Grandmaster Repertoire

Mihail Marin

The English Opening

VOLUME TWO



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Grandmaster Repertoire 4

The English Opening

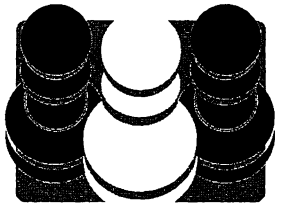
Volume Two

By

Mihail Marin

with invaluable help from Valentin Stoica

TO LUIZA



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Grandmaster Repertoire 4 - The English Opening Volume Two

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Series Foreword

Creating the Grandmaster Repertoire series seemed a natural idea. There is a glut of opening books at the *Starting Out* level. These books have certainly been refreshing, but they have almost completely replaced high-level opening books.

As chess fans, we felt we were missing out, and because we can, we decided to do something about it.

The books in the Grandmaster Repertoire series are written by grandmasters, edited by grandmasters, and will certainly be read by grandmasters. **This does not mean that players who are not grandmasters cannot read them**. We have worked hard to make our books clear in their presentation and to make it possible for the readers to decide the depth to which they want to study them.

When we were young and trying to be up-and-coming, we understood that you do not have to remember everything in an opening book in order to use it. It is our hope that those readers who find this repertoire too extensive and detailed, will ignore many of the details. Even now that we are grandmasters, we see the bolded moves as what we want to memorize, and the notes as explanations and illustrations.

It is our conviction that you will eventually be more successful by playing the main lines, simply because they are based on better moves. Instinctively most players know this, but they fear losing to a prepared line and thus turn to unambitious systems, or unhealthy surprises. The opponent will not be able to use his preparation but, sadly, will not need it. These sidelines generally end in uninspiring positions almost automatically.

Possibly the main reason why high-level opening books have disappeared is the rise of databases. It has been assumed that there is no point in having traditional opening books anymore, as you can look it all up in the database. Some rather lazy authors have a system: collect a few hundred games from the database, give Fritz a few moments, then hit Print. Such books add nothing to chess literature. We have seen enough of them and have never wanted to add to that pile.

In these days of multi-million game databases, we all have access to information, what is lacking is understanding. In the Grandmaster Repertoire series, very strong players will share their understanding and suggest strong new moves that are in no one else's database.

We are excited about this series and hope that the reader will share some of that excitement.

John Shaw & Jacob Aagaard

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Key to symbols used

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

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Foreword

By the author

I have always regarded building up a *perfect* opening repertoire, suitable for one's style and skills, as no easier a task than the Argonauts' search for the Golden Fleece.

There is a whole series of aspects to be clarified before even starting thinking about picking specific openings. Should we approach the opening in the same way irrespective of colour, or would it be wiser to display our main ambitions with White, while playing in a more restrained style with the black pieces? At all levels, we will find adherents of both these methods.

There are also several ways to give the repertoire a coherent character. We may be guided by the same general principles in all *our* opening variations (such as fighting for space and the initiative, or, on the contrary, aiming for solid but somewhat passive positions). This is the widest approach, which can lead to the coexistence of systems that bear absolutely no optical similarity to each other. It has frequently been the choice of the greatest players in history, but it is not easy to handle for mere mortals.

Many prefer to develop and exchange their pawns and pieces according to the same general patterns, irrespective of the opponent's play. In order to achieve this with Black, they utilize tandems of related openings such as the Slav and the Caro-Kann, or the King's Indian and the Breyer Ruy Lopez. This is likely to lead to a high degree of specialization in the respective systems, but risks limiting one's chess horizon.

When building up my repertoire with White, I treasure space and the initiative, but also the possibility of keeping play within a relatively limited range of structures, which I tend to study in depth. I also make major changes in my repertoire every five, ten or fifteen years, to avoid the risk mentioned in the previous paragraph.

As a child and teenager I only played 1.e4, but at the age of 18 I switched to 1.d4. For several years I employed aggressive set-ups, but in the early '90s I started to be attracted to the schemes involving a kingside fianchetto. Without me being aware of it, this was the moment when the book you are holding in your hands started its unusually long period of gestation.

The Catalan and the Fianchetto variations against the King's Indian and Grünfeld yielded me many wins, but I failed to find adequate related schemes against the Slav. Experience taught me that 1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 c6 followed by ...♗c8-f5 or ...♗c8-g4 offers White nothing but trouble. I was amused to find out that, a long time ago, a certain Valentin Marin (!) managed to

hold his own by employing this set-up with Black against the great Saviely Tartakower. It is also ironical that, together with other games played by Tartakower at Barcelona in 1929, that game convinced theoreticians to baptize the system based on 1.d4 and 2.g3 "The Catalan Opening".

In order to avoid the aforementioned problems, I started employing 1.♘f3 followed by 2.g3 and 3.♗g2 as my main move order, delaying the direct fight for the centre. After a few years I understood that this works well if Black develops in the spirit of the Indian Defences, but does not offer chances for an advantage if Black occupies the centre with 1...d5 (or 1...♘f6 and 2...d5).

After having had enough of 1.♘f3, I decided that the d5-square should immediately be taken under observation with 1.c4. Thus was initiated the most consistent period of success with White in my whole career. Against most of Black's answers I would generally develop according to my own taste, with g2-g3, ♗f1-g2, etc. If allowed, I did not hesitate to transpose to the Catalan or the Fianchetto King's Indian and Grünfeld, by playing d2-d4 at the right moment. The Slav Opening remained somewhat aside from this point of view, but I usually answered 1...c6 with 2.e4, transposing to the aggressive Panov Attack.

When I first considered writing a book dedicated to a *pure* English Opening repertoire, I was afraid that I would face insurmountable problems proving an advantage for White in *every* line while avoiding recommending a transposition to 1.d4 at various points. This over-ambitious quest, which I had secretly been dreaming of, was against the long-established views of official theory and looked nearly impossible to accomplish.

After more than one year of deep analysis with Valentin Stoica, I managed to make a step I had never dared to try before, by building a viable repertoire based on 1.c4 followed by 2.g3 irrespective of Black's answer!

That White refrains from an early d2-d4 in all these lines does not mean that he gives up the fight for the centre. Once White has eliminated the danger of Black's counterplay, or achieved some other sort of advantage, White will strive to occupy the centre. You will find the spirit of this general strategy throughout this book and its companion volume.

I completed the initial analytical work shortly before participating in the 51st edition of the Reggio Emilia tournament, as 2008 turned into 2009, and felt ready to give the brand new repertoire a thorough practical testing. The result was more than encouraging: with White I scored 4 out of 5, the equivalent of a rating performance of over 2800. Moreover, I had the better position in the only game I lost.

I cannot anticipate how my understanding of chess will change in, say, ten years, but for the moment I feel confident that, after almost 20 years of research, I have finally found *my* Golden Fleece.

By writing this book, I wish to share my conquest with you, dear reader.

Mihail Marin
Bucharest, August 2010

How to Use this Book

I have noticed that many chess players seem to read books by dipping in and out of various chapters, as the mood strikes them. I have a request – the first time you read this book, please read it in order. I ask this because I often introduce strategic ideas in one chapter that will be relied upon in later chapters. My plan is to build the reader's understanding of the English gradually, as the story unfolds.

This book supplies the second part of our complete repertoire for White with 1.c4. I may point out possible transpositions to other openings, but I will not rely on them for our repertoire. This does not necessarily mean that I would always choose to play certain lines in the English instead of playing the Catalan, as an example. But as a great guide for the Catalan already exists in Boris Avrukh's 1.d4 repertoire, it does not make sense for me to cover the same ground. And besides... This is a book on the English after all!

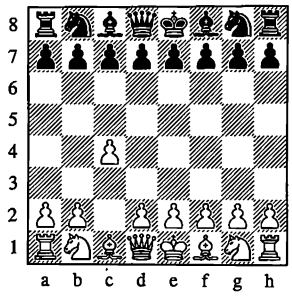
In the English Opening, where direct contact between the pieces is often delayed, both sides often have a wide range of moves. I mention every significant variation, but covering every possible move would be neither practical nor especially helpful to the reader. What is important is to cover all of the key ideas. Thus, even though you may encounter unfamiliar moves from time to time, you will not be "all at sea" – your new understanding of the English will be a reliable compass. I have decades of experience in playing and analysing the English and yet I am often surprised in the opening – it is the nature of the beast.

I have marked some moves with N for Novelty. This means the move is new to me and I cannot find it in my database or books. However, there is always a possibility that the move could have been played in some obscure game, unbeknown to me. Should the reader encounter any such examples, I would ask him to remember that it is almost impossible to acquaint oneself with every possible source of chess games. In any case, this book contains a great deal of original analysis, which I hope will prove useful to the reader.

I have delayed you long enough – I hope you enjoy the book.

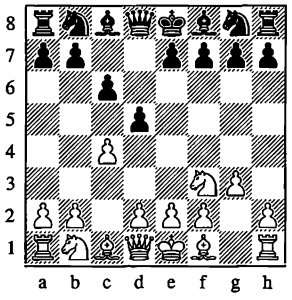
Chapter 1

The English



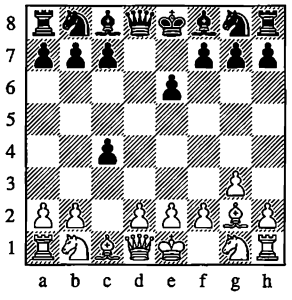
Introduction

Chapters 3-11



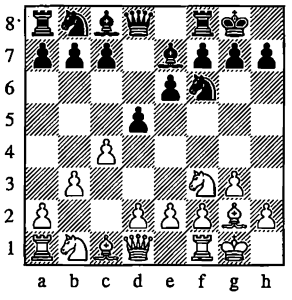
Anti-Slav Systems

Chapters 12-18



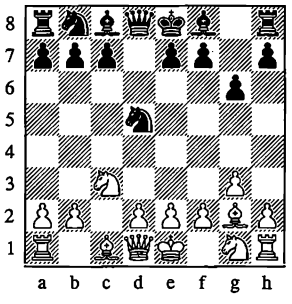
Anti-QG Systems

Chapters 19-25



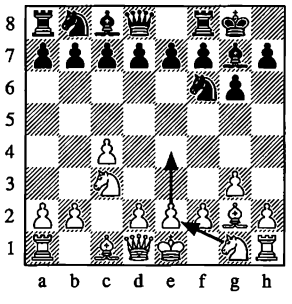
Anti-QGD Systems

Chapter 26



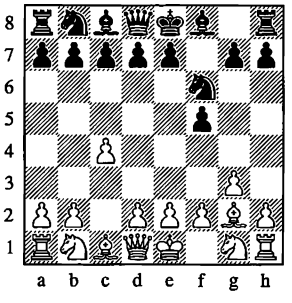
Anti-Grünfeld

Chapter 27



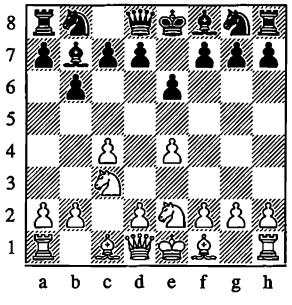
Anti-King's Indian

Chapter 28



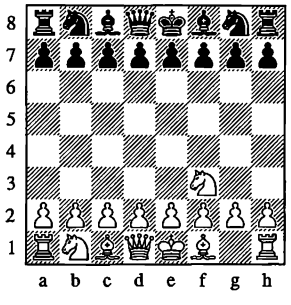
Anti-Dutch

Chapter 29



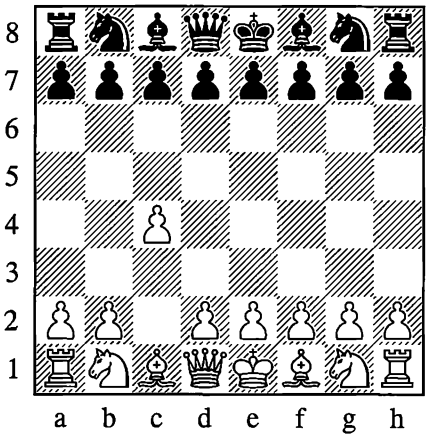
Anti-Owen

Chapter 30



Reti Move Order

1.c4



The variations examined in this volume are of critical importance in maintaining the coherence of our whole repertoire.

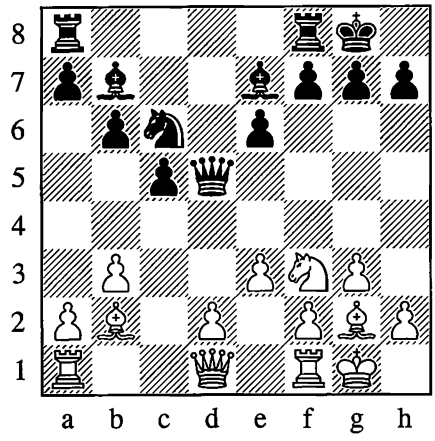
By playing 1...e5 (see Volume 1) or 1...c5 (Volume 3), Black defines at least part of his intentions in the centre at the very start of the game, making our planning easier and practically accepting the invitation to genuine English paths.

Things are less clear after 1...♘f6, 1...c6 or 1...e6, which represent the heart of the present volume. In most cases, Black challenges White's control over the d5-square by playing ...d7-d5 at an early stage. This can have two different purposes: to restrict the g2-bishop or to take advantage of its early departure from the f1-a6 diagonal by creating the threat of ...dxc4. We have seen a similar situation in the lines based on ...c6 and ...d5 from the first volume, but in those cases the presence of a black pawn on e5 helps White to develop his initiative in the centre.

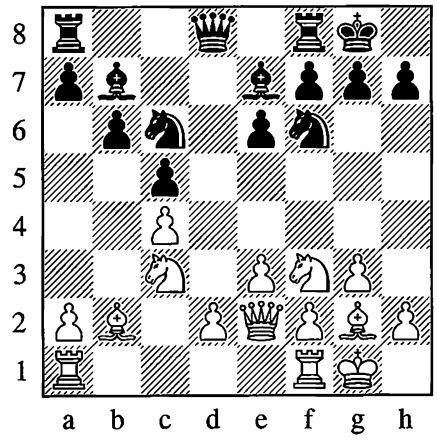
Many players use the 1.c4 move order as a method of avoiding openings such as the Nimzo-Indian and the Grünfeld, but gladly transpose to 1.d4 systems once this has been achieved. Throughout this volume I have marked the moments at which it is possible to transpose to the main lines examined by Boris Avrukh in his 1.d4 repertoire books or by Lars Schandorff in *Playing the Queen's Gambit*, but these are just additional options. At the same time, I have endeavoured to keep our repertoire compact and provide hypermodern systems against every possible black set-up. I believe that in the vast majority of the variations examined here, White's chances are not worse than in the main lines of the classical openings. Only in very rare cases (for instance, against the black move order that is characteristic of Chapter 27) have I recommended a transposition to 1.d4 as possibly a more consistent quest for an advantage rather than the purely English continuation that I examine.

When given a choice, I have opted for dynamic or strategically ambitious lines, even if this implies some increased level of risk. In Chapters 2 to 25 White bravely leaves the c4-pawn undefended, aiming to prove that the opening of the long diagonal and his better development more than compensates for the sacrificed material. My initial fears and difficulties mentioned in the foreword refer precisely to this important section of the book, in which the d5-pawn is defended by one of its colleagues, giving Black's play a strategically sound character and confronting White with a complex situation in the centre.

Playing in the spirit of the English Opening does not imply refraining from d2-d4 forever. This would be a severe self-limitation, allowing Black to grab space at his own convenience. As any reader of the first volume already knows, we should not be indifferent to such basic notions as the centre and space, although we approach them in an indirect way. Once the pieces have been harmoniously developed, White frequently has to advance his queen's pawn to crown his strategy. One typical case arises in the tabiya examined in Chapter 25.



The presence of the black queen on d5 is asking for 12.d4, with the strong threat of ♘e5. This variation has been well known and approved for at least half a century, but in Chapter 24 I have made a step forward in the same direction.



Official theory recommends slow manoeuvring with the pawn on d3 or d2, but I prefer preparing d2-d4-d5.

There are no independent chapters on 1...g6 or 1...d6. By playing his usual moves (2.g3, 3.♗g2, 4.♘c3), White leaves Black practically no other choice than transposing to variations examined elsewhere in the three companion volumes.

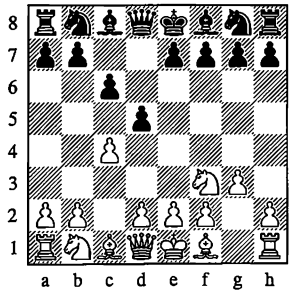
Throughout this book the reader will frequently find novelties that improve on White's previous play over the board, but I would mention Chapters 3, 12, 13, 16, 17 and the aforementioned Chapter 24 as those containing the greatest amount of original analysis and, some of them, aiming to open new theoretical trends.

An interesting aspect is related to terminology. Many of the positions examined below may be considered to belong to the Reti Opening, characterized by 1.♘f3, which is in some contradiction with the title of the book. Solving this problem is beyond the powers of any mortal, because after 1.c4 it is Black who decides if it will be an English Opening (1...e5 and 1...c5) or a Reti (...e6 or ...c6 followed by ...d5). However, I feel that from a practical point of view the title is entirely justified. As explained in the final chapter, 1.c4 is more active and restricting than 1.♘f3.

Besides, these two openings are so tightly linked to each other that the whole discussion is academic. The important thing is to remain true to the hypermodern spirit and this is precisely what I have tried to achieve in the following pages.

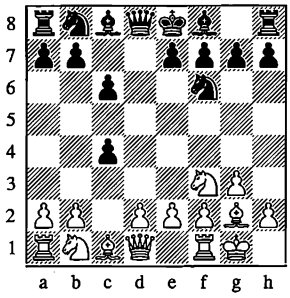
Chapter 2

Anti-Slav Systems



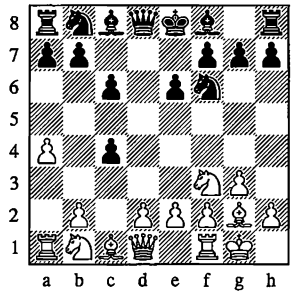
Introduction

Chapter 3



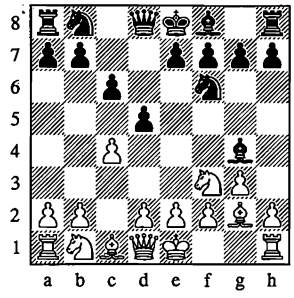
5th Move Various

Chapter 4



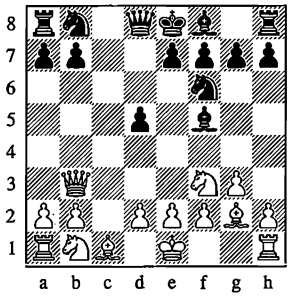
5...e6

Chapter 5



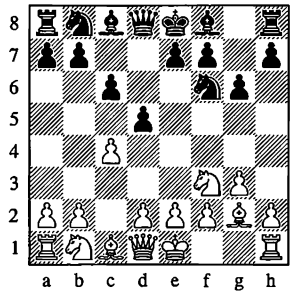
4...♗g4

Chapter 6



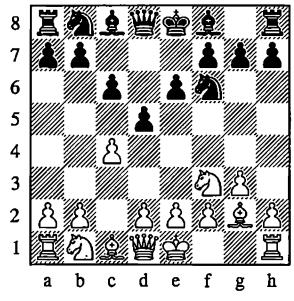
The Barcza Variation

Chapter 7



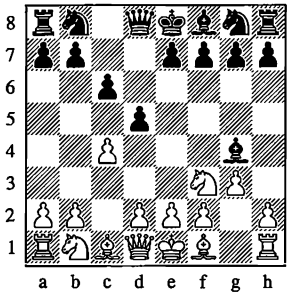
4...g6

Chapter 8



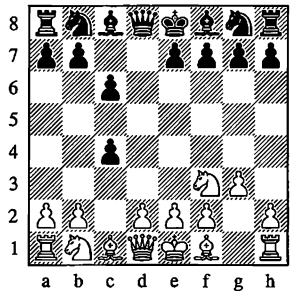
4...e6

Chapter 9



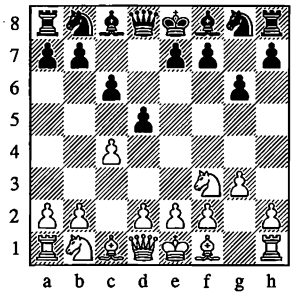
3...♗g4

Chapter 10



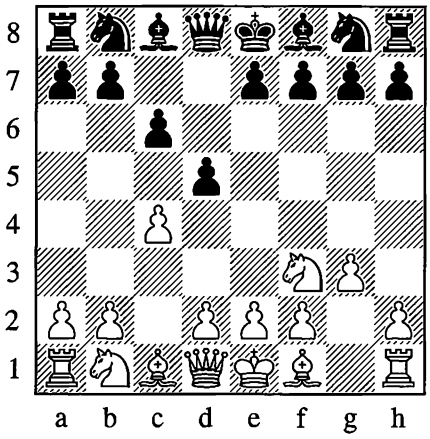
3...dxc4

Chapter 11



3...g6

1.c4 c6 2.g3 d5 3.♘f3



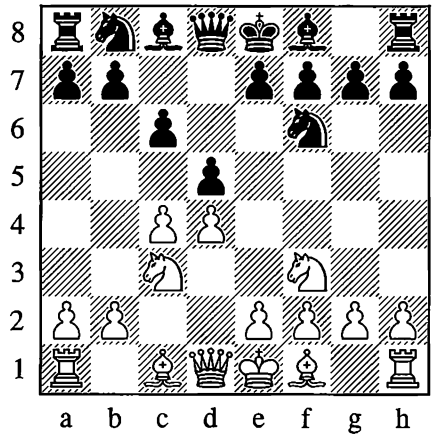
For 1.d4 players, the Slav Defence is one of the toughest nuts to crack. Many of them occasionally switch to 1.c4, with the idea of meeting 1...c6 with 2.e4, thus transposing to the Panov Attack. Although I have often played the Panov, I felt that for the purposes of this book it would be unsuitable. First of all, this is a completely different opening (classified under the Caro Kann B13-14 ECO codes), but more important is that the character of the position would differ so much from the rest of the book. Instead of a slow strategic struggle with a white kingside fianchetto, where tactical fireworks occur only after the gradual accumulation of small advantages, we would get a mass of forced variations with an isolani.

I must confess that initially I had been rather sceptical about my chances of proving the system of development based on g3 and ♗g2 viable. Modern theory considers it simply inoffensive or, if White is overambitious, even risky. Perseverance and analytical work helped me discover many new ideas for White and I fell in love with the whole variation. When I took part in Reggio Emilia 2008/09, the anti-Slav chapter was more or less ready and I was only too happy to use my newly acquired knowledge against two much higher rated opponents, Alexey Dreev and Jan Gustafsson. As an author, I was greatly encouraged by the fact that both games ended in wins for me, meaning that my theoretical approach was confirmed by practice.

Before moving on to explain White's general concept, we need to understand Black's aims and the eventual dangers awaiting him in the genuine Slav Defence.

The main Slav tabiya arises after the introductory moves:

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3



Black has placed a solidly defended pawn in the centre, leaving the c8-h3 diagonal open. This latter aspect is quite important, because in most closed or semi-closed games, the natural development of the c8-bishop is a frequent problem. However, if he wants to play ...♗f5, Black has to give up the centre first.

4...dxc4

The immediate 4...♗f5? fails to 5.cxd5 cxd5 6.♕b3, when the only way to defend the d5- and b7-pawns would be the anything but appealing 6...♗c8±.

After 4...dxc4, White needs to deal with the threat of ...b7-b5, safely defending the extra pawn, which explains the next move.

5.a4

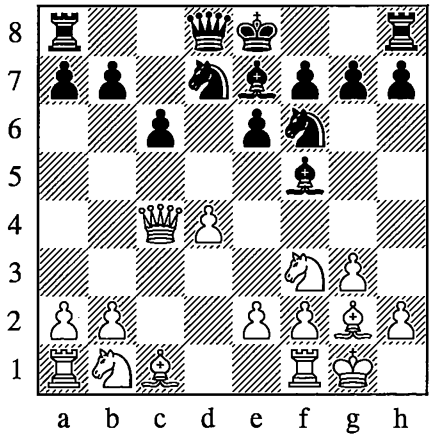
This is almost unanimously played. However, it weakens the b4-square and Black can develop comfortably. For example:

5...♗f5 6.e3 e6 7.♗xc4 ♗b4 8.0–0 ♘bd7

With good chances to undermine the white centre in the future.

In order to prove that ...dxc4 is a significant concession, White would need to avoid the weakening move a2-a4. This can be achieved with the increasingly popular variation:

4.♕c2 dxc4 5.♕xc4 ♗f5 6.g3 e6 7.♗g2 ♘bd7 8.0–0 ♗e7



However, this system of development has another significant drawback. White has spent two tempos placing the queen on a vulnerable square. In the near future, new losses of time are to be expected. At the same time, Black has excellent control of the e4-square, which makes it difficult for White to increase or even maintain his space advantage in the centre. It is little wonder that Black has excellent possibilities for counterplay.

The conclusion is that Black's plan of developing his queen's bishop only works well if combined with the threat of capturing on c4, aiming to provoke a concession from White.

We now have sufficient elements to define our English strategy with White.

By refraining from the early advance of the d-pawn, White wins an important tempo for his piece development. Besides, the king's bishop will be actively placed on the long diagonal, putting the enemy queenside under serious pressure in case of an early ...dxc4. These elements give us good reasons to look for gambit lines, in which White is in no hurry to defend his c4-pawn or restore material equality after its removal from the board.

In modern practice players with White frequently shy away from this ambitious strategy, by playing the over-cautious b2-b3 at an early stage. I have discarded this move for two reasons. White spends a valuable tempo and deprives himself of the possibility of a queen incursion to b3 or a4, which allows Black to complete his development in a very satisfactory way with, say, ...♗g4, ...e6, ...♗d6, ...♘bd7 and ...♕e7. These lines are playable with either colour, but my feeling is that White loses all of his opening initiative.

By refraining from b2-b3, White poses his opponent a difficult decision: develop his c8-bishop and leave the queenside vulnerable for just an instant, or give up the centre in the hope that he may later return the pawn under favourable circumstances.

The following game clearly demonstrates the seriousness of the concession implied by giving up the centre without gaining anything in exchange.

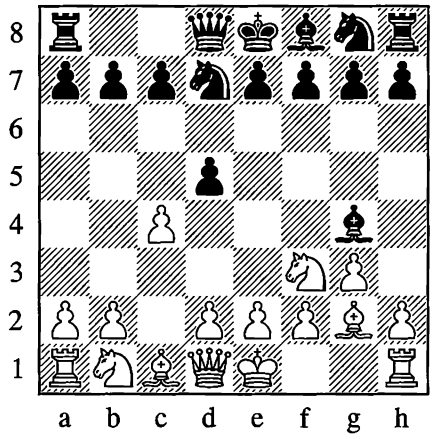
Marin – Korneev

Sitges 1996

1.♘f3 d5 2.g3 ♗g4 3.♗g2 ♘d7

This move order is typical of the Reti Opening, but the next move will bring the game back to English paths.

4.c4



4...dxc4?!

Carelessly played. Black did not anticipate White's answer.

5.♘a3!

We will see a lot more of this move in the next hundred pages. Capturing with the knight on c4 will increase White's control over the centre, while also accelerating his development.

Korneev expected 5.♕c2 when after 5...c6 6.♕xc4 the exposed position of the white queen gives Black the opportunity to simplify the position and achieve approximate equality with 6...♗xf3 7.♗xf3 ♘e5 8.♕c3 ♘xf3† 9.♕xf3 ♘f6=.

5...c6

5...♘b6 is hardly better because of 6.♘e5, when the weakness of the b7-pawn forces the passive retreat 6...♗c8. White can play 7.0–0± followed soon by a knight capture on c4, with a considerable advantage in both development and space.

6.♘xc4

From here the knight controls such important squares as e5, d6, b6 and a5, keeping Black under pressure over a wide area.

6...♘gf6?!

Careless again. 6...e6 would have required some more effort from White to win space on the queenside.

7.b4!

Taking full advantage of Black's previous inaccuracy. White advances his b-pawn without needing to place a rook on b1. Later, the rook will go directly to the half open c-file.

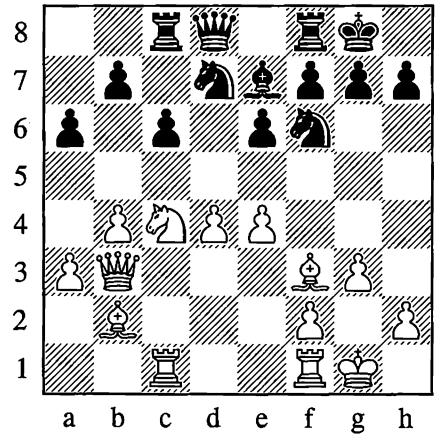
7...e6 8.♕b3 ♗xf3

This looks like another serious concession, but otherwise the bishop may have remained out of play after an eventual knight jump to e5.

9.♗xf3 ♗e7 10.♗b2 0–0 11.a3 ♘d5 12.0–0 ♖c8 13.♖ac1 a6

Both sides have more or less completed the mobilization of their forces and it would be fair to end the line here with the evaluation ±. However, I will continue for just two more moves, in order to reveal the essential feature of the position.

14.e4! ♘5f6 15.d4!±



White has achieved a clear opening advantage partly because he refrained from the early advance of his central pawns, using the time saved to

develop his pieces and force concessions from Black. Also, the occupation of the c4-square by the knight rather than the queen secures White greater stability in the centre than in the 4.♕c2 line mentioned above. In the current position the queen is safely placed behind the pawns, depriving Black of any dream of counterplay based on the queen's exposure to attacks by the minor pieces.

However, being enthusiastic supporters of the English Opening should not prevent us from understanding the importance of the centre and space in general. Having avoided any major concession after ...dxc4, White is best advised to switch back to classical chess. This is precisely how his last two moves can best be described and this kind of flexible thinking is recommended in almost every line of the English Opening.

Black defended stubbornly for 50 more moves, but White's huge space advantage and bishop pair eventually decided the result.

We may divide the analytical material into two categories, depending on whether Black plays an early ...♘f6 (1.c4 c6 2.g3 d5 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♗g2, Chapters 3 to 7) or not (1.c4 c6 2.g3 d5 3.♘f3 3...others, Chapters 8 to 11). Although it is generally recommended to develop the g8-knight before undertaking anything concrete, Black sometimes finds it more appropriate to use this tempo to consolidate his centre with a pawn move.

The former situation is highly relevant for the move order:

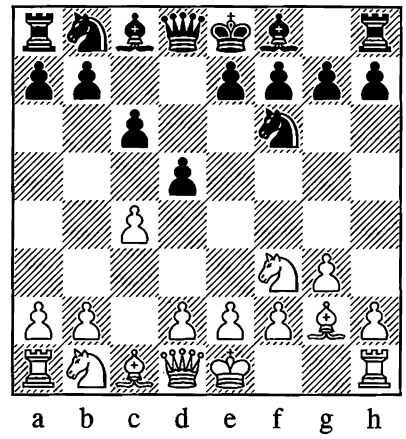
1.c4 ♘f6 2.g3

Most opening books recommend:

2...c6

Supposed to be the simplest way of punishing White's impatience in fianchettoing his bishop. However, after weeks of analysis I still cannot find a clear path to equality for Black.

3.♗g2 d5 4.♘f3



Now the main continuations are 4...dxc4 (Chapters 3 and 4), 4...♗g4 (Chapter 5), 4...♗f5 (Chapter 6) and 4...g6 (Chapter 7). 4...e6 is entirely possible, but is examined in the section dedicated to 1...e6 (Chapters 12 to 18).

Although the character of the position is not changed radically, concrete play can take different forms if Black employs the purely Slav move order with:

1.c4 c6 2.g3 d5

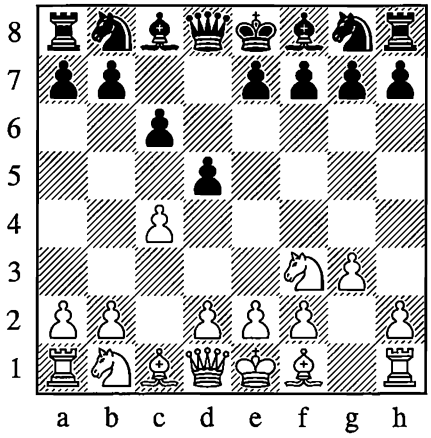
Now the most accurate move is:

3.♘f3

Taking the e5-square under control.

Some books recommend 3.♗g2, in order to inhibit the c8-bishop's development in view of the threat of ♕b3. However, nothing is said about 3...e5, when Black's centre is quite solid and White has no way to transpose to the 1.c4 e5 2.g3 c6 3.d4 lines from the first volume. For instance: 4.cxd5 (the immediate 4.d4 can be answered with 4...dxc4!?) 4...cxd5 5.d4 (it is well known that increasing the piece pressure against the d5-pawn with 5.♘c3 ♘f6 6.♕b3 ♘c6! leaves White badly underdeveloped)

5...e4 And White has exchanged on d5 too early, allowing the b8-knight to develop comfortably. Moreover, the move ♗g2 is much less useful than ♘c3, since in some lines of the aforementioned system the bishop emerges with great effect on other diagonals.



3...♗g4

If 3...dxc4 4.♗g2 then Black should probably transpose to a position discussed above by playing 4...♘f6 anyway. The reason (explained in more detail in Chapter 11) is that other moves tend to be too committal, while delaying castling does not reduce White's attacking potential.

Another important move is 3...g6 (Chapter 10). Black aims for a symmetrical Grünfeld and White cannot force a transposition to the lines with 4...g6 from Chapter 7. If he wishes to remain within English territory, he needs to look for original solutions.

4.♗g2

Black has a couple of continuations that avoid an immediate transposition to the systems with an early ...♘f6.

4...e6

The most consistent. After 4...♘d7 5.cxd5 cxd5 6.♕b3± White retains the initiative.

5.cxd5

If ...♘f6 had been played instead of ...e6, the best move would be 5.♘e5, but here, after 5...♗h5 6.cxd5, Black can deviate with 6...exd5! when the knight would remain unstable in the centre. Compared to the lines from Chapter 5, the e-file has been opened for Black's pieces, while the a4-e8 diagonal has not been weakened.

5...♗xf3!?

Black aims for plain equality. Since the immediate 5...cxd5 would drop the bishop to 6.♕a4†, he can maintain the symmetrical character of the position only by giving up the bishop pair without having provoked h2-h3.

5...exd5 leads to more complex play where White has reasonable chances of an advantage after 6.0–0 ♘f6 7.d3 ♘bd7 8.♘c3 (Chapter 8).

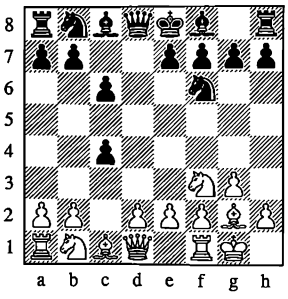
6.♗xf3 cxd5

When embarking on this whole analytical project, I expected that in the lines without an early ...♘f6 White would have fewer chances of gaining an objective advantage. Now that the work has been done and I have had the encouraging experience of Reggio Emilia, I consider that White's play is just as threatening as some of the official main lines after 1.d4 or 1.e4.

Finally, by starting the book with this group of chapters, I have followed the same policy as in the first volume. It is precisely in the field of the Slav and Semi-Slav style lines that I have acquired the richest practical experience, allowing me to explain the typical ideas in the best way. I aim to make the explanations of this system instructive and relevant for other lines that are examined later.

Chapter 3

Anti-Slav Systems



5th Move Various

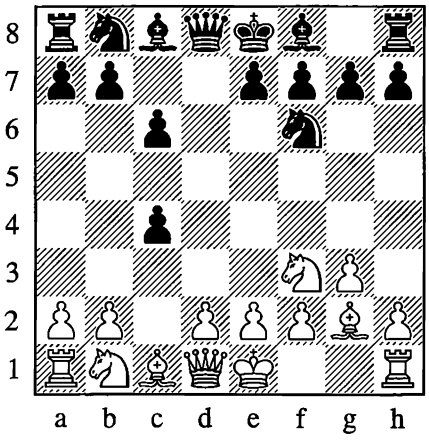
Variation Index

1.c4 c6 2.g3 d5 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♗g2 dxc4

5.0–0

A) 5...g6 6.♘a3 23
A1) 6...♕d5 23
A2) 6...♗g7 24
A3) 6...b5 26
B) 5...b5 28
C) 5...♗e6 6.♘g5 30
C1) 6...♗f5 30
C2) 6...♗d5 7.e4 h6 8.exd5 hxg5 9.dxc6 ♘xc6 10.♘a3 32
C21) 10...e6 33
C22) 10...♕d3 34
D) 5...♘bd7 6.♘a3 ♘b6 7.♕c2 38
D1) 7...♗e6 8.♘g5 ♕d7 9.b3! cxb3 10.axb3 ♗g4!?
11.♘c4! ♘xc4 12.♕xc4 e6 13.♗b2 ♗h5 14.♖a5 39
D11) 14...♗e7 43
D12) 14...♗g6 43
D2) 7...♕d5 8.♘e1! 44
D21) 8...♕d4 45
D22) 8...♕h5 45
D23) 8...♕f5 46
D24) 8...♕e6 9.d3! cxd3 10.♘xd3 g6 11.e4!N ♗g7 12.♗f4 47
D241) 12...♕g4 49
D242) 12...♘fd7 50
D25) 8...♗f5 51

1.c4 c6 2.g3 d5 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♗g2 dxc4



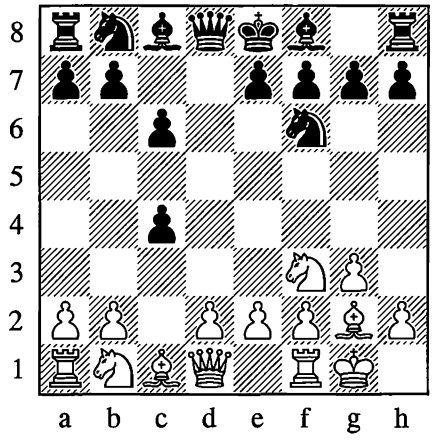
This is the critical test for our chosen move order and the main reason why many players shy away from leaving the c4-pawn undefended. Black willingly gives up the centre, in the hope that White will need to make some major concessions in order to restore material equality. In certain cases, Black is ready to defend his pawn with ...b7-b5, forcing White to embark on sharp gambit play with b2-b3 or d2-d3.

Official theory in this variation is not well developed and is rather chaotic. In order to get a general overview of each side's chances, we have to resort to a comparison with a more popular opening, the Open Catalan. The essential difference is that the white d-pawn is still on its initial square. The first impression is that this detail clearly favours Black, because White's queenside development will be slowed down considerably, while the move d2-d4 would allow Black to get rid of his double pawn with ...cxd3. However, we should not forget that for the time being White has saved a tempo, which allows him to complete his kingside development faster than in the Catalan and without being annoyed by early checks on b4. Another important detail is that Black has played ...c6 instead of ...e6, as would be the case in the Catalan. While this obviously contributes to the consolidation of the extra pawn, the black king will remain in the centre for longer than is desirable, offering White additional chances to develop his initiative.

Being a pawn down at such an early stage of the opening is likely to cause a lot of stress, which explains why moves such as 5.♘a3 or 5.♕c2 are quite popular in practice. In fact, they only justify Black's ...b7-b5, because both mentioned moves represent premature commitments. After 5.♘a3 b5 6.d3 cxd3 7.♘e5 ♗b7 8.0–0 e6, White's lead in development and initiative are partly neutralized by the unhappy placement of his queen's knight. The fairly popular variation 5.♕c2 b5 6.a4 ♗b7 7.b3 cxb3 8.♕xb3 a6 9.♗a3 causes Black some problems with the development of his kingside, but has the significant drawback that White loses a tempo with his queen. This leads me to believe that his chances of an advantage are very slim.

Therefore, I have concentrated my analytical efforts on the positions resulting after the most natural developing move.

5.0–0



This is the most flexible move, since White will have to castle at some point anyway. In certain cases it is quite useful to have the g2-bishop defended, while the king's rook is ready

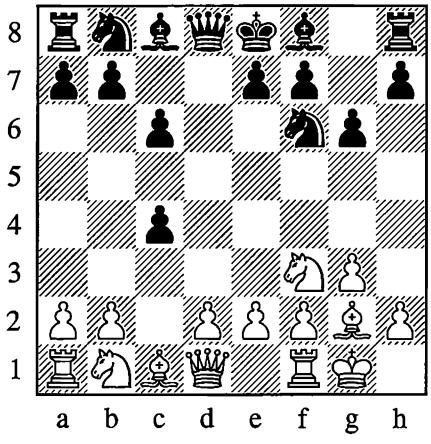
to occupy either the c- or d-file, if they open.

At the same time, it appears that Black faces a difficult choice regarding his next move, as practically every continuation implies a small commitment, allowing White to take over the initiative one way or another. This may seem less obvious at this stage, but by investigating the possible moves one by one, the reader will understand my point of view.

Following the model of my game against Korneev (page 17), White will mainly try to retrieve the pawn with ♘b1-a3xc4, in order to gain firm control over the centre and avoid prematurely exposing the queen. However, in most of the variations Black has several ways to cross this basic plan, which usually leads to interesting play. I will not spend much time on those positions where Black leaves the c4-pawn undefended, as this simply offers White a stable advantage at no cost.

In this chapter, we will examine **A) 5...g6**, **B) 5...b5**, **C) 5...♗e6** and **D) 5...♘bd7**. I have dedicated the next chapter to **5...e6**, because it deviates from the original Slav spirit, by closing the h3-c8 diagonal for the sake of rapid kingside development.

A) 5...g6



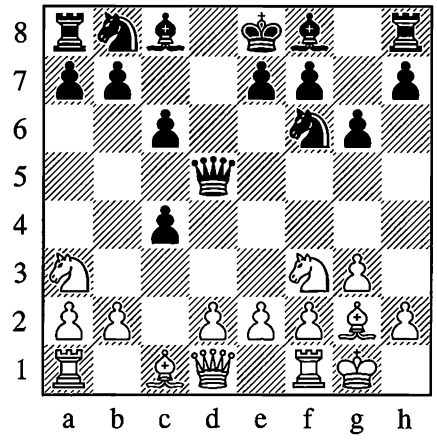
The main drawback of this seemingly solid developing move is that it leaves the a3-f8 diagonal without control, which would tell if Black plays ...b7-b5. At the same time, the temporary weakness of the long diagonal offers White some additional ideas in one of the lines given below.

6.♘a3

Black has several ways of defending the extra pawn, but none of them is entirely satisfactory. He can also ignore the threat and continue developing. We have the main continuations **A1) 6...♕d5**, **A2) 6...♗g7** and **A3) 6...b5**.

6...♗e6 has never been played and fails to equalize after 7.♘g5 ♗d5 8.e4 h6 9.exd5 hxg5 10.dxc6 ♘xc6 11.♘xc4 ♗g7 12.d4!±. All White's minor pieces are well developed and both of Black's wings are under serious pressure. We will see a similar position in line C2 below, with the difference that in that case Black plays ...e6 and ...♗e7. In the current position, the d5-square is not well enough defended, depriving Black of the relative stability of the respective line.

A1) 6...♕d5

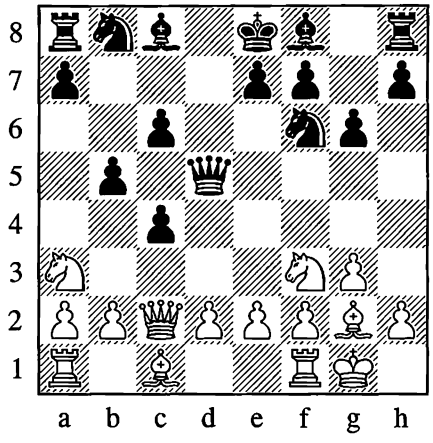


This is a rather artificial way to defend the pawn, as the queen is obviously exposed in the centre.

7.♕c2 b5

Consistent but risky. 7...♗e6 has been played a couple of times, but 8.♕c3! retrieves the pawn optimally. Note that several elements make this atypical move possible here: the f6-knight is pinned, making ...♘e4 impossible, while the g2-bishop is defended, enabling a knight jump to d4. 8...♗g7 9.♘d4 ♕d6 10.♘xe6 ♕xe6 11.♕b4!? ♕d7 12.♘xc4±

In this line, instead of 9...♕d6, if Black tries 9...♘e4 then White has a killing queen sac: 10.♘xe6 ♘xc3 11.♘xg7†! ♔d7 12.dxc3 ♕e5 13.♗h6 For the queen White has three minor pieces and a huge attack, despite the trapped knight. For example, 13...b5 14.♘c2 and a2-a4 will shred Black's queenside.



8.b3!

White opens the c-file and prepares ♗b2, in order to create the threats ♘d4 and ♘e5.

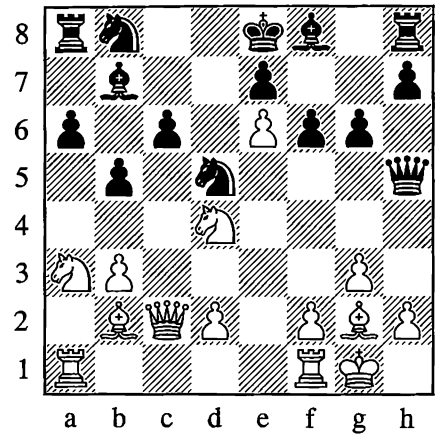
8...cxb3 9.axb3 ♗b7

Black has no time to continue his kingside development with 9...♗g7 because after 10.♗b2 he will lose one of the pawns on c6 or b5. As we can see, in this line Black has not managed to keep the white knight isolated on a3.

10.♗b2 a6

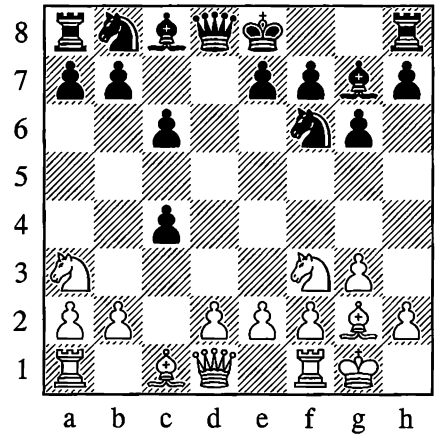
Black has managed to defend the queenside in a satisfactory way, but now White launches an attack in the centre, taking advantage of the vulnerability of the long dark diagonal.

11.e4! ♕h5 12.e5 ♘d5 13.e6 f6 14.♘d4±



White has won a lot of space and practically frozen Black's queenside. Next, he will play ♕c5 and reroute his knight with ♘c2 and then to e3 or b4.

A2) 6...♗g7



Played in the spirit of the Grünfeld Defence. Black gives up the centre without a fight, hoping to exert piece pressure. The early commitment of ...c7-c6 restricts Black's chances for counterplay. Besides, White is very flexible in the centre. Black's position will remain solid, but rather passive.

7.♘xc4 0–0 8.d3

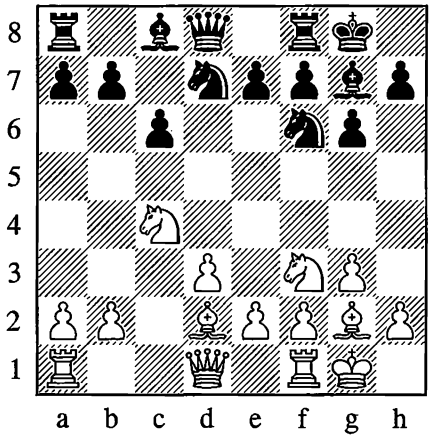
This is one of the cases when keeping the game within pure English territory may offer better chances than transposing to a 1.d4 line with 8.d4. Without developing the subject, I will only mention that after 8...♗e6 9.b3 ♗d5 Black enjoys some stability in the centre and has an acceptable position, having neutralized, at least temporarily, the g2-bishop. These are direct consequences of the fact that the c4- and e4-squares are not defended by the d-pawn.

8...♘bd7

Now 8...♗e6 is less effective. White should develop just as in the main line with 9.♕c2 ♘bd7 10.♗d2± and in the long run the bishop will be exposed on e6.

9.♗d2

An apparently modest move, which is typical of hypermodern play. White develops the bishop on a safe square, keeping both wings under control. An eventual queenside expansion with ...b7-b5 is inhibited because of ♘a5, while in certain cases White may play ♕c1 and ♗h6. This position has occurred in three games of Dzindzichashvili, spread over more than two decades.



9...♘d5 10.♕c2

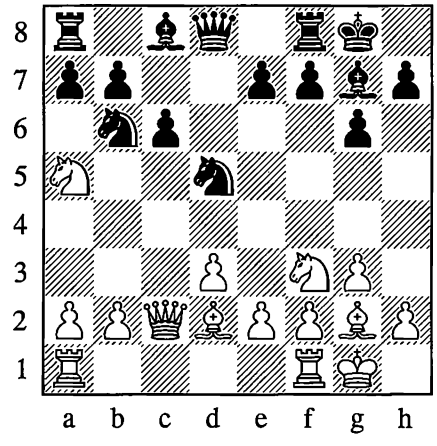
Twenty years after his second game with this line, Dzindzichashvili changed his move order with 10.♖b1 b6 11.♕c2 and obtained an overwhelming space advantage after 11...♗b7 12.e4 ♘c7 13.d4 c5 14.d5. Black tried to free her position with 14...f5, but ran into trouble after 15.exf5 ♖xf5 16.♘h4 ♖f8 17.d6!±, Dzindzichashvili – Krush, San Francisco 1999.

10...♘7b6

With his development incomplete, Black should refrain from queenside expansion, as this is likely to leave him with chronic weaknesses. For instance: 10...a5 11.a3 b5?! 12.♘e3 ♘xe3 13.♗xe3 ♗b7 14.♘d4 ♖c8 15.♘b3 ♗a8 16.♘c5± Dzindzichashvili – Fedorowicz, Hastings 1977. This position is a dream come true for fianchetto players.

11.♘a5

Although Black seems to have developed normally, he cannot do much against White's mounting queenside pressure.



11...e5 12.♖ab1 ♕e7 13.b4 h6 14.b5 cxb5

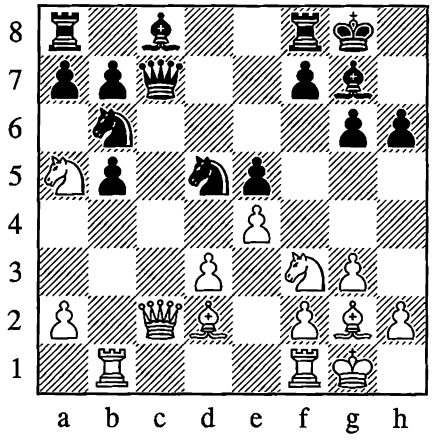
Against 14...c5, Dzindzichashvili gives the following interesting, but not really necessary, variation: 15.♖fc1 ♘d7 16.♘h4 ♕d6 17.♘xg6! fxg6 18.♕b3 ♘7f6 19.e4 b6 20.♘c4 ♕d8 21.exd5+–

15.e4!

This is the best way to develop the initiative, annihilating Black's main trump – his well centralized knight.

15...♕c7

Forced, in order to avoid the loss of an exchange, but now White completes his development with gain of time.



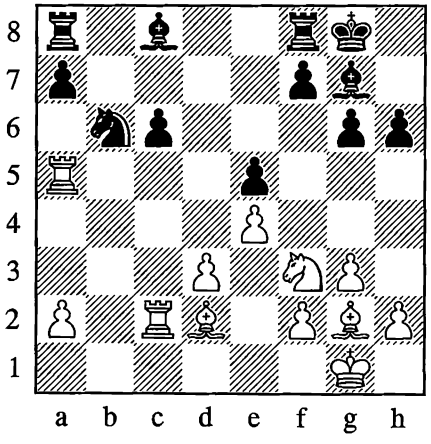
16.♖fc1!

After this accurate move, the exchange of queens will help White to activate his position.

16...♕xc2 17.♖xc2 ♘e7 18.♖xb5

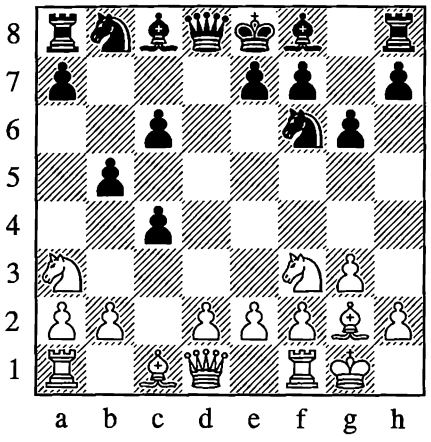
Threatening both ♘xe5 and ♖c7.

18...♘c6 19.♘xc6 bxc6 20.♖a5!+–



White won a pawn and later the game in Dzindzichashvili – Shamkovich, USA 1979.

A3) 6...b5



This ambitious move weakens the long diagonal and delays Black's development. Unsurprisingly, White has effective ways to take over the initiative.

7.♘e5

Another possible move order is 7.d3 cxd3 8.♘e5. Now 8...a6 would transpose below, but the greedy 8...dxe2? is bad. The following line proves that the pawn is worth less than White's extra tempo for developing. 9.♕xe2 ♘d5 The only way to defend the c6- and b5-pawns. 10.♖d1 ♗g7 (This is equivalent to resignation, but Black could not stand the pressure along the central files. 10...e6 does not strengthen the knight's position because of the pin along the e-file after 11.♘xc6! ♘xc6 12.♗xd5+– while 10...♗e6 can be met by 11.♘xb5 cxb5 12.♕xb5†+–.) 11.♘xc6 ♘xc6 12.♗xd5 1–0 Sebenik – Hess, Salzburg 2004. I believe that even the most aggressive 1.e4 player would relish an instant crush like this...

7...a6!N

This move, defending b5 and leaving the c6-pawn to White's mercy, is the only one that

offers chances for survival. It would not be easy to decide upon over the board, because it implies a temporary exchange sacrifice.

The only game to reach this position continued with:

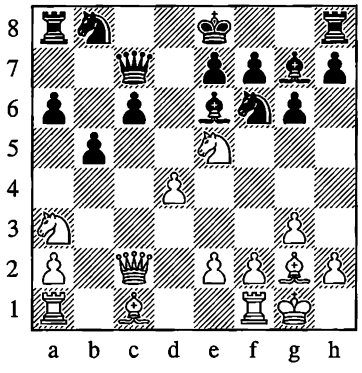
7...♕c7?!

A typical mistake. By prematurely developing his queen, Black exposes Her Majesty to further attacks, allowing White to win time for his initiative.

8.d4 a6

8...cxd3 9.♘xd3 a6 is not an entirely satisfactory solution either in view of 10.♗f4 ♕b6 11.♖c1 ♗g7 12.♘e5 ♗b7 13.♕b3 0–0 14.♘ac4!. Again, Black has failed to keep this knight out of play, which puts him in a critical situation. 14...♕d8 15.♖fd1± White has achieved superb development, while many black pieces are on their initial squares or just passive.

9.b3 cxb3 10.♕xb3 ♗e6 11.♕c2 ♗g7

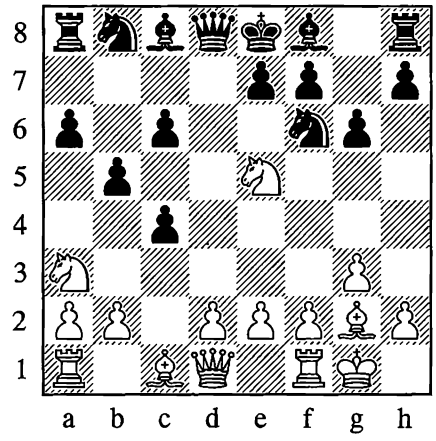


12.♗f4!

Avoiding the trap 12.♘xc6 ♗d5! which would solve Black's problems because of the pin along the c-file. After the text move Black cannot defend the c6-pawn, and has to embark a forced continuation, which is likely to end badly for him because of his lack of development.

12...♘h5 13.♘xg6 ♘xf4 14.♘xf4 ♗xd4 15.♖ad1 ♗f6 16.♘xe6 fxe6 17.♕b3 ♔f7 18.♗h3±

White has a strong attack, Pigusov – Graf, Pavlodar 1987.

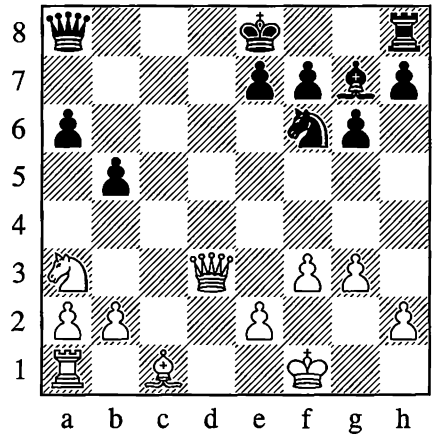


8.d3!

White has to open lines. After the hurried 8.♘xc6 ♘xc6 9.♗xc6† ♗d7 10.♗xa8 ♕xa8 11.f3 h5∓ Black's space advantage and pair of bishops, combined with the weakness of the white king's residence, offer him good compensation.

8...cxd3 9.♘xc6 ♘xc6 10.♗xc6† ♗d7 11.♗xa8 ♕xa8 12.♕xd3 ♗h3 13.f3 ♗xf1 14.♔xf1 ♗g7

Apparently, Black is about to complete his development, while the a3-knight has remained out of play.



15.♘xb5!

This resolute move completely changes the picture. White sacrifices his knight in order to create two dangerous passed pawns and prevent Black from castling.

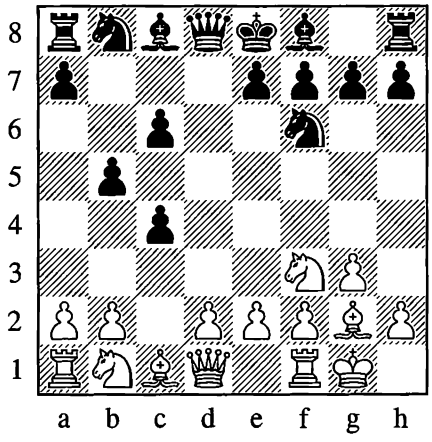
15...axb5 16.♕xb5† ♘d7

16...♔f8 17.a4± is similar.

17.♗f4 h5 18.♖d1 ♕c8 19.a4±

Black's position is very dangerous. He has no easy way to complete his development, while the white queenside pawns are threatening.

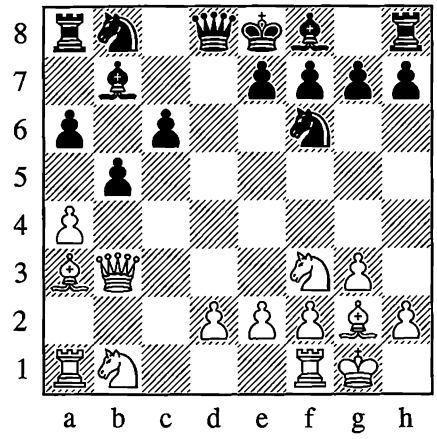
B) 5...b5



Needless to say, this is the most committal move. In order to defend a pawn that was not yet under attack, Black weakens the long diagonal, which allows White to orientate his further actions quite easily.

6.a4 ♗b7 7.b3 cxb3 8.♕xb3 a6 9.♗a3

Having avoided the loss of time ♕d1-c2xb3, White is a whole tempo up (he has castled) if compared with the aforementioned line 5.♕c2 b5, etc. Black's queenside is under pressure and the inevitable ...e6 will lead to the loss of the right to castle and chronic weaknesses on the dark squares.

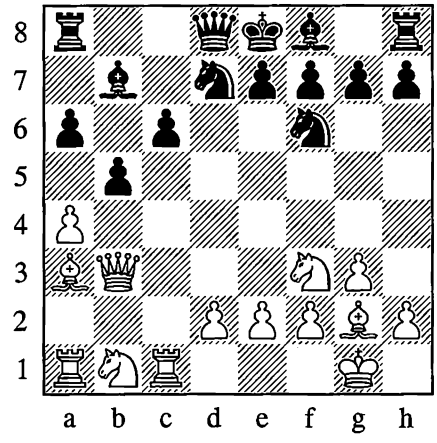


9...♘bd7

9...e6 10.♗xf8 ♔xf8 11.♖c1 g6 12.♕b2 ♔g7 13.♘e5± left Black under pressure on both wings in Vukanovic – Barle, Ljubljana 1996.

Note that 9...g6 would not avoid playing ...e6, because of 10.♘e5!.

10.♖c1



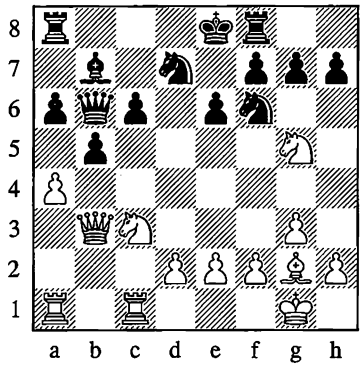
This move, with which we are familiar from a comment to the ninth move, seems to be the best way to develop White's initiative. The mechanical occupation of the centre with 10.d4 is less constructive. The text move puts the c6-pawn under severe pressure and keeps the long dark diagonal open for the queen.

10...e5

A risky move. Black deprives the white knight of the d4-square, but weakens the a2-f7 diagonal.

The more restrained 10...e6 loses the c6-pawn to 11.♘d4±, without solving the problem of evacuating the king from the centre in view of 11...♗xa3 12.♕xa3.

Vuksanovic mentions 10...♕b6!? as Black's best defence, aiming to keep the queenside together without creating weaknesses on the other wing. She provides the following variations: 11.♘g5 (forcing the opening of the a3-f8 diagonal) 11...e6 12.♗xf8 ♖xf8 (12...♔xf8 would allow White win time with 13.axb5 cxb5 14.♕b4† ♔e8 15.♘c3±, while 12...♘xf8 leaves the c5-square undefended. 13.♘c3± I would continue her analysis with 13...♘8d7 14.axb5 axb5 15.♖xa8† ♗xa8 16.♕a3 ♗b7 17.♕d6±, or 14...cxb5 15.♗xb7 ♕xb7 16.♕b4±.) 13.♘c3∞ (Vuksanovic).



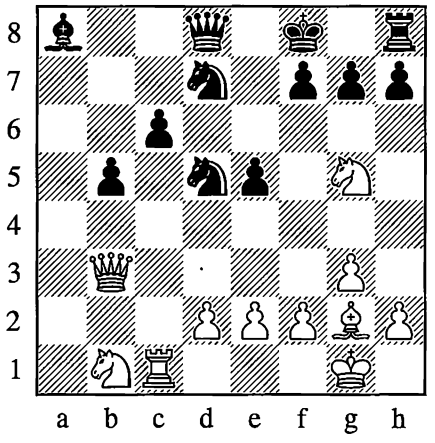
White is fully developed and prepared to start fighting for the c5-square (♘ge4). With his rooks uncoordinated, Black faces a difficult defensive task.

11.♘g5! ♘d5 12.♗xf8 ♔xf8 13.axb5

The start of a typical exchanging operation, which aims to leave the enemy bishop passive and vulnerable.

13...axb5 14.♖xa8 ♗xa8

14...♕xa8? would lose material to 15.e4+–.



15.♗xd5!N

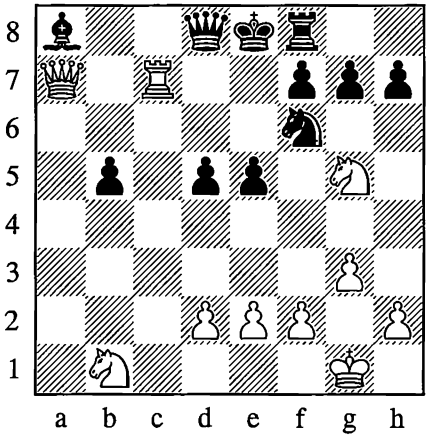
During an over-the-board game it is not easy to spot the surprising queen manoeuvre allowed by this move.

15.e4 is also strong. 15...c5 16.exd5 ♕xg5 17.♕xb5 ♕d8 18.♘c3± White has restored material equality and enjoys a huge lead in development, Vukanovic – Acs, Hungary 1996.

15...cxd5 16.♕f3!

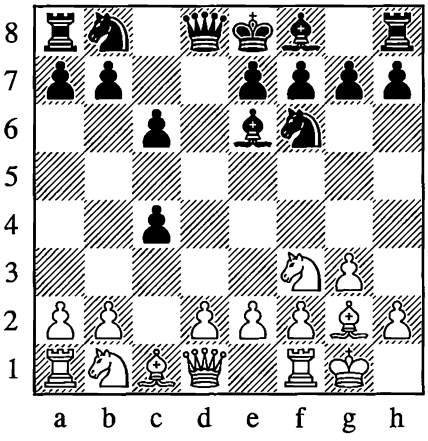
White forces the next move, which clears the seventh rank for the attack.

16...♘f6 17.♕a3† ♔e8 18.♕a7 ♖f8 19.♖c7+–



With his pieces uncoordinated, Black is helpless against the threats along the seventh rank.

C) 5...♗e6



Another way to defend the extra pawn. It does not weaken the queenside, but exposes the bishop prematurely.

6.♘g5

After this natural move Black has a choice between **C1) 6...♗f5** and **C2) 6...♗d5**.

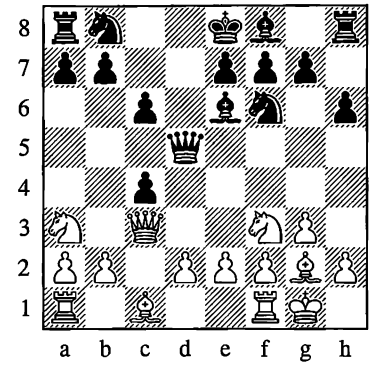
C1) 6...♗f5

This is a safe square, but in the long run the bishop will remain passive, especially after a later d2-d3.

7.♘a3 h6 8.♘f3 ♕d5

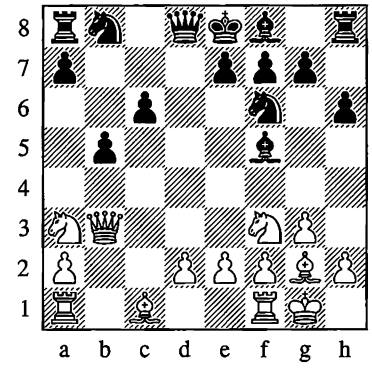
Black aims to take advantage of the fact that White cannot increase the pressure against the c4-pawn with ♕c2. However, Black's queen and light-squared bishop are so exposed that White can afford to play in gambit style.

There are other ways to defend the pawn, but none of them is entirely satisfactory. 8...♗e6 9.♕c2 ♕d5 (With the bishop vulnerable on e6, blocking the further development of the kingside, 9...b5 looks suspicious after the standard continuation 10.b3 cxb3 11.axb3⩲.) 10.♕c3! We saw this position in line A1 on page 24, with the difference that Black had played ...g6 instead of ...h6. The fact that the f6-knight is not pinned does not absolve Black from problems.

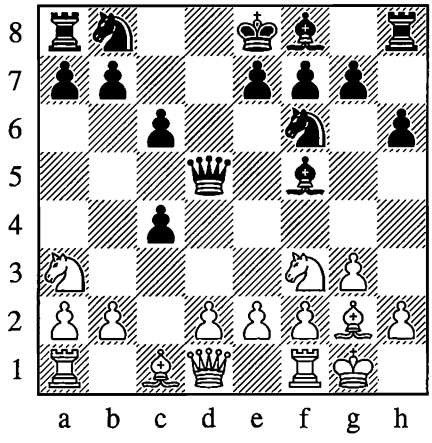


10...♘e4 The only way to prevent ♘d4. 11.♕e3! ♘d6 Otherwise, the knight would soon be pinned. 12.♘d4± Black cannot maintain his stability in the centre. Tactics such as 12...♘f5? do not work, because of 13.♗xd5 ♘xe3 14.♗xe6 ♘xf1 15.♗c8+–.

8...b5 also looks suspicious in view of 9.b3 cxb3 10.♕xb3. White plans ♘e5 (preceded by d2-d3, in case of 10...e6), when the f5-bishop cannot contribute to the defence of the queenside. Black should not rely on the fact that the a3-knight is out of play, because it can eventually emerge via b5 or c4.



For instance: 10...♕d6?! 11.♘c4! ♕d5 (the knight is taboo since 11...bxc4? loses the undeveloped rook after 12.♕b7+–) 12.♘e3 ♕xb3 13.axb3 Developing the queen's rook without the necessity of moving it. 13...♗e4 14.d3± Black's position remains underdeveloped and vulnerable.



9.b3!

At the cost of a pawn, White wins time for his development. It is obvious that the enemy queen will have to retreat, while the opening of the a-file will leave Black's queenside under pressure even in the absence of the weakening move ...b7-b5.

9...cxb3 10.axb3 e6 11.♘c4 ♕d8 12.d3

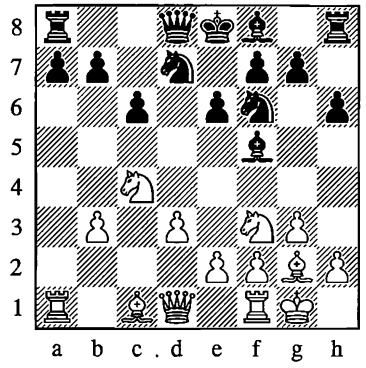
Having obtained a considerable lead in development, White can play in slow mode. With his last move, he cuts the enemy bishop out of play and threatens ♗e3.

12...♗c5

This move fails to defend the g1-a7 diagonal, but 12...♗e7 is no better. 13.♗e3 Black cannot play 13...a6 or 13...b6 because of ♘(x)b6.

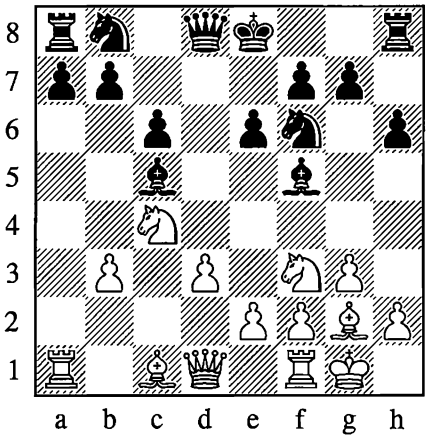
If 13...♘bd7 then White can safely capture the pawn with 14.♗xa7±, since Black cannot trap the bishop. For instance, 14...c5? 15.♘h4!± or 14...b6? 15.♘d4+–.

12...♘bd7 is an interesting alternative.



13.♗e3 ♗c5?! (The point behind the early development of the queen's knight is that Black can play 13...a6, when White may not have anything better than returning to the idea mentioned below with 14.♗f4⩱.) 14.♗xc5 ♘xc5 15.e4! Aiming to take advantage of the weakness of the d6-square. 15...b5!? (15...♗h7 is also not appealing after 16.e5 ♘d5 17.♘d6† ♔f8 18.d4±) 16.exf5 bxc4 17.♘e5 0–0 18.♘xc6 ♕c7 (18...♕xd3 loses an exchange to 19.♘e7†±) 19.bxc4 exf5 20.d4 ♘ce4 21.d5 a5 22.♕d4 White had a crushing space advantage in Carlstedt – Klimov, Vung Tau City 2008.

In this line 13.♗f4, threatening ♘d6†, is even simpler.

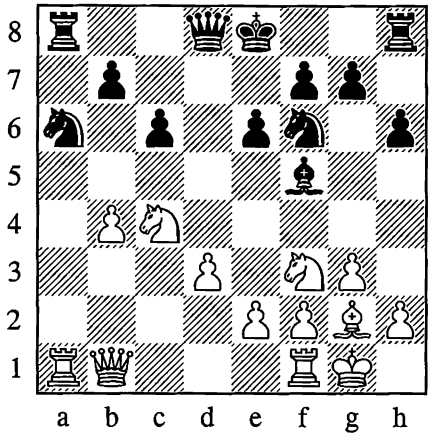


13.b4! ♗e7

It appears that capturing the pawn would only accelerate White's queenside attack after 13...♗xb4 14.♕b3 a5 15.♗d2 ♘a6 (15...♗xd2

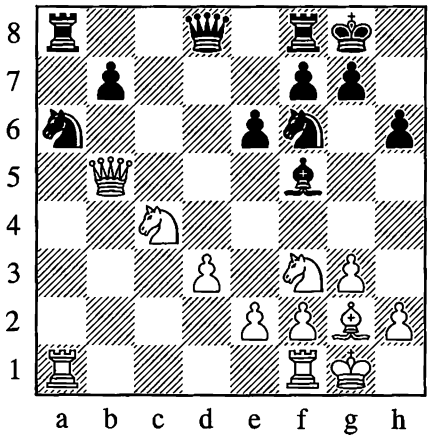
allows the intermediate 16.♕xb7!± eliminating an essential link from Black's pawn chain) 16.♘xa5 ♗xa5 (16...♗xd2 17.♘xd2 ♘c5 18.♕b4 leaves the black queenside desperately weak, since 18...♕e7? fails to 19.♘xc6!+–) 17.♗xa5 ♕c8 18.♖fb1 ♘c5 19.♕b4 ♘fd7 20.♘e5± The black king has not castled yet and the queenside pawns are vulnerable.

14.♗e3 ♘d5 15.♗xa7 ♘a6 16.♗d4 ♗f6 17.♗xf6 ♘xf6 18.♕b1



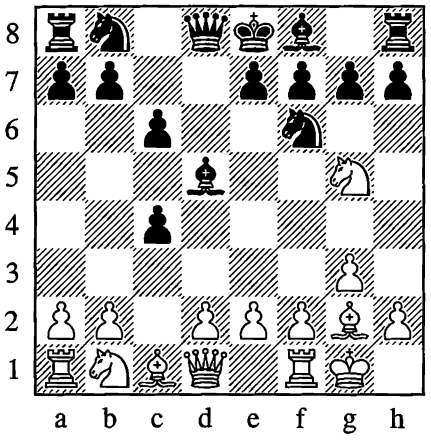
After retrieving the pawn, White can carry out his minority attack with the minimum of effort.

18...0–0 19.b5 cxb5 20.♕xb5±



Black will lose a pawn, while his bishop remains out of play, Prang – J. Fritz, corr. 1998.

C2) 6...♗d5



A more principled move than 6...♗f5. Black will not manage to neutralize the g2-bishop, but at least he will exchange his own bishop, thus preventing it from remaining offside. The structural modifications resulting after the following forcing sequence lead to an interesting situation.

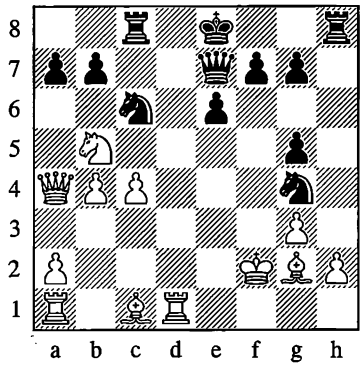
7.e4 h6 8.exd5 hxg5 9.dxc6 ♘xc6 10.♘a3

Black retains the more compact structure, but his kingside is completely undeveloped. Besides, the g5-pawn is vulnerable and White's pressure along the h1-a8 diagonal is quite annoying. We will examine mainly **C21) 10...e6** and **C22) 10...♕d3**. But first let's check out a couple of minor lines:

10...g6?! 11.♘xc4 ♗g7 would transpose to an unfavourable sub-line of variation A, page 23.

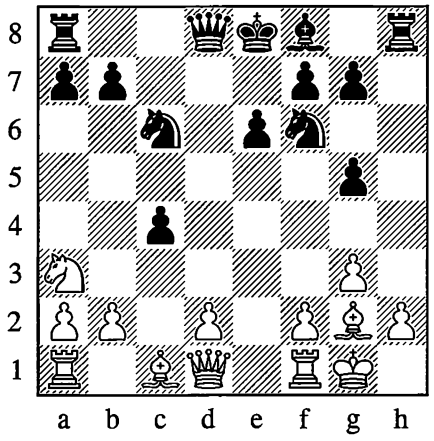
Defending the pawn with 10...♕d4?! is too risky. For instance: 11.♕a4 ♖c8 12.d3! e6 (the text move is too late, but 12...♕xd3 13.♗xg5↑ intending ♖ad1 looks equally bad)

13.♘b5 ♕d7 (13...♕xd3? would be simply weak because of 14.♘xa7+–) 14.dxc4 White has restored material equality and kept a considerable lead in development. 14...♗c5 15.♖d1 ♕e7 16.b4 ♗xf2† (The only practical chance. After 16...♗xb4 17.♘xa7+– most of Black's developed pieces would be hanging.) 17.♔xf2 ♘g4†



In the game Kirov – Stojanov, Pamporovo 2001, White could have repelled the attack with 18.♔g1!N±.

C21) 10...e6



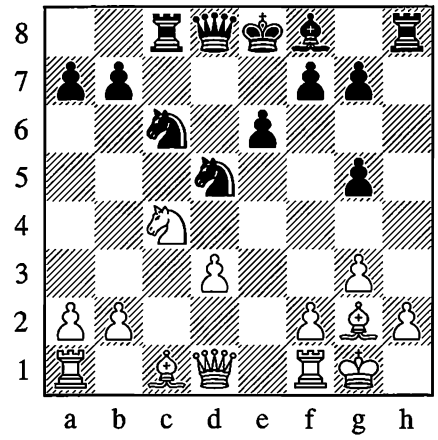
Strategically, this is the most constructive move, preparing the development of the bishop and taking the d5-square under control.

11.♘xc4 ♖c8

A generally useful move, putting the c4-knight under some indirect pressure. Instead 11...♗c5 was played in Maletin – Landa, Tomsk 2006. 12.d4!N The best way to maintain the initiative. 12...♗xd4 (Black should not expose his queen with 12...♕xd4?! because of 13.♕a4!↑ ♕d7 14.♗xg5 and then ♖ad1 leaves Black hanging) 13.♗xg5 0–0 14.♕e2± Followed by ♖fd1. Despite his apparent stability on the dark squares, Black is under long-term pressure.

12.d3 ♘d5

Black defends the g5-pawn and occupies the rather strong d5-square.



13.d4!

White transforms his potentially backward pawn into a strong isolani.

13...♗e7 14.♘e3 0–0

Black loses stability in the centre after 14...♘cb4 15.a3 ♘xe3 16.fxe3±.

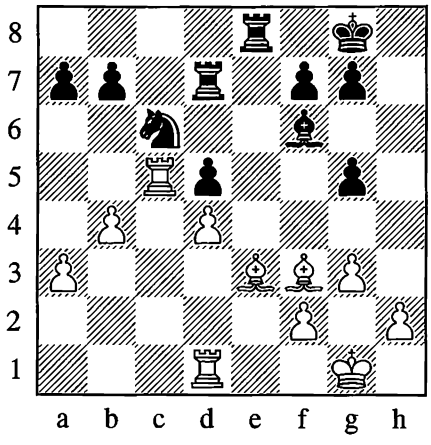
15.♘xd5 exd5 16.♗e3 ♗f6

Both sides have completed the initial phase of development, but White's bishop pair ensures him a stable advantage. Moreover, the doubled g-pawns slightly weaken the black king's position. In the two games I quote below Black could not cope with the defensive task and eventually lost.

17.♕g4

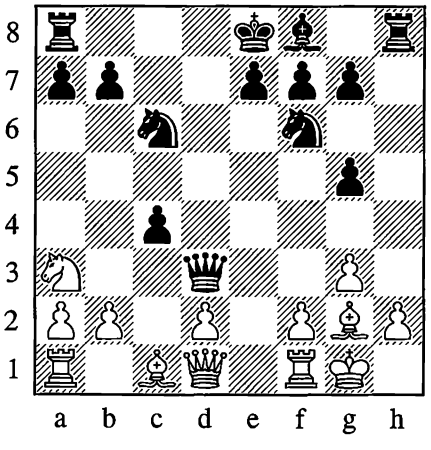
This looks slightly more active than 17.♕d2 ♖e8 18.♖ac1 ♖c7 19.♖c5 ♖d7 20.♖fc1 ♗e7 21.♖5c2 ♕b6 22.♕d1 g6 23.♖c3 ♗f6 24.♕g4± with pressure for White all over the board in Maletin – Perez Garcia, Cappelle la Grande 2007.

17...♖c7 18.♖fd1 ♖e8 19.♖ac1 ♖d7 20.♖c3 ♖d6 21.a3 ♘a5 22.♗c1 ♖de6 23.♗f3 ♘c6 24.♗e3 ♖d6 25.b4 ♕d7 26.♕xd7 ♖xd7 27.♖c5±



White has a promising attack on the queenside, Dizdar – Shamkovich, Saint John 1988.

C22) 10...♕d3



A very ambitious move. Black blockades the d-pawn, aiming to make the development of White's queenside difficult to accomplish. This move also allows the rapid transfer of the queen onto the h-file with ...♕h7, which would be dangerous if White gave up his g2-bishop for the c6-knight. The obvious drawback is that after White's answer Black will be forced to castle long, right into the firing line. The other negative aspect is that the queen is a notoriously bad blockading piece, but for the time being White does not seem to have a way to utilize this aspect.

I faced this novelty against a young and very strong opponent during a team championship. During the post-mortem, he confessed that it was suggested by Rybka, with the encouraging evaluation "0.00". However, my opponent did not seem to be entirely convinced, since he also confessed that he had warned his teammates that they should blame the engine if he happened to lose very quickly.

Together with Vali Stoica, I needed many hours of analysis to confirm my opponent's fears.

11.♕a4 0–0–0

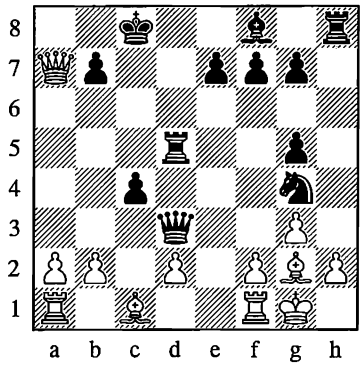
Both sides need a couple of tempos to complete their development (at least two in order to develop the bishops). White's efforts should take into account the exposed position of the black king, which can become a telling factor in the near future. In several of the lines given below, White will be able to force a draw with ♗xc6, but we will ignore them all.

12.♖e1!N

This is the only move that allows White to take advantage of the enemy queen's lack of stability. The main threat is ♖e3, but another important aspect is clearing the f1-square for the king, which could prove useful if the enemy queen reaches h2.

The aforementioned game continued with the overcautious 12.♗xc6, followed by a draw by perpetual check, Marin – Postny, Spanish Team Championship 2009. With his king seriously weakened after the exchange of the bishop and his queenside underdeveloped, White has no time to organize an effective attack.

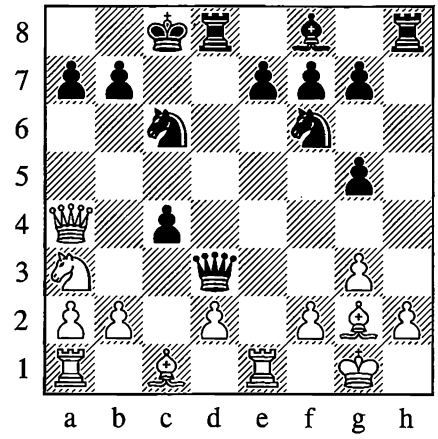
During the post-mortem, I tortured Evgeny for about an hour with the logical attacking move 12.♘b5. Our conclusion was that the position remains very dangerous for Black, but home analysis revealed the best way to react: 12...♘g4! 13.♘xa7† ♘xa7 14.♕xa7 ♖d5! A very effective way to neutralize the bishop. Accepting the sacrifice would rapidly lead to disaster.



15.♖e1!? This was the first moment when Vali Stoica came up with the idea of activating the rook, but in this concrete position it is too late. 15...♘xh2 Threatening the deadly ...♘f3†. 16.♖e3 ♕c2 Not the only possible answer, but the safest one, forcing White to repeat moves. 17.♖e1 (the optimistic 17.♕a8†? leads to disappointment after 17...♔c7 18.♖xe7† ♗xe7 19.♕xh8 ♘g4 20.♗xd5 ♕f5 and Black has an overwhelming attack) 17...♕d3= Rybka's initial evaluation is supported by this variation.

The captures on c4 should also be mentioned briefly. 12.♕xc4?! fails to unblock the d-pawn after 12...e6!?. Besides, White is not interested in exchanging queens at this stage of the game. His structure is clearly worse and his main trump is the exposed position of the black king, which offers attacking chances.

After 12.♘xc4 Black can play 12...♘g4 anyway: 13.♘d6† ♖xd6 14.♕xg4† ♔b8 15.♕xg5 ♘d4 With active play and more than enough compensation for the pawn.

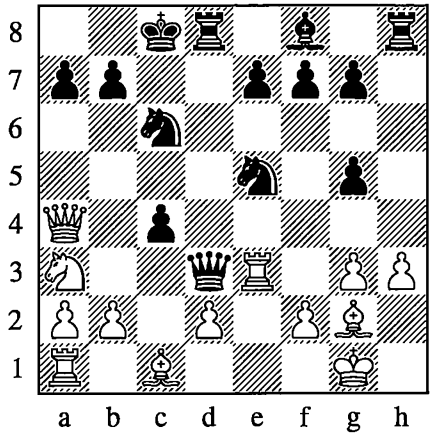


12...♘g4

Black delays ♖e3 and brings the knight closer to the d3-square in order to replace the queen in its blockading duties.

The alternate way to defend against ♖e3 is 12...♘d5. Now that the kingside is under less pressure White can start slowly developing the queenside. 13.♘xc4 ♕h7 (Otherwise, the queen would be cut off from the kingside: 13...e6 14.♗e4! With the knight on f6, this was impossible. 14...♕d4 15.d3± Apart from ♗xg5, White also threatens ♗e3 followed by ♖ac1, with increasing queenside pressure.) 14.h3 e6 15.♘e5! After exchanging the c6-knight, which controls the important d4-square, the weakness of the d-pawn loses relevance. 15...♘xe5 16.♖xe5 ♔b8 17.d4± White is better coordinated, his king is safer and the g5-pawn is weak. The relative stability of the d5-knight cannot compensate for all these aspects.

13.h3 ♘ge5 14.♖e3

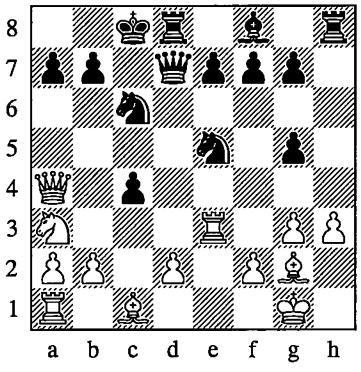


14...♕f5

This is the only way in which Black can continue fighting for the initiative. The pressure against the f2-square is essential.

14...♕d4?! 15.♘b5 offers White a vital tempo for his attack.

The optically more natural 14...♕d7 gives White a free hand with his development.

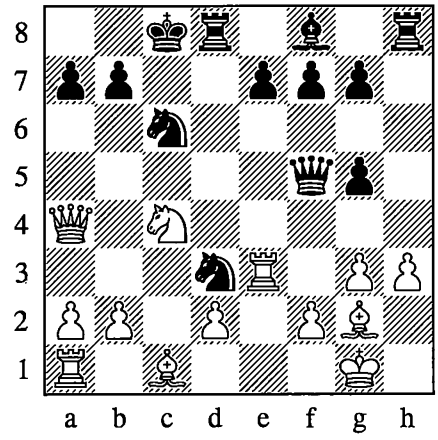


15.♘xc4 ♘d3 16.♘a5 ♘xa5 17.♕xa5 ♔b8 18.♗f1 The knight will soon have to leave the blockading square without having caused any damage. 18...b6 (after 18...♘xc1 19.♖xc1 White has a big lead in development) 19.♕c3 ♘c5 20.b4 The weakness of the black king will soon tell.

15.♘xc4 ♘d3

The most logical continuation. Black hopes to win time by attacking the f2-pawn.

After a neutral course of events White would complete his development and use his bishop pair to create threats against the enemy queenside. For example, 15...♘xc4 16.♕xc4 ♖d4 17.♕c3 ♖d6 18.b3± followed by ♗a3.

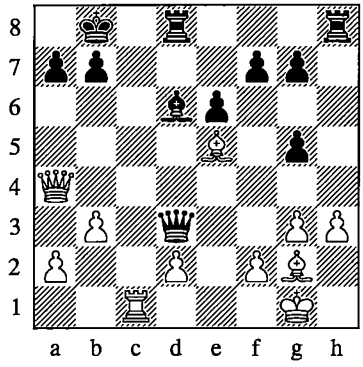


16.♖xd3!

In order to speed up his development, White is ready to sacrifice an exchange.

16...♖xd3

16...♕xd3 would keep the c4-knight under pressure, preventing 17.b4, but it leaves the e5-square undefended, allowing ♘e5 at a later stage. 17.b3! Finally, White switches to the long-planned queenside development. 17...e6 18.♗b2 (White threatens 19.♗xc6 bxc6 20.♕xc6† ♔b8 21.♗e5†) 18...♗c5 (Black hopes to meet 19.♗xc6 with 19...♕xg3†) 19.♖c1! In just a few moves, White has completed his development and set up dangerous threats against the enemy king. 19...♔b8 (19...♕xg3 20.♘e3± leaves the black king in great danger) 20.♘e5 At long last, the availability of this square begins to tell. 20...♘xe5 21.♗xe5† ♗d6 Black seems to have almost consolidated.



22.♕b4! A strong move, threatening mate in one and increasing the pressure against the d6-bishop in view of the additional threat of ♗e4. 22...♖d7 In connection with the next move, the only way to stay in the game. 23.♗e4 ♖c8 (Appropriately, the last developing move saves Black from immediate defeat. 23...a5? 24.♕a4+– and 23...♕a6? 24.♖c6+– both leave the black pieces hanging. The last variation explains why occupying the c-file with the text move is essential.) 24.♗xd3 (24.♖xc8†? ♔xc8 would unpin the d6-bishop) 24...♖xc1† 25.♗f1 ♗xe5 Black has avoided losing material, but White retains the initiative. 26.♕b5 ♖d5 27.♕e8† ♖c8 28.♕xf7 ♖xd2 29.♗g2± White retains threats against the enemy king, while the black kingside pawns are weak.

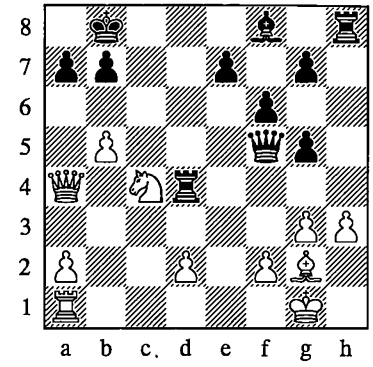
17.b4!

There is a very strong threat of ♗b2 followed by either b4-b5 or ♗xc6, in order to proceed with ♗e5†.

17...♖h6

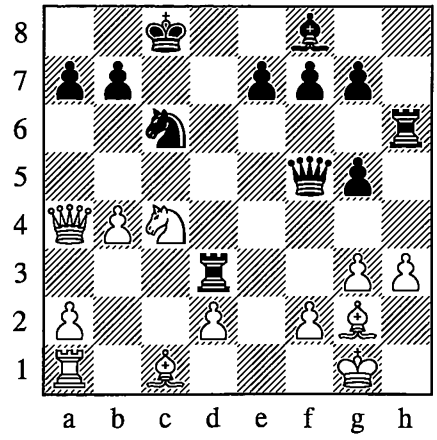
Black uses an original way to develop his king's rook, consolidating his knight. This does not do much for the bishop's development, though. Other moves would not spare Black from trouble.

17...♔b8 18.♗b2 f6 consolidates on the dark squares, but leaves Black terribly underdeveloped. 19.b5 ♘d4 20.♗xd4 ♖xd4



21.♗xb7! An elegant sacrifice, destroying the king's residence. 21...♕xh3 (this counterattack fails, but 21...♔xb7 would also lead to a decisive attack after 22.♕a6† ♔b8 23.b6 ♖d7 24.♘a5) 22.♗g2 ♕d7 23.♗c6 White will play b5-b6 next, with decisive threats.

The more natural 17...e6 fails to complete development in time. 18.♗b2 ♗xb4 The point behind this capture is revealed by the next comment. 19.♘e3 (Simplest. Black intends to answer 19.♗xc6 with 19...♗c5, but here too 20.♘e3 leads to favourable complications.) 19...♕a5 20.♗xc6± Black has to exchange queens, entering an endgame with a material disadvantage. 20...bxc6? loses to 21.♕xc6† ♔b8 22.♘c4 followed by ♗e5.



18.♗b2 ♔b8 19.g4!

This is a good moment to force the queen to make up her mind. Since the rest of the pieces are not yet coordinated, there is no adequate way to retreat.

19...♕e6

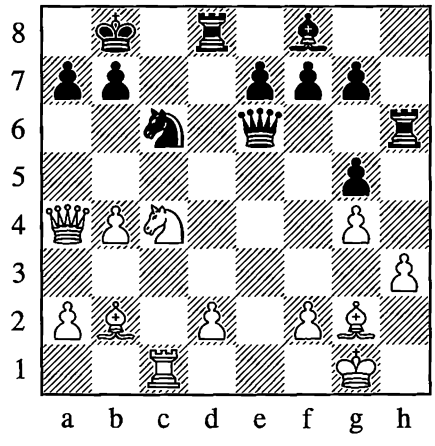
This obstructs the h6-rook, but the more natural-looking 19...♕d7 allows 20.♘e5! ♘xe5 21.♗xe5† ♔a8 22.♖c1!. The back rank problems will cost Black dearly.

20.♖c1

White has completed his development and the threats of b4-b5 or ♗xc6 are very strong.

20...♖d8

Black clears the d4-square for his knight and defends the back rank at the same time. The importance of this latter detail becomes obvious after: 20...♖d7?! 21.♗xc6 bxc6 (this is forced, because the strategically desirable 21...♕xc6 loses to 22.♘b6) 22.♗e5† ♔c8 23.♘b6†! The most effective, although not the only way to continue the attack. 23...♔d8 24.♘xd7 ♕xd7 25.b5+– White has restored formal material equality and continues the attack with an extra piece, since the enemy bishop is out of play.



21.♕b5

An interesting way to activate the queen.

21...a6

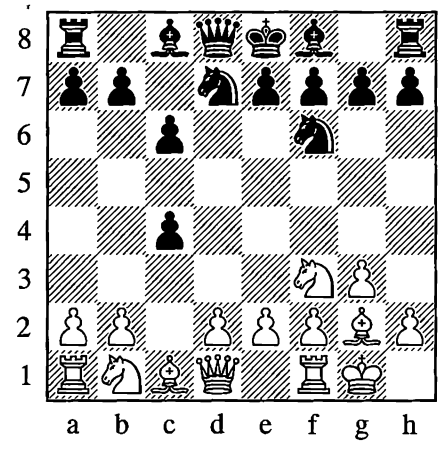
21...♔a8? allows 22.♘a5 ♘xa5 23.bxa5. There is no adequate way to defend the b7-pawn. For instance: 23...♕a6 24.♕d7! ♖b8 25.♖c8 with mate to follow soon.

22.♕xg5±

Once this pawn has fallen, a check on f4 will cause Black serious problems. He is badly underdeveloped, his king is vulnerable and his minimal material advantage is insufficient to compensate for these details.

After having examined several second-rate moves, the time has come to move on to the main continuations.

D) 5...♘bd7



A flexible move, preparing to defend the pawn with ...♘b6. Its main merit is that it does not weaken or expose anything yet.

6.♘a3 ♘b6

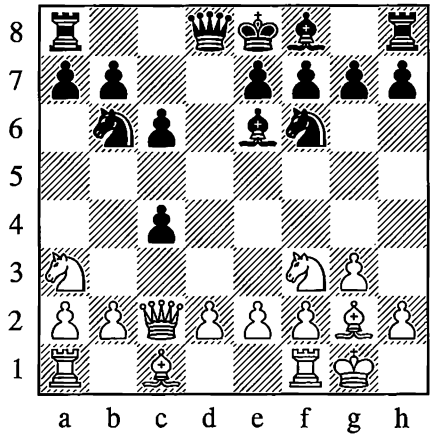
White's previous move is justified by the fact that 6...b5? is unplayable in view of 7.♘d4±, when the c6-pawn has lost what is usually its main defender in other lines.

7.♕c2

Black has two ways of defending the pawn: **D1) 7...♗e6** and **D2) 7...♕d5**. We can note

that Black is forced to expose one of his pieces anyway, in order to avoid a slightly worse and rather passive position after ♘xc4. It should also be mentioned that if Black allows 8.♘xc4 ♘xc4 9.♕xc4, the exposure of the white queen is less significant, because the black queen's knight has disappeared from the board. Therefore, retrieving the pawn in this way cannot be considered a major concession.

D1) 7...♗e6



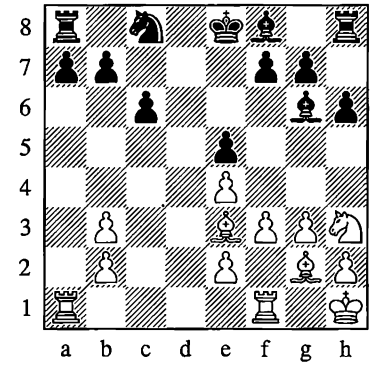
Surprisingly, this logical developing move is not popular. However, I dedicated special attention to it and my intuition proved correct, since in Reggio this was precisely how Dreev played against me.

8.♘g5

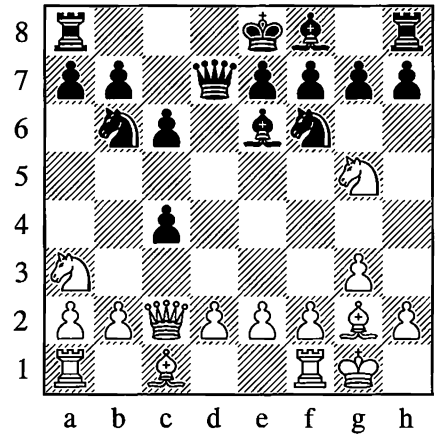
The standard reaction.

8...♕d7

Preserving the bishop from exchange with 8...♗g4 9.f3 ♗h5 leads to a considerable loss of time after: 10.♘xc4 ♕d4† 11.♘e3 ♘fd5 12.♔h1 ♗g6 13.♕b3 ♘xe3 14.dxe3 This is hardly a structural concession, because the doubled pawns will restrict the enemy bishop's activity. 14...♖d5 15.e4 ♕xb3 16.axb3 h6 17.♗e3 (This intermediate move is not really necessary. 17.♘h3!?N± followed by ♗e3 may be more restricting.) 17...♘c8 (Black could deviate with 17...hxg5 although after 18.♗xb6 a6 19.e5 e6 20.e4 ♗e7 21.♖fd1 White's position remains more active) 18.♘h3 e5



19.♘f2!N (White clears the h3-square for the king's bishop and gets ready to put pressure on the e5-pawn with a further ♘d3. This continuation is more logical than 19.♗f2 when after 19...♗d6 a draw was agreed in Velickovic – Sax, Celje 2004.) 19...♗e7 20.♗h3 0–0 21.♖fd1± White's pieces are more active and he controls the only open file.



9.b3!

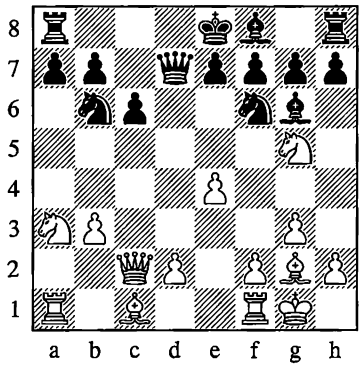
Again, this is the simplest way to keep White's initiative going. Soon, several of Black's pieces will start feeling uncomfortable. If you have doubts about the correctness of White's pawn sacrifice, just compare it (by reversing colours)

with the Benko Gambit. Here, White has similar pressure against the enemy queenside (especially after a further knight exchange on c4, resulting in the opening of the b-file). Besides, he is also better developed and has chances of gaining a space advantage in the centre – something that is hardly typical for the Benko Gambit!

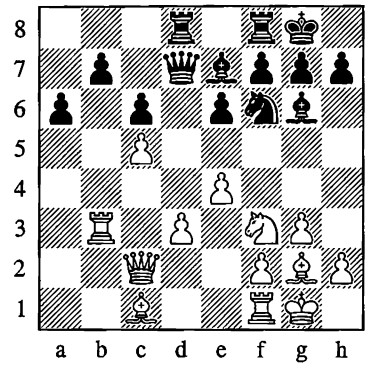
I also have to mention that the last move is *almost* a novelty, since it had been played only in two games between low rated players.

9...cxb3

During the game I was slightly worried about 9...♗f5, but Dreev captured on b3 rather quickly. Later, I discovered two ways of answering the suggested move. 10.e4 cxb3 11.axb3 (White could also deviate from the standard plan of building up a strong centre with 11.♕xb3 ♗g6 12.e5 ♘fd5 13.e6. Black will have huge problems completing his kingside development.) 11...♗g6

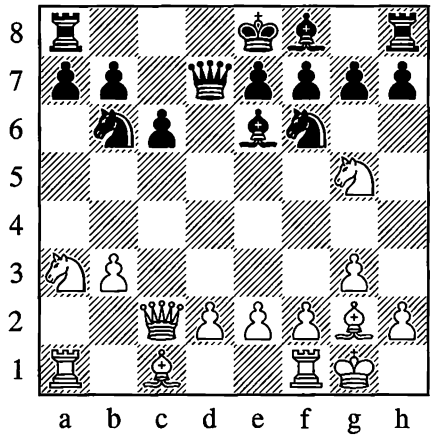


12.d3 A strong move, consolidating the e4-pawn and aiming to leave the g6-bishop out of play. The weakness of the d4-square is not relevant because the enemy knights are many moves away from it. 12...♖d8 13.♘c4 ♘xc4 14.bxc4 a6 (Black tries to keep the position closed. After 14...♕xd3 15.♕xd3 ♖xd3 16.♖xa7 the king starts feeling unsafe.) 15.♖a3 e6 16.c5 Defending the rook and blocking the enemy queenside pawns. 16...♗e7 (Black is not well enough developed for such lively action as 16...b6?! 17.e5 ♘d5 18.cxb6! ♗xa3 19.♗xa3±. The king is stuck in the centre and the b6-pawn is very dangerous.) 17.♘f3 0–0 18.♖b3±



White takes the b7-pawn under observation, while unpinning the c5-pawn at the same time. Next, he will play ♗f4 and ♖fb1, with enduring pressure. With his minor pieces horribly restricted by the white centre, Black has virtually no counterplay.

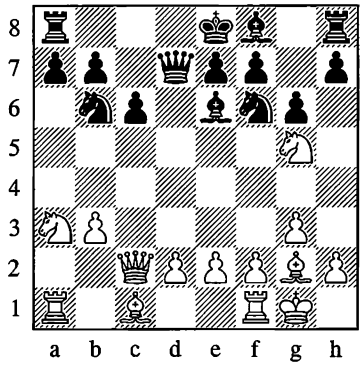
10.axb3



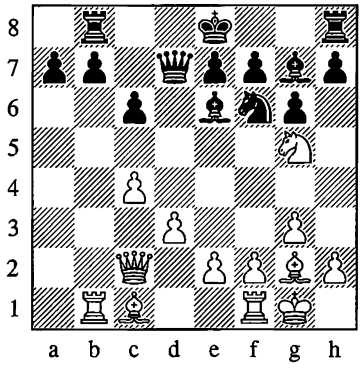
10...♗g4!?

Dreev was surprised by my opening choice and thought for a long time in the opening, but not in vain. He managed to deviate from my initial analysis as early as move 10! I had not

examined any bishop moves, being convinced that Black had to complete his kingside development as soon as possible. Therefore, my analysis continued with: 10...g6



11.♘c4! By attacking the b6-knight, White obtains a further improvement of his structure. 11...♘xc4 (Or 11...♗xc4 12.bxc4 ♗g7 13.♖b1 0–0 14.c5 ♘c8 [this looks passive, but 14...♘bd5 would lose the b7-pawn to 15.e4±] 15.♘f3± and Black is poorly coordinated and faces problems defending the b7-pawn.) 12.bxc4 ♗g7 13.♖b1! ♖b8 The only way to avoid further weakening of his position. (13...b6 weakens the c6-square and can be met in several ways. One brutal continuation is 14.♘xe6 ♕xe6 15.d4 0–0 16.e4↑ followed by e5 and f4, with a big space advantage.) 14.d3

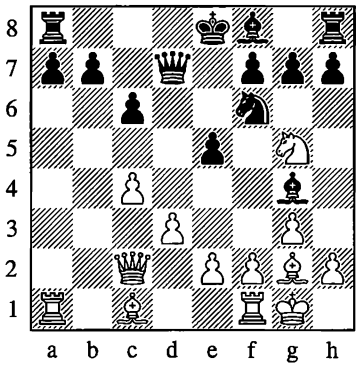


White threatens ♗f4, after which Black will not be able to avoid the creation of weaknesses on the light squares.

During the game I planned to meet 10...♗f5 with 11.d3 when after 11...e6 12.♘c4 ♘xc4 13.bxc4∞ the bishop is obviously misplaced. White's plan consists of setting up play against the queenside pawns with ♘f3, ♗e3, ♖fb1, etc.

11.♘c4!

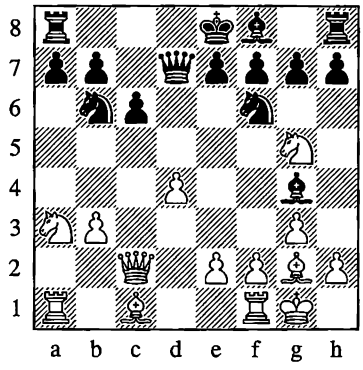
I considered this move during the game against Dreev, but eventually decided to play 11.d3?!. Here, this move is less accurate. 11...e5! I underestimated this move, which wins some space for Black, preventing White's further expansion in the centre: 12.♘c4 ♘xc4 13.bxc4



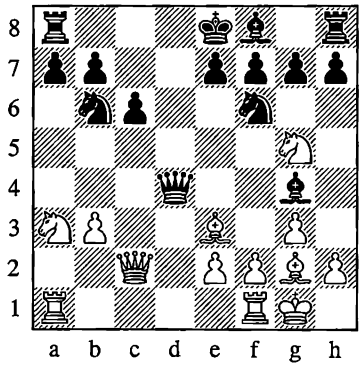
Apparently, everything is going according to White's plan. After ♗e3 Black would have to weaken his queenside structure with ...a7-a6, leaving White with strong pressure. However, 13...♗c5! was a big disappointment for me. Black aims to consolidate on the dark squares and it is not easy for White to increase his pressure. 14.♖a5 ♕e7 15.♗b2 0–0 16.♘f3 ♗xf3 17.♗xf3 ♘d7 18.♖b1 ♖fe8 19.♗c3 ♗b6 20.♖a2 ♘c5 21.♕b2∞ White's compensation should suffice only for maintaining equality. However, the position remains double-edged if Black tries to make progress. In Marin – Dreev, Reggio Emilia 2009, Black missed a simple trick in mutual time trouble and eventually lost.

There is another interesting possibility which I

noticed immediately after my opponent's answer. With 11.d4!?N White defends the e2-pawn and also starts fighting for space in the centre.



11...♕xd4 (Black probably has to pick up the gauntlet. The line 11...e6 12.♘c4 ♘xc4 13.bxc4 ♗e7 14.♕b2 0–0 15.e4 h6 16.♘f3 ♖fd8 17.♗e3 ♗xf3 18.♗xf3∞ is a much more favourable form of the game position, since White has an enormous space advantage in the centre and the usual queenside pressure.) 12.♗e3



12...♕b4? Playing "actively". 13.♗c5 ♕a5 14.b4 ♕a4 (or 14...♕a6 15.b5 cxb5 16.♕b3+– attacking f7 and threatening ♘xb5) 15.♗xb6! And White wins a piece after 15...♕xc2 16.♘xc2+–.

In this line 12...♕d8 is safer, but after 13.♘c4 White has an overwhelming lead in development.

11...♘xc4

During the game for some reason I only analysed 12.bxc4 ♗xe2 13.♖e1, when I was unsure about my compensation.

12.♕xc4

This is a lot stronger than I at first thought, and it allows White to set up very unpleasant piece pressure on Black's position.

12...e6 13.♗b2

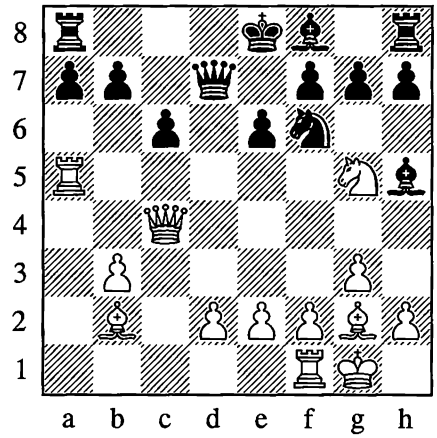
White threatens 14.♗xf6 gxf6 15.♘xf7! leaving Black with structural problems on the kingside and a rather unsafe king. Therefore, the bishop should retreat.

13...♗h5

The bishop is not stable after 13...♗f5 14.♖a5 either, when 14...♗e7 is met by 15.♖xf5! exf5 16.♕xf7† with an attack, while 14...♗d6 15.e4 ♗g6 16.e5 ♗c7 17.exf6 ♗xa5 18.fxg7 ♖g8 19.♘e4± allows White to win back the exchange and keep a dangerous pawn on the seventh rank.

14.♖a5

An active move, increasing the pressure against both Black's wings.



Black has a choice between **D11) 14...♗e7** and **D12) 14...♗g6**.

Of course the greedy 14...♕xd2? loses instantly to 15.♗xc6†!.

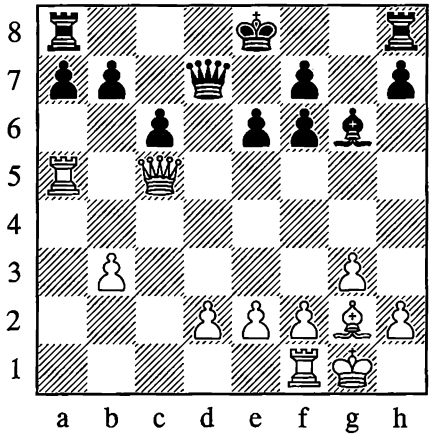
D11) 14...♗e7

Black ignores the X-ray threat against the h5-bishop and speeds up his development. This approach will cause him serious structural damage.

15.♗xf6 ♗xf6

15...gxf6 leads to a strategically unpleasant position after 16.♘xe6!±. For instance: 16...♕xe6 (the greedy 16...♗xe2?! allows White to keep the queens on the board with 17.♕xe2 ♕xe6 18.♕d1! followed by ♖e1, with excellent chances to set up a deadly attack with opposite-coloured bishops) 17.♖xh5 ♕xc4 18.bxc4±

16.♘e4 ♗g6 17.♘xf6† gxf6 18.♕c5▣



The black king is trapped in the centre. White's plan is to activate his rooks with ♖a4-d4, ♖c1-c3, etc. and Black cannot free himself easily, mainly because his bishop is so passive. For example, 18...♕e7? is impossible because of 19.♗xc6!†.

18...♕xd2

This move wins another pawn, but fails to solve the problem. Apart from the spectacular 19.♖a6!? which leads to simplifications and a microscopically better ending for White after the forced 19...♕c2 20.♖xc6!, White can play the neutral move:

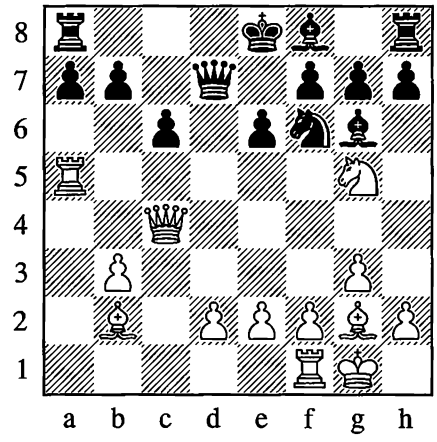
19.♗f3

Defending the e2-pawn and avoiding any back rank problems. The main plan remains the same – ♖a4-d4.

19...♕d7 20.♖a6!?

This looks much stronger than one move ago, because the exchange of queens is no longer possible.

D12) 14...♗g6



This is the safest continuation, although it fails to equalize. Black maintains the integrity of his kingside and is ready to give up the extra pawn for the sake of completing his development.

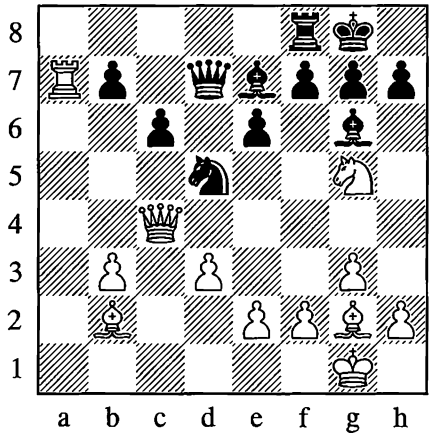
15.♖fa1 ♗e7

15...a6 is hardly a solution because of 16.♖xa6!±.

16.♖xa7 ♖xa7 17.♖xa7 0–0

White has restored material equality and has an advantage in the centre, while controlling the only open file. These are sufficient elements to consider the outcome of the opening a success.

18.d3 ♘d5



19.♘e4!N

This strong move, threatening ♘c5, practically forces Black to give up the bishop pair. In a game played more than six months after Reggio Emilia, I chose the less active 19.♘f3, hoping to leave the g6-bishop out of play. After 19...f6 20.♘d4 ♗f7 Black managed to reroute his bishop and came close to equality in Marin – Cioară, Romania 2009.

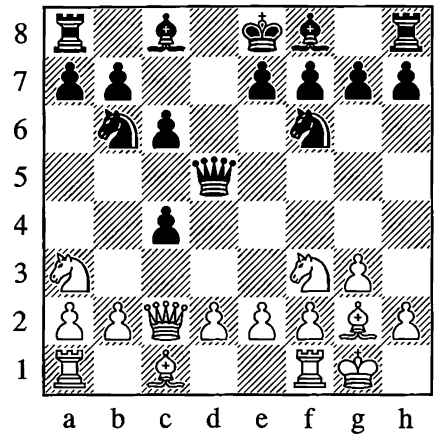
19...♗xe4

It is better to give up this bishop, since the light squares are relatively well defended. After 19...♕c7 20.♕d4 f6 21.♘c5 ♗xc5 22.♕xc5± followed by b3-b4, Black would have problems holding his position together.

20.♗xe4 ♗f6 21.♗xf6 ♘xf6 22.♕b4 ♖b8 23.♗f3±

Black has managed to avoid immediate trouble, but remains under long-term pressure. The bishop is stronger than the knight and White can combine pawn play on both wings. He can start a minority attack with b4-b5 and/or win space on the kingside, forcing the knight to retreat from the optimal f6-square. Only further practice will reveal which of the recommended alternatives to my game against Dreev is better. I have a feeling that it could be a matter of taste, since White has a strong initiative either way.

D2) 7...♕d5



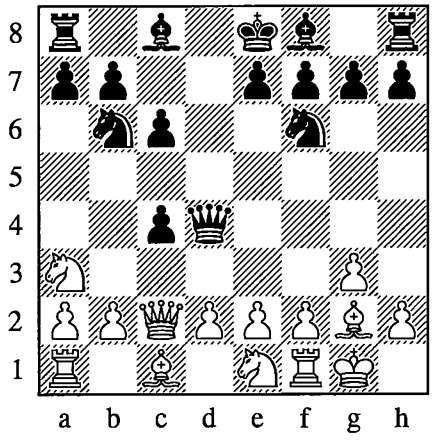
For decades, this has been considered the main continuation. Relying on my recent analysis with Vali Stoica, I believe that White has excellent prospects here, too.

8.♘e1!

The exposed position of the queen invites a discovered attack, so why award the knight retreat with an exclamation mark? My evaluation is rather subjective, because the direction of my initial research was dictated by two old games by Salov, in which he played 8.♘h4. The main point behind this move may have been to prevent ...♕f5 and offer some protection against ...♕h5 followed by ...♗h3. However, after 8...♕e6 9.e4 g6 10.b3 cxb3 11.axb3 ♗g7 12.♗b2 0–0 the awkward placement of the knight on the edge of the board restricts White's active possibilities, allowing Black to regroup in time.

After 8.♘e1 Black has a rather wide choice of queen moves, **D21) 8...♕d4**, **D22) 8...♕h5**, **D23) 8...♕f5** and **D24) 8...♕e6** and also the intermediate move **D25) 8...♗f5**.

D21) 8...♕d4



This attempt to keep defending the c4-pawn by centralizing the queen is not realistic.

9.e3 ♕g4 10.e4

White has cut off the enemy queen from the queenside and will restore material equality, while retaining the more compact structure in the centre.

10...e5

10...♕e6 11.d3 cxd3 12.♘xd3 g6 13.♗f4± would lead to a position from line D24, with an extra tempo for White.

11.♘xc4 ♘xc4 12.♕xc4 ♗d6 13.b3 h5 14.h4 ♗e6

14...c5 was recommended by Gagunashvili, but it only weakens the light squares. After 15.♗b2 followed by ♘d3 or ♘f3, the increasing pressure against the c5- and e5-pawns will become threatening.

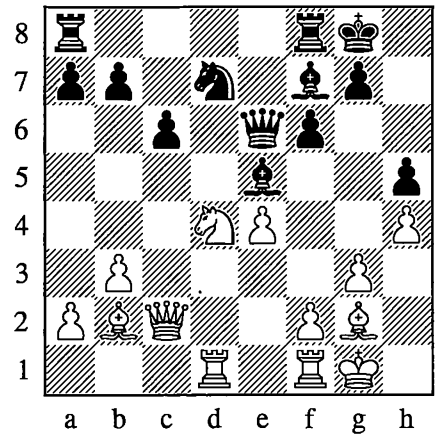
15.♕c2 ♘d7 16.♘f3 f6 17.d4

After this central break White has a stable advantage.

17...0–0 18.♗b2 ♗f7 19.♖ad1 ♕e6

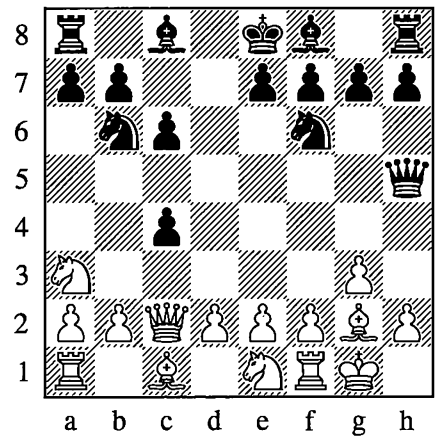
Now, in the game Zueger – Gagunashvili, Silivri 2003, White could have increased his advantage with:

20.dxe5!N ♗xe5 21.♘d4±



Black has nothing to oppose to White's better development and space advantage in the centre.

D22) 8...♕h5



This straightforward attempt to create threats against the white king leaves Black's queenside without sufficient defence.

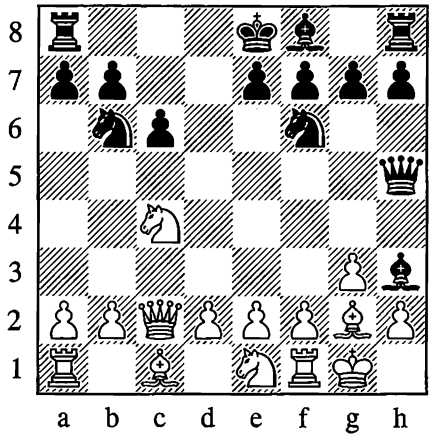
9.♘xc4 ♗h3!?N

This works out quite well tactically, but does not solve Black's lagging development.
9...♕xe2? fails to 10.♘xb6 axb6 11.♗xc6†!±.

9...♘bd5 was played in Chigladze – Shalamberidze, Batumi 2001, and should be

answered with 10.d4!N ♗h3 11.f3± with a lead in development and a space advantage in the centre.

We have a similar situation after 9...♘fd5 10.d4 ♘xc4 11.♕xc4 ♘b6 12.♕c2 e6 and now in Muskat – Fink, Germany 2004, White could have consolidated his advantage with 13.♘d3!N±.



10.♘xb6 ♗xg2

Practically forced. After 10...axb6 11.♗xc6† ♔d8 12.♗g2 ♗xg2 13.♘xg2 ♕xe2 14.♕b3± White attacks two pawns and is ready to complete his development with d2-d4, while the black king is in danger.

11.♘xa8 ♗xf1

Or 11...♕h3 12.♕d3! and the tactics work out in White's favour. For example, 12...e6 13.♘c7† ♔e7 14.b3 ♘g4 15.♘f3! (Not 15.♗a3† ♔f6 16.♘e8†? as the king calmly walks away and wins with 16...♔g5.) A couple of variations will illustrate what is happening: 15...♗xf3 16.♗a3† ♔f6 17.♕xf3† ♔g6 18.♖fb1 ♗xa3 19.b4 ♕xh2† 20.♔f1 ♘e5 21.♕e4† f5 22.♕g2± or 15...c5 16.♗a3 b6 17.♖fe1 ♗h1 18.♔xh1 ♘xf2† 19.♔g1 ♘xd3 20.exd3±. Typical variations in the "dull" English...

12.♕d3!

Threatening mate in one with ♘c7.

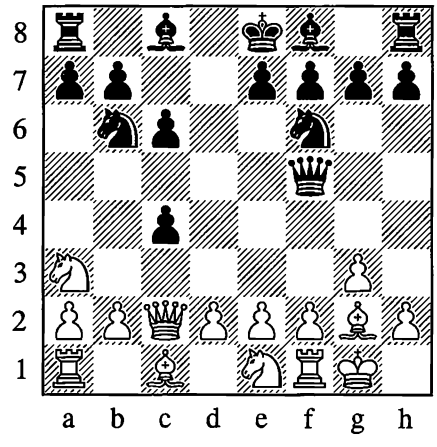
12...♕e5

12...♘d5 does not change much. 13.♔xf1 ♕h3† (13...♕xh2? loses material to 14.e4+–, for instance 14...♕h1† 15.♔e2 ♕h5† 16.♘f3 and the checks are over) 14.♔g1 ♕c8 15.b3 ♕xa8 16.♗b2± Black is badly underdeveloped and has no stability in the centre.

13.♔xf1 ♕b8 14.b4!? ♕xa8 15.b5±

Black faces the typical minority attack, long before he has even started developing his kingside.

D23) 8...♕f5

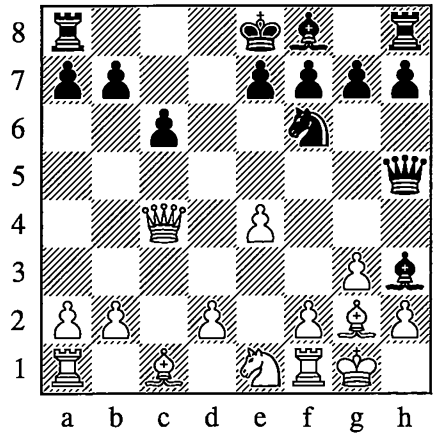


Before transferring the queen to h5, Black wants to induce the weakening of the d3- and f3-squares.

9.e4

However, occupying the centre with a pawn with tempo gives White good chances of retaining a space advantage.

9...♕h5 10.♘xc4 ♘xc4 11.♕xc4 ♗h3



12.♘f3!N

I believe that, after having won a tempo with e2-e4, White should switch to classical chess, aiming to build up a strong pawn centre. By returning the knight to f3, he defends the h2-square and takes the d4-square under control. At the same time, White creates the threat of ♗xh3 followed by ♕xf7!† and a knight fork on g5.

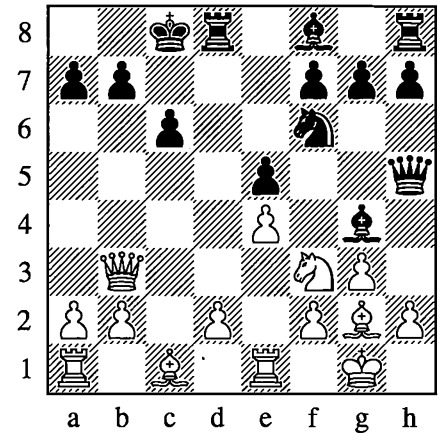
The hypermodern 12.♗xh3 ♕xh3 13.f3 e5 14.♘d3, keeping the d-pawn on its starting square, led to interesting but probably equal play after 14...♗d6 15.b4 0–0 16.♗b2 ♖ad8 17.♗c3 ♖fe8∞ in Ponkratov – Romanov, Chelyabinsk 2007.

12...♗g4!?

Black also has to adapt to the new circumstances. The f3-knight and the e4-pawn are temporarily vulnerable, which allows Black to win some time to complete his development.

The more simplistic 12...♗xg2 13.♔xg2 0–0–0 leaves the queen unstable on h5. After 14.♖e1± (threatening d2-d4) 14...e5?! 15.b4!± the queen would remain cut off from the king's position, leaving His Majesty in great danger.

13.♕b3 0–0–0 14.♖e1 e5



The only way to prevent White's plan of building a strong centre.

15.d4!

All the same! White has to open the centre in order to complete his development and endanger the enemy king.

15...exd4 16.e5 ♘d7

Black has no constructive way to take advantage of the relatively exposed white queen. For instance, 16...♗e6 17.♕a4± or 16...♘d5 17.♘xd4 ♗c5 18.♕c4 ♗xd4 19.♕xd4 ♔b8 20.b3 ♗f3 21.♗a3± followed by ♗d6 and b4-b5, with a space advantage and attacking chances for White.

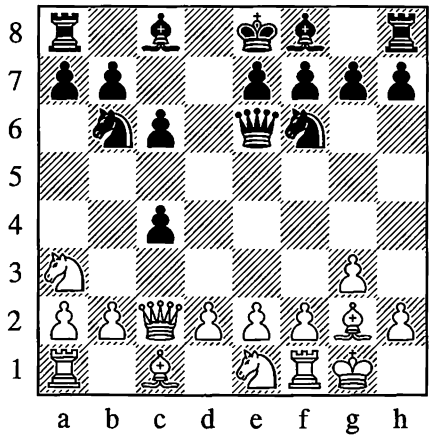
17.♘xd4 ♗c5

17...♘xe5?! is too dangerous because of 18.♗f4 f6 19.♗xc6!± with a crushing attack.

18.♕c4 ♗xd4 19.♕xd4 ♘b6 20.♕e3 ♔b8 21.b3±

White has the bishop pair, a space advantage and the safer king. The relative stability the knight will have on d5 cannot compensate for all these elements. White intends to transfer his bishop to d6 and start an attack with b4-b5.

D24) 8...♕e6



The most conservative move. Black hangs on to the extra pawn, while maintaining a position with virtually no weaknesses. This demands very accurate play from White to prevent his lead in development from vanishing. One important element is the exposed position of the black queen, which is likely to allow White to win a couple of tempos in the near future.

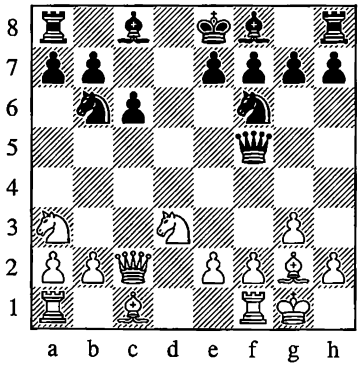
9.d3!

The most constructive way to activate the minor pieces.

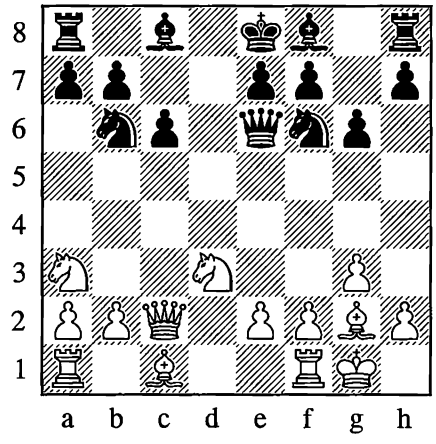
9...cxd3 10.♘xd3 g6

Black aims to castle as soon as possible.

10...♕f5?! was tried in Pantsulaia – Panarin, Internet (blitz) 2006.



White could have obtained strong initiative with 11.e4N! ♕h5 (In a blitz game it is easy to overlook that 11...♘xe4 drops a piece without sufficient compensation after 12.g4!±. The queen also does not reach the desired safety after: 11...♕a5 12.b4 ♕a4 13.♕b2 Threatening ♘c5. 13...a5 14.b5± When Black already has a weakness to worry about, having made no progress with his development.) 12.b4!? By taking the a5-square away from the queen, White creates the threat of ♘f4 and prepares an eventual ♗b2. 12...g5!? (The other way to take the f4-square under control is 12...e5 but after 13.f4 ♗d6 14.f5↑, followed by h2-h3, the black queen is in a miserable situation.) 13.f3 ♗g7 14.♗e3 0–0 15.♖ad1 White is still ahead in development, while the black queen is out of play. One of Black's problems is that he has no stable squares for his queen's bishop, because of the permanent threat of ♘c5. 15...♘fd7 16.♕c1 h6 17.b5↑ Black is under pressure on the queenside, but his other wing is also likely to be submitted to a strong attack at the right moment.



11.e4!N

This move is the result of a thorough examination of the position. White intends to create a lethal net around the enemy queen.

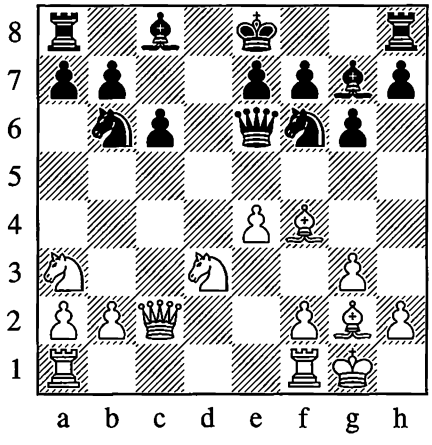
The rather pointless 11.♗e3?! allowed Black

to complete his development and retain an extra pawn in Serafimov – Chuchelov, France 2006.

For a while we were tempted by 11.♘c5, but this is a premature commitment of the knight and Black can escape his trouble with: 11...♕f5! (the careless 11...♕e5? is met by 12.♗f4 ♕h5 13.♘xb7! ♗xb7 14.♗xc6† ♗xc6 15.♕xc6† ♘fd7 16.♘b5 ♖c8 17.♘c7† ♖xc7 18.♕xc7 ♗g7 19.a4!± with complete paralysis of Black's army) 12.e4 ♕h5 And White has no obvious way to develop his initiative. Obviously, the knight would have been useful on d3 now, in order to continue chasing the queen with ♘f4.

11...♗g7 12.♗f4

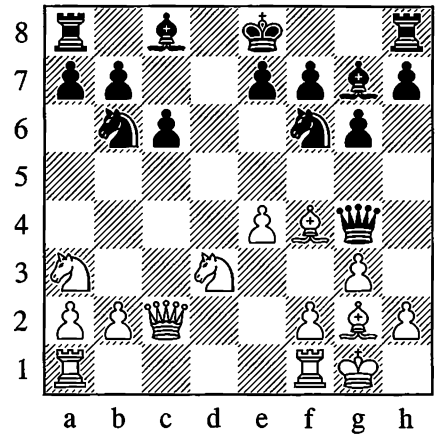
12.♘c5 is still premature because of 12...♕e5.



After the text move the trap is already set and Black has a choice between **D241) 12...♕g4** and **D242) 12...♘fd7**. In my recent practice (Benasque 2009), a third possibility occurred. Since I enjoyed a favourable tournament position, I offered a draw after 12.♗f4, despite having most of the analysis still fresh in my mind. After brief thought my opponent, Laznicka, felt he could not reject such an offer...

White's idea would be crowned with success after 12...0–0? 13.♘c5 ♕g4 14.h3 ♕h5 15.g4! ♕h4 16.♕d2± when Black will have to sacrifice a piece without sufficient compensation in order to save his queen.

D241) 12...♕g4



This move is an attempt to escape with the queen before it is threatened, but it loses a lot of time.

13.f3 ♕d7

Quite awkward, but safest. 13...♕h5 would leave the queen in trouble after 14.♕d2. For instance: 14...0–0 (against 14...h6, preventing the loss of a piece, White would play 15.♖ac1 followed by 16.♖c5, but now Black is prepared to react with 15...♖d8, pinning the knight) 15.e5 ♘fd5 16.g4 ♗xg4 Otherwise, the queen would perish after ♗g5. 17.fxg4 ♕xg4 18.♗g3± White has regrouped well, which makes Black's compensation insufficient.

14.♖ad1

With the brutal threat ♘c5.

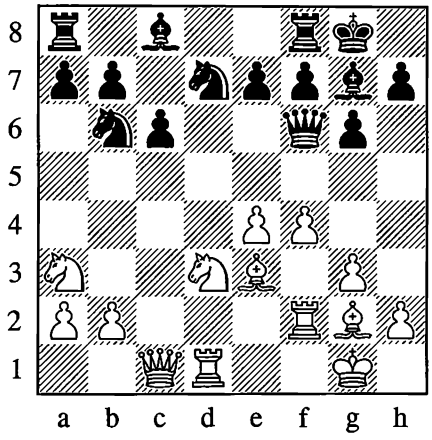
14...♕d4† 15.♖f2

Renewing the threat.

15...♘fd7

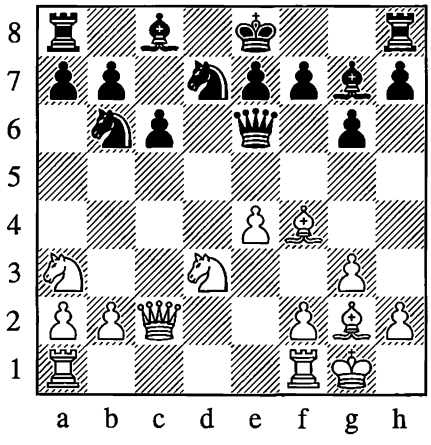
This move blocks the development of the queenside, but after 15...♕a4 16.♕d2! the threat of ♘c5, targeting both members of the royal family, is quite unpleasant.

16.♕c1 0–0 17.♗e3 ♕f6 18.f4



White has completed his development optimally and has active play on both wings. Next, he may play b2-b4, eventually followed by a knight jump to c5. Black's position remains very passive.

D242) 12...♘fd7



Black takes preventive measures against the knight jump to c5, deviating from the natural course of development.

13.♗c7!

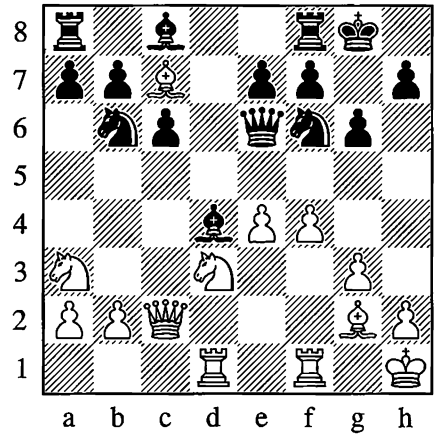
White clears the way of the f-pawn in the most efficient way possible. Given Black's lack of coordination, the bishop will enjoy near total stability on this square.

13...0–0 14.f4 ♗d4†

The attempt to return the pawn in order to obtain some counterplay with 14...c5 15.e5 c4 16.♘f2 ♘c5 17.♗xb6 axb6 18.♘xc4± is not realistic, since White remains in absolute control of the position.

15.♔h1 ♘f6 16.♖ad1

White has completed his development and is ready to launch an attack with f4-f5.



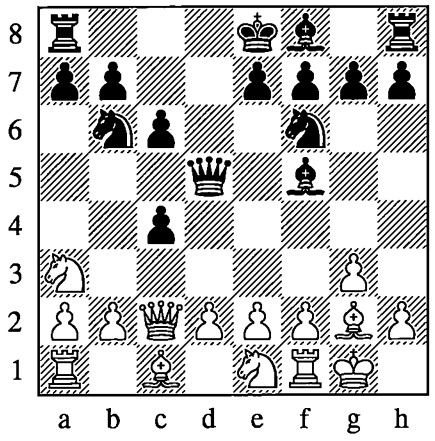
16...♘g4

Desperately striving for counterplay. 16...♕xa2 17.f5!↑ is at the very least dangerous, while after the odd 16...♕d7 White has the following nice tactic: 17.♘b5! cxb5 18.♘e5 ♕e6 19.♖xd4↑

17.♘c5 ♗xc5 18.♕xc5 ♘d7 19.♕c3▤

White has a big lead in development, enjoys more space and has an active pair of bishops. In all these lines, the evaluations "initiative" or "compensation" can easily be exchanged with "±".

D25) 8...♗f5



I must confess that I got a bit of a shock when I faced this novelty. For an instant, I thought that it was a logical way to fight for the initiative, but then I discovered I could cause Black irreparable structural damage.

9.♗xd5 ♗xc2 10.♗xc6†!

This is much stronger than 10.♗xf7† ♔xf7 11.♘exc2 e6∞ when the weakness of the kingside is not relevant, because White's knights are far from the crucial e4- and e5-squares. Besides, Black's queenside majority may prove dangerous in the long term.

After the text move, the c4-square will become weak and the knights are ideally placed to occupy it.

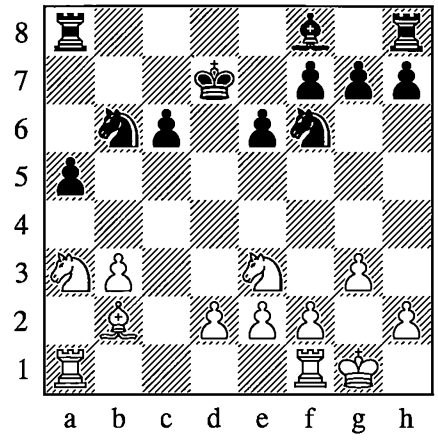
10...bxc6 11.♘exc2 e6 12.b3!

White has few prospects of winning the c4-pawn after 12.♘e3 ♗xa3 13.bxa3. Occupying the c4-square is more important than the pawn itself and after the text move Black cannot prevent White from achieving this under favourable circumstances.

12...cxb3 13.axb3 a5

Black hopes to exchange this pawn for the b3-pawn, in order to ease his defence. A possible alternative is 13...♗d6 14.♗b2 ♔d7 15.♘e3 ♖hb8 16.♖fb1 ♘e8. It is not easy to live with the permanent threat of ♗xf6, spoiling the kingside structure and aiming for an ending with a good knight against a bad bishop. 17.♗c3 f6 18.♘ac4 ♘xc4 19.♘xc4 Black will have to suffer forever.

14.♗b2 ♔d7 15.♘e3



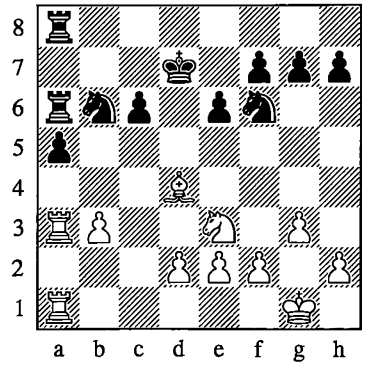
15...♗d6!?N

I suggest this novelty. Instead my opponent decided to eliminate one of my knights, in order to prevent the stable occupation of the c4-square, but this cost him a pawn without any compensation:

15...♗xa3?! 16.♖xa3 ♖a6 17.♗d4

It appears that after giving up the bishop, Black has lost stability on the dark squares.

17...♖ha8 18.♖fa1



Black lacks the tempo he needs to prevent both the loss of a pawn with b3-b4 by over-defending the b6-knight with ...♔c7 and also avoid decisive the structural damage caused by ♗xf6.

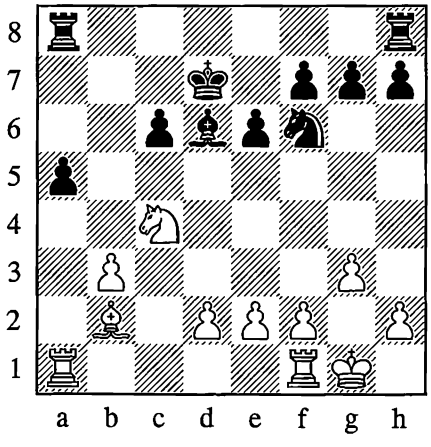
18...♘e8

18...♔c7 would only solve the other half of the problems: 19.♗c3 a4 20.bxa4 ♖xa4 21.♖xa4 ♖xa4 22.♖xa4 ♘xa4 23.♗xf6! With his pieces far away, Black cannot defend his kingside pawns. 23...gxf6 24.♘g4 An instructive situation. The solution to one problem (18...♔c7) provoked another one. With his king on d7, the last move would not be dangerous. 24...f5 25.♘f6 h6 26.♘g8 h5 27.♘f6 h4 28.gxh4 Black has managed to give up the pawn under strategically favourable circumstances, but the h-pawn is very dangerous now. 28...♔d6 29.h5 ♔e7 30.♘d7! Creating a barrier in front of the king. 30...f6 31.h6 ♔f7 32.h7 ♔g7 33.♘xf6+– The black king is tied down to the defence of the h8-square, while his rival will march in with decisive effect.

19.b4 a4 20.♗xb6 ♖xb6 21.♖xa4 ♖xa4 22.♖xa4

White converted his material advantage into a win in Marin – Ris, Reykjavik 2009.

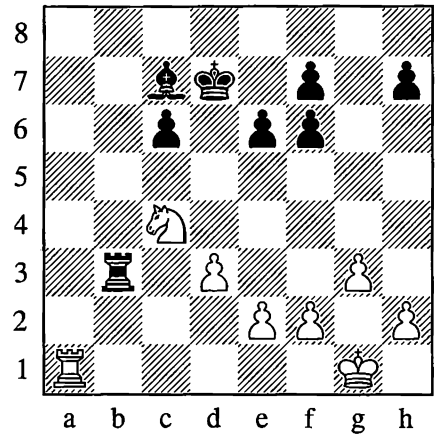
16.♘ac4 ♘xc4 17.♘xc4



17...♖hb8!

Only the rapid mobilization of Black's forces will maintain material equality. The overcautious 17...♗c7?! loses a pawn to 18.♗c3 ♖hb8 19.♗xa5 ♖xb3 20.♗xc7 ♖xa1 21.♖xa1 ♔xc7 22.♖a7† ♖b7 23.♖xb7† ♔xb7 24.♘d6† followed by 25.♘xf7+–.

18.♘xa5 ♗c7 19.♘c4 ♖xa1 20.♖xa1 ♖xb3 21.♗xf6 gxf6 22.d3±

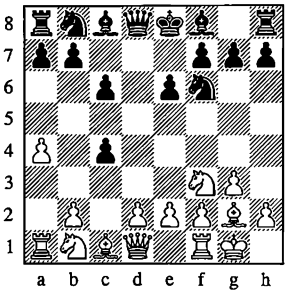


Black has structural defects on both wings and the knight is stronger than the bishop. Besides, the activity of the white rook along the a-file is very annoying.

Conclusion

Contrary to the current opinion of official theory, Black is struggling in all the lines examined in this chapter. This is quite a revolutionary discovery, which means that after 1.c4 ♘f6 there is no punishment for 2.g3, which is essential for our repertoire.

Chapter 4



Anti-Slav Systems

5...e6

Variation Index

1.c4 c6 2.g3 d5 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♗g2 dxc4 5.0–0 e6

6.a4

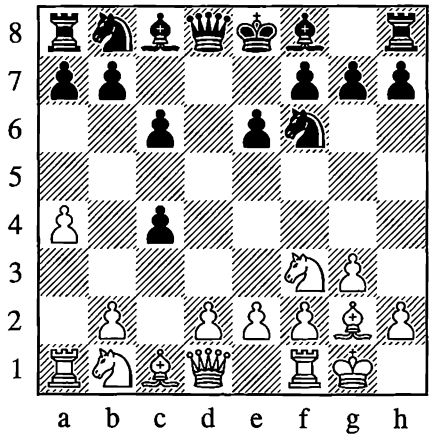
A) 6...♘d5?! 54
B) 6...♗e7?! 54
C) 6...♕c7?! 55
D) 6...♕d5?! 56
E) 6...b6?! 7.♘e5 ♗b7 8.♘xc4 ♗e7 9.♘c3 0–0 10.d4! ♕c8 57
E1) 11.♗g5 57
E2) 11.e4!N 59
F) 6...♘bd7 59
G) 6...a5 7.♘a3 ♗xa3 8.♖xa3!N 61
G1) 8...♖a7 62
G2) 8...0–0 63
H) 6...♘a6 7.♘a3 ♗xa3 8.♖xa3 64
H1) 8...0–0 64
H2) 8...♕a5?! 65
H3) 8...♘b4 9. a5! 0–0 10.b3 cxb3 11.♕xb3 65
H31) 11...♕e7!?N 66
H32) 11...♘a6 67

1.c4 c6 2.g3 d5 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♗g2 dxc4 5.0–0 e6

Another logical move. Black continues developing his kingside, relying on the fact that 6.♘a3 is not dangerous because of 6...b5, and there is no obvious way for White to take advantage of the weakness of the long diagonal. Therefore, the time has come for him to play:

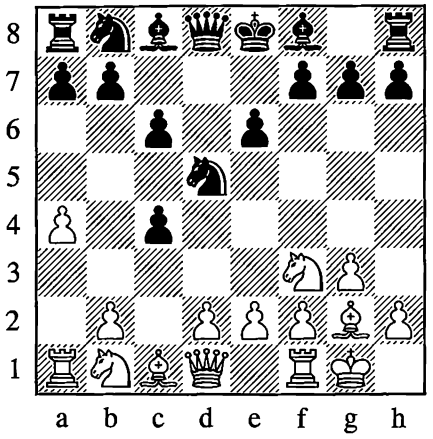
6.a4

Preventing ...b7-b5 and renewing the threat of ♘a3. It may seem that White has finally made one of the concessions I was speaking about in the introduction to the anti-Slav chapter by weakening the b4-square. However, we should not forget that Black has also restricted his active possibilities by closing the c8-h3 diagonal and leaving the queen's bishop (at least temporarily) passive. The main thing for White in the next phase of the game is to avoid making a second concession, namely capturing the c4-pawn with the queen.



Black has a wide choice now. We will analyse the inferior continuations **A) 6...♘d5?!, B) 6...♗e7?!, C) 6...♕c7?! D) 6...♕d5?!** and **E) 6...b6?!**, which leave White with a comfortable advantage practically without any fight and then we shall study the more consistent **F) 6...♘bd7, G) 6...a5** and **H) 6...♘a6.**

A) 6...♘d5?!

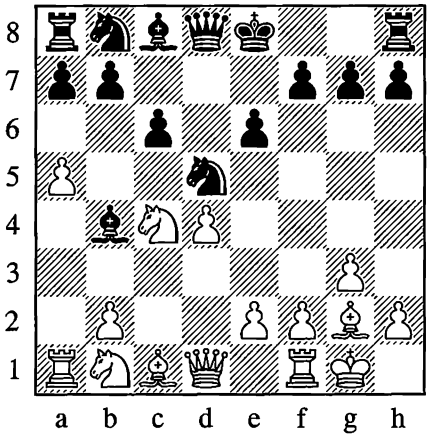


This move loses a lot of time.

7.♘e5 ♘b6

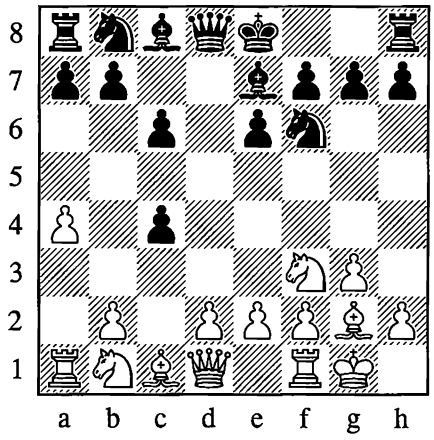
7...b5 weakens the position too much, for instance 8.axb5 cxb5 9.♘c3 ♕d6 10.d4 cxd3 11.♕xd3± and Black's whole position is hanging.

8.a5 ♘d5 9.♘xc4 ♗b4 10.d4±



White has earned a huge space advantage at no cost, Petursson – Bromann, Copenhagen 1996.

B) 6...♗e7?!



This move deserves to be mentioned only because it caused some trouble to a reigning World Champion.

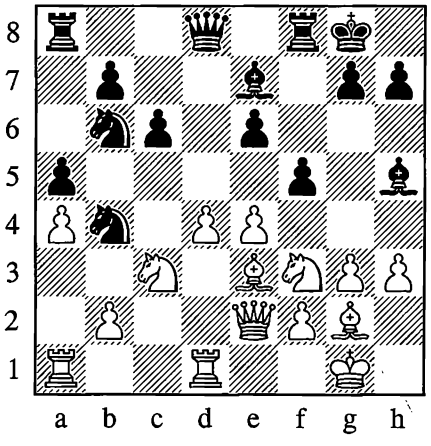
7.♕c2?!

A typical mistake, against which I have warned the reader in the introduction. By attacking the pawn with the queen, White restores material equality by force, but loses a lot of time, because Her Majesty will not be stable in the centre.

7...♘bd7 8.♕xc4 ♘b6 9.♕c2 ♘fd5 10.♘c3 ♘b4 11.♕d1

White has spent no fewer than four tempos for nothing.

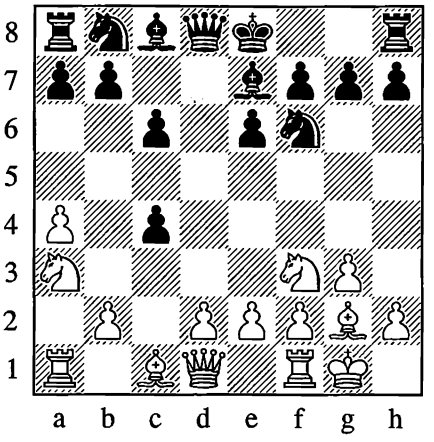
11...0–0 12.d4 a5 13.e4 ♗d7 14.♕e2 ♗e8 15.♖d1 f6 16.♗e3 ♗h5 17.h3 f5!



With counterplay for Black, although the human Champion eventually, with a little luck, managed to win in Kasparov – Turbostar 432, Hamburg 1985.

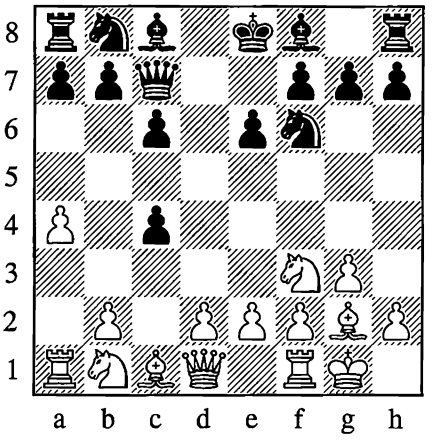
In this line, White can improve with:

7.♘a3!N±



7...♗xa3 is out of question as it loses a tempo with respect to the main variations.

C) 6...♕c7?!



This early commitment of the queen is the same kind of mistake as Kasparov's 7.♕c2. Black prepares ...e6-e5, but this is hardly a good idea at a moment when most of Black's pieces are on their initial squares.

7.♕c2

In fact, I would prefer the immediate 7.♘a3!N±.

7...e5 8.♘a3!

Even when played a move late, this manoeuvre is still strong.

8...♗xa3N

As usual, this is the critical move. 8...e4 loses this pawn to 9.♘g5, while 8...♗g4 9.♘xc4 ♘bd7 10.d4 exd4 11.♗f4 ♕c8 12.♘xd4± left Black with a miserable position in Lopez Martinez – Balogh, Budapest 2002.

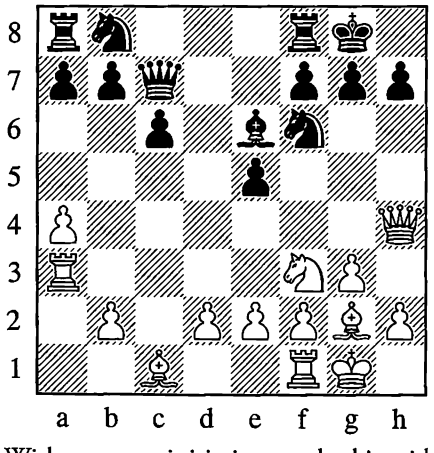
9.♖xa3!

We shall see more of this move in the future. White takes full advantage of the previous advance of the a-pawn by activating the rook and avoiding pawn weaknesses. Compare this with the lines after 1.c4 e6 2.g3 d5 followed by ...dxc4, when ♘a3 is met by ...♗xa3, forcing bxa3.

9...0–0

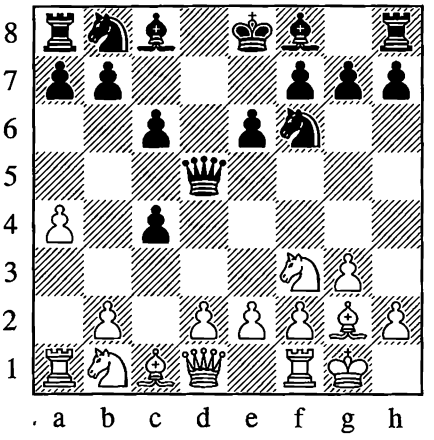
9...♗e6 fails to keep the extra pawn due to 10.♘g5.

10.♕xc4 ♗e6 11.♕h4±



With a strong initiative on the kingside. In certain cases, White will be able to mount an attack along the h-file with g4-g5 and ♖h3. Otherwise, d2-d4 is the main threat, opening up the position for White's bishops.

D) 6...♕d5?!



This looks even more provocative than 6...♕c7, because the queen is unstable in the centre.

7.♘c3

The customary 7.♘a3!? also deserves to be mentioned.

7...♕h5 8.b3!

This kind of gambit play seems to be a specialty of Matamoros. Here it is entirely justified, because Black is underdeveloped and poorly coordinated.

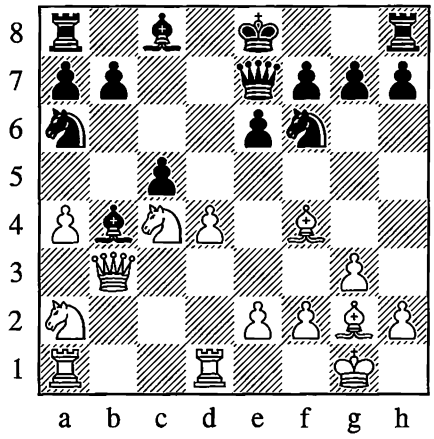
8...cxb3 9.♕xb3 ♘a6 10.d4 ♕a5

Another loss of time, but after the more natural 10...♗e7 11.♗a3! Black would find it difficult to castle.

11.♘e5 ♗b4 12.♘a2 c5

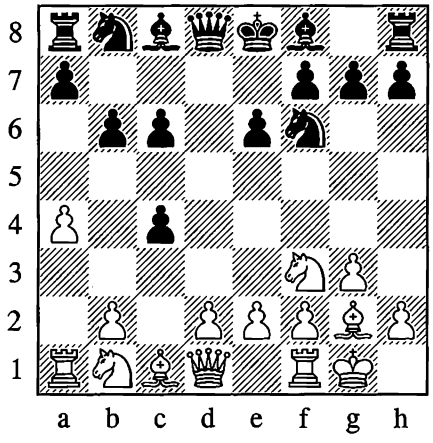
Black is forced to open the centre earlier than he might have wanted to. 12...♗e7 loses to 13.♘xc6!+–.

13.♘c4 ♕d8 14.♖d1 ♕e7 15.♗f4+–



With a decisive lead in development, Matamoros – Kekki, Porto Mannu 2007.

E) 6...b6?!



Black's attempt to neutralize the English (or, if you wish, Catalan) bishop fails because of White's big space advantage.

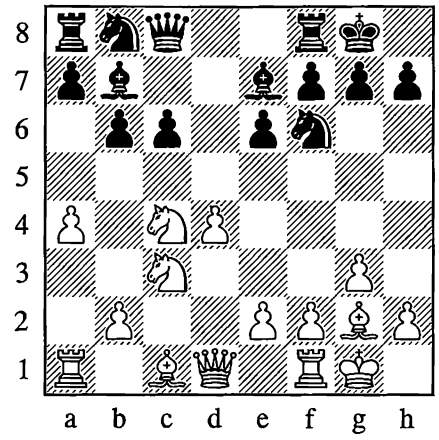
7.♘e5

The easiest way to win the pawn back. The weakness of the c6-pawn prevents Black from defending the c4-pawn with 7...♕d4.

7...♗b7 8.♘xc4 ♗e7 9.♘c3 0–0 10.d4!

The correct approach, as White would get nowhere if he refused to push his d-pawn to the fourth rank; with this well-timed transposition to a Catalan structure, he obtains a stable space advantage.

10...♕c8

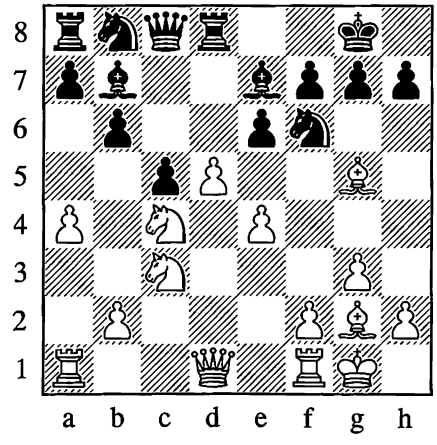


In practice, **E1) 11.♗g5** has proved quite effective, but I prefer **E2) 11.e4!**. Even though the first line is not part of my recommended repertoire it is still worth a look, as it contains some instructive points.

E1) 11.♗g5

White keeps developing, but delays the occupation of the centre.

11...♖d8 12.e4 c5 13.d5



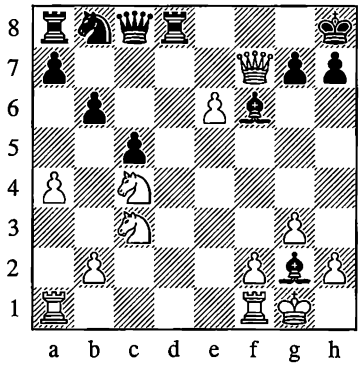
White is perfectly coordinated, which means the apparent vulnerability of the d5-pawn is only an illusion.

13...♘c6!?

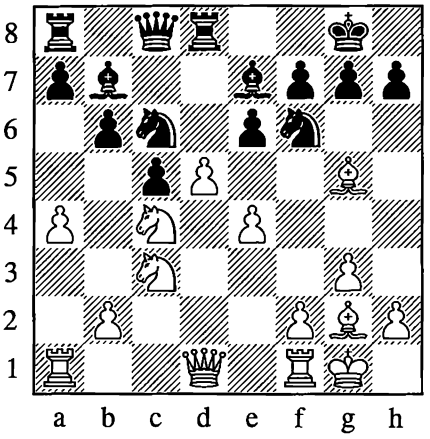
Probably the only chance for survival, although it means losing some material; Black has to develop somehow. Tactics based on taking the d5-pawn do not work out well as can be seen from the following variations.

13...exd5 14.exd5 ♘xd5? 15.♗xe7 ♘xe7 16.♗xb7 ♖xd1 17.♖axd1 ♕f8 18.♗xa8+– With a decisive material advantage.

13...♘xd5?! 14.exd5 ♗xg5 15.♕h5 ♗f6 (after 15...exd5 16.♕xg5 Black cannot retrieve the lost piece because so many of his forces are hanging, for instance 16...f6 17.♕d2!+–) 16.dxe6 ♗xg2 (the natural 16...fxe6? loses to the explosive 17.♘d6!+– when 17...♖xd6 18.♗xb7 ♕xb7 leads to mate after 19.♕e8#) 17.♕xf7† ♔h8 White is going to win a pawn, but he still needs to play one more accurate move.



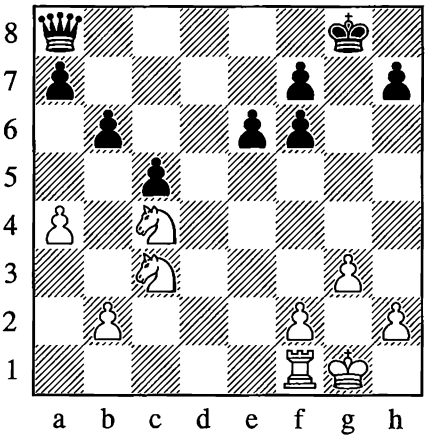
18.♖fe1! Removing the rook from the attacked square and preparing the advance of the e-pawn (instead 18.♔xg2 loses the extra pawn to 18...♖f8, leaving White with just a tiny edge after 19.♕h5 ♕xe6 20.♕d5±). 18...♘c6 (The e-pawn needs to be stopped, as otherwise Black would lose instantly. For instance, 18...♖f8 19.♘d6 ♖xf7 20.exf7+– or 18...♗c6 19.e7 ♖g8 20.♘d6+– or 18...♗h3 19.e7+–.) 19.♔xg2 ♖f8 20.♕h5± White has an extra pawn and harmonious development.



14.♗xf6!

The start of a well calculated tactical operation.

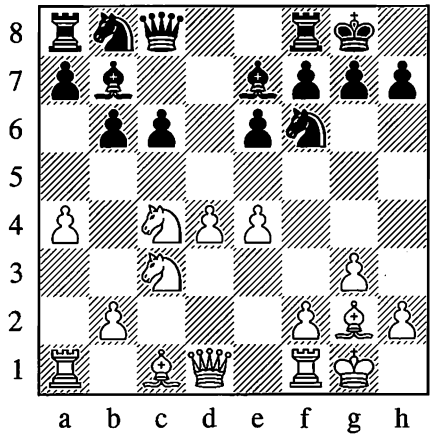
14...♗xf6 15.dxc6! ♖xd1 16.cxb7 ♖xf1† 17.♖xf1 ♕xb7 18.e5 ♕c8 19.♗xa8 ♕xa8 20.exf6 gxf6±/±



Despite White's material advantage, the insufficient stability of his knights means he faces a difficult technical task. The game Vanderwaeren – Goloshchapov, Leuven 2003, ended in a draw, mostly because of the big difference in class between the players.

I believe this variation is a good example about the importance of switching from hypermodern to classical chess, by occupying the centre with d4 once the partial goals (such as winning back the c4-pawn) have been achieved. Also, it is an excellent advertisement for the Catalan Opening, by revealing some of its hidden tactical nuances.

E2) 11.e4!N



The immediate occupation of the centre puts Black under more pressure than in the line above.

11...c5

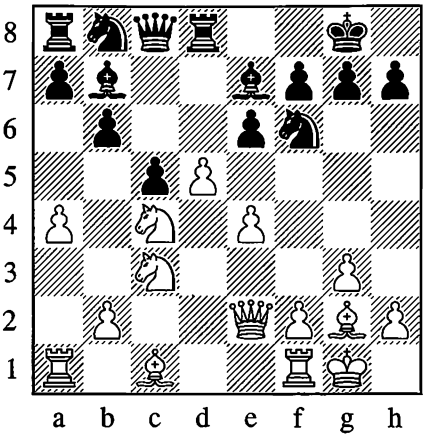
There is no time for 11...♖d8 because of 12.e5 ♘d5 13.♘e4 followed by the invasion of the d6-square.

12.d5 ♖d8

The hurried exchange 12...exd5 13.exd5 opens the e-file for the white rook, which can be felt after 13...♖d8 14.♖e1. Black is underdeveloped and his pieces are hanging. A bishop retreat would be followed by ♗g5, while the spectacular 14...♘c6 loses material to 15.♗d2+–.

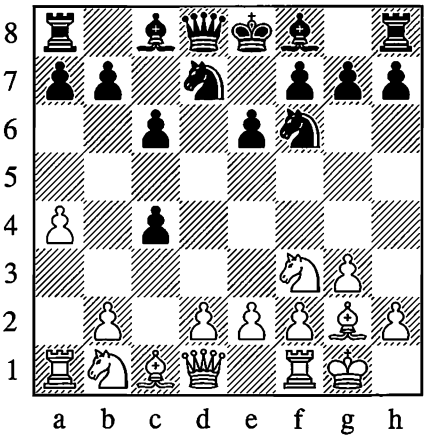
Now, instead of 13.♗g5, which transposes to E1, White could indirectly defend his d5-pawn with:

13.♕e2±



Followed by ♖d1. Black has no way to simplify the position and will have to endure long-term pressure.

F) 6...♘bd7



Black develops a piece and aims to take advantage of the newly created weakness of the b3-square.

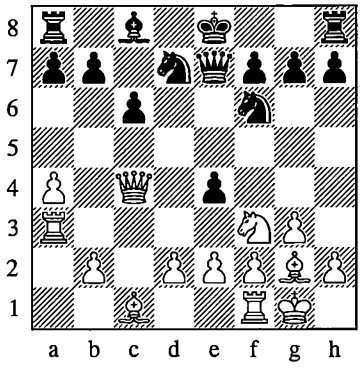
7.♘a3!

As usual in such situations, this is our main continuation. Instead Black gets "undeserved" counterplay after 7.♕c2 ♘c5 8.♘a3 ♕b6 as in Matamoros – Suba, Campillos 2005.

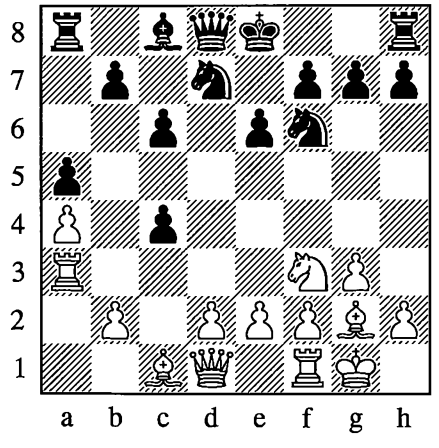
7...♗xa3 8.♖xa3 a5

Black secures the b6-square for his queen's knight, in order to safely defend the c4-pawn.

Counterplay in the centre with 8...e5 9.♕c2 ♕e7 10.♕xc4 e4 was recommended by John Watson at Chess Publishing, but Black is not really prepared for such an early opening of the position.



11.♘g5! Not mentioned by Watson; Black's central pawn is in some trouble now. 11...♘b6 12.♕c2 ♗f5 13.a5 ♘bd5 14.♖a4! Increasing the pressure against the e4-pawn and forcing Black to weaken his position even more. 14...♘b4 15.♕c4 c5 16.f3!± After this well-timed opening of the centre, Black's position will collapse rapidly.



9.♕c2

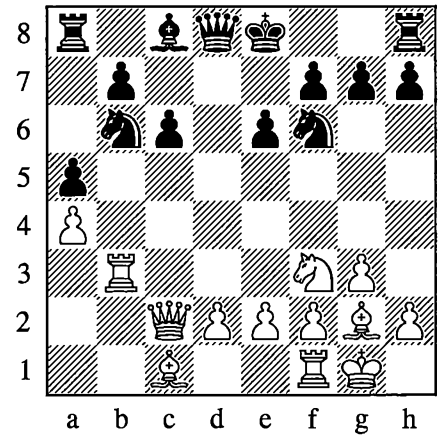
Now that Black has parted with his active bishop, moving the queen is an acceptable concession. The main aim of this move is to force the enemy queen's knight to occupy a vulnerable square.

9...♘b6

Apparently, Black can be satisfied with the outcome of the opening. White cannot increase the pressure against the c4-pawn (♘e5 would be met by ...♕d4) and will have to play on a pawn down. However, the chronic weakness of the dark squares in Black's camp offers White excellent compensation after the thematic continuation:

10.b3! cxb3 11.♖xb3

We can note some Benko Gambit-style patterns, but with reversed colours. White will exert strong pressure along the b-file and the a3-f8 diagonal, while his pawn centre will soon become threatening. These elements offer more than sufficient compensation for the sacrificed pawn.



11...♘bd5

Black intends to return the pawn in order to gain some relief. However, he will not neutralize White's space advantage and better development.

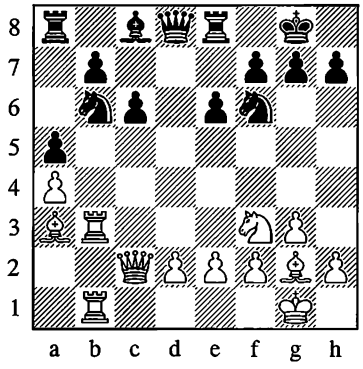
The a-pawn is poisoned, since 11...♘xa4? drops the knight to 12.♖d3!.

A more conservative try is:

11...0–0

But this leaves Black almost paralysed after:

12.♗a3 ♖e8 13.♖fb1



13...♘bd7

Preparing to fight for space in the centre with ...e6-e5.

13...♘xa4? still loses a piece to 14.♖d3!+–.

The pseudo-active 13...♘bd5 gives White a free hand in the centre. 14.♘e5 Among others, there is a permanent threat of g3-g4 followed by ♖h3. 14...♘d7 fails to solve the problems because of 15.♘c4± followed by the invasion of the d6-square.

13...♘fd5 14.e4 ♘b4 returns the pawn without solving Black's problems with lack of space. Compared with the game, Black has spent a tempo on the relatively useless ...♖e8. 15.♗xb4 axb4 16.♖xb4 ♘d7 17.d4±

14.d4 e5 15.e4!

It appears that Black cannot maintain the tension in the centre because of his lack of development.

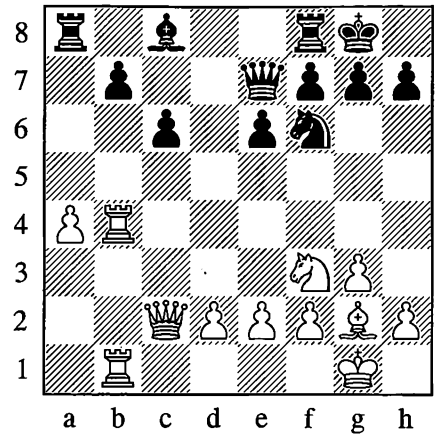
15...exd4

15...h6 16.♖d1± leaves Black without any useful moves.

16.♘xd4 ♘e5 17.♖d1±

The insecure situation of his queen puts Black in real trouble.

12.♗a3 ♘b4 13.♗xb4 axb4 14.♖xb4 0–0 15.♖fb1 ♕e7

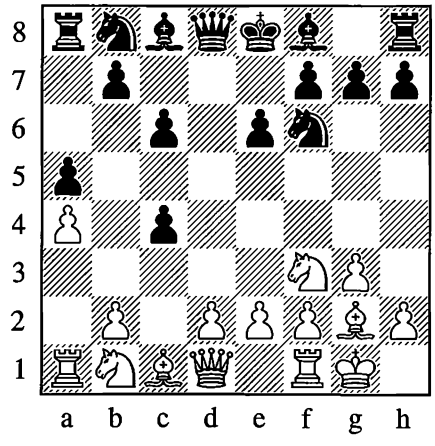


In the game Forintos – Votruba, Forli 1988, White continued to play in hypermodern style, keeping his central pawns on the second rank and manoeuvring with the rook along the fourth rank. This eventually provoked some additional weaknesses in Black's camp and yielded a win after a long fight. However, I would recommend the simple occupation of the centre.

16.d4!N±

This leaves Black in a very passive position.

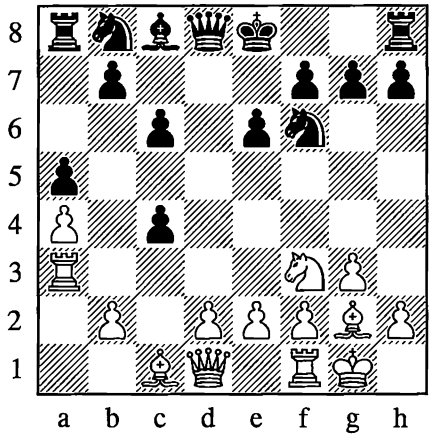
G) 6...a5



Black establishes firm control over the b4-square, which was weakened by White's previous move. However, this aspect loses part of its relevance after the following exchange.

7.♘a3 ♗xa3 8.♖xa3!N

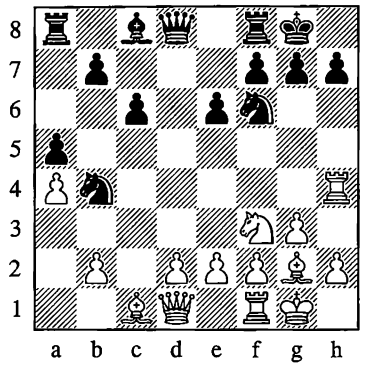
White takes full advantage of the space he has cleared by advancing the a-pawn. I find this move a lot more logical than 8.bxa3, which creates unnecessary pawn weaknesses and fails to activate White's pieces. However, this odd capture may also be entirely playable. A recent high-level game continued 8...0–0 9.♕c2 b5 10.♖b1 ♗a6 11.axb5 cxb5 12.♘d4 ♕xd4 13.♗xa8 ♘d5. Despite appearances, Black's compensation may not be entirely satisfactory. After 14.♗b2 ♕a7 15.♗xd5 exd5 16.♕f5 ♕c5 17.e4 ♗b7 18.♗c3 h6 19.♖fe1 f6 20.♖e3 Black soon lost his stability in Tomashevsky – Korneev, Dresden 2007.



Black's main continuations are **G1) 8...♖a7** and **G2) 8...0–0**. Other moves are either worse or have no independent value.

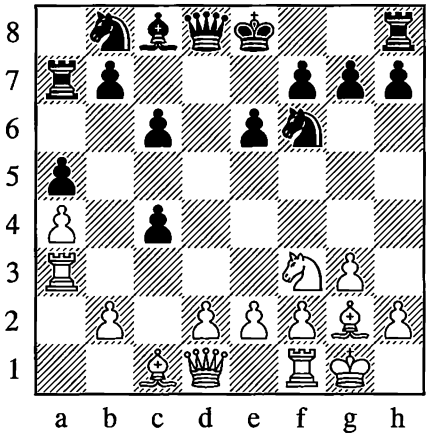
8...♘bd7 transposes to line F with 6...♘bd7 above.

The mechanical occupation of the b4-square, starting with 8...♘a6, offers White a comfortable advantage after: 9.♖c3 ♘b4 (After 9...♕d5 10.d3! White will succeed in playing ♖xc4 anyway, since 10...cxd3? loses to 11.♖xd3 followed by ♖d8†. 9...b5? weakens the position too much and can be answered with 10.♘e5) 10.♖xc4 0–0 11.♖h4



Quite a nice trajectory for the rook. After d2-d4 followed by ♗g5, apart from the usual advantages, White will have chances for an attack.

G1) 8...♖a7



Under the circumstances, this looks like the most constructive move (although it has never been played or recommended). Black, too, makes use of the available space, removing the rook from the dangerous diagonal and preparing a major regrouping with ...b7-b6, ...♖d7 and ...♗b7.

9.b3

Since 9.♕c2 can be met by 9...b5, White has to open the queenside at once.

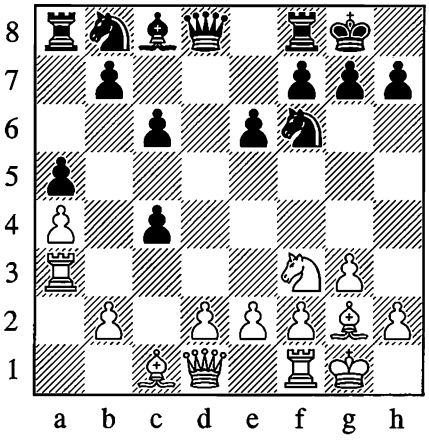
9...cxb3 10.♖xb3 0–0 11.♗a3 ♖e8 12.♕c2 ♘a6

The generally desirable 12...b6 leaves Black with coordination problems after 13.♖fb1±.

13.♖fb1 ♘d5 14.d4 ♘ab4 15.♕d2±

Black's stability on b4 is temporary in view of the threat of e2-e4.

G2) 8...0–0



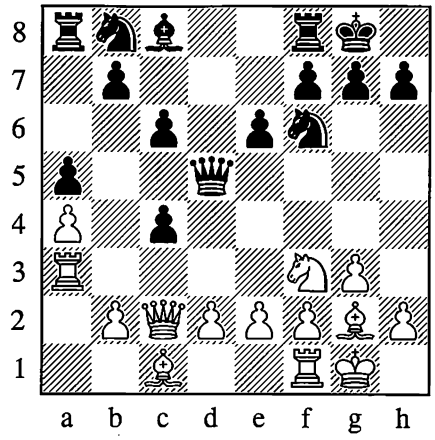
This neutral move can make some difference in concrete play, but not in the final evaluation of the position.

9.♕c2

9.♖c3 is not advisable, because of 9...b5! 10.axb5 cxb5 11.♘d4 ♕xd4 12.♗xa8 b4 13.♖c2 ♗a6∓ when Black has a pawn for the exchange and an enormous space advantage.

9...♕d5

Now 9...b5 no longer works as well because of 10.axb5 cxb5 11.♘d4 ♕xd4 12.♗xa8 a4 13.d3±. We can see that capturing with the rook on a3 makes a lot of difference when compared with the game Tomashevsky – Korneev with 8.bxa3.



10.b3!

Now White cannot do without this freeing move, which implies that he has given up any hope of restoring the material balance in the near future.

10...cxb3 11.♖xb3 ♘a6 12.♗a3 ♖e8

And certainly not 12...♖d8? 13.♖d3+–.

As usual, 12...♘b4 is only a partial solution because of 13.♗xb4 axb4 14.♖xb4 e5 15.d3± followed by ♖fb1 and ♘d2-c4. Although Black's position looks normal, his queenside will soon be submitted to strong pressure.

13.d4

Intending ♖d1 and ♘e5. The centralized queen offers Black some hopes for activity, but also a clear target for White's minor pieces.

A romantic spirit may be inspired by abandoning the last remaining queenside pawn and focusing on the kingside with 13.♕b2!? ♘c5 14.♖e3 ♘xa4 15.♕c2 ♘b6 16.♘e5 ♕d8 17.g4∞.

13...♘b4!? 14.♗xb4 axb4 15.♖xb4 ♕f5 16.♕b2±

White remains in firm control of the position. An immediate attempt by Black to free himself by force would be premature, as can be seen from the following long variation.

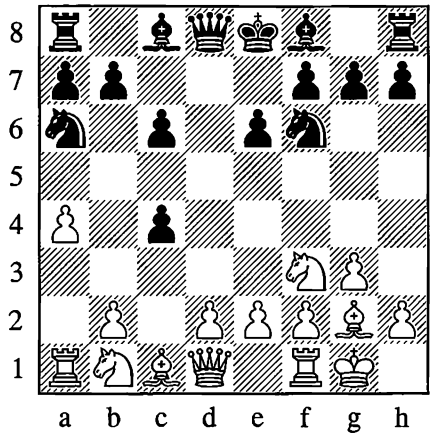
16...♘d5 17.♖c4 ♖a6 18.♘e5 ♘b6 19.♖b4 ♘xa4 20.♕b3 ♘c5 21.♕e3 ♘d7 22.♗e4 ♕f6 23.♘xd7 ♗xd7 24.♖xb7 ♗c8

24...♕d8?! 25.♗xh7†! leaves the a6-rook hanging.

25.♖c7±

Black cannot save the c6-pawn with 25...e5? 26.dxe5 ♕xe5 as this loses to 27.♖xc8!+– eventually followed by ♗xh7†.

H) 6...♘a6



This looks like a combination of the basic ideas of lines F and G. Black develops a piece *and* takes the b4-square under control. At the same time, Black leaves the d-file available for an eventual centralization of his queen. However, this also looks like employing half-measures and the absence of the move ...a7-a5 will leave the knight unstable on b4.

7.♘a3 ♗xa3

7...♕d5 fails to save the pawn after 8.♕c2 ♗xa3 9.♖xa3 ♘b4 10.♕c3 ♕c5 11.d4±.

8.♖xa3

Black can complete the development of his kingside with the cautious **H1) 8...0–0** or choose between two possible ways to attempt an invasion of the slightly weakened white queenside, **H2) 8...♕a5?!** and **H3) 8...♘b4**.

H1) 8...0–0 9.♖c3!N

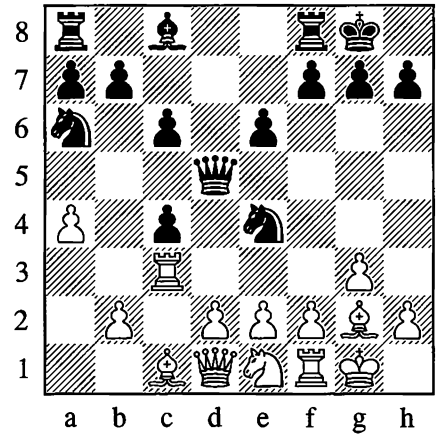
While preparing the analytical material, I was surprised to see how often White refrains from this move. When playing the English Opening, the tendency is to employ familiar manoeuvres and ♖c3 does not really belong to this category yet.

9.♕c2?! is a premature commitment of the queen in view of 9...b5 10.♘e5 ♘b4 11.♕b1 ♘fd5 and Black had nothing to complain about in Kern – U. Rohde, Dortmund 1998.

9...♕d5

Only this ambitious move keeps Black in the game. White's lack of space prevents him from taking full advantage of Black's exposed position in the centre.

10.♘e1 ♘e4



11.♖e3!

Avoiding the trap 11.♕c2?! ♘xc3! 12.♗xd5 ♘xe2† 13.♔g2 exd5∓ when White's position would be in ruins.

11...f5 12.♕c2

White is ready to give up his king's bishop in order to restore material equality and take advantage of Black's weaknesses on the dark

squares. The tactically more ambitious 12.d3 cxd3 13.♘xd3 c5 14.b3⩲ is also playable.

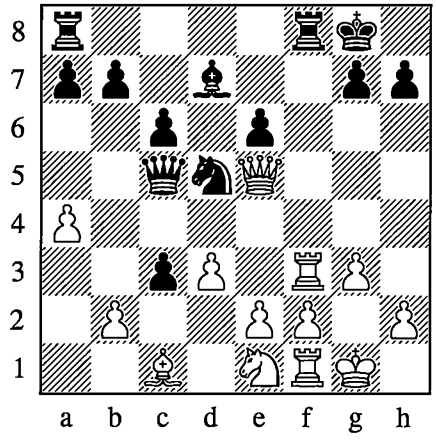
12...♘b4 13.♕b1 ♕c5 14.♗xe4 fxe4 15.♕xe4 ♘d5 16.♖f3 ♗d7 17.d3

White has almost completed his development and retains the better structure; the presence of opposite-coloured bishops offers him some attacking chances.

17...c3!?

17...♖xf3 18.♘xf3 cxd3 19.♕xd3± threatening ♘g5 also looks unpleasant for Black.

18.♕e5±



The c1-bishop may soon emerge on the long diagonal, helping the queen to create dangerous threats.

H2) 8...♕a5?!

This pseudo-active move is likely to cause Black problems maintaining stability, because of the absence of his dark-squared bishop.

9.♖c3!N

Stronger than 9.d4 cxd3 10.♖xd3, which gave White reasonable compensation for the pawn, but not more in Bachmann Schiavo – Real de Azua, Villa Martelli 2008. In the absence of White's d-pawn it is more difficult to break Black's position in the centre, although White's pressure is undeniable.

9...0–0

9...♕b4 loses the pawn anyway after 10.♘e5±.

10.♖xc4 e5

The only way to strive for active play, but White is well prepared for such a course of events.

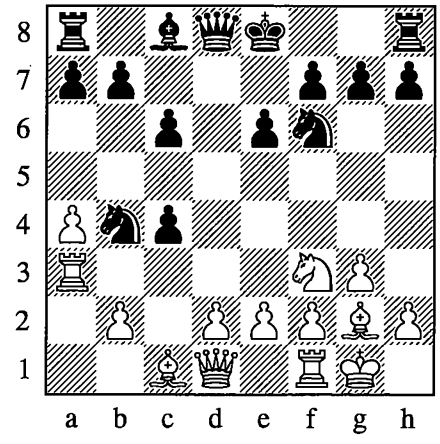
11.b4!

The kind of move that aroused great enthusiasm during the matches between Alekhine and Euwe.

11...♘xb4 12.♗a3 c5 13.♘xe5±

Black's position is both underdeveloped and loose.

H3) 8...♘b4



The most principled move, preventing ♕c2.

9.a5!

An important move, winning space and cutting the communication of the b4-knight and the c4-pawn with the rest of Black's forces

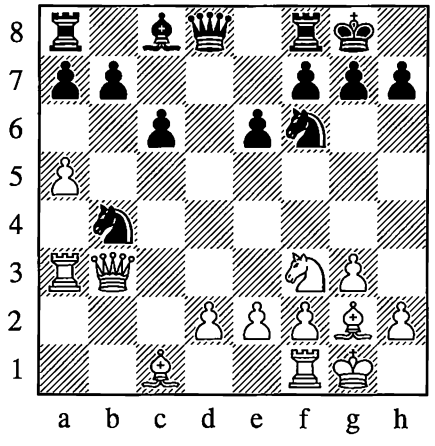
by preventing ...a7-a5 and ...b7-b5. 9.♘e5 ♕d4 and 9.♖c3 b5, intending ...♘fd5, are less clear.

9...0–0

9...c5 weakens the long diagonal and fails to consolidate the knight. 10.b3! cxb3 11.♕xb3 ♗d7 12.d4 It becomes obvious that Black will not be in time to neutralize White's pressure. 12...♗c6 13.dxc5 ♘a6 14.♖d1 ♕e7 15.♘e5! 0–0 (quite sadly, 15...♗xg2 is more or less lost after 16.♕b5†! ♔f8 17.♔xg2) 16.♘xc6 bxc6 17.♕c4± Sznapik – Skrobek, Krakow 1978. White's bishop pair is killing.

10.b3 cxb3 11.♕xb3

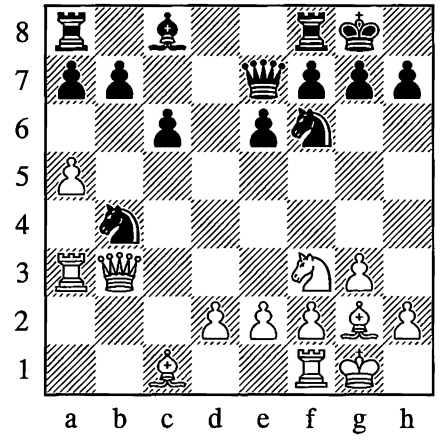
White is better developed, has an active pair of bishops and controls a lot of space on the queenside. His compact pawn mass promises him a long-term advantage in the centre, too. Black is already underdeveloped and has to spend a valuable tempo to save his attacked knight.



He can achieve that with **H31) 11...♕e7!?** or **H32) 11...♘a6**.

The knight would be less stable after 11...♘bd5. Now, in the game Kosten – Goldin, Paris 1994, White should have continued his development with 12.♗b2± followed by ♖c1, ♖a4, etc. according to familiar patterns. Black's position would remain solid but passive.

H31) 11...♕e7!?N



A logical although as yet untested move. Black defends the knight by developing a piece and maintains some hope of fighting back on the queenside.

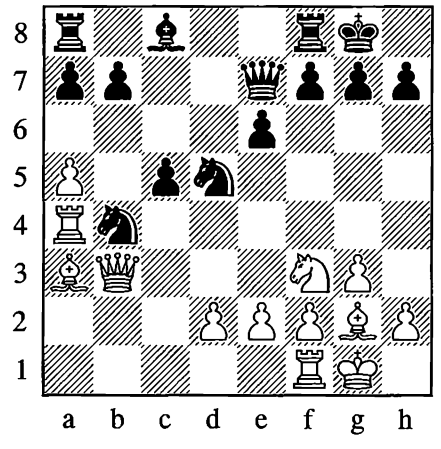
12.♖a4

12.d4 ♖d8 13.♖a4 c5 14.dxc5 ♘a6 15.♗a3 ♕c7 16.♕c2 ♗d7 17.♖h4 ♕xa5 leaves White with no obvious compensation for the pawn.

12...c5 13.♗a3

Threatening ♖xb4!. Instead 13.d4?! ♗d7 forces the rook to retreat.

13...♘fd5



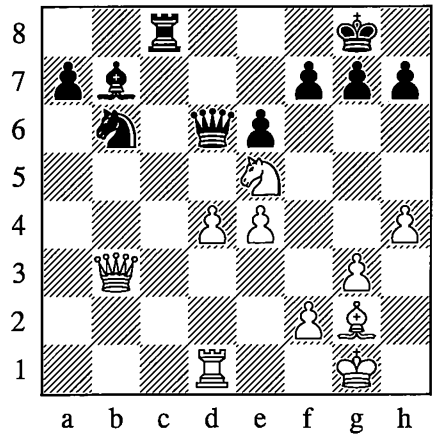
14.e4 b5!

An important intermediate move, preventing White from enlarging his space advantage.

15.axb6 ♘xb6 16.♖xb4 cxb4 17.♗xb4 ♕d8 18.♗xf8 ♕xf8 19.d4

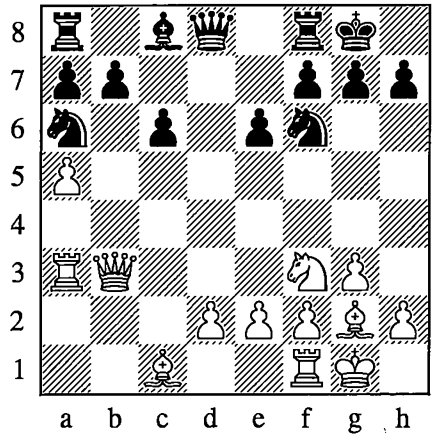
White has built up a fine centre and is well developed. However, Black's position has almost no weaknesses, with the exception of his passed pawn.

19...♗b7 20.♘e5 ♕d6 21.♖d1 ♖c8 22.h4±



A long positional struggle lies ahead, with better chances for White.

H32) 11...♘a6



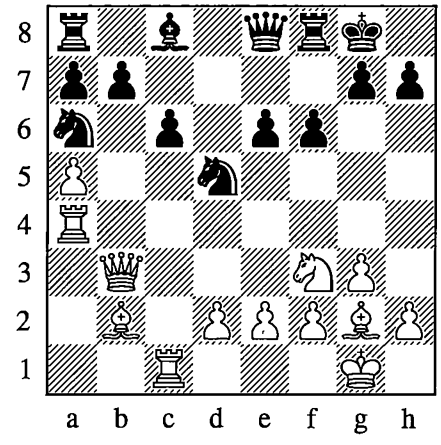
Once the primary goal of depriving White of ♕c2 has been achieved, the knight retreats to the most stable square. The difference compared with some previous lines is that Black's queenside has not been weakened with ...a7-a5. However, the advance of White's pawn to a5 has won him more space than usual.

12.♗b2 ♘d5 13.♖c1 f6

Aiming to neutralize the b2-bishop.

14.♖a4 ♕e8

Black refrains from any weakening moves and prepares kingside counterplay with ...♕h5. However, it will not be easy to develop his queenside, which leaves him struggling. Any display of central activity such as 14...c5 is premature because of 15.d4↑ opening the position in White's favour.



15.e4!N

It is best to play this move at once. After 15.♖h4?! ♕f7 16.e4 ♘e7 17.e5 ♘g6 18.♖h3 the rook had certainly not improved its placement in Matamoros – Lesiege, Istanbul (ol) 2000.

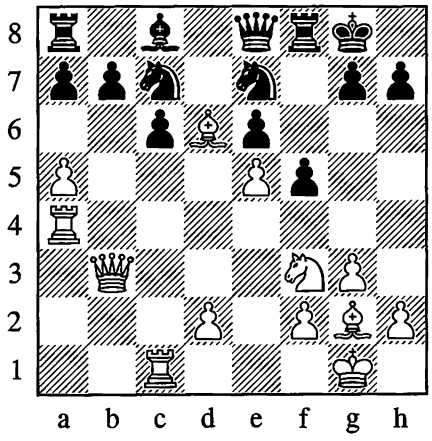
15...♘e7 16.e5 f5

The only way to keep the activity of the dark-squared bishop within acceptable limits.

17.♗a3!

Looking for new horizons.

17...♘c7 18.♗d6▦

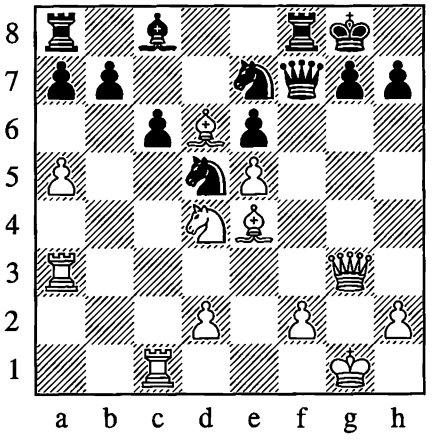


Black has managed to stabilize the position, but he has rather poor development. White enjoys better piece mobility and will prepare to open the kingside.

18...♘cd5 19.♘d4 f4

This pseudo-attacking move is likely to fire back at Black like a boomerang. However, after the more restrained 19...♖f7 White would consolidate his space advantage with 20.f4, planning ♖a2 and maybe a5-a6. Black would probably have to play ...a7-a6 himself, but this would leave him with a strategically lost position. True, it would require quite some time and technical effort to convert White's advantage into a win, but the play would be rather one-sided.

20.♗e4 ♕f7 21.♖a3! fxg3 22.♕xg3±



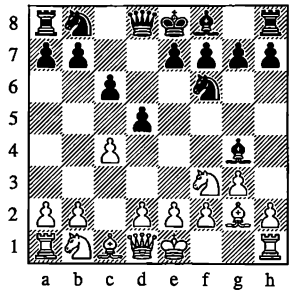
The opening of the kingside clearly favours White, who is fully developed and has a considerable numerical superiority on the right wing.

Conclusion

The lines examined in this chapter are dangerous for Black. He is committed to giving up his king's bishop, which leaves his dark squares chronically weak. In most cases, White's queen's rook works very effectively along the third rank.

Chapter 5

Anti-Slav Systems



4...♗g4

Variation Index

1.c4 ♘f6 2.g3 c6 3.♗g2 d5 4.♘f3 ♗g4

5.♘e5!

A) 5...e6?! 70

B) 5...♗h5?! 6.cxd5 cxd5 7.♘c3 e6 8.♕a4† ♘bd7 9.g4 ♗g6 10.h4 72

B1) 10...♗d6 73

B2) 10...♗c2!? 74

C) 5...♗e6 6.cxd5 ♗xd5! 7.♘f3! 76

C1) 7...e5 77

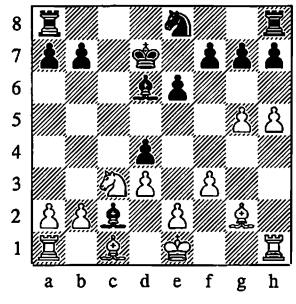
C2) 7...c5 8.♘c3 ♗c6 9.0–0 e6 10.d3 ♗e7 11.e4 78

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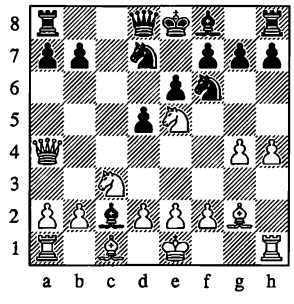
C23) 11...0–0 82

B1) after 16...d4



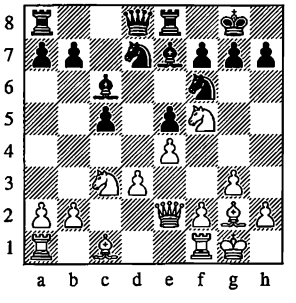
17.♘b5!N

B2) after 10...♗c2!?



11.♘xf7!

C22) after 14...♖e8



15.a4!N

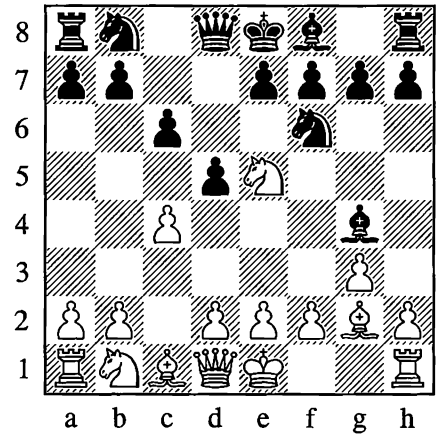
1.c4 ♘f6 2.g3 c6 3.♗g2 d5 4.♘f3 ♗g4

This active development of the bishop is one of Black's most reliable in the Reti Opening. Supporters of the Slav Defence do not mind giving up the bishop pair, especially if White loses a tempo on the weakening move h2-h3. In other cases, the hidden pressure against the e2-pawn and the d1-square prevent White from consolidating his advantage in the centre.

However, against the specific English Opening move order, White is just in time to take advantage of the early exposure of the bishop.

5.♘e5!

Before carrying out the thematic exchange on d5, weakening Black on the a4-e8 diagonal, White removes the knight from the range of the enemy bishop. Instead the immediate 5.cxd5 could be met by 5...♗xf3! 6.♗xf3 cxd5, transposing to the slightly safer lines from Chapter 9. Instead, the stereotypical 5...cxd5 would transpose to line B in this chapter after 6.♘e5!.



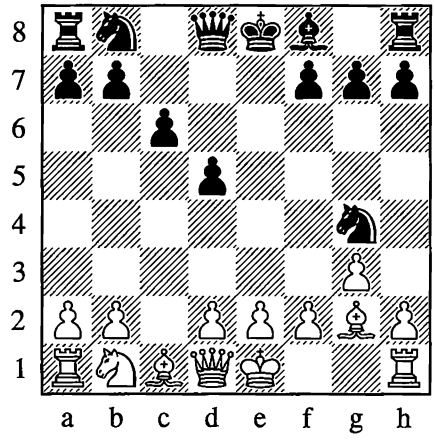
Black now has a choice between **A) 5...e6?!**, **B) 5...♗h5?!** and the relatively best **C) 5...♗e6**.

5...♗f5?! has little independent value and is likely to transpose to 5...♗h5. The only and rather insignificant difference is that after 6.cxd5 cxd5 7.♘c3 ♘bd7 8.♕a4 e6 9.g4, Black can immediately play 9...♗c2 (instead of 9...♗g6 10.h4 ♗c2 as in the main line) when after 10.♘xf7 ♗xa4 11.♘xd8 ♖xd8 12.♘xa4 ♘xg4 the white h-pawn is still on its initial square. However, this does not change the evaluation of the position after 13.♗h3 ♘df6 14.f3 ♘e5 15.♗xe6±, A. Petrosian – Tischbierek, Dortmund 1990.

A) 5...e6?!

In some of the main variations of the Slav Defence, Black leaves the bishop on g4, aiming to gain time for development, but here this is not an adequate solution because it allows White to win space without loss of time.

6.cxd5 exd5 7.♘xg4 ♘xg4



8.e4!

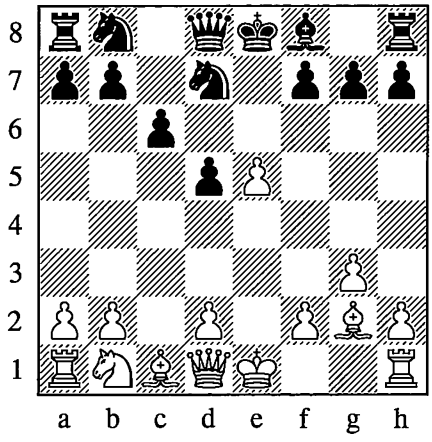
White takes advantage of the vulnerable position of the enemy knight to seize space in the centre without time-wasting preparations.

8...♘f6

Aiming to stabilize the position. Instead 8...♘e5 loses even more time on knight moves. 9.d4 ♗b4† 10.♘c3 ♘c4 11.exd5 ♗xc3† 12.bxc3 0–0 13.dxc6 ♖e8† 14.♔f1 ♘xc6 15.♗f3± Davies – Krayz, Tel Aviv 1993.

9.e5 ♘fd7

Again, the most solid continuation. 9...♘e4 would lead to the exchange of the knight that has consumed so much time already, leaving White ahead in development. 10.0–0 h5 11.♘c3 ♘xc3 12.bxc3 ♘d7 13.♖b1 b5 14.d3 (14.a4!? also looks like a natural move, aiming to weaken the enemy queenside) 14...♘b6 15.c4!? This pawn sacrifice is justified by Black's lagging development. 15...bxc4 16.dxc4 ♘xc4 17.♕a4↑ Black's position is shaky and his king will be in the centre for a while, Wirig – Bergez, Belfort 2004.



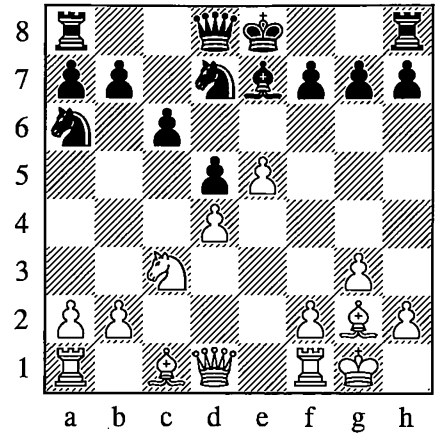
10.0–0

White is better developed with a considerable space advantage on the kingside and he also has a dangerous pair of bishops.

10...♘a6

Black should not be in a hurry to castle short, since White has a strong pawn majority on that wing. For instance, 10...♗e7 11.d4 0–0 12.♘c3 ♘a6 13.f4 f5 14.g4 g6 15.gxf5 gxf5. In Paragua – Tran, Phu Quoc 2007, White's most promising attacking continuation would have been 16.♖f3!N.

11.d4 ♗e7 12.♘c3



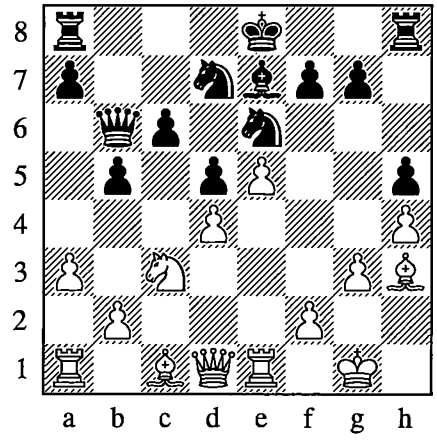
12...h5!? 13.h4

Good enough, but not really necessary. After the more natural 13.♗e3!N, intending f2-f4 and so on, the consistent 13...h4 could be met by 14.♕g4±, leaving Black struggling to complete his development.

13...♕b6 14.a3

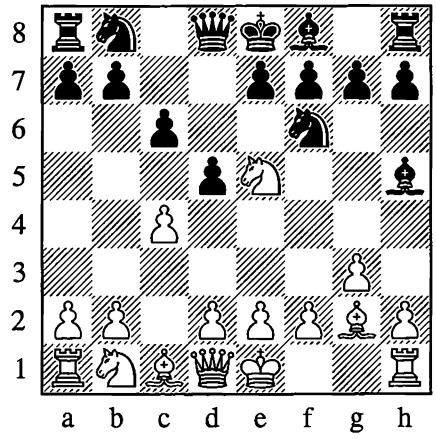
White is in no hurry to start attacking operations. For the time being, he plays to restrict Black's counterplay.

14...♘c7 15.♘a4 ♕a6 16.♖e1 ♘e6 17.♗f1 b5 18.♘c3 ♕b6 19.♗h3±



Black has managed to regroup harmoniously, but faces the difficult task of finding a safe place for his king, Pigusov – Flear, Aosta 1989.

B) 5...♗h5?!



The most natural retreat, but hardly the best. With energetic play, White can cause a lot of trouble for this bishop.

6.cxd5 cxd5

The a4-e8 diagonal has been opened, enabling the massive advance of White's kingside pawns with g3-g4 and h2-h4, as capturing on g4 would drop a piece to ♕a4†. However, before initiating this promising plan, White should take the other knight out of the bishop's range.

7.♘c3 e6

Consolidating the d5-pawn.

7...♘c6 has never been played and rightly so. In the event of an exchange on c6, Black will be left with chronic weaknesses along the c-file, but White can also play more actively. 8.♕a4 ♕c7 9.d4 e6 10.0–0 ♗e7 11.e4↑ and Black will soon lose stability in the centre.

Or if 7...♘bd7 then after 8.♕a4 Black has to defend the d5-pawn with 8...e6 anyway, transposing to the main line.

8.♕a4†

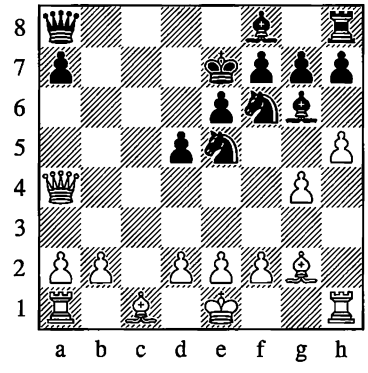
I assume that at this point many strong players with Black start regretting their rush in developing the light-squared bishop, which is so badly needed on the queenside. Incidentally, 8.g4 ♗g6 9.♕a4† is another possible move order.

8...♘bd7 9.g4 ♗g6 10.h4

Black is close to suffering a complete failure of his whole Slav philosophy. His "active" queen's bishop is in great danger, after having cost Black three whole tempos of development. We can understand now why the white queen's knight had to be developed before advancing the pawns. Otherwise, Black would simply have exchanged on b1 and continued with his development.

Since any advance of the h7-pawn would irremediably weaken his structure after an exchange on g6, Black has to resort to radical methods. The main continuations are **B1) 10...♗d6** and **B2) 10...♗c2!?**. Other moves are inferior:

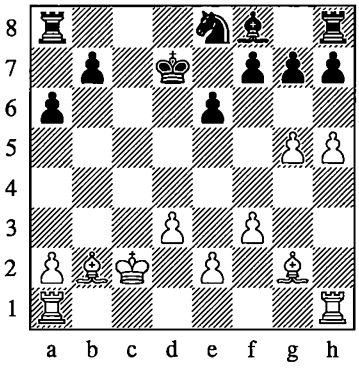
10...b5?, hoping for 11.♕xb5 ♖b8 12.♕a4 ♖b4, is unsound because of 11.♘xb5 ♘xe5 12.♘c7† ♔e7 13.♘xa8 ♕xa8 14.h5±.



Having trapped the bishop, White was an exchange up in Konstantinopolsky – Goglidze, Leningrad 1936.

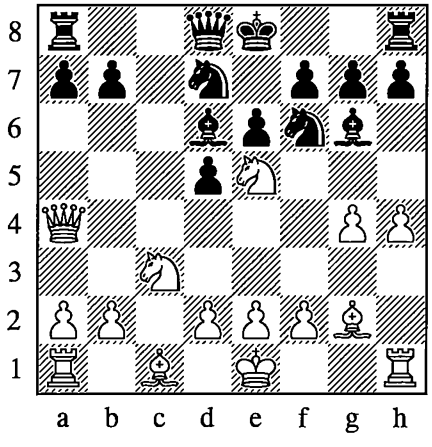
10...a6?!, threatening ...b7-b5, is just too slow because of 11.♘xd7 ♕xd7 12.♕xd7† ♔xd7

13.h5 ♗e4 14.f3 ♗c2. Black has finally found an available square for his bishop, but now... 15.g5 ♘e8 16.d3 With the brutal threat of ♔d2. 16...d4 17.♔d2! dxc3† 18.♔xc2 cxb2 19.♗xb2±



White's huge space advantage and his bishop pair secured him a long-term advantage in Jobava – Wang Hao, Taiyuan 2006.

B1) 10...♗d6



This is slightly more constructive than the previous alternatives. Black continues his development and allows the other bishop to be sent on a dangerous mission.

11.♘xd7

This has been the main choice of strong players, although 11.d4, defending the knight and renewing the threat of h4-h5, looks just as good.

11...♕xd7 12.♕xd7† ♔xd7 13.h5

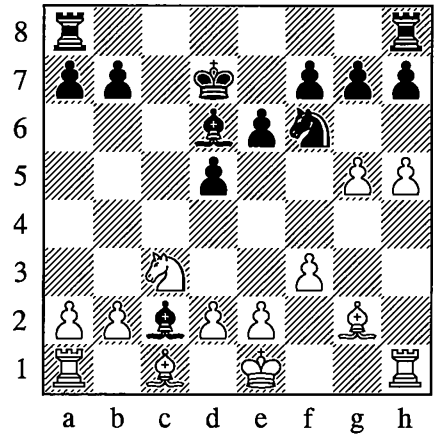
Compared with the line starting with 10...a6?!, ...♗d6 is more useful than ...a7-a6, but Black faces the same kind of problems.

13...♗e4

It seems logical to provoke f2-f3, which slightly weakens the dark squares and obstructs the g2-bishop. In the event of the immediate 13...♗c2 play may continue 14.d3 ♘xg4 15.♔d2 d4 16.♔xc2 dxc3 17.bxc3± and the bishop's pressure against Black's queenside is quite annoying, Dzindzichashvili – Hebert, Buenos Aires (ol) 1978.

14.f3 ♗c2 15.g5!

Now that the e4-square is covered, this move forces the enemy knight to go back, temporarily disconnecting the rooks.

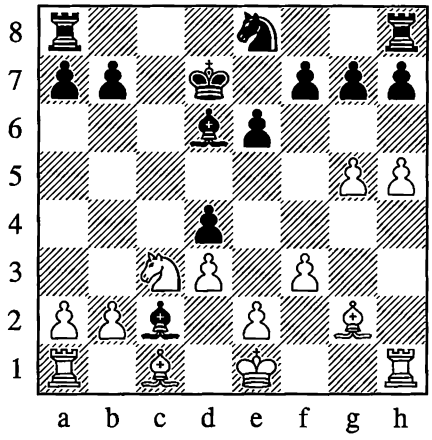


15...♘e8

The intermediate check 15...♗g3† forces the king to step away from the other bishop with 16.♔f1, but after 16...♘e8 17.d3 the "slower" threat of ♗d2 followed by ♖c1 leaves the c2-bishop in great danger anyway. 17...d4 does not solve the problem because 18.♘b5± not only attacks the pawn, which is not easy to

defend, but also creates the threat of trapping the bishop with b2-b3.

16.d3 d4



17.♘b5!N

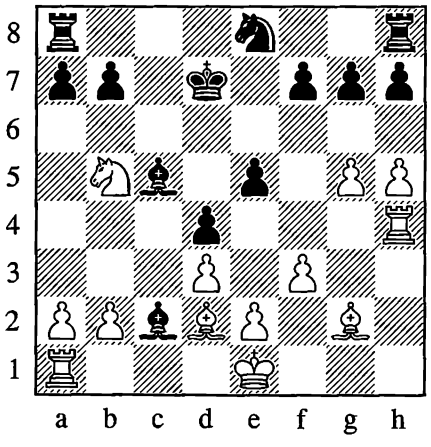
This is even stronger than 17.♔d2 dxc3† 18.♔xc2 cxb2 19.♗xb2± as in A. Petrosian – Beliavsky, Minsk 1976.

17...♗c5 18.♖h4

Provoking the next move, which opens a new diagonal for the light-squared bishop.

18...e5 19.♗d2!

White keeps developing. The main threat is ♖c1, winning a piece, but b2-b4 is also a strong positional threat.



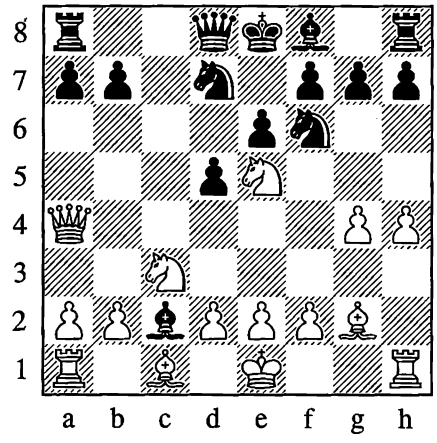
19...♗a4

After 19...a6 20.b4 axb5 21.bxc5± Black's centre remains rather shaky in view of the threat of f3-f4, eventually combined with a check on h3. Although no longer in immediate danger, the black bishop is out of play. The strategically ambitious 21...f5?! is elegantly refuted by 22.♗h3 ♖f8 23.♖e4! when Black's centre cannot be saved, for instance 23...♔e6?! 24.f4+–.

20.♖c1 ♗b6 21.♘a3±

White has strong pressure on virtually every area of the board. Threats such as ♗h3†, f3-f4 and h5-h6 make Black's position vulnerable.

B2) 10...♗c2!?



Spectacular, but insufficient.

11.♘xf7!

White cannot avoid the exchange of his centralized knight for the queen's bishop, but he gladly disrupts the enemy structure in the process.

11...♗xa4

In his notes to the main game, Romanishin mentioned that:

11...♔xf7 12.♕xc2 ♘xg4

Could be met by:

13.♘xd5!

With a strong attack. This assessment was later proven in practice:

13...exd5?!

Black's position was bad anyway, but this loses by force.

14.♗xd5† ♔e8

Or 14...♔f6 15.♕e4 (threatening ♕e6#) 15...♘c5 16.♕d4†!+– and Black will lose one of his knights with check, without having time to capture the d5-bishop.

15.♕e4† ♘de5 16.f3+–

With a decisive material advantage (and not only that!) for White in Loginov – Shaposhnikov, St Petersburg 2000.

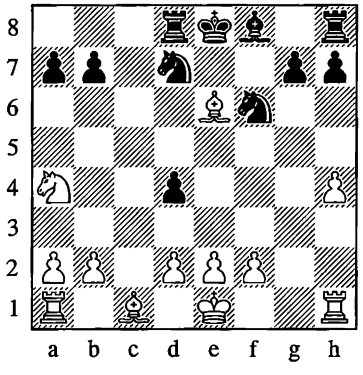
12.♘xd8 ♔xd8

A later game continued:

12...♖xd8 13.♘xa4 ♘xg4 14.♗h3 ♘gf6

14...h5 weakens the kingside without saving the e6-pawn after 15.f3±.

15.♗xe6 d4



White has won a pawn, but still needs to complete his development. Starting from this moment, the game is highly instructive from the point of view of hypermodern chess.

16.b3!

Preparing the knight's transfer to the perfect blockading square on d3.

16...b5

This move fails to spoil White's coordination; his pieces have the excellent d3-square for regrouping.

16...d3 is a try to muddy the waters. White's simplest continuation then is 17.♖h3! dxe2 18.♖e3, winning time to activate his pieces. White will be a pawn up anyway and his knight has the c3-square.

17.♘b2 ♘c5 18.♗f5!

Keeping control of the light squares.

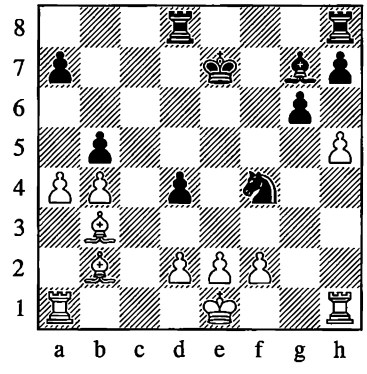
18...g6 19.♗c2

White's position may seem passive, but in fact Black is overextended.

19...♘d5 20.♘d3 ♘e6 21.♗b2 ♗g7 22.h5 ♔f7 23.b4

With two consecutive pawn moves, White has improved his position on both wings. He does not need to connect rooks, because they will be activated from their initial squares. The king is needed in the centre in order to defend the compact mass of pawns.

23...♘ef4 24.♘xf4 ♘xf4 25.♗b3† ♔e7 26.a4!



It becomes obvious now that Black can no longer hold the position. It is also instructive that White has made absolutely no effort to occupy or control the centre with pawns. His remaining pawns in this area are still on their initial squares.

26...♘xe2!?

Hoping for 27.♔xe2 d3†.

27.♖h4

Finally, a white piece reaches the fourth rank. Suddenly, the enemy knight is trapped.

27...♖de8 28.axb5 ♔d8 29.♔f1 ♖e7 30.hxg6 hxg6 31.♖xh8† ♗xh8 32.b6!

And, with both his pieces vulnerable, Black resigned in Novik – Dobosz, Loosdorf 1993.

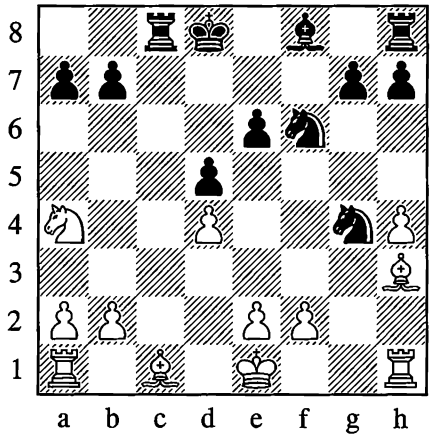
13.♘xa4 ♘xg4 14.♗h3

White has the bishop pair and the better pawn structure. Black is not well enough developed to generate adequate counterplay, while his king stands in the way of Black's other pieces.

14...♘df6 15.d4

Romanishin is concerned about rapid development, but he considers that 15.♖g1 h5 16.f3 ♘e5 17.♗xe6±, winning a pawn, would have been a worthy alternative.

15...♖c8



In his annotations to the game Romanishin – Suba, Moscow 1986, Romanishin recommends:

16.f3!N

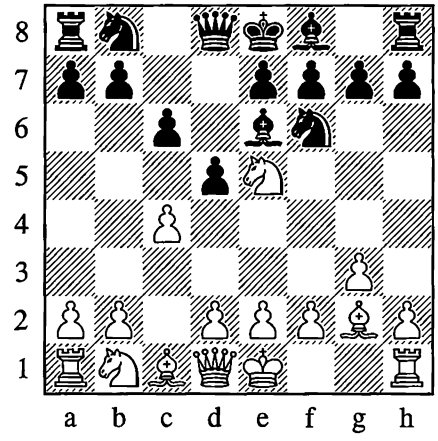
This is the simplest path to a clear advantage, for instance:

16...♖c4 17.b3 ♖xd4 18.fxg4 b5 19.♘b2±

Black has insufficient compensation for the sacrificed piece.

It is amazing how many strong players have fallen into the theoretical trap 5...♗h5?!.

C) 5...♗e6



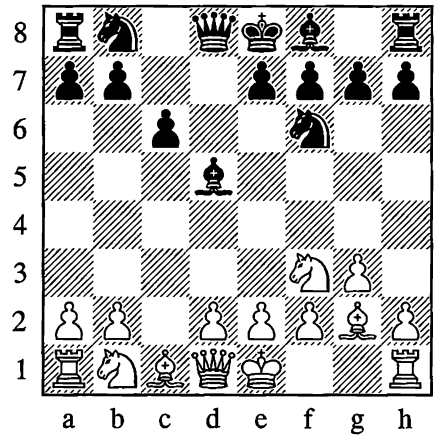
This awkward-looking move is Black's only chance of reaching a decent position. The point is that, with his knight exposed on e5 and the c4-pawn under pressure, White has to release the tension in the centre anyway.

6.cxd5 ♗xd5!

This reveals Black's point: he counteracts the g2-bishop, at least temporarily.

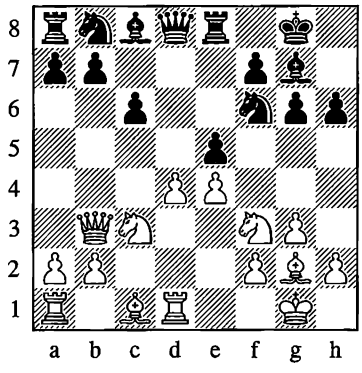
7.♘f3!

It would be too early to agree to an exchange of bishops. White plans to win time by attacking the enemy bishop with ♘c3.



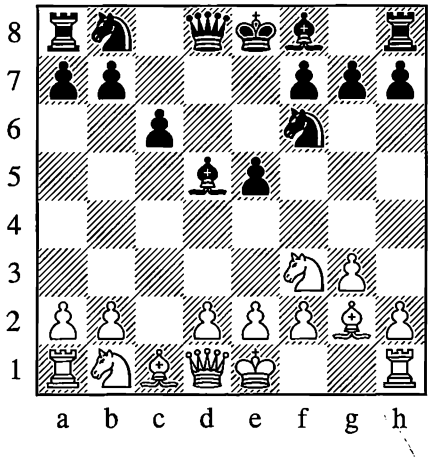
Black now has two ways of fighting for space in the centre, **C1) 7...e5** and **C2) 7...c5**.

7...g6 is occasionally played by strong players, but the light-squared bishop is likely to get into some trouble. The following line shows one example of how White can play. 8.0–0 ♗g7 9.d3 (9.♘c3 0–0 10.d3 may be a more restricting move order) 9...0–0 (Black could consider 9...c5) 10.♘c3 ♖e8 11.e4! ♗e6 12.♘g5 ♗c8 13.♕b3 e6 Only a few moves have passed and the centralized bishop has retreated and been cut off from the action. 14.♖d1 h6 15.♘f3 e5 16.d4±



White is better developed and has a space advantage in the centre, Nogueiras – Antunes, Santa Clara 1991.

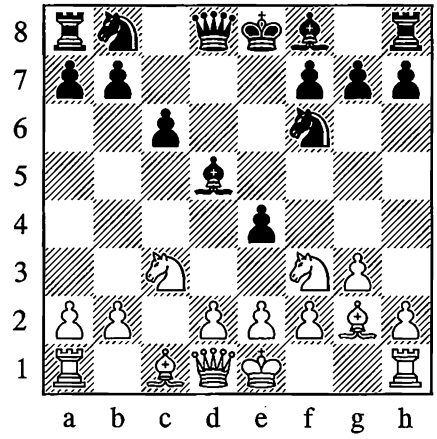
C1) 7...e5



Black intends to challenge White's stability in the centre. However, White's initiative, in true hypermodern spirit, is quite dangerous.

8.♘c3 e4

The more restrained 8...♘bd7 leaves White with a pleasant reversed Dragon position. What is the bishop doing on d5? 9.0–0 ♗xf3 10.♗xf3 ♗c5 11.♖b1 0–0 12.b4 ♗d4 13.b5 ♗xc3 14.bxc6 bxc6 15.dxc3 e4 16.♗g2 ♕a5 17.♕c2 ♖fe8 18.♖d1 ♕f5 Black has more space, but White controls both open files and has a potentially dangerous pair of bishops. With his next two moves, White secures the e3-square for his queen's bishop. 19.h3 h5 20.c4 ♖e6 21.♗e3± Ki. Georgiev – Gligoric, Vrnjacka Banja 1998.



9.♘h4

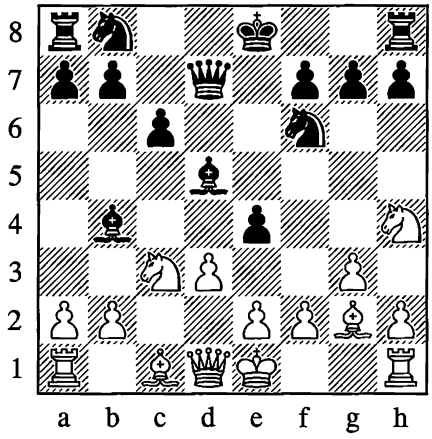
The departure of Black's light-squared bishop from its initial diagonal has made the f5-square an appealing target for the white knight. The generally desirable 9.♘g5, attacking the e4-pawn, justifies the presence of the bishop on d5 in view of the tactical trick 9...e3!⇄.

9...♕d7 10.d3

Preventing ...g7-g5 and undermining the e4-pawn.

10...♗b4

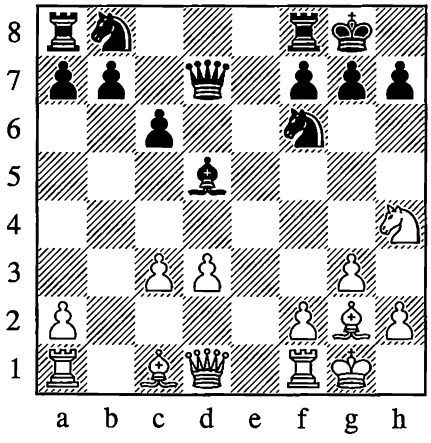
The only way to fight for the central squares. Instead 10...exd3 11.♘xd5 cxd5 12.♕xd3± leads to rather one-sided play because of the weakness of the d5-pawn.



11.0–0

Also worthy of attention is 11.♗g5, aiming to spoil Black's kingside structure and chronically weaken the f5-square. For instance, 11...exd3 12.♗xf6 gxf6 13.♗xd5 ♕xd5 14.0–0 ♗xc3 15.bxc3 d2. Aiming to slow down White's initiative. 16.c4!? ♕d7 Black has to keep the d-file closed, as otherwise his king would get into trouble. 17.♕b3±

11...♗xc3 12.bxc3 exd3 13.exd3 0–0

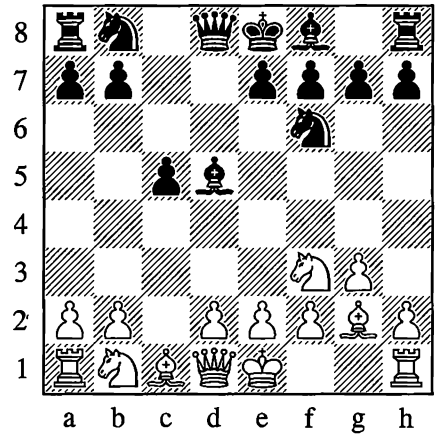


This position was reached in Kirov – Ivkov, Bor 1984. Now Vaganian recommended:

14.c4!N ♗xg2 15.♔xg2±

White will follow up with ♕f3 and ♗b2, with strong pressure against the black kingside.

C2) 7...c5



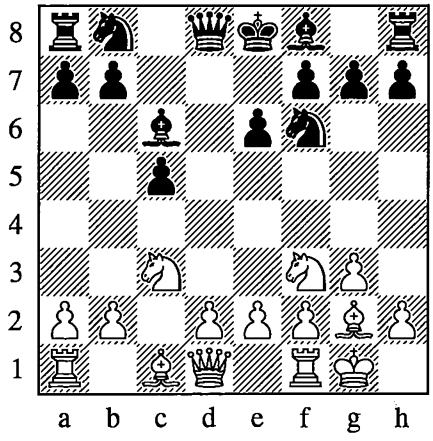
This is an entirely different approach from line C1. Black prepares the bishop's retreat to c6, in order to preserve it from exchange and maintain the opposition with the g2-bishop. The main drawback of this plan is that it is time-consuming, which more than compensates for the white knight's jumps back and forth.

8.♘c3 ♗c6 9.0–0 e6

Black has restored the harmony of his position and is ready to continue his development. There is only one drawback of his regrouping: the c6-bishop has spent four tempos just to deprive the b8-knight of its best square, from where it would control the important d4-square.

9...♘bd7 has little independent value. 10.d3 e5?! (This weakens the light squares too soon. Black is best advised to transpose to the main line with 10...e6.) 11.♘g5! White immediately takes advantage of the vulnerability of the f7-square and of the whole a2-g8 diagonal in

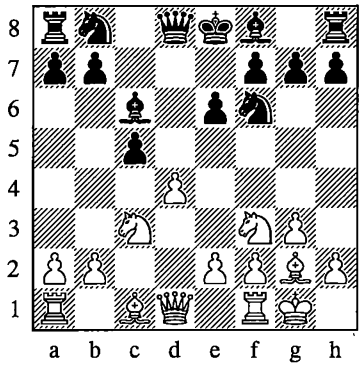
general. 11...♗xg2 12.♕b3 ♕e7 13.♔xg2± The d5-square is weak, the queenside needs defence and Black is underdeveloped.



10.d3

The most principled move, aiming to restrict the enemy bishop with e2-e4 and then prepare to open the centre with d3-d4.

Amazingly, the also natural 10.d4 transposes to a variation from the Catalan Opening, where the previous play has almost nothing in common with the English variation we are currently investigating. Just compare: 1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.g3 d5 4.♗g2 dxc4 5.♕a4† (not really ambitious) 5...♗d7 (one of the few moves that allow White to retain a more pleasant position) 6.♕xc4 ♗c6 7.♘f3 ♗d5 8.♕d3 (8.♕a4† may pose more problems) 8...♗e4 9.♕d1 c5 10.♘c3 ♗c6 11.0–0

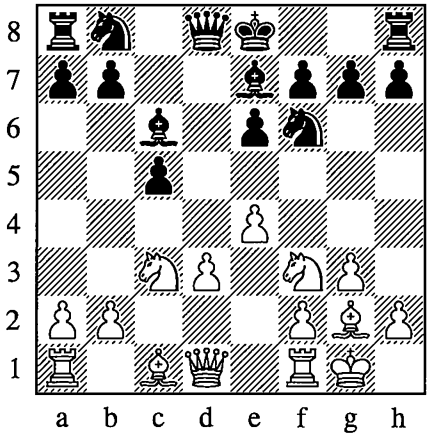


Black is in no immediate danger, but his position remains a little unpleasant because of his lagging development in an almost symmetrical position. White will retain a slight initiative with ♕d3 followed by ♖d1.

I will not develop the subject any further, because the English approach seems more consistent to me, as it fights against the "controversial" c6-bishop.

10...♗e7 11.e4

Black's well-travelled bishop risks remaining passive and, as we shall see, even getting into some trouble.

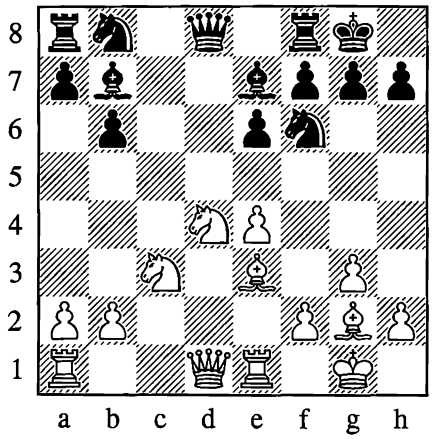


Black can try to solve this problem with **C21) 11...b6** or ignore it for the sake of rapid development with **C22) 11...♘bd7** or **C23) 11...0–0**.

C21) 11...b6

It makes sense for Black to open a retreat for the bishop before it is too late, but this implies an additional loss of time. The next sequence of moves is natural and does not require special comments.

12.♖e1 0–0 13.d4 cxd4 14.♘xd4 ♗b7 15.♗e3



Black cannot continue his development with natural moves and now has to make some positional concessions.

15...♗b4

The generally desirable 15...♘bd7? is met by 16.e5 ♘d5 (16...♗xg2? loses material to 17.exf6) 17.♘xd5 ♗xd5 18.♗xd5 exd5 19.♘c6 ♕e8 20.♕xd5+– or 17...exd5 18.♘f5 with a similar evaluation.

The slightly more conservative 15...♘a6 leaves the black queen exposed after 16.♕e2 ♘c5 17.♖ed1 ♕b8 18.♖ac1. For instance, the capture on e4 would be answered by general exchanges followed by ♗f4 and if ...♕b7 then ♖c7, winning a piece. If 18...♖d8 then White develops his initiative with 19.♗f4! e5 20.♘f5±. Maybe best is 18...♖e8, defending the e7-bishop in advance, but this move hardly contributes to the fight for the central files.

A possible deviation for White is the immediate 18.♗f4!?.

16.♘db5

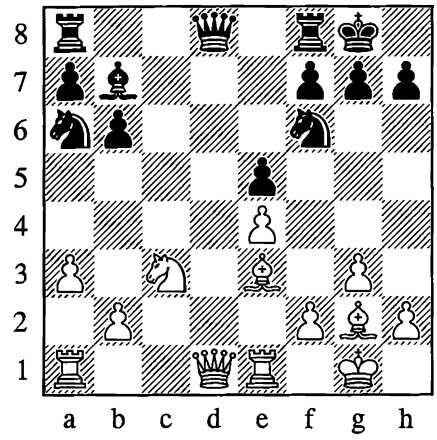
White reinforces the defence of the e4-pawn and also avoids any weakening of his structure.

16...♘a6 17.a3 ♗xc3 18.♘xc3

White has an active pair of bishops and a space advantage.

18...e5

Black feels like gaining some space in the centre, but now the d5-square becomes weak.



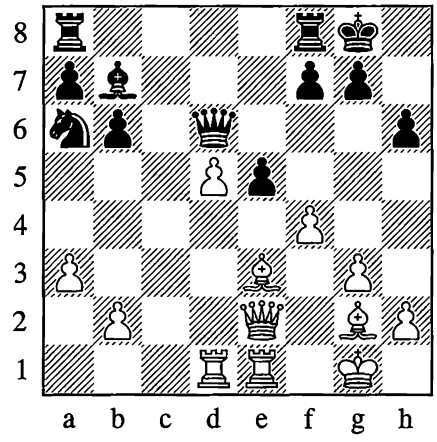
19.♕e2 h6

Preventing any ideas of ♗g5, undermining one of the main defenders of the d5-square.

20.♖ad1 ♕e7 21.♘d5 ♘xd5 22.exd5

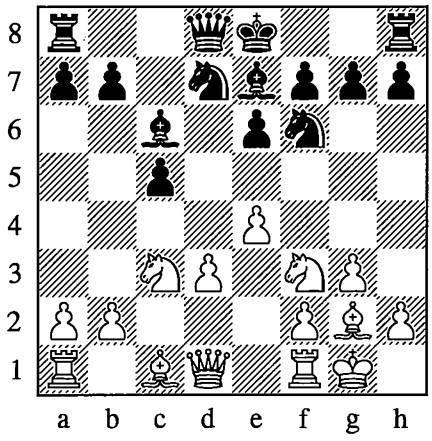
All according to Nimzowitsch's theory – the strong outpost has been transformed into a passed pawn.

22...♕d6 23.f4!±



Black failed to stabilize his position in Badea – Rogozenko, Bucharest 2004.

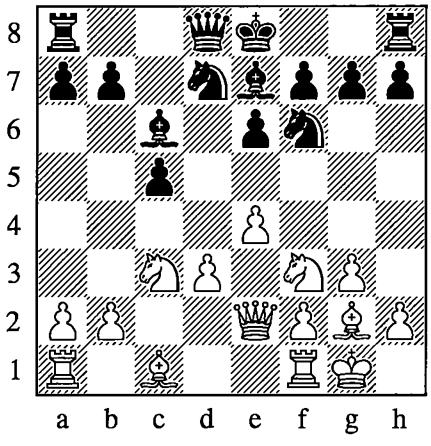
C22) 11...♘bd7



The drawback of this developing move is that it defines the knight's intentions too soon, while also obstructing the queen's pressure along the d-file.

12.♕e2

Black has a big decision to make – should he allow d3-d4 or not?



12...e5

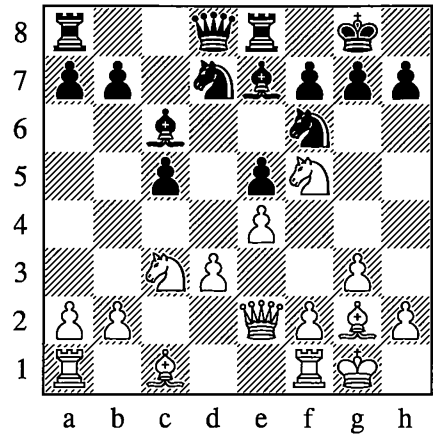
This is a strategic concession, because it weakens the f5- and d5-squares, while Black cannot even think about installing a knight on d4. The more cautious and somewhat better 12...0–0 transposes to line C23.

13.♘h4

Initiating the invasion of the weak squares.

13...0–0 14.♘f5 ♖e8

14...b5 would be premature because of 15.♘d5±, forcing the exchange on d5 when White has a tremendous initiative.

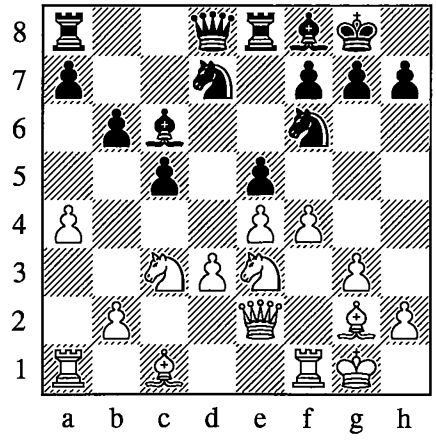


This position was reached in Hausrath – Kraemer, Bindlach 2006. White eventually won, but I believe that here the best move order would have been:

15.a4!N

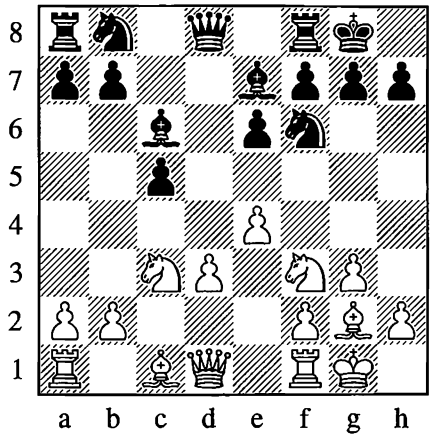
Restricting Black's queenside activity.

15...b6 16.f4 ♗f8 17.♘e3±



By combining the threat of a kingside attack with f4-f5, g3-g4, etc. with the invasion of the d5-square, White retains a long-term advantage.

C23) 11...0–0

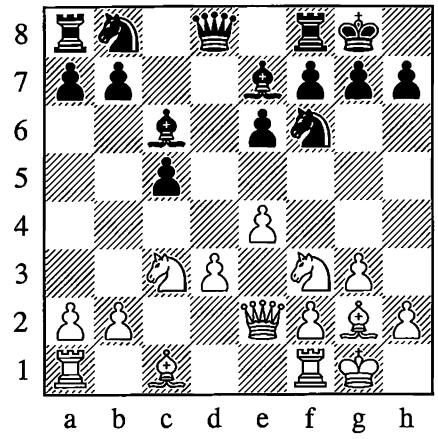


This is the most flexible move, leaving the d-file open for counterplay.

12.♕e2!

Although d3-d4 is not yet a threat, ♖d1 may follow to prepare it. Besides, it is not easy for Black to refrain from the natural continuation of his development, based on ...♘bd7, which would release the pressure against the d4-square.

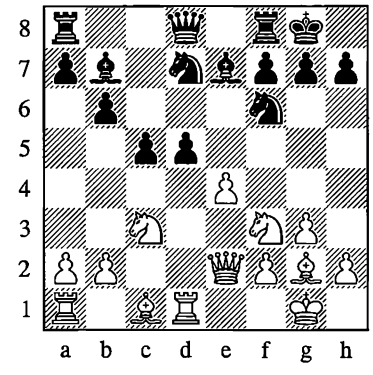
12.♖e1 is a less effective way to defend the e4-pawn because of 12...♕b6! clearing the d8-square for the rook. 13.♘e5 (White has to change plans. After 13.d4?! cxd4 both 14.♘xd4 ♖d8 and 14.♕xd4 ♗c5 are unpleasant.) 13...♖d8 14.a4 White intends to drive the black queen away in order to release the pressure against b2 and develop the c1-bishop. The main drawback of this plan is that it weakens several squares along the b-file. 14...♘bd7 15.a5 ♕c7 16.♘xc6 bxc6 The mutual weaknesses compensate for each other and a draw was agreed in Marin – Balogh, Andorra 2009.



12...b5!?

This strategically ambitious move, which aims to cross White's plans of opening the centre, does not contribute to Black's development.

However, ignoring White's threat with 12...♘bd7 would also lead to unpleasant consequences after: 13.d4 b6?! Too ambitious; Black wants to save his bishop, but this new loss of time allows White to develop his initiative in the centre (13...cxd4 14.♘xd4± would have been the lesser evil). 14.♖d1! ♗b7 (It is too late for 14...cxd4, because of 15.♘xd4 ♗b7 16.e5! ♘d5 17.♘xd5 ♗xd5 18.♗xd5 exd5 19.♘f5 with a virtually decisive advantage.) 15.d5 exd5



Now, in the game Hausrath – Prasad, Pardubice 2005, White missed the thematic 16.e5!±, which would have placed Black in serious trouble.

The other alternative is:

12...♕b6

Now this manoeuvre does not work as well as it did in Marin – Balogh, mentioned in the note to White's 12th move.

13.♖d1

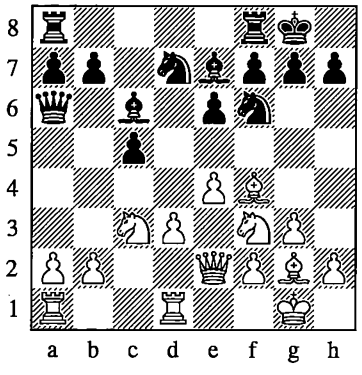
Threatening d3-d4.

13...♕a6

This looks logical, but White will break the pin easily.

13...♖d8 would also delay d3-d4, but after 14.♗f4 Black is short of developing moves. 14...♘bd7 would allow 15.d4 anyway, with similar play as in the main line, while 14...♘a6 15.♘e5 is an improved version of the line from my game with Balogh, because White has avoided weakening his squares along the b-file.

14.♗f4 ♘bd7



15.♕c2!

Strictly speaking, this looks like a loss of time. However, Black has also spent two tempos on queen moves. Besides, his queen is a bit passive on a6, and is also vulnerable to later attacks with ♗f1.

Another way to take advantage of the awkward position of the black queen would be 15.a3!? followed by b2-b4, but I prefer the central strategy involved in the main line.

15...♖ac8

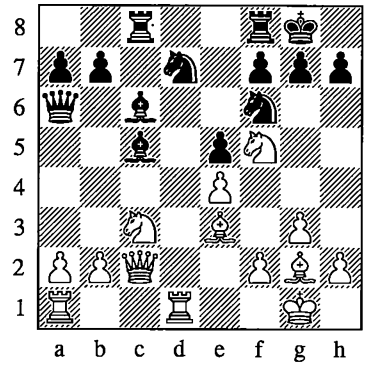
Given the placement of the white queen, this looks logical. However, the lack of mobility of the c6-bishop makes the opposition along the c-file inoffensive for White.

16.d4 cxd4 17.♘xd4 e5

Black has to prevent the opening of the long diagonal.

17...♖fd8 18.♘xc6 bxc6 19.♗f1± leaves White with the bishop pair, more space and the better structure.

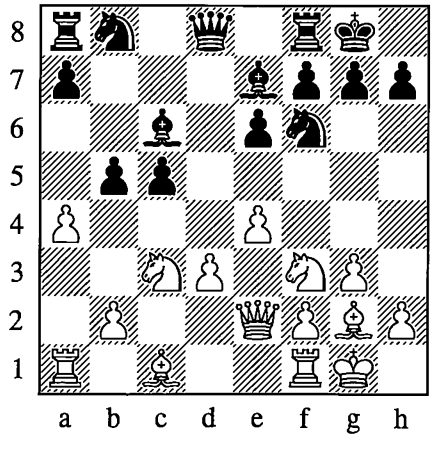
18.♘f5 ♗c5 19.♗e3±



In this symmetrical position, White's knights are better placed for the fight for the central squares.

13.a4!

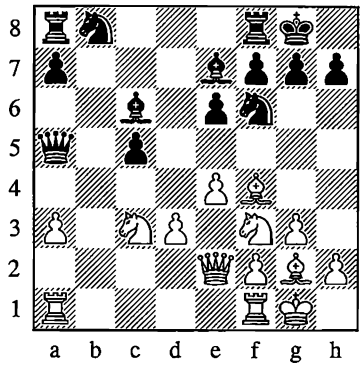
Not giving Black time to consolidate.



13...b4!?N

This is the most ambitious continuation.

13...bxa4 gives up the c4-square without a fight, leaving White with a comfortable strategic advantage. 14.♗f4 a3 15.bxa3 ♕a5 This position was reached in Kern – Eperjesi, Budapest 1994.

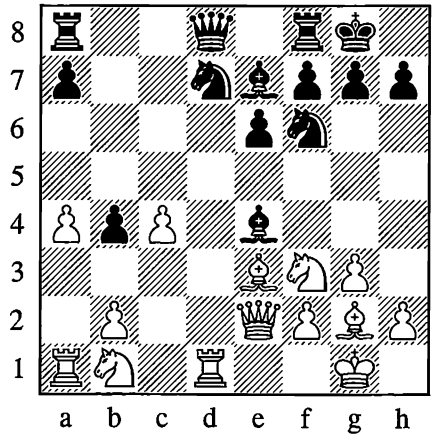


16.♖fc1!N The start of the optimal regrouping, aiming to occupy the c4-square. 16...♘bd7 17.♘d2 ♘b6 18.♘d1! The second knight is approaching c4. 18...♖fd8 19.♘e3± Followed by ♘dc4. White has the better structure, which would ensure him of the better chances in any type of endgame.

14.♘b1 c4

Black logically fights against the blockade on c4, but this fails to yield him equality, because of White's better development.

15.dxc4 ♗xe4 16.♖d1 ♘bd7 17.♗e3±



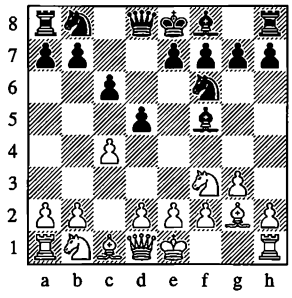
White will win a tempo with ♘bd2 and then install his knight on b3. His pieces are exerting pressure against the weakened black queenside, while Black is rather passive. If allowed, White will play a5-a6, while ...a7-a5 would weaken the b5-square and be met by ♘f3-d4-b5.

Conclusion

The development of the bishop to the vulnerable g4-square allows White to take over the initiative. Black has an unpleasant choice between endangering his bishop or giving up his control of the centre. In either case, White retains the better prospects.

Chapter 6

Anti-Slav Systems



The Barcza Variation

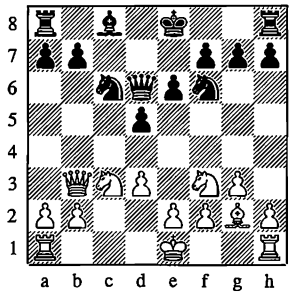
Variation Index

1.c4 ♘f6 2.g3 c6 3.♗g2 d5 4.♘f3 ♗f5

5.cxd5 cxd5 6.♕b3

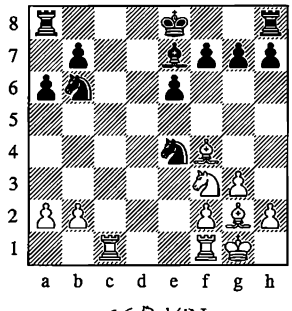
A) 6...♗c8 87
B) 6...♕d7 89
C) 6...♕c7 7.♘c3 e6 8.d3 91
C1) 8...♘c6 92
C2) 8...♘bd7 93
D) 6...♕c8 7.♘c3 e6 8.d3 ♘c6 9.♗f4 ♗e7 10.0–0 0–0 11.♖ac1 94
D1) 11...♕d7 95
D2) 11...♗g6 98
E) 6...♕b6 99
E1) 7.♕xb6 100
E2) 7.♘c3 e6 8.d3 ♘c6 9.0–0 ♗e7 10.♗e3 ♕xb3 11.axb3 102
E21) 11...0–0 103
E22) 11...♘g4 105

A) after 10...♕xd6



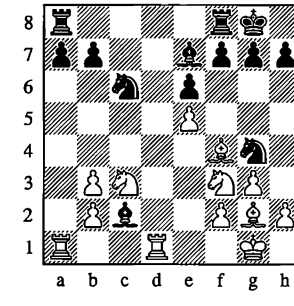
11.0–0!N

C2) after 15...♘xe4



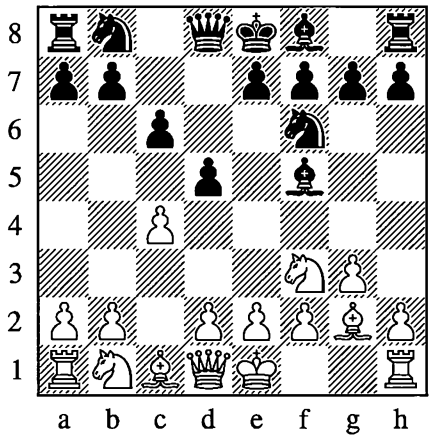
16.♘d4!N

E22) after 16...♗c2



17.♖d2!N

1.c4 ♘f6 2.g3 c6 3.♗g2 d5 4.♘f3 ♗f5



The reader may have noticed that of all the anti-Slav tabiyas, only this one bears the name of a player. Gideon Barcza (1911-1986) was a strong Hungarian grandmaster with a solid positional style, being able to squeeze a victory out of an apparently only symbolic advantage. He was a great Reti/English opening specialist with White and obtained a fantastic score in the games where the diagrammed position was reached.

Apparently, Barcza also had a refined sense of humour. According to the legend, one of his friends once asked him for an opinion about a young IM who was courting his daughter. "Oh, a very fine young gentleman," Barcza answered. "His games in the Nimzo-Indian Defence are simply brilliant!"

The reader will come across Barcza's games quite frequently in the next few pages. However, I have failed to find relevant games of his in any other sub-variation of our anti-Slav complex. A possible explanation is that, in his best years, players with Black mainly opted for this specific line. If this is true, there is some sort of contradiction with a comment written by Botvinnik in the '70s, according to which the difficulties faced by Black after the opening of the c-file were well known from the '20s.

Returning to the position itself, we can note that Black develops the bishop on a less exposed square than g4, but fails to put any pressure on his opponent. Besides, the temporary vulnerability of the queenside remains an important factor.

5.cxd5

Here, this move can be played immediately, since there is no "danger" of an intermediate exchange on f3.

5...cxd5

Instead, exchanging the bishop for the undeveloped knight makes little sense.

5...♗xb1

Here is our first Barcza game:

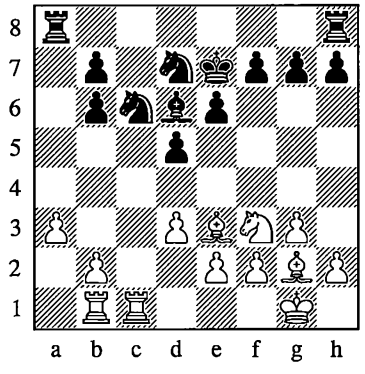
6.♖xb1 cxd5 7.♕b3! ♕b6

In the absence of the f3-knight after, for instance, 4...♗g4 5.cxd5 ♗xf3 6.♗xf3 cxd5 7.♕b3, Black could defend the b7-pawn with 7...♕d7, but here this is impossible because of 8.♘e5. This marks a clear difference between the efficiency of 5...♗xf3 and 5...♗xb1.

8.♕xb6 axb6 9.a3 ♘c6 10.d3

White is slightly ahead in development and has a potentially strong pair of bishops. Besides, Black has chronic weaknesses on the queenside.

10...e6 11.0–0 ♗d6 12.♗e3 ♘d7 13.♖fc1 ♔e7



Black is close to completing his development, too, but Barcza finds natural ways to maintain his slight initiative.

14.♘d4

A typical move, preparing the activation of both bishops and eliminating the main defender of the c-file.

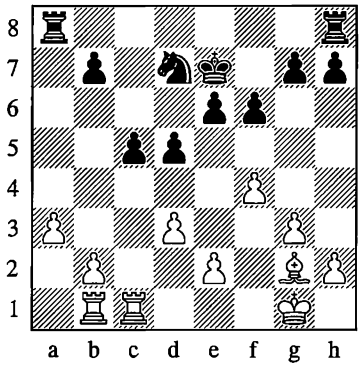
14...♘xd4 15.♗xd4 f6

15...e5 16.♗c3 would leave the h3-c8 diagonal vulnerable, causing Black problems during the fight for the c-file.

16.f4

Personally, I would prefer to preserve the dark-squared bishop from exchange with 16.♗c3. Later, White could win space in the centre with f2-f4 and e2-e4. Given the vulnerability of the b7-pawn, Black cannot move his central pawns in any way. A possible continuation is 16...♘c5 17.b4 ♘d7 18.♗b2± and Black's problems persist.

16...♗c5 17.♗xc5† bxc5



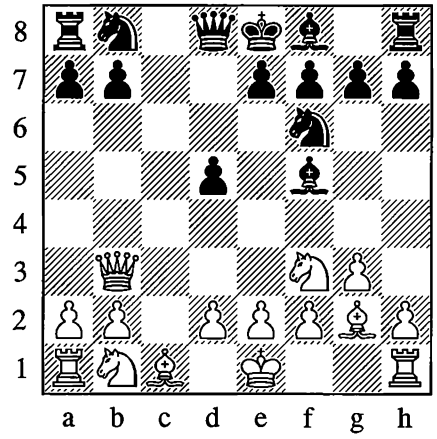
Apparently, Black has improved his pawn structure, but Barcza's subtle feel for the initiative allows him to keep the upper hand.

18.f5! b6 19.fxe6 ♔xe6 20.♗h3† ♔d6 21.b4! cxb4 22.♖xb4±

The apparently strong black centre has been undermined with two effective blows. Despite mass simplifications, Black has not achieved complete equality yet. His queenside pawns are vulnerable, his king slightly exposed and the seventh rank is weak. This latter aspect leaves the kingside pawns vulnerable in the event of any lines opening for the white rooks. White went on to win in Barcza – Tipary, Hungary (ch) 1958.

6.♕b3

This simple attack against the b7-pawn is not easy to meet. In practice, Black has tried numerous continuations, but none of them is entirely satisfactory.



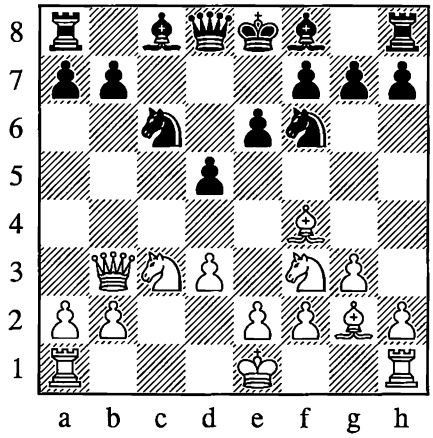
We will examine **A) 6...♗c8**, **B) 6...♕d7**, **C) 6...♕c7**, **D) 6...♕c8** and **E) 6...♕b6**.

A) 6...♗c8

This conservative move is sometimes played in the Slav Defence, if White has previously been forced to make some sort of concession. For instance, 1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.e3 (a first small concession, restricting the c1-bishop) 4...♗f5 (not really popular) 5.cxd5 (A second minor concession. In combination with 4.e3, the Exchange Variation is not supposed to be dangerous.) 5...cxd5 6.♕b3 ♗c8 My feeling is that even this line is not fully satisfactory for Black, though.

In our case there is nothing to compensate Black for the loss of two tempos.

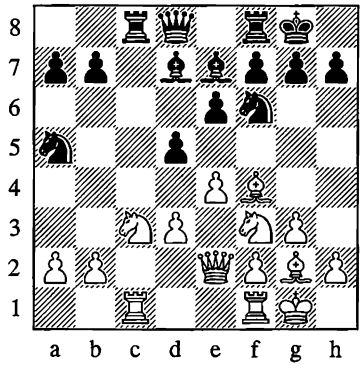
7.d3 ♘c6 8.♗f4 e6 9.♘c3



9...♗d6

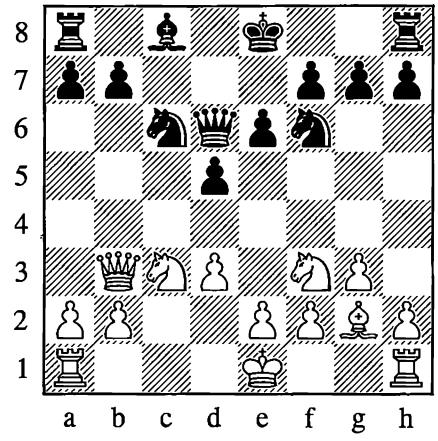
Black refuses to tolerate the active enemy bishop on f4, but this will lead to further loss of time.

The more solid 9...♗e7 is also a bit passive. 10.0–0 0–0 (Or 10...♘a5 11.♕d1 ♗d7 12.e4 0–0 and now, in the game Khasin – Dokhoian, Nabereznye Chelny 1988, the simplest way to a stable advantage would have been 13.exd5 ♘xd5 14.♘xd5 exd5 15.♘e5±. In this symmetrical position, White's pieces are more active.) 11.♖ac1 ♘a5 12.♕c2 ♗d7 13.e4 A typical move, aiming to activate the g2-bishop and win space in the centre. 13...♖c8 14.♕e2±



White is better mobilized and enjoys more space. After the pseudo-active 14...b5?! the game Benko – Sanguinetti, Portoroz (izt) 1958, continued with 15.exd5 exd5 and now White missed the possibility of obtaining a clear advantage by tactical means with: 16.♘xb5! ♗xb5 (16...♖xc1 simply loses a pawn after 17.♖xc1 ♗xb5 18.♗c7±) 17.♖xc8 ♕xc8 18.♕xe7 When retrieving the pawn with 18...♗xd3 would leave Black's pieces and pawns hanging after 19.♖c1±.

10.♗xd6 ♕xd6



11.♘b5

We already know that Barcza liked to install a minor piece on d4.

11...♕e7 12.♖c1 0–0 13.♘bd4 ♗d7!

An excellent defensive move, keeping the c-file closed.

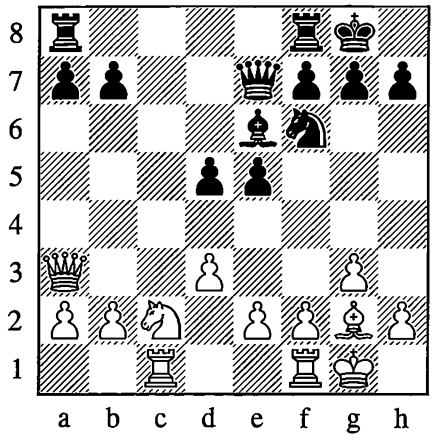
14.0–0

14.♕xb7? is likely to lead to trouble after 14...♘xd4 15.♘xd4 ♖fb8.

14...♘xd4 15.♘xd4 e5 16.♘c2!

An original way to maintain harmony between the pieces. Instead 16.♘f3 would offer Black good counterplay after 16...e4 17.♘d4 e3!.

16...♗e6 17.♕a3!?



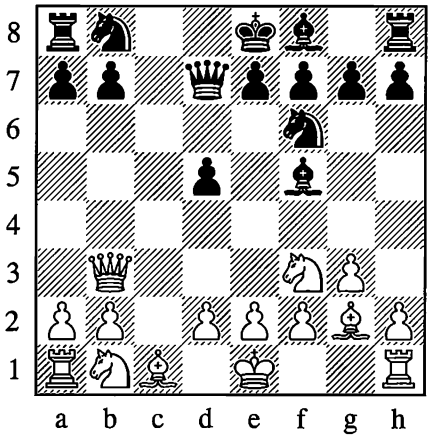
White retained a slight initiative in Barcza – Rossolimo, Venice 1949.

In this line a simpler and, to my understanding, better way to develop the initiative would have been:

11.0–0!N 0–0 12.e4 dxe4 13.dxe4 e5 14.♖fd1±

Consolidating White's lead in development.

B) 6...♕d7



A provocative move. Black is ready to invest a tempo in order to decoy the enemy knight to the relatively unstable e5-square.

7.♘e5 ♕c7 8.♘c3!

The knight is temporarily taboo because of ♕xb7, regaining the material with interest.

8...♘c6

Black should attack the knight before it acquires relative stability by tactical means. For instance:

8...e6 9.d3 ♘c6

This can be met by:

10.♘b5!

When the possibility of immediately activating the dark-squared bishop changes the situation radically.

10...♕b6

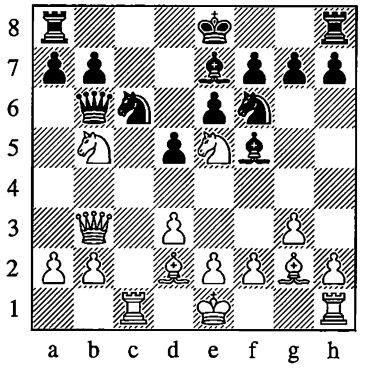
10...♕xe5 leaves the queen trapped after 11.♗f4, when Black has no favourable way to return the extra piece in order to save Her Majesty, for instance: 11...♗b4† 12.♔f1 ♘d4 13.♘xd4 ♕xd4 14.♗e3 ♕g4 15.h3± or 11...♘d4 12.♗xe5 ♘xb3 13.axb3 ♗b4† 14.♗c3 ♗xc3† 15.bxc3±.

11.♗e3

By continuing to chase the queen, White wins a tempo for his development.

11...♕a5† 12.♗d2 ♕b6 13.♖c1 ♗e7

This position was reached in Roshal – Tseshkovsky, Soviet Union 1964.



White could have converted his initiative into a stable advantage with:

14.♕a4!N a6

14...0–0 15.♗e3 ♗b4† fails to 16.♕xb4!±.

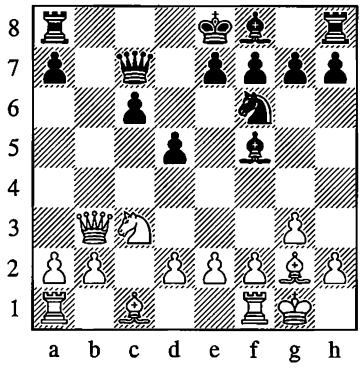
15.♘xc6 bxc6 16.♘d4±

The vulnerability of the c6-pawn and the f5-bishop are not compensated by the temporary weakness of the b2-pawn.

9.♘xc6 bxc6 10.d3

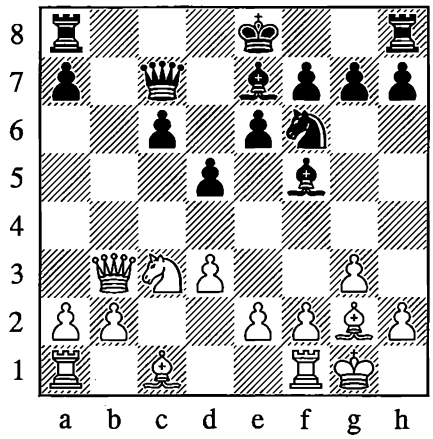
Black has managed to neutralize White's initiative, but only at the expense of being left with weaknesses along the c-file. Although the c6-pawn is not easy to capture, establishing a blockade on the c5-square looks like a reasonable plan. Compared with similar lines of the Exchange Slav, Black's light-squared bishop will be kept completely out of play by the d3-pawn.

10.0–0 should not have much independent value if Black simply develops, starting with 10...e6. In the following game, he started moving the pieces around without a clear plan and soon ran into trouble.



10...♖b8?! 11.♕a4 e6 12.d3 ♕d7?! 13.♕c2 ♗g6?! 14.♘a4 ♗d6 15.♗e3 0–0 16.♖ac1 ♖fc8 17.♗c5 Since the black queen deprived the f6-knight of the d7-square, White has taken control of this important square. The following simplifications do not make Black's situation any easier. 17...♕e7 18.b3 ♗xc5 19.♕xc5 ♔f8 20.♖c3 ♕xc5 21.♘xc5 ♔e7 22.♖fc1 ♘d7 23.e4 ♘xc5 24.♖xc5 ♔d7 25.f4± White has an advantage on both wings, Loginov – Z. Almasi, Budapest 1991.

10...e6 11.0–0 ♗e7



12.e4

White needs to harass the enemy queen with ♗f4 in order to speed up his pressure along the c-file. In view of the possible answer ...e6-e5, he also has to put the d5-pawn under pressure.

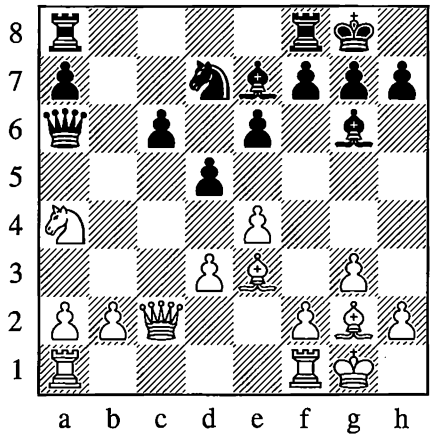
Starting with 12.♗f4 is less efficient because of 12...e5 (12...♕d7?! once again prevents ...♘d7, leaving the c5-square at White's mercy. 13.♖ac1 0–0 14.♘a4 ♘h5 15.♗e5 ♖fc8 16.♘c5 ♕e8 17.♘a6 ♕d7 18.♗d4 ♘f6 19.♖c2± The play is rather one-sided; White will gradually increase his pressure along the c-file, while Black has no counterplay at all, Rossolimo – Castillo, Venice 1950.) 13.♗d2 0–0 And Black's position remained solid in Wirthensohn – Czerniak, Vraca 1975.

12...♗g6 13.♗f4 ♕b6

With the d5-pawn already under pressure, 13...e5 is less advisable now because of 14.♗g5! undermining the main defender of the d5-square. For instance: 14...dxe4 (14...d4 15.♘a4 leaves the g6-bishop completely out of play, while the queenside weaknesses are significant) 15.♘xe4! ♘xe4 16.♗xe7 ♘d2!? (This intermediate move does not work out properly, but 16...♕xe7 17.dxe4± is simply better for White. The g2-bishop is

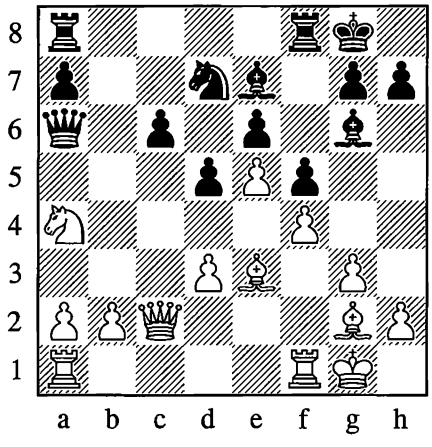
at least not worse than its counterpart [f2-f3 and ♗h3 is a possible continuation at the right moment] while the queenside situation clearly favours White.) 17.♕c2 ♘xf1 18.♕c5! ♔d7 19.♖xf1↑ Black's situation is quite dangerous, despite the extra exchange.

14.♕c2 0–0 15.♗e3 ♕a6 16.♘a4 ♘d7



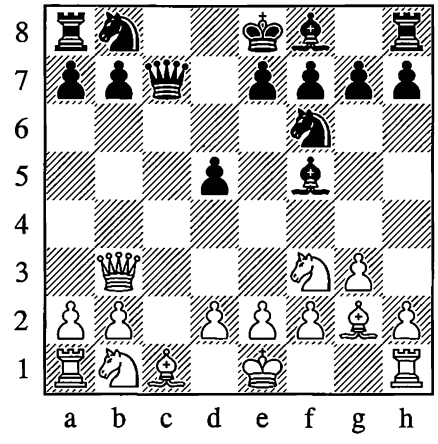
Black has more or less managed to defend his queenside, but White can increase his pressure on the other wing, too.

17.f4 f5 18.e5±



Black's light-squared bishop has finally become "bad", while the problem of the c5-square has not been solved completely. Meanwhile, White can activate his g2-bishop via f1, Dzindzichashvili – Bagirov, Tbilisi 1973.

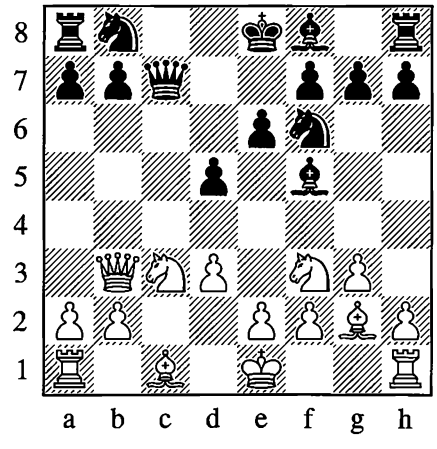
C) 6...♕c7



This move looks worse than 6...♕d7; the queen is vulnerable anyway and there is no hanging knight on e5.

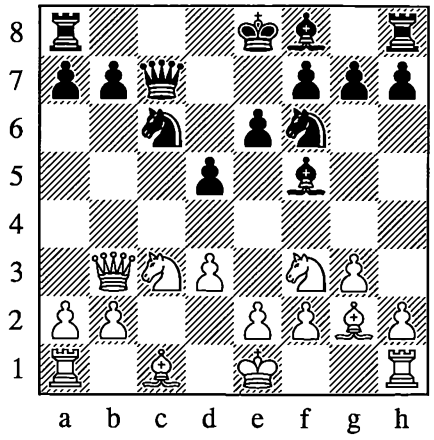
7.♘c3 e6 8.d3

White plans ♗f4 with gain of tempo, followed by the occupation of the c-file.



Black has a choice regarding his queen's knight development between **C1) 8...♘c6** and **C2) 8...♘bd7**.

C1) 8...♘c6



Black leaves the d7-square available for the queen. However, playing with queens on the board is dangerous because of White's lead in development.

9.♗f4 ♕d7

The generally safer 9...♕b6 would simply lose a tempo over line E, 6...♕b6, on page 99.

10.0–0 ♗e7 11.e4!

White is better mobilized, so he opens the centre.

11...♗g4

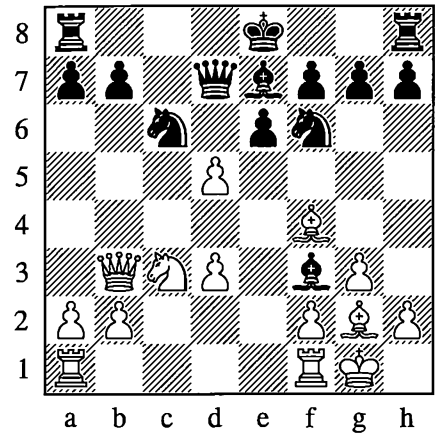
Black hopes to win some time in view of the threat of ...♗xf3 followed by ...♘d4. Accepting the sacrifice with 11...dxe4 12.dxe4 ♘xe4 would open the d-file, leaving the queen in an uncomfortable position after 13.♖fd1 ♕c8 14.♘d4 when White has much better development.

12.exd5

Strong and certainly simpler is 12.♘e5, but the main line shows some fascinating ideas.

12...♗xf3

This is playing with fire, but 12...exd5 13.♘e5± is also quite unpleasant for Black.



13.dxe6!

Inspired play. The position opens completely and, despite Black's temporary huge material advantage, White's initiative will be almost decisive.

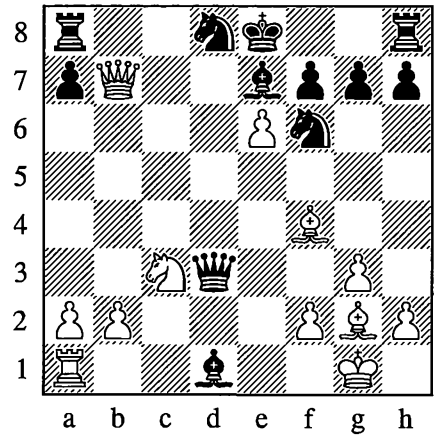
13...♕xd3 14.♖fd1!

Forcing Black to give up control of the long diagonal.

14...♗xd1 15.♕xb7

After having sacrificed a massive amount of material, White starts retrieving it, while maintaining the initiative.

15...♘d8



16.♗c6†!N

The most energetic continuation of the attack. In the game, possibly tired after a sequence of brilliant moves, White went astray with 16.exf7†?! which helped Black to develop his forces after 16...♔xf7 17.♕xa8 ♗g4∞, Ricardi – Mannion, Manila (ol) 1992.

16...♔f8

After 16...♘xc6 17.♕xc6† ♔f8 18.♕xa8† White regains the sacrificed material, keeping two extra pawns.

17.♕xa8 ♗h5

The bishop cannot defend the h3-c8 diagonal with 17...♗g4 because of 18.h3! when after 18...♗xh3? 19.♖d1+– Black either loses his queen or is mated.

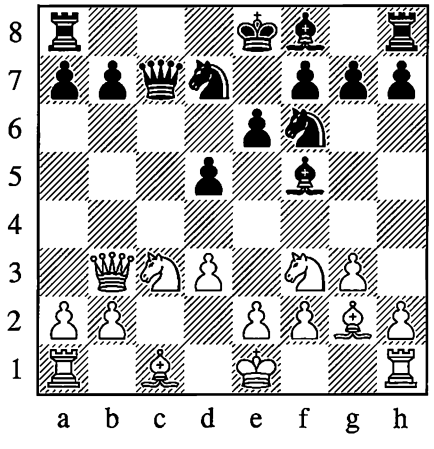
18.♘d5 ♘xd5 19.♗d6!

Threatening mate in one.

19...♔g8 20.♗xd5±

Black's army is too poorly coordinated to resist White's initiative.

C2) 8...♘bd7



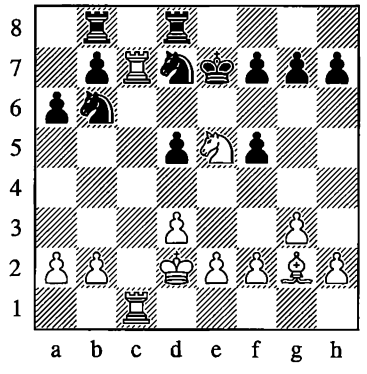
Black intends to neutralize the queenside pressure with ...♕b6, without spoiling his structure.

9.♗f4 ♕b6 10.♕xb6 ♘xb6

Apparently, Black has managed to stabilize the position, but White's initiative remains dangerous even after the exchange of queens. It should also be mentioned that the knight is generally badly placed on b6 in this structure (something Dr Tarrasch liked to write about).

11.0–0

Played in accordance with the belief that the threat can be stronger than its execution. However, the immediate 11.♘b5 is also annoying. 11...♗b4† The only way to win some time in order to parry ♘c7†. 12.♗d2 ♗xd2† 13.♔xd2 ♔e7 14.♖hc1 With a knight on c6, Black could have hoped to defend the c-file. 14...a6 15.♖c7† ♘fd7 (15...♔d8 fails to take advantage of the apparently hanging position of the white pieces because of 16.♖xb7!±) 16.♘bd4 ♖ab8 17.♘xf5† exf5 18.♘e5 ♖hd8 19.♖ac1±



Black has managed to parry the immediate threats, but his structure is ruined and his position remains passive, Konstantinopolsky – Shiumilin, Ukraine 1936.

11...a6 12.♖ac1 ♗e7

Apparently, Black will castle safely and retain a viable game.

13.e4!

A familiar pattern; White sacrifices a pawn in order to activate most of his pieces at once.

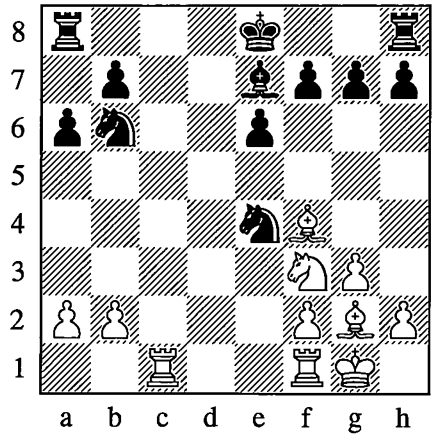
13...dxe4 14.dxe4 ♗xe4

Accepting the sacrifice is quite risky.

14...♘xe4?! is no better than the game continuation because of 15.♘d4 ♘xc3 16.♖xc3± when the threats of ♘xf5 and ♗xb7 are very unpleasant.

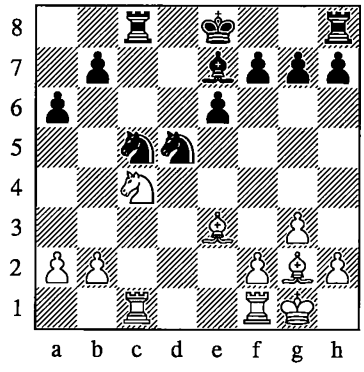
14...♗g6N would have been relatively best, although after 15.♘e5± White retains the more active position. Among other points, the g6-bishop and the b6-knight are far from optimally placed.

15.♘xe4 ♘xe4



16.♘d4!N

This centralizing move is best, although 16.♘d2 also looks strong enough. For example: 16...♘c5 17.♗e3 ♖c8 18.♘c4 ♘d5



It may seem that Black has achieved some stability, but White has not exhausted his dynamic resources. 19.b4! ♘xb4 (19...♘xe3? loses a piece to 20.♘xe3+– and 19...♘a4? "only" loses an exchange to 20.♘d6†!+–) 20.♘b6 ♖c7 21.♗f4 ♖c6 22.♗xc6† ♘xc6 23.♖fd1± Black has sufficient material in return for the lost exchange, but White's position is very active, Barcza – J. Balogh, corr. 1943/44.

16...♘c5 17.♖fd1

Black lacks stability on the queenside.

17...♘d5

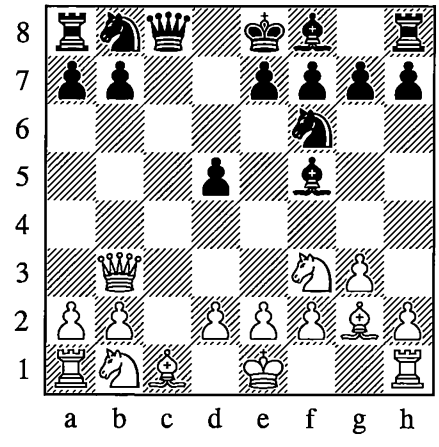
If 17...0–0 then White would be ready for concrete action with 18.b4! ♘ca4 19.♗xb7 ♖a7 20.♗f3± when 20...♗xb4? loses to 21.♘c6+–.

17...g5 is met by 18.♗xg5 ♗xg5 19.♖xc5±.

18.♗xd5 exd5 19.♖e1±

The threats of ♖xe7† and ♗d6 cannot be parried in an adequate way.

D) 6...♕c8



This square is safe but only for the moment, as in the near future the black queen will be in opposition with a white rook. Black relies on the relatively closed character of the position, hoping that he will be able to improve the

queen's placement later. This variation is interesting because it was the occasional choice of World Champions and their challengers.

7.♘c3 e6 8.d3 ♘c6 9.♗f4 ♗e7 10.0–0

According to Botvinnik, a worthy alternative would be 10.♘b5 0–0 11.♘d6 ♗xd6 12.♗xd6 ♖d8 13.♗f4±, when the bishop pair could be significant in the long run.

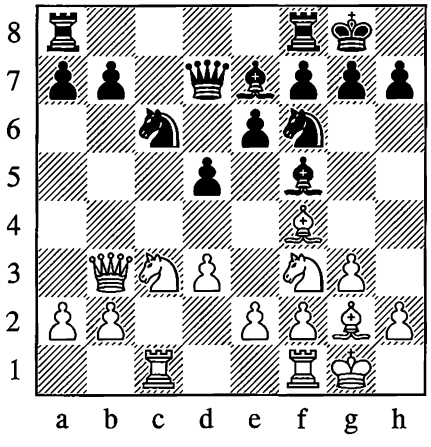
10...0–0 11.♖ac1

White has completed his development and the time has come for Black to find a way to neutralize the opponent's initiative.

The main continuations are **D1) 11...♕d7** and **D2) 11...♗g6**.

11...♘d7 is occasionally played, but remaining underdeveloped for so long cannot guarantee Black an easy life. I recommend 12.♘a4!N±, preventing ...♘c5 and planning ♖c2 followed by ♖fc1.

D1) 11...♕d7

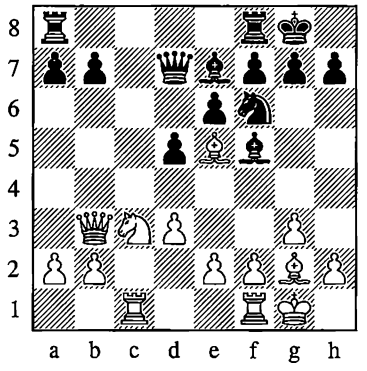


Black immediately connects rooks, hoping to fight for the c-file. However, the queen does not feel entirely comfortable on d7 either, and White has two promising continuations.

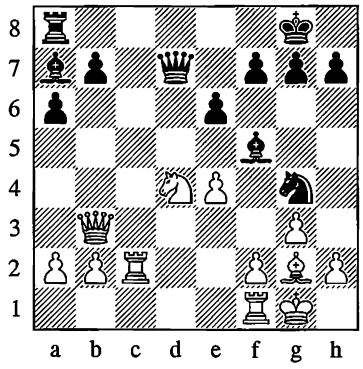
12.e4!?

This energetic move has ceased to surprise us after having read the previous pages. In this concrete position, it bears the seal of several great players (including our specialist Barcza).

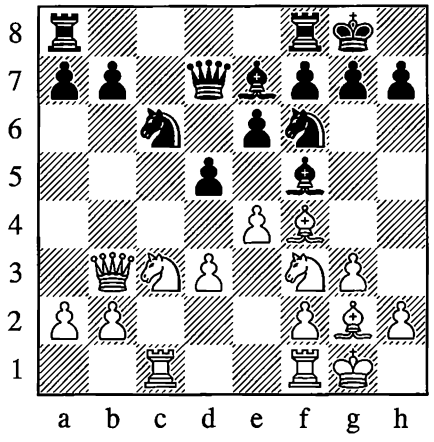
12.♘e5 ♘xe5 13.♗xe5 is also possible. White has activated both his bishops and is ready to win space in the centre with e2-e4. Besides, after the exchange of the c6-knight, the c-file has been opened, meaning that Black will find himself under pressure on various areas of the board. Since the exchange on e5 is part of White's plan in the main line, it could all lead to a transposition.



Now 13...♘g4 fails to endanger the enemy bishop and has the drawback of misplacing the knight and weakening the pressure against the centre. 14.♗d4 ♗d6 (The following correspondence game is a good example of White's possibilities of gradually winning space in the centre and on the kingside. 14...♖fc8 15.h3 ♘f6 16.f4 ♗g6 17.♔h2 ♘e8 18.♖fd1 ♗c5 And now in Nijssen – De Boer, corr. 1991, the simplest continuation would have been 19.♗xc5!N ♖xc5 20.e4±, leaving Black in a passive position.) 15.♘b5 ♗b8 16.e4 a6 Black tries to solve his problems by tactical means, but his poor coordination will cause him to lose material. 17.♗c5 ♖c8 18.♘d4 dxe4 19.dxe4 ♖xc5 (This is entirely justified desperation. After 19...♗g6 20.♖fd1± the black queen and, indirectly, the b7-pawn are in lethal danger.) 20.♖xc5 ♗a7 21.♖c2±

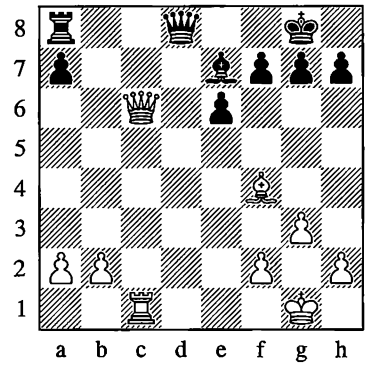


In Kirov – Agzamov, Potsdam 1985, Black had only a slight practical chance of survival as compensation for the exchange. Curiously, this was enough to eventually save the game.



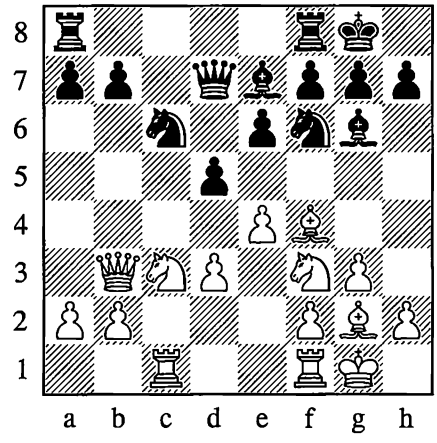
12...♗g6

Accepting the sacrifice with 12...dxe4 13.dxe4 ♘xe4 14.♘xe4 ♗xe4 leads by force to an unpleasant endgame after: 15.♘e5 ♘xe5 16.♗xe4 ♘c6 (Chess does not change so much with the passing of time. In a game played 30 years later, Black could not avoid trouble with 16...♗f6 17.♖fd1 ♕e7 18.♕b5 a6 19.♕a5 ♘c6 20.♗xc6 bxc6 21.♗d6 ♕d8 22.♕a4 ♖e8 23.♖xc6 ♗xb2 and now, in Dizdar – Haba, Halle 1987, White could have obtained excellent winning chances with 24.♗e5 ♕xd1† 25.♕xd1 ♗xe5 26.♕a4± winning the a-pawn.) 17.♖fd1 ♕c8 (The queen has to return to the back rank, disconnecting the rooks. 17...♘d4? leaves the knight trapped after 18.♖c4!+–.) 18.♕a4 ♖d8 19.♖xd8† ♕xd8 20.♗xc6 bxc6 21.♕xc6±



White's queenside majority is not easy to neutralize. It is telling that a great endgame specialist could not save Black in Barcza – Smyslov, Moscow 1956. Let's see the rest of this inspiring game: 21...h6 22.♗e5 ♗g5 23.♖c4 ♕d1† 24.♔g2 ♖d8 25.♕f3 ♕xf3† 26.♔xf3 ♗f6 27.♗xf6 gxf6 28.♔e3 ♖d5 29.b4 ♔g7 30.a4 e5 31.b5 ♖d1 32.♖c7 a6 33.bxa6 ♖d4 34.a7 ♖xa4 35.♔d3 f5 36.♔c3 ♔f6 37.♔b3 ♖a1 38.♔b4 ♔g5 39.♔b5 ♔h5 40.♔b6 1–0

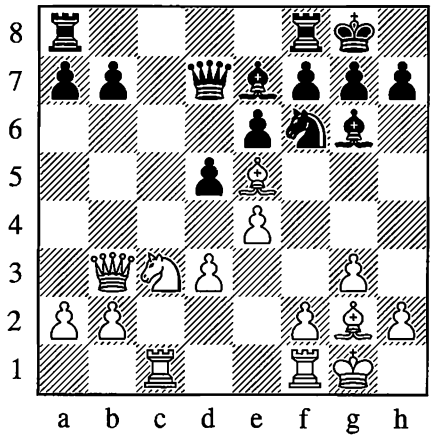
Apparently, Smyslov enjoyed the execution so much that he later adopted Barcza's variation to defeat a mighty opponent; see the main variation.



13.♘e5

13.exd5 is also strong. After 13...exd5, as played in Davies – Quillan, Liverpool 2008, the best continuation would have been 14.d4 followed by ♘e5, with strong pressure in an almost symmetrical position.

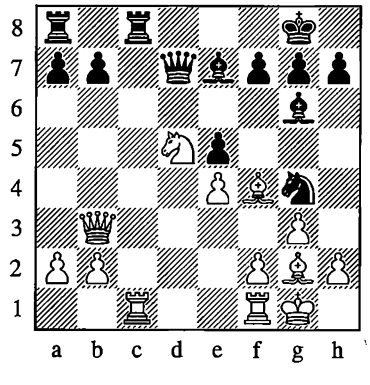
13...♘xe5 14.♗xe5



14...♖ad8

Black ignores the tension and keeps centralizing his forces, hoping that he will obtain dynamic compensation for the lost pawn. His evaluation will prove to be overoptimistic, but other continuations are no better.

14...♘g4 takes the knight away from the centre, leaving the d5-square undefended after: 15.♗f4 dxe4 (15...e5 loses a pawn to 16.♘xd5!±, while 15...d4 can be met by 16.♘b5±, according to Smyslov) 16.dxe4 e5 17.♘d5 ♖fc8



In Pigusov – Maksimenko, USSR 1988, White would have retained a stable advantage with 18.♗d2!N±.

14...dxe4 15.dxe4 opens the d-file for White's major pieces. The natural 15...♖fc8 would transpose to Navrotescu – Itkis, Romania 1992. White should have increased his pressure by natural means, starting with 16.♖fd1!N. For instance: 16...♕e8 17.♗d4 (17.♕xb7 is premature because of 17...♘g4 followed by either ...♗c5 or ...♖cb8) 17...♗h5 18.f3±

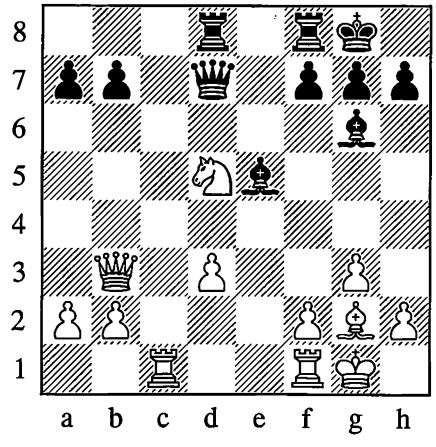
Despite the apparent symmetry, White's position is by far the more active. His kingside pawns severely restrict the h5-bishop and the f6-knight, while on the other wing he has strong pressure.

15.exd5 exd5

15...♘xd5 allows the opening of the c-file with unpleasant consequences after 16.♘xd5 exd5 17.♖c7± (Smyslov).

16.♗xf6 ♗xf6 17.♘xd5 ♗e5

This is the position Black had in mind when sacrificing the pawn. However, the next strong move will prove that the dark-squared bishop is not such a powerful piece.



18.d4!

This elegant move spoils Black's coordination, depriving him of any compensation for the pawn.

18...♗b8

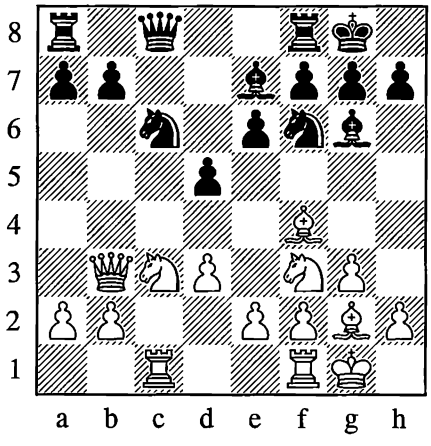
A sad necessity. The bishop is passive and vulnerable on this square, but 18...♗xd4 loses more material to 19.♖fd1 ♗e5 20.♘f6† ♗xf6 21.♖xd7 ♖xd7 22.♗xb7+– (Smyslov).

18...♗d6 looks more active, but would enable 19.♘e3±, because the d4-pawn would not be attacked. With his b7-pawn under pressure, Black would soon have to weaken the c6-square.

19.♖fe1 ♖fe8 20.♖xe8† ♖xe8 21.♘e3 ♕xd4 22.♕xb7±

White is a pawn up and has better coordination; Black's attempts to gain kingside counterplay failed painfully in Smyslov – Bronstein, Odessa 1974.

D2) 11...♗g6



Since the queen proved to be not so stable on d7, Black makes a generally useful move, removing the bishop from the exposed f5-square. However, this rather looks like an admission of the fact that White is simply better.

12.♘e5

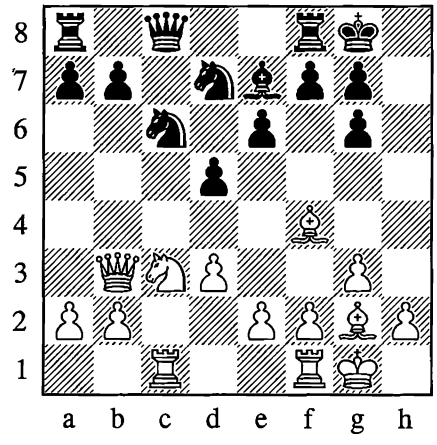
Since Black is not threatening anything, White may also think about making some neutral useful move, too, but the text continuation is simple and strong.

12...♘d7

Black makes use of the d7-square to chase the intruder away. The careless 12...♘xe5? loses material to 13.♘xd5!+–.

13.♘xg6 hxg6

White has gained the bishop pair and retained a lead in development. However, since he has no immediate threats, it is time to think about long-term measures.



14.h4!

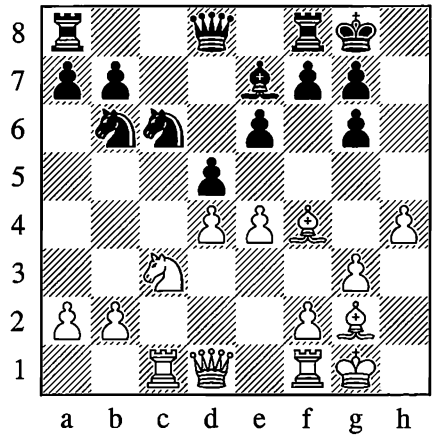
White radically prevents ...g6-g5, leaving Black with an unfavourable structure. In some cases, h4-h5 can start a mating attack.

14...♘c5 15.♕d1 ♕d8

Black continues keeping the d7-square available for the knight, but I cannot help thinking that all this is quite artificial. If instead 15...♕d7, then White seizes a strong initiative in the centre with 16.d4 ♘a6 17.e4 dxe4 18.d5!↑.

16.d4 ♘d7 17.e4 ♘b6

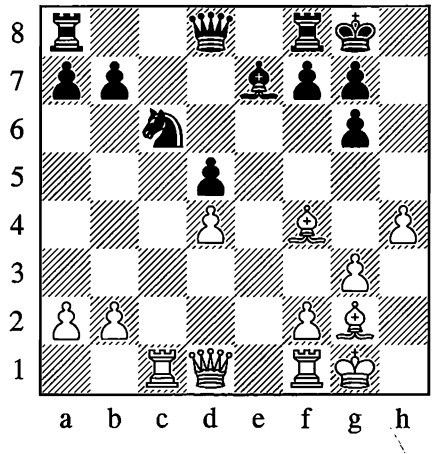
Black does his best to keep the position blocked. Instead 17...dxe4 18.d5 exd5 19.♘xd5± followed by ♗xe4 leaves White on top, since 19...f5? loses material to 20.♘c7±.



18.exd5!

This move was recommended by Botvinnik as an improvement over: 18.e5 ♖c8 19.♗h3 (even here, 19.♖e1± followed by ♗f1 would retain some advantage for White, according to Botvinnik) 19...a6 20.♔g2 ♘c4 (the attempt to get rid of the doubled pawns with 20...g5? leads to a strong attack for White after 21.hxg5 ♗xg5 22.♕h5! ♗xf4 23.gxf4 ♘xd4 24.♖h1) 21.b3 ♘a3 With adequate counterplay for Black in Korchnoi – Karpov, Moscow (15) 1974.

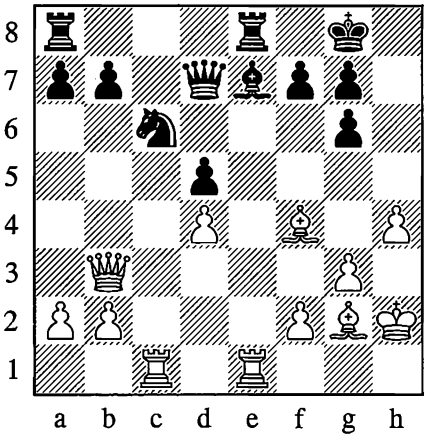
18...♘xd5 19.♘xd5 exd5



20.♖e1

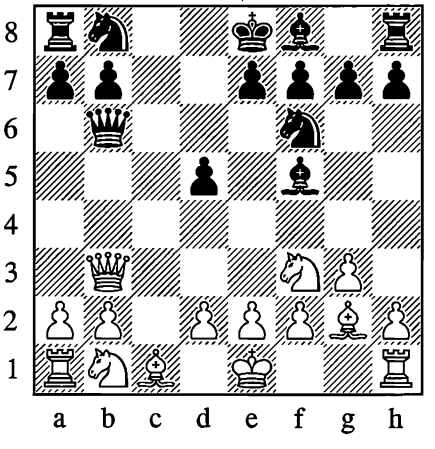
A deviation from Botvinnik's initial line, which continued with 20.h5 gxh5 21.♕xh5±. Apparently, Black has been helped to get rid of his doubled pawns, but the presence of the white queen on h5 is rather threatening. Apart from the pressure against the d5-pawn, it creates the threat of ♗f3, ♔g2 and ♖h1.

20...♕d7 21.♔h2 ♖fe8 22.♕b3±



The bishop pair and his superior structure offer White a long-term advantage, Dzindzichashvili – Brunner, Luzern 1989.

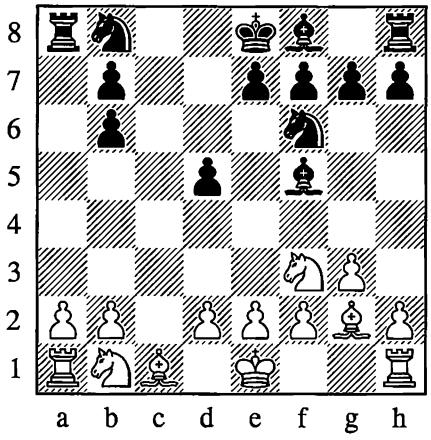
E) 6...♕b6



From the point of view of development, this is the most natural move. However, it has the significant strategic drawback that it allows Black's queenside structure to be spoiled. At the same time, we will see that White can retain some initiative even if he forces an exchange on b3!

We will examine **E1) 7.♕xb6** and **E2) 7.♘c3**. Objectively, both have equal merits, but they lead to different types of play. Subjectively, I am more inclined towards the second possibility, which I have already employed in practice.

E1) 7.♕xb6 axb6



White relies on the long-term advantage offered by the weakness of the doubled pawns, but gives up the fight for the initiative at an early stage.

8.♘c3 ♘c6 9.d3 e6 10.0–0

The early exchange of queens makes a sacrificial advance of the e-pawn less probable. However, White retains the more flexible structure and can combine preparation of e2-e4 with pressure against the weakened enemy queenside.

10...h6

This move provides the bishop with a safe emergency retreat to h7 and prevents an eventual knight jump to g5 in the event of ...♔d7. Of course, the move is not absolutely necessary at this stage of the game, but Black may have to play it soon anyway.

We should also consider some other possibilities:

10...♗e7 11.♗f4 h6 12.♘b5 0–0

A questionable move. In the absence of queens, the king is best placed in the centre, contributing to the defence of the queenside.

13.♖fc1 ♗h7 14.a3

In this kind of position, White should not be in a hurry, but instead focus on gradually strengthening his position.

14...♘d7

This move gives some meaning to the king's departure from the centre, which has left the d7-square available. However, now White can invade the d6-square.

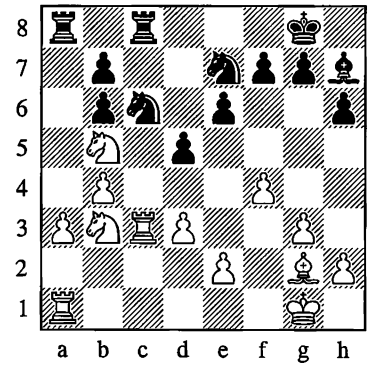
15.♗d6 ♘c5 16.♗xe7 ♘xe7 17.♘d2

White continues to concentrate his forces on the queenside, clearing the way for the f-pawn at the same time.

17...♖fc8 18.b4 ♘d7

The seemingly active 18...♘a4 is in fact a self-imprisonment by the knight.

19.♘b3 ♘e5 20.f4 ♘5c6 21.♖c3±



White has the upper hand on both wings. With his weakened queenside and desperately

passive bishop, Black can do little other than wait for White to build up the pressure, Barcza – Opocensky, Karlovy Vary 1948.

The bishop is not especially well placed after 10...♗c5 11.♘b5 0–0 12.♗f4 h6 13.♖fc1 ♖fc8 14.a3. When playing his 10th move, Black may have overlooked that a queenside expansion is part of White's main plan. 14...♘e8 15.b4 ♗e7 16.♗e3 ♗d8 17.♘fd4± White will proceed with his typical slow play on both wings, Loginov – Sherzer, Budapest 1990.

11.♘b5

An excellent square for the knight, which is one of the most important consequences of the queen exchange on b6. After a2-a3 and b2-b4, the knight is invulnerable, while ensuring the absolute safety of his queenside pawns at the same time. A perfect symbiosis!

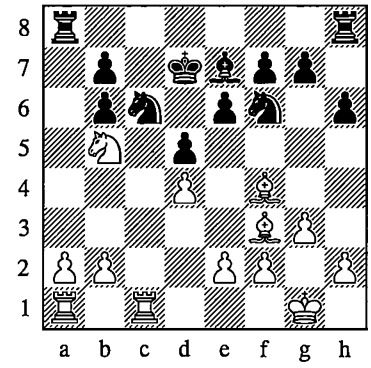
It should be mentioned that after 11.♗e3, aiming to set up the same kind of play as in line E2, Black can answer with 11...♗c5! taking advantage of the previous "centralization" of the a7-pawn, if I may call it that.

11...♔d7 12.♗f4

I believe this is the critical plan. Since Black has an extra piece to defend his queenside compared with the previously examined games, the mechanical concentration of white forces will not necessarily promise an advantage. The final outcome depends on White's ability to create some tactical threats to endanger the enemy king. Concretely, this can be achieved by preparing e2-e4, in order to provoke the opening of the d-file.

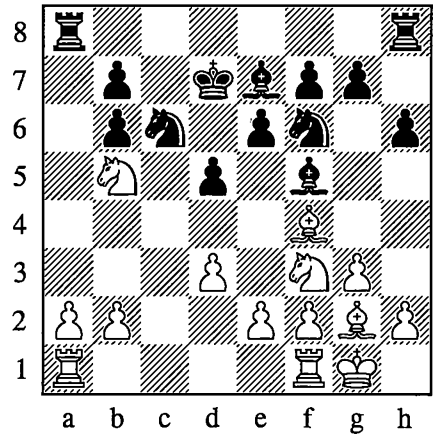
12...♗e7

In many lines Black's light-squared bishop remains out of play, which may justify the attempt to exchange it for the f3 knight with: 12...♗g4 13.♖fc1 ♗c5 14.d4!? ♗xf3 (forced, since 14...♗e7? 15.♘e5† ♘xe5 16.dxe5+– leaves the black king in danger) 15.♗xf3 ♗e7 (again, opening the c-file with 15...♘xd4 16.♘xd4 ♗xd4 is not recommended because of 17.♖c7† ♔e8 18.e3 ♗xb2 19.♖b1 ♗a3 20.♖xb6±)



In the game Markowski – Lopez Martinez, Merida 2005, White could have consolidated his small advantage with 16.h4!N±, ensuring the stability of his bishops.

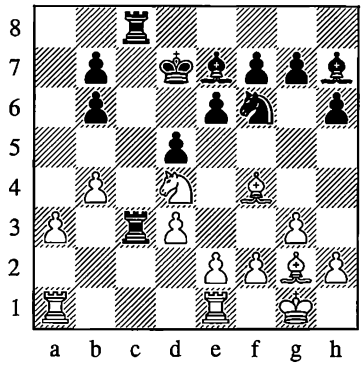
In this line, 14.d4 is a bit too straightforward for my taste. White gives up the possibility of opening the centre with e2-e4 under optimal circumstances; 14.a3± looks more natural.



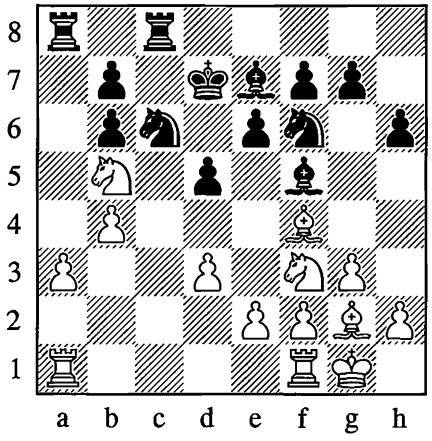
13.a3 ♖hc8 14.b4

This move is not necessary yet, because ...♖a5 is not such a strong threat. After 14.♖fc1 ♖a5 15.♘bd4 ♘xd4 16.♘xd4 Black manages to

take control of the c-file with 16...♖ac5, but since he lacks an entry point, he cannot develop on this small success. 17.♖e1 ♗h7 18.b4 ♖c3



In Tseitlin – Anikaev, Severodonetsk 1982, White could have regrouped with 19.♗c1!N ♘e8 20.♗b2 ♖3c7, when everything would be ready to open the centre with 21.e4 dxe4 22.dxe4 ♘d6 23.♖ad1 ♔e8 24.♗a1±. The black king has been pushed away from the centre and the h7-bishop is cut off from the action. At the same time, the weakness of Black's queenside pawns is still an issue.



14...g5

The only active possibility for Black.

15.♘e5†

Instead in the following game, by aiming to open the position at any cost White made too many positional concessions: 15.♗e3 ♗d8 16.h4 ♘g4 17.hxg5 ♘xe3 18.fxe3 hxg5 19.e4 dxe4 20.dxe4 ♗g6 21.♖ad1† ♔e7= Black is fine despite the small material deficit, Korchnoi – Kudrin, London 1982.

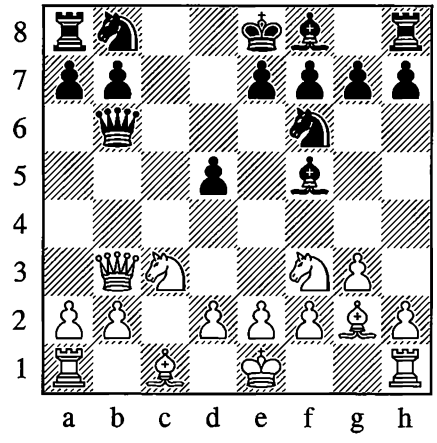
15...♘xe5 16.♗xe5 ♗g4

Black can simplify the position further with 16...♘g4 17.♗d4 ♗f6, but after 18.h3 ♗xd4 19.♘xd4 ♘f6 20.f4 g4 21.hxg4 ♗xg4 22.♔f2± the weakness of the h6-pawn, combined with the absence of the king from that wing, leaves Black under pressure across the whole board.

17.f3 ♗h5 18.e4±

With his light-squared bishop cut off from the play, Black faces a long passive defence, Khasin – Sorokin, Kursk 1987.

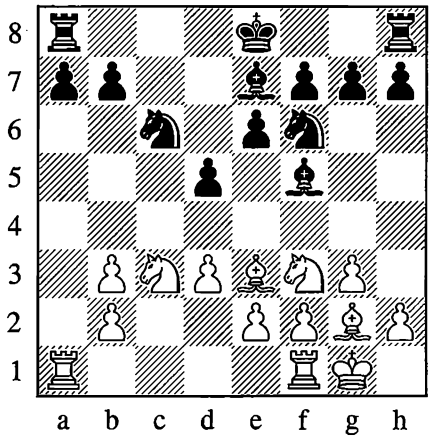
E2) 7.♘c3



An interesting dynamic concept. White intends to force the exchange of queens on b3 rather than b6, in order to open the a-file and win an important tempo by attacking the a7-pawn. The plan is that this will support an early opening of the centre, offering White a lasting initiative.

7...e6 8.d3 ♘c6 9.0–0 ♗e7 10.♗e3 ♕xb3 11.axb3

The critical position. For the time being, the a7-pawn is well defended, while the e2-pawn has its path blocked. However, the calm is only apparent. White intends to play ♘d4, forcing an exchange on this square. This would eliminate a key defender of the a7-pawn and also free the way for the e-pawn.



Black has two main possibilities, **E21) 11...0–0** and **E22) 11...♘g4**.

E21) 11...0–0

After this neutral move White takes over the initiative with Barcza's favourite method.

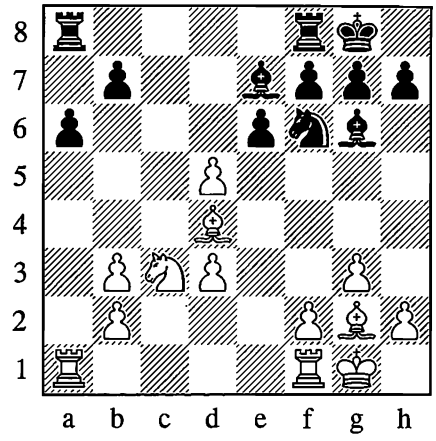
12.♘d4! ♘xd4 13.♗xd4 a6 14.e4

We can see that Black only lacked one tempo (...♖fd8) to parry White's threat; the tempo was lost defending the a7-pawn with 13...a6.

14...♗g6!

After 14...dxe4 15.dxe4 ♗g6 Kiril Georgiev recommended 16.e5, with an initiative. His evaluation is correct, but in the only practical game where this position was reached, White preferred the more neutral 16.♖fd1, when Black went completely astray in what is an unpleasant position anyway. 16...♖ab8 17.♗b6 ♖be8 18.f4 ♗d8 19.♗a7 e5 20.f5 ♗h5 21.♖d2 ♗c7 22.h3+– And White won a piece in Volzhin – Bu, Koszalin 1999.

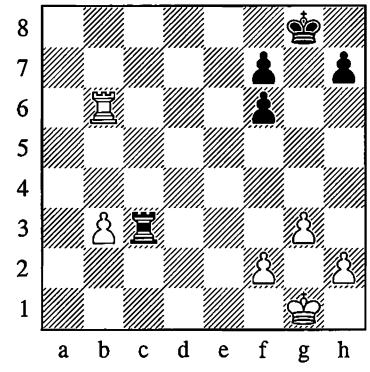
15.exd5



15...♘xd5

Black hopes draw by mass simplifications.

Keeping the knights on the board only complicates his defensive task. 15...exd5 16.♖fe1 ♗b4 17.♗xf6 This resource is not available in the main line. 17...gxf6 18.♗xd5 ♗xd3 (18...♖ab8 19.♗e4± allows White to consolidate his material advantage) 19.♗xb7 ♖a7 20.♗e4! After the exchange that follows, Black is deprived of the hope of reaching a draw with opposite-coloured bishops. 20...♖d8 21.♖ed1 ♖ad7 22.♗xd3 ♖xd3 23.♖xd3 ♖xd3 24.♖xa6 ♗xc3 25.bxc3 ♖xc3 26.♖b6



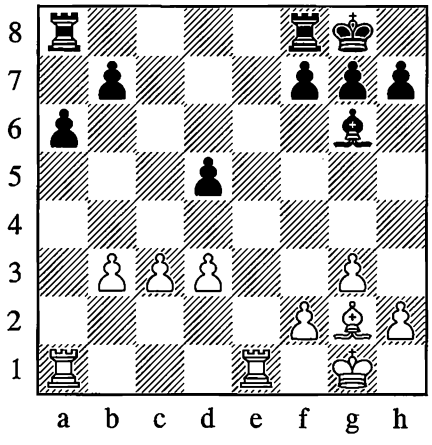
White has reached a favourable form of the thematic rook ending with an extra pawn on the queenside. The position is difficult to

analyse exhaustively, but I feel that it should be a win for White. Black's kingside structure has been seriously weakened, which has two main effects. He will not be able to create a passed pawn easily if the white king abandons the kingside to support the b-pawn. Also, White can combine the threat of advancing the b-pawn with a massive kingside attack, which was what happened in Marin – Danilov, Romania 2009.

16.♘xd5 exd5 17.♖fe1!±

It is instructive to follow the way Kiril Georgiev maintained the initiative for several moves, until this resulted in a stable advantage. Move by move, the feeling is that Black will just be one tempo too late...

17...♗b4 18.♗c3 ♗xc3 19.bxc3



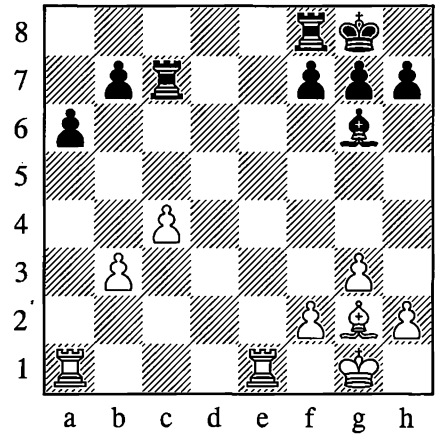
White has repaired his structure and now his pawns are more actively placed than they were on a2 and b2.

19...♖ac8

Black avoids placing his rook on the d-file, which could result in a loss of time later. For instance: 19...♖fd8 20.c4 dxc4 21.dxc4 ♖d7 22.♖ad1 ♖c7 (22...♖xd1 23.♖xd1 ♗c2 does not avoid the loss of a pawn after 24.♖d7 ♗xb3 25.♗xb7 followed by ♗xa6) 23.♖d6± Followed by ♖b6, as given by Georgiev.

While double-checking this line, I found the following beautiful variation: 20...♗xd3 21.♗xd5 ♖d7 Apparently, Black has managed to consolidate, but now there is the surprising 22.♖xa6!!±.

20.c4 dxc4 21.dxc4 ♖c7



22.♖a4!

Now that there is no play along the d-file, White chooses another route towards the b7-pawn.

22...b5

22...♗f5 would lead to a very passive position for Black after 23.♖b4 ♗c8 24.♖b6 ♖d8 25.♗d5± as given by Georgiev.

23.cxb5 axb5 24.♖b4 ♗d3 25.♗e4!

By exchanging this important defender of the b5-pawn, White will force the enemy rooks to remain passive.

25...♗xe4

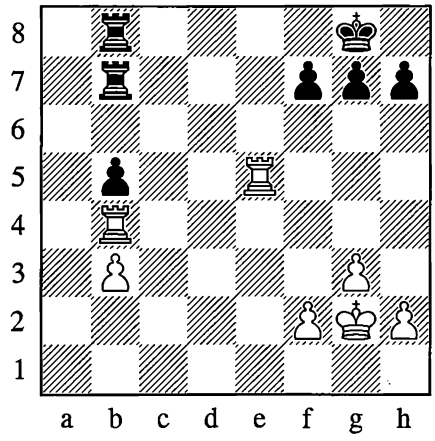
25...♖e8? loses to 26.♗xh7†!.

26.♖exe4 ♖b7

As pointed out by Georgiev, 26...♖c5 would have failed to keep the rooks on more active

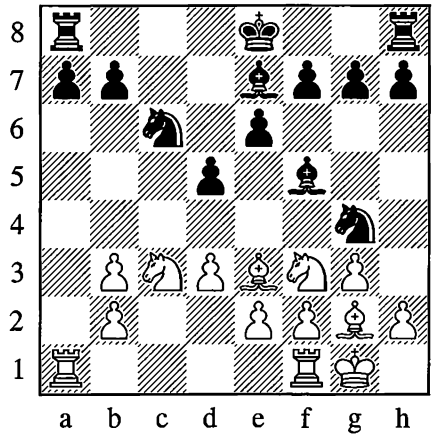
positions because of 27.♖e7 ♖b8 28.♖d4 with the threats of ♖b7! or simply ♖dd7.

27.♖e5 ♖fb8 28.♔g2±



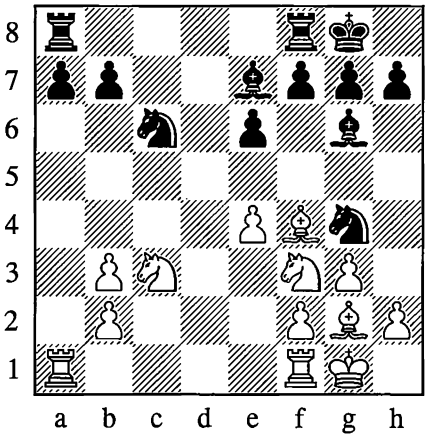
Black has landed in a difficult position. He probably should abandon the b5-pawn as soon as possible, although the ending with an extra white b-pawn is by no means easily drawn. In any case, in the game Ki. Georgiev – Suba, Lugano 1987, White converted his advantage into a win.

E22) 11...♘g4



In view of the fluid course of White's initiative in the previous line, we can understand that it is important for Black to dismantle the mechanism of White's minor pieces.

12.♗f4 0–0 13.e4 dxe4 14.dxe4 ♗g6



15.e5!

White takes full advantage of the hidden drawbacks of the knight jump to g4. First of all, he has carried out e2-e4 effortlessly and now he cuts off the knight's retreat, threatening to force it out of play with 16.h3 ♘h6 17.g4.

15...♗d3

Black clears the way for the g-pawn, in order to be able to meet h2-h3 with the counterattacking move ...g7-g5.

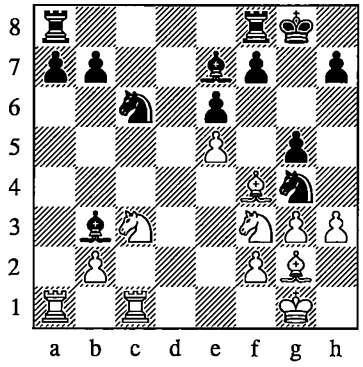
The other way of doing this was 15...♗c2, but after 16.h3 g5 (if 16...♘h6 then White defends his b3-pawn indirectly with 17.♖fc1± when 17...♗xb3? is met by 18.♘d2 ♘d4 19.♗xb7± regaining the pawn with interest) White has 17.♗xg5!? ♗xg5 18.hxg4± taking advantage of the fact that the white rook has not been decoyed onto the c1-h6 diagonal by the intermediate move ...♗d3.

16.♖fd1! ♗c2

For several decades, the game mentioned below has been considered a "perfect draw" on the basis of Polugaevsky's annotations.

17.♖d2!N

This is a significant improvement for White, which allows him to retain the initiative. Instead Fischer played 17.♖dc1?! which, from an abstract point of view, looks like a loss of time as it moves the rook twice along the same rank. The concrete reason for leaving the d2-square available for the knight may have been the possibility that after 17...♗xb3 18.h3 Black would transpose to a line from the previous comment after 18...♘h6. However, Black instead replied 18...g5!.



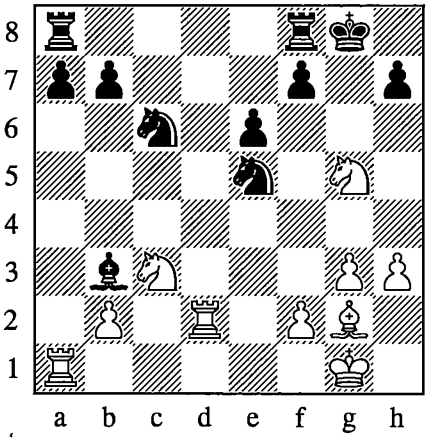
And eventually Black held an only symbolically worse ending in Fischer – Polugaevsky, Palma de Mallorca (izt) 1970.

Fischer had had a slow start at the Interzonal, which eventually turned out to be one of his greatest successes and the first step in his campaign leading to the world title. The game against Polugaevsky was of crucial importance for him and it is significant that he (probably for the first time in his life) abandoned his trademark 1.e4 for 1.c4. Apparently, Fischer knew all about the dynamic virtues of the English Opening. In any case, two years later he opened four of his games in the match against Spassky with 1.c4...

17...♗xb3 18.h3 g5

In fact, 18...♘h6 is not a problem because of 19.♖d7, threatening to leave Black's bishops hanging after ♘d2, or simply capture on b7, for instance 19...♘f5 20.g4 ♘h4 21.♘xh4 ♗xh4 22.♖xb7±.

19.♗xg5 ♗xg5 20.♘xg5 ♘gxe5



If White had played ♖c1, his rook would have remained awfully passive in view of the threat of ...♘d3. But now it can be activated along the d-file.

21.f4 ♘c4

21...h6 would drive the knight away and relieve the pressure against the f7-pawn, but after 22.♘ge4 ♘c4 23.♖d7 ♖ab8 the knight can put pressure on the other wing with 24.♘c5±.

22.♖d7 ♘4a5

This looks like an artificial way of defending the queenside, but 22...♖ab8? would be simply bad now because of 23.♗xc6! bxc6 24.♖axa7+– with decisive threats along the seventh rank.

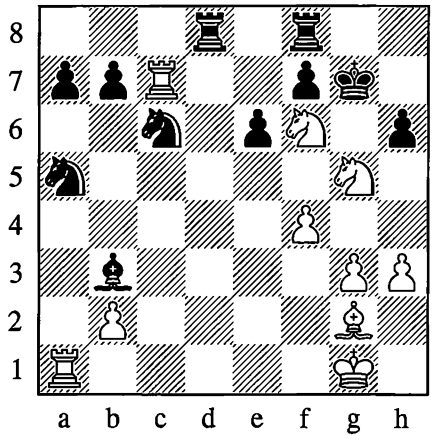
23.♘ce4

A logical continuation. With Black's minor pieces concentrated on the queenside, White starts an attack on the other wing, taking advantage of the weakness of the f6-square. However, the more restrained 23.♖a3±, leaving Black's pieces hanging, is also playable.

23...♖ad8 24.♖c7! h6

Black cannot harass the enemy rook with 24...♖c8 because of 25.♖xc8 ♖xc8 26.♘xf7! restoring material equality and keeping the better structure.

25.♘f6† ♔g7



26.♘h5†!

With most of his pieces involved in the attack, White can start sacrificial play despite the absence of queens.

26...♔g6?!

Activating the king looks like the critical test of the minor-piece attack, but it will lead to disaster. 26...♔g8 is safer, but after 27.♘e4± the black king would still not achieve its desired comfort.

27.♗e4†! ♔xh5

27...f5? leads to mate after 28.♖g7† ♔xh5 29.♗f3#.

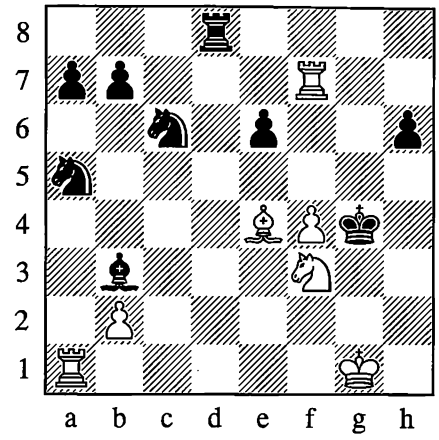
28.♘f3!

Threatening 29.g4 mate!

28...♖g8

The only defence. If 28...f5? then White renews the threat with 29.♖g7!+–.

29.g4† ♖xg4† 30.hxg4† ♔xg4 31.♖xf7±



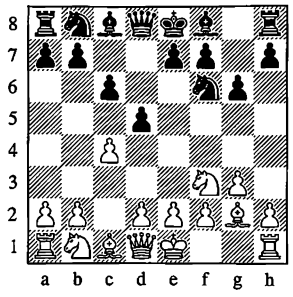
With his king exposed and his minor pieces far away, Black is in trouble despite the approximate material equality.

Conclusion

Although the bishop is more stable on f5 than on g4, if compared with the previous chapter, the early weakening of the b7-square still causes Black some trouble. In the main line I believe that choosing between 7.♕xb6 and 7.♘c3 is purely a matter of taste. I would probably pick the variation depending on my mood on the particular day.

Chapter 7

Anti-Slav Systems



4...g6

Variation Index

1.c4 ♘f6 2.g3 c6 3.♗g2 d5 4.♘f3 g6

5.b3 ♗g7 6.♗b2 0–0 7.0–0

A) 7...a5 111

B) 7...♖e8 8.♕c2 ♘bd7 9.♘c3 115

B1) 9...e5 116

B2) 9...♘c5 116

B3) 9...♘f8 117

B4) 9...♘b6 118

C) 7...♗g4 8.d3 119

C1) 8...♕c8 120

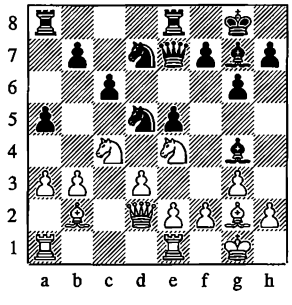
C2) 8...♗xf3 121

C3) 8...♘bd7 9.♘bd2 ♖e8 10.♖c1 e5 11.cxd5 cxd5 12.h3! ♗xf3 13.♘xf3 123

C31) 13...e4 125

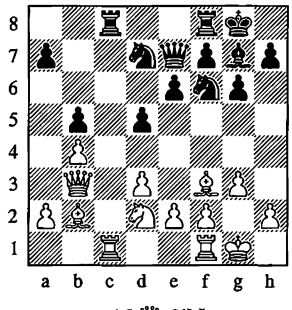
C32) 13...♗f8 125

B1) after 17...♘d5



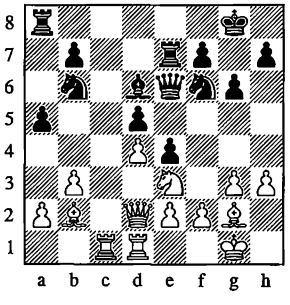
18.h3!N

C2) after 14...♖ac8



15.♕a3!N

C32) after 20...e4



21.♖c5!!±

1.c4 ♘f6 2.g3 c6 3.♗g2 d5 4.♘f3 g6

Although not very fashionable, this system of development in the spirit of the Schlechter variation of the Slav is one of the soundest against the move order employed by White. Since the early development of the c8-bishop is not without risks, as we have seen, Black delays it until a more favourable moment, by developing his kingside first while keeping the c8-h3 diagonal open.

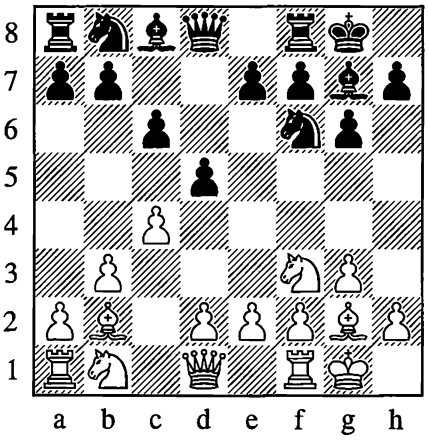
White could transpose to a symmetrical Grünfeld by exchanging on d5, but that is not in the spirit of this book.

5.b3

The main purpose of this move is to neutralize the enemy bishop's action along the a1-h8 diagonal. Defending the c4-pawn is not necessary yet (5.0–0 dxc4 6.♘a3 would be one of the sidelines in Chapter 3 on page 23) and if this were the last move's aim, it would be in obvious contradiction with the philosophy behind the whole system of development I have been preaching about so far.

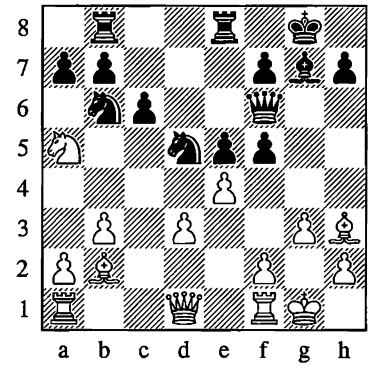
White can afford to switch to a slow mode of development because Black will need considerably more time to prepare ...e5 than in the lines with ...♗f5 or ...♗g4, when he plays ...e6, ...♗d6, ...♘bd7 and so on.

5...♗g7 6.♗b2 0–0 7.0–0



Both sides have completed the routine moves and the time has come for Black to define his plans. He can fight for space on the queenside with **A) 7...a5** or threaten to occupy the centre with **B) 7...♖e8** followed by ...♘bd7, or develop his queen's bishop with **C) 7...♗g4**.

Instead 7...♗f5 is closely related to line C, but Black's possibilities are restricted to the plan based on ...♗h3, because otherwise the bishop would be badly placed on f5. For instance, 8.d3 ♖e8?! (8...♕c8 9.♘bd2 ♗h3 transposes below) 9.♘bd2 ♘bd7 10.♘d4! and White obtains the bishop pair, while provoking some structural defects in Black's position at the same time. 10...e5 11.♘xf5 gxf5 12.cxd5 ♘xd5 (Black's massive centre would be vulnerable after 12...cxd5 13.♘f3±, when 13...e4?! only makes things worse after 14.♘h4 ♘h5 15.♗xg7 ♘xg7 16.♗h3 ♖e5 17.d4 ♖e6 18.♘xf5± with an extra pawn for White in Chernyshov – Iljin, Pardubice 1997.) 13.♘c4 ♘7b6 14.♗h3 ♕f6 15.♘a5 ♖ab8 16.e4±



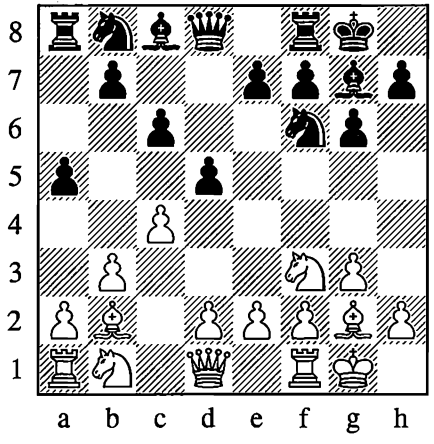
White had a dream version of the reversed Dragon in Dizdarevic – Ljubicic, Solin 1994.

Before moving on, I would like to mention an important aspect. Against virtually any black move, White can transpose to a relatively favourable line of the symmetrical Grünfeld by playing d4. If we compare with the genuine

Grünfeld move order 1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘f3 ♗g7 4.g3 0–0 5.♗g2 c6 6.0–0 d5 7.b3, White has avoided the annoying variation 7...dxc4 8.bxc4 c5, where he does not have any advantage at all. For this variation, please refer to Chapter 11.

However, keeping the game within "English" territory also offers White an entirely viable game, as can be inferred from the lines given below. White's standard plan is d2-d3 followed by ♘bd2, keeping the c4- and e4-squares well defended and the e5-square under piece pressure, in the best tradition of hypermodernism. Later, he may start a slow queenside attack with b3-b4 or increase his influence in the centre with e2-e4.

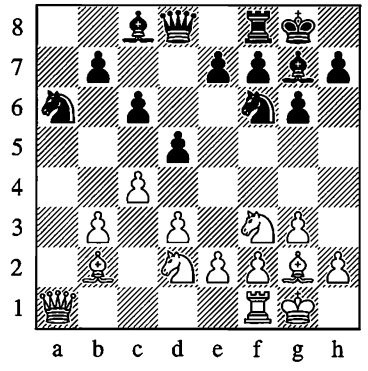
A) 7...a5



This seemingly active move does not solve Black's problems. The attempt to undermine the queenside light squares would only be justified if White would advance his d-pawn to the fourth rank, leaving the c4-pawn vulnerable. Otherwise, the advance of the a-pawn only delays Black's development, which, together with the departure of the dark-squared bishop from the a3-f8 diagonal, also prevents him from taking advantage of the relative weakness of the b4-square. If Black develops his queen's knight to a6, in order to keep the b4-square under some pressure, it would weaken his fight for the e5-square.

8.d3 a4 9.♘bd2 ♘a6

Black refrains from exchanges on the queenside, avoiding activating the white queen. The following is an illustration of this situation: 9...axb3 10.axb3 ♖xa1 11.♕xa1 ♘a6



12.♕a3!

Preventing Black from consolidating his knight on b4.

12...♗e6

12...♕b6 can be met by 13.♗d4!± when 13...c5 loses a pawn to 14.♗xf6.

13.♗e5 h6 14.♘d4 ♗d7 15.c5!

White has established control over the most important dark squares, while the a6-knight has remained out of play.

15...♘g4

Aiming to release White's pressure in the centre, but misplacing the other knight, too.

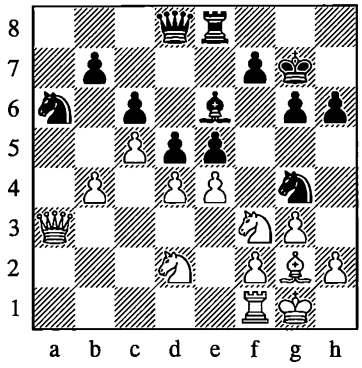
16.♗xg7 ♔xg7 17.b4 e5 18.♘4f3 ♖e8 19.e4!

After stabilizing the situation in the centre, White retains the safer king position and the more harmonious piece placement.

19...♗e6

According to Psakhis, Black should immediately have put the e4-pawn under pressure with 19...♘f6!?±, thus preventing the game continuation.

20.d4!±



The centre opens in White's favour, Psakhis – Svidler, Haifa (rapid) 2000.

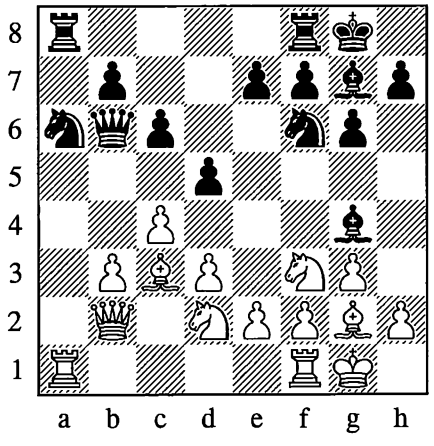
10.♗c3

White takes the b4-square under control and prepares to transfer the queen to b2.

10...♗g4 11.♕c2 axb3

Sooner or later, this exchange would have been practically forced. White threatened ♕b2 followed by b3-b4, when the a4-pawn would have remained weak.

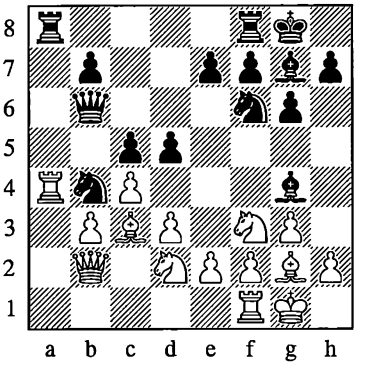
12.axb3 ♕b6 13.♕b2



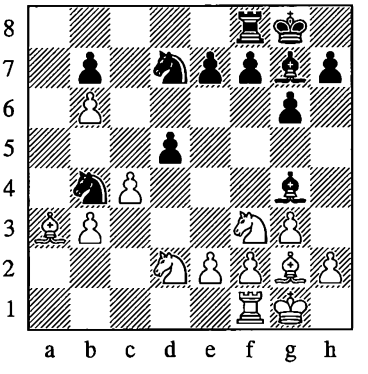
13...♖fc8

Instead it may seem logical to occupy the b4-square, aiming to prevent the queenside attack. However, as the subsequent analysis shows, Black is not prepared for such an approach. 13...♘b4?! 14.♖a4! Black loses stability immediately. 14...♖xa4 15.bxa4 c5 16.♖b1± Black is hanging along the b-file.

14...c5 is safer only in appearance.



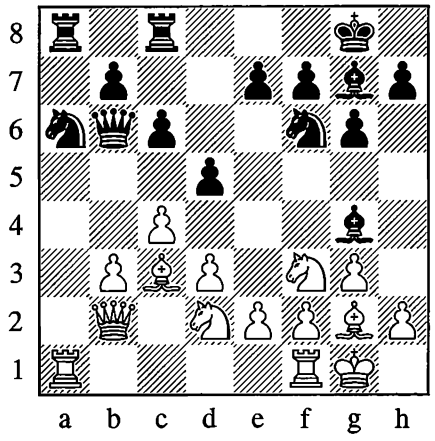
15.d4!N White shakes the enemy queenside to its very foundations. (15.♖fa1 allowed Black to hold his own after 15...♖xa4 16.♖xa4 ♗d7 in Damljanovic – Leko, Cacak 1996) 15...♖xa4 This attempt to release the tension does not work out well tactically. 16.dxc5! Without fearing the forthcoming simplifications. 16...♖a2!? The best chance. Against any queen move, White would capture on a4. 17.cxb6 ♖xb2 18.♗xb2 ♘d7 19.♗a3±



Black will have a hard time retrieving the missing pawn, while White has a strong initiative.

After the text move, we can state that both sides have completed their development, but White

retains an advantage because of his better coordination and more flexible structure. In the next phase of the game he will use these circumstances to win plenty of space.



14.b4 ♘e8

The exchange of the dark-squared bishops would bring Black some relief.

15.d4!

Crossing Black's plans and leaving the knight misplaced on e8.

15...♕d8 16.b5 ♘ac7

After 16...cxb5 17.cxd5 Black would lose ground in the centre.

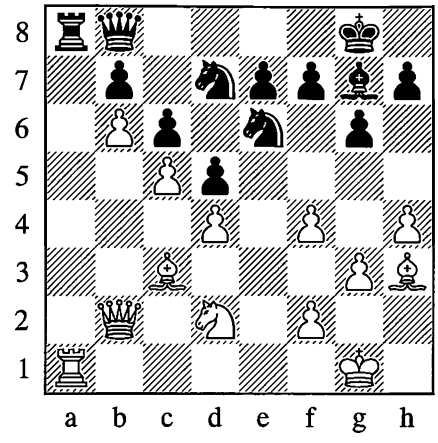
17.b6!

An important strategic decision. It may seem that this move kills White's queenside play. The truth is that in the long run, the relative weakness of the b7-pawn will cause Black many worries.

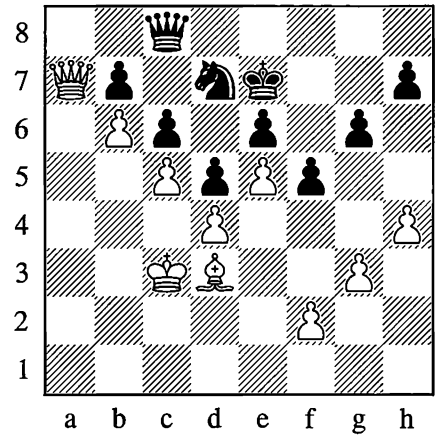
17...♘e6 18.c5 ♘f6 19.h3 ♗xf3 20.exf3!

Another important element of White's global plan – the doubled pawns are not at all weak. White will be able to prevent the thematic counterplay based on ...e5 by playing f3-f4, without leaving a chronic weakness on e4. The opening of the e-file is another element that contributes to Black having a passive position.

20...♘d7 21.f4 ♖xa1 22.♖xa1 ♖a8 23.h4 ♕b8 24.♗h3±



White has achieved complete domination. Black's position may seem hard to break, but the huge queenside space advantage offers White tactical ideas. After a series of exchanges, the following position was reached:



It may seem that with all his pawns on light squares, Black could keep the activity of the enemy bishop under control, but the solidity of his position is deceptive.

42.♗a6!!

I had been preparing this move ever since I had blocked the queenside right after the

opening. White gives up the bishop for the sake of opening the seventh rank and also creates a dangerous passed pawn.

It would have been tempting to activate the king to the maximum before sacrificing the bishop, but this would have allowed Black to reach his desired fortress. 42.♔b4?! ♘b8! (preventing ♗a6) 43.♕a8 Pinning the knight and renewing the threat. 43...♔d8! After defending his queen, Black is out of danger on the queenside. He will not fall into zugzwang because he has two favourable squares (d7 and d8) for his king.

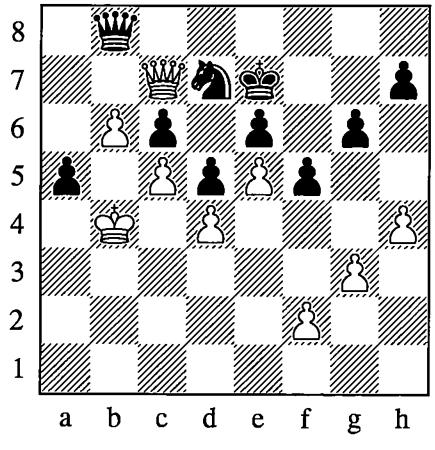
42...bxa6 43.♕c7 ♕b8

The only way to avoid material losses. Instead 43...♕a8 would allow 44.♕d6† ♔d8 45.♕xe6 (threatening to win the queen with 46.♕g8†) 45...♕b8 46.♕g8† ♔e7 47.♕xh7†+– and Black will lose his entire kingside.

44.♔b4

Although he is a piece down, White takes his time to improve his position slowly. It is essential to transfer the king to a safe zone, as 44.♕xc6? ♘xe5! would allow Black to save himself with a perpetual check.

44...a5†



45.♔a3!

The king has to choose his steps with care.

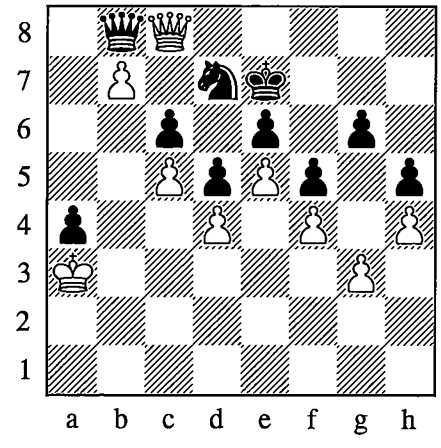
45.♔a4? would lose to: 45...♕xc7 46.bxc7 ♘xc5† A strong intermediate check, clearing the d7-square with gain of time. 47.dxc5 ♔d7

45.♔xa5 would allow the activation of the black queen with 45...♕a8† 46.♕a7 ♕b8. White faces the threat ...♔d8, with an optimal regrouping, which would force him to repeat the position with 47.♕c7=.

45...♕a8 46.b7 ♕b8 47.♕c8

The idea of this move is to place Black in zugzwang in the near future. Instead the hurried 47.♕xc6 would allow 47...♔d8, when Black should be able to hold the position with ...♕c7.

47...a4 48.f3 h6 49.f4 h5



The kingside moves have been exhausted and White has to recreate this zugzwang position by losing a tempo on the other wing.

50.♔b2! a3† 51.♔a2 ♕a7

Finally, Black has been forced to play this move, allowing the capture of the c6-pawn.

52.♕xc6 ♕a5

With the queen on a7, 52...♔d8 would not save the game because of 53.♕c8† ♔e7 54.c6+–.

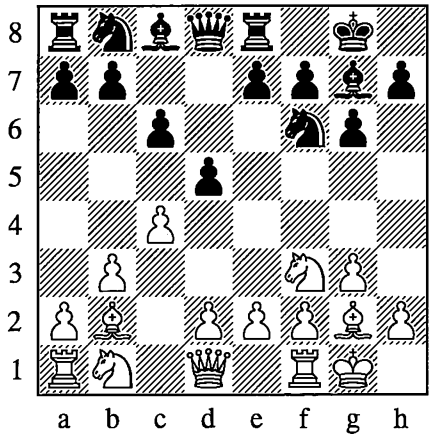
53.♕d6† ♔e8 54.♕xe6† ♔d8 55.♕g8† ♔e7 56.♕g7† ♔e8

During the game I considered this to be a blunder, costing Black an important pawn. However, 56...♔d8 would not be any better because of the spectacular 57.♕f6†! with favourable simplifications: 57...♘xf6 58.b8=♕† ♔d7 59.c6†! Forcing the king to occupy an unfavourable square. 59...♔xc6 60.♕c8† Black cannot avoid the exchange of queens, which would lead to a lost pawn ending. 60...♕c7 61.♕xc7† ♔xc7 62.exf6 ♔d7 63.♔xa3+–

57.♕xg6† ♔e7 58.♕d6† ♔e8 59.♕e6† ♔d8 60.♕g8† ♔e7 61.♕h7† ♔e6 62.♕g6† ♔e7 63.♕d6† ♔e8 64.b8=♕† ♘xb8 65.♕xb8†

White won this queen ending 20 moves later, Marin – Espinosa Aranda, Benasque 2009.

B) 7...♖e8



If White intends to refrain from occupying the centre with d2-d4, Black's plan of carrying out ...e7-e5 can pose some practical problems. The alternate move order is 7...♘bd7 8.♕c2 ♖e8. If Black deviates with the slightly unusual and rather passive 8...b6, White should play 9.d4 followed by occupying the centre with e2-e4. For instance, 9...♗b7 (or 9...♗a6 10.♘bd2± intending e2-e4) 10.♘c3 Threatening e2-e4. 10...♗a6 Black tries to be tricky, attacking the c4-pawn after White has defined the queen's knight's intentions, but losing time like this cannot be good. 11.♘d2 ♖c8 12.e4± Wojtkiewicz – Komljenovic, Valencia 1990.

8.♕c2

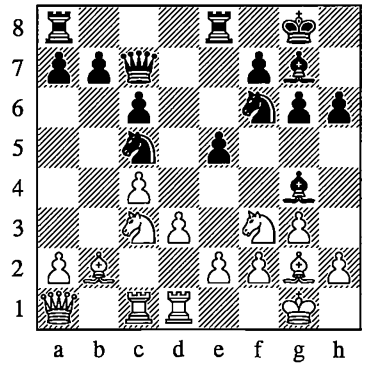
This slight deviation from the initial plan aims to cross Black's intentions.

8...♘bd7 9.♘c3

The knight is much more active here than on d2. It keeps the enemy centre under pressure and is ready to jump to b5 after an eventual exchange on d5.

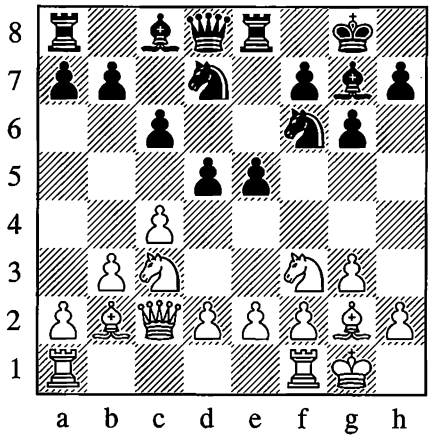
Black can occupy the centre immediately with **B1) 9...e5**, or prepare this move with **B2) 9...♘c5**, **B3) 9...♘f8** or **B4) 9...♘b6.**

Giving up the tension in the centre with 9...dxc4 10.bxc4 before playing 10...e5 leaves White with the more flexible position. Black gains easy development for his pieces, but lacks a constructive plan against White's compact structure. 11.d3 ♕c7 12.♖fd1 ♘c5 13.♖ac1 h6 14.♕b1 ♗g4 15.♕a1



White's slow way of making progress is typical for this structure. 15...♗xf3 (Black probably feared that 15...♖ad8 16.♘d2 would leave the bishop without scope) 16.♗xf3 ♖ad8 17.♕b1 h5. The only constructive pawn move. 18.e3 Threatening to occupy the centre with d3-d4. 18...♘e6 19.♘d5! ♕b8 20.♘xf6† ♗xf6 21.♗c3. Clearing space for a slow queenside attack. 21...♕c7 22.♕b2 ♘c5 23.♕c2 ♘e6 24.♖b1 ♖e7 25.♕a4± White had strong queenside pressure in Rotstein – De la Riva, France 2000.

B1) 9...e5



This seems to be the most consistent continuation, but White is well prepared against it.

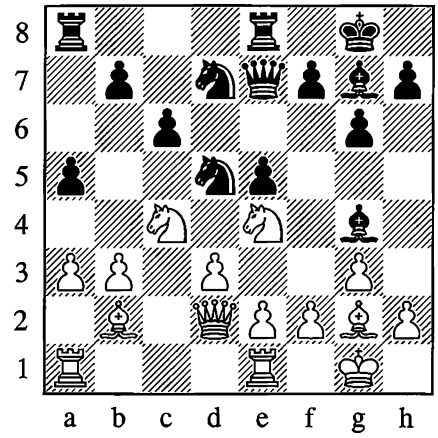
10.cxd5 ♘xd5

Keeping the integrity of the centre with 10...cxd5 leads to trouble after 11.♘b5 ♖e6 12.♕c7 ♕e8 13.♖fc1 ♗f8 14.♘xa7!± as in Seeman – Nystrom, Helsinki 2000.

11.d3

White has achieved a comfortable version of the reversed Dragon.

11...♕e7 12.♘d2 ♘7b6 13.♘ce4 ♗g4 14.♖fe1 ♘d7 15.♘c4 ♘b4 16.♕d2 a5 17.a3 ♘d5



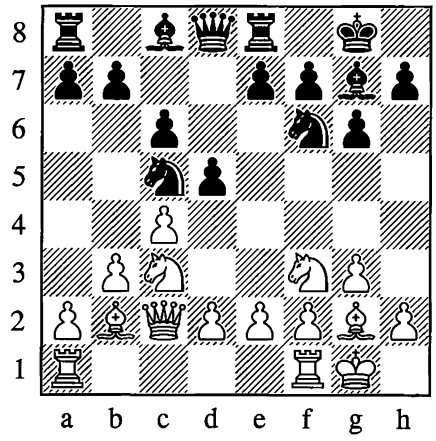
18.h3!N

Winning a pawn with 18.f3 ♗e6 19.♘xa5 leads to unclear consequences after 19...f5, as in Najdorf – Sanchez, Mar del Plata 1959.

18...♗e6 19.♖ac1±

White has completed the mobilization of his forces and is ready for concrete operations, such as d3-d4 and/or ♘ed6.

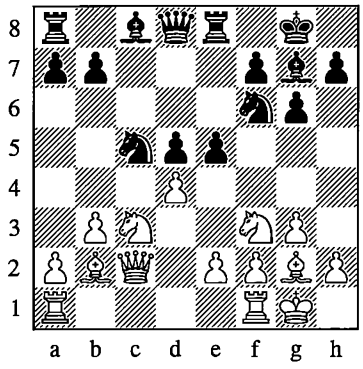
B2) 9...♘c5



This is a rather artificial way of completing development.

10.d3 ♗f5

If 10...e5 then White can disrupt the enemy centre with 11.cxd5 cxd5 12.d4.



For instance: 12...♗f5 13.♕d1 exd4 14.♘xd4±.

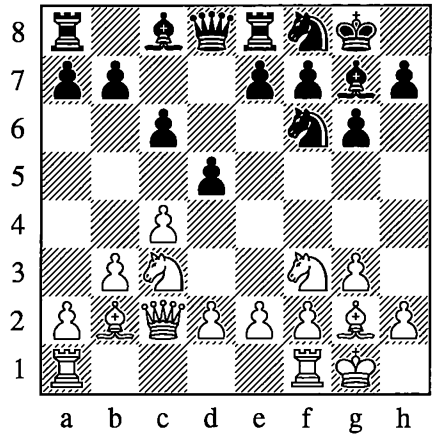
11.♖ac1 may be even trickier, leaving Black hanging.

10...d4? loses a pawn to 11.♘xd4 ♕xd4 12.♘e4, since the counter-combination 12...♕xb2 13.♕xb2 ♘fxe4 fails to 14.♕a3 ♗xa1 15.♖xa1+–, when Black will lose one of his knights.

11.cxd5 cxd5 12.b4 ♘e6 13.h3±

White's pieces are more harmoniously placed, while Black's position lacks flexibility, Sunye Neto – Granda Zuniga, Cienfuegos 1985.

B3) 9...♘f8



This may look a bit strange, but it reveals a deep understanding of the position. The knight clears the way for the queen's bishop, creating the threat of ...e7-e5 and challenging the enemy queen's stability. In doing so, it makes use of the square that was made available by the rook move. Later the knight may jump to e6, putting the d4-square under pressure.

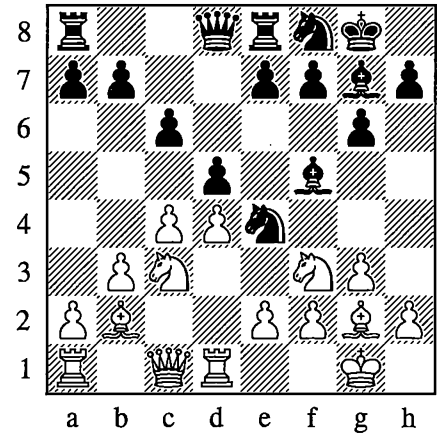
10.d4

Finally, White has to occupy the centre. Otherwise, ...e7-e5 would at least equalize. However, this is not a full transposition to the Grünfeld, because in that opening Black would not play ...♖e8 and ...♘f8, while White would find a better square for his queen.

My personal feeling is that against this plan, an earlier d2-d4 would be the simplest way to retain a small advantage, because in the Grünfeld Black usually plays ...♗f5 and ...♘e4, while ...♘bd7 is somewhat passive.

10.cxd5 cxd5 11.♘b5 is inoffensive because of 11...♗f5 12.d3 ♖c8=, L. Bronstein – Sabao, Caseros 1974.

10...♗f5 11.♕c1 ♘e4 12.♖d1



12...♘xc3

A typical manoeuvre. Black hurries to clear the e4-square for his bishop. Botvinnik criticized this move, recommending 12...♖c8. However, after 13.♕e3 with the threat ♘h4,

Black would probably have to play 13...♘xc3 14.♗xc3 ♗e4 anyway, when 15.♗h3!± unpins the knight with gain of time and leaves the enemy bishop vulnerable.

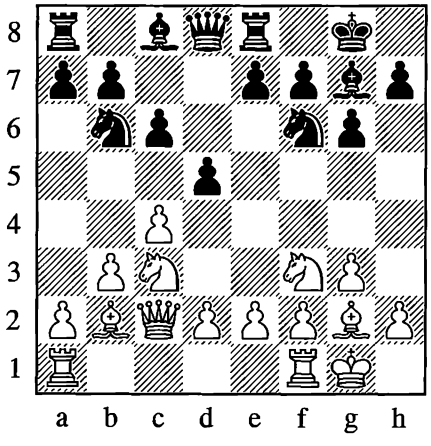
13.♗xc3 ♗e4 14.♘e1

Here, too, 14.♕e3 comes into consideration. White intends to get rid of the pin without allowing his structure to be spoiled with ...♗xf3. 14...♘e6 15.♗f1 (15.♗h3 would lead to excessive simplifications after 15...♗xf3 16.♕xf3 ♘g5 or 16.♗xe6 ♗e4 17.f3 ♗f5 18.♗xf5 gxf5 19.♕f4 e6. White does not seem to have time to start a kingside attack with 20.♔h1 followed by ♖g1 and g3-g4, because Black's counterplay initiated by 20...a5 would be quite fast.) 15...♗xf3 Otherwise, the bishop would feel insecure after ♘e5. 16.♕xf3 ♘g5 17.♕d3 ♘e4 18.♗e1± The pair of bishops ensures White a long-term advantage. Refer also to the line B2 from Chapter 11.

14...♗xg2 15.♔xg2 ♘d7 16.♕c2 ♕c7 17.♗b2 ♖ac8 18.♖ac1±

White retains a stable space advantage. As proven by the game Botvinnik – Stahlberg, Moscow 1956, which White won, the freeing move ...e7-e5 is not so easy to carry out.

B4) 9...♘b6



This move has similar ideas as 9...♘f8, but attempts to be more forcing by attacking the c4-pawn. However, the knight is not especially well placed on b6, as it is restricted by the white pawns.

10.cxd5

Blocking the position with 10.c5 would offer Black a good game after 10...♘bd7 followed by ...e7-e5 and/or ...b7-b6, but the text move leaves White with pleasant play in an almost symmetrical position..

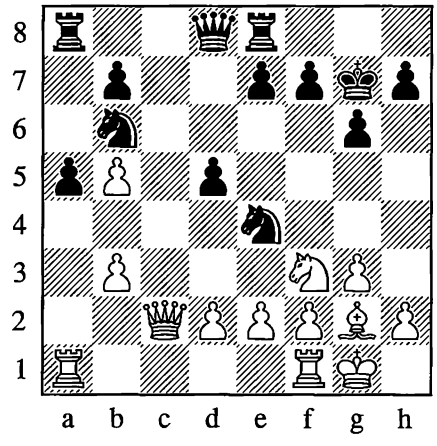
10...cxd5 11.a4 a5 12.♘b5 ♗d7

Black's "initiative" soon comes to an end after 12...♗f5 13.d3 ♖c8 14.♕d2, when there is no convenient way to defend the a5-pawn. For instance, 14...♘bd7 15.♘fd4± and the bishop feels uncomfortable.

13.♗d4

Since this bishop is likely to be exchanged for its opposite number, it is worth considering saving a tempo by making some other useful move, for instance 13.♖fc1 ♖c8 14.♕b1± or 13.d3±.

13...♗xb5 14.axb5 ♘e4 15.♗xg7 ♔xg7

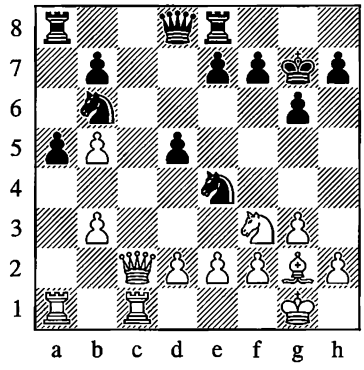


16.d3

This weakens the c3-square and, besides, White should not be in a hurry to drive the

knight away from its vulnerable position. In Karpov's games we can frequently see him ignoring such unstable knights. At a certain point, the opponent would retreat it without being physically forced to, which often spared the 12th World Champion a tempo and a weakness.

16.♖fc1!N± would retain a pleasant position.



Play may eventually transpose to the main line, without offering Black the possibility of muddying the waters in the way mentioned in the next comment.

16...♘f6

Black should have tried 16...♖c8! 17.♕b2† ♘c3∞.

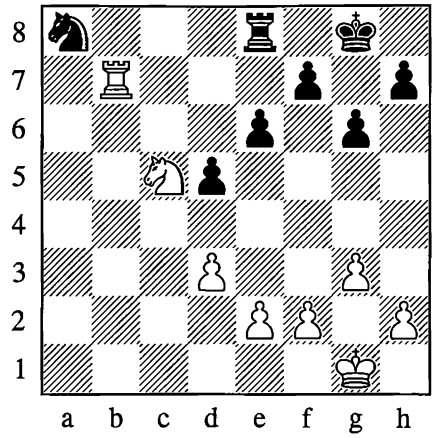
17.♕c3 ♘bd7 18.♗h3 ♔g8

Probably missing the force of the next move. It would have been better to restrict the bishop with 18...e6!?, keeping White's advantage within bearable limits.

19.♗xd7! ♘xd7 20.♖fc1

Being better developed in a symmetrical position, White retains an initiative that is not easy to neutralize. The next series of moves, leading almost by force to favourable simplifications, is quite typical of the whole variation.

20...♕b6 21.♕c7 ♕xb5 22.♘d4 ♕b6 23.♕xb6 ♘xb6 24.♖c7 a4 25.♖xb7 axb3 26.♖xa8 ♘xa8 27.♘xb3 e6 28.♘c5±

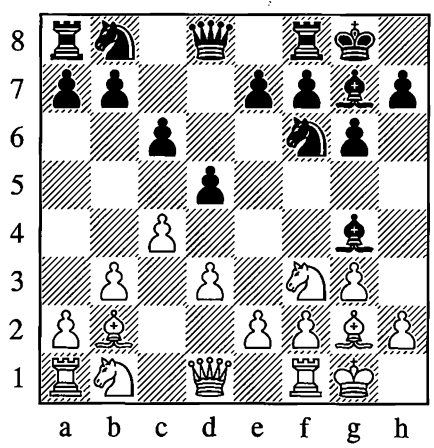


With his knight stuck in the corner and the f7-pawn vulnerable, Black is still far from complete equality. In the game Olafsson – Wright, Athens 1969, White eventually won.

C) 7...♗g4

This typical Slav move can be connected with two basic plans: exchanging the bishop for the f3-knight or establishing control over the c8-h3 diagonal with ...♕c8.

8.d3



Black now has three main possibilities. He can play **C1) 8...♕c8**, preparing ...♗h3, or give up the bishop with **C2) 8...♗xf3** before the reserve knight gets to d2, or continue his development with **C3) 8...♘bd7**.

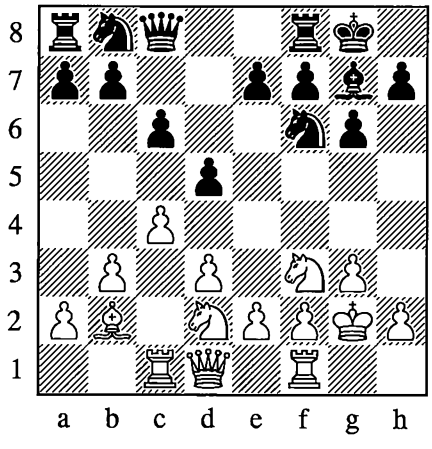
C1) 8...♕c8

To my taste, this is a rather artificial idea. Black loses valuable time in order to exchange the light-squared bishops. In doing so, he neglects both his development and the fight for the e5-square.

9.♘bd2 ♗h3 10.♖c1

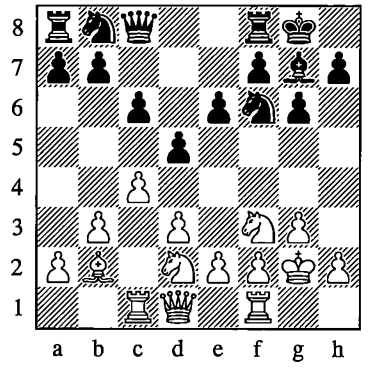
This natural developing move forces Black to lose another tempo with his queen.

10...♗xg2 11.♔xg2

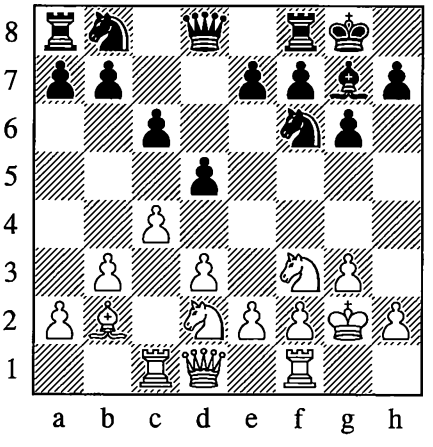


11...♕d8

Black was facing the threat of losing ground in the centre after an exchange on d5. It is easy to establish that the queen has no stable squares along the c8-h3 diagonal. Therefore, the only reasonable alternative to the text move is 11...e6. This consolidates the centre, but weakens the f6-square, does not contribute to development, and fails to solve the problem of the queen's vulnerability.



12.b4!N This clears the b3-square for White's queen and creates the threat of b4-b5. 12...♘bd7 13.cxd5 Now is a good moment to carry out this exchange, because Black's natural answer does not open the c8-h3 diagonal for the queen. 13...exd5 14.e4± With an advantage in the centre and on the queenside. White will combine the threats of b5 and e5 to keep Black under serious pressure.



12.♕c2

Apart from this natural move, White has 12.♖c2!?, which prepares one of Reti's favourite regrouping with ♕a1 and ♖fc1. 12...♘e8 13.♕a1 ♗xb2 14.♕xb2 ♘f6 15.♖fc1 ♘a6 16.b4± White has a promising queenside attack, Schebler – Gasthofer, Griesheim 2002.

12...♘a6

12...a5!? followed by ...♘a6 has been recommended, but it delays development and the pawn is likely to become a weakness after 13.cxd5 cxd5 14.♘e5 ♘a6 15.♘df3 ♖c8 16.♕d2±.

Because of Black's previous losses of time, the generally desirable 12...♘bd7, keeping control of the e5-square, leads to an active position for White after 13.cxd5 cxd5 14.♕c7±.

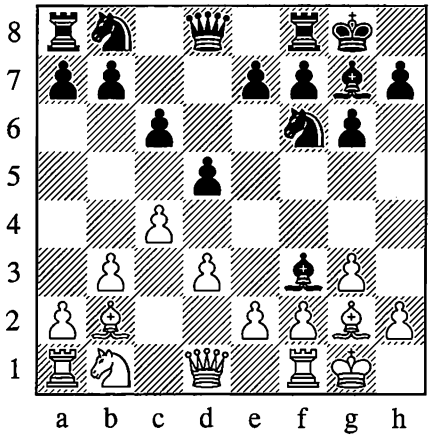
13.a3!

The knight will be passive now.

13...♖c8 14.b4 ♘b8 15.♕b3 e6 16.e4!±

White is better developed and has a considerable space advantage, Vukic – Gligoric, Yugoslavia 1987.

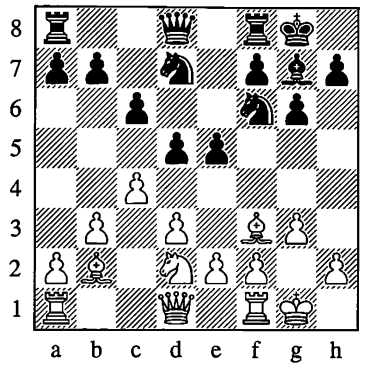
C2) 8...♗xf3



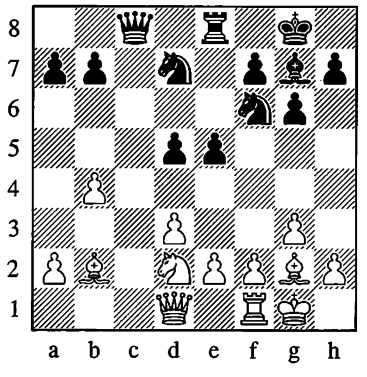
By eliminating this knight at a moment when ♘xf3 is not possible, Black reduces White's influence on the e5-square and retains a solid position in the spirit of the Schlechter variation.

9.♗xf3 ♘bd7 10.♘d2 e6

This is almost always played; Black strengthens his centre and restricts the activity of the f3-bishop. The more ambitious 10...e5 leaves Black with coordination problems caused by the vulnerability of his centre.

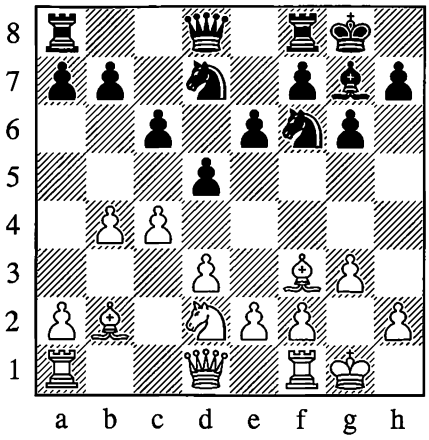


11.cxd5!N After Black has weakened his light squares, this exchange increases the scope of the g2-bishop. 11...cxd5 12.♖c1 ♖e8 (12...♕b6 would give up the c-file in view of 13.♕c2!±) 13.♗g2 Anticipating an eventual advance of the e5-pawn. 13...♖c8 (as it is played without any gain of time, 13...e4?! leads to White's advantage after 14.dxe4 dxe4 15.♘c4±) 14.♖xc8 ♕xc8 15.b4±



White will gradually increase his space advantage on the queenside with ♕b3, ♖c1, a2-a4, keeping an eye on Black's centre. The play is rather one-sided, because advancing any of the black pawns would open diagonals for the white bishops.

11.b4



If compared with a genuine Schlechter Slav, White's position is more flexible. He retains control of the e4- and c4-squares, leaving Black's knights relatively passive. In the Schlechter Slav, White frequently has problems activating his queen's bishop, which is not the case here. Also, his slow queenside attack is not easy to parry.

On the other hand, the fact that the a1-h8 diagonal is open allows Black to exchange the dark-squared bishops, which somewhat frees his position.

11...♕e7

Black connects rooks and prepares to fight back on the queenside.

Below are two short games in which Black carried out an exchange of bishops, but both draw agreements were premature.

11...♘e8 12.♕c2 ♗xb2 13.♕xb2 ♕f6 14.♖ab1 ♕xb2 ½-½ Vaganian – Petrosian, Tallinn 1979. Black has not yet reached full equality, but Vaganian may have been intimidated by Petrosian's renowned defensive skills.

11...a5 12.a3 axb4 13.axb4 ♕b6 14.♕b3 ♖xa1 15.♖xa1 ♘e8 16.♗xg7 ♘xg7 ½-½ Giorgadze – Rublevsky, Istanbul (ol) 2000. A possible continuation was 17.♕c3 ♘f5 18.♘b3 ♘d6 19.♖a5±. Although it is not easy to make further progress, Black's queenside remains under pressure.

12.♕b3 b5

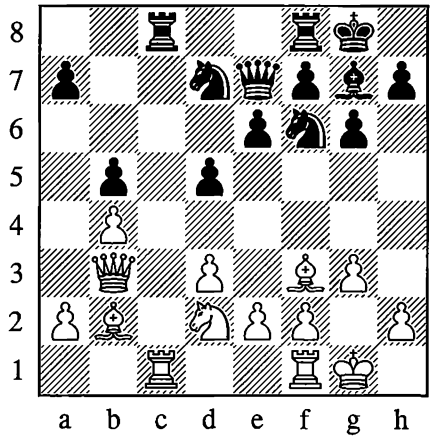
This radical method of stopping the further advance of the b4-pawn has the drawback of weakening the c5-square.

13.cxb5 cxb5

For the main ideas characteristic for this type of structure, please refer to Chapter 9.

14.♖ac1 ♖ac8

In view of the next comment, 14...♖fc8 may seem better. However, with the rooks concentrated on the queenside, Black cannot think about central expansion, which allows White to increase his pressure gradually with: 15.♗g2 (the point behind the previous move is that 15.♕a3 can be met by 15...♗f8!) 15...♕d6 16.♘f3 a6 17.a3± White has completed his regrouping and intends to start fighting for the c-file with ♖c2.



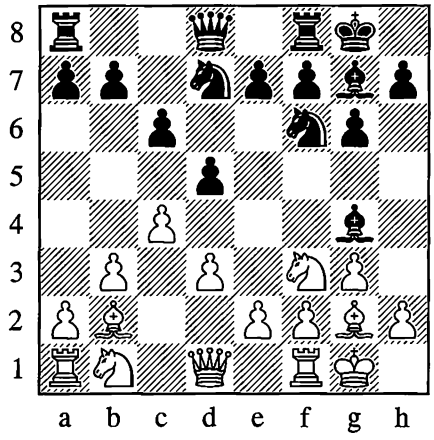
15.♕a3!N

White prepares to invade the c5-square with his knight. In a game played at the top level, White preferred 15.e3 ♘b6 16.♖c5, but after 16...♕d7= followed by ...♘a4, the rook proved unstable on c5 in Larsen – Uhlmann, Las Palmas 1971.

15...♕d6 16.♘b3 ♖fe8 17.♘c5±

Having established this outpost, White can slowly increase his pressure with ♖c2, ♖fc1, etc.

C3) 8...♘bd7



9.♘bd2 ♖e8

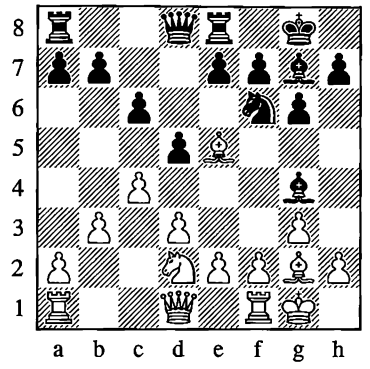
The most principled continuation, aiming for an improved version of line B. Black intends to occupy the centre with a second pawn, having previously developed his queen's bishop.

10.♖c1

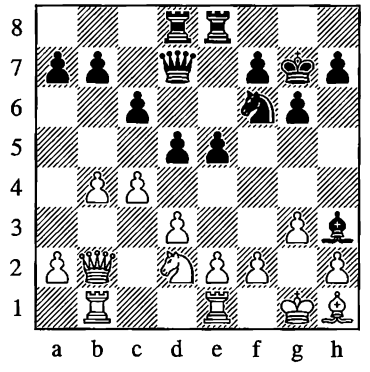
White continues developing, anticipating the possible opening of the c-file and consolidating the c4-square in view of a further b3-b4. This is also the most restrictive move order to reach the position after the 13th move.

Starting with 10.h3 ♗xf3 11.♘xf3 gives Black the possibility of deviating with 11...e6!? when White's queenside attack is somewhat slower. For instance, 12.♕c2 (more conservative than 12.b4 when after 12...dxc4 13.dxc4 a5 14.a3 ♕e7 15.♕b3 the knight would be better placed on d2 for this specific structure) 12...♕e7 13.a3 a5 14.♖ab1!? Followed by b3-b4.

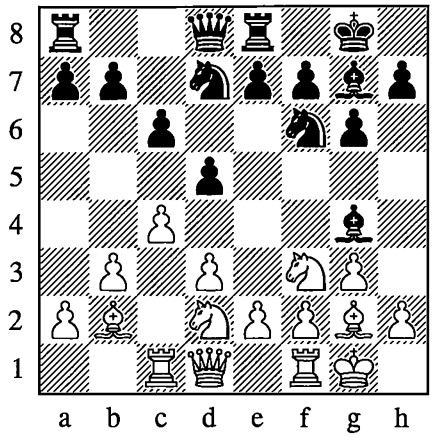
Another popular continuation is 10.♘e5: a radical method of crossing Black's plan. By physically occupying the central square, White prevents ...e7-e5, but only temporarily. 10...♘xe5 11.♗xe5



11...♕d7 The most consistent move, connecting the rooks and threatening ...♗h3. 12.♖e1 ♘h5 Another consistent move, aiming to clear the way for the e-pawn. 13.♗xg7 ♔xg7 14.b4 (14.d4 would be met by 14...♖ad8, leaving White slightly underdeveloped and with problems consolidating his centre) 14...♘f6 15.♕c2 e5 16.♕b2 ♗h3 17.♗h1 ♖ad8 18.♖ab1



This position was reached in Kozul – Stefansson, Gothenburg 2005. Both sides have arranged their pieces optimally. Black's most constructive plan now was to weaken the white kingside with 18...h5!N 19.b5 h4, when 20.bxc6 bxc6 21.♕b7 would release the pressure along the a1-h8 diagonal, allowing 21...e4 with adequate counterplay.



10...e5

10...e6 has never been played. White could choose between 11.b4, which is likely to transpose to line C2 after a further exchange on f3 (otherwise, the g4-bishop could run into trouble, having his retreats cut off) or 11.♘e5!? threatening to win the bishop immediately. After 11...♘h5 12.d4± a few of Black's minor pieces would remain miserably placed.

11.cxd5 cxd5

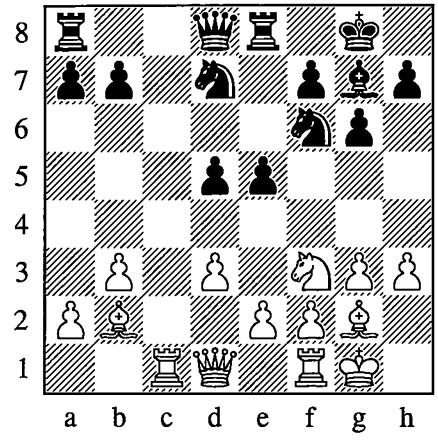
11...♘xd5 is rarely played and offers White comfortable play. 12.♕c2 a5 13.a3 ♕e7 14.h3 ♗xf3 (14...♗e6 15.♘c4 leaves the e5-pawn vulnerable, since 15...f6 16.d4± secures White an initiative in the centre) 15.♘xf3 ♗h6 16.e3 f6 17.♖fe1± In the absence of his light-squared bishop, Black cannot display any form of activity. Therefore, the play is rather one-sided, although it is not easy for White to open the position in his favour, Lobron – Bleiman, Luzern 1982.

12.h3!

This is a good moment to force this favourable exchange; the bishop cannot retreat because of the vulnerability of the e5-pawn.

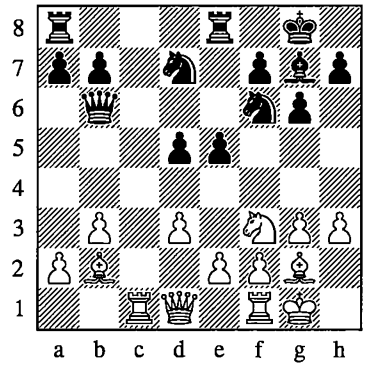
12...♗xf3 13.♘xf3

Apparently, Black has a perfectly normal position. However, he has some problems regarding the placement of his minor pieces. His bishop is not so active, while the d7-knight stands in the way of Black's other pieces (c6 would be a much better location).



Black can put his centre into motion immediately with **C31) 13...e4**, or initiate a major regrouping with **C32) 13...♗f8**.

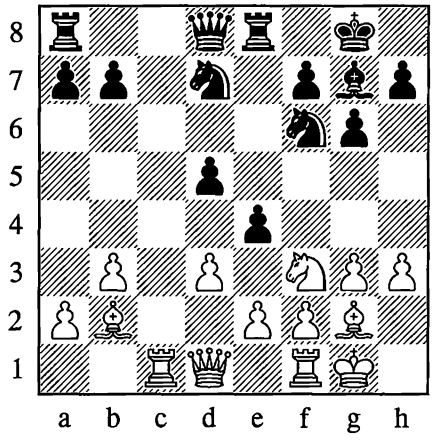
13...♕b6 is less constructive, because the queen's location was not one of Black's biggest problems.



14.♖c2!? Preparing the typical ♕a1 manoeuvre. 14...e4 15.♗d4 We can see now that the exposed position of the black queen allows White to win some time to activate his pieces. 15...♕a6 16.dxe4 dxe4 17.♘d2 ♖ad8 18.e3± The weakness of the e4-pawn severely restricts Black's activity. 18...h5 19.♕a1 ♗f8 20.♖d1 h4?!

Forcing White to make a strong move: 21.g4± The e4-pawn found itself in a critical situation in Fahnenschmidt – Gutman, Germany 1987.

C31) 13...e4



This move was played almost without exception in games between very strong players where this position was reached. However, I feel that such an approach just gives White possibilities for active play, as the pawns have abandoned their optimal side-by-side position. One possible explanation for the popularity of this move is that Black tends to fear reaching a reversed King's Indian type of position after White's e2-e4, when the absence of the light-squared bishop may tell.

14.dxe4 dxe4 15.♘d4 ♕b6

Now that the d4-square has been occupied by a white knight, this is the best available square for the queen. Instead 15...♕a5 allows White to win space with 16.a3 ♖ac8 17.b4. For example, Taimanov – Leko, Nettetal 1994, continued: 17...♕d5 18.♕b3 ♕xb3 19.♘xb3 b6 20.♖fd1 ♖xc1 21.♖xc1 ♘d5 22.♗xg7 ♔xg7 23.♘d4 ♘7f6 24.e3 h5 25.♗f1 ♔f8 26.♗b5± White's position remained more pleasant.

16.♘c2 ♖ad8 17.♘e3

A perfect blockading square.

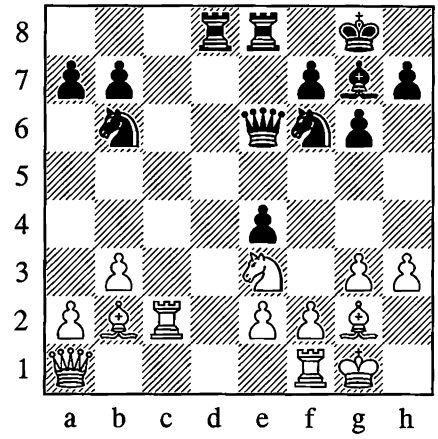
17...♕e6

17...♘e5 leaves the e4-pawn exposed after 18.♕c2±.

18.♖c2

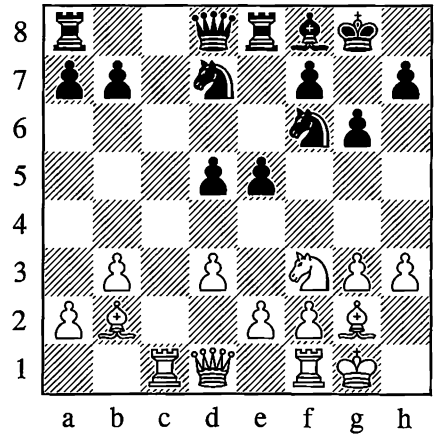
18.♖c7!N looks even more active.

18...♘b6 19.♕a1±



A typical situation for hypermodern openings; the advance of the central pawns has left Black over-extended. White has lots of empty space for manoeuvring and a clear target on e4, Glek – Van Mil, Wijk aan Zee 1995.

C32) 13...♗f8



Black transfers the bishop to d6 in order to consolidate the e5-pawn and protect the c7-square against a possible invasion.

14.♕c2 ♗d6 15.♘d2 ♘b6

15...♖c8 leads to mass exchanges after 16.♕xc8 ♕xc8 17.♖xc8 ♖xc8 18.♖c1± when the pair of bishops would ensure White a stable advantage in the endgame.

16.♖fd1

White completes his centralization, thus discouraging the opening of the centre with ...e5-e4, and plans to transfer the knight to e3. The other way to activate the knight in order to increase the pressure against the d5-pawn would be 16.♘b1 ♕d7 17.♕d2 followed by ♕a5 and ♘c3.

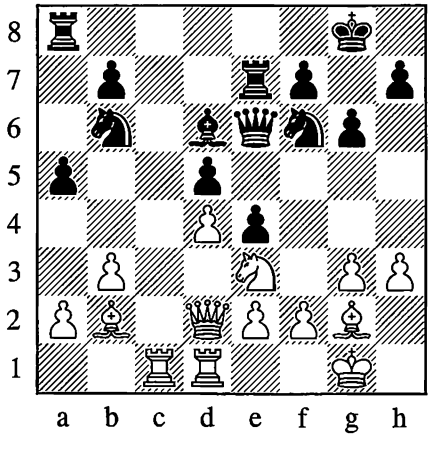
16...♕e7 17.♘f1 ♕e6 18.♘e3 ♖e7

A draw was agreed here in the game Olivera – Tempone, Buenos Aires 1978; I believe that White has many reasons to play on.

19.♕d2

Threatening ♕a5, which would put Black under pressure on several areas of the board.

19...a5 20.d4 e4



21.♖c5!!±

Attacking the weakened black queenside; the a5-pawn is in danger, while the threat of ♖b5 leaves Black unstable.

21...♗xc5

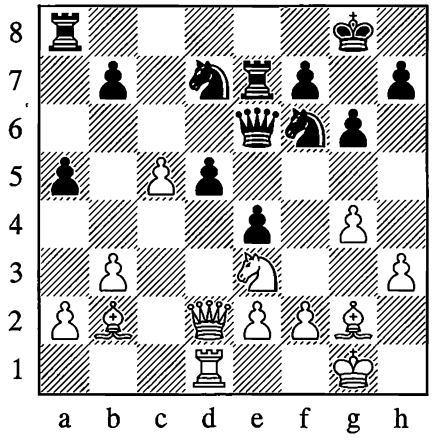
This is the critical line, accepting the sacrifice, but opening the long diagonal is dangerous for Black.

22.dxc5

The b2-bishop is worth much more than a rook.

22...♘bd7 23.g4

Threatening g4-g5 followed by ♘xd5.



23...h6 24.h4!

Not giving Black time to breathe.

24...♘xg4 25.♘xd5 ♖ee8 26.♕d4 ♕e5 27.♕xe5 ♘gxe5 28.♘c7±

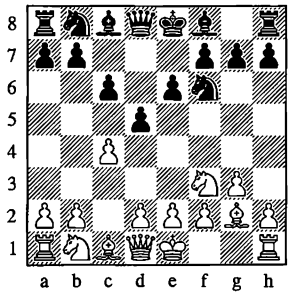
White regains the sacrificed material and retains a big strategic advantage.

Conclusion

In the lines based on 4...g6 the play has a slower character than in the previous chapters. I find Black's position to be sound, but subtle manoeuvring should allow White to retain chances for a long-term initiative or, even more typically, for a better endgame.

Chapter 8

Anti-Slav Systems



4...e6

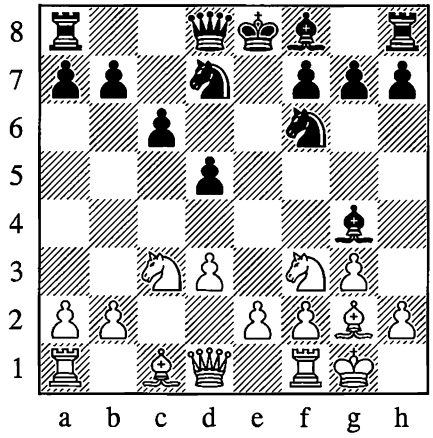
Variation Index

1.c4 c6 2.g3 d5 3.♘f3 ♗g4 4.♗g2 e6

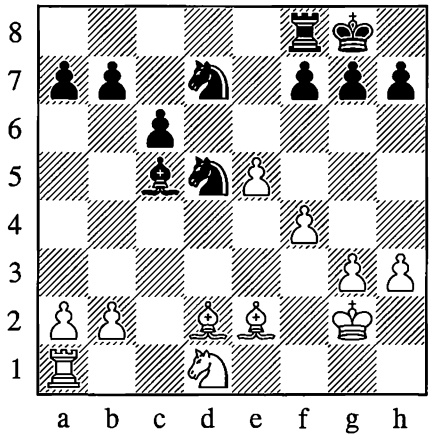
5.cxd5 exd5 6.0–0 ♘f6 7.d3 ♘bd7 8.♘c3

A) 8...♗e7 9.h3 128
A1) 9...♗xf3 10.♗xf3 129
A11) 10...0–0 129
A12) 10...d4!? 132
A2) 9...♗h5 10.e4 dxe4 11.dxe4 ♘c5 12.g4! ♗g6 13.♘e5! 134
A21) 13...♕xd1 136
A22) 13...♘fd7 137
B) 8...♗c5 140
B1) 9.h3 140
B11) 9...♗h5 140
B12) 9...♗xf3 143
B2) 9.♕b3 145
B21) 9...b5!? 146
B22) 9...♘b6 147
B23) 9...♗b6 10.♘a4 0–0 11.♘xb6 axb6 12.♕c2 148
B231) 12...♗xf3 149
B232) 12...♕e7 150
B233) 12...♖e8 151
B234) 12...h6 152

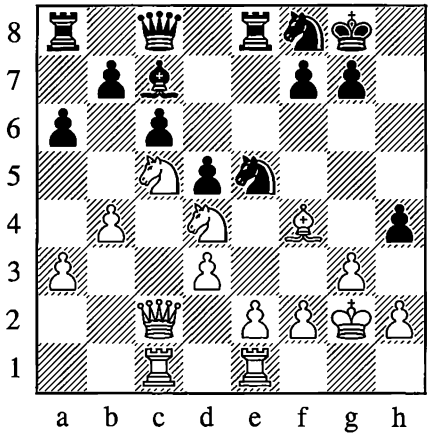
1.c4 c6 2.g3 d5 3.♘f3 ♗g4 4.♗g2 e6 5.cxd5 exd5 6.0–0 ♘f6 7.d3 ♘bd7 8.♘c3



This is one of the most typical tabiyas of the English/Reti complex. Black has achieved a comfortable development for his pieces, has no weaknesses at all and enjoys a space advantage in the centre. However, White's structure remains more flexible, offering him easier long-term planning. White's two main plans are the central expansion based on e2-e4 and the minority attack with a2-a3 and b2-b4. Let's see two examples of optimal implementation of these plans.



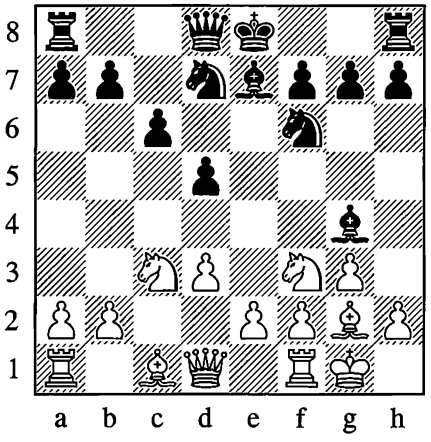
This position is taken from a note to line A11 below. White has the bishop pair and a considerable space advantage; Black has no active plans.



This position was reached in Dizdar – Chernin, New York 1989, from line B2. White has established strong pressure against the enemy queenside and now chose to develop his initiative with 27.e4!, gaining space in the centre as well.

In the starting position of this chapter Black has two main continuations at his disposal: the solid **A) 8...♗e7** and the more active **B) 8...♗c5**.

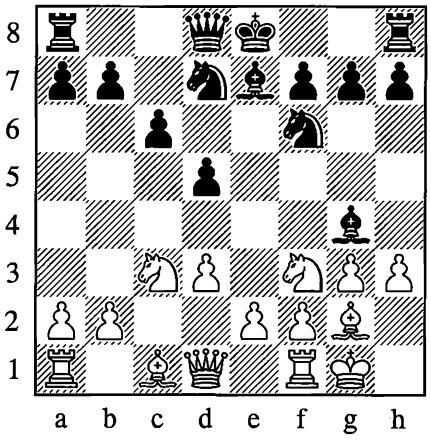
A) 8...♗e7



Black refrains from any early display of activity and aims to complete his development as soon as possible. He also leaves the c5-square available for the knight to use later.

9.h3

Before starting active operations in the centre, it is useful to force Black to define his intentions regarding the light-squared bishop, especially as the premature 9.e4 allows the nasty 9...♘e5!.



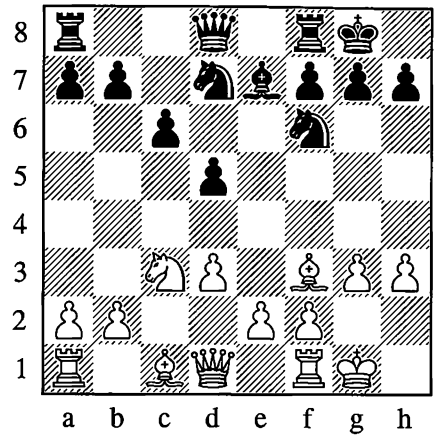
Black can choose between **A1) 9...♗xf3** and **A2) 9...♗h5**.

A1) 9...♗xf3 10.♗xf3

Adherents of the Slav Defence do not mind giving up their queen's bishop for the f3-knight, especially when this means winning a tempo for development. However, in this concrete case there is a drawback to this approach. From the perspective of his main plan (winning space with e2-e4), it is useful for White to have eliminated the pin along the d1-h5 diagonal and cleared the way for the f-pawn (after a further bishop retreat).

The character of the position depends on Black's next move. He can ignore White's plan with **A11) 10...0–0** or cross it radically with **A12) 10...d4**.

A11) 10...0–0



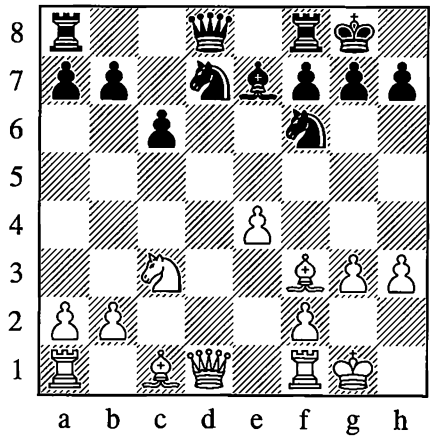
11.e4 dxe4

The strong pressure against the d5-pawn forces Black to release the tension in the centre.

11...d4 has never been tried in practice, probably because it gives White a free hand on the kingside after 12.♘e2±, followed by ♗g2, f2-f4, g3-g4 and ♘g3.

If 11...♘e5 12.♗e2 then the threats of d3-d4 or f2-f4 followed by e4-e5 more or less force Black to transpose to the main line by playing 12...dxe4, as 12...d4 13.♘b1, followed by f2-f4, looks promising for White.

12.dxe4



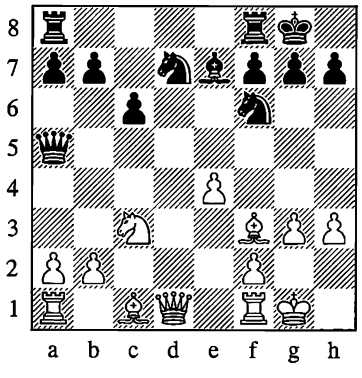
The situation in the centre has changed dramatically. It is White who now enjoys more space and he will do his best to increase it with ♗g2 (or ♗e2), followed by f2-f4 and e4-e5, with a crushing advantage. However, from a practical point of view, things are not so simple. The advance of the e-pawn has weakened some squares along the d-file and, especially since he is not yet fully developed, White needs to find the best way to defend them. One thing to avoid is an exchange of dark-squared bishops, which would simplify Black's task of finding a stable square for his queen and enable him to fight for the d4-square.

The next 2-3 moves (which represent precisely the amount of time White needs to complete his development) are crucial for the outcome of the opening.

12...♘e5

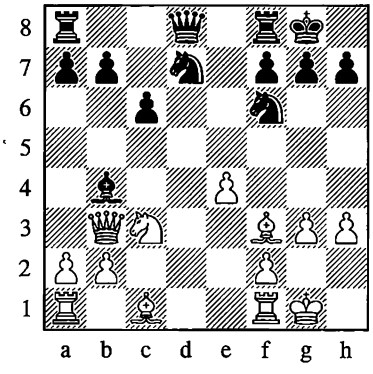
This is the most frequently played move and, frankly, it is hard to refrain from it. The seemingly active knight jump to the centre more or less forces a bishop retreat to the not so appealing e2-square. However, the knight is not stable in the centre. If Black's initiative is neutralized, his position will simply collapse after f2-f4 and e4-e5.

Black's micro-problems regarding the development of his queen can be seen after 12...♕a5, as played in Sale – Zheliandinov, Ljubljana 1995.



White should play 13.♕c2!N ♖ad8 14.♗d2± followed by ♖ad1, ♗g2 and f2-f4, while Black will probably have to spend an additional tempo to remove his queen from its exposed square.

12...♗b4, as played in Radulov – Peng, Budapest 2001, is an interesting alternative. It may seem illogical to move an already-developed piece for a second time, but the indirect increase of pressure against the e4-pawn demands an accurate reply from White. I recommend 13.♕b3!N, aiming to win a tempo for development.



Below are some possible continuations:

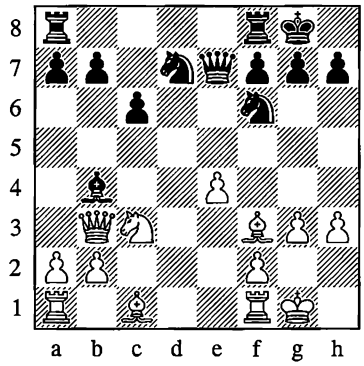
a) The intermediate 13...♘e5?! does not work because of 14.♕xb4! ♘xf3† 15.♔g2 ♘e5 16.♖d1 ♕c7 17.f4± and Black loses too much ground.

b) Once again, the queen is slightly exposed after 13...♕a5 14.♗d2 ♖ad8 15.♖ad1 ♘e5 16.♗g2±.

c) 13...a5 is solid, but loses a valuable tempo: 14.♗e3 ♕e7 15.♖ad1±

d) 13...♕e7

This is the most logical answer. Black immediately takes advantage of the availability of the e7-square.



14.♗f4!?

A slight deviation from the original plan; White temporarily refrains from ♗g2 and f2-f4, but threatens to open the position for his bishops with e4-e5.

14...a5

Parrying the threat by over-defending the bishop.

15.♖ad1±

White has completed his development in a favourable way. Next, he will continue regrouping with ♖fe1, ♗g2, ♕c2 and, finally, ♗c1 and f2-f4, while Black will always have to watch out for the threat of e4-e5.

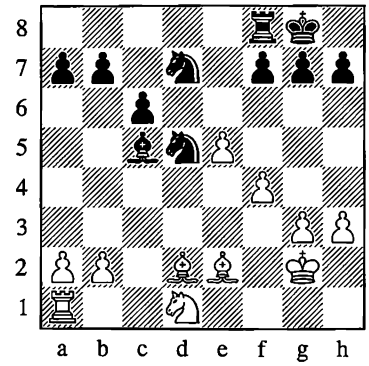
13.♗e2

In order to make f2-f4 effective, it is important to deprive the e5-knight of the active d3- and c4-squares.

13...♗b4

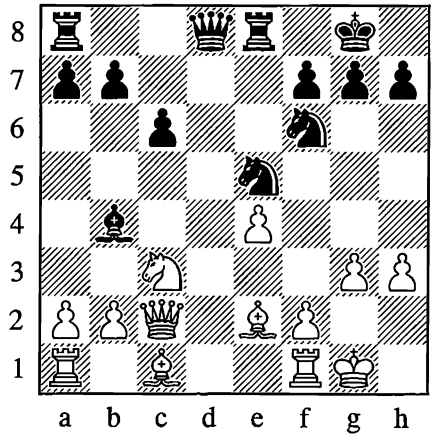
This move, attacking the e4-pawn, has so far been universally played.

13...♕xd1 would eliminate the problem of finding a stable square for the queen, but also help White to complete his development after: 14.♖xd1 ♗c5 (or 14...♖ad8 15.♗e3± followed by f2-f4) 15.♔g2 ♖ad8 16.f4! Since the bishop is unable to occupy the e3-square, it is best to start advancing the pawns. 16...♖xd1 17.♘xd1 ♘ed7 18.e5 ♘d5 19.♗d2±/±



White has completed his development while retaining a considerable space advantage and the bishop pair; Black's future will involve lengthy suffering.

14.♕c2 ♖e8



15.f4!N

White has no reason to shy away from this active move.

In the game Khasin – Shabanov, Kursk 1987, White adopted a slow approach, but after 15.a3 ♗a5 16.♔g2 ♘g6 17.b4 ♗b6 18.♗b2 ♕e7 19.♖fe1 Black could have obtained counterplay with 19...h5, when it becomes obvious that the flank development of White's dark-squared bishop has left the f4-square vulnerable.

The natural 15.♗e3 eventually worked out well after: 15...♕e7?! 16.f4! (this is even stronger now than in the main line) 16...♘ed7 17.e5 ♗c5 18.♗f2 Black has been completely pushed back. The thematic exchange of the bishops comes too late to be effective. 18...♘d5 19.♘xd5 cxd5 20.♖ad1 ♗xf2† 21.♖xf2 ♖ac8 22.♕b3 ♘b6 23.♗f3± In M. Socko – Danielian, Yekaterinburg 2007, White had a promising kingside position and the d5-pawn is weak.

Instead of 15...♕e7?!, 15...♘ed7! would have prevented the central expansion, although White's position would have remained preferable anyway.

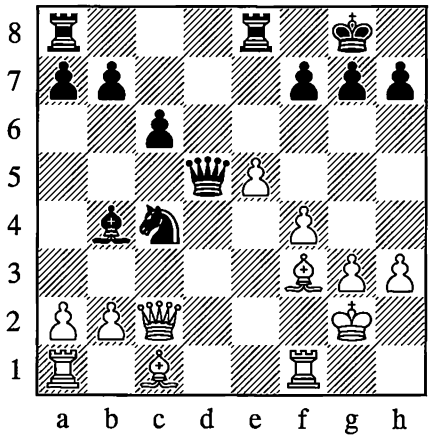
15...♕d4†

After 15...♘c4 16.e5 Black would have to give a check on d4 anyway, in order to avoid losing the c4-knight.

16.♔g2 ♘c4 17.e5 ♘d5 18.♘xd5 ♕xd5†

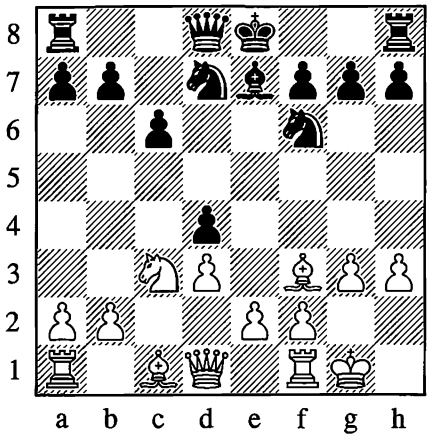
18...cxd5 19.♖d1± is no improvement for Black.

19.♗f3±



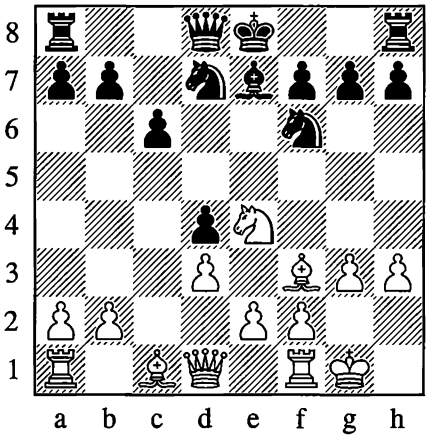
White has carried out his main plan without allowing Black any counterplay. In fact, the black minor pieces have become more of a source of worry or, at the very least, will cause even more time to be lost.

A12) 10...d4!?



A controversial move; this prevents White's expansion in the centre with e2-e4, but opening the long light diagonal is strategically risky. Although for the time being the b7- and c6-pawns keep the English bishop restricted, White is offered the simple plan of a minority attack with b4-b5. At the same time, Black has no clear targets, which makes the play rather one-sided.

11.♘e4



Sometimes White retreats his knight to b1, but to my taste this is rather slow and gives Black the time he needs to consolidate his space advantage.

11...0–0

I have picked this as a main line only because of the level of the players involved. An alternative is:

11...♘xe4

Here, the exchange does not really mean giving up the tension, because the bishop is not better placed on e4.

12.♗xe4 a5

Black radically prevents b2-b4.

If 12...0–0 then White could experiment with 13.b4, but 13.♗d2 is more restricting, more or less forcing 13...a5, with a transposition to the game.

13.♗d2 0–0 14.♕c2

I really enjoyed playing through this game; White's attack develops in the slowest possible mode, but Black can do little in the meantime.

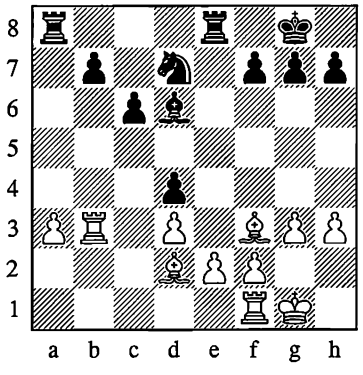
14...♕b6 15.♗f3 ♗d6 16.♖ab1 ♖fe8 17.a3

At this point the absence of Black's queen's bishop makes itself felt, as Black's next move fails to keep the queenside closed:

17...a4 18.b4 axb3 19.♕xb3

The choice between this move and 19.♖xb3± may be purely a matter of taste.

19...♕xb3 20.♖xb3



The further course of the game is predestined. White will attack the enemy queenside pawns and Black will have to defend them. The loss of the a3-pawn will not mean too much.

20...♘c5 21.♖bb1 ♖xa3 22.♗b4 ♖a6

Giving White a pleasant choice.

22...♖a7 does more to limit White's options, but after 23.♖fc1 ♖e5 24.♖c4± White regains the pawn, and has fewer pawn islands.

23.♗xc5

23.♖fc1± also looks fine.

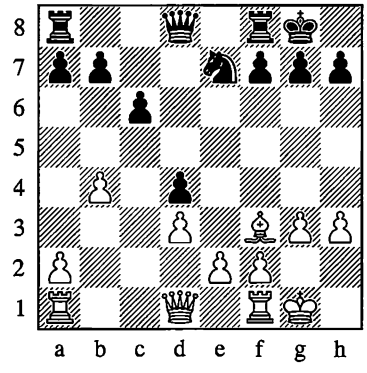
23...♗xc5 24.♖xb7 ♗f8 25.♖d7 c5 26.♖b1±

Despite the presence of opposite-coloured bishops, Black is far from achieving a draw. His bishop is much more passive and the f7-square is vulnerable. In addition, Black still does not have anything to attack. In the game Dizdar – Kononenko, Siviglia 2006, Black eventually lost.

12.♘xf6† ♗xf6

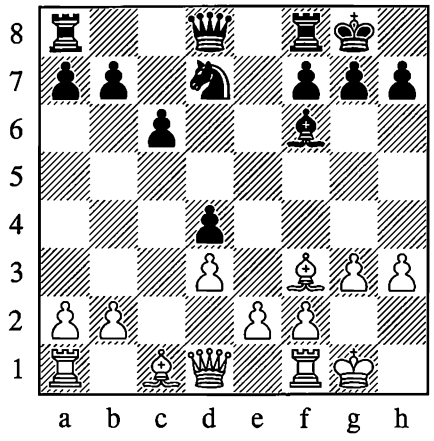
Black keeps his knight close to the queenside, in the hope that it will prove useful in the defence.

12...♘xf6 could be met by 13.♗g5!N, aiming to eliminate the knight and gradually transpose to a similar ending as in Dizdar – Kononenko. (13.b4?! is premature because of 13...♕d7!, attacking h3 and defending b7 at the same time, which leaves the b4-pawn hanging) 13...♘d5 14.♗xe7 ♘xe7 15.b4±



White's attack is hard to counter. For example, installing a knight on c3 would fail to solve Black's problems. The e2-pawn is well defended and, besides, the knight would not

be entirely stable in view of the permanent threat of e2-e3.



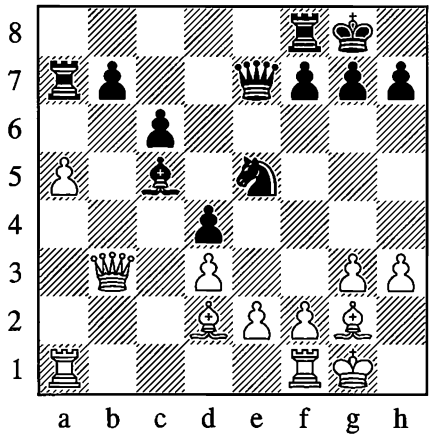
13.b4! a5

Apparently, Black relied on this counterattacking move when capturing with the bishop on f6. However, we already know that opening the b-file is just as good for White as undermining the c6-pawn with b4-b5.

14.♕b3! axb4 15.♕xb4 ♖a7 16.a4

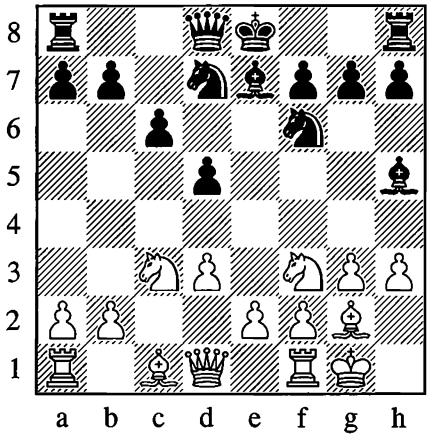
This pawn plays an important part in the attack.

16...♘e5 17.♗g2 ♗e7 18.♕b3 ♗c5 19.♗d2 ♕e7 20.a5±



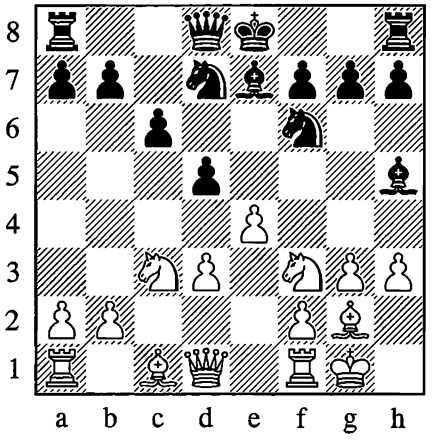
Black was doomed to passive (and, as it turned out, unsuccessful!) defence in Shirov – Vyzmanavin, Lvov 1990.

A2) 9...♗h5



Black keeps the bishop, in the hope that it will exert pressure along the d1-h5 or b1-g6 diagonals. However, if White manages to consolidate then the bishop risks remaining out of play, which is a common situation in many Slav set-ups.

10.e4

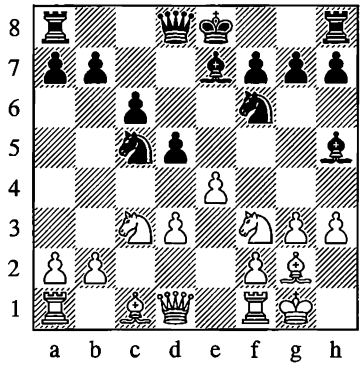


10...dxe4

Here, too, Black can delay this exchange for just one move.

10...0–0 offers White a choice. 11.g4 (The text move is probably even more promising than 11.exd5 ♘xd5 12.♘xd5 cxd5 13.♗e3 ♗c5 14.d4 ♗d6 15.♕b3 ♘b6 16.♘e5 ♗c7 17.a4 a5 18.♖fe1 f6 19.♘d3± as in Dizdar – Bosiocic, Sibenik 2006. White's pieces are more active in an almost symmetrical position.) After 11.g4, Black has to exchange on e4, since 11...♗g6?! loses a pawn without compensation after 12.g5 ♘h5 13.exd5 cxd5 14.♘xd5±.

Also possible is 10...♘c5. When facing this position a long time ago, I started calculating many active lines, but finally chose the passive 11.♕e2?! when after 11...dxe4 12.dxe4 a draw was agreed in Marin – Magem, Sitges 1997. When analysing the position later that same evening, I was surprised to discover that most of my calculation had been correct, but my evaluation had been too pessimistic. You will find some of these lines below.



The correct answer is 11.g4!N. Again, this is the last moment when Black can exchange on e4, since 11...♗g6?! is met by 12.g5 ♘h5 13.exd5 cxd5 (13...♘xd3 allows 14.dxc6 bxc6 15.♘d4!±) 14.d4± and after the knight moves, then 15.♕a4† ♔f8 (15...♕d7 would drop the d5-pawn) and 16.♘e5. Black has no compensation for having lost the right to castle.

11.dxe4 ♘c5

The knight makes use of the c5-square, putting pressure on the e4-pawn and the d3-square. As I found out many years after my game with Magem, theory considers this move to be a reliable reaction to White's plan.

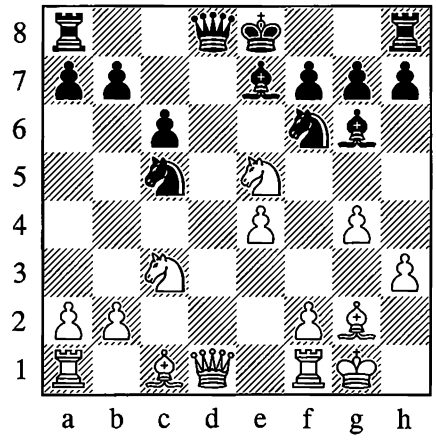
After 11...0–0?! 12.g4 ♗g6 13.♘d4 ♘c5 14.♘f5 ♗xf5 15.gxf5 ♕c7 16.♕e2 ♘fd7 17.f4 f6 18.b4 ♘a6 19.a3± Black was left with little breathing space in Haag – Berger, Voros Lobogo 1955.

12.g4!

With the black king still in the centre, White has to play actively in order to retain an advantage. Instead 12.♕e2 would transpose to the final position of the aforementioned game Marin – Magem. The verdict of approximate equality was confirmed after 12...♕d3= in an earlier game, Landenbergue – Keitlinghaus, Prague 1990.

12...♗g6 13.♘e5!

White correctly assumes that the opening of the e-file and the long diagonal would offer him a strong initiative in the event of any form of capture on e4.



Black can go for the e4-pawn with **A21) 13...♕xd1** or start to fight against the central knight with **A22) 13...♘fd7**.

13...♘fxe4? loses to 14.♕xd8†! ♖xd8 15.♘xg6 ♘xc3 16.♘xh8+– and there is nothing to capture on d1.

A21) 13...♕xd1

In order to enable the capture on e4, Black needs the white rook to be on d1.

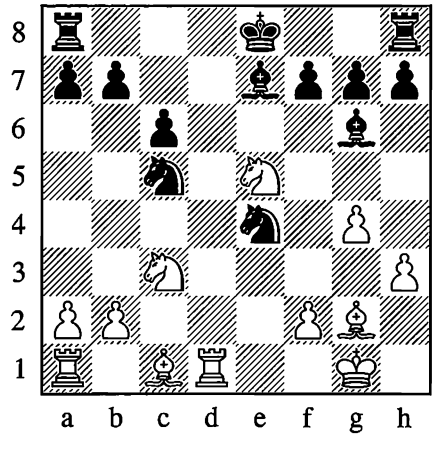
14.♖xd1 ♘fxe4N

The only reasonable way to take the pawn.

14...♗xe4?! 15.♘xe4 ♘fxe4 16.♗e3! followed by ♖ac1 leaves the knights hanging. If the e4-knight retreats, ♘xc6 would follow. 16.b4? is justified after 16...♘c3? 17.♖e1 ♘e6 18.♘xc6!±, but Black can play better with 16...♗f6!.

Or 14...♘cxe4?! 15.♘xg6 ♘xc3 16.bxc3 hxg6 17.♖b1!± and Black cannot defend his queenside.

The more cautious 14...♘fd7 15.♘c4 0–0–0 was played in Dizdar – Vavrak, Reykjavik 2008. White could have consolidated his advantage with 16.♗f4!N± eventually followed by occupying the d6-square.



15.♖e1!!

The key move. Black is forced to exchange his central knight, after which the pressure along the e-file is very unpleasant. Instead both 15.♗xe4 ♘xe4! and 15.♘xg6 ♘xc3 16.bxc3 hxg6 are fine for Black.

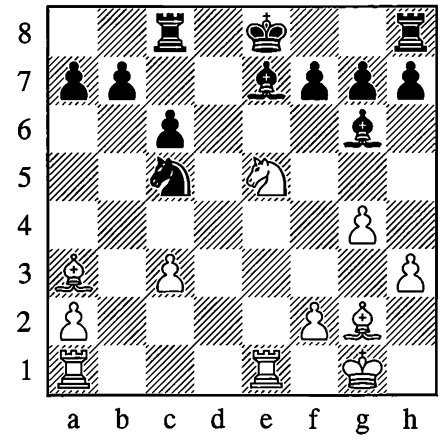
15...♘xc3 16.bxc3

Black cannot castle because after ♘xg6 the e7-bishop would be hanging. In addition, he has to parry the threat of ♘xc6.

16...♖c8!

This is the best square available for the rook. Instead after 16...♖d8?! (16...♔f8 is similar) 17.♗a3 ♘e6 18.♗xe7 ♔xe7 19.f4 f5 20.♖ab1! Black cannot defend the b7-pawn from the seventh rank, while after 20...♖b8 White regains the pawn with 21.♗xc6!±, leaving the enemy king in a dangerous situation.

During my game with Magem, I reached the position after 16...♖c8 in my calculations and wrongly assessed the position as safe for Black. There is a lot more life in this position...



17.♗a3!

In my original calculations I probably failed to spot that the forcing tactical operation has also opened this diagonal. White gains a strong attack.

17...♘e6 18.♗xe7 ♔xe7 19.f4 f5

Black has managed to stabilize the position, but only temporarily.

20.♖e2!

White prepares to double rooks on the e-file. It is also essential to maintain communications with the queenside, in case the king tries to escape to b8. Therefore, the text move should be preferred to the optically more active 20.♖e3. However, 20.♗f1!?, intending ♗c4, may also be worth a try.

20...♖he8

Again the best defence. 20...♖hd8 21.♖ae1 ♖d6 22.♘c4± and 20...♔f6? 21.g5† ♔e7 22.♘xg6† hxg6 23.♖ae1+– lose material. We can see in these lines how dangerous Black's position really is.

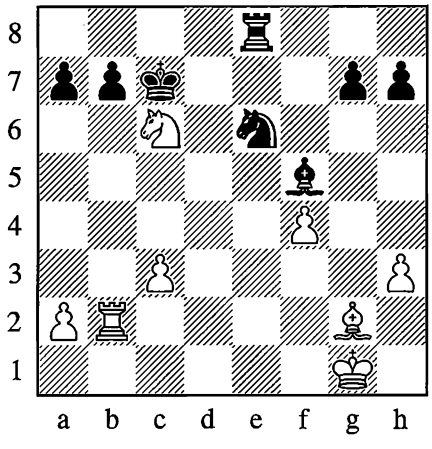
21.♖ae1 ♔d6 22.♖d1† ♔c7

22...♔c5? leads to trouble after 23.♘d7†!.

23.♖d7† ♔b8

Or 23...♔b6 24.♘c4† ♔c5 25.♘d6± with multiple threats.

24.♖b2 ♖c7 25.gxf5 ♗xf5 26.♘xc6† ♔c8 27.♖xc7† ♔xc7



Again, it may seem that Black has escaped dry from deep waters, but...

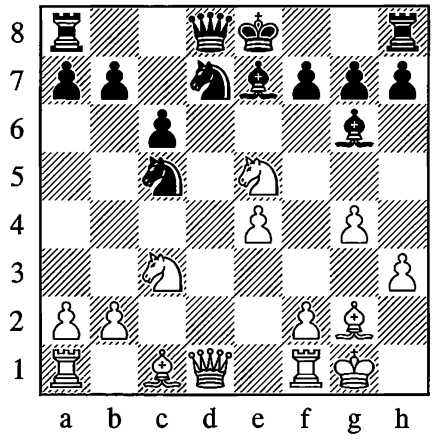
28.♘d4!

This wins a pawn.

28...♘xd4 29.♖xb7† ♔d6 30.cxd4±

With good winning chances for White.

A22) 13...♘fd7



This is much better than the pawn grabbing of the previous line. Black lacks space, so he is interested in simplifying the position. At the same time, he prepares ...f7-f6 in the event of f2-f4, ensuring a safe retreat for the g6-bishop.

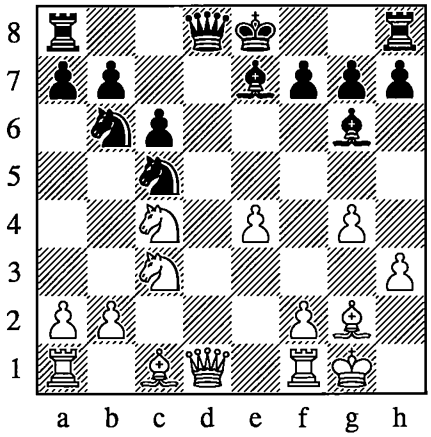
During my initial work for the book, I had not examined this strong continuation. When I reached the position after 13.♘e5 in a vital rapid game, I was very happy that the variation was familiar to me. My opponent spent a few precious minutes, but then came up with the best reply, placing me in uncharted territory.

Decades ago, Ljubomir Ljubojevic stated that one can never be sure about a variation studied at home, because only a real game can provoke the required level of concentration. I feel that the situation described above merely confirms the Yugoslav legend's remark.

14.♘c4

The correct approach. Having a space advantage, White should avoid exchanging minor pieces. The immediate threat is ♘d6, while if 14...0–0 White could play 15.♗f4, increasing the force of the threatened ♘d6.

14...♘b6



15.♘a5!N

The same policy again. White avoids exchanges and puts the enemy queenside under pressure. This move was suggested by my opponent immediately after the game.

Instead I played:

15.♘xb6 axb6 16.f4 ♕xd1 17.♖xd1 f6 18.♗e3 b5 19.♖ac1 ♘a4 20.♘xa4 ♖xa4 21.a3 h5

21...♗xe4 loses the exchange to 22.b3!.

After the threatened opening of the h-file, White has to be ready to counter ...♗xe4.

22.♖d4 ♖xd4 23.♗xd4 hxg4 24.hxg4 0–0 25.♗c5

White aims for further simplifications, hoping the enemy queenside's lack of mobility would offer chances in the endgame.

25...♖e8?!

After this inaccuracy, Black will fail to generate counterplay along the d-file.

Black should have played 25...♗xc5† 26.♖xc5 ♖d8, when White has to think about maintaining equality with 27.♖c2=.

26.♗xe7 ♖xe7 27.f5!

White can afford to make this apparently weakening move because Black cannot maintain the blockade on e5 and control of the d-file at the same time.

27...♗e8 28.♔f2 ♖d7 29.♔e3

White has centralized his king in time to prevent the enemy rook infiltrating.

29...♗f7 30.♗f3 ♗c4 31.♖d1 ♖xd1 32.♗xd1 ♔f8 33.e5

White has squeezed all he could from the apparently dull opening position. Black's position may still be defensible, but, with little time left, he quickly went down in Marin – Nanu, Romanian Rapid Championship 2009.

15...0–0

The most flexible move. I had rejected

15.♘a5

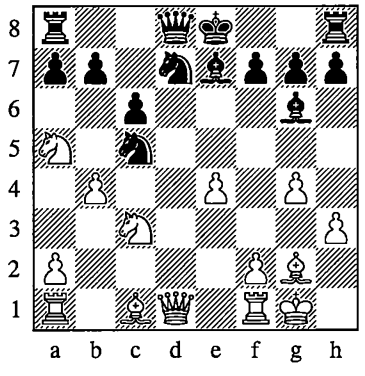
because of

15...♘bd7

The knight retreat is something White always has to be ready for, but in this concrete position it is premature.

16.b4

This does not threaten bxc5 yet, but it does consolidate White's knight on a5.



16...♕c7 17.♗e3 h5!

Black provokes a weakening in the enemy kingside.

The careless 17...♘e6 is strongly met by 18.♘d5! when White opens the position for the attack, taking advantage of the enemy king's presence in the centre. 18...cxd5 19.exd5 ♘f4 20.♖c1 ♕b8 21.♗xf4 ♕xf4 22.♖e1 ♔f8 23.♖c4 ♕b8 24.♘xb7 Black is completely crushed.

18.g5 ♘e6 19.a3!

White calmly defends the b4-pawn, preparing to win space with f2-f4.

19.♘d5 would be less effective because of 19...cxd5 20.exd5 ♘xg5!. The crucial differences if compared with the line from the previous comment are that this captures a pawn and h3-h4 does not trap the knight, which can retreat to h7.

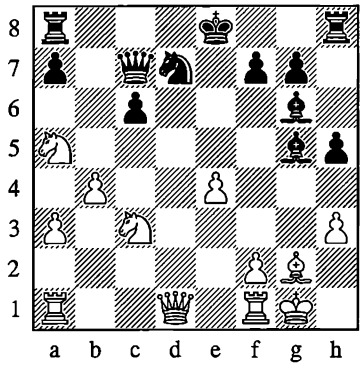
19...♘f4

The only way to cross White's plans.

20.♗xf4 ♕xf4 21.♘xb7 ♕c7

A necessary retreat, defending the queenside.

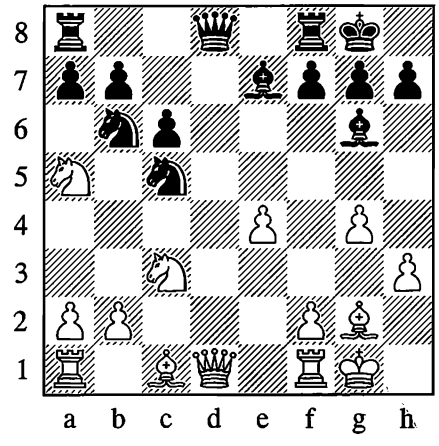
22.♘a5 ♗xg5



Now that the danger of ♘d6† has been removed, this seems entirely playable, but...

23.e5!±

With his king in the centre, Black lacks just one tempo to consolidate on the dark squares. The e5-pawn is taboo and White will proceed with f2-f4 and, if possible, ♘xc6.



16.♗e3!

A strong developing move, threatening to win a pawn with ♗xc5 and defending the g1-a7 diagonal before advancing the f-pawn.

After 16.f4?! ♘bd7 White cannot consolidate with 17.b4 because of 17...♕b6!. This leaves him with 17.♘c4, when Black gains strong counterplay with 17...b5 18.♘d6 b4.

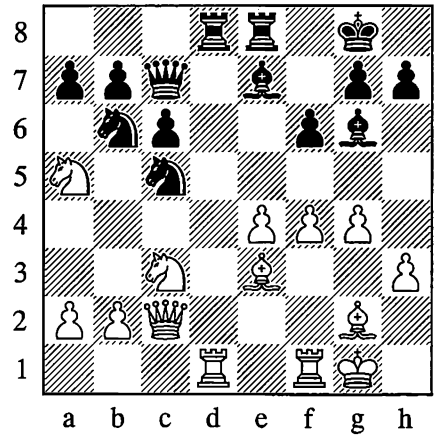
16...♕c7 17.f4 f6 18.♕c2

In this phase of the game it is important to avoid a hurried advance of the b-pawn. Only when his development has been completed should White think about carrying out this move.

Here is concrete proof of the previous statement: 18.b4?! ♖ad8 19.♕c2 ♘d3 20.a3 ♖d7 21.♖ad1 ♖fd8 Black has an active position, but White still has a trump up his sleeve: 22.f5 ♗f7 23.♘d5!? ♘xd5 24.exd5 Apparently, Black loses stability but... 24...♖xd5! A logical sacrifice, taking advantage of the weakened position of the white king.

18...♖ad8 19.♖ad1 ♖fe8

Black keeps developing, as if inviting his opponent to start concrete action.



20.a3!!

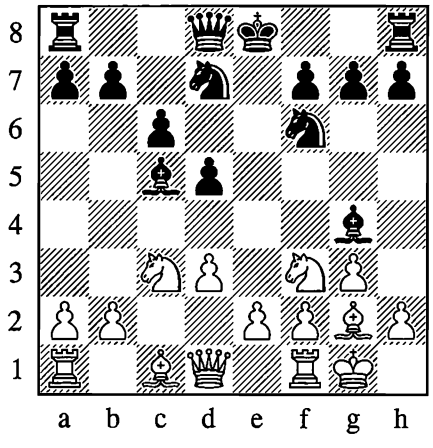
One of the best moves I have found in analysis. White defends the b4-square in advance, relying on the fact that Black has practically exhausted his possibilities of strengthening his position.

It would be too soon for 20.b4 ♖xd1 21.♖xd1 ♘e6!. The f4- and b4-pawns are under attack, forcing White to accept the sacrifice. 22.f5 ♗xb4 23.♘b3 ♕g3 Black has a strong initiative, despite the inevitable loss of material.

20...♗f7 21.b4 ♖xd1 22.♖xd1 ♘e6 23.♕f2 ♖d8 24.♖c1!±

In this type of position, with a space advantage all over the board, it is useful to keep one pair of rooks. White will enjoy a long squeezing phase.

B) 8...♗c5

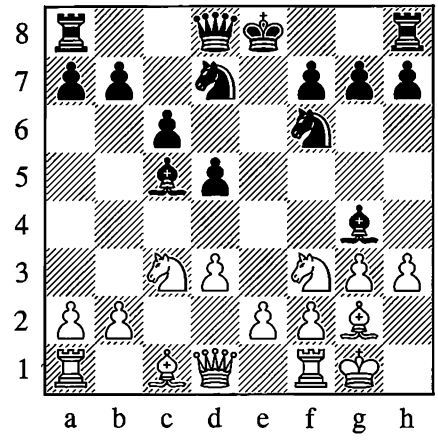


This move is more active than 8...♗e7. If White sticks to the plan based on e2-e4, the bishop would be better placed here, because it would control the d4-square and prevent the desirable development of the c1-bishop to e3. Also, the e7-square would be available for the queen, solving one of Black's main problems in the lines based on 8...♗e7.

On the other hand, if White switches to some other plan, the bishop will be more exposed on c5, while depriving Black of the important resource ...♘c5.

White has two different approaches at his disposal. Those liking to have the bishop pair will prefer **B1) 9.h3**, while **B2) 9.♕b3** is suited to players who strive for a slight but persistent initiative.

B1) 9.h3



Black can choose between **B11) 9...♗h5** and **B12) 9...♗xf3**.

B11) 9...♗h5

The most natural move, which, however, does not guarantee preserving the bishop from exchange.

10.d4!?

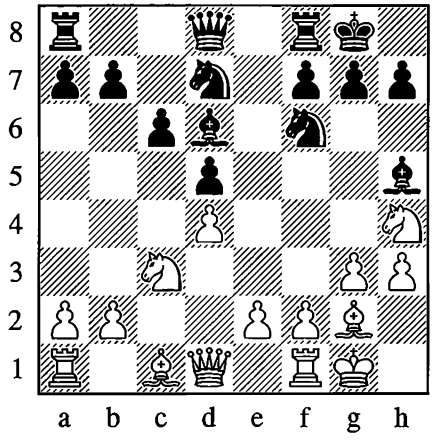
A creative treatment of the position. This unusual move has been played by Malakhov twice over the past few years.

I have nice memories of the more natural 10.a3 a5 11.e4 dxe4 12.dxe4 0–0 13.♗f4 ♖e8 14.♕c2 h6?!. The strategically ambitious plan introduced by this move is unsound tactically, because Black is not fully developed. 15.♖ad1 g5?! 16.e5! With a strong initiative in Marin – Krasenkow, Elista (ol) 1998.

However, Black could do a lot better with 14...♗xf3 15.♗xf3 ♘e5, for instance 16.♗e2

♘g6 17.♖ad1 ♕e7 with pressure against the central pawn. I have failed to find an advantage for White in this line.

10...♗d6 11.♘h4 0–0



It has long been established that the Carlsbad structure, usually arising from the Exchange Variation of the Queen's Gambit Declined, is inoffensive for Black if White has developed his bishop to g2. There are several abstract reasons for this. White's main plan is to launch a minority attack with b4-b5, but in the fianchetto lines the c4-square would remain weak, allowing ...♘b6-c4 with comfortable play for Black. The presence of the pawn on g3 is also supposed to be to Black's advantage. In the event of ♗g5 and ...h7-h6, the bishop cannot retreat to h4, as in the QGD, while in certain cases counterplay based on ...h5-h4 could be dangerous.

However, the minor changes induced by the moves h2-h3 and ...♗h5 are quite relevant for the diagrammed position. The advance of Black's h-pawn is blocked, while if ♗g5 it is best to refrain from ...h7-h6, which would leave the h5-bishop in a delicate situation. White is in no hurry to start his queenside attack. He can simply strengthen his position and play b2-b4 only if the d7-knight moves away.

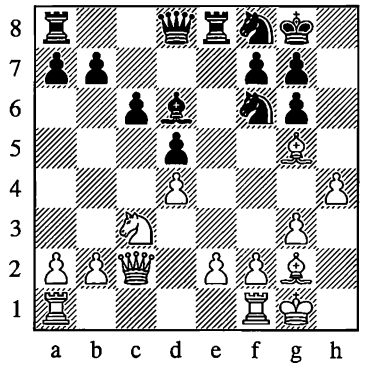
If White had played d4 in one move, Black could have answered a further h2-h3 with ...♗f5 followed by ...♗e4, which leads us to conclude that Malakhov's plan works only with this specific move order.

It is too early to give a final evaluation of the position, but Malakhov's games suggest that White's play is, at the very least, easier.

12.♕d3

A few months later, Malakhov deviated with 12.♕c2 ♖e8 13.♗g5 ♗g6 14.♘xg6 hxg6 15.h4 ♘f8 16.e4?! dxe4 17.♘xe4 ♗e7 18.♘c5 ♗xc5 19.dxc5 ♘e6= and Black's stability compensated for the bishop pair in Malakhov – Karjakin, Benidorm 2005.

However, White can improve on 16.e4.



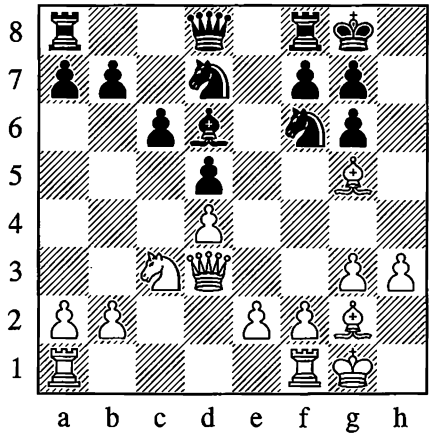
Better is 16.♖ab1!N ♘e6 17.♕d2 followed by b4-b5, since the black knights are far from the c4-square.

12...♗g6

With hindsight, it is easy to state that this willing retreat of the bishop is one of the main causes of Black's future problems. Black gives up the bishop pair, spoils his kingside structure and releases the pressure against the e2-pawn. However, after defending the g3-pawn, White creates the potential threat of trapping the bishop with f2-f4 and g3-g4, which may not work every time, but it demands that Black is always cautious.

13.♘xg6 hxg6 14.♗g5

As mentioned before, this is a fairly stable square for the bishop.



14...♖e8 15.♖ac1

It is not easy to comment on this move. White probably wanted to discourage the development of the black queen on the queenside (since now ...♕c7 can be met by ♘b5 while ...♕b6 allows ♘a4, a2-a3, b2-b4 and ♘c5; in both cases the rook is useful on c1). In any case, this mysterious move convinced Black to transfer his queen to f8, where it will be rather passive.

15...♖e6

Black is short of active plans. The idea behind the text move is to double (or even triple) his major pieces along the e-file, but the rook is exposed on e6.

16.h4!

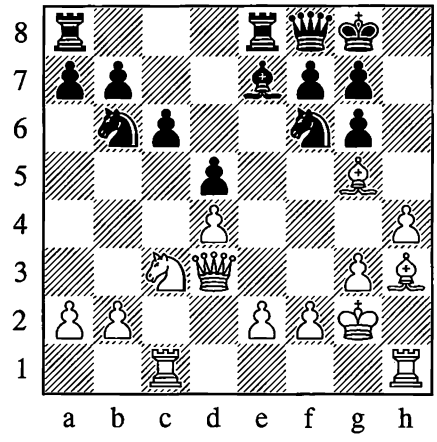
A wonderful multipurpose move. White prepares to activate the light-squared bishop on the attractive h3-c8 diagonal. 16.h4 also deprives Black's kingside pawns of any mobility and threatens an eventual attack along the h-file (after the preliminary ♔g2 and ♖h1).

16...♕f8 17.♗h3 ♖ee8 18.♔g2 ♗e7 19.♖h1

As we shall see, this statement of intent on the kingside is initially planned merely to restrict Black's possibilities, rather than start an immediate attack. The h-pawn will only advance 29 moves later, deep in the endgame.

19...♘b6

Obviously, Black did not like having both his knights under pressure from the enemy bishops.



20.♗xf6!

Now that the knights are no longer connected, this exchange is well timed. One move earlier, this exchange would have been met by ...♘xf6, keeping the e4- and h5-squares under control.

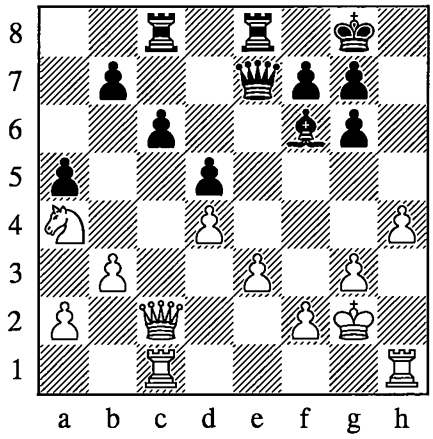
20...♗xf6 21.b3 a5 22.e3±

With his last two moves, White considerably restricted the activity of Black's minor pieces. We have reached a position where, compared with a normal Carlsbad structure, White has active pieces and a very safe king position. Black can hardly start any kingside counterplay, because of the defects of his structure.

22...♕e7 23.♕c2 ♘c8?!

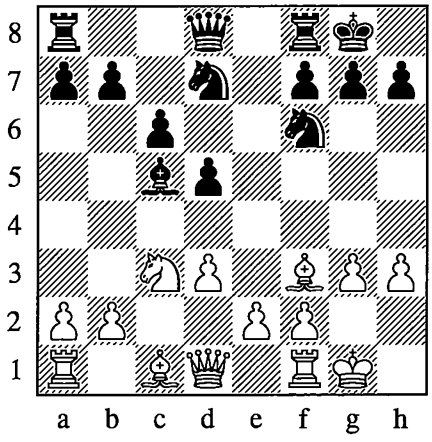
Rather careless. If Black managed to transfer the knight to d6, his problems would belong to the past, but this is not going to happen.

24.♗xc8! ♖axc8 25.♘a4±



This last exchange has increased White's advantage. He can now proceed with his queenside attack at his own convenience, which he did with great artistry in Malakhov – Yakovich, Moscow 2005.

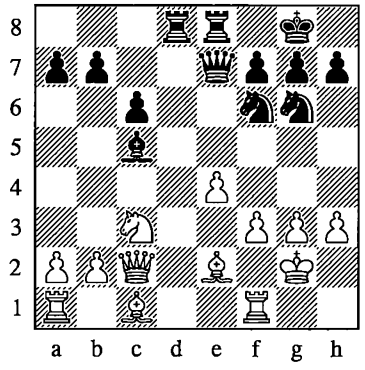
B12) 9...♗xf3 10.♗xf3 0–0



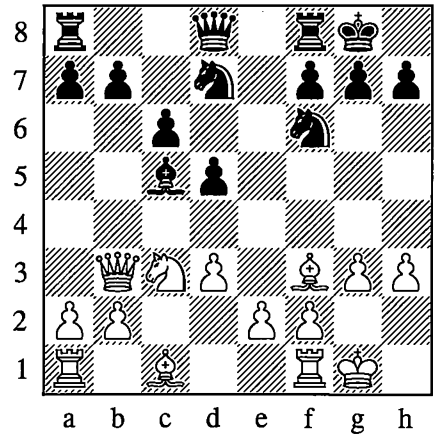
11.♕b3

A logical move, aiming to take advantage of the drawbacks of ...♗c5. With the bishop on e7, Black would react with ...♘c5, but here he has to worsen the placement of one of his pieces in order to defend the b7-pawn.

I remember that in Elista, Shirov had been quite interested in my game with Krasenkow. Therefore, I was not surprised when the next year he employed a similar plan with 11.e4. However, since Black has avoided any loss of time (...♗h5xf3), things run even more smoothly for him here. 11...dxe4 12.dxe4 ♘e5 13.♗e2 ♖e8 14.♔g2 ♘g6 15.♕c2 ♕e7 16.f3 ♖ad8



Black has completed his development, while White is far from starting the advance of his mass of pawns. 17.♗d2 ♗d6 18.♖ad1 ♘h5 As stated by Nimzowitsch, any pawn majority that is not advancing may become a weakness. 19.f4 ♘xg3! 20.♔xg3 ♕g5† And Black's initiative sufficed for a draw in Shirov – Short, Sarajevo 1999.



11...♕b6

Not an easy decision. 11...♗b6 allows the exchange of the remaining bishop after 12.♘a4±, while 11...♘b6 can be met by 12.e4± when the knight is far from the e5-square, allowing White to hope for an advantage in the centre.

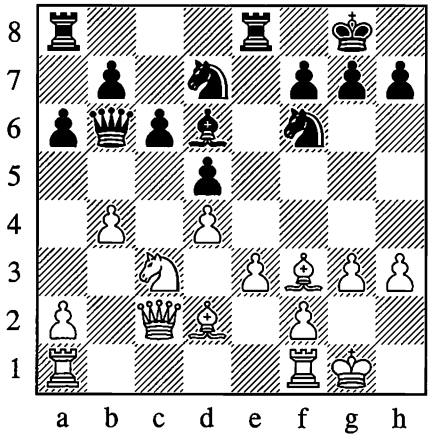
12.♕c2!

The point; Black's pieces are hanging now.

12...♗d4 13.♗d2 ♖fe8 14.e3 ♗e5 15.d4

If you did not know who is playing with White, you may guess after this move. Again, we have a viable form of the Carlsbad structure, because Black has lost several tempos with his bishop and the queen deprives the knight of the b6-square. As for White's dark-squared bishop, it is doing fine on d2, indirectly supporting the advance of the b-pawn.

15...♗d6 16.b4 a6



17.a4!!N

An improvement over:

17.♖ab1?!

This allowed Black to regroup in time with:

17...♕c7 18.♔g2 ♘b6

Facing the unpleasant threat of ...♘c4, White had to open the centre with:

19.e4!? dxe4 20.♘xe4 ♘xe4

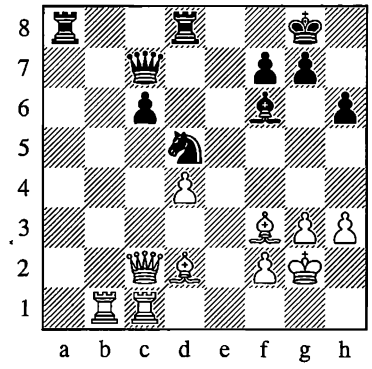
Black probably avoided the solid 20...♘bd5 because of 21.♘c5, with pressure on the b7-pawn, but 21...h5 seems to offer adequate counterplay.

21.♗xe4 h6 22.♗f3 ♘d5 23.a4

Once the danger of an invasion on c4 has been removed, White continues with his attack.

23...♖ed8 24.b5 axb5 25.axb5 ♗e7 26.bxc6 bxc6 27.♖fc1 ♗f6±/=

Malakhov – Komarov, Saint Vincent 2002.



White's advantage looks rather symbolic, but in Malakhov's hands it proved sufficient for a win.

17...♗xb4

The alternative is:

17...♕c7

Then White will practically be one tempo up compared to Malakhov's game. For instance:

18.b5 axb5 19.axb5 ♘b6 20.bxc6 bxc6 21.♖xa8 ♖xa8 22.e4 dxe4 23.♘xe4 ♘fd5

Now 23...♘xe4 would immediately drop a pawn to 24.♗xe4±.

24.♖c1

It appears that the c6-pawn is not easy to defend.

24...♗a3

24...♖c8 25.♗g4± wins the pawn without the need for White to exchange his active bishop.

After 24...♘e7 25.♘g5 g6 26.♗xc6± the black pieces are more vulnerable than after 24...♗a3.

25.♘g5! g6 26.♗xd5! ♘xd5 27.♕xc6 ♕xc6 28.♖xc6±/±

White has won a pawn, but Black's stability allows him to put up resistance. I estimate that out of 10 games, White should win 4 or 5.

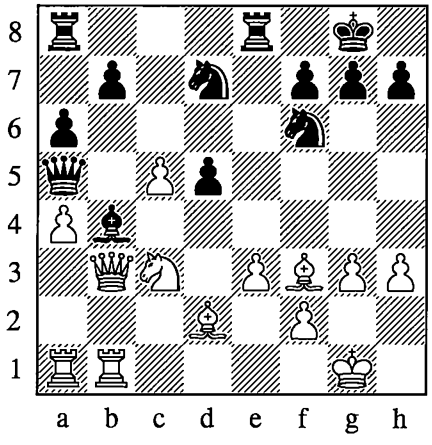
18.♖fb1 ♕a5

18...a5 fails to consolidate the queenside because of 19.♘a2±.

19.♕b3

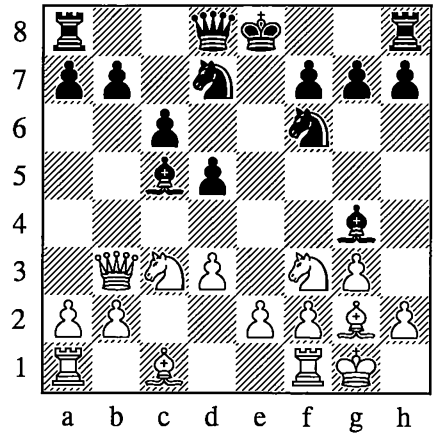
For those who love adventure, 19.♖xb4!? is a natural choice. 19...♕xb4 20.♘xd5 ♕d6 21.♗b4 ♕b8 22.♘e7† ♔h8 23.♕c4!? ♘g8 The only way to avoid the loss of the f7-pawn. 24.♘f5 (avoiding the trap 24.♕xf7? ♘xe7 25.♗xe7 ♘e5!!∓) 24...♖e6 25.e4⩲ White's position is much more active, but the pawns are equal, which makes me fear that the compensation is only enough to maintain the balance.

19...c5 20.dxc5±



White will win the pawn back while retaining the better structure.

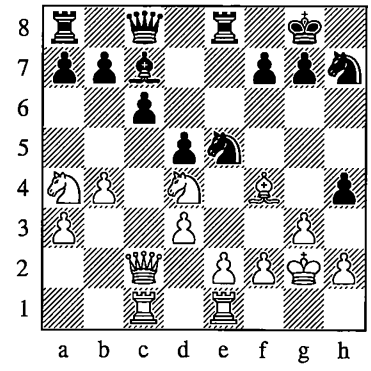
B2) 9.♕b3



We are already familiar with this idea. Here, White carries it out without any loss of time. I would mention that the main expert with White in this variation is Grandmaster Goran Dizdar. The theory is mainly based on his games.

Black's main options are **B21) 9...b5!?**, **B22) 9...♘b6** and **B23) 9...♗b6**. But first let's see some less important alternatives.

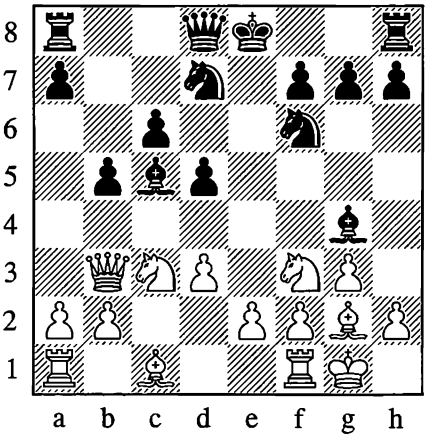
9...♕c8 looks rather passive and allowed White to carry out the minority attack in a favourable form, although only after a laborious preparatory phase: 10.♗f4 0–0 11.♘a4 ♘h5 12.♗d2 ♗d6 13.♖ac1 ♘hf6 14.♘d4 ♗e5 15.♘f3 ♗c7 16.♖fe1 ♖e8 17.♘d4 ♗e5 18.♘f3 ♗c7 19.a3 h5 20.♕c2 ♘e5 21.♘d4 ♗h3 22.♗g5 ♘h7 23.♗f4 ♗xg2 24.♔xg2 h4 25.b4



Both sides have started concrete action, but White's attack enjoys better prospects of success because of his greater piece activity. 25...a6 26.♘c5 ♘f8 27.e4. Finally opening the centre. 27...♘fg6 28.♗xe5 ♘xe5 29.f4 ♘d7 30.e5 a5 31.♘xd7 ♕xd7 32.b5!± White had the advantage on both wings in Dizdar – Chernin, New York 1989.

In the Slav Defence, the most desirable reaction to ♕b3 is 9...♕b6, but here it only causes Black a considerable loss of time after 10.♕c2, threatening to win the bishop pair with ♘a4. For instance, 10...♕a6 (The queen has little to do here, but 10...♕d8, as played in Shabalov – Abreu, Cali 2001, simply gives White an extra tempo for nothing. The simplest continuation is 11.e4±.) 11.♖b1 0–0 12.b4 ♗d6 13.a4 ♕b6 14.♗e3± White had used the exposed position of the enemy queen to build up a promising minority attack in Obukhov – Kornev, St Petersburg 2001.

B21) 9...b5!?



A highly unusual way of defending the b7-pawn. Black hopes to leave the white queen misplaced on b3 and eventually start active queenside operations himself.

10.h3 ♗h5

In view of the weakness of the c6-pawn, giving up the light-squared bishop looks a bit risky.

11.e3 0–0 12.♘e2

Since Black's queenside pawns restrict the white pieces, Dizdar rightly decided to regroup.

12...♗b6 13.♕c2±

White's position remains more harmonious. However, he had an interesting alternative here. 13.a4!? This is just a temporary pawn sacrifice. 13...♘c5 (13...a6 14.♘ed4± leaves Black under pressure on several areas of the board) 14.♕c2 ♘xa4 (or 14...bxa4 15.♗d2 ♘fd7 16.d4±, regaining the pawn and maintaining the better structure) 15.♕xc6 a6 16.♕c2 ♖c8 17.♕b1 ♕d7 18.b3± Black's temporary activity has been extinguished and his structure has been seriously weakened.

13...c5

This plan is not without risk. White has a very solid position that is likely to resist this type of aggression, whereas the weaknesses left behind by the pawn advances will not be easy for the black pieces to cover.

14.a4 c4!? 15.♘f4

Only not 15.axb5? because of 15...♗xf3 16.♗xf3 ♘e5 winning a piece.

15...♗xf3 16.♗xf3 ♘e5 17.♗g2 b4

Black has no choice; he has to continue attacking. Giving up the pressure would most likely leave him with an unpleasant position, for instance: 17...cxd3 18.♘xd3 ♖c8 19.♕d1 ♘xd3 20.♕xd3 bxa4 21.♖xa4 ♕d6 22.♗d2 ♕e6 23.♗c3±

18.♖d1 b3 19.♕e2

Black cannot hold his position by normal means.

19...g5?!

This move is consistent but it should only have made things worse for Black. Maybe he should have aimed for a worse but defensible position with 19...cxd3.

20.d4! ♘g6

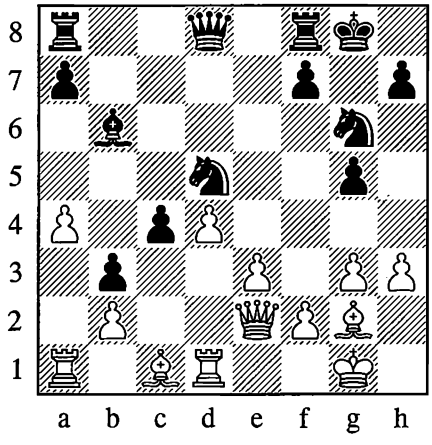
20...♘c6 21.♘h5± leaves the d5-pawn desperately weak.

21.♘xd5!

This piece sacrifice should have underlined the over-extended character of Black's position.

21.♘h5 would also have been strong.

21...♘xd5



22.a5!!N

This strong intermediate move leaves Black's pieces hanging.

In the game White played 22.♕xc4?!, which let most of the advantage slip away. 22...♘f6 23.♕xb3 ♖e8 24.♕d3 ♕e7 25.♗d2 ♖ab8 26.b4 ♘e4 27.♗e1 f5 28.♖ac1∞ Despite the unusual material balance, both sides have a normal placement of pieces, Dizdar – Babula, Warsaw 2005.

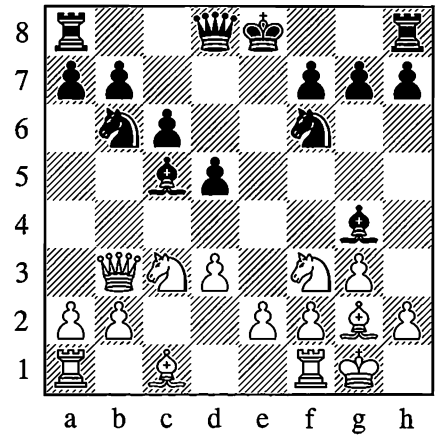
22...♗xa5 23.♕xc4 ♘ge7

23...♘de7 loses material to 24.♗xa8 ♕xa8 25.♖xa5+–.

24.e4 ♘f6 25.♗xg5+–

Black cannot save his poorly coordinated army.

B22) 9...♘b6



As we already know, this move drives the knight away from the centre. As a curiosity, I will mention that, according to the database, Dizdar has never won a game against it!

10.♕c2

Frankly speaking, I do not understand the necessity of retreating with the queen at this stage of the game.

I would consider 10.e4!?N immediately. Maybe Dizdar wanted to inhibit an eventual retreat of the g4-bishop to e6, but this does not seem so troublesome for White. In any case, I have kept his move as the main line, in order to offer a clear picture of the character of the fight.

10...0–0 11.e4

A possible way to justify 10.♕c2 would be inserting 11.a3!?N a5 before opening the centre with 12.e4.

11...dxe4 12.dxe4

We have reached a familiar structure, with Black facing some problems keeping the e5-square under control.

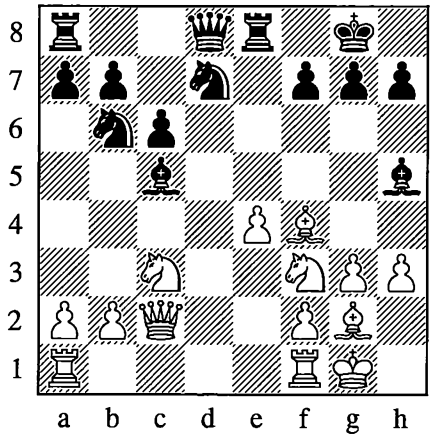
12...♖e8

Against 12...♘fd7, as played in Dizdar – Rogic, Zagreb 1993, White should develop normally with 13.♗f4!N ♕e7 14.♖ad1±, eventually followed by ♖fe1 and h2-h3.

13.h3 ♗h5

After 13...♗xf3 14.♗xf3 ♘fd7, White can neutralize the enemy piece pressure with 15.♗g2 ♘e5 16.♘e2 (covering the d4-square and clearing the c3-square for the bishop) 16...♕e7 17.♗d2± and soon the white pawns may start to advance.

14.♗f4 ♘fd7



15.♖ad1!N

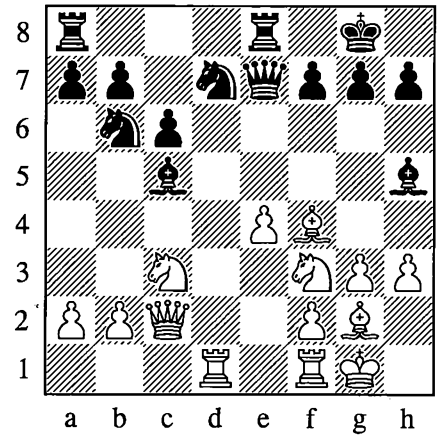
I consider this move to be the best. Before undertaking anything concrete, White completes his development.

Another Dizdar game went 15.g4 ♗g6 16.♗g3 h5!. The logical reaction to White's premature action. 17.♘h4?! hxg4 18.♘xg6 And now the unexpected 18...♕g5! left White struggling in Dizdar – Bukal, Medulin 2002. Black intends to capture on g6 with the queen, while ♘h4 or ♘f4 can be met by ...gxh3, threatening ...♕xg3!†.

In this line, 17.♖ad1!? may still have maintained some pressure.

15...♕e7

White is well prepared for the hyper-ambitious 15...♗xf3 16.♗xf3 g5, for instance: 17.♗c1 ♕f6 18.♗g2 ♘e5 19.♘b5!±



16.g4

Once the knight jump to d4 has been enabled, this move is entirely viable. A more conservative approach would be 16.♖fe1, without fearing 16...♗xf3 17.♗xf3 g5 18.♗c1 ♘e5 in view of 19.♗h5±, preventing the attack developing with ...g5-g4.

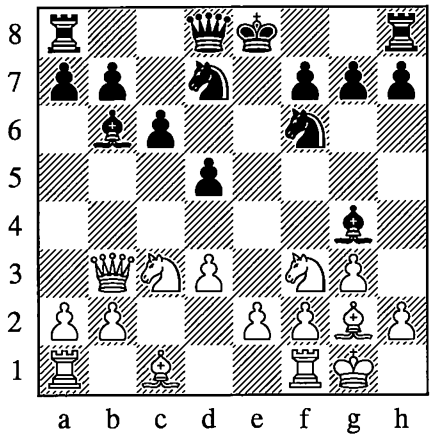
16...♗g6 17.♘d4! ♘e5

17...♘d5 does not solve Black's problems after 18.♘xd5 cxd5 19.♘f5! ♗xf5 20.exf5± and 17...h5 leaves the g-file weakened after 18.♘f5 ♗xf5 19.gxf5±.

18.♗g3 ♖ad8 19.♘b3 ♗d6 20.f4 ♘ec4 21.♕f2±

White has regrouped perfectly and enjoys a considerable space advantage on the kingside.

B23) 9...♗b6



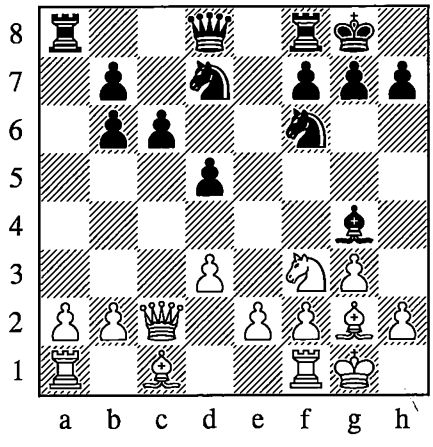
This looks like a solid move, but it has the drawback of giving up the bishop pair.

10.♘a4 0–0 11.♘xb6 axb6

Black agrees to play with doubled pawns, in order to somewhat restrict White's domination of the dark squares. However, this small structural defect is likely to make White's queenside pawnstorm quite effective. The seriousness of Black's situation is revealed by the game classified under B232 below, in which a reigning World Champion was put against the wall.

12.♕c2

In this position the queen retreat is entirely justified; White prepares the advance of the b-pawn. As Black is not under immediate pressure, he has a relatively wide choice.



We will examine **B231) 12...♗xf3**, **B232) 12...♕e7**, **B233) 12...♖e8** and **B234) 12...h6**.

B231) 12...♗xf3

It makes little sense to give up the bishop without being provoked.

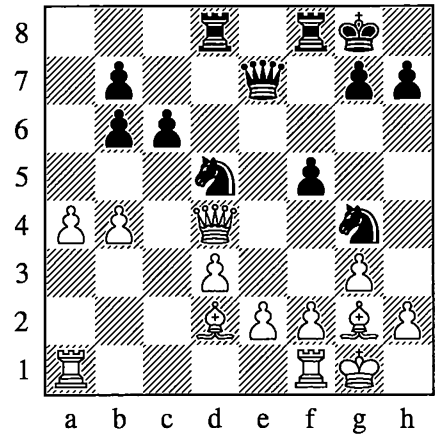
13.♗xf3 ♘e5 14.♗g2 d4

Black has managed to win space in the centre without loss of time, but this is hardly an improvement of his position. White now has clear targets on d4 and c6.

15.b4 ♕e7 16.♗d2 ♖ad8 17.a4 ♘d5 18.♕b2 f5

A desperate attempt to complicate matters.

19.♕xd4 ♘g4



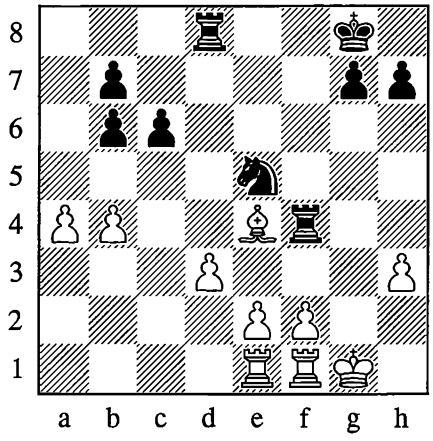
20.♖ae1!N

20.h3 led to less clear consequences after 20...♕xe2 21.♗g5 ♘gf6 22.♖fe1 ♕h5 23.♗xf6 ♖xf6 24.♖e7 f4, with some counterplay for Black in Piket – Jonkman, Amsterdam 2001.

20...f4

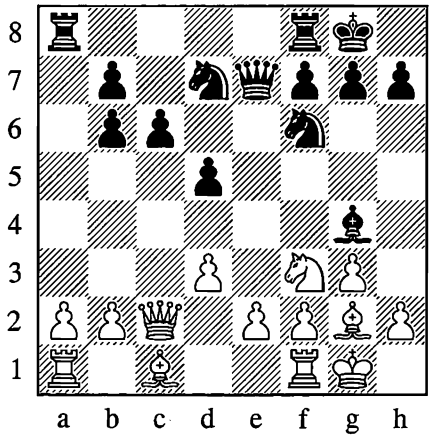
Instead 20...♘de3 21.♕xb6 ♘xf1 22.♗xf1± leaves White with two pawns and a marvellous pair of bishops to more than compensate for the sacrificed exchange.

21.♕e4 ♕f6 22.h3 ♘e5 23.gxf4 ♘xf4 24.♗xf4 ♕xf4 25.♕xf4 ♖xf4 26.♗e4±



Black does not have sufficient compensation for the pawn.

B232) 12...♕e7



This move bears the seal of a reigning World Champion. Black prevents b2-b4, at least temporarily.

13.b3 b5

This radical attempt to prevent the queenside attack has the drawback that it is rather time-consuming.

14.♗b2 b4 15.♘d4!

Threatening to leave the enemy bishop out of play with h2-h3, eventually followed by e2-e4.

15...c5 16.h3!

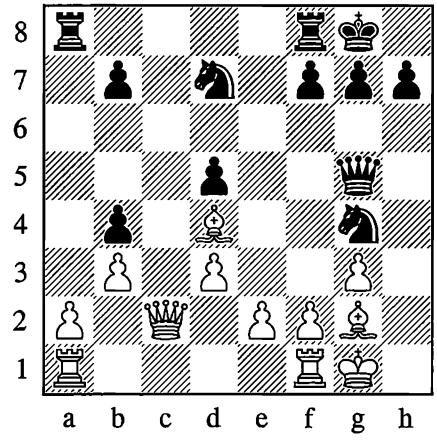
The logical way to fight for the initiative. In this critical moment Black is forced to make up his mind regarding the bishop's fate.

16...cxd4

16...♗h5 fails to equalize after: 17.♘f5 ♕xe2 This is the critical continuation (otherwise after 18.e4 White would simply be better). 18.♕xe2 ♗xe2 19.♘e7† ♔h8 20.♖fe1 ♗xd3 21.♘xd5± White will soon regain the pawn while remaining very active.

17.hxg4 ♘xg4 18.♗xd4 ♕g5

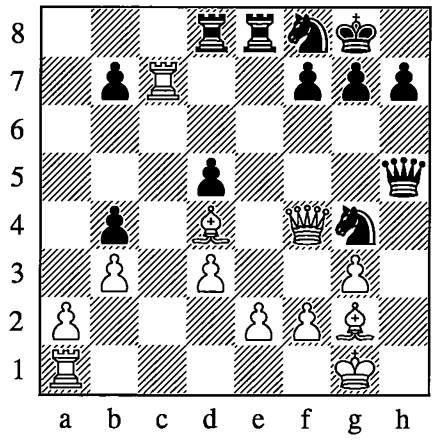
From a structural point of view, the whole operation has been a success for White, but Black has obtained some threats on the kingside.



19.♕c7 ♕h5

This is a good moment to note that with the addition of the moves 12...♖e8 and 13.♖e1, which are characteristic of line B233 below, Black's counterplay would have failed completely. White could have simply captured the d7-knight at this point.

20.♖fc1 ♖ad8 21.♕f4 ♖fe8 22.♖c7 ♘f8



Both sides have considerably activated their pieces. To claim an advantage, White has to find a radical solution to his kingside problems.

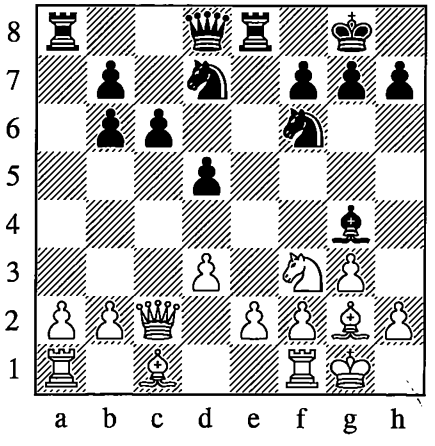
23.♗h3!!N

This spectacular move, relying on the fact that the f7-square needs to be defended, is much stronger than 23.♗f3 which led to an interesting draw by repetition after 23...♕h2† 24.♔f1 ♘h6 25.♖xb7 ♘e6 26.♕e5 ♘g4 27.♕f5 ♘h6 28.♕e5 ♘g4 29.♕f5 in Piket – Kramnik, Zurich 2001.

23...♘h6 24.♔g2 ♕xe2 25.♕f3±

Black's attack has been repelled and the knights are being dominated by the h3-bishop. White will soon win the pawn back while retaining a pleasant position.

B233) 12...♖e8



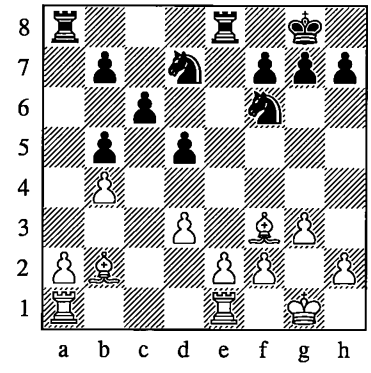
13.♖e1 ♕e7

Inserting these rook moves before the queen develops does not change the character of the position.

14.b3 ♕c5

Instead 14...♘e5 15.♘xe5 ♕xe5 16.♗b2 ♕h5 17.♗xf6 gxf6 left Black's kingside structure in ruins without any compensation. Now White methodically strengthened his position and achieved a clear advantage rather quickly. 18.e3 ♗f3 19.a4 ♖e6 20.♕c3 ♗xg2 21.♔xg2 ♕e5 22.♕b4 c5 23.♕g4† ♔h8 24.d4 f5 25.♕d1 ♕d6 26.♕d3 ♖f6 27.♖ed1 ♖d8 28.♖ac1± The weakness of the f5-pawn complicates Black's task of defending his hanging pawns, Dizdar – Lukacs, Debrecen 1992.

The following game must have inspired Piket's play with White in this variation. 14...♕b4 15.♗d2 ♕c5 16.♕b2 Exchanging on c5 would only strengthen Black's structure after ...bxc5. 16...♕a3 17.♗c1 ♕xb2 18.♗xb2 ♗xf3 19.♗xf3 b5 20.b4±



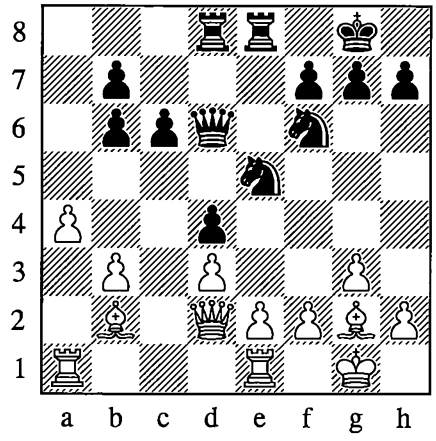
With a lasting advantage for White, who has a flexible structure and a mighty pair of bishops, Markowski – Piket, Istanbul (ol) 2000.

15.♕d2 ♕d6 16.♗b2 ♗xf3

Black probably feared ♘d4 followed by h2-h3, when his bishop would risk remaining

offside. However, we already know that the operation initiated by the previous move fails to solve his problems.

17.♗xf3 ♘e5 18.♗g2 d4 19.a4 ♖ad8



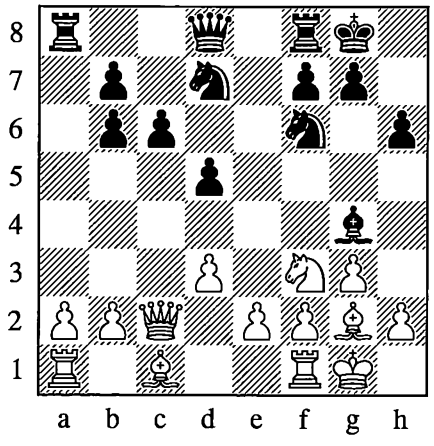
20.a5!

An original way to carry out the queenside attack. There is a paradox regarding play against doubled pawns – sometimes their weakness consists of the fact that one of them can be exchanged, without the possibility of being replaced by a colleague!

20...bxa5 21.♕xa5 c5 22.♕b5 b6 23.b4±

Black's queenside was shaky in Dizdar – Landenbergue, Geneva 1999.

B234) 12...h6



This move is frequently played in the Reti Opening; Black prepares a safe retreat for his remaining bishop. However, with a white pawn on d3, the bishop will be practically dead on h7. In addition, 12...h6 does not do anything to stop White's main plan.

13.b4!

There is no need for White to shy away from such a brutal launch of the queenside attack.

13...♕e7 14.♖b1

I initially intended 14.a4?! when the capture on b4 would lose an exchange to ♗a3. However, I noticed in time that 14...b5! leaves White with problems defending his pawns on b4, a4 and e2.

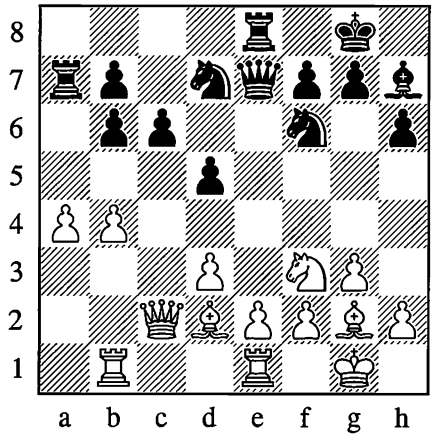
14...♖fe8 15.♖e1 ♗f5

If Black had tried to prevent the advance of the a-pawn with 15...b5, then the dark squares would have remained under White's influence. After 16.♘d4 followed by e2-e4 (eventually, after a2-a3 and ♗b2), Black gradually loses ground in the centre. Besides, his bishop would remain poorly placed. However, this may have been a lesser evil than the game continuation, because it would have prevented the simple plan based on the advance of the a-pawn.

16.a4 ♗h7

It is obvious that Black cannot find a constructive plan. Instead, he allows White to play "on his own". I expected 16...♘f8, although White's play would be very pleasant anyway. For instance: 17.♗e3 ♘6d7 18.a5 b5 19.♘d4 ♗h7 20.♕c3 (gradually increasing the dark-squared domination) 20...♘e6 21.♘xe6 ♕xe6 (21...fxe6 would fail to strengthen the centre because of 22.f4± intending ♗d4 and e2-e4.) 22.♗d4 f6 23.e4± White has an advantage on both wings.

17.♗d2 ♖a7



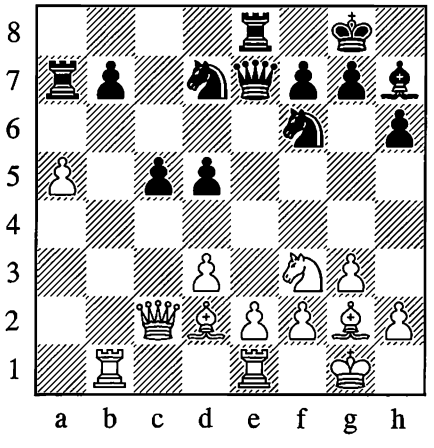
18.a5

Black's structural defects become clear now. Because of the presence of doubled pawns, he cannot maintain control of the b6-square, which will lead to a weakening of his entire queenside.

18...bxa5

Black decides to get rid of the doubled pawns, but this exchange opens the b-file for White's major pieces. Instead 18...b5 would lead to an even less favourable form of the variation mentioned in the notes to the 15th move, since White has a considerable space advantage on the queenside.

19.bxa5 c5



Black has finally prevented the knight jump to d4, but the b5-square is now chronically weak. Besides, with just a minimum of care, White can avoid the potential threat of ...c5-c4.

20.♖b5

The pawn attack has ended in complete success for White; now the time has come to increase the piece pressure.

20...♕d6

20...c4 would be answered by 21.♕b2!, when Black cannot defend his weaknesses.

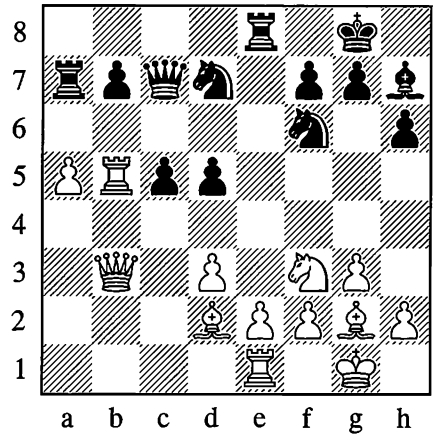
21.♕b3

From an aesthetic point of view, I prefer 21.♕b2. However, my decision over-the-board was based on a tactical nuance that will be explained in the next comment.

21...♕c7

I planned to answer 21...♕a6 with 22.♗c3 (threatening ♗xf6) 22...d4 23.♘xd4! cxd4 24.♗xd4±. With the queen on b2, Black could have captured on d3 now.

With hindsight, I feel that as I was very content with my position, I had started to look for a decisive blow too early.



22.♗c3

Indirectly increasing the pressure against the c5-pawn, in view of the possible capture on f6. However, according to Gustafsson, 22.♗h3± would have been even more unpleasant, because of the pressure along the h3-c8 diagonal and the irrevocable passivity of the h7-bishop.

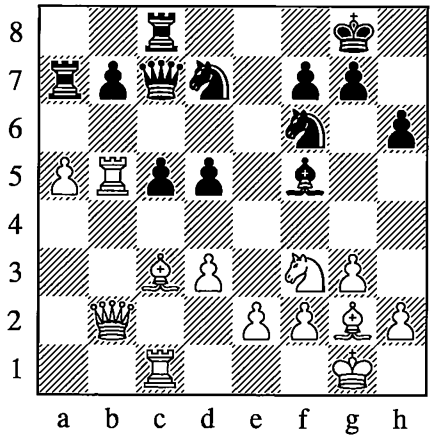
22...♗f5!?

Probably the only way to avoid being crushed by a further ♗h3, but it is obvious that Black's bishop has already moved too often...

23.♖c1 ♖c8

My previous move was justified by the simple variation: 23...♖xe2? 24.♗xf6 ♘xf6 25.♘d4+–

24.♕b2±

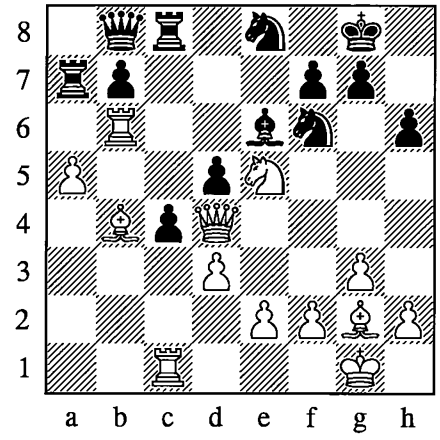


Finally placing the queen on the right square. White intends to increase his pressure with ♘e5, opening the long light diagonal, among others. The game Marin – Gustafsson, Reggio Emilia 2008/09, continued:

24...♘e8 25.♘e5 ♘d6 26.♖b6 ♘f6 27.♘f3 ♘de8 28.♖b1 ♘d7 29.♖c1 ♗e6 30.♘e5 ♘df6 31.♗b4 c4 32.♕d4

White already has a decisive advantage.

32...♕b8



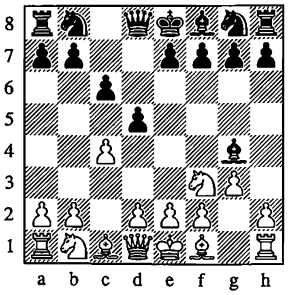
Now the shortest path to victory would have been 33.dxc4!N dxc4 34.♘c6.

Conclusion

The asymmetrical character of the structures examined in this chapter tends to favour White, who can combine the advance of his kingside majority with a slow minority attack.

Chapter 9

Anti-Slav Systems



3...♗g4

Variation Index

1.c4 c6 2.g3 d5 3.♘f3 ♗g4

4.♗g2

A) 4...♘d7 156

B) 4...e6 5.cxd5 ♗xf3! 6.♗xf3 cxd5 7.♘c3 ♘c6 8.0–0 ♘f6 9.d3 ♗e7 156

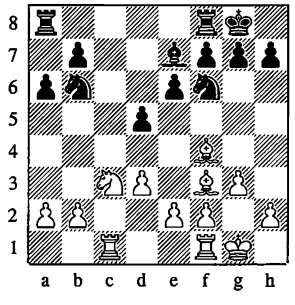
B1) 10.♗g2 158

B2) 10.♕a4 0–0 11.♗f4 160

B21) 11...♘d7 160

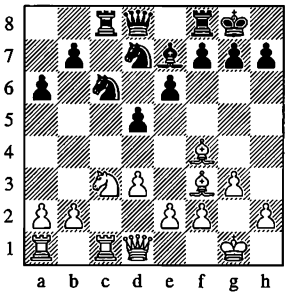
B22) 11...♕d7 161

A) after 13...a6



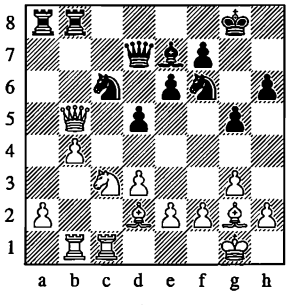
14.♖c2!N

B21) after 13...♖c8



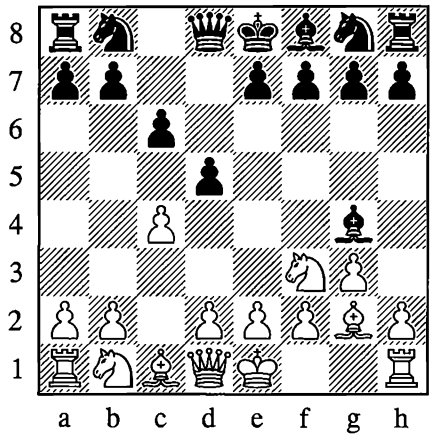
14.a3!?N

B22) note to 12...♖fc8



19.♘xd5!!

1.c4 c6 2.g3 d5 3.♘f3 ♗g4 4.♗g2



Black has two main moves that do not transpose to the lines from the previous chapters: **A) 4...♘d7** and **B) 4...e6.**

A) 4...♘d7

This is rarely played. Black prevents ♘f3-e5 without giving up the bishop pair, but the drawback of this move is that it commits the knight too soon. After the exchange on d5, Black will be deprived of the active ...♘c6.

5.cxd5 cxd5 6.♘c3 e6

After 6...♘gf6 7.♕b3 the careless 7...♘c5? allowed 8.♕b5† ♘fd7 9.d4!± in Andersson – Tal, Stockholm (2) 1976.

7.♕b3 ♗xf3

In the event of the immediate 7...♕b6 the bishop may remain out of play after 8.♕xb6 ♘xb6 9.♘d4!?.

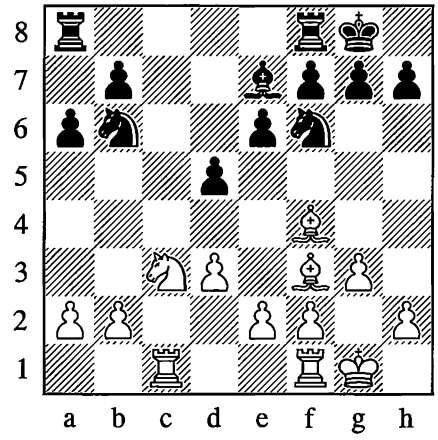
In this line, instead of 8...♘xb6, weakening the pawn structure with 8...axb6 does not make much sense. 9.♘d4 ♘gf6 10.h3 ♗h5 11.♘db5 ♖c8 12.d3 ♗e7 13.0–0 ♗g6 14.♗f4 0–0 15.♖fc1± As usual, the play is rather one-sided, Yermolinsky – Ubilava, Volgodonsk 1981.

After 7...♘gf6 White should play 8.0–0!? avoiding tricks based on ...♘c5 when if ♕b4 then ...♘d3†.

8.♗xf3 ♕b6 9.♕xb6 ♘xb6 10.0–0 ♘f6

Concentrating the knights on the queenside with 10...♘e7 11.d3 ♘c6 is time-consuming and does not solve Black's problems. 12.♘b5 ♔d7 13.♗e3 ♘c8 14.♖fc1± with strong pressure.

11.d3 ♗e7 12.♗f4 0–0 13.♖ac1 a6



14.♖c2!N

This is my suggested improvement over 14.♗c7, which led to excessive simplifications after 14...♘bd7 15.d4 ♖fc8 16.♘a4 ♔f8 17.♘b6 ♘xb6 18.♗xb6 ♗d8 19.♗xd8 ♖xd8 20.♖c7 ♖ab8= in Dizdar – Tischbierek, Austria 2003. White's bishop has failed to join the rest of the white army.

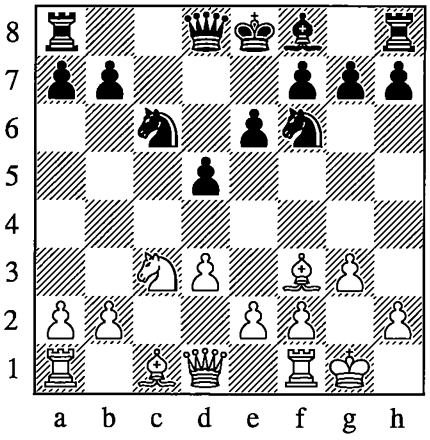
14...♖ac8 15.♖fc1±

The least White can hope for is the ending from Larsen – Ivkov, as in line B1 below.

B) 4...e6 5.cxd5 ♗xf3!

This is considered to be more solid than 5...exd5, which has been thoroughly examined in the previous chapter.

6.♗xf3 cxd5 7.♘c3 ♘c6 8.0–0 ♘f6 9.d3



I must confess that of all the tabiyas of the anti-Slav system, this has been the toughest nut to crack. This was *not* due to the fact that theory considers the position to be dead equal; I had to fight against the "official" opinion in most of the other lines, too. The problem was based on the entirely different character of the position. Instead of the dynamic fireworks of the lines with 4...dxc4 or the one-sided strategic struggle after 4...♗f5, here all White has is his theoretically strong pair of bishops and the slightly more flexible structure. The position is almost symmetrical and it will not be easy to gain an advantage on any part of the board.

At the same time, Black has easy development while his actively placed queen's knight leaves White with problems finding a good square for his queen in order to connect the rooks. One of the most painful things is that the favourite bishop of hypermodernists is severely restricted by Black's central pawns.

The more I looked at the practical material available, the less I felt I understood the position. It is hard to find two games that look alike, but little by little this detail made me realize that I was not the only one who did not grasp the essence of the position. It was then that I changed my general approach. Instead of trying to build a draft tree of variations from the diagram position, I decided to take one or two games as models. After listing the names of players who had successfully played this variation with White, my choice was simple, since nobody could stand beside the outstanding strategist of the hypermodern openings, Bent Larsen.

Although the following game features mistakes from both sides, I managed to spot Larsen's strategic aim. In order to take advantage of the bishop pair and be able to start the gradual expansion of his flexible structure, White needs to trade all the rooks and, if possible, the queens as well. However, this is not easy to achieve, because the c6-knight keeps the c-file closed, while, as mentioned above, connecting the white rooks is not easy.

At the same time, Black's active possibilities are also somewhat restricted, despite his space advantage. The main problem is that the careless advance of either of the central pawns would revive the g2-bishop, which can have important consequences.

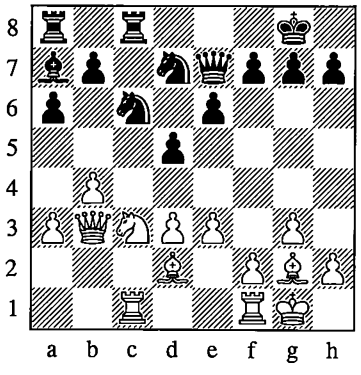
9...♗e7

The most popular move. Less accurate is:

9...♗c5

The problem is that this places the bishop on a vulnerable square.

10.♗d2 0–0 11.♖c1 ♕e7 12.a3 a6 13.♗g2 ♗a7 14.b4 ♖fc8 15.♕b3 ♘d7 16.e3



White has taken advantage of the time Black spent transferring the bishop to the passive a7-square to build up a position similar to Larsen's after Ivkov's inaccuracy.

16...♘ce5

The tempting 16...d4 only opens the long diagonal without bringing about the desired activation of Black's forces. 17.♘e2 dxe3 18.fxe3 ♘f6 19.d4± With pressure against Black's queenside.

17.♘e2 b5 18.h3 ♘b6

Black has regrouped his pieces rather awkwardly, while White's slow expansion keeps progressing.

19.f4 ♘ed7 20.♔h2 g6 21.♘d4 ♕d6 22.♘f3 ♘a4 23.e4

Playing for a kingside attack.

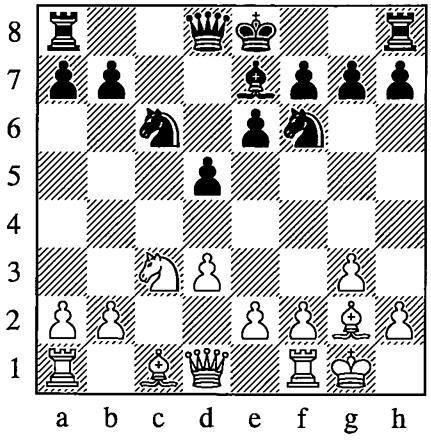
I would also consider the more conservative 23.♖c2±, fighting for the c-file.

23...♘db6 24.♖cd1 ♕c7 25.♖c1 ♕d6 26.f5

White soon obtained a decisive attack in Mchedlishvili – Steingrimsson, Plovdiv 2008.

In line **B1) 10.♗g2**, I will share my opinions about the aforementioned remarkable game, but our repertoire choice is **B2) 10.♕a4!?.**

B1) 10.♗g2



This is typical of Larsen. The bishop was slightly exposed on f3 so White, not seeing any concrete plan yet, retreats it to a safer square.

Generally speaking, opening the centre is one of White's ideas, but at this specific point 10.e4 leads nowhere because of 10...dxe4 11.dxe4 0–0 12.♗e3 ♕a5! followed by ...♗c5, when the weakness of the d4-square makes itself felt.

10...0–0 11.a3

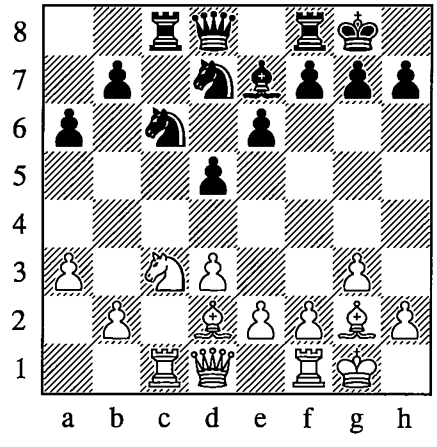
We are familiar with this move from the previous chapter. At some point White may start taking some space on the queenside with b2-b4.

11...♖c8

This move is not bad, but here Beliavsky's plan, consisting of 11...♕d7 12.♗d2 ♖ab8 followed by ...b7-b5, is the most efficient. Being better developed, Black is ready to win territory on the wing where it was White who was supposed to attack.

12.♗d2 a6 13.♖c1 ♘d7

This looks like a multipurpose move, preparing to meet b2-b4 with ...b7-b5 followed by ...♘b6, or to inhibit an eventual e2-e4 by bringing the knight one step closer to the d3-square.



14.♔h1

This slightly awkward move is a sign that something has gone wrong for White; his position is cramped and he cannot easily

display any activity. Larsen probably wanted to enable f2-f4, but after, say, 14...b5 15.f4 ♕b6 White is still far from attacking, while Black's position looks pretty active.

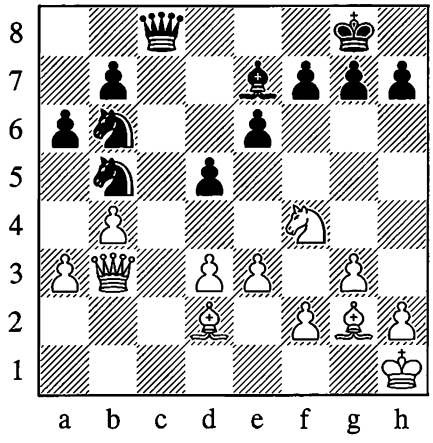
14...♘d4?!

But this is a significant inaccuracy. Black willingly removes the main defender of the c-file and allows White to take space in the centre with gain of time.

15.b4 ♘b6 16.e3 ♘b5 17.♕b3 ♕d7 18.♘e2

Things have changed very much in White's favour; he is getting close to the type of ending I mentioned.

18...♗f6 19.♘f4 ♖xc1 20.♖xc1 ♖c8 21.♖c5 ♗e7 22.♖xc8† ♕xc8

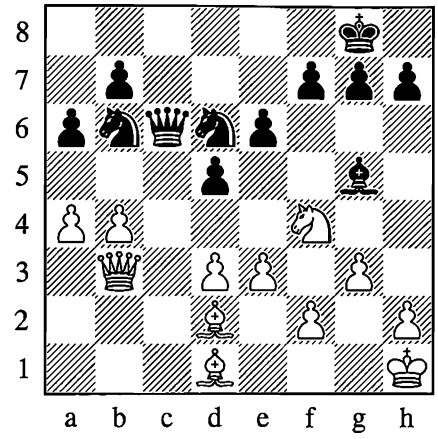


The first part of the plan has been accomplished. In order to achieve full success, White needs to exchange queens, or at least take control of the only open file with his own queen. For the time being, it seems that this is not easy to achieve, because of the relative weakness of the queenside pawns.

23.a4 ♘d6 24.♗f3!

A very strong move. White transfers the bishop to the other wing, in order to over-defend the a4-pawn.

24...♕c6 25.♗d1 ♗g5



26.♕c3?

A blunder, probably caused by time trouble. White should have prepared this move with ♔g1 or else played 26.♕c2±.

26...♘bc4!

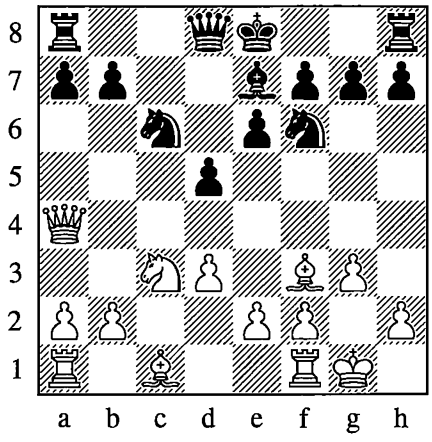
Suddenly, White is in some trouble because of the threat of ...d5-d4†. The lucky thing is that the game Larsen – Ivkov, Bled (1) 1965, was nevertheless won by White after some time trouble miracles. Otherwise, I may not have turned my attention towards it and thus failed to understand White's main goal in this variation...

We now have sufficient elements to build up a system of concrete variations, but before moving further, I will make a short list of the reasons why Larsen (and, in fact, many other players) failed to obtain an advantage after the opening.

First of all, he lost a couple of tempos. Moves like ♗g2 and a2-a3, played just on general grounds, allow Black to take a lead in development. Time is an important factor even if there is no direct contact between the enemy pieces. The player who occupies the best squares first will be able to dictate the further course of events.

We also know that ...♖b8 followed by ...b7-b5 is an unpleasant plan. Therefore, summing up, White should prevent this latter plan, but without losing any time!

B2) 10.♕a4



White prepares to connect his rooks.

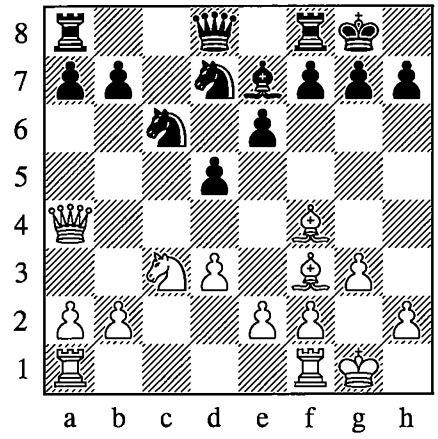
10...0–0 11.♗f4

Depriving the enemy rooks of the important b8-square. We can see that White can develop normally without retreating his bishop to g2. His rooks are connected and, even in the worst case, he can just play ♖fc1 followed by ♕d1. Then the plan based on ...b7-b5 would be less effective because White's forces are concentrated on that wing.

Black now has a choice regarding which piece is to be placed on the d7-square. We have **B21) 11...♘d7** and **B22) 11...♕d7**.

Instead 11...♗d6, aiming to neutralize the pressure along the f4-b8 diagonal, can be met by 12.♗e3!? when the black bishop does not stand so well.

B21) 11...♘d7

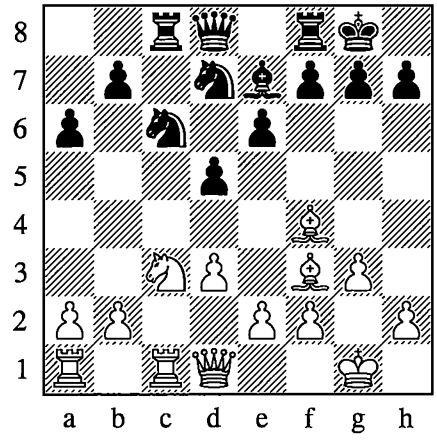


This is slightly artificial and leaves Black with some coordination problems. Since the attack against the white queen is not so terrible in view of ♕d1, the knight simply stands in the way of the other black pieces.

12.♖fc1 a6

12...♘b6 13.♕d1 ♗g5 "with equality" has been recommended. Indeed, the exchange of the dark-squared bishops is likely to make Black's defence easier, but here it implies some loss of time, since the queen will not be especially well placed on g5. After 14.♗xg5 ♕xg5 15.♖ab1 ♖ac8 16.b4± followed by a massive advance of the queenside pawns, White has a long-term initiative.

13.♕d1 ♖c8



14.a3!?N

Once the main regrouping has been achieved, White can start his queenside play.

14...b5 15.b4 ♘de5

The standard pawn break 15...a5 is premature because of 16.♘xb5 axb4 17.♘d6 ♖c7 18.♘f5! exf5 19.♗xc7 ♕xc7 20.♗xd5 ♘c5 21.♗xc6 b3 22.♖ab1 ♕xc6 23.♕xb3± when White has a minimal material advantage and a dangerous passed pawn.

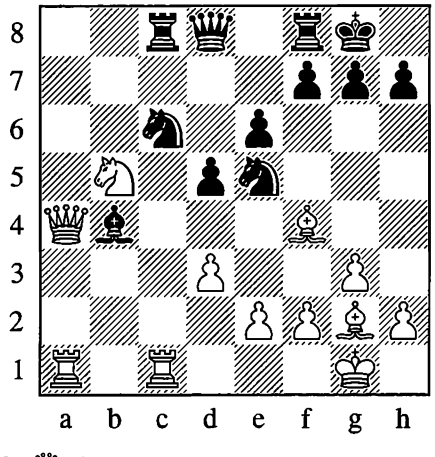
15...♗f6 is inoffensive because of 16.♗d2±, followed by Larsen's regrouping with ♗g2, e2-e3 and ♘e2.

16.♗g2

White's position starts becoming more pleasant and the next move is a radical attempt to liquidate the queenside, which fails tactically.

16...a5?! 17.♘xb5 axb4 18.axb4 ♗xb4 19.♕a4

With his king's rook passive on f8, Black cannot muster adequate resistance on the queenside, even though there are no pawns left in that area.



19...♕e7

After 19...♗e7 20.♘a7! ♘xa7 21.♗xe5 ♖xc1† 22.♖xc1 ♘c8 the passive placement of practically all the black pieces leaves White with a free hand in what is only superficially a dull position. 23.♕g4 Now the weakening 23...g6 is forced (since 23...♗f6? fails to 24.♖xc8!). 24.♗a1 ♕d7 25.♕d4 f6 26.e4± Black faces an unpleasant defence.

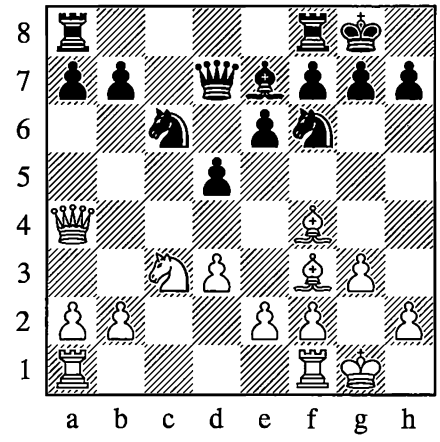
20.♖ab1 ♖a8

Or 20...♘g6 21.♗c7! and Black's pieces are hanging.

21.♕b3 ♗a5 22.♕b2±

Black's lack of coordination will cause him to lose material.

B22) 11...♕d7



The most natural move.

12.♖fc1 ♖fc8

This is the most logical move, but it has never been played so far. A move that has been tested is:

12...♖ac8

Once again this leaves the queenside slightly vulnerable. The following is an inspiring game, which I discovered only after having designed the plan with ♕a4 and ♗f4 "from scratch".

13.♖ab1 a6 14.♗g2 h6 15.b4

With his rooks optimally placed, White's plan continues naturally.

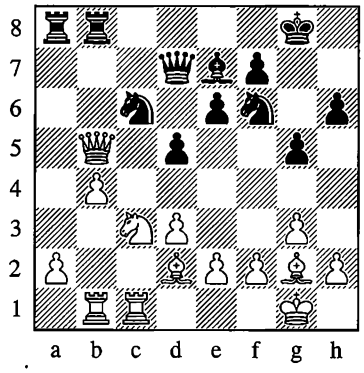
15...b5?!

This attempt to hold his ground is tactically flawed.

16.♕xa6 g5

A necessary weakening move, in order to "trap" the queen.

17.♗d2 ♖a8 18.♕xb5 ♖fb8



19.♘xd5!!

In fact, it is Black who was trapped this time!

19...♖xb5 20.♘xf6† ♗xf6 21.♗xc6 ♕d8 22.♗xb5 ♖xa2 23.♖d1±

As a consequence of the forcing line, White has ended up with a minimal material advantage, stable squares for his bishops and a dangerous passed pawn.

23...♗d4 24.♗c4 ♖a7 25.♖dc1 ♕b6 26.e3 ♗f6 27.b5

And White won in Landenbergue – G. Flear, Geneva 1991.

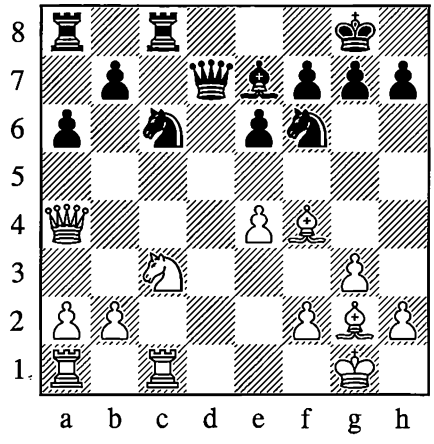
13.♗g2 a6 14.e4!?

This is a moment when opening the centre works out well, but moves such as 14.♕d1!? and 14.a3!? are also worth considering.

14...dxe4

After this standard reaction White manages to retain an advantage. 14...d4 may be objectively better, but if you are a King's Indian specialist you should not be put off by the position arising after 15.♘e2 e5 16.♗d2. White still has the bishop pair and a comfortable post for all his pieces.

15.dxe4



14...♗c5

Aiming to take control of the weakened dark squares. Instead the overambitious 15...b5 only weakens the queenside. After 16.♕d1 ♕xd1† 17.♖xd1 ♘g4 18.♗f3! (preparing to reroute the bishop, while driving the enemy knight far from the f2-square) 18...♘ge5 19.♗e2 ♗c5 20.♖ac1 ♗b6 21.♔g2± White is almost ready for his kingside expansion.

16.♖d1 ♕e7 17.e5

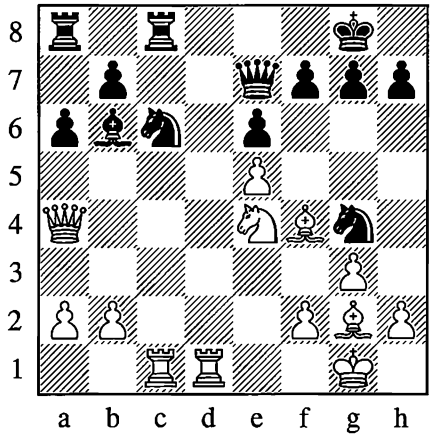
Finally bringing the English bishop to life. Now the concentration of the black rooks in the upper left corner looks clumsy.

17...♘g4 18.♘e4 ♗b6

The greedy 18...♘gxe5 19.♖ac1 offers White huge compensation, because of the hyperactivity of all his pieces. After 19...b5 20.♕c2 there are no favourable tactics for Black based on the apparently exposed position of the white queen.

Or if 18...b5 19.♕c2! ♘cxe5 then 20.♕e2± and Black's pieces are hanging.

19.♖ac1



White has completed the mobilization of his forces. The loss of the e5-pawn is of minor importance.

19...♘cxe5 20.h3!

The intermediate exchange 20.♖xc8†?! ♖xc8 before 21.h3 allows 21...♖c4!.

20...♖xc1 21.♖xc1 ♘d3 22.hxg4 ♘xc1 23.♗xc1 ♖d8 24.♕b3±/±

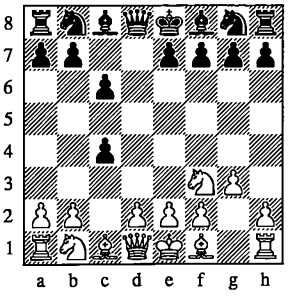
Black has insufficient compensation for the material deficit because White's minor pieces are quite stable.

Conclusion

In order to confirm the viability of the plan I have introduced, a few practical tests are needed. If things look too complicated for White, do not forget that they are no simpler for Black! I will confess a little psychological secret – I travelled to Reggio Emilia with the hope that I would get to play this variation in at least one of my games. Although I could not be sure of the result, I certainly had fallen in love with White's position...

Chapter 10

Anti-Slav Systems



3...dxc4

Variation Index

1.c4 c6 2.g3 d5 3.♘f3 dxc4

4.♗g2 ♘d7 5.0–0

A) 5...♘b6N 6.a4 a5 7.♘a3 **166**

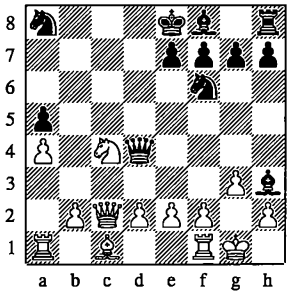
A1) 7...♘f6 **167**

A2) 7...♕d5 **168**

B) 5...e5 **169**

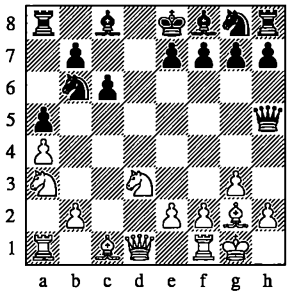
C) 5...e6 **170**

A1) after 13...♗h3



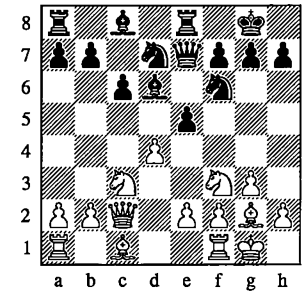
14.♘xa5!

A2) note to 10.♘xd3



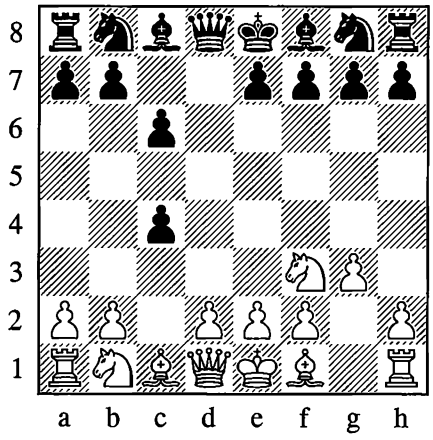
White enjoys a huge lead in development

B) after 10...♕e7



11.b3!N

1.c4 c6 2.g3 d5 3.♘f3 dxc4



The main ideas of the structure resulting after this capture are familiar to us from Chapters 3 and 4, but play can take an independent course if Black delays the development of his king's knight.

4.♗g2

As in the main lines, White is best advised to refrain from attacking the c4-pawn before he has played all the generally useful moves. This way, there will come a moment when Black will have to make one commitment or another.

4...♘d7

Apart from 4...♘f6, this is the most constructive move, aiming to defend the c4-pawn without having to weaken the long diagonal with ...b7-b5.

4...b5 is likely to transpose to line B from Chapter 3 on page 28 after 5.a4 ♗b7 6.b3 cxb3 7.♕xb3 a6 8.♗a3. Black will eventually have to develop his g8-knight anyway.

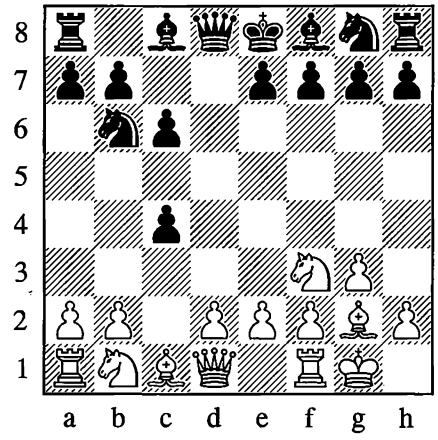
4...e6 5.♘a3 transposes to the Chapter 13.

After 4...g6 5.♘a3 ♕d5 6.♕c2 ♗e6 7.♕c3 Black has nothing better than transposing to a note to line A1 from Chapter 3, page 24 with 7...♘f6.

5.0–0

Black faces an important decision for his further development. Apart from 5...♘f6, transposing to Chapter 3, he can play **A) 5...♘b6**, **B) 5...e5** and **C) 5...e6**.

A) 5...♘b6N



Although never played, this move requires investigation, because White will not be able to regain the pawn and thus has to find effective ways of developing his initiative.

The main drawback of the last move is that it exposes the knight to the threat of a4-a5. Note that in the main lines from Chapter 3, Black plays ...♘b6 only after the a-pawn has been blocked with ♘a3.

6.a4

The attempt to transpose to Chapter 3 with 6.♘a3 can be crossed with 6...e5!?. Matters are far from clear in this line, but one thing White should avoid is 7.♘xe5? ♗xa3 8.bxa3 ♕d4 when Black wins material.

6...a5

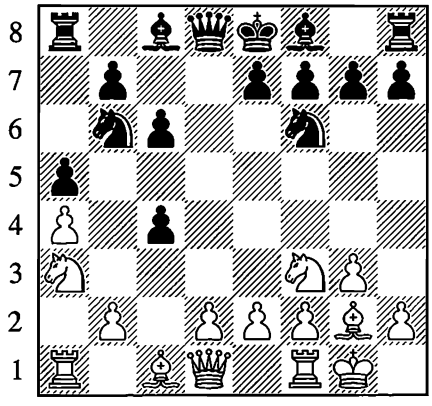
This is the only way to keep the c4-pawn defended, but on the other hand it reduces the stability of the b6-knight.

7.♘a3

White starts the attack against the c4-pawn in a way that is already familiar to us.

We shall examine **A1) 7...♘f6** and **A2) 7...♕d5**.

A1) 7...♘f6



After this natural developing move, the insertion of the moves a4 and ...a5 favours White if compared with the similar lines from Chapter 3.

8.♕c2 ♗e6

Or 8...♕d5 9.♘e1 when with his b6-knight undefended, Black is likely to have even more problems than in line D2 from Chapter 3, page 44.

9.♘e5

With his pawn on a4, White can no longer think about breaking with b2-b3, but the new circumstances allow him to choose an alternate plan.

9...♕d4

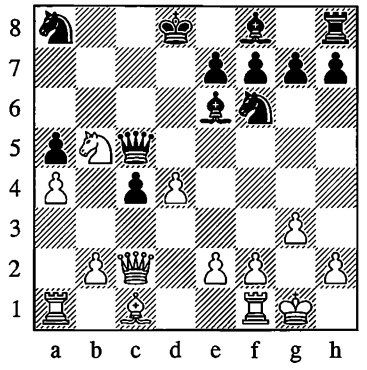
The only way to defend the extra pawn and thus justify giving up the centre and delaying his development.

10.♘xc6!

This tactical operation leads by force to a position where Black's pieces will lack harmony.

10...bxc6 11.♗xc6† ♗d7

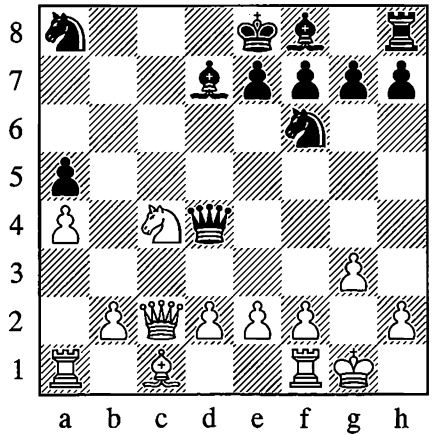
Another line in which Black's weakened queenside structure is significant is: 11...♔d8 12.♘b5 ♕c5 13.♗xa8 ♘xa8 14.d4



With an almost decisive lead in development and approximate material equality; the knight stands very well on b5.

12.♗xa8 ♘xa8 13.♘xc4

As a consequence of the insertion of 6.a4 a5, the a5-pawn is very weak. Besides, Black's lack of development makes the a4-pawn a dangerous candidate for promotion.

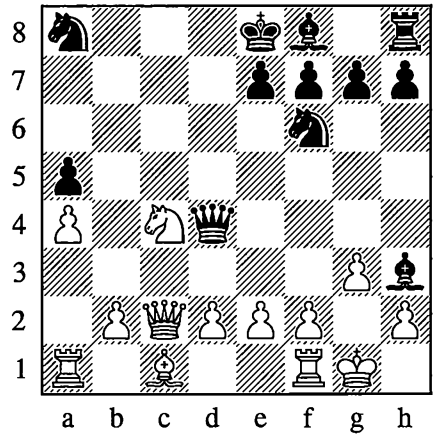


13...♗h3

An attempt to generate some counterplay. Defending the a5-pawn would require moving the queen again, which would do nothing to help solve Black's development problems.

13...♕c5 would allow White to speed up his development with 14.d4!±.

The more cautious 13...♕a7 can be answered with 14.d3± when White threatens either ♗d2 or ♗e3.



14.♘xa5!

White carries out his plan of clearing a path for his queenside pawns, without paying much attention to the material balance. This is the correct attitude when the opponent is underdeveloped.

14...♕d5

This is the only way in which Black can win some material. 14...♗xf1? loses to 15.♕c6† followed by 16.♕xa8†.

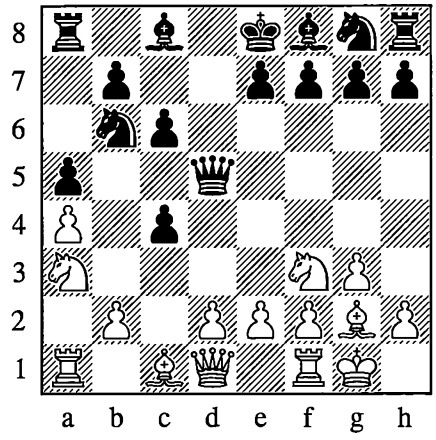
15.♕c6†

Parrying the double threat on g2 and a5.

15...♕xc6 16.♘xc6 ♗xf1 17.♔xf1 e6 18.b4±

The material count is about even, but White's queenside pawns are very dangerous.

A2) 7...♕d5



This early development of the queen anticipates 8.♕c2, which would be answered with 8...♗f5. On the other hand, the presence of Her Majesty in the centre is likely to lead to further loss of time in the near future.

8.♘e1

The standard manoeuvre, preparing d2-d3 or d2-d4. Instead 8.d4!? cxd3 9.♗e3 also leads to a strong initiative for White, but implies the sacrifice of a second pawn, which makes the position slightly more difficult to handle from a practical point of view.

8...♕h5 9.d3 cxd3

A natural alternative is:

9...♗g4

But this fails to force White to close the g2-bishop's diagonal.

10.dxc4!

White creates the threat of ♕b3, which is quite annoying once the b7-pawn has been left undefended.

10...♗xe2 11.♕b3 ♕c5 12.♘ec2

Taking the b4-square under control in order to make ♗e3 a real threat, as the immediate 12.♗e3?! is answered by 12...♕b4! when Black avoids losing material.

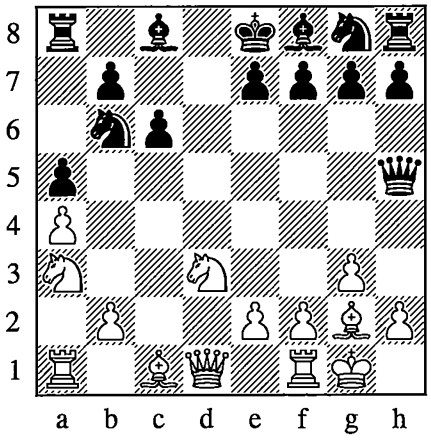
12...♗xf1 13.♔xf1

The best way to capture, leaving the bishop on the active diagonal.

13...♘d7 14.♗e3 ♕d6 15.♕xb7 ♖b8 16.♕a6 ♘gf6 17.♗xc6±

Black's queenside structure is about to disappear, while his kingside remains underdeveloped.

10.♘xd3



At the cost of just one pawn, White enjoys a huge lead in development. Moreover, the enemy queen and the b6-knight both lack stability.

10...♘f6 11.♘f4 ♕f5 12.e4

Forcing the queen to occupy the unfavourable d7-square. Instead 12.♕b3 would be a bit premature because of 12...♘bd7 when Black remains passive, but at least he has a flexible regrouping.

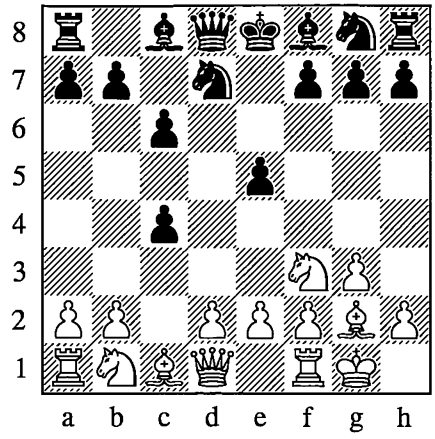
12...♕d7

12...♘xe4 loses a piece to 13.g4!.

13.♕b3±

White's initiative is very threatening. He will continue developing with ♗e3, ♖fd1 and ♖ac1, creating new threats with each move.

B) 5...e5



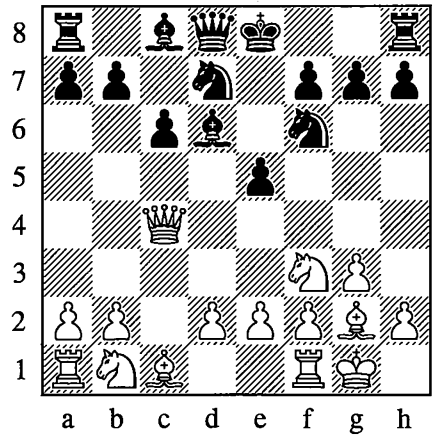
This ambitious developing move wins space in the centre, creates the potential threat of ...e5-e4 and opens the diagonal for the f8-bishop.

6.♕c2

This is one of the rare cases where I recommend attacking the c4-pawn with the queen. White prevents ...e5-e4 and relies on the fact that, with the e5-pawn under pressure, Black will not have time to harass the queen with ...♘b6 in the near future.

6...♘gf6 7.♕xc4 ♗d6

Black over-defends the e5-pawn, in order to enable ...♘b6.



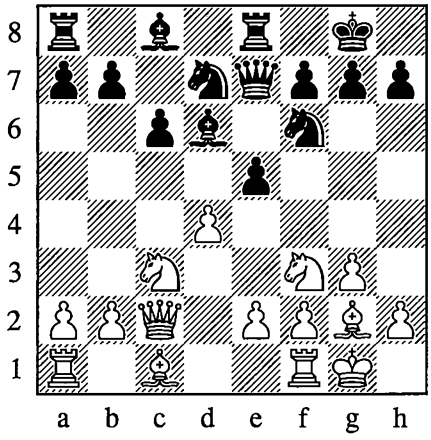
8.♕c2!?

An interesting moment. White plans to fight for space in the centre with ♘c3 and d2-d4. On c4 the queen would be exposed, while from c2 it keeps an eye on the important e4-square.

8...0–0 9.d4 ♖e8

In the next phase of the game both sides will try to force the opponent to release the tension in the centre, in order to activate their own pieces.

10.♘c3 ♕e7



11.b3!N

White prepares to develop the bishop on its most active diagonal.

11.♖d1?!

This is less effective, because it neglects his queenside development.

11...h6!

By eliminating the possibility of ♘g5, Black threatens ...e5-e4.

12.♘h4

White hopes to take advantage of the slight vulnerability of the f5-square, but this looks like premature activity.

12...♘b6!∓

Once the pressure on the e5-pawn has been released, the knight can finally open the diagonal for the c8-bishop. Black was already better developed in Hodgson – Smagin, Amantea 1995.

11...exd4

11...h6 would be met by 12.e4±, followed by ♗b2 and ♖ad1.

12.♘xd4 ♘b6 13.♗b2

White intends to start active operations in the centre with ♖ad1, e2-e4, ♖fe1, etc.

13...♗a3

There was some danger that this bishop would remain exposed in view of the aforementioned plan, which makes the last move quite logical.

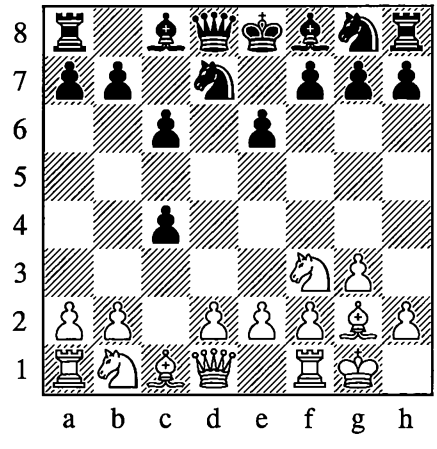
14.♗xa3 ♕xa3 15.♖ad1 ♗d7

The active-looking 15...♗g4 16.h3 ♗h5 puts the bishop in danger after 17.f4±, threatening g3-g4.

16.e4±

Black can do little against White's systematic plan of advancing his e- and f-pawns.

C) 5...e6



Black opens the a3-f8 diagonal as in the previous line, but does not tie down his knight to the defence of the e5-pawn.

6.♕c2

Black's previous moves have deprived him of any dynamism, which once again justifies the early development of the queen. Specifically, Black will not be able to meet ♕xc4 with ...b7-b5, because his c6-pawn is undefended.

6.♘a3 ♗xa3 7.bxa3, in the spirit of Chapter 13, is also possible.

6.a4, with similar ideas as in Chapter 4, may transpose to the main line after 6...a5 7.♘a3 ♘b6 8.♕c2.

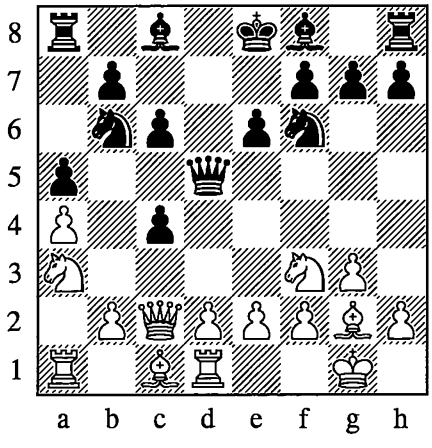
6...♘b6 7.a4 a5 8.♘a3 ♕d5

A familiar picture; Black can defend his extra pawn only at the cost of exposing his queen. Since the c5-square is controlled by the f8-bishop, Black is ready to meet 9.♘e1 with 9...♕c5, keeping the pawn defended without fearing 10.d3.

9.♖d1!

White prepares to open the d-file with d2-d3. It should be mentioned that if ...♘f6 had been played instead of ...e7-e6, this move would not have worked because of 9...♗f5.

9...♘f6



10.d3!N

The consistent continuation. Instead 10.♘e1, as played in Wojtkiewicz – Kostyra, Rzeszow 1988, should be answered with 10...♕c5!N when White does not have a clear way to prove he has compensation.

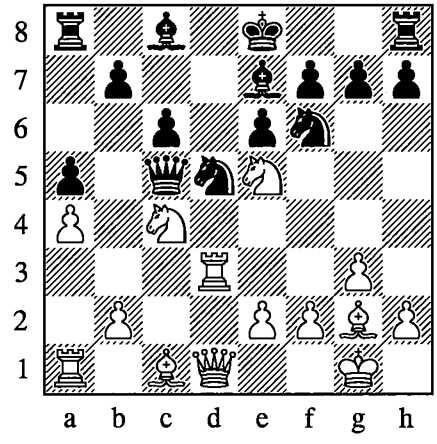
10...cxd3 11.♖xd3 ♕c5 12.♕d1

White is several tempos ahead in development and already has concrete threats.

12...♘bd5

Black has to put up some resistance in the centre; the passive 12...♘bd7 would allow 13.♗e3 with a strong initiative.

13.♘e5 ♗e7 14.♘ac4

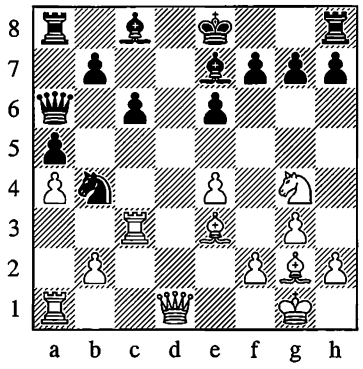


Black is one move away from castling, but the situation in the centre has become quite tense.

14...♘d7

Instead 14...0–0?! 15.e4 followed by ♗e3 would leave the black queen in great danger.

The other way of offering the exchange of the e5-knight is:
14...♘g4 15.♘xg4 ♕xc4 16.e4 ♘b4 17.♖c3 ♕a6 18.♗e3



Black seems to have an almost normal position, but the awkward position of his queen will force him to weaken his queenside.

18...0–0

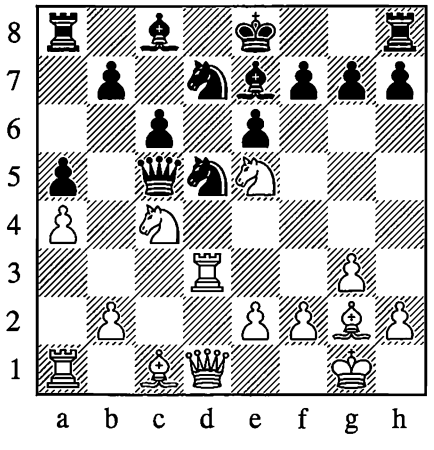
18...f6?! with the intention of leaving the g4-knight out of play, would leave the black king in the centre for too long.19.♗f1 b5 20.axb5 cxb5 21.♖c7 Black is helpless against the threats of e4-e5 and/or ♖ac1.

19.♘e5 ♖b8 20.♗f1 b5

20...♕a8 looks too passive after 21.♘c4.

21.♖ac1±

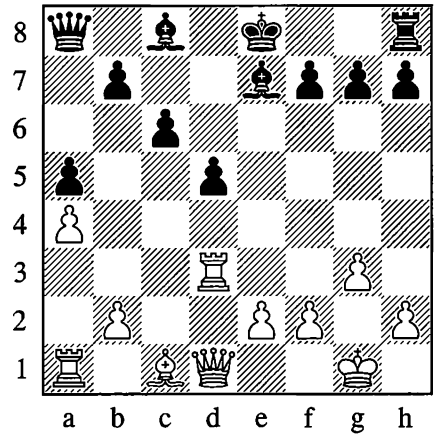
White has strong pressure against the enemy queenside and will most likely retrieve the pawn while maintaining active play.



15.♘xd7 ♕xc4!

This implies an exchange sacrifice, but is the best practical chance. 15...♗xd7? is strongly met by 16.b3± followed by ♗a3.

16.♗xd5 exd5 17.♘b6 ♕a6 18.♘xa8 ♕xa8



Black has a pawn for the exchange and a solid position in the centre. His pair of bishops could become threatening, but White can exchange one of them within a couple of moves.

19.b3 0–0 20.♗a3 ♗xa3 21.♖xa3

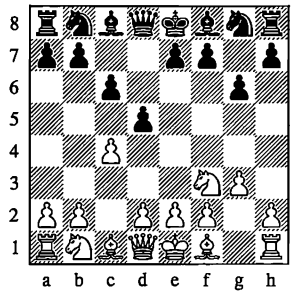
After the exchange of bishops, White enjoys stability on the dark squares. He will regroup with ♖d4, ♖a2-d2 and activate his queen somehow. Black's position remains solid, but only White has chances to win.

Conclusion

Delaying ...♘f6 in the lines with ...dxc4 can give the play an independent character, but it does not change the essence of the position. White has excellent compensation for the pawn and good chances to get out of the opening with some advantage.

Chapter 11

Anti-Slav Systems



3...g6

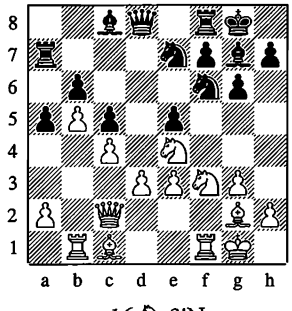
Variation Index

1.c4 c6 2.g3 d5 3.♘f3 g6

4.♗g2 ♗g7 5.0–0

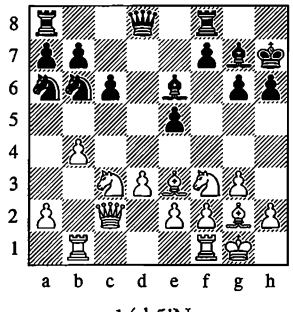
A) 5...e5 6.♕a4! 174
A1) 6...d4 174
A2) 6...e4 177
A3) 6...♘d7 180
A4) 6...♘e7 182
B) 5...♘f6 6.b3 ♘e4 7.d4 185
B1) 7...dxc4 186
B2) 7...0–0 188

A1) after 15...♘f6



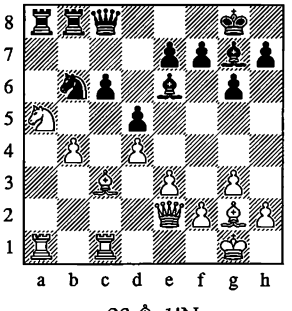
16.♘c3!N

A4) note to 9...h6



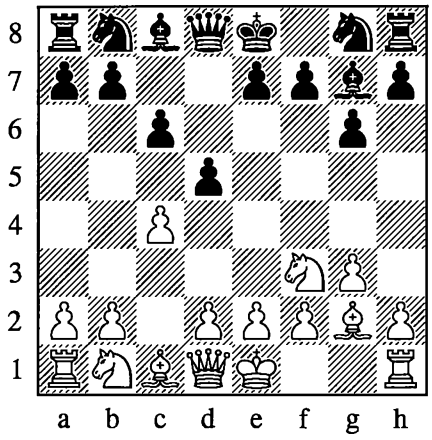
14.b5!N±

B2) note to 12...♘d7



23.♗e1!N

1.c4 c6 2.g3 d5 3.♘f3 g6 4.♗g2 ♗g7



By delaying the development of the king's knight, Black keeps his bishop's diagonal open. Now White could offer a transposition to the ...c6 Grünfeld with 5.d4 (see Avrukh's second volume on 1.d4), but here we are constrained to examine a continuation in the spirit of the English Opening.

Unfortunately, it is not possible to force a transposition to the variations from Chapter 7, but White still has one neutral move at his disposal:

5.0–0

Now Black can choose between two different approaches. He can gain space in the centre with **A) 5...e5** or switch back to normal development with **B) 5...♘f6**, which does not necessarily transpose to Chapter 7.

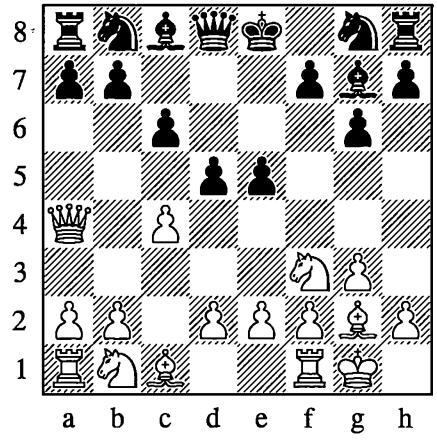
Other moves tend to be too committal. For instance, 5...♘d7 can be answered with 6.cxd5 cxd5 7.d4, leading to a favourable form of the Symmetrical Grünfeld, where the knight is passive on d7.

A) 5...e5

A very ambitious move, setting up a strong and flexible pawn centre. The drawback of this approach is that so far Black has spent four tempos on pawn moves and developed only one piece. Also, it is most likely that he will have to develop his knights to d7 and e7, which would leave the c8-bishop and the queen rather passive.

6.♕a4!

Of all the moves that have been tried at various levels, this is the only one which poses Black concrete problems. By pinning the c6-pawn, White threatens to reduce the strength of the black centre with cxd5. I must confess that I initially feared that it would be impossible to prove any shade of an initiative or advantage for White, but intense analysis together with Vali Stoica led to encouraging conclusions.

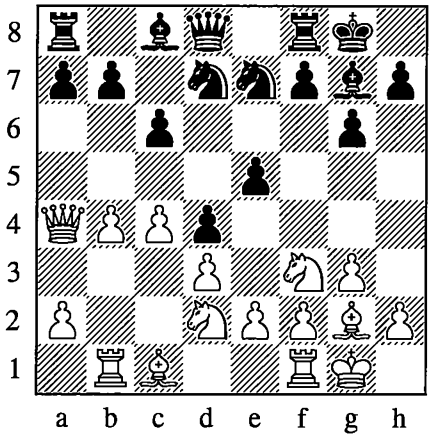


Black has a rather wide choice. We will examine **A1) 6...d4**, **A2) 6...e4**, **A3) 6...♘d7** and **A4) 6...♘e7**.

A1) 6...d4

Black parries the threat by winning space in the centre, but this is his fifth pawn move. Besides, after the tension has been released and the long diagonal opened, White will be able to orientate his play more easily.

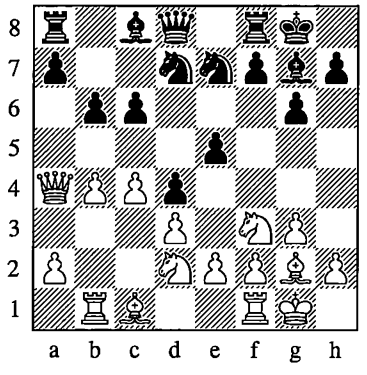
7.d3 ♘e7 8.b4 0–0 9.♘bd2 ♘d7 10.♖b1



Both sides have played normal developing moves, in the spirit of the reversed Benoni structure. Now Black needs to find a way to complete his queenside development.

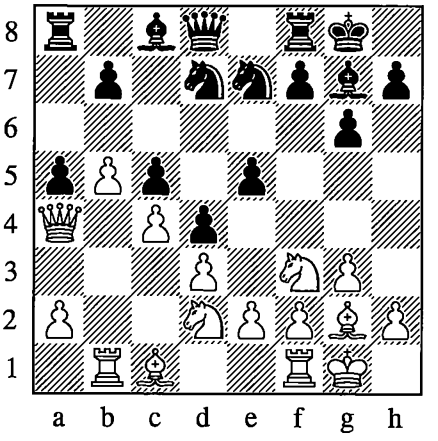
10...a5

Aiming to gain some space on this wing. Instead 10...b6, as played in Pavlovic – Kritz, Biel 2005, looks quite provocative. Black weakens the c6-square, increasing the scope of the g2-bishop.



11.♘e4!N White threatens ♘d6xc8, thus clearing the c1-h6 diagonal with gain of time. 11...♕c7 12.e3 dxe3 13.♗xe3 ♘f5 14.♗d2± White is much better developed. The apparent weakness of the d4-square is irrelevant, because Black cannot install a piece on it permanently (...♘xd4 would always be answered with ♘xd4, ...exd4).

11.b5 c5



Black has blocked the queenside, but White's space advantage on this wing remains annoying. Black is still a few tempos away from completing his development.

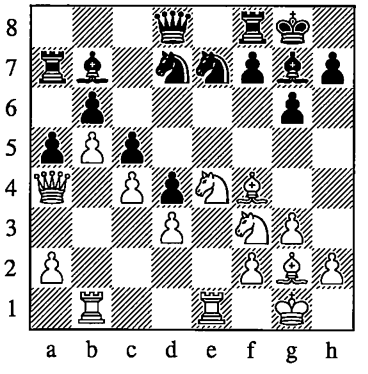
12.e3

Immediately starting the fight against Black's centre.

12...dxe3

Black is seriously lagging in development, so he gives up his ambitions in the centre.

Maintaining the tension with 12...♖a7 (preparing ...b6 and ...♗b7) would offer White a comfortable reversed Benoni position: 13.exd4 exd4 (or 13...cxd4 14.♗a3± and Black's pieces are badly placed for the fight for the c5-square) 14.♖e1 b6 15.♘e4 ♗b7 16.♗f4±



Despite his space advantage in the centre, Black has serious coordination problems. Note that most endgames would be dangerous for him, because of the weakness of the b6-pawn.

13.fxe3 ♖a7 14.♕c2

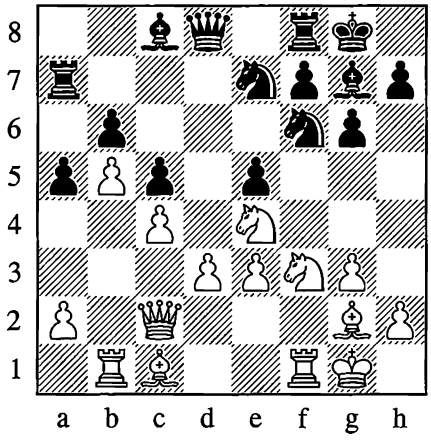
The queen no longer does anything on a4.

14...b6 15.♘e4

One important consequence of ...dxe3 is that the c3-square has become available for the white pieces. White threatens to invade the d5-square with ♘c3-d5, which would yield a stable advantage.

15...♘f6

Black clears the seventh rank, preparing to activate his rook in the hope of re-establishing some harmony between his pieces.



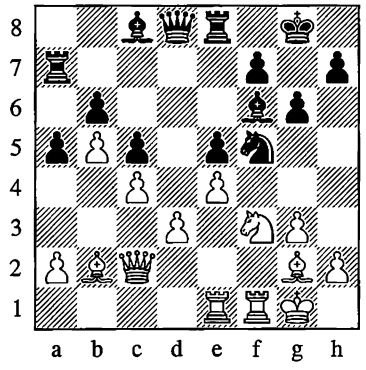
16.♘c3!N

The most consistent move, but a different path was chosen in a game between two chess legends:

16.♘xf6†

White wins some time for his development, but delays the main plan of occupying the d5-square, since the remaining knight is rather far from it.

16...♗xf6 17.♗b2 ♘f5 18.♖be1 ♖e8 19.e4



19...♘g7?!

Black should have played 19...♘d4. This is the start of an active but time-consuming plan. 20.♘xd4 exd4 Korchnoi probably feared that after 21.♗c1 the play would have been rather one-sided. Indeed, White's kingside pressure will be lasting, but Black has good chances to resist.

20.♘d2

The second knight starts the long journey to d5.

20...h5

Black needs to generate some kingside counterplay, as otherwise he will simply be worse.

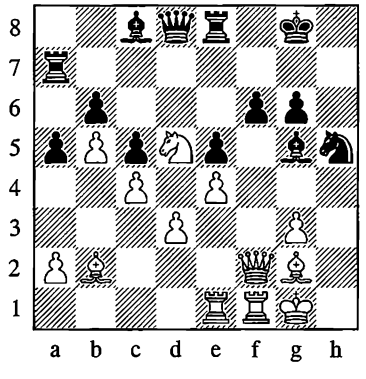
21.♘b1 h4 22.♘c3 hxg3 23.hxg3 ♘h5

This was the idea behind 19...♘g7. Black hopes that the pressure against the g3-pawn will restrict White's active possibilities.

24.♘d5

With such a strong knight in the centre, White is in control of the position.

24...♗g5 25.♕f2 f6



26.♗c1!

Although Black has many pawns on dark squares, his g5-bishop cannot be considered to be bad. By exchanging it, White intends to weaken the f6-square and, in the event of ...f6-f5, the e5-square.

26...♗xc1 27.♖xc1 f5!?

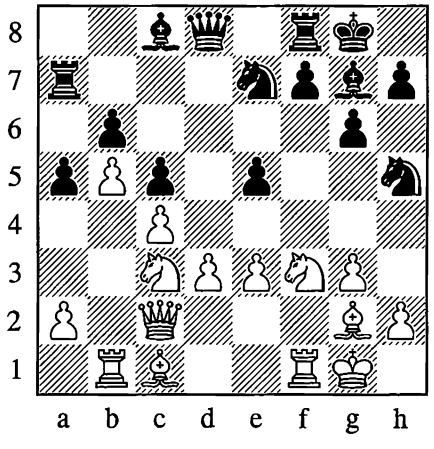
In reply to passive defence with 27...♖f7, White would increase his pressure with 28.♗f3 ♘g7 29.♔g2±, followed by ♖h1.

28.♕e3 ♖h7 29.♖ce1±

Black has managed to regroup harmoniously, but his position in the centre remains shaky and his king is unsafe. In Larsen – Korchnoi, Palma de Mallorca 1969, White eventually won after a time scramble.

16...♘h5

According to Larsen, the plan initiated by this move (...f5-f4) was what made him exchange knights on f6.



17.♗b2!

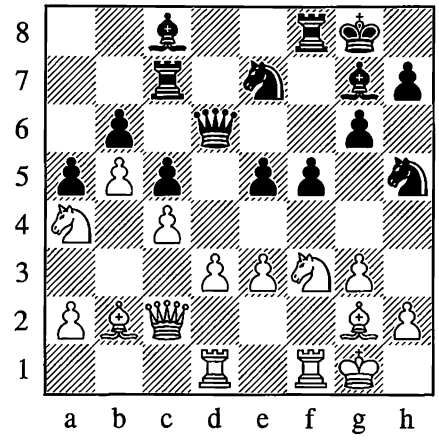
White continues regrouping, aiming to put the e5- and b6-pawns under strong pressure. This will add force to the thematic break d3-d4. Instead Larsen only analysed 17.e4 f5 with the strong threat of ...f5-f4.

17...f5 18.♘a4!

A deviation from the initial plan based on the invasion of the d5-square. With his knights awkwardly placed, Black is poorly coordinated and needs to use his queen for defensive tasks.

18...♕d6 19.♖bd1 ♖c7

Black hopes to complete his development with ...♗b7, but White strikes first.



20.d4!

Despite the apparently dangerous opposition of his queen with the c7-rook, White opens the centre to his advantage. His better development will be the telling factor.

20...cxd4 21.exd4 e4

This is the standard reaction and the only one that usually offers Black chances to hold his own. Here, it does not work properly because of the exposed position of his pieces, especially the queen.

22.c5 exf3 23.cxd6 ♖xc2 24.♗xf3

The e7-knight is trapped and the b6-pawn is doomed. White will win at least a pawn and has a huge advantage.

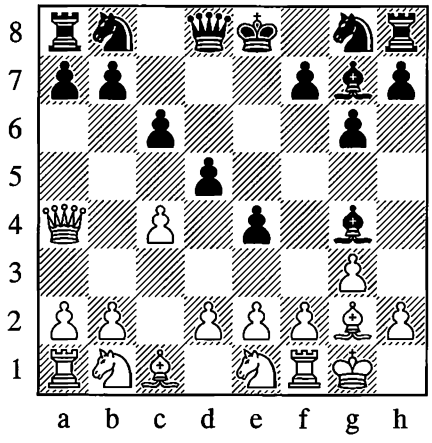
A2) 6...e4

This daring advance is normally premature, because it gives White the possibility of breaking in the centre with d2-d3 or f2-f3

before Black has developed. In this concrete case the early departure of the queen from d1 leaves the e2-pawn undefended, giving Black the possibility of justifying his approach, at least partly.

7.♘e1 ♗g4

The only logical continuation; Black threatens to win an exchange. Instead normal developing moves would not do. For example, after 7...♘f6?! 8.cxd5 b5 9.♕c2 cxd5 10.d3± Black cannot hold his centre.



8.♘c3!N

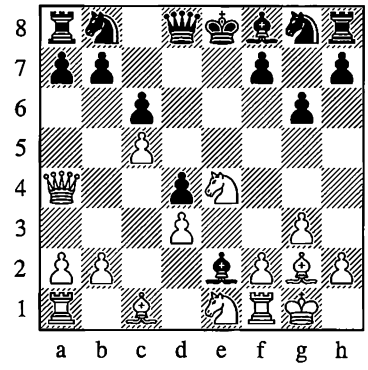
The final consequences of the complications provoked by this move are far from easy to foresee, but White should choose a developing move on principle. The immediate threat is cxd5, destroying Black's centre.

The tempting 8.f3 allows Black to reach a playable position. 8...exf3 9.♘xf3 d4 10.d3 ♘e7 11.♕b4 ♕b6 The weakness of the e3-square restricts White's active possibilities, Karlsson – Bengtsson, Uppsala 1985.

8...♗xc3

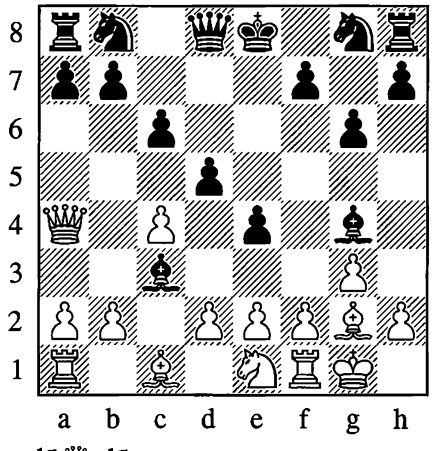
This is the only way to keep fighting for the initiative, but the long-term consequences of this move will be chronic weaknesses on the kingside.

8...d4?! leads to the radical activation of White's queen's knight. 9.♘xe4 ♗xe2 10.c5 With the terrible threat ♘d6†. 10...♗f8 11.d3±



White will play ♗f4 next, with a devastating attack. After the occupation of the d6-square, Black's central pawn will be doomed and the white queen will occupy a dominating position on d4.

Half measures are not effective: 8...♘e7?! 9.h3! Black will not be able to carry out his main threat (...♗xe2) in time. 9...♗xc3 10.hxg4 ♗g7 11.cxd5± White wins a pawn and retains a strong pair of bishops.



9.cxd5 ♕xd5

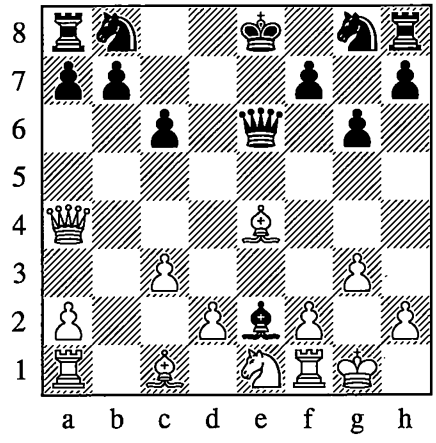
Black needs to prevent the centralization of the enemy queen, as any retreat of the c3-bishop would be answered with 10.♕xe4(†), winning the other bishop.

9...♗xe2 allows 10.♕xe4† ♕e7 11.dxc6 ♘xc6 12.♕xe7† ♘gxe7 13.bxc3 0–0–0 14.d4±. White will have a pawn for the exchange and his pair of bishops will have no rivals anywhere on the board.

10.bxc3

By capturing this way, White strengthens his centre and prepares ♗a3. One of the tactical ideas of Black's previous move is revealed after 10.♗xe4? ♕d4 11.♕b3 ♗b4!∓. The queen's presence in the centre is essential in holding Black's position together.

10...♗xe2 11.♗xe4 ♕e6



12.♕b4!

A strong intermediate move. The queen is heading for d4, but by attacking b7 it forces its opposite number to retreat to e7, where it will be more vulnerable.

12...♕e7

12...♕d7 allows White to dominate the a3-f8 diagonal with 13.♗a3±.

13.♕d4 ♘f6

13...♕f6? loses outright to 14.♕e3, attacking the bishop and threatening ♗xc6†.

14.♗f3 ♗xf1

Black has won the exchange and seems to be just one move away from castling...

15.♗a3!

A strong intermediate move, speeding up the process of occupying the e-file.

15...♕xa3 16.♘c2 ♕e7

There is nothing better, as otherwise ♖e1† followed by ♕xf6 would be killing.

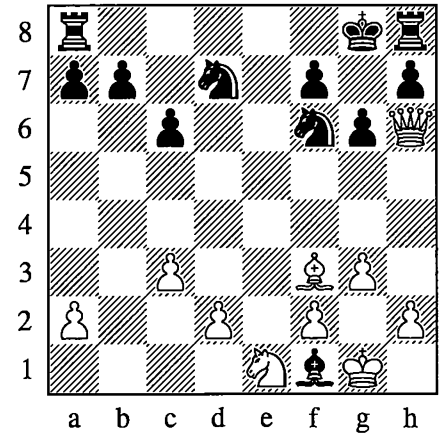
17.♖e1 ♕xe1 18.♘xe1 ♘bd7

Things have almost settled down. Black will have two rooks for the queen, but White's active queen can prevent the enemy forces from coordinating.

19.♕e3† ♔f8 20.♕h6† ♔g8

This looks a bit awkward, but the alternative is not very appealing either.

20...♔e7 21.♔xf1 ♖he8 22.d4 ♖ad8 23.♘d3± The black king stands in the way of its comrades. White can develop his initiative by combining such moves as ♘e5, c3-c4, g3-g4 or even ♕c1 with the threat of ♕a3†.



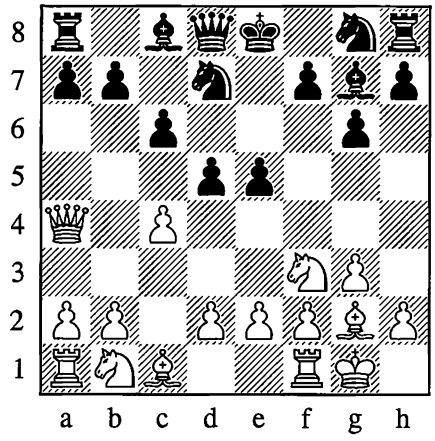
21.♔xf1 ♖e8

Black fails to place White's centre in real danger after 21...♘c5 22.d4 ♘a4 23.c4 ♘b6 24.♗e2 ♖d8 25.♘f3±.

22.d4 ♘b6 23.♘d3±

With his rook under arrest on h8, Black is doomed to passivity. White will play ♘e5 and then h4-h5, aiming to retreat his queen to an active square and then replace her guard duty with h5-h6.

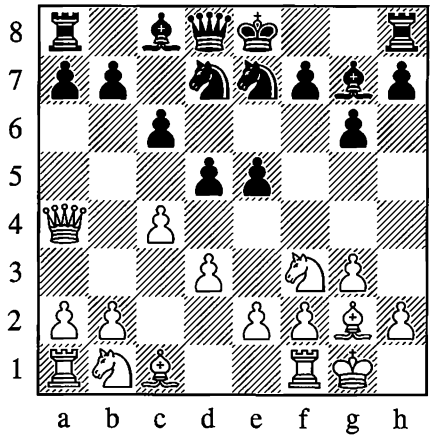
A3) 6...♘d7



Black eliminates the pin on the c6-pawn with a developing move. The drawback is that the c8-bishop and the queen are left passive. In this structure the knight would ideally aim to develop on a6 or, in the event of a previous exchange on d5, on c6.

7.d3 ♘e7

The most flexible move, keeping both central pawns well defended and avoiding an irritating pin with ♗g5.



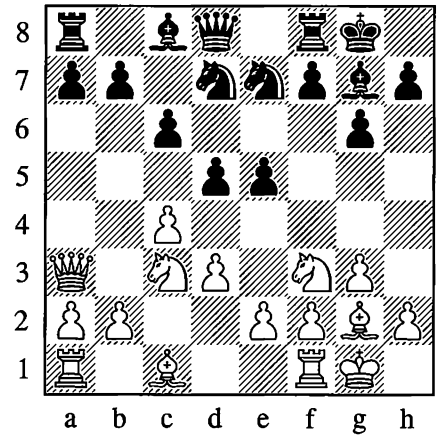
8.♘c3!N

White's only compensation for the strong enemy centre is the black knights' lack of activity. Therefore, it is essential to avoid making the c6-square available for them.

8.cxd5 cxd5 9.♘c3 would transpose to Panno – Pachman, Mar del Plata 1962, which continued: 9...0–0 10.♗g5 ♘b6 If a white pawn were on c4, this would not be a stable location for the knight. 11.♕a3 f6 12.♗d2 ♗e6 13.♖fc1 ♕d7 14.♘b5 ♘c6 15.♗b4 Black has normal development and could have obtained excellent play with 15...♘xb4 16.♕xb4 ♖fc8 followed by ...♗f8.

8...0–0 9.♕a3

White has placed his queen on a safe square, from where it controls the important a3-f8 diagonal. Black has problems finding a plan for completing his development.

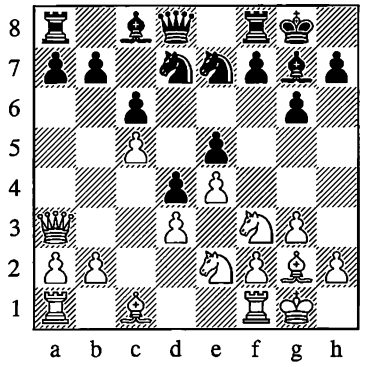


9...♖e8

The most flexible move. Black intends to challenge the enemy queen's stability with ...♗f8, without defining his plan of development yet.

9...♘b6 is now less favourable than it was in the aforementioned game. 10.c5! White wins two tempos in the fight for the centre. 10...♘d7

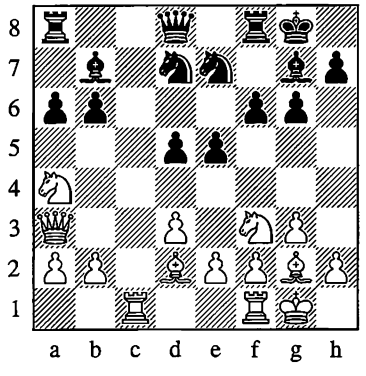
11.e4 Black is underdeveloped and his centre is under pressure. 11...d4 12.♘e2±



White will play ♘d2 and f2-f4, perhaps followed by ♘c4-d6.

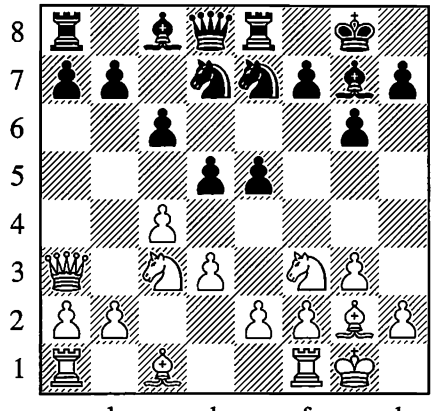
9...d4 Releasing the tension like this allows White to activate his queen's knight. 10.♘e4 ♘f5 11.♗g5 f6 12.♗d2± White will play b2-b4 next, with easy play in this reversed Benoni structure.

9...b6 Black prepares ...♗b7, but weakens his queenside and deprives himself of ...♘b6. 10.cxd5 cxd5 11.♗g5 A typical idea, more or less forcing Black's next move, which weakens the light squares and leaves the g7-bishop passive. 11...f6 12.♗d2 ♗b7 13.♖ac1 Threatening ♘b5. 13...a6 14.♘a4±



Black's development is incomplete and he has to worry about his b6-pawn and an eventual invasion of the enemy queen to d6.

The hyperactive 9...f5 is premature. 10.♗g5 ♗f6 11.♗xf6 ♖xf6 12.cxd5 cxd5 13.♖ac1± Black has problems holding his centre while also preventing an invasion along the c-file.



10.♗g5

This is an active approach. Instead the prophylactic 10.♖d1, discouraging Black from opening the d-file with ...dxc4, is also worth considering. After 10...♗f8 11.b4± Black is left with the same development problems as a few moves earlier.

10...f6 11.♗d2 ♗f8 12.b4

White plans to increase his pressure with ♖fd1, ♖ab1 and, at the right moment, b4-b5.

12...dxc4 13.dxc4 ♘b6

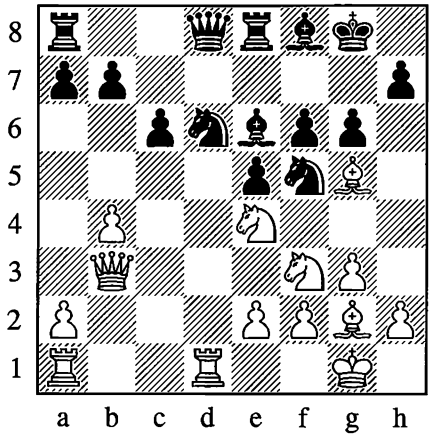
A tempting counterattack, but White's better development allows him to retain the initiative.

14.♖fd1 ♘xc4 15.♕b3 ♗e6

15...b5 loses the f6-pawn to 16.♗g5±.

16.♘e4 ♘f5 17.♗g5 ♘cd6

With this discovered attack against the enemy queen, Black avoids immediate disaster, but not permanent structural damage.



18.♘xf6† ♕xf6

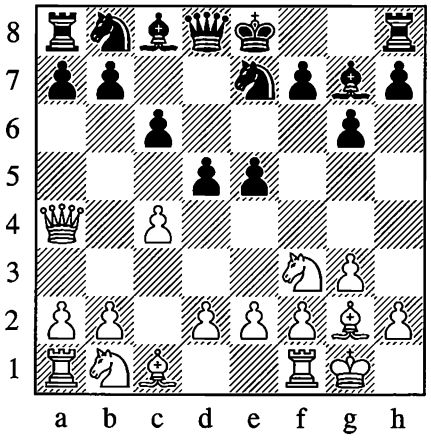
18...♔h8? loses material to 19.♘xe8.

19.♗xf6 ♗xb3 20.axb3±

White has the bishop pair and the more flexible kingside structure.

This variation, played in true hypermodern spirit, requires practical testing.

A4) 6...♘e7



This is the most common answer. Black is not afraid of the structural modifications induced by cxd5 and continues developing his kingside. In doing so, he keeps the c8-h3 diagonal and the d-file open for his pieces.

7.cxd5 ♘xd5 8.♘c3 0–0 9.d3

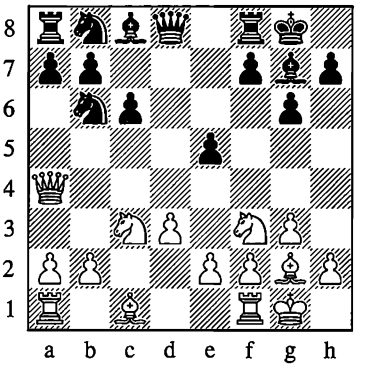
We have reached a typical structure for the Reversed Dragon, which was examined in the previous volume. The main difference is that Black has a pawn on c6, rather than a knight. This offers him some flexible ways of developing his queen's knight, but weakens his control over the d4-square and gives White a clear target for a queenside attack with b4-b5.

Even before investigating the position more concretely, we can state that the opening has yielded White a psychological success. He has managed to steer the game along the paths of *his* opening (the English) instead of the opponent's (the symmetrical Grünfeld).

9...h6

Black spends a tempo on this prophylactic move, which prevents the generally annoying ♗g5. Many other moves have been tested in practice.

9...♘b6?!



This retreats the knight from an active position and merely helps the white queen to reach a more favourable square.

10.♕c2

Or 10.♕a3 ♘a6 11.♖d1± also looks playable.

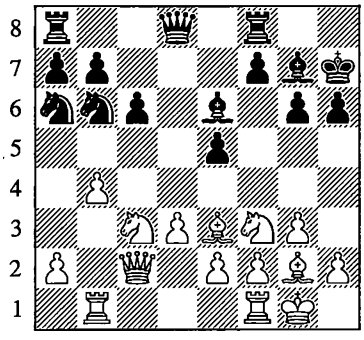
10...h6

Black prepares to develop the bishop to e6.

10...♗f5, as played in Schandorff – Elsness, Stockholm 1998, is best met by 11.♗e3!N.

White prepares the thematic break d3-d4 and also keeps an eye on c5. 11...♘a6 12.♖ac1± White plans ♘a4, ♖fd1 and, according to the circumstances, b4-b5 or d3-d4. It is too late for Black to fight for the centre: 12...♘d5 13.♘xd5 cxd5 14.♕b3 b6 15.d4 e4 16.♘e5± The a6-knight is passive and the c6-square is weak.

11.♗e3 ♘a6 12.♖ab1 ♔h7 13.b4 ♗e6



In Yap – Priehoda, Balatonbereny 1985, White should have continued his plan with: 14.b5!N±

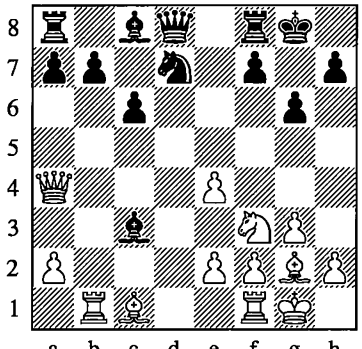
9...♘xc3

This is another premature way of releasing the tension.

10.bxc3 e4

This is the only possible justification of the previous move, but Black is too poorly developed to start concrete play.

11.dxe4 ♗xc3 12.♖b1 ♘d7



This position was reached in Dudas – Le Thi Phuong Lien, Budapest 1997.

13.♕a3!N

White takes control of the a3-f8 diagonal with gain of time, thus making it difficult for Black to find a safe square for his queen.

13...♗g7

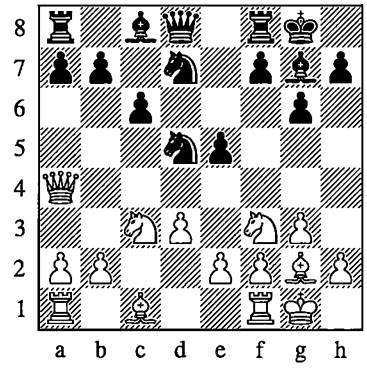
13...♕a5 drops an exchange to 14.♖b3! ♕xa3 15.♗xa3±.

14.♖d1 ♖e8 15.♗g5 ♕c7 16.♗f4 ♘e5 17.♘xe5 ♗xe5 18.♗xe5 ♕xe5 19.f4±

White will play e4-e5 and ♖d6, with complete domination.

In the event of normal developing moves, the aforementioned ♗g5 can be unpleasant. For instance:

9...♘d7



10.♗g5 f6 11.♗d2 ♘c5 12.♕a3 ♘e6

This position was reached in Shpilker – Kosets, Chisinau 1976.

13.♘e4!N

White opens a path for his d2-bishop and the c-file for the rooks, while creating the threat of ♘d6.

13...♖f7 14.♖fc1 ♗f8 15.♕a4 ♕b6 16.♖ab1±

Everything is ready for the minority attack.

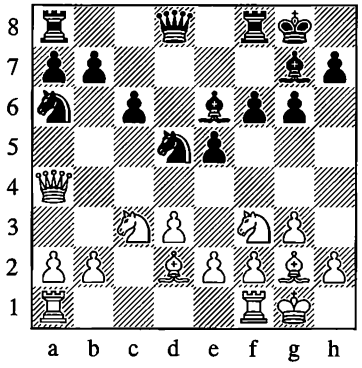
Another example of a developing move that can be met by an irritating ♗g5 is:

9...♘a6

10.♗g5 f6

The careless 10...♕b6?! remained unpunished in Damljanovic – Kozakov, Noyon 2008. White could have won an exchange with 11.♘xd5!N cxd5 12.♗e7±.

11.♗d2 ♗e6



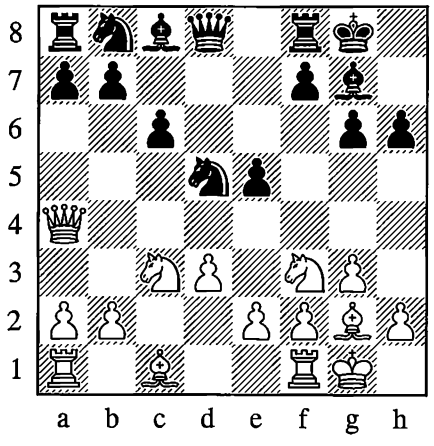
In the game Maksimovic – Chelushkina, Belgrade 1999, White could have carried out the promising and by now familiar plan:

12.♘e4!N ♕e7 13.♖ab1±

Intending b4-b5; it would now be risky for Black to display activity in the centre:

13...f5 14.♘eg5 ♗d7 15.e4 ♘b6 16.♕b3† ♔h8 17.exf5 gxf5 18.♖fe1±

The e5-pawn is doomed and the immediate threat is 19.♘xe5 ♗xe5 20.♖xe5!.



10.♖d1

A strong move, preparing to open the centre with d3-d4. This plan is logical once Black has spent a tempo on a pawn move that is useful only on a restricted area of the kingside.

10...f5

This move is frequently a logical follow-up of ...h7-h6, since ♘g5 is no longer possible. In this specific case it is aimed at discouraging d3-d4, but White can switch to another typical plan.

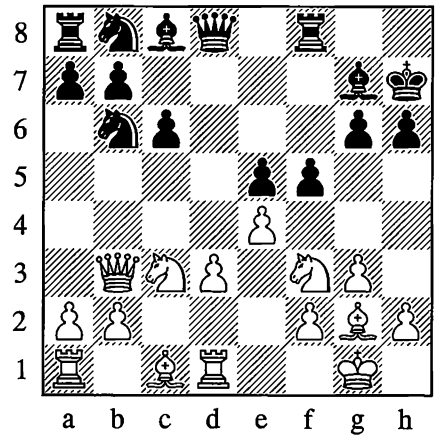
Neutral moves would not have promised equality either: 10...♕e7 11.d4 ♘b6 (one of the negative effects of ...h7-h6 is that after 11...e4 12.♘e5± Black cannot defend his e4-pawn with 12...f5) 12.♕b3 exd4 13.♘xd4± White has an active position. In the long run, he will advance his e- and f-pawns, gaining space on the kingside.

Or 10...♗e6 11.d4 ♘b6 12.♕c2 exd4 13.♘xd4 ♗xd4 14.e3 ♗f5 15.♗e4± and White will regain the piece and Black's kingside will remain weak in the absence of the dark-squared bishop.

11.e4!

This is the thematic break when facing a pawn tandem on e5 and f5 (as d3-d4 would almost always be met by ...e5-e4).

11...♘b6 12.♕b3† ♔h7



13.exf5!N

As White is better developed, he should immediately cause Black concrete problems in the centre.

13.♗e3 is slower and in Ehlvest – Krush, USA (ch) 2009, this offered Black the time she needed to complete her development. 13...♕e7 14.exf5 gxf5 15.♗xb6 axb6 16.♕xb6 ♗e6 17.♖e1 ♘d7! Suddenly, the central pawns have become strong, compensating for the material deficit.

13...gxf5

Strategically, the most consistent move. 13...♗xf5 would have left Black's kingside vulnerable after 14.♘h4±.

14.♖e1!

Since Black's development has not progressed over the past few moves, White can afford to lose a tempo in order to put pressure on the e5-pawn.

14...♘8d7

Black defends the pawn with a developing move, but now the c8-bishop will have to remain passive for a long time.

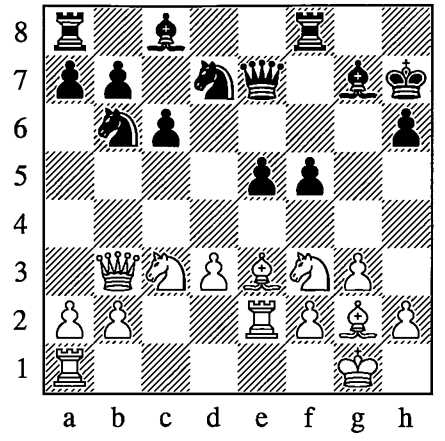
14...♖e8 allows the white queen to transfer closer to the kingside weaknesses. 15.♕f7 ♖e7 16.♕h5 ♕e8 17.♕h4±

14...♕d6 exposes the black queen too soon. 15.d4! With this energetic break, White gains time for his development. 15...exd4 16.♗f4 ♕d8 17.♖ad1 c5 18.♘b5± White has fully mobilized all his forces. The c5-pawn is vulnerable and the threats of ♘c7 or ♘d6 are very strong. In addition to all that, Black's king is unsafe.

15.♗e3 ♕e7

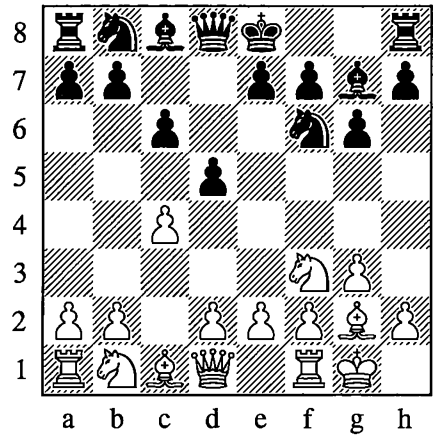
Or 15...f4?!, aiming to enable ...♘c5 anyway, leads to trouble after 16.♘h4!, threatening ♗e4†.

16.♖e2±



White plans ♖ae1 followed by ♗d2. Moves such as ♘h4 or d3-d4 must always be taken into account. Black has no obvious way of completing his development.

B) 5...♘f6



This flexible move leads to one of the very few situations in which we have to abandon the purely English paths and switch to a favourable variation from a 1.d4 opening.

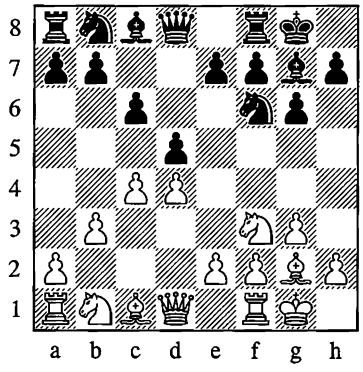
6.b3

With the clear intention of transposing to the variation examined in Chapter 7 after 6...0–0 7.♗b2, but since Black has developed his king's bishop earlier than in that line, he can cross White's plans:

6...♘e4 7.d4

Finally, we have transposed to a fianchetto Grünfeld, but White's psychological concession is only partial, because Black has been forced to commit himself with an early ...♘e4.

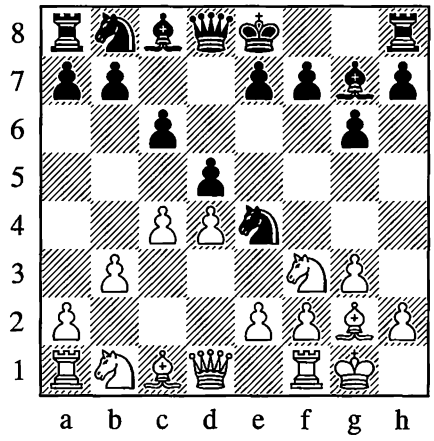
Let's compare with the variation arising from the genuine Grünfeld move order: 1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘f3 ♗g7 4.g3 0–0 5.♗g2 c6 6.0–0 d5 7.b3



When taking up the fianchetto systems against the Grünfeld and the King's Indian, some 15 years ago, one of my model players was the strong Bosnian grandmaster Predrag Nikolic. One of his specialties was precisely the system introduced by 7.b3 against the ...c6 Grünfeld and I was quite successful when employing his plans in auto-pilot mode. We will speak more about this later.

The main problem with the move order above is that Black can start a counterattack in the centre with 7...dxc4 8.bxc4 c5, as discovered more recently. After ensuring the c5-square is available for one of his knights, Black would enjoy stability on the queenside, which may yield him approximate equality.

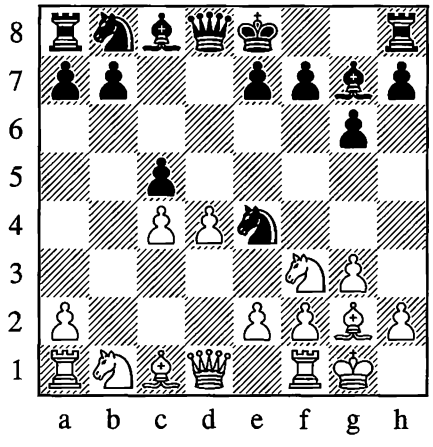
As will soon become clear, with the knight on e4 Black cannot carry out the same plan under favourable circumstances.



Since this is a book on the English Opening, I will only mention some essential ideas of this variation to complete our repertoire. In fact, the play is generally not forcing, so exhaustive research would hardly be justified anyway.

We will examine **B1) 7...dxc4** and **B2) 7...0–0**.

B1) 7...dxc4 8.bxc4 c5



This has never been tried in practice. White can fight for the initiative by sacrificing the exchange and taking advantage of the fact that the black king is still in the centre.

9.♕c2 ♘d6 10.dxc5!

The most energetic continuation. I assume that the position resulting after 10.♗b2 should also be more pleasant for White, because the d6-knight is not useful in the fight for the c5-square, despite having cost Black two tempos.

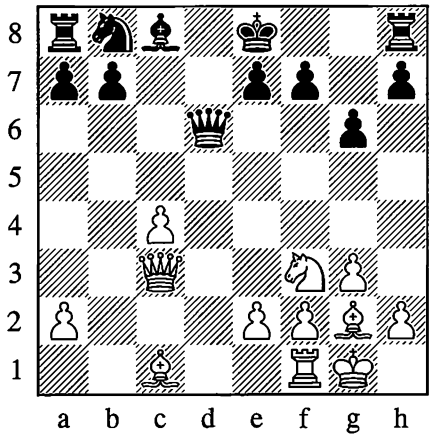
10...♗xa1 11.cxd6 ♕xd6

Forced, in view of the threat of dxe7 followed by ♗a3.

12.♘c3

White has caged the bishop and threatens to win it with ♗f4.

12...♗xc3 13.♕xc3



Black is a full exchange up, but he is poorly developed and both his wings are likely to be submitted to strong pressure.

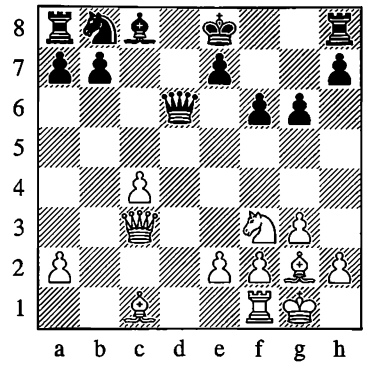
13...♕f6

Black intends to get castled without weakening his position.

13...0–0 14.♗h6 regains the exchange while keeping a lead in development.

13...f6

This creates an important weakness and allows White to develop his initiative.



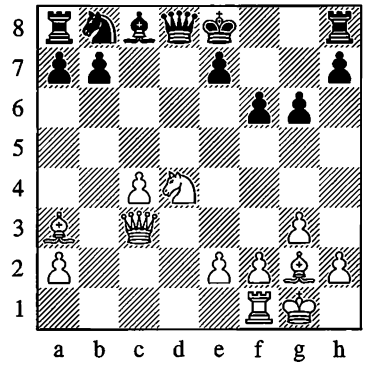
14.♗a3 ♕d8

This seems the best square for the queen, keeping e7 defended and avoiding being attacked again over the next few moves.

The queen is more vulnerable after 14...♕c7 15.♘d4 ♔f7. This looks more solid than castling, because it keeps e7 well defended. 16.♘b5 ♕d8 17.♕b3 White has numerous threats, for instance ♖d1 or c4-c5†. With the exception of his king, all Black's pieces are on their initial squares.

The black queen is equally badly placed after 14...♕a6 15.♘d4 ♔f7 16.♕e3 ♖e8 17.♘b5±.

15.♘d4



15...0–0

With the b7-square inadequately defended, 15...♔f7 is not to be recommended, because the king will be exposed to attacks along the seventh rank: 16.♖b1 ♕c7 17.♗d5† And now 17...e6 18.♘xe6! or 17...♔g7 18.♗xb7!.

16.♗d5† ♔h8

16...♔g7? allows 17.♗xb7 when the bishop is taboo because of the fork on e6.

17.♕e3 ♖e8 18.♗f7±

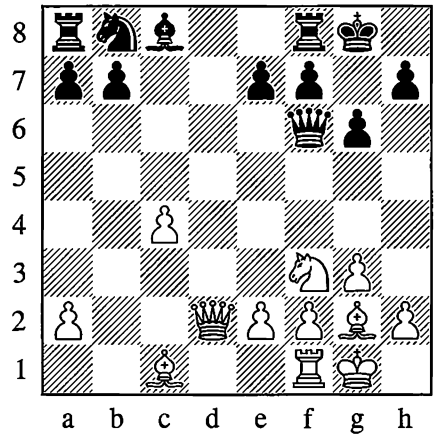
White wins back the exchange and has very active play.

14.♕d2

Avoiding the exchange of queens and preparing to take back control of the long diagonal with ♗b2. At the same time, the queen is preparing to start an attack with ♕h6.

14...0–0

Black should not delay castling. For example, 14...♕d6 15.♕h6 forces the king to stay in the centre. 15...♘c6 16.♗b2 f6 17.♕g7 ♖f8 18.♕xh7± White has a pawn for the exchange, active pieces and the safer king.

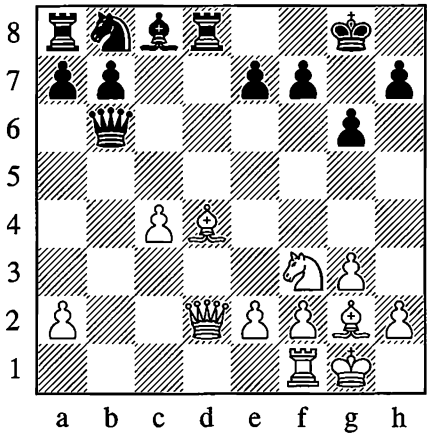


15.♗b2 ♕b6

Black has to be very careful. In reply to most queen moves, White would play 16.♕h6 and if 16...f6 then 17.♘g5! winning. With his last move, Black attacks the b2-bishop, hoping to win a tempo for his defence.

16.♗d4 ♖d8

The only move, for the reasons explained above.



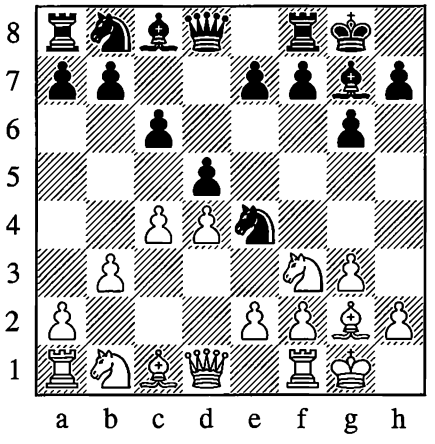
17.♕e3 ♕e6 18.♕h6 ♖xd4

Finally, Black has to return the exchange, as 18...f6? loses to 19.♘g5!.

19.♘xd4±

White has restored material equality and still has the better development. Black cannot play 19...♕xc4? because of 20.♖c1 mating.

B2) 7...0–0



This solid continuation is almost unanimously played.

8.♗b2

This is what I used to consider the Nikolic tabiya. White does not have any immediate

threats, but his better control of the centre is likely to ensure him a long-term, even though minimal, advantage.

8...♗f5

This is the start of Black's main plan. The e4-knight is not so stable and at some point White will threaten to exchange it with either ♘bd2 or ♘c3. Black's best reaction is to use this exchange to get his bishop to e4, thus neutralizing the g2-bishop, at least temporarily. It is precisely against this plan that Nikolic designed an effective antidote.

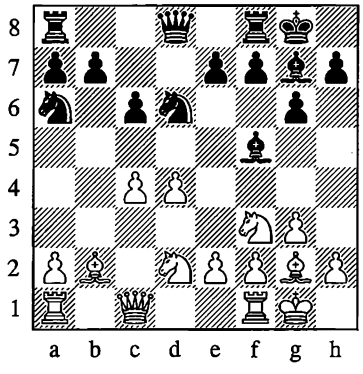
8...dxc4

This gives up the centre for nothing.

9.♕c2 ♘d6

9...♗f5? loses a piece to 10.g4.

10.bxc4 ♗f5 11.♕c1 ♘a6 12.♘bd2



White has a considerable space advantage in the centre and Black is left with almost no counterplay at all.

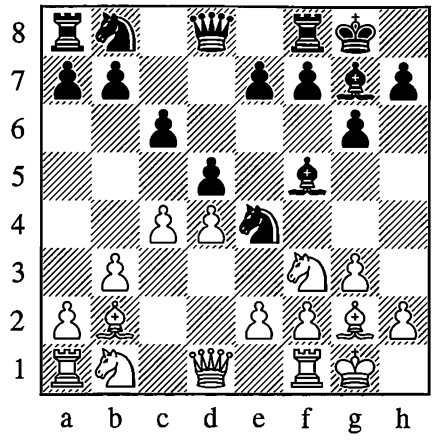
12...♕c8

12...c5 fails to solve Black's space problems because of 13.d5±, as in Ehlvest – Perelshteyn, USA (ch) 2007.

13.♖e1 ♘e4

In Bogoljubow – Euwe, Netherlands 1928, White could have consolidated his advantage with:

14.♘xe4!N ♗xe4 15.♕e3 ♗xf3 16.♗xf3 e6 17.♖ab1±



9.e3

White is in no hurry to develop his b1-knight. He still has a few useful moves from the main plan at his disposal, such as ♕e2 and ♖c1.

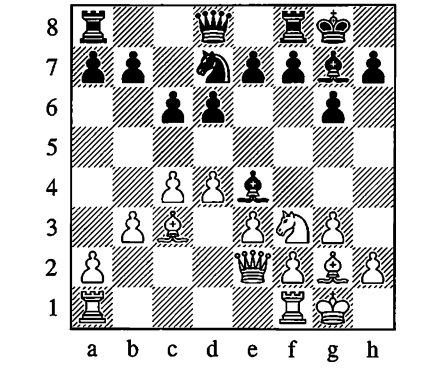
9...a5

The threat of ...a5-a4 more or less forces White to develop his knight.

10.♘c3 ♘xc3 11.♗xc3 ♗e4 12.♕e2!

The start of an effective regrouping. White plans ♖fc1 and ♗f1, when all his pieces would be targeting the enemy queenside. This will offer White excellent chances of a positional attack.

It should be mentioned that a similar position can arise from the fianchetto variation of the King's Indian Defence: 1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘f3 ♗g7 4.g3 0–0 5.♗g2 d6 6.0–0 c6 7.♘c3 ♗f5 8.b3 ♘e4 9.♗b2 ♘xc3 10.♗xc3 ♗e4 11.e3 ♘d7 12.♕e2



If Black plays ...d6-d5 at an early stage, White would simply be a tempo up compared to our main line. Black can delay action in the centre with the more flexible ...a5 or ...e6. In this case, White may play ♖fd1, discouraging ...c5 or ...e5. Black would have nothing better than to play ...d5 anyway, when White may give up his extra tempo later, by re-positioning his king's rook to c1, thus transposing to our main line.

In this line of the King's Indian, Nikolic's games are also of vital theoretical importance.

12...♘d7

A natural developing move, but of course there is an alternative:

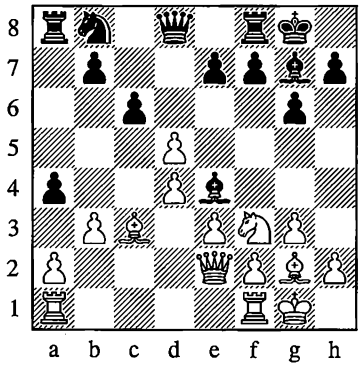
12...a4

This is ineffective. Once the bishop has evacuated the b2-square, the threat of ...a4-a3 no longer exists.

13.♗h3

A slight deviation from the initial plan, as 13.♖fc1 would lose a tempo after 13...axb3 14.axb3 ♖xa1.

However, Nikolic defeated an ex-World Champion with 13.cxd5:



13...♕xd5?! This move only *looks* active and it gives up the centre unnecessarily. (13...cxd5 is more solid when White would only have a symbolic advantage.) 14.b4 ♘d7 15.♖fd1 ♕h5 16.h3! White immediately challenges the queen's stability on the kingside. Remarkably, Nikolic employs one of his mighty opponent's favourite methods in this type of position. 16...♖fc8 17.♖ac1 a3 18.g4 ♕d5 19.♘e1 ♗xg2 20.♘xg2 ♘b6 21.♘f4 ♕b5 22.♗e1 ♕xe2 23.♘xe2 e5 24.dxe5 ♗xe5 25.♗c3 ♖e8 26.♗xe5 ♖xe5 27.♘c3± Black's queenside play has been neutralized, while White's kingside majority is ready to advance, Nikolic – Karpov, Monte Carlo (rapid) 1996.

13...♕b6

13...♗xf3 14.♕xf3± would leave White with a space advantage and the bishop pair.

14.♘d2 ♗f5 15.♗g2 ♗e6 16.♖fc1

It was also possible to block the queenside at once with 16.c5!? followed by b3-b4.

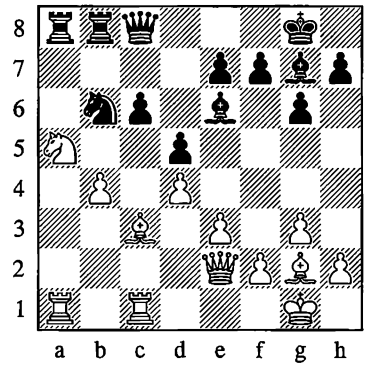
16...axb3 17.axb3 ♘d7 18.c5 ♕c7 19.b4±

White has a space advantage on the queenside, while Black's counterplay in the centre is not easy to start, because the e6-bishop stands in the way.

19...♖fb8 20.♘b3 ♕c8 21.♘a5 b6

Black parries the threat of b4-b5, but creates a weakness on c6.

22.cxb6 ♘xb6



In Marin – Ripari, Linares 1998, I failed to find the best continuation:

23.♗e1!N

Black has no easy way to defend his c6-pawn.

23...♘c4

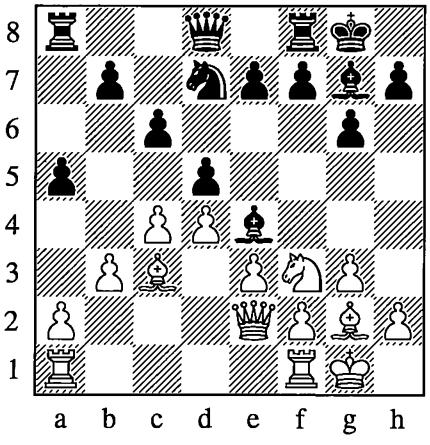
23...♗d7 leads to a deadly pin after 24.b5 ♘c4 25.bxc6 ♗xc6 26.♘xc6 ♕xc6 27.♖xa8 ♖xa8 28.♖xc4+–.

24.♘xc4 ♖xa1

24...dxc4 would lose the fight for the a-file anyway after 25.♖a5±.

25.♖xa1 dxc4 26.♖a7 ♖b7 27.♖a6 ♗d5 28.♕a2±

White controls the only open file and has the better structure.



13.♖fc1 e6

Since Black is going to give up his queen's bishop, it makes sense to place most of his pawns on light squares.

14.♗f1

White has completed his regrouping and threatens ♘d2, which would put the e4-bishop in danger.

14...♗xf3 15.♕xf3

For a Slav Defence specialist, this position may seem entirely safe for Black. However, White's excellent regrouping offers him chances to start an effective queenside attack.

15...f5

Black has to look for counter-chances on the kingside. His last move leads to a structure that is typical for the Stonewall Dutch.

Black could also play this move after transferring the knight to e4.

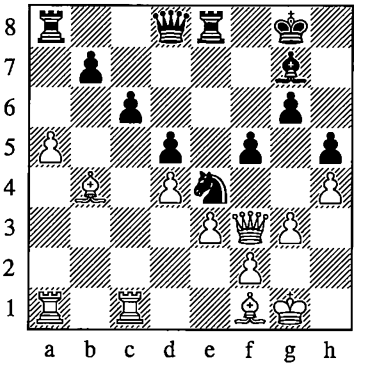
15...♘f6 16.♗e1 ♘e4 17.cxd5 exd5

After 17...cxd5 18.♕e2 White would have a lasting queenside initiative (the immediate threat is ♕b5). 18...♘d6 19.♖c5 a4 20.bxa4 ♖xa4 21.♕c2 (White clears the f1-a6 diagonal in order to prevent ...♘c4) 21...♕a8 The position is almost symmetrical, but White's superior activity is threatening. All his pieces are playing, while the g7-bishop and the f8-rook still need to be activated. 22.♖c7± The rook occupies the seventh rank, which could later lead to a dangerous attack, as it is not easy to neutralize its action. For example: 22...♖c8?! 23.♖xc8† ♘xc8 24.♗b5 ♖a7 25.♗b4 With overwhelming activity.

18.b4!

Since White has the bishop pair, he can employ an unusual form of the minority attack. After the forced pawn exchange, Black will not be able to maintain the blockade on a6 or b5.

18...axb4 19.♗xb4 ♖e8 20.a4 h5 21.h4 f5 22.a5



After a huge transposition, play has transposed to the game Bu Xiangzhi – Radjabov, Sofia 2008, which continued:

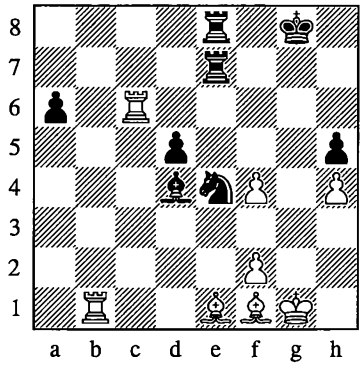
22...♖e6 23.♖ab1 ♕d7 24.♖b3

White is slowly increasing his queenside pressure.

24...♕f7 25.♗e1 ♖ae8 26.♖cb1 ♖6e7 27.♖b6

White's initiative is becoming threatening, which forces Black to start a desperate attack on the opposite wing.

27...g5 28.a6 bxa6 29.♖xc6 gxh4 30.gxh4 f4 31.♕xf4 ♕xf4 32.exf4 ♗xd4



So far, we have followed the aforementioned game. Now White could have retained an advantage with:

33.♖d1N ♖g7† 34.♗g2

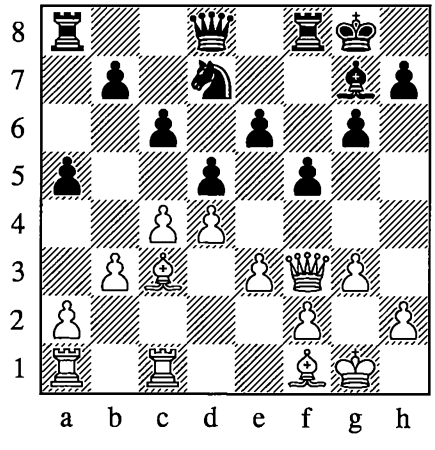
After the tricky:

34...♗a7

White should not rush in with 35.♖xd5 because of 35...♘xf2! 36.♗xf2 ♖e1† simplifying to a draw. The correct move is:

35.♔f1!±

This leaves Black's pawns vulnerable and his minor pieces are unstable.



16.cxd5 exd5

With the knight far from the d6-square, the other way of recapturing is even less favourable than in a previous comment. 16...cxd5 17.♕e2 White will continue with ♕b5, ♖c2 and ♖ac1 with strong queenside pressure.

17.b4

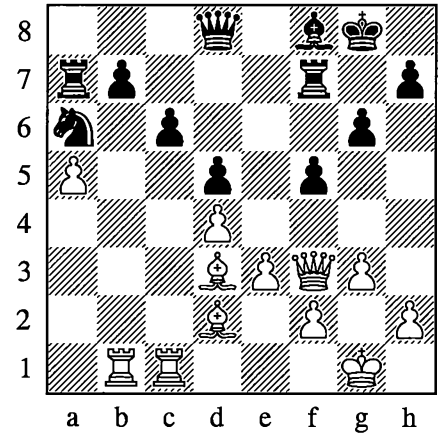
The start of a familiar plan.

17...axb4 18.♗xb4 ♖f7 19.a4 ♘b8!?

A different defensive method than that employed by Radjabov. The knight is heading for a6, with the intention of maintaining stability on the queenside.

20.a5 ♘a6 21.♗d2 ♗f8 22.♖ab1 ♖a7 23.♗d3

Since the enemy knight is far from the f3- and h3-squares, the bishop can abandon the kingside in favour of the optimal d3-square. From here, it keeps both wings under observation.



23...♗a3 24.♖c2 ♕f8 25.♖b6

It is clear that Black has limited stability on the queenside: ♗xa6 is threatened, with irreparable structural damage.

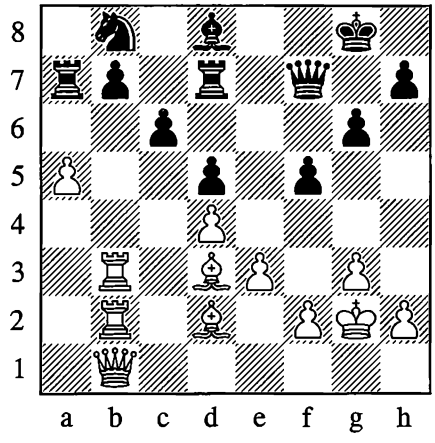
25...♘b8 26.♕d1 ♗e7 27.♕b1 ♗d8 28.♖b3 ♕g7

Black prepares his defence along the seventh rank. Instead the simplifying operation

28...♗xa5 29.♗xa5 ♖xa5 30.♖xb7± leaves the c6-pawn and the seventh rank weak, while the knight is very passive.

29.♖cb2 ♖d7 30.♔g2 ♕f7

For the time being, Black seems to be out of danger, but his position remains passive. If the b-file was opened, his king would feel unsafe.



31.♗b4!

White threatens ♗c5, forcing Black to allow the exchange of the dark-squared bishops, which will make the b6-square available for White's rooks.

31...♗e7 32.♗xe7 ♕xe7 33.♖b6

The thematic break a5-a6 is in the air, but White takes his time before carrying it out. He will try to find the best placement for his major pieces and obtain the most favourable kingside configuration. Meanwhile, Black cannot undertake anything active.

33...♖c7 34.♖2b3 ♔g7 35.h4

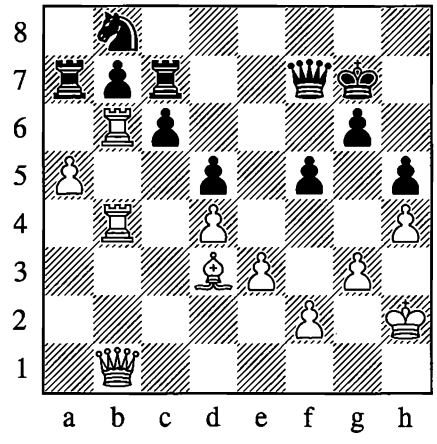
White intends to weaken the enemy kingside with h5xg6, or create a mating net with h5-h6.

35...h5

This parries the threat, but in any ending Black's kingside structure will lack flexibility. In some cases, the white king could march in with ♔f3-f4 and then to e5 or g5.

36.♕b2 ♔f7 37.♔h2 ♔g7 38.♖3b4 ♔f7 39.♕b3 ♔g7 40.♕b1 ♕f7

With his last moves White has been marking time in order to reach the time control.



41.a6!

Finally opening the queenside.

41...♘xa6 42.♖a4

Winning back the pawn is only a matter of time. Later, White's major pieces will invade the enemy position. In Marin – Hebert, Yerevan (ol) 1996, Black could not defend his chronically weak c6-pawn and his vulnerable king at the same time and lost 20 moves later.

Conclusion

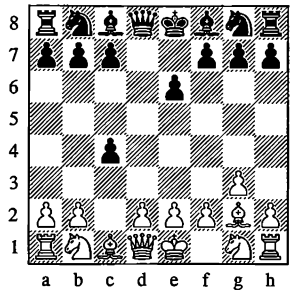
The black set-up that is examined in this chapter requires that White change his strategy compared to the previous chapters. In line A he has to embark on truly hypermodern play, undermining the black centre by piece pressure alone, at least in the first phase of the game. In line B we see the opposite: White has to occupy the centre himself with an early d4, which is not entirely in the spirit of this book. Although this can be regarded as a

moral concession, objectively White has little to complain about, since he retains the more pleasant position.

Anti-Slav Conclusion

As a general conclusion to the Anti-Slav chapters, I find that the system based on g2-g3 offers White plenty of possibilities for active play, especially if Black develops his king's knight at an early stage. Although delaying ...♘f6 offers Black a wider choice, only one of the lines is really critical from White's point of view, namely line B from Chapter 9.

Chapter 12



Anti-QG Systems

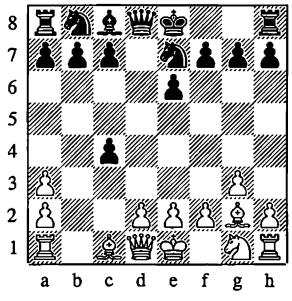
Introduction and 3...dxc4

Variation Index

1.c4 e6 2.g3 d5 3.♗g2 dxc4

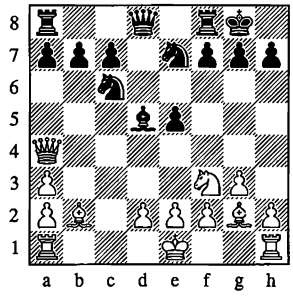
4.♘a3

after 5...♘e7



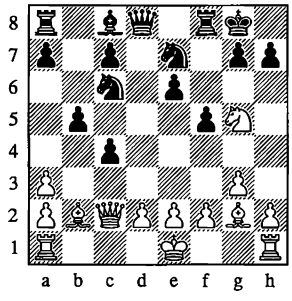
6.♗b2!N

note to 6.♗b2!N



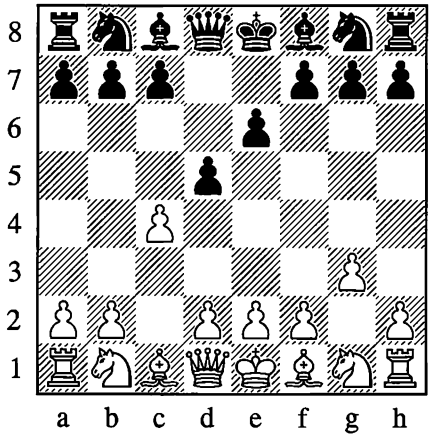
11.e4!?N

after 9...f5



10.d3!

1.c4 e6 2.g3 d5



The Queen's Gambit Declined set-up is historically the oldest and may objectively be the most reliable defence against 1.d4, so it certainly deserves respect when played against 1.c4. Black consolidates his outpost in the centre with ...e6 rather than with ...c6 as in the previous group of chapters (2 to 11). This induces a series of significant differences between the two set-ups.

When playing ...c6 followed by ...d5, Black willingly delays the development of his kingside. He needs to find a quick way to develop his queen's bishop, in order to allow ...e6 and get castled soon. This frequently leads to early tactical complications, which tend to be dangerous with the king in the centre.

In comparison, ...e6 is much more flexible. Black is first of all concerned with developing his kingside and castling, thus avoiding any early turbulence. Once the king is brought to safety, Black will have a rather wide choice in developing his other wing, without the necessity of acting in a hurry.

Experience as a 1.c4 player has taught me that in some ways the Queen's Gambit set-up is more aggressive than the Slav. Since everything is prepared for the black king to make a rapid exit from the centre, White always has to be ready for ...dxc4. The approved solution for such cases is ♕a4† followed by ♕xc4. I have played these lines myself, but despite my satisfactory results I felt that the considerable loss of time caused by Her Majesty moving around should offer Black excellent possibilities for counterplay.

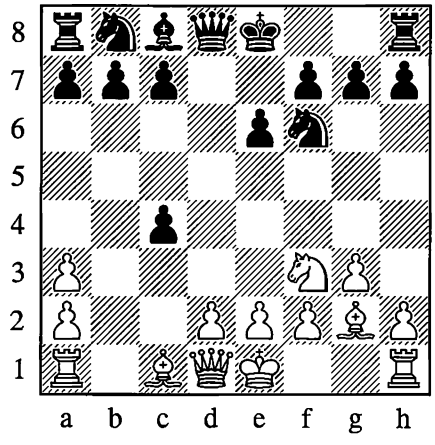
After 1.c4 e6 2.g3 d5 3.♗g2 ♘f6 4.♘f3 dxc4 5.♕a4† ♘bd7 6.♕xc4 c5, Black threatens to neutralize the g2-bishop with 7...b6, since 8.♘d4 would not be dangerous because of the intermediate 8...♘e5, defending the c6-square with gain of time. Therefore, the main line goes 7.♕b3, but this means an investment of three tempos, while the queen would not be absolutely stable anyway.

Another good line for Black is 5...c6 6.♕xc4 b5, followed by ...♗b7, ...♘bd7 and ...c5, with active queenside play.

In order to solve the problem of an early ...dxc4, I have resorted to a similar philosophy as in the previous group of chapters. White should first attack the pawn with ♘a3 and only in certain cases, after Black has made some sort of queenside commitment, with ♕a4† or ♕c2.

This approach is regarded by theory with even greater scepticism than in the case of the Anti-Slav systems, mainly because ♘a3 can (and should) be answered with ...♗xa3, not only winning a tempo for kingside development, but also spoiling White's queenside structure.

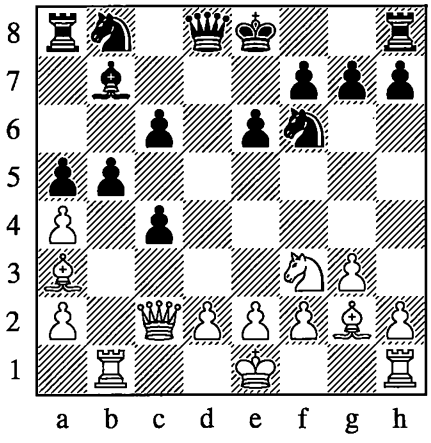
Below is the critical position, which will be investigated in Chapters 16, 17 and 18.



What did White get in exchange for his doubled pawns and the (possibly not just temporary) material deficit?

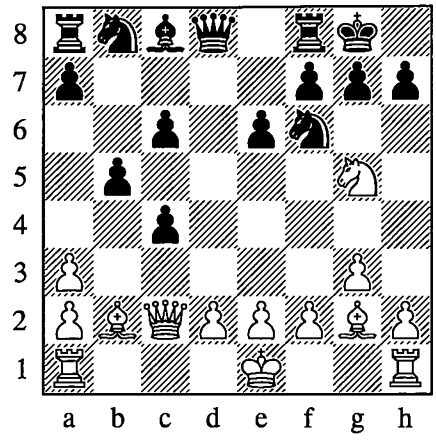
First of all, he has two mighty bishops. Neutralizing the g2-bishop will be anything but easy for Black, while on the dark squares the queen's bishop will have no opponent. If White manages to regain the pawn, his advantage would become obvious, because his massive central structure would become mobile.

Black can choose whether or not to defend his extra pawn. Hanging on to the minimal material advantage is usually achieved by means of ...b7-b5, but there are several versions of this. In general, we should note that this advance will weaken the dark squares even more, increasing the strategic danger Black is facing. Here is a typical situation taken from Chapter 17, line B:

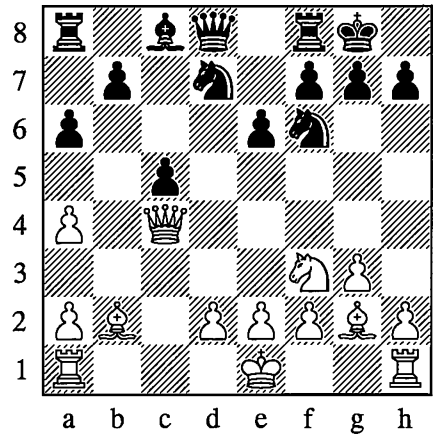


The a3-bishop prevents Black from castling and the queenside is under serious pressure. Playing ...b5-b4 would allow castling, but after ♘e5xc4 White would favourably stabilize the queenside.

The situation may become dangerous for the black king even after castling. White can take advantage of the lack of support His Majesty gets from the undeveloped queenside pieces to create brutal threats. For example, the following position is from Chapter 18 on page 260:



A good question is which is the best way to attack and capture the c4-pawn if Black does not defend it. As mentioned above, White should avoid playing ♕a4 or ♕c2 while Black's queenside still has its initial flexibility. The following position, taken from a note to line C from Chapter 18, is a good illustration of this rule:

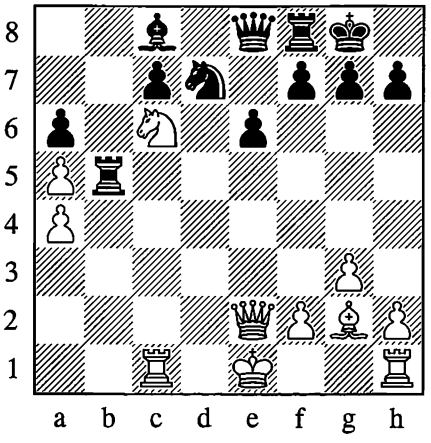


White seems to have achieved the desired stability, allowing him to enjoy the bishop pair, but tactics come to Black's aid: 10...b5! Gaining queenside space, followed by ...♗b7.

This is the kind of reason why I generally prefer ♖c1 over ♕c2. There are cases, though,

when ♕c2 is recommended. Happily, there is a reliable indicator that will help us to avoid any confusion. The commitments I had in mind earlier include such moves as ...c6 and ...♘c6, both delaying ...c5, or ♕d6, which makes Black violate the natural order of development.

One final aspect regards the doubled pawns – White should not be ashamed of his queenside structure. We already saw a case in which a3-a4 made it likely the pawns would be "undoubled". Sometimes, these pawns can be useful in controlling important squares along the b-file, as in the next diagram:



Despite his extra pawn, Black is under serious pressure. His situation would be a lot better if the rook had a stable square along the b-file, but this is not the case.

The reader will notice that if Black refrains from ...dxc4, the c4-pawn will be defended with b2-b3 at a later stage. This raises a natural question: why not play b2-b3 on the third move, thus avoiding all these double-edged variations with ♘a3?

As a matter of fact, I have played this way several times, but I gradually became aware of a number of limitations with this approach. First of all, 1.c4 e6 2.g3 d5 3.b3 loses a pawn to 3...dxc4 4.bxc4 ♕d4. There may be ways to prove good compensation for White, but this is just one negative aspect of the whole story. White could employ a slightly different move order, with 2.♘f3 d5 3.b3, but this only solves the problem of the pawn loss.

First of all, the lines based on an early ...a7-a5 tend to be quite annoying. (Compare this with line B from Chapter 19). Black also has 3...♗e7 followed by 4...♗f6, when the simplifications allow him to count on a safe position. Finally, b2-b3 is an important commitment if Black decides to transpose to the Stonewall Dutch set-up with ...f7-f5 (please refer to Chapter 28).

In the event of 2.♘f3, White has to be prepared to face one more opening: the Queen's Indian, which is completely ruled out by our move order of 2.g3 against virtually any first move.

I hope this mass of problems convinces the reader that it is worth risking the pawn sacrifices I recommend. It has certainly convinced me!

I should mention that the material in the ...dxc4, ♘a3 lines mainly consists of detailed and original analysis, carried out together with Vali Stoica. Although improvements may be found on the way, I remain convinced of the correctness of White's approach.

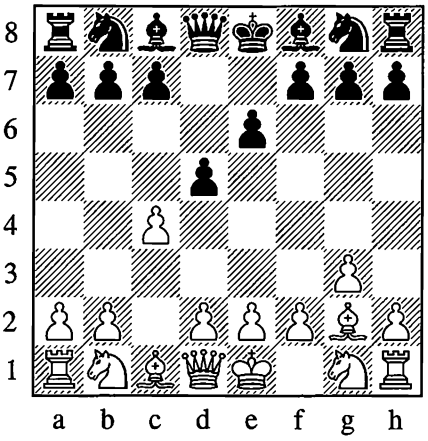
The reader may notice that not all the chapters have been covered in the same level of detail. It very much depends on the character of the positions. In Chapters 19 to 22 I have focused on explaining general ideas, but Chapters 23 to 25 involve a tense situation in the centre that requires careful and detailed examination.

Since Black's play is characterized by flexibility, numerous transpositions are possible. The move orders used to reach certain of the tabiyas are somewhat arbitrary, but basically no important line is missing.

After having acquainted ourselves with some essential aspects of the Queen's Gambit set-up,

let's play one more move and reach the first branching point:

3.♗g2



Before moving on, I will mention one variation that is not easy to include in any of the main chapters:

3...dxc4

Giving up the centre at a moment when the English bishop's diagonal is wide open leaves Black with little chance of keeping his extra pawn with a later ...b7-b5. Thus White is likely to gain an initiative in the centre.

The reader will not find a tabiya arising after:

3...c5

This is in the spirit of the Tarrasch Defence, but the last move will most likely transpose to one of the Chapters 22 to 25.

4.♘f3 ♘c6 5.0–0 ♘f6

5...d4 is premature, as White has two promising continuations:

He can choose a reversed King's Indian set-up with 6.d3 ♘f6 7.e4. If Black plays ...e6-e5, he will be two tempos down compared with a genuine KID, while otherwise e4-e5 is a permanent threat. In any case, White has good attacking prospects.

The reversed Benoni model is also good, when Black's safest choice is to keep the position symmetrical: 6.e3 e5 7.exd4 exd4 8.♖e1† ♗e7 9.d3 0–0 10.♘a3 Followed by ♗f4 and ♘e5. Again, White is two tempos up in comparison with the Hromadka system, a hybrid between the Benoni and the King's Indian.

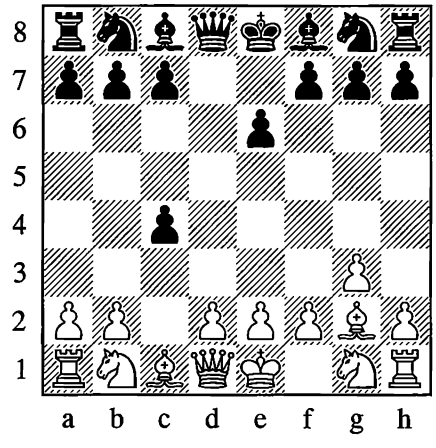
6.e3 ♗e7

After 6...dxc4 White effortlessly retrieves the pawn with 7.♘a3.

7.b3

We have almost transposed to the aforementioned chapters.

Nowadays, the Tarrasch Defence does not have a good reputation. Therefore, White could also play 4.cxd5 exd5 5.d4. For further details see Boris Avrukh's *Grandmaster Repertoire 1* or Lars Schandorff's *Playing the Queen's Gambit.*



4.♘a3 ♗xa3

If Black refrains from this exchange he is likely to end up in a slightly inferior position without any real counterplay. In the following game he managed to equalize only after an inaccuracy from White:

4...♘f6 5.♘xc4 c5 6.b3?!

Delaying the kingside development takes away some of the dynamism of White's position.

6.♘f3! is much stronger and transposes to line A from Chapter 16.

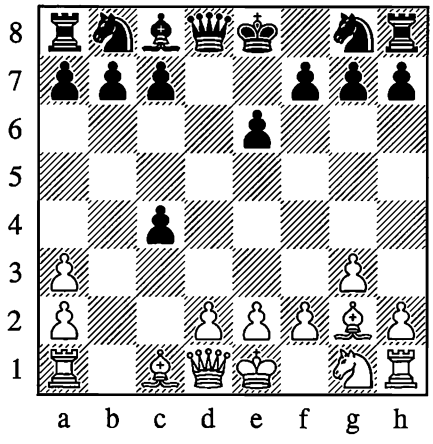
6...♗e7 7.♗b2 0–0 8.♘f3 b5!

With his king safe, Black can start fighting for space and for the long light diagonal.

9.♘ce5 ♘d5 10.e4 ♘b4 11.d4 cxd4 12.a3 ♘4c6 13.♘xc6 ♘xc6 14.♘xd4 ♘xd4

With equality and a draw agreement in Marin – Gelfand, Istanbul (ol) 2000.

5.bxa3



5...♘e7

This looks like a flexible way to develop the kingside. The knight controls d5 and will over-defend its colleague after a later ...♘bc6, but on the other hand the h7-square is left without defence, which in some cases allows White to create threats with ♕c2 and ♘g5.

Other moves have no independent value: 5...c6 6.♘f3 transposes to Chapter 13 and the position arising after 5...♘f6 6.♘f3 is thoroughly examined in Chapters 16 to 18. Another possible transposition is 5...♘d7 6.♗b2 ♘gf6 7.♘f3 0–0 8.0–0, which leads to line C from Chapter 18.

6.♗b2!N

Before regaining the pawn with a time-consuming queen manoeuvre, it is essential to take measures against the central expansion based on ...e6-e5.

6.♕a4†

This is rather premature.

6...♘bc6 7.♗b2 e5!

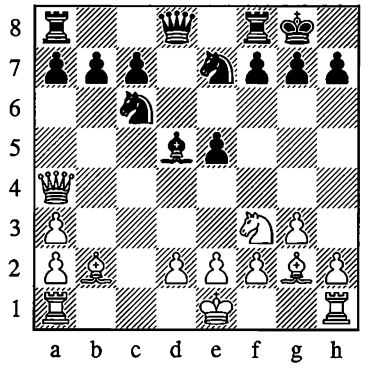
Black is ready to part with his central pawn for the sake of rapid development.

8.♕xc4

The following lines, provided by Salov, prove that 8.♗xe5 is risky: 8...0–0 9.♗b2 (or if 9.♗c3, preventing 9...b5, then 9...♗e6 followed by ...♘d5, when the dark-squared bishop is vulnerable anyway) 9...b5! The pawn is taboo because of ...♖b8. 10.♕c2 ♗f5 11.♕c3 f6 Black's superior development compensates for his strategic drawbacks.

8...♗e6 9.♕a4 0–0 10.♘f3 ♗d5?!

Black could have done better with 10...f6, maintaining a solid position.



In Salov – Yusupov, Linares 1990, White could have achieved an advantage with:

11.e4!?N b5 12.♕c2 ♗c4 13.♗f1 ♗xf1 14.♔xf1±

Followed by ♔g2, ♖hd1, ♖ac1 and d2-d4 (Salov).

6...0–0 7.♕c2

From this square the queen not only attacks the c4-pawn, but also keeps an eye on h7. 7.♕a4?! is less accurate because after 7...♘bc6 8.♘f3 Black has 8...b5! defending the extra pawn with gain of time.

7...♘bc6 8.♘f3

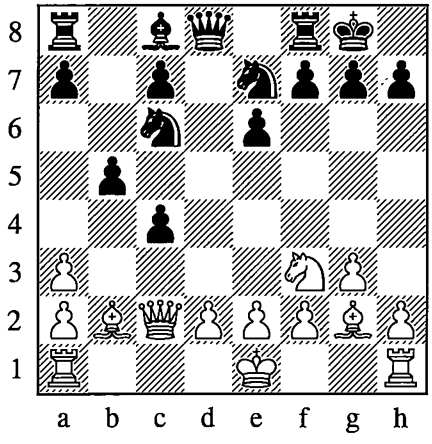
Occupying the centre with ...e6-e5 is not so easy anymore, since after 8...e5 9.♘xe5 ♘xe5 10.♗xe5 Black has far fewer possibilities for counterplay than in the lines examined in the previous comment.

8...b5

This looks like a critical test of White's play, but weakening the queenside is not without risks.

The other way of defending the pawn is ineffective: 8...♕d5 9.0–0 ♖d8 10.♖fc1± White will regain the pawn anyway, while keeping an active bishop pair.

Preparing ...e6-e5 with a queen move is likely to leave Her Majesty exposed in the centre: 8...♕d6 9.♘g5 ♘f5 10.♕xc4± With ♘e4-c5 to follow.

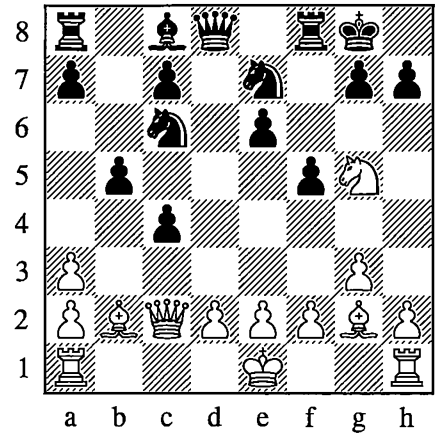


9.♘g5!

This is far more ambitious than 9.a4 a6 10.axb5 axb5 11.a4, which may offer White the more pleasant play in a simplified position. Instead after the text move, Black cannot avoid a chronic weakening of his kingside.

9...f5

9...g6 leaves Black paralysed after 10.♗f6. For instance, 10...♗b7 11.♕b2 a6 12.h4± with a dangerous attack.



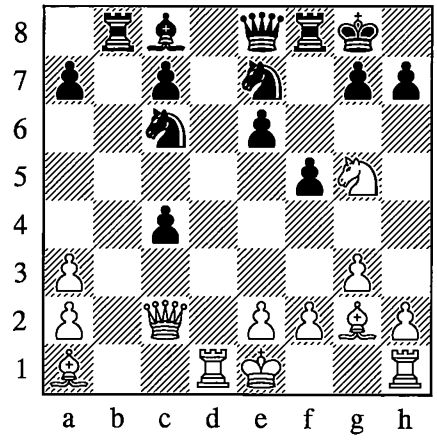
10.d3!

A typical move, although in this case it does not imply a pawn sacrifice, as we shall see.

10...♖b8

Black anticipates the opening of the b-file. Instead 10...cxd3? loses a piece to 11.♕c3!. Black cannot defend the c6-knight and the g7-square at the same time, while 11...d2† is ineffective because of 12.♔d1! keeping the pawn safely blocked.

11.dxc4 bxc4 12.♖d1 ♕e8 13.♗a1±



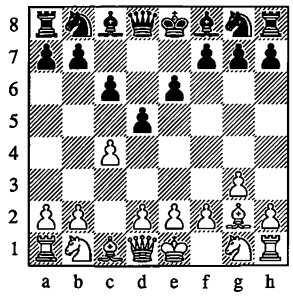
Black's extra pawn is not so relevant, while his pieces are badly coordinated and his dark squares are chronically weak.

Conclusion

We can note that after 1...e6 the impact of delaying ...♘f6 on the general character of the position is much less than was the case in the Anti-Slav systems. Most likely, Black will have to transpose to the usual lines, where the g8-knight is developed before capturing on c4.

Chapter 13

Anti-QG Systems



The Triangle I

Variation Index

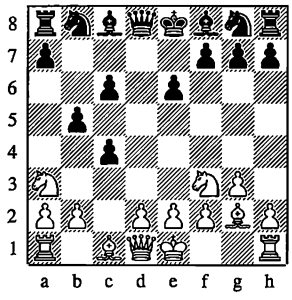
1.c4 e6 2.g3 d5 3.♗g2 c6

4.♘f3! dxc4 5.♘a3!

A) 5...b5 **204**

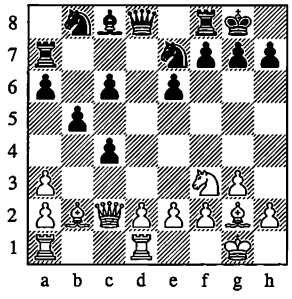
B) 5...♗xa3 **207**

A) after 5...b5



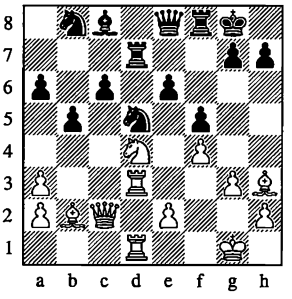
6.♘xb5!N

B) after 10...0–0



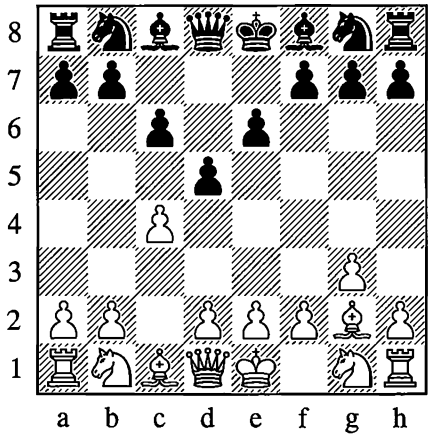
11.d3!

B) after 16...♘d5



17.♗g2!N

1.c4 e6 2.g3 d5 3.♗g2 c6



This is a fashionable and aggressive set-up against both 1.d4 and 1.c4. By preparing ...b7-b5, Black creates the threat of winning a pawn with ...dxc4. More than half a century ago, Botvinnik, who was a renowned pioneer in this territory, used to call this way of developing "the triangle" or, simply, "the system".

4.♘f3!

White has no favourable way of preventing ...dxc4 and is best advised to embark on gambit play, as in many of the early chapters of the 1...e6 system.

4.b3 loses a pawn without adequate compensation after 4...dxc4 5.bxc4 ♕d4.

As explained in the introductory Chapter 12, a move such as 4.♕c2 does not fit into our general repertoire.

4.d4, with the intention of transposing to the Catalan, is a good move and I have played it a few times, but it steers the game away from English paths. Apart from 4...dxc4, which leads to irrational complications, 4...f5 also creates some inconvenience, as we no longer have our desired anti-Dutch plan based on d2-d3 and e2-e4.

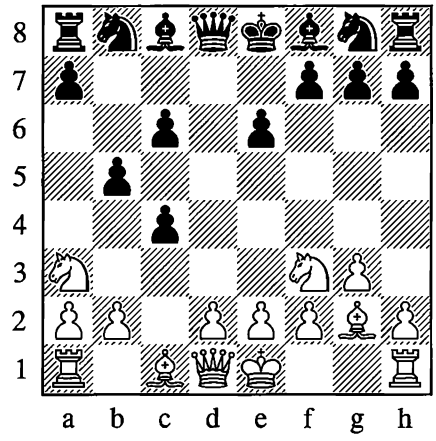
4...dxc4

The present chapter is dedicated to this critical line. 4...♘f6 transposes to Chapter 20, 4...♗d6 will be examined in Chapter 14, and 4...f5 leads to the Stonewall Dutch set-up, see Chapter 28.

5.♘a3!

Black can parry the threat of 6.♘xc4 with either **A) 5...b5** or **B) 5...♗xa3**.

A) 5...b5



An over-ambitious move; Black intends to keep the extra pawn without giving up his dark-squared bishop. This certainly is a dangerous approach, since Black weakens the long diagonal before developing any pieces.

6.♘xb5!N

It is curious that this obvious move (and the only one that can question the viability of Black's play) has never been tried in practice.

6...cxb5 7.♘g1!

This paradoxical retreat is the only way to justify the previous move. The natural 7.♘e5? leads to a material disadvantage after 7...♘d7!.

After the text move, Black will remain an exchange down. His only way to look for

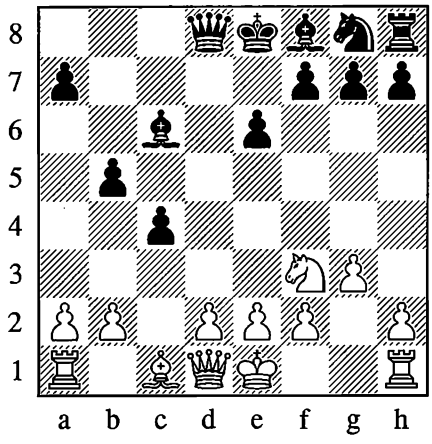
compensation is to eliminate White's light-squared bishop, in the hope that he will get an attack against the weakened kingside. As the subsequent analysis proves, Black is not well enough developed to achieve this.

7...♗d7

This is the start of the most effective regrouping. Instead 7...♘c6 poses White fewer practical problems. 8.♗xc6† ♗d7 9.♗xa8 ♕xa8 10.♘f3 Compared to the main line, the black queen and light-squared bishop are less prepared to set up pressure along the h1-a8 diagonal.

8.♗xa8 ♘c6 9.♗xc6 ♗xc6 10.♘f3

Although the knight has moved three times so far, Black has not achieved a significant lead in development. Also, his queenside space advantage is shaky in view of threats such as a2-a4 or b2-b3, which requires immediate action on the opposite wing.



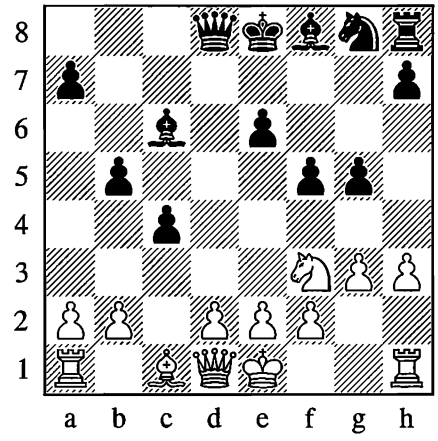
10...g5 11.h3!

White should not hurry with castling, as after 11.0–0?! ♕d5! 12.h3 h5 Black would gain a powerful attack. By keeping his rook on h1, White anticipates the opening of the h-file after an eventual ...g5-g4, hxg4.

11...f5

Black's play, consisting of so many pawn moves, looks a bit extravagant, but he has to keep the threat of ...g5-g4 alive. In the event of normal developing moves, White would have fewer problems fighting for space.

For instance: 11...♗g7 12.d3 cxd3 13.♗xg5 ♕d5 14.♖c1 ♗xb2 15.♖xc6 ♕xc6 16.0–0± White has returned the exchange and is even a pawn down, but his huge lead in development and the numerous weaknesses in the enemy camp offer him a large advantage.



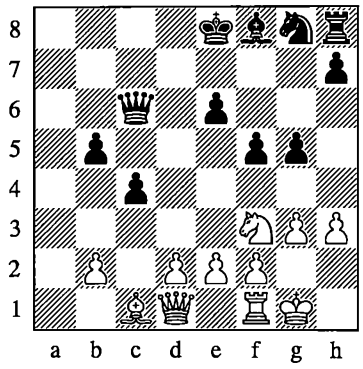
12.a4!

White has no way to resist the pressure on the kingside and has to react on the opposite wing, where a black rook is missing.

12...b4

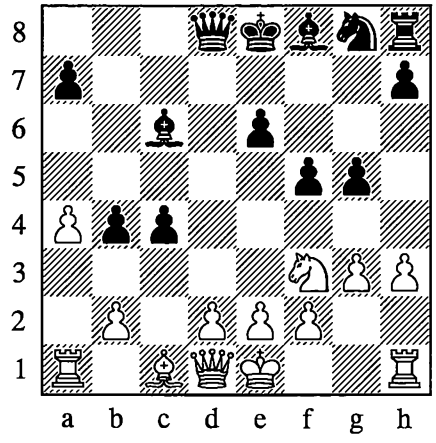
Black tries to keep the queenside closed.

Attempting to maintain the integrity of his structure would allow the opening of the a-file for the enemy rook, offering White a strong initiative. 12...a6 13.axb5 axb5 14.♖a6 ♕d5 (14...♗d5 removes the threat of doubling pieces on the long diagonal and can be met with 15.0–0! followed by d2-d3) 15.♖xc6! ♕xc6 16.0–0±



After the elimination of the dangerous bishop, White is ready to take advantage of his better development and of the overextended black position.

Continuing with the original plan of utilizing the pin to gain material allows White to make decisive progress on the queenside: 12...g4 13.hxg4 fxg4 14.axb5 ♗d5 15.♕a4 gxf3 (15...♔f7 parries b5-b6, but allows 16.♘e5† ♔g7 17.♕xa7† with a decisive material advantage) 16.b6† ♔f7 17.bxa7 ♕a8 18.exf3 ♗xf3 19.♖h4± Material is about equal, but the black king and queen feel rather uncomfortable.



13.♕c2

As in many lines of the Catalan, the queen targets not only c4, but also h7. The latter point may be less obvious at the moment, but it will become relevant in some lines.

13...♕d5

13...♗d5 allows White to set up his coordination against the h7-pawn after 14.d3 g4 15.hxg4 fxg4 16.dxc4 ♗c6 17.♖xh7, winning.

14.b3!

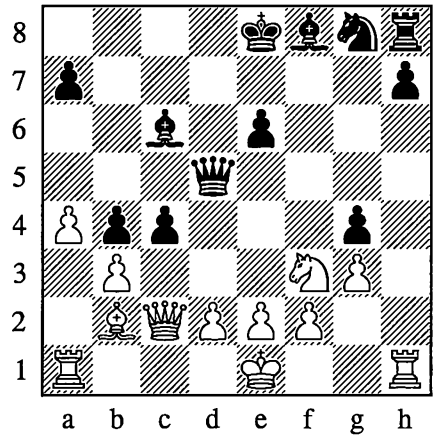
Since 14.d3? does not work now because of 14...cxd3, White has to hit from the other side.

14...g4

This is consistent but ineffective. 14...cxb3 is somewhat better, although it allows White to stabilize the position with 15.♕b2 e5 16.d4 h6 17.♖g1±. Black's attack has come to an end and White's material advantage will soon be significant.

15.hxg4 fxg4 16.♗b2

Black has tried hard to cause his opponent problems on the long light diagonal. Unfortunately for him, this has led to the chronic weakening of the other diagonal, which leaves the h8-rook in no better a situation than its rival on h1.



16...c3

More or less forced, since after 16...cxb3 17.♕d3 ♕xd3 18.exd3 ♗xf3 19.♖h5 White has a decisive material advantage.

17.dxc3 ♘f6 18.c4 ♕d8 19.♘d2

White sacrifices the rook for the sake of castling long and obtaining a decisive attack against the poorly developed black army.

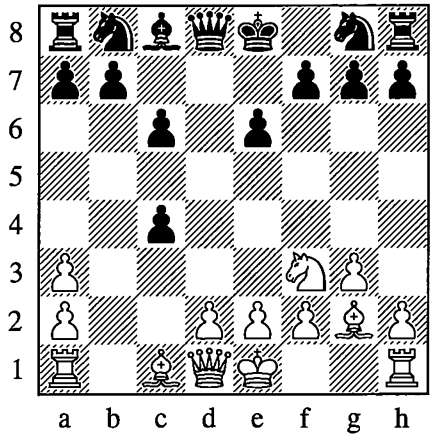
19...♗xh1 20.0–0–0 ♗c6 21.♘e4

Major material losses are inevitable for Black.

B) 5...♗xa3

This is the typical reaction against ♘a3. In this specific case, the weakness of the dark squares induced by ...c6 makes the absence of the dark-squared bishop more relevant than in most of the lines examined later in Chapters 16 to 18.

6.bxa3



6...♘e7

This is the only reasonable move with independent value. 6...♘f6 transposes to line B from Chapter 17.

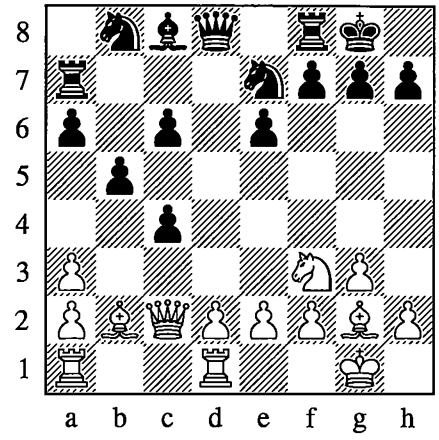
7.♕c2 b5

Black has consolidated his minimal material advantage, but his remaining bishop is desperately passive. White is better developed and can look for a plan to take control of Black's weakened dark squares.

8.0–0 a6

Not only solidifying the queenside, but also preparing to activate the rook along the seventh rank.

9.♖d1 ♖a7 10.♗b2 0–0



11.d3!

White eliminates the strongest black pawn and opens the central files for his pieces.

11...cxd3 12.♖xd3 ♖d7 13.♖ad1

White has completed his development and threatens ♘e5, which would leave the d-file completely in his hands.

13...f6

In such positions, there is no perfect remedy for the strategic problems. The last move restricts the b2-bishop and the f3-knight, but weakens the e6-square.

14.♘d4

Black needs to choose a way to parry the threat of ♘xe6.

14...♕e8

After the queen has left the d8-square, the pawn is taboo because of the discovered attack ...♖xd3. The text move keeps the queen close to the kingside, with the aim of avoiding a direct attack.

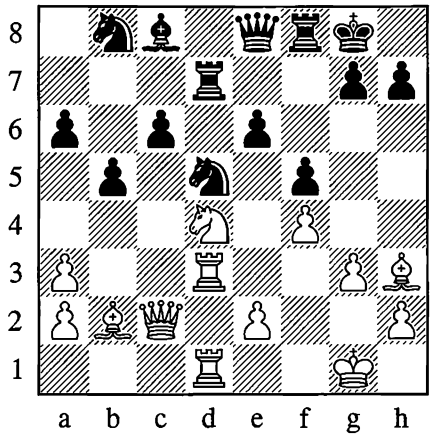
The more natural 14...♕b6 leaves the king exposed after 15.♗h3 f5 16.♘b3, possibly followed by ♕c3.

15.♗h3

Provoking a new weakening of Black's position.

15...f5 16.f4 ♘d5

Black has managed to more or less consolidate on the light squares, but his development is poor and his dark squares are weak.



17.♗g2!N

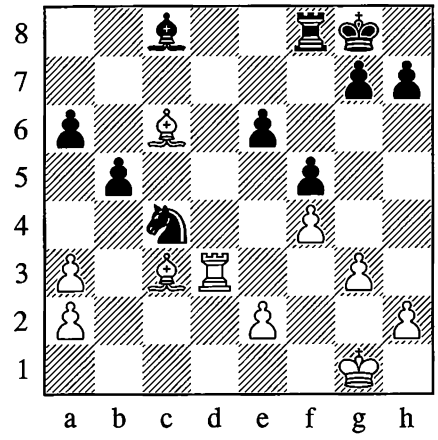
Once the h3-c8 diagonal has been well blocked, White reroutes his bishop, preparing e2-e4. After ...fxe4, ♗xe4, Black's kingside will be under pressure, especially as many of his pieces are far away on the other wing.

17.e4 is premature and leads to a considerable loss of time for White. 17...fxe4 18.♖b3 ♖e7 In view of the threat of ...e6-e5, Black can hope to activate his play, Kopylov – Tolush, corr. 1971.

17...♘b6

Black decides to return the pawn in order to simplify the position. After 17...♗b7 18.♘b3 followed by ♘c5, his position would remain very passive.

18.♘xc6 ♘xc6 19.♕xc6 ♖xd3 20.♖xd3 ♕xc6 21.♗xc6 ♘c4 22.♗c3±

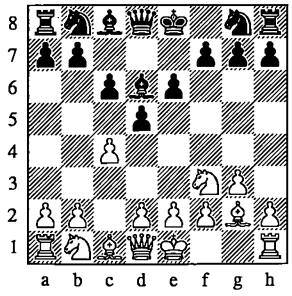


The active pair of bishops and the control of the d-file yield White better play in the endgame despite his minor structural defects.

Conclusion

The standard triangle plan based on ...c6 followed by ...dxc4 does not promise Black an easy life against our English set-up.

Chapter 14



Anti-QG Systems

The Triangle II

Variation Index

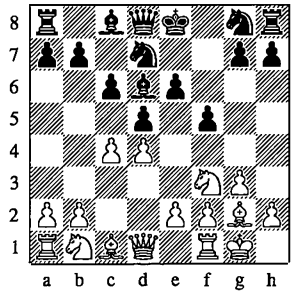
1.c4 e6 2.g3 d5 3.♗g2 c6 4.♘f3 ♗d6

5.0–0 e5 6.cxd5 cxd5 7.♘c3

A) 7...♘f6 **211**

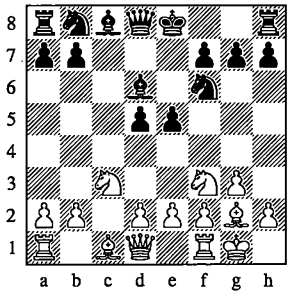
B) 7...♘e7 **212**

note to 5...e5



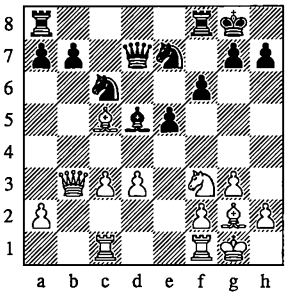
7.♕c2!

A) after 7...♘f6



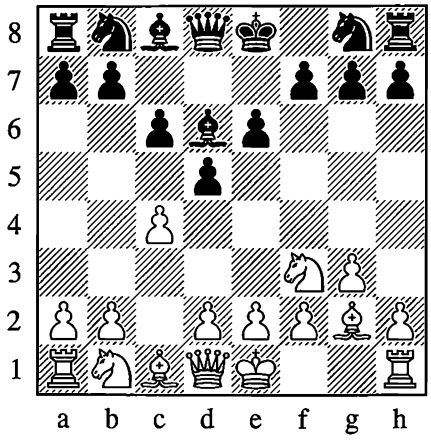
8.♕a4†!

B) after 16...♗xd5



17.c4±

1.c4 e6 2.g3 d5 3.♗g2 c6 4.♘f3 ♗d6



In the Catalan Opening this is an unusual and relatively unfavourable way of developing the bishop. One main reason is that after a well-timed opening of the centre with e2-e4, the bishop will remain exposed. These lines have been analysed by Boris Avrukh in his update to *Grandmaster Repertoire 1*, published on www.qualitychess.co.uk.

With our repertoire move order, the presence of the bishop on d6 creates the continuing threat of ...e6-e5, which means that we will not be able to delay d2-d4 forever. Still, it is essential to refrain from 5.d4, because this gives Black the possibility of transposing to a viable line of the Stonewall Dutch with 5...f5.

5.0–0

White plays the most flexible move and is ready to play d2-d4 next.

5...e5

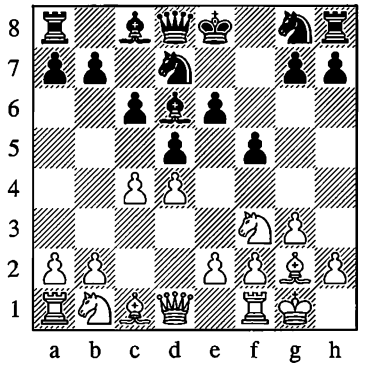
At this stage of the game, when Black is almost completely undeveloped, occupying the centre with loss of time is risky. Even so, White needs to play accurately in order to take advantage of his lead in development. This will be the main subject of this chapter.

Against 5...♘f6 I recommend an immediate transposition to the Catalan with 6.d4. I do not think this is a big concession because, as mentioned before, this is not a critical line of the Catalan. Avrukh's main line goes: 6...♘bd7 7.♘c3 dxc4 (or 7...0–0 8.♘d2 followed by e2-e4, when the d6-bishop is obviously misplaced) 8.♗g5 h6 9.♗xf6 ♕xf6 10.♘e4 ♕e7 11.♘fd2 ♘b6 12.f4!?N 0–0 13.♖c1 ♖d8 14.♘xc4 ♗c7 15.♕d3!±

5...♘d7

This is not as tricky for White to meet as it may seem at first: Black leaves the path clear for the f-pawn, but transposing to the Dutch Defence is less favourable once the c8-bishop has been blocked.

6.d4 f5



7.♕c2!

A typical anti-Stonewall method; by attacking the f5-pawn, White threatens to open the c-file.

7...♘gf6

7...♘e7 over-defends the f5-pawn, but places the knight far from the e4-square. In addition, after 8.b3 Black can no longer parry the threat of ♗a3 with ...♕e7.

8.cxd5 cxd5

This is a sad concession. Black should be prepared to meet the exchange in the centre with ...exd5, opening the e-file for his major pieces and keeping the queenside

defended. The second negative effect of the early development of the b8-knight is that blocking the c-file with ...♘c6 is no longer possible.

9.♘c3 a6

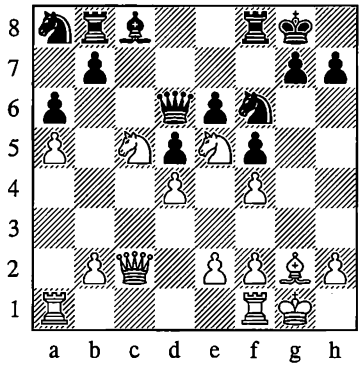
A necessary loss of time and weakening of the b6- and c5-squares.

9...0–0 allows an invasion on c7 after 10.♘b5 ♗b8 11.♗f4±.

10.♗f4

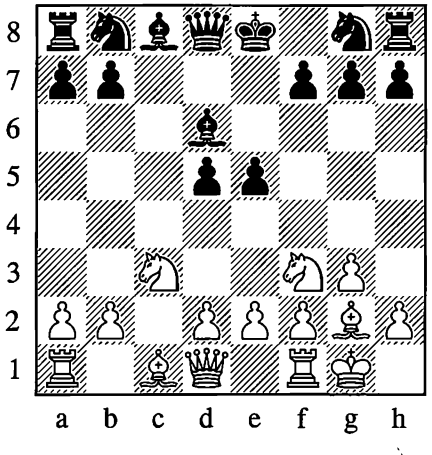
White exchanges the main defender of the dark squares, after which he will invade them with his knights.

10...♗xf4 11.gxf4 0–0 12.♘a4 ♘b6 13.♘c5 ♕d6 14.♘e5 ♖b8 15.a4 ♘a8 16.a5±



With a strategically winning position, Taimanov – Lisitsin, Leningrad 1949.

6.cxd5 cxd5 7.♘c3

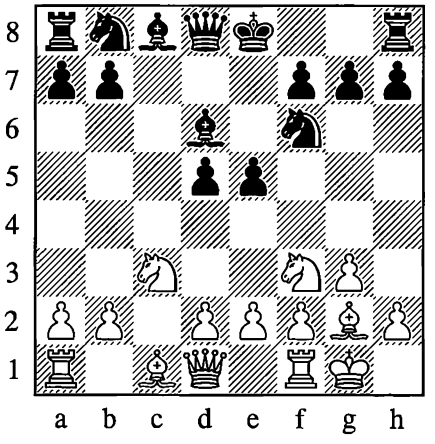


Black has two reasonable ways of defending his d5-pawn: **A) 7...♘f6** and **B) 7...♘e7**. The alternatives are unimpressive:

7...d4 8.♘e4 followed by e2-e3 opens the centre in White's favour.

7...♗e6 loses a pawn to 8.♕b3, as if 8...d4 then 9.♕xb7.

A) 7...♘f6



This natural way of developing the knight has the drawback of allowing an invasion of the e5-square and, in some cases, a pin on the knight with ♗g5.

8.♕a4†!

Although Black has several ways to parry this check, none of them is without drawbacks.

8...♘c6

The most natural answer.

8...♗d7?! is probably the worst way to block the check, since the bishop will have difficulty finding stability. 9.♕b3 ♗c6 (9...d4 loses a pawn to 10.♘g5 0–0 11.♗xb7±) 10.d4 e4 11.♘e5± White has several threats, such as ♘xc6 followed by ♕b7, or ♗f4 followed by ♘b5.

8...♕d7 impedes the natural development of the c8-bishop. 9.♘b5 0–0 10.b3!± A multipurpose move: White defends his queen in order to create the threat of ♘xd6 and prepares ♗a3 after the elimination of the d6-bishop.

8...♘bd7

This obstructs both the c8-bishop and the queen.

9.♘b5 ♗b8

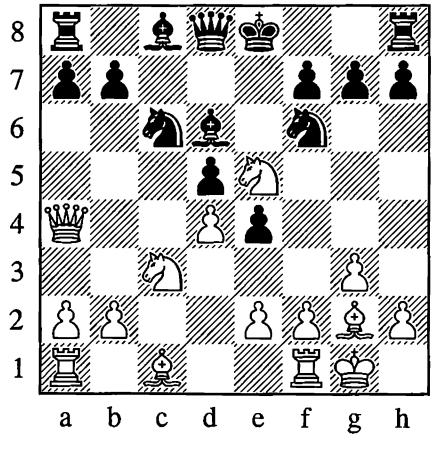
9...♗e7 loses material: 10.♘xe5 ♘xe5 11.♘c7† ♔f8 12.♘xa8 ♘c6 Black threatens to win the isolated knight, but White has effective ways to keep his initiative going. 13.b4! Opening files and diagonals at the cost of just one pawn. 13...♗xb4 14.♖b1 ♗d6 15.♗a3± With the h8-rook out of play, Black will not be able to trap the a8-knight under favourable circumstances, as White's other pieces are too active.

10.b3±

Followed by ♗a3 and ♘d6, winning the bishop pair.

9.d4 e4 10.♘e5

The pin on the c6-knight will result in a pawn weakness.



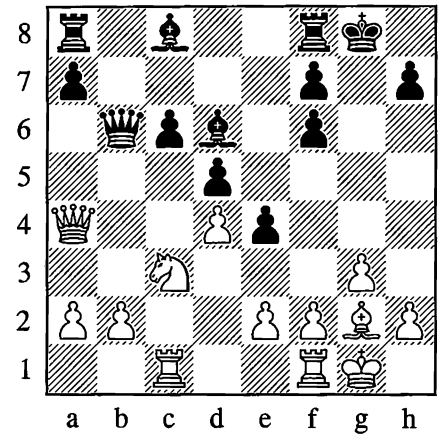
10...♕b6

Instead 10...♗d7 leaves the d5-pawn vulnerable after 11.♘xd7 ♕xd7 12.f3 exf3 13.♗xf3± followed by ♗g5.

11.♘xc6 bxc6 12.♗g5 0–0

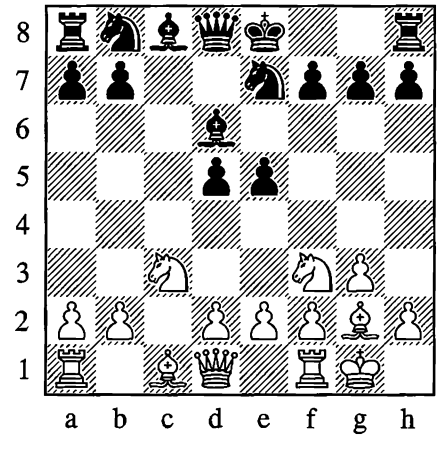
The pin along the a4-e8 diagonal prevents Black from maintaining his structural integrity with 12...♗e7 because of 13.♗xf6 ♗xf6 14.♘xd5, winning.

13.♗xf6 gxf6 14.♖ac1±



Black's numerous pawn weaknesses are not fully compensated by his active dark-squared bishop.

B) 7...♘e7



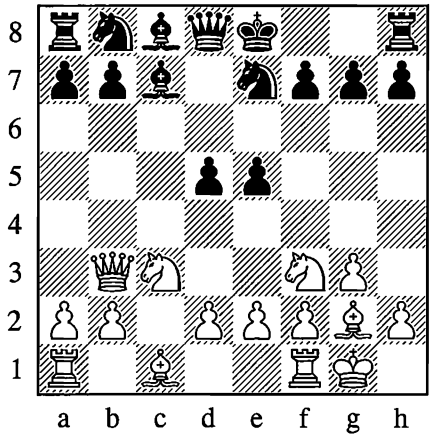
Black tries to avoid the aforementioned drawbacks of 7...♘f6, but the knight is slightly more passive on this square. Therefore, White does not need to force the events anymore and can continue with normal development.

8.♕b3 ♗c7

Black defends the d5-pawn and maintains the flexibility of his centre.

8...e4 is premature: 9.♘e1 ♗e6 10.♕xb7 ♘bc6 11.♕a6 0–0 12.d3 f5 13.♘c2± White has regrouped properly and Black's space advantage does not offer him sufficient compensation for the lost pawn.

8...d4 9.♘e4 0–0 10.e3! allows White to open the position in his favour.

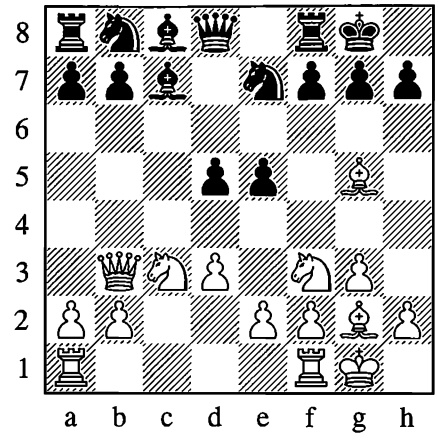


9.d3

White could win a pawn with 9.♘e1!?, but I suspect that Black's chances of gaining full compensation are higher than in the 8...e4 line in the previous comment. The abstract reason is that the knight has retreated without being forced to and will need some time to get back on a favourable route.

9...0–0 10.♗g5

An important move, provoking a weakening of the a2-g8 diagonal after which the d5-pawn will remain pinned.



10...♘bc6 11.♖ac1 f6

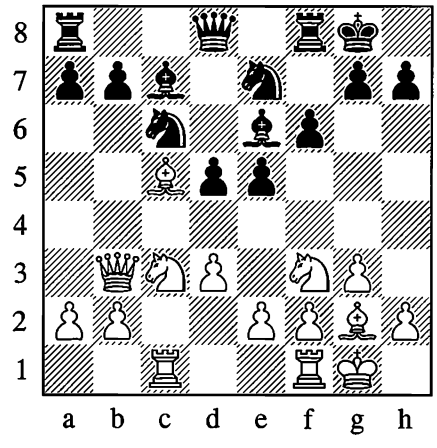
Sadly for Black, he can no longer avoid this weakening nudge.

11...♗e6 exposes the bishop to 12.♗xe7 ♘xe7 13.♘g5±. Black will suffer structural damage and his light squares will remain weak.

11...h6 loses too much time: 12.♗xe7 ♘xe7 13.♖c2± Followed by ♖fc1, with threats such as ♘b5, or ♘xd5 ...♘xd5, e2-e4, regaining the piece while keeping a lead in development.

12.♗e3 ♗e6 13.♗c5

White plays in truly hypermodern style, putting piece pressure on the massive enemy centre. This can be successful only because Black lost several tempos in the opening (...e6-e5, ...♗d6-c7).



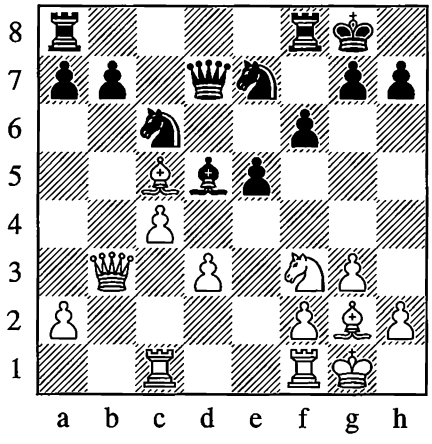
13...♗a5

Aiming to reduce the pressure against the d5-square.

13...♕d7 allows White to weaken Black's control of the c-file: 14.♕xb7 ♖fb8 15.♕a6 ♖xb2 16.♘d1± Black's minor pieces are hanging.

After 13...♗b6 White can maintain the tension with 14.♘a4!±, activating his pieces even more.

14.e4 ♗xc3 15.bxc3 ♕d7 16.exd5 ♗xd5 17.c4±

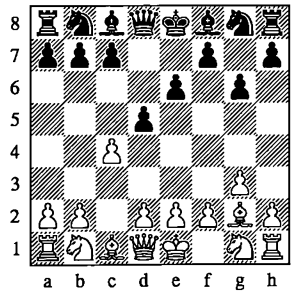


White has the bishop pair and excellent development. Soon he will open the centre in his favour with d3-d4.

Conclusion

Displaying early ambition in the centre with ...e6-e5 is highly risky for Black. The safer alternative is to keep developing for a while, although this gives White the possibility of transposing to a favourable line of the Catalan.

Chapter 15



Anti-QG Systems

The Georgian System

Variation Index

1.c4 e6 2.g3 d5 3.♗g2 g6

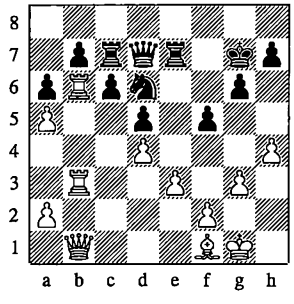
4.♘f3 ♗g7 5.0–0 ♘e7 6.d4 ♘bc6 7.cxd5 exd5 8.♘c3 0–0 9.b3

A) 9...♗e6 **218**

B) 9...♗g4 10.e3 **221**

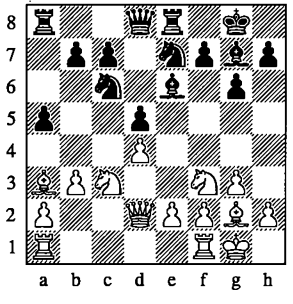
B1) 10...♕c8 **221**

B2) 10...♕d7 **223**



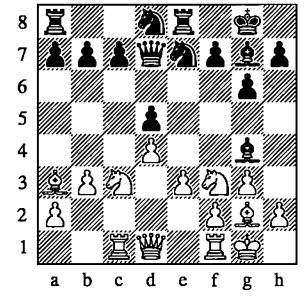
a typical situation White should avoid at all costs

A) after 11...♖e8



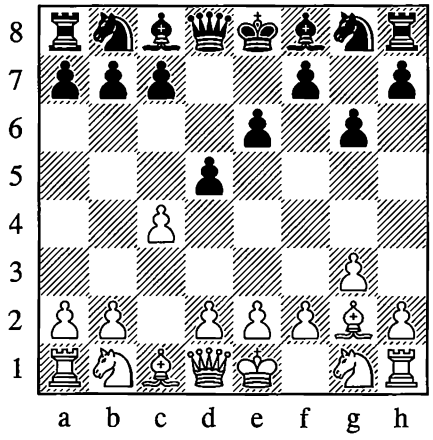
12.e3!N

B2) after 12...♘d8



13.♘a4!N

1.c4 e6 2.g3 d5 3.♗g2 g6



The combination of the moves ...e6 and ...g6 looks rather paradoxical, especially at such an early stage of the game. Isn't Black weakening his dark squares too much?

The answer to this question will come later, after Black develops his pieces according to his plan. For the time being, I will merely mention that this system has been quite popular among Georgian players of various generations, which explains the title chosen for this chapter.

4.♘f3

At one point in my career I was prepared to meet this peculiar move order with:

4.♕b3

As we shall see, ...♘bc6 is an essential part of Black's plan. With 4.♕b3 White increases his pressure on the d5-pawn, aiming to provoke ...c6 instead. If 4...♘e7, then 5.♘c3 renews the threat of winning a pawn, while after:

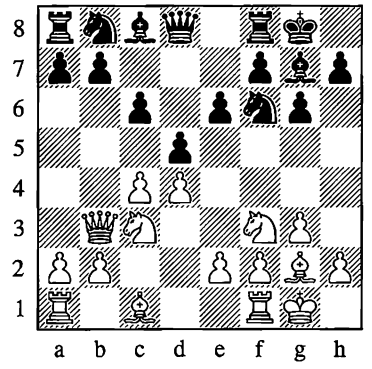
4...c6

White can continue to develop normally.

5.♘f3 ♗g7 6.0–0

I still consider this a good choice, but will not investigate it here because it may lead to a 1.d4 tabiya! Instead of sticking to ...♘e7, which would be simply passive now, Black can deviate with:

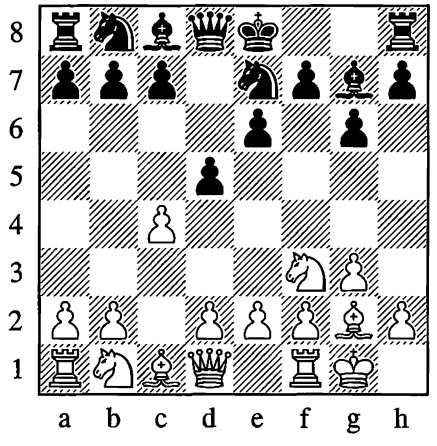
6...♘f6 7.d4 0–0 8.♘c3±



This Grünfeld tabiya was popular at one point, but practice showed that White retains the better chances. Still, I prefer to suggest a line in the spirit of our English repertoire, even though we will soon have to advance the d-pawn anyway.

4...♗g7 5.0–0 ♘e7

The main difference compared with the variation examined in Chapter 7 is that the g7-bishop is not obstructed by the knight, which practically forces White to play the next move in order to develop his queenside.

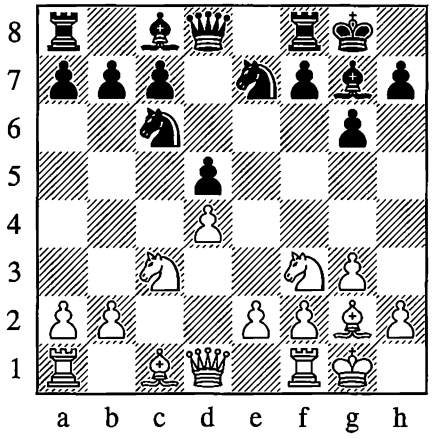


6.d4 ♘bc6

Finally, Black's main idea is revealed. With this unusual way of developing the knights, he has created great pressure against the d4-pawn, which makes ...dxc4 a strong threat. In order to maintain the stability of his centre,

White is more or less forced to release the tension.

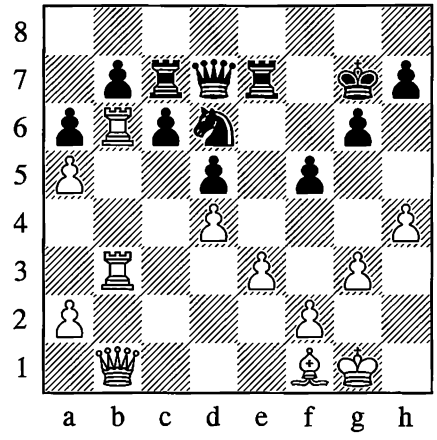
7.cxd5 exd5 8.♘c3 0–0



This is the position Black has been aiming for. The structure is typical for the Queen's Gambit Exchange Variation, with the notable difference that White's king's bishop is on g2 rather than d3. I have explained the negative side of this aspect in the notes to line B11 of Chapter 8 on page 141.

On the other hand, Black has made a series of positional concessions to provoke this relatively favourable course of events. His knights and king's bishop are badly placed. The queen's knight blocks the way of the c-pawn while its colleague is far from the e4-square. The g7-bishop bites on the rock-solid d4-pawn, which White can consolidate with e2-e3.

Black's hopes are that all these negative aspects may be temporary and that he will be able to improve his knights' locations and perhaps exchange the light-squared bishops. An optimal knight placement would be on e6 and d6. The d6-knight would put pressure on e4, making the central break e3-e4 more difficult to carry out and inhibiting the minority attack with b4-b5, because it would leave the c4-square chronically weak. The e6-knight would restrict the activity of the enemy knights, being ready to exchange either of them if they jumped to c5 or f4. For example, here is a typical situation White should avoid at all costs:



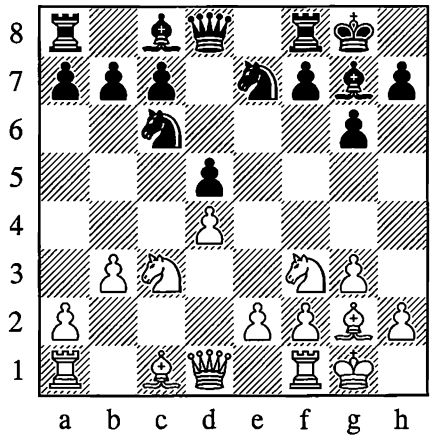
White's task has a different character. Redirecting the bishop with ♖fe1 and ♗f1-d3 would require less time than Black's general plan, but would leave the kingside exposed to the attack that is typical for these structures. Therefore, White should leave his bishop on its current square, keeping the d5-pawn under pressure (at least until Black gets to play ...c6) and aim to develop harmoniously. This will hopefully allow some tactical exploits given that Black's pieces are badly coordinated and the regrouping process is time-consuming.

We now understand that the enemy armies will use different weapons (or methods). White's main advantage is that he more or less knows what to expect from Black and his main concern should be to play the most flexible moves.

9.b3

Other moves have been tried in this position, particularly 9.♗f4 and 9.♗g5, but I find that the bishop is not so stable on the c1-h6 diagonal, especially as e2-e3 is part of

White's plan. On a3, the bishop is not only more stable, but also quite effective, effectively cutting Black's position in two along the a3-f8 diagonal.



We will examine the solid **A) 9...♗e6** and the more active **B) 9...♗g4.**

A minor alternative for Black is immediately starting the knight regrouping with:

9...♘f5 10.e3 ♘ce7

This gives White a clearer hint of the future course of the game, allowing him to orientate his own play much more easily. The following is a typical game:

11.♗a3 ♖e8 12.♘e5

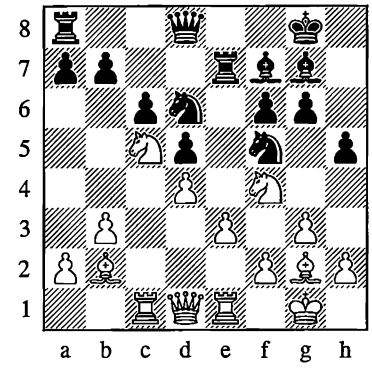
Since the black knight has retreated from c6 so quickly, White suffers no inconvenience in playing this active move. Black may have to play ...f7-f6 at a later stage, in order to get some breathing space, but this would weaken the e6-square.

12...c6 13.♘a4 ♘d6 14.♖c1 ♘ef5 15.♗b2

There was not much to be done on the a3-f8 diagonal, so the bishop returns to consolidate the central knight.

15...f6 16.♘d3 ♗e6 17.♘f4 ♗f7 18.♖e1 h5 19.♘c5 ♖e7

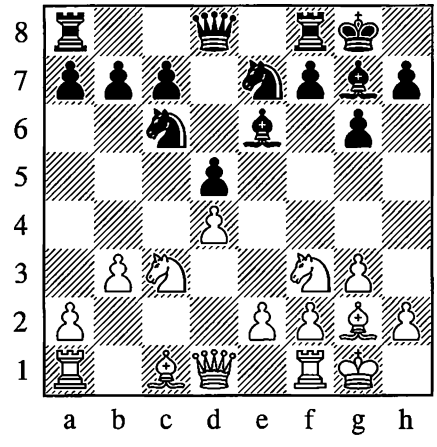
Both sides have regrouped harmoniously, but White has more space and the weakness of the e6-square justifies opening the position.



20.e4! dxe4 21.♘xe4 ♘xe4 22.♗xe4 ♗h6 23.♕f3±

Black's development is incomplete and his kingside has many weaknesses, Csom – J. Horvath, Budapest 1990.

A) 9...♗e6



A natural developing move that consolidates the d5-pawn. Its only drawbacks are that it fails to put any pressure on White and that it occupies a square which in the long run should be the property of a knight.

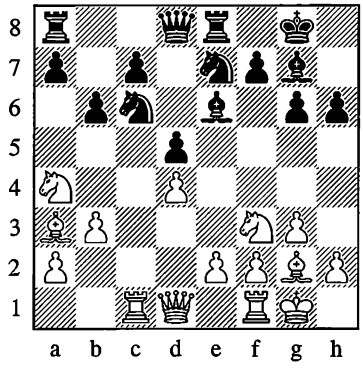
10.♗a3 a5

As Vali Stoica pointed out during our joint analysis, Black should always consider such moves as ...a5 and ...h5 in positions where his pieces are so badly committed, in order to generate some stability on the b4- and g4-squares.

In the following game Black played without a clear plan, probably hoping that his lower-rated opponent would gradually self-destruct, which did not happen at all:

10...♖e8 11.♖c1 h6 12.♘a4 b6

This is an important achievement for White. Once the c6-square has been weakened, the pattern of the position changes from the Carlsbad structure to the Queen's Indian. In this latter opening, the presence of the bishop on g2 is most welcome. Black will either have to permanently defend the c6-square or fight for space with ...c6-c5, thus weakening the d5-pawn and increasing the g2-bishop's scope.



13.♕d2 ♕d7 14.♖c3 ♖ac8 15.♖fc1 a5 16.e3 ♘b4

Black seems to have achieved some queenside activity, but White's next two moves, which are very typical for such situations, prove that Black's position is not so stable.

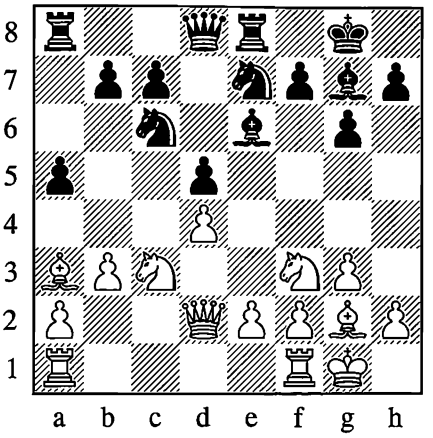
17.♗f1 ♗f5 18.♘e1 ♗f8 19.♘d3 ♘ec6

Black has managed to keep his outpost, but his coordination is poor and White rightly switches play to the kingside.

20.♘f4 ♘b8 21.f3±

White is better coordinated and keeps the whole board under control. In Adel Lahchaichi – Levin, Balaguer 2008, he started a slow kingside expansion and eventually won.

11.♕d2 ♖e8



12.e3!N

White makes a generally useful move, which strengthens his centre and postpones the decision about which rook to place on the half-open c-file. Most likely, he will choose ♖fc1 for reasons that will be explained below, but the centre should be made absolutely safe before moving his pieces so far to the left!

When I faced the Georgian System over the board, I rushed things with:

12.♖ac1?!

This has the disadvantage of leaving the a2-pawn without sufficient defence, which will restrict the regrouping possibilities at a later stage.

12...♘b4 13.♘a4 ♘ec6

Black's queenside set-up looks rather unnatural, but the fact that ♗a3-b2 would lose the a2-pawn offers him increased stability.

14.♘c5 ♗c8 15.e3 b6 16.♘d3!?

White embarks on unclear tactical complications.

During the post mortem, Giorgadze suggested 16.♘a4 ♗a6 17.♖fd1, planning ♘c3, ♗b2 and finally a2-a3, but after having lost so much time White cannot count on an advantage.

16...♗a6

We can see another drawback of ♖ac1 over ♖fc1: the f1-rook is vulnerable.

16...♘xd3 is worse because of 17.♖xc6.

17.♘xb4 axb4 18.♖fd1 ♕d6

18...bxa3 19.♖xc6± leaves White with pressure along the c-file.

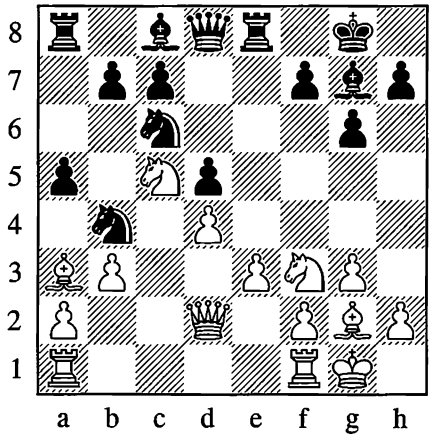
19.♘e5!? ♘xd4!?

With irrational complications that eventually petered out into a draw in Marin – Giorgadze, Benasque 1996.

12...♘b4

This is the logical consequence of Black's previous move, but White can react a lot better than in my game.

13.♘a4 ♘ec6 14.♘c5 ♗c8



15.♖fc1!

White has completed his development and threatens to regroup with ♗b2, in order to push Black back.

15...b6

As mentioned before, after this move Black will have weaknesses along the c-file, but there is no other way to fight back for the initiative.

16.♘d3

White intends to trade a couple of minor pieces, which would make Black's queenside weaknesses more relevant.

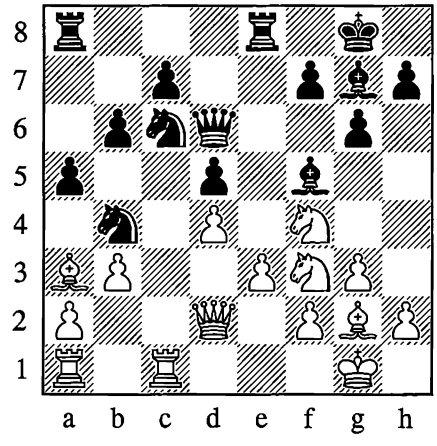
16...♕d6

Black increases his control over the b4- and c6-squares, thus avoiding any tactical problems.

16...♘xd3 loses a pawn after 17.♖xc6 ♗d7 18.♖c2 ♘b4 19.♗xb4 axb4 20.♕xb4. Black does not get enough compensation after 20...c5 21.♕d2 ♗f5 22.♖cc1 ♗e4 23.a4 followed by either a4-a5 or ♖a2. Another option is 23.b4, taking the steam out of the enemy hanging pawns.

16...♗f8 leaves the c6-square insufficiently defended. 17.♗xb4 ♘xb4 18.♘f4± White is much better developed and ready to start attacking the enemy centre.

17.♘f4 ♗f5



18.♗b2

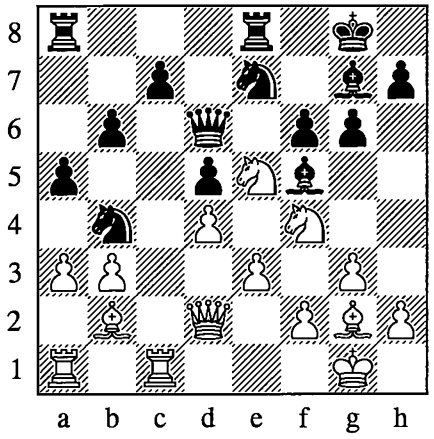
The threat of a2-a3, driving the b4-knight to the passive a6-square, forces Black to start retreating.

18...♘e7 19.♘e5

White immediately occupies the space that has been made available.

19...f6 20.a3!?

White would like to retreat to d3 without allowing the knight exchange, because his knights are more active than Black's. His last move involves a promising exchange sacrifice.



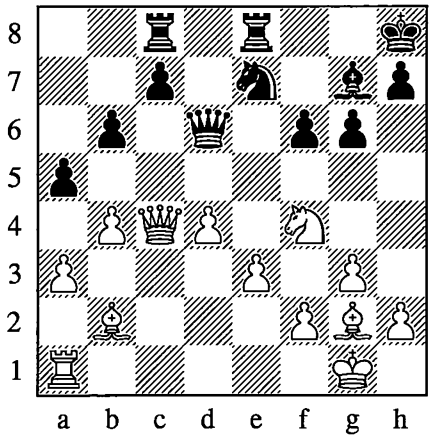
20...♘c2

20...fxe5?! leaves Black's position hanging after 21.dxe5 ♗xe5 22.♗xe5 ♕xe5 23.axb4±.

21.♖xc2 ♗xc2 22.♘c4!

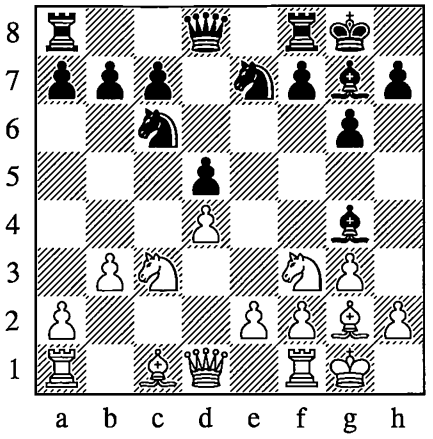
This is the best way to give up the exchange. Black is forced to surrender the pride of his position, the d5-pawn.

22...dxc4 23.♕xc2 ♖ac8 24.♕xc4† ♔h8 25.b4±



White has a strong pair of bishops plus a solid and mobile centre; Black's position contains many weaknesses on the light squares.

B) 9...♗g4

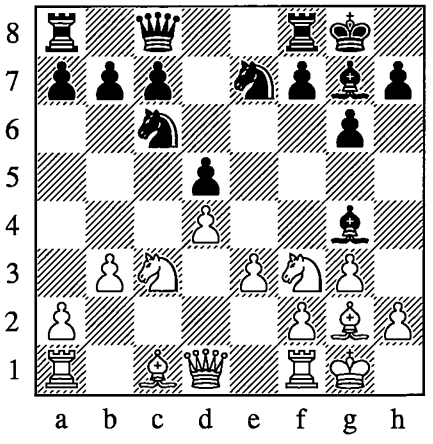


This is Black's most active continuation and the one that requires the greatest accuracy from White. White will have to play e2-e3 before having completed his development, giving Black some time to carry out his main regrouping plan, which was explained in the introduction. The e6-square is left free for one of the knights and in many cases Black would give up his bishop for the f3-knight, thus solving some of his space problems.

10.e3

We shall examine **B1) 10...♕c8** and **B2) 10...♕d7**.

B1) 10...♕c8



Black takes control of the h3-c8 diagonal while avoiding any harassment of his queen after a later ♘c3-a4. However, this move has the drawback of leaving the rooks uncoordinated.

11.♗a3 ♖e8 12.♖c1 a6

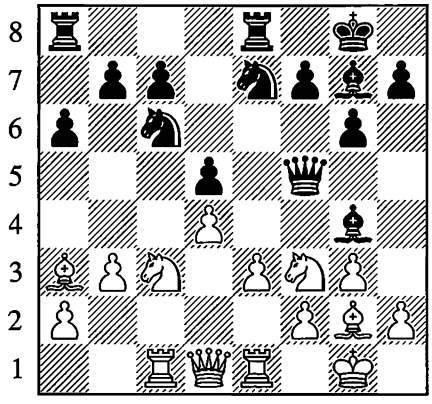
Black prepares to exchange the light-squared bishops, which would not be possible immediately: 12...♗h3? 13.♗xh3 ♕xh3 14.♗xe7 ♘xe7 15.♘b5± White wins material.

13.♖e1

Now White is ready to meet ...♗h3 with ♗h1.

13...♕f5

Finally, Black connects rooks and hopes that the pin will cause White some discomfort.



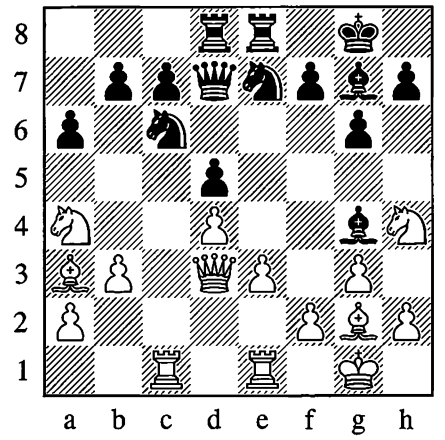
14.♘h4!

White immediately frees himself from the pin. Later, he will have to spend another tempo to bring the knight back into play, but this is compensated by the fact that the black queen will also have moved back and forth quite a lot.

14...♕d7

14...♗xd1?! 15.♘xf5 ♘xf5 loses the d5-pawn after 16.♖exd1, while 15...gxf5 leaves Black with a chronic weakness.

15.♕d3 ♖ad8 16.♘a4



16...♗f6

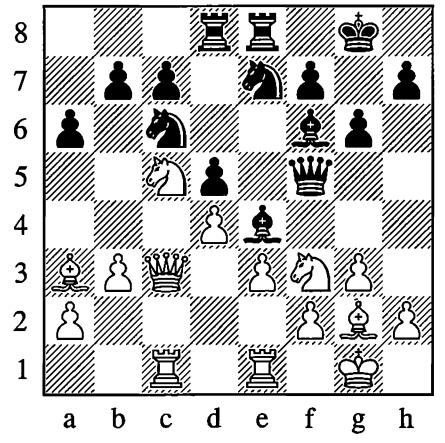
Black intends to enable the manoeuvre ...♗f5-e4. In doing so, she forces the enemy knight to get back into play by placing her own dark-squared bishop on a vulnerable square.

16...♕c8 looks more solid, but fails to solve Black's problems. 17.♘c5 ♘f5 18.♘f3± With strong queenside pressure.

17.♘f3 ♗f5 18.♕c3 ♗e4

The bishop is vulnerable on this square, but its rival on g2 has to be neutralized somehow. After 18...♕c8 19.♘e5 Black's position is hanging.

19.♘c5 ♕f5

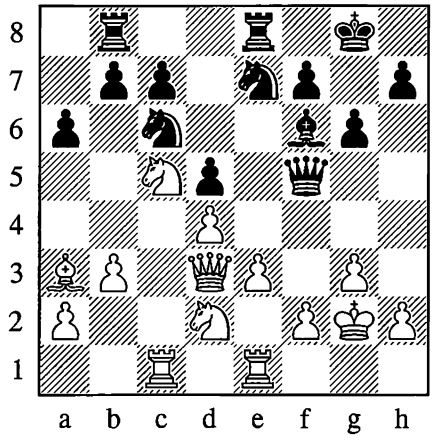


20.♘d2!

Capturing on e4 would clear the d5-square for the e7-knight. Therefore, White prefers to force the exchange of the active bishop by other means.

20...♗xg2 21.♔xg2 ♖b8 22.♕d3!

White shows a deep understanding of the position. After the previous exchange, the queen has become Black's most active piece.



22...♕c8

By keeping the queen, Black seems not to have abandoned the hope of gaining some kingside counterplay. Or maybe she was afraid that after 22...♕xd3 23.♘xd3 h5 White could start a slow kingside expansion with 24.h3 followed by g3-g4. In the absence of queens, the white king would be absolutely safe and the pressure on both wings would have yielded White a long-term advantage.

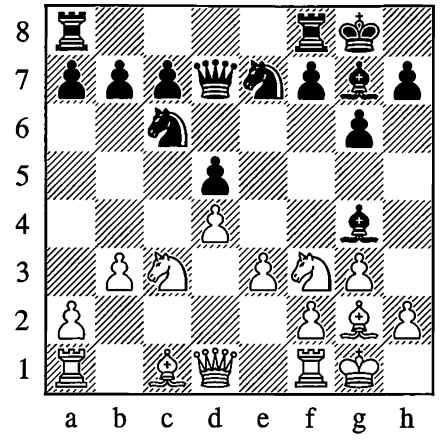
23.♘f3 ♘f5 24.e4!

White is perfectly coordinated, while Black still has not completed her development, so opening the centre is very logical.

24...dxe4 25.♘xe4 ♗g7 26.d5±

White has a space advantage in the centre and a strong initiative, Polugaevsky – Zsu. Polgar, Aruba 1992.

B2) 10...♕d7



The most natural way to develop the queen, although at some point Her Majesty will feel uncomfortable after ♘c3-a4.

11.♗a3 ♖fe8

The start of a long regrouping plan consisting of ...♘d8-e6, ...♘c8, ...♗f8 and finally ...♘d6.

Exchanging the light-squared bishops would lose some time and allow White to seize the initiative.

11...♗h3 12.♗xh3 ♕xh3 13.♘e1!

Symmetrically to Black's plans, the white knight will be well placed on d3.

13...♖fe8 14.♘d3 ♕f5!

The queen no longer had anything to do on h3.

After the stereotypical 14...♖ad8, White would increase his pressure with 15.♕f3.

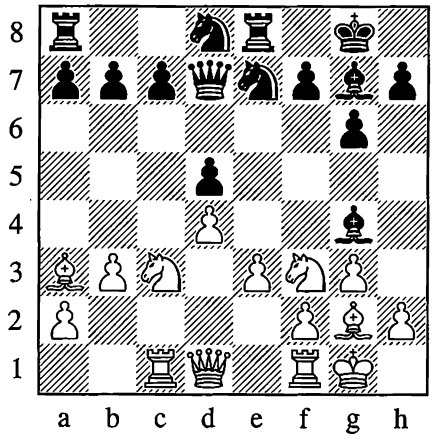
15.♖c1 ♖ad8 16.♘b5 ♕c8 17.♕f3 a6 18.♘c3±

White plans ♕f4 and ♘a4 with strong pressure, while Black's knights are still far from their optimal squares.

12.♖c1 ♘d8

The most logical move. Instead the neutral 12...♖ac8 was played in Stangl – Yusupov,

Altensteig 1993. White should have replied 13.♘a4!N. In order to avoid piece congestion, Black would have to parry the threat of ♘c5 with 13...b6, but then White could regroup to exploit Black's weakened pawn structure with 14.♕d2 followed by ♘e1-d3-f4.



13.♘a4!N

White also has to start his active regrouping without any loss of time.

13.h3?!

This is too slow and allows Black to get on with his own plan.

13...♗xf3!

In many cases, the f3-knight is a more important piece than White's fianchettoed bishop.

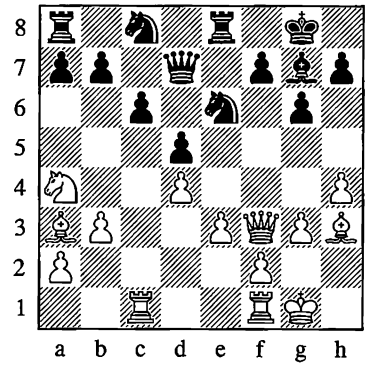
Note that the h3-pawn is poisoned: 13...♗xh3?! 14.♗xh3 ♕xh3 15.♗xe7 ♖xe7 16.♘xd5 ♖d7 17.♘xc7± With a sound extra pawn for White.

After the move played, we can follow a model game for Black, which will help us to learn which kind of things we should avoid.

14.♕xf3 c6 15.h4

Activating the bishop is logical, but this loses more time and will create some unfavourable tactical nuances.

15...♘e6 16.♘a4 ♘c8 17.♗h3



17...♘b6!

A slight deviation from the original plan. Normally, it is the other knight that is supposed to be exchanged for its white rival, but in this case it is pinned. On the other hand, the X-ray opposition of the black queen and the white bishop has some favourable consequences, too. The main point is that White cannot play 18.♘c5 because of 18...♘xd4, which means he has to allow his queenside structure to be spoiled.

This trick does not work immediately: 17...♘xd4? 18.♗xd7 ♘xf3† 19.♔g2 ♖d8 20.♗xc8, winning material. After 17...♘b6, there is no piece hanging on c8.

18.♕d1 ♘xa4 19.bxa4

White's prospects of a queenside attack are very slim. Black can defend his only weakness (b7) rather easily, while his kingside attack will eventually start.

19...♗f8 20.♗xf8 ♔xf8 21.♖b1 ♖e7 22.♖b3 ♖c8 23.a5 ♖c7 24.♕d3 ♕d6 25.♖fb1 f5!

After this move, the white bishop will remain very passive. White could have considered exchanging on e6 at some point, but this would have weakened his king's defence.

26.♖b4 a6

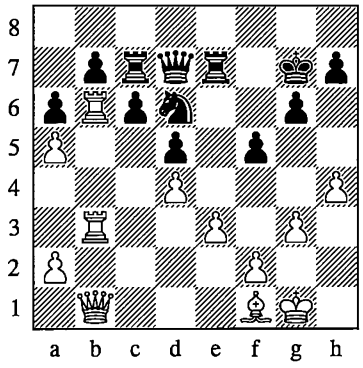
By placing his last pawn on a light square, Black prevents any attempt to muddy the waters with a5-a6.

27.♖1b2 ♔g7 28.♕b1 ♘d8!

The final regrouping for the attack; the knight is heading for d6.

29.♖2b3 ♕d7 30.♖b6 ♘f7 31.♗f1 ♘d6∓

We have reached a position mentioned in the introduction.



Black has regrouped perfectly and White has no active plan. The b7-pawn is safely defended and everything is ready for launching the kingside assault with ...h7-h6, ...g6-g5, etc. In Smejkal – Short, Prague 1990, White went down quickly in time trouble.

13...♗xf3!?

Hoping to either win time for his regrouping or provoke a loss of coordination in White's camp.

13...♘e6

This allows White to eliminate the g4-bishop in a more favourable form:

14.♘e5 ♗xe5 15.♕xg4 ♗d6

Black carries out the planned exchange of the dark-squared bishops.

It is risky to leave the a3-f8 diagonal under White's control: 15...♗g7 16.♘c5! Only this piece sacrifice allows White to retain the initiative. 16...♘xc5 17.♕xd7 ♘xd7 18.♖xc7 ♖ad8 19.♖xb7 ♗f8 20.♖c1± White will soon have three pawns for the piece, with an active position.

16.♗xd6 ♕xd6 17.♘c5 ♘xc5 18.♖xc5±

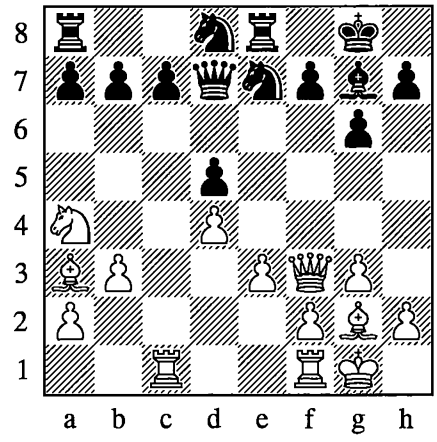
White's minority attack with b4-b5 will start before Black can transfer his knight to d6.

It also makes little sense to play the neutral 13...c6 because of 14.♘c5 followed by b3-b4 and ♕b3 with a strong queenside initiative.

14.♕xf3!

It is essential to create the threat of ♗xe7 followed by ♕xd5 in order to win a tempo to move the knight to c5. The drawback of the text move is that it takes the queen away from the queenside, but White will have time to restore his coordination.

14.♗xf3 ♘e6 followed by ...c6, ...♘c8, ...♗f8 and ...♘d6 would be fine for Black.



14...c6 15.♘c5 ♕d6

Paradoxically, the opposition of the black queen and white bishop slightly favours Black. The immediate threat is ...b7-b6.

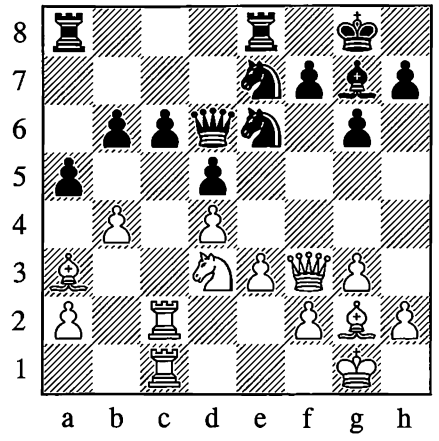
15...♕c8 not only looks passive, but also takes the c8-square away from the knight. 16.♕d1 Re-directing the queen towards b3. 16...♘f5 This attempt to reach d6 fails because of the pin along the h3-c8 diagonal. 17.♗h3!± White threatens ♕d3, spoiling Black's kingside structure. Now 17...♘xe3? would lose material to 18.♗xc8 ♘xd1 19.♗d7+–.

16.b4 a5

Black must try to put pressure on White's temporarily uncoordinated queenside before the regrouping ♕d1-b3 is carried out.

17.♖c2 b6 18.♘d3 ♘e6 19.♖fc1

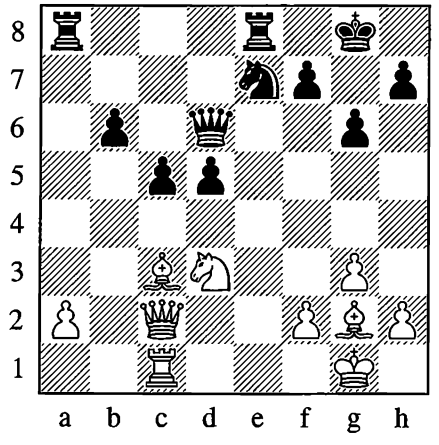
White has consistently strengthened his position over the past few moves and now threatens ♘e5, which would add to the pressure on the hanging pawns.



19...♗xd4!?

The only way to keep chances of reaching a double-edged position.

20.exd4 ♘xd4 21.♕d1 ♘xc2 22.♕xc2 axb4 23.♗xb4 c5 24.♗c3±



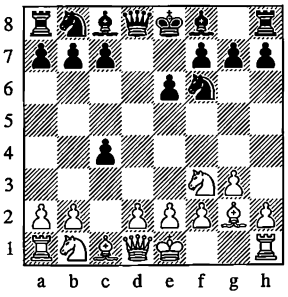
In simple material terms, Black is alright, but the strong bishop pair and the weakened position of the black king mean that White has the better chances.

Conclusion

The Georgian System is solid but somewhat inflexible. Thus White has good chances of gaining an advantage by choosing a flexible long-term plan.

Chapter 16

Anti-QG Systems



4...dxc4

Variation Index

1.c4 e6 2.g3 d5 3.♗g2 ♘f6 4.♘f3 dxc4

5.♘a3

A) 5...c5 6.♘xc4 ♘c6 7.0–0 ♗e7 8.b3 0–0 9.♗b2 **228**

A1) 9...♗d7 **229**

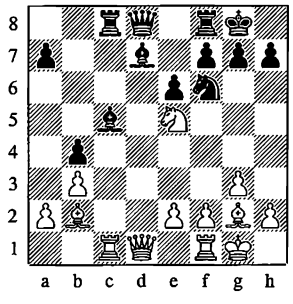
A2) 9...♘d5 **231**

B) 5...♗xa3 6.bxa3 **234**

B1) 6...♕d6 **235**

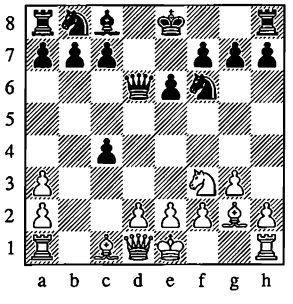
B2) 6...♘c6 **236**

A1) note to 10...cxd4



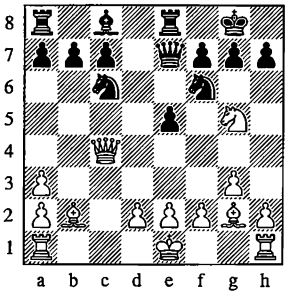
15.♕d3!N

B1) after 6...♕d6



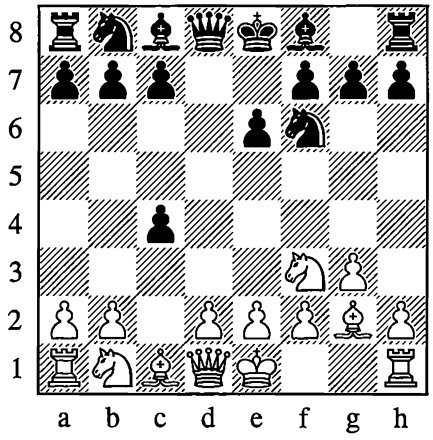
7.♕a4†!N

B2) after 10...♕e7



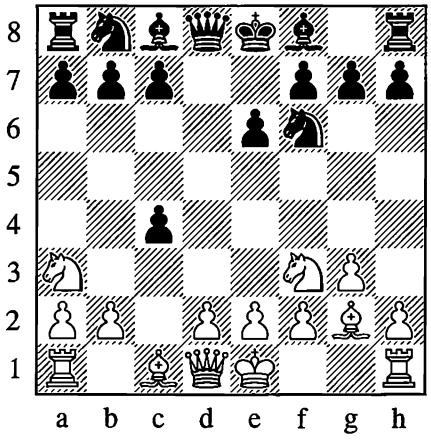
11.0–0!N

1.c4 e6 2.g3 d5 3.♗g2 ♘f6 4.♘f3 dxc4



This is a better moment to capture the undefended pawn than one move earlier. In the meantime, Black has played the useful developing move ...♘f6, while White's equivalent, ♘f3, has the slight drawback of having obstructed his bishop. Note that including one more move (4...♗e7 5.0–0) before playing 5...dxc4 would be the worst possible timing because after 6.♘a3 the critical reaction ...♗xa3 would simply lose a tempo compared to the variations examined in this and the following chapters.

5.♘a3



Black has a choice between the peaceful but rather passive **A) 5...c5** and the critical **B) 5...♗xa3**.

A) 5...c5

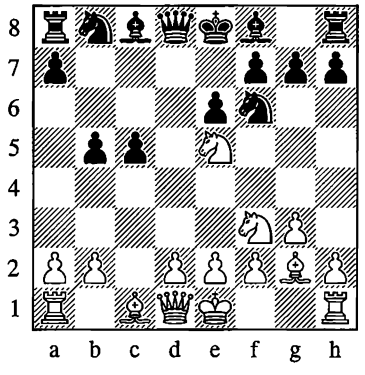
Black keeps the bishop pair and aims to gain some space in the centre, but White's very active minor pieces will ensure he has a long-term initiative. At some point after the opening, White will open the centre with d2-d4, obtaining an active form of the Catalan.

6.♘xc4 ♘c6

It is essential to develop this knight now or on the next move.

After 6...♗e7 7.0–0 0–0 8.d4± White effortlessly reaches a very active form of the Catalan opening, with an obvious lead in development.

The over-ambitious
6...b5
is rather premature:
7.♘ce5



7...♘d5

The only way to stay in the game. Black closes the long diagonal and threatens to challenge White's stability in the centre with ...f7-f6.

7...♗b7? allows 8.♘xf7! as if 8...♔xf7 then

9.♘e5† followed by ♗xb7.

7...♕c7 can be met by 8.a4±, conquering the c4-square for one of the knights.

8.d4 f6

Again the only playable move.

8...cxd4 9.♘xd4± or 8...♗b7 9.♘g5 ♘c3 10.bxc3 ♗xg2 11.♖g1± both leave the initiative with White.

9.♘d3 c4 10.e4 ♘b6

Opening the position cannot be recommended: 10...cxd3 11.exd5 exd5 12.0–0± White is well ahead in development and Black's position is full of weaknesses.

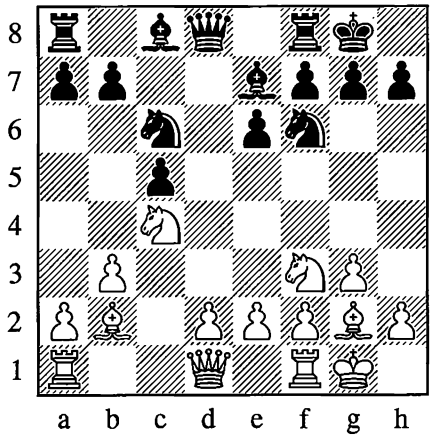
11.♘f4±

White has a space advantage in the centre, while Black's position contains various weaknesses (e6 for a start).

7.0–0 ♗e7 8.b3

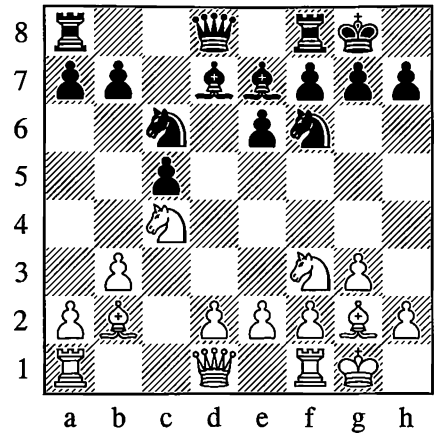
Since d2-d4 is not possible yet, White prepares it by developing his queen's bishop.

8...0–0 9.♗b2



Both sides have completed the first phase of mobilization and Black has a choice between the mechanical developing move **A1) 9...♗d7** and the more subtle **A2) 9...♘d5**, preparing ...b6 (or ...b5) followed by ...♗b7.

A1) 9...♗d7

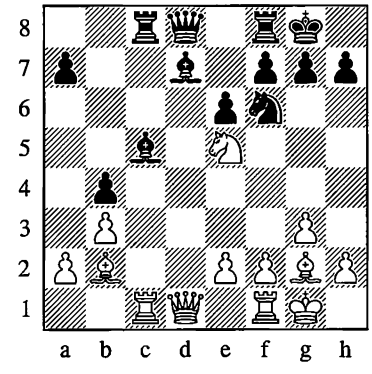


Black hurries to complete his development as soon as possible, but the bishop will not be easy to activate after the centre is opened.

10.d4 cxd4

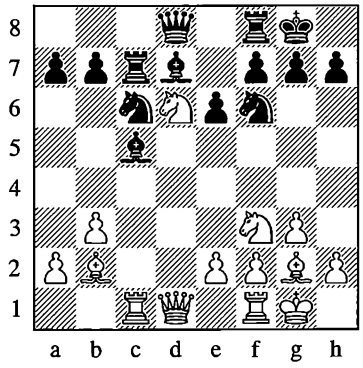
This is one of those cases when the best Black can do is to release the tension, because White is better developed.

The hyper-active 10...b5 prematurely fights for space at a moment when Black still needs to develop. 11.♘ce5 ♘xe5 12.♘xe5 ♖c8 13.♖c1 b4 14.dxc5 ♗xc5



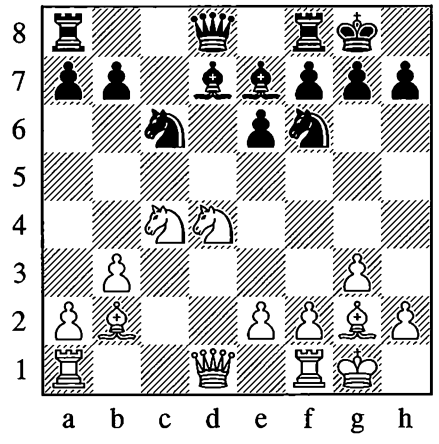
In Dizdar – Boensch, Portoroz 1987, White could have obtained a stable advantage with 15.♕d3!N ♕e7 16.♘xd7 ♘xd7 17.♖fd1±. White is better developed, his bishops are quite strong and Black's queenside is weak.

The developing move 10...♖c8 places the rook on a vulnerable square. 11.dxc5 ♗xc5 12.♘d6 ♖c7 13.♖c1± Black has serious coordination problems, but his next move is a blunder.



13...♘b4? 14.♖xc5! ♖xc5 15.♘xb7 With a decisive material advantage, because in some lines the d7-bishop is hanging, Sarno – Efimov, Saint Vincent 1999.

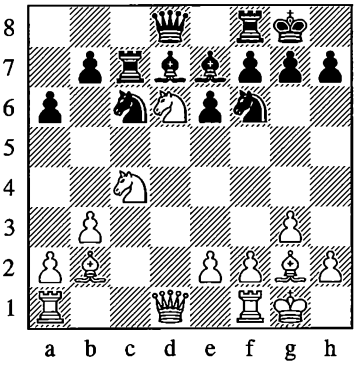
11.♘xd4



11...♘xd4

Black makes another concession in the centre, in order to activate his d7-bishop.

Once again, developing the rook is answered by a knight invasion to d6. 11...♖c8 12.♘b5 a6 13.♘bd6 ♖c7

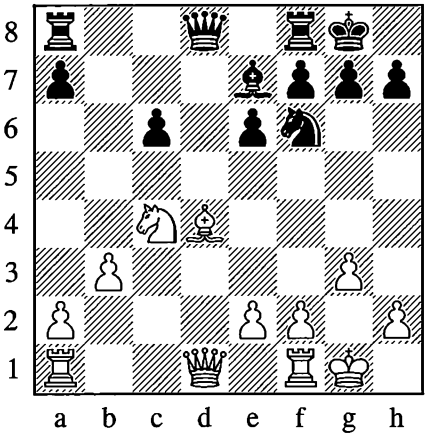


In Stein – Tarve, Tallinn 1969, the simplest way to obtain a stable advantage would have been 14.a4!N, preventing ...b5. Black has no way to free himself and is doomed to endure lasting pressure.

11...♘d5 somewhat reduces the pressure against the queenside, but leaves the bishop passive on d7. 12.♖c1 ♘xd4 13.♕xd4 ♗f6 14.♕d2± White has a considerable lead in development in an open position, Blagojevic – Sher, Prague 1988.

12.♗xd4 ♗c6 13.♗xc6 bxc6

At the cost of spoiling his queenside structure, Black has considerably simplified the position. However, by combining threats against both wings, White retains a strong initiative.



14.♘e5 ♕d5 15.♖c1 ♖fc8 16.♗b2 ♕b5

Exchanging the queens would have helped White to develop his initiative. For example, 16...♕xd1 17.♖fxd1 c5 18.♘d7.

17.♖c4 a5 18.♕c2 c5

Black hopes to generate some counterplay with a well-timed ...a4, but his queen has been completely cut off from the kingside. This allows White to start a powerful attack.

19.♖h4 g6

This allows a decisive combination, but the alternative did not solve the problems either.

19...h6 20.♘g4

Opening the bishop's connection with the g7-square.

20...♘xg4

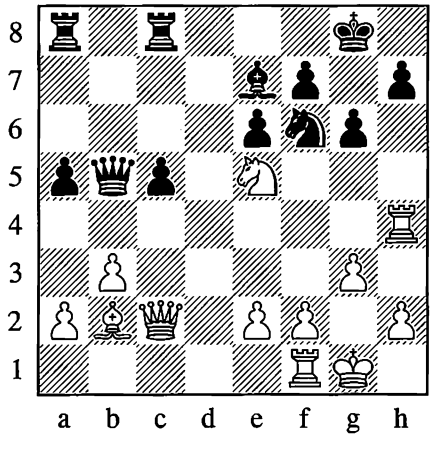
Forced, since 20...♘d5 loses to 21.♘xh6†!.

21.♖xg4 ♗f8?!

21...g5 is somewhat better, but with such a weakened king position Black cannot hope for salvation.

22.♕c3 f6 23.♕xf6

With an extra pawn and a continuing attack.

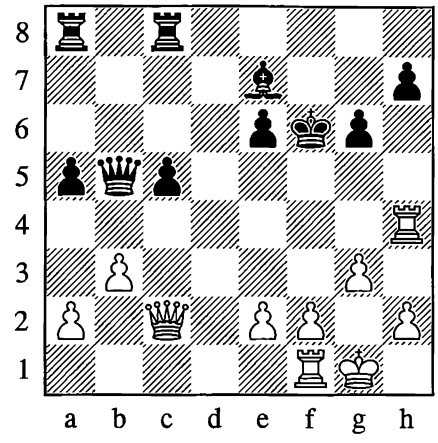


20.♘xf7!

Demolishing the king's residence.

20...♔xf7 21.♗xf6 ♔xf6

The king is more or less forced to advance, since 21...♗xf6 loses material to: 22.♖xh7† ♗g7 23.♕c3 ♖g8 24.♕f3† ♔e7 25.♖xg7†! The a8-rook is hanging.



22.♕c3† e5 23.♖xh7

With the deadly threat of 24.♕f3† ♔e6 25.♕f7†.

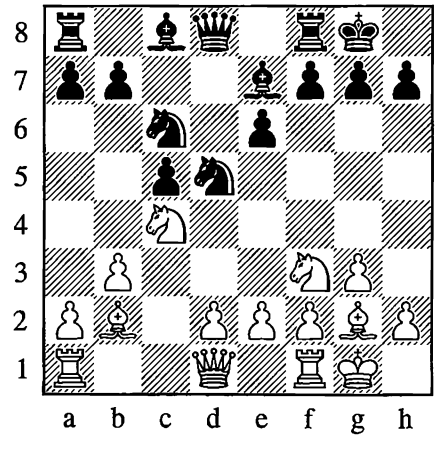
23...♕c6 24.♕c4

White keeps attacking with "quiet" moves. The threat is ♕f7†.

24...♕e6 25.♕h4† g5 26.♕h6†

Facing the inevitable loss of his queen (26...♔f5 27.e4†), Black resigned in Hickl – Straat, Biel 1986.

A2) 9...♘d5

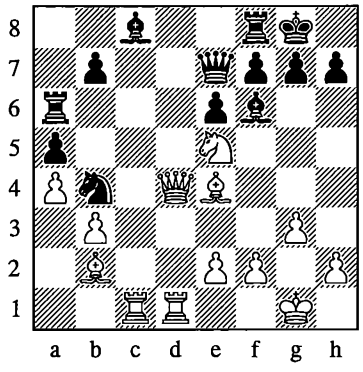


By blocking the long diagonal, Black prepares to develop the queen's bishop to b7. This plan is rather slow and weakens the defence of the kingside.

10.d4 b5

The only consistent move: if Black does not hurry, he might well not be able to solve the problem of the c8-bishop at all.

10...cxd4?! is a release of tension that should be avoided in this line. 11.♘xd4 ♘xd4 12.♕xd4 ♗f6 13.♘e5 ♕e7 14.♖fd1 ♘b4 15.♗e4 a5 16.a4 ♖a6 17.♖ac1±



Most of the black pieces are artificially placed, while White's army is fully and harmoniously developed, Vaganian – Raicevic, Belgrade 1974.

11.♘ce5 ♘xe5 12.♘xe5 ♗b7

Black has made progress with his development and has almost neutralized the pressure of the g2-bishop (he still needs to defend his own bishop in order to unpin the knight). The elements that allow White to maintain the initiative are his active minor pieces and the weakness of the c5-square.

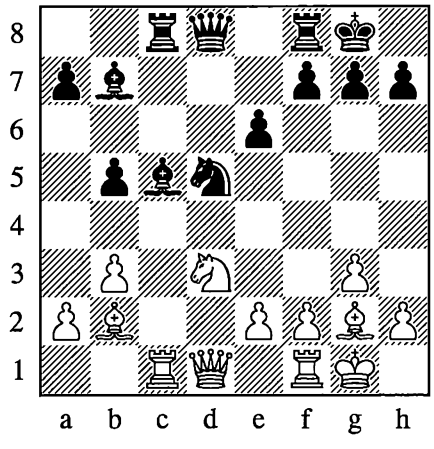
13.dxc5 ♗xc5 14.♖c1 ♖c8

Black does best to keep developing, as the tactical operation initiated by 15.♖xc5?! is not dangerous for him: 15...♖xc5 16.♘d7 ♕xd7 17.♕d4 ♘f6 18.♕xc5 ♗xg2 19.♔xg2 ♖c8 With counterplay in a simplified position.

14...♗b6?! is more passive and allows White to obtain a strong initiative. 15.e4 ♘f6 16.♕e2 ♖c8 (this loses a pawn without compensation, but after 16...a6 17.♖fd1 White's lead in development is simply too big) 17.♖cd1 ♕e7 18.♕xb5 ♖c2 19.♘c4± White converted his material advantage into a win in Gofshtein – Arkhipkin, Yerevan 1981.

15.♘d3

This is the best way to improve White's coordination. The knight retreats to a stable square from where it keeps the weak c5-square under control, while opening the long diagonal for the b2-bishop at the same time. After the inevitable rook exchange, the queen will have access to a1, putting Black's kingside under pressure and preparing to occupy the c-file with ♖c1.



15...♗e7

The tactical operation 15...♘e3 16.fxe3 ♗xe3† fails to offer entirely adequate compensation for the sacrificed material. 17.♖f2 ♖xc1 18.♗xc1 ♗xf2† 19.♔xf2 ♗xg2 20.♔xg2 ♕d5† 21.♔f2 ♖c8 22.♗e3± White has restored his coordination and can combine

the plan of occupying the c5-square with threats against the kingside.

15...♗b6 leaves the c5-square at White's mercy after 16.♗a3±.

16.♖xc8 ♕xc8 17.♕a1 ♘f6

The most solid answer, removing the knight from the near-pin, but Black is moving back and forth with the same pieces, while his opponent improves his position systematically.

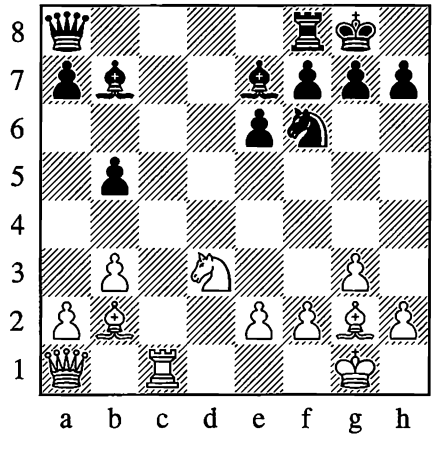
17...f6 weakens the e6-square, which is likely to create additional problems. 18.♖c1 ♕d7 19.♗d4± Followed by ♘c5.

17...♗f6? loses a pawn to 18.♗xd5 and 18...♗xb2? makes things worse because of 19.♗xb7+–.

18.♖c1

This is the position White had in mind when playing 15.♘d3. White has completed his development with gain of time and has a strong initiative.

18...♕a8



19.♖c7!?

The most ambitious continuation, but Gutman also analysed 19.♗xb7 ♕xb7 20.♗d4 a6 21.♕c3 ♖d8 22.♗xf6! ♗xf6 23.♕c7± with a pleasant Catalan ending. White's rook is very active, while Black's control of the d-file does not help him because of the excellently placed knight. In addition, Black's queenside pawns require constant defence.

19...♗xg2 20.♖xe7

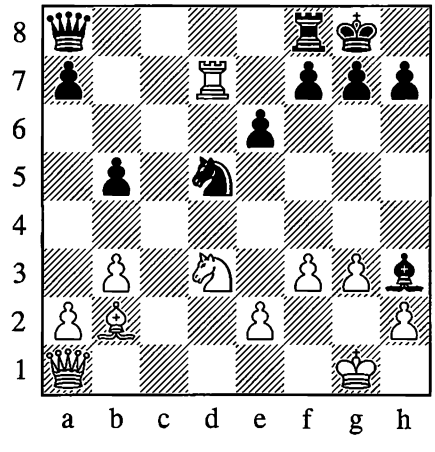
The presence of the enemy bishop in the immediate vicinity of the white king looks a bit scary, but White's better coordination will allow him to create the more dangerous threats.

20...♗h3

The move order actually played was 20...♘d5?! 21.♖d7 ♗h3. As pointed out by Gutman, White could have won with 22.♗xg7!. He probably missed that 22...♘c3 is not dangerous because of 23.f3! when Black's attack has come to an end and his king is left in deadly danger.

21.f3 ♘d5 22.♖d7

We have transposed back to the game. White controls the long diagonal and the seventh rank, while the black bishop is in danger of being trapped with g3-g4 and ♘f2.



22...f6

Black has to play carefully in order to limit White's initiative to bearable limits.

22...e5 23.♖d6 f6 offers White an important tempo: 24.e4 ♘b6 This no longer attacks the rook. 25.g4! Suddenly, the bishop is in trouble. 25...h5 26.♘f2 ♕c8 27.♕d1 Black loses material.

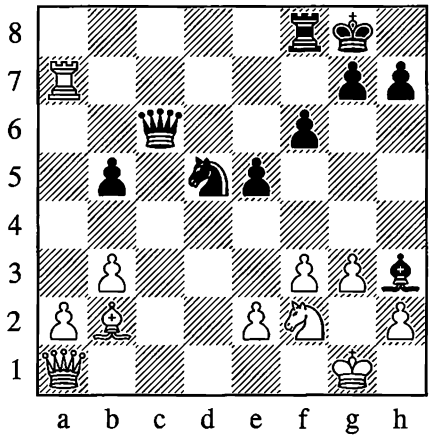
The voluntary retreat 22...♘b6 only helps the rook to reach a more stable square. 23.♖c7 f6 (23...♘d5 does not force a repetition of moves at all: 24.♖c1 f6 25.e4 Followed by ♘f2, winning the bishop.) 24.♘f2 ♗f5 25.♕c1± White controls the entire board.

23.♘f2 ♕c6 24.♖xa7

Winning a pawn and keeping an active position. As mentioned by Gutman, 24.♖xd5 ♕xd5 25.♘xh3 leads to strong black counterplay after 25...♕d2. Suddenly, White has lost coordination and the threat of ...♖c8-c2 is very strong.

24...e5

So far, we have followed the game Gutman – A. Sokolov, Biel (izt) 1985.



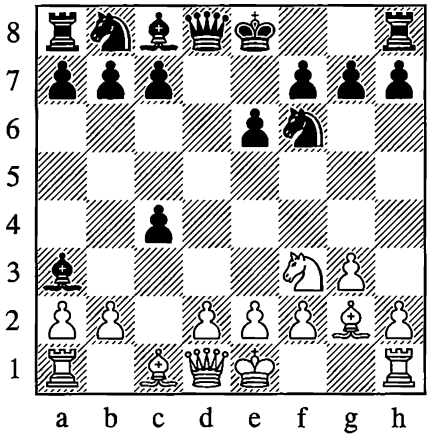
25.♕d1!N

Once the long dark diagonal has been safely defended, the queen had nothing more to do in the corner.

25...♗e6 26.e4±

Black has insufficient compensation for the pawn. His only drawing chances are based on opposite-coloured bishops in the endgame, but the endgame is a long way away.

B) 5...♗xa3



As in some similar variations from the previous chapters, this is the only way to question the strength of White's previous move.

6.bxa3

Unlike in the lines from Chapter 12, the g2-bishop is obstructed by the knight, offering Black the possibility to defend his extra pawn with ...b5. Also, Black has not made the committal move ...c6, as in line B of Chapter 13.

Black has a wide range of continuations. In this chapter, we will examine the less critical **B1) 6...♕d6** and **B2) 6...♘c6**, aiming to get the queenside mobilized, but delaying castling. Chapter 17 will focus on those lines in which Black defends his c4-pawn with ...b5 (with or without the preparatory moves ...a6 or ...c6). Finally, in Chapter 18 we will examine the most flexible move, 6...0–0.

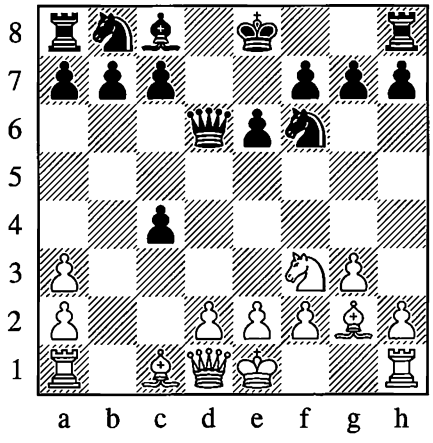
Some other queenside developing moves are also worth a brief mention.

6...♕d5 defends the pawn but places the queen on a vulnerable square. 7.♗b2 ♘c6 8.0–0 ♗d7 9.♘e5 ♕c5 10.♘xd7 ♔xd7 11.d4 ♕b5 12.♖b1 ♘d8 13.d5 White had a decisive attack in Reshko – Platonov, USSR 1971.

6...♗d7, planning ...♗c6, fails to neutralize the g2-bishop. 7.♘e5 ♗c6 8.♘xc6 ♘xc6 9.♕a4 0–0 10.♕xc4± White has two active bishops and may build up a strong pawn centre, Smyslov – Saborido, Oberhausen 1961.

Finally, 6...♘bd7 7.♗b2 0–0 transposes to Chapter 18.

B1) 6...♕d6



Black wants to play ...♘bd7 without leaving the queen passive on d8.

7.♕a4†!N

Since Black has moved his queen at such an early stage, White can afford to do the same, without fearing that he will be left behind in development. This early check is also a way of taking advantage of Black delaying castling.

7.♗b2 ♘bd7 8.♕a4 is less effective because of 8...b5!. Black has defended his pawn with gain of time and has an entirely viable position, Meduna – Thesing, Bad Woerishofen 1989.

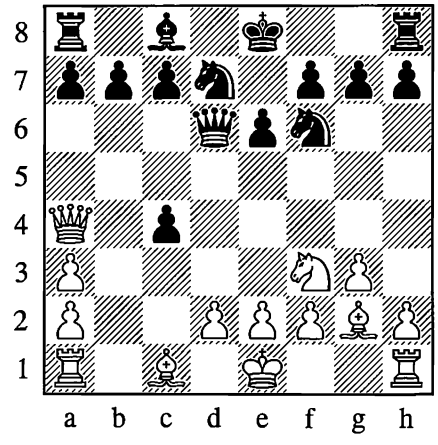
7...♘bd7

The most flexible move.

7...♕c6 8.♕c2 ♕e4 fails to neutralize the white queen's activity. 9.♕c3 ♘bd7 10.♘h4 ♕e5 (Otherwise, the queen may be forced to an unfavourable square. For instance: 10...♕g4 11.h3 ♕h5 12.♕xc4± White has regained the pawn and Black's queenside has been weakened by the departure of the queen.) 11.♕xe5 ♘xe5 12.♗b2 ♘ed7 13.♖c1 ♘b6 14.♘f3± White will get the pawn back with ♘e5xc4, while Black still has not solved the problem of developing his queenside.

After 7...♘c6 8.♗b2 Black can transpose to a note on the eighth move of line B2 with 8...0–0. The alternative 8...b5?! is rather risky. 9.♕xb5 ♖b8 10.♕g5 ♖xb2 11.♕xg7± White will restore material equality, after having chronically weakened Black's kingside structure.

7...♗d7 8.♕xc4 ♗c6 would neutralize the g2-bishop only temporarily. 9.♗b2 ♘bd7 10.0–0 ♗d5 (10...0–0 11.♖ac1± would leave the c6-bishop pinned to the defence of the c7-pawn) 11.♕c2 0–0 12.d3± White intends to restrict the enemy bishop with e2-e4, seizing the upper hand in the centre at the same time. Black will also have to spend a move parrying the threat of e4-e5, winning a piece.



8.♕xc4

White intends to occupy the centre with d2-d4, possibly followed by ♗f4.

8...c5

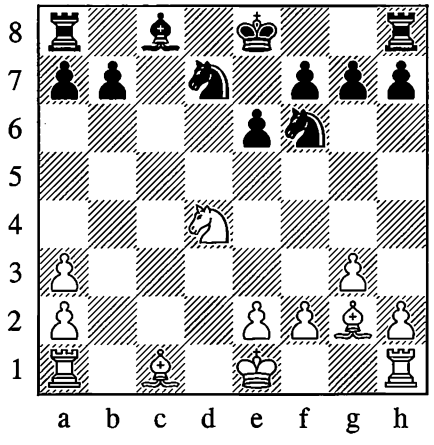
The other way to react in the centre is 8...e5, threatening ...c5 with a space advantage, but White could reply in the same way as in the main line: 9.d4± The position opens in White's favour; his bishops will exert strong pressure all over the board.

9.d4!

White should not allow ...e5, after which he would not have any active plans.

9...cxd4 10.♕xd4 ♕xd4 11.♘xd4

The position has simplified, but White retains the usual Catalan-like pressure against the underdeveloped black queenside. White's minimal structural defect is compensated by the weakness of the dark squares in Black's camp.



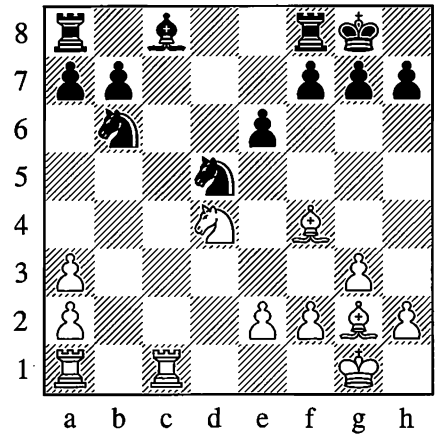
11...♘b6

Black takes measures against ♗b2, which could now be met by ...♘a4. Instead 11...♔e7 would put the king in some danger after 12.a4± followed by ♗a3†, while White gets a dominating position after 11...0–0 12.♗b2± followed by 0–0 and ♘b3 or ♘b5.

12.0–0 0–0 13.♗f4

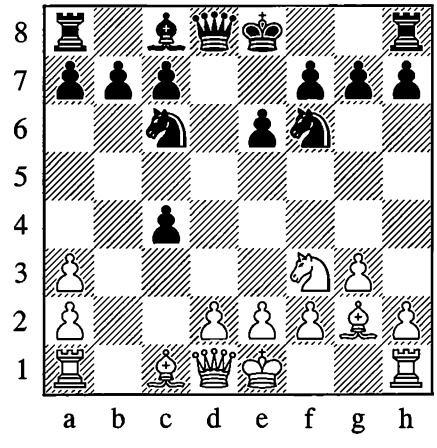
Black's queen's knight has failed to dominate White's dark-squared bishop. After ...♘b6, the fork ...e6-e5 is not possible anymore and so the bishop stands well on f4.

13...♘fd5 14.♖fc1!±



An exchange on f4 would leave Black's queenside exposed to merciless pressure from the g2-bishop. In fact, White threatens to undermine Black's defence with ♗c7xb6. Black has problems finding a viable way to complete his development.

B2) 6...♘c6



This is an active way to develop the knight. On the other hand, now Black needs to play ...e6-e5 in order to activate his bishop, which may not be so easy to carry out.

7.♗b2!

White immediately takes measures against Black's main idea. In order to advance his e-pawn, Black will have to make a slight concession.

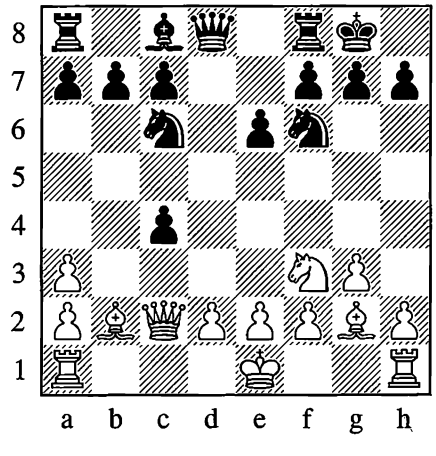
7...0–0

Or 7...♕d6 8.♕a4! transposes to line B1.

8.♕c2!

A deviation from our usual strategy, according to which the c4-pawn should not be captured by the queen. There are concrete reasons for this change: with the black knight on c6, the queen will not be exposed to harassment with ...♘b6 or ...b5.

In many similar situations, I recommend ♖c1xc4, but here this does not work out so well. 8.♖c1 ♖e8 9.♖xc4 e5 This is the troublesome position. In the main line, where White has a queen on c4 rather than a rook, an immediate attack against the weakened f7-square is possible. 10.0–0 e4 11.♘d4 ♘e5 12.♖c1 c6 White's position remains more flexible and he in fact won in S. Ernst – Tereick, Germany 2008, but Black's space advantage seems to be quite stable at this point.



8...♖e8

This looks like the most flexible way to prepare ...e6-e5, but the move has a hidden defect: the f7-square is left without sufficient defence.

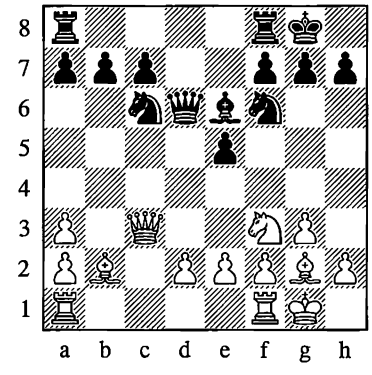
8...♕d5?! is ineffective because of 9.0–0 threatening ♘e5.

8...♕d6

This looks slightly more solid, but the queen will be vulnerable at some later point anyway.

9.♕xc4 e5 10.0–0 ♗e6 11.♕c3!

By attacking the e5-pawn, White forces his opponent to worsen his piece placement.



11...♘d5

11...♘d7 is too passive. 12.d4 exd4 13.♘xd4 ♘xd4 14.♕xd4 ♕xd4 15.♗xd4 c6 16.a4± White has the bishop pair and a dangerous kingside majority.

11...♗d5 allows a nice tactical operation, taking advantage of the exposed position of the black queen. 12.♘xe5! ♗xg2 13.♘c4 ♕d5 14.♘e3± White has simply won a pawn.

12.♕c2

Apparently, White has lost a tempo, but the d5-knight is not well placed. White will win time to open the centre with e2-e4 and d2-d4, while the h7-pawn has become vulnerable.

12...f6

12...♖ad8 13.♘g5± offers White a strong initiative.

13.♖fd1±

Black's position is unstable in view of the threats of d2-d4, or e2-e4 followed by d2-d4.

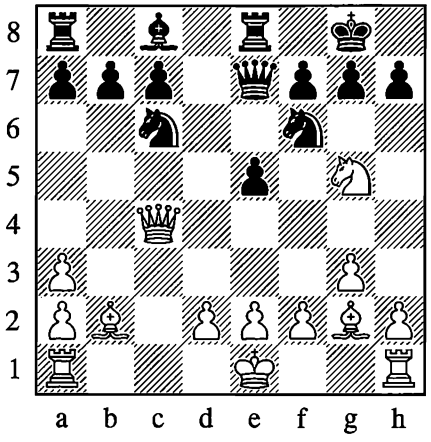
9.♕xc4 e5 10.♘g5!

This is another point in favour of developing the queen on c4.

10...♕e7

Instead 10...♖e7 offers White a strong initiative after 11.f4!? exf4 12.♕xf4.

So far we have been following the game D. Gurevich – Oll, Biel 1993, but now White should vary:

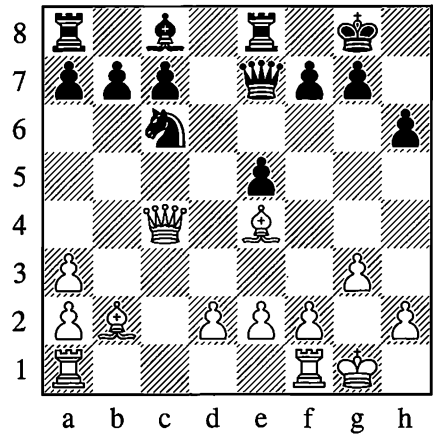


11.0–0!N

The most flexible move. White removes his king from the centre, creating the strong threat of f2-f4, when the pressure against the f6-knight may become unbearable. Black's next move is more or less forced.

11...h6 12.♘e4 ♘xe4 13.♗xe4

White is better developed and, although his pieces may look vulnerable along the fourth rank, they create sufficient activity to maintain the initiative.



13...♗e6

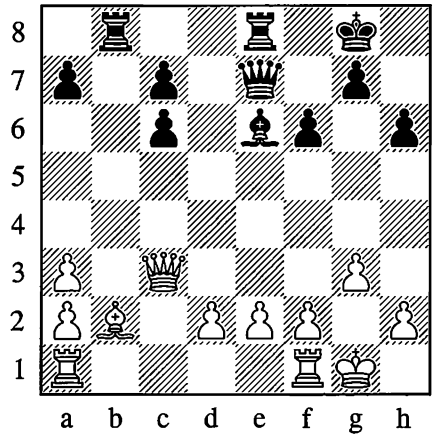
This developing move is not without drawbacks: the b7-pawn is left vulnerable and the defence of the e5-pawn has been weakened.

The overcautious 13...♖b8 is strongly met by 14.f4! ♗e6 15.♕c3 ♘d4 16.♖ae1 when White has completed his development and Black will soon lose his stability.

13...♗h3 14.♖fc1 ♖ab8 15.♕c5± offers White strong queenside pressure.

14.♕b5 ♖ab8 15.♗xc6 bxc6 16.♕xe5 f6 17.♕c3

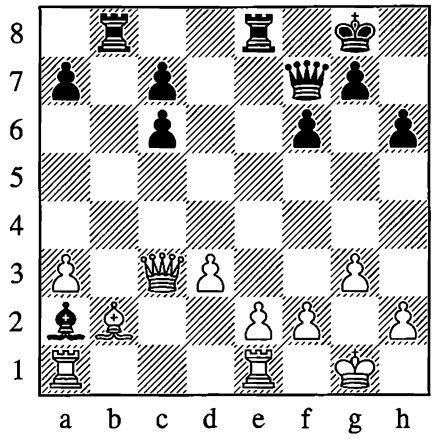
White has won a pawn and seriously damaged the enemy structure. The presence of opposite-coloured bishops does not offer Black sufficient attacking chances.



17...♕f7

After 17...♗h3 18.♖fe1 ♖b6 White restores his coordination with 19.♕c2±, followed by a3-a4 and ♗c3.

18.d3 ♗xa2 19.♖fe1±



Black has regained the pawn, but his structural defects leave him struggling.

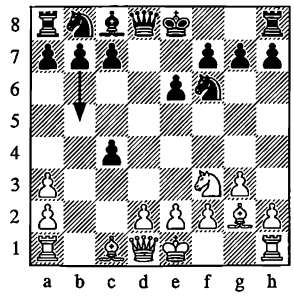
Conclusion

We can draw two main conclusions from this chapter.

If Black refrains from ...♗xa3 then White has a pleasant and practically risk-free game. The position frequently resembles the Catalan Opening, in a favourable form for White.

After 5...♗xa3 6.bxa3, Black does not benefit from making developing moves on the queenside (instead of the kingside). All of them tend to be too committal (with the exception of 6...♘bd7 which, as already mentioned, transposes to Chapter 18) and the presence of the king on e8 makes a check on a4 unpleasant in certain lines.

Chapter 17



Anti-QG Systems

4...e6 with a quick ...b5

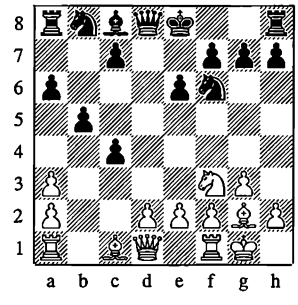
Variation Index

1.c4 e6 2.g3 d5 3.♗g2 ♘f6 4.♘f3 dxc4 5.♘a3 ♗xa3

6.bxa3

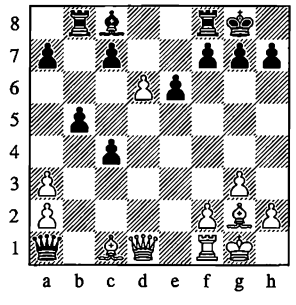
A) 6...a6 242
B) 6...c6 244
C) 6...b5 7.♘e5! 246
C1) 7...c6 246
C2) 7...♕d4 247
C3) 7...♘d5 8.d3! 249
C31) 8...c3 249
C32) 8...cxd3 251
C33) 8...♕f6 252

A) after 7...b5



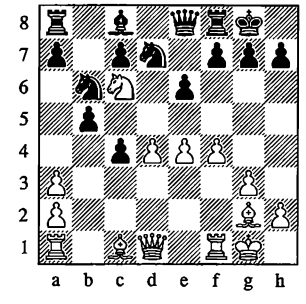
8.d3!N

C33) note to 11...♘5b6



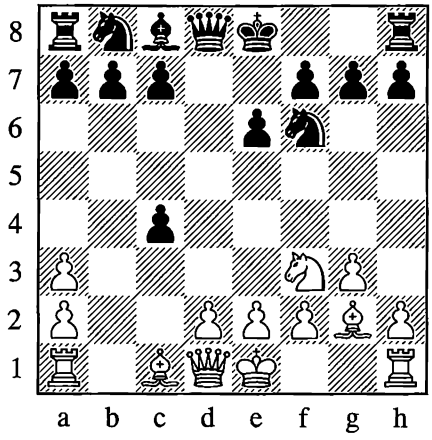
15.dxc7!

C33) after 13...♕e8



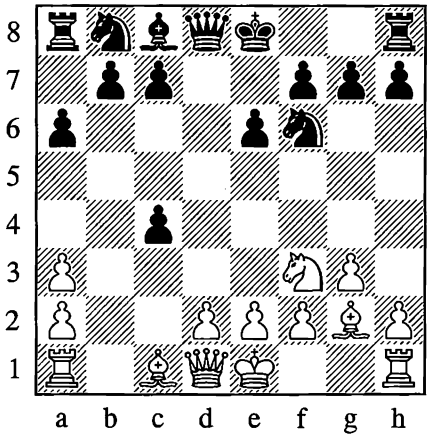
14.f5!N

1.c4 e6 2.g3 d5 3.♗g2 ♘f6 4.♘f3 dxc4 5.♘a3 ♗xa3 6.bxa3



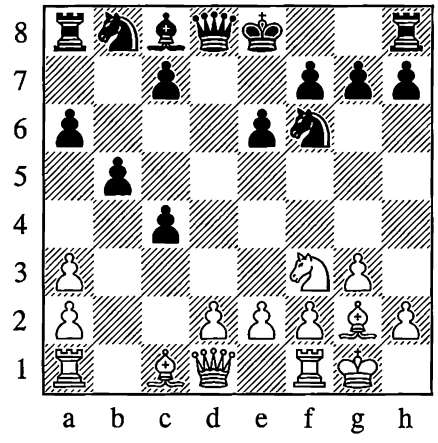
In this chapter we will examine those lines in which Black plays ...b7-b5, either after preparing it with **A) 6...a6** or **B) 6...c6**, or immediately: **C) 6...b5**. These situations tend to be double-edged. Black certainly weakens his dark squares and spends a valuable tempo, but on the other hand White has to play accurately in order to justify his pawn deficit. Just as in the anti-Slav chapters, we will frequently see typical gambit play.

A) 6...a6



Black defends the b5-square in advance and clears the a7-square for the rook. This way, he will not have to worry about moves such as a3-a4 or ♘e5. On the other hand, Black spends a tempo on a pawn move that does not increase his influence in the centre.

7.0–0 b5



8.d3!N

A thematic move that, curiously, has not been tried in the very few games where 6...a6 was played. Consolidating the pawn on c4 has cost Black a lot of time and created some important weaknesses. Once this pawn is exchanged, Black's space advantage will disappear and his only remaining trump will be his minimal material advantage. As we will see, White's initiative weighs more heavily than that.

8...cxd3 9.♘e5 ♕d4

Black attempts to build counterplay based on White's hanging pieces.

Of course if 9...dxe2? then 10.♕xd8† ♔xd8 11.♖e1 wins, as both Black's rooks are threatened.

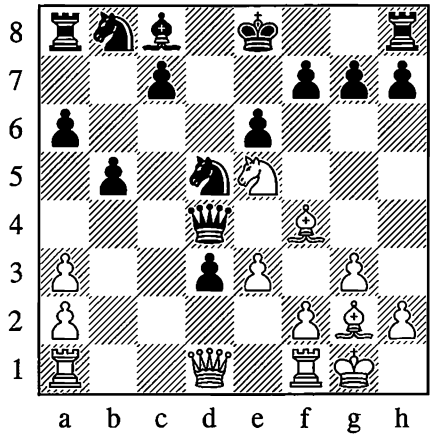
Blocking the long diagonal with 9...♘d5 places the knight in a pin along the d-file, which can be taken advantage of with e2-e4: 10.♕xd3 f6 (if 10...0–0 then White renews the threat of

e2-e4 with 11.♖d1) 11.e4! The black knight cannot retreat because of ♕xd8† followed by ♘f7†, which means Black has to accept significant weaknesses. 11...fxe5 12.exd5 ♗b7 13.♕f3! The black king is stuck in the centre and White threatens ♕h5†.

Another merit of the move 8.d3 is revealed after 9...♖a7? 10.♗e3! trapping the rook. As we can see, opening the c1-h6 diagonal contributes greatly to White's initiative.

10.♗f4 ♘d5 11.e3!

The black queen is forced to abandon her centralized position.



11...♕a7

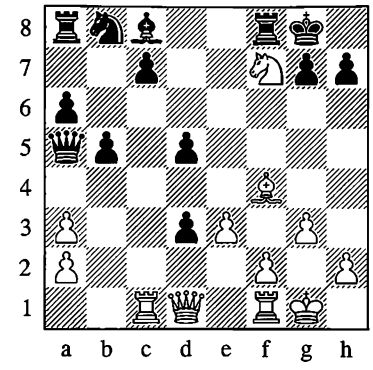
This certainly looks passive and leaves the kingside weakly defended, but the alternative allows White to activate his position with gain of time:

11...♕c3?! 12.♖c1! ♕a5

Hoping to keep c7 defended, but this is just an illusion.

13.♗xd5 exd5 14.♘xf7! 0–0

Accepting the sacrifice leads to a decisive attack: 14...♔xf7 15.♖xc7† ♗d7 16.♕h5† The king is helpless against the combined attack of the white pieces. In some lines, the a8-rook is lost after ♕xd5†.



15.♖xc7 ♘d7

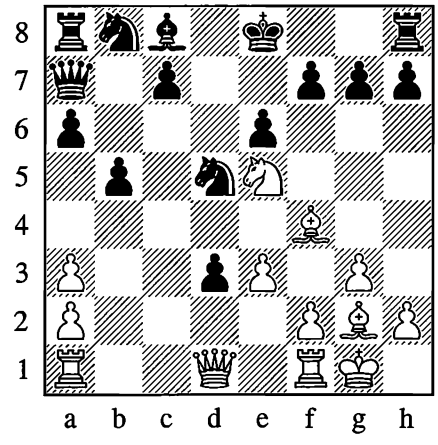
Apparently, Black can hope, but the next spectacular move makes his illusions vanish.

16.♘h6†! ♔h8

16...gxh6 leads to mate: 17.♕g4† ♔h8 18.♗e5† ♘xe5 19.♕g7#

17.♕xd3

White's pieces may seem to be hanging, but in fact they display sufficient dynamism to make the position winning. For instance, 17...♖xf4 fails to 18.♕xd5 gxh6 19.♖xd7 ♗xd7 20.♕xa8† ♔g7 21.exf4 with a decisive material advantage.



12.♕g4!

With the black queen far away on the other wing, the kingside is not easy to defend against a series of simple threats.

12...♘xf4 13.♕xf4 f6

We can understand now that 11...♕b6 would have been bad because in this line the a8-rook would have been hanging.

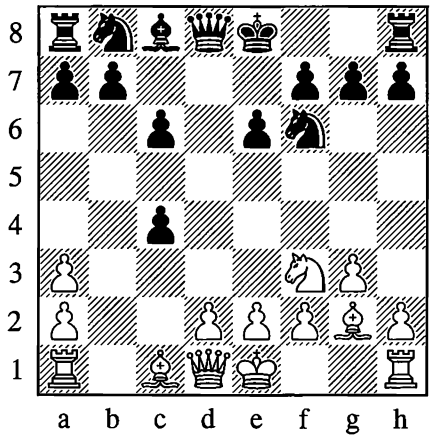
14.♘xd3!

14.♗xa8 leads to unclear consequences after 14...fxe5 15.♕xe5 ♕xa8 16.♕xg7 ♖f8. Capturing the a8-rook is a bullet that White must keep in reserve. For the time being, he should just consolidate his dominance of the dark squares.

14...c6 15.♕d6 ♕d7 16.♕c5 ♔f7 17.♖fd1

Black is badly underdeveloped and his dark squares are desperately weak; White has more than sufficient compensation for the pawn.

B) 6...c6



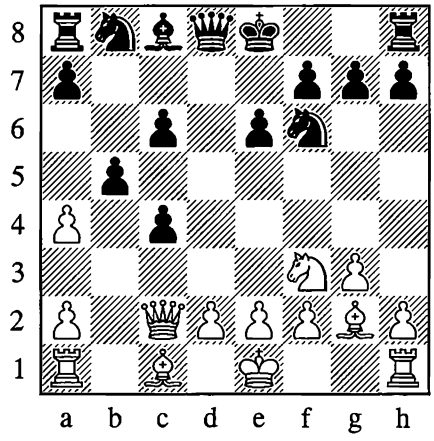
This move has a greater impact on the fight for the centre than 6...a6, but its negative effects are also notable. The c8-bishop is restricted even more than its rival on g2 and some key dark squares are weakened.

7.♕c2

Since the previous move has somewhat reduced Black's dynamic possibilities, White can afford to deviate from the normal course of development by moving his queen rather early.

7...b5 8.a4

Putting some pressure on the massive group of black pawns and clearing the a3-f8 diagonal for the bishop.



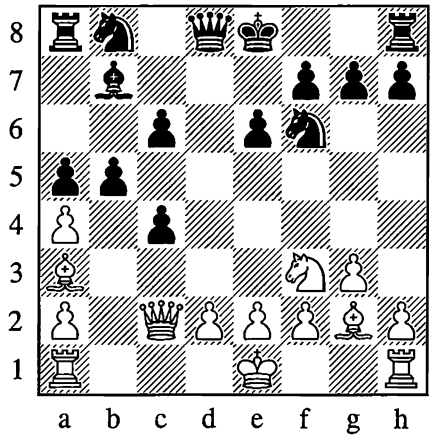
8...♗b7

This is essential prophylaxis, since 8...0–0? loses to a trick that is known from the Catalan Opening: 9.axb5 cxb5 10.♘g5 Black cannot save his rook with 10...♘d5 because of the mate on h7.

9.♗a3

Black will have to work hard in order to enable castling.

9...a5



10.♖b1!N

The best way to maintain the initiative. Instead the voluntary retreat 10.♗b2 has been played, but it makes little sense. 10...♘a6 11.0–0 ♘c5 12.♘d4 ♕b6 13.♖ab1 In Chuprov – Tregubov, Smolensk 2000, Black could have captured the second pawn with 13...♘xa4, leading to unclear play.

10...♗a6

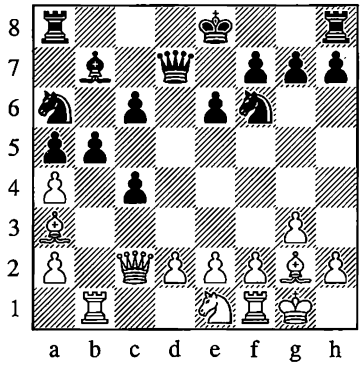
Black defends the b5-pawn without exposing his queen, but abandoning the long diagonal is not without risk.

10...♕d7 11.0–0 b4 can be met by 12.♘e5 ♕c7 13.♘xc4±. White has regained the pawn and favourably stabilized the queenside. The a3-bishop is taboo because of ♖xb7.

10...♕d5

This also looks provocative.

11.0–0 ♘a6 12.♘e1 ♕d7



13.d3!

We are familiar with this move, which leads to genuine gambit play.

13...cxd3

Of course 13...b4 allows 14.♕xc4±, since 14...bxa3? loses to 15.♖xb7!.

14.♘xd3 b4 15.♖fd1!

White takes advantage of the fact that 15...bxa3 loses to 16.♖xb7! and completes his development, forcing the queen to occupy an unfortunate position.

15...♕c7 16.♗b2 0–0 17.♗e5

A fresh gain of time.

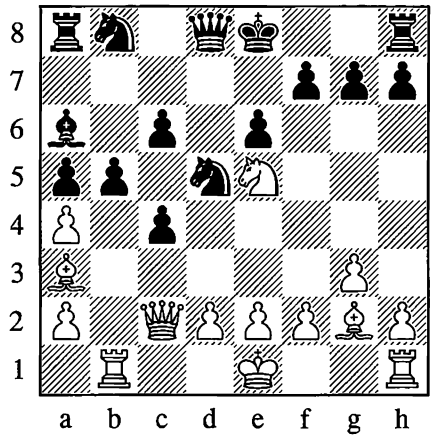
17...♕e7 18.♘b2

Threatening ♗d6.

18...♖fd8 19.♘c4±

White is in absolute control of the position and may soon win the a5-pawn.

11.♘e5 ♘d5



12.♘xc6!

A courageous decision. At first sight White is simply winning, but Black has some hidden resources.

12...♘xc6 13.axb5 ♘cb4

This is the best chance. 13...♘d4 14.♕xc4 leaves Black's pieces hanging and his king stuck in the centre.

14.♗xb4 ♗b7!

The bishop has to return to the long diagonal at once; after 14...♘xb4? 15.♕a4± it would already be too late.

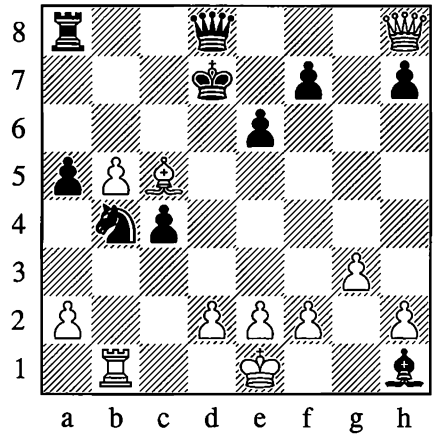
15.♗c5 ♘b4

This leads to material gains for Black, but White will get overwhelming compensation. The safer 15...♖c8 leads to favourable simplifications for White: 16.e4! ♖xc5 17.exd5 ♗xd5 18.♗xd5 ♕xd5 19.0–0 0–0 20.a4±

The strong passed pawn offers White better prospects in any kind of ending.

16.♕c3 ♗xg2 17.♕xg7 ♗xh1 18.♕xh8† ♔d7

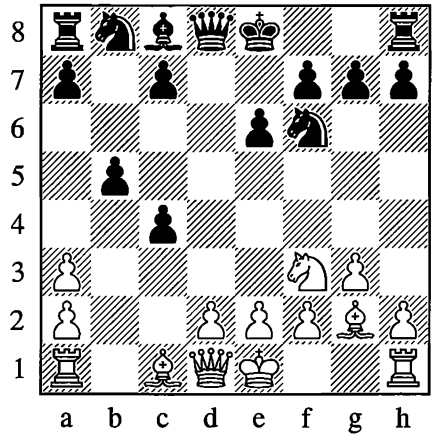
White has only two pawns for the piece, but retains a strong initiative. At the same time, Black's minor pieces are unfavourably placed. The bishop faces the constant threat of being trapped with f2-f3.



19.♕g7 ♕g8 20.♕e5 ♕b8 21.♕h5±

Black cannot parry the threats of ♕xf7† and f2-f3 at the same time.

C) 6...b5



Since the slow ways of defending the c4-pawn that we examined in the previous lines are not convincing, Black should take the bull by the horns and push his b-pawn immediately.

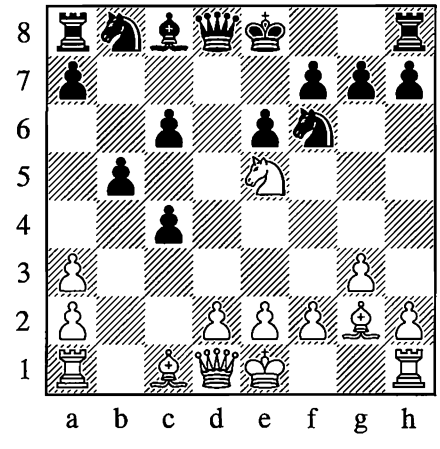
7.♘e5!

This is the only logical answer. With the long diagonal wide open and the rook immobile on a8, there is really no other move White should be thinking about. I introduced this novelty into practice in my game against Landa, at the 51st edition of the Reggio Emilia tournament.

Previously, 7.a4 used to be played, but 7...a6 leaves White struggling, because there is no way to prevent the development of the black bishop to b7, completely neutralizing the g2-bishop. After 8.♖b1 (or 8.♗a3 ♗b7 followed by ...♘bd7 and ...c5, when Black neutralizes White's initiative without any loss of time) 8...♗b7 9.axb5 Black wins an essential tempo with 9...♗e4! followed by ...axb5, when the a2-pawn would be hanging.

Black can play **C1) 7...c6**, **C2) 7...♕d4** or **C3) 7...♘d5**.

C1) 7...c6



Black intends to return the pawn in order to exchange the dangerous g2-bishop and retain a space advantage on the queenside.

8.♘xc6 ♕b6 9.♘e7!

White's pieces display irrepressible dynamism. Instead Black's strategy would be justified after the uninspired 9.♘e5?! ♗b7∓.

9...♔xe7

Black should sacrifice the exchange at once, because after 9...♗b7 10.♘c8! he would have to do so under even less favourable circumstances: 10...♗xc8 (10...♕c7 loses a lot of material to 11.♗xb7+–) 11.♗xa8±

10.♗xa8 ♘c6

Having played the developing move ...♔e7, Black is a tempo ahead compared with the line from the previous comment. Now if ...♗d7 or ...e6-e5 followed by ...♗h3, the a8-bishop would be attacked.

11.♗xc6

11.0–0 is less accurate because Black has 11...e5! threatening ...♗h3, with adequate counterplay.

11...♕xc6 12.f3!

The pressure along the long diagonal has been neutralized and White will be able to start his own play on the dark squares.

12...h5

A last attempt to generate counterplay.

13.♗b2 h4 14.g4!

A well-timed sacrifice, keeping the h-file closed and leading to the opening of the g-file for White's rook.

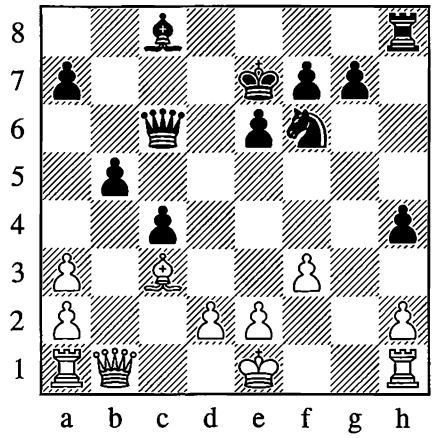
14...♘xg4

Otherwise, Black's previous moves would not make any sense.

15.♕b1!

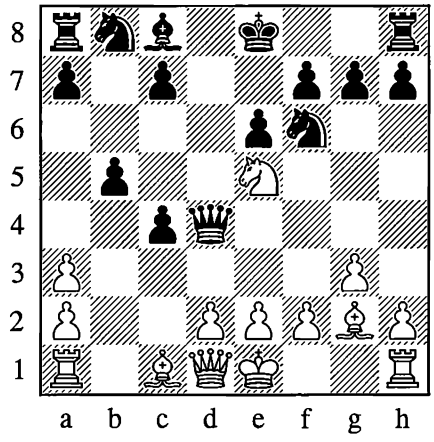
Threatening ♗xg7 followed by ♕b4†.

15...♘f6 16.♗c3±



White has stabilized the position and will soon start attacking with ♕b4† and ♖g1.

C2) 7...♕d4



This seemingly active incursion of the queen will leave her exposed in the centre of the board.

8.♖b1 ♕xe5

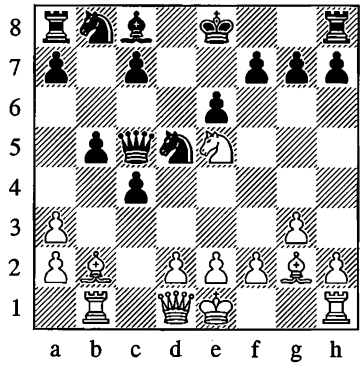
As in the previous line, Black sacrifices an exchange, hoping to trap the enemy bishop on a8.

8...♘e4 9.♘g4 leaves Black hanging.

8...♘d5

This requires slightly more inventiveness from White.

9.♗b2 ♕c5



10.e3!

A multipurpose move. White opens a new diagonal for the queen and prepares ♗d4.

10...0–0

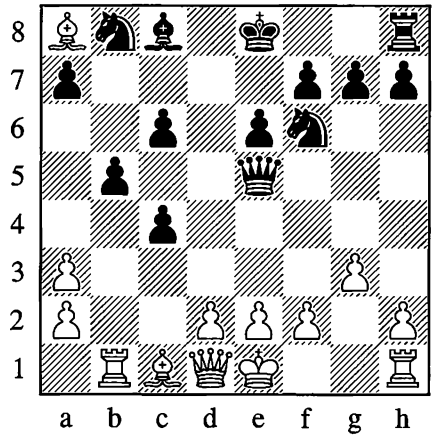
10...c6 leads to a strong initiative for White after 11.♕g4.

11.♗d4 ♕xa3 12.♖xb5 ♗a6 13.♖c5 ♕xa2 14.e4

White has a very active position and his initiative may explode into a direct mating attack at any moment.

9.♗xa8 c6

The bishop's retreat has been cut off, but Black is not well enough developed to trap it under favourable circumstances.



10.0–0 ♕c7

In the event of a neutral move such as 10...0–0 White would free his bishop with 11.a4 a6 12.axb5 axb5 13.a4±.

11.d3!

Preparing to develop the other bishop.

11...♘d5

Black intends ...♘b6, without allowing ♗e3. 11...♘fd7?! is worse because of 12.♗e3 ♘b6 13.♗xb6 axb6 14.dxc4 ♕a7 15.♕d6 ♕xa8 16.cxb5±. The king is stuck in the centre, while material is almost even.

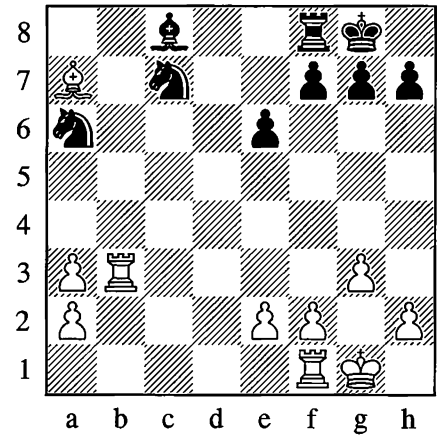
12.dxc4 ♘b6 13.♗e3!?

13.♗xc6† ♘xc6 14.cxb5 also deserves some attention.

13...♘xa8

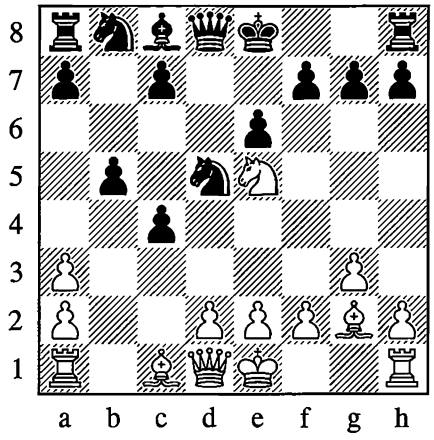
Black has won two minor pieces for a rook, but his forces lack coordination and he will soon lose two pawns.

14.♕d4 0–0 15.♕xa7 ♕xa7 16.♗xa7 ♘a6 17.cxb5 cxb5 18.♖xb5 ♘8c7 19.♖b3±



From a materialistic point of view, White is okay, but more significantly his pieces are active and the a-pawns will be quite dangerous in the ending.

C3) 7...♘d5



Detailed analysis proved that this is Black's best chance, although moving again with the only developed piece rather contradicts the rules of development.

8.d3!

This familiar move once again is the best way to fight for the initiative.

Black's main answers are **C31) 8...c3**, **C32) 8...cxd3** and **C33) 8...♕f6**.

The developing move 8...♘d7 fails to extinguish White's initiative, because of 9.♘xf7!. Before undermining Black's position in the centre, the kingside is seriously damaged and the king is decoyed onto a vulnerable square. 9...♔xf7 10.dxc4 ♘5b6 (10...bxc4 loses material to 11.♗xd5±) 11.♗xa8 ♘xa8 12.cxb5± White has a slight material advantage and his king will be safer than Black's.

C31) 8...c3

It is rather obvious that Black will lose this pawn in the future, but he hopes that White will need to waste some time and maybe weaken his central structure in order to drive the d5-knight away. On the other hand, once White has regained the pawn, Black's weaknesses along the c-file may become a telling factor.

9.0–0 0–0

It is dangerous to weaken the kingside with: 9...f6 10.e4 ♘e7

10...fxe5? leaves Black underdeveloped and with weaknesses everywhere. 11.exd5 ♕d6 12.dxe6 c6 13.♕h5† g6 14.♕h6± Black's position is barely survivable.

11.♘f3 a5

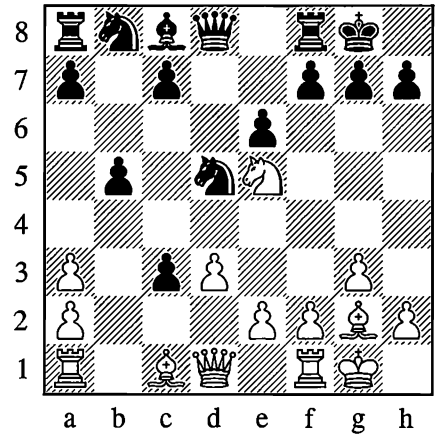
Black intends to defend his extra pawn.

12.♗e3 ♘bc6 13.♕c2 b4 14.axb4 axb4 15.a3

White's doubled pawns have done their job; Black cannot support his c3-pawn anymore.

15...♗a6 16.♖fd1±

After the inevitable restoration of material equality, White will retain the more compact structure and a strong bishop pair.



10.♕b3

From this square, the queen also attacks b5 and puts pressure on the d5-knight.

10...♘d7

As usual, we take a developing move as the main line.

10...♕d6

This prematurely exposes the queen.

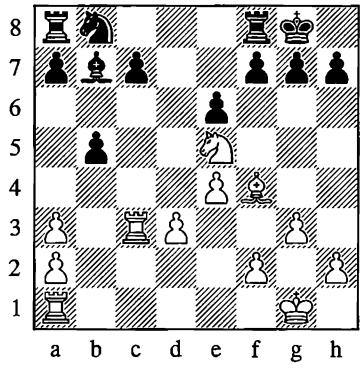
11.♗f4!

With the strong threat of ♘xf7!.

11...♕c5

11...♘xf4 allows White to dominate the dark squares after 12.gxf4 c6 13.♕xc3 ♗b7 14.d4±. This type of position is a dream for Catalan players.

12.♖fc1 ♗b7 13.♗xd5 ♕xd5 14.♕xd5 ♗xd5 15.e4 ♗b7 16.♖xc3±



The presence of opposite-coloured bishops does not make Black's defence any easier. In fact, his dark squares are incurably weak.

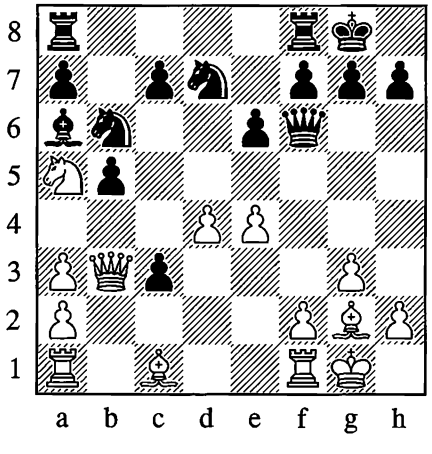
11.♘c6 ♕f6

The most active defence, offering the c3-pawn some additional support.

12.d4

White starts gaining space in the centre, isolating the c3-pawn from the rest of the black army at the same time.

12...♗b7 13.♘a5 ♗a6 14.e4 ♘5b6



15.♕xc3!

It is important to control the light squares; grabbing the exchange with 15.e5 ♕f5 16.♗xa8 ♖xa8 would allow Black to increase his stability. Instead, White is ready to sacrifice the exchange himself!

15...b4

The logical consequence of Black's previous play.

Another thematic attempt for counterplay is:

15...c5

But this allows White to pick up the exchange under more favourable circumstances than in the previous note, because he would get rid of the weak d4-pawn and have better possibilities of activating his dark-squared bishop.

16.e5 cxd4 17.♕xd4 ♕xe5

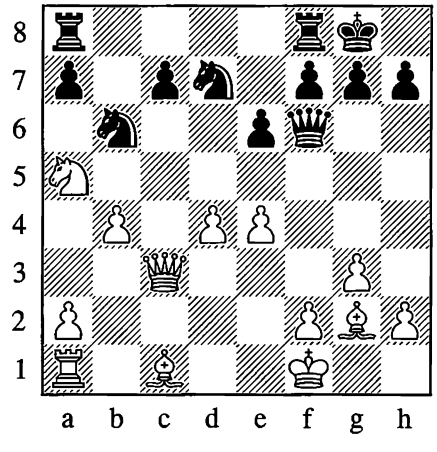
17...♘xe5 18.♗b2± adds an unpleasant pin to Black's list of problems.

18.♕xe5 ♘xe5 19.♗xa8 ♖xa8 20.♖d1 ♘bc4 21.♗f4±

White is quite active, which makes Black's compensation for the exchange insufficient.

16.axb4 ♗xf1 17.♔xf1

White has improved his structure and has a mighty pair of bishops. This more than compensates for the small material disadvantage.



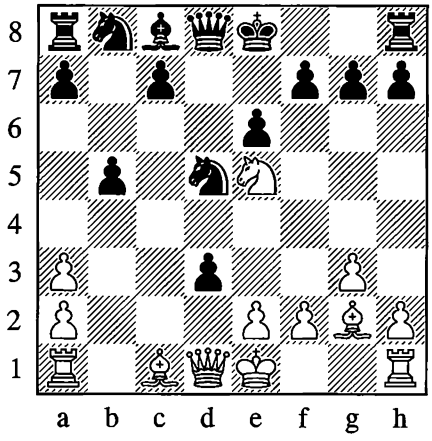
17...e5

Logically fighting for some space in the centre.

18.♗e3 ♘a4 19.♕d2 exd4 20.♗xd4±

Black's knights have no stable squares (just compare with the white knight!) while the bishops are dominating the board.

C32) 8...cxd3



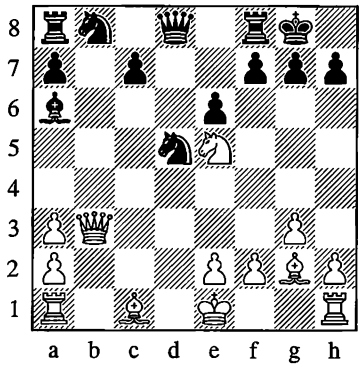
A rather simplistic approach; Black keeps his extra pawn, but this approach underestimates White's initiative.

9.♕xd3 a6

The consistent continuation.

Black does not achieve full equality if he returns the pawn for the sake of rapid development:

9...0–0 10.♕xb5 ♗a6 11.♕b3



11...f6

Black drives the enemy knight away in order to develop his b8-knight without fearing ♘c6, but this move weakens the e6-square.

11...♘d7 12.♘c6 ♕e8 13.♗e3! leaves Black dominated.

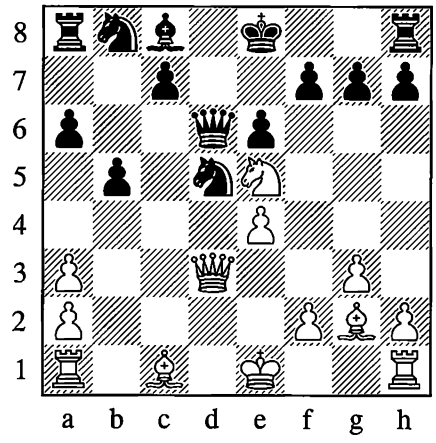
11...♕d6, preparing to develop the b8-knight, is met by 12.♗f4, threatening ♘xf7.

12.♘d3±

White will play ♘f4 soon, when his bishop pair and the weakness of the light squares in the enemy camp would leave him on top.

10.e4 ♕d6

The black knight cannot retreat without losing material, but now White can destroy the integrity of Black's kingside structure.



11.♘xf7! ♔xf7 12.exd5 ♕e5†

Black has to grab all the material he can, because otherwise his position would be losing on account of the vulnerability of his king and his poor development.

13.♕e3 ♕xa1 14.0–0

White is a whole rook down, but he is threatening to restore material equality with dxe6†.

14...♕f6

The alternative is:

14...e5

But this fails to keep the material advantage.

15.♕b3!

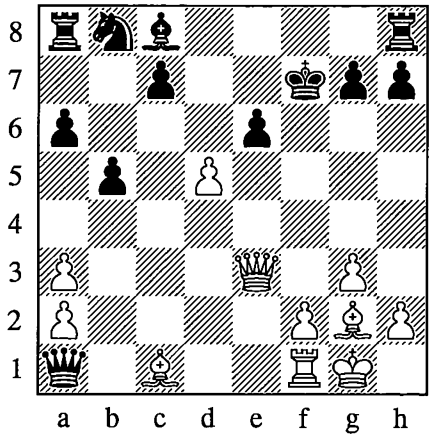
White threatens both ♗b2, trapping the queen, and d5-d6†, winning the a8-rook.

15...♕d4 16.d6† ♗e6 17.♕f3† ♔g6 18.h4!?

The threat of mate-in-one forces Black to weaken his kingside position. White could well do without this, but why not take advantage of every single detail of the position before capturing the rook?

18...h5 19.♕xa8 ♕xd6 20.♗b2±

White has more than enough compensation for Black's extra (weak) pawn.



15.dxe6† ♗xe6 16.♗xa8 ♘d7 17.♗g2±

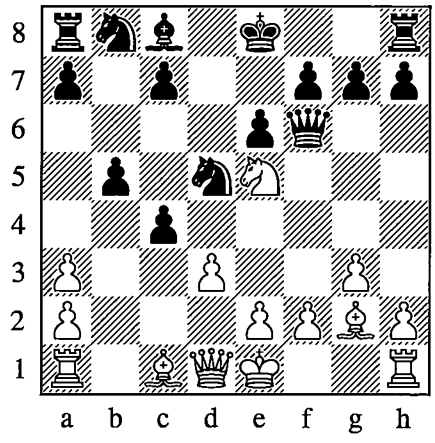
Material is even and White retains an active position.

Pawn-grabbing is likely to cause Black a lot of trouble. For example:

17...♗xa2?! 18.♕d2 ♗e6 19.♗b2 ♕e7 20.♖e1±

White has won time to regroup and has a dangerous attack.

C33) 8...♕f6



This is the continuation I faced in the only game in which I have experimented with ♘a3 so far (and the one in which the novelty 7.♘e5 was introduced). Although the move contradicts the general principles of development, the early queen move may be Black's best chance for a double-edged fight.

9.d4!

I did not hesitate much before "losing a tempo", since I relied on the fact that the queen is badly placed on f6.

After the game, Landa asked me why I refrained from 9.f4, leading to a forced draw. I had no fewer than three reasons for that.

1) I did not like the move itself.
2) I did not see a forced draw after it (I do not see it now, either).
3) I do not believe White should play for a draw. He could do that with 5.♕a4†.

9...♘d7

Black hopes to exchange White's most active piece, but this is not easy to achieve.

10.0–0!

White strives for rapid development, ignoring the central tension.

10...0–0

Accepting the pawn sacrifice would give White too much play. 10...♘xe5 11.dxe5 ♕xe5 12.♗f4 ♕h5 13.♗f3 Finally, Black has to abandon the defence of the d5-square. 13...♕g6 14.♗xd5 exd5 15.♕xd5 c6 16.♕c5± The black king is stuck in the centre and, most likely, would soon run into trouble.

10...c5

This looks like a logical counterattacking move, but the presence of the black king in the centre offers White some additional tactical chances.

11.a4 a6 12.♗a3 b4

Black needs to neutralize the a3-bishop.

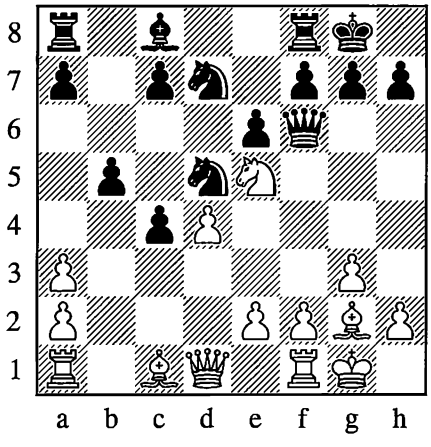
12...♘xe5 13.dxe5 ♕xe5 14.♗xc5 leaves the black king stuck in the centre.

13.♘xc4!

A temporary piece sacrifice to blow up the black pawn mass.

13...bxa3 14.e4

White will restore material equality while keeping the initiative in the centre.



11.e4!

Just as in line C31 above, White is not interested in winning the exchange. After 11.♘xd7?! ♗xd7 12.e4 ♘c3 13.♕c2 ♘a4 14.e5 ♕e7 15.♗xa8 ♖xa8 Black has a pleasant position and the play is rather one-sided; White has no active plans at all.

11...♘5b6

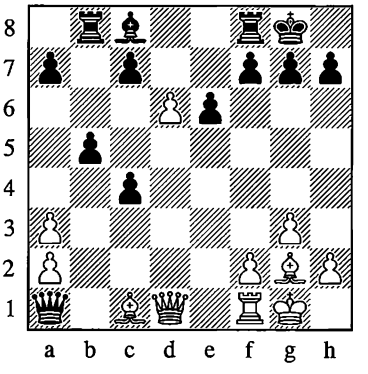
Black is not well enough developed to embark on forced variations with piece exchanges:

11...♘xe5 12.dxe5 ♕xe5 13.exd5 ♕xa1 14.d6!

This pawn will cause Black to lose his coordination.

14...♖b8

14...c6 15.♗xc6 ♖b8 16.d7 ♗a6 17.♕d6 leaves Black paralysed, despite his material advantage.



15.dxc7!

White has to use his main trump, the d-pawn, in the most effective way.

15.d7?! can be strongly met by 15...♖d8! 16.dxc8=♕ ♖bxc8 17.♕e2 ♕d4 18.♗g5 ♖d7∓ when Black has too many pawns.

15...♖b6 16.♕d8

White's domination of the uncoordinated black army at the very least compensates for the material deficit.

After the text move, White finally needs to consolidate his knight.

12.f4 ♕e7!

Black plays with a clear plan, preparing ...♗b7, but his queen has moved twice already,

at a stage when his development is still incomplete.

The immediate 12...♗b7? drops a piece to 13.♘xd7 ♘xd7 14.e5+–.

12...♘xe5

This is too provocative and offers White a dangerous attack.

13.fxe5

Opening the f-file for the rooks and the c1-h6 diagonal for the bishop.

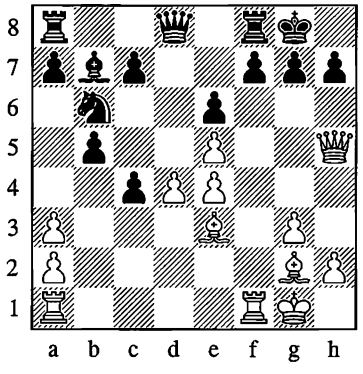
13...♕d8

Black hopes to slow down White's attack by keeping the d4-pawn under observation.

13...♕e7 allows 14.♕h5 followed by ♗g5-f6.

13...♕g6 places the queen on an uncomfortable square, speeding up the white attack after 14.♖f4.

14.♗e3 ♗b7 15.♕h5



During the game and the post mortem analysis, I considered that this position favoured White. When I learned that the engines preferred Black by a large margin, at first I was disappointed. Later, I understood that this may be one of those cases when the engines simply do not understand the situation. It is impossible to exhaust the position analytically, but the following line is the fruit of a friendly game between me (with White) and Rybka 3:

15...♕e7

After ♗e3, the a3-pawn is undefended. By capturing it, Black intends to provoke a loss of coordination in the white army.

16.♖f4 ♕xa3 17.♖e1

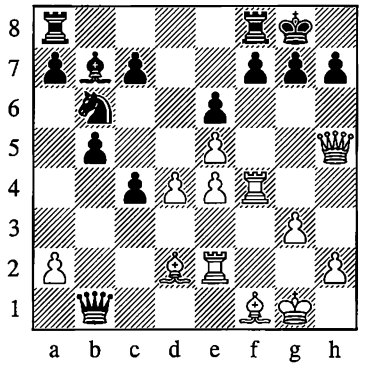
White threatens 18.♖h4 h6 19.♗xh6 with a winning attack.

17...♕c3 18.♖e2 ♕a1† 19.♗f1 ♕b1

Planning to defend the h7-pawn with ...♗xe4.

19...♘a4, hoping for 20.♖h4 ♗xe4 21.♖xe4 ♘c3, is refuted by the calm 20.♖ef2, creating the additional threat of ♖xf7.

20.♗d2±



White has defended e4 and is ready to proceed with his attack. Finally, the engine's evaluation dropped dramatically around this moment. The black king is in great danger.

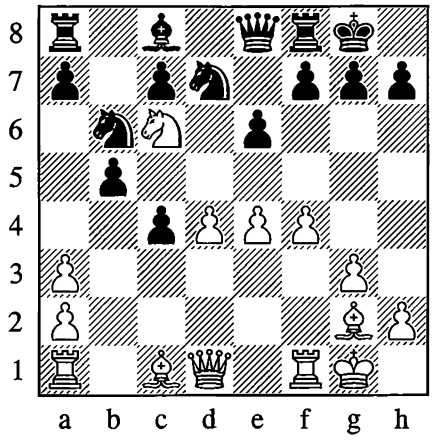
13.♘c6 ♕e8

A first critical position of the game. Black's position looks a bit awkward, but White has not yet achieved a stable domination and is still a pawn down.

During the game, I understood clearly that White's main problem is having too many pawns on dark squares, which restricts the activity of his c1-bishop. Accepting doubled pawns on the a-file is part of the initial plan, but I knew I should get rid of them at some point. Pushing the pawn to f4 was useful in

supporting the knight a few moves earlier, but now that the knight has jumped forward, the pawn is obviously in the way.

I thought for a long time about which of the problem pawns I should advance and eventually came up with the wrong decision.



14.f5!N

The reasons why this move should be preferred are mainly tactical, but I would also like to mention some general points.

The text move creates the basis for a kingside attack without additional material investment, whereas the move I played was:

14.a4?!

This sacrifices a second pawn and leaves Black with an impressive queenside majority, without endangering the black king yet.

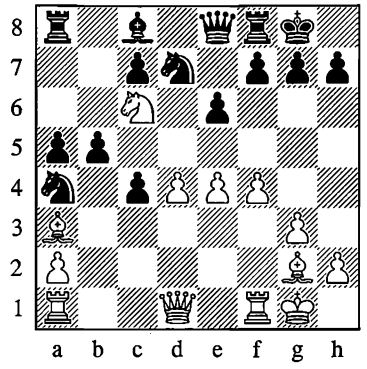
14...♘xa4 15.♗a3

The bishop has been activated, but White should definitely refrain from ♗xf8, which would take the steam out of his initiative.

15...a5?!

This offers White the tempo he needed to get perfectly coordinated.

Landa should not have changed from his initial intention: 15...♘dc5! Black threatens to activate his play with ...♘d3 after which White would be struggling. I must confess that when playing 14.a4?! I overlooked that after 16.dxc5? ♕xc6 17.e5 ♕a6 18.♗xa8 Black has 18...♘c3 followed by ...♕xa3, since ♕c1 is impossible in view of the fork on e2. This would have left Black with huge compensation for the exchange.



In Marin – Landa, Reggio Emilia 2008, I should have played:

16.e5!N

Threatening f4-f5, with good attacking chances.

After the suggested novelty, it is not easy for Black to free himself.

14...e5

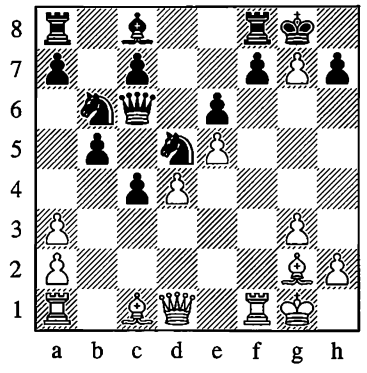
During the game I considered this to be the toughest defence.

One point behind White's previous move is that after the generally desirable:

14...♘f6?!

White has a strong attack after:

15.e5 ♘fd5 16.f6 ♕xc6 17.fxg7



17...♖d8

White's attack is even easier to carry out after 17...♔xg7 18.♕h5 followed by ♗h6.

18.♗e4 ♕e8

Hoping for 19.♕h5 f5!.

19.♗g5

With the threat of ♗f6, followed by ♕h5 or even ♗xh7!†. Black's answer is forced.

19...f6 20.exf6±

The black king is surrounded by enemies while receiving no help from his colleagues.

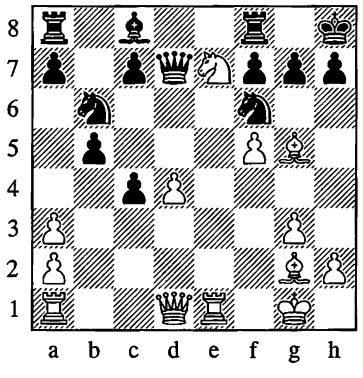
Black also fails to free himself with:

14...exf5?! 15.exf5!

Apparently, this is strategically unfavourable, because it gives up the control of the d5-square. However, opening the e-file serves White well in developing his initiative, taking advantage of the unfortunate placement of the queen.

15...♘f6 16.♖e1 ♕d7 17.♘e7† ♔h8 18.♗g5

The reader will be used to the idea that the a8-rook should be ignored while there are still active moves available. The g2-bishop is very useful in controlling the d5-square and for restricting the enemy queen's mobility. The last move creates the threat of spoiling Black's kingside structure, and moving the f6-knight away does not avoid this because of f5-f6!. As for 18...♘bd5? it just loses a piece to 19.♗xf6.



18...♖b8 19.♗xf6 gxf6 20.♕d2

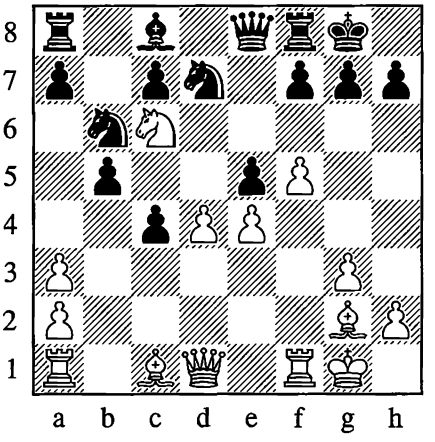
Threatening ♕h6.

20...♔g7

20...♗b7? 21.♗xb7 ♖xb7 leaves the f8-rook undefended; White wins with 22.♕h6.

21.♗c6 ♕d6 22.♖e4

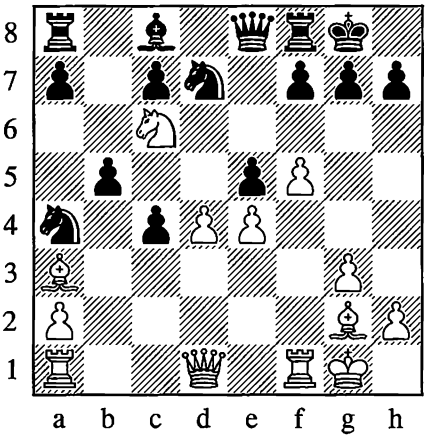
White has a strong attack.



15.a4!

Now that White has made some progress on the kingside, the time has come for the other thematic break.

15...♘xa4 16.♗a3



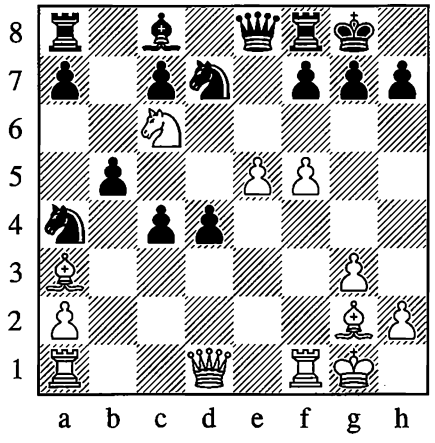
16...exd4

Keeping the centre closed is also dangerous: 16...♗b7 17.♘a5 ♖b8 18.d5 Black has to be

ready to meet the violent f5-f6. If he defends against it with ...f7-f6, then the typical kingside attack based on g4-g5 would be hard to meet. Black's main problem is that he has no active plan.

The tactical trick that was possible in my game against Landa no longer works out as well. The difference is that after 16...♘dc5 17.♘xe5 the black e-pawn has vanished!

17.e5



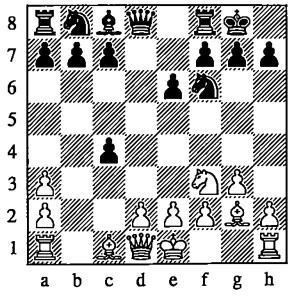
A picturesque position! Black's pawn majority looks beautiful, but it is not very threatening yet. On the contrary, White's pawns are close to the enemy king and his attack based on f5-f6 is likely to become very dangerous.

This is one of the most difficult lines in the whole book. I do not pretend to have exhausted it, but I hope that I have at least managed to underline the main ideas.

Conclusion

The plans involving ...b5 offer White the possibility of combining threats against both wings, with good chances of retaining a lasting initiative.

Chapter 18



Anti-QG Systems

4...dxc4 – 6...0–0 Main Line

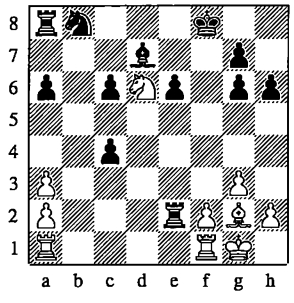
Variation Index

1.c4 e6 2.g3 d5 3.♗g2 ♘f6 4.♘f3 dxc4 5.♘a3 ♗xa3 6.bxa3 0–0

7.♗b2

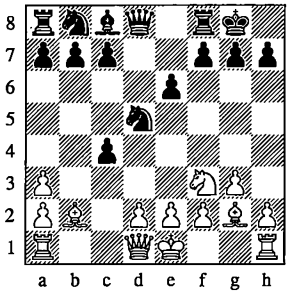
A) 7...c6 **260**
B) 7...♘d5 **262**
C) 7...♘bd7 **265**

A) note to 10...e5



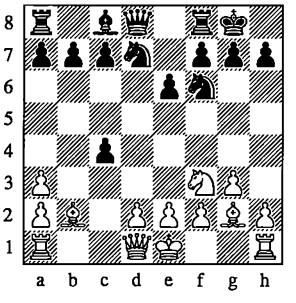
20.♖fc1!N±

B) after 7...♘d5



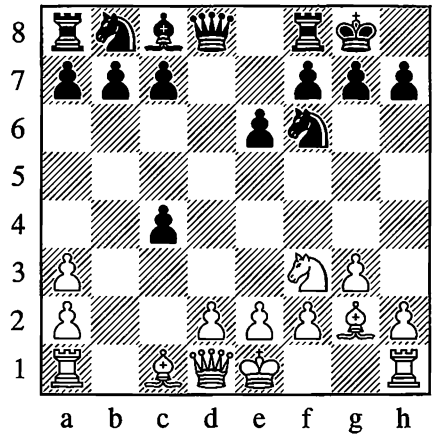
8.♖c1!N

C) after 7...♘bd7



8.♖c1!N

1.c4 e6 2.g3 d5 3.♗g2 ♘f6 4.♘f3 dxc4 5.♘a3 ♗xa3 6.bxa3 0–0



At first sight, this looks like the most flexible continuation. Black will need to castle anyway, so why make any kind of queenside commitment before that?

In general, this sounds reasonable, but concretely there is a slight problem. Defining the king's intentions is also a kind of commitment, offering White the opportunity to combine his general plan (which may involve ♗b2 followed by ♕c2) with casual threats such as ♘g5.

From this point of view, White's next move is quite logical.

7.♗b2

The main continuations that have been tested in practice are **A) 7...c6**, **B) 7...♘d5** and **C) 7...♘bd7**.

With the bishop on b2, 7...b5 is simply bad because of 8.♘d4 followed by ♘xb5.

A) 7...c6

My opinion of this move remains the same as in line B of the previous chapter. The strategic price Black is ready to pay for defending his extra pawn is too high. The insertion of the moves ...0–0 and ♗b2 moves the focus of the battle slightly to the right, but the general aspects remain the same.

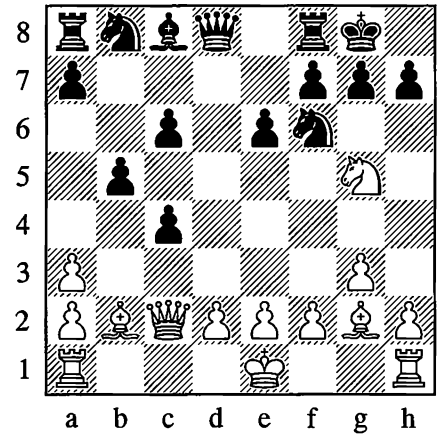
8.♕c2

As we already know, attacking c4 with the queen is justified in reply to a slow move such as ...c7-c6. In this specific case, the threat of ♘g5 is also a possibility.

The hurried 8.♘e5?! can be met by 8...b5 when regaining the pawn with 9.♘xc6 ♘xc6 10.♗xc6 would simply free Black's game. After 10...♖b8 followed by ...♗b7 Black has comfortable play.

8...b5 9.♘g5!

This early mating attempt is justified by the fact that White is almost completely mobilized, while Black's queenside is still undeveloped.



9...♖e8

This is the only move that keeps Black in the game.

Apart from being extremely ugly, 9...g6? immediately loses material to 10.♕c3+–.

9...♘bd7? also leads to disastrous consequences after 10.♗xc6 followed by ♗xd7, removing the reserve knight before playing ♗xf6.

10.0–0!

White connects rooks and, as we shall see later, makes an attack along the f-file possible. After the hurried 10.♗xf6? ♕xf6 11.♕xh7† ♔f8, White's pieces would be hanging. Now that the a1-rook has been defended, ♗xf6 becomes a real threat.

10...e5

Reducing the influence of the b2-bishop is Black's best chance of getting a decent game.

10...h6?!

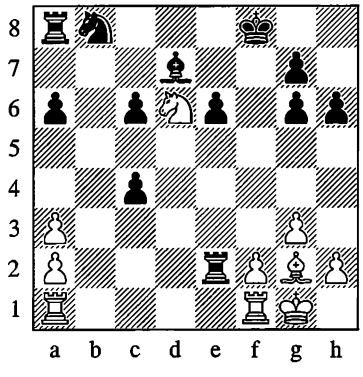
This leads to an unpleasant ending.

11.♗xf6 ♕xf6 12.♕h7† ♔f8 13.♘e4 ♕g6 14.♕xg6 fxg6 15.♘d6 ♖d8 16.♘xb5

White has eliminated an important pawn from Black's chain. Even though Black will soon capture on d2, his position remains strategically damaged.

16...a6 17.♘c3 ♖xd2 18.♘e4 ♖xe2 19.♘d6 ♗d7

So far, we have followed the game Smyslov – Kholmov, Soviet Championship 1961.



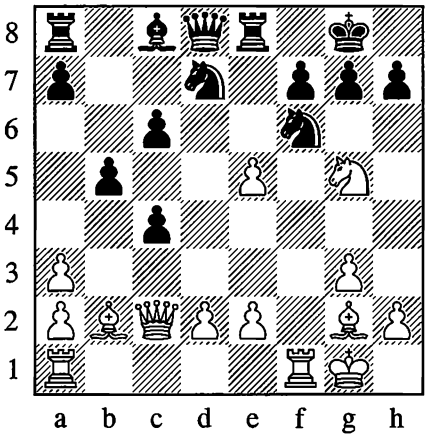
20.♖fc1!N±

This is the safest way to consolidate the advantage. Before playing ♘xc4, White prevents the possibility of ...♖c2 attacking the knight. Black will have great difficulty completing his development.

11.f4

Aiming to re-open the long dark diagonal and also to include the rook in the attack.

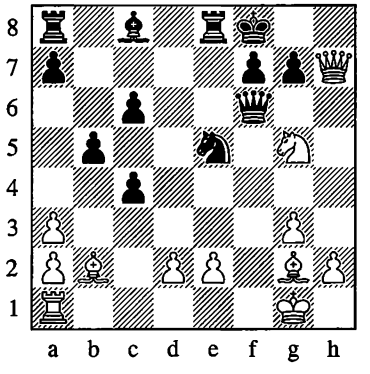
11...♘bd7 12.fxe5



12...♖xe5!N

For the sake of keeping the f6-knight defended by its colleague, Black should be ready to sacrifice an exchange, as recapturing with the knight leads to trouble:

12...♘xe5 13.♖xf6 ♕xf6 14.♕xh7† ♔f8



In Nikcevic – Marciano, Bastia 1998, White missed the opportunity to carry out a combination:

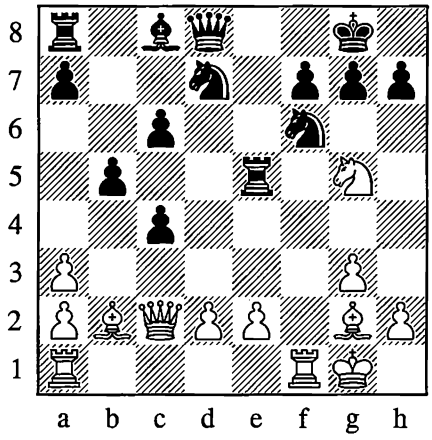
15.♘xf7!N

This leads to a powerful attack, for instance:

15...♗f5 16.♘xe5 ♗xh7 17.♘d7† ♔f7 18.♘xf6 gxf6 19.♗xc6 ♖ac8 20.♗xe8† ♖xe8

21.♔f2±

White has two extra pawns and should win despite the presence of opposite-coloured bishops.



13.♗xe5

White has nothing better than accepting the sacrifice, since 13.♖xf6 is adequately met by 13...♖xg5, when Black is out of danger.

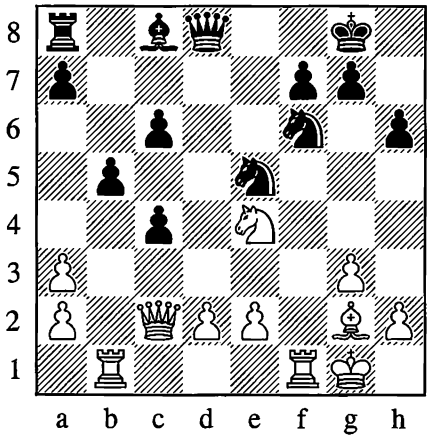
13...♘xe5

In order to prove an advantage, White has to re-orientate his play from a kingside attack to pressure against the enemy queenside.

14.♖ab1

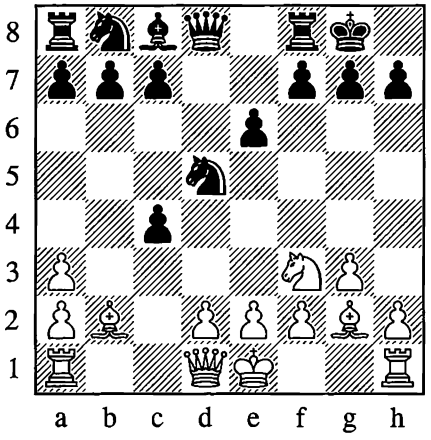
After removing the rook from a1, there is a threat of ♖xf6!.

14...h6 15.♘e4±



Black has a pawn for the exchange and has avoided immediate disaster. However, his compensation is not entirely adequate, partly because he cannot create any passed pawns.

B) 7...♘d5



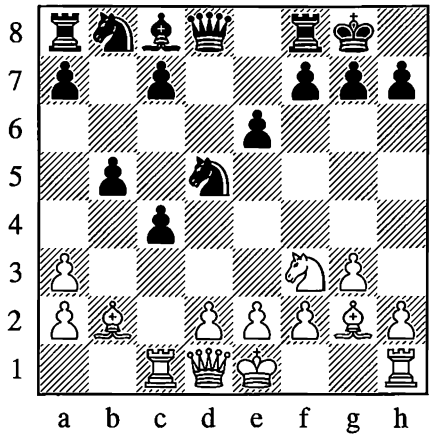
Black blocks the long diagonal in order to prepare ...b7-b5.

8.♖c1!N

This is the most effective way to attack the c4-pawn. The concrete justification can be seen in the following line: 8.♕c2 b5 9.0–0 ♗b7 10.d3 cxd3 11.♕xd3 White has simply lost a tempo. In our main line, his queen's rook would be on c1 already. In Pachman – Polugaevsky, Manila (izt) 1976, White had adequate compensation for the pawn, but I believe that White is entitled to hope for more than this.

8...b5

Black cannot afford to return the pawn. After 8...♘b6?! 9.♘e5± or 8...c3?! 9.♗xc3 ♘xc3 10.♖xc3± White has a stable advantage with virtually no risk. In this last line, 9.dxc3 followed by c3-c4 is an interesting alternative. As compensation for the damaged structure, White can create strong pressure against the enemy kingside with the help of the b2-bishop.



9.d3!

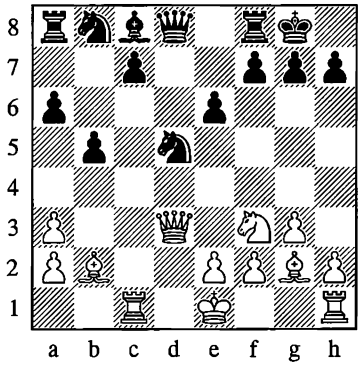
The standard continuation, opening lines for the white pieces. As we will see in the next comment, it is best to carry out this pawn break before castling (this is another difference compared to Pachman's play).

9...cxd3 10.♕xd3 ♘d7

Black defends the b5-pawn indirectly (11.♕xb5 would lose the b2-bishop to 11...♖b8), which is better than the obvious alternative:

10...a6?

This slow clumsy move is just asking for trouble.



11.h4!!

This is one of my favourite moves in the whole book. The threat of ♘g5, which would cause a chronic weakening of the enemy kingside, is tough to prevent, mainly because of the presence of the white king's rook on its initial square.

11...f6

11...h6 leads to a crushing attack after 12.♘g5 hxg5 13.hxg5 followed by ♕h7†.

Or if 11...f5 then 12.♕d4 ♕f6 13.0–0!± and Black's structure is full of weaknesses.

12.♘g5!

By sacrificing his knight, White activates both his bishops and his h1-rook.

12...fxg5 13.hxg5 ♕xg5

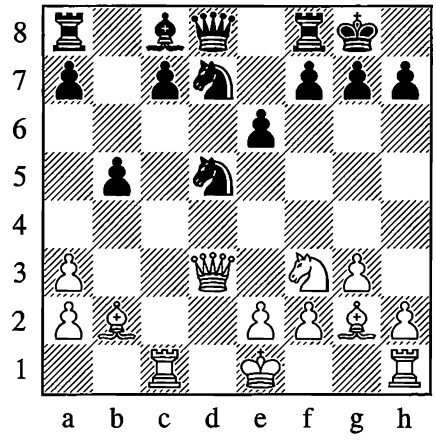
13...♖f5 is also insufficient because of 14.e4 ♖xg5 15.f4 ♖g6 16.exd5+– when Black's lack of development is disastrous.

14.♕xh7† ♔f7 15.♗xd5 exd5 16.♖xc7†

At this point the extra tempo with ♖c1 is essential. The following forcing line demonstrates Black's lack of coordination, which prevents him from obtaining adequate material compensation for the queen.

16...♘d7 17.♖h5 ♕g4 18.♗xg7 ♕xg7 19.♖f5† ♔e8 20.♕xg7 ♖xf5 21.♕g6† ♖f7 22.♕c6+–

Winning the c8-bishop.



11.♘d4!

The knight approaches the numerous queenside weaknesses. Instead the plan based on 11.h4 does not work out so well here: 11...♖b8! The only move, removing the

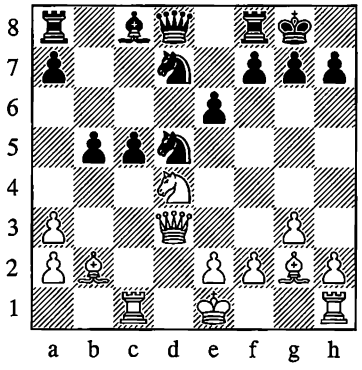
rook from the long diagonal. 12.♘g5 ♘5f6 Black has defended against the immediate threats. White certainly has compensation for the pawn in view of his active pieces, but it is not easy to find a way to increase the pressure.

11...♗b7!?

Black is willing to return the pawn for the sake of active development.

11...a6? is simply bad because of 12.♘xe6!±.

Black is not well enough developed to start fighting for the initiative:
11...c5



12.♘xe6!

It appears that Black's light squares are not secure enough with the bishop still on c8.

12...♕a5†

It is best to start this queenside counterattack while the d5-knight is still alive. The reasons will become clear later.

13.♗c3 ♕xa3

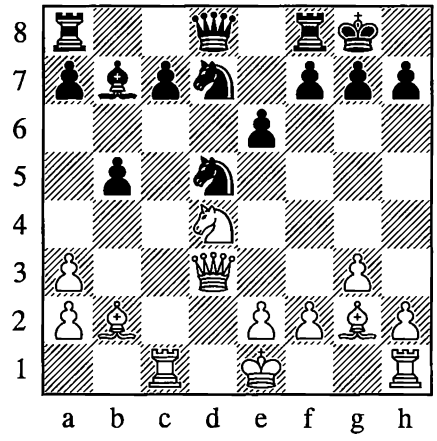
13...♘xc3 14.♕xc3± wins the exchange without any compensation.

14.0–0

White abandons his a2-pawn because 14.♖c2 ♘b4 would offer Black some counterplay. This resource would not have been available had Black used the move order starting with 12...fxe6.

14...fxe6 15.♗xd5 exd5 16.♕xd5† ♔h8 17.♕xa8 b4 18.♗e5 ♕xa2 19.♗d6±

Black's pawns look threatening, but he is not fully coordinated and his king's position is weak. The significance of this latter detail is increased by the presence of opposite-coloured bishops.



12.0–0!

Ignoring the undefended pawn and following the same policy of rapid development. 12.♘xb5 ♖b8 would leave the white minor pieces hanging.

12...a6

Defending the pawn indirectly with 12...♖b8 would lead to similar play as in the main line after 13.♘c6 ♗xc6 14.♖xc6.

13.♘b3

By transferring the knight to a5, White wins some time to develop his initiative.

13...♖c8

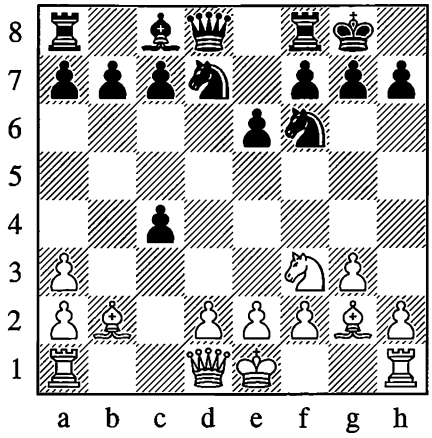
Hoping to put his queenside pawns into motion with ...c7-c5.

14.a4 bxa4 15.♘a5 ♗a8 16.♘c6 ♗xc6 17.♖xc6 ♖b8 18.♗a1±

White will soon get one of the pawns back and will retain overwhelming compensation

for the other one. His bishops dominate the whole board, while the black knights are rather unstable.

C) 7...♘bd7



The most constructive move. Black continues developing and clears the b8-square for his rook, which in some cases creates a possible defence of the c-pawn after the predictable ...b7-b5.

8.♖c1!N

We are becoming familiar with this move. Black has not made any queenside commitments, which is the abstract reason why we should refrain from:

8.♕c2

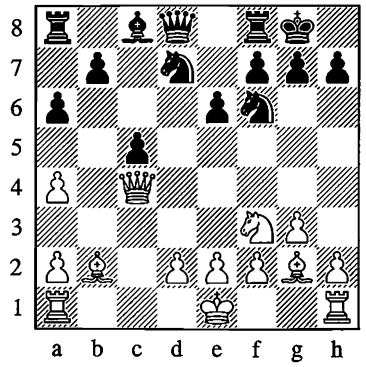
The following game will give us some more concrete reasons:

8...c5

Black starts gaining space on the queenside. He will also be helped by the exposed position of the white queen.

8...b5?! does not work out well, because after 9.♘d4 ♘d5 10.♘xb5 the b2-bishop is defended, which makes 10...♖b8 inoffensive. Compare this with the comment to the next main line move.

9.a4 a6 10.♕xc4



10...b5!

Speeding up his development and allowing the later neutralization of the g2-bishop with ...♗b7.

11.axb5 axb5 12.♕c2

12.♕xb5? loses material to 12...♖b8 13.♗xf6 ♕xf6.

12...♗b7 13.0–0 ♖a4

Black has successfully completed his development and his queenside space advantage yields him the better chances, Stein – Keres, Tallinn 1969.

8...b5

This move is sound because 9.♘d4 ♘d5 10.♘xb5 ♖b8 leaves White's pieces hanging. While after the hasty 9.d3 Black could react with 9...♗a6.

If Black refrains from defending his extra pawn, White gets an improved version of the Stein – Keres game above:

8...c5 9.♘e5

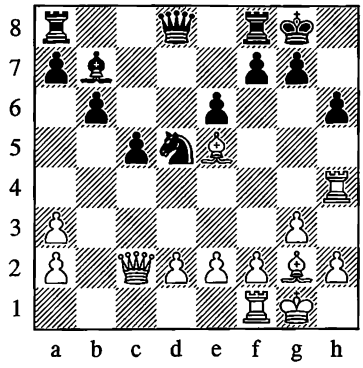
White opens the long diagonal to cause Black some problems with his queenside development.

9.♖xc4 b5 10.♖h4 also deserves attention, planning ♕c2 possibly followed by g4-g5.

9...♘xe5 10.♗xe5 ♘d5

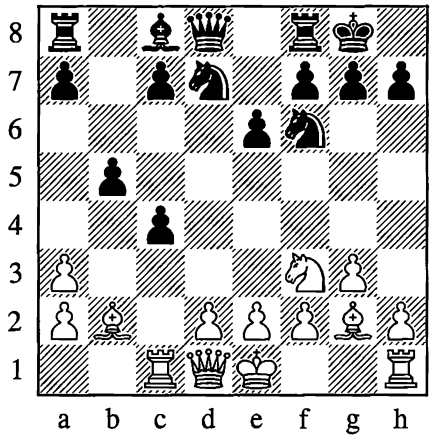
Black covers the long diagonal, but weakens his kingside's defences.

11.♖xc4 b6 12.♕c2 ♗b7 13.♖h4 h6 14.0–0±



White has an active position and the black kingside is vulnerable.

After the text move, White needs to undermine the enemy pawn chain. It is best to do so in accordance with Nimzowitsch's recommendations: first at its base and only later at its head.



9.a4!

By forcing the next move, White eliminates the possibility of ...♗a6. Opening the a3-f8 diagonal is also important, as in some cases White can make the f8-rook feel uncomfortable.

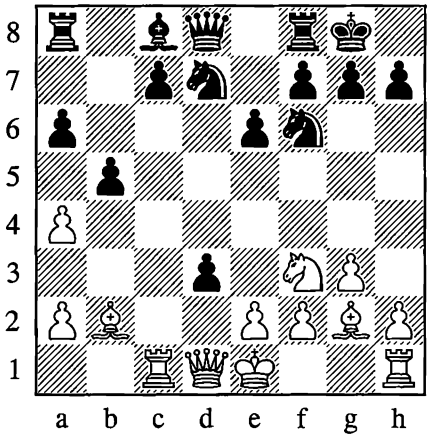
9...a6 10.d3!

Everything is ready for this new break. After the position opens, most of White's pieces will become very active.

10...cxd3

Returning the pawn does not offer Black the desired counterplay:

10...♗b7 11.dxc4 bxc4 (11...b4 12.c5 prevents Black from consolidating, while the b2-bishop remains very strong) 12.♖xc4 ♖b8 13.♕c2 ♗d5 14.♖h4 In the absence of Black's dark-squared bishop, the rook is well placed on this square. It helps to create threats against the black kingside and keeps the fourth rank under control. White will castle soon and place the other rook on c1 or d1, thus exerting combined pressure on several sectors of the board. When all White's pieces are optimally placed, g4-g5 may become a serious threat.



11.♘d4

Once the position has been opened, White should not delay this active move. Otherwise, Black would neutralize the pressure along the h1-a8 diagonal with ...♗b7.

11...♘d5

The greedy option is:

11...dxe2

This allows the activation of the white queen, offering White additional tactical ideas:

12.♕xe2 ♘d5 13.♘xe6 fxe6 14.♕xe6† ♔h8 15.♕xd5

Black is severely underdeveloped and his only chance of survival is connected with the presence of the white king in the centre.

15...♕e7†

15...♖e8† is parried by the self-pinning 16.♗e4!!. With almost all his pieces on the back rank, Black cannot take advantage of the pin in any way.

16.♕e4 ♕xe4† 17.♗xe4 ♖e8 18.f3 ♗b7 19.0–0 ♗xe4 20.fxe4

Black has improved his position a lot, but White has kept a strong initiative. Both his rooks are ready to invade via the seventh rank.

20...c5 21.♖f7 ♘e5 22.♖b7 c4 23.♗c3±

Despite Black's apparent activity, his position is unstable. The threat of ♖f1-f5 is hard to meet.

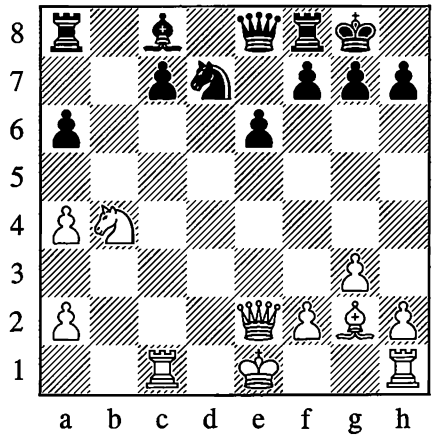
A premature display of activity with 11...e5 loses an exchange to 12.♘c6 ♕e8 13.♗a3±.

12.♘c6 ♕e8 13.♗a3

Revealing one of the useful aspects of 9.a4.

13...dxe2 14.♕xe2 b4 15.♗xb4 ♘xb4 16.♘xb4

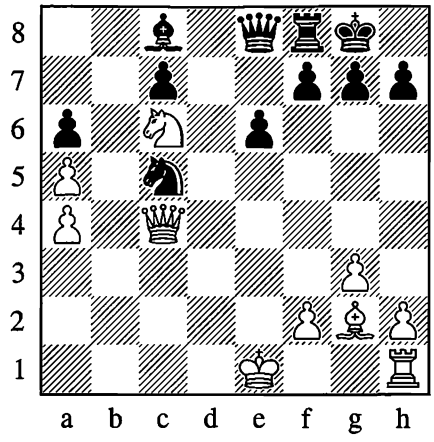
Black has removed the danger to his king's rook, but now the other rook has problems finding a safe square.



16...♖b8 17.♘c6 ♖b6 18.a5 ♖b5 19.a4

An instructive case of perfect coordination between the doubled pawns and the rest of White's pieces.

19...♖c5 20.♖xc5 ♘xc5 21.♕c4

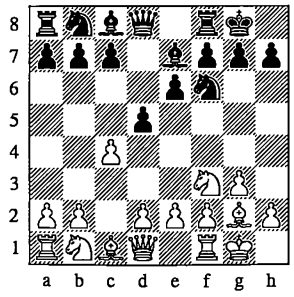


Black has also managed to solve the problems with his queen's rook, but he remains poorly developed. His only advanced piece, the knight, faces similar problems to the ones the rooks had in the previous phase. After the safest move, 21...♘d7, Black would almost be paralysed despite his extra pawn. White would castle, followed by ♖b1, when Black would hardly be able to make a move.

Conclusion

The seemingly flexible 6...0-0 fails to keep Black out of trouble. The king is exposed in some lines, while otherwise White gains an extra tempo for development.

Chapter 19



QGD Set-up

6...d4 and 6...a5

Variation Index

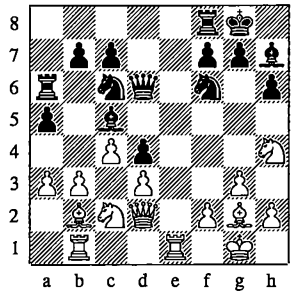
1.c4 e6 2.g3 d5 3.♗g2 ♘f6 4.♘f3 ♗e7

5.0–0 0–0 6.b3

A) 6...d4 **270**

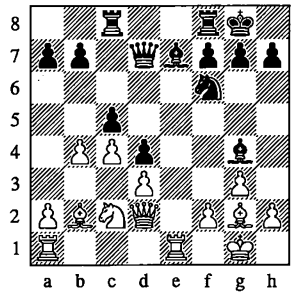
B) 6...a5 **273**

A) note to 11...♘b4



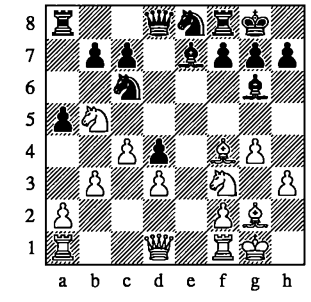
18.♗xc6!

A) after 17...♖ac8



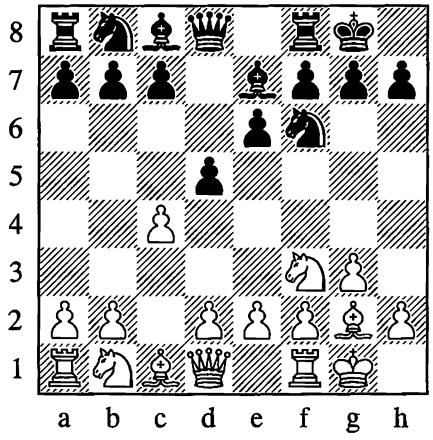
18.♖xe7!N

B) after 14...♘e8



15.♖e1!N±

1.c4 e6 2.g3 d5 3.♗g2 ♘f6 4.♘f3 ♗e7 5.0–0 0–0



Black has developed his kingside in the fastest possible way, maintaining the tension in the centre. Now White needs to find a method of developing his queenside, while always taking into account the possibility of ...dxc4.

A good practical decision is 6.d4, transposing to a Catalan, after having side-stepped the mass of variations with 4...dxc4 and also the lines with ...♗b4†.

There is another reasonable alternative, which is much better suited to the spirit of this book:

6.b3

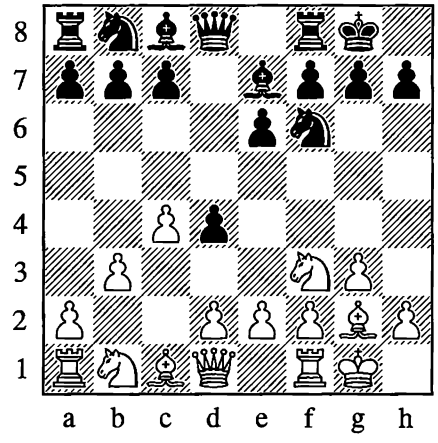
Finally defending the c4-pawn and preparing to develop in hypermodern style. The occupation of the centre is delayed and the second bishop will also be fianchettoed.

The next phase of the game tends to flow in slow-manoeuvring mode, but abrupt changes of rhythm are always possible at the slightest inaccuracy from Black. This is unsurprising, because the combined action of the white bishops can be very powerful, while White's indirect control over the centre (with the help of the b3-pawn and, depending on the variation, of the d3 and/or e3-pawns) is quite strong.

Most of the lines are highly transpositional, which means that my way of organizing the material is not the only way. Given that he is not under immediate pressure yet, Black has a wide range of set-ups at his disposal.

The main lines will be examined in Chapters 20 to 25, but here we will deal with some of the minor lines. We have **A) 6...d4** and **B) 6...a5**.

A) 6...d4



Black is heading for a reversed Modern Benoni or Schmidt Benoni where he is two tempos down (one of them will be caused by the e-pawn, which will have to advance again in order to defend the d-pawn). Generally speaking, moving for the second time with the same pawn is rather premature, because Black's whole queenside is undeveloped.

7.♗b2 ♘c6

The other option is:

7...c5

But this would fail to consolidate the central

pawn because of a thematic blow in the spirit of the Benko Gambit:

8.b4

Taking advantage of the inadequately defended d4-pawn.

White can also transpose to Chapter 23 by playing in the spirit of the Modern Benoni: 8.e3 ♘c6 9.exd4 cxd4 10.♖e1

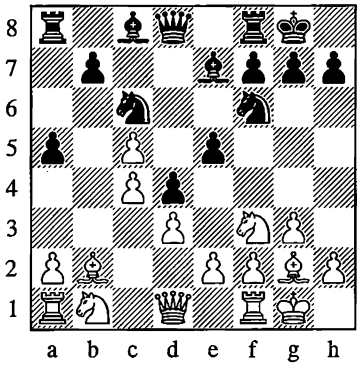
8...a5

Forcing White to make a decision.

8...♘fd7 9.bxc5 e5 10.e3± left Black's centre vulnerable in Euwe – Spanjaard, Amsterdam 1950.

9.bxc5 ♘c6 10.d3 e5

Black has managed to consolidate his centre and neutralize White's dark-squared bishop, at least temporarily. The main defect of Black's position remains his weaknesses along the b-file. It is instructive to follow the way White will manoeuvre to activate his minor pieces despite his relative lack of space.



11.♘bd2 ♗xc5 12.♕a4 ♗d7 13.♖fb1 ♕e7 14.♘g5 ♗b4 15.♕d1 h6 16.♘ge4 ♘xe4 17.♗xe4

The exchange of one pair of knights offers White better possibilities for manoeuvring. Besides, the d5-square is still undefended.

17...a4

Aiming to restrict the d2-knight.

18.a3 ♗c5 19.♗c1 ♖a7 20.♗d5 ♘a5 21.♖a2

Black has no time to launch his kingside attack, because he has to take care of his numerous queenside weaknesses.

21...♔h7 22.♘e4 b6 23.♗d2 ♘b3 24.♗b4 f5 25.♗xc5 bxc5 26.♘d2 ♘xd2 27.♖xd2

A new series of exchanges has led to the opening of the b-file, which will help White to invade.

27...e4 28.♖db2 exd3 29.exd3 f4 30.♖b7 ♖xb7 31.♖xb7±

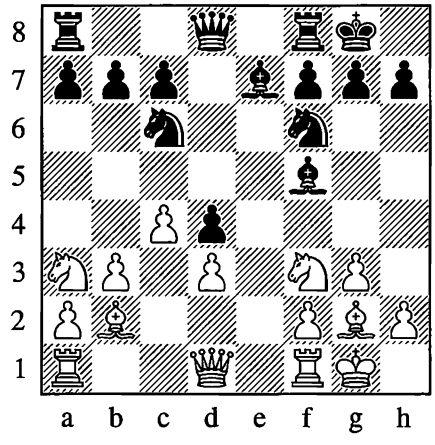
White's superior activity renders Black's attack inoffensive, Miles – Geller, Wijk aan Zee 1977.

8.e3 e5

Black needs to hold onto his recently conquered territory. Instead 8...dxe3 9.fxe3 would leave White with a strong mass of central pawns and the better development.

9.exd4 exd4 10.d3 ♗f5 11.♘a3!

The knight will be transferred to c2, in order to support b3-b4 and also to put additional pressure on the d4-pawn.



11...♘b4

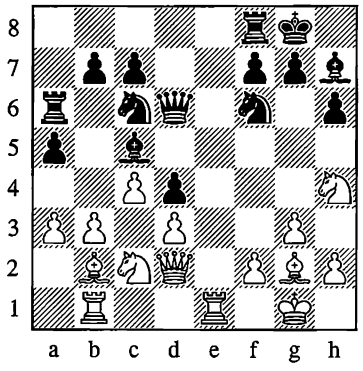
Wisely deciding to over-protect the d4-pawn with ...c7-c5, as defending it only with pieces would place Black in a passive position:

11...♗c5 12.♘c2 a5 13.a3 ♕d7 14.♕d2 ♕d6

The loss of a tempo does not dramatically change the character of the position, because

Black is tied to the defence of the d4-pawn anyway.

15.♖ab1 ♖a6 16.♖fe1 h6 17.♘h4 ♗h7



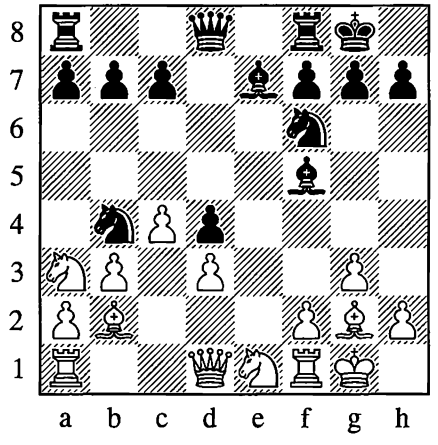
18.♗xc6!

A typical method of completely isolating the c5-bishop.

18...bxc6 19.b4 axb4 20.axb4 ♗a7 21.c5+–

White will win the d4-pawn, while the a7-bishop is a mere spectator, Nyback – Hintikka, Vammala 2002.

12.♘e1



12...♗c8

A sad necessity. The other ways of defending the b7-pawn would endanger its comrade in the centre.

12...♖b8 allows the double attack 13.♘b5 when 13...♗c5 does not work because of 14.a3±.

12...c6 makes a later ...c5 impossible, because the b7-pawn would be hanging. 13.♘ac2 ♗c5 14.a3 ♘xc2 15.♘xc2± Followed by b3-b4.

13.♘ac2 ♘xc2 14.♘xc2 c5 15.b4!

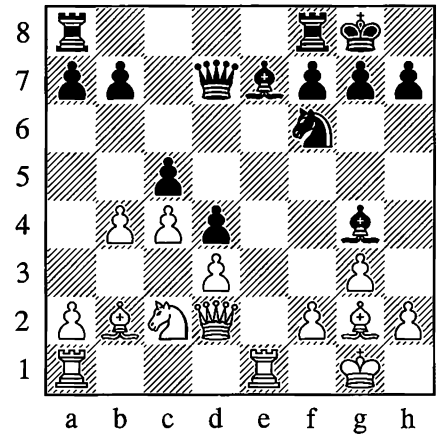
White must undermine Black's centre before the consolidating ...b7-b6 becomes possible.

15...♗g4

15...cxb4 16.♘xd4 offers White a mobile centre and strong pressure against both enemy wings.

16.♕d2 ♕d7 17.♖fe1

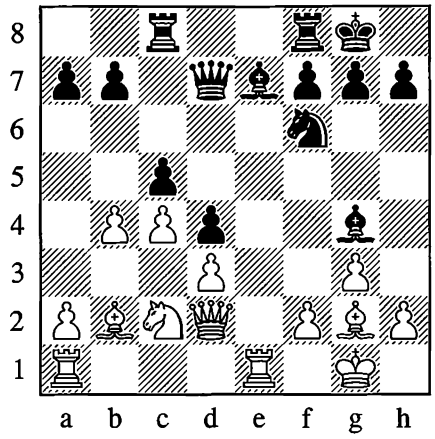
Or 17.♗a3±, with similar play as after 17.♖fe1 ♖fe8 below, is also worth considering.



17...♖ac8

Over-defending c5 and threatening ...b7-b6. If instead 17...♖fe8 then White would activate his play with 18.♗a3 cxb4 19.♗xb4±. The d4-pawn is weak and the pressure along the b-file may become annoying.

So far, we have been following the game McNab – Quaresma, corr. 1994, but now White can improve:



18.♖xe7!N

By sacrificing the exchange, White inflicts serious strategic damage.

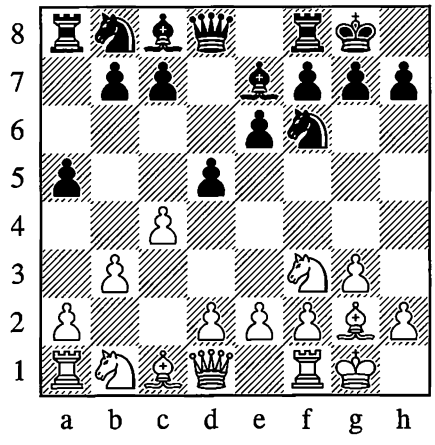
18...♕xe7 19.♖e1 ♕d7 20.bxc5 ♖xc5

Otherwise, White would have two central pawns for the exchange.

21.♗xd4 ♖cc8 22.♗xf6 gxf6 23.♘e3 ♗e6 24.♘d5 ♗xd5 25.♗xd5±

White has a dominating position and Black's king is vulnerable.

B) 6...a5



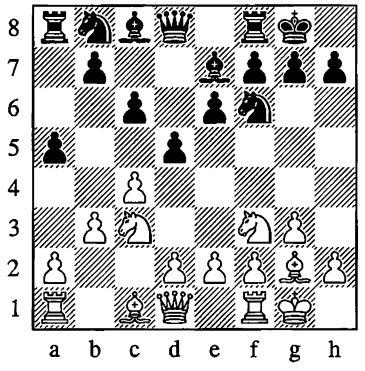
A natural move. If Black is allowed to play ...a5-a4, then White's queenside would become vulnerable.

7.♘c3!

It is always best to parry the enemy's threats with developing moves. It is worth mentioning that 6.♘c3 would have been bad because of either 6...d4 or ...dxc4, but on the seventh move the situation is different. The c4-pawn is defended and the b5-square has been slightly weakened.

7...d4

Against 7...c6 White has a choice:



One natural reaction is 8.d4 transposing to some sort of Catalan, where the point of ...a7-a5 is not entirely clear: 8...♘bd7 9.♗b2 b6 10.♘d2 ♗b7 11.e4±

I will also mention a game in which White developed in the spirit of the lines examined in Chapters 21, 22, 24 and 25:

8.e3 b6 9.♗b2 ♗b7

Here, too, Black's queenside structure fails to impress, if compared with any of the aforementioned chapters.

10.d3 ♘bd7 11.♖c1 ♖e8 12.♕e2 ♗c5

Finally, Black loses his patience and provokes White into transposing to a Catalan structure. 12...e5 is not recommended because of 13.cxd5 cxd5 14.♘b5±, threatening both ♘xe5 and ♘c7.

13.d4 ♗f8 14.♖fd1 h6 15.♘d2 ♕b8 16.e4±

With perfect development and a space advantage for White in Miles – Kelly, Britain (ch) 1998.

8.♘b5 ♘c6

8...c5 would transform b5 into a permanent weakness. White would get a comfortable version of the reversed Benoni with: 9.e3 ♘c6 10.exd4 cxd4 11.♖e1±

9.d3 e5 10.e3

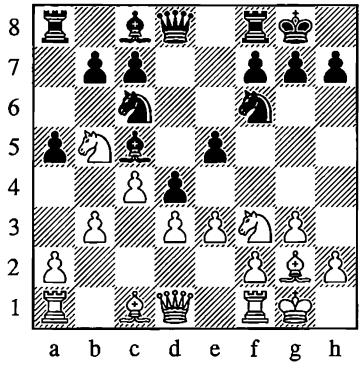
White has to start attacking the d4-pawn as soon as possible.

10...♗g4

An alternative is:

10...♗c5

We have reached a curious situation.



Let's compare this position with the one that arises if White plays b2-b3 at an earlier stage: 1.c4 e6 2.♘f3 d5 3.b3 ♘f6 4.g3 a5 5.♘c3 d4 6.♘b5 ♘c6 7.♗g2 e5 8.0–0 ♗c5 9.e3 0–0 10.d3 This is the same position except it is Black to move, so in our line White is a tempo up! This is one of the arguments in favour of leaving the c4-pawn en prise for several moves.

11.exd4 ♘xd4

It is useful to clear the way for ...c7-c6, taking advantage of the fact that 12.♘xe5 loses material to 12...♘xb5 13.cxb5 ♗d4.

12.♘bxd4 exd4 13.a3 c6 14.♕d2!

The start of a well-planned regrouping with the aim of carrying out b3-b4.

14...♖e8

Or 14...♕d6 15.♕b2 ♗f5 16.♗f4 ♕d7 17.b4± with similar effect.

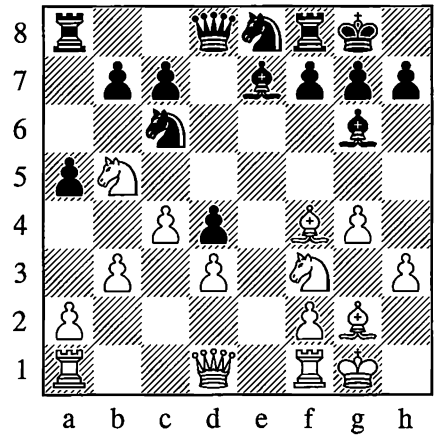
15.♖b1 ♗f5 16.b4±

White's queenside pawns are more mobile than Black's and the d4-pawn is weaker than the d3-pawn.

Black can spoil White's central structure with 10...dxe3 11.fxe3 e4 12.dxe4 ♘xe4. However, his knight is not stable in the centre and the connection between the queens leaves the c7-pawn vulnerable. White should just keep developing: 13.♗b2±

11.h3 ♗h5 12.g4 ♗g6 13.exd4 exd4 14.♗f4 ♘e8

We have reached a position from the game Korchnoi – Gelfand, Tilburg (rapid) 1992.



15.♖e1!N±

A strong developing move, pinning the e7-bishop in view of the possibility of ♖xe8, winning a pawn. Next, White could play a2-a3, followed by ♖a2-e2. Or perhaps ♘e5, intending to recapture with the bishop, attacking d4.

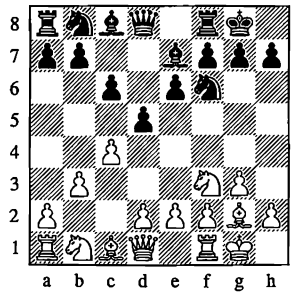
Conclusion

The minor lines examined in this chapter, which display Black's ambitions in the centre at an early stage, offer White comfortable play.

Chapter 20

QGD Set-up

6...c6



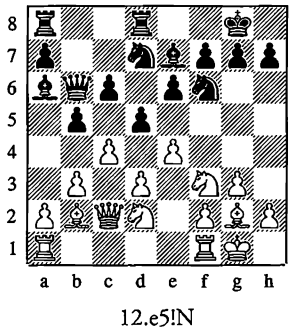
Variation Index

1.c4 e6 2.g3 d5 3.♗g2 ♘f6 4.♘f3 ♗e7 5.0–0 0–0 6.b3 c6

7.♗b2

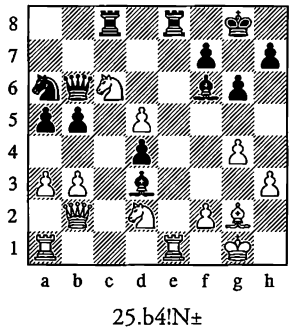
A) 7...b5 8.♕c2 276
A1) 8...bxc4 277
A2) 8...♗a6 279
A3) 8...♘bd7 280
A4) 8...a5 282
B) 7...b6 8.d3 ♗b7 9.♘bd2 ♘bd7 10.♕c2 284
B1) 10...♕c7 284
B2) 10...♖c8 285
B3) 10...c5 11.e4! 288
B31) 11...d4 288
B32) 11...dxe4 290

A4) after 11...♖fd8



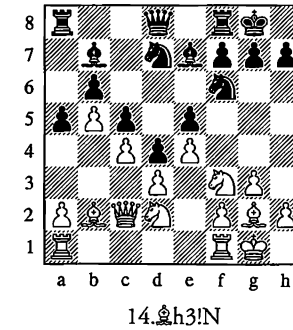
12.e5!N

A4) after 24...♖e8



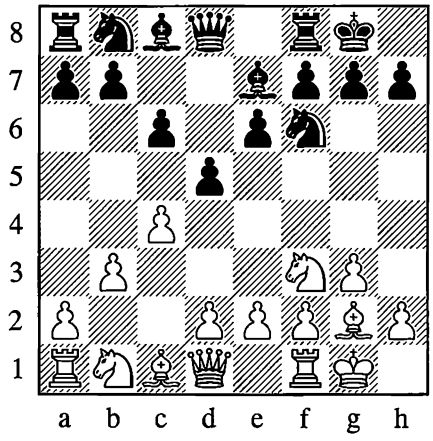
25.b4!N±

B31) note to 12.♖ae1



14.♗h3!N

1.c4 e6 2.g3 d5 3.♗g2 ♘f6 4.♘f3 ♗e7 5.0–0 0–0 6.b3 c6

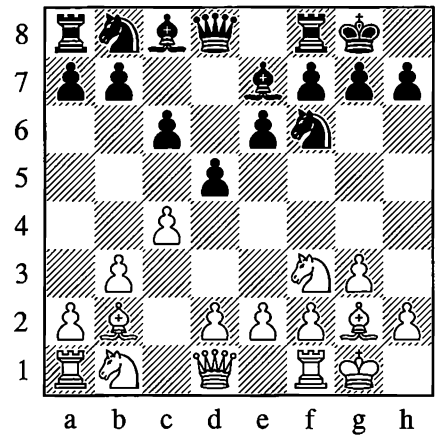


A solid but somewhat passive set-up. Against the Catalan, Black frequently plays like this, but mainly after the insertion of the moves ...♗b4†, ♗d2 ...♗e7, when White can no longer develop his queen's bishop in the most harmonious way. Since our repertoire move order does not allow the early check on b4, we could safely transpose to the Catalan with 7.d4, or 7.♕c2 ♘bd7 8.d4, which leads to a pleasant position for White (see *Grandmaster Repertoire 1* by Boris Avrukh).

It is my duty, however, to examine lines that are characteristic of the English/Reti opening, in which White refrains from an early d2-d4. My own tournament experience, as well as my analytical work with Vali Stoica, suggests that White also has chances to retain an edge with this method.

It should be mentioned that, given the flexibility of both sides' play, there are a practically unlimited number of move orders available to reach the positions examined below. It is nearly impossible to cover every plausible line. I have preferred to focus on presenting the main ideas, based on a limited number of illustrative games.

7.♗b2



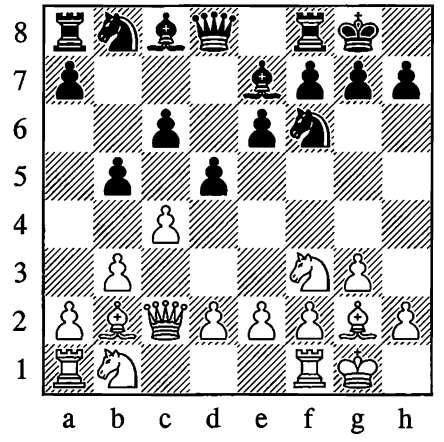
Black has a choice between two main plans: **A) 7...b5** and **B) 7...b6**.

A) 7...b5

The main drawback of this active move is that activating the c8-bishop along the h1-a8 diagonal with ...c6-c5 will be difficult to carry out.

8.♕c2

Adding to the defence of the c4-square.

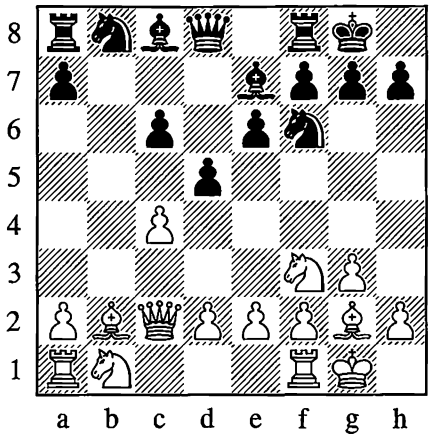


Now Black can choose between **A1) 8...bxc4**, **A2) 8...♗a6**, **A3) 8...♘bd7** and **A4) 8...a5**.

A1) 8...bxc4

By releasing the tension, Black hopes to gain counterplay along the b-file and the f1-a6 diagonal.

9.bxc4

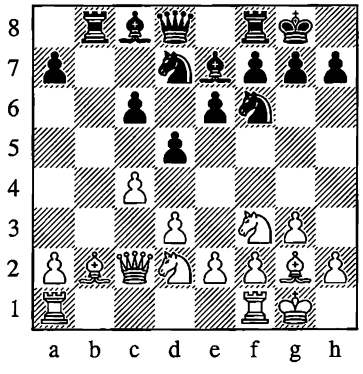


9...♗a6

The most active, but also the most committal move. White will consolidate c4 effortlessly, leaving the bishop somewhat misplaced. On the other hand, delaying ...♗a6 could cause Black problems when fighting for the b-file, since his rooks would not be connected.

The main alternative is:

9...♘bd7 10.d3 ♖b8 11.♘bd2



11...♕a5

11...♘c5 leaves the e5-square undefended. 12.♖ab1 ♗a6 13.♗e5 ♖xb1 14.♖xb1± White controls the only open file and Black's minor pieces are unstable in view of the threat of d3-d4 followed by ♕a4, Dossett – Benson, Port Erin 1998.

12.♗c3!N

It is essential to challenge the queen at once.

12.♘d4 ♗b7 13.♘4b3 ♕a4 14.e4 dxe4 15.dxe4 e5 was about equal in Przewoznik – Ilczuk, Lubniewice 1994.

12...♕a3

From this square, the queen has less communication with the rest of the board.

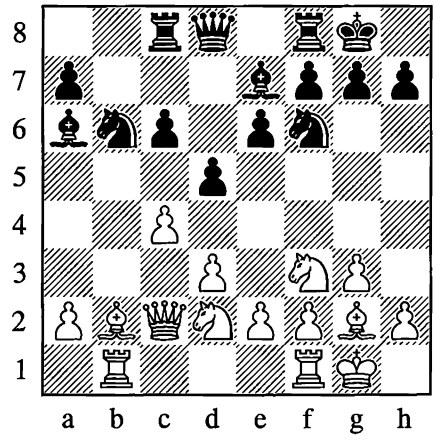
13.♖ab1 ♖b6 14.cxd5 cxd5 15.♗d4

White is better developed and has the initiative along the open queenside files.

10.d3 ♘bd7

Black is not well enough developed to play the strategically desirable 10...dxc4 11.dxc4 ♘bd7, as 12.♘d4± wins a pawn.

11.♘bd2 ♖c8 12.♖ab1 ♘b6



13.♖fd1!

An important prophylactic move that discourages Black's main threat, which is to free his position with ...dxc4.

13...c5

Black decides to gain some space, but now his centre becomes rather vulnerable. Instead 13...dxc4?! 14.dxc4 ♘fd7 15.a4± offers White a strong initiative.

14.e3!

Keeping the enemy centre immobile by preventing ...d5-d4.

14...♘fd7 15.♕c3

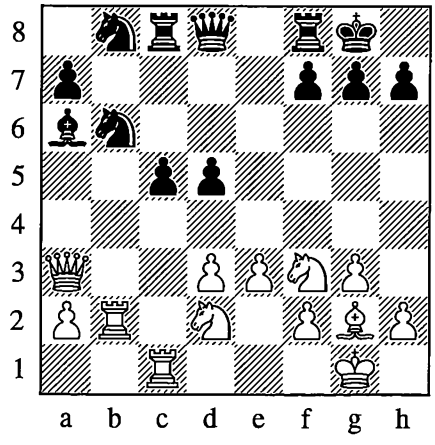
The queen is heading for a3, which became available after ...c6-c5.

15...♗f6 16.♕a3 ♗xb2 17.♖xb2 ♘b8

If 17...♗b7 then White does not need to be greedy with 18.♕xa7, which would offer Black counterplay after 18...♗c6. Instead, he should prefer 18.cxd5 exd5 19.d4 c4 20.♘b1± followed by ♘c3, with similar play as in the game.

18.cxd5 exd5 19.♖c1

With his knight passive on b8, Black does not have enough strength to maintain the integrity of his hanging pawns.



19...♕f6

19...c4 is met with 20.dxc4 (rather than 20.d4?! which loses an exchange to 20...c3!) 20...dxc4 21.♘e4 planning a regrouping with ♘d4, ♘c3 and ♖cb1. The attempt to gain counterplay with 21...c3?! loses the excessively bold pawn after 22.♖b3 c2 23.♘d4±.

20.♖bc2 c4 21.d4

The most constructive move. White retains the more compact structure and plans to regroup with ♘b1-c3, blocking the c4-pawn and attacking the weak d5-pawn. Later, he will double rooks on the b-file, with pressure that will be hard to resist.

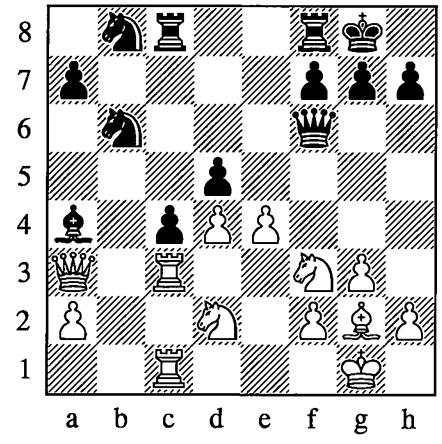
21...♗b5

This attempt to generate counterplay allows the immediate opening of the centre, based on the exposed position of the bishop.

22.e4!±

The main point is that 22...dxe4 loses an exchange to 23.♘xe4 ♕e6 24.♘d6+–.

22...♗a4 23.♖c3



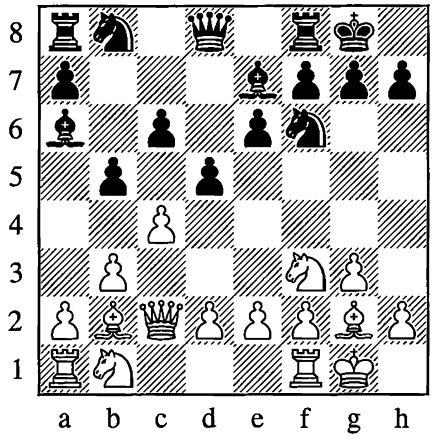
23...♖fe8

Once again, releasing the tension with 23...dxe4 loses material. 24.♘xe4 ♕h6 (Black cannot keep the c4-pawn defended with 24...♕e6 because of 25.♘c5) 25.♘d6 ♖cd8 26.♘xc4+– White is a pawn up and has the more active position.

24.exd5 ♖e2 25.♘xc4±

The rook's infiltration to the second rank does not offer Black sufficient compensation for the pawns, as the b8-knight is passive and the bishop is hanging. In Marin – Vukovic, Bucharest 1999, White won without difficulty.

A2) 8...♗a6



This way of developing the bishop is familiar to us and refraining from ...bxc4 makes some sense. After having examined line A1, we know that it is White who has the better chances of taking control of the open b-file.

9.d3 ♘bd7

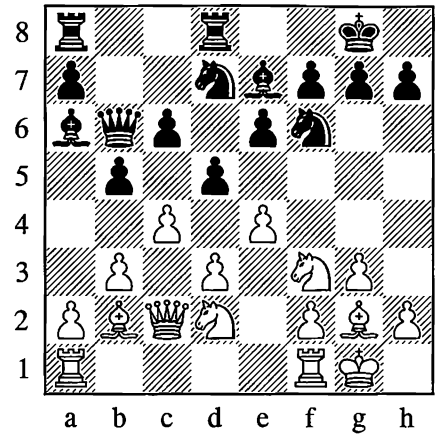
9...bxc4 does not necessarily transpose to line A1. White can deviate with 10.dxc4 ♘bd7 11.♘bd2± followed by e2-e4, ♖ad1 and ♖fe1. Opening the b1-h7 diagonal will allow White to create some kingside threats, while the a6-bishop is misplaced, as it prevents the strategically desirable advance of the a7-pawn. Below I will say more about this structure.

10.♘bd2 ♕b6

In line A1, Black could only dream of such a comfortable way of developing his queen, but we will soon see that everything is relative.

11.e4 ♖fd8

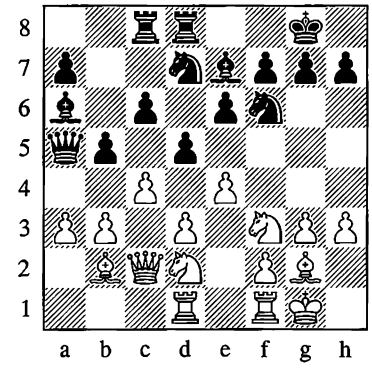
Black prepares to meet e4-e5 with ...♘e8, without disconnecting his rooks.



12.e5!N

Usually, I preach against such an early release of the tension, but in this case I have taken into account the particularities of the position. Black's queenside set-up is artificial, but before turning his attention towards that area, White needs to stabilize the centre.

Neutral play allows Black to obtain satisfactory play:
12.♖ad1 ♖ac8 13.h3 ♕a5 14.a3



14...bxc4?!

A strategic concession; Black probably underestimated White's answer.

Black should have continued the neutral

policy: 14...♕b6 15.♖fe1 h6 16.e5 ♘e8 White's position remains slightly more active, but Black has regrouped well and has no weaknesses.

15.dxc4!

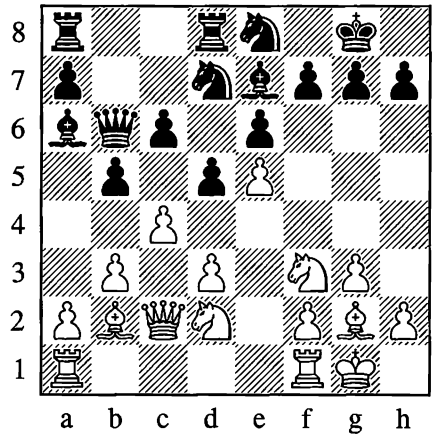
I mentioned the merits of this way of recapturing in the comments to Black's ninth move.

15...h6 16.♖fe1 ♗f8 17.b4 ♕c7 18.e5 ♘e8 19.c5 g6 20.♘d4 ♗g7 21.f4±

Black has been completely pushed back and can only wait for White's attack, McNab – A. Grant, Aberdeen 1997.

12...♘e8

The typical retreat. Instead 12...♘g4 13.h3 ♘h6 places the knight on an unfavourable route. A possible continuation would be 14.g4 ♖ac8 15.♖ae1 c5 16.♘h2 ♗b7 17.f4±. Another possibility is 14.d4, planning to win even more space with c4-c5.



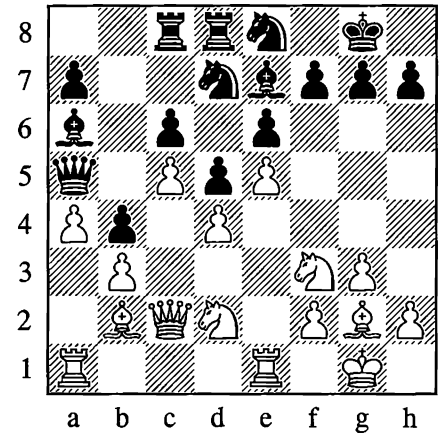
13.a4!

This is the reason why the rook is needed on a1. Confronted with the positional threat of axb5, Black has to release the tension in White's favour.

13...b4

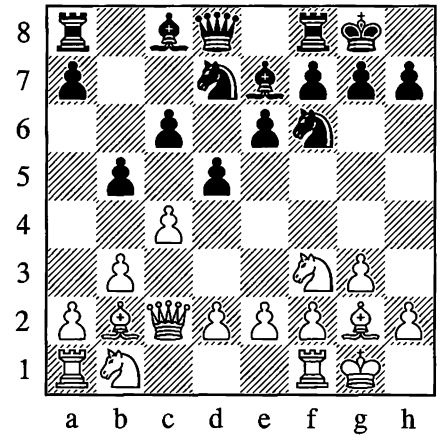
13...bxc4 14.bxc4 would offer White good prospects along the b-file.

14.d4 ♖ac8 15.c5 ♕a5 16.♖fe1±



White has an enormous space advantage and can prepare his kingside attack at no risk. The long plan consists of h2-h4, ♖ad1, ♗c1 and ♘h2. The seemingly active a6-bishop controls an empty diagonal and the best it can hope for is to be exchanged for one of White's knights. Even though the merits of giving up the bishop pair are questionable, White can avoid this if he wants, by using the f3- and g4-squares for his knight manoeuvres, rather than f1.

A3) 8...♘bd7



A flexible move, aiming for harmonious piece development.

9.d3

Apart from this typical move, White could consider 9.♘d4!?N, which leads to interesting play with unclear consequences. 9...♕b6 10.cxb5 cxb5 11.♕c6 b4 12.♕xa8 ♗b7 13.♕xf8† ♗xf8 White has a small material advantage, but Black enjoys more space and better development. The position remains balanced, with chances for both sides.

9...♗b7 10.♘bd2 a5

Unlike in the previous line, Black can place all his pawns on optimal squares.

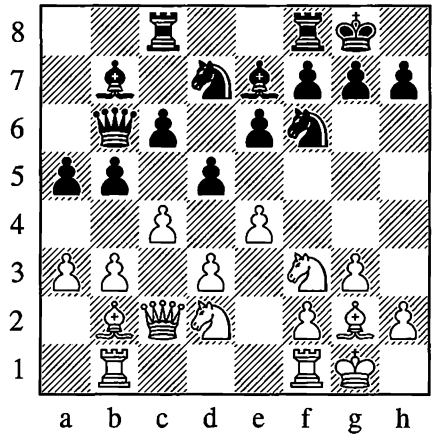
11.a3

Taking preventive measures against ...a5-a4, which can now be answered with b3-b4.

11...♕b6 12.♖ab1

Discouraging the opening of the b-file.

12...♖ac8 13.e4



13...♕c7

This looks like an unnecessary loss of time, but Black is starting to have micro-problems anyway. This is quite typical for most of the lines examined in this chapter: White has a series of far from obvious threats and Black has problems dealing with all of them at the same time.

13...♖fd8

This developing move runs into:

14.d4!

Taking advantage of the exposed position of the black queen.

14...a4

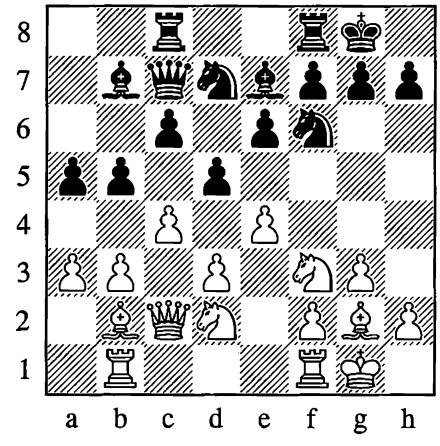
14...dxe4 is answered with 15.c5! ♕c7 16.♘xe4, reaching a typical Catalan structure that favours White. The b7-bishop is desperately weak and White has chances of building a crushing kingside attack after transferring his g2-bishop to the b1-h7 diagonal.

15.c5!

Here, too, this intermediate move prevents the activation of the b7-bishop.

15...axb3 16.♕xb3 ♕c7 17.e5 ♘e8 18.♖fe1±

White has a space advantage on both wings and can prepare the kingside attack at his own convenience. It will not be easy for Black to find good squares for his cramped minor pieces.



14.♖fe1 dxe4

Again, this looks like a concession, but Black had good reasons to fear e4-e5. For instance:

14...♖fd8 15.e5 ♘e8 16.♘f1 ♕b6 (This loses another tempo, but there is no other convenient way to activate the e8-knight, since 16...g6 would weaken the kingside too much:

17.♘e3 ♘g7 18.♘g4 With a dangerous attack.) 17.♘e3 ♘c7 18.d4± White has regrouped and is ready to gain space.

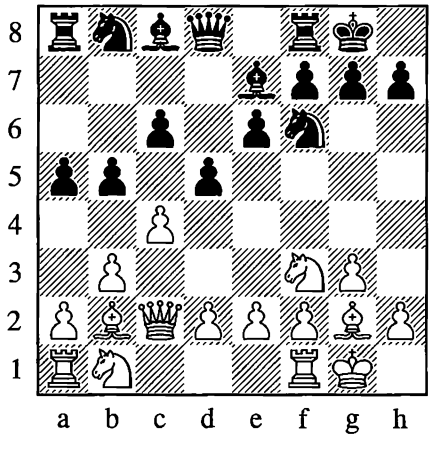
15.dxe4 ♖fd8

15...e5 defends the long diagonal, but weakens the f5-square. Besides, Black remains tied to the defence of the e5-pawn, which makes it difficult for him to fight for the only open file. 16.♘f1 ♖fd8 17.♘e3 ♗c5 18.♖bd1± Black can hardly display any form of activity, while White can increase his pressure with moves such as h2-h4, ♗h3, ♘f5 and ♖d2.

16.e5 ♘g4 17.h3 ♘h6 18.♘e4±

In McNab – Bolt, Gibraltar 2004, White had stabilized the position in his favour; the d6-square is weak and the h6-knight somewhat passive.

A4) 8...a5



By playing this thematic move at an early stage, Black declares his intention of developing his knight on a6 rather than on d7, as in the previous lines. While this does avoid piece congestion in the centre, it also leaves the e5-square at White's mercy.

I have faced this line in a practical game and I must confess that the play is more complex and less one-sided than, say, in line A1. However, in the event of accurate play from both sides, White can expect to retain the better chances.

9.a3 ♘a6

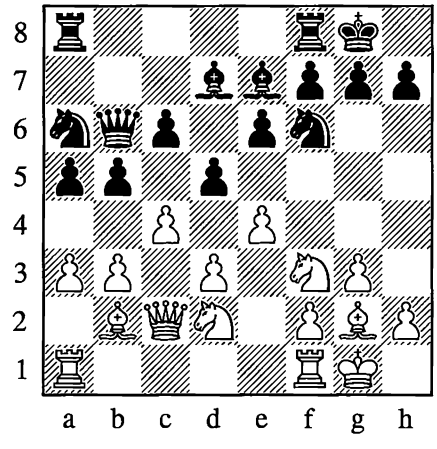
9...a4 allows White to stabilize the position in his favour. 10.cxb5 cxb5 (10...axb3 11.♕xb3 cxb5 12.♘c3 wins a pawn, without allowing Black sufficient compensation) 11.b4± The b5-pawn and the c5-square are both weak. White will keep developing flexibly with d2-d3, ♘bd2 and ♖ac1. Later, he can start concrete operations with ♘d4 and/or e2-e4.

10.d3 ♗d7

From this square, the bishop keeps the queenside chain well defended, but it is hardly any more active than in the previous lines.

11.♘bd2 ♕b6 12.e4

All the thematic points of tension have been established and now the game enters a manoeuvring phase.



12...♖ab8

Black provokes the next move, hoping that the bishop will be exposed on e5. There are quite a few alternatives, but none of them is likely to equalize completely. Below are just a few examples:

12...♖fc8 allows White a comfortable space advantage after 13.d4±.

12...c5 weakens the light squares and is best met by 13.♘e5±.

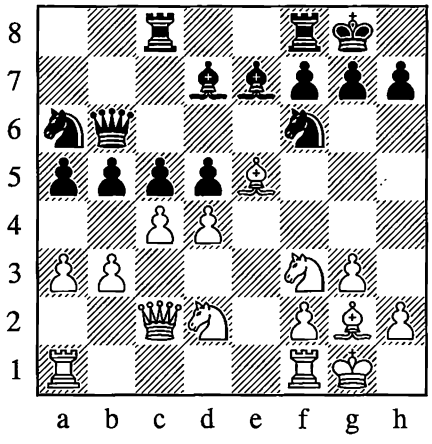
12...♘c5 leaves the knight in an unpleasant pin after 13.♗d4±.

13.♗e5 ♖bc8 14.d4

White threatens to crush his opponent with c4-c5. Therefore, the next move is forced.

14...c5 15.exd5 exd5

The central tension has reached its apogee, which is very much in the spirit of the Catalan opening. White has superior development, but has to act with precision.



16.♘g5

A typical Catalan move; White attacks the d5- and h7-pawns simultaneously. Both squares are defended by the f6-knight, which not only is over-burdened, but also faces the danger of being exchanged.

The straightforward developing move 16.♖fe1±, suggested by Stoica, also deserves attention.

16...g6 17.cxd5 ♘g4

Consistently pursuing the idea mentioned in the notes to 12...♖ab8. Instead 17...cxd4?! 18.♕b2, followed by ♗xd4, offers White a strong initiative.

18.♘gf3 ♗f5

18...f6 looks tempting. After the apparently forced bishop retreat, then ...cxd4 would be much better than one move earlier. However, I intended to sacrifice a piece to build up a strong centre: 19.h3! fxe5 20.dxe5 ♘h6 21.g4 White's pawns are threatening and the black knights are passive.

19.♕b2 ♖fd8 20.h3

I was in an aggressive mood that day and wanted to land my king's knight on c6 as soon as possible. The more solid 20.a4!?±, preparing the c4-square for the other knight, was also entirely playable.

20...♘xe5 21.♘xe5 ♗f6 22.g4

Following the same policy. Once again, 22.a4 comes into consideration and if 22...cxd4 then 23.♘c6±.

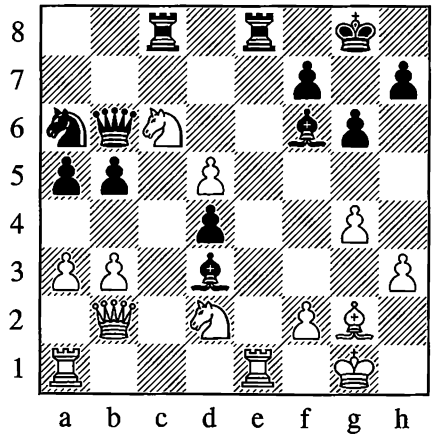
22...cxd4

Black has to pick up the gauntlet and strive for counterplay, as 22...♗d7? is too passive. After 23.♖ac1± White threatens ♘e4 and 23...cxd4 is answered with 24.♘c6 followed by ♘e4 soon.

23.♘c6 ♗d3 24.♖fe1 ♖e8

The forcing sequence has come to an end. Both sides have their trumps, but White needs just one more accurate move to consolidate his advantage.

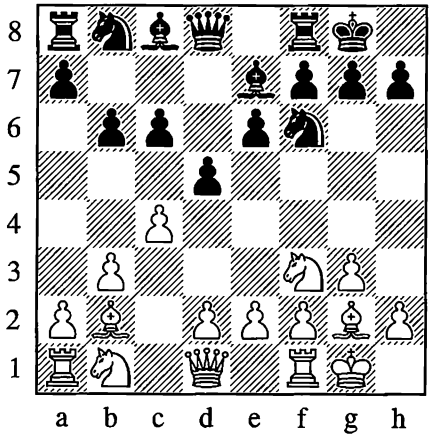
In Marin – Aleksandrov, Batumi 1999, I played 25.♗e4? wishing to exchange Black's most active piece, overlooking 25...♘c5! with active counterplay. I was so disappointed that I quickly went down.



25.b4!N±

Preventing the activation of the a6-knight. Next, White will play either ♗e4 or ♕b3, challenging the d3-bishop. Little by little, the strong outpost on c6 will become the telling factor.

B) 7...b6

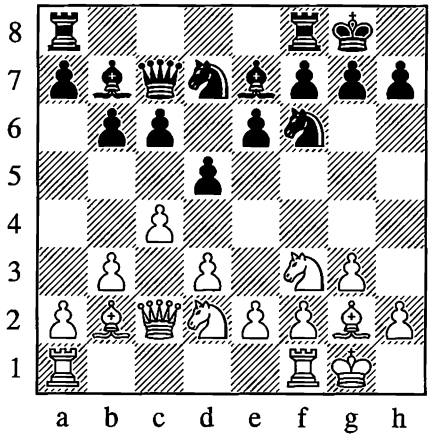


This is more prudent than 7...b5. Black does not fight for space at once, but instead he hopes to lengthen the long diagonal for his bishop with ...c6-c5 once the rest of his development has been completed.

8.d3 ♗b7 9.♘bd2 ♘bd7 10.♕c2

We will examine **B1) 10...♕c7**, **B2) 10...c5** and **B3) 10...♖c8**.

B1) 10...♕c7



This logical developing move has a hidden defect. White can take advantage of the pin along the c-file in order to provoke favourable structural modifications.

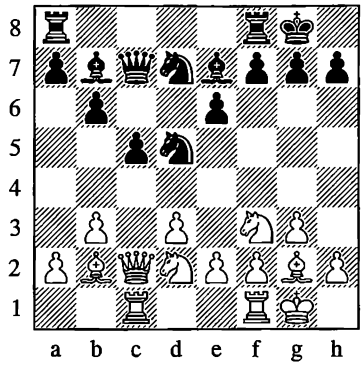
11.cxd5!

After the standard 11.e4 dxe4 12.dxe4 e5 13.♖ad1 Black would get an improved version of line B3 after 13...♖ad8, as his rook would be better placed on d8 than on c8.

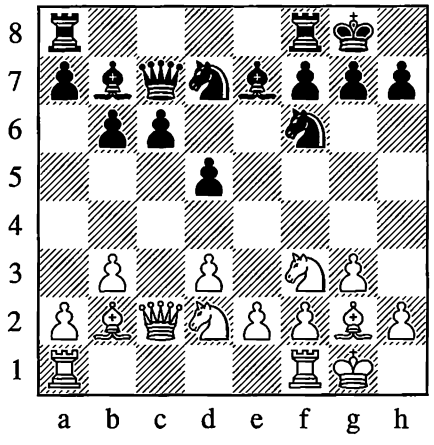
11...exd5

In the closed Catalan lines, the usefulness of ...c7-c6 is often based on the possibility of answering cxd5 with ...cxd5, avoiding having hanging pawns against White's kingside fianchetto. In our specific case, the undefended black queen makes this impossible. The text move leads to a structure similar to that examined in Chapter 8, the main difference being the placement of Black's queen's bishop. Since ...c6-c5 would allow White to weaken the enemy queenside with b3-b4, we can infer that the bishop risks remaining passive on b7.

White has an interesting way of fighting against the more flexible and as yet untested 11...♘xd5!?N with: 12.♖ac1 c5



13.b4!!± This minority attack is carried out without loss of time and ensures White either a pawn advantage in the centre or control of the c4-square. The tactical point is that 13...♘xb4? loses a piece to 14.♕c3 ♗f6 15.♕xb4 cxb4 16.♖xc7+–.



12.♖ac1

White initiates a coherent queenside attack, based on ♕b1, b3-b4, ♖c2 and ♖fc1. It is also possible to put the central majority into motion: 12.e4 dxe4 13.dxe4 ♖ad8 14.e5 ♘d5 15.a3 ♘c5 16.b4 ♘e6 17.♘e4 h6 18.♖fe1± White had a stable space advantage in Onkoud – Ragot, Guingamp 2006.

12...♖ac8 13.♕b1 ♕b8

As mentioned before, 13...c5 is met by 14.b4±.

14.♗h3 ♖cd8 15.b4!

White clears the b3-square for the knight and discourages ...c6-c5. The pawn is taboo: 15...♗xb4? 16.♗xf6 ♗xd2 17.♗xd8 ♗xc1 18.♗h4+– Two black pieces are hanging.

15...♕a8 16.♖c2 ♖fe8 17.a3 ♗d6 18.♘b3

White's position is more harmonious and Black does not have a clear plan. Compare this with the game Marin – Gustafsson from Chapter 8.

After regrouping properly, White may finally play e2-e4, but the course of the main game also reveals some other hidden tactical nuances.

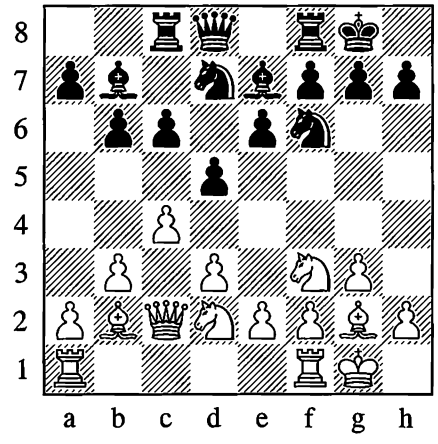
18...♘e5 19.♘fd4 ♗c8 20.♗g2 ♗b7 21.♖fc1 ♖c8 22.♕a1

White's ♕+♗ battery is far more effective than Black's.

22...♘ed7 23.♘f5 ♗f8 24.♘h6†!±

Black will suffer severe structural damage, G. Horvath – Letay, Hungary 2003.

B2) 10...♖c8



Black defends the c7-square, preparing to connect rooks with ...♕c7. However, in the long run the rook will not be especially well placed on c8.

11.♖ad1

Before playing e2-e4, it is useful to indirectly defend the d3-square, thus avoiding Black's counterplay with ...dxe4 followed by ...♘c5.

11...♕c7

If 11...c5 12.e4 d4 13.♖de1 then we reach a position from line B31, with the insignificant difference that Black's rook has moved to c8. This hardly makes any difference, because there is little to do on the c-file.

12.e4 dxe4

An alternative is the half-waiting move:

12...♖fd8

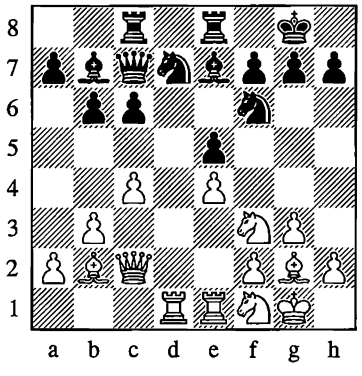
This is best met by:

13.♖fe1

White over-defends the e5-square in anticipation, threatening 14.e5 and if 14...♘g4, then 15.h3 ♘h6 16.g4, cutting the knight out of play.

13...dxe4 14.dxe4 e5 15.♘f1 ♖e8

Black has lost a tempo compared to the main line.



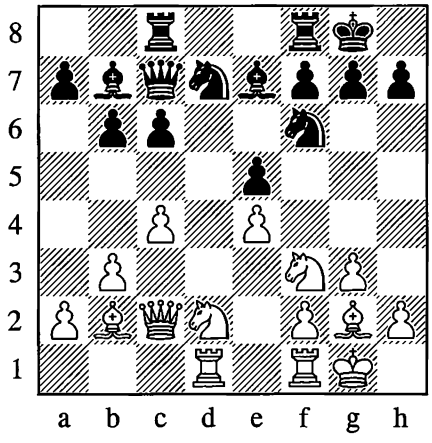
In Lie – Gronn, Hamar 2007 White should have played:

16.♘e3!N

With the same plan as after the text move.

13.dxe4 e5

It may seem that the structure favours Black, as the d4-square has been weakened, while the d5-square is controlled by the c6-pawn. In fact, the piece placement radically changes the evaluation. White's strong pressure against the e5-pawn makes the standard manoeuvre ...♘c5-e6 difficult to carry out. The b7-bishop is passive and the permanent necessity of defending the e5-pawn does not allow Black to fight for the only open file.



14.♖fe1

Or 14.♘e1!? ♖fe8 15.♘d3± looks like an interesting alternative, preparing a kingside attack with f2-f4.

14...♖cd8 15.♘f1 ♗d6

Black over-defends the e5-pawn, hoping to transfer his knight to e6. Instead the seemingly active 15...♗c5 is ineffective: 16.♘e3 ♖fe8 17.♖d3± Followed by ♖ed1, with increasing pressure.

16.♘e3 g6 17.h3

Before undertaking anything concrete, White over-defends the g4-square, thus preventing any counterplay based on ...♗(x)c5 and ...♘g4 (which is essential if we follow the main line). In some cases, ♘h2-g4 or ♘e3-g4 are also possible.

17...♖fe8

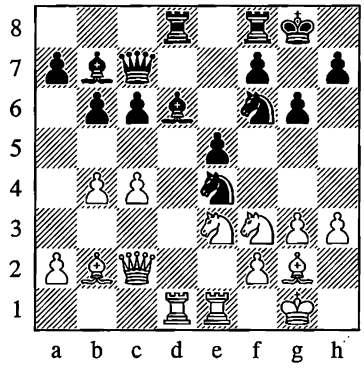
It is too early to start the desired knight manoeuvre:

17...♘c5 18.b4!

The open lines created by this move will allow White to take full advantage of his superior development.

18...♘cxe4

The more cautious 18...♘e6 leads to similar consequences: 19.c5 bxc5 20.bxc5 ♗xc5 21.♗xe5 ♕e7 22.♘f5 gxf5 23.exf5± Black's pieces are hanging, allowing White to restore material equality with an overwhelming strategic advantage.



19.c5!

Clearing the c4-square for the e3-knight and preventing the activation of the b7-bishop with ...c6-c5.

19...bxc5 20.bxc5 ♗xc5

20...♘xc5 21.♘c4± leaves Black's pieces hanging.

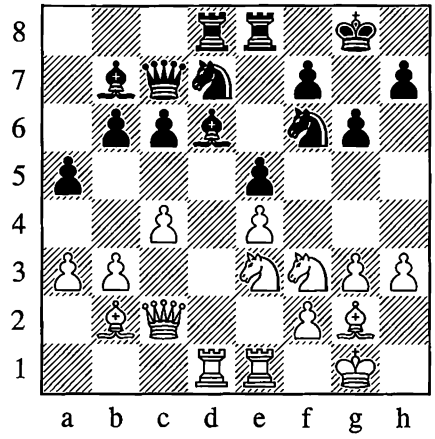
21.♗xe5 ♕a5 22.♖xd8 ♖xd8 23.♕b2!±

A double attack that wins a piece, without offering Black sufficient compensation.

18.a3 a5

Once again, 18...♘c5 is premature. 19.b4 ♘cxe4 With his b4-pawn safely defended, White does not need to force events anymore and can play the quiet move 20.♘g4±. Black will not be able to keep his e5-pawn and the weakness of the long dark diagonal will offer White attacking chances.

After the text move, everything is prepared for ...♘c5, so White has to react quickly.



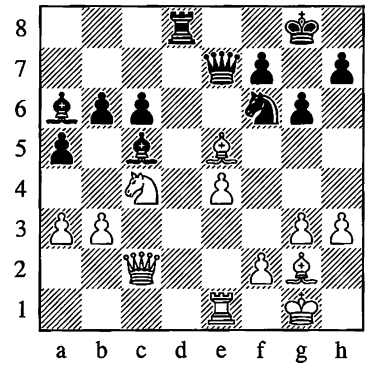
19.c5!

It is essential to clear the c4-square for the e3-knight. Suddenly, Black's lack of coordination becomes obvious.

19...♘xc5

Evacuating the bishop from its exposed square does not solve all the problems:

19...♗xc5 20.♘c4 ♗a6 21.♘fxe5 ♘xe5 22.♖xd8 ♖xd8 23.♗xe5 ♕e7



Apparently, Black has obtained some counterplay in view of the threat of ...♗xc4 and ...♗xa3.

24.♘xa5!

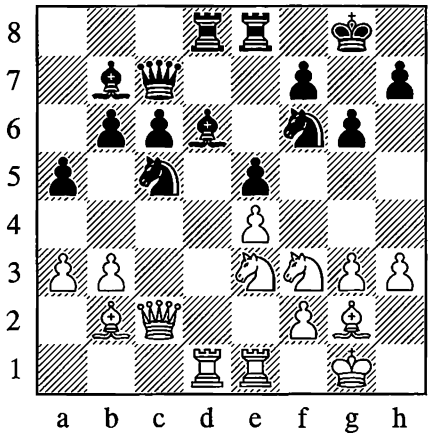
This tactic leads to a better ending.

24...♕xe5 25.♘xc6 ♕c7

The attempted counterplay with 25...♗d3 26.♕c1 ♕xg3 fails to 27.♕xc5±.

26.♘xd8 ♕xd8 27.♖d1±

White is not worse on the material scale and Black's minor pieces are unstable in view of the threats of b3-b4 and e4-e5. In the event of a queen swap, the queenside majority would become very dangerous.



20.♘c4 ♖d7

By over-defending his rook, Black parries the threat of ♘xe5, but White has another way to regain the pawn at his disposal.

21.♖xd6 ♖xd6 22.♗xe5 ♖xe5 23.♘fxe5 ♖e6 24.f4±

The passivity of the b7-bishop and White's kingside majority offer him a dangerous initiative.

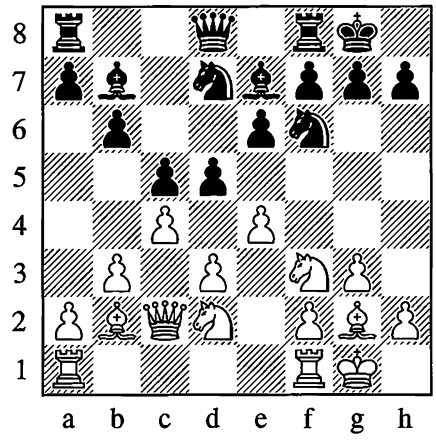
B3) 10...c5

Black has lost a tempo (...c7-c6-c5) to reach the starting position of line B in Chapter 21, but in the meantime White has developed in a way that puts less pressure on the d5-square. Therefore, the play takes a completely independent course.

The threat of ...d5-d4 followed by ...e6-e5 forces White to react in the centre immediately.

11.e4!

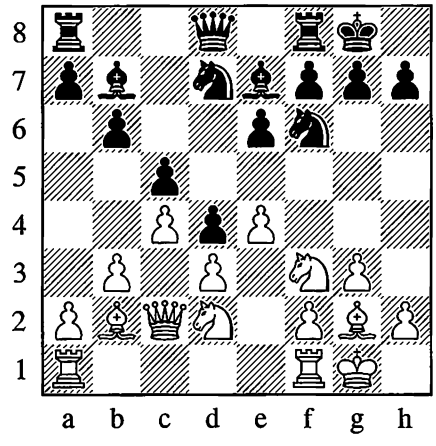
Only energetic play will give meaning to the extra tempo of development.



The main lines we will examine are **B31) 11...d4** and **B32) 11...dxe4**.

Maintaining the tension with 11...♕c7 allows White to win space on the kingside: 12.cxd5 exd5 13.e5± Next, he will play d3-d4, ♖ad1, ♖fe1 and ♘f1-e3, building up pressure in the centre and on the kingside.

B31) 11...d4



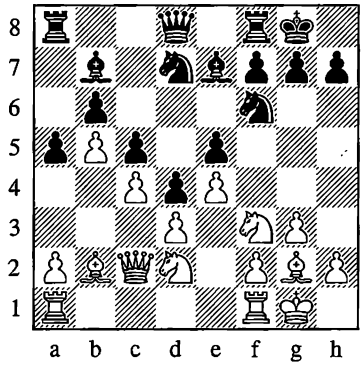
The most ambitious answer; Black gains space in the centre and blocks the diagonal of the b2-bishop.

There are many drawbacks of this approach, though. The b7-bishop also bites on granite (e4) and activating it will be more difficult to achieve than the white bishop, which only needs to retreat to c1. Also, Black's queen's knight is passively placed for this reversed King's Indian structure (it will need two tempos to get to c6). As we will see, White has a coherent plan of building up a kingside attack.

12.♖ae1

White starts concentrating his pieces on the kingside. His last move is also useful in making sure a later ♗c1 would not disconnect the rooks.

White could also start by blocking the queenside with 12.b4 e5 13.b5 a5 as in Bogdanov – Gaillard, St Quentin 2002.

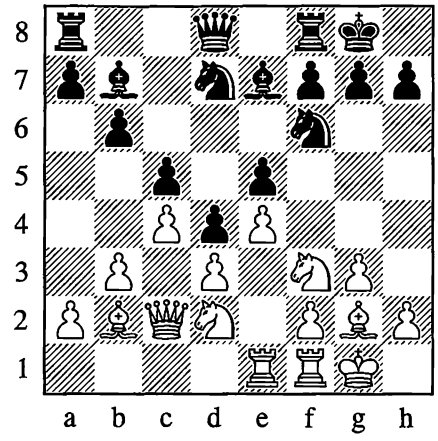


14.♗h3!N Followed by ♘h4-g2(f5), ♖ae1 and ♗c1, with similar play as in the main line.

Still, I prefer the text move, which does not lose time on prophylaxis. There is no immediate queenside danger in view of the unfavourable placement of the b7-bishop and d7-knight.

12...e5

Black prevents e4-e5, but opens the h3-c8 diagonal for the g2-bishop. Instead the untested 12...♕c7 leaves White with a kingside space advantage: 13.e5 (13.b4!? also comes into consideration) 13...♘g4 14.♕d1 ♘h6 15.♕e2± Followed by h2-h3, ♗c1 and ♘h2, with a gradual build-up of the attack. Black's knights will find it tough to find useful jobs.



13.♗h3

Activating the bishop and preparing a regrouping that is characteristic of the Czech Benoni (with reversed colours).

13...h5

A risky decision. Fighting for space in this way without having a rook on h8 weakens the kingside.

However, it is true that after the more cautious 13...♕c7 Black also fails to equalize: 14.♘h4 g6 15.♘g2 ♘b8 16.f4 ♘c6 17.♘f3± White has regrouped well and his kingside attack has reached an advanced phase, while Black's offensive on the opposite wing has not even started yet. After ♗b2-c1, Black will face problems keeping control of the e5-square.

14.♘h4 ♘g4

A strategically ambitious alternative is:

14...g6

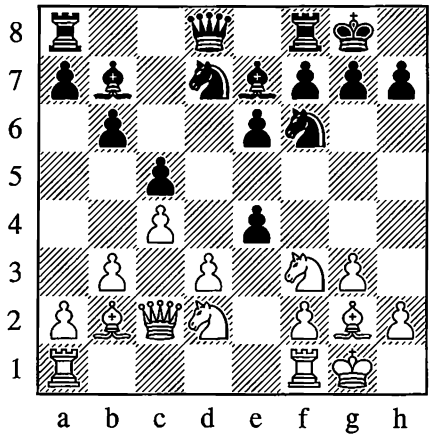
However, this spends another valuable tempo, which allows White to develop a dangerous initiative:

15.♘df3 ♕c7 16.♕d2 ♖fe8 17.♘g5
Threatening f2-f4.
17...♘g4 18.♗xg4!
The fastest way to start the attack.
18...hxg4 19.f3±
Black's kingside is in great danger.

15.♘f5±

After having defended the e3-square, White is ready to push the enemy knight back with f2-f3, after which his initiative will develop freely, Portisch – Sallay, Budapest 1961.

B32) 11...dxe4



This looks like an acceptance of the fact that Black has to fight for equality. In an almost symmetrical position, White is allowed to win space in the centre.

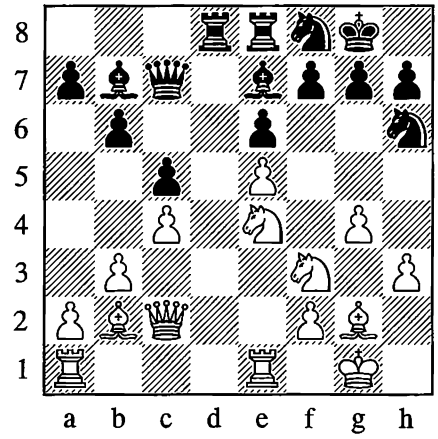
12.dxe4 ♕c7 13.e5 ♘g4 14.♖fe1 ♖ad8 15.h3 ♘h6 16.g4

The knight stands badly on h6, but there is still some hope for Black. If he could transfer his other knight to g6 in time, the weakness of the f4-square may offer him chances for counterplay.

16...♖fe8 17.♘e4 ♘f8

The critical moment. Black is just one tempo away from carrying out the aforementioned plan.

We can state that White is fully developed, even though his a1-rook is still on its initial square. The thing is that ♖ad1 would only allow simplifications, while an invasion by Black along the d-file is not very likely. In any case, everything is prepared for concrete action.



18.♘d6!

This well-timed pawn sacrifice opens the long dark diagonal, offering White a strong initiative. Remarkably enough, Black will not have time to play ...♘g6 for a long while.

18...♗xd6 19.exd6 ♕xd6 20.♕c3 f6 21.g5

White brings his last resources into the attack and demonstrates the overall coherence of his plan. In the previous phase, the g-pawn has been used to restrict the enemy knight and now it serves to weaken the long diagonal.

21...♗xf3

Black needs the d4-square for his pieces, in order to reduce the danger on the kingside. This is the only moment when exchanging the f3-knight is possible, because the white queen is tied to maintaining the battery, which removes the possibility of ♕xf3. For example, after:

21...♘f5 22.gxf6

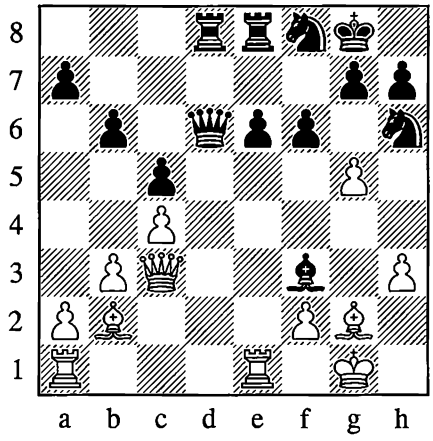
Now it is too late to take on f3:

22...♗xf3

Not 22...♘d4? which loses a piece to 23.f7† ♔xf7 24.♘e5† followed by ♗xb7.

23.♕xf3±

Material is balanced, but the bishops are clearly superior to the knights. In addition, 23...♘d4? loses a rook to 24.f7†.



22.gxf6!?

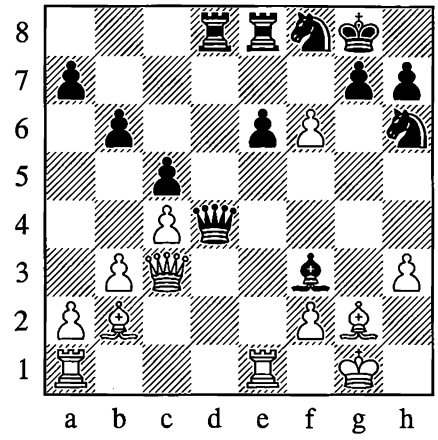
An interesting intermediate move, threatening f6-f7† followed by ♕xg7 mate.

The simpler 22.♗xf3 is also possible. 22...♘f5 23.gxf6 ♘d4 24.fxg7 ♘g6 25.♗e4 ♔xg7 26.♖ad1 e5 27.♖d3± Black's knights occupy stable squares, but they are unable to neutralize the bishop's activity. White plans a slow attack against the weakened enemy kingside, starting with ♖g3 and ♗c1.

22...♕d4

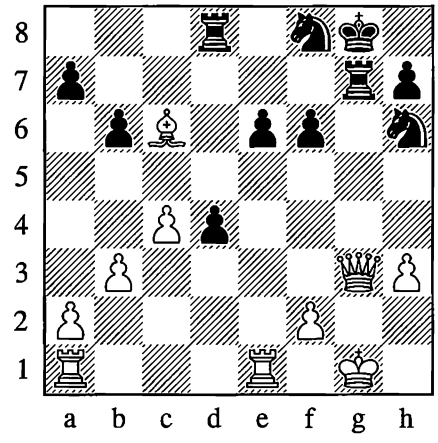
This loses an exchange after an interesting forcing manoeuvre.

The main alternative is 22...e5 when White has a promising pawn sacrifice at his disposal: 23.♗xf3 gxf6 24.♖ad1 ♕c7 25.♖xd8 ♕xd8 26.♗d5† ♘f7 27.♕g3† ♘g6 28.♔h2 White plans to continue his attack with ♖g1, h3-h4, ♗c1 and maybe f2-f4. The d5-bishop dominates the position, while Black cannot transfer a knight to d4.



23.♗xf3 gxf6 24.♗c6 ♖e7 25.♕g3† ♖g7 26.♗xd4 cxd4

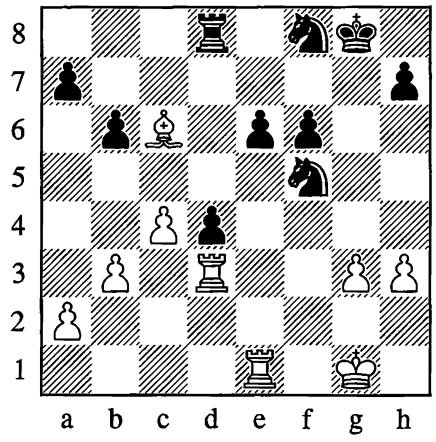
Up to this point, White had played a great game in Ivkov – De Firmian, Smederevska Palanka 1981.



27.♖ad1!N

Finally, the time has come to complete development. The rook is useful on d1 because it prevents the transfer of the black knight to e3, which eventually changed the course of the aforementioned game.

27...♖xg3† 28.fxg3 ♘f5 29.♖d3±



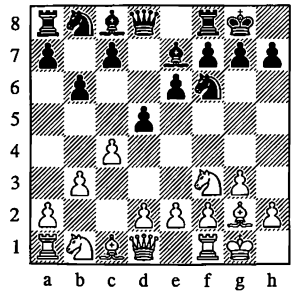
The pawns are blockaded, ...♘e3 is impossible because of ♖exe3 and White threatens ♗e4 or g3-g4, followed by the advance of the queenside majority.

Conclusion

Against the solid set-up based on ...c7-c6, White usually retains an advantage by gradually gaining space with d2-d3, e2-e4 and, when everything is ready for it, e4-e5.

Chapter 21

QGD Set-up



6...b6 without ...c5

Variation Index

1.c4 e6 2.g3 d5 3.♗g2 ♘f6 4.♘f3 ♗e7 5.0–0 0–0 6.b3 b6

7.♗b2 ♗b7 8.e3 ♘bd7 9.♘c3

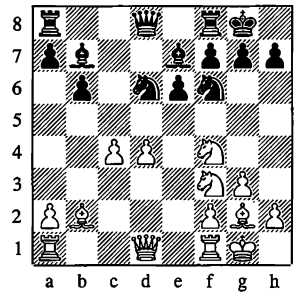
A) 9...♘e4 **294**

B) 9...c5 10.♕e2 ♖c8 11.♖fd1! ♕c7 12.cxd5 ♘xd5 13.♘xd5 ♗xd5 14.e4 ♗b7 15.♖ac1 ♕b8 16.d4 **296**

B1) 16...♖fd8 **298**

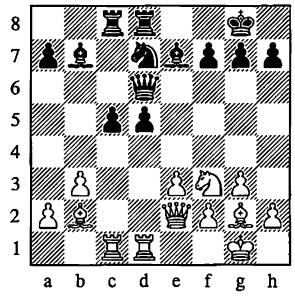
B2) 16...cxd4 **300**

note to 9.♘c3



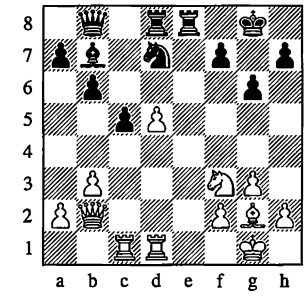
15.♕b3!N

B) note to 13...♗xd5



17.♕b5!N

B1) after 22...♖cd8



23.♖c2!N

1.c4 e6 2.g3 d5 3.♗g2 ♘f6 4.♘f3 ♗e7 5.0–0 0–0 6.b3 b6

A flexible move, in the spirit of the Queen's Indian. Black prepares to fianchetto his queen's bishop, leaving the decision about what to do with the c-pawn for later.

7.♗b2 ♗b7 8.e3

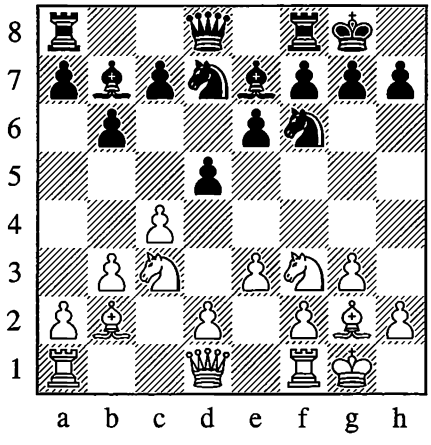
It is important to play this move at once, as the careless 8.♘c3 gifts Black a space advantage after 8...d4 followed by ...c7-c5.

8...♘bd7

This way of developing the knight has both positive and negative aspects. It certainly is more passive than on c6 (after ...c7-c5), but on the other hand it does not obstruct the b7-bishop, thus preventing the queen from being decoyed in the centre, as is the case in Chapter 25.

8...c5 9.♘c3 dxc4 10.bxc4 ♘c6 transposes to Chapter 24 and 9...♘c6 10.cxd5 ♘xd5 11.♘xd5 ♕xd5 leads to the tabiya from Chapter 25. For 9...♘bd7 see line B below.

9.♘c3



The main lines we shall examine are **A) 9...♘e4** and **B) 9...c5**, but first we should consider a minor line:

9...dxc4 10.bxc4 ♘c5

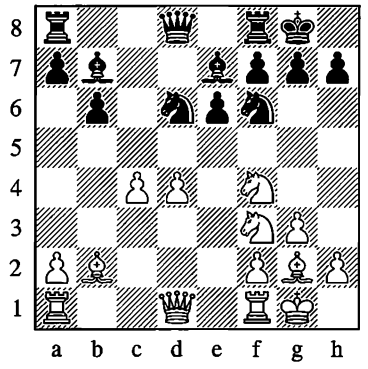
This is sometimes played, but I consider it unsound.

11.d4 ♘ce4 12.♘e2

It is important to avoid the exchange, since Black has two knights, but only one strong central square.

12...c5 13.♘f4 cxd4 14.exd4 ♘d6

So far, we have followed Nogueiras – Alonso, Santa Clara 2005.



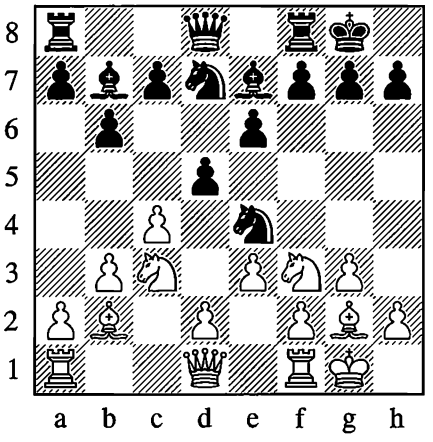
15.♕b3!N

The most active way to develop the queen. Her Majesty not only clears the d1-square for one of the rooks, but also supports the thematic d4-d5, while preventing ...b6-b5 at the same time.

15...♖c8 16.♖ac1 ♖e8 17.♖fd1±

White is well centralized and ready to carry out the central break. In some cases, a4-a5 will be a useful complementary plan.

A) 9...♘e4



This was Karpov's reaction against Kasparov's unexpected opening choice in the final and decisive game of their Seville match in 1987. Karpov did not completely solve the opening problems and the variation never became popular for Black.

10.♘e2

The e4-knight is unstable and White does best to avoid the exchange.

10...♗f6

A logical follow-up of the previous move, but the aforementioned game went:

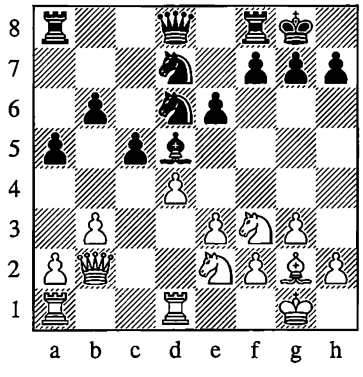
10...a5

This move was criticized because it spends a valuable tempo and weakens the b6-square. Kasparov characterized it as "not typical for Karpov".

11.d3 ♗f6 12.♕c2 ♗xb2 13.♕xb2 ♘d6 14.cxd5 ♗xd5

14...exd5 15.d4 leads to similar play as in the main line.

15.d4 c5 16.♖fd1±



White's development is more harmonious. In Kasparov – Karpov, Seville (24) 1987, the thirteenth World Champion managed to maintain the tension for a long time, until his great rival collapsed.

11.♕c2

11.d4!? c5 12.♘f4± was recommended by Kasparov. Indeed, White's position is more pleasant. The d4-pawn is better defended than the d5-pawn and the f6-bishop is vulnerable to the threat of ♘h5.

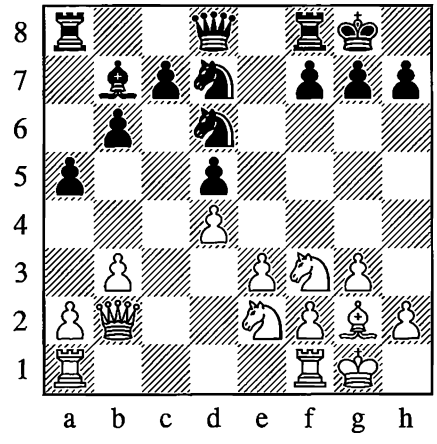
11...♗xb2 12.♕xb2 ♘d6

The same regrouping as in the Kasparov – Karpov game. It may just be a coincidence, but this game was also played in Seville...

The attempt to force matters with 12...♕f6 fails to equalize: 13.d4 dxc4 14.bxc4 ♘d6 15.♘d2 ♗xg2 16.♔xg2 c5 17.a4± The hanging pawns are under control, but White threatens to open a new front with a4-a5, Sorokin – Garcia Palermo, Villa Gesell 1997.

13.cxd5 exd5 14.d4 a5

Black refrains from ...c7-c5, because his d6-knight would not help much in defending the hanging pawns. Therefore, White can increase the pressure at his own convenience.



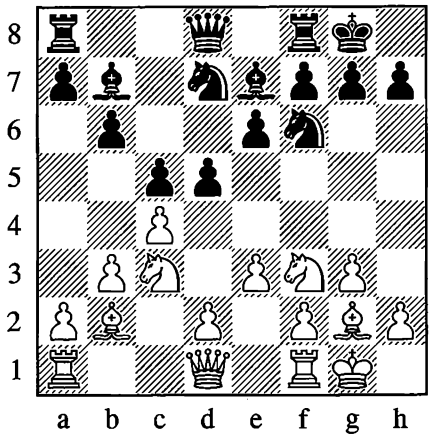
15.♘f4 ♕e7 16.♖ac1 c6 17.♗h3

Provoking an important weakness.

17...f5 18.♘d3 ♘e4 19.♘de5 ♘xe5 20.♘xe5±

White has an excellent outpost on e5 and a clear plan of attacking the c6-pawn, Spraggett – Rivas Pastor, Seville 1994.

B) 9...c5



This variation differs from those examined in Chapters 24 and 25 only by the black queen's knight's placement. Black is better prepared for an immediate release of the tension in the centre with cxd5, since he can capture with the knight and then with the bishop. On the other hand, White can take his time before playing the thematic cxd5, because ...dxc4 is not really a threat. After bxc4, White could carry out the plan based on a4-a5, thus creating an important weakness in Black's queenside. (This would be almost unthinkable if the knight was on c6).

10.♕e2 ♖c8

Black prepares to develop his queen.

The immediate 10...♕c7 could be met with 11.♘b5, when the queen does not have any favourable squares at her disposal. Later, Black will have to play ...a7-a6 and ...♕c7, meaning that he would have to spend a valuable tempo on the relatively useless move ...a7-a6.

As mentioned before, if:

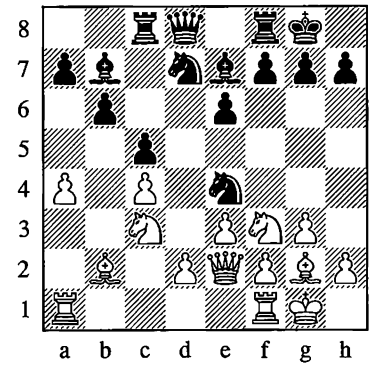
10...dxc4 11.bxc4 ♖c8

Then this can be met by:

12.a4 ♘e4

Or 12...♕c7 13.♖a3± followed by a4-a5 and ♖fa1.

Black is not prepared for a blockade on d3: 12...♗xf3 13.♗xf3 ♘e5 14.♗g2 ♕d3 15.♕xd3 ♘xd3 16.♖fb1 ♘g4 17.f4 ♗f6 18.♖a3 ♖fd8 19.h3 (Since 19...♘gf2 leaves Black's knights hanging after 20.♗a1 followed by ♔f1-e2, the time has come for a general retreat.) 19...♘xb2 20.♖xb2 ♗xc3 21.♖xc3 ♘f6 22.♔f2± White has an active bishop and a clear plan on the queenside. His structure is more compact and he can also think about a massive kingside offensive, while in the centre Black has absolutely nothing.



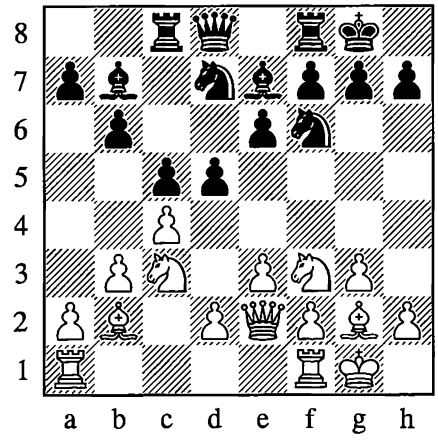
This position was reached in Sergeev – Lorenc, Tatranske Zruby 2000.

13.d3!N

Forcing an exchange that improves White's position.

13...♘xc3 14.♗xc3±

Followed by ♖fb1 and a4-a5.



11.♖fd1!

The best move order! White needs to delay releasing the tension in the centre for one more move and to refrain from moving the queen's rook in order to keep the threat of a4-a5 alive in case of ...dxc4.

11.♖ac1?! can be met by 11...dxc4 12.bxc4 ♕c7, when a4-a5 may lose a pawn.

11.cxd5 ♘xd5 12.♘xd5 ♗xd5 13.♖ac1 allows the additional possibility of 13...♖c7 followed by ...♕a8, as in Smyslov – Polugaevsky, Amsterdam 1981, which soon ended in a draw.

11...♕c7

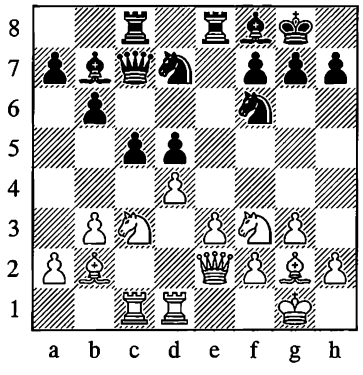
One important difference, if compared to Smyslov – Polugaevsky above, is that 11...♖c7? loses a pawn to 12.♘b5±.

12.cxd5

White had no other useful moves left.

12...♘xd5

As usual in the lines involving ...b7-b6, when Black agrees to play with hanging pawns it offers White the more pleasant game. For example: 12...exd5 13.d4 ♖fe8 14.♖ac1 ♗f8



In Korchnoi – Adianto, Novi Sad (ol) 1990, one of the most effective ways to increase the pressure in the centre would have been 15.♘g5± followed by ♘h3-f4.

13.♘xd5 ♗xd5

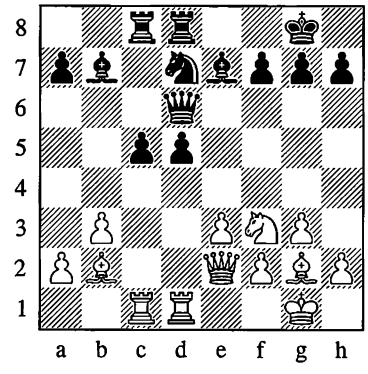
The same evaluation as in the previous note also applies to:

13...exd5 14.♖ac1 ♖fd8 15.d4

The truly hypermodern 15.♘d4!?, threatening ♘f5 or ♘b5 followed by d2-d4 and ♘c3, also comes into consideration.

15...♕d6 16.dxc5 bxc5

So far we have followed Braga – Capo Vidal, Dresden (ol) 2008. Now White has at least two possible ways of increasing his pressure in the centre.



17.♕b5!N

Aiming to spoil Black's coordination.

Equally good is 17.e4!N d4 18.e5 ♕b6 19.♘e1± with a perfect blockade on the light squares.

17...♗c6

Other moves also fail to neutralize the white queen's irritating activity: 17...♗a6 18.♕a5 ♗f6 19.♗a3± Followed by ♘e1 and/or b3-b4.

Or 17...♖b8 18.♘e1±.

18.♕a6 ♕c7 19.♘e1±

Black is busy trying to deal with the enemy queen, while White threatens ♘d3-f4.

14.e4

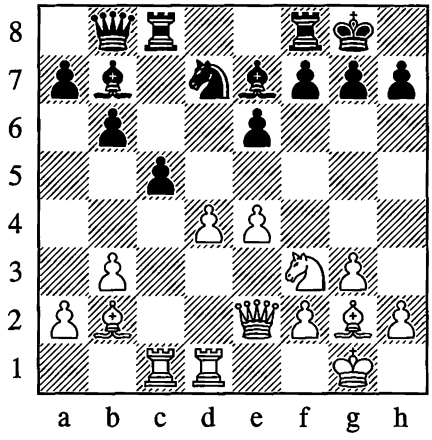
An important move, preventing Black from taking control of the long diagonal with ...♕b7.

14...♗b7 15.♖ac1 ♕b8

15...♖fd8 16.d4 ♕b8 transposes to line B1.

16.d4

White is one step ahead in development and has already occupied the centre.



Black's main choice is between completing his development with **B1) 16...♖fd8** and releasing the tension with **B2) 16...cxd4**.

Instead 16....♕a8 can be met by 17.d5 exd5 18.exd5 ♗f6. In S. Kasparov – G. Gutman, Rovno 2000, White could have obtained a strong initiative with 19.♘h4!N. It is worth comparing this with line B1 below; the queen is rather passive in the corner.

B1) 16...♖fd8

Black completes his development without releasing the tension in the centre.

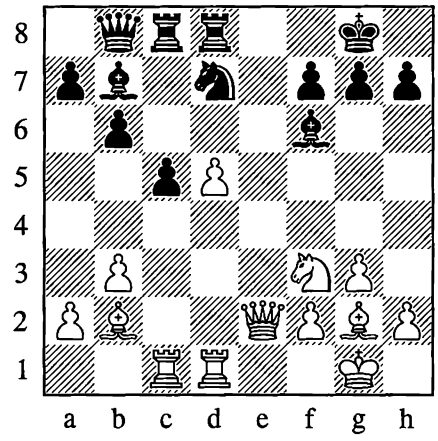
17.d5!

The only way to fight for an advantage. At first sight, it may seem that the d5-pawn may become weak, but accurate manoeuvring by White will convert it into a strength.

17...exd5 18.exd5 ♗f6

Black needs to reduce White's pressure against the weakly defended kingside.

In Nemeth – Gara, Budapest 2000, Black reversed the move order with 18...♖e8 when White could have won time for the final manoeuvre recommended in the main line with: 19.♘d2!N ♗f6 20.♘e4± If necessary, the knight may land on c3, over-defending the central pawn, thus consolidating White's space advantage.



19.♘h4!

Since ♘d2 is impossible and 19.♗xf6 ♘xf6 would lose a pawn, White searches for alternate knight routes (♘f5-e3) aiming to consolidate the d5-pawn.

19...♖e8 20.♕d2 ♗xb2

A small success for White: Black has to release the tension, allowing the queen to reach a favourable position.

20...♗xh4

This exposes Black to a strong kingside attack:

21.gxh4 ♕d6 22.♖c3!

This rook lift reveals that the recent structural modification also has positive aspects: the g3-square has become available.

22...♖cd8 23.♖g3 f6 24.h5

This supposedly weak pawn becomes an important element in White's plan.

24...h6

Black has to prevent h5-h6, in order to avoid trouble along the long diagonal, but now the g6-square is weakened.

25.♕c2±

With a strong initiative.

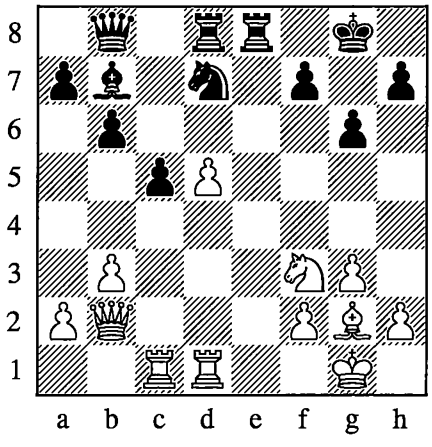
Refraining from ...♗xb2 with 20...g6 allows 21.♗xf6 ♘xf6 22.♘f5!±. The knight is taboo because of ♕g5†. Having crossed the mined f5-square, the knight will retreat to e3 next, achieving the original aim of the manoeuvre.

21.♕xb2 g6 22.♘f3

The knight manoeuvre cannot be considered a loss of time. After ...g7-g6, it is not easy for Black to play ...♘f6, ensuring at least temporary safety for the d5-pawn.

22...♖cd8

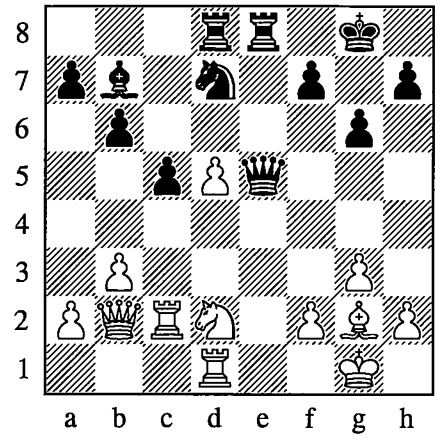
A critical moment. White has developed harmoniously with one exception: his knight obstructs the bishop and does not contribute in any way to defending the d5-pawn. Now 23.♘d2 looks natural, but then 23...♕e5 gives Black active play. So White needs to prepare ♘d2 in some way.



23.♖c2!N

Before allowing ...♕e5, White defends his queen. Instead 23.b4?! cxb4 24.♕xb4 was played in Tkachiev – Drasko, France 2008, but after 24...♘f6!N the d-pawn would have been in danger.

23...♕d6 24.♘d2 ♕e5



25.♘e4!

With his queen defended, White does not need to release the tension.

25...f5

Or 25...♗xd5 leads to simplifications that favour White: 26.♕xe5 ♖xe5 27.♘xc5 ♘xc5 28.f4 ♖ee8 29.♗xd5± In this type of position, the superiority of the light-squared bishop over the knight offers White good winning chances.

White's rook lift is fully justified after 25...♕xb2 26.♖xb2 ♖e7 27.♖bd2±. The d5-pawn is well defended, ensuring White a long-term advantage.

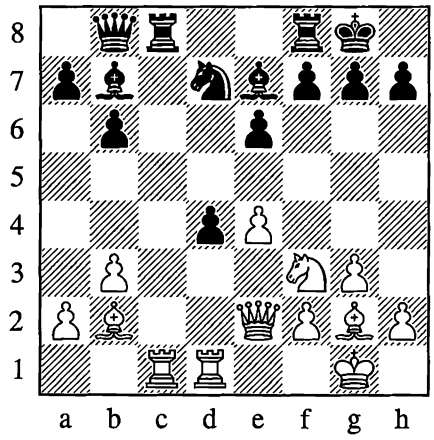
26.♘c3

This looks slightly more accurate than 26.♕xe5 ♖xe5 27.♘d6 ♗a6 28.a4±, which also favours White.

26...♕g7 27.♘b5±

Apart from ♘d6, White also threatens ♘xa7. All White's pieces are ready to offer support to the d5-pawn, which leaves Black without counterplay.

B2) 16...cxd4



Black opens the centre, aiming to provoke mass exchanges and achieve a draw. However, White's better development allows him to retain a small edge.

17.♘xd4

Threatening ♘xe6.

17...♖xc1

Black can also complete his development:

17...♖fd8

However this does not neutralize White's initiative completely:

18.♖xc8

18.♘xe6!? is interesting, but seems to suffice only for a draw: 18...fxe6 19.♕g4 ♘f6 20.♕xe6† ♔f8 21.e5 ♘e8 In Ribli – Saren, Helsinki 1972, White should have forced a perpetual with ♕f5-e6.

18...♕xc8

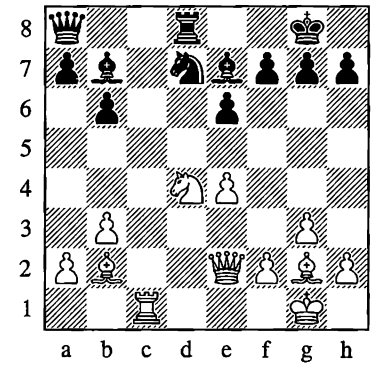
This is forced, as 18...♖xc8? loses a pawn to 19.♘xe6±.

19.♖c1

Now we shall look at two moves, 19...♕a8?! and 19...♕b8.

a) 19...♕a8?!

This is answered with the active:



20.♖c7± ♕b8?

This allows a winning combination.

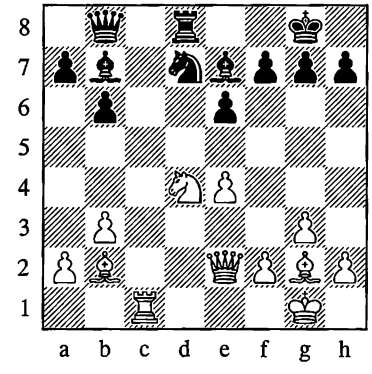
20...♗f8 is somewhat better, but after 21.♕h5, the threat of ♘xe6 followed by ♗h3 is very dangerous.

21.♘xe6 fxe6 22.♕g4

And White won in Hergott – Schuh, Manila (ol) 1992. Black can improve on move 19:

b) 19...♕b8

This more cautious move was played in Espig – Farago, Halle 1978.



20.e5!N

White intends to occupy the c6-square with his knight.

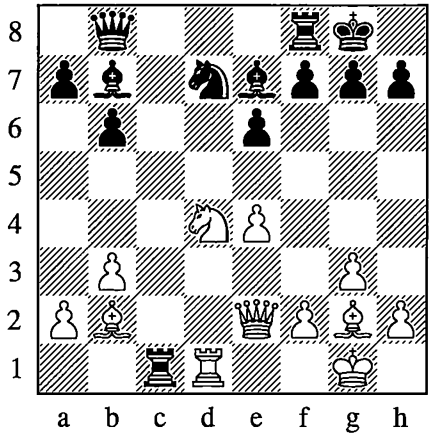
20...♗xg2 21.♔xg2 ♕b7†

21...♕xe5 leads to unfavourable simplifications. 22.♕xe5 ♘xe5 23.♘xe6 fxe6 24.♗xe5± White has the more active pieces and the more compact structure.

22.f3 ♗c5

The only way to prevent White's threat.
23.♘b5±

Switching to plan B; an outpost on d6 also offers White an advantage. Black cannot prevent this with 23...♘f8 because of 24.♘d6 ♗xd6 25.exd6 ♖xd6?! 26.♗xg7!. The bishop is taboo because of the check on e5.



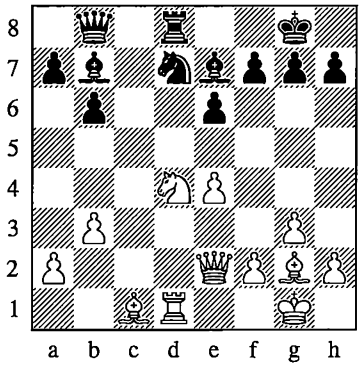
18.♗xc1!

The only way to maintain the initiative; the bishop is transferred to e3 or f4.

18...♘f6

This looks solid enough, but the knight will remain rather passive on f6. There is an alternative that leads to interesting play:

18...♖d8



19.♗f4 ♘e5

19...♕a8 20.♗c7 or 19...♕c8 20.♘b5 are both even worse for Black.

20.b4!

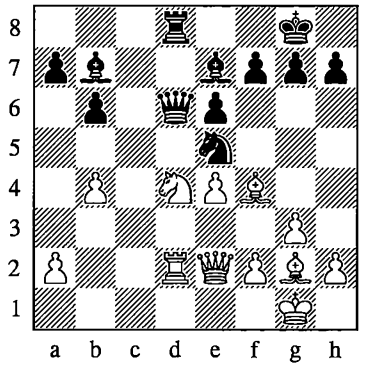
White intends to create an outpost on c6.

20...♕d6

Accepting the sacrifice cannot be recommended: 20...♗xb4 21.♕h5 ♗d6 Apart from 22.♘xe6, which regains the pawn and spoils Black's kingside structure, White has the more spectacular: 22.♘b5 g6 23.♕g5 h6 24.♕xd8† ♕xd8 25.♗xe5 ♕g5 26.♘xd6 ♕xe5 27.♘xb7± With a material advantage.

21.♖d2

Unpinning the knight.



21...♕c7

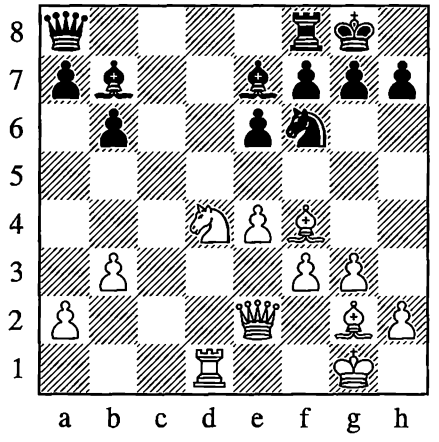
Once again, the pawn is rather inedible! Let's see why: 21...♕xb4 22.♗xe5 f6 It becomes clear that Black will regain the piece, but White can make a series of intermediate moves and emerge on top. 23.a3 ♕c3 24.♖c2 ♕a5 25.♘xe6 ♗a6 26.♖c4 The queen does not have a good retreat square. 26...♕xe5 27.♘xd8 ♗xd8 28.♗f1 ♗xc4 29.♕xc4† ♔f8 30.♕c8 ♕e7 31.♗c4± The presence of queens and opposite-coloured bishops plus the kingside majority makes the black king's situation quite dangerous.

22.b5 ♗f6 23.♘c6 ♗xc6 24.♖xd8† ♕xd8 25.♗xe5 ♗xe5 26.bxc6±

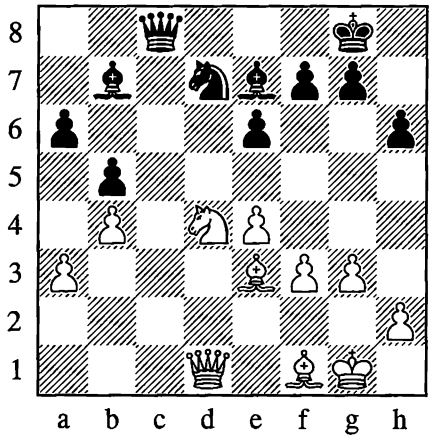
Despite the simplifications, White's far-advanced pawn offers him a long-term advantage.

19.♗f4 ♕a8 20.f3!

An important element in White's plan; the f6-knight and the b7-bishop are restricted.



20...a6 21.♗e3 ♖d8 22.♘c2 b5 23.b4 ♖xd1† 24.♕xd1 ♕c8 25.a3 h6 26.♗f1 ♘d7 27.♘d4±



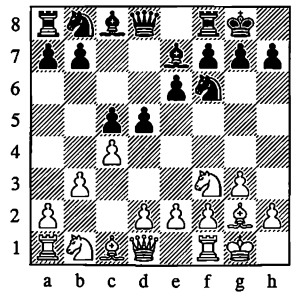
Despite the almost symmetrical structure, White retains the more active position. He has more space on the kingside and the b7-bishop is passive. In Kosten – Mancini, Montpellier 2001, White eventually won.

Conclusion

In the lines with ...b7-b6 and ...♘bd7 that are examined in this chapter, Black aims for simplifications in the hope of earning a draw. Line B2 is the only one in which he comes quite close to this aim and this line should be regarded as being of crucial significance for our entire repertoire.

Chapter 22

QGD Set-up



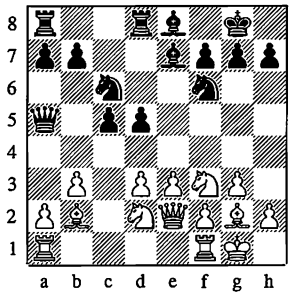
6...c5

Variation Index

1.c4 e6 2.g3 d5 3.♗g2 ♘f6 4.♘f3 ♗e7 5.0–0 0–0 6.b3 c5 7.♗b2 ♘c6 8.e3!

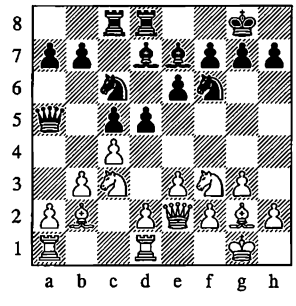
A) 8...dxc4 304
B) 8...♕a5!? 9.♕e2 ♖d8 306
B1) 10.d3 306
B2) 10.♖d1 307
C) 8...b6 9.♘c3 309
C1) 9...♗a6 309
C2) 9...♗b7 10.cxd5 313
C21) 10...exd5 313
C22) 10...♘xd5 314

B1) after 12...exd5



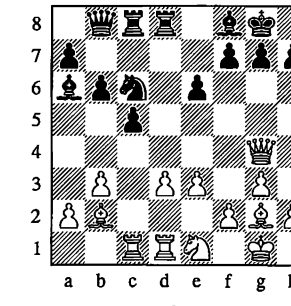
13.e4N

B2) after 11...♖ac8



12.d4!N

C1) after 17...♗f8



18.♗f6!N

1.c4 e6 2.g3 d5 3.♗g2 ♘f6 4.♘f3 ♗e7 5.0–0 0–0 6.b3 c5

The most active move, occupying the centre and preparing to develop the queen's knight to c6. Black does not fear 7.cxd5 for two different reasons. 7...exd5 transposes to the b3-variation of the Tarrasch Defence, which is considered to be harmless for Black, but 7...♘xd5 is also a good possibility, with a rather symbolical advantage for White.

7.♗b2 ♘c6

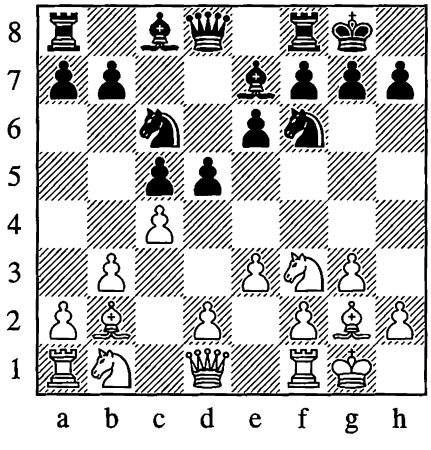
Threatening 8...d4 and if 9.e3 then 9...e5! 10.exd4 exd4. Black is two tempos down if compared with a hybrid between the Hromadka and the King's Indian, but White has spent this time on the now useless moves b2-b3 and ♗b2.

For 7...d4 see line A from Chapter 19.

8.e3!

A multipurpose move. White takes preventive measures against ...d5-d4 and prepares the queen's development to the comfortable e2-square.

This is the splitting point of several systems of development.



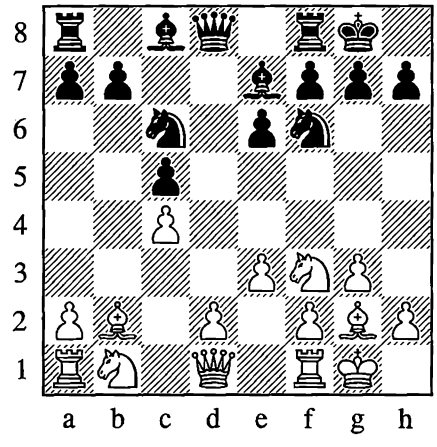
In this chapter, we will examine some of the less common lines: **A) 8...dxc4**, **B) 8...♕a5** and some of the possible sidelines after **C) 8...b6**. Since these variations are not especially popular, some of the lines recommended below have not been tested very often.

Later, we will examine 8...d4 in Chapter 23 and the main lines after 8...b6 in Chapters 24 and 25.

A) 8...dxc4

This is an obvious concession provoked by the mirage of the theoretically weak d3-square. Black is not well enough developed to establish a blockade on that square and opening the long light diagonal will only cause him additional problems in completing his development.

9.bxc4



9...♕d3

Another way of trying to make use of the d3-square is 9...♕b6. Let's see two possible continuations:

a) 10.♕c2 ♘b4 11.♕b3 ♘d3

Black gains the bishop pair, but neglects his development. Against other moves, White could play d2-d4 with better development and more space in the centre.

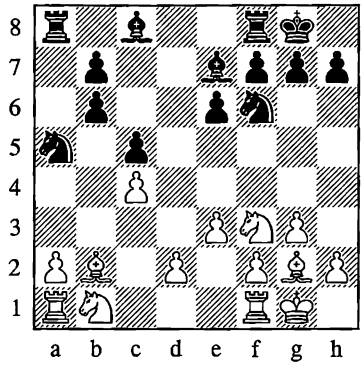
12.♕xd3 ♕xb2 13.♘c3 ♕b6 14.♖fb1 ♕c7

15.♘b5 ♕a5 16.a4 a6 17.♘c3 ♕c7 18.a5±

White is better developed and has the more compact structure, Magerramov – Prandstetter, Trnava 1981.

b) 10.♕b3 ♘a5 11.♕xb6 axb6

Black has forced White to make the exchange, but the structural modifications are not necessarily favourable for Black. Once White has consolidated his central chain, the pressure along the b-file will become annoying.



12.♖c1 ♖d8 13.♘a3 ♗d7 14.d3 ♗c6 15.♘e1 ♘e8 16.♗c3 ♗f6 17.♗xf6 ♘xf6 18.♖cb1 ♘d7 19.♗f1

The d3-pawn is safely defended and White intends to regroup with ♖b2 and ♘b1-c3.

19...♔f8 20.♖b2 ♗a4 21.♘b1 ♗d1 22.♘c3 ♗h5

Black has transferred the bishop to the other wing in order to leave the c6-square available for the knight, but the bishop will soon become passive.

23.f4 ♘c6 24.♗g2 ♗g6 25.♗xc6!

White is planning to place his central pawns on light squares, in order to restrict the enemy bishop. First, he has to get rid of his own bishop, though.

25...bxc6 26.a4 ♖a5 27.e4±

White has a space advantage and better minor pieces; the d7-knight is tied to the defence of the b6-pawn, while the bishop cannot find a useful job. White went on to win a technical game in Damljanovic – Topalov, Benidorm 1992.

10.♕b3 ♖d8

Black must maintain the tension, as 10...♕xb3?! 11.axb3± leads to the consolidation of White's centre and the opening of the a-file for the a1-rook. White would play d2-d4 soon, with a considerable space advantage and a lead in development.

11.♖d1 a6

This weakens the queenside, but it is hard to suggest a constructive move for Black. For instance, 11...♖b8 loses two tempos after 12.♘e5 ♘xe5 13.♗xe5±.

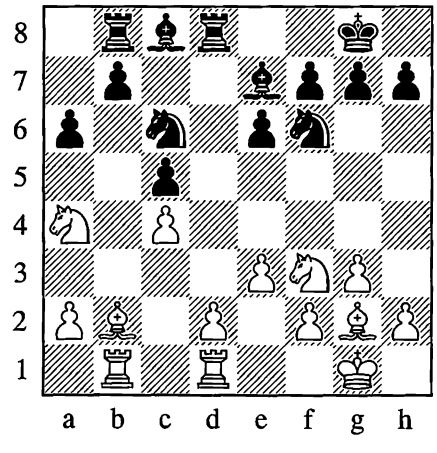
12.♕xd3 ♖xd3 13.♘c3 ♖d8

Since ...♗d7 would leave the rook trapped after ♘e1, Black retreats immediately. It becomes clear that Black's opening has turned into a fiasco.

14.♖ab1

Taking the weaknesses along the b-file under observation, but the simpler 14.d4± would have been equally good. If Black had played any other neutral move instead of 11...a6 (let's say 11...h6), 14.d4 would have been the best move for sure.

14...♖b8 15.♘a4



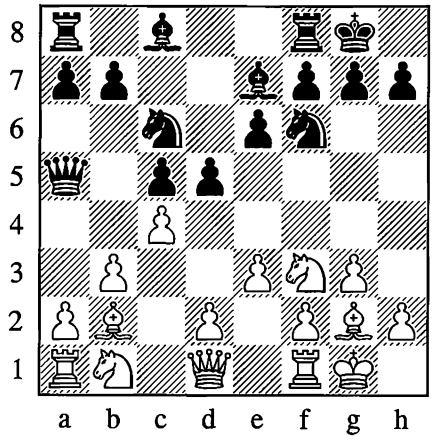
15...♗d7

Over-defending the c6-knight in order to prepare ...b7-b5, as the immediate 15...b5?! is strongly met by 16.cxb5 axb5 17.♘xc5 ♗xc5 18.♖dc1± when White regains the piece after having weakened the enemy queenside.

16.♘b6±

With a dominating position, Neverov – Efimenko, Rivne 2005.

B) 8...♕a5!?



The plan of ...♕a5 followed by ...♖d8 and ...♗d7 (in either possible move order) was introduced into grandmaster practice by Boris Spassky. Black aims to develop as quickly as possible, without weakening squares along the h1-a8 diagonal. In addition, the c3-square is put under some pressure. Despite its lack of popularity, no adequate antidote to this plan has been seen in practice so far. For a time, I considered this to be one of the most challenging lines for our whole repertoire, but shortly before the book was sent to the printer I managed to discover a hidden defect of Black's development.

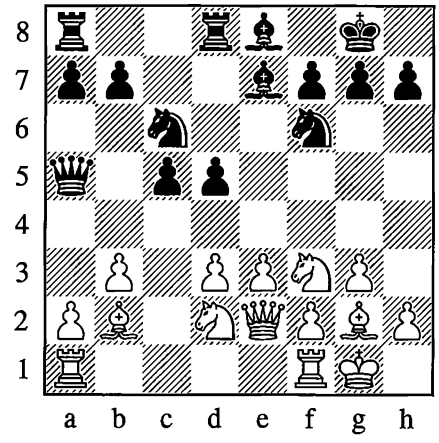
9.♕e2 ♖d8

Now we have a split: **B1) 10.d3** and **B2) 10.♖d1**. My repertoire choice is definitely line B2, but I have included line B1 to offer the reader a better understanding of the position.

B1) 10.d3 ♗d7 11.♘bd2 ♗e8 12.cxd5

12.♘e1N is a strange and quirky idea. 12...♖ac8 13.f4∞ In shatranj I believe they used to call a similar pawn set-up a Double Mujannah.

12...exd5



13.e4N

This was the line on which I originally based my hopes.

13...♕a6

And this is the strong new move that caused so much trouble.

14.exd5

White has a range of options, but Black has all the answers:

14.e5 is a logical try, but Black equalizes after 14...♘e4!?. For example, 15.♘xe4 dxe4 16.♕xe4 ♕xd3.

14.♘h4 looked interesting for a moment, but after 14...♘b4 15.♘f5 (and not 15.a3?! ♘xd3 16.♘f5 ♗f8 17.♗xf6 ♕xf6 18.♕xd3 dxe4 19.♕c2 ♕xf5 20.♗xe4 ♕d7∓) 15...♗f8 Black's queen covers f6, and he seems fine.

14...♘xd5 15.♘c4 ♖ac8 16.♖fe1 b5 17.♘e3

The hope was Black's minor pieces would be targets and that g7 is vulnerable, however:

17...♘xe3 18.♕xe3

Or 18.fxe3 ♘b4 is pleasant for Black.

18...♗f8

White cannot exploit Black's back-rank bishops. Perhaps some line with a later d3-d4 will be equal, but that is about all.

B2) 10.♖d1 ♗d7

Continuing the usual scheme, but we must also consider what happens if Black advances:

10...d4 11.exd4 cxd4 12.d3 In this reversed Benoni both sides have unusually placed pieces – particularly White's rook on d1 and Black's rook on d8 and queen on a5 (right in the path of a2-a3 and b2-b4). White's issues can be fixed in one move; Black's problems are more troublesome.

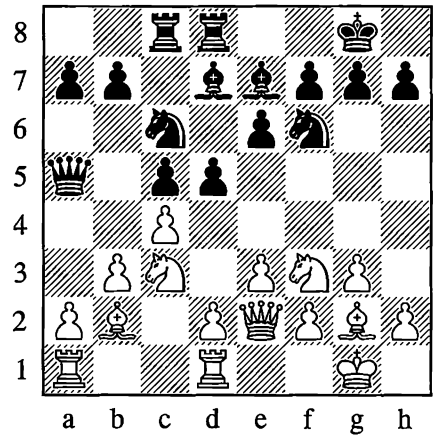
11.♘c3

I believe this is the best move order. White has delayed the knight's development until Black has blocked the d-file with ...♗d7, in order to reduce the effectiveness of ...d5-d4. As we know, with the queen on a5 there is little point in transposing to a reversed Benoni, but, if allowed, an eventual ...d4-d3 may cause White some trouble.

11...♖ac8

This position has been reached via different move orders in a number of games.

Instead this was Black's last chance to advance his d-pawn: 11...d4 12.exd4N A strangely obvious move to be a novelty (12.♘b1 has been successfully played, but we shall not follow that path). 12...♘xd4 (12...cxd4? 13.♘b5 simply wins the pawn) 13.♘xd4 cxd4 14.♘e4 White has a slight edge. For example, 14...♘xe4 15.♗xe4 ♗c6 16.d3±.



12.d4!N

The same idea as in other lines of related chapters; White switches from hypermodern play to fighting for space in the centre. The somewhat unnatural placement of Black's light-squared bishop prevents him from putting pressure on White's hanging pawns.

One of the points behind Black's strategy is that White cannot transpose to an isolani structure because after 12.cxd5 exd5 13.d4 cxd4 14.♘xd4? ♘xd4 the c3-knight is hanging.

Preparing this operation with 12.♖ac1 would leave the a2-pawn undefended and can be met with 12...d4.

The game Lombardy – Spassky, Buenos Aires 1979, continued 12.d3 ♗e8 13.e4 dxc4 14.bxc4 ♘d4 with active play for Black.

12...cxd4

Black was still short of useful moves. Continuing the general regrouping with:

12...♗e8

Would be strongly met by:

13.cxd5!

The opening of the h3-c8 diagonal does not bother White anymore, because ...♗g4 is now impossible.

13...exd5

13...cxd4 can lead to many enjoyable tactics. In fact, g7 turns out to be a fine target: 14.♘xd4 ♘xd4 15.♖xd4 For example: 15...♘xd5 (not 15...♖xc3? 16.♕d2!) 16.♘xd5 exd5 17.♕g4! Eyeing both g7 and the c8-rook. 17...♗d7 18.♖xd5 Black has dropped a pawn and his best move is an amusing desperado: 18...♕e1† 19.♖xe1 ♗xg4 20.♖xd8† ♖xd8 21.♗d4 With a clear extra pawn.

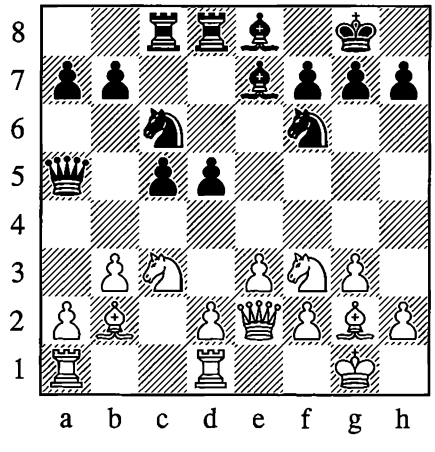
14.dxc5 ♗xc5 15.a3

White has a favourable set-up against the isolani.

13.exd4 ♗e8

The last regrouping move, aiming to activate the d8-rook. The defect of the whole plan is that the bishop cannot emerge into play easily.

If 13...♕a6 then the pressure along the f1-a6 diagonal can be neutralized with 14.♗f1 h6 15.♖ac1±. White retains more space and has the more harmonious piece placement.



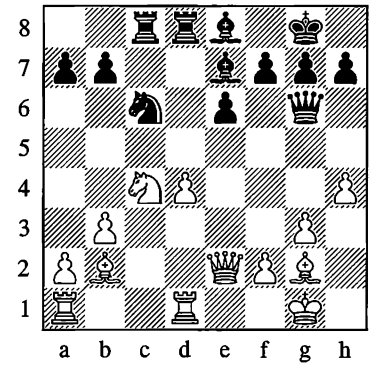
14.cxd5

Once again, releasing the tension in the centre is justified after the bishop retreat.

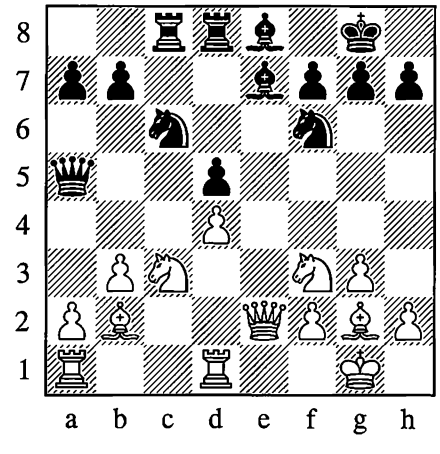
14...exd5

The structure is almost symmetrical, but White's position is more active.

Black cannot maintain the blockade on d5 after: 14...♘xd5 15.♘xd5 ♕xd5 (15...♖xd5 16.♘e5 ♖dd8 transposes) 16.♘e5 ♕a5 17.♘c4 ♕g5 18.h4 ♕g6



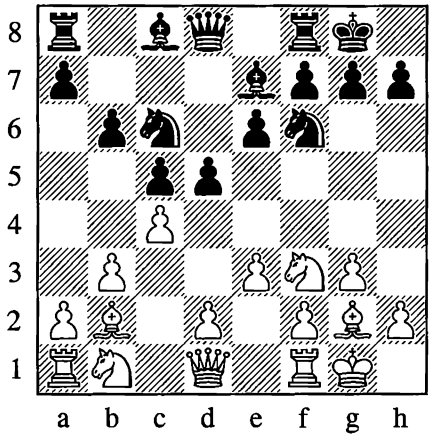
White has a very pleasant position. He can open the centre with 19.d5±, or prepare this operation with 19.♘e3. Maybe the most troubling continuation is 19.a4±, preventing ...b5 and keeping all the threats in reserve. With his b7-pawn under indirect pressure, Black cannot play the generally desirable ...♘b4-d5, while White can slowly activate his position, starting with, say, ♖ac1.



15.a3

White prevents ...♗b4 and prepares to play ♘e5. Black's queen feels rather uncomfortable in view of a possible b3-b4 followed by ♘a4-c5 and ♖ac1.

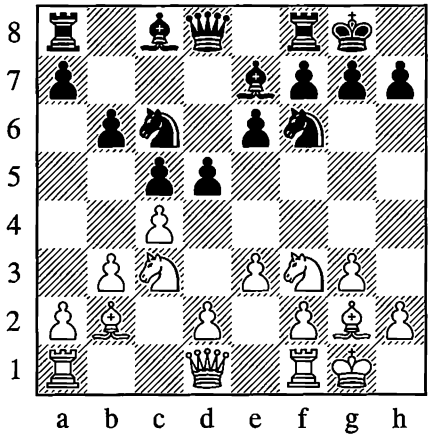
C) 8...b6



This is the most natural way of developing, but, as we shall see later, Black will face some problems along the h1-a8 diagonal.

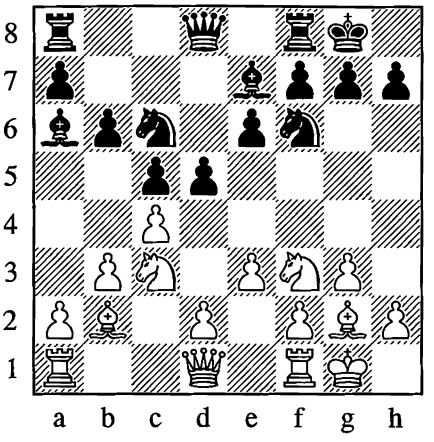
9.♘c3

The most active move, increasing the pressure on the d5-pawn.



We will now examine **C1) 8...♗a6** and **C2) 8...♗b7**. The popular 8...dxc4 9.bxc4 ♗b7 will be examined in Chapter 24.

C1) 9...♗a6



This unnatural way of developing the bishop, attacking a pawn that can easily be defended, contains more venom than it may look at first sight. Black intends to prevent (or at least discourage) the plans employed in Chapters 24 and 25. Once he has completed his development, he may well retreat the bishop to its more natural location on b7. In order to understand the position better, I recommend that this line is studied together with the aforementioned chapters.

Black's strategy causes White serious problems in maintaining flexibility. He has to be prepared not only for the eventual threats Black may have with his bishop on a6, but also for the moment when the bishop steps back to b7. In many games, ♘b5 (now or a few moves later) is played. Although ...♗xb5 and cxb5 followed by ♘e5 would leave the c6-square dominated by White, the knight jump should generally be avoided. Instead of taking on b5, after a well-timed ...♗b7 followed by ...a7-a6 White will simply have lost a tempo.

10.d3

The mathematical logic behind this move is simple. 10...dxc4 11.bxc4 ♗b7 12.♕e2 followed by ♖fd1 and d3-d4 or 10...♗b7 11.cxd5 followed soon by d3-d4 would

transpose to Chapters 24 and 25, respectively. The same mechanism is valid for the next few moves.

10...♖c8

Black plans to develop his rooks behind the hanging pawns and place the queen on a safe square away from the dangerous central zone (b8 or e8). An alternative is:

10...♕c7

This hurried move leads to one of the few cases in which the correct answer is:

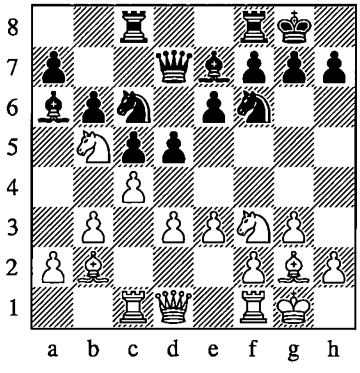
11.♘b5!

Black will have to lose an additional tempo with his queen, making the plan based on ...♗b7 and ...a7-a6 less effective.

11...♕d7

Black cannot avoid the loss of time with 11...♗xb5 12.cxb5 ♘a5 13.♖c1± because White threatens b3-b4, forcing the enemy queen to move again.

12.♖c1 ♖ac8



13.d4!?

Taking into account Black's loss of time and the not entirely adequate placement of the light-squared bishop, White can fight for the centre in the spirit of the lines from Chapter 24.

13...cxd4 14.exd4 ♖fd8

Simplifications would not promise Black an easy life: 14...♗xb5 15.cxb5 ♘a5 16.♕d3 ♖xc1 17.♖xc1 ♖c8 18.♘e5 ♖xc1† 19.♗xc1 ♕c7 20.♗d2± White has the bishop pair and a considerable space advantage on the queenside. Black's central majority is practically impossible to advance, partly because this would strengthen the g2-bishop.

15.♕e2 ♘e4 16.♖fd1 ♘d6 17.a4!

White has consolidated his knight and is ready to capture towards the centre in case of an exchange.

17...♗b7

Hoping to play ...a7-a6.

18.♘e5!

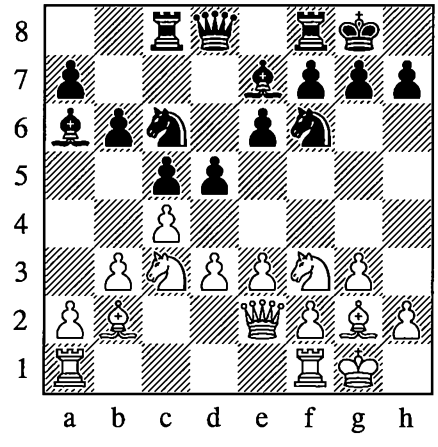
Black does not have time for it! The threat of ♘xc6 followed by ♘xa7 forces Black to release the tension twice.

18...♘xe5 19.dxe5 ♘xb5 20.axb5 ♗c5 21.♕g4±

White had a considerable space advantage in Yudovich – Mukhin, Sochi 1968.

11.♕e2

Provoking the blocking of the centre in the spirit of line B3 from Chapter 20 is not entirely adequate because the c3-knight will have to lose a lot of time being rerouted. 11.e4?! d4 12.♘b5 e5 13.♘h4 g6 With the white queen's knight far from the e4-square, the plan based on f2-f4 can be adequately met with ...♘h5-g7 followed by ...f7-f5, Miles – Spassky, Vienna 1980.

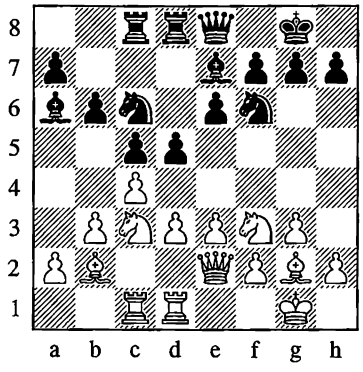


11...♕c7

The queen is heading for b8. Another rather popular plan is:

11...♕d7 12.♖fd1 ♖fd8 13.♖ac1 ♕e8

The queen is absolutely safe on this square, but also very passive. One important element is that, once the bishop retreats to b7, the queen will not be able to defend it, increasing the possibility of an unpleasant pin of the d5-pawn.



14.♖d2!N

Since Black is not threatening much, White can take his time to regroup. The idea of the last move is to unpin the d3-pawn with ♕d1, when the standard operation cxd5 followed by d3-d4 will become possible.

14...h6

A half-waiting move, as Black has few active possibilities.

14...♗b7 allows 15.cxd5 followed by d3-d4 soon.

15.♕d1

Now that the queen has evacuated the f1-a6 diagonal, the bishop has nothing more to do on a6.

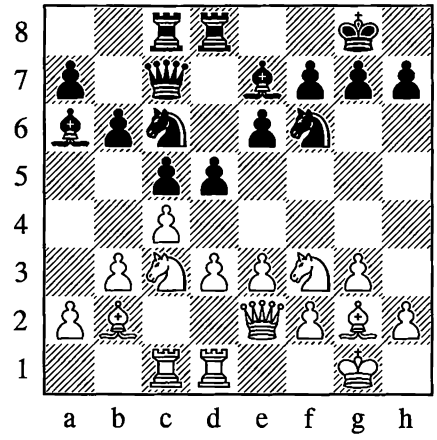
15...♗b7 16.cxd5

Another possible plan enabled by the queen retreat is 16.♘e2 a6 17.♘f4± followed by h4-h5, stabilizing the position in White's favour.

16...♘xd5 17.♘xd5 ♖xd5 18.d4±

Followed by ♘e5 with active play in the centre and constant pressure against the g7-square.

12.♖fd1 ♖fd8 13.♖ac1



13...♕b8

The main alternative is 13...dxc4 14.bxc4. Remarkably, 14...♗b7 15.d4 would transpose to line D2 from Chapter 24!

14...♕b8

This is trickier. Black completes the regrouping of his major pieces without allowing cxd5 or d3-d4, because the c4-pawn is still under pressure. Delaying ...♗b7 for so long has a hidden drawback, though.

15.♘e1

In the classical plan mentioned in the introduction to Chapter 24 (and which we wish to avoid), White cannot gain space on the kingside without exchanging the light-squared bishops (for instance, had the bishop been on b7, Black could have played ...♘a5). This would slightly weaken the white king's defence and offer Black some additional space for manoeuvring on the queenside. In this concrete position, White is in time to play f2-f4 and avoid an exchange of bishops. This will leave the b7-bishop in the way of its colleagues, while the g2-bishop may

be useful, not only for defensive purposes, but also for putting pressure on the h3-c8 diagonal, creating the threat of f4-f5.

15...♗b7 16.f4 a6 17.♖b1 ♗a8 18.♘f3±

Followed by ♗h3 and g4-g5 or f4-f5. In some cases, e4-e5 followed by ♘e4 also looks interesting.

14.cxd5!

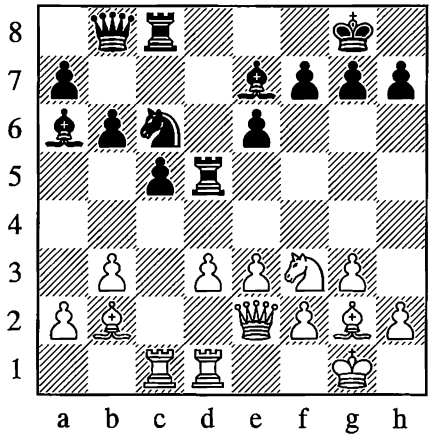
Although the d3-pawn remains pinned, giving up the centre is justified by the passive (and sometimes vulnerable) position of the black queen.

14...♘xd5

14...exd5 is answered with 15.a4!± followed by ♘b5 and d3-d4. If ...♘b4 then the black queen would feel uncomfortable after ♘b5 and ♗e5.

15.♘xd5 ♖xd5

15...exd5 leaves empty spaces on the kingside: 16.♗h3 ♖c7 17.♘e5± Black's piece placement is rather odd; White will unpin the d-pawn soon, in order to play d3-d4.



16.♘e1

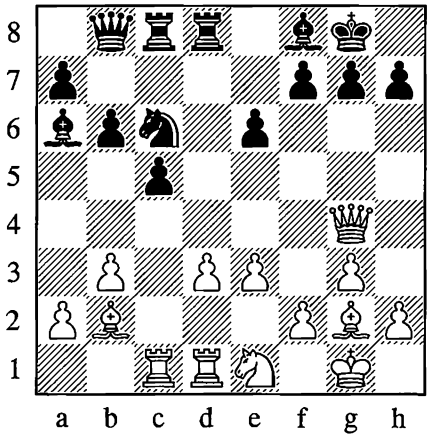
White over-defends d3 and opens the h1-a8 and d1-h5 diagonals.

16...♖dd8

16...♖d7 places the rook on a vulnerable square: 17.♕g4 ♗f8 18.♕a4 ♗b7 19.b4!± This trick would not be possible with the rook on d8.

17.♕g4 ♗f8

White has achieved some activity, but he cannot count on an advantage without opening a new front in the centre.



18.♗f6!N

Activating the bishop with gain of time and provoking a loss of harmony in Black's camp before playing the thematic d3-d4.

In Hickl – Zaitsev, Germany 2006, White's advantage was rather symbolic after 18.d4 ♘e7 19.dxc5 ♖xc5 20.♖xc5 bxc5. White cannot prevent ...c5-c4 and a draw was soon agreed.

18...♖d7

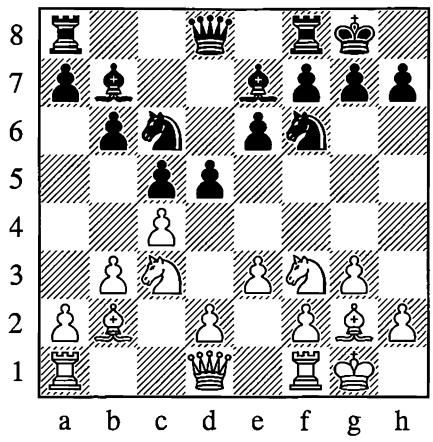
18...♘e7 is passive and allows White to gain space on the kingside. 19.h4 ♗b7 20.♘f3 h6 21.h5± In various types of ending, Black would have to endure prolonged suffering.

19.d4 ♔h8 20.♗g5±

Black is poorly coordinated and his pieces are exposed to threats such as d4-d5 or ♗f4. White is entitled to hope that he will convert his initiative into a more stable advantage,

such as a black weakness on c5 or a weakening of the kingside.

C2) 9...♗b7



Black hopes to neutralize the pressure of the g2-bishop, but this is not so simple to achieve. It is well known (partly from the theory of the fianchetto Queen's Indian) that White's light-squared bishop is in a slightly better situation than its rival. This is because it is defended by the king, a piece that is not needed for any active functions, at least not in the middlegame. This means that only Black can be submitted to a pin along the h1-a8 diagonal, unless he employs a rook or the queen for the passive job of defending his bishop.

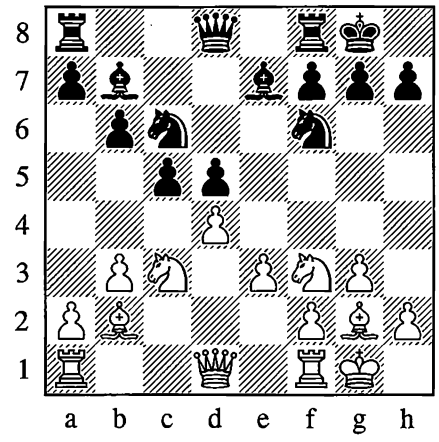
10.cxd5

10.♕e2 and 10.d3 are popular alternatives, but I believe that immediately clarifying the situation in the centre offers White the best chance of keeping the initiative.

In this chapter we shall examine the lines in which Black accepts hanging pawns after either **C21) 10...exd5** or **C22) 10...♘xd5 11.♘xd5 exd5**. (11...♕xd5 will be studied extensively in Chapter 25).

The main defect of Black's position in both lines is the placement of the queen's knight, which obstructs the b7-bishop, thus weakening the defence of the important d5-pawn.

C21) 10...exd5 11.d4



The only difference compared with a popular Queen's Indian tabiya is the black knight is on c6 rather than a6. This is enough to ensure White a stable plus.

11...♖e8

For the time being, it seems that Black has nothing better to do than develop his rooks. To back up this claim, we can have a look at a couple of alternatives:

11...♕d7

From the point of view of the general rules of development, this may seem more logical, but the queen will be unsafe in the centre.

12.♘e5 ♕e6

12...♕d6?! unexpectedly loses a pawn to 13.♘xd5 ♘xd5 14.dxc5±.

13.♘e2 ♖fd8 14.♘f4 ♕d6 15.♖c1 ♖ac8 16.♖e1 ♘b8

Having completed his development, Black tries to improve the position of his queen's knight. It should be mentioned that ...♘d7 can run into ♗h3, while ...♘a6-c7-e6 is rather slow. Once again, carelessness could cost him an important pawn: 16...♘e4 17.dxc5 bxc5 18.♕xd5±

17.♘h5!±

After the exchange of the f6-knight, the f7- and d5-squares will remain vulnerable, Csom – Miles, Bad Lauterberg 1977.

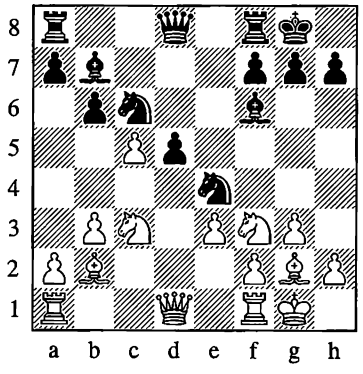
11...♘e4

This seemingly active move is also premature.

12.dxc5 ♗f6

Consistent but not really sufficient.

The somewhat better 12...♘xc3 13.♗xc3 bxc5 leads to the same material balance as in line C22, but with an extra tempo for White (♗b2-c3). This will allow him to set up a strong battery against the enemy kingside. 14.♕d2 ♕b6 15.♕b2 f6 16.♘h4± Black has problems holding his position together, Miles – Kosten, Torquay 1982.



13.♘d4!

Neutralizing the f6-bishop and opening the way for the g2-bishop.

13...♘xd4

13...bxc5 loses a pawn after the forcing sequence: 14.♘xe4 dxe4 15.♘xc6 ♗xc6 16.♕xd8 ♗xd8 17.♖ac1 ♗b6 18.♗a3±

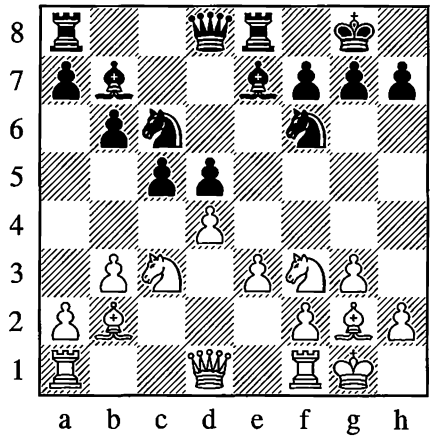
14.♘xe4 ♘f3†!?

A desperate attempt to muddy the waters.

14...dxe4 leads to an endgame with an extra pawn for White: 15.♗xd4 bxc5 16.♗xc5 ♗xa1 17.♗xf8±

15.♗xf3 ♗xb2 16.♘d6 ♗xa1 17.♘xb7 ♕f6 18.♗xd5 ♗e5 19.c6±

With two pawns for the exchange, perfect control of the light squares and a huge space advantage on the queenside, White is close to winning, Petkov – Bueno, corr. 2001.



12.♖c1 ♖c8 13.♗h3!

White refuses to tolerate the rook on the half-open c-file.

13...♖b8

13...♖c7? drops an exchange to 14.♘b5±.

14.♖e1

This move is useful in the eventuality of an exchange on d4. In some cases, White can increase his pressure against the d5-pawn with ♖e2-d2.

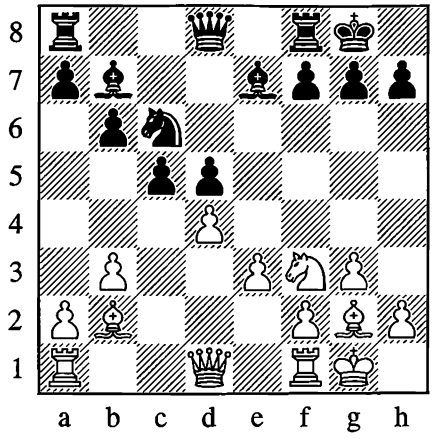
14...cxd4 15.exd4 ♗b4 16.♖xe8† ♕xe8 17.a3 ♗f8 18.♕d3

The structure is almost symmetrical, but White's superior activity allows him to seize control of the position.

18...g6 19.♖e1 ♕d8 20.♘e5 ♗g7 21.f3±

Black lacks breathing space and eventually lost after long suffering in Botvinnik – Petrosian, Moscow 1964.

C22) 10...♘xd5 11.♘xd5 exd5 12.d4



Generally speaking, the exchange of one pair of minor pieces favours the side playing against the hanging pawns. However, in this case, Black's hopes are connected with the disappearance of the c3-knight, which gives him the idea of creating a passed pawn with ...c5-c4, which he hopes will be more difficult to blockade than with all four knights still on the board.

12...♗a6

This is essential preparation for the aforementioned plan, as the impatient 12...c4 loses a pawn to 13.bxc4 dxc4 14.♘e5±.

Below are two examples of games in which Black chose not to force the events:

12...♗f6 13.♕d2 ♕e7 14.♖fd1 ♖fd8 15.♖ac1 ♘b4 16.dxc5

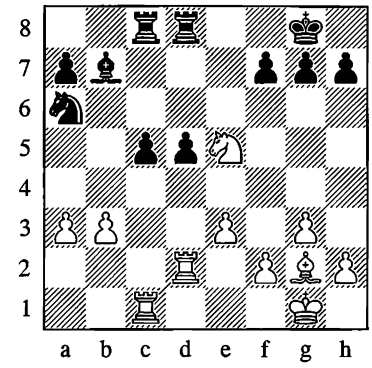
After having completed his development, White releases the tension in order to set up the thematic pressure against the hanging pawns. The exchange of another pair of minor pieces favours his plan.

16...♗xb2 17.♕xb2 bxc5 18.♕e5!

Exchanging an important defender of the c5-pawn and activating the knight at the same time.

18...♕xe5 19.♘xe5 ♖ac8 20.a3 ♘a6 21.♖d2

The threats of ♖cd1 or ♘d3-f4 are very unpleasant. Black needs to defend his bishop in order to make ...d5-d4 possible.



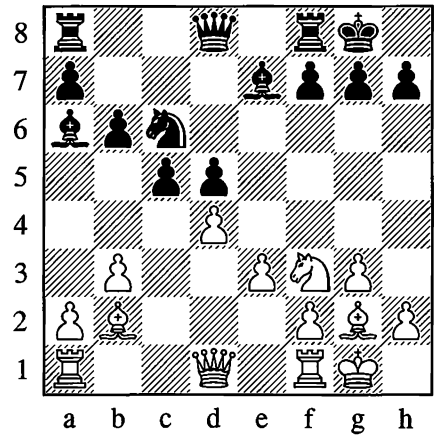
21...♖b8 22.♗f1

The series of threats against the two hanging pawns will result in a won ending.

22...f6 23.♗xa6 fxe5 24.♗xb7 ♖xb7 25.♖xc5 ♖xb3 26.♖dxd5 ♖xd5 27.♖xd5 ♖xa3 28.♖xe5+–

The rest is a matter of technique, Kengis – Levin, Groningen 1991.

12...♕d7 13.♕d2 ♖fd8 14.♖fd1 a5 15.♗c3 f6 16.♕b2 ♕e6 17.♖d2 ♗a6 18.dxc5 bxc5 19.♖ad1 ♖d7 20.h4 ♗b7 21.♔h2± Apart from the usual attack against d5, White threatens ♗h3, with unpleasant pressure on the light squares, Csom – Wiedenkeller, Esbjerg 1984.



13.♖e1 c4

Otherwise, Black's previous move would make no sense and would most likely lead to a loss of time. For instance: 13...♖c8 14.♘e5 ♘xe5 15.dxe5 ♗b7 16.♖e2 ♖c7 17.♖d2 ♖d7 18.♕g4 f5 19.♕e2 ♕a8 20.♖ad1± White has a dangerous passed pawn and the d5-pawn needs permanent care, Botvinnik – Dzindzichashvili, Soviet Union 1967.

14.♗c3!?

Immediately blockading the passed pawn and restricting the c6-knight at the same time. The importance of this latter detail will be revealed in the final position.

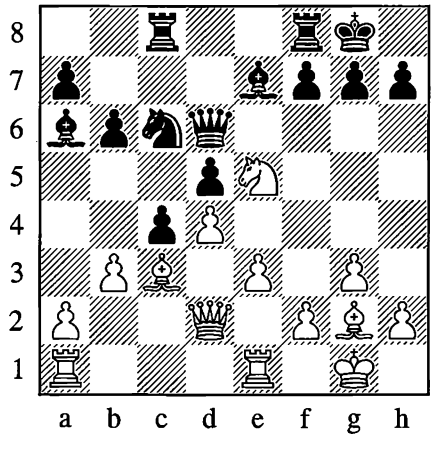
14.bxc4 ♗xc4 15.♘d2 ♖c8 would offer Black some counterplay, although I still prefer White.

14...♖c8

The consistent 14...b5 fails to put the queenside majority into motion: 15.bxc4 dxc4 (15...bxc4 leaves the queenside immobile and allows 16.♕a4±) 16.a3± Black's pawns are blockaded and White's central majority is ready to advance.

15.♕d2 ♕d6 16.♘e5

Threatening bxc4.



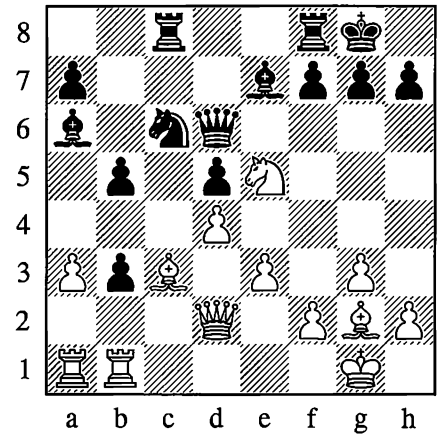
16...b5N

The text move is best, as releasing the tension with 16...cxb3?! loses a pawn: 17.axb3 ♗b5 18.♘xc6 ♖xc6 19.♖xa7 Black's initiative will soon be extinguished: 19...♖fc8 20.♖c1 ♕d8 21.♗h3 ♖8c7 22.♖aa1± With a sound extra pawn, Csom – Jakobetz, Hungary 1993.

17.a3!

This is an effective way to stop the enemy pawns because the unfavourable placement of the a6-bishop prevents ...a7-a5.

17...cxb3 18.♖eb1±



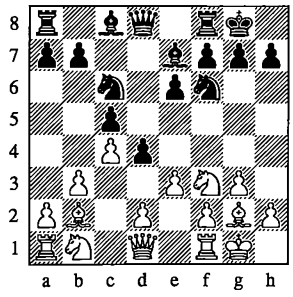
White has the more compact structure and an active position. It should be noted that the c3-bishop prevents the strong manoeuvre ...♘a5-c4, which, if it were possible, would immediately turn the tables.

Conclusion

Line A is an obvious concession and cannot be recommended. Lines B and C1 deviate from the traditional paths and require subtlety and independent thinking from White at an early phase of the game. Line C2 features structures that are pleasant to play with White, although Black's position is not necessarily unsound.

Chapter 23

QGD Set-up



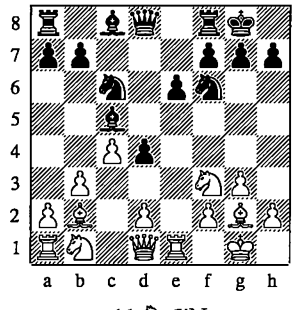
Reversed Modern Benoni

Variation Index

1.c4 e6 2.g3 d5 3.♗g2 ♘f6 4.♘f3 ♗e7 5.0–0 0–0 6.b3 c5 7.♗b2 ♘c6 8.e3 d4 9.exd4 cxd4 10.♖e1!

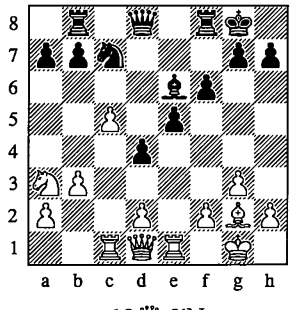
A) 10...d3 318
B) 10...♗c5 320
C) 10...♘e8 322
D) 10...♖e8 11.d3 324
D1) 11...♗f8 325
D2) 11...♗b4 327
D3) 11...♗c5 12.♘e5 ♘xe5 13.♖xe5 329
D31) 13...♕c7 330
D32) 13...♘d7 330

B) after 10...♗c5



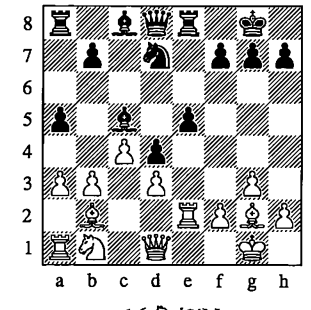
11.♘e5!N

C) after 17...♗e6



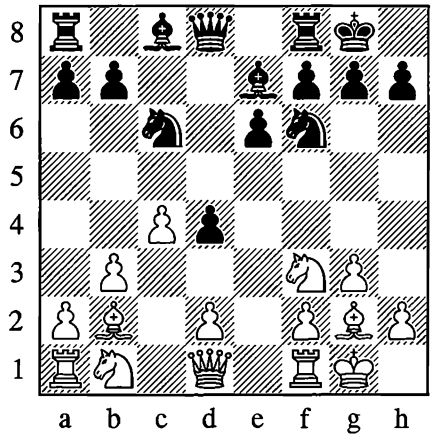
18.♕e2!N

D32) after 15...a5



16.♘d2!N

1.c4 e6 2.g3 d5 3.♗g2 ♘f6 4.♘f3 ♗e7 5.0–0 0–0 6.b3 c5 7.♗b2 ♘c6 8.e3 d4 9.exd4 cxd4



A very ambitious approach; Black gains space in the centre and closes the long dark diagonal. Black's main risk is connected with his slightly delayed development, which may prevent him from keeping control in the centre.

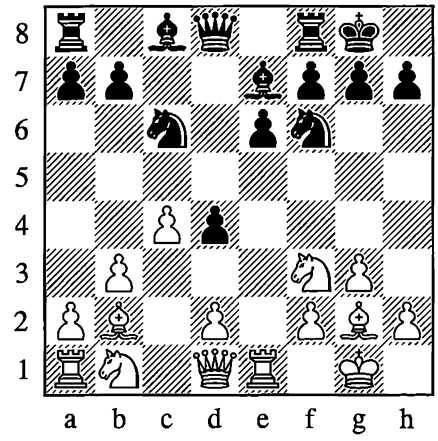
The structure is characteristic of a Benoni with reversed colours. The advance of the d-pawn has opened the other long diagonal, which makes the g2-bishop the most powerful minor piece at this stage of the game.

The significance of White's extra tempo, compared with a genuine Benoni, should be treated with caution, since the moves b2-b3 and ♗b2 have cost him two tempos. If White cannot use his b2-bishop to eliminate the d4-pawn or find a way to re-develop it, it will be White who is trailing in the tempo race.

The main defect of Black's set-up is that he has not played ...e5 yet. This makes his centre shaky for the time being and White should prolong this situation for as long as possible. Thus the next move is absolutely essential.

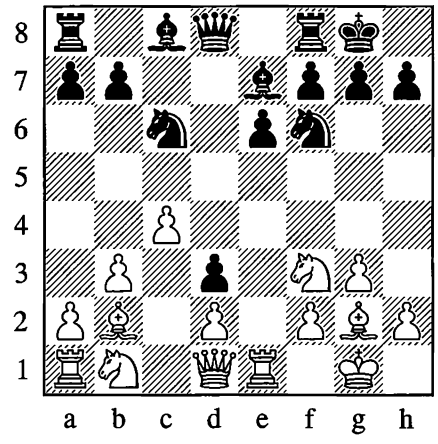
10.♖e1!

In the Benoni, the king's rook belongs on the e-file anyway, but the fact that an early ...e6-e5 is prevented gives the last move the highest priority (although d2-d3, ♘a3 or a2-a3 are also typical developing moves).



Black's main attempts to resolve the tension in the centre are **A) 10...d3**, **B) 10...♗c5**, **C) 10...♘e8** and **D) 10...♖e8**.

A) 10...d3



An over-optimistic move, which has however been played by an ex-World Champion. By blocking the d2-pawn, Black hopes to cut White's position in two. This strategy might be successful if Black's development were better, but under the given circumstances the pawn risks becoming vulnerable. Besides, the last move does not contribute to Black's development, while

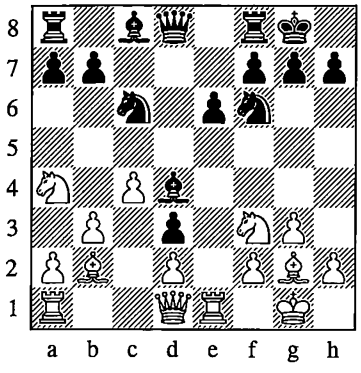
opening the a1-h8 diagonal for the b2-bishop and making the c3-square available for the knight.

11.♘c3 ♘d7

The most constructive move, aiming to overdefend the pawn with ...♘c5. We will also consider two other approaches:

11...♗c5?! 12.♘a4 ♗d4

This was played in Szabo – Fuchs, Havana 1966.



13.♘xd4!N

White has no reason to refrain from taking a grip of the dark squares while also improving the scope of his g2-bishop.

13...♘xd4 14.♖c1!

White is willing to give up an exchange in order to eliminate Black's only active forces, the d4-knight and the d3-pawn.

14...♘e2†

In the event of any neutral black move, White would play 15.♘c5.

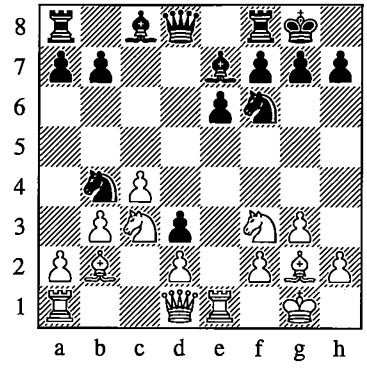
15.♖xe2 dxe2 16.♕xe2±

White's bishops dominate the board and there is no obvious way for Black to complete his development.

A more direct way to activate the queen's knight is:

11...♘b4

This was played in Golovanj – Jakimov, Alushta 2007.



12.♖c1!N

The same reaction to the threatened fork as in the previous line.

12...♗d7

12...♘c2 13.♖f1± leaves the d3-pawn vulnerable to ♘e5 or even ♘e1. Black's queenside would be difficult to develop.

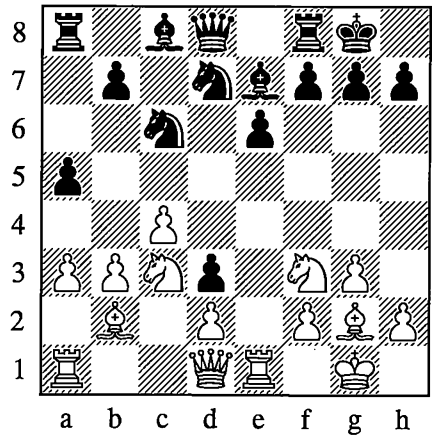
13.♘e5 ♗c6 14.a3 ♘c2

14...♗xg2 is strongly met by 15.axb4! making it difficult for the enemy bishop to find a good square. For instance, 15...♗h3 16.♕f3± or 15...♗c6 16.b5 ♗e8 17.♕f3±, winning the d3-pawn.

15.♗xc6 bxc6 16.♘xc6 ♕d7 17.♘xe7† ♕xe7 18.♖xc2 dxc2 19.♕xc2±

White has two mobile pawns for the exchange and his bishop is very strong.

12.a3 a5



13.♕b1!N

From b1, the queen not only attacks d3, but also supports the advance of the b-pawn. This multi-purpose move is better than 13.♘a4 ♘c5 with counterplay for Black, as in Etruk – Tal, Soviet Union 1972.

13...♕b6

One hidden merit of White's last move is revealed after:

13...♘c5 14.b4 axb4

Instead 14...♘b3 15.♖a2 leaves the black knight vulnerable: 15...axb4 16.axb4 ♖xa2 17.♘xa2±

15.axb4

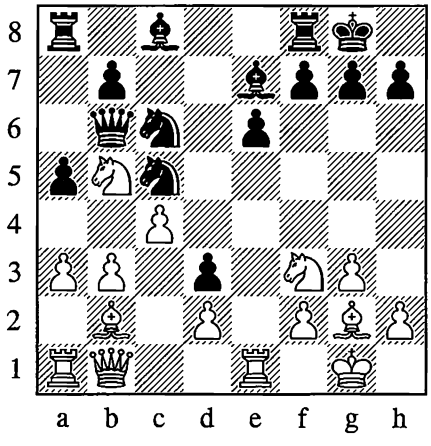
The a8-rook is hanging, which forces:

15...♖xa1 16.♗xa1±

The b4-pawn has been defended, while its rival on d3 is in danger.

14.♘b5 ♘c5

14...♗c5 is answered by the calm 15.♖f1 followed by ♕xd3.



15.b4!

A familiar move, taking full advantage of White's better development.

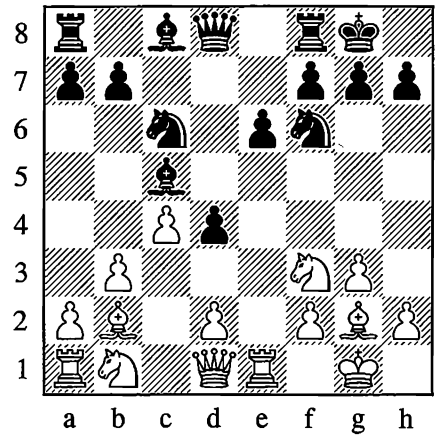
15...axb4 16.axb4 ♖xa1 17.♗xa1 ♘a6

In the similar line examined in the notes to Black's 13th move, this retreat was not available because of the fork with b4-b5. However, the last move only solves the immediate tactical problems, but not the strategic ones.

18.♕xd3 ♘axb4 19.♕b1±

After the pawn exchange, White retains the more active position and the better structure.

B) 10...♗c5



Black over-defends the d4-pawn, preparing ...♘d7 followed by ...e6-e5.

11.♘e5!N

A golden rule that every Benoni player should know is that exchanging one minor piece is essential in order to gain enough space for harmonious development. Of course, this does not refer to the g2-bishop, which has its own special status as master of the long diagonal.

11...♘xe5 12.♖xe5

It appears that the bishop is exposed on c5.

12...♕c7

The obvious alternative is:

12...♘d7

However, this offers White comfortable play after:

13.♖e2

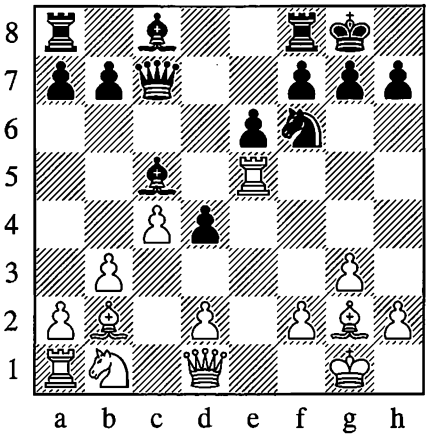
Planning d2-d3, ♘d2, a2-a3, ♕c2 and ♖ae1.

13...d3

This attempt to change the course of the game does not solve Black's development problems.

14.♖e1 ♕b6 15.♖f1±

Followed by ♘c3, with active play; the d3-pawn is more of a weakness than a strength.



13.♖xc5!

White achieves the simplifications that are typical of line C with greater ease.

13...♕xc5 14.♗a3 ♕c7 15.♗xf8 ♔xf8 16.d3 e5 17.♘d2

It is obvious that White has achieved a comfortable reversed Benoni position, but can he really count on an advantage? The exposed position of the black king is the detail that tilts the balance towards a positive answer.

17...♗g4

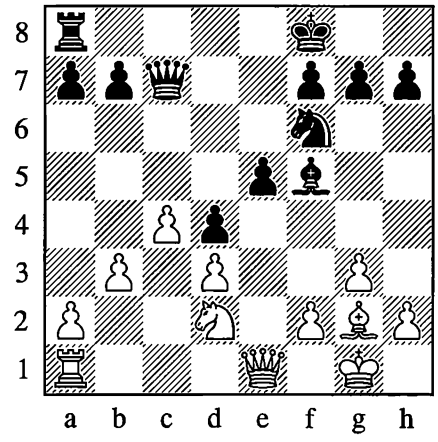
After 17...♗f5 18.♕f3 the bishop has to return to c8, since 18...♗g6 loses a pawn without compensation: 19.♕xb7 ♕xb7 20.♗xb7 ♖b8 21.♗e4±

18.♕e1

Under normal circumstances, the queen would not be well placed on this square, but now the possibility of a check on b4 significantly changes this evaluation.

18...♗f5

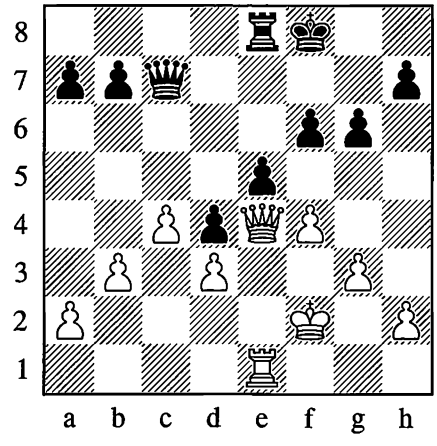
Black is best advised to provoke simplifications with the text move. For example, the developing 18...♖e8 leaves Black's pieces and pawns hanging after 19.♘e4 when the relatively best 19...♘d7 does not neutralize White's initiative: 20.♕b4† ♔g8 21.♘d6±



19.♘e4 ♘xe4 20.♗xe4 ♗xe4

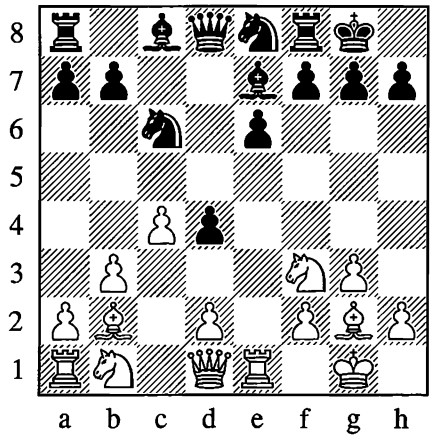
Black has to release the tension, since 20...♕d7 loses a pawn to 21.♗xf5 ♕xf5 22.♕b4† ♔g8 23.♕xb7 ♖f8 24.♖d1±.

21.♕xe4 g6 22.♖e1 f6 23.f4 ♖e8 24.♔f2±



In view of the predictable simplifications, the king moves closer to the centre. In some endings it might occupy the e4-square. In the long run, White's queenside majority will prove more dangerous than Black's centre.

C) 10...♘e8



Black clearly aims to consolidate his centre with ...f7-f6 and ...e6-e5. Later, the knight may go to c7, in order to meet White's queenside attack with ...b7-b5. Taking into account that Black is not fully developed yet, the knight does not stand well on the back rank, but Black has little choice if he wants to carry out the aforementioned plan. (as the generally desirable 10...♘d7 is simply impossible because the d4-pawn is hanging). Note that b2-b3 and ♗b2 cannot be regarded as mere losses of time, since they tend to provoke small concessions from Black.

11.♘e5

In this case, the knight exchange causes White to lose some time, but he can afford this as most of Black's pieces are sitting on the back rank.

11...♘xe5 12.♖xe5 f6 13.♖e1 e5

Given that the break with f2-f4 is one of White's key ideas in the main line, it is worth mentioning the case in which Black delays ...e6-e5:

13...♘c7

Play follows the same patterns:

14.♗a3

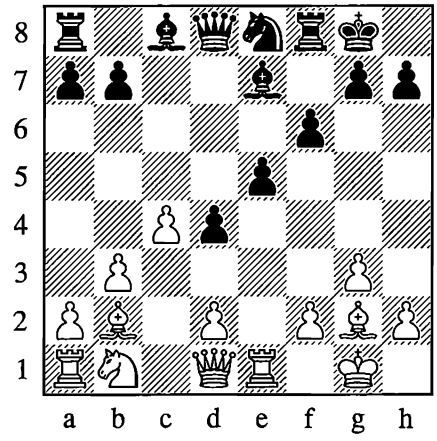
The ideas behind this move will be explained in the notes to the main line.

14...♖b8 15.♗xe7 ♕xe7 16.d3 b5 17.♘d2 bxc4 18.bxc4 e5

After having opened the b-file, Black finally connects his pawns. Otherwise, the pressure against the d4-pawn might have become unpleasant after ♘b3.

19.f4 ♖b2 20.fxe5 fxe5 21.♕c1±

Black's counterplay has been neutralized, while his weaknesses remain.



14.♗a3

Once Black has safely blocked the long dark diagonal, White is willing to spend another tempo to exchange his passive bishop. The last move also pursues a long-term plan: in certain cases, the white knight may reach the d6-square, where it will be supported by the c-pawn.

In *Dangerous Weapons – Flank Openings*, Tony Kosten analyses the sharper 14.f4 exf4 15.♕f3, which leads to very entertaining play. I failed to find anything fundamentally wrong in his lines, but have taken it as my duty to provide

an alternative method of fighting against the massive black centre. I believe that the objective merits of the two different lines are about equal, although their character is different.

14...♗xa3

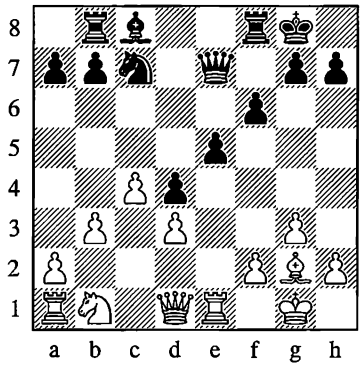
In a broad sense, this is a concession, because it speeds up White's development, but Black hopes to prove that the knight is not well placed on a3. The plan based on d2-d3, ♘a3-c2 and b3-b4 is slow and can be met by ...♖b8 and ...b7-b5, while otherwise the knight is far from the e4-square, from where it could exchange its rival once it reaches the optimal c5-square. The main alternative is:

14...♘c7 15.♗xe7 ♕xe7 16.d3

Preparing the natural development of the knight to d2 and, in some cases, e4. Black now has two main possibilities:

a) 16...♖b8

This was played in Manouck – Iwanesko, Saint Affrique 2009. By over-defending the b7-pawn, the bishop's development is enabled. In some cases, ...b7-b5 will offer queenside counterplay.



17.f4!N

Immediately taking advantage of the pin along the e-file.

17...♗f5 18.♘d2!

White keeps developing, without being disturbed by temporary material losses.

18...♗xd3

Only pawn-grabbing might offer Black some compensation for his shaky centre.

19.♘f3 ♗g6 20.♕xd4 ♘e6 21.♕xa7 e4

Apparently, Black has managed to get some activity in the centre, but...

22.f5! ♗xf5 23.♘h4±

Black's centre will evaporate, while the queenside majority promises White a great ending.

b) 16...♘e6

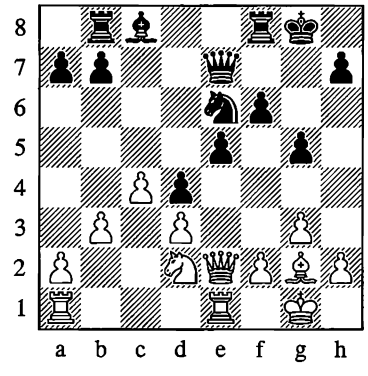
Black improves his knight's position and reduces the impact of the break f2-f4.

17.♘d2 ♖b8 18.♕e2

The pressure along the e-file increases, making the threat of f4 (...exf4, ♗d5) quite unpleasant.

18...g5

Preventing f2-f4 by radical means. So far, we have followed Tihonov – Vunder, St Petersburg 2005.



19.a3!N

Once the enemy kingside has been weakened, White opens a new front.

19...a5 20.b4

This pawn sacrifice is typical for the Benko Gambit. In this case, the justification lies in Black's lagging development.

20...axb4 21.axb4 ♕xb4 22.♗d5 ♔h8 23.♖eb1±

For the sacrificed pawn, White has the initiative. His rooks have open files at their disposal and Black has several weaknesses.

15.♘xa3

In order to justify the knight's development to a3, White will need to play c4-c5 and ♘c4, threatening an invasion on d6. In some cases this implies a pawn sacrifice, but this will be justified by his lead in development.

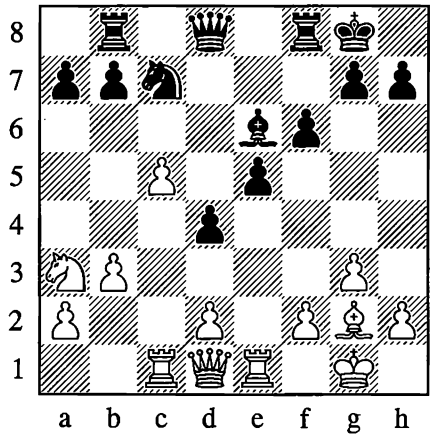
15...♘c7

Once again, the main alternative to improving the knight's position is the prophylactic: 15...♖b8 16.c5!? ♕a5 17.♘c4 ♕xc5 18.♖c1 White is fully developed and, apart from the obvious ♘xe5, threatens f2-f4 (...exf4, ♕f3) with a strong initiative along the open files. With his queen exposed and the rest of his pieces passive, Black is in great danger.

16.♖c1

Before advancing his c-pawn, White places his rook behind it, however this refinement is not really necessary and the immediate 16.c5 is also possible, most likely leading to a transposition.

16...♖b8 17.c5 ♗e6



18.♕e2!N

White completes his development and takes control of an important light-squared diagonal. The significance of this detail will be revealed in the comments to move 19.

The slightly hurried 18.♘c4 was played in Manouck – Colin, Chartres 2005. 18...♘a6!?N This offers Black adequate counterplay: 19.f4 ♗d5 20.fxe5 ♗xg2 21.♔xg2 ♘xc5

18...♗d5

18...♘a6 makes less sense now because of 19.♘b5 when the knight will reach d6 without leaving the c5-pawn undefended.

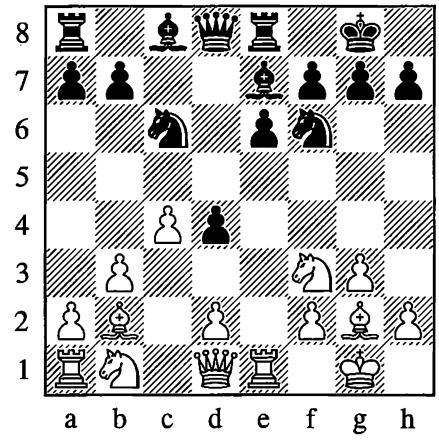
19.♘c4 ♗xg2

The activity of the white queen makes itself felt after 19...♘a6? 20.♘d6 ♗xg2 21.♕c4†±.

20.♔xg2 ♕d5† 21.♕f3±

The c5-pawn is taboo because of ♘xe5, so White will install his knight on d6 in total comfort, while his queenside majority is ready to start advancing. As a curiosity, note that after 21 moves White's d-pawn has not advanced yet! Truly hypermodern play...

D) 10...♖e8



This developing move is Black's best continuation and it prepares ...e6-e5 in a more

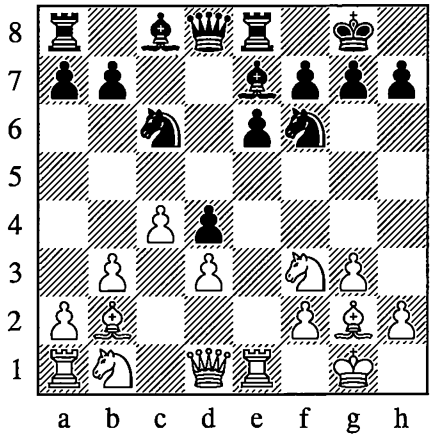
subtle and flexible way than 10...♘e8. True, in order to create the threat of advancing the e-pawn Black still needs to move his e7-bishop, but on the other hand he does not misplace any of his pieces, as happened in line C.

11.d3

In the absence of an immediate threat, White can afford to play a quiet move, preparing to complete his development.

For the time being, White should refrain from defining the queenside structure. After 11.a3 a5 12.d3 ♗c5 13.♘e5 ♘xe5 14.♖xe5 ♕c7 15.f4, he will be deprived of the possibility of harassing the queen with ♘a3.

In our main line White can insert the moves a2-a3, ...a7-a5 at a later moment, according to the circumstances.



Black can choose between **D1) 11...♗f8**, **D2) 11...♗b4** and **D3) 11...♗c5**.

D1) 11...♗f8

This is a solid but somewhat passive move.

12.a3!

It is essential to provoke the weakening of the b5-square before carrying out the thematic knight exchange.

12...a5 13.♘e5 ♘xe5 14.♖xe5 ♘d7

The critical continuation; Black forces the rook to define its intentions immediately.

14...♖b8 15.♘d2 b6

This is too slow.

16.♘f3 ♘d7

Black has to play this anyway, in order to defend his d4-pawn.

17.♖e2!

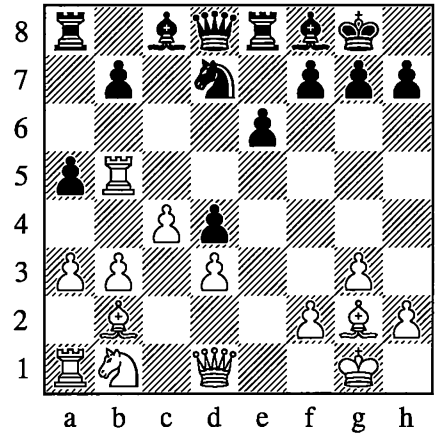
Once White has completed his development, there are good reasons to keep the rook on the half-open e-file.

17...e5 18.♕e1±

With strong pressure against Black's centre, McNab – Liebowitz, corr. 1990.

15.♖b5!

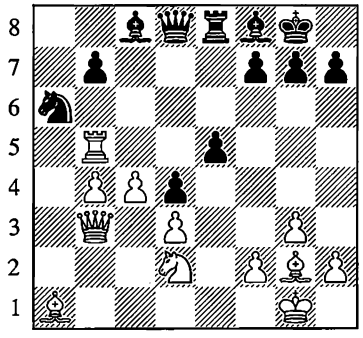
This is why the b5-square was needed! The rook exerts strong pressure against the enemy queenside, preventing its normal development and allowing White to complete his own. This method is frequently employed in the fianchetto Benoni.



15...e5

The most constructive way to defend d4. The knight is fairly well placed on d7, ensuring some stability to Black's position. Moving it away would be premature, as the following two variations illustrate:

15...♘c5 16.b4 axb4 17.axb4 ♖xa1 18.♗xa1 ♘a6 19.♕b3 e5 20.♘d2 White intends to invade all the available queenside squares with c4-c5, ♘c4, ♖b6, ♘d6, etc. The next tactical operation must have been the result of an oversight, but Black's position is difficult anyway.



20...♘xb4? 21.♖xb4 ♕a5 22.♕a4 ♕xb4 23.♕xe8 ♗e6 24.♘f1 White won a piece and later the game in Vyzmanavin – Zaitsev, Minsk 1983.

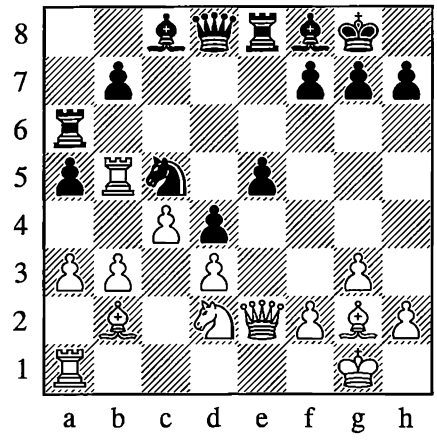
15...♘b6 16.♕e1! Immediately attacking the inadequately defended a5-pawn. 16...a4 17.b4 f6 18.♘d2 e5 19.c5 ♘d5 20.♘c4 ♘c7 21.♖b6 ♖a7 22.♖c1 ♔h8 23.♕d2± White had a crushing advantage on the queenside in Eingorn – Agzamov, USSR 1979. Several black pieces are passive, so the limited activity of the b2-bishop is not so significant. Later, White may reroute it with ♖c2 and ♗c1-d2.

16.♘d2 ♖a6

A typical way of developing the rook without the necessity of moving the c8-bishop. The more passive 16...♖b8 hands over the control of the a-file after 17.b4±, Miles – Muir, Ostend 1990.

17.♕e2 ♘c5

Once the white queen no longer controls the a4-square, this knight jump makes sense.

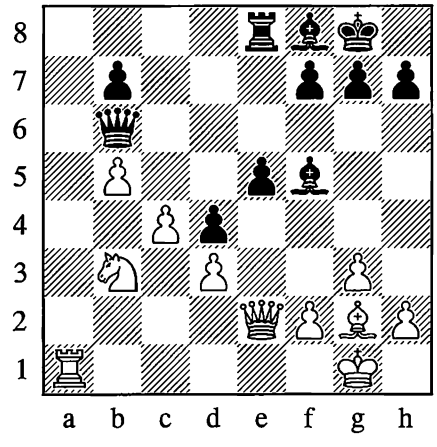


18.b4

Vali Stoica suggested the following interesting plan: 18.♘e4!? b6 19.♘xc5 bxc5 20.a4 ♗d7 21.♗c1 ♖a7 22.♗d2 ♗xb5 23.axb5± Followed by ♗c6 and ♕e1. I remember employing a similar plan of consolidating the rook in a fianchetto Benoni against Joel Akesson, at Gothenburg 2004.

18...♘a4 19.♘b3 axb4 20.axb4 ♘xb2 21.♕xb2 ♖b6 22.♖xb6 ♕xb6 23.b5 ♗f5 24.♕e2

After a series of natural moves, the play has settled down. White's queenside majority is not easy to keep blockaded and White controls the only open file.



24...h6

Instead Yudovich recommended:

24...♕g6

And he claimed "with equality". In my opinion, White's position remains preferable.

25.♖d1

Threatening ♘xd4 as well as the simpler ♗xb7.

25...♗g4

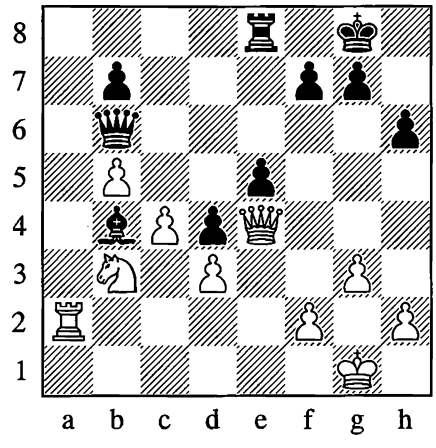
This parries both threats, but allows the activation of the white queen.

26.♗f3 ♗xf3 27.♕xf3 b6 28.♕d5±

With domination of the light squares.

25.♗e4 ♗xe4 26.♕xe4 ♗b4 27.♖a2

Black's position remains unpleasant. White's main threat is f2-f4 followed by f5, with a fantastic blockade on the light squares.



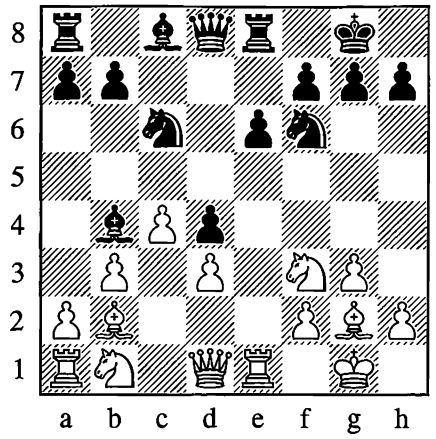
27...♖e6?

As Tarrasch said, "In bad positions, every move is bad." Curiously, in Tal – Zhuravliov, Soviet Championship 1967, the greatest-ever tactical talent missed a simple opportunity to gain a decisive advantage:

28.c5!N

The only way to keep the back rank defended is 28...♕d8, but this loses the b7-pawn.

D2) 11...♗b4



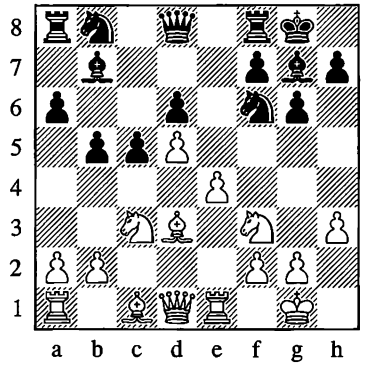
Black wins an essential tempo to carry out ...e6-e5, but later he will have to pay it back with interest, because the bishop will be exposed to an attack with a2-a3.

12.♘bd2 e5 13.a3 ♗c3

This is the only logical attempt to justify the eleventh move, as retreating would be exceptionally slow:

13...♗d6 14.b4

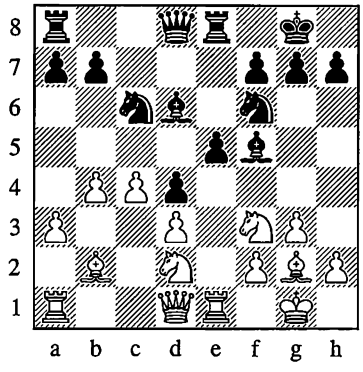
This leads to a curious situation. If we compare with the following Benoni variation, we will be shocked to notice that in our line White is no fewer than three tempos up: 1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 c5 4.d5 exd5 5.cxd5 d6 6.♘c3 g6 7.e4 a6 8.h3 b5 9.♗d3 ♗g7 10.0–0 0–0 11.♖e1 ♗b7



Theory considers this position to be slightly better for White (in our reversed-colours case that would mean Black is better!) but the big lead in development in our current position is likely to make a difference. Still, in our line White needs to display some accuracy to prevent Black from stabilizing the position.

14...♗f5

14...h6 should be met actively: 15.c5 ♗c7 16.b5 ♘a5 17.♖c1 ♗f5 18.♘c4±



Now S. Toth – Elez, Senta 2009, continued 15.c5?! ♗c7 16.♘c4 a6 17.♕b3 h6. Once he has stabilized the position, preventing b4-b5 and ♘g5, Black has comfortable play. So much better was:

15.♘g5!N ±

Planning ♘ge4 with active play. The tactical point is that 15...♗xd3?! is met by 16.c5 ♗c7 17.♘xf7! followed by ♕b3.

14.♕c2 ♗xb2 15.♕xb2

The price Black had to pay for occupying the centre is rather high. He made four moves with his bishop then exchanged it for its passive rival on b2. In addition, the bishop exchange has created the possibility of a white knight invading on d6. White is fully developed and threatens the usual queenside expansion.

15...♗f5

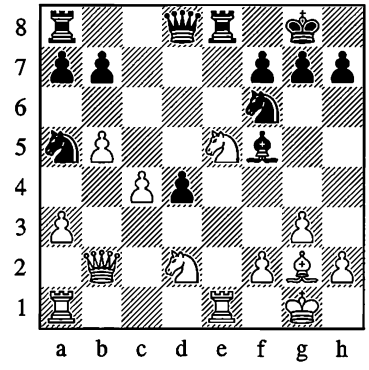
The most active continuation. After the solid 15...a5 White would carry out the standard manoeuvre 16.♘g5± followed by ♘ge4.

16.b4!

It appears that the d3-pawn does not need to be defended yet.

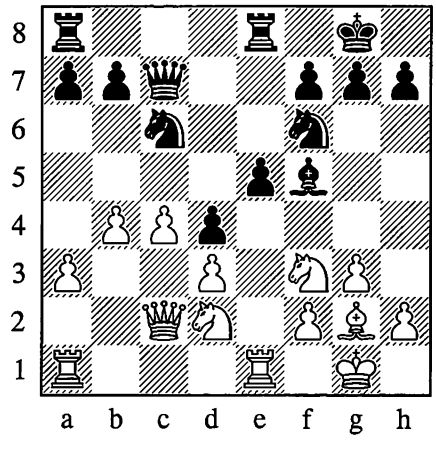
16...♕c7

The capture on d3 has also been tested: 16...♗xd3 17.b5 ♘a5 18.♘xe5 ♗f5 This was played in Schilling – Linklater, corr. 1994.



19.♘ef3!N Removing the knight from its unsecure square and stabilizing the position in the centre. 19...d3 20.♖xe8† ♘xe8 21.c5± The d3-pawn is safely blockaded, while White's queenside majority is very dangerous. Besides, the a5-knight is passive.

17.♕c2

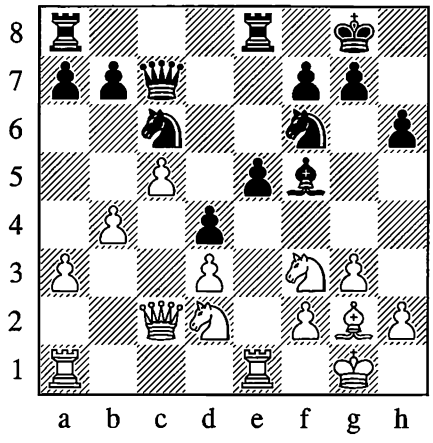


17...h6!?N

The most constructive move, preventing ♘g5. Instead 17...♖ad8 offers White easy play: 18.♘g5 ♘e7 19.♖ac1 h6 20.♘ge4 ♘xe4 21.♘xe4± All White's pieces are optimally placed and the queenside majority is ready to advance, Welin – Schneider, Norrkoeping 1988.

18.c5

White prepares to invade the d6-square, but the main question remains whether Black can counter ♘c4 with ...e5-e4.



18...♖ad8

Black completes his development and provides his d-pawn with much needed support. Instead, trying to prevent b4-b5 is too slow:

18...a6 19.♘c4 e4 20.dxe4

Now the generally desirable 20...♘xe4 loses a piece to 21.♘h4. With the rook on d8, Black would save the day with 21...d3, but this move is not available in the current position. Therefore, Black must choose:

20...♗xe4 21.♕b2 ♖ad8 22.♘d6±

Black will have to give up the exchange for the active knight, but his compensation hardly looks sufficient.

19.b5!

Immediately taking advantage of the omission of ...a7-a6.

19...♘a5

Or 19...♘b8 is rather passive and allows White to regroup comfortably: 20.♖ac1 ♘bd7 21.♘b3 ♖c8 22.♘fd2± Black's centre remains immobile, while c5-c6 is a constant threat.

20.♖ac1 ♗h7

Black has no other useful moves.

21.♕a4

Black's position starts to hang. The main threat is ♘xe5, taking advantage of the overloaded black queen.

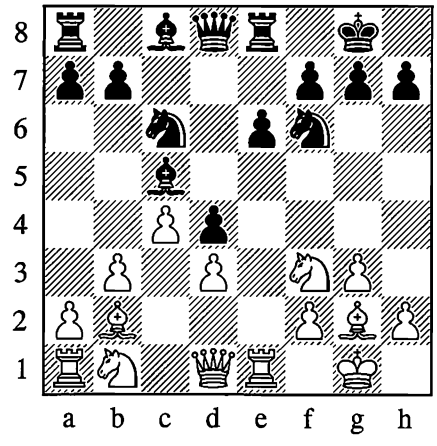
21...♗xd3

Or 21...♘d5 allows the elimination of the other central pawn: 22.♘xd4±

22.♘xe5±

White is very active and his queenside majority will soon produce a dangerous passed pawn.

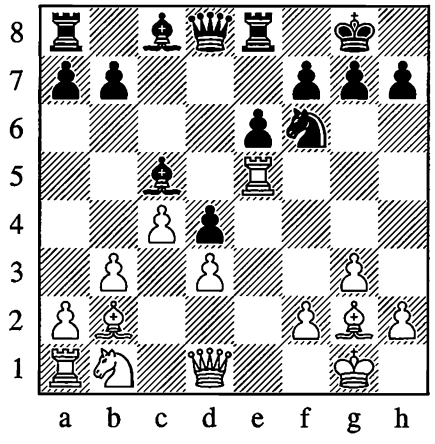
D3) 11...♗c5



I believe this is Black's best way to prepare ...e6-e5. The bishop is more active on c5 than on f8 and less exposed than on b4. One concrete

element is that the white rook's transfer from e5 to b5 is mechanically prevented.

12.♘e5 ♘xe5 13.♖xe5



In practice, Black has tried **D31) 13...♕c7** and **D32) 13...♘d7**.

D31) 13...♕c7

This early queen development would be justified if the rook was forced to retreat, allowing ...e6-e5 with the knight actively placed on f6.

14.f4!N

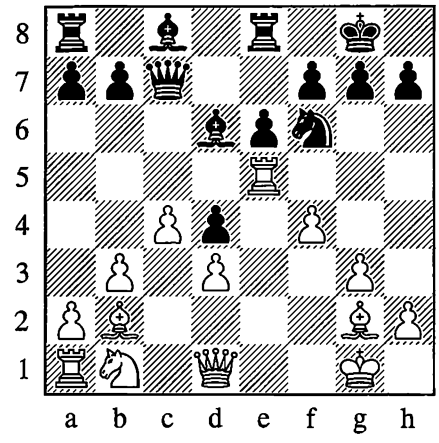
Preventing Black's central expansion. This move is more constructive than 14.♕e1 as played in Webster – Flear, Hastings 1993. After the text move, White is ready to continue his development with either ♘a3 or ♘d2.

14...♗d6

The critical answer. If the rook retreats, then ...e6-e5 will be very strong.

Note that 14...♗d7 drops a pawn to 15.♗xb7!.

Black makes no progress after 14...♘d7 15.♖e2 e5, because the e-pawn is pinned. 16.♕e1 Threatening b3-b4. 16...a5 17.♘a3 With active play.



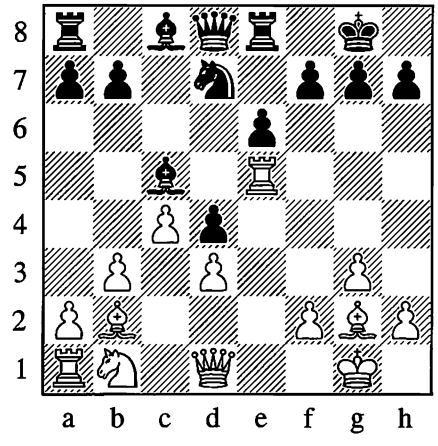
15.♗xd4!

White eliminates the important central pawn and keeps the e6-pawn blocked. At the same time, he will gain absolute control over several dark squares in the centre. These elements more than compensate for the small material investment.

15...♗xe5 16.♗xe5 ♕b6† 17.d4±

Apart from ♗xf6, spoiling Black's kingside structure, White threatens to invade the dark squares with c4-c5 followed by ♘d2-c4. Since Black has no open files for his rooks, he faces a passive defence.

D32) 13...♘d7

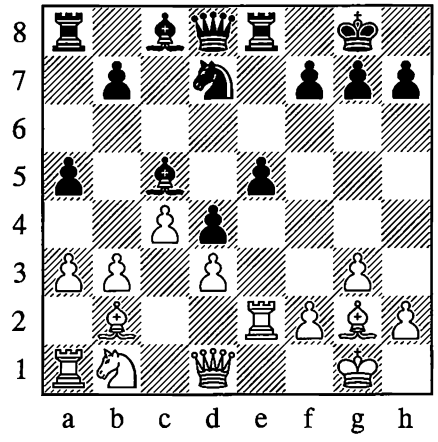


In my opinion, this line is critical for the final evaluation of the reversed Benoni system. Black occupies the centre, while maintaining his overall harmony.

14.♖e2!

The e1-square should be left available for the other rook.

14...e5 15.a3 a5



16.♘d2!N

Development first! Previously, 16.♕e1 has been played in a couple of games.

16...♖a6!

The best way to keep developing. The knight has to defend the e5-pawn, while the queen should keep the e8-rook protected, in order to avoid f2-f4 or ♘f3xd4.

17.♕c2 ♖ae6 18.♖ae1

White has a lead in development, but the final evaluation remains unclear, because Black's centre is well defended.

18...♕b6

Now that the pin along the e-file has been removed, the time has come to develop the queen. Instead 18...♘f6 leads nowhere because of 19.♘f3!± when 19...e4? loses a pawn to 20.♘g5±.

19.♘e4 ♗e7

Black should keep the g5-square under control. For example:

19...♗f8 This leads to an initiative for White. 20.♘g5!? ♖6e7 21.♗d5 h6 22.♘e4 ♘c5 23.♘xc5 ♕xc5 24.b4! axb4 25.♕b3± White threatens to create a dangerous queenside majority with axb4. Now 25...bxa3 loses an exchange to 26.♗xa3, while after 25...♖c7 26.axb4 ♕xb4 27.♕xb4 ♗xb4 28.♖xe5 the only thing left from the black centre is a weakness on d4.

20.♗c1

White has completed his regrouping in a very harmonious way. In contrast, Black's pieces are somewhat immobile. In order to get some activity, he needs to put his centre into motion.

20...h6

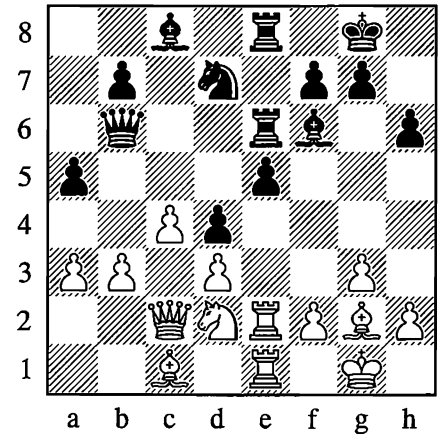
Threatening ...f7-f5 without allowing ♘g5.

21.♗h3 ♖c6 22.♘d2

White uses his greater mobility to cause a loss of harmony in Black's camp.

22...♗f6 23.♗g2 ♖ce6

More active than 23...♖c7 24.♘f3, when it is not easy to display any form of activity. For instance, 24...♘c5 allows 25.♘xd4.



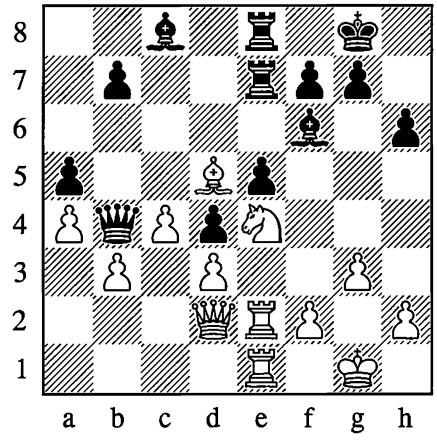
24.a4!

An interesting idea found by Vali Stoica (compare this to his suggestion on the 18th move from line D1). White intends to open new horizons for his dark-squared bishop. With the black bishop tied to the defence of the e5-pawn on a relatively unfavourable diagonal, Black cannot maintain the blockade on c5 and b4 for long.

24...♘c5

24...♗e7 is strongly met by 25.♗d5 ♖g6 26.f4± with an unpleasant pin along the e-file.

25.♗a3 ♕c7 26.♗d5 ♖6e7 27.♗xc5 ♕xc5 28.♘e4 ♕b4 29.♕d2±



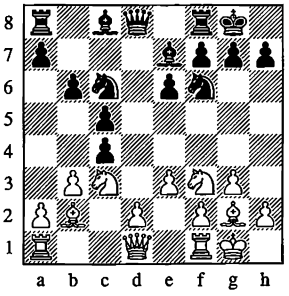
The queenside will soon be unblocked when White will have a strong initiative.

Conclusion

The reversed Benoni demands that both sides play very accurately on every move, as is to be expected from such a strategically unbalanced variation. White's extra tempos, compared with a normal Benoni, should offer him a slight initiative, but only if he takes advantage of them in the right way.

Chapter 24

QGD Set-up



9...dxc4 Main Line

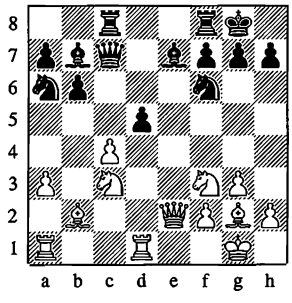
Variation Index

1.c4 e6 2.g3 d5 3.♗g2 ♘f6 4.♘f3 ♗e7 5.0–0 0–0 6.b3 c5 7.♗b2 ♘c6 8.e3 b6 9.♘c3 dxc4

10.bxc4 ♗b7 11.♕e2

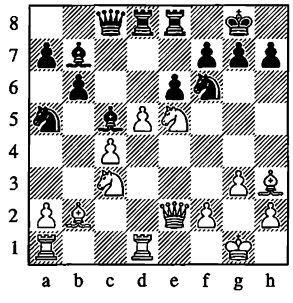
A) 11...♘b4 336
B) 11...a6 339
C) 11...♕d7 12.♖fd1 341
C1) 12...♖ad8 341
C2) 12...♖fd8 344
D) 11...♖c8 12.♖ac1! 346
D1) 12...♖c7 346
D2) 12...♕c7 348

A) note to 14...♖e8



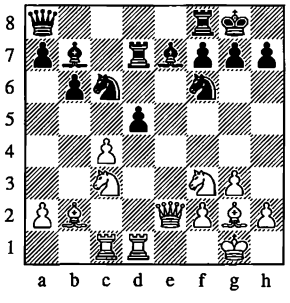
17.♘xd5!N

C1) after 17...♗c5



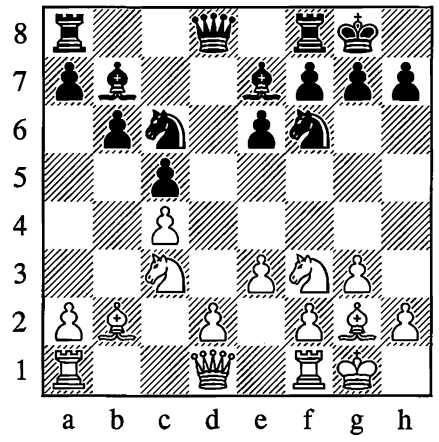
18.♘b5!N

D1) after 16...exd5



17.cxd5!N

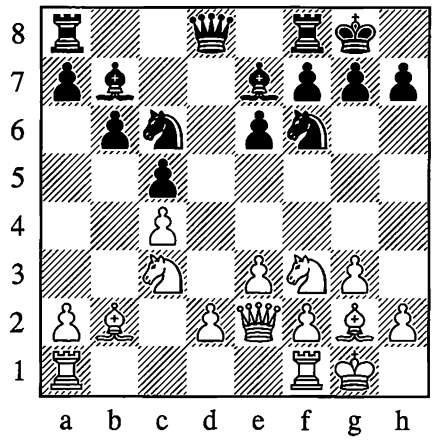
1.c4 e6 2.g3 d5 3.♗g2 ♘f6 4.♘f3 ♗e7 5.0–0 0–0 6.b3 c5 7.♗b2 ♘c6 8.e3 b6 9.♘c3 dxc4 10.bxc4 ♗b7



From a structural point of view, giving up the centre at such an early stage is an obvious concession, because White is left with a strong mass of central pawns, but a common view is that Black is fully rewarded by the possibility of completing his development without any immediate problems, which has made the intermediate ...dxc4 quite popular at grandmaster level. However, the lines examined in this chapter tend to offer White a long-term initiative.

11.♕e2

An excellent square for the queen, from where it keeps both wings under observation and is entirely safe from any attacks from the enemy pieces.



In practice, White's most common plan in this variation consists of a slow kingside attack, based on ♘e1, f2-f4 and g3-g4-g5. Against less strong opponents, this can yield excellent results almost effortlessly, but experience has taught me that a well-timed regrouping with ...♘e8-d6(-f5) and the thematic queenside counterplay with ...a7-a6 and ...b7-b5 should allow Black to hold the balance.

Before embarking on a concrete examination of the variations that comprise this chapter, I took a minute to have a fresh look at the position and could not help lamenting that in the official theory White makes no use of his main trump – his extra pawn in the centre. I assume that the reason for this self-imposed limitation is the common thought that the hanging pawns (resulting after d2-d4 followed by ...cxd4 and exd4) tend to be weak if White's king's bishop is not on the f1-a6 diagonal. And yet, I had the intuitive feeling that by quickly creating the threat of d4-d5 White could hinder Black's normal development and obtain a strong initiative.

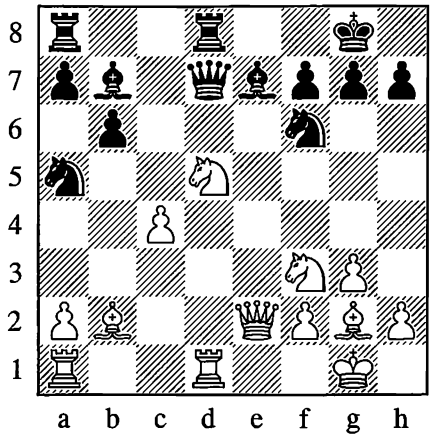
After having decided to make this radical plan work, I was pleasantly surprised to learn that it had occasionally been used by strong players, although much less frequently than the traditional kingside attack. This offered me the pillars to build up the rest of the system, which turned out to be a success, at least from an analytical point of view.

Before examining concrete variations, we will look at a few typical situations to gain a better understanding of the position.

Let's suppose that White has managed to play d4-d5 (this usually happens after ♖fd1 and/or ♖ac1). One question is: how should White answer the natural ...exd5 in the most effective way?

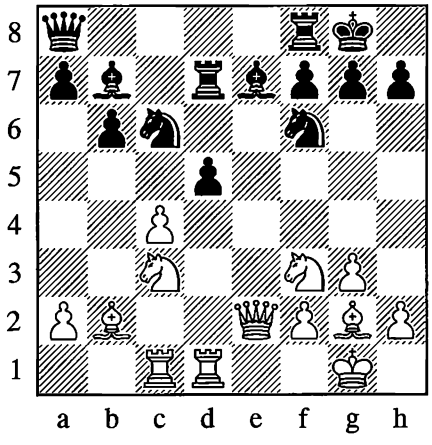
This issue is far from one-sided. In principle, there is a strong argument in favour of ♘c3xd5, which opens the diagonal of the b2-bishop and

aims to eliminate the f6-knight, an important defender of the enemy kingside. Here is an optimal situation of this kind:



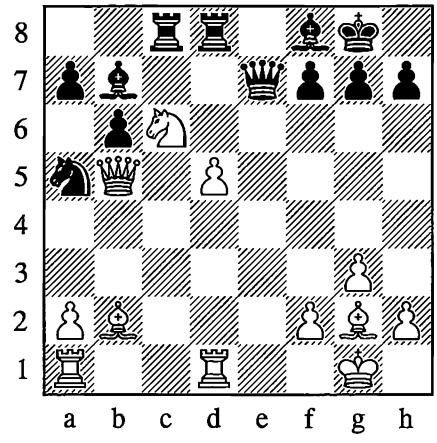
Black's queen and dark-squared bishop are in danger, forcing him to capture on d5 once again, helping White to create a passed pawn. This position is taken from line C2, which continues with a strong attack against the poorly defended black kingside.

In the following example, the situation is reversed:



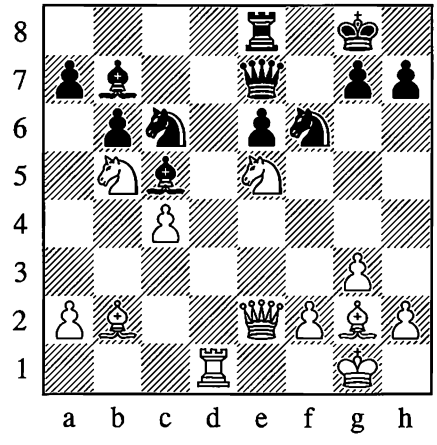
In this case, 17.♘xd5 puts much less pressure on Black than in the previous position. After the calm 17...♖e8, White can spoil the kingside structure, but this would lead to simplifications and his queen would need to retreat to a passive square. Instead, 17.cxd5!, as suggested in the text, is much stronger. Black is forced to move away with his c6-knight, allowing White to play 18.♘e5 and gain material.

One important consequence of a white pawn reaching d5 is that the c6-square is taken under strict control. Installing a white knight on this square would be a strategic triumph, as in the following position:



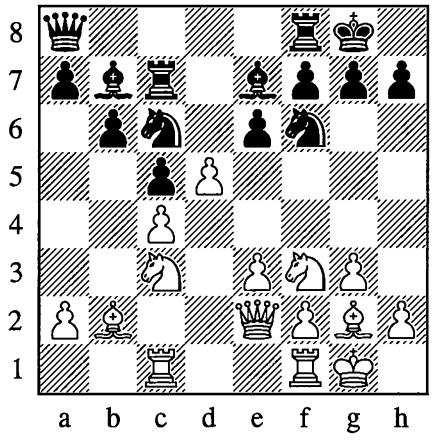
The knight completely paralyses Black, while an exchange on c6 would transform the white pawn into a serious candidate for promotion.

If Black does not answer d4-d5 with ...exd5, he must take into account the weakening of his structure after dxe6 ...fxe6.



True, White is also left with an isolated pawn on c4, but the pressure against the e6-pawn is easier to organize and, even more importantly, Black's kingside remains vulnerable.

Black is best advised to exchange on d4 before the threat of d4-d5 becomes real. In the following example we can see the negative sides of refraining from this exchange:



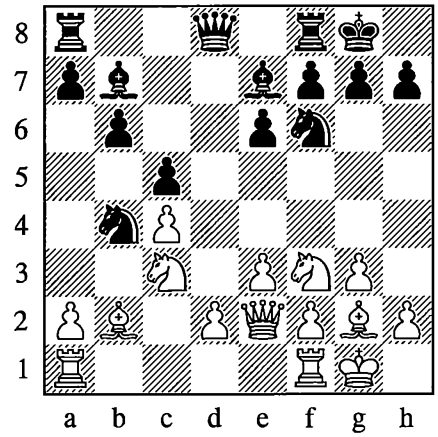
The presence of the c5-pawn restricts the e7-bishop and the c7-rook, while the e3-pawn may become very useful by supporting its advanced colleague with e3-e4.

After 11.♕e2, Black has tried several defensive methods. Some of them are slightly inadequate against the plan explained above, but we must not forget that in practice Black is mainly concerned about a kingside attack!

We will examine the main lines **A) 11...♘b4**, **B) 11...a6**, **C) 11...♕d7** and **D) 11...♖c8**.

Instead 11...♕c7 does not make much sense. After 12.♘b5 Black's queen does not have any favourable squares for retreat. White will continue carrying out his plan starting with ♖fd1. At some moment, Black would have to play ...a7-a6 and redevelop his queen, which would transpose to other variations, in which ...a7-a6 is usually a loss of time.

A) 11...♘b4



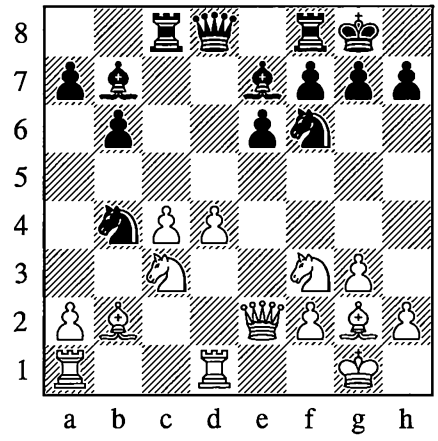
This is a typical inadequate defence, which will simply lead to a loss of time against our main plan.

12.d4

The main idea of putting early pressure on the d3-square is that after 12.♘e1 (which is part of the kingside pawnstorm plan that we are *not* choosing with White) he must answer 12...♗xg2 with 13.♔xg2, leaving the king slightly exposed and rather in the way of White's attacking pieces. Usually, ♘xg2 or even ♕xg2 (if f2-f4 has already been played) are to be preferred.

12...cxd4 13.exd4 ♖c8 14.♖fd1

Black is not fully developed yet and White already threatens a2-a3 followed by d4-d5.



14...♖e8

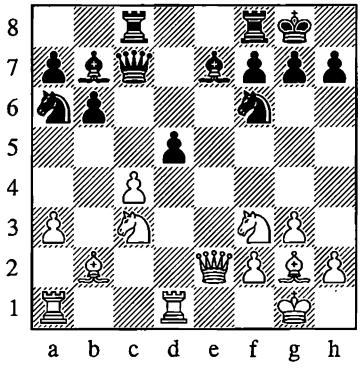
By placing the rook in opposition with the enemy queen, Black hopes to discourage d4-d5. He could instead attack the c4-pawn in the hope that the absence of a rook on c1 would make itself felt, but this achieves very little. Below are two examples:

14...♕c7 15.a3 ♘a6 16.d5!

It turns out that the c4-pawn is indirectly defended, as 16...♕xc4 loses an exchange to 17.♕xc4 ♖xc4 18.d6 ♗d8 19.♘e5.

In the game Kharitonov – Dvoirys, Hoogeveen 2000, Black played:

16...exd5



White should have answered with:

17.♘xd5!N ♘xd5 18.cxd5

With the strong threat of ♘d4-c6.

18...♖fe8

It may seem that the weakness of the b3-square (a direct effect of the knight incursion to b4) allows Black to hold the balance. Of the active moves possible, both 19.♕d3 and 19.♕d2 would run into ...♘c5, while instead 19.♕f1 is rather passive. However, White has one more option:

19.♕e5!

White does not need his queen in order to prove the strength of the d5-pawn. The essential thing is to get his knight to c6 in time.

19...♕xe5

19...♗f8 slows down ♘d4-c6, but allows the advance of the d-pawn: 20.♕xc7 ♖xc7 21.d6 Black has serious problems finding a safe square for his rook. For instance, after 21...♖c2 22.♗e5± there is the strong threat of a double attack with ♘d4. Besides, Black must always watch out for d6-d7.

20.♘xe5 ♗d6

Black is best advised to block the pawn, as 20...♗f6 loses an exchange to 21.d6! ♗xg2 22.d7±.

21.♘c6 ♖a8 22.♖e1±

White is totally dominant.

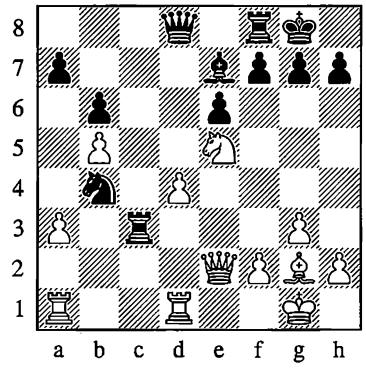
14...♗a6 15.♘e5 ♘fd5 16.♘b5

The simplest way to neutralize the bishop's pressure.

16...♗xb5 17.cxb5

Black has obtained the d5-square for one of his knights, but the other one is in danger. Besides, White has gained the c6-square for his own minor pieces.

17...♘c3 18.♗xc3 ♖xc3 19.a3



19...♘c2

Playing *va banque*.

The natural 19...♘d5 does not solve Black's problems: 20.♘c6 ♖xc6 Forced, in view of the threat of ♗xd5, winning a piece. 21.bxc6 ♘c3 22.♕a6 ♘xd1 23.♖xd1 ♕c7 24.♕b7 ♖c8 25.d5± After the opening of the d-file, White's c-pawn becomes very dangerous.

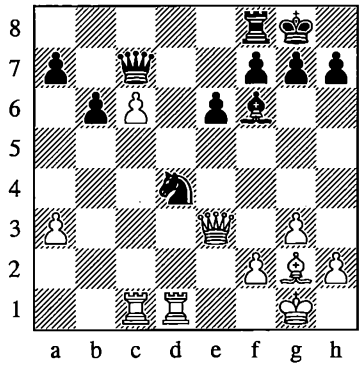
20.♕d2 ♕c7!?N

A slight improvement over 20...♖xa3? 21.♕xc2 with an extra piece for White in Rebers – Van Wessel, Leiden 2002.

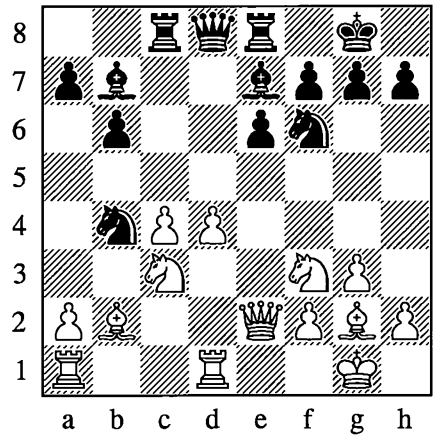
21.♖ac1 ♗f6 22.♘c6 ♖xc6

The only way to avoid major material losses.

23.bxc6 ♘xd4 24.♕e3±



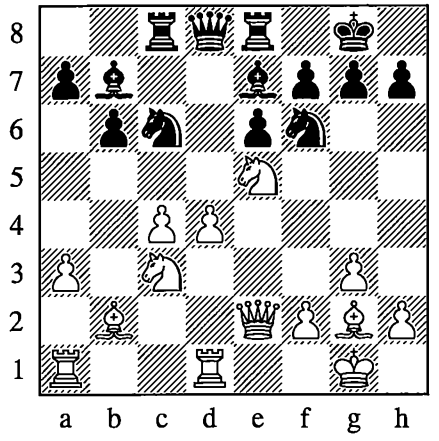
If the c6-pawn was instead on c4, then Black would have fantastic compensation for the exchange. The way it is, the strong passed pawn offers White excellent winning chances.



15.a3 ♘c6

This move accepts that Black's knight incursion was merely a waste of time, but after 15...♘a6 the white knight will be stable on b5: 16.♘b5± With unpleasant pressure on the a7-pawn.

16.♘e5



16...♕c7

Black has another way of increasing the pressure on the e5-knight:

16...♗d6

However, this has the drawback of weakening Black's kingside.

17.♘b5!N

The text is more active than 17.f4, securing a space advantage, as in Plachetka – Gizynski, Bardejov 1991.

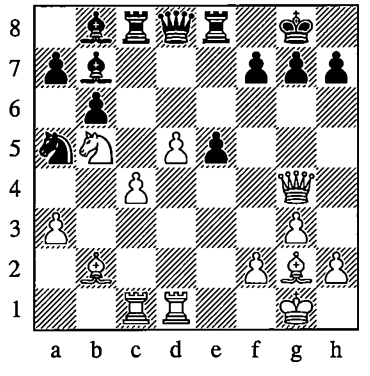
17...♗b8 18.♘g4!

A logical way to exploit the bishop's departure from the kingside.

18...♘xg4

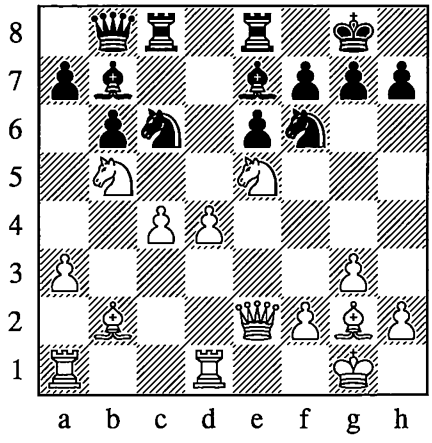
Black does not have time for 18...a6 because of the energetic 19.d5! when 19...exd5 20.♘xf6† gxf6 21.♕g4† offers White a strong attack while 19...♘xd5!? 20.♘d4± leaves Black dangerously pinned.

19.♕xg4 ♘a5 20.d5 e5 21.♖ac1±



White has a space advantage and perfect coordination, whereas the b8-bishop is miserably placed. The threat of d6-d7 is very strong and means Black has no time to react with ...a7-a6.

17.♘b5 ♕b8



18.d5!

White's coordination is so good that Black cannot take advantage of the opening of the e-file.

18...exd5 19.cxd5 ♘xe5 20.♕xe5

A familiar picture; White does not mind exchanging queens. In this case, the knight gains the a7-square for its transfer to c6.

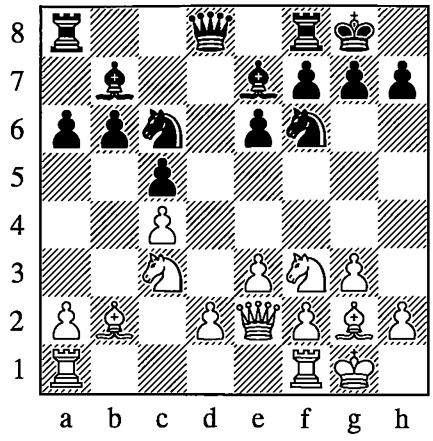
20...a6 21.♕xb8 ♖xb8 22.♘a7 ♗d6

Black needs to block the pawn, since the generally desirable 22...b5 runs into 23.d6± followed by d7.

23.a4±

After having prevented Black from reaching an optimal queenside configuration with pawns on a6 and b5, White will occupy the c6-square, consolidating his space advantage, Panno – Mecking, Buenos Aires 1970.

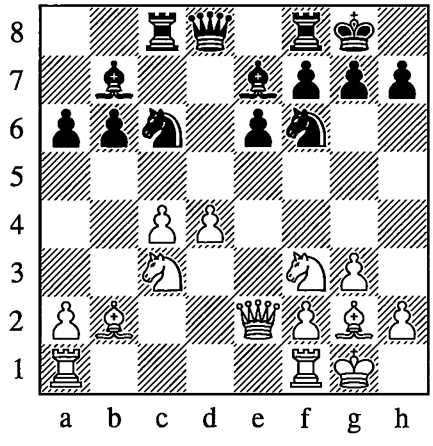
B) 11...a6



Black intends to play ...♕c7 without allowing any irritations. If White follows the traditional plan based on a slow kingside attack, the move ...a7-a6 will be useful anyway, because it prepares the thematic counterplay with ...b6-b5. However, this move does not improve Black's development and thus it allows White to seize the initiative in the centre.

12.d4 cxd4 13.exd4 ♖c8

The central pawn cannot safely be grabbed: 13...♘xd4 14.♘xd4 ♗xg2 15.♖fd1 ♗h3 16.♘xe6 ♗xe6 17.♖xd8 ♖fxd8 18.♖d1± Black does not have full compensation for the queen. Pawns are equal and his kingside will be submitted to strong pressure after a later ♘e4.



14.♘d1!?

An interesting regrouping. In structures with hanging pawns, it is more common to transfer the knight to e3 via a3-c2 or d2-f1. In this case, White takes advantage of the fact that he has not placed a rook on d1 yet.

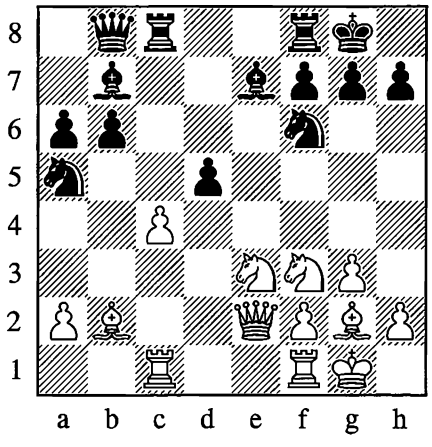
14...♘a5 15.♘e3 ♕c7 16.♖ac1

White has almost completed his development and it has become clear that his pawns are very well defended. In the near future, the central break d4-d5 will cause Black some trouble.

16...♕b8

Wisely removing the queen from the dangerous c-file. For example, 16...♖fd8 is worse: 17.d5 exd5 18.♘xd5 ♘xd5 19.cxd5 ♕d7 20.♘e5 ♕d6 21.♘c6± With a crushing space advantage, Toscano – Milgram, corr. 1995. Black cannot win a pawn by repeatedly capturing on c6 because his e7-bishop is hanging.

17.d5 exd5

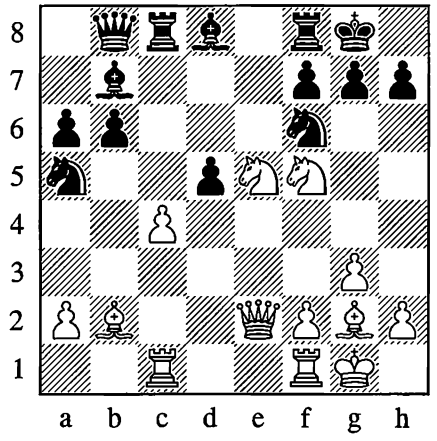


18.♘f5!

Once the black queen has fled to the queenside, the incursion of the white knights on the opposite wing provokes panic.

18...♗d8 19.♘e5

With the exception of the king's rook, which can be regarded as a reserve unit, defending the back rank, all White's pieces are involved in the fight. Black has to react very carefully.



19...d4

This is the only way to slow White's initiative, by temporarily closing the long dark diagonal and offering the exchange of the light-squared bishops. At the same time, Black hopes the relative weakness of the c4-pawn will keep White's advantage within bearable limits.

19...♘xc4 loses material to 20.♘d7! as the knight is taboo because of ♕g4 followed by mate. 20...♖e8 21.♕xe8† ♘xe8 22.♘xb8 ♖xb8 23.♖fe1± White's position is very active, which leaves Black with insufficient compensation for the exchange.

19...dxc4 is refuted in a similar way: 20.♗xb7 ♘xb7 (20...♕xb7 falls for another fork: 21.♘d6±) 21.♘d7! Again, 21...♘xd7?! leads to mate after 22.♕g4.

20.♗xb7 ♘xb7 21.♗xd4 ♖e8 22.♕b2

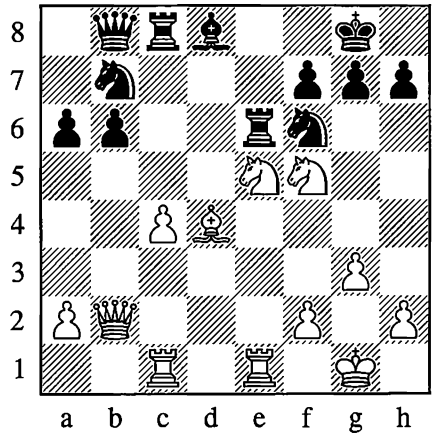
Black has somewhat improved his position, but White's pressure is still annoying. The next move consolidates the f6-knight.

22...♖e6

The attempt to exchange one of the active white knights with 22...♘d6 fails to 23.♘xg7! ♔xg7 24.♘d7±.

23.♖fe1

Finally, all White's pieces have been developed. The main plan for the next phase of the game consists of increasing the pressure with ♖e3 and ♖ce1.



23...♘c5

Aiming for some stability in the centre. Instead 23...♘d6 is possible, but not entirely satisfactory: 24.♘xd6 ♕xd6 25.♖cd1± White's centralized army controls the whole board.

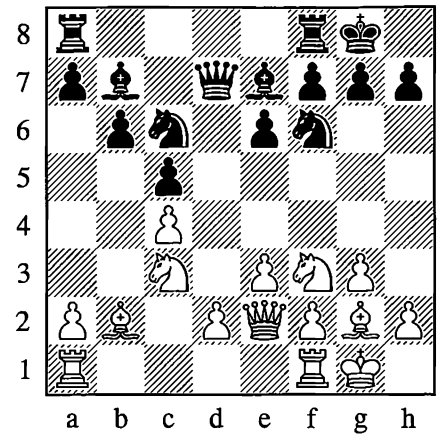
24.♖e3 ♕c7 25.♖ce1 ♘cd7

Black provokes some simplifications, but he will be left with a chronic weakness on e6. It is hard to suggest anything else, because Black is almost paralysed.

26.♘xd7 ♕xd7 27.♖xe6 fxe6 28.♘e3±

White has regrouped harmoniously and has the safer king. In addition, after the latest modifications, he also has the better structure (with two black weaknesses on b6 and e6 against just one for White on c4). In Barczay – Schmidt, Polanica Zdroj 1980, White eventually won a fine game.

C) 11...♕d7

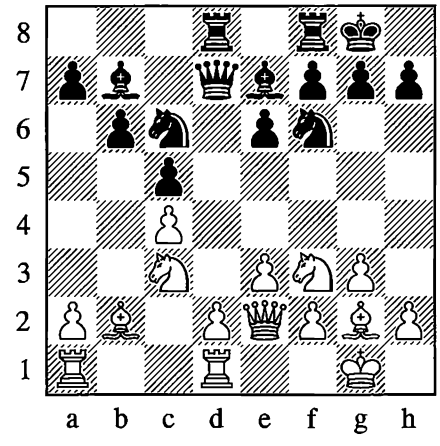


Black connects his rooks without any loss of time.

12.♖fd1

Although the queen cannot be immediately harassed by either of the enemy knights, it certainly stands on a vulnerable square in view of White's planned d2-d4. Black can choose between **C1) 12...♖ad8**, possibly followed by ...♕c8, and **C2) 12...♖fd8**, allowing a later ...♕e8.

C1) 12...♖ad8

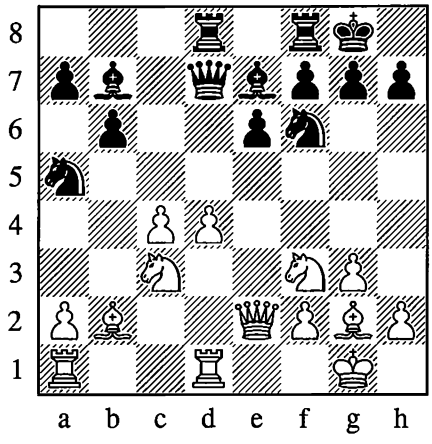


This seems to leave the other rook out of play as, unlike in line F from Chapter 25, there

is no immediate danger related with the f7-square. A deeper look reveals that ...♖fe8 may be quite useful at a later point, by defending the e7-bishop and creating an opposition with the enemy queen, thus reducing the damage caused by the central break d4-d5.

13.d4 cxd4 14.exd4 ♘a5

The advance of the d-pawn is imminent and Black takes preventive measures against it. Note that 14...♕c8 15.d5 ♘a5 16.♘e5 simply transposes to the main line.



15.♘e5!

This is the correct move order. 15.d5?! is far less effective: 15...exd5 16.♘xd5 ♘xd5 17.cxd5 ♖fe8∓ Black has managed to regroup in time and the d-pawn risks becoming a weakness. If 18.♘e5 then Black can take advantage of the premature opening of the e-file with 18...♗d6!.

15...♕c8 16.d5 ♖fe8

Under the current circumstances, the exchange on d5 is less effective than in the previous line: 16...exd5 17.♘xd5 ♘xd5 18.cxd5± White has an active position and intends to increase his domination with ♖ac1. 18...♖fe8? is simply bad because of 19.♕h5, practically forcing the rook to retreat. 19...g6? loses on the spot to the simple combination 20.♘xg6 fxg6 21.♕e5+–.

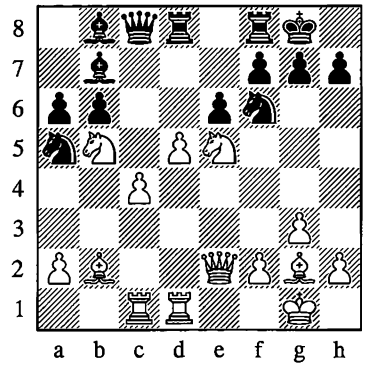
The attempt to undermine the c4-pawn by attacking the e5-knight only leads to a complete loss of coordination:

16...♗d6 17.♘b5 ♗b8

The bishop has to retreat to this unnatural position, because the consistent 17...♗xe5 18.♗xe5 ♕xc4 19.♕xc4 ♘xc4 loses by force: 20.♗xf6 gxf6 21.dxe6! This pawn will have a royal career! 21...♗xg2 22.e7 ♖xd1† 23.♖xd1 ♖e8 24.♖d8 ♗c6 25.♘c7 With decisive material gains.

18.♖ac1 a6

Apparently, White's position is hanging, because the knight has no favourable retreat squares.



19.f4!

It turns out that the threat of ...axb5 is not real:

19...axb5 20.cxb5 ♗c7 21.d6±

After having consolidated his e5-knight with 19.f4, White is ready to play ♘d4 whenever needed, not fearing ...♗xe5 because of fxe5.

17.♗h3!

After having completed the mobilization of his forces, Black was threatening to open the position with ...exd5. The text move practically freezes the centre, allowing White to consolidate his space advantage.

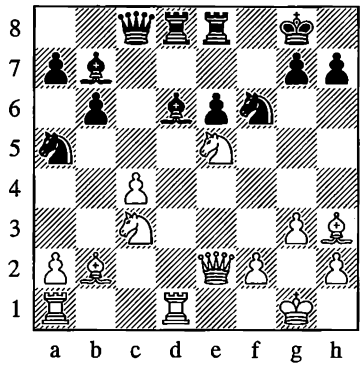
17...♗c5

Trying to gain some breathing space, but there was an alternative:

17...♗d6

Threatening ...♗xe5 followed by ...♘xc4, but obstructing the d-file allows White to start active operations in the centre:

18.dxe6 fxe6



19.♘d5!

It appears that Black does not have enough pieces controlling this square.

19...♗xe5 20.♕xe5 exd5

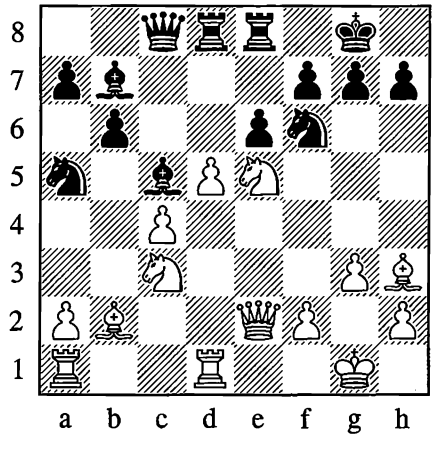
This is the only way to release the kingside pressure, but it turns out to be tactically insufficient.

21.♗xc8 ♖xe5 22.♗xb7 d4 23.♗g2!

Black will lose the d4-pawn, while the c4-pawn is taboo:

23...♘xc4 24.♗xd4 ♖ee8 25.♗xf6 gxf6 26.♗d5†

Winning the exchange and the game.

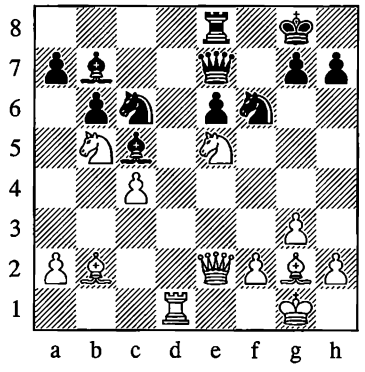


18.♘b5!N

The careless 18.♘e4?, aiming to open the long diagonal for the attack, allows Black to free himself from the pin: 18...♘xe4 19.♕xe4 exd5 20.♕f3 ♕c7 In Vega Holm – Magem, Cala Galdana 1999, Black was better developed and had an extra pawn.

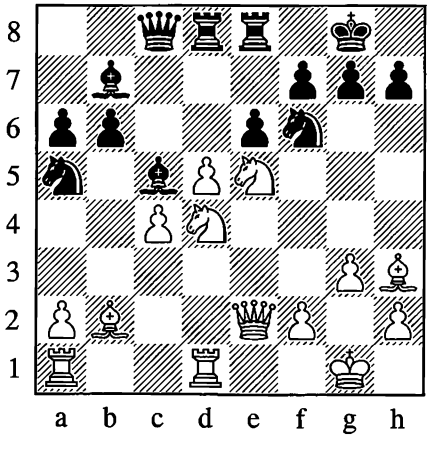
This fragment should be a serious warning about playing positions with central tension. Often, even a slight inaccuracy will instantly turn the tables.

Even the simplistic 18.dxe6!?N is better than the game continuation: 18...fxe6 19.♖xd8 ♕xd8 20.♖d1 ♕e7 21.♘b5 ♘c6 22.♗g2±



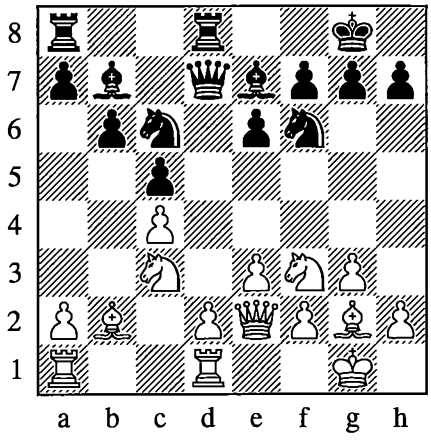
This structure is familiar to us from the final position of line B above.

18...a6 19.♘d4±



White has overwhelming activity; Black's kingside is in serious danger, with threats such as dxe6 or ♘xf7 looming.

C2) 12...♖fd8



Black plans to place his rooks on the half-open files, in order to put maximum pressure on the hanging pawns. The weak point of this move is that the e-file is left without sufficient defence.

13.d4 cxd4 14.exd4 ♘a5

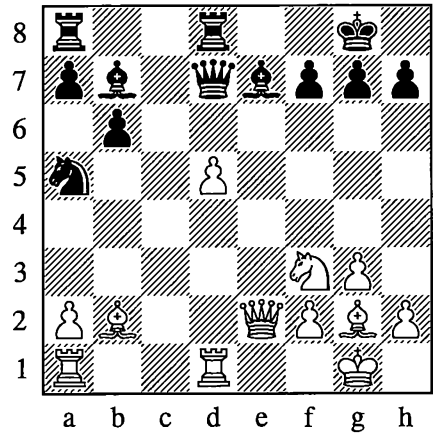
Black's general problems in this line are illustrated by the fact that the normal developing move 14...♖ac8 places Black's queenside in great danger: 15.♘e5 ♕e8 16.♘b5±

15.d5 exd5N

This is undoubtedly the critical line. Instead the passive 15...♕c8?! allows White to build up a kingside attack, taking advantage of his space advantage in the centre: 16.♖d4 ♗a6 17.♘e5 ♗c5 18.♖h4 ♗d6 19.♘e4 ♗xe5 20.♗xe5 ♘d7 21.♗xg7 ♔xg7 22.♕g4† Black resigned in Rukavina – Paci, Pula 2005.

16.♘xd5 ♘xd5 17.cxd5

Both sides are well developed and the only open question is whether the d5-pawn is a strength or a weakness.



17...♗f8

Black clears the e-file for possible counterplay and frees the queen from the task of defending the bishop.

17...♖ac8

Once again this developing move turns out badly:

18.♘e5 ♕e8

Black has to keep the e7-bishop defended in order to prevent an invasion with ♘c6.

19.♗h3!

Winning an important tempo for the attack.

19...♖c7 20.♘xf7!

A logical sacrifice against the poorly defended black kingside.

20...♔xf7 21.♗e6† ♔f8 22.♕f3† ♗f6 23.♗xf6 gxf6 24.♕xf6† ♖f7 25.♗xf7 ♕xf7 26.♕xd8†

With a decisive material advantage.

17...♖e8 is adequately met by 18.♕d3, increasing the kingside pressure.

18.♘e5 ♕e8

The queen cannot take advantage of the freedom mentioned in the comment to the previous move, partly because controlling the c6-square is essential.

18...♕e7 allows 19.♕b5 ♖ac8 20.♘c6±, paralysing Black completely.

The queen fails to defend the kingside properly with:

18...♕f5 19.♗e4

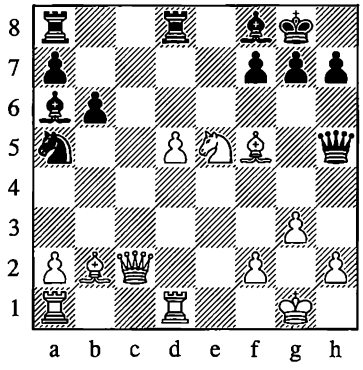
Curiously, Her Majesty will be very unstable on this area of the board.

19...♗a6

A desperate attempt to save the game.

If 19...♕g5 20.♕f3 then the f7-square is impossible to defend adequately. 20...♕e7 drops a piece to 21.d6!, 20...♕f6 leads to a strategic disaster after 21.♕xf6 gxf6 22.♘g4 and, finally, 20...f6 loses the queen to 21.h4 ♕h6 22.♘g4 ♕h5 23.♘xf6†.

20.♕c2 ♕h3 21.♗f5 ♕h5

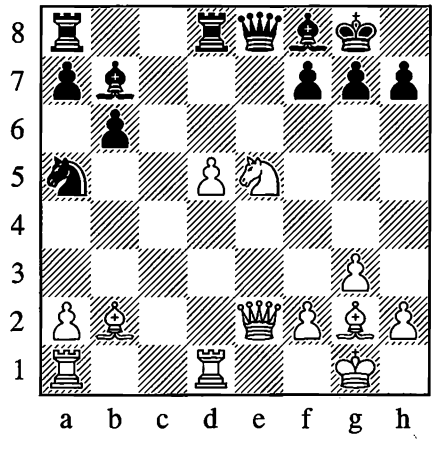


22.♘xf7!

The same sacrifice as in a previous comment. Most of Black's pieces are mere spectators to His Majesty's suffering.

22...♔xf7 23.♗e6†

Followed by ♖e1 with decisive threats.



19.♗e4!

A perfect illustration of one of the central pawn's strengths: the enemy knight has been driven away from the centre and the b7-bishop is isolated from the rest of the board. This allows White to start an attack with such simple means as the text move.

19...♗d6

Hoping to challenge White's stability in the centre. Instead, the familiar 19...♖ac8 is, not surprisingly, also not good enough. 20.♕d3 h6 21.♖e1 ♗e7 22.♖ad1± White's domination is crushing.

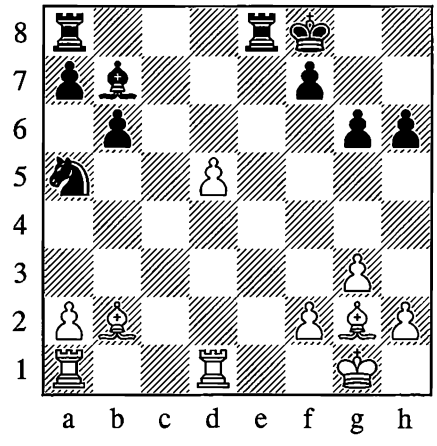
20.♕h5 g6 21.♕g5 h6 22.♕f6 ♗e7

The attack has almost been parried, but the strategic problems have only increased.

23.♘g4!

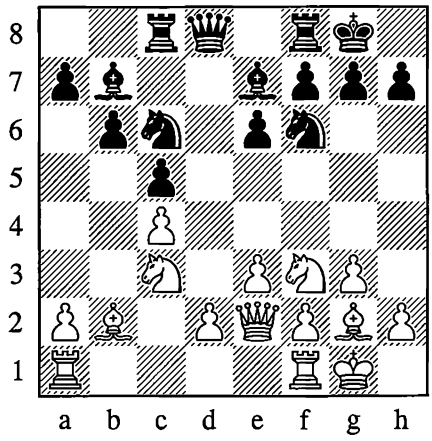
Simplifying to a very promising ending.

23...♗xf6 24.♘xf6† ♔f8 25.♘xe8 ♖xe8 26.♗g2±



White's bishop pair and the weakness of the black kingside (and especially that of the f6-square, which can comfortably be occupied by the dark-squared bishop) leaves Black little hope of salvation.

D) 11...♖c8

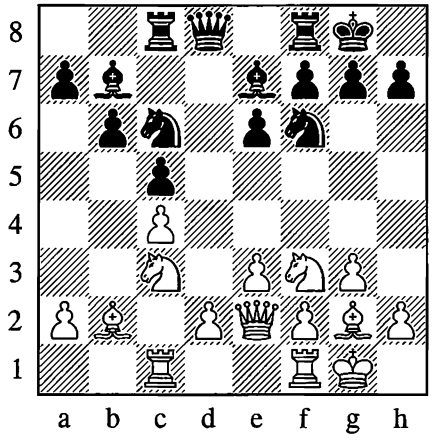


A flexible move, preparing ...♕c7 followed by ...♖fd8, when ♘b5 would be adequately met by ...♕b8.

12.♖ac1!

This move is the result of a clear understanding of the position. White takes some defensive measures on the file where Black is likely to put pressure after the opening of the centre.

Most games instead continue with 12.♖fd1?!, which causes White problems in carrying out our main plan based on d2-d4. 12...♕c7 13.♖ac1 a6 14.d4 cxd4 15.exd4 ♘a5 Although White is completely developed, he has problems neutralizing the pressure against the c4-pawn, Gulko – Browne, Modesto 1995.



After 12.♖ac1, Black can continue his development with the slightly extravagant **D1) 12...♖c7**, preparing ...♕a8, or the more natural **D2) 12...♕c7**.

D1) 12...♖c7

This can be the introduction to various regrouping schemes, including moves such as ...♖d7, ...♕a8, ...♖fd8 or ...♖e8. All these plans are time-consuming and Black's queen's rook will be exposed on the seventh rank to either ♘b5 or ♘e5.

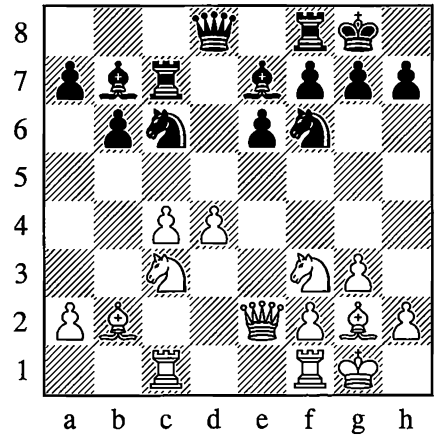
13.d4!

As explained below, White can advance his d-pawn without the preparatory move ♖fd1.

13...cxd4

As explained in the introduction, 13...♕a8? is bad because of 14.d5!.

14.exd4



14...♖d7

This is necessary prophylaxis against d4-d5, but we should also check that Black cannot grab the d-pawn:

14...♘xd4

This leads to material losses:

15.♘xd4 ♗xg2

A necessary intermediate exchange.

15...♕xd4?! loses a tempo compared to the main line after 16.♘b5 ♕d7 17.♖fd1±.

16.♔xg2

16.♖fd1? is impossible because of 16...♕a8! defending the bishop.

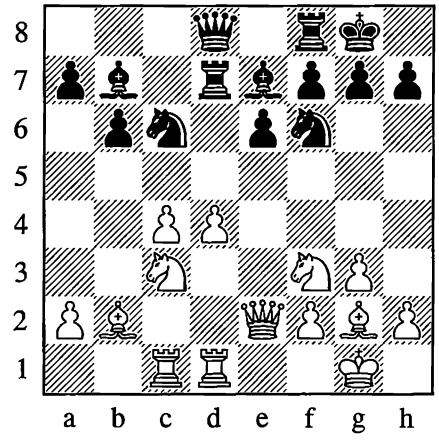
16...♕xd4 17.♘b5 ♕c5 18.♘xc7 ♕xc7 19.♖fd1±

Black has some chances to resist on account of his better structure, but the play is rather one-sided.

As was the case one move earlier, it is still too early to transfer the queen to the corner: 14...♕a8?! 15.d5 exd5 16.♘xd5 ♖d7 17.♘h4± White has a strong kingside attack at no cost.

15.♖fd1

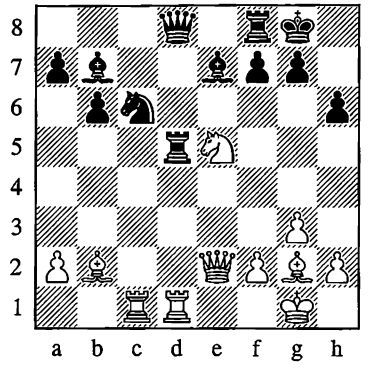
White has completed his development, whereas Black still needs a couple of tempos to achieve that. Besides, the rook that has so far cost him three tempos is exposed to ♘e5 and, as we will see, even to ♗h3, and is thus likely to cause even more time to be lost.



15...♕a8

Black needs to keep regrouping and he cannot afford to play neutral moves such as:

15...h6? Because of the usual threat: 16.d5! This is devastating.16...exd5 17.cxd5 What now?



a) 17...♘xd5 loses material to: 18.♘xd5 ♖xd5 19.♘e5+– A fantastic picture: all White's pieces are working, while most of Black's pieces are hanging!

b) 17...♘b4 is no better: 18.♘e5 ♖d6 19.♘c4 ♖d7 20.d6 Winning a piece.

c) 17...♘a5 looks the most stubborn try, but it is also not good enough: 18.♘e5 ♖d6 19.♘c6 ♗xc6 20.dxc6 Black is helpless against the threat of ♘b5.

The optimistic 15...♘xd4 fails to win a pawn; in fact, it loses one! 16.♖xd4 ♖xd4 17.♘xd4 ♗xg2 18.♘xe6 fxe6 19.♕xe6† ♔h8 20.♔xg2±

The main alternative to the text move is:

15...♖e8

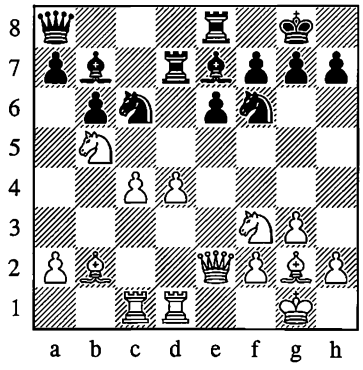
By placing his rook in opposition with the enemy queen, Black hopes to inhibit the opening of the centre.

16.♘b5!

White over-defends the d4-pawn in order to create the threat of ♘e5. Black has no time for 16...a6 because of 17.♘e5! with a favourable opening of the position.

16...♕a8

This was played in Giardelli – Galagovsky, Buenos Aires 1979.



17.d5!N

The justification of this unexpected blow will become clear next move.

17...exd5 18.♗h3

Black's rooks are in danger. Now 18...♖dd8 loses an exchange to 19.♘c7, which means a logical answer is the intermediate move:

18...♗d6 19.♕d3 ♖dd8

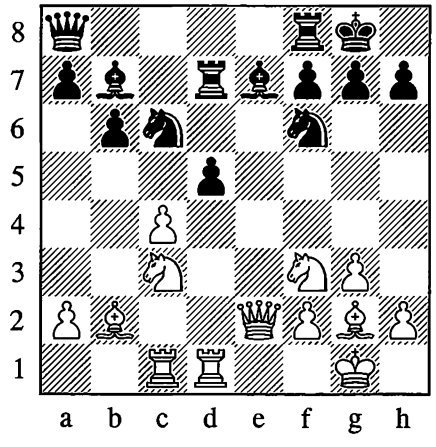
Black has managed to avoid material losses, but his position deteriorates strategically:

20.♗xf6 gxf6 21.cxd5±

White is well centralized and has chances of a kingside attack.

16.d5 exd5

This position from the game Barczay – Happel, Cordoba 1994, is familiar to us from the introduction.



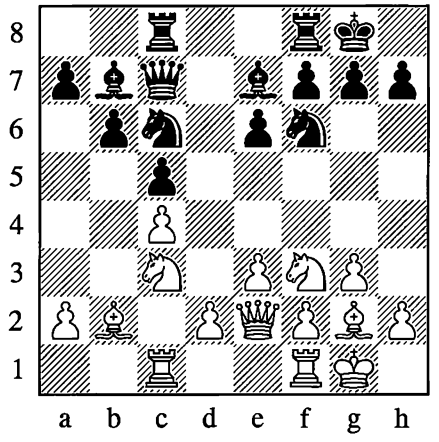
17.cxd5!N

White forces the c6-knight to move away, in order to enable ♘e5.

17...♘b4 18.♘e5±

White will play ♘c6 next, based on the fact that the e7-bishop is hanging. This will give him a crushing space advantage.

D2) 12...♕c7



This is the natural way to develop, but the queen is not entirely safe on c7.

13.d4 ♖fd8 14.♖fd1

Both sides have completed their development; Black faces the immediate threat of d4-d5.

14...cxd4

This is the best try, as we know already.

14...♘a5

Black mechanically increases his control over the d5-square, but this does not prevent the central break:

15.♘b5 ♕b8

15...♗xf3 16.♗xf3 ♕b8 17.d5± does not improve Black's situation in any way, Damljanovic – Yermolinsky, Moscow 1994. True, Black has got rid of his passive bishop, but White remains in absolute control of the light squares.

16.d5!

This is possible because of the unfavourable position of the black queen.

16...exd5

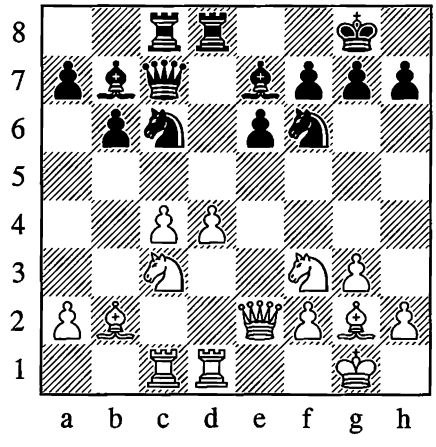
16...a6 avoids material losses but leaves Black desperately passive after 17.♗e5 ♕a8 18.♘c7 ♕a7 19.e4. The following attempt to take advantage of the seemingly hanging position of the white pieces led to disaster: 19...♘d7 20.♗f4 e5 21.♘xe5 ♖xc7 22.♘xf7 ♔xf7 23.♗xc7 Black resigned in Hickl – Koutsin, Neu Isenburg 1992.

17.♗e5 ♕a8 18.♘c7

Black loses an exchange without sufficient compensation, Ehrenfeucht – Polowniak, Police 1993.

15.exd4

It is an encouraging sign about the strength of our repertoire that, despite having played only natural developing moves, Black is suddenly in danger. With d4-d5 looming, it is impossible to find safe places for Black's pieces.



15...a6

Hoping to ensure some safety for the queen.

Once again, clearing the b7-bishop's diagonal does not prevent the central break: 15...♘a5 16.♘b5 ♕d7 (After the previous exchange in the centre, 16...♕b8 leaves the e7-bishop hanging: 17.d5 a6 18.♘bd4 White's pressure is crushing.) 17.♘e5 ♕e8 18.♗xb7 ♘xb7 19.♕f3 ♘a5 20.♘xa7± White has won a pawn, Landenbergue – Netusil, Prague 1989.

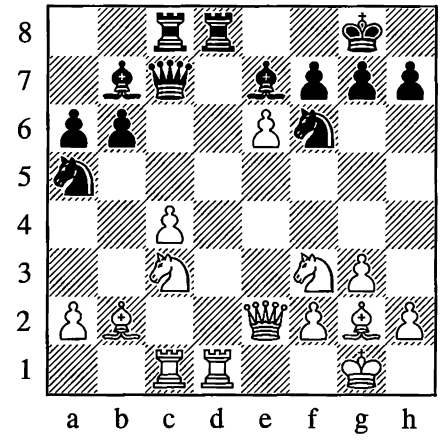
The attempt to put pressure on the c4-pawn with 15...♗a6 fails to: 16.♘b5 ♕b8 17.♗h3 ♗xb5 18.cxb5 ♘b4 19.♗xe6!± This simple combination yielded White an extra pawn in McNab – Upton, Oban 1996. The point is that after 19...fxe6 20.♕xe6† ♔f8 21.♘e5 the threat of ♕f7 mate is decisive.

16.d5 ♘a5

Quite surprisingly, 16...exd5? leads to decisive material losses after 17.♘xd5. The pressure of White's major pieces along the open central files is killing.

17.dxe6

This is more than just structural damage; the black king is in great danger.



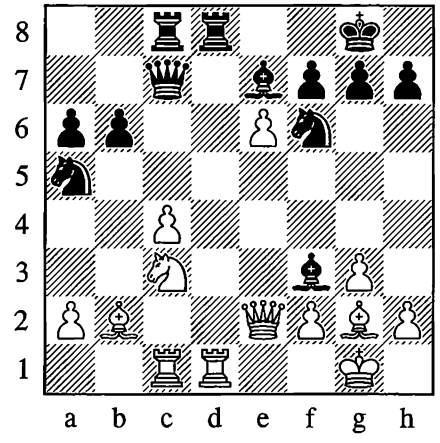
17...♗xf3

This turns out badly, but other moves do not save Black either.

The exchange of the f3-knight is justified in view of the lines: 17...♘xc4 18.exf7† ♔h8 19.♘g5 and 17...♕xc4 18.exf7† ♔f8 19.♖xd8†

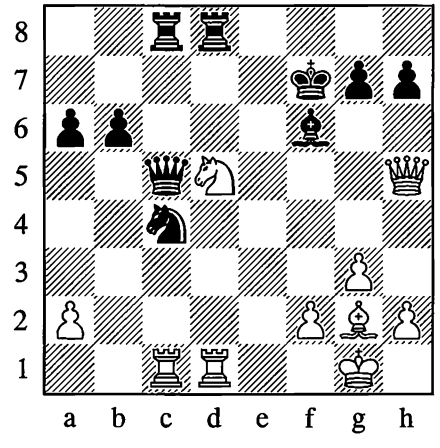
♖xd8 20.♘g5 ♕xe2 21.♘xe2 ♖d2 22.♘f4 with a decisive invasion of the e6-square in both cases.

The lesser evil would have been 17...♖xd1†, although after 18.♘xd1± followed soon by ♘e3, White will be a pawn up.



18.exf7† ♔xf7 19.♕xf3 ♘xc4 20.♘d5 ♕c5 21.♗xf6 ♗xf6 22.♕h5†

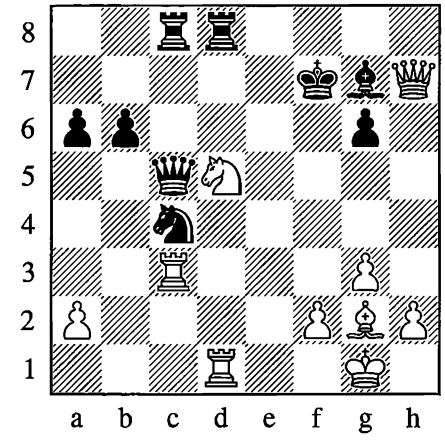
Black has managed to maintain the material balance, but most of his pieces (including the king) are hanging.



22...g6

Desperation. Instead 22...♔g8 drops a knight after a series of forcing exchanges: 23.♘xf6† gxf6 24.♖xd8† ♖xd8 25.♕xc5 bxc5 26.♖xc4+–

23.♕xh7† ♗g7 24.♖c3



The threat of ♖f3 is decisive and so Black resigned in Etruk – Oim, Viljandi 1972.

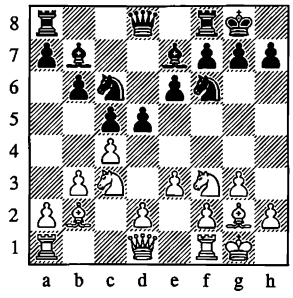
Conclusion

Putting the central pawn majority into motion is a good way to punish Black for giving up the tension at an early stage of the game. With all his pieces on optimal squares (with a special mention for the bishops' cross-linked action), White usually obtains a dangerous initiative in the centre.

Chapter 25

QGD Set-up

9...♗b7 Main Line



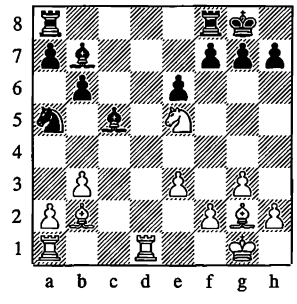
Variation Index

1.c4 e6 2.g3 d5 3.♗g2 ♘f6 4.♘f3 ♗e7 5.0–0 0–0 6.b3 c5 7.♗b2 ♘c6 8.e3 b6 9.♘c3 ♗b7

10.cxd5 ♘xd5 11.♘xd5 ♕xd5 12.d4!

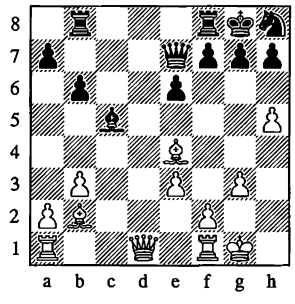
A) 12...♕d8 13.dxc5 ♗xc5 14.♘e5 352
A1) 14...♘xe5 353
A2) 14...♕c7!?N 356
B) 12...♕h5 357
C) 12...♕f5 358
D) 12...♘a5 360
E) 12...♘b4!? 363
F) 12...♖fd8 364
G) 12...♖ad8 13.♘e5 366
G1) 13...♕xg2†!? 366
G2) 13...♕d6 14.dxc5 ♕xc5 15.♘d7! 367
G21) 15...♕g5 368
G22) 15...♕f5 370

A) note after 14.♘e5



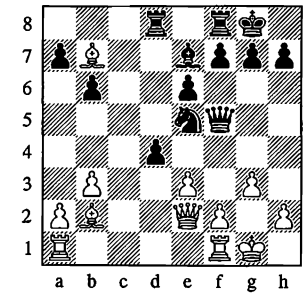
16.♖d7!N

A1) after 18...♘h8



19.♕e2!N

C) after 15...cxd4



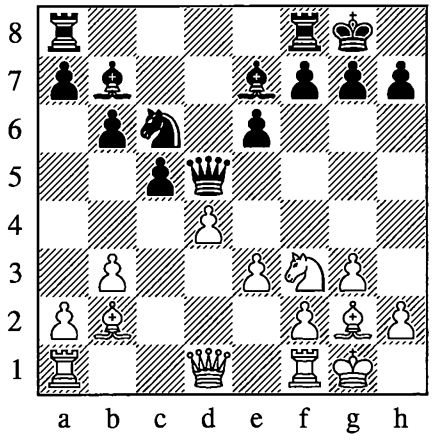
16.exd4!N

1.c4 e6 2.g3 d5 3.♗g2 ♘f6 4.♘f3 ♗e7 5.0–0 0–0 6.b3 c5 7.♗b2 ♘c6 8.e3 b6 9.♘c3 ♗b7 10.cxd5 ♘xd5 11.♘xd5 ♕xd5

This looks like one of the most logical set-ups against the English/Reti opening. With his last move, Black avoids any pawn weaknesses and continues his development by connecting rooks.

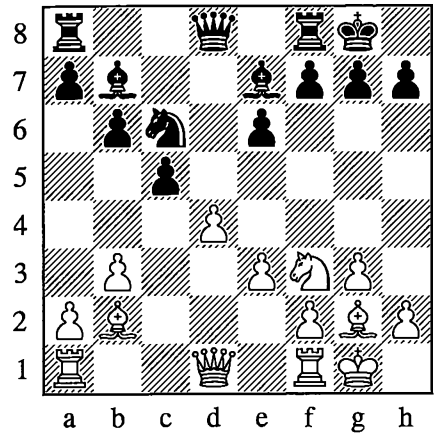
12.d4!

This move is fully in accordance with White's general strategy in the flank openings. He has temporarily refrained from occupying the centre, but now is a good moment to do so. In view of the threat of ♘e5, the black queen will lose some time, while the pin along the h1-a8 diagonal may become troublesome. In practice, Black has tried a wide range of moves, which is a hint that there is no absolutely safe solution available.



We will start by examining three possible ways of removing the queen from the danger: **A) 12...♕d8**, **B) 12...♕h5** and **C) 12...♕f5**. Then we consider opening the long diagonal with **D) 12...♘a5** or **E) 12...♘b4** and we finish with two developing moves that ignore the main threat: **F) 12...♖fd8** and **G) 12...♖ad8**.

A) 12...♕d8

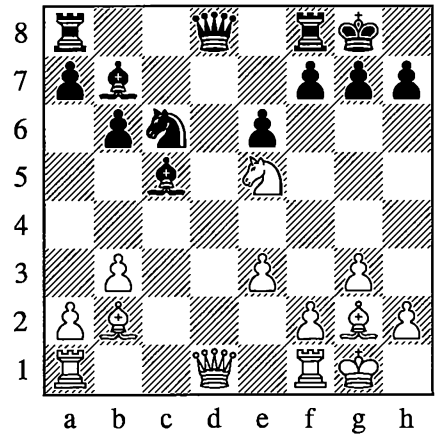


Black places the queen on the safest square, but this is the precise opposite of a good developing move.

13.dxc5

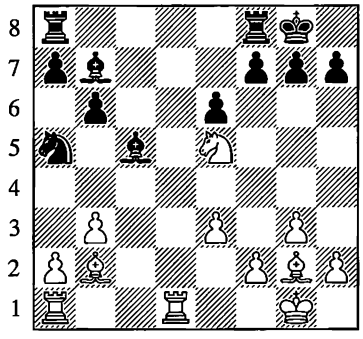
Before playing the thematic ♘e5, White opens the d-file for his queen and the long dark diagonal for the bishop, putting pressure on the g7-square. The possibility of an exchange with ...♕xd1 does not bother White, since Black has invested two moves on his queen already, so the disappearance of the black queen would mean that Black had thrown two tempos away.

13...♗xc5 14.♘e5



In practice, Black has usually played **A1) 14...♘xe5**, but the untested **A2) 14...♕c7** also deserves investigation.

14...♕xd1? is an obvious concession, helping White to obtain a lead in development. 15.♖fxd1 ♘a5



In Marin – Meiers, Gothenburg 2004, the simplest way would have been: 16.♖d7!N ♗xg2 (16...♖ab8 17.♖ad1 is similar) 17.♔xg2 White's advantage is practically decisive; he has overwhelming activity and the black minor pieces are unstable.

14...♖c8? is simply bad: 15.♘d7 ♖e8 16.♕g4 e5 17.♖fd1 Again, White's activity is decisive.

14...♕c8?!

This is not entirely adequate either. Developing the queen on c8 is seen in some openings as a temporary solution if the c7-square is too exposed; this is not the case here and the queen is simply passive on c8.

15.♗xc6

Better than 15.♕g4, as suggested by V. Sokolov, with only a slight initiative for White.

15...♗xc6 16.b4!

This energetic move takes full advantage of White's superior coordination.

16...♖d8!?

The only way to stay in the game is to deny the queen access to d4.

Black would lose one of his bishops after 16...♗xb4? 17.♘xc6 ♕xc6 18.♕d4 or 16...♗e7? 17.♖c1.

17.♕h5!

This is the moment when a major drawback of 14...♕c8 is revealed: the f7-pawn is undefended. Still, Black has a trick to avoid an immediate loss.

17...♗e8 18.bxc5 f6 19.♕g4 fxe5 20.♗xe5±

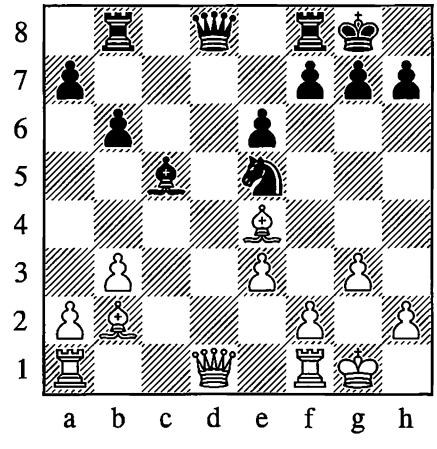
White is a pawn up and his king is much safer.

A1) 14...♘xe5

In practice, this has been the most popular choice at grandmaster level. Black avoids immediate tactical problems, but the bishop pair will offer White a stable advantage.

15.♗xb7 ♖b8 16.♗e4!

The most active retreat. The bishop not only keeps an eye on the enemy kingside, but also prevents ...♘d3. It appears that apart from the long-term problems, Black also experiences some immediate difficulties with his coordination. Both his minor pieces are unstable and need to be reactivated.



16...♘g6

In the notes to the Portisch – Unzicker game below, this was mentioned as a possible

improvement. However, a later game proved that this is hardly a reliable solution, because the knight is passive on g6.

Unzicker played:

16...♘d7

Intending to regroup with ...♗e7-f6 and ...♘c5. This would be a very effective method if he had the time for it, but this is not the case.

17.b4!

White opens the d1-a4 diagonal with gain of time.

17...♗e7

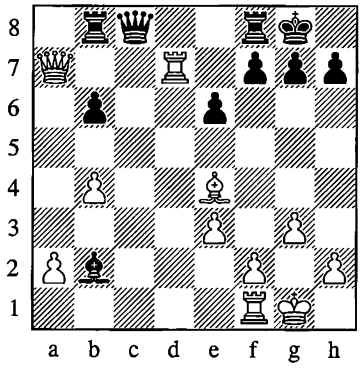
17...♗xb4? loses the bishop to 18.♕d4+–.

18.♕a4

White is several tempos ahead in development and the threats of ♕xa7 or either rook to d1 are very strong.

18...♗f6 19.♖ad1 ♗xb2 20.♖xd7 ♕c8 21.♕xa7

White has won a pawn, but the situation has not settled down yet and the presence of opposite-coloured bishops seems to give Black some hope. White's play in the next phase of the game is exemplary, allowing him to consolidate his advantage.



21...♕c4 22.♗d3!

The best way to maintain the initiative in such cases is to keep attacking the unstable enemy pieces (just as White did with 17.b4!).

22...♕c3

Black has no time for pawn-grabbing on b4 because of ♖xf7, so he keeps the bishop attacked to parry that threat.

23.♖d1

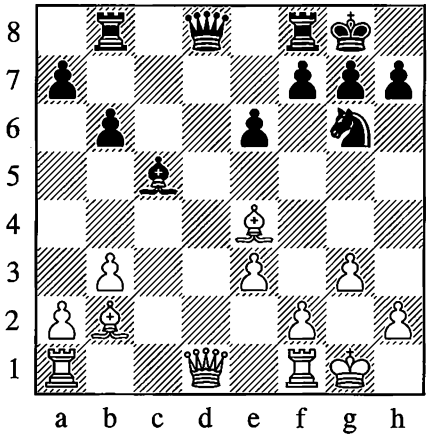
White completes his development and, by over-defending the bishop, renews the threat.

23...♕e5 24.♗f1

The final phase of regrouping; the bishop returns to g2, after having caused Black a lot of trouble.

24...♗c3 25.a3 g6 26.♗g2±

White is a pawn up and has the more active pieces, Portisch – Unzicker, Bath 1973.



17.h4!

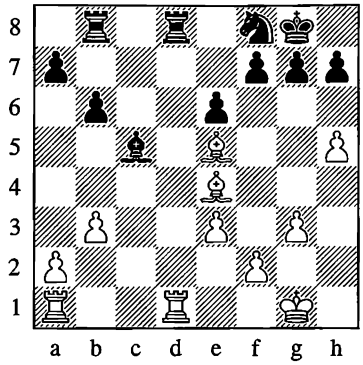
The threat of h4-h5 causes Black serious problems with his coordination; I cannot help remembering Dr Tarrasch's saying that a knight is always badly placed on b6 or g6.

17...♕e7

This illustrates Black's problems; in many cases, it would be a natural developing move, but here it dooms the knight to sit in the corner. However, the alternatives are also unsatisfactory.

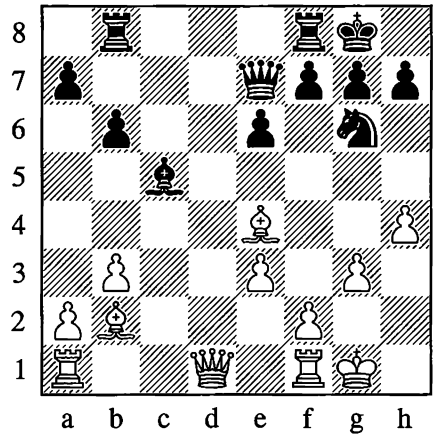
17...♖e8 clears the f8-square for the knight, but offers White an important tempo to develop his initiative: 18.h5 ♘f8 19.♕g4±

17...♕xd1 18.♖fxd1 ♖fd8 pursues the same aim as the previous line, but only after eliminating the possibility of ♕g4. 19.h5 ♘f8 20.♗e5! A picturesque position! White's bishops are dominating the board.



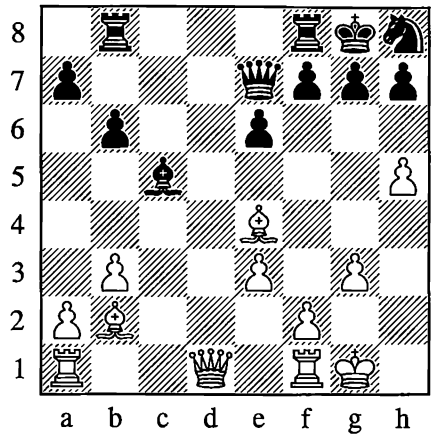
20...♖bc8 21.♗b7 ♖xd1† 22.♖xd1 ♖e8 23.♗a6± The only thing Black can do is sit and watch his opponent increasing the pressure.

Finally, 17...♕c7 18.h5 ♘e7 deprives the bishop of the e7-square after the thematic 19.b4!±.



18.h5 ♘h8

Initially, Black may have thought that he could play the intermediate move 18...♖fd8. Unfortunately, this loses material after 19.♕f3 ♘f8 20.h6!±. Black cannot move his g-pawn because his major pieces would be hit by ♗f6.



19.♕e2!N

This is the best square for the queen, from which it keeps both wings under control. Apart from ♕g4 (or, later, ♕h5), White can also play ♕a6 if necessary.

19.♕c2

This tempting move is less effective.

19...f5

Black needs to play such a weakening move not only to activate his knight, but also to prevent simple threats such as ♗xh7 mate!

20.h6!

Provoking a further weakening of the long diagonal.

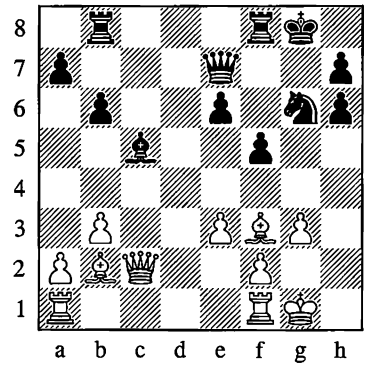
20...gxh6

Practically forced.

20...g6 21.♕c3! would lead to a decisive attack.

20...fxe4 would lose material to 21.hxg7.

21.♗f3 ♘g6



In Gheorghiu – Radulov, Nice 1974, a draw was prematurely agreed. White's position remains more pleasant after, say: 22.♕c4±

19...f5

The point behind refraining from attacking the h7-pawn is that Black needs to play this weakening move anyway, in order to redevelop his knight.

20.h6 gxh6 21.♗g2 ♘g6 22.♖ac1!

Black will need to provoke the bishop exchange at some point, in order to neutralize White's pressure along the a1-h8 diagonal. This makes the c-file an optimal route for an invasion.

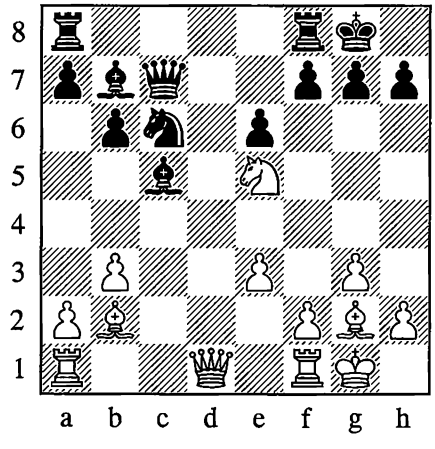
22...♖bc8 23.♕a6

Threatening b3-b4.

23...♖c7 24.♖c4±

White threatens to take control of the c-file with ♖fc1 and b3-b4. Later, after the exchange of one pair of rooks, the queen may switch her attention towards the opposite wing with ♕e2-h5.

A2) 14...♕c7!?N



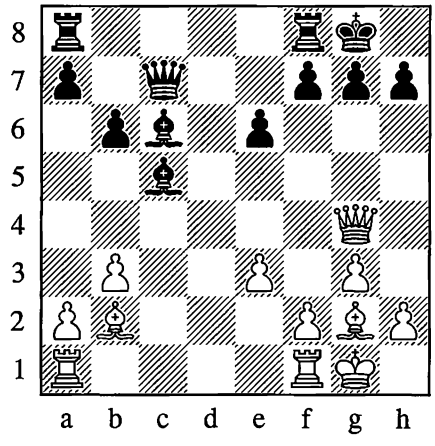
This natural developing move may be the lesser evil. Black tries to justify the previous losses of time by finally putting the queen on a favourable square, from where she offers the minor pieces much needed support, in an almost maternal way.

15.♘xc6

V. Sokolov considers Black's last move unplayable because of 15.♘d7 followed by ♕g4. However, Black has a tactical trick: 15...♗d4! Simplifying to a defendable ending. 16.exd4 ♕xd7 17.d5 exd5 18.♕xd5 ♕xd5 19.♗xd5 ♘a5 White's chances remain preferable after 20.♖fd1, because the b2-bishop will be stronger than the knight in the endgame, but in line A1 we saw that the light-squared bishop is the more dangerous one.

15...♗xc6 16.♕g4

Provoking a severe weakening of Black's kingside.



16...f5

The lesser evil.

16...g6?!

This loses a pawn.

17.♕h4

Threatening ♕f6.

17...f5

Despite his efforts, Black cannot avoid advancing the f-pawn.

17...♗e7? loses a piece to 18.♕h6 f6 19.♖ac1.

18.♕c4 ♗xg2 19.♕xe6†

In addition to his material advantage, White also has the safer king.

17.♕c4!

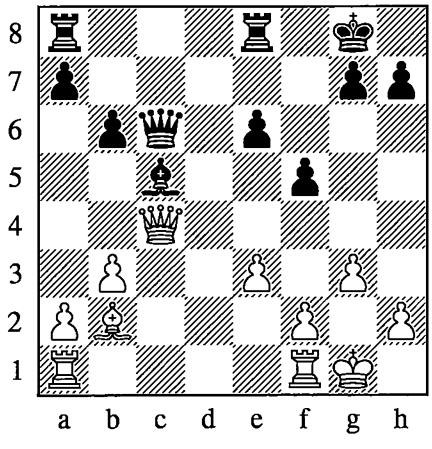
White should refrain from winning a pawn: 17.♕xg7† ♕xg7 18.♗xg7 ♗xg2 19.♗xf8 ♗xf1 20.♗xc5 ♗e2 21.♗d4 ♖c8 Black has the more active rook and after ...♗f3 White will not be able to prevent the rook exchange forever. This would lead to a drawn opposite-coloured bishops ending.

17...♖fe8!

As we will see, it is important to clear the f8-square for the bishop.

18.♗xc6 ♕xc6

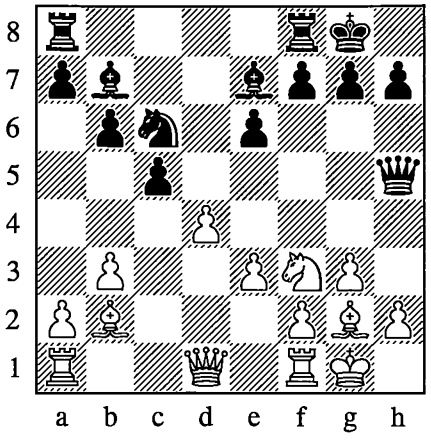
Because he has avoided playing ...g7-g6, Black can parry 19.b4 with 19...♕a4 20.♕c3 ♗f8.



19.♖fd1!±

White retains an active position and his king is a lot safer than Black's.

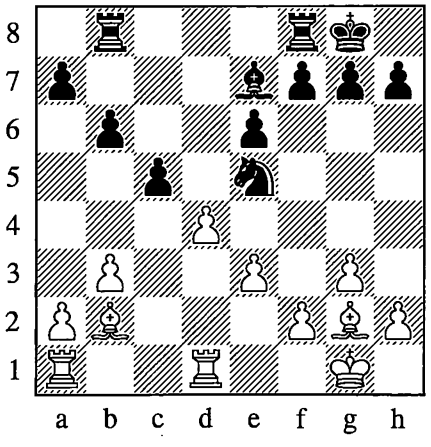
B) 12...♕h5



The queen merely looks active on this square. With his next move, White provokes its exchange, which allows him to speed up his development.

13.♘e5 ♕xd1 14.♖fxd1 ♘xe5 15.♗xb7 ♖ab8 16.♗g2

We have reached a similar position as in line A1. The absence of queens makes the black king feel safer, but the extra tempo in development (♖fxd1) secures White a strong initiative in the endgame.



16...cxd4

16...♘g4 does not change the evaluation: 17.dxc5 ♗xc5 18.♖d7 a5 19.♖ad1± White has the bishop pair and an active position, Dorfman – Jenni, Internet (blitz) 2006.

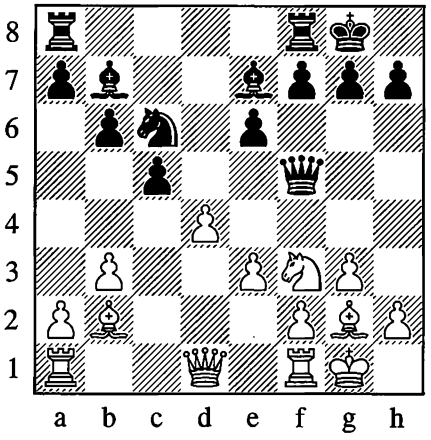
17.♖xd4 ♗f6 18.♖d2 ♘g4

Black has managed to neutralize one of the enemy bishops, but has lost a lot of time in the process.

19.♖c1 ♗xb2 20.♖xb2 ♖fc8 21.♖bc2 ♖xc2 22.♖xc2

After the inevitable infiltration of the rook to c7, White will be totally dominant. In Obukhov – Nikitin, Alushta 2002, White won a good game.

C) 12...♕f5



The queen is more active than on d8 as in line A and not exposed to exchange as in line B. White's best plan is to isolate Her Majesty from the left wing, in order to seize the advantage on that side of the board.

13.♘e5

The tempting 13.e4, aiming to immediately prove that the queen is exposed, fails to bother Black: 13...♕h5 14.d5 ♖ad8 Black is better developed and the d5-pawn is more of a weakness than a strength.

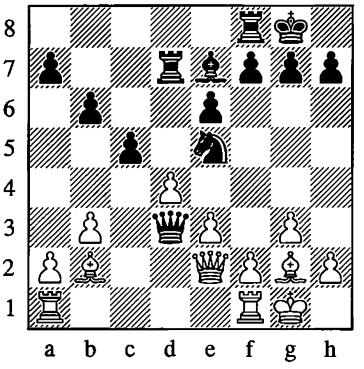
13...♘xe5 14.♗xb7 ♖ad8 15.♕e2

White has the bishop pair as in some previous lines, but Black's position is far more active in this case.

15...cxd4

Before choosing a square for his knight, Black clarifies the situation in the centre. Alternatively, he can maintain the tension with:

15...♖d7 16.♗g2 ♕d3



17.♖fe1!

White cannot favourably avoid the queen swap, but he can negotiate this exchange from a position of strength; now Black cannot prevent the activation of the white king's rook.

17...♕xe2 18.♖xe2 ♘d3N

Black's best chance is to harass the b2-bishop, which is temporarily restricted by the d4-pawn.

18...cxd4 unnecessarily frees the bishop and leaves White with a promising ending. 19.♗xd4 ♘g6 20.♖c1± Osladil – Nevole, corr. 1998.

19.♗a3 a5

Maintaining the semi-closed character of the position.

19...cxd4 makes things simpler for White: 20.♗xe7 ♖xe7 21.♖d1± White will take control of the d-file and his bishop is more active and more stable than the knight.

20.♖d2!

This is more accurate than 20.♖d1 when after 20...♘b4 White cannot play ♗b2 because the a2-pawn is hanging.

20...♘b4 21.♗b2

After a brief interlude, the bishop has returned to the most favourable square and so the time has come for the knight to jump around in search of stability.

21...♗f6 22.a3 ♘a6

22...♘d5 unpins the d4-pawn, allowing 23.dxc5, weakening the black queenside.

23.♗c6!

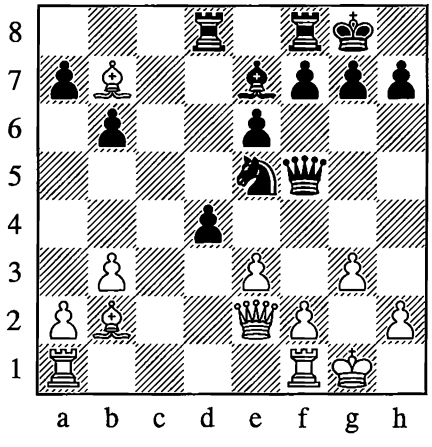
This bishop is the unchallenged master of the light squares; White has to make use of this detail in order to maintain his initiative.

23...♖d6 24.♗b7 ♘b8

This looks passive, but 24...♘c7 25.♖c2 leaves the c-pawn pinned.

25.♖ad1±

White has completed his regrouping, while the black knight is very passive. In the event of simplifications, the white king could invade the queenside through the weakened light squares.



16.exd4!N

Accepting an isolated pawn is the only way to fight for the initiative. First of all, White wins an important tempo by renewing the attack against the knight and secondly the further advance of the d-pawn becomes a permanent threat.

In my only experience with this line, I preferred the natural 16.♗xd4, but Black quickly neutralized the d4-bishop: 16...♗f6 17.♖ad1 ♘d7 The position is close to equality, because Black is quite active. By refusing to accept this, I ran into some trouble: 18.♕a6?! e5! Suddenly, White's pieces are hanging, Marin – Pashikian, Moscow 2005.

16...♘g4

The knight is heading for f6, in order to block the d4-pawn.

16...♘g6

This is too passive and allows White to open the centre in his favour.

17.♗e4 ♕a5

Black cannot keep his queen on the kingside: 17...♕g5 18.h4! ♘xh4? 19.♗c1± White wins material.

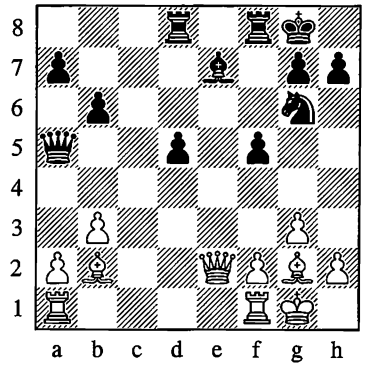
18.d5

White achieves the key central break by exploiting Black's vulnerable minor pieces.

18...f5

Of course 18...exd5? loses a piece to 19.♗xg6.

19.♗g2 exd5



Black has won a pawn, but his position lacks harmony. White will restore material equality with a series of accurate moves, while maintaining the positive aspects of his position.

20.♖fd1 ♔h8 21.a3!

It becomes clear that the queen will not be able to support the d5-pawn anymore.

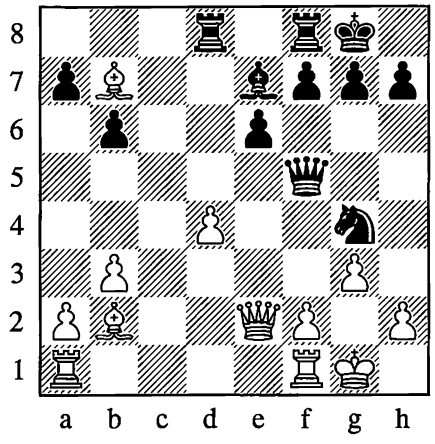
21...♗f6

21...♕c5 is strongly met by 22.♖ac1.

22.b4 ♕a4 23.♗xf6 ♖xf6 24.♖xd5±

White is more active and has the safer king.

The alternative way to prepare the knight transfer to f6 is 16...♘d7, but occupying the d7-square allows a nasty pin along the e-file after: 17.d5 (compare this with the main line) 17...♘c5 18.♗c6± After the thematic breakthrough in the centre, the light-squared bishop is stronger than the knight.



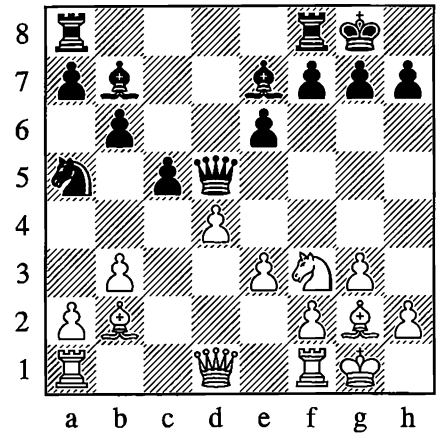
17.♖ac1

White starts to build up his pressure against the enemy queenside. Note that with the d7-square available, 17.d5 is not effective because after 17...exd5! 18.♕xe7 Black has 18...♖d7, restoring material equality.

17...♘f6 18.♕a6±

Black has problems defending his queenside. In contrast, his kingside counterplay is not so dangerous, because the b7-bishop can return to the defence at any moment.

D) 12...♘a5



Black clears the long diagonal for the b7-bishop and creates the threat of ...c5-c4.

13.dxc5!

The simplest way to parry the threat of ...c5-c4, thus leaving the enemy knight badly placed. At the same time, opening the d-file leaves the enemy queen exposed.

13...♗xc5

We should also consider what happens if Black exchanges queens:

13...♕xd1

This is a rather simplistic solution; Black hopes to ease his position by simplifications. In doing so, he allows White to gain a lead in development, which remains an important detail even in the endgame.

14.♖fxd1 ♗xc5 15.♗c3!

White starts fighting for the c6-square by provoking the exchange of its main defenders, the a5-knight and the b7-bishop.

15.♘e5?! pursues the same aim, but is the wrong move order: 15...♗xg2 16.♔xg2 ♖fd8 17.♗c3 ♗d6! Black is ready to meet ♗xa5 with ...♗xe5 and had little to fear in Marin – Dorin, Andorra 1998.

15...♖ac8 16.♘e5 ♗xg2

16...♗xe3? does not work out well tactically: 17.♗xa5 ♗xf2† 18.♔xf2 ♖c2† 19.♖d2!

17.♔xg2

Threatening ♗xa5 followed by ♖ac1, when Black would struggle to prevent the occupation of the c6-square.

17...♗d6!?

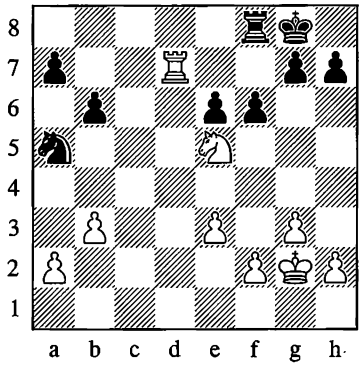
This prevents the undesired exchange, but allows the activation of the white rooks.

18.♖xd6 ♖xc3 19.♖ad1 ♖c7

The attempted counterplay with 19...♖c2 20.♖d7 ♖xa2 fails to 21.♖xa7 threatening both b3-b4 and ♖dd7.

20.♖d7 ♖xd7 21.♖xd7 f6

Hoping to play ...♖f7 in time.

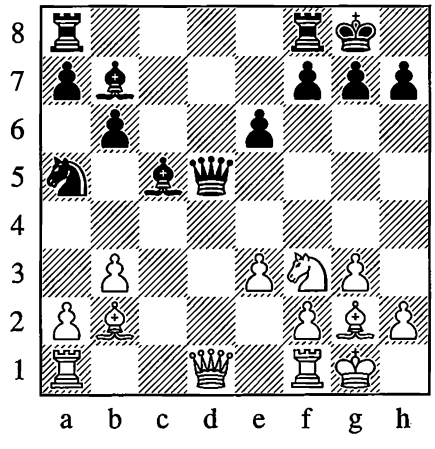


22.b4!

Provoking major damage to Black's structure.

22...fxe5 23.bxa5 ♖f7 24.♖d8† ♖f8 25.♖d6 ♔f7 26.♖d7† ♔f6 27.♖xa7 bxa5 28.♖xa5±

White went on to win this endgame in Marin – Hutters, Internet (rapid) 2000.



14.♕e2!

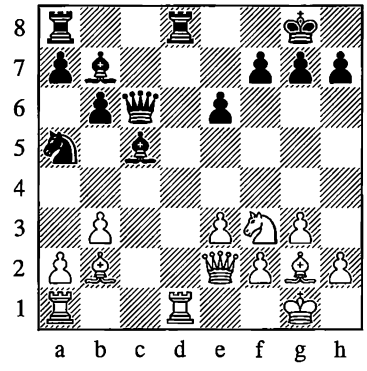
White will play ♖fd1 with gain of time, while the a5-knight and the c5-bishop are passive and, as we shall see, exposed.

White eventually was successful with 14.♕xd5 in Miles – Short, Torquay 1998, but this leads to a slightly less favourable form of the ending from the previous line.

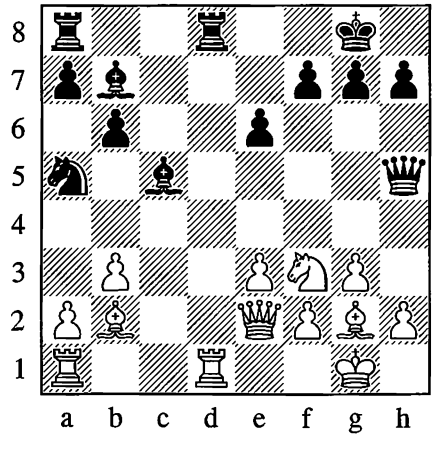
14...♖fd8 15.♖fd1 ♕h5

This looks like a safe retreat, but appearances are deceptive.

Instead 15...♕c6 was played in Rukavina – Nabavi, Basel 2009.



16.♖ac1!N White increases his pressure with simple developing moves. 16...♖xd1† 17.♕xd1 ♕d5 18.♘e1 ♕xd1 19.♖xd1± With a familiar favourable ending.

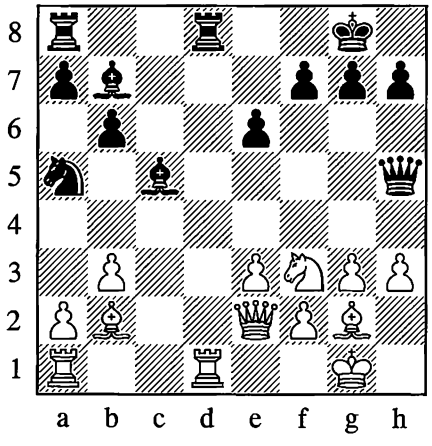


16.h3!

Suddenly, the black queen starts feeling uncomfortable; the main threat is g3-g4 followed by ♘e5. This method of fighting for space has frequently been used in similar situations by Anatoly Karpov.

Many years after I played this game, I became a team-mate of my pleasant opponent. On one occasion, Alf Jerez confessed that this had been his first game against a grandmaster. After the opening, he was feeling slightly disappointed. Was this really the best a grandmaster could do with White – develop his pieces on the first three ranks without threatening anything? It may have been my previous move that started causing him some discomfort. He could not cope with the unexpected problems and went down rather quickly.

This episode illustrates the subtle nature of White's strategy in the English/Reti Opening. Black tends to overlook the dangers and, once he detects them, it may well be difficult to adjust to the reality or perhaps it is simply too late to change anything.



16...♗d6?!

This allows White's forces to become extremely active.

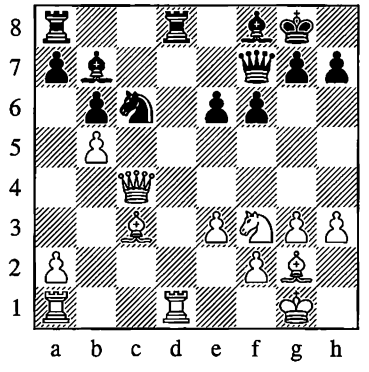
16...f6

This would have been a lesser evil, although the weakness of the light squares would have caused Black permanent problems.

17.♗c3

Apart from the brutal idea of b3-b4, White has the strategic threat of giving up his bishop for the enemy knight, in order to dominate the light squares.

17...♘c6 18.♕c4 ♕f7 19.b4 ♗f8 20.b5



Black has a difficult choice: 20...♘a5 21.♗xa5 bxa5 22.♘d4 is a strategic triumph for White, while 20...♘e7 is met by 21.♘e5! fxe5 22.♗xb7. Therefore, Black needs to clear the d8-square for the knight, which leads to a very passive position.

20...♖xd1† 21.♖xd1 ♘d8 22.♕a4±

With active play for White, who also has the better structure.

17.♖d4 f6

In view of the threat of ♖h4, Black has to weaken the e6-square anyway.

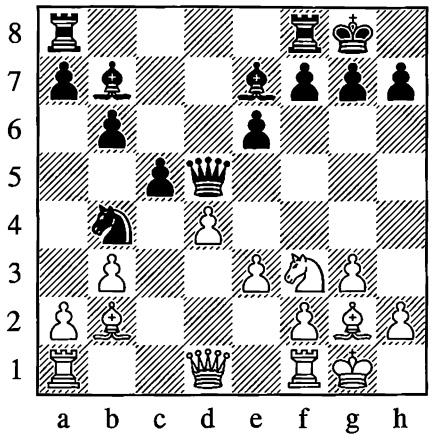
18.♖ad1 ♗e7?!

This loses at once, but even after the better 18...♗c7 19.♖d7± Black's position is grim.

19.b4

In Marin – Jerez Perez, Badalona 1996, Black resigned. A possible continuation would have been 19...♘c6 20.♖d7 ♗c8 21.♖c7 ♗a6 22.♖xd8† ♗xd8 23.♕xa6 ♗xc7 24.♕b7 with decisive material gains.

E) 12...♘b4!?



This knight move is more flexible than the one in the previous line. Even if pushed back, the knight can re-enter the game with ...♘a6-c5.

More than a quarter of a century ago, this was my own over-the-board choice when facing this set-up, which I had never heard about before.

13.♘h4!

Taking advantage of a hidden defect of Black's previous move: unlike in line D, the knight does not defend the b7-bishop, which causes Black problems in maintaining stability. Instead, playing in the spirit of line D is less effective because the black knight is more active:

13.dxc5?! ♕xd1 14.♖fxd1 ♗xc5 15.a3 ♘c2 16.♖a2

16.♖ac1 allows the tactical operation 16...♘xe3 17.fxe3 ♗xe3† 18.♔f1 ♗xc1 19.♖xc1 ♖ac8∓ when White has problems keeping both his wings defended.

16...♖ad8

White's lack of coordination is obvious.

17.♖f1 ♗d5 18.♗xg7

White spoils the enemy kingside structure, but the weakness of the dark squares cannot be exploited. To do that, White would need a queen or, at the very least, the dark-squared bishop that has just been sacrificed.

18...♔xg7 19.♖xc2 ♗xb3

After the elimination of this pawn, the c5-bishop becomes totally secure, preventing any invasion along the c-file.

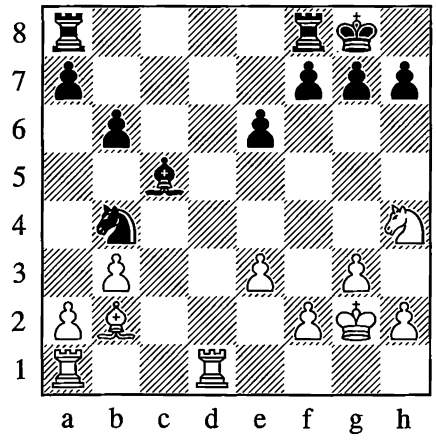
20.♖c3 ♗d5 21.♘e5 ♗xg2 22.♔xg2 ♖d2∓

Black controls the only open file and the a3-pawn is weak, Stefanov – Marin, Bucharest 1984.

Selecting the correct move order is important. Although a2-a3 is part of White's plan, it is essential to choose the right moment for it. For example, the immediate 13.a3 is premature because after 13...♘a6 14.♘h4 ♕d7 15.dxc5 ♕xd1 16.♖fxd1 ♗xg2 17.♔xg2 Black can capture with the knight: 17...♘xc5 With his queenside weakened and the knight hanging on h4, it is White who has to think about equality.

13...♕d7 14.dxc5 ♕xd1 15.♖fxd1 ♗xg2 16.♔xg2 ♗xc5

After a series of forcing moves, White has retained his lead in development. Black's hope is that the white knight may need a couple of tempos to be re-activated, but we will see that this is not true.



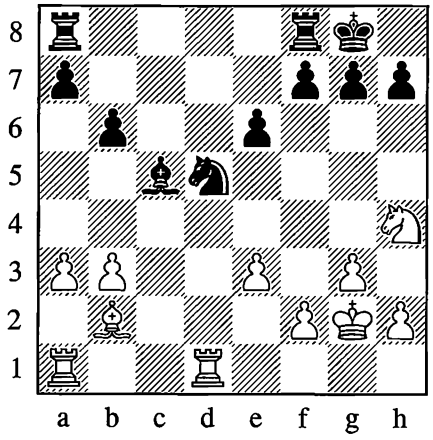
17.a3!

This is the right moment to chase the knight away.

17...♘d5

The natural and best retreat, even though in some cases it allows the activation of the white knight by tactical means.

After the previous series of exchanges and now that the c5-square is occupied, 17...♘a6 makes little sense because of 18.♖d7± when White not only has an active position, but also threatens to win a piece with b3-b4.



This position was reached in Nogueiras – Arencibia, Cuba (ch) 1991.

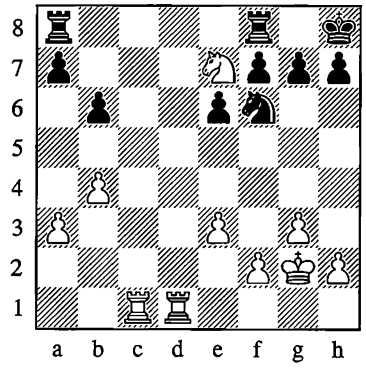
18.b4!N

This was recommended by Nogueiras. White should not tolerate the presence of Black's minor pieces on the central squares. Only by forcing their retreat or exchange, can he find a way to activate his rooks.

18...♗xe3

This is the only way to justify Black's previous play.

Nogueiras analysed only the following lines after the passive retreat: 18...♗e7 19.♘f5 ♗f6 (Or 19...exf5 20.♖xd5 ♖fc8 21.♖d7 ♗f8 22.♖c1 ♖xc1 23.♗xc1 ♖c8 24.♗b2 ♖c2 25.♗d4±. The queenside problems are accentuated by the back rank weakness.) 20.♗xf6 ♘xf6 21.♘e7† ♔h8 22.♖ac1±

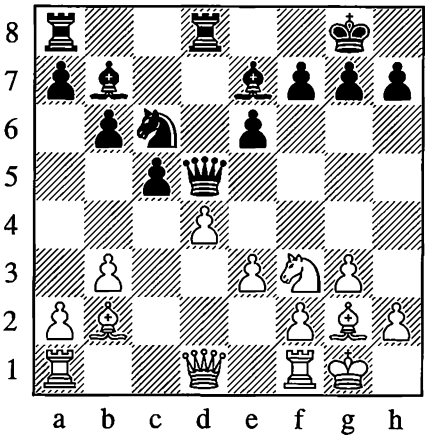


White is totally dominant.

19.♖xd5 exd5 20.fxe3±

Black only has a pawn and a rook to fight the two minor pieces. But more importantly, the control over the d4-square offers White considerable stability.

F) 12...♖fd8



This natural developing move, aiming to occupy the open files with both rooks, has the significant drawback that it weakens the f7-square.

13.♘e5 ♕d6

The interesting queen sacrifice 13...♕xg2† leads to positions similar to those from line G1. Since Black will most likely double rooks on the d-file anyway, we can expect an exact transposition.

14.♕h5

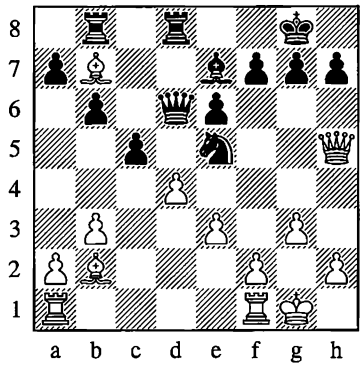
Immediately taking advantage of the negative sides of 12...♖fd8.

14...g6

This is a weakening move, but it is hard to choose between the unappealing options.

14...♘xe5 15.♗xb7 ♖ab8

This was played in Markowski – Jaracz, Gdansk 1994.



16.♗e4!N

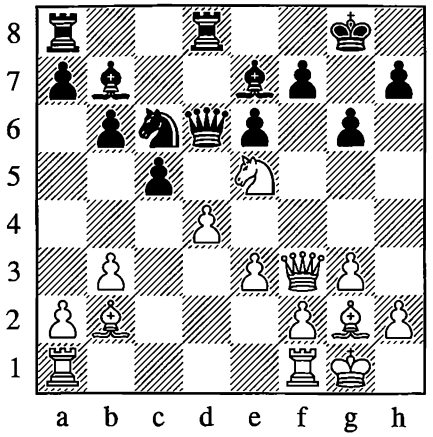
We are familiar with this retreat from line A1. In this case, the attack against the h7-pawn forces Black to place his knight on a passive square.

Instead 16.dxe5 does not achieve anything because of 16...♕d2 17.♗c1 ♕c3 18.♗e4 g6. 16...♘g6 17.♖fd1±

White is more active and has a mighty pair of bishops.

15.♕f3

The double attack against f7 and c6 forces Black to give up the bishop pair, with similar play as in line A1.

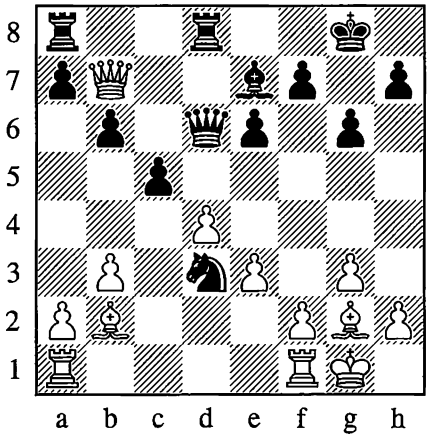


15...♘xe5 16.♕xb7

Only not 16.dxe5? because of 16...♕d5!∓ when Black retains material parity and has the better pawn structure.

16...♘d3

The knight has managed to occupy an advanced position but has insufficient support from its colleagues. White will have little trouble finding a stable square for his b2-bishop.



17.dxc5 ♘xc5

17...bxc5 spoils Black's structure for nothing, because White has the calm 18.♗c3±.

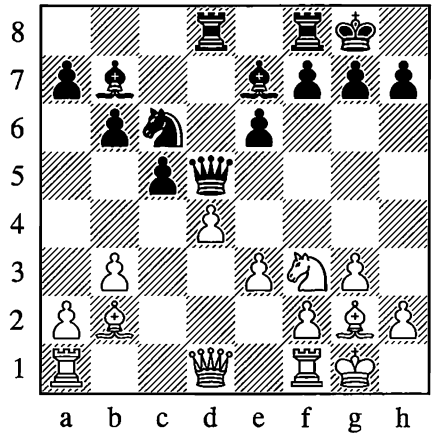
18.♕xa8!

Winning material.

18...♖xa8 19.♗xa8 ♕d2 20.♗d4±

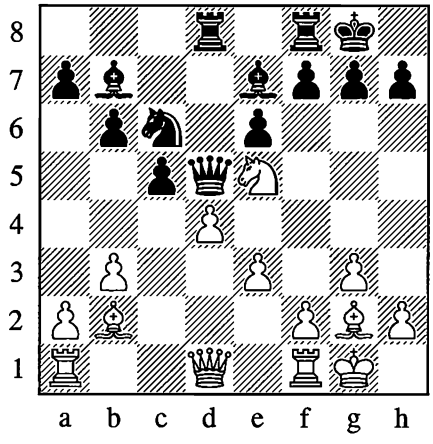
White has a safe king position and no weaknesses. This leaves Black with no compensation for the material deficit, Panchenko – Lengyel, Sochi 1981.

G) 12...♖ad8



This looks more solid than 12...♖fd8 above, but it also has drawbacks. Surprisingly, in some lines the f8-rook will be hanging, while the natural rook placement on c8 and d8 becomes improbable.

13.♘e5



Black now has a choice between the creative **G1) 13...♕xg2†** and the more common **G2) 13...♕d6**.

G1) 13...♕xg2†!?

This spectacular move has the direct aim of building a fortress, which Black hopes will allow him to draw despite the significant material deficit.

14.♔xg2 ♘xe5† 15.f3

A forced weakening. After 15.♔h3? ♘f3 the king is trapped in a deadly net.

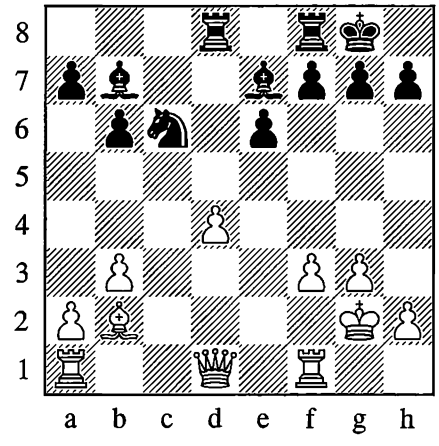
15...cxd4 16.exd4

The attempt to simplify towards a favourable ending worked out well in a blitz game of mine: 16.♗xd4 ♘xf3 17.♖xf3 e5 18.♖c1 exd4 19.exd4 ♗c5?! 20.dxc5 ♖xd1 21.♖xd1 bxc5 22.♖d7 ♗xf3† 23.♔xf3 ♖a8 24.♖c7± White had a promising rook ending in Marin – Gelashvili, Internet (blitz) 2003.

However, instead of the careless 19...♗c5?!, Black can improve with 19...♗f6 with a probable draw.

16...♘c6

Black only has two minor pieces for the queen, but he may soon win the d4-pawn, while keeping an active position.



17.♖c1!N

White does not have the means to defend the d4-pawn effectively and his only chance to

fight for an advantage is to gain some active play. The c-file is the only weak spot in Black's position and White intends to regroup with ♖c4 and ♕c2.

Black's main problem will be that any time he captures on d4, the infiltration of the white rook to c7 would provoke a serious loss of harmony in Black's camp.

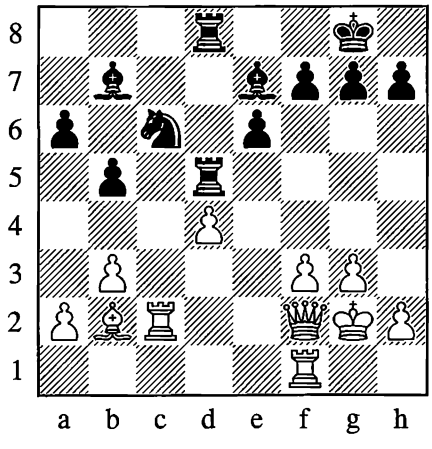
In a couple of previous games White had played 17.♕e2. However, the queen does not stand well on e2. 17...♖d5 18.♖ac1 ♖fd8 19.♖c4 The same plan as in the main line, but under less favourable circumstances. 19...♗a6 Black regains part of his sacrificed material, while the elimination of the d4-pawn remains very probable. In Ehlvest – Nakamura, USA (ch) 2009, Black managed to draw without too much trouble.

17...♖d5 18.♖c4 b5

Practically forced in view of the threat of ♕c2, but now the queenside is seriously weakened.

19.♖c2 ♖fd8 20.♕e2 a6 21.♕f2

Black still cannot afford to open the c-file by capturing on d4, while the threat of ♖fc1 is very annoying.



21...♗f6

Evacuating the vulnerable e7-square and increasing the pressure against the central pawn.

21...♗f8

This keeps the c5-square under control, but Black has little hope of reducing the damage caused by the rook invasion on c7.

22.♖fc1 ♘xd4 23.♖c7 ♘xb3

This does not work out well, but 23...♗a8 24.♖c8 is equally hopeless.

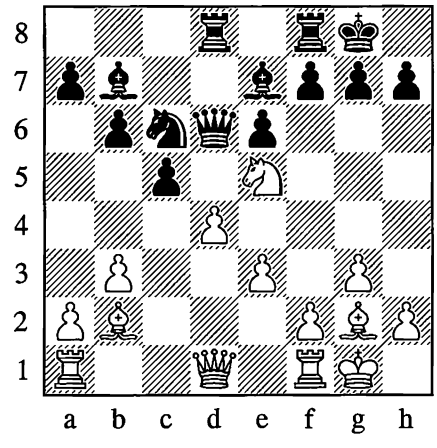
24.axb3 ♖d2 25.♖xb7 ♖xf2† 26.♔xf2 ♖d2† 27.♔g1 ♖xb2 28.♖c8+–

Black will lose his bishop.

22.♖c5!±

The simplifications provoked by this move offer White reasonable winning chances, especially since the enemy queenside is vulnerable.

G2) 13...♕d6



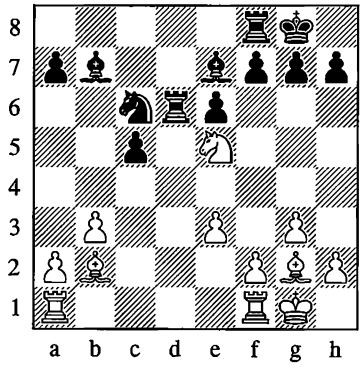
Black intends to play an improved version of line F, on account of the fact that the f7-pawn is defended. The tactical defect of this set-up is that in certain lines the f8-rook will be hanging.

14.dxc5 ♕xc5

We should also consider the other recapture:

14...bxc5 15.♕xd6 ♖xd6

This weakens the queenside and offers White a choice of promising continuations.



16.♖fd1

White keeps developing and tries to exchange Black's most active piece.

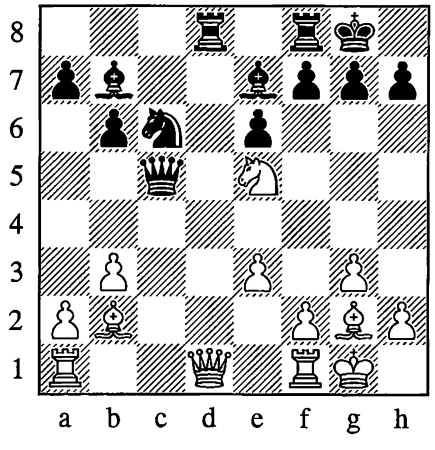
The rook and opposite-coloured bishops ending with two extra pawns reached after 16.♘xc6 ♗xc6 17.♗e5 ♗xg2 18.♗xd6 ♗xf1 19.♗xe7 ♖e8 20.♗xc5 ♗e2 21.♗xa7 ♗f3 22.♔f1 ♖d8 23.♔e1 e5 24.a4 also offers winning chances, but instinctively I would avoid having my king caged.

16...♘xe5

Black cannot maintain the tension with 16...♖fd8? because of 17.♖xd6 ♖xd6 18.♘xc6 ♗xc6 19.♗e5 with decisive material gains.

17.♗xb7±

White has an active pair of bishops and the better structure.



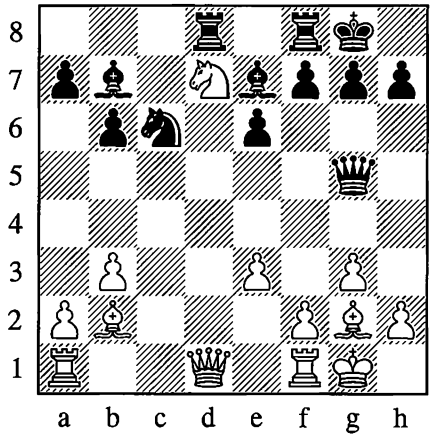
15.♘d7!

The knight steps into an apparently dangerous pin, but Black's coordination is too poor to allow him to take advantage of this.

Black has a choice between **G21) 15...♕g5** and **G22) 15...♕f5**. Other moves would allow 16.♕g4, hitting g7 and unpinning the knight, followed by ♘xf8 with a decisive material advantage.

In both the main lines, White's main trump is that the enemy queen cannot move to g6 because of ♘xf8, winning an exchange.

G21) 15...♕g5



16.h4!

Forcing the queen onto a passive square.

16...♕h6

16...♕f5?! loses material to 17.e4 as Black cannot parry the threats of ♘xf8 and ♕g4 at the same time.

17.♖c1

White continues his development, putting pressure on Black's queenside, which has been left without sufficient defence after the queen's departure.

17...♘a5

The alternatives are equally unappealing.

17...♗c5 loses a piece to the elegant 18.b4!, taking advantage of the double pin.

17...♘b8

This places the knight on a passive and vulnerable square, allowing a thematic queen sacrifice:

18.♘xf8 ♗xg2

18...♗a6 is met most simply by 19.♕g4 ♗xf1 20.♘xe6 with an extra pawn and an overwhelming positional advantage, Ftacnik – Bokros, Slovakia 2005.

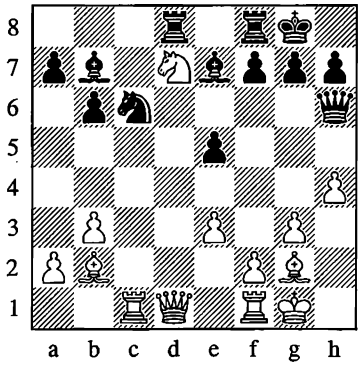
19.♔xg2 ♖xd1 20.♖fxd1 ♗xf8 21.♖d8

Black's pieces are hanging and his king is in deadly danger. Huge material losses are inevitable.

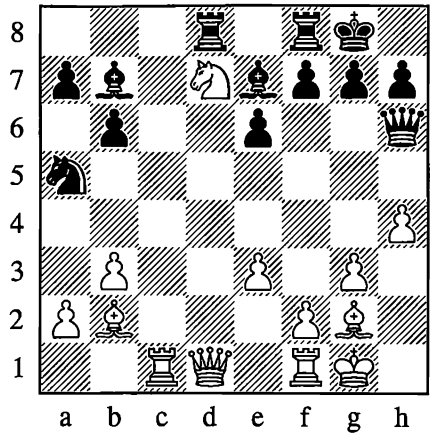
21...♕h5 22.♖xb8 ♕d5† 23.♔g1 h5 24.♗a3

And White won in Loseries – Schwarz, corr. 1993.

Black can attempt to restore communication between the queen and the rest of the black army with 17...e5. However, Black's problem is that, in addition to clearing the sixth rank, the pawn also opens the h3-c8 diagonal, which is very much in White's favour (a theme frequently seen in chess studies and problems).



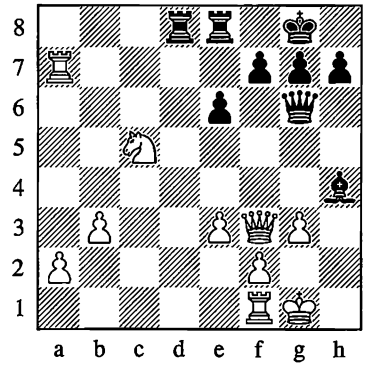
18.♕g4! This is possible only because the knight remains defended. 18...♖fe8 In Valdes – Batchuluun, Turin 2006, White could have consolidated his indisputable advantage with: 19.♖fd1± Black is paralysed.



18.♘xf8!?

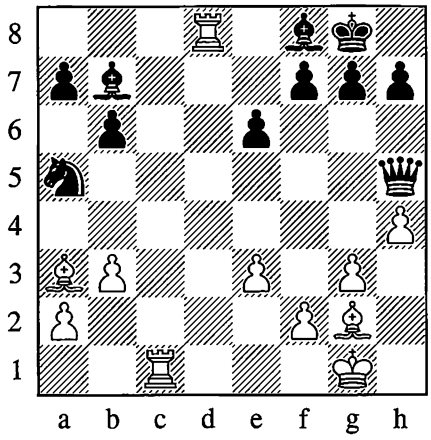
After having provoked a near total loss of harmony in Black's camp, White sacrifices his queen and a minor piece for two rooks, in order to invade via the back rank.

White's position is so strong that he can choose between the radical text continuation and the more solid: 18.♗xb7 ♘xb7 19.♖c7 White over-defends his knight and exerts strong pressure along the seventh rank. 19...♘c5 20.♗a3 Getting ready to reduce the pressure on the knight with a well-timed ♗xc5. 20...♖fe8 21.♖xa7 ♕g6 22.♗xc5 bxc5 23.♕f3 ♗xh4 24.♘xc5±



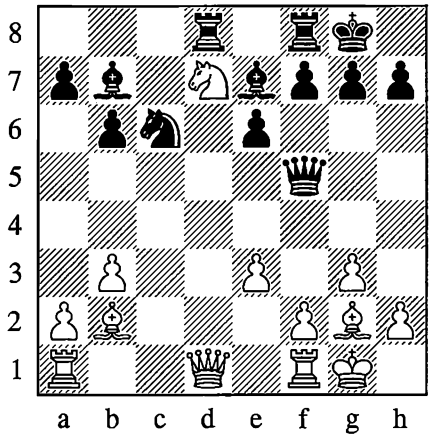
Black has no compensation for the pawn, Dizdar – Carlsson, Dos Hermanas 2006.

18...♖xd1 19.♖fxd1 ♗xf8 20.♖d8 ♕h5 21.♗a3



White had a decisive attack in Galliamova – Inkiov, Moscow 1989.

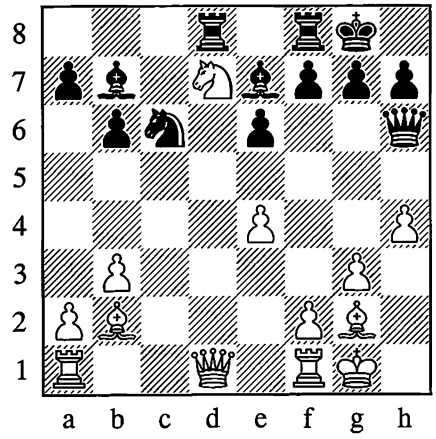
G22) 15...♕f5



Before transferring his queen to h6, Black provokes White's next move, in order to neutralize the g2-bishop's pressure against his queenside.

16.e4 ♕g5 17.h4 ♕h6

The h1-a8 diagonal has temporarily been closed, but in exchange White gains the c1-h6 diagonal for his other bishop. Once again (as in the case of 17...e5 from line G21), this is a frequently used theme in artistic chess.



18.♗c1!

The g6-square remains taboo, so Black must weaken his kingside.

18...g5 19.hxg5 ♕g7

The best way to take advantage of Black's only trump, the pin along the d-file.

19...♗xg5?! This allows White to unpin the knight under favourable circumstances. 20.f4 ♕g7 Forced, in order to prevent ♕g4†. 21.fxg5! Temporarily sacrificing an exchange for the sake of establishing an outpost on f6. 21...♕xa1 22.♘f6† ♕xf6 Otherwise ♕h5 would lead to a decisive attack. 23.gxf6 ♖xd1 24.♖xd1± White has the bishop pair and a huge space advantage.

20.e5

It is essential to re-open the long diagonal. At the same time, White's control over the f6-square is strengthened. Instead the following rather simplistic solution would offer White fewer chances of an advantage:

20.♘f6† ♗xf6 21.gxf6 ♕g6!

By temporarily letting the f6-pawn live, Black prevents the activation of the white queen.

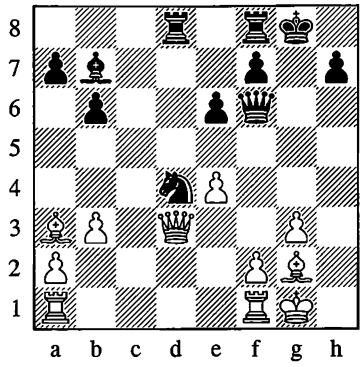
21...♕xf6?! 22.♕g4† offers White the initiative.

22.♕e2 ♘d4 23.♕d3 ♕xf6

Black captures this pawn only after having forced the enemy queen to occupy an insecure square.

24.♗a3

A draw was agreed in Makarichev – Servat, Valencia 1990.



After 24...♖fe8, the centralized knight offers Black good compensation for his imperfect structure and White's bishop pair.

After the text move, the threat of ♘f6† becomes more serious.

20...♔h8

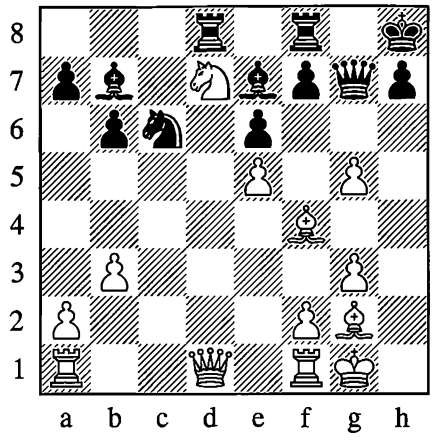
This is the best attempt to cross White's plans. Capturing either of the advanced white pawns would be premature:

20...♗xg5 This gives up the control of the d6-square, allowing the radical activation of the white queen. 21.♗xg5 ♕xg5 22.♕d6 ♘b8 23.♘f6†± White has managed to escape from the pin; he retains the better structure and the more active play. Black cannot play 23...♕xf6? because of 24.♕xf8†! winning the exchange.

20...♘xe5 21.♗b2 also leads to material losses: 21...♖xd7 22.♕xd7 ♗xg2 23.♗xe5±

21.♗f4

White consolidates his position with a natural developing move, creating the strong threat of ♖c1.



21...♗a3

Apart from parrying ♖c1, Black clears the seventh rank in order to create the threat of ...f5 or ...f6, trapping the knight. The alternatives are clearly inferior.

Capturing the g5-pawn is once again mistaken, although for different reasons than on the previous move: 21...♗xg5 22.♗xg5 ♕xg5 23.♘xf8! This is possible because the king no longer controls the f8-square. 23...♖xd1 24.♖axd1± White has two rooks for a queen and the safer king position. The slightly insecure situation of his knight is compensated by the pin along the h1-a8 diagonal, which also causes Black some discomfort.

21...♗c5

This does not defend the c-file properly:

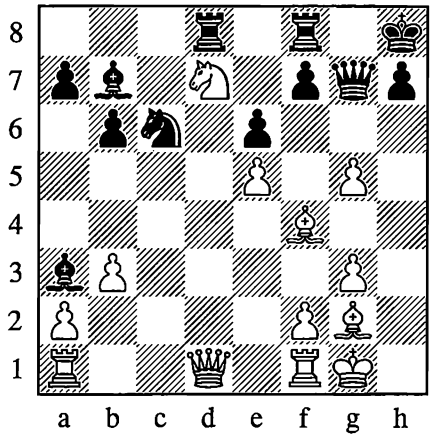
22.♖c1 f5

Black has no time for consolidating moves: if 22...a5 then 23.♖c2 followed by ♖d2, and the d7-knight would suddenly become very strong.

23.exf6 ♕xd7 24.♕xd7 ♖xd7 25.♗xc6 ♗xc6 26.b4+–

White will be one or two pawns up with a huge space advantage on the kingside.

21...♘b8 leads to an unfavourable release of the tension: 22.♗xb7 ♖xd7 23.♕f3 ♗xg5 24.♗e4± White has more space, the better structure and his light-squared bishop is stronger than the knight, Fernandez Vicente – Bebchuk, corr. 2006.



22.b4!

White makes use of all his resources. This modest pawn advance clears the d1-a4 diagonal for the queen and cuts off the enemy bishop from the rest of the board.

22...♗xb4

Black restores material equality, but allows the a1-rook to become active with gain of time.

22...f5

This is strongly met by:

23.♕a4

White exchanges his pinned knight for the a3-bishop, retaining the extra pawn.

23...♕xd7 24.♕xa3 ♘d4

The counterplay initiated by this move can be kept under control because of White's space advantage on every sector of the board.

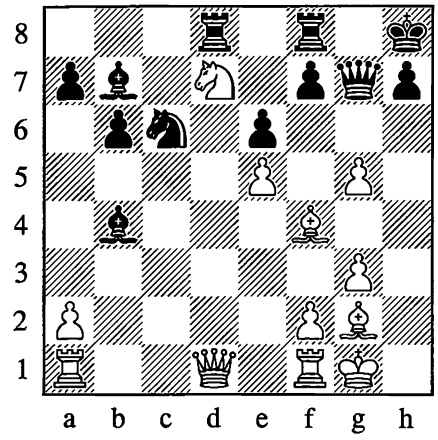
25.♖ad1!

Development and centralization above all!

The greedy 25.♕xa7, as preferred by the engines, allows Black to reach a drawn ending: 25...♘f3† 26.♗xf3 ♗xf3 27.♕xd7 ♖xd7 28.a4 ♖fd8 29.a5 bxa5 30.bxa5 ♖d1 31.a6 ♖xa1 32.♖xa1 ♖d1† Black has managed to exchange all the rooks just in time.

25...♗xg2 26.♔xg2 ♕c6† 27.f3

White has consolidated his position and the enemy knight will soon lose its stability.



23.♖c1!N

Once the c1-square is available, this is the most effective move. Instead 23.♕a4 allows Black to achieve a favourable regrouping: 23...♖xd7 24.♗xc6 ♗xc6 25.♕xc6 ♖fd8 Followed by ...♕g6, Rath – Flear, Esbjerg 1982.

23...♗c5 24.♖c3

White is just one step away from achieving a strong set-up with 25.♖d3, when threats such as ♘xc5, ♘xf8 or simply ♘f6 would become very annoying.

24...♘b8

The best practical chance, provoking mass simplifications.

25.♗xb7 ♖xd7 26.♕f3 ♗d4

White has broken the pin and obtained the bishop pair, while the enemy knight is passive. The only problem is that the e5-pawn

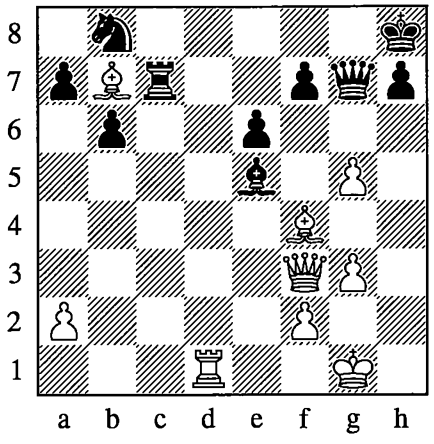
is hanging. I assume that there are several ways of just playing for compensation on account of White's active pieces, but the following line keeps a stable plus in conditions of material equality.

27.♖c8 ♖xc8 28.♗xc8 ♖c7 29.♗b7 ♗xe5

After 29...♘d7 30.♖d1, the best Black can do is transpose with 30...♗xe5.

30.♖d1!

The weakness of the back rank forces Black to make a concession.



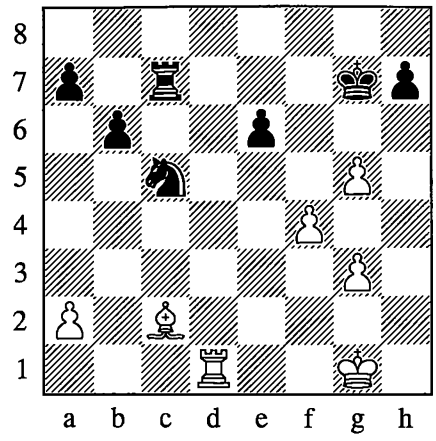
30...♘d7

This loses the f7-pawn, but even so it is the lesser evil. Instead 30...♖d7?! fails to neutralize the enemy rook's activity: 31.♖c1 ♖d8 32.♗xe5 ♕xe5 33.♕xf7± White has a hyper-active position and good attacking chances.

31.♗xe5 ♕xe5 32.♕xf7 ♕g7 33.♕e8† ♕g8 34.♕xg8† ♔xg8

This ending favours White, because of his better structure and more active minor piece. The first task is to find a stable square for the bishop.

35.♗e4 ♘c5 36.♗c2 ♔g7 37.f4±



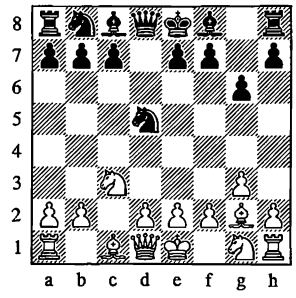
White has completed his regrouping. In the next phase of the game his king has better chances of centralizing than its rival. Despite the reduced number of pawns, Black faces an unpleasant defensive task.

Conclusion

The tabiya examined in this chapter arises after logical developing moves from both sides. The fact that Black faces problems in every variation is proof of the effectiveness of White's hypermodern strategy and of our whole repertoire.

Chapter 26

Odds and Ends



Anti-Grünfeld

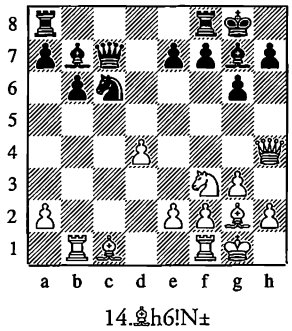
Variation Index

1.c4 ♘f6 2.g3 g6 3.♗g2 d5

4.cxd5 ♘xd5 5.♘c3

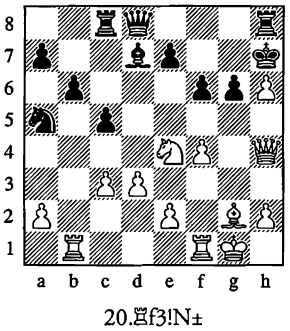
A) 5...♘xc3 6.bxc3 ♗g7 7.♘f3! 0–0 8.0–0 376
A1) 8...♘d7 378
A2) 8...c5 379
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B1) 7...h6 383
B2) 7...0–0 8.♕d2 384
B21) 8...♘c6 384
B22) 8...e5 385
B23) 8...♖e8 386
B24) 8...♘8d7 387
B3) 7...♘c6 389

A2) note to 10...♘a5



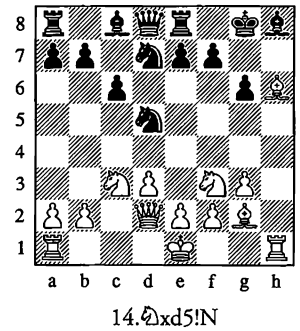
14.♗h6!N±

A2) after 19...b6



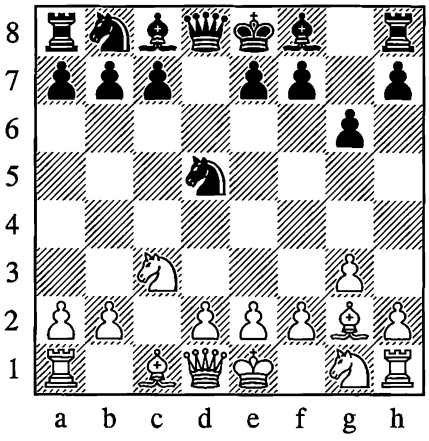
20.♖f3!N±

B23) after 13...♘d7



14.♘xd5!N

1.c4 ♘f6 2.g3 g6 3.♗g2 d5 4.cxd5 ♘xd5 5.♘c3



The Grünfeld Defence is an active opening in reply to 1.d4, aiming to generate early counterplay against the white centre and in particular the d4-pawn. After 1.c4 or 1.♘f3, there are several anti-Grünfeld systems available, most of them delaying d2-d4 in order to deprive Black of his main trump. Since our repertoire is based on 2.g3, we are confined to the system examined in this chapter, but this is hardly a problem, because White usually gets very pleasant play with it.

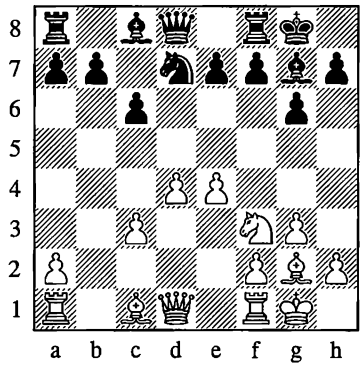
White's structure is identical to that of the Reversed Dragon, which was examined in the first volume, and his general plan is similar: build up pressure against the enemy queenside using the force of the g2-bishop and the rook's action along the half-open c-file, and use his a- and b-pawns for a minority attack.

In my opinion, Black is less well prepared for this course of events in the variations we are going to examine in this chapter. Having opted for the kingside fianchetto, Black has willingly given up the control of the a3-f8 diagonal, which is an essential element of his counterplay in the Reversed Dragon. The bishop may look more active on g7 than it would on e7, but there are certain factors that restrict its effectiveness. In order to gain some control in the centre, Black will have to play ...e5 at some point, thus releasing the pressure against the white queenside. Besides, the bishop risks being exchanged with ♗h6, leaving the kingside slightly weakened.

I should add that the following move order, 2...d5 3.cxd5 ♘xd5, is often used by Grünfeld players, but it has little independent value after 4.♗g2. For instance, 4...e5 5.♘c3 transposes to the Reversed Dragon and 4...c5 5.♘c3 ♘c7 to Chapters 8 and 9 from Volume 3.

In this chapter we will examine two main continuations: **A) 5...♘xc3** and **B) 5...♘b6**.

The seemingly solid 5...c6 allows White to transpose to a favourable form of Grünfeld, in which the thematic ...c5 will be connected with an important loss of time. 6.♘f3 ♗g7 7.d4 0–0 8.0–0 ♘d7 9.e4 ♘xc3 10.bxc3



Definitely not a dream position for a Grünfeld player; White has an advantage in the centre and there is no obvious way to start Black's counterplay.

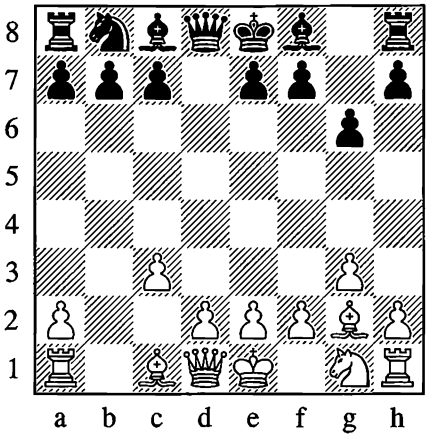
A) 5...♘xc3

Black plays in the spirit of the Exchange Variation of the Grünfeld.

6.bxc3

White has strengthened his centre, but unlike in the aforementioned main lines, he can

choose the right moment to play d4, or simply refrain from it. This will cause Black problems coming up with a concrete plan. Besides, with a bishop on g2 the opening of the b-file is more effective than in the Exchange Grünfeld.



6...♗g7 7.♘f3!

I believe this flexible developing move is best. According to theory, the main line is:

7.♖b1

With the threats of ♗xb7 or ♖xb7, as in the main line. This move would be perfectly justified if Black was forced to play the relatively passive 7...c6 or 7...♘d7. The latter has the idea of meeting 8.♗xb7 ♗xb7 9.♖xb7 with 9...♘b6, trapping the rook and is likely to transpose to line A1 below after 8.♘f3.

The situation is less clear after the active:

7...♘c6!

In the near future the rook may be exposed on b1, as I learned in the following rapid game against a Grünfeld specialist.

8.h4 h6 9.d4 0–0 10.♗e3 e5 11.♘f3 ♗f5!

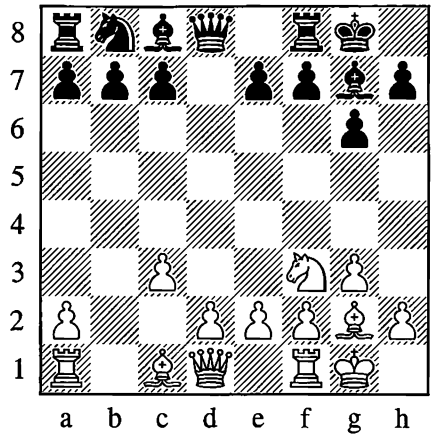
This temporary pawn sacrifice is possible because White has delayed castling, resulting in the g2-bishop being undefended.

12.♖xb7 ♗e4 13.♖b5 exd4 14.cxd4 ♘xd4

With good counterplay for Black, Marin – Mikhalevski, Internet (rapid) 2000.

7...0–0 8.0–0

Both sides have completed their kingside development and the time has come for Black to define his plans on the opposite wing.



We will examine **A1) 8...♘d7** and **A2) 8...c5.** Other moves are less critical.

8...♘c6

Under these concrete circumstances (without White having spent a tempo on ♖b1), this way of developing the knight is artificial. Black blocks the path of his c-pawn, restricting his possibilities of counterplay in the centre.

9.♕c2 b6 10.♗b2 ♗b7 11.c4!

White starts gaining space in the centre without giving Black any target for counterplay (as he would have, for instance, after 11.d4).

11...♗xb2 12.♕xb2 ♘a5 13.c5 ♕d5 14.♖ac1±

White has almost completed his development and is ready to consolidate his space advantage with d2-d4.

14...bxc5

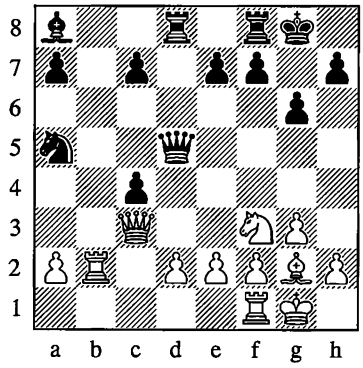
The only way to cross the opponent's plans, but the minor pieces will remain terribly misplaced.

15.♕c3 c4 16.♖b1 ♖ad8 17.♖b2

The threat of ♖fb1 possibly followed by ♖b5 is very unpleasant.

17...♗a8

This loses material to a far from obvious forced operation, but I doubt that Black has an adequate answer.



18.e4!

The queen will not be able to keep defending the a5-knight.

18...♕h5

18...♕c5 only makes things worse because of 19.d4±.

19.g4±

Black does not get sufficient compensation for the lost piece, although in Malakhov – Ni Hua, Ergun 2006, he eventually managed to draw.

8...e5

With the white pawn on d2, this is just a shot in the air.

9.♕c2 ♖e8 10.d3 h6 11.♖b1 ♘d7 12.♘d2

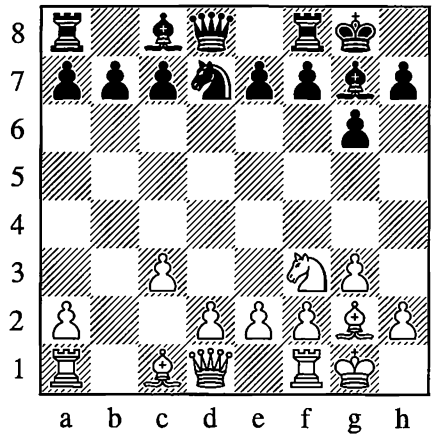
White builds up his queenside pressure in the best hypermodern tradition.

12...♖b8 13.♘c4 ♘b6 14.♘a5±

White was dominating in Ribli – Berndt, Germany 2003.

A1) 8...♘d7

Black keeps developing and avoids creating any weaknesses. The knight is heading for b6, taking the c4- and a4-squares under control. This plan would be effective with the white d-pawn already on d4, but White can avoid weakening the c4-square.

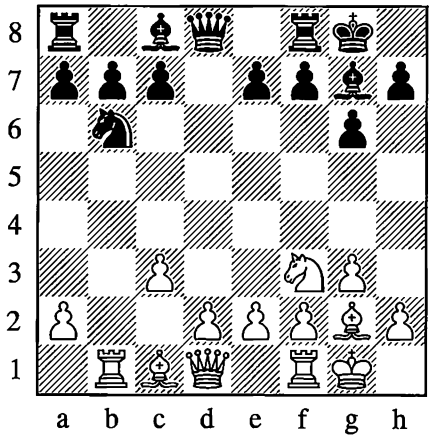


9.♖b1

This position can also be reached via the 7.♖b1 ♘d7 move order and is a specialty of Gutman with Black, who seems to trust his counterplay in a basically static position. My feeling is that if White plays accurately, Black is doomed to passivity.

9...♘b6

Black has carried out the first part of his regrouping, but developing his c8-bishop remains problematic.



10.♘g5!

White opens the long diagonal and intends to transfer the knight to c5. Dark clouds are gathering around the black queenside.

10...♕d7!?

Really unusual. Before developing his bishop, Black intends to activate his queen, in an attempt to put some pressure on the white kingside.

Another original queen move employed by Gutman is:

10...♕e8

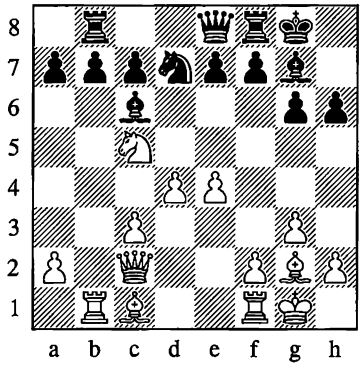
Apart from the somewhat irrelevant fact that it inhibits a2-a4 (which is also achieved by the text move), I fail to see a clear idea behind this manoeuvre.

11.♕c2 h6 12.♘e4 ♗d7 13.♘c5 ♗c6 14.e4

Black has almost completed his development, but most of his pieces are passive.

14...♖b8 15.d4 ♘d7

Hoping to simplify the position in order to get some breathing space.



16.♘e6!?

A spectacular and effective exchanging operation, gaining the bishop pair and weakening the enemy kingside.

16...fxe6 17.d5 exd5 18.exd5 ♗xd5 19.♗xd5† ♔h7 20.♖xb7±

White has the bishop pair and the better structure, Smejkal – Gutman, Bundesliga 1984.

11.♘e4 ♕f5

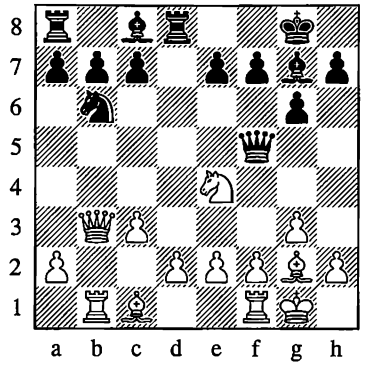
The alternative is:

11...♖d8

However, this prematurely defines the rook's intentions.

12.♕b3 ♕f5

So far, we have followed Quinteros – Gutman, Biel (izt) 1985.



13.d3!N

A natural move, preparing to complete development.

13...♗d7 14.♕a3 e6 15.♗g5 ♖e8 16.h3

Threatening to trap the queen with g3-g4.

16...h5 17.f4!±

The threat of 18.♘f6† ♗xf6 19.e4 is practically impossible to parry.

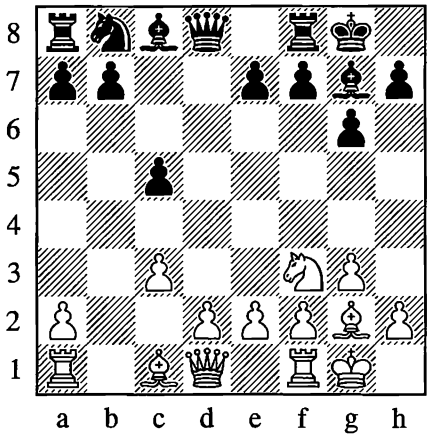
12.♗a3 ♖e8

Compared with the game mentioned in the previous comment, Black has avoided the loss of a tempo, but his situation remains difficult.

13.d3 ♕h5 14.c4 ♗g4 15.♖e1 ♖ad8 16.♕c2±

Both sides have completed their development, but White has the more flexible structure and his pieces are more active. The b6-knight is passive and the b7-pawn is vulnerable, Smejkal – Gutman, Bundesliga 1985.

A2) 8...c5



9.♖b1

After Black has spent a tempo on a pawn move, this way of developing the rook becomes more effective.

9...♘c6

Black does not have much of a choice. The attempt to secure the c5-pawn against any sort of trouble with 9...♕c7 delays development and allows White to take the initiative. 10.♕a4 e5 11.d3 ♗d7 (or 11...♘c6 12.♘g5± threatening ♕h4 followed by ♘e4 with pressure against both enemy wings) 12.♕a3± Black has problems completing his development adequately, Jacobsen – Kjeldsen, Aarhus 1989.

9...♘d7

This makes slightly more sense, but Black causes himself some development problems anyway by blocking the c8-bishop.

10.♕a4 e5

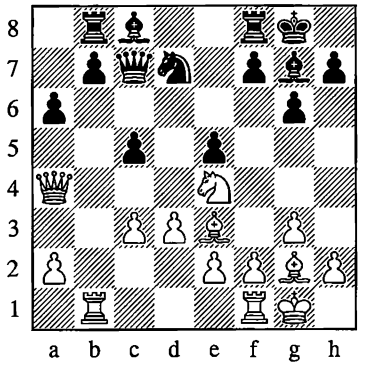
Black increases his control in the centre, taking preventive measures against the opening of the position with d2-d4.

The super-cautious 10...h6?!, directed against the plan based on ♕h4 and ♘g5, loses too much time. 11.♕a3 ♕c7 12.d4 cxd4 13.cxd4 ♘b6 14.♗f4± With a space advantage and better development for White in Hübner – Savon, Sukhumi 1972.

11.d3 a6

Necessary in order to prepare ...♖b8 and ...b7-b6.

12.♘g5 ♖b8 13.♘e4 ♕c7 14.♗e3



White has completed his development and exerts strong pressure on the enemy position. How should Black proceed?

14...h6

This was played in Tal – Bagirov, Baku 1972.

14...b5 15.♕a3 leaves the c5-pawn in trouble, while after 14...b6 White has a pleasant choice between 15.f4 with a kingside initiative and 15.c4 followed by the occupation of the d5-square.

After the text move, Bagirov recommended:

15.c4!N±

Followed by ♘c3-d5.

10.♕a4

As usual, this queen incursion threatens to either attack the c5-pawn with ♕c4 or ♕b5, or start a kingside attack with ♕h4. The transfer of the queen from one wing to the other along the fourth rank is typical in the hypermodern openings. With 1.d4, White would put an obstacle in the way from the very beginning of the game, while in our position the occupation of the centre is delayed until the queen has reached its desired destination.

10...♘a5

The alternate way of securing the c5-pawn is:

10...♕c7

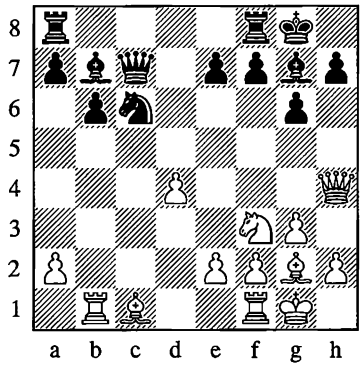
The drawbacks of this move are that the pressure along the d-file is released and the possibility of a queen exchange after ♕h4, ...e6 is discarded.

11.♕h4 b6

11...♗f5 is ineffective because of 12.d3 when White prepares to develop his c1-bishop and leaves the f5-bishop passive. 12...♗xc3 leads to a dangerous attack for White: 13.g4 ♗f6 14.♘g5 ♗xg5 15.♗xg5 ♗e6 16.♗xc6 ♕xc6 17.♗xe7 ♖fe8 18.♗f6 ♗xa2 19.♖b2 The bishop has no good retreat squares. It has to avoid going to e6, because this would release the pressure on the f6-bishop, allowing ♕h6 with mate to follow. Also, 19...♗d5 is met by 20.e4.

12.d4 cxd4 13.cxd4 ♗b7

Black has almost completed his development, but his kingside is vulnerable.



In Svedtchikov – Estrin, corr. 1977, White should have played:

14.♗h6!N±

The threat of ♘g5 will force Black to weaken his position with ...f7-f6. Besides, the c1-square has been made available for the rooks, underlining the fact that the development of the black queen was slightly premature.

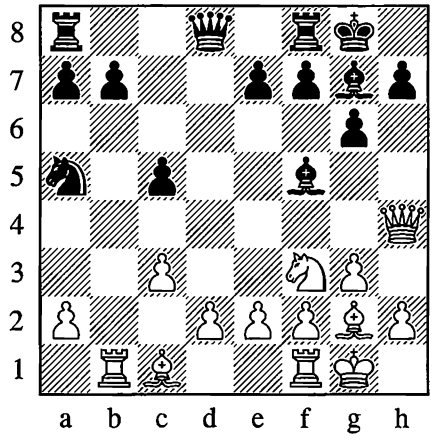
11.♕h4 ♗f5

This is the best option.

Exchanging queens turns out badly for Black: 11...e5 12.♕xd8 ♖xd8 13.♖b5 b6 14.♘xe5 White wins a pawn.

The more restrained 11...e6 does not expose the e-pawn, but leaves the c8-bishop passive. 12.♘g5 h6 13.♘e4± Black's queenside is vulnerable, Akopian – Stambulian, USSR 1991.

A neutral move such as 11...♗d7 can be met by 12.d4± when White has more space in the centre and threats on the kingside.



12.d3!

The most solid answer. The pseudo-active 12.e4 offers Black counterplay after 12...♕d3.

12...♖c8

A classical approach; Black makes a developing move, eliminating any possible problems along the h1-a8 diagonal.

12...♗xc3? 13.g4, followed by ♘g5, leads to even more unpleasant consequences than in a similar line from the comments to Black's 10th move, because the e7-pawn is poorly defended.

12...c4

This is a premature display of activity.

13.e4!

The circumstances have changed slightly compared to the very short line starting with 12.e4 above. Black's next intermediate move is not effective any more.

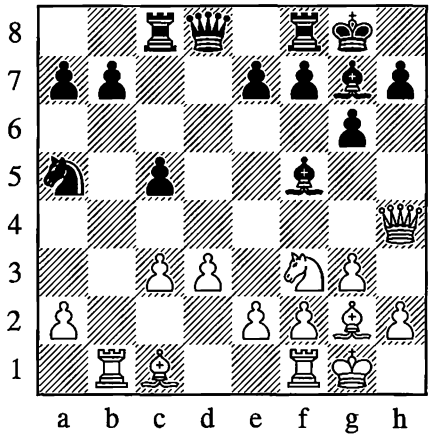
13...♕xd3?

13...♗d7 is somewhat better, but after 14.d4 White's massive centre offers him a large advantage.

14.♖b5+–

This is the point! In the aforementioned line, with Black's pawn still on c5, this move was impossible; now White wins a piece.

The ultra-cautious 12...f6, preventing ♘g5, leaves the g7-bishop passive and weakens the e6-square. This latter aspect can be taken advantage of with 13.♗h3.



13.g4!

This is the best way to start the kingside attack in which the g-pawn will play an important part. Against 13.♗h6 Black may consider 13...f6, when avoiding the exchange of Black's passive bishop would cost White another tempo.

13...♗d7 14.♘g5 h6 15.♘e4 ♔h7

Black has to give up a pawn in order to slow down White's attack.

The provocative 15...g5 allows 16.♗xg5 hxg5 17.♘xg5 ♖e8 18.♕h5 ♗e6 19.f4 threatening f5 or ♖f3-h3.

15...e5 leaves Black's kingside chronically weak after the blockading move 16.g5±.

16.♗xh6 ♗xh6 17.g5 ♖h8 18.gxh6 f6

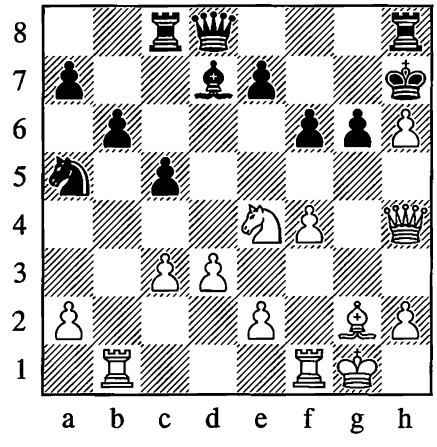
Black has parried the immediate threats, but the weakness of the g6-pawn causes him some discomfort. Besides, White's structure is more flexible on the other areas of the board, which makes the play rather one-sided.

19.f4!

An important element in consolidating White's advantage. White prepares to activate his king's rook and indirectly defends his h6-pawn against 19...♕f8? which can now be met by 20.♘g5†! opening lines for the attack: 20...fxg5 21.fxg5 ♕e8 (21...♕g8 is answered in the same way) 22.♕f4 ♖f8 23.♕e5± White has two pawns for the piece and very dangerous threats.

19...b6

So far, we have followed the game Polugaevsky – Szabo, Kapfenberg 1970.



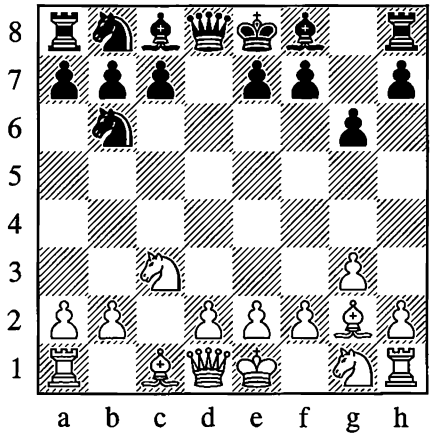
20.♖f3!N±

The most convincing way to keep White's attack going. The plan involves ♗h3 (...♗xh3,

♖xh3), followed by ♖af1 or even ♔h1 and ♖g1. Black has no active counterplay (for instance, ...c5-c4, d3-d4! only increases White's advantage in the centre).

In general, I consider 5...♘xc3 to be a positional concession for which Black does not obtain adequate compensation.

B) 5...♘b6



A knight retreat in the spirit of the Reversed Dragon. Black avoids strengthening White's centre and hopes that his knights will keep the minority attack under control.

White could transpose to a genuine Grünfeld by playing d2-d4 in the near future, but this is *not* one of the cases when we really need to deviate from our general opening strategy.

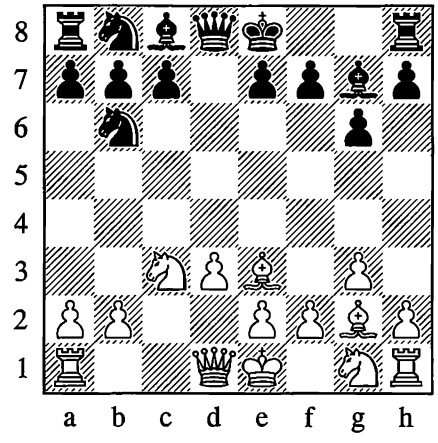
6.d3!

The plan initiated by this move is directed against both black wings.

White intends to set up a battery with ♗e3 and ♕d2 or ♕c1 as soon as possible, in order to exchange the g7-bishop and possibly start an attack with h4-h5. There is little chance of forcing mate against accurate black defence, but the attacking operation is likely to force Black to make some sort of strategic concession (for instance, disrupt his structure with ...fxg6 in order to avoid an immediate disaster along the h-file).

By leaving the g2-bishop's diagonal open, White intends to inhibit ...♘c6 (the most natural way of developing this knight) in view of the strategic threat of ♗xc6, chronically weakening the queenside.

6...♗g7 7.♗e3



Black is confronted with problems on both wings, so he has a difficult choice. We will examine **B1) 7...h6**, **B2) 7...0–0** and **B3) 7...♘c6**.

B1) 7...h6

Black radically prevents ♗h6, but the weakness of the h6-pawn will force him to delay castling for a long time.

8.♕c1 ♘8d7 9.♘f3 ♘f6 10.0–0 c6 11.♖b1

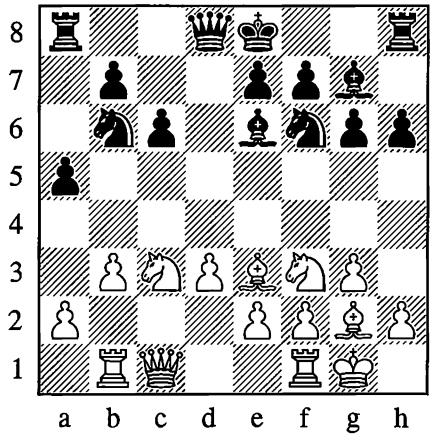
Threatening to start the minority attack with b2-b4.

11...a5 12.b3!

A typical method. Once the black queenside has been weakened, White does not need to hurry with a2-a3 followed by b2-b4-b5. Before starting the queenside attack, the b-pawn can

be useful on the third rank, as will be revealed one move later.

12...♗e6



13.♘a4!

This is the point; the exchange on a4 would open the b-file, leaving the b7-pawn and the b6-square extremely weak.

13...♘bd7 14.♗d2

A flexible move, clearing the way for the central pawns while keeping the pressure on the h6-pawn.

14...♘b6

This may look like throwing tempos away, but Black needs to play ...h6-h5 in order to get castled and 14...h5?! leaves the e6-bishop in an uncomfortable position after 15.♘g5±.

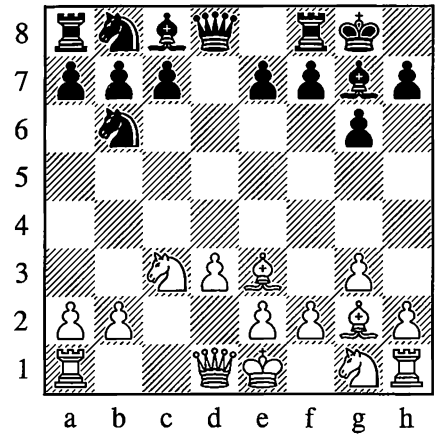
15.♘c5 ♗c8 16.a3

Finally, everything is prepared for the minority attack.

16...h5 17.♗c3 0–0 18.♕b2 ♘bd5 19.♗e5±

White has harmonious development and a flexible structure; he can start playing in the centre or on the queenside. Black's position is solid, but very passive, Miles – Tisdall, Lone Pine 1976.

B2) 7...0–0



It may seem that this must be the most flexible move, because it leaves open the question about how to develop the queenside. However, placing the king right in the firing line is an important commitment, allowing White to orientate his play easily.

8.♕d2

Black has several ways of meeting the looming danger of ♗h6: **B21) 8...♘c6**, **B22) 8...e5**, **B23) 8...♖e8** and **B24) 8...♘8d7**.

B21) 8...♘c6

This natural move allows a double exchange that has highly favourable strategic consequences for White.

9.♗xc6 bxc6 10.♗h6

If Black could keep both his bishops, he could find adequate compensation for the structural damage on the queenside. However, after the exchange of the g7-bishop, the dark squares (the c5-square in particular) will become weak, offering White the possibility of taking control of the centre with his knights.

10...c5

Black needs to advance this pawn before

White installs a knight on c5. The alternate way to do so is:

10...♗xh6 11.♕xh6 c5 12.♘f3!

By threatening ♘g5, White wins an important tempo over the main line.

12...f6 13.b3

The advance of the c-pawn has been stopped and Black still has serious weaknesses.

13...♗b7 14.♕e3 a5 15.♖c1±

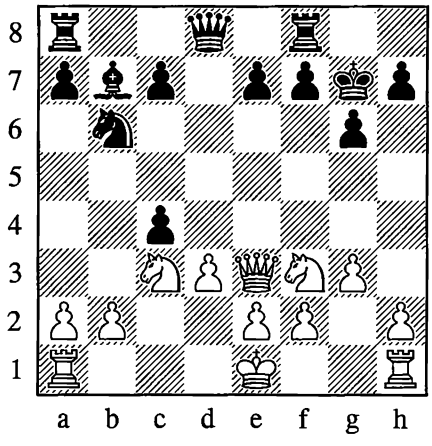
White had a crushing strategic advantage in Foișor – Lupulescu, Romania (ch) 2001.

11.♗xg7

The slightly extravagant 11.h4!? ♗b7 12.♖h2±, aiming to retain attacking chances, is also possible as in Lerner – R. Bagirov, Moscow 2002.

11...♔xg7 12.♘f3 ♗b7 13.♕e3 c4

Black has managed to get rid of his doubled pawns, but the weaknesses along the c-file will remain.



14.♖d1

After 14.d4?! ♗xf3 White has to either spoil his structure or give up the d4-pawn.

14...♕c8

Black bets all his money on his attack working. In doing so, he might have overlooked White's strong defensive resource on the 16th move.

14...cxd3 would have allowed White to activate his position with 15.♖xd3 ♕c8 16.0–0 ♖e8 17.♖c1. Black has insufficient resources to generate adequate kingside counterplay and his queenside is weak. Besides, his king is not entirely safe either.

15.dxc4 ♕h3 16.♖d4!

White will eject the enemy queen with ♖h4, while creating the threat of a mating attack with ♕h6† at the same time.

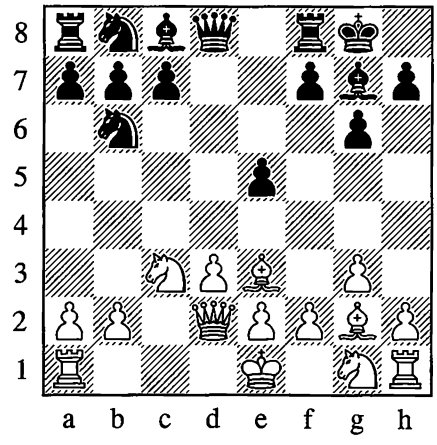
16...h5 17.♖h4 ♕e6

Black has to offer the queen exchange under very unfavourable circumstances. Otherwise, 18.g4 would place his king in danger.

18.♖xe6 fxe6 19.0–0±

White has an extra pawn and the better structure, Shamkovich – Webb, Hastings 1977.

B22) 8...e5



Black gains space in the centre and starts clearing the seventh rank in order to use his queen to defend the king's position. The drawback of this move is that it fails to contribute to his queenside development.

9.h4 h5 10.♗h6 ♖e8 11.♗xg7 ♔xg7 12.♖c1

White delays ♘f3 until Black has defined his queenside intentions.

12...c6

We already know that 12...♘c6?! is not recommended because of 13.♗xc6!, while there are not many "half-waiting" moves available.

13.♘f3 ♘a6 14.0–0 ♘c7 15.♖fd1 f6

The structure is typical of the Reversed Dragon, with the important difference that Black does not control the d4-square very well. This suggests a plan based on opening the centre with d3-d4, but only after all White's pieces are on optimal squares.

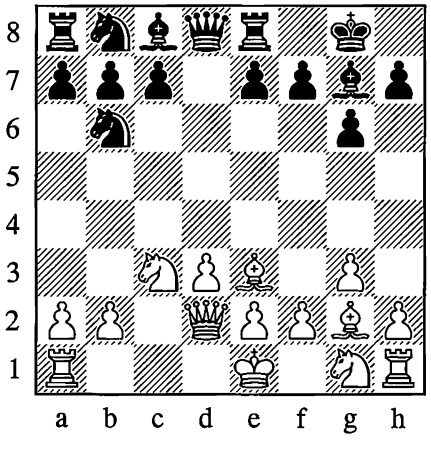
16.e3 a5 17.♕c2 ♕e7 18.♘e4 ♗g4 19.♖d2

Unpinning the f3-knight.

19...♖ed8 20.♕c5 ♕xc5 21.♘xc5 ♖a7 22.d4±

White is better coordinated, has more space and the more flexible structure, Miles – Panno, Wijk aan Zee 1978.

B23) 8...♖e8



Black declares his intention of keeping the dark-squared bishop and hopes that the rook will be useful in the event of a later ...e7-e5. This plan involves a considerable waste of time and does not prevent the opening of the h-file.

9.♗h6 ♗h8 10.h4 c6

Black prepares to return the knight to d5 in order to put some pressure on the enemy queenside, but we should consider a couple of alternatives:

10...c5

This only weakens the c-pawn.

11.♗e3 c4 12.d4

White has created a mobile pawn centre, while the c4-pawn is safely blocked by the c3-knight.

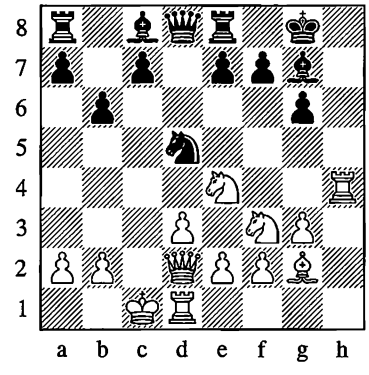
12...♘c6 13.d5 ♘e5 14.h5 ♗f5 15.hxg6 ♗xg6

A necessary structural concession, since 15...hxg6 16.♗d4 puts the king in great danger. It is funny to note that 16...♘d3† loses a piece to 17.♕xd3! when the queen is taboo because of the threat of mate in one. 17...e5 fails to limit the damage because of 18.♗xb6!.

16.♘h3!±

White has a space advantage in the centre, the more compact structure and safer king, Lerner – Isaev, Moscow 2002.

10...♘8d7 allows White to build up a slow but effective attack. 11.h5 ♘f6 12.♘f3 ♘g4 13.hxg6 hxg6 14.♖h4 ♘xh6 15.♕xh6 ♗g7 16.♕d2 ♘d5 17.♘e4 b6 18.0–0–0±



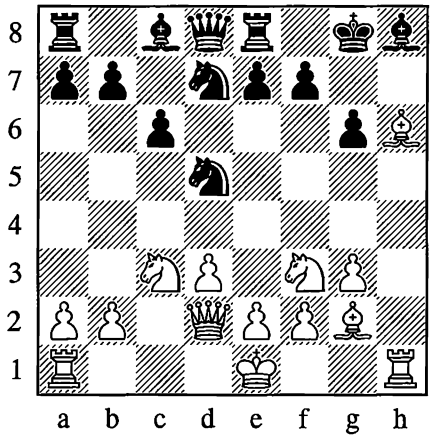
White is perfectly mobilized for an attack along the h-file, while Black still needs to complete his development, Ribli – Adorjan, Budapest 1973.

11.h5 ♘d5 12.hxg6 hxg6 13.♘f3 ♘d7

Black keeps developing and bringing his pieces closer to his king.

Releasing the tension with 13...♘xc3, in the hope of obtaining queenside counterplay, is not entirely justified because of the lack of development. 14.bxc3 ♕a5 15.♖c1 ♗e6 16.♖c2 White has parried the immediate threats and has lasting kingside pressure. Also, his structure remains more flexible, Xu Jun – Isaev, Udaipur 2000.

So far, we have followed Koshy – Krasenkow, Dhaka 1995.



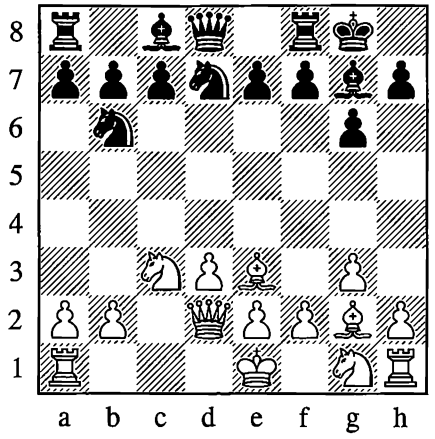
14.♘xd5!N

White does not mind the structure becoming symmetrical, because his position remains more active and his king much safer. The essential thing is to prevent Black's counterplay and ensure the play is one-sided.

14...cxd5 15.d4±

Black finds it hard to complete his development properly. For instance, 15...♘f6 allows 16.♘e5, when the pressure on the f7-pawn makes things even more difficult.

B24) 8...♘8d7



Black hurries to bring defensive resources to the kingside. However, from the point of view of the fight for the centre, this move is quite passive.

9.♗h6 ♘f6

Black would not gain any advantage by delaying this standard move, which consolidates the kingside and opens the diagonal for the c8-bishop.

Protecting b7 at a moment when the c8-bishop cannot move is not really necessary, however:

9...c6

This will often lead to a transposition to the main line. Below are some games with an independent character:

10.h4 ♗xh6

Given Black's kingside problems, 10...e5 is likely to lead to additional weaknesses rather than a space advantage. 11.♗xg7 ♔xg7 12.h5 ♕e7 13.♘f3 ♘f6 14.hxg6 fxg6 15.♘g5± Apart from the kingside pressure, White has an excellent square for his knights on e4, Lerner – Naumann, Berlin 1998.

11.♕xh6 ♘e5

11...♘f6 does not prevent 12.h5 because 12...♘xh5? allows a crushing attack: 13.♗f3 ♘f6 14.♘e4 ♘bd7 15.♘g5 The h7-pawn is impossible to defend.

12.h5 ♘g4 13.♕d2 ♕d4 14.♘e4±

Black's king is very insecure, Timman – Jansa, Amsterdam 1974.

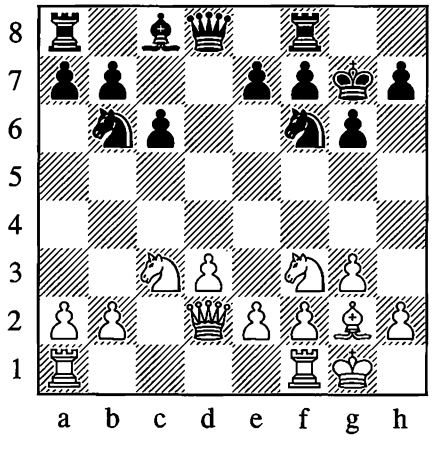
10.♗xg7

White switches to positional play. After having eliminated the active black bishop, he will be able to start the queenside attack with b2-b4 in total comfort, or occupy the centre with e2-e4 and d3-d4 without fearing the typical Grünfeld pressure.

10.h4 is ineffective because of 10...♗xh6 11.♕xh6 ♘g4 followed by ...h7-h5. This line reveals the necessity of transferring the knight to f6 as soon as possible.

10...♔xg7 11.♘f3 c6 12.0–0

White has completed his development and is ready to advance his queenside pawns. Black is two tempos behind with the mobilization of his forces and cannot easily find counterplay.



12...♖e8

The most constructive plan; by gaining space in the centre, Black keeps White's advantage within bearable limits.

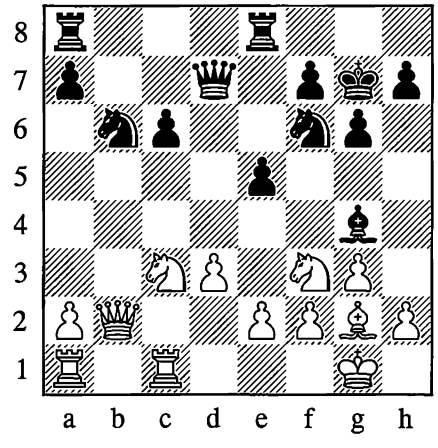
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Or 12...a5 13.♖ab1 ♘bd5 14.e4 ♘b6 15.h3 h6 16.♕e3 ♖a6 17.♖bd1 a4 18.♖fe1 ♖a5 19.d4 ♗e6 20.♘e5± and White has occupied the centre and is ready to start an attack on either side of the board, Larsen – Hort, Amsterdam 1980.

13.b4 e5 14.♕b2 ♗g4 15.b5 ♕d7

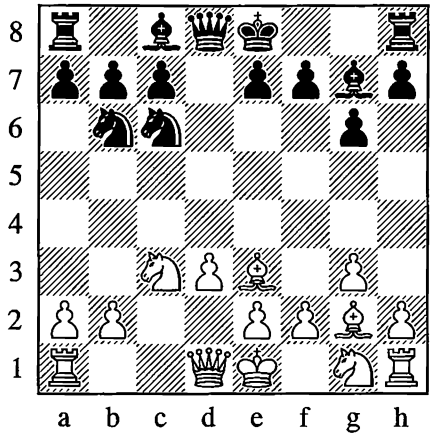
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16.bxc6 bxc6 17.♖fc1±



Black has nothing to compensate for his queenside weaknesses, Panchenko – Okhotnik, Dnepropetrovsk 1980.

B3) 7...♘c6



If Black intends to develop his knight in this active way, then this is the right moment to do so, before the threat of ♗h6 becomes real. The main idea is that after 8.♗xc6† bxc6 9.♕d2, he can react with 9...h5 (preventing ♗h6 and threatening ...h5-h4) 10.♘f3 ♗g4 with counterplay.

8.♖c1

A useful half-waiting move; White keeps the positional threat of ♗xc6 in reserve.

8...♘d4

This is considered to be best, but we shall see that the knight will eventually jump around a bit too much before Black has completed his development.

8...0–0

As usual, this involves a certain amount of risk.

9.♕d2

Threatening 10.♗xc6 bxc6 11.♗h6.

9...♖e8 10.♗h6 ♗h8 11.h4 ♘d4

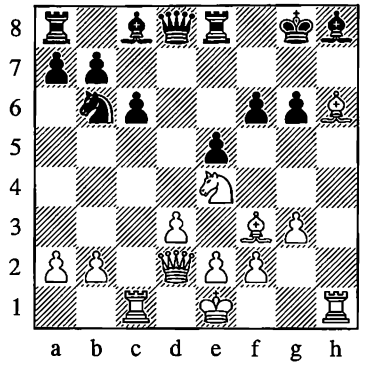
With the e2-pawn over-defended, this move fails to cause White any trouble.

12.h5 e5 13.hxg6 hxg6 14.♘e4 f6

In order to prevent the immediate threats, Black has been forced to significantly weaken his kingside.

15.♘f3 ♘xf3† 16.♗xf3 c6

Black is far behind in development, while White is perfectly mobilized. It is little wonder that the attack can be continued by tactical means.



17.♗f8!

Threatening, among others, ♖xh8†.

17...g5

Sadly, this weakening move is the only defence.

17...♖xf8 leads to a decisive attack after 18.♖xh8† ♔xh8 19.♕h6† ♔g8 20.♕xg6† ♔h8 21.♔d2+–.

18.♗a3

The bishop will be quite effective on this diagonal, supporting the white knight's adventures.

18...♗g7 19.♘d6 ♖e6 20.♘xc8 ♘xc8 21.♕b4

White simultaneously threatens to take on b7 or pin the e6-rook; Black is practically lost, Eingorn – Konopka, Graz 2001.

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The neutral 9...c6 does not solve Black's opening problems. Although it restricts the g2-bishop, it fails to put pressure on the centre and allows the exchange of the dark-squared bishops. 10.♗h6 0–0 11.♗xg7 ♔xg7 12.e3 ♘f5 13.♘f3 f6 14.d4±

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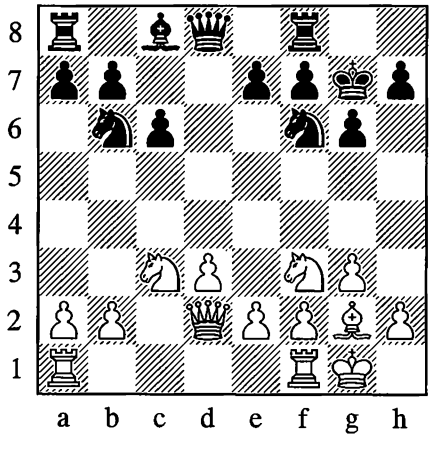
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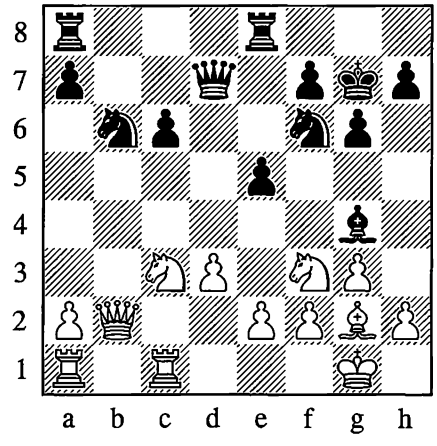
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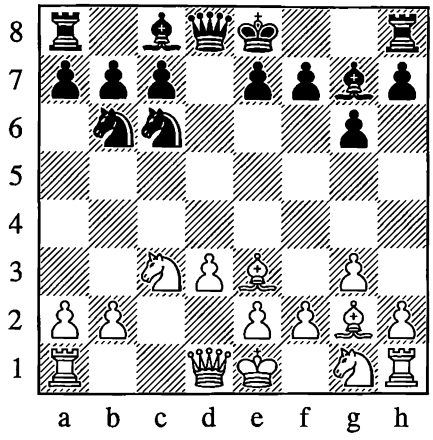
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9...♖e8 10.♗h6 ♗h8 11.h4 ♘d4

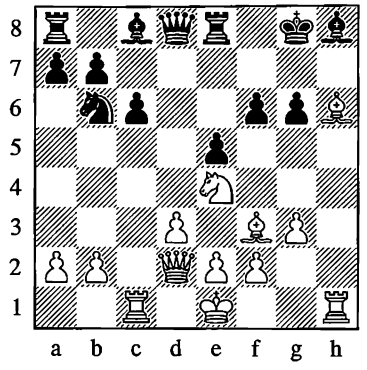
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The bishop will be quite effective on this diagonal, supporting the white knight's adventures.

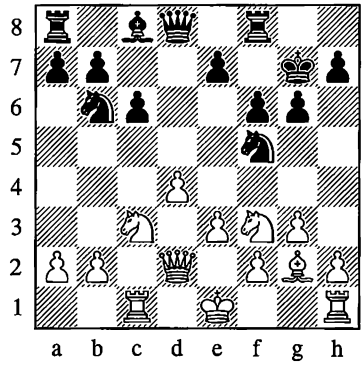
18...♗g7 19.♘d6 ♖e6 20.♘xc8 ♘xc8 21.♕b4

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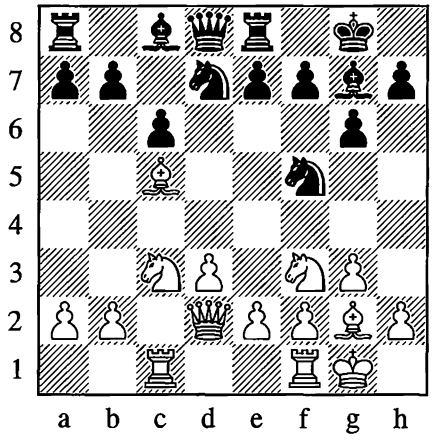


White has comfortably occupied the centre. Besides, the absence of the g7-bishop makes it quite difficult for Black to launch his Grünfeld-style counterplay, Marin – Ris, Plovdiv 2008.

10.♗c5

Switching to another favourable diagonal.

10...0–0 11.♘f3 c6 12.0–0 ♖e8 13.♕c2 ♘d7



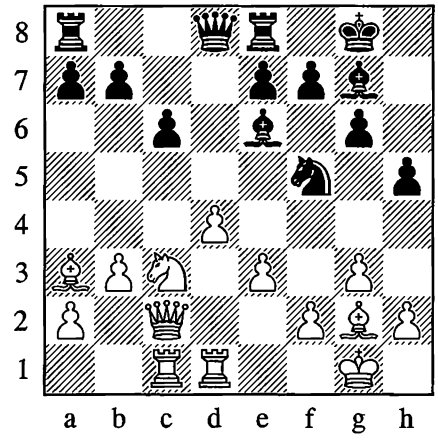
Black keeps manoeuvring, aiming to improve the placement of his knights or exchange them.

Instead, 13...e5 would be met by 14.e4 ♘d6 15.♖fd1, threatening d3-d4. 15...♗g4 16.h3 ♗xf3 17.♗xf3± Black's knights are far from the critical d4-square, leaving White with an enjoyable position. He has the bishop pair and can organize the minority attack or the opening of the centre, according to the circumstances.

14.♗a3 ♘e5

Once again, occupying the centre fails to equalize: 14...e5 15.e4 ♘d4 16.♘xd4 exd4 17.♘e2± White is better developed and has the more flexible structure.

15.♘xe5 ♗xe5 16.e3 ♗g7 17.d4 ♗e6 18.b3 h5 19.♖fd1±



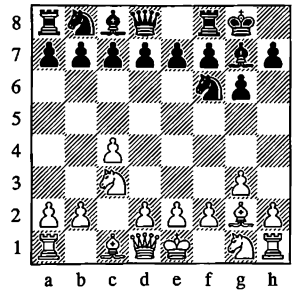
Despite the exchange of one pair of knights, White will enjoy his space advantage and harmonious development, Vilela – Pribyl, Trnava 1979.

Conclusion

I find the anti-Grünfeld system examined in this chapter quite pleasant for White, who does not need to remember long variations in order to retain a small but lasting plus.

Chapter 27

Odds and Ends



Anti-King's Indian

Variation Index

1.c4 ♘f6 2.g3 g6 3.♗g2 ♗g7 4.♘c3 0–0

5.e4 d6 6.♘ge2 c5 7.0–0 ♘c6 8.d3

A) 8...♘e8 9.♗e3 **393**

A1) 9...♘c7 **393**

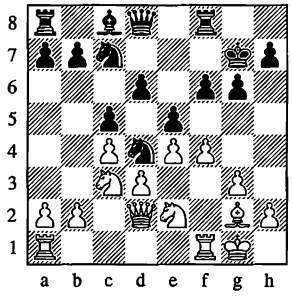
A2) 9...♘d4 **397**

B) 8...♖b8 9.h3 a6 10.a4 ♘e8 11.♗e3 **398**

B1) 11...♘c7 **399**

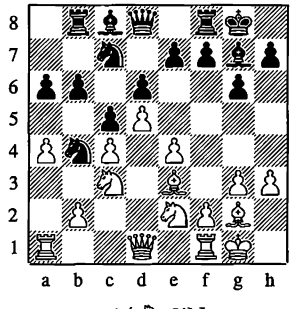
B2) 11...♘d4 **401**

A2) after 13...f6



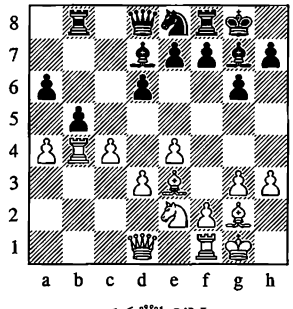
14.♖ab1!N±

B1) note to 12...cxd4



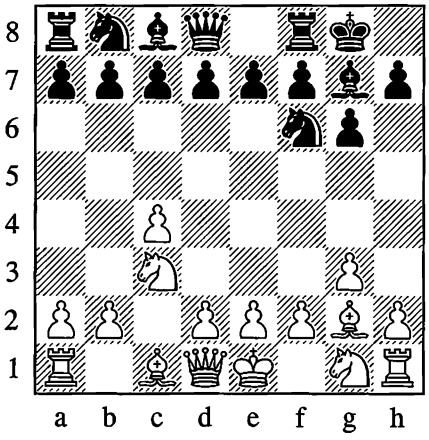
14.♘a2!N

B2) after 15...b5



16.♕b3!N

1.c4 ♘f6 2.g3 g6 3.♗g2 ♗g7 4.♘c3 0–0



Black has played all the "obligatory" moves of the King's Indian Defence, without defining his plans in the centre. This move order is quite tricky against our repertoire and we could even speak about some sort of zugzwang. 5.♘f3 would be met by 5...d6 followed by 6...e5, taking us out of the repertoire against 1...e5 that was examined in the first volume. 5.d3 d6 maintains the "zugzwang", while against 5.e4 Black is not forced to transpose to the lines examined in the first volume with 5...e5, but can deviate with a plan involving ...c5.

I believe this is a good moment to transpose to a 1.d4 opening with 5.d4 (the fianchetto system against the King's Indian is covered by Boris Avrukh in the second volume of his 1.d4 repertoire). I have excellent results with this line and see no reason to avoid it. It should be mentioned that by using this particular move order, White has avoided the Grünfeld, which offers Black better chances for counterplay against White's kingside fianchetto.

After having said all this, I will now suggest a way of avoiding the transposition to 1.d4 that is in the spirit of some of the lines from the first volume.

5.e4

I will not say too much about the merits of this pawn set-up, because I have done so already in the previous volume.

5...d6 6.♘ge2 c5

Only this move can give the game an independent course.

6...e5 would transpose to Chapter 14 or line A of Chapter 30 from the first volume.

Against 6...c6 White would develop like in line A of Chapter 30 from the first volume, with a probable transposition: 7.0–0 a6 8.d3 b5 9.h3 ♘bd7 10.♗e3 Followed by ♕d2. Black will have to play ...e5 at some point anyway, in order to get some control in the centre.

7.0–0 ♘c6 8.d3

This is our anti-King's Indian tabiya. Instinctively, I find Black's position slightly more appealing than in the Botvinnik system with ...e5, because the g7-bishop has the open long diagonal. Concretely, this may be debatable, because Black's general influence in the centre is reduced and he finds it more difficult to generate counterplay because of his structural rigidity.

The reader is advised to refer to Chapter 4 from the third volume, where we examine the same structure, but with reversed colours. White's extra tempo in the current line makes an important difference in the fight for the initiative.

White has two main plans at his disposal, and he can switch between them according to Black's own plan. The kingside attack with ♗e3, ♕d2, ♗h6, f4-f5 may be effective, but White should not neglect the possibility of transposing to a Maroczy-type of structure with d3-d4. This usually leads to one-sided play with a space advantage for White.

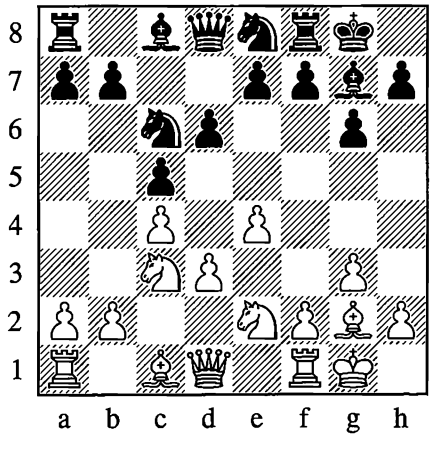
Before embarking on a detailed examination of the possible lines, I will mention a curious incident. While the present volume was being written, my young team-mate FM Tiberiu Georgescu asked me for some opening advice for his first ever grandmaster tournament, the 2010 Ciocâltea Memorial. Among other alternatives to his usual 1.d4, I suggested the lines examined in this chapter, warning him that he should not expect miracles.

The facts strongly contradicted me. After two crushing wins with this system, Tibi told me that he considers it one of his best ever weapons, some sort of "winning line". You will find one of these games in the theoretical section below.

The truth may be somewhere in between. Despite my natural caution, I have to say that White's system is promising, based on my favourable experience of the positions resulting after 5.e4.

We will examine **A) 8...♘e8** and **B) 8...♖b8**. Note that 8...a6 9.h3 ♖b8 transposes to line B.

A) 8...♘e8



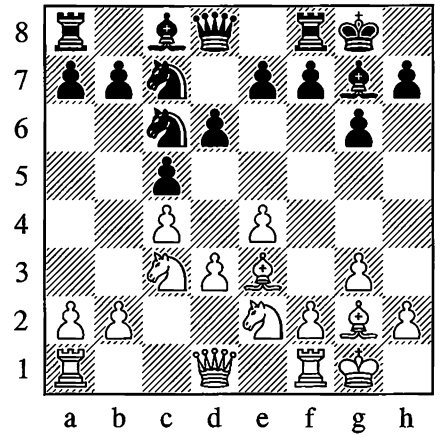
Immediately starting the transfer of the knight to e6, in order to increase Black's control over the d4-square.

9.♗e3

The possibility of playing this developing move without having to spend a tempo on h2-h3 to prevent ...♘g4 suggests that Black's previous move was premature.

Black can choose between **A1) 9...♘c7** and **A2) 9...♘d4.**

A1) 9...♘c7



Allowing the opening of the centre gifts White a crushing space advantage.

10.d4 cxd4 11.♘xd4

White has carried out the first part of his plan. Having lost ground in the centre, Black needs to define his defensive plan.

11...♗d7

A natural developing move, hoping for general exchanges on d4 followed by ...♘e6 and ...♗c6.

After 11...♘xd4 12.♗xd4 ♗xd4 13.♕xd4 ♘e6 14.♕e3 White's lead in development becomes threatening. After completing his centralization with ♖ad1, he will be able to combine the threats of e4-e5, f2-f4-f5 and ♘d5.

11...♘e6

This leads to similar play as in the main line.

12.♘de2!

The same idea as in the main game.

12...♘e5

The neutral 12...♘c5 is best met by 13.b3± defending the c4-pawn in advance in order to avoid tricks based on ...♘e5-g4.

13.b3 b6

13...♘g4 14.♗d2± leaves Black's pieces unnaturally placed.

14.h3 ♗b7 15.f4 ♘d7 16.♕d2 ♖c8 17.♖ad1 ♘b8 18.♕e1 ♕e8 19.♘d5

With a big space advantage, Narciso – Mrva, Ohrid 2001.

12.♘de2

A well known pattern; White has a space advantage, so he avoids unnecessary simplifications.

12...♖c8 13.b3 ♘e6 14.♕d2 ♖e8

White systematically activates his position, while Black is confined to passive neutral moves. Although Black's play doubtlessly can be improved on the way, the following sequence is illustrative of the significance of White's space advantage.

15.h3

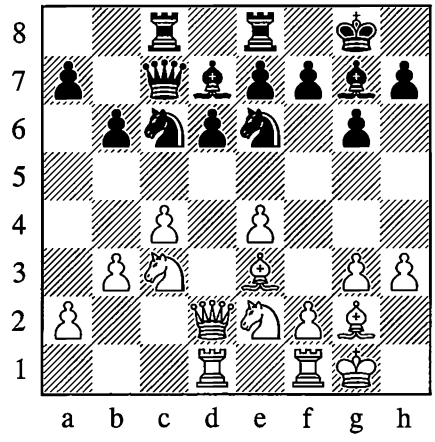
Directed against a possible ...♘e5-g4. This is hardly a threat at this stage of the game, but White has no reason to hurry.

15...b6

Another passive move, giving up any ambitions of counterplay. Georgescu confessed that starting from this moment he considered White's position to be close to winning, which sounds like a reasonable evaluation. Black has no space and no possibility of improving his position.

15...♕a5 looks more active, although it does not change the character of the posi 16.♖ad1 ♘c5 17.f4± Although W activity is somewhat more restricted tha the game, Black still has no counterpl all.

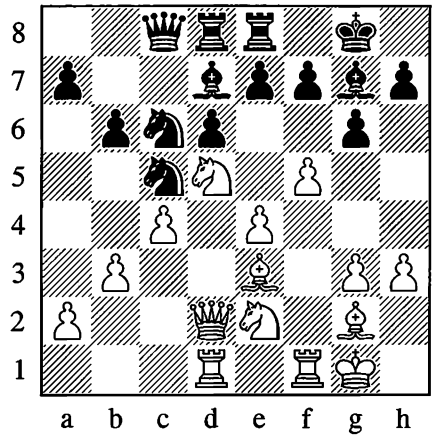
16.♖ad1 ♕c7



17.f4

After having completed his developr White starts concrete action. The threat c f5 is quite unpleasant in view of the fact the f6-square lacks its most natural defe a knight.

17...♖cd8 18.f5 ♘c5 19.♘d5 ♕c8



20.♘d4!?

This paradoxical move was played after 40 minutes of thought. Just a few moves earlier, White avoided simplifications, but now he willingly offers the exchange of a knight and a bishop. The explanation is quite logical. Circumstances have changed and eliminating one of the pieces that defends the e7-pawn and the f6-square would just add force to White's attack. In addition, White's last move clears the second rank, preparing ♕f2, with strong pressure against f7.

20...♘e5

In many Sicilian-type positions, such a stable knight would be a warranty against any sort of major trouble. However, in our current position, White's overall activity is a much more important factor.

Below are some alternatives for Black, as analysed by Tiberiu Georgescu:

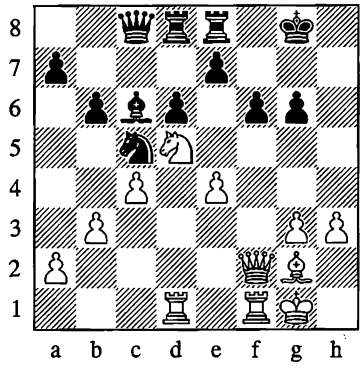
20...♘xd4 21.♗xd4 ♗xd4† 22.♕xd4 ♗c6 23.fxg6 hxg6 24.♕f2

With his queen isolated on the left wing, Black faces concrete problems parrying the threats along the f-file.

24...f6

Hoping to avoid opening the e-file for White's pieces.

24...♗xd5 25.exd5 ♖f8 would avoid the combinative fireworks, but after 26.♕e3 ♖de8 27.♖d4± Black's kingside remains very difficult, if not impossible, to defend.



25.e5!

A thematic break, opening lines for White's attack.

25...dxe5 26.♘xe7† ♖xe7 27.♕xf6 ♖xd1 28.♖xd1

With the double threat of ♖d8† and ♗xc6.

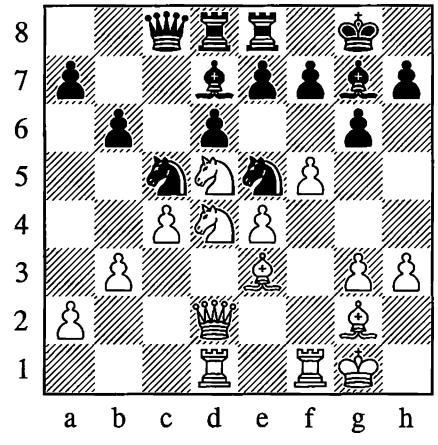
28...♖d7 29.♕xg6† ♖g7

The attempt to save the bishop by keeping the tension with 29...♔h8 allows an elegant winning manoeuvre: 30.♕h6† ♔g8 31.♕g5† ♔h7 Black cannot block the check because of ♖d8†. 32.♕f5† ♔g8 33.♖d6!+– Taking advantage of the pin, White hits the bishop and threatens ♖g6† with a decisive attack.

30.♕xc6 ♕xc6 31.♗xc6 ♖xg3† 32.♔h2±

With a clear extra pawn in the ending.

20...e6 does not bring Black any relief either after 21.♘xc6 ♗xc6 22.f6±.



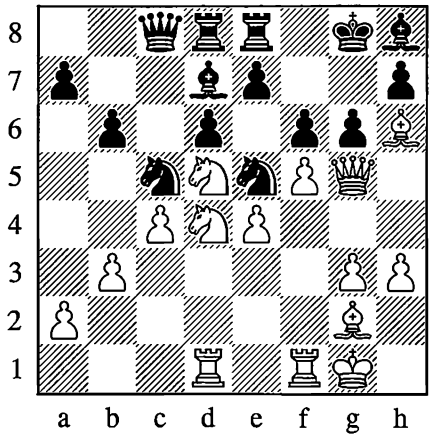
21.♗h6

Persisting in the attempt to exchange an important defensive piece, or at least force it to occupy a passive square.

21...♗h8 22.♕g5

The pressure has become unbearable and Black is forced to weaken his kingside.

22...f6

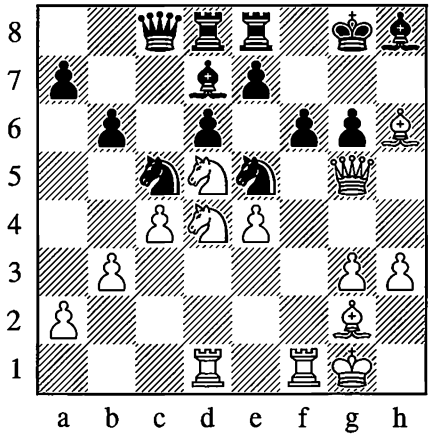


23.fxg6!

Showtime! The funny thing is that the player handling the white pieces is known for his positional style. As we were once told by our trainer Vali Stoica: "Beware of positional players when they get to attack you!"

23...hxg6

The queen is taboo because of mate in two: 23...fxg5? 24.♖f8† ♖xf8 25.♘xe7 mate – an elegant pattern. 23...♘xg6 24.♕h5+– is also hopeless for Black.



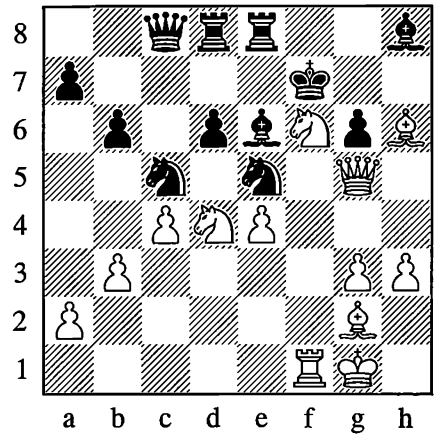
24.♖xf6!

Having placed all his pieces on optimal squares, White can start sacrificing them in order to start the king hunt.

24...exf6 25.♘xf6† ♔f7 26.♖f1

Despite his extra rook, Black is helpless. His king is vulnerable and many of his pieces are hanging.

26...♗e6



27.♘c6!!

It is rather obvious that several other moves should also win, but this is the most spectacular one and also the engines' favourite. By taking the e7-square under control, White threatens 28.♘xe8† ♔xe8 29.♕e7 mate, while either capture on c6 would leave something else hanging.

27...♘xc6

After 27...♕xc6? the d8-rook becomes vulnerable: 28.♘xe8† ♔xe8 29.♖f8† ♔d7 30.♕xd8 mate.

28.♘d5†

Since the g6-pawn is no longer defended by the knight, Black cannot retreat with his king.

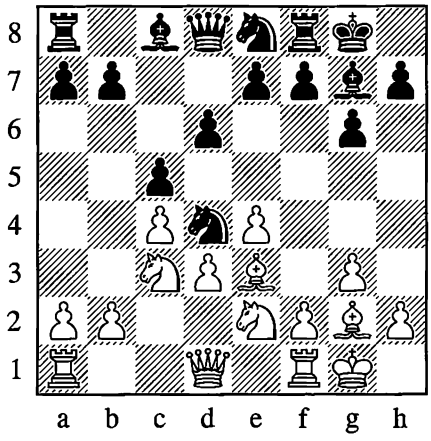
28...♗f5 29.exf5

White won a few moves later in T. Georgescu – Jianu, Bucharest 2010.

According to Tibi Georgescu, throughout this game he had a distinct feeling of harmony. He would not have minded sacrificing six

pieces in order to deliver mate with the seventh, because something was telling him that he was on the right path and White's position should be winning.

A2) 9...♘d4

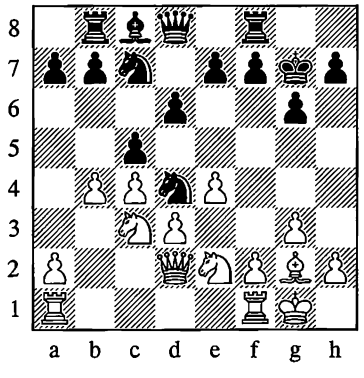


With his development incomplete, Black is not well prepared for the occupation of this critical square.

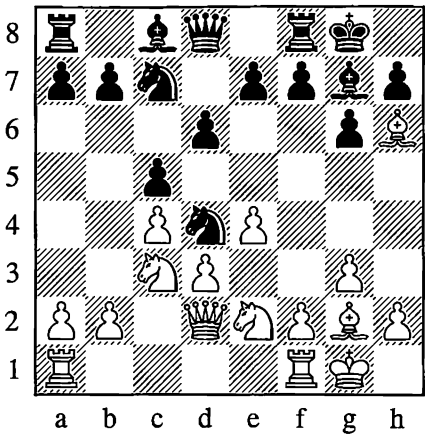
10.♕d2 ♘c7 11.♗h6

Since unblocking the d4-square is impossible, White exchanges the active black bishop. This is not necessarily a commitment to a kingside attack, but also a way of undermining the central knight.

In the event of a neutral move such as 11...♖b8, White can seize the upper hand across the whole board with: 12.♗xg7 ♔xg7 13.b4!N



Black lacks space and is behind in development.

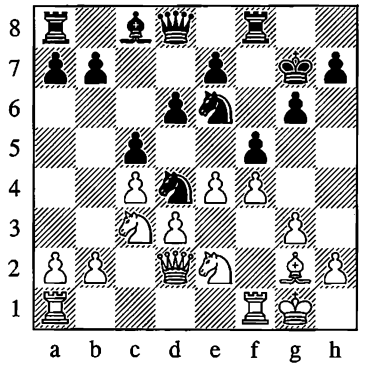


11...e5

Weakening the d5-square looks like a structural concession, but this is the safest way of consolidating the central knight.

Also consistent is 11...♘ce6. However, this has the drawback of moving an already developed piece. 12.♗xg7 ♔xg7 13.f4 Black's development is incomplete and he already faces concrete problems. For example, the threat of f4-f5 should be taken seriously: 13...♘c6?! 14.f5 ♘ed4 15.♖f4 White gains good attacking chances.

Therefore, instead of 13...♘c6?!, the lesser evil is:
13...f5



14.b4!N

The most energetic continuation, undermining Black's stability in the centre. 14.♘xd4 ♘xd4 15.♘e2 e6?! 16.♘xd4 cxd4 was played in Thirion – Vandevoort, Huy 1992. White should have continued 17.♖fe1!N creating the strong positional threat of e4-e5. Instead of 15...e6?!, 15...♘xe2† 16.♕xe2 e6 would have been better, with a defensible position.

14...cxb4

Otherwise, Black would be simply worse, without any counterplay.

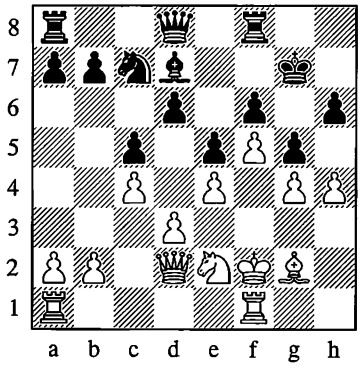
15.♘d5 ♘xe2† 16.♕xe2 a5 17.♖ae1

With a huge lead in development and excellent attacking chances.

12.♗xg7 ♔xg7

Black should keep his central knight, in the hope that he will convince his opponent to carry out the exchange ♘xd4, allowing ...cxd4 which would clear the excellent c5-square for his reserve knight.

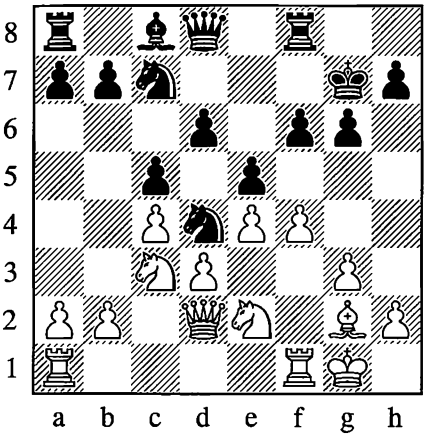
12...♘xe2† is an obvious concession. 13.♘xe2 ♔xg7 14.f4 f6 15.f5 g5 16.h4 h6 17.g4 ♗d7 18.♔f2



White has a dangerous plan of invading along the h-file, Granados – Rahal, Tarrasa 1998.

13.f4 f6

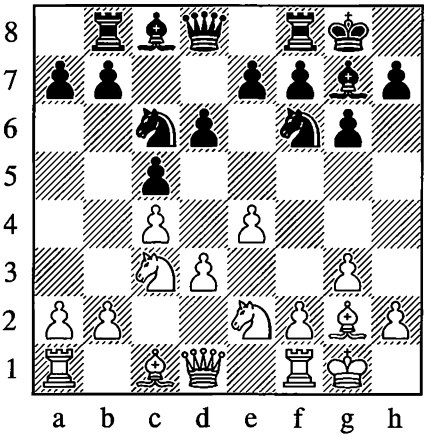
So far, we have followed the game Golubovic – Hirneise, Rijeka 2008.



14.♖ab1!N±

Planning b2-b4. Given the blocked centre, White needs to open a new front in order to take advantage of his better development and safer king position.

B) 8...♖b8

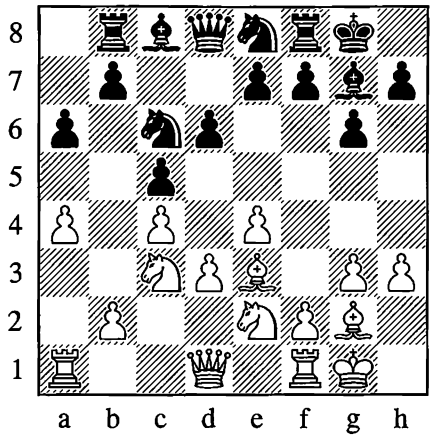


Before retreating his f6-knight, Black makes a generally useful move, more or less forcing White to spend a tempo on prophylaxis.

9.h3 a6 10.a4 ♘e8

There was nothing left to justify the presence of the knight on f6.

11.♗e3



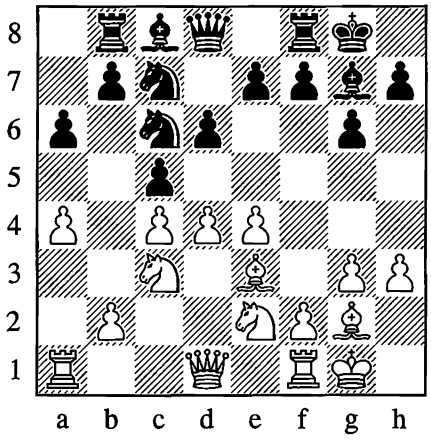
Black now has a choice between **B1) 11...♘c7** and **B2) 11...♘d4**.

B1) 11...♘c7

Black continues his regrouping, ignoring White's threat of gaining space in the centre.

12.d4

The only logical continuation. Otherwise, Black would obtain comfortable play with ...♘e6-d4. We can see a similar situation with reversed colours in the aforementioned line from the third volume.



12...cxd4

The main alternative is:

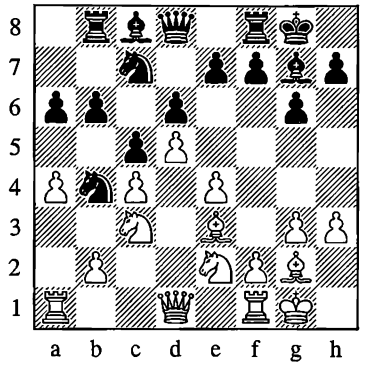
12...b6

This consolidates the c5-pawn and creates the positional threat of taking control of the d4-square with ...e5.

13.d5

Parrying the threat and leaving the c7-knight awfully passive.

13...♘b4



14.♘a2!N

It is essential to exchange Black's most active piece at once.

In Azmaiparashvili – Kochyev, Pavlodar 1982, Black obtained a strong queenside initiative after the neutral: 14.b3 b5 15.f4 bxc4 16.bxc4 e6 17.g4 ♖e8 18.♗f2 exd5 19.exd5 a5 20.♖a3 ♘a8 21.♘c1 ♘b6 22.♕b3 ♗xc3 23.♕xc3 ♗a6∓ White's centre will soon vanish.

14...♘xa2

Pawn-grabbing is risky: 14...♗xb2 15.♘xb4 cxb4 16.♖b1 ♗a3 (Otherwise, White would be much better after ♖xb4.) 17.♘d4 ♗d7 18.♗h6 White has a very active position and chances of a kingside attack.

15.♖xa2 ♗d7

15...b5 fails to take the upper hand on the queenside because of the counter-break 16.b4!±.

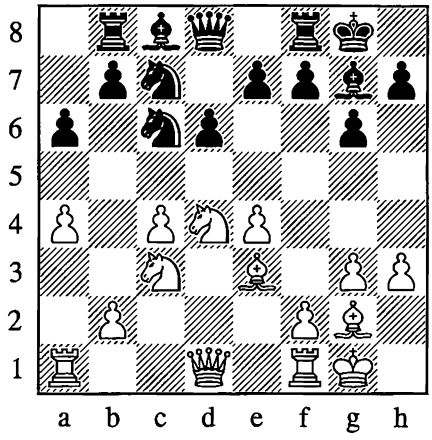
16.♕d2±

White plans to exchange Black's only active

piece with ♗h6, after which he will be able to choose which wing to open. Once again, opening the queenside would be premature: 16...b5 17.axb5 axb5 18.b4 cxb4 19.c5

White has a strong initiative.

13.♘xd4



13...♘xd4

Black releases the tension in the hope that he will gain queenside counterplay.

13...♘e6 fails to challenge White's space advantage. 14.♘de2 ♘e5 15.b3± If we compare with the similar line with reversed colours (which is considered to be good for Black anyway), White's extra tempo of h2-h3 proves useful by preventing ...♘g4.

14.♗xd4 ♗xd4

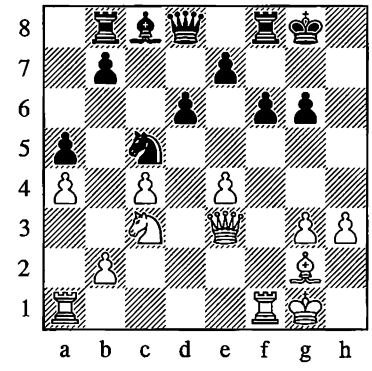
Refraining from this exchange does not change the character of the position: 14...b5 15.cxb5 axb5 16.a5 b4 17.♗xg7 ♔xg7 18.♘d5 ♗a6 19.♖e1 ♘xd5 20.exd5 ♕d7 21.♖e4 ♖fc8 22.♕e1± With a simultaneous attack against Black's weak pawns, Narciso – Granero, Cala Galdana 1999.

15.♕xd4

White's lead in development prevents Black from generating effective counterplay.

15...b5

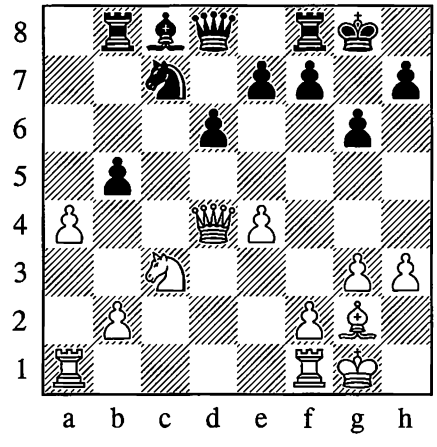
Playing for a blockade on the dark squares does not work out well either. For instance: 15...a5 16.f4 ♘e6 17.♕e3 ♘c5 18.f5 f6 19.fxg6 hxg6



20.e5! A thematic break, opening lines and yielding White a strong attack, Lima – De Toledo, Brasilia 1998.

Or 15...e5 16.♕e3 b6 17.f4 f6 18.♖ad1 ♗e6 19.♕d3 ♘e8 20.f5 ♗f7 21.h4! when White is very active and can prepare the kingside attack at his own convenience, Miezis – Piesina, Riga 1995.

16.cxb5 axb5



17.a5!

White creates a strong passed pawn, which will force Black to remain on the defensive.

17...b4 18.♘d5 ♘xd5 19.exd5 ♗a6

The pawn has been blockaded, but Black will not be able to use his bishop to defend the c6-square against an invasion by White's rooks.

20.♖fc1 ♕d7 21.♖c6 ♗b5 22.♖b6

White's pieces feel at home on the weakened black queenside.

22...♕a7

22...b3 weakens the b-pawn even more: 23.♖a3± Gausel – Afek, Gausdal 2003.

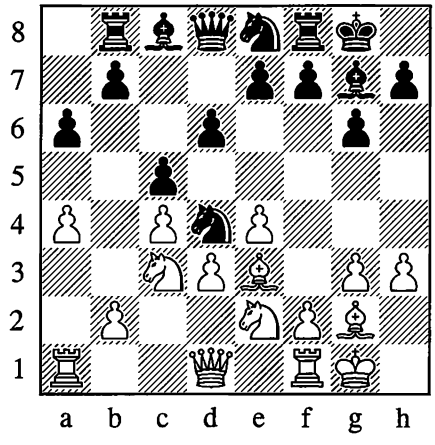
23.♗f1!

White exchanges Black's most effective defensive piece.

23...♗xf1 24.♔xf1±

The king moves one step closer to the centre, anticipating possible simplifications. Black is very passive and the passed pawn is likely to decide the game, J. Grant – Zueger, Istanbul 2003.

B2) 11...♘d4



Black prevents the opening of the centre, but it is quite obvious that his coordination becomes rather poor.

12.♖b1!

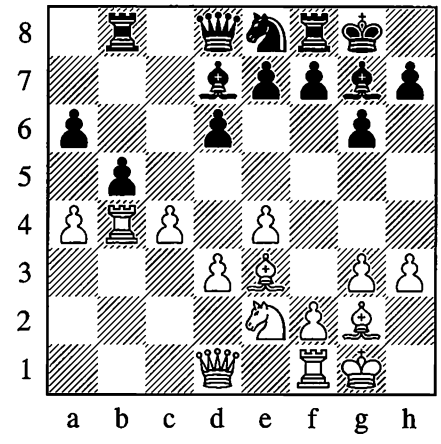
Now that the knight no longer controls the b4-square, White prepares to open the b-file, undermining Black's outpost at the same time.

12...♗d7

Black prepares a counter-break with ...b7-b5.

13.b4 ♘xe2† 14.♘xe2 cxb4 15.♖xb4 b5

The critical position of the variation, which has repeatedly led to colourless draws after general exchanges on b5.



16.♕b3!N

White has no reason to release the tension, since he is better developed. From a general point of view, this is crystal clear, but certain concrete details may have inhibited those with White from playing this way.

First of all, Black needs to find a way to free himself from the pin along the b-file.

16...♘c7

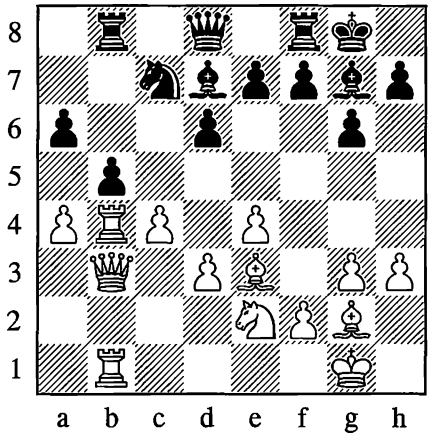
16...bxa4? loses material to 17.♖xb8+–.

The natural 16...a5?! is answered with 17.♖xb5 ♗xb5 18.axb5±. Black can do very little against the plan of a mass advance of the white pawns, starting with d3-d4 and c4-c5. Also, the g2-bishop has no rival on the light squares.

If 16...♕a5, threatening ...bxa4 or ...bxc4, White restores the pin with 17.♕b1! ♘c7 18.♖c1±. Black can hardly display any form of activity and his queen is badly misplaced.

17.♖b1

White completes his development and increases his queenside pressure.



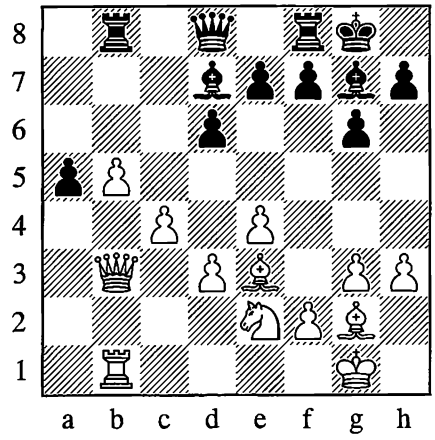
17...a5

The simplifications starting with 17...bxa4 18.♖xb8 axb3 19.♖xd8 ♖xd8 20.♖xb3± leave Black struggling. White controls the only open file and his pieces are more active than Black's.

18.♖xb5!

A familiar motif.

18...♘xb5 19.axb5±



White's advantage is smaller than after 16...a5, because Black has not given up his light-squared bishop, but the play remains one-sided. A possible plan is ♘c3, d3-d4, b5-b6, d4-d5, ♘b5 and so on.

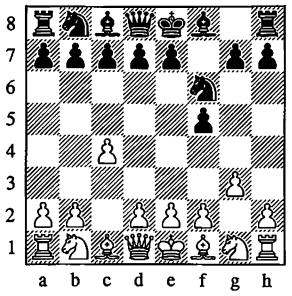
Conclusion

I find it hard to give a definitive evaluation of the lines examined in this chapter, possibly because I am tempted to compare with the line with reversed colours (Volume 3, Chapter 4), which offers White very pleasant play. I have suggested a few novelties that seem to keep White on top in what used to be considered viable positions for Black. Overall, I have failed to find a way for Black to achieve complete equality in the event of accurate play by White.

A reasonable practical solution would be to alternate between 5.e4 and 5.d4, transposing to the fianchetto lines of the King's Indian, however specializing in the English set-up covered in this chapter may also yield good results.

Chapter 28

Odds and Ends



Anti-Dutch

Variation Index

1.c4 f5 2.g3 ♘f6

3.♗g2 e6 4.♘f3 d5 5.0–0

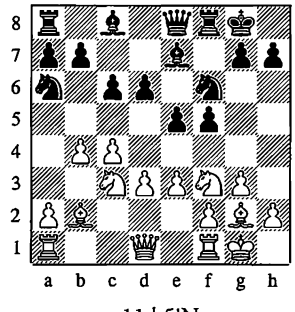
A) 5...c6 6.d3 **406**

A1) 6...♗e7 **406**

A2) 6...dxc4 **408**

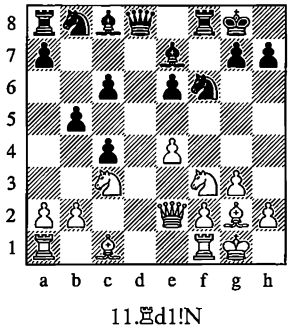
B) 5...♗e7 **409**

note to 4...d5



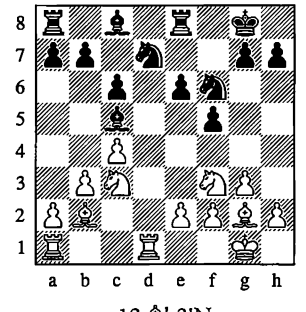
11.b5!N

A1) note to 8...d4



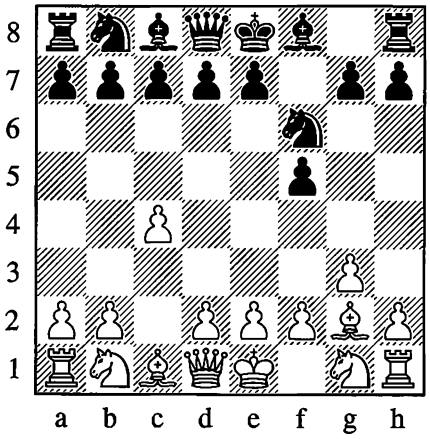
11.♖d1!N

A2) after 11...♖e8!



12.♗h3!N

1.c4 f5 2.g3 ♘f6 3.♗g2



The Dutch Defence is an ambitious (though somewhat risky) opening against 1.d4, but it does not endanger our general English Opening philosophy. By delaying the occupation of the centre, White allows ...e7-e5, but this would transpose to lines examined in the first volume, in which White opens the centre with d2-d4.

3...e6

This move, aiming to build up either the Stonewall or Ilyin-Genevsky structures, is the only move that gives the play an independent character.

3...g6

This will most likely transpose to lines examined in the first volume. The following is one possible deviation, but it is not especially effective:

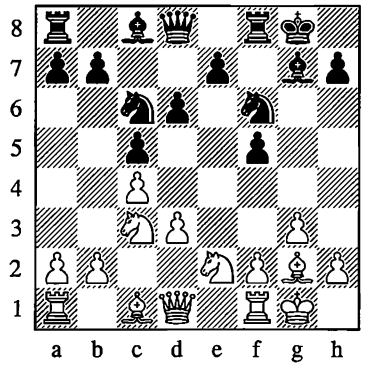
4.♘c3 ♗g7 5.d3 0–0 6.e4 d6 7.♘ge2 c5!?

Black keeps the long dark diagonal open and hopes to gain absolute control over the d4-square. The drawback of this plan is that it leaves Black with potential weaknesses along the e-file.

8.exf5!

A good moment to carry out this thematic exchange, as Black cannot play the developing 8...♗xf5 because his b7-pawn would be hanging.

8...gxf5 9.0–0 ♘c6

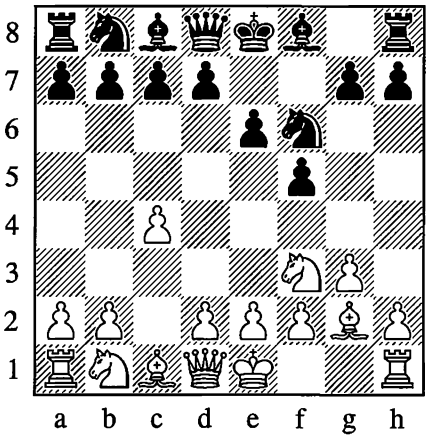


This position has been seen in only a couple of games.

10.♗g5!N

The most active way of developing. White plans ♕d2, ♖a(or f)-e1, ♗h6 and ♘f4, with strong pressure on the kingside and along the e-file. Now 10...h6 would only make things worse after 11.♗h4, because the g6-square has been weakened, without causing the white bishop any inconvenience.

4.♘f3



4...d5

This is the only plan that deserves detailed examination.

Developing in the spirit of the Ilyin-Genevsky variation is pointless: Black would have played ...e6 only to follow up with ...e5 after laborious preparation. Although this will happen after White has deviated from our favourite c4-d3-e4 triangle set-up, losing a tempo in this way cannot be recommended for Black:

4...♗e7 5.0–0 0–0 6.♘c3

Below I will give a couple of illustrative examples:

6...d6 7.b4

White effortlessly starts the typical English queenside attack.

7...e5 8.♗b2

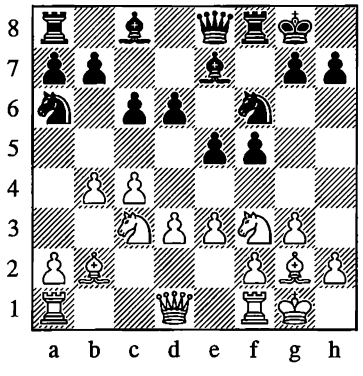
8.d3 is also possible, with a possible transposition to the next game after 8...c6.

8...c6

Black has insufficient development to display ambitions in the centre: 8...e4 9.♘d4 ♘c6 10.♘xc6 bxc6 11.d3± With excellent development and the better structure for White, Gufeld – Sax, Debrecen 1969.

9.d3 ♕e8 10.e3 ♘a6

So far, we have followed Illescas – Pomes, Linares 1998.



11.b5!N

This natural attacking move is best; the queenside light squares are shaken to their foundations.

11...♘c5 12.d4

Neutralizing Black's space advantage in the centre.

12...exd4 13.♘xd4 ♗d7 14.♕c2±

White has obtained a very active form of the Dutch Defence.

6...c6

This prevents b2-b4, but not for long.

7.d3 d6

How else to stay within the Ilyin-Genevsky territory?

7...d5 8.e4 would transpose to line A1 below.

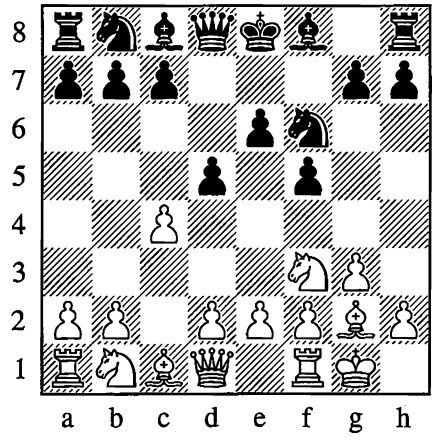
8.b4 e5 9.♖b1 ♔h8 10.b5 c5

Black has blocked the queenside but at a very high price: the weakening of the d5-square. In order to consolidate his advantage, White needs to neutralize Black's space advantage on the kingside.

11.♘e1 ♕e8 12.f4 ♘bd7 13.♘c2 ♕h5 14.♘e3 exf4 15.gxf4 ♖f7 16.♖f3±

White is better developed and has an advantage on practically every sector of the board, Korchnoi – Sequera, Curacao 2002.

5.0–0



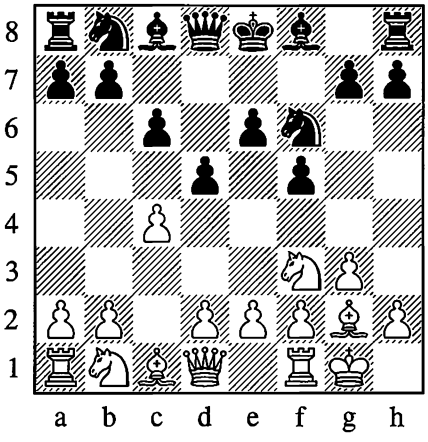
White has completed his kingside development and the time has come to explain his general plan.

Important elements in the usual Stonewall Dutch are Black's control over the e4-square and

his relative stability in the centre. By refraining from d2-d4, White can keep an antidote to both these aspects. The modest-looking set-up based on d2-d3 not only deprives the enemy knight of the e4-square, but also prepares a break with e2-e4, shaking the Stonewall where it looks strongest. Naturally, some specific details need to be worked out, depending on the move order Black chooses.

We will examine **A) 5...c6** and **B) 5...♗e7**.

A) 5...c6



This seemingly solid and typical Stonewall move allows White to carry out the aforementioned plan without any special problems. The point is that after d2-d3 and ♘c3, gaining space with ...d5-d4 makes little sense, since Black's position now lacks dynamism.

6.d3

Black's main choice is between **A1) 6...♗e7** and **A2) 6...dxc4**, but one minor line should be considered first:

6...♗d6?!

This places the bishop on a vulnerable square and cannot be recommended.

7.♘c3 0–0 8.e4 dxe4 9.dxe4

The threat of e4-e5 forces Black to lose a tempo.

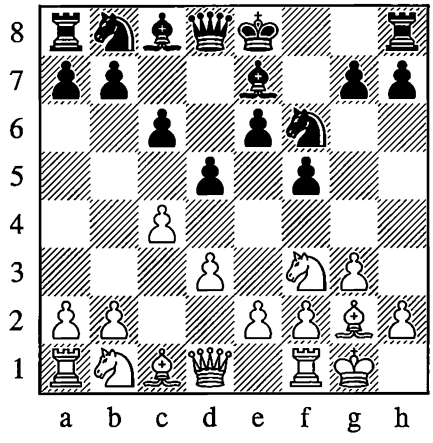
9...♗b4

9...e5 is strongly met by 10.♕b3± threatening both c5† and exf5, after which the b7-pawn would be hanging.

10.exf5 ♕xd1 11.♖xd1 exf5 12.♘a4 ♘e4 13.♘d4 ♘a6 14.♗e3 ♖e8 15.a3 ♗f8 16.♖ac1

White is better developed and Black's position has many weaknesses, Malaniuk – Gleizerov, Barlinek 2002.

A1) 6...♗e7



Black keeps developing in the spirit of the Dutch Defence, without taking any measures against White's plan.

7.♘c3 0–0

As mentioned before, the following move is over-ambitious:

7...d4?! 8.♘b1

Apparently, White has lost two tempos, but if we compare with what we could call a reversed Benoni, Black's pawns are on c6 and e6 instead of c5 and e5. In other words, Black theoretically needs two tempos himself to restore the harmony in his camp, but there is actually no way to achieve that from a practical point of view.

8...c5 9.e3

9.b4!? cxb4 10.a3, in the spirit of the Benko Gambit, is also worth trying.

9...dxe3

Keeping the central pawn would leave Black with weaknesses along the e-file: 9...♘c6 10.exd4 cxd4 11.♖e1±

10.♗xe3 ♘c6 11.d4

White is better developed, so he opens the centre.

11...♘g4

This looks like the only way to change the unfavourable trend of the game, but losing so much time can hardly be a solution.

12.d5!

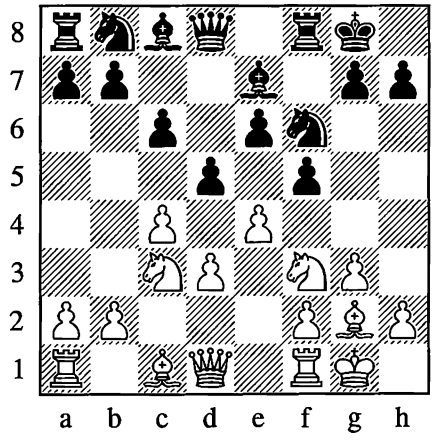
After this energetic break, White's lead in development becomes threatening.

12...♘xe3 13.fxe3 exd5 14.cxd5 ♘b8 15.♘c3±

Strategically, Black seems to be doing fine, but White's weaknesses in the centre are not relevant, because Black cannot control them. White's plan consists of ♕e2, ♖ad1, e3-e4 and it will be Black who will be left with weaknesses along the e-file.

8.e4

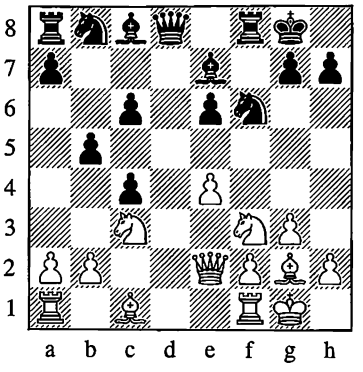
The central collision has occurred. White's main threat is exf5 followed by ♗f4 and ♖e1, and then occupying the e5-square.



8...d4

Pawn-grabbing is too risky at this stage of the game:

8...fxe4 9.dxe4 dxc4 10.♕e2 b5



In Krnic – Abramovic, Vrnjacka Banja 1983, the most effective way to develop the initiative would have been:

11.♖d1!N ♕e8

Hoping to activate the queen with ...♕h5, in the spirit of the Dutch Defence.

11...♕b6 places the queen on a vulnerable square. 12.♗e3 ♗c5 13.♗xc5 ♕xc5 14.e5 Followed by ♘e4-d6; Black has many weaknesses and all his queenside pieces are sleeping.

12.e5 ♘d5

Hoping for 13.♘e4 ♕h5, with an unpleasant pin.

13.♘d4!

After having prevented ...♕h5, White threatens to take a grip on the central squares with ♘e4. Black does not have an adequate solution. For instance, 13...♘xc3 14.bxc3 opens the long diagonal and leaves Black's queenside vulnerable.

9.♘e2 fxe4

9...c5 fails to stabilize the position after 10.exf5 exf5 11.b4!±.

10.dxe4 ♘xe4

The tactical operation initiated by this move is illogical; Black is underdeveloped, so in

principle he should try to keep the position closed.

Unfortunately for him, the structure arising after 10...c5 11.e5 offers White better possibilities for regrouping: 11...♘e8 12.♘f4 ♘c6 13.♘d3 ♘c7 14.h4 ♗d7 15.♕e2 ♗e8 16.♘d2 ♕d7 17.♘e4 b6 18.♗g5± White was in complete control of the position in Marin – Moskalenko, Barcelona (blitz) 2005.

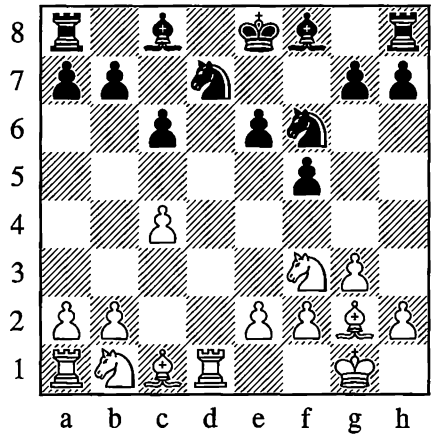
11.♘exd4 ♘xf2!?

This was the blow Black was relying on, but it only leads to simplifications that favour White. However, after 11...c5 12.♘e2 ♘c6 13.♗e3± White's advantage would be indisputable.

12.♖xf2 c5 13.♗e3 cxd4 14.♘xd4±

White has the better structure and a considerable lead in development, Marin – Pablo Marin, Manresa 1997.

A2) 6...dxc4 6...dxc4 7.dxc4 ♕xd1 8.♖xd1 ♘bd7



This line has repeatedly been employed with outstanding practical results by Stonewall specialist Viktor Moskalenko. After releasing the tension in the centre, Black hopes to carry out ...e6-e5, reaching a relatively favourable structure.

9.b3 ♗c5 10.♗b2 0–0 11.♘c3 ♖e8!

The critical position of the Moskalenko variation; the e6-pawn is now ready to advance.

11...e5?!

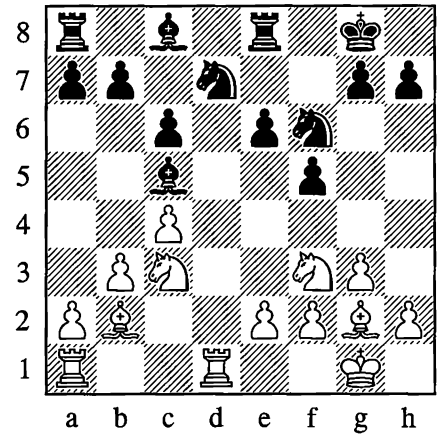
This is premature.

12.♘a4

The inadequate defence of the e5-pawn forces Black to give up the bishop pair.

12...e4 13.♘xc5 ♘xc5 14.♘e5±

White has unchallenged domination of the dark squares. Next, he will activate his g2-bishop with f2-f3.



12.♗h3!N

This novelty is the fruit of my preparation for a game against Viktor in the team championship of Catalonia. I did not have the chance to use it though, because my opponent seems to have suspected something and deviated on the very first move (the game is given in the first volume, Chapter 11, line B2).

By attacking the f5-pawn, White intends to prevent ...e6-e5 with a minimum of effort. If White achieves this, then his superior development is likely to offer him an advantage.

Below are two examples revealing the depth of Moskalenko's plan:

12.♘e1 e5 13.♘d3 ♗f8 14.e4 With his knight on d3, White is not ready to keep the blockade on e4. 14...fxe4 15.♘xe4 ♘xe4 16.♗xe4 ♘f6 17.♗g2 e4 18.♘e1 ♗g4 Black had a strong initiative in Matamoros – Moskalenko, Ciudad Real 2004.

12.♘a4 ♗f8 13.♘e5 After this apparently logical move, it will be the other knight that will not contribute to maintaining the blockade on e5, like in an echo variation of a study. 13...♘xe5 14.♗xe5 ♘g4 15.♗d6 e5 16.♘c5 e4 17.♗xf8 ♔xf8 18.♖d6 ♘e5 With an entirely satisfactory position for Black, Burmakin – Moskalenko, Sitges 2007.

12...g6

The most direct approach. By over-defending the f5-pawn, Black renews the threat of ...e6-e5, but the weakness of the dark squares involves a certain amount of risk.

Neutral play is likely to allow White to regroup favourably: 12...a5 13.♘e1 ♗a7 14.♘d3 (planning ♘a4 followed by c4-c5) 14...♘c5 15.♘xc5 ♗xc5 16.♘a4± Black has failed to maintain stability on the queenside and his newly created weaknesses will soon tell.

12...♘g4 also leaves Black with structural defects after 13.♗xg4 fxg4 14.♘g5±.

13.e4

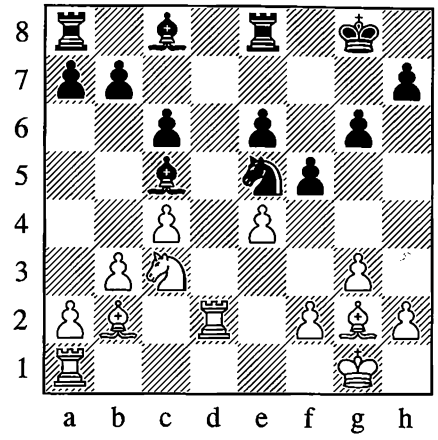
Continuing the fight against the f5-pawn.

13...♘g4

Now that the e4-square has been occupied by a white pawn, Black no longer fears an exchange on g4.

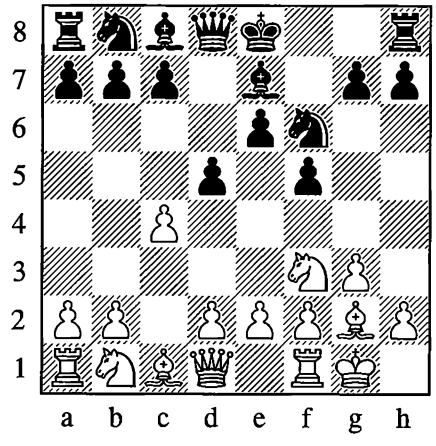
The alternate way of fighting for counterplay ends up badly: 13...fxe4 14.♘g5 e3 15.♗xe6† ♔f8 16.♗xd7 exf2† 17.♔g2 Black cannot avoid material losses: 17...♘xd7 18.♘ce4 or 17...♗xd7 18.♘a4.

14.♖d2 ♘ge5 15.♘xe5 ♘xe5 16.♗g2±



The central tension favours White, who has by far the better development.

B) 5...♗e7



By delaying ...c7-c6, Black intends to retain some dynamism in his position.

6.cxd5!

The only correct reaction in the spirit of our repertoire. The careless 6.♘c3 can be met by 6...d4 followed by either ...♘c6 or ...c5, with good chances to consolidate the centre.

6...exd5 7.♘c3

With ...c7-c6 played instead of ...♗e7, this move order could be answered with 7...d4. The way it is, 7...d4 loses a pawn to 8.♕a4†, for instance 8...♘c6 9.♘xd4!.

7...0–0 8.e3

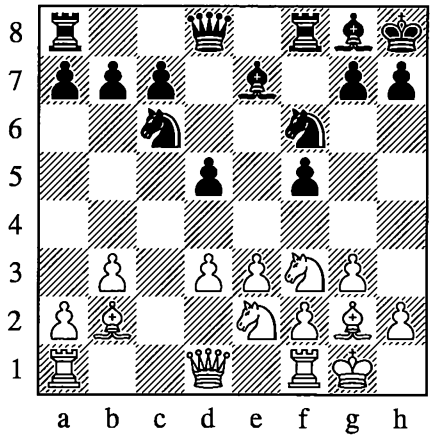
Preventing ...d5-d4 and preparing a flexible regrouping with ♘e2.

8...♔h8

Fighting for space with 8...c5 allows 9.d4! when the f5-pawn does not fit very well into the isolani structure.

9.b3 ♘c6 10.♗b2 ♗e6 11.♘e2 ♗g8 12.d3

White has developed harmoniously, without offering Black any active squares for his knights. In the long run, the minority attack and the weakness of the e5-square promise White a pleasant game.



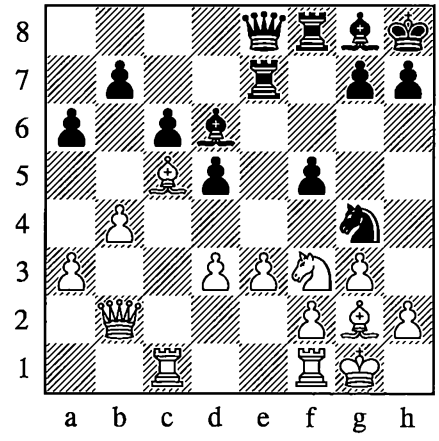
12...♕d7 13.a3 ♗d6

13...a5 would weaken the queenside without permanently preventing b3-b4, in view of the regrouping ♗c3 and ♕c2-b2.

14.♕c2 ♖ae8

Black seems to be well developed, but his structure's lack of flexibility deprives him of a constructive plan.

15.b4 ♘g4 16.♘ed4 ♘ce5 17.♖ac1 c6 18.♗c3 ♘xf3† 19.♘xf3 ♖e7 20.♕b2 ♕e8 21.♗d4 a6 22.♗c5±

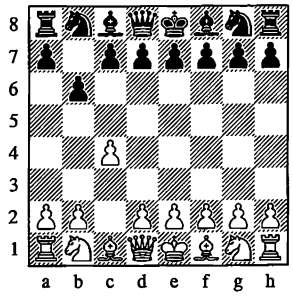


The exchange of the dark-squared bishops consolidates White's advantage and the minority attack will start very soon, Kasparov – Short, Paris 1990.

Conclusion

In the lines examined in this chapter, Black has difficult play. His best practical chance is to transpose to a 1...e5 variation at some point.

Chapter 29



Odds and Ends

Anti-Owen

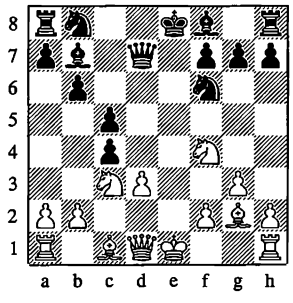
Variation Index

1.c4 b6

2.♘c3 ♗b7 3.e4 e6 4.♘ge2

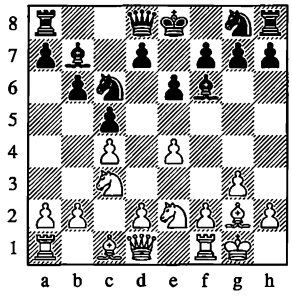
A) 4...♗b4 412
B) 4...♘f6 415
C) 4...c5 5.g3 417
C1) 5...g6 417
C2) 5...♘c6 420
C3) 5...f5 420
C4) 5...h5 421
C5) 5...♘f6 421

B) after 9...dxc4



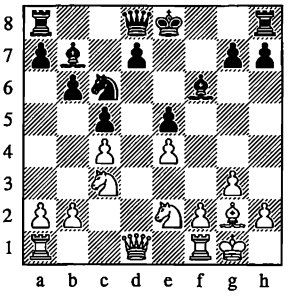
10.♗xb7!N

C2) after 7...♗f6



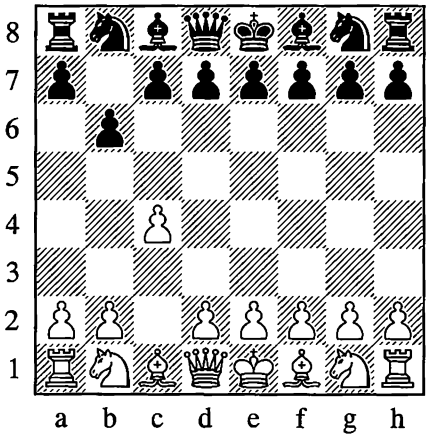
8.♘b5!N

C3) after 11...♗xf6



12.♘b5!N

1.c4 b6



Against players who enjoy developing their king's bishop to g2, the Owen set-up tends to be a strong psychological weapon. 2.g3 is possible, but after 2...♗b7 3.♘f3 Black can give the game an original twist with 3...♗xf3 4.exf3 c5. Moreover, from the point of view of our repertoire, natural developing moves such as 3...♘f6 or 3...c5 would be unpleasant, transposing to the Queen's Indian or the Hedgehog English – two openings that we constantly avoid (see also the third volume).

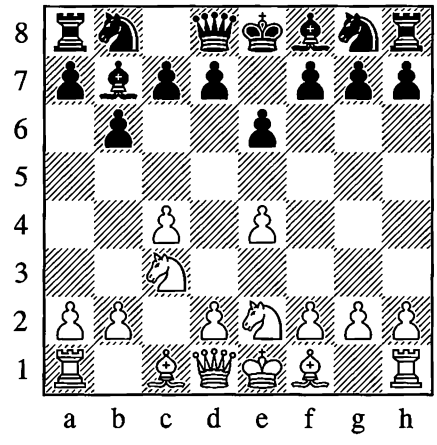
White's most ambitious answer is 2.d4, accepting the invitation to play a genuine Owen Defence, in which Black frequently balances on the edge of the precipice in trying to avoid being crushed by White's centre. However, White must memorize quite a few forcing lines and the play tends to be complicated. Those wishing to keep a consistent 1.c4 repertoire will thus be glad that there is also an effective English set-up available.

The reader may have noticed that against most black set-ups that do not prepare ...d7-d5, I have recommended "Botvinnik's triangle" (with pawns on c4, d3 and e4). Although the d5-square is controlled by the b7-bishop, its occupation is delayed, giving White sufficient reasons to employ the aforementioned system.

2.♘c3 ♗b7 3.e4 e6 4.♘ge2

I believe this is the most accurate move order.

If 4.g3, then Black can play 4...f5, obtaining a similar position as in line A below, but without the necessity of playing ...♗b4. As we will see, the exposed position of the bishop on b4 offers White the possibility of gaining space with a2-a3 and b2-b4 once things have settled down in the centre.



We will examine **A) 4...♗b4**, **B) 4...♘f6** and **C) 4...c5**. Instead 4...f5 only leads to the weakening of the kingside, offering White an easy game after 5.exf5 exf5 6.d4.

A) 4...♗b4

Undermining the e4-square with ...♗b4 and ...f7-f5 is quite typical for the Owen Defence, when 1.d4 is played on the first move. Against our English set-up, this plan proves less effective because White can consolidate e4 with d2-d3, leaving the bishop slightly misplaced on b4.

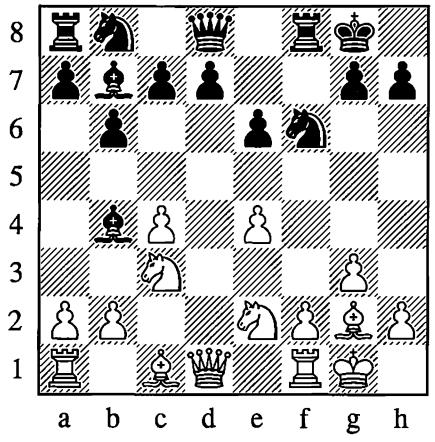
For the next few moves, both sides will focus on the critical e4-pawn.

5.g3 f5 6.♗g2 ♘f6

6...fxe4 transposes to the main line after 7.d3 ♘f6 8.0–0.

7.d3 fxe4 8.0–0 0–0 9.dxe4

White has managed to consolidate his considerable space advantage and Black needs to find a way to complete his development.



9...♘c6

Quite logical; Black develops his last minor piece, without defining the structure in the centre yet.

Although ...e6-e5 will be useful at some point in taking the d4-square under control, 9...e5?! prematurely weakens the d5-square. 10.♘d5 ♗c5 11.♗g5± With a strong initiative, McNab – Heinis, Coulsdon 2007.

With his queenside underdeveloped, Black cannot be successful with such early attacks as:

9...♘g4

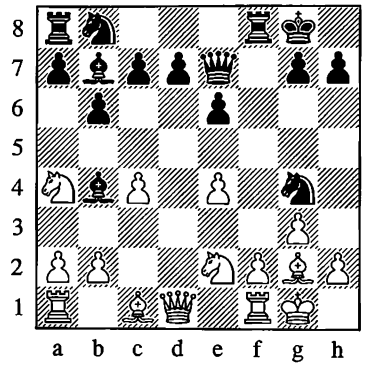
Threatening ...♘xf2 (and then ♖xf2, ...♗c5).

10.♘a4!

Preventing ...♗c5 and leaving the bishop in midair. The main threat is a2-a3 followed by f2-f4, with a crushing space advantage.

10...♕e7

Preparing to meet 11.f4? with 11...♗c5†. So far we have followed Cekro – Groffen, Belgium 2004.



11.a3!N

Underlining the artificiality of Black's development.

11...♗d6

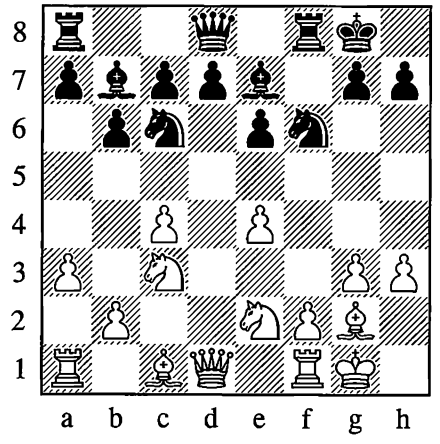
Now White should avoid the trap 12.e5?! ♗xg2 13.exd6 ♕f7 14.♔xg2 ♕f3† 15.♔g1 ♘xf2 with a strong attack, and instead play the solid:

12.♘d4±

Followed by f2-f4.

10.a3 ♗e7 11.h3

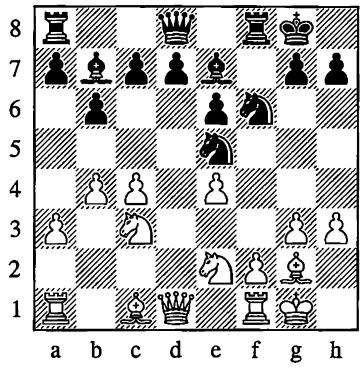
By preventing ...♘g4, White creates the strong threat of e4-e5.



11...e5

Although Black is playing a hypermodern opening, he needs to push a pawn in the centre at some point. In the event of careless play by White, the control of the d4-square may offer Black good counterplay.

The other way to block the e4-pawn leads to a more unstable situation for Black:
11...♘e5 12.b3
Threatening f2-f4 followed by e4-e5.
12...♗c5 13.b4 ♗e7

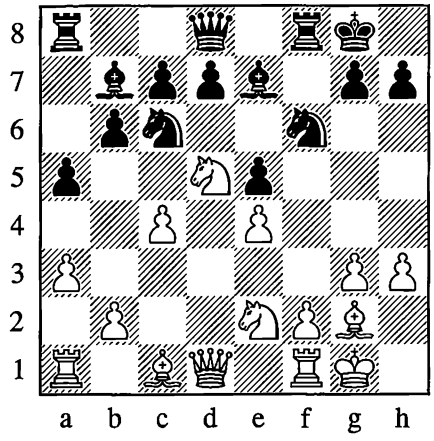


14.♗f4!
It becomes apparent that the c4-pawn is not really hanging, which means the black bishop's manoeuvres have been merely a waste of time.
14...♘g6
After 14...♘xc4?! 15.♕b3 Black will have to ruin his position to save the knight. 15...d5 16.♘d4 ♕d7 17.♘xe6! The weakness of the light squares will cost Black dearly. 17...♕xe6 18.exd5±
15.♗e3 a5 16.♕b3 axb4 17.axb4±
White has a space advantage practically all over the board; Black is doomed to passivity, Mitin – Juegel, Internet 2002.

12.♘d5 a5

Black tries to increase his control of the dark squares. If White could play b2-b4, then Black would have very little chance of fighting for the d4-square.

So far we have followed Dittmar – Djuric, Arco 2000.



13.♗e3!N

A natural developing move, over-defending the d4-square.

13...♔h8

Black does not have any active moves at his disposal, so he must adopt a prophylactic strategy.

13...a4 loses a pawn to 14.♘ec3±.

13...♗a6 fails to destabilize White after 14.♕d3±.

The text move is a necessary preparation of the thematic ...♗c5, since 13...♗c5 loses a pawn after 14.♗xc5 bxc5 15.♘xf6† ♕xf6 16.♕d5† ♕f7 17.♕xc5.

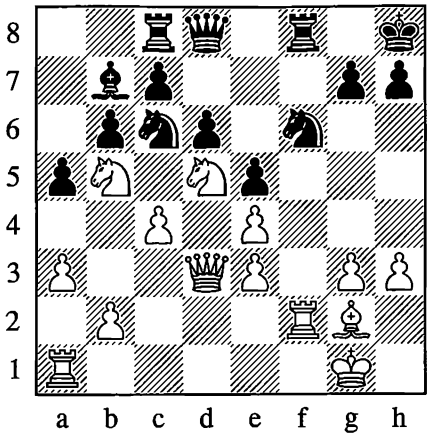
14.♘ec3

This knight is heading for b5 in order to tie Black to the defence of the backward c7-pawn.

14...♗c5 15.♘b5 ♗xe3 16.fxe3!

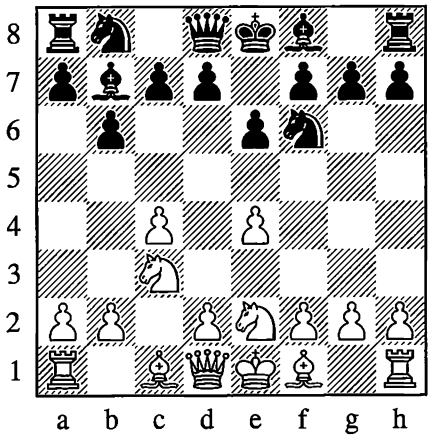
The only way! Black can forget about occupying the d4-square.

16...♖c8 17.♕d3 d6 18.♖f2±



White has a very active position and intends to increase his pressure with ♖af1.

B) 4...♘f6



This way of attacking the centre is ineffective in the genuine Owen Defence. After 1.c4 b6 2.d4 e6 3.e4 ♗b7 4.♘c3 ♗b4 5.♗d3 ♘f6?! White can consolidate his e4-pawn with 6.f3. Having deprived himself of the thematic ...f7-f5, Black is doomed to passivity. For instance, 6...d5 7.cxd5 exd5 8.e5 merely helps White to increase his space advantage.

In our current position, things are a bit different. The system of development chosen by White is solid, but slower than after 2.d4.

5.f3 is possible, but after 5...c5 White has nothing better than transposing to a Hedgehog with 6.d4, which is a deviation from our planned repertoire.

5.e5 is premature, because after 5...♘g8 followed by ...c7-c5 and ...d7-d6, White cannot support his centre, partly because of the placement of his king's knight.

5.♘g3 is sometimes played, but after 5...c5 White can no longer fianchetto his king's bishop, while his control over the d4-square has been weakened.

All these considerations leave us with the text move.

5.d3

After having consolidated the e4-pawn, White intends to continue his development in the true spirit of the Botvinnik set-up with g2-g3 and ♗g2.

5...c5

By taking the d4-square under control, Black prepares to open the centre with ...d7-d5.

5...d5

This allows White to win space in the centre. 6.cxd5 exd5 7.e5 ♘fd7 8.d4 c5 9.f4 ♘c6 10.♗e3

White has lost a tempo with d2-d3-d4, but this is less relevant because Black's moves ...b7-b6 and ...♗b7 do not contribute to the fight for the critical d4-square.

10...♘a5

This is the only way of trying to make use of the bishop's presence on b7. After Black's dream sequence of ...♘c4 ♗xc4 and ...dxc4, the bishop would become the unchallenged master of the long diagonal.

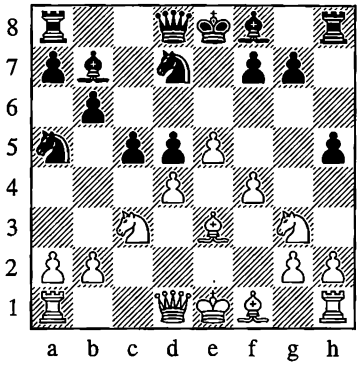
As mentioned before, White is well prepared for the fight around the d4-square: 10...cxd4

11.♘xd4 ♘xd4 12.♗xd4 ♗c5 13.♗e2 0–0 14.0–0 ♕e7 15.♗f3 ♖ad8 16.♖e1 ♗xd4† 17.♕xd4± With a stable blockade on d4 and a dangerous kingside majority, Franco – Arizmendi, Cala Mendia 2001.

11.♘g3

Since 11...♘c4 is premature in view of 12.♗xc4 dxc4 13.d5, in Poldauf – Hertneck, Germany 2003, Black tried:

11...h5



12.dxc5!N

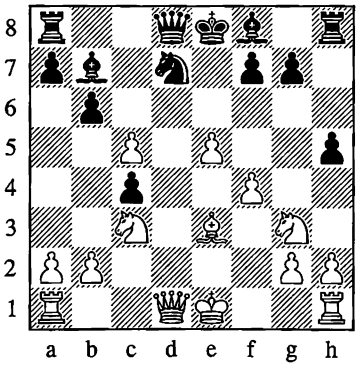
It appears that Black's centre is shaky and his development not entirely satisfactory.

12...♘c4

This was recommended by Ribli, who also mentioned that after 12...♗xc5 13.♗xc5 bxc5 14.♘f5± the knight is activated with devastating results.

13.♗xc4 dxc4

Ribli opines that Black has good compensation for the pawn because of his strong bishop.



14.♕a4!

In fact, White has a very active position. The last move pins the knight and threatens to castle long with a complete crush.

14...♗xg2 15.♖g1 ♗f3 16.♘ge4 ♕h4† 17.♖g3±

White has a very dangerous initiative.

6.g3 d5?!

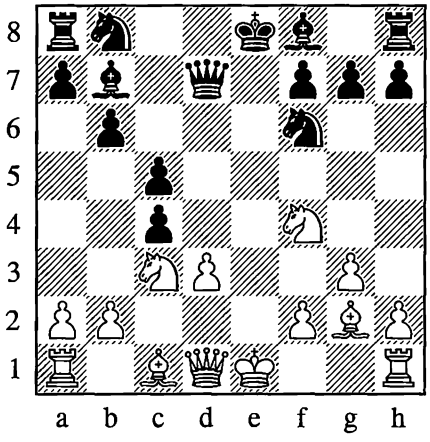
Consistent but risky. In view of the recommended novelty below, it would be safer to transpose to line C5 with 6...d6 or 6...♘c6.

7.exd5 exd5 8.♗g2

Threatening to win a pawn with ♘f4.

8...♕d7 9.♘f4 dxc4

This position has been seen in a couple of games, but White failed to hit on the right continuation.



10.♗xb7!N

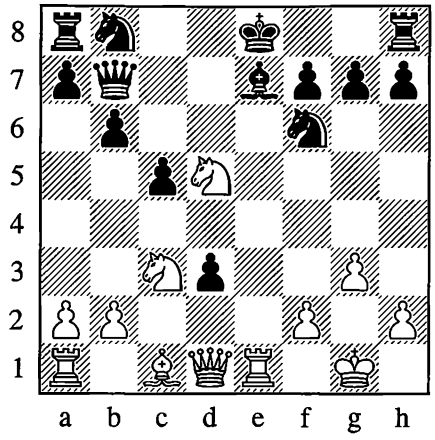
White sacrifices a pawn in order to take advantage of the continued presence of the enemy king in the centre; White also keeps fighting for the d5-square.

10...♕xb7 11.0–0 cxd3?!

This is the critical continuation, but delaying development to this extent is inadvisable.

12.♖e1† ♗e7 13.♘fd5!

White exploits the undefended black queen to occupy the d5-square and prevent Black from castling.



13...♘c6

After 13...♘xd5 14.♕f3 ♘c6 15.♘xd5 the numerous pins will cause Black to lose material.

14.♕f3 ♘g8

Sadly, this is the only way to avoid material losses.

14...♖b8 loses an exchange to 15.♗f4 ♘d4 16.♕g2±.

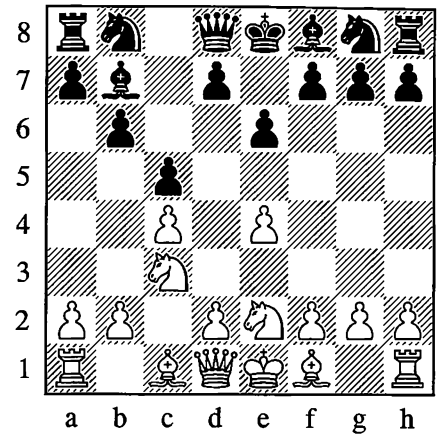
14...0–0–0 drops a piece to 15.♘xe7† ♘xe7 16.♕xb7† ♔xb7 17.♖xe7†.

15.♗f4±

White has a strong attack.

Instead of 11...cxd3?!, safer is 11...♗e7. But this allows White to retain a positional advantage at no cost. 12.♘fd5 ♘xd5 13.♕f3 0–0 14.♘xd5 ♔h8 The only way to avoid material losses. 15.dxc4± In this almost symmetrical position, White is more active. Also, the d5-square is more important than the d4-square because of the presence of dark-squared bishops; if Black succeeds in playing ...♘c6-d4, White will be able to exchange the active knight with ♗xd4.

C) 4...c5



Since White has refrained from completely occupying the centre, this looks like a logical move.

Now 5.d4 cxd4 6.♘xd4 is a good practical choice, leading to a Paulsen Hedgehog, but that is a variation with independent and well-developed theory. In this chapter, we will stick to our English repertoire.

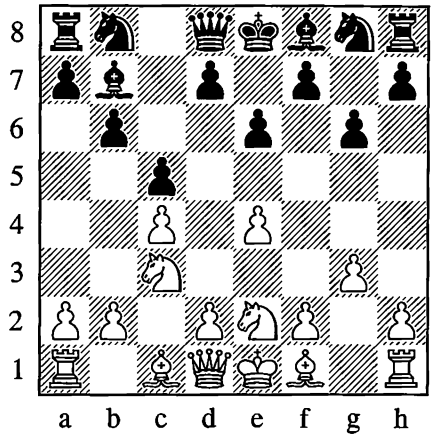
5.g3

Black now has several ways to develop. In lines **C1) 5...g6** and **C2) 5...♘c6** we will examine those cases in which he tries to develop his king's bishop on the long diagonal (either to g7 or f6). This is a risky strategy which White can usually punish with a well-timed d3-d4, underlining the weakness of the d6-square. In line C2, Black can transpose to line C5 by playing ...♘f6 within the next few moves. **C3) 5...f5** and **C4) 5...h5** both aim to annoy White on the kingside. The most solid black set-up is examined in line **C5) 5...♘f6**.

C1) 5...g6

The set-up based on ...e7-e6 and ...g7-g6, which works well in the Closed Sicilian, is less justified in this line, because Black has

spent two tempos on the moves ...b7-b6 and ...♗b7, which do not contribute to stabilizing the position on the dark squares. Also, White has not played d2-d3 yet, so the possibility of achieving d2-d4 in one move adds force to the central break.



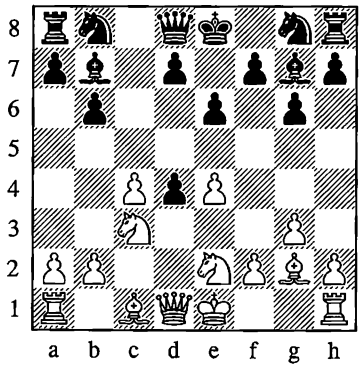
6.♗g2 d6

It looks like a good idea to offer the d6-square some protection before abandoning the f8-a3 diagonal with the bishop.

6...♗g7

This runs into:

7.d4 cxd4



8.♘b5!N

Targeting the d6-square at once.

The less energetic 8.♘xd4 leads to an acceptable position for Black after 8...a6 9.♗e3 ♘e7, Hammer – Huang, San Francisco 2001.

8...e5

Black tries to keep the centre closed; the piece sacrifice is temporary.

After 8...d6 9.♘exd4 Black has problems stabilizing the position. It is relevant that the attempt to remove the danger looming over the d6-pawn with 9...a6 allows a decisive tactical operation: 10.♘xe6 fxe6 11.♘xd6† ♔e7 12.♘xb7+– White will be able to free his knight with either e4-e5 or c4-c5, leaving him with an extra pawn and a strong bishop pair.

9.♘d6† ♔e7

The king will be exposed on this square, but Black needs to force the enemy knight away from d6.

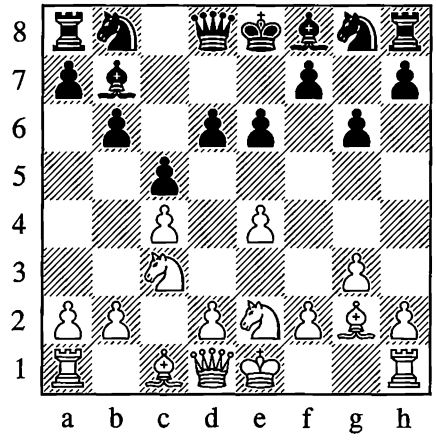
After the more cautious 9...♔f8, White can consolidate the knight: 10.b3 ♕c7 11.♗a3 ♘e7 12.0–0 ♘bc6 13.f4 With an unstoppable attack.

10.♘xb7 ♕c7

The extra knight will be lost, but in the meantime White will manage to open the f-file to strengthen his attack.

11.f4 ♘c6 12.fxe5 ♗xe5 13.0–0 ♕xb7 14.♘f4±

Black's extra pawn is not so relevant, as his king is in danger.



7.0–0 ♗g7

Black is one move away from consolidating his control over the d4-square with ...♘c6.

8.d4

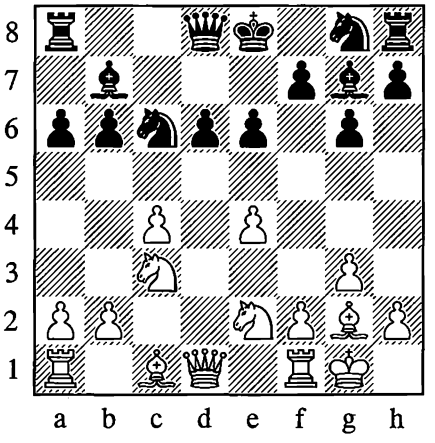
This well-timed opening of the centre puts the d6-pawn in danger.

8...cxd4 9.♘xd4 a6

Necessary, in order to prevent ♘db5.

10.♘de2 ♘c6

So far, we have followed Levi – Finegold, Warren 2002.



11.♗f4!N

It is best to attack the d6-pawn before Black completes his development.

11...♘e5

In practice, White might have refrained from 11.♗f4 because of 11...♗e5 12.♗xe5 dxe5, when Black's control over the d4-square seems to offer him a good game. However, after 13.♕b3± the threat of ♘a4 shows that Black's position is still shaky.

12.♕a4†!

The best way to maintain White's lead in development, relying on an elegant tactical resource.

12...♕d7

A natural try is:

12...♗c6?

However, this is met by the spectacular:

13.♗xe5!! ♗xa4 14.♗xg7 ♗c6 15.♗xh8

White has a big material and positional advantage. The h8-bishop is impossible to trap:

15...f6 16.♖ad1

Threatening 17.e5 ♗xg2 18.♔xg2 fxe5 19.♗xe5.

16...e5 17.f4

With a decisive attack.

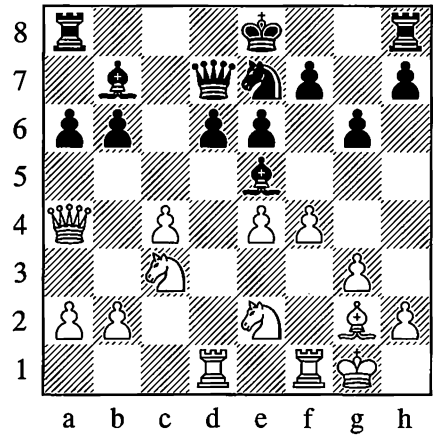
13.♖ad1 ♘e7

13...♕xa4 14.♘xa4 ♗c6 is no better: 15.♘xb6 ♖b8 16.c5! A thematic move, disrupting Black's structure and clearing the c4-square for the knight. 16...dxc5 17.♘c4± White is better developed, and he has the superior structure and a strong initiative.

14.♗xe5!

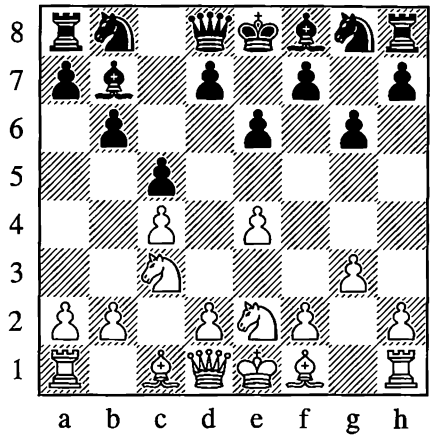
Eliminating Black's most active piece. 14.♖xd6 is less clear because of 14...♕xa4 15.♘xa4 ♘xc4.

14...♗xe5 15.f4±



Black will soon lose either his d6- or b6-pawn.

spent two tempos on the moves ...b7-b6 and ...♗b7, which do not contribute to stabilizing the position on the dark squares. Also, White has not played d2-d3 yet, so the possibility of achieving d2-d4 in one move adds force to the central break.



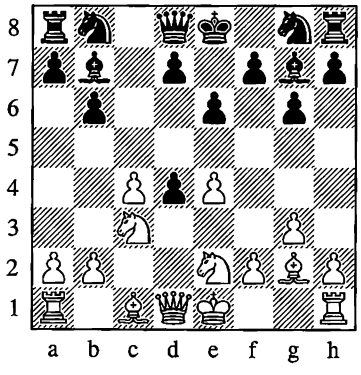
6.♗g2 d6

It looks like a good idea to offer the d6-square some protection before abandoning the f8-a3 diagonal with the bishop.

6...♗g7

This runs into:

7.d4 cxd4



8.♘b5!N

Targeting the d6-square at once.

The less energetic 8.♘xd4 leads to an acceptable position for Black after 8...a6 9.♗e3 ♘e7, Hammer – Huang, San Francisco 2001.

8...e5

Black tries to keep the centre closed; the piece sacrifice is temporary.

After 8...d6 9.♘exd4 Black has problems stabilizing the position. It is relevant that the attempt to remove the danger looming over the d6-pawn with 9...a6 allows a decisive tactical operation: 10.♘xe6 fxe6 11.♘xd6† ♔e7 12.♘xb7+– White will be able to free his knight with either e4-e5 or c4-c5, leaving him with an extra pawn and a strong bishop pair.

9.♘d6† ♔e7

The king will be exposed on this square, but Black needs to force the enemy knight away from d6.

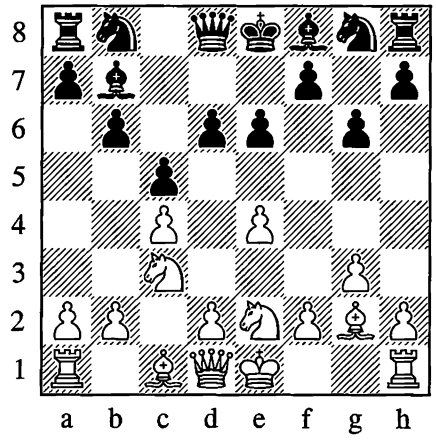
After the more cautious 9...♔f8, White can consolidate the knight: 10.b3 ♕c7 11.♗a3 ♘e7 12.0–0 ♘bc6 13.f4 With an unstoppable attack.

10.♘xb7 ♕c7

The extra knight will be lost, but in the meantime White will manage to open the f-file to strengthen his attack.

11.f4 ♘c6 12.fxe5 ♗xe5 13.0–0 ♕xb7 14.♘f4±

Black's extra pawn is not so relevant, as his king is in danger.



7.0–0 ♗g7

Black is one move away from consolidating his control over the d4-square with ...♘c6.

8.d4

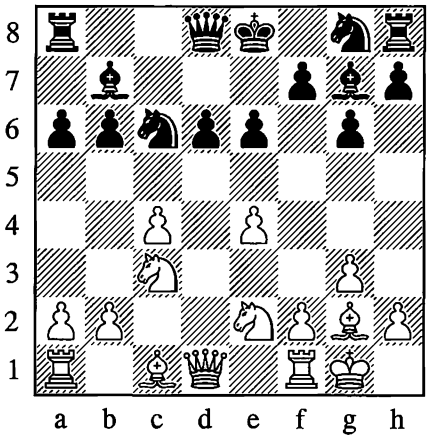
This well-timed opening of the centre puts the d6-pawn in danger.

8...cxd4 9.♘xd4 a6

Necessary, in order to prevent ♘db5.

10.♘de2 ♘c6

So far, we have followed Levi – Finegold, Warren 2002.



11.♗f4!N

It is best to attack the d6-pawn before Black completes his development.

11...♘e5

In practice, White might have refrained from 11.♗f4 because of 11...♗e5 12.♗xe5 dxe5, when Black's control over the d4-square seems to offer him a good game. However, after 13.♕b3± the threat of ♘a4 shows that Black's position is still shaky.

12.♕a4†!

The best way to maintain White's lead in development, relying on an elegant tactical resource.

12...♕d7

A natural try is:

12...♗c6?

However, this is met by the spectacular:

13.♗xe5!! ♗xa4 14.♗xg7 ♗c6 15.♗xh8

White has a big material and positional advantage. The h8-bishop is impossible to trap:

15...f6 16.♖ad1

Threatening 17.e5 ♗xg2 18.♔xg2 fxe5 19.♗xe5.

16...e5 17.f4

With a decisive attack.

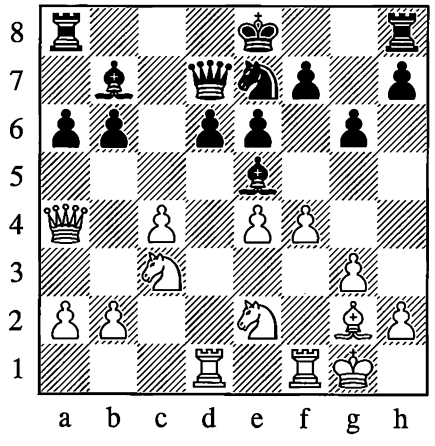
13.♖ad1 ♘e7

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14.♗xe5!

Eliminating Black's most active piece. 14.♖xd6 is less clear because of 14...♕xa4 15.♘xa4 ♘xc4.

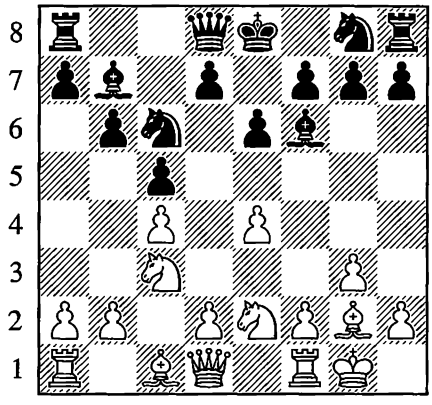
14...♗xe5 15.f4±



Black will soon lose either his d6- or b6-pawn.

C2) 5...♘c6 6.♗g2 ♗e7 7.0–0 ♗f6

Black adopts the same plan as in line C1, but without weakening the kingside dark squares with ...g7-g6. In order to take advantage of the exposed position of the f6-bishop, White needs to invert the move order.



8.♘b5!N

Now 8.d4 is less effective: 8...♗xd4! (in the position with ...g7-g6 and ...♗g7, Black could hardly think about giving up his bishop, but in this case his kingside is relatively safe) 9.♘b5 ♗e5 10.f4 ♗b8 White certainly has compensation for the sacrificed pawn, but Black's position remains solid, Bors – Leviczky, Budapest 2009.

8...d6 9.d4 cxd4

The vulnerability of the f6-bishop is relevant in the variation 9...a6 10.♘xd6† ♕xd6 11.e5±, when the position opens up in White's favour.

10.♘exd4 ♘xd4 11.♘xd4 ♕d7

Black has no time for the prophylactic move 11...a6? because of 12.e5!. Once again, the f6-bishop proves to be badly placed. 12...♗xg2 13.exf6 ♗xf1 14.fxg7 With decisive material gains.

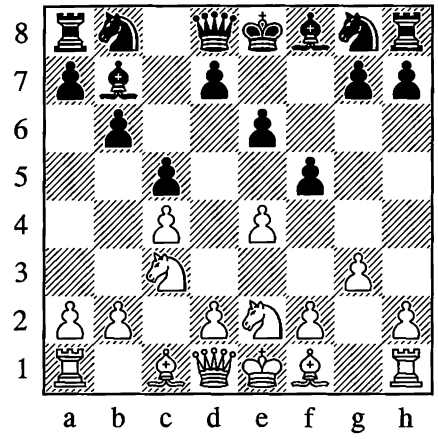
12.♘b5 ♗e7 13.♗f4 e5

The only way to avoid losing a pawn.

14.♗e3±

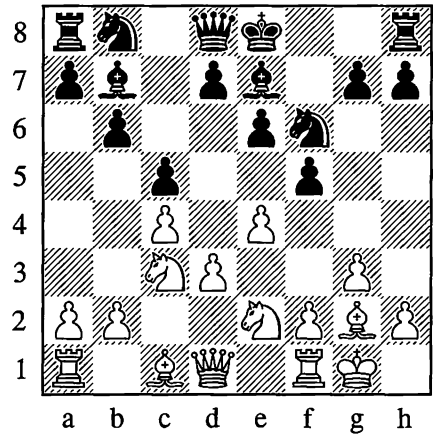
White has a clear positional advantage because of the weakness of the d5-square. In addition, he has a lead in development.

C3) 5...f5



Similarly to a line examined in the introduction to the Anti-Dutch system, the combination of the moves ...c7-c5 and ...f7-f5 leaves Black's central structure weak.

6.d3 ♘f6 7.♗g2 ♗e7 8.0–0



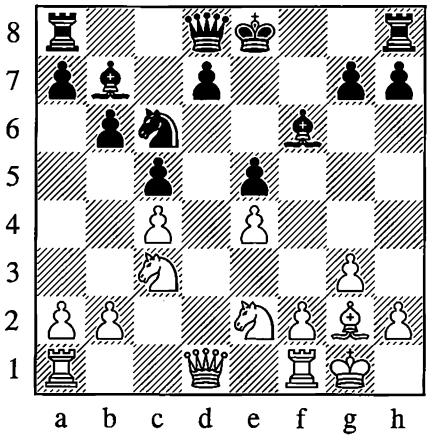
The twin threats of e4-e5, winning material, and exf5, weakening the d5-square, force Black to release the tension.

8...fxe4 9.dxe4

Renewing the threat of e4-e5.

9...e5 10.♗g5 ♘c6 11.♗xf6 ♗xf6

Black has managed to consolidate on the dark squares, but the presence of the king in the centre allows White to retain the initiative.



12.♘b5!N

Only this energetic move offers White an advantage. The neutral 12.♘d5 proved ineffective after 12...0–0 13.♘ec3 ♘d4 with a solid position for Black in Bykov – Koshelev, Voronezh 2007.

12...♗e7

12...0–0 13.♘d6 leaves Black facing the double threat of ♘xb7 and ♕d5† followed by ♘f7†. 13...♘d4 14.♘xb7 ♕b8 15.♘xc5± Black has insufficient compensation for the pawn.

13.f4 d6

Strategically, this is the consistent move. Instead 13...0–0 allows White a strong initiative in the centre: 14.♕d5† ♔h8 15.♖ad1±

14.fxe5!

This looks like a strategic concession, but it has the merit of preventing Black from castling.

14...♘xe5 15.♗h3±

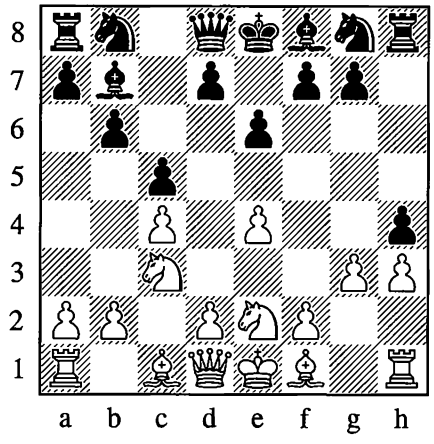
Black's king is stuck in the centre and his light squares are desperately weak.

C4) 5...h5

In some lines of the English Opening, advancing the h-pawn in reply to g2-g3 can cause White some problems. In this specific situation, the plan is not so effective, because White is better prepared for the fight on the kingside.

6.h3 h4

Principled but not really dangerous. Instead 6...♘f6 7.♗g2 a6 8.0–0 ♕c7 9.d3 ♗e7 10.f4 d6 11.♗e3 ♘bd7 would transpose to line C5.



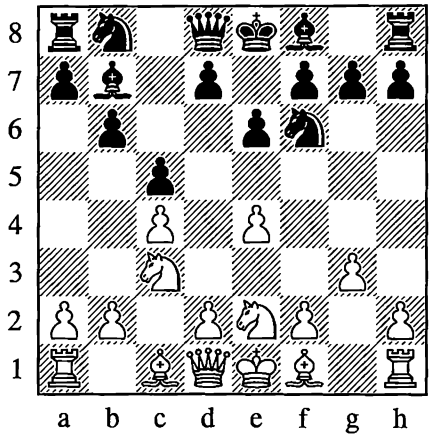
7.g4!N

White maintains the flexibility of his position; he has no reason to play the timid 7.♗g2? as in Troyke – Krasenkow, Port Erin 2007.

7...♘c6 8.d3 ♘ge7 9.♗g2 ♘g6 10.♗e3 ♗e7 11.♕d2 a6 12.f4 0–0 13.0–0±

White has more space and can build up a dangerous kingside attack based on g4-g5 and f4-f5.

C5) 5...♘f6



The most natural continuation. Black develops the knight on an active square, putting the e4-pawn under pressure and retaining the possibility of later opening the centre with ...d7-d5.

6.♗g2 a6

Black chooses a flexible set-up in the spirit of the English Hedgehog. Having refrained from opening the centre with d4, White can prevent the black counterplay that is typical in hedgehog structures.

6...♘c6 This is an important alternative. 7.d3 ♗e7 8.0–0 0–0 9.f4 d6 Black intends to develop with ...♕d7 and ...♖ad8, when the threat of a pawn sacrifice with ...d7-d5 would become realistic. This position has occurred in a few games. 10.f5!N±

White anticipates Black's aforementioned plan by submitting the e6-pawn to strong pressure. He will play ♘f4 and/or ♗h3 next, more or less forcing Black to release the tension. The apparently safe ...e6-e5 would allow White to build up a dangerous kingside attack based on g4-g5, while the b7-bishop would remain rather passive.

6...d5?! is premature because of 7.exd5 exd5 8.♘f4 winning a pawn.

7.d3 ♕c7 8.0–0 ♗e7 9.h3

Since Black has somewhat delayed his general development, White can switch to active operations on the wing.

9...h5

Preventing White's kingside expansion, which could become threatening in the event of neutral play from Black: 9...d6 10.♗e3 ♘bd7 11.f4 0–0 12.g4 ♖fd8 13.g5 ♘e8 14.♘g3± Followed by f4-f5 with a strong attack, Savenko – Moroz, Russia 2002.

10.f4 d6 11.♗e3 ♘bd7

After having weakened his kingside, Black is in no hurry to castle short. Transferring the king to the other wing would also be risky in view of a2-a3 followed by b2-b4.

12.♖c1!?

A flexible move, inviting Black to define his intentions. The opposition of the white rook with the enemy queen can be useful if the centre opens.

12.f5± looks entirely playable, too.

12...♖c8 13.a3 ♕b8 14.b4±

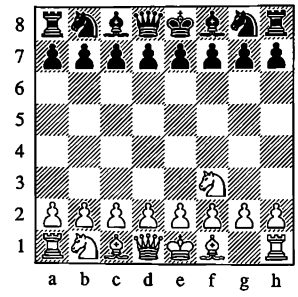
White enjoys greater structural flexibility on both wings, which leaves Black doomed to passive defence, Hauchard – Rocha, Porto 2000.

Conclusion

The triangle set-up is an effective way to meet the Owen Defence. In most lines, White prevents the early opening of the centre, giving the game a positional character and maintaining a space advantage. Black usually has problems justifying the development of the bishop to b7; with the e4-pawn solidly defended, this bishop may remain passive for a long time.

Chapter 30

Odds and Ends



Reti Move Order

As suggested by the title of this book, our repertoire is based on 1.c4, but many of the examined positions can also be reached via a 1.♘f3 or 1.g3 move order. It is difficult to draw a clear borderline between the English and the Reti openings, but each of the mentioned moves has merits and limitations. While I firmly believe that of these options 1.c4 is the most ambitious move from a strategic point of view, I hope it will be helpful to highlight the cases where 1.♘f3 or 1.g3 may prove useful, depending on the opponent's repertoire and opening taste in general.

Many consider 1...e5 to be the most unpleasant reply against 1.c4. I do not agree with them and have extensively expressed my views in the first volume. While I was working on my English repertoire books, I occasionally played 1.♘f3, but this was not because I was concerned about any ...e5 set-ups.

Against Black's set-ups based on 1...c6 and 1...e6 followed by ...d7-d5, White employs similar strategies, based on leaving the c4-pawn undefended in the early phase of the game. In both cases, the lines based on ...dxc4 are of crucial importance, but my feeling is that the position tends to become double-edged only in the Anti-Queen's Gambit systems, while in the Anti-Slav they lead to a strong white initiative.

Against an opponent whose repertoire against the English/Reti opening consists only of these two schemes of development (1...c6 and 1...e6), it makes sense to delay the exposure of the c-pawn until the moment Black has defined his intentions. For instance: 1.♘f3 d5 2.g3

Now 2...c6 and 2...♘f6 3.♗g2 c6 can be met by 3.c4 or 4.c4, respectively, but after 2...e6 White should proceed with his kingside development: 3.♗g2 ♘f6 4.0–0 White will play c2-c4 next, because Black cannot avoid making some sort of commitment with his next move (4...♗e7, 4...c6 or 4...c5), reducing his chances of achieving counterplay with ...dxc4.

The reader should not infer that I really fear (or we should fear) the positions arising after 1...e6, 2...d5 and ...dxc4. To tell the truth, I have refined the last details of these positions almost one year after having designed the analysis on the similar lines with 1...c6, which justifies my few experiments with 1.♘f3 in the meantime.

Unfortunately, the Reti move order has several drawbacks.

Having committed his knight on the very first move, White can no longer meet 1...g6 or 1...d6 with the Botvinnik set-up (d3, e4, ♘ge2). This is a problem only from the point of view of our repertoire, because White can transpose to a fianchetto King's Indian by playing d2-d4 within the next few moves.

I am slightly more concerned about allowing Black to fianchetto his queen's bishop in comfort (1.♘f3 ♘f6 2.g3 b6 3.♗g2 ♗b7). The Queen's Indian has been heavily analysed nowadays and White needs to embark on long theoretical discussions in order to retain chances of an advantage. There is also the English Hedgehog (1.♘f3 c5 2.g3 b6), which offers Black a solid position with good chances for counterplay. I must confess that I have always enjoyed playing this system with Black.

In conclusion, 1.♘f3 is an adequate invitation to our repertoire set-ups against opponents who mainly play the Slav and the Queen's Gambit. Against King's Indian and Queen's Indian players, we risk being taken out of our favourite schemes. I will also mention that strong players with White often transpose to 1.d4 lines after having avoided some openings such as the Nimzo-Indian or the Grünfeld.

Many years ago, I occasionally tried 1.g3.

I remember having the feeling that this cannot be a serious move, mainly because there are not so many games in which great players used it. While my work on these volumes was progressing, I changed my opinion. White prevents an early ...b7-b6 followed by ...♗b7, does not expose the c-pawn to ...dxc4 and maintains flexibility with respect to his king's knight, which can go to either f3 or e2, depending on the system Black chooses. 1...e5 2.c4 or 1...c5 2.c4 transpose to the first and third volumes respectively, while 1...d5 can be answered with 2.♘f3, reaching a position discussed in the previous paragraphs. It should be mentioned that the slightly careless 2.♗g2 after 1...e5 or 1...d5 would allow Black to build up a strong centre with 2...d5 or 2...e5, respectively.

All these nuances make 1.g3 more tightly related to our repertoire than 1.♘f3. Its only drawback compared with 1.c4 is that it fails to take the d5-square under control immediately. There are at least two ways in which Black can take advantage of this circumstance.

After 1.g3 d5 2.♘f3, fans of the Chigorin Defence will be glad to play 2...♘c6, threatening 3...e5. 3.c4 does not solve the problem because of 3...d4 followed by ...e7-e5 anyway, reaching what we could call the reversed Schmidt Benoni, when it is difficult to find a way to take over the initiative with White. The most principled answer is 3.d4, preventing Black's expansion in the centre. This is a deviation from our intended paths and leads to somewhat static play where White has some chances of retaining an edge.

Another way to take us out of the main repertoire is 2...c5 3.♗g2 ♘c6. Black threatens 4...e5, when White's extra tempo if compared to a King's Indian (with reversed colours) would not offer more than comfortable equality. Therefore, 4.d4 is obligatory, with a possible transposition to the Catalan, Tarrasch or Semi-Tarrasch (the reader may refer to Avrukh's *Grandmaster Repertoire 1* and Schandorff's *Playing the Queen's Gambit*).

I hope that having explained all these subtleties will help the reader display flexibility when preparing for a specific game and choosing the concrete move order.

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C2) 6...♗d5 7.e4 h6 8.exd5 hxg5 9.dxc6 ♘xc6 10.♘a3 *32*
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A21) 13...♕xd1 *136*
A22) 13...♘fd7 *137*
B) 8...♗c5 *140*
B1) 9.h3 *140*
B11) 9...♗h5 *140*
B12) 9...♗xf3 *143*
B2) 9.♕b3 *145*
B21) 9...b5!? *146*
B22) 9...♘b6 *147*
B23) 9...♗b6 10.♘a4 0–0 11.♘xb6 axb6 12.♕c2 *148*
B231) 12...♗xf3 *149*
B232) 12...♕e7 *150*
B233) 12...♖e8 *151*
B234) 12...h6 *152*

Chapter 9

1.c4 c6 2.g3 d5 3.♘f3 ♗g4 4.♗g2
A) 4...♘d7 156
B) 4...e6 5.cxd5 ♗xf3! 6.♗xf3 cxd5 7.♘c3 ♘c6 8.0–0 ♘f6 9.d3 ♗e7 *156*
B1) 10.♗g2 *158*
B2) 10.♕a4 0–0 11.♗f4 *160*
B21) 11...♘d7 *160*
B22) 11...♕d7 *161*

Chapter 10

1.c4 c6 2.g3 d5 3.♘f3 dxc4 4.♗g2 ♘d7 5.0–0
A) 5...♘b6N 6.a4 a5 7.♘a3 *166*
A1) 7...♘f6 *167*
A2) 7...♕d5 *168*
B) 5...e5 *169*
C) 5...e6 *170*

Chapter 11

1.c4 c6 2.g3 d5 3.♘f3 g6 4.♗g2 ♗g7 5.0–0
A) 5...e5 6.♕a4! *174*
A1) 6...d4 *174*
A2) 6...e4 *177*
A3) 6...♘d7 *180*
A4) 6...♘e7 *182*
B) 5...♘f6 6.b3 ♘e4 7.d4 *185*
B1) 7...dxc4 *186*
B2) 7...0–0 *188*

Chapter 12

1.c4 e6 2.g3 d5 3.♗g2 dxc4 4.♘a3 *195*

Chapter 13

1.c4 e6 2.g3 d5 3.♗g2 c6 4.♘f3! dxc4 5.♘a3!
A) 5...b5 *204*
B) 5...♗xa3 *207*

Chapter 14

1.c4 e6 2.g3 d5 3.♗g2 c6 4.♘f3 ♗d6 5.0–0 e5 6.cxd5 cxd5 7.♘c3
A) 7...♘f6 *211*
B) 7...♘e7 *212*

Chapter 15

1.c4 e6 2.g3 d5 3.♗g2 g6 4.♘f3 ♗g7 5.0–0 ♘e7 6.d4 ♘bc6 7.cxd5 exd5 8.♘c3 0–0 9.b3
A) 9...♗e6 *218*
B) 9...♗g4 10.e3 *221*
B1) 10...♕c8 *221*
B2) 10...♕d7 *223*

Chapter 16

1.c4 e6 2.g3 d5 3.♗g2 ♘f6 4.♘f3 dxc4 5.♘a3
A) 5...c5 6.♘xc4 ♘c6 7.0–0 ♗e7 8.b3 0–0 9.♗b2 *228*
A1) 9...♗d7 *229*
A2) 9...♘d5 *231*
B) 5...♗xa3 6.bxa3 *234*
B1) 6...♕d6 *235*
B2) 6...♘c6 *236*

Chapter 17

1.c4 e6 2.g3 d5 3.♗g2 ♘f6 4.♘f3 dxc4 5.♘a3 ♗xa3 6.bxa3
A) 6...a6 *242*
B) 6...c6 *244*
C) 6...b5 7.♘e5! *246*
C1) 7...c6 *246*
C2) 7...♕d4 *247*
C3) 7...♘d5 8.d3! *249*
C31) 8...c3 *249*
C32) 8...cxd3 *251*
C33) 8...♕f6 *252*

Chapter 18

1.c4 e6 2.g3 d5 3.♗g2 ♘f6 4.♘f3 dxc4 5.♘a3 ♗xa3 6.bxa3 0–0 7.♗b2
A) 7...c6 *260*
B) 7...♘d5 *262*
C) 7...♘bd7 *265*

Chapter 19

1.c4 e6 2.g3 d5 3.♗g2 ♘f6 4.♘f3 ♗e7 5.0–0 0–0 6.b3
A) 6...d4 *270*
B) 6...a5 *273*

Chapter 20

1.c4 e6 2.g3 d5 3.♗g2 ♘f6 4.♘f3 ♗e7 5.0–0 0–0 6.b3 c6 7.♗b2
A) 7...b5 8.♕c2 *276*
A1) 8...bxc4 *277*
A2) 8...♗a6 *279*
A3) 8...♘bd7 *280*

A4) 8...a5 *282*
B) 7...b6 8.d3 ♗b7 9.♘bd2 ♘bd7 10.♕c2 *284*
B1) 10...♕c7 *284*
B2) 10...♖c8 *285*
B3) 10...c5 11.e4! *288*
B31) 11...d4 *288*
B32) 11...dxe4 *290*

Chapter 21

1.c4 e6 2.g3 d5 3.♗g2 ♘f6 4.♘f3 ♗e7 5.0–0 0–0 6.b3 b6 7.♗b2 ♗b7 8.e3 ♘bd7 9.♘c3
A) 9...♘e4 *294*
B) 9...c5 10.♕e2 ♖c8 11.♖fd1! ♕c7 12.cxd5 ♘xd5 13.♘xd5 ♗xd5 14.e4 ♗b7 15.♖ac1 ♕b8 16.d4 *296*
B1) 16...♖fd8 *298*
B2) 16...cxd4 *300*

Chapter 22

1.c4 e6 2.g3 d5 3.♗g2 ♘f6 4.♘f3 ♗e7 5.0–0 0–0 6.b3 c5 7.♗b2 ♘c6 8.e3!
A) 8...dxc4 *304*
B) 8...♕a5!? 9.♕e2 ♖d8 *306*
B1) 10.d3 *306*
B2) 10.♖d1 *307*
C) 8...b6 9.♘c3 *309*
C1) 9...♗a6 *309*
C2) 9...♗b7 10.cxd5 *313*
C21) 10...exd5 *313*
C22) 10...♘xd5 *314*

Chapter 23

1.c4 e6 2.g3 d5 3.♗g2 ♘f6 4.♘f3 ♗e7 5.0–0 0–0 6.b3 c5 7.♗b2 ♘c6 8.e3 d4 9.exd4 cxd4 10.♖e1!
A) 10...d3 *318*
B) 10...♗c5 *320*
C) 10...♘e8 *322*
D) 10...♖e8 11.d3 *324*
D1) 11...♗f8 *325*
D2) 11...♗b4 *327*
D3) 11...♗c5 12.♘e5 ♘xe5 13.♖xe5 *329*
D31) 13...♕c7 *330*
D32) 13...♘d7 *330*

Chapter 24

1.c4 e6 2.g3 d5 3.♗g2 ♘f6 4.♘f3 ♗e7 5.0–0 0–0 6.b3 c5 7.♗b2 ♘c6 8.e3 b6 9.♘c3 dxc4 10.bxc4 ♗b7 11.♕e2
A) 11...♘b4 *336*
B) 11...a6 *339*
C) 11...♕d7 12.♖fd1 *341*
C1) 12...♖ad8 *341*
C2) 12...♖fd8 *344*
D) 11...♖c8 12.♖ac1! *346*
D1) 12...♖c7 *346*
D2) 12...♕c7 *348*

Chapter 25

1.c4 e6 2.g3 d5 3.♗g2 ♘f6 4.♘f3 ♗e7 5.0–0 0–0 6.b3 c5 7.♗b2 ♘c6 8.e3 b6 9.♘c3 ♗b7 10.cxd5 ♘xd5 11.♘xd5 ♕xd5 12.d4!
A) 12...♕d8 13.dxc5 ♗xc5 14.♘e5 *352*
A1) 14...♘xe5 *353*
A2) 14...♕c7!?N *356*
B) 12...♕h5 *357*
C) 12...♕f5 *358*
D) 12...♘a5 *360*
E) 12...♘b4!? *363*
F) 12...♖fd8 *364*
G) 12...♖ad8 13.♘e5 *366*
G1) 13...♕xg2†!? *366*
G2) 13...♕d6 14.dxc5 ♕xc5 15.♘d7! *367*
G21) 15...♕g5 *368*
G22) 15...♕f5 *370*

Chapter 26

1.c4 ♘f6 2.g3 g6 3.♗g2 d5 4.cxd5 ♘xd5 5.♘c3
A) 5...♘xc3 6.bxc3 ♗g7 7.♘f3! 0–0 8.0–0 *376*
A1) 8...♘d7 *378*
A2) 8...c5 *379*
B) 5...♘b6 6.d3! ♗g7 7.♗e3 *383*
B1) 7...h6 *383*
B2) 7...0–0 8.♕d2 *384*
B21) 8...♘c6 *384*
B22) 8...e5 *385*
B23) 8...♖e8 *386*
B24) 8...♘8d7 *387*
B3) 7...♘c6 *389*

Chapter 27

1.c4 ♘f6 2.g3 g6 3.♗g2 ♗g7 4.♘c3 0–0 5.e4 d6 6.♘ge2 c5 7.0–0 ♘c6 8.d3
A) 8...♘e8 9.♗e3 *393*
A1) 9...♘c7 *393*
A2) 9...♘d4 *397*
B) 8...♖b8 9.h3 a6 10.a4 ♘e8 11.♗e3 *398*
B1) 11...♘c7 *399*
B2) 11...♘d4 *401*

Chapter 28

1.c4 f5 2.g3 ♘f6 3.♗g2 e6 4.♘f3 d5 5.0–0
A) 5...c6 6.d3 *406*
A1) 6...♗e7 *406*
A2) 6...dxc4 *408*
B) 5...♗e7 *409*

Chapter 29

1.c4 b6 2.♘c3 ♗b7 3.e4 e6 4.♘ge2
A) 4...♗b4 *412*
B) 4...♘f6 *415*
C) 4...c5 5.g3 *417*
C1) 5...g6 *417*
C2) 5...♘c6 *420*
C3) 5...f5 *420*
C4) 5...h5 *421*
C5) 5...♘f6 *421*



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