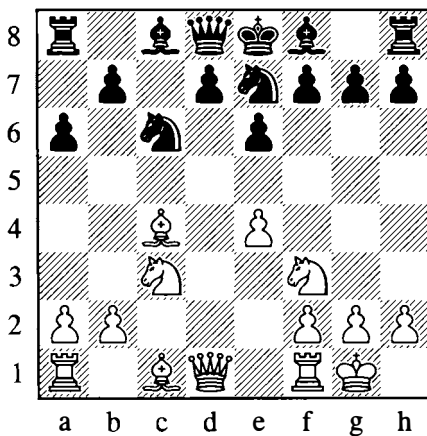


And the rook draws one step closer to its target. 13. ♖d5 beckons, forcing the defender to duck and cover.

Chase #4

Our last example covers a variation favored by many strong grandmasters. Once again, the gambiteer's basic method of attack involves stalking the queen.

1.e4 c5 2.d4 cxd4 3.c3 dxc3 4.♖xc3 ♖c6 5.♗f3 e6 6.♗c4 a6 7.0–0 ♖ge7?!



With this sly move, Black intends to establish a firm grip on the central dark squares with ...♗g6, then finish his development smoothly

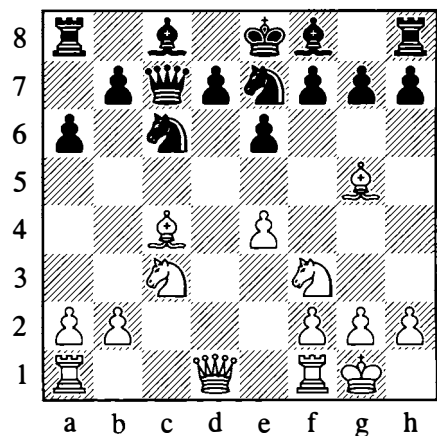
after ...♗e7, castles, ...b5, ...♗b7, and ...d6. The black queen dares not venture out and wisely hides behind a solid pawn shield at d7, thus making the hackneyed ♖e2/♖d1 plan inert. White's standard e4-e5 thrust also becomes impotent, as instead of the pawn badgering the knight on f6, a knight on g6 will pester it. But the proper plan to cause chaos involves chasing the black queen, even though she may seem oh so far away.

8. ♗g5!

After this powerful pin, suddenly Black cannot finish his development routinely. Note that if the black pawn stood at a7, White would already be threatening the knockout strike ♖b5!/♖d6#.

To complete the ...♗e7-g6 slog, Black must brave either 8...f6 or 8...h6, producing subtle weaknesses surrounding his kingside complex. Or the queen can nobly take matters into her own hands with 8...♖c7, although on that square her struggles have already been well documented. White can then either slowly build up the pressure with 9.♖c1, or frenetically continue the chase with 9.♗d5!.

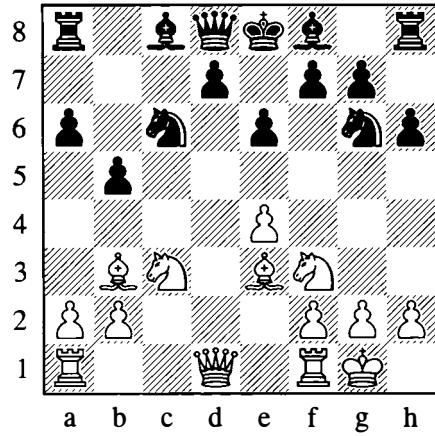
8... ♖c7



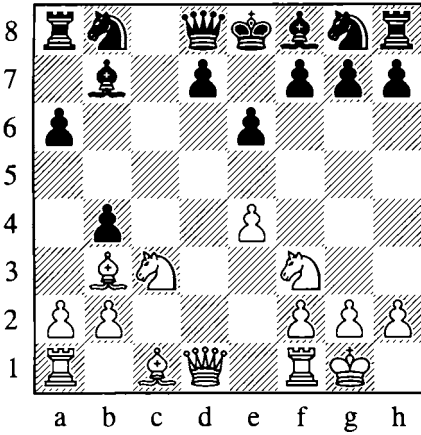
9. ♗d5!

The d5-square – Ring of fire

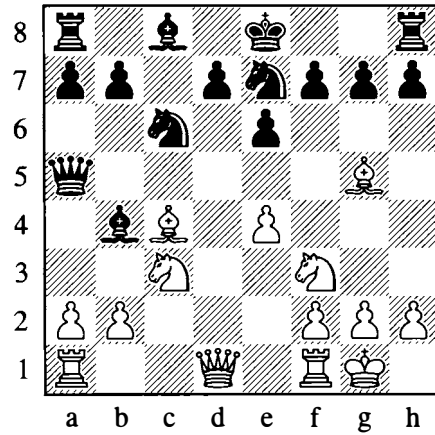
“But didn’t you just hang a piece on d5?” the skeptical reader may ask. “No, no, I merely invested the piece, and shall reap the rewards of my investment soon enough,” the sage gambiteer may retort. Speaking of sacrificing knights (or bishops!) on d5, which one of these plunges on d5 would you make in your own games, and which ones, if any, are objectively sound? Some of these sacrifices on d5 you may already know, some of them you will be meeting for the first time...



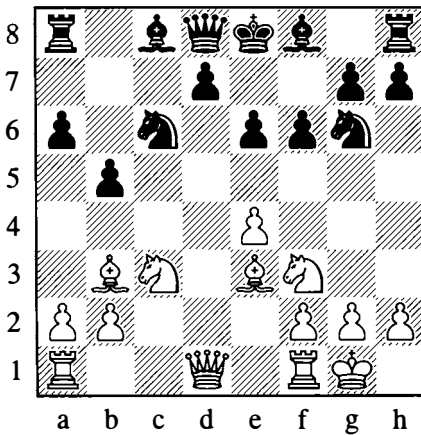
11. ♖d5!?



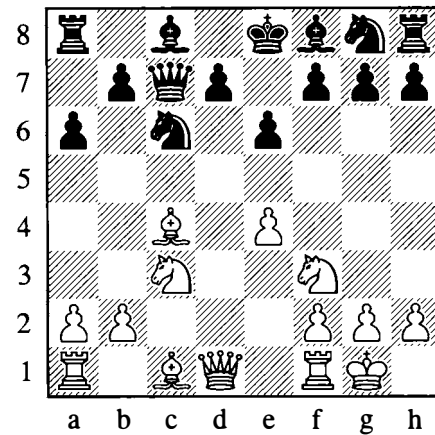
9. ♖d5!?



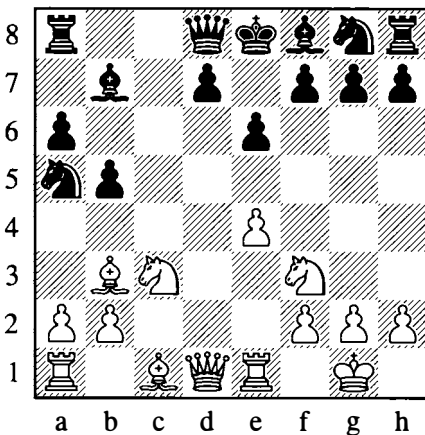
9. ♖d5!?



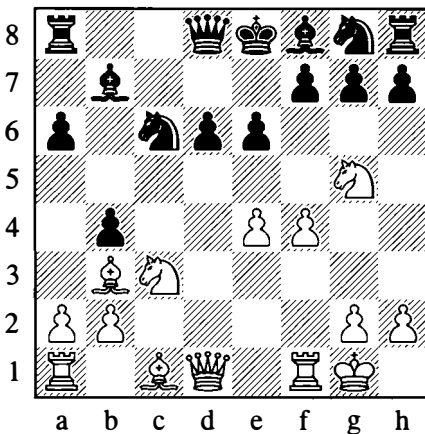
11. ♖d5!?



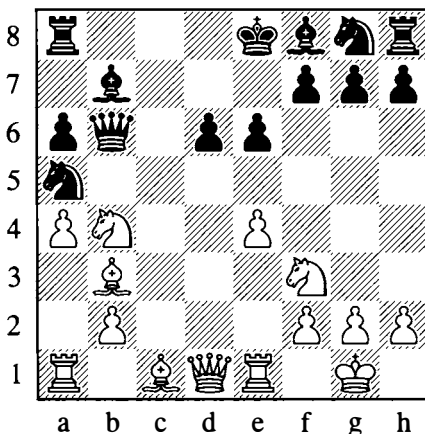
8. ♖d5!?



10. ♖d5!?



11. ♘d5!?



13. ♖d5!?

I hope that after completing this book, you will make at least half of these “leaps of faith” on d5. And how many of these sacrifices are indeed sound? None? Half? For the few of you who guessed *all* of them, you know who you are, and you are correct! Yes, every one of these sacrifices on d5 is completely sound and offers White excellent winning chances.

The d5-square is the Morra Gambit’s ring of fire, the square where all mayhem breaks loose. We have already glossed over how d5 transforms into the featured battleground in the quiet Scheveningen lines when Black blockades with ...e6-e5. However, when a White piece offers its life on d5, the position can devolve into utter chaos. Knowing when a sacrifice on d5 is good, bad, or unclear is what often separates the amateur from the virtuoso Morra gambiteer. Sometimes the sacrifice is not just optional, but forced! In such hair-raising scenarios, tossing a piece into the fire early on will likely lead to a glorious win for White. Not taking the risk, on the other hand, will yield the advantage to Black. Quite a change from conventional thinking – after all, the chess world has enough trouble accepting that White can sacrifice a pawn in the opening stages, and now it must come to terms with a maniacal gambiteer donating a whole piece, often before move 10! Now a few general considerations and rules of thumb before you contemplate taking a dive on d5.

White sacrifices a knight on d5 primarily to rip open the e-file for a direct path to the black king. Refusing the sacrifice is usually untenable, as the monstrous knight stomps on all in its wake the longer it stampedes. After Black accepts the offering, the White e-pawn typically captures back on d5, regaining not only a pawn in the process, but cutting the enemy army in two. Once on d5, the white pawn grows exponentially in