FIGHTING THE LONDON SYSTEM

Kiril Georgiev

Contents

Fighting the London System

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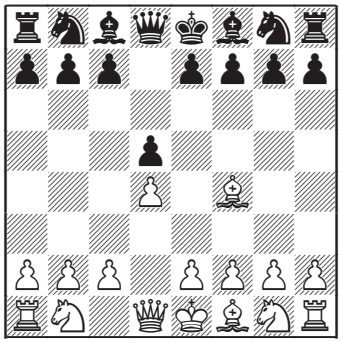
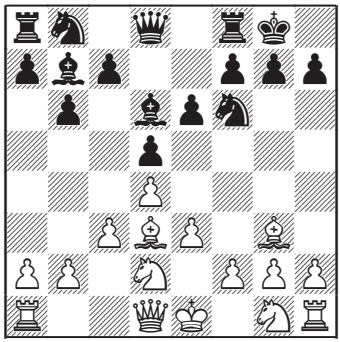
Preface

Are you still curious what are the best openings for White? I have an answer for you: almost any normal development! At depth 50, modern engines evaluate most main lines as 0.00! Suppose that I want to build a repertoire against the Slav. I have tried everything against it and I assure you that the Meran is 0.00. I have also tested the Botvinnik Variation. The most principled lines follow a very narrow path, reaching 0.00 well after move 40. The same applies to the Queen's Gambit etc. Thus any strong player faces the same question before every White game: **how to throw the opponent out of his home preparation as early as possible** without crossing the red line? Sharp openings mean **more** narrow paths, therefore less to memorise. Even a master would be able to hold to a draw a super GM in the Botvinnik.

Lately the chess elite solves the problem by adopting the following **anti-computer strategy**: they choose openings without narrow paths. The more candidate-moves of equal worth on every split, the better! Nobody can memorise at home a variation tree with a huge crown of branches. Even better would be to find systems where the computer tends to underestimate White's chances. One of the most serious candidates for the title "Opening of the future" is the London System, more precisely, the Accelerated London System. It arises after 1.d4 d5 (1...♘f6) 2.♗f4.



It has been played by world champion Carlsen, Kasparov, Kramnik, So, Nakamura... the list could go on several pages. The computer is almost useless if you ask it what is the best answer to it. My favourite example is the following position:



Would you believe that Stockfish 8 at depth 41 offers as best the following line: 8.♖c1!!? ♘e4 9.♘e2 ♘f6!!? 10.♘g1!!?, evaluating it at 0.00!!

The closed centre and virtually no threats make such positions difficult for computer analysis. On any turn both sides have at least 4-5 candidate-moves of equal worth. It is a laborious task to encompass the maze of branches and transpositions that arise. You could easily drown into the sea of variations.

I have endeavoured to select several systems for Black so you could pick out something that suits your taste. My task was to offer clear plans and answers in the "Main Ideas" sections, and a tree-like presentation in the "Step by Step" sections. The annotated games often present back-up lines or additional information which would only distract you from the more important lines.

Note that I'm not biased towards Black's cause. I started playing the London about 10 years ago with White and I have hundreds of blitz and rapid games on the ICC server at highest level (3300+ Elo).

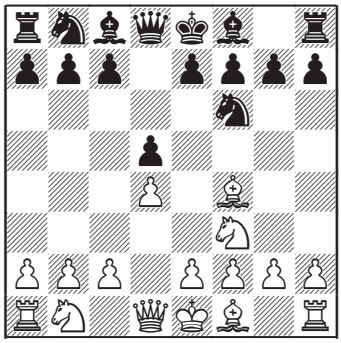
Practical experience shows that many Black players at some point begin testing the London System with White, too. That is possible because this opening counts on understanding the plans and structures. If you feel confident with Black, you should perform well with the other colour, too.

Kiril Georgiev

July 2017

Introduction

I'll start by defining the terms. The classical treatment of the London System is the move sequence 1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.♗f4.



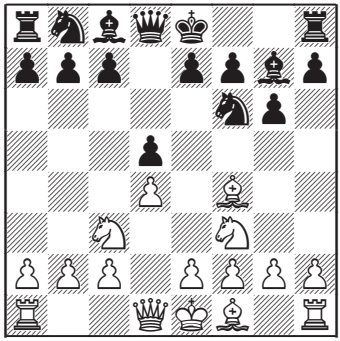
I devote Chapter 7 to this particular order of moves (and to 3.c3).

In the rest of the book I assume that White delays ♘f3 in favour of the more flexible and trendy approach 2.♗f4, followed up by e3 or c3. It is called the Accelerated London System. In most cases the lines interweave and I try to point out the pros and cons of the different move orders.

I also pay attention to schemes with an early 3.♘c3. I have not separated them in an independent chapter, since the character of play greatly depends on Black's choice. For instance, 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♗f4 d5 3.♘c3 is commonly called the Jobava Attack.

I analyse in detail 3...e6 in Chapter 4, **Game 14** Sheng-So, rapid, chess.com 2017. However, Black hasanother good answer, 3...g6, and it is covered in Chapter 2, which deals with the Grünfeld approach.

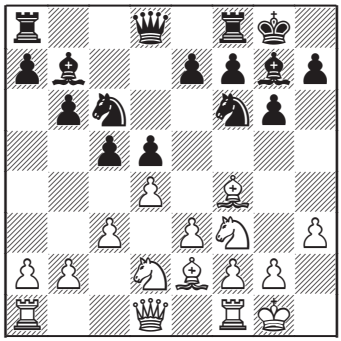
A special case of the Jobava Attack is the Barry Attack – 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 d5 3.♗f4 g6 4.♘c3 ♗g7 – Chapter 2.

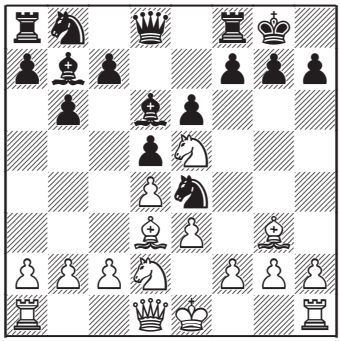


In it the white knight is already on f3. Knowing this system is indispensable if you prefer a repertoire based on the Grünfeld approach.

For the same reason I consider 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 d5 3.♗f4 g6 4.c4 (Chapter 3) – it is a pure Grünfeld, but you cannot not skip it. Thus the first three chapters provide you with everything you would need to meet ♗f4 by ...g6.

Black's main set-up with ...g6 is shown on the following diagram.





It is easy to play as he has a clear plan – to trade light-squared bishops with ...♕c8 and advance on the queenside. The bishop on g7 secures Black's castling position against any sharp attack White could attempt. The Grünfeld approach is not currently in the limelight, but it is very solid and easy to learn.

Chapter 4 presents another rare antidote to the London System – 1.d4 d5 2.♗f4 ♘f6 3.e3 e6 4.♘d2 ♗d6 5.♗g3 b6 (or 5...0-0 6.♗d3 b6). Its main feature is that Black refrains from early ...c5 in favour of the queen's fianchetto. That neutralises practically all the trendy plans White is accustomed to employ. Our typical set-up is:

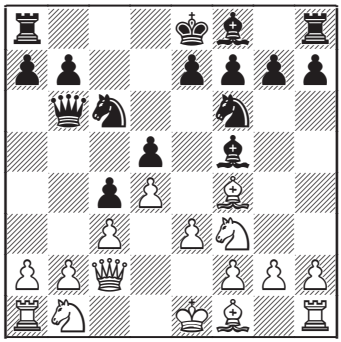
We have avoided both Carlsen's ♗b5 and e3-e4 from White, and ♘e5 is not of any concern to us, as we always have ...f6 or ...f5. We do not have to worry about dxc5, followed by c4, either.

This is my favourite way to play for a win against the London System! It leads to safe, but tangled positions with a lot of pieces. White's strategic tasks are significantly more complex than in the set-ups with ...♗f5. And White is usually completely surprised when facing it!

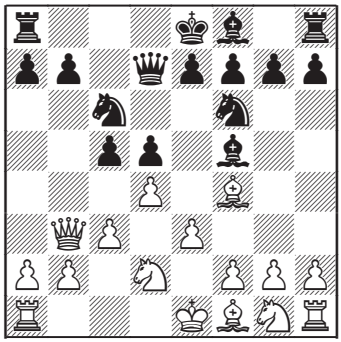
Chapter 5 delves deeper in the same direction, but this time I consider move orders with ...c5 before ...b6. In my opinion, they have no advantages over the lines from Chapter 4, but they are very hot, as all the elite plays them. My "little" trick here is to delay ...♘c6. That effectively sidesteps ♗b5.

The forth plan against the London is too popular to be omitted. It is based on early ...c5, followed by ...♗f5 or ...♗g4. In Chapter 6 I focus on the move order 1.d4 d5 2.♗f4 c5. Black's play is straightforward and it does not require a lot of learning.

Basically, he must be acquainted with the following two positions:

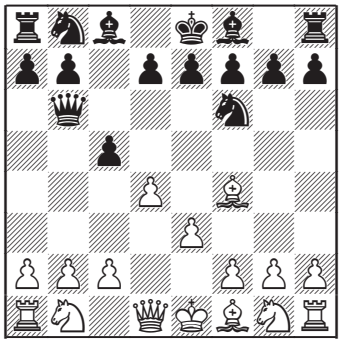


and



The first one could arise if White used the classical move order with ♘f3, while the second is typical for the Accelerated London. In all events, Black does not experience any theoretical problems. In my opinion, play is more boring, compared to the previously mentioned plans.

Finally, Chapter 8 deals with 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♗f4 c5. Of course, Black has an enormous choice of other plans – such as the Queen's Indian approach with ...b6 without ...d5, or the King's Indian set-up with ...d6 with further ...e5. However, I prefer to exploit White's moves more concretely by hitting his sore point – b2 by 2...c5 3.e3 ♕b6. In all the events this queen sortie hampers the enemy normal development.



After 4.♘c3 we can either capture the pawn, allowing repetition of moves, or demonstrate a strong determination with ...4...d6.

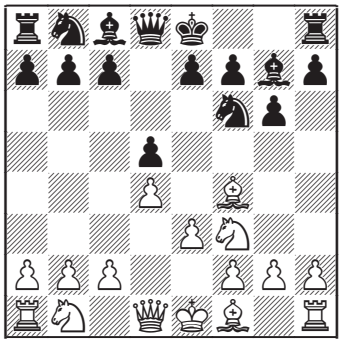
You can start by picking out one of the plans I consider, and then enrich your arsenal with others. In all cases you should be obtaining decent positions in the opening, but you'll play some of them more confidently, depending on your personal style.

Chapter 1. 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 d5 3.♗f4 g6 Main Ideas

Move order

The first three chapters of this book are devoted to the Grünfeld approach towards the London System. I'll consider the move order:

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 d5 3.♗f4 g6 4.e3 ♗g7

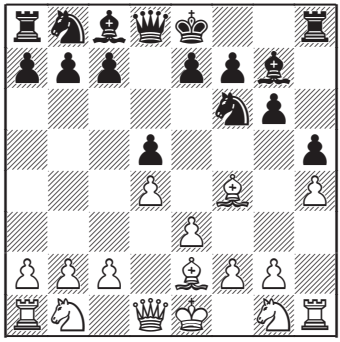


1.d4 d5 2.♗f4 ♘f6 3.e3 g6!? 4.♘f3 ♗g7 leads to the same position.

White cannot extract anything positive from delaying 4.♘f3:

a) 4.♘d2 ♗g7 5.c3 0-0 6.♗d3 c5 7.dxc5 is dubious. Black would get an overwhelming position after 7...♘fd7 8.♘b3 a5 9.a4 e5 10.♗g3 ♕e7 11.♗b5 ♘xc5 12.♕xd5 ♘ba6 13.♗xa6 ♘xa6 14.♘f3 ♗e6 15.♕b5 f6 16.0-0 ♖fc8∓.

b) 4.h4!? ♗g7 5.♗e2 is a more challenging try. I propose not to cede any space and answer 5...h5.



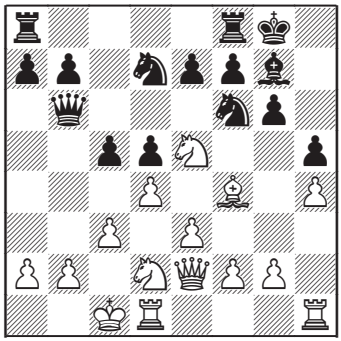
In my opinion, the insertion of h4 h5 may be in Black's favour. In many lines with White's short castling, he can no longer fear the positional threat of g4 which typically earns White more space. Our bishop gets stable stands on f5 or g4. The real test of our set-up should be plans with long castling:

6.c3

6.♘f3 c5 7.0-0 (7.♘bd2 ♕b6) 7...cxd4 8.exd4 ♕b6 9.♘c3 0-0.

6.f3?! c5.

6...c5 7.♘f3 0-0 8.♘bd2 ♗g4!? 9.♘e5 (9.dxc5 ♕c8; 9.0-0 ♕b6 10.♕b3 ♘c6) 9...♗xe2 10.♕xe2 ♘bd7 11.0-0-0 ♕b6!



Black's attack is quick and natural: 12.♘xd7 (12.♘df3 ♖ac8) 12...♘xd7 13.g4 ♖ac8 14.♔b1 hxg4 15.♕xg4 cxd4 16.cxd4 ♕b5 17.♕h3 e5⇄.

I believe that the Grünfeld set-up is one of the most unpleasant weapon against the London – both psychologically and theoretically.

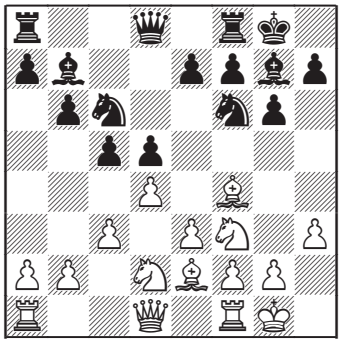
It does require knowledge of the pure Grünfeld line 5.c4 0-0 6.♘c3 c5 (covered in Chapter 3), but on the other hand, it has always been a sideline which brings White a modest 45% in practice. Its theoretical overhead is nothing in comparison to the monstrous amount of variations you would need to swallow before daring into the Grünfeld Exchange System, for example. Besides, the overall effort to master the king's fianchetto against the London is relatively small, as Black's play is surprisingly clear and easy.

Things get even better if you already have the Grünfeld in your repertoire. Then you should consider the following move order: 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 g6!?. Many adepts of the London System hate to play 3.♗f4 here because of 3...d6, so they would have to resort to the Barry Attack 3.♘c3, when 3...d5! immediately evens the chances. We'll discuss it in Chapter 2.

Black's main set-up

White's most popular scheme is to secure his dark-squared bishop by playing h3 early. Then we fianchetto the second bishop to reach the following position:

4.e3 ♗g7 5.h3 0-0 6.♗e2 c5 7.c3 b6! 8.♘bd2 ♗b7 9.0-0 ♘c6



Note two important moments here.

1. After 7.c3, we defended our c5-pawn with 7...b6!

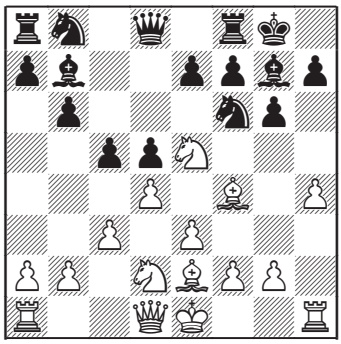
2. We have clearly shown that we were not focused on a plan with ...e5 or we would have prepared it with ...♘fd7. Instead, we want to keep the tension in the centre and prepare ...e5 only if White weakens his kingside: 10.♕b3 ♘d7 11.♖fe1 ♕c8 12.♖ad1 e6, see **Game 1** Pakleza-Bartel, Katowice 2016.

We could meet plans with a4 by the same ...♘d7, ...e5.

Do not close the centre with ...c4 unless you have something concrete in mind.

White saves h3

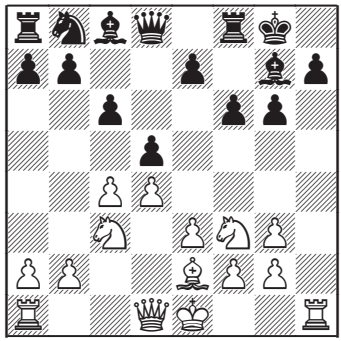
White can deviate from this scenario in various ways. The most challenging plan is to organise an attack on the h-file. His strategic aim is to reach something like the following position:



Although White's attack is not too dangerous, I cannot deny him an initiative. The key point of his idea is the early leap ♘e5. My receipt is to oppose it by playing ♘h5, but not before White had played c3 or ♘bd2.

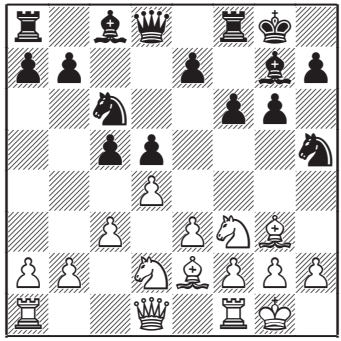
When to play ...♘h5

Suppose we played ...♘h5 too early, White answered ♗e5 and the following position has arisen:



White's knight is active on c3 and that forces Black to take a passive stand with ...e6.

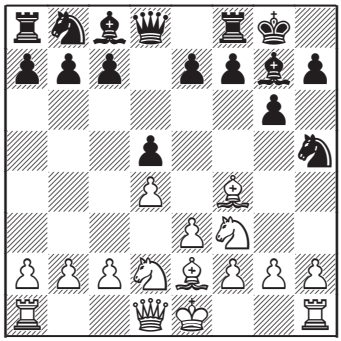
However, if White has already committed his knight to d2, ...♘h5 is a fair option as we would have time to occupy the centre with ...e5:



10...cxd4 11.cxd4 ♘xg3 12.hxg3 e5 (or after some preparation) 13.dxe5 fxe5 14.e4 ♔h8∞.

Commonly the appropriate moment for ...♘h5 is on move 6 or later:

5.♗e2 0-0! 6.♘bd2 (bingo!) 6...♘h5!



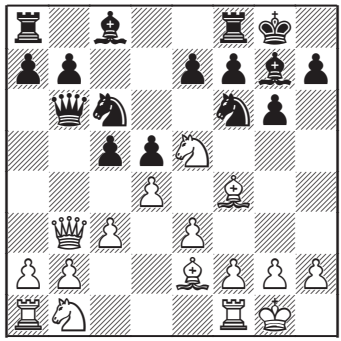
7.♗e5 is no longer attractive due to 7...f6, so White answers 7.♗g5. That eliminates the threat of ♘e5 in view of the fork at f6, and we can comfortably return to our main plan: 7...c5 8.c3 b6.

White plays ♗d3 instead of ♗e2

We follow the same scheme as against ♗e2 – ...c5, ...b6, ...♘c6. If White omits h3, we answer ...♘h5. In general, the development ♗d3 hides less venom than ♗e2, since the bishop does not control h5, blocks the d-file and hampers ♕b3 (in view of the fork ...c4).

White saves ♘bd2

If White leaves his queen's knight on b1 for too long, we could exploit that by hitting b2: 5.♗e2 0-0 6.0-0 c5 7.c3 ♘c6 8.♘e5 ♕b6! 9.♕b3

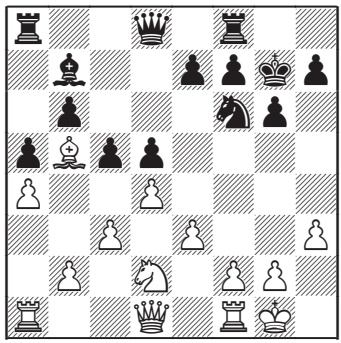


9...c4=. See **Game 2** Michna-Kachiani, Dresden 2014.

To summarise: If White delays h3, we play ...♘h5, and if he delays ♘bd2, we play ...♕b6.

Positional decisions

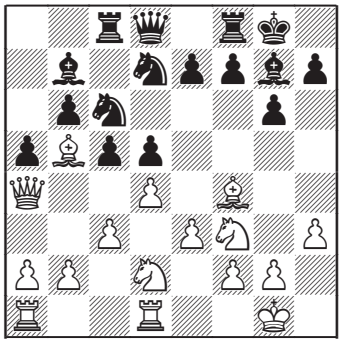
The following examples could help you in practice when you have to take important decisions.



White often displays activity on the queenside. Do not stop a4 with the semi-automatic ...a5. That would open a hole at b5 and would deprive our pawn formation of flexibility. One possible way to exploit it

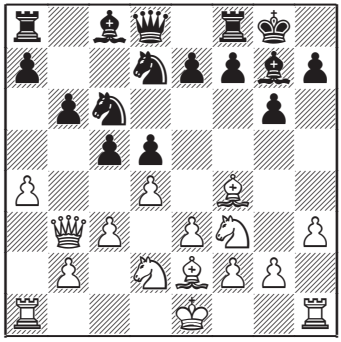
is 15.dxc5 bxc5 16.c4 with the better pawn structure.

Here is another example:



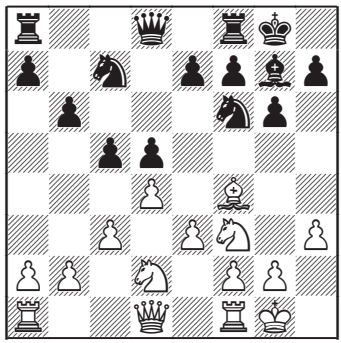
13.c4! cxd4 14.cxd5 ♘c5?! 15.dxc6 ♘xa4 16.cxb7 ♖c7 17.♗xa4 ♖xb7 18.exd4±, Spark 1.0-Hiarcs 13.2, 2011.

Instead, it is better to counter the enemy's flank assault with a break in the centre:



Korobov-Edouard, Dubai 2014, saw 10...e5 and Black had nice compensation for the pawn.

Do not trade light-squared bishops too early. This piece may be passive, but it hampers White's active plans with e4 or c4. Furthermore, our knight would take a really bad place on a6 instead of his natural stand on c6:



11.dxc5 bxc5 12.♗e5 ♘e6 13.c4.

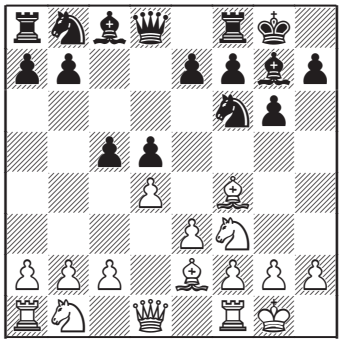
The plan with ...♗b7-a6 would be justified at a later stage, when Black had consolidated and could enable the exchange with ♕d8-c8.

Theoretical status

This set-up has remained untouched by the current burst of popularity of the London System. It is difficult to find meaningful theory on it. Ten years ago Prié was quite confident about White's chances after his two wins against Boudre. He then wrote for *ChessPublishing.com* about 3...g6: "Although the way to combat this set-up is far from evident for the first player, it is reputed to be dubious for the fianchettoed side because of the dark-squared dragon spitting his craving for space against the heat-resistance of the c3-d4-e3 wall."

I like the emotion, but the bitter truth is somewhat different. Time has passed, and White players have come to realise that the pride of the London System, the d3-bishop, is also biting on granite against the heat-resistance of the h7-g6-f7 wall. That effectively neutralises White's play on the kingside while Black, as a rule, remains more active in the centre thanks to his c5-d5 pawns.

Sedlak in *Winning With the Modern London System*, 2016, bases his White repertoire on 5.♗e2 0-0 6.0-0 c5



7.c3 ♘c6 8.♘e5 ♕b6 9.♕b3, but he does not consider 9...c4 at all.

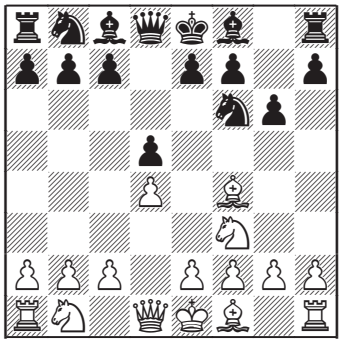
Interestingly, Romero and *De Prado in The Agile London System*, 2016, promote the same variation, but propose 7.♘bd2 instead of 7.c3. However, they do not even mention the most logical answer 7...♘c6, and 7...♕b6!? (my sign) deserved just "8.dxc5 ♕xb2 9.♗e5=".

It is indicative that both authors claim that the early h3 is "just a waste of time", but completely fail (or avoid) to analyse Black's most principled retort to the lines they advocate.

I encourage you to try yourself the Grünfeld set-up. You will be surprised how easy and natural Black's play is.

Chapter 1. 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 d5 3.♗f4 g6 Step by Step

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 d5 3.♗f4 g6



4.e3

4.♘bd2 ♗g7

There is no point to deviate with 4...♘h5?! 5.♗e5 f6 6.♗g3 ♘xg3 7.hxg3 c6 8.e4.

5.♘e5?!

5.c4?! c5 6.dxc5 0-0 7.e3 ♘bd7 is pleasant for Black.

5.e3! transposes to 5.♘bd2.

5...♘h5! 6.♗g3 c5 7.c3 ♕b6 takes over the initiative.

4...♗g7

It is very interesting to investigate 4...c5!?, hoping for 5.c3 ♘c6.

A. 5.h3; **B.** 5.♘bd2; **C.** 5.♗e2; **D.** 5.♗d3.

5.♘c3 is the subject of Chapter 2.

5.c4 is covered in Chapter 3.

5.c3 should transpose to other lines after 5...0-0.

Black could also try 5...♘h5?!.

Commonly this move offers White a slight initiative after 6.♗e5 f6 7.♗g3 ♘xg3 8.hxg3, due to the possibility of pressurising the centre with c4, ♕b3. The innocuous 5.c3 makes this plan less efficient and should not cause Black serious trouble. For instance: 8...e5 9.c4 (9.dxe5 fxe5 10.e4 c6 was fine for Black in Suvrajit-Ganguly Mumbai 2003.) 9...exd4 10.♕xd4 ♘c6 11.♕xd5 ♕xd5 12.cxd5 ♘b4 13.♘a3 ♘xd5 14.♗c4 ♘b6 15.♘b5 c6 16.♘d6+ ♔e7=.

More testing is 6.♗g5! h6 7.♗h4 g5 8.♘e5 ♘f6 9.♗g3 ♘e4 10.♘d2 ♘xg3 11.hxg3 and the open h-file assures White of the initiative, Skoberne-Beliavsky, Bled 2016.

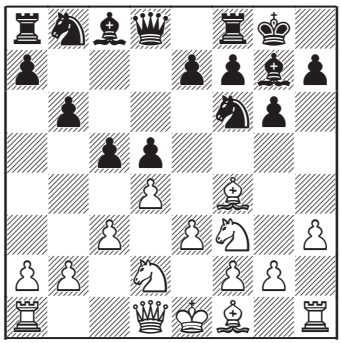
A. 5.h3 0-0 6.♘bd2 c5

When the queen's knight goes to d2, we could no longer fear c4. That allows us to postpone the attack on the centre and

fianchetto our bishop first – 6...b6 7.c3 ♗b7 8.♗e2 and now it would be best to return to our main set-up with 8...c5, as 8...♘bd7 9.0-0 ♘e4 10.a4 c5 11.a5 would give the opponent a slight initiative.

7.c3 b6!

I do not see any reason to play 7...♘c6?! although it is as popular as 7...b6. First of all, 8.♗e2 ♘d7 9.0-0 e5 10.dxe5 ♘dxe5 11.♘xe5 ♘xe5 12.♘f3 was a tad better for White in Dominguez-Mamedyarov, Doha 2016. And second, after 8.dxc5!? a5 9.a4 ♘d7 10.♘b3 e5 11.♗g5, Pomes-Lautier, Terrassa 1991, Black still has to prove that his centre is worth a pawn.



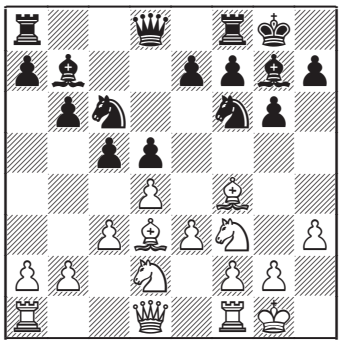
8.a4

This move has been played recently by Nakamura and Korobov. It aims to discourage 8...♗a6 whereupon White would take on a6 in one leap. Note that I do not recommend this exchange even after:

8.♗d3

Although the ABC book teaches us to trade this "bad" bishop in such positions, White would get some play after 8...♗a6 9.♗xa6 ♘xa6 10.0-0 ♘c7, Anikonov-Dreev, Khanty-Mansiysk 2016, 11.dxc5!? bxc5 12.♗e5 ♘e6 13.c4. Instead, we should adhere to another rule, namely to put our pieces on good places near the centre:

8...♘c6 (or 8...♗b7 9.0-0 ♘c6) 9.0-0 ♗b7



The "bad" b7-bishop would become excellent should White execute his only active plan based on e3-e4. Furthermore, it would protect our central pawn in the event we push ...e5 ourselves. However, I consider this break not too wise as it would not improve our chances in any way. It would be better to manoeuvre in the centre and on the queenside, keeping ...e5 in reserve against a possible White's expansion on the kingside. Of course, if White presented us with a couple of tempi like in the game Vazquez-Stany, Roquetas de Mar 2017, we might "concede" to push ...e5:

10.♗h2 ♘d7 11.♗b5 a6 12.♗e2 e5 13.dxe5 ♘dxe5 14.♘xe5 ♘xe5 15.♘f3 ♘c6 16.♘e1 ♘e5 17.♘f3, when 17...♘d7 would have preserved slightly the better chances.

A more natural approach for White is to bring his rooks in the centre:

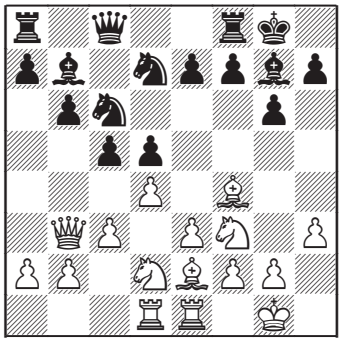
10.♕e2 ♘d7 11.♖ad1 ♖e8 12.♖fe1 with a balanced game. We could chose virtually any natural move here – 12...e6, 12...f5, or open the centre with 12...e5 13.dxe5 ♘dxe5 14.♘xe5 ♘xe5 15.♗b5 ♖e7=.

8.♗e2 is similar, but it allows White to play ♕b3 at some point since ...c4 would not be a fork: 8...♗b7 9.0-0 (9.♘e5 ♘fd7=) 9...♘c6 10.♕b3

10.a4 transposes to the main line.

10.♘e5 ♘xe5 11.♗xe5 ♘d7 12.♗xg7 ♔xg7 13.f4 (13.a4 e5=) 13...♕c7=.

10...♘d7 11.♖fe1 ♕c8 12.♖ad1



Both sides have no weaknesses. Black could boast with a slightly better centre due to the active pawn on c5, but his pieces have defensive functions. In near future ...e5 should unload the tension, but it is not obligatory at all. In practice Black prefers to wait – see **Game 1** Pakleza-Bartel, Katowice 2016.

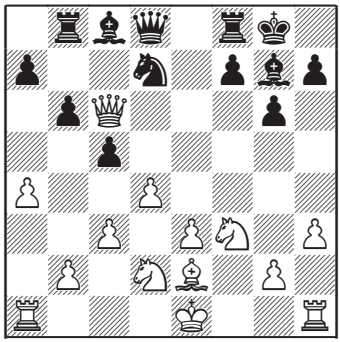
8...♘c6 9.♗d3

9.♘e5 ♘xe5 10.♗xe5 ♘d7 11.♗xg7 ♔xg7 12.♗e2 ♕c7 13.a5 ♖b8 14.axb6 axb6 15.0-0 ♗b7 16.♕c2 ♖a8= occurred in the correspondence game Hugo-Solar, 2014.

9.♗e2 ♘d7 10.♕b3 e5

10...♗b7 was also possible, as 11.♕xd5?! runs into 11...cxd4 12.exd4 ♘xd4 13.♕xb7 ♘c2+ 14.♔f1 ♘c5.

11.♕xd5 exf4 12.♕xc6 fxe3 13.fxe3 ♖b8



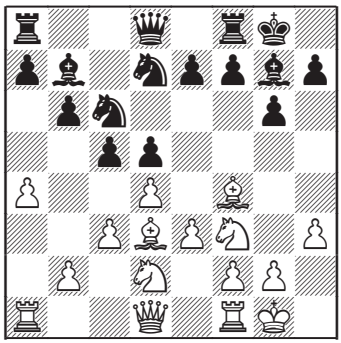
Objectively, Black's compensation may be enough just for maintaining the balance. However, in a practical game the cost of his mistakes is lower and the 2700 White player Korobov lost in 32 moves against Edouard in Dubai 2014. The game went 14.0-0 ♘f6 15.♖ae1 ♕e7 16.♗d3 ♗b7 17.♕b5∞.

More simple was 15...♗b7 16.♕b5 ♗h6 17.♗c4 a6 18.♕b3 b5 19.axb5 axb5 20.♗xb5 cxd4 21.exd4 ♗a6 22.c4 ♗xb5 23.cxb5 ♕d5= or 15...♗d7 16.♕d6 ♗xa4 17.♕xd8 ♖fxd8 18.♖a1 ♗e8 19.♖xa7 ♘d5=.

9...♘d7

This move order prevents 9...♗b7 10.♘e5 which should not be a cause of concern for us anyway. We could choose between 10...♘xe5 11.♗xe5 a5!? (11...♘d7) 12.0-0 e6 13.♖e1 ♕e7 14.♗e2 ♘d7=, 10...♘d7, 10...a5, and 10...e6.

10.0-0 ♗b7



11.♗g5

Nakamura opted for 11.♗h2, intending to meet 11...e5 by 12.e4?

12.♘xe5 ♘dxe5 13.dxe5 ♘xe5 14.♗e2 ♖e8 15.♘f3= was called for.

12...dxe4!

Yu Yangyi in Doha rapid 2016, actually answered 12...exd4 13.exd5 ♘ce5 14.♘xe5 ♘xe5 15.♗xe5 ♗xe5 16.c4 a5∓, but failed to break in and the game ended in a draw.

13.♘xe4 cxd4 14.♘d6 dxc3 15.bxc3 ♘a5∓.

The immediate 11.e4 dxe4 12.♗xe4 cxd4 13.♘xd4 is dubious. Besides 13...♕c8=, Black could take over the initiative with 13...♗xd4!? 14.cxd4 ♘f6 15.♗xc6 ♗xc6 16.♗e3 ♖c8.

11...♕c7

Black is consistent – he aims to fully equalize with ...e5. 11...f6 was more direct, but after all, it weakens the light squares, e.g. 12.♗h4 e5 13.a5!?∞.

Perhaps he could prepare the same idea with ...f6 by 11...a6!? 12.♖e1 f6.

12.♗e2 e5 13.dxe5 ♘dxe5=, Korobov-Yu Yangyi, blitz, Doha 2016.

B. 5.♘bd2 0-0

5...♘h5 6.♗e5 f6 7.♗g3 ♘xg3 8.hxg3

is better for White. Although the queen's knight could have been more active on c3 instead of d2, the pressure on d5 after c4 would assure him of the initiative.

6.c3

6.♗e2 ♘h5 – see line C.

6.♗d3 c5 7.c3 ♘c6 – see line D.

6...b6

6...♘h5 is possible, but I prefer to delay it until the next move. 7.♗g5 h6 8.♗h4 ♘d7

Our position will break apart after 8...♘c6?! 9.h3 f5 10.♗d3 ♕d6 11.♖g1 e5 12.g4 ♘f4 13.exf4 e4 14.g5 h5 15.♗c2±.

9.h3 c5 10.♕c2 ♘hf6 11.♗e2 b6 12.0-0 ♗b7 13.b4 and White's centre is more fluid.

6...c5 is a little shaky. Perhaps White should play first 7.♗e2!?, intending to capture on c5 on the next turn.

7.dxc5 was roughly balanced after 7...♗g4 8.♗e2 ♘bd7 9.♘b3 ♖c8 10.0-0 ♘xc5 11.♘xc5 ♖xc5 12.♗e5, Taimanov-E.Geller, Leningrad 1971, when best was 12...♘e4=.

7...b6

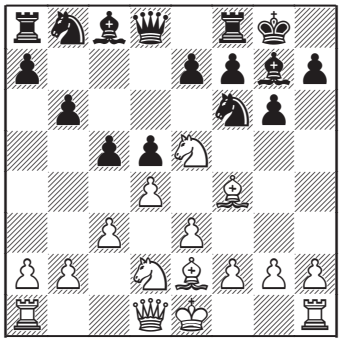
7...♘c6 is enterprising, but risky. Nisipeanu in 2016 took the pawn: 8.dxc5 ♘h5 9.♗g5 h6 10.♗h4 g5 11.♗g3 ♘xg3 12.hxg3, but Graf's 12...b6!? probably surprised him and he quickly signed a draw after 13.♗b5?! ♕c7 14.♕c2 ♖d8 15.e4.

Critical is 13.cxb6 ♕xb6 14.♕b3±.

7...♘bd7 8.h3 throws us out of our main set-up in which we aim for ...♘c6+♘fd7.

7...♕b6 8.♕b3 is also not in my taste when White has not spent a tempo on h3. For instance, 8...♘c6 9.♕xb6 axb6 10.♗c7 practically forces 10...cxd4 11.exd4 ♗f5. White will not take on b6, but will castle and try to exploit later Black's split queenside pawns.

8.♘e5!?



White may not have anything tangible, but at least he has gained the psychological initiative. He occupied the e5-square and now he will launch the h-pawn – 8...♘bd7 9.h4 or 8...♘fd7 9.h4 (9.♘df3 ♘xe5 10.♘xe5 f6 11.♘d3 ♘d7) 9...♘xe5 10.♗xe5 h5 11.♗xg7 ♔xg7 12.dxc5 bxc5 13.c4.

This line explains why we should prepare our action in the centre by 6...b6.

7.♗e2

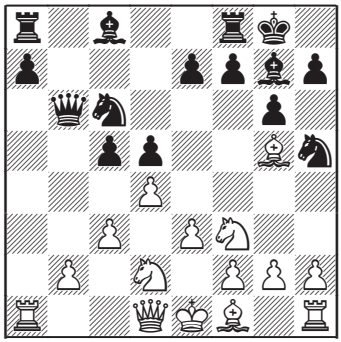
7.h3 leads us straight into line A.

7.♗d3 is popular, but the bishop looks misplaced there. It supports neither h2-h4-h5 nor ♗e2-f3. Furthermore, a possible ...c4 would be with tempo. The only reasonable idea could be to fight for the queenside light squares with 7...c5 (For consistency sake, we may include 7...♘h5 8.♗g5, as against 7.♗e2, and only now 8...c5.) 8.0-0 ♗b7 9.♕e2 ♘c6, when I do not see a more useful move than 10.h3, which transposes to line A.

7.a4 is hardly White's most useful move so early in the opening. We could follow as in the main line – 7...♘h5

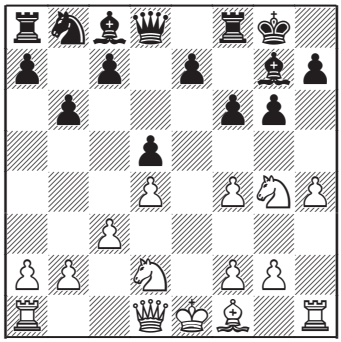
7...a5 only creates a hole on b5 – 8.h3 ♘bd7 9.♗b5 ♗b7 10.0-0 ♘e4 11.♖e1 ♘xd2 12.♕xd2 f6 13.♗g3±, Prié-Boudre, Gap 2007.

8.♗g5 c5 9.a5 ♘c6 10.axb6 ♕xb6



White is lagging behind in development and must be careful. He still has a narrow path to equality – 11.♕b3 ♕xb3 12.♘xb3 h6 13.♗b5! ♘xd4 14.cxd4 hxg5 15.♘xc5 g4 16.♘e5 ♗xe5 17.dxe5 ♖b8=.

7.♘e5 is an attempt to execute the active plan ♗e2, h4. We should exploit the absence of h3 with 7...♘h5! 8.h4 (what else?!) 8...♘xf4 9.exf4 f6 10.♘g4



Black has the bishop pair and no serious weaknesses. He has at least two promising ways to counter-attack:

a) 10...e5! 11.fxe5 ♕e7 12.♘e3 (12.♗e2 ♗xg4; 12.h5 fxe5 13.dxe5 ♗xe5 14.♘xe5 ♘d7) 12...fxe5 13.♘xd5 ♕f7↑.

b) 10...c5 11.h5 cxd4 12.cxd4 ♕d6, intending to defend g6 with the queen, e.g. 13.hxg6 hxg6 14.♗d3 ♗xg4 15.♕xg4 f5 16.♕h4 ♘c6 17.♘f3 ♔f7, or 13.♘e3 ♘c6 14.♘f3 ♗d7!? (14...e5 15.dxe5 ♕b4+=) 15.hxg6 hxg6 16.♖c1 e6 17.g3 ♔f7 18.♗d3 ♕b4+ 19.♕d2 ♖h8=.

7...♘h5!?

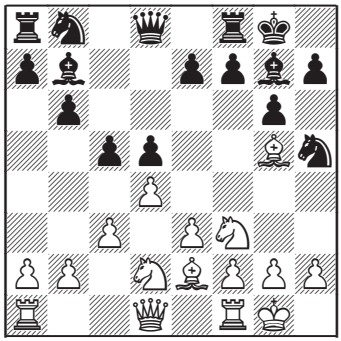
My idea is to drag the bishop to g5 and leave it there. That deprives White of his main plan based on ♘e5, which would be forked with ...f6. Thus we spoil his plan of attacking with ♘e5, h4.

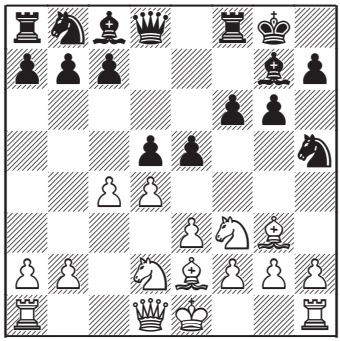
I do not like the idea of 7...♗a6 since 8.♗xa6 ♘xa6 9.♕a4 ♕c8 10.b4 leaves us with a bad piece on a6 and no active plan.

8.♗g5

8.♗e5 f6 9.♗g3 ♘xg3 10.hxg3 e6 (10...e5!? 11.c4 e4) 11.c4 a5 12.♖c1 ♗b7 13.0-0 c6 builds up a Stonewall-like defence line, e.g. 14.♖e1 f5= or 14.cxd5 exd5 15.e4 ♗h6 16.♖e1 ♘a6 17.♗f1 dxe4 18.♖xe4 ♘b4=.

8...c5 9.0-0 ♗b7





Black has successfully neutralised the most dangerous plans with ♘e5 and h4, e4 is also under control. White has nothing left, but to display some activity on the queenside with b4, a4, which will result in closing it if we answer ...c4. For instance:10.♗h4 ♘d7 (Another decent set-up is 10...♘c6 11.♖b1 ♕d6.) 11.a4 a6 12.b4 c4 13.♕c2 ♘hf6=.

C. 5.♗e2 0-0 6.0-0

6.♘c3 ♗g4 is line C of Chapter 2.

6.♘e5 is rather pointless since after 6...♘fd7 White has nothing better than returning to f3. However, 6...♘e4! 7.f3 ♘d6 is more testing.

6.♘bd2 is best met by 6...♘h5

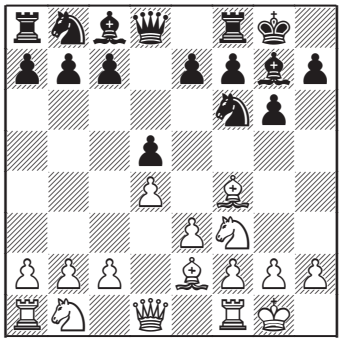
6...c5 7.c3 b6 (7...♘c6 8.dxc5±) 8.♘e5!?, intending h2-h4, leads to a position I commented in line B, 6...c5.

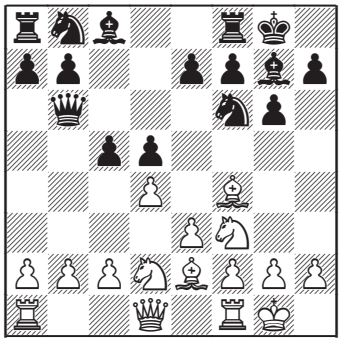
7.♗g5

7.♗e5 f6 8.♗g3 e5 9.c4 9...e4 (It looks more consistent to open up the centre with 9...♘xg3 10.hxg3 exd4 11.♘xd4 c5 12.♘4b3 d4 13.exd4 cxd4 14.0-0 ♘c6, but our limit here is a draw, e.g. 15.♗f3 a5 16.♗d5+ ♔h8 17.♗xc6 bxc6 18.♘f3 f5 19.♘bxd4 f4 20.gxf4 ♖xf4 21.♘e2 ♖f8 22.♕xd8 ♖xd8 23.♖ad1 ♗g4 24.b3 ♔g8 25.♘g3 a4∞.) 10.♘g1 ♘xg3 11.hxg3 c6 12.♘h3 g5 reminds me of the Keres Attack in the English. The same position might arise from line B, where Black's "extra" tempo of ...b6 actually compromises his set-up due to the weakness of the c6-square.

White lacks space, but he does not have any weaknesses. We should play energetically on the kingside: 13.g4 h6! 14.f3 (14.♖c1 f5) 14...f5 15.gxf5 exf3 16.gxf3 ♗xf5 17.♕b3 ♖e8 18.♘f2 ♘a6 19.cxd5 cxd5 20.e4 ♗g6=.

7...c5 8.c3 b6 – play has transposed to line B.





6...c5!

We no longer fear the attack with h2-h4-h5, but on the other hand, White preserved the possibility of playing c4, ♘c3, e.g. 6...b6 7.c4 ♗b7 8.♘c3.

6...♘h5 is dubious owing to the same reason – 7.♗e5! f6 8.♗g3 ♘xg3 9.hxg3 e5 10.c4 e4 11.♘fd2 c5 12.♘b3±.

Therefore, we should create the threat ...♕b6 in order to narrow the enemy's choice.

7.c3

7.♘c3 cxd4 8.exd4 ♘c6 9.♘e5 ♗f5 is perfectly comfortable.

7.♘bd2 offers us an additional possibility – 7...♕b6

Note that 7...♘c6! transposes after 8.c3 ♕b6 or 8.dxc5 ♘h5 9.c3 d4!. Only 8.♘e5 is of independent significance, but it hardly deserves any attention – 8...cxd4 9.♘xc6 bxc6 10.exd4 ♕b6.

8.c4

8.♖b1 ♘c6 9.c3?! drops the b2-pawn owing to 9...cxd4 10.exd4 ♗f5.

Romero mentions 8.dxc5 ♕xb2 9.♗e5=. Indeed, 9...♕b4 10.c4 ♕xc5 11.♘b3 ♕c6 12.♖c1 ♘bd7 13.♗f4 promises White just enough compensation for the pawn although Black could play this for a win.

8.♕c1 puts White on the defensive after 8...♘c6 – 9.c3 ♘h5.

8...cxd4 9.♘xd4 (9.exd4 ♕xb2) 9...♘c6 10.♘xc6 bxc6=, Pecorelli-Fedorowicz, Havana 1985.

7...♘c6

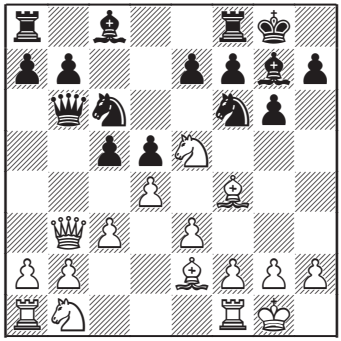
7...♕b6 8.♕b3 c4 does not transposes as after 9.♕a3 ♘c6 White has 10.b3!, which is more useful than Dreev's 10.♘bd2.

8.♘bd2

8.dxc5?! surrenders the centre after 8...♘e4 – this is the price of delaying ♘bd2!

8.h3 b6 9.♘bd2 ♗b7 is covered in line A.

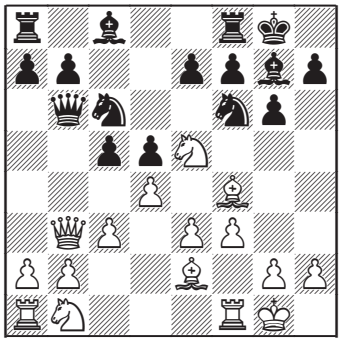
8.♘e5 ♕b6 9.♕b3 brings White excellent results, but we have good antidotes:



9...c4

The game Berkes-Yu Yangyi, Moscow 2017, went 9...♘xe5?! 10.♗xe5 ♘d7, when instead of 11.♗xg7 White had 11.♕xb6! axb6 12.♗c7 e5 (12...c4 13.♘a3) 13.♖d1 exd4 14.cxd4 cxd4 15.exd4 ♘f6 16.♘c3 ♗e6 17.♗xb6±.

Sedlak considers 9...♘e4. I'm not sure why Black should spend a tempo on provoking 10.f3 (10.♕xb6 axb6 11.♘d3 c4 12.♘b4=), but it looks enough for equality: 10...♘f6 [10...♘d6 11.♖d1 ♘a5 12.♕xb6 (12.♕xd5 cxd4 13.b4 ♘c6 14.exd4 ♘xe5 15.♗xe5 ♗e6 16.♕c5 ♖fc8 17.♕xb6 axb6 18.♗xg7 ♔xg7 19.a3 ♗f5 20.♗d3 ♗xd3 21.♖xd3 ♖a6 22.♘d2 b5=) 12...axb6 13.♘a3 g5 14.♗g3 ♗e6 15.♘b5 ♗xe5=.]



11.♕xb6 [11.♘d3 c4 12.♕xb6 axb6 13.♘b4 ♗f5! 14.a3 (14.♘d2 ♘xb4 15.cxb4 ♘d7↑) 14...♘xb4 15.cxb4 ♗xb1 16.♖axb1 b5=] 11...axb6 12.g4 ♘xe5 13.♗xe5 ♗d7=.

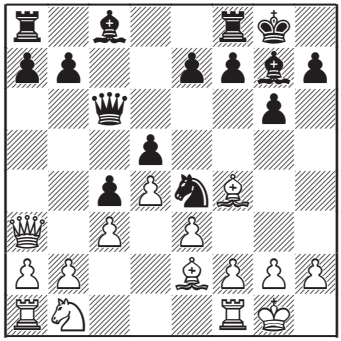
10.♕a3

10.♕xb6 axb6 11.♘d2 b5 12.a3 is comfortable for Black. This pawn structure is often met in the London System so I devoted to it a detailed analysis. See **Game 2** Michna-Kachiani, Dresden 2014.

10...♘e4!?

This is more challenging than 10...♘xe5 11.♗xe5 ♗g4, BlackMamba 2.0-Komodo 6, 2015, when 12.♗xf6 ♗xe2 13.♗xg7 ♔xg7 14.♖e1 ♗d3 15.♘d2 ♖fd8 16.e4 would have been level. The game went instead 12.♖e1 ♗xe2 13.♖xe2 ♖fe8 14.♘d2 (14.b3 ♕c6 15.♘d2 cxb3∓) 14...♕c6 15.♖c1 ♗f8 16.b3 ♘d7 17.♕b2 ♘xe5 18.dxe5 whereas 18...cxb3! 19.axb3 a5↑ should be pleasant for Black who has a bishop in an asymmetric position.

11.♘xc6 (11.f3 ♘d6 12.♘xc6 bxc6) 11...♕xc6 (11...bxc6∞)



It turns out that Black has enough compensation for the pawn after 12.♕xe7 g5 13.♗g3 because of his space advantage. For instance:

13...f5 14.♗f3 f4 15.exf4 ♖f7 16.♕d8+ ♖f8 is a draw while 16.♕a3?? loses to 16...♗f8 17.b4 gxf4 18.♗h4 a5 19.♕c1 ♕h6, or:

13...♗f5 14.b3 b5 15.a4 a6 16.bxc4 bxc4 17.a5 ♖ae8 18.♕c7 ♕a8 19.♗f3 ♖e6 20.♗xe4 ♗xe4 21.♖c1 ♗d3.

8...♘h5

This is our typical reaction when White tries to save h3.

8...b6, as in line A, is also possible, even though Black is practically a tempo down: 9.♘e5

Or 9.dxc5 bxc5 10.c4 ♘h5 11.cxd5 ♘xf4 12.dxc6 ♘xe2+ 13.♕xe2 ♕b6.

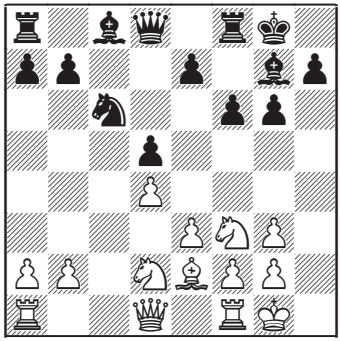
9...♗b7 10.b4 c4 11.♘xc6 ♗xc6 12.a4 a6 13.a5 (13.e4 dxe4) 13...b5 14.♗e5 ♗h6=.

9.♗e5

9.♗g5 h6 10.♗h4 g5 11.♘e1?! (11.♗g3 ♘xg3=) runs into 11...cxd4! 12.cxd4 ♘f4!.

9.dxc5 d4 10.cxd4 ♘xf4 11.exf4 ♘xd4 12.♘c4, Arnold-Spiriev, Hungary 1989, 12...♕d5! regains the pawn and the bishop pair fully compensate the split pawns after 13.♘xd4 ♕xd4 14.♕xd4 ♗xd4 15.c6 bxc6 16.♖fd1 c5=.

9...f6 10.♗g3 cxd4 11.cxd4 ♘xg3 12.hxg3



It is clear that Black has solved the opening problems. He could quietly ditch himself behind the pawns, but the bishop pair dictates to open up the centre with 12...e5!? 13.dxe5 fxe5 14.e4 ♔h8∞.

D. 5.♗d3 0-0 6.0-0

After 6.♘bd2, we attack the centre with 6...c5 7.c3 ♘c6

In contrast with line C, we are not afraid of 8.dxc5 as 8...♘fd7 threatens to fork a piece with ...e7-e5-e4.

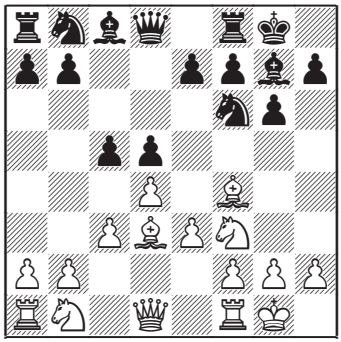
8.0-0

8.♘e5 allows 8...♘h5.

8.h3 b6 achieves the set-up from line A, although even better is to save ...b6 in favour of 8...♘d7. The recent game Jojua-Mchedlishvili, Tbilisi 2017, lasted only 3 more moves: 9.0-0 e5 10.dxe5 ♘dxe5 11.♗e2 ♘xf3+ ½-½.

8...♘h5, transposing to the main line.

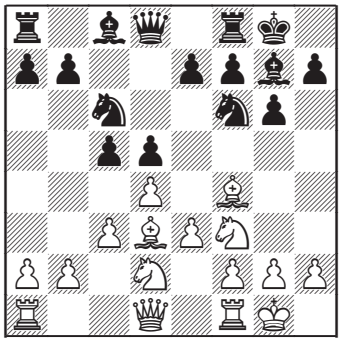
6...c5 7.c3



7...♘c6

Black could exploit the placement of the bishop on d3 to gain space with 7...♕b6!? 8.♕b3 c4 as White cannot answer 9.♕a3. From a theoretical standpoint, this is perhaps the best continuation. With the knight still on b1, White cannot defend the b2-pawn with ♖b1 and has to trade queens. The position after 9.♕xb6 axb6 10.♗c2 b5! (The trick is that 11.♘a3?! would run into 11...b4! 12.cxb4 ♘a6 13.b5 ♘b4 14.♖fc1 ♗d7 15.♘e5 ♗e6 16.h3 ♖fc8 with a strong pressure on the queenside.) 11.♘bd2 ♗f5 is fine for Black although a little too static to play it for a win.

8.♘bd2



8...♘h5

This is the easiest way to win the battle for the e5-square. 8...♘fd7 is not so effective in view of 9.♗b5.

9.♗g5 ♕d6

Two computer games finished in a draw after 9...h6 10.♗h4 ♕b6 11.♖b1 cxd4, but I would not alter the pawn structure in this way since Black would remain without the plan of pushing ...e5.

10.dxc5

White cannot keep the tension in the centre with 10.♖e1 because 10...e5 11.dxe5 ♘xe5 12.♘xe5 ♕xe5 equalizes at once – 13.♗h4 ♗f6 (13...♕c7 14.e4 d4 15.cxd4 ♗xd4=) 14.♗xf6 ♘xf6 15.e4 dxe4 16.♗xe4 ♕g5=.

10...♕xc5 11.e4 dxe4!

11...♘f6 12.h3 dxe4 13.♘xe4 ♘xe4 14.♗xe4 ♗e6 15.♕a4 ♗c4 16.♗e3 ♕b5 17.♕xb5 ♗xb5 18.♖fd1 was in White's favour in Beliavsky-Faibisovich, Leningrad 1967.

12.♗xe4 ♘f6 (or 12...♕b6 first) **13.♘b3 ♕b6**

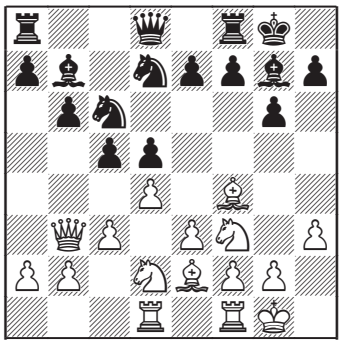
Black has a comfortable game. After 14.♗xc6, both captures are solid: 14...♕xc6 15.♖e1 ♖e8= or 14...bxc6 15.♖e1 ♖e8 16.h3 ♕c7=.

Chapter 1. 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 d5 3.♗f4 g6 Annotated Games

1. Pakleza – Bartel

Warsaw 17.01.2010

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♗f4 g6 3.e3 ♗g7 4.♘f3 0-0 5.♗e2 b6 6.0-0 c5 7.c3 ♗b7 8.h3 d5 9.♘bd2 ♘fd7 10.♕b3 ♘c6 11.♖ad1

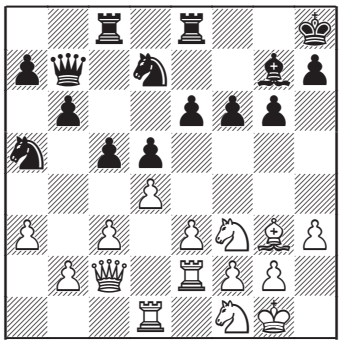


Chances are even, but what should Black do from here? This game offers a good model to follow. The first step is to evacuate the queen and consolidate the centre.

11...♕c8 12.♖fe1 e6

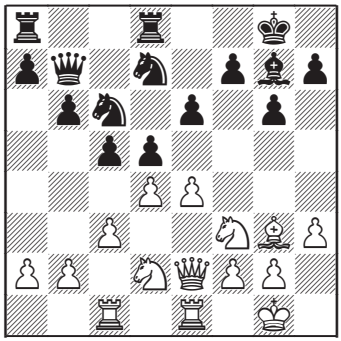
We can observe similar manoeuvring in the computer game Equinox 3.30-Protector 1.7 2015:

12...♖e8 13.a3 e6 14.♕c2 ♗a6 15.♘f1 ♗xe2 16.♖xe2 ♕b7 17.♘g3 ♖ac8 18.♕d2 ♘a5 19.♘f1 f6 20.♗g3 ♔h8 21.♕c2



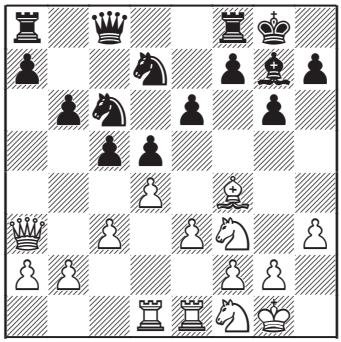
The computer chose 21...f5 and went on to draw eventually. I admit that this natural move is perhaps best, but it is difficult to win after it. A human player might prefer 21...e5 22.dxe5 fxe5 23.♖ed2 e4 24.♘3h2 with two sharp options: 24...♘c4 25.♖xd5 ♘f6 26.♖g5 ♗h6 and 24...c4 25.♖xd5 ♘c5 26.f3 ♘d3, with mutual chances in both lines.

And here is an example where White pushed e4: 12...♖d8 13.♗g3 e6 14.♖c1 ♗a6 15.♕d1 ♗xe2 16.♕xe2 ♕b7 17.e4



17...♖ac8 18.exd5 exd5 19.♘b3 ½-½, Ribli-Adorjan, Hungary 1995.

13.♗f1 ♗a6 14.♕a3 ♗xf1 15.♘xf1



It is time for decision. Perhaps the most ambitious plan is to gain space on the queenside with ...♕b7, ...a5, b5. On the other hand, that would give White some hopes on the kingside with ♘g3, h4, although I do not nose out any danger for us with his queen in exile on a3.

The safest plan is undoubtedly connected with ...f5.

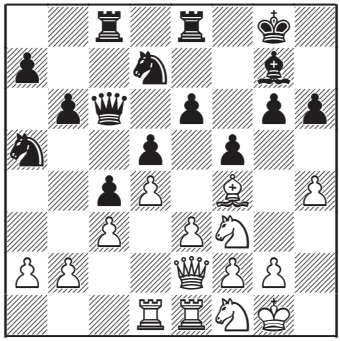
The idea of ...e5 is also positionally well founded, but it does not look too attractive to me as we'll stay pretty, but without a clear plan.

It seems that the higher rated player, Bartel, opted for a waiting game.

15...♖e8 16.♘g3 ♘a5 17.♕a4 ♕c6 18.♕c2 ♖ac8 19.♕e2 f5

In the last 5 moves White has improved his queen while Black has achieved nothing. Bartel reasonably decides to secure himself against an opening of the centre. However, I like 19...cxd4!?, intending to trade queens with 20.exd4 ♕c4!.

20.h4 h6 21.♘f1 c4



22.g4?

The idea of breaking through with g4 is certainly good, but I do not understand her rush. 22.♘1h2 ♘b7 23.g4 led to a normal position with mutual chances, e.g. 23...♘d6 24.♔h1 e5 25.dxe5 ♗xe5 26.♘xe5 ♘xe5 27.♗xe5 ♖xe5 28.♘f3 ♖e4 29.♘d4 ♕d7 30.f3 ♖e7 31.♖g1 ♔h7. After the hasty sacrifice, Black has at least two ways of getting the upper hand.

22...fxg4 23.♘3h2 h5 24.f3 gxf3

24...e5! 25.dxe5 ♗xe5∓ was more clear.

25.♘xf3 ♘b7 26.♕g2 e5 27.dxe5 ♘xe5 28.♘d4 ♕f6 29.♕xd5+ ♕f7 30.♕xf7+ ♘xf7

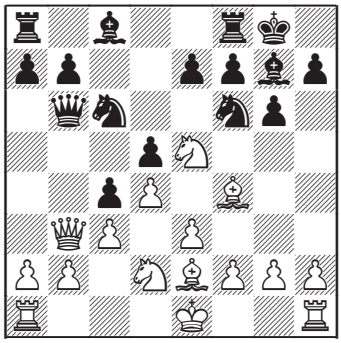
Black is positionally better, and won after mutual mistakes:

31.♘b5 ♘c5 32.♖e2?! ♘d3 33.♖g2 ♔h7 34.♘h2 a6 35.♘d4 ♖e4 36.♘e2 ♖ce8 37.♖d2 ♗h6 38.b3 ♖xe3 39.♗xh6 ♔xh6 40.bxc4 ♘fe5 41.♘d4 ♘f4 0-1

2. Michna – Kachiani Gersinska

Dresden 24.11.2014

1.d4 d5 2.♗f4 ♘f6 3.e3 g6 4.♘f3 ♗g7 5.c3 0-0 6.♘bd2 c5 7.♗e2 ♘c6 8.♘e5 ♕b6 9.♕b3 c4!

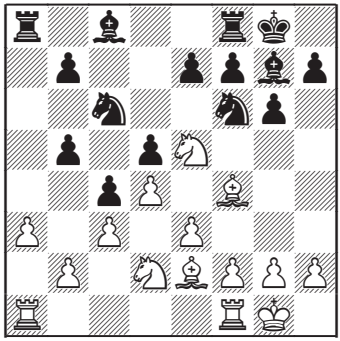


I believe that we should fight for every inch of ground.

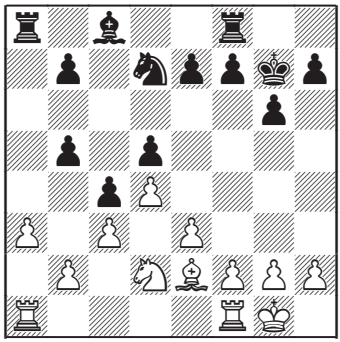
10.♕xb6

After 10.♕a3, we must consider the pawn sac 10...♗f5 11.♘xc6 ♕xc6 12.♕xe7 ♖fe8 13.♕d6 ♕a4∓. The point is that the white queen is in danger, and its exchange would offer Black tangible pressure, e.g. 14.♗d1 ♕b5 15.♕b4 ♕xb4 16.cxb4 a5.

10...axb6 11.0-0 b5 12.a3

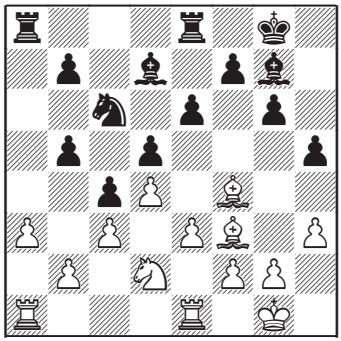


We have nothing to worry about our position, since White is left without an active plan on the queenside. The only danger for us is to remain with a passive bishop on c8. If it remained caged in after ...e6, White would enjoy a lasting initiative, e.g.



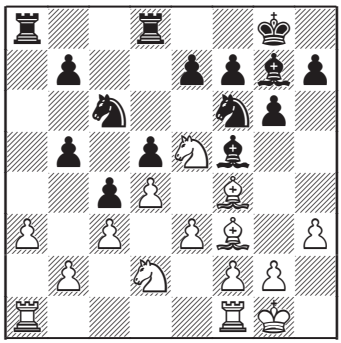
15.e4±.

And a similar example:



17.♖ad1±.

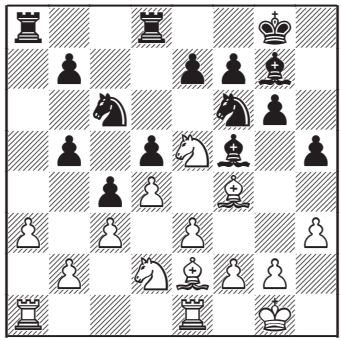
Black would be fine if she prevented e4 by putting a piece on e4, or if she activated his light-squared bishop with the manoeuvre ...♗c8-f5-d3:



14...♘e4= 15.♘xe4 ♗xe4.

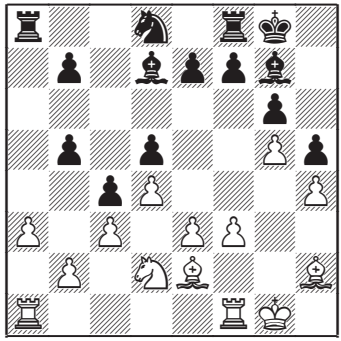
12...♘d8?!

Kachiani chooses a passive set-up. Perhaps simplest was to prevent any White expansion on the kingside with 12...h5 13.h3 ♗e6, but 13...♗f5 was also fine in the game Nocci-Ruggieri, ICCF 2009 – 14.♖fe1 ♖fd8



15.♘ef3 ♖a6 16.♘g5 ♖da8 17.♖ad1 ♘d8 18.♗f3 ♘e6 19.♘xe6 ♖xe6 ½-½.

13.h3 ♘e6 14.♗h2 ♘g5 15.f3 h5 16.h4 ♘e6 17.g4 ♘d8 18.g5 ♘d7 19.♘xd7 ♗xd7



20.e4!

Had Black one tempo, she would have blocked everything with 20...f6 21.f4 f5, but now White takes the initiative.

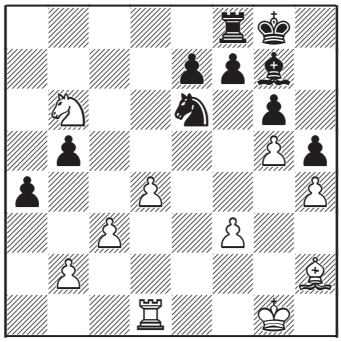
20...♗c6 21.exd5 ♗xd5 22.a4 ♖xa4 23.♖xa4 bxa4 24.♗xc4?!

24.♘xc4 would have been more unpleasant. Black would still be able to hold thanks to the tactics 24...♘c6 25.♘b6 ♘xd4 26.♘xd5 ♘xe2+ 27.♔f2 ♘d4!=. The

a-pawn suddenly enters play in a marvellous fashion.

The attempt to improve with 25.♖e1 e6 26.♔g2 is neutralised by 26...♗xc4! 27.♗xc4 ♖c8.

24...♗xc4 25.♘xc4 b5 26.♘b6 ♘e6 27.♖d1



27...♖d8

27...f6! 28.gxf6 ♗xf6 29.♘d7 ♖d8 30.♘xf6+ exf6 was easier to play with Black.

28.♔f1 f6 29.♖e1 ♔f7 30.gxf6?!

It was better to remain active with 29.d5 ♘c5 30.♗c7 ♖e8 31.♔g2. The text practically drops the h4-pawn.

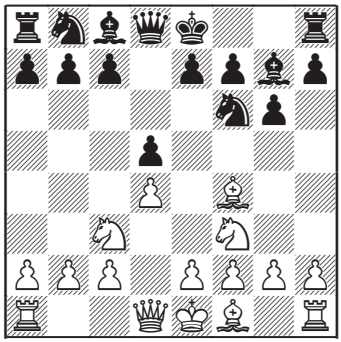
30...♗xf6 31.♗g3 g5?

The pawn was doomed after 31...♘g7, but Black exchanges it!

32.hxg5 ♘xg5 33.♔f2 ♘e6 34.♖e4 ♘g5 35.♖e1 ♘e6 36.♖e4 ♘g5 37.♖e1 ♘e6 ½-½

Chapter 2. The Barry Attack 3.♗f4 g6 4.♘c3 Main Ideas

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 d5 3.♗f4 g6 4.♘c3 ♗g7



The Barry Attack is surprisingly popular, although the typical move order is 2.♘f3 g6 3.♘c3 d5 4.♗f4. I found in my database about 5000 games which reached the diagram position, but only a hundred of them followed the sequence of my main line. Obviously White chooses the Barry Attack reluctantly, just to avoid King's Indian set-ups with ...d6, and prefers 4.e3 and ♘bd2 when he has a choice. That is a strong hint for players with ...g6 in their repertoire. For instance, I'm not afraid of entering the Grünfeld, so I would choose against a London player 2...g6!. I believe that Black has a fine game after 3.♘c3 d5, with more active options than in the event of 2...d5 3.♗f4 g6 4.e3 followed by c3.

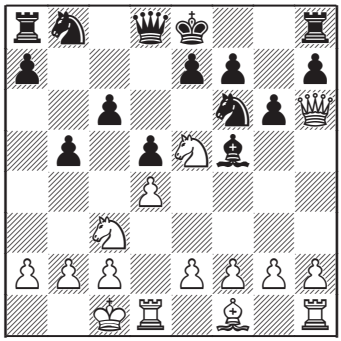
In the diagram position the staunchest advocate of the Barry Attack, Hebden, opts for:

5.♕d2. He counts on a quick attack with 0-0-0, ♗h6 and h4, so he refrains from e3. Then 5...♘e4 forces exchanges in the centre and practically takes the sting out of White's plan – see **Game 3** Cooper-Batchelor, email ICCF email 2011. However, it reduces our own striking power as well.

I suggest to pick up the gauntlet and ignore completely the attack with:

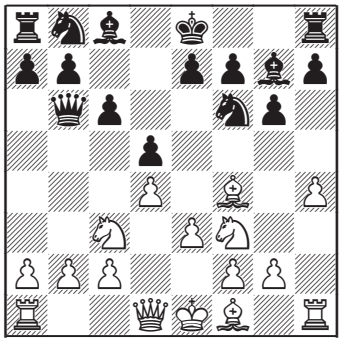
5...c6!?

This opens a path for the queen to the queenside and prepares ...b5-b4. The latter is a nasty threat since Black would gain control over e4. The key point of our set-up is the line 6.♗h6 ♗xh6! 7.♕xh6 ♗f5 8.0-0-0 b5! 9.♘e5



It may look dangerous for us, but in fact our attacking prospects are more substantial. White should desperately seek counterplay with e2-e4 or he will become clearly worse. For instance, 9...b4 10.e4! would be unclear. More promising for Black is 9...♕a5!? 10.e4! ♘xe4 (10...dxe4=), or 9...♘bd7!? 10.e4!∞.

5.h4 is a modification of Hebden's plan. White is planning e3, ♗e2, ♘e5, h4. He refrains from ♕d2 in order to avoid ...♘e4. I suggest to answer it with: **5...c6 6.e3** (6.♘e5 ♕b6) **6...♕b6!?**, aiming to provoke weaknesses on the queenside that would prevent White from castling there.

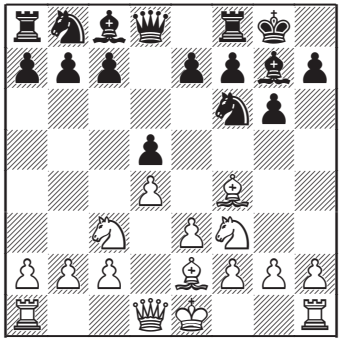


On 7.a3 we answer 7...♗g4 and do not rush with castling.

We saw that the direct attack with ♕d2, ♗h6 was not too efficient. That explains the popularity of the slower approach:

5.e3 0-0 6.♗e2

In this line White preserves the option of castling in both directions. He could still play ♘e5, h4, but if we weaken our queenside, he may shift his attention leftwards.



We could answer 6...c5 7.♘e5 ♘c6 – **Game 5** Wang-So, Edmonton 2014. 6...c6 is also consistent, albeit less active.

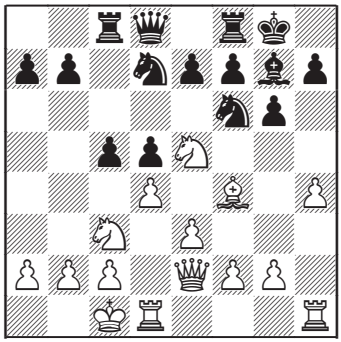
My practice shows that after 6.♗e2 we have a simple way of levelling the game at once:

6...♗g4!?

This offers Black an easy game with simple decisions to make. More importantly, we do not need to know any theory after it. Note that the bishop sortie would have been premature one move earlier as White's queen would have obtained an active stand after 6.h3 ♗xf3

7.♕xf3. With the actual move order, 7.h3 ♗xf3 8.♗xf3 c6 leaves White without a clear plan – see my **Game 6** Miles-Kiril Georgiev, Wijk aan Zee 1989.

7.♘e5 ♗xe2 8.♕xe2 ♘bd7 9.h4 c5 10.0-0-0 ♖c8



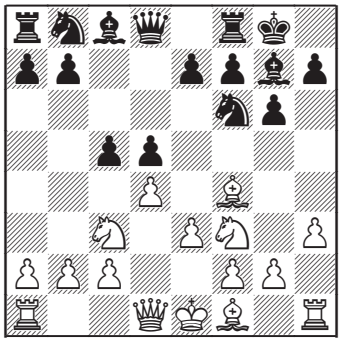
The exchange sacrifice on c3 should offer us a lasting initiative.

...c6 or ...c5?

By refraining from c4, White gains a tempo for his development, but allows us to expand with ...c6 and ...b5.

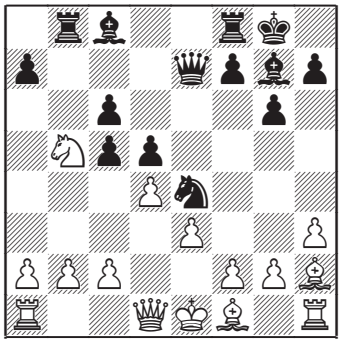
In short, plans with ...c6 are always possible against the Barry Attack, but they are most effective against long castling. Note that after 5.♕d2 c6 White cannot comfortably switch to the plan with e3, ♗e2, 0-0 due to ...b5, ...♗b7, when ...♘e4 would be a constant threat.

An early ...c5 is called for when White delays development, commonly with an early h3. That enables typical Grünfeld motifs:



The trick is that 7.dxc5 runs into 7...♘bd7! 8.♗e2 ♘e4!∓.

Here is another example:



14.♗xb8 cxd4!! with an overwhelming attack.

Theoretical Status

Nikola Sedlak does not grant in his book any attention to the Barry Attack at all.

Alfonso Romero and Oscar de Prado consider mostly irrelevant lines so their coverage is of no interest to us. Their main game features 5.e3 0-0 6.♗e2 c6 (?!) 7.h4 ♗g4 8.♘e5 ♗xe2 9.♕xe2. My proposition is 6...♗g4! and then ...c5, while 6...c6 is

unnecessarily passive against White's harmless development.

Conclusion

The Barry Attack offers Black a wide range of plans. He can either aim for exchanges in the centre with an early ...♘e4 or shift the focus of the game to the flank with ...c6 and ...b5.

I do not expect dramatic discoveries that could change the evaluations of my main lines in near future.

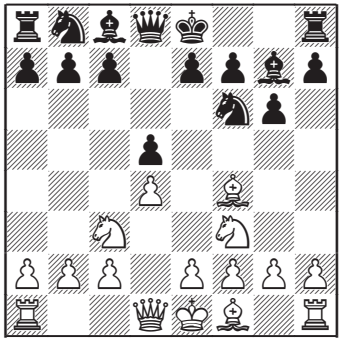
Chapter 2. The Barry Attack 3.♗f4 g6 4.♘c3 Step by Step

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 d5 3.♗f4 g6 4.♘c3

Lately White has been ardently testing the so-called Jobava Attack 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♗f4 d5 3.♘c3 (although Jobava himself seems to have migrated to ♗g5 already). It is trendy to meet it by 3...a6 or 3...e6. I cover the latter in Chapter 4.

However, 3...g6!? is perfectly playable, even though Black's defence is more complicated compared to the Barry Attack where the knight is already on f3. You can find a detailed analysis of this line in **Game 7** Ratkovic-V.Spasov, Kragujevac 2015.

4...♗g7



I do not see any advantage in delaying the fianchetto with 4...c6.

A. 5.♕d2; **B.** 5.h4; **C.** 5.e3

5.h3 0-0 6.e3 c5! transposes to line C.

A. 5.♕d2

A modern approach. White aims for 0-0-0, ♗h6, h4.

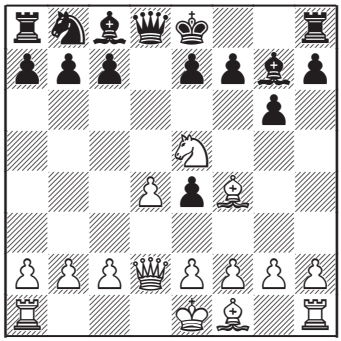
5...c6!?

From a theoretical standpoint, 5...♘e4!? is the most principled answer as it forces White to take 6.♘xe4.

6.♕e3?! does not work owing to 6...c5! 7.♗e5 ♘f6! gaining the bishop pair in an open position. (7...f6 8.♗xb8 is pleasant for White, but 7...♗xe5!? 8.♘xe5 f6 is a nice alternative to 7...♘f6, e.g. 9.♘d3 ♘xc3 10.bxc3 cxd4 11.cxd4 ♘c6 and White's pieces stand awkwardly.)

7.♘xe4 dxe4 8.♕xe4 may be even worse since both 8...♘c6 and 8...cxd4 9.♗e5 ♕a5+ favour Black.

6...dxe4 7.♘e5



7...c5!?

7...♘d7 has established itself as a solid equalizer in correspondence chess. See **Game 3** Cooper-Batchelor, email ICCF email 2011.

The text is sharper and gives more chances to fight for a full point.

8.e3

8.dxc5?! ♕xd2+ 9.♔xd2 hands Black the initiative: 9...0-0 10.e3 ♗e6 11.♖d1 ♖c8 12.♔c1 ♘c6 13.♘xc6 ♖xc6 14.♔b1 ♖xc5 15.f3 (15.♗e2 h5 16.h4 ♗xa2+! 17.♔xa2 ♖xc2) 15...♖ac8 16.♖d2 ♖d5↑.

8...0-0 9.♗c4

9.0-0-0 cxd4 10.exd4 ♘d7 is balanced, e.g. 11.♘xd7 ♕xd7 12.d5 ♕a4 13.♔b1 ♖d8= or 11.♕e3 ♕a5 12.♗c4 ♘b6 13.♗b3 ♗e6∞.

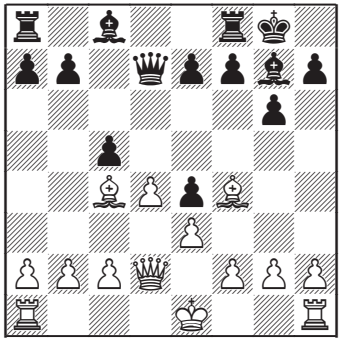
9.♗e2 has no venom. A good line for Black is 9...♗e6 10.c3 ♘d7 11.♘xd7 ♕xd7 12.0-0 ♖ac8 13.h3 ♖fd8=.

9...♘d7

It is possible to define immediately the centre with 9...cxd4 10.exd4 ♘d7, as 11.♘xd7 ♕xd7 12.♗e3 is roughly equal after 12...b5 13.♗e2 ♗b7=.

10.0-0-0

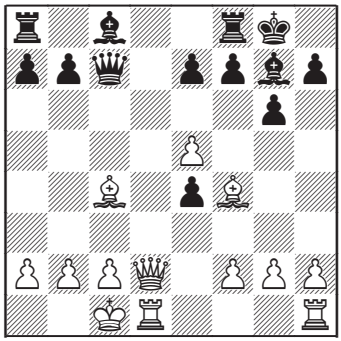
10.♘xd7 ♕xd7! has been tested in several games, where White has to play carefully in order to maintain the balance:



11.dxc5 ♕xd2+ 12.♔xd2 ♗xb2 13.♖ab1 ♖d8+ 14.♔e2 ♗a3 15.♖hd1 ♗g4+ 16.f3 ♖xd1 17.♖xd1 ♗f5 is obviously drawish, but:

11.c3 could be dangerous for White – 11...b5! 12.♗e2 ♗b7∞ (12...b4!?; 12...a5 13.♖d1 a4 14.a3 c4∞), when the greedy 13.dxc5 ♕c6↑ 14.b4 runs into 14...a5 15.♖b1 ♖fd8 16.♕b2 ♖d3!!∓ 17.♗xd3 exd3 18.f3 axb4 19.♕xb4 ♖a4 20.♕b3 ♕xc5.

10...cxd4 11.exd4 ♘xe5 12.dxe5 (12.♗xe5 ♗xe5 13.dxe5 ♕c7 14.♕c3 ♗e6=) 12...♕c7



13.♕c3

Or 13.♗d5 ♗xe5 14.♗xe5 ♕xe5 15.♕e3 ♗f5 16.h3=.

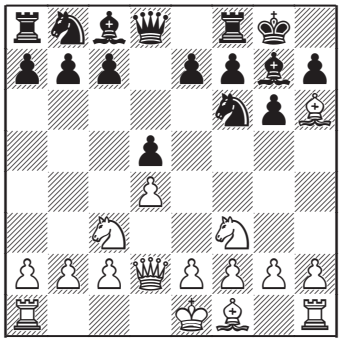
13...♗e6 14.♗xe6

14.♗b3 ♕xc3 15.bxc3 ♖ac8 16.♔b2 ♖c5 17.♖he1, Hebden-Hunt, England 2011, could be dangerous only for White after 17...♗xe5 18.♗xe5 ♖xe5 19.f4 ♖h5 20.h3 ♗xb3 21.axb3 f5 22.♖d7 g5 23.fxg5 ♖xg5 24.g4 e6 25.♖xb7 f4!?.

14...♕xc3 15.bxc3 fxe6 16.g3 g5 17.♗xg5 ♖xf2=.

5...0-0 waits for White to define his plan. It also brings Black good results: 6.♗h6

6.0-0-0 ♘e4 7.♘xe4 (7.♕e3 c5↑) 7...dxe4 8.♘e5 b5 or 8...♕d5 9.b3 ♘d7 passes the initiative to Black.



a) 6...c6

It turns out that White's attack is not developing smoothly owing to the weakness of the g4-square.

7.♗xg7

Hebden employed 7.h4, but I do not see what White could oppose to 7...♗xh6! 8.♕xh6 ♕b6. The only game in my database went 9.0-0-0 ♘g4 10.♕f4 ♘xf2 11.♕h6 ♘d7–+, Kohout-Svoboda, Czechia 2009.

7...♔xg7 8.♘e5 ♘bd7 9.f4 may be balanced, but it looks too static to me.

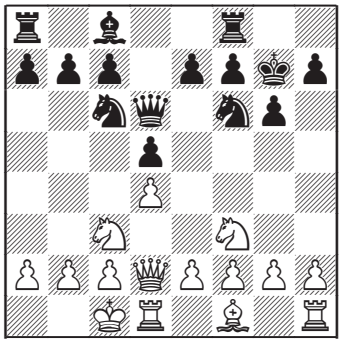
b) 6...♘e4 7.♕e3!?

7.♘xe4 dxe4 8.♘g5 e5! offers Black full compensation after 9.dxe5 ♕xd2+ 10.♔xd2 ♖d8+.

7...♘xc3 8.♗xg7 ♔xg7 9.♕xc3 This position is somewhat easier to play with White OTB, although the engines tend to evaluate it as 0.00. A good model to follow is 9...♕d6!? 10.e3 ♗f5 11.♗d3 ♗xd3 12.cxd3 a5 13.0-0 ♘d7 14.e4=, Hebden-Berg, Oslo 2012.

c) 6...♘c6!? Paying White in the same coin. Black hurries to complete development. More importantly, it takes e5 under control. It is indicative that most strong players adhere to this approach.

7.♗xg7 ♔xg7 8.0-0-0 ♕d6

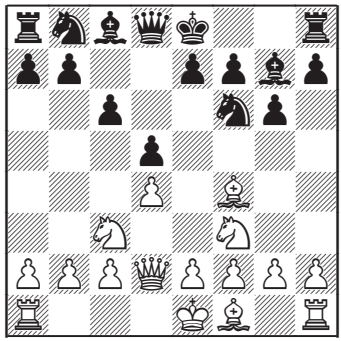


This position has occurred in four Hebden's games.

In 2009 he fought for e5 with 9.♘b5 ♕d7 (9...♘e4!? 10.♘xd6 ♘xd2=) 10.♕f4 (10.h4 a6 11.♘c3 h5 12.e3 b5 13.♗d3 b4 14.♘a4 ♘xd4∞), but 10...♘e4! would have been nice for Black. Later he turned to:

9.e3 ♗g4 10.h3 and signed a draw after 10...♗xf3 (Hebden-Jones, Kilkenny 2012). I would mention that 11.gxf3 e6 12.e4 ♘h5 leads to a complex position with mutual chances.

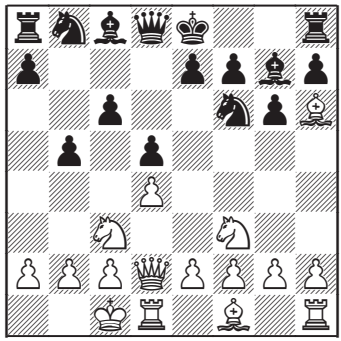
After 5...c6!?, I will focus on:



A1. 6.♗h6; **A2.** 6.e3; **A3.** 6.♘e5

6.h3 ♘bd7 7.e3 transposes to A2.

6.0-0-0 b5 7.♗h6

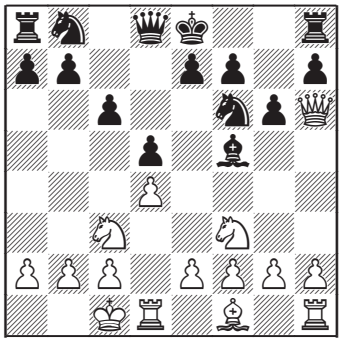


7...♗xh6 8.♕xh6 b4 9.♘b1 ♕a5 is plain bad for White.

A1. 6.♗h6

The Barry Attack in its purest form, yet it yields White a meager 39% after the following answer:

6...♗xh6! 7.♕xh6 ♗f5 8.0-0-0



8...b5

Revealing the main idea behind 5...c6. The threat of ...b4 does not leave White a choice.

The slower 8...♘bd7 gives time for 9.h3 b5 10.g4 ♗e4 11.♗g2 ♕c7 12.♖hf1 a5 13.♘xe4 ♘xe4 14.♘e5 ♘xe5 15.♗xe4 ♘c4∞.

9.♘e5 ♘bd7

9...♕a5!? is a fair alternative. After 10.e4 (10.a3 b4), Black could force a draw by repetition with 10...dxe4 11.d5 b4 12.♘c4 ♕c5 13.♘a4 ♕xf2 14.♖d2 ♕e1+ 15.♖d1 ♕f2, or play on for a win with 10...♘xe4 11.♘xe4 dxe4 12.a3 a6 13.♗e2 ♕c7∞.

10.e4!?

This looks somewhat desperate, but it is the only way to distract Black from the queenside. 10.♘xd7 ♔xd7! helps Black to evacuate his king to a safer place and to set up connection between the heavy pieces.

10.e3?! cedes the centre in view of 10...b4 11.♘a4 ♘xe5 12.dxe5 ♘g4.

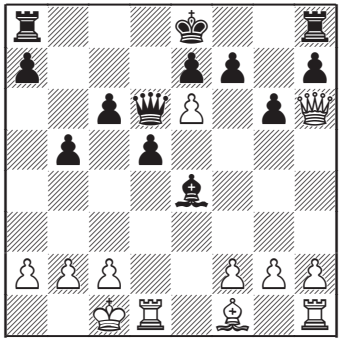
10...♘xe5

10...♘xe4 11.♘xe4 ♗xe4 12.♕g7 ♖f8 13.♘xd7 ♔xd7! 14.f3 ♗f5 15.♕xh7 ♕c7= is also possible, if you prefer calmer play.

11.dxe5

Black's chances are slightly better after 11.exf5 ♘eg4 12.♕h4 g5 13.♕xg5 b4 14.♘a4 ♕d6 due to the weakness of f2.

11...♘xe4 12.♘xe4 ♗xe4 13.e6! ♕d6



A critical position. White has enough compensation, but he must find a series of strong moves to prove it – 14.f3 ♗f5 15.exf7+ ♔xf7 16.g4 ♗d7 17.h4 ♖af8

17...a5 18.♗d3 a4 seems too arrogant, although White is unable to extract anything substantial from his attacking position – 19.a3 e5 20.h5 ♕f6 21.♕d2 ♕f4 22.♕xf4+ exf4 23.g5!=.

18.h5 ♔e8 19.♖e1!? ♔d8 20.♕e3 d4 21.♕d2 g5 22.♖e4 ♖f4 23.♕a5+=.

A2. 6.e3 ♘bd7

6...♘h5!? is always an option when White saved h3. 7.♗e5

7.♗g5 h6 8.♗h4 g5 9.♗g3 ♘d7 10.0-0-0 is risky for White – 10...♘xg3

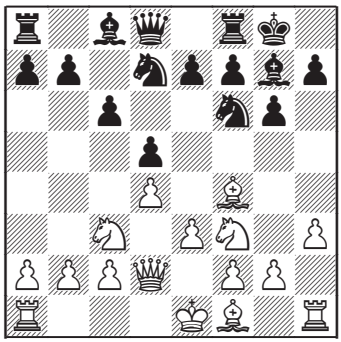
11.hxg3 b5 12.♔b1 ♖b8 13.♕e1 b4 14.♘a4 ♕a5 15.b3 e6.

7...f6 8.♗xb8

Or 8.♗f4 ♘xf4 9.exf4 ♗g4 10.♗e2 ♘d7 11.0-0-0 ♕c7.

8...♖xb8 9.♗e2 0-0 10.♘h4 e5 11.♗xh5 gxh5 12.0-0-0∞. The only White's threat is ♘c3-e2-g3-f5, but we could prevent it with the manoeuvre 12...♗h6!? 13.♘e2 ♗g5.

7.h3 0-0



8.♗e2

8.♗d3 does not make sense ,as the bishop bytes on the granite g6-pawn and leaves h5 without control. A good retort is to gain space on the queenside with 8...b5 9.♘e5 ♗b7 10.0-0 a5 11.a3, and then turn to the centre with 11...♘xe5 (or 11...♘b6 12.b4 e6) 12.♗xe5 ♗h6= 13.♕e1 ♘d7 14.♗g3 ♗g7 15.f4 e6.

8...b5 9.a3

9.0-0 is harmless – 9...♗b7, and White cannot establish a favourable dark-squared blockade. For example, 10.a3 a5, or 10.b4 a5 11.a3 ♘e4 12.♘xe4 dxe4 13.♘g5 c5 14.♗xb5?! (14.bxc5 ♘xc5) 14...cxd4 15.exd4 h6 16.♘xf7 ♖xf7∓.

9...a6 10.♘e5 ♗b7 11.b4

11.h4 is more enterprising, but risky. It would be more to the point in schemes without e3.

Black can allow h4-h5 with 11...c5 12.h5 e6 13.♗g5 ♕c7 or opt for the more challenging:

11...h5 12.g4 (12.0-0-0 c5) 12...♘xe5 13.♗xe5 ♘xg4 14.♗xg4 hxg4 15.h5 f6 16.♗g3 ♗c8! 17.hxg6 ♗f5 where Black is better on both wings.

11...a5

We have been following the game Eslon-Ubilava, Terrassa 1996, where Black simply blocked everything with 12.0-0 a4 13.♖ae1 ♘b6 14.♗h2 ♘e8 15.e4 e6 16.♘g4 ♘d6 17.♗xd6 ♕xd6 18.e5 ♕e7 19.f4 ♗c8 20.♕e3 ♗d7 21.♘b1 h5 22.♘h2 f5 23.♘f3 ♗h6 24.h4 ♔f7 25.g3 ♔g8 26.c3 ½-½. Nothing urged him to close the queenside though. He could safely play on with either 12...♖e8 or 12...♘xe5, having ...e5 in mind.

Even more straightforward was 11...♘e8 12.♘xd7 ♕xd7 13.0-0 f6 14.e4 e5 15.♗e3 ♘c7 with mutual chances.

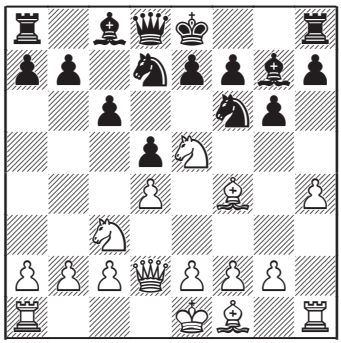
A3. 6.♘e5 ♘bd7 7.h4

7.f3 ♘h5 8.♘xd7 ♘xf4 9.♘e5 offers Black a pleasant choice:

9...f6!? 10.♘xc6 bxc6 11.♕xf4 0-0 12.e4 (12.♕d2 ♖b8 13.♘a4 e5 14.e3 ♕e7 15.♗e2 ♗h6∓) 12...e5 13.dxe5 ♖b8

14.♕d2 ♖xb2 15.exd5 cxd5 16.♕xd5+ ♕xd5 17.♘xd5 ♖xc2⩱;

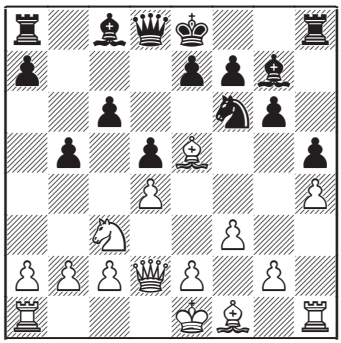
9...♗xe5 10.dxe5 ♘e6 11.e4 d4 12.♘e2 c5 13.♘g3 ♕b6 14.b3 ♗d7 15.♗c4 ♗b5 16.♗d3 0-0-0∞.



7...♘h5!?

7...♘xe5 8.♗xe5 (8.dxe5 ♘g4 9.e4 d4∓) 8...♘e4 looks rather dull, but it is the simplest solution.

Black could also stop the h-pawn with 8...h5 9.f3 b5



A sharp fight is ahead, but Black's kingside is permanently compromised.

For instance: 10.e3 ♔f8 (10...a5 11.♗d3 ♔f8 12.0-0 ♘d7 13.♗g3 ♕b6 14.♕f2 ♗b7 15.♘e2 c5 16.c3 ♔g8) 11.♗d3 ♘d7 12.♗xg7+ ♔xg7 13.e4.

9.♘xe4 ♗xe5 10.dxe5 dxe4. The arising endgame is drawish:

11.0-0-0

11.♕xd8+ ♔xd8 12.0-0-0+ ♔c7 13.e3 ♗f5 14.a3 ♖ad8 15.♗c4 f6.

11...♕xd2+ 12.♖xd2 (12.♔xd2 f5 13.exf6 exf6 14.♔e3 ♔e7) 12...f6 13.h5 g5 14.exf6 exf6 15.f3 ♔e7!=.

8.♗h2 ♘xe5 9.dxe5 f6 10.exf6 ♘xf6 11.f3 0-0 12.0-0-0 ♗e6!?

Chatalbashev-Avrukh, Benidorm2008, saw 12...b5 13.e4 ♕a5 (13...b4!? 14.♘a4 ♕a5 15.b3 dxe4 16.♗c4+ ♔h8∞) 14.a3 d4 15.♕xd4 ♘g4 16.♕c5 ♘xh2 17.♖xh2 ♕c7 18.♖h1 ♗e6 19.♔b1 ♗e5 20.h5 g5 21.h6 ♖f6 22.♘e2 ♗f7 23.♘d4 ♕d6 24.b4 a5 25.♗e2 ½-½.

13.g4 (13.e3 ♕a5) 13...♕a5

Black's attack would be faster after 14.h5?! d4 15.♕xd4 ♘xg4 16.♕e4 ♗xa2∓, so White should probably switch to defence with 14.a3.

B. 5.h4

This is a modification of the plan from line A. White is planning e3, ♗e2, ♘e5, h4. He refrains from ♕d2 in order to avoid ...♘e4. I suggest to answer it again with:

5...c6

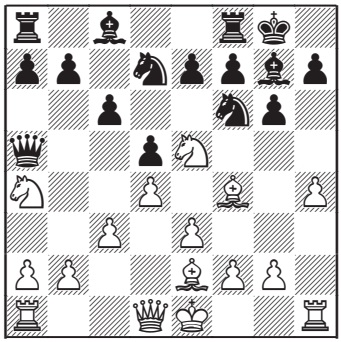
Our idea is to play ...♕b6. Then ♖b1 would cancel long castling, while ♘a4

♕a5+ would provoke c3, b4. White would hardly risk to "hide" his king on that wing.

Another possible plan is 5...0-0 6.e3 c5 7.♕d2 cxd4 8.exd4 ♘c6 9.♘e5, Inarkiev-Volokitin, blitz, Doha 2016, when Black could open the centre with 9...♘g4!? 10.♘xg4 ♗xg4 11.♗e2 ♗xe2 12.♘xe2 e5⇄.

6.e3

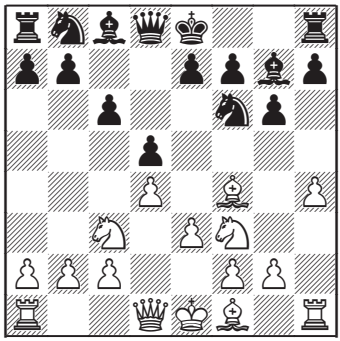
6.♘e5 ♕b6 7.♘a4 ♕a5+ 8.c3 ♘bd7 9.e3 0-0 10.♗e2



Now 10...h5 is a natural way to cut across White's plan. His further attempts to attack could only compromise his position:

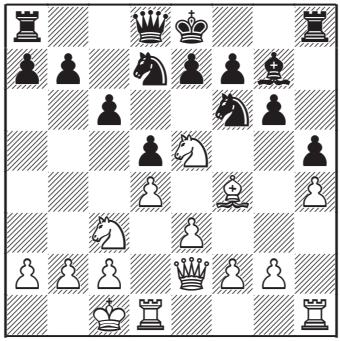
11.b4 ♕d8 12.♘c5 a5 13.♘exd7 ♘xd7 14.g4 axb4 15.cxb4 e5! 16.♘xd7 exf4 (16...♕xd7 is also good) 17.♘xf8 ♕xf8 18.a3 ♕e7 19.gxh5 fxe3 20.♕d3 exf2+ 21.♔xf2 c5!∓.

11.♘d3 ♖e8! The threat of ...e5 should make White castle short – 12.0-0 ♕d8 13.♘ac5 e5!? (or 13...♘xc5 14.♘xc5 ♘g4 15.f3 e5=) 14.dxe5 ♘xc5 15.♘xc5 ♘g4 16.♗xg4 hxg4↑.



6...♕b6!?

This move has occurred in only one game. More popular is 6...♗g4 7.♗e2 ♘bd7 8.♘e5 ♗xe2 9.♕xe2 h5 10.0-0-0,



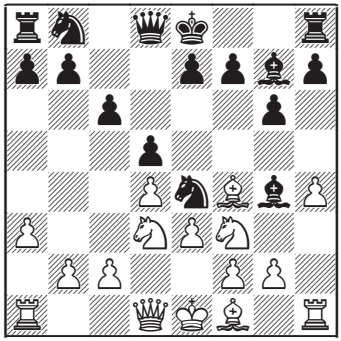
but I do not like this course of events. White's pieces are clearly more active and he has no weaknesses around his king. The latest game Karjakin-Giri, blitz, Stavanger 2017, saw 10...♕a5 11.♔b1 ♖c8 12.e4↑. Li Chao had previously tried against Karjakin 10...♘xe5 11.♗xe5 ♕d7 12.f3↑.

7.a3

7.♖b1 ♗g4 is a greatly improved version of 6...♗g4.

7.♘a4 ♕a5+ 8.c3 ♘bd7 9.♗e2 0-0 10.b4 ♕d8. The queen has fulfilled its mission. Now White cannot castle long. The c5-square is not of any use for him, and the b4-pawn gives us a lever on the queenside – 11.0-0 b6 12.♘b2 ♗b7 13.a4 a5 14.♕c2 axb4 15.cxb4 c5 16.dxc5 bxc5 17.bxc5 ♖c8 18.♘d3 ♘e4 19.♖ac1 ♕a5=.

7...♗g4 8.♘a4 ♕d8 9.♘c5 ♘e4 10.♘d3



10...♘d7

10...0-0 11.♗e2 c5 12.c3 ♘d7 is a bit more risky.

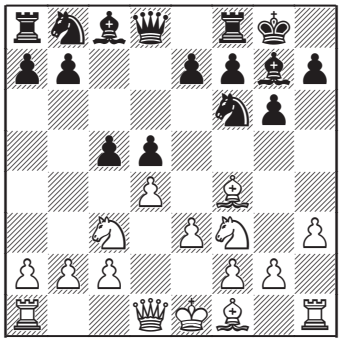
11.♗e2 f6 12.♗h2 a5∞

Everything is covered and we can calmly wait for White to define his plan.

C. 5.e3 0-0 6.♗e2

6.h3 waists precious time and should encourage us to seek a tactical refutation in the Grünfeld style:

6...c5!



7.♗e2

The point is that 7.dxc5, played by Capablanca and Aronian (in blitz), runs into 7...♘bd7! 8.♗e2 ♘e4!∓.

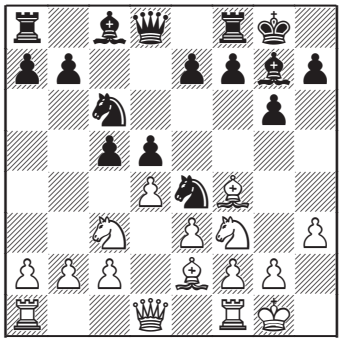
7.♘b5 is a strike at the air owing to 7...♘e4!. White does win a pawn with 8.♗c7 ♕d7 9.♗xb8 ♖xb8 10.♘xa7, but his queenside is terribly weakened by the lack of the dark-squared bishop. After 10...cxd4, he should concede to a slightly worse position following 11.♘xd4 (as 11.exd4 ♕a4 12.♘xc8 ♕b4+ 13.c3 loses to 13...♕xb2!) 11...♕d6 12.♘xc8 ♖fxc8 13.c3 b5∓.

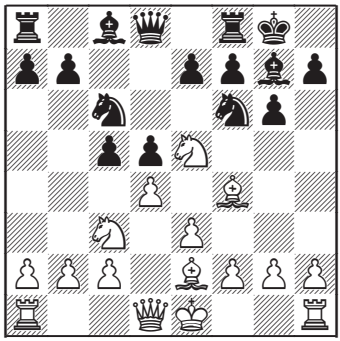
Finally, 7.♗d3 ♘c6 8.0-0 b6 is roughly equal.

7...♘e4! 8.0-0

8.♘xe4 dxe4 9.♘e5 cxd4 10.exd4 ♕b6 would cost White a pawn as 11.♖b1 ♗e6 12.b3? ♘c6 13.♘xc6 bxc6 14.c3 c5 is lost altogether.

8...♘c6





Black's chances are already preferable – 9.♘b5 stumbles into 9...a6, 9.♘a4 does not improve White's position either – 9...cxd4 10.exd4 a6, preparing a minority attack.

After 6.♗d3, we can still play 6...♗g4 as in the main line, but I like the more refined move order 6...c5! 7.0-0 cxd4 8.exd4 ♗g4.

Finally, 6.h4 is not too consisting with White's previous move. We should attack the centre with 6...c5 7.♕d2 ♘c6 8.♘e5 ♕a5 9.♗e2 ♘d7.

6...♗g4

I played this move twice and I still like it as it offers Black an easy game with simple decisions to make. At the same time, two alternatives also deserve serious attention:

6...c5 7.♘e5

Another possible move order is 7.0-0 cxd4 8.exd4 ♘c6 9.♘e5 ♗f5=.

7.dxc5 is best met by 7...♘bd7! – see **Game 4** Stefanova-Dunnington, London 1997.

7...♘c6=.

I consider this set-up in **Game 5** Wang-So, Edmonton 2014.

6...c6 is more contestable here than in the line 5.♕d2. White has not committed his king to the queenside, so he could castle short. It is still a decent option.

7.h3

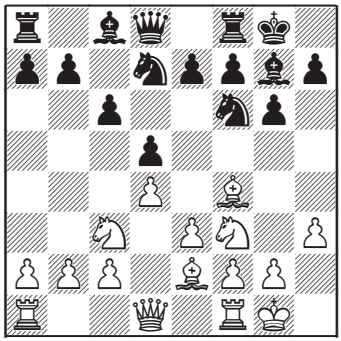
7.h4 is dubious – 7...♕b6 8.♖b1 ♗g4 9.♘e5 ♗xe2 10.♕xe2 ♘bd7.

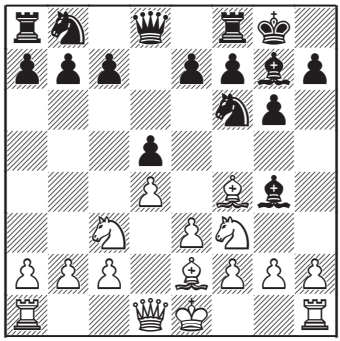
7.♘e5 could be repelled by 7...♘fd7! 8.♕d2 f6.

7...♘bd7

Carlsen-Salem, blitz, Doha 2016, saw 7...♗f5, but I do not understand the reason behind this development. Carlsen's sharp choice 8.♘e5 ♘bd7 9.g4 ♗e6 10.f3 led to a messy position, but the quiet 8.0-0 ♖e8 (White's pawn formation is more flexible after 8...♘bd7 9.g4 ♗e6 10.♘g5 ♘e8 11.♘b1 c5 12.c3.) 9.♗h2 promises some initiative on the kingside.

8.0-0





8...b5

I chose this plan for consistency sake, but any sensible move as 8...a5 or 8...♖e8 should not be any worse. Also the somewhat paradoxical 8...b6 brings Black good results: 9.a4 a5 10.♘e5 ♘xe5 (more cunning is 10...♗b7!? first) 11.♗xe5 ♖e8 12.♗f3 e6, and the game Malaniuk-Aronian, Batumi 1999, ended at this point with a draw.

9.a3 a5 10.♗d3 ♗b7

Aimed against 11.e4, when Black would take over the initiative with 11...b4 12.axb4 axb4 13.e5 bxc3 14.exf6 ♘xf6 15.bxc3 c5.

Kantans opted twice for 10...♘b6, but I think that the knight is better placed on d7 from where it controls e5.

11.♖e1 ♖e8 12.♗h2 e6 13.♖b1 ♕b6=.

7.♘e5

White can gain the bishop pair with 7.h3 ♗xf3 8.♗xf3, but after 8...c6 he remains without a clear plan since e4 would only weaken the d4-pawn.

See my **Game 6** Miles-Kiril Georgiev, Wijk aan Zee 1989.

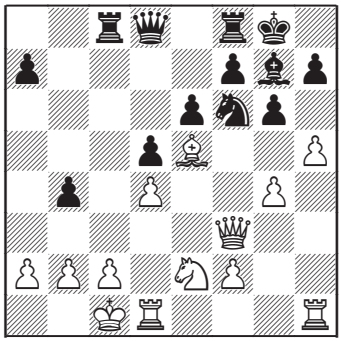
7...♗xe2 8.♕xe2 ♘bd7 9.h4 c5 10.0-0-0 ♖c8

Pinpointing the sore point of White's set-up. In many lines Black could sac the exchange on c3.

11.f3

White could defend c3 by 11.♖h3, but it costs a tempo in a race-type position: 11...a6 12.g4 b5 13.h5 b4 14.♘a4 ♕a5 15.b3 c4 16.♘xd7 ♘xd7 17.hxg6 fxg6 18.♖dh1 ♖c6!. Black's threats are more tangible.

11.♕f3 frees e2 for the c3-knight and wins a tempo by hitting d5, but it is not enough to maintain the balance – 11...e6 12.g4 b5 13.h5 cxd4 14.exd4 b4 15.♘e2 ♘xe5 16.♗xe5



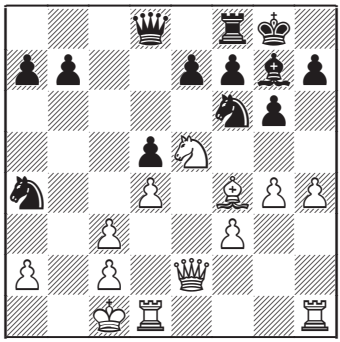
16...h6. Black's king is absolutely safe unlike its white counterpart.

The text enables ♕e2-h2 and takes control of e4. The idea of ...a6, ...b5 is already slow.

11...♘b6 12.g4

12.h5 cxd4 13.exd4 ♘xh5 14.♖xh5 is overly optimistic – 14...gxh5 15.♖h1 ♕e8∓.

12...cxd4 13.exd4 ♖xc3 14.bxc3 ♘a4



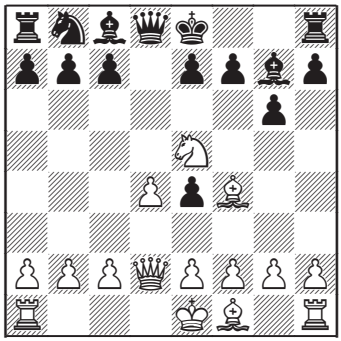
Black has full positional compensation for the exchange – 15.♕e3 (or 15.♖d3 h5; 15.♗d2 ♕b6) 15...h5⩱.

Chapter 2. The Barry Attack 3.♗f4 g6 4.♘c3 Annotated Games

3. Cooper – Batchelor

ICCF email 2011

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 g6 3.♘c3 d5 4.♗f4 ♗g7 5.♕d2 ♘e4 6.♘xe4 dxe4 7.♘e5

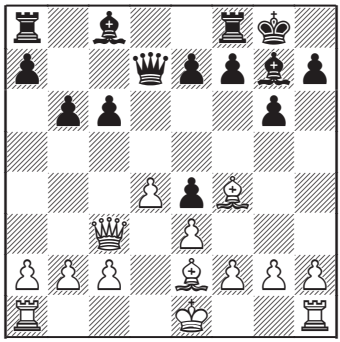


7...♘d7 (7...c5!?) **8.♘xd7 ♕xd7 9.e3**

If White followed the dream of mating the opponent with the overt 9.0-0-0 0-0 10.♗h6?!, he would soon notice that Black's attack was more dangerous – 10...♗xh6! 11.♕xh6 ♕d5 12.h4 (12.a3 c5–+) 12...♕xa2 13.h5 e3 14.fxe3 ♕a1+ 15.♔d2 ♕a5+ 16.c3 g5∓.

9...0-0 10.♕b4

This is Hebden's attempt to improve on the older 10.♕c3 c6. In both cases the position is close to equal. The stem game for this line is Kogan-Krasenkow, Sanxenxo 2003: 11.♗e2 b6



12.♕b3!

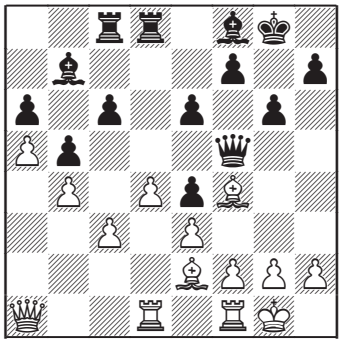
12.0-0-0 c5 13.♗e5 ♗xe5 14.dxe5 is well met by the same manoeuvre 14...♕f5, or 14...♕e6 15.♗c4 ♕f5 (proposed by Dembo).

14...♕c6 15.h4 ♗e6 16.h5 ♖ad8 is also solid. The only danger for Black would stem from ungrounded attempts to attack the white king, for instance: 16...♕a4?! 17.a3 g5 18.h6 ♖ac8 19.♕e1 b5 20.f4 ♔h8 21.♕g3 ♖g8 22.f5 c4 23.c3 ♗xf5 24.♖hf1 ♗e6 25.♖xf7 b4 26.axb4 a5 27.♖g7!→.

12...♕f5 13.c3. Here, instead of 13...c5, I like first 13...♗e6 while we are still controlling the d5-square. Later we could push ...c5.

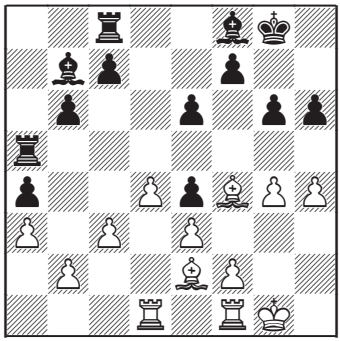
10...b6 11.0-0-0

Hebden has played twice 11.♖d1. Then Black should be careful to avoid a blockade of the queenside since the e4-pawn would allow White to obtain an initiative with the break f2-f3. Hebden-Holmes, rapid Daventry 2013, went 11...♗b7 12.♗b5 c6 13.♗e2 ♖ac8 14.0-0 ♖fd8 15.a4 e6 16.c3 ♕d5 17.a5 ♗f8 18.♕a4 b5 19.♕a1 a6 20.b4 ♕f5.



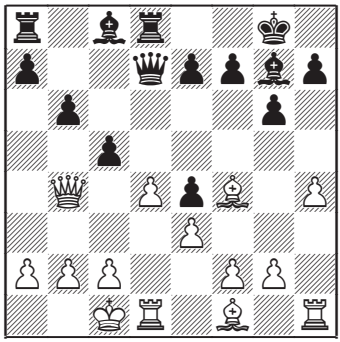
Black is deprived of counterplay and his b7-bishop is particularly bad.

The correct approach was demonstrated in the game Bender-Schludecker, BdF-Schachserver 2014: 11...a5! 12.♕b5 a4 13.a3 ♕xb5 14.♗xb5 ♗b7 15.c3 ♖a5 16.♗e2 ♖c8 17.h4 e6 18.g4 h6 19.0-0 ♗f8



This diagram favourably defers from the previous one – the b7-bishop controls f3, Black's rooks are active. White is unable to make progress as the only sensible plan 20.c4 is easily parried with 20...♔g7 21.♖d2 ♗d6. Instead, the game saw 20.♔g2 ♔g7 21.♖h1 (21.c4 ♗d6) 21...♗d6 22.g5 hxg5 23.hxg5 ♖f5 24.♖h4 ½-½.

11...♖d8 12.h4 c5



13.♕b5

White should seek a queen trade since 13.♕b3?! simply loses a pawn after 13...cxd4 14.exd4 ♗xd4 15.♗c4 ♕f5 16.♗c7 ♖d7 17.h5 gxh5∓.

13...cxd4 14.exd4 ♕b7!?

Playing for a win! 14...♕xb5 15.♗xb5 ♗g4 16.♖de1 ♗xd4 17.♖xe4 ♗xf2 18.♗g5= reduces the material.

15.♗c4

15.h5!? ♗e6 16.hxg6 also looks logical. Then Black should take the difficult decision to open the h-file – 16...hxg6! (16...fxg6 would have left the doubled e-pawns defenceless in the endgame after 17.♗c4 ♗xc4 18.♕xc4 ♕d5) 17.♗c4 ♗xc4 18.♕xc4 ♖ac8 19.♕b3 ♖xd4! 20.♖xd4 ♗xd4 21.♕h3 ♔f8. It turns out that White is still to prove that he has sufficient compensation.

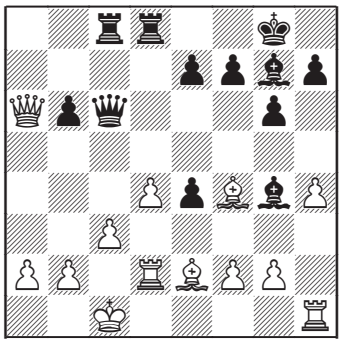
15...♗g4 16.♖d2 ♖ac8

Black might include 16...h5, for instance, 17.♕b3 e5 18.dxe5 ♖xd2 19.♗xd2 ♖e8=.

17.c3?!

White obviously missed the following pawn sac. 17.Qa4!, threatening Ba6, maintained the balance.

17...a6! 18.♕xa6 ♕c6 19.♗e2



19...♗e6

I would have taken the queen – 19...♖d5! 20.♗xg4 ♖a8∓, since the text allows the ingenious defence 20.d5! ♖xd5 21.♖xd5 ♗xd5 22.♕b5 ♕f6 23.♗e3 ♗xa2 24.♔d2= and White's king escapes.

20.♗e3 ♕d5 21.♔b1?

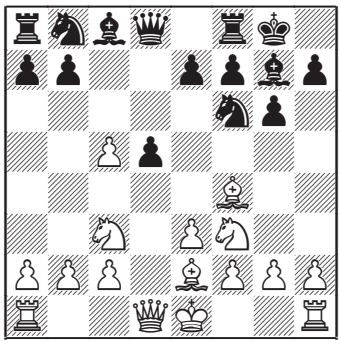
This loses on the spot. 21.c4 still kept White in the game.

21...♖a8! 22.c4 ♕d7 23.♕xb6 ♖db8 24.♕c5 ♕a4 25.a3 ♖b7 26.♗d1 ♕a6 27.a4 ♗xc4–+ 28.h5 ♗d3+ 29.♖xd3 exd3 30.hxg6 hxg6 31.b4 ♕e6 32.b5 ♖c8 33.♕b4 ♖bc7 34.♗b3 ♕e4 35.♗d2 ♕xg2 36.♖d1 ♕xf2 37.b6 ♖d7 38.♗c3 ♗xd4 39.♗xd4 ♖xd4 40.♕d2 ♕xd2 41.♖xd2 ♖b4 42.♖xd3 ♖xb6 43.♔b2 ♔g7 0-1

4. Stefanova – Dunnington

London 1997

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 g6 3.♘c3 d5 4.♗f4 ♗g7 5.e3 0-0 6.♗e2 c5 7.dxc5



7...♘bd7

7...♘e4 is only good for equality after 8.♘xe4

8.♘xd5?! ♗xb2 9.♘c7, Van Foreest-Deepan, Basel 2017, 9...♘d7! favours Black.

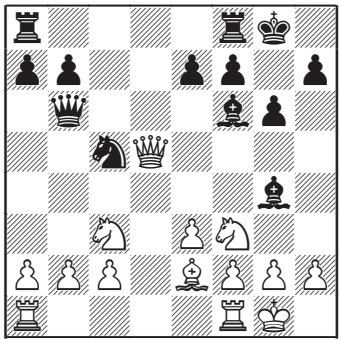
8...dxe4 9.♕xd8 ♖xd8 10.♘g5 or 10.Ne5=.

7...♕a5 8.♘d2 ♕xc5 9.♘b3 ♕b6 is the most popular line. Although Black has more pawns in the centre, his queenside is undeveloped. White scores well after 10.a4 (10.♘b5 ♘a6 or even 10...♘e8 is balanced) 10...♘c6 11.a5 ♕d8 12.0-0, but that is mostly due to Black's middlegame mistakes. A solid stand with 12...♖e8 should keep him safe.

8.♘b5

8.♘xd5 ♘xd5 9.♕xd5 ♗xb2 10.0-0 (10.♖b1 ♕a5+ 11.♔f1 ♗g7↑) 10...♗xa1 11.♖xa1 ♕a5 12.♗h6 ♕xc5 offers Black the better pawn structure after 13.♕b3 b6 14.♖d1 ♘f6.

After 8.0-0 ♘xc5 9.♗e5 (9.♘b5 ♗g4), we should find a way of developing our bishop. The simple 9...b6= is well tested, but I like the more aggressive 9...♗g4!? 10.♗xf6 ♗xf6 11.♕xd5 ♕b6



White needs a series of accurate moves to keep the balance – 12.♘d4 ♗xe2 13.♘dxe2 ♖fd8 14.♕c4 ♖ac8 15.♖ab1

Abdulla-Hossain, Dhaka 1999, saw 15.♘d5?! ♕xb2 16.♘d4 ♘e6 17.♘xf6+ exf6 18.♕b3 ♕xb3 19.axb3 ♘xd4 20.exd4, when 20...a6^{3} wins a pawn.

15...♘d3 16.♕e4

16.♕g4?! ♘e5 17.♕h3 ♘c4 18.♘d5 ♕c6 19.♘xf6+ ♕xf6∓.

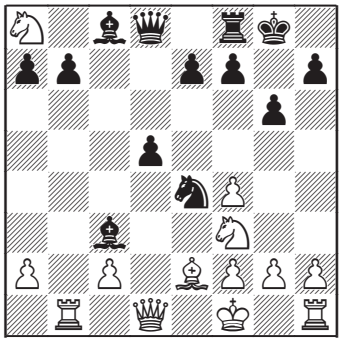
16...♘c5 17.♕f3 (17.♕c4=) 17...♕a6 18.♖fd1 ♖xd1+ 19.♖xd1 ♘a4 20.♖d7 ♘c5 21.♖d1=.

8...♘xc5 9.♗c7

9.♘c7 ♖b8 10.♘b5 is a draw, but Black could try to mess things up by: 9...♘h5!? 10.♘xa8

Of course White should take the rook. Palacios de la Prida-Yevgeniy Vladimirov, Marchena 1989, saw 10.♕xd5? ♘xf4 11.♕xd8 ♘xg2+ 12.♔f1 ♘xe3+ 13.fxe3 ♗h3+–+.

10...♘xf4 11.exf4 ♗xb2 12.♖b1 ♗c3+ 13.♔f1 ♘e4



A spectacular position! Black is currently a whole rook down, but he will capture the stray knight to obtain sufficient compensation. For example:

14.♗d3 ♗f5 15.♗xe4 dxe4 16.♕xd8 ♖xd8 17.♘e5 ♖xa8 18.♖xb7 ♖d8 19.♔e2 ♖d2+ 20.♔e3 ♖xc2⩱.

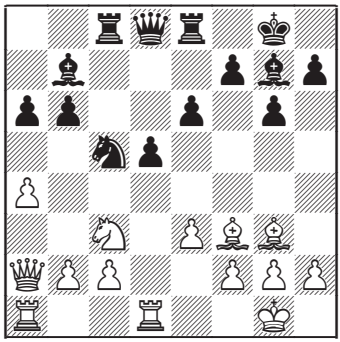
9...♕d7 10.♗e5 a6 11.♘c3 b6

Only 11 moves have been sufficient for Black to obtain the better game. His pawn centre should allow him to gradually organise an attack on the kingside. Now White could simplify to an opposite coloured bishops endgame, but the distant passer on the a-file would be a strong trump – 12.♗xf6 ♗xf6 13.♘xd5 ♗xb2 14.♘xb6 ♕xd1+ 15.♖xd1 ♖b8 16.♘xc8 ♗c3+ 17.♘d2 ♖fxc8 18.0-0 ♖b2 19.♘b3 ♖xa2 20.♘xc5 ♖xc5 21.♖d7 ♔f8 22.♗d3 a5∓.

12.0-0 ♗b7 13.a4 ♖ac8 14.♕d4 ♕d8 15.♕b4 ♘cd7 16.♗d4 ♖e8 17.♘e5 ♗f8 18.♖fd1

White's only chance to keep his bishop on the active square d4 was 18.f4.

18...e6 19.♕b3 ♘xe5 20.♗xe5 ♘d7 21.♗g3 ♘c5 22.♕a2 ♗g7 23.♗f3



Black has achieved everything one could want from the opening. Now he has to devise a plan for a further expansion. A natural continuation would be 23...♕e7, followed by ...h5. White lacks space and it would be difficult for him to manoeuvre. More importantly, he could not activate his queen. For instance, 24.h3 ♖ed8 25.♕a3 h5 26.♕b4 ♖d7 27.♕xb6?! would be disastrous due to 27...h4 28.♗h2 d4∓.

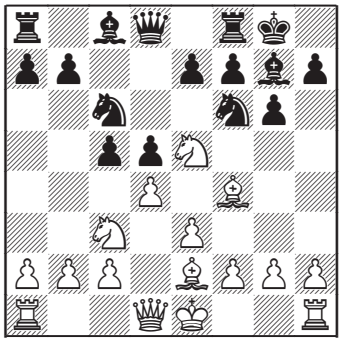
I can only guess that Dunnington fell under the charms of the 18-year-old Antoaneta and he gallantly steered the game to a draw:

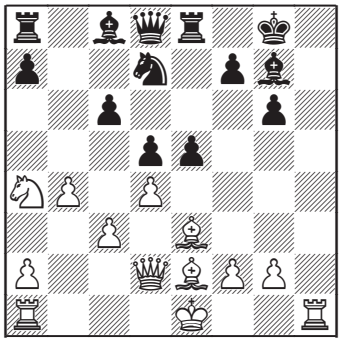
23...♘d7 24.♕b3 ♘e5 25.♗e2 ♘d7 26.♗f3 ♘e5 27.♗e2 ♘d7 ½-½

5. Wang – So

Edmonton 21.06.2014

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 g6 3.♘c3 d5 4.♗f4 ♗g7 5.e3 0-0 6.♗e2 c5 7.♘e5 ♘c6





8.0-0

8.dxc5 ♕a5= hardly deserves an attention.

8.h4 is more consistent. A good reply is 8...cxd4 9.exd4 ♕b6

Cebalo and Lalic successfully tested 9...h5, but it looks too risky. For instance, White's pieces are more active after 10.♕d2 (10.♘xc6 bxc6 11.♕d2 ♗f5 12.♗e5 c5 13.dxc5 ♘e4) 10...♘d7 11.♘xd5 ♘dxe5 12.dxe5 ♘xe5 13.0-0-0 ♗e6, Bentley-Lalic, rapid 2003, 14.♔b1.

10.♘xc6 bxc6 11.♘a4 ♕a5+ 12.c3 ♘d7 13.b4 ♕d8 14.h5 e5 15.♗e3 ♖e8 16.hxg6 hxg6 17.♕d2

This position occurred in Zichichi-B.Lalic, Bratto 2001. White's attack is a total failure as he is undeveloped and does not control the centre. Black could start a decisive counter-offense with 17...a5 18.♗h6? ♗f6–+.

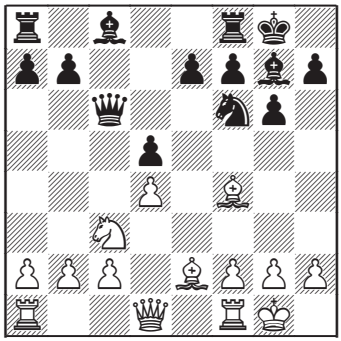
8...cxd4

In such positions we should always take into account the option of dxc5. Pert-Palliser, Witley 2000, saw 8...♗f5 9.dxc5! ♕a5 10.♘xc6 bxc6 11.♗e5 ♕xc5. The transformation of the pawn structure is in White's favour since he possesses a clear plan on the queenside – 12.b3! ♘d7 13.♘a4 ♕a5 14.♗xg7 ♔xg7 15.c4.

9.exd4 ♗f5!

Black is not afraid of 10.♘xc6 bxc6 11.♘a4 as 11...♘d7 would cover c5 while preparing the break ...e5.

Many games have featured 9...♕b6 10.♘xc6 ♕xc6. Stayed the queen's knight on f3, White could have hoped for an initiative. However, it is clearly awkward on c3 and chances are roughly even after:



11.♗b5

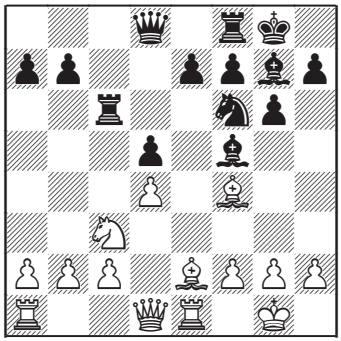
11.♖e1 a6 12.a4 ♗f5 13.a5 ♖ad8= is similar.

11...♕b6 12.a4 a6 13.a5 ♕d8 14.♗e2 ♗d7=. Hebden-Tukmakov, Neuchatel 2003, went further 15.♕d2 ♖c8 16.♖fe1 e6 17.♗h6 ♗xh6 18.♕xh6 ♘e8 19.♗d3 ♕f6 20.♕e3 ♘d6 21.♘a4 ♗xa4 22.♖xa4, when instead of 22...♖c6 23.c3 ♖fc8 24.♖b4 ♖8c7 25.♕g3 ♔g7 26.h3 ♕d8 27.h4±, Tukmakov should have fixed a draw with 22...♘c4 23.♗xc4 ♖xc4 24.♖xc4 dxc4 25.♕e5 ♕xe5 26.♖xe5 ♖d8 27.c3 ♖d5=.

10.♖e1 ♖c8 11.♘xc6

More tension preserved 11.♗f3 ♖e8, Torre-Ganguly, Pattaya 2015. 11...h6 is another useful move.

11...♖xc6



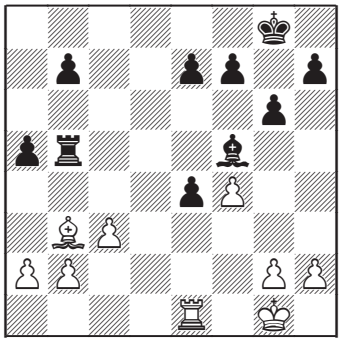
12.♗e5?!

It was more accurate to cover the e4-square first – 12.♗f3 ♕d7 13.♗e5 ♖fc8 14.♗xf6 ♗xf6 15.♘xd5 ♗xc2=, Chatalbashev-S.Nikolov, Pleven 2005.

12...♘e4 13.♘xe4 ♗xe5! 14.dxe5 dxe4∓ 15.c3?!

15.♕xd8 ♖xd8 16.♖ad1 ♖xd1 17.♗xd1 h5∓ is pleasant for Black as his rook is very active. Still it was more stubborn.

15...♖c5 16.♕xd8 ♖xd8 17.♖ad1 ♖xd1 18.♗xd1 ♖xe5 19.f4 ♖b5 20.♗b3 a5



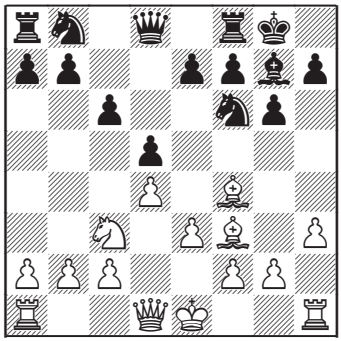
21.♖e2 ♖b6 22.♔f2 ♗e6 23.♗xe6 ♖xe6 24.♔e3 f5 25.♔d4 ♔f7 26.♔c5 ♔f6 27.♔b5 ♖a6 28.a4 e5 29.fxe5+ ♔xe5

30.b4 axb4 31.cxb4 f4 32.a5 e3 33.♔c4 ♔e4 34.♖a2 ♖c6+ 35.♔b3 ♔d3 36.b5 ♖c8 0-1

6. Miles – Kiril Georgiev

Wijk aan Zee 18.01.1989

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 g6 3.♘c3 d5 4.♗f4 ♗g7 5.e3 0-0 6.♗e2 ♗g4 7.h3 ♗xf3 8.♗xf3 c6



9.0-0

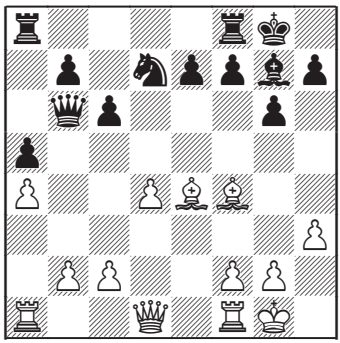
White's attack has no bite without the king's knight – 9.♕d2 ♘bd7 10.0-0-0 b5 11.g4 (11.h4 h5) 11...♘b6 12.g5 ♘c4 13.♕e1 ♘d7 14.e4 e5 was winning for Black in Em.Lasker/Haalebos-Reti/Oskam, Rotterdam 1923.

9...♘bd7 10.a4

It looks reasonable to include a4 a5 as it deprives Black of a future minority attack. Besides, the pawn on a4 makes more risky a possible capture on b2 after ...♕b6. Many years after this game, in Cetinje 2013, Kosic played against me 10.e4 dxe4 11.♘xe4 ♘xe4 12.♗xe4 ♕b6 13.c3?!, and I obtained the better game with 13...♕xb2 14.♖b1 ♕xc3 15.♖xb7 ♘f6∓.

Correct would have been 13.♗e3 ♘f6 14.♗f3 ♘d5 15.♗xd5! (15.♖b1 ♘xe3 16.fxe3 c5∓) 15...cxd5 16.♖b1, although the plan with ...b5 would still give me some initiative.

10...a5 11.e4 dxe4 12.♘xe4 ♘xe4 13.♗xe4 ♕b6



14.♗e3

14.c3 ♕xb2 is possible and should lead to simplification.

Perhaps 14...♖fe8!? 15.♕c2 e5∞ is a better way to play for a win.

15.♕f3 f5 16.♗d3 ♕xc3 17.♖ac1 ♕b2

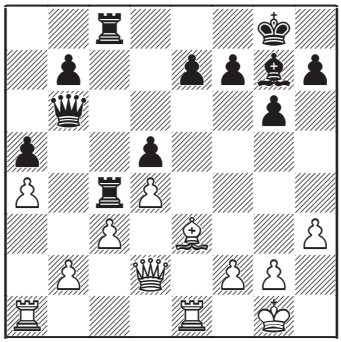
17...♕xd4? is worse – 18.♗c4+ ♔h8 19.♖fd1 ♘e5 20.♕g3 ♕xc4 21.♖xc4 ♘xc4 22.♖d7±.

18.♖c4 e5 19.♖b1 ♕a3 20.♖xc6 ♔h8 21.♖xb7=.

14...♘f6 15.♗f3 ♘d5 16.♗xd5

White cannot preserve a flexible pawn structure – 16.c4? ♘xe3 17.fxe3 e5∓ is murky for him, and 16.♗g5 e6 17.c4 ♘b4∓ is not attractive either.

16...cxd5 17.♕d2 ♖fc8 18.c3 ♖c4 19.♖fe1 ♖ac8



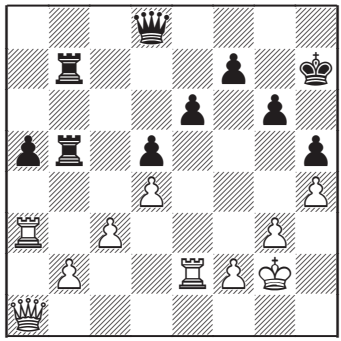
20.♖e2

We have finally reached a static pawn structure which leaves little choice to both sides. Of course, I can display some activity with ...b5, but the b2-pawn is easily defended. Now Miles could have chosen a solid, but very passive stand with 20.♖a2 e6 21.♗f4 ♕c6 22.♕d1=. Instead, he decides to trade bishops.

20...♕c6 21.♗h6 e6 22.♗xg7 ♔xg7 23.♕d1 ♖b8 24.♖a3

24.f4 does not really threaten f4-f5 since it would only weaken White's king. After 24...b5 25.axb5 ♖xb5 26.♖f2 ♕b7 27.♕e2 ♖c6 28.g4 ♖cb6 29.♖a2 ♕b8, White should maintain the balance by swapping queens, as 30.♔h1 a4 (intending...♖b3, ...a3) 31.f5 exf5 32.gxf5 ♔g8! would give me new targets.

24...b5 25.axb5 ♖xb5 26.♕a1 ♕b6 27.g3 h5 28.h4 ♖c7 29.♔g2 ♖b7 30.♖a4 ♕d8 31.♖a3 ♔h7



I have reached the maximum I could extract from the position, but it is not enough. The point is that I can never play ...g5? owing to ♖e5!.

32.♖a4 ♖b8 33.♖a3 ♕b6 34.♖a4 ♔g7 35.♖a3 ♔f6 36.♖a4 ♖xb2 37.♖xb2 ♕xb2 38.♕xb2 ♖xb2 39.♖xa5 ♖c2 40.♖c5 ♔f5 41.♔f3 f6 42.♔e3 g5 43.hxg5 fxg5 44.♔f3 ½-½

7. Ratkovic – V.Spasov

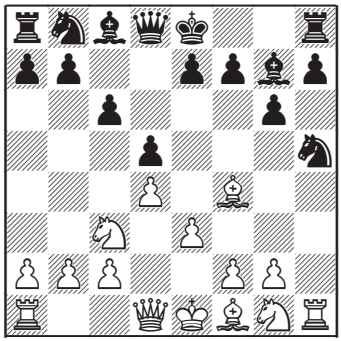
SRB-chT Kragujevac 24.08.2015

This game shows that Black can employ the Grünfeld approach even if White has not played ♘f3. It is a decent, albeit double-edged weapon against the Jobava attack.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♗f4 g6 3.♘c3 d5 4.♕d2

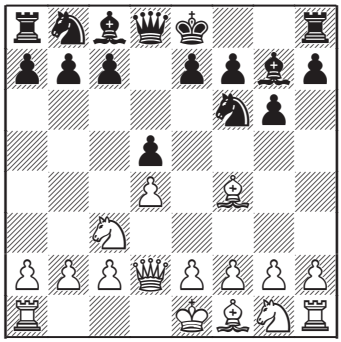
4.e3 ♗g7 5.h4 c6 6.♘f3 ♕b6 is covered in the "Step by Step" chapter, line B.

The purely speculative exchange sac 6.h5?! ♘xh5



7.♖xh5 gxh5 8.♕xh5 ♘d7 9.♕h2 occurred in Wei Yi-Tomashevsky, blitz, Doha 2016. Simplest is 9...♘f8 to cover the g-file from g6. However, if you are afraid of it, you could slightly alter the move order and answer 4.e3 by 4...c6 5.h4 ♕b6, harassing White's queenside. After 6.a3 ♗g7, 7.h5 is no longer a threat, as the b2-pawn would be hanging.

4...♗g7



5.0-0-0

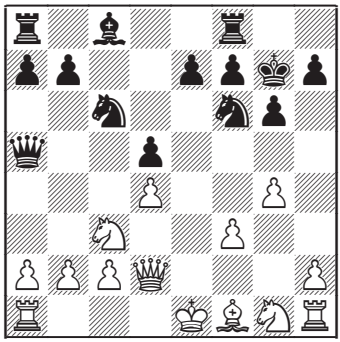
The most principled line is 5.♗h6 0-0 6.♗xg7 ♔xg7. The chips are down, the race is about to start. Typical plans with ...c6, ...b5 are ineffective as White has not committed his king to the queenside yet. Instead we should strike in the centre with ...c5. White has tried from here:

7.e3 c5 8.dxc5 (for 8.f3 – see 7.f3) 8...♕a5 9.♘e4 ♕xd2+ 10.♘xd2 ♗f5 11.♗d3 ♘bd7 12.♘b3 ♖fc8 13.♗xf5 gxf5 14.♘d4 e6=, Kovalev-Karjakin, rapid, Berlin 2015. The game went 15.b4?! which gave Black the initiative after 15...a5. 15...b6 was even stronger.

7.f3 c5 8.e3 ♕a5 9.g4

Giving up the centre with 9.dxc5 should nor bring White success – 9...♘c6 10.g4 ♕xc5 11.0-0-0 ♖d8 12.♘ge2 e5 13.g5 ♘h5 14.♘g3 d4 15.♘xh5+ gxh5 16.♘e4 ♕b6 and White's attack has been stalled.

9...cxd4 10.exd4 ♘c6



Black is better developed and controls the centre. Therefore, he should not be afraid of the enemy attack. He is going to meet 11.h4 by 11...h5 12.0-0-0 ♖h8 13.♗e2 ♖b8 14.♔b1 ♗e6 15.gxh5 ♘xh5 16.♗d3 b5 17.♘h3 ♗xh3 18.♖xh3 e6.

11.g5 does not make sense either – 11...♘e8 12.h4 ♘d6 13.h5 ♗f5 14.hxg6 hxg6 15.a3 ♖h8∓.

7.0-0-0 c5! 8.e3

8.dxc5 ♕a5 transposes to the main game.

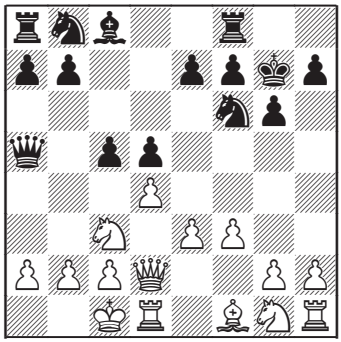
8...♕a5!

Black should be careful with his hanging centre. 8...♘c6 left Black a clear pawn down – 9.dxc5 ♗e6 10.♗b5 ♘e5 11.♕d4 ♕c7 12.♘ge2 ♖ac8 13.♘f4±, Van Foreest-Grandelius, Wijk aan Zee 2017.

9.f3

9.dxc5 ♖d8 10.h4 h5 effectively cuts across White's main plan – 11.♘f3 ♕xc5 12.e4 ♘c6 13.exd5 ♗e6, regaining the pawn.

Here in Delchev-Zakhartsov, Paleochora 2015, Black correctly judged that he should push ...b5, but he over-optimistically decided not to prepare it at all and unnecessarily sacrificed a pawn with:



9...b5?!. However, this pawn is important for the attack, so it was better to play first:

9...c4! 10.g4 ♖d8 11.g5 ♘h5 12.e4 and now 12...b5 is already strong – 13.a3 e6 14.♗h3 ♘c6.

Finally, 7.♘f3 blunts White's attack and gives Black a wide choice. He could play in the centre with 7...♕d6 8.e3 ♘bd7, intending ...♘e4, or with 7...c6 8.e3 ♘bd7 9.h3 ♕c7, Kotainy-Timman, Germany 2017.

5...0-0

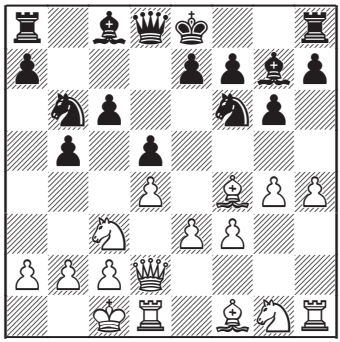
After White's castling, the plan with 5...c6! 6.f3 b5 becomes topical, too:

7.e4

Alternatively:

7.h4 h5 8.e4 b4;

7.e3 ♘bd7 8.g4 ♘b6 9.h4



9...h5 10.g5 ♘fd7 11.e4 b4 12.♘ce2 a5 13.b3 0-0 14.e5 c5∓;

7.♔b1 ♘bd7 8.e3 ♘b6 (8...0-0!? 9.g4 ♖e8) 9.♗d3 a5 10.e4, Alekseev-

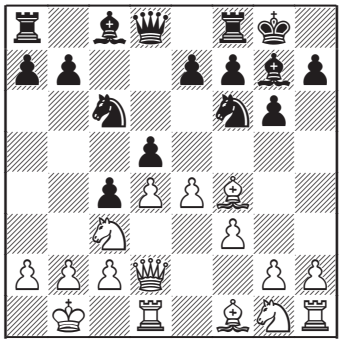
Grigoriants, Moscow 2017, 10...b4 11.♘ce2 ♘c4 12.♕e1 ♕b6↑.

7...b4 8.♘a4 dxe4 9.fxe4 ♕a5 10.♘c5 ♘bd7 11.♘xd7 ♗xd7 12.♗c4 ♘xe4 13.♕e1 ♘f6 14.♘f3 0-0∓.

6.♗h6

Another plausible option is 6.f3 c5 7.dxc5

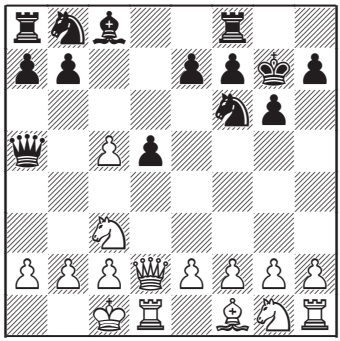
7.e3 ♘c6 8.♔b1 is solid. (Black's attack is faster after 8.g4 ♕a5 9.♔b1 c4 10.h4 b5 11.g5 b4∓.) Black should probably try the pawn sac 8...c4 9.e4



9...b5!? 10.♘xb5 dxe4 11.♗xc4 ♕b6 12.♘c3 ♖d8 13.♘ge2 ♘a5 14.♗b3 ♘xb3 15.axb3 exf3 16.gxf3 ♘d5 with full compensation. The f3-pawn is very weak, Black's bishop pair and heavy pieces will target the enemy king.

7...♘bd7 8.e3 (8.♘xd5? ♘xd5 9.♕xd5 ♕a5) 8...♘xc5 9.♗e5 ♕b6 10.♕d4=.

6...c5 7.dxc5 ♕a5 8.♗xg7 ♔xg7



9.h4

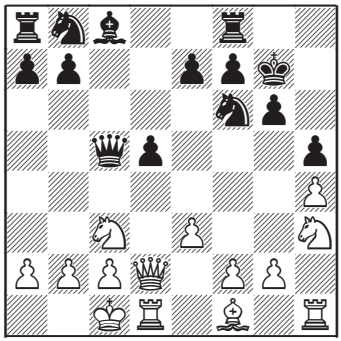
The point is that 9.♘xd5 ♕xa2 10.♕c3 is not any better for White. Black could answer 10...♖d8 11.e4 ♗e6⇄. Even 10...♕a1+ 11.♔d2 ♕a4 was playable, Cabrera-Dvirnyy, Catalunya 2014.

9...h5

This is an almost automatic reaction, but Black could also take over the initiative with 9...d4!? 10.♕xd4 ♘c6, followed by ...♗f5. It is not easy to weigh up the ensuing complications, though.

A clever alternative was also 9...♘c6!?, hoping for 10.h5? d4 11.hxg6 h5! 12.♘b1 ♕xc5 with a devastating attack. Instead, 10.e3 h5 would transpose to the game.

10.e3 ♕xc5 11.♘h3



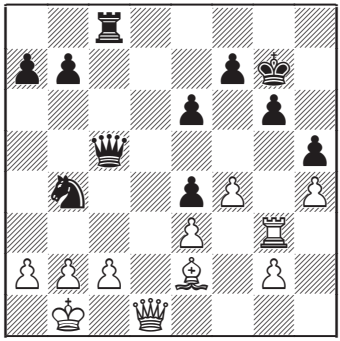
11...♗xh3!

A good strategic decision. In positions with opposite attacks, knights are often stronger than bishops.

12.♖xh3 ♘c6 13.f4 e6

Black has a huge positional edge. All his pieces are active.

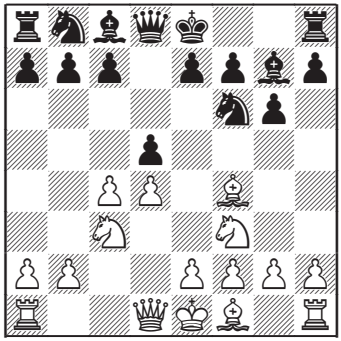
14.♔b1 ♖fd8 15.♗e2 ♖ac8 16.♖g3 ♘e4 17.♘xe4 dxe4 18.♕c1 ♖xd1 19.♕xd1 ♘b4



20.a3 (20.c3 ♘d3 21.♗xd3 ♖d8) **20...♘xc2 21.♕d2 ♕d5 22.♕xd5 exd5 23.♗d1 ♘e1 24.♗b3 ♖c5 25.f5 ♘d3 26.♖g5 d4 27.fxg6 ♖xg5 28.hxg5 dxe3 0-1**

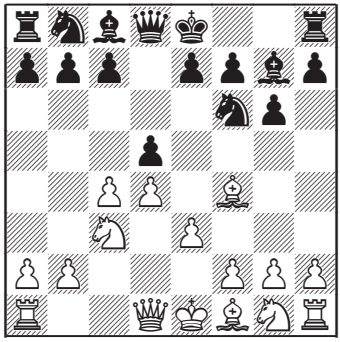
Chapter 3. 1.d4 d5 2.♗f4 ♘f6 3.♘f3 g6 4.c4
Main Ideas

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 d5 3.♗f4 g6 4.c4 ♗g7 5.♘c3



5...0-0

The move order 1.d4 d5 2.♗f4 ♘f6 3.e3 g6 rules out the line 3.♘f3 g6 4.c4 ♗g7 5.♘c3 0-0 6.♖c1, but enables 4.c4 ♗g7 5.♘c3, where instead of ♘f3, White has played e3.



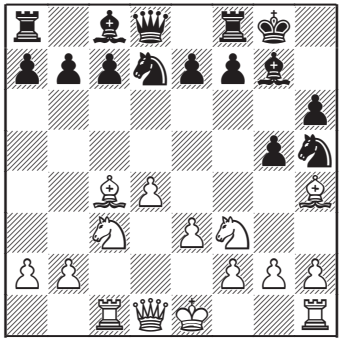
Now 5...c5 6.dxc5 ♕a5 7.♖c1 dxc4 8.♗xc4 would throw us out of our repertoire after 8...0-0 9.♘ge2 or 9.♘f3. Therefore, we go 5...0-0, when 6.♘f3 reaches line B. However, White has two major alternatives with independent significance: 6.♖c1 and 6.cxd5. I consider them in **Game 11** Wojtaszek-Nepomniachtchi, Wijk aan Zee 2017. They do not pose any theoretical problem for us, but we have to include one more line in our home preparation. That's why I consider the move order with 1...♘f6 preferable, provided that you are not afraid of 2.c4, to be sure.

After 5...0-0, White could aim at building a pawn centre or stake on quick development:

A. 6.♖c1 dxc4 7.e4

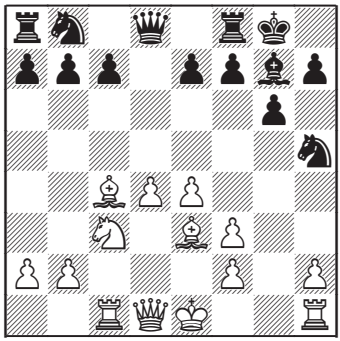
It is not late to return to the more prudent 7.e3, when 7...♗e6 8.♘g5 ♗d5 9.e4 h6 is the proven equalizer – see **Game 9** Del Rio de Angelis-Espinosa,Linares 2016.

Instead, I suggest a surprise line which runs 7...♘bd7!? 8.♗xc4 ♘h5 9.♗g5 h6 10.♗h4 g5



Although it is a very rare guest in practice, it is the weapon of choice of famous adepts of the Grünfeld as Kasparov, Svidler, Cheparinov. Black will counter-attack in the centre with ...e5 or ...c5. His bishop pair is a potential winner, so White must play concrete, energetic chess. That would assure fair winning chances to the better player.

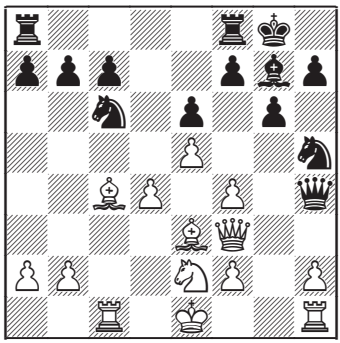
7...♗g4 8.♗xc4 ♘h5 9.♗e3 ♗xf3 10.gxf3



Here the main line is 10...e5 11.dxe5 ♗xe5 12.♕xd8 ♖xd8=, see **Game 8** Zubov-Timofeev, Moscow 2009. Instead, I have another surprise for White in store:

10...e6!? 11.f4 ♕h4 12.♕f3 ♘c6 13.e5 (or 13.♘e2 ♖fd8! 14.e5)

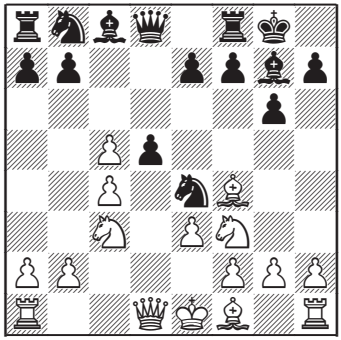
In practice Black invariably put his queen's rook on d8 and his bishop on f6. That allowed White to mount an attack with ♔h1, ♖g1 and the h6-bishop was hanging in some lines. I recommend a much better redeployment:



13...♖fd8! 14.♘e2 ♗f8

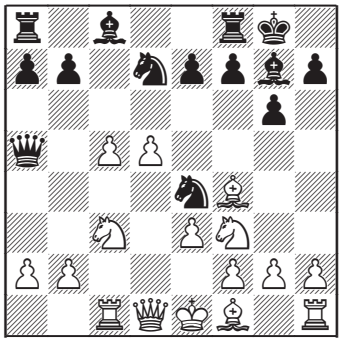
This position is completely unexplored. Black's play is rather easy. He is planning ...♘e7, ...♘g7-f5, ...♗h6, ...c6, and White's centre will be paralysed.

B. 6.e3 c5 7.dxc5 ♘e4!?

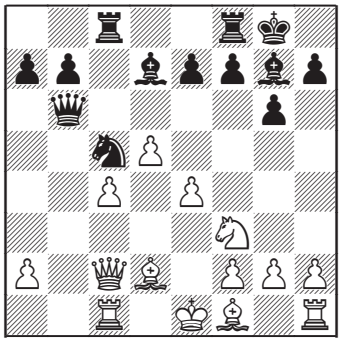


We are going for a kill! White is still to find an adequate reaction to this sharp move.

8.♖c1 ♘d7!? 9.cxd5 ♕a5



It is a bit awkward to recommend here to White 10.♕c2 ♘xc3 11.bxc3 ♘xc5 12.e4 ♗d7 13.♗d2 ♖ac8! 14.c4 ♕b6.



The e4-pawn falls after ...♗a4 and White should be struggling for the draw, with his compromised pawn structure.

Still, that may be the lesser evil, as the more popular 10.♘d4 ♘xc3 11.bxc3 ♕xa2∓ is not fun either. See **Game 10** Simantsev-Shishkin, Police 2013.

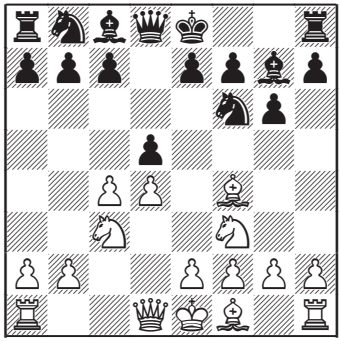
Theoretical status

The ♗f4 System has seen its moment of fame in the 80-ies when Karpov employed it against Kasparov, but it is currently struggling. In most lines Black has found clear equalizers. Even more, I show that Black has plenty of ways to aspire to the initiative at an early stage of the opening.

My main lines are practically uncovered by the best latest books on the Grünfeld. The surprise effect should be on your side.

Chapter 3. 1.d4 d5 2.♗f4 ♘f6 3.♘f3 g6 4.c4
Step by Step

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 d5 3.♗f4 g6 4.c4 ♗g7 5.♘c3



5...0-0

5...c5 is a major option against an early e3, but it is dubious here. White can answer 6.dxc5 ♕a5 7.cxd5 ♘xd5 8.♕xd5 ♗xc3+ 9.♗d2 ♗e6 10.♕xb7 ♗xd2+ 11.♘xd2 0-0 12.b4! ♕a4 13.e3±.

A. 6.♖c1; **B.** 6.e3

6.cxd5 ♘xd5 7.♘xd5

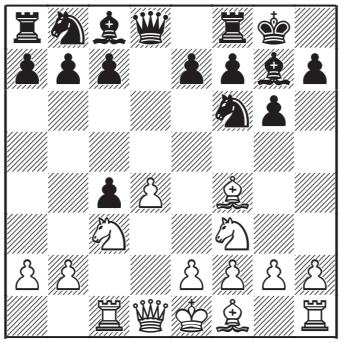
Akobian keeps defending 7.♗e5, but the natural 7...♗xe5 8.♘xe5 ♘xc3 9.bxc3 ♘d7 is fine for Black, especially after 10.♘xd7 ♗xd7 11.e4 e5!.

7...c5 8.♗xg7 ♔xg7 9.e3 ♘c6 10.♖c1 cxd4 11.♘xd4 ♘xc3 12.bxc3 ♗d7 13.♗e2 e5 was also better for Black in Akobian-Khachiyan, chess.com 2017

7...♕xd5 8.♗xc7 has nearly disappeared from practice owing to the following line: 8...♘c6! 9.e3 ♗f5 10.♗e2 ♖ac8 11.♗g3 ♕a5+ 12.♕d2 ♘b4 13.0-0 ♖c2 14.♕e1 ♖xb2 15.♘e5 ♗xe5 16.♗xe5, Anikaev-Giorgadze, Soviet Union 1973, 16...♕a3!∓ (Avrukh).

A. 6.♖c1 dxc4

6...c5 7.dxc5 ♗e6 8.♘d4 ♘c6 9.♘xe6 fxe6 10.e3 d4!? is a decent option. 6...♗e6 7.e3 dxc4 transposes to A1.



A1. 7.e3; **A2.** 7.e4

A1. 7.e3 ♘bd7!?

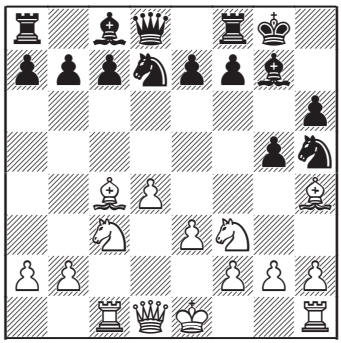
The solid equalizer is 7...♗e6 8.♘g5 ♗d5 9.e4 h6 – see **Game 9** Del Rio de Angelis-Espinosa,Linares 2016.

The text is an enterprising alternative, meant for players willing to take some risks. In practice it brings nice dividends, probably because White is less prepared to meet it.

8.♗xc4 ♘h5

8...c5?! 9.0-0 cxd4 10.♘b5 ♘e8 (10...dxe3 11.♘g5±) 11.♘c7 ♘xc7 12.♗xc7 ♕e8 13.♘xd4 ♘b6 14.♗xb6 axb6 15.♕b3 ♗xd4 16.exd4 ♕d8 17.♕b4 b5 18.♗b3 e6± is an inferior alternative.

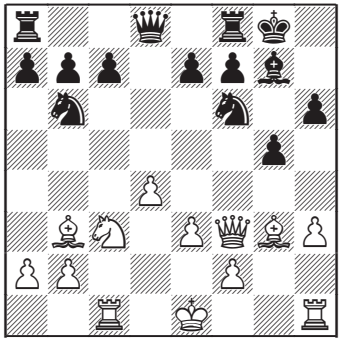
9.♗g5 h6 10.♗h4 g5



11.♗g3

11.♘d2 e5 12.♕xh5 exd4 13.exd4 gxh4 14.0-0 ♘b6 15.♗b3 ♕xd4 16.♘de4 h3, intending ...♕e5, was comfortable for Black in L'Ami-Cheparinov, Tromsoe 2014. This game is important for the theory, as L'Ami was Cheparinov's second and both opponents were undoubtedly well prepared for each other.

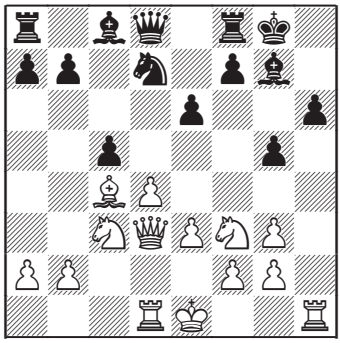
11.g4 ♘b6 12.♗b3 ♗xg4 13.h3 ♗xf3 14.♕xf3 ♘f6 15.♗g3 is interesting.



White's bishop pair could become dangerous, so Black should seek counterplay at all cost: 15...c5! 16.dxc5 ♘bd7 17.♘a4 ♕a5+ 18.♔f1 b6 19.cxb6 axb6 20.♔g2 ♖ac8, planning ...h5-h4, ...g4.

11...♘xg3 12.hxg3 c5 13.dxc5

In my opinion, 13.♕d3! e6 14.♖d1, which preserves the tension in the centre, is the most challenging option.

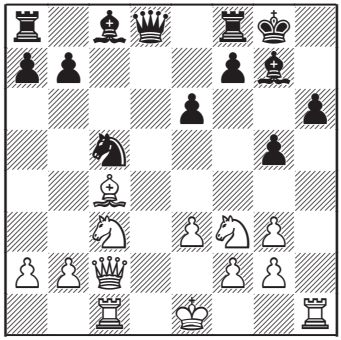


Here 14...g4 15.♘h4 cxd4 (15...b6 16.♕e4!) 16.exd4 ♕g5 17.0-0 ♖d8 is

too dangerous as White gets a strong initiative after 18.f4 gxf3 19.♕xf3 ♘f6 20.♗b3!. White's main threats are based on the break d4-d5 and the attack on h7. Therefore, we should make the prophylactic move:

14...♖e8!, when 15.d5 (14.0-0 ♕a5 15.♘e4 cxd4 16.exd4 ♖d8∞) 15...exd5 16.♗xd5 ♕e7 17.♘b5 ♘f6 18.♘d6 ♖f8 19.♗c4 ♗e6 20.♘f5 ♗xf5 ♕e4! is roughly equal.

13...♘xc5 14.♕c2 e6



15.♘h2

Naturally, 15.0-0 cannot be scary. Timofeev-Artemiev, Khanty-Mansiysk 2015, saw 15...♕b6 16.a3, when 16...♗d7= would have been more reasonable than 16...a5. More natural would be to complete development with 15...♗d7 and only after 16.♖fd1 – 16...♕b6=.

15...b5! 16.♗xb5 ♖b8

Black has full compensation for the pawn. Matsenko-Ipatov, Izmir 2016, went 17.♗e2 ♗a6 18.♗xa6 ♘xa6 19.0-0 ♘b4⩱. The computer finds an amazing resource: 17...♗xc3!! 18.bxc3 ♗b7 19.f3 ♗c6! aiming at a4. The point is that 20.♘g4? is not a threat owing to 20...f5! and Black's counter-attack is crushing.

A2. 7.e4 ♗g4 8.♗xc4

Alternatively:

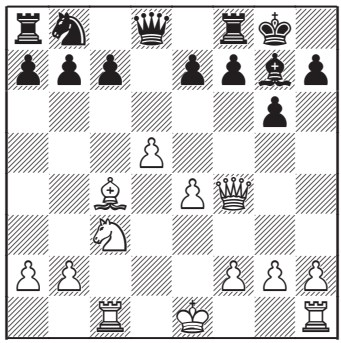
8.e5? ♘h5 9.♗e3 c5 10.dxc5 ♕xd1+ 11.♖xd1 ♗xf3 12.gxf3 ♗xe5 13.♗xc4 ♘c6∓, Borges-Llobel Cortell, Albacete 2002.

8.♗e3 is more consistent, but it gives us a wide choice between 8...♘h5, 8...c5 9.dxc5 ♕a5 10.♕c2 ♗e6 and even 8...b5 9.e5 ♘d5 10.♘xb5 c5 11.♗xc4 ♘xe3 12.fxe3 a6 13.♘c3 ♘c6 14.dxc5 ♕a5 15.♕a4 ♕xc5 16.♘e2 ♕a5+ 17.♕xa5 ♘xa5 18.♗d5 ♖ab8=.

8...♘h5

This move order is not obligatory.

8...♗xf3 transposes after 9.gxf3. In practice White has tried to exploit the move order by 9.♕xf3 ♘h5 10.d5 ♘xf4 11.♕xf4, but the arising position is rich and promising for Black.



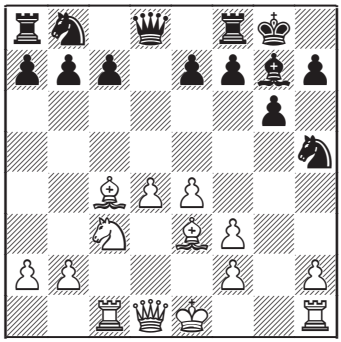
The game Novikov-C.Horvath, Cairo 1997, went 11...♕d6 12.♕e3 c6 13.0-0 cxd5 14.exd5 ♘d7. Even better is to leave the queen on d8: 11...c6 12.0-0 cxd5, intending to meet 13.exd5 by 13...♘d7 and 13.♗xd5 by 13...♕b6.

9.♗e3

9.♗g5?! just drops a pawn after 9...♗xf3 10.♕xf3 ♕xd4, since 11.♘d5 e6 12.♘xc7 ♕e5 13.♘xa8 ♕xg5 14.0-0 ♘c6 promises Black a devastating attack, for instance: 15.♘c7 ♗e5 16.♘b5 a6 17.♘c3 ♗f4 18.♖c2 ♘e5 19.♕e2 ♗xh2+ 20.♔xh2 ♘f4.

9...♗xf3 10.gxf3

After 10.♕xf3 ♗xd4 11.0-0, we should refrain from taking on e3. Instead, 11...e6 or 11...c5 are fine.



10...e6!?

The established equalizer is 10...e5 11.dxe5 ♗xe5 12.♕xd8 ♖xd8=, see **Game 8** Zubov-Timofeev, Moscow 2009.

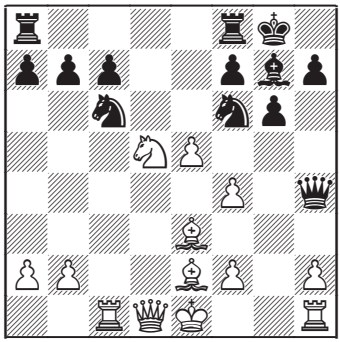
The text brings about sharp, strategically unbalanced positions, where the strongest player has higher chances to win compared to the above-mentioned endgame.

11.f4 ♕h4

Mounting the tension.

11...♘c6!? is of equal worth. It forces White to open the centre since after 12.e5?! ♗h6 White cannot play 13.♕f3 as the d4-pawn will hang. Remains:

a) L.Portish answered 12.d5 exd5 13.♘xd5, when best is 13...♕h4! 14.♗e2 ♘f6 15.e5



15...♘xd5

15...♘d7!? 16.♕d3 ♘b6 is more ambitious.

16.♕xd5 ♖ad8 17.♕g2 f6. Black has good counterplay, but White could draw with 18.e6 (18.f5∞) 18...f5 19.0-0 ♖fe8 20.♗b5 ♗xb2 21.♗xc6 bxc6 22.♖xc6 ♗d4 23.♗xd4 ♖xd4 24.♖xc7 ♕xf4 25.♕b7 ♕g4+=.

b) 12.♗e2 ♗xd4 13.♗xh5

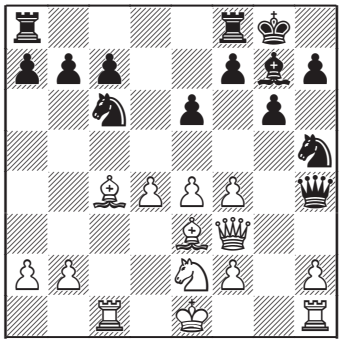
Or 13.♗xd4 ♕xd4 14.♗xh5 gxh5 15.♕xh5 ♖ad8 16.♕g5+ ♔h8 17.♖d1 ♕g7 18.♕xg7+=.

13...♗xe3 14.♕xd8=.

12.♕f3 ♘c6 13.e5

13.♘e2 most likely will transpose after 13...♖fd8! 14.e5.

After 14.♖d1, Black could repeat moves with 14...♘a5 15.♗d3 ♘c6 16.♗c4, while 16.♗c2 ♘b4 17.♗b3 c5 would be fine for him. More interesting is to play on with 14...♖ac8 15.e5 ♘b4 16.0-0 ♗h6.



13...♖fd8!

Only this move assures Black of adequate counterplay. Its idea is to free f8 for the bishop which would enable the manoeuvre ...♘h5-g7-f5. At the same time the bishop might enter the play from b4. In practice Black has only tried 13...♖ad8, but after 14.♘e2 ♗h6?! 15.♖g1 ♘g7 16.♗d3 ♘b4 17.♗b1! ♘d5 18.♖g3 the threat ♖h3 is extremely unpleasant because the h6-bishop is hanging.

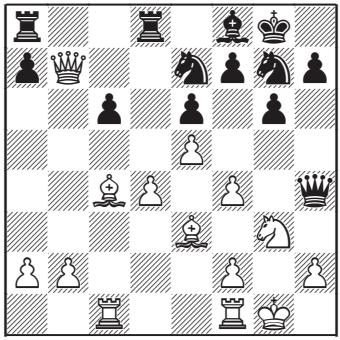
14.♘e2 ♗f8

This position is double-edged, but it is more demanding strategically from White since his pawn structure is compromised. Possible continuations are:

a) 15.f5 exf5 16.♖g1 ♘g7 17.♔f1 ♗e7∞.

b) 15.♗b3 ♖ac8 16.f5 exf5 17.♖g1 ♘g7 18.♖xc6 bxc6 19.♗g5=.

c) 15.0-0 ♘e7 16.♘g3 ♘g7 17.♕xb7 c6

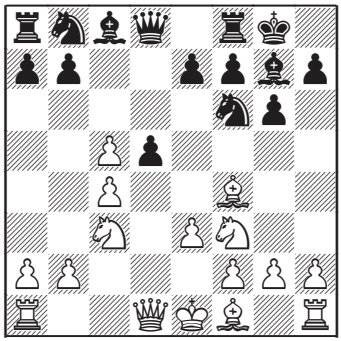


White's queen is cut off from the kingside. That requires accurate defence, e.g. 18.♖c3 ♖ac8 19.♔h1 ♘gf5 20.♗c1 ♗h6↑.

d) 15.d5 exd5 16.♗xd5 ♘b4 17.♗c4 ♘d3+ 18.♗xd3 ♖xd3 19.♖xc7 ♕d8 20.♖c1 ♗b4+ 21.♘c3 ♖c8 22.0-0 ♗xc3 23.bxc3 b6=.

B. 6.e3 c5 7.dxc5

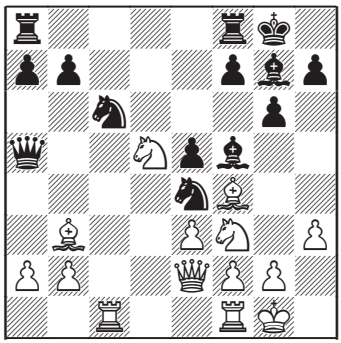
7.♗e2?! dxc4 8.♗xc4 ♗g4 9.♗e2 ♘c6 is unacceptable for White.



7...♘e4!?

This should be a little surprise for your opponents as 7...♕a5 is by far the most fashionable move. It has two serious drawbacks: the arising positions may be drawish in view of the symmetrical pawn structure; you should remember a lot of theory. The main line goes:

8.♖c1 dxc4 (8...♖d8 – Carlsen) 9.♗xc4 ♕xc5 10.♗b3 ♘c6 11.0-0 ♕a5 12.h3 ♗f5 13.♕e2 ♘e4 14.♘d5 e5



This position became extremely popular after Karpov's exchange sacrifice 15.♖xc6!? in his world title match against Kasparov in 1986. Later White has also tested extensively 15.♗g5 and 15.♗h2 with long forced variations in all cases. They are covered in Chess Stars book *The Safest Grünfeld.* Black may be holding his own, but I do not see any reason to recommend such lines when we have such a noteworthy alternative as 7...♘e4.

8.♖c1

8.♘xe4? dxe4 9.♕xd8 ♖xd8 10.♘d4 e5 11.♗g5 f6 12.♘b5 fxg5 13.♘c7 ♘a6 is plain bad for White.

8.♗e5 ♗xe5 9.♘xe5 ♘xc3 10.bxc3 ♕a5 11.♖c1 ♘c6 12.♘xc6 bxc6 13.cxd5 cxd5 14.♗e2 was drawn in L.Portisch-Ruck, Hungary 2003, but nothing hampers Black to play on from the final position.

8...♘d7!?

8...♘xc3 9.bxc3 ♕a5 is slightly premature, as the pawn on c3 enables the line 10.cxd5 ♘d7 11.♕b3 ♘xc5 12.♕b4.

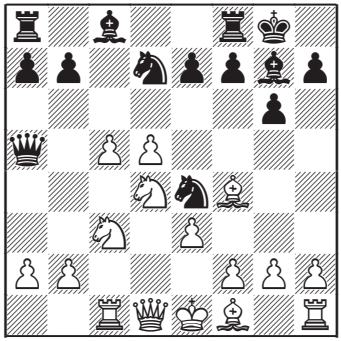
Black may try 9...dxc4 10.♕xd8 ♖xd8 11.♗xc4 ♘d7 12.♖d1 ♖f8 13.♗g5 ♗xc3+ 14.♔e2 ♗f6 15.♗xf6 ♘xf6 16.♘e5 ♗f5 17.c6, where White preserves some pressure and plays with a draw in the pocket.

9.cxd5 ♕a5 10.♘d4

10.♗c4?! ♘xc3 11.bxc3 ♗xc3+ 12.♔e2 ♘xc5 is best punished by 12...b5!.

10.♕c2 ♘xc3 11.bxc3 ♘xc5 12.e4 ♗d7 13.♗d2 ♖ac8! 14.c4 occurred in Prohaszka-Jansa, Germany 2016, when 14...♕b6! instead of 14...♕a6 would have been disturbing for White. The point is that the queen controls b1 so ...♗a4 threatens to win the e4-pawn. The only move would be 15.♗e3 (15.♗e2 ♗a4; 15.♖b1 ♕a6)

15...♗b2 16.♖b1 ♗c3+ 17.♗d2 ♗xd2+ 18.♘xd2 ♕a5 19.♗e2 ♗a4 20.♕b2 ♘xe4 21.♕b4 ♕xb4 22.♖xb4 ♘c5 23.f3! with even chances.



10...♘xc3

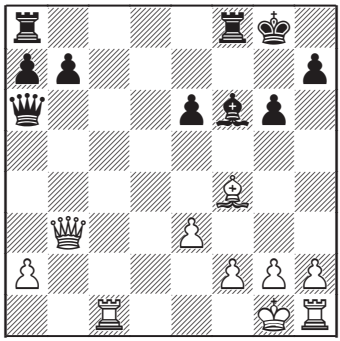
10...♘dxc5 is less popular and scores horribly, but in fact it also offers Black a nice game:

11.♗c4

11.♕c2 ♖d8 (11...♘xc3!? 12.♕xc3 ♕xc3+ 13.bxc3 ♖d8 14.♗c4 ♗d7=) 12.♗c7 ♕xc7 13.♘xe4 ♕a5+ 14.♕c3 ♕xc3+ 15.♘xc3 ♘d7 16.♗c4 ♗xd4 17.exd4 ♘f6 is enough for a draw, for instance: 18.0-0 a6 19.a4 b6 20.♖fe1 ♔f8 21.♖e5 ♗b7 22.♖ce1 ♖d7 23.f3 ♖ad8=.

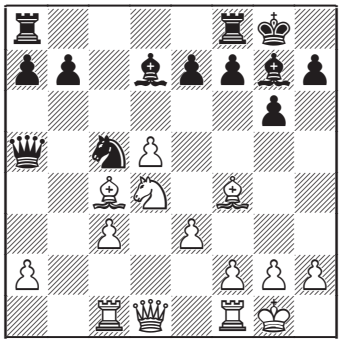
11...♘xc3 12.bxc3 ♗d7

12...e5 is brutal, but effective play for a draw: 13.dxe6 ♗xe6 14.♗xe6 ♘xe6 15.♘xe6 ♗xc3+ 16.♔f1 fxe6 17.♕b3 ♕a6+ 18.♔g1 ♗f6



19.h3 ♖ad8 20.♔h2 ♖d2 21.♖c2 ♖xc2 22.♕xc2 ♕c6 23.♕xc6 bxc6 24.♖c1 ♖c8 25.♗d6 ♔f7 26.♔g3 ♗e7 27.♗c5 ♗xc5 28.♖xc5 ♔e7 29.♖a5 c5! 30.♖xa7+ ♔d6 31.♔f3 c4 32.♔e2 ♖b8 33.♔d2 ♖b2+ 34.♔c3 ♖xf2 35.g4 h5 36.gxh5 gxh5 37.♔xc4 ½-½ Gustafsson-Safarli, Porto Carras 2011.

13.0-0



This typical position has been tested in a number of games with poor results for White. He cannot retain the extra pawn:

13...♘a4 14.♕b3 ♘b6 15.♗b5 ♗xd4 16.♗xd7 ♗g7 17.♗b5 a6 18.♗e2 ♘xd5

19.c4 ♘xf4 20.exf4 b6∓, Sanikidze-Gupta, Istanbul 2012.

11.bxc3 ♕xa2∓

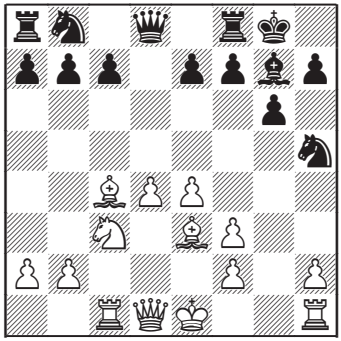
Practice has proved that the a-pawn is more dangerous than White's centre. See **Game 10** Simantsev-Shishkin, Police 2013.

Chapter 3. 1.d4 d5 2.♗f4 ♘f6 3.♘f3 g6 4.c4
Annotated Games

8. Zubov – Timofeev

Moscow 31.01.2009

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 d5 4.♘f3 ♗g7 5.♗f4 0-0 6.♖c1 dxc4 7.e4 ♗g4 8.♗xc4 ♘h5 9.♗e3 ♗xf3 10.gxf3



10...e5

This is a well tested route to an equal endgame. I consider 10...e6!? in the "Step by Step" chapter.

11.dxe5

After 11.d5, Black should undermine the centre with 11...c6 or prepare the break with 11...♘d7 12.h4 ♖c8.

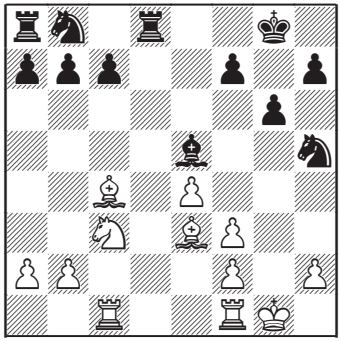
11...♗xe5 12.♕xd8 ♖xd8 13.0-0

13.♘e2 commonly transposes, but it is good for White to keep the more active option of ♘d5.

13...♘c6 14.0-0 ♗xb2 15.♖b1 ♘e5 returns to the main game.

14...♘d4!? 15.♘xd4 ♗xd4 16.b4 ♗e5 17.b5 ♘f4 18.♖fd1 b6= occurred in Jankovic-Naumann, Austria 2012. The game soon finished in a draw.

14...♘a5 is also possible, as 15.♗d5 c6 16.♗xf7+ ♔xf7 17.b4 ♗c7 does not look dangerous.



13...♘d7

13...♘c6!? is a little more straightforward. Then 14.♘e2 transposes, and 14.♘d5 ♘a5 15.♗g5 ♖d7 16.♗b5 c6

17.b4 cxb5 18.bxa5 ♖e8= 19.♖c5 a6 20.♖fc1 f6 21.♗e3 ½-½ was the short game Sumets-Shishkin, Crespi 2009.

14.♘e2

The somewhat passive Black's 13th move, which did not target d4, allows White to keep more tension with 14.♖c2!? ♗f4

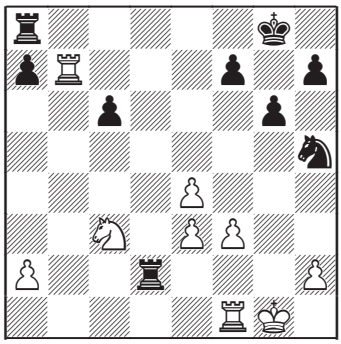
14...♘b6 15.♗b3 c6 16.♘e2 ♖d3 17.f4 ♗c7 was seen in Epishin-Ftacnik, Bad Zwesten 1999. White preserves a space advantage after 18.♔g2 ♖ad8 19.♔f3±.

15.♘d5 ♗xe3 16.fxe3 c6 17.♘c3.

14...♗xb2!

White's pieces are more coordinated, but he is unable to gain dividends from that.

15.♖b1 ♘e5 16.♖xb2 ♘xc4 17.♖xb7 ♘xe3 18.fxe3 ♖d2 19.♘c3 c6



20.♖c7

20.e5 ♖d3 21.♘d1 ♖ad8 22.♘f2 ♖xe3 23.♘g4 ♖e2 24.♘h6+ ♔g7 25.♘xf7 ♖dd2 26.♘d6+ is a perpetual.

20...♖d3 21.♖xc6 ♖xe3 22.♘d5 ♖a3 23.♖f2

At this point the game Janczarski-Nurkiewicz, Warsaw 2013, ended in a draw. This is a logical outcome, but equal endgame still does not mean a draw. An important factor here is that Zubov is about a hundred Elo points lower rated than Timofeev and perhaps that makes him rush to trade more pieces.

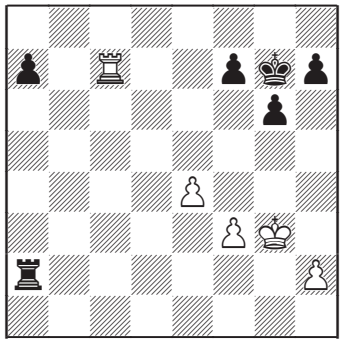
23...♖e8 24.♘f6+?!

Why voluntarily give a perfect centralised knight for the one at the edge of the board?!. Anything like 24.♔g2 or 24.♖c7 maintained the balance. The text suddenly gives Black considerable chances as his pawn structure is much better.

24...♘xf6 25.♖xf6 ♖e5 26.♖c6 ♔g7

26...♖g5 27.♔f1 h5!, intending ...h4-h3, was perhaps more testing.

27.♖c7 ♖ea5 28.♔g2 ♖xa2 29.♖xa2 ♖xa2+ 30.♔g3



The asymmetric kingside pawns facilitate White's defence. Shift the e4-pawn to g2, and his task would have been more difficult.

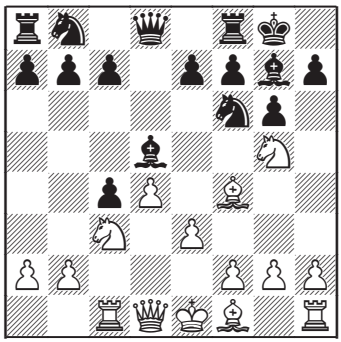
30...a5 31.♖a7 a4 32.e5!? ♔f8 33.e6 fxe6 34.♖xh7 a3 35.♖a7 ♖a1 36.♔g2 ♔e8

37.♖a6 ♔e7 38.h4 ♔d7 39.♔h2 ♔e7 40.♔g2 ♔d7 41.♔h2 ♔c7 42.♖xe6 ♔b7 43.♖e3 ½-½

9. Del Rio de Angelis – Espinosa

Linares 10.08.2016

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 g6 3.c4 ♗g7 4.♘c3 d5 5.♗f4 0-0 6.♖c1 dxc4 7.e3 ♗e6 8.♘g5 ♗d5

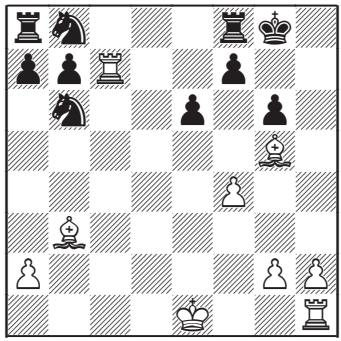


9.e4

The latest top level game with 9.♘xd5 ♘xd5 10.♗xc4 was Wang-Grischuk, blindfold, Beijing 2011. It went 10...♘xf4 11.♕f3 e6 12.♕xf4 c5 13.dxc5 ♕a5+ 14.♔e2 ♘d7 15.♖c2 ♘xc5 16.♖hc1, when 16...b5! 17.♗b3 ♘xb3 18.axb3 ♖ad8 is slightly better for Black since he could attack pawns on both flanks, for example, 19.♘e4 b4 20.♘f6?! ♗xf6 21.♕xf6 ♕h5 or 21...♕d5.

9...h6 10.exd5 hxg5 11.♗xg5 ♘xd5 12.♗xc4 ♘b6 13.♗b3 ♘c6

13...♕xd4 14.♕xd4 ♗xd4 15.♘b5 ♗xb2 16.♖c2 ♗e5 17.f4! ♗d6 18.♘xc7 ♗xc7 19.♖xc7 e6! (19...♘c6 20.f5!?) is another interesting line.



Black should be holding after 20.g4 ♘a6, but he would need accurate defence.

14.d5

14.♘e2 is passive. In G.Garcia-Uhlmann, Cienfuegos 1973, White managed to hold the draw after 14...♘xd4

> I do not see much sense in inserting 14...a5 15.a4 ♖c8 as recommended by Avrukh in his book *The Grünfeld Defence*. After 16.0-0 ♘xd4 17.♘xd4 ♕xd4 18.♗xe7, the position is a dead draw. Or 14...♖c8 15.0-0 ♘xd4 16.♘xd4 ♕xd4 17.♕f3 e6 18.♕xb7 ♘d5=, Lauber-Baramidze, Griesheim 2017.

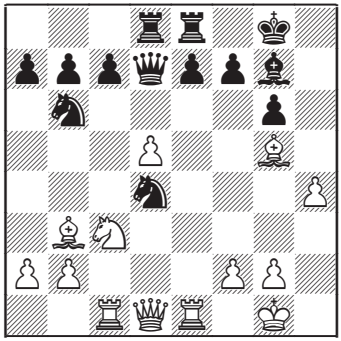
15.♘xd4 ♗xd4 16.0-0 c6 17.♕g4 ♗xb2 18.♖cd1 ♘d5 19.♖d3 ♔g7 20.♗xd5 cxd5 21.♕b4 ♗f6 22.♗xf6+.

14...♘d4 15.0-0 ♕d7 16.♖e1

16.♗e3 ♘xb3 17.♕xb3 ♗xc3!? is satisfactory for Black.

16.h4 looks more disturbing, but 16...♖fe8 17.h5? fails to 17...♕f5. Thus White should transpose to the main game with 17.♖fe1.

16...♖fe8 17.h4 ♖ad8



18.a4

The latest try.

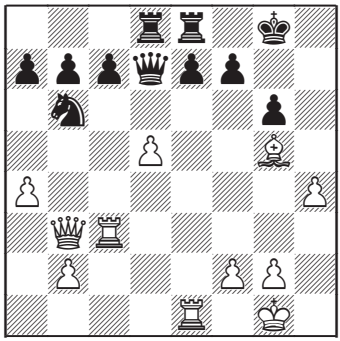
18.h5 ♕f5 is already less clear as White has 19.hxg6 ♕xg5 20.gxf7+ ♔xf7 21.d6+ with compensation. On the other hand, Black could slightly modify his idea with 18...gxh5! 19.♕xh5 ♕f5 20.♗d1 ♘xd5 21.♕h4 ♘f6 22.♘e4 c6 23.♖c5 ♘e2+ 24.♗xe2 ♕xe4∓ to gain the upper hand in Nguyen-Li, China 2010.

18...♘xb3 19.♕xb3 ♗xc3!

19...c6 20.dxc6 bxc6 21.♕b4 gave White an initiative in Dreev-Tari, Gjakova 2016.

The text equalizes, although Black should have strong nerves to defend with a naked king.

20.♖xc3



20...♕xa4?

A critical point. I can understand Black's longing for an endgame, but his wrong decision should cost him a pawn. 20...♘xd5 was better and after 21.♖g3, both 21...♔g7 22.h5 ♕d6 and 21...♔h8!? 22.♗d2 ♖g8 23.h5 gxh5 24.♕f3 ♖xg3 25.♕xh5+ ♔g8 26.fxg3 ♘f6 should hold.

21.♕xa4 ♘xa4 22.♖xc7 f6 23.♗h6 ♔f7 24.♖xb7 ♖xd5 25.♗c1?

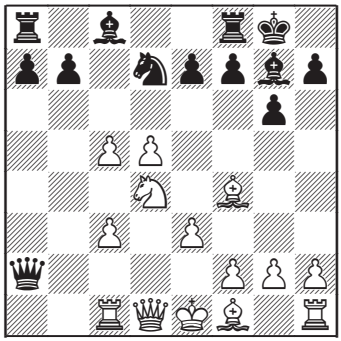
Now Black escapes. 25.♗e3! a6 26.♖c1 dominates the a4-knight and 26...♖b5 27.♖xb5 axb5 does not help much – 28.b3 ♘b2 29.♖c5 b4 (29...♖b8 30.♖d5) 30.♔f1 ♘d1 31.♗d2 ♖a8 32.♔e2±.

25...a6 26.♖a7 ♖b5 27.♖e2 ♘c5 28.♗e3 ♘a4 29.♗c1 ♘c5 30.♗e3 ♘a4 ½-½

10. Simantsev – Shishkin

Police 18.07.2013

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 d5 4.♘f3 ♗g7 5.♗f4 0-0 6.e3 c5 7.dxc5 ♘e4 8.♖c1 ♘d7 9.cxd5 ♕a5 10.♘d4 ♘xc3 11.bxc3 ♕xa2

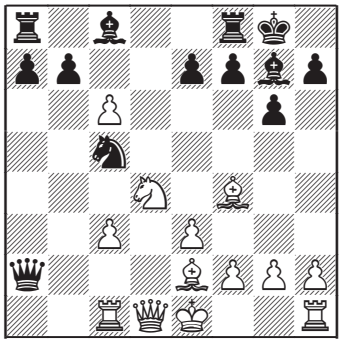


12.c6

12.♕b3 ♕xb3 13.♘xb3 was bad for White in Swayams-Melkumyan, Riga 2014 – 13...a5 14.c6 ♘b6 15.e4 bxc6 16.♗c7 ♘a4∓.

His best chance is perhaps 12.♘b3 a5 13.e4 ♕b2 (13...a4 14.♘d2) 14.♗d2 a4 15.♖b1 ♕a3 16.♘d4=.

12...♘c5 13.♗e2 ♕xd5 14.♗f3 ♕c4 15.♗e2 ♕a2



Of course, Black rejects the draw by repetition of moves. His distant passed pawn has great prospects and White should find the only move to keep the balance – 16.0-0! e5 17.♖a1 ♕b2 18.♖b1 ♕xc3 19.♘b5 ♕a5 20.♗g5 .bxc6 21.♗e7 cxb5 22.♖xb5 ♕a4 23.♗xc5 ♕xd1 24.♖xd1 ♗a6 25.♗xf8 ♗xb5 26.♗xb5 and the ending is a draw – 26...♗xf8 27.♖d7 f5 28.♗c6 ♖c8 29.♗d5+ ♔h8 30.g4. Instead, he hands the initiative to his opponent.

16.♗g5 e5 17.♗e7 exd4 18.♗xc5 dxe3 19.0-0?

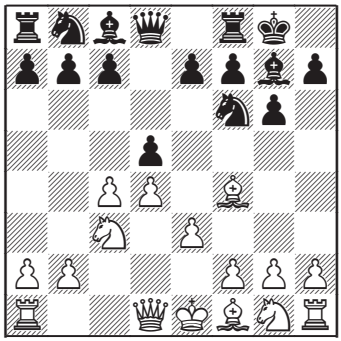
White surrenders without much fight. 19.♗xf8 exf2+ 20.♔xf2 ♗xf8 21.♖e1 ♗c5+ 22.♔f1 bxc6 may look scary, but at least he would have been an exchange up. If we look a few more moves ahead, the manoeuvre 23.♕d8+ ♔g7 24.♕g5 ♗f5 25.♕f4 ♕e6 26.g4= would ensure a *luft* for the king at g2 and sufficient counterplay.

19...♖e8 20.cxb7 ♗xb7 21.♗xe3 a5 22.♖a1 ♕d5 23.♕xd5 ♗xd5 24.♖a3 ♖ec8 25.♗d4 ♗f8 26.♖aa1 a4 27.♗f3 ♗xf3 28.gxf3 a3 29.♖fb1 ♖cb8 30.♔g2 ♖xb1 31.♖xb1 ♗g7 32.♗xg7 ♔xg7 33.♔f1 ♔f6 34.♔e2 a2 35.♖a1 ♔e5 0-1

11. Wojtaszek – Nepomniachtchi

Wijk aan Zee 2017

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 d5 4.♗f4 ♗g7 5.e3 0-0

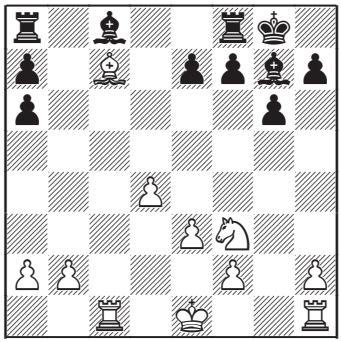


6.♖c1

Two decades ago 6.cxd5 ♘xd5 7.♘xd5 ♕xd5 8.♗xc7 was considered the most principled retort to 5...0-0.

> The point is that 8...♘c6, which promises Black the better game in the line with ♘f3 instead of e3, is not so effective as White has 9.♘e2 ♗g4 10.f3.

8...♘a6 practically regains the pawn since 9.♗g3 ♗f5 would be dangerous for White. So he takes 9.♗xa6 ♕xg2 10.♕f3 ♕xf3 11.♘xf3 bxa6 12.♖c1 and hopes to exploit the full control of the c-file.



White had some initial success because Black could not find the right place for his light-squared bishop. If he put it on d7, White would answer ♔d2, and on ...♗b7 the retort is ♔e2. In both cases White preserved some pull. Then Black discovered the clever waiting set-up:

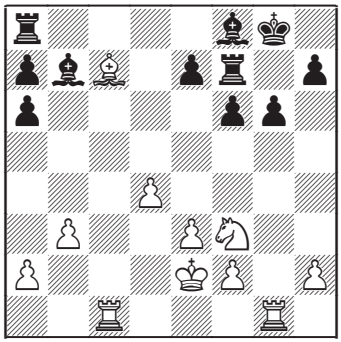
12...f6! 13.♖g1 ♖f7! and the current verdict is that the chances are completely even. Black obtains enough counterplay with ...e5:

14.♔e2 ♗d7

> 14...e5!? 15.dxe5 ♗d7 16.exf6 ♗xf6⇄ may be a simpler solution.

15.d5 e5=.

Here are a couple of recent examples where White tried the new idea 13.b3 – 13...♖f7 14.♖g1 ♗b7 15.♔e2 ♗f8



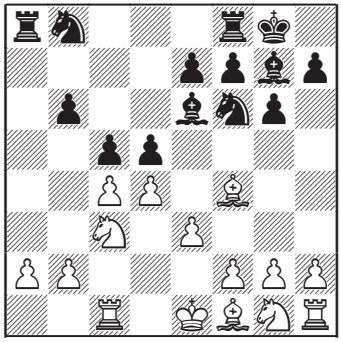
16.♗a5 e6 17.♘d2 ♖e8 18.h4 e5 19.h5 exd4 20.hxg6 hxg6 21.♖xg6+ ♔h7=, Li Chao-Giri, Stavanger 2016;

16.♘d2 e6 17.♗g3 ♖d8 18.♘c4 ♖d5 19.f3 ♖fd7 20.♖gd1 e5 21.e4 ♖xd4 22.♖xd4 exd4 23.♘a5 d3+ 24.♔d1 ♗b4 25.♘xb7 ♖xb7 26.♖c6 a5 27.♖xf6 a4

28.♖c6 axb3 29.axb3 ♔f7 30.♖c4=, Lysyj-Dominguez Perez, Sochi 2016.

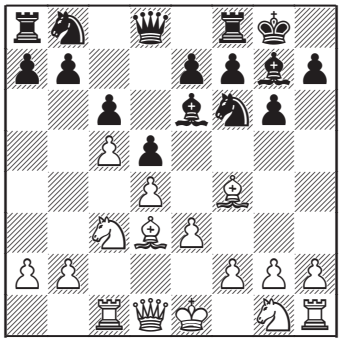
6...♗e6!

White misses the option of ♘g5. This is the drawback of 5.e3. The only attempt to punish Black is 7.♕b3 c5 8.♕xb7, but 8...♕b6! 9.♕xb6 axb6 has turns out to be pleasant for Black!



10.♘f3 dxc4 11.dxc5 (11.♘g5 cxd4 12.exd4 ♗d5) 11...bxc5 12.♘g5 ♗d5 13.e4 (13.♖d1 e6) 13...♗b7 14.♗xc4 (14.f3 ♗a6∓) 14...h6 15.♘xf7 ♖xf7 16.f3 ♗a6∓, Li Bo-Xu Minghui Shijiazhuang 2016. As a rule, a rook and two pawns should be better than two minor pieces, but the d3- and d4-square are very weak and Black's pieces will use them to invade the enemy camp.

7.c5 c6 8.♗d3



8...♗c8!

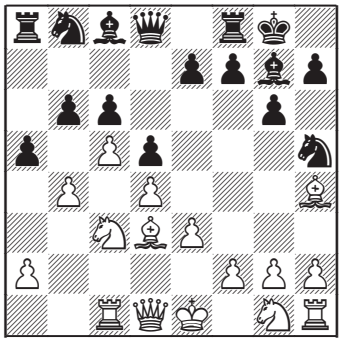
I do not see any reason to provoke f3 with 8...♗g4 9.f3 (9.♘ge2 ♗xe2 10.♗xe2 ♘bd7=) 9...♗c8 10.♘ge2 ♘bd7 11.b4 e5 12.♗g5 exd4 13.exd4 ♖e8 14.0-0.

9.♗g3

9.♗g5 does not hamper Black's counterplay – 9...h6 10.♗h4 b6 11.b4 a5 12.b5 (12.a3 axb4 13.axb4 ♘a6) 12...bxc5 13.dxc5 ♘fd7 14.♘a4 cxb5 15.♗xb5 ♗a6 16.♗e2 ♕c8↑.

9.♘f3 allows 9...♗g4 10.h3 ♗xf3 11.♕xf3 ♘bd7 12.0-0 ♖e8 followed up by ...e5. In principle, Black should be glad to trade his light-squared bishop, even at the cost of shuttling along the c8-h3 diagonal.

9...b6 10.b4 ♘h5 11.♗h4 a5



12.cxb6

White cannot preserve his space advantage since 12.a3 axb4 13.axb4 ♘a6 14.♖b1? drops the c5-pawn. White's lag in development left the c3-knight hanging.

12...axb4 13.♘a4 ♘d7 14.♖xc6 ♗b7 15.♖c1 ♗f6

This is not a mistake, of course, but Black could have offered the e7-pawn – 15...♘xb6!? 16.♘xb6 ♕xb6 17.♗xe7 ♖fe8 18.♗c5 ♕a5 19.♔f1 ♘f6 with tangible threats. After the text, the game sets course to a peaceful end.

16.♗xf6 ♘hxf6 17.♘f3 ♘xb6 18.♘c5 ♗c8 19.♕b3 ♘bd7 20.0-0 ♕a5 21.♖c2 ♘xc5 22.♖xc5 ♕xa2 23.♕xb4 ♖a4 24.♕b1 ♗a6 25.♕xa2 ♖xa2 26.♗xa6 ♖xa6 27.♖c7 e6 28.♘e5 ♘e4 29.♖fc1 ♖a2 30.f3 ♘d6 31.♖1c2 ♖xc2 ½-½

Chapter 4. 1.d4 d5 2.♗f4 ♘f6 3.e3 e6 with ...b6
Main Ideas

In this chapter I will offer you a simple and straightforward way to combat the London System by a hybrid between the Queen's Gambit and the Queen's Indian. Its main pluses are:

- It is very reliable for Black;
- It is easy to learn;
- It is practically unexplored so your opponents would not find models to follow;
- It is psychologically unpleasant for White since his main plan of pushing e4 does not work.

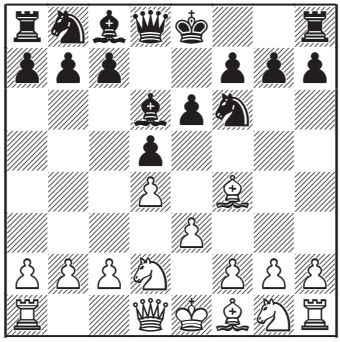
We start with:

1.d4 d5 2.♗f4 ♘f6 3.e3 e6 4.♘d2 ♗d6!

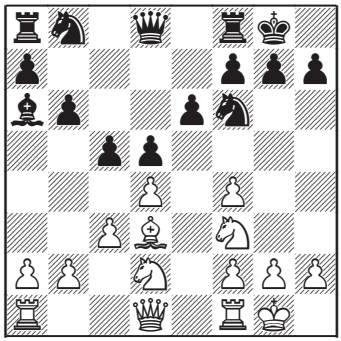
White's move order does not bother us – we play the same against 4.♘f3.

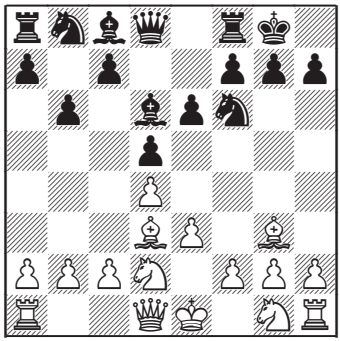
Depending on your repertoire against 1.d4, you could also choose 1.d4 e6 2.♘f3 d5 3.♗f4 ♗d6 4.♗g3 ♘f6 or move orders with 1...♘f6, 2...e6.

I consider the early ♘f3 as a concession from the first player as we can no longer fear a number of unpleasant set-ups where White plays ♘h3 or f4 before ♘f3. Sometimes he just has more useful moves than ♘f3, e.g. he could build a ♕b1-♗d3 battery towards our king.



Our first goal is to make White define the place of his bishop at once. That is important since if he does not retreat it to g3, we take on f4 and aim to trade the other bishopvia a6. In this scenario we need our knight on b8 in order to support ...♗a6: 5.♘gf3 ♗xf4 6.exf4 b6 7.♗d3 c5 (or 7...0-0 8.♕e2 a5) 8.c3 0-0 9.0-0 ♗a6=.





Remember that such an early exchange of our light-squared bishop is commonly not very good because White could use the temporary misplacement of our knight by opening the centre. In our case we do not fear it since the e3-pawn has moved to f4, depriving White of the break e3-e4. See **Game 12** Baron-Rodshtein, Biel 2016.

5.♗g3 0-0 6.♗d3 b6

The point of our set-up. We are going to play ...♗b7 and stop e4 even by means of ...♘e4, ...f5, if needed.

Note that we could play ...b6 on the previous turn and in most cases play would transpose. Here are the pros and cons of that particular move order:

After 5...b6, the only important independent line is 6.♗b5+ c6 7.♗d3 ♗b7 8.♘gf3 c5 which leads to positions from the next chapter.

The only minor drawback of 5...0-0 6.♗d3 b6 is that White could play 7.e4 dxe4 8.♘xe4 ♗b7 9.♕e2 ♘xe4 10.♗xe4 ♗xe4 11.♕xe4 ♘d7 which is equal, but easier to play with both sides than the main lines of the London System.

White has the following sensible plans from here:

White insist on e4

This is possible only after the move order with 4.♘d2 when White can make use of the delay of ♘gf3:

5...b6 6.♗d3 ♗b7 7.♕e2. However, e4 is not such of a threat as long as we have our bishop on b7 – we can ignore it with 7...0-0 and meet 8.e4 by trading everything on that square. Besides, the stubborn 7...♘e4 is also possible.

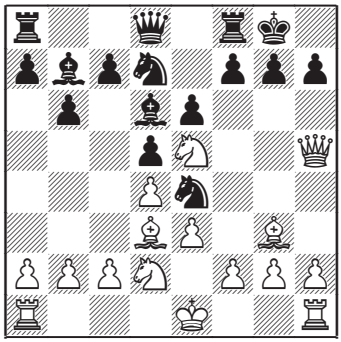
In the diagram position White has 7.e4 directly, but as I mentioned above, it does not bring White any advantage.

White plays ♘e5

Less experienced players like this leap very much since they hope to win with a quick kingside attack based on f4, ♕f3 and probably g2-g4-g5. Our set-up works very well against it, as we have ...♘e4, followed up by ...f6:

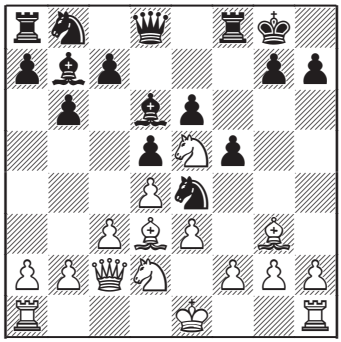
7.♘gf3 ♗b7 8.♘e5 ♘e4 (8...♘bd7!? is a more subtle retort) **9.♕h5** (the only

sensible try against the threat ...f6)
9...♘d7!



This is White's most aggressive approach, but it also gives us excellent counterplay. 10.♘xe4 dxe4 11.♘xd7 ♕xd7 and 10.0-0-0 f5 are clearly not what White had hoped for, so **10.f3** remains the only way to pour some oil into the fire. **10...♘df6 11.♕h3 ♘xd2 12.♔xd2 g6**. I think that after ...c5 White's king will soon begin to feel rather exposed in the centre.

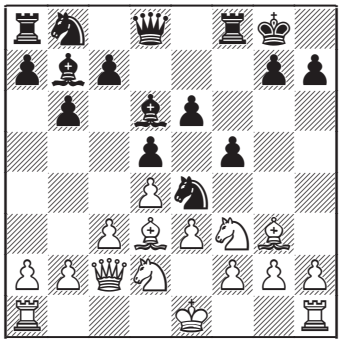
White could also wait for us to push ...f5, and only then play ♘e5:



Indeed, we do not have ...f6 anymore, but the white queen is clearly misplaced on c2. Without an active support from the queen, the knight on e5 is just a cause of concern for White. We play 10...c5! when 11.0-0-0 would stumble into 11...cxd4 12.exd4 ♗xe5!∓. Remains 11.f3 ♘xd2 12.♕xd2 ♘c6=, winning the battle for e5.

White plays on the queenside

7.♘gf3 ♗b7 8.c3 ♘e4 9.♕c2 f5

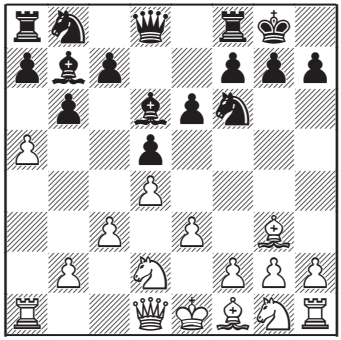


This position is the main goal of our plan with the early ...b6. However, note that we play ...f5 only after White's knight has landed on f3. Otherwise ♘h3! would take control of f4 while leaving the option of f2-f3 open. White can now switch to 10.c4 ♘d7 11.0-0, but he gets a really harmless version of the Stonewall. Almost all of his pieces are passive and we have decent chances on the kingside after 11...♘xg3! 12.hxg3, see **Game 13** Van Foreest-Jakubowski, Berlin 2017.

Plan with a2-a4-a5

It was practically never tried in this setting, but I thought I should mention it.

Let's consider 6.c3 b6 7.a4 ♗b7 8.a5

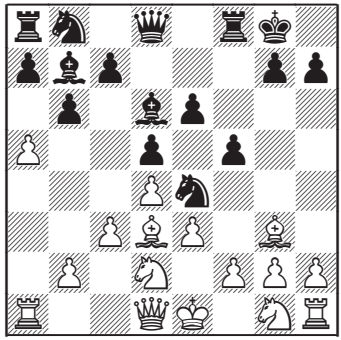


We have achieved our goal of preventing e3-e4. White does not have any threats on the kingside either, so we can take a course towards taking over the initiative with 8...c5! 9.♗d3 ♕c7, followed by ...♘bd7.

Positional decisions

White could take on d6 at any moment. Perhaps both recaptures ...♕xd6 and ...cxd6 are equally good, but I prefer to take by queen inorder to preserve a more fluid pawn structure.

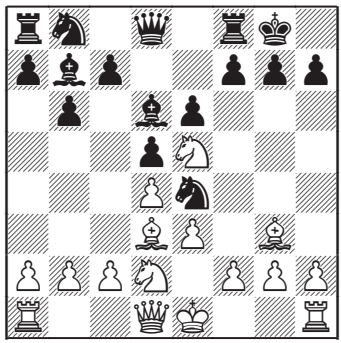
When to build a Stonewall construction? It is rather passive, so I would resort to it only when I see strong indications in its favour, for instance, to stop White's battery ♕c2, ♗d3. I would definitely refrain from it when the white knight is on g1, in order to avoid:



10.♘h3! with a positional edge.

Theoretical status

Only Sedlak mentions briefly the plan with ...b6, ♗b7, giving the game Heberla-Pinkas, Katowice 2015:



9.♕h5, when he ignores the best option 9...♘d7!.

As a whole, the early fianchetto is uncharted territory. It deserves serious attention.

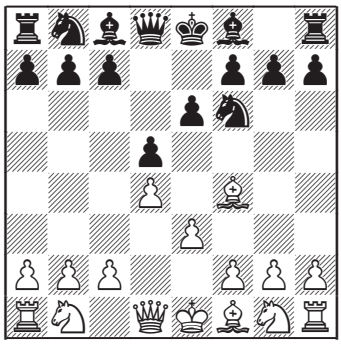
Chapter 4. 1.d4 d5 2.♗f4 ♘f6 3.e3 e6 with ...b6
Step by Step

1.d4 d5 2.♗f4 ♘f6 3.e3

I analyse in detail the Jobava Attack 3.♘c3 e6 in **Game 14** Sheng – So, rapid, chess.com 2017. The other good answer, 3...g6, is covered in Chapter 2. Another version of it – 1.d4.d5 2.♗f4 c5 3.♘c3, is considered in Chapter 6.

3...e6

3...c5 4.♘c3, 4.c3 – see Chapter 6.



4.♘d2

4.c4 does not fit in with the concept of the London System. That does not mean it is a bad move and we should be ready to face it.

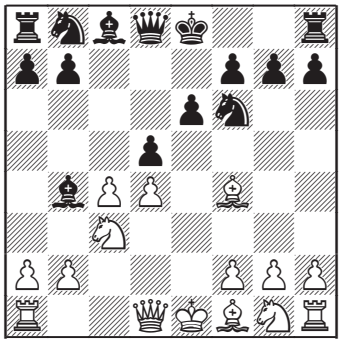
4...♗d6 5.♗xd6 ♕xd6 6.♘c3 0-0 is certainly possible, but it would leave us with little chances of showing activity.

4...♗b4+ is a more exploitative attempt since the f4-bishop can neither protect the a5-e1 diagonal nor is it pinning the f6-knight. Still, 5.♘d2 keeps things under control. In my opinion, the most challenging retort is:

4...c5, aiming at playing against an *isolator* – 5.♘c3

5.dxc5 ♗xc5 6.♘c3 leads to a popular position from the 1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♗e7 4.♗f4 ♘f6 5.e3 c5 6.dxc5 ♗xc5 variation, with a clear tempo up for Black.

5...cxd4 6.exd4 ♗b4



7.♘f3

The greedy 7.♗xb8?! ♗xc3+ 8.bxc3 ♖xb8 9.♕a4+ ♗d7 10.♕xa7?! brings White to the edge of losing after 10...0-0 11.♘f3 dxc4 12.♗xc4 ♗c6.

7.a3?! hands Black the initiative after 7...♗xc3+ 8.bxc3 ♕a5 9.♘f3 0-0! 10.♖c1 ♗d7.

7...0-0 8.♗d3 dxc4 9.♗xc4 ♘d5 10.♗d2 ♘c6 11.a3 ♗e7=. Black has won the battle for the tempo, Vitiugov-Zvjaginsev, rapid, St Petersburg 2014.

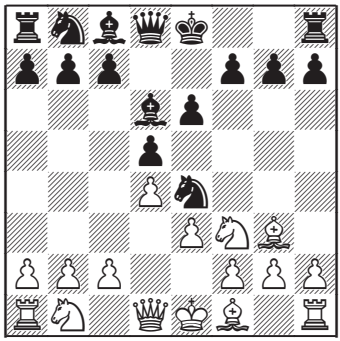
4.♗d3 ♗d6 5.♗xd6

5.♗g3 c5 or 5...0-0 transpose. Instead, 5...♘e4? drops a pawn owing to 6.♗xe4 dxe4 7.♕g4.

5...♕xd6 6.♘d2 0-0 7.f4 is senseless, as after 7...c5 8.c3 cxd4 White has to recapture 9.cxd4 when 9...b6 is pleasant for Black.

4.♘f3 ♗d6 5.♗g3 should transpose to the main line after 5...0-0.

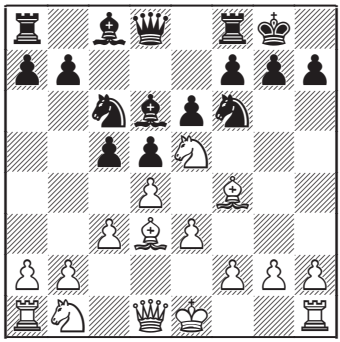
Many adepts of the London System prefer to avoid the Stonewall set-up: 5...♘e4, planing to meet ♘bd2 and ♗d3 by ...f5. I do not believe that wasting a tempo on move 5 could be the best option. White has at least two promising options:



a) 6.♗xd6 ♘xd6 7.♘bd2 b6 8.c4 ♗b7 9.cxd5;

b) 6.c4!? ♘xg3 7.hxg3 c6 8.g4!?↑, Vazquez-Candela, Madrid 2013.

Finally, 4.♘f3 ♗d6 5.♘e5 is an attempt to save a tempo on ♗g3. However, White lacks the option of f4 in this line. A solid retort is 5...0-0 6.♗d3 c5 7.c3 ♘c6 (Another consistent plan is 7...b6 8.♘d2 ♗a6.)



Now 8.♕f3 ♕c7 9.♘xc6 bxc6 10.dxc5 is harmless owing to 10...♗xf4 11.exf4 e5 12.fxe5 ♕xe5+ 13.♕e2 ♕b8!? 14.0-0 ♖e8 15.♕c2 ♘g4 16.g3 ♘e5, when 17.♗e2 runs into 17...♗f5.

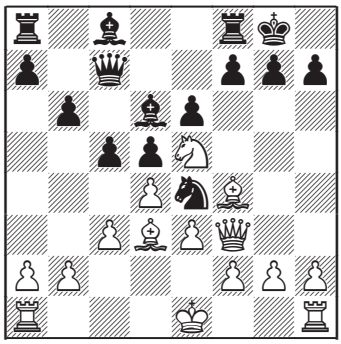
Giri chose against Hou in Wijk aan Zee 2016:

8.♘d2 ♕c7 9.♘df3 b6 10.♘xc6

10.♗g3 ♘e7 11.♕b1 ♘f5 is fine for Black.

10.h4!? ♗b7 11.h5 cxd4 12.exd4 ♘e4 13.♗h2 f6∞.

10...♕xc6 11.♘e5 ♕c7 12.♕f3 ♘e4!



13.♘c4?! ♗xf4 14.♕xf4 ♕xf4 15.exf4 ♗a6 16.♗xe4 dxe4∓, and miraculously saved a difficult game.

4...♗d6

It is good to make White define his intentions about the f4-bishop first. After 4...c5, we should also worry about 5.♗d3 ♘c6 6.c3 ♗d6 7.♗xd6 ♕xd6 8.f4, as in Kramnik-Grandelius, Stavanger 2016.

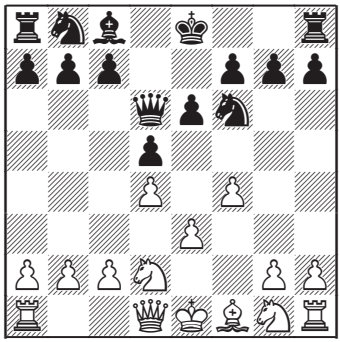
5.♗g3

5.♗xd6 is best met by 5...♕xd6.

The engines will tell you that 5...cxd6 is completely equal. That may be true after 6.♗d3 ♘c6 7.c3 0-0 8.♘e2 e5 9.0-0 ♖e8=, but we lack any active plan.

6.f4

6.♘gf3 looks totally harmless. We have a wide range of possible plans. Simplest is to play for ...e5 with 6...0-0 7.♗d3 ♘bd7.



White has built a Stonewall formation with two details in his favour – he has traded his bad bishop, and he has not committed his king to the kingside. In order to insure myself against long castling, I would play 6...♕b6! 7.♖b1 c5 8.c3 ♗d7 9.♗d3 ♗b5 with nice prospects for a minority pawn attack on the queenside. Our queen's knight could help the defence from e7.

5.♘gf3 ♗xf4 6.exf4 is not without venom. It is true that e3-e4 is no longer a threat, but Black may experience lasting problems with his remaining bad bishop. I think that its exchange should be our primary goal, so we go 6...b6 7.♗d3 c5 (or 7...0-0 8.♕e2 a5) 8.c3 0-0 9.0-0 ♗a6=. See **Game 12** Baron-Rodshtein, Biel 2016.

5.c3 ♗xf4 is similar to the above line.

5...0-0

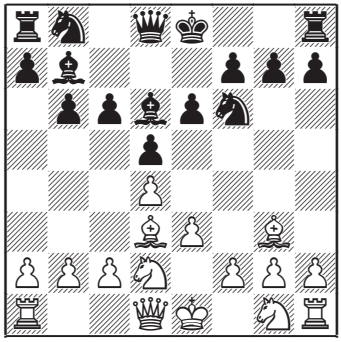
This move order aims to avoid the check from b5:

5...b6!? 6.♗b5+. It is not really dangerous, but transposes to positions from the next chapter so you would need more preparation. Play continues:

6...c6

6...♘bd7?! 7.♗c6 ♖b8 8.c4 earned White space in Stefanova-Rudolf, Mamaia 2016.

7.♗d3 ♗b7



8.♘gf3

Or 8.♕e2 c5 9.c3 ♘c6 (9...0-0 10.e4!?) 10.♘gf3 0-0;

8.c3 0-0;

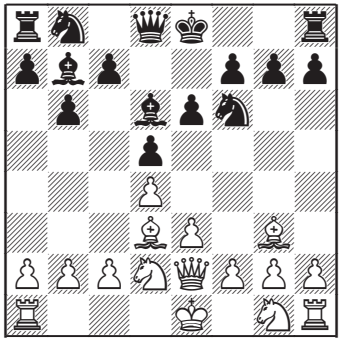
8.e4? dxe4 9.♘xe4 ♘xe4 10.♗xe4 f5!.

8...c5 9.c3 0-0.

If you still prefer 5...b6, here are more White options on move 6:

6.♘gf3 0-0 7.♗d3 ♗b7 transposes.

6.♗d3 ♗b7 7.♕e2 nurtures the idea of pushing e3-e4-e5 when Black would lack ...♘h5, e.g. 7...c5 8.c3 0-0 9.e4 ♗e7 10.e5∞.



It is easily parried with 7...♘e4, when 8.♗xe4 dxe4 9.0-0-0 is harmless owing to 9...♕e7, preparing long castling, e.g. 10.♔b1 10...f5 11.f3 ♘d7 or 10.f3 exf3 11.gxf3 ♘d7.

However, White could answer 8.c3 with complex play. For instance: 8...♘xd2 9.♕xd2 c5 10.♗xd6 ♕xd6 11.f4, or 8...♘d7 9.0-0-0.

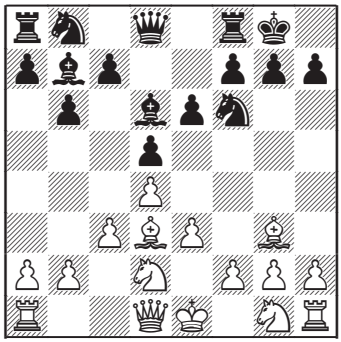
The simplest solution is:

7...0-0 as 8.e4 is not such of a threat – 8...dxe4 9.♘xe4 ♘xe4 10.♗xe4 ♗xe4 11.♕xe4 ♘d7 12.♘f3 ♘f6 13.♕e2 c5 14.0-0-0 ♕c7 looks fine for Black.

6.c4 is certainly inconsistent with the knight already committed to d2. Black can play in the centre with 6...0-0 7.♘gf3 c5 or 7...♗b7 8.♖c1 c5.

White could also try to postpone ♘gf3 with 6.c3!? ♗b7 7.♗d3 0-0

7...♘e4!? considerably restricts White's choice, when 8.♘xe4 dxe4 9.♕a4+ ♘d7 10.♗a6 ♗xa6 11.♕xa6 leaves White with a slightly more flexible pawn structure, although the evaluation remains equal.



a) 8.a4 c5

I recommend to avoid the Stonewall set-up 8...♘e4 9.a5 f5 while the white knight remains on g1 in view of the possibility of 10.♘h3!. The f3-square remains free for the pawn or for the other knight.

9.♘gf3 ♘c6 10.0-0 ♗xg3 11.hxg3 occurred in Sergeev-Ovsejevitsch, Zalakaros 2010. The game went 11...♕e7 12.♖e1 e5 13.♘xe5 ♘xe5 14.dxe5 ♕xe5 15.a5 h6 ½-½. While the plan with ...e5 does equalize, it should be the last resort for Black if he wants to play for a win. It is better to choose a waiting game first, e.g. ...h6, ...♖fc8, ...♖fb8.

b) 8.♕b1 is a known idea in positions with ...c5. White is eyeing h7 while supporting b4. It also denies ...♘e4. The best retort is 8...c5 9.♘gf3 ♘c6 10.♘e5, when the typical manoeuvre ...♘e7, preparing ...f6, should assure Black of even chances. See **Game 16** Skoberne-Halkias, Baku 2016, of the next chapter.

6.♗d3

6.♘gf3 b6 7.♘e5 (7.c3 ♗b7 8.♗d3 is line B.) 7...♗b7 8.♗d3 is line A.

6...b6 7.♘gf3

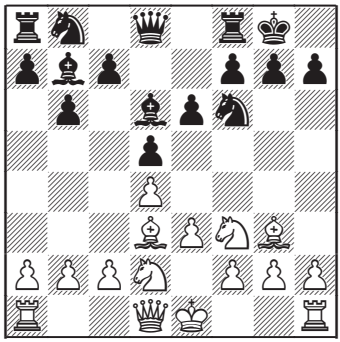
7.e4 dxe4 8.♘xe4 ♗b7 9.♕e2 ♘xe4 10.♗xe4 ♗xe4 11.♕xe4 ♘d7=.

7.♕e2 ♗b7 8.♗h4 (8.♘gf3 is the main line) is harmless. Black could play in the spirit of this chapter, without ...c5: 8...♘c6!?

8...c5 9.c3 ♘bd7 is quite good, too.

9.c3 e5 10.♕d1, when the manoeuvre 10...♕e7 11.♘e2 ♕e6 unpins the knight.

7...♗b7



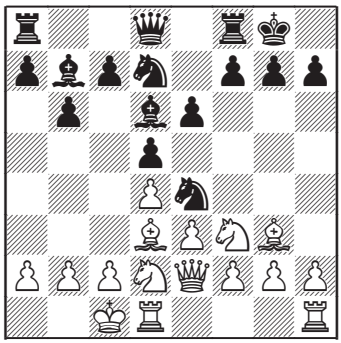
A. 8.♘e5; **B.** 8.c3

8.0-0 is a solid move, but it is too modest to set us problems. We can follow our main scheme with 8...♘e4 9.♗xd6 ♕xd6 10.c4

c5 11.♖c1 ♘xd2 12.♕xd2 ♘d7 13.♖fd1 cxd4 14.♘xd4 ♘e5.

If you wish to avoid positions with a bishop vs a knight, you could consider 8...♗xg3 (this exchange is always an option after White has castled short) 9.hxg3 ♘bd7 10.♖e1 (10.♘e5 ♘xe5 11.dxe5 ♘e4) 10...c5 11.c3 ♕e7=.

8.♕e2 is thematic against schemes with an early ...c5, but here it is quite questionable, as we simply stop e3-e4 by 8...♘e4!? (8...c5 9.c3 ♘c6 is line A13 of the next chapter.) 9.0-0-0 ♘d7 (9...c5!?)

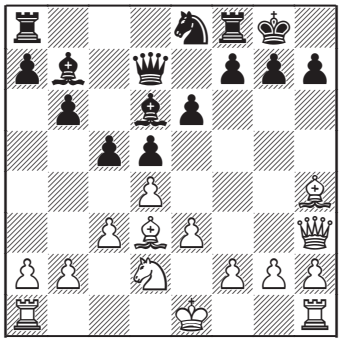


10.♘e5 ♗xe5 11.dxe5 ♘ec5 12.h4 ♘xd3+ 13.cxd3 c5 14.h5 b5 15.♔b1 c4↑.

A. 8.♘e5 ♘e4

This is our main idea, but 8...♘bd7!? is more safe and could be the best continuation. The obvious plus of this move is that it does not allow ♕h5. White on his turn can deny us ...♘e4 with:

a) 9.♕f3, but then he will be unable to bolster the e5-knight with f4. We start the battle for e5 – 9...c5 10.c3 ♕c7 11.♘xd7 ♕xd7 12.♗h4 ♘e8 13.♕h3



13...g6

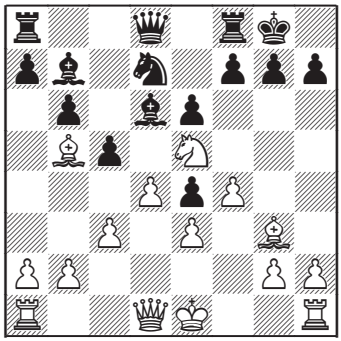
Keeping the tension in the centre. The flank approach is also possible – 13...f5 14.0-0 ♘f6 15.♗g3 c4 16.♗c2 b5 17.♘f3 b4 18.♘e5 ♕e7=.

14.0-0 f6 15.♗g3 ♖d8 16.♖fe1 ♗xg3 17.♕xg3 ♘d6 18.♖ad1 ♕e7

Black maintains a firm grip on e4, while his threat ...e5 is real, e.g. 19.a3 e5. 19.f4 does not prevent it due to 19...♖fe8. Black controls the course of the game so he could choose the best timing for ...e5. Perhaps the best White could do is to open the centre with:

19.c4 ♗a6 20.♗f1 ♘xc4 21.♘xc4 dxc4 22.♕f3 with counterplay.

b) Another consistent move is 9.f4 c5 10.c3 ♘e4 11.♘xe4 dxe4 12.♗b5 Now simplest is to kill the strong knight:

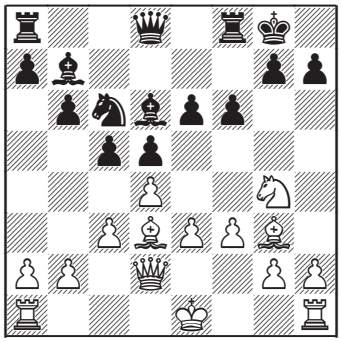


12...♘xe5 13.fxe5 ♗e7 14.0-0 a6 15.♗a4 ♖c8 16.♗c2 b5 17.a3 a5 18.♕g4 ♗g5∞, but 12...♘f6 13.♗h4 cxd4 is also possible. After 14.exd4 (14.exd4 a6=) 14...a6 15.♗a4, we could play 15...♔h8, planning to take ...gxf6. The imbalances in the position should give us fair chances to play for a win.

9.♕h5

It would be senseless to support the e5-knight with 9.f4, as 9...f6 would repel it anyway – 10.♘g4 c5 11.c3 ♕e8∓ (11...♘xd2 12.♕xd2 ♘c6∓).

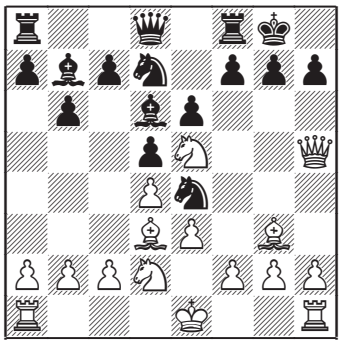
9.f3 is more to the point and play is roughly equal after 9...♘xd2 10.♕xd2 c5 11.c3 f6 12.♘g4 ♘c6



Black has more space, but he lacks targets – 13.♗xd6 (13.♗b5 ♘e7) 13...♕xd6 14.0-0 f5 15.♘f2 e5=.

9...♘d7!

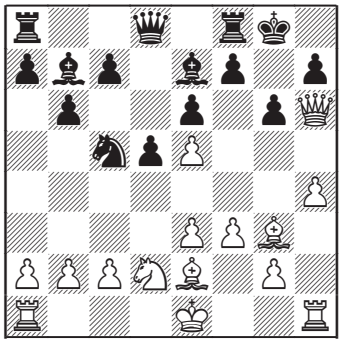
Finally Black completes development and obtains a good game. Heberla-Pinkas, Katowice 2015, saw 9...f5?! 10.♘xe4 fxe4 11.♗b5!. Although Black could still hold with 11...♗a6!, White's pieces remain slightly more active and he could play for the break f2-f3. Instead, Pinkas completely forgot about development – 11...c6?! 12.♗e2 c5? 13.♗g4 ♕e8 14.♕h3 ♗c8, when 15.♘c4!± would have nailed him down at once.



A1. 10.f3; **A2.** 10.0-0-0; **A3.** 10.♘xe4

A1. 10.f3 ♘df6

10...g6!? 11.♕h6 ♘ec5! 12.♗e2 ♘xe5 13.dxe5 ♗e7 14.h4



is less complicated, but it is also less demanding from White.

Black's defence is based on the idea of meeting h5 by ...g5 – 14...f6 15.0-0-0 ♖f7 16.e4 fxe5 17.♗xe5 ♗f6 18.♗xf6 ♕xf6 19.h5 g5=.

Or 14...f5 15.♘b3 ♘xb3 16.axb3 ♕d7 (16...♖f7 17.♗f4 a5!?) 17.♗f4 ♖f7 18.♖h3 ♔h8 19.h5 ♗f8 20.♕g5 ♗e7=.

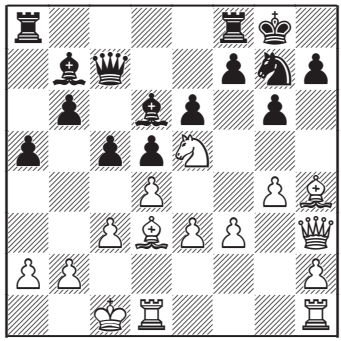
11.♕h3 ♘xd2 12.♔xd2 g6

A sharp position with imminent opposite attacks has arisen. White will complete an artificial castling after:

13.♖ad1 c5 14.c3 ♘h5 15.♔c1

Now Black should aim to activate his passive bishop:

15...a5 16.♗h4 ♕c7 17.g4 ♘g7

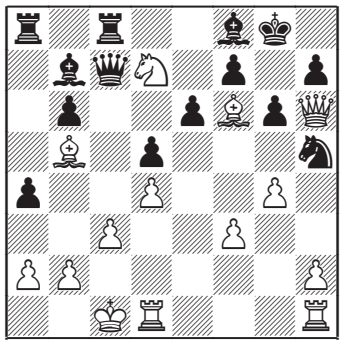


It is unclear whose attack is more dangerous, but Black's moves look easier to find. For example, 18.♗g3 ♗a6! 19.♗c2 ♘e8! 20.g5 (20.♕h6 a4 21.a3 f6) 20...cxd4 21.exd4 b5.

Perhaps White should play for a draw with:

18.♗b5! cxd4

Black could try 18...♖fc8!? 19.♗f6 (19.♘d7 ♘e8) 19...cxd4 20.exd4 a4 21.♕h6 ♗f8 22.♘d7 ♘h5

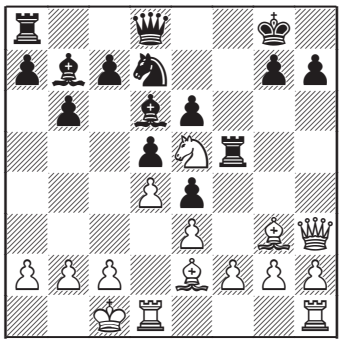


23.♕xh5!! ♗c6!=, when it is White's turn to defend accurately – 24.♗xc6 ♕xc6 25.♘e5 ♕b5 26.♘xg6! (or ...a3 would be

nasty) 26...fxg6 27.♕e5 ♖c6 28.♔b1 ♕c4 29.♖he1 a3 30.♕e2=.

19.♘d7 dxc3 20.♘f6+ ♔h8 21.♘xh7 cxb2+ 22.♔xb2 ♗e5+ 23.♖d4 ♗xd4+ 24.exd4 ♖ac8 25.♗f6 ♕c2+ 26.♔a1 ♕c3+ with a perpetual check.

A2. 10.0-0-0 f5 11.♘xe4 fxe4 12.♗e2 ♖f5 13.♕h3



13...♗xe5

13...♘xe5 14.dxe5 ♗xe5 15.♗g4 ♕f6 16.c3 ♗xc3 17.bxc3 ♕xc3+ is only a draw.

14.dxe5 ♘xe5 15.f4! exf3 16.gxf3 ♘xf3 17.♗d3 d4

17...♕e8 is also noteworthy – 18.♗xf5

18.♗xc7 ♘g5 19.♕g3 ♘e4 20.♗xe4 dxe4 21.♗e5 ♕f7 22.h4 ♖f3 23.♕g2 ♖f5 24.♕g3=.

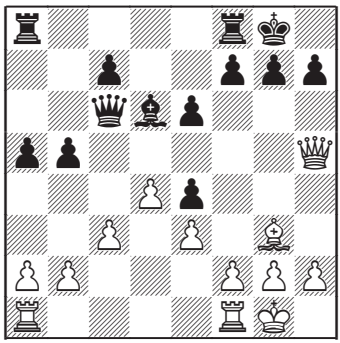
18...exf5 19.♕xf5 ♕xe3+ 20.♔b1 d4=.

18.♗xf5 exf5 19.♕xf5 ♕e7 20.exd4 ♘xd4 21.♖xd4 ♗xh1 22.♕e5=

A3. 10.♘xe4 dxe4 11.♘xd7 ♕xd7 12.♗b5

12.♗c4 ♗d5 13.♗xd5 exd5 14.♗xd6 ♕xd6 is equal, but we could also try 12...g6, followed by ...f5.

12...♗c6 13.♗xc6 ♕xc6 14.c3 b5 15.0-0 a5



Black is more active, but the position remains equal since White has no weaknesses – 16.♖fc1 ♖fb8 17.b3 a4=.

B. 8.c3 ♘e4 9.♕c2

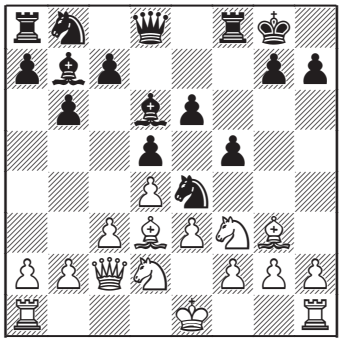
9.♕e2 is commonly met by 9...♘bd7 (although 9...c5 and 9...a5 also deserve attention). Play might continue 10.0-0-0

Weaker is 10.♘e5 ♗xe5.

In Yermolinsky-Luther, Tekirdag 2016, Black showed a fresh plan against 10.0-0: 10...♘xg3 11.hxg3 ♖e8!? 12.♗a6 ♕c8 13.♗xb7 ♕xb7, with ...e5 to follow.

10...♕e7 11.♗h4 (11.♘e5 ♗xe5=) 11...♕e8.

9...f5



This position is the main goal of our plan with the early ...b6. Remember that the white knight should be already on f3, to avoid possible ♘h3.

10.c4

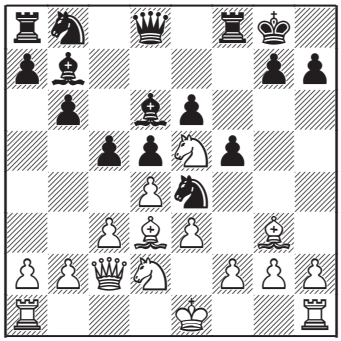
This is more accurate than 10.0-0, when Black could already take the bishop – 10...♘xg3 11.hxg3 ♘d7.

10.♘e5 is well met by 10...c5, waiting for White to define his plans. We want to see where he is going to castle and whether he will play f3.

10...♘d7 11.♘df3 (11.♘xd7 ♕xd7 12.♗f4=) is a bit easier for White. For instance:

11...♘xg3 12.hxg3 ♗xe5 13.♘xe5 ♘xe5 14.dxe5 d4 15.exd4 ♗xg2 16.♖h2 ♗f3 17.♗e2 ♗xe2 18.♕xe2 h6 19.f4;

11...♘df6 12.♗f4 (12.♗h4 ♕e8) 12...♘h5 (12...c5 13.h4) 13.0-0 c5 14.♗e2 a6 15.a4 ♕c7.



11.f3

If White tries to follow the previous example with 11.♘df3, we can answer 11...♕e7 12.♕e2 ♗c6 (12...a5!?) 13.♗f4 ♗e8.

11.♗xe4?! fxe4 12.0-0-0 is simply bad owing to 12...cxd4 13.exd4 ♗xe5 14.dxe5 ♕g5 15.♔b1 ♗a6 16.♔a1 ♗d3 17.♕c1 ♘d7∓.

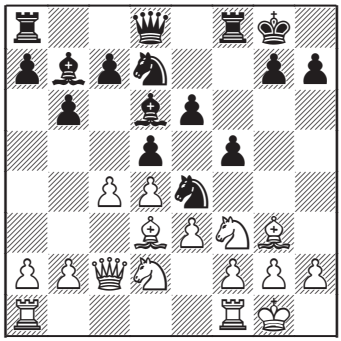
11.♘xe4 fxe4 12.♗e2 ♘c6 is balanced – 13.♘xc6 ♗xc6 14.♗xd6 ♕xd6 15.0-0 e5=.

11...♘xd2

The engines assess that Black has more space, so they prefer to keep more pieces – 11...♘f6!? 12.0-0 ♕c7. It is up to you to decide, according to your mind frame for the game.

12.♕xd2 ♘c6=.

10...♘d7 11.0-0



Black has achieved his positional goals. He prevented the break e4 and long castling. Now he can safely take on g3 as he does not fear an open h-file. On the contrary, he might use it in his favour. The engines like 11...♗xg3 12.hxg3 c5 13.cxd5 exd5 14.♗b5 ♘df6, but they tend to overestimate the importance of the e4-forepost.

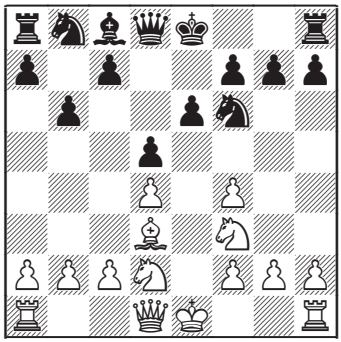
Human grandmasters would prefer to keep the dark-squared bishop and part with the knight: 11...♘xg3! 12.hxg3, see **Game 13** Van Foreest-Jakubowski, Berlin 2017.

Chapter 4. 1.d4 d5 2.♗f4 ♘f6 3.e3 e6 with ...b6
Annotated Games

12. Baron – Rodshtein

Biel 02.08.2016

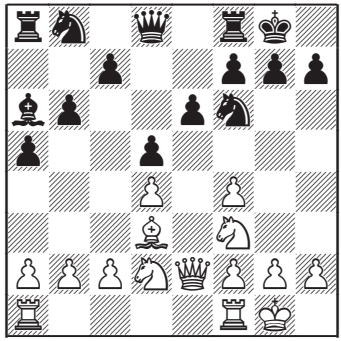
1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.♗f4 e6 4.e3 ♗d6 5.♘bd2 ♗xf4 6.exf4 b6 7.♗d3



7...c5

After the exchange of the dark-squared bishops, we are left with a classical example of a "bad" bishop. While White's pawn was still on e3, we had reason to keep it on b7 in order to hamper e3-e4. When this plan is no longer valid, we should obviously aim to trade our bishop via a6. The question is, what is the best way to arrange the exchange. Some players include first 7...♕d6 8.g3, but I'm not convinced this is in our favour.

In my opinion, we should not hurrywith ...c5, since it offers White chances to attack us in the centre with c4. So I would recommend 7...0-0 8.♕e2 a5 9.0-0 ♗a6 (perhaps 9...c5 10.c3 ♗a6 is more accurate)

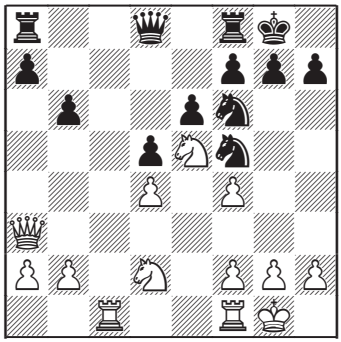


This position occurred in Prohaszka-S.Zhigalko, Gjakova 2016. The game finished with a quick draw after 10.♖fe1 a4 11.♘e5 ♗xd3 12.♕xd3 c5 13.f5 exf5 14.♕xf5 a3 15.bxa3 ♖xa3 16.dxc5 bxc5 17.c4 d4 18.♘b3 ♕c8 19.♕g5 h6 20.♕c1 ♖a4 21.♕c2 ♖a3 22.♕c1 ♖a4 23.♕c2 ♖a3 ½-½.

8.c3 0-0 9.0-0 ♗a6 10.♗xa6 ♘xa6 11.♘e5 ♘c7

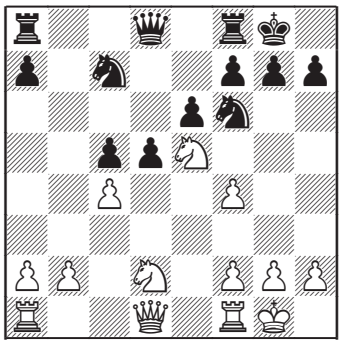
It was objectively safer to fix the centre at once with 11...cxd4 12.cxd4 ♘c7 13.♖c1

♘b5 14.♕a4 ♘d6 15.♕a3 ♘f5!?=.



We do not have any weaknesses and White should be careful with his sensitive pawn on d4.

Rodshtein, who is the clear Elo-favourite in this game, prefers to keep the tension in the centre. He allows 12.dxc5!? bxc5 13.c4. I would not say White has something tangible here, but Black should make some tough decisions. He is likely to be straddled with hanging pawns soon, and it is not a trivial task to defend them.

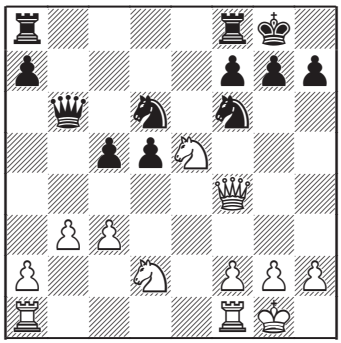


He should probably seek counterplay down the b-file with 13...a5 14.♖c1 ♘a6 15.cxd5 exd5 16.♘b1 ♖c8 17.♘c3 ♘b4∞ or in the centre with 13...♘ce8 14.cxd5 exd5 15.♖c1 ♖c8 16.♘b3 c4 17.♘d4 ♘d6 18.b3 ♕b6. In both cases White's initiative should gradually fade away.

12.♕f3?! ♘b5 13.dxc5 bxc5 14.f5

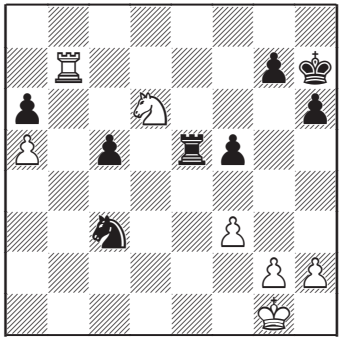
White plays for a draw! He trades his doubled pawn, but meanwhile he loses the initiative.

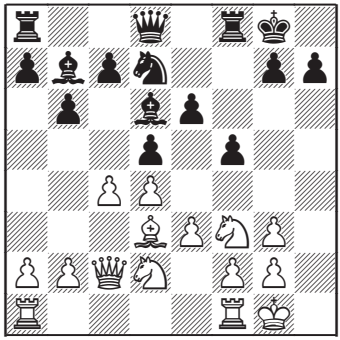
14...exf5 15.♕xf5 ♘d6 16.♕f4 ♕b6 17.b3



Black is slightly more active, but play remains roughly equal. The next 20 moves do not tip the balance, but just before the time control White commits a mistake:

17...♘b5 18.♖ac1 ♖ae8 19.a4 ♘d6 20.♖fe1 ♘de4 21.♘xe4 dxe4 22.♘c4 ♕xb3 23.♘d6 ♖e6 24.♘xe4 ♘d5 25.♕d2 ♕c4 26.f3 h6 27.♖ed1 ♖e5 28.a5 ♖b8 29.♖b1 ♖xb1 30.♖xb1 f5 31.♘d6 ♕xc3 32.♕xc3 ♘xc3 33.♖b8+ ♔h7 34.♖b7 a6





35.♖b6?!

35.♔f1 or 35.♖a7 should allow White to draw. The text suddenly puts White under a nasty pin after 35...♘d5! 36.♖xa6 ♖e1+ 37.♔f2 ♖e6 and he must find only moves to stay in the game – 38.♔g3 c4 39.♖c6 c3 40.a6 ♖g6+ 41.♔f2 ♘b4 42.♖c4 ♘d3+ 43.♔e3 ♖xd6 44.a7 ♖d8 45.♖xc3 ♘b4∓. Rodstein misses this opportunity and the game flows smoothly towards the draw.

35...f4 36.♔f1 c4 37.♖xa6 ♖e6 38.♖b6 ♘d5 39.♖c6 ♘e3+ 40.♔f2 ♘d1+ 41.♔f1 ♘e3+ 42.♔f2 ♘d5 43.♖xc4 ♖xd6 44.♖d4 ♖d7 45.a6 ♘f6 46.♖xd7 ♘xd7 47.a7 ♘b6 48.♔e2 ♔g6 49.♔d3 ♔f5 50.♔d4 g5 51.♔c5 ♘a8 52.♔d5 ♔f6 53.♔d6 ♔f7 ½-½

13. Van Foreest – Jakubowski

Berlin 18.03.2017

1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.♗f4 e6 4.e3 ♗d6 5.♗g3 b6 6.♘bd2 ♗b7 7.♗d3 0-0 8.c3 ♘e4 9.♕c2 f5 10.c4 ♘d7 11.0-0 ♘xg3 12.hxg3

12...c6

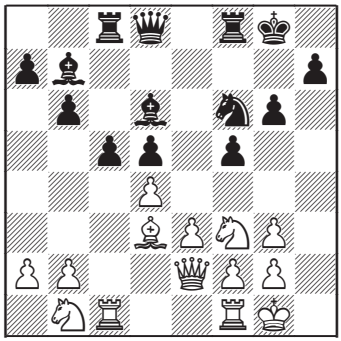
Black chooses to keep the centre closed and to attack on the kingside. The doubled g-pawns guarantee him an open h-file after ...g5-g4, ...h5-h4.

The other logical plan is to aim for hanging pawns in the centre. Artemiev-Grandelius, Doha 2016, saw 12...g6 13.♖ac1 c5

It was still possible to play 13...♕e7 14.♘b1 c6 15.♘c3 ♖ac8.

14.cxd5

Stronger is 14.♘b1!. Besides improving the knight, it also opens the way for the white queen to e2. 14...♖c8 15.♕e2 ♘f6 16.cxd5 exd5

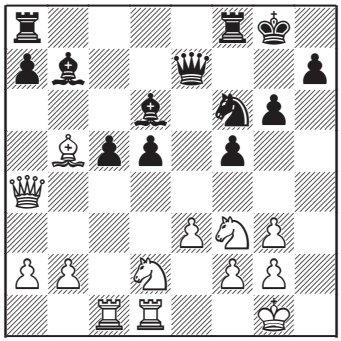


17.♗a6! It may look that Black's bishop is "bad", but two other positional factors have higher priority here: White lacks space so it is good to trade minor pieces; White cannot effectively attack the hanging pawns until the black bishop is alive. If White had a dark-squared bishop, he would have targeted the c5-pawn (with ♘a4, ♗a3). In the concrete position, it is more realistic to hit d5.

17...♕d7 18.dxc5 bxc5 19.b3 with complex play.

14...exd5 15.dxc5 bxc5 16.♖fd1 ♕e7 17.♗b5 ♘f6 18.♕a4

White is trying to trade bishops, but in vain. He is doomed to remain with both clumsy pieces – the bishop and the d2-knight. Black is already better.

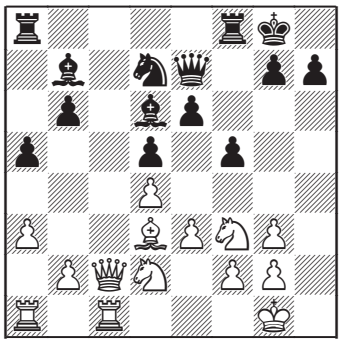


18...♖fc8 19.♗a6 ♗c6 20.♕c2 ♖cb8 21.♘b3 ♖b6 22.♗f1. Now instead of 22...♖ab8∓, Black erred with 22...♗a4?! 23.♗c4!= and even went on to lose the game.

13.♖fc1 ♕e7

It seems that Jakubowski is still hesitant about his plan and postpones his decision. It was time to start the offensive with 13...g5!.

14.a3 a5 15.cxd5 cxd5



16.♘b1

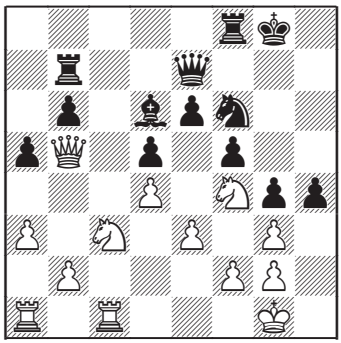
16.♗b5!, hitting the d7-knight, would have prevented 16...g5 altogether. 16...♖ad8 would not help as then White

would attack b6 with 17.♕b3. That means, Black would have to play for equalization with 16...♘f6 17.♕b3 h6 18.♘e5 ♖fc8.

16...g5 17.♘c3 ♖ac8 18.♕e2 g4 19.♘e1 h5 20.♗a6 ♘f6 21.♕b5 ♖b8 22.♗xb7 ♖xb7 23.♘d3?

By trading the bishops, White prepared to invade through the c-file. It is certainly a serious threat, but only enough to keep the balance. Black's potential attack on the opposite wing ensures sufficient counterplay, and White should have devised a solid stand against it. The e1-knight may be passive, but it is a good defender. For instance, it prevents ...h4. Instead of moving it, White could have simply double his rooks on the c-file, e.g. 23.♖c2, since 23...h4? 24.gxh4 g3 would be neutralised with 25.f4! ♘g4 26.♘f3.

23...h4!∓ 24.♘f4



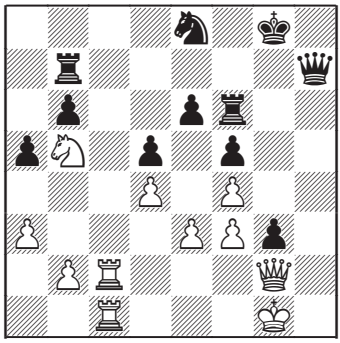
It transpires that 24.gxh4 loses to 24...g3.

24...♗xf4

Another continuation of the attack was 24...hxg3 25.fxg3 ♗xf4, but the text is more straightforward.

25.gxf4 g3 26.f3 ♘e8 27.♕d3?!

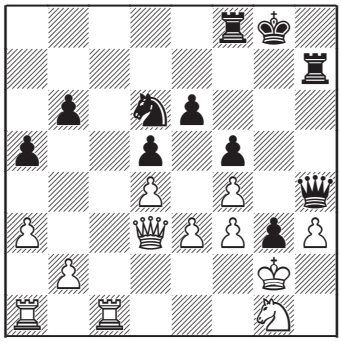
The threat ...h3 should have been prevented with 27.♕f1, intending to meet 27...♕h7 by 28.♖c2. Then 28...♖f6 29.♖ac1 h3 is winning, but Black has to find the line 30.♘b5 hxg2 31.♕xg2



31...♖d7! (31...♖h6 32.♖c8=) 32.♖c8 ♔f7 33.♖a8 ♖h6 34.♖cc8 ♘f6 35.♘a7! ♖h2 36.♕xg3 ♖h3 37.♕g2 ♕h4 38.♖f8+ ♔e7 39.♖ae8+ ♘xe8 40.♖xe8+ ♔f6 41.♖f8+ ♖f7 42.♕g5+ ♕xg5+ 43.fxg5+ ♔g7 44.♖xf7+ ♔xf7 45.♔g2 ♖h7 46.f4 ♔g6 and then he should show good technique. It is not trivial to convert the exchange.

After White's mistake, Black is winning with 27...♕h7! 28.♕f1 ♖g7 29.♖c2 ♖f6. Instead, all his advantage goes down the drain and he was lucky to escape:

27...h3?? 28.gxh3 ♕h4 29.♔g2 ♘d6 30.♘e2 ♖h7 31.♘g1



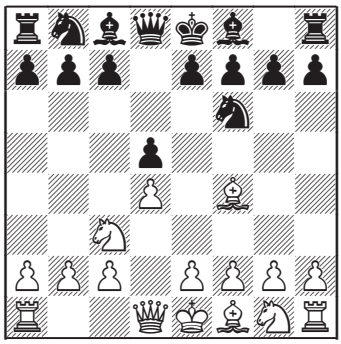
I guess, Black missed this defensive manoeuvre.

31...a4 32.♖c6 (32.♕a6!±) 32...♕d8 33.♖ac1 ♖h6 (33...b5=) 34.♕a6 ♘c4 35.♖1xc4 dxc4 36.♕xc4 b5! 37.♕xb5 ♕b8 38.♕e2 ♕b3 39.♖c3 ♕b7 40.♕c2 ♖b8 41.♕xa4 ♕xb2+ 42.♖c2 ♕b1 43.♕c4 ♖b2 44.♖xb2 ♕xb2+ 45.♘e2 ♕d2 46.♕c8+ ♔f7 47.♕d7+ ♔f8 48.♕d8+ ♔f7 49.♕d7+ ♔f8 ½-½

14. Sheng – So

rapid chess.com 08.03.2017

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘c3 d5 3.♗f4



This opening is often named after Jobava and Prié. In Chapter 2, **Game 7** I showed that 3...g6 is a reliable option. Here we'll discuss play in QG style.

3...e6

3...♗f5 4.f3 e6 5.g4 ♗g6 6.h4 may not be too dangerous, but at least gives White a psychological initiative.

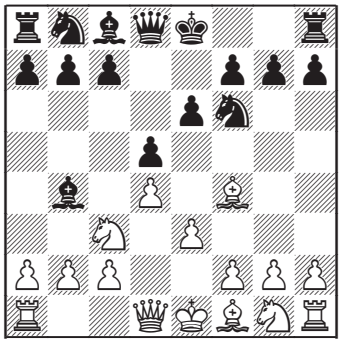
Similarly, the trendy 3...a6 4.e3 e6 also allows 5.g4 c5 (5...h6 6.♕f3 b5 7.h4) 6.g5 ♘fd7 7.♘f3 ♘c6 8.a3 b5 9.h4 ♗b7 10.h5↑ offers White too much space, Carlsen-Caruana, Stavanger 2017.

4.♘b5

Apparently, this is the only chance to pose some problems.

4.e3 is more popular, but Black has a wide choice of decent plans. I suggest to opt for the most aggressive one:

4...♗b4!?



The idea of this stab (in connection with...♘e4) is to drag White's king's knight to e2 where it stands obviously worse than on f3. With this mission

accomplished, we could retreat the bishop to e7.

White cannot ignore our threats with 5.♘f3?! ♘e4 6.♕d3, as after 6...c5∓ he cannot prevent...c4 and must take on c5.

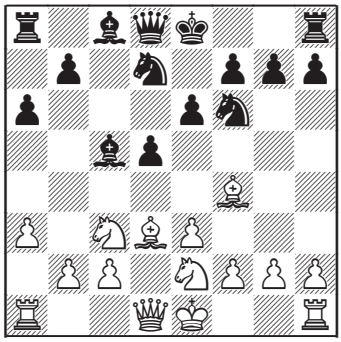
Jobava tried against Caruana 5.♘ge2 0-0 6.a3 ♗d6 7.g3 (After 7.♕d2 c5 8.0-0-0, Black's attack could be very quick – 8...cxd4 9.exd4 ♘c6 10.♗xd6 ♕xd6 11.♔b1 ♖b8 12.♘c1 a6→.) 7...b6 8.♗g2 ♗b7 9.0-0 c5, it is unclear what White could do.

The most natural answer is:

5.♗d3 c5

It is pointless to harass the f4-bishop with 5...♘bd7 6.♘ge2 ♘h5 7.♗g3, since it would be dangerous to take on g3 before White castled.

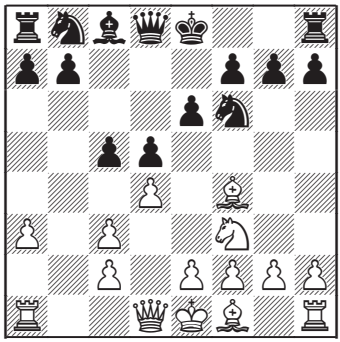
6.dxc5 ♘bd7 7.♘ge2 a6 8.a3 ♗xc5



It is obvious even at a cursory glance that Black has a nice position due to his mobile pawn centre. In the game Bakalchuk-Postny, Tiberias 2016, White rushed to break it with 9.e4?!, but 9...e5 10.♗g3 d4∓ gained even more space. More accurate was 9.♗g3 b5 10.b4 ♗e7 11.h3 0-0 12.0-0 ♗b7 13.a4=.

Another frequent move is 4.♘f3. I suggest to follow the same course: 4...♗b4, with a split:

a) 5.a3 ♗xc3+ 6.bxc3 c5



We'll employ typical French motifs: 7.g3 (7.dxc5 ♕a5 8.♕d3 ♕xc5 9.e3 ♘c6 10.♘e5 ♘d7 11.♘xc6 bxc6 12.♗g3 e5 13.♕d2 0-0 14.♗d3 f6 15.0-0 ♘b6 16.a4 a5∓) 7...♕a5 8.♗d2 ♕a4 9.h4 ♘c6 10.♗h3 ♘e4 11.0-0 b6∓.

b) 5.♕d3 ♘e4

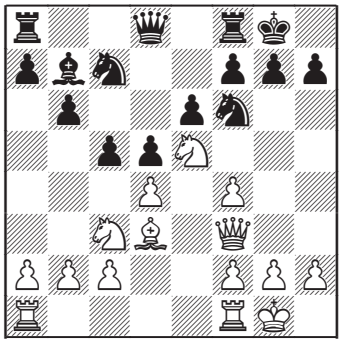
It is natural to discourage long castling by damaging White's pawn structure. 5...c5 6.dxc5 ♘bd7 (6...0-0 7.a3 ♗xc5 8.e4 ♕a5 9.0-0-0 leads to a perpetual check – 9...♗xa3 10.bxa3 ♕xa3+ 11.♔b1 ♕b4+ 12.♔c1 ♕a3+=) 7.a3 ♗xc5 8.e4 ♘g4 is messy after 9.♗g3 ♕b6 10.0-0-0 ♗xf2 11.h3 ♗xg3 12.hxg4 ♘e5 13.♘xe5 ♗xe5 14.exd5 ♗d7 15.dxe6 ♗xe6 16.♕f3 a6∞.

6.♘d2 ♘xc3 7.bxc3 ♗d6∞.

4...♘a6 5.a3

Preventing ...♗b4, but wasting a tempo. More principled is 5.e3 c6 6.♘c3 when we have to decide at what kind of play we are aiming. Simplest solution is:

6...♘c7 7.♗d3 ♗d6 8.♘f3 ♗xf4 9.exf4 b6 10.0-0 0-0 11.♘e5 ♗b7 12.♕f3 c5



Black has no weaknesses, he can easily parry kingside attacks. For instance: 13.♘e2 ♘ce8 14.c3 ♘d6 15.♕h3 ♖c8 16.g4 g6 17.♖ad1 (17.f5 exf5 18.gxf5 ♖c7) 17...♘d7 18.♖fe1 ♖c7 19.♘f3 ♖e8=.

6...♗b4 7.♗xa6 bxa6 is strategically double-edged. The key issue here is how Black could bring his light-squared bishop into play. If he solved this task, his bishop pair could prevail.

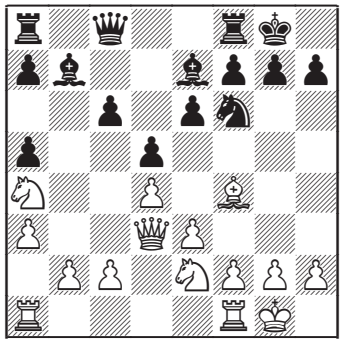
8.♘ge2

Or 8.♘f3 a5 9.0-0 ♗a6 10.♖e1 c5=.

8...a5

8...0-0 should probably lead to similar positions. White cannot prevent both ...♗a6 and ...c5, e.g. 9.a3 ♗e7 10.♘a4 a5 11.♕d3 ♘d7 12.0-0 c5.

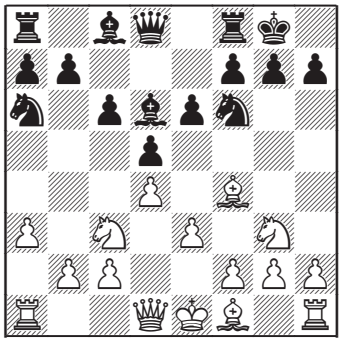
9.a3 ♗e7 10.♕d3 ♗b7 11.♘a4 0-0 12.0-0 ♕c8



Black will achieve ...♗a6. The question is will he get enough compensation for the a5-pawn after:

13.♕c3 ♘e4! 14.♕xa5 ♗a6 15.♖fe1 ♗d8 16.♕b4 ♗c4 17.♘c5 a5 18.♕b7. Now he could take over the initiative with 18...♘xc5 19.♕xc8 ♖xc8 20.dxc5 ♗e7 21.b4 (21.♘c3!?=) 21...♗f6 22.♖b1 e5 23.♗g3 ♖a8⩲, or pour more oil into the fire with 18...♗h4?! 19.g3 ♕xb7 20.♘xb7 ♗e7 21.f3 ♘d2 22.♔f2 ♖a7 23.♘c5 e5!? 24.♗xe5 ♗xe2 25.♖xe2 ♘c4. Suddenly it transpires that Black is winning a piece, but 26.e4! grabs a third pawn for it and although the computer sees 0.00 at depth 45, only White could win OTB.

Of course, White could preserve his bishop, but 7.♘ge2 0-0 8.a3 ♗d6 9.♘g3 is rather comfortable for Black:

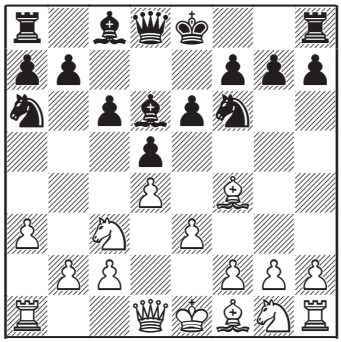


The blitz game Rapport-Wei Yi, Yancheng 2016, went: 10.♗d3 ♖e8 11.♗xd6 ♕xd6 12.f4 c5∞.

Throughout the book, I preach to take on f4 whenever possible, in order to make the enemy pawn structure more static:

9...♗xf4 10.exf4 b6 11.♗d3 ♘c7 12.0-0 ♗a6=. Our next step will be the thematic knight transfer to d6, and the break ...c5 – 13.♘ce2 ♗xd3 14.♕xd3 ♕d7 15.♖fe1 g6 16.♕e3 ♘ce8 17.♘c1 ♖c8 18.♘d3 ♘d6 19.c3 ♕c7. At last, ...c5 is coming, so the game is balanced.

5...c6 6.♘c3 ♗d6 7.e3



7...b6

I prefer 7...♗xf4! 8.exf4 b6. Then 9.g4 ♗b7 10.♕f3 0-0 11.g5 ♘e8 12.♗d3 only looks dangerous. Black has good counterplay on the queenside – 12...c5 13.♘ce2 ♘b8 14.c3 ♘c6 15.♕h3 g6 16.♘f3 ♘g7 17.0-0 a5, planning to trade bishops via a6.

Jobava-Topalov, Baku 2016, saw 7...♘c7 8.♘f3 ♗xf4 9.exf4 ♕d6?!

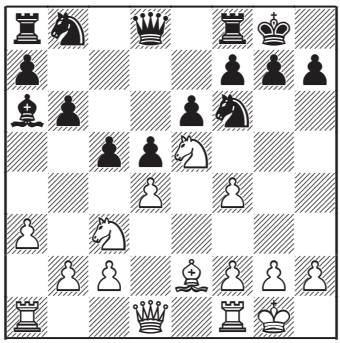
This move could prove to be a waste of time. 9...b6!= is easier.

10.♘e5 b6 11.♕f3 c5 12.♘b5 ♘xb5 13.♗xb5+ ♗d7 14.♘xd7 ♘xd7 15.0-0-0 0-0 16.♗xd7 ♕xd7 17.f5 ♕e7 18.♖he1 cxd4 19.♖xd4 ♕f6 20.♕f4 ♖ae8 21.♖e5 exf5 22.♖dxd5 ♖xe5 23.♖xe5 g6=.

8.♘f3

8.♗xd6! ♕xd6 9.g4 offers White some initiative.

8...♗xf4 9.exf4 0-0 10.♗e2 c5 11.0-0 ♘b8 12.♘e5 ♗a6



At many occasions in the book I point out that such an early exchange has a sound position reasoning and should gradually

equalize. At the same time, it always gives White a slight iniatiative, due to the arising weakness of our light squares. Black would have more chances to win if he completed his development first, e.g. 12...♗b7, then, ...♘c6, and prepare ...♗a6 at a later stage of the game.

13.♘b5

13.♗xa6!? ♘xa6 14.♖e1 ♘c7 15.a4 is roughly equal. The text is pointless, as Black can easily force the bishops trade anyway.

13...♘e4 14.f3 ♗xb5

I do not understand this move. It wastes a tempo and allows White to repair his pawn structure 14...♘d6 was a natural retort.

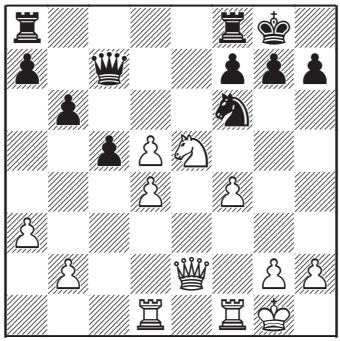
15.fxe4 ♗xe2 16.♕xe2 ♘d7 17.exd5 exd5 18.♖ad1 ♘f6!

Preserving the knights for defence. 18...♕c7 19.♘xd7 ♕xd7 20.dxc5 bxc5 21.f5 would retain some threats.

19.c4

19.dxc5 bxc5 20.c4 d4 21.b4 ♕c7= would break the symmetry a little.

19...♕c7 20.cxd5



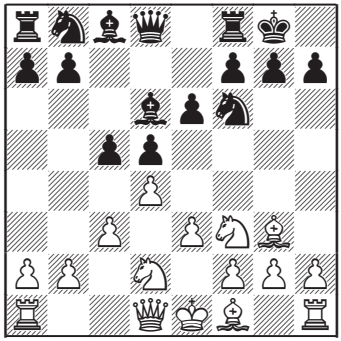
20...♘xd5

The position is totally dry and 20...♖ad8 21.dxc5 ♕xc5+ 22.♕f2 ♖xd5 would have underlined it. The rest of the game saw a series of horrible blunders and is irrelevant for the opening:

21.dxc5 ♕xc5+ 22.♔h1 ♖ad8 23.♖c1 ♕d6 24.♕f3 f6?? (24...♕e6=) 25.♘c6 ♖d7 26.♖fd1 ♖c8 27.♘e7+ ♘xe7 28.♖xc8+ ♘xc8 29.♖xd6 ♘xd6 30.♕c6 ♖e7 31.h3 (31.♕d5+! ♔h8 32.g4 ♘b7 33.b4+–) 31...♘e4 32.g4 g5 33.♔g2 ♔g7 34.h4 gxf4 35.♔f3 ♘c5 36.♔xf4?= ♘d3+ 37.♔g3 ♖e3+ 38.♔g2 ♖e2+ 39.♔f3?? ♘e5+ 40.♔xe2 ♘xc6 41.♔e3 ♘e5 42.♔f4 ♘d3+ 0-1

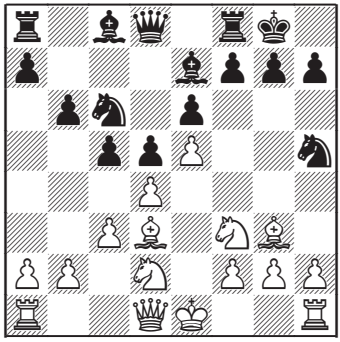
Chapter 5. 1.d4 d5 2.♗f4 ♘f6 3.e3 e6 with ...c5
Main Ideas

1.d4 d5 2.♗f4 ♘f6 3.e3 e6 4.♘d2 ♗d6 5.♗g3 0-0 6.♘gf3 c5 7.c3



The sudden burst of popularity of this line is based on the discovery that 7...♘c6 8.♗d3 b6 9.e4 ♗e7!! holds Black's position together. It is critical for him as he cannot avoid it by delaying ...♘c6 in favour of ...b6: White could choose the particular move order 6.♗d3 c5 7.c3, when 7...b6?! (7...♘c6!) 8.e4! is slightly more pleasant for White. Thus the first thing you should learn is how to deal with the following position:

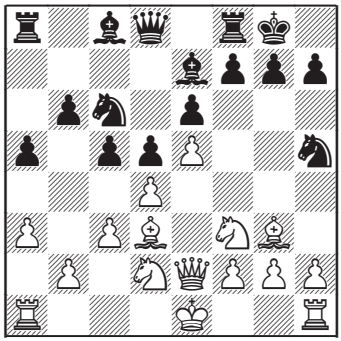
10.e5 ♘h5



White has two sharp ways of attacking – ♘g5 and h4, threatening ♗h2, g4. Whatever variation we calculate, we always should answer first how we meet those threats. If we neutralise them and live up to a short castle from White, we could start thinking about more long-term planning.

As long as we maintain the tension in the centre, ♘g5 will be connected with an unclear pawn sac, for instance: 11.♘g5 ♗xg5 12.♕xh5 g6 13.♕e2 cxd4 14.h4 ♗e7!?. Therefore, the first players commonly choose:

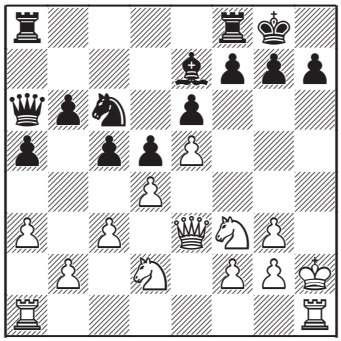
11.a3 a5 12.♕e2 and we have a wide choice at our disposal.



On the defensive side, all is clear – we'll stay with ...g6 and ...f5 at some point. What about the queenside? In most games Black opts for ...c4, ...b5. For instance, 12...♗d7!? 13.0-0?! c4 14.♗c2 b5, or 12...♖a7!? 13.0-0?! c4, as in **Game 15** Grischuk-Nakamura, Skopje 2015. While this plan quickly creates targets in White's camp, at a later stage we might regret that we deprived our light-squared bishop of any prospects.

I think that our game would be much easier if we got rid of that bishop before closing the flank. My recommendation is:

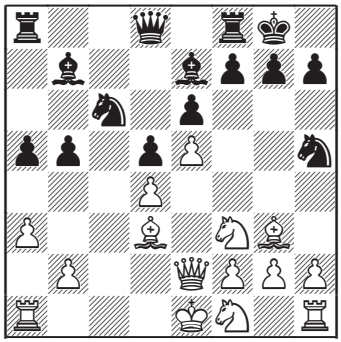
12...♗b7!?, preparing to meet 13.0-0 by 13...♘xg3 14.hxg3 ♕c8 15.♔h2 ♗a6 16.♖h1 ♗xd3 17.♕xd3 ♕a6 18.♕e3



Having exchanged the bishops, we should execute the second stage of our plan – to open the f-file with ...♖ae8, ...f6.

Of course, White should delay castling.

A typical manoeuvre is **13.♘f1**. I propose to always counter-attack it by 13...cxd4 14.cxd4 b5!



15.♗xb5 a4!⇄, intending ...♕b6, ...♗a6.

The best retort to the waiting 13.♖d1 is 13...g6.

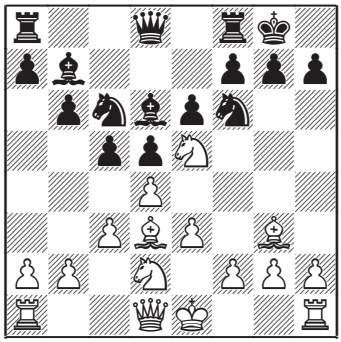
Finally, 13.h4!? may be White's best choice, playing for a draw after 13...♘xg3

14.fxg3 ♕c8 15.♗xh7+ ♔xh7 16.♘g5+ ♔h6 17.♕d3 g6 18.h5 ♔g7 19.♘xf7=.

Let's now consider White's other major plans.

White plays ♘e5

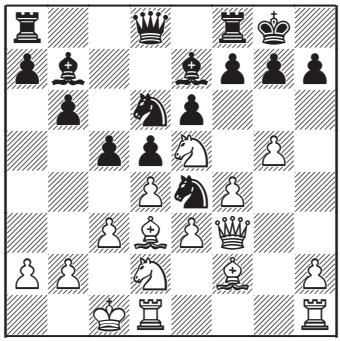
7...♘c6 8.♗d3 b6 (or 7...b6!? 8.♗d3 ♘c6) **9.♘e5 ♗b7**



The simplest way to treat this position is to **ignore the e5-knight** and to aim to put our own knight on e4. We'll start with ...♘e7, but then we'll need the manoeuvre ...♘e7-f5-d6. Once our king's knight lands on e4, we'll be in command, and our counterplay on the queenside should promise us excellent chances. White has tested two ways of contesting e4 – with ♕f3 and ♕b1:

a) **10.f4** ♘e7 11.♕f3 (11.0-0?! ♘e4 12.♗h4 f6) 11...♘f5 12.♗f2 ♗e7! 13.g4 ♘d6 14.g5 ♘fe4 15.0-0-0

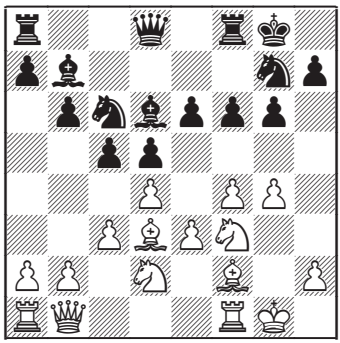
A key position for the plan with ♘e5.



We can do little to avoid it. The big question is who is ahead in the race. I think I know the answer – Black's attack is more dangerous, but only because of the novelty:

15...cxd4! 16.exd4 b5!→.

b) **11.♕b1** is less committing as it assumes a short castle. I consider in the annotations to **Game 17** Sandipan-Kryvoruchko, rapid, Dubai 2014, several good plans against it. A safe stand is 11...g6!? 12.0-0 ♘h5!? 13.♗f2 f6 14.♘ef3 ♘c6!?



Our "Hedgehog" on the kingside is flexible and sturdy. See the similar **Game 16** Skoberne-Halkias, Baku 2016.

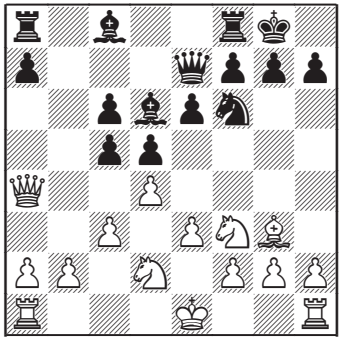
White castles short

Instead of defining his plan with 9.♘e5 or 9.e4, White could choose the noncommittal 9.0-0. I suggest to answer 9...♗xg3 10.hxg3 ♗b7, when White does not have a clear plan. 11.♕a4 could be met by 11...♖b8, preparing ...c4.

White plays 8.♗b5

This calm positional plan was popularised by Kamsky and then adopted by Carlsen, Kramnik and other top players. It aims to repel (or exchange) the c6-knight from the centre and then push e4 or c4. Initially Black semi-automatically answered 8...♘e7 but the surprising follow-up 9.♗d3!, intending e4, offers White some initiative. I suspect that Black should try to prove that his bishop is not worse than a knight. A key moment in his counterplay is the b-file. I recommend:

8...♕e7 9.♗xc6 bxc6 10.♕a4



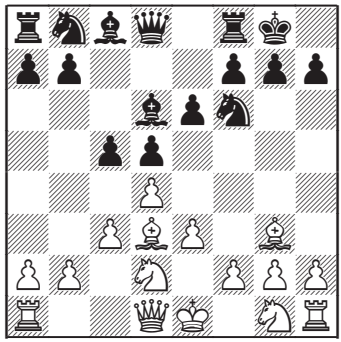
10...♗xg3! 11.hxg3 cxd4 12.cxd4 ♖ab8!?.

Although my analyses suggest that Black should gradually equalize, I must admit that White's position is extremely solid, without any pawn weaknesses. In other words, he would often play with a draw in the pocket. I prefer more double-edged play, so I offer to sidestep the plan with ♗b5 by delaying ...♘c6. In line B I consider the clever move order 7...b6! and we lead out our knight only when we see ♗d3.

Move Order

We have seen from the above paragraph that delaying ...♘c6 with 7...b6! has the obvious advantage of avoiding 8.♗b5. In fact, this move order could restrict White's choice even further. If he played an early ♘f3, he would not be able to enter another critical line, A11. 9.e4, as well, remaining only with the ♘e5-plan. Besides, Black could also use his knight at b8 to trade light-squared bishops via a6.

As a partial anti-dote, White should leave his king's knight on g1. His most flexible sequence is 4.♘d2 ♗d6 5.♗g3 0-0 6.♗d3 c5 7.c3.

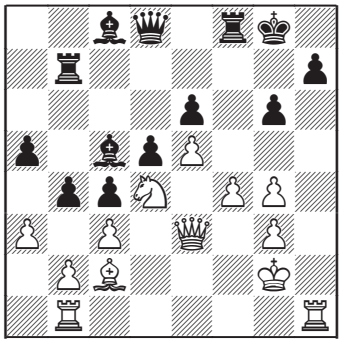


Now 7...b6?! would stumble into 8.e4!, so 7...♘c6 8.♘gf3 b6 is indispensable. White will have at his disposal all the options on move 9 – lines A11 to A14, but without line A2. 8.♗b5.

Positional decisions

Black's biggest problem is what active plan to choose. The most natural idea is to close the queenside with ...c4 and push b6-b5-b4. I cannot say it is a bad plan, but it is rarely the best one. At least it is quite risky as the d4-pawn is no longer hanging and that gives White a free hand on the kingside. Another obvious drawback is that Black remains with a poor light-squared bishop. Even when Black wins a pawn on the queenside, his position could still be dangerous owing to the concentration of white pieces on the opposite flank.

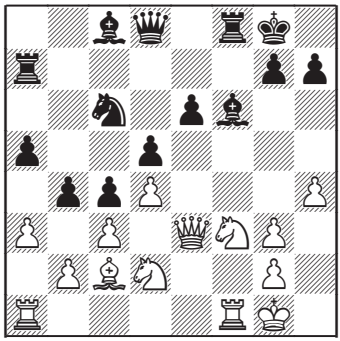
Analysis



30...bxa3 31.bxa3 ♖xb1 32.♖xb1 ♗xa3 33.f5→.

Remember the following typical hit:

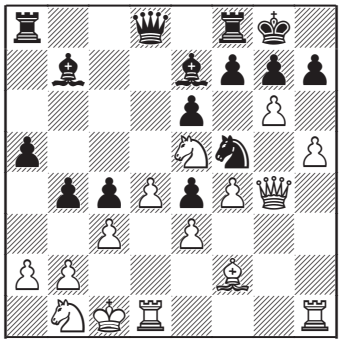
Analysis



19.♘xc4! dxc4 20.♕e4.

Even against a long castle, the pawn storm is not too efficient:

Analysis

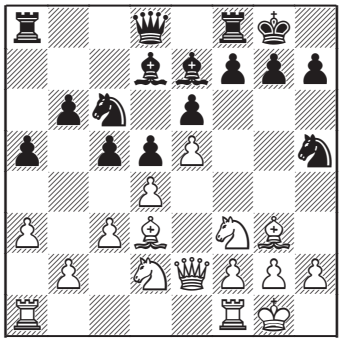


21...fxg6 22.h6! ♕e8 (22...♘xh6? 23.♖xh6! gxh6 24.♘xg6) 23.hxg7 ♔xg7 24.♖h2 ♖g8∞.

The plan with ...c4 is more viable if White has already castled and Black's bishop is on d7 (to enable counterplay with ...f6):

Kamsky-Goryachkina

Gibraltar 2016

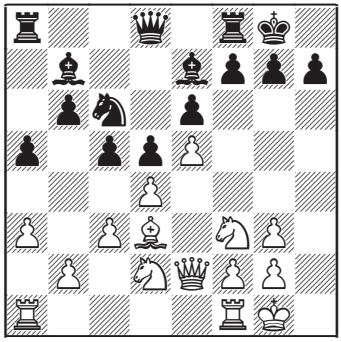


13...c4!? 14.♗c2 b5 15.♖fe1 ♘xg3 16.hxg3 b4↑.

I'm not entirely against the idea of closing the centre, but I prefer to resort to it after having traded light-squared bishops with ...♗b7, ...♕c8, ...♗a6. That would reduce the opponent's attacking potential:

Nguyen-Tregubov

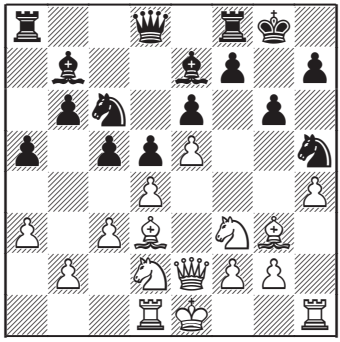
Doha 2016



14...♕c8 15.♔h2 ♗a6.

Whatever our active plan is, we should not forget the defence. We can hardly survive a gradual attack without opening the f-file with ...f6 or ...f5. Our typical stand on the kingside should be similar to the following diagram:

Analysis

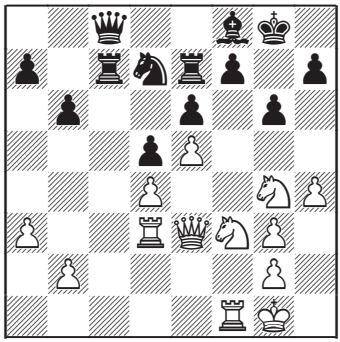


14...f6 15.exf6 ♖xf6⇄.

Here are negative examples where Black remained without counterplay:

Pechac-Caletka

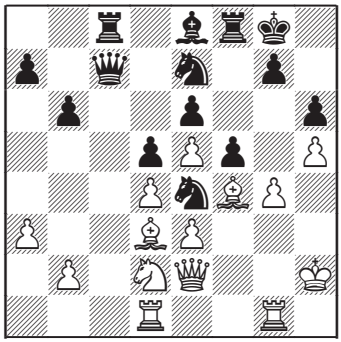
Slovakia 2016



Black's strategy has led him to a positional disaster. He has gained full control of the c-file, but it is often fruitless since Black lacks targets and invasion

squares. On the kingside he did not create any counterplay either. The game saw further 25.♘f6+ ♔h8 26.h5 ♗g7 27.♕f4 ♕f8 28.♕h4 and White went on to win.

Kamsky-Dreev
Khanty-Mansiysk 2013

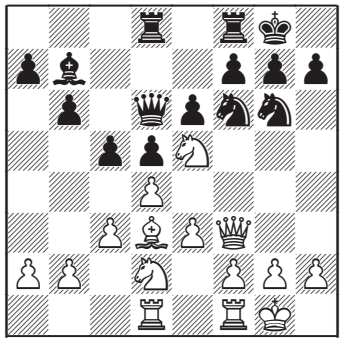


A similar example of a one-way-game. After 31.g5! Black would have faced serious problems.

"Bad" bishop

White often aims to saddle the opponent with a poor light-squared bishop. Indeed, sometimes a knight might be stronger than the bishop, but more often our bishop would be quite useful on the a6-f1 diagonal. It all depends on who owns the initiative.

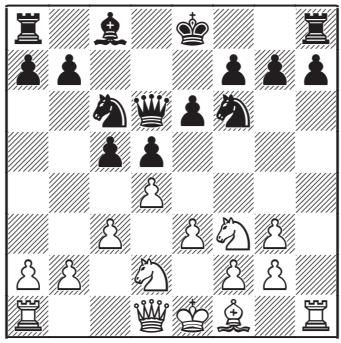
Kramnik-Hou Yifanrapid Medias 2016



White has the more active pieces and his next move weakens Black's castling position: 15.♗xg6! hxg6 16.♕h3↑ ♗a6 17.♖fe1 ♘h7 18.f4 ♗b5 19.♘df3 ♕e7 20.♕g3 ♗e8 21.♖f1 ♕f6 22.♘g5+– ♕e7 23.♖f3 f6 24.♘xh7.

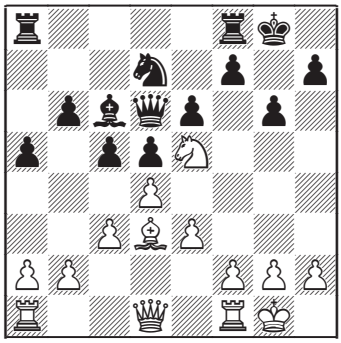
Carlsen-Ghaem

Baku 2016



The open h-file is a strong factor in White's favour. Carlsen developed his initiative with 9.♗b5 ♗d7 10.♗xc6 ♗xc6 11.♘e5 ♕c7 12.♕f3 h6 13.♕f4 ♕e7 14.g4 ♘h7 15.♕g3±.

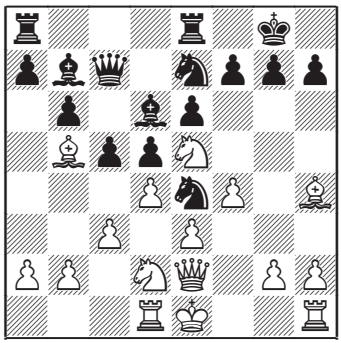
Grachev-Litvinov
Moscow 2016



The theory of the "bad" bishop might prompt White to take on d7. However, 17.♘xd7 ♕xd7 would be even slightly more pleasant for Black because he would have a clear plan of advancing on the queenside. 17.♘xc6 ♕xc6 18.a4= is more solid.

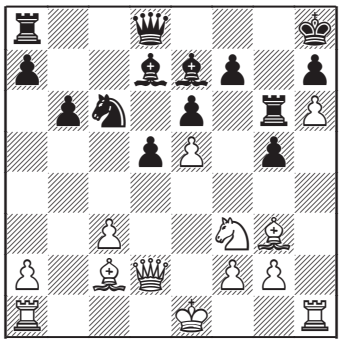
Finally, I want to show you two extreme examples to support my assertion that we should weigh the dynamic factors first:

Analysis



It looks that White has made all the right moves. His pieces are active, he is threatening the rook. But he delayed castling for too long. After 14...♘f5!! 15.♗xe8 ♖xe8 16.♗f2 cxd4 17.exd4 (17.cxd4 ♗b4) 17...f6 18.g4 ♘xf2 19.♕xf2 ♘h6 20.g5 fxe5 21.gxh6 exd4 22.cxd4 ♗a6→, his positions is spectacularly falling apart. The a6-bishop plays a big role in that.

Analysis



22...♘a5! 23.♗xg6 hxg6∓. Again, Black's "bad" bishop could become the hero of the day.

Theoretical status

This set-up is still too young and unexplored. I could not understand well what Romero and Sedlak recommend for White as they prefer to show examples with awful play from Black.

It seems that lately White tends to avoid ♗d3 in favour of ♗b5 (which is easy to prevent, as I have shown!). Black, for his part, investigates the early ...♘h5, as in **Game 19** Kamsky-Nakamura, Saint Louis 2017.

In all events, Black should expect rich, double-edged middlegames with mutual chances. It is unlikely to get early endgames, so typical for the set-ups with ...♗f5.

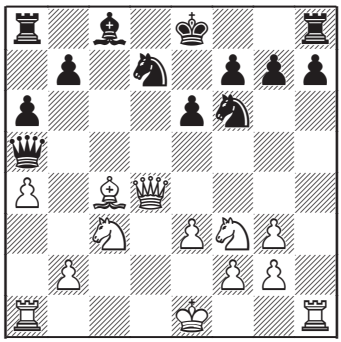
Chapter 5. 1.d4 d5 2.♗f4 ♘f6 3.e3 e6 with ...c5
Step by Step

1.d4 d5 2.♗f4 ♘f6 3.e3 e6 4.♘d2 ♗d6 5.♗g3 0-0

5...c5 should transpose.

5...♗xg3 is dubious in all possible settings, since it offers White a tangible structural advantage – the semi-open h-file. For instance, 6.hxg3 ♘bd7 7.g4! is obviously in White's favour.

I have realised a more complex version of the idea of g4 in the game Kiril Georgiev-Lazic, Padowa 2015. In it I had already the king's knight on f3: 4.♘f3 ♗d6 5.♗g3 ♗xg3?! 6.hxg3 ♘bd7 7.c4 dxc4 8.♗xc4 c5 9.♘c3 a6 10.a4 cxd4 11.♕xd4 ♕a5 (11...♘b6 12.♕xd8+ ♔xd8 13.♖h4)

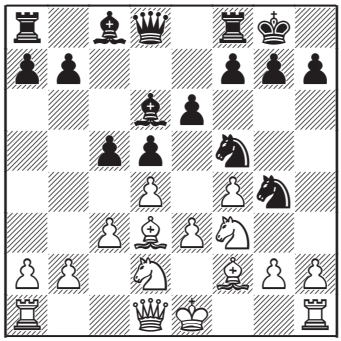


12.g4! e5 13.♕d6 13.♗xf7+!! ♔xf7 14.♕c4+ was killing: 14...♔f8 15.♘g5 ♘d5 16.♕xd5 ♕xd5 17.♘xd5 ♘f6 18.♘b6 ♖b8 19.f3+–; 14...♔e8 15.♕e6+ ♔d8 16.♘g5 ♖f8 17.♘f7+ ♖xf7 18.♕xf7; 14...♔e7 15.♘g5 ♖f8 16.♕e6+ ♔d8 17.♘f7+ ♖xf7 18.♕xf7 ♔c7 19.0-0-0+–.

13...♕b6 (13...♘e4 14.♕d5) 14.♕a3! e4 15.♘d2+– ♕a5 16.g5 ♕xg5 17.♘dxe4 ♘xe4 18.♘xe4 ♕a5+ (18...♕e7 19.♘d6+ ♔f8 20.♘xf7 ♕xa3 21.bxa3 ♖g8 22.♖xh7+–) 19.♔f1 1-0

6.♘gf3

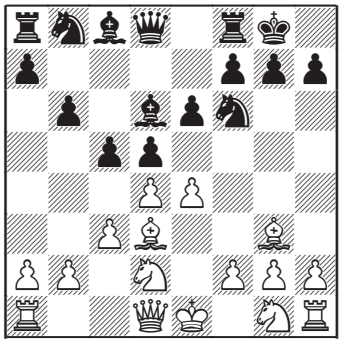
6.♗d3 prunes one important branch based on ♗f1-b5. Play should transpose to line A after 6...c5 7.c3 ♘c6! 8.♘gf3. White has also tried 8.f4, but 8...♘e7 9.♘gf3 ♘f5 10.♗f2 ♘g4



11.♕e2 ♘xf2 12.♕xf2 ♕b6 13.♖b1 f6 is pretty for Black – we control the centre, White cannot castle long.

On the other hand, the delay of ♘gf3 discourages lines with ...b6 without ...♘c6 because White could push e3-e4: 6.♗d3 c5 7.c3 b6?! 8.e4!

The difference with line A11 is that our knight cannot reach h5. This is not dramatic, but makes our castling position more vulnerable:



8...♗e7 9.e5 ♘fd7 10.♕b1!

Provoking a weakness without wasting a tempo.

10.♕h5 g6 11.♕e2 cxd4! 12.cxd4 ♘bc6 13.♘gf3 ♘b4 14.0-0 ♘xd3 15.♕xd3 a5 solves Black's main positional problem – the activation of the light-squared bishop. The blitz game Grachev-Malakhov, Moscow 2014, went 16.♖fc1 ♗a6 17.♕e3, when simple trade of rooks would assure Black of penetration squares down the c-file – 17...♖c8! 18.h4 ♖xc1 ♖xc1 ♕b8 20.h5 ♖c8=.

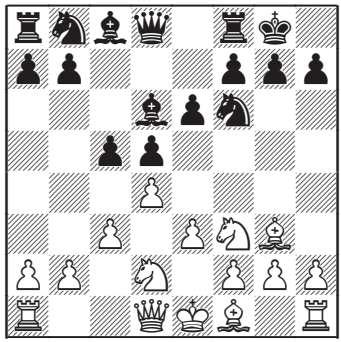
10.♘gf3 is even easier – 10...♗a6! 11.♗xa6 ♘xa6 12.0-0 b5= (or 12...♘c7=), Grachev-Sakaev, St Petersburg 2015.

10...g6

10...h6 is not safer – 11.♘e2 ♗a6 12.♗xa6 ♘xa6 13.0-0 b5 14.f4 with f4-f5 in mind.

11.h4! ♗a6 12.h5 with an initiative, although 12...♗xd3 13.♕xd3 g5 keeps things under control.

6...c5 7.c3

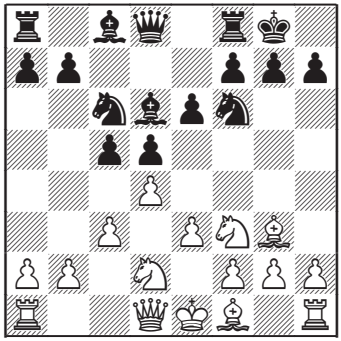


A. 7...♘c6; **B.** 7...b6!

The latter aims to cut off most of White's choices and to steer the game into line A14.

8.♘e5.

A. 7...♘c6



This position has been put under the microscope lately. It looks like Black is slightly lagging behind in the theoretical dispute and constantly has to catch up with White's new ideas. That is not surprising if we look at White's team, led by Carlsen, Kramnik and a strong field of 2700+ GMs.

The newest trend is **A2.** 8.♗b5, while **A1.** 8.♗d3 had been the main line.

8.♘e5?! is premature because Black could save ...b6 and go directly for the main plan with ...f6:

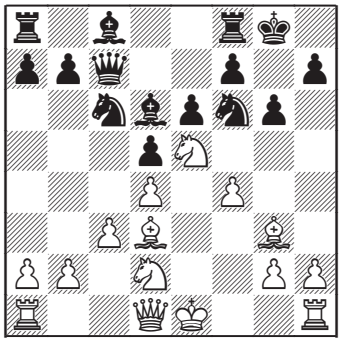
8...♕c7

There is no reason to play for equalization with 8...♗xe5 9.dxe5 ♘d7 10.f4 (10.♘f3 c4) 10...f6 11.exf6 ♘xf6 12.♗e2 ♗d7 (12...♘e7) 13.0-0 ♗e8=.

9.f4 cxd4

9...c4 10.♗h4 ♘d7 11.♗e2 f6 is also a good option.

10.exd4 g6 11.♗d3



Black commonly gets this position with ...b6, ...♗b7.

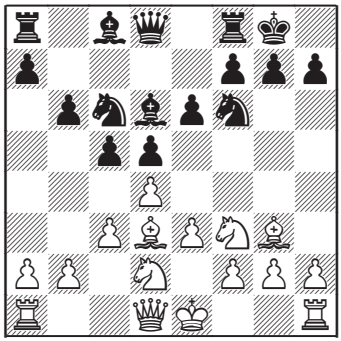
11...♘h5! 12.♕f3 f6 and White quickly lost after 13.♘xg6 hxg6 14.♗xg6 ♘g7∓, Macagno-Yudasin, chess.com 2017.

A1. 8.♗d3 b6

The fianchetto has been dominating the scene, but 8...♕e7 9.♘e5 ♘d7 10.♘xd7 ♕xd7! is close to equal.

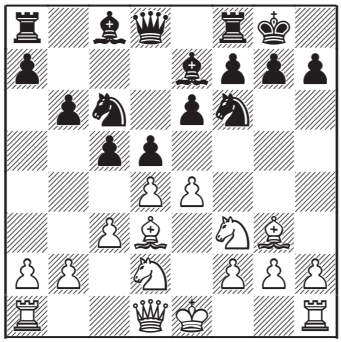
10...♗xd7? loses a pawn to 11.♗xd6 ♕xd6 12.dxc5 when 12...♕xc5? fails to 13.♗xh7+!!.

11.dxc5 ♗xc5 12.0-0 ♗d6 13.♗xd6 ½-½, Chigaev-Kravtsiv, Riga 2016. The text is certainly more interesting and double-edged.



A11. 9.e4; **A12.** 9.0-0; **A13.** 9.♕e2; **A14.** 9.♘e5

A11. 9.e4 ♗e7!



This surprising retreat is the cause of the current popularity of the set-up with an early e6. It put the question on the whole concept based on the e4-break. The bishop retreat was first played by Rogers in 1992, but the London had then the status of an "irregular" opening so nobody paid attention. It returned gloriously to the front stage only in 2015 thanks to Nakamura.

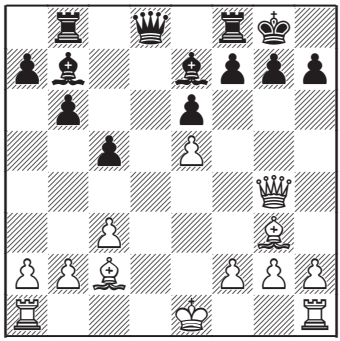
9...dxe4?! 10.♘xe4 ♘xe4 11.♗xe4 ♗b7 12.♕a4 ♖c8 13.dxc5 ♗xc5 14.♖d1 obviously favours White.

10.e5

Kamsky's attempt to improve with 10.♘e5 ♘xe5 11.dxe5 ♘xe4 12.♘xe4 dxe4 13.♗xe4 is best met by 13...♖b8! when:

14.♕xd8 ♖xd8 15.♖d1 ♖xd1+ 16.♔xd1 ♗b7 is totally equal. More challenging is:

14.♕g4 ♗b7 15.♗c2



The engines suggest here to grab a pawn, but this is not too practical as White enjoys an initiative after 15...♗xg2 16.♖g1 ♗c6 17.♖d1 ♕c7 18.♖d3 g6 19.♖e3 ♖fd8 20.♗f4 ♖d5 21.♕h5. The game is too chaotic and it is easy to err in rapid time controls. It is safer to answer:

15...♕d5 16.f3 g6 17.0-0 (17.♗f4 ♗a6) 17...♕d2 18.♖f2 ♕g5=.

10.exd5 is also harmless owing to 10...♕xd5 11.♗c4 ♕h5 (or 11...♕f5).

10...♘h5 11.a3

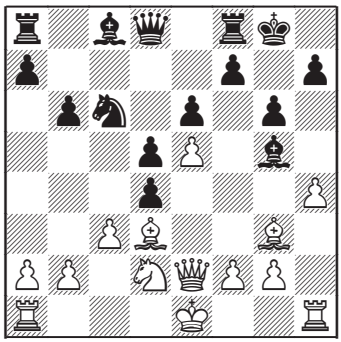
Aiming to prevent queenside counterplay with b4.

Kamsky tested 3 times 11.♕e2. We should not underestimate it as we could easily find ourselves thrown out of our repertoire.

For instance, Romero and De Prado only mention 11...♗d7 12.a3 a5 13.0-0?! c4 14.♗c2 b5 15.♖fe1 ♘xg3 16.hxg3 b4↑, Kamsky-Goryachkina, Gibraltar 2016, but instead of castling White should play 13.♖d1 – see 11.a3 a5 12.♕e2 ♗d7.

I propose 11...a5, when Kamsky did not find anything better against Taborsky than to transpose to our main line with 12.a3.

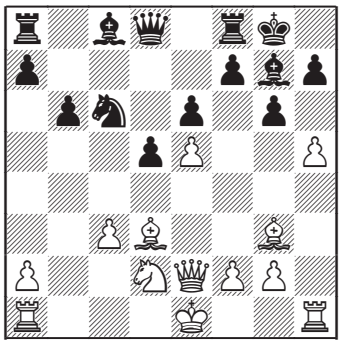
11.♘g5 is one of White's major resources, so we should know what to do against it. 11...♗xg5 12.♕xh5 g6 13.♕e2 cxd4 14.h4 and we face a choice:



14...♗e7!?

I would feel uneasy to play OTB without my dark-squared bishop: 14...♗xd2+ 15.♕xd2 dxc3 16.bxc3 d4 17.c4 ♕e7 18.♖b1 h5 19.♗f4 ♗b7 (19...♗a6∞) 20.0-0 ♖fc8? 21.♗g5 ♕f8 22.♗f6±, Van Foreest-Svane, Aachen 2016.

14...♗h6 15.h5 dxc3 16.bxc3 ♗g7 (16...♕e7 17.hxg6 ♗xd2+ 18.♕xd2 fxg6 19.♗h4 ♕g7 20.f4⩲, Shimanov-Abasov, Minsk 2017; 16...g5 17.♘f3 f5 18.exf6 ♕xf6 19.0-0 ♗g7 20.♖ae1 ♗d7 21.♗b5! ±.)



17.♔f1!? (Sedlak) is also tangled. (17.f4 ♕c7 18.hxg6 fxg6 19.♘f3 ♘e7 20.♖c1 is unclear, Filipovic-Derakhshani, Flims 2016. The g7-bishop is rather poor, and White has fair compensation for the pawn.) 17...♕e7 18.♖e1 ♗d7 19.♕g4 f5 (19...g5 20.h6 f5 21.♕h5∞) 20.exf6 ♕xf6 21.♘f3 ♕xc3∞.

15.h5

15.♘f3?! dxc3 16.bxc3, Lupulescu-Aleksandrov, Minsk 2017, allows 16...h5 or first 16...d4 17.♗e4 ♗b7 18.♖d1 ♕c8 19.c4 and now 19...h5, when it is unclear how White could develop his attack.

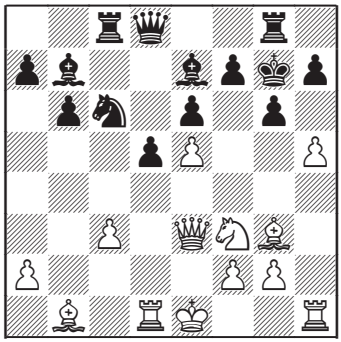
15...♔g7 The idea is to defend with ...g5 or ...f5. For instance:

16.♘f3 dxc3 17.bxc3 ♗d7 18.♘h2

18.♕e3 g5 19.h6+ ♔h8 20.♗c2 ♖g8 21.♕d3 ♖g6 22.♕d2 ♘a5∓; 18.♗h4 g5.

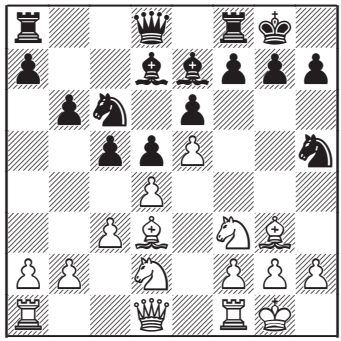
18...f5 19.exf6+ ♗xf6 20.♖d1 (20.0-0 e5 21.♖ad1 ♕e8∞) 20...♗xc3+ 21.♔f1 ♕f6∞, or:

16.♖d1 ♗b7 17.♗b1 ♖c8 18.♘f3 dxc3 19.bxc3 ♖g8 (20.♔f1 ♘a5 21.♔g1 g5) 20.♕e3



20...g5 21.♕d3 ♔f8 22.♕xh7 ♗a6 23.♗d3 ♗xd3 24.♖xd3 ♖g7=.

11.0-0 looks harmless. Kamsky twice failed to equalize with White against 11...♗d7, e.g. 12.♖e1



Kamsky-Muzychuk, Gibraltar 2016:

12...♘xg3 13.hxg3 a5!? 14.a3 a4 15.♘f1?! b5! 16.♘e3 b4 17.cxb4 cxb4 18.axb4 ♘xb4∓. Critical would be 15.g4!, intending to mount an attack on the h-file;

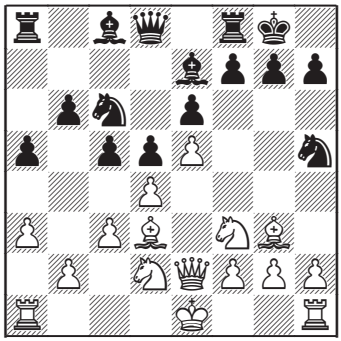
Kamsky-Nakamura, Saint Louis 2015: 12...♖c8 13.a3 ♘xg3 14.hxg3 f5 15.dxc5?! bxc5 16.b4 g5∓. The obvious 15.exf6 ♗xf6 16.♘f1 cxd4 17.cxd4 ♘xd4 would be roughly equal, but White's moves look more easy since he is free of apparent weaknesses.

I think that instead of 11...♗d7, Black could play 11...a5 (intending ...♗a6) 12.♕e2 ♗b7 as in the main line. Instead, 12...c4 13.♗c2 b5 14.♘g5 ♘xg3 (14...g6!? 15.h4∞) 15.♗xh7+ ♔h8 16.♘xf7+ ♖xf7 17.fxg3 is a draw by perpetual check.

11...a5

11...g6 is not a bad move either.

12.♕e2



12...♗b7!?

Played with the undisguised intention to trade light-squared bishop with ...♕c8, ...♗a6. Then Black's queen could attack the b2-pawn through b5.

Another approach is to prepare ...f5, e.g. 12...g6 13.0-0 f5 14.exf6 ♗xf6. It is safer from a practical standpoint, as it anticipates any White's attack on the kingside, but we remain with a bad bishop.

Black can choose a pawn storm with ...c4, ...b5 after the prophylactic move 12...♖a7!?. See **Game 15** Grischuk-Nakamura, Skopje 2015.

He could also prepare ...c4 with 12...♗d7!?. It maintains the hit on d4 so 13.♘g5 would drop the pawn. The only thing I do not like about it is that Black abandons the fine positional plan of trading like-squared bishops. In my opinion, White should delay castling in order to provoke some weakening around our king:

13.♖d1!

13.0-0?! c4 14.♗c2 b5 15.♖fe1 ♘xg3 16.hxg3 b4↑, Kamsky-Goryachkina, Gibraltar 2016.

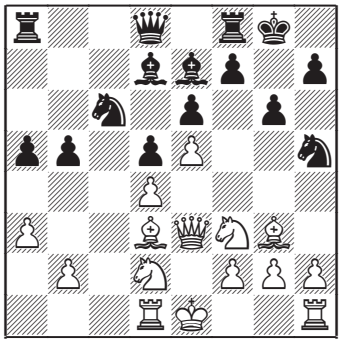
13...g6

13...c4 would give White a freehand on the kingside – 14.♗c2 b5 15.♘g5.

14.♕e3

Or 14.♘f1 cxd4 15.cxd4 b5!.

14...cxd4 15.cxd4 b5



16.h4 ♘xg3 17.fxg3 f5 18.exf6

18.♗xb5 ♘b4 19.axb4 ♗xb5 20.bxa5 ♖xa5 promises sufficient compensation.

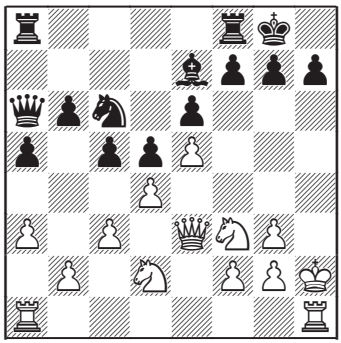
18...♗xf6 19.♘e5 (19.h5 ♕c7) 19...♘xe5 20.dxe5 ♗e7 21.♘f3 b4 22.h5 (22.♕h6? ♖f7 23.h5 g5) 22...g5 23.0-0 bxa3 24.bxa3 ♖b8 25.♔h2 a4 26.♖b1∞. I'm afraid that Black does not have serious winning chances with his weak king.

13.♖d1!?

The direct 13.♘g5?! ♗xg5 14.♕xh5 just drops the d4-pawn.

Castling short would mean to abandon all hopes for a quick attack – 13.0-0 ♘xg3

14.hxg3 ♕c8 15.♔h2 ♗a6 16.♖h1 ♗xd3 17.♕xd3 ♕a6 18.♕e3



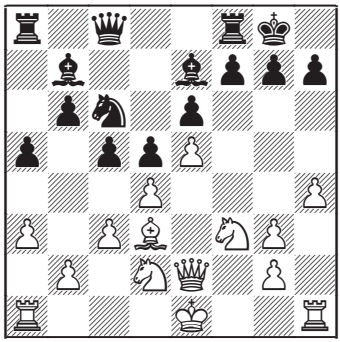
Nguyen Ngoc Truong Son-Tregubov, blitz, Doha 2016. went 18...cxd4 19.cxd4 ♖fc8 20.g4 ♗f8 21.♔g3 h6 22.♖h5 ♘e7 with a tangled game where Black is holding his own. Still, it is scary to allow such a concentration of white pieces against our king. I suggest to counter-attack in the centre with:

18...♕b5 19.♖ab1 ♖ae8 20.g4 cxd4 21.cxd4 f6! 22.exf6 ♗d6+ 23.g3 ♖xf6 24.♔g2 e5↑.

13.h4!? might be White's best option. It seems that we have nothing more than a draw after 13...♘xg3

13...cxd4 14.cxd4 ♘xg3 15.fxg3 f5 may be interesting, but White should be slightly better after 16.exf6 ♗xf6 17.♘g5 h6 18.♕xe6+ ♔h8 19.♘f7+ ♖xf7 20.♕xf7 ♕e8+ 21.♕xe8+ ♖xe8+ 22.♔d1±. This line shows the drawback of 12...♗b7 – it leaves the e6-pawn unprotected. If Black refrains from ...f5, White has a draw with 15...♖c8 16.♘g5 (or 16.♗xh7+ ♔xh7 17.♘g5+ ♔h6 18.♕d3 g6 19.h5 ♔g7 20.♘xe6+ fxe6 21.♕xg6+=) 16...h6 17.♕g4 ♗xg5 18.hxg5 ♕xg5 19.♕xg5 hxg5 20.♗h7+ ♔h8 21.♗d3+ ♔g8=.

14.fxg3 ♕c8



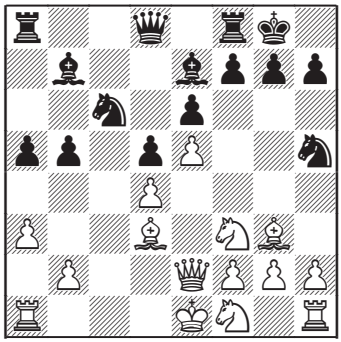
Now 15.♘g5 does not make much sense owing to 15...h6 so the following forced line looks imperative:

15.♗xh7+ ♔xh7 16.♘g5+ ♔h6 17.♕d3 g6 18.h5 ♔g7 19.♘xf7 gxh5 20.♕f3 ♗a6 21.♕xh5 ♗d3 22.♘g5 ♗xg5 23.♕xg5+ ♔f7 24.0-0-0. Black cannot escape from the perpetual check: 24...c4 25.♖df1+ (25.♘f3 ♔e8 26.♖xd3 cxd3 27.♖h7 ♖a7=) 25...♗xf1 26.♖h7+ ♔e8 27.♕h5+ ♔d8 28.♕g5+ ♔e8 or 24...♔e8 25.♘f3 ♗e4=.

The only other way to delay castling is 13.♘f1. I propose that we thematically meet it by 13...cxd4 (or even 13...b5 at once) 14.cxd4 b5!

The engines also claim that 13...♕c8 14.♘g5 g6 15.♘xh7 cxd4 16.♘xf8 ♕xf8 gives full compensation for the exchange, but it is far from obvious. For instance: 17.cxd4 ♘xd4 18.♕d1 ♕g7

19.♘e3 ♘xg3 20.hxg3 ♕xe5⩲ or 17.♘d2 dxc3 18.bxc3 d4 19.c4 ♗xa3 20.0-0 ♗e7 21.♕g4 ♘b4 22.♗e4 ♗xe4 23.♘xe4 ♘xg3 24.♕xg3 ♕d8⩲.



15.♗xb5 a4! 16.♗d3 ♕a5+ 17.♘1d2 ♕b6↑.

13...g6

13...♕c8 is dubious owing to 14.♘g5.

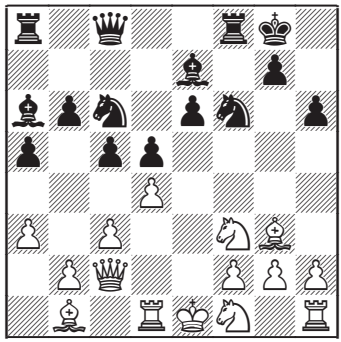
We could prevent that threat with 13...h6 and the engines are fond of this move. I have invested a lot of time in it, but I could not convince myself that weakening the h7-b1 diagonal is the best idea. My analysis suggests that Black has probably good counterplay, but my human intuition hints that 13...g6 is safer. Let's delve deeper in 13...h6:

a) 14.♘f1 ♕c8 15.♗b1

15.♘e3 ♗a6 16.♘g4 (16.♗xa6 ♕xa6 17.c4 ♖fd8) 16...♗xd3 17.♖xd3 ♕a6 18.♕e3 ♕b5∓;

15.h4 ♗a6 (15...♘xg3 16.♘xg3 ♗a6 17.♘h5 ♔h8 18.♘f4 cxd4 19.cxd4 a4 20.♖h3 ♖a7 21.♘h5 ♗xd3 22.♕xd3 ♘a5 23.♘g5 g6 24.♘f6 ♔g7 25.♘h5+ ♔h8) 16.♗h2 ♗xd3 17.♕xd3 f6 18.exf6 ♖xf6 (18...♘xf6=) 19.♘1d2 ♕d7 20.0-0 ♖af8 21.♖de1 ♘f4 22.♗xf4 ♖xf4 23.g3 ♖4f5 24.♖e3=.

15...♗a6 16.♕c2 f5 17.exf6 ♘xf6



At first sight it seems that all the fun is for White, but note a subtle detail – White's king cannot castle! That brings suspense in the game:

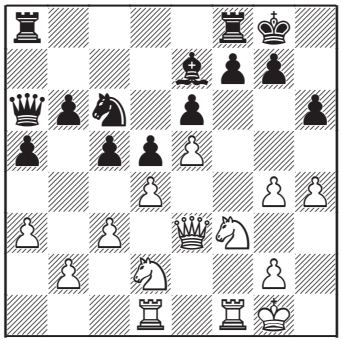
18.♘e3 cxd4 19.♘g4 (19.cxd4? ♕e8 20.♗h4 ♘e4–+) 19...♘e4

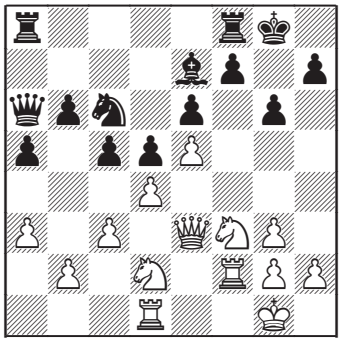
19...d3 20.♘xf6+ ♗xf6 21.♖xd3 ♘e7! 22.♗d6 ♗xd3 23.♕xd3 ♕c4 24.♕h7+ ♔f7 25.♘e5+ ♗xe5 26.♗xe5 ♖g8∞.

20.♘xd4 ♘xd4 21.♖xd4 ♖f5 22.f3 ♘xg3 23.hxg3 ♗c5 24.♖f4 ♗d6 25.♖d4 What a mess! You can take the draw or play on with ...♕e8.

18.♗h4?! cxd4 19.♗xf6 ♗xf6 20.cxd4 ♘e7 21.♕h7+ ♔f7 22.♘e3 ♖h8 23.♕c2 ♕xc2∓.

b) 14.0-0!? ♕c8 15.h4 ♘xg3 16.fxg3 ♗a6 17.g4 ♗xd3 18.♕xd3 ♕a6 19.♕e3





19...b5 allows White to start the attack at once with 20.g5 h5 21.g4 hxg4 22.♘h2∞, since Black lacks 22...♘xd4. The computer comes up with ingenuous defence and somehow holds the position, but it is scary to play this over the board.

14.♘f1

We meet 14.h4 by 14...f6 (14...♘xg3 15.fxg3 ♕c8 16.0-0 ♗a6 is more risky) 15.exf6 ♖xf6 16.0-0 cxd4=.

14.♕e3 allows 14...♗a6=.

14.0-0 gives us time for our main strategic idea – 14...♕c8 15.♕e3

15.h3 ♘xg3 16.fxg3 ♗a6 17.♖f2 ♗xd3 18.♕xd3 ♕c7, preparing ...f6.

15...♘xg3 16.fxg3 ♗a6 17.♗xa6 ♕xa6 18.♖f2

18...♕b5

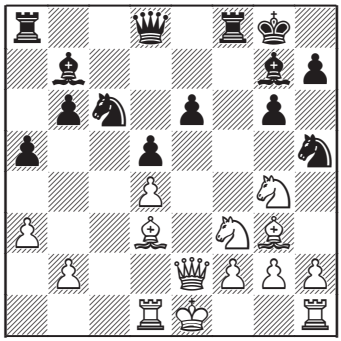
Another idea is 18...b5 19.♘f1 b4 20.h3 cxd4 21.cxd4 bxa3 22.bxa3 ♖ae8 23.♘3h2 f5 24.exf6 ♗xf6.

19.♘f1 ♕b3 20.♕d2 ♖ae8 21.♖e1 f6 22.exf6 ♗xf6 23.♘e3 ♗g7 24.♘g4 b5⇄.

14...b5!

I recommended the same pawn sac against 13.♘f1. Whenever White decides to spend two tempi on the knight manoeuvre, we could throw in a pawn.

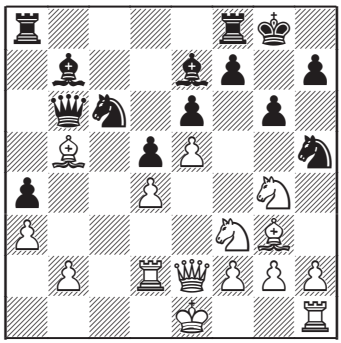
14...f5 is another decent retort, but it hangs on a tactical sequence: 15.exf6 ♗xf6 16.♘e3 ♗g7 17.♘g4 cxd4 18.cxd4



18...♘f4! 19.♗xf4 ♖xf4 20.♕xe6+ ♔h8 21.♘ge5 ♘xe5 22.♘xe5 ♕e8 23.♕xe8+ ♖xe8 24.♗b5 (24.♗e2 ♖e4=) 24...♖e4+! 25.♔f1 ♗xe5 26.♗xe8 ♗a6+ 27.♔g1 ♗xd4 28.h4 ♗xb2 29.♗c6 ♗xa3 30.♖xd5 ♖e6 31.♖d8+ ♔g7=. The black pawns are dangerous.

14...♕c8?! is too slow and gives White good attacking prospects – 15.♘e3 ♗a6 16.♘g4 ♗xd3 17.♖xd3 a4 18.0-0 cxd4 19.cxd4 ♘a5 20.♕d2 ♘c4 21.♕h6.

15.♗xb5 cxd4 16.cxd4 a4 17.♘e3 ♕a5+ 18.♖d2 ♕b6 19.♘g4



Black has successfully shifted the focus of the game to the queenside. His initiative fully compensates for the missing pawn. For instance:

a) 19...♘a5 20.0-0 ♗a6 21.♗xa6 ♕xa6 22.♕e1 ♖fc8 23.♗h4 ♗f8 24.♕e3 ♘c4 25.♘h6+ ♗xh6 26.♕xh6 ♘xd2 27.♕xd2 ♘g7;

b) 19...♗a6!? 20.♗xa6 ♕xa6 21.0-0 ♕xe2 22.♖xe2 ♘xg3 23.hxg3 ♖a7 24.♖c1 ♘a5 25.♘e3 ♘b3 26.♖c3 ♖b8 27.♖ec2 ♗d8 28.♘g4 ♔g7 29.♘e3 ♖aa8 30.g4 ♘a1 31.♖c1 ♘b3 32.♖1c2=.

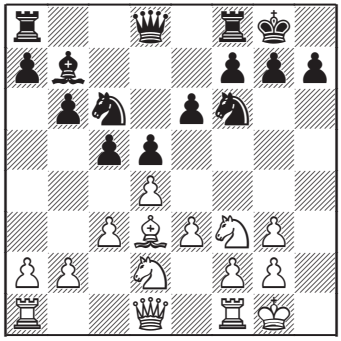
A12. 9.0-0

After the short castle, we can calmly trade bishops:

9...♗xg3

This looks more straightforward than 9...♗b7, which allows 10.♗h4. Of course, we have 10...♗e7 (10...e5? 11.e4) 11.♖e1 ♘e4, but the text is simpler. As a rule, we should take on g3, whenever White castles.

10.hxg3 ♗b7



The position is roughly equal. Harikrishna-Nakamura, chess.com blitz

5m+2spm 2016 saw further:

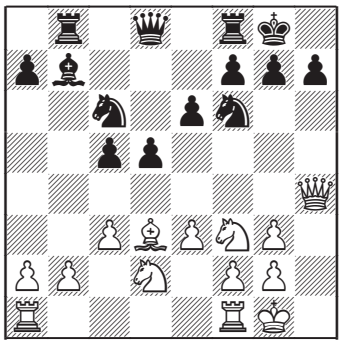
a) 11.♕e2 ♘e7

More simple is 11...♖e8 12.♘e5 (12.♖fe1 e5) 12...♘xe5 13.dxe5 ♘e4 14.♘xe4 dxe4 15.♗b5 ♖f8 16.♖ad1 ♕g5, grabbing the e5-pawn. Of course, White is very active, but he lacks targets.

12.dxc5 bxc5 13.e4 ♘g6 14.♖ad1 ♕b6 15.b3 ♖ad8 16.e5 ♘d7=.

b) 11.♘e5 looks more challenging, but the thematic exchange operation 11...♘xe5! 12.dxe5 ♘e4 saves the day.

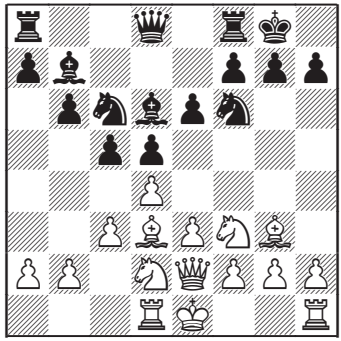
c) Finally, 11.♕a4 also makes sense. White prepares a queen lift to the kingside after a possible dxc5. We can ignore the threat – 11...♖b8, intending to wait for the best timing for advancing our queenside pawns. Then 12.dxc5 bxc5 13.♕h4 can be parried by both:



13...e5 14.e4 ♘e7 15.♘xe5 ♕c7 16.♘g4 ♘xg4 17.♕xg4 dxe4 18.♗c4 ♘g6 19.♖fe1 ♔h8 20.♕f5 ♖be8 21.f4!=, and the sharper line:

13...h6 14.g4 d4 15.cxd4 (15.g5 dxc3 16.gxf6 cxd2 17.fxg7 ♔xg7) 15...cxd4 16.g5 dxe3 17.fxe3 hxg5 18.♘xg5 ♕xd3 19.♘de4 ♘e5 20.♘xf6+ gxf6 21.♖xf6 ♕xe3+ 22.♔h2 ♗e4 23.♖e1 ♕xe1 24.♕xe1 ♘g4+ 25.♔g1=.

A13. 9.♕e2 ♗b7 10.♖d1



A recent and quite fashionable idea. White brings the rook in the centre while delaying the castle. His idea is to define his further plan after seeing our answer (and take on d2 by rook in the event of ♘f6-e4xd2).

10.e4 (or 10.dxc5 bxc5 11.e4 ♗e7) is still met by 10...♗e7.

10.0-0 has no venom – 10...♗xg3 11.hxg3 with a wide choice before Black. The most thematic way is 11...♕e7 (or 11...♖e8) 12.♘e5 ♘xe5 13.dxe5 ♘e4=.

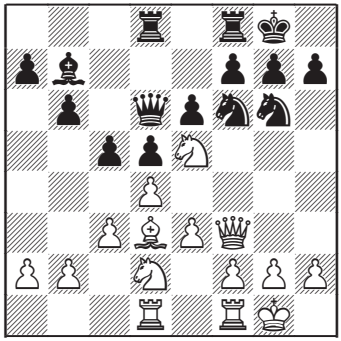
Nakamura played 11...♘e7, and I would suggest the useful waiting move 11...h6.

10...♖e8!?

10...h6 is another popular retort, but it does not work well against plans with ♘f3-e5.

10...♘e7 is a fine idea when White has played ♘e5 and especially f4, but it does not make much sense here. White can trade bishops and try to mount a piece attack on the kingside. The purest form of this approach is displayed by the game Kramnik-Hou Yifan, rapid Medias 2016:

11.0-0 ♕c7?! 12.♗xd6 ♕xd6 13.♘e5 ♖ad8 14.♕f3! ♘g6



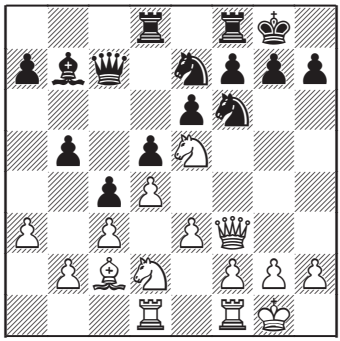
15.♗xg6! hxg6 16.♕h3↑ ♗a6 17.♖fe1 ♘h7 18.f4 ♗b5 19.♘df3 ♕e7 20.♕g3 ♗e8 21.♖f1 ♕f6 22.♘g5+– ♕e7 23.♖f3 f6 24.♘xh7.

However, after 11.0-0 Black could answer 11...♘f5 and recapture by knight on d6. Therefore, it would be more principled to exchange the bishops at once:

11.♗xd6 ♕xd6 12.♘e5 ♕c7 13.0-0 ♖ad8 14.a3

14.♕f3!, as in Kramnik's game, was stronger.

14...c4 15.♗c2 b5 16.♕f3



16...♘c6?!

The e5-knight should be repelled, not exchanged. The correct stand was 16...♘e8! 17.♖fe1 g6 with ...f6 in mind.

After the text, White was better in the game Shimanov-Lenic, chess.com 2017.

17.♕g3 a5?! and here 18.♘xc6! ♕xc6 19.♕h4 ♕e8 20.g4 would have been awkward for Black.

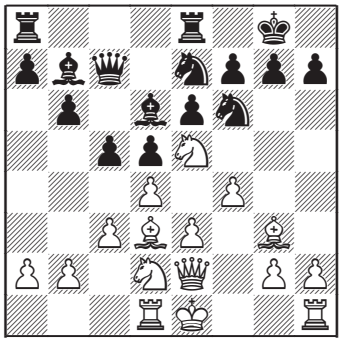
11.e4

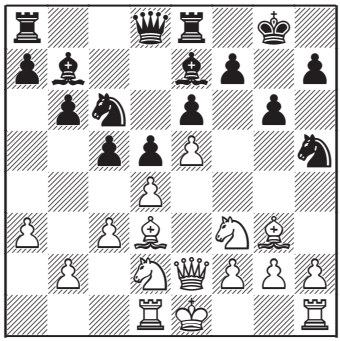
11.0-0 ♗xg3 12.hxg3 e5 was comfortable for Black in Javakhadze-Sevian, Dallas 2016 – 13.dxe5 ♘xe5 14.♘xe5 ♖xe5 15.♘f3 ♖e7 16.♗a6 ♕c8 17.♗xb7 ♕xb7 18.♖d3 ♕a6 19.a3 ♕a4.

11.♘e5 ♕c7

11...♘e7 allows the trick 12.♗b5 ♖f8 13.♘d7.

12.f4 ♘e7





I consider such positions in line A14. The main difference is the inclusion of ♖d1 ♖e8. To me, it can only be in Black's favour as the rook supports plans with ...e5 and defends e6 in the event Black plays ...f6. On the contrary, it is doubtful that the white rook is more active on d1 than on a1 if Black opts for a queenside pawn storm. The game Ziegler-Sevian, Stockholm 2016, went further:

13.♕f3 ♘f5 14.♗f2 ♗e7 (14...♗f8!?) 15.g4 ♘d6 16.g5 ♘fe4 17.h4 f6! 18.gxf6 ♗xf6 19.♘g4 ♖f8 20.h5 ♔h8 (20...♕e7!) 21.♘xf6 ♖xf6 (21...gxf6∓) 22.♗h4 ♖f7 23.♕h3 cxd4 24.cxd4 ♘f5∓. In this game Black did lose a tempo on ♖e8-♖f8, but it was much more important that White could not castle long.

11...♗e7 12.e5 ♘h5 13.a3 g6!

14.♘f1

14.0-0 ♘xg3 solves all the problems – 15.fxg3

15.hxg3 h5 (15...f5?! 16.exf6 ♗xf6 17.♗b5) 16.b4 ♔g7 builds a solid defensive line. If White pushed g4 at some point, we would answer simply ...♖h8.

15...f5 16.exf6 ♗xf6 17.♗b5 cxd4 18.♗xc6 d3 19.♕f2 ♗xc6. White does not have time to construct Nimzowitsch's ideal blockading set-up ♘d4+♘e5.

14...f5 15.exf6 ♗xf6 16.♘e3 e5↑

Black's centre is hanging, but it is very dynamic. See the beautiful **Game 18** Sedlak-So, Baku 2016.

A14. 9.♘e5 ♗b7

We could delay ...♗b7 with 9...♕c7.

The idea is to fight for e5 with ...f6:

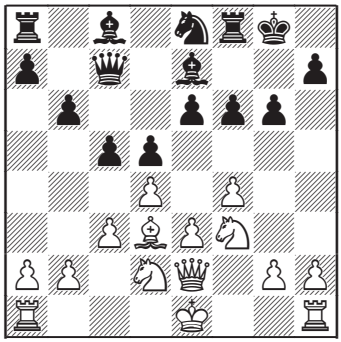
10.f4

A small minus of 9...♕c7 is that White could answer 10.♘xc6 ♕xc6 11.a4=.

10...♘e7 11.♗h4 ♘e8 12.♗xe7 ♗xe7 13.♕h5 g6 14.♕e2

14.♕h6 ♗d6 15.h4 f6.

14...f6 15.♘ef3



Sedlak puts here a "±" sign, but I would gladly take Black. White has not crossed the central line yet, while we have a clear plan of a pawn storm. Play might continue 15...♘d6 16.0-0 c4 17.♗c2 b5 18.a3 ♗b7 19.e4 f5 20.exf5 gxf5.

10.f4

10.♕b1 ♕c7 is discussed in detail in **Game 16** Skoberne-Halkias,Baku 2016, while 10...♘e7! leads to **Game 17** Sandipan-Kryvoruchko,rapid, Dubai 2014.

10.♘df3?! ♘e7 leaves White with two knights crowded at only one square, e5, and the prospect is to lose even that one after ...f6.

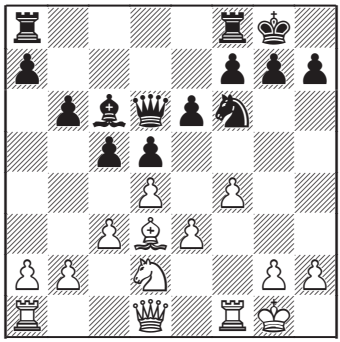
10.♕e2 has been played in a number of games even by strong grandmasters, but I fail to see any idea behind it. Agrest even "corrected" himself on the next turn – 10...♕c7 11.♕f3?!. Perhaps 11.♘xc6 ♗xc6=, Perez-S.Zhigalko, Doha 2016, was more realistic.

10.0-0!? ♕c7 or 10...♘e7 will most probably transpose to 10.f4.

Independent lines are:

10...♘e7 11.♕f3 (Kamsky opted for 11.♕b1 g6 12.♘ef3 ♘f5 13.♗e5=) 11...♕c7 12.♘g4 ♘d7 13.♗xd6 ♕xd6 14.♕g3 (or 14.♕h3 f5 15.♘f3 fxg4 16.♕xh7+ ♔f7 17.♕h5+ g6 18.♘g5+ ♔e8 19.♗xg6+ ♘xg6 20.♕xg6+ ♔e7 21.♕g7+ ♔e8 22.♕g6+=) 14...♕xg3 15.hxg3 a5 16.♖fd1 a4=, Shengelia-Dragun, Czech Republic 2016.

10...♕c7 11.♘xc6 ♗xc6 12.♗xd6 ♕xd6 13.f4



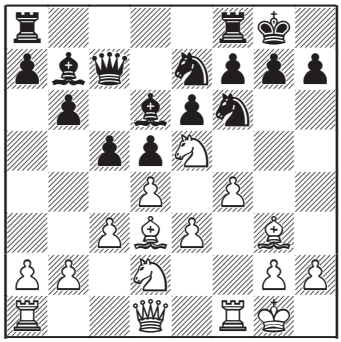
The simplest way to generate counterplay here is to launch a minority attack with 13...cxd4 14.exd4 b5 because after 13...b5 14.g4 ♘d7?! (it is safer to defend with ...♘e4) 15.g5 cxd4, White could already recapture 16.cxd4 or even ignore the pawn by 16.♖f3.

10...♘e7

I faced 10...♕c7 in my game Kir.Georgiev-Rauk, rapid Puhajarve 2013.

a) I chose 11.0-0 ♘d7

11...♘e7 is seen much more often, and it is probably the best plan. Still, I do not understand why Black should combine ♕c7+♘e7. In any event, he has a solid position. For instance:



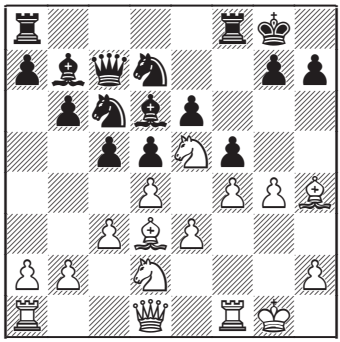
12.♗h4?! ♘e4 13.♗xe7 ♕xe7 14.♕e2 f6 15.♘ef3 ♘xd2 16.♕xd2, when 16...e5 was drawish in Boskovic-Krivokapic, Subotica 2010, while 16...c4!? would be more challenging.

After 12.♕f3 ♘f5 13.♗f2 ♗e7, White has tried 14.♖ac1 ♖ad8 15.♖fd1, 14.♘g4 ♘xg4 15.♕xg4 ♘d6 16.♗h4 f5, and 14.♕h3 ♘e4, with a comfortable game for Black.

12.♕h5?!

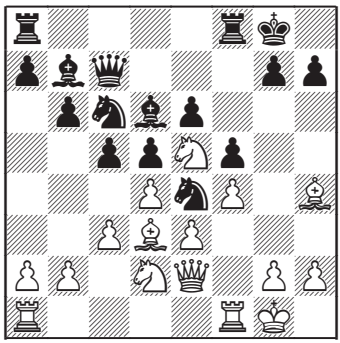
Too hasty! I should have exploited the absence of a knight on f5 to activate my bishop with 12.♗h4!. The idea is to meet 12...f6 by 13.♕h5 or 12...g6 by 13.♖f3.

The only defence is 12...f5 13.g4



13...♘dxe5 14.fxe5 ♗e7 15.♗g3 ♗g5 16.♗f4 ♗xf4 17.♖xf4 ♘e7. Everything is protected, but White is more active.

12...f5 13.♕e2 ♘f6 14.♗h4 ♘e4



The e4-knight does not leave me much chances and I decided to trade it, but perhaps 15.g4 deserved more attention. For instance: 15...♘xe5 16.dxe5 ♗e7 17.♗xe7 ♕xe7 18.gxf5 exf5 19.♘xe4 fxe4 20.♗a6 ♗xa6 21.♕xa6∞.

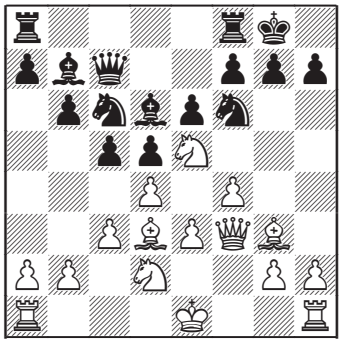
15.♘xe4 fxe4 16.♗b5 ♘xe5 (16...♗xe5=) 17.fxe5 ♗e7=.

Alternative lines are:

b) 11.♗h4?! ♘e4! (11...♘e8 is also possible.) 12.♘xe4 dxe4 13.♗xe4 cxd4 14.exd4 ♘xe5 15.dxe5 ♗xe5 16.♗xh7+ ♔xh7 17.♕h5+ ♔g8 18.fxe5 ♕c4 with excellent compensation for the pawn.

c) 11.♕b1 g6 is **Game 16** Skoberne-Halkias, Baku 2016.

d) 11.♕f3!?

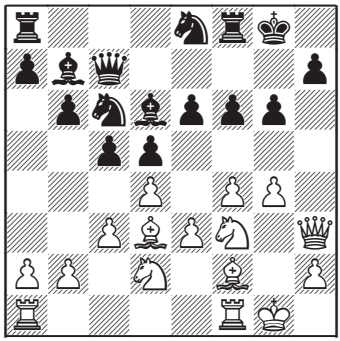


11...♘e7 12.♗f2

12.♗h4 does not rule out 12...♘e8 13.♕h3 g6 14.♘df3 f6 since 15.♕xe6+ ♔g7 16.♕h3 cxd4 17.exd4 ♗c8 18.g4 h5 is double-edged. Besides, 12...♘g6 also deserves consideration.

12...♘e8 13.g4 (13.0-0 f5=) 13...a5!?

It is not realistic to play for ...♘e4, so we do not need our bishop on the long diagonal anymore. Still, the thematic defence based on 13...f6 14.♕h3 g6 is also effective. Black could then rearrange his pieces in the following way: 15.0-0 ♘c6 16.♘ef3

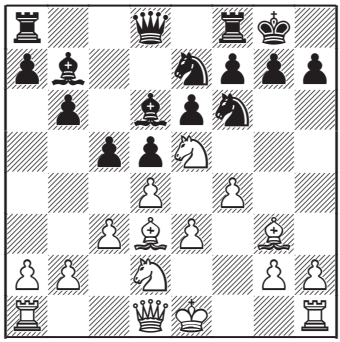


16...♕d7 17.♗g3 ♗c7, followed up by ...♘d6. Black's queen could easily reach g7 to neutralise White's attack.

14.0-0

14.♕h3 g6 15.g5 cxd4 16.exd4 ♗a6.

14...♗a6 15.♗xa6 ♖xa6=. It transpires that White should turn his attention to the queenside in order to keep the balance.



11.♕f3

We were threatening to stop any further attack with 11...♘e4, for instance after 11.♗h4?!.

The game Ivanisevic-Pavlovic, Belgrade 2014, saw 11.0-0?! ♘e4 12.♗h4 f6 13.♘xe4? dxe4 14.♗c4 ♗d5 with an overwhelming strategic advantage.

It is clear that White should take control of e4:

11.♕b1 brings better practical results, but you can see in the annotations to **Game 17** Sandipan-Kryvoruchko, rapid, Dubai 2014, that Black has at least two good plans against it – 11...♘g6 and 11...g6!?.

11.♕c2 suffers from the obvious drawback of taking the c2-square. Andreikin-Karjakin, Baku 2015, saw 11...c4 12.♗e2 ♘f5 (12...b5!? was more straightforward, intending to meet 13.♗h4 by 13...♘e4) 13.♗f2 ♗e7 14.♘g4 ♘xg4 15.♗xg4 ♘d6, and White was lucky to save the game.

11.♕e2 is aimless as 11...♘e4 blocks e4 and threatens ...f6.

11...♘f5

11...♘e8, intending ...f6, has a "major" drawback – White could force a draw after 12.♗f2 cxd4 13.exd4 f6 14.♗xh7+ ♔xh7 15.♕h3+ ♔g8 16.♕xe6+=.

12.♗f2 ♗e7 13.g4

13.0-0 is safer for both sides. We can opt for a queenside advance: 13...♘d6 14.♕h3

14.♖ad1 c4 15.♗c2 ♘fe4 16.♕h3 ♕c8 17.g4 f6 18.♘ef3 b5;

14.♗h4 ♘fe4.

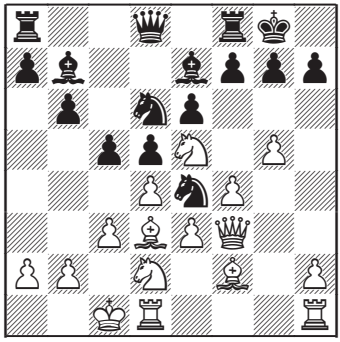
14...c4

Or 14...cxd4!? (to avoid dxc5) 15.exd4 ♘fe4.

15.♗c2 ♘fe4 16.g4 f6.

13.♕h3 does not change our plan – 13...♘d6 14.♗h4 ♘fe4 15.♗xe7 ♕xe7 16.♖d1 f6 17.♘ef3 c4 18.♗c2 b5 19.♖b1 ♖ab8 20.0-0 a5 21.♘xe4 dxe4 22.♘d2 f5∓.

13...♘d6 14.g5 ♘fe4 15.0-0-0



15...cxd4!

Sedlak only mentions:

15...c4

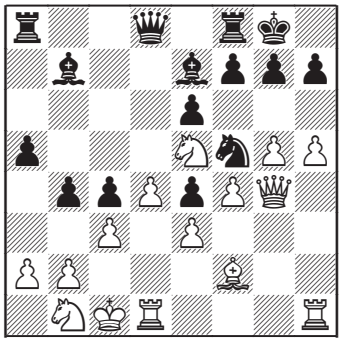
16.♗c2(?) 16...b5 "and Black was much faster n the queenside, Karjakin-Adams, Wijk aan Zee 2016."

Indeed, 17.♕h3 b4 18.♘xe4 dxe4 19.♗e1 ♗d5 20.♖g1 b3 21.axb3 cxb3 22.♗b1 f5 was clearly better, but White should not lose a tempo on 16.♗c2. Correct is:

16.♗xe4! dxe4 17.♕g4! b5

17...♗d5 18.h4 f6 is risky – 19.gxf6 ♗xf6 20.h5 ♘f5 21.♖dg1 ♕c7 22.h6∞.

18.h4 b4 19.h5 a5 20.♘b1 ♘f5



White obtains sufficient counterplay here with 21.g6 fxg6 22.h6! ♕e8 23.hxg7 ♔xg7 24.♖h2 ♖g8 25.♖dh1 h6

25...♖h8 26.♕g1 ♗d5 27.♘xg6 hxg6 28.♖xh8 ♕xh8 29.♖xh8 ♖xh8=.

26.♖g1 ♔h7 27.♕h3 ♗f6 28.♘g4 ♗g7 29.♗h4 ♖f8 30.♘e5 ♗xe5 31.fxe5 h5 32.♗g5 ♗d5 33.♕g2 ♖b8 34.♕e2 ♖h8 35.♗f6 ♖g8 36.a3. Neither side could make progress from here.

The "flexible" 15...b5 may seem clever, but 16.dxc5! ♘xc5 17.♗xh7+! ♔xh7 18.e4!! removes the defender of e6 and enables a perpetual check after 18...♘cxe4 19.♘xe4 ♘xe4 20.g6+! ♔g8 21.♕h3 fxg6 22.♕xe6+ ♔h7 23.♕xg6+.

16.exd4 b5

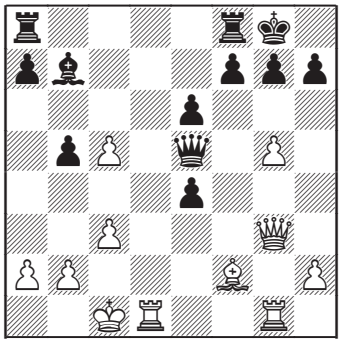
Black owns the initiative.

The straightforward 17.h4?! b4 18.cxb4 a5 19.b5 a4 20.a3 ♕a5 21.♗e1 ♕b6 22.♕e2 ♖ac8+ 23.♔b1 ♘xb5 24.♗xb5 ♗a6 25.♘d7 ♗xb5∓ was terrible for White in Sodomski-Fedorov, ICCF 2011. Instead, he should think about prophylaxis.Stockfish at depth 40 suggests:

17.♘b3 ♘c4

17...a5 18.♘c5 b4 19.♘xb7 ♘xb7 20.c4.

18.♖hg1 ♕c7 19.♘c5 ♗xc5 20.dxc5 ♘xe5 21.fxe5 ♕xe5 22.♗xe4 dxe4 23.♕g3,



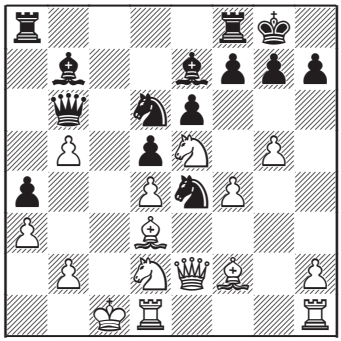
but "it" does not "feel" that the endgame after 23...♕xg3 24.♗xg3 ♗d5 25.♗d6 f5! 26.♗xf8 ♖xf8 is highly unpleasant for White.

Perhaps the most stubborn defence is:

17.♕e2!? (preparing to take on e4) 17...b4

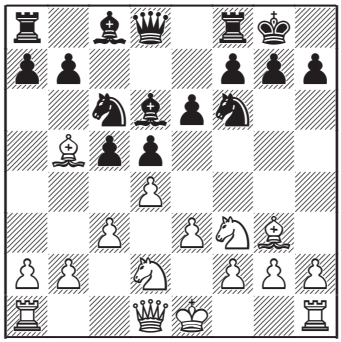
17...a5 18.♘xe4 dxe4 19.♗xb5 is unclear.

18.cxb4 a5 19.b5 a4 20.a3 ♕b6



21.♘d7 ♕c7+ 22.♘c5 ♖fb8, followed up by ...♖a5, and Black captures on b5.

A2. 8.♗b5



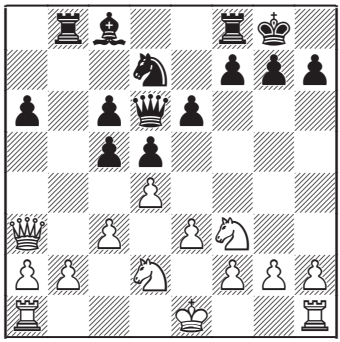
A21. 8...♘e7; **A22.** 8...♕e7!?

8...a6 might be enough for equality after 9.♗xc6

Let me also note the game Nisipeanu-Cornette, Germany 2016: 9.♗d3 b6 10.e4 ♗e7 11.exd5 exd5 12.♘e5 ♗b7 13.0-0 cxd4 14.♘xc6 ♗xc6 15.cxd4. I understand White's idea to weaken the queenside pawns, but such subtleties are not enough for a substantial advantage. Instead of 15...♗b5?!, Black could have equalized with 15...♘e4!.

9...bxc6 10.♕a4 cxd4

10...♖b8?! is worse when the pawn is on a6, as it deprives Black of ...♗a6 or ...♖b8-b6-a6 e.g. 11.♗xd6 ♕xd6 12.♕a3 ♘d7



13.0-0!? (13.♘b3 e5 14.♘xc5 ♘xc5 15.dxc5 ♕g6 16.0-0 e4 17.♘d4 ♗h3 18.g3 is also slightly better for White.) 13...e5 14.dxe5 ♘xe5 15.♘xe5. In these examples White obtains a more flexible pawn structure and in many positions his knight is more efficient than the opponent's bishop.

11.cxd4 a5!. A similar idea was successfully tested in the game Le Roux-Bellahcene, Chartres 2017.

12.♗xd6 ♕xd6 13.0-0 ♗a6 14.♖fc1 ♗b5 15.♕c2 a4=. The only drawback of this stand is that it is a little passive.

A21. 8...♘e7 9.♗d3

9.0-0 is not threatening with e4, so we could safely answer 9...b6!?

Closing the centre is also possible – 9...c4 10.♗a4 b5 11.♗c2 b4 12.♗e5

bxc3 13.bxc3 ♗xe5 14.♘xe5 ♘d7. We have a bad bishop, but this is balanced by our space advantage on the queenside.

10.♗d3 ♗b7 11.♕e2 ♗xg3 12.hxg3 ♕c7 13.♖ac1 ♖ac8 14.dxc5 ♕xc5 15.c4 ♖fd8 16.♘b3 ♕b4 17.cxd5 ♗xd5 18.♘fd4 ♖xc1 19.♖xc1 ♗xb3 20.♘xb3 g6 21.♖c4 ♕d6 22.♖d4 ♕c7 23.♖xd8+ ♕xd8 24.♕c2 ½-½, Golubov-Moskalenko, Sochi 2016.

9.dxc5 ♗xc5 10.♗d3 b6 hardly deserves any attention, despite Kramnik's name on the White side (it was a blitz game, after all).

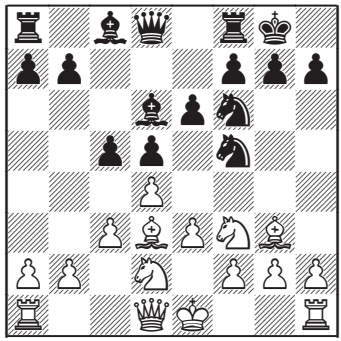
9...c4!?

This logical retort has been nearly unexplored. It is understandable that Black would like to preserve tension in the centre, but that is exactly White's intention, too. His pieces are better placed for such course of events as Black's knight had been pushed back to e7.

Two games of Carlsen showed that White was on top after 9...b6 10.e4! – 10...♗xg3? 11.hxg3 dxe4 12.♘xe4 ♘g6 was Carlsen-Korobov, rapid Doha 2016. White was winning with 13.♘e5!.

10...dxe4 11.♘xe4 ♘xe4 12.♗xe4 ♖b8? 13.dxc5 occurred in Carlsen-Bosiocic, blitz Doha 2016. 12...♘d5 was stronger, but 13.dxc5 still leaves White with the better game.

9...♘f5

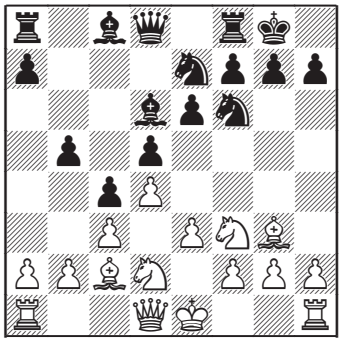


10.♗xf5 exf5 11.♗xd6 ♕xd6 12.dxc5 ♕xc5 13.0-0 ♖e8, Izoria-Khachiyan, chess.com 2017, also results in a static pawn formation where White could press for many moves.

10.♗c2

Wei Yi-Ganguly, China 2016, saw the strange retreat 10.♗b1?! b5 11.♗h4 ♘g6 12.♗xf6 ♕xf6 13.h4 and White was better after 13...e5? 14.h5 ♘e7 15.dxe5 ♗xe5 16.♘xe5 ♕xe5 17.♘f3 ♕d6 18.♖h4 ♖b8 19.♗c2 b4 20.h6±. Of course Black should have carried on his plan with 13...♖b8 14.h5 (14.♘g5 h6) 14...♘e7, but even more interesting is to recapture on f6 by pawn – 12...gxf6. I consider such positions below, with a bishop on c2.

10...b5



This position is virtually untested so it is difficult to select a main line. White has a rich choice. Let's consider the most logical options:

a) 11.e4

This move is the main idea behind the manoeuvre ♗f1-b5-d3, but here it is not too effective because White cannot eliminate completely the central pawns – 11...dxe4 12.♘xe4 ♘xe4 13.♗xe4 ♖b8 14.♕e2

The mundane 14.♗xh7? ♔xh7 15.♘g5+ fails to 15...♔g6.

14.0-0 is also innocuous – 14...♗b7 (14...f5!? 15.♗c2 ♗b7, followed up by ...♗d5, is also a sturdy construction.) 15.♗xb7 ♖xb7 16.♗xd6 ♕xd6=.

14...h6

A simple prophylactic move. 14...♗b7 allows 15.♘g5 h6 16.♗xb7 hxg5 17.♗e4 ♘d5 and White could further unbalance the position with h4.

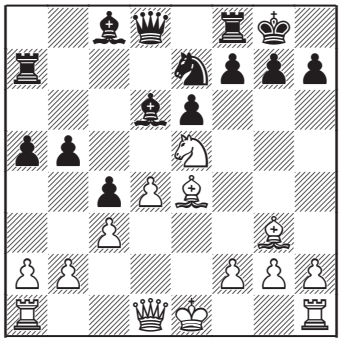
14...f5 15.♗c2 ♘g6∞ is also a bit too provocative.

15.0-0 ♗b7=.

b) 11.♘e5 enables the queen manoeuvre ♕d1-f3-h3. Our position has no weaknesses and it could withstand a direct attack, but I'd prefer to open quickly a second front on the queenside with:

11...b4

This trades pawns and equalizes. The slower 11...a5 is more ambitious, intending 12.0-0 ♕c7 13.b3 ♗b7. Perhaps critical is 12.e4 ♘xe4 13.♘xe4 dxe4 14.♗xe4 ♖a7



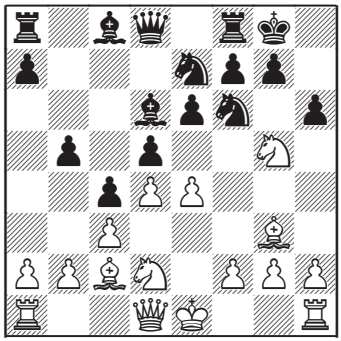
15.a4 f5 16.♗c2 ♗xe5 17.♗xe5 b4=.

12.cxb4 ♗xb4 13.0-0 ♗a6 14.♘b1. Chances are even, as 14...c3?! 15.bxc3 ♗xf1 16.cxb4 could be only in White's favour due to the closed centre.

c) 11.♘g5!? intends to push 12.e4 and recapture by knight.

11...♖b8 12.e4 dxe4 13.♘gxe4 ♘xe4 14.♘xe4 ♗xg3 15.hxg3 f5 16.♘c5 ♕d5 17.♕f3± is obviously unattractive, so:

11...h6 12.e4! appears to be critical.

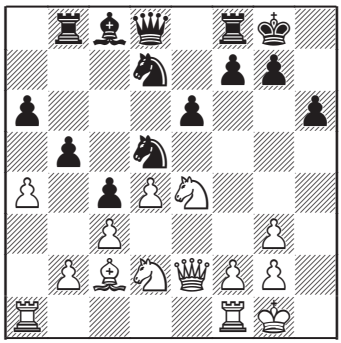


White's cunning design is to mate us if we choose 12...hxg5? 13.e5 ♘e8 14.h4 g4 15.♕xg4!! and Black is helpless despite having an extra piece – 15...♗c7 (15...f5 16.♕h5→) 16.♘f3 ♘f5 17.♕h5 ♘h6 18.a3 ♕d7 19.♗f4 f5 20.♕g6 ♕f7 21.h5 ♕xg6 22.hxg6→.

12...♘f5 13.♘xf7! ♖xf7 14.e5 b4 15.exd6 is positionally better for White.

Perhaps best is:

12...♗xg3 13.hxg3 dxe4 14.♘gxe4 ♘ed5 15.♕e2 ♖b8 16.0-0 ♘d7 17.a4 a6



White owns the initiative, but we should be able to gradually neutralise it by counter-attacking c3:

18.♖fc1

18.axb5 axb5 19.b3 cxb3 20.♘xb3 ♗b7 21.♘bc5 (21.♗d3 ♘7f6 22.♖fb1 ♘xe4 23.♕xe4 ♘f6 24.♕e1 ♕d5 25.♗f1 ♗c6 26.♘c5 ♖a8=) 21...♘xc5 22.♘xc5 ♘f6 23.♖fb1 ♕d5=.

18...♕c7 19.axb5 axb5 20.b3 f5 21.bxc4 bxc4 22.♘g5 ♘7f6 23.♘xe6 ♘xc3 24.♕e3 ♗xe6 25.♕xe6+ ♔h8=.

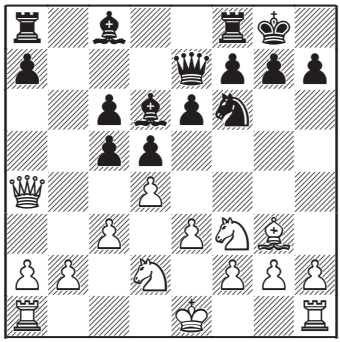
d) 11.♗xd6 ♕xd6 12.♘e5 ♘d7 13.f4 f6∞.

e) 11.♗h4 ♘g6 12.♗xf6 (12.♗xg6 hxg6 13.0-0 a5) 12...gxf6 13.h4 (13.a3 ♔h8) 13...b4 14.cxb4 ♗xb4 15.a3 ♗a5 16.♔f1 ♗a6 17.♔g1 ♖b8⇄.

A22. 8...♕e7!? 9.♗xc6

After 9.0-0 Black could safely take on g3 – 9...♗xg3 10.hxg3 ♗d7=.

9...bxc6 10.♕a4



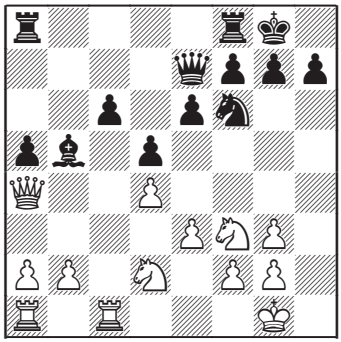
10...♗xg3!

10...cxd4 allows the intermediate 11.♗xd6.

It is essential that Black avoid the pin along the a3-f8 diagonal. The recent game Gajewski-B.Socko, rapid, Zgierz 2017, saw 10...♖b8 11.♗xd6 ♕xd6 12.♕a3 ♖b5?! (12...♘d7 13.0-0 e5 is more critical) 13.♘b3 ♘e4 14.dxc5, winning a pawn.

11.hxg3 cxd4 12.cxd4 ♖ab8!?

This is a bit more aggressive than 12...a5!? 13.0-0 ♗a6 14.♖fc1 ♗b5



Black seals the queenside and his defensive line from a4 to c6 looks unassailable. At the same time the b5-bishop is more than a "big pawn" as its role could become important if Black opened the e-file with ...e5. The game Le Roux-Bellahcene, Chartres 2017, went:

15.♕c2 a4 16.♘e5 ♖fc8 17.♕c5 ♕d8 18.♖c3

18.b4!? ♘e8 19.a3 ♘d6 20.♕c2 f6 21.♘ef3=.

18...♘e8 19.♖ac1 f6 20.♘d3 ♘d6 21.♘f4 ♕d7 22.f3 ♖e8 23.♘d3 ♘f5 24.♘f1 e5∓.

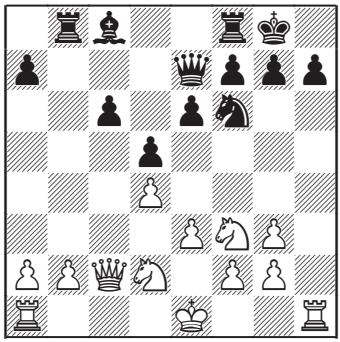
Perhaps White should answer 15.♕d1 a4 16.♘e5 ♘d7 17.♘xd7 ♕xd7 18.♘b1 ♖fb8 19.♖c5 ♗c4 20.♘d2, when simplest is 20...♖xb2=.

13.♕c2

The only way to fight for the advantage is to allow ...♗a6.

13.0-0 ♖xb2 14.♖fb1 ♖xb1+ 15.♖xb1 ♕c7 16.♘e5 c5 17.♕c6 ♕xc6 18.♘xc6 ♗d7 19.♘xa7?! c4 was promising for Black in Raznikov-Li Ruifeng, Dallas 2016. Better is 19.♘e7+! ♔h8 20.dxc5 ♖e8 21.c6 ♖e7 22.♖b7! ♔g8 23.cxd7=.

13.b3 ♖b6 (threatening ...♖a6) 14.♕a5 ♗a6 15.♘e5 ♖c8 and 13.♘b3 ♖b6 are also fine for Black.



13...♗a6

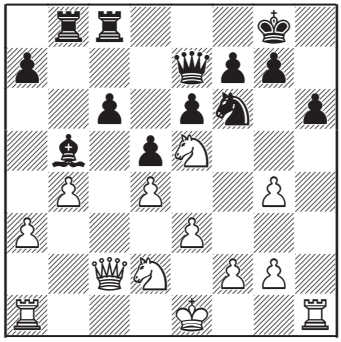
13...♕b4!? 14.♕b3 ♘d7 equalizes immediately – 15.♕xb4 ♖xb4 16.b3 ♖b6 17.♖c1 a5 18.0-0 ♗a6 19.♖fe1 ♖c8 20.♖c3 c5.

The text aims to face White with more complex tasks.

14.a3 h6

You could certainly try 14...c5 15.dxc5 e5 in a rapid game. White cannot castle short, the centre is fluid – all this for a mere pawn. Yet, White may be somewhat better. For instance: 16.b4 ♖fe8 17.♘b3 d4 18.♘a5 (18.0-0-0 is another option that needs analysis.) 18...dxe3 19.♘c6 ♕b7 20.♘xb8 exf2+ 21.♕xf2 ♕e4+ 22.♔d1 ♖xb8 23.♔c1 ♗d3 24.♖h4 ♕f5± with sharp play.

15.b4 ♖fc8 16.♘e5 ♗b5 17.g4



Black has sufficient counterplay thanks to the break ...a5. For instance:

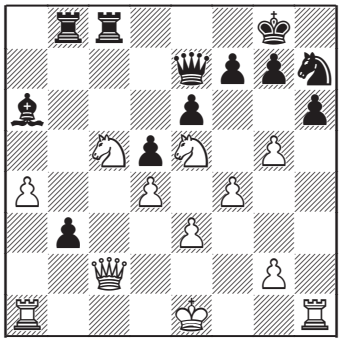
17...a5 18.g5 hxg5 19.♘df3 ♘e4 20.♘d2 ♘f6 is a draw by repetition.

A bolder try is:

17...♘h7 18.f4 a5

Or even 18...f6 19.♘g6 ♕e8 20.♘h4 a5 21.a4 ♗a6 22.bxa5 ♘f8 23.♔f2 ♘d7 24.g5 fxg5 25.fxg5 c5 26.gxh6 gxh6⇄.

19.g5 axb4 20.a4 ♗a6 21.♘b3 (21.gxh6 c5 22.hxg7 f5) 21...c5 22.♘xc5 b3



23.♕d2 (23.♕c3 f6) 23...♖xc5⇄.

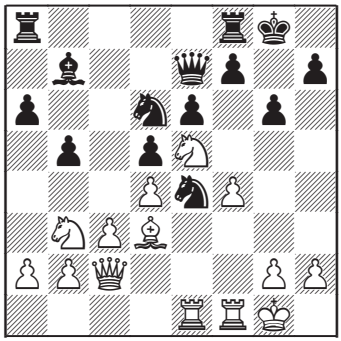
B. 7...b6! 8.♗d3

8.♘e5 ♗b7 9.♗d3 ♘c6 transposes to line A14.

The new trend, however, is 8.♘e5 ♗b7 9.♗b5.

The only reason behind it is to provoke 9...a6 10.♗d3. This way White hampers a future plan with ...♕c8, ...♗a6. However, Black can also play in the centre. The game Agrest-Roberson, chess.com 2017, saw further:

10...♘c6 11.f4 ♘e7 12.♕b1 g6 13.♗f2 cxd4 14.exd4 ♘f5 15.0-0 ♗e7 16.♕c2 ♘d6 17.♗h4 ♘fe4 18.♗xe7 ♕xe7 19.♖ae1 b5 20.♘b3



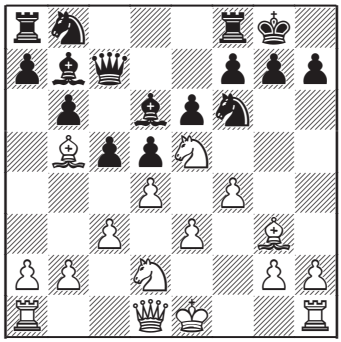
It is obvious that until Black holds e4, he would not be running serious risks. Roberson chose here 20...♖ac8 (20...♖fc8=) 21.♕e2 ♖fe8 22.♖a1 f6 with at least equal play – 23.♘f3 ♘c4 24.a3 ♖c7

Or 24...♕c7 25.♖ae1 ♖e7.

25.♔h1 ♔g7 26.♖ab1 ♕d6 27.♘fd2 ♘exd2 28.♘xd2 e5 29.♗xc4 dxc4 30.dxe5 fxe5 31.♘f3 ♗xf3 32.♖xf3 e4 33.♖ff1 ♕e6 34.♖bd1 e3∓.

Although 9...a6 is possible, I prefer:

9...♕c7 10.f4



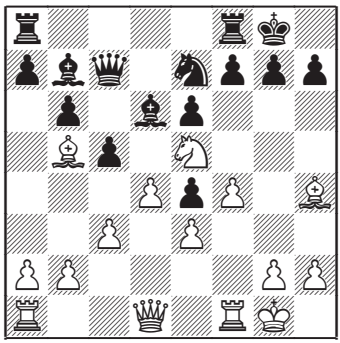
10...♘c6

In Gupta-Borisek, chess.com 2017, Black closed the centre with 10...c4 and White practically presented a tempo by retreating the bishop in advance: 11.♗a4?! (11.0-0) 11...♘e4 12.♗c2 f5 (12...b5 13.♕g4 ♘d7 14.♕h3 f5 15.♘df3 ♘df6 16.0-0 a5∓) 13.♗xe4 (on 13.♘xe4 we recapture 13...dxe4) 13...fxe4 14.♕g4 ♕e7 (14...♗c8 15.h4 ♘c6 16.h5 h6 17.♗h4 b5 18.a3 ♘xe5 19.fxe5 ♗e7∞) 15.♗h4 ♕e8 16.0-0 ♘d7 with complex play. Gupta decided to open a second front on the queenside with 17.b3, but Black has the bishop pair and should welcome any imbalances – 17...cxb3 18.axb3 a5.

11.♗h4 ♘e4 12.♘xe4 dxe4 13.0-0

This balanced position occurred in Andreikin-Zhou Weiqi, China 2016. Black chose here the consistent move 13...f6 14.♕g4 ♖ae8 15.♘c4 a6 16.♘xd6 ♕xd6 17.dxc5 ♕xc5 18.♗a4 b5=, but we should always resort reluctantly to pawn moves near our king. It is better to improve the knight:

13...♘e7



14.♗xe7 (14.♕g4 ♘f5 15.♕h3 a6 16.♗e2 b5 17.♘g4 f6∓) 14...♕xe7 15.dxc5 (15.♘c4 ♗b8) 15...♗xc5 16.♕e2 ♕c7 17.♘d7 a6 18.♘xc5 ♕xc5=.

8.a4 is aimed against 8...♗a6 when White has 9.♗b5. We can answer 8...♘c6 9.♗b5 ♗b7 or 9...♘e7 10.♗d3 ♗b7 11.♗xd6 ♕xd6 12.♘e5 ♘e4 13.a5 ♘xd2 14.♕xd2 f6 15.♘f3 e5 16.dxe5 fxe5 17.e4 ♔h8∞.

8...♗b7

8...♗a6!? is the most principled alternative. Engines and latest games suggest that White does not achieve any significant advantage after 9.♗xa6 ♘xa6. My only objection to this plan is that it is easy for White, too. Possible continuations are 10.♘e5 ♘b8 11.0-0 ♕c7 or 10.♕e2 ♘b8!?

> 10...♘c7 11.♘e5 cxd4 12.cxd4 ♘e4?! (12...♕e7 13.0-0 ♖fc8), as in Iturrizaga-Adams, Caleta 2017, is slightly annoying after 13.♘xe4! dxe4 14.0-0 ♘d5 15.♘c6.

In both lines we should expect further exchanges and even chances.

9.♘e5

It is useless to try 9.♕e2 in view of 9...♘e4 10.♗xd6 ♕xd6, when 11.♗xe4?! dxe4 12.♘g5 f5 13.♘c4 ♕e7 14.♕h5 h6 15.♘h3 cxd4 16.exd4, Romanov-Gagunashvili, Gjakova 2016, would be clearly in Black's favour after 16...♘c6∓, intending ...e5 or ...♗a6.

9.0-0 at best could transpose to the game after 9...♘c6 10.♘e5. However, Black might also play 9...♗xg3 10.hxg3 ♘bd7, since he is no longer afraid to open the h-file.

9.♕b1 ♘c6 10.♘e5 leads us to **Game 17** Sandipan-Kryvoruchko.

9...♘c6

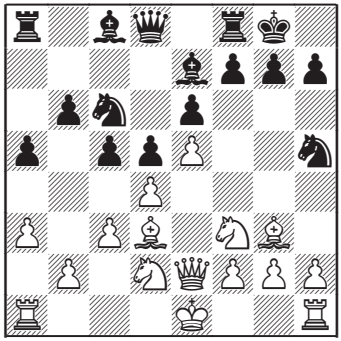
Play has transposed to line A14. Thus Black has sidestepped the slightly annoying line A2.

Chapter 5. 1.d4 d5 2.♗f4 ♘f6 3.e3 e6 with ...c5
Annotated Games

15. Grischuk – Nakamura

Skopje 2015

1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.♗f4 e6 4.e3 ♗d6 5.♗g3 c5 6.♘bd2 ♘c6 7.c3 0-0 8.♗d3 b6 9.e4 ♗e7 10.e5 ♘h5 11.a3 a5 12.♕e2



12...♖a7!?

The idea behind this move is to discourage sharp onslaughts with ♘g5. For instance, the line 13.h4 ♘xg3 14.fxg3 f6 15.♘g5, which draws against 12...♗b7!?, fails here due to 15...fxg5 16.♕h5 g6 17.♗xg6 ♗d6!.

A small drawback of the rook manoeuvre is that it does not prepare any constructive plan. Thus it has purely prophylactic merits.

Note that closing the centre at this point with 12...c4?! 13.♗c2 b5 offers White a stable positional advantage after 14.♘g5 ♗xg5 15.♕xh5 g6 16.♕e2. The threat of h2-h4-h5 forces Black to undermine the centre in unfavourable circumstances – 16...f5 17.exf6 ♕xf6 18.h4 ♗f4 19.♗xf4 ♕xf4 20.g3 ♕f6 21.f4±, Kramnik-Zhigalko, rapid Berlin 2015.

A better setting of the same plan is 12...g6!? 13.0-0 (13.h4 and 13.♘f1 are strongly met by 13...f6.) 13...c4 14.♗c2 b5 15.♕e3 ♗d7 16.h4∞.

13.0-0

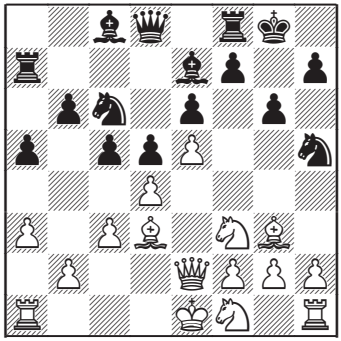
13.♘g5 was not a threat, as the d4-pawn is hanging.

13.♘f1 deserves attention.

The point is that our thematic retort to this manoeuvre, mentioned in the analysis of 12...♗b7 and 12...♗d7, is not so effective here – 13...b5 14.dxc5! ♗xc5 15.♘1d2 b4 16.♘b3 ♗b6 17.axb4 axb4 18.♖xa7 ♗xa7 19.♘fd4 with slightly the better chances.

Sedlak's recommendation 13...c4 14.♗c2 b5 is not clear. Instead of 15.♘g5 ♗xg5 16.♕xh5 g6 17.♕e2 f5 18.exf6 ♗xf6 19.♘e3 e5⇄, White can try 15.♘e3 b4 16.♘d2 g6 17.♘g4∞.

13...g6!



Now 14.♘e3 cxd4 15.cxd4 f5! is excellent for Black due to the attack on d4, and 14.♖d1 allows 14...b5 as noted below.

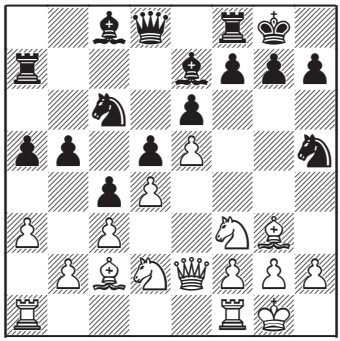
13.♖d1!? is a clever waiting move.

Then 13...c4 14.♗c2 ♗d7 stumbles into 15.♘g5 ♗xg5 16.♕xh5 g6 17.♕e2±.

13...h6 14.0-0 c4 15.♗c2 b5 16.h3 ♘xg3 17.fxg3 b4 (17...f5 18.exf6 ♗xf6 19.♔h2±) 18.♘h2 bxc3 19.bxc3 ♖b7 20.♘xc4 dxc4 21.♕e4 g6 22.♘g4 ♗g5 23.♕xc6 is unattractive. Remains:

13...g6 14.♘f1 b5 15.♗xb5 ♕b6 16.♘e3 cxd4 17.cxd4 ♗a6⇄.

13...c4 14.♗c2 b5



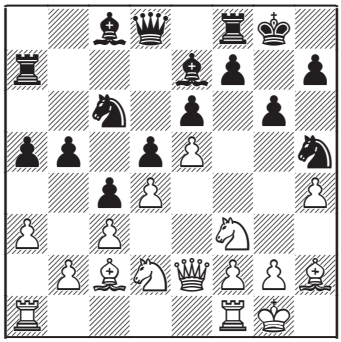
15.h4?!

15.♕e3! maintained the balance – 15...♘xg3 16.hxg3 f6 17.exf6 ♗xf6 18.b3 might be even more pleasant for White, so Black should continue his offensive – 15...b4 16.axb4 axb4 17.♖xa7 (17.b3=) 17...♘xa7 18.♖a1 ♘b5 19.cxb4 ♘xg3 20.hxg3 ♗xb4 21.g4 (or 21.♘h2) with complex play. The sight of Black's light-squared bishop induced me to promote the plan with 12...♗b7, ...♕c8 for a main line against White's set-up. While it defends well the weak e6-pawn in the event of 21...f6!, it is difficult to play for a win with such a piece.

15...g6?!

The white bishop should be killed on the spot after h4. It may look unemployed, but in fact it is important for the attack. 15...♘xg3 16.fxg3 f6 would have kept White's activity under control. Even better was 16...b4 17.♘h2 (17.axb4 axb4 18.♘c4 ♗a6) 17...bxc3 18.bxc3 f5 19.exf6 gxf6 20.♕h5 ♗d6 21.♘g4 f5 22.♘f3 ♔h8 23.♘g5 ♕e8 24.♕xe8 ♖xe8 25.♘f6 ♖f8 26.♘h5 a4 27.♘f4 ♘d8∓. Without queens, White's queenside is rather weak.

16.♗h2!



16...♗xh4

It was safer to seek counterplay with 16...f5 17.exf6 ♗xf6 18.♕e3 ♘g7 19.♕h6 ♘h5 20.♖ae1 ♗g7.

17.g4

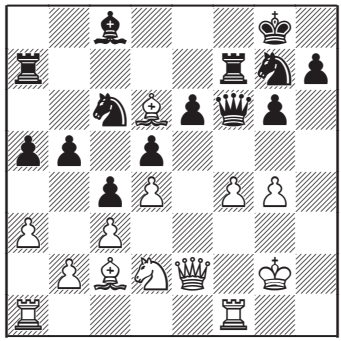
This is a bit hasty. 17.♘xh4 ♕xh4 18.♘f3 ♕g4 19.♕e3 was stronger. Black will be unable to keep the knight on h5 anyway, e.g. 19...f5 20.exf6 ♖xf6 21.♘e5 ♘xe5 22.♗xe5 ♖f8 23.f3 ♕h4 24.♕h6 ♕e7 25.g4.

17...♘g7 18.♘xh4 ♕xh4 19.♔g2 f5 20.exf6 ♕xf6 21.♗d6

White should have staked on piece play – 21.♘f3!, threatening to smother the opponent. Black would have to return the pawn in order to activate his bishop – 21...e5 22.♘xe5 ♘xe5 23.♗xe5 ♕g5 24.f3=.

21...♖ff7 22.f4?!

White could have partly repaired the damage with 22.♕e3, but he had a (wrong!) plan...



22...e5!

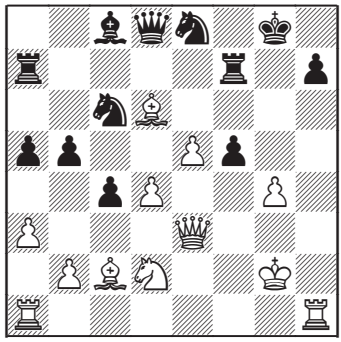
A nice shot. Black takes over the initiative.

23.dxe5 ♕h4 24.f5 gxf5

24...♘xf5! 25.e6 ♘xd6! 26.exf7+ ♔f8 would win the g4-pawn. Then even the endgame would be in Black's favour.

25.♖h1 ♕d8 26.♕e3 d4 27.cxd4 ♘e8

After 27...♗b7 White should avoid the trap 28.d5 ♘d4!! 29.♕xd4 ♘e6⇄. Correct is 28.♔f2!! ♘e7 29.♗xe7 ♕xe7 30.♖h6±, maintaining the grip.



28.♖h6?

28.♗c5! or 28.d5 kept a big advantage.

28...♖g7 29.♖g1 ♖ad7? (why not 29...♖xg4+?!) **30.d5?** (30.♔f1+–) **30...♘e7 31.♗xe7 ♖dxe7 32.♕d4 ♗b7?**

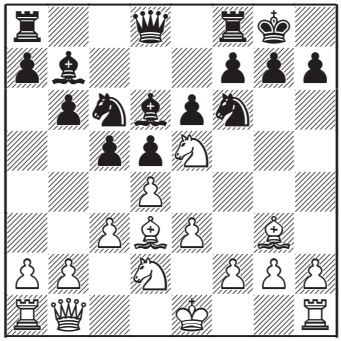
Black stubbornly avoids taking on g4 and the game ends in a draw.

33.♔f2 ♕xd5 34.♕xd5+ ♗xd5 35.♗xf5 ♖xe5 36.♖e1 ♖xe1 37.♔xe1 b4 38.axb4 axb4 39.♗e6+ ♗xe6 40.♖xe6 ♘c7 ½-½

16. Skoberne – Halkias

Baku ol 10.09.2016

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 e6 3.♗f4 d5 4.e3 ♗d6 5.♗g3 0-0 6.♘bd2 c5 7.c3 b6 8.♕b1 ♗b7 9.♗d3 ♘c6 10.♘e5

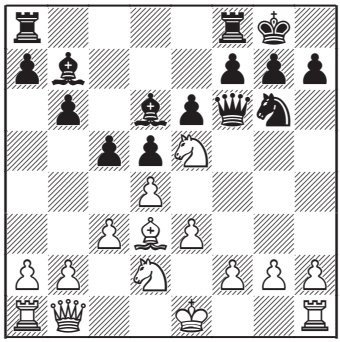


10...♕c7

The diagram position is of crucial importance for our set-up. White wants to provoke weaknesses in our king's position and then advance the f- and g-pawn. Knowing that, it looks superfluous to force f4 by 10...♕c7. The game course shows that the queen development is not bad – it controls the seventh rank against possible sacrifices, but it is not strictly necessary for the moment. 10...♘e7 might be a slightly improved version – see **Game 17** Sandipan-Kryvoruchko,rapid, Dubai 2014. Black should not be afraid of 11.♗h4 ♘g6 (11...♕c7 is also good) 12.♗xf6

Or 12.♘xg6 hxg6 13.f4 cxd4 14.cxd4 ♕d7.

12...gxf6 13.♘xg6 hxg6 since 14.♗xg6 fxg6 15.♕xg6+ ♔h8 is a perpetual. Besides, he could play on with 12...♕xf6!

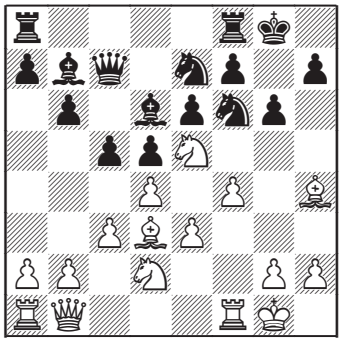


13.f4 (13.♘d7 ♕g5↑) 13...cxd4 14.cxd4 ♗xe5 15.dxe5 ♕h4+ 16.g3 ♕h3 17.♗f1 ♕h6 18.♗d3 d4 19.♗e4 dxe3 20.♘f3 ♗xe4 21.♕xe4 ♕h3 22.0-0-0 ♘e7=.

11.f4 g6 12.0-0

This is a good sign that we are in command. After the short castling Black is safer, but 12.♗f2 ♘e8 13.h4 was simply bad due to 13...cxd4 14.exd4 f6 15.♘xc6 ♗xc6 16.h5 g5! 17.fxg5 e5! 18.♗e2 e4. This line shows that delaying the manoeuvre ...♘c6-e7 has its own pluses – the queen protected h7!

12...♘e7 13.♗h4



13...♘e8

This was the idea of 11...g6 – to defend h7 in order to enable the knight retreat. Then all will be ready for ...f6 and Black's defensive line would be practically unassailable. Strong GM Motylev chose instead 13...♔g7, but it does not look like a long-term solution. White could carry on his attack with 14.♖f3.

14.g4

White still nurtures some hopes for an attack, but they are not too realistic. A correspondence game featured 14.♘g4?! f6 15.h3 h5! 16.♘e5 cxd4 17.cxd4 g5∓ and Black went on to win.

A more positional decision was to part with the bad bishop and maintain the balance by piece manoeuvring:

14.♗xe7 ♕xe7

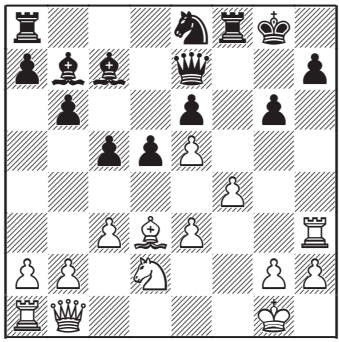
Another solid stand is 14...♗xe7 15.♖f3 ♘d6 16.♖h3 f5 17.g4 ♗f6=.

15.♖f3 f6

Naturally, Black could always seal off the centre with 15...f5=.

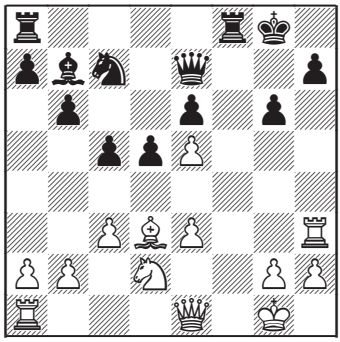
16.♖h3 fxe5 17.dxe5 ♗xe5

Do not be greedy! 17...♗c7?? fails spectacularly to:



18.♗xg6! hxg6 19.♕xg6+ ♘g7 20.♘f3 and Black is helpless despite his two extra pieces, e.g. 20...♖f5 21.♘g5 ♖xg5 22.fxg5 ♖f8 23.♕h7+ ♔f7 24.♖f1+ ♔e8 25.♖xf8+ ♕xf8 26.♖f3 ♕e7 27.♕g8+ ♔d7 28.g6+–.

18.fxe5 ♘c7 19.♕e1

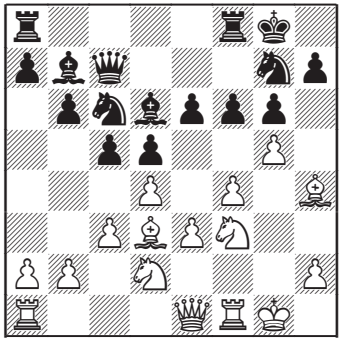


Chances are even here because Black has enough counterplay down the f-file. For instance:

19...♗a6 20.♗c2 ♖f7 21.♕g3 ♖af8 22.♖e1= (22.♘f3 d4!∓). Black could try here 22...d4 23.c4 d3!? or 22...♖f2!?, but the threat on g6 should be sufficient for a draw in both events, e.g. 23.♗xg6 hxg6 24.♕xg6+ ♕g7 25.♕xg7+ ♔xg7 26.♖g3+=.

14...f6 15.♘ef3 ♘g7 16.♕e1 ♘c6 17.g5

Gholami-Krush, Doha 2015, saw 17.♗g3, when Black hastily opted for 17...e5 18.fxe5 fxe5. The most such a break could achieve is equality, as all the white pieces are in the centre and well prepared to meet it, e.g. 19.e4=. On the other hand, Black's set-up is more flexible – such is the nature of the Stonewall. He could keep on improving his position with 17...♖ae8, preserving all his options open. For instance, he could gain more space on the queenside. It is unclear what White could oppose in his turn.

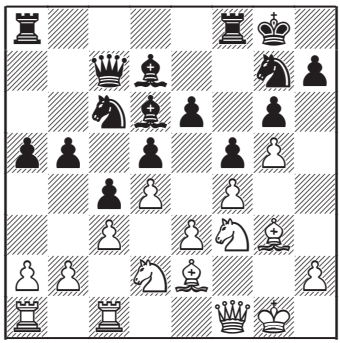


17...f5

I cannot blame this normal human decision to put safety first against a decent, equally rated opponent. From this moment on, it is a one way road. Black is not risking anything on the kingside, while White still has to withstand a pawn storm on the opposite wing. Yet, 17...cxd4!? 18.♘xd4 (18.cxd4 ♘b4) 18...fxg5! 19.♗xg5 e5 was more enterprising. White's naked king would demand unfaltering defence.

18.♕f2 c4 19.♗e2 b5 20.♗g3 b4?!

Not the best way of conducting the advance. White could now take on b4 and prepare b3. 20...a5 preserved more tension – 21.♖fc1! ♗c8 (21...b4 22.b3) 22.♕f1 ♗d7.

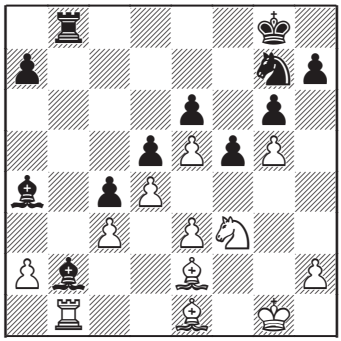


At some point Black could try ...b4, ...a4-a3.

21.♘e5?

A grave positional mistake. It is not important that White plugs the hole on e5. The big fault of his position will transpire when he tries to defend the queenside pawns. He should have never left two targets – on a2 and c3. Correct was 21.cxb4 ♗xb4 22.♖fc1.

21...bxc3 22.bxc3 ♘xe5 23.fxe5 ♗a3 24.♖fb1 ♗c6 25.♘f3 ♕a5 26.♕e1 ♖fb8 27.♕d2 ♖b6 28.♖xb6 ♕xb6 29.♗e1 ♖b8 30.♕c2 ♕b2 31.♕xb2 ♗xb2 32.♖b1 ♗a4



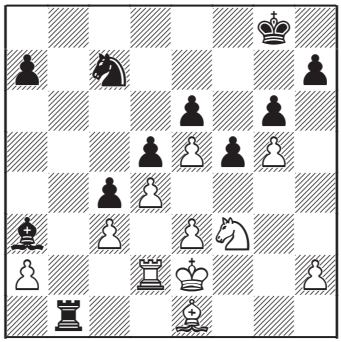
White cannot prevent the penetration of Black's rook. The game should have finished quickly was not for Halkias' mistake 3 moves later:

33.♗d1 ♗xd1 34.♖xd1 ♗a3 35.♔f2 ♘e8?!

35...♖b2+! 36.♖d2 ♖b1 37.♔e2 ♖a1 38.♖c2 a5 39.♘g1 a4 puts White in near *zugzwang*. The coup-de-grace will come from the kingside after ...♘h5, ...f4, and the g5-pawn will be doomed to fall.

In his turn, White misses the defence 36.♗d2 ♖b2 37.♖a1 after which Black should start working hard all over again.

36.♔e2 ♘c7 37.♖d2 ♖b1



38.♖c2?

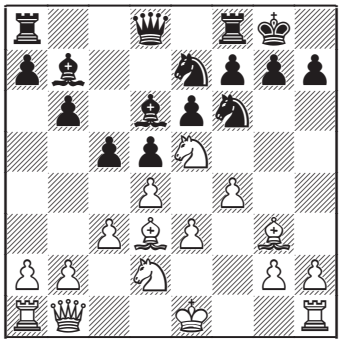
The last moves look influenced by time trouble. 38.♖d1 was a must.

38...♘b5 39.♘d2 ♖a1 40.♘f3 ♔f7 41.h4 a6 42.♗d2 ♖b1 43.♗e1 ♔e8 44.♔f2 a5 45.♘d2 ♖a1 46.♘f3 ♔f7 47.♔e2 a4 48.♔f2 ♔e7 49.♔e2 ♔e8 50.♔f2 ♔d7 51.♔e2 ♔c6 52.♔f2 ♖b1 53.♘d2 ♖a1 54.♘f3 ♗c1 55.♗d2 ♗xd2 56.♘xd2 a3 (56...♘xc3!–+; 56...♘a3–+) **57.♘f3 ♔d7** (57...♘xc3!–+) **58.♘e1 ♘c7 59.♔e2 ♘a8 60.♔d2 ♘b6 61.♖c1 ♖xa2+ 62.♘c2 ♖b2 63.♖a1 a2 64.♔c1 ♘a4 65.♘b4 ♖b1+ 66.♖xb1 axb1♕+ 67.♔xb1 ♘xc3+ 68.♔c2 ♘e4 69.♘a2 ♔c6 70.♘c1 ♘g3 71.♔d2 ♔b5 72.♘a2 ♔a5 73.♘c3 ♔b4 74.♔c2 ♔a5 75.♔d2 ♘e4+ 76.♘xe4 fxe4 77.♔c3 ♔a4 78.♔b2 ♔b4 79.♔c2 c3 80.♔c1 ♔b3 81.♔b1 c2+ 82.♔c1 ♔c3 83.h5 ♔d3 0-1**

17. Sandipan – Kryvoruchko

rapid Dubai 16.06.2014

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 e6 3.♗f4 d5 4.e3 c5 5.c3 ♘c6 6.♘bd2 ♗d6 7.♗g3 0-0 8.♗d3 b6 9.♘e5 ♗b7 10.f4 ♘e7 11.♕b1



11...♘g6

I chose to annotate this game because it presents an entirely different approach, compared to the previous game. I would not say it is superior to ...g6, but by some reason it brings Black better results. Perhaps White is unprepared against it.

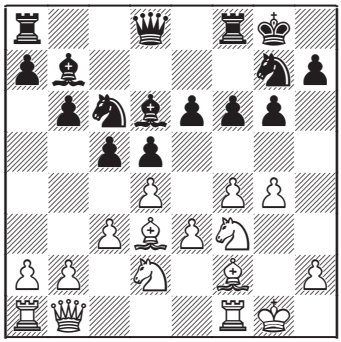
11...g6!? is more popular. White could castle or attempt to mount an attack:

a) 12.0-0 ♘h5!?

12...♕c7 13.♗h4 transposes to **Game 16** Skoberne-Halkias.

The standard plan is 12...♘f5 13.♗f2 ♗e7 having in mind to meet 14.g4 by 14...♘d6 or 14.b4 by 14...♕c7 15.a4=. It offers Black a comfortable game, but I believe it would be difficult to win without removing the knight from e5 by ...f6.

13.♗f2 f6 14.♘ef3 ♘c6!?



This position is very similar to the previous annotated game.

b) 12.♗f2 ♘h5!?

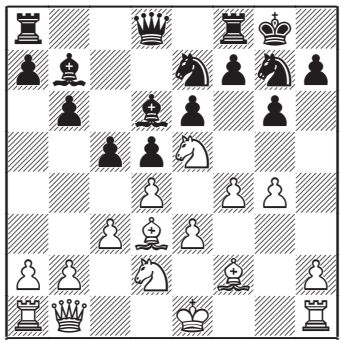
This is provocative, indeed, but it is the most challenging option.

12...cxd4 13.exd4 ♘h5 is safer as it forces 14.g3. Then Black has a tempo for 14...f6 15.♘ef3 ♕c8 16.0-0 ♗a6 17.♖e1 ♘g7=, Grischuk-Wang, Beijing 2014. However, the exchange on d4 deprives Black of his main plan – a pawn storm on the queenside with ...c4 and ...b5.

12...♘e8 is at least risky as it does not stop the march of the h-pawn – 13.h4 f6 14.h5!.

Vocaturo chose 12...♘d7. It prepares ...f6 more effectively than 12...♘e8 as 13.h4 f6 14.h5? fails to 14...fxe5 15.fxe5 ♗xe5, while 14.♘xd7 ♕xd7 15.h5 is unclear after 15...cxd4 16.cxd4 e5 or 15...♔g7!. However, 13.♗b5 could force a repetition after 13...♘f6 14.♗d3.

13.g4 ♘g7

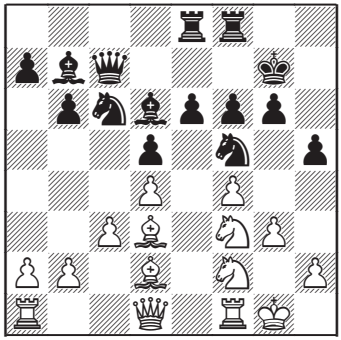


Now after 14.0-0 or 14.♘ef3, Black will repel the knight from e5 and will take the defensive stand from the above-mentioned game Grischuk-Wang, but he will still possess an active plan, based on ...c4, ...b5.

14.g5 is awful as it boxes in the dark-squared bishop – 14...cxd4 15.exd4 ♗xe5 16.fxe5 ♘c6 17.♘f3 ♘b4.

The only consistent continuation of White's previous play would be 14.h4?!, but White is so behind in development that we could strike back with 14...f6 15.h5 (15.♘ef3 cxd4 16.cxd4 e5!) 15...fxe5 16.fxe5 ♗xe5 17.dxe5 c4 18.♗f1 d4–+.

Finally, the game Romanov-Fraczek, ICCF 2013, demonstrates that Black could even aim to break through White's stronghold at e5: 11...cxd4 12.exd4 g6 13.♗f2 ♘e8 14.♘df3 ♘g7 15.♗e3 f6 16.♘g4 ♕c7 17.♕c1 ♖ae8 18.0-0 ♘gf5 19.♗d2 h5 20.♘f2 ♔g7 21.g3 ♘c6 22.♕d1



22...♗c8 23.♖c1 e5↑.

12.♘xg6?!

The hasty 12.h4 is well parried by 12...cxd4 13.cxd4 ♗b4 14.h5 ♘xe5 15.fxe5 ♘e4 16.♗xe4 ♗xd2+ 17.♔xd2 dxe4 18.h6 ♕g5↑.

12.0-0! looks innocuous, but it offers us to reveal our plan. One logical option is 12...a5! – preparing ...♗a6 or ...c4, followed by ...b5-b4.

The blitz game Kamsky-Dreev, Khanty-Mansiysk 2013, took on a different course. Black decided to open the c-file with 12...♘h5?! and Kamsky obliged – 13.♗e1. (Actually, ...♘xg3 was not a threat since 13.♘df3 ♘xg3 14.hxg3 would be in White's favour.) 13...cxd4 14.exd4 ♘f6 15.a3 ♖c8 16.h3 ♕c7?! Black has achieved his idea, to discover that he has no way to penetrate through the c-file. On the contrary, White's attack would be unpleasant after 17.♘g4!.

13.a4 ♕c7

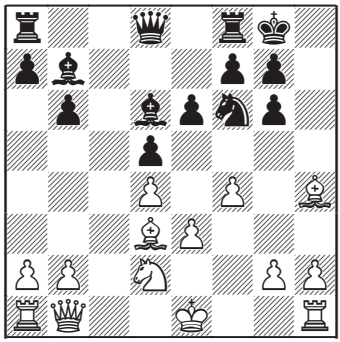
13...♗a6 allows 14.♗xa6 ♖xa6 15.f5 so Black takes e5 under control.

14.♖e1 ♗a6=.

12...hxg6 13.♗h4

We should meet 13.0-0 the same way as on the previous turn – 13...a5 14.♗h4 ♕c7 15.a4 ♗a6 (or 15...♖fb8 first).

13...cxd4 14.cxd4

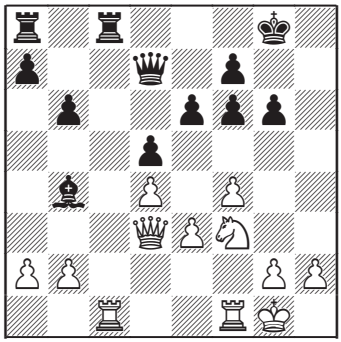


14...♗b4

It is tempting to drag the enemy king to the centre, but this line could lead just to a draw after 15.a3 ♗xd2+ 16.♔xd2 ♘e4+ 17.♗xe4 ♕xh4 18.g3 ♕h3 19.♗d3 ♕g2+ 20.♗e2 ♗a6 21.♕f1=.

14...♕d7! 15.♕d1 ♗c6 16.♕e2 ♘e4 retained more tension.

15.♕d1 ♕d7 16.♗xf6 gxf6 17.0-0 ♗c6 18.♘f3 ♗b5 19.♖c1 ♗xd3 20.♕xd3 ♖fc8



21.♕a6?!

The position is equal and White could prove it by trading all the rooks with 21.♕b1! ♗d6 22.♖xc8+ ♖xc8 23.♖c1. Instead, he makes an awful "active" move which could have faced him with difficulties after 21...b5! 22.♔f2 ♖ab8. White could only hope to return his queen back to safety.

21...♖c7?! 22.♖xc7 ♕xc7 23.♕a4?!

23.♕e2 ♖c8 24.♘e1 covers the c2-square. Black would still be slightly better thanks to his bishop, but without any concrete threats.

23...♕c4 24.g3 ♖c8 (24...b5!) **25.a3? ♗d2 26.♕xc4 ♗xe3+ 27.♔g2 ♖xc4 28.♖d1 ♖c2+ 29.♔h3 ♖f2 30.♘h4 g5 0-1**

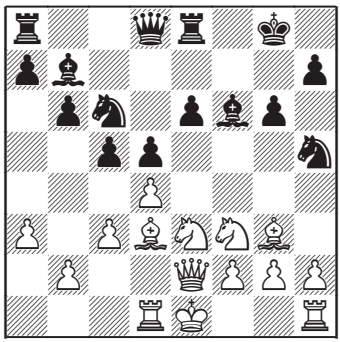
18. Sedlak – So

Baku ol. 06.09.2016

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 d5 3.♗f4 c5 4.e3 ♘c6 5.♘bd2 e6 6.c3 ♗d6 7.♗g3 0-0 8.♗d3 b6 9.♕e2 ♗b7 10.♖d1 ♖e8 11.e4 ♗e7 12.e5 ♘h5 13.a3 g6

Sedlak assigns a "?!" mark to 10...♖e8 in his book, but he does not consider 13...g6 at al. It is all the more interesting to watch his reaction to this typical plan of Black.

14.♘f1 f5 15.exf6 ♗xf6 16.♘e3



16...e5

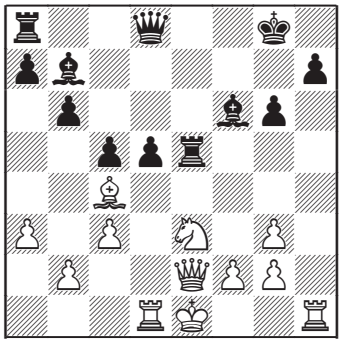
The most straightforward continuation. Alternatively:

16...cxd4 17.cxd4 ♘xg3 18.hxg3 e5 19.dxe5 ♘xe5 20.♗e4

20.♘xe5 ♖xe5 21.0-0 ♕e7 22.♖fe1 ♖e8=, Artemiev-Sevian, Lake Sevan Martuni 2016.

20...♘f7 21.♗xd5 ♗xd5 22.♕b5 a6 23.♕xd5 ♕xd5 24.♖xd5 ♗xb2=, Carneiro-El Debs, Florianopolis 2017. The text is sharper.

17.dxe5 ♘xe5 18.♘xe5 ♘xg3 19.hxg3 ♖xe5 20.♗c4



20...b5!

The exclamation mark is for the psychological value of this pawn sacrifice. Black takes over the initiative and faces his opponent with difficult practical decisions. So's phenomenal calculation abilities soon tip the balance in his favour.

Objectively slightly better is 20...♔g7 21.0-0 d4 22.b4 ♖e7 23.bxc5 bxc5 24.♕a2 ♕d7 25.♘d5 ♗xd5 26.♗xd5 ♖ae8 with a slight plus for Black, but the opposite-coloured bishops might lead to a draw.

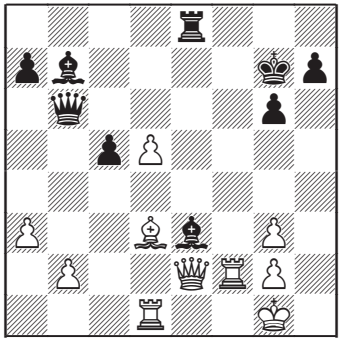
21.♗xb5 ♕b6 22.0-0 ♔g7 23.♗d3 ♗g5

23...c4 24.♗c2 ♗g5 looks also attractive since 25.♘xc4 loses a piece to 25...♖xe2. However, Black would be missing the threat of ...d4 so White would survive with 25.♖de1 ♖ae8 26.♔h2, for instance: 26...♗c6 27.♕d2 ♖xe3 28.fxe3 ♗xe3 29.♕d1 ♖e5 30.g4 ♕c7 31.g3 ♕e7 32.♗a4 ♗b7 33.♕f3=.

24.c4?

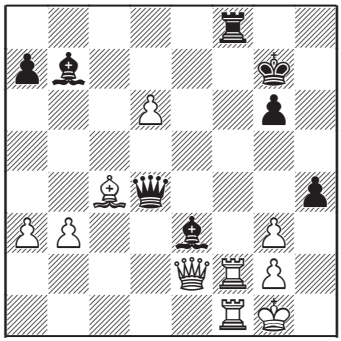
This turns out to be the decisive mistake. The only defence was 24.♘c4! dxc4 25.♕xe5+ ♗f6 26.♕f4 cxd3 27.♖xd3 ♕c6 28.f3 with a balanced game. Both Black's bishops are biting on granite.

24...♖ae8 25.cxd5 ♖xe3 26.fxe3 ♗xe3+ 27.♖f2



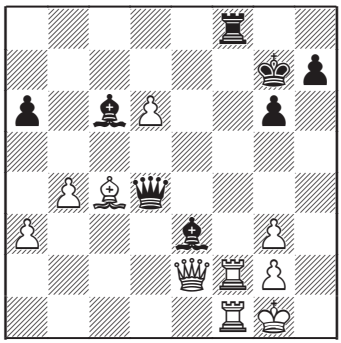
27...c4!! 28.♗xc4 ♖f8 29.♖df1 ♕d4

White is tied up and down. The point is that when his moves with the a-pawn finish, he will have to push d6, fatally opening the long diagonal. Then the march of the h-pawn will lead to this mating net:



1.gxh4 ♕e4 2.♔h2 ♕xh4+ 3.♔g1 ♕g3 threatening ♕xg2#!

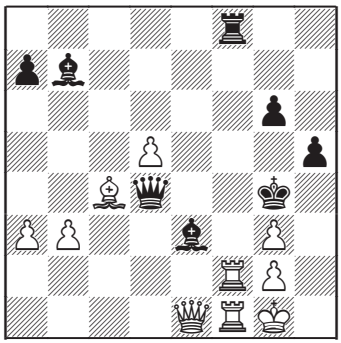
The computer needs depths of 40-50 half-moves to reach the verdict: White is doomed! Over the board, things remain very complicated. For instance, 30.d6! ♗c6 31.b4 h5? allows White to escape after 32.b5 ♗b7 33.d7 h4 34.♔h1 hxg3 35.♖f7+ ♔h6 (35...♖xf7 36.♖xf7+ ♔h6 37.d8=♕! controls h4!) 36.♖1f4!=. In this line the c4-bishop helped in the defence by ensuring the check from f7. The computer discovers the decoy combination 31...a6!!. *Zugzwang*!



Now 32.♗xa6 h5 is already winning and 32.♕e1 drops a piece after 32...♗xf2+.

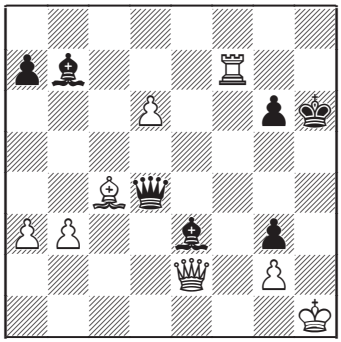
30.b3 h5 31.d6

If White maintained a passive stand, e.g. 31.♕e1, cutting off the b7-bishop and protecting his own one with the b3-pawn, he would lose after 31...h4 32.gxh4 ♕f4 33.h5 ♕g3 34.hxg6 ♖f6 35.♔h1 ♗xf2 and there is no perpetual check. Black could even improve this idea by bringing his king into the attack: 31...♔h6! 32.♕e2 ♔g5! 33.♕e1 ♔g4



A spectacular activity of the king!

31...h4 32.♔h1 ♖xf2 33.♖xf2 hxg3 34.♖f7+ ♔h6 0-1



The pawn is still on d6 (compare with the line 30.d6! where it quickly reached d7!) so the mate from h4 is unavoidable!

19. Kamsky – Nakamura

Saint Louis 01.04.2017

This game discusses the latest trend against the London System – the plan with ...♘h5. In my opinion it has no advantages over the queen's fianchetto, but it certainly deserves attention as a backup line.

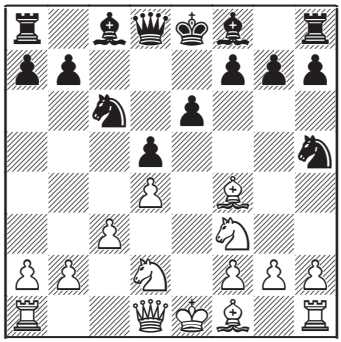
1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 e6 3.♗f4 d5 4.e3 c5 5.c3

We could meet 5.♘bd2 by 5...♘c6 (or 5...♕b6 6.♖b1) since 6.♗b5 ♕b6 (6...♗d7?! 7.0-0 a6 8.♗e2!) 7.a4 a6 8.♗xc6+ bxc6 9.a5 ♕b7 is not a problem.

5...♘c6 6.♘bd2 cxd4

Another version of the same plan is 6...♘h5 7.♗g5 f6 when White lacks the retreat to e3. On the other hand, he controls the f4-square and could meet 8.♗h4 cxd4 by 9.cxd4∞. The super-speedy blitz game Giri-So, chess.com 2017, saw instead: 8...g6 (8...♗d6 9.♘e5 g6 10.♗e2) 9.♗d3 cxd4 10.cxd4 ♗e7 11.0-0 with long manoeuvring ahead.

7.exd4 ♘h5



8.♗e3

There is no reason to provoke ...f6 with 8.♗g5 f6 9.♗e3 (9.♗h4 ♗e7) 9...♗d6 10.g3

10.♗b5 0-0 11.0-0 a6 (or 11...♗d7 12.♖e1 ♕e8∞) 12.♗a4 ♗d7 13.♘e1 ♘f4 14.g3, Karjakin-Nakamura, Blitz Stavanger 2017, 14...♘g6∞.

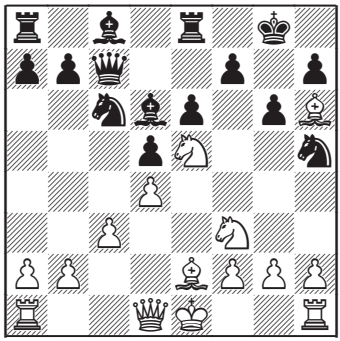
10...0-0 11.♗d3

11.♗g2?! f5 12.♘e5 f4↑, Giri-So, London 2016.

11...♕e8 12.♘h4 g6 (12...g5?! 13.♘g2) 13.0-0.

8...♗d6 9.♘e5 g6 10.g4

The critical line, but this game suggests that it is only balanced. Naiditsch chose against Kravtsiv in Sharjah 2017 the less committing 10.♘df3!? ♕c7 11.♗e2 0-0 12.♗h6 ♖e8



Here instead of sacrificing a pawn with 13.♘g5 ♗xe5, White should have done it with 13.0-0! ♘xe5?! 14.♘xe5 ♗xe5 15.dxe5 ♕xe5 16.♖e1 ♗d7 17.♗g4 (17.♗xh5 ♕xh5 18.♕xh5 gxh5 19.♖e3 h4) 17...♕d6 18.♗xh5 gxh5 19.♕xh5±. Of course, taking on e5 is not obligatory, and 13...f6 would lead to a passive, but sound position.

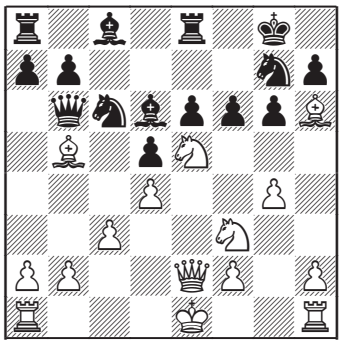
We see that the hit on e5 does not bring dividends, so it would be better to meet 10.♘df3 by 10...0-0!, intending to push ...e5.

The game Zavortink-So, chess.com 2017, went 11.♗e2?! f6 12.♘xc6 (12.♘g4 ♗f4) 12...bxc6 13.♕d2 e5∓. More testing is:

11.♗h6 ♖e8 12.♗b5 ♕b6 13.♕e2

13.♕d3 a6 14.♗xc6 bxc6 15.0-0 a5 16.♖fe1=.

13...f6 14.g4 ♘g7



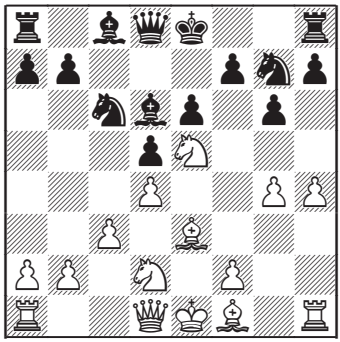
15.h4! This looks scary, but 15...♖f8! 16.h5 fxe5 17.dxe5 ♘xe5 18.♘xe5 ♗xe5 19.♕xe5 ♕xf2+ 20.♔d1 ♕f6 evens the chances – 21.♕xf6 ♖xf6 22.♗g5 ♖f7 23.hxg6 hxg6 24.♗d3 e5 25.♗xg6 ♗xg4+ 26.♔c2 ♖f2+ 27.♔b3 ♗f5 28.♗xf5 ♘xf5 29.♗f6 ♖e8 30.♖h8+ ♔f7 31.♖xe8 ♔xe8 32.♗xe5=.

10.♕a4 occurred in Alekseev-Matlakov, Sochi 2017.

Then 10...♕c7 11.♗e2 ♘g7 12.♘xc6 bxc6 was roughly equal. However, Black could offer a pawn:

10...0-0!?, when 11.♘xc6 bxc6 12.♕xc6 would be risky as Black will open the centre with 12...♖b8 13.♖b1 e5.

10...♘g7 11.h4



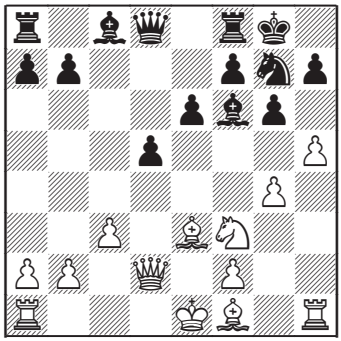
11...♘xe5

11...h5 12.♗g5 ♕b6! 13.♗f6 ♖g8 14.♖b1

White failed to prove enough compensation after 14.♕f3 ♗xe5 15.dxe5 hxg4 16.♕xg4 ♘h5 17.0-0-0 ♕xf2 18.♗g5 ♕g3 19.♕a4 ♗d7 20.♗b5 ♕xe5 21.♗xc6?. White had to put his rooks on f1 and e1 and it is unclear how Black could improve his position.

14...♘xe5 15.dxe5 ♗c5 16.♕e2 hxg4 17.♘b3 ♗e7 18.♗xe7 ♔xe7 19.♕xg4 ♗d7 20.♕g5+ ♔f8 is holding, too. White's pieces are more active, but his king does not have a shelter: 21.h5 ♘xh5 22.♗e2 (22.♘d4 ♕d8=) 22...♗b5 23.♗xh5 gxh5 24.♕xh5 ♗c4=, or 21.♗d3 ♗b5 22.♗xg6=.

12.dxe5 ♗xe5 13.♘f3 ♗f6 14.h5 0-0 15.♕d2

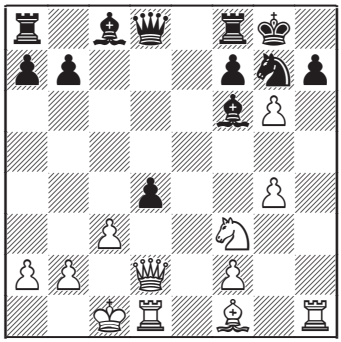


15...d4!

This move turns the tide and now White should be accurate. Kamsky is up to this task.

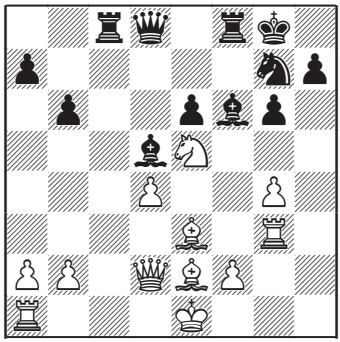
16.cxd4

A later game saw 16.♗xd4 e5 17.hxg6? exd4 18.0-0-0



18...dxc3 19.gxf7+ ♔xf7 20.♗c4+ ♗e6 21.♗xe6+ ♘xe6 22.♕c2, Lie-Arvola, Stavanger 2017, when 22...♕b6 23.b3 ♗g7 is close to winning.

16...b6 17.hxg6 fxg6 18.♘e5 ♗b7 19.♖h3 ♖c8 20.♗e2 ♗g2 21.♖g3 ♗d5



22.♖h3! ♗g2 23.♖g3 ♗e4 24.♖c1 ♕d6 25.a3 ♖xc1+ 26.♕xc1 ♗xe5 27.dxe5 ♕xe5 28.♕d2 ♗d5 29.♗d4 ♕e4 30.f3 ♕f4 ½-½

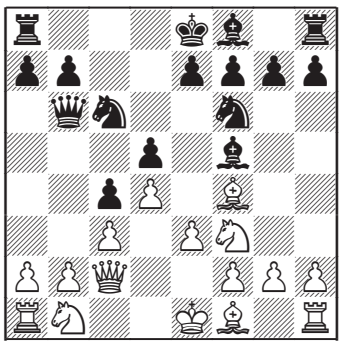
Chapter 6. 1.d4 d5 2.Bf4 c5 Main Ideas

In this chapter I will discuss systems with ...♗f5 or ...♗g4, focusing on the move order:

1.d4 d5 2.♗f4 c5

It is fashionable to call it The Accelerated London System, in contrast with the "Classical" London with 2.♘f3. I devote a special chapter on the intricacies of the latter move order.

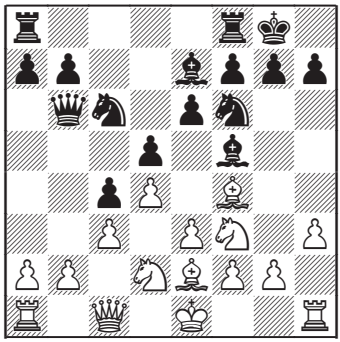
The idea of delaying the knight development is to avoid the famous line 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.♗f4 c5 4.e3 ♘c6 5.c3 ♕b6 6.♕b3 c4 7.♕c2 ♗f5,



when White should retreat ingloriously to c1. The same position could arise after 2.♗f4 c5 3.e3 ♘c6 4.♘f3 ♘f6 5.c3.

Note that the inclusion of ♘f3 ♘f6 is a must. If you are too hasty to demonstrate the tactical trick ...♗f5, you would be in for a nasty surprise: 2.♗f4 c5 3.e3 ♘c6 4.c3!? ♕b6 5.♕b3 c4 6.♕c2 ♗f5? 7.♕xf5! ♕xb2 8.♕xd5 ♕xa1 9.♕b5±.

The diagram position has been reached in hundreds, even thousands of games. I must admit, I also played it as White in 2013, even though it was just a blitz game. I consider it in detail in line B. My conclusion is that after 8.♕c1, 8...♘h5 9.♗g3 is roughly equal. My suggestion is to go for 8...e6 and save ...h6. Our desired set-up is: 9.♘bd2 ♗e7 10.♗e2 0-0 11.h3

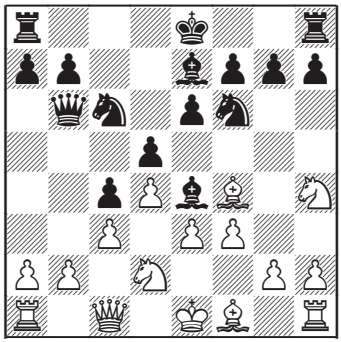


11...♖fc8!, aiming for ...♕d8, ...♗d6 ...b5. While our plan of a pawn storm is well outlined, White's play is much more obscure. My attempt against Artemiev to attack the centre with b3 was dubious, as ...cxb3 highlighted the awkward placement of the queen at c1. Whenever White plays

♘h4, for example on move 10, we answer 10.♘h4 ♗e4 11.f3?

Toth-Csirik

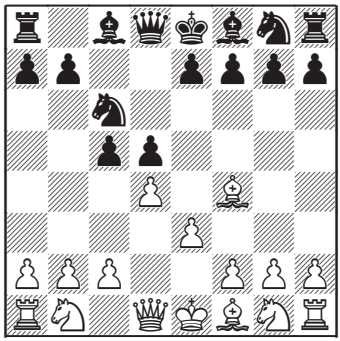
Hungary 2008



11...♗d3! 12.♗xd3 cxd3∓. Do not misunderstand me – we are better here not because of the pawn on d3, but because the h4-knight is hanging. That was the reason to provoke f3 – to ban its retreat to f3. Black often plays ...♗d3 in various different settings, but I do not recommend it in general. The computer as a rule evaluates positions with a pawn on d3 and a knight on f3 as 0.00, but in practice the overextended pawn is a nuisance, as it needs constant attention and protection.

Let's now return to the "accelerated" move order:

2.♗f4 c5 3.e3 ♘c6



A lot of players favour 2...♘f6 3.e3 c5, but I think that it is important to lead first our queen's knight. That eliminates a number of tricky lines with ♘c3 and other tactical attempts.

4.c3

4.♘c3 hides no venom here in view of 4...cxd4 5.exd4 ♗f5, taking the sting of ♘b5 in view of ...♖c8.

4...♘f6 5.♘d2

Until we have not played ...♗f5, we could still shift to variations from Chapter 5, e.g. 5.♘f3 e6.

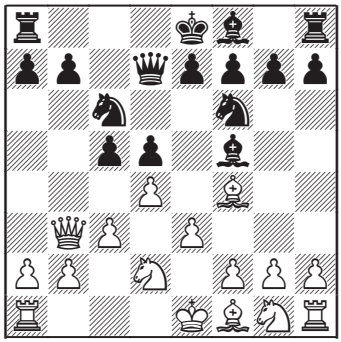
5...♗f5

Some players prefer the simple 5...cxd4 6.exd4 ♗f5, arguing that the exchange transforms the opening into a timid side line of the Caro Kann. I agree that Black has no problems there, but my task throughout the book is not just to show you how to even the chances. I have tried to offer first-rate schemes with a good potential to play them for a win. Whenever possible, I prefer to preserve the c5-pawn in order to have the active plan with ...c4 in reserve.

6.♕b3

Or 6.♘gf3 e6 7.♕b3 ♕c8!

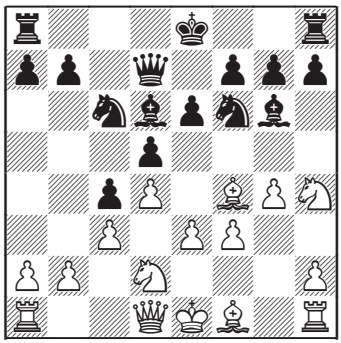
6...♕d7!



Please note that against the Accelerated London I never consider ...♕b6. We defend the b7-pawn by either ...♕d7 or ...♕c8 (if White's knight is already on f3). This approach preserves more tension.

7.♘gf3 c4 8.♕d1 e6 9.♗e2

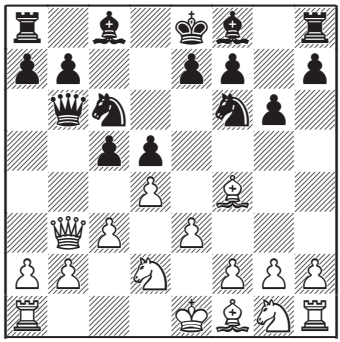
We meet 9.♘h4 semi-automatically by 9...♗e4, e.g. 10.f3 ♗g6 11.g4 ♗d6.



We also offer this exchange if White does not play f3+g4. It is an important link of our plan of pushing ...b5-b4. Without it we could not put a rook on b8.

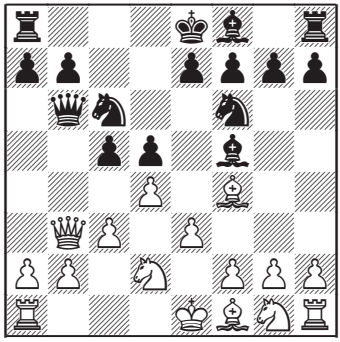
Key points

In most lines we'll have a choice – whether to play ...♕b6 or not. I tried to formulate a rule: we go there only if we can meet ♕b3 by ...c4 and ...♗f5. The following diagrams show what to avoid:



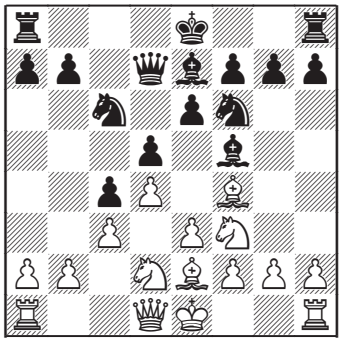
7.♕xb6! axb6 8.♗c7 ♘d7 9.♗b5. Black is tied with the defence of b6.

We should always keep in mind that White could take on c5:



7.dxc5!.

Another point is not to spend a tempo on h6 at the early stage of the opening. It is better to use it on development.



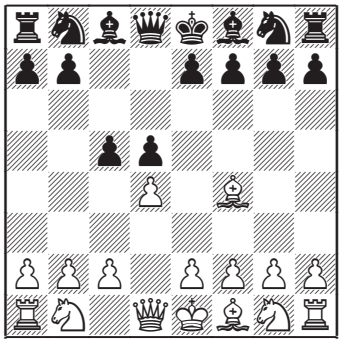
We meet 10.♘h4 by 10...♗e4 11.♘xe4 ♘xe4 12.♘f3 ♗d6=.

Theoretical status

The Accelerated London is White's latest hope of confusing the opponent by its flexibility. The move order I suggest – with ...♘c6 before ...♘f6, allows to prune most of the unclear lines and reach sound, well tested positions where White should even be careful if he wants to maintain the balance.

Chapter 6. 1.d4 d5 2.Bf4 c5
Step by Step

1.d4 d5 2.♗f4 c5



3.e3

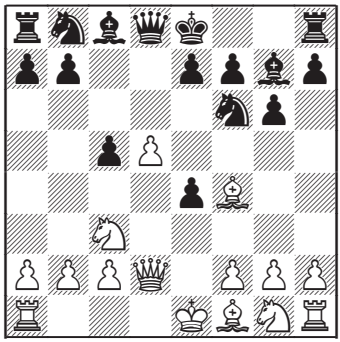
3.e4 is obviously inspired by the Albin Countergambit. I suggest to take the challenge – 3...dxe4!, and ignore White's extra tempo:

3...♘c6 is not bad, but it leads to many complex, but balanced endgames, for instance:

4.exd5 ♕xd5 5.♘c3 ♕xd4 6.♘d5 e5 7.♘c7+ ♔d8 8.♘xa8 exf4 9.♘f3! ♕xd1+ 10.♖xd1+ ♗d7 11.♗b5 ♔c8 12.0-0 f6=;

4.♘c3 cxd4 5.exd5 dxc3 6.dxc6 ♕xd1+ 7.♖xd1 bxc6 8.♗c7 e6 9.♖d8+ ♔e7 10.b3 ♘f6 11.♘e2 ♘d5 12.♗a5 c5 13.g3 ♗b7=.

4.d5 ♘f6 5.♘c3 g6 6.♕d2 ♗g7



7.0-0-0 a6! 8.d6 b5!

8...♘c6 9.dxe7 ♕xd2+ 10.♗xd2, Miladinovic-Nikolic, Murska Sobota 2008, 10...♘xe7 is also good.

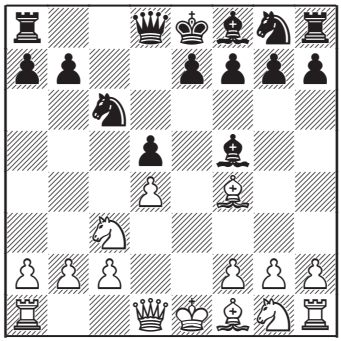
9.dxe7 ♕xd2+ 10.♖xd2 ♗b7 11.♘ge2 ♘c6 12.♘g3 ♘d4 13.♗e5 ♖g8 14.♖d1 ♗c6∓.

3.c3 ♘c6 4.e3 transposes to line A, and 4.♘f3 ♘f6 5.e3 is considered in line B.

3.♘c3!? ♘c6 4.e3 (4.e4 cxd4 transposes to 3.e4 ♘c6) is an aggressive set-up, based on long castling. I suggest to adopt the most natural development:

4...cxd4 5.exd4 ♗f5

5...a6 is quite popular, but I prefer to lead out a piece rather than spend a tempo on unnecessary prophylaxis.



6.♘f3 e6 7.♗b5

The only way to exploit the absence of ...a6. 7.♗d3 could be met by 7...♗g4.

7.♘e5 ♘xe5 8.♗xe5 f6 9.♗f4 ♗b4 is easy for Black.

7...♗d6, followed up by ...♘ge7. Black's pieces stand harmoniously.

3.♘f3 cxd4 (3...♘c6!? is also possible, of course.) 4.♗xb8 (4.♘xd4 f6 is awkward for White.) 4...♖xb8 5.♕xd4 was played by Alekhine. 5...a6 is not bad, but we did not take on d4 to chicken out later. We should consider a pawn sac – 5...♘f6 6.♕xa7 ♗d7 7.e3 e6 8.♘c3 ♗e7

The main idea of the sacrifice is that if White's queen returns home with 9.♕d4, 9...b5 will offer Black a tangible initiative.

9.a4 0-0 (9...b6 10.♗b5 0-0⩱) 10.♗d3

10.♕d4 ♕a5 threatens ...b5, so White should play 11.♘d2 ♗c5 12.♘b3 ♗xd4 13.♘xa5 ♗xc3+ 14.bxc3 ♖fc8=.

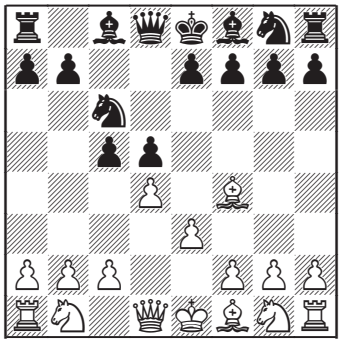
10...b6= and Black has a repetition of moves.

Finally, 3.dxc5 ♘c6 4.♘f3

4.e4 ♘f6 5.exd5 (5.e5 ♘e4 6.♘d2 ♘xc5 7.♘b3 ♗f5=) 5...♘xd5 6.♗g3 ♗f5=, Bu Xiangzhi-Ding Liren, rapid Shenzhen 2016. More challenging is 6...e5!?.

4...e6 5.e3 (5.e4 ♗xc5 6.♘c3 ♘ge7=) 5...♗xc5 is comfortable.

3...♘c6



Now **A.** 4.c3 follows in the spirit of The Accelerated London while **B.** 4.♘f3 returns to the classical treatment of this system.

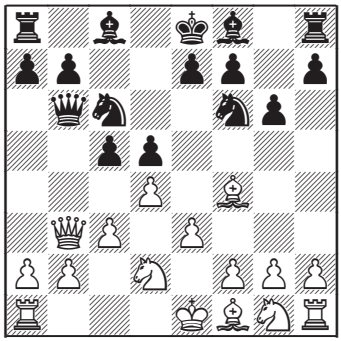
4.♘c3 transposes to 3.♘c3!? ♘c6 4.e3.

A. 4.c3 ♘f6

4...♕b6 5.♕b3 c4 6.♕c2 ♗f5? is a common mistake. This tactical device does not work when the d5-pawn is unprotected, owing to 7.♕xf5 ♕xb2 8.♕xd5 ♕xa1 9.♕b5 0-0-0 10.♗xc4±.

Black could try to justify the queen sortie to b6 by 5...♘f6 6.♘d2 g6

6...c4 7.♕c2 g6 8.e4 ♘xe4 9.♘xe4 dxe4 10.♗xc4 ♗g7 11.♗e3 ♘a5 12.♗e2 ♕c6 13.♖d1 ♘c4 14.♗xc4 ♕xc4 15.b3±.



Perhaps the position after 7.♕xb6 axb6 8.♗c7 c4! (all 4 games have seen 8...♘d7 9.♗b5±) 9.♗xb6 e6 is not bad for Black, but it needs practical tests.

5.♘d2

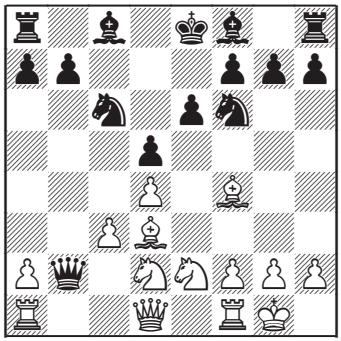
5.♘f3 ♕b6 transposes to line B, and 5...e6, followed up by 6...♗d6, is considered in the previous chapter.

Nakamura tried 5.♗d3 against Kramnik, but it was a blitz game.

It went 5...♗g4 6.♘f3 e6 7.♘bd2 ♗d6=.

Critical is, of course:

5...♕b6 6.♘d2 ♕xb2 7.♘e2 cxd4 8.exd4 e6 9.0-0, Schlosser-Gross, Bayern 1995,

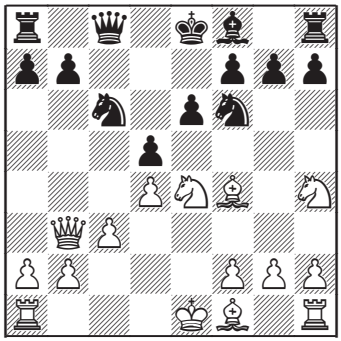


9...♕a3! 10.♖e1 ♗e7 11.♘f3 0-0 12.♖b1 ♘e4, and White does not have clear compensation for the pawn, e.g. 13.♕c2 f5.

5...♗f5

I prefer to preserve the c5-pawn.

5...cxd4 6.exd4 ♗f5 is also possible, though. 7.♕b3 ♕c8 8.♘gf3 e6 9.♘h4 ♗e4 10.♘xe4 leads to the following position:



Both recaptures are possible:

10...♘xe4 11.♘f3 ♗d6=, and 10...dxe4 11.g3 ♗e7 12.♘g2 ♘d5 13.♗d2 0-0 14.♘f4 ♘f6 15.♗e2 ♕d7=.

6.♕b3

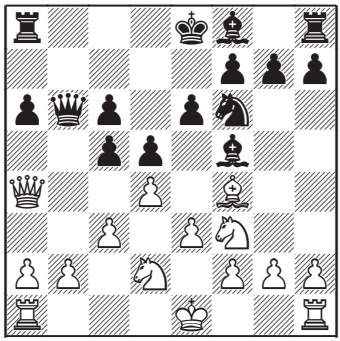
6.♘gf3 e6 brings about another important position.

6...♕b6 could be met by 7.♘h4! (7.♕b3 c4 8.♕xb6 axb6∓; 7.dxc5 ♕xb2 8.♘d4 ♗g4) 7...♗d7 8.♕b3 c4 9.♕c2 ♘h5 10.♗g3.

7.♕b3

7.♕a4 ♘d7 8.♗b5 is well met by the natural 8...♖c8! when 9.♗xc6 ♖xc6 10.♕xa7 is dubious in view of 10...♗d3 and White's king remains in the centre. Therefore, he should castle, when 9.0-0 a6 is at least equal. Black could even sac a pawn with 9...♗e7 10.♖fe1 0-0 (10...a6) 11.♗xc6 ♖xc6 12.♕xa7 g5 13.♗g3 g4, trying to shift the focus of the game to the kingside. However, 14.♘e5 ♘xe5 15.dxe5! (15.♗xe5 cxd4 16.exd4 ♗g5 17.♘b3 f6 18.♗g3 ♕c8 19.f3 gxf3 20.gxf3 ♔h8→) looks safe enough. The computer finds only a draw after 15...♕a8 16.♕xa8 ♖xa8 17.e4 dxe4 18.♗f4 ♖b6 19.♘c4 ♖ba6 20.a3 b5.

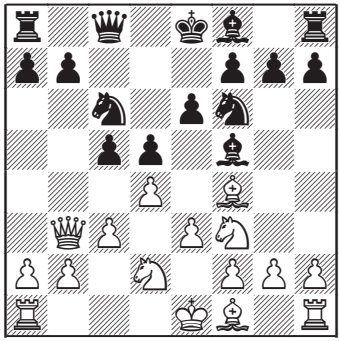
7.♗b5!? is the better way of pinning the knight. Then 7...♘d7 (hoping for 8.♕a4 ♖c8), could be met by 8.0-0, followed by ♖e1, e3-e4. Therefore, Black should employ another defence: 7...♕b6! 8.♕a4 a6 9.♗xc6+ bxc6 with a balanced game, for instance:



10.c4 ♗e7 (10...♗d3 11.dxc5) 11.dxc5 ♗xc5 12.cxd5 ♘xd5 13.0-0 0-0 14.♗e5 (14.♘b3 ♗b4 15.♘bd4 ♗e4 16.a3 ♗xf3 17.♘xf3 ♘xf4=) 14...♗g6 15.♖fc1 ♖fd8 16.♗d4 ♗xd4 17.♕xd4 c5=.

7...♕c8!

I do not like 7...♕b6 because of the dull endgame arising after 8.♕xb6 axb6 9.♗b5 ♘d7 10.h3! (10.♘e5 only trades another piece) 10...♗e7 11.g4 ♗c2 12.0-0 White's pieces are more active, and he could open the centre at an opportunity.



White can now open the centre or advance on the kingside. Important continuations are:

a) 8.♗b5 a6 9.♗xc6+ bxc6 10.h3 ♗e7 11.0-0 0-0=.

b) 8.c4 cxd4

b1) 9.♘xd4 dxc4!

It is essential to take on c4 while our c6-knight is still alive. That eliminates 10.♘xc4? owing to 10...♗b4+.

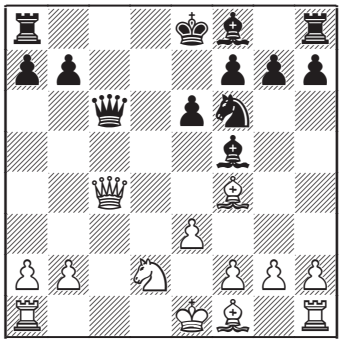
10.♕xc4

10.♗xc4 ♘xd4 11.exd4 a6 12.♖c1 ♕d7= has no venom.

10...♘xd4

10...e5 11.♗xe5 ♘xe5 12.♕b5+ ♘c6 13.♕xf5 ♘xd4 14.♕xc8+ ♖xc8 15.exd4 ♗b4 should be drawn – 16.♗b5+ ♔e7 17.a3 ♗a5 18.♔e2 ♖hd8 19.♖hc1 ♖xc1 20.♖xc1 ♖xd4=.

11.♕xd4 ♕c6 12.♕c4



12...♕xc4

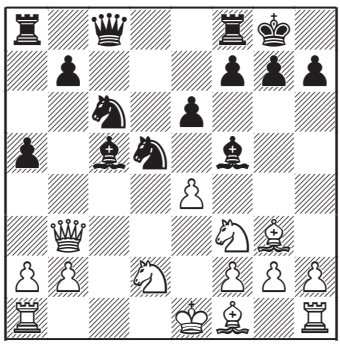
Sedlak claims that 12...♘d5?! 13.♕xc6+ bxc6 14.♗g3 ♘b4 is equal, but only White could win after 15.e4! ♘c2+ 16.♔d1 ♘xa1 17.exf5 ♖d8 18.♔c1 exf5 19.♗e5±.

13.♗xc4 a6. White is ahead in development, but 14.f3 b5 15.♗b3 ♗d3 16.♔f2 a5 17.♖hc1 (17.a4 ♗b4) 17...a4 allows Black to hold.

b2) 8...a5!?, enabling ...♗b4, requires more difficult decisions from White: 9.dxc5

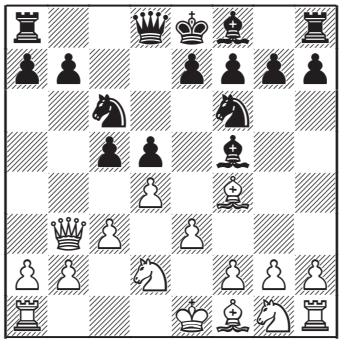
9.♕a4!? is a more solid retort. After 9...cxd4 10.♘xd4 ♗b4 11.♖d1 Black has two ways of obtaining a complex fight where his active knights balance the opponet's bishop pair: 11...0-0 12.♘xf5 exf5 13.a3 ♗xd2+ 14.♖xd2 d4 15.♗d3 dxe3 16.fxe3 ♖e8 17.0-0 g6∞ and 11...dxc4 12.a3 ♗xd2+ 13.♖xd2 c3 14.bxc3 0-0 15.♘xf5 exf5 16.♗d3 ♖d8 17.♕c2 ♕e6 18.0-0 ♘e5 19.♗e2 ♖xd2 20.♕xd2 ♘e4 21.♕b2 b6 22.♖d1 h6=.

9...♗xc5 10.cxd5 ♘xd5 11.♗g3 0-0!? 12.e4



12...♗xe4 13.♘xe4 ♗b4+ 14.♘ed2 ♗xd2+ 15.♔xd2 a4 16.♕a3 e5. The computer can make a draw here, but OTB White's task is not easy.

c) 8.♘h4 ♗e4! 9.f3 ♗g6 10.g4 (or 10.♘xg6 hxg6 11.g4 ♗e7 10...♗e7 11.♘xg6 hxg6 with mutual chances. See **Game 20** Sapis-Korneev, Cappelle-la-Grande 2004.



6...♕d7!

6...♕b6 is thematically met by 7.dxc5 ♕xb3 8.axb3 e5 9.♗g3 ♗xc5 10.♘gf3 and Black's central pawns are weak – 10...♘d7 11.b4 ♗d6 12.♘d4 ♘xd4 13.exd4 f6 14.♗e2±.

7.♘gf3

7.dxc5 is less efficient with queens, since we can use our strongest piece to protect the central pawn pair – 7...e5 8.♗g3 ♗xc5 9.♘gf3 ♕e7 10.♗b5 ♗d6 11.c4 a6 12.cxd5=.

7...c4 8.♕d1

8.♕b5 is a weird attempt to trade queens via b6-c7. At the same time White is planning b3.

The safest retort is to stabilise our space advantage with 8...♕c8 9.♘e5 a6 10.♕b6 ♘xe5 11.♗xe5 ♘d7 12.♕c7 b5 13.a4 e6=. More ambitious is to switch to tactics by:

8...e6 9.b3 a6 10.♕b6 cxb3 11.axb3 ♕c8!? intending to win a piece after 12.♗e2 g5 13.♘xg5 e5 14.♗xe5 ♘d7 15.♕c7 f6. Although White obtains 3 pawns, our chances are at least not worse and play is very tangled.

8...e6 9.♗e2

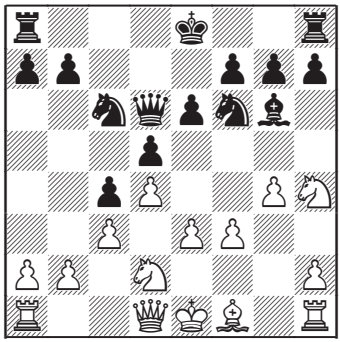
A major alternative is 9.♘h4 ♗e4

By provoking f3, we deprive the h4-knight of retreat squares. That will force a further weakening – g4, which will saddle White with a backward pawn on h3. Compare it with 9...♗g6 10.♗e2 b5 11.♘xg6 hxg6 12.♕c2 ♗d6 13.♗xd6 ♕xd6 14.h3, where our semi-open h-file is useless.

10.f3

10.♘xe4 ♘xe4 11.♘f3 b5 12.♕c2 ♗d6 was comfortable for Black in Vorobiev-Moiseenko, Kazan 2017.

10...♗g6 11.g4 ♗d6 12.♗xd6 ♕xd6



White's pieces are passive and do not support his advanced pawns. In Pakleza-

Jarmula, Szklarska Poreba 2013, he made a serious positional mistake – 13.g5?! ♘d7 14.♘xg6 hxg6 15.f4. Of course, it is wrong to close the position having a bishop vs. a knight. 15...b5 16.♕e2 ♘e7 would have promised Black an initiative on the queenside.

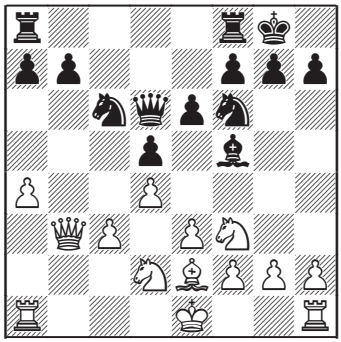
13.e4 is much more natural.

Then 13...♘g8 14.♗e2 ♘ge7 stops White's offensive, but Black could pose more problems with:

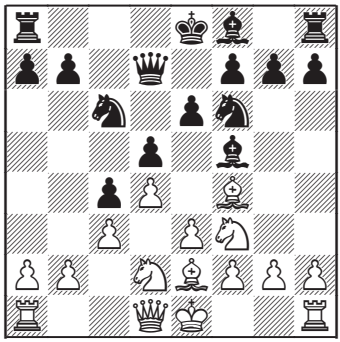
13...e5!? 14.exd5 ♘xd5 15.♘xc4 ♕e7 16.♘xg6 hxg6 17.dxe5 ♕h4+ 18.♔d2 ♖d8 19.♕e1 ♕g5+ 20.♔c2 b5⇄. The game may finish in a draw by perpetual check after 21.h4 ♕f4 22.♘d6+ ♔e7 23.♕e4 ♕xe4+ 24.♘xe4 ♘e3+ 25.♔b3 ♘a5+ 26.♔b4 ♘c6+ 27.♔b3, since 27.♔xb5?? ♖d5+! 28.♔xc6 ♖b8! traps the king in a mating net.

9.b3 is dubious owing to 9...♗a3, so White should play first:

9.a4 ♗d6 10.♗xd6 ♕xd6 11.b3 cxb3 12.♕xb3 0-0 13.♗e2



I have seen Prohaszka recently opting for this plan (although Black lost a tempo on 8...h6 in that game). he then pushed a4-a5 and c3-c4. The extra tempo gives us the pleasant choice between 13...♘a5 14.♕b5 b6= and 13...♖fc8 14.a5 ♕d8 15.♕a3 b6 16.axb6 axb6 17.♕b2 ♖xa1+ 18.♕xa1 ♘a5 and White will never achieve c4. For instance, 19.0-0 ♘e8 20.♘e5 ♘d6, followed up by ...f6.



9...♗e7

We should not spend a tempo on 9...h6 as White will enjoy some initiative after 10.♘e5 ♘xe5 11.♗xe5 ♗e7 12.b3 cxb3 13.♕xb3! (13.axb3 0-0=) 13...0-0 14.0-0. This line is a hint to bolster our c4-pawn with:

9...b5. Indeed, it is a good option, e.g. 10.0-0 ♗d6 11.♘e5 ♕c7 12.g4 ♗g6 13.♘xg6 hxg6 14.♗g3 0-0 15.♔g2=.

We should always be ready to counter-attack in the centre with...e5 so our knight should not leave c6. For instance, 15...b4?! would be premature due to 16.cxb4 ♘xb4 17.g5 ♘h7 18.♘f3,

intending to meet 18...♘c6 by 19.b3!.

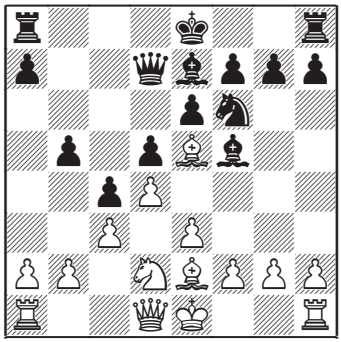
The best solution is:

15...♖ab8 16.g5 ♘h7 17.♗xd6 ♕xd6 18.h4 e5!=.

10.♘e5

10.♘h4 should not be of any concern to us – we are fully developed and have a clear plan on the queenside – 10...b5=. The thematic 10...♗e4 11.♘xe4 ♘xe4 12.♘f3 ♗d6 is also good.

10...♘xe5 11.♗xe5 b5!?



It transpires that we are not forced to define our king's position yet. The game Berkes-Thorhallsson, Reykjavik 2014, reached a messy position after 11...0-0 12.g4 ♗g6 13.h4 ♕b5 14.♗xf6 gxf6 15.h5 ♗d3 16.♗xd3 cxd3, when 17.♘b3 e5 18.g5 e4 19.gxf6 ♗xf6 is double-edged. White could win a pawn with 17.♕b3 ♕c6 18.♘f3 b5 19.♕d1 b4 20.♕xd3, but Black's pressure evens the chances.

12.g4 ♗g6 13.g5 ♘e4 14.♗xg7 ♖g8 15.♗h6 ♘xg5 16.♖g1 f6 17.♗xg5 fxg5 18.♘f3 ♗f6 19.♘e5 ♗xe5 20.dxe5 ♕e7∞

A sharp fight is ahead. Our king will stay on the f-file, ...♖b8 will support ...b5-b4, while White's only active idea seems to be f3, e4. Play might continue 21.♕d4 ♔f7 22.f3 b4.

B. 4.♘f3 ♘f6

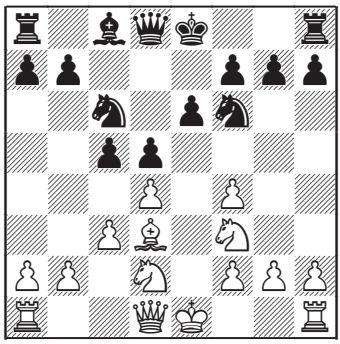
Another approach against the early ♘f3 is to pin the knight with 4...♗g4.

5.c3

White has tried many other ideas here.

The only fifth move which brings White a positive score in my database is 5.♘bd2. The absence of c3 suggests 5...♕b6 as the most principled retort.

We could also reach positions from Chapter 5 with 5...e6!? 6.c3 (6.♗b5 ♗d7) 6...♗d6. The only independent line is 7.♗d3 ♗xf4 8.exf4.

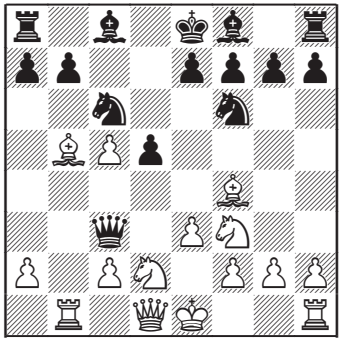


We do not have the plan with ...b6 I recommended, since the knight is already on c6. However, Black's task is even simpler here thanks to the tactical trick 8...♕b6! 9.♕b3 (9.♖b1?! cxd4 10.cxd4 0-0 11.♘b3 ♘b4 is in Black's favour.) 9...♕c7 10.dxc5 ♕xf4=.

Karjakin, Topalov, and many other GMs prefer 5...cxd4 6.exd4 ♗f5 7.c3 e6 8.♕b3 ♕c8, but I treat this position without the exchange on d4 – see line A. Unfortunately, the immediate 5...♗f5 does not transpose, as White has 6.dxc5!? e6 7.♘d4, taking the f5-bishop.

Finally, if you prefer to insure yourself against any sharp home preparation, but still preserve tension, you could choose 5...♗g4 6.c3 e6 – see **Game 21** Naiditsch-Meier, Karlsruhe 2017.

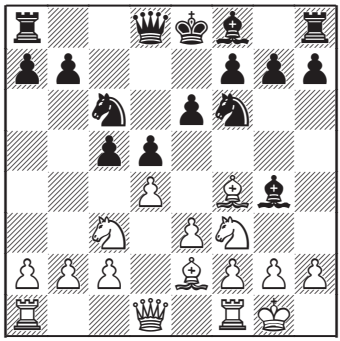
6.dxc5 ♕xb2 7.♖b1 ♕c3 8.♗b5



Now both 8...e6 and 8...g6 offer Black fair chances. See **Game 22** Böhme-Buzek, Lechenicher SchachServer, 2013.

5.♘c3 is a slightly improved version of 3.♘c3, since the inclusion of ♘f3 ♘f6 is in White's favour. That is due to the fact that in some lines Black would have preferred to develop his knight on e7, as I noted in the beginning of this chapter.

A good model to follow is the game Torre-So, Manila 2011: 5...♗g4 6.♗e2 e6 7.0-0



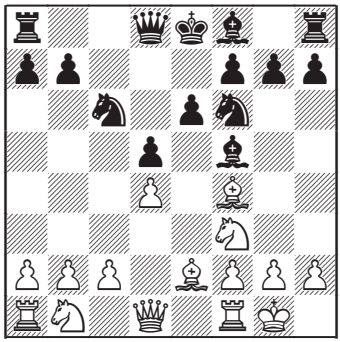
7...♗xf3 8.♗xf3 cxd4 9.exd4 ♗d6 10.♗g5 ♗e7=.

5.♗b5?! ♕a5+ 6.♘c3 ♘e4 damages White's pawn structure.

5.dxc5 e6 6.a3 ♗xc5 7.c4 0-0 offers Black a clear extra tempo over one of the main lines of the Queen's Gambit with ♗f4.

5.♗e2 counts mostly on 5...♕b6 6.♘c3, although 6...c4 is playable.

Perhaps 5...cxd4 6.exd4 ♗f5 7.0-0 e6 is the most solid option.



After 8.c3, White could choose between 8...♗d6, 8...♗e7, and even 8...♘e4,

followed up by 9...♗d6.

5...♕b6

5...♗f5 is questionable owing to 6.dxc5.

You can improve on the above line with 5...♗g4 which is in many aspects similar to the schemes with ...♗f5, only 6.dxc5?! does not work in view of 6...e5. Instead White answers 6.♘bd2 e6 7.♕b3 ♕c8 – see **Game 21** Naiditsch-Meier, Karlsruhe 2017.

5...e6 6.♘bd2 ♗d6 could still transpose to Chapter 5.

On the contrary, 5...g6 only looks similar to Chapter 1, but the knight on c6 mars the picture, since the c5-pawn is hanging in a number of variations.

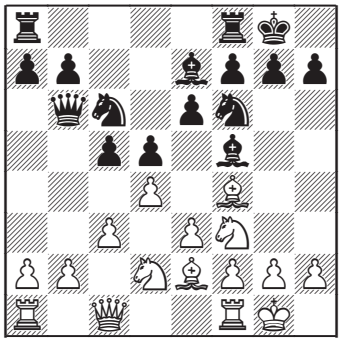
6.♕b3

This is the big main line, but I'm not sure it is better than the humble:

6.♕c1 ♗f5. Black preserves the option of opening the c-file with...cxd4. That deprives White of active plans on the kingside. 7.♘bd2 e6

7...cxd4!? 8.exd4 ♖c8 is also a promising set-up.

8.♗e2 (8.♘h4 ♗e4) 8...♗e7 (8...♖c8!?) 9.0-0 0-0

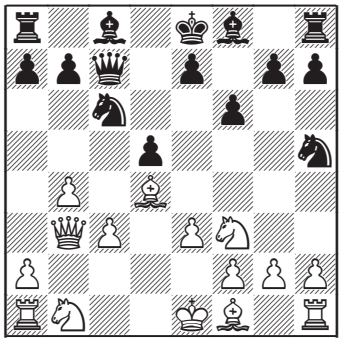


Black's queen is more active, but White does not have weaknesses. The game might continue 10.♘h4 ♗e4 11.f3 (11.♘xe4?! ♘xe4 12.♘f3 g5 13.♗g3 f5↑) 11...♗g6 12.♘xg6 hxg6=.

6.♕c2 invites Black to play 6...♗f5? when White has 7.dxc5!

6...g6 is a natural move, but you should still avoid ...♗f5 – 7.♘bd2 ♗g7! (mind the little trick 7...♗f5 8.dxc5!) 8.h3 (8.♗e2 0-0 9.0-0 ♘h5 10.♗g5 h6 11.♗h4 ♗f5 with slight pressure) 8...0-0 9.♗e2 ♘d7 10.0-0 e5=.

Perhaps simplest is 6...♘h5! 7.♗e5 (7.♗g3 ♘xg3 8.hxg3 g6) 7...f6 8.dxc5 (8.♗g3 cxd4 9.exd4 e5) 8...♕xc5 9.♗d4 ♕a5 10.b4 ♕c7 11.♕b3

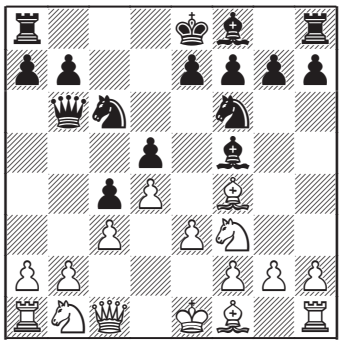


11...e5! 12.♕xd5 exd4 13.♕xh5+ g6 14.♕h4 dxe3 15.fxe3 ♗f5 16.♗b5 0-0-0 with an active bishop pair.

6...c4 7.♕c2

7.♕xb6?! axb6 is perfect for Black if ♗b5 is impossible – 8.a3 b5 9.♘bd2 b4 or 8.♘a3 ♘a7 9.♗e2 ♗f5 10.♘h4 ♗d7.

7...♗f5! 8.♕c1



8...e6

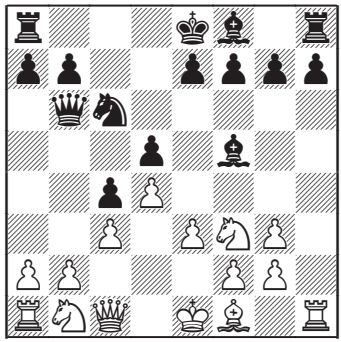
8...♘h5 is much less popular. Black kills the enemy bishop, but the resulting position is closed and roughly balanced:

9.♗g3

The other retreats allow Black to gain space: 9.♗e5 f6 10.♗g3 e5 11.♗e2 (11.♘bd2 0-0-0 12.♗e2 exd4 13.♘xd4 ♘xd4 14.cxd4 ♘xg3 15.hxg3 ♔b8∓) 11...0-0-0 (or 11...♘xg3 12.hxg3 exd4 13.♘xd4 ♘xd4 14.cxd4 ♗b4+∓, Ider-Wagner, Chartres 2017) 12.♘bd2 exd4∓;

9.♗g5 f6 (9...h6 10.♗h4 g5 11.♗g3 ♘xg3 12.hxg3 ♗g7 13.♘bd2 ♖c8 14.♗e2 0-0∓) 10.♗h4 g5 11.♗g3 e5 12.dxe5 ♘xg3 13.hxg3 ♘xe5∓.

9...♘xg3 10.hxg3



10...h6 11.♘bd2 e6 12.♗e2 ♗e7 13.♗d1=.

9.♘bd2 ♗e7 10.♗e2

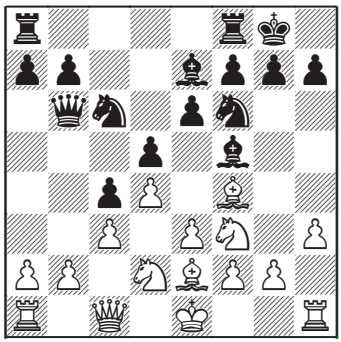
10.♘h4 does not achieve to kill the bishop, as 10...♗e4 11.f3? ♗d3 12.♗xd3 cxd3∓ is awful for White. Young Kamsky chose 11.♗e2 0-0 and acknowledged his mistake by going back – 12.♘hf3 ♗g6=.

10...0-0 11.h3

I played 11.b3?! against Artemiev in the World blitz championship 2013, but it only offered Black an active plan on the

queenside after 11...cxb3 12.axb3 ♖fc8, threatening ...♘b4.

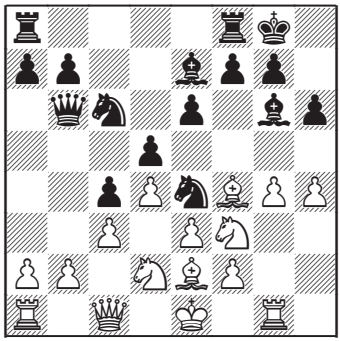
11.0-0 ♖fc8= will transpose to the main line, but 11...♘h5 is also an option – 12.♗e5 f6 13.♗g3 ♘xg3 14.hxg3 ♗g6!, keeping the bishop pair. (Pakleza-Macieja, Warsaw 2010, saw 14...♕c7?! 15.♘h4 b5? 16.♘xf5 exf5, when 17.a4 a6 18.b3 would have gained the initiative.)



11...♖fc8

A standard regrouping of the major pieces. Black's plan is ...♕d8, followed up by ....b5.

Another popular set-up involves 11...h6!?. It is mostly a matter of taste whether to spend a tempo on this prophylactic move. As I noted before, 12.b3 cxb3 13.axb3 ♖fc8 is promising for Black. The attempt for a direct attack with 12.g4 ♗g6 13.♖g1 ♘e4 14.h4 should not disturb us as White's pieces, and especially his queen, are passive. A safe retort would be:



14...♕d8 15.g5 h5, but Black could also launch a counter-attack with 14...e5! 15.dxe5 ♘c5 16.g5 h5 17.♔f1 ♖ae8 18.♔g2 ♗d8, regaining the e5-pawn.

12.0-0

The acid test of Black's set-ups without ...h6 is 12.♘h4 ♗e4

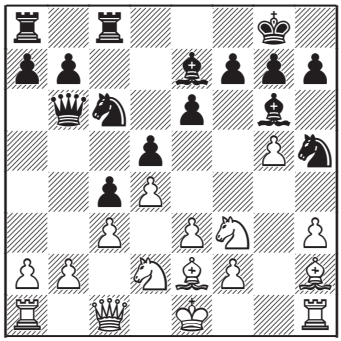
12...♗d3 13.♗xd3 cxd3 is too committing. Although the computer finds it equal, the d3-pawn would be a cause of constant concern for us.

13.♘xe4 ♘xe4 14.♘f3 ♗d6=.

12.g4 ♗g6! 13.g5 is another principled try.

13.♘h4 ♗e4 14.♘hf3 does not necessarily lead to a repetition. Black can play on with 14...♕d8.

13...♘h5!? (13...♘e4 14.h4 ♗f5∞) 14.♗h2



14...f6! 15.♖g1 fxg5 16.♘xg5 ♗xg5 17.♖xg5 ♘f6⇄.

12...♕d8

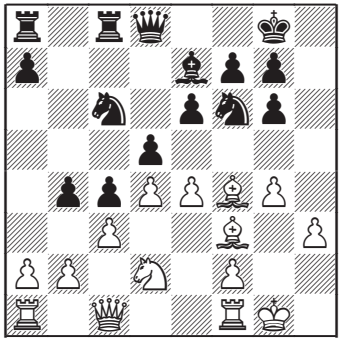
This is consistent with our previous play, but White's timid last move encourages 12...h6!?. We can no longer fear a pawn storm against our king. See **Game 22** Lazic-Nabaty, Belgrade 2015. It is a model example of Black's plan in this pawn structure.

13.g4

13.♘e5 ♘xe5 14.♗xe5 b5∓ is a onesided game.

13.♘h4 ♗e4 14.f3 ♗d3∓ leaves the h4-knight hanging.

13...♗g6 14.♘h4 b5 15.♘xg6 hxg6 16.♗f3 b4 17.e4



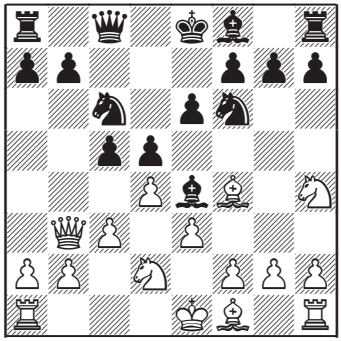
Both sides have realised their plans. It is obvious that Black's play is much more straightforward and effective. He could now thrust forward his a-pawn – 17...a5!, intending ...a4-a3. 17...dxe4 18.♘xe4 ♘d5 19.♖d1 a5∓ is also pleasant for him.

Chapter 6. 1.d4 d5 2.Bf4 c5 Annotated Games

20. Sapis – Korneev

Cappelle-la-Grande 01.03.2004

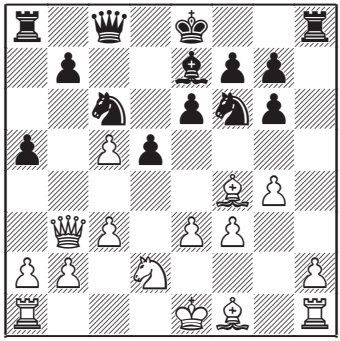
1.d4 d5 2.♗f4 c5 3.e3 ♘c6 4.c3 ♘f6 5.♘d2 ♗f5 6.♘gf3 e6 7.♕b3 ♕c8 8.♘h4 ♗e4!



8...♗g6 is sound, but passive. By provoking f3, we create imbalances which we'll try to exploit in future. Of course, White might attempt to avoid f3 by 9.♗g5, but we'll keep the tension with 9...♗e7 10.♘xe4 (10.dxc5 0-0) 10...♘xe4 11.♗xe7 ♘xe7 12.♗b5+ ♘c6. Our aim here is to gain more space with ...c4 so 13.♕c2 looks logical. 13...a6 14.♗d3 f5 15.f3 ♘f6 16.g4 c4 17.♗e2 g5 18.♘g2 fxg4 19.fxg4 ♕c7 20.0-0-0 0-0-0∞.

9.f3 ♗g6 10.♘xg6 hxg6 11.g4 ♗e7

The first important decision in this game. It is connected with a pawn sac since 12.dxc5!? ♗xc5?! 13.0-0-0 e5 14.♕b5± would be a little unpleasant. Fortunately, we can delay recapturing the pawn with 12...a5!



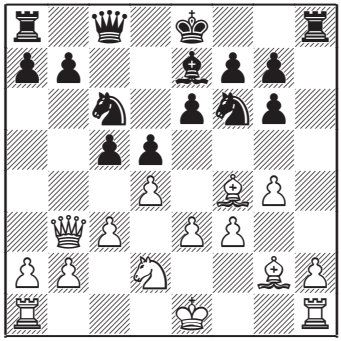
It is easy for White to fall under attack – 13.♗b5 ♘d7 14.0-0-0 a4 15.♕c2 ♖a5 16.♗xc6 bxc6. He should stop the advance of our pawn, but then his castling position will be a bit shaky:

13.a4! ♘d7 14.0-0-0 ♘xc5 15.♕c2 ♕d8 16.♔b1 ♗d6 17.♗xd6 ♕xd6 18.♘e4 ♕e7 19.♘xc5 ♕xc5 20.♕f2 ♘a7 and the threat of ...b5 offers enough counterplay – 21.♕d2 ♖b8 22.e4 dxe4 23.♕d7+ ♔f8 24.fxe4 ♘c6=. We have a nice square on e5 for our knight.

In the correspondence game Dos Reis-Bowyer, ICCF 2008, Black obtained a decent position with the prophylactic 11...♘d7 12.♗g3 a6 13.♗g2 ♗e7, but why to remove a piece from the centre without a serious reason?!

12.♗g2

A strange move at first sight – it is unnatural to put a bishop behind its own pawns. White's choice betrays an intention to keep the king on f2 or g1, and an extra piece around it would be reassuring.



12...a6?!

Such a move would have made sense if White's bishop were still on f1 and could go to b5. The game shows that Black was planning ...b5, but we do not need ...a6 in order to push it.

It was time to devise a plan. Black can opt for ...c4, ...b5, but that would give White a free hand in the centre. Stronger is ...cxd4, followed by a minority attack with ...b5-b4. In all events he needs to exchange the g3-bishop to gain access to b8. Thus his first steps should be 12...♕d7 13.♗g3 cxd4 14.exd4 ♗d6. If White takes 14.cxd4, we play the same 14...♗d6 and probably ...g5. In this symmetrical structure we might not need ...b5 at all.

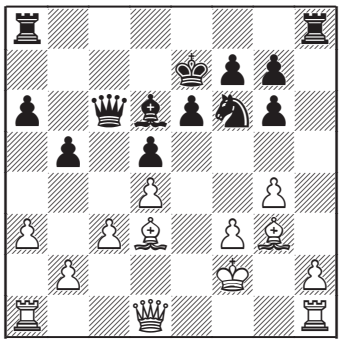
13.♗g3 b5 14.a3?!

This apparently aims to prevent 14.0-0 c4 15.♕c2 b4, but the whole Black's concept of closing the flank is wrong. White would bust his fragile construction with 16.b3 or 16.e4. Instead of 14...c4?!, Black should castle 14...0-0 and fight for the dark squares with ...g5 and ...e5 at an opportunity.

14...♘a5 15.♕d1 cxd4 16.exd4 ♘c4 17.♘xc4 ♕xc4?!

Why not 17...bxc4∓ ?!

18.♗f1 ♕c6 19.♗d3 ♗d6 20.♔f2 ♔e7



Another option was 20...♘d7 21.♕e2 ♘b6 22.♔g2 ♘c4 23.f4∞.

The king move sets up the positional trap of fixing the h2-pawn, which White could have prevented with 21.♔g2!.

21.♕e2? ♖h3! 22.♖ag1?

White should have assumed a passive, but firm stand with 22.♖hg1.

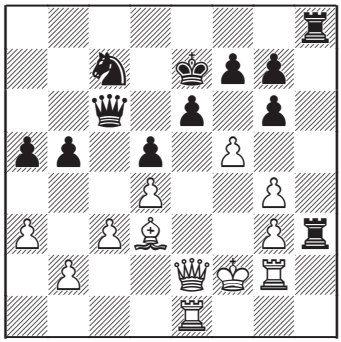
22...♖ah8 23.♖g2 ♘e8?!

It seems that Korneev does not trust his technique too much, so he prefers to keep the pressure with even material. 23...♗xg3+ 24.♖xg3 ♖xh2+ was a clear pawn up. After the text, White gets the chance to correct his mistake on move 22.

24.♖e1 ♘c7?!

It was essential to stop f4 with 24...g5 25.♕d2 f6.

25.f4 a5 26.f5 ♗xg3+ 27.hxg3



27...b4?!

Black fails to adapt to the new reality. Instead of playing to convert an extra pawn, he should think about defence. A good solution was 27...gxf5 28.gxf5 ♖8h6.

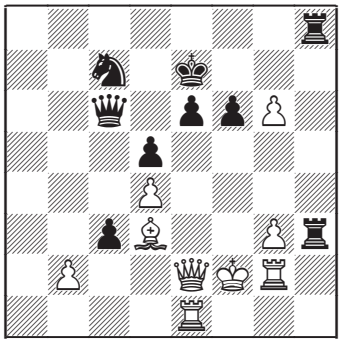
28.axb4 axb4 29.fxg6 f6?

Sheer panic. 29...fxg6 30.♕e5 bxc3 31.♕xg7+ ♔d8 was nearly equal, and even 29...bxc3 30.gxf7 ♖f8 31.♕e3 e5! was tenable.

30.g5+– bxc3 31.gxf6+ gxf6

The winning idea here is to bring the passive rook at g2 to the queenside with 32.♕g4! ♖3h6 33.♔f3!!+–.

White misses his chance and the game sets off for a draw.

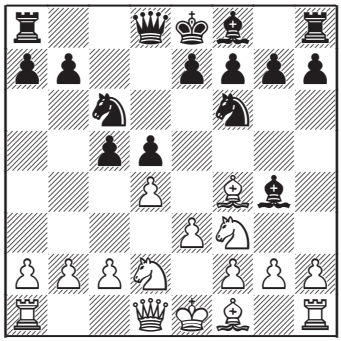


32.♕c2? ♖3h5 33.♕xc3 ♕xc3 34.bxc3 ♖g5 35.g4 ♔d6 36.♖e3 e5 37.dxe5+ fxe5 38.♗f5 ♘e6 39.♔g3 ♘f4 40.♖h2 ♖xh2 41.♔xh2 ♘xg6 42.♗xg6 ♖xg6 43.♔g3 ♖g8 44.♔h4 ♖h8+ 45.♔g5 e4 46.c4 ♔e5 47.cxd5 ♖g8+ 48.♔h5 ♔f4 49.♖e1 ♖g5+ 50.♔h6 ♖xg4 51.d6 ♖g8 52.♖f1+ ♔e3 53.d7 ♔e2 54.♖f7 e3 55.♖e7 ♖e8 56.♔g6 ♔d2 ½-½

21. Naiditsch – Meier

Karlsruhe 19.4.2017

1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.♗f4 c5 4.e3 ♘c6 5.♘bd2 ♗g4



White's move order is specifically aimed against 5...♗f5, which would be met by 6.dxc5. However, Black's bishop has a backup route!

6.c3 e6

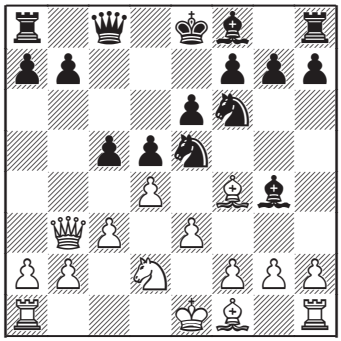
Meier had previous bad experience with 6...♕b6?! 7.dxc5! ♕xc5 8.♕b3 and he went on to lose to Kramnik in 2015.

7.♕b3 ♕c8

You have learned from the previous sections of this chapter that I disapprove of 7...♕b6 when White's bishop is able to reach b5 – 8.♕xb6 axb6 9.♗b5±. 7...♕d7 is also dubious owing to 8.♗b5.

8.h3

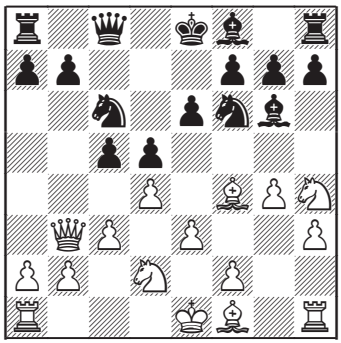
Kramnik, Karjakin and yours truly had opted for 8.♘e5 ♘xe5:



I chose 9.dxe5 against Mads Andersen in 2016, when the most critical answer is 9...♘d7 10.e4 b5.

9.♗xe5 c4 10.♕c2 ♗f5 11.♕d1 is a typical London position with mutual chances.

8...♗h5 9.g4 ♗g6 10.♘h4



10...♗e4

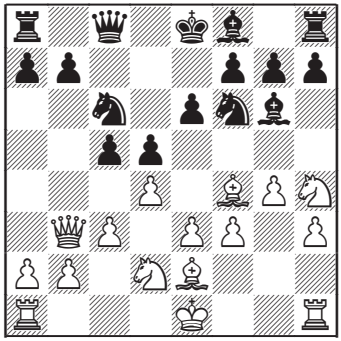
A rather provocative decision. Black's queen is a little awkward, the opponent will soon get the bishop pair advantage. All that suggests to drain out the dynamic with 10...cxd4!? 11.exd4 and complete development without any risks. Curiously, the same position has arisen several times

with a clear tempo up for White. For instance, Parligras-Solodovnichenko, Konya 2016 saw 4.e3 cxd4 5.exd4 ♘c6 6.c3 ♗f5 7.♘bd2 e6 8.♕b3 ♕c8 9.♘h4 ♗g4 10.h3 ♗h5 11.g4 ♗g6 – and the game finished quickly in a draw after 12.♘xg6 hxg6 13.♗g2 ♗e7 14.0-0 0-0 15.♖fe1 ♕d7 16.a4 ½-½.

In P.Prohaszka-Jo.Horvath, Hungary 2016, Black preferred 10...♘e4 11.♘xg6 ♘xd2 12.♕d1 hxg6 13.♕xd2 ♕d7, but the trade of knights has left his king unprotected and 14.0-0-0 (instead of the harmless 14.♗g2) would have assured White of a promising position.

11.f3 ♗g6 12.♗e2

When we keep the tension in the centre, we should always think of the possible dxc5, especially if the opponent is ahead in development. Here 12.dxc5 ♗xc5 13.♘xg6 hxg6 14.0-0-0 looks dangerous, but Black should hold with 14...e5! 15.♕b5 ♗e7 16.♗g3 d4 17.cxd4 a6 18.♕d3 ♘b4+ 19.♕c4 exd4 20.exd4 ♘xa2+ 21.♔b1 ♘b4.



12...♗e7

Meier is playing with fire. He invites White to take on c5 and castle long, and that would give him an initiative.

Our thematic plan in such positions is 12...c4 13.♕d1 ♕d8, planning to exchange the bishops from d6.

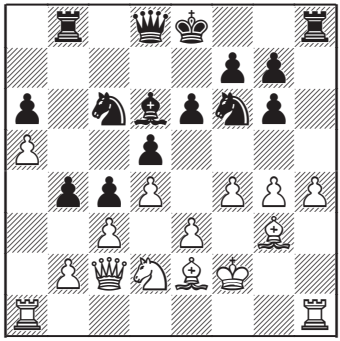
13.♗g3?! a6 14.♔f2 b5 15.♕d1 ♕d8 16.a4

The only sharp plan of White is to take on g6 and push h4. Shifting the focus of the game to the queenside perfectly suits Black.

16...b4 17.a5?! c4 18.♘xg6 hxg6 19.h4 ♗d6

Black has finally picked out the right idea and his game is already preferable. Naiditsch continues to act chaotically:

20.f4 ♖b8 21.♕c2



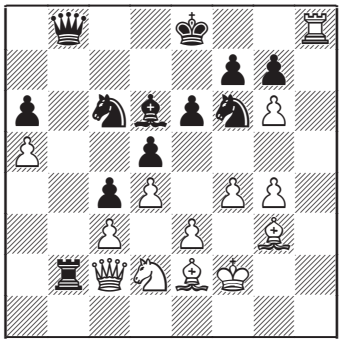
21...♖b5?

White is seemingly preparing e4, but Meier ignores the threat. 21...♘e7!∓ would have discouraged it, leaving Black on top.

After the text, 22.e4! would have changed the character of the game since 22...♘xe4? was bad owing to 23.♘xe4 dxe4

24.♗xc4. Black should concede to 22...♗c7 23.exd5 bxc3 24.bxc3 exd5 25.h5 gxh5 26.g5 ♘g8 27.♗xh5 ♘ge7∞, when the open files would promise White certain compensation for the doomed pawn at a5.

22.h5? bxc3 23.bxc3 ♕b8? (23...gxh5 24.g5 ♘g8∓) 24.hxg6 ♖xh1 25.♖xh1 ♖b2 26.♖h8+



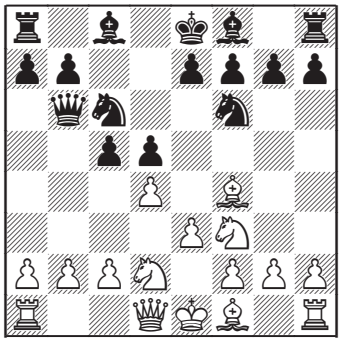
Now 26...♗f8 would be balanced, but both players were not at their best level. The rest is entertaining, but irrelevant to the opening.

26...♔e7? 27.♖xb8 (27.♕c1+–) **27...♖xc2 28.♖b7+ ♘d7 29.gxf7 ♖xd2 30.♗h4+ ♔f8 31.♖xd7 ♗e7 32.♗xe7+ ♘xe7 33.g5 ♔xf7 34.♖a7 ♖c2 35.♔e1?** (35.♖xa6+–) **35...♖xc3 36.♔d2 ♖a3 37.♗h5+ g6 38.♗xg6+ ♔xg6 39.♖xe7 ♖a2+ 40.♔c3 ♖a3+ 41.♔d2 ♖a2+ 42.♔e1 ♔f5= 43.♔f1 c3 44.♖c7 ♖c2 45.g6 ♔xg6 46.♔e1 ♔f5 47.♔d1 ♖d2+ 48.♔c1 ♖d3 49.♔c2 ♖xe3 50.♖c6 ♖f3 51.♖xa6 ♔e4 52.♖xe6+ ♔xd4 53.a6 ♖f2+ 54.♔b3 ♖b2+ 55.♔a3 ♖b1 56.♖c6 ♔d3 57.a7 ♖a1+ 58.♔b3 d4 59.♖c7 c2 60.♔b2 c1♕+ 61.♖xc1 ♖xa7 62.♖h1 ♖c7 63.f5 ♖c2+ 64.♔b3 ♖f2 65.♖h3+ ♔e4 66.♖h4+ ♔d5 67.♖h8 ♖xf5 68.♔c2 ♔e4 ½-½**

22. Böhme – Buzek

Lechenicher SchachServer, 2013

1.d4 d5 2.♗f4 c5 3.e3 ♘f6 4.♘d2 ♘c6 5.♘gf3 ♕b6



6.dxc5 ♕xb2 7.♖b1 ♕c3 8.♗b5 g6!?

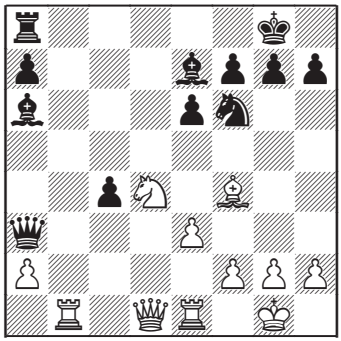
The fianchetto is a rare guest in practical chess, but it performs well in correspondence games.

8...e6 is the main line. As you'll see below, it is viable continuation, too. 9.0-0

9.♘e5 ♗d7

9...♗e7 10.♘e5 ♗d7

Black commonly refrains from 10...♕xc5 in view of 11.c4 0-0 12.♘b3. However, it turns out that he obtains serious compensation for the exchange after 12...♕a3 13.♘xc6 bxc6 14.♗xc6 ♗a6 15.♗xa8 ♖xa8 16.♖e1 dxc4 17.♘d4

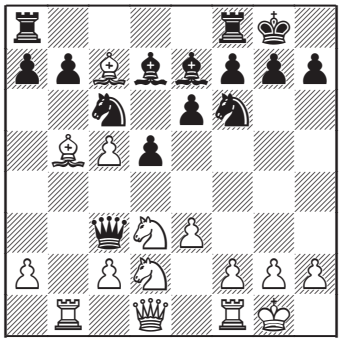


The best move order now is 17...c3 (the game Van Foreest-Brunner,Vaujany 2016, saw 17...♖c8 18.♗e5 c3 but 18.♖b8 would have been slightly better for White) 18.♗e5 ♖c8 19.♗xf6 gxf6 and White cannot avoid the elegant combination 20.♕c2 (or 20.h3 ♗d3! 21.♕xd3 c2 22.♕xa3 cxb1♕ 23.♖xb1 ♗xa3=, although Böhme-Buettner, corr. 2013, went 20...f5 and soon ended in a draw.) 20...♗d3!! 21.♕xd3 c2 22.♕xc2 ♖xc2 23.♘xc2 ♕xa2=. It seems that 10...♕xc5 is a sound alternative.

11.♘d3

Or 11.♘xd7 ♘xd7 12.e4 0-0 (12...a6 13.exd5 axb5 14.dxc6 bxc6 15.♘e4 ♕c4 16.♘d6+ ♗xd6 17.♕xd6 ♕xc5 18.♕c7 ♕b6=) 13.exd5 exd5 14.♘e4 dxe4 15.♕xd7 ♗xc5 16.♕xb7 ♖ac8 17.♔h1 ♗b6=, Cornette-Feuerstack, chess.com 2017.

11...0-0 12.♗c7

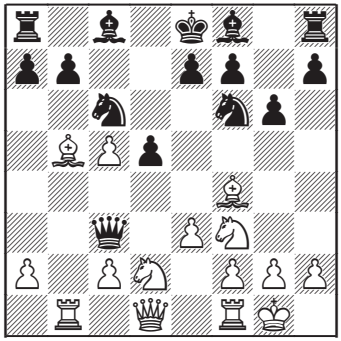


12...b6!

Two top level games saw the weak 12...♘e8?! 13.♖b3 ♕f6 14.♗g3±. The text solves all the problems at once.

13.♖b3 ♕a5 14.c4 ♖ac8 15.cxd5 exd5 16.cxb6 axb6=, Indjic-Fridman, Warsaw 2017.

9.0-0

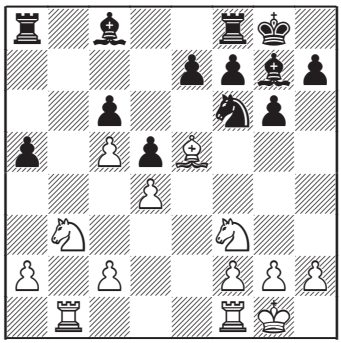


9...♗g7

It is not a good idea to eat the pawn as White will develop a strong initiative after 9...♕xc5?! 10.c4.

10.♘b3 (10.♘d4 ♗d7) 10...0-0 11.♗xc6 bxc6 12.♗e5 ♕c4 13.♕d4 ♕a6

In positions with a bishop vs. a knight we should seek to break the symmetry. Besides, d4 is a nice square for the enemy knights. Therefore, we should consider 13...♕xd4! 14.exd4 a5, taking over the initiative.

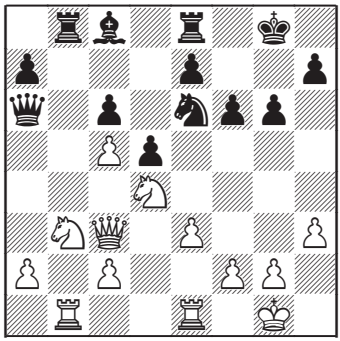


White has enough counterplay after 15.♘bd2 ♗h6 16.♖fe1 ♗f5 17.♗g3 ♖a7 18.♖b6 ♖c8 19.♗b8 ♖a8 20.♗g3= though.

14.h3 ♘e8 15.♗xg7 ♘xg7 16.♕e5

Time to take stock. The c8-bishop does not have clear prospects for now, the c6-pawn is weak. White's major pieces are also more active. Black should devise an accurate defensive set-up in order to neutralise threats like ♕c7, ♘e5, c4.

16...♘e6 17.♕c3 f6 18.♘fd4 ♖b8 19.♖fe1 ♖e8



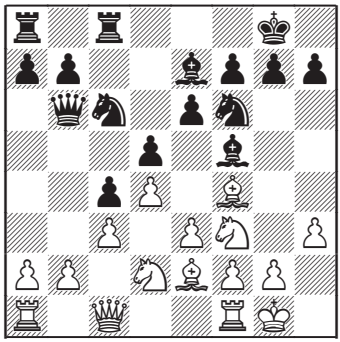
Everything is covered and Black will soon be able to claim full equality. White undertakes a last attempt:

20.♕a5 ♘xd4 21.exd4 ♔f7 22.♕xa6 ♗xa6 23.♘a5 ♖xb1 24.♖xb1 ♖c8 25.f4 ♔e6 26.g4 ½-½

23. Lazic – Nabaty

Belgrade 2015

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 d5 3.♗f4 c5 4.c3 ♘c6 5.e3 ♕b6 6.♕b3 c4 7.♕c2 ♗f5 8.♕c1 e6 9.♘bd2 ♗e7 10.h3 0-0 11.♗e2 ♖fc8 12.0-0



12...h6

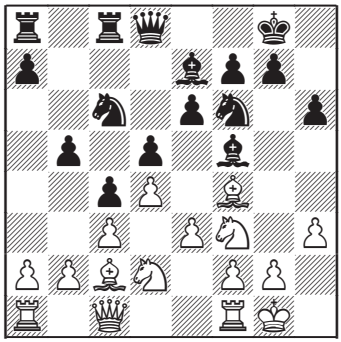
Almost everybody plays here 12...♕d8, which is consistent with Black's previous moves. However, White's phlegmatic development offers us the luxury of spending a tempo on ensuring a retreat square to our bishop.

13.♘e5

Another typical manoeuvre is 13.♗d1 ♕d8 14.♗c2, when we have a choice.

I generally prefer to keep my pawn chain flexible, but 14...♗xc2 15.♕xc2 b5 enables 16.e4. Of course, it does not create any threats as e4-e5 would be a strategic suicide, but it undermines the base of our c4-pawn. A better option is:

14...b5

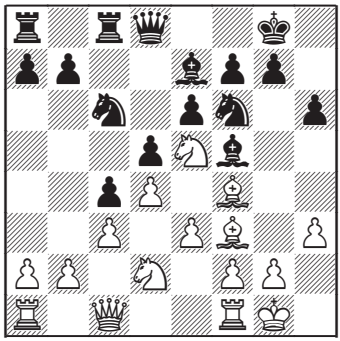


Now the plan with e4 will cost White a tempo – 15.♖e1

15.♗xf5 exf5 would leave White with no plan at all.

15...b4 16.e4 dxe4 17.♘xe4 ♘d5 18.♗d2 ♖ab8, Abdulla-Gagare, Kolkata 2015. Black is clearly ahead in his play.

13...♕d8 14.♗f3



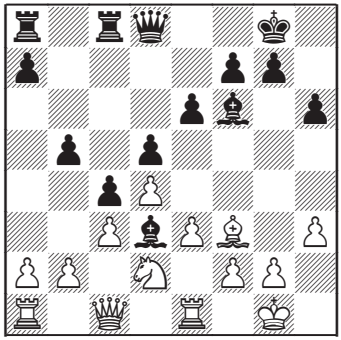
14...♘xe5

The obvious 14...b5 is stronger. It turns out that the tactical threat of ♘dxc4 does not help White – 15.♖e1 b4 16.♘dxc4 bxc3 17.bxc3 ♘xe5 18.♘xe5 ♘e4 with strong pressure.

15.♗xe5

It is difficult to evaluate the position after 15.dxe5!? ♘d7 16.e4 dxe4 17.♘xe4 ♕b6!. White's space advantage is delusive, as the d3-square is weak and easily accessible by a knight from c5 and the f5-bishop. Perhaps White should put his hopes on the bishop pair by 18.♘d6! ♗xd6 19.exd6 ♘c5 20.♖d1 ♘d3 21.♕e3, intending 21...e5 22.♕xb6 axb6 23.g4!=.

15...♗d3 16.♗xf6 ♗xf6 17.♖e1 b5

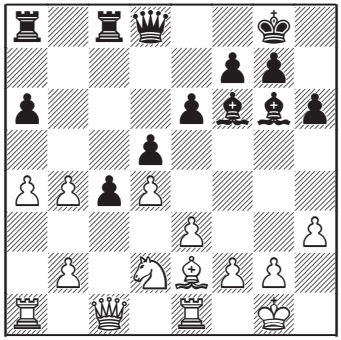


18.♗e2?!

For better or worse, White had to push 18.e4. It would open the e-file and create a target on d5. The game Archangelsky-Rublevsky, Aalborg 1993, went further 18...b4 19.exd5 exd5 20.♘f1 bxc3 21.bxc3 ♕a5 22.♘e3 ♖d8 23.g3 ♗g5 24.h4 ♗xe3 25.♖xe3 ♖ab8 26.♕d2=.

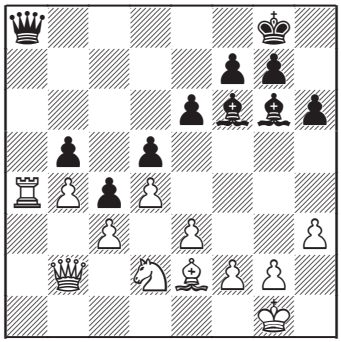
18...♗g6 19.a4

This clarifies the reason behind White's 19th move – he aims at blocking the queenside with b4. However, it has two flaws: the resulting position is unpleasant for him, and, more importantly, Black could cut across this plan by 19...b4! 20.cxb4 a6!!



It transpires that White fails to eliminate the queenside pawns, e.g. 21.♕c3 ♗e7 22.b3 ♕b6 23.b5 axb5 24.axb5 ♕xb5 25.bxc4 ♕b4!, and Black's c-pawn is alive and rushing forth.

19...a6 20.axb5 axb5 21.b4 ♖xa1 22.♕xa1 ♖a8 23.♕b2 ♖a4 24.♖a1 ♕a8 25.♖xa4

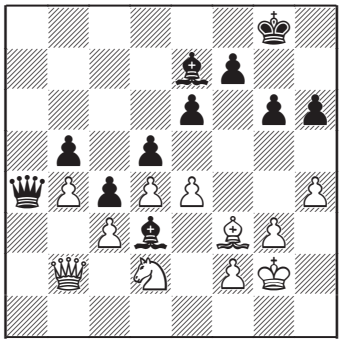


25...♕xa4?

From a practical standpoint, in near-fortress positions one should be eager to unbalance them. 25...bxa4! 26.♕a3 ♗c2, with a further ...e5 in mind, not only created a passer. It also immobilised the white queen – ♕b2? would lose on the spot to ...a3. After the text, White could just

move the king along the first line. That should earn him a draw. Instead, he completely forgot any textbooks he might have read, and opened the centre himself!

26.g3 ♗c2 27.♔g2 g6 28.h4 ♗e7 29.♗f3?! ♗d3 30.e4??

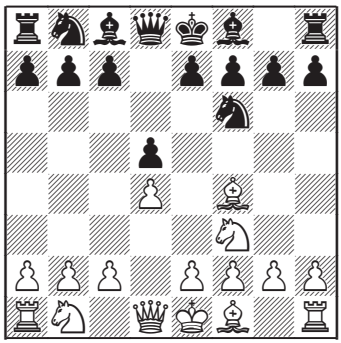


Do not do this, even at home!

30...e5! And the game is suddenly over. **31.exd5 exd4 32.♘e4 dxc3 33.♕xc3 ♗xe4 34.♗xe4 ♕xb4 35.♕d4 ♕c5 36.♕e5 h5 37.♕b8+ ♔g7 38.♕e5+ ♗f6 39.♕b8 b4 40.d6 ♗e5 41.♕c7 ♗xd6 42.♕xc5 ♗xc5 43.♗d5 c3 44.♗b3 ♔f6 45.♔f3 ♔f5 46.♔e2 ♔g4 47.♗xf7 ♔h3 48.♗xg6 b3 49.♗f7 c2 50.♔d2 ♗a3 0-1**

Chapter 7. The Classical London System Main Ideas

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 d5 is the older way of entering the London System. Lately Carlsen, Karjakin and other top players prefer 2.♗f4, which is the subject of our next chapter. I explained the reasons for the decline of the Classical London that arises after **3.♗f4** in Chapter 6.

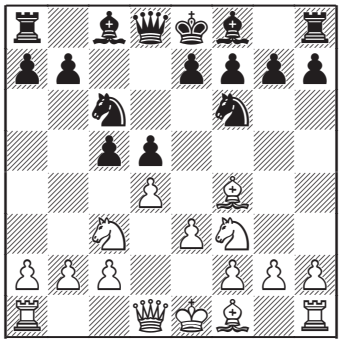


The main argument against this move order is the line 3...c5 4.e3 ♘c6 5.c3 ♕b6.

Chapter 5 provided another way of exploiting the early knight development: 3...e6 4.e3 ♗d6 5.♗g3 0-0 6.♘bd2 c5 7.c3 b6!? (instead of 7...♘c6) and White cannot push e4 at all.

The only small plus of playing ♘f3 early is the system with ♘c3:

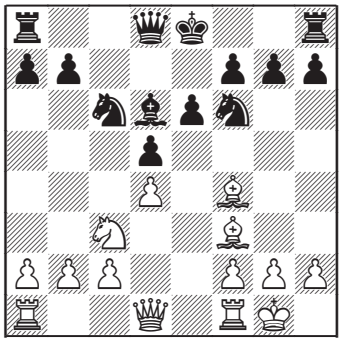
3...c5 4.e3 ♘c6 5.♘c3



The inclusion of ♘f3 ♘f6 might be in White's favour in some lines with ♗b5, when Black's knight would stay better on e7.

In the diagram position the best way to take the sting of White's set-up is to pin and kill the f3-knight. Another link of our plan is to exchange on d4, obtaining a Carlsbad structure in which the c3-knight would be on a wrong place. We could shape all this in the following way:

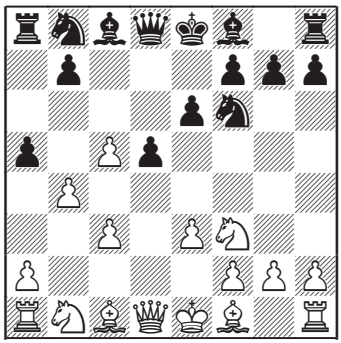
5...♗g4 (or 5...cxd4 first) 6.♗e2 e6 7.0-0 ♗xf3 8.♗xf3 cxd4 9.exd4 ♗d6



Our natural plan in this structure is the minority attack with ...b5 and ...a5.

Another trendy approach after 2.♘f3 d5 is to discourage ...c5 by choosing the tricky move order **3.c3**, having in mind **3...c5 4.dxc5**

The Agile London System generously gives this move a "!", but my analyses suggest that White should play very accurately after it not to become worse. **4...e6 5.b4 a5 6.e3**



The most challenging line now is 6...axb4! 7.cxb4 b6 – see **Game 24** Thompson-Matheis, ICCF 2007.

If you prefer an easier life, you could regain the pawn with 6...b6. This way you avoid positions with two passed pawns on the queenside, which are commonly pleasant for Black, but the cost of mistakes is higher.

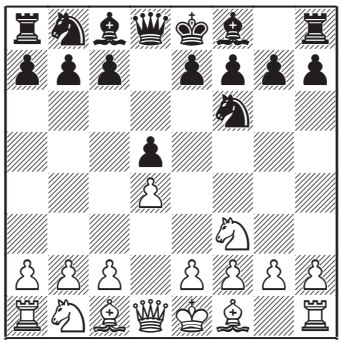
Theoretical status

It seems that The Classical London System is unanimously assessed as completely harmless by modern theory.

First players try completely new ways of treating it. They experiment with 3.c3 or an early ♘c3, but this chapter shows that the ball is still in White's court.

Chapter 7. The Classical London System Step by Step

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 d5

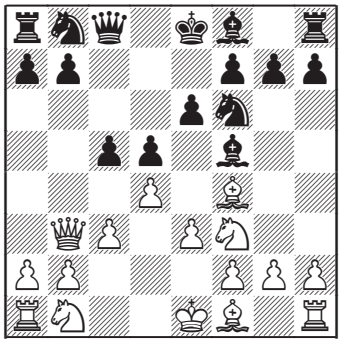


3.♗f4

A modern way to discourage systems with ...c5 is to play first 3.c3.

Then 3...g6 (Chapter 1) and 3...e6 (chapters 4-5), are decent options.

3...♗f5 does not transpose to the main line since 4.♕b3 drags the black queen to c8. Although 4...♕c8 5.♗f4 e6 6.e3 c5



is far from clear, there have been no candidates to test 7.♗xb8 ♖xb8! 8.♗b5+ ♔d8!. I have won a similar position, but with colours reversed (and the corresponding extra tempo, of course).

I suspect that best is 7.c4∞ or 7.♘bd2. The latter transposes to Chapter 6, line A – 6.♘gf3.

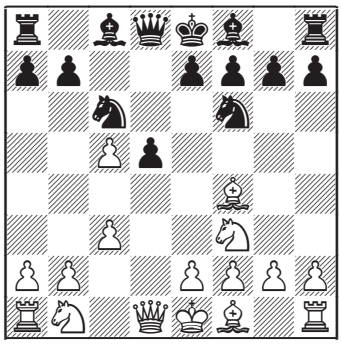
In conclusion, 3...♗f5 deserves serious attention and might be the most principled retort to the ultra-sophisticated 3.c3.

The main idea behind 3.c3 is to meet:

3...c5 by 4.dxc5

Another version of this idea is 4.♗f4 ♘c6 (White should also be prepared to play the Exchange Variation against the Slav after 4...cxd4 5.cxd4. Another fair

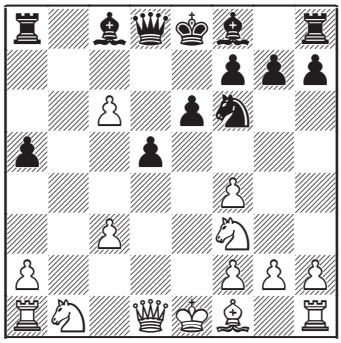
option is 4...♕b6 5.♕b3 c4 6.♕c2 g6=.) 5.dxc5



Black has two promising continuations here:

5...♘e4 brings him nice results, but the simple 6.♘bd2! (6.b4 g6 7.♘fd2 ♗g7 8.♘xe4 dxe4 9.♕xd8+ ♘xd8 10.a4 a5⩲ is easier for Black.) 6...♘xc5 7.b4 ♘e6 8.♗g3 leaves White with the more harmonious pieces.

I faced with White 5...e6! 6.b4 a5 7.b5 (7.♘d4 axb4 8.♘xc6 bxc6 9.cxb4 ♘g4 10.♕d4 ♗e7 11.♕b2 e5 12.♗d2 d4⩱) 7...♘e7 8.e3 ♘g6 9.c6 bxc6 10.bxc6 ♘xf4 11.exf4



It transpires that White has nothing here.

11...♕b6 (11...♗c5!? 12.♗d3 ♕b6) 12.♕b3 ♖b8 (12...♕c7! 13.♗b5 a4 14.♕c2 ♖a5∓ – capturing on a4 loses to ...♕xf4) 13.♘bd2 ♗d6 14.♕xb6 ♖xb6 15.g3. Chances are even, although I went on to win, Kiril Georgiev-Goloshchapov, Dubai 2014.

It seems that the inclusion of ♗f4 ♘c6 is in Black's favour.

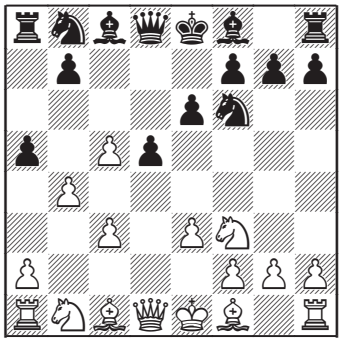
4...e6 5.b4

Or 5.♗e3 a5 (5...♕c7 6.b4 a5) 6.c4 ♘a6 7.cxd5 ♕xd5=.

5...a5 6.e3

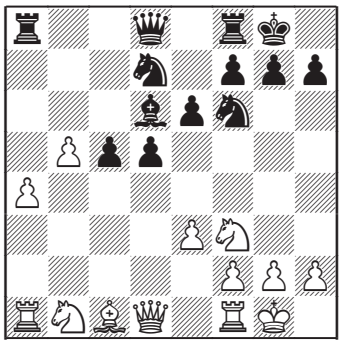
The game Norwood-Wahls, Germany 1993, ended in a quick draw after 6.♕b3 b6! (It is better to preserve the a-pawn) 7.cxb6 ♕xb6 8.♗e3 (8.b5 a4! 9.♕b2 ♘bd7 10.e3 ♗d6 11.♗e2 0-0 12.0-0 ♗b7 13.♕c2, Stefanova-Graf, Recklinghausen 1998, 13...a3! is promising for Black.) 8...♕b7 9.bxa5 ♖xa5 10.♘bd2 (10.♕xb7 ♗xb7) 10...♘bd7 11.♗d4 ♗d6 12.c4 e5 13.♗c3 ♖a3 14.♕xb7 ♗xb7 15.♗b2 ♖a4 16.e3 ♔e7 ½-½.

Similar is 6.♘bd2 axb4 7.cxb4 b6 8.cxb6 ♕xb6 9.a3 ♗xb4=.



6...b6!?

This move equalizes easily. More challenging is 6...axb4! 7.cxb4 b6. The arising Noteboom structure is very tangled and difficult to play with both sides as the cost of mistakes is high. After 8.♗b5+ ♗d7 9.♗xd7+ ♘bxd7 10.a4 bxc5 11.b5 ♗d6 12.0-0 0-0,



White must find a couple of only moves to stay in the game, but if he consolidated, play would be double-edged. Exchanges may charge the white passers with terrible power. See **Game 24** Thompson-Matheis, ICCF 2007.

My suggestion is safer as it prevents the creation of two passed pawns.

7.♗b5+7.a4 bxc5 8.b5 c4∓) 7...♗d7 8.♗xd7+ ♕xd7

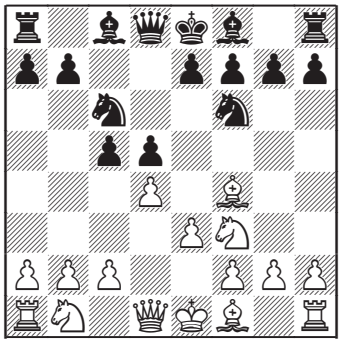
8...♘fxd7 9.b5 ♘xc5 10.0-0 ♘bd7 11.♘bd2 ♕f6 12.♘d4 e5 13.♘c6 ♘b8=.

9.♘e5 (9.cxb6 axb4 10.0-0 ♕c6=) 9...♕a7 10.♕a4+ ♘fd7 11.♘xd7 ♕xd7 12.♕xd7+ ♔xd7. The ending is equal, since Black easily regains the pawn – 13.cxb6 axb4 14.♗b2 bxc3 15.♗xc3 ♘c6 16.a4 ♗b4 17.♗xb4 ♘xb4 18.♔e2 ♖hb8=.

3...c5 4.e3

4.dxc5 has no venom here – 4...e6 5.e3 ♗xc5 6.♗e2 0-0 7.0-0 ♘c6=.

4...♘c6



White has now two moves of independent significance:

A. 5.♘c3 and **B.** 5.♗e2

5.♘bd2 is covered in Chapter 6, line B.

A. 5.♘c3 ♗g4

The battle is for the e5-square, so the pin looks natural. Black often includes 5...cxd4 6.exd4 and only then 6...♗g4 (6...♗f5 7.♗b5). Most likely the game will transpose to the main line after 7.♗e2 or 7.♗b5.

6.♗e2

6.dxc5 e6 7.♘b5 ♖c8 is comfortable for Black after both 8.♗d6 ♘e4 9.♗xf8 ♔xf8 and 8.♘d6+ ♗xd6 9.♗xd6 ♘e4=.

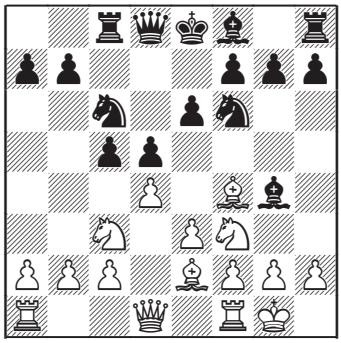
6.♗b5 e6 7.h3 ♗xf3!

Alekhine answered against Nimzowitsch 7...♗h5, but it is a mistake, as the pin ensures an initiative after 8.g4 ♗g6 9.♘e5 ♕b6 10.a4!.

8.♕xf3 cxd4 9.exd4 ♗e7 (9...♗d6!?) 10.0-0 0-0 11.♗xc6 bxc6 12.♘a4 ♕a5 13.b3 ♘e4=.

6...e6 7.0-0 ♗xf3!?

Correspondence players prefer 7...♖c8!?



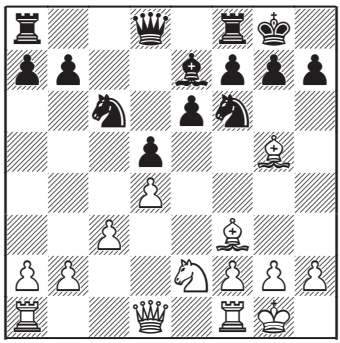
with equal play after 8.♘e5 ♗xe2 9.♘xe2 ♗e7 10.♘xc6 ♖xc6 11.c3 0-0. The text has a sound strategic background. Black aims to trade dark-squared bishop which would free his hands for a minority attack. The game Torre-So, Manila 2011, went further:

8.♗xf3 cxd4 9.exd4 ♗d6 10.♗g5

10.♘e2? ♗xf4 11.♘xf4 ♕b6 12.c4 dxc4 cost White a pawn in M.Popovic-Solak, Valjevo 2011.

10.♗e3 a6 11.♘e2 ♕c7 12.g3 0-0 13.♘c1 b5 14.♘d3 b4 15.♔g2 ♖fc8 was already more pleasant for Black in Kovalev-Onischuk, Khanty-Mansiysk 2017.

10...♗e7 11.♘e2 0-0 12.c3



The most straightforward way now is 12...b5 13.a3 a5 with a balanced game.

B. 5.♗e2

This modest-looking move is better than its appearances. In most lines it is similar to 5.♘c3, only the white knight stands better on d2.

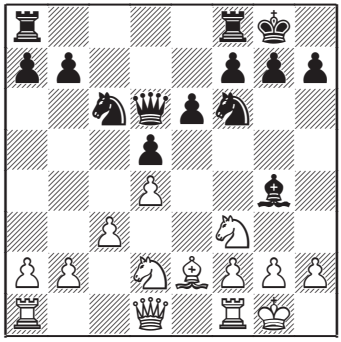
First of all, we cannot choose the plan with 5...e6 6.0-0 ♗d6, since 7.dxc5! ♗xc5 8.c4 0-0 9.♘c3 dxc4 10.♗xc4 a6 11.♖c1 is slightly annoying – White is about 2 tempi ahead in a symmetrical position.

5...♕b6 also lead to a passive position after 6.♘c3! a6 7.0-0 (similar is 7.♘a4 ♕a5+ 8.c3) 7...cxd4 8.exd4 ♗g4 (8...♕xb2? 9.♘a4 ♕b4 10.c4±) 9.♘a4 ♕a7 10.c3 e6 11.b4, occupying the c5-square.

5...cxd4

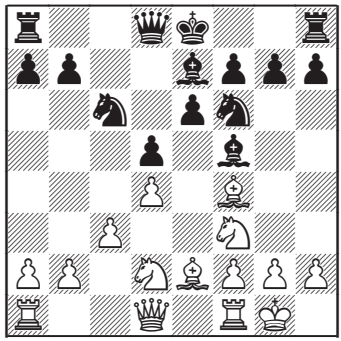
This exchange is indispensable if we want to lead out our bishop to f5.

Another option is 5...♗g4, but I believe that we have only modest chances to win after 6.0-0 e6 7.♘bd2 cxd4 8.exd4 ♗d6 9.♗xd6 ♕xd6 10.c3 0-0.



A typical Carlsbad structure with reversed colours has arisen. However, after 11.♘e5 ♗xe2 12.♕xe2 White has the best of it since the minority attack with ...♖ab8, ...b5 is not effective without bishops. White could meet it by a3, b4, ♘b3-c5.

6.exd4 ♗f5 7.0-0 e6 8.♘bd2 (8.♘h4 ♘h5=) 8...♗e7 9.c3



9...h6!

We need to preserve more pieces. All the games in my database have featured 9...0-0 10.♘h4 ♗g4

> 10...♗e4 11.♘xe4 dxe4 12.g3 ♘d5 13.♘g2 ♘xf4 14.♘xf4 ♗d6 is double-edged, but White possess the cunning 11.g3 first, when the above line does not work.

11.♗xg4 ♘xg4 12.♕xg4 ♗xh4. Chances may be roughly equal, but Black does not have a clear plan.

10.♘e5 0-0 11.♖e1

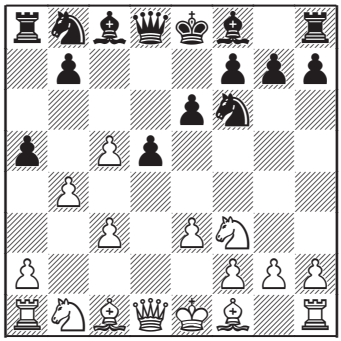
In this complex position Black's chances are in no way worse. He cannot start a minority attack before trading the dark-squared bishops, so his immediate task is to put ...♗d6, for instance: 11...♗d6, ...♕c7. Then he should reevaluate his plans according to the enemy actions.

Chapter 7. The Classical London System Annotated Games

24. Thompson – Matheis

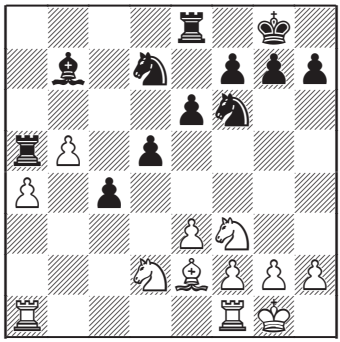
ICCF 2007

1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.e3 c5 4.dxc5 e6 5.b4 a5 6.c3



6...axb4 7.cxb4 b6 8.♗b5+

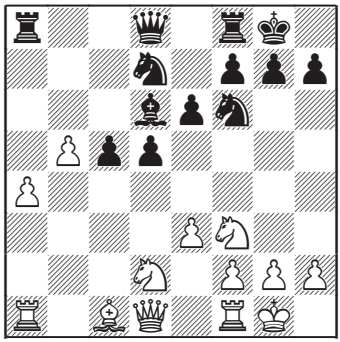
White follows the general rule that exchanges are good with less space. 8.a4 bxc5 9.b5 ♗d6 10.♗b2 ♘bd7 11.♗e2 0-0 12.♘bd2 ♗b7 13.0-0 ♗c7 14.♕c2 c4 is the same structure as in the main game, but the e2-bishop is obviously unemployed. The game Barber-Brasier, ICCF 2014, went further 15.♗a3 ♖e8 16.♗b4 ♗a5 17.♕c3 ♕b6 18.♗xa5 ♕xa5 19.♕xa5 ♖xa5 and White found nothing better but embark on a difficult struggle for the draw with:



20.♗xc4 dxc4 21.♘xc4 ♖aa8∓.

8...♗d7 9.♗xd7+ ♘bxd7 10.a4 bxc5 11.b5 ♗d6 12.♗b2?

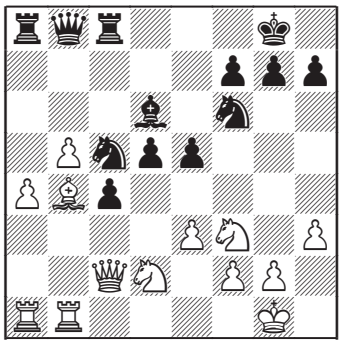
This game shows that the natural set-up with ♗b2 is nearly lost! The only correct way is 12.0-0 0-0 13.♘bd2!



The point is that 13...♕b8 14.♕c2 ♖c8 15.h3! e5? 16.e4 c4 is not threatening the

fork ...c3 and White is much better after 17.exd5 ♘xd5 18.♘g5. Instead, Black should try 15...♕b7 16.♗b2 ♗c7, followed by ...♗a5, or:

15...c4 16.♗a3! ♘c5 17.♗b4 e5 18.♖fb1



A critical position for the Noteboom structure arising after White's 8th move. It offers chances to both sides, although Black has a slight initiative. For instance:

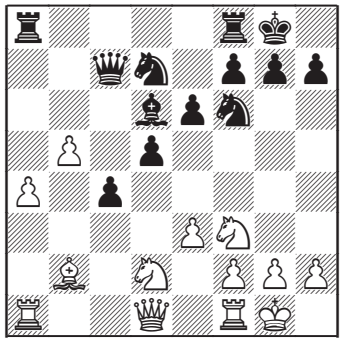
18...♘b3 (18...♖a7 19.♕f5) 19.♘xb3

19.♖xb3? cxb3 20.♕xb3 ♗xb4 21.♕xb4 ♘d7 22.e4 ♕c7 23.exd5 ♕c3∓.

19...♗xb4 20.♘c1 ♗a5 21.b6 ♕b7 22.♘xe5 ♖e8 23.♘f3 ♖e6 24.♘e2=.

12...0-0 13.♘bd2 ♕b8!

The most popular continuation is 13...♕c7?! 14.0-0 c4

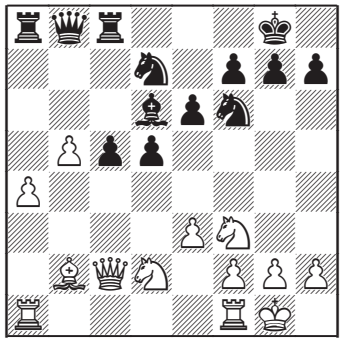


15.♕c2

Correspondence games have also tested 15.♗c3 and Black has not scored a single win. Play might continue 15...♖fb8 16.♕c2 e5 17.h3 ♖b7 18.♖fb1 ♖ab8 19.♕b2 h6 with a dynamic equilibrium.

15...♘c5 16.h3 e5 17.♖fb1 ♘d3, Morovic-Slipak, Buenos Aires 2017. White chose 18.♗a3 and eventually won. Stronger was 18.♗c3!, setting his pawns in motion.

14.0-0 ♖c8 15.♕c2

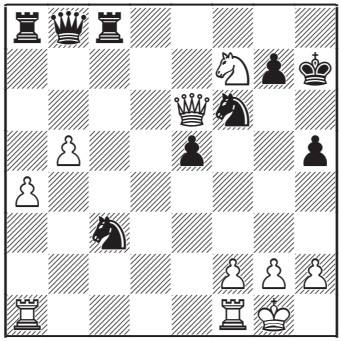


15...e5!

15...c4 16.♗c3 ♘c5 17.♖fb1 is tangled. Black's play is not clear. He must do

something, but exchanges favour White. Cifuentes-Bauer, San Sebastian 2009, saw 17...♘g4? 18.h3 ♘e5 19.♘xe5 ♗xe5 20.♗xe5 ♕xe5 21.a5 and the pawns were unstoppable.

16.e4 c4 17.exd5 c3! 18.♗xc3 ♗b4 19.♘b1 ♘xd5 20.♕b3 ♗xc3 21.♘xc3 ♘xc3 22.♘g5 ♘f6 23.♕xf7+ ♔h8 24.♕e6 h5 25.♘f7+ ♔h7



The dust has settled and it becomes clear that Black has won the opening battle. The only question is could he convert his advantage. White could now take a third pawn, but 26.♕f5+ ♔g8 27.♘xe5 ♕d6 gives Black the initiative. His extra knight at c3 is perfectly placed. With hindsight, that could still be his best chance. At least he would suffer with equal material.

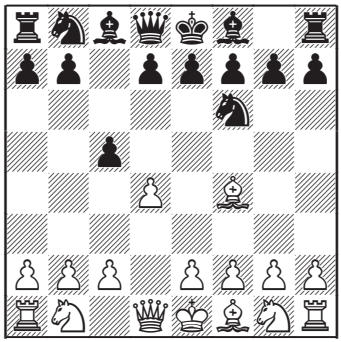
26.♖fe1?! e4 27.h4 ♖c5 28.♘g5+? ♔h6

28...♖xg5! 29.hxg5 ♘g4 wins at once – 30.♕f5+ ♔h8 31.g3 e3 32.f4 (32.♖xe3 ♘xe3 33.♕f3 ♘ed5) 32...♕b6.

29.♘f7+ ♔g6 30.♘g5 ♕b7 31.♖e3 ♕d5 32.♕e7 ♖e8 33.♕a7 ♖c4 34.g3 ♖a8 35.♕e7 ♖cxa4 0-1

Chapter 8. The Benoni Approach Main Ideas

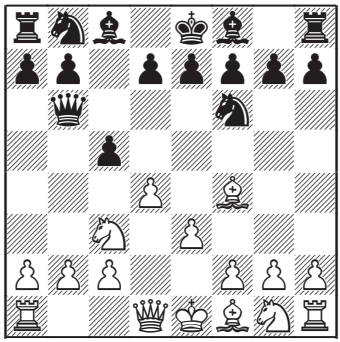
In the previous chapters we assumed by default that Black would play d5 on move 1 or 2. However, recently many top players, as Carlsen and Karjakin, became leading out their bishop against **1.d4 ♘f6 – 2.♗f4**, without waiting for ...d5. That invites King's Indian's and Benoni's aficionados to push **2...c5**.



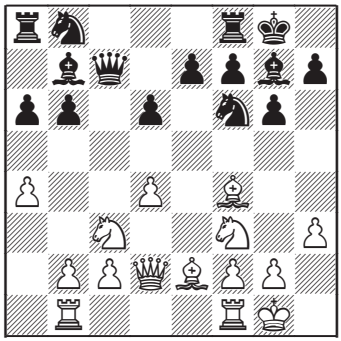
In my opinion, ...c5 should always be met by d4-d5 – nobody has revoked the rule that we should gain space in the opening. However, the London fans obviously hate this move, as statistics confirms – 3.d5 is 8 times less popular than 3.e3. I propose a novel approach: 3...d6 4.♘c3 e5 5.♗d2 e4!, ensuring an open diagonal for our beloved KI bishop.

3.c3 ♕b6 4.♕b3 ♕xb3 does not deserve any further attention, so let's move on to the main line:

3.e3 ♕b6! 4.♘c3



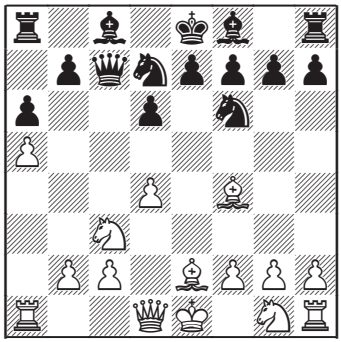
Now 4...♕xb2 might lead to a repetition of moves – see **Game 25** Prié-Argandona, San Sebastian 2011. I beieve that we can safely keep the tension with **4...d6!?**. Our plan is to fianchetto both bishops! A key point is to neutralise the positional threat of d5. We could accomplish that in different ways, but best is to exchange early on d4. That would give us more breathing space. Our target position should be: 5.♖b1 g6 6.h3 ♗g7 7.♘f3 cxd4! 8.exd4 0-0 9.♗e2 a6 10.0-0 ♕c7 11.a4 b6 12.♕d2 ♗b7=.



Then we could think of ...e5.

White's only way to cut across our plan is 5.♗b5+, when 5...♗d7 would be solid, but not very promising – see **Game 26** Prié-Kiril Georgiev, Aix les Bains 2011.

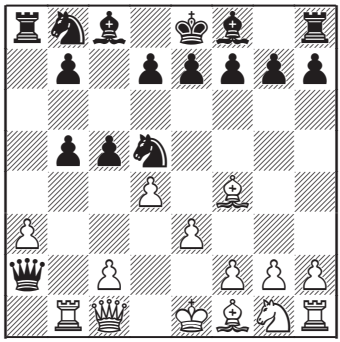
5...♘bd7 preserves more pieces and it is also less explored: **6.a4 a6 7.a5 ♕c7 8.♗e2 cxd4 9.exd4**



9...b5! This thematic break gives us active pieces and targets on the queenside. Our a-pawn only looks weak – in fact it is an important resource. We'll push it up to a4 in order to fix b2.

Theoretical status

The line 3.e3 ♕b6! 4.♘c3 ♕xb2 5.♘b5 ♘d5 6.a3 a6 7.♖b1 ♕a2 8.♕c1?! axb5 is not covered correctly by theory.

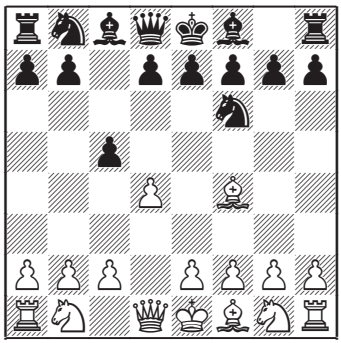


The truth is that Black preserves practical chances to win, but 8.♖a1 is an immediate draw.

4...d6 5.♗b5+ ♘bd7!? is virtually ignored so the effect of surprise should give you some psychological advantage.

Chapter 8. The Benoni Approach Step by Step

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♗f4 c5



In this chapter I consider King's Indian set-ups with ...c5. The move order 1.d4 g6 2.♘f3 ♗g7 3.♗f4 c5, followed up by ...♘f6, should also lead to the main line.

3.e3

3.c3 ♕b6 is unpleasant for White – 4.♕b3

The queen is misplaced on c2 – 4.♕c2 cxd4 5.cxd4 ♘c6 6.e3 d5 or 6...d6, threatening ...♘b4, ...e5.

4...♕xb3

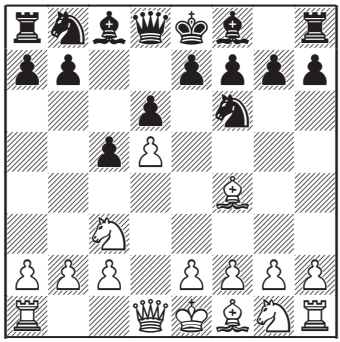
4...cxd4 5.♕xb6 axb6 6.cxd4 ♘c6 7.e3 ♘b4 8.♔d1 ♖xa2= wins a pawn, but White's king's rook quickly enters play.

5.axb3 cxd4 6.cxd4 ♘c6 7.♘f3 ♘d5 8.♗d2 ♘db4 9.♘a3 f6 (9...d5 10.♘e5=) 10.e3 d5.

3.d5 d6 is safest.

There is abundant practice with 3...♕b6 4.♘c3 ♕xb2 5.♗d2 ♕b6 6.e4 d6 7.f4. It confirms that Black's game is not easy, at least in tournaments. In correspondence chess the score is roughly even.

4.♘c3



4...e5!

The ♗f4 gives us a valuable tempo. As long as 5.dxe6 ♗xe6 6.e4 ♘c6 7.♘f3 d5 is totally equal (Black could also keep the tension with 7...♗e7), White commonly answers:

5.♗d2

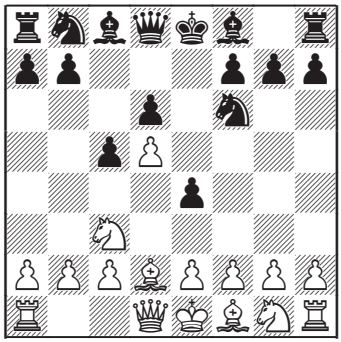
Now we should not allow 6.e4, as White would get a comfortable space advantage in a closed centre where tempi are irrelevant. e.g. 5...♗e7 6.e4 0-0 7.♗e2 ♘bd7 8.♘f3 ♘e8 9.a4, Carlsen-Aronian, blitz, Leuven 2017.

Instead, we could prevent it by 5...♗f5!? 6.e3 h5 7.♘ge2 (7.f3 e4 8.♘ge2 h4) 7...h4 8.h3 ♘a6.

5...a6 6.e4 b5 is interesting, but White can preserve his centre with 7.♕f3!, intending a4.

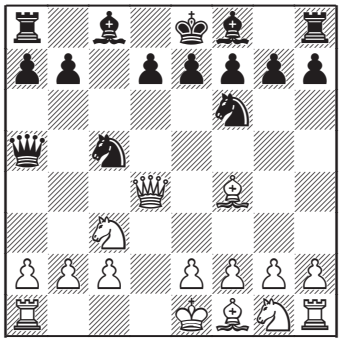
The most straightforward approach is:

5...e4!



Black is planning ...a6 (or ...♘a6), ...g6, ...♗g7. 6.♗g5 is not a problem due to 6...♗e7 7.e3 0-0 8.♘ge2 ♘h5.

3.dxc5 ♘a6 4.♕d4 ♕a5+ 5.♘c3 ♘xc5 has been tested by Meister and Rapport.



6.♗d2 ♕b6 7.♘f3

7.f3 d6 8.e4 would bring about a very nice Sicilian, e.g. 8...e5!?.

7...d6 8.♘a4 ♘xa4 9.♕xa4+ ♗d7 10.♕b3 g6!, Meister-Ftacnik, Dresden 2015. White has not equalized yet.

3...♕b6

The idea of this move is to uncoordinate White's pieces and drag the opponent into unfamiliar schemes. For instance, 3...g6 4.c3 would certainly be more comfortable for the London player.

4.♘c3

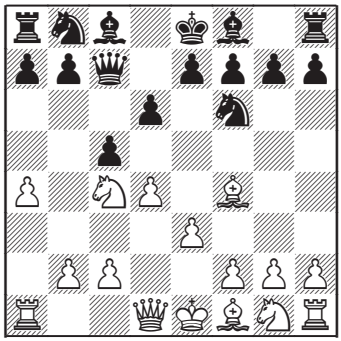
4.♘a3 ♕xb2 5.♘b5= transposes to 4.♘c3 ♕xb2.

Black can avoid the draw with 4...d6!? 5.♘c4

5.♘f3 ♕xb2 6.♘b5 ♕b4+.

5...♕c7 6.a4

6.♘f3 g6 7.♗e2 ♗g7 8.0-0 0-0 9.h3 b6 (9...b5 10.♘cd2 a6=) 10.c3 ♗b7=.



6...♗e6!

In this structure White's biggest threat is to gain space with d5. For instance, 6...g6 7.d5! ♗g7 8.♘e2 is better for him.

7.♘d2 cxd4 8.exd4 ♗f5 9.♘c4 (9.c3 e5) 9...♘c6 and Black will prepare ...e5.

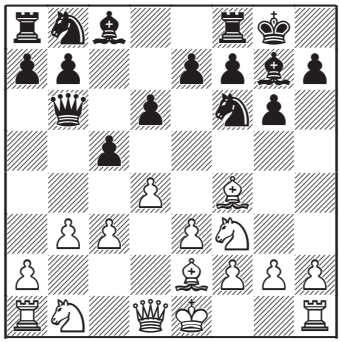
The bottom line is that White's knight is not any better on a3 than on c3. It would need quite a few tempi before finding a good place.

Another version of the pawn sacrifice is 4.♘f3!? ♕xb2 5.♘bd2. It may be not any worse than 4.♘c3, but is totally unexplored. A natural continuation is 5...e6.

5...♘c6 hampers the queen to return home – 6.dxc5 (6.♖b1 ♕xa2) 6...♕c3 7.♖b1 ♕xc5 8.♗d3 d6 9.0-0∞.

6.♗d3 d5 (6...♕c3!?) 7.c4 cxd4 8.♘xd4 ♗b4. White is ahead in development, but I'm not sure if that compensates for the missing pawn.

4.b3 is often seen, but it only encourages us to fianchetto our bishop – 4...g6 5.♘f3 ♗g7 6.c3 0-0 7.♗e2 d6.



We easily complete our development with ...♘c6 and ...♗f5.

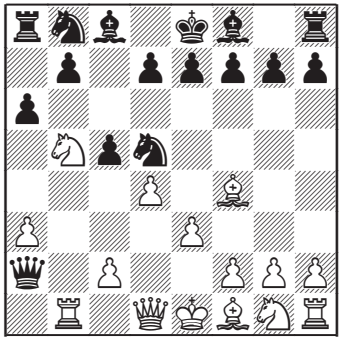
4...d6

This might not be the best move, but we do not have much of a choice if we want to avoid a forced draw.

The critical line is, of course, 4...♕xb2! 5.♘b5

Grischuk tried 5.♘ge2, but he would need to prove his compensation after 5...♕a3 6.♖b1 d6 .

5...♘d5 6.a3 (6.♖b1 is a draw.) 6...a6 7.♖b1 ♕a2



Now 8.♖a1= ends the game with a repetition, so we should investigate:

8.♕c1 axb5 9.♖a1 ♕xa1 10.♕xa1 ♘c6 11.♗b5!?. This rich position offers excellent chances to the better player, although in correspondence chess it is drawish. See **Game 25** Prié-Argandona, San Sebastian 2011.

5.♗b5+

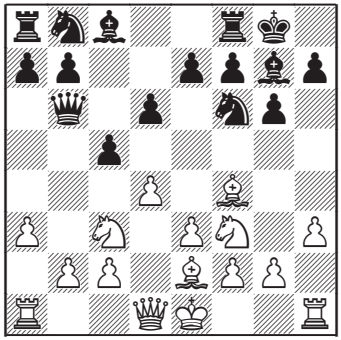
The check is undoubtedly the most testing continuation as it allows White to develop without spending tempi on defending the b2-pawn.

5.a3 looks superfluous, as White might still have to protect the b2-pawn by ♖b1 later. We could continue in the KI spirit:

5...g6

The exchange 5...cxd4 6.exd4 is always an alternative – 6...♗d7 7.♖b1, when 7...e5 would be premature due to 8.♗e3!.

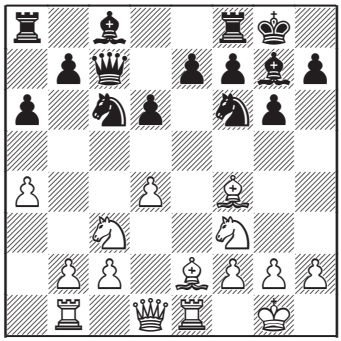
6.h3 ♗g7 7.♘f3 0-0 8.♗e2



The game Glienke-Rotstein, Bled 1997, went further: 8...cxd4 9.exd4 ♗f5 10.♖b1 ♘c6 11.0-0=. The exchange on d4 is usually meant to discourage d4-d5, but in the diagram position it is still not threat owing to the hanging b2-pawn. I prefer the Sicilian set-up:

8...a6!? 9.0-0 ♕c7 10.a4 cxd4 11.exd4 ♘c6 12.♗g5 e6=, taking d5 under control. 13.d5?! would be a mistake – 13...♘xd5 14.♘xd5 exd5 15.♕xd5 ♗xb2 16.♖ab1 ♗e6 17.♕d2 ♗g7 18.♖fd1 ♖fe8 19.♕xd6 ♕xd6 20.♖xd6 ♗f8 21.♖d2 ♗b4∓.

5.♖b1 is a natural move. After 5...g6 White commonly plays 6.h3 at once. Another move order is 6.♘f3 ♗g7 7.♗e2 cxd4 8.exd4 0-0 9.0-0 a6 10.♖e1 ♕c7 11.a4 ♘c6



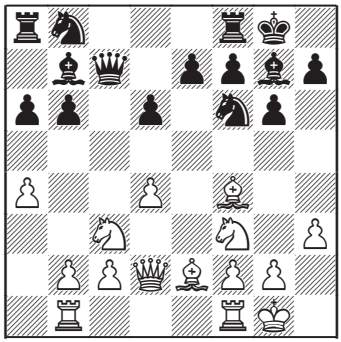
Now 12.d5 ♘b4 13.♕d2 b6 is fine for Black so White should probably resort to 12.h3, whe we could choose between 12...♗f5 13.d5 ♘e5 14.♘d2 ♖ab8 and 12...b6 13.♕d2 ♗b7 14.♗h6 ♖ac8 15.♗xg7 ♔xg7 16.♘d1 e6.

6...♗g7 7.♘f3 cxd4 8.exd4 0-0 9.♗e2

Or 9.♗d3?! ♘c6 10.♗e3 ♘b4 11.♗c4 ♗f5 12.♗b3 ♕a6∓, Harmon-Ehlvest, Oak Bridge 2000;

9.♗c4 ♕c7 10.♕e2 a6 11.a4 ♘c6 12.0-0 ♗f5=.

9...a6 10.0-0 ♕c7 11.a4 b6 12.♕d2 ♗b7



White could choose a piece attack with 13.♗h6 ♘bd7 14.♘h2 e5=, or gain space with 13.d5 ♘bd7 14.♖fe1 ♘c5 15.♖bd1, when we should prepare ...e5 even at the cost of the d6-pawn – 15...♖ad8 16.♗h6 (16.♗f1 ♖fe8 17.♔h1 e5 18.dxe6 ♘xe6 19.♗xd6 ♕c8 20.♕c1 ♗xf3) 16...e5 17.dxe6 fxe6⇄.

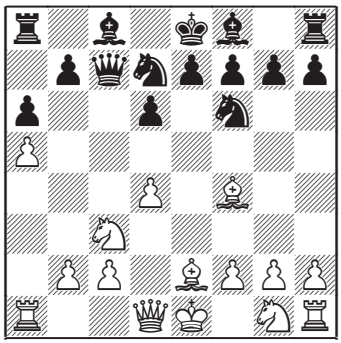
5...♘bd7

In the Moscow Variation of the Sicilian we have the same dilemma – to trade or to keep the bishops. 5...♗d7 is much more popular than the text, but without the light-squared bishop we would have less active options in future. See **Game 26** Prié-Kiril Georgiev, Aix les Bains 2011.

6.a4 a6 7.a5 ♕c7 8.♗e2 cxd4

It is possible to delay this exchange – 8...g6 9.♘f3 ♗g7 10.0-0 cxd4 11.exd4 0-0 12.♕d2 b5 13.axb6 ♘xb6 14.♗h6 ♗b7 15.♗xg7 ♔xg7 16.♖fc1 e5∞.

9.exd4



9...b5

This break is not urgent, but it is indispensable in the long run. Without it, Black will suffer on the queenside.

10.axb6 ♘xb6 11.♘f3

11.♗g5 e6 12.♗xf6 gxf6 13.d5 e5 14.♘f3 f5 would offer Black the best of the Sveshnikov.

11...g6 12.0-0 ♗g7 13.♘a2

White should push c4 before Black put his king's rook on c8 or b8.

13...0-0 14.c4 ♗b7 15.♖c1 ♘e4 16.♗e3 e5

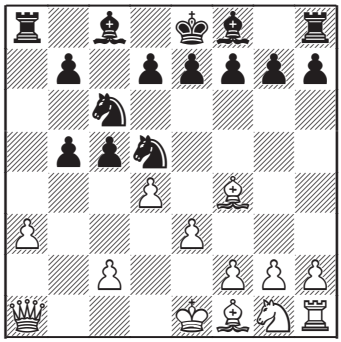
Black has finally achieved the main KI goal. He is ready to meet d5 by ...f5 or open the centre by ...exd4 if allowed. As it often happens in the KI, White enjoys a space advantage, but Black's pieces constantly generate threats. For example, 17.b4 a5!? (or 17...♖fe8, intending to take on d4) 18.dxe5 (18.c5 ♘d5 19.c6 axb4 20.cxb7 ♕xb7 21.♗c4 ♘xe3 22.fxe3 ♗h6∞) 18...dxe5 19.c5 ♘d5 20.c6 ♘xe3 21.cxb7 ♕xb7 22.fxe3 ♗h6∞.

Chapter 8. The Benoni Approach
Annotated Games

25. Prié – Argandona

San Sebastian 18.07.2011

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♗f4 c5 3.e3 ♕b6 4.♘c3 ♕xb2 5.♘b5 ♘d5 6.a3 a6 7.♖b1 ♕a2 8.♕c1 (8.♖a1=) **8...axb5 9.♖a1 ♕xa1 10.♕xa1 ♘c6**



11.♗xb5!

Three days before the current game Prié lost to Gonzalez de la Torre after 11.dxc5?! b4 12.a4 ♘c3 13.♘f3 (13.♘e2 is also insufficient for equality owing to 13...g5! 14.♗xg5 ♖g8 15.♗f4 ♗g7, Pirs-Fajs, ICCF 2006) 13...♖xa4∓.

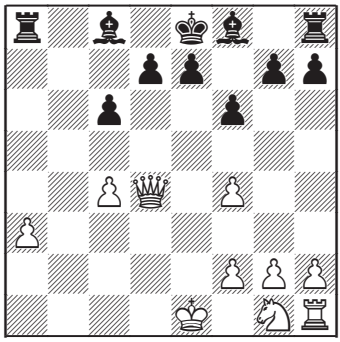
11...cxd4 12.♗xc6 bxc6

12...dxc6 also looks logical. Then the pieces sac 13.♕xd4 f6 14.♘f3!? (14.c4 ♘xf4 15.exf4 ♖xa3 16.♘f3 e5 is roughly balanced.) 14...e5 15.♗xe5 fxe5 16.♕xe5+ ♗e7 is difficult to assess. Most likely White does not risk a lot in view of Black's poor coordination and a naked king.

13.♕xd4 f6

The a3-pawn will not run away. Leben-Heinemann, ICCF 2011, saw 13...♖xa3?! 14.♘f3 e6 15.0-0 f6 16.♘d2 ♘c3 17.♕b6 ♖a8 and Black miraculously survived in this passive position.

14.c4 ♘xf4 15.exf4



15...e5!!

A very courageous decision! It is counter-intuitive, since when the opponent has a queen, it is generally of utmost importance to have a safe shelter for the king.

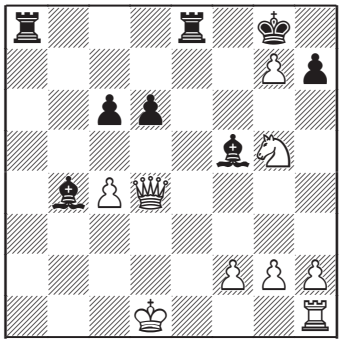
It was no secret that Prié played regularly this system, but even if Argandona had

found this move during his home preparation, he deserves the highest praise. The arising complications are hard to assess, but I believe that Black is at least not worse, and he obtains decent practical chances. In a later correspondence game Black preferred the passive, but solid 15...♖xa3 16.♘f3 e6 17.0-0 ♗e7 18.c5 ♔f7 19.♖c1 ♖d8 20.h3 g6, holding firmly the draw, Cvetnic-Gábris, ICCF 2014.

The book *The Agile London System* decorates 15...e5 with an interrogation mark, missing the check from e8 after 16.fxe5 ♗xa3 17.exf6 0-0 18.fxg7.

16.fxe5 ♗xa3 17.exf6 0-0 18.♘e2?!

Black's audacity bears fruit. Prié instinctively tries to keep his pieces closer together, but his hesitant move is second-rate. If he were to suffer an attack anyway, it would have been better to destroy the enemy pawns by 18.fxg7 ♖e8+ 19.♔d1 d6 20.♘f3 ♗b4 21.♘g5 ♗f5



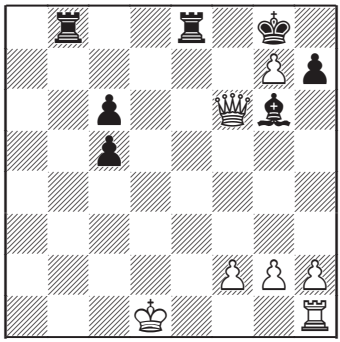
Black's long-ranged pieces exert tremendous pressure, but the computer finds a draw:

22.♕f6 ♗g6 23.♘e6 d5 24.♘c7 ♖a2 25.♘xe8 ♖d2+ 26.♔c1 ♖c2+ 27.♔b1 ♖xf2+ 28.♔a1 ♖xf6 29.♘xf6+ ♔xg7 30.♘g4 dxc4=.

Or 22.c5 ♗xc5 23.♕f6 ♗g6 24.♘e6 (24.♖e1 ♖eb8=) 24...♖ab8

24...♗b4 is also a draw – 25.h4 ♗h5+ 26.f3 ♖ab8 27.♘f4 (but not 27.g4? ♗f7 28.♘g5 ♗b3+ 29.♔c1 ♖e2–+).

25.♘xc5 dxc5



26.♔d2 ♖b3. Only a computer could claim that this is a draw! Black has always a perpetual check with his rooks, but not a win.

Simpler alternatives are:

18.♘f3 ♗b4+ 19.♔e2 ♖a2+ 20.♔d1 ♖xf6 21.c5 ♗a6 22.♕xb4 ♗e2+ 23.♔c1 ♗xf3 24.♖e1 ♖a1+ 25.♔b2 ♖xe1 26.♕xe1 ♗xg2 with a fortress.

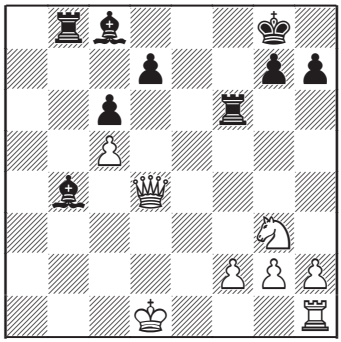
18.♘h3 ♗b4+ 19.♔f1 d6 20.♘g5 ♖xf6 21.♘e4 ♖f4 22.f3 ♖a2=.

These evaluations are for the record only. Over the board, Black's pieces generate

more threats, so White's task looks more difficult.

18...♗b4+ 19.♔d1 ♖xf6 20.c5 ♖b8 21.♘g3

21.♘f4?! (recommended by Romero and De Prado in their book) 21...d6 22.♘h5 ♖f7 23.cxd6 ♖b5 24.♘f4 is far from equal, since Black enjoys a strong attack after 24...♗a5! 25.♕e4 ♗d7 26.g3 g5 27.♖g1 ♗g4+! 28.f3 ♗d7∓.



21...d5

Perhaps Black wanted to deprive the opponent of 21...d6! 22.♘e4 (22.f3 ♗xc5 23.♕a1 ♗b4↑), but then 22...♖f5 would retain the initiative.

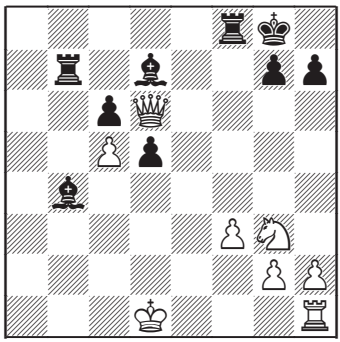
22.♕e5

22.f3 ♖b5 23.♕e5 ♗d7 24.♕c7 ♗e8 25.♕e5 is equal, as the queen constantly harasses the black pieces.

22...♖f8 23.f3 ♖b7 24.♕d6?! ♖f6?!

The end of the game has been marred by mutual mistakes. Firstly Black missed 24...♗d7*f*, then White made 28.♕d6 on the board instead of claiming a draw by repetition of moves. Perhaps he was expecting a verbal proposition of draw, but Black suddenly got an insight and deviated from the repetition:

25.♕d8+ ♖f8 26.♕d6 ♖f6 27.♕d8+ ♖f8 28.♕d6 ♗d7!



This course of events must have been a shock for Prié, as he immediately blundered decisively:

29.♘h5?

Only 29.♔c2 kept him in the game. The text loses as it allows a check from f5. One possible line was 29...♗c3 30.♔c2 d4 and White lacks 31.Rb1.

29...♗c8??

Black has changed his mind and already wants the draw! But his move simply gives up a pawn – 30.♕xc6!

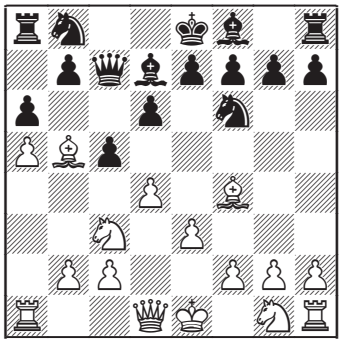
30.♘g3? ½-½

Despite the tragicomedy at the end, it was a fine game of a big theoretical importance.

26. Prié – Kiril Georgiev

Aix les Bains 26.03.2011

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♗f4 c5 3.e3 ♕b6 4.♘c3 d6 5.♗b5+ ♗d7 6.a4 a6 7.a5 ♕c7



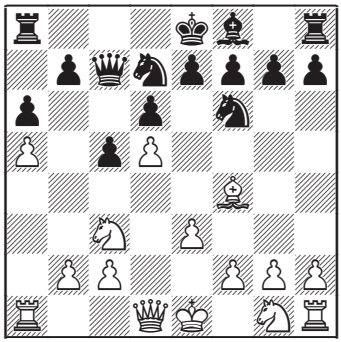
8.♗a4

In a recent game Agrest also decided to preserve the bishop, but he retreated to d3 – 8.♗d3 cxd4 9.exd4 ♘c6 10.♘f3, and got nothing after 10...♗g4 11.d5 ♘e5. I would fianchetto my bishop with 10...g6.

The sternest test of Black's set-up in my opinion is:

8.♗xd7 ♘bxd7 9.d5!?

9.♘f3 would give me a tempo for 9...cxd4 10.exd4 g6, when d4-d5 would be already double-edged.



What should be our plan here? If we push ...e5, then ♗f4-g5xf6 would give White a lasting pull. In such a scenario we would strongly miss our exchanged light-squared bishop. Our only real counterplay could be based on ...b5. The best timing for it is probably not at once. Let's castle first and see what happens:

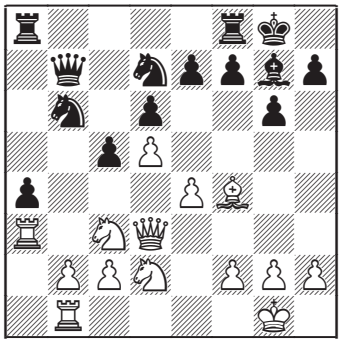
9...g6 10.e4 ♗g7 11.♘f3 0-0 12.0-0 b5!

12...♘h5 13.♗g5 ♖ae8 14.♖e1 only distracts us from the queenside and does not help us at all.

13.axb6 ♘xb6

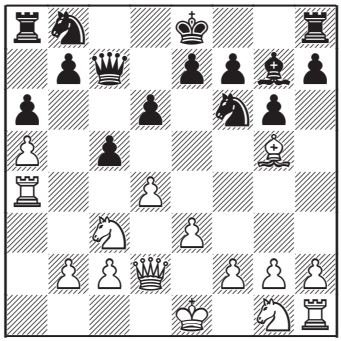
13...♕xb6 is another possible set-up.

14.♕d3 a5 15.♖a3 a4 16.♖b1 ♕b7 17.♘d2 ♘fd7



We have fixed a target at b2 which balances our own weak pawn at a4. We should not mind trading queens, e.g. 18.♘d1 ♕a6=.

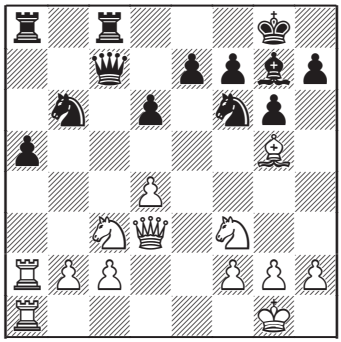
8...g6 9.♗g5 ♗g7 10.♕d2 ♗xa4 11.♖xa4



We have exchanged the bishops in favourable circumstances – White has not taken the centre. Perhaps I should have take now on d4 to ensure myself against a possible d4-d5, but I wanted to keep the pawn structure undefined. d5 is still not a threat in view of ...b5.

11...♘bd7 12.♘f3 0-0 13.0-0 ♖fe8

Sticking to the same "flexible" strategy. This move cannot be bad, of course, but I might have designed an active plan already. For instance, 13...cxd4 14.exd4 b5! 15.axb6 ♘xb6 16.♖a2 ♖fc8 17.♖fa1 a5! 18.♕d3

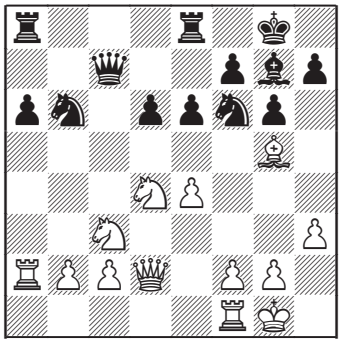


My pieces are clearly more active – 18...h6 19.♗d2 (19.♗xf6 ♗xf6 20.♖xa5 ♖xa5 21.♖xa5 ♘c4 22.♖a2 ♘xb2 wins d4-pawn, too.) 19...a4.

14.h3 e6!

Finally I address the problem of d4-d5. It is no longer possible due to ...b5. Perhaps my move also "opened the eyes" of my opponent for the importance of having more space and he tries to achieve d5. But he had missed the moment.

15.e4 b5! 16.axb6 ♘xb6 17.♖a2 cxd4 18.♘xd4

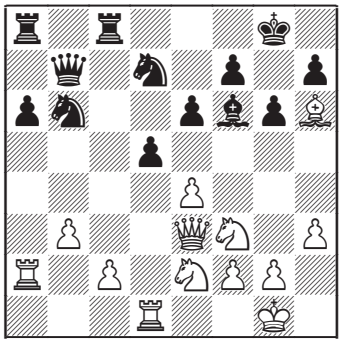


The game has transformed to the Sicilian Defence. In such structures Black should always consider ...d5. It is possible right now, but it would only simplify White's task. I decided to transfer my pieces to the queenside, but the f6-knight was already on its perfect place. Perhaps I should have played ...♖ec8, ...♕b7 and wait. Note that 18...♕b7 would take aim at e4 so White would not be able to keep his queen on the c1-h6 diagonal.

18...♘fd7?! 19.♘de2 ♖ec8 20.♗h6 ♘c4 21.♕c1 ♗f6 22.♖d1 ♕c6

It was better to play 22...♕b7 23.b3 ♘cb6=.

23.♘d4 ♕c5 24.♘ce2 ♘cb6 25.b3 ♕c7 26.♕e3 ♕b7 27.♘f3 d5

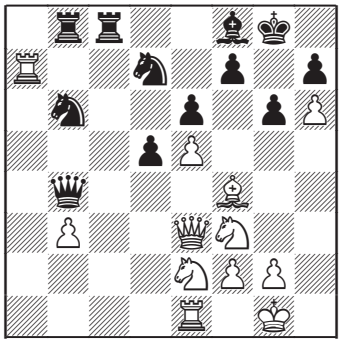


Prié has not offered me any "present" so I return to ...d5. However, meanwhile he has accumulated significant piece power on the kingside. The waiting 27...♗e7 was certainly safer.

28.e5 ♗h8 29.♘g3?! (29.♘ed4) **29...♕c7 30.♗f4 a5 31.♖da1 a4! 32.h4 ♖ab8 33.h5 axb3 34.cxb3 ♕c3 35.♖e1?!**

The first critical moment of the game. White should have given up a pawn to activate his pieces – 35.♕xc3! ♖xc3 36.♘e2 ♖xb3 37.♘fd4 ♖d3 38.♘c6 ♖e8 39.♖a7=. Instead, his move gave me the opportunity to complicate things with 35...d4 36.♕d2 (36.♕xd4 ♕xd4 37.♘xd4 ♘d5 38.♗g5 ♗xe5) 36...♘d5.

35...♗g7 36.h6 ♗f8 37.♖a7 ♕b4 38.♘e2



38...♘c4??

38...♘c5 or 38...♖a8 would have maintained the balance. My combination is based on a wrong assessment. The arising position with 3 pieces vs a queen and a pawn is very difficult for Black. Fortunately, my opponent shared my delusion, so we signed a draw!

39.bxc4 ♗c5 40.♖xd7 ♗xe3 41.♗xe3 ♕xc4 42.♘ed4 ♕a4 ½-½

Index of Variations