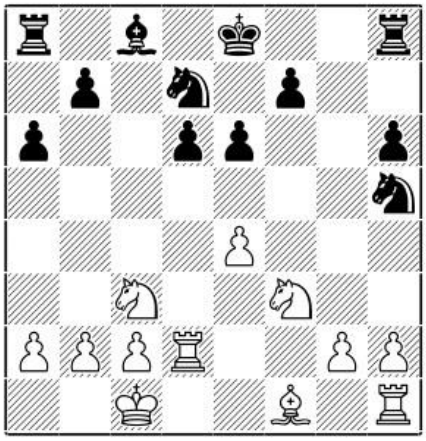
13.Qe3 Qc5

This is necessary to regain the pawn, but the queen will lose some time.



14.Kb1!

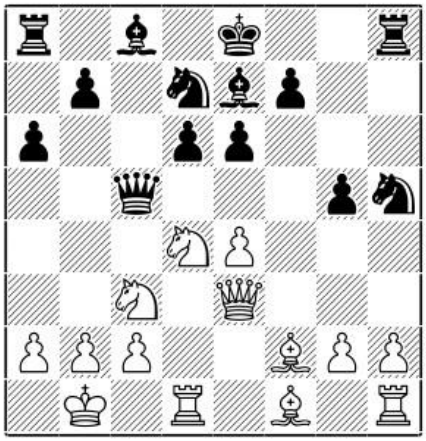
14.Qd2 is the main alternative, which usually leads to an endgame after: 14...Bxg5 15.Bxg5 Qxg5 16.Nf3 Qxd2† 17.Rxd2



17...Ke7 18.Be2 Nhf6 19.Rhd1 Ne8= Practice has shown that this is quite alright for Black. His position may look a bit passive but there is an upside too, as Black controls the e5-square and has the chance to play on either flank after a future ...b6 and ...Bb7 (which may be prefaced by ...Ra7-c7).

14...hxg5 15.Bf2

White lines up his bishop against the black queen. Even though the pawn has been regained and Black has the e5-square for his knight, White has chances to develop an initiative, as Black's development is lagging and his king is still in the centre. This balance of initiative versus structure is typical in the Najdorf.



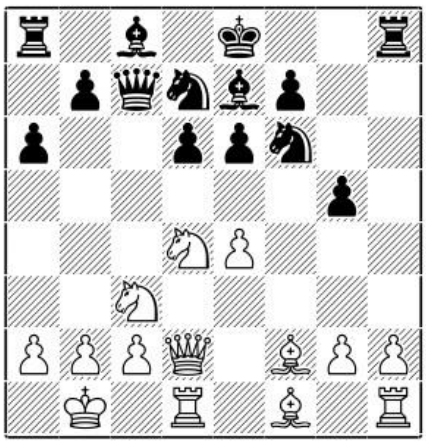
15...b5!?

This is an aggressive try.

By far the most popular move is 15...Ne5, but I suspect that it is not the best. The problem is that the knight will be traded off quickly, and after 16.Qd2! Qc7 17.Nf3! Nxf3 18.gxf3 White has the

pawn breaks f3-f4 and h2-h4 available. It all looks rather shaky for Black to me.

An alternative worth considering, however, is 15...Nhf6!? intending ...Ng4. A logical continuation is: 16.Qd2 (16.Be2 should be met by 16...b5!; but not 16...Qc7, since 17.h4! is dangerous when White's rooks are connected) 16...Qc7 Black is ready to play ...Ne5. Play may continue:

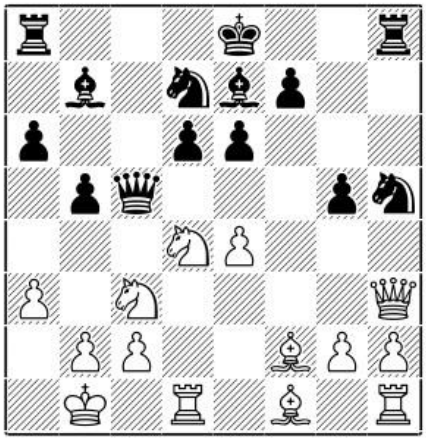


17.Nf3 (17.Qxg5? Nxe4) 17...g4 18.Ng5 Ne5,, Intending ...b5 or ...Bd7, while even ...Ng8!? is a possibility because the g5-knight is out on a limb.

16.Qd2

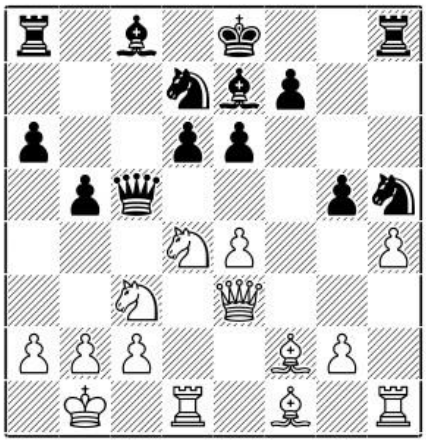
Threatening a discovered attack against the queen. I checked two other ideas:

16.a3 Bb7 17.Qh3



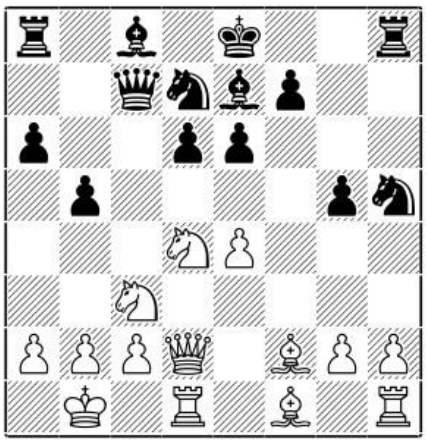
17...Rh7! Black stabilizes the position easily. After the further 18.Qd3 Ne5 19.Qe2 Qc7 20.h3 Nf4 21.Qd2 Nfg6 22.Be2 Nf4 23.Bf1 a draw was agreed in Grigoryev – Valent, corr. 2003, but over the board you could battle it out.

A sharper try is 16.h4!? as seen in Ottesen – Ould Ahmed, corr. 2012. Here I would suggest:



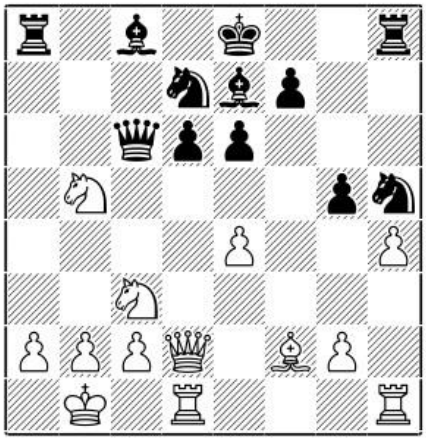
16...Nhf6!?N 17.Be2 (17.Qd2? b4!) 17...gxh4 (17...g4!? also leads to double-edged play) 18.Bxh4 Bb7 With an unclear game.

16...Qc7



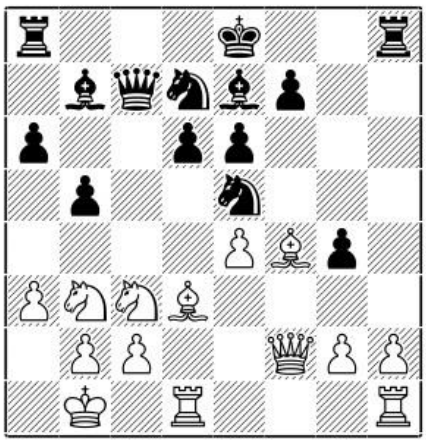
17.h4

The piece sacrifice 17.Bxb5?! does not look too scary here: 17...axb5 18.Ndxb5 Qc6 19.h4 (19.Nxd6† Bxd6 20.Qxd6 Qxd6 21.Rxd6 Nf4³ leaves Black active in the endgame)



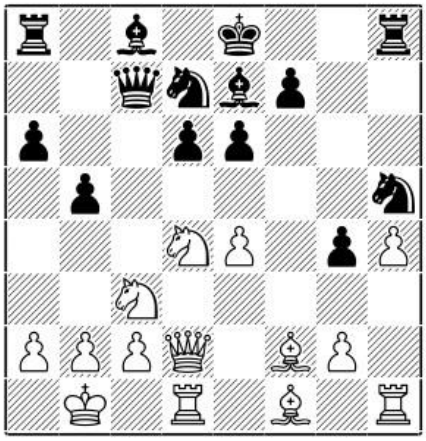
19...gxh4 (19...Ba6!?N also deserves attention) 20.Bxh4 (20.Rxh4!N÷ was a better try) 20...Nhf6 21.Bxf6 Rxh1 22.Rxh1 Bxf6 23.Nxd6† Ke7 24.Rh7 Ne5³ Eberl – Kirwald, corr. 2002.

White can also play more calmly with 17.Bd3. Then 17...Bb7 18.Be3 g4 19.a3 Nhf6 20.Nb3 Ne5 21.Qf2 Nfd7 22.Bf4 occurred in Soberano – Valent, corr. 2003, at which point Black castled on the queenside. Instead I prefer:



22...Rc8!? Intending ...Qb6, offering a queen trade, while Black may also contemplate an exchange sacrifice on c3.

17...g4



18.a3 Bb7 19.g3 Ne5

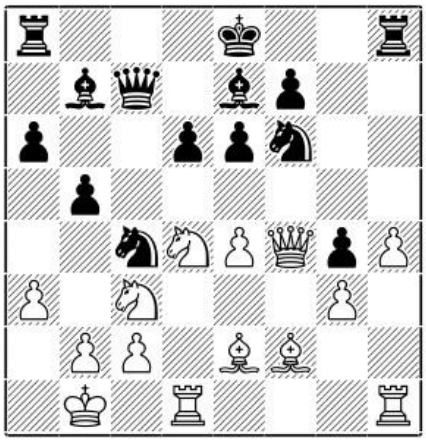
Black has finally managed to cement his knight on the fine e5-square. The position is strategically very complicated. The passed h4-pawn looks nice, but it is not going anywhere.

20.Be2 Nf6 21.Qf4?!

This leaves the queenside looking vulnerable.

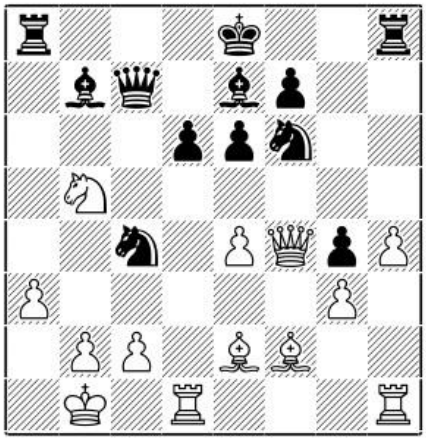
21...Nc4

Black threatens both ...e5 and ...Nxa3†.



22.Bxc4

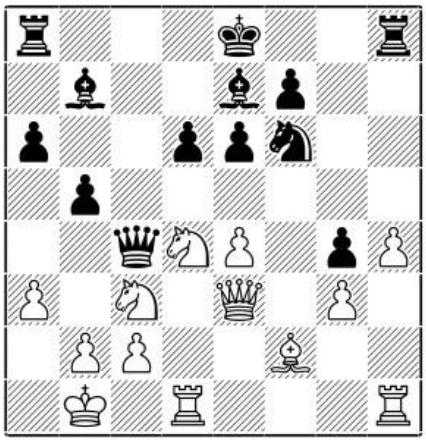
The sacrifice 22.Ndxb5 axb5 23.Nxb5 looks dangerous, but in a correspondence game Black would be sure to find the counter:



23...Nxa3†! 24.bxa3 (24.Nxa3 Bxe4 with the idea of ...Rxa3 is winning for Black) 24...Qb8!µ Nothing works for White.

22...Qxc4 23.Qe3

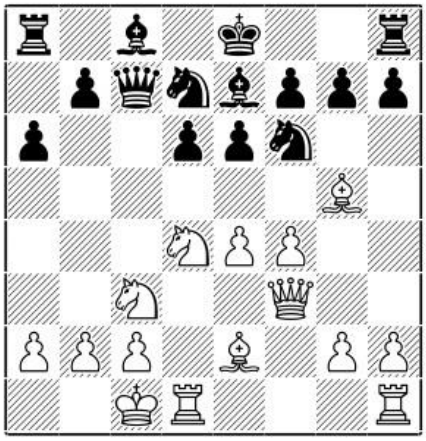
Now Black finds a fine manoeuvre. It looks quite exotic; but if you gain enough Sicilian experience, it may well seem typical!



23...Rh5! 24.Rhf1 Rc8 25.Bg1 Re5µ

A lovely position. The pressure on the e4-pawn is too much, and Black eventually prevailed in Ould Ahmed – Henrichs, corr. 2011.

B3) 10.Be2



This tricky move first came to the world's attention when Keres played it against the sixteen-year-old Bobby Fischer in the 1959 Candidates tournament. Keres had prepared a tricky queen sacrifice, but Fischer aptly dealt with it over the board. For many years Fischer's decisive response was the gold standard, but later it became clear that Black could gain an even bigger advantage. Most of the time White avoids this and keeps his queen, but Black is looking good there too.

10...b5

This typical move works well. However, please note that 10...h6?! should be avoided, as 11.Bh4 takes us back to the 8...h6 line mentioned on pages 224-225, which is no fun for Black.

11.Bxf6

This somewhat unnatural move is practically forced.

The passive 11.a3 gives Black a pleasant choice between 11...Bb7 followed by ...Nc5 targeting the e4-pawn, and 11...Rb8 intending ...b4.

11.f5?! e5 12.Nb3 b4 13.Bxf6 Nxf6 14.Nd5 Nxd5 15.exd5 (15.Rxd5 Bb7 16.Rdd1 0-0µ) 15...0-0³ gives White a bad version of the 10.f5 line, as his bishop has moved to a passive square and his knight is miles away from the black king.

Sometimes White confuses his move order and plays the immediate:

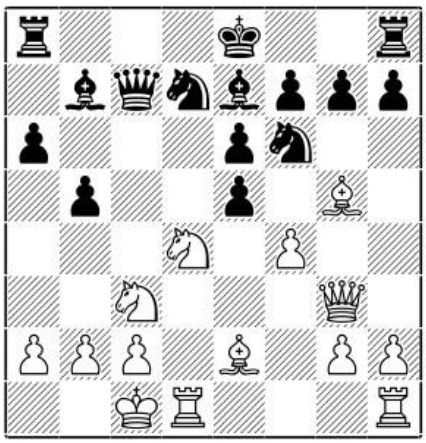
11.e5?!

This turns out badly for him after:

11...Bb7 12.Qg3

12.exf6? is not an option here, since after 12...Bxf3 13.Bxf3 gxf6–+ the g5-bishop is hanging.

12...dxe5



13.fxe5

13.f5 Nc5! 14.fxe6 fxe6 15.Bxf6 Bxf6 16.Bh5† g6 17.Bg4 b4 is winning for Black, though after 18.Na4, as played in Bisco – Pasko, Slovakia 1995, Black should avoid grabbing the knight immediately and instead play 18...Rc8!N–+ when White has nothing.

13...Qxe5 14.Bf4 Qc5 15.Be3

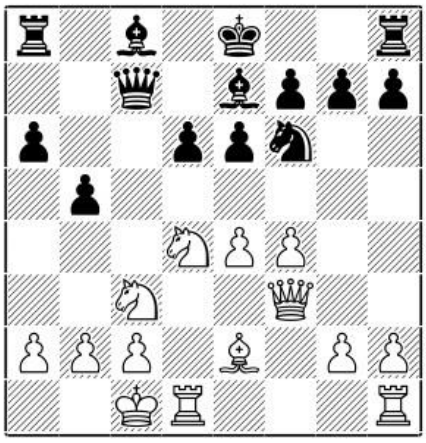
15.Nb3 Qf5!µ was also great for Black in Jendras – Mankiewicz, Ann Arbor 1993.

15...Qc8!µ

White had no real compensation for the pawn in Kuzmin – Gheorghiu, Riga 1979.

11...Nxf6

Sometimes Black has a choice on how to recapture, but here 11...Bxf6? fails after 12.e5! Bb7 (or 12...dxe5 13.Ndxb5 axb5 14.Qxa8+–) 13.Ndxb5! with decisive material gains.



12.e5 Bb7

There are two options which we must consider. **B31)** 13.exf6?! is the aforementioned queen sacrifice, and **B32)** 13.Qg3 is the calmer alternative.

B31) 13.exf6?!

GAME 19

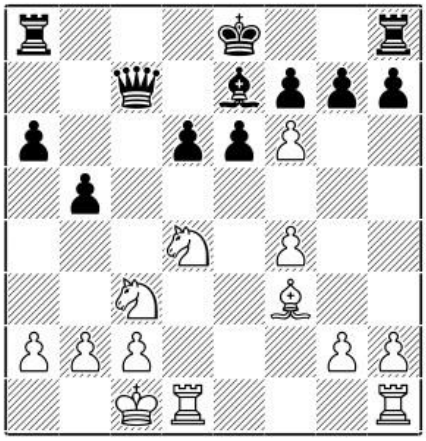
Jack Rudd – Valeriy Neverov

Hastings 2010

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Bg5 e6 7.f4 Be7 8.Qf3 Qc7 9.0-0-0 Nbd7 10.Be2 b5 11.Bxf6 Nxf6 12.e5 Bb7 13.exf6?!

This seems like an attractive idea but it does not work – probably for more than one reason. Nowadays White would mostly play this as a surprise weapon, but we will have a surprise of our own.

13...Bxf3 14.Bxf3



14...Bxf6!

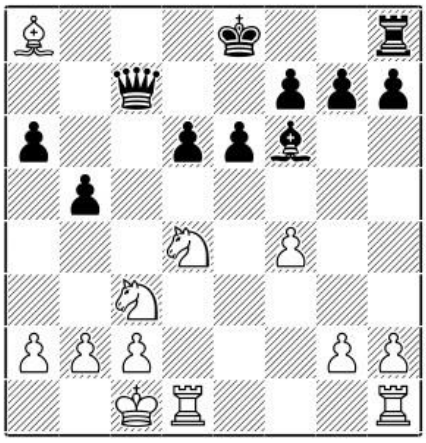
14...d5? hands White the initiative after 15.fxe7 Qxf4† 16.Kb1 Kxe7 17.Bxd5.

I (along with some other commentators)

used to regard 14...Rc8!? as dubious, but it is actually a playable alternative. After 15.Bc6† (15.fxe7 b4 16.Nce2 d5 17.Rhe1 g6 18.Kb1 Kxe7³ turns out well for Black) 15...Kf8 16.fxe7† Qxe7 17.Rhe1 Qa7 (or even 17...g6!?) the position is unclear. Still, our main line leads to some advantage for Black, so we should leave the rook to its fate.

15.Bxa8

Many years ago (around 1997) I studied this position and found an interesting idea. Apparently, I was not the only one.



15...Qc4!

This move causes White big problems.

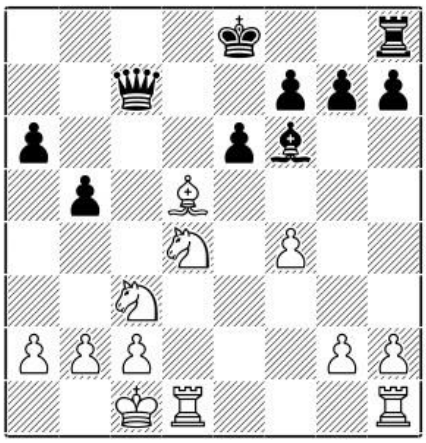
Fischer's choice was slightly less precise, but still good enough to give Black the upper hand:

15...d5!? 16.Bxd5!

16.Bc6†?! is a mistake although Black must be precise in order to punish it:

a) 16...Ke7? was a mistake by a great Najdorf connoisseur. 17.Rhe1! Qxf4† 18.Kb1 Kd6 19.Bxd5! exd5 20.Nxd5± G. Garcia – Browne, USA 1990.

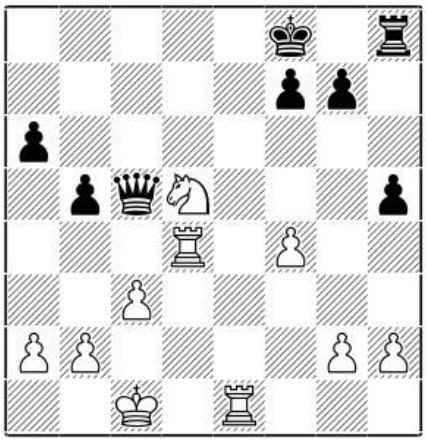
b) 16...Kf8! is correct: 17.Nce2 g6! 18.a4 White needs to bring this pawn to the fight. (18.g3 Kg7 19.Rd3 Rc8µ made things easier for Black in Rubinetti – Szmetan, Santos Lugares 1977) 18...b4 19.Rhf1 Kg7 20.g4 Rc8 21.g5 This was G. Garcia – Yap, Las Vegas 2007, and now 21...Bxd4!N 22.Nxd4 Qb6 23.a5 Qxa5 24.Kb1 Qb6 25.Ba4 Rc4µ would have favoured Black.



16...Bxd4! 17.Rxd4 exd5 18.Re1† Kf8 19.Nxd5

19.Re5 g6 20.Nxd5 Qd6 21.c3 Kg7³

19...Qc5 20.c3 h5



21.f5

Fischer gave 21.Re5 g6 22.f5 Kg7 23.f6† Kh6 as equal, although today's engines prefer Black.

21...Rh6 22.f6?!

White should play more solidly although Black may still press.

22...gxf6

Black went on to win in Keres – Fischer, Bled/Zagreb/Belgrade 1959.

It is also worth pointing out that 15...Bxd4!? 16.Rxd4 d5 17.Bxd5 is another possible route to Keres – Fischer above. I offer these updates on the 1959 game partly for historical reasons, and also to provide a backup option in case anything 'happens' to 15...Qc4!.

16.Ne4

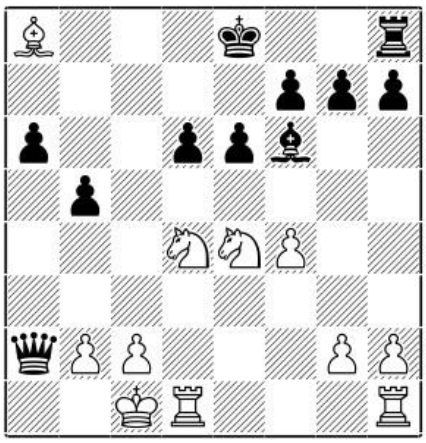
16.Bc6†?! Kf8 does not help White, as his

bishop is unstable here.

Black is also much better after 16.Nce2 Qxa2µ or 16.Nde2 Bxc3! 17.Nxc3 b4 18.Ne4 0-0!µ.

16...Qxa2

White has a rook and two knights for a queen and some pawns. Materially he is fine but his bishop and d4-knight are vulnerable, while his king is also far from happy.



17.Nxd6†?

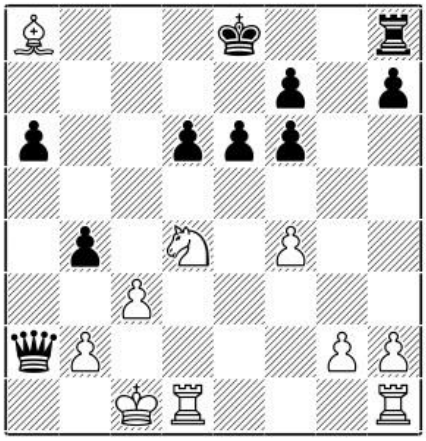
White's only chance to prolong the game is:

17.Nxf6† gxf6 18.c3

Here too, we can improve on an older game.

18...b4!

18...d5 19.Bc6† Ke7 20.Rhe1 occurred in Mokrishchev – Makarov, corr. 1983, when 20...b4!N 21.cxb4 Rb8 22.b5 axb5 23.Re2 Kf8 would have favoured Black. However, going back a few moves, 20.Bb7!?N would have been a better try for White.



19.Be4N

After 19.cxb4 0-0 Black's attack looks winning, for instance: 20.Be4 Rc8† 21.Nc2 (or 21.Bc2 Qa1† 22.Kd2 Qxb2–+) 21...d5 22.Bd3 e5–+

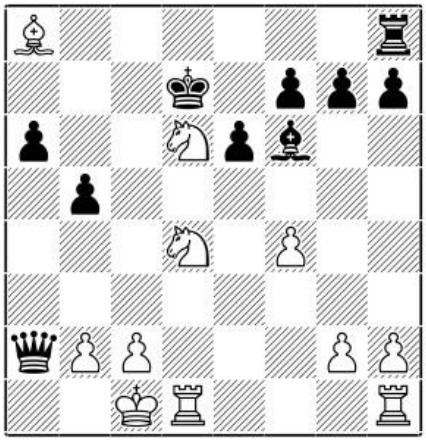
Also after 19.Rhe1 0-0 White was also unable to save himself in Blask – Hirmer, corr. 2010.

19...bxc3 20.bxc3 Ke7µ

Black's initiative is more important than White's scattered material advantage.

17...Kd7!

17...Kf8 is clearly better for Black but the text move is even stronger. The king is not afraid of ghosts on the d-file.



18.Bf3

After 18.Ne4 Rxa8–+ there are no useful discovered checks.

18...Qa1†

18...Kxd6 is also good enough.

19.Kd2 Qxb2

White will lose one of his knights, for starters, so he resigned.

0–1

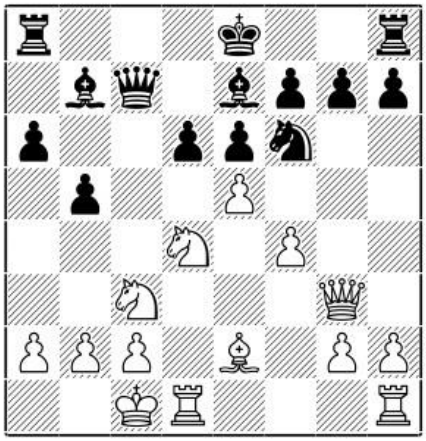
B32) 13.Qg3

GAME 20

Juan Sebastian Morgado – Pablo Ricardi

Mar del Plata 1988

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Bg5 e6 7.f4 Be7 8.Qf3 Qc7 9.0-0-0 Nbd7 10.Be2 b5 11.Bxf6 Nxf6 12.e5 Bb7 13.Qg3



This sober choice is certainly best, although Black has nothing to complain about.

13...dxe5 14.fxe5

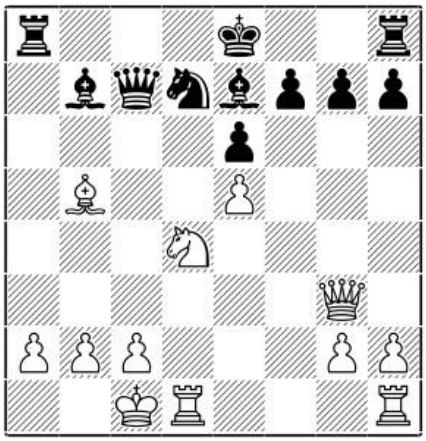
But not 14.Qxg7? Rg8 15.Ncxb5 (or 15.Nxe6 Qb6!–+) 15...Qb6! when Black wins.

14...Nd7 15.Bf3

This leads to relatively calm play.

15.Qxg7?! is once again a mistake; after 15...Qxe5 16.Qxe5 Nxe5 17.Nf3 Nxf3 18.Bxf3 Bxf3 19.gxf3 only Black can be better, as the bishop is stronger than the knight in the endgame.

The sacrifice 15.Ncxb5?! axb5 16.Bxb5 also backfires after:

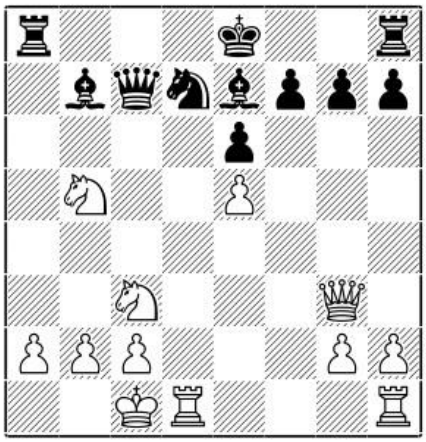


16...0-0! 17.Nxe6 fxe6 18.Rxd7 Qc5 19.Rxb7 (or 19.Bd3 Rxa2 20.Bxh7† Kh8–+) 19...Rxa2–+

The most important deviation from the game continuation is:

15.Bxb5!? axb5 16.Ndxb5

This has actually been the more popular and higher-scoring continuation, but Black should be able to fight for more than equality with precise play.



16...Qc5!

But not 16...Qxe5? 17.Nc7† Kf8 18.Nxa8 Qxg3 19.hxg3± when White's extra material should decide.

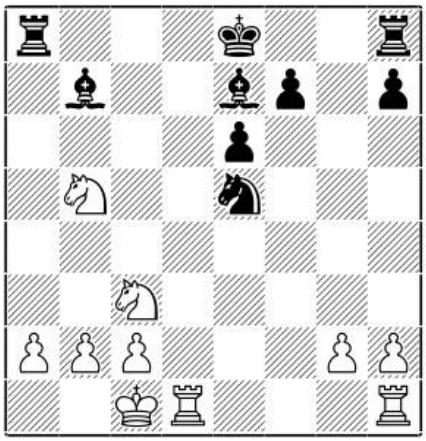
17.Qxg7 Qxe5

17...0-0-0!? 18.Qxf7 Nxe5 19.Qxe6† Kb8 occurred in Rowley – Browne, Los Angeles 1989, and a few other games. "Unclear" seems a fair assessment, although engines slightly prefer Black.

18.Qxe5

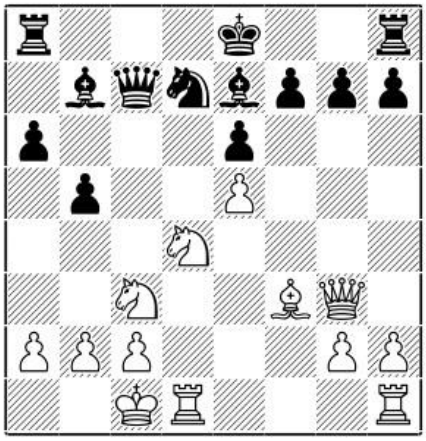
18.Nc7† Qxc7 19.Qxh8† Nf8 20.Qg8 has been tried in a few correspondence games. 20...Bf6!?N would be my choice, and after 21.Nb5 Qf4† 22.Kb1 Bd5 23.Rxd5 exd5 24.Re1† Be7³ White will struggle to demonstrate full compensation for the missing piece.

18...Nxe5



19.Nc7† Kf8 20.Nxa8 Bxa8 21.Rhe1 Ng4!?N

Reaching an oft-quoted but never played endgame. Positions with rook and pawns against two minor pieces are notoriously difficult to evaluate, but I imagine that most grandmasters would take Black. One point in Black's favour is that he has two unopposed bishops against the rook; another is that he still has one rook left on the board. Finally, although White has three connected passed pawns, they are a long way back and it will be hard to advance them without creating weaknesses. Black, on the other hand, should not find it too difficult to mobilize his kingside pawns with the help of his king and strong minor pieces.



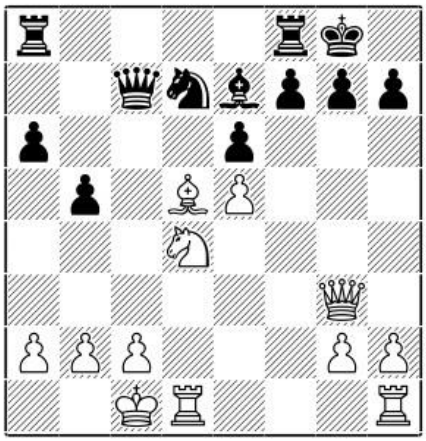
15...0-0!

I prefer this to 15...Bxf3 16.gxf3 g6 17.f4 as seen in Larsen – Portisch, Manila 1974. I would rather leave the e5-pawn as a potential target.

The text move leaves us with a typical Sicilian structure, and a pretty nice version for Black. He is fully developed and has ample scope for counterplay on the queenside and in the centre. The e5-pawn looks like more of a weakness than a strength to me.

16.Bxb7

White may also try:
16.Nd5!?
This looks tricky but it is not dangerous.
16...Bxd5 17.Bxd5
Now Black has a choice:



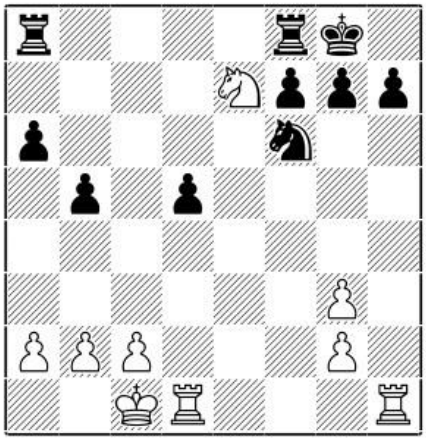
17...exd5

This is a safe route to at least equality.

17...Rad8!?N is more adventurous: after 18.Nc6 Nxe5 19.Nxd8 (19.Nxe7†?! Qxe7 20.Qxe5 Qc5³ wins a pawn) 19...Rxd8 20.Bb3 Bd6 Black has reasonable compensation for the exchange.

18.Nf5 Bf6 19.exf6 Qxg3 20.hxg3 Nxf6 21.Ne7†

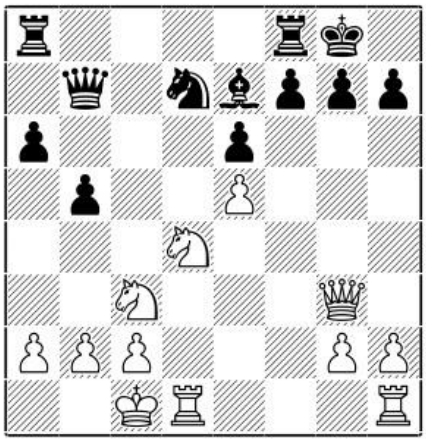
A draw was agreed in Rattinger – Tesic, corr. 2005. However, in a practical game Black could still test his opponent's endgame technique with:



21...Kh8 22.Nxd5 Ne4!

It should be a draw of course, but the doubled g-pawns ensure that the burden of proof is on White.

16...Qxb7



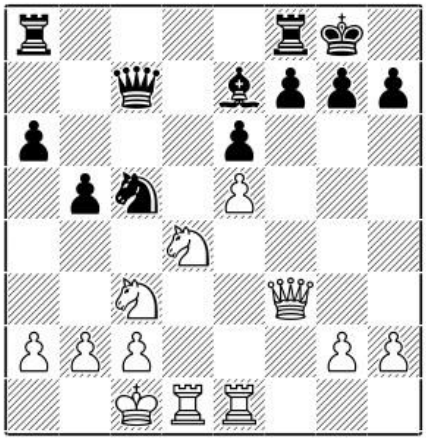
17.Rhe1

Here 17.Nd5?! does not work at all because of: 17...Qxd5 18.Nf5 Bg5†! Forced, but good. 19.Qxg5 Qxe5 20.Rxd7 (or 20.Ne7† Kh8 21.Qxe5 Nxe5µ) 20...exf5µ Black went on to convert his extra pawn in Espindola – Grabinger, corr. 1997.

17...Nc5

Black is also doing well after 17...Nb6!?N³.

18.Qf3 Qc7



19.Qc6

White tries to disturb Black's coordination. Instead 19.Nc6 Bg5† 20.Kb1 Rac8 would just force the knight to retreat.

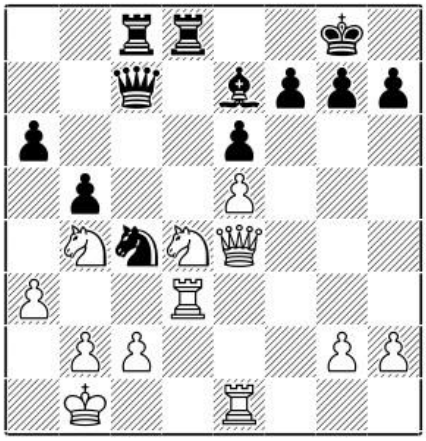
19...Qa5 20.Kb1 Rac8 21.Qf3 Qc7 22.a3 Nd7

The knight heads for the b6-square after all. 22...Na4!? was a good alternative.

23.Qe4

23.Qc6 may look like a clever attempt to simplify, but after 23...Qxc6 24.Nxc6 Rxc6 25.Rxd7 Black has 25...Bxa3!, snatching a pawn.

23...Nb6 24.Rd3 Nc4 25.Na2 Rfd8 26.Nb4



26...Bf8

26...Bxb4! 27.axb4 Rd5! would have been even stronger. The last move attacks e5 and

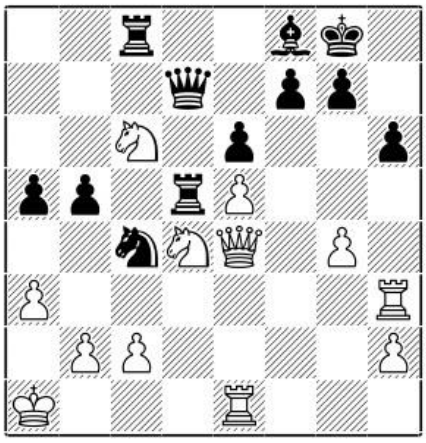
reinforces b5, and after the further 28.Qf4 (if 28.Nf3 then 28...Nxb2! is crushing) 28...a5! Black's attack should decide.

27.Ka1?!

27.Qc6! was the last real chance to resist, although Black is still clearly better.

27...a5 28.Nbc6 Rd5 29.Rh3 h6 30.g4 Qd7

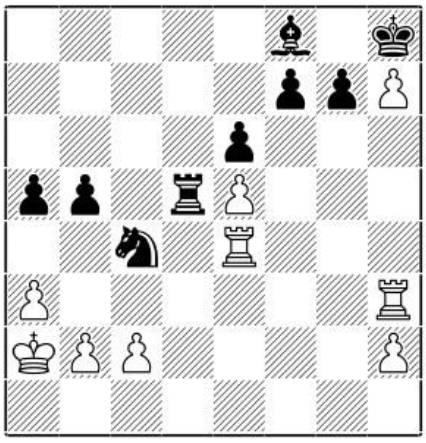
White is all tangled up and must inevitably lose material.



31.g5 Rxc6 32.Nxc6 Qxc6 33.gxh6 Rd1†?!

The endgame is excellent for Black, but modern tools confirm that 33...Nxe5! 34.hxg7 Bxg7 would have been winning more easily.

34.Ka2 Qxe4 35.Rxe4 Rd5 36.h7† Kh8



37.a4

37.Rd3! was the last chance to offer serious resistance.

37...Nxe5 38.axb5 Rxb5 39.c4 Rc5 40.Kb3 f5 41.Rd4 Rc8 42.Ka4 Nxc4 43.b3 Ne5 44.Rd1 Rb8 45.Re3 Rb4† 0–1

Conclusion

We have entered the world of 6.Bg5, White's sharpest choice against the Najdorf. Our choice against it is the classical set-up with 6...e6 7.f4 Be7 8.Qf3 Qc7 9.0-0-0 Nbd7, which fell out of fashion for a while but is currently undergoing a revival. This chapter dealt with some of White's less common ideas against it.

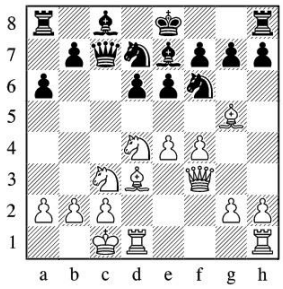
The direct 10.f5!? is nothing like as bad as some older texts would indicate, as demonstrated by Negi. After 10...e5 11.Nde2 b5 12.Bxf6 Nxf6 13.Nd5 Nxd5 14.exd5 the key point is to avoid the superficial 14...Bb7?! in favour of either 14...b4!? or 14...0-0!? (which can easily transpose to one another) when Black obtains sufficient counterplay.

We then examined 10.Qg3, a tricky move which is relatively unexplored. This section introduced the Browne System with 10...h6 11.Bh4 g5! 12.fxg5 Nh5. The ensuing play is double-edged, but the main line offers Black a few options, with 15...b5!? and 15...Nhf6!? both looking healthy.

Finally, the apparently quiet 10.Be2 renders any ...h6 ideas less effective, and thus should deter any premature advance of the black h-pawn, such as on move 7 or 8. Instead we play 10...b5 11.Bxf6 Nxf6 12.e5 Bb7 when the original Keres queen sacrifice with 13.exf6?! simply does not hold up. White should thus prefer 13.Qg3 which leads to more normal positions, though

Black has few problems.

Chapter 9



10.♗d3

Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.♗g5 e6 7.f4 ♗e7 8.♕f3 ♕c7 9.0–0–0 ♘bd7 10.♗d3 h6

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C) 11.Bh4 g5! 257

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C2) 12.fxg5 Ne5 13.Qe2 Nfg4 14.Nf3 hxg5 263

C21) 15.Bxg5 265

C22) 15.Bg3 Bd7 16.h3 Nxf3 17.hxg4 Rxh1 18.Rxh1 Nh4 267

C221) 19.e5 *Game 24* 269

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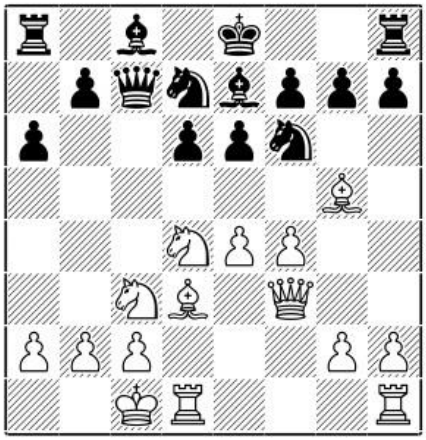
1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Bg5 e6 7.f4 Be7 8.Qf3 Qc7 9.0-0-0 Nbd7 10.Bd3



We have arrived at one of the big main lines. The other major option at this juncture is 10.g4, which can be found in the next chapter.

Developing the bishop to its most natural square is a common continuation. White simply intends to complete development with Rhe1 and then blow things up in the centre with a pawn advance or a knight sacrifice on d5 or f5.

10...h6!?

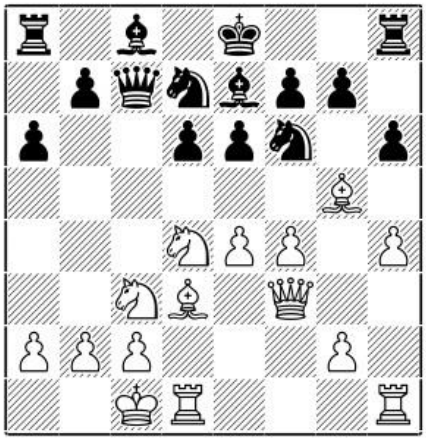
The main alternative is 10...b5, which seems to hold up theoretically, but it is dangerous and requires a lot of pure memorization. The main continuation is 11.Rhe1 Bb7 12.Qg3 b4 13.Nd5! exd5 14.exd5! (14.e5 leads to a forced draw, as far as I know) 14...Kd8 15.Nc6† Bxc6 16.dxc6 Nc5 17.Bh4 Rg8 when both 18.Bf5 and 18.Bxh7!? are covered from White's perspective in *Experts vs. the Sicilian*. Time has moved on and Black seems to be okay, but I don't find it the most practical choice for the reasons already stated.

The text move leads to the Browne System, which we first encountered in the previous chapter. As mentioned there, I define this as a Najdorf main line in which Black plays an early ...h6, usually with the idea of meeting the Bh4 retreat with ...g5.

There are three main options which we must analyse: the speculative **A)** 11.h4!?, the pinning **B)** 11.Qh3 and the main line of **C)** 11.Bh4.

I once faced 11.Bxf6?! and reacted badly with 11...Nxf6? in Elmore – Vigorito, Portsmouth 2012, after which 12.Rhe1! would have produced the annoying threat of e4-e5. The correct recapture is 11...Bxf6![3] when Black should be happy.

A) 11.h4!?



Black should react with calmness.

11...Nc5!

11...hxg5?! 12.hxg5 Rxh1 13.Rxh1 Nf8 occurred in Navara – Adly, Dubai 2005, when 14.Nf5! would have been strong.

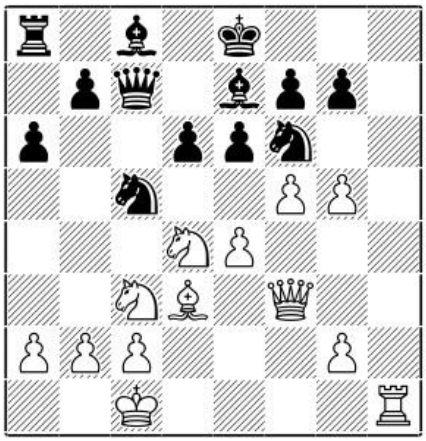
12.f5

This is White's best attacking try.

12.g4? is too slow, and after 12...hxg5 13.hxg5 Rxh1 14.Rxh1 Nfd7 15.g6 fxg6 16.Rh8† Nf8–+ White had little to show for the piece in Tolnai – Ruck, Budapest 1993.

12.Bxf6 Bxf6 13.Be2 h5 14.f5 Bd7 15.fxe6 fxe6 intending ...0-0-0 favoured Black in Littlewood – Gormally, Canterbury 2010.

12...hxg5 13.hxg5 Rxh1 14.Rxh1



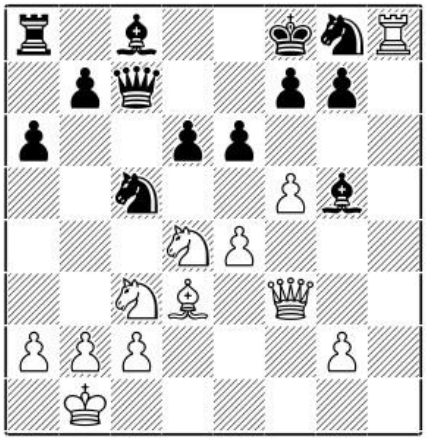
14...Ng8!

14...Nfd7?! 15.Rh8† Bf8 16.fxe6 Ne5 17.Nd5 Ncxd3† 18.Kb1 Qa5 was an old book recommendation, but 19.Qf1!!+– is crushing, as I discovered to my cost in a blitz game long ago. I shared this tidbit with Richard Palliser, who then let the world know in *Starting Out: Sicilian Najdorf*, where he recommended the text move.

15.Rh8!?N

This is usually queried, but it looks like a better try than 15.f6 Nxf6 16.Rh8† Kd7 17.gxf6 Bxf6 when, despite Black's eventual defeat in F. Larsen – Kubach, corr. 1984, at this point White still had to prove his compensation for the pawn.

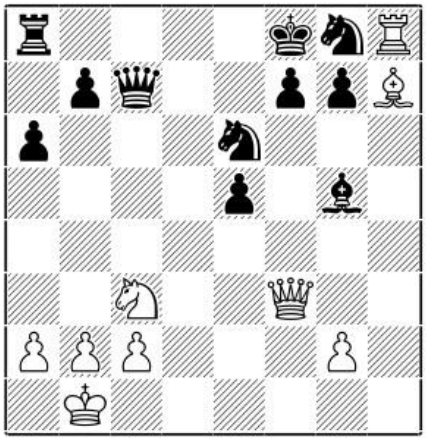
15...Bxg5† 16.Kb1 Kf8



17.fxe6

In the event of 17.Qh5 Bh6 18.g4 Nxd3 19.cxd3 Qc5 20.g5 Qxd4 21.gxh6 gxh6 22.Qxh6† Qg7 23.Qh2 the computer calls it equal, but Black has several playable options and from a human perspective it is not simple for White to justify his piece sacrifice.

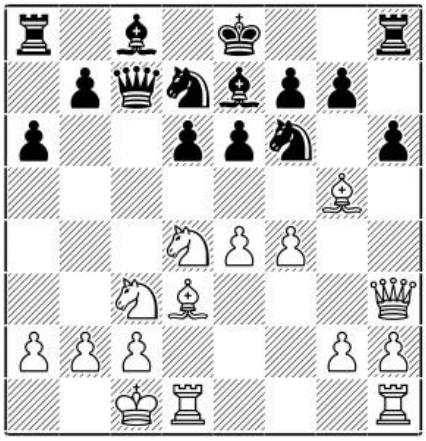
17...Bxe6 18.Nxe6† Nxe6 19.e5 dxe5 20.Bh7



20...Rd8 21.Rxg8† Ke7 22.Nd5† Rxd5 23.Qxd5 g6©

We end up in a strange position that looks easier to play for Black.

B) 11.Qh3



This is an old move. White pins the h6-pawn and thus maintains the tension.

11...Nb6!

This is the key move to remember. It is unusual in the Najdorf to put the knight on b6 before playing ...b5, but it is a good decision here; the c8-bishop lines up with the white queen, while Black also prepares ...Bd7 and possibly ...0-0-0.

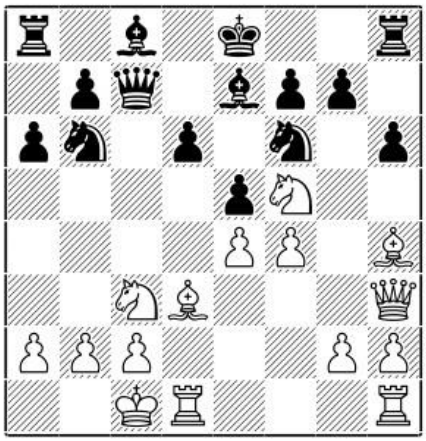
We will analyse **B1)** 12.Rhe1 and **B2)** 12.f5.

12.Bxf6?! does not make much sense. Black simply plays 12...Bxf6, and if 13.Bb5†? Kf8! White is losing; the bishop is still hanging and ...e5 is threatened.

12.Bh4?!

This retreat leads to more complex play, but is still a mistake.

12...e5 13.Nf5



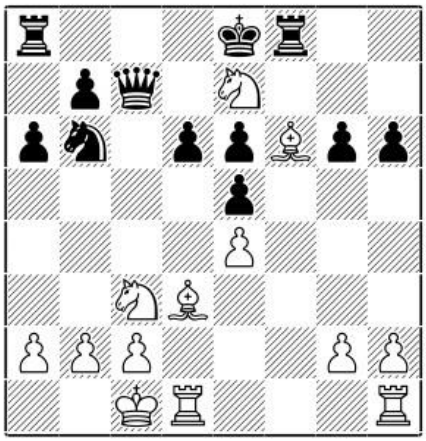
13...g6! 14.Nxe7 Bxh3 15.Bxf6 Be6 16.f5 Rf8!

White will have to scramble just to hold the endgame. For instance:

17.fxe6

17.Bb5† Bd7! 18.Ned5 Nxd5 19.Nxd5 Qa5 20.Bxd7† Kxd7µ

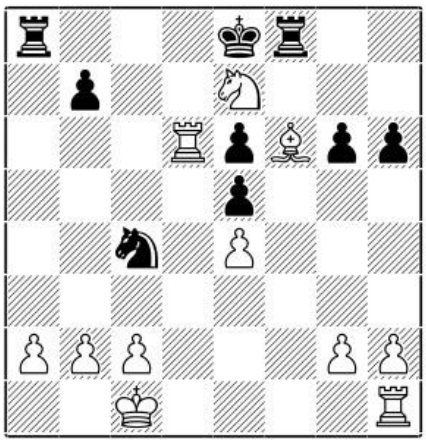
17...fxe6



18.Bb5†!

White has to play spectacularly just to stay in the game. The text move actually leads to a temporary material advantage for him, but Black keeps the upper hand.

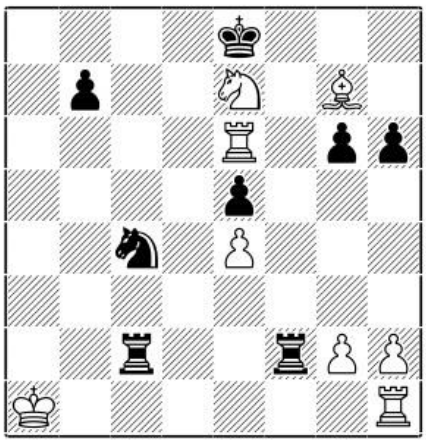
18...axb5 19.Nxb5 Qb8 20.Nxd6† Qxd6 21.Rxd6 Nc4



22.Bg7

22.Rxe6 Kf7µ

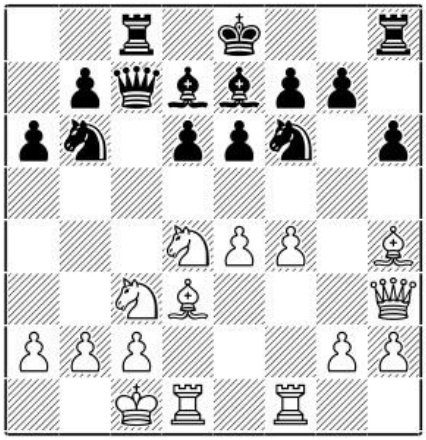
22...Rxa2 23.Kb1 Rxb2† 24.Ka1 Rf2 25.Rxe6 Rbxc2



26.Nf5† Kd7 27.Re7† Kc8 28.Re8† Kc7 29.Bxe5† Nxe5 30.Rxe5 gxf5 31.exf5 Ra2† 32.Kb1 Rfb2† 33.Kc1 Rxg2[3]

White should be able to hold the endgame, although Black is clearly the only side with any winning chances.

12.Rhf1 is a more solid way to play, and Timman turned to it against the same opponent after the defeat he suffered in Game 21 below. Nevertheless, after 12...Bd7 Black is fine, for instance13.Bh4 (13.f5 e5 14.Nb3 0-0-0 15.Be3 Na4 was balanced in Bronstein – Tukmakov, USSR 1974) 13...Rc8



14.Qg3 e5 15.fxe5 dxe5 16.Nf5 Bxf5 17.Bxf6 Bxf6 18.Rxf5 Qe7= Timman – Browne, Amsterdam 1976.

B1) 12.Rhe1

This brings us to a game that I came across early in my Najdorf studies. It made a strong impression on me, which made the ideas easier to digest. The game also taught me that rook

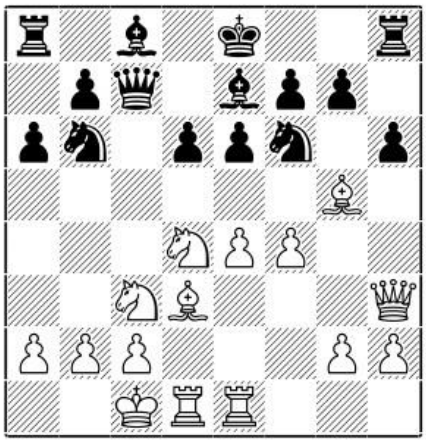
and opposite-coloured bishop endgames can be quite interesting.

GAME 21

Jan Timman – Walter Browne

Wijk aan Zee 1974

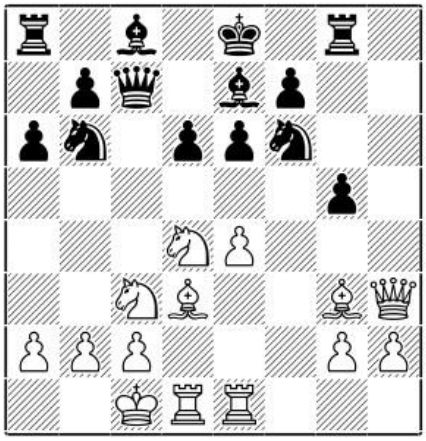
1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Bg5 e6 7.f4 Be7 8.Qf3 Qc7 9.0-0-0 Nbd7 10.Bd3 h6 11.Qh3 Nb6! 12.Rhe1



White simply centralizes his last undeveloped piece.

12...e5

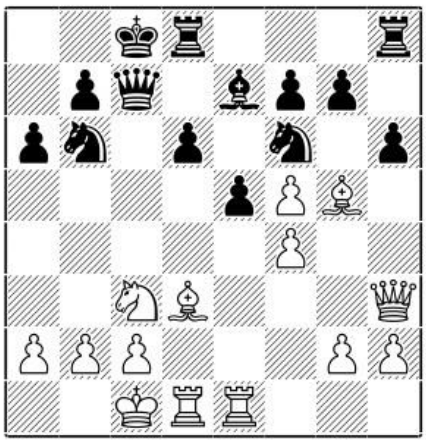
This has always been the main line, but 12...Rg8!? was suggested by Emanuel Berg. This looks funny but it is not so uncommon in the Browne systems. 13.Bh4 (Berg also mentions 13.e5!? hxg5 14.exf6 Bxf6 when White should hurry to do something, perhaps with 15.Bf5!? or 15.Bg6!?) 13...g5 14.fxg5 hxg5 15.Bg3



Berg goes on to evaluate 15...e5 16.Nf5 g4 17.Qh6 Bxf5 18.exf5 0-0-0 as unclear. Another idea is 15...Nbd7!? intending ...b5. The position looks quite typical for the Browne System, and is not unfavourable for Black.

13.Nf5 Bxf5 14.exf5 0-0-0!

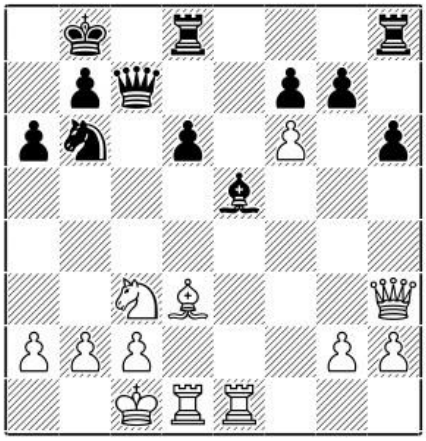
Black connects his rooks, so now the g5-bishop really is hanging



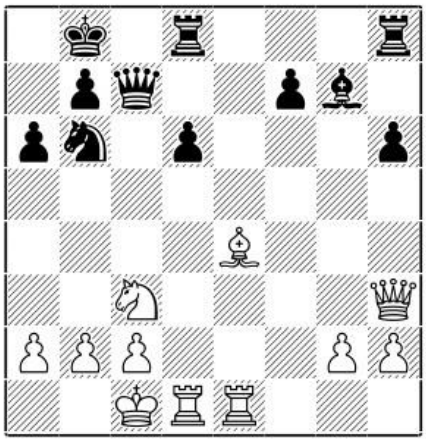
15.Bh4!?

White's most enterprising continuation.

The more solid alternative is: 15.Bxf6 Bxf6 16.fxe5 (Black is fine after 16.Ne4 d5 17.Nxf6 gxf6=) 16...Bxe5!? Activating the bishop at the expense of the pawn structure. (16...dxe5 is a playable alternative, and if 17.Ne4 then 17...Kb8!?N could be considered) 17.f6† Kb8



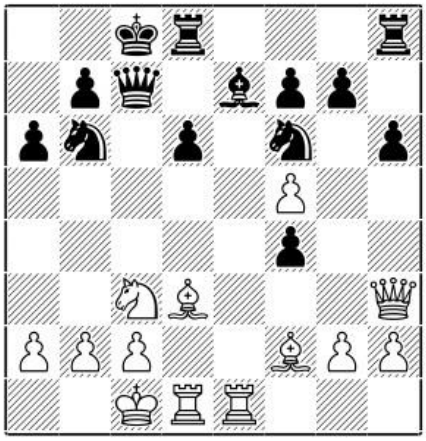
18.fxg7 (Berg avoids 18.Rxe5 dxe5 19.fxg7 Rhg8 20.Qxh6, probably because of 20...Qc6!) 18...Bxg7 19.Be4 Berg suggests the following improvement for Black:



19...Rc8!N Black's king is safe and, if anyone, White must be more careful not to become worse. (Instead after the premature 19...Bxc3?! 20.Qxc3 Qxc3 21.bxc3 White was better in Berg – Hillarp Persson, Kungsor 2009.)

15...exf4 16.Bf2

Threatening Bxb6 followed by Rxe7.

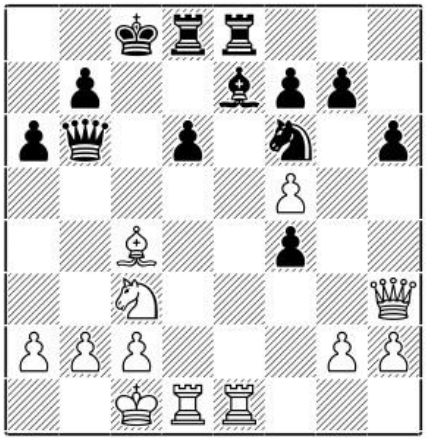


16...Rhe8 17.Bxb6

In the event of 17.Qf3 d5 (17...Nfd7 is also possible) everything is safe. With 18.Bd4 White soon won back the pawn in Narayanan – Kokarev, New Delhi 2010, after which the game was quickly drawn.

17...Qxb6 18.Bc4

This was White's idea: the f7-pawn is attacked and White seizes control of the d5-square. However, Black has a thematic Najdorf reply ready.



18...d5!

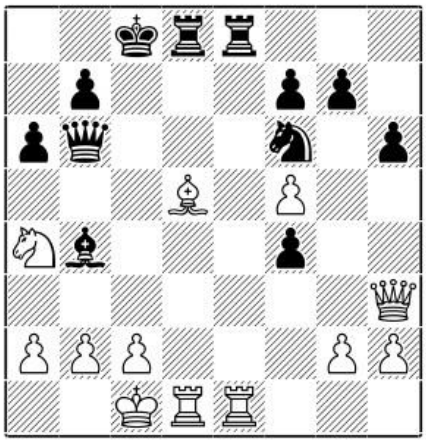
Black returns his extra pawn in order to free his position.

19.Nxd5

The alternative is:
19.Bxd5 Bb4!
White must be careful. In a few games he has faltered with:

20.Na4?

White should play safe with 20.Rxe8 Rxe8 21.Qd3 Qe3† 22.Qxe3 fxe3 23.Bxf7 Bxc3 24.bxc3 Re5= as in Pecka – Hrdy, corr. 2003.



20...Bd2†!

The most spectacular, although 20...Qb5!?Nµ is also excellent for Black.

However, 20...Qf2? only led to equality after 21.Rxe8 Rxe8 in Planinec – Browne, Madrid 1973.

21.Kb1 Qf2

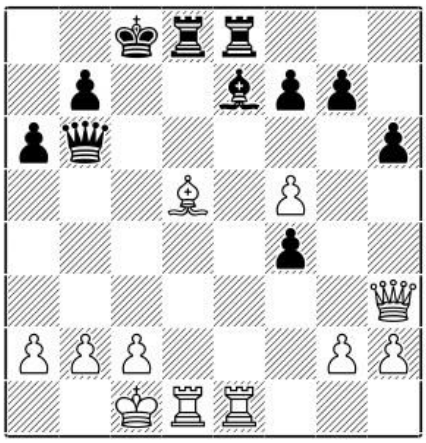
21...Qd4!?N 22.Rxe8 Rxe8 23.Qb3 Nxd5 24.Qxd5 Qxd5 25.Nb6† Kb8 26.Nxd5 Re2µ also offers Black excellent winning chances.

22.Rf1 Qd4 23.Bb3 Re3

Black was dominating in A. Zaitsev – Lorincz, corr. 1980.

19...Nxd5 20.Bxd5?!

It was safer to play 20.f6† Kb8 21.fxe7 Rxe7 22.Rxe7 Nxe7 23.Rxd8† Qxd8 24.Bxf7 when the endgame is level, although there is still plenty of play left.

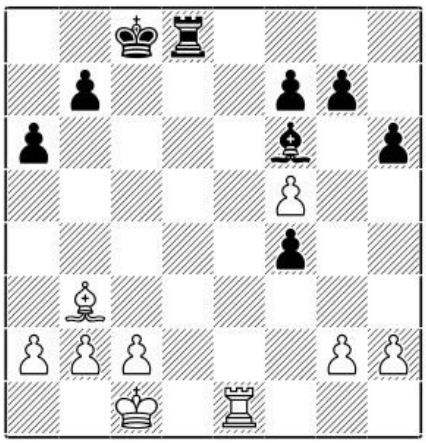


20...Bf6! 21.Qb3

Obviously White cannot defend with the slow 21.c3?? due to 21...Rxe1 22.Rxe1 Rxd5 with an extra piece.

21...Qxb3 22.Bxb3 Rxe1 23.Rxe1

The position may appear to be heading for a draw, but Browne's next move shows that White still has some problems to solve.



23...Bg5![3]

The threat of a discovered check is annoying for White.

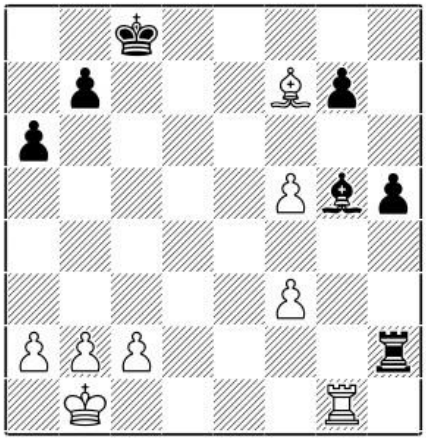
24.Kb1

24.Bxf7?? f3† 25.Kb1 fxg2–+ is obviously not an option for White.

Perhaps White should have tried 24.h4!? Bxh4 25.Rd1 to neutralize the enemy rook. After 25...Bg5 26.Rxd8† Kxd8 27.Kd1 Ke7 Black can certainly keep trying for a while, but White has good drawing chances.

24...Rd2 25.Rg1 f3! 26.gxf3 Rxh2 27.Bxf7 h5

White's extra pawn is meaningless, but the h-pawn is a daunting asset.

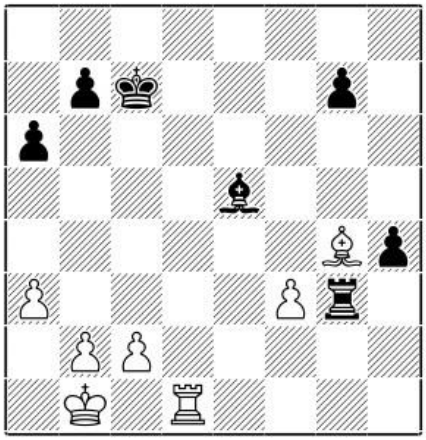


28.f6?!

Timman decides that he will have to give up one of his f-pawns to slow down the advance of Black's runner.

Instead 28.a3 Bf6 29.Bd5 h4 keeps up the pressure, as 30.f4?! runs into 30...Rf2µ.

28...Bxf6 29.Rd1 Kc7 30.a3 Rh3 31.Bg6 h4 32.Bh5 Rg3 33.Bg4 Be5



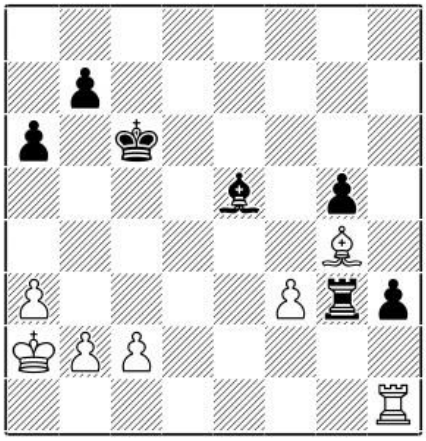
34.Ka2

34.Rd5! Bf6 35.Rh5 would have been more resilient.

34...Kc6 35.Rh1 g5 36.Rd1?

Under serious pressure, White commits the decisive mistake.

36...h3! 37.Rh1



37...Rxg4! 38.fxg4 h2 39.b4 Kd5 40.Kb3

40.Re1 loses to 40...Bd4 followed by ...Bg1.

40...Ke4

0–1

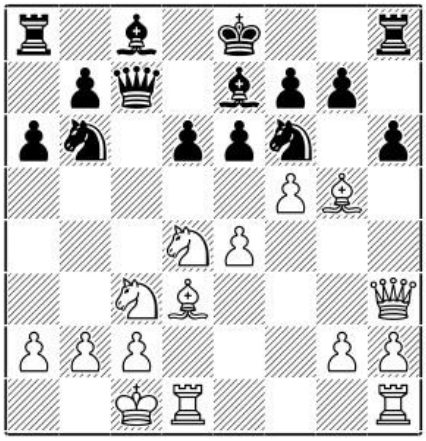
B2) 12.f5

GAME 22

John Nunn – Matthew Sadler

Hastings 1997/98

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Bg5 e6 7.f4 Be7 8.Qf3 Qc7 9.0-0-0 Nbd7 10.Bd3 h6 11.Qh3 Nb6 12.f5



This is the more direct continuation: White attacks the e6-pawn.

12...e5 13.Nde2

This seems like White's best chance to give the knight a brighter future.

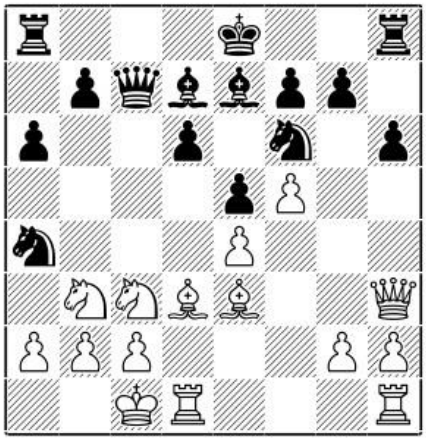
Black should not have much to worry about after:

13.Nb3 Bd7 14.Be3

14.Kb1 Na4!? (this is a typical move, though Black can also play 14...0-0-0 or 14...Bc6) 15.Nxa4 Bxa4 16.Rhe1 Bc6= gave Black a safe position in Saren – M. Petursson, Haifa (ol) 1976.

14.Rhe1 0-0-0 15.Bxf6 Bxf6 16.Nd5 Nxd5 17.exd5 Kb8 18.Kb1 Qb6 19.Qf3 a5!? (or 19...h5!?N÷) led to a double-edged game in Naiditsch – Bologan, Sibenik 2010.

14...Na4

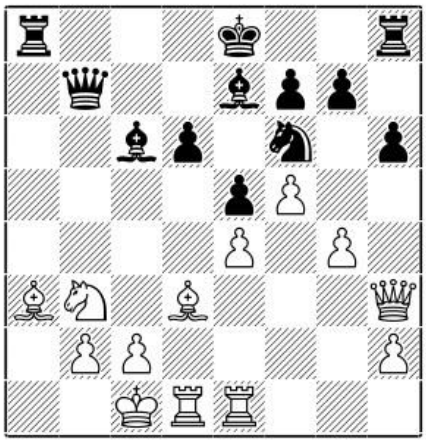


15.Bd2?

White should have gone for safety with 15.Nxa4 Bxa4= followed by ...Bc6; or with 15.Nd5 Nxd5 16.exd5 Nb6 17.Bxb6 Qxb6 18.Kb1 Bf6= as in Quinteros – Szmetan, Fortaleza 1975.

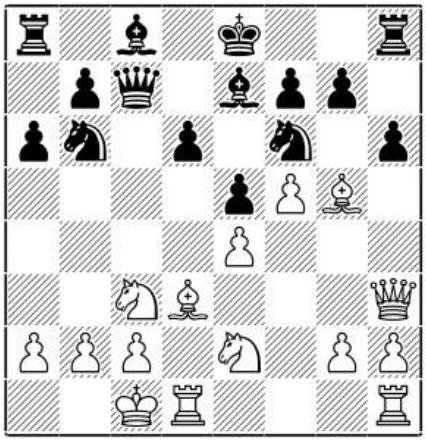
15...Nxc3 16.Bxc3 a5! 17.a3 Bc6 18.Rhe1 b5 19.g4 b4 20.axb4 axb4 21.Bxb4 Qb7 22.Ba3

In Timman – Portisch, Plovdiv 1983, Black took on a3 prematurely, then misplayed his attack and eventually lost. Instead he should have played:



22...0-0!N–+

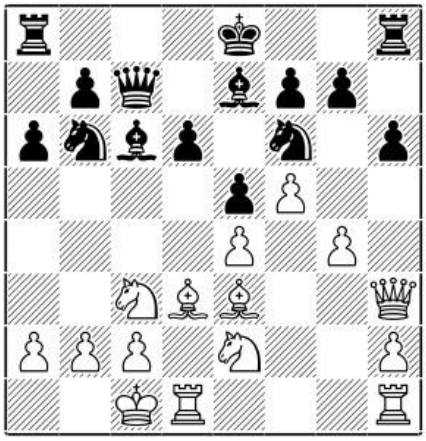
With a winning attack.



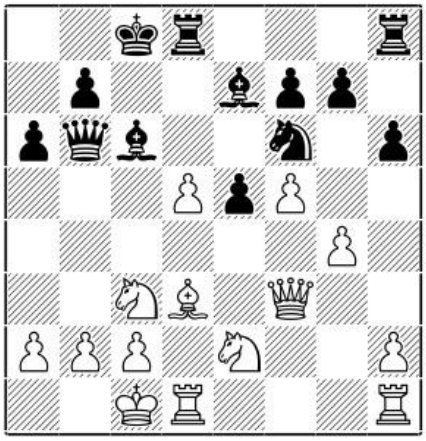
13...Bd7 14.Kb1

Here are some alternative lines showing the typical methods for Black's counterplay:

14.Be3 Bc6 15.g4?! (the safer 15.Qf3 0-0-0 16.Bxb6 Qxb6 17.Bc4 Nxe4! 18.Nxe4 d5 leads to equal chances) White's last move is ambitious, but it meets with a thematic strike after:

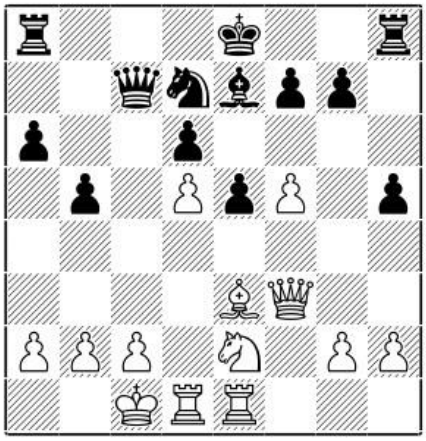


15...0-0-0 16.Qf3 d5! Black is already doing great. 17.Bxb6 Qxb6 18.exd5 In Chandler – Browne, Bath 1983, Black missed a fine opportunity:



18...Rxd5!N 19.Be4 (after 19.Nxd5 Bxd5µ Black has a strong initiative and he may or may not choose to regain the exchange immediately on the next move) 19...Rxd1† 20.Rxd1 Nxe4 21.Nxe4 Bg5† 22.Kb1 Rd8µ

14.Rhe1 Bc6 15.Be3 h5!? prevents g2-g4. A good example continued: 16.Qf3 Nbd7 17.Bc4 b5 18.Nd5 Bxd5 19.Bxd5 Nxd5 20.exd5



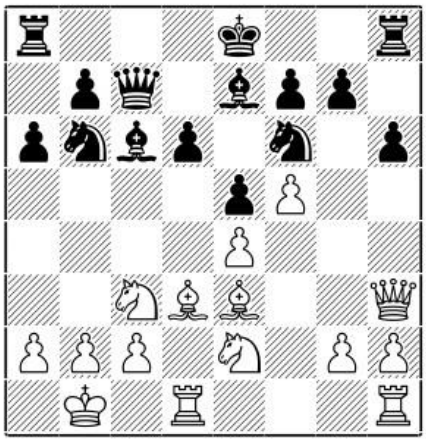
20...Rc8 21.Rd2 Nf6 22.Kb1 Qc4 23.Nc3 Bd8,, Pavlovic – Nemet, Winterthur 2001.

14...Bc6

Black should avoid 14...0-0-0?! 15.Be3 when he cannot play ...d5, and his knight cannot retreat to the d7-square. After 15...Bc6 16.Bxb6 Qxb6 17.Bc4² White hits the f7-pawn and establishes a grip on the d5-square. This is the main positional pitfall that Black needs to watch out for in this line.

15.Be3

White again intends Bxb6 and Bc4, but Black can demonstrate the value of the bishop on c6.



15...d5!

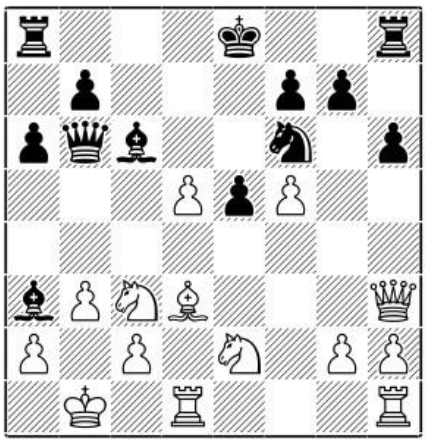
This is stronger than 15...Nbd7, after which 16.g4 0-0-0 17.Qf3 leaves Black somewhat cramped. The pioneer of our system showed he could handle the White pieces too after 17...Nc5 18.Bxc5 dxc5 19.Bc4 with a pleasant edge in

Browne – Grefe, Lone Pine 1976.

16.Bxb6 Qxb6 17.exd5 Ba3!

17...Nxd5 18.Be4 Nxc3† 19.Nxc3 leaves White with a grip on the light squares.

18.b3

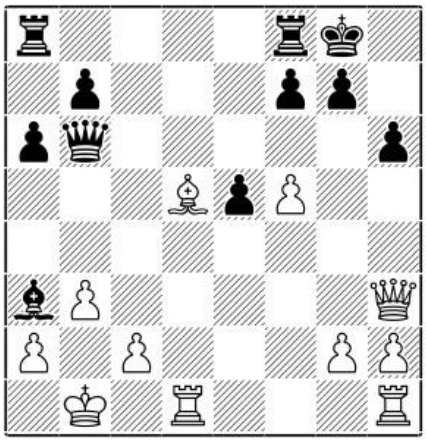


18...Bxd5

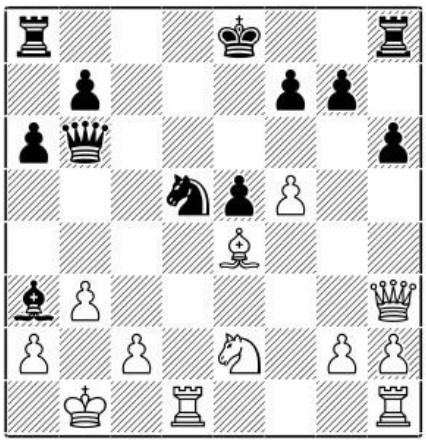
This is the correct recapture, as opposed to 18...Nxd5? 19.Nxd5 Bxd5 20.Nc3 Bc6 21.f6! when Black's king will not find a safe haven.

19.Nxd5 Nxd5 20.Be4

Many years earlier, Nunn had tried 20.Bc4 Nf6 21.Nc3 0-0 22.Nd5 Nxd5 23.Bxd5 when Black should have played:



23...Rad8!N (23...Rac8 24.f6! Qxf6 25.Rhf1 Qb6 26.Rxf7 Kh8 27.Be4 Rxf7 28.Qxc8† Rf8 29.Qg4 was agreed drawn in Nunn – Browne, Tilburg 1982, although White still had some initiative in the final position) The text move gives level chances and prevents the 24.f6? idea, since 24...Qxf6 25.Rhf1? would lose to 25...Rxd5!.



20...Nf6 21.Qf3

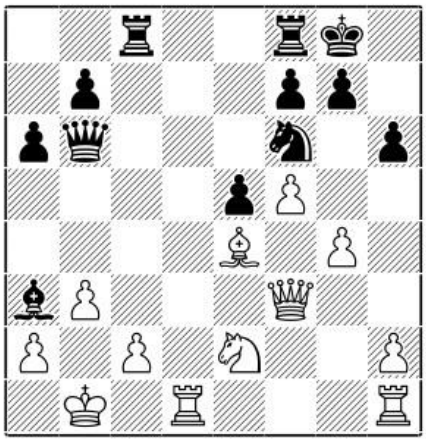
21.Nc3 0-0 22.Nd5 Nxd5 23.Rxd5 Rad8 is fine for Black. Note that White cannot grab a pawn with 24.Rxe5? because 24...Qd4 wins.

21...0-0!

With the kings on opposite sides, Black is more than willing to offer up a pawn to fight for the initiative.

22.Bxb7

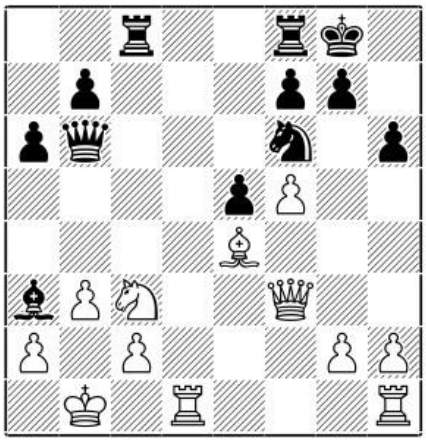
Declining the offer with 22.g4?! does not help. For example: 22...Rac8



23.c3 (23.h4 also loses to 23...Rc4–+; 23.Bxb7 is the best try although 23...Rc7 24.Ba8 Rfc8 25.c3 a5µ leaves White under serious pressure) 23...Rc4! 24.Ng3 Rfc8–+ Nevanlinna – Maki Uuro, Finland 2002.

After 22.Nc3 Black has tried a few moves

but 22...Rac8N seems easiest. Play continues:



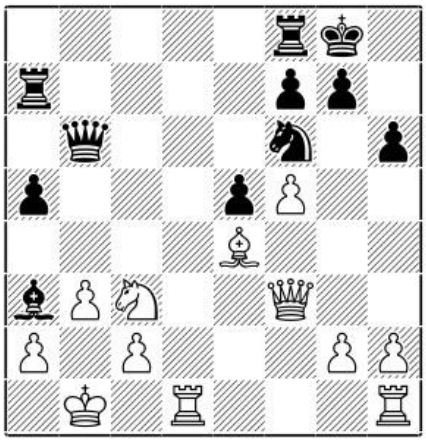
23.Nd5 Nxd5 24.Bxd5 (or 24.Rxd5 Rfd8=) 24...Qf6 25.Be4 (25.Bxb7?? e4) 25...b5=

22...Ra7

With modern tools we discover that 22...Rab8!N tips the scales from 'compensation for the pawn' to 'advantage for Black'. Although it is tempting to remain on the a-file with ...a5-a4 on the cards, on b8 the rook has more scope. Play may continue 23.Bd5 (after 23.Be4 Rfc8 Black has the familiar threat of ...Rc4) 23...Rfc8 followed by ...a5, with a strong initiative for Black.

23.Be4 a5 24.Nc3

White must mind the centre. Trying to counterattack with 24.g4?! looks too slow: 24...a4 25.h4 Rc8 26.g5 Nxe4 27.Qxe4 Rac7 28.Rd2 Rc4 29.Qxe5?! axb3 30.cxb3 (or 30.axb3 Rxc2!) 30...Qc6! Hitting the h1-rook while threatening mate on c1.



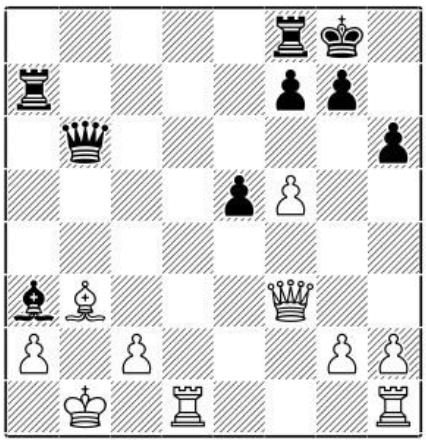
24...a4 25.Nd5 Nxd5 26.Bxd5

If 26.Rxd5 axb3 27.Qxb3 (Black's attack is too strong after 27.axb3? Rfa8–+ or 27.cxb3? Rc8 28.Qd3 Ra4!–+) 27...Qf2 Black maintains at least enough compensation for the pawn.

26...axb3 27.Bxb3?!

White tries to keep everything covered, but the defence should not hold up.

Instead 27.cxb3 Rc8 28.f6! would make a mess of things, as 28...Rac7 29.Qf5 is not clear at all.



27...Be7!

This is much stronger than 27...Rfa8, when 28.Rd7! gives White counterplay.

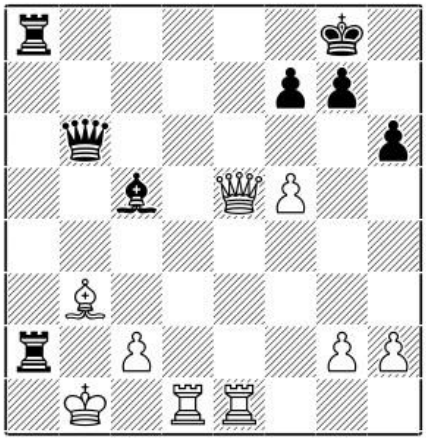
28.Rhe1

This is a better try than 28.Qe4 Rfa8 29.Rd7?, when 29...Rxa2 30.Rxe7 Ra1† 31.Kb2 R8a2† 32.Kc3 Qc5† wins for Black.

28...Rfa8!

The thematic 28...e4 29.Rxe4 Bf6 is well met by 30.a4!.

29.Qe3 Bc5 30.Qxe5 Rxa2



The *Informant* annotations indicated a slight advantage for Black at this point. Today we can see that Black is actually winning, but it takes computer-like precision.

31.Re4!

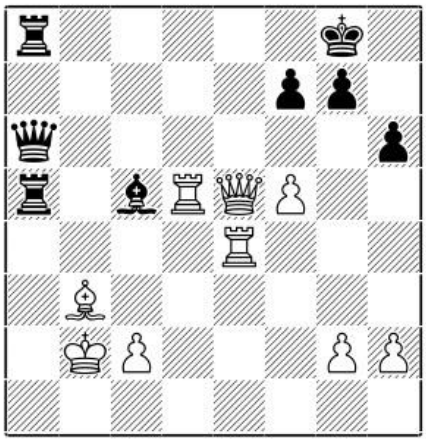
Nunn continues to offer a lot of resistance.

White has no time for 31.Rd7?, since 31...Ra1† 32.Qxa1 (32.Kb2 R8a2† 33.Kc3 Qb4†–+) 32...Rxa1† 33.Kxa1 Qa5† picks up the e1-rook.

31.f6 R2a3! 32.Kb2 Rxb3†! 33.cxb3 Ba3† 34.Kc2 Rc8† 35.Kd3 Qc6 leaves White defenceless.

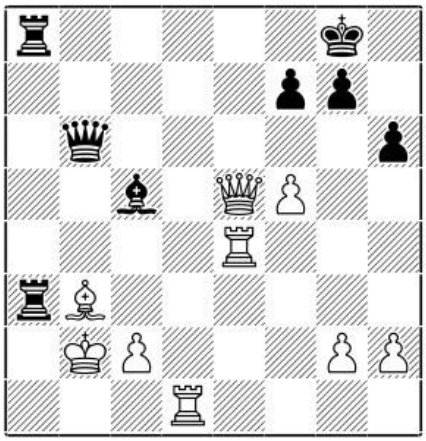
31...R2a3

Sadler misses the engine win with 31...R2a5!, intending ...Qa7. The key line continues 32.Rd5 Qa6! 33.Kb2 and here Black has:



33...Bd4†! Certainly an easy move to miss, especially from a distance. Play continues 34.Qxd4 (or 34.Rexd4 Rxd5 followed by mate on a1) 34...Rxd5 35.Bxd5 Qa1† 36.Kb3 Qa3† 37.Kc4 Ra4† and it is all over.

32.Kb2 Ra2† 33.Kb1 R2a3 34.Kb2



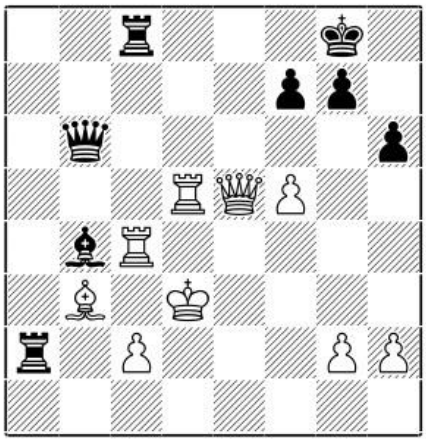
34...R3a5?

The surprising prophylactic move 34...Kh7! still gives Black a winning position.

35.Rd5! Ra2†

Now 35...Qa6 36.Rg4! Bd4†? 37.Qxd4 just throws away a rook; there's no time to take on d5 to make way for the queen, because of the mate on g7.

36.Kc3 Rc8 37.Rc4 Bb4† 38.Kd3



38...Rxc4?!

Better was 38...Raa8 when Black still has compensation for the pawn.

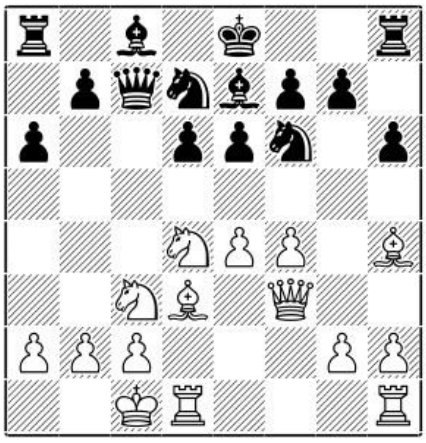
39.Kxc4 Ra8 40.Rb5

This forces the queens off. Now Black must suffer for a long time, but in the end he managed to survive.

40...Qd6 41.Qxd6 Bxd6 42.h3 Rc8† 43.Kd5 Bg3 44.c4 Kf8 45.c5 Ke7 46.Ke4 h5 47.Bd5 Rc7 48.c6 h4 49.Kd4 Ra7 50.Bf3 Bc7 51.Rd5 Ra4† 52.Kd3 Bd6 53.Rb5 Bc7 54.Be4 Ra3† 55.Kc4 Ra4† 56.Kd3 Ra3† 57.Ke2 Ra4 58.Bf3 Ra5 59.Rb7 Kd6 60.Rb4 Rxf5 61.Rd4† Kc5 62.Rxh4 g5 63.Ra4 Rf4 64.Ra7 Kd6 65.Ra1 f5 66.Rd1† Kc5 67.Rd5† Kb6 68.Kd3 g4 69.hxg4 fxg4 70.Be4 Kxc6 71.g3 Rxe4

½–½

C) 11.Bh4



This is the most common continuation. Along with the 10.g4 line of the next chapter, this is the position that followers of this repertoire can expect to reach most often in their games after 6.Bg5.

11...g5!

This is the Browne system in its most common form. Now **C1)** 12.e5!? is a sharp option which should be checked, but **C2)** 12.fxg5 is the main line.

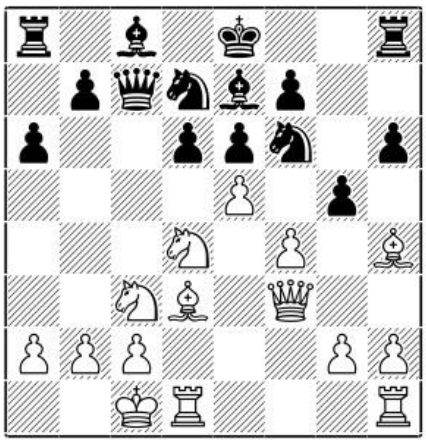
C1) 12.e5!?

GAME 23

Anatoly Isaev – Anatoly Timoshenko

Correspondence 1991

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Bg5 e6 7.f4 Be7 8.Qf3 Qc7 9.0-0-0 Nbd7 10.Bd3 h6 11.Bh4 g5 12.e5!?



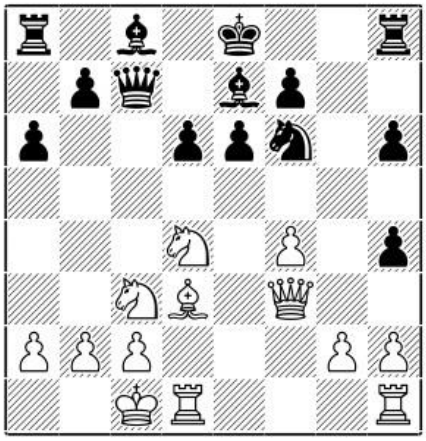
This move stirs up a mess which could be difficult to deal with if unprepared. If Black knows his stuff, however, he has good chances to take over the initiative.

12...gxh4

Black should avoid 12...dxe5? 13.Nxe6! fxe6 14.Bg6† with a horror show.

13.exf6 Nxf6

Those h-pawns may not look pretty but they are not as weak as they seem, and one of them is an extra pawn. Black also has a central majority and the bishop pair, so White has to prove the viability of his sacrifice.



14.f5

White puts pressure on the e6-pawn.

A tame alternative is:

14.Rhe1?! Bd7 15.Re3

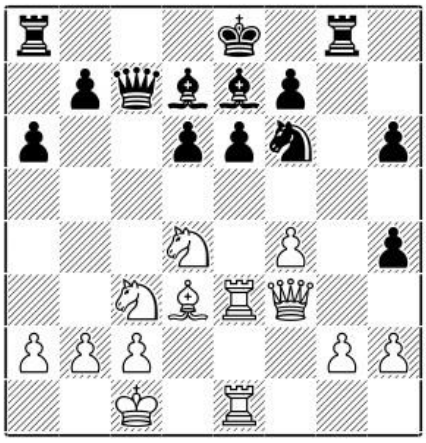
Black is also better after: 15.f5 e5 16.Ne4 (16.Nb3 Bc6µ) 16...0-0-0 17.Nxf6 Bxf6 18.Ne2 d5! 19.Qxd5 Bc6 20.Qb3 Bxg2 21.Bc4 Rxd1† 22.Rxd1 Rd8µ Jadoul – Y. Gruenfeld, Brussels 1985.

15...Rg8!?

15...0-0-0 is possible although 16.Bxa6 bxa6 should lead to a draw with best play. The text move is more ambitious.

16.Rde1

In J. Anderson – A. Hunt, Hastings 2008, Black should have continued:



16...0-0-0!N

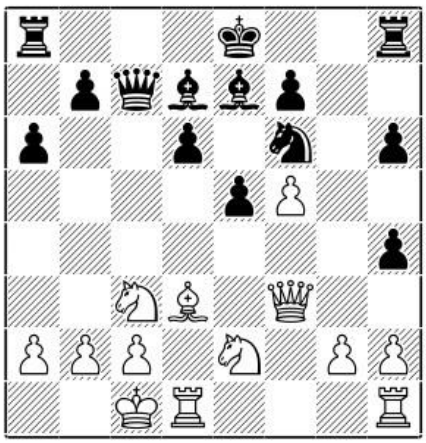
Castling is tactically justified here, due to:

17.Bxa6 Qb6!

Black wins with a double attack.

14...e5 15.Nde2 Bd7

White hopes to win the battle for the central light squares. He may do so, but Black can fight for the initiative nonetheless. The open g-file and the advanced h4-pawn will be useful tools to cause White trouble.



16.Be4

Some other games have continued:

16.Ne4?!

This enables Black to return his extra pawn with good effect.

16...d5!

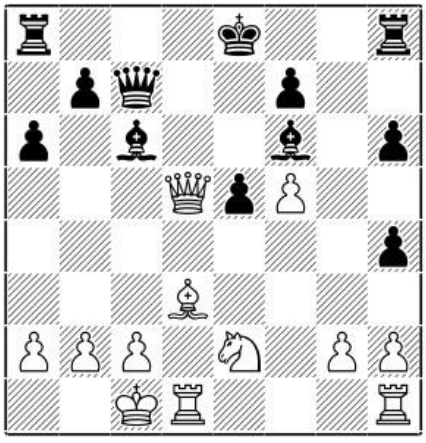
But not 16...Bc6? 17.Nxf6† Bxf6 18.Be4 when White stands better.

17.Nxf6† Bxf6 18.Qxd5

Declining the pawn is no solution: 18.Nc3 Bg5† 19.Kb1 d4 20.Nd5 Qd6 clearly favours Black.

18...Bc6

Black has two strong bishops and practice has shown that he has the upper hand.



19.Qb3

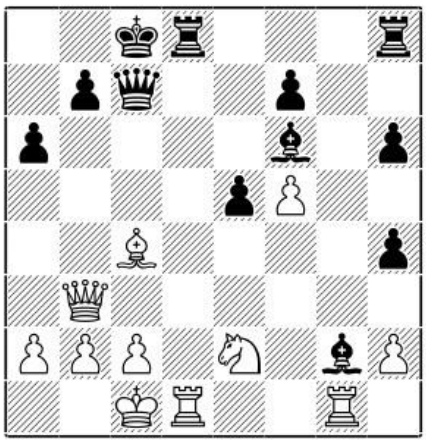
19.Qc5 0-0-0 gave Black a huge advantage in Biriescu – Georgescu, Sibiu 1977.

19...0-0-0 20.Bc4

20.Nc3 Bxg2 21.Rhg1 h3µ was excellent for Black in Gasloli – Quinteros, Buenos Aires 1979, and 20...e4!N–+ would have been even stronger.

20...Bxg2 21.Rhg1

In Parma – Bukic, Belgrade 1978, Black should have continued:

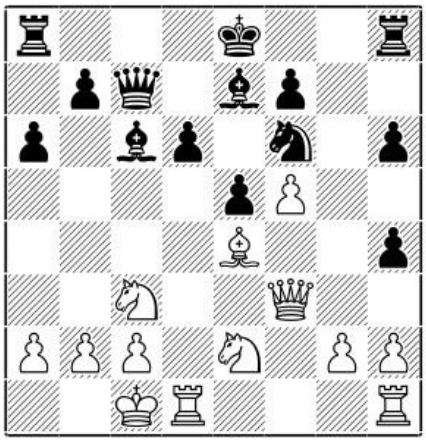


21...Rxd1† 22.Rxd1 e4

With a serious advantage.

16...Bc6

At first I thought that 16...Rc8 could be an even simpler solution, but I discovered an interesting possibility for White: 17.Nd5!?N 17...Nxd5 18.Rxd5 Bc6 19.Nc3! and if 19...Bxd5 20.Nxd5 Bg5† 21.Kb1 White has good compensation for the exchange.



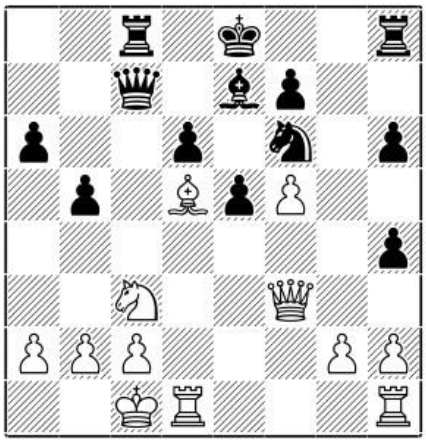
17.Nd5

White must fight for the centre.

After 17.Bxc6†? bxc6µ Black is much better, with ...d5 coming soon.

17...Bxd5 18.Bxd5 Rc8 19.Nc3 b5

White controls some light squares but his position is not stable. The pressure on the c2-pawn is most inconvenient for him.



20.Bb3

This is the safest continuation; 20.a3?! a5 certainly does not help White.

20.Rd2? loses material after 20...b4 21.Nd1 (if 21.Ne4? Nxd5 the rook cannot recapture because of mate on c2) 21...Nxd5 22.Qxd5 Bg5µ.

20.Bb7!?

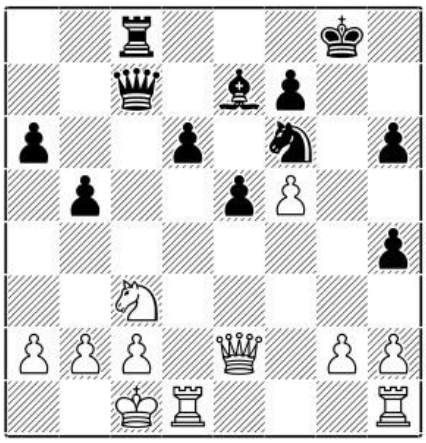
White may also be tempted by this move, but Black can boldly sacrifice the exchange with:

20...0-0!

20...Rb8 21.Bxa6 0-0 22.Bxb5 led to an eventual victory for Black in Smirin – Gelfand, USSR 1984, but he was worse at this stage.

21.Bxc8 Rxc8 22.Qe2

White must defend c2.



22...Qc6! 23.Rhe1 b4 24.Ne4 d5 25.Nf2

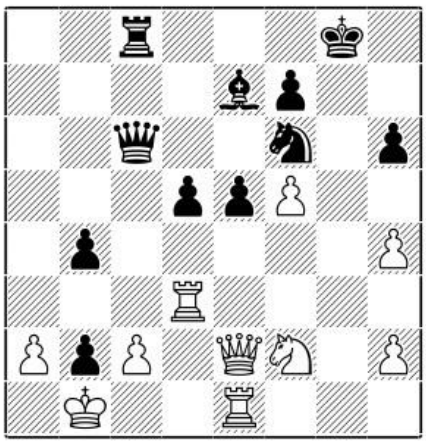
Also after 25.Nxf6† Bxf6 Black has obvious compensation.

25...a5 26.Kb1 a4

26...e4N© is also promising.

27.g3 a3 28.gxh4 axb2 29.Rd3

We have been following B. Grabarczyk – G. Ginsburg, Darmstadt 2001. Black should have continued:



29...e4!N

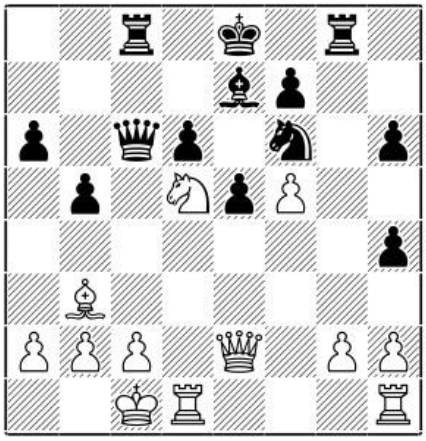
Black has excellent chances, especially since 30.Rg3† Kh7 31.Reg1 d4 32.Rg7† Kh8–+ sees White run out of gas.

20...Qc6

20...Rg8 is also good.

21.Qe2 Rg8 22.Nd5

It looks like White has consolidated to some degree, but Black's next move stirs up more trouble.



22...a5! 23.Nxf6†

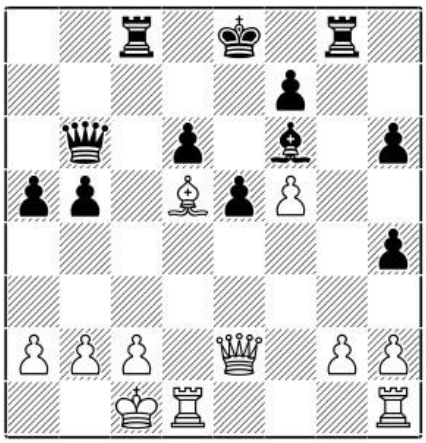
23.Nxe7? Kxe7–+ gives Black too strong an attack, while 23.a3N gives Black a pleasant choice between 23...Rg5 and 23...Kf8.

23...Bxf6

The position is messy, but Black can at least hold his own.

24.Bd5 Qb6

24...Qc5!N looks slightly more accurate although the general character of the position is similar.



25.Rd3 Rg5

25...Ke7?! is inaccurate. After 26.Rhd1 Rc5 27.Kb1 the players agreed a draw in Nunn – Ljubojevic, London 1980, but Qh5 is going to be a problem, and Black cannot defend with 27...Rg5? in view of 28.Be4+– when d6 is falling.

Black could consider 25...b4!?N or 25...Kf8!?N however.

26.Kb1 Kf8! 27.c3

Avoiding 27.Rhd1 Rxf5 28.Qg4 Qf2! when Black defends his rook while attacking c2.

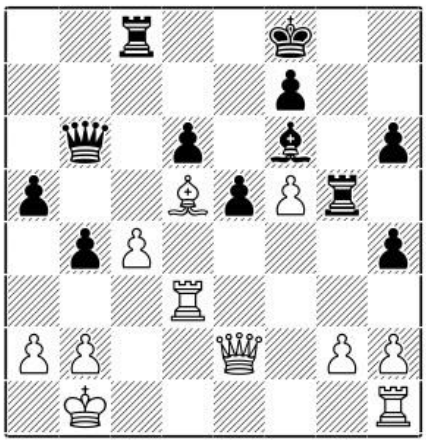
27...b4

The point of White's last move is that 27...Rxf5?? 28.Qg4 Qf2 29.Rf3! would win for White.

28.c4

Now Black begins a cascade of sacrifices to get to the white king. Many years ago, I saw this position in an old *Informant*. I did not really understand what was happening, or what to make of Black's pawn structure. Now I understand the

initiative better – because I decided to play the Najdorf. What follows is truly amazing.



28...e4! 29.Bxe4 Re8!

Black is just a little better after 29...Rxc4 intending ...Rd4.

The pin along the e-file causes White big problems, especially in the pre-computer era.

30.Rd5

30.Rhd1 Rxf5 31.Rxd6? Qf2! wins material, while 30.Qf3 Rxe4! 31.Qxe4 Qf2 32.Rb3 Rxg2 sees Black break through to b2.

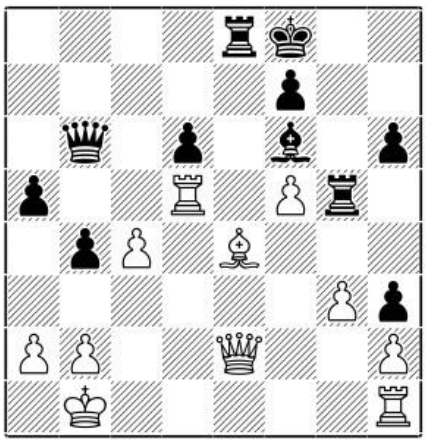
30.Rf1! was the best defence although 30...Qb7!? 31.Re3 Qe7 maintains Black's initiative.

30...h3!

30...Rxe4 31.Qxe4 Qf2 32.Qc2 Rxg2 offers Black good compensation for the exchange. The text move is more ambitious.

31.g3

Avoiding 31.gxh3? Rg1† 32.Rxg1 Qxg1† 33.Kc2 Qa1 (or 33...a4) with a winning attack.



31...b3!

Continuing the cascade of sacrifices.

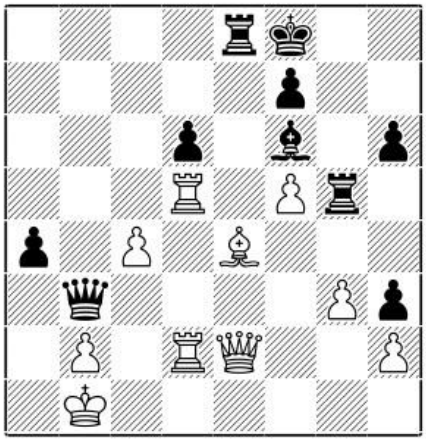
32.axb3

32.a3? allows 32...Rxe4! 33.Qxe4 Qf2 with a fatal attack on b2.

32...a4! 33.b4

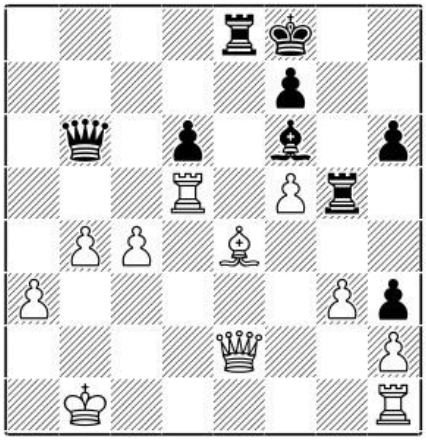
Even today's computers believe that this is good for White, at least at a low search depth. Timoshenko had analysed deeply.

33.Rhd1 Qxb3 34.R1d2 allows a nice winning sequence:



34...a3! 35.Rb5 Qa4 36.b3 Qa7! 37.c5 d5! 38.Rxd5 Rxe4!–+ Even in a correspondence game, it is impressive that Black was able to work out this supporting variation.

33...a3! 34.bxa3



34...Rg4!!

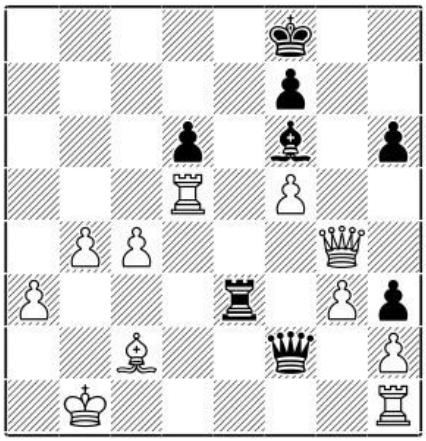
Beautiful.

35.Qxg4

White has no choice: 35.c5 Qa7! 36.Qxg4 Qxa3 37.Kc2 Qc3† 38.Kd1 Qb3† wins for Black, while 35.Qd2 Bg5! 36.Rxd6 Qb8! followed by ...Rgxe4 is also terminal.

35...Qf2 36.Bc2 Re3!

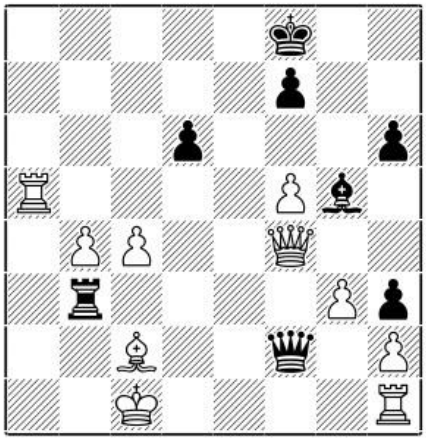
Another elegant move, threatening ...Rb3†!.



37.Ra5?

This loses. White also fails to save himself with 37.Rhd1? Rb3† 38.Kc1 Bb2† 39.Kb1 Bxa3† with a mating attack, or with 37.Rxd6 Rb3† 38.Kc1 Qe3†–+ followed by ...Rxa3.

37.Qf4! was the only chance, when Timoshenko analyses: 37...Rxa3! 38.Ra5 Rb3† 39.Kc1 Bg5

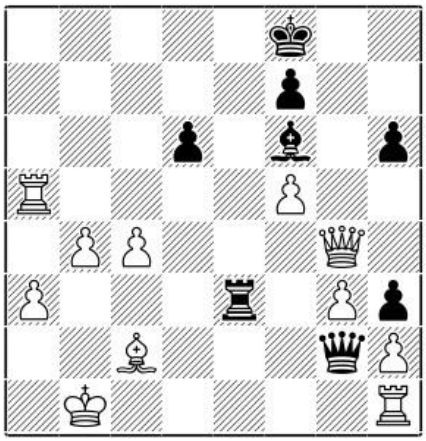


40.Ra8† (40.Qxg5 hxg5 41.Bxb3 Qf3 42.Rd1 Qxb3³) 40...Ke7 41.f6† Kd7 42.Qxg5 hxg5 43.Bxb3 Qf3 44.Ra7† Kc6 45.b5† Kc5³ White will have to give up his bishop with 46.Rd1, but the game is hardly over yet.

37...Qg2!–+

An important finesse, based on the fact that White's rook does not have a good square.

There is no knockout after 37...Rb3†? 38.Kc1 Bb2†? (better would be 38...Bg5† 39.Qxg5 hxg5 40.Bxb3 Qf3 41.Rd1 Qxb3 with a likely draw) 39.Kd1+– when the white king sneaks away.



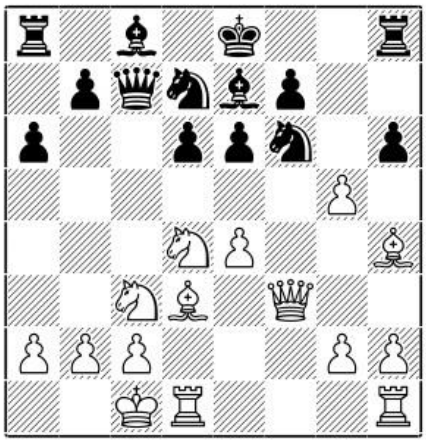
38.Rd1 Rb3†

Now this move wins because, unlike the line above, White does not have the d1-square for his king.

39.Kc1 Bb2† 40.Kb1 Bd4†

0–1

C2) 12.fxg5



This is the most common move.

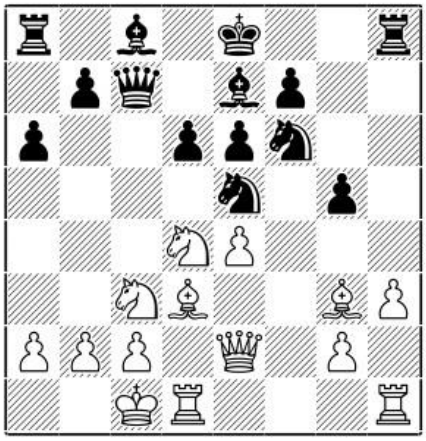
12...Ne5 13.Qe2 Nfg4

This can be considered the main line of the Browne System. In return for the pawn, Black has solidified his control of the e5-square and will have some open lines on the kingside. His king is still in the centre, but his pawns provide good cover. Black will still have to watch for possible sacrifices; but provided he catches up in development without suffering any accidents, he can look forward to the future. Most endgames tend to be good for Black, whose king will be just fine in the centre.

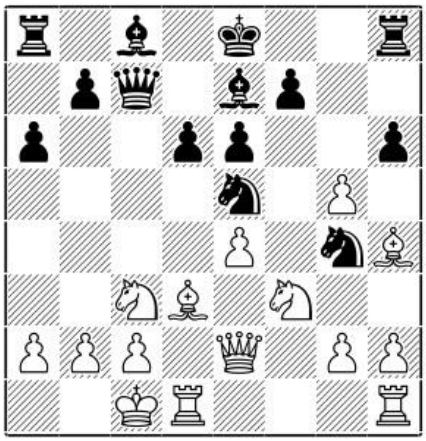
14.Nf3

Although this protects the g5-pawn, White actually tends not to hold on to his extra pawn. Rather, the knight is being used to fight for the important e5-square.

Other moves allow Black to consolidate rather easily. For example14.h3 hxg5 15.Bg3 (15.hxg4?! gxh4³ left White weak on the dark squares in Polok – Jakubowski, Katowice 2018) 15...Nf6



16.Rhf1 (16.Nf3 Nh5 17.Bh2 Bd7 is comfortable for Black) 16...Bd7 17.Kb1 0-0-0 (or 17...Nh5 18.Bh2 Nf4 19.Bxf4 gxf4 20.Rxf4 b5©) 18.Nf3 Nh5 19.Bh2 Nf4 20.Qd2 Neg6!?N=



14...hxg5

My personal preference is to avoid exchanging on f3 in these positions, unless White burns a tempo with h2-h3 to provoke it.

That said, Black also obtains a reasonable position with:

14...Nxf3 15.gxf3

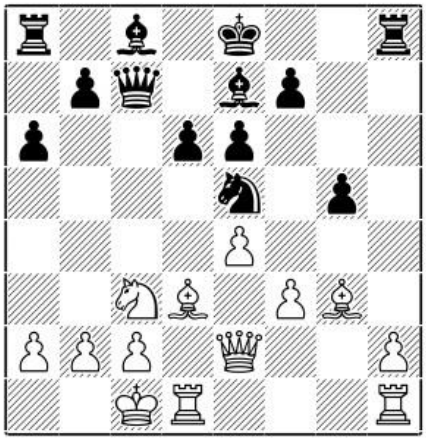
15.Qxf3 Ne5 16.Qh5 Ng6 is fine for Black.

15...hxg5 16.Bg3

16.fxg4 gxh4= gives Black nice long-term prospects with the bishop pair.

16...Ne5

White should act quickly, by breaking open the kingside with one of his two pawn levers:



17.f4

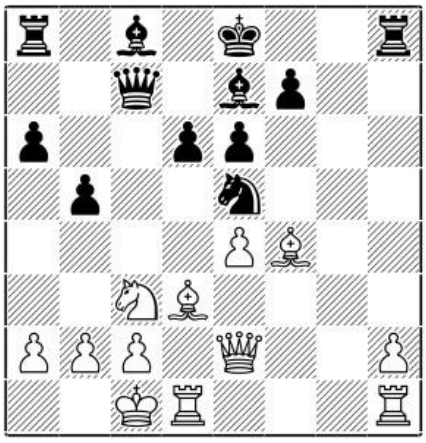
17.Bxe5? dxe5µ is certainly wrong for White.

17.Qf2 is rather slow, and 17...b5 18.a3 Qa7 19.Qe2 Bd7 20.Kb1 Qb7 21.Na2 a5 was good for Black in Bartholomew – Wojtkiewicz, Connecticut 2005.

17.h4 gxh4 18.f4 Nxd3† 19.Rxd3 (19.Qxd3? Bd7µ was great for Black in Hay – Browne, Adelaide 1971) 19...b5!? (the more common 19...Bd7 is also playable) 20.a3 Bb7 (or 20...Bd7!?N intending ...a5) The position was unclear in Langer – Morcin, corr. 2010.

17...gxf4 18.Bxf4 b5!

18...Bd7 19.Rdf1 Rh7 20.h4 0-0-0 21.h5 Rdh8 left Black with a playable but somewhat passive position in Azarov – Kalashian, Istanbul 2006.

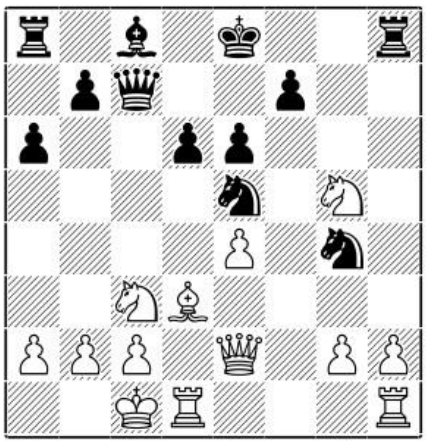


19.a3 Rb8 20.Rhg1 Bf6 21.Na2 Bd7 22.Rdf1 a5 23.Bd2 Nxd3† 24.Qxd3 Be5

Black was doing well in Peli – Jaederholm, corr. 2010.

White can capture the pawn with **C21)** 15.Bxg5, though declining it with **C22)** 15.Bg3 is actually the more ambitious approach.

C21) 15.Bxg5 Bxg5† 16.Nxg5



16...Qc5

Threatening ...Nxd3† followed by ...Qxg5, as well as a fork on f2.

17.Nh3

This is the main move.

17.Nf3?!

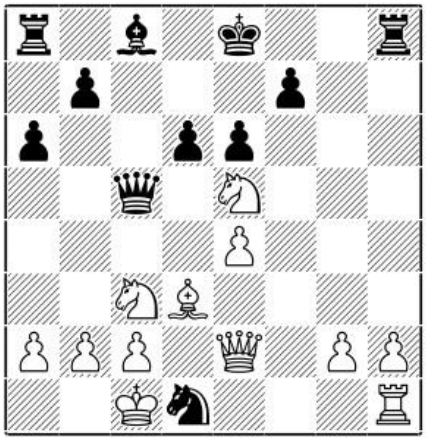
This looks like a blunder at first – and indeed it's not objectively a good move – but Black needs to be precise.

17...Nf2 18.Nxe5

18.Na4 Nfxd3†N 19.Rxd3 Nxd3† 20.Qxd3 Qc7 leaves White with less than enough compensation for the exchange.

18...Nxd1!

18...dxe5?! 19.Na4 Qa7 20.Bb5† axb5 21.Qxb5† Ke7 22.Qb4† Kf6 23.Nb6 was dangerous for Black in Ivanovic – Bukic, Belgrade 1978.



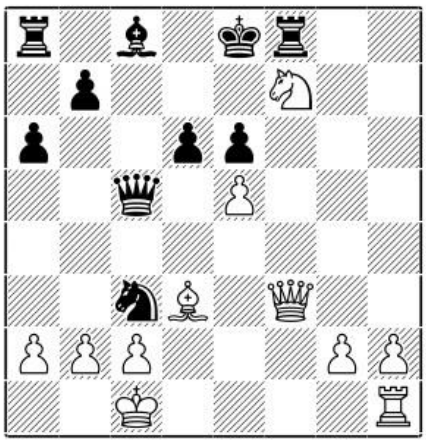
19.Nxf7 Nxc3 20.Qf3 Rf8!

20...Rxh2 21.Rf1! is not so clear.

21.e5

21.Rf1N 21...Nxa2† 22.Kb1 Nb4 23.e5 Nxd3 24.Qxd3 Kd7µ also works out well for Black.

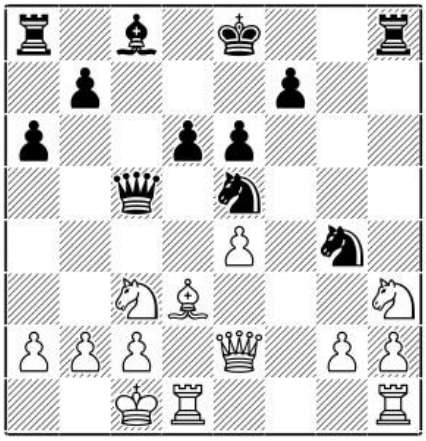
In Supancic – Tarjan, Maribor 1978, Black missed the most convincing continuation:



21...dxe5!N 22.Bg6 Nd5!–+

Black is winning, as White lacks a damaging discovered check.

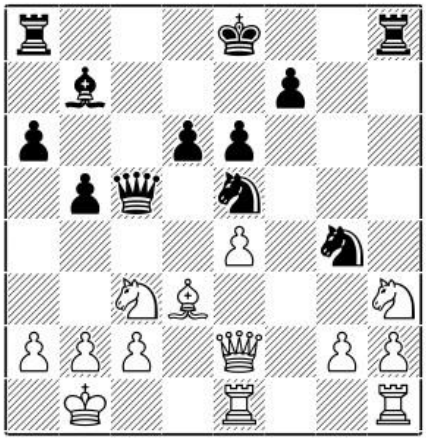
The text move consolidates White's extra pawn. In return for the small material investment, Black has consolidated his grip on the e5-square and White's knight has been lured to the poor h3-square. With the dark-squared bishops exchanged and a queen on c5, Black has good dark-square control.



17...Bd7

It is important to note that Black should avoid 17...Rxh3?! 18.gxh3 Nf2, as this just frees White's position. After 19.h4 White's h-pawns may not look like much, but White still has an extra pawn and Black has little chance of seizing the initiative.

17...b5!? is a reasonable alternative though. 18.Kb1 Bb7 19.Rde1 occurred in Mamedov – Areshchenko, Moscow 2007, when Black castled queenside. Although his position remained quite playable, I would prefer:

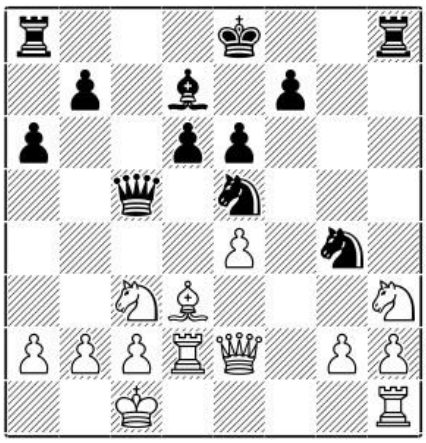


19...Ke7!?N Echoing our main line below. The king has some advantages on e7 compared to c8, as the f7-pawn is covered and pushing the queenside pawns is a more tempting possibility. Another advantage is that both of Black's rooks can go to either side of the board.

18.Rd2

This has been the usual choice.

18.Qd2 should be met by 18...0-0-0!, avoiding 18...Ke7 19.Qg5†.

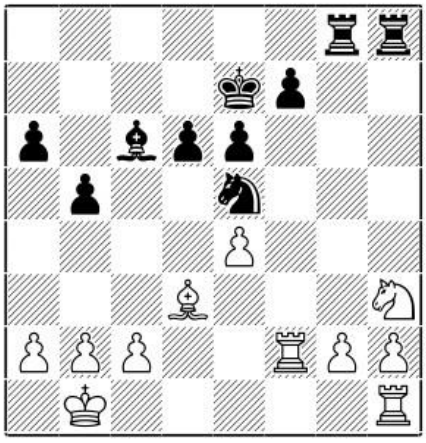


18...Ke7!?

18...0-0-0 and 18...b5 are more popular alternatives. Although both of these moves are playable, I want to point out a relatively fresh concept with the king going to e7. Connecting the rooks in this way gives Black great flexibility, as he can either start a queenside assault or bring his queen's rook to the kingside.

19.Nd1 Rag8 20.Kb1 b5 21.Ndf2 Nxf2 22.Qxf2 Qxf2 23.Rxf2 Bc6

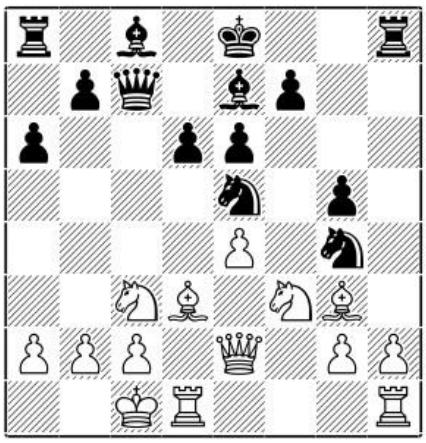
Following the queen exchange, Black's king is perfectly placed in the centre.



24.Re2 Rh4 25.Rf1 Rgg4 26.Ref2 Rg7 27.Re2 Ng4 28.Rh1 Nf6 29.Rhe1 Rgg4³

Black is winning his pawn back and he went on to win the endgame in Klek – Danin, Nuremberg 2011.

C22) 15.Bg3



15...Bd7

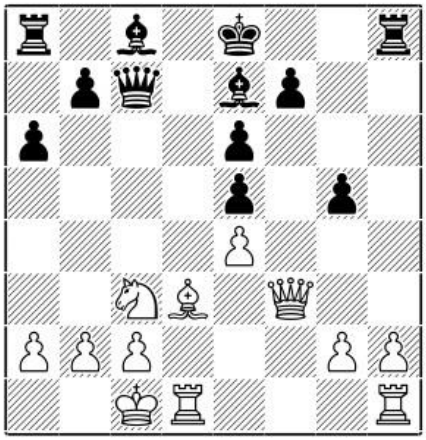
As mentioned earlier, I prefer to wait until provoked before exchanging knights.

A popular and reliable alternative is:

15...Nxf3 16.Qxf3!?

16.gxf3 Ne5 takes us back to the 14...Nxf3 line on page 264.

16...Ne5 17.Bxe5 dxe5



White has to decide which rook to bring to f1. The following examples show the typical ways for White to try to seize the initiative, along with Black's methods of dealing with them.

18.Rhf1

18.Rdf1 gives Black a choice:

a) 18...Rh7 19.h4 gxh4 20.Qg4 Rh8!N (20...Rh6?? occurred in So – Adly, Dubai 2008, when 21.Qg8†!N 21...Bf8 22.Nb5! Qe7 23.Rxf7! would have won for White) 21.g3 Bd7 22.gxh4 0-0-0 23.Rxf7 Rdg8 24.Rg7 Rxg7 25.Qxg7 Rxh4 is equal.

b) 18...f6 19.h4 gxh4 20.Qg4 Qc5 21.Rxh4

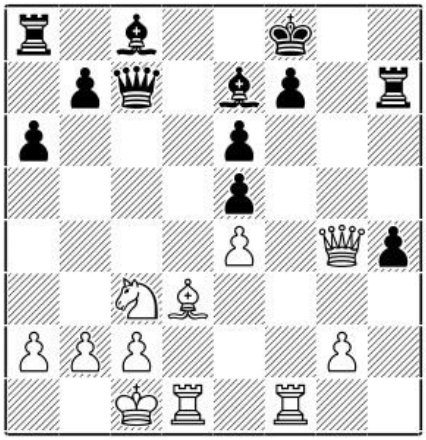
Rxh4 22.Qxh4 Kd8!÷ was also playable in Kusmierek – Wantoch Rekowski, corr. 2008.

18...Rh7!

Here 18...f6 would be well met by 19.h4! Rxh4 20.g3 Rh2 21.Rh1 Rxh1 22.Rxh1 with some initiative for White.

19.h4! gxh4 20.Qg4 Kf8!

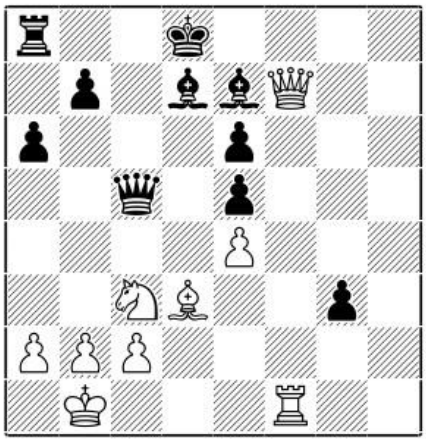
20...Rh8? runs into 21.Qg7 Rf8 22.Nb5! Qc5 23.b4! Qe3† 24.Kb1 Qb6 25.Qxe5 when Black has a horrible position: the engine points out that his only chance to prolong the game is 25...Kd8, which speaks volumes about the trouble he is in.



21.Kb1 Bd7

This is much safer than 21...b5?! as played in Gao Rui – Wen Yang, Ho Chi Minh City 2012.

22.g3 hxg3 23.Rf3 Rg7 24.Qh5 Ke8! 25.Rdf1 Qc5 26.Rxf7 Rxf7 27.Qxf7† Kd8



28.Qg8† Kc7 29.Qxg3

29.Qxa8? g2µ

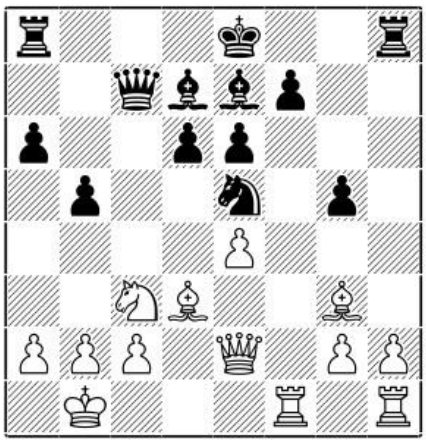
29...Rf8=

Black had threaded his way to equality in O'Grady – Kunz, corr. 2012.

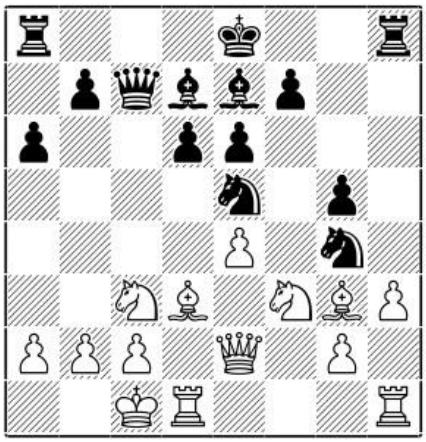
16.h3

White finally looks to resolve the kingside tension.

There is not really anything better. For instance: 16.Rdf1 b5 (16...Qc5 also looks fine) 17.Nxe5 Nxe5 18.Kb1 (later White tried 18.Bxe5 dxe5 19.Nd1 but after 19...Bc6 20.Nf2 0-0-0 21.Ng4 Rhf8= he had no advantage in Azarov – Paragua, Rockville 2014)

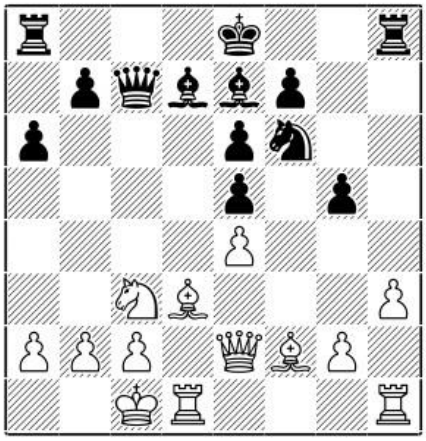


We have been following Azarov – Amonatov, Voronezh 2007. This would have been a good time for 18...Nxd3N, after which 19.cxd3 takes pressure off of the d6-pawn and 19...b4 is fine for Black, while 19.Qxd3 Rc8 (intending ...Qc4) was suggested by Goh Wei Ming, and also looks quite satisfactory.



16...Nxf3

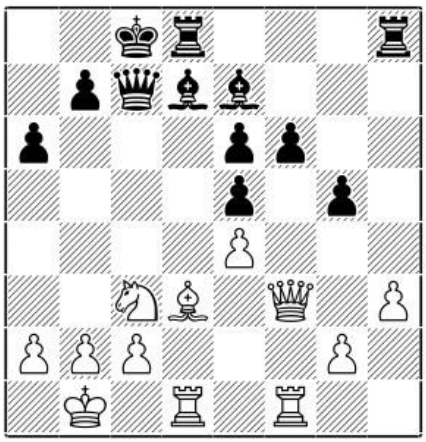
16...Nf6 is a playable alternative, for instance: 17.Nxe5 This not forced but White will be compelled to take at some point. 17...dxe5 18.Bf2



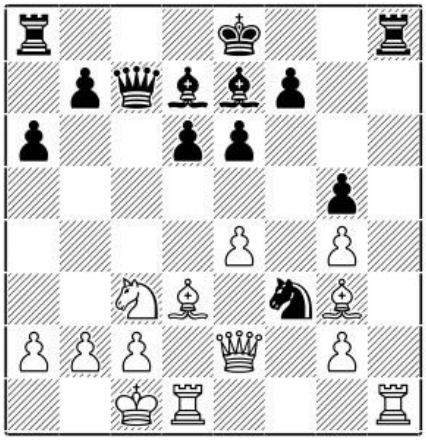
Black can continue in various ways, including 18...0-0-0, 18...Nh5 or 18...b5!?N. In practice, 18...Bc6 has been the most common. Then 19.Rhf1 Nh5 20.g3 0-0-0 21.Kb1 occurred in Ivanchuk – Zhe Quan, Edmonton 2005, when Black should have played 21...Kb8N or even 21...Bb4!?N.

17.hxg4

A typical example of what Black is aiming for is: 17.Qxf3 Ne5 18.Bxe5 dxe5 19.Rhf1 f6 20.Kb1 0-0-0[3]



This was Lwin – Vigorito, Somerville (rapid) 2008. I went on to win a typical endgame with the bishop pair and an eventual ...f5 break.



17...Rxh1

This is played to get White's rook away from the d-file. Instead 17...Nh4?! 18.e5! forces 18...d5, when 19.Bf2 gives White an edge.

18.Rxh1 Nh4

Black needs to block the h-file; 18...Ne5? proves too dangerous after 19.Bxe5! dxe5 20.Qf3, as pointed out by Goh Wei Ming.

We have a final split: **C221)** 19.e5 is a natural move, but **C222)** 19.Rf1!? is more dangerous.

C221) 19.e5

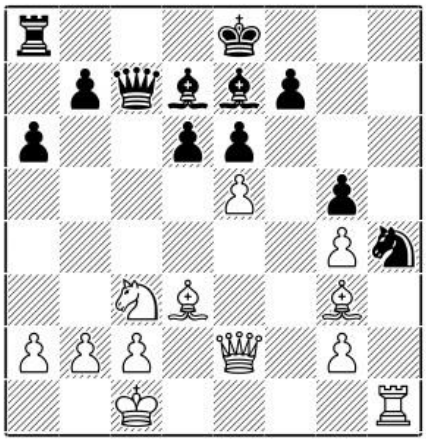
GAME 24

Albert Chow – David Vigorito

Chicago 2008

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Bg5 e6 7.f4 Be7 8.Qf3 Qc7 9.0-0-0 Nbd7 10.Bd3 h6 11.Bh4 g5 12.fxg5 Ne5 13.Qe2

Nfg4 14.Nf3 hxg5 15.Bg3 Bd7 16.h3 Nxf3 17.hxg4 Rxh1 18.Rxh1 Nh4 19.e5



19...Bc6!

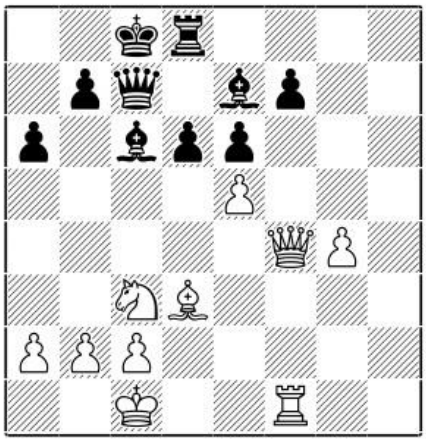
Creating pressure against the g2-pawn. We should avoid 19...d5?! 20.Rf1 when Black cannot castle.

20.exd6

White has also tried:

20.Rf1 Nxg2 21.Qf2 Nf4 22.Bxf4 gxf4 23.Qxf4 0-0-0

Black can also play 23...Kd7!?, borrowing an idea from variation C222 below. 24.exd6 Qxd6 25.Qxd6† Kxd6 26.Ne4† occurred in Pillhock – Cutillas Ripoll, corr. 2000, when 26...Bxe4N 27.Bxe4 Rg8 would have given Black enough activity to hold.



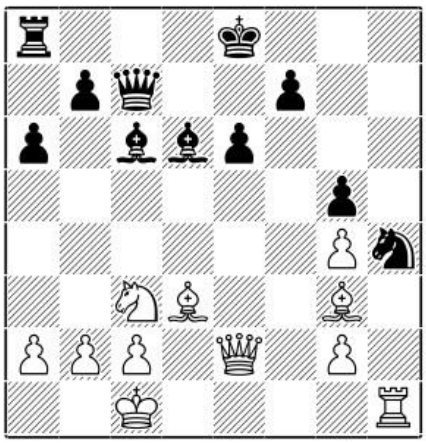
24.exd6

24.Qxf7 Bg5† 25.Kb1 Qxf7 26.Rxf7 dxe5 is equal.

24...Qxd6 25.Qxd6 Rxd6 26.Rxf7 Bg5† 27.Kb1 Rd4

Black held without difficulty in Vuckovic – Vujacic, Yugoslavia 1999.

20...Bxd6



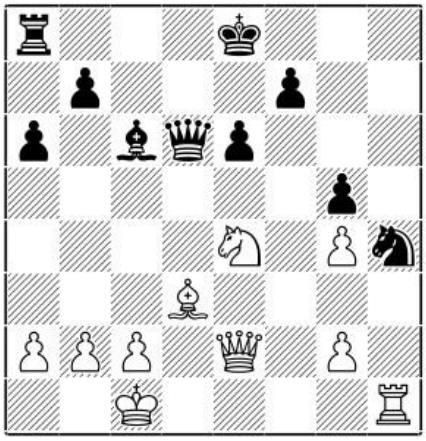
21.Bxd6

There is no need to fear 21.Bxh4 gxh4 22.Rxh4 0-0-0 when Black's strong bishops give him plenty of compensation for the pawn.

21...Qxd6 22.Qf2

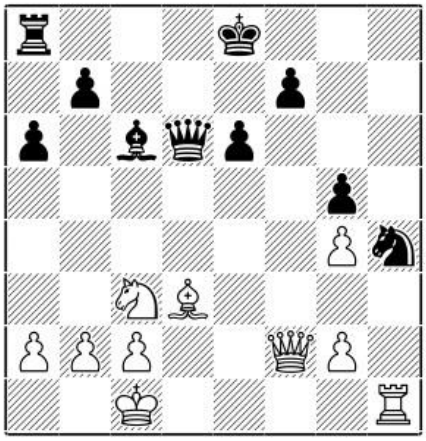
Black was fine afte22.Be4 Qf4† 23.Kb1 Bxe4 24.Nxe4 0-0-0 in Maurer – Pasko, corr. 2010.

I also checked 22.Ne4, when Black traded his bishop for the knight in a couple of games. Instead I suggest:



22...Qf4†N 23.Kb1 0-0-0 24.Rf1 Qe5

Black has no problems at all, as 25.Rxf7?? would allow him to exploit the weakness of the first rank: 25...Bxe4 26.a3 Rd4!–+



22...0-0-0!

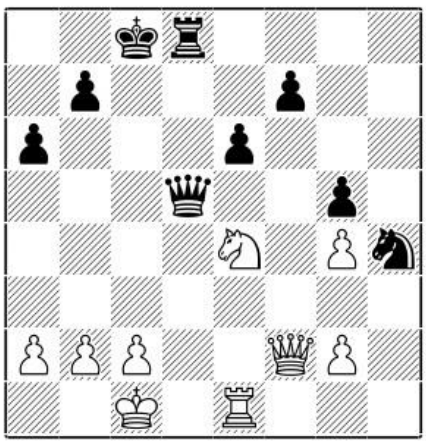
Black is doing fine, as the pawn weaknesses for each side offset each other.

23.Be4

23.Qxf7 Nxg2 is balanced.

23...Bxe4 24.Nxe4 Qd5 25.Re1!?

An interesting idea, avoiding 25.Nc3 Qxg2 26.Qxg2 Nxg2 27.Ne4 with a level endgame after White regains the pawn.



25...Ng6

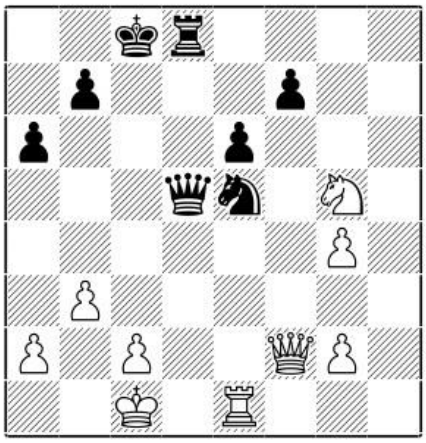
I did not like the look of 25...Qxa2 26.Qc5† Kb8 27.Nc3 Qa1† 28.Nb1 when the black queen is out of play.

26.b3 Ne5

26...Qe5 and 26...Rd7 27.Nf6 Qd4 were decent alternatives.

27.Nxg5?!

27.Kb1 would have avoided the idea in the next note.



27...f6

Black could have seized the initiative with 27...Nxg4!N 28.Qf4 Qa5!, hitting the rook and the a2-pawn.

28.Ne4 Nxg4 29.Qe2 f5!?

29...Qe5 30.Kb1 f5 31.Nf2 Qxe2 32.Rxe2 Nxf2 33.Rxf2 Rg8 results in a rook endgame where Black is slightly for choice, but it should be a draw. Since White was already getting low on time in the game, I decided to aim for confusion.

30.Nc3 Qd4 31.Qxe6† Kb8

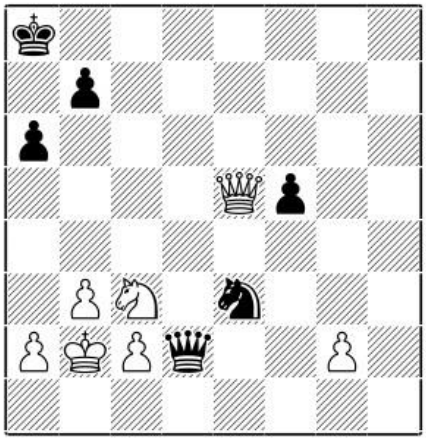
Despite the extra pawn, the position is not so easy for White. His knight is hanging and ...Qd2† is threatened.

32.Rd1

32.Kb2?? walks into a deadly pin and 32...Rc8 wins easily.

32...Qf4† 33.Kb2 Rxd1 34.Nxd1 Qd2! 35.Nc3 Ne3 36.Qe5† Ka8

White is temporarily a pawn up and there is limited material, but he must nevertheless be careful.



37.Na4?!

The best defence was 37.g3! Qxc2† 38.Ka3 Qc1† 39.Ka4= when it turns out that Black does not really have anything.

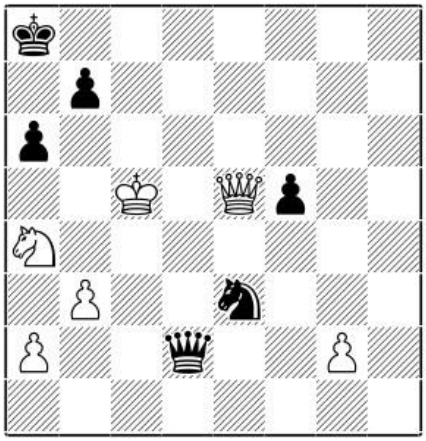
37...Qxc2† 38.Ka3 Qc1† 39.Kb4

39.Qb2? Nc2# ends things immediately, while 39.Nb2? Nc2† 40.Ka4 Qd2! soon mates.

39...Qd2† 40.Kc5

40.Ka3? Nc2† wins quickly for Black.

40.Nc3 is not so terrible, although 40...f4! still leaves White facing a difficult defence.



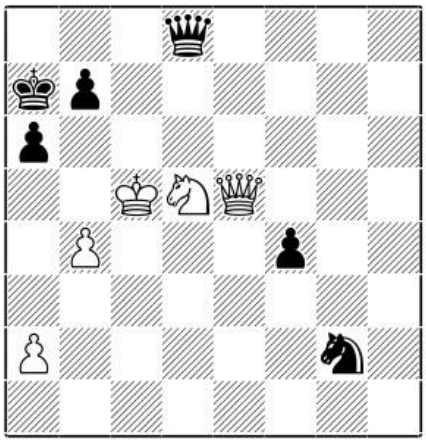
40...Qa5† 41.Kd6 Qd8† 42.Kc5

42.Ke6 f4!? maintains the pressure, since 43.Qxf4? Qe8† would win for Black – his last two pieces coordinate perfectly.

42...Nxg2 43.b4?

43.Qd5! would still have been holding.

43...f4! 44.Nb6† Ka7 45.Nd5

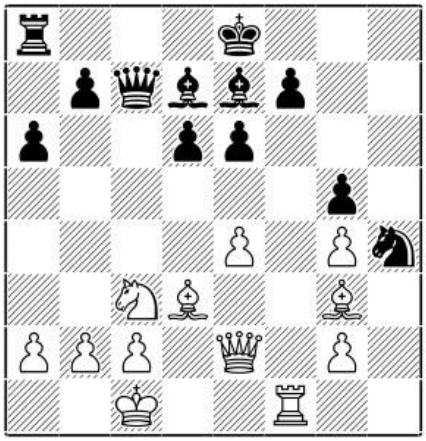


45...Ne3! 46.Nxe3

White lost on time while making this move. After 46...Qb6† 47.Kc4 Qxe3 Black is winning, for example: 48.Qxe3† fxe3 49.Kd3 Kb6 50.a4 a5–+

0–1

C222) 19.Rf1!?



Finally we come to the move which forces Black to be most careful.

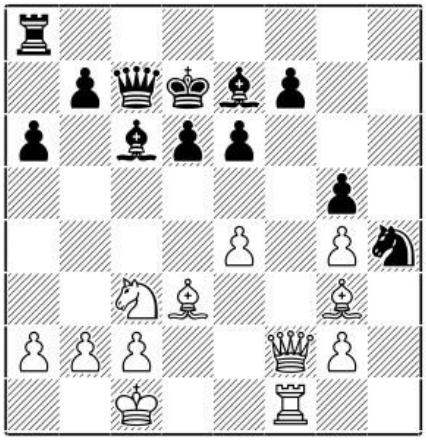
19...Bc6!

This is the only decent option.

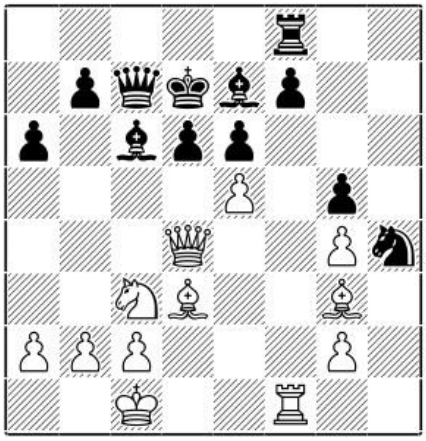
For some reason 19...Ng6?! has been more popular, but then 20.Qf3 gives Black no choice but to play the ugly 20...Nh8 to defend f7, since 20...f6? 21.e5! opens things up with decisive effect.

20.Kb1!

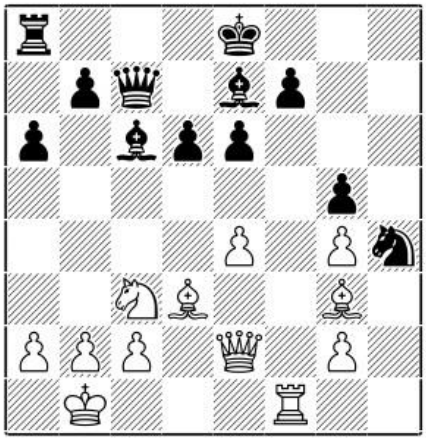
Black has less to fear after:
20.Qf2 Kd7!
This idea is well worth noting. Compared to castling, the e6-pawn has some extra protection.



21.Qd4
21.Qxf7 Rf8 shows the value of Black's last move, and after 22.Qh7 Rxf1† 23.Bxf1 Qb6,, he is doing well.
21...Rf8 22.e5
22.Bc4? Nxg2 23.e5 Nf4!µ was great for Black in Lajthajm – Vujacic, Kragujevac 2000.
22.Rf2?! Ng6 23.e5 Nf4!³ was also less than ideal for White in Lambrechts – Kostromin, Novi Sad 2016.
We have been following Pavlenko – Hamilton, corr. 2003. Here I suggest:



22...Nxg2!N 23.exd6 Bxd6
With ...Nf4 coming next, Black should be fine.



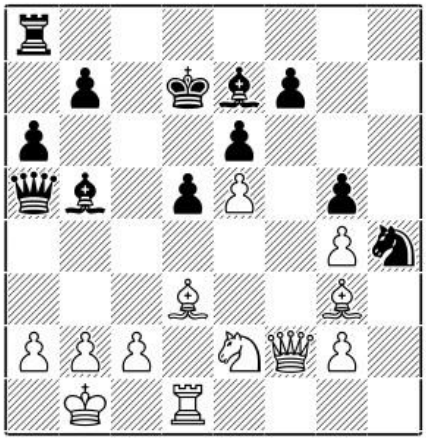
20...Qa5

20...f6?! 21.Bc4 is annoying, but 20...Rc8 or 20...Ng6 are possibilities.

21.e5 d5 22.Qf2 Kd7!

Again we see this king move, ensuring that Qxf7 can be strongly met by ...Rf8.

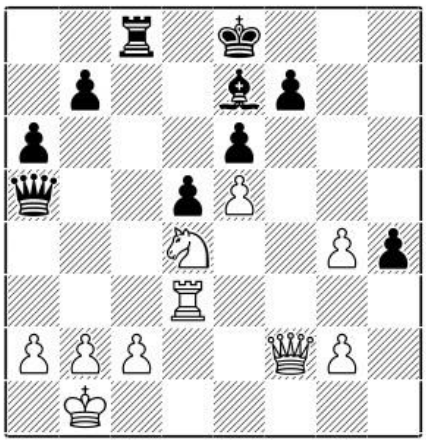
23.Ne2 Bb5 24.Rd1



24...Bxd3

24...Rc8 25.Bxb5† axb5 26.Nd4 looks slightly trickier to me, although Black went on to hold in Dearnley – Borisovs, corr. 2010.

25.Rxd3 Rc8 26.Nd4 Ke8 27.Bxh4 gxh4



28.c3 Bg5 29.Rd1 Qc7 30.Rf1 Qe7

White kept a slight initiative but Black went on to draw without any real drama in Skvira – Maesa, corr. 2010.

Conclusion

10.Bd3 is one of the big main lines of our classical set-up against 6.Bg5. With 10...h6 we enter the Browne System, when the ensuing play can be quite varied.

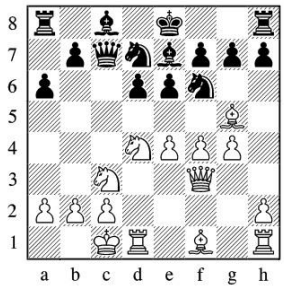
The aggressive 11.h4!? must not be ignored, especially since one of the older theoretical recommendations for Black has been refuted.

The pinning 11.Qh3 is not so common nowadays, so it is important to remember the unusual idea of 11...Nb6!. Then both 12.Rhe1 and 12.f5 lead to complicated strategic battles where both sides generally castle queenside and fight for control of the light squares in the centre.

11.Bh4 is most common, when 11...g5! is the consistent choice. The sharp 12.e5!? is an interesting continuation which leads to an unusual pawn structure, although I think Black has good chances. 12.fxg5 is the main line by far, when 12...Ne5 13.Qe2 Nfg4 14.Nf3 reaches the most important tabiya of the chapter.

We saw that 14...Nxf3 is a viable option, but 14...hxg5 is my personal preference. The pawn grab with 15.Bxg5 leaves Black with good compensation – pay attention to the ...Ke7 idea. More often, White plays the strategic game with 15.Bg3 Bd7 16.h3. Black has a nice structure and e5-outpost, so the only concerns are his king and White's initiative. The final variation with 19.Rf1!? looks like White's most dangerous try, but correspondence games indicate that Black's position is reliable enough; and any players who are uncomfortable with the prospect of neutralizing White's slight initiative in that line can investigate alternatives such as 16...Nf6 and the aforementioned 14...Nxf3.

Chapter 10



10.g4

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1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.♗g5 e6 7.f4 ♗e7 8.♕f3 ♕c7 9.0–0–0 ♘bd7 10.g4 b5 11.♗xf6 ♘xf6

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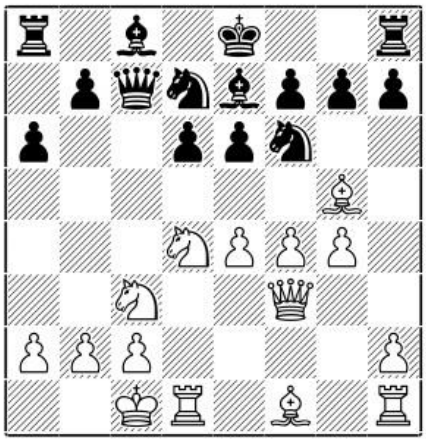
1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Bg5 e6 7.f4 Be7 8.Qf3 Qc7 9.0-0-0 Nbd7 10.g4



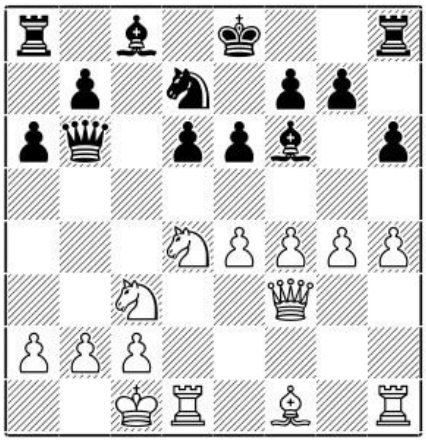
This is certainly White's most dangerous option, although he has to know quite a bit of theory in order to play it. Around the year 2008, this variation was causing me big problems – so much so that I questioned whether 7...Be7 was even playable. I wondered if something like the Poisoned Pawn may simply be a necessity, or if I could continue playing the Najdorf at all! This type of overreaction sometimes happens when one encounters a problem in a favourite opening.

10...b5

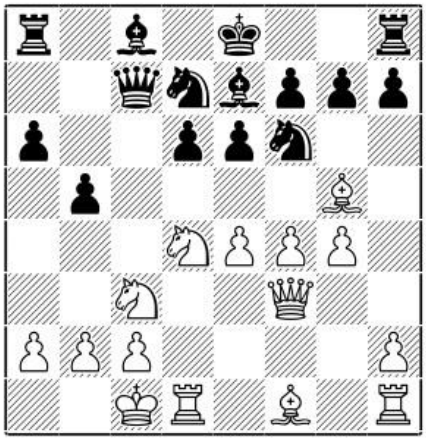
When I found issues in the main lines, I naturally started backtracking looking for playable alternatives.

We can quickly dismiss 10...0-0 11.Bh4! when g4-g5 will be strong.

I experimented with 10...h6 (as did some strong grandmasters) but I do not fully trust the positions that arise after: 11.Bxf6 Bxf6 12.h4 Qb6 (the immediate 12...g5? loses after 13.hxg5 hxg5 14.e5 dxe5 15.Nxe6! fxe6 16.fxg5!N 16...Bxg5† 17.Kb1 Rf8 18.Qe4+–)



Here White can choose between 13.Nb3 (as played in the well-known game Shirov – Dominguez Perez, Sofia 2009) or 13.Nde2. Even if White does not have a clear path to an edge, I think it is all too dangerous for Black.



11.Bxf6

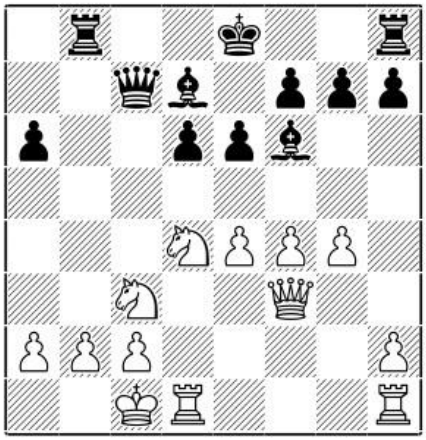
11.a3 Rb8 12.Bxf6 Nxf6 is another way of reaching variation A below.

11...Nxf6

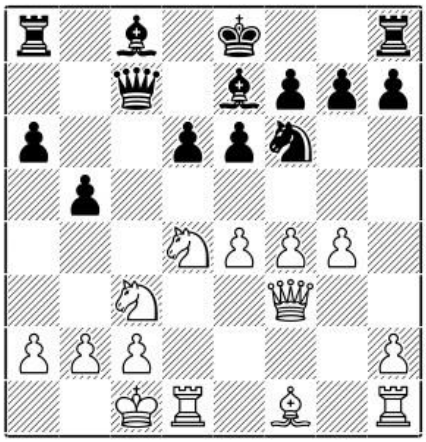
This is another juncture where I looked at different possibilities.

11...gxf6!? is an interesting option but I do not really trust it for a repertoire move.

11...Bxf6!? is tricky but a good answer is: 12.Bxb5! (12.g5 Bxd4 13.Rxd4 Bb7 seems quite playable for Black) 12...Rb8 (not 12...axb5 13.Ndxb5+–) 13.Bxd7† Bxd7



14.g5! 'Falling into it.' 14...Bxd4 15.Rxd4 Qb6 16.Qd3 Qxb2† 17.Kd2 White stands better, despite the odd appearance of his king. Centralization and a space advantage mean something, even if Black simplifies to an endgame.



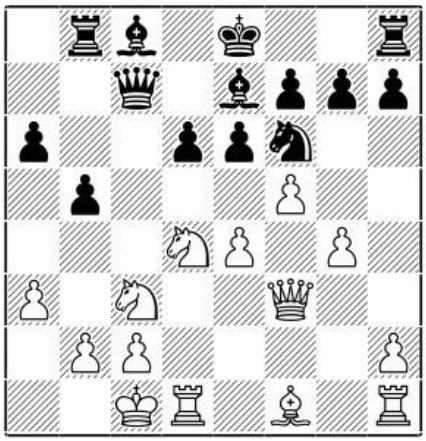
We will consider the rare **A)** 12.a3 followed by the normal **B)** 12.g5.

A) 12.a3 Rb8 13.f5!?

By delaying g4-g5, White hopes to make the e6-pawn more vulnerable because Black's

knight (apparently) cannot get to the c5-square.

13.g5 Nd7 leads to variation B2 below.

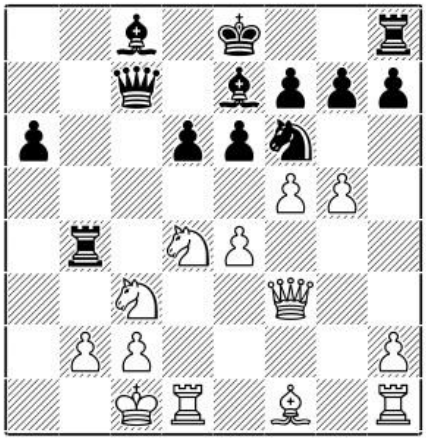


13...0-0

Castling seems the most trustworthy option.

13...e5?! may appear natural but after 14.Nde2 Black stands worse. A good example continued: 14...Bb7?! (14...b4 is a better try, but still insufficient) 15.g5 Nxe4 (14...Nd7 15.h4 clearly favours White) 16.Nxe4 d5 17.N4c3 d4 18.Ne4 Bxg5† 19.Kb1 0-0 20.N2g3± Nunn – Lalic, London 1996.

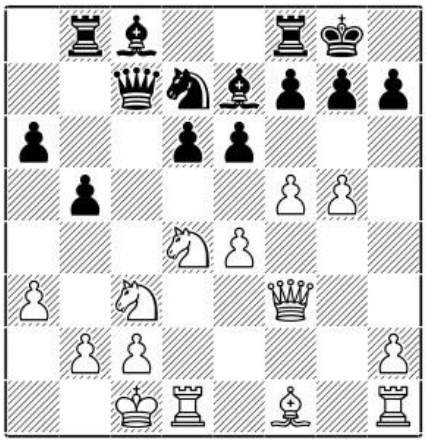
13...b4!? is a more interesting idea, connected with the following piece sacrifice: 14.axb4 Rxb4 15.g5



15...0-0! 16.gxf6 Bxf6 17.Nb3 This occurred in Psakhis – Cvitan, Hartberg 1991, when 17...a5!N would have given Black quite reasonable compensation.

14.g5 Nd7!?

14...Ne8 has been played more, but d7 is a better square for the knight, provided it works tactically.

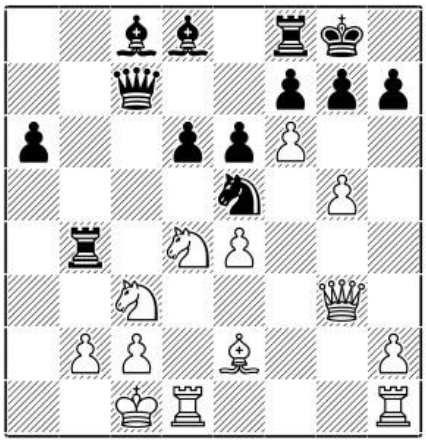


15.f6

This is certainly a critical move to consider. I checked three other options:

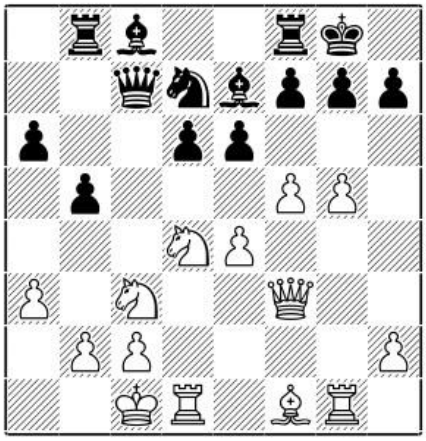
15.fxe6?! has not yet been tried, probably because 15...fxe6 16.Nxe6 Rxf3 17.Nxc7 Bxg5† 18.Kb1 gives Black a better version of Game 27.

15.Qg3 Ne5 16.f6 Bd8 is also quite promising for Black. A good example continued: 17.Be2 b4 18.axb4 Rxb4



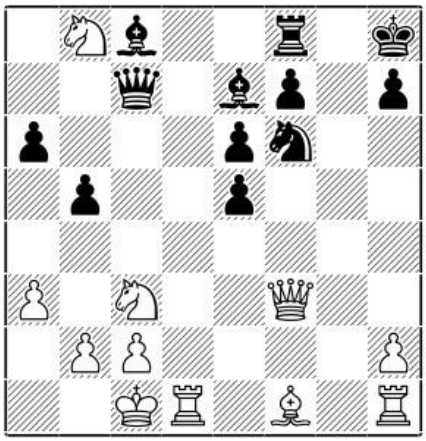
19.Rd2 Bb7 20.Rhd1 Kh8 21.fxg7† Kxg7 22.Nb3 Be7 Black had the upper hand in Stibal – Taras, corr. 2006.

15.Rg1 has been met by 15...Ne5 in a couple of games. Instead I would prefer:



15...b4!N 16.axb4 Rxb4 17.f6 Bd8 The position is double-edged but I would be willing to defend Black's cause.

15...gxf6 16.gxf6 Nxf6 17.e5 dxe5 18.Nc6 Kh8 19.Nxb8



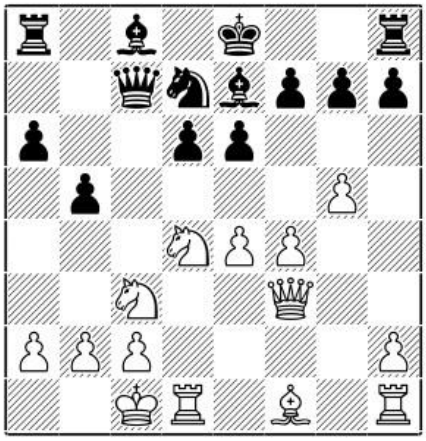
19...Bb7!?N

The simple 19...Qxb8 gave Black good compensation for the exchange in Kavalek – Donner, Wijk aan Zee 1969.

20.Nxa6 Bxf3 21.Nxc7 Bxh1

The resulting endgame is messy and double-edged, but Black's strong bishop pair should make him the slight favourite.

B) 12.g5 Nd7



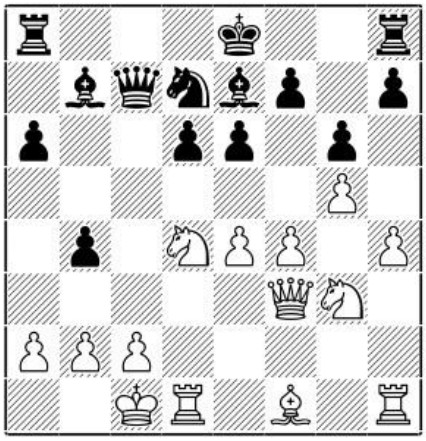
We have reached a popular position where **B1)** 13.h4 and **B2)** 13.a3 are significant sidelines leading to quite different types of play, but **B3)** 13.f5! is the clear main line and certainly the critical move.

B1) 13.h4

This natural move is not seen much in master practice, but it is worth checking. Protecting the g5-pawn could be a common response at club level, and it also gives us a chance to consider Black's best plan of action when White opts for a slower build-up. The basic recipe is ...b4 and ...Bb7, developing the last minor piece while putting pressure on the e4-pawn and the long diagonal generally. Often the knight will go to c5 to add to the effect. Later, ...d5 is a typical motif, intending to meet e4-e5 with ...Ne4. Another common idea is ...g6, covering the f5-square in preparation for ...e5 to control the dark squares. Another important point is that Black will often castle queenside in these positions.

13...b4 14.Nce2 Bb7 15.Ng3 g6

Black has tried several other ideas but the text move seems the most flexible.

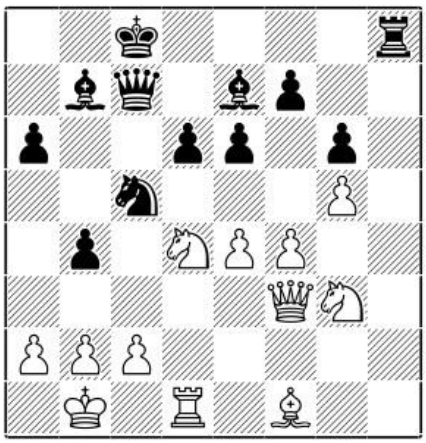


16.h5

16.Bd3 0-0-0 17.Rhe1 Kb8 18.Kb1 was played in Reinhardt – Najdorf, Buenos Aires 1965, when 18...e5!N would have been excellent for Black.

16...0-0-0 17.Bh3

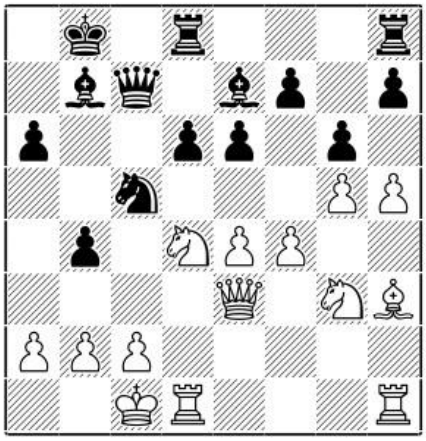
17.hxg6 hxg6 18.Rxh8 Rxh8 19.Kb1 Nc5 favours Black. A game of mine continued:



20.Nb3 Rh2 21.Rd2 Rh4 22.Nxc5?! dxc5!µ White fell apart on the dark squares in Siamon – Vigorito, Parsippany 2017.

17...Nc5 18.Qe3 Kb8

Once again Black stands better. We will follow a few more moves of an instructive game.



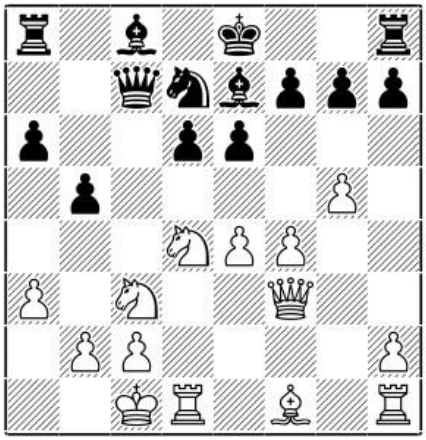
19.Nb3?! a5

19...gxh5!N–+ was a safe pawn grab.

20.Kb1 d5 21.f5? Nxb3 22.axb3 Bc5 23.Qe1 exf5 24.exf5 Rhe8–+

Mista – Swiercz, Warsaw 2008. This game is a nice example of the power of Black's centralization and bishop pair.

B2) 13.a3



This line was tested a lot in the 60s and 70s. Nowadays it is considered relatively harmless for Black, but we can still learn from our predecessors.

13...Rb8!

This is an important idea to know. Instead 13...Bb7?! would be too routine and White could continue his build-up on the kingside. With the text move Black has the clear plan to open lines

with ...b4, taking full advantage of the 'hook' created by White's last move. By the way, let me remind you that the current position could also arise after 11.a3 Rb8! 12.Bxf6 Nxf6 13.g5 Nd7, as was noted on pages 276-277.

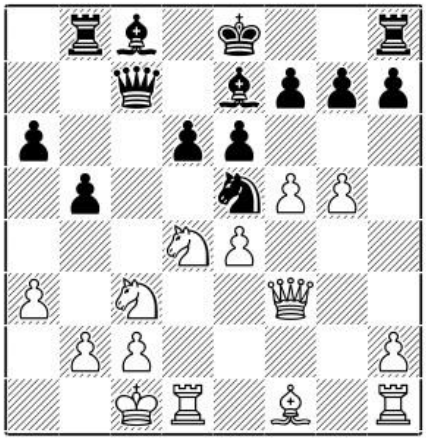
We will analyse **B21)** 14.Bh3 and **B22)** 14.h4.

Less common alternatives include:

14.Qh3 threatens g5-g6, but 14...Nc5! solves that problem and gives Black an excellent game.

14.f5 Ne5!

Taking the pawn runs into trouble: 14...Bxg5† 15.Kb1 Ne5?! 16.Qh5*f*

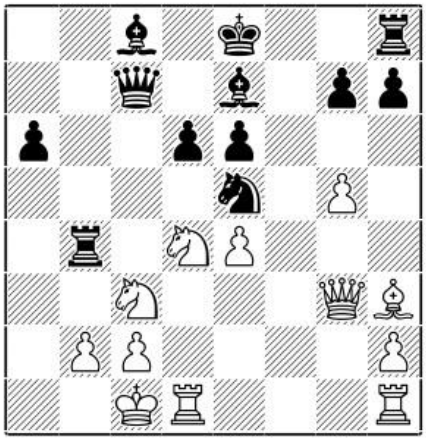


15.Qg3

15.Qh3? allows 15...Bxg5† under much better conditions. 16.Kb1 was played in Pruijssers – Vazquez Igarza, Amsterdam 2005, when 16...0-0!N would have given Black a winning position.

15...b4 16.axb4 Rxb4 17.fxe6 fxe6 18.Bh3

Van der Wiel once evaluated this as '±' in *Chess Informant*, but times have changed.



18...0-0!

White's position is falling apart tactically, as the following lines demonstrate.

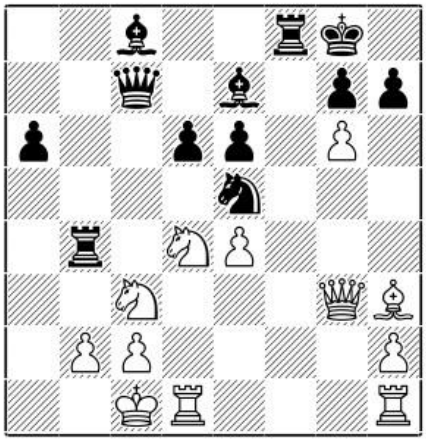
19.g6

19.Nxe6? loses to 19...Qa5! with decisive threats on the queenside.

19.Bxe6†? Bxe6 20.Nxe6 Qa5 is also winning for Black, since 21.Nxf8? will be met by 21...Nc4! when the king will be caught.

19.b3? also allows a quick kill: 19...Rxd4! 20.Rxd4 Rf3 21.Rc4 Nxc4 22.Qxf3 Bxg5† 23.Kd1 Ne3† 24.Kd2 Nd5†–+ Peltier – Chizelle, corr. 1976

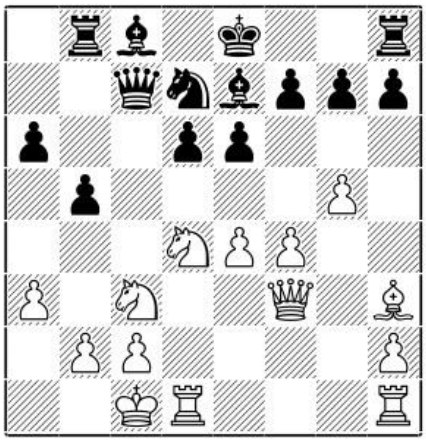
19.Na2N is perhaps the least of the evils, but 19...Rxd4! 20.Rxd4 Nf3 21.Rdd1 Bxg5† 22.Kb1 Nd2† 23.Rxd2 Bxd2µ still leaves Black a pawn up and in complete control.



19...Rxd4! 20.gxh7† Kh8 21.Rxd4 Rf3 22.Qg2 Rxc3–+

White was busted in Korchut – Slezak, corr. 2011, as 23.bxc3 Qxc3 would have left his king much too exposed.

B21) 14.Bh3



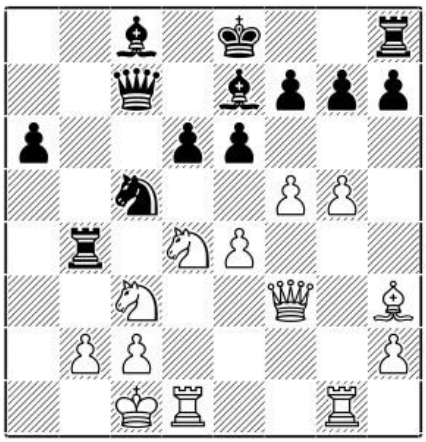
14...Nc5

Black activates the knight and fortifies the e6-square, avoiding 14...b4? 15.axb4 Rxb4 16.Bxe6! when White crashes through.

15.Rhg1

15.b4 Na4! is good for Black.

15...b4 16.axb4 Rxb4 17.f5



17...g6!

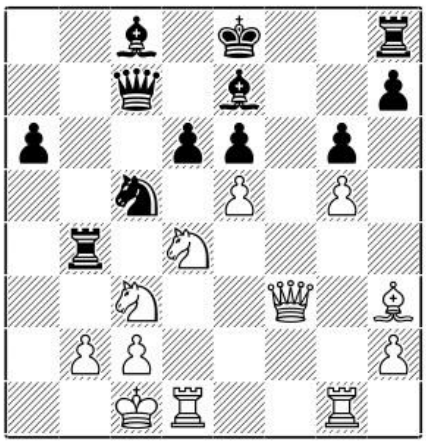
Surprisingly, this strong prophylactic move has scarcely been played.

In most games Black has moved his queen to b7 or b6, but both 17...Qb7 18.f6! gxf6 19.gxf6 Bf8 20.b3 a5 21.Nd5! exd5 22.Bxc8 Qxc8 23.exd5 and 17...Qb6 18.f6! gxf6 19.Nxe6! give White good attacking chances.

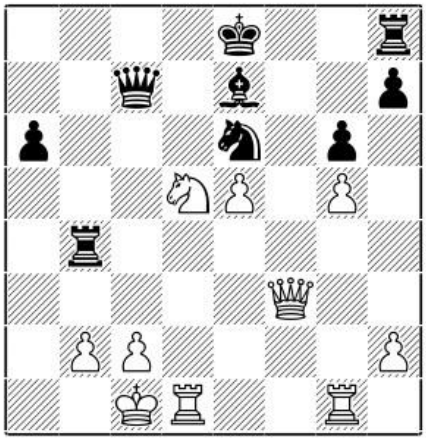
18.Qe3

18.f6 Bd8! may look odd, but Black can proceed with his play on the queenside, while it is not so easy for White to make inroads elsewhere. Black can opt for either ...0-0 or ...h5 at a suitable moment, depending on circumstances.

18.fxe6 fxe6³ is also unpromising for White. The immediate idea is ...Rf8, and if 19.e5 the complications favour Black after:



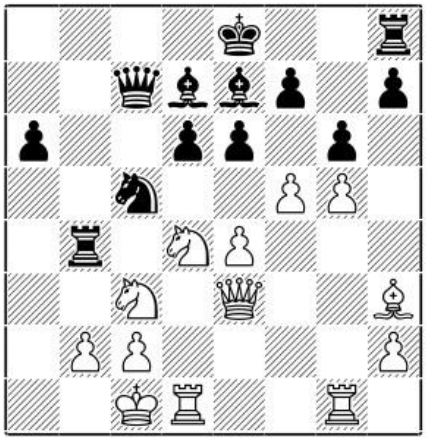
19...d5!? (19...dxe5 20.Qc6† Qd7! is also good) 20.Nxe6 Bxe6 21.Bxe6 Nxe6 22.Nxd5



22...Qb7!µ Black's last move pins the knight, and if 23.Nf6† Kf7! White's attack fails. Compare this to our main line below, where White employs a similar sacrifice which leads to equality.

18...Bd7

18...0-0!? proved to be a playable alternative in Kovacs – Radek, corr. 2014, so you may wish to consider this as an alternative to the concrete continuation of our main line.

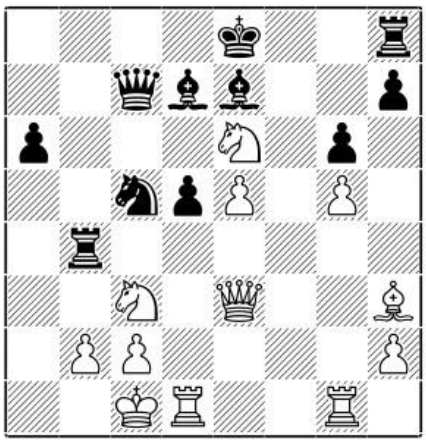


19.fxe6 fxe6 20.e5 d5

20...dxe5 21.Nxe6! Bxe6 22.Bxe6 Nxe6 23.Nd5 Qb8 is also playable according to the engine, but the text move makes more sense to me.

21.Nxe6!

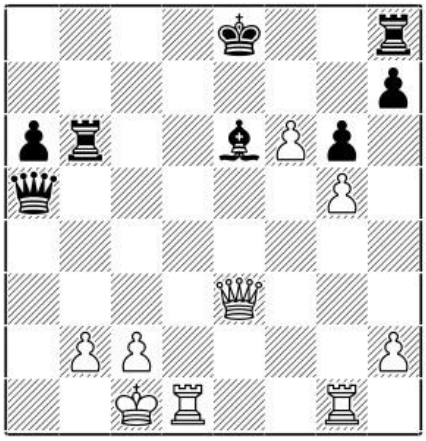
White has nothing better, but now the game is reduced to a computer draw.



21...Nxe6!

This is the right recapture, as 21...Bxe6 22.Bxe6 Nxe6 23.Nxd5 Qb7 24.Nxb4 Qxb4 25.Qh3*ƒ* makes things trickier.

22.Nxd5 Qa5 23.Nf6† Bxf6 24.Bxe6 Bxe6 25.exf6 Rb6



26.f7†! Ke7

The game could end in a draw in a few different ways. In Ljubicic – De Oliveira, corr. 2010, a draw was agreed five moves later due to perpetual check.

B22) 14.h4

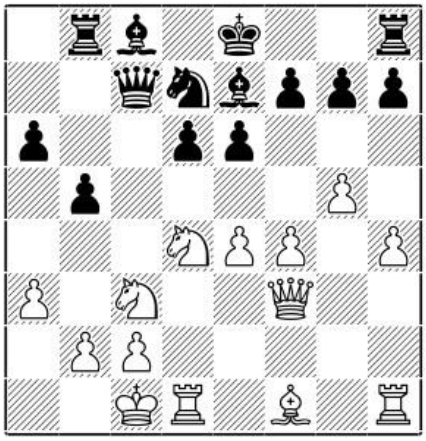
GAME 25

Pieter Spierenburg – Helmut Littke

Correspondence 2011

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Bg5 e6 7.f4 Be7 8.Qf3 Qc7 9.0-0-0 Nbd7 10.g4 b5 11.Bxf6 Nxf6 12.g5 Nd7 13.a3 Rb8! 14.h4

This is the usual move.



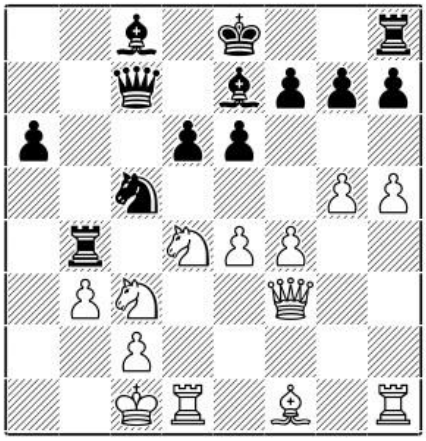
14...b4 15.axb4 Rxb4

Black has clear counterplay on the queenside, with his rook exerting pressure against both the d4-knight and the b2-pawn. White will look to storm the black kingside with f4-f5 (or perhaps h4-h5) followed by g5-g6. The main things for Black to watch out for are pressure on the e6-pawn and possible knight hops to f5 or d5.

16.Bh3

This is by far the most popular move, threatening Bxe6.

16.h5 is rather slow. 16...Nc5 (16...h6!?N is also interesting, when 17.g6 Nc5 transposes to the next note) 17.b3 (after 17.g6 the machine likes Black after several moves, but a good 'human' choice is 17...h6!?N 18.gxf7† Kxf7 intending ...Bf6)

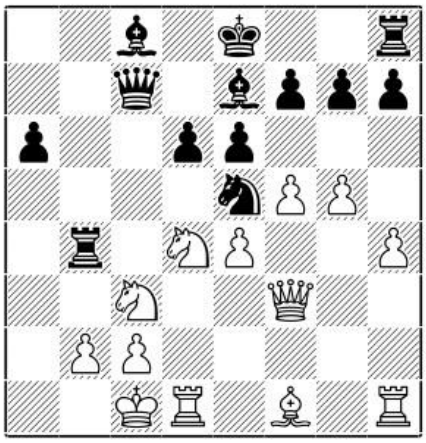


17...Bb7 (17...h6!? deserves attention here too) 18.Bc4 Qa5 19.Qe3 0-0 Black had an excellent game in Robitsch – Mader, corr. 1992.

White has also tried:

16.f5 Ne5

Several queen moves have been tested, but Black has good chances in all lines.



17.Qh3

17.Qf2 Qb6 (17...0-0!?N also looks sensible) 18.b3 Nc6! 19.Bc4 gives Black a pleasant choice: 19...Rxc4!?N 20.bxc4 d5 gave him good play for the exchange in Bandelj – Hribersek, corr. 2005, but 19...Na5!N 20.Be2 Qc5µ would have been even stronger.

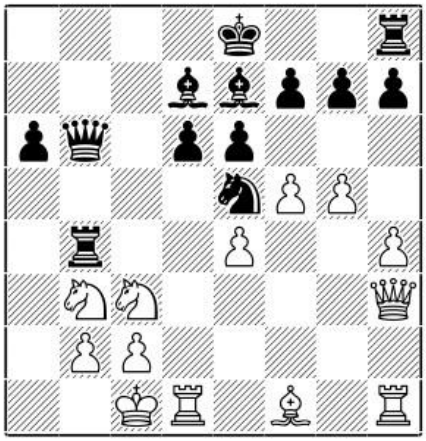
17.Qe3 0-0 18.Be2 (18.f6 gxf6 19.gxf6 Bxf6 20.Rg1† Kh8 21.Qh6 Qe7 leaves White without a convincing follow-up) 18...Qb6 19.fxe6 fxe6 20.b3 Qc5 21.Na4 Qa5 22.Rhf1 Bd7 23.Rxf8† Bxf8³ Khorunzhy – De Filippis, corr. 2011.

17...Qb6 18.Nb3

And not 18.fxe6?? Rxd4 19.exf7† Kxf7–+ when the c8-bishop is protected.

18...Bd7

The immediate 18...a5Nµ is also excellent.



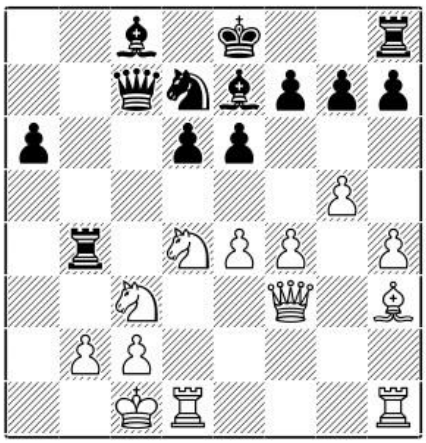
19.Bd3 a5 20.Na2 a4! 21.Nxb4 Qxb4 22.Na1

This is ugly, but 22.Nd2 a3 23.bxa3 Qxa3†

24.Kb1 0-0 25.Nb3 Ba4 would have given Black a crushing attack, with ...Rb8 coming next.

22...a3

Black had a winning attack in Ducharme – Vigorito, Las Vegas 2005.



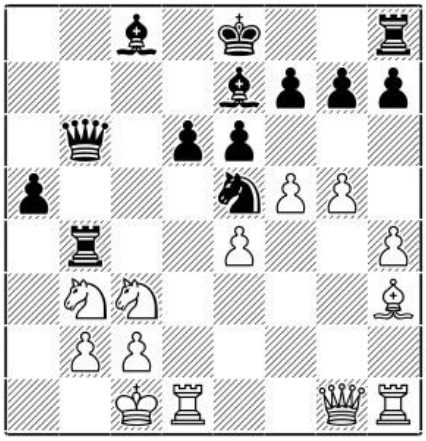
16...Qc5!

It is important to chase the d4-knight away from the centre.

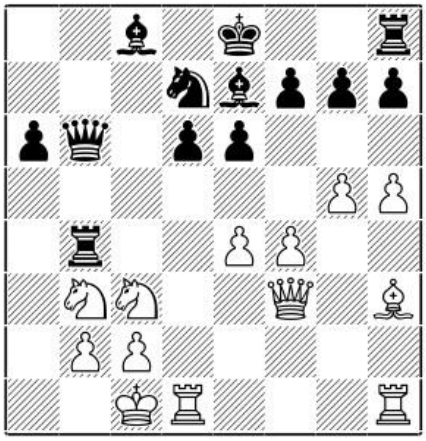
16...Qb6 would be a good choice if the knight had to retreat to b3, but 17.Nf5! is an annoying reply.

17.Nb3 Qb6 18.h5

White also has a tough time after: 18.f5 Ne5! 19.Qg3 (19.Qe2? a5µ was Enkin – Vigorito, Waltham 2000) 19...a5 (19...Bd7 is also promising for Black) 20.Qg1



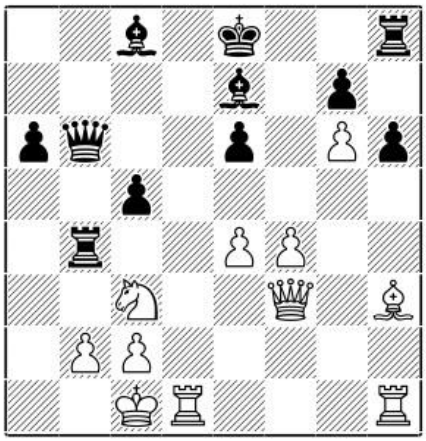
20...Qb8! (even stronger than 20...Qxg1 21.Rhxg1 h6³) 21.fxe6 fxe6 22.Nxa5 Rxb2 23.Nb3 Rxb3 24.cxb3 Qxb3 25.Qd4 0-0µ Bazela – Karasek, Slovakia 1997.



18...Nc5 19.Nxc5 dxc5!

It is a bit unusual to split the pawns like this, but now b2-b3 can be met with ...c4. Thus, White has no choice but to ignore the queenside and hurry with his own play.

20.g6 fxg6 21.hxg6 h6



22.Nd5

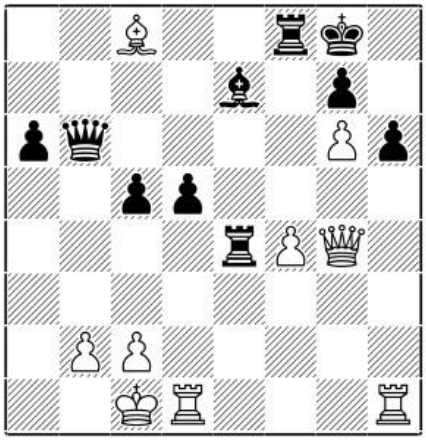
White forces the pace, since 22.b3 0-0 threatens both ...c4 and ...Rxf4!.

22...exd5 23.Bxc8 0-0 24.Qg4

24.e5? defends the bishop by tactical means but the simple 24...Rxb2 gives Black a winning position: 25.Be6† Kh8–+

24...Rxe4

Since the early 1970s, this has been known to be good for Black. The only question is how good...



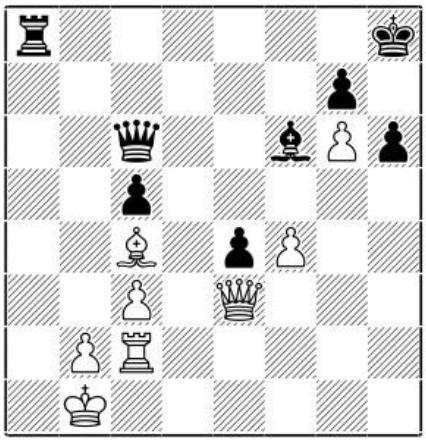
25.Rde1

Another early game saw 25.Bf5 Bf6! when Black's attack is already winning. 26.Bxe4 (26.c3 Bxc3! 27.bxc3 Rb8–+) 26...Bxb2† 27.Kd2 Qb4† 28.c3 Bxc3† 29.Kc2 Qb2† 30.Kd3 dxe4† 31.Kxe4 Re8† 32.Kd3 Qb3 0–1 Kaplan – Browne, Madrid 1973.

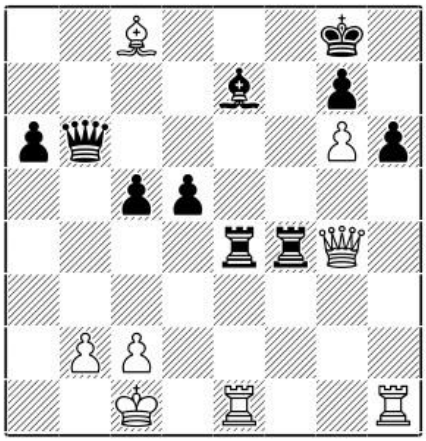
25...Rfxf4!

This is the most accurate move.

The game I knew from my youth went: 25...Bf6 26.c3 Qa5 (decent alternatives are 26...Rxe1† 27.Rxe1 Qd8 and 26...Qc7 27.Rxe4 dxe4 28.Bxa6 Kh8 29.Bc4 Qa5 Rimkus – Nemec, corr. 1989) 27.Rxe4 dxe4 28.Kb1 Qc7 29.Bxa6 Kh8 30.Bc4 Rb8 31.Qg3 Qb6 32.Rh2 Qd6 33.Rc2 Ra8 34.Qe3 Qc6



35.Re2?? (35.Rc1 was necessary, when it's still a game) 35...Qa4 0–1 Bellin – Portisch, Teesside 1972. This game, along with Kaplan – Browne above, made an impression that lasted a generation. In modern times, correspondence players have shown that White has chances to defend after 25...Bf6, but Black can do better with the text move.

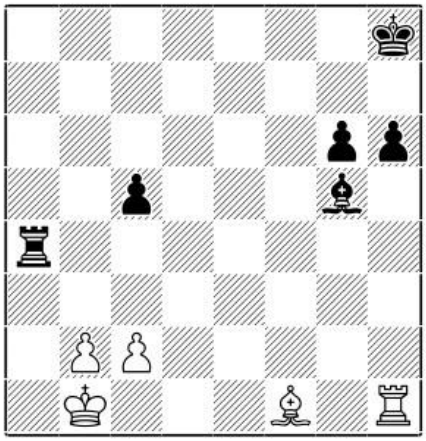


26.Qd7 Qxg6 27.Qxd5† Kh8 28.Rxe4 Qxe4 29.Qxe4 Rxe4 30.Bxa6 Ra4 31.Bf1

After 31.Bb7 Black should avoid trading rooks as the resulting endgame would be a draw. Instead he should aim to advance his kingside passers, with good winning chances, just like in the game.

31...Bg5† 32.Kb1 g6µ

Black has an extra pawn and should eventually win thanks to his connected passers, despite the presence of opposite-coloured bishops.

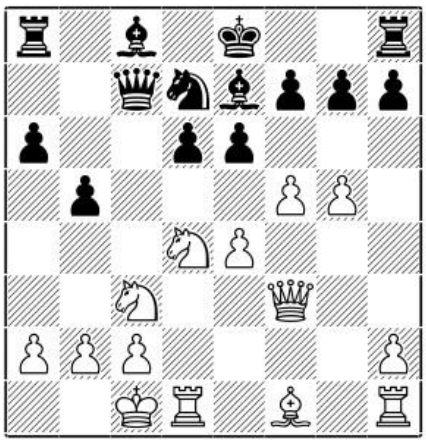


33.Bb5 Rb4 34.Bd3 Kg7 35.c3 Rg4 36.Kc2 h5 37.Rh2 h4 38.Kb3 Be7 39.Re2 Bf6 40.Rf2 g5 41.Bf5 Rg1 42.Kc4 g4 43.Rf4 g3 44.Kxc5 Kh6 45.Be4 Be7† 46.Kc4 h3 47.Rf7 Bh4 48.Rh7† Kg5 49.Rg7† Kf4 50.Rh7 Kg4 51.Rg7† Bg5 52.Bb7 Rh1 53.Bc8† Kh5 54.Rh7† Bh6 55.Rh8 g2 56.Bb7 g1=Q

0–1

We have seen that 13.h4 and 13.a3 are not only slow, but also offer Black ready-made counterplay with 13...b4 and 13...Rb8! respectively. We will now turn our attention to the most popular and critical move.

B3) 13.f5!



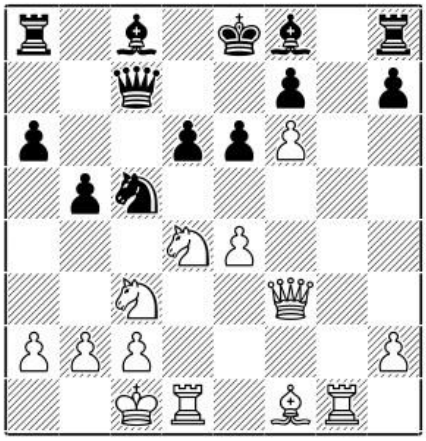
When I was younger and first saw this position, I thought it could hardly be possible that White could just give up a pawn with check. Years later, this was the line that caused me to question the viability of the entire 7...Be7 variation.

13...0-0!

This bold move is the solution I was searching for. Before analysing it any further, I will explain why I was not happy with Black's other ways of playing.

13...Ne5? may appear tempting but 14.Qg3 leaves Black with big problems defending the e6-square.

The big theoretical main line used to be 13...Nc5 but this never appealed to me in view of: 14.f6 gxf6 15.gxf6 Bf8 16.Rg1



The ensuing variations can be quite irrational and Black's king is always in danger, with Rg7 and various knight sacrifices in the air. Maybe in a correspondence game Black can hold his own, but over the board it looks too scary. One recent example went 16...h5 17.a3 Rb8 18.Re1 Nd7 19.Nxe6! with a winning attack for White in Vallejo Pons – Wynn, Bangkok 2016. No thank you.

13...Bxg5†?!

For a long time this was my favourite continuation, as I was heavily influenced by the Shabalov – Hellers game mentioned below. Unfortunately, this line now looks to be in rough shape.

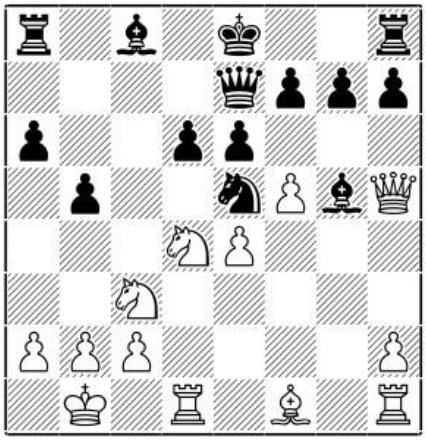
14.Kb1 Ne5

When I started my backtracking looking for acceptable options for Black, I checked 14...0-0!?, which was the top choice of an older version of Houdini – at least at a low search depth. Unfortunately, it's not much of a solution after: 15.fxe6 Nb6 16.Nd5 Nxd5 17.exd5 fxe6 18.Qg4 e5 19.Qxg5 exd4 20.Bd3 g6 21.h4 (21.Rhf1 is also a problem) Black was only praying to survive in Radjabov – Cheparinov, Hersonissos 2007.

15.Qh5 Qe7

I always felt that this was best, even though it will lose a tempo.

Instead 15...Qd8 16.h4 (16.Rg1 also seems promising) 16...Bf6 17.fxe6 0-0 18.Bh3 gives White a strong initiative.



16.Nxe6!

White has to play an exact sequence of moves to get anything.

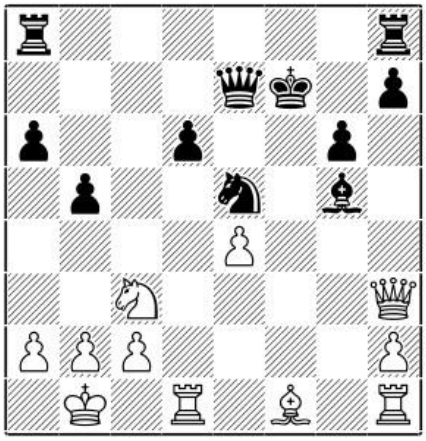
Instead 16.fxe6?! g6 17.exf7† Kxf7 18.Qe2 Bg4 19.Qf2† Qf6 20.Qxf6† Bxf6 21.Be2 Bc8!³ allows Black to keep the bishop pair. A model game for Black continued: 22.Rhf1 Kg7 23.Nd5 Bd8 24.Rf4 Ra7! A typical manoeuvre, preparing to bring the rook to the f-file. 25.h4?! h5! Fixing the enemy pawn to be devoured later. 26.Rdf1 Rf7µ Shabalov – Hellers, New York 1993. I witnessed this game in person, and Hellers seemed to win so easily against Shabalov, who had been tearing up the U.S. circuit at the time. Unfortunately, taking with the knight is much stronger.

16...Bxe6

Nakamura tried 16...g6!? a few times in his youth, but 17.Qxg5 fxe6 18.Qd2!? (Black's idea is seen after 18.f6 Qd8 intending ...0-0 and ...Ra7-f7) 18...0-0 19.fxg6 hxg6 20.h4 looks dangerous for Black.

17.fxe6 g6 18.exf7† Kxf7 19.Qh3!

This is more incisive than 19.Qe2 Kg7 20.Nd5 Qd8 21.Bh3 (or 21.Qe1 Bh4 22.Qc3 Ra7) 21...Rf8 22.Rhf1 Ra7! when Black will equalize and have his own chances to play for more. I won a couple of endgames arising from this line.



19...Kg7 20.Nd5 Qd8 21.Qc3!

Another key move. The threat of Nc7-e6(†) is pretty serious.

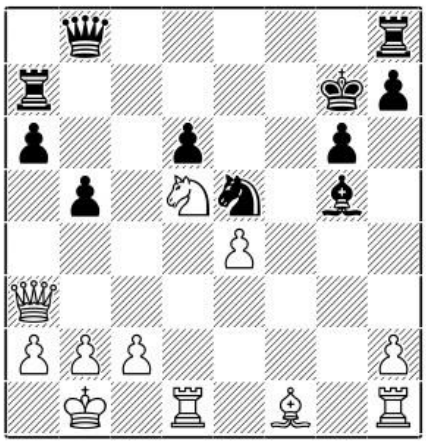
21...Ra7 22.Qa3!

Threatening Bxb5.

22...Qb8

After 22...Ra8 23.Be2± Black will hardly get coordinated.

The text move has been the usual choice, but now the black queen has been lured off of the h4-d8 diagonal.



23.h4!

This is not even a pawn sacrifice now. The engines already claim that White is winning here; who am I to argue?

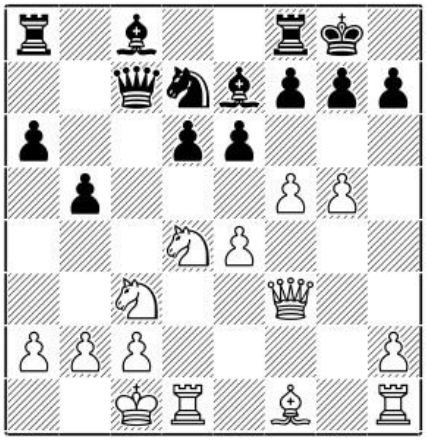
23...Bh6 24.h5 a5 25.Qg3!

White won handily in Sjugirov – Danin, Lipetsk 2008, and several other games. Interestingly, the first game to reach this position continued 25.Be2, and although White was better here too, Black went on to win in Vuckovic – Nakamura, Bermuda 2002, which probably gave Najdorf players a false sense of optimism for a while. In 2008 I was preparing for a game when the penny dropped and I realized how bad the

problems were.

I am quite convinced that Black has no improvements in the above line, and I find 13...Nc5 to be far too treacherous. If I was willing to take those kinds of risks, I would prefer to switch to the theoretically sounder Poisoned Pawn.

With my favourite Najdorf line seemingly busted, I figured I would have to play the Caro-Kann – and I did. But salvation was coming, so let us now return to the key idea of castling, which has revitalized Black's prospects in this variation.



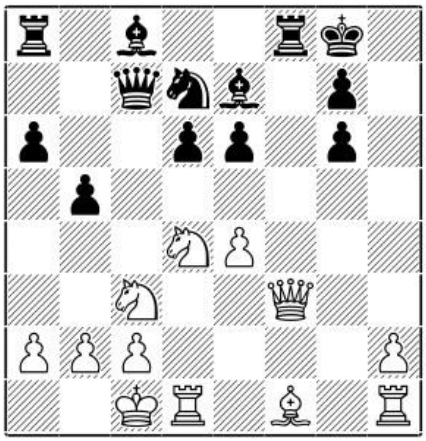
Here it is! At first this looks crazy, and for a long time I resisted the whole idea. I thought that 'castling into it' would be impractical, either because Black would have to memorize too much to survive, or that White's attack would be too easy to play and always offer good practical chances. Well, this is the Najdorf, so we do have to know some stuff, but I think Black's play is far easier to understand than in certain lines of the Poisoned Pawn and other ultra-sharp systems. Compared to many other lines, Black's king is, rather surprisingly, relatively safe!

Although she was not the first to play 13...0-0, the Chinese grandmaster and current Women's World Champion Ju Wenjun is clearly the player who put this line on the map. Although there have been some missteps, Black's position has held up well, even under the microscope of correspondence play.

We will analyse five main continuations: **B31)** 14.f6, **B32)** 14.fxe6, **B33)** 14.Qh5, **B34)** 14.Rg1 and **B35)** 14.h4.

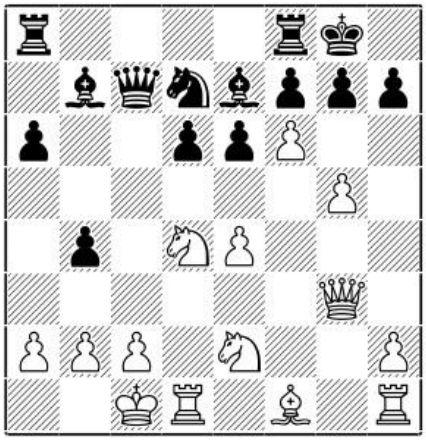
A couple of less critical options are:

14.g6 should be met by 14...hxg6 15.fxe6 fxe6 when White must settle for equality with:



16.Nxe6 (16.Qg3? Rf6µ was great for Black in Haubro – Ahlander, Ballerup 2015) 16...Rxf3 17.Nxc7 Ra7 18.N7d5 Bg5† 19.Kb1 Ne5= Black's bishop pair and active pieces were at least as important as his doubled g-pawns in Blom – Barnett, corr. 2006.

14.Qg3 b4 15.Nce2 (15.f6? bxc3 16.fxe7 cxb2† 17.Kb1 Re8–+ was terrible for White in Soumya – Hejazipour, Abu Dhabi 2016) 15...Bb7 16.f6 is well met by:



16...Nxf6! A typical sacrifice. 17.gxf6 Bxf6 18.Bg2 a5 19.Rhf1 Be5 20.Qe3 a4 21.Rd2 Qc5 22.h4 Ba6 23.Rfd1 Rfc8µ Hanzalik – Polak, corr. 2013. Black has two pawns for the piece, as well as the bishop pair, a safe king and obvious attacking chances.

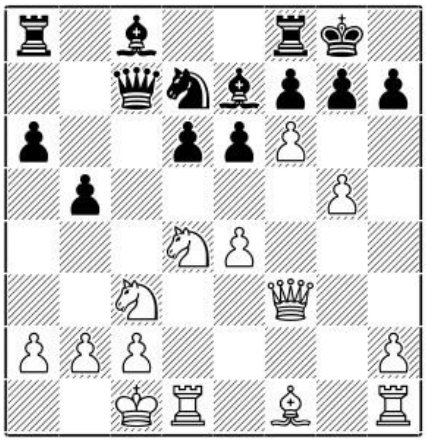
B31) 14.f6

GAME 26

Dragan Solak – Ju Wenjun

Moscow 2012

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Bg5 e6 7.f4 Be7 8.Qf3 Qc7 9.0-0-0 Nbd7 10.g4 b5 11.Bxf6 Nxf6 12.g5 Nd7 13.f5! 0-0! 14.f6



White immediately breaks up Black's kingside. This is the most direct attacking try and it certainly looks worrisome. But have faith – we will get a pawn at least...

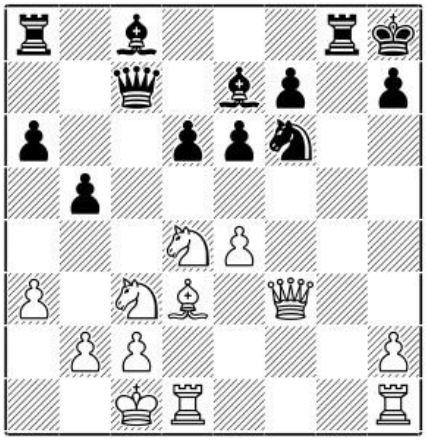
14...gxf6 15.gxf6 Nxf6

I know the open g-file looks scary, but Black's king will (hopefully!) be safe on h8. Another important point is that White will find it hard to attack on the dark squares, having already traded off his bishop for a knight. White's position is also not entirely safe, with ...b4 and ...Bb7 coming.

16.e5

White cannot afford to hesitate; even the tempting 16.Rg1†? Kh8 only helps Black.

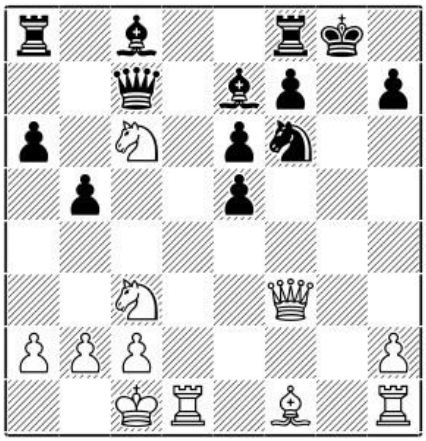
Black also does well after: 16.Bd3 Kh8 (16...Bb7 17.Rhf1 Qc5 18.Nd5! was less clear in Fier – Britton, Hastings 2017) 17.a3 Rg8



18.Rdf1 Bb7 19.Qh3 Rg7 20.Rf2 Qc5 21.e5 dxe5 22.Rhf1 exd4 White was already compelled to resign in Zavalia – Goodman, corr. 2013.

16...dxe5 17.Nc6

17.Qxa8? exd4 is already winning for Black, for example: 18.Qg2† Kh8 19.Ne2 Bb7–+

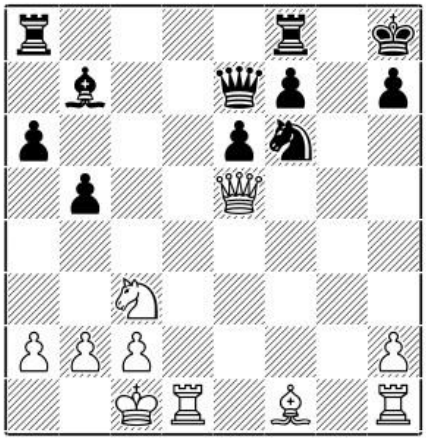


17...Bb7

In one of the early games in this variation, Black erred with 17...Kh8?, which allowed White to get away with grabbing the material: 18.Nxe7 Qxe7 19.Qxa8 b4 (19...Bb7 20.Qa7 Ra8 21.Qe3 Bxh1 22.Qxe5±) 20.Qb8! (the simple 20.Ne2! is also strong) 20...Nd7 (20...bxc3? 21.Qxe5) 21.Qc7 bxc3 22.Qxc3± Shirov – Huschenbeth, Germany 2012.

18.Qg3†

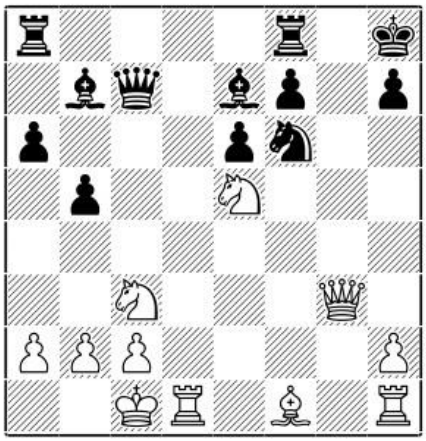
After 18.Nxe7†?! Qxe7 19.Qg3† Kh8 20.Qxe5 Black can fight for an advantage with:



20...Rg8! (20...Bxh1 21.Rd7 Qxd7 22.Qxf6† is a simple draw) White has nothing other than 21.Nd5 Bxd5 22.Rxd5 Rg7³ with an extra pawn for Black.

18...Kh8 19.Nxe5

Careful now – White is threatening 20.Ng6†, winning the queen.



19...Bd6

This could lead to a forced draw.

A good alternative is:

19...Bd8!? 20.Rxd8!

After 20.Rg1 Nh5 21.Qe3 Bf6³ Black holds everything together.

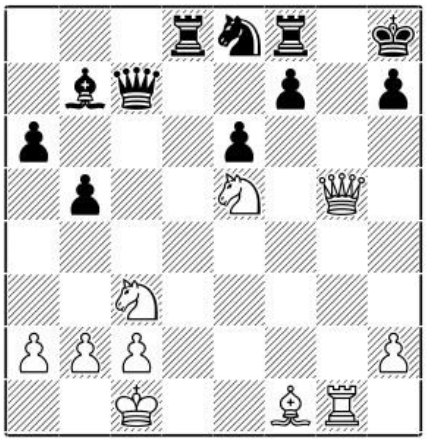
20...Raxd8

This is more reliable than 20...Rfxd8 21.Ng6† fxg6 22.Qxc7 Bxh1 which looks unclear, but White has won some computer games.

21.Rg1

21.Ng6†?! hxg6 22.Qxc7 Bxh1 simply gives Black an improved version of the note above.

21...Ne8 22.Qg5



22...f5!N

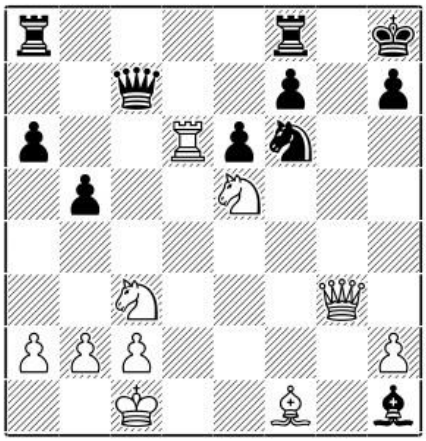
I like this suggestion of Ntirlis.

22...b4!? led to a tactical skirmish followed by a draw after: 23.Bb5 f6 24.Qh6 Ng7 25.Ng6† Kg8 26.Nxf8 Rxf8 27.Bd3 f5 28.Na4 Kh8 29.Nc5 Bc8 30.Nxa6 ½–½ Burridge – Williamson, corr. 2016.

23.Qh6 Ng7 24.Ng6† Kg8 25.Nxf8 Rxf8 26.Qxe6† Kh8=

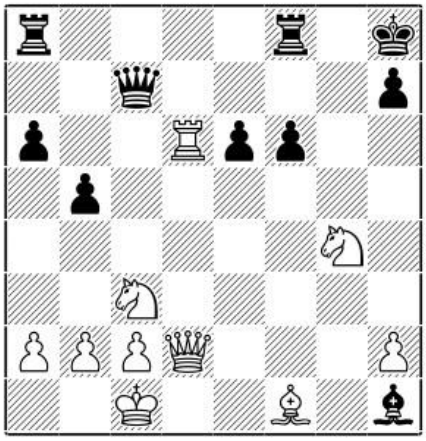
Black has a safe position and will follow up with ...b4 and ...Be4.

20.Rxd6 Bxh1



21.Rd1

If 21.Qg5?! then 21...Ng4! is a deflection to remember. Then 22.Nxg4 f6!? is a try for an advantage. (22...f5 23.Ne5 Qxd6 24.Ng6† hxg6 25.Qh6† is a draw – it is important that White does not have any rooks left!) One possible line is: 23.Qd2



23...Bd5! 24.Rxd5 exd5 25.Nxd5 Qg7 We have reached an unusual material balance of three minor pieces against two rooks, where the engines slightly favour Black.

21...Rac8

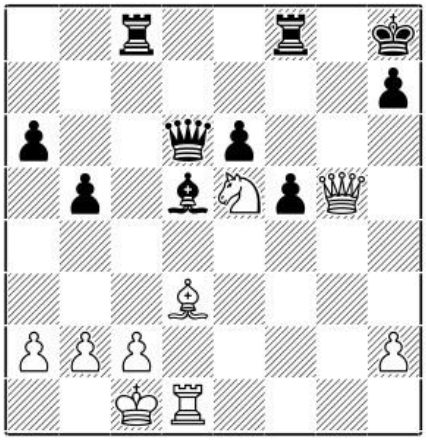
21...Ra7?! was played in Bujdak – V. Khan, corr. 2012, when 22.Qf4!N 22...Ng8 (22...Nh5 23.Qh6! hits the f8-rook) 23.Rd7 Qc5 24.b4! Qxc3 25.Rxa7 Be4! 26.Qxe4 Qa1† 27.Kd2 Qxf1 is a mostly forcing line which slightly favours White. Ju Wenjun's move is more natural and stronger.

22.Bd3

22.Qf4? Nh5, intending ...b4, would win for Black.

22...Bb7

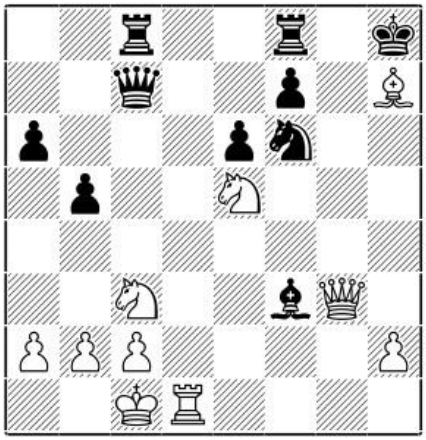
This seems playable, but keeping the d-file closed with 22...Bd5!? would have been simpler. 23.Qg5 (compared to the main line below, 23.Bxh7? Nxh7 does not work for White because Rd1-d7 is physically impossible) 23...Ne4 24.Nxe4 f5 25.Nd6 Qxd6



26.Ng6† hxg6 27.Qh6† Kg8 28.Qxg6† Kh8 29.Qh6† Kg8 White must settle for perpetual check, either immediately or after: 30.Rg1† Kf7 31.Rg7† Ke8 32.Qh5† Kd8 33.Qh4†=

23.Qg5

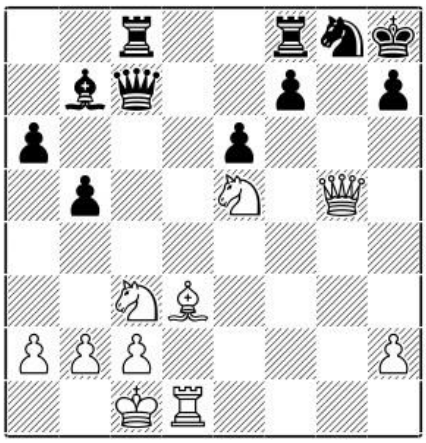
White could have tried 23.Bxh7!? although Black has a miraculous resource: 23...Bf3!! (23...Kxh7? 24.Qh4† is obvious enough, but the real point is that 23...Nxh7? 24.Rd7 wins for White)



24.Bd3 (the rules dictate that only one move can be made at a time, so 24.Qxf3? Qxe5, 24.Nxf3 Qxg3 25.hxg3 Kxh7 and 24.Rg1 Nh5! are all insufficient for White) 24...Bxd1 25.Kxd1 Nh7 26.Bxh7 Kxh7 27.Qh4† With a draw.

23...Ng8

The attempt to distract White with 23...Ng4? runs into 24.Nxg4 f5 25.Ne3±.



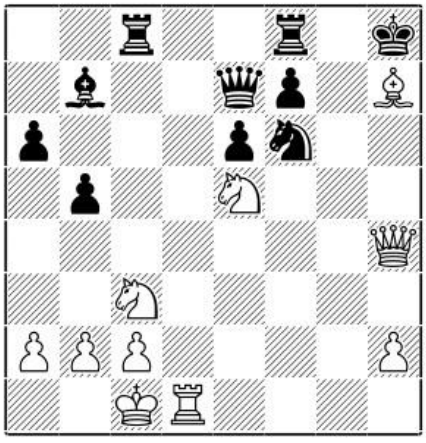
24.Bxh7

24.Qh4!?N f5! is also interesting: 25.Bxf5!? (25.Ng6† Kg7 26.Nxf8 Rxf8 looks okay for Black) 25...Rxf5 26.Rd7 Qxd7 27.Nxd7 Rf1† 28.Kd2 Rc4! With some kind of dynamically equal mess.

24...Qe7! 25.Qh5

White could have tried 25.Qe3!? Rcd8! (25...Kxh7 26.Qd3† f5 27.Qh3† Nh6 28.Rd7 wins the queen and favours White) 26.Bd3! (26.Bxg8 Rxd1† 27.Nxd1 Kxg8 28.Qg3† is only a draw) 26...Qh4 when Black seems to be holding although her position looks dangerous.

25...Nf6 26.Qh4



26...Ng8!

The only move, but good enough.

27.Qh5

27.Qg4 would also be met with 27...Nf6 drawing, but White cannot play 27.Qh3? Qg5†.

27...Nf6 28.Qh4 Ng8 29.Qh5 Nf6 30.Qh4

½–½

The game featured some wild tactics; Black's position was always okay, although the alternatives noted at moves 19 and 22 could make life more straightforward. Let's move on to the next of White's main options.

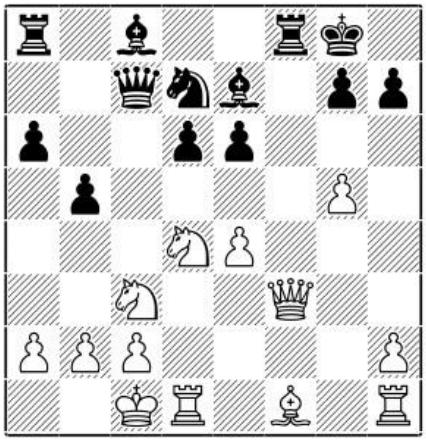
B32) 14.fxe6

GAME 27

Tibor Antal – Pouya Idani

Kecskemet 2012

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Bg5 e6 7.f4 Be7 8.Qf3 Qc7 9.0-0-0 Nbd7 10.g4 b5 11.Bxf6 Nxf6 12.g5 Nd7 13.f5! 0-0! 14.fxe6 fxe6



This generally leads to a queen exchange. White often emerges a pawn up, but Black will have the bishop pair and active play. If that does not sound enticing enough, the fact that Black has scored around 75% from this position bodes well.

15.Nxe6

White acquiesces to simplification. Keeping the queens on is harmless at best, for instance:

15.Qg3 Nc5 16.a3 Bd7 (16...Rb8!?N also deserves attention) was fine for Black in Nigmatov – Bashirli, Porto Carras 2013.

15.Qe3

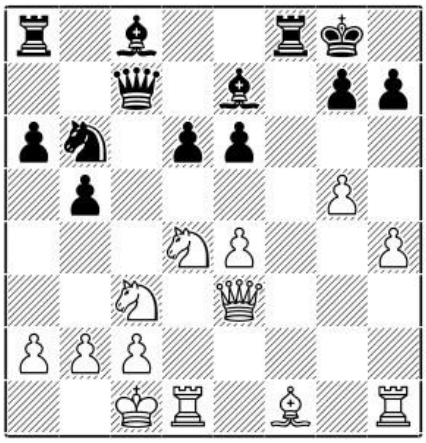
Black can fight for the advantage with the following improvement:

15...Nb6!N

15...Qc5?! is premature; this move should be kept in reserve. After the further 16.h4 Nb6 17.Bh3 Bd7?! 18.Qg3! White unpinned the knight and created pressure on the e6-pawn in N. Kosintseva – Ju Wenjun, Nalchik 2011.

16.h4

If 16.Bh3?! then the timely 16...Qc5! would indeed be strong.



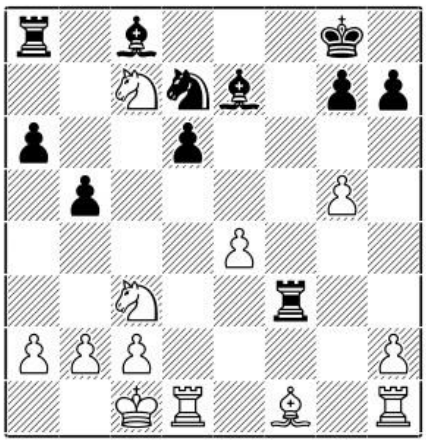
16...b4

Goh Wei Ming's suggestion of 16...e5 17.Nf5 Bxf5 18.exf5 Rxf5 is similar.

17.Nce2 e5 18.Nf5 Bxf5 19.exf5 Rxf5 20.Bh3 Rff8

White does not have quite enough for the pawn.

15...Rxf3 16.Nxc7



16...Bxg5†

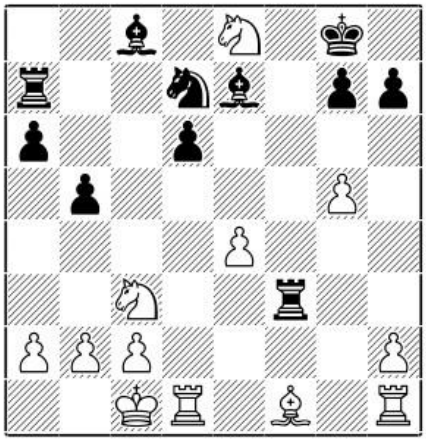
Taking the pawn with check is natural of course, but a case can also be made for:

16...Ra7!? 17.Ne8

This seems to be White's best.

After 17.Ne6 Nb6!N 18.Nd4 Bxg5† 19.Kb1 Rf2 Black has his usual 'compensation', but here he is not even a pawn down.

17.N7d5 looks natural but Black is doing well after: 17...Bxg5† 18.Kb1 Ne5 19.Bd3?! (19.Nb6N 19...Bg4 20.Rxd6 is preferable although Black has at least enough play for the pawn) 19...Nxd3N (19...Bh3 was also good for Black in Moller – Ahlander, Lund 2016; 19...Raf7N is promising as well) 20.Rxd3 (20.cxd3 Bh3µ) 20...Raf7µ



17...Ne5

Black can also consider 17...Bxg5† 18.Kb1 as in Kowalczyk – Sliwerski, Polanica Zdroj 2016, when 18...Nc5!N 19.Nxd6 Be6 would have given him plenty of play for the pawn.

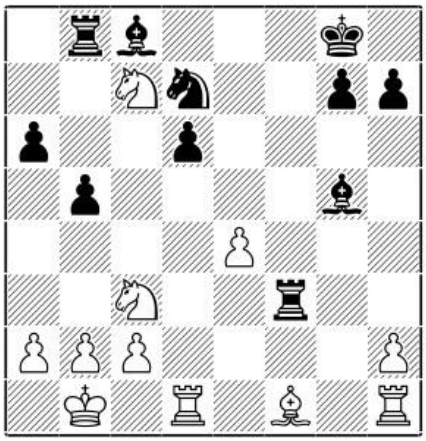
18.Nxd6 Bg4 19.h3 Rxc3 20.hxg4 Rc6 21.Nf5 Bxg5† 22.Kb1 Nxg4

Black had some initiative in Bernal

Caamano – Santamaria Perez, corr. 2010.

17.Kb1 Rb8

Here 17...Ra7 gives White the additional option of 18.Ne6!? (rather than 18.N7d5, transposing to Moller – Ahlander above) which I believe should be avoided.



This endgame has occurred several times in practice, with generally excellent results for Black. There are some similarities to Shabalov – Hellers, as discussed on page 288. Black has the bishop pair and a kingside pawn majority.

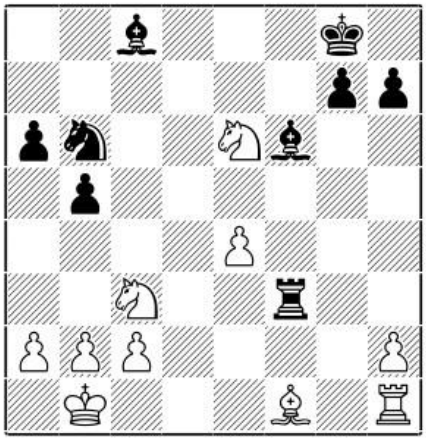
18.Ne8

White has not been able to cause any problems at all with other moves. For instance:

18.Be2 Rf2 19.Bg4?! (19.Rdf1N was better although after 19...Rxf1† 20.Rxf1 Nf6 Black is still comfortably equal) 19...Nc5 20.Bxc8 Rxc8 21.N7d5 Re8 Black clearly had the initiative in Braun – Navara, Plovdiv 2012.

18.h4 Bf6 19.N3d5 Bb7 20.Bh3 Nc5 was equal in Istratescu – Salgado Lopez, Porto Carras 2011.

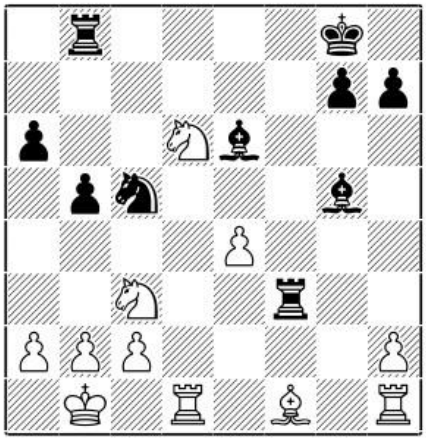
18.Ne6 Bf6 19.Rxd6 is a somewhat risky pawn grab: 19...Rb6 (19...Bxc3N 20.bxc3 Rb6 is also promising for Black) 20.Rxb6 Nxb6



21.Nd5 Bxe6 22.Nxb6 Be5 (Black could also get rolling with 22...g5!?N) Black had excellent compensation for the pawn in Huschenbeth – Hamitevici, Chotowa 2010.

18...Nc5 19.Nxd6 Be6

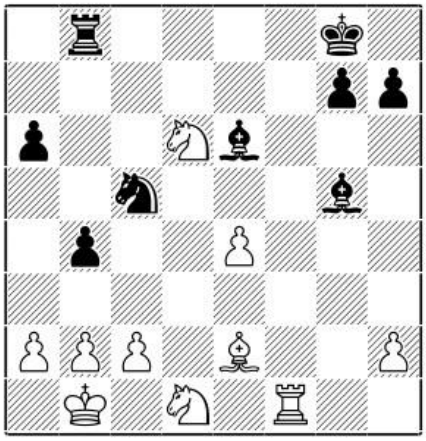
Black has at least enough for the pawn; he has the bishop pair and all of his pieces are active. White's queenside pawn majority is not going anywhere, but Black's kingside majority can easily advance.



20.Bd3?!

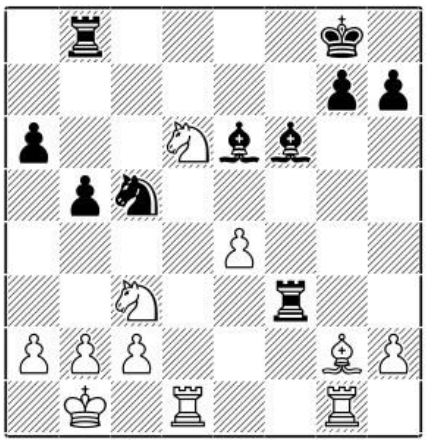
With this seemingly natural move, White starts to drift into a worse position.

20.Be2?! is also a mistake: 20...Rf2 (simplest, but 20...Rxc3!?N 21.bxc3 Na4 is also tempting) 21.Rdf1 Rxf1† 22.Rxf1 b4 23.Nd1 (23.Nd5 Rd8³)



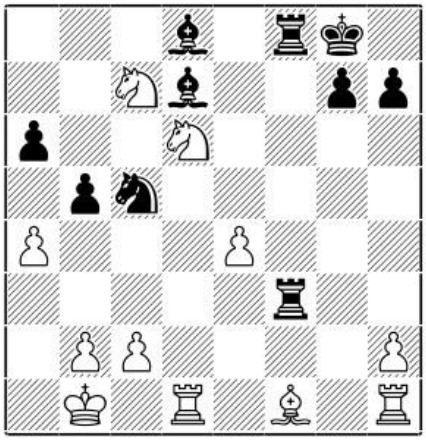
23...Bf6 24.Ne3 Be5 25.Nec4 Bxh2 26.e5 This occurred in Yip – Kavi, USA 2016, when 26...Rf8!N would have been winning for Black. Following the rook exchange, the connected passed pawns supported by the bishop pair will be too much for White to handle.

Kavi also faced 20.Rg1 and got a fine position: 20...Bf6 (20...Bf4N is another good option) 21.Bg2?! (21.Nd5 Rf8 22.Nxf6† R3xf6©)



21...Rxc3! 22.bxc3 Na4 23.Rd3? (23.e5! was necessary although 23...Bxe5 24.Rge1 Nxc3† 25.Ka1 Bf6 26.Rd3 Nxa2† 27.Kb1 Bc4 leaves Black with two pawns for the exchange plus the initiative) Now in Hoy – Kavi, USA 2016, the simple 23...Nxc3†N 24.Rxc3 Bxc3 would have given Black a huge advantage.

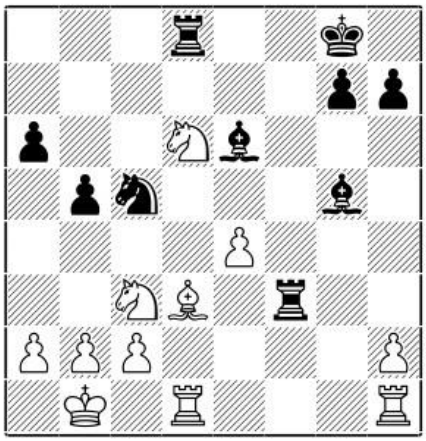
20.Nd5 is the safest. Afte20...Rbf8 21.Nc7 Bd7 22.a4 Bd8 the position is dynamically equal, although White needs to step up and offer some material with:



23.Nxa6! Nxa6 24.Nb7 Be7 25.Be2 Nb8 26.Bxf3 Rxf3 27.axb5 Bxb5 28.Nd6 Bd7 29.Nf5 Bc5 The position remained unclear and a draw eventually ensued in C. Sadler – Andriuschenko, corr. 2012.

20...Rd8

It is a tossup between this and 20...Rbf8N³.



21.e5

21.Nf5?! Nxd3 22.cxd3 Rfxd3µ is much better for Black.

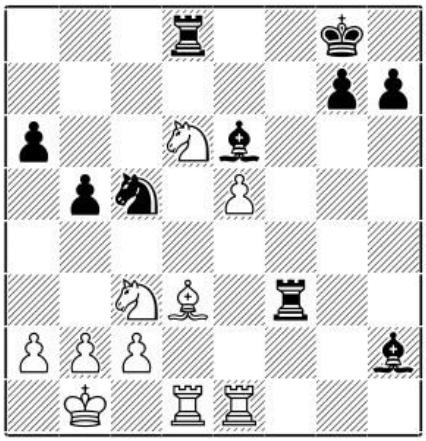
21.Be2 Rf2³ is also pleasant for the second player.

21...Bf4 22.Rhe1

In the event of 22.Bf5 Bxf5 23.Nxf5 Rxd1† 24.Nxd1 Bxe5µ Black has won back the pawn, and his powerful bishop and mobile kingside pawn majority give him the upper hand.

22...Bxh2

Black's strong play has netted him a clear advantage, but things start to get a little dicey from here.



23.Be4 Nxe4 24.Ncxe4 Bg3?

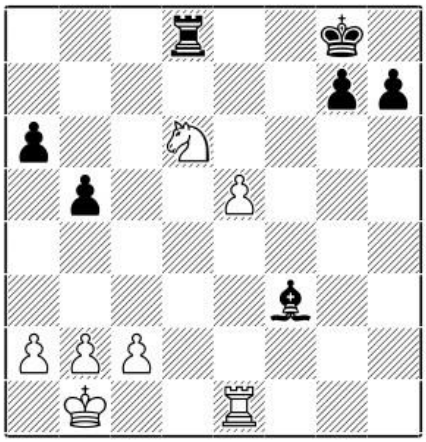
24...Rff8!Nµ would have kept full control. The text move allows annoying counterplay.

25.Ng5! Bg4 26.Nxf3?

26.Rg1! would have held the balance.

26...Bxe1 27.Rxe1 Bxf3

Black has regained the advantage and he won after a few minor adventures.



28.b3 h5 29.Re3 Bg4 30.c4 bxc4 31.bxc4 Be6 32.c5 Rd7 33.Kb2 Rc7 34.Rc3?! h4–+ 35.Ne4 h3 36.Ng3 Bd5 37.Rc2 Kf7 38.Nh5 g5 39.Nf6 Ke6 40.Ng4 Kf5 41.Nh2 g4 42.Rc3 Kf4 43.Nf1 Kxe5 44.Ka3 Rf7 45.Nh2 Kf4 46.Nf1 Bg2 47.Rc4† Kg5 48.Ne3 Rf4 49.Kb4 Rxc4† 50.Kxc4 Bc6

0–1

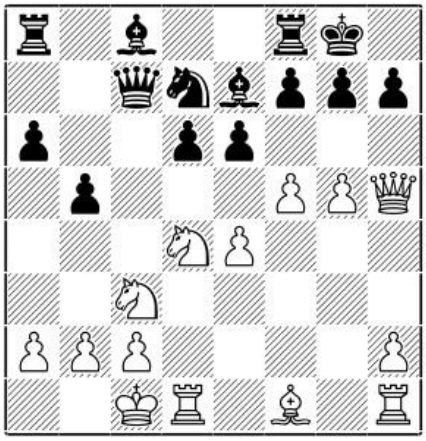
B33) 14.Qh5

GAME 28

Ponnuswamy Konguvel – Srinath Narayanan

Kolkata 2012

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Bg5 e6 7.f4 Be7 8.Qf3 Qc7 9.0-0-0 Nbd7 10.g4 b5 11.Bxf6 Nxf6 12.g5 Nd7 13.f5! 0-0! 14.Qh5



This is a sharp attempt, reminiscent of the Velimirovic Attack in the Sozin. There, White also plays g4-g5 and Qh5 and then follows with Rg1-g3-h3, trying to mate Black in similar fashion. I do not think White's last move is theoretically too challenging; but as usual, care is needed.

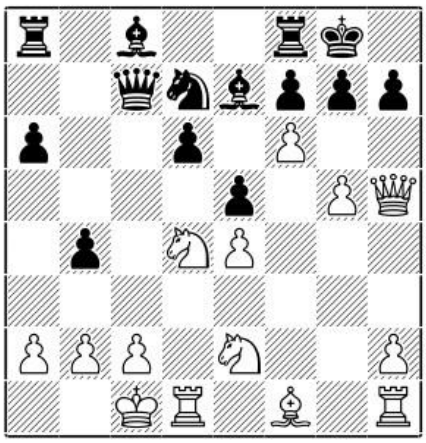
14...b4!

Instead 14...Ne5?! 15.Rg1! gave White a dangerous attack in Brinkmann – M. Mueller, Oberhof 2013; the main threat is Rg3-h3. (15.Bh3 worked out well for White after 15...Qc4?! 16.Kb1 Bd7 17.f6 gxf6 18.Nf5!± in Li Chao – Dao Thien Hai, Manila 2013, but 15...b4!N 16.Nce2 Bb7 would have kept Black in the game.)

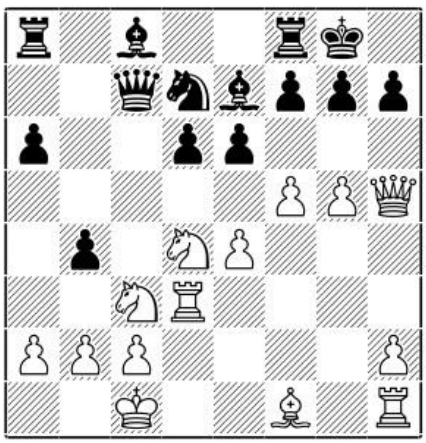
15.Rd3!

Both sides are forced to walk something of a tightrope. If 15.f6? then 15...Bxf6! 16.gxf6 Nxf6–+ exploits the position of the white queen.

Retreating with 15.Nce2 can be met by a similar motif: 15...e5 16.f6



16...Bxf6!N (16...exd4 17.fxe7 Re8 was fine for Black in Maikov – Roth Jr., corr. 2017; the text move is stronger though) 17.gxf6 Nxf6 18.Qh4 exd4 19.Rg1 Qe7 White has less than full compensation for the missing pawn.



15...bxc3 16.Rxc3

White should remove this pawn before focusing on the kingside.

16.Rh3

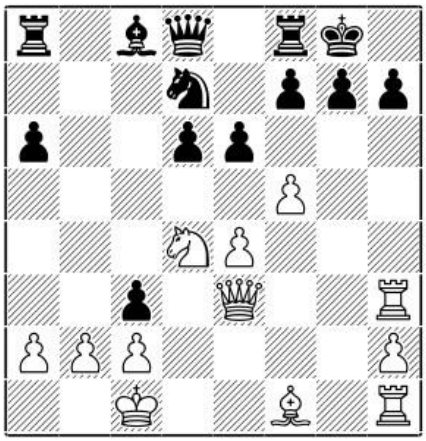
Black can counter this move with a nice deflection:

16...Bxg5†! 17.Qxg5 Qd8

17...cxb2† 18.Kb1 Qd8![3] was a good alternative in De Silva – Weerawardane, Colombo 2013.

18.Qe3?

18.Qxd8N was preferable, although 18...cxb2† 19.Kxb2 Rxd8 20.fxe6 fxe6 21.Nxe6 Ne5! 22.Nxd8 Bxh3 23.Bxh3 Rxd8 reaches an endgame where Black is at least equal.



18...cxb2†N

This is clearly stronger than 18...Qf6? 19.Qxc3 when Black was 'only' comfortably equal in T. Mohammed – Firouzja, Abu Dhabi 2015.

19.Kb1 Qf6µ

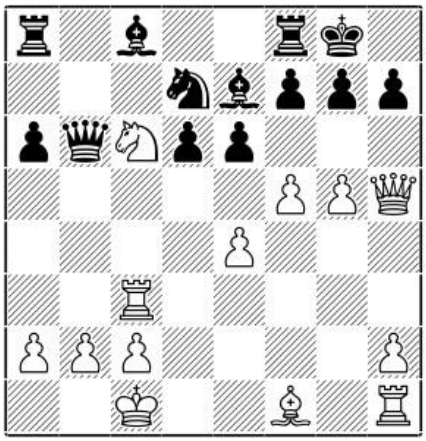
16...Qb6

What follows really has to be memorized. This should be quite manageable after playing through the game and main variations a couple of times. It is easier to remember moves when there is little choice.

17.Nc6

This is always played.

17.Rh3?? is refuted by a familiar motif: 17...Bxg5†! 18.Qxg5 Qxd4–+



17...Bf6!

Not an easy move to spot!

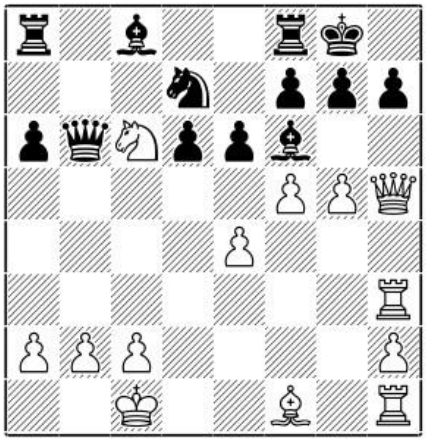
In the very first game to reach this position, our heroine erred with 17...Re8?? which is already a losing move: 18.fxe6 Ne5 19.exf7† Nxf7 20.Bc4+– T. Kosintseva – Ju Wenjun, Ankara 2012. We have the advantage of hindsight.

18.e5!

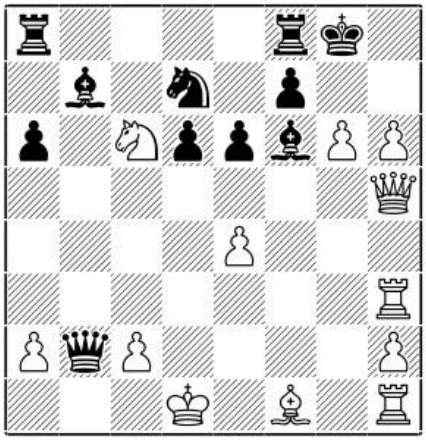
The point of this move is to close the diagonal leading to b2.

18.gxf6?! Nxf6 19.Ne7† Kh8³ is good for Black.

18.Rh3? is more complicated, but objectively unsound. In Palusa – E. Li, San Francisco 2019, Black missed the refutation:

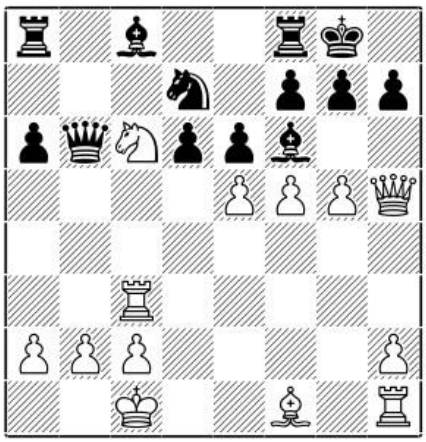


18...Qxb2†!N 19.Kd1 (19.Kd2 Bxg5†! 20.Qxg5 Qf6µ is a familiar scenario) 19...h6! 20.gxh6 g6 21.fxg6 Bb7



Despite the apparent danger on the kingside, the engines confirm that Black is totally winning. For instance, both 22.g7 and 22.Rg1 can be met by 22...Bxc6–+ when White has no major threat on the kingside.

The text move may also appear scary, so please remain calm.



18...g6!

Black must sidestep the 'Anastasia mate' which occurs after 18...Bxe5?? 19.Ne7† Kh8 20.Qxh7†! Kxh7 21.Rh3#.

18...dxe5?! is also best avoided, as 19.Rh3 h6 (the desperado 19...Bxg5† does not work here after 20.Qxg5 Qxc6 21.Rg1+–) 20.gxh6 Qf2 21.Kd1! is dangerous for Black.

19.Qh6?

This tempting move meets with a nice refutation.

White had to play:

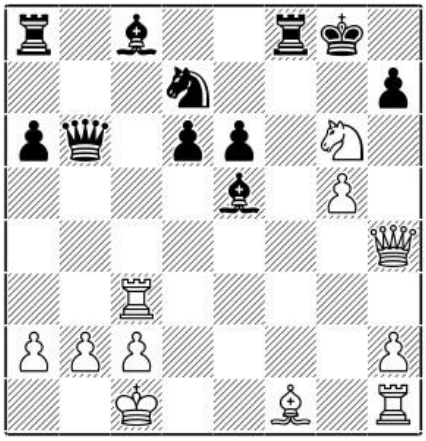
19.Qh4! Bxe5 20.Ne7† Kh8

20...Kg7?? 21.f6† Bxf6 22.Qh6† Kh8 23.gxf6 leads to a quick mate.

21.fxg6 fxg6 22.Nxg6† Kg8

22...Kg7? 23.Nxe5! Nxe5 24.Rh3 gave White a winning attack in Tanti – Camacho Dominguez, corr. 2014.

Now White has no real choice but to take a perpetual with:

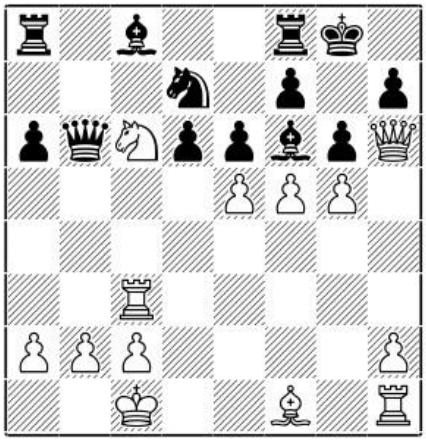


23.Ne7† Kh8

But no23...Kf7? 24.Qxh7† Ke8 25.Nxc8 and White wins.

24.Nxg6† Kg8

With a draw, as has occurred in a number of games.



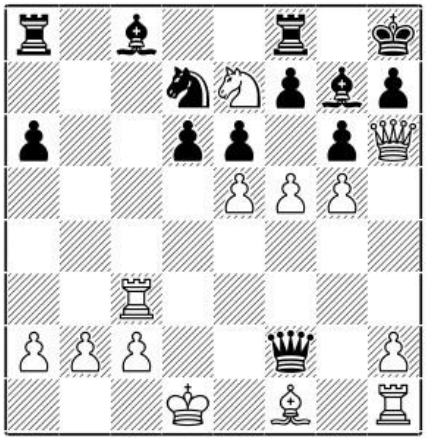
19...Qf2!

This is the only move not to lose – and it wins handily. Black threatens both ...Qe1# and ...Qf4† followed by ...Bxg5.

20.Kd1

Other moves offer no real resistance at all.

20...Bg7 21.Ne7† Kh8

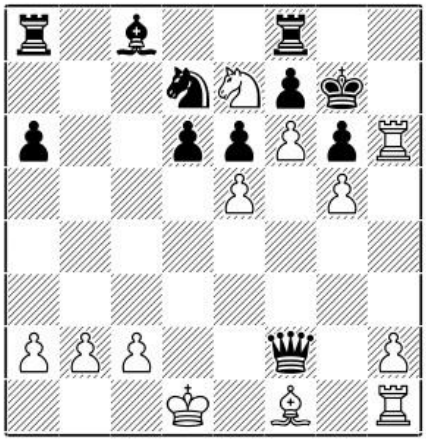


22.Qxh7†!?

This is as good a try as any. Instead 22.Qh3 exf5–+ leaves White material down with a terrible position.

22...Kxh7 23.Rh3† Bh6 24.Rxh6† Kg7 25.f6†

Fortunately, there is a big difference between mate and ‘almost mate’.

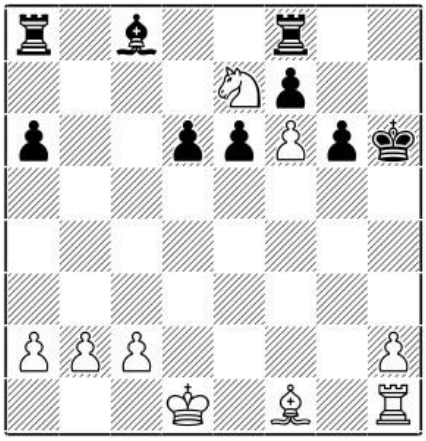


25...Nxf6 26.exf6† Qxf6

I would give this an exclamation mark, but it is the only legal move.

27.gxf6† Kxh6µ

The dust has cleared and Black is a healthy exchange up.



28.Rg1 a5!

A nice way to activate the rook. Black converted his advantage confidently.

29.c4 a4 30.Kc2 Ra5 31.Rg3 Rh5 32.h3 Rg5 33.Rd3 Rg1 34.Be2 Rg2 35.Kd1 d5 36.Ra3 Bd7 37.c5 Rb8 38.c6 Rxb2

0–1

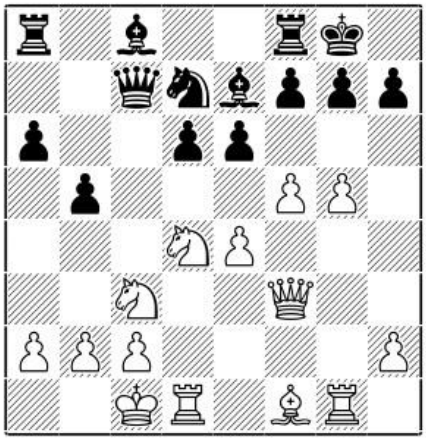
B34) 14.Rg1

GAME 29

Markus Hoemske – Gabriel Jimenez Molina

Correspondence 2014

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Bg5 e6 7.f4 Be7 8.Qf3 Qc7 9.0-0-0 Nbd7 10.g4 b5 11.Bxf6 Nxf6 12.g5 Nd7 13.f5! 0-0! 14.Rg1



White protects the g5-pawn and keeps various attacking options open. This is the most common move by far, although Black's path to an acceptable position is not too complicated.

14...b4

As is usually the case, 14...Ne5?! is too one-dimensional; White has good chances after 15.Qh3 or 15.Qg3.

15.Nce2

Obviously 15.f6?? is no good in view of 15...bxc3 16.fxe7 cxb2†–+ followed by 17...Re8.

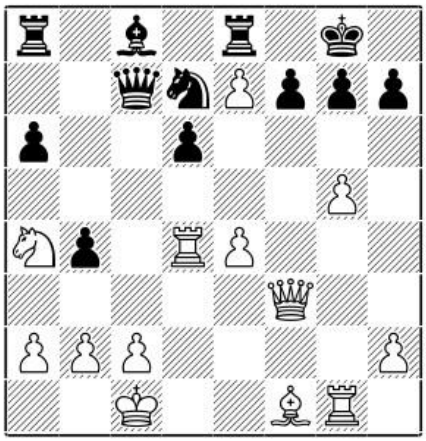
15.Na4!?

This move does not appear in the database but it is playable, and I even faced it myself a few years ago. The game continued:

15...e5

15...Nc5!?N 16.Nxc5 dxc5 17.f6 cxd4 18.fxe7 Qxe7 leads to an equal game, and 19.Qf6!? Qc5 20.Qxd4 is a funny possibility.

16.f6 exd4 17.fxe7 Re8 18.Rxd4



18...Rb8!?

I found this move at the board. I was familiar with the idea of not only protecting the b4-pawn but also preparing ...Rb6 if necessary, defending the d6-pawn (once the knight has been removed from a4 of course).

I also considered 18...Ne5 19.Qd1 Rxe7 when 20.Rxd6? Bg4!µ is good for Black, but I rejected it on account of 20.Rxb4, which is a sensible pawn grab.

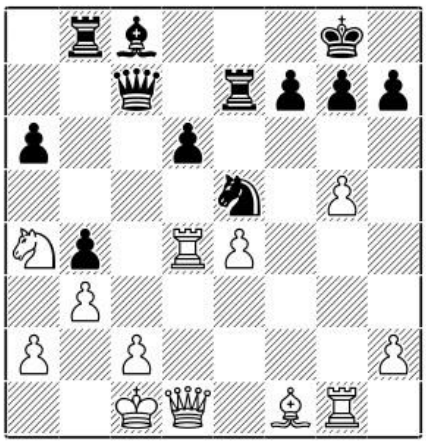
19.b3N

This is White's best.

My game continued 19.Be2?! Ne5 20.Qg3?! Bd7µ when White's queenside was about to get wrecked in Cote – Vigorito, Portsmouth 2017.

It is also worth noting that after 19.Qd1 Rxe7 White can hardly take the pawn, as 20.Rxd6? Bb7µ intending ...Bc6 gives Black a serious initiative.

19...Ne5 20.Qd1 Rxe7



21.Rxd6?!

This is the critical continuation but it seems too risky.

Correct is 21.Nb2 a5 with equality, since 22.Rxd6? is still no good due to 22...Bg4!µ.

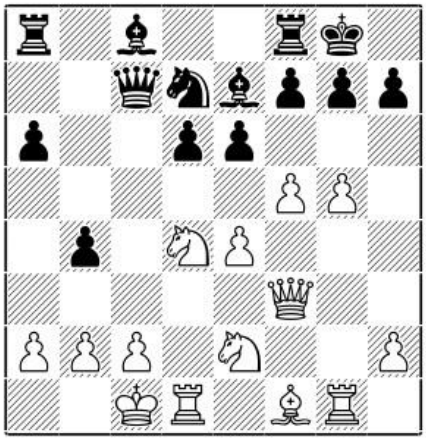
21...Bd7!

21...Bg4? 22.Qd5 Re6 23.Rxe6 fxe6 24.Qc5!± works out for White.

The text move is a useful finesse. White cannot move his knight due to the following line:

22.Nb2? Bg4!µ 23.Qd5 Re6!

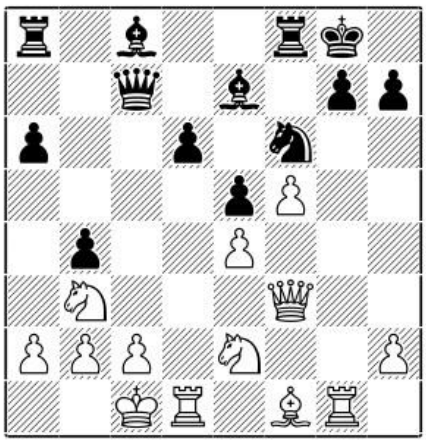
A neat trick: after 24.Rxe6 fxe6–+ White cannot avoid a winning fork on f3.



15...e5 16.f6

This is the standard reply to ...e5 in these positions, and White should play it here too.

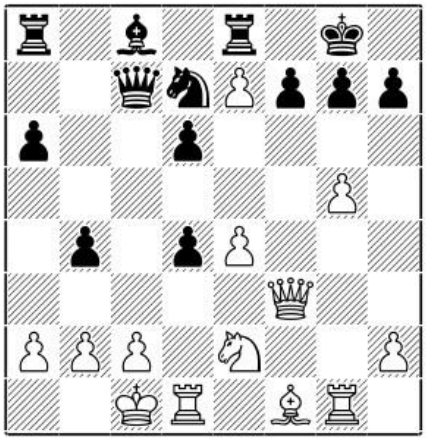
16.Nb3 f6 reaches a structure that is generally nice for Black. It is difficult for White to achieve anything on the kingside, while Black has ready-made play in the centre and on the queenside. For example: 17.gxf6 (17.h4? Bb7 [or 18...a5µ] 18.Kb1 Rac8µ was great for Black in Bosiocic – Hosseinipour, Hamedan 2017) 17...Nxf6



18.Ng3 Bb7 19.Bd3 a5„ Bracker – Blomqvist, Barcelona 2012.

16...exd4 17.fxe7 Re8

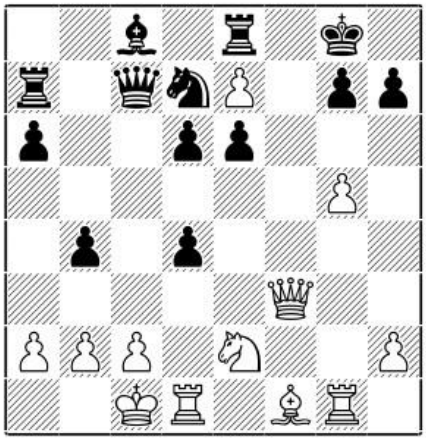
We have seen this indirect exchange of pieces before. If Black can get developed quickly, he will generally be doing fine.



18.Nxd4

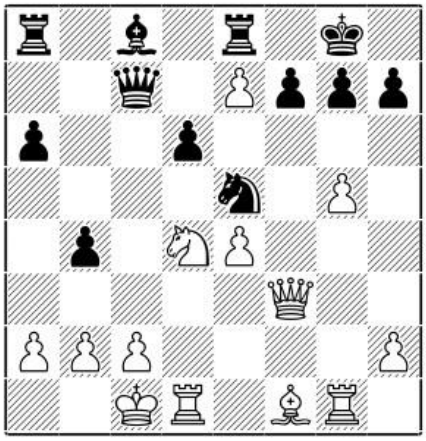
Another game continued 18.Rxd4 Ne5 19.Qg3 Qc5 and Black quickly grabbed the initiative: 20.Bh3 Bxh3 21.Qxh3 Rac8 22.Qb3 Rxe7 23.Rgd1 Nc4µ Pijpers – Raznikov, Dieren 2012.

18.e5!? Ra7! is a sharper continuation which petered out to equality in a correspondence game: 19.e6!? (after 19.exd6N 19...Qxd6 20.Nxd4 Ne5 21.Nf5 Bxf5 22.Qxf5 Qc5! followed by ...Rae7 Black is fine according to Goh Wei Ming) 19...fxe6



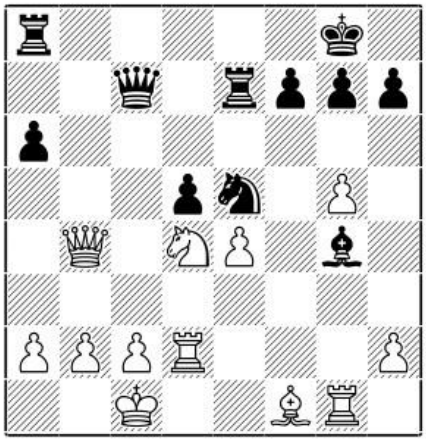
20.g6! hxg6 21.Nf4 Ne5 22.Qg3 Qxe7 23.Nxg6 Qf6 24.Rxd4 Nxg6 25.Qxg6 Qxg6 26.Rxg6 d5 27.Rxb4 Rf8 28.Bd3 a5= A draw ensued in Wilhelmi – Riedener, corr. 2012.

18...Ne5



19.Qf4

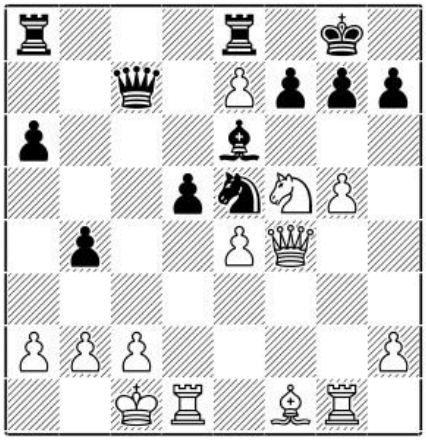
Some other games have continued 19.Qb3 Bg4 20.Rd2 Rxe7 21.Qxb4 when 21...d5!? is an interesting idea with the following tactical justification:



22.exd5? (White should prefer 22.Rg3 or 22.h3, although he has not achieved anything special with either move) 22...Nc6! 23.Qxe7 There is nothing else. 23...Nxe7 24.Rxg4 Nxd5µ

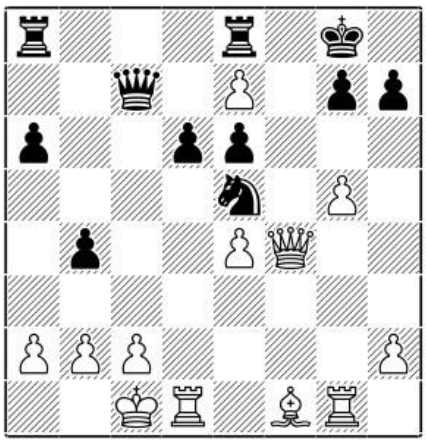
19...Be6 20.Kb1!?

After 20.Nf5 d5! Black threatens ...Nd3†. One example continued:



21.Qg3? (21.Kb1 should be preferred, when 21...dxe4 22.Qxe4 Bxf5 23.Qxf5 a5 followed by taking on e7 is level) 21...dxe4 22.Nh6† Kh8µ White had nothing to show for the pawn in Lindholm – Eggleston, London 2018.

Trading with 20.Nxe6 fxe6 only makes sense if White can attack the d6-pawn, but White cannot play 21.Qd2 because there is a fork on f3. Instead he may try:

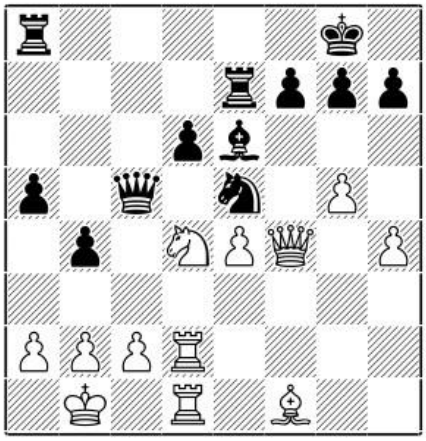


21.Rg2 (21.Rg3 Rab8!= intending 22.Qd2 Rb6 is a manoeuvre I mentioned before) 21...Rxe7 22.Rgd2 Rf8 23.Qe3 Qc5 24.Qxc5 dxc5 25.Be2 Rf4 Black's strong knight assured him of equal chances in Pommrich – Ntirlis, corr. 2014.

20...Rxe7 21.h4

21.Nf5!? Rd7 is also fine for Black, who will most likely follow up with ...Qc5.

21...Qc5 22.Rg2 a5 23.Rgd2



23...g6!

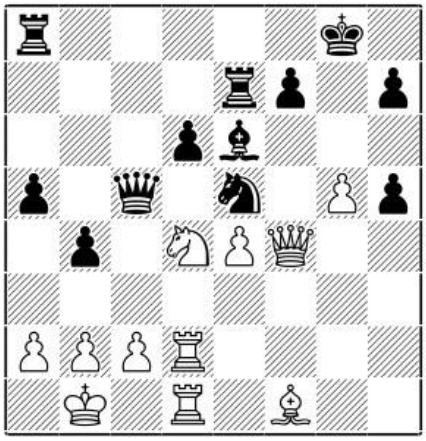
Black gives his king a little breathing room in preparation for the coming pawn sacrifice.

23...a4?! is inaccurate due to 24.Nxe6 Rxe6 (White has immediate threats after 24...fxe6 25.Rxd6) and now 25.Rd5! saw Black come under pressure in a couple of games, as opposed to 25.Bh3 Ng6! 26.Qg3 Qe5! 27.Qxe5 Rxe5 28.Rxd6 Kf8 when Black had adequate counterplay in Rakay – Kurgansky, corr. 2012.

24.Nxe6

24.Be2 Nc4 offers Black plenty of play.

24.h5 gxh5! is messier, but Black is still doing fine after:

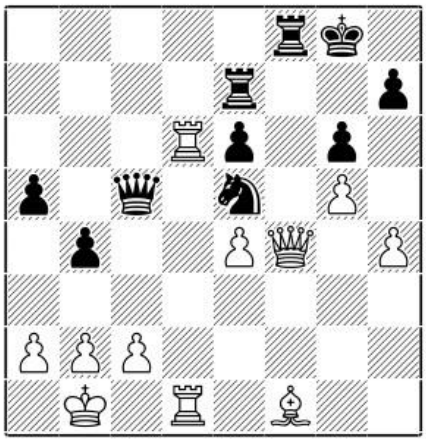


25.Nf5 Bxf5 26.exf5 Ng4 27.g6 fxg6 28.fxg6 Rae8 29.gxh7† Kh8,,

24...fxe6! 25.Rxd6 Rf8,,

Black's strong knight and active rook and

queen give him enough for the pawn.

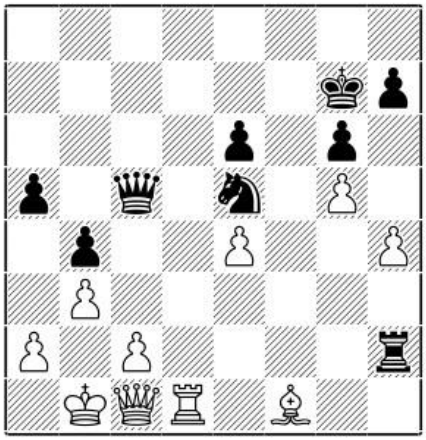


26.Rd8

26.Qd2 Rf2 gives Black a lot of activity.

26...Ref7 27.Rxf8† Rxf8 28.Qc1 Rf3 29.b3 Kg7 30.Ba6 Rf2 31.Bf1 Rh2

Over the board, I would really fancy Black's chances here. In a correspondence game, however, White's next (equalizing) move is not hard to find.



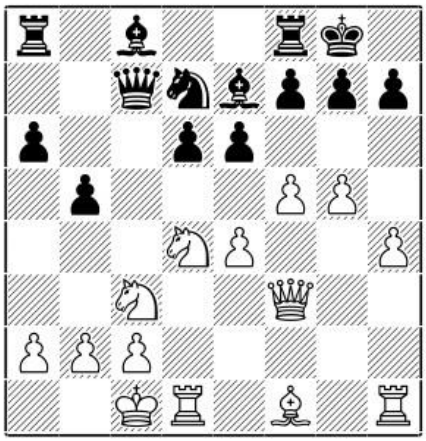
32.Bc4! Nxc4

32...Rxh4 avoids the forced draw, but after 33.Bxe6 Qe7 34.Bd5 Rg4 35.Rg1 Rxg1 36.Qxg1 Nf3 White is the one fighting for the initiative.

33.Rd7† Kg8 34.Rd8†

½–½

B35) 14.h4



This patient move was Negi's recommendation in *1.e4 vs The Sicilian I*, so it is clearly a move to be taken seriously. A kingside pawn storm is obviously quite a logical plan for White.

14...b4 15.Nce2

A rare alternative is:

15.Na4

This gives Black a choice of good continuations.

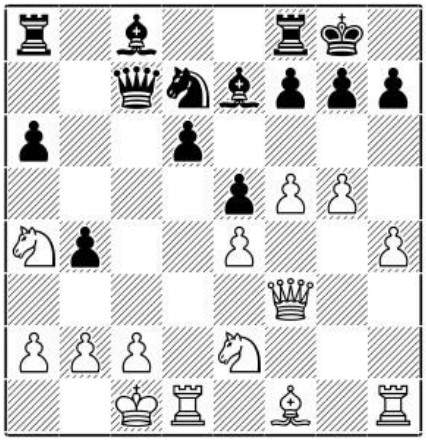
15...e5!?

This is the more complex and ambitious option.

15...Nc5N 16.Nxc5 dxc5 17.f6 cxd4 18.fxe7 Qxe7 19.Rxd4 Bb7= is a simpler way to play.

16.Ne2

After 16.f6 exd4 17.fxe7 Re8= White can hardly hope for an advantage with his knight on such a square.



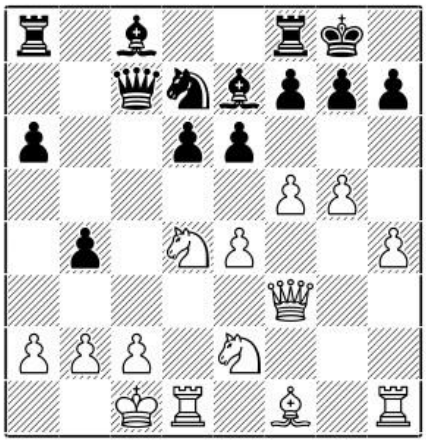
16...f6!N

16...Qc6?! 17.b3 only helped White in Blasi – Kusturin, corr. 1984.

I would also avoid 16...Bb7?! 17.f6 gxf6 18.Ng3 with a strong attack.

17.Qb3† Kh8 18.Qxb4 Rb8

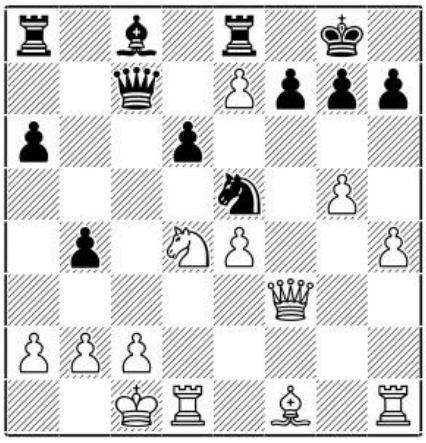
With unclear play.



15...Bb7!

Black should not be tempted by 15...Ne5?!, as it is only one happy piece. 16.Qg3 d5 17.fxe6 fxe6 occurred in Arenas – Cano, Medellin 2017, when 18.exd5N 18...Bd6 19.Nxe6± would have been simple and strong.

15...e5?! is a typical move to consider, but White's pawns are pretty fast after: 16.f6! (this is almost always necessary, as 16.Nb3?! f6! 17.g6 h6³ left Black's kingside stable in Savchenko – Ju Wenjun, Moscow 2012) 16...exd4 17.fxe7 Re8 18.Nxd4 Ne5

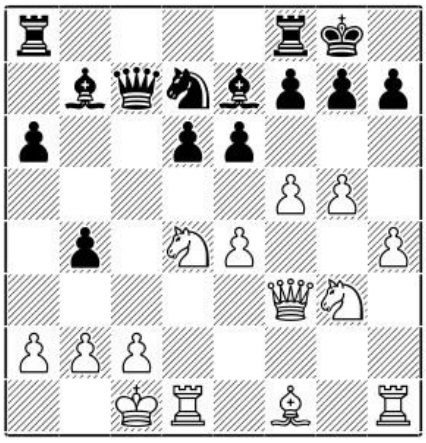


An important improvement is 19.Qg2!N as indicated by Negi, when White's play seems easier. (Instead 19.Qf2 was seen in Pourkashiyan – Hejazipour, Tashkent 2016, when 19...Rxe7N 20.h5 Bg4! 21.Be2 Bxe2 22.Qxe2 Qc4! 23.Qxc4 Nxc4 would have equalized, as Negi points out.

Black has also tried 15...exf5 but 16.Nxf5!N (rather than 16.exf5?! Bb7 17.Qh3 Bxh1 18.Qxh1 d5! when Black had good play in Tari – Esserman, Gibraltar 2016) 16...Ne5 17.Qg3² again gives White easy play.

We have a final branching point where **B351)** 16.Ng3 and **B352)** 16.fxe6 should be checked, although **B353)** 16.Kb1!? and **B354)** 16.Bg2 are the more challenging options.

B351) 16.Ng3



Originally I had noted this move as an untested possibility, and briefly mentioned Black's best reply. However, I subsequently encountered it in a 2019 game, and it is worth adding a few of the details which I learned from that encounter.

16...d5!

This should be perfectly satisfactory, if followed up correctly.

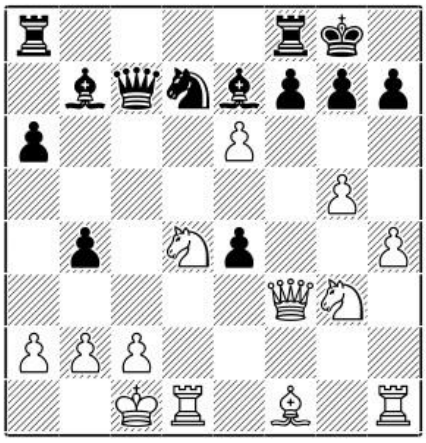
17.fxe6 dxe4!N

This seems like the most convincing solution.

17...fxe6 18.Qg4?! Nc5 worked out well for Black in Bryant – Vigorito, Greensboro 2019, the continuation of which can be found in variation B352 below, where the position arises via a different move order. In my preparation I had checked the Garcia Ruiz – Eggleston game quoted in variation B352, and was ready to play the improvement on Black's 18th move as noted in that line. When the current move order arose over

the board, I pieced things together and obtained the position I wanted – but the change of move order gives White an extra opportunity here, as my editor pointed out. 18.Nxe6!N was more critical, when the game goes on but Black has to be more careful.

Before moving on, it is worth noting that 17...Nc5!?N is another idea which can be worth considering in these positions. The critical continuation is 18.exf7† Rxf7 19.Ngf5 Kh8 20.exd5 g6 21.Qg3 Qxg3 22.Nxg3 Bd6 when Black has a lot of activity but he still has to justify the investment of two pawns.



18.exf7†

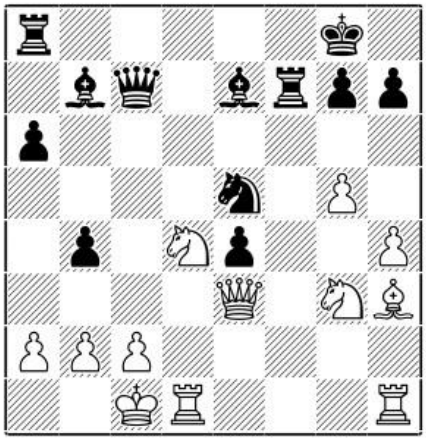
18.Qe3 can be met by 18...Ne5 with a likely transposition, although 18...Nb6 and 18...Bd6 are reasonable alternatives – as is the case on the next move in the main line below.

18...Rxf7 19.Qe3 Ne5

It was not my initial intention to give another long line, but a lot of the moves are logical and relatively forced on both sides, making me think of what Svidler has called a "clicking party".

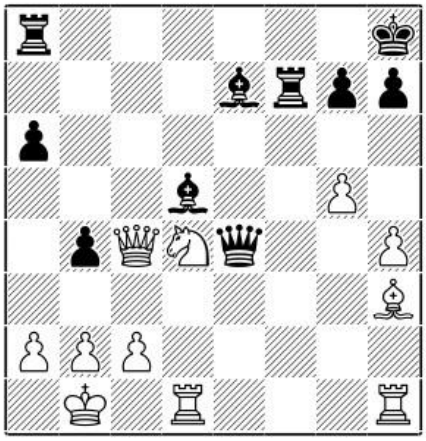
20.Bh3

20.Nxe4? Ng4 wins material.



20...Kh8 21.Nxe4 Nc4 22.Qe2 Qf4† 23.Kb1 Qxe4 24.Qxc4 Bd5

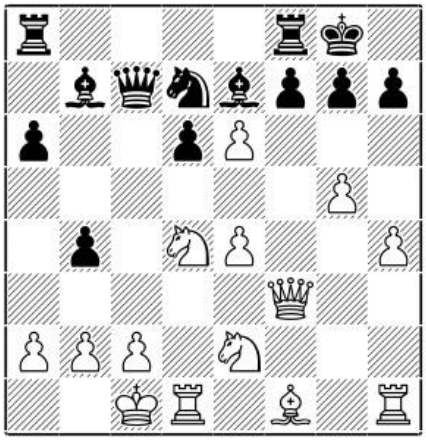
Forcing the white queen to step into a discovered attack.



25.Qc7 Bxg5 26.Qa5 Bd8 27.Qxb4 Bxh4

Material is equal and the engine evaluation remains close to 0.00, although White's task is slightly trickier due to Black's bishop pair.

B352) 16.fxe6

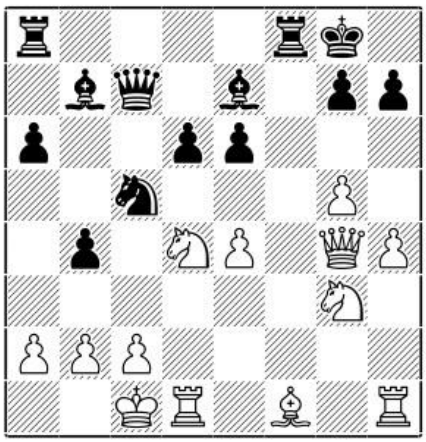


16...Nc5! 17.Ng3 fxe6

17...d5!?N transposes to 17...Nc5!?N in the notes to variation B351 above.

18.Qg4?!

18.Qe3 is a better try, although 18...Rad8 was still quite pleasant for Black in Schild – Morcin, corr. 2014.

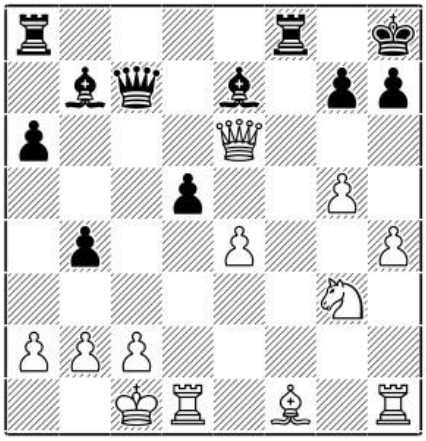


18...d5!

18...Rf2 was reasonable for Black in Garcia Ruiz – Eggleston, Barcelona 2018, but the text move is more incisive. Interestingly, although Black has only played this way in one correspondence game, the text move also transposes to my recent game, as well as another game from way back in 1982!

19.Nxe6 Nxe6 20.Qxe6† Kh8

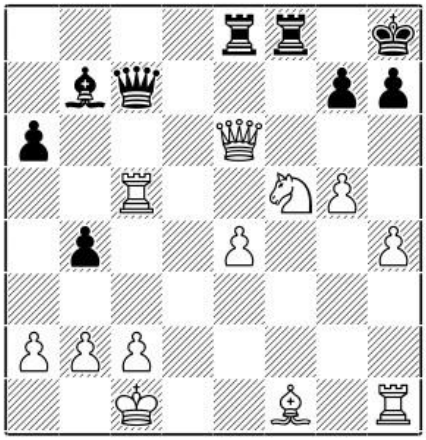
Black has a tremendous initiative.



21.Nf5

21.exd5 is most accurately refuted by 21...Bd6!N (21...Rae8 is slightly less precise, but it was still good enough to give Black winning positions in Wedberg – De Firmian, Gausdal 1982, and O'Brien – Wood, corr. 2012) 22.Nh5 Rae8 23.Qg4 Bc8 24.Qd4 Qf7–+ and White's knight is doomed.

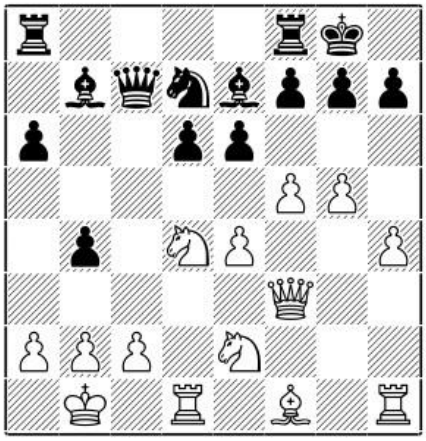
21...Bc5 22.Rxd5 Rae8 23.Rxc5



23...Qf4†N–+

Winning the queen outright would have been the cleanest finish, although 23...Qxc5 24.Qd7 Rxf5 25.Qxe8† Rf8 26.Qd7 Bxe4 was still good enough to force White's resignation in Bryant – Vigorito, Greensboro 2019.

B353) 16.Kb1!?



This is a much trickier continuation than the previous lines. White has scored a couple of good victories with this move, but a correspondence game reveals the best reply:

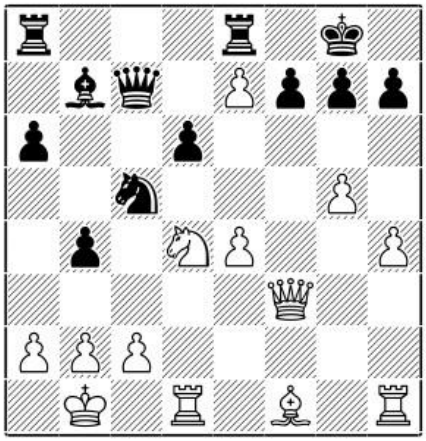
16...e5!

16...Rac8?! proved insufficient after 17.Bh3 e5 18.f6 exd4 19.fxe7 Rfe8 20.Nxd4± in Sutovsky – Huschenbeth, Isle of Man 2017.

16...Nc5 17.Ng3 d5 18.f6 dxe4 19.Qg4 Bd6 20.g6! gives White a strong attack, and Black's resourceful defence did not save him after 20...hxg6 21.h5 Bxg3 22.hxg6 Qf4 23.Qh5 Qh6 24.fxg7 Qxg7 25.gxf7† Rxf7 26.Qxc5+– in D. Fischer – Eggleston, London 2018.

17.f6 exd4 18.fxe7 Rfe8 19.Nxd4 Nc5

Black has plenty of counterplay. An amusing possibility is:



20.Nf5!?N

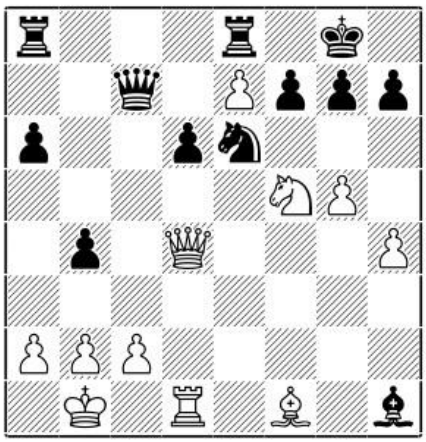
20.Bc4 Rxe7 21.Nf5 Rxe4 22.Bd5 Re5 23.Bxb7 Qxb7 24.Qxb7 Nxb7 25.Nxd6 Nxd6 26.Rxd6 ½–½ was the peaceful conclusion of K. Jensen – Repanic, corr. 2018.

20...Bxe4 21.Qf4 Bxh1

21...Bxf5 22.Qxf5 Rxe7= is also fine.

22.Qd4 Ne6

White appears to be lost as he is down a rook, but there is an attractive save with:



23.Qxg7†! Nxg7 24.Nh6† Kh8 25.Nxf7† Kg8 26.Nh6†

With perpetual check.

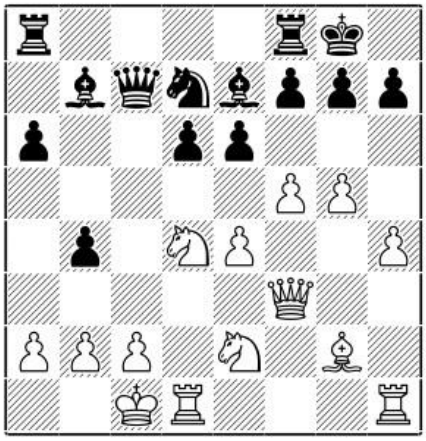
B354) 16.Bg2

GAME 30

Hugues Baufays – Franjo Lovakovic

Correspondence 2015

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Bg5 e6 7.f4 Be7 8.Qf3 Qc7 9.0-0-0 Nbd7 10.g4 b5 11.Bxf6 Nxf6 12.g5 Nd7 13.f5! 0-0! 14.h4 b4 15.Nce2 Bb7! 16.Bg2



This was Negi's suggestion and it has been the most popular choice.

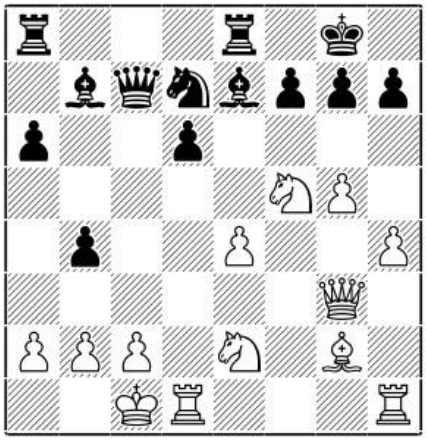
16...Rac8!?

Black has the relative luxury of being able to choose between three sound options.

The most popular continuation has been:

16...exf5 17.Nxf5 Rfe8 18.Qg3

Negi reached this position and considered 18...Bf8 and 18...Ne5, but there is a third option which has held up perfectly well in correspondence games:



18...Rac8! 19.Nh6†

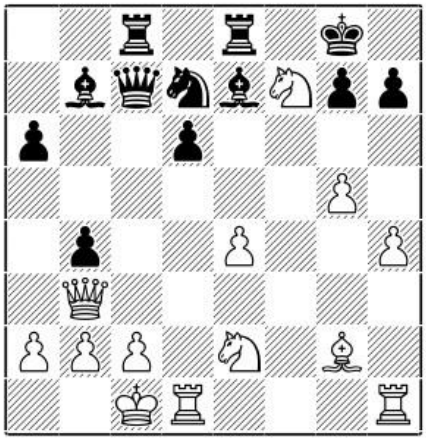
19.Ned4?! Bf8 was better for Black in Crapulli – Fragniere, corr. 2015, and a few other games.

19...Kh8!

but not 19...Kf8 20.Nd4!

20.Nxf7† Kg8 21.Qb3!?

White has settled for an immediate draw with 21.Nh6† in two correspondence games.



21...d5! 22.exd5 Bf8!

After these two accurate moves, White found nothing better than taking the draw.

23.Nh6†

23.d6? backfires after 23...Qxc2†! 24.Qxc2 Rxc2† 25.Kxc2 Rxe2† and Black wins.

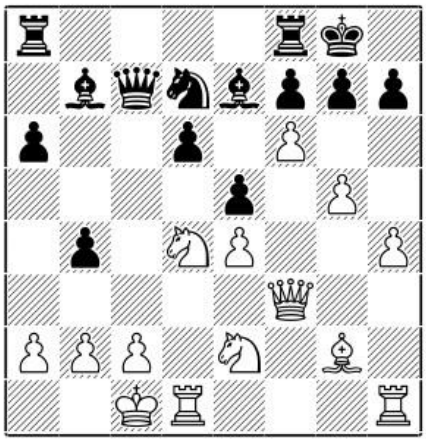
23...Kh8 24.Nf7†

A draw was agreed in Cvak – Nucci, corr. 2017. (24.d6? Qxc2†! wins as above.)

16...e5!?

This is another thematic move and arguably the most practical solution, provided that Black follows up correctly.

17.f6



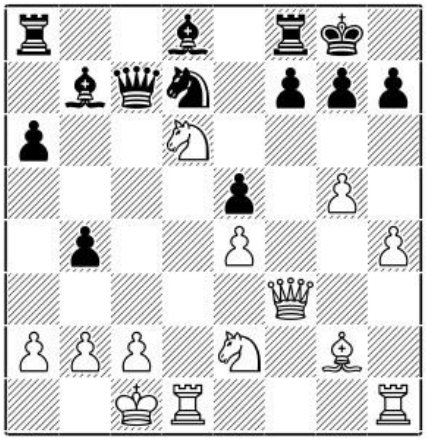
17...Bxf6!

17...exd4 18.fxe7 Rfe8 19.Nxd4 gave White some initiative in Baron – Kaspi, Escaldes 2017.

18.Nf5

18.gxf6 Nxf6µ wins back the piece immediately, since moving the knight allows ...Bxe4, threatening mate while attacking a bunch of pieces.

18...Bd8 19.Nxd6



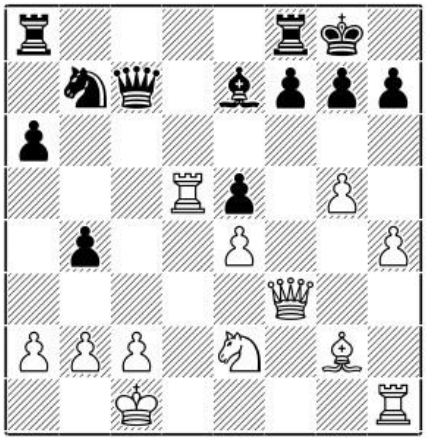
19...Nc5!

Negi only offers 19...Bc6 20.g6! fxg6 21.Qb3† Kh8 22.Nf7† Rxf7 23.Qxf7±. Even in that line, 20...Nc5! is an improvement which proved to be okay for Black in one correspondence game, but the text move is more straightforward.

20.Nxb7

20.Ng3 gives Black a pleasant choice between 20...g6 21.Kb1 a5,, and 20...Bc8!? 21.Ngf5 Be6 22.Kb1 Na4!,, with good prospects in either case.

20...Nxb7 21.Rd5 Be7



22.Qd3 Nc5 23.Qc4 Rad8

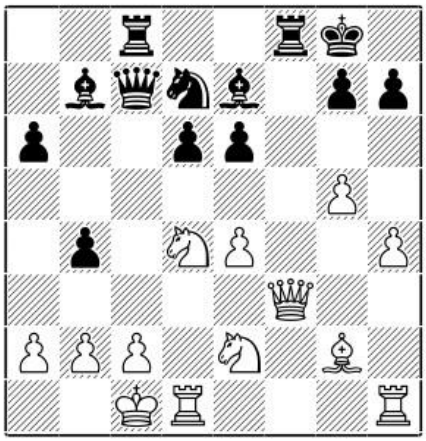
Black had a comfortable game in Burke – Brattain, Saint Louis 2018.

17.fxe6

17.Kb1 e5 18.f6 exd4 19.fxe7 Rfe8 20.Nxd4 Rxe7= looks fine for Black, as he already has his counterplay going against the e4- and c2-pawns.

17...fxe6

Now the play becomes somewhat forcing.

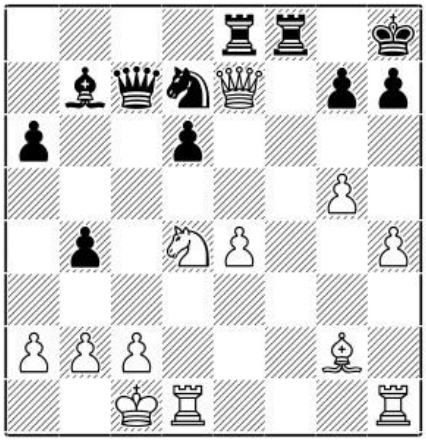


18.Qh3 e5

Obviously the knight cannot move because of mate on c2.

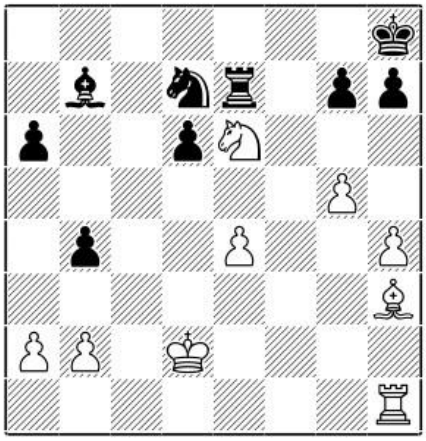
19.Qe6† Kh8 20.Qxe7 exd4 21.Nxd4 Rce8

Apparently trapping the queen, but White has a resource.



22.Ne6! Qxc2† 23.Kxc2 Rf2† 24.Rd2 Rxd2† 25.Kxd2 Rxe7 26.Bh3

This was all given by Negi! Theory runs deep – although should you wish to follow this path (as opposed to one of the alternatives given at move 16 above), the forcing nature of the play makes the line easy enough to memorize.



26...Kg8!

It is more important to secure the position, especially the back rank, than it is to grab a pawn.

Negi only considers 26...Bxe4 27.Rc1! Nb6 28.Rf1!? h6 29.Ke3 Bg6 30.Kd4!?[2] when Black is under some pressure.

27.Rc1 Nf8

The c8-square remains covered, so Black is able to simplify. White's king is still more active, but Black has counterplay against White's pawns.

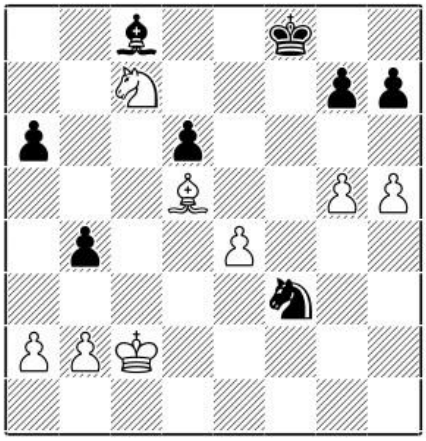
28.Rc7

There is nothing better.

28...Rxc7 29.Nxc7 Ng6 30.Be6†

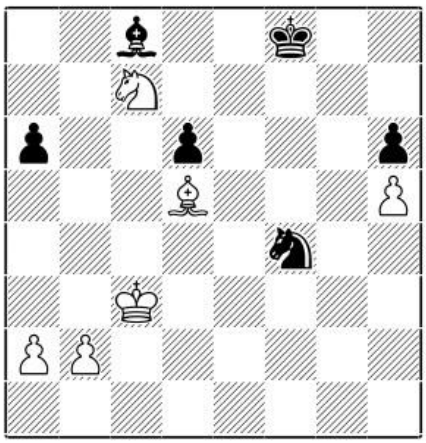
30.h5 Ne5 also looks like a draw.

30...Kf8 31.h5 Ne5 32.Bd5 Bc8 33.Kc2 Nf3



34.Kb3

Ntirlis provides an alternative drawing line: 34.e5!? Nxe5 35.Kb3 h6 36.gxh6 (or 36.g6 Ke7 37.Kxb4 Nd3† 38.Ka5 Nxb2=) 36...gxh6 37.Kxb4 Nd3† 38.Kc3 Nf4

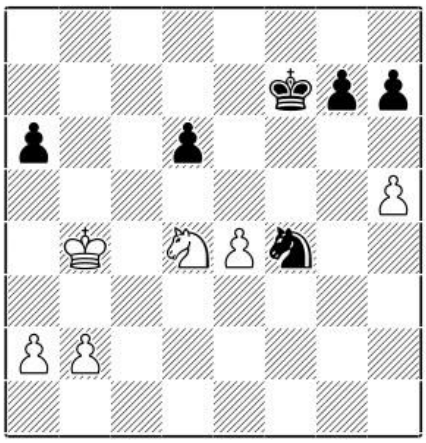


39.Bf3 Ke7 40.b4 Kd8 41.Nd5 Nxd5† 42.Bxd5 Kc7 43.a4 Bd7 44.a5 Bg4=

34...Nxg5 35.Kxb4 Nh3 36.Be6

After 36.a4 Nf4 37.Bc4 Nxh5 38.a5 g5 Black has enough counterplay.

36...Bxe6 37.Nxe6† Kf7 38.Nd4 Nf4



39.Ka5 Nd3 40.b4 g5 41.hxg6† Kxg6 42.Nf3 h5 43.a4 Nb2 44.b5 axb5 45.Kxb5 Nxa4!

46.Kxa4 h4! draws by one tempo, so White gave up trying to win.

½–½

Conclusion

10.g4 is undoubtedly the critical test of Black's classical Najdorf set-up. After discussing a few sidelines after 10...b5 11.Bxf6 Nxf6 12.g5 Nd7, we moved on to the big main line of 13.f5!, beginning with a walk down memory lane to see Black's ups and downs with a few of his main options. For a while it seemed like Black was permanently down, until Ju Wenjun revived 13...0-0!. Although generalizations can only go so far in sharp positions, there are some thematic ideas which can help to guide us.

The direct 14.f6 looks scary, but Black will be a pawn up and it is not so easy for White to attack without control of the dark squares. As long as Black avoids any early pitfalls and survives the first wave of White's initiative, he will hold lasting positional advantages.

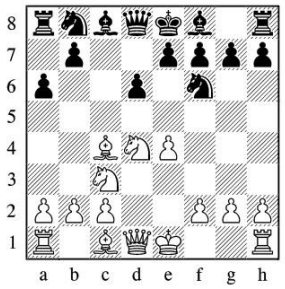
Exchanging with 14.fxe6 leads to an endgame which should be balanced with model play, but in practice Black's initiative and bishop pair have tended to outweigh White's extra pawn. There is not much to fear here.

The lunge 14.Qh5 contains its share of venom, but White also takes great risks with scant room for error. With correct play, it should all end in a draw.

14.Rg1 is the main line in terms of popularity. After 14...b4 15.Nce2 e5 16.f6 exd4 17.fxe7 Re8 the fireworks have died down and we get a strategic battle, where chances look pretty even.

Finally, Negi's recommended 14.h4 entails more of a slow and steady approach. After 14...b4 15.Nce2 there is some choice, especially regarding the timing of the typical ...e5 move. 15...Bb7! looks best, when the tricky 16.Kb1!? has caught a few players off guard, but 16...e5! seems fully satisfactory. Negi's 16.Bg2 is another option, but we saw that Black has a number of decent ways to meet it.

Chapter 11



6.♗c4

Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.♗c4 e6 7.♗b3 ♘c6!? 8.♗e3 ♗e7 9.0–0 0–0 10.f4 ♘xd4 11.♗xd4 b5

A) 12.a3 *Game 31* 320

B) 12.e5! dxe5 13.fxe5 Nd7 14.Ne4 Bb7 15.Nd6 Bxd6 16.exd6 Qg5 324

B1) 17.Qe2 *Game 32* 325

B2) 17.Rf2 a5! 333

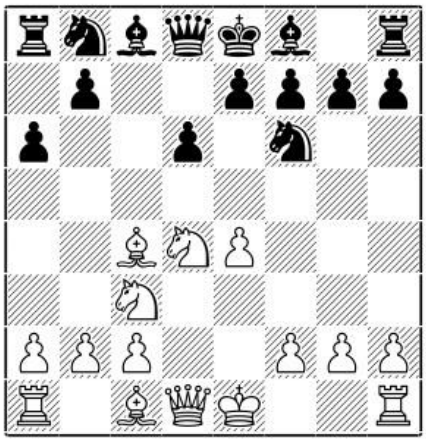
B21) 18.a4 333

B22) 18.Qe2!? *Game 33* 335

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Bc4

I will refer to this set-up as the Sozin. Technically speaking, the 'pure' Sozin involves 6.Bc4 against the Classical Sicilian (where Black plays 5...Nc6 instead of 5...a6), whereas 6.Bc4 against the Najdorf is sometimes called the Fischer-Sozin, due to the contributions of the eleventh World Champion. However, as I mentioned in the Introduction on page 10, we will be playing ...Nc6 soon anyway, so the term 'Sozin' works fine for me.

Whatever you prefer to call it, 6.Bc4 has a long history against both the Classical and Najdorf move orders. White develops quickly and brings his bishop to an active post. He will often try to increase the scope of the bishop with a quick f4-f5, although this can also leave the e4-pawn weak. White can castle on either side and try to attack with pieces or pawns, so Black must be ready for anything.



6...e6

6...e5? is obviously a positional error here, as White's last move puts him in a great position to exploit the d5-outpost.

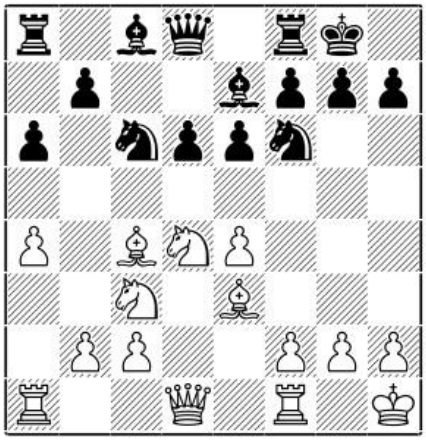
7.Bb3

This flexible retreat is by far the most popular move.

The main alternatives are 7.0-0 and 7.Be3, neither of which presents us with any problem, as

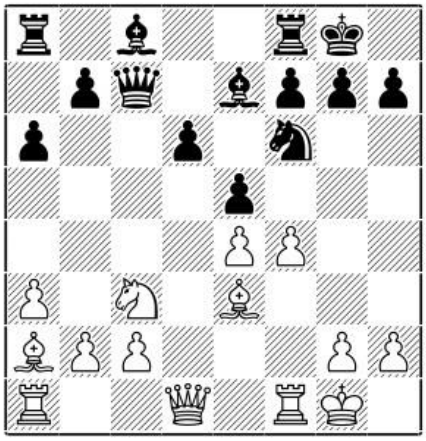
we can simply play 7...Nc6 anyway, with a likely transposition to one of our main lines after a few moves. It should also be noted that 7...b5 is a good alternative: after the normal 8.Bb3, Black has a pleasant version of the popular 7.Bb3 b5 variation because White has lost some important options.

The only deviations that avoid a quick transposition are the early advances of White's a-pawn. For instance, 7.a4 has been played by some strong GMs including Kuzmin, Emms and Areshchenko. Here our choice of 7...Nc6 becomes even more attractive, as the b4-square might become relevant; and we were not in a hurry to play ...b5 anyway. Play may continue: 8.0-0 Be7 9.Be3 0-0 10.Kh1

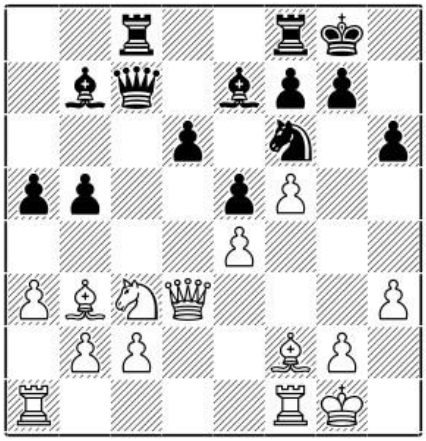


10...Qc7 (the isolated pawn position that results from 10...d5 11.exd5 exd5 is also fine, for instance: 12.Bb3 Re8 13.h3 Be6 14.Qf3 Ne5 15.Qe2 Bb4 16.Nxe6 fxe6 17.Bd2 Nc6= Emms – Krush, Hastings 2000) 11.Qe2 Bd7 12.f4 Rac8 13.Ba2 Nxd4 14.Bxd4 e5 15.Be3 Be6= Emms – Grischuk, Esbjerg 2000.

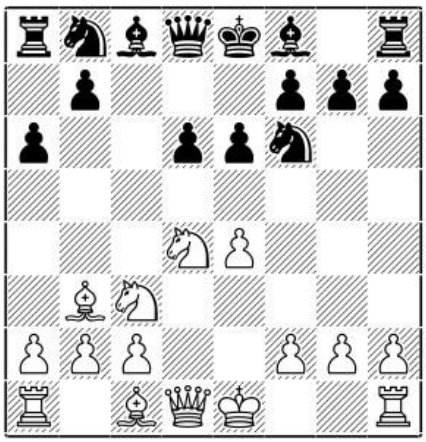
7.a3 is a pretty timid move which can be met similarly. 7...Nc6 (7...b5 is a decent alternative but there's no reason to deviate from our usual plan) 8.Ba2 Be7 9.0-0 0-0 10.Be3 Qc7 11.f4 Nxd4 12.Bxd4 e5 13.Be3



13...b5 (13...Be6 14.f5 Bxa2 15.Rxa2 Rfd8 16.Bg5 d5! also worked well for Black in Jurkovic – Stocek, Nova Gorica 2004) 14.f5 Bb7 15.Qd3 h6 16.h3 Rac8 17.Bf2 a5 18.Bb3 Now in Praggnanandhaa – Gopal, Gibraltar 2018, Black missed a nice idea:



18...a4!N 19.Bd5 (19.Ba2 b4! 20.axb4 a3 works out perfectly) 19...Nxd5 20.exd5 Ba6 Black has a useful initiative.

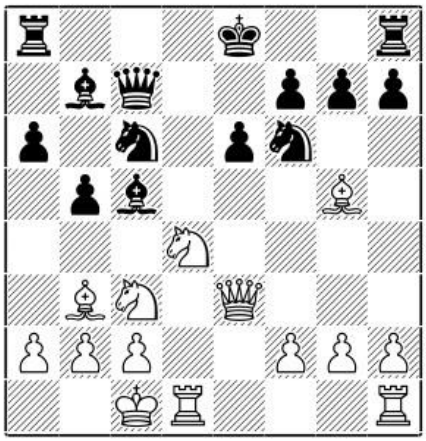


7...Nc6!?

All right, this is going to be a controversial move. Some will regard this as not a 'real' Najdorf. Very well, but the Sozin is the Sozin and we have to make a decision here.

Long ago, I went for the normal Najdorf move 7...b5, and after 8.0-0 Be7 9.Qf3 (the old 9.f4 is quite nice for Black but no one plays this way anymore) the play is quite solid for both sides, and White has not loosened his centre.

However, the newer plan of 8.Bg5!? Be7 9.Qf3 followed by long castling has changed things, as there are a great many sharp lines that require hardcore memorization. A good example is: 9...Qc7 10.e5 Bb7 11.exd6 Bxd6 12.Qe3 Bc5 13.0-0-0 Nc6



14.Qxe6†!? This amazing move was introduced by Ivanchuk, who used it to defeat Karjakin in 2008. It should not yield an advantage for White, but you would have to memorize a bunch of sharp lines just to reach a drawish endgame.

When I started playing the Najdorf, the once maligned 7...Nbd7 was beginning to make its comeback. White has a lot of options on every move though, and I personally never played this line. Another slight drawback of 7...Nbd7 is that it cannot be played against 7.0-0 (since 8.Bxe6! would give White a huge attack), although 7...b5 is admittedly a good choice then.

So what's good about 7...Nc6? Well, I have played this move for a long time, and I think the ensuing positions should suit Najdorf players just as much as those after 7...b5 and 7...Nbd7. The Sozin is not so topical nowadays – I think because all three of the aforementioned 7th-move options are holding up quite well for Black. If I recommended 7...b5 or 7...Nbd7, I would mostly be mimicking the choices of authors such as Ftacnik, Georgiev/Kolev and Andrasian, not to mention the digital repertoires of Bologan and Huschenbeth. I hope to add something valuable to chess literature with 7...Nc6, as it is rarely covered, and a lot of the so-called theory is plain wrong!

I have also found that a lot of White players hesitate after 7...Nc6 – like it is not an 'official' move or something. Bryan Smith's recent Najdorf book does not even mention the possibility in the Sozin chapter! Another little bonus is that if you have any experience with the Classical Sicilian, you will already know something about the ensuing positions.

White has three main ways to play: he can castle kingside and play f2-f4; he can play f2-f4 and Qf3 intending to castle long; or he can play Be3 and Qe2 followed by long castling (the Velimirovic Attack).

8.Be3

Generally the bishop moves to this square in all three of the above scenarios, so it is no surprise that White starts with this move in the great majority of games. Here are a few sidelines where he tries to do without it:

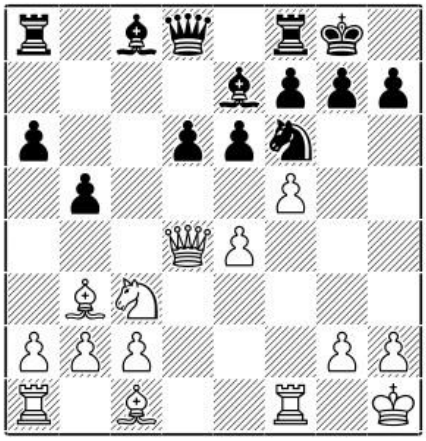
8.f4 Be7 9.0-0 (9.Be3 leads to the next chapter) transposes to the 9.f4 line in the note immediately below.

8.0-0 Be7 9.Kh1

9.f4 is met by 9...0-0 and since 10.f5?? Qb6 11.Be3 e5–+ loses a piece for White, he should transpose to normal paths with 10.Kh1 or 10.Be3.

9...0-0 10.f4 Nxd4 11.Qxd4 b5 12.f5

12.a3 Rb8!? 13.f5 a5÷ offers Black plenty of counterplay.



12...b4!?

An interesting move, though by no means the only option.

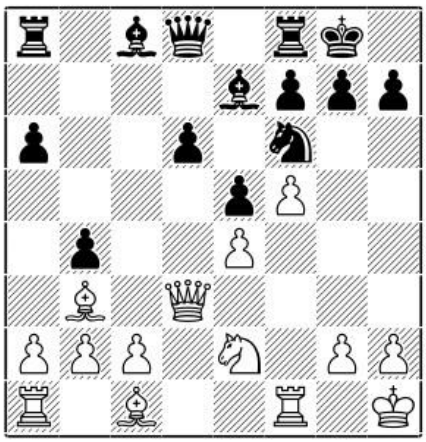
12...Rb8 and 12...exf5!? 13.exf5 Bb7 are decent alternatives.

13.Ne2?!

White should settle for 13.Qxb4 d5 14.Qd4 dxe4 15.Qxd8 Rxd8 16.fxe6 Bxe6 with approximate equality.

13...e5 14.Qd3

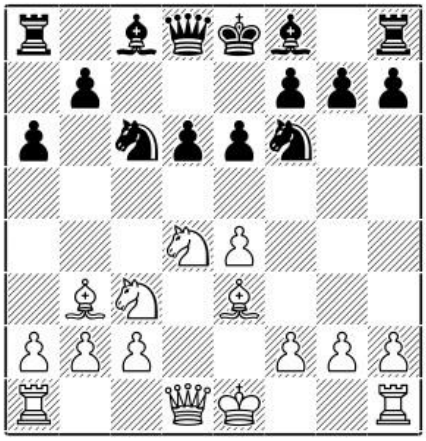
This occurred in Bykovtsev – Krush, Saint Louis 2016. Black has more than one promising continuation but I would prefer:



14...Bb7!N 15.Ng3 a5

With excellent prospects for Black.

After the text move we reach another big decision for Black.



8...Be7

This is the classical move.

I have also played the big alternative 8...Qc7 several times, with the idea of ...Na5. This works well if White goes for the Velimirovic Attack, but matters are less simple if White castles kingside. An important point is that ...Nxb3 can often be met by cxb3! when the queen will be uncomfortable on the c-file.

9.0-0

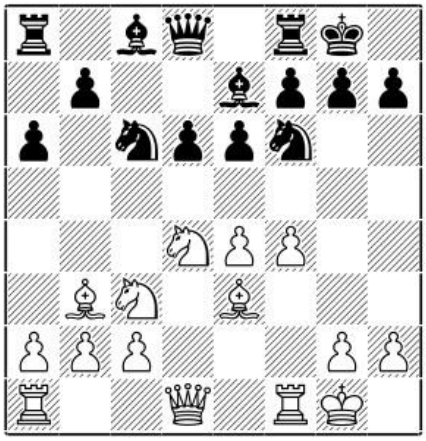
Straightforward play. 9.f4 0-0 10.0-0 would transpose.

9...0-0

9...Qc7 is still playable, as is 9...Na5!?, but we will stick with simple development.

10.f4

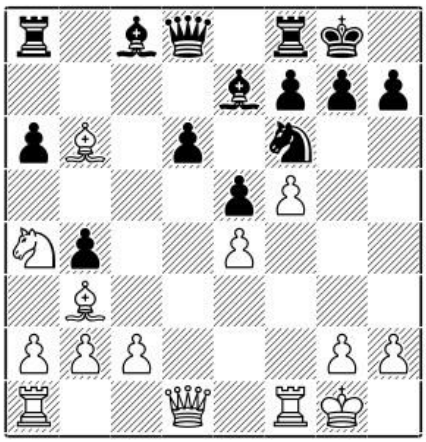
Now White is ready for f4-f5, putting pressure on the light-squares. Black's response is thematic: he has to create counterplay, and quickly.



10...Nxd4 11.Bxd4 b5

The threat is obviously ...b4 to win the e4-pawn. We will analyse **A)** 12.a3 followed by the more popular and challenging **B)** 12.e5!.

Instead 12.f5?! is strategically desirable, but it does not address Black's threat12...b4 13.Na4 (13.fxe6 does not work: 13...bxc3 14.exf7† Kh8 15.Bxc3 Bg4 16.Qd3 Bh5µ) 13...e5 14.Bb6



14...Qe8! 15.Be3 Bb7 16.Nb6 Rb8 (16...Bxe4!? 17.Nxa8 Qxa8© offers excellent compensation but, as the old saying goes, it is better to sacrifice the opponent's pieces!) 17.Nd5 (17.Bd5 Bd8!³) 17...Nxe4 White had no real compensation for the pawn in Kovacs – Trapl, Decin 1978.

A) 12.a3

GAME 31

Robert Fischer – Boris Spassky

Reykjavik (4) 1972

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6

The actual move order of the game was 5...Nc6 6.Bc4 e6 7.Bb3 Be7 8.Be3 0-0 9.0-0 a6.

6.Bc4

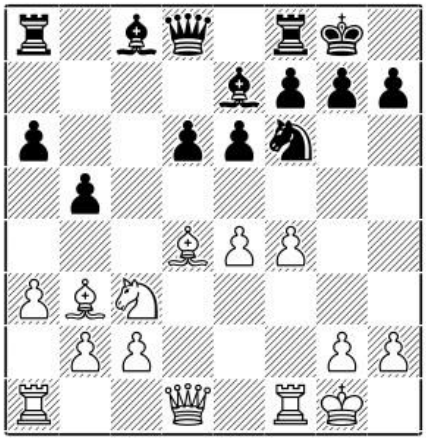
The Sozin was a great favourite of Robert James Fischer, and he had a tremendous score with it. As a Najdorf devotee himself, he also developed many ideas for Black.

6...e6 7.Bb3 Nc6!? 8.Be3 Be7 9.0-0 0-0

After the earlier move-order switch, we rejoin the main game.

10.f4 Nxd4 11.Bxd4 b5 12.a3

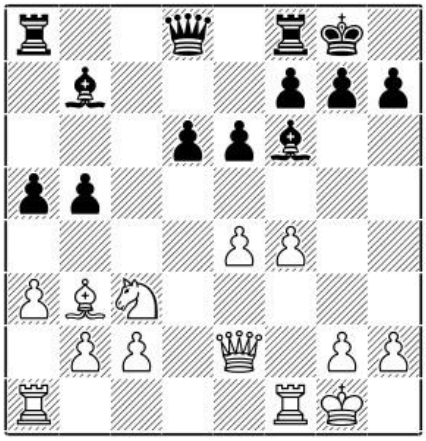
This move is quite common, but hardly critical.



12...Bb7 13.Qd3

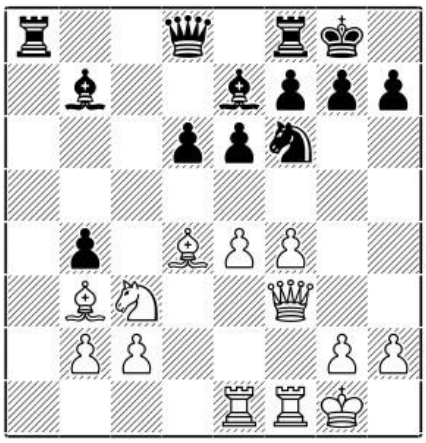
White can protect the e4-pawn with a few different queen moves, but Black will react in the same way against all of them.

13.Qe2 a5! 14.Bxf6?! (14.e5? dxe5 15.Bxe5 b4µ also turned out badly for White in Nilsson – De Firmian, Taastrup 2005; his best option is 14.Qxb5, as covered in the note to White's 14th move below) 14...Bxf6

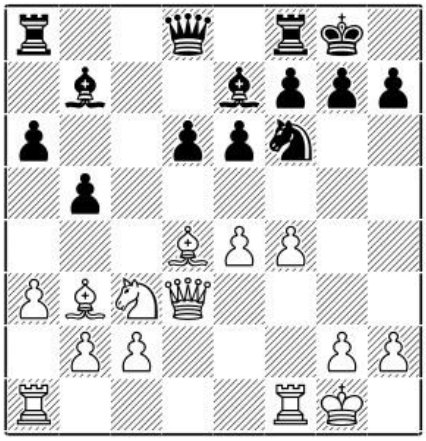


White's opening strategy has clearly failed, and after the further mistake 15.e5? dxe5 16.fxe5 Qd4† Black was already winning in Grishin – P. Gaprindashvili, corr. 2005.

13.Qf3 a5! 14.Rae1 (14.Rfe1 b4 15.Na4 Bc6 16.f5 e5 17.Bf2 Rb8µ was Segovia – Vigorito, USA 2000) 14...b4 15.axb4 axb4



16.Nd1 (after 16.Nb1 both 16...d5 17.e5 Ne4³ and 16...e5!?N 17.fxe5 dxe5 18.Bxe5 Ba6 are promising for Black) 16...d5 17.e5 Ne4³ The position was pleasant for Black in Arancibia Guzman – Celis, Santiago de Chile 1996.



13...a5!

This is the key idea. Black is already fighting hard for the initiative.

14.e5?!

This wins a pawn but leads to trouble.

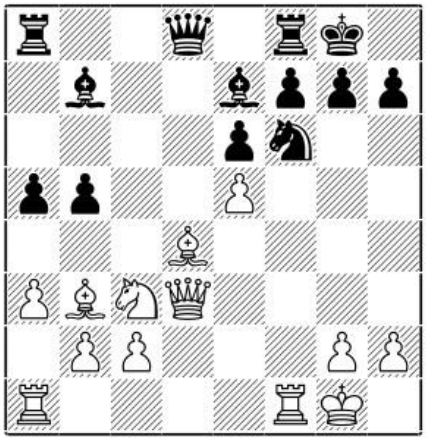
Black will be happy to exchange b- for e-pawn after 14.Nxb5 Bxe4.

14.Rae1 b4 15.Nb5 a4 16.Ba2 was seen in K. Müller – D. Gurevich, Mermaid Beach 1998, when 16...d5!?N 17.e5 Ne4 would have been comfortable for Black.

White can sacrifice the exchange with 14.Qxb5 Ba6 15.Qg5 Bxf1 16.Rxf1, but Black is certainly not worse after 16...Qd7N.

14...dxe5 15.fxe5

15.Bxe5? proves to be even worse after 15...Qb6† 16.Kh1 a4 17.Ba2 Rad8 18.Qe2 (or 18.Qxb5? Qxb5 19.Nxb5 Rd2–+) 18...Ba6µ with a near-decisive advantage for Black.



15...Nd7 16.Nxb5

White may as well take the pawn and hope for the best.

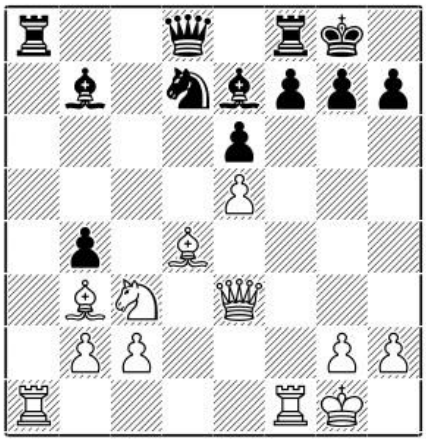
16.Qe3

Somehow this move has achieved a positive score for White, but this has nothing to do with the strength of his opening play.

16...b4 17.axb4

17.Nb5 occurred in Voitsekhovsky – Ulibin, Kstovo 1997, when 17...a4N (17...Qc8!? is also promising) 18.Bc4 bxa3 19.Nxa3 (or 19.bxa3 Rc8³) 19...Ra5! would have favoured Black.

17...axb4



18.Nb5N

18.Ne2?! has been played in a couple of games, when Black should have played 18...Rxa1!N 19.Rxa1 Qc7µ intending ...Nc5 and ...Qc6.

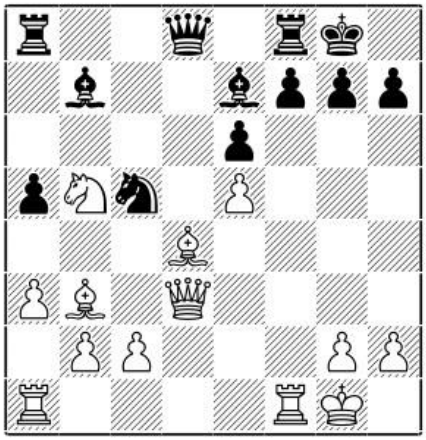
18.Ne4N 18...Bxe4! 19.Qxe4 Rxa1 20.Rxa1 Nc5 is a typical sequence, and after 21.Bxc5 Bxc5† 22.Kh1 Qd4 Black is already winning material.

18...Rxa1 19.Rxa1 Qc8

Once again Black has good prospects, with ...Qc6 and either ...Bc5 or ...Nc5 on the agenda.

16...Nc5

One way or another, White will have to relinquish the bishop pair.



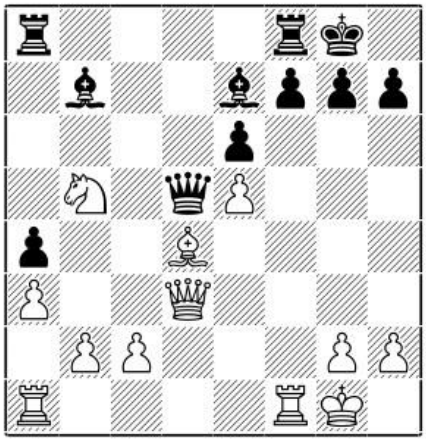
17.Bxc5

Fischer does not want to lose his 'Sozin' b3-bishop, but it's not such a great piece anyway, staring into a solid barrier on e6.

17.Qe3

This seems safer, although Black has fine compensation after:

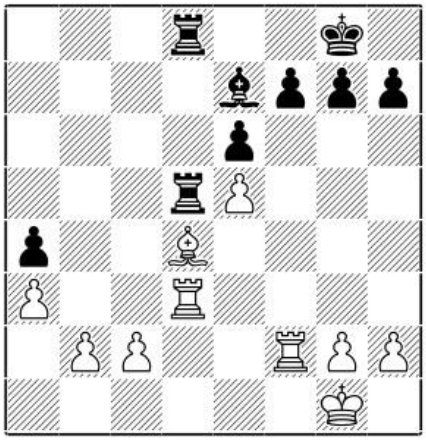
17...Nxb3 18.Qxb3 a4 19.Qd3 Qd5



20.Rf2

Another game continued 20.Rf3 Rac8 21.Nc3 Qc4 22.Rf2 Rfd8 when Black's initiative was worth more than the pawn in Drake Diez de Rivera – Kokkila, corr. 2002.

20...Rfd8 21.Rd1 Ba6 22.Nc7 Bxd3 23.Nxd5 Rxd5 24.Rxd3 Rad8



25.Rf4

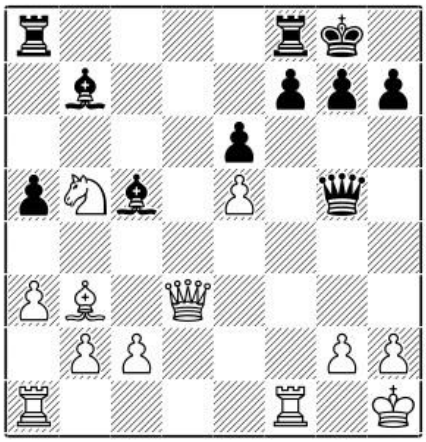
25.Rfd2? Bg5–+ wins immediately, while 25.c3 Rxe5³ gives Black the more mobile pawn majority.

25...Bg5 26.Rg4 Rxd4 27.Rxg5 Rxd3 28.cxd3 Rxd3

Black had slightly the better of a drawn rook endgame in Moutousis – Tukmakov, Haifa 1989.

17...Bxc5† 18.Kh1 Qg5

A nice move, although both 18...Ba6!?N 19.Bc4 Bxb5 20.Bxb5 Bd4 and 18...a4 19.Bc4 Qh4 20.Qe2 Rad8*ƒ*, as in West – Ashley, Chicago 1989, are decent alternatives.

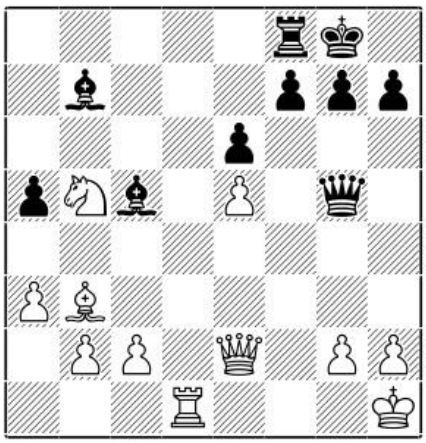


19.Qe2?

It was time to bail out into the endgame with 19.Qg3 Qxg3 20.hxg3 a4 21.Bc4 Ba6 when Black keeps a slight initiative, but after 22.Rf4 Rad8 23.Nd6 Bxd6 24.exd6 Rxd6 25.Bxa6 Rxa6 White was safe enough in Meshcheriakova – Kiss, Szombathely 2004.

19...Rad8 20.Rad1 Rxd1 21.Rxd1

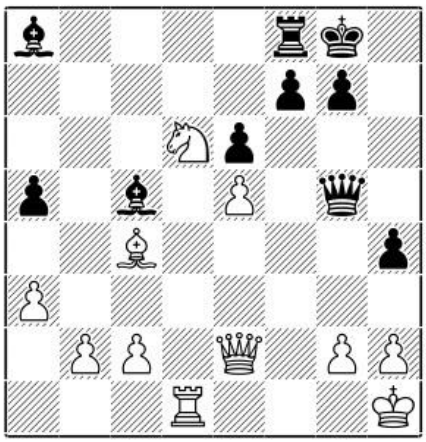
Black's bishops rake down upon the white kingside. White's extra queenside pawns mean little in the middlegame.



21...h5

Bringing another attacking unit into play is logical enough. However, 21...Be3!N intending ...Bf4 was even stronger.

22.Nd6 Ba8 23.Bc4 h4



24.h3?!

Stopping the advance of the frisky little h-pawn is natural, but White could have bailed out with: 24.Ne4! Qxe5 (Black has compensation after 24...Bxe4 25.Qxe4 Rb8 but this is not without risk) 25.Nxc5 Qxc5 26.h3=

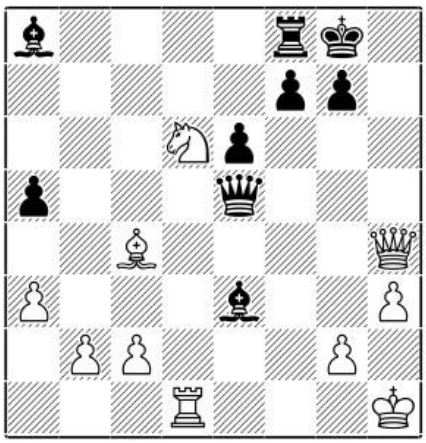
24...Be3 25.Qg4 Qxe5!

25...Qxg4 26.hxg4 h3 may look tempting, but after 27.Bf1 Bf4 28.Nc4 White holds things

together by a thread.

26.Qxh4

The h-pawn is gone, but there is another...



26...g5!

I like this thrust, although 26...Bg5!? was good too.

27.Qg4 Bc5

Spassky avoids 27...Rd8? 28.Nxf7! Rxd1† 29.Qxd1 Kxf7 30.Qd7† which saves White.

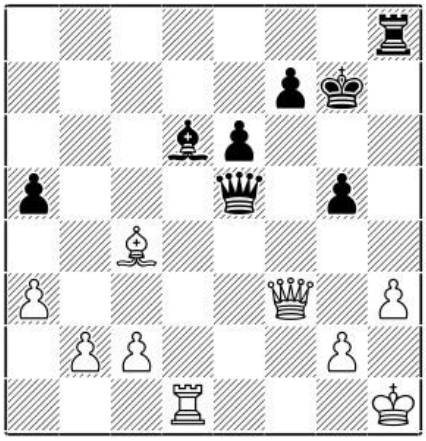
27...Kg7!?µ may have been slightly more accurate though.

28.Nb5 Kg7

Preparing to bring the rook into play on the h-file.

29.Nd4 Rh8 30.Nf3 Bxf3 31.Qxf3 Bd6?

This allows White to save himself. 31...Rh4!µ was stronger.



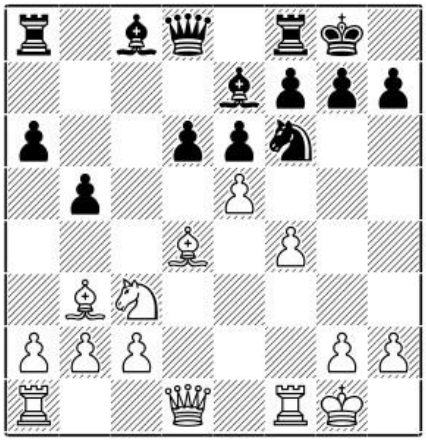
32.Qc3!

With the queens off the board, White's king is safe and he can hold the endgame. Spassky tried pressing for a while, to no avail.

32...Qxc3 33.bxc3 Be5 34.Rd7 Kf6 35.Kg1 Bxc3 36.Be2 Be5 37.Kf1 Rc8 38.Bh5 Rc7 39.Rxc7 Bxc7 40.a4 Ke7 41.Ke2 f5 42.Kd3 Be5 43.c4 Kd6 44.Bf7 Bg3 45.c5†

½–½

B) 12.e5!



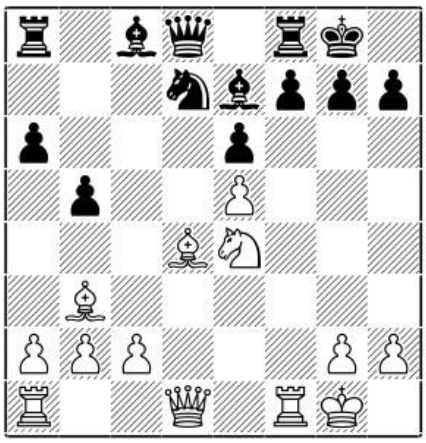
This is clearly the critical move.

12...dxe5 13.fxe5 Nd7 14.Ne4

White has to fight for the initiative or things will quickly go downhill. Other moves allow one of Black's pieces to land on c5 with good effect: for instance, 14.Qg4 Bc5! or 14.Qf3

Nc5! and Black is better in both cases.

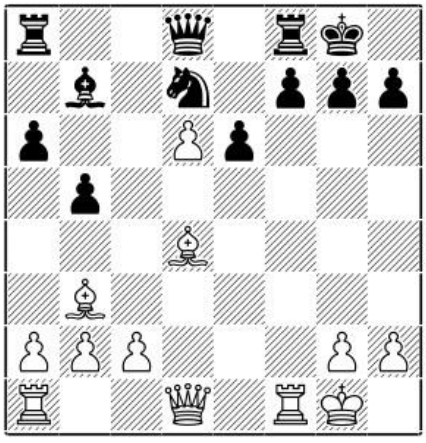
Another good example continued 14.Qh5 Nc5 15.Rad1 Bb7! 16.Bxc5 (or 16.Rf4 Qc7µ intending ...Rad8) 16...Bxc5† 17.Kh1 Qc7µ with a great position for Black, Kuzmin – Ermenkov, Varna 1976.



14...Bb7 15.Nd6

15.Qg4 Bxe4! 16.Qxe4 Nc5 is a typical theme, with easy play for Black.

15...Bxd6 16.exd6



This is an old and well-known position, yet it has no clear verdict. White has the bishop pair and a passed pawn on d6, while Black has a mobile pawn majority on the kingside and chances to round up that d6-pawn. The position is strategically complicated, and both contestants may play on any part of the board depending on how things go.

16...Qg5

Black may as well activate his queen while hitting g2. Yasser Seirawan once said that if Black could threaten mate in the opening, then White must have done something wrong.

White has two serious options: **B1)** 17.Qe2 and **B2)** 17.Rf2.

B1) 17.Qe2

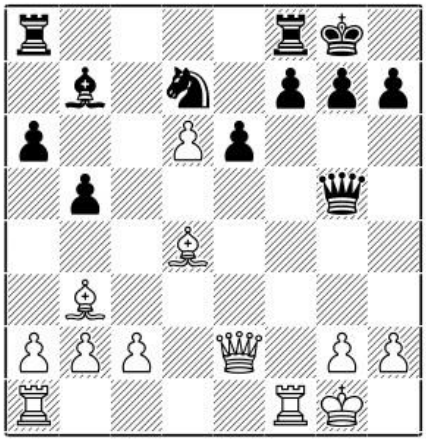
GAME 32

Nigel Short – Garry Kasparov

London (14) 1993

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Bc4 e6 7.Bb3 Nc6!? 8.Be3 Be7 9.f4 0-0 10.0-0 Nxd4 11.Bxd4 b5 12.e5! dxe5 13.fxe5 Nd7 14.Ne4 Bb7 15.Nd6 Bxd6 16.exd6 Qg5 17.Qe2

This is simple and logical, although Black more than one reasonable option against it.



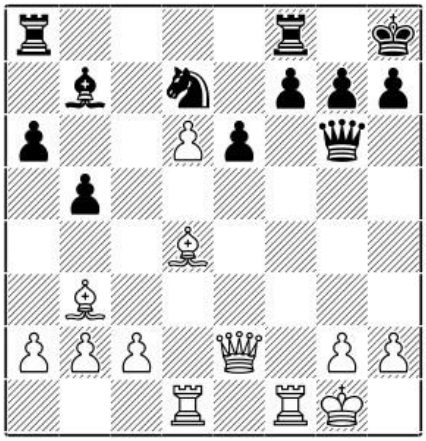
17...e5

Kasparov does not hesitate to get the pawns moving.

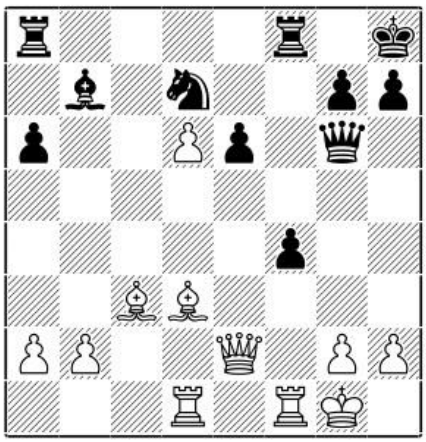
Trying to neutralize the bishop pair immediately with 17...Bd5? allows White to move quickly on the queenside, as occurred after

18.Rad1 Bxb3 19.axb3 e5 20.Bf2 f5 21.c4± in Rogos – Sanchez Rodenas, corr. 2010.

17...Kh8!? 18.Rad1 Qg6 is another typical idea but I rejected it due to:

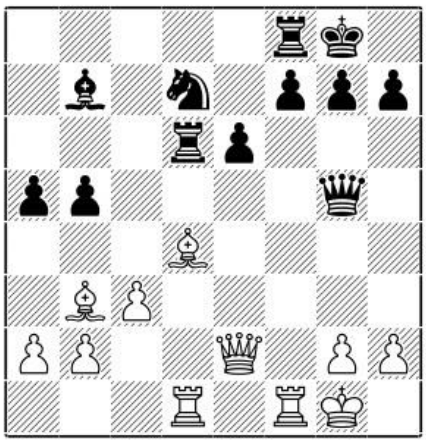


19.h4!? This unusual-looking move actually proved to be quite annoying in Sarlat – Andriuschenko, corr. 2007. As we will see, there are some other lines where Black must be on the lookout for this pawn advance, so it is worth making a mental note of it. (Instead, 19.c4 allows Black to fight actively with: 19...bxc4 20.Bxc4 f5 21.Bc3 f4 22.Bd3



22...f3! Black seized the initiative in Illescas Cordoba – Polgar, Dos Hermanas 1997.)

As we will see later, 17...a5!? is a common theme and it is playable here too. After 18.c3 (18.a4 b4 19.Bc4 Rac8 20.Bb5 Bc6 was fine for Black in Friedel – Finegold, San Diego 2004) 18...Ra6 19.Rad1 Rxd6 White has the trick:

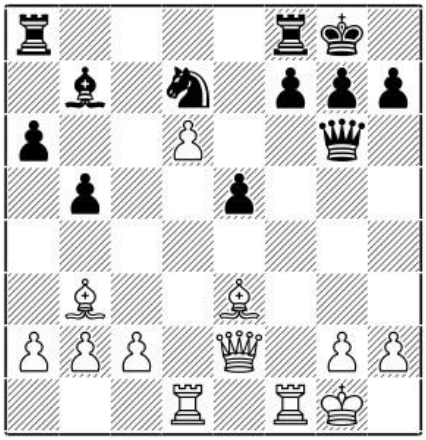


20.Bxg7! Rxd1 21.Rxd1 Kxg7 22.Rxd7 Bc6 23.Rd4 Kh8 Black's position is certainly sound, although to me it looks slightly unpleasant due to his exposed king, and White went on to win in De Firmian – Fishbein, Philadelphia 1997. Nevertheless, it is completely equal according to engines, so some readers may wish to consider this as an option.

18.Bc3

White has chosen the alternative bishop retreat in almost as many games:

18.Be3 Qg6 19.Rad1



19...Kh8

Preparing to mobilize the f-pawn.

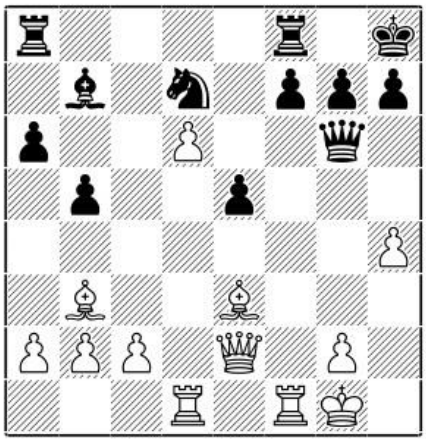
20.h4!?

The advance of the h-pawn is always interesting.

After 20.c3 I suggest 20...f5 (20...Be4 21.h4! f5 22.Bg5 f4 23.Rf2 was messy but somewhat favourable to White in Leiner – Hamilton, corr. 2010) 21.Bc2 as seen in Del Rio de Angelis – Gomez Esteban, Pamplona 1995, when 21...Bc6!?N would have maintained a

dynamic balance.

White can also try to exchange queens with 20.Qf2 f5 21.Qg3, when 21...f4 (or 21...Rf6!?N 22.Qxg6 Rxg6 23.Rxf5 Rxg2† 24.Kf1 Rxh2÷) 22.Qxg6 hxg6 23.Bf2 g5 was again unclear in Ghaem Maghami – Wells, Germany 2014.



20...f5!

But not 20...Nf6? 21.d7± as seen in Zapata – A. Rodriguez, Bucaramanga 1992.

21.h5 Qf6

The position remained unclear and double-edged in Browne – Donner, Wijk aan Zee 1974.

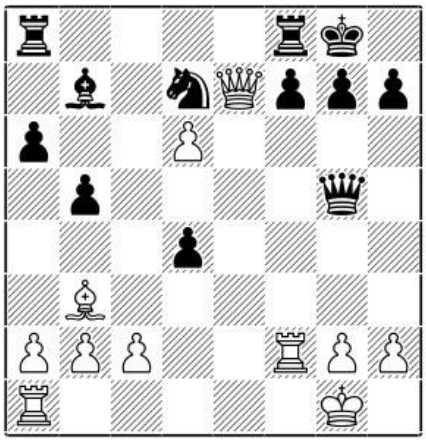
White has also left his bishop hanging with:

18.Rf2!? exd4

18...Kh8!? could also be considered.

19.Qe7

Black's simplest approach is to return the piece with:



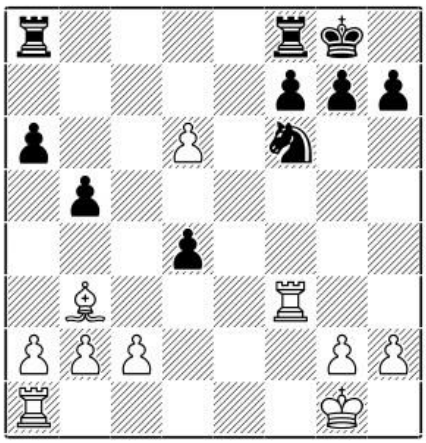
19...Nf6

19...Qxe7 20.dxe7 Rfe8 21.Bxf7† Kh8 22.Re1 was messier in Mueller – Acs, Rethymnon 2003. It should almost certainly be a draw with best play, but in a practical game the ending holds slightly more danger for Black.

20.Qxb7 Qe3 21.Qf3

21.Bxf7†? Kh8–+ leaves White without a good answer to ...Ne4 (or ...Ng4).

21...Qxf3 22.Rxf3



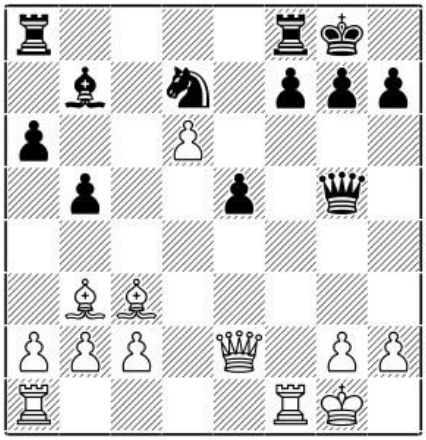
22...Rfd8N

22...Rad8 23.a4 bxa4 24.Rxa4 Rxd6 is also fine, and a draw was agreed ten moves later in Cid Prolongo – Monreal Godina, corr. 2011.

The text move feels most natural to me. White can win back the pawn with:

23.Rd1 Rxd6 24.Rfd3 Rad8 25.c3=

There is no advantage for either side, although moves still have to be made.



18...Qg6 19.Rad1

This is the most natural way to protect the d6-pawn.

I also considered 19.Qd2 Kh8, when 20.Bd5!?N hopes to use the queen to pester the black queenside. However, 20...Rab8!? 21.Bxb7 Rxb7 22.a4 (or 22.Qd5 Rb6) 22...Qe6 holds everything together.

19...Kh8!

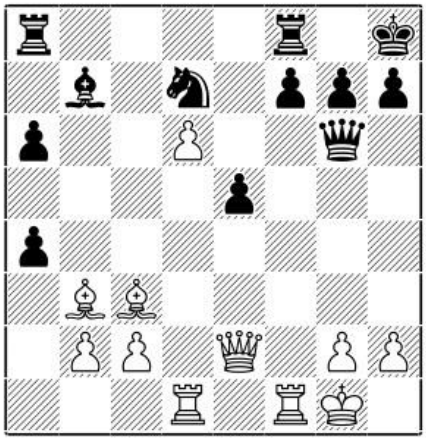
Black prepares to advance his e- and f-pawn tandem.

20.Bd5

We should also consider:

20.a4 bxa4!

Black's queenside was more vulnerable after 20...f5? 21.axb5 axb5 22.Bd5! Bxd5 23.Rxd5± in Skorchenko – Zagrebelny, Krasnodar 2003.



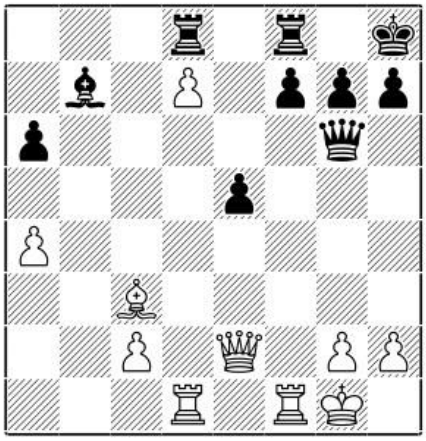
21.Bxa4

White achieves nothing with: 21.Bd5 Bxd5 (there is also 21...Qxd6!?N 22.Bxb7 Qb6† 23.Qf2 Qxb7 24.Qf5 Ra7 25.Bxe5 Nxe5 26.Qxe5 when White will probably scrape out equality, but certainly not more) 22.Rxd5 Rfc8 23.Bxe5 This occurred in Manakov – Joachim, Germany 2006, when the simple 23...Rxc2N 24.Qf3 Rac8 would have given Black at least equal chances.

21...Nc5

Kasparov assessed this position as offering counterplay for Black, which is accurate, but it's worth going slightly deeper to improve on a game.

22.b3 Rad8 23.d7 Nxa4 24.bxa4



24...Bc6!N

Black erred with 24...Qc6? 25.Bxe5 f6 (25...Rxd7 26.Bxg7† Kxg7 27.Qg4†+–) 26.Rd6 Qxa4 in Kotsur – Belozerov, Novokuznetsk 1999, when 27.Rfxf6!N would have been crushing.

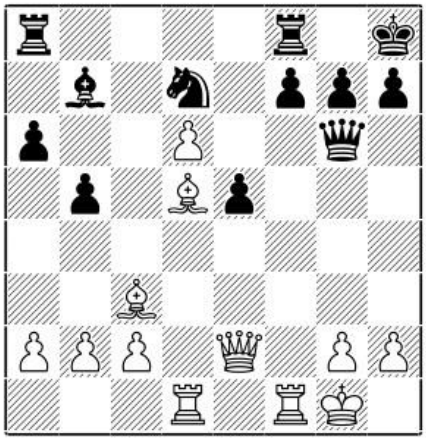
The text move works fine due to the following tactical detail:

25.Bb4

White has nothing better.

25...Bxg2! 26.Qxg2 Qb6† 27.Kh1 Qxb4

White has enough activity to draw, but nothing more.



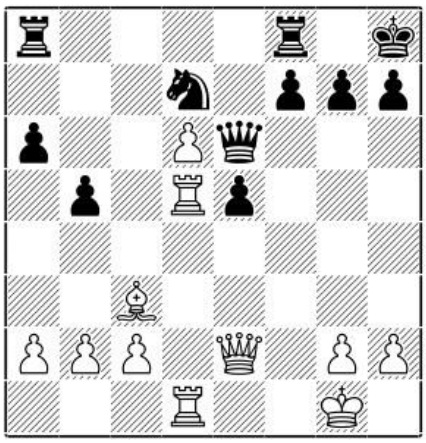
20...Bxd5 21.Rxd5 Qe6!

With the light-squared bishops gone from the board, the queen must take over its duties.

22.Rfd1

22.Rd2 has been tested in a couple of correspondence games, with unclear play ensuing: 22...f5 (22...Rac8 23.a4 Rc4 24.axb5 axb5 25.Ba5 occurred in Ottesen – Klengel, corr. 2006, when 25...f5!?N 26.b3 Rc5 would have maintained the dynamic balance) 23.a4 Rab8 24.axb5 axb5

25.Re1 e4 26.b3 b4 27.Bd4 Rbe8÷ Van Leeuwen – De Souza, corr. 2007.



22...Rfc8!

Kasparov points out that the immediate 22...f5 is well met by 23.a4 bxa4 24.Ra5!, so he activates his rook first.

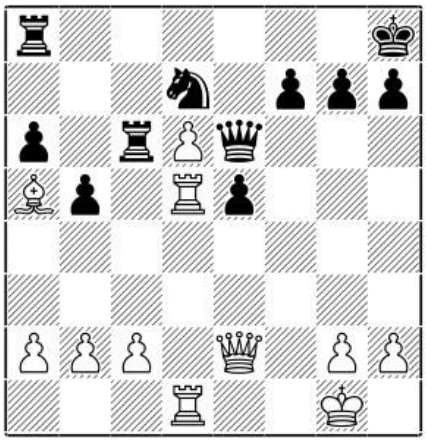
23.Ba5

Short wants to swing the bishop around to the c7-square, where it supports the d6-pawn and his queenside ambitions.

Instead 23.a4 bxa4 24.Qe4 Rab8 gives Black counterplay, and 25.Ra5 can be met by 25...Rb6, hitting d6.

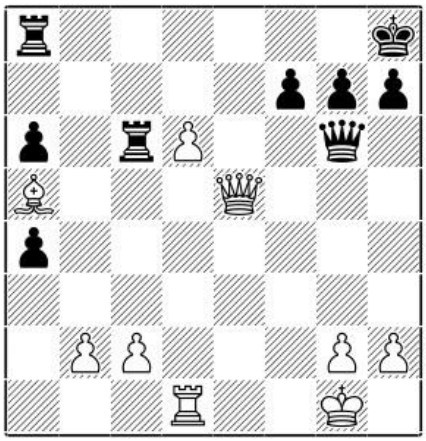
23...Rc6

Amusingly, the computer suggests 23...Rc4 24.b3 Rc6 when Black is a whole tempo down on the game.



24.b3

White has also tried: 24.a4 bxa4 25.Qe4 Qg6 (25...Rac8!?N also deserves attention) 26.Rxe5!? Nxe5 27.Qxe5

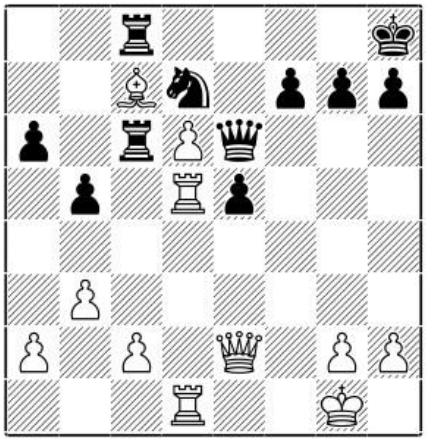


27...Rxc2 (27...Qg4? 28.Rd4 Qd7 29.Qe7+–) 28.Qd5 Rg8 29.d7 h6 30.d8=Q Rxd8 31.Bxd8 (31.Qxd8† Kh7=) 31...Rxb2 With three pawns for the piece and not much material remaining, Black drew easily enough in Jaumandreu Llopis – M. Mueller, corr. 1996.

24...Rac8

Beliavsky suggested 24...Re8!?N, which looks equally playable.

25.Bc7



25...Re8

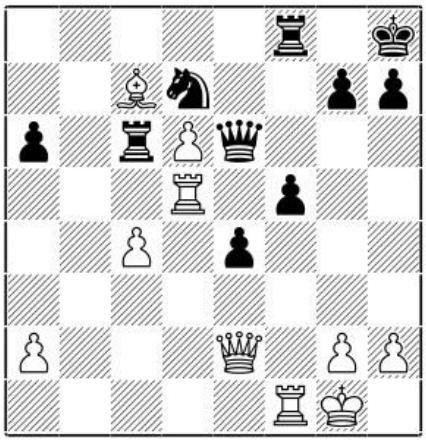
Kasparov was critical of this move but it actually seems fine.

Nevertheless, a good alternative is:
25...f5!?N
The 13th World Champion recommended

this move, which leads to wild complications.

26.c4 bxc4 27.bxc4 e4 28.Rf1 Rf8

Now things really heat up after:



29.g4!

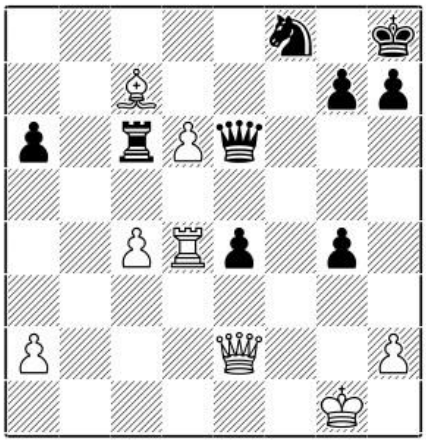
Even the world's greatest player was unable to analyse this correctly.

29...fxg4

29...f4 30.Rd4 Nc5 31.d7 Nxd7 32.Rxe4 Qg6 33.Bxf4 (or 33.Rexf4 Rxf4 34.Bxf4 h5,,) 33...h6! 34.h3? Rcf6 offers counterplay according to Kasparov; but with ...Nc5-e6 coming, this is actually winning for Black. However, 34.Bg3! slightly favours White.

30.Rxf8† Nxf8 31.Rd4

Kasparov thought that Black had problems here, but he seems fine after:



31...e3!

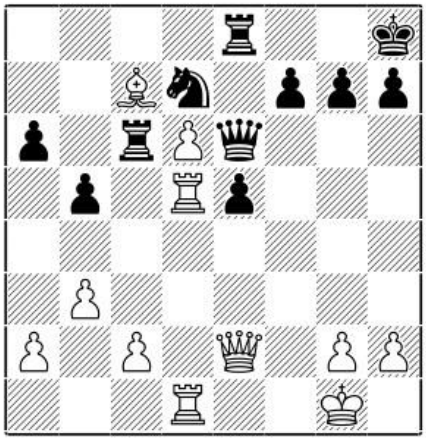
Black has sufficient resources, for instance:

32.Qxg4 Qf6 33.Qf4

Without this move, White would be in deep trouble.

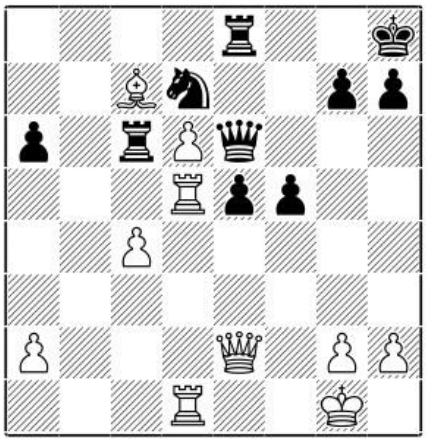
33...Qg6† 34.Qg4 Qf6=

With a draw.



26.c4 bxc4 27.bxc4 f5

Kasparov subsequently suggested 27...e4 but the text move is fine.



28.h3!

Short finds a clever way of preparing Qc2-a4.

28.Qc2

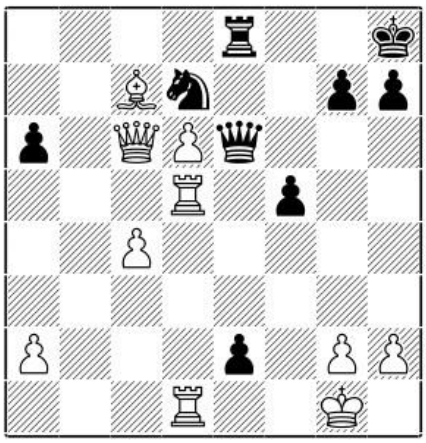
The immediate queen manoeuvre is well met by:

28...e4 29.Qa4 e3!

29...Rc5 30.Rxc5 Nxc5 31.Qc6 is comfortable, if not advantageous, for White.

30.Qxc6 e2

White has to play with great care to avoid disaster.



31.h3!

31.Re1? Qe3† 32.Kh1 Qf2–+ was given by Kasparov.

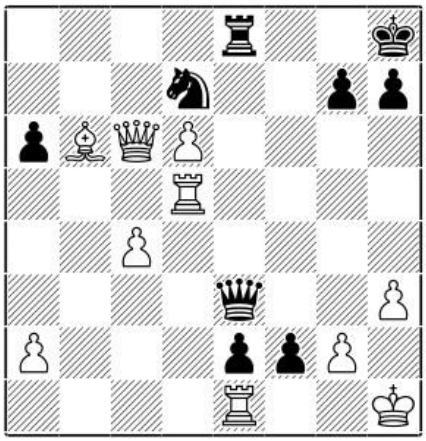
31...f4!? 32.Re1 Qe3† 33.Kh1 f3 34.Bb6!

Another only move.

34...f2!?

34...fxg2† 35.Kxg2 Qe4† is an immediate perpetual.

The text move leads to a crazy draw after:



35.Bxe3 fxe1=Q† 36.Kh2 Qg3†! 37.Kxg3 e1=Q† 38.Bf2 Re3† 39.Kh2 Qxf2 40.Qc8†

40.Rd1= is also good enough.

40...Nf8 41.Qg4

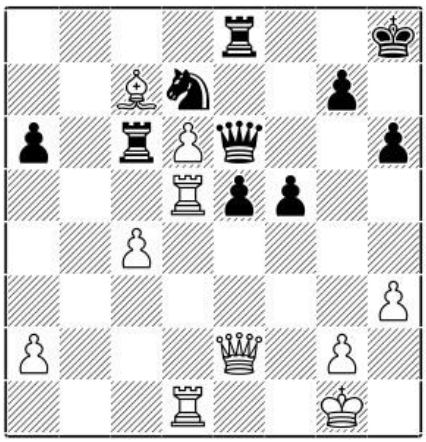
My trusty computer assures me that the position is drawing in more than one way, 41...Re1 being the most forcing.

28...h6?

White has just made some luft for his king so Black follows suit, but it could have led to a lot of suffering for him. In such a complex middlegame, it is hardly surprising that both of these great players finally made some mistakes.

28...e4? also fails after: 29.Rf1! Rf8 (or 29...g6 30.g4!) 30.g4! f4 31.Rd4 Nc5 and now 32.Rxf4! Rxf4 33.d7 Nxd7 34.Bxf4± is even stronger than Kasparov's suggestion of 32.d7.

Advancing the other pawn with 28...f4!N was the correct way to maintain the balance.



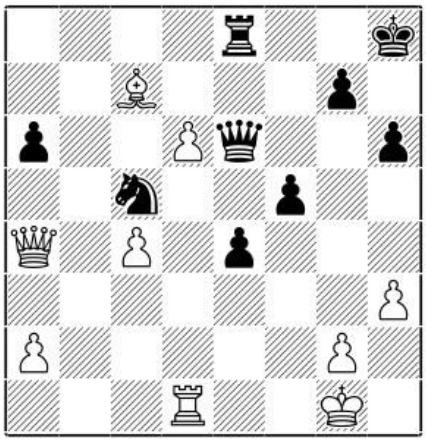
29.Qc2!

Kasparov suggested 29.a4!? intending a4-a5 and Bb6, but 29...f4 30.a5 Rf8 31.Rf1 (31.Bb6? allows 31...f3 32.gxf3 Qxh3) 31...Qg6 gives Black enough counterplay.

29...e4

This secures the d3-square for the knight. Instead 29...f4 30.Qa4 Rc5 31.Rxc5 Nxc5 32.Qb4 forces the retreat 32...Nd7, allowing 33.c5 when the pawns should decide.

30.Qa4 Rc5 31.Rxc5 Nxc5

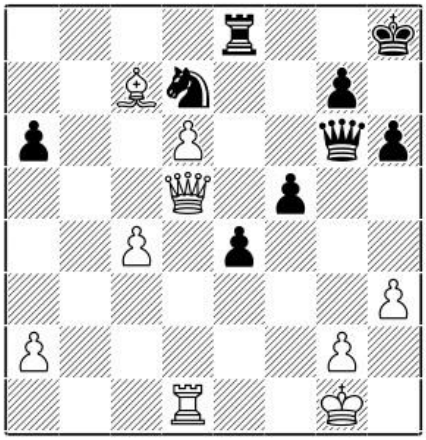


32.Qc6?!

32.Qb4 Nd3 gives Black plenty of counterplay.

32.Qa3! would have been problematic though. Best play continues: 32...Nd3 (32...Nd7? 33.c5 Qc4 34.Rc1+–) 33.Qxa6 e3! 34.Rxd3 e2 35.Ba5 e1=Q† 36.Bxe1 Qxe1† 37.Kh2 Qe5† 38.Rg3 Rd8 39.a4 Rxd6 40.Qb5± with a solid extra pawn, although Black still managed to salvage a draw in Cintins – Rovchakov, corr. 2011.

32...Nd7 33.Qd5 Qg6



34.Qd2?

Perhaps low on time, Short slips again and plays too passively.

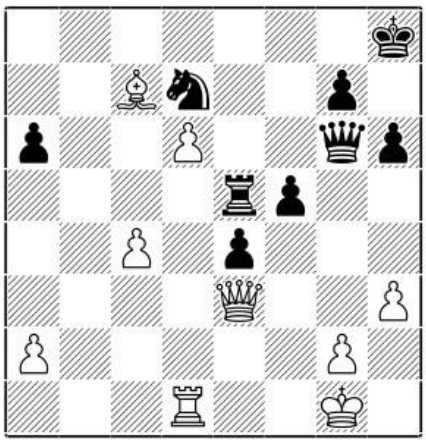
White needed to get the pawns moving with 34.c5! when a draw should ensue after best play, although in a practical game either side could easily slip up.

34...Re5!?

The straightforward 34...e3 was also strong after 35.Qc2 (or 35.Qe2 f4 36.Rf1 Rf8 intending ...Qe4, ...Rf6 and a timely ...Ne5) 35...Qg5 followed by ...f4.

35.Qe3

Or 35.Rc1 Qe6µ.



35...Qe6?!

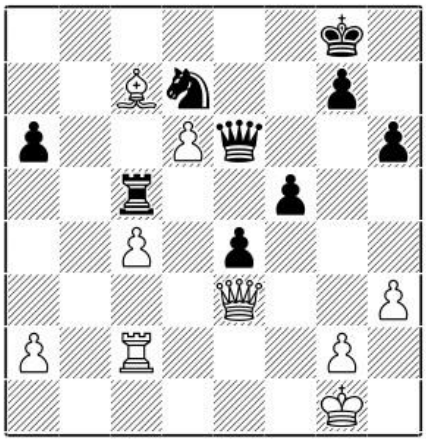
Black had several better options available. Kasparov gives 35...Qf7 (also good are 35...Qf6µ and 35...Rc5µ) 36.Rc1 f4 37.Rf1 f3! 38.gxf3 Rg5† 39.Kh2 Qxc4 when White is clearly under pressure.

36.Rc1?!

White can hold with 36.Bb6! planning Bd4, and if 36...f4 37.Qxf4 Nxb6 38.d7 Nxd7 39.Rxd7= play simplifies to a draw.

36...Rc5 37.Rc2 Kg8

But not 37...Rxc4?? 38.Qb3 when the tables are turned.



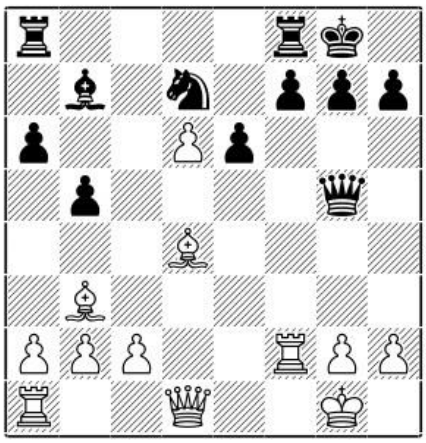
38.a4 Kf7 39.Qf2 e3µ

Black is clearly better here, so... draw!
½–½

Kasparov had a comfortable lead in the match and perhaps this rollercoaster game wore

him down a bit. Play might continue 40.Qf3 (or 40.Qe2 f4–+ followed by ...Qe4 and ...Rf5) 40...Re5 41.Qh5† Kg8 42.Qe2 f4 when Black is building up a strong attack, with ...Rf5 coming next.

B2) 17.Rf2



This is more flexible than the previous line, as White avoids tying down his most powerful piece to the mate threat on g2. Black has a narrower choice here.

17...a5!

The accepted antidote. Black is not only looking to harass White's b3-bishop, but also preparing ...Ra6 to target the dangerous d-pawn.

Note that 17...e5? is less attractive here because after 18.Bc3 the f7-pawn can quickly come under pressure, for example with Qf1!?.

White may respond to the threat of ...a4 with **B21)** 18.a4 or the more subtle **B22)** 18.Qe2!?.

B21) 18.a4

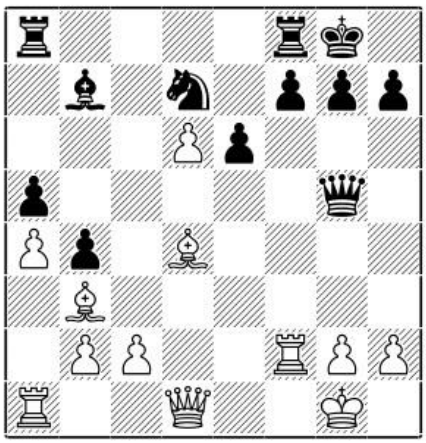
This is the most common continuation but it holds little danger for Black.

18...b4!

This natural move is the accepted response.

18...e5?! runs into 19.Qe2! exd4 20.Qe7 Nf6 21.Qxb7 when, although Black subsequently held a draw in Nichols – Wosch, corr. 2010, at this stage his queenside is under pressure and the f7-pawn is vulnerable.

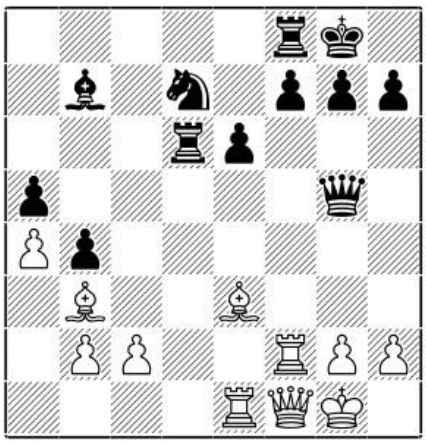
18...Ra6!? is playable, although 19.axb5 Rxd6 20.Qd2 Qxb5 21.Rxa5 Qc6 22.Qf4 e5 23.Bxf7† Kh8 24.Rxe5! Rf6 25.Rg5! R8xf7 26.Bxf6 Rxf6 27.Qd4 h6 28.Rg3 gave White a slight edge in Sychov – Y. Petrov, corr. 2012.



19.Qd2

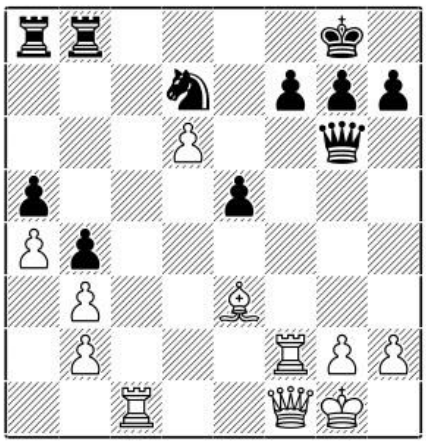
This is by far the most common move although Black is at least equal after it. There are some alternatives, with various possible transpositions:

19.Qf1 Ra6 20.Re1? (20.Qb5 reaches the Winants – Tukmakov game, under 19.Qe2 below) 20...Rxd6 21.Be3 occurred in Polgar – Lutz, Frankfurt (rapid) 1999, when Black's most accurate continuation would have been:



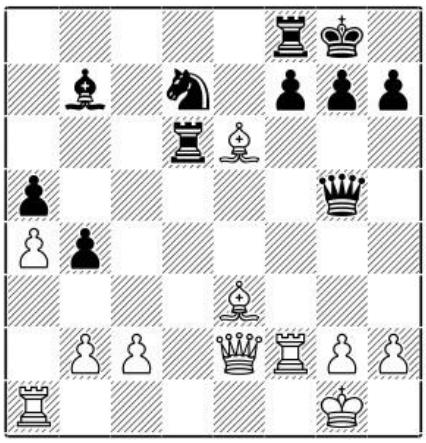
21...Qd8!Nμ White will struggle to find compensation for the pawn.

19.Qd3 Bc6 (19...Ra6!?N is also sensible) 20.Qe2 Bd5 21.Qb5 Rfb8! 22.Qf1 (22.Qxd7? Rb7 traps the queen) 22...Bxb3 23.cxb3 Qg6 24.Rc1 e5 25.Be3 occurred in Kindermann – Reeh, Bad Woerishofen 1990. Here I suggest:



25...Qxd6!?N 26.Rxf7 Qe6 I think Black is at least equal.

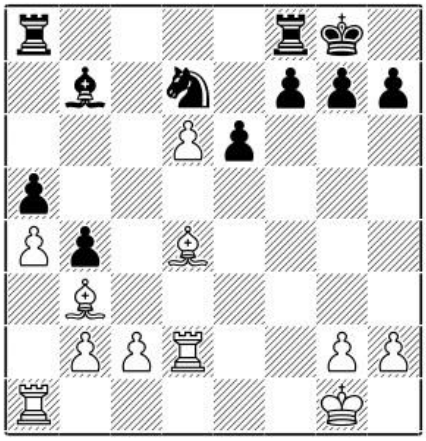
19.Qe2 Ra6 (there is also 19...Bd5, when 20.Qb5 reaches Kindermann – Reeh above) 20.Bxe6 (20.Qb5 Qxb5 21.axb5 Rxd6 22.Be3 Ra8 was level in Winants – Tukmakov, Wijk aan Zee 1993) 20...Rxd6 21.Be3



21...Qe7!?N (21...Qe5 22.Bc4 Qxb2 was also decent for Black in Morovic Fernandez – Milos, Yopal 1997) 22.Bxd7 (22.Bb3 Bd5!) 22...Qxd7= It's essentially equal, although if I had to pick a side I would go with Black due to his safer king. Note that 23.Bc5 does not win material as 23...Re6 hits the queen.

19...Qxd2 20.Rxd2

The endgame holds few horrors for Black.

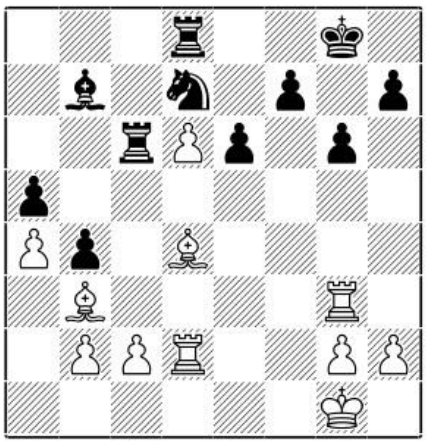


20...Rac8 21.Re1 Rfd8

21...Ba6?! is inaccurate in view of 22.c3 Bc4 23.Bd1![2].

22.Re3 Rc6 23.Rg3 g6[3]

The d-pawn is well blocked and, without queens on the board, the black king is secure. In the following game, the second player gradually took over.



24.Be3 Nc5 25.Bxc5 Rxc5 26.c3 bxc3 27.Rxc3 Rc6 28.Rxc6 Bxc6

Black subsequently brought his king to d7 and won by mobilizing his e- and f-pawns in De Blasio – Schoen, corr. 2005.

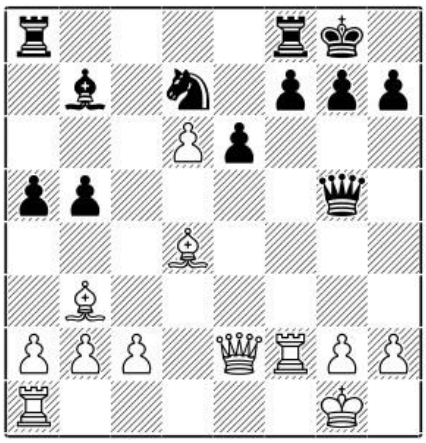
B22) 18.Qe2!?

GAME 33

Sergey Kudrin – David Vigorito

Cambridge (USA) 2000

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Bc4 e6 7.Bb3 Nc6!? 8.Be3 Be7 9.f4 0-0 10.0-0 Nxd4 11.Bxd4 b5 12.e5 dxe5 13.fxe5 Nd7 14.Ne4 Bb7 15.Nd6 Bxd6 16.exd6 Qg5 17.Rf2 a5 18.Qe2!?

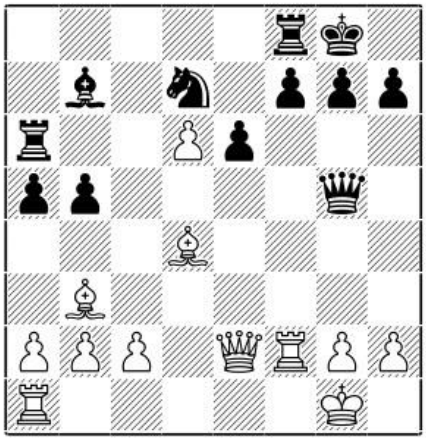


This was a relatively new idea at the time. Instead of deciding between Rf2 and Qe2, White plays both.

18...Ra6!

18...a4?! 19.Bxe6! is the tactical point behind White's last move. Actually the story does not quite end there: after 19...fxe6 20.Qxe6† Kh8 21.Qxd7 Rxf2 22.Qxb7 Rff8 White went on to win fairly quickly in Sulskis – Piesina, Riga 1995, but the engine only rates White's position as slightly better after 23.h3!N. Nevertheless, with White having two pawns for the exchange and the strong passer on d6, the position is certainly more dangerous for Black in a practical game.

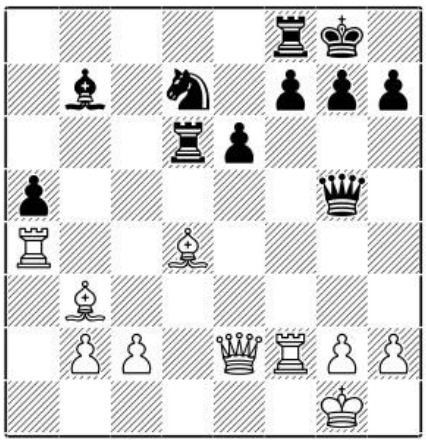
18...Bc6 looks unnatural and cuts off the rook from its intended a6-d6 route. After 19.a3!?[2] White had every reason to be satisfied with the outcome of the opening in Young – De Firmian, Las Vegas 2010.



19.Bc3

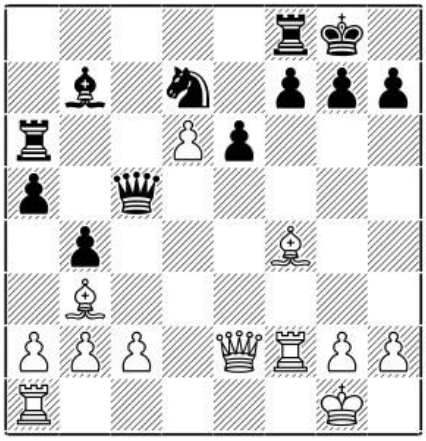
19.Bxe6 is no problem due to 19...Rxd6 20.Bxd7 Rxd7= as in Almasi – Lutz, Budapest 2003.

19.a4 gives Black a choice: 19...b4 is a safe option which immediately transposes to Winants – Tukmakov above, whereas 19...bxa4!? 20.Rxa4 Rxd6 leads to complications after:



21.Bxg7!? Ba6! 22.Bc4 Kxg7 23.Bxa6 Qc1† 24.Rf1 Qxb2 With some kind of mess, and an eventual draw in Horwitz – De Sa Nobrega, corr. 2000.

19...b4 20.Bd2 Qc5 21.Bf4



21...Nf6!

21...Raa8 is a playable alternative but I consider the text move the most flexible choice. An earlier game seemed to indicate that this move was bad, but I had an improvement up my sleeve.

22.Rd1

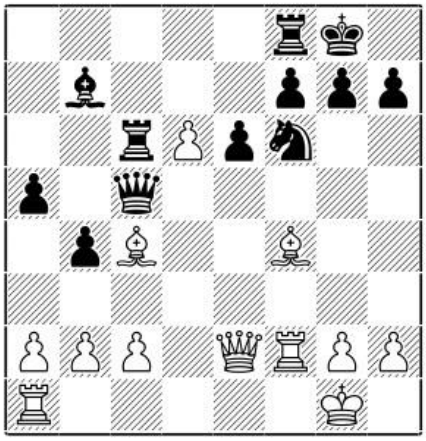
This was the theoretical recommendation at the time. I used to think it was a mistake, but matters are not so clear.

The alternative is:

22.Bc4 Rc6!?N

22...Raa8 is the only move to have been seen in practice. After 23.Bd3 Black should prefer 23...Rad8 with approximate equality, rather than 23...Nd5?! 24.Qe4 f5, when 25.Qe5!N favours White – thus improving on 25.Qxe6†? Kh8 26.Bg5 Rae8 27.Be7 Nxe7 28.dxe7 Rxe7³ as in Bragin – Kosteniuk, Kazan 2005.

22...Rxd6!?N 23.Bxd6 Qxd6 is a more straightforward option which offers Black full compensation for the exchange.



23.Bb5

Also possible is 23.Bd3 Rd8 when Black is poised to sacrifice the exchange in the near future.

23...Ne4! 24.Be3?!

This may seem tempting, but 24.Qxe4 Qxb5= or 24.Bxc6 Nxf2 25.Qxf2 Qxc6= would be safer for White.

24...Qxd6 25.Bxc6 Qxc6

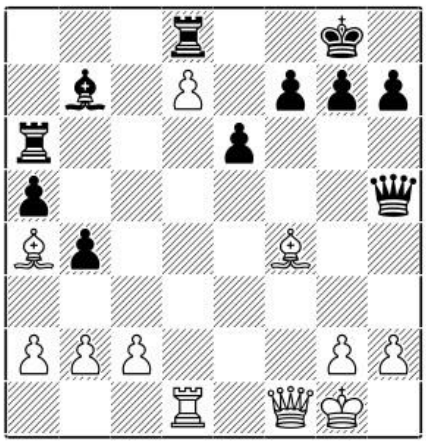
With ...f5 coming next, Black has more than enough compensation.

22...Ne4 23.d7 Rd8

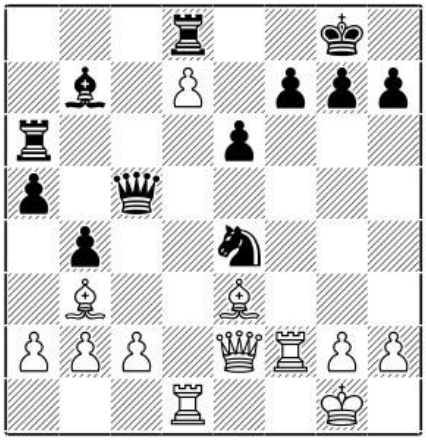
Not 23...Nxf2? 24.Qxf2 Qxf2† 25.Kxf2+– when the advanced d-pawn will decide.

24.Be3

24.Ba4N is met by 24...Nxf2! (better than 24...Qxf2† 25.Qxf2 Nxf2 26.Kxf2 Bc6 27.Rd6! Bxa4 28.Rxa6 Bxd7 29.Rxa5 when White has an edge) 25.Qxf2 Qh5! 26.Qf1 and here I like:



26...h6!? (rather than 26...Bc6 27.Bc7) Black intends ...Bc6 soon, and White cannot play 27.Bc7?? due to the fork on c5.



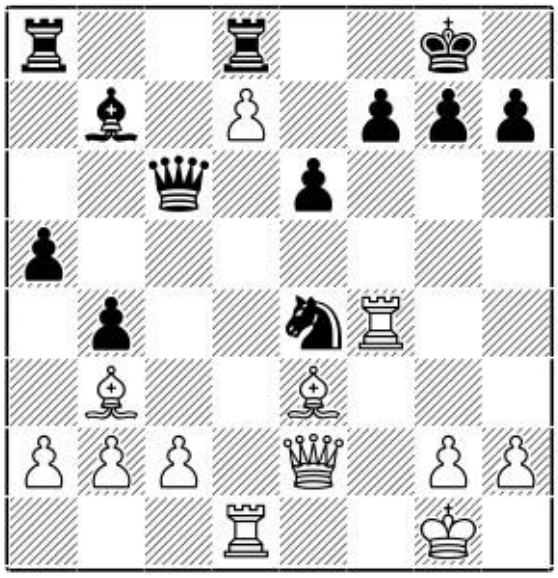
24...Qc6!

This was my big idea. The queen looks down at the g2-square while preventing Ba4 and sometimes threatening ...a4. Black's kingside is not so well protected, but I had already checked White's sacrificial attempts to take advantage of this.

Previously Black had retreated with: 24...Qe7 25.Rf4 Rd6 26.Ba4 Rxd1†? (26...Ba6!N would have kept Black in the game) 27.Qxd1 Nc5 28.Rxf7! Qxf7 (28...Kxf7? 29.Qh5† is even worse for Black) 29.Bxc5 Bd5 30.Qf1!± Renet – Sakalauskas, Koszalin 1997.

25.Rf4 Raa8!

The rook had no further purpose on a6, and this retreat coordinates Black's forces. Now the d7-pawn is really hanging.



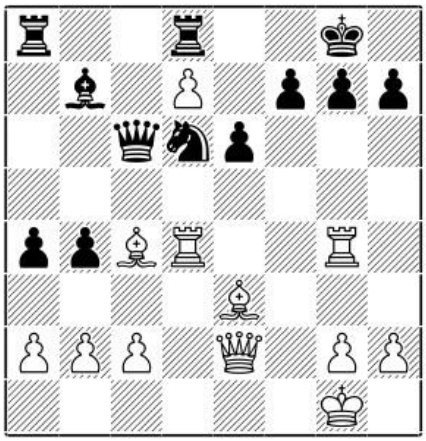
26.Qf3?

Targeting f7 looks logical while Black's king is alone, but it does not work.

There is no time for 26.c3 due to the simple 26...Rxd7µ.

26.Bc4? Rxd7 27.Bd3 is well met by 27...Nd6! when Black keeps a clear advantage. (During the game I was thinking about 27...Nf6?, but then 28.Rc4! is rather annoying.)

The best move is 26.Rd4!N when 26...a4 27.Bc4 (27.Rfxe4? axb3µ) 27...Nd6 28.Rg4 is unclear:



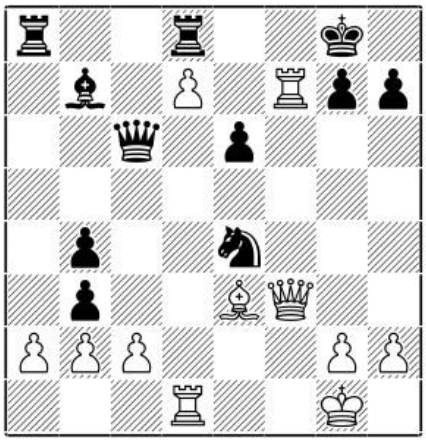
It is important to note that 28...Rxd7?! can be met by 29.Bd5!, since 29...exd5? 30.Rxg7†! mates. Instead Black should prefer something like 28...g6!? 29.Bg5 Nf5, or 28...Nf5!? 29.Bb5 Qc5 30.Bf2 Bc6, with an unclear position in both cases.

26...a4!

Give me that bishop!

27.Rxf7 axb3

I was still in my preparation here, and had only used about fifteen minutes. My opponent, on the other hand, only had about fifteen minutes left of his two hours to get to move 40. Moreover, I had already lost a blitz game to my good friend IM Joe Fang from this exact position, so I had checked the critical lines in advance.



28.Rf1

My preparation had focused on:
28.Rxg7†
Joe played this move, so I had made sure to

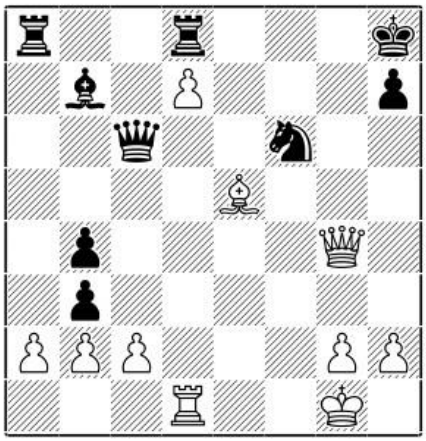
analyse it.

28...Kxg7 29.Qg4†

29.Bd4† e5 is similar.

29...Kh8 30.Bd4† e5 31.Bxe5† Nf6

The possible checks on the a7-g1 diagonal along with ...bxc2 or ...bxa2 give Black more than enough resources to stave off the attack. A couple of lines from my analysis went:



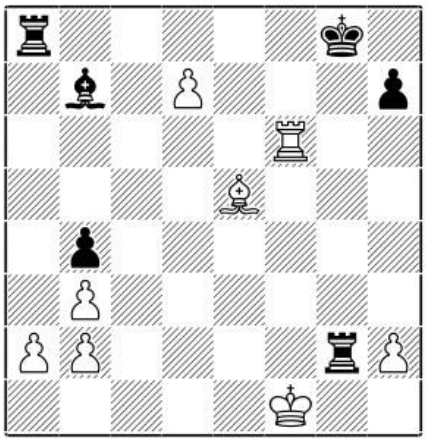
32.Rf1

32.Qg5 Qb6†! 33.Kh1 (or 33.Bd4 bxc2–+) 33...Bxg2†! 34.Qxg2 bxa2 and Black wins.

32...Rg8

32...Rf8 works too.

33.Rxf6 Qxg2† 34.Qxg2 Rxg2† 35.Kf1 Kg8! 36.cxb3



36...Rg7! 37.Rd6 Rf7† 38.Bf6 Rd8–+

Black picks up the d-pawn while keeping an extra rook.

Although I had not examined the text move, it is not difficult to figure out the solution when you 'know' Black is winning.

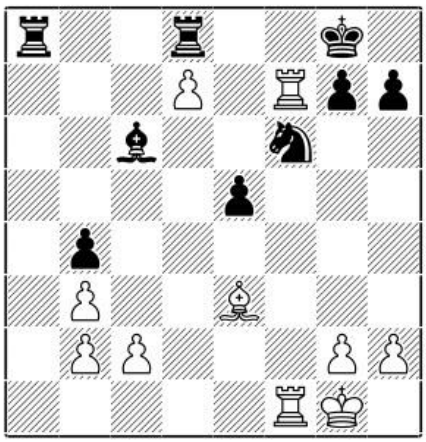
28...e5!–+

A tragic mistake would be 28...Nf6?? 29.Rxg7† when White wins.

29.axb3

Kudrin was down to less than a minute here. There is nothing to be done; for instance, if 29.Qg4 Qg6 30.Qxg6 hxg6 31.Bb6 Nf6 32.Bxd8 Rxd8 33.Re7 bxc2 Black will quickly mop up.

29...Nf6 30.Qxc6 Bxc6



31.Re7 Rxd7 32.Rxe5 Ng4 33.Re6 Nxe3

33...Bd5! is more accurate but an extra piece is still enough, even for me.

34.Rxe3 Rd2 35.Rg3 Rxc2 36.h4 Re8

0–1

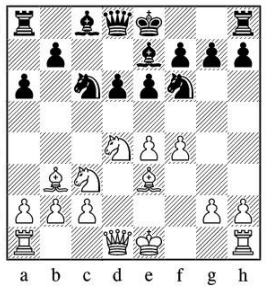
Conclusion

We meet 6.Bc4 e6 7.Bb3 with 7...Nc6!?, a completely sound alternative to the more traditional 7...b5 and 7...Nbd7, which could easily catch opponents off guard. After the normal moves 8.Be3 Be7 we took 9.0-0 as the primary topic of the chapter, after which 9...0-0 10.f4 Nxd4 11.Bxd4 b5 reaches the main tabiya.

In this classic position, none other than Bobby Fischer played the rather passive 12.a3. This gives Black good chances to seize the initiative with 12...Bb7 followed by 13...a5!.

The more critical continuation is the forcing 12.e5! dxe5 13.fxe5 Nd7, when the only way to test Black is with 14.Ne4 Bb7 15.Nd6 Bxd6 16.exd6. Then 16...Qg5 threatens mate in one, and White has two ways of responding. In the event of 17.Qe2 we play 17...e5, seeking to mobilize the e- and f-pawns. 17.Rf2 requires a different approach with 17...a5! to harass the b3-bishop and target the d6-pawn with ...Ra6. In both cases, play is double-edged and Black has a full share of the chances.

Chapter 12



9.f4

Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.♗c4 e6 7.♗b3 ♘c6!? 8.♗e3 ♗e7 9.f4 0–0

A) 10.Qe2 *Game 34* 341

B) 10.Qf3 Nxd4 11.Bxd4 b5! 343

B1) 12.0-0-0 Bb7 344

B11) 13.Rhe1 344

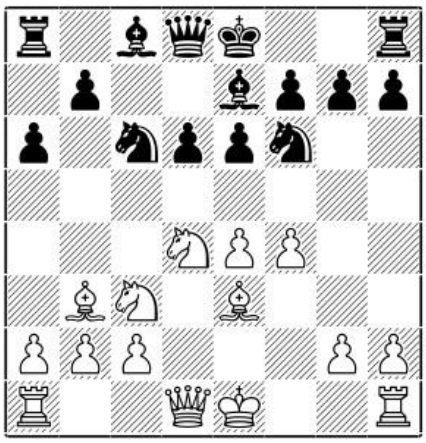
B12) 13.a3 *Game 35* 346

B2) 12.Bxf6! Bxf6 13.e5 Bh4† 14.g3 Rb8 350

B21) 15.0-0-0 350

B22) 15.gxh4 *Game 36* 352

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Bc4 e6 7.Bb3 Nc6!? 8.Be3 Be7 9.f4



White often goes for f4-f5 in the Sozin to accentuate the power of the b3-bishop, so this immediate advance is natural. White can still castle on either side, although most lines in this chapter will see him opt for the queenside.

9...0-0

We will start by considering the rare but tricky **A)** 10.Qe2, followed by the main line of **B)** 10.Qf3.

10.0-0 takes us back to the previous

chapter.

A) 10.Qe2

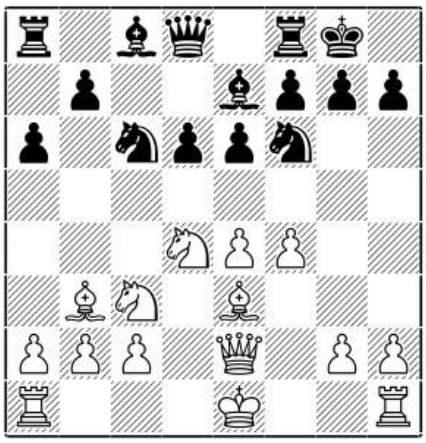
GAME 34

Csaba Balogh – Christopher Lutz

Budapest 2004

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Bc4 e6 7.Bb3 Nc6!? 8.Be3 Be7 9.f4 0-0 10.Qe2

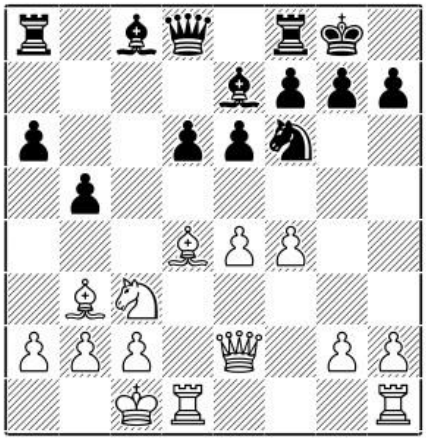
My nemesis Alexander Ivanov has used this a few times with success, so it merits attention. The queen is less active here than it is on f3, but it lends extra support to an e4-e5 advance.



10...Nxd4

10...Qc7 is too passive, and 11.f5 Nxd4 12.Bxd4 b5 13.fxe6 Bxe6?! 14.0-0 b4?! 15.Nd5 Bxd5 16.exd5± was a good example of how not to handle Black's position in A. Ivanov – Vigorito, USA 2000.

11.Bxd4 b5 12.0-0-0



12...b4!?

This ambitious move seems completely justified.

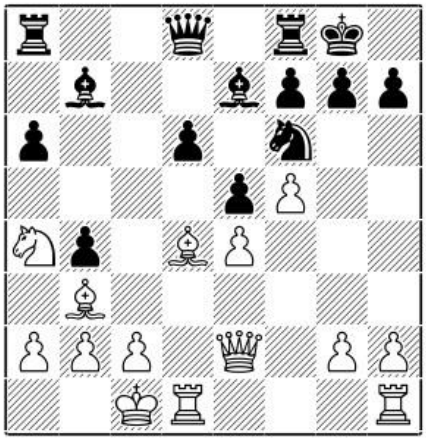
12...Bb7

This natural move is also fully playable, if followed up correctly.

13.f5 b4 14.Na4 e5!

An important trick.

Instead 14...exf5?! 15.exf5 was good for White in A. Ivanov – Vigorito, USA 2009.



15.Bxe5 Nxe4 16.Bd4 Bf6

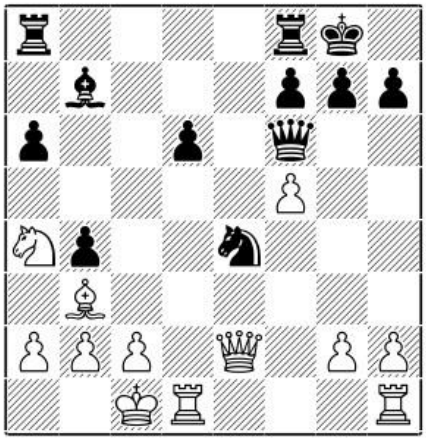
Another game continued 16...Qa5 17.Nb6 Rad8 18.Kb1 Bf6 19.Nd5 Bxd5 20.Bxd5 Qxd5 21.Bxf6 Qb7 22.Bd4 Rfe8 with approximate equality, Savchenko – Dreev, Moscow 2007.

17.Bxf6?!

White has gone for the same faulty idea in a couple of games.

17.Kb1N= is better.

17...Qxf6



18.Bd5?

Consistent, but the whole idea is tactically flawed.

18...Bxd5

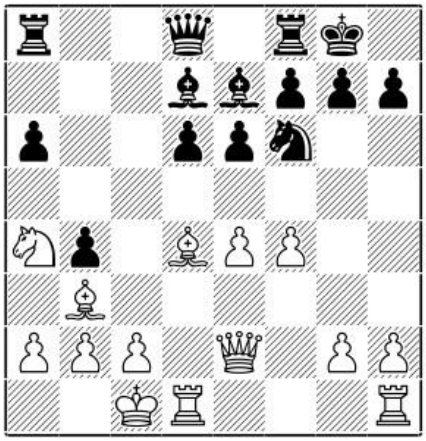
18...Qg5† 19.Kb1 Bxd5 20.Rxd5 Rae8–+ was also good enough in Farkas – Arsovic, Senta 2008; the white queen has nowhere good to move to.

19.Rxd5 Qh6† 20.Kb1 Ng3–+

Black won the exchange and the game in Marholev – A. Zhigalko, Plovdiv 2008.

13.Na4 Bd7!

13...e5 14.Bxe5 Bg4 has been played more frequently; Black wins the exchange for a pawn, but White gains plenty of compensation for it.



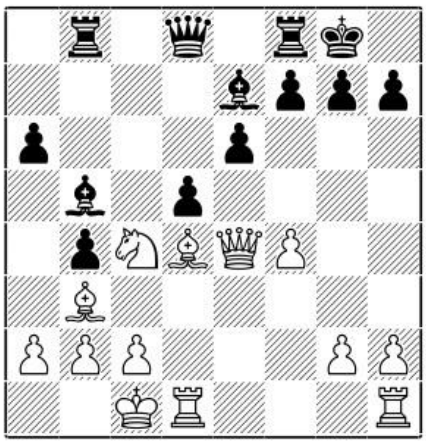
14.Nb6

14.e5 Bb5 15.Qe3 dxe5 16.Bxe5 Qe8 17.Nb6 Rd8µ turns out great for Black.

14.Rhe1 Bb5 also gives Black a comfortable game, with ...a5 or ...Qc7 coming next.

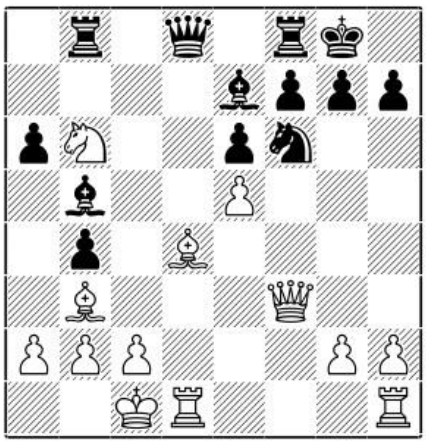
14...Bb5 15.Qf3 Rb8 16.e5

16.Nc4 Nxe4! 17.Qxe4 d5 is excellent for Black:



Note that if White 'wins' the queen with 18.Qf3 dxc4 19.Bxg7 Kxg7 20.Rxd8 Rfxd8, Black will be the one with a decisive material advantage.

16...dxe5 17.fxe5

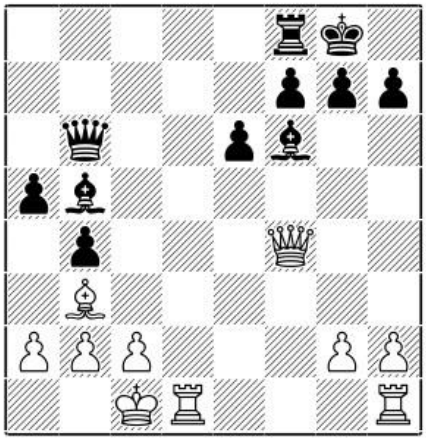


17...Rxb6!

Black is also doing well after 17...Nd7 18.Nxd7 Qxd7, but the game continuation is stronger.

18.exf6 Bxf6 19.Bc5 Qb8 20.Bxb6 Qxb6 21.Qf4 a5

Black has a tremendous position for a tiny material investment. On the next move White tries to relieve the pressure by simplifying, but overlooks a vital tactical point.

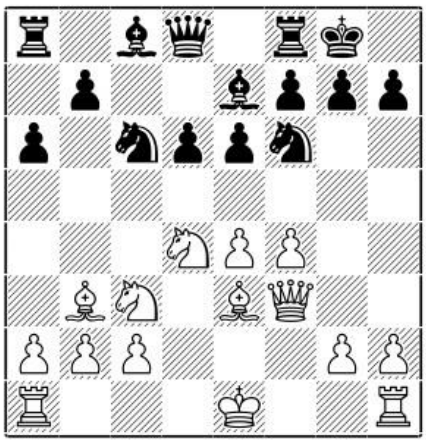


22.Bc4? Qc5!

The c4-bishop is attacked and ...Bg5 is threatened, so the game is over.

0–1

B) 10.Qf3



This is the usual move. White posts his queen aggressively and prepares to castle long.

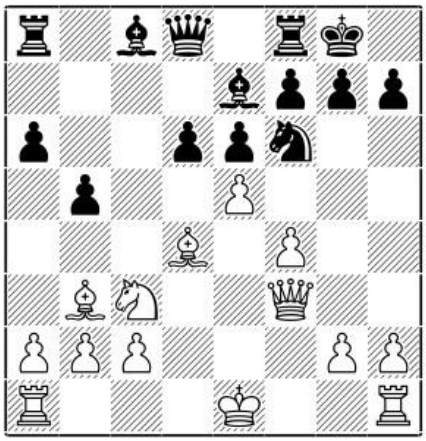
10...Nxd4 11.Bxd4 b5!

Other moves are playable, but it turns out that Black can live with the tactical scares along the h1-a8 diagonal.

We will consider **B1)** 12.0-0-0 followed by the more testing **B2)** 12.Bxf6!.

12.a3 Bb7 13.0-0-0 transposes to variation B12 below.

12.e5?



Immediately attacking f6 and a8 looks tempting, but it does not really work as the bishop is loose on d4. This is typical in the Sicilian.

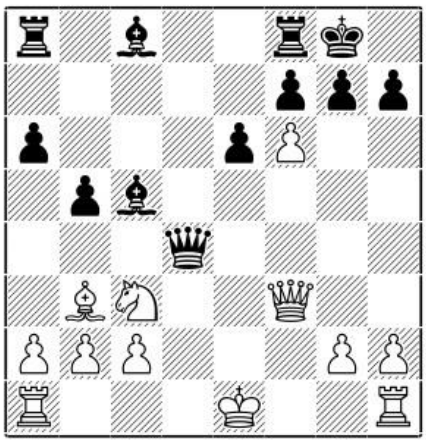
12...dxe5! 13.fxe5

13.Qxa8? exd4 is even worse; for instance, 14.Ne4 Qb6 15.Nxf6† Bxf6 16.Qf3 a5–+ with a huge initiative for a tiny amount of material.

13.Bxe5 Ra7 14.0-0 Rd7 15.Rad1 Qb6† 16.Kh1 Bb7µ gave Black a dream Sicilian position in Sorensen – Sher, Hastings 1989.

13...Qxd4 14.exf6 Bc5!

The key move.



15.fxg7

15.Qxa8? Qf2† 16.Kd1 Be3 wins immediately.

15.Rd1?! is also not much good in view of 15...Qxf6µ (or 15...Qe5†!? first, which the machine rates as slightly more accurate) with a clear extra pawn.

15...Rd8 16.Rd1

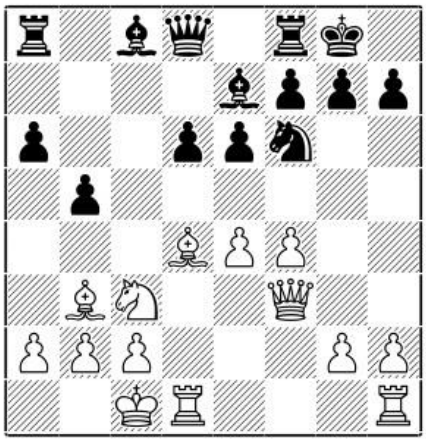
16.Ne4 Bb7–+

16...Qe5† 17.Qe4 Rxd1† 18.Kxd1 Qxe4 19.Nxe4 Be7µ

White had to defend a miserable endgame

in Hermlin – Shamkovich, USSR 1972.

B1) 12.0-0-0

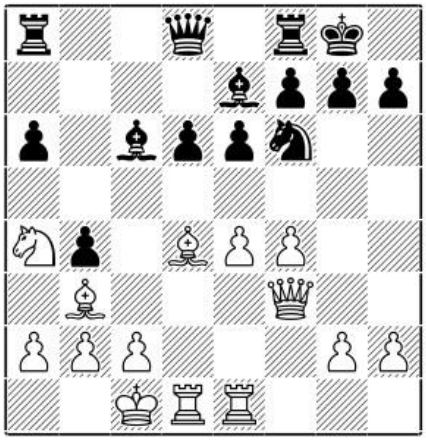


12...Bb7

Black simply threatens ...b4 to win the e4-pawn, so White has a decision to make. We will analyse **B11)** 13.Rhe1 and **B12)** 13.a3.

B11) 13.Rhe1 b4 14.Na4 Bc6

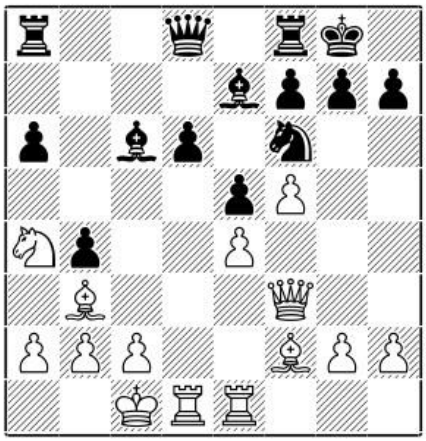
This is a typical move. The black bishop eyes the a4-knight and, if White is not careful, a subsequent ...Rb8 will leave it corralled on the rim.



15.Nb6

Other options seem worse:

15.f5?! does not work because of 15...e5! 16.Bf2 (Black's point is that 16.Bxe5 Qa5 wins a piece) when the most accurate continuation is:

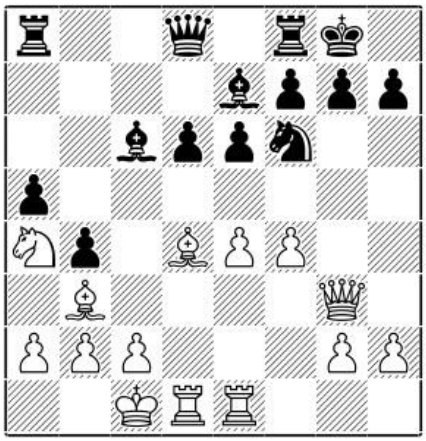


16...Nd7!N (16...Rb8 17.Nc5? a5 was great for Black in Kelleher – De Firmian, Woburn 1998, but White should have tried 17.g4 Nd7 18.Kb1 Qa5 19.g5! when he at least has some counterplay) 17.Kb1 Qa5 White's knight is trapped, and the only way for him to stay in the game is 18.f6!? Nxf6 19.Nb6 Rab8 20.Nc4 Qc7, when Black 'only' has an extra pawn and a clear advantage.

Black also does well after:

15.Qg3 a5!

Now if White moves his knight away via b6-c4, or even c5, he will have to reckon on ...a4. We will follow a correspondence game.



16.e5

16.Kb1 is well met by 16...Qc7µ intending ...Qb7.

16...dxe5 17.Rxe5

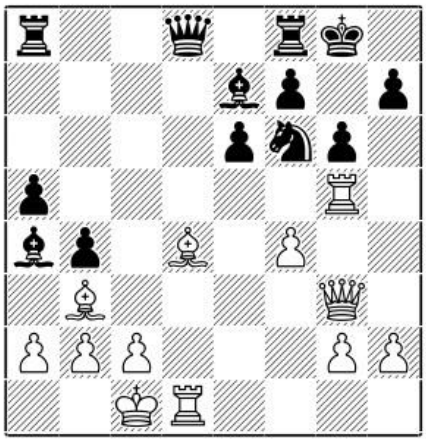
17.Bxe5 Qe8! is good for Black.

17...Bxa4 18.Rg5

18.Bxa4 Qc7 intending ...Rfd8 is pleasant for Black, but objectively White should have settled for this.

18...g6!

18...Bxb3?? leads to an unfortunate reversal: 19.Rxg7† Kh8 20.Rxh7†! Kxh7 21.Qh4† Kg7 22.Qg5† Kh8 23.Qh6† Kg8 24.Rd3+–



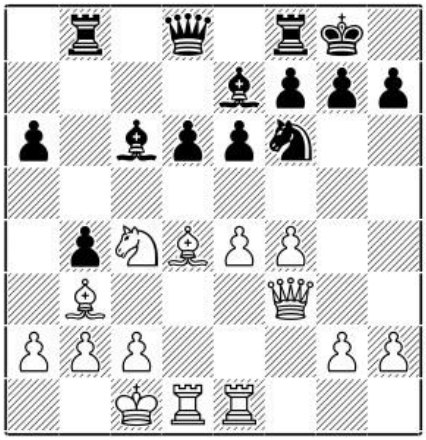
19.Bxf6 Qc7! 20.Bxe7 Bxb3 21.Qxb3

After 21.axb3?! Qxe7 Black will prise open the queenside with ...a4.

21...Qxe7µ

Black had all the attacking chances in Rudolf – Dorer, corr. 2009.

15...Rb8 16.Nc4

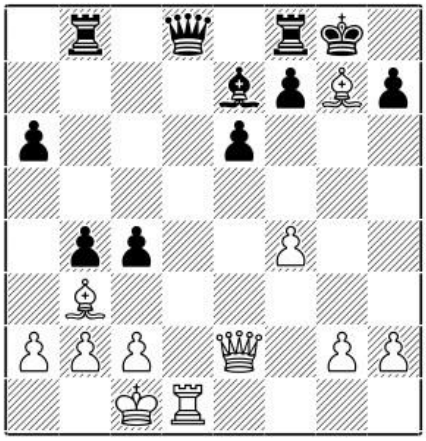


16...Bxe4!

Beginning a long forcing sequence.

16...a5?! is well met by 17.Bxf6!.

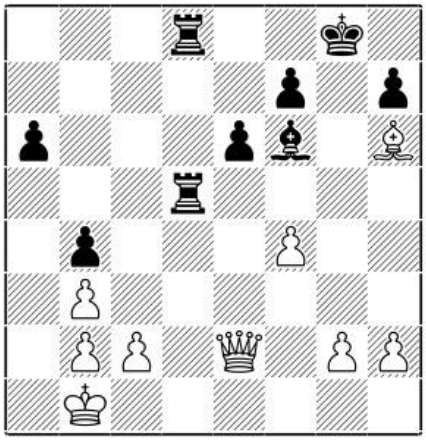
17.Rxe4 Nxe4 18.Qxe4 d5 19.Qe2 dxc4 20.Bxg7



20...cxb3!

Black will get two healthy rooks for the queen.

21.Rxd8 Rfxd8 22.Bh6 Bf6 23.axb3 Rd5 24.Kb1 Rbd8

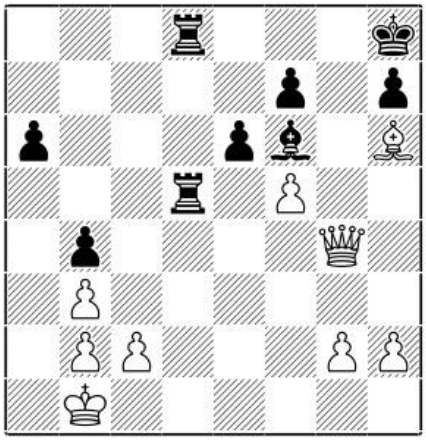


25.Qg4†?

25.f5!?N 25...exf5 26.Qc4= would have held things together for White.

25...Kh8 26.f5

We have been following Grishin – Kulagin, Russia 1998. In the game Black traded b4 for f5 and a draw was soon agreed, but he could have won with:



26...Rd1†!N 27.Bc1

27.Ka2 loses to 27...R8d4! followed by ...Rd5.

27...Rf1 28.Qxb4 exf5–+

Black will soon pick up the enemy bishop.

B12) 13.a3

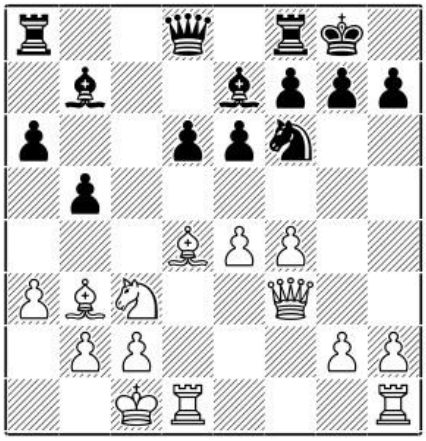
GAME 35

Wilfried Rausch – Paata Gaprindashvili

Correspondence 1997

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Bc4 e6 7.Bb3 Nc6!? 8.Be3 Be7 9.f4 0-0 10.Qf3 Nxd4 11.Bxd4 b5! 12.0-0-0 Bb7 13.a3

This simply stops the advance of the b5-pawn. Or does it? We shall see.

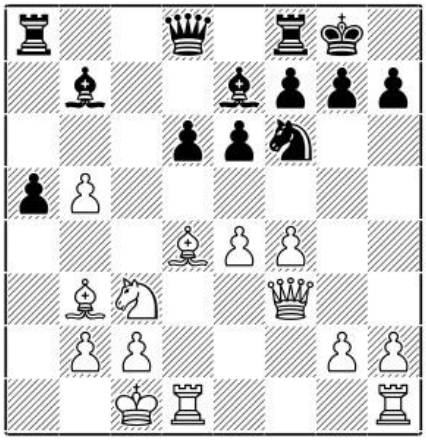


13...a5

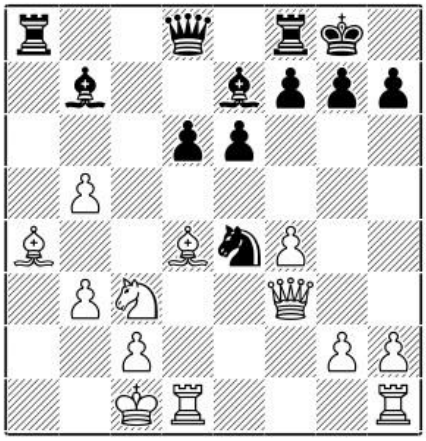
This is a good, focused move.

13...Rc8?! is common but I find it too slow.

13...b4!?
This surprising move, on the other hand, is quite an appealing alternative.
14.axb4 a5 15.b5
15.bxa5 Qxa5 16.Rhe1 (16.g4? runs into 16...e5 17.Bf2 Nxe4! 18.Nxe4 Qb4–+) 16...e5 17.Bf2 Rfc8 gives Black an obvious initiative for the pawn.



15...a4! 16.Bxa4
16.Bc4?! gives Black excellent attacking chances after 16...Qa5 followed by ...Rfc8.
16.Nxa4? Bxe4 17.Qe2 was played in Istratescu – Kotronias, Hastings 2011, when 17...d5!N would have given Black the upper hand.
16...Nxe4 17.b3
We have been following De Holanda – J. Fernandes, corr. 1994. Instead of 17...f5, Black should have continued:

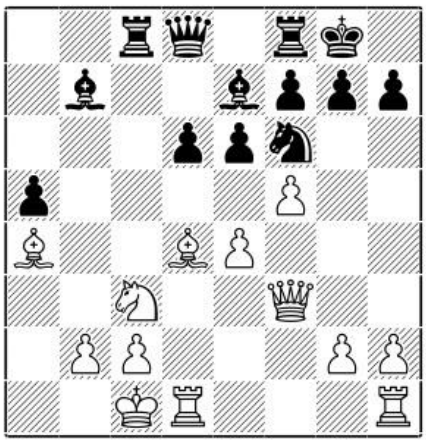


17...Nxc3N 18.Qxc3 Be4
With good chances on the queenside.

14.Bxf6

White goes for tactics.

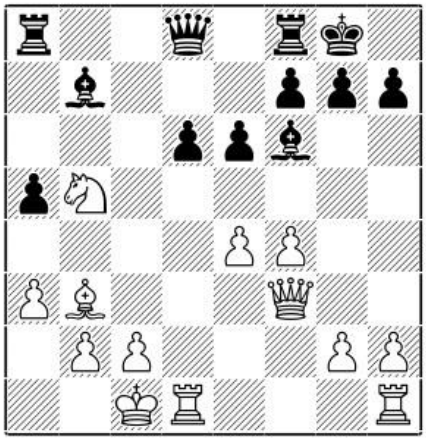
14.a4 allows Black to open the queenside immediately with: 14...bxa4 15.Bxa4 Rc8 (15...Qc7!?N also looks decent) 16.f5



16...Rxc3!? (tempting, but 16...e5!?N 17.Bxe5 Qb6 18.Bd4 Qb4 was also good) 17.Qxc3 Nxe4 18.Qb3 Bd5 19.Qd3 e5 20.Bxe5 Bg5† 21.Kb1 dxe5 22.Qxd5 Nf2 23.Qxd8 Bxd8 The adventures culminated in a level endgame in Primakov – Sirobaba, corr. 2008.

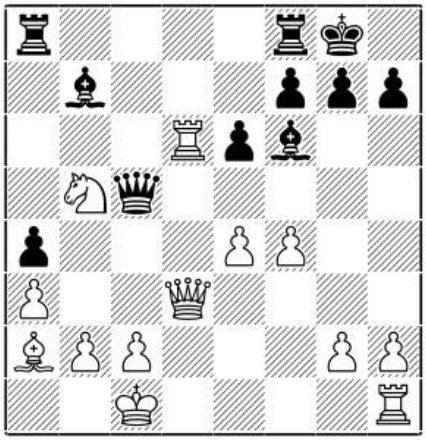
14...Bxf6 15.Nxb5

White's idea of trading on f6 is not without logic, as he has pressure against the d6-pawn while e4 is no longer hanging. However, these factors are overshadowed by Black's bishop pair and open lines towards White's king.



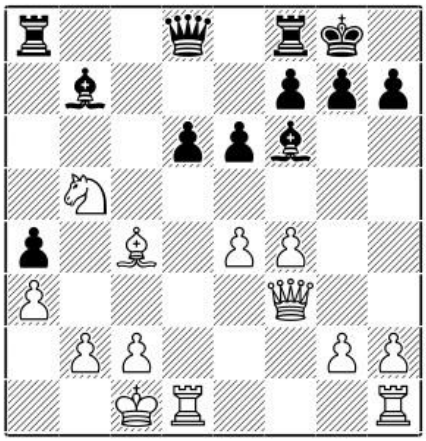
15...a4 16.Bc4

A few games have continued:
16.Rxd6
This looks natural but Black has an excellent reply.
16...Qc8! 17.Ba2 Qc5!
White's pieces are all floating in the air.
18.Qd3
18.Qe2 Bc6!µ is similar: the position resembles the main game, except White's bishop is on the inferior a2-square instead of c4. The upshot is that White has to give up the exchange, just as in the present variation.



18...Bc6!N
18...Bxe4 19.Qxe4 Qxb5 20.c3 Rab8 21.Qc2 Rfc8 22.Rhd1 left Black with compensation for the pawn in Istratescu – Buturin, Bucharest 1992, but the text move is much more convincing.
19.Rxc6
Alternatives are worse: 19.Nc3? Bxc3–+; 19.Bc4 Rab8 20.e5 Be7µ; or 19.Nc7 Bxe4! 20.Qxe4 Bxb2†! 21.Kxb2 Rab8† and Black wins.
19...Qxc6 20.e5 Be7µ

Material is approximately equal but Black has a serious initiative, and he may also pick off the g2-pawn at any moment.

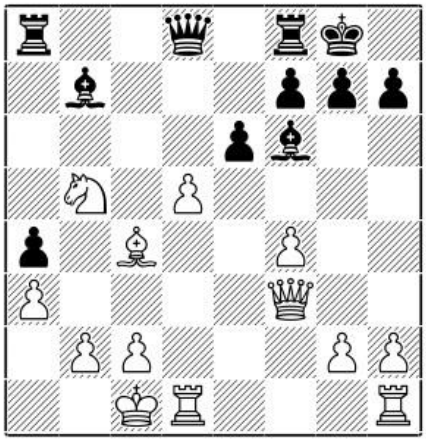


16...Qb6!?

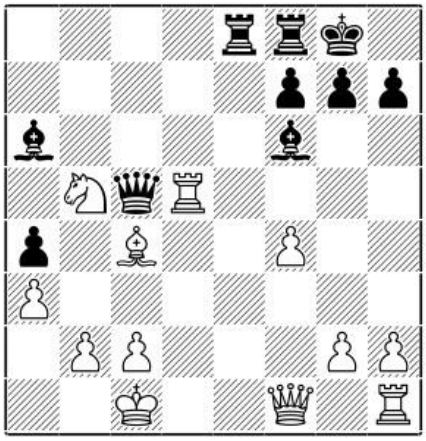
This is a decent move and it led to success for Black in the game, but it is not best.

16...Qb8!? has been played a couple of times, and can be evaluated similarly to the text move.

The star move is 16...d5!N, which seems surprising but the variations work out perfectly. For instance: 17.exd5 (17.e5 is safer although 17...Be7 18.Bd3 Qb6 gives Black superb compensation for the pawn)



17...Qb6! 18.Qe2 exd5 19.Bxd5 Rae8! 20.Qf1 Ba6 21.Bc4 Qc5 Threatening the deadly ...Rc8. 22.Rd5



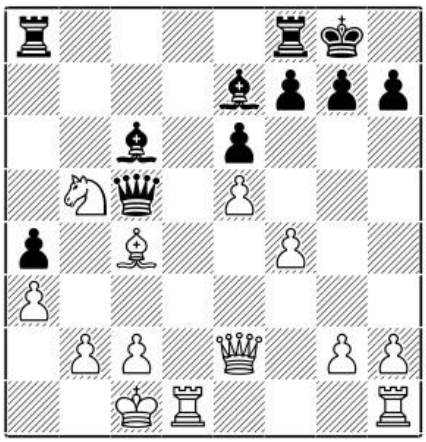
22...Re1†! 23.Qxe1 Qxc4 White's position is falling apart.

17.Rxd6 Qc5 18.Qe2 Bc6 19.e5

White can sacrifice the exchange with 19.Rxc6, but Black is still better after 19...Qxc6 20.e5 Be7 21.Kb1 Rfd8 22.Bd3 Rab8[3].

19...Be7 20.Rdd1?

White does not sense the danger. 20.Rxc6 was necessary.



20...Bxb5 21.Bxb5 Rab8µ

Now White has serious problems.

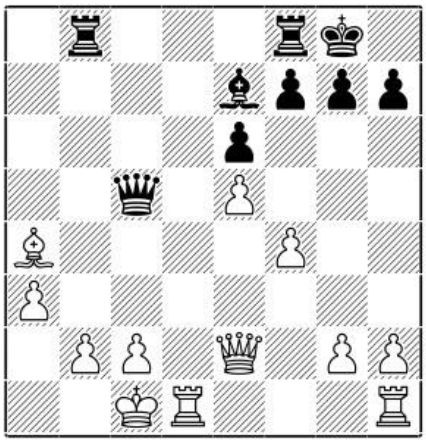
22.Bxa4?

White gets destroyed after this.

22.Rd7 Rxb5 23.Rxe7 Rfb8µ is not much better.

22.Bd3 was the only chance. This still

allows 22...Rxb2! but here White has 23.Bxh7†! Kh8! (and not 23...Kxh7? 24.Qd3† g6 25.Kxb2) 24.Bd3 g6 25.Kd2 when Black is still much better, but some work will be required to secure the win.



22...Rxb2! 23.Kxb2 Qxa3† 24.Kb1 Qxa4

White's king is fatally exposed.

25.Qe3 Rb8† 26.Kc1 Rc8 27.c3 Qa2

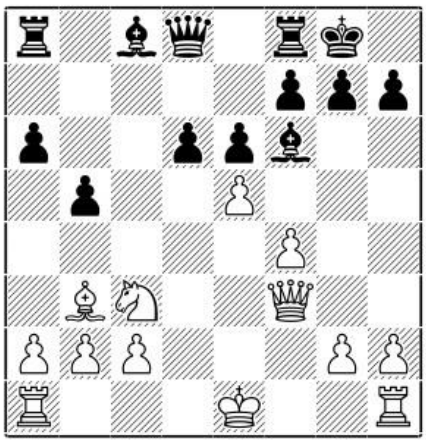
White is defenceless: 28.Qd2 Ba3† ends the game immediately, while if 28.Rd2 Qa1† Black picks up the rook, which never moved from h1.

0–1

B2) 12.Bxf6!

This is the critical attempt to exploit the long diagonal.

12...Bxf6 13.e5



White's threats to win material are quite real, so Black's next two moves are forced.

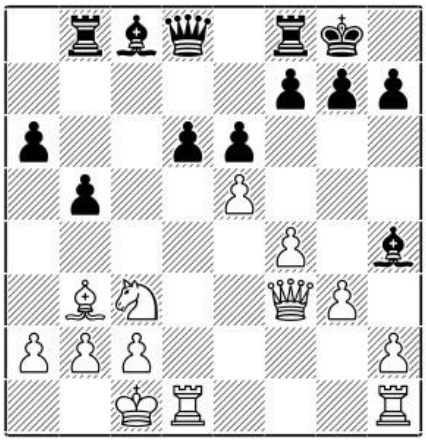
13...Bh4† 14.g3 Rb8

The counter-threat of ...Bb7 keeps Black afloat. White has often responded with **B21)** 15.0-0-0 in practice, although **B22)** 15.gxh4 is more critical.

15.Rf1?! Be7 16.0-0-0 just looks like a worse version of variation B21 below. A good example continued 16...b4! 17.Ne4 d5 18.Qh5 Bd7 19.Ng5 h6 20.Nf3 a5 and Black was already winning in G. Papp – Magyar, Paks 2002.

B21) 15.0-0-0

This is the most common, but it doesn't really put Black under pressure and he has a choice of pleasant continuations.



15...Bb7

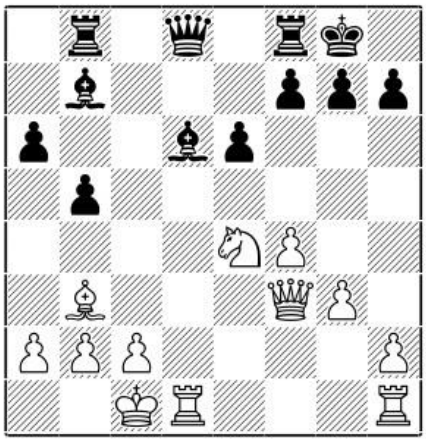
This is the most natural move and the most interesting.

The alternative is:

15...Be7 16.exd6

16.Rhe1?! d5³ was nice for Black in Morozevich – De Firmian, Amsterdam 1996.

16...Bxd6 17.Ne4 Bb7

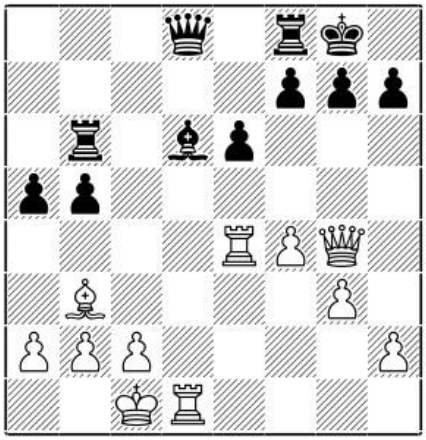


18.Rhe1

It would be safer to play 18.f5N 18...exf5 19.Qxf5 Bxe4 20.Qxe4 Qc7 with equality.

18...a5 19.Qg4 Bxe4 20.Rxe4 Rb6!

Conveniently defending against the threat of Bxe6.



21.Red4

Again 21.f5!?N was safer; a wacky line ending in equality goes: 21...a4 22.fxe6 axb3 23.e7 bxa2 24.exd8=Q Bf4†! 25.Qxf4 a1=Q† 26.Kd2 Rxd8†=

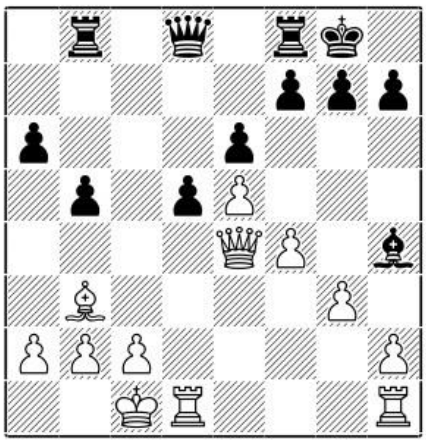
21...Qe7 22.c3? a4 23.Bc2 a3 24.b3 Rc8 25.R1d3 g6

Black was clearly better in Mitkov – Alvarez, Matanzas 1995.

16.Ne4 Bxe4

16...Be7?! is worse on account of 17.f5! exf5 18.Qxf5 Bxe4 19.Qxe4 Qc7 as in Romanishin – Poutiainen, Tallinn 1977, when 20.e6!N² would have led to a one-sided position with a better structure for White.

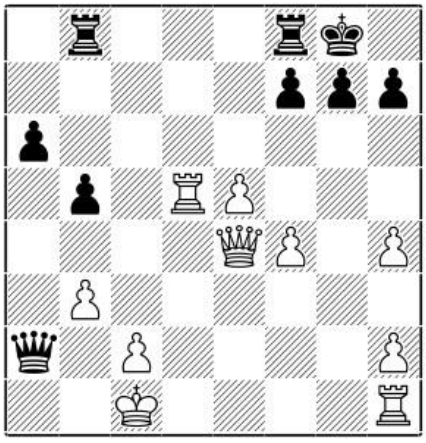
17.Qxe4 d5



18.Qd3!

This retreat is uncommon but I believe it is White's best. Alternatives are dangerous for him:

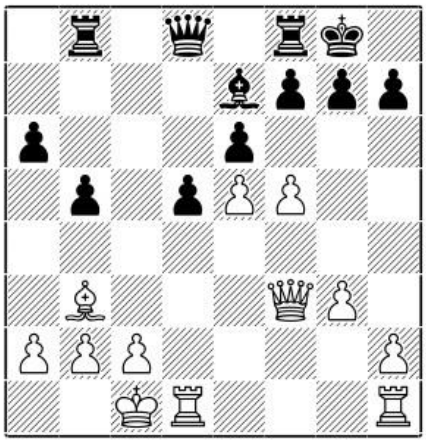
18.Bxd5?! exd5 19.Rxd5 Qa5 20.gxh4 Qxa2 21.b3 gives Black more than enough play for the pawn after:



21...Rbc8 22.Kd2 Qa5† 23.Ke2 Qc3© Antok – T. Papp, Hungary 2007. The machine only gives Black a miniscule edge in its evaluation, but in a practical game it would be much easier for White to fall into trouble due to his exposed king. (In the aforementioned game, White soon went wrong and had to resign on move 30.)

18.Qf3 Be7 19.f5

This has been played a few times, but Black's attack is faster.



19...a5 20.c3 b4!

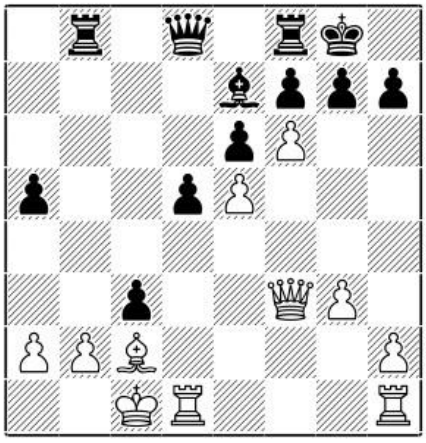
20...a4 is also completely playable: 21.Bc2 Bg5†!? (21...b4 22.f6 gxf6 allowed White to bail out with 23.Bxh7† Kxh7 24.Qh5† Kg7 25.Qg4†, when a draw was agreed in Ehlvest – Mednis, Las Vegas 1998) 22.Kb1 b4 23.h4 Bh6 24.f6? (24.Bxa4N was necessary, although Black retains good compensation for the pawn) Now in Mitkov – D. Fernando, Mondariz 1999, 24...b3!N would be crushing. For instance, 25.Bd3 a3! when the white king's cover is ripped open.

21.Bc2?!

Objectively this is a mistake, but Black was already ahead in the attacking race, and the text move is a reasonable practical attempt to complicate the issue.

21...bxc3 22.f6

Black's most precise continuation is:



22...Qb6!N

22...Rxb2!? 23.fxe7 Qxe7 24.Qxc3 Rxa2 gave Black three pawns for the piece plus some initiative in Reinderman – Van Wely, Leeuwarden 2002, although White's position should be tenable with accurate play.

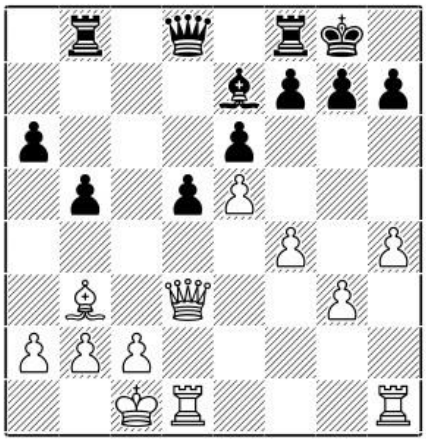
22...gxf6? lets White off the hook, as 23.Bxh7† leads to an immediate perpetual.

23.b3 Ba3† 24.Kb1 g6!

The game is far from over, but Black should be winning with precise play.

18...Be7 19.h4

White intends c2-c3 and Bc2 to provoke ...g6, followed by h4-h5 to prise open the kingside. Black can counter this plan with:



19...Qb6!N

The routine 19...a5?! 20.c3 b4 21.Bc2 g6 22.h5 gave White the initiative in Milos – Coelho, Santos 2008.

20.c3

20.Kb1 Rfc8 is similar.

20...b4!

Black is doing well, and is effectively a tempo up on the aforementioned game.

B22) 15.gxh4

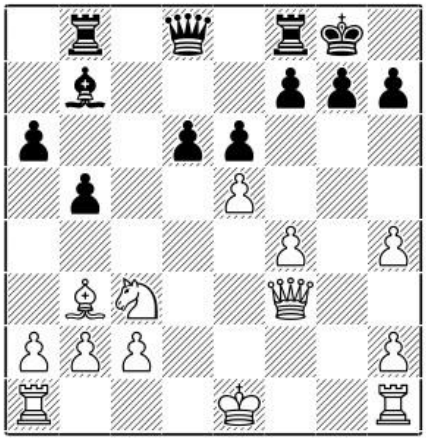
GAME 36

Sergio Badolati – Jueri Siigur

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Bc4 e6 7.Bb3 Nc6!? 8.Be3 Be7 9.f4 0-0 10.Qf3 Nxd4 11.Bxd4 b5! 12.Bxf6! Bxf6 13.e5 Bh4† 14.g3 Rb8 15.gxh4

As stated earlier, taking the bishop is critical.

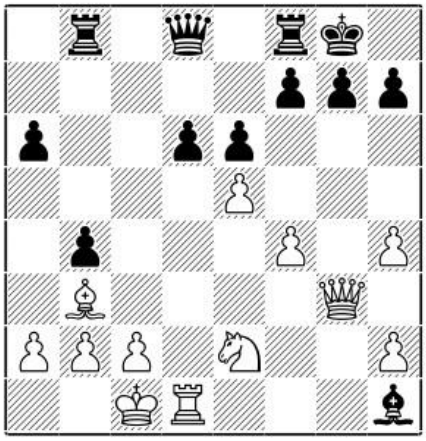
15...Bb7



16.Ne4

White must cling to all the pieces he's got.

16.Qg3? Bxh1 17.0-0-0 does not work after: 17...b4 18.Ne2



18...Bd5! 19.Bxd5 exd5 20.Rxd5 Qc7 21.Rxd6 (21.exd6 Qc4–+) 21...Rfd8–+ Matinian – Zakhartsov, Voronezh 2008.

16...Qxh4†!

This seems strongest – although the decision is not a simple one, as evidenced by Kasparov's indecision.

16...dxe5

Originally Kasparov thought that was best – he played it in a World Championship match after all – but later he considered it to be dubious.

17.Rg1 g6

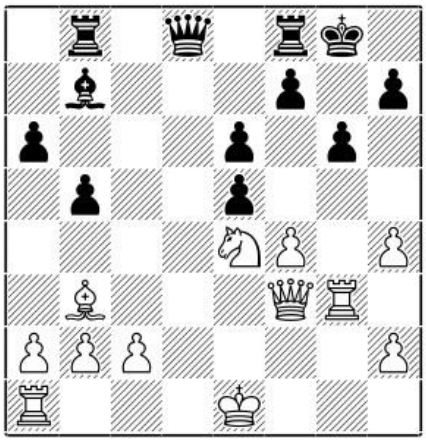
17...Qxh4†? 18.Qg3± is no good, and 17...Bxe4?! 18.Qxe4 Qxh4† 19.Kf1 exf4 20.Qe5 g6 21.Rg2² gave White a pleasant edge in Danin – Tyutyunnikov, Tula 2007.

18.Rg3!

18.Rd1?! Bxe4 19.Qxe4 Qxh4† 20.Ke2 (20.Kf1 Rbd8÷) 20...Qxh2† 21.Rg2 Qxf4 22.Qxf4 exf4 23.Kf3 Rfd8 24.Rxd8† Rxd8 25.Kxf4 Kf8÷ was the well-known game Short – Kasparov, London (12) 1993.

18.Rf1 has also been tried, and now 18...Qd4 and 18...f5 have been shown to be lacking, but 18...a5!?N is more interesting.

The text move is more annoying. Black should try:



18...a5!N

18...Qxh4? 19.Qf2! leaves the black queen vulnerable.

18...Qd4?! 19.Nf6† Kg7 20.c3! Qd8 21.Ne4 Qxh4 22.Qf2!± was excellent for White in Sadikhov – Alekseenko, Albena 2011.

Kasparov offers the following ideas:

19.a3

After 19.fxe5 Bxe4 20.Qxe4 a4 or 19.Rd1 Qxh4 20.Qf2! Qe7! 21.Rd7! Qb4† 22.Nd2 Qxf4÷ Black has enough counterplay.

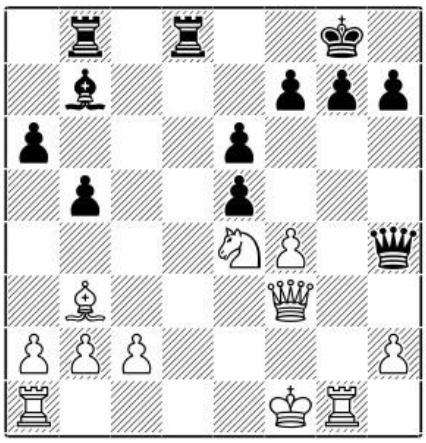
19...a4 20.Ba2 Bxe4! 21.Qxe4 Qxh4 22.0-0-0Qxh2

White may have some edge, but Black is fighting. To summarize, 16...dxe5 looks playable

and complicated, but also riskier and less theoretically reliable than our main line.

17.Qg3

17.Kf1!?N is another valid option, when Kasparov gives: 17...dxe5 18.Rg1 Rfd8!



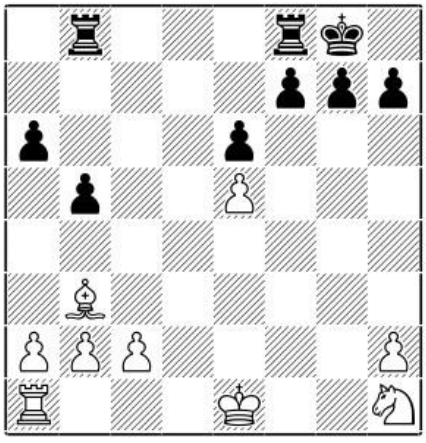
19.Qg3 Qxg3 20.Nxg3 exf4 21.Nh5 g6 22.Nxf4 Rd4© (or 22...Rd2 23.h3 Rh2©) With another type of unclear endgame.

17...Qxg3† 18.Nxg3 Bxh1 19.Nxh1 dxe5

Black could also fling in 19...a5 20.c3 a4 before making this exchange.

20.fxe5

Material is roughly even, but Black needs to activate his rooks before White coordinates his minor pieces.



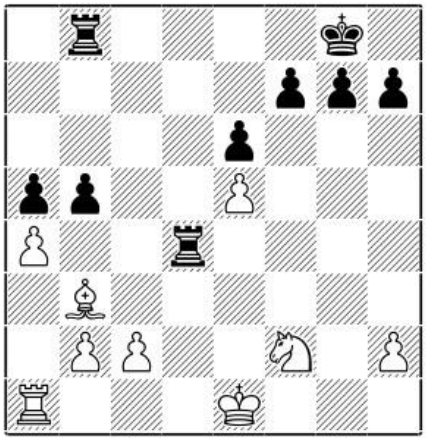
20...a5!

Kasparov considers this to be the key move.

Black has preferred 20...Rfd8 in a few other games: 21.Nf2 Rd4 22.Ke2 (22.h3 Rh4 23.Kf1 Rd8 24.Kg2 Rd2 25.Kf3 Rdd4 26.c3 Rd2 gave Black enough play in Manso Gil – San Segundo Carrillo, Mondariz 1997) 22...a5 (22...Rh4!?N 23.Rh1 a5 24.c3 a4 25.Bc2 a3,, is suggested by Beliavsky) 23.a4 bxa4 24.Bxa4 h5 (if 24...Rxb2 25.Bb3 a4 26.Nd3 White wins the rook) 25.b3 White had consolidated and went on to win in Kersten – Marxen, Cuxhaven 2000. Although 20...Rfd8 in conjunction with Beliavsky's improvement should be playable for Black, our main line provides a more clear-cut way to activate the rooks.

21.c3

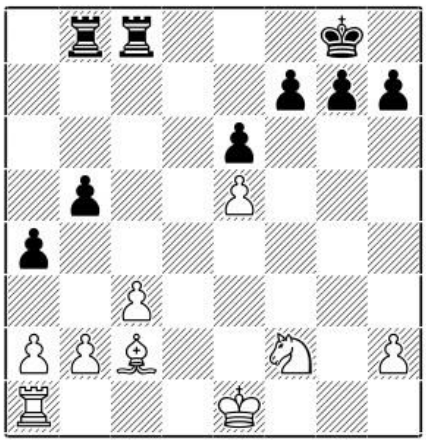
An earlier game which Kasparov took note of went: 21.a4 Rfd8 (another possibility is 21...bxa4!?N 22.Bxa4 [22.Rxa4?! Rb5³] 22...Rxb2 23.Bb3 a4 24.0-0-0! a3 25.Nf2 when both sides must be careful) 22.Nf2 Rd4



23.Nd3?! Rh4 24.axb5 Rxb5 25.Kd2 Rxh2† 26.Kc3 h5³ Votava – Rotman, Rishon LeZion 1993.

21...Rfc8 22.Nf2 a4 23.Bc2

The position is also double-edged after 23.Bd1N 23...Rc5 24.Nd3 Rc4.

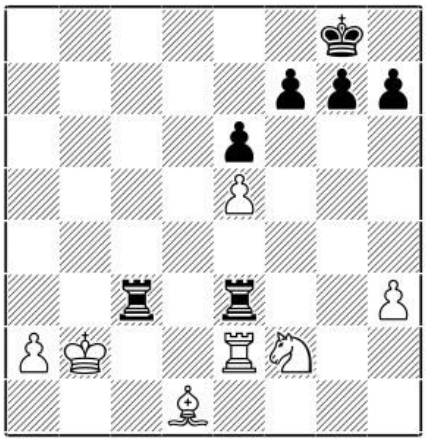


23...a3 24.0-0-0 axb2† 25.Kxb2 b4 26.cxb4 Rxb4† 27.Bb3 Rh4

Compared to the Kersten – Marxen game quoted above, Black's rooks have much more freedom and he has not been left with an isolated pawn on the queenside.

28.h3 Rf4 29.Rd2 Rf3 30.Bd1 Re3 31.Re2 Rcc3

The endgame remains dynamically equal. Over the board anything could happen; but in a correspondence game, both sides avoid mistakes until the game reaches its natural conclusion.



32.a4 Rb3† 33.Kc1 Rxe2 34.Bxe2 Re3 35.Kd2 Rxe5 36.Ng4 Rg5 37.Ne3 Kf8 38.Nc4 Ke7 39.a5 Kd8 40.a6 Kc7 41.Bf3 Kb8 42.Nd6 f6 43.Bb7 Kc7 44.Ne8† Kb8 45.Ke3

½–½

Conclusion

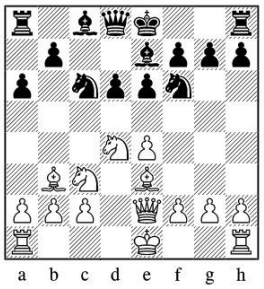
In the Sozin, White can castle kingside on move 9, or prepare to castle queenside with 9.Qe2. But with 9.f4, he does not reveal his intentions just yet. After 9...0-0 the flexible 10.Qe2!? is a bit tricky, as I found out myself, but direct play with 10...Nxd4 11.Bxd4 b5 12.0-0-0 b4!? gives Black good prospects.

Usually White prefers 10.Qf3, when 10...Nxd4 11.Bxd4 b5! gives White a choice. The aggressive 12.0-0-0 is somewhat risky, especially if White meets 12...Bb7 with 13.a3, as Black's attack comes quickly after 13...a5 or even 13...b4!?.

More critical is 12.Bxf6! Bxf6 13.e5 Bh4† 14.g3 Rb8. In practice White most often plays 15.0-0-0, but Black does well after 15...Bb7 16.Ne4 Bxe4 17.Qxe4 d5. Then 18.Qd3! is the only challenging idea, but even here a well-prepared Black player will have excellent chances.

The most critical line is 15.gxh4, leading to complications where even the great Garry Kasparov had trouble finding clear conclusions. With the help of modern engines, correspondence players have shown that best play leads to a complicated endgame with mutual chances.

Chapter 13



9.♕e2

Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.♗c4 e6 7.♗b3 ♘c6!? 8.♗e3 ♗e7 9.♕e2

A) 9...0-0 357

B) 9...Qc7 360

B1) 10.Rg1?! 361

B2) 10.0-0 362

B3) 10.f4 364

B4) 10.0-0-0 Na5! 11.g4 b5 12.g5 Nxb3† 13.axb3 Nd7 366

B41) 14.Nf5!? exf5 15.Nd5 Qd8 16.exf5 Bb7! 17.f6 gxf6! 18.Rhe1! Bxd5! 19.Rxd5 Rg8! 368

B411) 20.h4!? 370

B412) 20.Bf4 371

B413) 20.gxf6 *Game 37* 373

B42) 14.h4 b4 15.Na4 Nc5 16.h5 Bd7 378

B421) 17.g6!? 381

B422) 17.Kb1 382

B4221) 17...Bxa4 *Game 38* 383

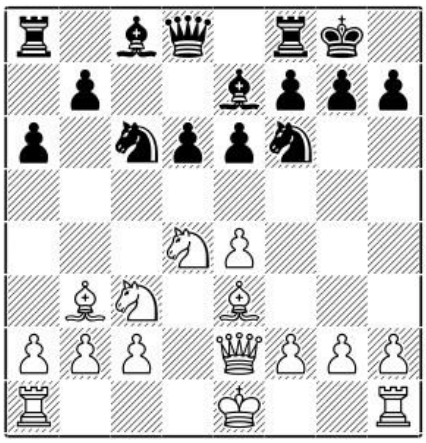
B4222) 17...0-0!N 387

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Bc4 e6 7.Bb3 Nc6!? 8.Be3 Be7 9.Qe2

This move generally implies that White will castle queenside on the next move, an aggressive scheme known as the Velimirovic Attack – although his last move does not completely rule out quieter set-ups with 0-0.

I have decided to offer two recommendations for Black, each of which will appeal to different types of players. **A)** 9...0-0 is a low-maintenance solution. The move itself is not unusual, but I was attracted by a rare follow-up involving an early ...Nxd4 exchange, which seems completely playable yet underrated. We will then move on to the main line of **B)** 9...Qc7, which leads to a full-blooded fight. The latter approach requires much more detailed preparation, but will suit those who prefer to meet White's aggressive system head-on.

A) 9...0-0



10.0-0-0

10.f4 transposes to variation A of Chapter 12, while 10.g4?! allows 10...Nxd4 11.Bxd4 e5, when Black wins a pawn for insufficient compensation.

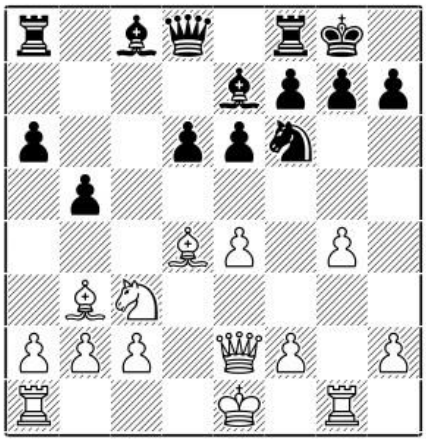
10.Rg1?!

White tries to accelerate his kingside attack but it is too risky with his king in the centre.

10...Nxd4 11.Bxd4 b5 12.g4

12.0-0-0 transposes to 12.Rhg1?! in the notes to the main line below.

12.a3N may be safest, but Black is doing well after 12...Rb8 (or 12...e5!? 13.Be3 Be6) 13.0-0-0 Nd7 intending ...b4.



12...b4 13.g5

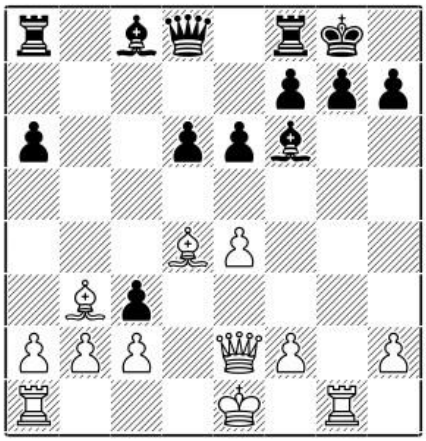
13.Na4 Bb7 14.f3 Nd7µ is great for Black, who can follow up with ...Qc7 and/or ...Nc5, or ...Qa5 and ...Bc6, not to mention possibly inserting a disruptive check on h4 at some point.

13...bxc3

13...Nd7 14.Na4 Bb7 is also good.

14.gxf6 Bxf6

White has no safe haven for his king, for example:

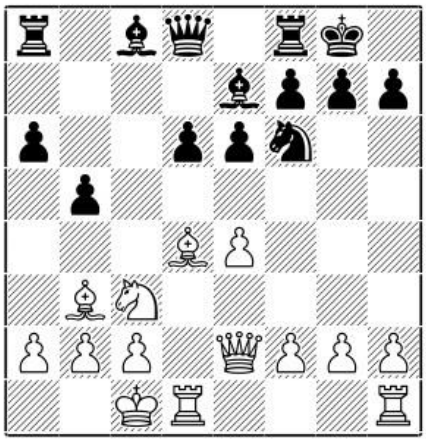


15.bxc3 e5 16.Be3 Be6 17.Rd1 Qc7µ Tomazini – Ulybin, Trieste 2013.

10...Nxd4!?

10...Qc7 is the traditional main line, when White can attack with 11.Rhg1 (the immediate 11.g4!? is also interesting) intending the crude but dangerous plan of g4-g5, Rg3-h3 and Qh5. Just one possible continuation is 11...Nd7 12.g4 Nc5 13.Nf5! b5 14.Bd5! when the play is highly theoretical and wildly complicated.

11.Bxd4 b5



12.e5

This is White's most direct and critical approach.

12.f4 again leads back to variation A of Chapter 12. See page 341 for the continuation of Game 34.

White has also tried:

12.Rhg1?!

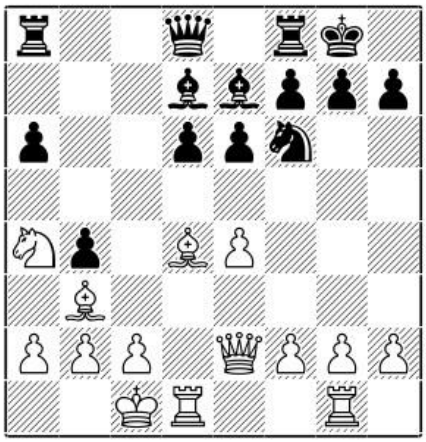
Again this is too slow.

12...b4!

Avoiding 12...Bb7, when 13.a3!? enables White to hold up the attack for a while at least.

13.Na4 Bd7!

Black's play is developing quickly.



14.e5

14.Nb6 would be met by 14...Bb5µ followed by ...Rb8, ...a5 and so on.

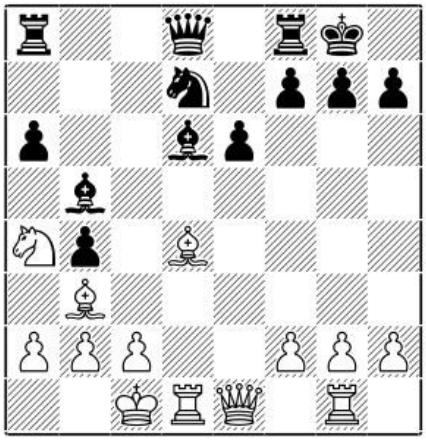
14...Bb5! 15.Qe1 Nd7

15...dxe5!?N 16.Qxe5 (16.Bxe5 Qa5–+) 16...Bd6 17.Qe3 Qc7³ is also good.

16.exd6

16.Qxb4 dxe5 17.Bc5 Nxc5! 18.Rxd8 Nd3† 19.Rxd3 Bxb4 gave Black the better endgame in Vaulin – Panchenko, Kursk 1987.

16...Bxd6



17.Nc5?!

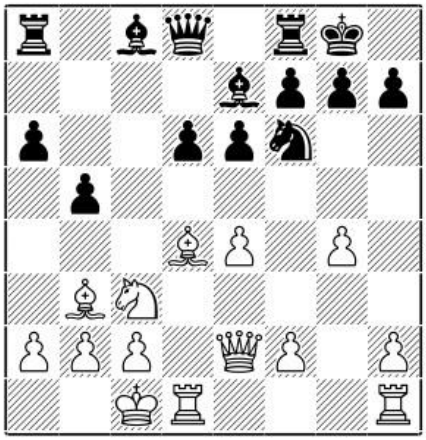
White should have tried 17.Kb1N although 17...Qc7³ still favours Black.

17...Nxc5 18.Bxc5 Qg5† 19.Be3 Qe7µ

With ...a5-a4 on the agenda, White was in trouble in Nikolin – Prudnikova, Belgrade 1999.

12.g4?!

This move has scored surprisingly well, but the statistics are skewed by several games where Black reacted badly. He should get an excellent game with a familiar plan:



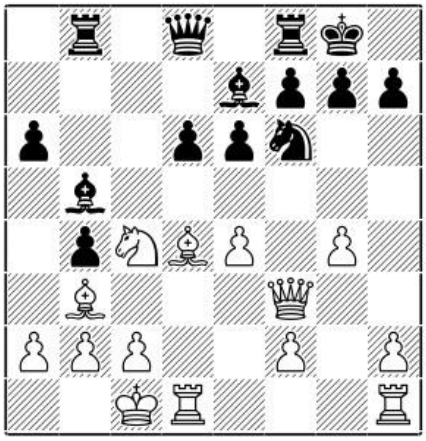
12...b4 13.Na4 Bd7

Just as we saw in the 12.Rhg1?! line above.

14.Nb6

14.g5 is conveniently met by 14...Bb5 followed by ...Nd7.

14...Bb5 15.Qf3 Rb8 16.Nc4



16...Nxe4!N

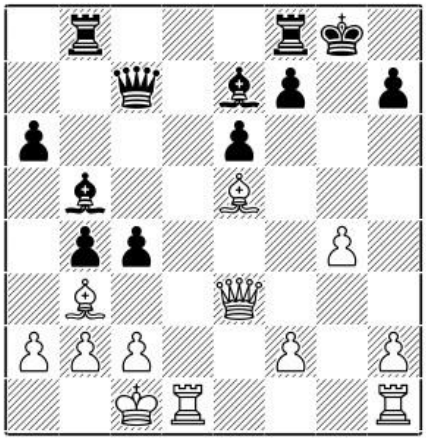
A thematic tactic, although 16...a5 17.Bxf6 gxf6µ was also excellent for Black in Istvandi – Kiss, Hungary 1993.

17.Qxe4 d5 18.Qe3 dxc4 19.Bxg7 Qc7!?

19...Kxg7 20.Rxd8 Rfxd8–+ is also more than good enough: Black is left with rook and two bishops against a queen, with good coordination and plenty of targets to attack. The text move wins in flashier style.

20.Be5

After 20.Bxf8 cxb3 21.axb3 Rxf8–+ Black's two bishops will easily outclass the enemy rook.



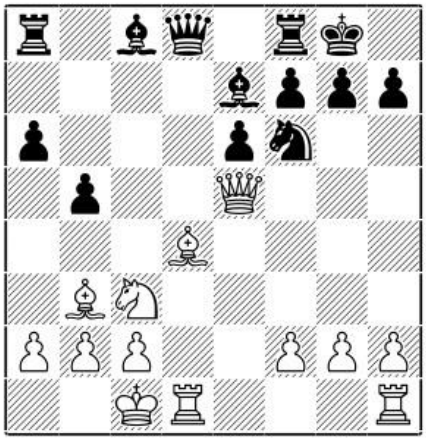
20...cxb3!! 21.Bxc7 bxa2 22.Kd2 Rbd8†! 23.Bxd8 Rxd8†

White must give up his queen to prevent the a2-pawn from promoting.

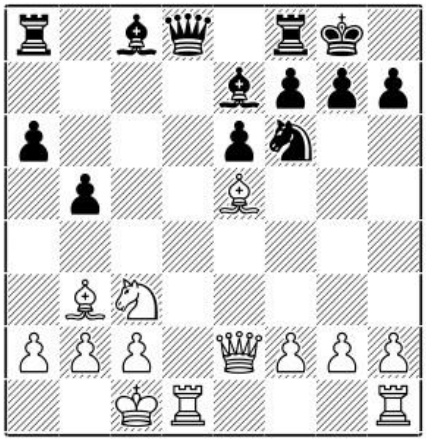
24.Qd3 Bxd3 25.cxd3 a5–+

12...dxe5 13.Bxe5

13.Qxe5?! is toothless, and Black can fight for the initiative with:



13...Bb7!N Intending ...Rc8 or ...Qb8. (A few games have continued with either 13...Qd6 or 13...Bd6, with equality in either case.) There are no dangerous discoveries, and after something like 14.Bc5 Qe8 15.Bxe7 Qxe7³ Black has the more comfortable position.

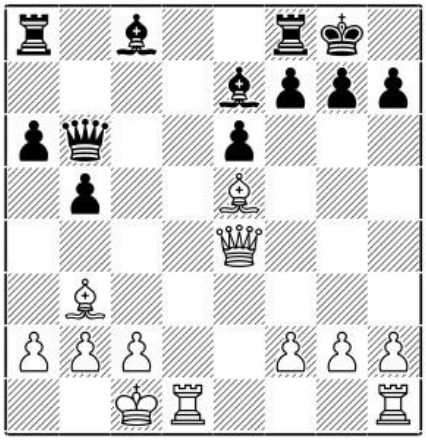


13...Qb6 14.Ne4 Nxe4!

14...Nd7 has been played more frequently but 15.Bd6! Bxd6 16.Rxd6 Qc7 17.Rhd1 Nc5 18.Nxc5 Qxc5 19.Qe4² leaves White with some initiative.

15.Qxe4

Black just needs one accurate move to secure a safe future.



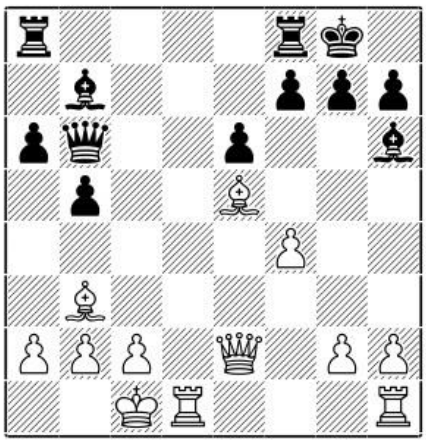
15...Bg5†!

Avoiding 15...Bb7? 16.Qg4 g6 17.Rd7± when Black soon collapsed in Dvorak – Nemec, Brno 2007.

16.f4

16.Kb1 is no better; Black simply plays 16...Bb7 17.Qg4 Bh6, then ...Rfd8 and ...a5.

16...Bb7 17.Qe2 Bh6



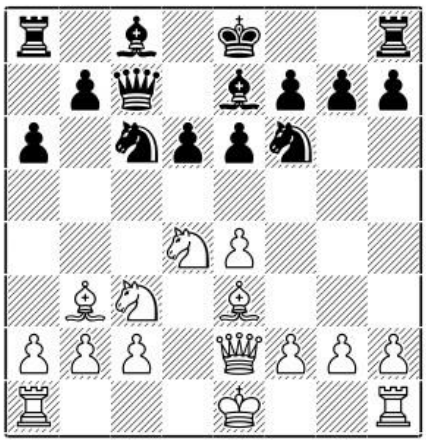
18.Kb1

18.Rd6 Qc5 19.Rhd1 gives Black a not unpleasant choice: 19...Bxg2!? (19...a5 is a decent move if Black prefers not to alter the kingside structure) 20.Bxg7 (20.Qxg2 Qxe5µ) 20...Bxg7 21.Qxg2 Kh8 leads to unclear play.

18...Rfd8

The game was pretty even in Panbukchian – Ermenkov, Bulgaria 1988. Black's dark-squared bishop is oddly placed at the moment, but he has a healthy position and he can always play ...g6 to reroute the bishop when the time is right.

B) 9...Qc7



This is the big main line and a flexible choice, keeping the option of castling but not committing to it for the time being.

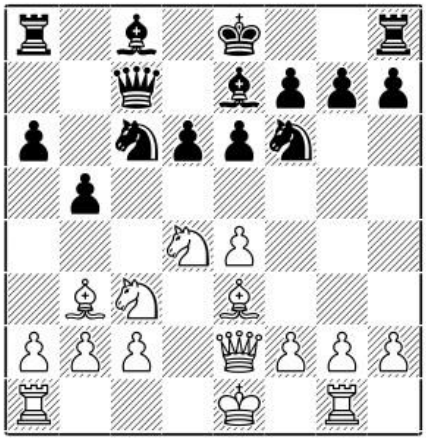
We will consider three sidelines in **B1)** 10.Rg1?!, **B2)** 10.0-0 and **B3)** 10.f4, before the main topic of **B4)** 10.0-0-0.

B1) 10.Rg1?!

White tries to accelerate his kingside play by preparing g2-g4 without losing a pawn to ...Nxd4 and ...e5. However, just as we saw after 10.Rg1?! in the notes to variation A above, neglecting development could prove costly.

10...b5!

10...Na5?! 11.g4 Nxb3 12.axb3 would completely justify White's 10th move. Compared with variation B4 below, the fact that White has not castled enables his rook to benefit from the open a-file, so 12...b5? 13.g5 Nd7 14.Ndxb5 simply wins a pawn. Black has avoided this with 12...Rb8 in some games, but this costs a valuable tempo. Perhaps 12...Nd7 is his best try although 13.f4!N still looks promising for White.



11.g4

11.0-0-0 Na5 gives Black an improved version of variation B4 below, as there is no need for White's rook to commit to g1 so early in that line.

11...b4 12.Na4

12.Ba4?! Bd7µ only helps Black.

12.Nxc6

This has been played a few times but Black does well after:

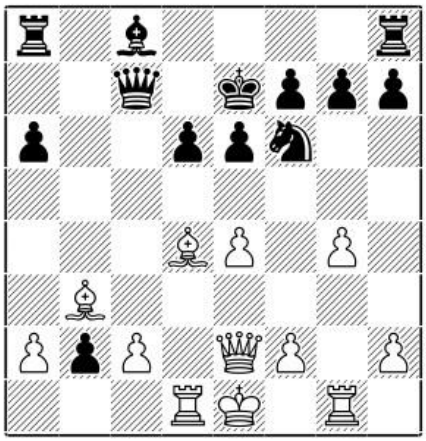
12...bxc3

And not 12...Qxc6?? 13.Ba4, obviously.

13.Nxe7 cxb2 14.Rd1

14.Rb1 Qxe7N gives Black an obvious edge due to White's ruined queenside.

14...Kxe7! 15.Bd4

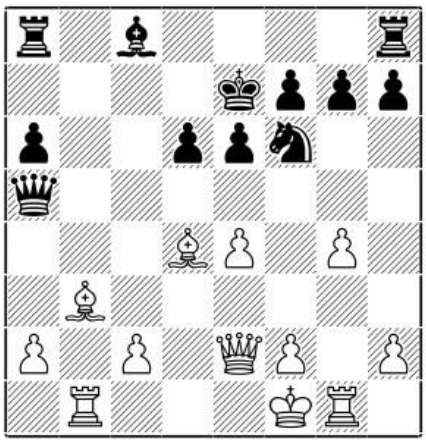


15...Qa5†!N

15...b1=Q 16.Rxb1 was the wrong move order in Vlaovic – Lauritson, Winnipeg 1993; even here, Black should have played 16...Qa5†N but then 17.Kd1! would have kept the game unclear.

16.Kf1 b1=Q! 17.Rxb1

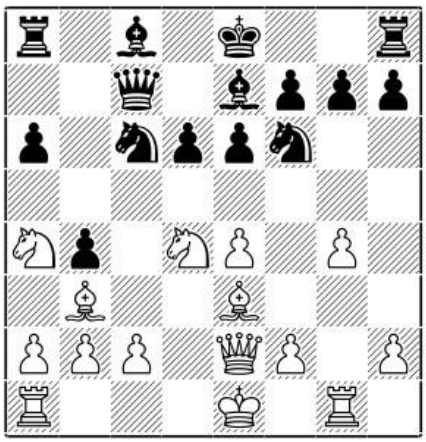
Now Black seizes the initiative with:



17...e5!N 18.Bb2 h5!

And since 19.g5 runs into 19...Bh3†, White has problems.

After the text move Black has several decent options but my favourite is:



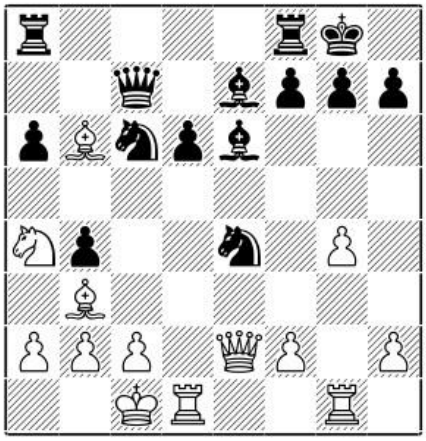
12...0-0!N³

Usually when Black castles early in the Velimirovic, White can meet an early ...b5-b4 violently, for instance with a Nd5 sacrifice. With the knight already on a4, his dynamic possibilities are much more limited.

13.Nxc6

13.f3 Nxd4 14.Bxd4 Nd7³ is also good for Black.

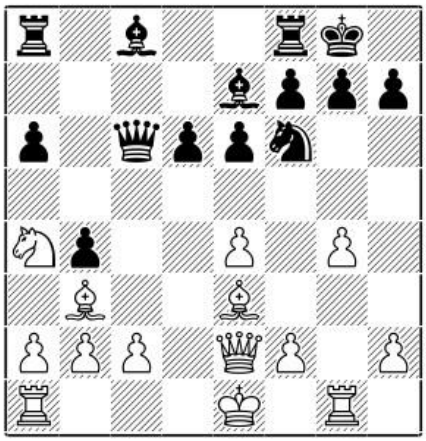
13.0-0-0 transposes to several games. Black gets an advantage after: 13...Nxe4 14.Nxe6 Bxe6 15.Bb6



15...Nc3! 16.bxc3 Qc8µ Casadei – Chojnowski, Cagliari 2019.

13...Qxc6

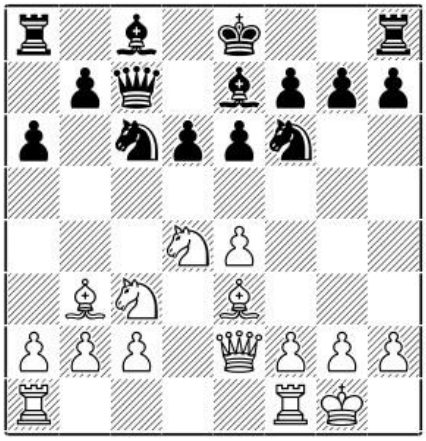
Once again, the poor placement of the knight on a4 works to Black's advantage.



14.f3 Nd7³

Intending ...a5 and ...Nc5, with ready-made queenside play.

B2) 10.0-0



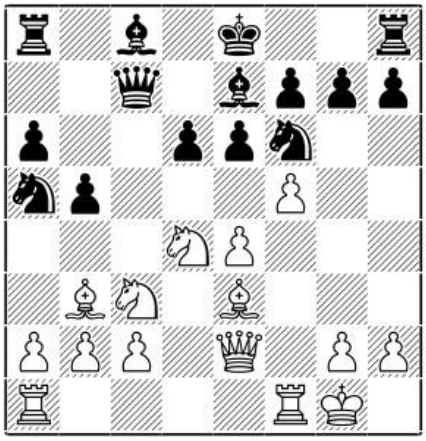
White seems to change his mind. The only real reason for giving this line any special attention is that, in Chapter 11 after 9.0-0, I commented that I preferred to avoid committing the queen to c7 too early when White castled short. So does that mean we have been tricked into an inferior version of that line? Not really, as White has also committed his queen prematurely, ruling out typical set-ups such as f2-f4 and Qf3, unless he is happy to lose a tempo.

10...Na5

With this typical move, Black gives himself the option of eliminating the Sozin bishop. However, it is best not to do it too quickly. As explained in Chapter 11, White may do well to recapture with the c-pawn, when the queen will be uncomfortably placed on the c-file.

10...0-0 11.f4 b5 is another sensible continuation, although I was not sure about the following line: 12.a3 (12.f5?! Nxd4 13.Bxd4 b4 14.Na4 e5³ works out well for Black as the knight has been driven far away from d5) 12...Bb7 13.f5 Nxd4 14.Bxd4 e5 15.Bf2 a5 and now 16.Nxb5!?N 16...Qc6 17.Nc3 Ba6 18.Qf3 Bxf1 19.Rxf1© is an interesting exchange sacrifice.

11.f4 b5 12.f5

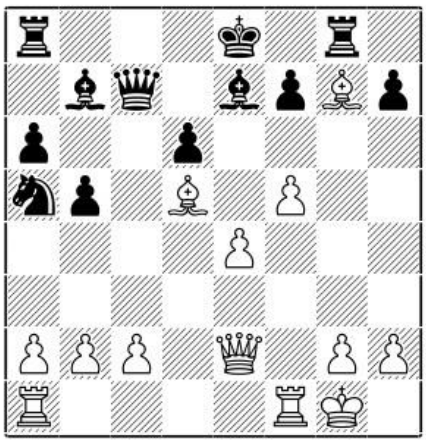


12...e5

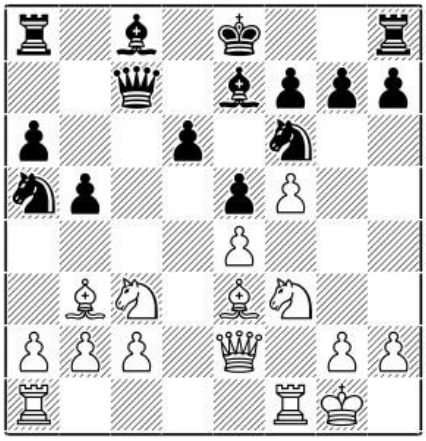
I also considered 12...b4!?N but found the consequences of 13.Na4 (13.Ba4†?! Kf8 14.Nd1 e5³) 13...e5 14.Ne6! (rather than 14.Nf3 Rb8µ) 14...fxe6 15.Bb6 Qc6 16.Bxa5 to be far from clear.

13.Nf3

13.Nd5? is too optimistic: 13...Nxd5 14.Bxd5 exd4 15.Bxd4 (15.Bxa8? dxe3–+ Ralys – Kottahachchy, Vung Tau 2008) 15...Bb7 16.Bxg7 Rg8



17.f6 Bf8 18.Qh5 Bxg7 19.Qxh7 0-0-0 20.fxg7 Bxd5 21.exd5 f6µ Black's extra knight was worth more than White's pawns in Guliyev – Abergel, Paris 2006.



13...Bb7N

This is a natural improvement over 13...Nxb3?! 14.cxb3 Bb7, after which 15.Rac1 Qd8 16.Bg5 b4 17.Bxf6 Bxf6 18.Nd5 Bxd5 19.exd5 0-0 20.Nd2² was pleasant for White in Cao – Bakre, Budapest 2001. As stated earlier, there is no need to give White an open c-file at this early stage. Besides, ...Nc4 may be a useful option at some point.

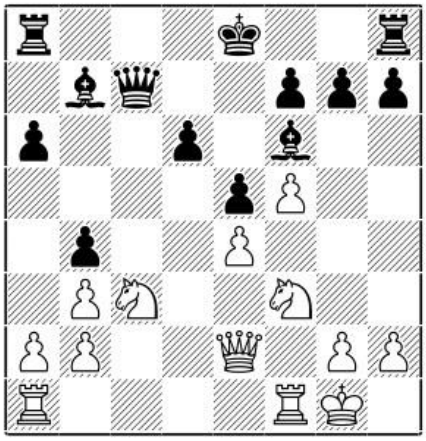
14.Bg5

14.Rac1 would be a fine move if Black was compelled to take on b3, but 14...Nc4 is a good answer.

14...Nxb3

Delaying this exchange by just one tempo makes a big difference.

15.cxb3 b4 16.Bxf6 Bxf6



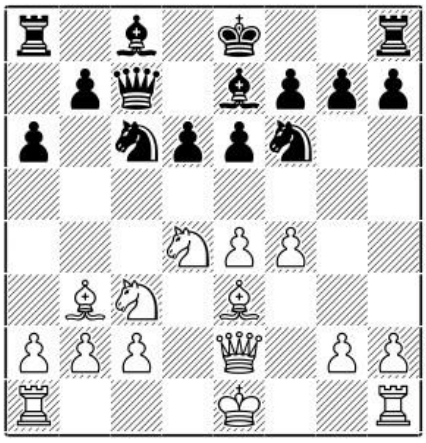
17.Nd5

17.Na4 Bc6 18.Nd2 Bb5 19.Nc4 0-0 is pleasant enough for Black.

17...Bxd5 18.exd5 Qc5†

Black picks up the d5-pawn. White will get some compensation for it by mobilizing his rooks with tempo, but he will be fighting for equality rather than for an advantage.

B3) 10.f4



This move is more flexible and generally trickier than the previous two lines, as White keeps the door open for castling on either side.

10...b5

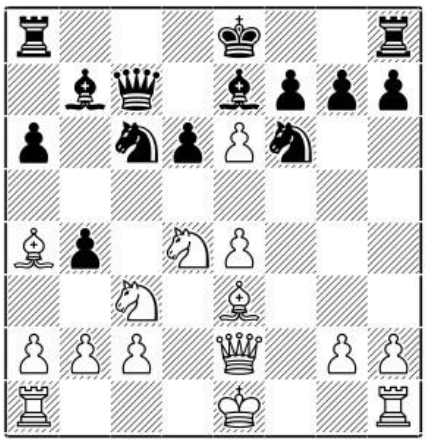
10...0-0 11.f5! is not to my liking, while 10...Na5 11.g4!? also looks quite dangerous.

11.f5

Surprisingly, this position has only been reached in a single game, but it is rich in tactical possibilities for both sides.

11...Nxd4

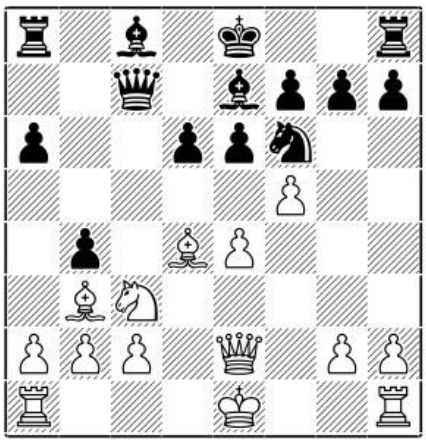
Another interesting line is:
11...b4!? 12.Ba4!
12.fxe6 bxc3 13.exf7† Kf8 14.bxc3 Na5 (or even 14...Bg4 first) will eliminate the bishop and then the f7-pawn, leaving White struggling to justify his material investment.
12...Bb7 13.fxe6
13.Nxc6 Bxc6 14.Qc4 Rc8 15.Qxb4 0-0 16.Bxc6 Qxc6© gives Black lots of activity for the pawn.



13...0-0! 14.Nd5
14.exf7†? is too risky in view of 14...Rxf7 15.Nd5 Nxd5 16.exd5 Nxd4 17.Bxd4 Bg5!–+ when White's king is caught in the centre.
14...Nxd5 15.exd5 Nxd4 16.Bxd4 Bxd5 17.Qg4 g6 18.exf7† Rxf7 19.0-0-0 Qa5
The engine evaluates this as completely equal, although personally I can't help feeling slightly uncomfortable about Black's inferior pawn structure.

12.Bxd4 b4!?

12...e5 is also playable, although after 13.Bf2 Black must be slightly careful not to allow a clamp on the d5-square. The text move leads to more complex play.



13.e5

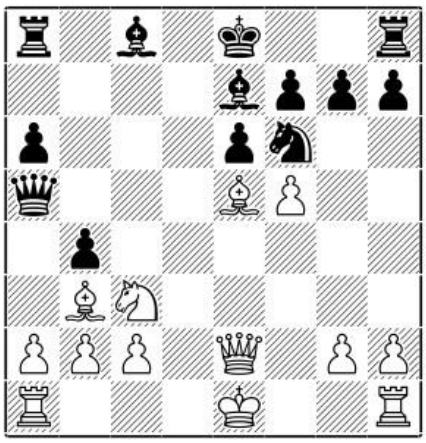
13.fxe6?! bxc3 14.exf7† Kf8 15.bxc3 a5! is clearly better for Black according to Nijboer. I would tend to agree, although it is worth adding

that after 16.0-0 Black should play 16...h5! to prepare ...Rh6, rather than 16...Ba6 17.Qf3 Bxf1? 18.e5! when the tables have turned.

13...dxe5

13...bxc3 14.exf6 also leads to dynamically balanced play after 14...cxb2 or 14...Bxf6, but I have chosen to focus on the text move.

14.Bxe5 Qa5



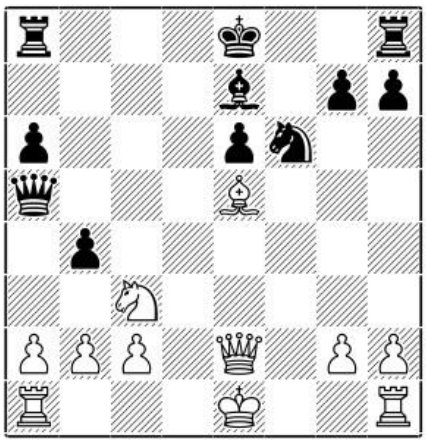
15.fxe6!N

15.Nb1? was the game continuation, when 15...0-0!N would have been great for Black. (15...exf5 was played in Nijboer – Garcia Ilundain, Groningen 1991, when 16.Bxf6N 16...gxf6 17.Nd2 would have been best, although I still prefer Black after 17...Qe5.) Then after 16.fxe6 Bxe6 17.Bxe6 fxe6 18.Nd2 Rac8!µ Black is clearly better, despite the isolated e6-pawn; he enjoys a lead in development and White's king has yet to reach a safe haven.

15...Bxe6

15...bxc3 16.exf7† Kf8 17.Bxc3 Qb5 is equal if you're an engine, but I don't fancy this for Black.

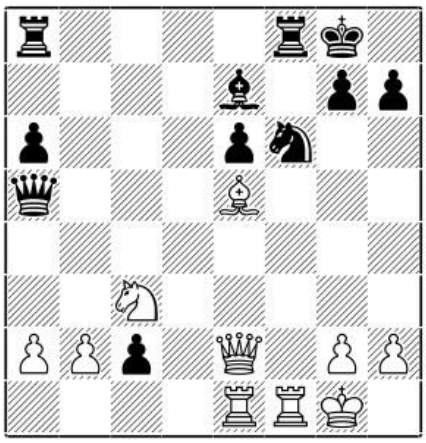
16.Bxe6 fxe6



17.Bxf6!

Only this move holds the balance.

17.Nb1? b3† 18.Nc3 bxc2 19.0-0 0-0 20.Rae1 was given as "²" by Nijboer, some years before the engine era. Today, a mouse click reveals the tactical refutation:

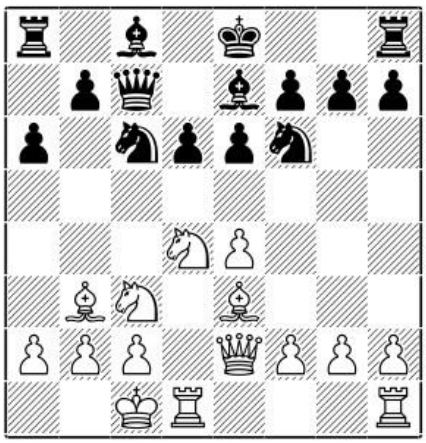


20...Nh5!! Black is completely winning, for instance: 21.Qxc2 (after 21.Qxh5 Qc5† 22.Kh1 Rxf1† 23.Rxf1 Rf8 the combination of the c2-pawn and White's weak back rank decides) 21...Rxf1† 22.Kxf1 Rf8† 23.Kg1 Qc5† 24.Kh1 Qxe5–+ Exploiting the weak first rank to win a piece.

17...gxf6 18.Ne4 0-0 19.0-0 Qe5=

The position remains balanced.

B4) 10.0-0-0



10...Na5!

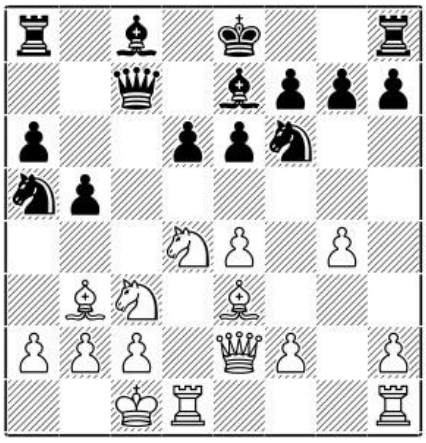
Again delaying castling.

11.g4

Moves like 11.Kb1 and 11.Rg1 have occasionally been used by strong players, but they do not warrant special attention, as the best White can hope for after such moves is to transpose to one of our main lines somehow. Time is important in the Velimirovic Attack and White gains nothing by delaying his attack.

11...b5

I have grown accustomed to this move, but there is not really anything wrong with the immediate 11...Nxb3† 12.axb3 (12.cxb3? Nxe4) 12...b5 13.g5 which transposes.



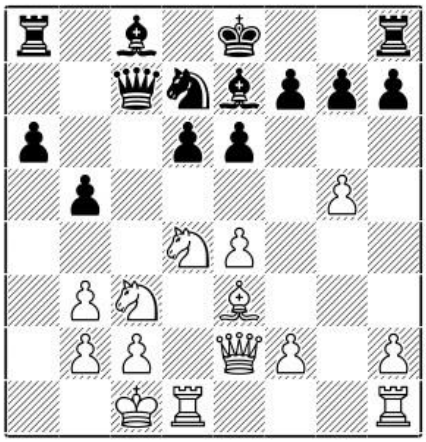
12.g5 Nxb3†

We have to take now because 12...Nd7? allows 13.Bxe6!±.

13.axb3

After 13.Nxb3?! Nd7 White's knight is decentralized, depriving him of many of the dynamic sacrificial possibilities he relies upon in this system. White's knights will also be convenient targets for Black's advancing pawns.

13...Nd7



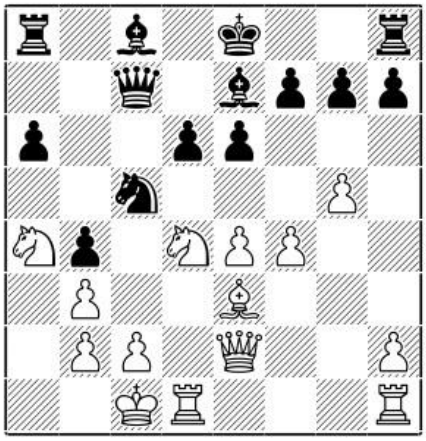
This is the big tabiya for our chapter. Black plans on ...b4, ...Nc5, and ...Bd7 with a quick queenside counterattack.

White has two main options: the violent **B41)** 14.Nf5!? and the more patient **B42)** 14.h4.

14.Kb1 is not a bad move, but after 14...b4 15.Na4 Nc5 White has nothing better than transposing to variation B422 with 16.h4 Bd7 17.h5. Other moves tend to be too slow, for instance:

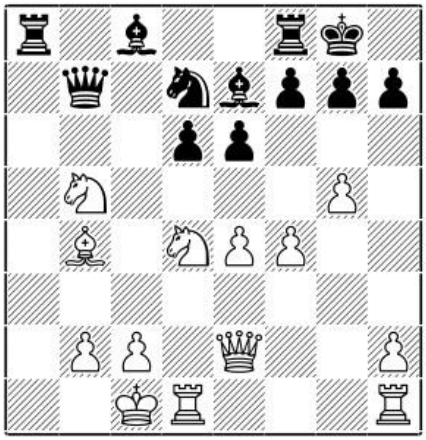
14.f3?! is unnecessary, and 14...b4 15.Na2 (15.Na4 Nc5³ has also been played, when Black enjoys a better version of variation B42) 15...a5³ was excellent for Black in Matikozian – Vigorito, Phoenix 2005.

14.f4 b4 15.Na4 Nc5 also gives Black a better version of the usual lines, for instance:



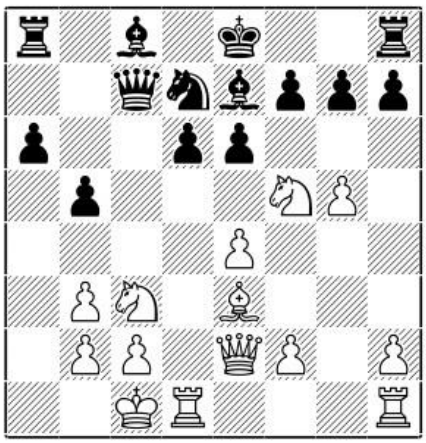
16.Nxc5 (16.f5 e5 17.Ne6 Nxe6! 18.fxe6 Bxe6 was mysteriously agreed drawn in Velicka – Jurka, Czech Republic 1995, but 19.Nb6 0-0!µ would have been a powerful exchange sacrifice) 16...dxc5 17.Nf3 a5 Black had the faster attack in L. Johanson – D. Cramling, Stockholm 1993.

Finally, 14.b4?! seeks to hold up Black's attack, but after 14...0-0 15.f4 Black can still crack things open with 15...a5! 16.Ncxb5 Qb7 17.Bd2 axb4 18.Bxb4 as in Brunner – Wolff, Maringa 1991. Here Wolff points out an improvement:



18...Nc5! White is in trouble, for instance: 19.Bxc5 (or 19.Rhe1 Ra1† 20.Kd2 Ra4 21.c3 Bd7 and Black is winning) 19...dxc5 20.Nb3 Now Wolff's suggestion of 20...Ra4!? is clearly better for Black, but 20...Bd7! is even stronger, since 21.Nd6 (or 21.Nc3 Rfb8–+) 21...Bxd6 22.Rxd6 Ba4 leaves White without a good defence.

B41) 14.Nf5!?



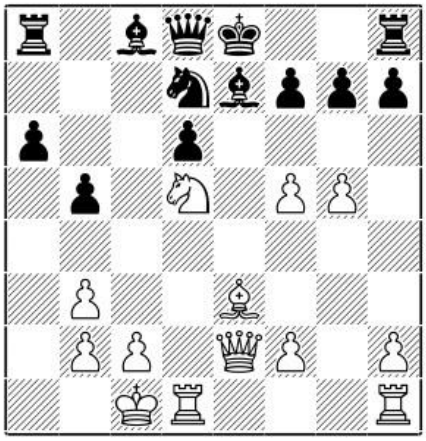
This is Velimirovic's patented sacrifice, which the Yugoslav player first unleashed in 1965, several years before he became a GM or even an IM. It demands careful play from both sides, but it should not yield an advantage. Black's defences have been well worked out over the years and they continue to hold up in the computer era.

14...exf5

Black has also experimented with 14...b4 which leads to interesting complications, but I do not trust it.

15.Nd5 Qd8 16.exf5

The situation looks scary, as Black's king is on an open file and castling will be met with a quick detonation on f6. Black has his share of resources though, not least of which being his extra piece. The next few moves are important to remember.

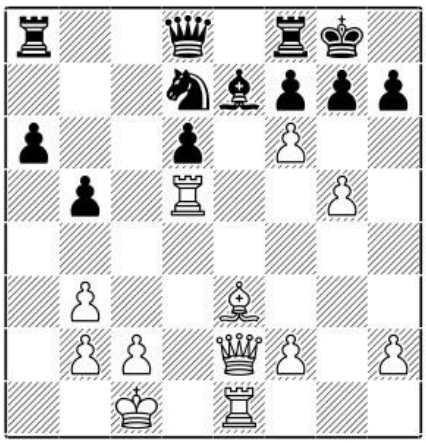


16...Bb7!

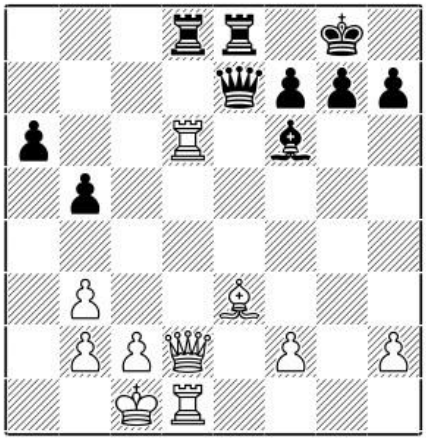
Black has to be ready to kill that knight.

17.f6

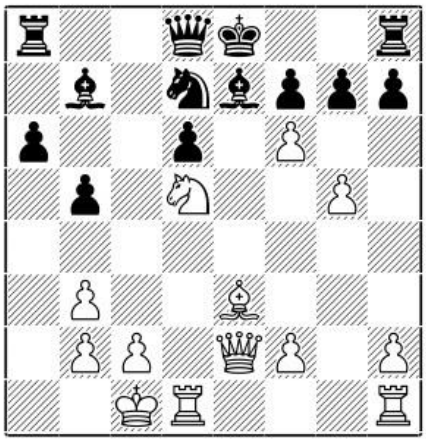
White has also tried:
17.Rhe1 Bxd5 18.Rxd5 0-0
Black can safely castle, as he can simply return the extra piece.
19.f6



19...Nxf6
For some reason 19...Bxf6!?N has never been tried but it is certainly possible; after 20.gxf6 Nxf6 21.Rdd1 Re8 White will not have an easy task proving compensation for the missing pawn.
20.gxf6 Bxf6
Black is at least equal. A good example continued:
21.Qd2
White has fallen for 21.Bf4? Bxb2†! a few times.
21...Re8 22.Rxd6 Qe7 23.Rd1 Rad8
23...Be5!?N 24.Rd7 Qf6 looks a touch more accurate.



24.Rxd8 Rxd8 25.Qxd8† Qxd8 26.Rxd8† Bxd8 27.Kd2 f5
Black managed to win this endgame in Van Oosterom – Van der Wiel, Dieren 2004.

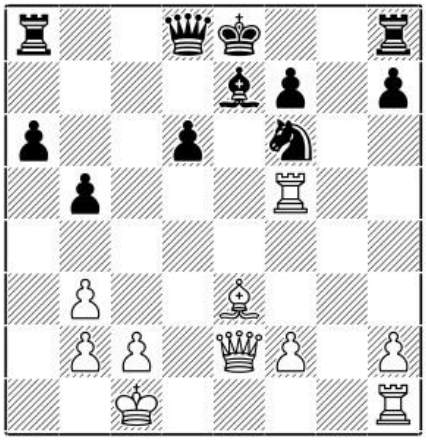


17...gxf6!

Black has also tried to be tricky with 17...Bxd5?, hoping for 18.fxe7?? when 18...Qa5!–+ has netted him a few cheap points. Things are not so rosy after other moves though: 18.Rxd5 gxf6 19.Bd4!? offers White an ongoing initiative for the piece, while 18.fxg7! Rg8 19.Rxd5 Rxg7 20.f4! is stronger still; Black has rarely managed to survive from here in practice.

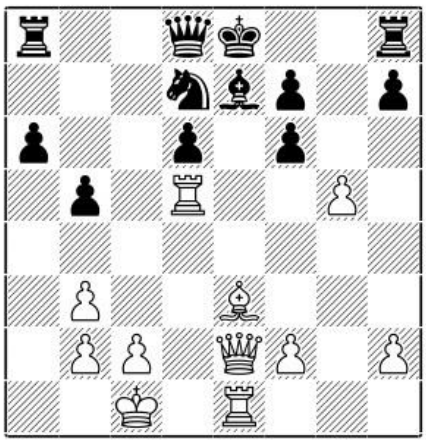
18.Rhe1!

18.gxf6? is a mistake, after which 18...Bxd5! suddenly works. 19.Rxd5 (19.fxe7 again runs into 19...Qa5!µ) 19...Nxf6 20.Rf5 and now Black secures his advantage with:



20...Qc8! (20...Rg8? lets White off the hook, as 21.Re1! leads to variation B413 below) 21.Qf3 Nd7 22.Bd4 This occurred in Dvirnyy – Yakovich, Brescia 2009, when 22...f6!Nµ would have held everything together, leaving White without enough compensation for the missing piece.

18...Bxd5! 19.Rxd5



19...Rg8!

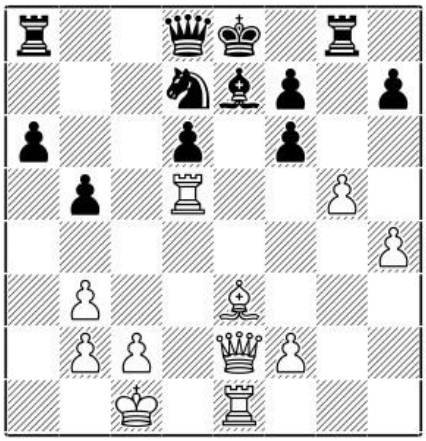
This is another key move. The rook often heads to the g6-square, and sometimes Black can hide his king on h8.

It is important to know that 19...0-0? loses by force after 20.gxf6 Bxf6 (or 20...Nxf6 21.Rg5† Kh8 22.Bd4+– when there are too many threats) 21.Rg1† Kh8 22.Rh5! threatening to take on h7.

White now faces an important choice between **B411)** 20.h4!?, **B412)** 20.Bf4 and **B413)** 20.gxf6.

20.Bd2? Kf8!µ enables Black to consolidate. Only one game arrived here, and after 21.Ba5? Qxa5 22.Qxe7† Kg7 23.Rxd6 Rae8 24.gxf6† Kh6 25.Qxe8 Rxe8 26.Rxe8 Qc7–+ Black had a decisive material advantage in Golyak – Petrushin, USSR 1971.

B411) 20.h4!?



This is relatively uncommon, but nonetheless a serious move. White plays positionally, even down a piece.

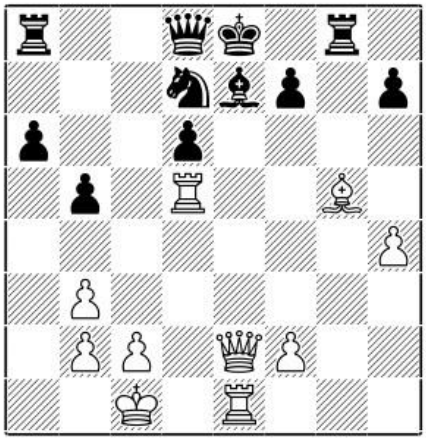
20...fxg5!

20...Rc8 is the commonly accepted solution, but after the consistent 21.f4! (21.Bf4?! Kf8 favours Black) 21...Kf8 22.Kb1 Rg6 I am not satisfied with Black's position. He would like to play ...fxg5 and ...Re6, but Ehlvest's suggestion of 23.h5!? Rg8 24.Qd3 Rg7 25.Bd4 seems quite good for White. It is too difficult for Black to get coordinated.

The text move has been condemned by some commentators, but it is best. Black has to force the play to avoid ending up in a completely passive position as we saw above.

21.Bxg5

This position has only been reached in one game, and an immediate improvement is needed.

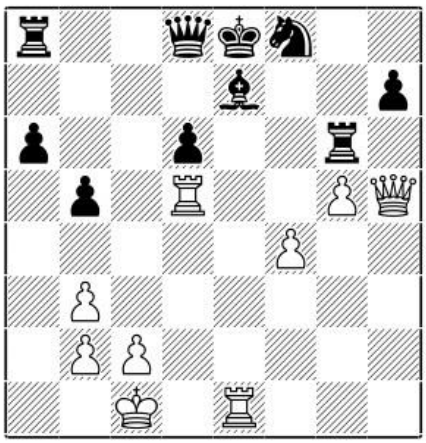


21...f6!N

21...Ne5?! 22.f4! proves to be good for White after 22...Nc6N (or 22...Bxg5 23.hxg5± Yurtaev – Sher, Volgodonsk 1983) 23.Qe4! h6 24.Bxe7 Nxe7 25.Qh7±.

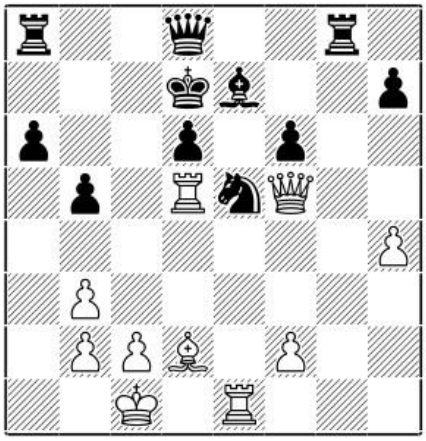
22.Qh5†

In the event of: 22.f4?! fxg5 (or 22...Rg7!? 23.Qh5† Rf7) 23.Qh5† Rg6 24.hxg5 Nf8



25.f5 Qa5! Black is fighting for the advantage.

A possible drawing line is: 22.Bd2 Ne5 23.Qh5† (23.f4 Nf7 is at least okay for Black) 23...Kd7 24.Qf5†

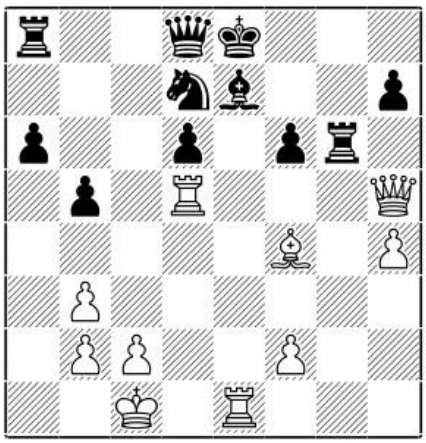


24...Kc6! 25.Qe4 Kd7 (25...Kb6? 26.Ba5†! Kxa5 27.Qd4+– must be avoided) 26.Qf5†= Neither side has anything better than repeating moves.

22...Rg6 23.Bf4

23.Qxh7?! Nf8 enables Black to consolidate.

The forcing play continues with:



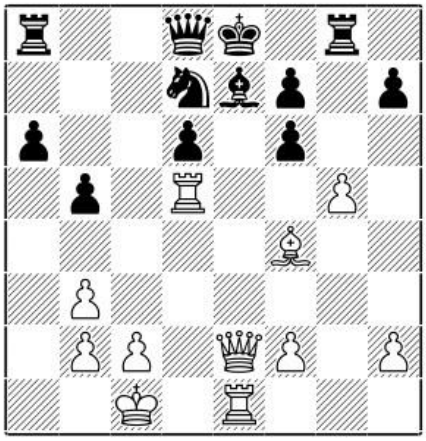
23...Ne5 24.Qxh7 Rg2

Now ...Qa5 is a serious threat.

25.Kb1 Rc8

The position remains quite unclear.

B412) 20.Bf4



White decides to try to recoup some material.

20...Kf8

Of course, with Bxd6 coming we have to move the king.

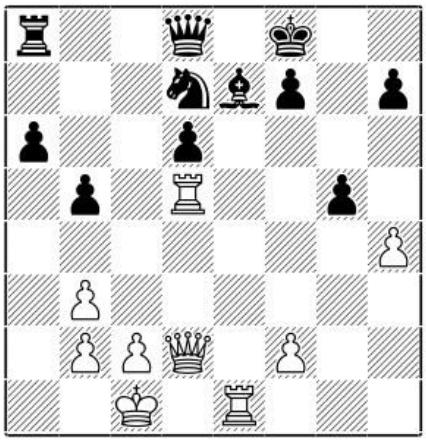
21.Bxd6

Two other moves should be considered:

21.Qd2? Rxg5!

This shows another resource available to Black.

22.Bxg5 fxg5 23.h4



23...a5!

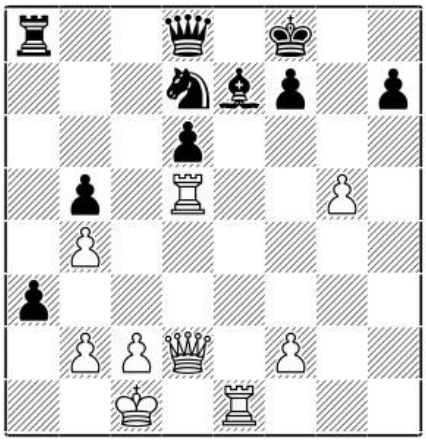
Black is already much better. The last move reminds us that these positions are not just about consolidating with the extra material; Black can also go on the offensive against the enemy king.

24.hxg5?

White was also losing after 24.Qd4? Bf6 25.Qe4 a4–+ in Szuk – Hjelm, Budapest 1995.

24.Rxb5N 24...a4 25.Qd4 Ne5 26.bxa4 gxh4µ was White's best chance although Black remains the clear favourite.

24...a4 25.b4 a3



26.b3

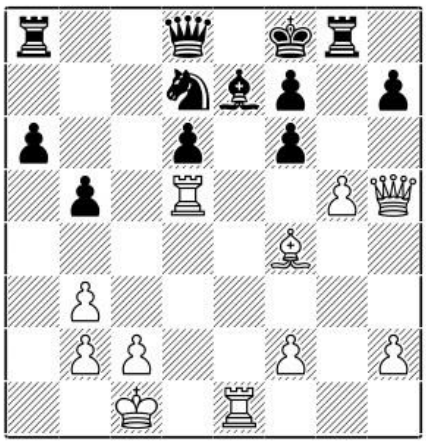
After 26.bxa3 Rxa3 27.Qd4 Kg8!–+ Black will contiue with ...Bf8-g7

26...Ne5–+

Hector – Fishbein, Stavanger 1991.

21.Qh5

This aggressive move gives Black a choice.



21...Qa5

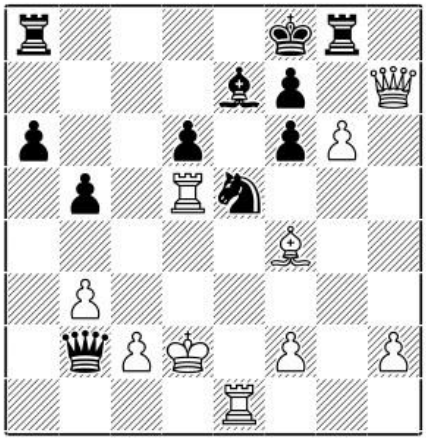
21...Kg7!?N 22.Bxd6 Bxd6 23.Rxd6 Rc8 24.gxf6† Kh8 also looks playable.

22.Kd1!

22.Qe2? gives Black a pleasant choice: 22...Re8!N–+ is most accurate according to the machine, but the more human 22...Ne5 23.gxf6 Bxf6µ is also good enough.

22...Qa1† 23.Kd2 Qxb2 24.Qxh7 Ne5 25.g6!

25.gxf6? Bxf6µ



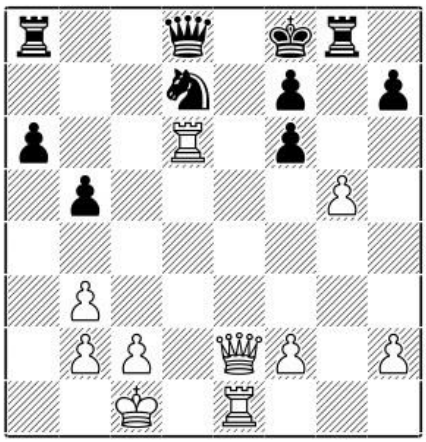
25...Nf3†!

The only move, which leads to perpetual check.

26.Ke3 Qc3† 27.Rd3 Qxe1† 28.Kxf3 Qh1† 29.Ke3 Qe1†

A draw was agreed in Colin – Weiner, corr. 2012.

21...Bxd6 22.Rxd6



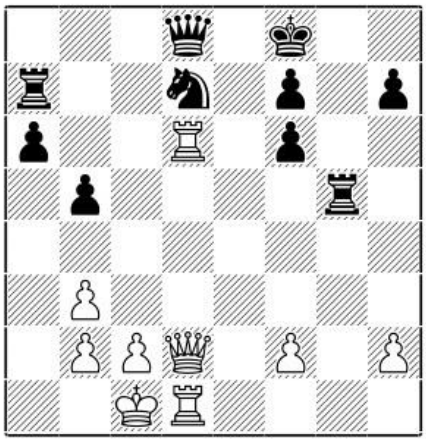
22...Rxg5!

It is more important to activate the rook than it is to worry about pawn structure.

I was surprised to see that Peter Wells, a Classical Sicilian expert, has twice preferred 22...fxg5. Both opponents played 23.Qd2, and both times the English GM got into trouble. First he tried 23...g4 in Lane – Wells, Torquay 2009, when 24.Re5!N would have been troublesome for Black; and a few years later, 23...Rg6? 24.Rxd7± was great for White in Balint – Wells, London 2013. A better try is 23...Ra7!N although even then after 24.Qb4! a5! 25.Rxd7† axb4 26.Rxd8† Kg7 27.Rxg8† Kxg8 28.Re5 Black is still suffering.

23.Qd2 Ra7 24.Rd1

24.f4? proved to be much worse after 24...Rg6 25.f5 Rg5 26.h4 Rg4 27.Qh6† Kg8µ in Mortar – Ardelean, Romania 1998.



24...Qb8

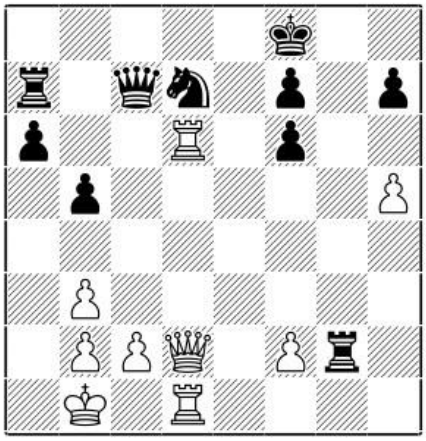
Sometimes when you have an extra piece, the best thing to do is give it back.

25.h4!

Correctly avoiding 25.Rxd7 Rxd7 26.Qxd7 Qxh2 when Black is better: his king will be safe on g7 and the h-pawn can advance.

25...Rg2 26.Kb1 Qc7 27.h5

We have been following Nepomniachtchi – I. Popov, Dagomys 2009. I agree with Palliser's suggested improvement:



27...Qc5!N 28.Qh6† Rg7 29.Rxd7 Rxd7

30.Rxd7 Qg5=

Leading to a drawn rook endgame.

B413) 20.gxf6

GAME 37

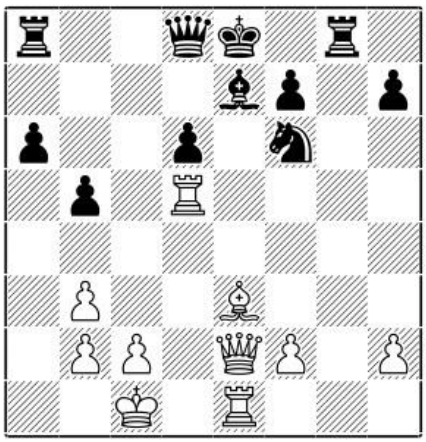
Klaus Hoeck Johnsen – David Overton

Correspondence 2005

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Bc4 e6 7.Bb3 Nc6!? 8.Be3 Be7 9.Qe2 Qc7 10.0-0-0 Na5 11.g4 b5 12.g5 Nxb3† 13.axb3 Nd7 14.Nf5!? exf5 15.Nd5 Qd8 16.exf5 Bb7 17.f6 gxf6 18.Rhe1 Bxd5 19.Rxd5 Rg8 20.gxf6

This is the main line and the safest move – even though it feels strange to talk of safety in a variation where White has already hurled his pawns up the board and sacrificed a knight.

20...Nxf6



21.Rf5

This is the only way to maintain White's initiative, so it is an automatic move. Black, on the other hand, can choose between a forcing continuation leading to a draw and a riskier winning attempt.

21...Rb8!?

This is the ambitious move if Black wants to test White – though as stated above, it makes life more dangerous for Black as well.

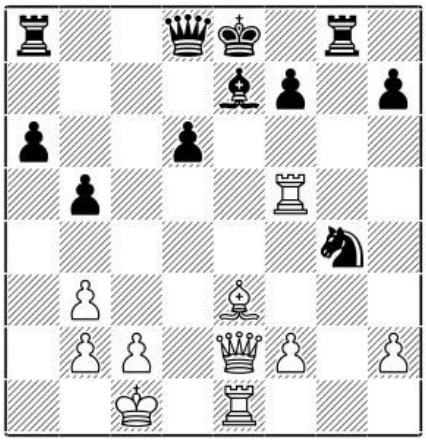
The one time I got this position over the board, I goofed it with 21...Rg6? – a typical idea, but it is poorly timed because of: 22.Bb6 Qd7 23.Qf3 Rb8 (in a later game Black lost after 23...Rc8 24.Rxf6+– in Azarov – Jobava, Kemer 2007, so at least I was in good company...) 24.Rxf6 Rxb6 25.Qa8† Qd8 26.Rxe7†! Kxe7 27.Rxf7† Kxf7 28.Qxd8± Black is still in trouble although my lower-rated opponent let me away with a draw in Terrie – Vigorito, Massachusetts 1999.

I will briefly mention 21...Nd7!? as a relatively unexplored move which seems playable. However, when I analysed it I found that Black had to be quite accurate to reach a drawn endgame, so I would recommend that you focus on the game continuation and/or the more reliable drawing line shown below.

The main theoretical line is:

21...Ng4!

This should guarantee a draw, but White can err in many ways. To maintain the balance, he must play:



22.Bg5!

Other moves are worse, for instance:

a) 22.Bd4? Rg6 23.Qf3 Ne5 24.Bxe5 dxe5 25.Rxf7 Ra7!N is winning for Black. (The last move dramatically improves upon 25...Rf6?? 26.Rxf6 Bxf6 27.Rd1 when White regained the piece with a winning position in Rogic – Lisenko, Makarska 1994.)

b) 22.Rg1? occurred in Torvald – Salamon, corr. 1973, when 22...Nh6!N would have refuted

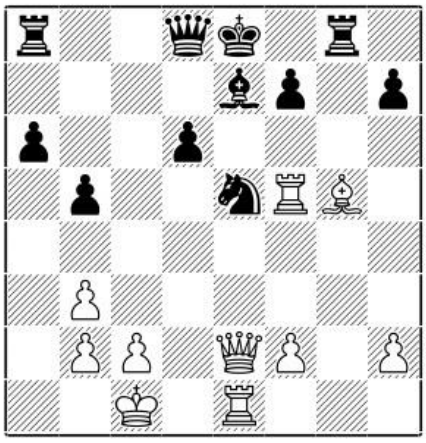
the attack, for instance: 23.Rfg5 Bxg5! 24.Bxg5† Kd7–+;

c) 22.Qf3? is also inadequate: after 22...Rc8 23.Bd4 Ne5 24.Qh3 Rg5 25.Rxg5 Bxg5† 26.Kb1 h6–+ White had nowhere near enough compensation in Zapata – Van der Wiel, Wijk aan Zee 1995.

d) Finally, 22.Rg5!? is playable but a less convincing equalizer for White than the main line. After the forcing continuation 22...Rxg5 23.Bxg5 Ne5 24.Bxe7 Qxe7 25.f4 Nd3†! 26.cxd3 Qxe2 the players agreed a draw in Kristjansson – Thorfinnsson, Selfoss 2002, but Black could have played on. The endgame after 27.Rxe2† Kd7 clearly should be a draw, but Black is marginally better and can keep playing with no risk.

22...Ne5

Black could even try 22...f6!?N 23.Bxf6 Nxf6 24.Rxf6 Ra7 if desperate for a win.



23.Bxe7 Qxe7 24.f4 Qe6

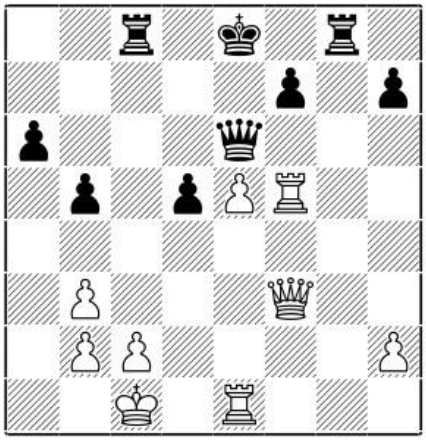
24...Nd3† 25.cxd3 Qxe2 26.Rxe2† Kf8= is another level endgame.

25.Qe4 Rc8!?

25...Nd3† 26.Kd2 Nxe1 27.Qxa8† Ke7 28.Qb7† Kf8 29.Qb8† was agreed drawn due to perpetual check in Waitzkin – De Firmian, Bermuda 1995.

26.fxe5 d5 27.Qf3

In Froeberg – Rahunen, corr. 1997, Black should have continued:



27...Qh6†!N 28.Qf4 Qxf4† 29.Rxf4 Rg2 30.c3 Rxh2 31.e6 fxe6 32.Rxe6† Kd7 33.Rff6

With equality. The conclusion is that 21...Ng4! is theoretically watertight, and a good technical player could always try to win one of these level rook endgames.

22.h4

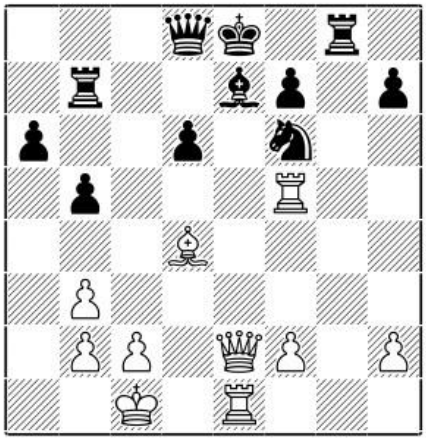
Kasparov gave the immediate 22.Bg5 in *Revolution in the 70s* but I think White is risking more than Black after 22...Rxg5 23.Rxg5 d5! 24.Re5 Rb7 intending ...Qd6 and ...Kd8.

White was successful with 22.Bd4? in Zapata – Becerra Rivero, Matanzas 1994, but the accurate 22...Kf8!N would have left White short on attacking ideas.

If White wants to place his bishop on d4, he is better off throwing in the following finesse:

22.Ba7!? Rb7 23.Bd4

The point is that Black's rook is tactically vulnerable, although it also has some defensive value along the 7th rank, as we will see.



23...Ng4!

The only decent move.

23...Kf8? is no good here as 24.Qf3 exploits the hanging rook.

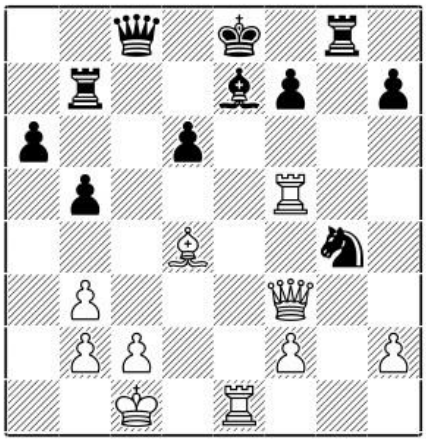
24.Qf3!?

At first I thought this move was unsound, but on closer inspection it just seems unclear.

24.h3? Ne5 25.Qe4 Rg5! 26.Rxg5 Bxg5† 27.f4 Re7!µ worked out perfectly for Black in Guseinov – Korunsky, USSR 1978.

24.Rg1!?N 24...Nh6 25.Rxg8† Nxg8 26.Rg5 Kf8 27.Bg7† Ke8 28.Bd4= ends in a draw by repetition.

24...Qc8

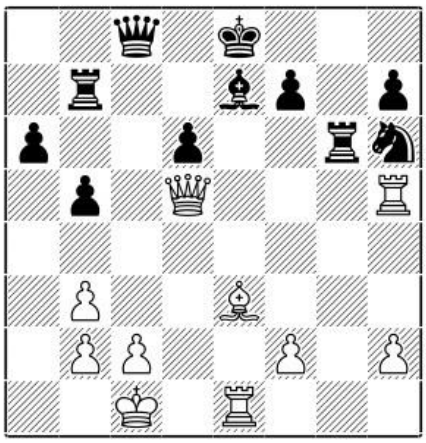


25.Qd5!

25.Rxf7? looks tempting but 25...Ne5! 26.Bxe5 dxe5 defends – although it is worth noting that if Black's rook was still on b8, Rxe7† would win for White. As is, Black went on to win convincingly after 27.Kb1 Qg4! 28.Qxb7 Kxf7 29.Qxa6?! (29.Rxe5 Qd1† 30.Ka2 Qd6µ) 29...Rd8 30.Rxe5 Bf6–+ in Kozlov – Losev, Moscow 1976.

25...Nh6 26.Rh5 Rg6 27.Be3

27.f4 Rc7µ left White with insufficient play for the piece in Taborov – Korsunsky, Tallinn 1976, while 27...Re6!–+ would have been even more convincing.



27...Ng4!N

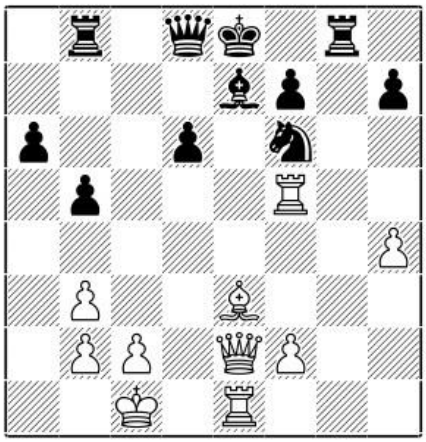
Improving on 27...Rc7? 28.Rxh6 Rxc2† 29.Kb1± as occurred in Ivanovic – Popovic, Banja Vrucica 1991.

28.Rxh7 Re6

Originally I thought Black was better here, but White obtains about enough compensation after:

29.Qf5! Nf6! 30.Rh8† Bf8÷

Returning to the main game, White's last move prepares Bg5, with a view to recapturing with the h-pawn in the event that Black gives up the exchange. Kasparov commented on this position that "White's attack is unpleasant". Perhaps, but Black is still a piece up.



22...Ng4

I also checked 22...Rg6 (intending ...Ng8) 23.h5 Rg8 when White can no longer play Qh5. Nevertheless, after 24.Bd4 Ng4N (24...Kf8 25.Qf3+–) 25.f3 Nh6 (25...Ne5 26.Bxe5 dxe5 27.Rxe5 Rb7 28.Qe4 Rd7 29.Qxh7 is too risky) 26.Rd5 White has the initiative.

22...Nd7!? is playable, though after 23.Bg5 Black should take the opportunity to transpose to the game with 23...Ne5. Instead 23...Rxg5?! 24.hxg5! is good for White, since 24...Kf8? would be refuted by 25.Qh5.

23.Bg5 Ne5

The old *Informant 59* praised 23...f6?, but after 24.Qxg4 fxg5 25.Qh5† Kd7 26.Rf7!N (26.Rxe7† Qxe7 27.Rf7 favoured White in Sion Castro – Atalik, Oviedo 1993, but the text move is much stronger) 26...Re8 27.hxg5! Kc6 28.Qf3† Kb6 29.Qe3† Kc6 30.Qc3† (30.Rxe7±) 30...Kb6 31.f4+– Black can barely move.

24.f4 Nc6

Black is ready to consolidate with ...Rg6-e6, so White needs to make something happen.

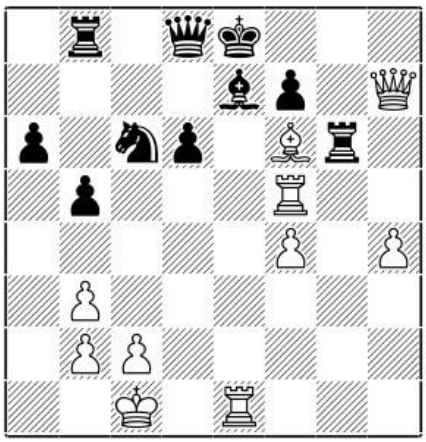
25.Qh5 Rg7 26.Bf6!

This is forced.

26.Qh6? Qa5!–+ threatens to take on e1 with mate, and a subsequent ...Qa1† followed by ...Qxb2 will cover the rook on g7.

26.Bh6? is also inadequate due to 26...Qa5–+ hitting the rook again, while also threatening ...Qa1† followed by ...Rg2†.

26...Rg6 27.Qxh7



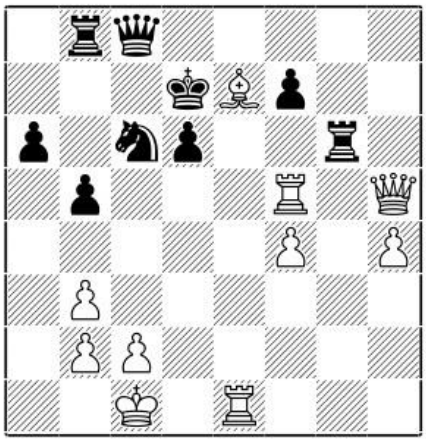
27...Qc8!

Both sides have to be careful.

27...Kd7? 28.Qxf7 Qe8 29.Qh7± is no good for Black.

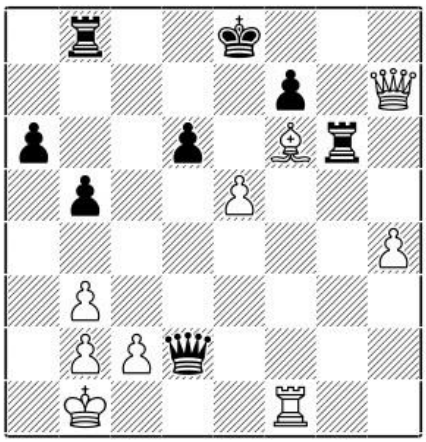
28.Bxe7!

28.Qh5 Kd7 29.Bxe7 is well met by:



29...Nd4! 30.c3 Nxf5 31.Qxf5† Re6 32.Bg5 Qe8³ Black is consolidating and has good chances to make his extra exchange count.

28...Qxf5 29.Bf6† Ne5 30.fxe5 Qf4† 31.Kb1 Qd2 32.Rf1



32...Qh6!

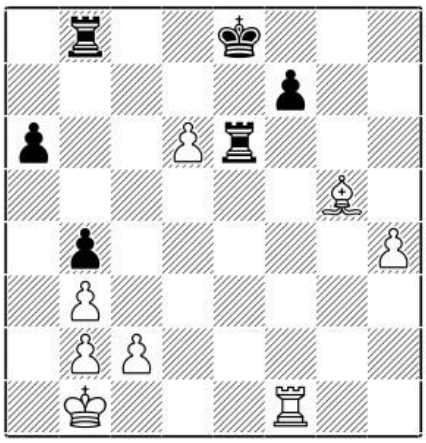
Trading queens brings relief to the beleaguered black king.

33.Qxh6 Rxh6 34.exd6 b4

Black must avoid 34...Kd7 35.c4 Kxd6? 36.Bg5!.

34...Rb6!? 35.Be7 is also equal though.

35.Bg5 Re6



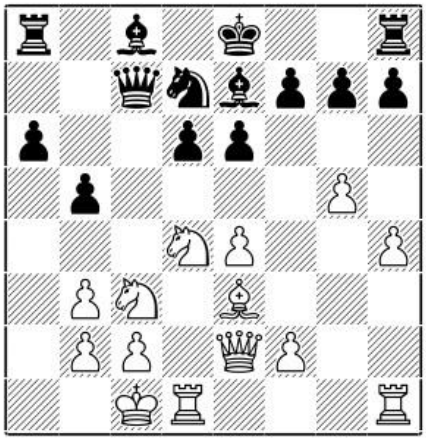
36.d7†!?

One of various ways to draw.

36...Kxd7 37.Rxf7† Ke8 38.Rf1 Re2

½–½

B42) 14.h4



I regard this as the 'ultimate main line' of the chapter. White intends h4-h5 and g5-g6 to crack open the kingside. I became interested in this line in the late 1990s, when a lot of American players were testing it out. Grandmasters Alex Fishbein and Dmitry Gurevich could be found playing the Black side, while Patrick Wolff and Nick de Firmian were playing both colours, showing that they believed in Black's resources. Note that De Firmian, a Sozin aficionado with the white pieces, was reaching the position from a Najdorf move order with Black.

While working on this part of the chapter, I discovered that, despite extensive grandmaster practice, a lot of the existing theory is riddled with analytical mistakes and incorrect assessments. I found a lot of attacking resources for White, but I still believe that Black's set-up is sound. Many of Black's best ideas have not been played or even analysed before.

14...b4 15.Na4

An inferior alternative is:

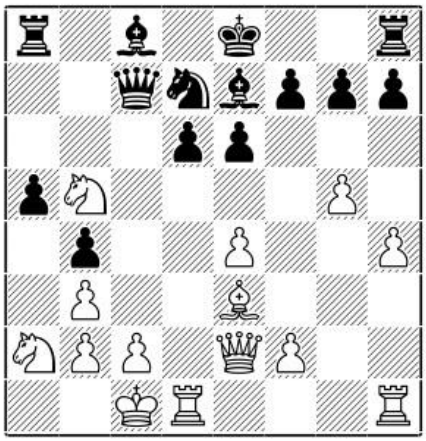
15.Na2?! a5!

I lost a game when I was overly worried about the b5-square and played 15...Rb8?, after which 16.h5 Nc5 17.g6 Bf6 18.gxf7† Kxf7 19.Kb1 a5 20.Rhg1 Rf8 21.Bg5 gave White the initiative in A. Ivanov – Vigorito, Portsmouth 2011.

16.Nb5

16.h5?! Ba6 17.Qe1 (17.Qd2 Nc5!–+ hits the e4-pawn and threatens ...e5) 17...Rc8µ was Wedberg – Yrjola, Finland 1988.

16.Qc4?! Nc5 threatens ...Ba6, and after 17.Nb5 Qc6 18.Rxd6 Bxd6 19.Nxd6† Qxd6 20.Bxc5 Qc7 21.Bd4 Qxc4 22.bxc4 0-0µ White did not have enough for the exchange in Ginsburg – Priebe, Germany 2012.

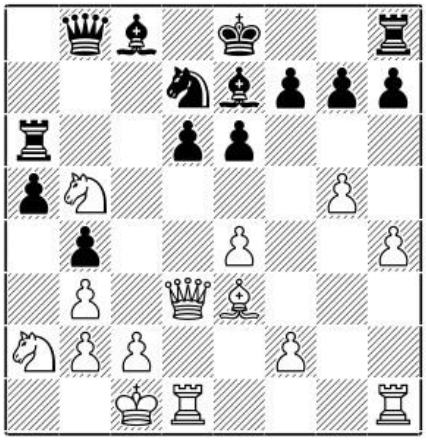


16...Qb8 17.Qd3

17.Nd4 Bb7 18.f3 d5!³ saw Black carry out the thematic central break with good effect in Sion Castro – Cortes Bueno, Pamplona 1991.

17...Ra6!?

Black has a pleasant choice, as 17...0-0 18.Nxd6 Ba6 19.Qd4 Rd8µ was also excellent for him in Breyther – Schirm, Germany 1991.

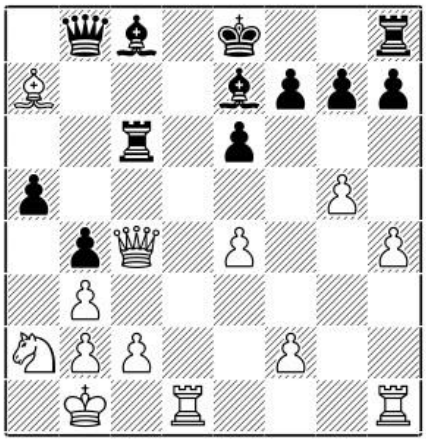


18.Qc4 Nc5 19.Kb1

19.Nxd6†? Rxd6 20.Bxc5 Rc6 21.Ba7 Qb7 22.Qd4 0-0!–+ gives Black a decisive initiative: ...e5 is coming, and White's coordination is terrible.

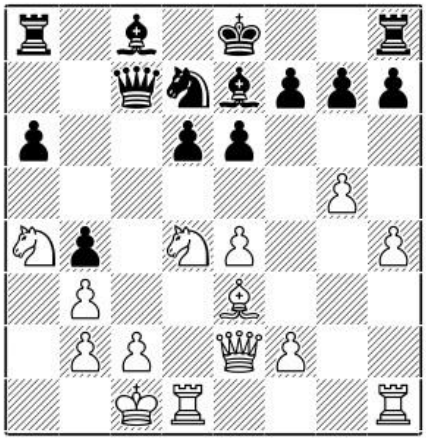
19...Rb6 20.Nxd6† Rxd6 21.Bxc5 Rc6 22.Ba7

In De Firmian – Hellers, Reykjavik 1990, Black should have continued:



22...Qb7!N 23.Qd4

Now Black can win material with 23...e5 24.Qxe5 Qxa7 25.Qxg7 Rf8µ is he wants to, but the simple 23...0-0!?µ is also extremely strong.



15...Nc5

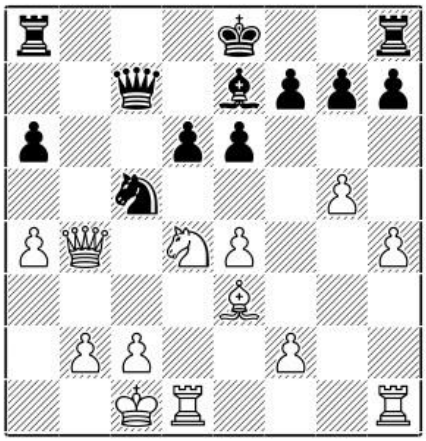
The race is on! Both sides have to balance attack and defence.

16.h5

After 16.Nxc5? dxc5 17.Nf3 a5 Black's attack is much faster, so White must leave the a4-knight to its fate.

16.Kb1 Bd7 17.h5 transposes variation B422 below, although Black could also consider 16...0-0!?N.

The sortie 16.Qc4 is misguided. 16...Bd7! 17.Qxb4 Bxa4 18.bxa4 occurred in Snoek – Luk, corr. 2007, when Black castled. Instead it would have been more incisive to create an immediate queenside threat with:



18...Rc8!Nµ Attacking the queen may look tempting but lining up against c2 is more effective. If 19.f3? then 19...e5! wins for Black.

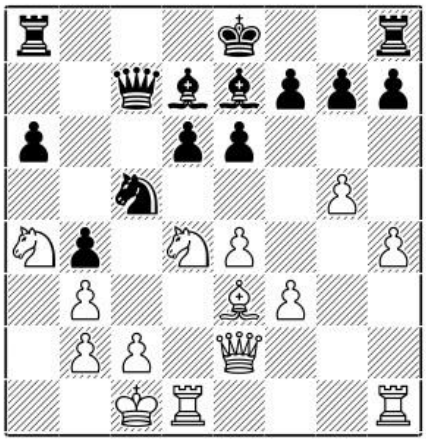
Finally, a common error is:

16.f3?!

This is too slow; a single wasted tempo makes a big difference in the Velimirovic. Moreover, White's queen can no longer go to the g4-square.

16...Bd7

Black is already better, as the following lines demonstrate.



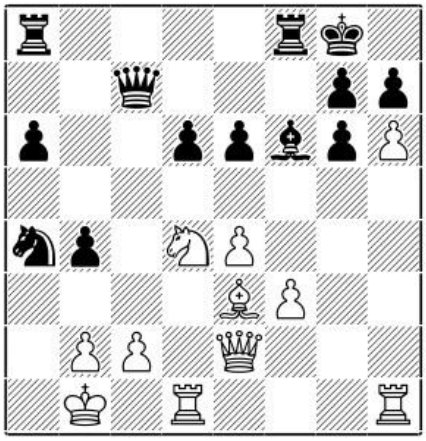
17.Kb1

17.h5 Nxb3†! is worth noting as the more effective way to win a pawn on a4, as after 18.Nxb3 Bxa4 White's knight has been lured to a worse square. 19.Kb1 0-0µ Banas – Zilberstein, Novy Smokovec 1971.

17...Bxa4

17...Nxa4 and even 17...0-0!? are possible as well.

18.bxa4 Nxa4 19.h5 0-0 20.g6 Bf6 21.h6 fxg6

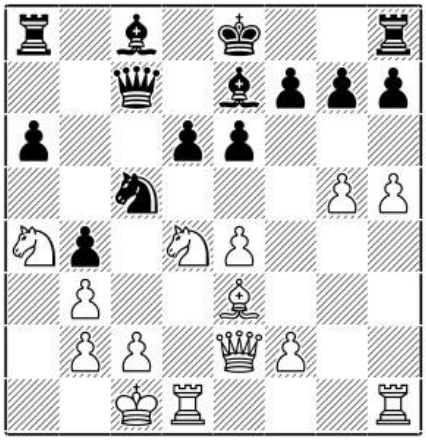


22.hxg7

22.Nxe6 Qc3!!–+ is a nice trick that we will see again.

22...Rfe8 23.Qh2 Qxg7 24.Qxd6 Rad8 25.Qc6 Qd7[3]

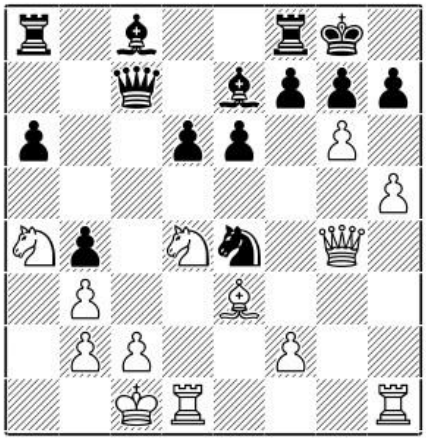
Philippe – Abergel, Paris 2016.



16...Bd7

Black attacks the a4-knight again, setting up the ...Nxb3† trick that we saw above. This is the main line by far, but it is not the only playable move.

16...Nxe4!? is supposed to be 'bad' but it scores well. After 17.g6 a logical continuation is: 17...0-0!? (Black has also done well with 17...Bf6 18.gxf7† Kxf7, but why put the king here?) 18.Qg4!?N (18.gxh7†? Kh8µ was Trs – Strnad, corr. 2004, and 18.h6 fxg6 19.hxg7 Rf7µ is also good for Black)

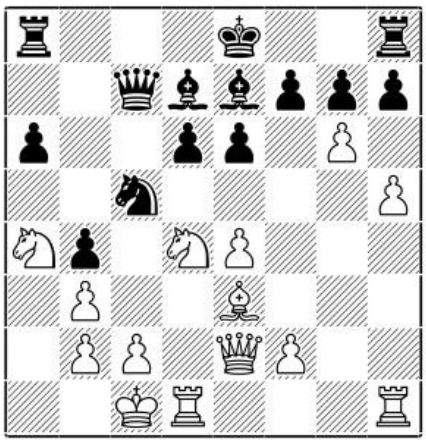


18...f5 (18...Nf6!?) 19.gxh7† Kh8 20.Qg6 Rf6 21.Qe8† Rf8= With a repetition.

White may press ahead with **B421)** 17.g6!? or take a moment for prophylaxis with **B422)** 17.Kb1.

As usual, 17.Nxc5? is bad. 17...dxc5 18.Nf3 Bb5µ Dembo – Krush, Paris (rapid) 1996.

B421) 17.g6!?



White has also tried this more speculative move.

17...Nxb3† 18.Nxb3

This limits White's offer to the usual pawn.

Although recapturing on b3 may appear an automatic choice, White has also tried:

18.Kb1?!

This might carry some shock value, but it should not work.

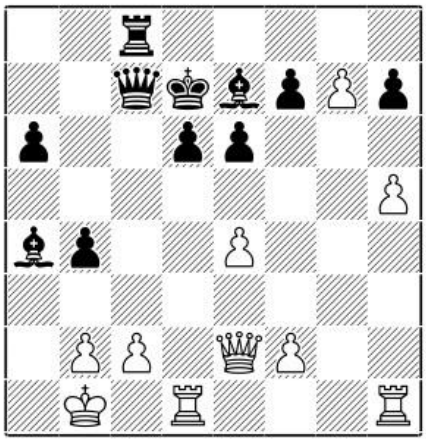
18...Nxd4 19.Bxd4 Bxa4 20.Bxg7 Kd7

Flicking in 20...Rc8!? is also good.

21.Bxh8

21.e5? Rhc8 22.b3 Bb5–+ simplified Black's task in M. Schlosser – Piket, Gausdal 1986.

21...Rxh8 22.g7 Rc8



23.b3

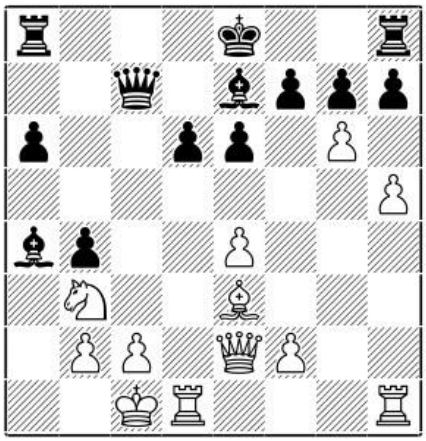
23.Rd2 occurred in N. Rogers – Rao, Philadelphia 1993, when 23...b3!N would have been powerful.

23.Rc1 Bg5 24.f4 Bh6 25.Rhg1 Bb5 26.Qf3 Rg8 is also unpleasant for White.

23...Bb5 24.Qd2 Bf6–+

De Firmian – D. Gurevich, Chicago 1994.

18...Bxa4

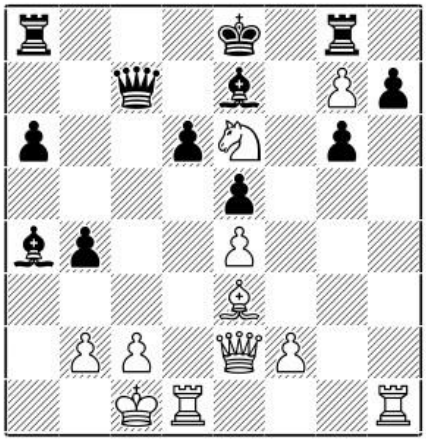


19.h6!

19.Nd4 Bf6 favoured Black in both Fedorowicz – Wessman, New York 1990 and Nijboer – Van der Wiel, Ter Apel 1993.

19...fxg6 20.Nd4!

20.hxg7? is slightly more common, but the wrong move order because of: 20...Rg8 21.Nd4 e5! 22.Ne6



22...Qc8! (rather than 22...Qc6, transposing to our main line below) 23.Nf8 Now 23...Rxg7 gave Black some advantage in a couple of games, while the machine points out that 23...Qc6!Nμ would have been even more accurate.

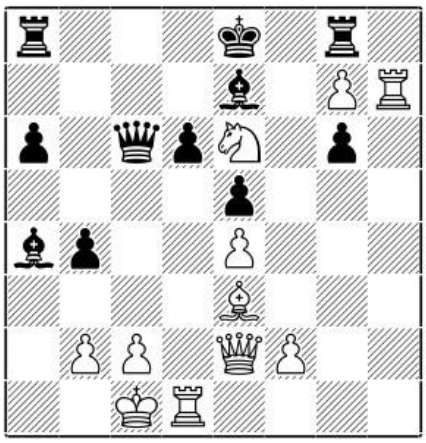
20...e5! 21.Ne6 Qc6

Now 21...Qc8 can be met by 22.Nxg7† with a messy position.

22.hxg7

22.Nxg7†? Kf7 23.Qf3† Bf6 24.Rd2 Rhf8µ

22...Rg8 23.Rxh7



23...Bb3!

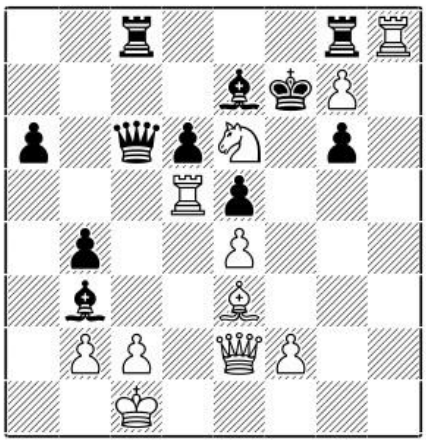
23...Rc8? 24.Bc5! has given White a winning position in a couple of games.

24.Rd5

24.Nc5 Bf7 25.Nd3 Qxe4 gave Black enough counterplay in Brunner – Van der Wiel, Lucerne 1989.

24...Rc8 25.Rh8 Kf7

25...Qxc2†N 26.Qxc2 Rxc2† 27.Kb1 Kf7 is also satisfactory.



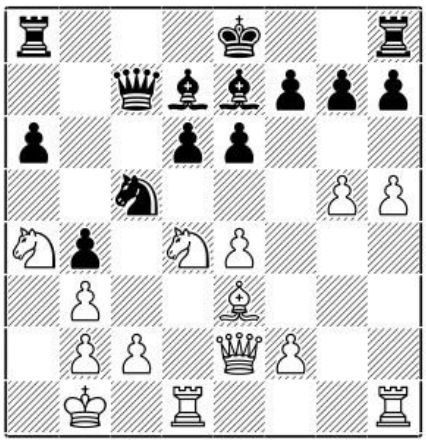
26.Nc5!

The only move, leading to a level endgame as follows:

26...dxc5 27.cxb3 c4! 28.bxc4 Qxc4† 29.Qxc4 Rxc4† 30.Kd2 Kxg7 31.Rxg8† Kxg8=

Rechlis – Piket, Gausdal 1986.

B422) 17.Kb1



This is a critical position that has been seen in practice dozens of times. It is possible though that Black's best move has yet to be played! We will examine an illustrative game involving the usual **B4221)** 17...Bxa4 before moving on to the new and surprising **B4222)** 17...0-0!N.

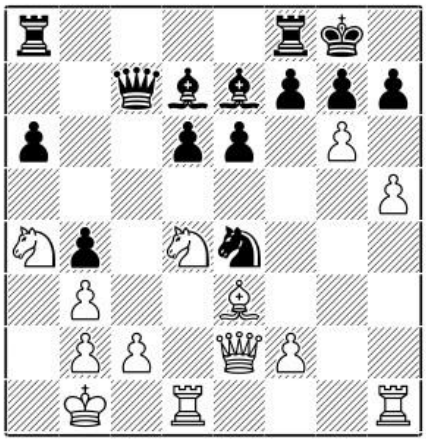
Another way to grab the pawn is 17...Nxa4?! 18.bxa4 Bxa4, but Black has a hard time after: 19.g6 Bf6 20.f4! (20.Rhg1 and 20.gxf7† are possible but the text move is strongest) 20...Rc8 21.b3 Bb5 22.Qf2 Qe7?! 23.f5± B. Smith – Shishkin, Baia Sprie 2011.

The rare 17...Rc8!? lost horribly after 18.g6 Bf6? 19.gxf7† Kxf7 20.e5! Bxe5 21.Nxc5 dxc5 22.Nf3 Bf6 23.Bf4+– in Wolff – Masculo, Philadelphia 1990, but 18...0-0!N is an improvement which transposes to variation B4222 below.

17...Qb7 has no special significance, as 18.g6 Bxa4 19.bxa4 transposes to 18...Qb7 19.g6 in the note to Black's 18th move in Game 38 below.

Finally, 17...Nxe4!? looks risky but Black

may get away with it after: 18.g6 0-0! (18...f5? 19.h6!+– was disastrous for Black in Wolff – D. Gurevich, Los Angeles 1991, while 18...Nf6 led to success for Black in Gdanski – Ivanchuk, Warsaw 1999, but 19.Nb6!N 19...Qxb6 20.Nxe6 could have led to the opposite result)



From here, the one example on my database continued 19.Rdg1 e5 20.gxh7† Kh8 21.Bh6? gxh6 22.Qxe4 f5µ (22...Rac8!N looks even better) when White's attack was nowhere near good enough in Tuma – Shishkin, Teplice 2012. Several improvements were possible, but I found no clear route to an advantage for White. Interested readers can investigate this line in more detail and make up their own minds about it.

B4221) 17...Bxa4

GAME 38

Ian Nepomniachtchi – Peter Wells

Budva 2009

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6

2...Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 d6 6.Bc4 e6 7.Be3 Be7 8.Qe2 a6 9.0-0-0 Qc7 10.Bb3 was the actual move order of the game.

3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Bc4 e6 7.Bb3 Nc6!? 8.Be3 Be7 9.Qe2 Qc7 10.0-0-0

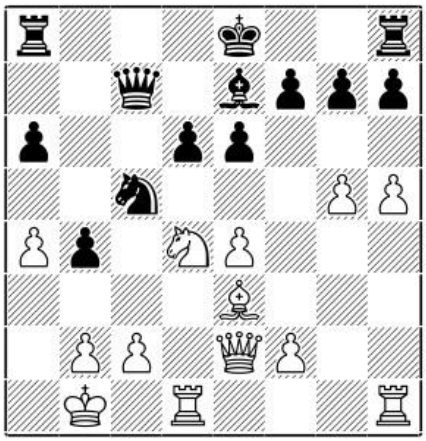
We are back in the main game.

10...Na5 11.g4 b5 12.g5 Nxb3† 13.axb3 Nd7 14.h4 b4 15.Na4 Nc5 16.h5 Bd7 17.Kb1 Bxa4

This capture is more common than all the other moves put together, and Black scores well with it. However, as stated earlier, I believe variation B4222 below to be the stronger move. Nevertheless, it is worth studying this game in order to gain a better understanding of the various resources available to both sides in these positions.

18.bxa4

Despite the sharpness of the position, Black once again has a choice.



18...Rc8!?

18...Qb7 19.g6 Bf6 20.f3 Nxa4 21.gxf7† Kxf7 (21...Qxf7 22.Qh2!±) 22.Qc4 (but not 22.Nf5?? Nc3† 23.Ka1 Qb5! 24.Nxd6† Kg8!–+) 22...Qd7 (if 22...d5? then 23.Qa2 intending Nxe6 gives White a strong attack) 23.f4! White held the initiative in Wolff – Piket, Baguio City 1987.

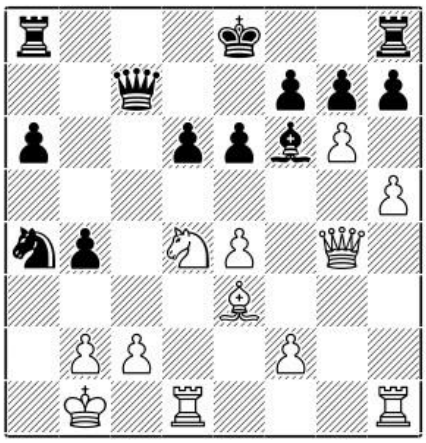
18...Nxa4?!

For a long time, I assumed this move was best, and it indeed scores well. However, there is a big problem with it.

19.g6 Bf6 20.Qg4!

20.gxf7† is more common but weaker.

Now White's initiative looks like too much to handle. For example:



20...0-0N

20...Rb8 21.gxf7† Qxf7 occurred in Ashton – Ramaswamy, Torquay 2002, when White elected to trade queens. 22.Nxe6N is a simple improvement, for instance: 22...Nxb2 (or 22...Bxb2 23.Rxd6+–) 23.Rxd6 Nc4 24.Bc5 White has a decisive attack.

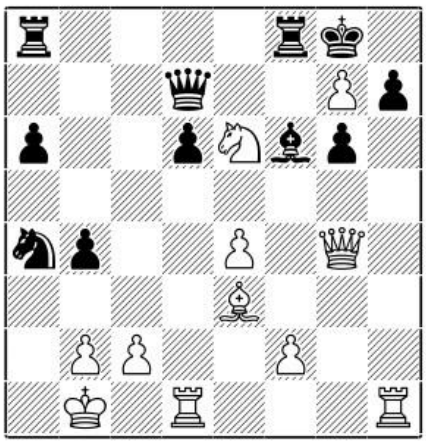
20...Qc4 21.gxf7† Kxf7 occurred in Ippolito – Badii, Paris 1994, when 22.h6!N would have been crushing. For instance: 22...g6 (22...Rhg8 23.Qh5† g6 24.Qf3 is similar) 23.Qf3 The pin on the bishop is decisive. For instance, 23...Rhf8 24.e5! dxe5 25.Bg5 Kg8 26.Bxf6 exd4 27.Qb7 and Black can resign.

Perhaps Black's best chance is 20...Nc5N although 21.gxf7† Kxf7 22.f4± clearly favours White.

21.h6! fxg6

21...hxg6 22.hxg7 Bxg7 23.Qh4+–

22.Nxe6 Qd7 23.hxg7



White wins in style after 23...Bxg7 24.Rxh7! or 23...Rf7 24.Qxg6!!.

19.f3

Nepo's move is White's most common choice, but not the strongest.

19.g6!

This move is the reason why I prefer a different option for Black on move 17. My analysis continues:

19...Bf6

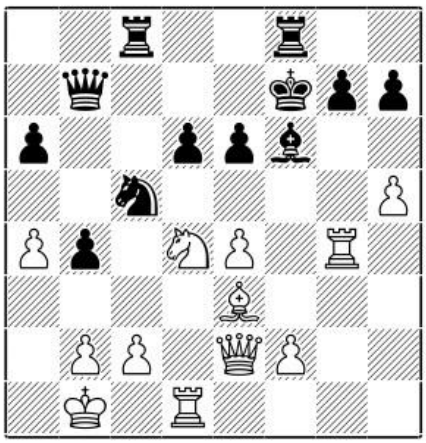
19...0-0N comes unstuck after: 20.Qg4! Bf6 21.h6 hxg6 22.hxg7 Rfe8 23.Bg5 Bxg7 24.Qh4+–

20.gxf7† Kxf7

20...Qxf7 21.e5!N proves strong after 21...dxe5 22.Nb3 Nxb3 23.Qxa6! 0-0 24.cxb3±; or 21...Bxe5 22.f4 Bxd4 23.Bxd4 with a powerful attack.

21.Rhg1 Qb7 22.Rg4! Rhf8

In Fernandez Aguado – Martin Gonzalez, Barcelona 1989, White should have played:

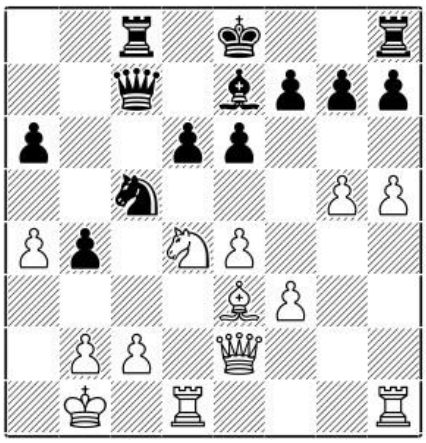


23.Qc4!N

With ideas of Nf5 or Bg5. Play may continue:

23...d5 24.exd5 exd5 25.Qe2 Kg8 26.Nb3 Nxa4 27.Bd4

The game goes on, but White has more than enough compensation for the sacrificed pawn.

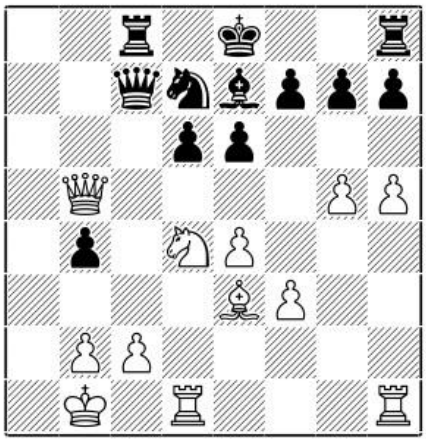


19...Nxa4 20.Qxa6

Black is doing well after 20.g6?! Bf6.

20...Nc5 21.Qb5† Nd7

21...Qd7?! left the queen misplaced after 22.h6 g6 23.Qxb4 0-0 24.Nb5 in Santos – Fernandes, Vila Real de Santo Antonio 1998.

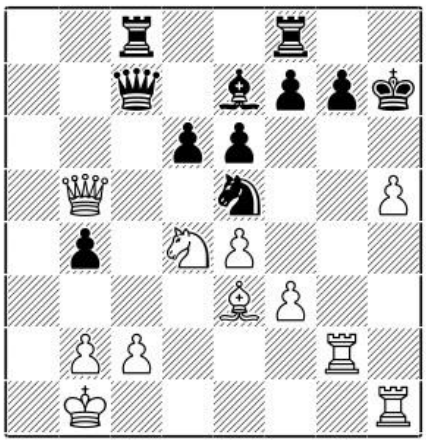


22.Rh2

White overprotects the c2-pawn and prepares to double his rooks at a moment's notice.

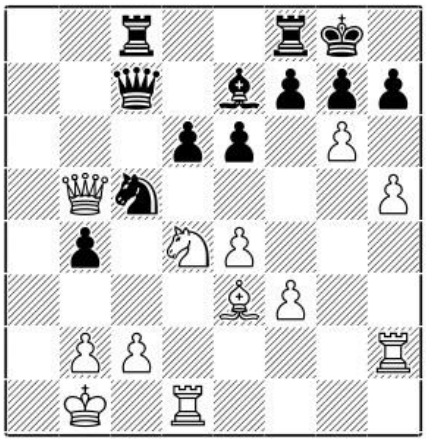
22.Rd2 can be played with similar ideas, and after 22...0-0 23.g6 Nc5 24.h6 fxg6 25.hxg7 Rf7 White should play 26.Rdh2, transposing to the main game. Instead 26.Qxb4? Rb8 27.Qc4 occurred in A. Onischuk – Van der Wiel, Wijk aan Zee 1996, when 27...Bf6!Nμ would have left Black with the much more threatening attack.

The direct 22.g6 is well met by: 22...0-0! (rather than 22...e5?! as seen in Nunn – Estremera Panos, Leon 1997) 23.gxh7†? (23.h6 fxg6 24.Rd2 Nc5 25.hxg7 Rf7 26.Rdh2 reaches the main game) 23...Kxh7 24.Rd2 Ne5 25.Rg2



25...Ra8 (Black has many strong moves, including 25...Bf6–+ or 25...Nc4–+) 26.Nb3 Rfc8 27.Qe2 Nc4 28.Bd4 e5 29.Rhg1 Bf6 30.h6 g6 0–1 G. Carlsson – Fremiotti, corr. 1996.

22...0-0 23.g6 Nc5



24.h6?!

This move seems natural and indeed the sight of those pawns on the kingside may look terrifying, but it is a 'normal' occurrence, and well met by a typical response.

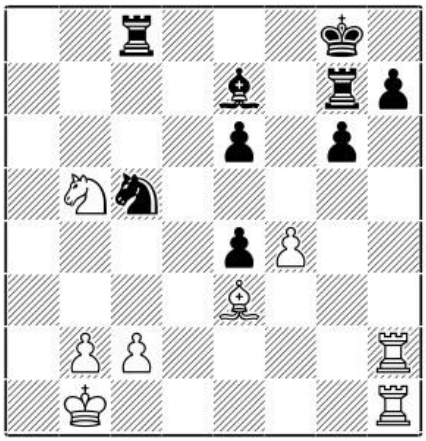
Objectively White should try something else, although after both 24.gxf7† Rxf7 and 24.Qxb4 Ra8!? Black is also doing well.

24...fxg6! 25.hxg7 Rf7!

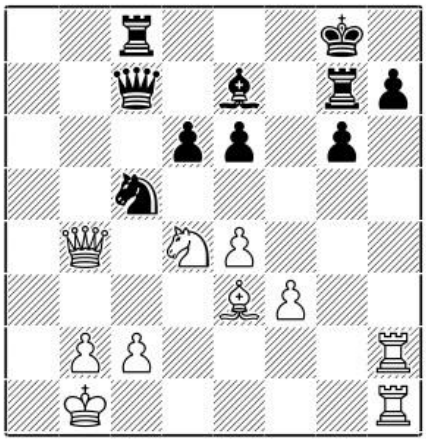
This is the thematic reaction to White's double pawn strike. Everything is under control!

26.Rdh1 Rxg7 27.Qxb4

An older correspondence game went: 27.Qc4 Qd7 28.Qxb4 d5 (28...Bf6!? also looks tempting) 29.Qb5 Qxb5 30.Nxb5 dxe4 31.f4



31...h5 32.Rg2 Kf7 33.Bd4 Rgg8 A draw was agreed in Khromov – Baumgartner, corr. 1999, but Black is certainly better in the final position.



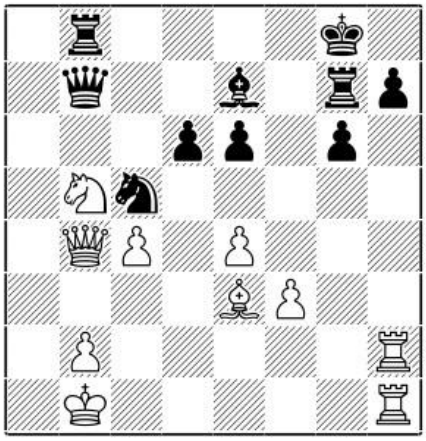
27...Rb8 28.Nb5

28.Qc4 is well met by 28...Qb7, followed by ...d5 after White defends against mate.

28...Qb7

This appears natural, but it was more accurate to play 28...Qc6! 29.c4 Bf6 when the c5-knight is protected.

29.c4



29...Nxe4?!

Unlike the previous note, 29...Bf6 would allow White to take twice on c5.

However, Black would still be doing well after 29...Rf7 or 29...Nd7!?.

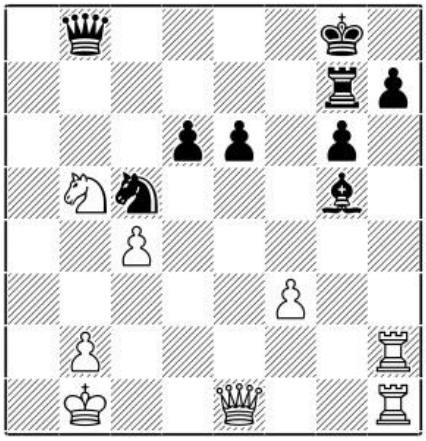
30.Qe1! Bg5?

Black seems to panic. Wells may have rejected 30...Nf6 due to 31.Ba7, but after 31...Rf8 32.Qxe6† Rgf7 White does not have anything special.

31.Ba7 Nc5?

This loses. Instead 31...Ra8 32.Qxe4 Qxe4† 33.fxe4 Raxa7 34.Nxa7 Rxa7 leaves Black an exchange for a pawn down, but the outcome is certainly not a foregone conclusion.

32.Bxb8 Qxb8



33.b4!

Not fearing any ghosts, Nepo grabs more material.

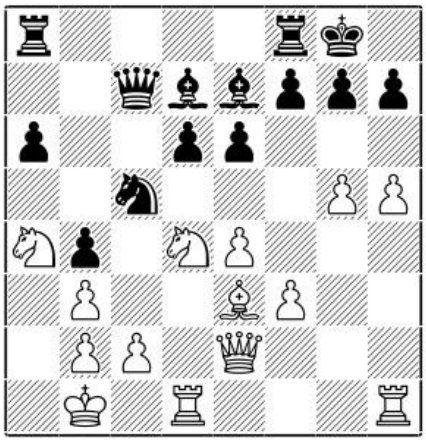
33...Nb3

After other moves White can simply take on e6, as he could have done in the game as well.

34.Kc2

1–0

B4222) 17...0-0!N



Finally we come to my recommendation for Black. Although it's my own idea and the following analysis is original, there is a bit of an echo of Ju Wenjun's 13...0-0! from Chapter 10.

As we have seen in Chapter 10 and elsewhere, castling is often a decent idea, despite White's apparent attacking chances. Compared to other lines where Black leaves his king in the centre and allows the sequence of g5-g6 and gxf7† followed by ...Kxf7, the position of the king on g8 looks safer to me. And if we compare the present position to Velimirovic lines where Black castles earlier in the opening, the dangerous possibility of Rg3-h3 combined with Qh5 to threaten mate on h7 is long gone.

18.g6

This is the most natural attacking continuation. It is always a challenge to analyse positions when there are no games and the engine gives many options for both sides as "0.00."

Although the following analysis was produced with engine assistance, I focused on the options which seemed most plausible for a human.

18.Rdg1

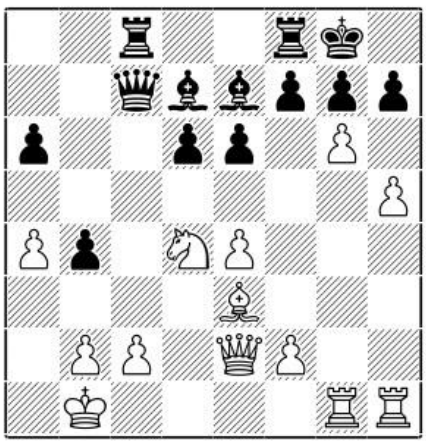
This seems playable, albeit a little slower than the main line.

18...Rac8!?

18...Nxe4?! 19.Qg4! is too risky.

18...Nxa4 19.bxa4 Bxa4 seems playable but I would instinctively prefer to bring another piece into play rather than grab a pawn.

19.g6 Nxa4 20.bxa4



20...Bf6!

Fortifying the kingside and getting ready to meet the following try.

21.h6?

21.gxh7† Kh8 looks fine for Black, but White should settle for this.

21...fxg6 22.hxg7 Bxg7µ

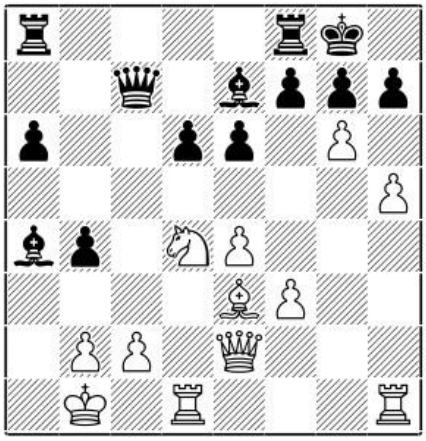
Black's kingside is relatively secure and he can turn his attention to his queenside attack next.

18.f3

This is rather slow, so there is no reason for Black not to grab a pawn on the queenside.

18...Nxa4 19.bxa4 Bxa4 20.g6

20.Rd2 a5 gives Black good chances.



20...Rac8!

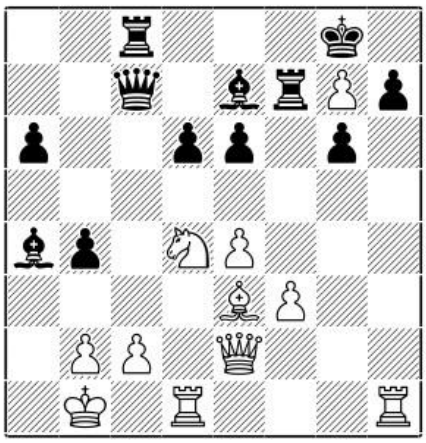
Threatening ...e5.

21.h6

21.b3?! is slow, and 21...Bd7 gives Black an excellent position.

21...fxg6 22.hxg7 Rf7

There follows a forcing tactical exchange which leads to some simplifications.

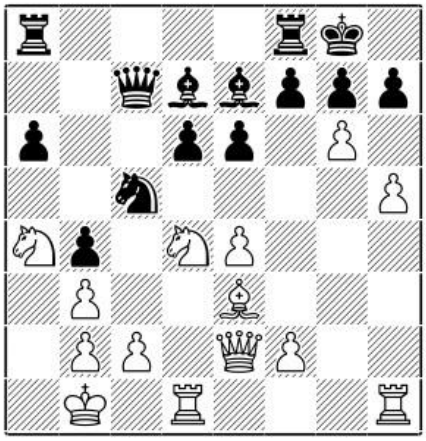


23.Rxh7! Bxc2†!

23...Kxh7? 24.Qh2† Kxg7 25.Nxe6† wins.

24.Nxc2 Qxc2† 25.Qxc2 Rxc2 26.Rdh1 b3=

The position is equal although both sides should continue to keep their wits about them.



18...Rac8!

With the pawn already on g6, Black cannot afford to spend time taking a pawn on the queenside.

18...Nxa4?! 19.bxa4 Bxa4? 20.h6! fxg6 21.Nxe6 is crushing.

18...Bxa4 19.bxa4 Bf6 20.Qg4 also leads to significant problems, for instance: 20...Rac8 (20...Nxa4? 21.h6!+–) 21.h6 fxg6 22.Nxe6 Nxe6 23.Qxe6† Rf7 24.Qb3±

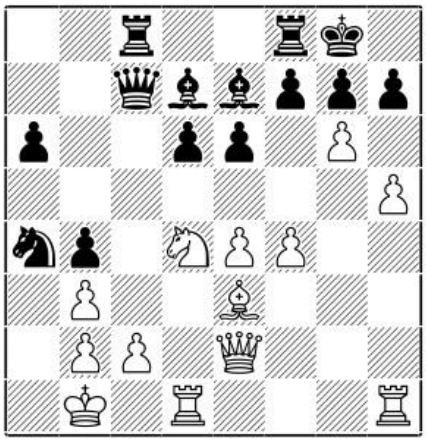
19.gxh7†

19.h6? is well met by the thematic counter of 19...fxg6 20.hxg7 Rf7µ.

I also checked:

19.f4 Nxa4

19...Nxe4!? 20.Qg2 is also playable, and could be analysed further.



20.h6!?

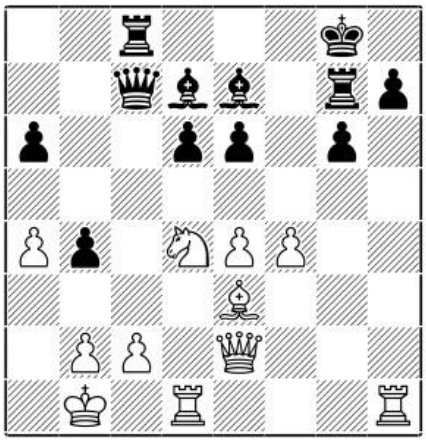
20.bxa4 can be met by 20...Qb7!? or even

20...h6!?. As usual, the machine gives 0.00 everywhere, but in a real game anything could happen.

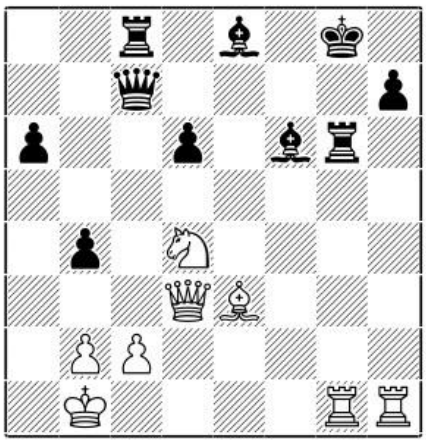
20...fxg6 21.hxg7 Rf7 22.bxa4 Rxg7

22...Bf6 and 22...Qb7 are valid alternatives.

It would have been possible to end the analysis here and call the position unclear, but I will add a fantasy line:



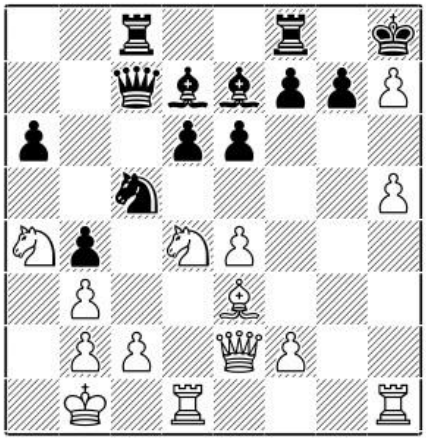
23.f5 exf5 24.exf5 Bf6 25.fxg6 Rxg6 26.Rdg1 Bxa4 27.Qd3 Be8



28.Ne6 Qc4 29.Qf5 Bf7 30.Qxf6 Qxc2† 31.Ka1 Qa4† 32.Kb1 Qc2†=

With perpetual check.

19...Kh8



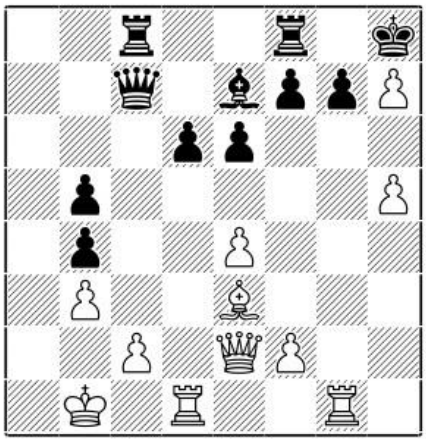
20.Rhg1 Nxa4 21.bxa4 Bxa4 22.b3

Other moves, such as 22.Bg5, should be met by 22...e5.

22...Bb5! 23.Nxb5

23.Qg4 Bf6 24.Rd2 Bd7 is also dynamically balanced. Out of curiosity, I decided to experiment by entering a null move (instead of ...Bb5-d7) and the 0.00 evaluation remained unchanged!

23...axb5



24.Bd4

24.Bg5? is refuted by 24...Ra8!–+ when Black's attack arrives first.

24...e5 25.Bb2 Bf6=

Both sides are holding firm and the position remains balanced.

Conclusion

9.Qe2 usually signifies White's intention to play the Velimirovic Attack, although he is not yet fully committed to long castling. I have presented two options for Black, each with its own merits.

9...0-0 is a safe, low-theory option, based on the plan of ...Nxd4 followed by ...b5 against practically anything White may try. White usually reacts by castling followed by e4-e5, but the open d-file is of no great concern and Black should equalize without much difficulty.

9...Qc7 is the full-blooded reply which I have analysed in detail, finding many new discoveries and improvements over existing theory. We started with a few minor options. 10.Rg1?! is a substandard way of starting White's attack, allowing Black to seize the initiative with 10...b5! 11.g4 b4. We then analysed 10.0-0 Na5 and 10.f4 b5, both of which lead to interesting play where Black is not worse.

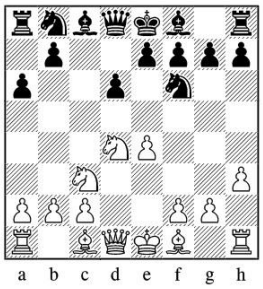
10.0-0-0 is the big main line, when 10...Na5! 11.g4 b5 12.g5 Nxb3† 13.axb3 Nd7 gives White two principled ways to play.

14.Nf5!? is a dangerous move, after which 14...exf5 15.Nd5 Qd8 16.exf5 Bb7! 17.f6 gxf6! 18.Rhe1! Bxd5! 19.Rxd5 Rg8! is an important sequence which should be memorized. For a while this whole line was considered to be a forced draw, but White can seek to keep the tension with 20.h4!? or 20.Bf4. The resulting positions will test both sides' feel for the initiative and the balance between attack and defence. The more forcing 20.gxf6 should indeed lead to a draw, although I have also included some ideas to keep the game going.

14.h4 is the less drastic continuation, but theoretically it looks more dangerous. After 14...b4 15.Na4 Nc5 16.h5 Bd7 17.Kb1 Black has a lot of choice, but I found that the established theory underestimated White's resources. Although 17...Bxa4 scores well, I would prefer the untested 17...0-0!N, while even the oft-condemned 17...Nxe4!? deserves further investigation.

Although the Sozin (and especially the Velimirovic Attack) is a fascinating system to analyse, it is important to stress that you are unlikely to encounter it in many games. The main reason is that 6.Bc4 suffers from a general lack of popularity at present, not least because Black is in good shape after the typical Najdorf options of 7...b5 and 7...Nbd7, in addition to the 7...Nc6!? approach which I am advocating. Given that 6.Bc4 is only likely to occur in a small percentage of your Najdorf games, this alone makes the low-theory option of 9...0-0 a tempting choice. And yet, the main lines of the Velimirovic are too fascinating to ignore – especially when there are ideas such as my 17...0-0! novelty waiting to be tested. And so, the choice is yours.

Chapter 14



6.h3

Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.h3 e5 7.♘b3 ♗e7!?

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B) 8.Be3 Be6 397

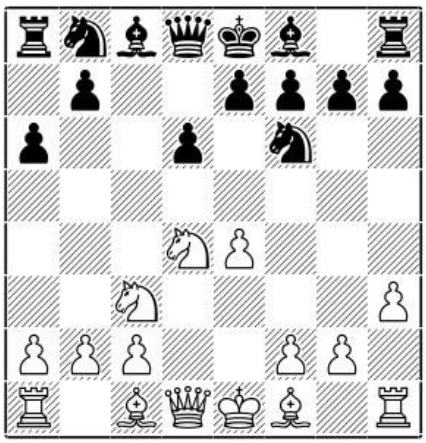
B1) 9.g4!? 398

B2) 9.Qf3 0-0 401

B21) 10.g4 *Game 39* 402

B22) 10.0-0-0 *Game 40* 408

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.h3



This unassuming little move has long been considered a sideline, but in the last few years it has become one of White's main weapons against the Najdorf.

6...e5

We will stick to the program. 6...g6!? is a move which I also like, while 6...e6 is a popular alternative of course.

7.Nb3

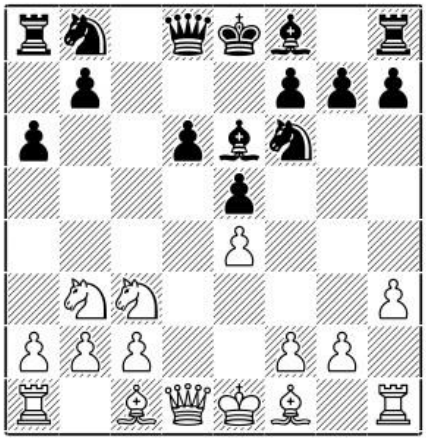
The more common 7.Nge2 will be considered in the next chapter.

After the text move, Black already has to make an important decision. I must confess that I only realized this when working on this book.

7...Be7!?

This is not the most popular move but I believe it is the most accurate.

Previously, I had always assumed 7...Be6 was virtually an automatic choice:



I will provide a quick summary of White's main options against this move, to give a clear picture of the pros and cons of Black's two move orders.

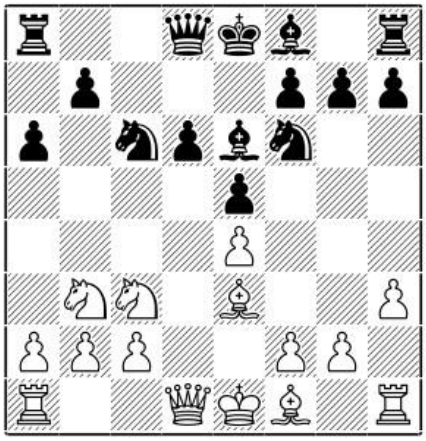
a) 8.g4?! makes little sense when 8...d5 is immediately available. This is one slight advantage of 7...Be6 over 7...Be7; although in variation A below, I will show why, even without ...d5 available, I do not believe the early g2-g4 should be dangerous for Black.

b) 8.Be3 is a normal move, when 8...Be7 reaches our main line – see variation B. By the way, the position after White's 8th move can also arise via 6.Be3 e5 7.Nb3 Be6 8.h3, as noted on page 191.

Although this move order isn't strictly relevant to our repertoire, it is worth noting that it would be a mistake for Black to meet 8.Be3 with 8...h5? in the spirit of our system against the English Attack, because a subsequent f2-f4 will save White a tempo compared to English Attack lines where the pawn goes to f3 first, bearing in mind that h2-h3 is always useful in those f3-f4 lines.

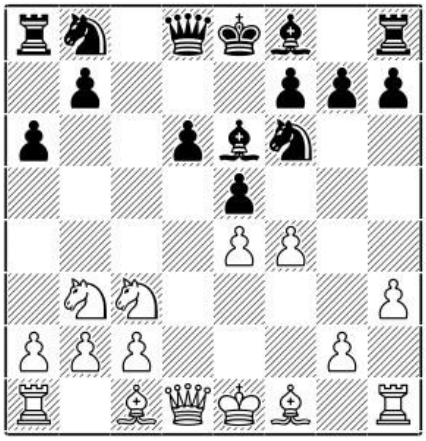
A more serious option is 8...Nbd7, when 9.g4 leads to various possible move orders and complications – but again, outside of the recommended repertoire.

Finally, it is worth noting that 8...Nc6!? is an interesting alternative to the standard set-up with bishops on e7 and e6.



Black's idea is to create quick counterplay on the queenside, so the plan only makes sense when he has developed a bishop to e6 rather than e7. Play may continue 9.Qf3 Rc8 10.0-0-0 when 10...Nb4!? is Wojtaszek's idea. Then 11.Kb1 Qc7 12.a3 Nxc2! is an interesting piece sacrifice, but after 13.Kxc2 Qc6 14.Nd2 d5 15.exd5 Nxd5 Black is essentially seeking perpetual check or an unclear endgame. A recent try is 10...Na5!? 11.Nd5 (both 11.g4 and 11.Kb1 can be met by 11...Rxc3!?) 11...Bxd5 12.exd5 Nxb3† 13.axb3 g6 14.g4 Bg7 15.h4 Qc7 16.Rd2 h5 17.g5 Nd7 18.Bh3 0-0 when Black had good counterplay in Aryan – Donchenko, Biel 2018. This is certainly an interesting line and I expect to see further tests of it. If this was the end of the story, 8...Be6 would definitely be the move to go for, but things are not that simple...

c) Black's life is more complicated after: 8.f4!?



This ultra-modern line has been tried by several strong GMs, especially Sutovsky. White is making a lot of pawn moves but he wants to gain time and space with f4-f5. In 2016 there was a wonderful

survey of this line in *New in Chess Yearbook* 121, written by... me. My conclusion back then was that Black has a couple of decent responses, but matters are more complicated than I originally thought.

8...g6!?

There are three alternatives worth mentioning:

a) First of all, 8...exf4? is just foolish in view of 9.Bxf4 Nc6 10.Qe2 when White is a whole tempo up on variation B2 of Chapter 7 on page 207.

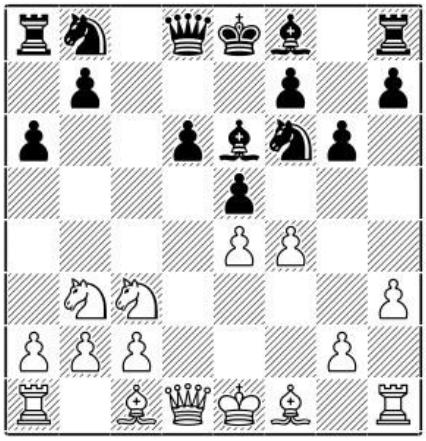
b) 8...Nbd7 9.f5 Bxb3 10.axb3 d5 11.exd5 Bb4 12.Bd2 0-0 13.Qe2 was seen in Sutovsky – Das, Gibraltar 2015, followed by Sutovsky – Shirov, Poikovsky 2015. I suspect Black is okay somehow, but he is walking on the edge.

c) My original intention was to recommend 8...Be7, when 9.f5 gives Black a choice:

c1) 9...Bc8 10.g4! (10.Qf3 b5 11.a3 Bb7 12.g4 d5! 13.exd5 e4! gave Black good play in Sutovsky – Wojtaszek, Bilbao 201410...h6 11.a4! Nc6 12.Bg2 Nb4 (the knight turns out to be unstable here so Black could consider 12...Na5!?) 13.Be3 Bd7 This occurred in Sutovsky – Szuhanek, Novi Sad 2016, when 14.a5! would have been rather uncomfortable for Black.

c2) 9...Bd7!? was Giri's little finesse with which he won a model game. However, after 10.Be3 b5 11.Qf3 b4 12.Nd5 Nxd5 13.exd5 Bg5 14.Bxg5 Qxg5 15.Bd3 Bb5 White should have played 16.0-0!N (rather than 16.h4?! Qd8 17.g4 Nd7 when White was rather overextended in Grandelius – Giri, Doha 2015) 16...Nd7 17.a3! with some initiative.

The text move is arguably Black's best try. It may look a little strange but, besides the obvious prevention of f4-f5 and the possibility of a fianchetto, Black may play ...Nh5, eyeing the weakened f4- and g3-squares.



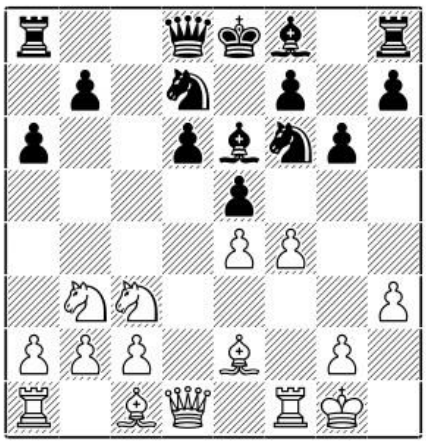
9.Be2

9.fxe5 Nh5! 10.Be3 Nc6! turns out well for Black.

Also after 9.Qf3 Nc6 10.Be3 (or 10.f5 gxf5 11.exf5 Bxb3 12.axb3 Be7 13.g4 d5!) 10...exf4 11.Bxf4 Nh5! Black was holding his own in Karjakin – Gelfand, Baku 2014.

9...Nbd7 10.0-0

10.g4!? is a more aggressive idea, when 10...exf4 11.g5 Ng8 12.Bxf4 h6 and 10...Rc8!? both lead to complex play.



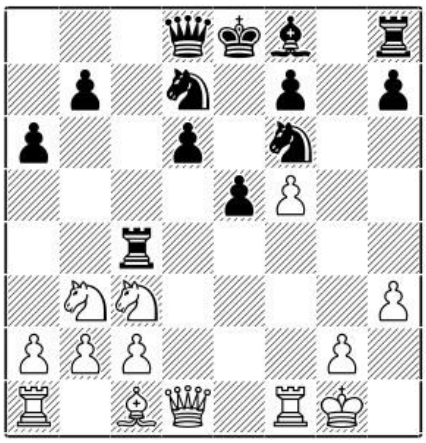
10...Rc8

10...b5 and 10...Qc7 are also playable.

11.f5

White can also play the restrained 11.Be3 when the exchange sacrifice is tempting, but after 11...Rxc3 12.bxc3 Nxe4 13.Bf3 Nxc3 14.Qd2 Qc7 15.fxe5 dxe5 16.Nd4! Black's lack of development proved costly in Volokitin – Jurcik, Minsk 2017. Just a few days later Black played 11...Be7 12.Qe1 exf4 13.Bxf4 0-0 with a solid position in Gabuzyan – Areshchenko, Minsk 2017.

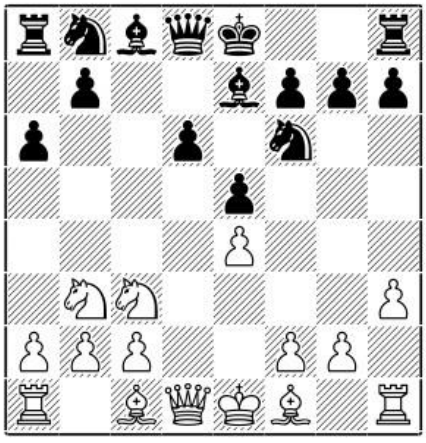
11...gxf5 12.exf5 Bc4 13.Bxc4 Rxc4,,



We have been following Sadzikowski – Cheparinov, Izmir 2016. Black's structure may look ragged, but he can utilize the open g-file and his king actually looks safer than White's. He may also contest the centre with ...Qc7-c6 at some point. Assessing positions like this properly is key to playing the Najdorf well.

Summing up, 7...Be6 and 7...Be7 may easily transpose to each other, and each option has its pros and cons. The former move has two advantages: it takes away 8.g4 as a serious option for White, and it gives Black the interesting additional option of meeting 8.Be3 with 8...Nc6!?. However, Black will have to devote serious attention to the possibility of 8.f4!? against it. (The lines above are just a summary of my analysis – a full repertoire against this move would have to go into much more detail.) Nevertheless, some readers may wish to do the extra work to have this move in their arsenal, especially if the 8.Be3 Nc6!? line appeals to them.

Let's return to my main recommendation of 7...Be7!?.



As mentioned earlier, this is less common than the other bishop move to e6, but it will often transpose. There is definitely some logic to playing this way, as we saw in Chapter 1 that Black should meet the classical 6.Be2 e5 7.Nb3 with 7...Be7, only later playing ...Be6. In the English Attack matters are different, because experience has shown that a fianchetto is preferable in some lines. Logic in chess becomes easier to explain after we know what happens...

We will analyse **A)** 8.g4!? followed by **B)** 8.Be3.

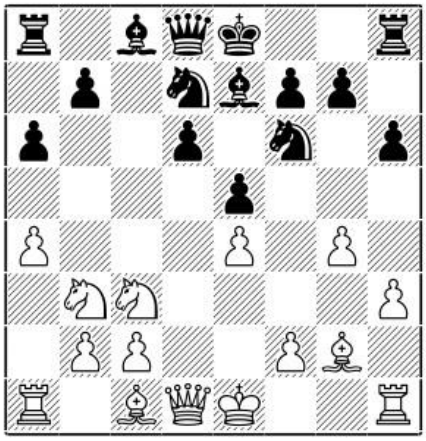
Obviously we should also consider 8.f4?!, and it is here that Black's choice of bishop move really comes into its own. He simply plays 8...0-0!, building a lead in development while White is busy pushing pawns and weakening his kingside. The key difference is that f4-f5 achieves nothing without a bishop on e6 acting as a target. Play may continue 9.g4 (or 9.Be3 b5! with fast and powerful counterplay) 9...exf4 10.Bxf4 d5!? (10...Nfd7!? is a good alternative) 11.exd5 Re8 when Black enjoys a powerful initiative for the pawn.

A) 8.g4!?

This is a more serious option than it would have been after 7...Be6, as Black is not ready for ...d5 here. White's goal is to play a set-up similar to 6.g3 e5 7.Nb3 (see variation B of Chapter 16 on page 453) but with more space on the kingside. There are drawbacks, however.

8...h6! 9.Be3

9.Bg2 Nbd7 10.a4 is well met by a typical manoeuvre:



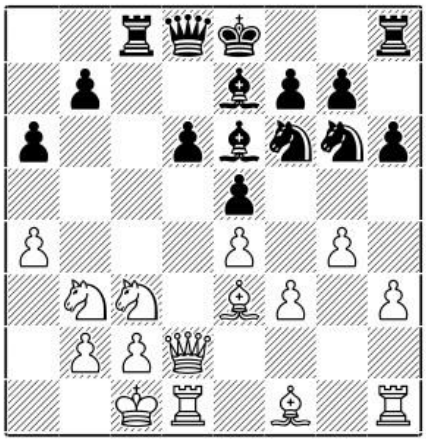
10...Nf8! The knight heads for the g6-square, where it will eye the weaknesses created by the g2-g4 advance. White already has to think carefully about his kingside, and after the further inaccuracy 11.Nd5? Nxd5 12.exd5 Ng6 Black clearly had the upper hand in J. Martin – Sadzikowski, Karlsruhe 2018.

9...Nbd7!?

9...Be6 10.Qf3 Nbd7 11.0-0-0 transposes to the note on 9...Nbd7!? in variation B2.

10.Bg2

After 10.a4 I once again like the 10...Nf8!? manoeuvre. (10...b6 would be a more conventional approach, although it didn't go so well for Black in the recent game Carlsen – Ganguly, Isle of Man 2019.) An interesting example continued: 11.Qd2 Be6 12.0-0-0 This looks a bit funny having already played a2-a4; but on the other hand, Black is spending time shifting his knight away from the queenside, so the position remains unclear. 12...Ng6 13.f3 Rc8



14.h4 Nd7 15.h5 Nf4 16.Bxf4 exf4 17.Kb1 0-0 18.Nd5 Bxd5 19.Qxd5 Qc7 20.c3 Ne5,, Williamson – Punzon Moraleda, corr. 2016.

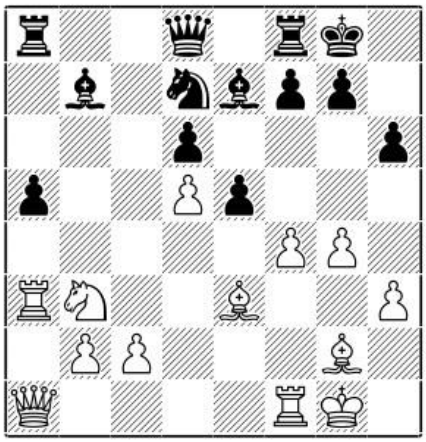
10...b5 11.0-0

11.a4 b4 12.Nd5 is the other thematic way of meeting ...b5 in these positions, but 12...Nxd5 13.Qxd5 Rb8 14.a5 Bb7 (or 14...Qc7 with the idea ...Nf6) 15.Qd2 Bc6 was comfortable for Black in Mannion – Esserman, Gibraltar 2017.

11...Bb7 12.f4 b4 13.Nd5 Nxd5 14.exd5

The position resembles the 6.g3 lines (that we will encounter in Chapter 16), and this is not an unfavourable version for Black.

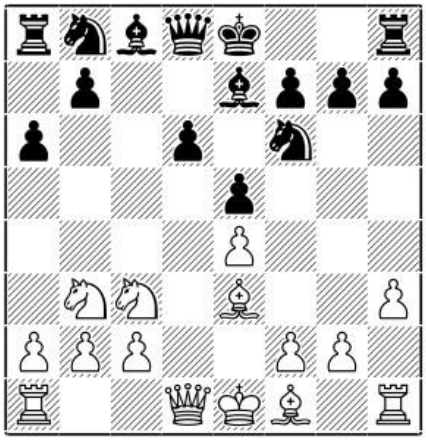
14...0-0 15.a3 bxa3 16.Rxa3 a5 17.Qa1



17...Nb6! 18.Nxa5 Bxd5 19.Bxd5 Nxd5 20.Nc6 Rxa3 21.Qxa3 Qd7 22.Nxe7† Qxe7

Black was on the more comfortable side of equality in Karthikeyan – Bok, London 2016.

B) 8.Be3



This is the main line, especially taking into account that the game count jumps up after Black's next move.

8...Be6

This position has more frequently been reached via the move order 6.Be3 e5 7.Nb3 Be6 8.h3 (rather than the usual 8.f3 which characterizes the English Attack, or the other options which were covered in Chapter 7) 8...Be7. I also covered this variation in my aforementioned *New in Chess* article. It is quite a modern line, and is not considered in the repertoire books of Ftacnik, Georgiev, or Andrasian.

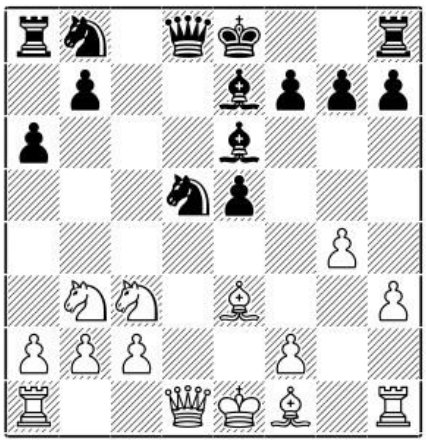
We will analyse two major options: **B1)** 9.g4!? and **B2)** 9.Qf3.

9.f4 has been reasonably popular, but after 9...exf4 10.Bxf4 Nc6 White has nothing better than 11.Qe2, transposing to variation B2 of Chapter 7 on page 207.

B1) 9.g4!?

I originally presented this section not as a numbered variation, but simply under the heading "Navara's King March". The move used to be considered harmless because of Black's response, but Czech Grandmaster David Navara came up with a fascinating though risky idea for White. The game (from 2015) made headlines due to the extraordinary king walk that ensued; if you have seen the game, you will immediately know the one I mean.

9...d5 10.exd5 Nxd5

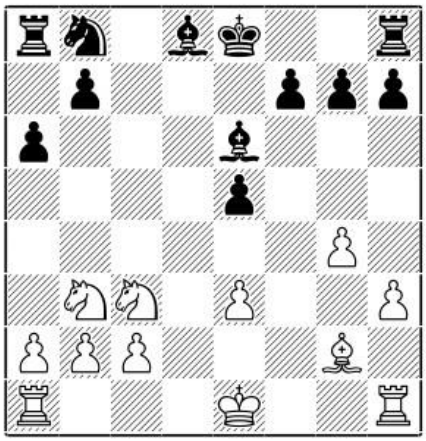


11.Bg2

11.Nxd5 Bxd5 really is harmless: 12.Rg1 Nc6 13.Qd2 Bf3 14.Be2 Qxd2† 15.Nxd2 Bd5 16.Bc4 Bxc4 17.Nxc4 0-0-0 was level in Libiszewski – Smirnov, Melbourne 2017.

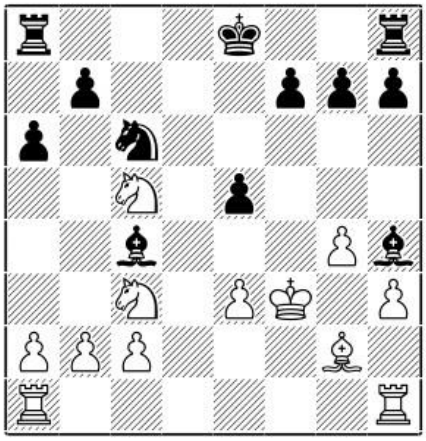
11...Nxe3 12.Qxd8† Bxd8 13.fxe3

White has given up the bishop pair and his pawns are split, but he has pressure on the long diagonal and his knights are ready to jump to the c5- and d5-squares.



13...Bh4† 14.Kf1

In a later game, White varied with:
14.Ke2?!
This is certainly not an improvement, as the game demonstrates.
14...Bc4† 15.Kf3 Nc6 16.Nc5



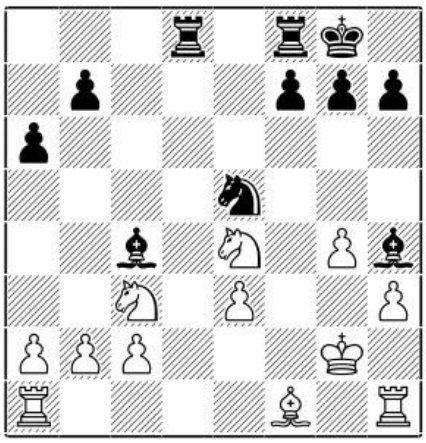
16...0-0!

Amazing foresight from Svidler. It is important to keep the f7-pawn protected, as evidenced by 16...0-0-0 17.Rhd1 e4† 18.Kf4 g5† 19.Kf5 when White is escaping.

17.Bf1

17.Rhd1? e4† 18.Kf4 g5† 19.Kf5 Rae8 soon catches the king, for example: 20.N5xe4 Re5† 21.Kf6 Re6† 22.Kf5 Ne7#

17...e4† 18.N5xe4 Ne5† 19.Kg2 Rad8



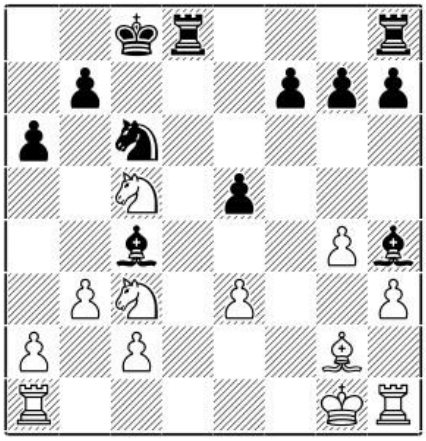
20.b3?

20.Bxc4 Nxc4 21.Kf3 was a better try, although Black still has excellent compensation.

20...Be6 21.Be2 Rc8µ

Black had an overwhelming initiative for the pawn in Kashtanov – Svidler, Tallinn 2016.

14...Nc6 15.Nc5 Bc4† 16.Kg1 0-0-0 17.b3



17...Bg5

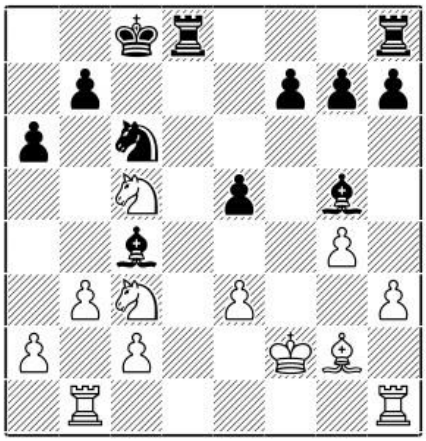
Black has to go for tactics. Instead 17...Be6? 18.Bxc6 bxc6 19.Nxe6 fxe6 20.Ne4 left Black with a horrific structure as well as the inferior minor piece in Lou Yiping – Zhou Jianchao, Shenzhen (blitz) 2017.

18.Re1 Bh4 19.Rb1!

A funny square, but an improvement compared to a1. If White gets to take on c4, the open b-file will be meaningful.

19...Bg5 20.Kf2

20.Re1 forces Black to repeat with 20...Bh4.



20...Bh4† 21.Kf3!?

Pressing ahead. Instead 21.Kg1 Bg5 repeats.

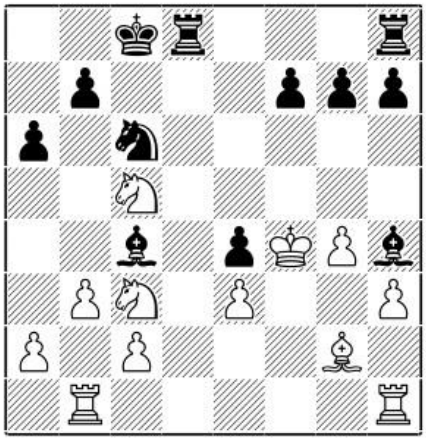
21...e4†!

Black has to try to take advantage of the misplaced white king. Instead 21...Bd5† 22.Nxd5 Rxd5 23.Ne4 gives White a nice little plus.

22.Kf4?!

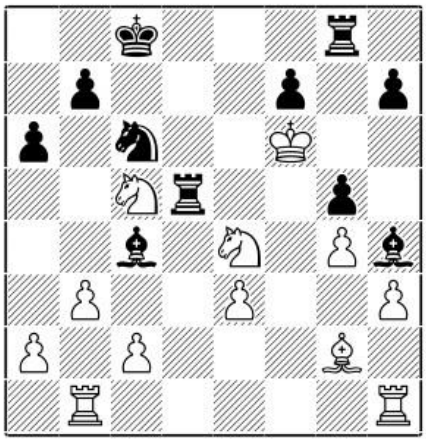
White is walking on the edge.

Objectively he should prefer 22.N5xe4, when 22...Ne5† 23.Kf4 Ng6† 24.Kf3 Ne5† is perpetual check.



22...g5†

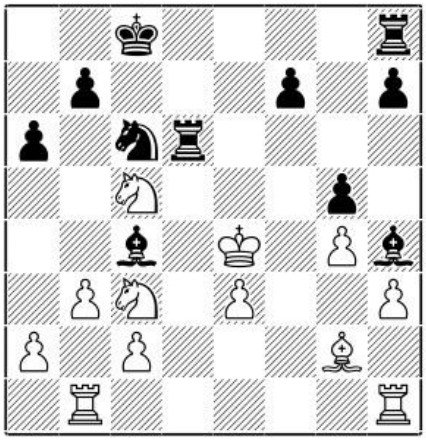
Another way is: 22...Rd6 23.N3xe4 g5† 24.Kf5 Rd5†!? 25.Kf6 Rg8



26.bxc4 Rg6† 27.Kxf7 Ne5† 28.Ke8 Rd8† 29.Ke7 Nc6† 30.Kf7 Ne5† with a perpetual.

23.Kf5

23.Kxe4? loses to 23...Rd6! with a mating net. For example:



24.Kf5 (24.bxc4 Re8† could lead to mate after 25.Kf5 Re5# or 25.Kf3 Nd4†! 26.exd4 Rf6#) 24...Ne7† 25.Ke4 Re8–+

23...Rhe8!

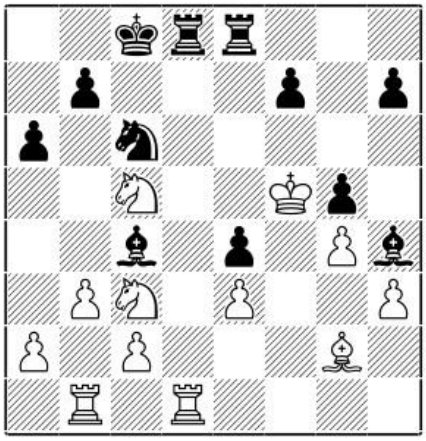
Black continues to hunt the king.

23...Be6† 24.Nxe6 fxe6† 25.Kxe4 Rd2 was a safe route to equality.

24.Rhd1

24.bxc4? Rd6! threatens ...Re5 with mate. There are some further details which can be checked with an engine, but the bottom line is that Black is winning.

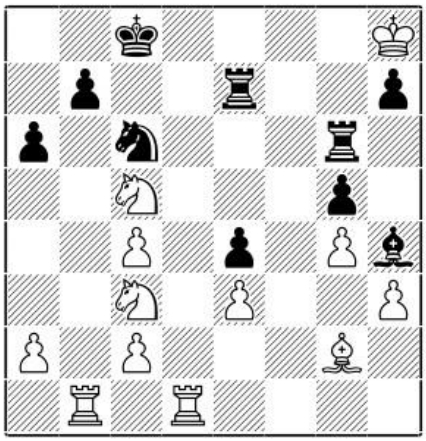
Up to now Black had handled the situation well, but the time has finally come when his play can be seriously improved.



24...Bd3!!N

24...Re5† was Wojtaszek's move, when the correct evaluation is equality, but the adventure

continued: 25.Kf6 Thus far was all Navara's preparation(!!). 25...Rg8 26.bxc4 Rg6† 27.Kxf7 Re7† 28.Kf8 Rf6† 29.Kg8 Rg6† 30.Kh8!

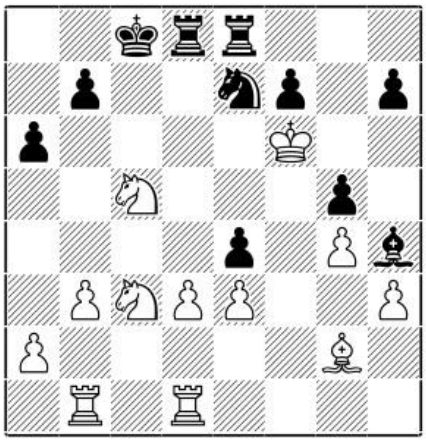


By now White had an advantage and he went on to win in Navara – Wojtaszek, Biel 2015.

The text move is an improvement pointed out by Knaak, which should win for Black. Apparently Navara missed it in his preparation. The position is still tremendously complicated, but here is a taste:

25.cxd3 Ne7†! 26.Kf6

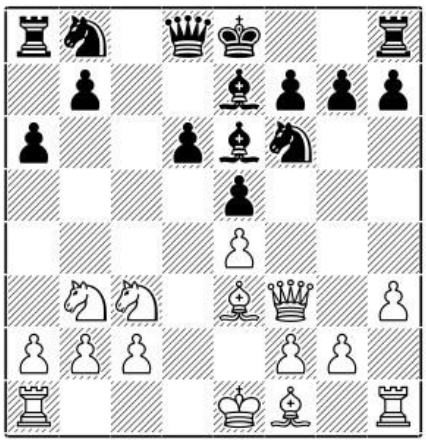
26.Kxe4 Nd5† 27.Kf5 Nxe3† 28.Kf6 Nxg2 is a more prosaic line where material ends up equal and White's exposed king is the deciding factor.



26...Ng8†! 27.Kg7 Bg3!

The bishop threatens to join the attack, and if 28.d4 f5!–+ the king will be caught.

B2) 9.Qf3



This move introduces quite a novel set-up. White will castle long and advance his kingside pawns, as he does in the English Attack. However, the queen is already on the kingside here, and White's rook will be unobstructed on the d-file. There is a definite echo of the Be3/Qf3 system against the Taimanov Sicilian, which has become hugely popular in recent years. Still, White's set-up looks a bit artificial to me and it definitely has its drawbacks. The most important is that the queen is not available to help defend the white king. Also, the queen is out of touch with the a5-square, so a potential knight sortie to a5 – an important resource for White in certain lines of the English Attack – will not be an option here.

9...0-0

It would be nice to recommend 9...h5 to maintain consistency with our repertoire against the English Attack. However, after 10.0-0-0 Nbd7 11.Nd5 Black cannot take with the knight, and 11...Bxd5 12.exd5 leaves White in good control of the light squares.

The main alternative is 9...Nbd7!? 10.g4 (10.0-0-0 Rc8 11.Nd5 is also playable, although here Black has not weakened himself with ...h5) 10...h6 11.0-0-0 Rc8 12.Nd5 (12.Kb1 allows 12...Rxc3! 13.bxc3 Qc7) and now 12...Nf8!? has been played a few times by Bologan, with Black seeking to contest the dark squares on the

kingside. This also produces an interesting game, but I have chosen to focus on the text move.

White has two natural options: **B21)** 10.g4 and **B22)** 10.0-0-0.

B21) 10.g4

GAME 39

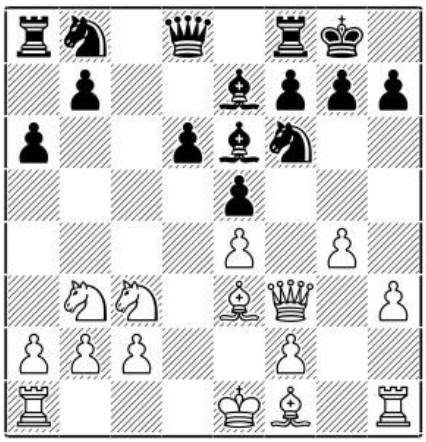
Roberto Molina – Sandro Mareco

Albena 2013

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.h3

The actual move order was 6.Be3 e5 7.Nb3 Be6 8.h3, which is also pretty common.

6...e5 7.Nb3 Be6 8.Be3 Be7 9.Qf3 0-0 10.g4



10...a5!

The position bears obvious similarities to a somewhat discredited line of the English Attack. Here White's committal kingside play makes it more difficult for him to switch to a positional battle.

11.Bb5

A typical move, which also appears in the English Attack. White occupies the newly weakened b5-square and hopes to halt the advance of Black's a-pawn.

White is not ready for 11.g5?! Nfd7 12.h4 a4 13.Nd2 a3 14.b3 Qa5 when Black already has a useful initiative. If 15.Nd5 Bxd5 16.exd5 then 16...f5! is strong.

Occasionally White has tried:

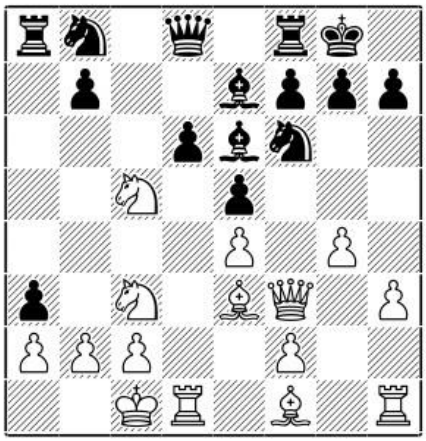
11.0-0-0?!

White must walk a fine line after allowing the a-pawn to advance.

11...a4 12.Nc5

12.Nd2? a3 13.b3 Qa5 already leaves White without a satisfactory defence.

12...a3



13.g5!

Already, this is the only move to keep fighting.

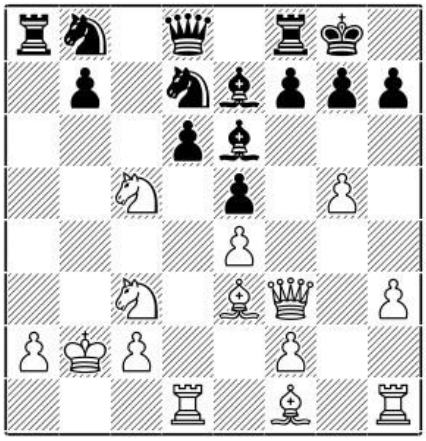
13.b3? Qa5 14.N5a4 occurred in Darini – Chu Wei Chai, Al Ain 2015, when 14...Rc8!N would have given White big problems.

13.Nxe6? axb2† 14.Kxb2 fxe6 15.Bc4 was seen in Khismatullin – Sjugirov, Khanty-Mansiysk 2015, when 15...Qa5!N 16.Bxe6† Kh8 17.Bd2 d5! (amongst others) 18.exd5 Bb4 would have yielded a crushing attack for Black.

13...axb2†

13...Ne8!? is also good, for instance: 14.Nxe6 fxe6 15.Qg4 Qc8 16.Nd5 axb2† 17.Kxb2 Bd8 18.h4 Na6 19.Bh3 Nc5 20.Bxc5 Qxc5 21.Qxe6† Kh8 22.Ne3 Bb6 23.Qb3 Nc7©

14.Kxb2 Nfd7



15.Nxe6 fxe6 16.Qg4 Kh8 17.Qxe6 Qa5

17...Nc6 18.Bb5 Qa5© is also decent.

18.a4?

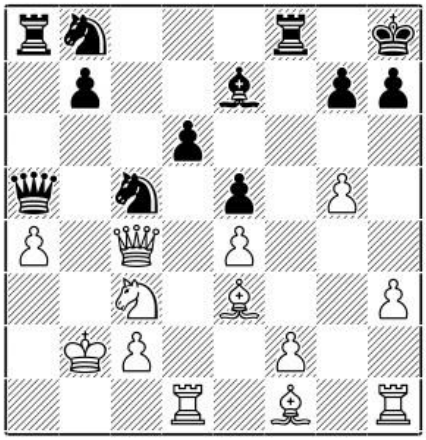
White can save himself with 18.Bc4!N 18...Qa3† 19.Kb1 Qxc3 20.Rd3 Qb4† 21.Rb3 Qa4 22.Rxb7 when the engines give 0.00.

18...Nc5

18...Rc8!?µ was also good.

19.Qc4

We have been following A. Zhigalko – Raznikov, Cappelle-la-Grande 2013. Black's best continuation would have been:



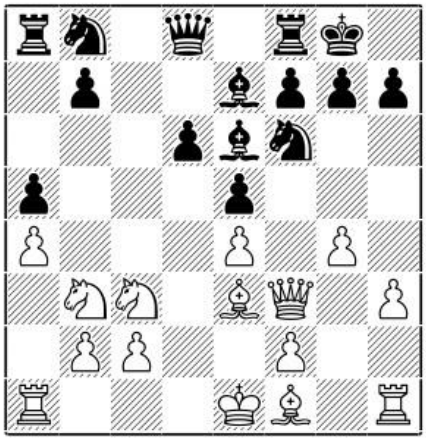
19...Nbd7!N

Black has an excellent position. A nice illustrative line is:

20.Qb5 Qd8 21.h4?! Ra5 22.Qb4 d5!–+

The most serious alternative is:

11.a4



11...Na6!?

11...Nc6 12.0-0-0 Nb4 has been tested at high levels, but I like the flexibility of the text move.

12.0-0-0 Rc8!?

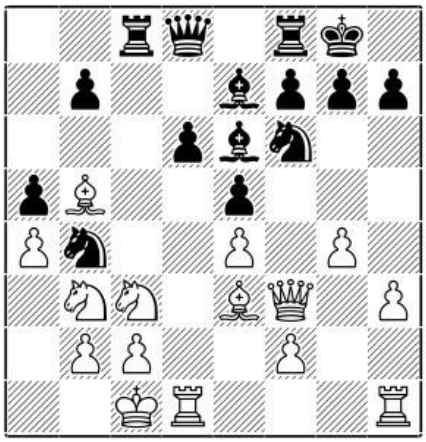
12...Nb4 transposes to the note above; instead we will look to utilize the open c-file.

13.Bb5

13.Kb1 Rxc3 14.bxc3 Qc7 (14...d5 15.Bg2! also led to double-edged play in Shabalov – A. Shen, Philadelphia 2013) 15.Bc1 Nd7 16.Bb5 Rc8 17.Rhg1 Nb6© has also proven fine for Black at correspondence level.

13...Nb4

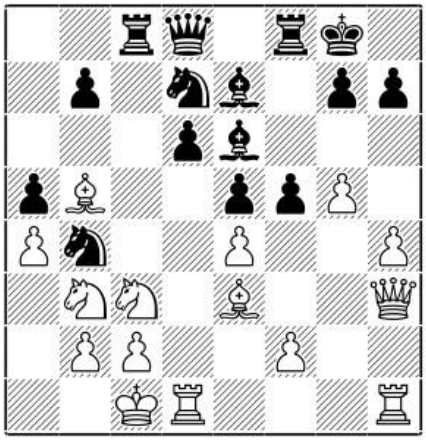
13...Rxc3 14.bxc3 d5© could also be considered.



14.g5 Nd7 15.h4

15.Kb1?! f5! 16.gxf6 Nxf6 favours Black.

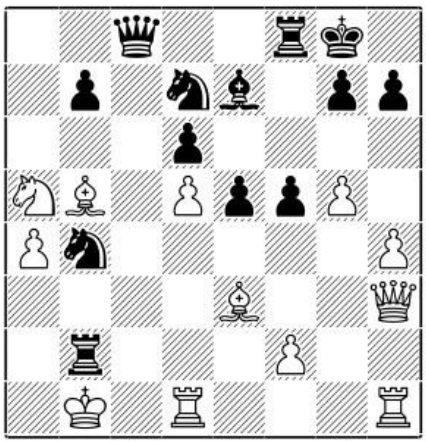
15...f5 16.Qh3



16...Rc7! 17.Kb1 Qc8

The queen brings pressure to the c-file and is ready to defend the e6-bishop, thus unpinning the f5-pawn. White's only decent continuation is:

18.Nd5 Bxd5 19.exd5 Rxc2 20.Nxa5 Rxb2†

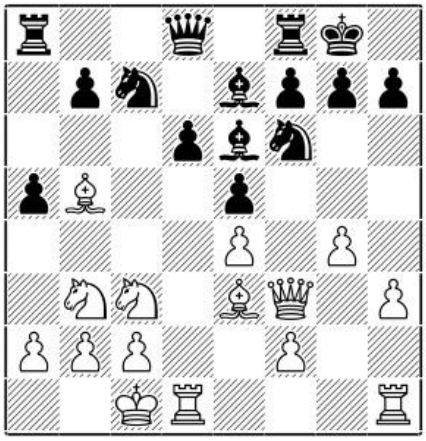


A draw was agreed here in Balabanov – V. Ivanov, corr. 2012. It is perpetual check:

21.Kxb2 Qc2† 22.Ka3 Qc3† 23.Nb3 Nc2† 24.Ka2 Nb4†=

The general picture from these correspondence games is that Black's position is holding up well, although the lines are complicated and there are surely playable alternatives along the way for both sides.

11...Na6 12.0-0-0 Nc7



13.Bb6

This looks the most sensible, as White keeps a grip on some key squares on the queenside.

Riskier is:

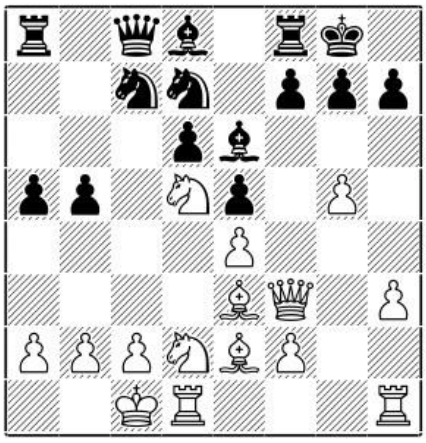
13.Be2?!

In some correspondence games White has played this way, not fearing Black's attack. We will soon see how that turned out.

13...Qc8! 14.g5

Another game went: 14.a3 b5 15.g5 Nfe8 16.Nd5 Nxd5 17.exd5 Bd7 18.Kb1 f5! 19.h4 b4 20.axb4 axb4 21.Rhg1 Nc7 22.Bd2 Qb8 23.Be3 Nb5 24.g6 f4 25.gxh7† Kh8 26.Bd2 Nd4! 0–1 Piccirilli – Lucki, corr. 2013.

14...Nd7 15.Nd2 b5 16.Nd5 Bd8!?

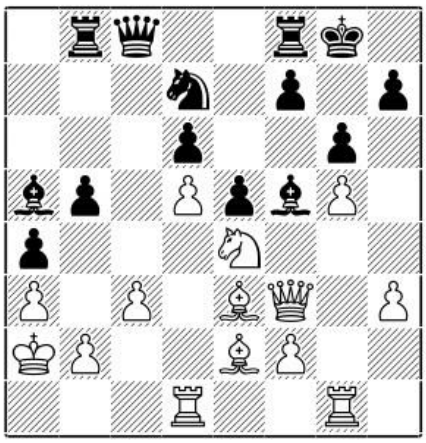


17.Rhg1 g6 18.Kb1

Black also crashed through in great style after 18.h4 a4 19.a3 Nxd5 20.exd5 Bf5 21.Ne4 b4! 22.axb4 a3 23.b3 Qb8 24.c3 Ba5! in Bezemer – Schutte, corr. 2012.

18...a4 19.a3 Nxd5 20.exd5 Bf5 21.Ka2 Rb8 22.c3 Ba5 23.Ne4

And now we have 'twin' games in which Black spectacularly broke through:



23...b4!! 24.Nxd6 bxc3!! 25.Nxc8 Rxb2† 26.Ka1 Rxc8 27.Rb1 Rcb8 28.Qh1 R2b3!

Amazing stuff! White resigned in both Siigur – Bock, corr. 2012, and Nizky – Efremov, corr. 2012.

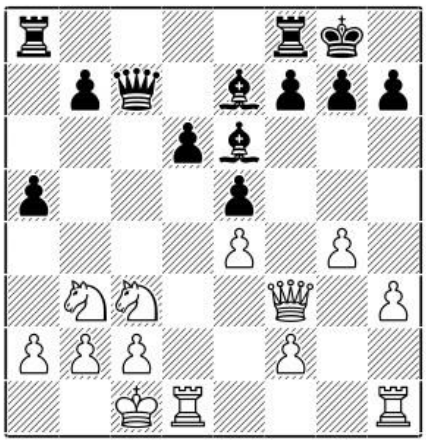
We have reached an interesting moment. Black needs to deal with the pin, and White will take on c7. It is a question of where Black wants his king knight.

13...Nd7!

13...Qc8 14.Bxc7 (but not 14.Ba4 Nd7 15.Bxa5? b5–+) 14...Qxc7 15.a4 has occurred in a few games, but I think it is more useful to have the knight on d7 than f6. (Incidentally, 13...Qb8 could lead to the same thing after 14.Bxc7 but White could even try 14.Ba4!? Nd7 15.Bxa5 here, since 15...b5? 16.Bxc7 comes with tempo.)

14.Bxc7

Trading the other bishop with 14.Bxd7 Qxd7 makes little sense: 15.Bxc7 (White gets in trouble after 15.Bxa5? Bxb3 or 15.Nxa5? Nb5 16.Nd5 Nd4 17.Bxd4 Bxd5 18.exd5 Rxa5µ) 15...Qxc7



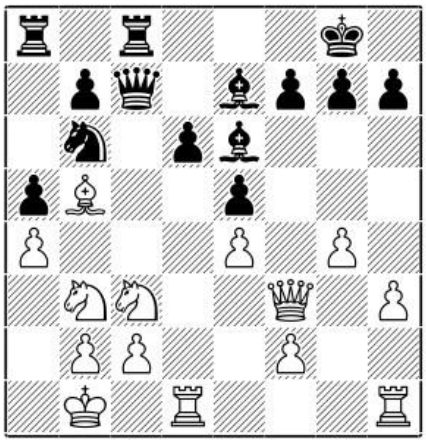
16.Nd5 (the attempt to hold up Black's attack with 16.a4 Rfc8 17.Kb1 is refuted by the thematic 17...b5!–+) 16...Bxd5 17.Rxd5 a4 18.Nd2 Rfc8 19.Qd3 Ra5 20.Rxa5 Qxa5 Black has the initiative.

14...Qxc7 15.a4

15.Kb1 Nb6 16.a4 transposes.

15...Rfc8 16.Kb1 Nb6

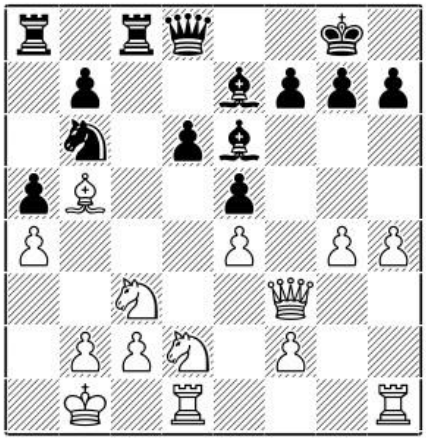
Black has everything ready on the queenside. White does not have any attack at all, so his play is just about keeping control of his outposts in the centre and on the queenside.



17.Qd3

17.Qe2 Bc4 amounts to the same thing.

White has also tried: 17.Nd2 Qd8!? (17...Qc5 and 17...Bg5 are playable too) 18.h4 (18.Nf1 Bd7 19.Qd3 Rc5 20.Ne3 Bxb5 21.Nxb5 Nxa4 22.Nxd6 Bf8 was about equal in Anderson – Heinke, corr. 2013)

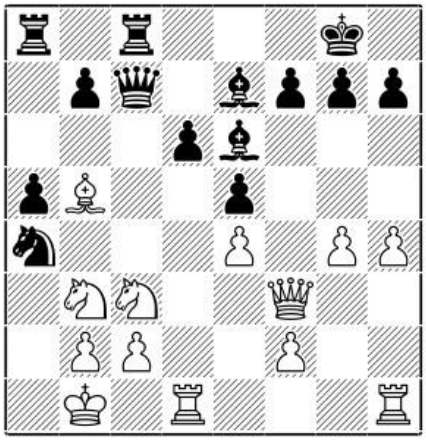


18...Bd7 (18...Rc5!? could be considered) 19.Nd5 Bxb5 20.axb5 a4 Black had decent counterplay in Feletar – Stanojevic, corr. 2017.

17.h4

Finally, after this move Black has an amazing resource.

17...Nxa4!!



18.Bxa4

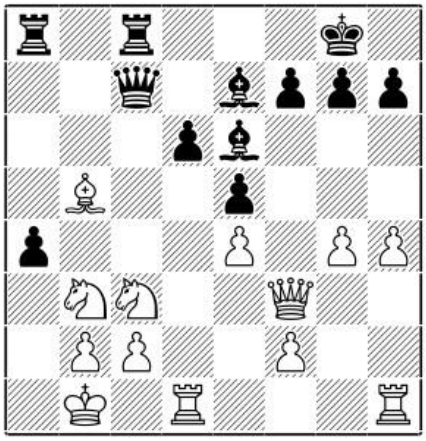
If 18.Nxa4 Qxc2† 19.Ka2 Rc5! 20.Naxc5 (20.Be2 b5–+) 20...Qxc5 White has to find the deflection 21.Bd7! to survive, after which 21...a4 22.Bxe6 axb3† 23.Kxb3 fxe6 gives Black good compensation for the exchange.

The text move is of course met by:

18...b5! 19.Bxb5

19.Nxb5? Qxc2† 20.Ka2 Qc4 21.Nc3 Qb4 wins for Black.

19...a4



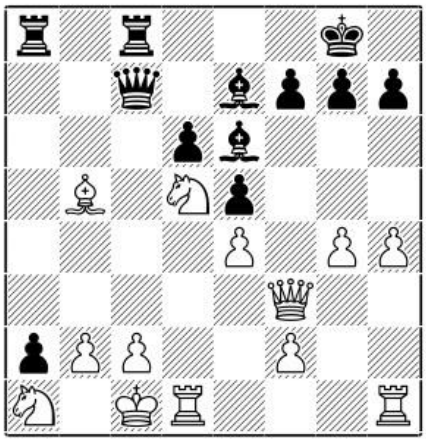
20.Na1!

Another only move. Instead 20.Nxa4? Qxc2†, 20.Bxa4? Rxa4! and 20.Nc1? a3 21.b3 Bxg4! all win for Black.

20...a3 21.Nd5

Again White has no choice.

21...a2† 22.Kc1

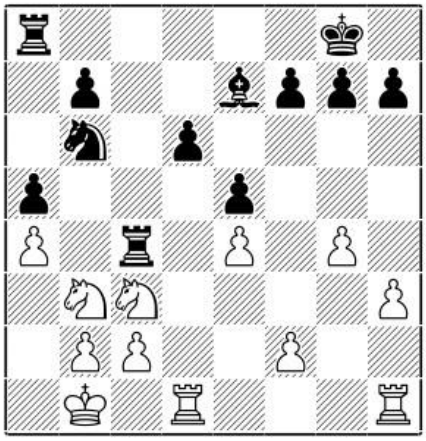


22...Qxc2†! 23.Nxc2 a1=Q† 24.Kd2 Qa5† 25.Nc3 Rxc3 26.bxc3 Qxb5

Black had full compensation in Blitsko – Yamaliev, corr. 2017, and a draw was agreed after a few more moves.

17...Bc4 18.Bxc4 Qxc4 19.Qxc4 Rxc4

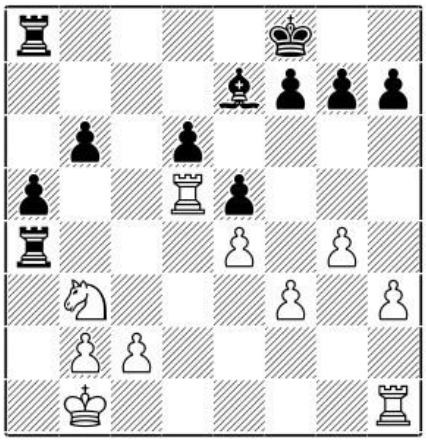
We have reached an endgame where White would enjoy a positional grip if he could consolidate – but to do so is far from easy.



20.Nd2?

This seemingly natural yet erroneous move has been played twice.

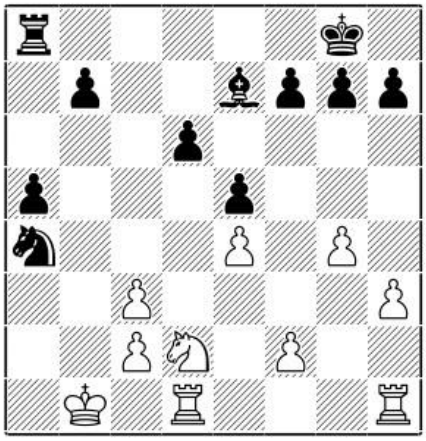
A more accurate continuation is: 20.f3 Kf8 21.Rd3 Nxa4 22.Nxa4 Rxa4 23.Rd5 b6



24.Nd2! Rd4 25.Rxd4 exd4 26.Nc4 Rb8 27.Rd1 d5 28.exd5 Bc5 A draw ensued in Stephenson – Bukarin, corr. 2017.

20...Rxc3! 21.bxc3 Nxa4

Black will get a second pawn for the exchange and have a clear advantage. He has a better structure and White's rooks will have trouble achieving anything.



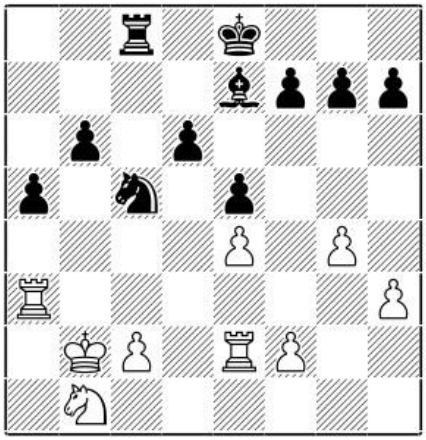
22.Ka1

The later game continued 22.Rde1 Nxc3† 23.Kb2 Na4† 24.Ka3 b5µ and Black went on to win in Wang Jue – Sebag, Sochi 2015.

22...Nxc3 23.Rde1 Rc8 24.Nb1 Na4 25.Re2 Kf8

25...b5!Nµ looks slightly more accurate.

26.Rd1 Ke8 27.Rd3 Nc5 28.Ra3 b6 29.Kb2



29...Kd7

This enables White's knight to reach the d5-square. Instead 29...Ne6! would have introduced the tactical possibility of ...d5.

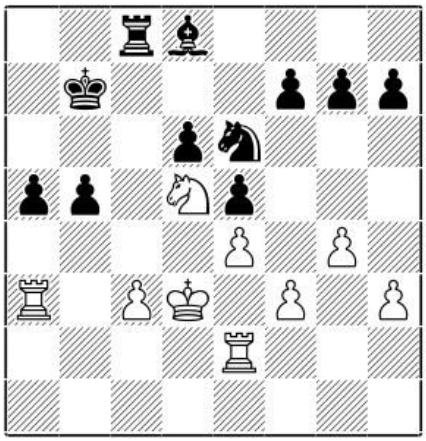
30.Nc3 Kc6

I would still prefer 30...Ne6, and after 31.Nd5 Bd8 Black can follow up with ...b5.

31.Nd5 Bd8 32.f3

Instead 32.Rf3!? would provoke ...f6, when White can hope to open some lines later with g4-g5.

32...b5 33.c3 Kb7 34.Kc2 Ne6 35.Kd3



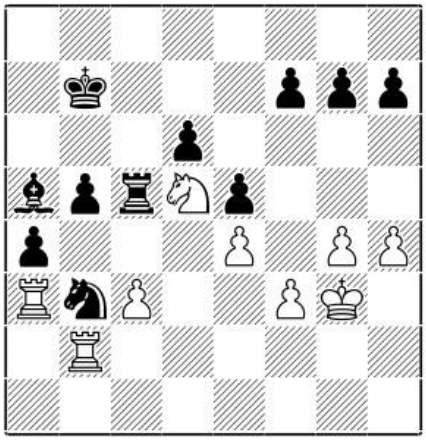
35...Nc5†

35...Rc5! looks strong, intending 36.Rd2 Nf4† 37.Nxf4 exf4 followed by ...Kb6 and ...Bf6.

36.Ke3

For some reason the white king heads for the kingside. 36.Kc2 makes more sense.

36...Bg5† 37.Kf2 a4 38.Rc2 Nb3 39.Kg3 Bd8 40.Rb2 Rc5 41.h4 Ba5



42.c4?

White finally cracks and misses a check. Instead 42.Raxb3 axb3 43.Rxb3 would have given good chances to save the game.

42...Be1†

42...Rxc4 was just as good, since 43.Rbxb3 would allow the zwischenzug 43...Be1†.

43.Kg2 Rxc4–+

With connected passed pawns, Black is simply winning.

44.h5 Bd2 45.Kf2 Bc1 46.Raxb3 axb3 47.Rxb3 Kc6 48.Ke2 Kc5 49.Kd3 Bg5 50.Rb2 b4 51.Rb1 Rd4† 52.Kc2 Rd2† 53.Kb3 Rd3† 54.Kc2 Rd2† 55.Kb3 Rf2 56.Ka4 Bd2 57.Rb2 Rxf3 58.Rc2† Bc3 59.Nxb4 Kd4 60.Nd5 Be1 61.Re2 Bf2 62.Kb5 Kd3 63.Ra2 Kxe4 64.Kc6 Bc5 65.g5 Rg3

0–1

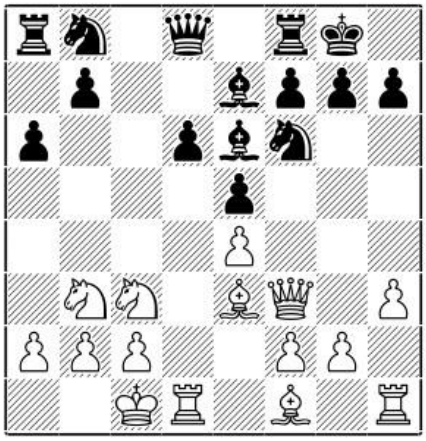
B22) 10.0-0-0

GAME 40

Kacper Drozdowski – Grzegorz Gajewski

Chorzow 2013

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.h3 e5 7.Nb3 Be6 8.Be3 Be7 9.Qf3 0-0 10.0-0-0



Although the previous variation is certainly playable for White, I find it more natural to get developed before throwing more pawns forward.

10...b5!

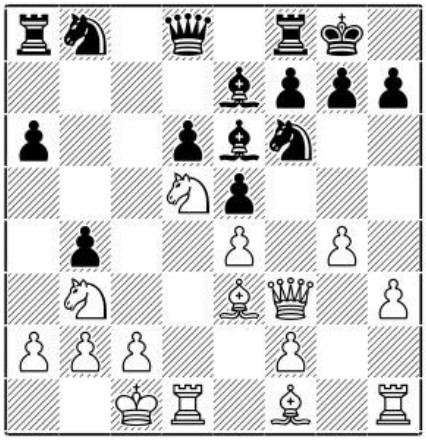
Note that 10...a5?! is not so good here because of 11.Nc5!.

11.g4

11.Kb1 is a typical move, albeit rather slow and not really necessary right now. After 11...b4 12.Nd5 Nxd5 13.exd5 Bc8! 14.g4 Black can play either 14...a5 or 14...Nd7 15.Nd2 Qc7, with similar play to the game.

11...b4 12.Nd5

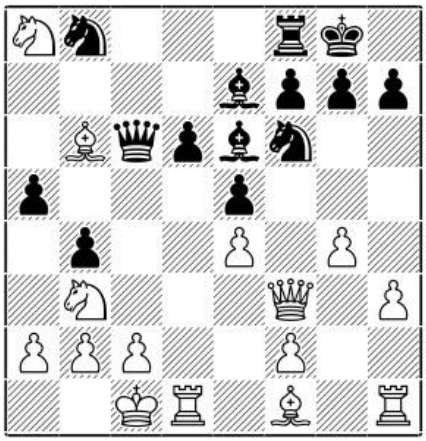
White cannot hold up the queenside pawns with 12.Na4? because 12...Nbd7 13.g5 Ne8 14.h4 Qc7 leaves the knight in too much trouble, and if he rescues it with 15.Nd2 Qc6 16.b3 then 16...d5! gives Black a winning position.



12...Nxd5

Worse is 12...Bxd5?! 13.exd5 a5 14.Kb1 when Black's total lack of light-squared control is telling.

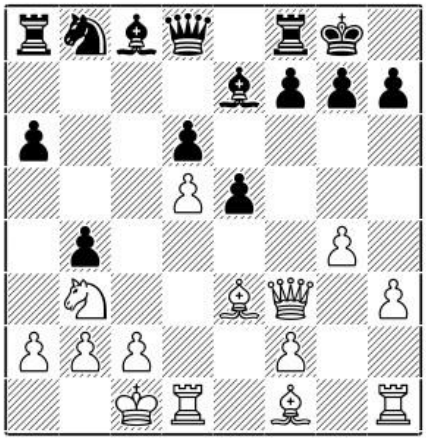
However, 12...a5!? is a tempting alternative, since winning the exchange turns out badly for White: 13.Bb6 Qe8 14.Nc7 Qc6 15.Nxa8



Now the calm 15...Qxa8!N would have given Black a decisive advantage, with the e4-pawn hanging and ...a4 followed by ...Bxa2 another big threat. (The game continuation of 15...a4!? 16.Nd2 Bxa2 also favoured Black, who went on to win after further adventures in Sprenger – Burg, Netherlands 2017.)

13.exd5 Bc8!

Black plans to reactivate with ...a5 and ...Ba6. Sometimes ...Bb7 is possible as well, taking aim at the d5-pawn.



14.Bd3

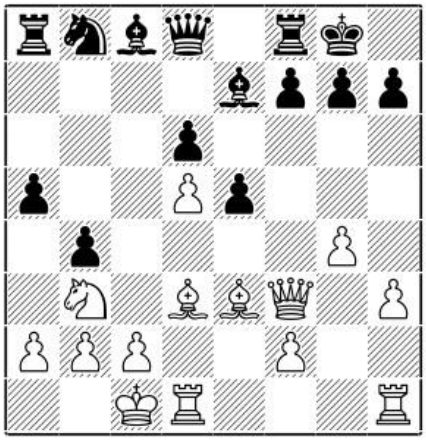
White develops and creates the possibility of a battery on the b1-h7 diagonal.

14.Nc5?! is something of a shot in the dark after 14...a5 or 14...Nd7 15.Nxd7 Bxd7 16.Bd3 a5.

14.Qe4 just gives Black an extra opportunity with 14...a5 15.Bd3 f5! 16.gxf5 Bxf5 17.Qg2 Bxd3 18.Rxd3 Nd7 19.Nd2 Nf6 and Black had a good position in Volokitin – Wojtaszek, Loo 2013.

14...a5

Black could also play 14...Nd7!? first, when 15.Nd2 a5 transposes to the game. Instead going after the b4-pawn with 15.Qe4?! is well met by 15...Nf6 16.Qxb4 a5, when 17.Qa4 Bd7 18.Bb5 Bxb5 19.Qxb5 a4 20.Nd2 Qc7 21.Qc6 Qb8 gave Black a strong attack in Trzeciak – Geissler, corr. 2017.



15.Nd2

15.Kb1 is still not really necessary, although it will often transpose somewhere. 15...a4 16.Nd2 Ba6 reaches Motylev – Tari, while 15...Nd7 16.h4 Qc7 17.g5 a4 18.Nd2 Ba6 is Visakh – Vishnu, both of which are referenced in the notes below.

15.Nc5!?

This is more interesting – although Black could easily remove this option with the 14...Nd7!? move order mentioned in the note to his previous move.

15...Nd7

Usually the knight should be ignored in such situations, and this is no exception: 15...dxc5 16.d6 Ra7 17.dxe7 Qxe7 18.Rhe1 gives White plenty of compensation for a pawn.

15...a4!? is quite reasonable though, and leads to complex play.

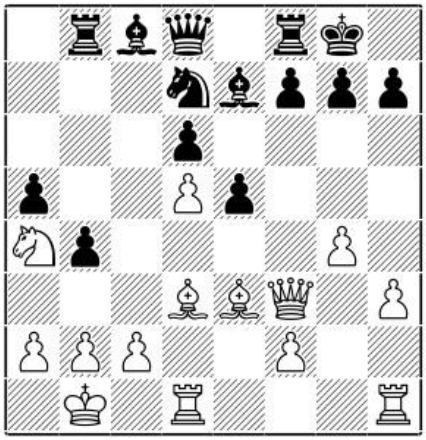
16.Na4!?

16.Nxd7 Bxd7 is safer, with equal chances.

The text move is more ambitious, but trying to block the queenside is risky.

16...Rb8 17.Kb1

We have been following V. Ibragimov – Morozov, corr. 2009. Here I like:



17...Nf6N

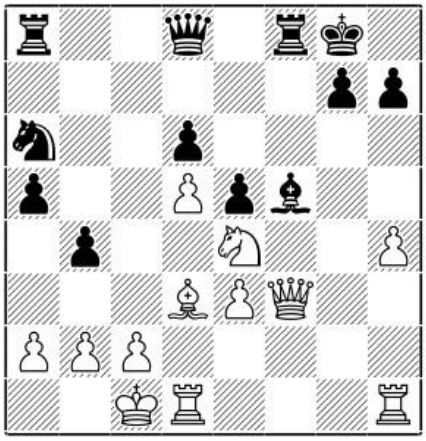
Intending ...Bd7. An important point is: 18.g5? e4! 19.Bxe4 Nxe4 20.Qxe4 Bxg5µ

15...Nd7

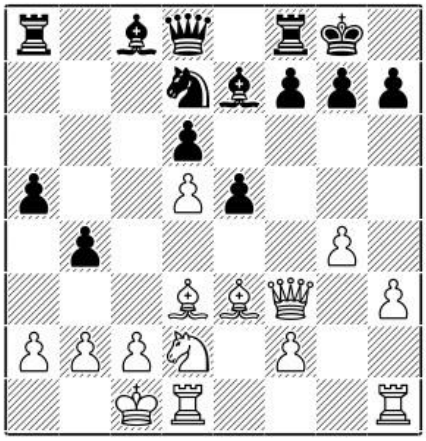
This seems the most flexible choice to me, but there are a couple of alternatives that Black may consider.

15...Ba6 is another natural move which led to complicated play after 16.Kb1 a4 17.Bf5!? (17.h4 Bxd3 18.cxd3 Nd7) 17...Nd7 18.h4 Qc7 19.Bg5 Nc5 20.Ne4 Nxe4 21.Bxe4 Rfb8,, in Motylev – Tari, Yerevan 2014.

15...Bg5!? 16.h4 Bxe3 17.fxe3 Na6 18.Ne4 f5 19.gxf5 Bxf5 reaches a position where White must be careful:

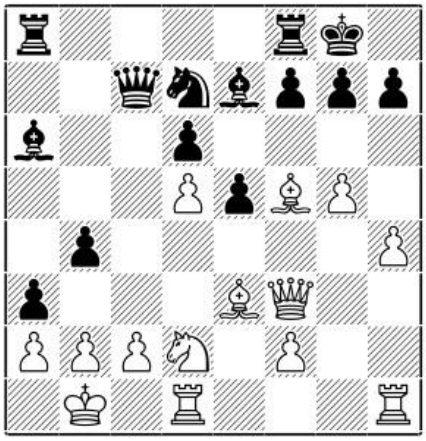


20.Qh5? (White should have preferred 20.Rdf1 b3!„ when any result is possible) Now instead of repeating with 20...Bg6 21.Qg4 Bf5 22.Qh5 Bg6 in Djukic – Sjugirov, Cappelle-la-Grande 2013, Black could have played 20...b3!N 21.axb3 Nb4 with a strong attack. For example, 22.Nc3 Bxd3 23.cxd3 Qc8!? intending 24.Kb1 a4 25.bxa4 Rxa4! when Black keeps some initiative.



16.g5

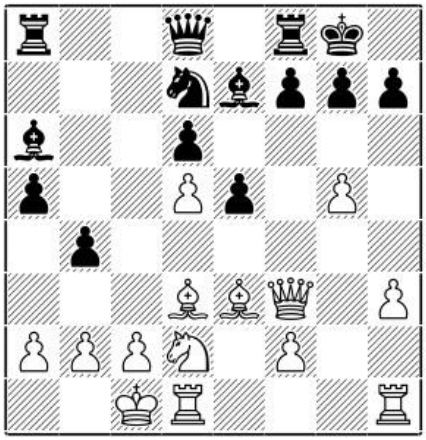
Another good example continued: 16.Kb1 Qc7! 17.g5 a4 18.h4 Ba6 19.Bf5? (White should have preferred 19.Bxa6N 19...Rxa6 20.Qe2 Raa8 21.Nc4 although Black still has good play after 21...b3„) 19...a3!



20.Qe4? (20.Bxd7 Qxd7 21.b3 was more resilient although Black keeps the upper hand after 21...f5 22.gxf6 Rxf6) 20...axb2 21.Bxh7† Kh8 22.Bf5 This occurred in Visakh – Vishnu, Isle of Man 2016, when 22...Qa5!N–+ would have been Black's most efficient route to victory.

16...Ba6

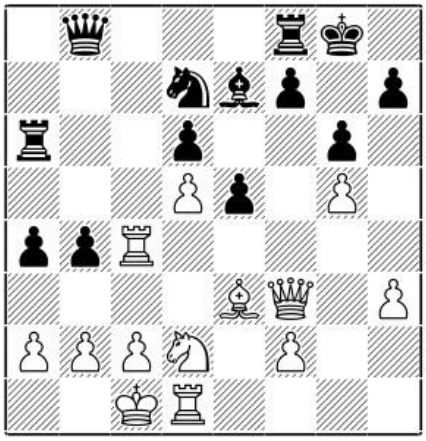
Black could also start with 16...Qc7, for instance: 17.Rhg1 Ba6 18.Bxa6 Rxa6 19.Rg4 f5 20.gxf6 Nxf6 21.Rc4 Qd7„



17.Bf5?

This manoeuvre looks awkward.

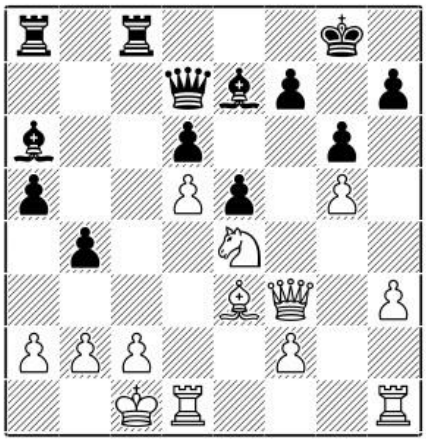
More accurate is: 17.Bxa6 Rxa6 18.Rhg1 a4 19.Rg4 Qb8 20.Rh4 g6 21.Rc4



21...f5! 22.gxf6 Nxf6 23.Bh6 Rf7 24.Ne4 Nxe4 25.Qxe4 b3 Dynamic equality was maintained in Gudzovaty – Mielke, corr. 2015.

17...g6 18.Bxd7 Qxd7 19.Ne4 Rfc8–+

Black's attack is much faster.



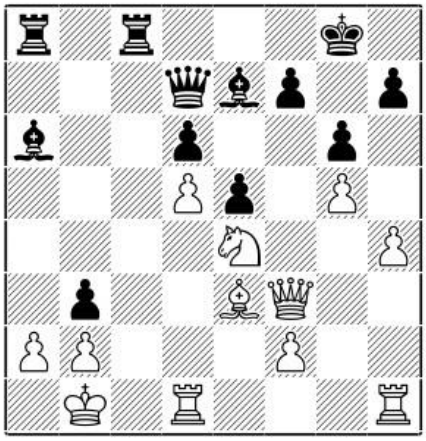
20.Kb1

If 20.Nf6† then 20...Bxf6 21.gxf6 Qa4 decides.

20...a4 21.h4

Here too 21.Nf6† does not help in view of 21...Bxf6 22.gxf6 b3 when White will not last long.

21...b3 22.cxb3 axb3



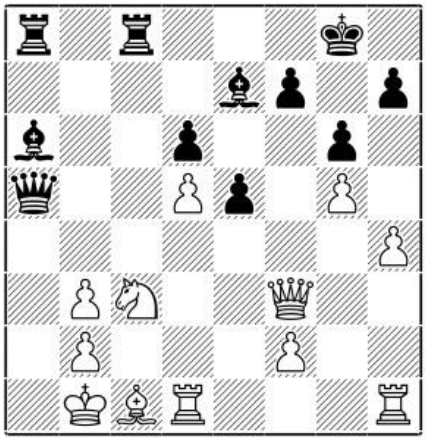
23.axb3

23.a3 Rc2 leaves White facing several nasty threats, including ...Be2, or ...Qa4 followed by ...Bc8-f5.

23...Qb5

Threatening ...Qd3†! with mate to follow.

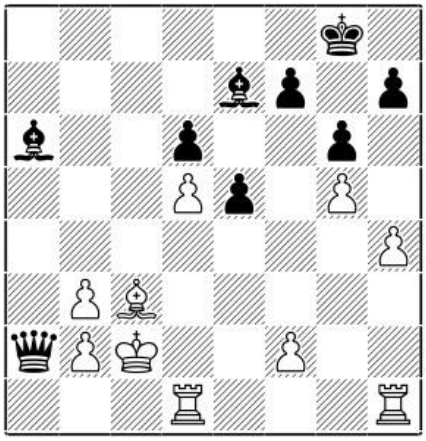
24.Bc1 Qa5 25.Nc3



25...Rxc3! 26.Qxc3

This loses the queen, but 26.bxc3 Bd3†! leads to a quick mate.

26...Qa2† 27.Kc2 Rc8 28.Bd2 Rxc3† 29.Bxc3



29...Bc8!

The remaining moves were hardly necessary.

30.Ra1 Bf5† 31.Kd2 Qxb3 32.Ra8† Kg7 33.Rha1 Qxd5† 34.Ke1 Qe4† 35.Kd2 Qd3† 0–1

Conclusion

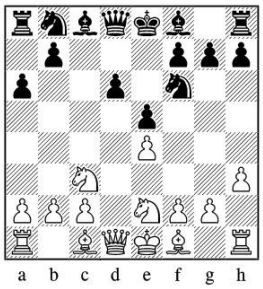
6.h3 is a modern move which enjoys tremendous popularity. After 6...e5 White often retreats his knight to e2, but 7.Nb3 is an important alternative, when Black already has a decision to make. The slightly unusual 7...Be7!? is our choice, since the more common 7...Be6 makes 8.f4!? a serious proposition – although if you do decide to investigate this path, 8...g6!? would be my choice.

After 7...Be7!? White may be tempted to 'punish' our last move with 8.g4!? although Black gets a decent position with 8...h6, with the ...Nbd7-f8-g6 manoeuvre often featuring in his plans.

8.Be3 Be6 is the main line of the chapter. Then 9.g4!? in conjunction with Navara's king walk is a fascinating idea, but White should really accept a repetition when he has the chance, otherwise his king could be caught – although Black needs to play accurately to do so.

9.Qf3 is the most important continuation, when 9...0-0 is our choice. In the early days White did well with his novel approach, but over time Black figured out the right move orders. Thus, both 10.g4 a5! and 10.0-0-0 b5! offer Black excellent counterplay.

Chapter 15



7.♘de2

Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.h3 e5 7.♘de2 h5!

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B) 8.g3 Be6 9.Bg2 Nbd7 10.a4 Be7 417

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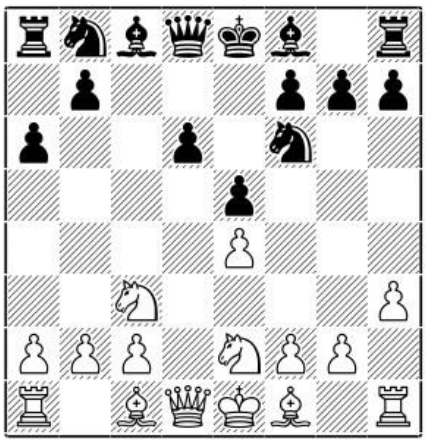
1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.h3 e5 7.Nde2



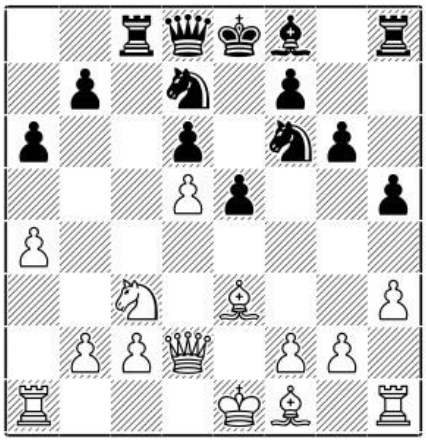
This is by far the most popular knight retreat. White hopes to play g2-g4 and Ng3, with practically an extra tempo on the 6.g3 lines where he follows up with the same plan. There was a time when 6...e5 was considered to be dubious because of this scheme, but we can stop White's intentions.

7...h5!

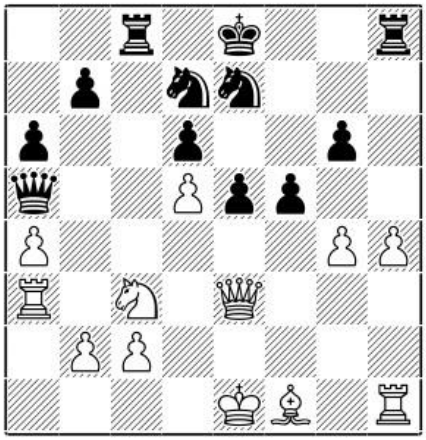
This is the modern move, preventing g2-g4. We will analyse the rare but interesting **A)**

8.Nd5!?, followed by the simple **B)** 8.g3 and finally the main line of **C)** 8.Bg5.

8.Be3 has been tried by a few strong players but I do not see any special idea behind it. White's set-up resembles an English Attack, but the e4-pawn is more vulnerable. A nice example continued: 8...Be6 9.Nd5 Bxd5 10.exd5 Nbd7 11.Nc3 g6 12.Qd2 Rc8 13.a4

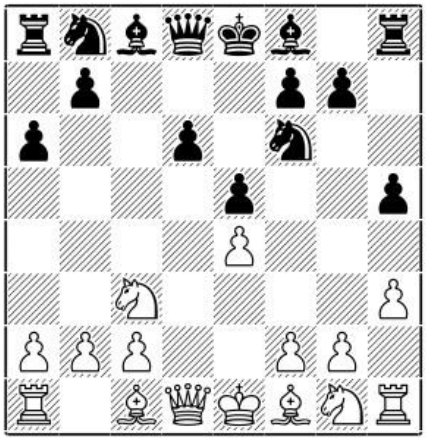


13...Ng8!? Borrowing a thematic idea from some lines of the English Attack. 14.Ra3 f5 15.h4 Qa5 16.f3 Bh6 17.g4 Bxe3 18.Qxe3 hxg4 19.fxg4 Ne7



20.Qd2 Qb4 21.Rb3 Qxg4 22.Rxb7 Rxc3! White resigned in Vishnu – Nakamura, Isle of Man 2016, as a fork will follow on e4.

A somewhat amusing idea is:
8.Ng1!?

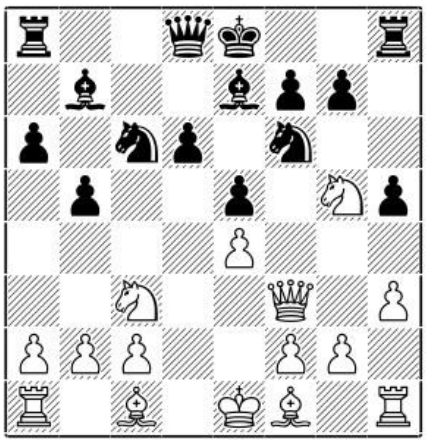


This move is unsurprisingly rare, but certainly not stupid. White wants to play Nf3-g5, taking advantage of Black's previous move. However, it is time-consuming in the extreme. Compared to a line such as 6.Be3 (or 6.Be2) 6...e5 7.Nf3, White is essentially sacrificing two tempos for the sake of including the moves h2-h3 and ...h5.

8...b5!

Usually it would be wrong to play this move so early in this structure, but White's development is too poor to exploit it here. Besides, we should prevent Bc4.

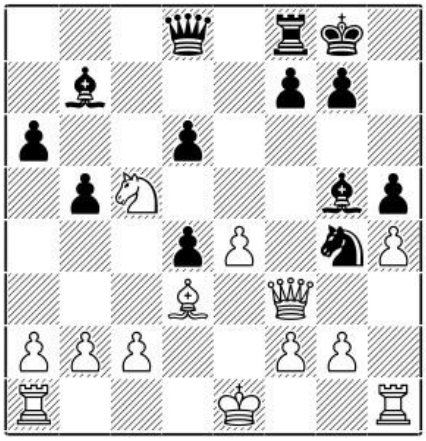
9.Nf3 Bb7 10.Ng5 Be7 11.Qf3 Nc6!



Black is already developing a nice initiative, and he went on to increase his advantage in the game we are following.

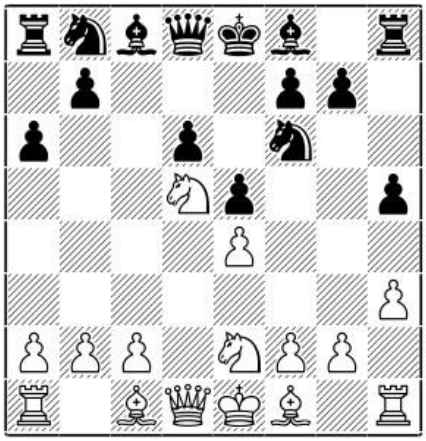
12.Be3 Nd4 13.Bxd4 exd4 14.Nb1 Rc8 15.Bd3 Rc5 16.h4 0-0 17.Nd2 Ng4 18.Nb3 Bxg5 19.Nxc5

Now in Narayanan – Marek, Pardubice 2015, Black's best continuation would have been:



19...Bd2†!N 20.Kxd2 dxc5
With an overwhelming position.

A) 8.Nd5!?



This is a relatively new move. Like some of the other ideas in this chapter, it was pioneered by Anand, and thus should be taken seriously.

8...Nxd5

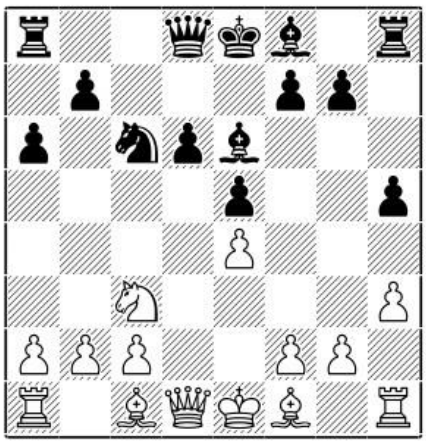
8...Be6?! is a lazy move, and after 9.Nec3 intending Bg5, White is better.

Grabbing the pawn with 8...Nxe4 9.Be3 Nd7 is possible, although both 10.g3 and 10.c4 give White decent compensation.

9.Qxd5 Nc6!

Black has also played 9...Nd7 10.Nc3 Nf6, and after 11.Qd1 Be6 12.Bg5 Be7 13.Bxf6 Bxf6 14.Be2 g6 (14...Rc8!?N) 15.0-0 Rc8 16.Nd5 Bg5 Black was doing okay in Anand – Topalov, Leuven 2016. However, Illingworth's suggestion of 11.Qb3!?N intending Bc4 looks more annoying.

10.Qd1 Be6 11.Nc3

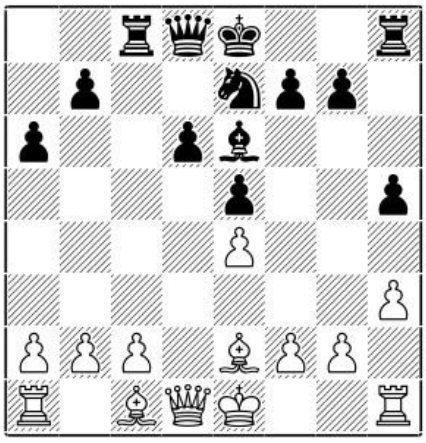


11...Be7

11...Ne7!? is an interesting move, but Black falls behind in development. 12.Bd3 d5 13.exd5 Nxd5 14.0-0 Nb4 occurred in Anand – Nakamura, Saint Louis 2016, when 15.Re1!?N is another good suggestion from Illingworth.

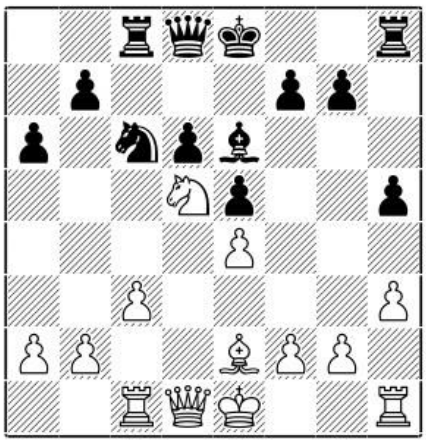
12.Nd5 Rc8 13.c3

13.Nxe7 Nxe7 14.Be2 occurred in Hovhannisyan – Gabuzyan, Yerevan 2017, when Black should have continued:



14...d5N 15.exd5 Qxd5 16.0-0 Qc6 Black is fine, as his strong centre and active pieces are at least as important as White's bishop pair.

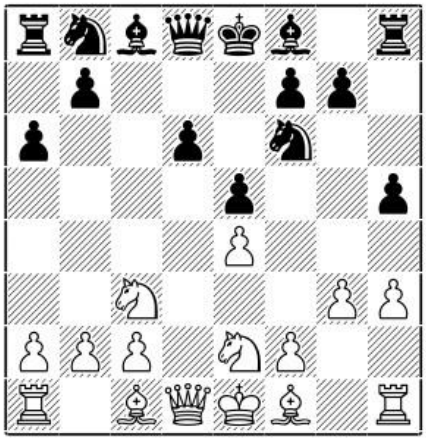
13...Bg5 14.Be2 Bxc1 15.Rxc1



15...Qh4!?

This disruptive move, played in Nepustil – Pecka, corr. 2013, looks best. (Instead Illingworth gives 15...Ne7 16.Ne3 g6 17.Rc2! Bxa2 18.Rd2 Be6 19.Rxd6 Qc7 20.0-0 0-0 21.Qd3 Rfd8 22.Rd1 Qxd6 23.Qxd6 Rxd6 24.Rxd6 with a symbolic edge for White.) Summing up, I do not think 8.Nd5!? will cause sleepless nights, but I expect further developments in this line.

B) 8.g3



As explained earlier, our 7...h5 move was designed to avoid giving White an improved version of the 6.g3 line, which could have been the case if he had been given time to play g2-g4, Bg2 and so on. However, we also have to reckon on the more modest text move. By playing it, White is essentially arguing that he has an improved version of the 6.g3 e5 7.Nde2 line, based on the idea that the inclusion of the h2-h3 and ...h5 moves helps him. Indeed, on the face of it, the former looks useful for White while the latter seems to weaken Black's kingside. As we will see, things are not that simple and Black's practical results have been good.

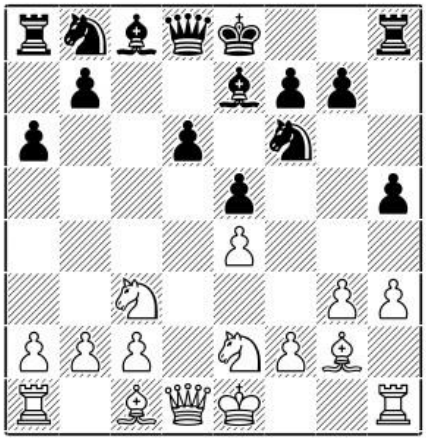
8...Be6

After any move by either side, the position can be compared to the equivalent version after 6.g3, where the respective h-pawns are still on their original squares. The text move is my preferred choice in the current situation, whereas in the next chapter we will see a different approach with the pawns on h2 and h7. Here is a brief summary of the main alternatives and why I was not so happy with them:

8...Nbd7?! is well met by 9.a4!. I will say more about why we should avoid this situation on the queenside in the next chapter, on page 463. For now, it suffices to say that the insertion of moves by the h-pawns hardly helps Black.

Gelfand has played 8...b5 several times, but most strong players have shied away from this move. 9.Bg5! is the critical reply, when the annoying bishop cannot be dislodged, and this line has essentially disappeared from practice since 2015. Play continues: 9...Nbd7 10.Nd5 Bb7 (or 10...Be7 11.Nxe7! Qxe7 12.Nc3) 11.Nec3 Rc8 12.Bg2 Be7 13.Nxe7! Qxe7 Gelfand has reached this position four times. After 14.h4! the position may be tenable for Black, but it is still unpleasant; see Karjakin – Gelfand, Wijk aan Zee 2014, and Swiercz – Gelfand, Skopje 2015.

Finally, 8...Be7 9.Bg2 reaches a position analogous to our repertoire against 6.g3, as detailed in the next chapter.



However, we would already have to

modify Black's approach, as castling looks too risky when ...h5 has been played and White has still not castled. Instead 9...b5 has been tried by some strong players, but 10.Nd5! is a good reply. 10...Nxd5 (10...Nbd7 11.Nxe7! Qxe7 12.Bg5! is similar to the 8...b5 line above) 11.Qxd5 Ra7 12.Be3 In the next chapter on page 473, I reach a similar position in the note to Black's 10th move of Game 46, and am less than satisfied by Black's prospects. With the pawns on h3 and h5, the situation is perhaps even worse for Black. One example continued 12...Rb7 (12...Be6 13.Qd2 Rb7 14.Nc3 Nd7 15.Nd5²) Edouard – Nepomniachtchi, Tromso (ol) 2014, and now Edouard points out that 13.0-0-0! would have been critical here. Where will Black put his king?

9.Bg2

9.Bg5 will be covered under 8.Bg5 Be6 9.g3 – see variation C2 on page 433.

9...Nbd7

This traditional move is my preference. Black avoids any weakening of his queenside until he is properly developed.

The main alternative is:

9...b5

This modern move has been played by both Giri and MVL – with both colours. It looks a bit odd to combine ...Be6 with ...b5 but, having secured the d5-square to some degree, Black is trying to gain space on the queenside.

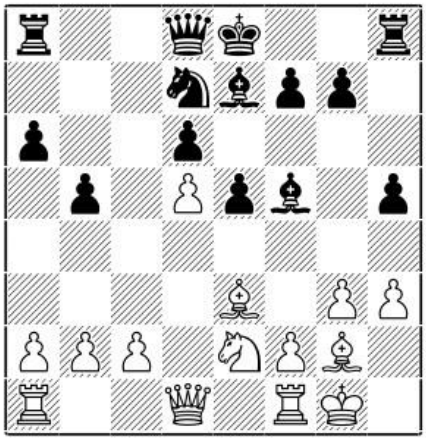
10.0-0

This is the critical line.

10.Nd5N 10...Nxd5 11.exd5 Bf5 is better for Black than it would be without h2-h3 and ...h5 included. The bishop has an extra retreat square on h7, and ...h4 is a possibility.

Inserting 10.a4 b4 before 11.Nd5 Nxd5 12.exd5 Bf5 does not alter the above assessment.

10...Nbd7 11.Be3 Be7 12.Nd5 Nxd5 13.exd5 Bf5



14.f4

White is trying to get the d4-square for his knight, in order to hop to c6. Black cannot allow this.

14...Rc8 15.c3 Bh7 16.fxe5

16.a4 is also possible, as played in Vachier-Lagrave – Giri, London 2016.

16...dxe5 17.d6 Bg5÷

Everything has turned out okay from here in correspondence games, but it doesn't seem very practical to me.

10.a4

As we have seen, this is a typical response when our knight commits to d7.

10.Bg5 again leads to variation C2, and 10.Be3 Be7 11.0-0 Rc8 12.a4 reaches variation B1 below.

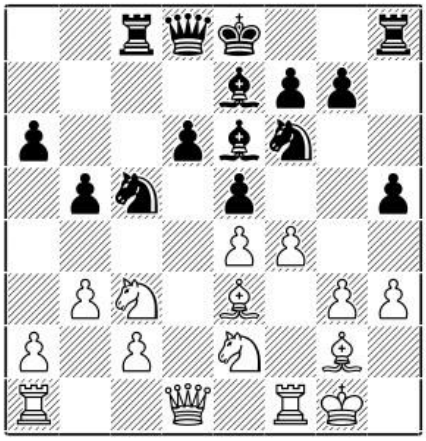
10.Nd5 Nxd5 11.exd5 Bf5 is very comfortable for Black. It is similar to a line we saw against the modern 9...b5 line in the previous note, but here Black has not weakened his queenside.

Recently I faced an unusual idea:

10.0-0 Be7 11.b3

11.a4 transposes to variation B1 below.

11...b5 12.f4 Nc5 13.Be3 Rc8



14.a4?

White should play more solidly, although Black has no worries in any case.

14...b4

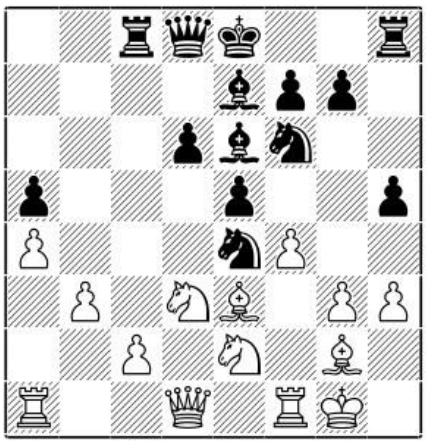
14...bxa4? 15.f5 Bd7 16.b4! would justify White's play.

15.Nd5

15.Bxc5 Rxc5µ

15...Ncxe4 16.Nxb4 a5 17.Nd3

In A. Ivanov – Vigorito, Westford 2019, we both totally missed:



17...Nd5!N

An easy move to play – if you think of it in the first place.

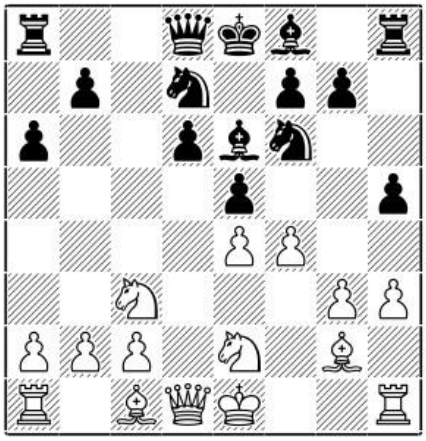
18.Bd2

18.Qc1 f5µ

18...Qb6† 19.Kh2 Nxd2 20.Qxd2 Ne3–+

With an overwhelming advantage.

10.f4!?



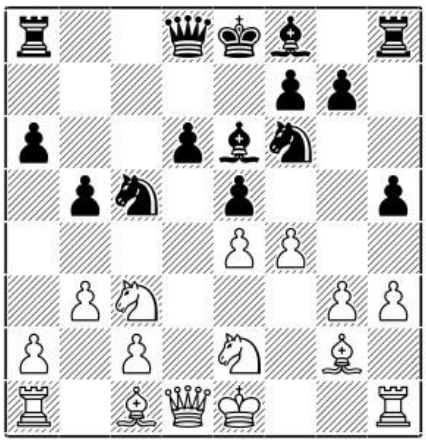
This has been played by Shirov a couple of times.

10...b5

10...Rc8 11.b3 also sees White trying to play against the e6-bishop. 11...Nc5 12.a4 occurred in Shirov – Matuszewski, Warsaw 2011, when Black should have tried 12...Bd7N or 12...b5!?N.

11.b3 Nc5

11...Nb6?! was not a good square for the knight in Shirov – Vachier-Lagrave, Melilla 2011.



12.Be3 Rc8 13.a3 Be7 14.0-0 0-0 15.Rc1 a5 16.Nxb5 Ncxe4,,

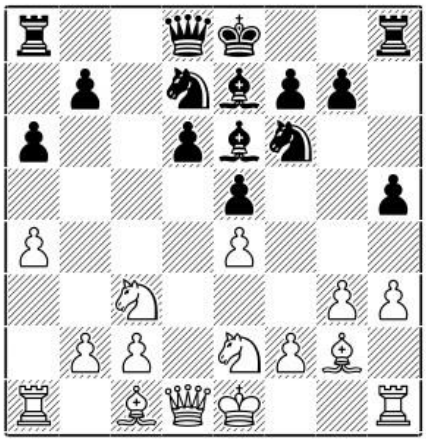
Having traded a flank pawn for the opponent's central one, Black had no cause for complaints in Movsesian – Gopal, Doha 2014.

10...Be7

This is the most accurate according to MVL.

Things did not go so well for Black after: 10...Rc8 11.Be3 Nb6?! (11...Be7 is still okay) 12.Bg5! Be7 13.b3 Interestingly, MVL once again suffered from a misplaced knight on b6, as also

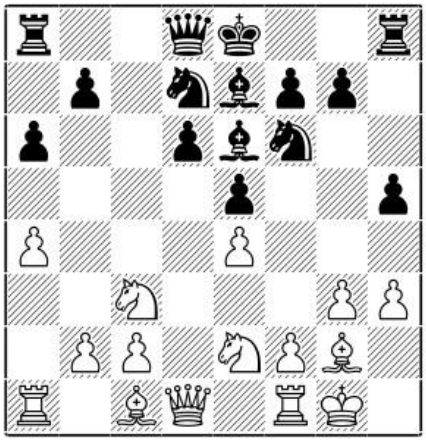
occurred in the Shirov game noted above. This time, the French super-GM felt compelled to sacrifice the exchange with 13...h4 in Polgar – Vachier-Lagrave, Hoogeveen 2011. Instead 13...0-0 14.0-0 Nbd7 is safer, but Black has lost a tempo more than White.



We will analyse the natural-looking **B1)** 11.0-0 followed by the trickier **B2)** 11.Be3.

11.a5 is another way of delaying castling, but Black has more than one satisfactory reply. There is nothing wrong with 11...Rc8, when 12.0-0 transposes to 12.a5!? in the notes to variation B1 below, and 12.Be3 transposes to variation B2. However, I would be tempted to leave the rook at home and go for 11...0-0 12.0-0 b5!?, when the rook is useful on the a-file where it keeps the a6-pawn covered.

B1) 11.0-0

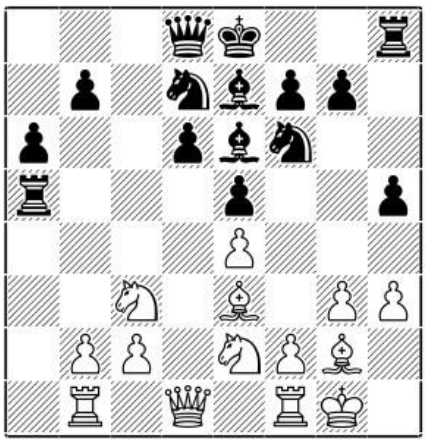


This is the most common move, though not necessary the most accurate.

11...Rc8

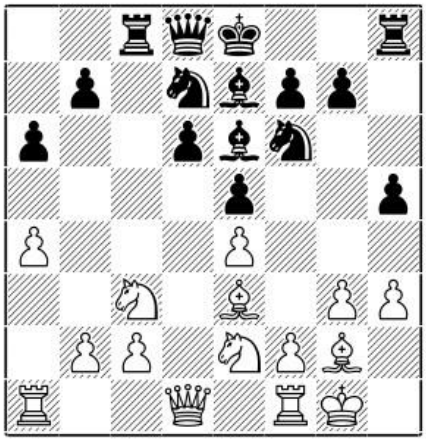
We will consider the natural developer **B11)** 12.Be3 and the more subtle **B12)** 12.b3!?.

12.a5!? looks weird, as 12...Rc5 immediately targets the pawn. White revealed his idea with 13.Be3 Rxa5 14.Rb1!, when the black rook was short of squares. However, Black was still fine after:



14...Qc8 15.Qc1 Rc5! 16.Bxc5 Nxc5 Black had full compensation for the exchange in Kloster – Datler, corr. 2016 (16...Qxc5!?N looks reasonable too).

B11) 12.Be3



12...Nb6!?

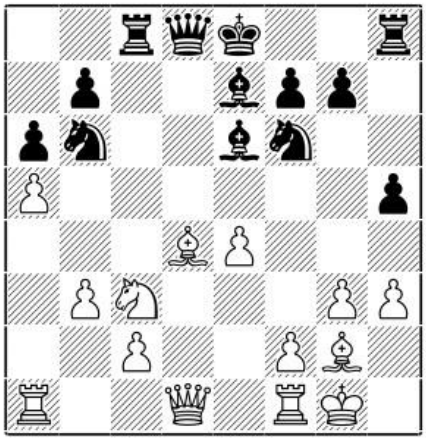
12...0-0 13.a5 transposes to the note to Black's 12th move in variation B2, where White stands better.

13.b3 d5!

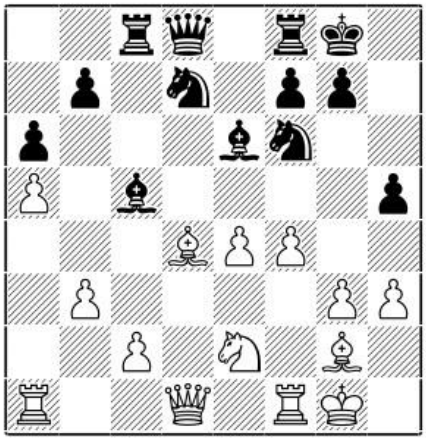
A nice idea from MVL. In the earlier notes, we saw two of his games in this variation (against Shirov and Polgar, both from 2011) in which his knight went to b6 and was restricted by the enemy pawn on b3. This time something similar happened, but he was able to use the knight to support a dynamic central break. White has to accept the pawn sac, one way or another.

14.Bxb6

14.a5 d4! is a typical counter, when best play continues: 15.Nxd4! exd4 16.Bxd4

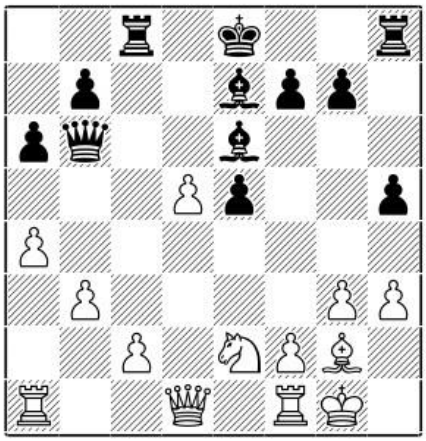


16...Bc5! An important move, highlighting the looseness of the knight on c3. MVL ends his analysis here, but it is worth looking a bit further with 17.Ne2 Nbd7 18.f4 0-0 when White seems to have good compensation for the piece, but Black can give it back. For example:



19.e5 (19.f5 Bxb3! 20.cxb3 Re8©) 19...Qc7!? 20.exf6 Nxf6© In both cases, White is a pawn up but his pieces are awkwardly placed, while Black enjoys smooth play.

14...Qxb6 15.Nxd5 Nxd5 16.exd5



16...Bd7! 17.c4 Qd6!? 18.a5?!

This move may be positionally desirable, but it is too slow.

18...f5 19.Qd3 h4

We have been following the well-known game Caruana – Vachier-Lagrave, Wijk aan Zee 2015. Black has a lot of counterplay thanks to the mobile e- and f-pawns and the unopposed dark-squared bishop, and he went on to win a great game.

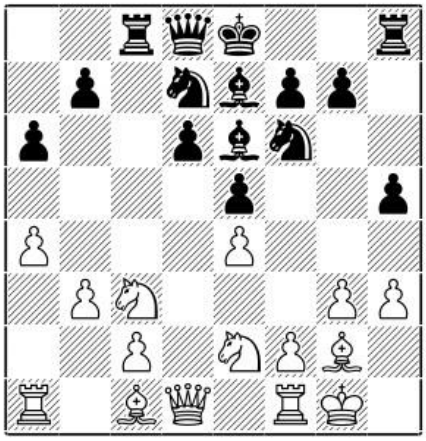
B12) 12.b3!?

GAME 41

Igor Kovalenko – Grzegorz Gajewski

Warsaw 2016

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.h3 e5 7.Nde2 h5 8.g3 Be6 9.Bg2 Nbd7 10.a4 Be7 11.0-0 Rc8 12.b3!?

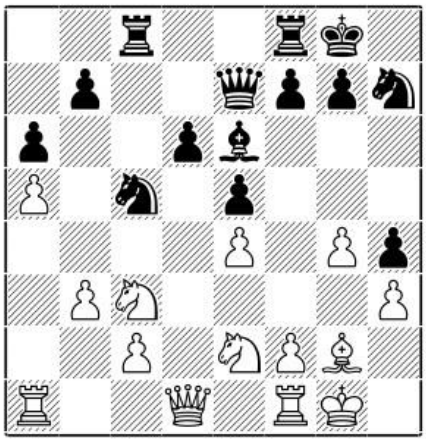


This prophylactic move prepares Be3, when Black will no longer have the ...Nb6 plan available, as White can simply meet it with a4-a5 now that the c4-square is unavailable. Thus, Black has to find another way to create counterplay.

12...Nc5!

I like this arrangement. Black will likely play ...Bd7-c6 to target the e4-pawn at some point, and the c5-knight may come back to the e6-square.

12...h4!? 13.g4 Qc7 is also possible, when a good example continued: 14.Be3 0-0 15.a5 Nc5 16.Bg5 Nh7 17.Bxe7 Qxe7



18.Qd2 Rfd8 19.Rfd1 Ng5 Black was doing fine in Swiercz – Matuszewski, Warsaw 2015. White can grab a pawn with 20.b4!? Nd7 21.Qxd6, but 21...Qxd6 22.Rxd6 Kf8 offers Black sufficient compensation, with ...Ke7 and ...Rc4 on the way.

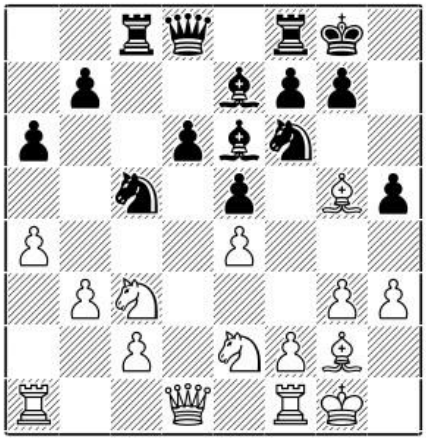
13.Be3

13.a5 should be met by 13...0-0, when 14.Be3 transposes to the main game. Instead 13...b6?! 14.axb6 Qxb6 15.Bg5 0-0 16.Qd2 Rfd8 17.Qe3 gave White the advantage in Hong – Keymer, Batumi 2016.

Another sensible continuation is:

13.Bg5!? 0-0

13...Nh7? led to trouble for Black after 14.Bxe7 Qxe7 15.f4 exf4 16.gxf4 Nf6 17.Qd4 0-0 18.Rad1 Rfe8 19.Rfe1 Bd7 20.Qxd6± in Radjabov – Sevian, Baku 2015.



14.a5 Re8!

Black has held his own with this flexible move in several correspondence games. It is important to mention the following point:

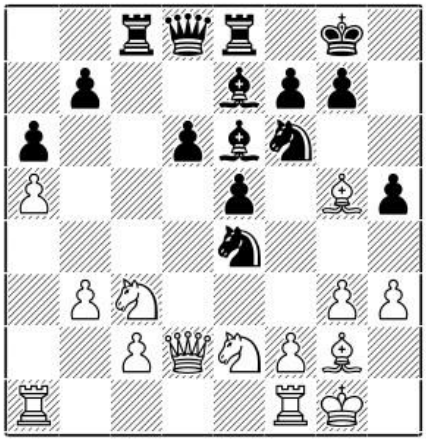
15.Qd2N

15.Re1 b5 16.axb6 Qxb6 17.Qd2 a5 18.Red1 Qb4,, has been seen in a few games.

The text move has never been played, but it is worth showing the forcing line that follows.

15...Ncxe4!

Now White has to avoid various pitfalls:

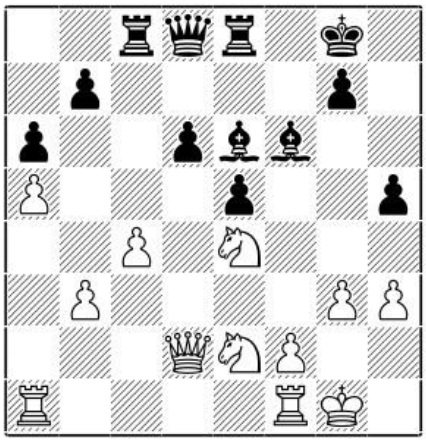


16.Bxe4!

16.Nxe4? Nxe4 17.Bxe7 Nxd2µ

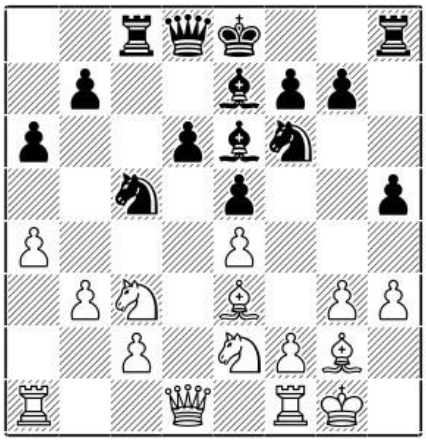
16...Nxe4 17.Nxe4 f6! 18.Bxf6

18.Be3? d5µ
18...Bxf6 19.c4
19.Nxd6? Re7µ



19...d5 20.cxd5 Bxd5 21.Nxf6† gxf6 22.Qh6 Qe7 23.Qxh5 Qf7,,

Black has plenty of play for the sacrificed pawn.



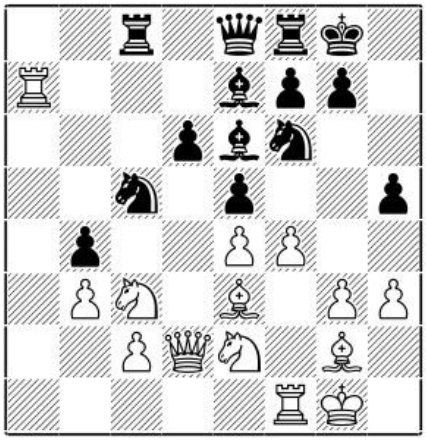
13...0-0

13...h4!?N 14.g4 0-0 is also possible; compare this with variation B2 below.

14.a5

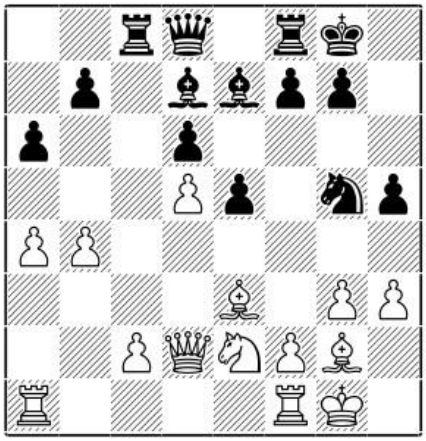
Clamping down on the queenside is a normal plan, although the position is open to different interpretations, as shown by the following examples:

14.f4 Qe8!? 15.Qd2 (15.a5 should be met by 15...Bd7 as in the main game) 15...b5 16.axb5 axb5 17.Ra7 b4

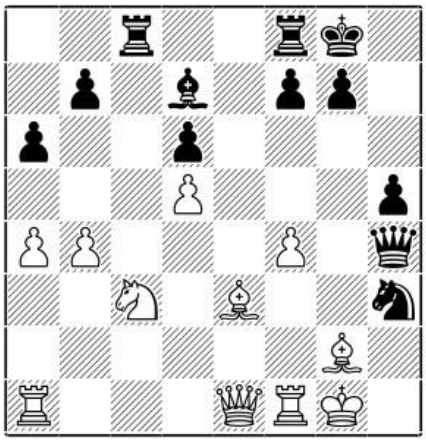


18.Nd5 Bxd5 19.exd5 Bd8,, The position was dynamically balanced in Luey – Klochan, corr. 2017.

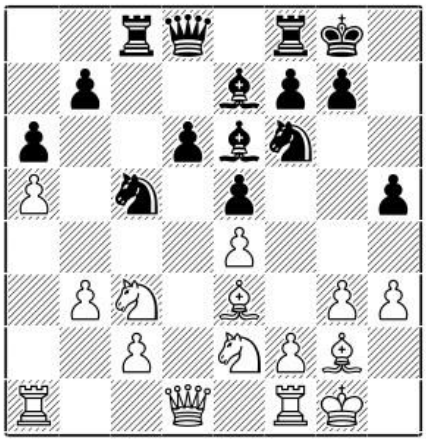
14.Qd2 Bd7 15.b4 Ne6 16.Nd5 Nxd5 17.exd5 Ng5



18.f4 (18.h4 Nh7³) 18...Nxh3†!? (18...exf4N is a good alternative, intending 19.Nxf4? Bf6µ or 19.gxf4 Nh7,,) 19.Kh2 exf4 20.gxf4 Bf6 21.c3 Bxc3 22.Nxc3 Qh4 23.Qe1 Nf2† 24.Kg1 Nh3†



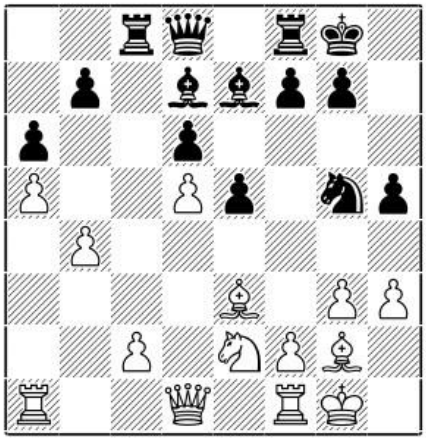
25.Kh2 (25.Bxh3? Qxh3–+) 25...Nf2† 26.Kg1 Nh3† 27.Kh2 A draw was agreed in Gopal – Kantans, Gibraltar 2017.



14...Bd7! 15.f3

This secures the e4-pawn but reduces White's control over the d5-square.

White can force the pace with 15.b4 Ne6 16.Nd5, but after 16...Nxd5 17.exd5 Ng5 Black attacks the h3-pawn and will follow up with ...f5 and ...Nh7-f6.

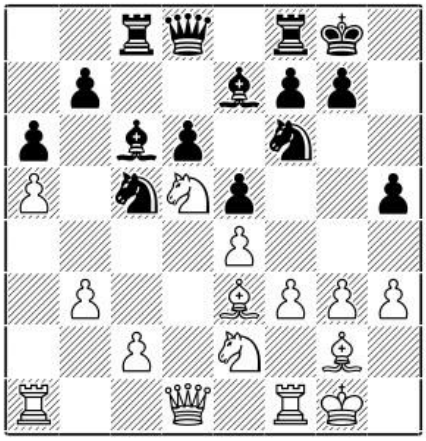


An additional point is that, in the event of 18.f4 Nxh3† 19.Kh2, Black has the resource 19...Ng5! 20.fxg5 (or 20.Bb6 Qe8 21.fxg5 Bxg5 followed by ...f5) 20...Bxg5,, with a lot of counterplay.

15...Bc6 16.Nd5

16.Qd2 allows 16...d5 of course.

If 16.b4 Ne6 Black can follow up with ...Nc7 to reintroduce the possibility of ...d5, and the knight may also head to the b5-square.



16...Bxd5

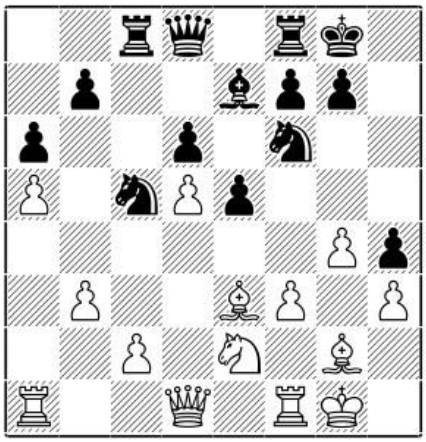
Perhaps 16...Nxd5!?N 17.exd5 Bd7 followed by ...f5 was even better.

17.exd5

Given time, White will strengthen his position with c2-c4, h3-h4 and Bh3, so Black must act quickly.

17...h4! 18.g4

I also like Black's position after 18.f4 exf4 19.gxf4 Re8, which is similar to the game but White's structure is more ragged.



18...Nh7 19.f4

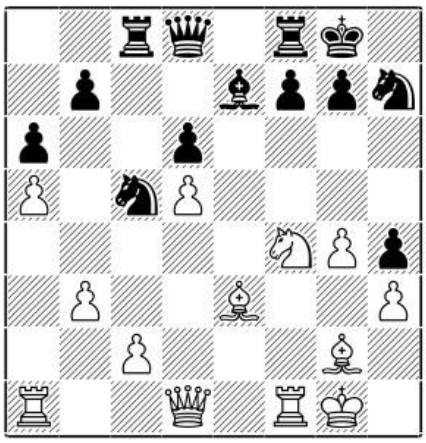
White opens things up, but the sword cuts both ways.

19.c4 Bg5 20.Bf2 was more prudent.

19...exf4 20.Nxf4

In the event of 20.Bxf4 Re8 21.c4 Black

can play 21...Bf6 or 21...Bg5, in either case with good play.



20...Re8

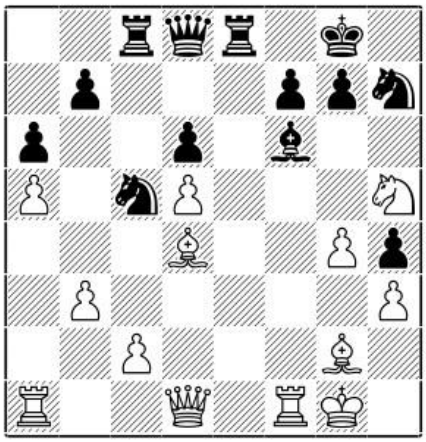
Hitting the rook immediately with 20...Bf6! looks even stronger.

21.Bd4

White should connect his rooks: 21.Qd2 Bg5 22.Rae1 Nd7 is fairly level.

21...Bf6 22.Nh5

White is hoping to attack, but Black's clever retort leaves the knight looking silly.

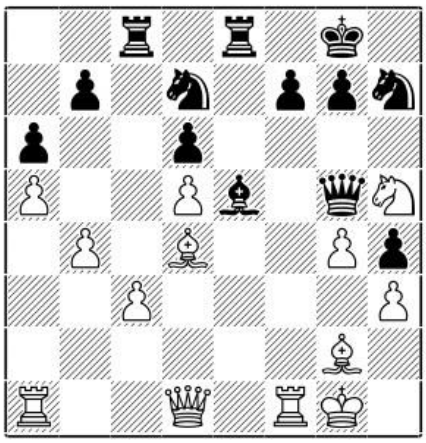


22...Be5! 23.b4

White avoids 23.Bxe5 Rxe5 24.b4 (or 24.c4 Qe7) 24...Ne4, but now he has weakened his control of some important squares on the c-file.

23...Nd7 24.c3 Qg5!

There is no reason to hurry with 25...Bxd4† 25.cxd4, when White covers the e5-square and Black does not have anything immediate.



25.Rf5?

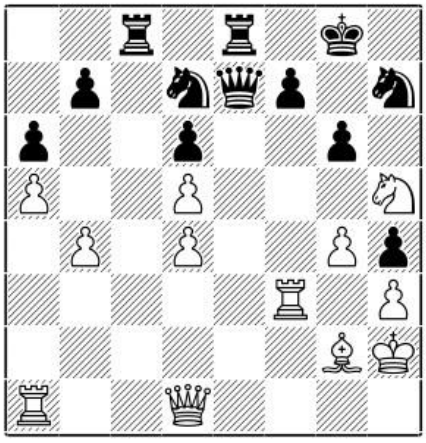
Wasting time. The endgame that arises after 25.Qf3 Bxd4† 26.cxd4 Qe3† 27.Qxe3 Rxe3 is also pretty miserable for White, so he should have sat and waited with 25.Kh1.

25...Bxd4† 26.cxd4

After 26.Qxd4 Qe3† 27.Qxe3 Rxe3 White loses the c3-pawn, for starters.

26...Qe3† 27.Kh2 g6 28.Rf3 Qe7

28...Qg5 29.Nf4 Re4 was also strong.

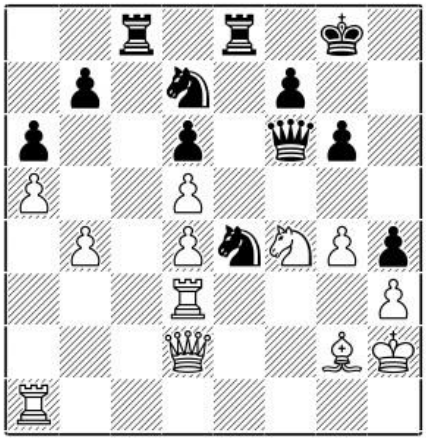


29.Nf4 Ng5 30.Rd3

30.Rf1 Qe3 does not help White.

30...Qf6 31.Qd2 Ne4

White's position is a mess and the contest does not last much longer.



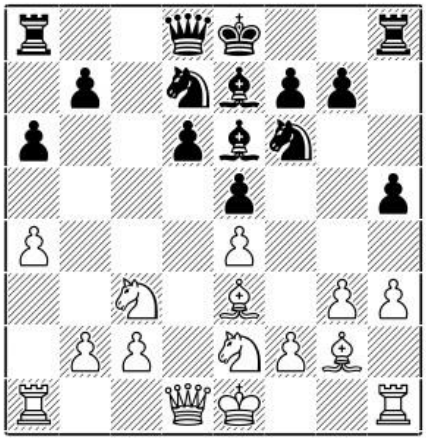
32.Bxe4 Rxe4 33.Rf1 Rc4! 34.g5

Desperation.

34...Qxg5 35.Rdf3 Rexd4 36.Qf2 Ne5

0–1

B2) 11.Be3



This is a trickier move order, and it took me a few attempts before I figured out the best way to meet it.

11...Rc8

This natural move would be my choice.

11...Nb6!?N is an interesting idea, intending 12.b3 d5!? with a similar pawn sacrifice as in Caruana – Vachier-Lagrave in variation B11 above. However, 12.Bg5!? is more troublesome, for instance: 12...Nh7 13.Bxe7 Qxe7 14.a5²

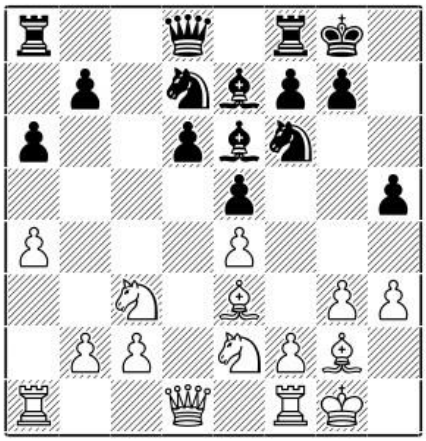
The best of the alternatives is:

11...0-0N

This is technically a new move but it is likely to transpose one way or another.

12.0-0

After 12.a5 b5 13.axb6 Nxb6 14.b3 a5,, the rook is useful on a8.



12...b5!?

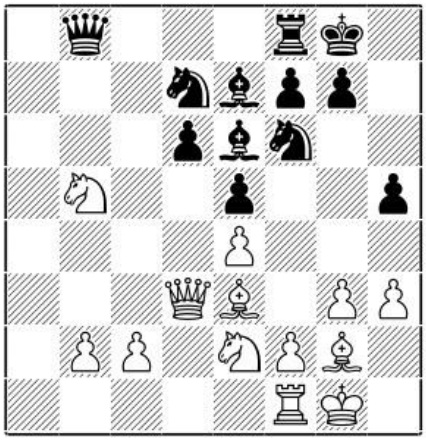
This pawn sacrifice should offer lasting compensation.

12...Rc8 13.a5 reaches the note to Black's 12th move in the main line below, where White stands better.

13.axb5 axb5 14.Rxa8

14.Nxb5 Rxa1 15.Qxa1 d5! gives Black fine play in the centre.

14...Qxa8 15.Nxb5 Qb8 16.Qd3



16...Nc5!N

16...Rc8? 17.b3± enabled White to consolidate in Pichot – Bellahcene, Durban 2014.

17.Bxc5 dxc5 18.c4 Rd8 19.Qc2 h4 20.b3

If 20.g4 Nh7 Black will target the weakened dark squares.

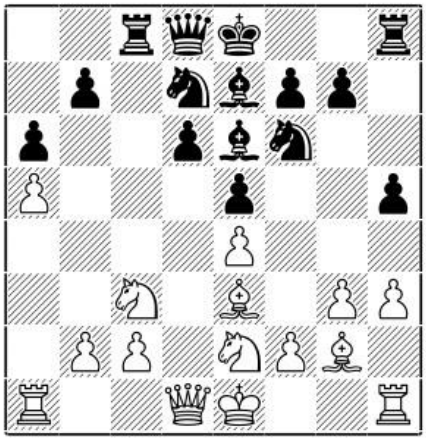
20...hxg3 21.fxg3 Qc8 22.Kh2 Qd7 23.Nec3 Qd2©

Objectively, the sacrifice seems fully playable, especially in correspondence. Personally I am not so comfortable being a pawn down for compensation which is hard to explain, but others may see things differently.

12.a5

12.0-0 leads back to variation B11.

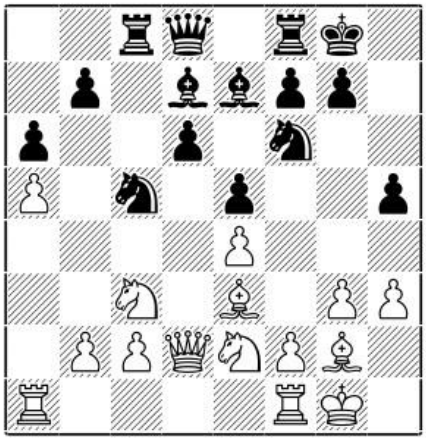
The text move is more consistent with White's previous move, as he continues to delay castling in order to improve his situation on the queenside.



12...h4!

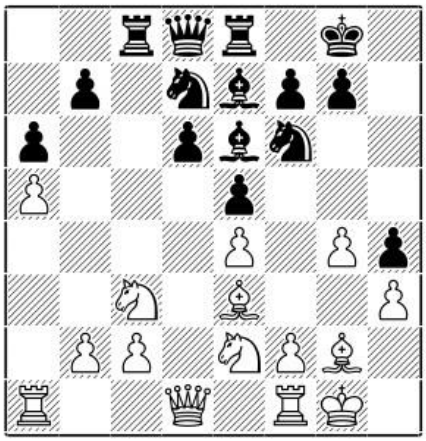
Before castling, Black utilizes his advanced h-pawn to stabilize the kingside structure.

12...0-0 does not work so well after 13.0-0 Nc5 14.Qd2 when, compared with variation B12 above, White has played the more useful Qd2 instead of b2-b3. 14...Bd7 is the consistent move for Black, but now White can go on the offensive with:



15.b4! (the less challenging 15.Rfd1 Bc6 16.f3 occurred in Jue Wang – Mo Zhai, Xinghua 2015, when 16...h4!? 17.g4 Re8 would have led to complicated play) 15...Ne6 16.Nd5!N (White squandered his advantage with 16.f4?! Rc4 17.Rab1 Qc8! 18.Rb3 Nc7 19.Qd3 Nb5³ in Barski – Kantans, Chorzow 2019) 16...Nxd5 17.exd5 Ng5 and now 18.f4!*ƒ* is a real problem.

13.g4 0-0 14.0-0 Re8

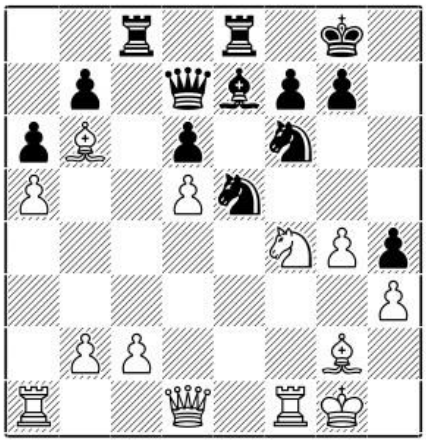


15.f4

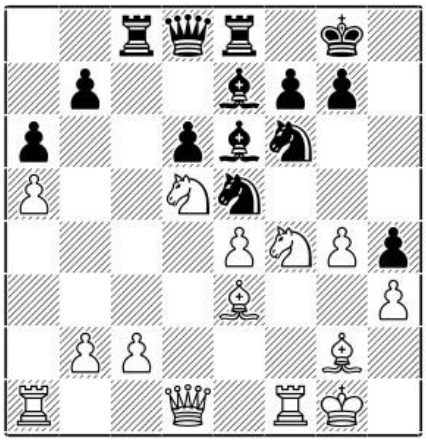
15.Qd2 Nh7!? is a typical idea with this kingside structure. Then 16.f4 exf4 17.Bxf4 Ne5 gives Black good play on the dark squares, for example: 18.b3 Ng6 19.Be3 Bg5,,

15...exf4 16.Nxf4 Ne5 17.Ncd5

I also considered: 17.Bb6 Qd7 18.Ncd5 Bxd5 (even 18...Bd8 is playable) 19.exd5



19...Bd8 (19...Qb5!? 20.Bd4 Nfd7 21.b3 Nc5 could also be considered) 20.Bd4 Qc7 21.c3 Nh7!,,



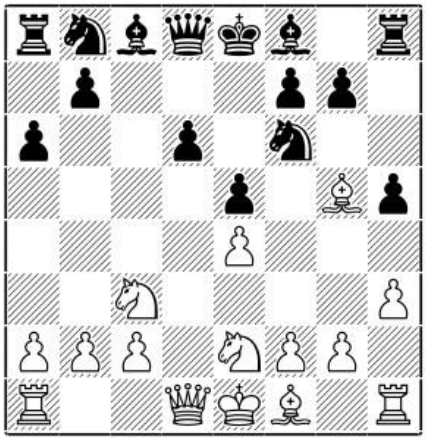
17...Bxd5 18.exd5

18.Nxd5? would be a mistake: 18...Nxd5 19.exd5 (19.Qxd5 Rxc2 20.Qxb7 Qb8!µ) 19...Nc4 20.Bd4 Bg5µ

18...Nfd7,,

Black has good play, with ...Bf6 or ...Bg5 coming next.

C) 8.Bg5



This is the most popular move as well as the most critical in my view.

8...Be6

We will analyse **C1)** 9.f4 and **C2)** 9.g3, followed by the main line of **C3)** 9.Bxf6 intending Nd5.

9.Ng3

This rare move should not be much of a problem.

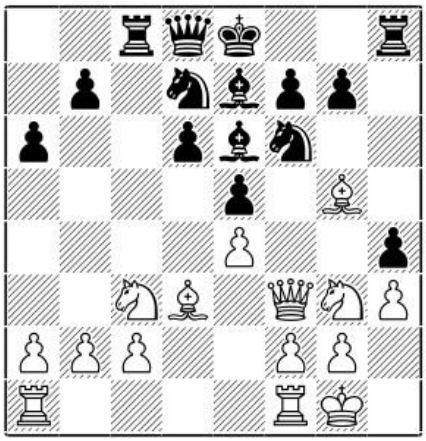
9...Nbd7

9...g6 and 9...Qb6!? are good alternatives.

10.Bd3

10.Be2 is more popular, but after 10...g6 I do not understand what White is doing.

10...Be7 11.Qf3 Rc8 12.0-0 h4



13.Nf5N

This is an obvious move to consider, although Black has nothing to fear.

The one game from here continued 13.Nge2 Nh5 (13...Rh5!?N) 14.Bxe7 Qxe7 15.Qe3 g5!? (15...Qf6 is also fine) 16.Nd5 Qd8 17.Nec3 Nf4 with promising play for Black, Zherebukh –

Areshchenko, Kharkov 2010.

13...Bxf5 14.Bxf6

After 14.Qxf5? Rh5! the pin is a big problem for White.

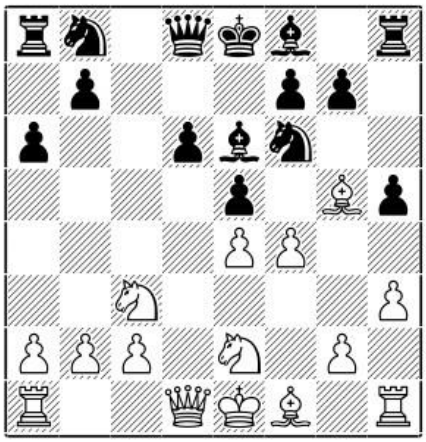
14...Nxf6

Black can also play 14...Be6!? because 15.Bxg7? Rh7 traps the bishop, and 15.Bxe7 Kxe7! is comfortable.

15.Qxf5 g6 16.Qf3 Kf8=

Followed by ...Kg7, with a pleasant game for Black.

C1) 9.f4



This looks strange optically, as White seems to be mixing up a bunch of ideas. Nevertheless, I think it is dangerous and Black should be careful – especially as a lot of the existing 'theory' is wrong.

9...Nbd7 10.f5 Bc4 11.Ng3

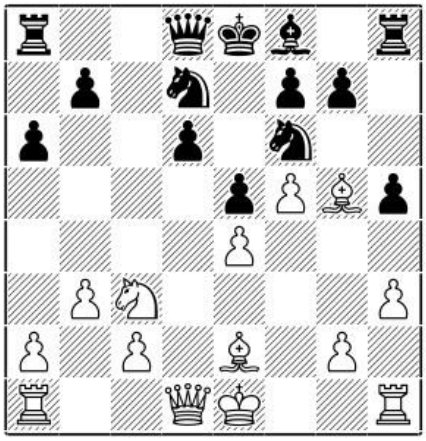
A harmless alternative is:

11.b3 Bxe2

I also like the look of 11...Bb5!?N intending ...Bc6, since 12.Nxb5? axb5µ turns out great for Black.

12.Bxe2?!

White should settle for 12.Qxe2N, when 12...Rc8 13.Nd5 Qa5† 14.Bd2 Qc5!? 15.Qd3 Nxd5 16.exd5 Be7 is equal.



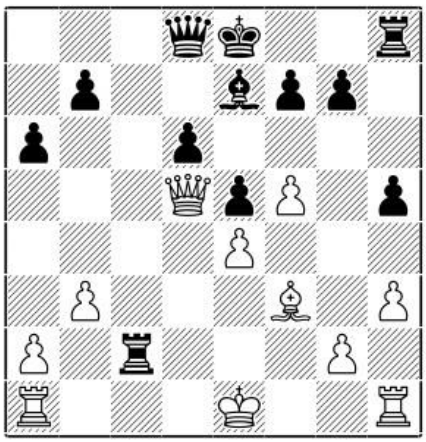
12...Be7

White's position is extremely loose and it is hard to even find equality. In practice, he has not come close:

13.Bf3?!

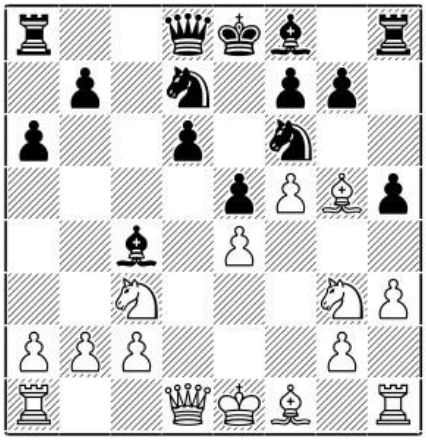
13.a4?! d5! 14.Bxf6 Nxf6 15.Nxd5 Nxe4 was excellent for Black in Langer – Preotu, Calgary 2016.

13...Rc8 14.Bxf6 Nxf6 15.Nd5 Nxd5 16.Qxd5 Rxc2µ



17.Qxb7? Qa5† 18.b4 Bh4†! 19.Kf1 Qa3

Black won in a few more moves in Zhang Pengxiang – Zhou Jianchao, Hefei (rapid) 2010.



11...Rc8 12.Qf3

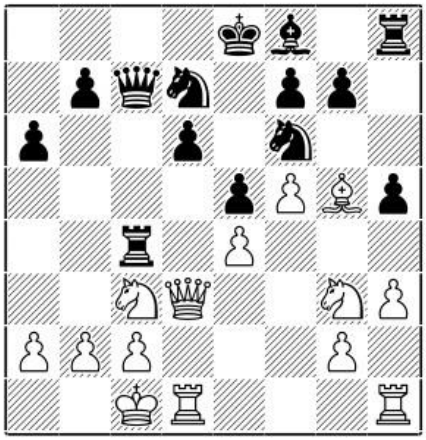
This looks like the most testing continuation.

Another example continued:

12.Bxc4 Rxc4 13.Qd3 Qc7 14.0-0-0?

14.Nge2 is more sensible, when 14...b5 (or 14...d5!? 15.exd5 e4) 15.b3 Rc6 16.0-0-0 Be7 offers chances for both sides.

After the text move Black has a major improvement available:



14...Rxc3!N

14...Be7? 15.h4! b5 16.Kb1 Nc5 17.Qf3² justified White's opening play in Naroditsky – Van Kampen, Philadelphia 2013.

15.bxc3

15.Qxc3 Qxc3 16.bxc3 h4 17.Bxf6 Nxf6 18.Ne2 Nxe4 offers Black superb compensation.

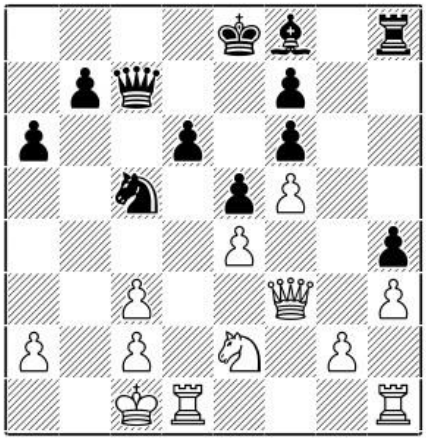
15...Nc5!

Strongest, although 15...h4 is also good.

16.Qf3 h4 17.Bxf6

17.Ne2 Nfxe4µ

17...gxf6 18.Ne2

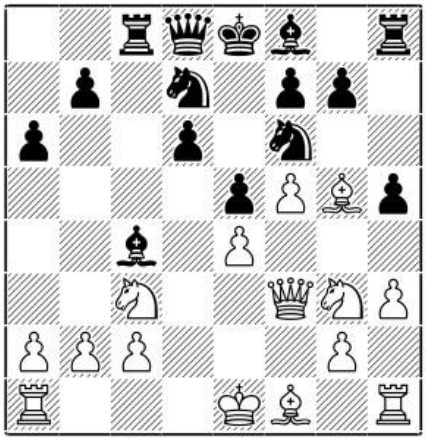


18...Qb6!

Now the check on h6 becomes a massive threat.

19.Kd2 Qb2

White's position is a mess.



12...Be7

My database indicates that Black has scored 6½/7 with this move, but the statistics are misleading and Black should take care.

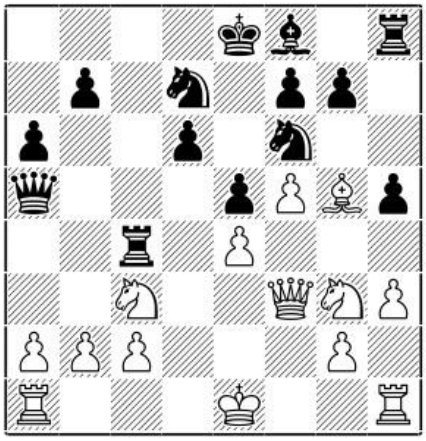
An equally playable alternative is:

12...Qa5!?

Preventing White from castling immediately due to ...Bxa2.

13.Bxc4 Rxc4

Here White should aim for safety with:



14.Bd2

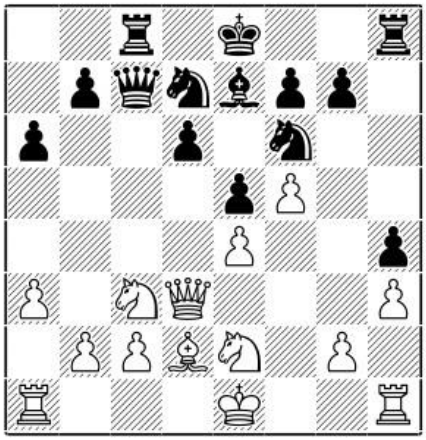
Instead 14.0-0-0?! was played in M. Muzychuk – Dorfman, Podebrady 2013, when Black should have gone for the familiar exchange sacrifice: 14...Rxc3! 15.Qxc3 (or 15.bxc3 Qxa2) 15...Qxc3 16.bxc3 h4 17.Bxf6 Nxf6 18.Ne2 Nxe4© With excellent compensation.

14...h4

14...Qc7 also looks decent.

15.Nge2 Be7 16.Qd3 Rc8 17.a3 Qc7

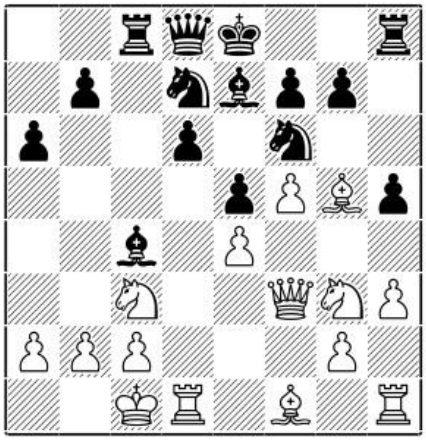
Black is doing fine. Andriasyan gives the further illustrative line:



18.Be3 Nc5 19.Bxc5 Qxc5 20.0-0-0 b5

With some initiative for Black.

13.0-0-0



13...h4!

This is the only move to hold the balance. Strangely enough, this move was played in the only game that Black did not win from this position! As I said, statistics can be misleading.

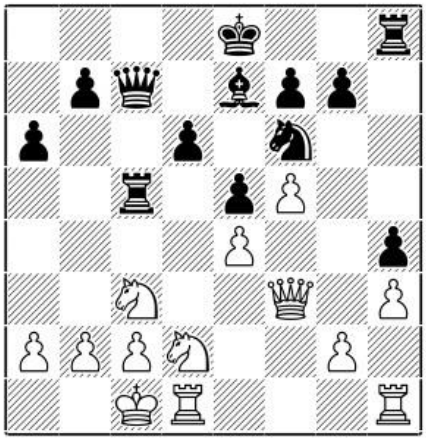
13...b5 was played in Bulski – Zhou Jianchao, Kazan 2013, when 14.Bxc4N 14...Rxc4 15.h4! looks good for White; this is similar to Naroditsky – Van Kampen above.

13...Qc7 deprives Black of the possibility of an exchange sacrifice on c314.Bxc4 Qxc4 15.Bxf6 Nxf6 occurred in Naiditsch – Spoelman, Germany 2010, and now 16.Kb1!N is a typical move that stops some tricks. After 16...b5 17.Nf1 b4 18.Ne3! White is better.

13...Qa5 is the most common. Then 14.Bxc4 Rxc4 15.Bxf6 (15.Rhe1!?N and 15.h4!?N also look quite troublesome for Black) 15...Nxf6 16.Nge2 0-0 17.Kb1 Qc7?! 18.g4 Qc6 occurred in Y. Zhou – Gabuzyan, Maribor 2012, when 19.b3N 19...Rc5 (the exchange sac on e4 would not help much) 20.g5 would have been crushing.

14.Bxc4 Rxc4 15.Bxf6 Nxf6 16.Nf1 Qc7 17.Nd2 Rc5

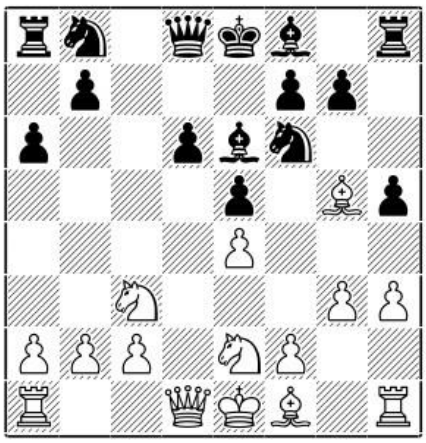
Note the value of Black's 13th move: White does not have the option of g2-g4-g5 to dislodge the knight.



18.Rhg1!? b5 19.Kb1 Qb7 20.Nb3 Rc7 21.Rge1 0-0 22.Nd5 Nxd5 23.Rxd5 Rfc8 24.Re2 Qb6

Black was fine in De la Calle – Anikeev, corr. 2016.

C2) 9.g3



Andriasyan flat out gives this move a dubious mark. I don't think it's so bad, but it is something of a hodgepodge of systems, as White will not be so keen to take on f6 after ...Nbd7.

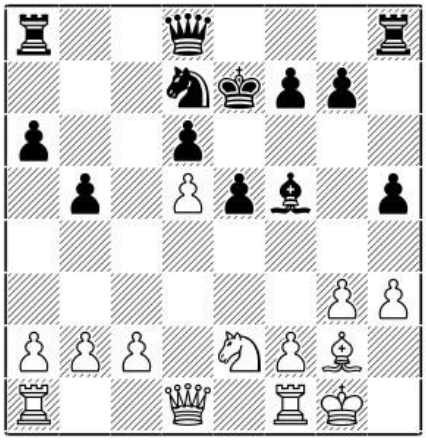
9...Nbd7 10.Bg2 Be7 11.a4

This is always sensible after Black's knight has gone to d7.

Another option is:

11.0-0 b5 12.Nd5 Nxd5 13.exd5 Bf5 14.Bxe7 Kxe7!?

This has proved reliable in correspondence play.

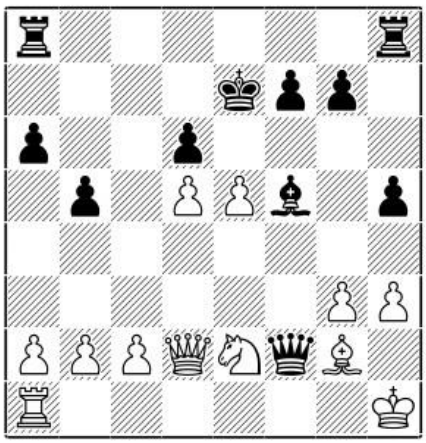


15.f4 Qb6† 16.Kh2 Nf6

16...Bg4!? is a decent alternative to keep the tension.

17.fxe5 Ng4† 18.Kh1 Nf2† 19.Rxf2 Qxf2 20.Qd2

20.exd6†? Kxd6µ

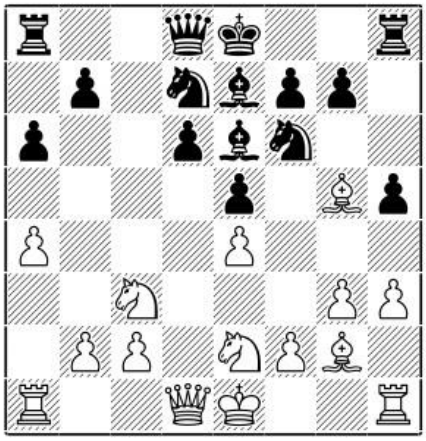


20...Bg4!

The only move, but good enough to force a draw.

21.Qg5† Kf8 22.Rf1 Qxe2 23.e6 f5 24.Rxf5† Bxf5 25.Qxf5† Kg8 26.Qf7† Kh7 27.Qf5†=

This perpetual check has occurred in a few correspondence games.



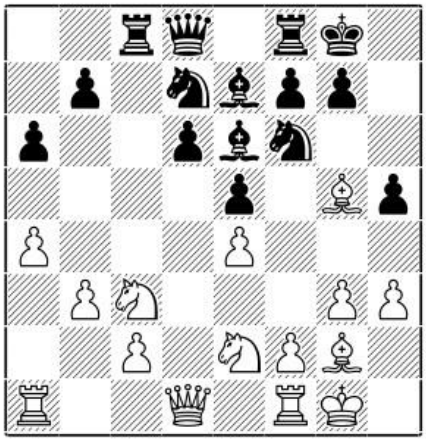
11...0-0

Bologan experimented with 11...Rc8 12.0-0 Nf8!? (12...0-0 returns to normal channels) 13.a5 Qd7 14.h4 N8h7 15.Na4 Bd8 with a double-edged game in Svidler – Bologan, Tromso 2013.

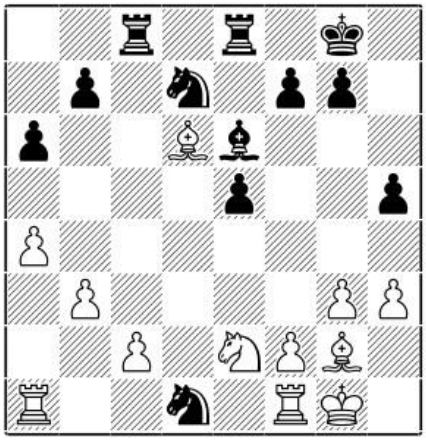
12.0-0

White can also delay castling. One such idea is 12.a5 although after 12...b5!? 13.axb6, both recaptures look quite acceptable for Black.

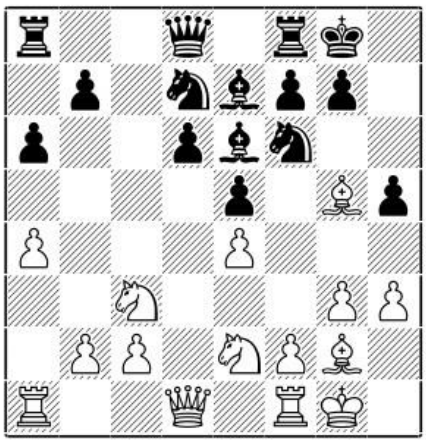
I also checked:
12.b3 Rc8 13.0-0
This gives Black an interesting tactical opportunity with:



13...Nxe4!?
Black could also play 13...Nc5 or 13...Re8.
The text move leads to long, forcing sequence which ends in a draw (of course):
14.Bxe7 Nxc3 15.Bxd8 Nxd1 16.Be7 Rfe8 17.Bxd6



17...Rxc2! 18.Rfxd1 Rxe2 19.Bf3 Rb2 20.Bxb7 Bxb3 21.Bc6 Bxd1 22.Rxd1 Reb8 23.Bxb8 Nxb8 24.Rd8† Kh7 25.Be8 Kg8=



12...b5!?

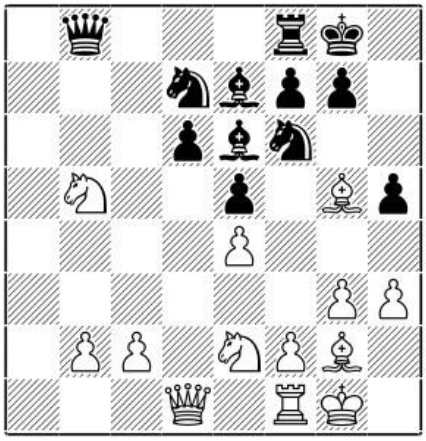
We have already encountered a similar situation with White's bishop on e3. Black's idea works even better here, because ...Nc5 can be played without White having the option of exchanging.

Black could also play the typical moves 12...Nc5 or 12...Rc8.

13.axb5 axb5 14.Rxa8

14.Nxb5 Qb6 15.Rxa8 Rxa8 16.Bxf6 Nxf6 17.Qd3 Rb8 18.Nbc3 (18.c4?! Bxc4!^{3}) 18...Qc5 19.b3 Rc8= leaves Black with full compensation for the pawn, but it is hard for either side to do anything.

14...Qxa8 15.Nxb5 Qb8



16.Bxf6

16.Qd3?? runs into 16...Nc5 of course.

16...Nxf6 17.Qd3 Qc8 18.Nxd6

This is safer than 18.b3 Bxh3 19.c4 Be6÷.

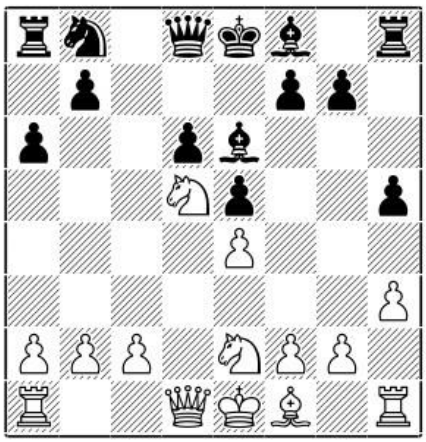
18...Bxd6 19.Qxd6 Qxc2 20.Nc3 Qxb2=

The players soon agreed a draw in Svidler – Anand, Sandnes 2013.

C3) 9.Bxf6

This is the most logical move.

9...Qxf6 10.Nd5 Qd8



For a while White always played the obvious **C31)** 11.Nec3, until Anand came up with the highly creative **C32)** 11.Qd3!? with the idea of castling queenside.

C31) 11.Nec3

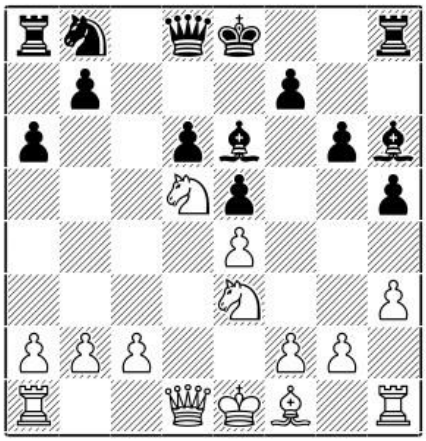
White cements his control over the d5-square and makes room for his bishop.

11...g6

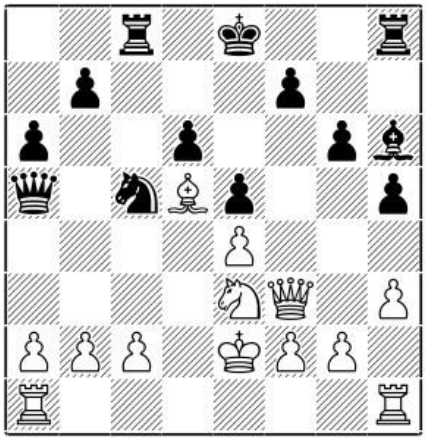
This the most flexible and popular continuation; Black does not yet determine the position of his knight.

12.Bc4

White does not really have time for 12.Ne3?! Bh6 13.Ncd5 because of:

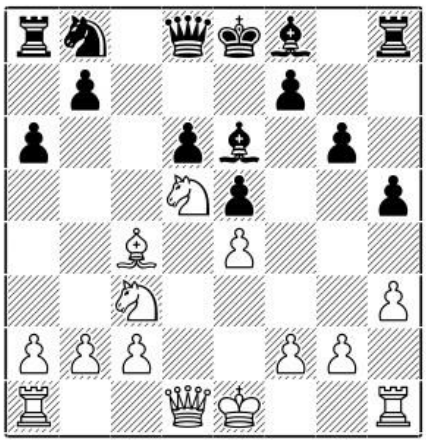


13...Nd7! 14.Bc4 Rc8 15.Bb3 Nc5 The attack on the e4-pawn already causes problems for White. A nice illustrative line is: 16.Qf3 Qa5†! 17.Ke2 (17.c3?? Nxb3–+) 17...Bxd5 18.Bxd5 (18.Nxd5? Nxb3–+)



18...Ne6! 19.Bxe6 fxe6 20.Qf6 Qb5†

21.Kd1 Kd7! 22.Qf7† Kc6 23.Qxe6 Bxe3 24.fxe3 Rhf8µ



12...Bh6 13.0-0

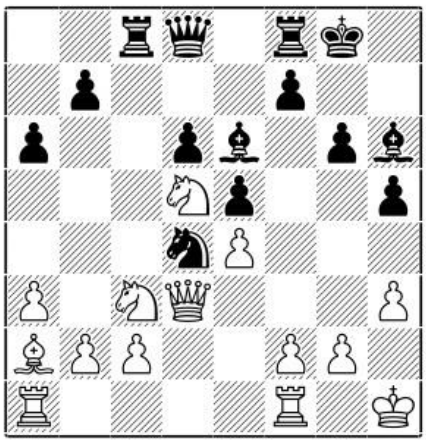
13.Bb3 0-0 14.0-0 reaches the main game, while 13.Qd3 is also likely to transpose within a few moves after 13...Nc6 or 13...0-0.

13...0-0 14.Bb3

This the main line.

Amanov and Kavutskiy (A&K) in *Modernized: The Open Sicilian* consider 14.Qd3 to be more accurate. However, after 14...Nc6 (rather than 14...Nd7, when White has 15.b4! Rc8 16.Bb3) 15.Rad1 (15.a4 transposes to 14.a4 Nc6 15.Qd3 in the notes below) 15...Rc8 16.Bb3 Nd4 we are right back in our main line.

14.a3 is another idea, enabling the bishop to retreat to a2. There is a catch though: once Black's knight arrives on d4, the c2-pawn is vulnerable and it will be harder to challenge Black's knight with Ne2. On the other hand, if the bishop goes to b3 as in the main line, then Black can exchange it off at will. A good example after the text move continued 14...Nc6 15.Qd3 Rc8 16.Ba2 Nd4 17.Kh1 and now in Fedorchuk – Van Kampen, Korinthia 2012, I think Black should have continued:



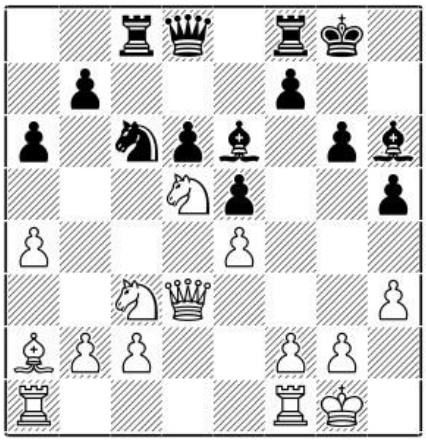
17...Kh7!N Intending ...f5, with promising counterplay. (The game continuation of 17...Qh4 was also fine though.)

A similar continuation is:

14.a4

This is more common than the previous line, but it has not done well for White.

14...Nc6 15.Qd3 Rc8 16.Ba2



16...Kg7

16...Kh8 is a good alternative.

The text move looks most natural, and my engines already prefer Black. We will follow a nice illustrative example.

17.Kh1

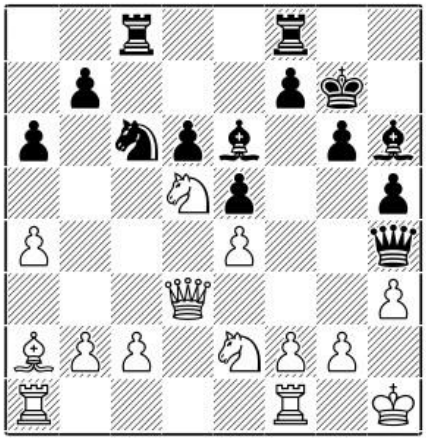
After 17.Rad1 Nd4 it is hard to find a constructive move for White, and Black will quickly play ...f5.

17...Qh4!?

Seeking tactical opportunities.

18.Ne2

18.Nb6? Nb4 and 18.Rad1 Bg4! both work well for Black. The text move is a better try, but Black responds with a well-timed exchange:

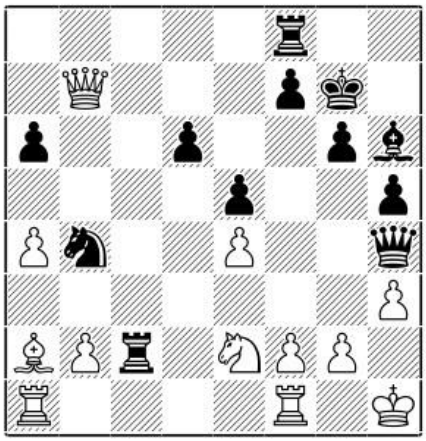


18...Bxd5! 19.Qxd5

19.Bxd5 Nb4 20.Qb3 Nxd5 21.exd5 Qe4 22.Nc3 Qc4µ

19...Nb4 20.Qxb7 Rxc2

This works perfectly in the game, but 20...Nxa2!N 21.Rxa2 Rxc2 was objectively more accurate.

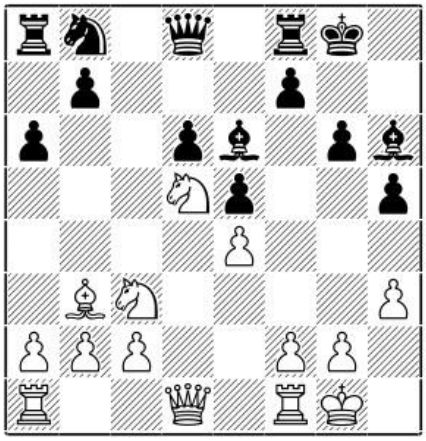


21.Ng1??

Collapsing under pressure; instead 21.Qxb4 Rxe2 22.Qxd6 holds.

21...Nd3–+

Aharon – Givon, St Petersburg 2013.



14...Nc6!

Black cannot really contest the d5-square, but White can only put one minor piece on the square at a time. So Black simply plays around it, following Dvoretsky's idea of the "superfluous piece".

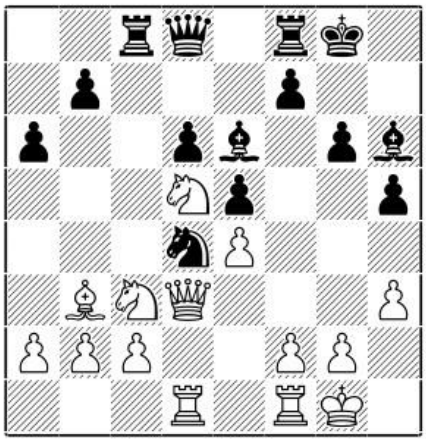
A&K like 14...Nd7 and evaluate the position as equal, but Black has struggled in practice. One idea is 15.Qe2 Rc8 16.Rad1 Nc5 17.Na4!? when White's position seems easier to play.

15.Qd3

15.Ne3 Nd4= is fine for Black.

15...Rc8 16.Rad1 Nd4

Black is fully mobilized and can aim to improve his position with ...Kh7/g7, ...Qh4, ...Rc5, and ...b5 or ...f5 at some point. He can also eliminate the white bishop at his convenience.

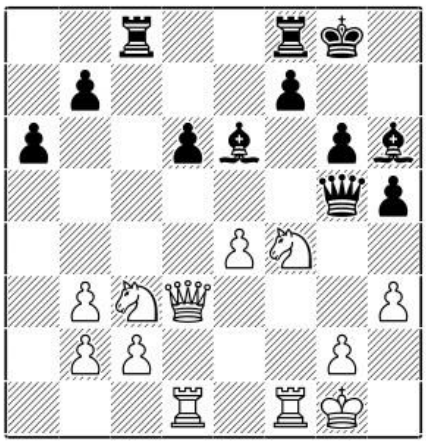


17.Ne2

White immediately challenges the powerful knight. Other moves do not promise much:

17.Ne3 Qh4!? 18.Ncd5 Kh7 19.c3 Nxb3 20.axb3 f5 21.exf5 gxf5 22.f4 e4 23.Qd2÷ reached a double-edged position reminiscent of a Sveshnikov in Biedermann – Keuter, corr. 2017.

17.f4 Nxb3 (17...f5!? is also playable, albeit a bit risky) 18.axb3 exf4 19.Nxf4 Qg5

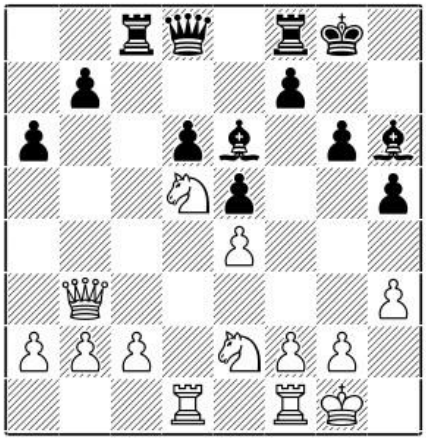


20.Kh1 (White cannot win the d6-pawn so easily, for example: 20.Qxd6? Rfd8 21.Qb6 Rxd1 22.Nxd1 Rxc2; o20.Nxe6? Qe3†! 21.Qxe3 Bxe3† 22.Kh1 fxe6µ) 20...Rcd8 21.Nce2 Qe5 22.Nxe6 fxe6 23.Ng1 Bf4 24.Nf3 Qg7= Jensen – Zugrav, corr. 2016.

17...Nxb3

17...Nxe2†?! 18.Qxe2² is not to be recommended; Black has merely traded off White's 'superfluous' knight and has trouble creating counterplay.

18.Qxb3

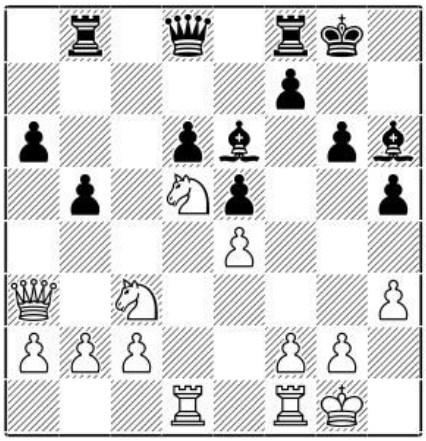


18...b5!

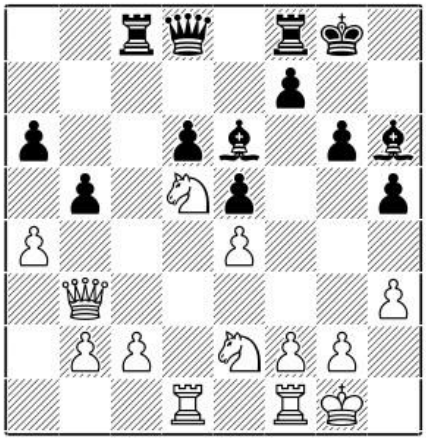
This natural move is not considered by A&K. After 18...Kg7 they propose 19.Nec3N (19.f4 Bxf4 20.Nexf4 exf4 21.Qxb7 Rxc2 22.Nxf4 Bxa2 was equal in Paragua – Le Quang Liem, Manila 2013) 19...Qd7 20.Rd3, but even here I think Black should be okay after 20...Rc5 21.Rfd1 Qc6. White's queen is awkwardly placed, and it is difficult for either side to make progress.

19.a4

After 19.Nec3 I like Black's play in the following example: 19...Rb8! (Black got away with 19...f5!? in Salles – Santos Ruiz, Montcada 2017, but his position could have become a bit loose after 20.exf5N 20...gxf5 21.Qa3!?) 20.Qa3



20...a5! 21.b4 Qg5 22.Rd3 a4 23.Qb2 Qh4³ Black was all set for ...f5 in Rozhnev – Mason, corr. 2016.



19...Rb8!N

19...b4?! is a bit too clever, and after 20.c3! (but not 20.Qxb4?! Rxc2 with active play) 20...bxc3 21.Nexc3 White had some initiative in Nakamura – Vachier-Lagrave, Saint Louis 2014.

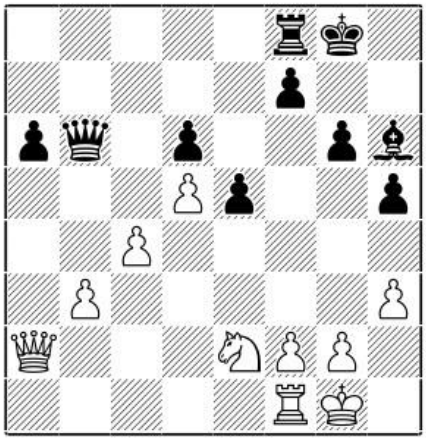
Black's position also looks shaky after 19...Rc4?! as played in Warakomska – Boruchovsky, Zalakaros 2015, because of the straightforward 20.axb5N 20...axb5 21.Nec3.

19...Rc5!? is more solid, and 20.Nec3 Qb8 21.axb5 axb5 was approximately equal in Kritz – Xiong, Richardson 2015.

The text move was MVL's own suggestion, and I consider it the strongest option. Bologan takes the line a bit further to show how White can get in trouble. His analysis continues:

20.axb5 Rxb5! 21.Qa2 Qb8 22.b3 Bxd5 23.Rxd5 Rxd5 24.exd5 Qb5 25.c4 Qb6

With counterplay against the b3-pawn. If White gets too distracted by the queenside he may get into trouble, for instance:



26.Ra1 e4! 27.Qxa6 Qxb3 28.Qxd6 e3!

Black has a strong attack, as Bologan points out.

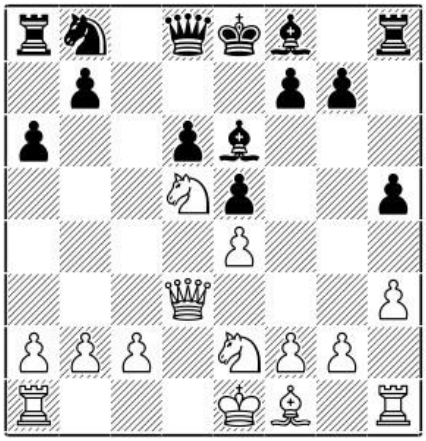
C32) 11.Qd3!?

GAME 42

Surya Ganguly – Anish Giri

Doha 2015

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.h3 e5 7.Nde2 h5 8.Bg5 Be6 9.Bxf6 Qxf6 10.Nd5 Qd8 11.Qd3!?



This unusual-looking move introduces a fascinating plan developed by Anand. White will castle queenside and try to eventually open the

kingside, utilizing the h5-pawn as a 'hook' to open lines. White still controls the d5-square, but he does not feel the need for overkill with moves like Nec3 and Bc4. Note that White must move the queen right now in order to castle long, otherwise ...g6 and ...Bh6 will prevent it. As you would expect, this line is strategically very complicated.

11...Nd7

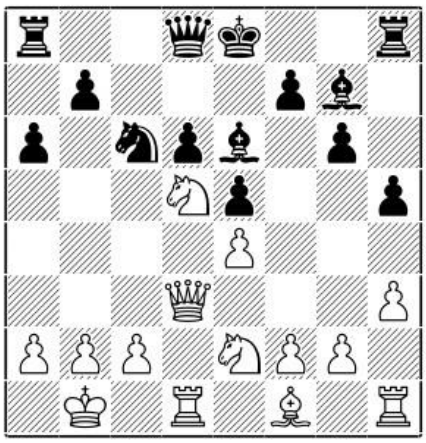
This is by far the most popular move and I would consider it the main line.

11...g6 12.0-0-0 Nd7 simply transposes. There is little point to 12...Bh6† 13.Kb1, as White will soon want to play Kb1 anyway, and sometimes Black is better off developing his bishop on g7 to cover the f6-square.

The most important alternative is:

11...Nc6!? 12.0-0-0 g6 13.Kb1 Bg7

Now White must make an important choice.



14.h4

This is not a loss of tempo; White needs to be able to break with g2-g4 at some point and he does not want Black to have ...h4 in response.

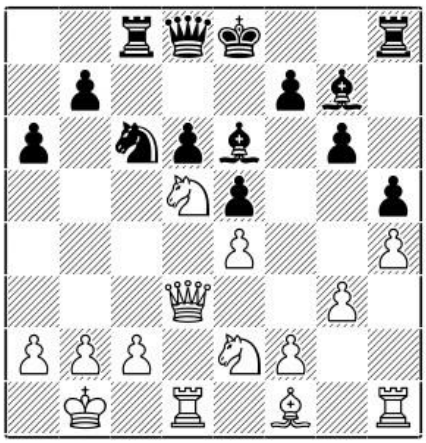
14.f4 allows Black to equalize immediately with 14...Bxd5!? 15.Qxd5 exf4 16.Nxf4 Qf6 when White has to think about holding the balance. 17.Nd3 0-0 18.Be2 Nd4 19.Rdf1 Qe6 20.Qxe6 fxe6= was Saric – Wojtaszek, Istanbul (ol) 2012.

14.g3 0-0 (14...h4!? also led to interesting play in Alonso – Valenzuela Gomez, Mendoza 2014) 15.Bg2?! (too passive; 15.h4 makes more sense) 15...Rc8 16.c3 b5 (a good alternative is 16...Ne7!?N 17.Nxe7† Qxe7 18.Qxd6 Qf6 when f2 is under pressure, and 19.f4 Rcd8! 20.Qxe5 Bxa2† 21.Kxa2 Qc6µ attacks the queen and threatens ...Qc4†; note the value of Black's 19th move, as White cannot trade rooks with check and follow up with Qa5) 17.a3?! Rb8 (Black is spoiled for choice – 17...Na5µ and 17...Bxd5 18.Qxd5 Qb6 19.Rhf1 a5µ are good too) 18.f4 exf4 19.gxf4 a5µ A. Ivanov – Kavi, Marlborough 2018.

14...Rc8

14...0-0 15.f3! gives White a ready-made attack.

15.g3



15...0-0!N

This is the most accurate move order.

15...b5?! 16.Bh3?! 0-0 was the actual sequence of the Oparin – Gelfand game mentioned below. However, Illingworth points out that 16.f3!?N 16...Na5 (or 16...0-0 17.g4) 17.Qa3! is annoying for Black.

16.Bh3

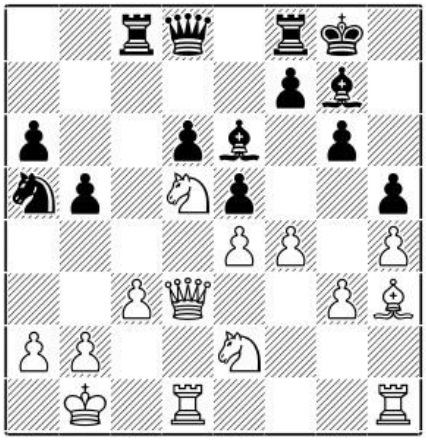
16.f3 is well met by 16...Bxd5! 17.Qxd5 Nb4, since 18.Qxd6? Qa5 wins.

16...b5

We are back to the game, having avoided the possibility mentioned in the note to Black's 15th move above.

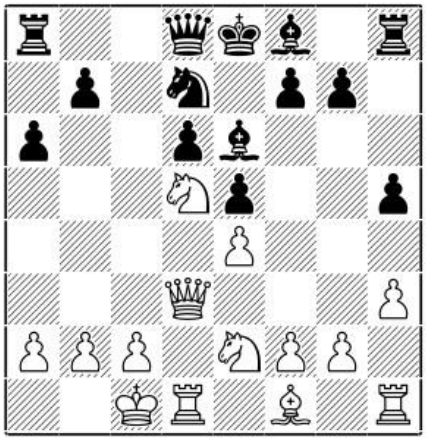
17.c3 Na5 18.f4

Now in Oparin – Gelfand, Moscow (rapid) 2015, Black's most accurate continuation would have been:



18...Nc4!N,,
With sufficient counterplay.

12.0-0-0



12...g6

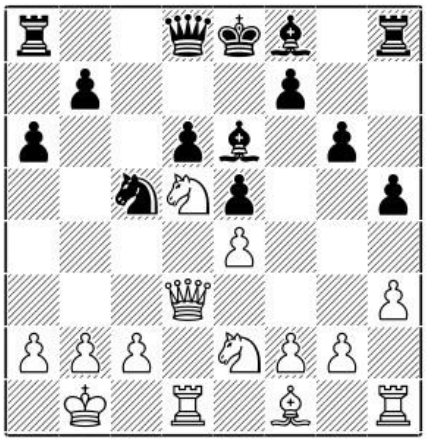
Black sticks with the program. 12...Nc5 and 13...b5 (played by MVL in a couple of blitz games against Dominguez Perez) is another possibility.

13.Kb1

13.Nec3 is less precise, as White will not have the Qa3 possibility. 13...Nc5 14.Qf3 (14.Qe2 b5 15.Kb1 Rb8 16.a3 Bg7!= is given by Illingworth; Black has a normal position but White's kingside play has not started) 14...Bg7 15.Be2 (15.Kb1 is the main game) 15...b5 16.a3 This occurred in Subhayan – Nihal, Bhubaneswar 2016, when the thematic 16...Rb8!N would have been most accurate.

13...Nc5

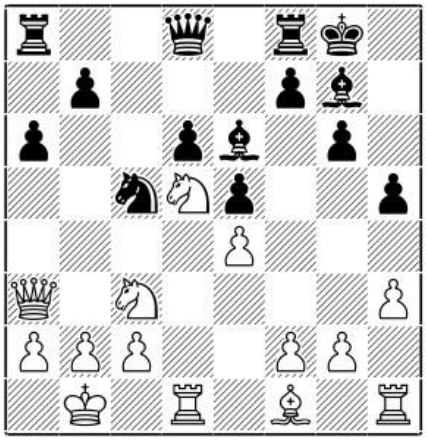
This flexible move looks best. Black should not be in a hurry to commit his bishop to g7 or h6. Some players have started with 13...Rc8, but this is also too committal as there are some lines where the rook should go to b8 instead.



14.Qf3

This is natural, as the queen stays in touch with the e4-pawn and eyes the f6-square, while helping to support further kingside play. However, h3-h4 will not be possible because of ...Bg4, so White will have to find another way to open lines on the kingside.

The alternative is:
14.Qa3!?
This obscure-looking move indirectly defends the e4-pawn due to the check on a4.
14...Bg7
14...Bxd5?! should usually only be played it there are immediate dividends. 15.Rxd5 Bg7 16.Nc3 0-0 17.h4 b5 18.f3 Rb8 19.b4 Ne6 20.Qxa6! Nc7 21.Qc6 Nxd5? 22.Nxd5 f5 23.Bxb5 fxe4 24.fxe4± gave White an overwhelming position in Salem – Areshchenko, Sharjah 2017.
15.Nec3 0-0

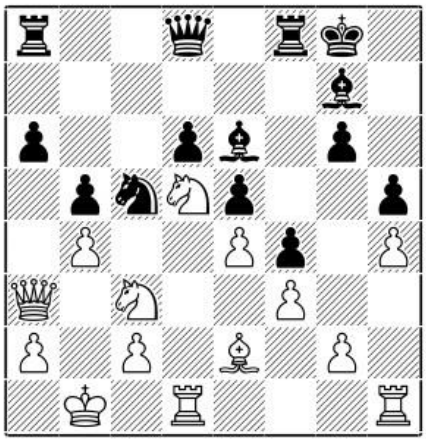


16.h4

Another example continued 16.Be2 b5 17.h4 Bxd5! 18.Rxd5 (18.Nxd5 Nxe4 leaves White struggling for compensation, but perhaps he should have tried this anyway) 18...Qf6 (this works well in the game, but 18...Qb6!N is more accurate) 19.Bf3? (19.f3 was a better try) 19...Rfb8 and Black's play was faster in Oglaza – Bjerre, Rymanow Zdroj 2017.

16...b5 17.f3 f5 18.Be2 f4 19.b4!

This may look strange, but White has to create some play somewhere, or Black could easily become better on both sides of the board. The text move fixes Black's queenside and forces him to decide what to do with his knight.



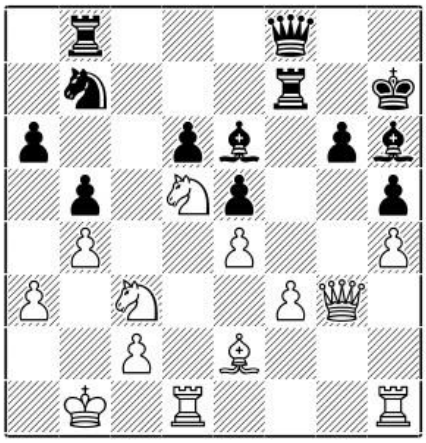
19...Nb7!

19...Nd7 may appear more natural. Black then has the plan of ...Kh7, ...Rf7, ...Bf8 and eventually ...a5, but White has a surprising solution: 20.Qa5! Qxa5 21.bxa5 Kf7 22.Nc7 Rac8 23.Nxe6 Kxe6 24.Nd5 Nc5 25.Rhg1! Illingworth analyses this far and considers White to be slightly better.

20.Qb2 Rf7 21.a3

Illingworth evaluates this position as slightly better for White, but a correspondence game paints a different picture.

21...Kh7 22.Qc1 Qf8 23.Qd2 Rb8 24.Qe1 Bh6 25.g4 fxg3 26.Qxg3



26...Nd8

Finally rerouting the knight from its passive square.

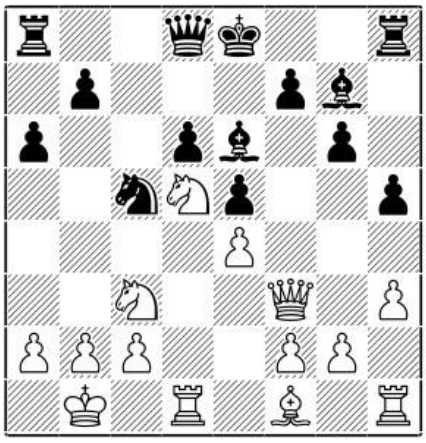
27.Rhg1 Rg7 28.Rgf1 Rc8 29.Bd3 Bxd5 30.Nxd5 Ne6

Black had a good position in Cumming – Williamson, corr. 2017.

14...Bg7

Covering the f6-square.

15.Nec3



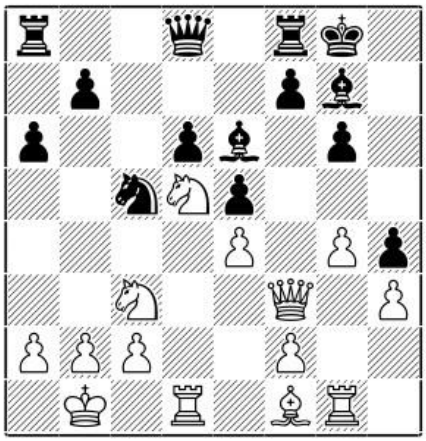
15...b5

Black does not have to hurry to castle. Nevertheless, a few players have done exactly that:

15...0-0!? 16.g4 h4 17.Rg1

Black must take measures against g4-g5

followed by Nf6†.



17...Bh6!N

17...Qg5 18.Nb6! (18.Ne3 Rad8 19.Ncd5?! b5 left the f1-bishop looking sad in Popov – Nepomniachtchi, Antalya 2017) 18...Rad8 19.Bc4 Bxc4?! (19...Nd7 was better although 20.Nxd7 Rxd7 21.Nd5 still keeps an edge for White) 20.Nxc4 b5 This occurred in Haussernot – Lettieri, Gallipoli 2018, when 21.Nb6N± would have been excellent for White.

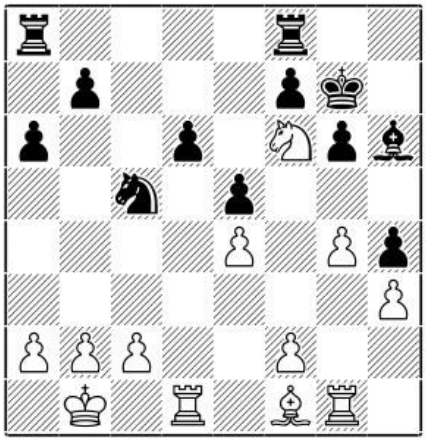
18.Qf6

Other moves would allow ...Bg5 with a nice positional bind for Black.

18...Bxd5

18...Bg5 19.Qxd8 Raxd8 20.Nb6 is also equal.

19.Nxd5 Qxf6 20.Nxf6† Kg7



21.b4! Kxf6 22.bxc5 dxc5 23.Rd6† Ke7 24.Rb6=

Roiz concludes that the position is equal, and I agree.

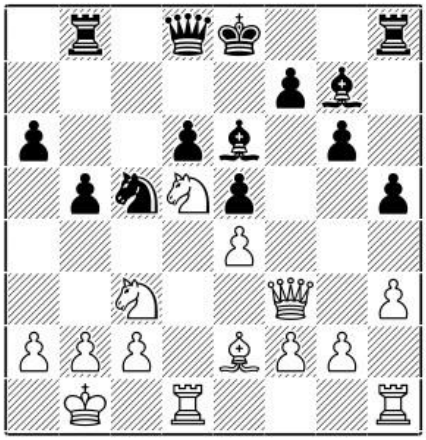
16.Be2

After 16.Rg1 Illingworth suggests 16...Kf8! followed by ...Bh6 and ...Kg7.

16.Ne3!? is another idea, when I agree with Illingworth's suggestion of 16...Rb8!N, which is highly thematic. (16...Bh6!?N is another idea, intending ...Kf8-g7; however, I would avoid 16...0-0 here, even though some strong GMs have played it.)

16...Rb8!

This tends to be the best square for the rook in these positions. From here it supports the further advance of the queenside pawns, whereas on c8 it would not really do much.



17.a3

After 17.Ne3 Black can choose between 17...h4 and 17...Bh6!? 18.Ncd5 Kf8 followed by ...Kg7.

A trickier alternative is:

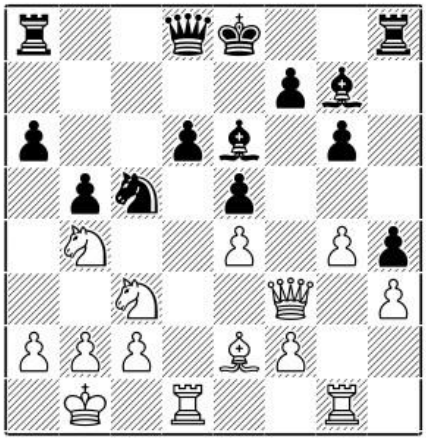
17.Nb4!?

White blocks the b-pawn and threatens a fork. When Alexander Ivanov played this move against me, it compelled me to think I had made a mistake. I was trying to recall Ganguly – Giri and thought I had gone off track somewhere, but I was still on course. Black has several acceptable replies, including:

17...Qd7!?N

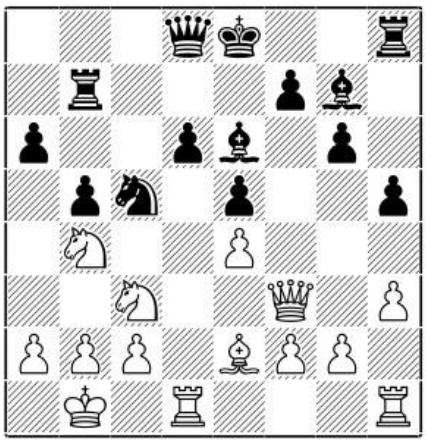
Of course 17...Rc8? is not possible because of the simple 18.Nxa6!±.

17...Ra8 was my choice, offering a repetition. The game continued: 18.g4 h4 (also possible was 18...hxg4N 19.hxg4 Rxh1 20.Rxh1 Kf8) 19.Rhg1!



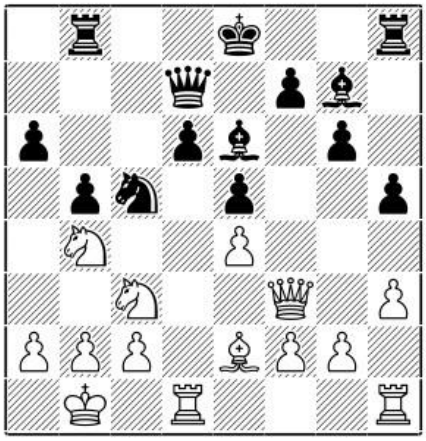
19...Bh6?! (19...Bc8!?N intending ...Ne6 should offer Black sufficient play) 20.Nc6 Qg5 (20...Qc7 21.Qf6 Rh7 22.Nb4±) 21.Rxd6± A. Ivanov – Vigorito, Boston 2017.

17...Rb7!?N is another decent solution:



18.Nxa6? Nxa6 19.Bxb5† Rxb5 20.Nxb5 0-0 21.Rxd6 Qa5 turns out badly for White, and 18.Ncd5 0-0 19.Nc6 Qd7 also does not help him.

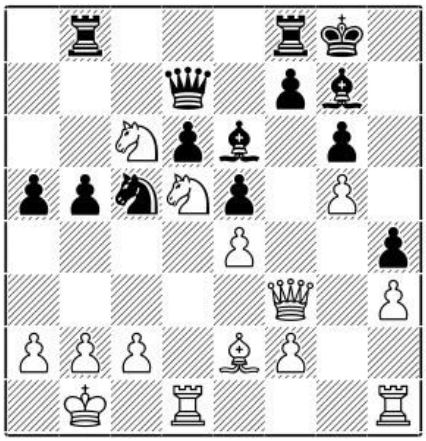
Illingworth mentions the text move without analysing any further. During the game I was concerned about:



18.Ncd5 0-0 19.g4 h4 20.g5

Now Nf6† ideas are in the air, but the engine cold-bloodedly finds:

20...a5 21.Nc6



21...Bxd5!

21...Rb7? 22.Nce7† Kh8 23.Rhg1± should be avoided.

22.Nxb8 Bxa2† 23.Kxa2 Rxb8©

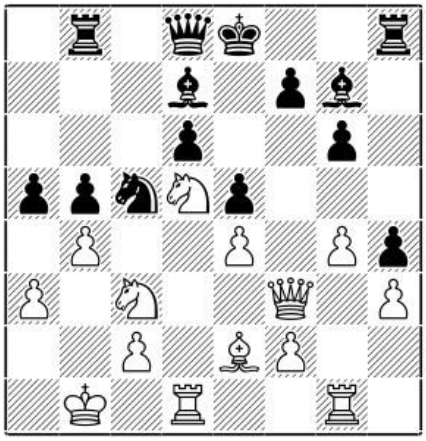
With good prospects for Black.

17...Bd7!

This supports a further advance of the queenside pawns and prepares ...Ne6-d4.

18.Qe3

18.g4 h4 19.Rhg1 a5 20.b4 occurred in M. Hansen – Ochsner, Skorping 2017, when Black should have played:



20...Ne6!N In the game Black prematurely traded pawns on b4, which enabled White to get organized on the queenside with Kb2 and Ra1. By maintaining the tension on the queenside Black makes this plan less appealing, and after 21.Qe3 Rb7 White faces a difficult future.

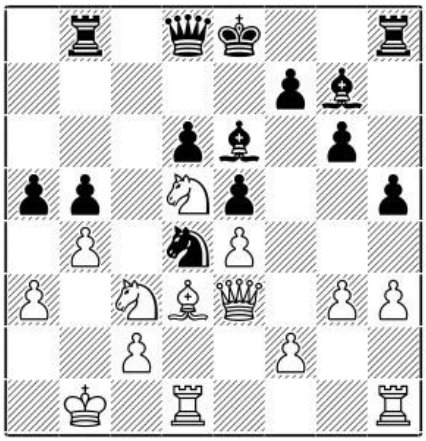
18...a5 19.b4 Ne6!

Giri avoids 19...axb4 20.axb4 Ne6 when White has the option of Kb2 and Ra1, just as in the previous note.

20.g3?!

Better was 20.h4N 20...Nd4 (or 20...Bc6 21.g4,,) 21.Qg5! with an unclear position.

20...Nd4 21.Bd3 Be6

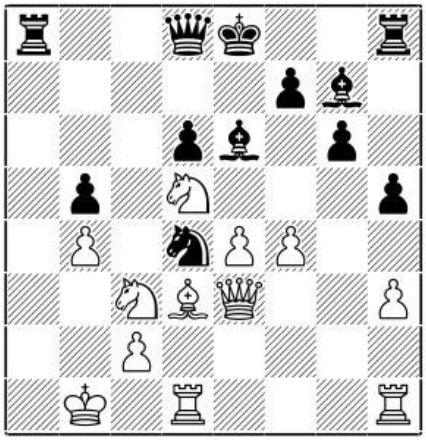


White has problems finding a decent plan. He lacks firepower on the kingside and the d4-knight radiates power all over the board. With his next move Ganguly allows the long diagonal to be opened towards his king in the hope of creating some chances in the centre.

22.f4 axb4 23.axb4 Ra8?!

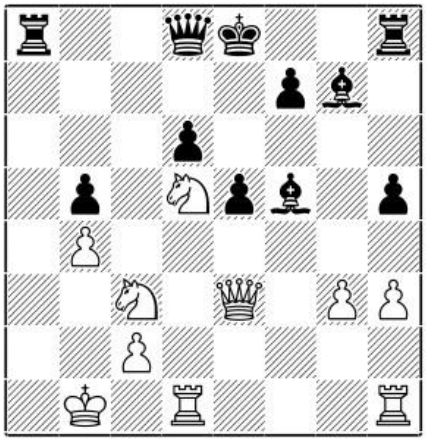
This gives White the chance to create meaningful counterplay.

After 23...exf4!N 24.gxf4 (24.Nxf4 0-0 favours Black) 24...Ra8 White's pawn duo and centralized pieces seem to offer some chances, but things work out fine after:



25.e5 Bxd5 26.Nxd5 dxe5 27.Bxb5† Kf8! (avoiding 27...Nxb5 28.Qc5!) Black is clearly better.

24.f5! gxf5 25.exf5 Nxf5 26.Bxf5 Bxf5



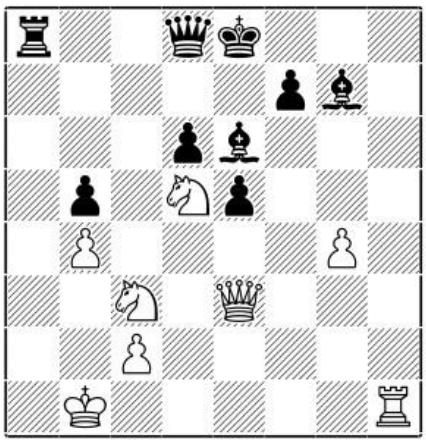
27.g4?!

27.Nxb5 0-0 28.g4!÷ would have been a better try.

27...hxg4 28.hxg4 Rxh1 29.Rxh1 Be6

Black has an extra pawn and the bishop

pair, but both kings are a bit open, so nothing is easy.

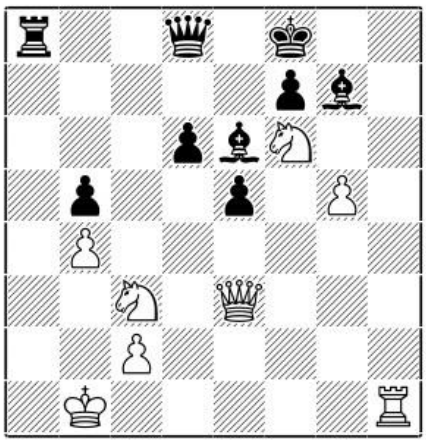


30.g5?!

Trying to grip the f6-square, but it will not mean much.

30.Rh7 Kf8 also achieves nothing for White; but 30.Qe4! was worth a try, with the idea of Nc7(†).

30...Kf8! 31.Nf6



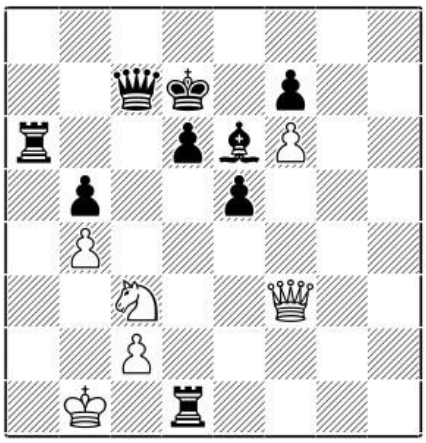
31...Ra6!

31...Bxf6 32.gxf6 Qxf6? 33.Ne4 Qg7 34.Qb6+– is to be avoided, so Giri covers the b6-square.

32.Qf3 Qc7 33.Nh7† Ke8 34.Nf6† Bxf6 35.gxf6 Kd7

Black has mostly consolidated, but care is still required.

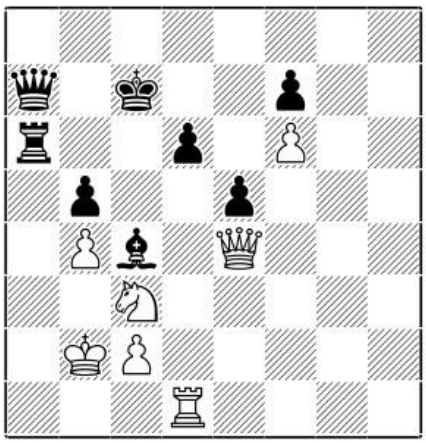
36.Rd1



36...Qa7

The engine finds the prophylactic 36...Kd8! to avoid a check on b7, when the threat of ...Qc4 is decisive.

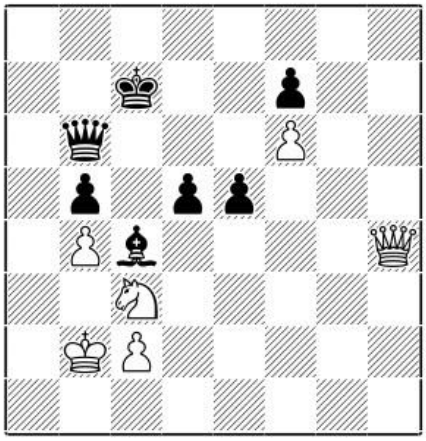
37.Kb2 Bc4 38.Qe4 Kc7 39.Nd5† Kb8 40.Nc3 Kc7



41.Qf3

41.Nd5† Kb8 gives White nothing better than 42.Nc3, when 42...Qb7 improves Black's position.

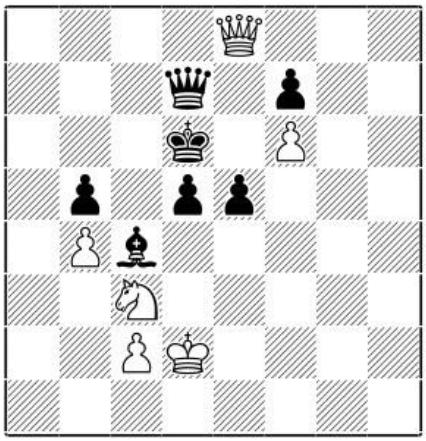
41...Qa8 42.Qe3 Qc6 43.Qg3 Ra8 44.Ra1 Rxa1 45.Kxa1 Qb6 46.Qh4 d5 47.Kb2



47...Qd6

It was time to march forward with: 47...e4! 48.Qg5 (48.Qf4† Qd6–+) 48...Qd4 49.Qg7 Kd6! 50.Qf8† Ke5 51.Qe7† (51.Qb8† Kf5) 51...Kf5–+

48.Kc1 Qa6 49.Qg5 Kd6 50.Qg8 Qa3† 51.Kd2 Qa7 52.Qe8 Qd7



53.Qg8 Qb7 54.Qe8 Qd7?!

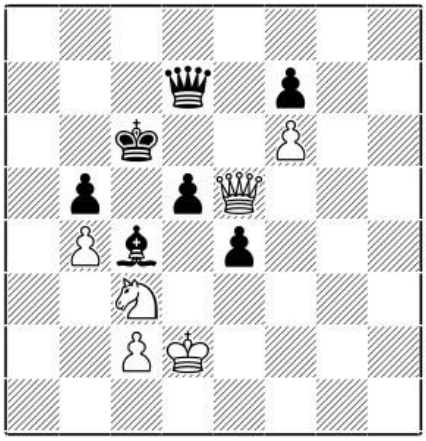
54...e4! 55.Qg8 Qa7 56.Qe8 (56.Nd1 Qd4†) 56...Qd4† 57.Kc1 Qxf6 should still be winning.

55.Qg8 e4?!

55...Qa7 was better.

56.Qg3† Kc6 57.Qe5!

The task of converting Black's extra pawn has become much harder.



57...Qc7

If 57...Qa7 then 58.Nd1! covers everything.

58.Qe8† Kb6

Black could still try to win with 58...Kd6!? and if 59.Nxb5† Bxb5 60.Qxb5 Ke6.

59.Qe7! Qf4† 60.Kd1 Qf1† 61.Kd2 Qf4† 62.Kd1 e3 63.Qd8† Ka6 64.Qa8† Kb6 65.Qd8† Ka6

½–½

Conclusion

6.h3 e5 7.Nde2 is a serious option, when 7...h5! is our move. This modern set-up is virtually non-existent in chess literature, but it has become hugely popular over the last several years.

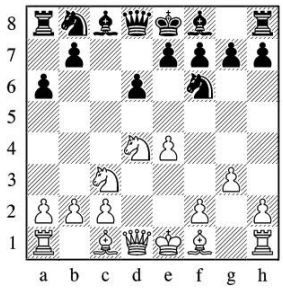
Of the 'odds and ends', only 8.Nd5!? looks at all challenging. Black's position is solid enough, although some new developments are to be expected.

8.g3 Be6 9.Bg2 Nbd7 is similar to the 6.g3 variation, but with certain differences caused by the mutual advance of the h-pawns. Pay special attention to the possibility of the ...d5 pawn sacrifice, and to the various move-order subtleties.

8.Bg5 is the main line, when 8...Be6 is our move. Then 9.Ng3 and 9.f4 are both a bit risky for White, while 9.g3 is solid as usual. The last of these can of course be compared to 8.g3.

The most principled choice is 9.Bxf6 Qxf6 10.Nd5 Qd8 when the natural 11.Nec3 is looking comfortable for Black, as White can only put one of his pieces on the d5-square. Black's best set-up is with the knight on c6. Black should not rush with the ...f5 break, as there are plenty of other useful moves to make. Lastly, Anand's modern 11.Qd3!? is more interesting, and leads to complicated strategic play all over the board.

Chapter 16



6.g3

Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.g3 e5

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B) 7.Nb3 Be7 8.Bg2 0-0 9.0-0 b5 10.a4 b4 11.Nd5 Nxd5 453

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C221) 10.h3 472

C222) 10.Nd5 *Game 46* 473

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.g3

This is often looked upon as a relatively harmless sideline, but Black takes it lightly at great risk to his own wellbeing. Andriasyan even considers it to be dubious, especially compared with the modern 6.h3, but I find this verdict to be quite exaggerated.

I have a rather personal relationship with the 6.g3 system because, having grown up in Boston, I have had the difficult experience of having to deal with this line far too often against Alexander Ivanov, the grandmaster who I would argue has the greatest pedigree with 6.g3. Going all the way back to 1994, my score against him in this system is +2 =2 –2 but, in all honesty, I was not doing well in either of the games that I won. Still, in more than 60 tournament games with Alexander, these are my only two wins, which shows the fighting nature of the Najdorf... as well as my ineffectiveness with the white pieces.

6...e5

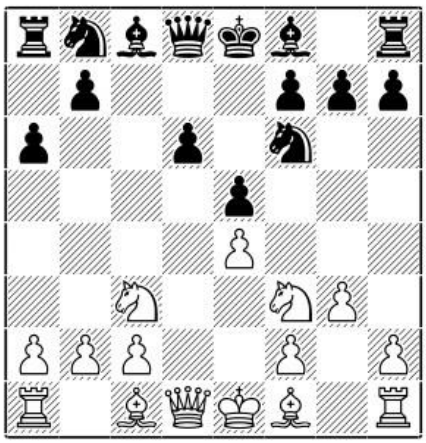
There are other options of course, but the text move is consistent and it is all that I have played for 20+ years, so I am not going to change my tune now.

We will analyse three options: **A)** 7.Nf3!? is a recent oddity, **B)** 7.Nb3 is fairly common and **C)** 7.Nde2 is the traditional main line.

7.Nf5?! is not a serious option due to 7...d5. Best play seems to be 8.Bg5 d4 9.Bxf6 gxf6 10.Ne2 (10.Nb1 Bxf5 11.exf5 Qd5 is also good for Black) 10...Bxf5 11.exf5 Qd5 12.Rg1 as seen in

Chistiakov – Stein, Odessa 1960. Black has more than one promising continuation but 12...Qa5†N 13.Qd2 Qxd2† 14.Kxd2 Bh6† is a simple solution, followed by ...Nc6 or ...Nd7. Black stands slightly better, so we can move on to more important things.

A) 7.Nf3!?



This is a strange move, but nowadays almost anything is playable, especially with White. The main idea is to switch the knight to h4 at some point – partly eyeing the f5-square (although f3-d4-f3-h4-f5 is a peculiar route for the knight), but also with the possible idea of Nh4-g2-e3 to enhance White's control of the d5-square. It reminds me of the Stonewall Dutch where White seeks to control the e5-square with Nc3-a4-b2-d3, although here the knight would take two extra tempos to reach its destination.

7...Be7 8.Bg2

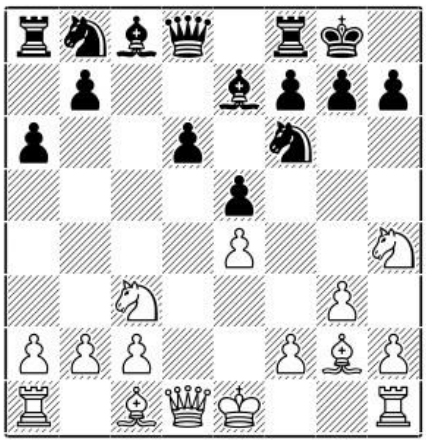
White can also go for the immediate knight manoeuvre:

8.Nh4 0-0

8...g6 prevents one idea but allows the other. Still, after 9.Ng2 Black can play 9...Bg4! to disrupt White's ideal set-up with Ne3 and Bg2. 10.f3 (after 10.Be2 Be6 the white bishop has been diverted from g2) 10...Be6 11.Ne3 This was Naiditsch – Zhou Weiqi, China 2017, and now I like Roiz's suggestion of 11...Nc6!?N, intending 12.Ned5 Bxd5 13.Nxd5 Nxd5 14.Qxd5 Nd4,, when White's position lacks coordination.

9.Bg2

9.Nf5 Bxf5 10.exf5 d5 11.Bg2 d4 12.Ne4 Nxe4 13.Bxe4 Qc7 is fine for Black.



9...g6

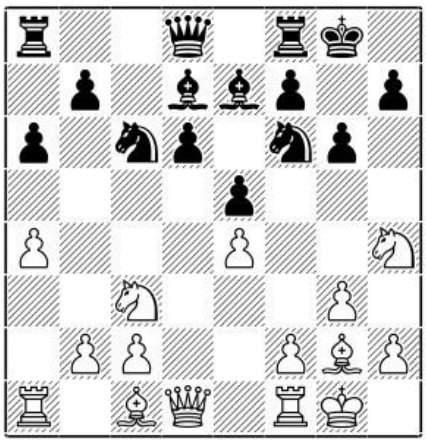
This seems logical when Ng2 is no longer available, although 9...Bg4!?N also looks good.

10.a4

10.Bh6 Re8 threatens ...Ng4, and if 11.h3 b5 Black has good prospects.

10...Nc6 11.0-0 Bd7!?

Nepo's choice deserves attention: not only is he an extremely strong player, but he has also dabbled with 7.Nf3 himself.



12.Re1 Rc8 13.Nf3 Na5 14.h3 Re8 15.Qd3 Qc7 16.Qe3 b5

Black developed a nice initiative in Oparin – Nepomniachtchi, Satka 2018.

8...0-0 9.0-0

9.Nh4 takes us back to the previous note.

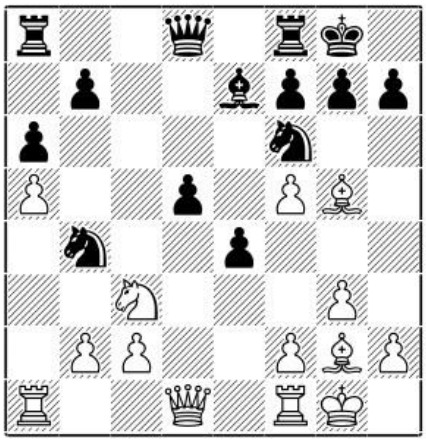
9.a4 Nc6 10.0-0 Be6 11.Nh4 Nb4

Another possibility is 11...Nd4!?N, intending 12.Be3 Ng4 when the h4-knight is a liability.

12.Nf5 Bxf5 13.exf5 d5 14.Bg5 e4 15.a5

Here I found a way to improve Black's

play.



15...b5!N

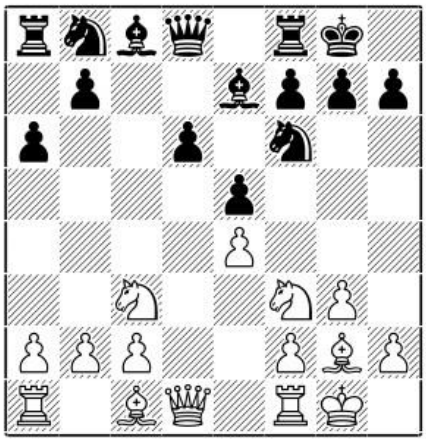
15...Qc8 16.Bxf6 Bxf6 17.Nxd5 Nxd5 18.Qxd5 Qxc2 19.Bxe4 Qxb2 20.Ra2² gave White a safe edge in Ponkratov – Sarana, Sochi 2018.

16.axb6 Qxb6

The main justification is:

17.Bxf6 Bxf6 18.Nxd5 Nxd5 19.Qxd5 e3!

With plenty of counterplay for Black.



9...b5!?

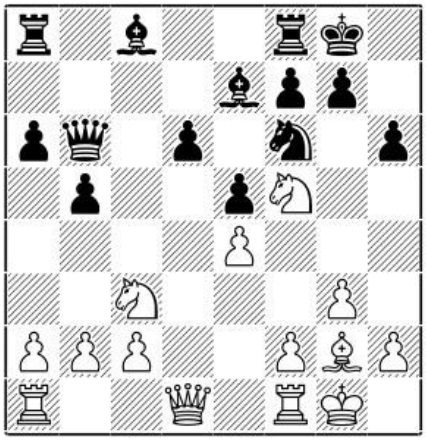
Normally we would not carry out this advance so early, but the way White has arranged his kingside pieces means he is in no position to punish it.

9...Be6 would be fine after 10.Nh4 g6, but 10.Ng5!? would force the bishop to retreat.

10.Nd5

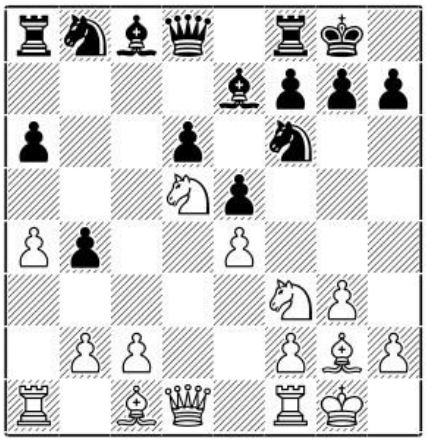
White has tried a few other ideas:

10.Bg5 Nbd7 11.Nh4 h6 12.Be3 Nb6 13.Bxb6 Qxb6 14.Nf5 and now Black could play:

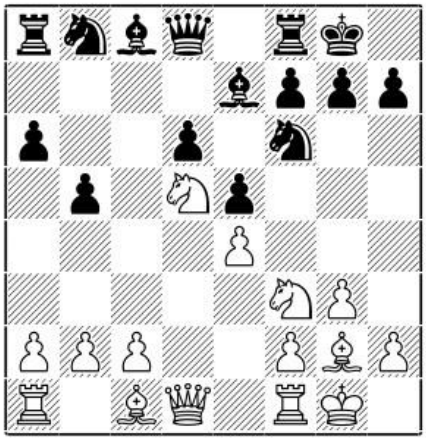


14...Ra7!N Intending ...Be6, with a good position (rather than 14...Bxf5 15.exf5 Rac8 16.Nd5 Nxd5 17.Bxd5² as seen in Balogh – Kanakaris, Achaia 2017).

White can also insert 10.a4 b4 before occupying the central outpost: 11.Nd5



11...Nxd5 (Quintiliano suggests 11...a5!? 12.Nh4 Nxd5 13.Qxd5 Ra6! 14.Nf5 Be6 15.Qd3 Rc6! 16.Rd1 g6 17.Nxe7† Qxe7 18.Bh6 Rfc8,, which also seems quite playable) 12.Qxd5 Ra7 13.Be3 Be6 14.Qd3 Ra8N Black is absolutely fine. Compared to the analogous situation which can occur after 7.Nb3 (which is more testing, as explained in the notes to Game 44), there is no knight on the queenside to bother Black's pawns.



10...Bb7

Black could also play 10...Nbd7, as mentioned by Quintiliano. After 11.Nxe7† Qxe7 12.Nh4 Black can play 12...Nc5, or 12...Qe6 intending 13.Nf5 d5.

11.Nxe7†

11.Nxf6† Bxf6 12.Nd2!? is an amusing alternative, intending to reroute the knight via b1-c3. Black is fine after 12...Nd7 13.Nb1 Be7 (13...Rc8 14.Nc3 Nb6 is another way) 14.Nc3 Nf6 with a typical position.

11...Qxe7 12.Nh4 Qe6!

This is a cosy square for the black queen.

13.Re1 Nbd7 14.Qe2 Rac8 15.c3 Rc4 16.f3

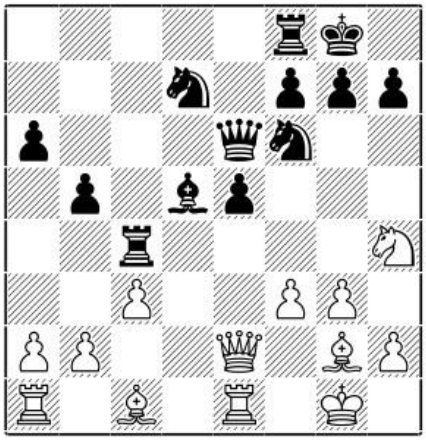
16.Qc2N b4 gives Black sufficient play, but this still seems a better choice for White than the rather ugly text move.

16...d5!

White's last move reduced his control over the centre, so Black strikes.

17.exd5 Bxd5

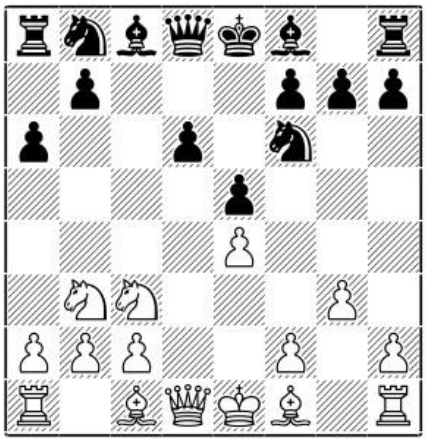
The engines still consider this to be about equal, but Black's harmonious position looks much easier to play.



18.Qf1 Re8 19.Bd2 h6 20.b3 Rcc8 21.Rac1 a5

Black had the initiative and went on to win in Hammer – E. Hansen, Saint Louis 2018.

B) 7.Nb3



This move gives the game a similar feel to the 6.Be2 e5 7.Nb3 variation. White's bishop will look more passive on g2 than e2, but the e4-pawn is well protected and White has greater control over the d5-square.

7...Be7

This move may appear obvious enough, yet it could be considered a modern choice.

The immediate 7...b5? is just bad here, as it would be in the 6.Be2 lines. After 8.Bg5! Nbd7 9.a4 b4 (9...Bb7? does not work due to 10.axb5 when the bishop is still active on f1) 10.Nd5 Bb7 11.Bc4! White has the upper hand. I have learned

from games with Ivanov and Kudrin (another 6.g3 specialist who is quite local to me) that just because White has played g2-g3, his bishop does not necessarily have to go to g2.

7...Nbd7 is a popular alternative, when 8.a4! b6 gives White a choice:

a) 9.Bg2 is normal, when 9...Bb7 10.0-0 Be7 11.Re1 0-0 (Black used to play the aesthetic 11...Rc8 12.Nd2 Rc5 13.Nf1 Qa8, but White is doing well after 14.Ne3!) 12.Nd2 Nc5 13.Nf1 b5 is quite playable for Black, a good example being Rasmussen – P.H. Nielsen, Silkeborg 2008.

b) I would be more concerned about the rare deviation 9.Bc4!? Bb7 10.Bg5, which proved quite effective in Kudrin – Vigorito, Philadelphia 1997. Kudrin also used this against Nakamura just a few months later, although the future American champion managed to survive. White's play is actually quite logical if we put our fianchetto stereotypes aside and look at 6.g3 as a possible waiting move, like 6.h3. Had White played his bishop to c4 in the latter case, it would not have seemed unusual at all.

8.Bg2

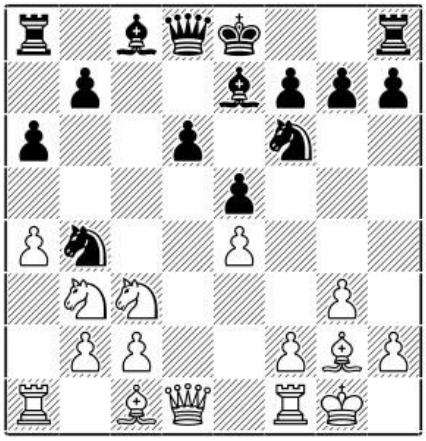
Very often in the 6.g3 line, there is a certain lingering tension concerning whether White should prevent ...b5 and, if he does not, if and when Black should play this advance.

8.a4?!

Preventing it at this early stage is not so effective. Black responds thematically with:

8...Nc6! 9.Bg2 Nb4 10.0-0

10.Bg5 Be6 11.0-0 Rc8 12.Re1 0-0 13.Qe2 h6 14.Bxf6 Bxf6 15.a5 Qd7[3] was also good for Black in Lopez Martinez – Dominguez Perez, Barcelona 2006.



10...Bg4!

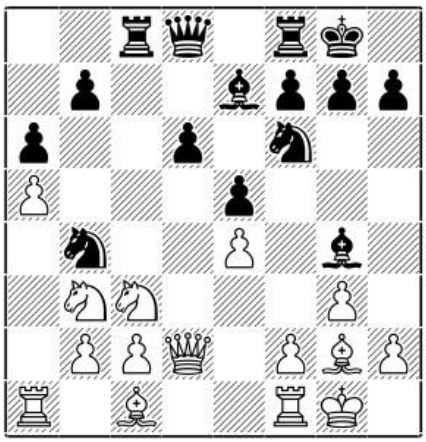
This is a typical disruptive move after a2-a4 and ...Nb4 have been played, as the d3-square is not available to the white queen.

11.Qd2

After 11.f3 Be6 the extra pawn move hurts White's position.

11...Rc8 12.a5 0-0

12...Qd7!? was also promising for Black in Sharapov – Gajewski, Cappelle-la-Grande 2010.



13.Ra4 d5! 14.exd5N

This is a better try than 14.Nxd5? Nfxd5 15.exd5 Rxc2–+ as occurred in Marinkovic – Smolovic, Kladovo 1992.

14...Re8!

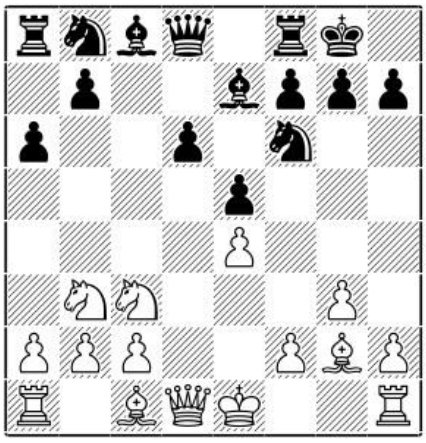
Black has a good position, with ...Bd7 coming next (the immediate 14...Bd7? would lose material to 15.d6).

8...0-0

I like this flexible choice.

A lot of the recent repertoire books give 8...b5, which is also fine, although it gives White

one additional option: 9.0-0 Nbd7 10.a4!? b4 11.Na2! This move scores poorly, but I believe it is the most challenging (instead 11.Nd5 Nxd5 12.exd5 a5 13.Bd2 0-0 reaches the main line). 11...a5 12.c3 Black must be careful as his queenside pawns are rather shaky. The best continuation is 12...bxc3 (Black has usually preferred 12...Ba6?! but this is inaccurate due to the strong exchange sacrifice 13.cxb4!N) 13.Nxc3 and 13...Nb6 (Adams – Topalov, Sofia 2005), 13...0-0 (Lujan – Zawadzka, Turin [ol] 2006) and 13...Ba6 14.Re1 0-0 (Dutreeuw – P.H. Nielsen, Gothenburg 2005) are all possible. Nevertheless, I still prefer to avoid this line.



9.0-0

9.a4 Bg4! is still disruptive, as 10.Qd3 Nc6 sees the knight heading to b4.

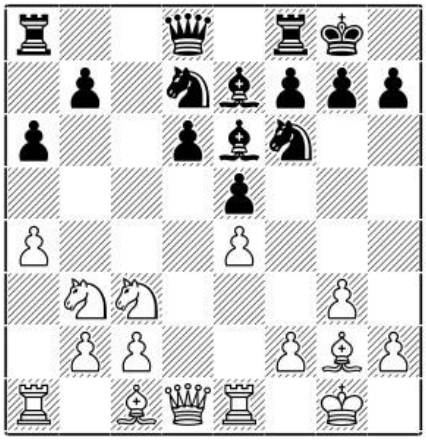
9...b5

9...Bg4 10.Qd3 Nc6 makes less sense when 11.a3 is possible.

However, Black can play in similar fashion to the 6.Be2 line with:

9...Be6!? 10.a4 Nbd7 11.Re1

We have a position that is almost identical to variation D2 of Chapter 3, where White played Be2-f3 instead of g2-g3 and Bg2. The bishop is less exposed on g2 but it is not covering the g4-square, and these differences should approximately balance out.



11...Qc7

This is perhaps the most traditional Najdorf move, although the following alternatives also deserve attention:

11...Rc8 12.Nd2 Bg4!? 13.Bf3 Bxf3 14.Nxf3 Re8 15.Be3 Nb6 16.Rb1 Nc4 17.Qd3 d5! and Black was already fighting for the initiative in Karjakin – Nepomniachtchi, Wijk aan Zee 2017.

11...Qb8!? is akin to what we saw on page 83 of Chapter 3. 12.Nd2 Bd8 13.a5 (13.Nd5 b5 14.a5 Nxd5 15.exd5 Bf5 16.Nf1 Bg6 17.Bd2 f5[3] was Maze – Indjic, Hersonissos 2017) 13...b5 14.axb6 Bxb6= This was Predke – Giri, Sochi 2017. Note that in the analogous position from Chapter 3, White was able to continue with a quick g4-g5 to generate kingside play.

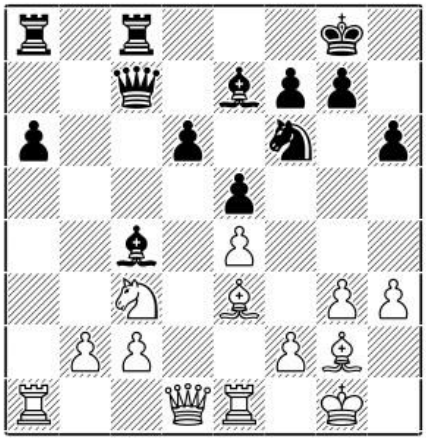
12.a5

12.Nd2 Qc5 (12...Rfc8 and 12...Qc6 are also decent) 13.Nf1 and now both 13...b5 and 13...Bd8!? are thematic.

12...Rfc8 13.h3

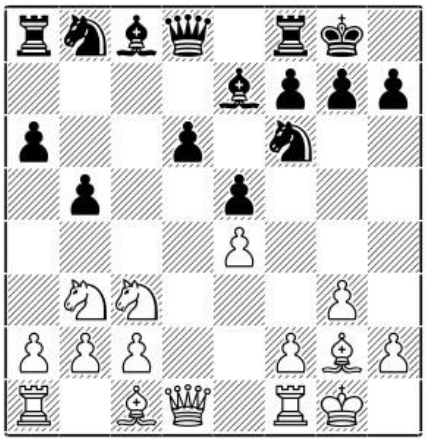
White felt compelled to cover the g4-square, but Black will obtain good counterplay on the queenside.

13...h6 14.Be3 b5 15.axb6 Nxb6 16.Na5 Nc4 17.Nxc4 Bxc4



18.Na4 Rab8 19.b3 Bb5 20.c4 Bxa4 21.Rxa4 Qb7

Black won the b3-pawn in Leko – Topalov, Wijk aan Zee 2006. Overall I regard 9...Be6!? as a completely viable alternative for anyone who happens to prefer these positions to those in our main line below.

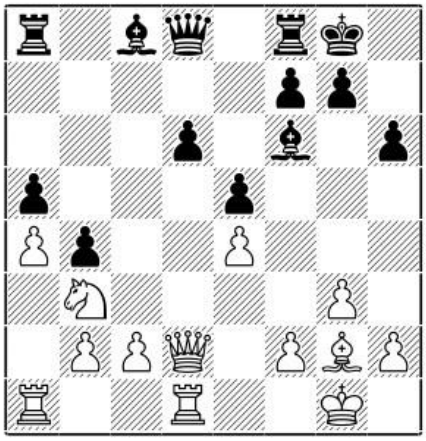


10.a4

White tries to weaken Black's queenside structure. This is the most common continuation by far.

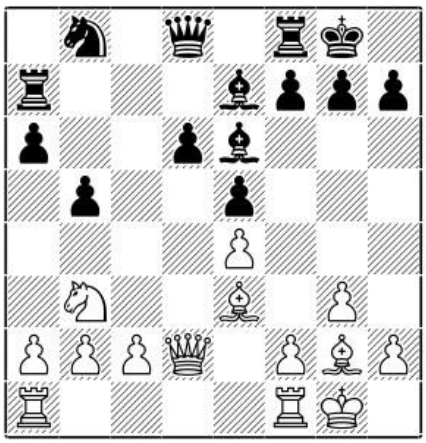
10.Bd2 Nbd7 11.a4 b4 12.Nd5 Nxd5 13.exd5 a5 transposes to Game 43 below.

10.Bg5 Nbd7 11.a4 b4 12.Nd5 proves harmless after: 12...a5 13.Qd2 h6 14.Bxf6 Nxf6 15.Nxf6† Bxf6 16.Rfd1

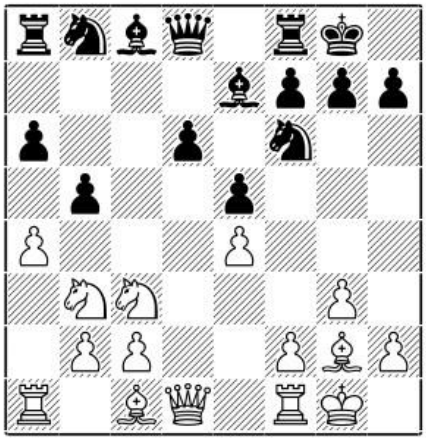


16...Be7 (16...Bg4 17.f3 Be6 18.Qxd6 Rc8–+) 17.Qe2 Qc7 18.h4 Be6 19.Rdc1 Rfc8 20.Nd2 Bd8µ Licznerski – Wojtaszek, Trzcianka 2014.

Sometimes White plays the immediate 10.Nd5 without altering the queenside structure. After 10...Nxd5 11.Qxd5 Ra7 12.Be3 Be6 13.Qd2 Black's queenside pawns are not softened up, but White hopes to profit from controlling the a5-square. Black should play:



13...Ra8! (13...Rb7?! 14.Na5 Rd7 is a bit too sophisticated, and 15.c4! bxc4 16.Rfd1 gave White some initiative in Shvayger – Donchenko, Isle of Man 2016) 14.a4 Nc6 (or 14...Nd7N) 15.axb5 axb5 16.Rxa8 Qxa8 17.Ra1 Qb7 was level in Naiditsch – Vidit, Linares 2017.



10...b4 11.Nd5

Unlike the earlier note on 8...b5, 11.Na2? is simply a mistake here due to 11...a5 12.c3 Na6!?µ (or 12...Nc6) when the a2-knight is junk.

11...Nxd5

Some strong players have continued **B1)** 12.exd5, but I believe **B2)** 12.Qxd5 to be superior.

B1) 12.exd5

GAME 43

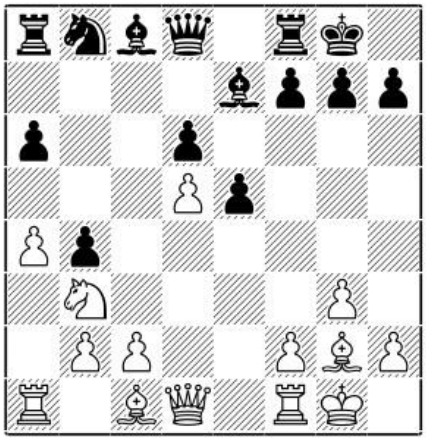
Bartosz Socko – Sergey Karjakin

Calvia (ol) 2004

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.g3 e5 7.Nb3 Be7 8.Bg2 0-0

The game actually continued 8...b5 and transposed to our repertoire some moves later, so I have switched it for our purposes.

9.0-0 b5 10.a4 b4 11.Nd5 Nxd5 12.exd5



By recapturing this way, White increases the scope of the g2-bishop and hopes to secure a future outpost on c6. On the flipside, Black gains a mobile kingside pawn majority.

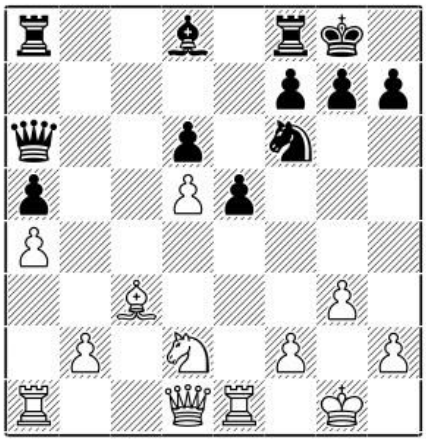
12...a5 13.Bd2 Nd7

With this, we transpose to the game – and indeed this position can be reached in several different ways. White hopes to attack Black's queenside pawns, but it does not really work out.

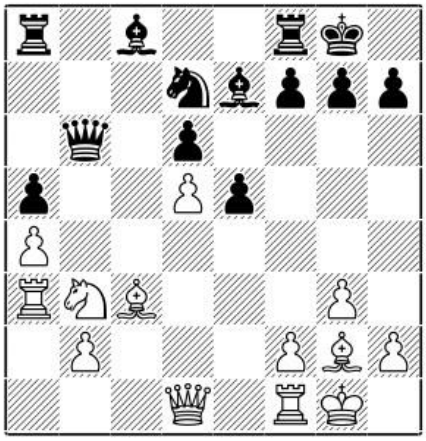
14.c3 bxc3 15.Bxc3 Qb6! 16.Ra3

White covers the knight to prepare Qd2, but it comes to nothing.

Black also gained the upper hand after: 16.Re1 Bd8 17.Nd2 Ba6 18.Bf1 Nf6 19.Bxa6 Qxa6



20.Ne4 Nxe4 21.Rxe4 f5 22.Re1 Bb6 White had no counterplay to oppose Black's impending kingside attack in Zorko – Fercec, Pula 2004.



16...f5

Black should avoid 16...Nc5?! which runs into 17.Nxa5 Rxa5 18.b4.

However, 16...Bd8 17.Qd2 Qa7µ is also good. Black's general ideas are the same as in the main game, and he can switch around the move order without affecting the evaluation too much.

17.Re1

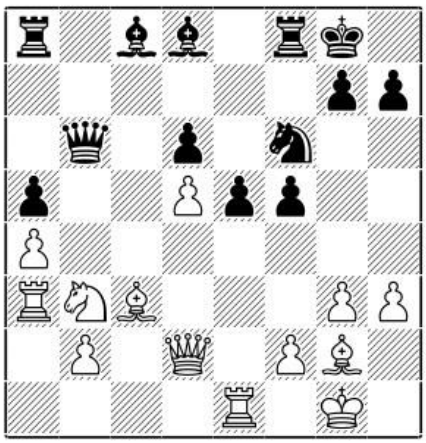
White has also tried:

17.Qd2 Bd8 18.Re1

18.Rb1?! Qa7! 19.Nc1 f4 (or 19...Nf6–+) 20.gxf4 Rxf4 21.Nd3 Rg4–+ Matsenko – Harikrishna, St Petersburg 2009.

18.Nxa5!? hopes to confuse matters, but it did not work after 18...Rxa5 19.Bxa5 Qxa5 20.b4 Qa7 21.a5 Bb6!µ in Firat – Raznikov, Batumi 2010.

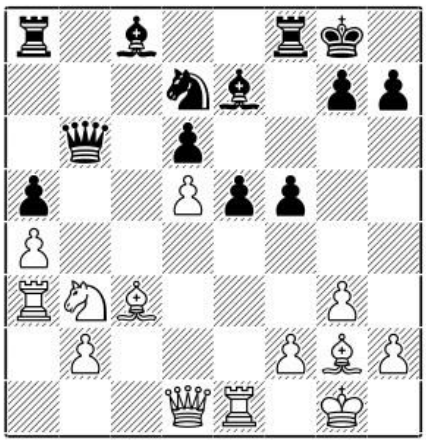
18...Nf6 19.h3



In Trabert – Dworakowska, Gothenburg 2005, Black could have kept a clear advantage with:

19...Qa7!N

Stopping any Bxa5 ideas and preparing ideas like ...Ne4 and ...Bb6.



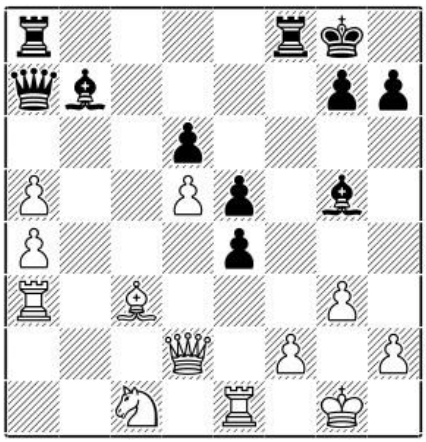
17...Bd8 18.Nd2 Ba6 19.Nb3 Bb7 20.Nd2 Rc8 21.Nb3 Qa7 22.Qd2 Ra8

This position has been evaluated as "³" by some older sources, but today's engines confirm that Black is already winning! White's pieces are in a sad jumble, while Black is ready to attack on the kingside.

23.Nc1 Nf6 24.b4

White desperately tries to create some play on the queenside, but Karjakin refuses to be distracted.

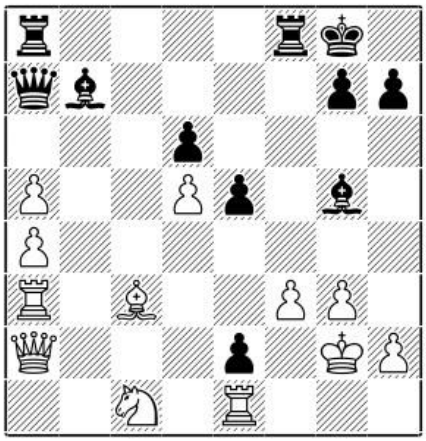
24...Ne4! 25.Bxe4 fxe4 26.bxa5 Bg5!



27.Qa2

If 27.Qxg5 Qxf2† 28.Kh1 e3! Black threatens to deliver mate by taking on d5, and 29.Rd1 does not help since 29...Bxd5†! comes anyway, followed by mate on f1.

27...e3 28.f3 e2† 29.Kg2



29...Rxf3!

Crunch.

30.Qxe2 Bxc1 31.Kxf3 Bxa3

31...Bxd5† leads to mate, but the text is good enough.

0–1

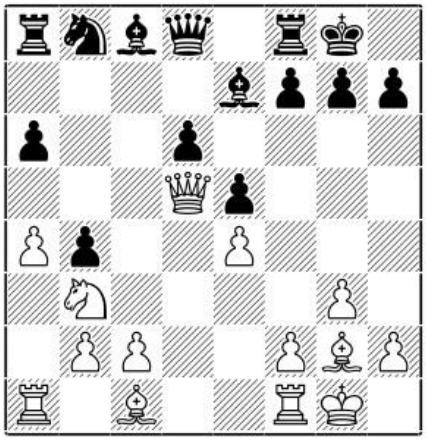
B2) 12.Qxd5

GAME 44

Hou Yifan – Alexander Grischuk

Moscow 2017

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.g3 e5 7.Nb3 Be7 8.Bg2 0-0 9.0-0 b5 10.a4 b4 11.Nd5 Nxd5 12.Qxd5



This recapture is more testing, as mentioned earlier.

12...Ra7 13.Be3 Be6

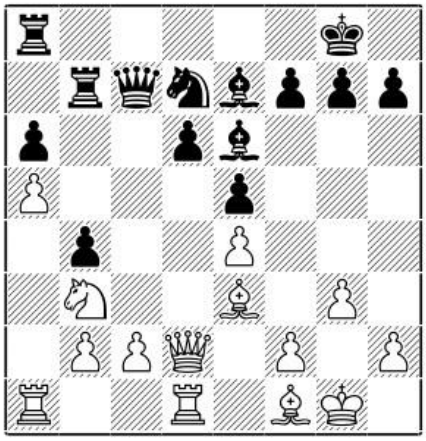
There are certain cases where it is better to keep this move in reserve and move the rook first, but here 13...Rb7?! runs into 14.Na5.

14.Qd3!

This is the most annoying, as it keeps an eye on the a6-pawn. The alternatives are not dangerous:

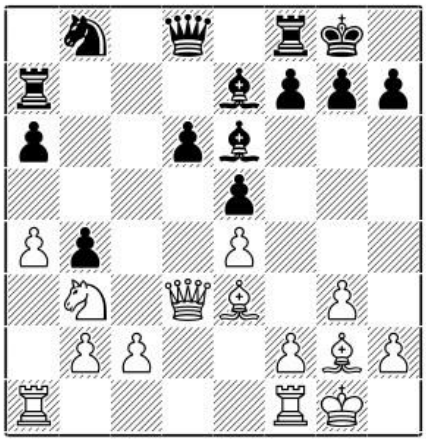
14.Qa5 Qxa5 15.Nxa5 Rc7 16.Rac1 Nd7=

14.Qd2 Rb7 15.a5 Nd7 16.Rfd1 Qc7 17.Bf1 Ra8



18.Rac1N (18.Ra4?! Qc6 19.Rda1 [19.Rxb4 Rxb4 20.Qxb4 Qxc2µ] 19...d5*ƒ* worked out well for Black in Zagrebelny – Biriukov, St Petersburg 2006) 18...Nf6 19.Bb6 Rxb6!? (the simple 19...Qc8 20.Qxb4 Nd7 is also fine) 20.axb6 Qxb6© Black has promising compensation for the

exchange.



Before going any further, let's take stock of the position. The pawn structure is typical for 6.g3 lines where Black plays a quick ...b5. Something similar can arise from the 7.Nde2 line, but White's scheme is much more effective here, as the b3-knight contributes greatly to White's queenside ambitions. General considerations aside, Black has to make an immediate decision: his rook must move, and it is not easy to choose the right square.

14...Ra8!

This retreat looks best. Black keeps the a6-pawn covered so that he can develop his knight.

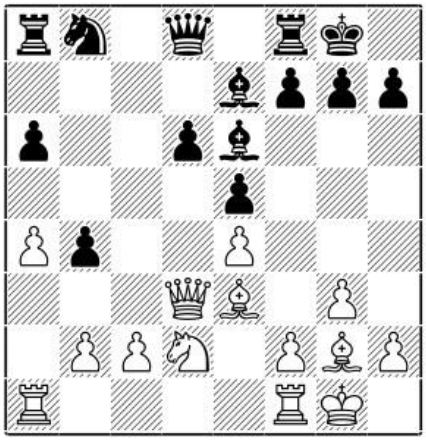
Black often prefers 14...Rb7, when the rook looks more active than it does on a8, but the a6-pawn requires attention. White should focus on the queenside, and thus 15.a5!? is annoying.

15.f4

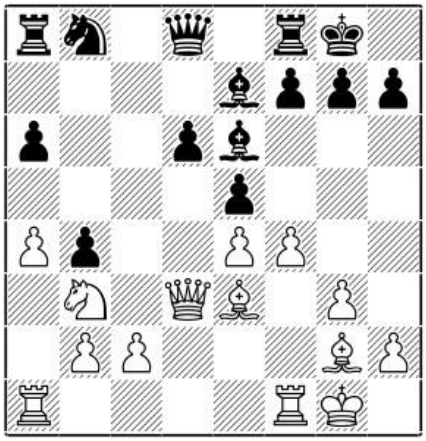
Black's rook on a8 is further from the centre and kingside than it would have been on b7 or d7, so there is some logic to the game continuation. Nevertheless, I do not believe it should be dangerous if Black responds correctly.

15.a5 is a typical idea, but 15...Nd7 16.Nd2 Qc7 17.Rfc1 Rfc8 (or 17...Nc5 18.Qe2 Rab8) looks okay for Black.

15.Nd2 demands an accurate response:



15...Nd7!N (15...Qc7 16.Rfc1 Nd7 17.c3 gives White some initiative, especially after 17...Nc5?! 18.cxb4! as occurred in in Kollars – Teplyi, Aarhus 2016) 16.Rfc1 (or 16.a5 Qb8 followed by ...Rc8) 16...a5! 17.c3 Rb8 Black has a full share of the chances.



15...Qc7

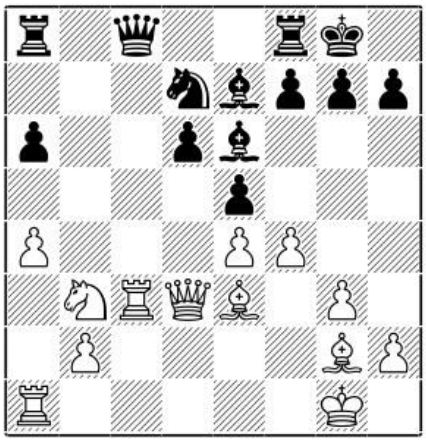
This works out well in the game, but I think it is a slight inaccuracy.

15...f6 is a typical response., when play may continue: 16.f5 Bf7 17.c3!? bxc3 (17...Bxb3?! is worse in view of 18.c4!; but 17...Nc6!? is possible) 18.Qxc3 a5 19.Rfc1 Nd7 Black is solid, but White has more freedom.

15...a5!?N looks solid; it is always nice to prevent a4-a5. After 16.Rfc1 (or 16.f5 Bd7 intending ...Bc6 and ...Nd7) 16...Na6 Black is fine.

15...Qc8!?N is similar to the main game but with a little finesse, the main point being that the queen is protected here. This may seem unimportant, but the point is revealed after:

16.Rfc1 Nd7 17.c3 bxc3 18.Rxc3



18...Nc5 19.Nxc5 dxc5 20.f5 Black has the surprising 20...Bb3! followed by ...c4 with counterplay. If Black's queen were on c7, White could simply capture the bishop and pin the pawn when it arrives on c4.

16.Nd2?!

This is too soft.

White should have tried to open the queenside as quickly as possible with:

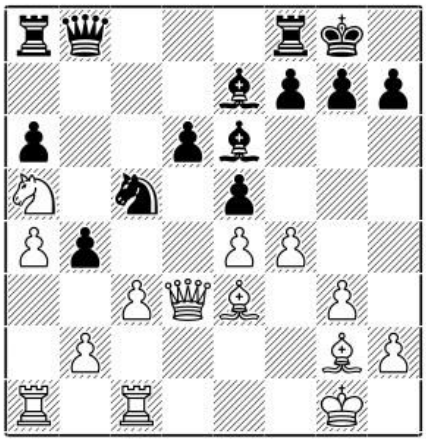
16.Rfc1! Nd7

16...Bc4 17.Qd1 does not help; nor does 16...Rc8 17.f5 Bc4 18.Qd1 intending c2-c3.

17.c3! Qb8

17...bxc3 18.Rxc3 Qd8 (18...Qb8 19.Na5±; as mentioned previously, 18...Nc5 19.Nxc5 dxc5 20.f5 favours White, since 20...Bb3?? would lose to 21.Rxb3 c4 22.Rc3) 19.f5 Bxb3 20.Rxb3 Rb8 21.a5²

18.Na5 Nc5



19.Bxc5!?N

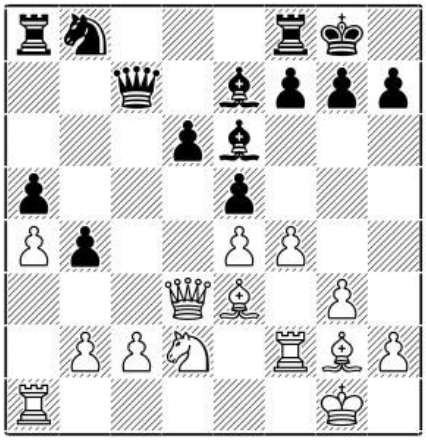
This bothers me more than 19.Qd2 exf4 20.gxf4 Bd8, after which Black has held a couple of correspondence games.

19...dxc5 20.Nc6 Qc7 21.Nxe5

White has an extra pawn. The engines claim that Black is fine and the correspondence players obviously agreed, but in a practical game it would not be easy to prove Black's compensation.

16...a5! 17.Rf2

17.f5 Bc8 followed by ...Ba6 looks good.



17...f6!?

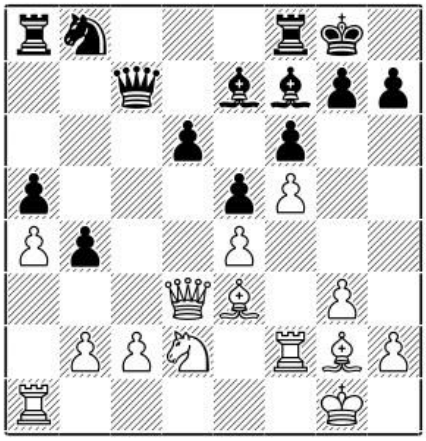
I like this strategic idea, but 17...exf4 18.gxf4 Nd7 also worked out well for Black after 19.Bd4 Bh4! 20.Re2 Rac8 21.Nf3 (or 21.f5 Bc4 22.Nxc4 Qxc4 intending ...Bf6) 21...Bf6 in Smirin – Belov, Biel 2008.

18.f5

White could get cute with 18.Bh3!? but after 18...Bf7 not much has changed.

18...Bf7

Black is comfortable. Instead of focusing on the queenside, White has wasted too much time with moves like f2-f4, Nd2 and Rf2, while Black has prepared his own queenside play.



19.Rc1 Na6!?

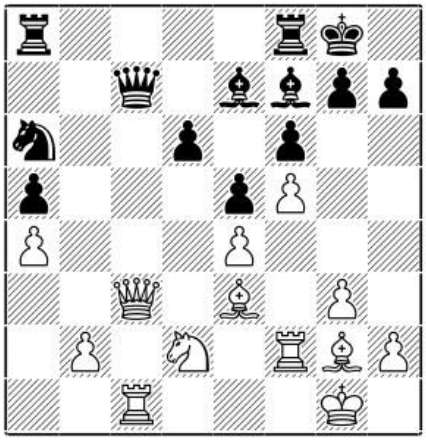
Black develops the knight where it can control the b4-square. 19...Nd7 was a good alternative, when 20.c4 Nc5 transposes to the next note.

20.c4 bxc3

I am sure Grischuk planned this when making his previous move, but 20...Nc5 was also strong. If 21.Bxc5 (21.Qc2 is well met by 21...b3! 22.Nxb3 Nxa4³) then 21...Qxc5 intending ...Bd8! is good for Black.

21.Qxc3

21.Rxc3 Qb8 22.Qb5 looks like a better try.



21...Qb8

This is good, but 21...Qb7! is even better: after 22.Nc4 Rfc8 23.b3 Rab8 White's position is folding up.

22.Rff1?!

22.Nc4 Rc8 23.b3 would have offered more resistance.

22...Nb4!?

Threatening ...Na2. Another good option was 22...Nc5 intending 23.Bxc5 Rc8!.

23.Qc7 Qe8!

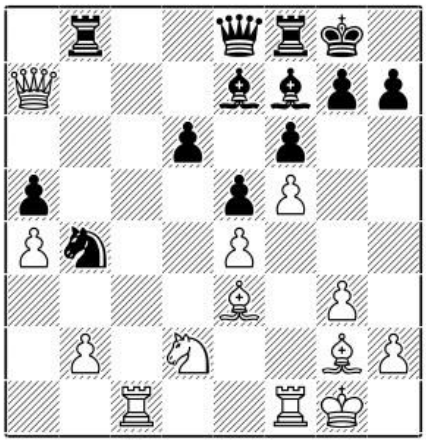
A multipurpose move. The a4-pawn is attacked, and the thematic ...d5 is coming.

24.Qb7

It is hard to find a move for White. 24.b3 would of course be met by 24...d5µ.

24...Rb8 25.Qa7 Ra8 26.Qb7 Rb8 27.Qa7

Perhaps in time pressure, Grischuk took the opportunity to burn a few moves chasing the queen. But now it is time to seize the moment.



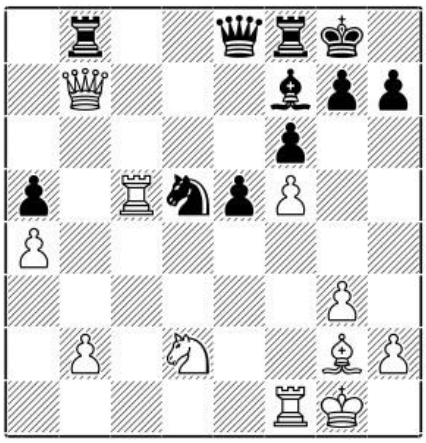
27...d5!µ

This thematic move really highlights White's lack of coordination.

28.exd5 Nxd5 29.Bc5?

After 29.Bf2 Bb4 (29...Rxb2?! 30.Nc4,,) 30.Ne4 Qxa4 Black is up a good pawn, but it is not over yet.

29...Ra8 30.Qb7 Rb8 31.Qa7 Ra8 32.Qb7 Bxc5† 33.Rxc5 Rb8



34.Qxf7†

Desperation, but 34.Qa7 Ne3! 35.Rf2 Nxg2 36.Rxg2 Qxa4 leaves White's position in shambles. She is already down a pawn, with more likely to fall, and then there is the weak king position.

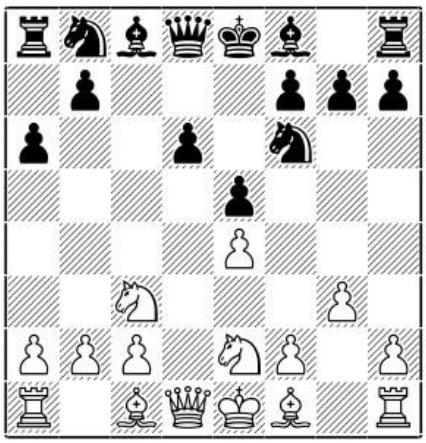
34...Rxf7 35.Bxd5 Kh8 36.Rfc1

Or 36.Bxf7 Qxf7 37.Rxa5 Qc7 and the queen mops up.

36...Rd7 37.Bc6 Qd8 38.Bxd7 Qxd7 39.Ne4 h5

0–1

C) 7.Nde2



This slightly clumsy-looking move is the traditional main line. The knight may replace its brother on c3 (after Nd5) to cement White's grip on the d5-square, or it may go to g3 (after h2-h3 and g3-g4) to participate in a kingside assault. As we saw in the previous chapter, after 6.h3 e5 7.Nde2 we chose 7...h5 to prevent White from reaching this thematic set-up with an extra tempo, as would have happened if he was allowed to play g2-g4 in one move.

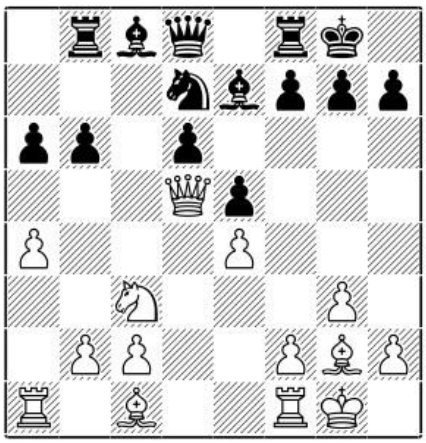
7...Be7

Again, I favour a classical approach to development. Here is a quick summary of the two main alternatives, to show why I was not so happy with them:

7...Nbd7

This flexible option has always been popular, but Ivanov has long had a little recipe that is annoying to meet:

8.a4 b6 9.Nd5!? Nxd5 10.Qxd5 Rb8 11.Nc3 Be7 12.Bg2 0-0 13.0-0



13...Bb7

A quarter of a century(!) ago, my first ever Najdorf game against Ivanov went 13...Nf6 14.Qd3 h6 15.Nd1!? with the knight headed to the comfortable e3-square in A. Ivanov – Vigorito, Cambridge 1994.

14.Qd1 Rc8 15.Qe2

White was also successful recently with 15.Re1 in the elite battle Giri – Nepomniachtchi, Wijk aan Zee 2017.

15...Nf6 16.Bg5 Rc5 17.Rfd1 h6 18.Bxf6 Bxf6 19.h4 Be7 20.Rd2 Qa8 21.Rad1 Rfc8 22.Qe3 b5 23.Bh3 R8c7 24.axb5 axb5 25.Bf1 Qa5 26.Nd5 Bxd5 27.Rxd5 Qb4 28.b3 Qa5 29.R1d2²

With a typical position that is no fun for Black to play, A. Ivanov – Najer, Moscow 2004.

7...b5

This immediate queenside expansion has been recommended in numerous sources, and I have stubbornly played it several times against Ivanov. My results have not been so bad, but Black needs to be careful.

8.Bg5!

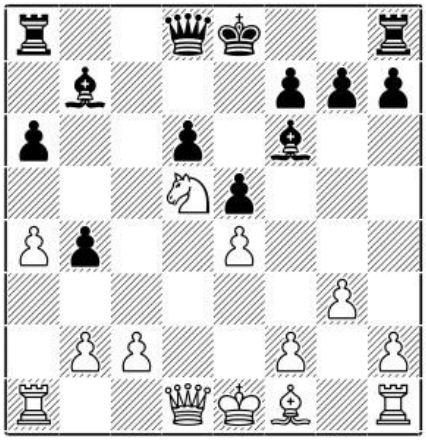
Ivanov's pet move. Now Black must show considerable accuracy to avoid getting a passive position.

8...Nbd7 9.Nd5 Be7 10.Bxf6 Nxf6 11.Nec3 Bb7

Perhaps Black could look to improve with 11...Be6, 11...0-0 or 11...Rb8!?, the last of which is Bologan's suggestion.

12.a4 b4 13.Nxf6† Bxf6 14.Nd5

White will 'forget' that he played 6.g3 and bring his bishop to c4. Black is just about okay, but it is too easy to drift. Some examples:



14...Rc8!

This move forces White to spend a tempo to bring the bishop to the c4-square.

14...Bxd5?! 15.Qxd5 0-0 16.Bc4 Be7 17.0-0-0 was difficult for Black in A. Ivanov – Mekhitarian, Buenos Aires 2005.

14...0-0?! 15.Bc4 Rc8 16.Qe2 (16.Qd3 Bxd5 17.Bxd5 Qc7? 18.Qxa6 Qxc2 19.0-0 Qxb2 20.a5± A. Ivanov – Raznikov, Boston 2016) 16...Bxd5 17.Bxd5 a5 18.0-0-0± In A. Ivanov – Vigorito, Nashua 2009, I reached the same type of unpleasant situation as in Ivanov – Mekhitarian above, although I somehow ended up winning this game.

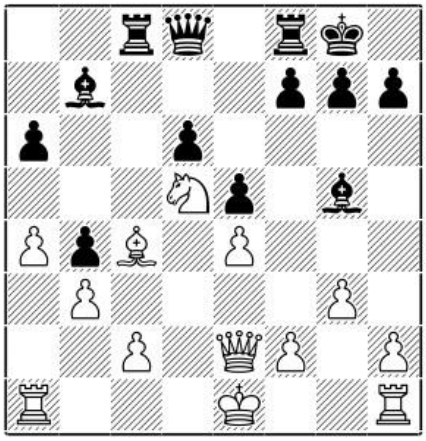
15.b3 0-0 16.Bc4 Bg5

Black should prevent long castling.

17.Qe2

Similar play resulted after 17.h4 Bh6 18.0-0 in A. Ivanov – Vigorito, Somerville 2009.

Here Black's play can be improved with:



17...a5!?N

Rather than 17...Bxd5?! 18.Bxd5 a5 19.h4 Bh6 20.Bc4! (avoiding 20.0-0 Rc3) 20...Rc5 21.Rd1 Qc7 22.0-0 with a nice plus for White in A. Ivanov – Vigorito, Burlington 2016.

18.Rd1

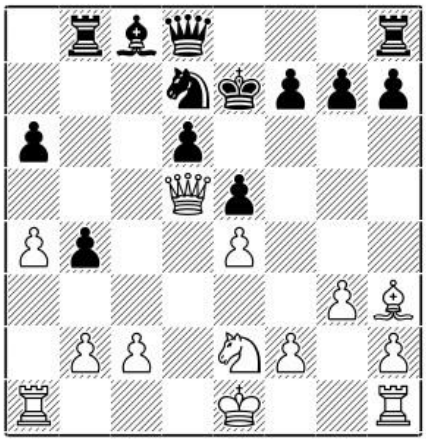
18.Ba6? allows 18...Bxd5!, since 19.Bxc8? Qxc8 20.exd5 Qc3† wins.

18...Rc5 19.h4 Bh6 20.0-0 Kh8

Black intends ...Bc8-e6 with a tenable position resembling a Sveshnikov. Still, this also implies that 11...Bb7 may have been misguided. Summing up, 7...b5 is a reasonable alternative, but Black must play very purposefully to avoid a passive position, whereas White's plan of Bg5 and knights to d5 is more straightforward.

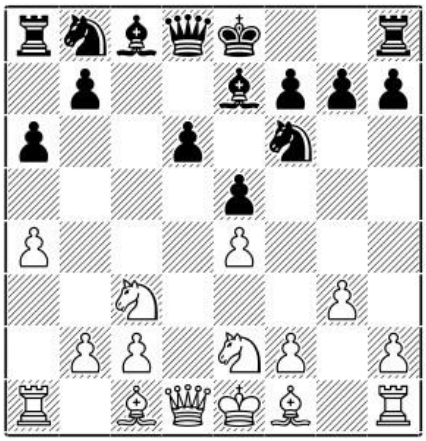
Returning to our favoured option, we will consider **C1)** 8.a4 followed by the main line of **C2)** 8.Bg2.

8.Bg5 Nbd7 9.Bh3?! was once played against Fischer, who produced yet another model display for Black: 9...b5 10.a4 b4 11.Nd5 Nxd5 12.Qxd5 Rb8 13.Bxe7 Kxe7!



14.Qd2 Nf6 15.Bg2?! Bb7 16.Qd3 Qb6 17.0-0 a5 18.Rfd1 Ba6 19.Qd2 Rhc8µ Black had a dream Najdorf in Matulovic – Fischer, Vinkovci 1968.

C1) 8.a4



Playing this move immediately gives Black an extra option of fighting for the d5-square before castling.

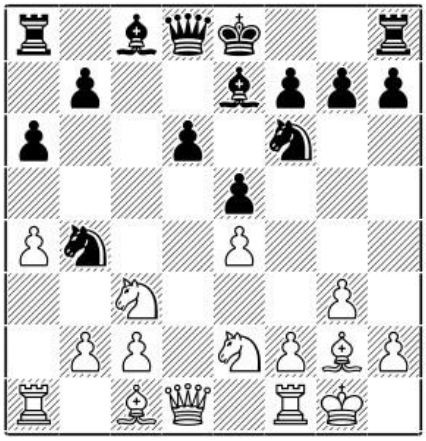
8...Nc6 9.Bg2 Nb4

There are some differences compared to the position from variation C21 where both sides have castled.

10.0-0

10.b3 Be6 11.Ba3 shows a difference: 11...d5 12.Bxb4? Bxb4 and the c3-knight is pinned. In my game against Ivanov (see the note to Black's 12th move in variation C21) I thought that I had goofed up the move order, thus missing this tactical point.

10.h3 d5! 11.exd5 Bf5 12.0-0 Bxc2 (12...Nxc2 13.g4 Bg6³ was also good in Waller – Hoelzl, Vienna 1986) 13.Qd2 Rc8 14.g4 0-0 15.Ng3 occurred in Kudrin – Kuligowski, Manchester 1981. White won the game but it was no thanks to his opening play, with 15...Rc4!?Nµ one of many good options for Black.



10...Be6

Preparing the ...d5 break.

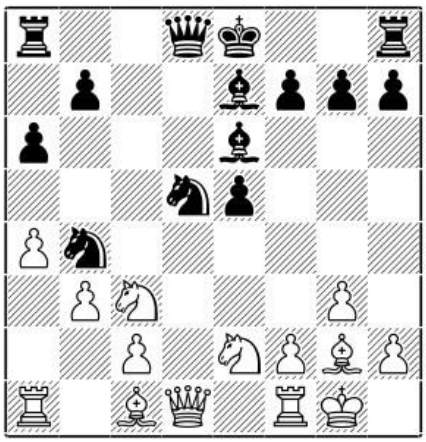
11.b3

11.Bg5 Rc8 12.Qd2 (12.Bxf6 Bxf6 13.Qd2 0-0³ was Piccoli – Swiercz, Fermo 2009) 12...0-0 13.Rac1 h6 14.Bxf6 Bxf6 15.Nd5 Nxd5 16.exd5 Bg4! 17.h3 Bg5µ Vulicevic – Moulin, New York 1993)

11...d5

More interesting is 11...0-0 transposing to the main game.

12.exd5 Nfxd5



13.Ba3

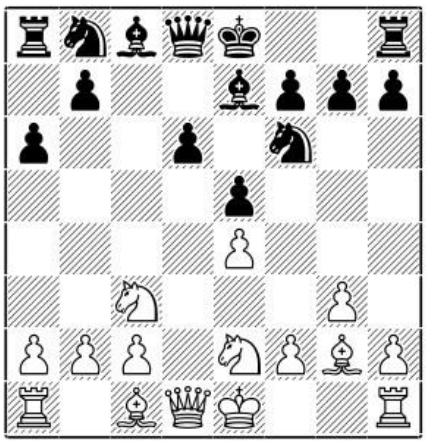
13.Nxd5 Bxd5 14.Bxd5 Qxd5 15.Qxd5 Nxd5= is pleasant for Black.

13...Nxc3 14.Nxc3 Qxd1 15.Raxd1

Rc8!N=

This looks easier than 15...Nxc2 16.Bxe7 Kxe7 17.Nd5† Bxd5 18.Rxd5 when Black was okay, but still had to take care in Ghaem Maghami – Vachier-Lagrave, Dresden (ol) 2008.

C2) 8.Bg2



8...0-0

This is the most flexible move.

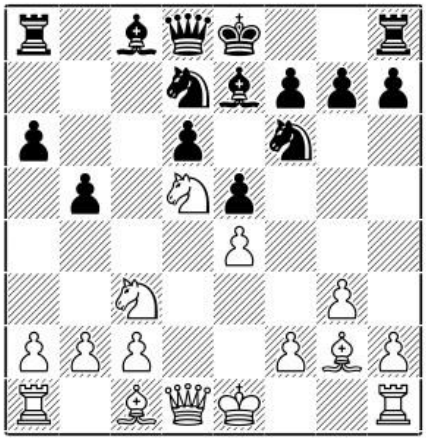
8...b5

Black often plays this move, and it was the recommendation of Georgiev and Kolev. However, their book preceded the surge in popularity of:

9.Nd5!

This is the modern choice. It is similar to variation C222 but there is a small tactical difference, as we shall see.

9...Nbd7 10.Nec3



10...Nb6!

This looks like the best try.

10...Bb7 is the move Black would like to play but 11.a4! is annoying: 11...Nxd5 12.Nxd5 Nf6 (since Black has not castled, 12...Bxd5?! does not work well here because 13.Qxd5 Nb6? runs into 14.Qc6†!) 13.Nxe7! (Black looked okay after 13.axb5 Nxd5 14.exd5 axb5 15.Rxa8 Qxa8 in Carlsen – Grischuk, Stavanger 2015, although the World Champion still managed to eke out a win) 13...Qxe7 14.axb5 axb5 15.Rxa8† Bxa8 16.Bg5 0-0 17.0-0 h6 18.Bxf6 Qxf6 19.Qd3 Bc6 20.Rd1 Rd8 21.Qc3 Rc8 22.Qb4² White maintained annoying pressure in Malakhov – Kuzubov, Chartres 2017.

11.Nxe7

11.Nxb6 Qxb6 was fine for Black in Hammer – Ragger, Norway 2016.

11...Qxe7 12.Bg5 0-0

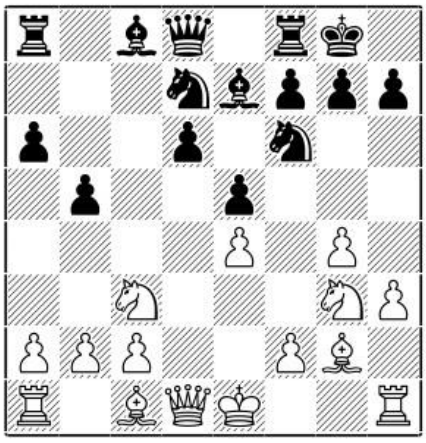
After 12...h6 13.Bxf6 Qxf6 14.a4 bxa4 15.Nxa4 Nxa4 16.Rxa4 0-0 17.0-0 Bd7 18.Ra5 Rfb8 19.b3 Rb5 20.Qd2 White had an edge and ground out a win in Giri – Wojtaszek, Doha 2015.

13.Qf3 Be6 14.Bxf6 Qxf6 15.Qxf6 gxf6

The position was pretty level in Karjakin – Vachier-Lagrave, Stavanger 2017. So 8...b5 seems playable, but Black needs to avoid some pitfalls.

Returning to our repertoire move, **C21)** 9.a4 has been tried by some strong players, but I think White does best to play **C22)** 9.0-0.

A tricky move order is 9.h3!? b5 10.g4 Nbd7 11.Ng3 (11.0-0 transposes to variation C221 below) but a good response is:



11...b4! 12.Nd5 Nxd5 13.exd5 Bg5N Black looks completely fine.

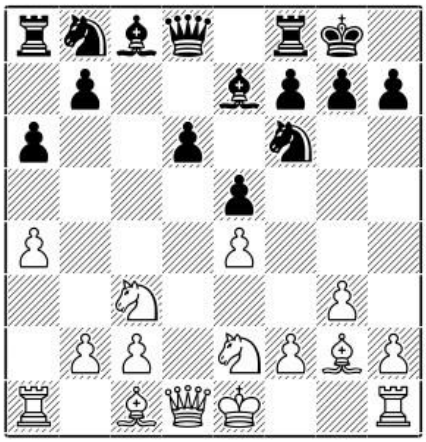
C21) 9.a4

GAME 45

Constantin Lupulescu – Radoslaw Wojtaszek

Djakovica 2016

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.g3 e5 7.Nde2 Be7 8.Bg2 0-0 9.a4



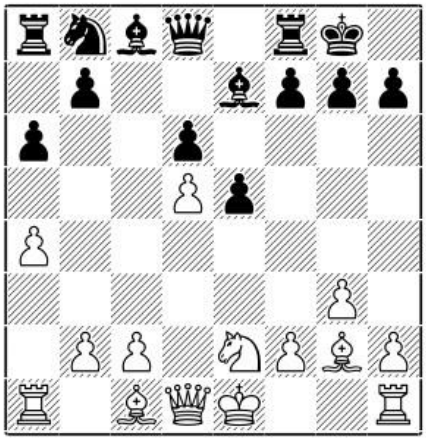
White prevents ...b5.

9...Nc6!

After White's last move, we of course take the opportunity to bring the knight to the b4-outpost.

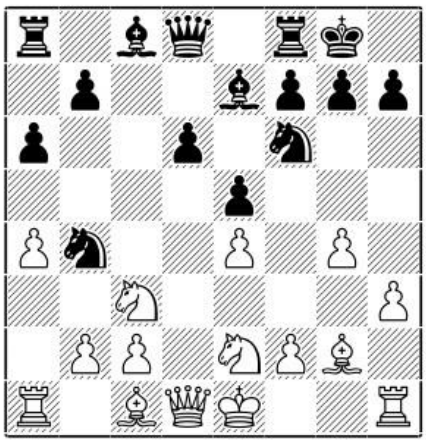
10.0-0

Little is achieved by: 10.Nd5 Nxd5 11.exd5 Nb8 (Black could also try 11...Na5!?)

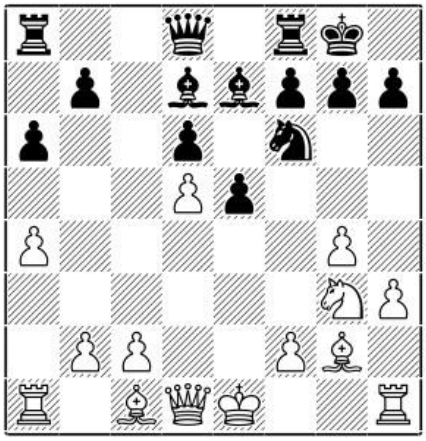


12.0-0 (12.a5 could be met by either 12...Bf5 or 12...Bg5 13.0-0 Bxc1 14.Qxc1 Bg4= as in Kholmov – Gavrikov, Tallinn 1983) 12...Bf5 13.Nc3 Nd7 14.a5 Rc8³ Pena Gomez – Yepez Gutierrez, corr. 2004.

Pushing pawns with 10.h3 Nb4 11.g4 looks too slow:



11...Be6 12.Nd5 (12.Ng3 d5 gives Black easy play) 12...Nbxd5 13.exd5 Bd7 14.Ng3 (14.0-0 h5 15.g5 Ne8 16.f4 occurred in Kashtanov – Donskov, St Petersburg 2013, when 16...g6!N³ followed by ...Ng7-f5 gives Black a good position)



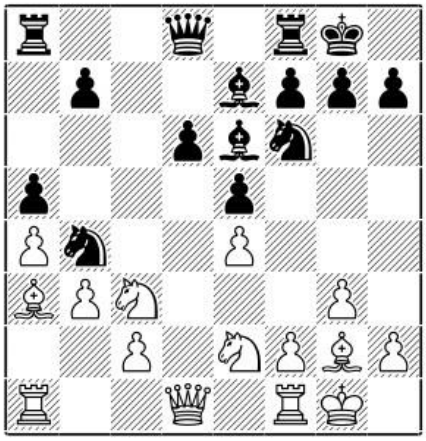
14...Qa5†!? 15.Qd2 (15.Bd2 Qc5 is also good for Black) 15...Qc5 16.a5 Rac8 17.c3 Qc4³ Black had the upper hand in Giaccio – Grifoll Miro, corr. 2008 (and 17...Bb5!?N 18.Nf5 Bd8³ was a promising alternative).

10...Nb4 11.b3

White wants to disturb the b4-knight with Ba3, but there is a risk that the bishop could become sidelined on the queenside.

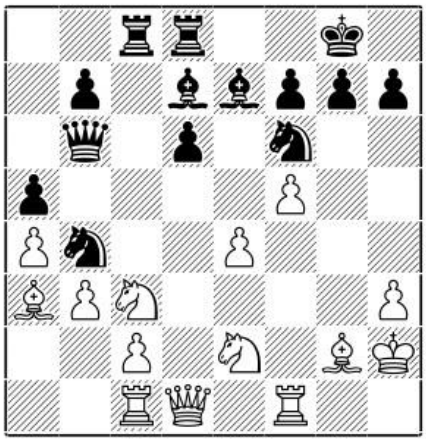
11...Be6 12.Ba3 a5

When I played this variation against Ivanov, I mistakenly believed I had goofed up my move order by castling too early. I played the unnecessary 12...Qb6?! and after 13.Qd2 White was already threatening to win material with 14.a5. After the forced 13...a5 (which I spent way too much time on) 14.Nb5 White had an edge in A. Ivanov – Vigorito, Burlington 2012. I soon fell into passive defence, but even here there is a fighting possibility with 14...d5!? 15.Bxb4 (15.c3 dxe4! 16.cxb4 axb4 17.Bb2 Ng4 gives Black dangerous counterplay) 15...Bxb4 16.c3 Bc5 17.exd5 Bd7 with interesting play for the pawn.



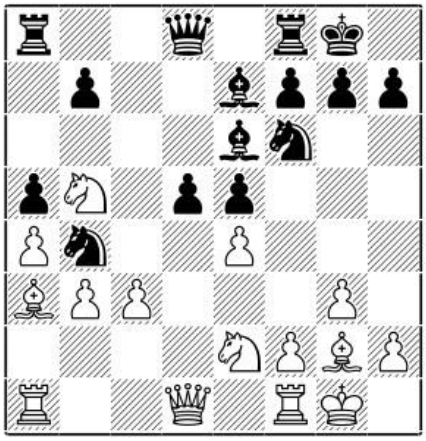
13.Qd2

Long ago, Ivanov tried 13.h3 and won, but it looks too slow: 13...Rc8 14.f4 Qb6† 15.Kh2 exf4!? (Black is also doing well after 15...Rfd8 16.f5 Bd7 17.g4 h6³) 16.gxf4 Rfd8 17.f5 Bd7 18.Rc1



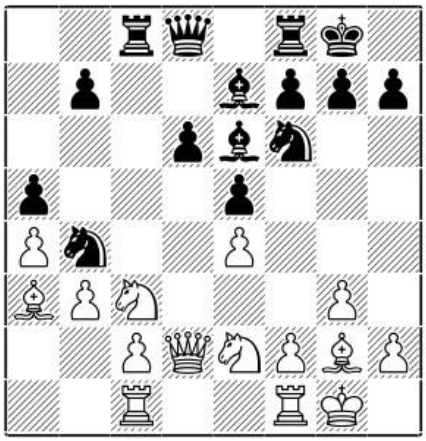
18...d5!µ Thematic and strong, this deserved a better fate. 19.Bxb4 (White is also in trouble after 19.exd5 Qd6† 20.Kh1 Qe5µ) 19...axb4 20.Nxd5 Nxd5 21.exd5 Now in A. Ivanov – Renet, St Martin 1991, Black should have played 21...Bd6†!N 22.Kh1 (22.Nf4 Bxf5–+) 22...Qe3 with a decisive attack.

White has also tried 13.Nb5 in order to kick the knight away with c2-c3, but this allows 13...d5. White has nothing better than 14.c3 when an interesting, sharp possibility is:



14...dxe4!?N (the simple 14...Nc6 15.Bxe7 Nxe7 16.exd5 Bxd5 was level in Makoveev – Biriukov, St Petersburg 2017) 15.cxb4 (15.Qxd8 Raxd8 16.cxb4 axb4 17.Bb2 Rd2 wins back the piece) 15...axb4 16.Bb2 Qxd1 17.Rfxd1 Bxb3 With excellent play for the piece.

13...Rc8! 14.Rac1



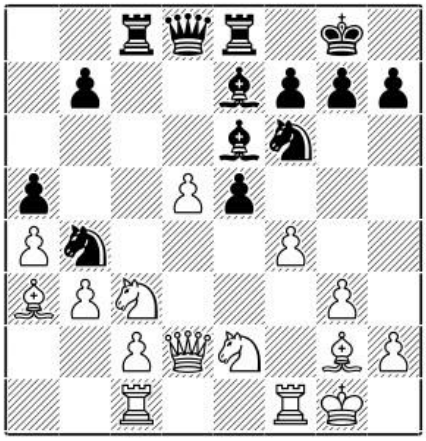
14...Re8!

This gives the e7-bishop some extra protection.

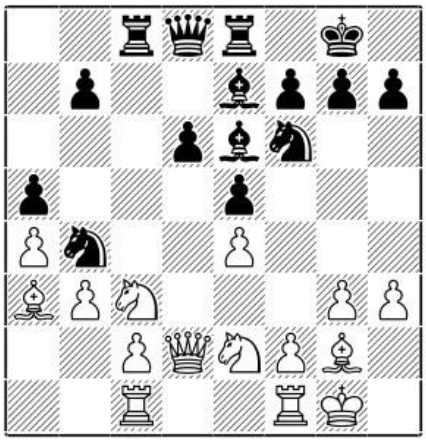
15.h3

The natural-looking 15.Rfd1?! weakens f2, which Black can immediately exploit by means of 15...Ng4! with the idea 16.h3?! Bg5!.

Also mistaken is: 15.f4?! d5! 16.exd5 (16.fxe5 Nxe4 17.Nxe4 dxe4 18.Qxd8 Rcxd8µ)



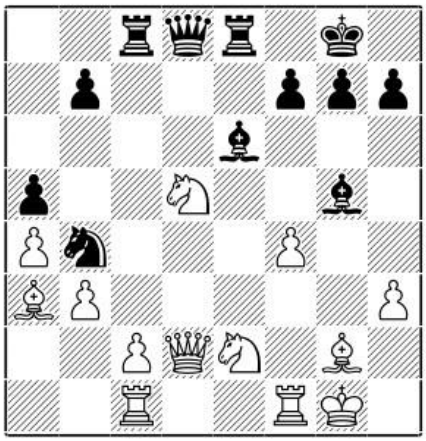
And now instead of 16...Nfxd5?!= as played in Aravindh – Nitin, Ahmedabad 2017, Black could have caused his opponent big problems with 16...Bc5†N 17.Kh1 e4!µ.



15...d5 16.exd5 Nfxd5 17.Nxd5 Nxd5

Of course this is natural and maintains some tension.

There was an unusual tactical possibility with: 17...Bg5!?N 18.f4 exf4 19.gxf4

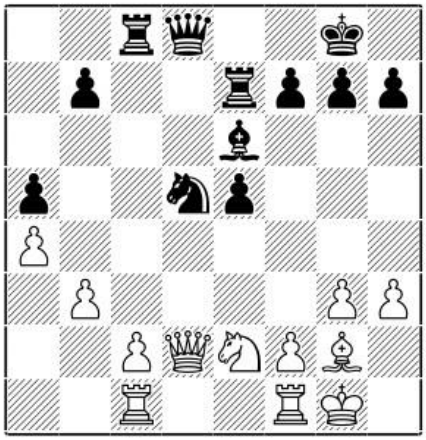


19...Bxd5! Based on the fact that the e2-knight is loose. It all ends in equality though after 20.fxg5 Bxg2 21.Qxd8 Rcxd8 22.Kxg2 Rxe2† 23.Rf2=.

18.Bxe7 Rxe7!?

This was probably Wojtaszek's intention all along.

Black could also play 18...Nxe7N, when 19.Qxd8 (19.Rfd1 Qb6=) 19...Rexd8 20.Bxb7 Rc7 followed by ...Rd2 would be equal.

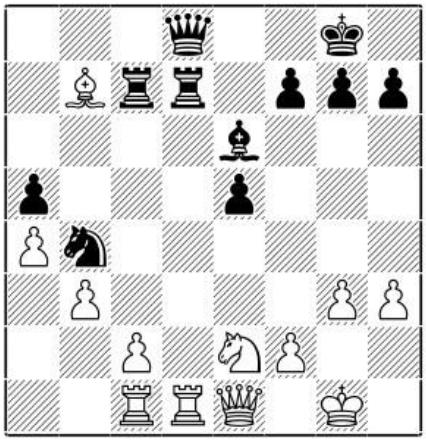


19.Rfd1

19.c4 is met by 19...Nb4 when the b7-pawn is protected.

19...Rd7 20.Qe1 Nb4 21.Bxb7 Rcc7

The h3- and c2-pawns are both hanging, so Black is guaranteed to recoup his investment.



22.Bg2?

White protects the wrong pawn. After 22.Be4 Bxh3 23.Nc3 the position is about equal.

22...Nxc2! 23.Rxd7 Rxd7!

White may have overlooked this tactical point: the knight cannot be taken because of ...Rd1. Instead 23...Qxd7? 24.Qxa5 would give White a winning position.

24.Qc3 Nb4 25.Qe3

Another tactical annoyance for White is seen after 25.Qxe5? Nd3.

25...f6³

Black is more active and has nice control of the centre.

26.f4?

White lashes out instead of keeping his cool with a neutral move like 26.Kh2 or 26.Bf1.

26...Rd3 27.Qc5 Rd2!µ

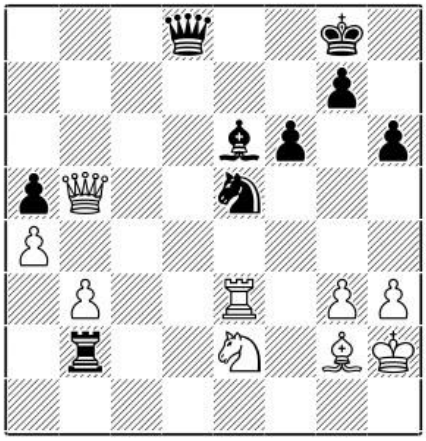
Black is not only attacking the knight, but also threatening ...Nd3. This is stronger than taking on b3, after which White would capture on e5.

28.Qb5 h6!?

Making a little breathing room. The straightforward 28...Nd3 29.Rc3 Bf5 was also good.

29.fxe5 Nd3 30.Rc3 Nxe5 31.Re3 Rb2 32.Kh2?!

Missing a shot. White had to try 32.Nf4 Qd1† 33.Kh2 Bf7 34.Qb8† Kh7µ when Black is much better, but it is not over yet.



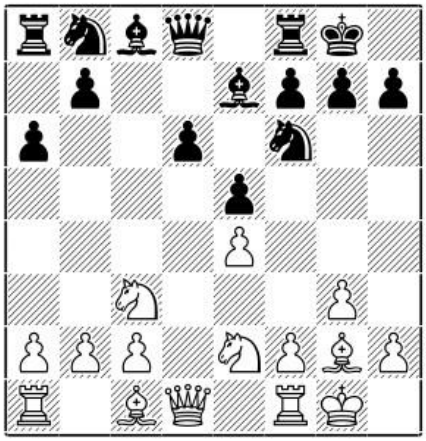
32...Bc4!–+

Simply winning material. The rest can pass without comment.

33.bxc4 Rxb5 34.cxb5 Qd2 35.Re4 Qb2 36.Nd4 h5 37.Kg1 g5 38.Nf3 Qb1† 39.Ne1 Nd3 40.Kf1 Nc5 41.Rc4 Nxa4 42.Rc8† Kg7 43.Rb8 Qf5† 44.Kg1 Qc5† 45.Kh2 Nb6 46.Rb7† Kf8 47.Nf3 a4 48.Nd2 a3 49.Ne4 Qd4 50.Ra7 Qb2

0–1

C22) 9.0-0

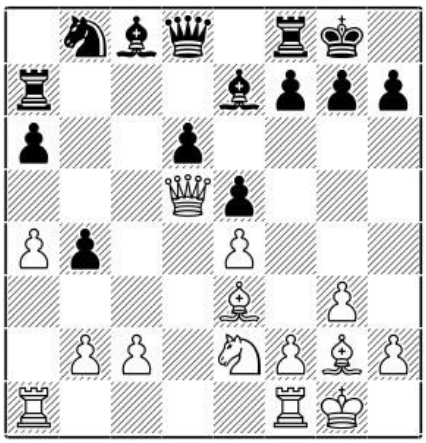


As mentioned earlier, I think this is White's best bet.

9...b5

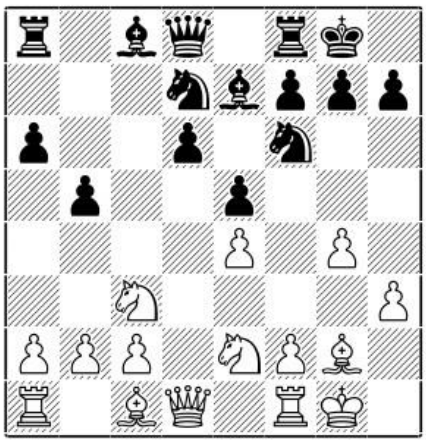
There is no reason to delay this move any longer. White may build up on the kingside with **C221)** 10.h3 or play in the centre with **C222)** 10.Nd5.

Inserting 10.a4 b4 before 11.Nd5 is less dangerous in view of 11...Nxd5 12.Qxd5 Ra7 13.Be3 when we reach a familiar set-up:



If we compare this to the earlier variation B2, we see that White's knight is unimpressive: it would be better on the b3-square, where it contributes to White's queenside play. Thus, after 13...Be6 (the immediate 13...Rb7!?, as played in Adams – Giri, Baku [ol] 2016, is also fine) 14.Qd2 Rb7 Black scores well. A nice example continued 15.f4 f6 16.b3 Qd7 17.f5 Bf7 18.g4 Bd8 19.a5 Rb5 with an excellent position, Dragnev – Sarana, Porto Carras 2015.

C221) 10.h3 Nbd7 11.g4



This variation has been around for a long time. Overall Black scores well, but he must remain alert. None other than Garry Kasparov lost quite badly with Black from this position, albeit in a simul.

11...b4

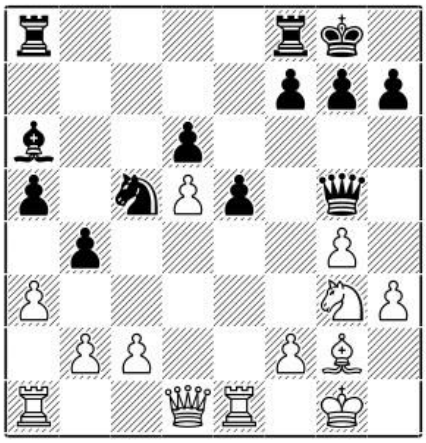
11...Bb7?! 12.Ng3 b4 13.Nd5 Nxd5 14.exd5 followed by a2-a3 gave White a serious initiative in Spangenburg – Kasparov, Buenos Aires (simul) 1997.

12.Nd5 Nxd5 13.exd5 a5 14.Ng3 Bg5

14...Ba6 15.Re1 Nc5!?N (15...g6 gives White a slight initiative after 16.Bh6 Re8 17.a3) 16.Nf5 Bf6 17.Be3 Na4,, is another possibility.

15.Bxg5 Qxg5 16.a3 Ba6 17.Re1 Nc5

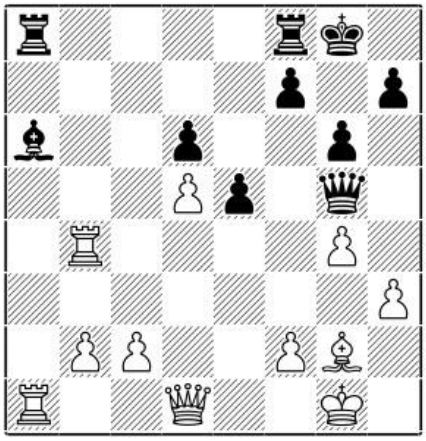
17...Qd8?! is forced according to Mokry in *Informant*, but after 18.axb4 axb4 19.Qd2 Qb6 as played in G. Kuzmin – Mokry, Polanica Zdroj 1984, White has 20.Re4!±.



18.axb4 axb4 19.Ne4 Nxe4 20.Rxe4 g6!?

I find this an interesting try, with the following idea:

21.Rxb4



21...Be2! 22.Qe1 Rxa1 23.Qxa1 Rc8 24.c3 Qd2,,

With plenty of play for the sacrificed pawn.

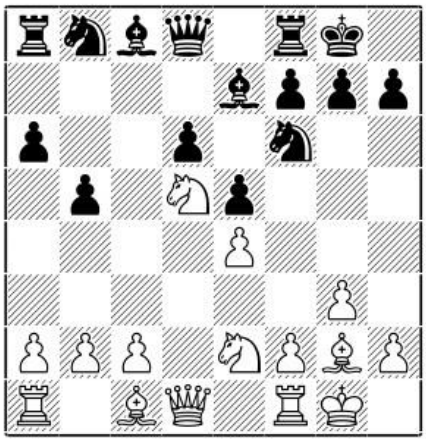
C222) 10.Nd5

GAME 46

Yuriy Kryvoruchko – Daniel Sadzikowski

Germany 2016

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.g3 e5 7.Nde2 Be7 8.Bg2 0-0 9.0-0 b5 10.Nd5



This is the main line these days.

10...Nbd7!?

Black maintains the tension.

The following alternative is just as common, but I prefer to avoid it due to the lines shown below:

10...Nxd5 11.Qxd5 Ra7 12.Be3 Rb7!

The most flexible.

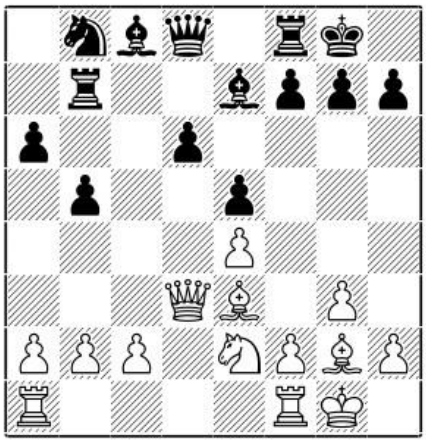
Instead after 12...Be6 13.Qd2! Rb7 White gets in 14.Nc3 immediately.

13.Qd3!

This looks like White's best.

13.Nc3?! is poorly timed as the knight will not get to d5 so easily. After 13...b4! 14.Nd1 Qc7 Black went on to gain the upper hand in Quesada Perez – Xiong, Saint Louis 2017.

13.Qd2 is a reasonable move though: 13...Nd7 (better than 13...Be6 14.Nc3 Nd7 15.Nd5) 14.Nc3 Nf6 15.Bg5 Be6 16.Bxf6 Bxf6 17.Nd5 Bg5 18.Qd3 Qd7 19.c3 Rc8 This was Lupulescu – Huschenbeth, Hamburg 2017. The position may be equal, but it does not look fun for Black. This is the type of position I am trying to avoid.



13...Be6

13...Nd7 14.Nc3 Nf6 15.Bg5 Be6 16.Bxf6 Bxf6 17.Nd5 Bg5 18.h4!? (Bok was willing to repeat this line, and later White played 18.c3 Qc8 19.Rfd1 a5 20.a3 a4 21.Qe2 g6 22.Kh1 Kh8 23.f4 Bh6 24.f5! gxf5 in Schroeder – Bok, London 2016, when 25.Nf6!N± would have been extremely strong) 18...Bh6 19.c3 a5 20.a3 Qc8 21.b4! axb4 22.axb4 Qc6 23.Rfd1 g6 24.Ra3² Adams – Bok, Isle of Man 2016.

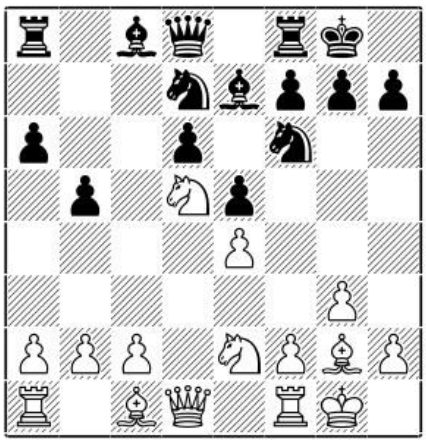
The text move basically gains a tempo because of the threat to go to c4, but I still find Black's set-up to be too passive. White keeps some pressure after:

14.b3 Nd7 15.Nc3 Nf6 16.a4 Qb8

Another example continued: 16...Qd7 17.axb5 axb5 18.Ra6 Rc8 19.Rfa1 b4 20.Na4 Qc7 21.Ra2 Nd7 22.Qf1 Rcb8 23.Qd1 h6 24.h4² Adams – Nepomniachtchi, Moscow 2017.

17.axb5 axb5 18.Bg5 b4 19.Bxf6 Bxf6 20.Nd5 Bd8 21.Rfd1 Bxd5 22.Qxd5 Bb6 23.Bf1 Bc5 24.Ra6 g6 25.Bc4²

Vidit – Areshchenko, Linares 2017.

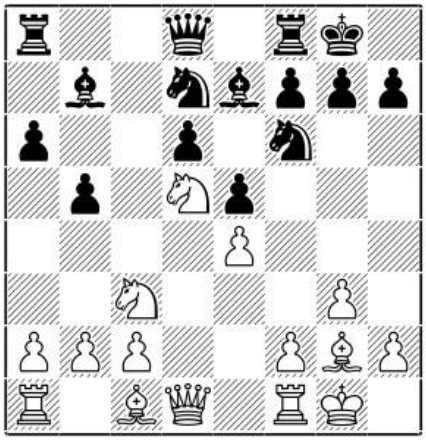


11.Nec3

After 11.Nxe7†N 11...Qxe7 12.Nc3 Bb7= Black's b-pawn is not under pressure, and he has counterplay against the e4-pawn.

11...Bb7

11...Nb6 and 11...Rb8!? are playable alternatives but developing the bishop seems the most natural and promising idea to me, so we will focus on that.



12.a4

It is difficult for White to create any pressure without this move, but there a couple of

other tries.

12.b3!?

This does not seem to do much, but White may want to have the option of c2-c4 at some point. I would expect further developments here.

12...Rc8

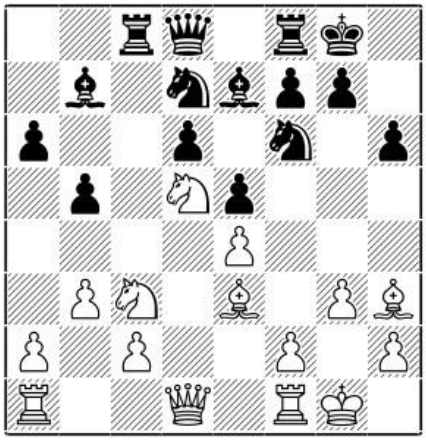
12...Nxd5 13.Nxd5 Nf6 14.c4 gave White some space advantage, though Black was still solid in Vidit – Andriasyan, Riyadh 2017.

13.Be3 h6!?

13...Nxd5 14.Nxd5 Bxd5 (14...Nf6 15.a4 gives White a slight initiative) 15.Qxd5 Rxc2 16.Rfc1 offers White good compensation for the pawn.

14.Bh3

Now Black opted for a surprising exchange sacrifice.



14...b4!?

Again White has compensation after 14...Bxd5 15.Nxd5 Nxd5 16.Qxd5 Rxc2 17.Rfc1.

15.Nxf6† Nxf6 16.Bxc8 Qxc8 17.Nd5 Nxd5 18.exd5 f5

White's kingside and d5-pawn are weak, so Black has interesting practical compensation. After a long battle, Ragger – Saric, Batumi (ol) 2018, resulted in a draw.

12.Be3 Nxd5 13.Nxd5 Nf6

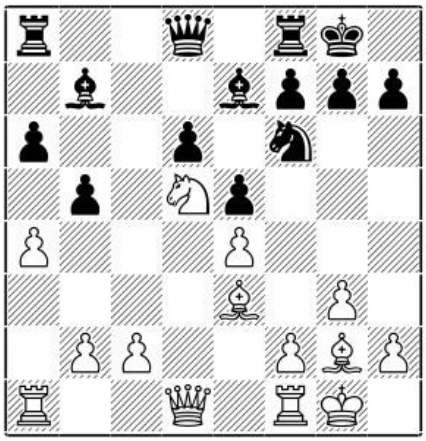
This has also occurred a few times.

14.a4

14.Nxf6† Bxf6 is just equal.

14.Bb6 Qd7 15.Nxe7† Qxe7 16.Re1 allows an unusual combination: 16...Nxe4! 17.Rxe4 (not 17.Bxe4?! Bxe4 18.Rxe4 Qb7) 17...f5 18.Re3 Bxg2 19.Kxg2 Qb7† Black regained the piece with equality in Adams – Van Wely, Wijk aan Zee 2016.

Here I like the following recommendation of Michael Roiz:



14...Nxd5N

The game continued 14...Bxd5 15.exd5 Qc7 and now Roiz suggests 16.Qe2!N² rather than 16.Qd3 as played in Ragger – Wojtaszek, Aachen 2018, which could be met by 16...Ng4! 17.Bd2 f5„.

15.exd5 Qb8!?

Not the only playable move, but it seems decent enough.

16.axb5 axb5 17.Qd3 Bc8 18.b3

Taking on a8 and b5 would cost White the exchange to a ...Ba6 skewer.

18...Bd7

Roiz stops here; Black looks fine to me.

12...Nxd5 13.Nxd5 Bxd5!?

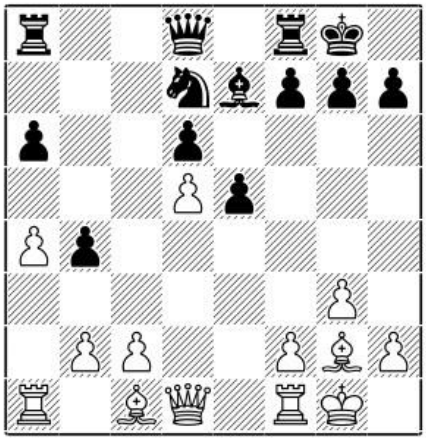
I like this idea, despite the strategic risk involved in giving up the bishop and thus weakening the light squares, especially on the queenside.

13...bxa4 is also plausible. After 14.Rxa4 Bxd5 15.exd5 I think 15...a5!?„ should be played, rather than 15...Bg5 16.Bxg5 Qxg5 as played in Anand – Giri, Zurich 2016, when 17.b4!?N looks like a good try for White, containing the knight.

14.exd5

After 14.Qxd5 Nb6 there is no check on c6, so Black wins the a4-pawn. White may still have a degree of compensation, but it should not be dangerous for Black.

14...b4



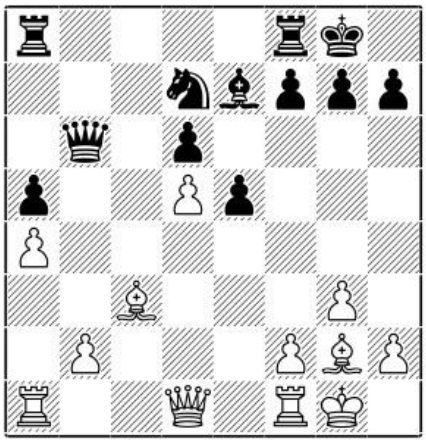
15.Bd2

15.a5 gives Black a pleasant choice between 15...Bg5, hoping to provoke 16.f4?! Bf6, or 15...Rb8 intending ...Rb5.

Going for immediate checkmate with 15.Qg4 a5 16.Bh6 Bf6 is also fine for Black.

15...a5 16.c3 bxc3 17.Bxc3 Qb6

Black has typical counterplay. The position is structurally similar to that discussed in variation B1, where White opted for 7.Nb3 and later exd5. Black can aim for a quick ...f5 or look to play on the queenside, as he does in the game.



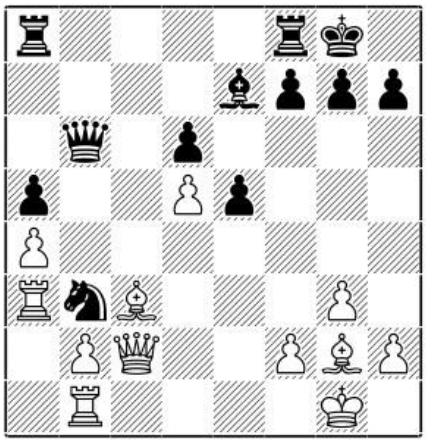
18.Qc2 Nc5

As mentioned above, 18...f5 is a good alternative, the choice mainly coming down to personal taste.

19.Rfb1

After 19.Ra3 Rab8 Black controls the b3-square again.

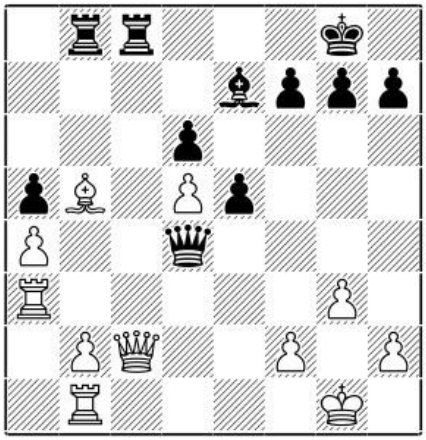
19...Nb3 20.Ra3



20...Nd4

Around here, Black begins to slip a bit.

It would have been better to maintain the tension for a few more moves while activating his rooks with 20...Rab8!N 21.Bf1 Rfc8, for example: 22.Bb5 Nd4 23.Bxd4 Qxd4



24.Rc3 Rxc3 25.Qxc3 Qxc3 26.bxc3 And now both 26...f5 and 26...Bd8 leave Black on the more pleasant side of equality.

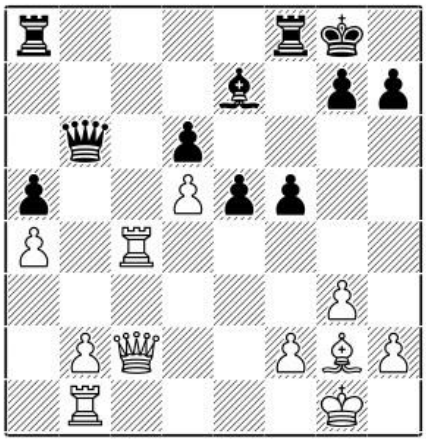
21.Bxd4 Qxd4 22.Rc3

Now White has some activity on the queenside.

22...f5?!

White's play is faster after this. Better was 22...Rfb8.

23.Rc4 Qb6



24.b4!

Now it is White who gets to activate his rooks.

24...axb4 25.Rbxb4 Qa5 26.Rb5

26.Rb7! would have given Black some problems: 26...Rae8 (26...Qe1† 27.Bf1 Bd8 [27...Bf6 28.Qxf5] 28.Rcc7!+– or 26...Bd8 27.Rcb4 with the idea Qc6*ƒ*) 27.Qc3! Bd8 28.Rd7!*ƒ*

26...Qe1† 27.Bf1 e4

Black is just in time with his counterplay.

28.Kg2

28.Rc7 e3! is a nice detail.

28...Qa1 29.Rb7 Bf6 30.Rbc7?!

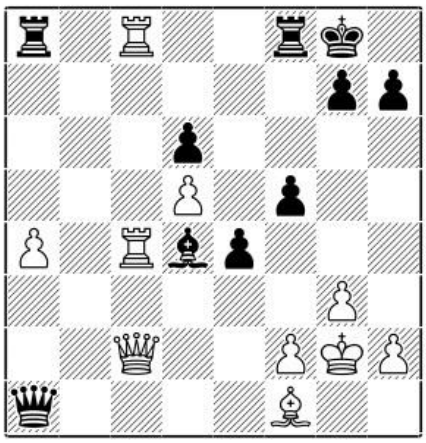
30.Be2 was safer.

30...Bd4

Grabbing the open b-file would have been more accurate: 30...Rab8! 31.Qd2 Be5 32.Be2 h6!?[3]

31.Rc8?!

White misses a chance to regain the initiative with 31.Rb4 Bc5 32.Rbb7.

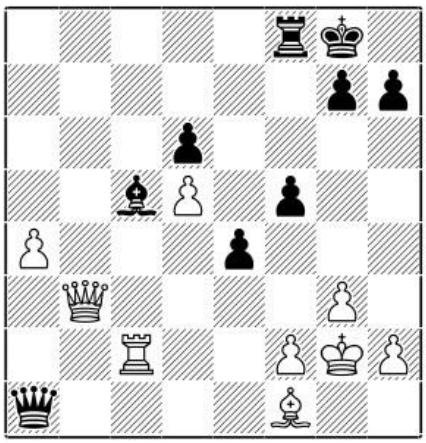


31...Bc5 32.Rxa8 Rxa8 33.Qb3

White could try to change the nature of the position with 33.Rxc5!? dxc5 34.Qxc5 but it seems that Black still has the better chances if he finds 34...f4!*ƒ*.

33...Rf8 34.Rc2

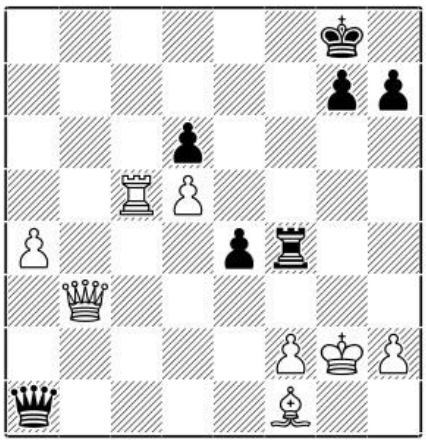
Now was the time for 34.Rxc5! dxc5 35.d6† Kh8 36.d7 with sufficient counterplay.



34...f4! 35.gxf4 Qd1?

There was a win, but it was hiding.

35...Rxf4 (intending ...Rf6–+) 36.Rxc5 and now the computer-esque winner is:



36...Rg4†! (36...dxc5? leads to nothing after 37.d6† Kf8 38.d7 Rg4† 39.Kh3 Qxf1† 40.Kxg4) 37.Kh3 h5!–+ White is caught in a mating net.

36.Be2

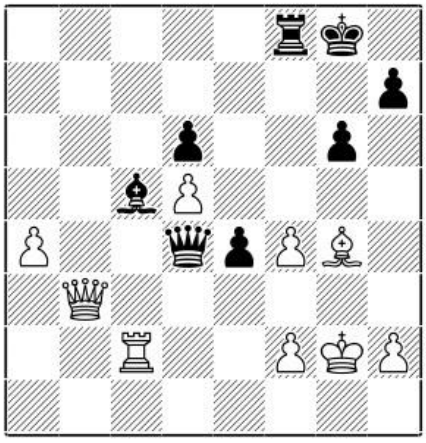
Now the worst is over.

36...Qd4 37.Bg4

White can also hold with 37.Qg3.

37...g6

37...Rxf4 38.Be6† Kf8 39.Qb2 Qxb2 40.Rxb2= is similar.



38.Be6† Kh8 39.Qb2

Once the queens are traded, the draw is just a matter of time.

39...Qxb2 40.Rxb2 Rxf4 41.a5 e3 42.fxe3 Ra4 43.Rb8† Kg7 44.Rb7† Kf6 45.Rxh7 Rxa5 46.Rf7† Ke5 47.Rf3 Ra2† 48.Kh3 Re2 49.Rg3 Rxe3 50.Rxe3†

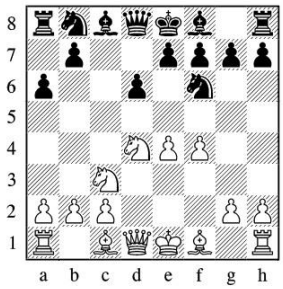
½–½

Conclusion

I have an unusually personal relationship with the apparently placid 6.g3, so I am well aware that it contains a lot of venom. After 6...e5, the quirky 7.Nf3!? is essentially a surprise weapon, but 7.Nb3 is more serious. I have opted for quick castling with 7...Be7 8.Bg2 0-0 and only after 9.0-0 going for the 9...b5 advance. Then 10.a4 b4 11.Nd5 Nxd5 12.exd5 is nothing to fear, but 12.Qxd5 is more challenging. Play continues 12...Ra7 13.Be3 Be6 14.Qd3! when the key move is the modest 14...Ra8!. Black still has to be careful on the queenside; but then again, so does White.

The real main line of the chapter is 7.Nde2. I have tried just about everything here, and again I recommend getting castled with 7...Be7 8.Bg2 0-0. Then 9.a4 is well met with 9...Nc6! followed by ...Nb4, as is often the case in the Najdorf. So 9.0-0 is more challenging, when 9...b5 10.Nd5 is the modern choice. 10...Nbd7!? 11.Nec3 Bb7 is our reply, maintaining the tension, when Black is not worse at all.

Chapter 17



6.f4

Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.f4 e5 7.♘f3 ♘bd7

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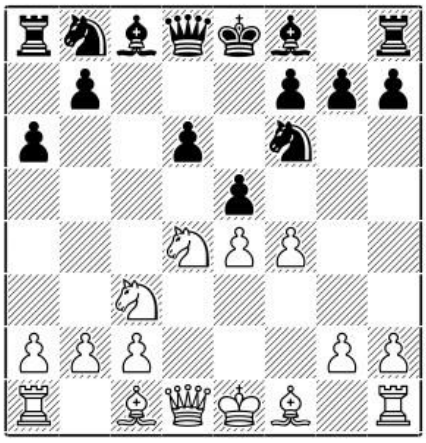
1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.f4

This blunt attacking move gained some popularity in the 1980s and 90s. It was enthusiastically recommended in John Nunn's *Beating the Sicilian* books. Long ago I found this line to be rather annoying as it can lead to the 'e4 vs. d6' pawn structure that I once dreaded. Nowadays 6.f4 is not very popular, as Black has more than one good way to meet it.

6...e5

This is the main move and I have no hesitation in recommended it.

Out of the many other decent options, I will mention 6...Qc7 as a good choice which I have played many times. Black may still follow up with ...e5, but ...g6 is also possible. This was recommended in King's old work, and it is also covered as a secondary line in *The Sharpest Sicilian 2012*.



7.Nf3

This is almost always played. In a way, it is the whole point of 6.f4: the knight can return to the kingside without blocking the f-pawn.

7.Nb3 has been played several times but it makes little sense to me. After 7...Nbd7 Black can continue with normal moves, while the advance of White's f-pawn looks a bit rash.

White can, however, fling the knight forward with:

7.Nf5!?

I have run into this move several times in blitz. I always assumed it was 'bad' although I could never prove it. Indeed, it is not a move which can be refuted outright – but at the same time, it is rare for a reason, and Black has more than one route to a comfortable game.

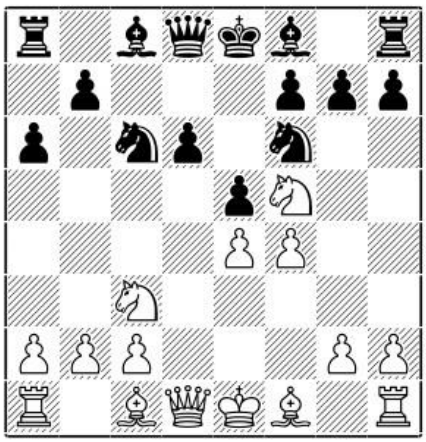
7...Nc6!?

This is a good reaction, and it was played by a young Giri.

The thematic 7...d5 runs into 8.Ne3! when 8...d4?! 9.fxe5 Ng8 10.Bc4! gives White a strong attack.

Another typical idea is 7...Nxe4 8.Nxg7† Bxg7 9.Nxe4 d5, but it only leads to an unclear game after 10.Ng3 or 10.Nc3.

Of course taking the knight with 7...Bxf5 is natural. After 8.exf5 I found a new idea: 8...Nc6N 9.g4 d5 10.g5 d4 11.gxf6 Qxf6!? 12.Ne4 (the passive 12.Nb1? gets killed after 12...Qh4† 13.Ke2 Qg4† 14.Ke1 Bb4† 15.c3 Qh4† 16.Ke2 0-0-0–+; and 12.Nd5 Qh4† 13.Ke2 Qg4† 14.Kd2 Bb4† 15.Nxb4 Qxf4† 16.Ke1 Qh4† is a draw) 12...Qh4† 13.Nf2 (13.Ng3? exf4 14.Qh5 Qe7†µ) 13...e4© This certainly looks like fun for Black.



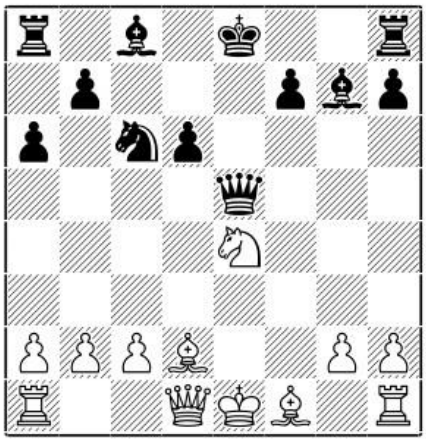
8.fxe5?!

8.Bd3? Bxf5 9.exf5 Qb6 leaves White too exposed.

8.Bc4 seems like his best bet, although Black obtains good counterplay after 8...Bxf5 9.exf5 Qa5 with a possible ...0-0-0 next.

8...Nxe4 9.Nxg7† Bxg7 10.Nxe4 Qa5† 11.Bd2 Qxe5

Black's pawn structure may not be pretty but his active pieces more than make up for it.



12.Qe2 0-0 13.Bc3 Nd4 14.Rd1 Nxe2 15.Bxe5 Bxe5 16.Bxe2 Bf5

Black had excellent play with his pair of bishops in Broekmeulen – Giri, Roosendaal 2009.

7...Nbd7

This is the main move.

Andriasyan likes 7...Qc7. Although this move stops Bc4, it weakens the d8-h4 diagonal, so White is more likely to get in Nh4 or even, after fxe5 dxe5, a possible exchange sacrifice on f6. One troubling example continued: 8.Bd3 Nbd7 9.0-0 Be7 10.Kh1 0-0 11.Nh4!? Nc5 12.fxe5 dxe5 13.Bg5! (Andriasyan evaluated White's 11th move as dubious, but only considered 13.Nf5?! Bxf5 14.Rxf5 Rad8³) 13...Be6 14.Nf5*ƒ* White had some initiative and went on to score a quick win in in Smirin – Sarkar, Rockville 2013.

A) 8.Bd3 is worth analysing, but **B)** 8.a4 is the clear main line.

Sometimes White plays 8.Bc4 but I think this asks too much of his position. After 8...Be7 (or 8...b5 immediately) 9.0-0 0-0 (9...b5 10.Bd5 Rb8 is good too) 10.Kh1 b5 Black can be happy; the bishop can easily be exchanged off with ...Nc5 at some point. Looking back at the previous note, the fact that the early Bc4 is harmless reinforces the view that 7...Qc7 is unnecessary.

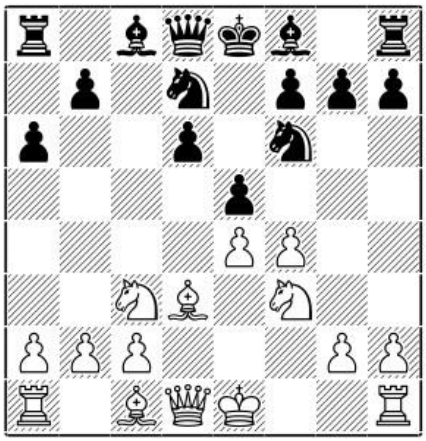
A) 8.Bd3

GAME 47

Roland Schmaltz – Gennadi Timoscenko

Cappelle-la-Grande 1993

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.f4 e5 7.Nf3 Nbd7 8.Bd3



This move has always been frowned upon somewhat, but it still occurs often enough, especially below international level.

8...Be7

Most strong players prefer this developing move.

Black can also play:

8...b5

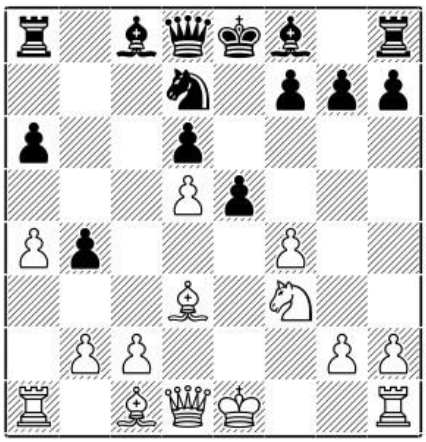
Not giving White a chance to 'change his mind'. This is perfectly fine too, and I have played both move orders myself. White's only way to mix things up is with:

9.a4!?

If White is going to play this move, he should do so immediately.

9.0-0 Be7 10.a4?! is worse in view of 10...b4 11.Nd5 Nxd5 12.exd5 Bb7[3] when the d5-pawn is a target.

9...b4 10.Nd5 Nxd5 11.exd5



11...Bb7

11...Be7 12.Bd2 is similar.

12.Bd2!?

I do not think that White is better, but Black should take some care as he has not developed the kingside yet.

9.0-0

Of course 9.a4 is possible, leading to variation B2 below.

9...0-0

9...b5!? could be a smart move order, as we saw in the note above that 10.a4?! does not work well for White.

10.Kh1

This is the most common continuation; the possibility of disruptive checks on the g1-a7 diagonal is quite real, as we shall see in the notes below.

This is White's last chance for 10.a4!, transposing to variation B2. Black could have taken this possibility away a move earlier, as noted above.

It is worth mentioning that releasing the tension with 10.fxe5?! dxe5 is almost always premature around this stage of the game, unless it

is connected with a concrete tactical idea.

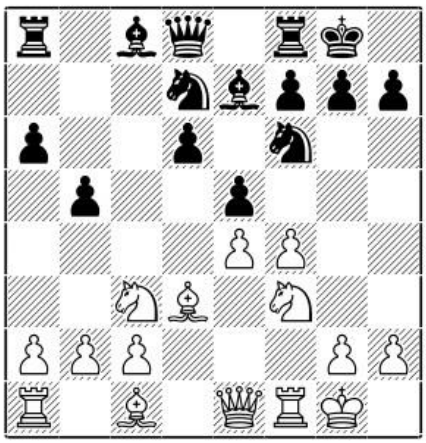
The most significant alternative is:

10.Qe1

Intending to swing the queen to the kingside.

10...b5

10...Nc5 is also possible, but we will consider the advance of the b-pawn, especially as it could have come as early as move 8.



11.fxe5

I checked three other possibilities:

a) 11.Kh1 transposes to 11.Qe1 in the notes to the main game below.

b) 11.a3 can be met by 11...Re8!? when White does not really have anything better than 12.Kh1, transposing to the main game. (11...Bb7 is also playable.)

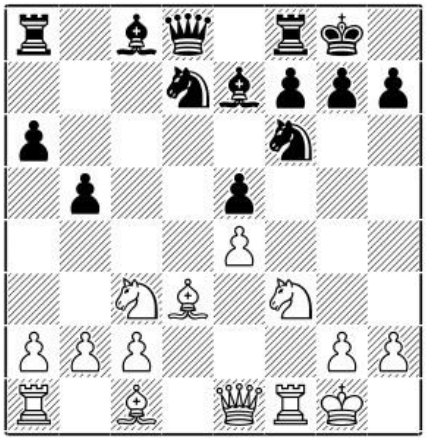
c) 11.a4 is combative but not very scary. 11...b4 (11...bxa4!? is also decent; neither of White's pieces really want to be on a4) White has a choice:

c1) 12.Nd5 Nxd5 13.exd5 Bb7 14.fxe5 dxe5 (14...Bxd5!?N) 15.Nxe5 has been played in a couple of games, when 15...Nxe5 16.Qxe5 Qxd5 has given Black easy equality but 15...Nf6!N[3] would be more ambitious.

c2) 12.Ne2 Nc5 (12...a5!? is also good) 13.Ng3 (13.Qxb4? d5–+) This occurred in L. Schneider – De Firmian, Reykjavik 1984, and now I like 13...a5!N[3]. Remember, Black always has the trick 14.fxe5 dxe5 15.Nxe5?? Qd4†, which is one of the reasons for moving the king to h1.

11...dxe5

11...Nxe5= is also fine.



12.Bg5

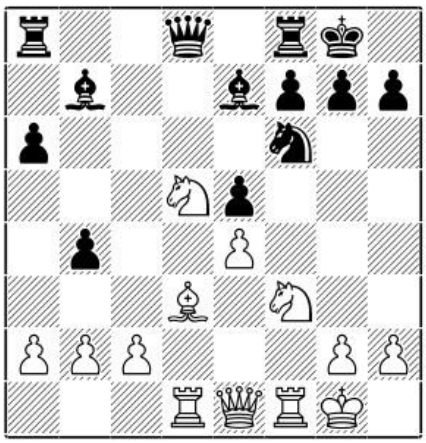
I once faced this against a renowned IM and trainer.

12...Bb7

Flicking in 12...h6 is also fine, but I was loath to weaken the kingside at all against the veteran attacker.

13.Rd1 b4 14.Bxf6 Nxf6 15.Nd5

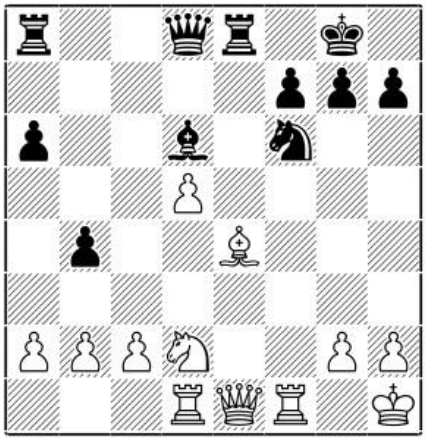
White's play has been very direct – too direct in fact. I missed a strong continuation which would have confirmed this view.



15...Bxd5!N

Instead I played 15...Nxd5 16.exd5 Bd6 when the relatively forcing continuation 17.Nxe5 Re8 18.Qf2 Bxe5 19.Qxf7† Kh8 20.Qxb7 Qh4 21.g3 Bxg3 soon led to a draw in Kapengut – Vigorito, Internet 2011.

16.exd5 e4 17.Bxe4 Bc5† 18.Kh1 Re8 19.Nd2 Bd6!

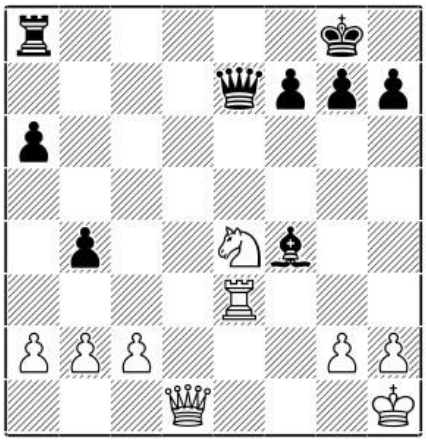


The last move is the detail which escaped my attention. Black threatens 20...Nxe4 21.Nxe4 Re5! when there is no escaping the pin, and ...f5 or ...Qe7 will decide.

20.Rf3

This is forced, as are White's next few moves.

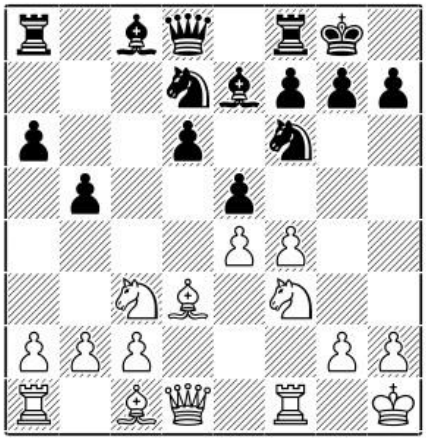
20...Nxe4 21.Nxe4 Re5 22.Re3 Qe7 23.Qg3 Rxd5 24.Qf3 Rxd1† 25.Qxd1 Bf4



Black has the initiative and the better minor piece.

10...b5

Well timed, or "finally!", depending on your personal perspective.

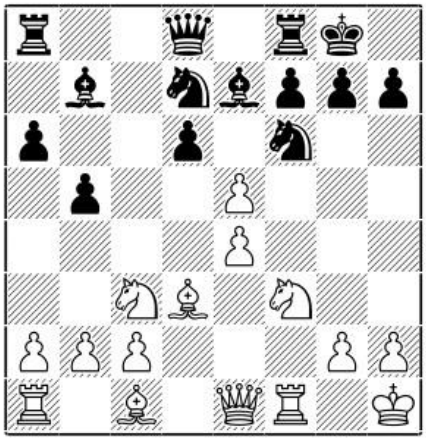


11.a3

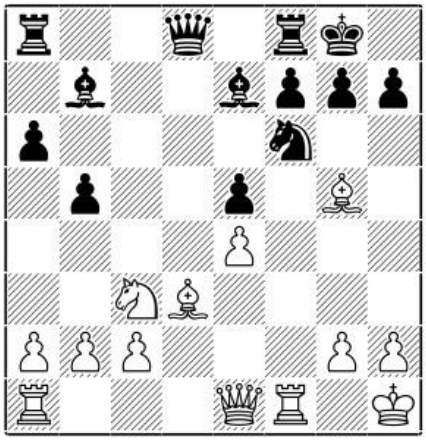
This is the most common move, eliminating any concerns about ...b4 once and for all. It does cost a tempo though – perhaps one that could have been better spent on a2-a4 earlier!? It makes quite a difference, as here Black has more space and the b6-square for either his queen or knight, while White does not have use of the c4-square.

11.fxe5?! dxe5 is uninspiring for White, as it usually is at this early stage.

White can also ignore the queenside with 11.Qe1, when play may continue: 11...Bb7 (Georgiev and Kolev like 11...b4, while 11...Re8 is also logical) 12.fxe5 (12.a3 Re8 transposes to the main game)



Black has a pleasant choice: personally I would lean towards 12...dxe5[3], as Black is not really suffering for space. But 12...Nxe5!? also turns out fine after: 13.Nxe5 dxe5 14.Bg5



And now 14...Nd7!N followed by ...Nc5 should be comfortable for Black.

More combative is:

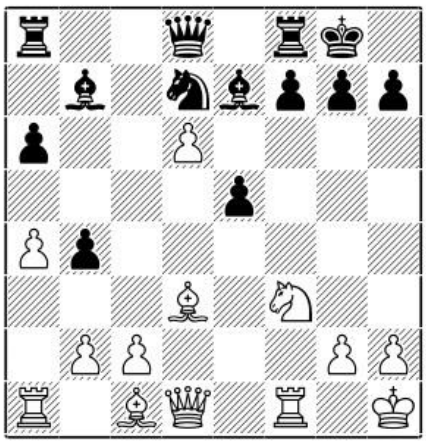
11.a4!? b4

11...bxa4!? could also be considered.

12.Nd5

12.Ne2 is hardly scary; 12...Nc5!?N is one good response.

12...Nxd5 13.exd5 Bb7 14.fxe5 dxe5 15.d6!?



This has been tried in a couple of correspondence games.

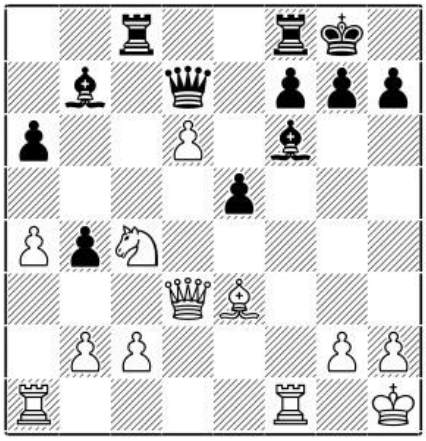
15...Bf6

15...Bxd6? allows 16.Bxh7† Kxh7 when White's idea is not to recapture on d6, but rather to play 17.Ng5†! with a decisive 'Greek gift' attack.

16.Nd2 Nc5 17.Nc4 Nxd3 18.Qxd3

18.cxd3 a5,, was Poleshchuk – Churkin, corr. 2010.

18...Rc8 19.Be3 Qd7



20.Qe2

20.Nb6?! achieves nothing in view of 20...Qg4.

20...Bd8 21.b3 f5,,

Black was doing fine in Pina Fernandez – Rocco, corr. 2010. Still, perhaps White should have considered this, as at least the game is complicated, whereas in the main lines White can easily become worse, as we shall see.

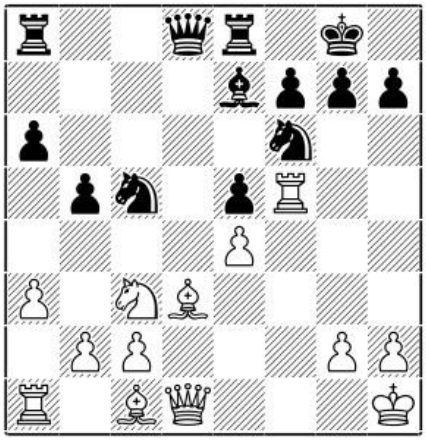
11...Re8!?

Somewhere during the course of my Najdorf education I learned that it was better to play this move before ...Bb7, so that Nh4-f5 is easily defused for one more move. In fact, 11...Bb7 is playable and is quite likely to transpose anyway after 12.Qe1 Re8. I analysed some independent possibilities after 11...Bb7 and found that Black is okay everywhere; but still, the text move would remain my first choice.

12.Qe1

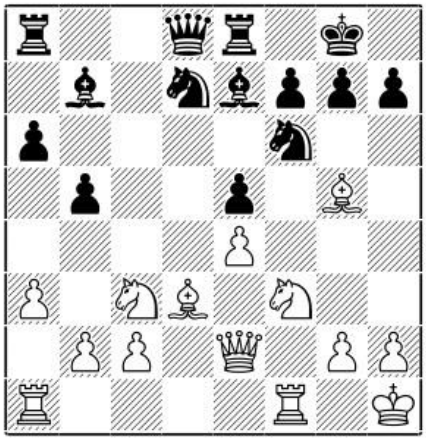
12.fxe5 dxe5 13.Bg5 Bb7 14.Qe1 transposes to the main game.

As promised, 12.Nh4 is completely toothless against our chosen move order: 12...Nc5! 13.fxe5 dxe5 14.Nf5 Bxf5 15.Rxf5



15...Ncxe4! 16.Nxe4 Nxe4 17.Qe2?! (17.Be3 was a better try although 17...Nd6 18.Rxe5 Bf6 19.Rxe8† Qxe8 still leaves Black with some initiative) 17...Nc5! 18.Rxe5 Bf6µ Black enjoyed a serious lead in development in Mannion – Donchenko, Isle of Man 2015.

12.Qe2 is hardly an improvement on the game continuation: 12...Bb7 13.fxe5 dxe5 14.Bg5 (14.Nh4 g6 15.Bg5 Qb6 16.a4 b4 17.Nb1 Nh5! also reached a good position for Black in Van der Wiel – Portisch, Amsterdam 1990)

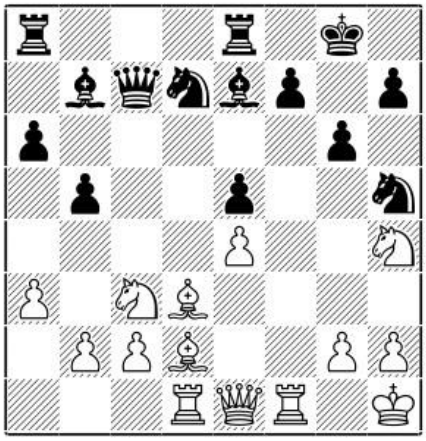


14...Ng4! 15.Bxe7 (or 15.Bd2 Nc5) 15...Qxe7 16.h3 Ngf6 17.Nh4 g6 18.Rad1 Rac8 19.Qf2 Nh5 Black had the more pleasant position in Overgaard – O. Johansen, corr. 2011.

12...Bb7 13.fxe5

White is running out of ideas; 13.Nh4? Nxe4 certainly does not work.

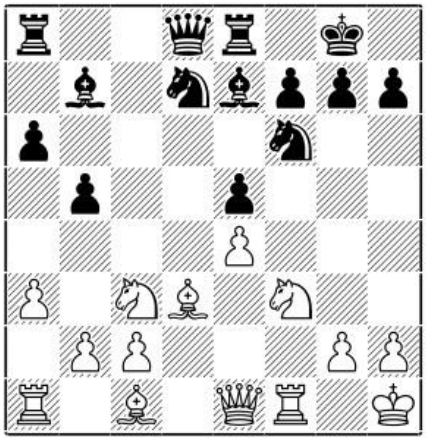
13.Bd2 also does not contribute much. 13...Nh5! is a good answer, when a nice example continued: 14.fxe5 dxe5 15.Rd1 Qc7 16.Nh4 g6



17.Bh6 Ndf6 18.Nf3 Rad8 19.Ng5 Bf8 20.Bxf8 Rxf8 21.Qh4 Kg7³ Ziatdinov – Wojtkiewicz, Zwolle 1995. White's attacking chances are illusory while Black's positional advantages are long-lasting.

13...dxe5

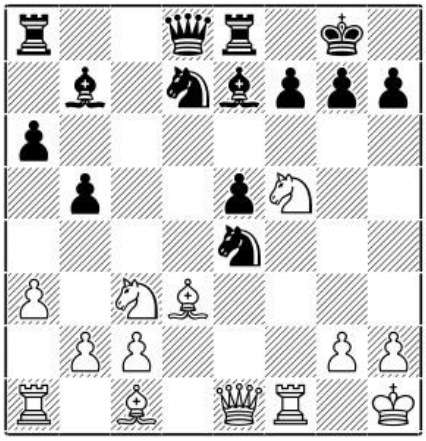
13...Nxe5 is certainly playable, but there is no need to exchange pieces as Black has good squares for everything. On the other hand, White's pieces appear rather clumsy.



14.Bg5

The rash 14.b4?! has been tried a couple of times, but after 14...Rc8 White has only weakened his queenside.

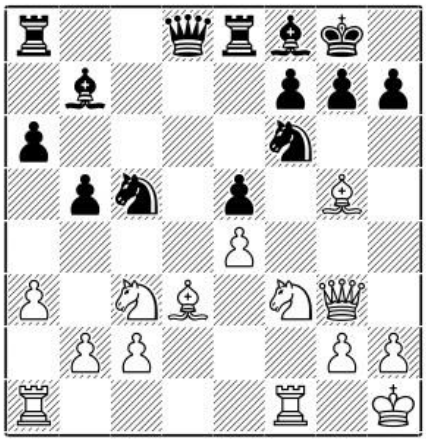
White would like to play 14.Nh4?! but it does not really work if Black is accurate. 14...Nxe4 15.Nf5



15...Nd6! (but not 15...Nef6? 16.Qg3 g6 17.Nh6† Kg7 18.Bg5 when White's attack is too much) 16.Bh6!? Nxf5 17.Bxf5 Nf8µ Hayrapetyan – Ter Sahakyan, Jermuk 2010.

14.Be3 Qc7 (the engines are also happy to play 14...Nc5!? 15.Nxe5 Qc7) 15.Nh4 g6 16.Qf2 Kh8 17.Qf3 occurred in Schmaltz – Puth, Gladenbach 1997, when 17...Nc5!N would have put White under pressure.

14.Qg3 is another attacking try, but 14...Nc5 (14...Rc8 15.Bh6 Nh5 as played in Maryasin – K. Szabo, Gibraltar 2009, is also good) 15.Bh6 Bf8 16.Bg5 can be met cleverly with:

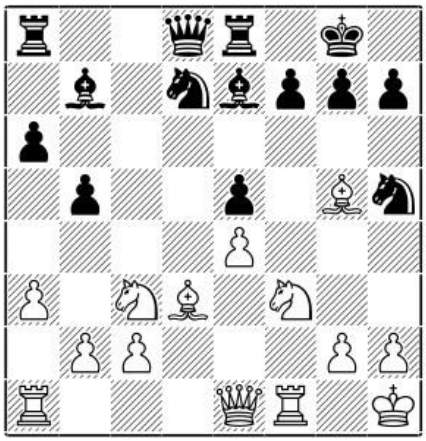


16...h6! 17.Bxf6 (17.Bxh6 Nxd3 18.cxd3 Qxd3µ) 17...Qxf6 18.Nh4 Qg5³ Vornanen – Fuhrwerk, corr. 2007.

14...Qb6

This is a healthy, active move, but not the only good option.

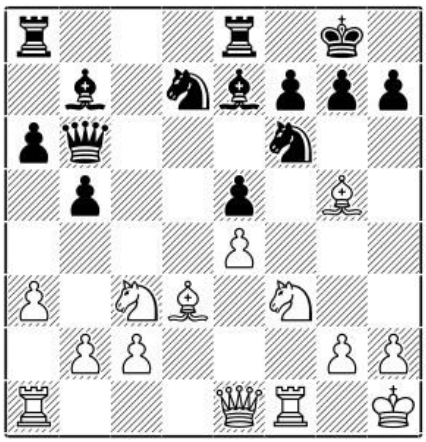
14...Nh5!? is also good, and highly thematic. White faces an uninspiring choice:



a) Black welcomes the exchange of dark-squared bishops with 15.Bxe7 Qxe7³.

b) Retreating with 15.Be3 allowed 15...Nf4³ (or 15...Rc8N³) in L. Schneider – Akesson, Borlange 1995.

c) White has usually tried to keep something going on the kingside with 15.Qh4, but then 15...Bxg5N 16.Nxg5 (or 16.Qxh5 Bf4) 16...Nhf6³ looks very comfortable for Black.



15.Nh4

This is the move White has been waiting to play, but Black's defensive resources are more than sufficient; White has yet to score at all from this position.

15...g6

The slight weakening of Black's kingside is quite tolerable.

16.Be3

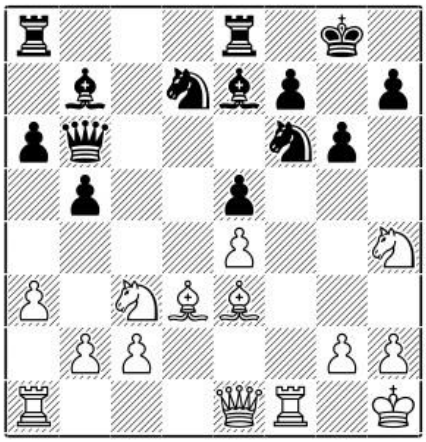
White's kingside ambitions have reached a

standstill and it is hard to offer him good advice.

After 16.Nf3 Nh5 17.Bxe7 Rxe7 the bishop trade once again favoured Black in Henao – Browne, Los Angeles 1991.

Similar play may come about after 16.Rd1 Nh5 17.Nf3, as in Zahariev – Delchev, Bankia 1992, when I would suggest 17...Bxg5N 18.Nxg5 Ndf6³ with ...Rad8 to follow.

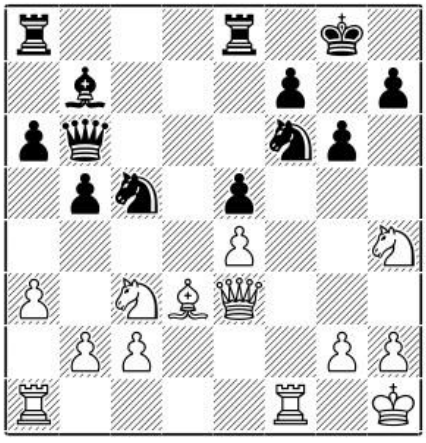
It may seem like White should strive to keep the dark-squared bishop on the board with 16.Bd2?!, but then 16...Nc5µ produces too much pressure on White's centre.



16...Bc5 17.Bxc5

17.Bg5 is a possible try for a repetition, but Black can meet it with 17...Rac8 or even 17...h6!? intending 18.Bxh6? (18.Bd2 Bf8³) 18...Ng4! when White loses material.

17...Nxc5 18.Qe3



18...Re6!

This is an important resource in these positions. Black guards his queen and overprotects the f6-knight, and may double rooks on another file at a suitable moment.

19.Rae1 Nxd3

19...Rd8 and 19...a5!? are promising alternatives, but the game continuation works fine.

20.cxd3

20.Qxd3 a5!µ works out well for Black, while 20.Qxb6 Rxb6 21.cxd3 Rd8µ is similar to the game.

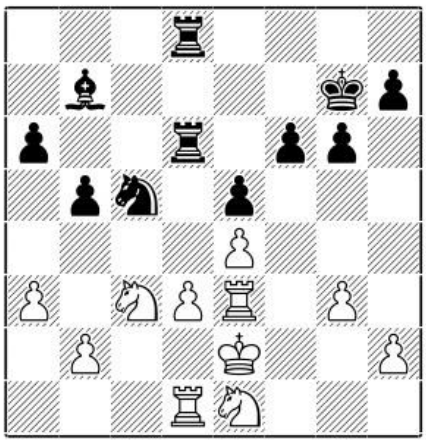
20...Qxe3 21.Rxe3 Rd8µ

The game has turned into something of a horror show for White. His attacking dreams fell flat and he is left with a miserable endgame.

22.Ref3 Kg7 23.Kg1 Rd7 24.Kf2 Ne8

The knight seeks better employment.

25.Re3 Red6 26.Rd1 Nc7 27.Nf3 f6 28.g3 Ne6 29.Ne1 Nc5 30.Ke2 Rd8



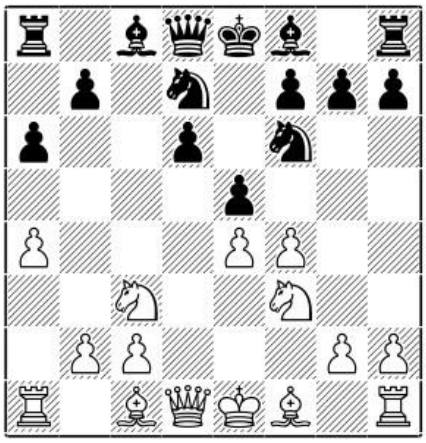
31.Nc2?

White's position is probably indefensible in any case, but this hastens the end.

31...Bc8! 32.Ne1 Bg4† 33.Nf3 Nb3!

0–1

B) 8.a4

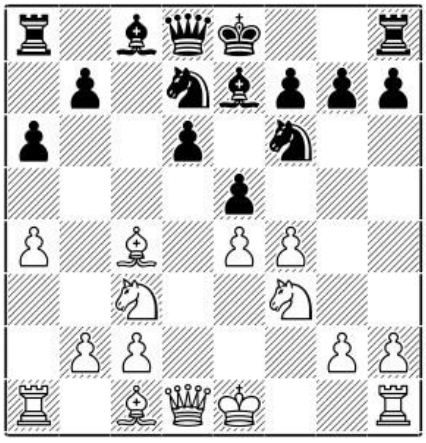


This is by far the main move. White stops ...b5 once and for all and secures the c4-square for his pieces.

8...Be7

Now **B1)** 9.Bc4 is a common enough alternative, but the most popular move by far is **B2)** 9.Bd3.

B1) 9.Bc4



This logical-looking move is a favourite of Smirin. The bishop is active but also a bit vulnerable, as is the e4-pawn.

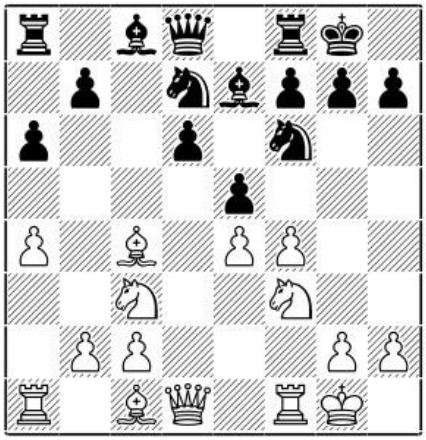
9...0-0

Simple enough.

Most works prefer 9...Qa5 which prevents 10.0-0?? because of 10...Qc5†. White usually continues 10.Qe2 though, so I would prefer not to commit the black queen so early.

We will consider the most common **B11)** 10.0-0 followed by **B12)** 10.Qe2!?

B11) 10.0-0



This move gives Black a wide choice, including a couple of tactical continuations.

10...Nc5!?

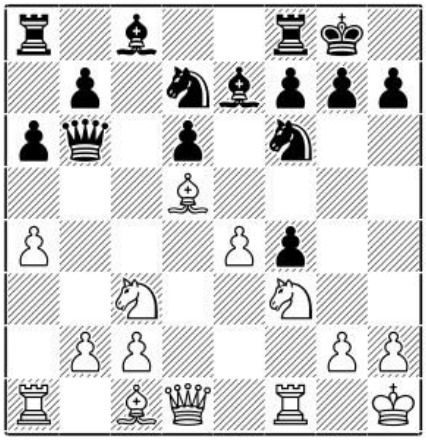
This interesting move is practically a novelty. I will mention two alternatives:

10...Qb6† 11.Kh1 exf4

This is Black's most ambitious approach, but I would be concerned about:

12.Bd5!?

I will focus on this tricky move, although Black would also have to check 12.a5 plus a few other options if he wanted to play this way.



12...Ng4 13.Nd4 Bf6

13...Ne3? 14.Bxe3 fxe3 15.Rxf7!! Rxf7 16.Bxf7† Kxf7 17.Qh5† Kg8 18.Qe8† Bf8 19.Nd5 Qxd4 20.Ne7† Kh8 21.Rf1 was crushing in Van der Wiel – Ribli, Amsterdam 1980.

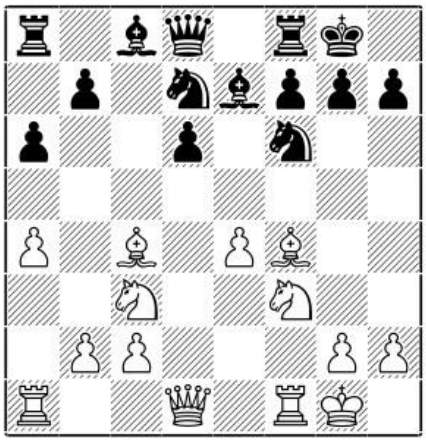
14.Bxf4 Qxb2!

Avoiding 14...Bxd4 15.a5! and 14...Qxd4 15.Qxg4².

15.Nce2 Qb6 16.a5 Qd8 17.Bxd6 Re8

The position was a mess in Martynov – Mignon, corr. 2013. This may be fine in a correspondence game, but it makes no sense for a practical player to prepare such a complicated line, especially against such a rare choice from White.

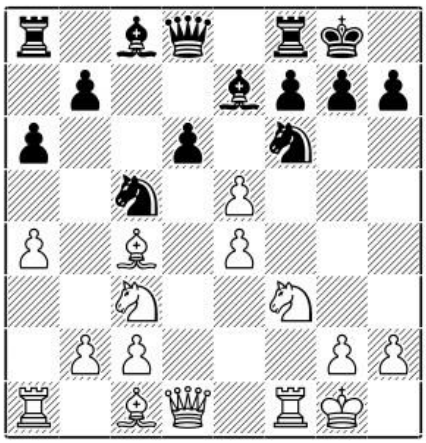
Safer and more thematic is 10...exf4 11.Bxf4 (11.Kh1?! Ne5 12.Bb3 Ng6 holds the pawn) when the simplest approach is:



11...Nc5 (Black has also 11...Qb6† when 12.Qd4 d5! eventually equalizes, but the pawn sac 12.Kh1!? Qxb2 would need to be checked) 12.Qe2 We have transposed to Game 48 below, although this way White has avoided the possibility of 11...Ne5!? as covered in the notes there.

11.fxe5!?N

This is an independent possibility, as opposed to 11.Qe2 exf4 12.Bxf4 which transposes to Game 48.



11...dxe5!?

11...Nfxe4= is a simpler route to a level game.

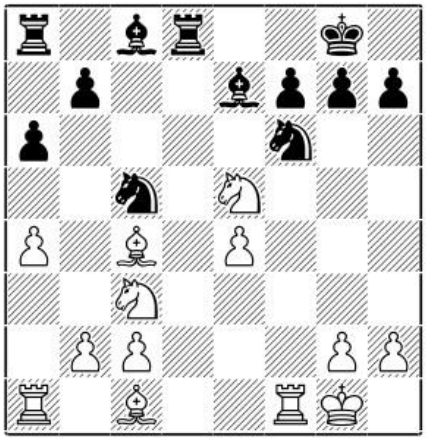
12.Qxd8

12.Nxe5 Qxd1 13.Rxd1 Ncxe4 is fine for Black.

12...Rxd8

12...Bxd8!? 13.Nxe5 Be6 14.Bxe6 Nxe6 also seems okay.

13.Nxe5



13...Be6 14.Bxe6 Nxe6

Black has enough counterplay for the pawn: his bishop can either go to b4 or via c5 to

d4, while ...Rac8 and/or ...Nd4 may also be played at any moment.

B12) 10.Qe2!?

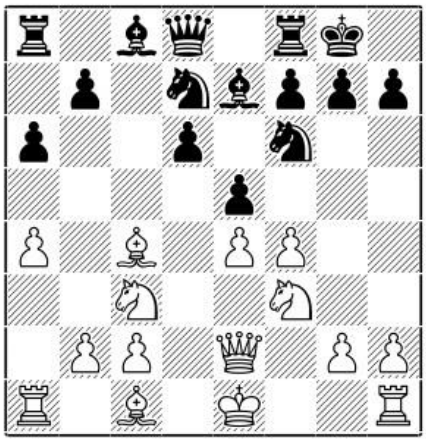
GAME 48

Ilya Smirin – Radoslaw Wojtaszek

Poikovsky 2016

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.f4 e5 7.Nf3 Nbd7 8.a4 Be7 9.Bc4 0-0 10.Qe2!?

This is Smirin's pet line. The queen move avoids certain complications that could have occurred in the previous line, but it gives Black a couple of extra options as well.



10...exf4

Black plays for clarity.

There are some other playable moves, although it is worth pointing out that 10...b6 11.0-0 Bb7 12.Kh1 Qc7 is too risky for my taste after 13.Nh4!? or 13.fxe5 dxe5 14.Bg5.

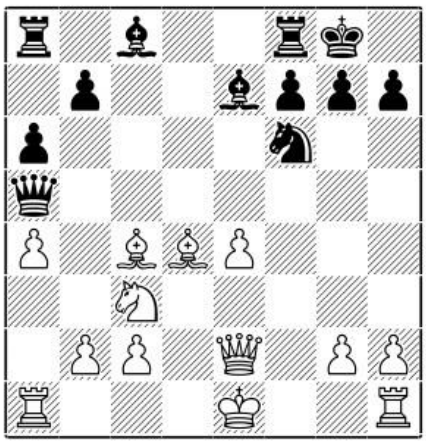
11.Bxf4 Nc5

This is the usual recipe, but an interesting alternative is:

11...Ne5!?

Let me reiterate that White can avoid this with the 10.0-0 move order, but then he allows various complications, though we can choose to avoid these complications and transpose to the main game.

12.Nxe5 dxe5 13.Bxe5 Qa5 14.Bd4



14...Bg4!?

This certainly looks tempting.

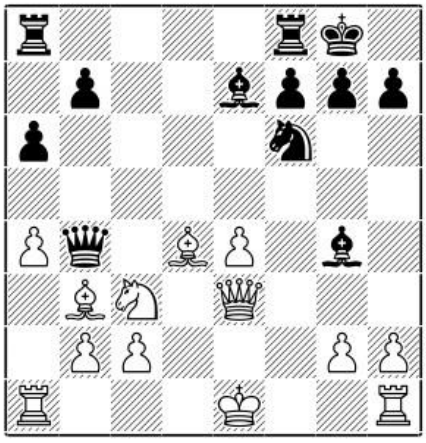
14...Rd8!?N is perhaps even simpler: after 15.Bxf6 Bxf6 16.0-0 Be6! 17.Bxe6 Qb6† 18.Kh1 Qxe6 Black has good compensation for the pawn.

15.Qe3 Qb4

15...Rad8!? 16.Bb6 Qb4 is another possibility, when White should play 17.Bb3, since 17.Bxd8? Rxd8 18.Bb3 Bc5 19.Qf4 Re8 gives Black a winning attack.

16.Bb3

A simple improvement is:

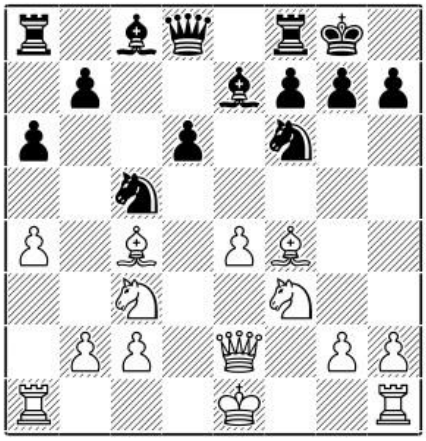


16...Rad8N

16...Nxe4?? 17.Qxe4 Bf6 occurred in Tomczak – Nasuta, Poland 2017, when 18.Qxg4N 18...Bxd4 19.Qf3 Rae8† 20.Kf1+– would have ended Black's dreams.

17.Bb6 Rde8

Black has sufficient compensation and the outcome is unclear.



12.0-0 Be6

Black seeks exchanges, although 12...Bg4 13.Kh1 Rc8 14.Rad1 Qb6 was also possible.

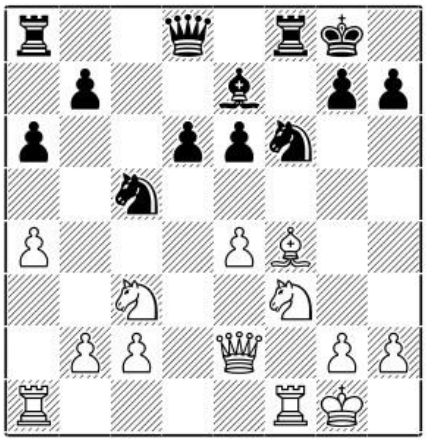
13.Bxe6

After 13.Kh1 I would recommend the straightforward 13...Bxc4!N 14.Qxc4 Rc8 with counterplay. Instead Black initiated complications with 13...Nfxe4 14.Nxe4 Bxc4 15.Qxc4 d5 and was rewarded after 16.Qxc5?! Bxc5 17.Nxc5 Qc8! in Stefansson – Zherebukh, Internet 2018, but 16.Nf6†!N 16...gxf6 17.Qe2² would have favoured White.

13...fxe6!

Black has a funny pawn structure, but he is active enough to hold the balance.

13...Nxe6 is worse in view of 14.Be3² when White has a stable edge.



14.e5

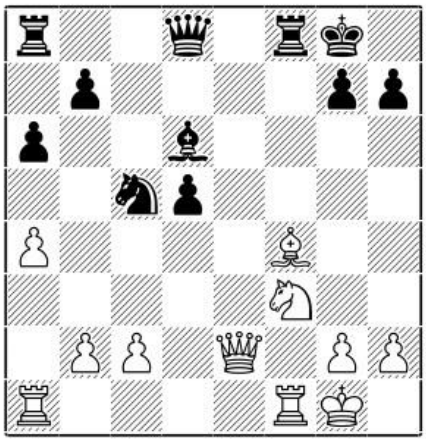
After 14.Kh1 Rc8 15.Rad1 Qe8 16.Bxd6 Bxd6 the players agreed a draw in Baufays – Andeer, corr. 2009. Play could continue 17.Rxd6 Nxa4 when the position is certainly equal, but plenty of play remains.

14...Nd5

This is solid enough, but 14...Nh5!? was also possible. For instance, 15.Be3 Nf4 16.Bxf4 (or 16.Qd2 dxe5 and Black is active enough) 16...Rxf4 17.exd6 Qxd6= and if 18.Rad1 Qb6! Black does well.

15.Nxd5 exd5 16.exd6 Bxd6

Black has an isolated pawn but he is doing fine, as White's structure on the queenside is not ideal either.



17.Be3

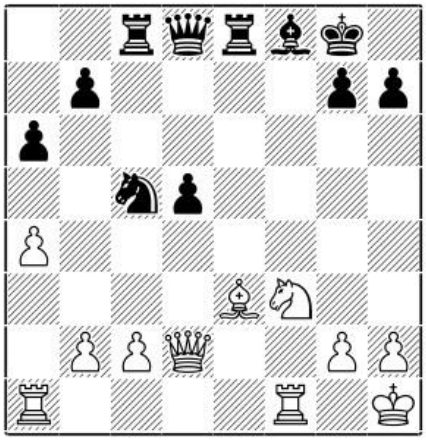
In the event of 17.Bxd6 Qxd6 18.Nd4 Rae8 Black's outpost on e4 maintains the balance.

17...Re8 18.Qd2 Bf8 19.Kh1

White would like to play Rad1 but the a4-pawn is loose.

19...Rc8

19...Ne4 20.Qd3 Rc8 is also fine.



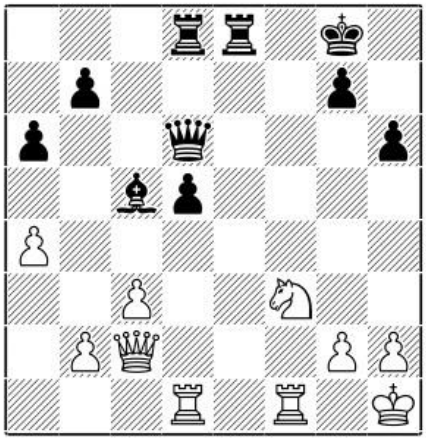
20.Bxc5

20.b3? Ne4 hands Black the initiative.

20.a5 was possible, but the pawn is on the 'wrong colour' and requires attention there too.

20...Bxc5 21.c3 Qd6 22.Rad1 Rcd8 23.Qc2 h6

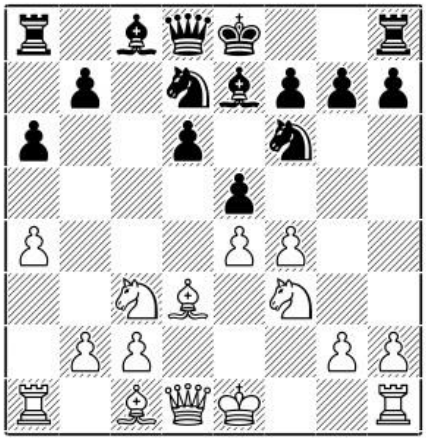
Recognising that he has no advantage, Smirin decides to trade pieces and call it a day.



24.Rfe1 Rxe1† 25.Rxe1 a5 26.g3 Qc6 27.Kg2 Rf8 28.Re5 b6 29.Rf5

½–½

B2) 9.Bd3



This is by far the main continuation. When 6.f4 had a short burst of popularity, it was this variation that was heavily tested.

9...0-0 10.0-0 exf4

Despite appearing committal, this immediate capture masks Black's intentions for another move or two.

10...Nc5 11.Kh1 exf4 is another common move order, transposing to our main line. (11...d5?! is the 'old line' which was popular when Nunn's *Beating the Sicilian* books were published, but White has scored well after 12.Nxe5 no matter how Black captures on e4.)

10...Qc7 transposes to Andriasyan's preferred line but is not the most logical choice for us.

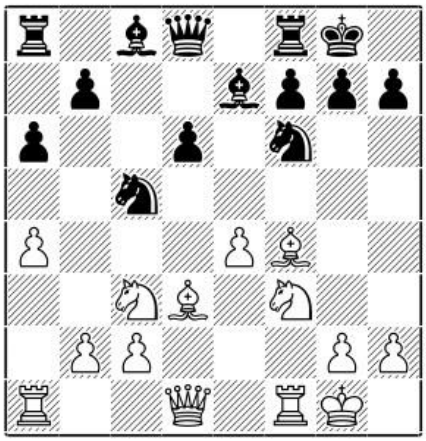
Finally, it is worth noting that Black cannot play akin to the lines without a2-a4 by means of 10...b6?! 11.Kh1 Bb7 12.fxe5 dxe5 13.Nh4 g6 14.Bh6 Re8, because 15.Bc4! would give White the upper hand.

11.Kh1

White can also play:
11.Bxf4
Offering up the b2-pawn.
11...Nc5
This move steers the game into calmer waters.

Taking the pawn 11...Qb6† 12.Kh1 Qxb2 is theoretically fine, and is actually what I always prepared for my own games. However, it does lead to a forced draw if both sides play accurately:

13.Nd5 (13.Qd2?! Qb6 14.Nd5 Nxd5 15.exd5 Nc5 and 13.Qe1 Qb6! 14.Nd5 Nxd5 15.exd5 Qd8 both leave White without sufficient compensation) 13...Nxd5 14.exd5 Nc5 15.Rb1 Qa2 (15...Qa3 is risky because of 16.Bxh7†! Kxh7 17.Qe2 Bf6 18.Bxd6) 16.Ra1 (16.Bxh7†? Kxh7 17.Qe2 does not work here due to 17...Re8! 18.Bxd6 Qxd5!) 16...Qb2=



12.Qd2

12.Kh1 transposes to the main line below.

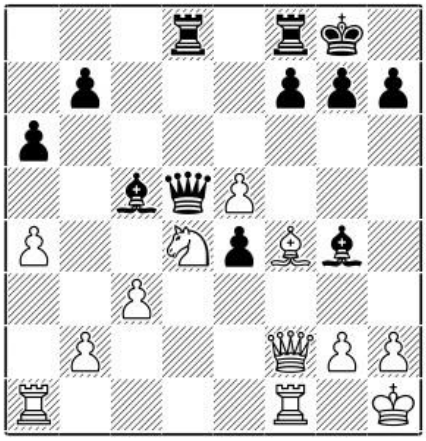
12...Bg4 13.Nd4 d5

There is also 13...Re8 14.Rae1 Rc8 when White found nothing better than playing 15.Kh1 anyway, and 15...Qd7 was fine for Black in Warakomski – Wojtaszek, Warsaw 2011.

14.e5 Nfe4 15.Bxe4 Nxe4 16.Nxe4 dxe4

Black has a comfortable game and White soon started drifting into trouble.

17.c3 Qd5 18.Kh1 Rad8 19.Qf2 Bc5

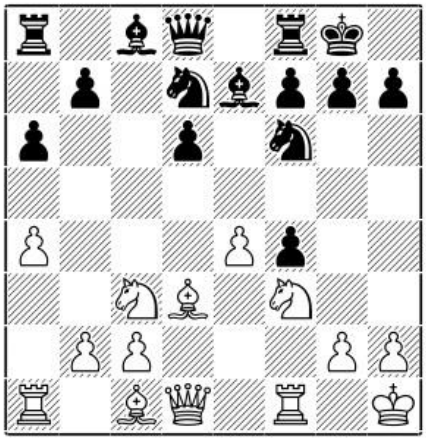


20.Bg5? Rde8

There is also the immediate 20...f6!, exploiting the pin along the 5th rank.

21.Bf4 f6

Black's bishop pair took over in Warakomski – Bernotas, Wroclaw 2014.



11...Nc5

This is the traditional move.

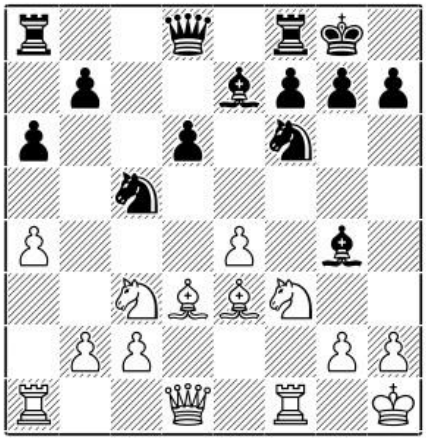
11...Ne5 12.Bxf4 Qc7 is also possible, while the discovery of 11...Nh5 further dampened White's enthusiasm for 6.f4. The latter move was recommended by Georgiev and it is a solid equalizer, but it tends to lead to several early exchanges.

12.Bxf4 Bg4!

This idea stems from Portisch. Developing in this way is a bit unusual for the Najdorf in general, but it makes perfect sense here. Often Black will bring the bishop to h5 and g6 to put pressure on the e4-pawn – but he should not hurry to do this, because White can manoeuvre his knight to f5 and Black would rather not spend so many tempos with his bishop only to exchange it.

White has all of his minor pieces developed, and must therefore decide on a plan. One option is to relocate his bishop with **B21)** 13.Be3, but more frequently he improves his queen with **B22)** 13.Qe1 or **B23)** 13.Qd2.

B21) 13.Be3



This flexible move threatens Bxc5 followed by e4-e5. White also sets up for a later Nd4-f5 when the rook can recapture on f5. Thirdly, he prepares to deploy his bishop as in our main line below.

13...Rc8!

In the other two main lines, this rook development is 'merely' more accurate than the premature ...Bh5. Here, on the other hand, it is necessary! Black cannot ignore White's ideas with 13...Bh5? because 14.Bxc5 dxc5 15.e5 Ne8 16.Nd5!± followed by c2-c4 leaves him in a miserable situation.

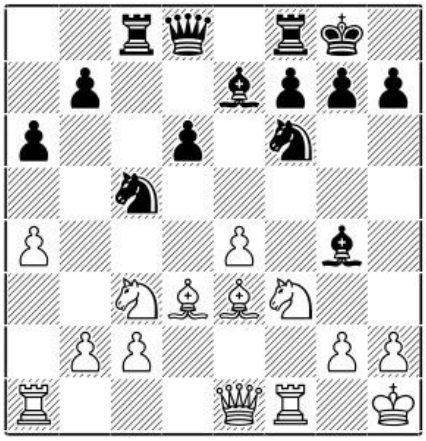
14.Bd4!?

This uncommon move is the most interesting try. The bishop is more ominously posted here than it was on f4.

14.Qd2 transposes to variation B231 below.

14.Qe1

Against this move, I like the following new idea:



14...Nxd3!?N

14...Bh5?! proves to be premature after 15.Nd4 Ng4 (or 15...Bg6 16.Nf5²) 16.Nd5².

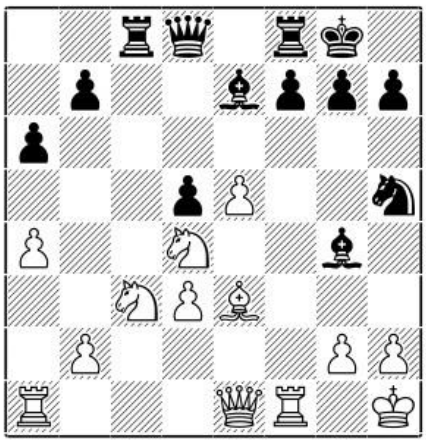
14...Re8 followed by ...Qd7 looks absolutely fine, but the text move is more challenging.

15.cxd3 d5 16.e5 Nh5!?

Threatening ...Bxf3 and ...d4.

17.Nd4

17.d4 could be met by 17...Qd7 or 17...f6.

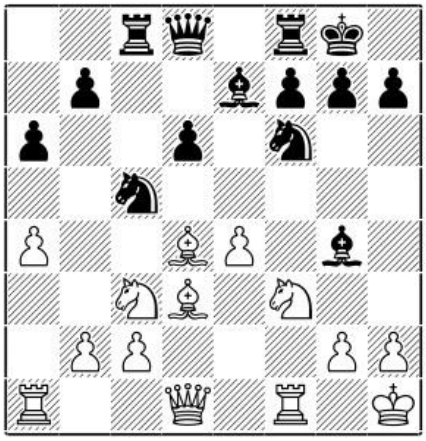


17...Bh4!? 18.Bf2

18.g3 Be7 leaves White's kingside weakened; and 18.Qd2?! Re8 19.Bf4 allows Black to open the position for his bishops with 19...f6!.

18...Bg5

The position is fairly level, but I would take Black's bishop pair.

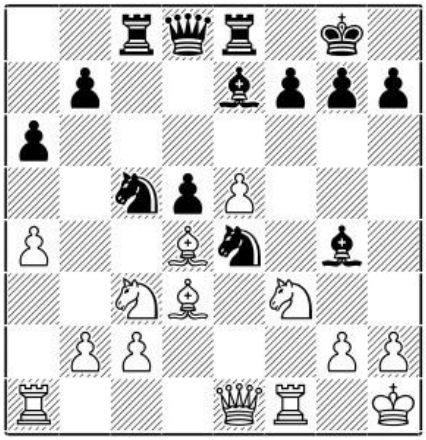


14...Re8

Again 14...Bh5 is premature, and 15.Qe1 Re8 16.Rd1 Qd7 17.a5 Bd8 18.b4 Nxd3 19.cxd3² left Black rather passive in Rebord – Ohtake, corr. 2007.

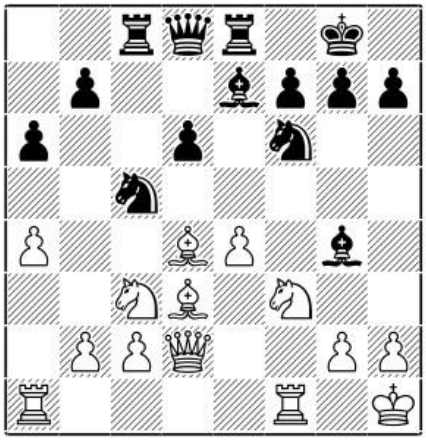
15.Qd2

Not surprisingly, 15.Qe1?! walks into 15...d5! 16.e5 Nfe4 when Black already has the initiative:



17.Nxe4?! dxe4 18.Bxe4? loses to 18...Bxf3, and 18.Bxc5 exd3 19.Bxe7 Qxe7 20.cxd3 Bxf3 21.Rxf3 Qxe5 favours Black with his better pawn structure.

The text move offers Black has a broad choice. An interesting new idea is:



15...d5!?N

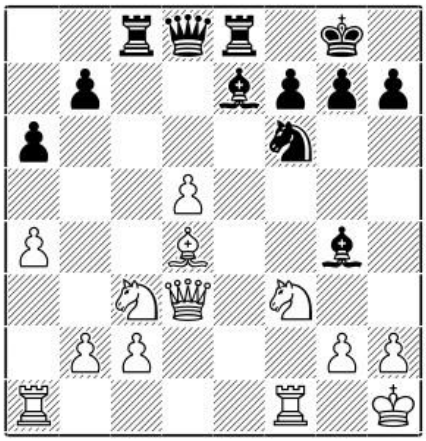
15...Ne6 16.Be3 Nc5= has occurred in practice a few times.

15...Nxd3 16.cxd3 Be6 and 15...Be6!? 16.Ng5 Nfd7 17.Nxe6 fxe6 are also quite playable.

16.exd5

16.Bxc5 dxe4 17.Bxe7 Rxe7 18.Nxe4 Nxe4= achieves nothing special for White.

16...Nxd3 17.Qxd3



17...Bh5!

Intending ...Bg6, with interesting counterplay. (Please note that Black needs to avoid 17...Nxd5? 18.Bxg7!.)

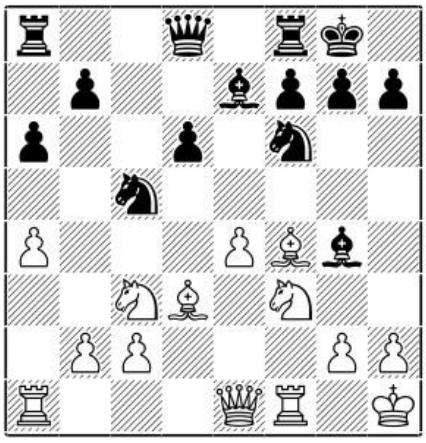
B22) 13.Qe1

GAME 49

Ivan Debnar – Petr Janous

Correspondence 2011

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.f4 e5 7.Nf3 Nbd7 8.a4 Be7 9.Bd3 0-0 10.0-0 exf4 11.Kh1 Nc5 12.Bxf4 Bg4 13.Qe1



Again we see this typical move: the white queen heads for the kingside, and it may also support an e4-e5 advance.

13...Rc8

This move is always useful.

13...Bh5 is normal but I see no reason to play it so soon, and 14.Nh4! gives White decent chances for an edge.

13...Re8 is a good, flexible move though.

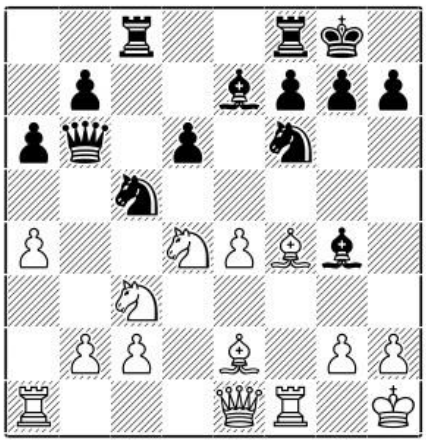
14.Qg3

White continues his plan.

14.Be3 leads back to the 14.Qe1 line in the notes to variation B21 above.

14.Rd1 allows 14...Qb6 with immediate counterplay.

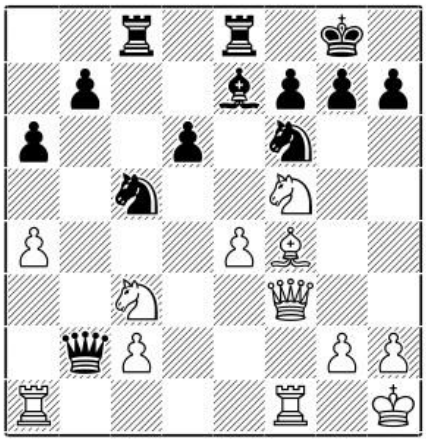
The same can be said about:
14.Nd4 Qb6!„
Here are a few examples:
15.Be2
15.Be3? Qxb2µ was a safe pawn grab in Bartakke – Konguvel, Chennai 2004.



15...Bxe2 16.Qxe2 Rfe8! 17.Nf5 Qxb2 18.Qf3!?N

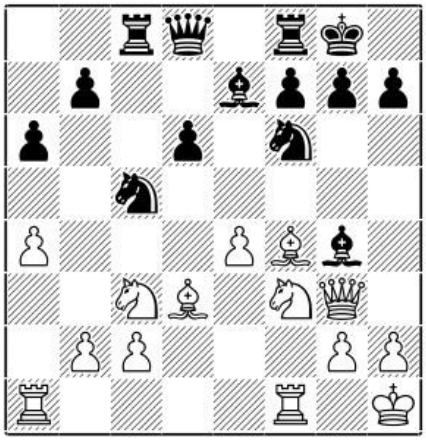
18.Nd5 Nxd5 19.Qg4 (19.exd5? Bf6µ makes things easier for Black) 19...Qf6 20.exd5 Bf8 21.Nh6† Kh8 22.Be3 Qg6 23.Nxf7† Kg8 gave Black the upper hand in Polgar – Anand, Buenos Aires 1994.

The text move is a better try, but Black has more than one decent answer.



18...Bf8

Even 18...Nb3!? is an option. (On the other hand, 18...Qxc2? was praised by Anand but 19.Rac1! Qb2 [or 19...Qd3 20.Nxe7† Rxe7 21.Nd5+–] 20.Bg5! wins for White.)

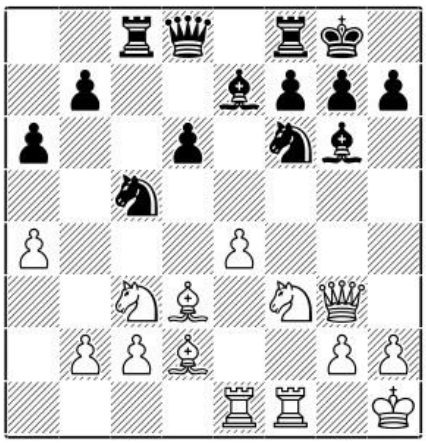


14...Bh5

Finally, it is time for this thematic move.

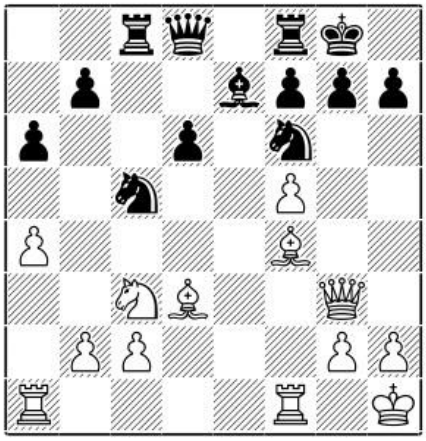
15.Be3

After 15.Rae1?! Bg6 Black has both ...d5 and ...Nh5 in mind. 16.Bd2?! (16.Nd4 was preferable although 16...Nh5 17.Qf3 Nxf4 18.Qxf4 Bf6 still favours Black) Now in Lyukmanov – Grigoryev, corr. 1997, Black missed:

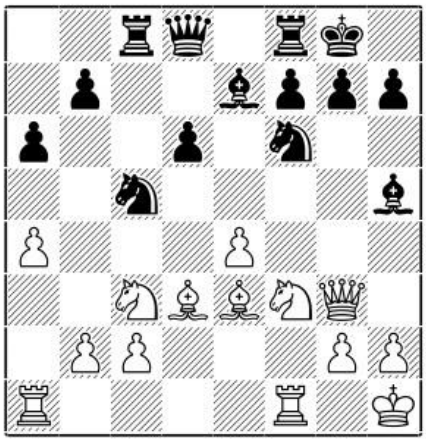


16...d5!Nμ White's central bastions are falling apart.

15.Nd4 Bg6 16.Nf5 is a typical manoeuvre but Black is comfortable after: 16...Bxf5 17.exf5



17...Re8 (other thematic reactions are 17...Nh5 18.Qf3 Nxf4 19.Qxf4 Bf6 and 17...Nxd3 18.Qxd3 d5) 18.Bh6 Bf8 19.Bg5 d5 20.Rae1 ½–½ Henri – De la Pena Balbuena, corr. 2012.



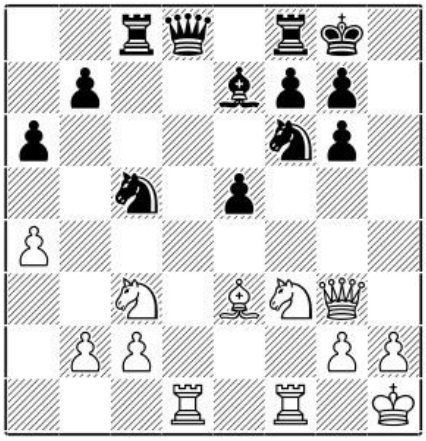
15...Bg6

Already White is under some pressure.

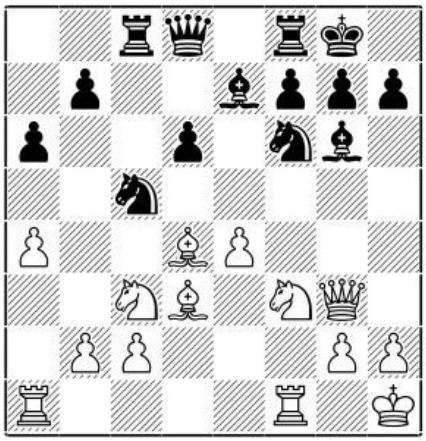
16.Bd4

16.Nd2 Nxd3 17.cxd3 d5! gives Black some initiative.

The attempt to simplify with 16.e5 dxe5 17.Bxg6 hxg6 also works out well for Black, as White has trouble getting his pawn back: 18.Rad1 (18.Qxe5 Ng4 and 18.Nxe5 Qc7 are both unpleasant for White)



18...Qe8!? 19.Ng5 Nfd7 20.Qh4 Bxg5 21.Bxg5 f6 22.Be3 Rc6³ Henri – Catozzi, corr. 2012. White has some compensation for the pawn but it is not really enough.



16...d5!

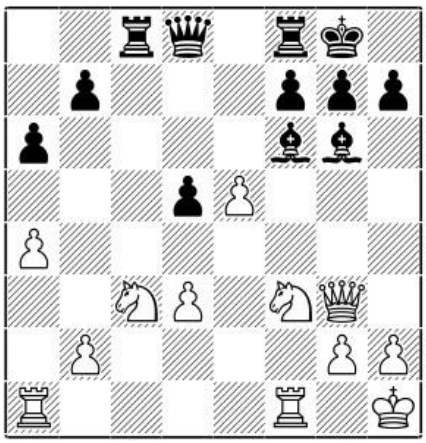
Black is relentless. A rather well-known game (which I witnessed in person!) went 16...Re8 17.Rae1 Qd7 18.b3 Bd8 19.Nh4 Nh5 20.Qf2 Nxd3 21.cxd3 Nf6 and Black went on to win in Sherzer – Wolff, New York 1994. However, no one seems to have noticed that White can easily trade down to a good knight versus a bad bishop with: 22.Nxg6!N 22...hxg6 (or 22...Ng4 23.Qd2 hxg6 24.Nd5± 23.Bxf6 Bxf6 24.Nd5±

17.Bxf6

There is not much else. White quickly gets into trouble after 17.e5 Nfe4µ because the bishop is rather loose on d4, while 17.exd5 Nxd3 18.cxd3 Nxd5µ simply leaves Black with the better pawn structure plus the bishop pair.

17...Bxf6 18.e5 Nxd3 19.cxd3

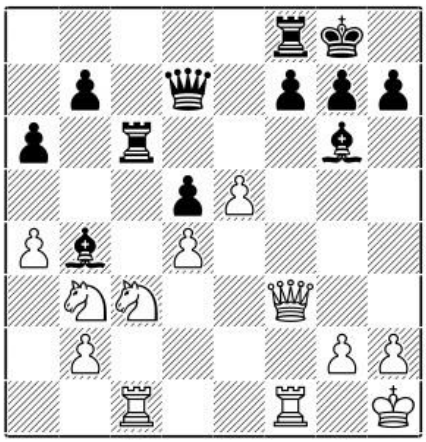
White could try 19.exf6 Nxb2 20.fxg7 which looks messier, but after 20...Re8 White's position is much looser than Black's. The bishop is perfect on g6 for both attack and defence.



19...Be7 20.d4 Rc4³

Black has the bishop pair and some initiative, while White has no active plan.

21.Qg4 Bb4 22.Nd2 Rc6 23.Rac1 Qc8 24.Qf3 Qd7 25.Nb3

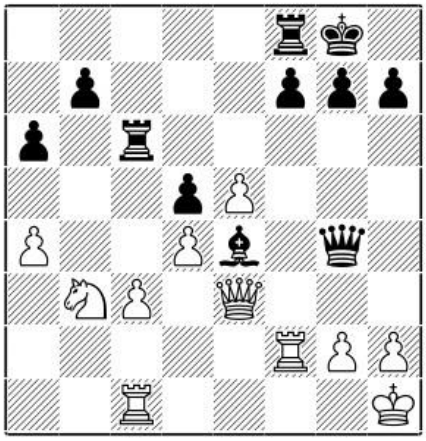


25...Bxc3?!

Giving up the bishop was unnecessary.

25...Rd8!µ would give Black a big advantage. Next he can either play ...b6 to shut down the b3-knight, or ...f6 to open the position,

26.bxc3 Be4 27.Qe3 Qg4 28.Rf2



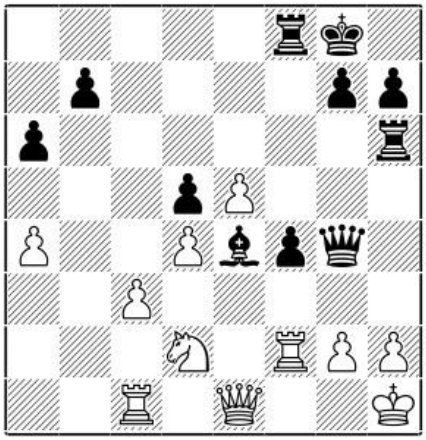
28...f5!?

This is a decent try, as Black's kingside pawn majority is quite potent.

29.Nd2

After 29.exf6? Rcxf6–+ White has problems on g2 and the back rank.

29...f4 30.Qe1 Rh6



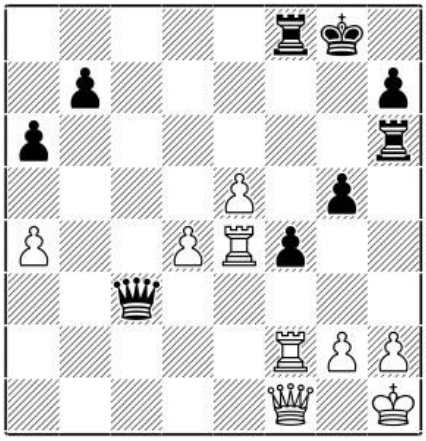
31.Nf3?

31.c4! would have created counterplay, and if 31...Qg3 then 32.Nf3 defends.

31...Qh5 32.Qg1 g5!

White lacks an active plan so Black can afford to advance his king's protective cover.

33.Nd2 Qg6 34.Re1 Qc6 35.Qf1 Qxc3 36.Nxe4 dxe4 37.Rxe4



37...Qg3! 38.Qg1 Rc8

After 38...Rxh2† 39.Qxh2 Qxf2 40.Qh6 Qg3 41.Qe6† Kg7 Black seems to be winning. This would be hard to judge over the board, but in a correspondence game it should be feasible.

39.Rf1

Now White is mostly out of the woods. The rest can pass with minimal comment.

39...Rc2 40.Ree1 g4 41.Rc1 Rd2 42.Rc8† Kg7 43.Rc7† Kg6 44.Rc8 Qd3 45.Rg8† Kh5 46.Rg7 Rb6 47.h3! gxh3 48.Rf3 hxg2† 49.Rxg2 Rb1 50.Rxd3 Rxg1† 51.Kxg1 Rxd3 52.Rg7 Rxd4 53.Rxh7† Kg4 54.Rxb7 Re4

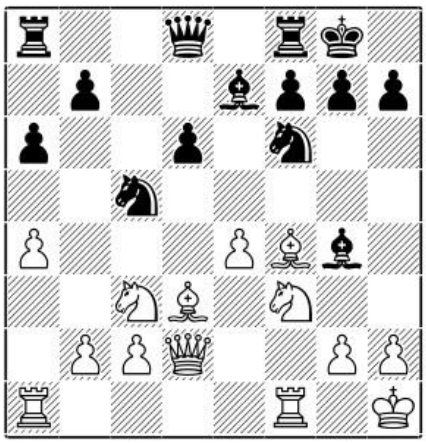
Or 54...Rxa4 55.e6 Kg3 56.Rg7† Kf3 57.Rd7 and White is holding.

55.Kf2 Rxe5 56.Rg7† Kf5 57.Rf7† Ke4 58.Rc7 a5 59.Rc3

Since 59...Kd4 60.Rc7 Rc5 61.Rf7 leads to a draw, Black called it a day.

½–½

B23) 13.Qd2



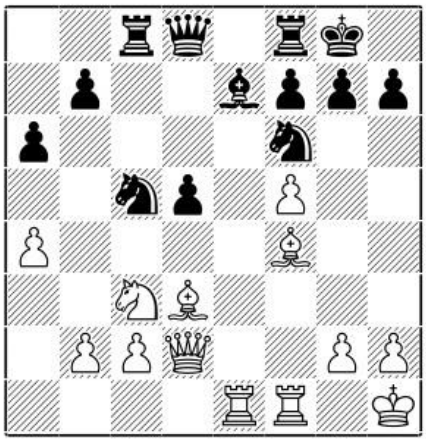
This is White's most popular move. He simply completes development and connects the rooks.

13...Rc8!

Once again we avoid playing 13...Bh5 too soon. 14.Be3 has then scored well for White, with the familiar positional threat of Bxc5 and e4-e5. Now 14...Rc8?! is what Black would like to play, but 15.Nd4 Bg6 (or 15...Ng4 16.Nd5) 16.Nf5 Bxf5 17.Rxf5[2] is pleasant for White.

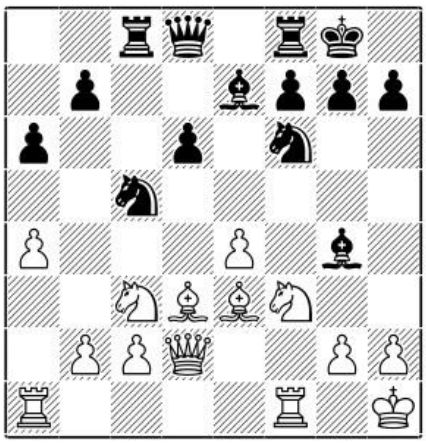
B231) 14.Be3 is a common continuation, and **B232)** 14.Nd4 will be the last branch of the chapter.

Instead 14.Rae1 is rather superficial. A good example continued: 14...Bh5 15.Nd4?! (15.Be3 looks better although Black certainly has nothing to fear) 15...Bg6 16.Nf5 Bxf5 17.exf5 d5



18.Be5 Ncd7 19.Bd4 Bc5 20.Qf2 Qb6 21.Bxc5 We have been following I. Toth – Bruzon Batista, Aviles 1999, and now 21...Nxc5!N 22.Qd4 Rfd8[3] would have left Black well centralized and able to improve his position with moves such as ...h6 and ...Qc6.

B231) 14.Be3



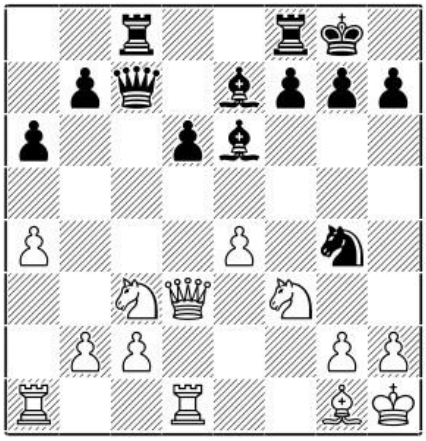
This is a common line, especially taking into account that the position may also arise after 13.Be3 Rc8 13.Qd2.

14...Nxd3!

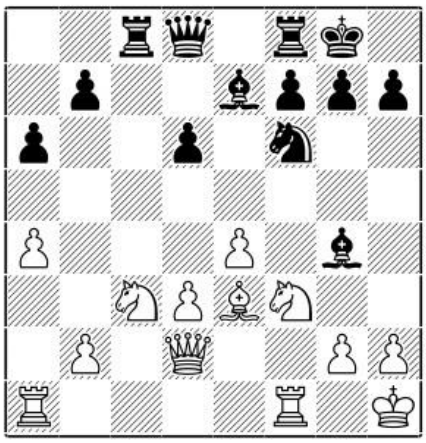
It is still too soon for 14...Bh5, when 15.Nd4 gives White good chances.

15.cxd3

15.Qxd3 is also possible of course. A good reply is 15...Be6, threatening ...Bc4, when play may continue: 16.Rfd1 (16.Nd5 Bxd5 17.exd5 Qc7 is level according to Georgiev and Kolev) 16...Ng4 17.Bg1 Qc7 (17...Bf6, as given by the aforementioned authors, is also good)



18.Nd4 Bf6 19.Nxe6 fxe6 20.Qh3 Bxc3 21.bxc3 Rf4 Black had a pleasant game in Kiran – Konguvel, New Delhi 2007.



15...d5!

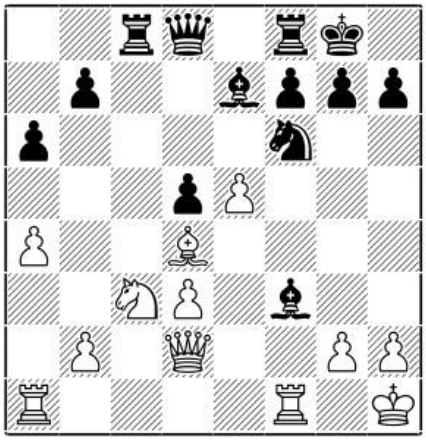
This is thematic of course, but in this particular instance we have some unusual tactical resources.

16.e5

16.Bd4 dxe4 17.dxe4 was seen in Nijboer – Roeder, Antwerp 1997, when 17...Be6N should be a bit better for Black due to his bishop pair.

16...Bxf3! 17.Bd4

After 17.exf6 Bxf6 18.Rxf3 d4 19.Ne4 dxe3 20.Nxf6† Qxf6!³ Black had the better pawn structure in Van der Weide – Shneider, Cappelle-la-Grande 2002.

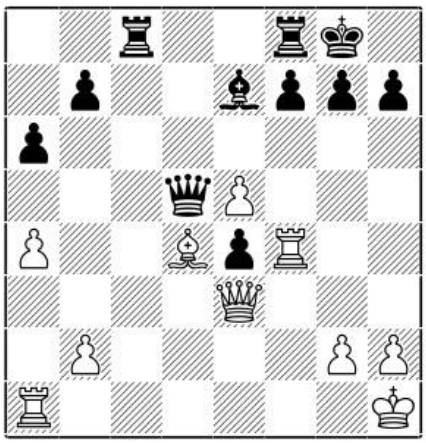


17...Ne4! 18.dxe4 Bxe4 19.Nxe4 dxe4 20.Qe3 Qd5µ

Black has won a pawn, and White's attempt to regain it lands him in even greater trouble.

21.Rf4?

In Warakomski – Nyzhnyk, Warsaw 2012, Black overlooked:



21...Rc4!N–+

Intending 22.Bc3 Bg5, winning the exchange and the game. (The immediate 21...Bg5? would allow 22.Qxe4 of course.)

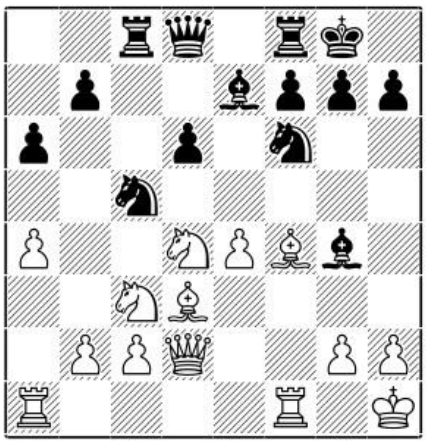
B232) 14.Nd4

GAME 50

Alois Lanc – Gergely Aczel

Slovakia 2016

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.f4 e5 7.Nf3 Nbd7 8.a4 Be7 9.Bd3 0-0 10.0-0 exf4 11.Kh1 Nc5 12.Bxf4 Bg4 13.Qd2 Rc8 14.Nd4



This is certainly a natural move, but Black is well placed to meet it.

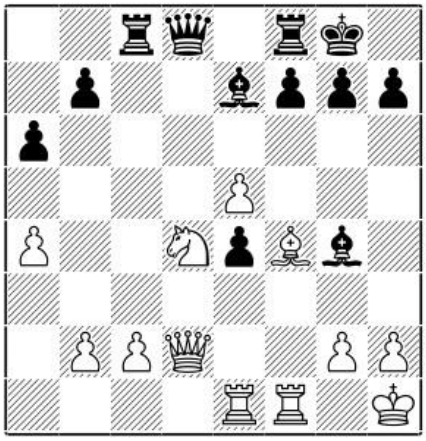
14...d5!

14...Re8= is completely playable but the text move is stronger. This position has been reached several times in practice, although I am not sure why White would go for it; Black already has the initiative.

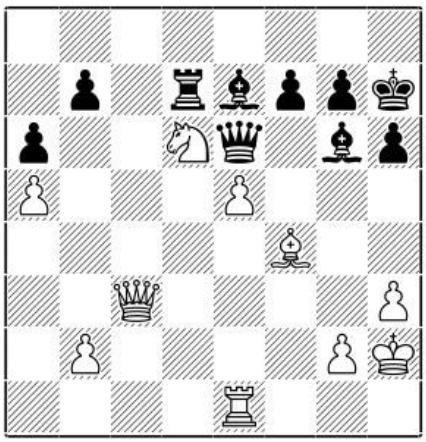
15.e5 Nfe4 16.Nxe4?!

White is loath to give up the bishop, but it would have been the safer choice.

16.Bxe4 Nxe4 17.Nxe4 dxe4 18.Rae1
Black keeps a fine position after:

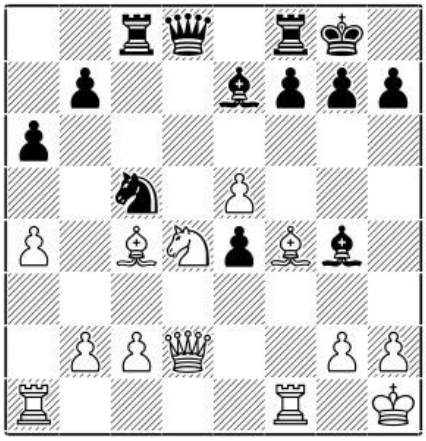


18...Bh5! 19.Nf5
19.Rxe4? Bg6 is strong.
19...Bg6 20.Nd6 e3!
Black has excellent play, for example:
21.Qxe3
21.Bxe3 Rxc2 22.Qd4 h6 does not help White.
21...Rxc2 22.Re2 Rxe2 23.Qxe2 Qd7 24.a5 Qe6 25.Re1 Rd8 26.Qe3 Rd7 27.Qc3 h6 28.h3 Kh7 29.Kh2



29...f6! 30.exf6 Qxf6 31.Qxf6 Bxf6[3]
Black impressively ground out a win with his bishop pair in Van Leeuwen – Vrkoc, corr. 2006.

16...dxe4 17.Bc4



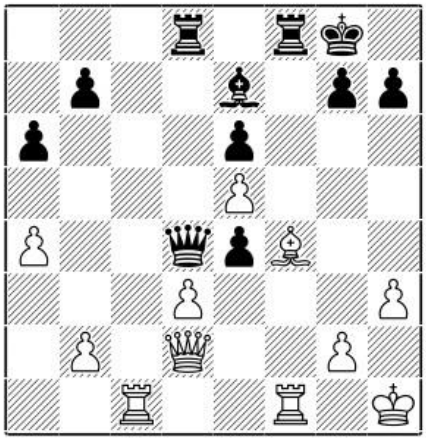
17...Nd3! 18.cxd3

Perhaps the funny 18.Nc6!?N is a better try. After 18...Rxc6 19.cxd3 exd3 20.Bxd3 Be6 Black is only a little better – although it's still not exactly a bad outcome from the opening.

18...Qxd4 19.Bg5

Under pressure, White tries to simplify, but he will remain with a poor pawn structure.

Instead 19.Rac1? Rcd8! produces too much pressure on the d-file. A good example continued: 20.h3 Be6 21.Bxe6 fxe6

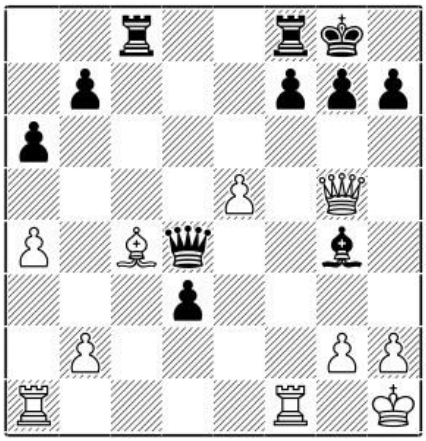


22.Bg5? (losing quickly, but 22.Be3 Rxf1† 23.Rxf1 Qxd3 is terrible too) 22...Bb4 (22...Bxg5 23.Qxg5 exd3–+ also does the job) 23.Qc2 (23.Rxf8† Rxf8 24.Qe3 Qxe3 25.Bxe3 exd3–+) 23...exd3 24.Qb3 Rd5 25.Rxf8† Bxf8 26.Qxb7 Qf2 0–1 Braghetta – Ortega, Verona 1998.

19.h3!?N looks like the best try, although 19...Be6 20.Bxe6 fxe6 21.dxe4 Rc4!? keeps some initiative for Black.

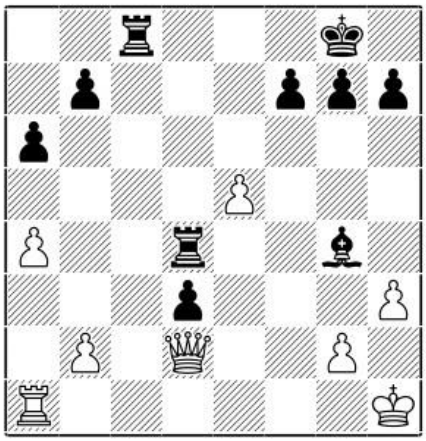
19...Bxg5 20.Qxg5 exd3!

This 'falls into the trap' but White should not bite.



21.Bxd3

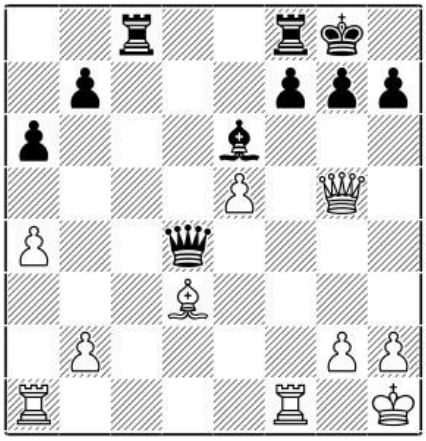
In another game White took the bait with 21.Rf4?, when 21...Rxc4 22.Rxd4 Rxd4 gave Black a huge advantage. Play continued: 23.Qd2 Rc8 (23...h6!?N–+) 24.h3



And now Black should win after 24...Be6N, or 24...Bh5N with the idea ...Bg6. (Instead, 24...Bf5?? ruined everything by allowing 25.Qf2! with a decisive fork in Van den Doel – Bosboom, Leeuwarden 1995.)

21...Be6µ

White's pawns are all rather loose.



22.Rf3

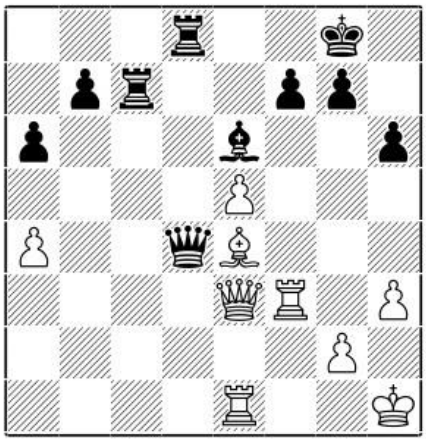
White is looking for some attacking chances, but he would have had more chances to save the game if he tried to trade bishops with 22.Bf5.

22...h6

Everything is good: for example 22...Rc5, or 22...Qxb2 23.Rb1 Qd4 24.Rxb7? Rc3.

23.Qe3 Rfd8 24.Be4 Qxb2 25.Re1 Rc7 26.h3 Qd4

With an extra queenside pawn, every offer to exchange material is a 'threat'. Black converted his advantage with ease.



27.Qf4 Qd2 28.Qg3 Rd4 29.Rfe3 b5 30.axb5 axb5 31.Bd3 b4 32.Kh2 b3 33.R1e2 Qc1 34.Qf3 Qc6 35.Be4 Qc4 36.Bd3 Qd5 37.Qg3 Kh8 38.Bb1 Rc1 39.Re1 Rdd1 40.Be4 Qd2 41.Rd3 Rxe1

0–1

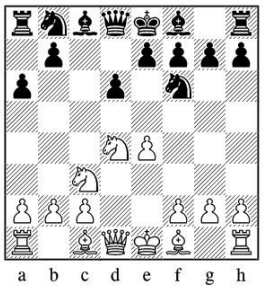
Conclusion

The aggressive 6.f4 is long past its heyday. After 6...e5 7.Nf3 Nbd7 the immediate 8.Bd3 is quite common at lower levels, but Black has excellent chances of getting an advantage with a timely ...b5.

8.a4 is more sensible. After 8...Be7, the active 9.Bc4 is uncommon but not completely harmless, although our classical set-up works fine against it.

The main line is 9.Bd3 0-0 10.0-0 exf4 11.Kh1 when Black has more than one good way to play, but we will go with Portisch's 11...Nc5 12.Bxf4 Bg4!. Today's tools show that Black is doing well and White is the one who needs to be more careful. White has a few different tries on his 13th move. Generally Black should not rush with the thematic ...Bh5-g6, instead preferring ...Rc8 and possibly ...Re8. It is especially important to know about the ...d5 resource, which often works out well when timed correctly.

Chapter 18



Odds and Ends

Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6

A) 6.a4 507

B) 6.Bd3 510

C) 6.Rg1 511

D) 6.Qf3 513

E) 6.Qe2 520

F) 6.Qd3 523

G) 6.a3 524

H) 6.h4 528

I) 6.Nb3 532

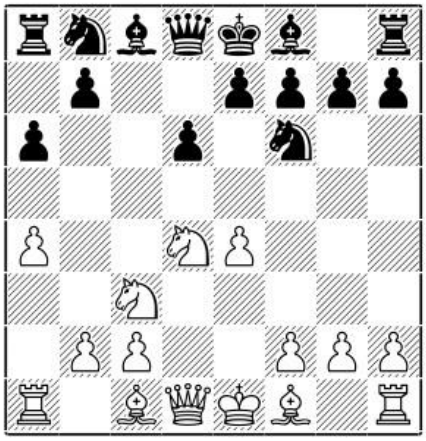
1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6

In this chapter we cover a selection of White's less common sixth moves. They range from the solid 6.a4 to the wacky-looking 6.h4 – from one rook's pawn to another.

There are nine options in total: **A)** 6.a4, **B)** 6.Bd3, **C)** 6.Rg1, **D)** 6.Qf3, **E)** 6.Qe2, **F)** 6.Qd3, **G)** 6.a3, **H)** 6.h4 and I) 6.Nb3.

Maybe someday we will also cover moves like 6.Rb1 and 6.Bd2, but for now these will have to wait.

A) 6.a4



This move is not so unusual, and I have faced it several times. White restricts Black on the queenside and waits for a reaction. We will see that several of White's choices in this chapter are semi-waiting moves.

6...e5

Once upon a time this was frowned upon. The supposed problem is that after White retreats the knight, Black cannot stop both Bc4 and Bg5. As we have seen before though (notably in Chapter 4 after 6.Be3 e5 7.Nf3), Black can allow

these moves and fight against them.

Both 6...e6 and 6...Nc6 are logical, but lead to a different type of game.

Personally, I also like:

6...g6

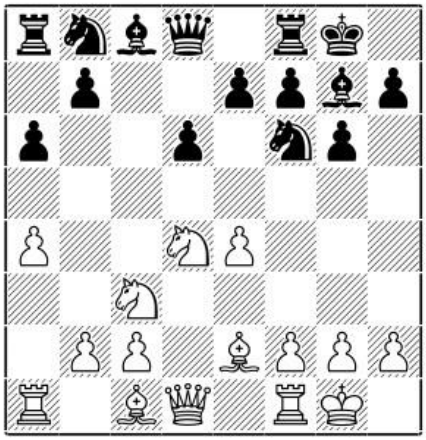
The Dragon is quite a good opening when White cannot play the Yugoslav Attack!

7.Be2

The rather benign 7.g3 is possible too.

7...Bg7 8.0-0 0-0

We have a Classical Dragon with ...a6 and a2-a4 thrown in.



9.Be3

9.Nb3 is more standard, although 9...Nc6 10.Bg5 Be6 11.f4 b5! gives Black a good position. A game of mine continued 12.axb5 axb5 13.Rxa8 Qb6† 14.Kh1 Rxa8 15.Bf3 Bc4 16.Re1 b4 17.Nd5 Nxd5 18.exd5 Nd4 19.Nd2 Nxf3 20.Qxf3 Bb5 21.Qe4 Qf2 22.f5 gxf5 23.Qxe7 h6! and Black was already winning in Fishbein – Vigorito, Philadelphia 1997.

9...Nc6 10.f4!?

This is a clever attempt because 10...Qb6?! (which works well without the moves of the a-pawns) is well met by 11.a5!. Instead Black should play 10...Bd7 or 10...Bg4!? with mutual chances.

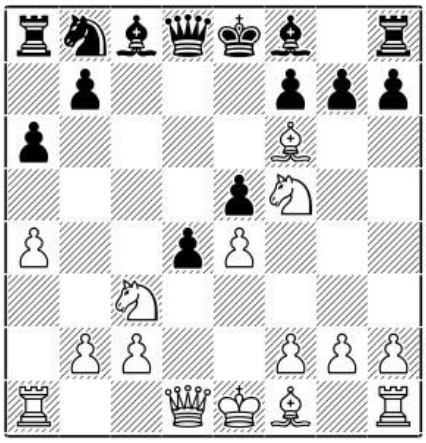
7.Nf3

This retreat is standard – White plays it like the aforementioned 6.Be3 e5 7.Nf3 line.

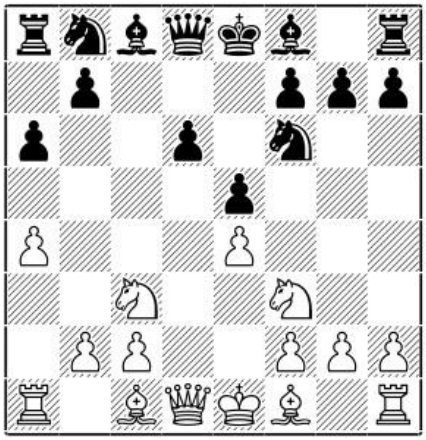
7.Nb3 can be met by 7...Be7 8.Be2 (or 8.Bc4 0-0 9.0-0 Be6) 8...0-0 9.0-0 when we are back in variation B of Chapter 3.

7.Nde2 Be6 (7...d5!? deserves attention) does not leave White with anything better than 8.g3, reaching a fianchetto line where a2-a4 is a bit premature.

Lunging forward with 7.Nf5 does not look so good here: 7...d5 8.Bg5 d4 9.Bxf6



Black's most accurate move is 9...gxf6!, with an improved version of the positions examined later under variation G. Moreover, 9...Qxf6 is fine too: 10.Nd5 Qd8 11.Qg4 is similar to Carlsen – Wojtaszek, as discussed in the notes to variation G, but White's dark squares are weaker due to the placement of the pawn on a4 rather than a3.



7...Be7

I once played 7...h6?! to prevent Bg5; but as I mentioned early in the book, I have come to dislike this idea.

I have also tried 7...Qc7 preventing Bc4. This is not a bad move but, apart from the common 8.Bg5, White could play 8.Be3!?, transposing to the well-known line 6.Be3 e5 7.Nf3 Qc7 8.a4, which is okay for Black but out of our repertoire.

8.Bc4

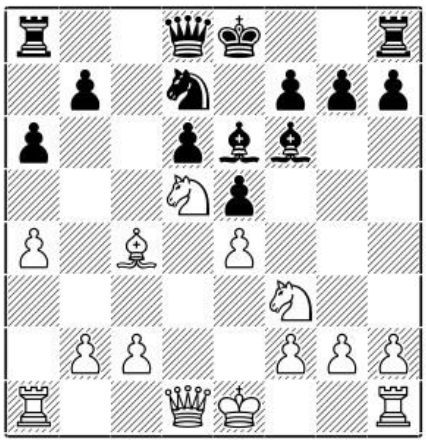
White can also deploy the other bishop:

8.Bg5 Be6

I do not like 8...Nbd7 9.Bc4 when there are problems developing the light-squared bishop.

However, 8...0-0 9.Bxf6 Bxf6 10.Nd5 Nd7 is a valid alternative.

9.Bxf6 Bxf6 10.Nd5 Nd7 11.Bc4



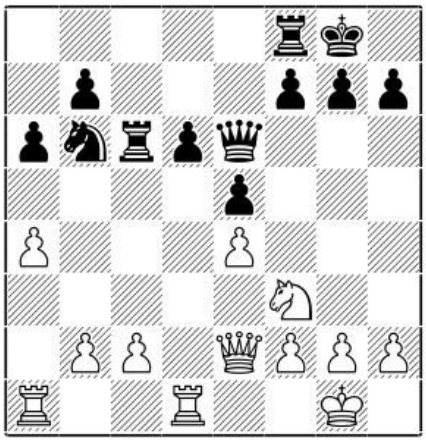
11...Rc8

11...Nb6 12.Nxf6† Qxf6 13.Bxe6 Qxe6 is also fine for Black, though admittedly rather sterile.

12.Qe2

12.b3 Qa5† 13.Qd2 Qxd2† 14.Nxd2 Bg5 15.Kd1 h5! gave Black good play in Kamsky – Topalov, Kazan (1.3) 2011. He has the bishop pair and his last move gains space on the kingside.

12...Nb6 13.Nxf6† Qxf6 14.Bxe6 Qxe6 15.0-0 0-0 16.Rfd1 Rc6

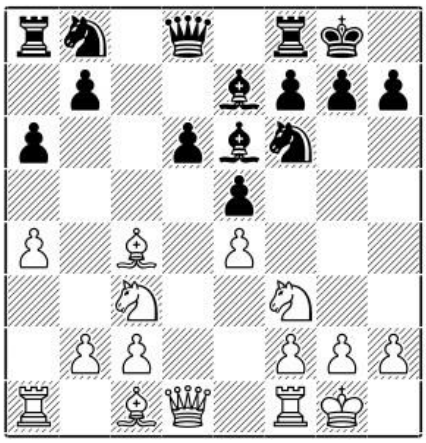


17.a5 Nd7 18.b3 Rfc8 19.Rd2 Nc5 20.Rad1 Qe7 21.Qe3 g6

The position was level in Hou Yifan – Carlsen, Karlsruhe/Baden-Baden 2017, although again the position is rather dry. The World Champion subsequently got a little too creative trying to unbalance things, and eventually was fortunate to save the game.

8...0-0 9.0-0 Be6

This is obviously similar to the 6.Be3 e5 7.Nf3 line, but here White has played a2-a4 instead of Be3. This means that his bishop can go to g5 in one move and then he will have his pawn on a4 'for free', but this is not necessarily beneficial.

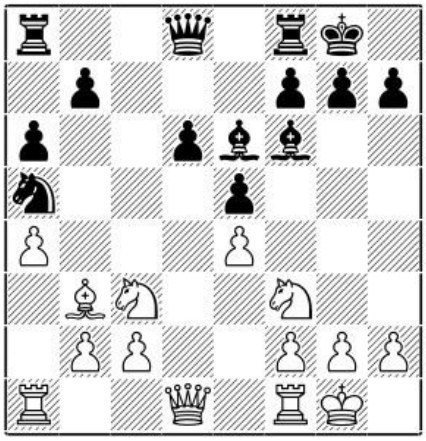


10.Bb3

Another possible continuation is 10.Qe2 Qc7 (or 10...Nc6!?) 11.Bb3 (11.Ba2 Nc6 12.Rd1 Nb4 is also fine for Black) 11...Nc6 (but not 11...Nbd7? 12.Bxe6 fxe6 13.Ng5) 12.Bg5 Rac8 13.Rfd1 Na5 with typical play.

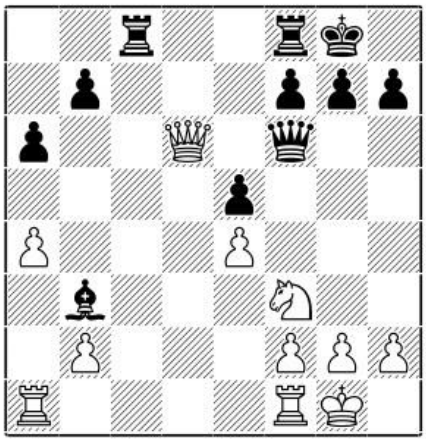
10...Nc6 11.Bg5 Na5 12.Bxf6 Bxf6

As Van Delft and Ris point out, this position can also be reached without the extra move a2-a4, via the move order 6.Be3 e5 7.Nf3 Be7 8.Bc4 0-0 9.0-0 Be6 10.Bb3 Nc6 11.Bg5 Na5 (11...Nd7 is stronger, as we saw in variation B3 of Chapter 4) 12.Bxf6 Bxf6, when White keeps an edge with 13.Nd5. Here the extra move of the a-pawn is unfavourable for White, as the axb3 recapture is no longer possible.



13.Bd5?!

Despite the above point, 13.Nd5 still seems preferable, when play continues: 13...Nxb3 14.cxb3 Rc8 15.Nxf6† (15.Qd3 Rc6=) 15...Qxf6 16.Qxd6 Bxb3 (the immediate 16...Rfd8 looks okay too)

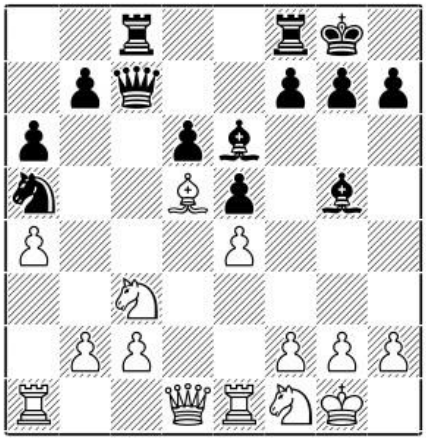


Van Delft and Ris end their analysis after 17.Qb4 (or 17.Qxe5 Qxe5 18.Nxe5 Rfe8) 17...Bc2 18.Qxb7 Rfd8 with compensation for the pawn.

13...Rc8 14.Nd2 Qc7

14...Qb6!? 15.Rb1 Qb4 is another idea.

15.Re1 Bg5 16.Nf1



16...Qb6 17.Rb1 Nc4 18.Qe2

Black is much better after 18.Bxc4 Rxc4 19.Ne3 Rd4; and 18.Qh5 h6 19.Qf3 Qb4 also favours the second player.

18...Bh6

I would prefer 18...g6.

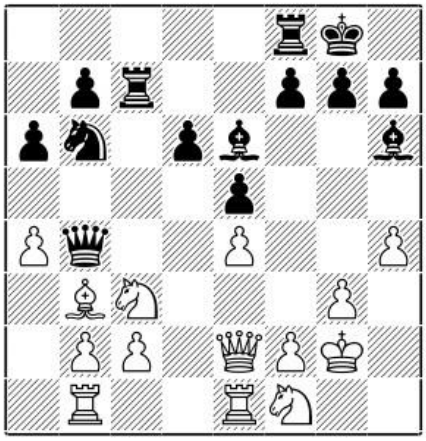
19.h4?!

This 'probing move' just weakens White's position.

White should have preferred 19.Bxc4 Rxc4 or 19.Red1 Qb4 20.Qf3 Rfd8; in both cases, Black is only a little better.

19...Qb4! 20.g3 Rc7 21.Kg2 Nb6 22.Bb3

In Kamsky – Nakamura, Saint Louis 2012, Black's most forceful continuation would have been:

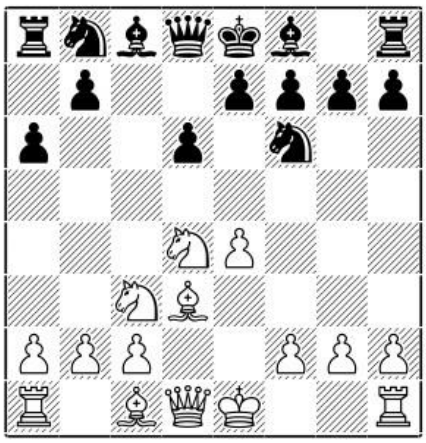


22...Nc4!N 23.Bxc4 Rxc4 24.Ne3 Bxe3

25.Qxe3 f5!?

Black has the initiative.

B) 6.Bd3



This is a very solid move, but it is mostly used as a one-off weapon. Even Nakamura's fine win against MVL did not inspire the masses. White does not create any real attacking chances, nor does the bishop move participate in the fight for the d5-square. A general understanding of Najdorf themes will serve Black well.

6...e5

There is no reason to avoid this, although 6...g6, as advocated by Ftacnik in *Grandmaster Repertoire 6*, is also quite good.

7.Nde2 Be7 8.0-0 0-0 9.Ng3

White has also tried 9.f4 but this looks weird to me. Afte9...Nbd7 (or 9...b5) 10.Kh1 b5 11.a3 Nc5 12.Ng3 Be6 13.fxe5 dxe5 14.Be3 Nfd7,, Black was fine in Ponomariov – Karjakin, Cuernavaca 2006.

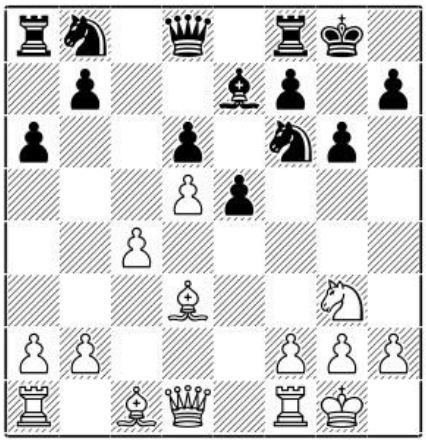
9...Be6 10.Nd5

This looks like the best try.

10...Bxd5 11.exd5 g6 12.c4

Instead 12.Bh6 Re8 13.c4 practically forces Black to place his knight correctly with 13...Nbd7; this was in fact the move order of Najer – Wojtaszek below.

We have reached a familiar pawn structure, with some slight differences in piece placement compared with earlier chapters.



12...Nbd7!

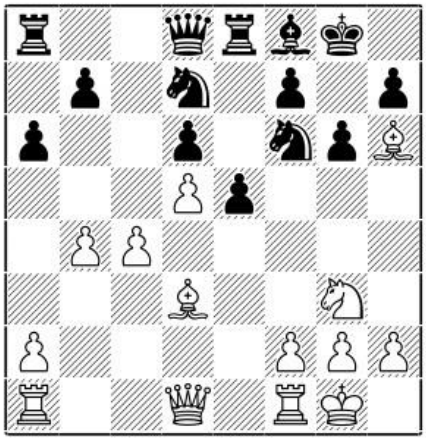
This is the most flexible choice. MVL preferred 12...Ne8 13.Bh6 Ng7 but later got into trouble: 14.b4 Nd7 15.Rc1 a5?! (Roiz points out that 15...f5!? 16.c5 dxc5 17.d6 Bg5 18.Bxg5 Qxg5 19.bxc5 Kh8 20.Qb3 Rab8,, is a better try) 16.a3 axb4 17.axb4 Ra3 18.Ne4! The knight is willing to take some time to take aim at the freshly weakened b5-square. 18...f5 19.Nc3 e4 20.Be2 Bg5 21.Bxg5 Qxg5 22.c5± Nakamura – Vachier-Lagrave, Stavanger 2017.

13.Bh6

White has to make a move somewhere. If 13.a3 Ne8 14.Bh6 Ng7 15.b4 Black can proceed with 15...Bg5 or 15...f5.

13...Re8 14.b4 Bf8

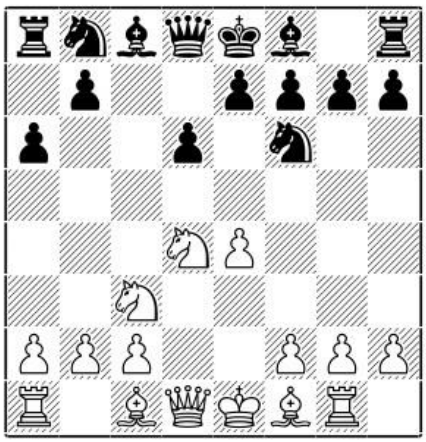
Both Roiz and Yermolinsky point out that 14...a5!?N 15.a3 axb4 16.axb4 Rxa1 17.Qxa1 b5! is a tempting alternative.



15.Bg5 h6 16.Bd2 e4 17.Be2 Bg7 18.a3 a5 19.Rc1 axb4 20.axb4 h5

With typical double-edged play for this thematic structure, Najer – Wojtaszek, Batumi (ol) 2018.

C) 6.Rg1



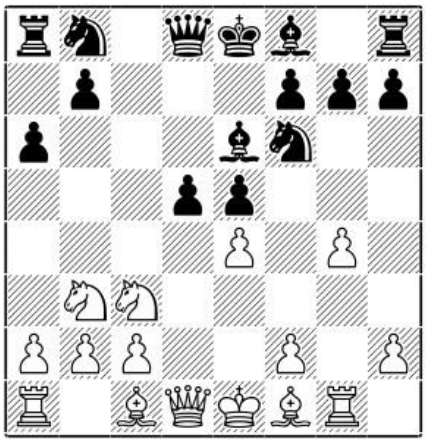
This move looks like a bit of a joke, but the idea is familiar – White wants to push his g-pawn. Even so, I find this to be the least threatening of the options covered in this chapter.

6...e5

A funny Dragon arose after 6...g6 7.g4 Bg7 8.Be3 Nc6 9.f3 in Ivanchuk – Kasparov, Moscow 2002. Now 9...0-0 10.Qd2 would be a Yugoslav Attack with the moves Rg1 and ...a6 added. I would expect this to favour Black slightly, as h4-h5 should be less effective, but who knows?

7.Nb3 Be6 8.g4 d5!

There is no reason to avoid this clean equalizing move. Some simplifications will occur, but plenty of play will remain.



9.exd5

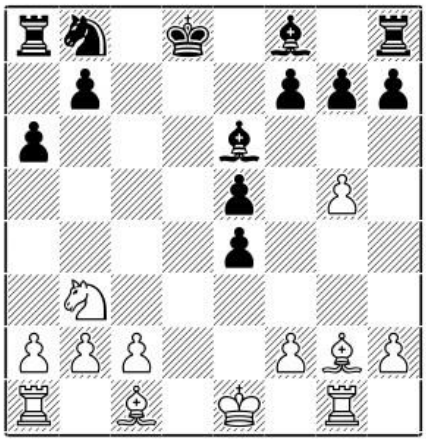
White has also tried:

9.g5 Nxe4 10.Nxe4 dxe4 11.Qxd8† Kxd8

White should be able to regain his pawn but it will take some time.

12.Bg2

12.Be3 Kc7 13.Bg2 h6 14.gxh6 (14.h4 hxg5 15.hxg5 Rh4 does not help White) 14...g6 15.Bxe4 Nd7 16.0-0-0 Bxh6³ favoured Black in Prasad – Sasikiran, Nagpur 2002.



12...Kc7

I do not think Black should bother with 12...Bf5?!, as it costs time and Black will not be able to keep his extra pawn in the long run anyway.

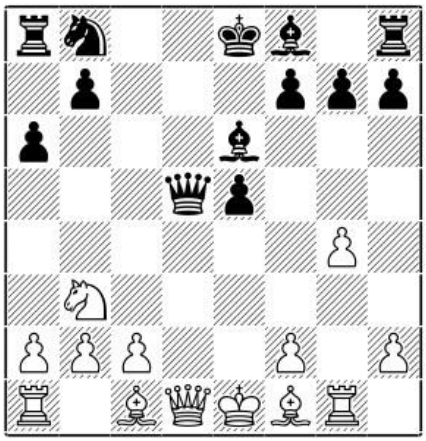
13.Bxe4 h6 14.gxh6

14.h4 is well met by 14...hxg5 15.hxg5 Rh4.

14...g6

Black is at least okay.

9...Nxd5 10.Nxd5 Qxd5



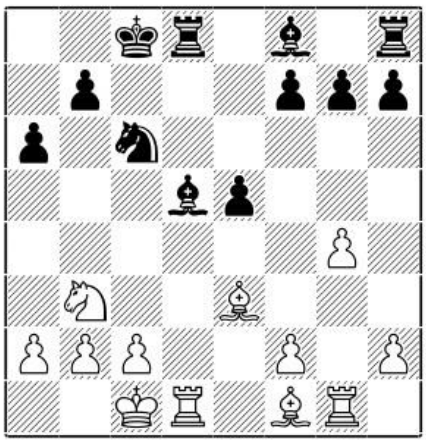
11.Qxd5

11.Be3 Nc6 12.Qxd5 Bxd5 is the same.

11.Qe2 Nc6 12.Bg2 Qc4=/³ is not the way to an advantage.

11...Bxd5 12.Be3 Nc6 13.0-0-0 0-0-0

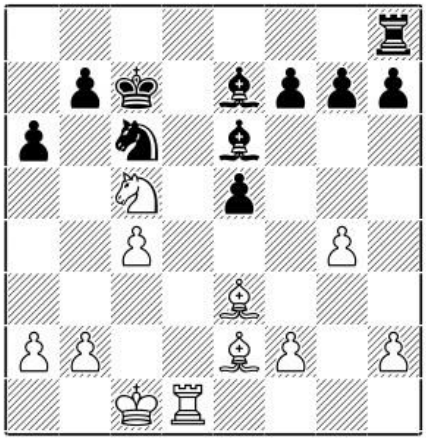
White has tried various things but he gets no advantage.



14.Bb6!?

14.g5?! proved to be a bit hasty, and fell into Black's plans after 14...Kc7 15.Bh3 g6 16.f4 h6!³ in Belousov – Antipov, St Petersburg 2012.

14.c4 has only been played once, but it is probably as good as anything else. 14...Be6 (14...Be4 is also possible, avoiding the reach of White's knight) 15.Rxd8† Kxd8 16.Be2 Kc7 17.Rd1 Be7 18.Nc5 Here Black should simply play:

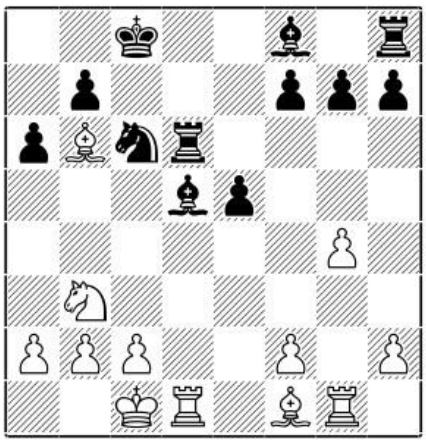


18...Bc8!= Keeping the bishop (rather than 18...Bxc5 19.Bxc5 Rd8 20.Rxd8 Kxd8 21.Kd2² as occurred in Sequera Paolini – Quesada Perez, Havana 2008).

The text move is a bit sneaky, but Black does fine with:

14...Rd6!

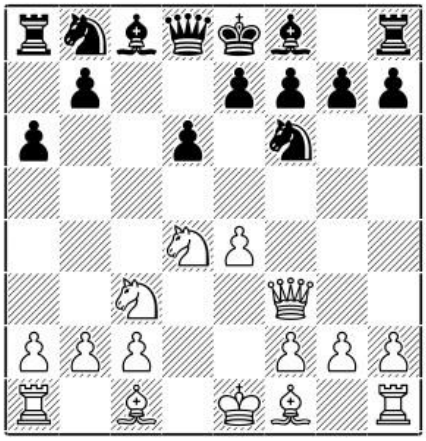
Instead 14...Rd7 15.g5 threatens Bh3, and 15...Be6 16.Rxd7 Kxd7 17.Bg2² gives White a lead in development.



15.a3 Bxb3 16.Rxd6 Bxd6 17.cxb3 Bc7 18.Be3 Nd4 19.Bxd4 exd4

A draw was agreed in J. van Foreest – Sasikiran, Sitges 2016.

D) 6.Qf3



We move on to the first of White's three 'silly' queen moves. "This move is not a pretty sight" was the assessment of Georgiev and Kolev. It is hard to disagree! This unusual line was a favourite of the American FM Andrew Karklins. Nowadays we see with engines that White's play does not really work out well.

6...g6

We will see that a Dragon set-up is appropriate in many of these sidelines. It is good to maintain some flexibility in our approach.

6...e5?! is not so good here after 7.Nf5, while 6...e6 7.g4 is what White is looking for.

7.h3

This will be necessary at some point to prevent ...Bg4 or ...Ng4.

7...Bg7 8.Be3

White has also tried:

8.Bg5

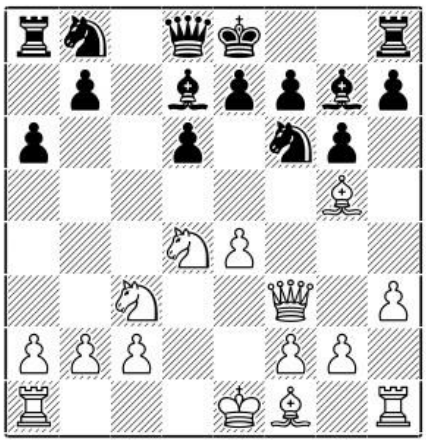
The bishop may prove to be exposed here, and the d4-knight is rather loose.

8...Bd7

This is a typical preparation to develop the queenside. Black is spoiled for choice though, with at least two other good options:

8...Qa5 9.Be3 0-0 10.0-0-0 Nc6 11.Kb1 occurred in Vallejo Pons – Topalov, Leon (rapid) 2012, when 11...Be6!N is an improvement pointed out by Georgiev and Kolev.

8...0-0 9.0-0-0 Nc6 10.Nb3 (10.Nxc6 bxc6 11.e5?! Nd5 12.exd6 Qxd6 is great for Black, as pointed out by Georgiev and Kolev) 10...Be6 11.Kb1 Qc7 12.Bxf6 Bxf6 13.Nd5 Bxd5 14.exd5 Na5³ was Mesquita – Csjernyik, corr. 2012.

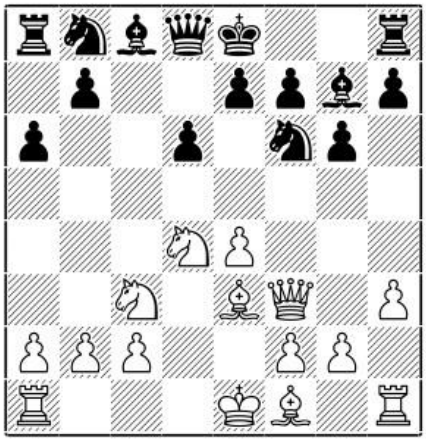


9.0-0-0 Nc6 10.Nxc6

10.g4?! has been played, when 10...0-0 11.Nb3 Rc8 was fine for Black in Mullon – Gopal, Benasque 2016, but I see no reason to avoid the obvious 10...Nxd4N 11.Rxd4 Nxg4.

10...Bxc6 11.Bc4 Qc7 12.Qe3 0-0 13.Rhe1 b5 14.Nd5 Bxd5 15.Bxd5 Rac8 16.Re2 a5³

Fernandez Romero – Bruzon Batista, Azuqueca de Henares 2013.



8...0-0

This is the most flexible move.

Black has also tried 8...Nc6 9.0-0-0 Bd7 (Black's last two moves could be inverted) when 10.Nxc6!? bxc6 (10...Bxc6 11.Bd4) 11.e5!? was a creative try. Then 11...dxe5 12.Bc4 0-0 13.Bc5 Rb8 14.Bb3 a5 15.Rhe1© gave White interesting play in Bauer – Navara, Montpellier 2015.

9.0-0-0 Bd7

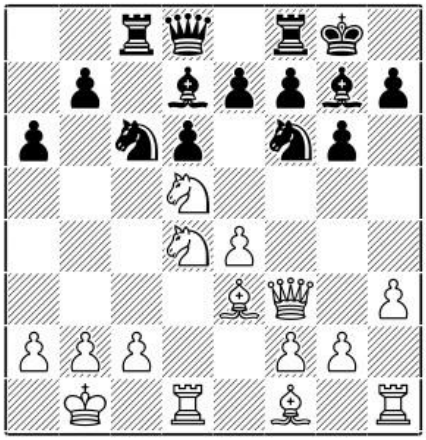
This is a safe move.

The immediate 9...Nc6!? is also fine, since 10.Nxc6?! (10.g4 heading for the main line is safer) 10...bxc6 11.e5 Nd5 does not work for White: 12.Nxd5 (12.exd6? Bxc3–+) 12...cxd5 13.exd6 Rb8! 14.c3 e6 and Black has good attacking chances.

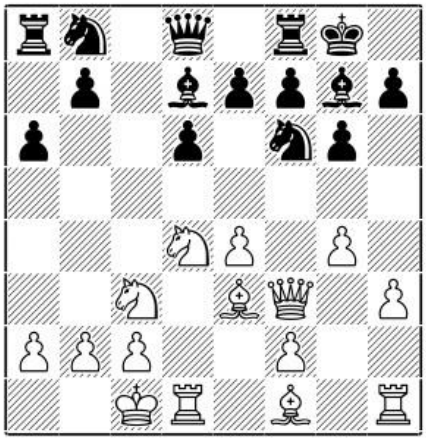
10.g4

10.Kb1 Nc6 does not change much.

White has also tried: 10.Nd5 Nc6 11.Kb1 Rc8 (Black wasted too much time with 11...Ne5?! 12.Nxf6† Bxf6 13.Qg3 Qa5 14.Nb3 Qc7 15.f4 in Polgar – Swiercz, Istanbul [ol] 2012)



12.g4 Nxd5 13.exd5 Ne5 14.Qg2 Nc4 15.Bxc4 Rxc4 16.Rhe1 Qc7 17.f4 Rc8 Black had good counterplay in Nitin – Salem, Al Ain 2015.



10...Nc6

Both sides have developed as planned, but White's play looks artificial and today's engines already show a clear preference for Black.

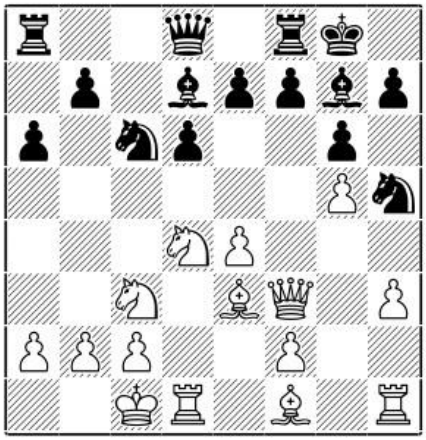
11.Qg2

White hopes to play Be2 and g4-g5 but this is rather slow.

Retreating with 11.Nb3 is hardly scary, and 11...b5 maintains Black's advantage.

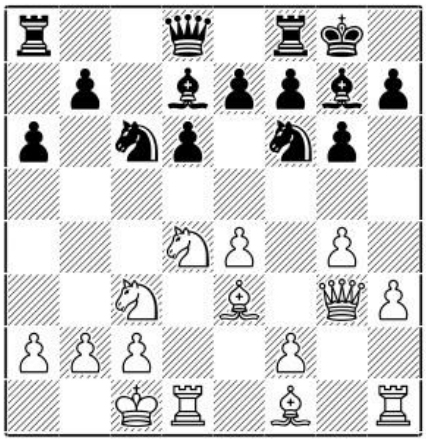
If 11.Be2 Rc8 12.Kb1 (12.g5 Nh5µ) 12...b5 Black is faster.

11.g5 Nh5 leaves White with no play, and Black has scored 100% from here. A good example went:



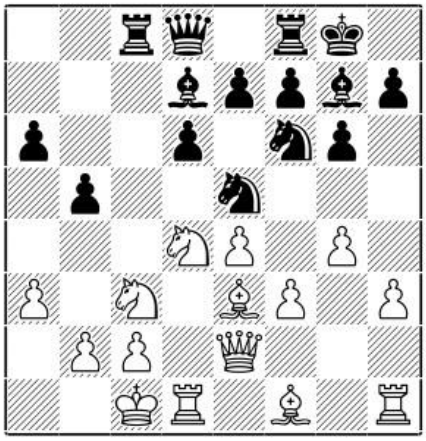
12.Kb1 Rc8 13.Be2 Ne5 14.Qg2 Nc4 15.Bxc4 Rxc4µ White – A. Hunt, Hastings 2008.

11.Qg3 is recommended in *Dangerous Weapons: The Sicilian*, but there is no mention of:



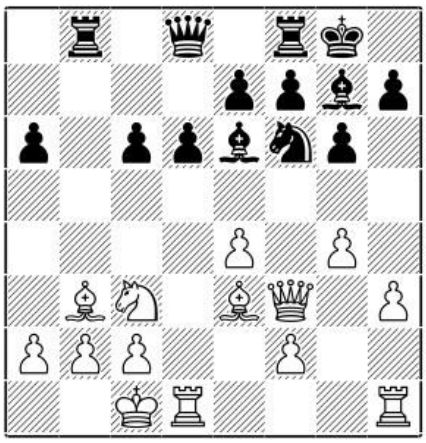
11...b5!µ The engines are horrified by White's chances.

White can hardly switch to a Yugoslav plan; for example, 11.Qe2 Rc8 12.f3 b5 13.a3 Ne5 and Black already threatens to take on c3.



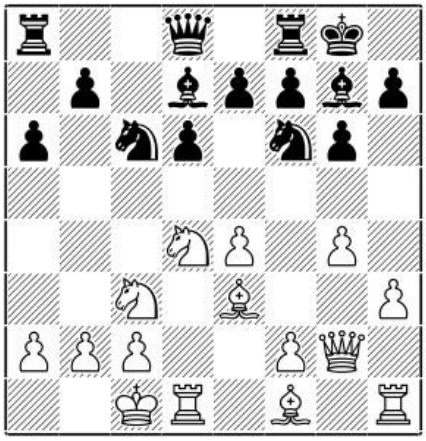
14.Qe1 Qc7 15.Be2 Qb7 16.Kb1 a5 17.g5 (no better is 17.Ncxb5 Bxb5 18.Bxb5 Nxf3µ) 17...b4µ Black's attack was clearly faster in Van Wieringen – Dedina, corr. 2010.

11.Nxc6 bxc6!? (11...Bxc6 12.Bd4=) 12.Bc4 Rb8 13.Bb3 Be6 (also good is 13...Qc8!? with the idea ...c5)



14.e5? Nd5 15.Nxd5 Bxd5 16.Bxd5 cxd5 17.Qxd5 Rb5 18.Qd2 was Xu Xiangyu – Debashis, Al Ain 2015. Black is rather spoiled for choice here, but 18...Qc7!Nµ looks strongest.

Finally, 11.Kb1 may be safest because a2 is not hanging, but it still looks so slow for White. After 11...Rc8 Black can be confident.



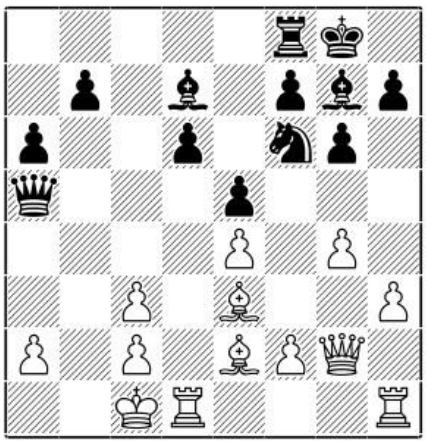
11...Rc8!

11...b5 looks pretty good too, but the text move has a hidden threat.

12.f4

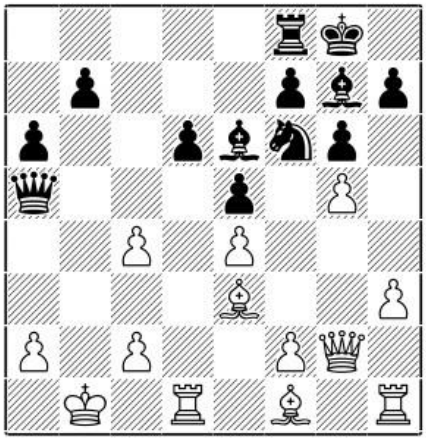
This is necessary.

12.Be2? is hit by 12...Nxd4 13.Bxd4 e5! 14.Be3 Rxc3! 15.bxc3 Qa5 when White is pretty much busted:



16.g5 Nh5 17.Bxh5 gxh5 18.Qf1 (heading for the hills with 18.Kd2 Rc8 19.Ke2 is a better try, but it is still pretty depressing) 18...Rc8 White did not last long in Abergel – Negi, Cappelle-la-Grande 2010.

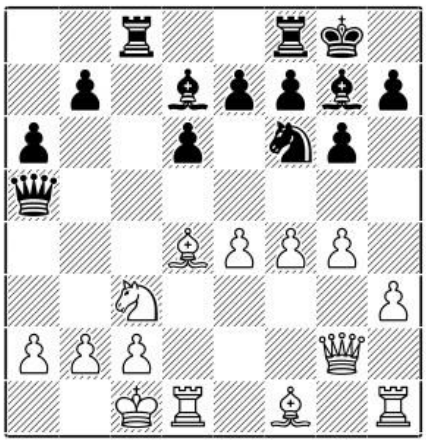
12.Kb1?! allows the same trick with 12...Nxd4 13.Bxd4 e5! 14.Be3 Rxc3 but it is not quite as devastating here. Black is still doing great though: 15.bxc3 Be6 16.c4 Qa5 17.g5



This was Dickl – Zemlyanov, corr. 2011, and now 17...Nd7!N would have been strong.

12...Nxd4 13.Bxd4 Qa5

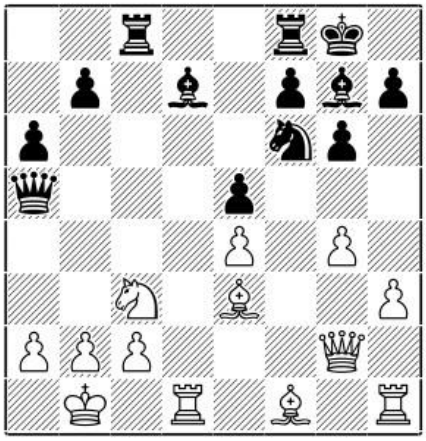
Ftacnik ended his analysis here, just calling it typical counterplay. This is a rather critical position however. Black threatens ...e5 when ...Rxc3 will be crushing again, so White has to be extremely careful.



14.Qg1!

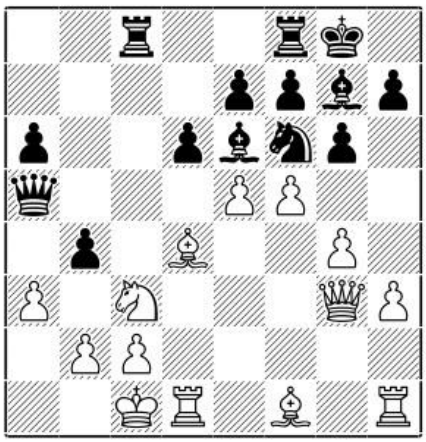
This move gives White Bb6 as a resource. Everything else looks worse:

A couple of times White fell asleep at the wheel with 14.Kb1, allowing the thematic sequence: 14...e5 15.fxe5 dxe5 16.Be3



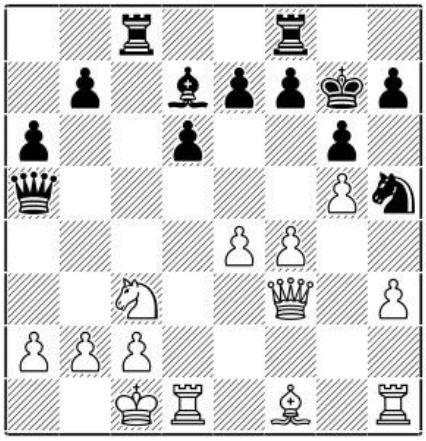
16...Rxc3 17.Bd2 (or 17.bxc3 Be6 18.Bd3 as played in Saptarshi – Praneeth, Kolkata 2012, when 18...Qxa2†N 19.Kc1 Rd8 would soon have ended White's resistance) 17...Be6 18.a3 And now Black found a nice sequence with 18...Rd8! 19.Bd3 Rcxd3! 20.cxd3 Qa4 with an easy win in Sotomonte – Ruiz Castillo, Bogota 2015.

14.Qg3 Be6 (after 14...b5 15.e5 b4 16.exf6 exf6 17.a3! White is somehow surviving) 15.a3 b5 16.f5?! (16.Qd3 b4 also favours Black) 16...b4! 17.e5? occurred in Berg – Hedman, Vasteras 2012. Berg points out the improvement:



17...Rxc3!N 18.Bxc3 bxc3 19.Qxc3 Bh6† 20.Kb1 Qxc3 21.bxc3 Ne4 and Black is winning.

Finally, there is 14.g5N 14...Nh5 15.Bxg7 Kxg7 16.Qf3 when Black has a choice:



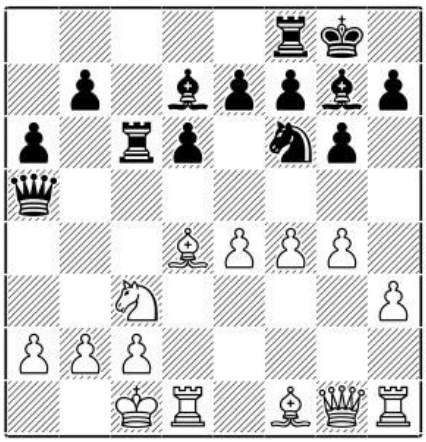
Georgiev and Kolev give 16...Rxc3 17.Qxc3† Qxc3 18.bxc3 Nxf4 with compensation; and 16...Rc5!?N with the idea of doubling rooks looks promising too.

14...Rxc3!?

This is the most enterprising choice.

Black cannot play 14...e5?? 15.Bb6.

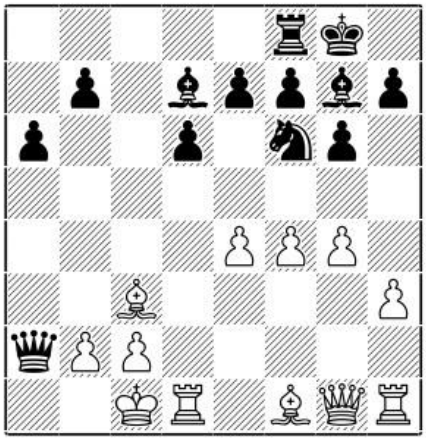
However, 14...Rc6 is possible, when play continues:



15.g5 Nh5 16.Bxg7 Kxg7 17.Qd4† Kg8 18.Nd5 Re8 We have been following Filippov – Saric, Bol 2014, and a couple of other games. This is solid enough for Black, but hardly a refutation of White's play.

15.Bxc3 Qxa2

The e4-pawn is under attack and Black can add further pressure with ...Bc6. Black may also look to sacrifice a second exchange with ...Rc8xc3.



16.Bd3

White has also tried:

16.Bg2 Rc8 17.Qe3

Black has a pleasant choice, the strongest option being:

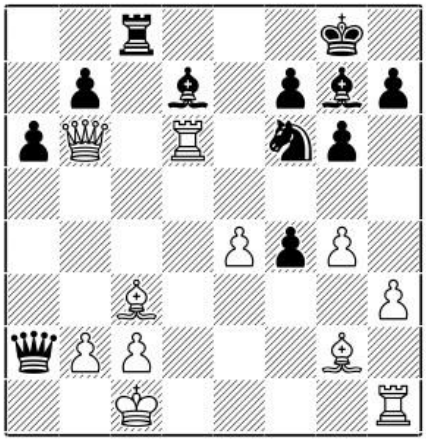
17...e5!

17...Ba4 18.e5 dxe5 19.fxe5 Nd7 20.Rd5? (20.Rd4 was necessary) occurred in Mihok – Aczel, Budapest 2018. Now Black can unleash a cascade of sacrifices with 20...Bh6! 21.Qxh6 Rxc3 22.Be4 Bxc2! 23.Bxc2 Qa1† 24.Kd2 Qxh1 25.Rxd7 Rxc2† 26.Kxc2 Qc6† and wins.

18.Rxd6

18.fxe5? Rxc3! wins for Black after 19.bxc3 Ba4 or 19.Qxc3 Bh6†.

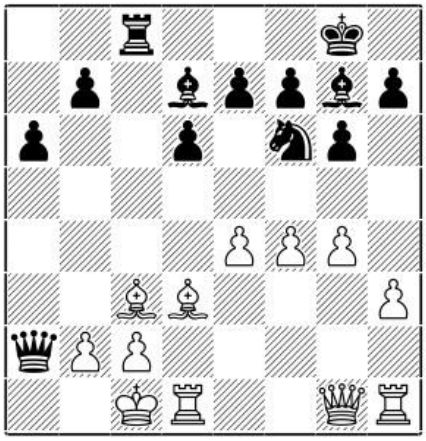
18...exf4 19.Qb6



19...f3! 20.Bxf3 Bh6† 21.Kd1 Qb1† 22.Ke2 Qxc2† 23.Kf1 Bb5† 24.Kg1 Rxc3 25.bxc3 Qxc3

Black has more than enough compensation for the two exchanges.

16...Rc8



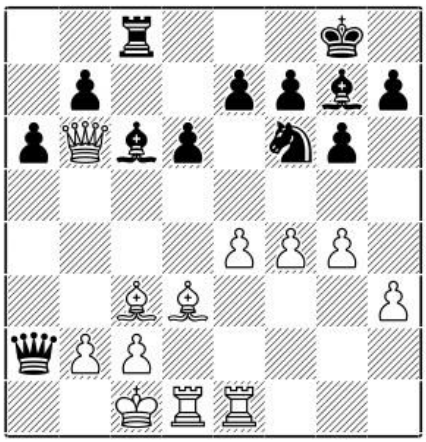
17.Qb6

White could try 17.Kd2!? but Black keeps good practical chances after 17...Rxc3! 18.bxc3 Bc6.

17...Bc6

Here 17...Rxc3? does not work due to 18.bxc3 Bc6 19.Rhe1± and White keeps control.

18.Rhe1

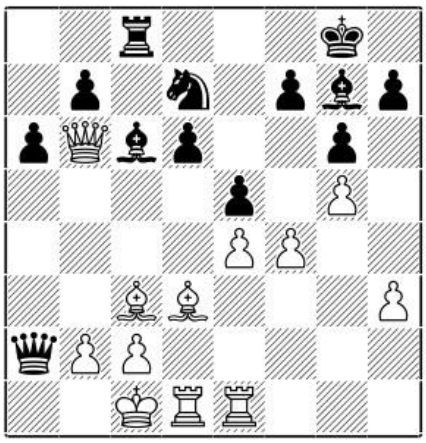


18...Nxe4

This move was mentioned by Fogarasi in *New in Chess Yearbook* 116. It leads to a pretty straightforward draw.

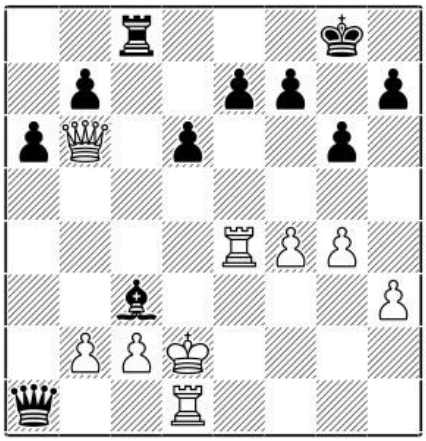
Black went astray with 18...Nd7 19.Qb4 Bxc3 20.Qxc3 Nc5 21.Bc4 Qa4 22.Rd4± Kf8? 23.Bf1 1–0 in Fedorchuk – Meertens, Vlissingen 2010.

If Black wants to spice things up, he could try Georgiev and Kolev's suggestion of: 18...e5!?N 19.g5 (19.fxe5?? Bh6†) 19...Nd7



20.Qb4 exf4 21.Bxg7 Kxg7 22.Bc4 Qa1† 23.Kd2 Qa4 The aforementioned authors stop here and call it unclear, which seems about right.

19.Bxe4 Bxe4 20.Rxe4 Qa1† 21.Kd2 Bxc3†

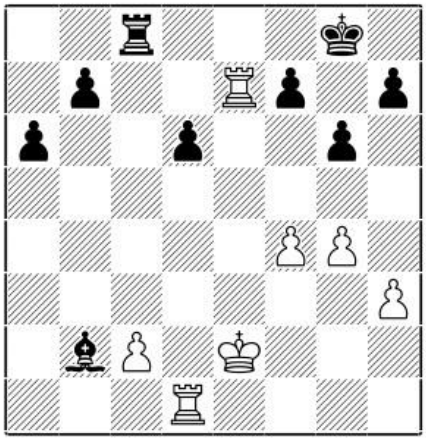


22.Ke2!

22.bxc3? Qxc3† 23.Ke2 Qxc2† wins.

22...Qxb2 23.Qxb2 Bxb2 24.Rxe7

All this happened in Tuncer – Kevlishvili, Prague 2016. Black should have played:

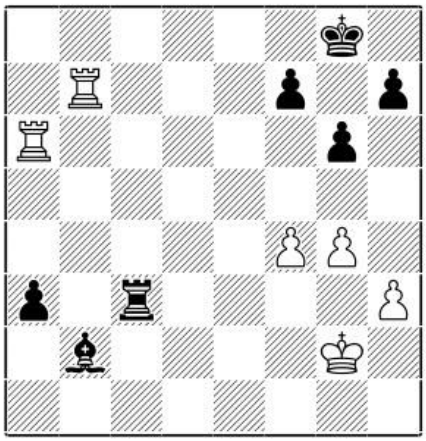


24...Rxc2†N 25.Kf3

This was given as equal by Fogarasi. We will look a little further.

25...a5 26.Rxb7 a4 27.Rxd6 a3 28.Ra6 Rc3† 29.Kg2

Or 29.Ke2 Rxh3.



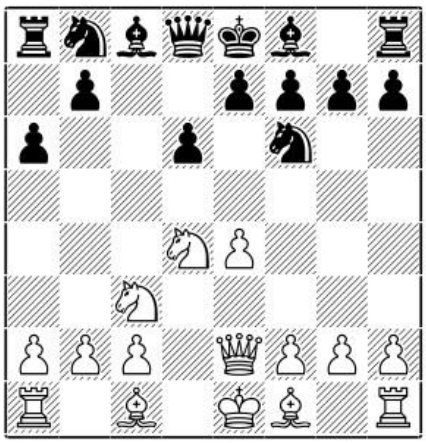
29...Rc2† 30.Kg3 Rc3†

White can either allow a repetition or play:

31.Kh4 Rf3=

Black is fine.

E) 6.Qe2



The database indicates that this is White's best-scoring move against the Najdorf! I faced it once and lost, as if to prove the point.

6...e5

It seems to me that White is hoping for this move, but I still think it is good.

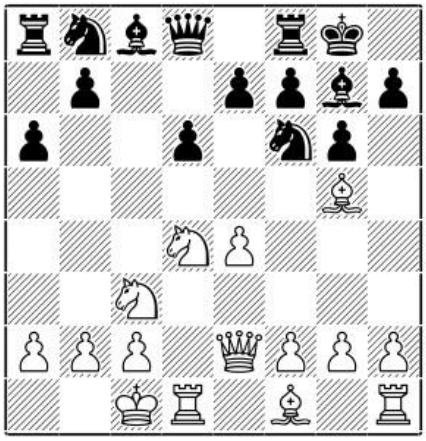
I was afraid to go into it myself and preferred:

6...g6

Indeed, this is the most common continuation, and not a bad option. My game continued:

7.Bg5 Bg7 8.0-0-0 0-0

8...Nbd7 would transpose to a line from the topical 6.Bg5 Nbd7 variation, but that is too much to cover here.



9.Kb1!?

This is not in any database, but I faced it.

9.e5 dxe5 10.Ne6 Bxe6 11.Rxd8 Rxd8 12.Qxe5 Nc6© looked thoroughly playable for Black in Czebe – G. Papp, Szombathely 2010.

9.f4 Bg4 10.Nf3 Qa5 11.h3 Bxf3 (I also like 11...Be6!?N with the idea 12.Kb1? Nh5!–+ or 12.a3 Rc8) 12.Qxf3 Rc8 13.Bxf6 Bxf6 14.Nd5 Qxa2 15.Qa3 Qxa3 16.Nxf6† exf6 17.bxa3 Rc6µ was Hector – Cheparinov, Malmo 2007.

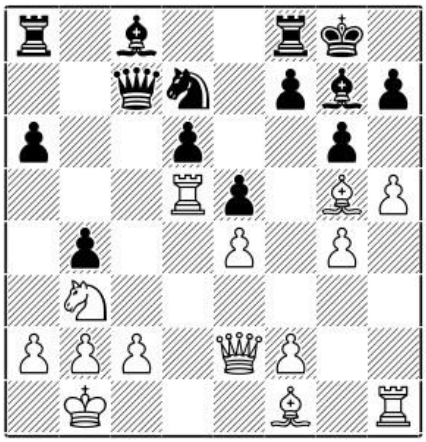
9...Nbd7

9...Nc6 and 9...Bd7 are reasonable alternatives.

10.g4 Qc7 11.h4 b5 12.h5 e5 13.Nb3

13.Nf5!? was interesting.

13...b4 14.Nd5 Nxd5 15.Rxd5



15...Nb6?!

The wrong way – instead 15...Nf6!N 16.Bxf6 Bxf6 would have been pleasant for Black.

16.Rd3 f6? 17.Bd2 a5 18.hxg6 hxg6 19.Rdh3 Be6? 20.Bh6+–

Izoria – Vigorito, Chicago 2009.

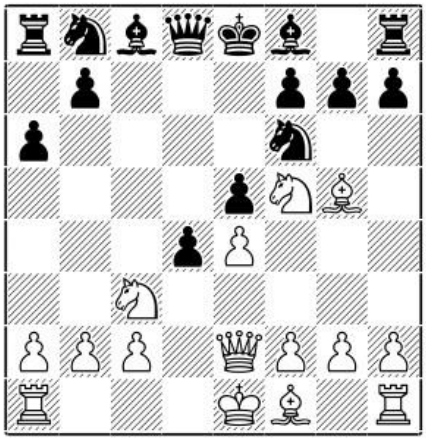
7.Nf5 d5!

This thematic move scores badly but I believe it is strong.

After 7...g6 White could try 8.Nh6!?N which looks annoying (8.Ne3 Be6 was double-edged in Romero Holmes – Harikrishna, San Sebastian 2006).

8.Bg5 d4

Black should avoid 8...Bxf5?! 9.exf5 when White's queen is not badly placed at all.



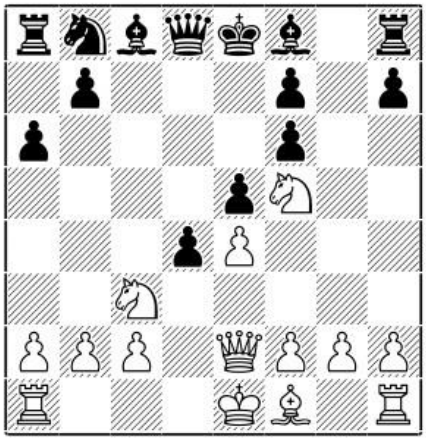
9.0-0-0

The alternative is:

9.Bxf6 gxf6!N

9...Qxf6 10.Nd5 Qd8 11.Qg4 g6?! (Black should prefer 11...Bxf5 12.Qxf5 as in Azarya – Raja, Puchong 2017, which is a lot like Carlsen – Wojtaszek, covered later in variation G) 12.Qg3! Nd7 (12...Nc6 13.Nxd4!) 13.Nxd4 Qa5† 14.c3± Sean – Nayhebaver, Dunajska Streda 2017.

The text move is stronger. My analysis continues:



10.0-0-0 Bd7!?

10...Be6 11.Qh5 is unclear.

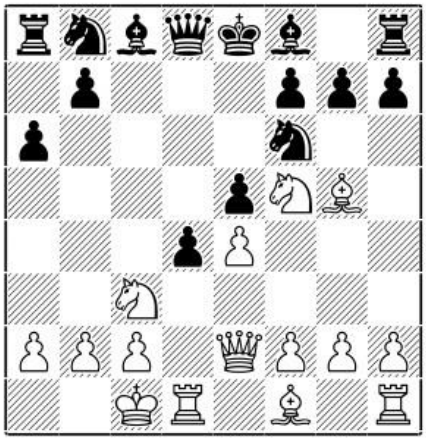
The text move attacks the c3-knight.

11.Nb1

11.Qh5?! dxc3 12.Bc4 is a creative attempt which does not seem to work after 12...Qb6 13.Qxf7† Kd8 14.Bb3 Kc8.

11...Be6

With a good position for Black.

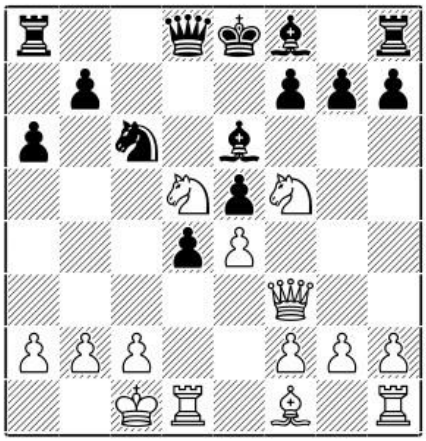


9...Nc6

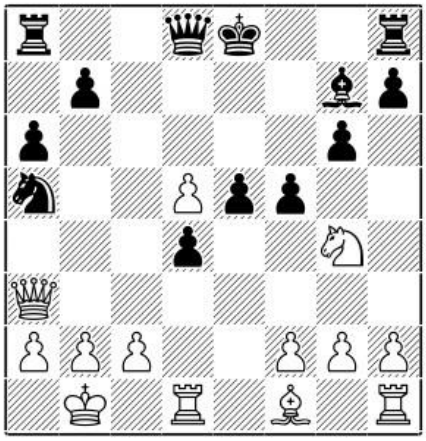
Black could also try 9...Be6!?N 10.Nd5 (10.Qf3? Qa5!µ) 10...Nbd7.

10.Qf3 Be6 11.Nd5

After 11.Bxf6? Qxf6! 12.Nd5 Qd8 White's pieces end up in a jumble. For example:



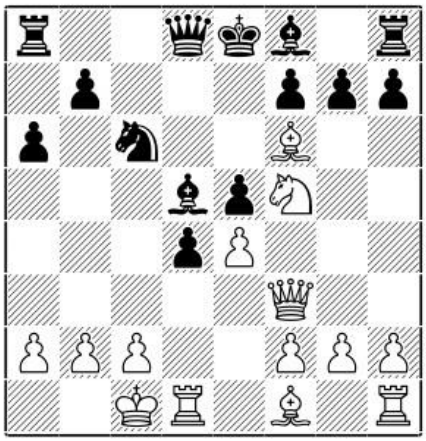
13.Kb1 g6 14.Nfe3 (14.Ng3 Bg7µ) 14...Bg7 This propelled White to go for the speculative 15.Ng4 f5 16.Qb3 Bxd5 17.exd5 Na5 18.Qa3 in Peczely – Cao, Gyor 2014, when Black should have played:



18...fxg4N The simplest. If 19.b4 then 19...0-0 intending ...e4 gives Black an overwhelming position.

11...Bxd5 12.Bxf6

White loses a pawn after 12.exd5 Qxd5.



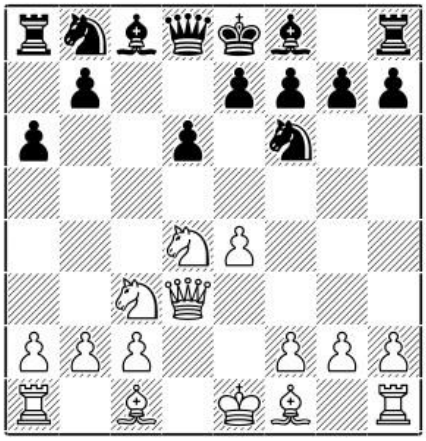
12...Qxf6!N

Improving over 12...Bxe4? 13.Qxe4 Qxf6 14.Nxd4 Nxd4 15.Rxd4² as played in Czebe – Vojtek, Slovakia 2011.

13.exd5 Ne7³

The d5-pawn looks weak and White will have to search for equality.

F) 6.Qd3



Another peculiar queen move.

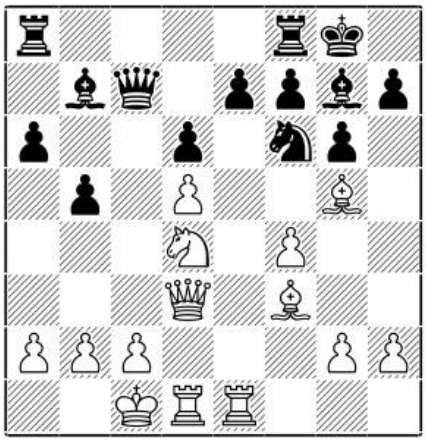
6...Nbd7!?

This is a clever response. Black will likely go for a Dragon set-up, but first he wants to see what White will do next.

6...e5?! 7.Nf5 Bxf5 8.exf5 d5 9.Bg5² is not a good version of this structure for Black.

Playing Scheveningen-style with 6...e6 has to be fine, but it is relatively foreign to our repertoire.

The immediate 6...g6 gives White chances to develop an initiative with: 7.Bg5 Bg7 8.0-0-0 Nbd7 9.f4 Qc7 (after 9...0-0 10.Be2 Qc7 11.h4 White's attack looks very real) 10.Be2 b5 11.Bf3 Bb7 12.Rhe1 0-0 13.Nd5 Nxd5 14.exd5 Nf6



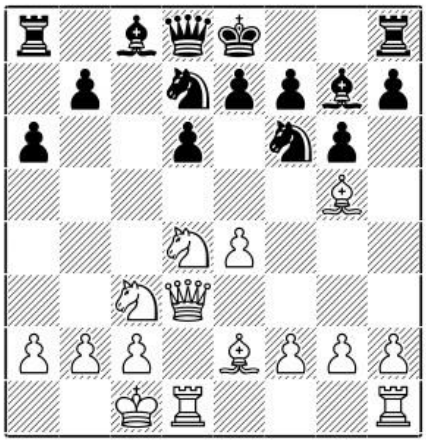
15.f5! (Black obtained good counterplay after 15.Qb3 Rac8 16.Kb1 Rfe8 17.Nc6 Bxc6 18.dxc6 e6 in Georgiadis – Baron, Porto Rio 2014) 15...Rfe8 This was Mihok – Griffith, Kecskemet 2015, and now 16.fxg6N 16...hxg6 17.Ne6! would have been strong, as 17...fxe6? 18.Qxg6+– leaves Black's king defenceless.

7.Be2

This gives us the spare tempo needed to justify a Dragon set-up.

7.Bg5 discourages the Dragon plan, but 7...e6 leaves White with nothing better than 8.0-0-0 Be7 9.f4 Qc7 10.Qg3, transposing to variation B2 of Chapter 8 on page 230.

7...g6 8.Bg5 Bg7 9.0-0-0



9...h6!

It is important to flick this move in now. Instead 9...0-0 10.Qe3! Qc7 11.h4 gives White good attacking prospects.

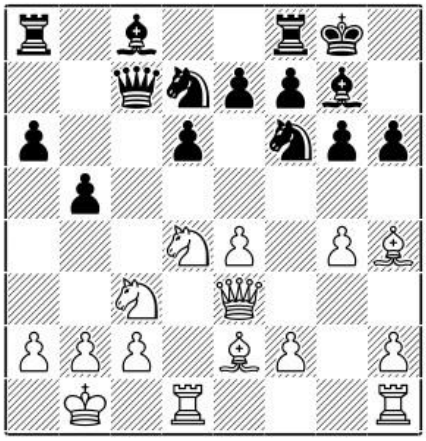
10.Bh4 0-0

This is a key position, although there are not so many examples on the database.

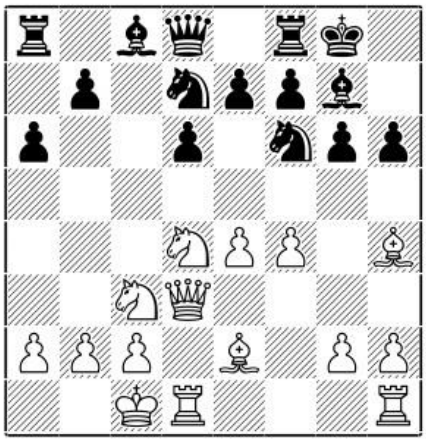
11.f4

11.Qe3?! Qc7 12.f4 is rather slow. 12...b5!N looks best, although the slightly imprecise 12...e5 13.fxe5 dxe5 14.Nb3 b5 still gave Black decent counterplay in Vallejo Pons – Grischuk, Dubai (rapid) 2014.

Another game continued 11.Kb1 Qc7 12.Qe3?! (12.f4 looks better although Black has no cause for complaints) 12...b5³ 13.g4 when Black's most precise continuation is:



13...e5!N (after 13...Bb7 14.g5 hxg5 15.Bxg5 b4 16.Nd5 Bxd5 17.exd5 Nxd5 18.Qe4 N7f6µ White did not last very long in Oparin – Nepomniachtchi, Zurich 2017; however, White missed a miraculous resource with 16.Bh6!N, since 16...bxc3? 17.Bxg7 Kxg7 18.Nf5† mates, while 16...Bh8! 17.Nd5 Nxd5 18.exd5 keeps White in the game) 14.Nb3 b4µ Black is clearly ahead in the attacking race.

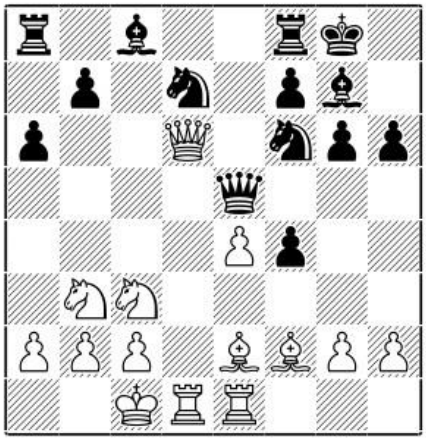


11...e5

11...Qc7!?N could be considered but the text move seems fine.

12.Nb3 exf4 13.Qxd6 Qe8! 14.Rhe1 Qe5 15.Bf2

White lost material after 15.g3? Qxd6 16.Rxd6 Ne8!µ in Maltsevskaya – Kokarev, Khanty-Mansiysk (rapid) 2017, as ...g5 is threatened.



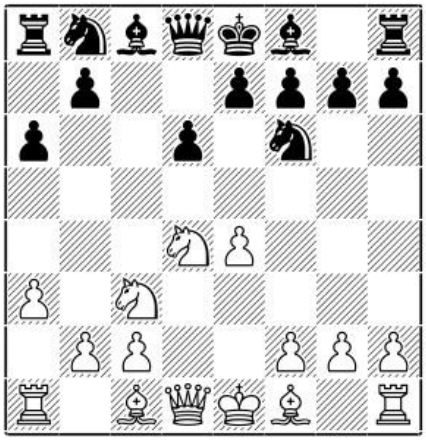
15...Qxd6 16.Rxd6 Re8 17.Bf3

We have been following Vitiugov – Kamsky, Sochi 2018. My suggestion would be:

17...Ne5N

With an excellent position for Black.

G) 6.a3



This surely is the refutation of the Najdorf Sicilian! In fact it is hardly stupid at all, and interest was fuelled by Carlsen's smooth win over Najdorf specialist Wojtaszek.

6...e5

I see no reason to refrain from this move, even though it allows White to show 'the point'.

I am not so keen on 6...g6 7.Be3 Bg7 8.f3 Nc6 9.Qd2, as ...a6 is not so useful in a Yugoslav Attack as ...b5 is not a common idea, but a2-a3

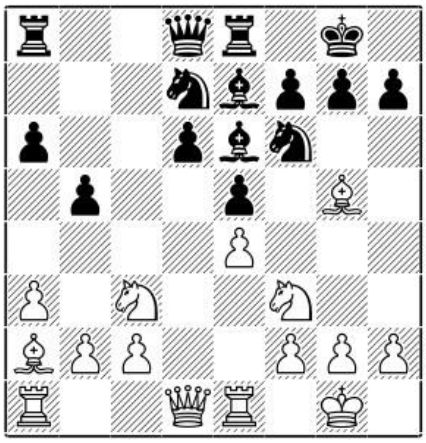
often helps White to simply safeguard the pawn.

Of course 6...e6 must be acceptable, and 6...Nc6 is also fine. The latter makes an especially suitable alternative to the main line, as 7.Bc4 (neither 7.Be2 g6! nor 7.Be3 Ng4 can worry Black) 7...e6 would lead back to our Sozin coverage – see the note in Chapter 11 on page 316.

7.Nf5!?

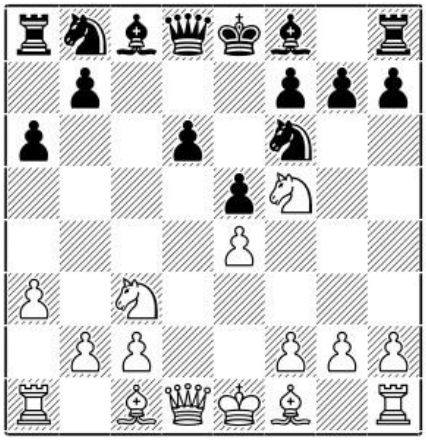
7.Nb3 can be met by 7...Be6 or 7...Be7, when White's a2-a3 move has little point.

7.Nf3 was once played by Karjakin; the story goes that he forgot his laptop and was unable to prepare before the following game, so he chose a low-theory line, with play continuing: 7...Be7 8.Bc4 Be6 9.Ba2 0-0 10.0-0 b5 11.Re1 Re8 12.Bg5 Nbd7



13.Nd2 Rb8 14.Bxf6 Nxf6 15.Nf1 b4 16.Nd5 bxa3 17.bxa3 Nxd5 18.Bxd5 Bg5= Karjakin – Giri, Wijk aan Zee 2017.

Carlsen's move is more interesting, and it has some subtle points which will become apparent when we compare the following lines to other variations where White meets ...e5 with Nf5.

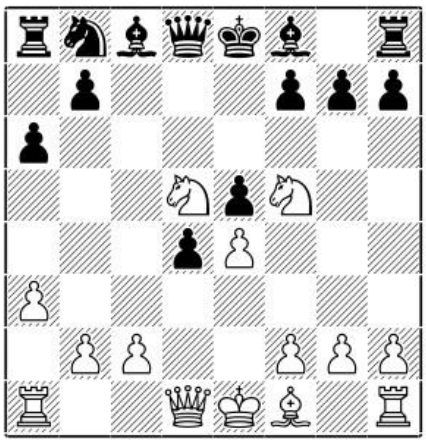


7...d5 8.Bg5 d4 9.Bxf6 gxf6!?

This is the more interesting option.Wojtaszek preferred:

9...Qxf6 10.Nd5 Qd8

Compared to the 6.Be2 e5 7.Nf5 line mentioned on page 12, there is a difference in White's favour.



11.Qg4!

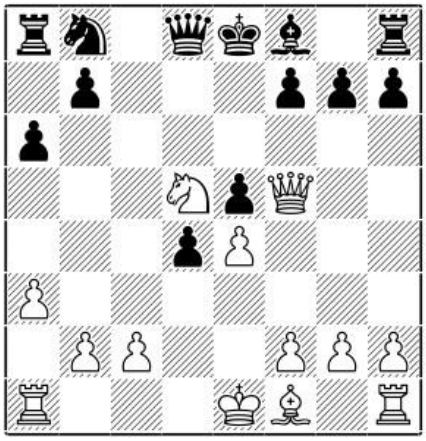
This would not be possible if White's bishop was on e2!

11...Bxf5

11...g6? runs into 12.Qg3!, when 12...Nc6 allows the trick 13.Nxd4! and 12...Bd6 could be met by 13.Nxd6† Qxd6 14.Nb6!N and White wins.

12.Qxf5

This position is close to equal but White's play still seems easier, and very Carlsen-esque.



12...Bd6 13.h4

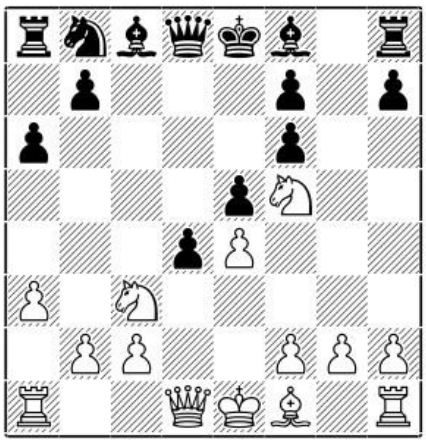
White also developed some pressure after 13.0-0-0 Nc6 14.Bc4 Rc8 15.Ba2 0-0 16.Rd3 g6 17.Qf3 Kg7 18.h4, in Oparin – Nenezic, Ruma 2017.

13...Nc6 14.Bc4 b5 15.Bb3 Ne7

15...0-0N 16.h5 h6 17.Rh3 Kh8 18.Kf1 Na5= is a possible improvement suggested by Roiz.

16.Qg4 0-0 17.Rh3 Nxd5 18.Bxd5 Ra7 19.Rg3 Qf6 20.a4

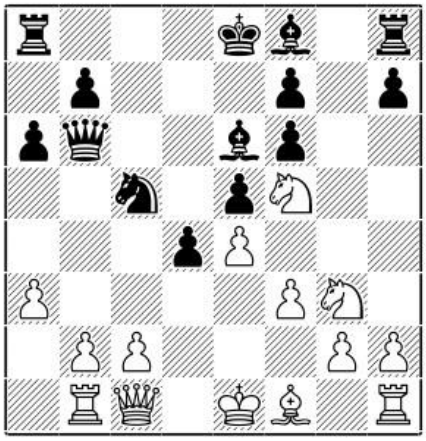
White kept a slight initiative in Carlsen – Wojtaszek, Wijk aan Zee 2017.



10.Nb1

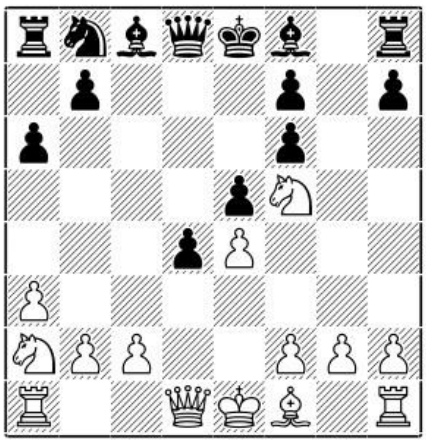
Going home is the most flexible.

10.Ne2?! Qb6 would be awkward for White: 11.Rb1 (11.b4 is well met by 11...a5) 11...Be6 Threatening ...Ba2. 12.Qc1 Nd7 13.Neg3 Nc5 14.f3



14...Rc8 (14...h5!?µ) 15.b4 Na4 16.Bd3 Nc3 17.Rb2 h5 18.h4 This was Debashish – Ashwin, New Delhi 2008, and now Bosch suggests 18...Qc6!Nµ with the idea of ...Qa4.

10.Na2!? is at least a creative attempt to 'take advantage' of White's 6th move. I would prefer the typical reply:



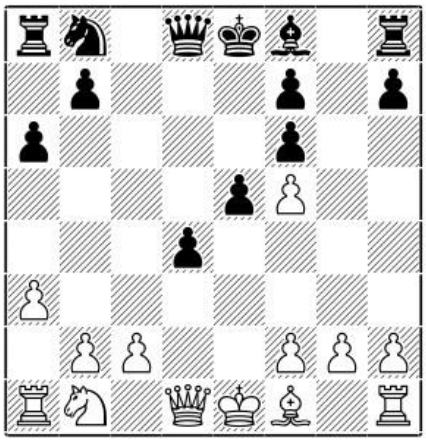
10...Bxf5N (10...Be6 11.Bd3 Nc6 12.0-0 h5 [or 12...Qd7 13.Qh5 0-0-0 14.Qh4] 13.Qf3² gave White some pressure in Ramesh – Montilla Carrillo, Barcelona 2017) 11.exf5 Qd5 With good prospects for Black.

10...Bxf5

10...Qb6?! 11.Nd2 Qxb2 looks too greedy here: 12.Bc4 b5? was seen in Asis Gargatagli – Neelash, Montcada i Reixac 2018, and now 13.Rb1!N 13...Qxa3 14.Bxf7† with the idea 14...Kxf7 15.Qh5† Kg8 16.Rb3!+– would win for White.

Black could, however, try 10...Be6!? 11.Nd2 followed by 11...Nc6 or 11...Nd7.

11.exf5



11...Qd5 12.Qd3 Nc6

Please do not fall for 12...e4? 13.Nc3!±.

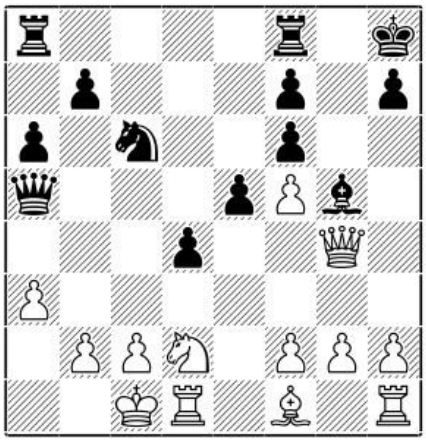
White was a bit better after 12...Qa5† 13.Nd2 Bb4 14.0-0-0 Bxd2† 15.Qxd2 Qxd2† 16.Rxd2 Nd7 17.Bc4 Rc8 18.Bd5 Rc7 19.Re1² in Demchenko – Areshchenko, Tbilisi 2017. Although Areshchenko is a 2650 GM and Najdorf specialist, even he got caught out by 6.a3. Instead we will follow the play of a sub-2200 player!

13.Nd2 Qa5 14.0-0-0 Bh6 15.Qb3

White is becoming a little bit too adventurous.

After 15.Kb1N 15...Bxd2 16.Rxd2 0-0-0 the position is about equal.

15...0-0 16.Qh3 Bg5 17.Qg4 Kh8



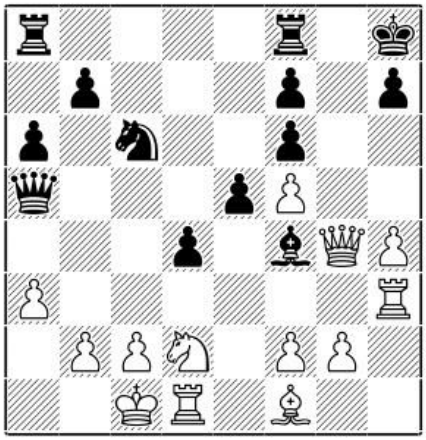
18.h4 Bf4!

This is a good positional move.

19.Rh3

After 19.g3 Black would not be doing badly even if he had to retreat his bishop, as the third rank would be closed for White's rooks, but in fact 19...Bxd2† 20.Rxd2 Qd5!–+ would immediately decide matters, as Black hits the h1-rook while threatening to invade on a2.

This position was reached in Seyb – Kerem, Riga 2018. Black's most accurate continuation is:



19...Rac8!N

Threatening ...Rg8. The immediate 19...Rg8 allows White to wiggle out with 20.Qe2 Rac8 21.Kb1.

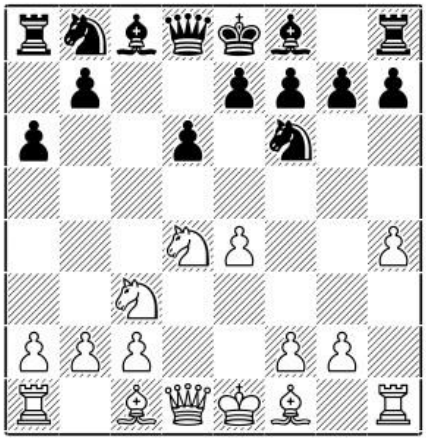
20.Qe2 d3!

Best, although 20...Rfd8µ is also strong.

21.Rxd3 Qa4!

White is in trouble, with ...Nd4 next up.

H) 6.h4



Now we are really entering the twilight zone. When I first saw this move in a U.S. Championship game, I thought it looked like a mouse slip... but of course, it was played over the board. Many good players have tried it, although mostly in fast time controls. It is certainly a strange move, but when playing White one can get away with certain things. So even though I do not think this move can be that dangerous, Black should be careful not to just laugh it off.

6...e5

As always both 6...e6 and 6...Nc6 must be playable.

7.Nb3

Look at the strange pawn on h4. We could compare this to the other positions arising after 6.a4 or 6.a3. Perhaps White's lunge is not so bad, and it could play a role in a kingside pawn storm.

7...Be6

This is actually quite a big decision! Black takes control over the d5-square and prepares queenside counterplay, but enables White to target the bishop by advancing his f-pawn.

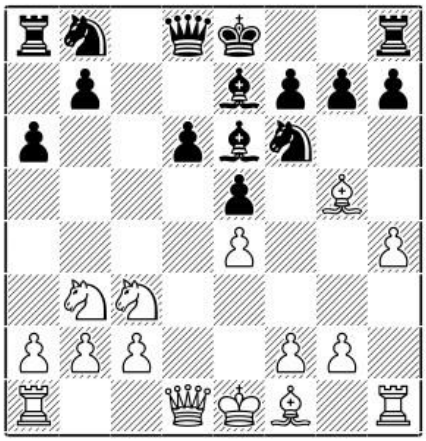
An equally valid alternative which leads to a different type of battle is:

7...Be7 8.Bg5

White should play for the d5-square with this move, as f2-f4 loses its point without a bishop on e6 acting as a target.

8...Be6

I do not like 8...Nbd7 9.a4! and in fact Nepomniachtchi beat both MVL and Gelfand this way, albeit in blitz.



9.Bxf6 Bxf6

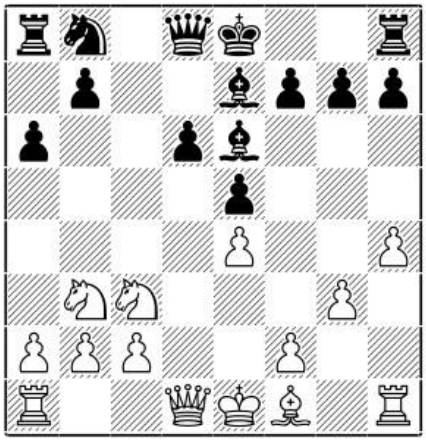
Now the h4-pawn is hanging!

10.g3 Be7

Black covers the d6-pawn and prepares to transfer his knight to f6.

Another game continued 10...Nc6 11.Qd2 0-0 12.0-0-0 Qb6 13.Bh3 Rfd8 14.Nd5 Bxd5 15.exd5 when 15...Ne7!?N should have been tried. (Instead 15...Nb8 16.Qe3!?² gave White a pleasant endgame in Fedoseev – Sadzikowski, Karlsruhe 2017, while 15...Nd4 16.Nxd4 exd4 results in sterile near-equality, with Black on the slightly worse side.)

10...0-0 is another idea, when 11.Qd2 has been played a few times but 11.Bh3!? may be a better bet.



11.Qd2

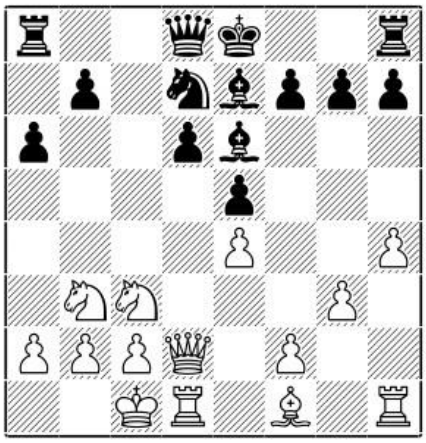
Black obtained a good position after 11.Bh3 0-0 12.Nd5 Nd7 13.Qd3 Nb6 14.0-0-0?! Nxd5 15.exd5 Bxh3 16.Rxh3 Qd7 in Haznedaroglu – Yilmaz, Ankara 2018.

11.Nd5 Nd7 12.Bh3 Rc8 13.c3 0-0 14.Kf1 Nb6 15.Ne3 Nc4 16.Nxc4 Rxc4 17.Nd2 Rc6= was also fine for Black in Golubka – Kovchan, Kiev

2018.

11...Nd7 12.0-0-0

Now Black should have brought the knight to the kingside with:

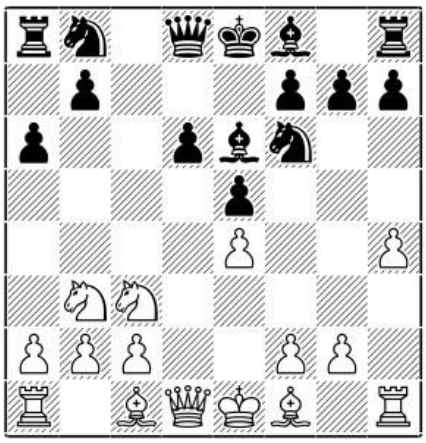


12...Nf6!N

Rather than 12...Nb6 13.f4! as played in Dastan – Esen, Ankara 2018.

13.f4 Rc8

Black has a good position, as 14.f5 Bd7 is nothing to worry about.



8.f4

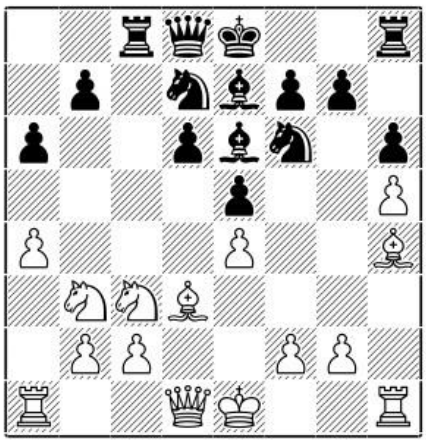
The most interesting and challenging move.

8.Bg5 Nbd7

I don't consider this dangerous at all, even though Caruana has tried it for White.

9.Qd2

9.a4 Rc8 10.h5 h6 11.Bh4 Be7 12.Bd3 occurred in Lagarde – Huschenbeth, Berlin 2018, and now:



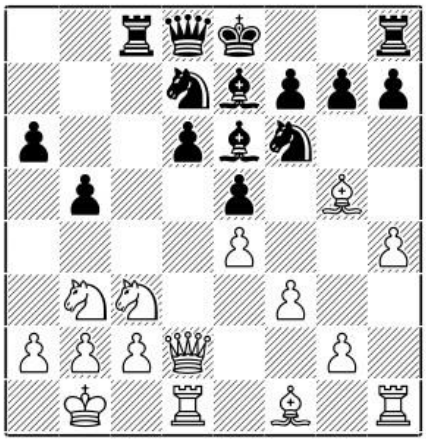
12...0-0Nµ would have left White's pieces looking silly.

9.g3 Be7 10.Qd2 b5 11.Bg2 0-0 12.0-0-0 b4 (12...a5!Nµ looks even better) 13.Nd5 Bxd5 14.exd5 a5 gave Black good chances in Kilic – Muradli, Manavgat 2018.

9...Rc8

9...h6 is also good.

10.0-0-0 Be7 11.Kb1 b5 12.f3



12...h6

Black went wrong with 12...0-0?! 13.g4 b4? 14.Nd5 Bxd5 15.exd5 a5 16.Bb5± in Caruana – Andriasyan, Internet (rapid) 2018.

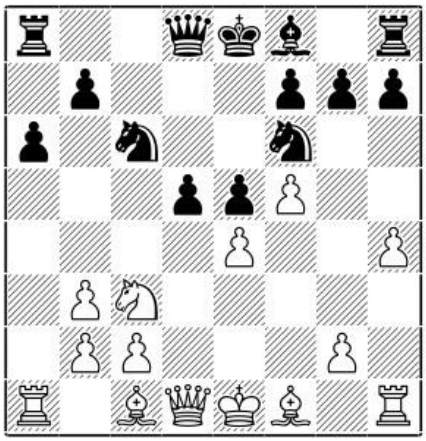
13.Be3 Nb6

Black had good prospects for counterplay in Silva Nazzarri – O'Kelly de Galway, Lugano (ol) 1968 – which, by the way, featured 6.f3 and subsequently transposed to the present line.

8...b5!?

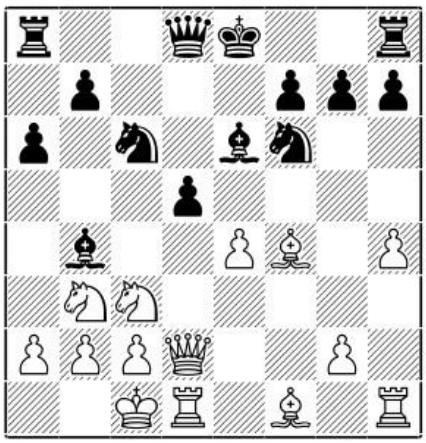
Svidler once tried 8...g6, which is similar to the Sadzikowski – Cheparinov game referred to in a note in Chapter 14 on pages 394-395.

It is important to mention that the seemingly principled 8...Nc6 9.f5 Bxb3 10.axb3 d5 does not work out very well after:

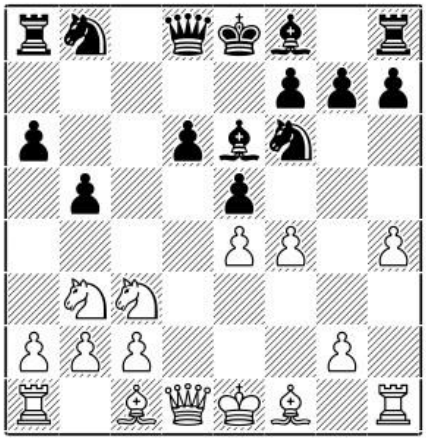


11.Nxd5!N 11...Nxd5 12.exd5 Nd4 13.f6! (Moradiabadi) 13...gxf6 (Black loses after 13...Qxf6 14.c3 Nf5 15.Bb5†!; and 13...Qxd5 14.c3 Qe4† 15.Kf2!± is bad too) 14.c3±

Black has often opened the position with 8...exf4 9.Bxf4 Nc6 10.Qd2 d5! (10...Be7 11.0-0-0²) but after 11.0-0-0 Bb4 White does well with:



12.Bg5! This only works because the bishop enjoys extra protection from the h-pawn! 12...Nxe4 13.Qe3 I analysed this more deeply but was forced to conclude that things are not easy for Black, so we should focus on our main continuation.

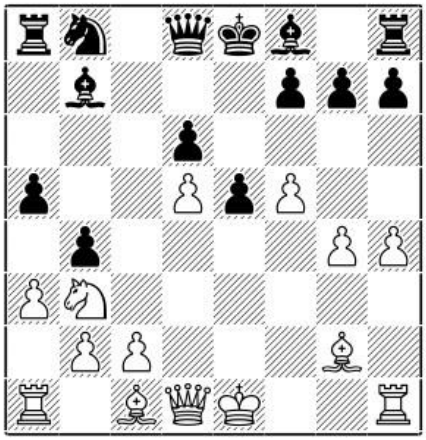


9.f5 Bc8!

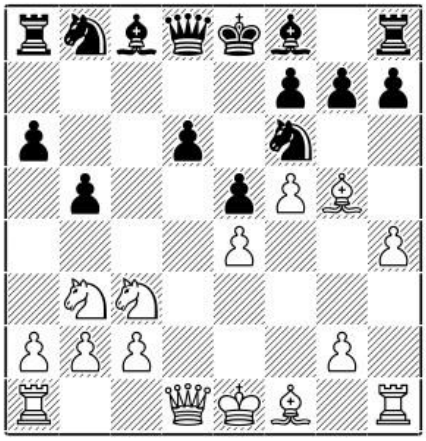
This idea can crop up in a few Najdorf lines. With the centre closed, there is time to reroute the bishop to b7, and Black has done well from here.

10.Bg5

10.g4 also looks consistent. A logical continuation is: 10...Bb7 11.Bg2 b4 12.Nd5 Nxd5 13.exd5 a5 14.a3

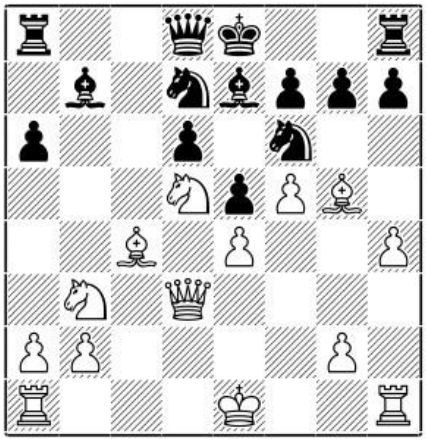


14...bxa3 (Black could also try 14...Be7!?N 15.g5 Nd7) 15.Rxa3 Nd7 16.Be3 h6 17.g5 (17.Qa1!?) 17...hxg5 18.hxg5 Rxh1† 19.Bxh1 a4 20.Nd2 Qa5÷ Ruiz Sanchez – Gordievsky, Greensboro 2017.



10...Nbd7 11.g4

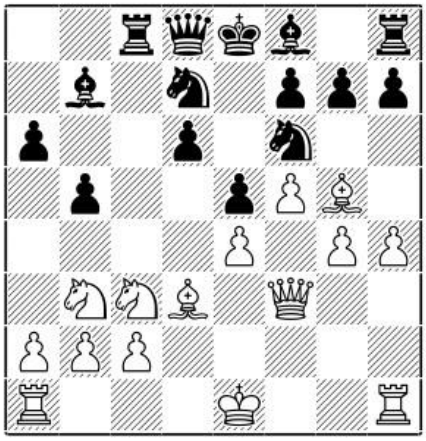
11.Nd5?! Bb7 12.c4 bxc4 (12...Be7 looks good too) 13.Bxc4 Be7 14.Qd3 occurred in Nestorovic – Lapcevic, Ruma 2017, when simple and strong would have been:



14...Nxd5N 15.Bxd5 Bxd5 16.Qxd5 0-0µ White's position is too loose.

11...Bb7 12.Qf3 Rc8 13.Bd3

13.Bxf6 Nxf6 14.0-0-0 would have been safer.



13...Rxc3!?

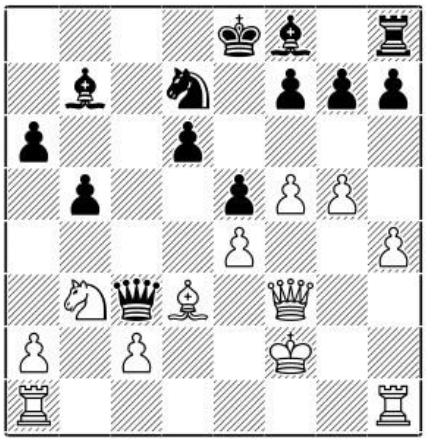
Cheparinov unsurprisingly goes for this enterprising sacrifice rather than settle for 13...h6 14.Bxf6 Nxf6 with approximate equality.

14.bxc3 Qc7

14...d5!? 15.exd5 Qc7 was another idea.

15.Bxf6 Nxf6 16.g5 Qxc3† 17.Kf2 Nd7

Black clearly has good compensation. White's next move looks natural enough but is a mistake.

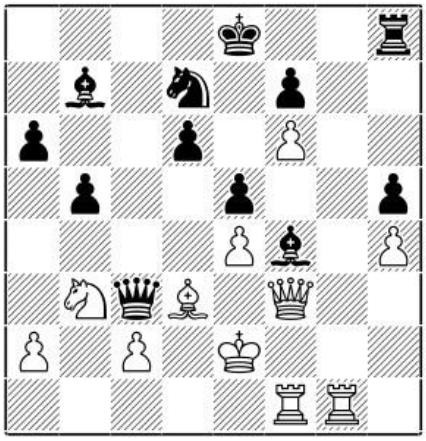


18.f6? gxf6 19.gxf6 h5! 20.Raf1 Bh6

20...Rh6Nµ is also strong.

21.Ke2 Bf4 22.Rhg1

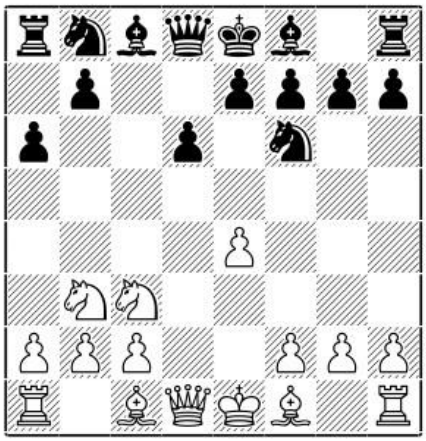
We have been following Ali Marandi – Cheparinov, Kocaeli 2017. Here I like:



22...Bc8!?Nµ

Preparing ...Kd8 and ...Nxf6.

I) 6.Nb3



Finally, we have this modern move which has been favoured by Bartel. White 'waits' again, but usually it is not a good idea to retreat the knight from its active central post. Even so, Black cannot really refute this move.

6...g6

6...e5?! does not give White anything special, but he gets a few additional options compared to the normal lines such as 6.Be3 e5. There is not much sense in playing a move whose normal purpose is to drive the knight away from the centre, when White has already retreated it voluntarily.

6...e6 allows 7.g4. The position after 7...b5 8.Bg2 Bb7 9.g5 Nfd7 (rather than 9...b4 10.Nd5! when the complications worked out in White's favour in Bartel – Wojtaszek, Poznan 2016) must be okay with White's knight having retreated to b3 so early, but it not the type of position I am looking for.

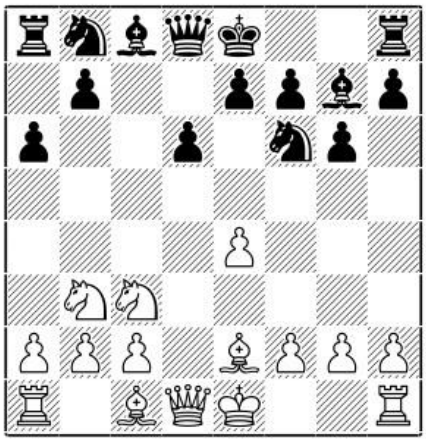
Black has also tried 6...Nc6 7.Be3 Ng4 (7...e6 8.g4) 8.Bd2 Nf6, as well as 6...Nbd7!? 7.g4 h6, if one wishes to research alternatives.

7.Be2

This is almost always played, as White wants to push his g-pawn, for better or worse.

7.Be3 Bg7 must be a pleasant version of a Dragon, with White's knight gone from the centre.

7...Bg7

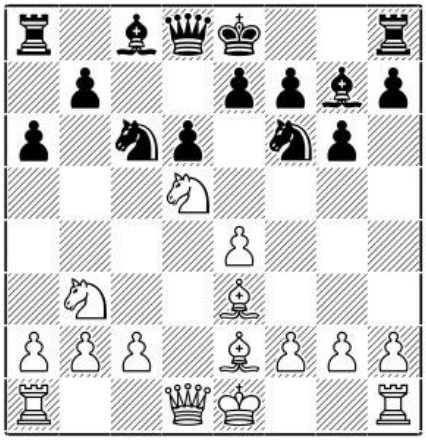


8.g4

If White does not want to go full throttle, there is also:

8.Be3 Nc6 9.Nd5!?

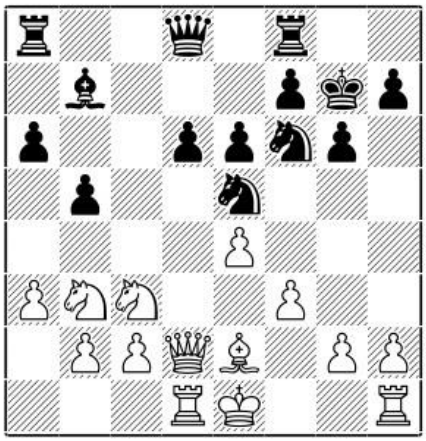
Some strong players have toyed around with this idea.



9...0-0!?

Black plays provocatively, not bothering to guard the b6-square.

9...Nd7 is perfectly playable, for instance: 10.Qc1 (the passive 10.c3 e6 11.Nf4 Nde5 was fine for Black in Fenil – Brunello, Reykjavik 2018) 10...e6 11.Nc3 b5 12.Bh6 0-0 13.Bxg7 (13.h4!? was worth considering) 13...Kxg7 14.Qd2 Nf6 15.a3 Ne5 16.Rd1 Bb7 17.f3



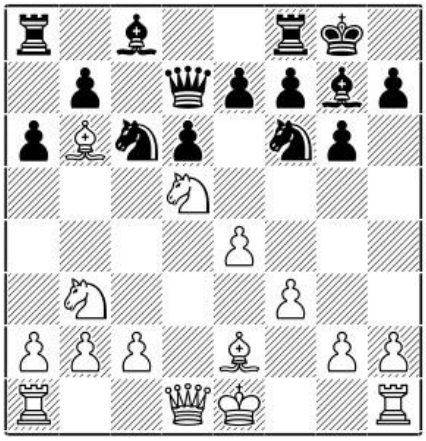
17...Nc4 (I would prefer striking in the centre with 17...d5!?N 18.Nc5 Qc7) 18.Bxc4 bxc4 19.Nd4 Qe7 The game was unclear in Sevian – Swiercz, Saint Louis 2018.

10.Bb6

10.Nxf6† Bxf6 11.c3 b5= was not at all dangerous in Nakamura – Vachier-Lagrave, Leuven (blitz) 2016.

10...Qd7 11.f3

11.Nc7? just wastes time. 11...Rb8 12.f3 e6 13.Qd2 Qe7 14.0-0-0 occurred in Gurvich – Zakhartsov, Moscow 2018, when 14...Rd8!Nµ would have prepared ...Rd7 to corral the knight.



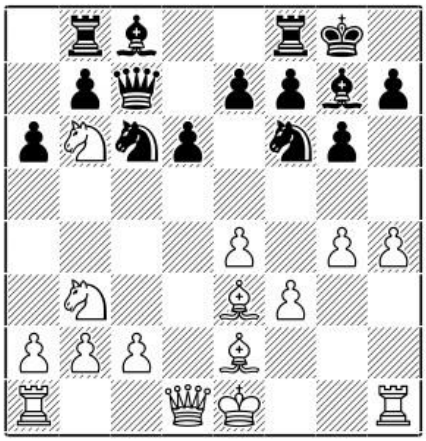
11...Nh5!?

11...Nxd5 12.exd5 Ne5 13.0-0² was the old game Westerinen – Dannevig, Gausdal 1994.

11...e6 12.Nxf6† Bxf6 13.c3 Bh4† 14.g3 Bd8! was given by Fogarasi, but I prefer White after 15.Bf2.

The text move is better, as well as more interesting.

12.Be3 Rb8 13.g4 Nf6 14.Nb6 Qc7 15.h4



Here Black could have continued:

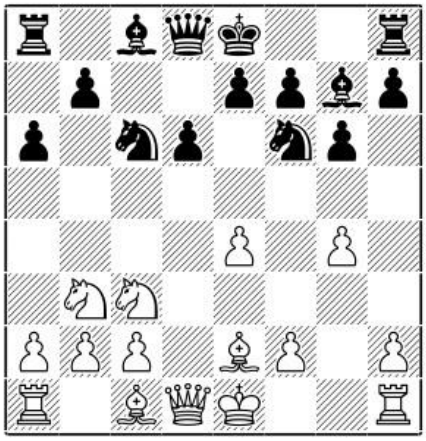
15...e6!N

Intending ...d5. (Instead after 15...Be6 White seized space with 16.c4!² in Vitiugov – Kovchan, Biel 2016.)

8...Nc6

I do not care for 8...h6 as played in Bartel – Artemiev, Moscow 2016.

However, 8...h5!? 9.g5 Nfd7 is an interesting idea and worth considering.

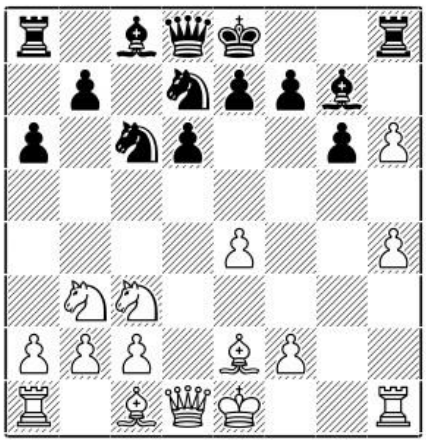


9.g5

9.Be3 gives Black the freedom to choose between 9...b5, 9...Be6 and 9...h5!?.

9...Nd7 10.Be3

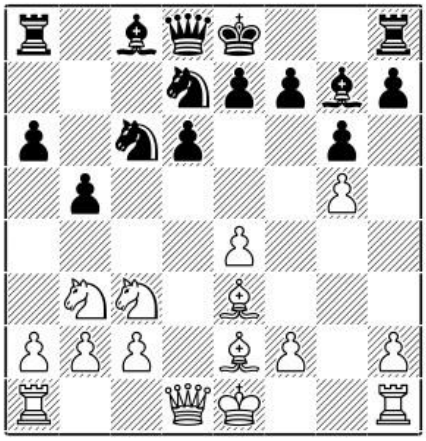
I also considered: 10.h4 h6!? (10...h5!? is also possible, while 10...b5 11.h5 Bb7 is another idea) 11.gxh6



11...Bxc3†! I tend to be attracted to such ideas. 12.bxc3 Nf6 13.f3 Qc7 The position is unclear but I would be happy to take Black.

10...b5

Normally this move would not be possible so early, as the c6-knight would be left hanging!

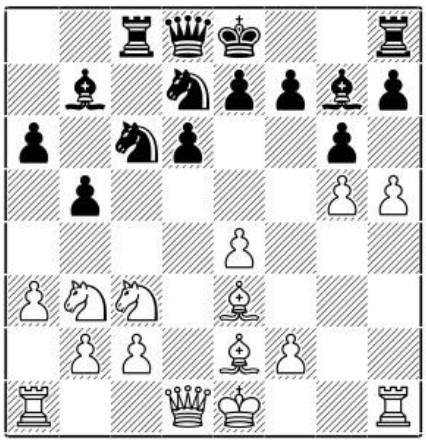


11.Nd4

White could try various alternatives:

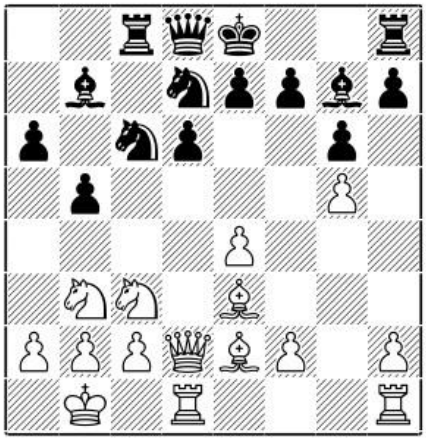
11.h4N 11...b4 12.Na4 can be met by 12...h6 or 12...h5.

11.a3 Bb7 12.h4 (12.f4? Rc8 13.0-0 h6 14.gxh6 was Fuchs – Fier, Maastricht 2016, when 14...Rxh6!Nμ would have been strongest) 12...Rc8 13.h5 Black should have tried one of the following improvements:



13...Rg8!?N or 13...Bxc3†!?N 14.bxc3 Nce5, with good chances in either case. (Instead of 13...Na5?! 14.Bd4 e5 15.Nxa5 Qxa5 16.Be3± as seen in Stankovic – Damljanovic, Niksic 2018, when 16...Rxc3 was not working due to 17.Bd2!).

11.Qd2 Bb7 12.0-0-0 Rc8 (12...b4!?N 13.Na4 Qc7 14.f4 0-0,, is another idea mentioned by Roiz) 13.Kb1 and Black should continue:

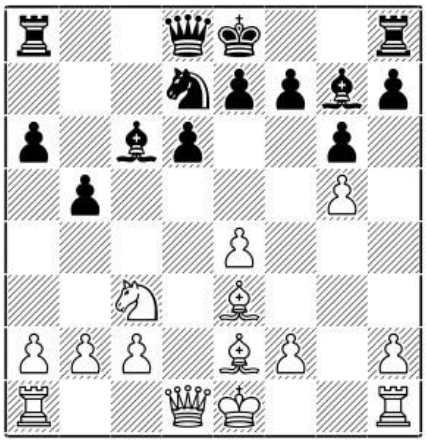


13...0-0N (13...Nce5? 14.Bd4! causes Black some discomfort, and 14...0-0 15.f4 Nc4 16.Bxc4 Rxc4 17.Bxg7 Kxg7 18.Rhe1 gave White the upper hand in Neiksans – Zagorskis, Parnu 2016) 14.h4 b4 15.Na4 Qc7„ As given by Roiz.

11...Bb7 12.Nxc6

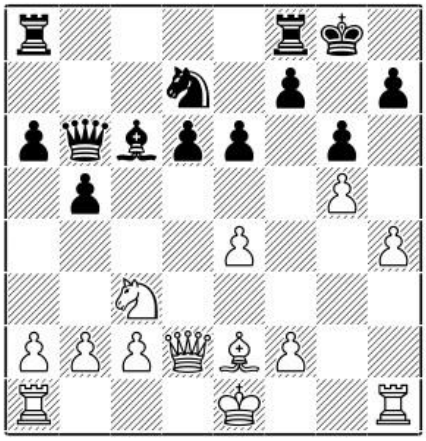
12.Qd2 Nc5 13.f3?! (13.Nxc6N 13...Bxc6 14.f3 b4 15.Nd1 is a better try, but Black has nothing to complain about) 13...Nxd4 14.Bxd4 Bxd4 15.Qxd4 e5! 16.Qd2 Ne6³ was Sosovicka – Sorkovsky, Tatranske Zruby 2017.

12...Bxc6

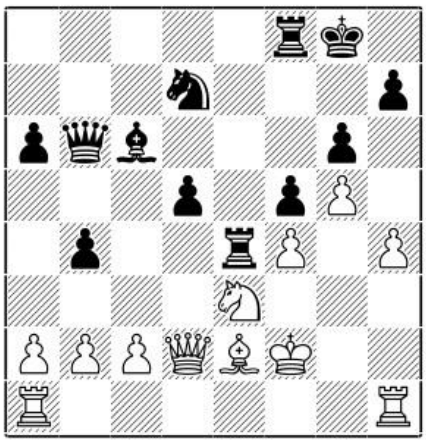


13.Bd4 Bxd4 14.Qxd4 0-0 15.h4 Qb6 16.Qd2 e6

We are following a game in which, having achieved nothing special from the opening, White quickly went downhill and came to a disastrous end.



17.f3?! b4 18.Nd1 d5 19.exd5 exd5 20.Ne3? Rae8 21.Kf2 f5 22.f4 Re4 0-1



Preotu – Xiong, Dallas 2017.

Conclusion

This final chapter has dealt with the remainder of White's sensible (and not so sensible) 6th moves after 5...a6.

The most common is 6.a4, which is solid and similar to some other positional lines. Developing with 6.Bd3 can hardly be bad, but Black gets a decent position with either our main line 6...e5 or the secondary option of 6...g6. The silly-looking 6.Rg1 is just that; but only a level ending awaits us.

I had never paid much attention to the trifecta of queen moves, but now it is clear that they should all be met in rather different yet

thematic ways. 6.Qf3 allows a promising Dragon set-up, while 6.Qe2 and 6.Qd3 are met in more traditional fashion.

The sly 6.a3 is not completely harmless as the World Champion has shown, but of course it should not be too dangerous either. I find 6.h4 to be the strangest line, but it is not without merit. After 6...e5 7.Nb3 both 7...Be6 and 7...Be7 are possible, with the latter being a safer choice.

Lastly, Bartel's 6.Nb3 has some venom. The Dragon set-up is a logical choice, and we can expect further developments.

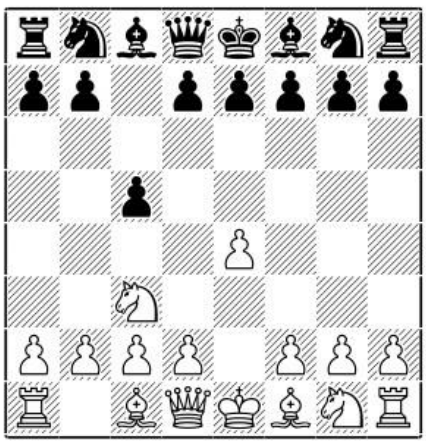
Appendix

Anti-Sicilians

This section is just a little bonus. I will not offer a complete Anti-Sicilian repertoire here – nor do I need to; there is *Grandmaster Repertoire 6A* by Kotronias, and Ftacnik also had Anti-Sicilian coverage in *Grandmaster Repertoire 6*. So why is this section even here? Well, I have played the Sicilian for a long time, so I have formed my own opinions and I figured I'd share them here.

I am not going to talk about every line – the theory does not change enough to warrant coverage of 2.Na3 or even things like the Closed Sicilian for that matter. Once a Black player is comfortable in the Closed Sicilian and such, it is not necessary to frequently update the theory. So I have decided to address what I consider to be the lines that require the most attention from a Najdorf player from a practical standpoint...

1.e4 c5 2.Nc3 Trickery



This may seem like an odd place to have some things to say, but this move presents a Najdorf player with a dilemma.

I have almost always played 2...Nc6, and in my experience 90% of 2.Nc3 players are going to follow up with 3.g3 and play a Closed Sicilian or 3.f4 going for a Grand Prix. In both cases, 2...Nc6 is the most flexible move. There is also 3.Bb5!? but that should not put anyone off too much. But I know that many readers will not want to play this way just 'hoping' not to get move-ordered. The 'problem' with 2...Nc6 is that a cunning White player could opt for 3.Nge2 (or 3.Nf3 would pose similar questions) with the intention of playing d2-d4 after all, when the c6-knight means we have been tricked out of the Najdorf.

So what can Black do? I have often played 3...d6 4.d4 cxd4 5.Nxd4 Nf6, but this is a Classical Sicilian. Another option is 3...g6 when there might follow 4.d4 cxd4 5.Nxd4 Bg7. Gelfand (a Najdorf and Sveshnikov player) has frequently played this way. All right, I know this is an Accelerated Dragon – not what you signed up for. But there is no Maroczy Bind, and if we got into a Yugoslav then there is no 9.0-0-0, so Black's workload is relatively small. Of course, these options are dependent on the Black player's experience...

Another idea is 3...Nd4. This is certainly a big shortcut, and it was advocated by Kotronias in the book mentioned above – *Grandmaster Repertoire 6A*. I have never studied this myself, but it is an option.

And of course, in reply to 2.Nc3 there is 2...d6. Traditionally, the 'problem' with this was the transposition to the Grand Prix Attack with 3.f4 because Black often prefers to do without

...d6, but now it is too late. Nevertheless, Ftacnik confidently went for this anyway, and Black should be fine after 3...Nc6 4.Nf3 g6 when there are a couple classic Kasparov games worth checking out: 5.Bb5 Bd7 6.0-0 Bg7 7.d3 a6 8.Bxc6 Bxc6 was Ljubojevic – Kasparov, Linares 1991, and 5.Bc4 Bg7 6.0-0 e6 (Ftacnik goes for 6...Nf6) was Tiviakov – Kasparov, Wijk aan Zee 2001.

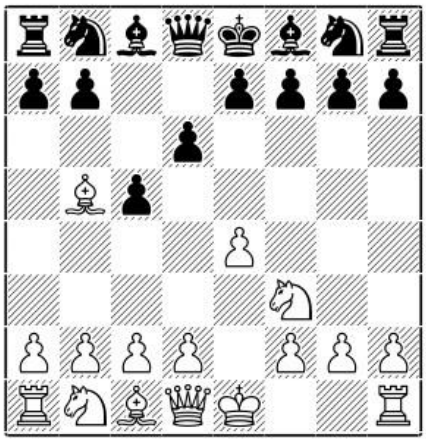
After 2.Nc3 d6 the 'Chameleon' approach with 3.Nge2 is not so scary. 3...Nf6 4.g3 (4.d4 cxd4 5.Nxd4 a6 is our Najdorf of course) 4...Nc6 5.Bg2 g6 6.d4 And although we have been 'tricked', 6...cxd4 7.Nxd4 Nxd4 8.Qxd4 Bg7 is a very comfortable line for Black (he scores well over 50%). And it's easy to learn.

Perhaps the biggest thing to consider in 2019 when playing 2...d6 is Carlsen's 3.d4!? cxd4 4.Qxd4 Nc6 5.Qd2 which is very strange looking, but not dumb at all.

Finally, if none of this is appealing, there is 2...a6!? which has also been the choice of many Najdorf players.

Moscow Variation

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.Bb5†



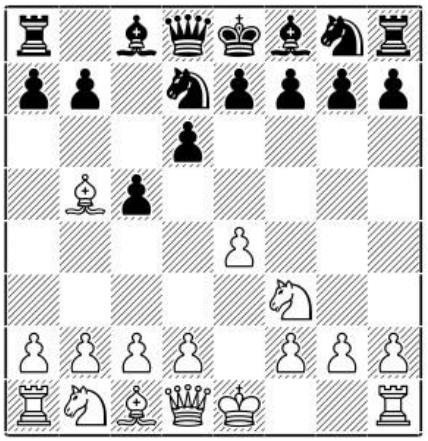
This line is probably the biggest nuisance for a 2...d6 Sicilian player. Once considered rather harmless, it is now a frequent choice. And of course it has been championed by Magnus Carlsen, and fashion trickles down from the top, so we have to take it seriously.

The most solid option is 3...Bd7 and I have played this several times. Often a Maroczy structure arises, and it can be quite difficult to play for a win with Black. Ftacnik covers this in *Grandmaster Repertoire 6*.

I used to play 3...Nc6 a lot and I still think it is viable, but White has developed some sharp ideas, and more can go wrong quickly. If you like this, then check out the coverage by Kotronias in *Grandmaster Repertoire 6A* – but make sure you stay up to date on the theory.

But the move I will focus on is:

3...Nd7



This is the most uncompromising answer. I have played 2...d6 for a very long time, but it took me a while to 'come around'. The text move is a favourite of Maxime Vachier-Lagrave, and a study of his games in this line is essential.

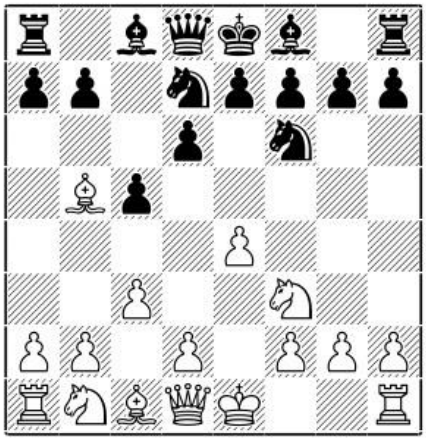
Usually White either immediately strikes in the centre or else castles, but there are some other options. So we will look at some minor fourth-move options before seeing the main lines: **A)** 4.d4 and **B)** 4.0-0.

4.c3

This is logical but appears less dangerous than the alternatives.

4...Ngf6

I prefer this move, which hits the e4-pawn immediately (compared to 4...a6 5.Ba4 Ngf6 when White can also try 6.Bc2).



5.Qe2

5.Bd3 is not as silly as it looks, but it is rather early and Black can just play 5...e6 or even 5...g6!?.

5...a6 6.Ba4 b5 7.Bc2 Bb7 8.d4

Or 8.0-0 e6 9.d4 Be7.

And here Black can play:

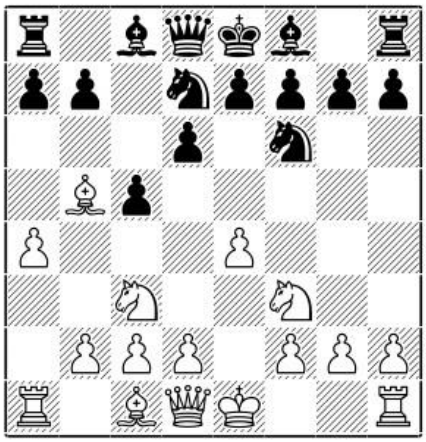
8...g6!?

Also possible but more compliant is 8...e6 9.0-0 Be7 10.Re1 0-0 11.Nbd2.

9.0-0 Bg7

With the idea of meeting 10.e5 with 10...dxe5 11.dxe5 Bxf3 12.gxf3 Nh5 (or 12...Nd5).

4.a4 was tried by Carlsen in an important game. 4...Ngf6 5.Nc3



And now I would rather avoid the rush of White's a-pawn after 5...g6 6.a5!? Bg7 7.a6, which was annoying in Carlsen – Dreev, Tbilisi 2017, and prefer putting the question to White's bishop immediately with:

5...a6!

"*Show me your papers*," as Bologan said.

6.Bc4

If 6.Bxd7† Bxd7 7.a5 g6 8.0-0 Bg7.

Or 6.Be2 b6.

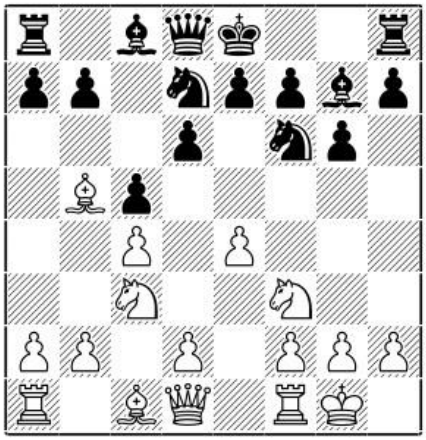
6...b6 7.0-0 Bb7

This gives Black a solid position with a lot of pieces still on the board. One example went:

8.Re1 g6 9.d4 cxd4 10.Qxd4 Bg7 11.Bd5 Qc7 12.Bxb7 Qxb7 13.Nd5 Rc8 14.Re2 h6 15.h3 Kf8! 16.Nxf6 Bxf6 17.Qd3 Kg7

Black was fine in Blomqvist – Svidler, Porto Carras 2018.

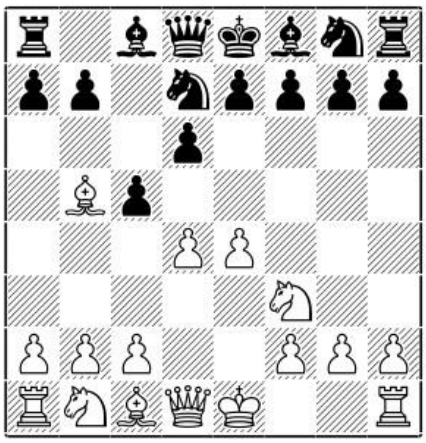
4.c4!? Ngf6 (Black delays 4...a6 5.Ba4 as there is another way to hound the bishop) 5.Nc3 g6 6.0-0 Bg7



7.d4 (after 7.d3 0-0 8.Ne1?! Nb6! the b5-bishop is stuck, while 7.Ba4 0-0 8.h3 Nb6 9.Bb3 e5 10.d3 Ne8 11.Bg5 f6 12.Be3 f5 13.Bg5 Bf6 14.Bh6 Bg7 15.Bg5 Qd7! 16.exf5 gxf5 17.a4 a5 gave Black good counterplay in Safarli – Giri, Shamkir 2016) 7...cxd4 8.Nxd4 0-0 9.Bxd7 Bxd7 10.b3 a6 11.a4 And now Black can still play: 11...b5!? 12.axb5 axb5 13.Rxa8 Qxa8 14.Ndxb5 Bxb5 15.Nxb5 Nxe4=

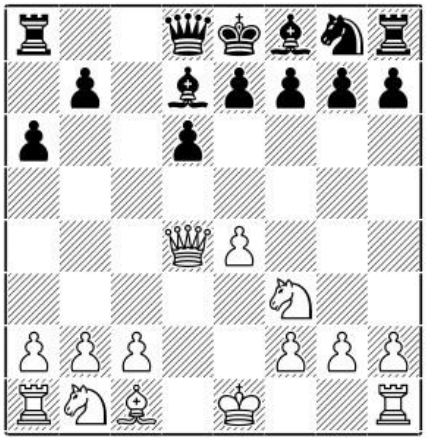
4.Ba4!? is a funny-looking move that is not without its points. After 4...Ngf6 5.0-0! a6 (Black has been crushed after 5...Nxe4; while 5...g6 6.Re1 Bg7 allows 7.c3!) 6.c4 White's argument is that this is an improved 4.c4 set-up. 6...g6 7.Nc3 Bg7 8.d3 0-0 9.h3 Rb8! Black prepares for a quick ...b5. 10.Rb1 (after 10.Be3 or 10.Bg5 Black can play 10...b5!? 11.cxb5 Qa5) 10...Ne8 11.Bg5 This was Liang – Lobanov, Manavgat 2018. Here 11...Nc7N 12.Qd2 b5 is possible.

A) 4.d4



This straightforward move has been less popular in recent years.

4...cxd4 5.Qxd4 a6! 6.Bxd7† Bxd7

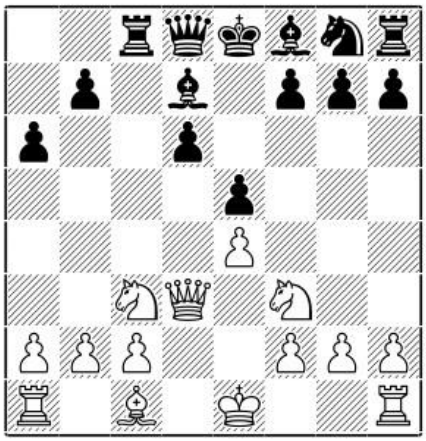


White has many possibilities here. In general Black will respond with ...e5, creating a familiar Najdorf structure, and ...h6 to prevent White's Bg5. Below are some possibilities:

7.0-0 Rc8 8.Nc3 e5 will generally transpose somewhere.

7.Bg5 h6 8.Bh4 Rc8 9.Nc3 e5! is a typical trick. 10.Qd3 (10.Bxd8?? exd4–+) 10...g5! 11.Bg3 Nf6 12.Nd2 (or 12.0-0-0 Qc7 13.Kb1 Be7 14.h4 g4 15.Nd2 b5 16.a3 Qb7 17.f4 gxf3 18.gxf3 a5,, Martirosov – Rizzitano, Marlborough 2013) 12...Be6 13.0-0-0 Qa5 14.a3 b5 15.Nd5 Nxd5 16.exd5 Bd7 17.h4 This was Enkin – Vigorito, Portsmouth 2010. Here 17...g4N,, would have been strongest.

7.Nc3 e5 8.Qd3 Rc8!? This has been the trend in 2019 (8...h6 is still possible). Maybe Black can save on ...h6, at least for a move or two.



9.0-0 (after 9.Nd2 Be6! 10.Nf1 Be7 11.Ne3 Nf6 12.0-0 Qc7 13.a4 Qc5 14.Rd1 0-0 15.Bd2 Bd8 White essentially blundered with 16.Nf5? allowing 16...Bxf5 17.exf5 d5µ in Hammer – Svidler, Palma de Mallorca 2017) 9...h6 10.Nd2 Qc7 11.Rd1 Nf6 12.Nf1 Be7 13.Ne3 Be6= With a typical position; Black has done very well here.

7.c4

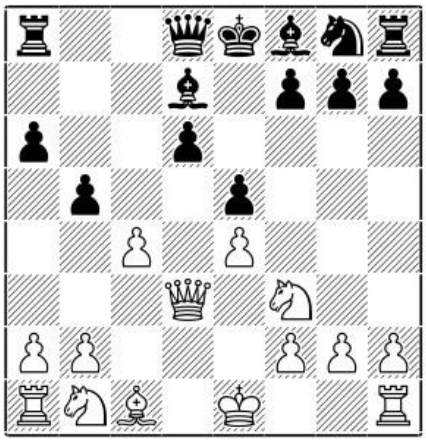
This gives the game a slightly different flavour.

7...e5

Another option is 7...Rc8!?.

8.Qd3 b5

A good example of what to avoid was seen after 8...h6 9.Nc3 Nf6 10.0-0 Be7 11.a4² in Tiviakov – Anand, Baden-Baden 2012.



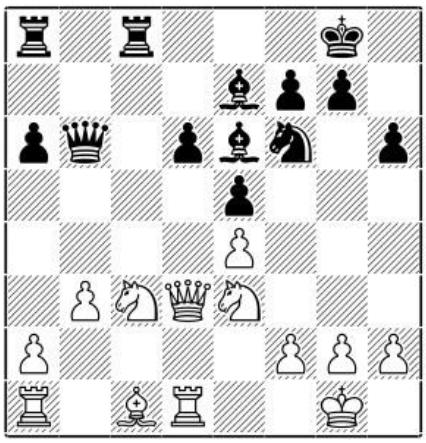
9.Nc3

9.Na3 Qb6 looks fine for Black. For example, 10.0-0 h6 11.b3 Nf6 12.Re1 Be7 13.Nd2 0-0 was pleasant for Black in Tiviakov – Babula, Dresden 2007.

9...bxc4 10.Qxc4 Be6 11.Qd3

11.Qc6† Bd7 12.Qc4 repeats.

11...h6 12.0-0 Nf6 13.Rd1 Be7 14.Ne1 0-0 15.Nc2 Qb6 16.Ne3 Rfc8 17.b3



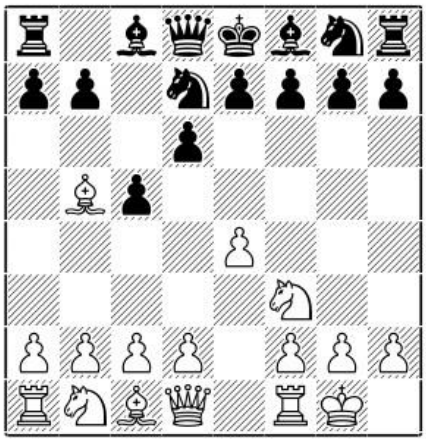
17...Qb7!

Better than 17...a5 18.Bd2 Qa6 19.Be1 Nd7 20.f3 Rc6?! 21.Qxa6 Rcxa6 22.Ned5² as in Carlsen – Anand, Stavanger 2013.

18.Bd2 Bd8 19.Rac1 Bb6=

Solozhenkin – Kulaots, Jyvaskyla 2015.

B) 4.0-0



4...a6!

The move order is important. After 4...Ngf6 5.d4!? (5.Re1 a6 6.Bf1 could also trip us up) 5...cxd4 6.Qxd4 a6 7.Bxd7† Bxd7 8.Bg5 we cannot get into the positions we want in the 4.d4 line.

After 4...a6 if White plays 5.Bxd7† Bxd7 6.d4 cxd4 7.Qxd4 Rc8 then this would bring us back to the 4.d4 line.

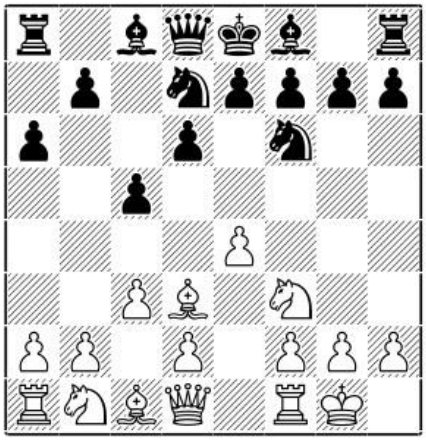
5.Bd3!?

This funny-looking move has evolved into the main line. The bishop will (usually) go to c2 after c2-c3.

5...Ngf6

White usually plays Re1 at some point, but first we will look at a line where White does without this move. Transpositions are common, as White can play moves like Re1, c2-c3, Bc2, and a2-a4 in various orders. So our lines are **B1)** 6.c3 and **B2)** 6.Re1.

B1) 6.c3



6...b5

One small rule of thumb would be to play ...b5 only after White's c2-c3, and ...e6 after Re1.

7.a4!?

Instead 7.Re1 e6 is variation B2 below, while 7.Bc2 Bb7 8.Qe2 e6 9.d4 Be7 reaches a position considered after 4.c3.

7...Bb7

It turns out that the natural 7...c4 can be met with 8.Be2! when 8...Bb7 9.axb5 axb5 10.Rxa8 Bxa8 11.Na3 has proven to be very

dangerous in several games. 7...b4!? is a decent alternative however.

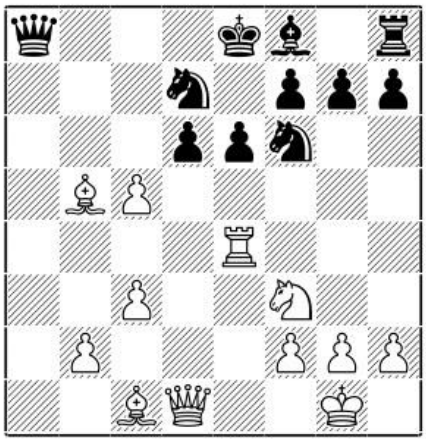
8.axb5 axb5 9.Rxa8 Qxa8 10.Bxb5 Bxe4 11.d4!?

The critical move, which entails a piece sacrifice. 11.d3 Bc6 12.Bxc6 Qxc6 is level.

11...Bxb1 12.dxc5 Be4 13.Re1

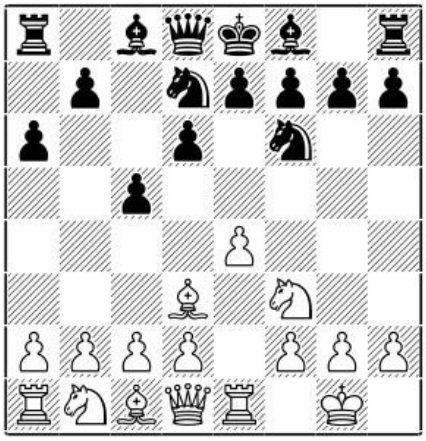
White can also try 13.cxd6 Bxf3 14.gxf3 exd6 when 15.Bf4?! was played in Givon – Sutovsky, Israel 2019. Now 15...Nd5!Nμ is best. White should have preferred 15.Re1†N 15...Kd8 16.b4!? with a mess.

13...e6 14.Rxe4!



The only way to add fuel to the fire, but Black is okay after either recapture. 14...Nxe4 was played in McShane – Svidler, Muelheim 2018, while 14...Qxe4 also worked out for Black in Jones – Mekhitarian, Batumi (ol) 2018.

B2) 6.Re1



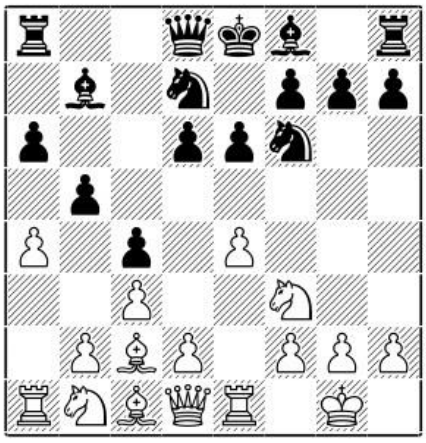
6...e6!

For a while 6...b5 was fashionable, but 7.c4! seems good for White, even after Topalov's successful introduction of the creative 7...g5!? which he used to defeat Carlsen.

7.c3

Instead 7.a4 (6.a4 would be met in the same way) 7...b6 leads to a kind of Hedgehog position after: 8.c3 Bb7 9.Qe2 Qc7 10.Na3 Be7 (or 10...g6!? Xu Yi – Cheparinov, China 2018) 11.Bc2 Rc8 12.d3 0-0 With a nice example being Gallagher – Georgiadis, Leukerbad 2019.

7...b5 8.Bc2 c4 9.a4 Bb7



10.d4!

This is critical.

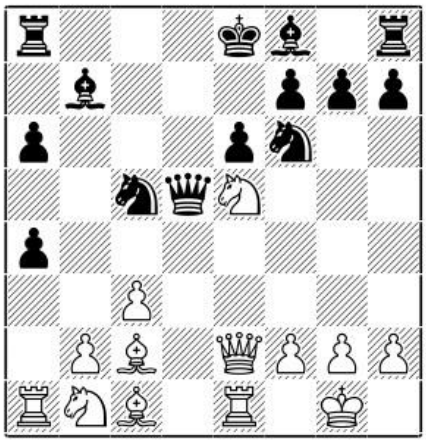
Practice has shown that 10.axb5 axb5 11.Rxa8 Qxa8 12.Na3 Be7! is a good pawn sacrifice. For example, 13.Nxb5 0-0 14.Qe2 Rc8

when it is not easy for White to develop. Black has moves like ...Nc5 and ...Ba6 to increase his grip.

10...cxd3 11.Qxd3!

The alternative 11.Bxd3 is very natural, but less dangerous. 11...bxa4 12.Qxa4 Be7 Then the forcing 13.e5 dxe5 14.Nxe5 does not lead to anything after: 14...0-0 15.Nxd7 (a couple of games saw 15.Nc6? Bxc6 16.Qxc6 and now 16...Nc5!N just wins for Black after 17.Bc4 Nfe4!–+ or 17.Bf1 Nd5 with the idea ...Rc8 when the queen is trapped!) 15...Nxd7 16.Rd1 (16.Qc2 Nf6=) 16...Qc8 17.Qxd7 Qxd7 18.Bxh7† Kxh7 19.Rxd7 Rfd8 20.Rd2 Bg5 21.f4 Be7 With excellent compensation.

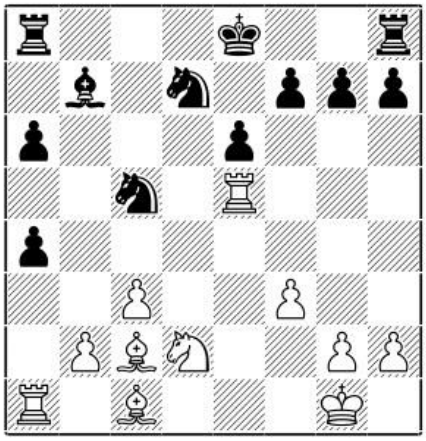
11...Nc5 12.Qe2 bxa4 13.e5! dxe5 14.Nxe5 Qd5!



15.f3 Bd6 16.Nd2 Bxe5!

This looks like the cleanest solution. Exchanging queens will avoid any quick disasters and the endgame offers chances for both sides.

17.Qxe5 Qxe5 18.Rxe5 Nfd7



Black is up a pawn for the moment. White can take it back of course, but then he will concede his pair of bishops. Black is ahead in development and quite active, so I think he can be happy enough here.

19.Rh5

Or 19.Rg5 0-0 20.Bxa4 Nxa4 21.Rxa4 f5³ as in Tomazini – Palac, Zagreb 2018. White's rook is out of play.

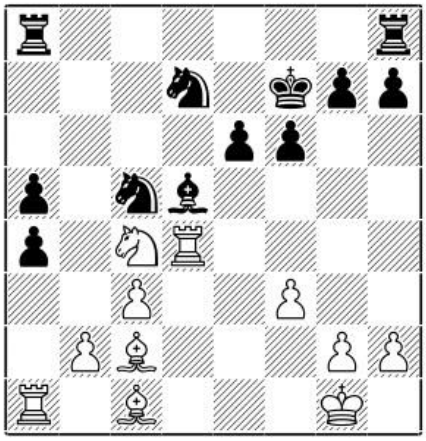
19...f6N

Another option is: 19...f5!? 20.Nc4 (better was 20.b4!?N 20...axb3 21.Nxb3 with some compensation, but Black looks okay too) 20...0-0 21.Na5 Rab8 22.Rh4 Ba8 23.Rb4 Rb5 24.Nc4 Rfb8 25.Bd2 Bd5 26.Bxa4?? Rxb4 0–1 Arjun – Harsha, Barcelona 2019.

20.Rh4!

After 20.Rxh7?! Rxh7 21.Bxh7 f5µ it is the bishop that is locked out of the game.

20...Kf7 21.Nc4 Bd5 22.Rd4 a5!?



And now a logical conclusion would be:

23.Nd6†

Taking on a4 is a bad idea: 23.Bxa4? Nxa4 24.Rxa4 Nc5 25.Ra3 Bxc4 26.Rxc4 Nd3µ For example, 27.Rc7† Kg6 28.Ra1 Rhb8 is excellent for Black.

23...Ke7 24.Nf5† Kf7 25.Nd6†

With a repetition.

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