

LUIS BERNAL

THE BERLIN DEFENCE **UNRAVELED**

A Straightforward Guide
for Black and White



NEW IN CHESS

The Berlin Defence Unraveled

Luis Bernal

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A Straightforward Guide for Black and White

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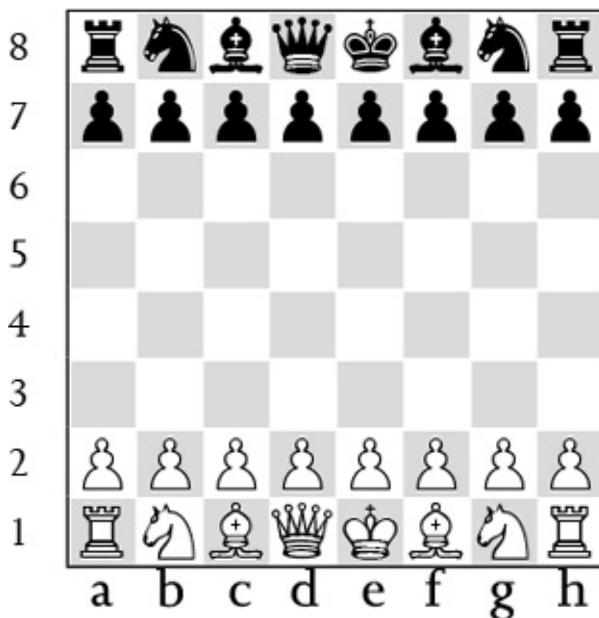
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Explanation of symbols

The chessboard with its coordinates:



White to move



Black to move



King



Queen



Rook



Bishop



Knight



White stands slightly better



Black stands slightly better



White stands better



Black stands better



White has a decisive advantage



Black has a decisive advantage



balanced position



the position is unclear



with compensation for the material



good move



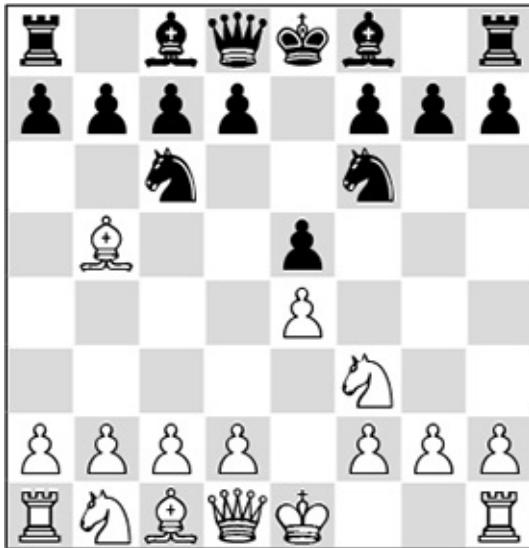
excellent move



bad move

??	blunder
!?	interesting move
?!	dubious move
⇄	with counterplay
→	with attack
↑	with initiative

Preface by the author

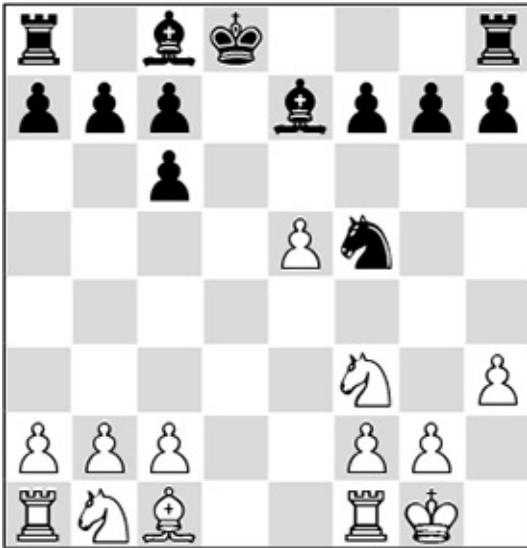


My teammate looked at my analysis of one of the critical variations of the Berlin endgame with a sense of pity and disbelief. Meanwhile, our daughters were playing, unbothered by an episode of the children's series Peppa Pig. For a moment, our looks were diverted to the television to see how Mummy Pig fell through a bramble from atop a ladder she had climbed to find the best berries. A dense shrub, full of thorns ready to dig into the flesh of anybody approaching it without proper caution, is certainly an appropriate metaphor to describe the study of chess openings in the age of computers.

The embryonic stage of the book consisted of fifty pages of analysis of Berlin games played by Magnus Carlsen, updated until December 2015. In late March 2016, I got a phone call from my editor, Alfonso Romero Holmes, encouraging me to expand the investigation beyond the games of the World Champion, and covering the practice of other elite GMs, as well as sidelines often found in the games of amateurs.

We must first of all climb to the top of Mummy Pig's bush to the consider the Berlin endgame. The games from the match Carlsen-Anand in 2014 had made it possible to draft a first version of Chapters 14, 16, 17 and 19, but the analysis of the game Adams-Eljanov, Wijk aan Zee 2016, resulted in a totally new approach:

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♗f6 4.0-0 ♗xe4 5.d4 ♗d6 6.♗xc6 dxc6 7.dxe5 ♗f5 8.♗xd8+ ♔xd8 9.h3 ♗e7



This line did not seem too important, and my first impulse was to mention it only as a sideline, perhaps dedicating an illustrative game to it. However, Pavel Eljanov also played this way against Maxime Vachier-Lagrave at Norway Chess (Game 16), as well as in several other games last year, which forced me to give it more serious consideration.

10. ♜d1+ ♛e8 11.g4

The bishop cuts off the retreat of the knight, which is forced into an exchange that is at first sight unfavourable.

11... ♞h4 12. ♜xh4 ♜xh4 13. ♜c3



Here Eljanov shows us his idea. Instead of comfortably awaiting events with a solid position he decides to break up the opponent's structure.

13...h5! 14.f3 f5! 15.exf6 gxf6 16. ♜e2 ♛f7

It might seem as if Black has started this mess to open up the game for his bishop pair. The main idea, however, is to create a safe position for his king on f7, where it will not disturb the coordination of his pieces. Black's play in this game is so interesting that I decided to dedicate an entire chapter (no. 15) to 9... ♜e7, which I have called 'Eljanov's Repertoire'.

Here is an experiment for you: enter the position of the above diagram in your favourite

analysis engine, editing it so that Black is allowed to castle. After a few minutes, you will see on your computer screen two alternatives to Eljanov's plan: one is 13...0-0, to continue with ... $\mathbb{Q}e8$ or ...f7-f6, and the other 13...h5 14.f3 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ and 15...0-0-0. I know I shouldn't fully trust the evaluation of Stockfish or Komodo, but a basic principle in the Berlin endgame can be inferred:

BLACK'S ONLY SERIOUS PROBLEM IS THE POSITION OF HIS KING.

From this point of view, understanding the final chapters of the book is much easier. In the lines of the Almasi-Kramnik Variation (Chapter 19), the black king comes to b7, and his position is comfortable if the opponent does not exchange the light-squared bishop or at least create serious threats with the advance of his pawn majority. In the other variations, the king remains on e8, either voluntarily or forced by a check on d1, and then you have to either find safety on f7 or accept piece exchanges as in the Blockade Variation (Chapter 16), hoping that the black king is well placed to stop the 'candidate' on e5. In this last line, the most solid one according to theory, I recommend you carefully analyse the ideas of Game 20 (Vachier-Lagrange-Carlsen, Stavanger 2016).

The world elite, led by their brilliant young champion, have stopped trying for an advantage in the typical Berlin endgame, looking for new positions in the labyrinth of the anti-Berlin with 4.d3, a system in itself. This is shown by a constant flow of ideas, such as Caruana and Wei Yi's plan with opposite-side castling after 4.d3 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 5. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ bxc6 (Chapter 4 and Game 2), the confirmation that 4.d3 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 5.0-0 $\mathbb{Q}d4!$ (Chapter 5) is a good method to avoid Carlsen's plans with $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ after ...d7-d6. New efforts by Anand, Vachier-Lagrange, Giri and Kramnik forced me to rewrite an entire Chapter (no. 7) after 4.d3 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 5.c3 0-0 6.0-0 d6. Another plan is seen in the atomic variation 4.d3 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 5.c3 d5!?, which, in the absence of more practical tests, seems to give Black excellent prospects for equality.

The lines of Chapters 8 to 12, although inferior to the Berlin endgame and the Anti-Berlin, are tricky as well. Bareev, Kramnik's second in the famous match of 2000, argues in the excellent book *From London to Elista* (New In Chess, 2007) that Berlin sidelines are inferior, leading to games devoid of content, and that they can be refuted by simple analysis. Relying on Bareev's opinion, and trusting in my own good fortune, I started tackling the lines in Chapters 9-12 with optimism, thinking that analysing them would not take me very long. To my surprise, however, no matter how hard I attacked the dubious positions that follow after 5.d4 a6?! (Chapter 9) and 5.d4 $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 6. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ bxc6 7.dxe5 $\mathbb{Q}e4$ (Chapter 12), they somehow kept holding up. On the other hand, the theoretically soft lines of Chapter 11 proved very difficult to deal with from a practical point of view. A good example of this is Game 13, in which Kramnik himself is unable to equalise after a seemingly harmless novelty by his opponent. From these chapters, an important lesson can be learned, i.e. although objectively Bareev may be right, sometimes grandmasters analyse one of these variations for a single game, hoping to catch an unprepared opponent off guard. This could be called the Muhammad Ali Strategy: float like a butterfly, sting like a bee.

This is not the case in the super-solid and somewhat boring variation 4.0-0 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 5. $\mathbb{Q}e1$,

in which White plays for a symmetrical position with minimal advantage, or in the venerable variation 5.d4 ♕e7, which we shall baptise Old Berlin in Chapter 10, which is perhaps theoretically not as solid as 5...♝d6 but perfectly playable. For the study of the latter we will use a very useful opening training ploy: we will follow the strong Grandmasters Vladimir Malakhov and Viktor Erdös and build a consistent repertoire based on their games.

I have lived for several months in the heart of the prickly Berlin bush, thorns nailed down to my very soul, but I have managed to unravel the mysteries of this diverse opening, sometimes even at the risk of losing my wits. Dear reader, I am confident you will make this book your own. And once you have removed the most dangerous spines, you may even be able to help me develop it further.

Now it is time to let the analyses speak on my behalf... In addition to the Muses (spiritual, or corporeal as the lyricist of Boleros) and to you, dear reader and future co-author, I would like to thank FIDE Master Marcos Rodriguez Fontecha for his contribution, reviewing the evidence of the book on Carlsen and helping me analyse a couple of critical positions; IM Juan Carlos Fernandez ('the English teacher') for his willingness to always translate some documents; correspondence GM Carlos Rodriguez Amezqueta for guiding me as I delved into the complex little world of his speciality; my father for helping me with a last-minute review; and, above all, my daughter, little Mar: the human brain needs to rest after several days working in a world as abstract as chess, and I know of no better method for this purpose than answering to the concrete and urgent calls of a four-year-old girl.

*Luis Bernal,
Santander, March 2017*

Fourth move alternatives

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6



4.0-0 and 4.d3 are played most often and offer the greatest hope of obtaining an advantage, but also worthy of mention are three other alternatives: 4.d4 (variation A), 4.♘e2 (variation B) and 4.♘c3, which leads to the Four Knights Game, in which 4...♘d4, the symmetrical 4...♗b4 or even the somewhat eccentric 4...♗d6 offer Black at least as many opportunities to equalise as in the variations of the Berlin proper. Among the world elite, Ivanchuk is the only one who uses this transposition.

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6

A) 4.d4



Advancing the d-pawn two squares is usually not a great idea in the Spanish when Black has not yet played ...d7-d6, and the Berlin is no exception to this principle.

4...exd4

The most comfortable. Also possible is 4...♝xe4, which leaves White with nothing better than 5.0-0, returning to the main roads leading to the Berlin. 5.d5!? allows Black to equalise with accurate play: 5...♞d6 6.♞c3 ♝xb5! 7.♝xb5 a6 8.♞c3 ♝e7 9.♝xe5 d6 10.♝f3 ♞g4 11.h3 ♞xf3 12.♝xf3 ♞g6= (Corrales-Lanzani, Seville 2011)

5.0-0

The late Vugar Gashimov occasionally tried the 5.e5 advance, although without too much success in the opening. His blindfold game against Ponomariov in the 2011 Beijing SportAccord continued 5...♞e4 6.0-0 ♞e7 7.♝xd4 0-0 8.♝xc6 (8.♝f5 d5 9.♝xe7+ ♞xe7 10.f3 ♞c5 11.♞e1 c6 12.♞f1 ♞g6 13.♞e3 ♞e6 14.♞f2 ♞e8 15.♞c3 ♞g5= Gashimov-Eljanov, Elista 2008) 8...dxc6 9.♞e1 ♞c5 10.♞c3.



analysis diagram

10...f5! is a resource mentioned by Ludek Pachman in his *Modern Chess Strategy* (Ishi

Press, 2013), a book that is far better than its reputation: 11.exf6 (without this exchange, the blockade of the pawn would give Black a good game: 11.Qce2 Qe6 12.Qxe6 Qxd1 13.Qxd1 Qxe6 14.Qf4 Qf7 (14...Qc8!?) 15.Qxe6 Qxe6, and Black cannot lose) 11...Qxf6 12.Qe3 Qe6 13.Qce2 b6 14.Qxc6 Qxd1 15.Qaxd1 Qxb2 16.Qed4 Qxd4 17.Qxd4 Qe8=

5...a6! 6.Qxc6

An idea that Carlsen has tried in blitz games.

6.Qa4 Qe7 7.e5 Qe4 8.Qxd4 Qxd4 9.Qxd4 Qc5 10.Qc3 0-0 11.Qd5 d6 12.Qxe7+ Qxe7 13.exd6 Qxd6 14.Qxd6 cxd6 15.Qb3 Qxb3 16.axb3 Qe6 led to a drawn endgame in V.Kovalev-Mikhalevski, Minsk rapid 2015.

6...dxc6 7.Qxd4 Qc5!

The classic structure of the Spanish Exchange Variation has been reached, but with the advantage to Black of still having the queens on the board.

8.c3 0-0 9.f3



9...Qe7!?

A possible improvement over Carlsen-Karjakin, Astana blitz 2012, where 9...Qd7 10.Qe3 Qe5 11.Qe2 Qe7 12.Qd2 f6 13.Qh1 Qd6 14.Qae1 c5 15.Qf5 Qxf5 16.exf5 was played, and White went on to organise the advance of the kingside pawns, with some chances of obtaining an advantage.

10.Qe3 Qd6

And with ideas of ...Qd5-f4 or ...c6-c5 followed by ...Qd8, Black is taking the initiative.

B) 4.Qe2

The favourite move of Dutch GM Tiviakov, a specialist in lines of the Closed Spanish with the queen on e2.

4...Qc5

Playing in the spirit of the 4.d3 Qc5 variation, which we analyse in Chapters 3-7.

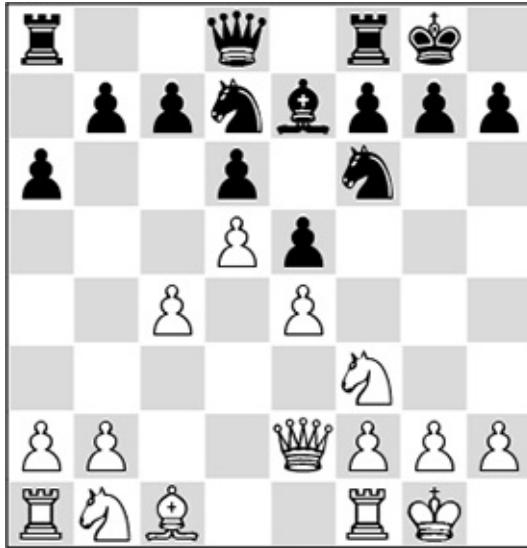
4...a6 is the main alternative, and a perfectly sound move that transposes to the Morphy Defence (3...a6) with the position of the white queen already defined, and which gives Black excellent prospects for equality. Unfortunately, Berlin devotees seldom learn the traditional lines with 3...a6 and, as a result, may feel uncomfortable in this type of positions. We are following the game Anand-Carlsen, Monaco rapid 2011. **5.Qa4**



5...Qe7 Carlsen had played 5...Qd6 against Tiviakov in Wijk aan Zee 2010, a game that began with the move order 3...a6 4.Qa4 Qf6 4.Qe2. The development of the bishop, extravagant at first sight, prepares a later ...Qe8 and ...Qf8, leaving open the possibility of advancing the d-pawn two squares. The game continued 6.c3 0-0 7.d3 Qe8 8.Qg5!? (exploiting as much as possible the position of the bishop) 8...b5 9.Qb3 Qa5 10.Qc2 c5 11.Qbd2 Qc6 12.Qf1 Qe7 13.Qe3 d6 14.0-0 Qe6 15.Qxf6 Qxf6 16.Qb3 and the control of the light squares gave White a small edge.

Another option is to play 5...b5 immediately, and after 6.Qb3, choose between ...Qe7 or ...Qc5, reaching variations of the Closed Morphy or the Arkhangelsk with the queen already committed on e2.

6.c3 d6 7.0-0 0-0 8.d4 Qd7 Also possible now is 8...b5, although the bishop has the extra possibility of reaching c2 in a single move. We will see this subtlety again in the next chapter. **9.d5 Qb8 10.Qxd7 Qxd7 11.c4**



analysis diagram

A typical situation in the Steinitz Defence Deferred ($3\dots a6\ 4.a4\ d6$) has been reached. White is a little better, since a possible enemy attack on the kingside is not so strong without the light-squared bishop.

5.c3

The king's pawn is not too appetising: $5.\mathbb{Q}xc6\ bxc6!\ 6.\mathbb{Q}xe5\ 0-0$, and after $\dots d7-d5$, the extra pawn cannot be maintained.

5...0-0 6.d3

In Harikrishna-Bacrot, Germany Bundesliga 2014/15, $6.0-0\ d6\ 7.\mathbb{Q}d1$ was played, a typical idea with the queen on e2. Black foiled the two-square advance of the white d-pawn with $7\dots \mathbb{Q}b6\ 8.h3$ (the pressure on the centre is too strong after $8.d4?!\ exd4\ 9.cxd4\ \mathbb{Q}g4$ and $\dots \mathbb{Q}e8$ if fitting) $8\dots \mathbb{Q}e8\ 9.d3$ (the recognition of a small failure) $9\dots \mathbb{Q}d7\ 10.\mathbb{Q}bd2\ \mathbb{Q}e7$ (10...a6, and only then starting the knight manoeuvre, might be more accurate) $11.\mathbb{Q}xd7\ \mathbb{Q}xd7\ 12.\mathbb{Q}c4\ \mathbb{Q}g6\ 13.\mathbb{Q}g5\ \mathbb{Q}e6\ 14.a4\ c6\ 15.\mathbb{Q}xb6\ axb6$ and Black has no major problems.



6...h6!?

Pretty much a novelty, played in **Hou Yifan-Kramnik, Dortmund 2015**. The former

World Champion prevents the pin, which could be annoying after otherwise playable alternatives such as 6... $\mathbb{Q}e8$ or 6...d6. It may be more surprising that the direct 6...d5!? is playable, another idea which we will see later on. After 7. $\mathbb{Q}bd2$ or 7. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ (the pawn cannot be taken: 7. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ bxc6 8. $\mathbb{Q}xe5?$ $\mathbb{Q}a6\#$) the game will transpose into a good version of Chapter 6, line A.

7. $\mathbb{Q}bd2$

The pawn is still not appetising, but White has two acceptable alternatives at his disposal:

- a) Normal is **7.0-0 d6 8.h3**



analysis diagram

8...a6 In these positions the knight is usually rerouted via e7-g6, but the direct 8... $\mathbb{Q}e7?$ is not good, on account of 9.d4 exd4 10.cxd4 $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}c3\pm$. A basic rule in this type of positions is that surrendering the centre is not justified if the white knight can be developed via c3.

9. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ The centre is unstable after 9. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ bxc6 10.d4?! exd4 11.cxd4 $\mathbb{Q}b6$. In general, the queen is not well placed on e2. **9... $\mathbb{Q}a7$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}e8!=$** The last two prophylactic moves eliminate the possibility of a rapid d3-d4. After 11. $\mathbb{Q}bd2$ Black can play 11... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ or 11...b5 and 12... $\mathbb{Q}b7$, followed later by the manoeuvre ... $\mathbb{Q}e7-g6$, with a good version of the variation 4.d3 $\mathbb{Q}c5$.

b) The pawn on h6 is a ‘hook’ which can be targeted with 7.h3!? followed by g2-g4, even if Black plays 7...d5. A similar scheme worked very well in a quick game between Gashimov and Kramnik.

7...d6 8.0-0 $\mathbb{Q}e7$

Kramnik begins the ritual dance without further ado.

9.d4 a6?! 10.dxc5?!

After 10. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ exd4 11.cxd4 $\mathbb{Q}a7\infty$, a typical situation is reached: Black puts pressure on the proud white centre, hindering White’s development.

10...axb5 11.cxd6 $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ b6



Though at first sight not so clear, there is more than adequate compensation for the pawn.
After the sloppy

14. ♜c4?! ♜e6 15. ♜e3 ♜xe4 16. ♜d5 ♜c5!

Black was already better, because if 17. ♜xa8 ♜b7 18. ♜a3 ♜a8 wins the queen for two rooks, with good attacking prospects.

CONCLUSION

It does not appear that either of the two variations we have discussed in this chapter is likely to refute the Berlin. 4.d4 is clearly worse, but if you are a connoisseur of Spanish structures you might be able to outplay your opponent in the equal positions that follow after 4. ♜e2. I have chosen 6...h6 as the main variation, out of respect for Kramnik, but if you study the variation 4.d3 ♜c5 5.c3 d5!?, which will be analysed in further detail in Chapter 6, you may well prefer 6...d5.

CHAPTER 2

4.d3 d6

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.d3

The main alternative to 4.0-0, avoiding the Berlin endgame. White does not endeavour to get the most out of the opening, focussing instead on the middlegame. As this variation has been the battle horse of many super GMs in recent times, its theory is in full development.

4...d6

A perfectly sound alternative, which leads the game into positions typical of the Closed Spanish.



1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♗f6 4.d3 d6

I have chosen as the main line the game **Ivanchuk-Carlsen, Bazna 2011.**

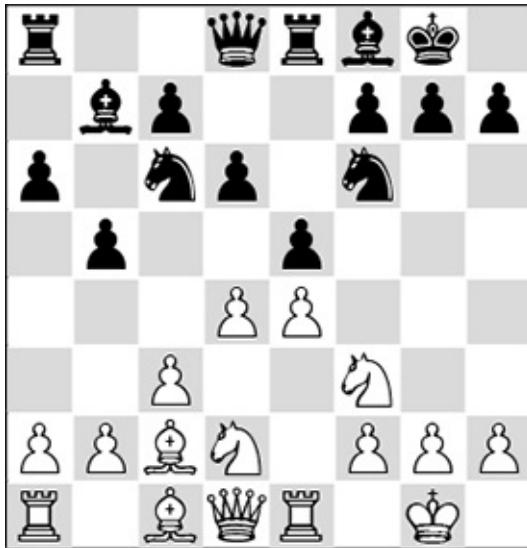
5.0-0 ♘e7

Also common is 5...♝d7, preparing a kingside fianchetto. The game Sjugirov-Kramnik, Russia tt 2016, continued 6.♕e1. This seeks to play 7.d4 without allowing ...exd4 (when e4-e5! would be strong), which will give White the chance to advance the pawn to d5 and force the trade of bishops. Another interesting idea is 6.c4 g6 7.♘c3 ♝g7 8.h3 0-0 9.♗e3 ±, as in Svidler-Andreikin, Nizhny Novgorod 2013. After d3-d4, White will have a kind of favourable version of the King's Indian. 6...g6 7.d4! ♝g7 8.d5 ♘e7 9.c4

It is more normal to trade bishops. An instructive example is Bok-Postny, Fagernes 2014, which continued 9.♗xd7+ ♘xd7 10.♗e3 0-0 11.c4 h6 12.♗fd2 f5 13.f3 c5 (looking for play on the entire board. Without the light-squared bishop, it is difficult for Black get very much on the kingside) 14.dxc6!? bxc6 15.♘c3±. 9...0-0 10.♘c3 ♝g4!? 11.h3 ♘xf3 12.♗xf3 ♔h8! 13.♔a4 ♘fg8 14.♗c2 f5∞ Black has achieved reasonable counterplay. Unless anything unusual happens, there will follow 15...♝h6.

6.♘e1

In Motylev-Dominguez Perez, Minsk rapid 2015, 6.c3 0-0 7.♗bd2 a6 8.♗a4 ♘e8 9.d4 b5 10.♗c2 ♘b7 11.♘e1 ♘f8 was played:



analysis diagram

It is interesting to compare this position to the one from the reliable yet slightly old-fashioned Zaitsev Variation in the Closed Morphy: 1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 a6 4.♗a4 ♗f6 5.0-0 ♘e7 6.♘e1 b5 7.♗b3 d6 8.c3 0-0 9.h3 (9.d4 ♘g4 gives Black better chances to equalise) 9...♗b7 10.d4 ♘e8 11.♗bd2 ♘f8



analysis diagram

In our line, White has not played the semi-useful h2-h3, and the bishop is on c2, where it is more passive but also less exposed than on b3; all in all, I think that Black has better chances to equalise than in the Zaitsev. In the game quoted above, the Russian GM tried **12.a3** (if 12. $\mathbb{Q}f1?!$, exd4 13.cxd4 $\mathbb{Q}b4$ eliminates the Spanish bishop) **12... $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 13.b3 $\mathbb{Q}bd7$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ g6 15.a4 $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ c6=**, and a position from the Breyer Variation is reached, in which White has managed to save a tempo by not playing h3, but used that tempo on a3-a4.

6...0-0 7.c3 a6 8. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ b5

8... $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}bd2$ transposes to Anand-Carlsen, Stavanger 2015, a game that began with the move order 1.e4 e5 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 3. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ a6 4. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 5.0-0 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 6.d3!? (also here, the trend to move the d-pawn only one square is featured) 6...d6 7.c3 0-0 8. $\mathbb{Q}bd2$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}e1$. The game continued: **9...b5 10. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}f1$**

White delays the advance of the d-pawn. In this way, the additional defence that is given to the e-pawn allows him to carry out the typical knight manoeuvre to g3 without major problems; this seems to be a more accurate plan than the one used in Motylev-Dominguez Perez. **11...g6 12.h3 $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 14.d4 $\mathbb{Q}bd7$**



analysis diagram

As indicated by Simen Agdestein in *New in Chess 2015/5*, a normal position of the Breyer Variation has been reached by transposition, as the tempo lost with the advance d3-d4 is cancelled out by the direct retreat to c2. Carlsen was considerably worse after **15.a4 c5 16.d5 c4 17.Qg5 Qg7?!** (better is 17...h6) **18.Qd2 Qb8 19.Qh2 Qc8 20.Qg4 Qc5 21.Qh6+±.**

9.Qc2

Now, Black can continue with 9...Qb7 and play as in the notes above, but he also has a good alternative at his disposal to avoid transpositions into Morphy territory, already played a long time ago by giants such as Rubinstein and Botvinnik:

9...d5!?



10.Qbd2

10.exd5 Qxd5 gives Black a comfortable game.

10...dxe4

In the symmetrical structure that this move leads to, Black has good chances to equalise.

10...d4 is an interesting yet slightly riskier alternative.

11.dxe4 Qe6 12.Qb3

In Adams-Baramidze, Baden-Baden 2015, the English GM preferred 12.a4, which seems like a better try for an advantage. The game continued 12...Qc5!? 13.Qe2 Qa7! (the bishop manoeuvre tries to prevent weaknesses on the queenside, which the advance of the b-pawn would create) 14.h3 Qh5 15.Qf1, and here Black was still OK with 15...Qc4. Instead, he chose 15...Qf6 16.Qd3 Qe7? (16...b4 was forced), and fell victim to a stylish combination:



analysis diagram

17.axb5 axb5 18.♖xa7! ♖xa7 19.♗g5 ♗g6 20.♗e3+–

12...♝xb3 13.axb3 ♜d3 14.b4

Ivanchuk attempts to fix the pawn as well as the c5-square, gaining a small advantage obtained by the exchange of the bishop, but Carlsen's better development allows him to liquidate the weaknesses with active play.

14...♞fd8 15.♝b3 ♜d7! 16.♝c2 ♜e6 17.♝b3

Dorian Rogozenco, annotating the game for *ChessBase Magazine*, points out that 17.♝b3 is answered by 17...♝c4 18.♝fd2 (18.♜e2? allows 18...♝xb4!, exploiting the weakness of the back rank) 18...♝e6 19.♝f1 ♜c4=.

17...♝d7 18.♝c2 ♜e6

Now, 19.♝b3 leads to a draw by repetition of moves. In the game,

19.h3 a5

was played, and Black fully equalised.

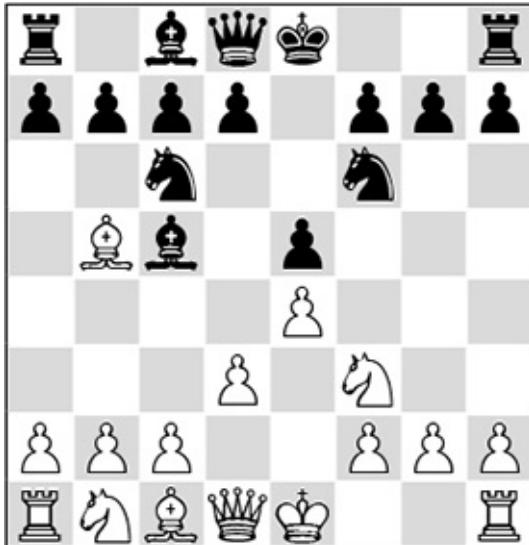
CONCLUSION

The positions from this chapter are ideal for players who are well versed in the complex Closed Morphy, or who like the Indian types of positions that are reached after 5...♝d7 and 6...g6. If this is not your cup of tea, I recommend that you study the following chapters.

CHAPTER 3

4.d3 ♜c5: Introduction, and the development of the b1-knight

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♜c6 3.♗b5 ♜f6 4.d3 ♜c5



The most popular system of development. After 4.0-0, it is not so good to play 4...♜c5, as 5.c3 or 5.♗xe5 give White good prospects for an advantage, but once the white d-pawn has advanced a square, top GMs usually seize the opportunity to develop the bishop actively.

The rapid theoretical development of the variation implicates a division of the material into different chapters; in this chapter we will discuss the moves of the ♜b1, in Chapter 4 the immediate exchange of the knight on c6, 5.0-0 in Chapter 5, and 5.c3, the main variation, in Chapters 6 and 7.

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.d3 ♘c5

A) 5.♘c3

An unpretentious move that leads to a kind of Four Knights Game with the black bishop on c5 instead of b4.

5...d6

The theory of these lines is not entirely established and the decision to promote one or the other move to our main line is rather arbitrary. In this case, we will pay due respect to the following big names, as we are following the game **Carlsen-Anand, London 2012**.

Black has two alternatives that are less solid, but definitely more fun:

a) 5...a6 loses a tempo in return for forcing White to make decisions. Karjakin-A.Onischuk, Baku 2015, continued 6.♗xc6 dxc6 7.♘xe5!? (the future tournament winner completely changes the structure. 7.♕e3 or 7.h3 were possible, aiming for schemes in the style of Chapter 4 (with the immediate 5.♗xc6), claiming that Black has lost a tempo with his 5th move) 7...♗d4 8.♗e3 ♗xe5 9.d4 ♗e7 10.dxc5 ♗xe4 11.♗d4 ♗f5 12.0-0-0.



analysis diagram

Karjakin, who had lost the first game of the mini-match to the experienced American GM, originally also from the Crimean Peninsula, decides to try his luck in an endgame with a minimal edge because of the c5-pawn which fixes weaknesses on b7 and c7. This decision shows just how difficult it is for White to get even the slightest of initiatives against the Berlin. After 12...0-0 13.♗xe4 ♗xe4 14.♗xe4 ♗xe4 15.f3 ♗f5 16.♗f4 ♖ac8 17.♖he1 ♗e6 18.♗e3 ♖fe8 19.♗d4 b6 20.♗b4 a5 21.♗a4 ♖e7 22.c4 ♖d7 23.cxb6 cxb6 24.c5 bxc5 25.♗xa5, White's advantage began to take shape and Karjakin displayed impressive technique, praised on Twitter by none other than Carlsen;

b) More interesting play occurs after 5...0-0 6.♗g5. With the king already castled, the pin seems annoying, but Black has an attractive resource at his disposal. Let's briefly examine other options:

b1) 6.0-0 is answered as in the main line: 6...♗d4! 7.♗xe5 (risky, but otherwise White would not be able to claim any opening advantage) 7...d6 8.♗f3 ♗g4 9.♗e3 ♗xf3

10.gxf3 c6 11.Qa4 b5 12.Qb3 Qh5 (Black has excellent compensation for the pawn)
 13.Qh1 Qh4 14.Qg1 Qh3 15.Qf1 Qxf3+ 16.Qg2 a5= Svidler-PH Nielsen,
 Copenhagen rapid 2010;

b2) The somewhat stronger 6.Qxc6 dxc6 7.Qg5, which was played in Motylev-Kramnik, Nizhny Novgorod 2013, forces Black to look for alternative ways to untangle in this structure with ...Qd6 and ...Qd7. The former World Champion solved the problem with 7...Qd6!? (more passive, but perfectly playable, is 7...Qg4 8.h3 Qxf3 9.Qxf3 Qe7=, followed by ...Qd7, as in Bartel-Balogh, Budapest 2014) 8.Qd2 a5 9.h3 Qe8 10.Qh4 a4 11.a3 b5 12.0-0 Qh5 13.Qe2 Qb6 14.g4 h6 15.Qe3 Qf4 16.Qxf4 exf4 17.Qxf4 Qf6 18.Qf5 Qxb2∞.

6...h6! 7.Qh4 Qd4! An improved version of the Rubinstein Gambit in the Four Knights Game. 8.Qxe5 Neither 8.Qxd4 Qxd4 nor 8.Qa4 c6!? (8...d6=) holds any promise to White. 8...Qe8 9.Qf3 The d3-pawn takes away the best retreat square for the knight. If 9.Qxf6 Qxf6 10.Qxd7 Qg5 11.Qxc5 Qxg2→.

9...c6 10.Qa4 The black initiative is very dangerous after 10.Qxf6?! Qxf6 11.Qa4 d5 (also strong is 11...a5!?) 12.Qxd4 Qxd4 13.0-0 b5 14.Qb3 a5 15.a3 Qg6, and even worse is 10.Qxd4? Qxd4 11.Qa4 Qxe4!+.



analysis diagram

10...Qxe4! This neat trick regains the pawn. Also possible is 10...d5∞. **11.Qxe4 Qxf3+** **12.Qxf3 Qxh4 13.0-0 Qf8** And in Navara-Landa, Minsk rapid 2015, Black had at least equalised thanks to his bishop pair.

6.Qa4!

This ensures the advantage of the bishop pair, a significant achievement that compensates for the slight loss of time and the doubled pawns.

6...Qb6 7.Qxb6 axb6 8.c3! Qd7 9.Qa4 Qe7 10.Qc2

White has managed to save the bishop. However, 10.Qb3, as in Bartel-Maletin, Moscow 2014, is a possible improvement. After 10...Qg6 11.h3 0-0 12.0-0, White can prepare the d3-d4 advance with his more active bishop, and if 12...Qe6 13.Qc2 he has prevented

Anand's ... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ in the main line. The game continued 13...c5!? 14.a3 h6 15.d4 $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}fe8$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}ad8$ 18.d5 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 19.a4 $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}d2\pm$.

10... $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 11.h3 0-0 12.0-0 h6 13. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 14.d4



14... $\mathbb{Q}c6!$

Forces White to take a decision in the centre.

15.dxe5

15.d5 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 16.c4 leads to more complicated play. As pointed out by Postny, Black gets counterplay with 16... $\mathbb{Q}h5$ and a later ...f7-f5, but preparing c4-c5 might give White chances of an advantage in the medium term.

15...dxe5 16. $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ $\mathbb{Q}exd8$ 17.g3 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}d2\pm$

In the endgame, Black's activity compensates for the bishop pair, and the Norwegian genius even managed to create certain difficulties for the then World Champion.

B) 5. $\mathbb{Q}bd2!?$

This subtle development became quite popular during the early months of 2016. White is trying to transpose to normal lines after eliminating or complicating some of his opponent's possible answers.

5... $\mathbb{Q}d4$

Allows White to carry out his main idea, but the consequences are not very serious. Of course, two natural developing moves are also possible:

a) 5...d6 cannot be bad, but White enters Chapter 5 (5.0-0), without having to look for an antidote against 5... $\mathbb{Q}d4$, which, as we will see in Chapter 5, seems very comfortable for Black;

b) After 5...0-0, Caruana (among others) has played 6. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$, and if Black captures with the d-pawn, we reach Chapter 4 (5. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{Q}dxc6$ 6. $\mathbb{Q}bd2$) with Black already having castled, ruling out the options 6... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ and 6... $\mathbb{Q}g4$ and allowing White to follow the fashionable plan with queenside castling. To avoid this transposition, some of the toughest proponents of the Berlin have experimented with an interesting gambit: 6... $\mathbb{Q}bxc6!?$

7. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 8. $\mathbb{Q}ef3$ d5 9. 0-0 $\mathbb{Q}g4$



analysis diagram

The bishop pair and the advantage in development seems to guarantee reasonable compensation. Grandelius-Aronian, Stavanger 2016, continued: 10. h3 $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ h6!? An attempt to improve on Anand-Caruana, Stavanger 2015: 11...dxe4 12. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ (12.dxe4 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}d5=$) 12...h6 13. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ (a more or less forced simplification to an endgame with a tiny advantage. With 13. $\mathbb{Q}e1$, it might be possible to hope for a little more) 13... $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 14. dxe4 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xd8+$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{Q}e2!$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}fc1$ a5 19. b3 a4, and Black defended with relative ease. 12. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ a5 13. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ 13.e5 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 14.g4 $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}f1\infty$ gives Black similar compensation as in our main game. 13... a4 13... $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ dxe4= 14. e5 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 15. d4 $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 16. c4 $\mathbb{Q}f8$ Black is very active and does not at all feel he is a pawn down. The whole line is in full theoretical development, and it won't surprise me if there will be some improvements for both sides.

6. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 7. c3

Taking into account the large number of lines in the 4. d3 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ complex where Black surrenders the e-pawn, it is easy to fall for the trick 7. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 8. $\mathbb{Q}xe5??$ (8. 0-0) 8... $\mathbb{Q}e7$, and White loses a piece as well as all hope.

7... $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 8. $\mathbb{Q}c4$



Taking advantage of the early development of the knight to gain the pair of bishops.

Vachier-Lagrange-Giri, Wijk aan Zee 2015, continued:

8...0-0 9.0-0 d5 10.exd5

After 10.♘xb6 axb6 11.exd5. also playable is 10...♝g4!?, provoking the advance of the f-pawn. Black's idea can be clearly seen in the variation 11.f3 (11.♗d2 ♞xd5 12.♗c4 ♞d6 13.♗e1 ♞fe8= did not create any difficulties for Black in Korneev-Lötscher, Lienz 2015) 11...♞xd5 12.♗c4 ♞c5+! 13.♗h1 ♛f5∞.

10... ♞xd5 11.♘xb6

11.a4 ♛g4 12.♗e1 c6 13.♘xb6 axb6 14.♗c4 ♞d6 15.♗e3 ♞d5=, Vachier-Lagrange-Jakovenko, Tbilisi 2015.

11...axb6 12.♗c4 ♞d6 13.♗g5 ♛g4!?

In *Informant 123*, Branko Tadic mentions 13...♝e6?! 14.♗xf6 ♞xc4 15.♗xe5 ♜xe5 16.dxc4±. It is possible that the extra pawn cannot be exploited, but as the American master Olav Ulvestad, who lived in Spain for many years, used to say in such cases: 'Better a doubled pawn, than no pawn at all.'

Tadic also suggests the possibility 13...♞d5!?∞.

14.♗d2

Again, it is useful to have a check on c5: 14.f3 ♛e6 15.♗xf6 ♞xc4 16.♗xe5 ♜xe5 17.dxc4 ♞ad8, and Black regains the pawn with full equality.

14...♞d7 15.d4 exd4?!

Better is 15...♝e6 16.d5 ♛f5∞, which was suggested by Tadic. It will not be easy for White to advance his majority on the queenside.

16.cxd4 ♛f6?! 17.♗f4 ♞d7

17...♞d8±

18.♗e5 ♛e6 19.♗xf6 gxf6 20.d5 c6 21.♗h6! cxd5 22.♗ad1

The brilliant young French GM obtained a considerable advantage, treating his younger but equally brilliant opponent to one of his rare defeats.

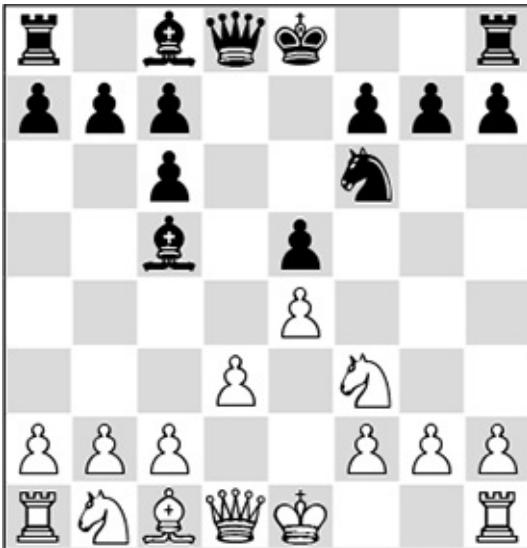
CONCLUSION

5.♘c3 is not without danger, but the difficulties can be solved with 5...0-0 or with the more passive 5...d6. Instead, the subtle 5.♘bd2?! is a serious try for an advantage in the Anti-Berlin complex, especially if White manages to refute the pawn sacrifice from Grandelius-Aronian, and comes up with something aimed against 5...♞d4.

CHAPTER 4

4.d3 ♜c5 5. ♜xc6 dxc6

1.e4 e5 2. ♜f3 ♜c6 3. ♜b5 ♜f6 4.d3 ♜c5 5. ♜xc6 dxc6



In this variation, the structure from the Exchange Variation is reached, with the ♜c5 and the ♜f6 not very well placed. The bishop will retreat to d6 to make way for the c-pawn, while the knight will look for greener pastures via d7. Meanwhile, White looks to exploit the fact that these manoeuvres use up quite a few tempi. The whole scheme was beginning to look innocuous, but efforts by Caruana and Wei Yi show that there are attacking chances with opposite-side castling after the critical 6. ♜bd2 0-0.

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.d3 ♗c5 5.♗xc6 dxc6

A) 6.h3

The fashion in 2014, aimed at preventing the development of the bishop to g4. We are following the game **Carlsen-Caruana, Zurich 2014**.

6...♝d7

White is playing in slow motion, and this allows the manoeuvre ...♝f8-g6 (or e6) before castling, thus sparing a future ...♜e8. 6...♝e6 is another interesting idea, reserving the option of queenside castling.

7.♗e3 ♗d6 8.♗c3

This novelty by Carlsen does not alter the evaluation: this line leads to equality. After 8.♗bd2, 8...0-0 (8...c5 is also possible) 9.0-0 ♜e8 led to a quick draw in Anand-Carlsen, Zurich 2014: 10.♗c4 ♘f8 11.d4 (11.♗fd2 ♘g6, and there is no f2-f4) 11...exd4 12.♕xd4 c5 13.♗d3 b6 14.♗xd6 ♕xd6 15.♗xd6 cxd6 16.♗fd1 ♛b7 17.♗xd6 ♛xe4 18.♗e1 ♜ad8 19.♗ad1 ♛e6 20.♗xd8 ♜xd8 21.♗xd8+ ♜xd8=, and there is hardly any material left on the board.

8...c5 9.0-0 ♘f8! 10.♗d2 ♘g6 11.♗c4 ♛e6 12.♗e2



Carlsen has prepared the advance of the f-pawn. Now, Caruana continued to delay castling with 12...♞d7?! 13.♗xd6+ cxd6 14.f4 exf4 15.♗xf4 ♛xf4 16.♗xf4 b6? (16...0-0 would still keep the game within drawing margins, as after 17.♗h5 f6 (17...f5?! 18.♗h4 g6 19.♗h6 is slightly annoying) 18.♗h4? (18.♗af1 ♛h8=) 18...g5!, the rook has nowhere to go) 17.♗h5 d5 18.d4!, and found himself in a very dangerous position.

The simple

12...0-0!

would equalise without too many problems. After

13.♗xd6 cxd6 14.f4

Black can break the tension with

14...exf4 15.♗xf4 ♛xf4 16.♗xf4 f5 17.exf5 ♜xf5 18.♗xf5 ♛xf5 19.♗f3 ♞d7 20.♗f1 ♛g6=

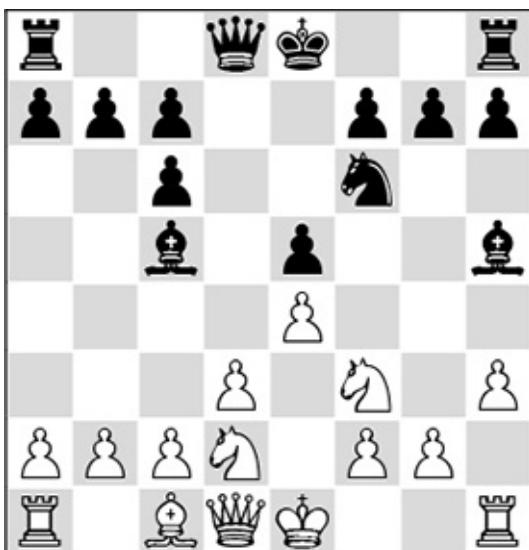
B) 6. ♘bd2

The most popular. The unforced character of the game leaves Black with several methods of development, three of which we will analyse in some depth: 6... ♗g4 (B1), 6... ♗e6 (B2) and 6... 0-0 (B3). Also frequently played are 6... ♘d7 and 6... ♗d6, which almost always transpose to line B3 after the normal 7. ♘c4 0-0. Less appropriate seems 6... ♗e7. In Caruana-Nakamura, London 2015, White managed to prove that the black queen is not too well placed: 7.h3!? (prevents ... ♗g4) 7... 0-0 8. ♘c4 ♘d7 9. ♗e2 b5?! (ugly. Perhaps Nakamura was afraid of 9... f6 10. g4!?) 10. ♘e3 ♘b6 11. ♘f5 ♗xf5 12. exf5 ♘d7 13. ♘d2±

B1) 6... ♗g4

A continuation that was briefly in vogue after Carlsen played it in his 2013 World Championship match against Anand. The ‘extra bishop’ is willing to sacrifice itself on f3.

7.h3 ♗h5



8. ♘f1

I have decided to keep this knight manoeuvre as the main variation because of the importance of the game in which it was played. However, White has two other ideas available that might give him better chances of getting some advantage:

a) 8. ♘c4 ♘d7 9. g4 ♗g6 10. ♗e2 ♗e7 11. ♘d2 0-0-0 12. 0-0-0 f6 was played in Laznicka-Gogonov, Gjakova 2016. The Czech GM is playing the scheme we will see in variation B3, but without a pawn attack on the king. After 13. ♘e3 ♘f8 14. ♘f5 ♖f7 15. ♖b1 ♘e6 16. ♘e3 ♖he8 White achieved next to nothing;

b) 8. ♘b3!? ♗d6 9. g4 ♗g6 10. ♗g5, as in Berg-Aronsson, Sweden tt 2014/15, leads to an interesting fight with regard to the bishop on g6, which could be left out of the game forever if the opponent manages to double pawns on the f-file. The Swedish GM got an edge after 10... h6!? 11. ♗h4 h5 12. ♗g1 hxg4 13. hxg4 ♗e7 14. ♗g5 0-0-0 15. ♗e2 ♗e6 16. ♘h4±, but his opponent could have played better at some point, for example with 14... a5 or 14... ♖h3∞.

8... ♘d7 9. ♘g3 ♗xf3! 10. ♗xf3 g6

The knight is not very well placed on g3.

11.♘e3 ♘e7 12.0-0-0

While it is true that White has very little chances of getting an edge, a better try to get active play was 12.0-0, with the idea of preparing f2-f4 after ♘e2 and ♖g3.

12...0-0-0 13.♖e2 ♜he8 14.♗b1 b6 15.h4 ♗b7 16.h5 ♘xe3 17.♘xe3 ♜c5

And White got nothing in **Anand-Carlsen, Chennai 2013.**

B2) 6...♘e6



The safest move, avoiding the mess that variation B3 currently leads to. Black develops his bishop before the necessary manoeuvre ...♗f6-d7, delaying castling while White decides where to put his own king. The only drawback of the plan is that the 'extra' bishop runs the risk of being exchanged.

7.0-0

7.♗b3 only has independent value after 7...♗d6. I prefer 7...♗b6 8.0-0 ♗d7 9.♗g5, which leads to the main line. **8.♘a5!?** The continuation in the game Hou Yifan-Zhu Chen, Sharjah 2014, is interesting: **8...♗b8 8...♗b4+ 9.♗d2 ♗xa5 10.♗xa5 ♗d7 11.d4±** is uncomfortable for Black. **9.♗d2**



analysis diagram

9...c5 In Caruana-Topalov, Leuven rapid 2016, Black chose not to advance the pawn: 9...0-0 10.♗e2 ♕e8 11.h3!?, and now he didn't find anything better than 11...♝d7, which allowed the exchange of the bishop that had no counterpart: 12.♝g5 ♝f8 13.♝xe6 ♝xe6 14.♝g4 ♛c5 15.0-0 ♛e7 16.♝c4± 10.♗e2 ♛e7 11.a3!? h6 12.0-0 ♜d7 13.♜fb1 ♛f6 14.♗b4± The plan to eliminate the opponent's doubled pawn by the advance of the b-pawn occurs frequently in the Rossolimo Sicilian (1.e4 c5 2.♝f3 ♛c6 3.♝b5).

7...♝d7

7...♝d6 is riskier than the main variation.

White has tried several methods to develop his initiative:



analysis diagram

a) **8.♝b3** is the latest fad. The game Saric-Fressinet, Germany Bundesliga 2015/16, is interesting: 8...♛e7 8...0-0?! 9.♝g5 c5 10.♞a5 ♕b8 11.♝e1 h6 12.♝h4 ♛g4 13.♝e3± was uncomfortable for Black in Bartel-Goryachkina, Moscow 2016. 9.♝e1!? 9.♞a5 ♕b8 10.♝d2 can also be considered, with the idea of playing the plan from the previous note with a3-b4. 9...h6 10.♞a5 ♕b8 11.d4!? exd4 12.e5 ♛b4 13.♝d2 ♛xa5?! Better is 13...♝d5. 14.♛xa5 14.exf6!? ♛xd2 15.fxg7!, which may punish Black's dubious move order.

14...♝d5 15.♝xd4 0-0 16.♗e4 c5 17.c4 ♛f4!∞;

b) Lately, super GMs have tried **8.d4 ♜d7 9.dxe5 ♜xe5 10.♝xe5 ♛xe5 11.f4**. The pawns advance menacingly, but the bishops seem to provide sufficient defensive resources. See e.g. Nakamura-Aronian, Zurich 2016: **11...♝d4+** An attempt to improve on Caruana-Grischuk, London 2015, which continued 11...♝d4+ 12.♝h1 f5 (12...f6 13.f5 ♛f7 14.♝g4 ♛e7! 15.c3 h5 16.♝e2 ♛e5 17.♝f3 0-0-0∞, Brkic-Hovhannisyan, Halkidiki 2011). Caruana blitzed out his opening moves, so we can assume he had prepared something: 13.♝h5+ g6 14.♝e2 0-0 15.♝f3 ♛f6 16.e5 ♛e7 17.♝d1 ♛e8 18.♝d4 ♛f7 19.♝xe6 ♛xe6 20.♝e3, and White is a little better, even though the blockade of the passed pawn makes a draw the most likely result. **12.♝h1 ♜d6 13.♝e2**



analysis diagram

And here, instead of 13...0-0-0?!, which was played in Nakamura-Aronian, Zurich 2016, it was safer to play **13...f6!∞**:

c) **8.b3** seeks to eliminate the pair of bishops with ♜c4, although Black seems to hold his own in the resulting positions: **8...0-0** In Adams-Giri, Germany Bundesliga 2014/15, the always well-prepared Dutch star equalised with 8...♜d7 9.♝c4 ♜xc4 (nor should Black be worried too much after 9...0-0 10.h3 ♔e7 11.♝xd6 cxd6 12.d4 f5!? 13.dxe5 dxe5 14.♝g5 f4= Svidler-Anand, St Louis 2016) 10.bxc4 0-0 11.♝e3 ♔e7 12.c3 b5 (takes advantage of the opponent's pawn on c4. In some previous high-level games, Black had sought counterplay with ...f7-f5, which seems less reliable) 13.cxb5 cxb5 14.a4 a6 15.♔c2 c5 16.axb5 axb5=. **9.♝b2** 9.♝c4 will probably transpose to the previous note.

9...♜d7 10.♔e2 c5 11.♝c4 f6 12.♝h4



analysis diagram

12...♝b8! The knight is on one of its two common circuits to get back into the game (the other one is f8-e6), and already eyeballing the d4-square. In Yu Yangyi-Eljanov, Havana 2015, the Chinese GM decided to break in the centre before his opponent could complete the plan, but he did not get anything: **13.♝xd6 ♔xd6 14.f4 exf4 15.e5 fxe5 16.♝xe5 ♔d7 17.♝xf4 ♜c6 18.♝e3 ♜d4 19.♝d2 ♜g4=** The downside of 7...♜d7 is that Black

more or less has to reconcile himself to the idea of exchanging his proud bishop.

8.♗b3! ♜b6

The best retreat. After 8...♝d6?! 9.♝a5! ♜b8 10.♝g5 ♜e7 11.♝xe6 ♜xe6 12.a4 0-0 13.♝c4±, as in Svetushkin-Dvirnyy, Skopje 2016, Black has a more passive version of the main line. 8...♝e7 prevents the exchange of the bishop, but White can get a better version of the plan from the note to 7.0-0, with 9.♝a5 ♜b8 10.♝d2, as in Nisipeanu-Wagner, Baden-Baden 2014, or break quickly with 9.d4. In this case, a possible continuation is 9...♝f6 10.♝a5! ♜b8 11.dxe5 ♜xe5 12.♝xd8+ ♜xd8 13.♝d4±, with a pleasant endgame (Harikrishna-Melkumyan, Biel 2012). In the Berlin endgame, the e-pawn is on e5, which makes the defender's life easier.

9.♝g5 ♜xb3 10.axb3 f6 11.♝f3 ♜c5

Simple chess. In Yu Yangyi-Kramnik, Doha 2014, the former World Champion preferred the slower 11...♝f8 12.♝d2 ♜e6, which the rising Chinese star capitalised on by creating a small weakness on the kingside with 13.♞h5+!? g6 14.♞d1. Now, exchanging the bishop on b6 followed by f2-f4 could create difficulties, so Kramnik complicated matters with 14...♝c5 15.♝c4 b5!? 16.♝a5 ♜d7 17.♝e3 ♜b6 18.b4 0-0, and in his publication *After Magnus* (New in Chess, 2015) Giri points out the idea 19.♝b3 here, which should give White some advantage.

12.♝d2 0-0 13.♝c4 ♜e6



In this type of position, White has the slightly more comfortable game and can fight for the advantage with the f2-f4 break, while Black is solid yet slightly passive. Nonetheless, it is by no means easy for White to make any progress. We are following the game **Eliseev-Khismatullin, Russia tt 2016**:

14.♚h1

In Bok-Khairullin, Bangkok 2016, White adopted a slightly different approach to the position: 14.g3 ♜d7 15.♛g2 ♜d4 16.♝e3 a6 17.♝xd4 ♜xd4 18.b4!? ♜e7 19.♝e3=± It is no big deal, but White can start preparing the f2-f4 advance with c2-c3 (to prevent the response ...f6-f5), and after that defend the d-pawn.

14...♜d7 15.♛g4 ♜ad8 16.f4

16. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xa7$ (19. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ a6 20. f4 f5=) 19... $\mathbb{Q}xc2$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ $\mathbb{Q}xd3=$ led to nothing in Nakamura-Kramnik, Zurich rapid 2016.

16... $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ $exf4$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xf4$

20. $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ immediately was more accurate, avoiding 20... $\mathbb{Q}d4$.

19... $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ $axb6$



In this endgame, the possibility of a minority attack gives White only a symbolic advantage, and with accurate play Black should be able to hold. You can see how things ended in Game 1 in Chapter 20.

B3) 6...0-0

The most common alternative, which leads to more interesting play. It is possible to reach this position from the move order 6. $\mathbb{Q}bd2!$? 0-0 7. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $dxc6$.

7. $\mathbb{Q}c4$

In the majority of recent outings, White has achieved not even a snippet of an advantage with the normal development 7.0-0 $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 8. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$. Anand-So, St Louis 2015, continued 9. $b3$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}fd2$ (10. d4 exd4 11. $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ cxd6 12. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}e5=$ led to a quick draw in David-A.Mastrovasilis, Isthmia 2015) 10... $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 11. a4 $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 14. f3 b6 15. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ c5, and if anything, White was worse in Mamedov-Caruana, Baku 2015. 9... a5 10. a4 f6 11. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ b5!?

A more active plan than the usual ...c6-c5, which is possible thanks to the white b-pawn. 13. c3 $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ and Black seized the initiative.

7... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 8. $\mathbb{Q}e2$!?

The modern trend that has increased interest in the trade on c6. White keeps the option of queenside castling, sharpening the game.

8... $\mathbb{Q}e8$

As was to be expected, the theory of this new plan is rapidly developing. Kokarev-Goganov, Russia tt 2016, saw the interesting plan 8... f6 9. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ (another plan is 10. $\mathbb{Q}a5$!?, with similar ideas to the variation 6... $\mathbb{Q}e6$) 10... $\mathbb{Q}e6$, which interferes

radically with the opponent's plans: **11.0-0** 11.0-0-0? is not possible on account of ♜xa2, but it might be preferable to adopt a waiting policy with 11.h3, not committing to anything while foreshadowing a possible g2-g4, or with 11.a3, preparing b2-b4 or even ♜b4. **11...♞c8!** Immediately improving the position of the knight. **12.c3?!** 12.b4 creates more problems. **12...a5 13.♕fd1 ♞d6** Now, Kokarev foregoes the planned 14.d4?, which would lead to a difficult position after 14...♝b6! 15.dxe5 fxe5!, and there is no comfortable defence against the e-pawn, but after 14.c4 b6, Black is completely OK.

9.♗d2



9...♝d6

We are following the game **Caruana-Nakamura, Moscow 2016**. In the months following this game, other methods of counterplay have been developed.

a) In Bruzon Batista-E.l'Ami, Baku 2016, the solid Dutch GM launched an immediate pawn storm on the queenside: 9...b5 10.♘e3 (10.♗a5 is a good alternative, but after 10...♝f6∞ (Areshchenko-Balogh, Germany Bundesliga 2015/16), there could follow ...♝f8-g6, or ...♝b6, followed by ...♝c5) 10...♝b6 11.0-0-0?! (brave, but I prefer 11.h3 or 11.h4!?) 11...a5 12.♔b1 b4 13.g4 ♘a4 14.♗c1 ♘d4 15.♗hg1 ♘e6 16.♗c4 ♘b8 and Black seems to be ahead in the mutual attacking race;

b) 9...♝b6!? was played in Howell-Adams, Llandudno 2016. 10.♘e3 (in *Informant* 129, Adams points out the possibilities 10.♗cxe5? f6†, 10.♗fxe5 ♘d4 11.♗c3 ♘xc3+ 12.bxc3 f6∞, and 10.♗a5!?) 10...a5 (10...f6∞) 11.h4 ♘d4 12.0-0-0 ♘e6 13.♔b1 f6 and here, instead of 14.g4 ♘xe3 15.♗xe3 ♘xg4 16.♗dg1 ♘xf3 17.♗xf3 ♔h8∞, which is not entirely clear, Adams likes 14.♗f5, no doubt with some advantage to White.

10.0-0-0!?

The Italo-American GM, who needed to win at all costs after starting the Candidates' with seven consecutive draws, comments in *New in Chess* 2016/3 that he had spent the whole night prior to the game looking at defensive resources against the black queenside attack, which confirms just how dangerous advancing the a- and b-pawns is.

It is interesting to follow how the ideas in this position have evolved in recent times:

a) Anand-Giri, Bilbao 2015, continued 10.g4 ♕f8! (immediately exploiting the weakness created on f4) 11.♕e3 ♕e6 12.♕f5 a5!? 13.h4 a4. Anand did not dare to castle queenside, intimidated by the advance of the pawn, but after 14.♕g5 a3 15.b3 ♔c5 16.♕xe6 ♔xe6 17.♔f3 ♕f8=, his attack ran out of steam;

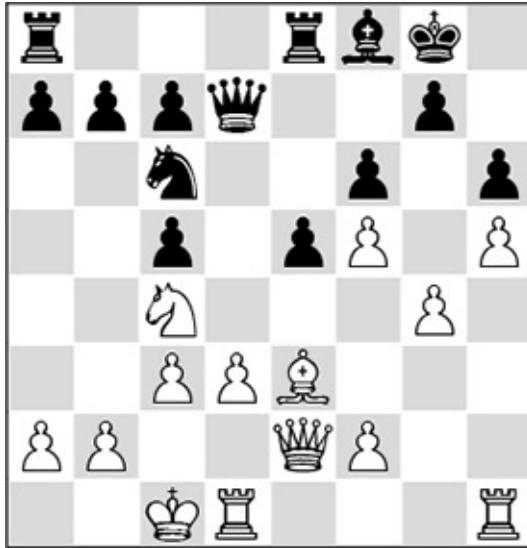
b) Three months later, in the ninth round of the traditional tournament in **Wijk aan Zee 2016**, a curious phenomenon took place: two world class GMs, surely working separately, had come to the same conclusions and tested at the same time the novelty **10.h4!?**, working with the light squares as this pawn threatens to move forward. An h-pawn attack usually has the advantage of not leaving many weaknesses in the pawn's wake. We are following the game **Caruana-Karjakin**: **10...♕f8** In Wei Yi-Navara, the optimistic Czech GM preferred 10...c5 11.h5 h6?! 12.0-0-0 ♕b8? (too ambitious. Better is 12...♕f8 13.g4 f6±. and a later ...♕e6 allows Black to organise a better defence) 13.♖dg1 (13.g4! is more accurate) 13...♕c6?! (13...♗g4 14.♕e3 ♖d7 15.♕xg4 ♖xg4±) 14.g4 f6.



analysis diagram

And here, White, the Benjamin among super GMs, unleashed a brilliant attack with 15.g5!!, which is further covered in Game 2 (Chapter 20).

11.h5 ♕e6 It is better not to touch the h7-pawn for the moment. 12.0-0-0 12.h6?! g6 is good for Black. **12...c5 13.♗f1 f6 14.♕h4 ♕d4 15.c3 ♕c6 16.♕f5 ♗xf5 17.exf5 h6 18.g4 ♕f8 19.♗e2 ♖d7 20.♗e3**



analysis diagram

At first sight, White seems a little better, but Caruana stated in *New In Chess* that he had obtained practically nothing.

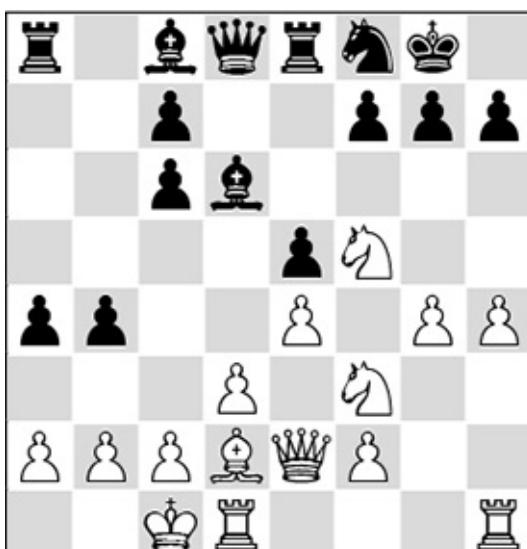
It may be unsurprising to see Caruana and Wei Yi share the same opinion: top GMs work in very similar ways, thoroughly researching a limited set of openings and using the same analysis engines.

10...b5

Starting the pawn race. Quick castling had already been attempted in the game Perez Candelario-Sargissian, Villafranca 2010. The Armenian GM took the initiative after 10...c5 11.♔b1 ♜b8 12.c3 ♜c6 13.♕e3 b5, but it is better not to touch the queenside and continue instead with 11.♕e3 ♜b8 12.♕f5 ♜c6 and now advance either the g- or h-pawn, or perhaps flick in 13.♕g5!?, as Caruana does in the main line.

11.♕e3 a5 12.♕f5 a4?!

After 12...♜f8 13.g4 b4 14.h4 a4∞



analysis diagram

a critical and as of yet unplayed position has been reached. It is understandable that Caruana stops the evaluation of the position here, and only points out that it is possible to

move the pawns or to continue with the prophylactic 15. $\mathbb{Q}b1$.

On the basis on the last move, you can investigate 15... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ (less convincing is 15... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 16. $h5$ $b3$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}c3!?$) 16. $h5$ $\mathbb{Q}b8!?$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}e3!$ (the threat was 17... $\mathbb{Q}xa2+!$ followed by ... $b3$. 17. $\mathbb{Q}c1!?$ $b3$ 18. $cxb3!?$ $axb3$ 19. $a3$ $\mathbb{Q}b5!$ looks too dangerous, with the mean intention of giving mate after ... $\mathbb{Q}eb8$ and ... $\mathbb{Q}xa3$) 17... $b3$ 18. $h6!$ $g6$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}g7\infty$.

13. $\mathbb{Q}g5!$ $f6$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}e3$

Caruana has created the possibility to break with g4-g5.

14... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 15. $g4$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}b1$



In the diagram position, Nakamura continued with 16... $b4!?$ 17. $g5$ $b3!?$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}hg1!\pm$ $bx $$$

16... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}hg1$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 18. $g5!?$ $\mathbb{Q}xf5$

18... $\mathbb{Q}xa2+?$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}a1$ does not contribute to the attack.

19. $exf5$ $a3$ 20. $b3$ $e4$ 21. $g6$

With a double-edged position.

C) 6. $\mathbb{Q}e2!?$



A rare idea that Carlsen put on the agenda in his game against So, Bilbao 2016. White immediately threatens the e-pawn, which limits the opponent's options, as it prevents 6... $\mathbb{Q}e6$.

6... $\mathbb{Q}e7$

So's choice. Of course, Black has other methods of development at his disposal:

a) The immediate 6... $\mathbb{Q}g4$ is solid, preparing to part with the bishop pair. In comparison with variation B1, the queen is worse on e2, since she loses a tempo when capturing on f3, a detail that Carlsen himself mentions in *New in Chess 2016/6*. Dominguez Perez-Kasimdzhanov, Baku 2016, continued 7. $\mathbb{Q}bd2$ (7.h3 $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 8. $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7=$) 7... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 8.h3 $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ (keeping the bishop with 9...f6?! is not very consistent 10. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$. After 11. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 0-0 12.g4, White's attack is well underway) 10. $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ g6 12.0-0 $\mathbb{Q}f8!$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ 0-0 15. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xe3=$. Black ended up losing, but not because of the opening; for example, 16... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ leads to comfortable equality;

b) 6... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ normally leads to the sharp variation B3 after 7. $\mathbb{Q}bd2$. In Oparin-Fedoseev, Novosibirsk 2016, White tried a different approach: 7. $\mathbb{Q}e3?$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 8.d4 0-0 9. $\mathbb{Q}bd2$ exd4 10. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ (I prefer 10... $\mathbb{Q}e8$, hoping to find a better square for the knight) 11.0-0-0 a5 12.g4 a4 13.a3 $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 14.f3 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 15.h4 ∞ ;

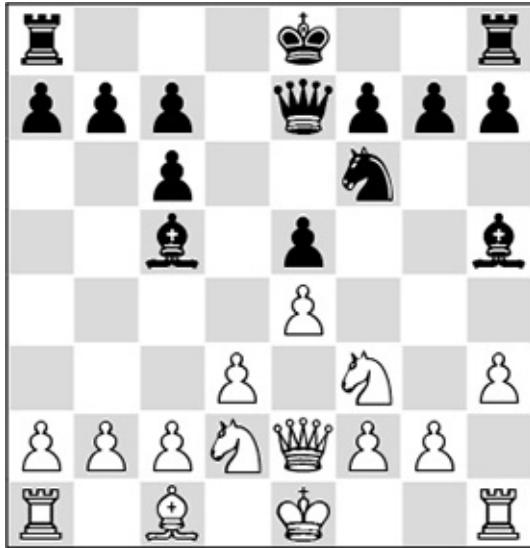
c) 6... $\mathbb{Q}d6$ carries the seal of approval of Anand, an indication that it may be the best move. After 7. $\mathbb{Q}bd2$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$, a version of variation B2 is reached (6. $\mathbb{Q}bd2$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$), with the white queen not particularly well placed on e2. Gharamian-Anand, Bastia rapid 2016, continued 8.b3. Preparing 9. $\mathbb{Q}c4$. The alternatives are not too impressive:

c1) 8. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ doesn't make any sense;

c2) 8. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ (safer than 8... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}a5$) 9.dxc4 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 10.0-0 $\mathbb{Q}e7$, and White had less than nothing in Antipov-Swiercz, Turkey tt 2016.

8... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ c5 10. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ f6 11. $\mathbb{Q}h4$ g6!? This leads to a more complicated game than 11...0-0 12. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{Q}b8!=$, a manoeuvre we saw in variation B2. **12.0-0** $\mathbb{Q}e7$ **13. $\mathbb{Q}xd6+$ cxd6 14.f4 0-0-0 ∞**

7. $\mathbb{Q}bd2$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 8.h3 $\mathbb{Q}h5$



9.a3!?

Carlsen, not impressed by the alternatives 9.♗c4, 9.g4 followed by ♘f1-g3, or 9.♘f1 ♘d7 10.♗g3 ♘xf3 11.♗xf3 g6, prepares to annoy the other bishop as well.

9...♝d7

9...a5!? Carlsen.

10.b4 ♞d6 11.♗c4 f6 12.♗e3



Now, So chose the risky 12...a5? 13.♗f5 ♗f8?! (forcing White to capture on a5 but neglecting his king) 14.bxa5 ♘xa5 15.0-0↑, and Carlsen brilliantly exploited his development advantage. It is better to immediately start rerouting the knight:

12...♝f8! 13.♗f5 ♘f7=

followed by ...♝e6 and ...0-0. Carlsen feels that Black is OK and we, mere mortals, are not in any position to question his diagnosis.

6.♗e2 leads to interesting new positions, but Black has sufficient resources to get good play.

CONCLUSION

The exchange on c6 followed by 6.♗bd2 is currently the stage for the most interesting

battles in the Anti-Berlin complex, perhaps together with the lines from Chapter 7. Black can choose between a more quiet approach with 6... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ or 6... $\mathbb{Q}g4$, with small positional disadvantages that do not seem very serious, or investigate the riskier plans based on opposite-side castling after 6...0-0, which are very much the latest fashion.

CHAPTER 5

4.d3 ♕ c5 5.0-0

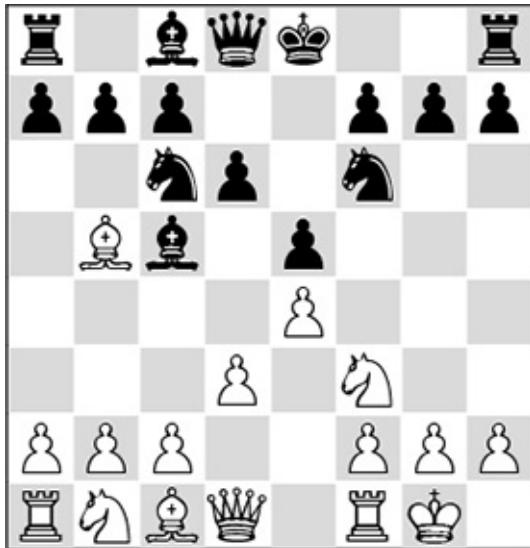
1.e4 e5 2.♘ f3 ♘ c6 3.♗ b5 ♘ f6 4.d3 ♗ c5 5.0-0



Immediate castling is the most flexible move. For the moment, Black has to decide how to defend his e-pawn.

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.d3 ♘c5 5.0-0

A) 5...d6



A solid move, defending the pawn without thinking about any further subtleties. Of course, it is possible to respond with 6.c3, which transposes to variations from the next chapters, but in this chapter we are going to examine options based on exchanging on c6, as Carlsen did in several important games from 2014 and 2015. I have chosen the game **Carlsen-Radjabov, Wijk aan Zee 2015**, as our main line.

6.♗bd2

In the second game of the World Championship match Carlsen-Anand, Sochi 2014, the Norwegian continued: 6.♗e1 0-0 7.♗xc6!? bxc6 8.h3 ♘e8 8...h6 9.♗e3?! ♘xe3 10.♗xe3 ♘b8 11.b3 c5, as in Ter Sahakyan-Harutyunian, Yerevan 2015, is more than comfortable for Black. 9.♗bd2 ♘d7 10.♗c4 ♘b6 Also possible was 10...♗f8, and if 11.♗a5, ♘d7?! 12.♗b7 ♘xf2+! 13.♔xf2 ♘b8∞, as Inarkiev points out in *Informant* 122. 11.a4 a5 12.♗xb6 The a-pawn is safe: 12.♗d2 ♘f8 13.♗c3 ♘e6 14.♗d2 ♘xc4 15.dxc4 ♘e6, and Black has nothing to be afraid of. 12...cxb6 13.d4 ♘c7 Safer is 13...c5=, mentioned by Giri in his notes for *New In Chess* 2014/2. 14.♗a3! ♘f8 15.dxe5 dxe5 16.♗h4!, and although the game is still balanced, the transfer of the rook to g3 created problems that Anand was unable to deal with satisfactorily, as you will see in Game 3 (Chapter 20).

6...0-0 7.♗xc6 bxc6 8.h3

The immediate 8.♗e1? allows the manoeuvre 8...♗g4! 9.♗e2 f5, and already Black is for choice.

8.♗c4 leads by transposition to the game Bartel-Topalov, Gibraltar 2015. The great Bulgarian responded in instructive fashion: 8...♗e6 9.♗e2 a5 10.a4 ♘d7 11.♗d2 ♘xc4 12.dxc4 ♘e7 13.♗h1?! ♘b6 14.♗a3 ♘c5, and the black position is already preferable based on the plan ...f7-f5.

8...h6

It is possible to refrain from advancing the h-pawn, and to transpose into the second game

from the Sochi match after 8... $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}e1$, which we saw in the notes to 6. $\mathbb{Q}bd2$.

9. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$

The previous move can be taken advantage of by 9... $\mathbb{Q}h7!?$, with the idea of advancing the f-pawn, as in Stevic-Handke, Legnica 2013.

Seeing Black's last two moves, I can't help but recall the legendary Spanish player Ramon Cue, who was no less than 18 times champion of the Spanish province of Cantabria. Some thirty years ago, during a few blitz games, Cue half-jokingly pointed out to me that whenever you don't know what to do, the best moves are first $\mathbb{Q}e1$ (or ... $\mathbb{Q}e8$) and then h2-h3 (or ...h7-h6). You may have noticed that Radjabov has reversed Cue's recommended move order. Who knows whether this is an important improvement by a top GM, or the main cause of his demise in the game...

10. $\mathbb{Q}f1$



10...a5!?

More solid than 10...d5 11. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ (there is no reason to bring the black bishops to life with 11.exd5 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ e4 14.dxe4 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 17.b3 c5 18. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 19.c4 $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 20.gxf3 a5 21. $\mathbb{Q}xe8$ $\mathbb{Q}xe8=$ Adams-Kramnik, Paris/St Petersburg 2013) 11... $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 12.b3, and White is somewhat better in the Nimzo-Indian type of positions reached after either 12...d4, or 12... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$.

11. $\mathbb{Q}g3$

11.a4 $\mathbb{Q}b4!?$ ($\frac{1}{2}-\frac{1}{2}$ Van den Doel-Korneev, Edinburgh 2015) 12.c3 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ c5=. In general, Black is comfortable after the exchange of the dark-squared bishop, although a rapid d3-d4 can be good for White, as in Game 5 (Chapter 20).

11...a4

Radjabov's continuation was quite dubious: 11... $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 12.b3 $\mathbb{Q}b4!?$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}a8!?$ 13... $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ $\mathbb{Q}a8$ 15.d4 gives some advantage to White. 14.c3 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 15.d4 $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 15... $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 16.exd4 $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}c1!?\pm$, threatening the c-pawn and at the same time a sacrifice on h6. 16.dxe5 $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 17.c4 \pm Carlsen-Radjabov, Wijk aan Zee 2015.

12.c3

12. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ and 13...c5 leads to equality; the advance of the black a-pawn has rendered the break with d3-d4 less attractive.

12... $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 13.d4 exd4 14.cxd4 c5=

And Black stands well. In the event of 15.d5, the ...c7-c6 break will give open prospects for the bishops.

B) 5... $\mathbb{Q}d4!$

The opening tends to be a kind of negotiation, in a way similar to what happens in card games such as bridge, or the Spanish game *tute subastado*. By castling quickly, White has avoided a couple of sharp lines that we will see in the next chapters, but the drawback is that it allows this exchanging operation, which relieves Black's game.

6. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$

Lures the bishop to a position that the opponent might be able to profit from by means of gaining a tempo. The modest retreat 6. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ was played in Carlsen-Anand, Moscow blitz 2011: 6... $\mathbb{Q}xf3+$ 7. $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 0-0 8. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ d6 (the position of the white queen is not enough to create any dangerous threats on the kingside) 9. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ c6 10. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}h4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ h6 13. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ a5 14. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 15.f4 $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8=$, and Anand had no reason to complain about the outcome of the opening.

6... $\mathbb{Q}xd4$



From the diagram position, White has looked for an advantage in two different directions:

B1) 7.c3

This was the main line until the game **Carlsen-Aronian, Reykjavik 2015**.

7... $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 8. $\mathbb{Q}a3$ c6

In Anand-Kramnik, Zurich rapid 2016, the Kaiser of our defence chose the prudent 8...0-0. I am not sure whether this indicates that White has an improvement in the main variation, which seems unlikely, as in the Candidates', with a lot more at stake, Anand preferred 7. $\mathbb{Q}d2$. Perhaps it means that Kramnik wasn't in the mood to go into the main line in a rapid game, with no rating points at stake, or, simply, that Black also equalises by immediately castling. After 9. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ (9. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ d5 transposes to Chapter 3, variation with

5. $\mathbb{Q}bd2$, line B) 9...d5 10.exd5 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ gxf6 12. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}d7!$ (nipping in the bud any attacking ideas White might be entertaining) 13. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 14.d4 $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}axd1$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ exd4 17. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}fd8=$, the bishop pair compensates for the doubled pawns.

9. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ d6 10. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ a5 11. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}a7!$

More active than 11... $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ h6 13. $\mathbb{Q}h4$ g5 14. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ h5 15.f3 $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}e3$, and White was for choice in Karjakin-Caruana, Zurich 2015.

12.a4 0-0 13. $\mathbb{Q}g5$

No doubt Carlsen had prepared this idea for his match with Anand, but Aronian didn't exactly come half-cocked either.

13...h6! 14. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$

Risky, but otherwise White must admit that his opponent has equalised comfortably.

14... $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xa5$ d5!



Aronian's centralisation gives him excellent compensation for a pawn.

16. $\mathbb{Q}c2$

16.exd5 cxd5 17. $\mathbb{Q}xd5?$ (better is 17. $\mathbb{Q}c2$, but for a pawn, Black enjoys a good game) 17... $\mathbb{Q}d8!$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}ab8$ loses a piece, and the three pawns are not enough compensation.

16...dxe4 17.dxe4 $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}e1?!$

18. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ gives more possibilities to arrange a decent defence.

18... $\mathbb{Q}g5$

If you have a membership to Carlsen's fan club, or if you are of a delicate disposition, I recommend you don't look up how things ended in Game 4 (Chapter 20).

B2) 7. $\mathbb{Q}d2$



During the first few months of 2016, supporters of the white cause in this variation, undoubtedly impressed by Carlsen's fate in the previous game, tried to demonstrate some advantage after the immediate development of the bishop, although I'm afraid without too much success.

7...a6

The fad of the season, giving the game a more Morphyesque character. The alternatives are of similar significance:

a) The most straightforward is: **7...c6 8.♗a4 d6 9.c3 ♗b6 10.♗b3** Prepares **9.♘c4**. **10...♗c7** A waiting move before castling. **10...0-0** leads to difficulties for Black after **11.♘c4 ♗c7 12.♗g5!** (the pin is annoying) **12...h6 13.♗h4 d5?!** **14.exd5 cxd5 15.♘e3 g5 16.♗g3 ♗e6 17.d4 e4 18.♗e5±** (Efimenko-Kryvoruchko, Dubai rapid 2014). Of course, **10...a5!?** can be tried, hoping to transpose to Carlsen-Aronian after **11.♘c4 ♗a7!**; if **11.♘f3, 11...h6**. Black's last move has not been very useful, but the bishop is still active on b6. **11.♘c4 ♗e6 12.f4!? exf4 13.♗xf4 d5 14.♘d2 14.exd5 ♘xd5 15.♗xc7 ♗xc7 16.d4** keeps more life in the position. **14...0-0 15.d4 ♗xe4 16.♗xc7 ♗xc7 17.♗xe4 dxe4 18.♗xe6 fxe6 19.♗g4 ♗d6 20.♗xe4 ♗d5** with complete equality (Efimenko-Fressinet, Bilbao 2014);

b) **7...0-0!?** **8.c3** After **8.♘f3**, Black has a temporary pawn sacrifice: **8...♗b6 9.♗xe5** (worse is **9.♗g5 h6 10.♗h4 d6 11.h3 g5 12.♗g3 ♘h5 13.♗h2 f5**, and Black seized the initiative in Antipov-Leko, Moscow rapid 2015) **9...d5!** **10.♗f4** (it is not possible to capture on d5, allowing Black to win the pawn back) **10...c6 11.♗a4 dxe4 12.dxe4 ♘xd1 13.♗axd1 ♗xe4=** A.Zhigalko-Fressinet, Belgium tt 2015/16. **8...♗b6** Safer than **8...♗c5?!**. In Harikrishna-Chirila, Gibraltar 2015, the Indian star obtained a dangerous attack after **9.d4! exd4 10.e5 dxc3 11.exf6 cxd2 12.fxg7 ♘xg7?** (in *Informant* 123, Hari himself recommends **12...♗e8**, and gives the variation **13.♗xd2 ♗d4 14.♗d3 ♘h4 15.g3 ♘h3 16.♗e1 ♘xe1+ 17.♗xe1 ♘e6±**) **13.♗xd2 d6 14.♗c3+ f6 15.♗h5 ♘e7 16.♗d3 ♘g8 17.♗ae1**, with a virtually winning attack. **9.♘c4 d5 10.♗xb6 axb6 11.exd5**, and we have transposed to Chapter 3, variation B with **5.♗bd2 ♗d4**, where Black has excellent prospects to equalise.

8. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ b5 9. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ d6



10.a4

We are following the game **Caruana-Nakamura, Moscow 2016**. In Tomashevsky-Ponomariov, Huai'an Basque 2016, White preferred to do without the a-pawn push, and got what looks like some advantage after 10. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 11. h3 0-0 12. c3 $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ h6 (all these positions are practically *terra incognita*, and the best methods of play are yet to be determined, assuming it will remain of interest to explore them. Here, the immediate 13... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ can be answered by 14. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}g5!?$, creating difficulties later on with the move a2-a4) 14. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ c5?! 15. a4 $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 16. axb5 axb5 17. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ 19. b3 d5 20. c4 bxc4 21. bxc4 dxe4 22. dxe4 $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}c2\pm$, but instead of Ponomariov's 14th move, the simple 14... $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ c5 is adequate, since if 16. d4 exd4! 17. cxd4 $\mathbb{Q}b7!=$ liquidates the centre.

10... $\mathbb{Q}b6$

A subtlety. Nakamura could have continued directly with 10... $\mathbb{Q}g4$, but he keeps this possibility in reserve depending on whether his opponent exchanges on b5 or not.

11. axb5 $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ axb5 13. $\mathbb{Q}xa8$ $\mathbb{Q}xa8$ 14. h3

Slightly more annoying is 14. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 15. h3 $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ fxe6 17. c3, preventing castling for the moment on account of the threat of $\mathbb{Q}b3$. I don't think this suggestion is likely to refute the black defensive set-up though.

14... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ fxe6

The doubled pawns do not pose any inconvenience.

16. $\mathbb{Q}h2$

16. c3 0-0 17. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ doesn't lead anywhere either.

16... 0-0 17. $\mathbb{Q}g4$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6=$

CONCLUSION

Carlsen's ideas from 2015, based on exchanging on c6 to get the better structure, objectively do not hold any promise of an advantage. Instead, this approach tends to lead

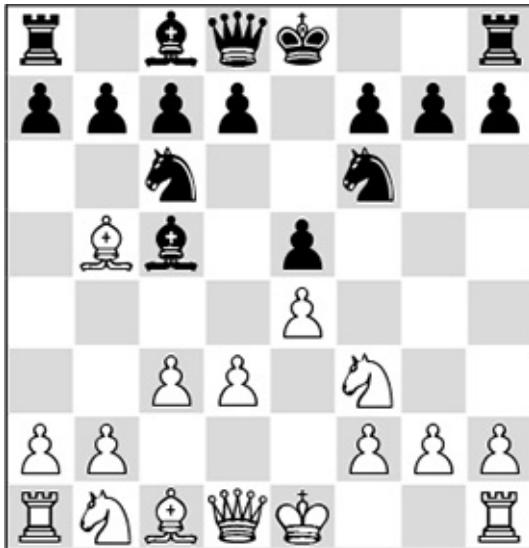
to original, lively positions where the better player will get decent chances to outplay his opponent.

The bad thing for White is that currently 5... $\mathbb{N}d4$ seems to guarantee equality for Black. If you think that refuting the knight's manoeuvre is not such a difficult task, then bear in mind that Carlsen himself, after losing to Aronian, has even resorted to the London system.

CHAPTER 6

4.d3 ♜ c5 5.c3: Sidelines

1.e4 e5 2.♘ f3 ♜ c6 3.♗ b5 ♜ f6 4.d3 ♜ c5 5.c3



The main variation according to the current state of theory. White appears to be threatening the e-pawn. Furthermore, he starts preparations to play d3-d4, while also preventing 5...♝d4. In this chapter, we will examine less popular ideas, reserving a separate chapter for the critical lines that arise after 5...0-0 6.0-0 d6.

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.d3 ♗c5 5.c3

A) 5...d5!?



Thank goodness, the e-pawn was under attack! I imagine that the creative process behind such a move is something like this: a master gets up from his chair to make himself some coffee or change some baby's nappy; he forgets to unplug his laptop and accidentally leaves his analysis engine running; he finishes whatever chores he had to attend to and gets back to work, only to see with great surprise that 5...d5 appears on his screen as Black's second best option!

6.♗bd2

The whole line is in its infancy, and it is difficult to determine what the best methods of play are. However, that certainly doesn't stop me from trying:

a) First of all, we have to look at why 6.♗xe5 doesn't win outright: Black responds with the cold-blooded 6...0-0 7.♗xc6 7.♗xc6?! is only interesting for White if he wants to run the risk to get checkmated: 7...bxc6 8.♗a4!? (8.♗xc6 ♗xf2+! 9.♗xf2 ♗g4+, and 10...♗f6 regains the piece, with more than enough compensation for the lost pawn) 8...dxe4 9.d4 ♗d6 10.♗xc6 ♗b8 11.b4 (11.♗d2 ♗b6! 12.d5 e3 →) 11...♗g4= 7...bxc6, and variation B is reached by transposition, 5.c3 0-0 6.♗xc6;

b) 6.♗a4!? is a more subtle method of trying to capture some chessmen. In B.Savchenko-Ponkratov, Kolomna 2016, Black played Stockfish's suggestion: 6...0-0! (certainly better than 6...♗d7? 7.exd5 ♗xd5? 8.♗c4+→) 7.♗xc6 bxc6 8.♗xc6 (8.0-0 ♗d6∞ leads to a Nimzo-Indian type of position worth trying out) 8...♗d6!? (also possible is 8...dxe4 9.♗xe5 ♗d5 10.♗xd5 ♗xd5 11.d4 ♗d6∞) 9.♗xe5? (better is 9.exd5 ♗f5 10.♗xd6 cxd6 11.♗e2 ♗xd5∞, although the centre and the bishop give ample compensation for the pawn), and now 9...♗xf2+! is very strong (rather than 9...♗a6 10.d4 ♗b6 11.a4∞, with complete murkiness). 10.♗xf2 ♗xe5! 11.♗xa8 (otherwise, Black has a fantastic position almost for free) 11...dxe4!, with a virtually winning attack. For example: 12.d4 ♗f5+ 13.♗e1 ♗g4!+;

c) Correspondence chess players, in these modern times the goldsmiths of our game, have found a strange transposition whose only purpose appears to be torturing the authors

of opening books. Glatthaar-Miettinen, Interzonal ICCF 2014, continued 6.d4!? exd4 7.e5 ♜e4 8.cxd4



analysis diagram

Do you recognise this position? In Mega Database, you can find well over a thousand games that start with the Italian move order 1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♜c6 3.♗c4 ♜c5 4.c3 ♘f6 5.d4 exd4 6.e5 d5 7.♗b5 ♜e4. Forget the river Styx, forget the burning of cities with fire, even forget about Satan himself: hell consists in looking out for transpositions in the Anti-Berlin with 4.d3. I won't delve too deeply into the analysis of this interesting old line here, but by all means, please visit the Chess Museum in Chapter 10, which is devoted to the variation I have baptised the Old Berlin. The battle between our correspondence heroes continued 8...♝b6 (more fashionable than 8...♝b4+) 9.♗e3 0-0 10.♘c3 ♜g4 11.h3 ♜h5 12.♘c2 ♜g6 13.♘xc6 (an attempt to improve on 13.♘b3 ♜e7 14.♘h4 c5 15.♘xg6 hxg6 16.dxc5 ♜xc5 17.♘xc5 ♜xc5 18.0-0 ♜d4= Ivanchuk-Kramnik, Antalya 2013) 13...bxc6 14.♘d1 ♜xc3 15.bxc3 h6 16.0-0 ♜f5∞;

d) Exchanging on d5 has become one of the most popular options to try to get some advantage in this line. We are following the game Carlsen-Aronian, Paris rapid 2016 (rapid): **6.exd5 ♜xd5 7.♗c4 ♜d6** 7...♗d8!? might be more solid. Now, 8.0-0 0-0 transposes to the game Svidler-Eljanov, Germany Bundesliga 2016/17, which continued 9.b4 (9.♘bd2 a5 10.♗e2 ♜d6 11.♘g5 h6 12.♘ge4 a4 13.♘xf6+ ♜xf6 14.♗e4 ♜g6 gave White nothing in Grischuk-Eljanov, Novi Sad 2016) 9...♜e7!? (more active than 9...♝d6. The engines help us find compensation for the e-pawn) 10.♘bd2 (10.b5 ♜a5 12.♘xe5 ♜d6∞) 10...♜f5 11.♘c2 (11.b5 ♜a5 12.♘xe5 ♜d6 13.d4 ♜xe5 14.dxe5 ♜e4 15.♘xe4 ♜xd1 16.♘xd1 ♜xc4=) 11...a6 12.a4 ♜d5 13.♗e4 ♜g4, and Black is comfortable. **8.b4 ♜b6 9.0-0 0-0 10.♘bd2** An interesting alternative is 10.♗a3! ♜e7 11.♘b3, with some chances of an advantage, as in Lanka-Friedel, Kiel 2015. **10...♜f5 11.♘c2** An improvement over 11.♗e2?! ♜d5 (the c-pawn is now undefended) 12.♘xd5 ♜xd5 13.♘e4 ♜ad8, and Black seized the initiative in Smirnov-Melkumyan, Canberra 2016. **11...♜ad8 12.♗e4 ♜xe4 13.dxe4 ♜g4 14.♗e2 a5 15.a3 ♜h8 16.♗g5 f6 17.♘ad1 ♜e7 18.♗c1 ♜xd1 19.♘xd1 ♜d8 20.h3 ♜e6 21.♘xd8+ ♜xd8=** The fact that Carlsen ended up outplaying his fearsome opponent and scoring a fine victory doesn't

mean he had any advantage in this position.

e) Smirin-Bologan, Poikovsky 2015, continued 6.♘e2 0-0 7.♗g5 dxe4 8.dxe4. Bologan found a good method to unpin, demonstrating that the queen is not particularly well placed on e2: 8...♝e7 9.♗bd2 (uncomfortable is 9.♕xc6 bxc6, followed by ...a7-a5) 9...♝d8! 10.b4 ♜b6 11.♗c4 ♜e6 12.♗xb6 axb6 13.0-0 (13.♗d2 ♜f4†, according to Branko Tadic in *Informant* 126) 13...♝xg5 14.♝xg5 ♜g4 15.♗e3 h6 16.♗f3 ♜fd8†;

f) After 6.0-0, Black again responds calmly: 6...0-0 White can transpose to the next note with 7.♗bd2 or exchange on d5, which will almost certainly transpose to 6.exd5, but he doesn't obtain anything with 6.♕xc6 bxc6 8.♗xe5 dxe4.

6...dxe4

Also possible is 6...0-0 7.0-0 (in fact, it is common to reach this position from the move order 5...0-0 6.0-0 d5), and now Black can keep the tension with 7...♜e8, as in Jakovenko-D.Mastrovasilis, Greece tt 2013. White gains the pair of bishops, and with it some advantage after 8.exd5 ♜xd5 9.♜e1 ♜g4 10.♗e4! (instead of 10.♔a4?! ♜f4∞) 10...♜b6 11.h3 ♜h5 12.♗g3.

7.dxe4 0-0 8.0-0 ♜e7



The white knight on d2 might be somewhat better placed than its counterpart on c6, but this small difference should be insufficient to build a long-lasting advantage, as the few practical examples so far have shown.

a) In Areshchenko-Volokitin, Lviv 2015, 9.♗e2 a5! was played: 10.♔a4!? Black's previous move prevented b2-b4, while discouraging the idea 10.♗c4?! ♜a7. Areshchenko's move prepares the knight manoeuvre. 10.♗h4!? has also been tried: 10...♜g4 11.♗df3 ♜h5!? 12.♗c4 ♜a7 13.♗g5 ♜d6 14.♗f5 ♜xf5 15.exf5 h6 16.♖ad1 ♜b6 17.♖d5 c6 18.♗xc5 ♜xb5 19.♗xf8+ ♜xf8 20.♖xb5 cxb5 21.♗e3 ♜c6= (Vachier-Lagrange-Giri, Tashkent 2014) and 10.a4 ♜g4 (10...♝d8!?) 11.h3 ♜h5 12.♗e1 ♜d8 13.♗f1 ♜e6∞ (E.Hansen-Kryvoruchko, Dubai blitz 2014). 10...h6 11.♗c4 ♜d7 12.♗e3 ♜xe3! 13.♗xe3 ♜a7 14.♗c2 ♜g4! 15.♗e2 ♜b5 16.♗d3 Resigning himself to equality. Play could continue 16.c4 ♜a6 17.b3 ♜c6 18.♗b2, but the bishop pair is well offset by the weakness of d4. 16...♜xd3 17.♗xd3 ♜fd8 18.♗c2 ♜c6= and draw

agreed;

b) After **9.h3 a5 10.a4**, defenders of the black cause have tried **10...♝b8!?**, improving the position of the knight while preventing **♞c4**. Areshchenko-Eljanov, Lviv 2014, continued **11.♛e1 ♜d8 12.♝c2 ♜bd7 13.♝f1**. **13.♝f1**, as in Almasi-Jakovenko, Germany Bundesliga 2014/15, prepares the knight's arrival on c4, but also allows Black to comfortably finish his development: **13...b6 14.♝c4 ♜a6 (14...h6!?) 15.♝g5 h6 16.♝h4 ♜xc4! 17.♝xc4 ♜f8=** Optically, the bishop pair should give good prospects for an edge, but the bishop on h4 is not well placed. The threat is ...♝g6 and ...♝h5. **13...c6 14.♝c4 ♜h5 14...♝b6 15.♝b3 ♜e6= 15.♝g5 ♜df6 16.♜ad1 ♜xd1 17.♜xd1 h6 18.♝e3**, and instead of the strange **18...b5? 19.axb5 cxb5 20.♝xc5 ♜xc5 21.♝d5 ♜xd5 22.♜xd5±**, Eljanov could have played the simple **18...♝xe3 19.♝xe3 ♜f4**, with a balanced game;

c) In Giri-Aronian, Paris blitz 2016, **9.b4!?** was tried, which was my obvious recommendation in the original Spanish version of this book. After **9...♝d6 10.a3**, the brilliant Armenian GM showed that Black can solve his opening problems in this line by rerouting the c6-knight via **10...♝d8! 11.♜e1 c6 12.♝f1 ♜c7** (the bishop is here to safeguard against any action of a knight on c4) **13.g3 a5 14.♜b1 axb4 15.cxb4 ♜e6 16.♝b2 ♜d8=**.

B) 5...0-0 6.♝xc6!

6.0-0 is an almost automatic move in this position, but White might also indulge in capturing the e-pawn.

6...bxc6 7.♝xe5 d5 8.d4



Here, it is important to establish what Black's compensation consists of, especially if we take into account that some strong GMs, such as B.Savchenko or the late Kurnosov, have tried to prove that any compensation is insufficient. However, there is no need to panic. After all, in the variation **4.d3 ♜c5 5.♝bd2 0-0 6.♝xc6 bxc6!?** **7.♝xe5 d5** (Chapter 3), we were not able to find any advantage for White, and there, instead of the move c2-c3, White had made a developing move with his knight.

8...♝b6!

According to my analysis, the best move. Let's look at a few other possible ideas:

a) 8... $\mathbb{Q}xe4?$ is refuted by 9. $dxc5!$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}f3!±$. The knight is trapped on h1 after capturing the rook;

b) 8... $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 10.e5 $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ 11.0-0!, as in Tari-Hammer, Oslo 2015, leaves Black with insufficient compensation for the pawn;

c) 8... $\mathbb{Q}e8!?$ is the best alternative to the main line, and bears the seal of approval of a great specialist in this opening. Tari-Fressinet, Oslo rapid 2015, continued 9.0-0 (9.exd5 $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 10.dxc6 $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 11.f4 $\mathbb{Q}d8$ is quite fearsome) 9...dxe4 10. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ (worthy of analysis is 10. $\mathbb{Q}a4!?$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ 12.dxc5 a5 \mathbb{Q}) 10... $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}dc4$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ c5 ∞ .

9.0-0

a) The advantage of having a bishop on b6 instead of d6 is clearly seen after 9. $\mathbb{Q}xc6?$ $\mathbb{Q}e8!$ 10.e5 a5!, and the white knight is in danger. The variation 11.b4?! $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ 12.exf6 axb4 13.cxb4? $\mathbb{Q}xd4!-+$ clearly shows the defence is difficult;

b) 9. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ is quite annoying, but Black has a good reply: 9...c5! 10.dxc5 $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}d3!?$ (11.0-0 dxe4 ∞) 11... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ (11... $\mathbb{Q}b6!?$, and if 12.e5, $\mathbb{Q}e8!\mathbb{Q}$ is interesting to analyse, as is this whole pawn-grabbing line in general) 12.e5 $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ 14.0-0 $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}h4$ 16.g3 $\mathbb{Q}h6$, and Black got plenty of compensation in Volokitin-Cheparinov, Cuernavaca 2006;

c) 9.exd5!? $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 10.0-0 (safer than 10. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ c5! (better than 10... $\mathbb{Q}a6$, which was played in B.Savchenko-Mozharov, Moscow 2014) 11. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ cxd4 12.cxd4 $\mathbb{Q}a5+$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}a6\mathbb{Q}$) 10...c5 11. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ cxd4 12.cxd4 $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 15.gxf3 $\mathbb{Q}ad8$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}a3$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}ac1$ $\mathbb{Q}d2$ leads to a drawn endgame.

9... $\mathbb{Q}xe4$

9...dxe4 10. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ (Wei Yi-Karjakin, Wijk aan Zee 2017, continued with 10. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ c5 11. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ cxd4? (better is 11... $\mathbb{Q}b7$, protecting the important e4-pawn and finishing his development: 12.dxc5 $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 14.c4 (C.Balogh-Naiditsch, Aix-les-Bains 2011), and now 14...e3! was the most accurate: 15. $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ exf2+ 16. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}fxd8$ 17.c5 $\mathbb{Q}d5!$, and Black saves his bishop) 12. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ dxc3 (12... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ could have been met by 13. $\mathbb{Q}e1!$) 13. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6!?$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}d7$ and White won an exchange – later he managed to win) 10... $\mathbb{Q}d6$ was played in Anand-Topalov, Monaco rapid 2006. After 11. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ c5 13. $\mathbb{Q}a3$ cxd4 14. $\mathbb{Q}ac4$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ axb6 16.cxd4 $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 17.f3 exf3 18. $\mathbb{Q}xf3$, a draw was agreed, but I'm not sure whether Black has sufficient compensation.

10. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}b4$

Black has no reason to complain after 11. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ c5 12. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ cxd4 13.cxd4 (13. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}c7\mathbb{Q}$) 13... $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}a5$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}ab8\mathbb{Q}$.

11...c5! 12.dxc5 $\mathbb{Q}xc5$



We are following the game **Kurnosov-Malakhov, Moscow 2010**, in which a typical position in this involuntary gambit was reached: the unopposed light-squared bishop, coupled with an advantage in development, provides full compensation for the material deficit. The d-pawn cannot be taken, since there is always ... $\mathbb{Q}a6$ at the end of the variation.

13. $\mathbb{Q}e3$

The Russian GM, who has sadly passed away, immediately gives the pawn back. 13. $\mathbb{Q}d3!$? is more aggressive. After the natural continuation 13... $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 15.b4! $\mathbb{Q}d3$ 16.a4!, White threatens to consolidate the extra pawn, but 16... $\mathbb{B}g6!$ (better than 16... $\mathbb{Q}xc1$ 17.b5±) 17.b5 $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ (avoids ...d5-d4) 18...a6 gives sufficient compensation.

13... $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ 14.cxb4 $\mathbb{Q}a6!$

The isolani means there is no advantage for White to speak of.

In short, capturing the e-pawn is not a far-fetched possibility, and leads to original positions with hardly any analysis. However, with accurate play, Black obtains sufficient compensation.

C) 5...0-0 6. $\mathbb{Q}g5$



The pin on the knight will feature again further on, in two sharper forms (variation D in this chapter, and variation A in Chapter 7). Originally, I wasn't going to mention it, but during the process of reviewing this book for the English edition, the tenth game in the World Championship match (2016) Carlsen-Karjakin was played, with the World Champion using this line to take his opponent out of book (and so causing it to be in this one).

6...h6 7.♗h4 ♜e7

A typical and good reaction. In his comments for ChessBase, So points out that 7...g5 8.♗g3 d6 9.♗bd2 is worse than in the variation 6.0-0 d6 7.♗g5, which we will examine in Chapter 7, since the position of the rook on h1 gives White additional attacking possibilities. In Svidler-Ivanchuk, Sochi 2008, Chuky obtained a comfortable position after 9...♝h5 10.♗xc6 (10.0-0 would transpose to Chapter 7, variation A, but in that case the advantage So alludes to is nowhere to be seen) 10...bxc6 11.d4 exd4 12.♗xd4 ♜xg3 13.hxg3 ♔f6 14.♗2b3 ♜b6 15.♗f3 ♔xf3 16.gxf3 ♔g7, since in the event of 17.♗xc6 f5, Black opens the position for his bishops. One can imagine that Carlsen had prepared some improvement over Svidler's play.

8.0-0

Carlsen had already played this sub-variation with black in his game against Shirov (Biel 2011), which continued 8.♗bd2 (not good is 8.♗xc6 bxc6 9.♗xe5? ♜xe4!) 8...d6 9.♗f1 ♜b8!? (9...♝h5 is possible; the exchange on e7 would lead to positions similar to the game, and if 10.♗g3, the exchange of the bishop can be delayed with 10...♝f6!? 11.♗e3 ♜e7∞) 10.♗e3 ♜g4 (Carlsen didn't like 10...♝bd7 11.♗a4!, as he wasn't sure how to proceed) 11.♗g3 (more complicated and also riskier than 11.♗xe7=) 11...♜xe3 12.fxe3 ♜d7∞.

8...d6 9.♗bd2

Concedes the bishop pair, after which it is difficult to speak of any opening advantage. Of course, Carlsen does not mind such things, as long as there are at least some chessmen left on the board to press with. So suggests 9.♗g3!?, preparing 9...♝h5?! (9...a6 10.♗a4 ♜e8 is more solid, following the ideas from Chapter 6) 10.♗xc6! bxc6 (10...♝xg3 11.♗xb7! ♜xb7 12.hxg3±) 11.♗xe5 dxe5 12.♗xh5 ♜xd3 13.♗xe5 ♜e8, with some compensation for the pawn.

9...♝h5 10.♗xe7 ♜xe7 11.♗c4

11.♗xc6 bxc6 12.d4 ♜f4 is not dangerous for Black: the pressure on the kingside compensates for the doubled pawns.



In this equal but lively position, Karjakin continued 11... $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 13. $g3$ $\mathbb{Q}h3+$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $c6$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}b3$, and instead of 16... $\mathbb{Q}g6$, which is not the perfect square for the knight, he could have equalised with 16... $d5!?$. Another alternative is 11... $f5!?$. All these lines, which are more of historical rather than theoretical interest, are analysed in Game 6 in Chapter 20.

D) 5....0-0 6.0-0 $\mathbb{Q}e8$



A quite playable option, which became fashionable when Carlsen used it in his 2013 match against Anand. Black wants to play ...a7-a6 and ...b7-b5, reaching an Arkhangelsk type of scheme, while leaving open the possibility of ...d7-d5, as well as that of dropping the bishop back to f8 or e7.

7. $\mathbb{Q}g5!?$

This bishop disturbs Black's coordination. Of course, there are other possibilities:

a) The standard developing move 7. $\mathbb{Q}bd2$ has become more popular since the second half of 2016. Play usually continues 7... $a6$ 8. $\mathbb{Q}a4$. 8. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $dxc6$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ is interesting, leading to positions similar to Chapter 4, but with the useless move ...a7-a6. The normal moves 9... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ or 9... $\mathbb{Q}d6$ can be met by a well-timed d3-d4, so most top GMs have responded with 9... $\mathbb{Q}g4$. In Caruana-Nakamura, St Louis (60 min) 2016, a strange position was reached with a bishop biting on granite on g6, in the style of the game

Winter-Capablanca, Hastings 1919: 10.h3 ♕h5 (10...♕xf3 is solid, but Black is resigned to a slightly inferior position) 11.♕g5 b5!? 12.♗a5 ♔d7 13.♕xf6 gxf6 14.♗b3 ♕b6 15.c4! (an improvement on Vachier-Lagrave-Nakamura, Leuven blitz 2016, where the French GM played the plan of trapping the h5-bishop without this in-between move) 15...c5 (two bishops out of play is too much) 16.g4 ♕g6 17.♔e2 ♕ad8 18.♕ad1 ♕e6 19.♗c1 ♕d6 20.b3± Black is very active, pressuring the d-pawn, and the engines give him a certain advantage, but it is difficult to imagine White not being able to consolidate with accurate play, and in fact, Nakamura managed to save himself by the skin of his teeth. **8...b5** Another possible reaction is 8...d5!?. Anand-Nakamura, Leuven rapid 2016, continued 9.♔e2 b5 10.♗b3 d4 11.♗c2 ♕b6, and White did not obtain anything concrete: 12.cxd4 ♕xd4 13.♗xd4 ♕xd4 14.♗b3 ♕b6 15.♕e3 ♔d6 16.♕xb6 ♕xb6 17.♔e3 ♕e6∞ The entire line is yet to be explored. **9.♗b3 d6 10.♕e1**, was played in Sasikiran-Almasi, Tsaghkadzor 2015. The Hungarian GM who handled the black pieces in this game, and whose name you will encounter several times throughout this book, experienced some difficulties after **10...h6 11.a4 ♕e6 12.♕xe6 ♕xe6 13.♗f1 ♕b6 14.♗g3 ♕b8 15.♗f5 ♔h7 16.♗3h4 ♕e7 17.♗f3±**, but his play can be improved on, for example with either the immediate 10...♕e6, or 11...b4∞;

b) **7.♕e1 a6 8.♗a4 b5 9.♗b3 d6 10.♗g5 ♕e6.** Black is better prepared to trade the light-squared bishops than in the main line. **11.♗bd2 11.♕xe6!?** fxe6 12.b4 ♕b6 13.a4∞ **11...h6 12.♗h4 ♕xb3 13.axb3**



analysis diagram

13...♝b8! The best way to unpin. Atalik points out in *Informant 119* that in the event of 13...g5?!, a very annoying sacrifice is 14.♗xg5 hxg5 15.♕xg5. **14.h3 ♕bd7 15.♗h2 ♕e7 16.♗df1 ♕b6 17.♗e3 ♕e6 18.b4 a5=** Anand-Carlsen, Chennai 2013. Not only did Carlsen comfortably equalise, but he even managed to win a drawn endgame.

7...h6 8.♗h4 a6

Starting the usual play on the queenside. Also playable is **8...♗e7 9.♗bd2 d6**. In Topalov-Stefansson, Gibraltar 2015, White maintained annoying pressure, though this can be attributed more to the difference in Elo rating between the players, rather than to the

objective merits of his plan: **10.Bg3!?** Prevents **10.Be1 g5!?** **11.Bg3 g4** **12.Bh4 Bxe4** **13.Bxe4 Bxh4** **14.Qxh4** **Bxh4** **15.d4∞**, as in Inarkiev-Aronian, Moscow 2014. **10...Bd7 11.a4** An interesting idea, instead of the routine **11.Ba4**. The bishop cannot be captured, because if **11...Ba5**, there follows **12.b4**. **11...Bf8** **11...Bh5** does not fully equalise after **12.Qc4!?**. **12.Be1 a6** **13.Qc4 g6** **14.d4** **14.b4±** might be more accurate. **14...Bg7!?** Black would have been well-advised to follow the fashionable trend of giving up the centre: **14...exd4** **15.cxd4** (**15.Bxd4 Bg7** **16.Bb3 Bf8∞**) **15...d5!** **16.exd5 Bxe1+** **17.Bxe1 Bxd4∞** **15.Bb3 Be7** **16.dxe5 dxe5** **17.Qd5±**

9.Ba4

The most natural, but in four recent encounters, the bishop dropped back to the other available square: **9.Qc4!?**



analysis diagram

White plays an Italian Game a tempo down: the a-pawn has moved to a6, which is useful for Black to secure a retreat square for his bishop. On the other hand, the rook on e8 is not perfectly placed. **9...d6** It is also possible to play the solid unpinning move **9...Be7**. After **10.a4 d6** **11.Bg3!** (preventing **...Bh5**), the game is likely to transpose to Topalov-Stefansson (see note to **8...a6**), which gives White better chances of an advantage than the main line. **10.Bbd2** Navara-Eljanov, Baku 2016, continued **10.a4 g5!?** (**10...Ba7** **11.Bbd2 Be6** would transpose to the game Caruana-Adams, which we will analyse later on) **11.Bg3** (Black must always reckon with **11.Bxg5!?** **hxg5** **12.Qxg5 Qg7** **13.b4 Ba7** **14.Qf3 Bh8**, but here it seems White runs out of steam) **11...Ba7** **12.Bbd2 Bg4!?** (the bishop is going to assist in the defence of g6 and f7, as Eljanov points out in his comments for *New In Chess 2016/7*) **13.h3 Bh5** **14.Be1 Bd7**, and here, instead of **15.b4 Bd8∞**, Eljanov suggests **15.Bf1 Be7** **16.Qh2!?** **±**. **10...Ba7** With the white knight already developed instead of Navara's **10.a4**, **10...g5** is too risky vis-à-vis the possibility of sacrificing on g5, as we will see in the next note. **11.a4 Be6** **12.a5** **12.b4** is a bit more flexible. **12...Bxc4** **13.Bxc4 Be6** **14.Be3 Bxe3** **15.fxe3 d5∞**, Caruana-Adams, Douglas 2016. The Englishman has finished the project of unpinning and his position is pretty good. A key point is that **16.exd5 Bxd5** **17.e4 Bb5!** gives play against the backward d-pawn. After this news update, we return to our analysis of **9.Ba4**:

9...b5 10.♗b3 ♗e7

It seems necessary to unpin. In Swiercz-Volokitin, France tt 2013, Black preferred 10...d6 11.♗bd2 g5, and was successful after 12.♗xg5!? hxg5 13.♗xg5 ♔g7 14.♗f3 ♗d7 (14...♗h8 gives better chances of survival) 15.♗ae1 (also strong was 15.♗g3!? ♗h8 16.d4!) 15...♗h8 16.♗e3! ♗h7 17.♗g3 ♔h8 18.♗f3+-. Perhaps the defence could be improved, but it's not worth the risk of trying to do so over the board.

11.♗g3

Giri-Ponomariov, Doha 2015, saw the seemingly more active 11.a4 b4 (if 11...♗b7, 12.♘a3! forces ...b5-b4 all the same) 12.♗g3 d6 13.a5. Black got a reasonable game after 13...♗e6 14.♗xe6 (14.♗a4!? ♘d7 15.♗bd2∞) 14...fxe6 15.♗bd2 ♗b8 16.d4 bxc3 17.bxc3 exd4 18.cxd4 ♗b5.

11...d6 12.♗bd2



A Closed Morphy type of position has been reached with the bishop on g3, making ...d6-d5 more difficult to execute, but here it also has little influence on the game.

12...♘a5

Here, Chigorin's method might be an improvement over Svidler-Goganov, Tallinn rapid 2016, where White obtained pressure on the queenside after 12...♗f8 13.♗e1 g6?! (with the e-pawn protected, the other classical knight manoeuvre was preferable: 13...♗b8 14.d4 ♘bd7∞) 14.d4 ♗g7 15.a4 ♗b7 16.d5 ♘e7 17.c4±.

13.♗c2 c5 14.h3

White must protect his bishop before opening the centre: 14.d4?! exd4 15.cxd4 ♘h5!± Instead, 14.a3 ♘h5 15.b4 ♘xg3 16.hxg3 ♘c6 17.♗b3∞ is interesting.

14...♘c6 15.♗e1

White prepares the advance of his d-pawn, but his opponent is well placed and should not experience any particular difficulties.

CONCLUSION

1. The line with 5...d5 is in its infancy, but it seems to hold firm against all aggressive

tries. Nonetheless, if you intend to incorporate it in your repertoire, be on the lookout for new developments.

2. The capture of the e-pawn can be used as a surprise weapon, but Black has no difficulties if he knows the themes well.

3. 6... $\mathbb{Q}g5$ is of historical rather than theoretical value, although it is a good idea to be aware of the line, at least until the ‘pull effect’ resulting from being featured in a World Championship game, has worn off.

4. 6... $\mathbb{N}e8$ is solid, although it is unlikely to achieve the same popularity as 6...d6, for the same reason discussed in Chapter 2: it leads to overly Morphyesque positions. As for its objective merit, the lines with $\mathbb{Q}g5$ are annoying, but do not seem to present Black with insurmountable difficulties.

CHAPTER 7

4.d3 ♜ c5 5.c3 0-0 6.0-0 d6

1.e4 e5 2.♘ f3 ♜ c6 3.♗ b5 ♜ f6 4.d3 ♜ c5 5.c3 0-0 6.0-0 d6



1.e4 e5 2.♘ f3 ♜ c6 3.♗ b5 ♜ f6 4.d3 ♜ c5 5.c3 0-0

Before we start, let's ask ourselves why 5...d6?! isn't normally played. After all, that move defends the pawn and avoids the gambit from the previous chapter, variation B.

The answer is that 6.d4! exd4 7.cxd4 ♜ b4+ 8.♗ d2 allows White to occupy the centre without major risks. In fact, Black also has to give up a pawn after 8.♔ f1!? d5 (8...0-0? 9.♕ a4 a5 10.a3+) 9.e5 ♜ e4 10.♕ a4 ♜ e7 11.♗ xc6+ bxc6 12.♗ xc6+ ♔ d7! 13.♗ xd7+ (13.♗ xa8 ♜ b5+ 14.♔ g1 ♜ e2 15.♗ xc8+ ♜ d8 16.h3 ♜ xf2+ 17.♔ h2 ♜ g3+ only leads to a draw) 13...♗ xd7 14.♗ e1!. The bishop pair should give sufficient compensation, but things were not so easy in Cuartas-Granados, Sitges 2008. 8...♗ xd2+ 9.♗ bxd2 ♜ d7 After 9...0-0 10.♗ xc6 bxc6 11.0-0, defending the c-pawn will not be easy. 10.0-0 0-0?! Castling on autopilot is a frequent error. It is more accurate not to allow the bishop to f1 with 10...♗ e7, according to Macieja in *ChessBase Magazine*. 11.♗ e1 ♜ e7 12.♗ f1 c6 13.b4±, Macieja-Rutkowski, Warsaw 2010. White has a comfortable version of the positions we will see throughout this chapter, without any pressure on his centre.

It is striking that strong GMs such as Hou Yifan or Smirin have not seized this opportunity to punish the weaker 5...d6. Perhaps they are unfamiliar with this subtlety, or they also play the opening on autopilot to save time on the clock.

6.0-0 d6



From this critical position from the variation 4.d3 ♜c5, White's efforts to get an advantage used to revolve around the sharp 7.♘bd2, which we will see in variation C, but in recent months, several high-level games have been played with the pin 7.♗g5 as well as with the quieter 7.h3.

A) 7.♗g5!?

The pin has never been a very popular plan, but in recent times top players such as Harikrishna, Svidler and Dominguez Perez have found interesting ideas in the resulting positions, which are relatively unknown.

7...h6

Black usually unpins using the most radical method, but he can also borrow two typical manoeuvres from the Four Knights Game:

a) 7...♝e7 8.♘bd2 ♝d8 is playable, but the queen will be vulnerable when a white knight reaches e3: 9.d4 ♜b6 10.♗h4 (sooner or later, a necessary retreat) 10...♝e6 (in Akopian-Aronian, Russia tt 2005, the alternative 10...c6 11.♗a4 h6 was tried, but White could have obtained a significant advantage with 12.♘c2 ♜c7 13.d5!±, keeping the black pieces bottled up. The key is that if 13...g5, the sacrifice 14.♗xg5! hxg5 15.♗xg5 gives a winning attack) 11.♘c4 c6 12.♗a4 (I prefer this to 12.♘xb6 axb6 13.♗a4 ♜f4 14.♘c2, which was played in Karjakin-Nechaev, Alushta 2008. Black could more or less equalise by unpinning, beginning with 14...h6, followed by ...g7-g5=.) 12...♜c7 13.♘c2 ♜f4 14.♖e1± and ♜e3;

b) 7...♝e7!? was played in Perunovic-Wang Hao, Baku 2015. Black doesn't care about his pawns being doubled. 8.d4 ♜b6 9.♗xf6 (9.dxe5 ♜xe4 is not dangerous for Black, and if White doesn't capture on f6, the knight goes to g6, and Black will soon get rid of the pin) 9...gxf6 10.♘bd2 ♜g6 11.♖e1



analysis diagram

The doubled pawns make the black position somewhat rigid. The Chinese GM solved the problem in a radical way: 11...exd4?! 12.♘xd4 d5 13.exd5 ♘xd4 14.cxd4 ♖xd5 15.♗a4 ♕g7 16.♗e4 ♖d8, and instead of 17.♗ad1, his opponent could have played the immediate 17.♗c4!, with a solid edge. 11...c6 is more flexible, with the ideas 12.♗d3 ♘g4 13.h3 ♘h5!? and 12.♗f1 d5!? 13.exd5 cxd5 14.dxe5 fxe5 15.♗xe5 ♘xf2+! 16.♕xf2 ♖b6+ 17.♗g3 ♗xe5∞.

8.♗h4 g5 9.♗g3

9.♗xg5?! **hxg5 10.♗xg5** must also be considered, but in this version, the attack is not strong enough to justify the piece sacrifice. After 10...♔g7 11.♘f3 ♕e7 12.♗d2, the most accurate defence seems to be 12...♗h8. 12...a6 worked out well in Dragomirescu-Pashikian, Plovdiv 2012, after 13.♗xc6?! bxc6 14.♗g3 ♕e6! 15.d4 ♔a7 16.♗xf6+ ♕xf6 17.♗f3 ♕g4 18.dxe5+ ♕e7 19.♗xg4 ♘xg4†. The piece is worth more than the pawns, but 13.♗c4!, preventing ...♗e6, creates more problems. 13.♗c4!? Not good is 13.♗g3? ♗h5. Also insufficient is 13.♗c4 a6 14.♗xc6 bxc6 15.♗g3 ♕e6! (avoids the draw) 16.♗e3+ ♕g4 17.♗xc5 ♕xg3 18.fxg3 dxc5 19.♗xe5 ♕e8!†, since if 20.♗xc6, a5!, and White has to weaken his structure to save the knight. **13...♗e6 14.♗d5 ♘ag8†** The situation is still not entirely clear, but Black is about to free himself with ...♗b8-d7.

9...♗h5

The alternative **9...g4** leads to even sharper positions. Harikrishna-Kryvoruchko, Czechia tt 2016, continued **10.d4!?** 10.♗h4 ♗h5 11.♗d2 (11.♗xc6 bxc6 12.d4 ♗b6) 11...♗g5 or 10.♗fd2 ♗h5 11.b4 ♗b6 12.♗c4 f5 13.exf5 ♘xf5 14.a4 lead to double-edged positions in which Black is fairly comfortable. **10...gxf3** 10...♗b6 11.♗fd2!? (11.♗h4!? gxf3 12.♗xf3 ♕g7=) 11...exd4 12.♗h4 gives White interesting compensation for the pawn. **11.dxc5 ♗xe4** More solid than 11...fxg2 12.♗e1∞. **12.♗xf3 ♗xc5 13.♗e3 ♗e7!** **14.♗xh6 ♗f5 15.♗h5 ♗f6 16.♗d2 ♗g6 17.♗xg6+ fxg6**, and the complications more or less forcibly led to an equal endgame.

10.♗bd2



Black has tried several ideas from this critical position.

10... ♕f6

a) In Sevian-Kryvoruchko, Spain tt 2016, Black, the Ukrainian GM who we've already seen playing 9...g4 against Harikrishna, took a simple approach by chopping off the bishop straight away: 10... ♕xg3 11.hxg3 ♕f6. The problem is that after 12. ♕c4 (12. ♕xc6 bxc6 13.d4 transposes to our main line), the pin 12... ♕g4 is not that strong, since there is no granite-biting bishop on g3 after the exchange on f3. The young American GM got the slightly more comfortable position after 13.b4 ♕b6 14.a4 a6 15. ♕xb6 cxb6 16. ♕c4 ♕e7 17. ♕e2 ♕ac8 18. ♕ac1 ♕c6 19. ♕e3;

b) 10... ♕g4!? is a good alternative in case something goes wrong in the complications that 10... ♕f6 leads to. Smirin-Pridorozhni, St Petersburg 2016, continued 11. ♕xc6 (11. ♔h1!? ♕e7 12.h3 ♕xg3+ 13.fxg3∞) 11...bxc6 12. ♕a4 ♕xg3 13.hxg3 ♕e8! 14.d4 ♕b6 15. ♕fe1 exd4 16. ♕xd4 c5! 17. ♕xe8 ♕fxe8 18. ♕f5 ♕xf5 19.exf5 d5, and if anything, it is Black who can take the initiative.

11. ♕xc6!?

White's best bet, trying to expose the black weaknesses. Other options are not too promising:

a) Not good is 11. ♕c4?! ♕g4, since the doubled pawns would leave the ♕g3 staring at a brick wall;

b) If White plays more quietly, he runs the risk of losing the initiative if his opponent manages to break with ...f7-f5 in favourable circumstances. The British GM David Howell has shown how to handle the black position after 11. ♔h1 ♕g6. In his game against Svidler (Tallinn rapid 2016), there followed: 12. ♕c4 (12.b4 ♕b6 13. ♕c4 ♔g7 14.a4 a6 15.a5 ♕a7 16.b5 axb5 17. ♕xb5 ♕e7 18.d4 exd4 19.cxd4 f5! 20.exf5 ♕xf5 21. ♕e5+ dxe5 22. ♕xe5 ♕f6 23. ♕xh5 ♕xd4 24. ♕g4 ♕f7 25. ♕xf7+ ♕xf7†, Bartel-Howell, Doha 2015) 12...a5! (a clever idea: diminishing the effect of the opponent's queenside advance) 13.a3 ♕g7 14.b4 axb4 15.axb4 ♕xa1 16. ♕xa1 ♕b6 17. ♕d5 (17.d4!? g4 18. ♕h4 ♕g5 shows another advantage of 12...a5: the white queen has been sidetracked) 17... ♕e7 18. ♕b3 f5 19.exf5 ♕xf5 20.d4 e4 21. ♕e1 ♕xg3+ 22.hxg3 d5†

11...bxc6 12.d4! ♜xg3 13.hxg3 ♜b6

Safer than 13...exd4 14.e5! dxe5 (14...♝g6?! led to a black position full of holes in Perunovic-Deac, Zalakaros 2016: 15.cxd4 ♜b6 16.♞e1 (16.♞c1 might be even better) 16...♝e6 17.♝e4±) 15.♝e4 ♜e7 16.cxd4!. White gets good compensation for the pawn, both after 16...exd4 17.♞e1, and after 16...♝xd4 17.♝xd4 exd4 18.♝xd4.

14.♝a4!?

I imagine that the Serbian GM Perunovic had something prepared in this position, since in the familiar examples, Black was very comfortable after 14.dxe5 dxe5 15.♞c4 ♜e8!. Andriasyan-Aghasaryan, Legnica 2013, continued 16.♝h2 ♜a6 17.b3 ♜xc4 18.bxc4 ♜ad8 19.♝e2 ♜g7 20.♝h1?! h5!+, and the bishop is much stronger than the knight.

14...exd4

14...g4 15.dxe5 dxe5 16.♝h4 is a bit better for White, who gets squares for his knights. A possible plan is ♜c4, followed by ♜h2 and f2-f4.

15.♝xd4



In this complicated and unexplored position, Black can defend the pawn with 15...c5, but the bishop on b6 is silly, and the knight finds new squares after 16.♞c2 and ♜e3. It is better to give up the pawn:

15...♝d7 16.♝xc6 h5!? 17.♞c4 h4∞

B) 7.h3

White allows his opponent to complete his typical regrouping ...♝c6-e7-g6 without major inconveniences, and later he will try to demonstrate that his centre gives him a little something. However, usually this is not a very successful endeavour.

7...♝e7!

7...a6 is possible, but less attractive than in the variations from the previous chapter with 6...♜e8, in which Black can capture with the d-pawn.

Instead of dropping the bishop back, White would do well to play 8.♝xc6 bxc6 9.♞e1, reaching positions in the style of Chapter 5, but with the relatively useless move ...a7-a6.

Carlsen-Grischuk, Moscow 2013, continued **9...♝e8** **10.♗bd2 d5!?**. Svidler-Navara, Prague 2012, continued **10...♝b6** **11.♗f1 h6** **12.♗g3 ♛e6** **13.♗e3!** **♗xe3** **14.♕xe3 c5.** Normally, exchanging bishops would have equalised for Black, but here, the lost tempi allow White to break in the centre with advantage: **15.♘c2 ♜d7?!** **16.d4 cxd4** **17.cxd4 exd4** **18.♗xd4 a5** **19.b3 ♜c5** **20.♗d1±** In Game 5 (Chapter 20), you can find the instructive continuation of this game. **11.exd5** **11.♗c2?!** leads to a Nimzo-Indian type of position, in which White has good chances to gain an edge. **11...♗xd5** **12.♗b3 ♜f8** **13.c4 ♜d6** **14.♗e3 ♜d7** **15.d4 e4** **16.♗fd2 a5** **17.a4 f5** **18.c5 ♜g6?** **18...♗e6!**, controlling the c4-square, leads to an unclear game. **19.♗c4 ♜f6** **20.♗f4 ♜d5** **21.♗d2 ♜e6** **22.♗bxa5±** **7...a6** cannot be bad, but is more difficult to play than the main line.

8.d4 ♜b6



In this position, White has tried two more or less equivalent methods to defend the e-pawn, which in practice often converge, but which we will analyse separately nonetheless.

B1) 9.♗d3 ♜g6

Maintaining the tension. The alternative **9...d5**, liquidating the white centre, was played in two important games last year:

a) Carlsen-Kramnik, Shamkir 2015, continued **10.♗bd2 dxe4** **11.♗xe4 ♜xe4** **12.♗xe4 exd4** **13.♗c2?!** **h6**. Kramnik is playing very cautiously, declining the pawn sacrifice that White's last move involved: **13...f5** **14.♗d3 dxc3** **15.bxc3=** **14.a4 c6** **15.♗d1 ♜d5** **16.♗xd4 ♜e8** Despite all of Carlsen's subtleties, Black has equalised relatively easily. But the champion, quite accustomed to this, found a way to complicate matters: **17.a5?!** **♗xa5** **18.♗f3 b5** **19.♗d4**



analysis diagram

And now 19... $\mathbb{Q}c7?$ led to unfavourable complications. After 20. $\mathbb{Q}xc6 \mathbb{Q}d6$ 21. $g3 \mathbb{Q}b7$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}f4 \mathbb{Q}xc6$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xd5 \mathbb{Q}e1+$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}h2 \mathbb{Q}xd5$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}xd5 \mathbb{Q}xa1$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}d1$, the extra queen was easily winning for White. Much better is 19... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xd5 \mathbb{Q}xd5$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xb5 \mathbb{Q}b6$, with approximate equality;

b) The whole line with 9. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ was thought to be harmless, but in Anand-Karjakin, Moscow 2016, the former World Champion essayed a new idea: 10. $\mathbb{Q}xe5!$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}d2$



analysis diagram

White's scheme is less modest than it appears. In this symmetrical position, White will try to capitalise on the fact that the $\mathbb{Q}b6$ needs several tempi to get back in the game. 11... $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 11... $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}xd2 \mathbb{Q}f5$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xf5 \mathbb{Q}xf5$ does not fully equalise after 14. $\mathbb{Q}f3\pm$. Black will probably be able to neutralise the opponent's initiative after 14... $\mathbb{Q}h4$ (not 14... $g6$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}g4!$, and it is evident that the bishop is out of play) 15. $\mathbb{Q}g4 \mathbb{Q}g6$, but over the board this is not such an easy task. 12. $\mathbb{Q}b3 \mathbb{Q}c6$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}c5 \mathbb{Q}g6?!$ Black is close to equality after 13... $\mathbb{Q}f5!$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ (14. $\mathbb{Q}f4 \mathbb{Q}xc5$ 15. $dxc5 \mathbb{Q}e4$ gives nothing, but 14. $\mathbb{Q}e1 \mathbb{Q}xd3$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}cd3$ $f6$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}f3 \mathbb{Q}g6$ 17. $h4$ might create more tension) 14... $\mathbb{Q}exf5$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}g4 \mathbb{Q}c8!$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}cd7 \mathbb{Q}f6!=$, because, as Vachier-Lagrave points out on Chess.com, 17. $\mathbb{Q}xf8?$ $fxe5$ 18. $dxe5 \mathbb{Q}e4\mp$ is not the way to go. 14. $\mathbb{Q}h5 \mathbb{Q}xc5$ 15. $dxc5 \mathbb{Q}e4$

16. ♜xe4! dxe4 17. ♜d1 ♜e7 18. ♜xg6 hxg6 19. ♜g5! ♜xg5 20. ♜xg5 f6 21. ♜e3!±



analysis diagram

Anand, combining the control over the d-file with a queenside pawn advance, achieved a splendid victory, which you can further analyse in Game 7, in the Games Collection in Chapter 20.

10. ♜e1 ♜e8 11. ♜c2

This avoids the virtually lifeless positions that occur after 11. ♜bd2 c6 12. ♜f1 d5, although after 13. ♜g5! dxe4 14. ♜xe4, some strong GMs (including World Championship candidates) have tried to squeeze something out of them:



analysis diagram

Further details can be found in Game 8 (Chapter 20), E.Hansen-Shankland, Baku 2016.

11...c6

Caruana preferred the original solution 11...exd4!? 12.cxd4 c5 in his game against Anand from the last Candidates Tournament, played a few rounds before the one we have just discussed. After 13.dxc5! (13.d5 ♜a5 14. ♜c3 ♜d7∞ leads to a complex Benoni type of position) 13... ♜xc5 14. ♜c3 ♜e6 15. ♜e3, instead of 15... ♜c8 16. ♜xc5 ♜xc5 17. ♜d2 ♜e5 18. ♜e2 ♜xf3+ (18... ♜c4 19. ♜d4±) 19. ♜xf3 ♜ad8 20. ♜ed1?!, after which the

Italian American experienced some problems due to his backward pawn, he could have equalised with 15... $\mathbb{Q}e5!$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ (16. $\mathbb{Q}d4?$ $\mathbb{Q}xh3!$ loses a pawn) 16... $\mathbb{Q}xe3!$, and if 17. $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ $\mathbb{Q}xf2+=$.

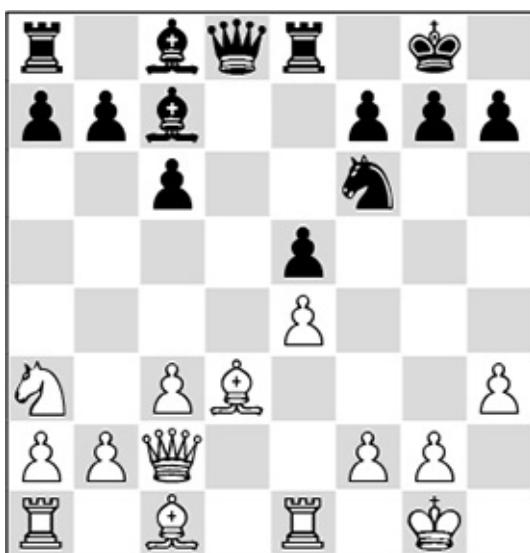
12. $\mathbb{Q}a3$

We are following a game between two specialists: **Vachier-Lagrave-Kramnik, Stavanger 2016**. The Frenchman, one of the few members of the global chess elite who has yet to incorporate the Berlin into his repertoire, introduces a small novelty. In Adams-Anand, Baden-Baden 2013, Black did not achieve equality after 12. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ d5 13.dxe5 $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ axb6 16.f4 $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 17.e5 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}e2\pm$. As a possible improvement, I suggest 12... $\mathbb{Q}h5!?$, with the continuation 13. $\mathbb{Q}bd2$ $\mathbb{Q}hf4$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ exd4! 15.cxd4 d5 16.e5 f6∞. In this line, Black is willing to give up the centre, especially after White has developed his b1-knight.

12... $\mathbb{Q}c7!?$ 13.dxe5

Kramnik's subtle retreat has prevented 13. $\mathbb{Q}c4?!$ exd4 14.cxd4 d5=.

13... $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ dxe5



15. $\mathbb{Q}e2!$

More prophylaxis: the manoeuvre ... $\mathbb{Q}f6-h5-f4$ would be annoying. It is clear that White cannot achieve much of an advantage in this symmetrical position, but he has the slightly easier game.

15...h6!

Looking for play on the kingside, while freeing a square for the queen. If 15... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 17.b3, Black wouldn't be forced to make any concessions.

16. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$

In the press conference after the game, Kramnik thought that Black might be better, showing attacking variations such as 17... $\mathbb{Q}h4?!$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}d6$ $\mathbb{Q}b6!?$, together with the sober refutation 19. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ (instead of 19. $\mathbb{Q}xe8?!$ $\mathbb{Q}xf2+$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}g4!!$), which leaves White for choice.

18. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}g4$ $\mathbb{Q}xg4$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xg4$

This is a good moment to evaluate the position. After 20... $\mathbb{Q}f6$, White just has nothing to continue playing for, but Kramnik made life difficult for himself with 20... $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 21.a4 h5 22. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 23.a5 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 24.b4 $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ a6 26. $\mathbb{Q}f3\pm$.

B2) 9. $\mathbb{Q}e1$

In principle, this is a more flexible move than 9. $\mathbb{Q}d3$, giving the bishop a comfortable retreat square. Black can choose between both plans we saw in the previous section.

9... $\mathbb{Q}g6$

I have chosen this variation as a main line to analyse the interesting idea from the game **Topalov-Kramnik, Stavanger 2016**, more deeply, but objectively the solid 9... $d5$ might be better. White has not managed to create serious problems after the forced liquidation 10. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$, most probably because there is no way to do it. Dominguez Perez-Bacrot, Spain tt 2013, continued 11. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$. In this line, the retreat of the knight gains a tempo, which brings Black even closer to equality. Svidler-Karjakin, Stavanger 2013, continued with the less accurate 11... $\mathbb{Q}xd2?!$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ f6 (in *ChessBase Magazine*, GM Krisztian Szabo gives an illustrative line to show the small and latent problems Black experiences: 12...c6 13. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 16.g3! $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 17.h4 contributes to the attack) 13. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7?!$ (13...c6 \pm) 14.a4 (14. $\mathbb{Q}f4!!\pm$ Szabo) 14...c6 15.a5! $\mathbb{Q}xa5$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}c5!$, and White's initiative is dangerous. It is interesting to see a defender of Karjakin's calibre losing two games in the same type of seemingly harmless position. 12. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ Dominguez Perez-Bruzon Batista, Havana 2015, was not such an exciting encounter either: 12. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ f6 13. $\mathbb{Q}ef3$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}ae8$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}ae1$ c6= 12...c6 13. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ 13.b3 seems more interesting, but in Krivic-Sochor, ICCF 2015, the correspondence master with the black pieces managed to thwart his opponent's attempt to press on the a3-f8 diagonal: 13... $\mathbb{Q}a5!$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}a3$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}b5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}g5$ = 13... $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}c5?!$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}xc5$, and 16.bxc5 $\mathbb{Q}e4$ is more dangerous for White than for Black. 14... $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}g4$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$, and the white initiative petered out. We will find similar positions in Chapter 8.

10. $\mathbb{Q}bd2$ c6 11. $\mathbb{Q}f1$

11. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ leads by transposition to Svidler-Anand, Moscow 2014. Black reacted with 11... $exd4!$ 12.cxd4 d5 13.e5 $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}hf4$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ f6 \mp , and once the e5-pawn was gone, Black took the initiative.



11...exd4!?

Following Anand's model in the previous note, even though the bishop is better placed on f1 than on a4. Of course, there is nothing wrong with 11... \mathbb{B} e8. Swiercz-Hovhannisyan, Martuni 2013, continued 12. \mathbb{B} c2 d5 13.exd5 exd4 14. \mathbb{B} xe8+ \mathbb{K} xe8 15. \mathbb{B} c4!? dx \mathbb{C} 3 16. \mathbb{B} xb6 axb6 17.dxc6 cxb2 18. \mathbb{B} xb2 \mathbb{B} xc6 19. \mathbb{B} d4, and White had enough compensation for the pawn, but no more than that.

12.cxd4 d5 13.e5 \mathbb{B} h5

Following the trend of neglecting the centre. Czech GM Igor Stohl, who annotated the game between Svidler and Anand for *ChessBase Magazine*, mentions that f4 is a good square for Black after the move h2-h3.

14.b4!

14.g3!? leaves the knight in the corner and in danger of being trapped. After 14...f6, bad is 15. \mathbb{B} h2? \mathbb{B} xg3, and Black creates an impressive centre. However, 15.e6 leads to a complex situation in which it will not be so clear what compensation Black obtains after giving up the \mathbb{B} h5.

14...f6 15.a4!

Topalov reacts brilliantly to the novelty by his arch-enemy. The pawn moves on the queenside indirectly help sustain the centre and create squares for the \mathbb{B} d2, by fixing the d5- and c6-pawns.

15... \mathbb{B} hf4

Better than the other options:

a) Black can win a pawn with 15...fxe5 16.a5! \mathbb{B} xd4 17. \mathbb{B} xd4 \mathbb{B} f6! 18. \mathbb{B} f3 e4, but after 19. \mathbb{B} a3 exf3 20. \mathbb{B} xf3, the bishop will promptly reach b2, and the pawn deficit is more than compensated;

b) 15...a6 maintains the bishop on the diagonal, even though it is not clear that it is more useful there than on c7, as the following sequence clearly shows: 16.a5 \mathbb{B} a7 17. \mathbb{B} b3 fxe5 18. \mathbb{B} xe5± The white knight is going to block the queenside from c5;

c) 15...a5 16. \mathbb{B} a3 axb4 17. \mathbb{B} xb4 \mathbb{B} e8 18. \mathbb{B} b3 is also uncomfortable for Black.

16.a5 ♜c7 17.♗b3



Black has not succeeded in liquidating the opponent's centre. Kramnik continued 17...a6, and after 18.♗c5 ♜e6 19.♗xe6 (19.♗d3!? ♜xc5 20.bxc5 ♜xa5 21.♗e2=) 19...♜xe6 20.♗d3, the white position is easier to play. Neither 17...♝f5 18.♗c5 b6?! 19.♗a6! nor 17...fxe5 18.dxe5 ♜e7 18.♗bd4!, indirectly defending the pawns, guarantees equality.

C) 7.♗bd2

The most natural continuation is also the most dangerous one for Black.

7...♝e7!?

The fashionable defensive system, although with the e4-pawn defended, this typical manoeuvre involves conceding the centre. Black has two more conventional ideas at his disposal:

a) 7...♝b6 is safe and sound, but it has the drawback of losing the bishop pair after 8.♗c4. Alekseev-Grigoriants, Wroclaw blitz 2014, continued 8...♝e7 9.♗a4 ♜g6 10.h3 h6 11.♗b3 c6 (11...♝e6 12.a4 ♜xc4 13.♗xc4 a5 14.♗b3 c6 15.♗h2 d5 16.♗f3±, Alekseev-Korneev, Baku 2013) 12.♗xb6 axb6 13.♗e3 b5 14.a4±. If the white advantage still seems like not a big deal to you, I suggest you go back to the previous chapters...;

b) 7...a6 is again the main alternative. I believe White should respond with 8.♗xc6, as in the lines from the previous section. Of course, 8.♗a4 is possible, but after 8...♝a7 9.h3 ♜e7, Black finishes his regrouping without making any concessions. The continuation in Shankland-So, St Louis 2015, was interesting: 10.♗e1 c5!? 11.♗f1 h6 12.♗g3 b5 13.♗c2 ♜g6 14.d4 ♜b7 15.♗e3 ♜e8 16.d5 c4= 8...bxc6 9.d4 If this direct approach does not work, you can always play 9.♗e1 and transpose to the positions of the previous chapter, which also give White chances to get an edge. 9...exd4 10.cxd4 ♜b6 11.♗c2 c5 12.d5 ♜e8 13.b3 If Black cannot create sufficient play against the opponent's centre, he will feel the poor position of his ♜b6. 13...♝g4



analysis diagram

14. $\mathbb{Q}b2!$? An attempt to improve on 14. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}a5$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ c6 16. $dxc6$ d5 17. $exd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 18. $fxe3$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ 21. c7 $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}d5=$, which was played in Dominguez Perez-Leko, London 2012. White's main idea is 14... $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 15. $gxf3$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$ (15...c6!? ∞) 16. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}h4$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}g1!$ $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}e3$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}f1$, with tremendous compensation thanks to the silly bishop on b6.

8. $d4$ $exd4$ 9. $cxd4$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$



A critical position in the variation. From a traditional point of view, a player might feel tempted to assign a \pm to the diagram, and focus on analysing 7...a6, but modern tournament chess prefers the concrete: Black keeps the proud enemy centre under pressure, and is ready to play ...d6-d5 or finish his development with ... $\mathbb{Q}g4$. Despite a few partial successes, White has not found a convincing way to consolidate his apparent advantage.

10. $\mathbb{Q}e1$

White has tried other ideas worthy of mention:

- a) Andreikin-Karjakin, Khanty-Mansiysk 2014, continued 10. h3 d5 11. e5 $\mathbb{Q}e4$. We can see why it is more urgent to overprotect e4 than to prevent ... $\mathbb{Q}g4$. 12. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$

13.♗e2 ♜c6 14.♕d1 No improvement is 14.♗xe4 dxe4 15.♗xe4 ♜xd4 16.♗xd4 ♜xe4 17.♗xe4 ♜xd4 18.♗xb7 ♜xe5 19.♖b1 ♜ad8, and Black had at least equalised in Areshchenko-Kramnik, Tromsø 2013. **14...♜xd4 15.♗xe4 dxe4 16.♗xe4 ♜xe4 17.♗xd4 ♜d5=;**

b) 10.a4 is a more recent example. In Sadler-Korneev, Blackpool 2016, 10...♝g4 11.h3 ♜h5 12.a5 ♜xa5 13.e5 dxe5 14.dxe5 ♜fd5 15.♖xa5 c6 16.♗c4 cxb5 17.♖xb5 b6 18.♗d6± was played. 10...a6 11.♗d3 ♜c6!∞ is a possible improvement for Black.

10...♝g4

In Topalov-Nakamura, St Louis 2015, Black opted for the more passive 10...♝g6 11.h3 c6 12.♗d3 ♜h5 (12...d5!? 13.e5 ♜h5 is interesting, and if 14.♗xg6 fxg6!∞) 13.♗c4 ♜c7. Topalov responded vigorously: 14.d5! ♜hf4 15.♗f1 f5 16.e5! ♜xd5 17.exd6 ♜xd6 18.♗xd6 ♜xd6 19.b3±, and the bishop pair gave more than enough compensation for the pawn, thanks to the weaknesses created by the pawn on f5.

11.h3

A useful interlude, which will later allow White to indirectly defend the d-pawn.

11...♝h5 12.♗b3

Here too, White has other, fairly interesting options at his disposal:

a) 12.a3?! a6 13.♗f1 ♜e8 14.e5 ♜fd5 15.♗c4 ♜a7 16.g4 ♜g6, and Black is more comfortable, as in Vachier-Lagrange-Karjakin, Khanty-Mansiysk 2015;

b) Anand scored an important victory in the last Candidates Tournament against Topalov after **12.a4 a6 13.♗f1**, although the opening was not to blame for the result of that game: **13...♜e8** The alternative 13...♜c6 was tested in Caruana-Kramnik, Leuven rapid 2016. Caruana had prepared the sharp pawn sacrifice 14.a5!? (14.d5 ♜e5 (14...♝d4 15.a5 ♜a7 16.♝a4∞) 15.a5 ♜a7 16.♗b3 ♜xf3+ 17.♗xf3 ♜e8∞ can also be explored). Kramnik declined it, and after 14...♜a7 15.♖a4! (the idea made possible by the move a4-a5) 15...h6 16.♗c2 ♜e8 17.♗d3 ♜g6 18.b3±, White had consolidated his centre and was better. Critical is 14...♜xf3 15.♗xf3 ♜xa5 16.♗e2 ♜b6 17.♗g5∞. **14.a5 ♜a7 15.♗b3** Either now or on the next move, 15.♖a4 gives better chances to get an advantage. **15...♜c6 16.d5?! ♜d4 17.♗xd4 ♜xd4 18.♗xb7 ♜d7 19.♗c4?** Objectively, it was better to give up the exchange with 19.♖a3 ♜h4 20.♖ae3!∞. **19...♜c5 20.♗c6**



analysis diagram

Topalov, who was in poor form during the tournament, now played 20... ♜b3? and ended up a pawn down. However, there was the combination 20... ♜xf2+! 21. ♛xf2 ♜h4+ 22.g3 ♜xe4+ 23. ♜xe4 ♜xe4 24. ♜e3 ♜f3+ 25. ♛g1 ♜xg3+ 26. ♜g2 ♜xh3†;

c) In Movsesian-Dvirnyy, Germany Bundesliga 2015/16, played one month before the Candidates Tournament, White chose a different square for the queen. After 12. ♜a4!? a6 13. ♜f1?! (more accurate is 13. ♜d3∞, overprotecting the e-pawn) 13... ♜c6?! 14.d5 ♜e7 15.b4 ♜g6 16. ♜b2 ♜xf3 17. ♜xf3, the white position is very comfortable, but I am not sure what the best set-up is for White if Black plays 13... ♜e8. For example, if 14.b4?!, 14... ♜c6 15.d5 ♜d4!†.

12...d5 13.e5 ♜d7∞



14. ♜d1!?

A novelty of **Caruana's**, introduced in his game against **Giri** in the **Candidates Tournament of 2016**. It may seem a bit strange to manoeuvre the queen back and forth like this, but she must make room for the knight, and there is no better square available. The idea had been tried before with the inclusion of 14.a4 a5 (14...a6?∞). Topalov-Caruana, St Louis 2015, continued 15. ♜d1. Sjugirov-Sethuraman, Baku 2015, showed why the queen is better on d1 than on e3: 15. ♜e3?! c6 16. ♜f1?! (16. ♜d3∞) 16...c5!

17.g4 ♜g6 18.b3 ♜c6†, and the white position is collapsing. 15...♞b8 The knight looks for the b4-square. 15...f6 is also possible, as in the main variation. 16.♞b3 ♜bc6 17.♝g5 h6 18.♝h4 ♜c8?! It might be better to play 18...♝b4 19.♛c1 c6 20.♝f1, and here choose between 20...♝e8, restricting the effects of e5-e6, and the risky 20...g5!? 21.♝g3 (21.g4!?) 21...♝f5∞. 19.g4 ♜g6 20.♛c1 ♜h7, and here, instead of the awkward 21.♝g3?, which allowed Caruana to untangle the knights with 21...♝b4 22.♜e3 ♜a2 23.♜a1 ♜b4=, Topalov should have played 21.♞c5±, with a more pleasant position. After 14.♝d1, now 14...♝b8 15.♝b3 ♜bc6 16.♝g5± makes less sense, since b4 is not weak. However, Giri, well-prepared as usual, had analysed the position deeply and instantly responded with a new concept:

14...f6!?

In Vachier-Lagrave-Anand, Leuven rapid 2016, played a few months after the Candidates Tournament, Anand preferred 14...♝e8, leaving f8 for the knight, and obtained a good game after 15.g4 (15.♝b3 c6 16.♝d3, delaying the advance of the g-pawn, might give better chances of an advantage, but Black seems to be comfortable after 16...f6∞) 15...♜g6 16.♝f1 c6 17.♝d3 f6 (Branko Tadic suggests the alternative 17...c5!? in *Informant* 129) 18.exf6 ♜xf6 19.♝g3 ♜xd3 20.♝xd3 ♜g6∞. Caruana found the best response after spending vast amounts of time:

15.e6! ♜b8 16.♝b3 ♜d6

Prevents 17.♞c5.

17.g4 ♜g6 18.♝h4 ♜bc6

18...♝e4!? is a typical engine suggestion, preparing to sacrifice a piece, and which should only be analysed in case of difficulties in the main line. I cannot resist the temptation to show you a complex computer variation, which is as beautiful as a plastic flower: 19.♝g2 (19.♝d3 ♜xe6! 20.f3?! f5!†) 19...♝g6 (19...f5∞) 20.f3 ♜g3? (20...c6 21.♝f1 ♜c7∞) 21.fxe4 ♜h4 22.♝f1!! ♜f3+ 23.♝xf3 ♜xf3 24.♜e3 ♜d1 25.♝d2 ♜c2 (25...♜xa1 26.♝xa1 ♜xd4 27.exd5+-) 26.♝c3+-

19.♝xc6 ♜xc6



This tense position is critical to the evaluation of the variation. White needs time to

consolidate his space advantage, which Caruana managed to a large degree, although a more in-depth analysis begins to show 0.00 everywhere.

20. $\mathbb{Q}d2$

20. $\mathbb{Q}f4!?$ can be considered, for if 20... $\mathbb{Q}c2$ (20... $\mathbb{Q}e4!?\infty$) 21. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}xb3$ 22. $a xb3$, winning a piece with 22... $g5$ is very double-edged. On the other hand, 20. $f4?$ is not advisable: 20... $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 21. $f5$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$, and it is Black who is on the attack.

20... $\mathbb{Q}c2!$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}xb3?!$

21... $\mathbb{Q}c4\infty$

22. $a xb3$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}b4$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}ec1$ $b6$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $bxc5\pm$

CONCLUSION

Variation A does not seem to give Black any serious problems, but the sharp positions that arise are virtually unexplored, so you should do your own research, and stay tuned for new developments. In variation B, Black can choose between a double-edged game, holding the centre, and a more boring type of game with ... $d6-d5$, which promises equality after a few defensive moves. The most critical situation occurs after 7. $\mathbb{Q}bd2$. In our main line, Black seems to maintain equality, but resources for both sides are far from being exhausted and we will surely see more important games in the near future, perhaps with the alternatives on the 10th and 12th moves.

The global chess elites have stopped trying to gain any advantage in the sharp Berlin endgame, often preferring to play the Anti-Berlin with 4. $d3$. This opening tends to lead to very rich positions but, objectively, not to any white advantage. For example, in the last Candidates Tournament (2016), the Berlin was played seven times, six of which saw 4. $d3$, while the remaining other game saw the drawish 4. 0-0 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 5. $\mathbb{Q}e1$, which we will see in the next chapter. More recent times have seen Black further tightening the screws, even prompting several super GMs to begin experimenting with the Italian Game, which used to be a less theoretical opening but is now hugely popular, and can lead to similar positions.

CHAPTER 8

4.0-0 ♜xe4: Alternatives to 5.d4

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♜c6 3.♗b5 ♜f6 4.0-0 ♜xe4



1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.0-0 ♗xe4

A) 5.♔e2?!



The move of a player who wants a draw.

5...♝d6

The most common continuation, which gives comfortable equality. At your own risk, you can look for complications with the original 5...♝g5!? 6.♞xg5 ♛xg5 7.d4 ♕e7 8.dxe5. Weaker is 8.♗xc6?! dxc6 9.dxe5 ♔f5!, as in De la Villa-Granda Zuniga, Benasque 2010.

Black has an improved version of the positions that we will see in Chapters 9 and 12.

8...♞d4 In Naroditsky-Kramnik, London rapid 2014, the former World Champion preferred 8...a6. His opponent did not get anything clear after 9.♗xc6 (9.♗a4 b5 10.♗b3 ♔b7∞) 9...dxc6 10.♗d2 ♜e6!? 11.f4 f5∞. **9.♞d3 ♜xe5** Black might consider 9...♝xb5 10.♝xb5 b6∞. **10.♝c3** 10.♗d2!? ♜e6 11.♗e1 was played in T.Petrosian-Minasian, Yerevan 2006. Instead of 11...♞d6?! 12.♗h3 ♜e7 13.♗d3 c6 14.♗c3 ♜c7 15.f4 g6 16.g4!, which gave a strong attack against the legendary champion's namesake, it is interesting to play 11...♞h5!? (preventing ♗h3) 12.♗c3 c6, even though White can provoke great complications with the piece sacrifice 13.♗f4?!. **10...♞c5** **11.♗d1 ♜e6** **12.♗e1 ♜d4** **13.♗f3 c6** **14.♗e3 ♜e5** It is difficult to assess what compensation there is for the pawn. The game Trofimov-Tyulenko, ICCF 2014, continued 15.♗d3 ♜e7 16.♗xa7 ♜f6, and the advantage in the centre meant Black was slightly for choice.

6.♗xc6 dxc6 7.♗xe5+ ♜e7

7...♜e6 8.♝g5 prevents a draw at the cost of being slightly worse.

8.♗a5



The point of White's play, preparing a disgraceful repetition of moves.

8... ♔d8

Acquiescing to a draw. I can't stand it when they try to kill a game by such wrongful means, so I feel morally compelled to seek a viable alternative, based on 8... ♔d7!?:

a) 9. ♕e1+ ♔e7 10. ♔g5 was played in Zeng Chongsheng-Pashikian, Al-Ain 2015. Here, Black played 10... ♔f8, which was enough to equalise, but even better was 10... ♔f5! 11. ♔h4 (11.g4 ♔d6 12.h3 ♔f8#) 11...h6#;

b) 9. ♔c3 ♔f5 is harmless. Black completes his development without any trouble, and can look to the future with optimism;

c) 9. ♔e5+! questions any black attempts to play for a win. After 9... ♔e6 (9... ♔e7= is an admission of failure) 10. ♔c3! (10. ♔a5!? ♔e7!∞ is the point of Black's play. The queen is hunted down if she dares capture the pawn) 10... ♔g6 (10... ♔b5 11. ♔d3 ♔e7 12. ♔e1 ♔g6 13. ♔e2 is more uncomfortable) 11. ♔e1+ ♔e6 12. ♔d4 0-0-0 13. ♔xe6 fxe6, it is not entirely clear whether Black's development compensates for his poor structure.

9. ♔c3!?

9. ♔e5+ ♔e7 10. ♔a5, and a draw is the most common result in this depressing sub-variation. White can continue the game with my suggested main move, either the result of a sudden flurry of ambition, or because the arbiter won't allow any repetitions.

9... ♔f5 10. ♔e1+ ♔e6 11. ♔b3



11...Qe7?*

In an outing between two legends, Short-Timman, London 2008, White obtained good compensation for the exchange after 11...Qb8 12.Qxe6+ fxe6 13.Qxe6+ Qe7 14.Qc3.

12.Qxb7 Qd5∞ 13.Qe5?*

Otherwise, Black exchanges on f3 and gets a strong attack against the weak castled king.

13...Qd4 14.c4 f6! 15.cxd5 fxe5

The position requires more analysis, but as a result of Black's lead in development coupled with the threat ...Qc2, White is in grave danger. For example, in the event of 16.Qxe5? 0-0 17.Qc3 Qd6 18.Qe4 Qf6→, Black has a decisive attack.

This analysis clearly shows that 5.Qe2 is indeed as soft as it looks.

B) 5.Qe1

A more reliable option than 5.Qe2. In fact, maybe a little too reliable.

5...Qd6 6.Qxe5 Qe7 7.Qf1

The artificial 7.Qd3 was the fashion in the 80s. Mind you, no shoulder straps and dreadful disco music: I am talking about the 1880s! After 7...0-0 8.Qc3 Qxe5 9.Qxe5 c6,



analysis diagram

Dominguez Perez has spruced up the following idea a little bit: **10. ♕e1!?** Black regroups easily after the traditional 10.b3 ♜e8! 11. ♔f3 d5 12. ♜b2 ♜f6 13. ♜e2 ♜c7! 14. ♜a4 ♜xb2 15. ♜xb2 ♜e6 16.c3 ♜d6 17. ♜ae1 ♜d7=, as in Shirov-Ivanchuk, Monaco blindfold 1995. **10... ♜e8 11. ♔e2 ♜f6** Better than 11... ♜d6?! 12.b3! ♜c7 13. ♜a3 d6 14. ♜h5±, Dominguez Perez-Fressinet, Huai'an blitz 2016. **12. ♜e4 d5** After 12... ♜d4 13. ♜g3! ♜f6 (the threat was 14. ♜xh7+) 14.c3 ♜b6 (14... ♜e8?! 15. ♜xh7+! may not be that serious, but there is no reason to allow it) 15. ♜c2 ♜e8 16. ♔d1 ♜xe1+ 17. ♔xe1 d5 18.d4, White might argue that his slightly more active bishop on c2, coupled with his knight that can go to f5, give him some initiative. However, he is wrong. **13. ♜xf6+ ♜xf6 14. b3 ♜e8 15. ♔f1 ♜e4!=** So far, we have followed the game Dominguez Perez-Radjabov, Tbilisi 2015. A typical situation has been reached that can be seen throughout this chapter: Black's lead in development compensates for the bishop pair in this symmetrical position.

Let's go back to the position after 7. ♜f1:



This is Carlsen's favourite line when he is happy with a draw. In the symmetrical positions that are reached, White maintains a slight initiative, in the style of the French Exchange Variation, or in the most boring lines in the Petroff, and as is the case in those variations, the drawing percentage is high.

B1) 7... ♜f5

The knight moves so as to be able to play the d-pawn. 7...0-0 is also possible, and usually transposes either to the main line after 8. ♜f3!?, or to variation B2, in the event of 8.d4 or 8. ♜c3.

8. ♜f3!

After 8.c3 ♜xe5 9. ♜xe5 d6 10. ♜e1 0-0 11.d4 d5 White cannot hope for any advantage, a pair of knights already having been swapped, and with Black comfortably developing. So-Kramnik, Paris blitz 2016, continued 12. ♜f4 c6 13. ♜d3 ♜d6 14. ♜f3 ♜xf4 15. ♜xf4 ♜d6 16. ♜f3 g6 17. ♜d2 ♜d7 18. ♜e2 ♜g7=.

8...0-0

Czech GM Stohl mentions the option 8... ♜cd4, which occurred in Llaneza-Pashikian,

Rijeka 2010. Black loses time to exchange a knight, which the Spanish IM exploited by occupying the centre, gaining him some advantage: 9.c3 ♜xf3+ 10.♘xf3 ♜h4 11.♗e4 ♜g6 12.c4 0-0 13.d4 d6 14.♗c3 c6 and here, instead of the risky move 15.f4?! played in the game, 15.♗c2±.

9.d4 d5 10.c3

Of course, Black is close to equal, but the awkward situation of the ♜f5, in a way stepping on its c6-colleague's toes, allows White to exert minimal pressure.

10...♜d6 11.♝d3



11...♞ce7

A solid positional move. Black supports the d-pawn and seeks play for his knights. Of course, there are other possibilities:

a) Svidler-Aronian, Reykjavik 2015, continued **11...♝e8 12.♞xe8+ ♜xe8 13.♗b3**. This creates more difficulties for Black than 13.♘c2 g6 14.♘bd2 (14.♗g5 ♛g7 does not seem dangerous either) 14...♝e6 15.♗f1 f6 16.♗d2 ♜d7 17.♗e3 ♜xe3 18.fxe3 ♜e7 19.e4 dxe4 20.♗xe4 c6= (Saric-Adams, Reykjavik 2015), or 13.♘bd2 ♜d7 14.♗f1 b6 15.♗c2 g6 16.♗g5 ♛f8 17.♗f6 ♜e8 18.h3 ♜f4 19.♗h2 ♜d6 20.♗g4 ♜e4 21.♗h4 h5= (Karjakin-Andreikin, Baku 2015). **13...♞fe7 14.♘bd2 b6 15.♘f1 ♜g4 16.♗h4 ♜e6 17.♗d2 ♜g6 18.♗f5 ♜f4**, and here, instead of 19.♗e3 ♜ce7 20.♗c2 ♜xf5 21.♗xf5 ♜d7 22.♗g3 ♜xd2 23.♗xd2 f6=, White could keep some pressure with 19.♗e1!, e.g. 19...♝xd2 20.♗xd2 ♜d7 21.♗a4!±;

b) **11...h6 12.♘bd2 ♜f6** is the most common plan. Two games in the match Adams-Dominguez Perez at the World Cup in Baku 2015, continued **13.♗f1 ♜e6 14.♗d2 ♜fe8**. In one of these games, Black found himself in some trouble after 14...♝fe7 15.♗g3 ♜g4 16.♗e2 ♜f5 17.♗b3 ♜xg3 18.hxg3 ♜e7 19.♗e5 ♜e6 20.♗d3±. We are following the other game from the tie-break. **15.♗c2 a6 16.♗e2 ♜fe7! 17.♗e3 ♜g6!** Black has successfully regrouped. After **18.♗xg6?!** 18.♗f5 ♜f4 19.♗xf4 ♜xf5 20.♗xf5 ♜xe2 21.♗xe2 ♜xf4= does not give anything serious. **18...fxg6 19.♗ae1 ♜f7 20.♗c1 g5**, if anything, Black is the one who has taken the initiative.

12.♘bd2

In Adams-Nakamura, Skopje 2015, the English GM essayed a sharper idea: 12. $\mathbb{B}c2$ g6 13. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ f6 14. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ c6 15. c4 $\mathbb{B}g7$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}h6$ (avoids the exchange of light-squared bishops at the cost of allowing ... $\mathbb{Q}g4$). 16.h3!? $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ gives some chances to get an edge) 16... $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}fd2$ $\mathbb{B}e8$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{B}d7$ 20. cxd5 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ cxd5 and Black, with his pair of bishops, is at least equal.

12...c6 13. $\mathbb{Q}f1$

13. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ doesn't let the opponent manoeuvre his e7-knight. Topalov-Nakamura, St Louis (60 minutes) 2016, continued 13... g6 14. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{B}g7$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ f6 16. $\mathbb{Q}h6$ $\mathbb{B}e8$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}h4!$ $\mathbb{Q}xg3$ 18. hxg3 $\mathbb{Q}ef5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ g5 20. $\mathbb{B}xe8+$ $\mathbb{Q}xe8$ 21. $\mathbb{B}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xf5!$ $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}e2$, and Black was in trouble. 15... $\mathbb{Q}ef5$ seems to be a clear improvement.

13... $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}c2$

Perhaps 14.g3!? gave some chances to get an edge, avoiding the exchange of one of the opponent's not very well placed knights.

14... $\mathbb{Q}fh4$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xh4$ $\mathbb{Q}xh4$ 16.g3



Carlsen-Anand, Nanjing 2010, continued 16... $\mathbb{Q}d8$?! 17. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{B}e8$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}f5$, and White keeps the initiative based on his powerful knight. We will see the rest of this interesting game in Game 9 in Chapter 20. Better was

16... $\mathbb{Q}h3=$

making the opponent's regrouping difficult.

B2) 7... $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 8. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 0-0



In this line, White's chances to get the advantage, although limited, rely on the bad position of the black knight, hindering the development of the bishop and therefore having to spend some time rerouting via e8. Top GMs tend to prefer this to 7... $\mathbb{Q}f5$, probably because it is concrete and easy to analyse.

B21) 9.d4

The most natural move. Now, Black completes his development without any difficulty, although he still has a few problems to solve.

9... $\mathbb{Q}f6$

Carlsen, with the black pieces, has opted for 9... $\mathbb{Q}e8$. After 10.d5, White wins space, but this does not seem enough to speak of any clear advantage: 10... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ (also solid is 10...d6 11. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}xc1$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xc1$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$, and Black was close to equalising in Leko-Carlsen, Wijk aan Zee 2013) 11. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ d6 12. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}xe1+$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xe1$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $dxc5$ 19.c4 $\mathbb{Q}e8$, and White has no way to take advantage of his 'extra bishop' (Karjakin-Carlsen, Moscow 2013).

10. $\mathbb{Q}e1$

In the third game of their match for the World Championship, Carlsen surprised Karjakin with **10. $\mathbb{Q}e2!?$** . Now, 10... $\mathbb{Q}e8$ makes less sense than in the main line, as the d-pawn is not attacked, and after the natural **10...b6**, the rook drops back: **11. $\mathbb{Q}e1!$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe1$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xe1$**



analysis diagram

The World Champion tried to demonstrate that the extra move ...b7-b6 actually favours White. **13... ♜e7** Preventing the opponent from doubling the pawns, which, combined with the bishop's fianchetto, would give advantage to White. Not possible was 13... ♜xd4? 14. ♜xd6 ♜xb2 (14... cxd6 15. ♜e4+) 15. ♜xc7!, and White wins material, but a good alternative is 13... ♜e8, with the idea of ...d7-d5, and follow the main line with a weakness on c6. **14. ♜c3 ♜b7 15. ♜xe7 ♜xe7 16.a4 a6 17.g3 g5 18. ♜xd6 ♜xd6 19. ♜g2 ♜xg2 20. ♜xg2**, and White maintains minimal pressure.

10... ♜e8 11.c3

In his comments for *ChessBase Magazine*, the Hungarian GM Krisztian Szabo mentions another, more interesting possibility: **11. ♜f4!?** 11. ♜c3!? ♜xd4 12. ♜f4 leads to the same position after the normal 12... ♜e8. **11... ♜xe1 12. ♜xe1** Black has to know what he is doing if he wants to keep the game within drawing margins: **12... ♜e8 12... ♜xd4** is quieter. After a later exchange on d6, the black bishop pair will compensate for his weak pawns. **13. ♜c3!?** 13.c3 would transpose to the main variation. **13... ♜xd4** The only way to avoid d4-d5, which would give some advantage to White, since if 13... d5?, there follows 14. ♜xd5!±. **14. ♜d5 c6** The complications that follow after 14... d6!? 15. ♜g5! look dangerous for Black, but the engines show us the way to the desired 0.00... Andreikin-Jakovenko, Poikovsky 2016, continued 15... f6 (also possible is 15... ♜f6 16. ♜xf6 ♜xf6 17. ♜xf6+ gxf6 18. ♜e4 f5 19. ♜f3 ♜f6, although White had enough compensation for the pawn in Solak-Kir.Georgiev, Serbia tt 2016) 16. ♜e3 ♜e5 17.f4 ♜xb2 18. ♜b1 ♜a3 19. ♜a5 ♜c5 20. ♜xc5 dxc5 21. ♜xc5 ♜d6 22. ♜xd6 cxd6=. **15. ♜e7+ ♜f8 16. ♜xc8 ♜f6!** Without this resource, the check on b4 would give White a clear advantage. **17. ♜b4+ c5 18. ♜d2 ♜xc8 19. c3** 19. ♜e1 g5! 20. ♜xg5 ♜xf2+! 21. ♜xf2 ♜xg5 22. ♜b5 ♜d6 23. ♜xd7 ♜d8, and Black had no major problems in Guseinov-Sargissian, Warsaw 2013. **19... ♜e5 20. ♜xe5 ♜xe5 21. ♜xd7 ♜c7 22. ♜d1 ♜xd7 23. ♜xd7 ♜c7 24. ♜xc7 ♜xc7**, and a dead-drawn endgame is reached (Kasimdzhanov-Leko, London 2012).

11... ♜xe1 12. ♜xe1 ♜e8

Typical of the variation. The pawn will reach d5, and the position is practically equal.

13. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ d5 14. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ g6!

Using the position of the knight to prepare the exchange of Black's bad bishop.

15. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}e2$

Setting up a positional trap. The game Carlsen-Kramnik, Leuven blitz 2016, shows the dangers Black runs if he is careless in this symmetrical position: 16. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}e1$



analysis diagram

20...c6? (20...h5 was necessary, giving the king some luft) 21. $\mathbb{Q}h6!$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}e7$, and the open file gives White a considerable advantage.

16...c6!

According to Szabo, after 16... $\mathbb{Q}f5$?! 17. $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}b5!$ \pm , Black still has to solve some problems, similar to the ones Karpov created for Kortchnoi in the fourth game of their match in 1981, a Petroff that ended in a victory for the reigning World Champion at the time.

17. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$



In Carlsen-Anand, Chennai (8) 2013, Carlsen exchanged on f6 and things were fully equal, not something he was particularly concerned about, taking into account that he had

a two-point advantage in the match. The Egyptian GM Amin, in his game against Jakovenko, Baku 2015, showed that there is still life in the position:

21. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}d1!$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 26. $g3$ $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}a4!$

The black pieces have been diverted to the kingside, which allows White to create problems on the other wing.

27... $a6$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}b4$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 29. $a4$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 30. $a5$

The blockade of the pawns gives White a small edge, though Black is very solid and should not lose with patient defence.

B22) 9. $\mathbb{Q}c3$

Somewhat more incisive than 9. $d4$. In almost all lines, White gets either the pair of bishops or some advantage in the centre.

9... $\mathbb{Q}e8$

9... $c6$?! prevents $\mathbb{Q}d5$, but now the plan based on advancing the d-pawn is stronger:
10. $d4$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ (10... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 12. $d5\pm$) 11. $d5!\pm$

10. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$



11. $\mathbb{Q}e1$

In Vachier-Lagrange-Giri, Biel 2014, the French GM preferred 11. $\mathbb{Q}e2$?, leaving the e1-square available for either the queen or the other rook. The game continued 11... $c6$ (11... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ is more accurate. Motylev-Fedoseev, Moscow blitz 2014, saw 12. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 13. $d4$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $d5$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$, and Black had nothing to fear) 12. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $d5$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}e7+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xc8$ $\mathbb{Q}xc8$ 16. $d3$ $f5$ (we will see this idea in the main line) 17. $g3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}c3$!. Giri followed up with the mistaken 19... $d4$?, underestimating White's light-squared bishop, and after 20. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 21. $f4$!, a later advance of the b-pawn gave White a substantial advantage, as you will be able to see in Game 10 (Chapter 20).

11... $c6$

11... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ does not achieve full equality after 12. $\mathbb{Q}xf6+$! $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 13. $d4$. Robson-So, St Louis 2015, continued: 13... $c6$ In Iordachescu-Aleksandrov, Nakhchivan 2012, 13... $b6$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $g6$ (14... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}g4\pm$) 15. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}h6$

$\mathbb{Q}fb8?!$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ c6 20. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ was played, and the control of the e-file entailed a tangible advantage. **14. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ b6!?** A semi-waiting move. If 14... $\mathbb{Q}c7$, 15. d5! **15. $\mathbb{Q}d3$** The difference with 11. $\mathbb{Q}e2$: now the bishop enters the fray. **15... $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 16. d5 ...d7-d5** must be prevented, if any advantage is to be achieved. Also possible is 16. c4±. **16... $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 17. c3 cxd5 18. $\mathbb{Q}g4!$ d6 19. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$** The better structure gives White a small but stable advantage.

12. $\mathbb{Q}e3$



12... $\mathbb{Q}c7$

The alternative **12... $\mathbb{Q}e7$** has started to become more prominent after Caruana adopted it against Carlsen in the 2015 London Chess Classic. **13. c4** It is possible to win the bishop pair with 13. $\mathbb{Q}f5!?$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ d5 15. $\mathbb{Q}e7+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xc8$ $\mathbb{Q}xc8$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}d1$, albeit in slightly worse conditions than after 12... $\mathbb{Q}c7$. Yu Yangyi-Nakamura, Las Vegas 2015, ended in a draw after 17... $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 18. c3 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 19. d4 $\mathbb{Q}xc1$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xc1$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ $\mathbb{Q}xe7$. **13... $\mathbb{Q}c7$** Because of the position of the bishop on e7, Black must make another preparatory move before playing ...d7-d5. 13... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 14. d4 d5 15. cxd5 cxd5 16. g3 $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 18. b3 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}a3$ $\mathbb{Q}fe8$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}c1\pm$ seems slightly worse (Vachier-Lagrave-Nakamura, Gibraltar rapid 2016). **14. d4 d5** In Wei Yi-Karjakin, Wijk aan Zee 2016, the Russian GM preferred 14... d6, and was slightly worse after 15. g3 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ g6 17. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ (better than 17. d5 c5; Black threatens ...b7-b5, and if 18. a4, the knight goes to b4 via a6) 17... d5?! (17... $\mathbb{Q}e8=$) 18. cxd5 cxd5 19. b3 $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}b2$.

15. cxd5 $\mathbb{Q}b4$ More accurate than 15... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ cxd5 17. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$, as was played in the above-mentioned game Carlsen-Caruana. White's advantage seems significant, but Caruana managed to avert the danger with active defence: 19... $\mathbb{Q}e8!$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xe8+$ $\mathbb{Q}xe8$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6!$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ a6 24. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ g6 26. d5 $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ $\mathbb{Q}xb2=$ **16. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}ae1$** In So-Caruana, St Louis 2016, it was demonstrated that 21. $\mathbb{Q}c3$, my suggestion in the original Spanish edition of this book, does not give much either: 21... $\mathbb{Q}ae8$ (if 21... b5?! 22. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ a5, the rook is well placed on a1 to support the move 23. a4) 22. $\mathbb{Q}ae1$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 23. dxe5 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ (slightly more promising is 24. $\mathbb{Q}a5$ a6 25. $\mathbb{Q}b6$, as in Vachier-Lagrave-Caruana, Chess.com 2016)

24... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}a5$ b5 27. $\mathbb{Q}xa7$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}d4=$ 21...b5 22. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ a5= (Svidler-Topalov, Moscow 2016).

Why are super GMs switching to 12... $\mathbb{Q}e7$? There are several possible answers to this question. It is possible that they have found some small difficulty in the boring positions with the white bishop pair that follow after 12... $\mathbb{Q}c7$, or perhaps the consequences are more difficult to work out with the computer. Or it might be only a matter of fashion, as fickle in chess as in other, less important areas in life.

13. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ d5 14. $\mathbb{Q}e7+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xc8$ $\mathbb{Q}xc8$



Black's better development and his pawn chain are factors that make it very difficult to exploit the advantage of the bishop pair. If Carlsen was prepared to enter this position, we can assume that he had found some idea to tighten the screws on his opponent, although it is not easy to see exactly where.

16.d3

Slightly more interesting than the alternatives:

- a) 16.d4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 18.f3 $\mathbb{Q}ce8$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}h5=$, as in Shirov-Kryvoruchko, Al-Ain 2015, leads to a position without any significant pawn breaks;
- b) Nakamura-Carlsen, St Louis 2013, continued with the perhaps slightly premature **16.g3**. After **16... $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ f5!**, the activity on the kingside compensates for the bishop pair, which for the moment is also lacking any targets. **18.d3 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 19.c3** 19. $\mathbb{Q}f4?$ $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ (it isn't at all necessary to capture the pawn) 20. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ gives compensation for the pawn, but it seems insufficient to give any chances of an edge. **19... $\mathbb{Q}ce8$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xe8$ $\mathbb{Q}xe8$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ f4 23. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ h6 25. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}g4$ $\mathbb{Q}d6=$** The pressure on the kingside prevents White from making progress.

16...f5!?

Creates tension on the kingside, which prevents White from manoeuvring calmly.

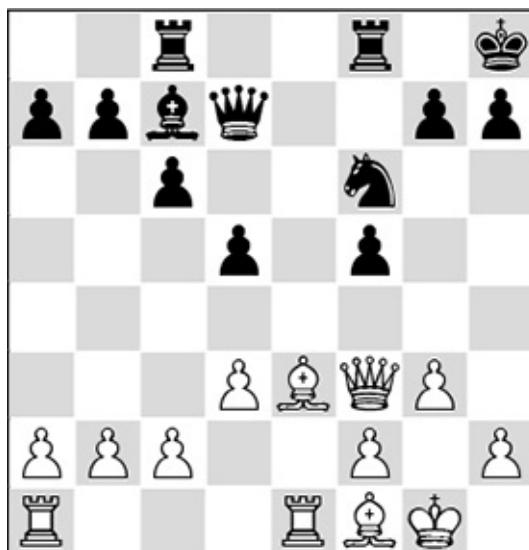
There is nothing wrong with 16... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ either. In fact, *Mega Database 2017* reveals that 29 out of 30 games in this variation have ended in a draw. A more recent example is Bocharov-Maletin, Mashdad 2016, which continued 17. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 18.h3 (a novelty that

prevents the common manoeuvre ... $\mathbb{B}g4$ and ...f7-f5) 18... $\mathbb{B}ce8$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{B}xe1$ 20. $\mathbb{B}xe1$ $\mathbb{B}e8$, and here, instead of heading towards a draw with 21. $\mathbb{B}xe8+$ $\mathbb{K}xe8$ 22.g3 $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}g2$, White could try 21. $\mathbb{B}b1!$? followed by advancing the b-pawn, which is probably not enough to obtain any real advantage.

17.g3

In Yu Yangyi-Kramnik, Doha 2015, the rising Chinese star preferred 17. $\mathbb{B}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}f4$, giving up the bishop pair to stifle Black's activity on the kingside, but his legendary foe did not experience major difficulties to keep the balance: 18... $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ 19. $\mathbb{B}xf4$ $\mathbb{B}c7$ 20. $\mathbb{B}xc7$ $\mathbb{B}xc7$ 21.d4 g6 22. $\mathbb{B}e6$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 23. $\mathbb{B}ae1$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 24.f3 $\mathbb{B}d8$, and the bishop does not give any significant advantage.

17... $\mathbb{B}f6$ 18. $\mathbb{B}f3$ $\mathbb{B}d7$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}e3$



We are following the game **Vachier-Lagrange-Kramnik, Stavanger blitz 2016**, in which the careless 19...d4?! was played, and after 20. $\mathbb{Q}d2$, White would have had some chance to take advantage of his light-squared bishop by advancing the b-pawn. More solid is

19... $\mathbb{B}g4$

And Black has no problems. For example:

20. $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $\mathbb{B}fe8$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ b6 22. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}e5=$

CONCLUSION

5. $\mathbb{B}e1$ perfectly meets the stereotype that chess fans have created about the Berlin. Black's biggest danger is falling asleep whilst navigating the tranquil waters of the symmetrical positions that arise in this variation.

CHAPTER 9

4.0-0 ♜xe4 5.d4: The Berlin jungle

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♜c6 3.♗b5 ♜f6 4.0-0 ♜xe4 5.d4



Are you bored of the theoretical stiffness in the variations with 4.d3, or the sterile positions from the previous chapter? Then join me for a few pages on a trip through the wild side of the Berlin.

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.0-0 ♗xe4 5.d4

A) 5...exd4?



An experimental move, against which White can obtain a significant advantage with simple and logical play.

6.♘e1 d5 7.♘xd4

The black position is not too enviable after 7.♘xd4!? either, mentioned already by Panov in his treasured opening manual (*Editorial Escaques*, 1960), long before the fall of the Berlin Wall.

a) 7...a6 8.♗xc6+ bxc6 9.♘c3 f5 10.♘f4± is very dangerous for Black, due to his lag in development, while if the artificial 7...♝d7 8.♗xc6 bxc6 (Panov mentions 8...♝xc6 9.c4 ♘c5, missing the direct refutation 10.cxd5 ♘xd4 11.♗xe4++–; risks that came with the job in the pre-computer era) 9.♘fd2±;

b) Black does not manage to stabilise the situation after 7...♝e6 8.c4! ♘b4 9.♗xg7 ♘f6 10.♗xf6 ♘xf6 11.♘c3±.

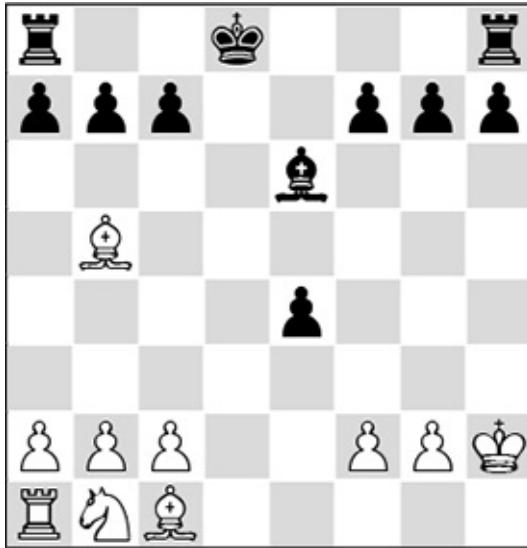
7...♝d6! 8.♗xc6 ♘xh2+

This standard combination is in some way the justification of Black's risky play.

9.♔h1

The only way to fight for a win. 9.♔xh2 ♔h4+ leads to a draw, whereas 9.♔f1? ♔h4 10.♗e3 bxc6! 11.♗xc6+ ♔f8 gives Black a dangerous attack.

9...♔h4 10.♗xe4+! dxe4 11.♔d8+ ♔xd8 12.♗xd8+ ♔xd8 13.♔xh2 ♘e6



The storm has calmed, and the material distribution appears reasonable for Black. However, White can exploit his advantage of the bishop pair, as well as the squares that the advanced e-pawn has left in its wake. It is more common to find this combination in the Open Spanish: 3...a6 4.Qa4 Qf6 5.0-0 Qxe4 6.d4 exd4?! 7.Rxe1 d5 8.Qxd4 Qd6 9.Qxc6 Qxh2+ 10.Qh1 Qh4 11.Qxe4+ dxе4 12.Qd8+ Qxd8 13.Qxd8+ Qxd8 14.Qxh2 Qe6. Compared to the line we are currently examining, Black has flicked in ...a7-a6, which allows him to gain some tempi, because of ...c7-c5 ideas. Efimenko-Drenchev, Golden Sands 2012, continued 15.Qe3 (stopping ...c7-c5) 15...f5 16.Qc3 Qe7 17.Qb3 Qf7 18.g4 g6 19.g5 (a typical procedure, fixing the opponent's pawn chain) 19...Rad8 20.Qg3 Rh8 21.Qh1 Qg8 22.Qf4 Qxb3 23.axb3 Re6, and White did not find a way to make progress.

Returning to the position of the previous diagram, the better position of the white bishop allows a sharp manoeuvre:

14.Qd2!

Rasulov-Abasov, Baku 2011, continued with the more typical 14.Qc3 f5 15.Qf4 c6 16.Qe2 Qe7, and instead of 17.Qe5?! Rhg8 18.a4 Rad8 19.a5?! Rd2, which gave Black good counterplay, White keeps the advantage with the typical push 17.g4!, and if 17...g6, 18.g5±. With the black pawn chain blocked, White boasts a stable advantage.

14...f5 15.Qb3±

The knight threatens to jump to either c5 or d4 (in case of 15...b6) with annoying consequences, and after it has been exchanged for the black bishop, the bishop pair will show its irresistible force.

B) 5...a6?!



A transpositional move: Black wants to enter an Open Spanish after 6. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ b5 7. $\mathbb{Q}b3$, while sidestepping the fashionable line 3...a6 4. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 5.d3. Please forgive me for not going into any further details...

6. $\mathbb{Q}xc6!$

The sharpest move is also the most natural: White is trying to make his shrewd opponent pay for the loss of time incurred in an open position. White has another option at his disposal, which leads to a more complicated transposition: 6. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ d5 7. dx e 5 7. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ seems to equalise on the spot with 7... $\mathbb{Q}xd4$, as in Paulsen-Morphy, New York 1857, which continued 8. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ (8.c4 $\mathbb{Q}d6$! 9.cxd5 $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 0-0 \mp , Moroz-Buturin, Kiev 1986) 8... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 9.c3 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ bxc6 11. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ dx e 4 13. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ =. I challenge you to write a book on modern opening theory using a relevant example older than this one (not the King's Gambit with 3...g5 or the Guoco Piano)!



analysis diagram

This rather unexplored position is reached quite frequently from a Petroff Defence with the pawn on a7: 1.e4 e5 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 3.d4 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 4. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ d5 (or in Murey's fascinating line: 4... $\mathbb{Q}c6$! 5.0-0?! (5. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ d5 wins the piece back) 5...d5) 5. dx e 5!? (5. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ is more common, but not necessarily better) 5... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 6.0-0. It is possible to demonstrate that this minor difference favours Black:

7... $\mathbb{B}c5$! A novelty. Unlike the twin position from the Petroff, the bishop cannot go to b5, and after its exchange, Black should not have any problems to equalise. 7... $\mathbb{Q}g4$ is also possible, although after the sharp 8. $\mathbb{B}c3$!? $\mathbb{B}xc3$ 9.bxc3 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 10. $\mathbb{N}e1$ 0-0 11.h3 $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 12. $\mathbb{N}b1$, following the example from the game Bacrot-Wang Yue, Baku 2008, but with the pawn on a6, White has some initiative. White's plans include $\mathbb{Q}f5$ and g2-g4. **8. $\mathbb{B}c3$** $\mathbb{Q}e6=$ Here I felt tempted to make the typically old-fashioned statement that 'the position requires further practical tests', but I don't think White players are anxious to carry those out, especially since the main line with 6. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ is so promising. Black can capture on d3 or develop his kingside first, depending on what his opponent does.

6...dxc6 7. $\mathbb{Q}e2$

7. $\mathbb{N}e1$ $\mathbb{B}f6$



analysis diagram

Correspondence players have experimented with this crazy position.

8. $\mathbb{B}bd2$!? Stronger than 8. $\mathbb{B}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$. White can press through the e-file with 9. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 10. $\mathbb{B}c3$, but then 10...0-0! suffices, ignoring the threats. White has virtually nothing after 11. $\mathbb{B}xf7$ $\mathbb{N}xf7$ 12. $\mathbb{B}xe6$ $\mathbb{B}xd4$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ (13. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{B}g4$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{B}xe3$ 15. $\mathbb{B}xe3$ ½-½, Hazai-Kaplan, Lublin 1975) 13... $\mathbb{B}d6$ (or 13... $\mathbb{B}h4$) 14. $\mathbb{B}c4$ $\mathbb{B}b4$ 15. $\mathbb{B}xb4$ $\mathbb{Q}xb4=$. **8... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 9. $\mathbb{B}xe5$ $\mathbb{B}h5$!** The knight boldly jumps to the edge of the board to prevent 9... $\mathbb{B}d5$ 10. $\mathbb{B}e4\pm$. An OTB example ('Over The Board', as our correspondence friends say) is Brajovic-Todorovic, Nis 1995, which continued 10... $\mathbb{B}f5$ 11. $\mathbb{B}e2$ 0-0 12.c4 $\mathbb{B}b6$ 13.b3 $\mathbb{B}d7$ 14. $\mathbb{B}b2$ $\mathbb{B}c5$? (14... $\mathbb{B}xe4\pm$) 15. $\mathbb{B}ad1$ $\mathbb{B}c8$ 16. $\mathbb{B}xc5$ $\mathbb{B}xc5$ 17.e6! $\mathbb{B}xe6$ 18. $\mathbb{B}e5$ $\mathbb{B}xe5$ 19. $\mathbb{B}xe5$ $\mathbb{B}c2$ 20. $\mathbb{B}c1$ $\mathbb{B}d6$ 21. $\mathbb{B}xc2$ $\mathbb{B}xe5$ 22. $\mathbb{B}xe5\pm$. **10. $\mathbb{B}e4$!** Otherwise the black knight will end up on e6. Incidentally, 11. $\mathbb{B}d4$ is threatened. **10...c5 11. $\mathbb{B}e2$!** Not good is 11.g4? f5. **11... $\mathbb{B}f5$**



analysis diagram

In Novikovas-Williamson, ICCF 2014, Black managed to circumvent the apparent dangers without suffering any major damage: **12.g4 ♖xe4 13.♘xe4 f5! 14.gxf5 0-0 15.♗eg5** (**15.♗fg5 ♖e8∞**) **15...♗xf5 16.♕c4+ ♔h8 17.♗f7+ ♗xf7 18.♗xf7 ♕e8=±** After a later ...g7-g6, the knight will return to the centre to blockade the central pawns.

The main line with **7.♗e2** seems more dangerous than this mess we have just analysed, but make no mistake: the SIM (Senior International Master; a correspondence title between IM and GM) Harvey Williamson and his rivals have devoted many more hours of analysis to uncover the subtleties hidden in these positions, and they might know something that we don't. But to be fair, let's not forget that analysing with the help of the computer is one thing; fighting against an opponent on your own and with limited time, is quite another.

7...♗f5



8.♖e1!

It looks strange to place the rook behind the queen in this position, but the threat of **9.♗d3** is surprisingly difficult to meet. White has two less dangerous alternatives at his disposal.

a) **8.♖d1?!** **♕e7** (more adventurous minds might try **8...♗f6?!** **9.dxe5 ♕g6∞**, the

point being that 10. $\mathbb{Q}h4?!$ $\mathbb{B}g4$ 11. $\mathbb{B}xg4$ $\mathbb{Q}xg4$ 12. f3 does not win any material on account of 12... $\mathbb{Q}e7!$ 13. fxg4 $\mathbb{Q}xh4\#$ 9. dxe5 $\mathbb{N}c8$ leads to the variation 5... $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 6. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ bxc6 7. dxe5 $\mathbb{Q}e4?!$ (Chapter 12), with the black dark-squared bishop already developed, which makes the black position comfortable. Geller-Kaplan, Amsterdam 1974, continued 10. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ (10. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ 0-0 11. $\mathbb{Q}bd2$ $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ h6 13. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ c5 14. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ b6 15. a3 $\mathbb{Q}b7=$, Aroshidze-Mastrovasilis, Korinthos 2004), 10... $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ 0-0 12. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ c5 14. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ b6. Black has more than equalised by simple means;

b) 8. g4 $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{B}xd4$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}xg6$ hxg6 11. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ f5 looks dangerous for Black, but the open position of the enemy king allows him to generate enough counterplay. After the practically forced line 12. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 0-0-0 13. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ fxe4 15. $\mathbb{Q}xd8+$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$, neither 17. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 18. g5 (18. $\mathbb{Q}b4$ $\mathbb{Q}e2\infty$) 18... $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 19. gxf6 gxf6 20. $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ cxd6 21. $\mathbb{Q}xd6+$ $\mathbb{Q}e7=\#$ (Womacka-Matamoros, Olomouc 2006), nor 17. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 19. b3 $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}f3=$ ($\frac{1}{2}-\frac{1}{2}$, Guseinov-Iordachescu, Budva 2009), gave White any advantage.

8... $\mathbb{Q}f6?!$

After thinking for quite a while, I have decided to make this entertaining novelty our main line. Furthermore, the move has the merit of being the only move that doesn't lose two pieces for a rook. Let's examine other possibilities:

a) 8... $\mathbb{Q}e7?!$ was played in Kr.Georgiev-Piket, Corfu 1991. After 9. g4! $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ f5, White got an edge with 11. $\mathbb{Q}c3$, but as the Romanian grandmaster Mihail Marin mentions, it is stronger to play 11. gxf5 $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}f3$, and if 12... $\mathbb{Q}d6?$ (although in any case a desperate situation, it is better not to move the knight), 13. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ and White is winning;

b) In Ivanchuk-Carlsen, Morelia/Linares 2008, the Norwegian genius, caught by surprise, improvised with 8... $\mathbb{Q}b4?!$ 9. c3 $\mathbb{Q}d6$. His opponent won material anyway with 10. $\mathbb{Q}c2$, and the weakness created on d3 was not felt too much: 10... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 11. dxe5 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 0-0-0 13. $\mathbb{Q}bd2$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}he8$, and now, instead of 15. b3, Ivanchuk could consolidate his advantage with 15. c4!? $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}b3\pm$. You can see the exciting continuation of this game in Game 11 (Chapter 20);

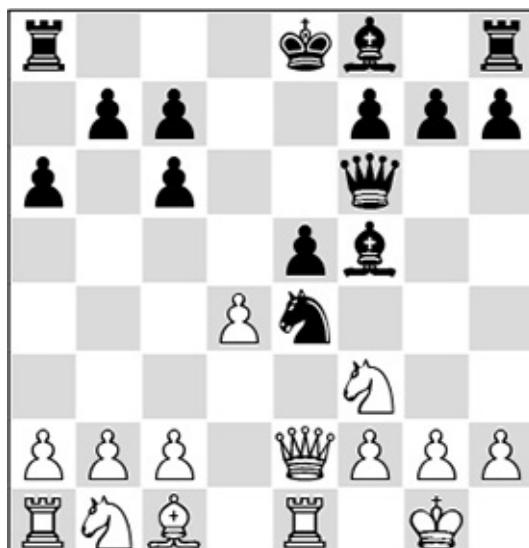
c) **8... $\mathbb{Q}d6$** was the other candidate move to be printed in bold. Black acquiesces to an unfavourable piece exchange, relying on his better development as compensation: 9. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ 0-0 9... $\mathbb{Q}g3?$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ only makes things worse. 10. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ f5!? 11... exd4 12. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}e5?!$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}d1+$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}xf1+$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xf1$ $\mathbb{Q}ad8$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}bd2$ $\mathbb{Q}fe8$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ (Simmelink-Van Wieringen, corr 1998) 18. b3 \pm and 11... $\mathbb{Q}e8?!$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}d2!$ (avoiding the trap 12. $\mathbb{Q}c3?$ exd4 13. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}e1+!$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xe1$ $\mathbb{Q}xh2+$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xh2$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}h4+\#$) 12... exd4 13. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}e5?!$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ $\mathbb{Q}axd8$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xc3\pm$ lead to the same type of position:



analysis diagram

I am not sure whether White can win this endgame against best defensive play, but at least he can try to do so without any risk, for example by softening up the pawn structure on the queenside by means of manoeuvring the knight, or by advancing the a-pawn to bring the rook to life. Black is forced to witness his opponent make progress without being able to undertake anything himself.

12. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ e4 13. $\mathbb{Q}e5!?$ After a passive retreat to d2 or e1, ... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ and ... $\mathbb{Q}ae8$ are unpleasant. **13... $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 14. $dxe5$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}c4+!$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}c3\pm$** With the queens on the board, White has the preferable position. For instance, if 17... $\mathbb{Q}ad8$, then 18. $\mathbb{Q}b4!$ is uncomfortable.



9. $dxe5$

9. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ leads nowhere.

9... $\mathbb{Q}d8!?$

Preventing 10. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ at the cost of lagging further behind in development.

9... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ might be viable, but White is able to prevent queenside castling by simple means: 11. $\mathbb{Q}d2!$ (11.e6?! c5!∞ (11...0-0-0 allows 12. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ bxc6 13. $\mathbb{Q}xa6+$ $\mathbb{Q}b8\infty$)) 11... $\mathbb{Q}c5!$ (11... $\mathbb{Q}xd2?!$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ 0-0-0? is refuted by 13. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ bxc6

14. $\mathbb{Q}xa6+$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}e3+-$; 11...c5 12. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ cxd4 13. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}f3\pm$) 12. $\mathbb{Q}2f3$ In any case, 12... $\mathbb{Q}h5!\pm$ (12... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}g5!$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}e3!\pm$, and the king is exposed, since penetration on a7 prevents 15...0-0-0), followed by, if possible, exchanging on f3 and ... $\mathbb{Q}e6$, leaves Black with reasonable chances to equalise, after suffering for some time. Our main variation does not let Black off the hook so easily either, but at least he can have some fun while he tries to escape checkmate.

10.e6!

10. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ would lead to a new transposition, in this case to the variation 6... $\mathbb{Q}e4$ (Chapter 12) with the extra move ...a7-a6. This detail favours Black in the chaotic main line, which you may already know if you, like me, enjoy reading chess books in random order: 10... $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 12. b4 $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 13. f3 $\mathbb{Q}d7!$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ 0-0-0 (the possibility ... $\mathbb{Q}g4$ defends the piece indirectly) 15. c3 (with the pawn on a6, 15. a4 does not make much sense) 15...c5 16. $fxe4?$ (16. $bxc5$ $\mathbb{Q}xc5\infty$) 16...cxd4! 17. exf5



analysis diagram

17... $\mathbb{Q}b5!!$ Long live tiny differences! The pawn on a6 allows this tactical shot. 18. $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ $dxe3!\mp$. There is no sense delving deeper in these subtleties, since the pawn sacrifice 10.e6 gives White a dangerous initiative.

10...fxe6



11.g4! ♜g6 12.♗bd2!

12.♗e5? ♜c5 13.♗xg6 ♜xf2+ 14.♔f1 hxg6 15.♗xe4 ♜xe1 gives Black a decisive counterattack. Better is 12.♗c3 ♜xc3 13.bxc3, but after 13...♜d6 14.♗xe6+ ♔f8 15.♗g5 ♜e8!, Black exchanges queens, with better chances to equalise than in the main line.

12... ♜g5!

12...♗xd2 13.♗xd2 is too dangerous. The e-pawn cannot be defended: 13...♜f7 14.♗e5 ♜g8 15.g5 with a decisive advantage to White.

13.♗xg5 ♜xg5 14.♗xe6+

There is nothing clear after 14.♗c4 ♜f6.

14... ♜e7



Black has survived the direct threats, but he is far from equal in the endgame:

15.♗xe7+ ♜xe7 16.♗c4 ♜f8

16... ♜f8 17.♗e2 ♛d8 18.♗e5±

17.♗f4 ♜xc2

17... ♜f7, 18.♗e5±, and apart from the c-pawn, 19.♗d7 is threatened.

18.♗xc7 h5!±

CONCLUSION

It is clear that 5...exd4 can hardly be played, perhaps not even in an ICC bullet tournament, but 5...a6, although too risky for the results it currently promises, might be used as an occasional weapon if you manage to improve on the main line, perhaps by refining the defence in the positions with rook vs. two minor pieces that arise after 8...♜d6. In any case, I have the impression that White has more scope to improve than Black.

The Old Berlin: 4.0-0 ♜xe4 5.d4 ♜e7

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♜c6 3.♗b5 ♜f6 4.0-0 ♜xe4 5.d4 ♜e7



For reasons beyond anybody's understanding, the most traditional variation in the Berlin is named 'the Rio de Janeiro Variation', more evocative of carnivals and sandy beaches than of old-fashioned chess openings. Let us therefore rename this variation as the Old Berlin: this will allow us to forget about that lovely Girl from Ipanema for a second, and think instead of Lasker and Schlechter after one of their 1910 match games, discreetly walking along the Unter der Linden boulevard toward the Brandenburg Gate.

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.0-0 ♘xe4 5.d4 ♘e7

6.♗e2

The traditional move is also the strongest, but 6.dxe5!? is worth mentioning. In the position after 6...0-0, White has two interesting tries to fight for the advantage:



analysis diagram

a) 7.♗e2 ♘c5 8.♗c3 8.♗d1 a6 9.♗c4 d6 10.♗e3 looks modest, but Black can regroup with 10...♗a4!? 11.c3 ♘g4∞. 8...a6 9.♗c4 d6 10.♗e3 10.♗d1 ♘g4 11.♗e3 ♘d7= 10...dxe5 11.♗ad1 ♘e8 12.♗fe1 ♘g4, and Black was not worse in Bologan-Malakhov, Dagomys 2010;

b) 7.♗d5 ♘c5 Safer than 7...d5 8.c4!, and the black centre is unstable. 8.♗e3 a6!? 8...d6 9.♗xc5 dxc5 10.♗xc6 bxc6 might be playable, but I don't like the look of those tripled pawns. 9.♗xc5 9.♗c4 is not forceful enough. In Dervishi-Marciano, Baku 2016, White got some advantage after 9...d6 10.exd6 ♘xd6 11.♗c3 ♘b4?! 12.♗xd6 ♘xd6 13.♗d4 ♘e6 14.♗xe6 ♘xe6 15.♗xe6 fxe6 16.♗ac1±, but 10...cxd6 or, even better, 11...♗g4, and if 12.♗ad1 ♘g6!, lead to equality. 9...axb5 10.♗xe7 ♘xe7 11.♗c3 b4 12.♗b5 ♘a5 13.a4 bxa3 14.♗xa3 ♘xa3 15.bxa3



analysis diagram

Black still has some problems with his development.

15...♝d8 This is an improvement over 15...♝d8?! 16.♞e1 b6 17.♞e3±, which was played in Sahakyan-Zherebukh, Kirishi 2010. **16.♝fd4 ♜xd4 17.♝xd4 b6! 18.♞d1 ♜b7!** and I believe it is possible for Black to unravel, with the help of the powerful bishop. A sample variation is: **19.f4 ♜c6 20.a4 ♛h8 21.♞d3 f6 22.e6 ♜e7!=**

Let's go back to the position after 6.♝e2.

6...♝d6 7.♝xc6 bxc6 8.dxe5 ♜b7

The alternative route 8...♝f5?! has never been very popular. 9.♝c3 0-0 10.♝f4 d5 11.exd6 cxd6 12.♞ad1 d5 13.♞fe1 ♜b4 14.♝e5 ♜f6= (Dominguez Perez-Ivanchuk, Beijing blitz 2013) and 9.♝e4 g6 10.b3 0-0 11.♝b2 ♜b8 12.♝bd2 c5 13.♞ad1 ♜b6 14.♝c4 ♜b7∞ (Efimenko-Kovalenko, Warsaw 2015) do not unsettle Black very much. However, a critical sequence is 9.c4! 0-0 10.♝c3, making it difficult to advance the central pawn.



analysis diagram

After the natural 10...d5?!, the black knight proved to be a tactical weakness: 11.♞d1 ♜e6 12.g4! ♜h4 (12...♝h6? 13.♝xh6 gxh6 14.♝d4 ♜d7 15.♝xc6 ♜xc6 16.cxd5+– Maroczy-Schlechter, Monte Carlo 1903) 13.♝xh4 ♜xh4 14.f4! f5? (somewhat desperate, but 14...g6 15.♝g2 is quite promising for White) 15.g5 ♜xg5 16.fxg5 f4 17.h4+–, Vachier-Lagrange-Kosten, France tt 2009. Better is 10...a6, although after 11.♝f4 ♜e8 12.♞ad1±, Black wishes his knight were on c5.

Let's go back to the position after 8...♝b7.



We have reached a theoretical position that has been discussed for some 140 years, although, admittedly, not very intensively since the beginning of the 20th century. At first sight, the knight's dance has not been very successful, but its unfavourable position provides us with an easy plan to improve it via c5-e6, having snatched half an enemy bishop pair in the meantime. Black's main problem is how to set up the centre properly: ...f7-f6 is usually a little risky, while ...d7-d5 can lead to positions with blockaded doubled pawns or a weakness on d6.

White has tried to develop his initiative in various ways over the past three centuries.

A) 9. ♜c3 0-0 10. ♜e1

Premature is 10. ♜d4 ♜c5 (in this position, better than 10... ♜c5 11. ♜d1 ♜e8 12. ♜f5 f6 13. ♜g4 ♜e6 14. ♜h6 ♜f7 15. ♜e3 ♜h8 16. ♜xe7 (16.f4 fxe5 17.fxe5 ♜f8 18. ♜f1∞) 16... ♜xe7 17.exf6 ♜xf6 18. ♜h4 d5∞, Winawer-Zukertort, Paris 1878. How unusual that such an old game is still of theoretical interest!) 11. ♜d1 11... ♜e8!? (it is also possible to directly play 11... ♜xd4 12. ♜xd4 ♜e8=) 12. ♜h5 (12. ♜xc6? is too dangerous: 12... ♜h4 13.g3 ♜h3 14. ♜d4 d6) 12... ♜xd4 (12... ♜e7 13. ♜f4 ♜xd4 14. ♜xd4 d5 15. ♜g3?! ♜d6! 16. ♜e1 ♜f5 17. ♜dd1 ♜b4 18. ♜b1 ♜e6∞,

Parma-Smyslov, Moscow 1971) 13. ♜xd4 d5 14. ♜d2 ♜d7 15. ♜f4 (15. ♜e1 ♜f5∞) 15... ♜e6! 16. ♜e1 ♜g6 17. ♜xg6 ½-½, Naiditsch-Motylev, Poikovsky 2010.



The old main line. White speeds up his development and doesn't move the c-pawn.

10...♝c5

If you are not happy with the somewhat passive position Black must defend in the main variation, you have the alternative **10...♝e8!?** at your disposal. **11.♝c4!?** The most annoying. In Topalov-Morozevich, Wijk aan Zee 2005, Black equalised after **11.♝e3 d5 12.exd6 cxd6 13.♝g5 ♜e6 14.♝xe7 ♜xe7=.** **11...♝c5 12.♝g5** Hübner gives as advantageous for White **12.♝g5 ♜e6 13.♝xe6 fxe6 14.♝e3 ♜b8 15.b3,** but **15...d5!?** gives Black counterplay. The point of the pawn move is **16.♝xc6? ♜b4+.** **12...d5! 13.exd6 cxd6 14.♝xe7! ♜xe7 15.♝d1±**, and White keeps some pressure on the opponent's central pawns.

11.♝d4

Sharper than **11.♝e3**, which allows Black to free his position with **11...♝e6 12.♝ad1 d5.** Traditionally, it was thought that White maintained a slight pull after **13.exd6 cxd6 14.♝d4**, but equality is not far away: **14...♝xd4** Simpler than **14...♝d7 15.♝f5 d5 16.♝xe7+ ♜xe7 17.♝d2**, which was played in Karpov-Kortchnoi, Merano 1981, which we will analyse more deeply in Game 12 in Chapter 20. **15.♝xd4 ♜e8!** This momentary self-pin is not dangerous. **16.♝f3 ♜d7** Nor does Black experience any major problems with **16...d5 17.♝a4 ♜d6=.** **17.♝e4 d5 18.♝g3 f6 19.♝d6 ♜xd6 20.♝xd6 ♜g4! 21.♝xd8 ♜axd8=** Bacrot-Fressinet, Belfort 2010, as well as Yu Yangi-Malakhov, China tt 2013, ended shortly after in draws.

11...♝e6



12.♝e3

12.♝f5 f6 13.♝xe7+ ♜xe7 14.exf6 ♜xf6 gives nothing, but White can create more difficult problems by changing the pawn structure: **12.♝xe6!?** **fxe6** The latter exchange has strengthened the black centre, while opening the f-file, and if he is allowed to play ...c6-c5 in favourable circumstances, Black will have a comfortable position, but otherwise the proud ♜c8 runs the risk of being imprisoned by its own pawns. **13.b3!?** **13.♝e3!?** **♝f5** is uncomfortable, since 14.f4 does not seem desirable. The modest pawn move postpones solving the problem of the bishop's development. **13...♝e8!?** **13...♝b7**

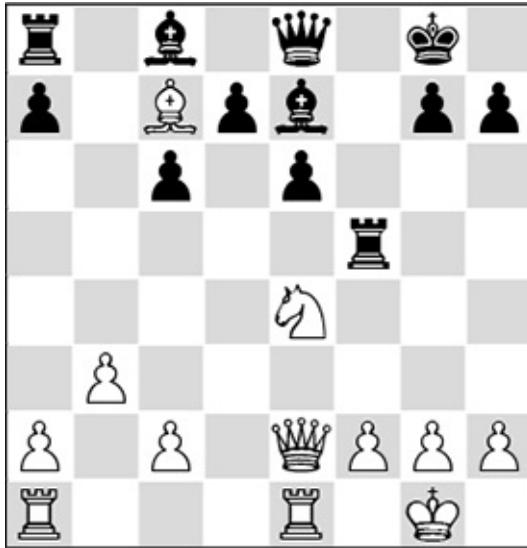
followed by 14...c5 might be simpler. **14.♗e3 ♕f5** Again, possible is 14...♗b7 15.♗e4 (15.♕ad1 is an alternative) c5! (otherwise, Black is suffocated after ♗c5), taking advantage of the fact that 16.♗xc5?! ♕f4! and 16.♗xc5 ♗xc5 17.♗xc5 ♗g6↑ are dubious. White would be well-advised to play 16.f3∞. **15.♗e4**



analysis diagram

Black must take measures to prevent the position from being blocked.

- a) In Anand-Timman, Wijk aan Zee 1999, the legendary Dutch GM let White execute his plan completely: 15...a5? (the a-file is irrelevant) 16.♗d4 a4 17.c4 ♗b7 18.♗g3 ♕f4 19.♗e3 ♕f7 20.c5!±. The future of the black bishops is not too bright...;
- b) The natural 15...♗b7, looking for play on the long diagonal, works quite well after 16.♗c5? ♗xc5 17.♗xc5 d6! 18.♗d4 c5 and 19...♗g6→, or after 16.♗d4?! c5! 17.♗xc5 (17.♗xc5? ♕xe5) 17...♗xc5 18.♗xc5 ♗g6♗, variations pointed out by the Danish GM Curt Hansen in his comments for *ChessBase Magazine*, but White remains in the driver's seat with 16.f3!. Now, not good is 16...c5? 17.♗xc5, and the centre is weak after 16...d6, so the best option must be 16...♗f8, threatening the e-pawn: 17.♗d4 c5 18.♗c3 ♗c6 19.♗ad1 and White is slightly better;
- c) Perhaps this is the most radical solution: 15...♗xe5!? 16.♗f4 ♕f5 17.♗xc7



analysis diagram

Black must shore up his dark-squared weaknesses, which is a manageable task after 17... ♕f8! (but not the soft 17...d5? 18.♖d6 ♗xd6 19.♕xd6±) 18.♗ad1 d5 19.♗d2 (if 19.♗g3 ♖f7 20.♗e5 ♗c5 21.♗d4 (21.♗f1 a5 22.a4 ♗a6 23.c4∞) 21...♗d6, the knight is misplaced on g3) 19...a5!? (19...c5?! is worse due to 20.c4±, a typical plan in some of the variations in the French or the Paulsen Sicilian), and Black has good counterplay after 20.♗f3 ♗b4! 21.♗f1 c5∞ or 20.c3 c5∞.

12... ♗xd4 13.♕xd4



13...c5

In Pillsbury-Tarrasch, Vienna 1898, the player with the white pieces, probably the strongest player in the world at the time this game was played, convincingly showed that 13...d5? is weaker: 14.♗a4 ♗b4?! 15.c3 ♗a5 16.♗h5 ♗b6 17.♗e3 ♗e6 18.♗g3 ♗h8 19.♗d1 ♗e7 20.b4, and White has an advantage on both sides of the board. Black cannot allow the pawns to be blocked.

14.♗e3 d5 15.exd6 ♗xd6

Black relies on his bishop pair as compensation for the weak c-pawn.

16.♗e4 ♗b7

Black is going to suffer in the endgame after 16... $\mathbb{Q}xh2+!?$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xh2$ $\mathbb{B}h4+$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}e7\pm$.

17. $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ $cxd6$



Another critical position in the variation. Black is slightly worse, due to his backward d-pawn, and although the opposite-coloured bishops might save the day for him in an endgame, for the time being, the white bishop will attack the d6-pawn, while its counterpart on b7 cannot do anything. We are following the game **Tseshkovsky-Ivkov, Bled 1979.**

18. $\mathbb{Q}ad1!$

18.c4, as in Tarrasch-Lasker, Düsseldorf/Munich 1908, is less accurate, since the d-pawn is not going anywhere yet. Black comfortably organises his defence with 18... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ $\mathbb{Q}ae8!$ (the World Champion played weaker: 19... $\mathbb{Q}fe8$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}g4!?$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ (20... $\mathbb{Q}xb2?$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}b1+-$) 21. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}e4!?$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}g3$, and the d-pawn was already difficult to defend), followed by 20... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ and 21... $\mathbb{Q}ae8=$. With the rook or the queen on e8, 20. $\mathbb{Q}g4$ is not that good, since Black can capture the pawn: 20... $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}c8!=$

18... $\mathbb{Q}f6$

The traditional defence. Back has two other ideas:

a) 18... $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 20.f3 (but not 20. $\mathbb{Q}xc5?!$ $\mathbb{Q}xe1+$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xe1$ $\mathbb{Q}g5+-$) 20... $\mathbb{Q}g6!?$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ gains time, because of the threats on the king, but White has the e-file after 22. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ d5 23. $\mathbb{Q}e5\pm$;

b) 18... $\mathbb{Q}b6!?$ 19.c4 (with the c-pawn defended, it was possible to play ...d6-d5) 19... $\mathbb{Q}ae8$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 21.f3 $\mathbb{Q}d8\pm$ prepares ...d6-d5 or ... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ as the case may be.

19.f3! $\mathbb{Q}ae8$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}f2!$

The very strong Russian GM piles up the pressure by simple yet effective means.

21... $\mathbb{Q}g6$

21... $\mathbb{Q}xe1+$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xe1$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 23.b3 might be somewhat better, but the pressure has not been eased.

22. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $fxe6$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}g3$

And here, Ivkov did not settle for passive defence after 23...d5 24. $\mathbb{Q}e1 \pm/\pm$, and didn't have enough compensation for the material after 23...h5?! 24. $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ h4 25. $\mathbb{Q}xh4$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}xc5 \pm$.

B) 9.b3 0-0 10. $\mathbb{Q}b2$



A prophylactic set-up. The bishop remains hidden behind the e-pawn, waiting for ...d7-d5.

10...d5

Since White is not threatening anything concrete either, it is possible (perhaps desirable) to delay the break. In Mecking-Ivkov, Rio de Janeiro 1979, the player with the black pieces, who was the world's first Junior World Champion, was successful with 10... $\mathbb{Q}e8$!? 11. $\mathbb{Q}bd2$ (11.c4 and 12. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ look more active, but after b2-b3, the queenside is liable to the advance ...a5-a4) 11... $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}fd1$ d6 13. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ a5 15.h3 a4 16. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ ½-½.

11.exd6

11.c4!? $\mathbb{Q}c5$ was played in Sutovsky-Malakhov, Bursa 2010. Instead of 12. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $dxc4$!?, 13. $\mathbb{Q}fd1$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}g4$ f5 16. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6\infty$, White could have arranged to put pressure against the central pawns with 12. $\mathbb{Q}d1$; 12... $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ looks dangerous, and if Black has to settle for developing the bishop to b7, he will have the slightly inferior position.

11...cxd6 12. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}bd2$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ d5



17.♘ce5

Here, White missed a good tactical opportunity: 17.♘g5! ♖d7 (not good is 17...dxc4? 18.♖xe6! ♘d6 (18...fxe6 19.♗f7+ ♔h8 20.♗h5+-) 19.♖xd6 ♖xd6 20.♗xf7+ ♔h8 21.♗xe8+-) 18.♘e5±

17...♕c7 18.♘g5 f6 19.♘xe6 ♕xe6 20.♘d3 ♕xe1+ 21.♖xe1 ♗xf4 22.♘xf4 ♗f7

And Black equalised in Berkes-Erdös, Hungary tt 2011/12.

C) 9.c4 0-0 10.♘c3



A more modern idea. The c4-pawn increases White's central control, which renders the advance of the d-pawn less attractive.

10...f6

10...♘c5 is also possible, but the pawn break is more promising in this case.

11.♖e1

11.exf6 ♗xf6 12.♘e4 d6 13.♘xf6+ ♗xf6 gives Black good play, as in Tikkannen-Ax.Smith, Uppsala 2016. Black threatens ...♗g4, which gives him time to activate the knight: 14.♘e1 ♘c5 15.♘e3 ♘e6 16.♘c1 c5 17.♘f3 ♗xf3 18.♘xf3 ♗b8 19.b3 a5=

11...fxe5 12.♗xe5

Minimising exchanges, while incorporating the queen into the attack. After 12. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$, Black is equalising little by little, preparing to exchange the knight and to advance the pawns to d6 and c5: 13. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ d6 16. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ (Liberzon-Pachman, Biel 1980), and now 17... $\mathbb{Q}g5!$? and ... $\mathbb{Q}g6=$ seems like the best way to set up the pieces.

12... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}h5!?$

The queen tries to create threats on the kingside. In Adams-Howell, London 2010, White preferred 13. $\mathbb{Q}g3$. After 13... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ (13... $\mathbb{Q}d6!?$ is worth considering. Both 14. c5 $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ d5 and 14. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$ appear playable for Black) 14. $\mathbb{Q}g5$, Howell took the bait with 14... $\mathbb{Q}d3?$ (14... d6 and ... $\mathbb{Q}f5$ should equalise) 15. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}ae1$ $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ (16... $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}e7+ -$) 17. $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}ce4$, with a decisive attack.

13... g6

Here, 13... $\mathbb{Q}d6$ can also be tried, with the idea of bringing the knight to f5 or f7.

Instead, 13... d6 14. $\mathbb{Q}e4\pm$ is less comfortable.

14. $\mathbb{Q}h6$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}h3$



15... d5!?

Trying to improve Black's play with reference to Svidler-Malakhov, Moscow 2010, which continued 15... d6 16. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7!?$. 16... $\mathbb{Q}f5$ is more natural. After 17. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}b8\infty$, the black pieces have drifted away from the kingside, but if White is unable to find anything fast, Black might be OK. 17. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ Avoiding the exchange of queens. 17... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}h4$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ And here, Malakhov was clearly worse after 19... $\mathbb{Q}xg5?!$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}c5!\pm$. Ftacnik comments that Black can defend with 19... $\mathbb{Q}f6!$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}ce4$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$, but this is an ugly plan since 21. b3!, exploiting the long diagonal, promises an advantage to White. By advancing the d-pawn two squares, Black accepts a less flexible structure, but he gains space and prevents White's attacking ideas in return.

16. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ d4 17. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}h4$

19. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ leads nowhere.

19... $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}ae8$

And in **Volokitin-Erdös, Warsaw rapid 2011**, Black, with the help of his passed pawn, did not experience too many problems.

One of the best methods of studying an opening is by following the example of a strong player who employs it regularly. You can be sure that the Hungarian GM Viktor Erdös, a fine positional player and a great exponent of the Hungarian chess school, with an Elo of around 2600, has worked long and hard before incorporating the Old Berlin into his repertoire, so you should have faith in his decisions (always verify, of course).

D) 9. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ 0-0 10. $\mathbb{Q}e3$

White delays development of the b1-knight, keeping the option open to play c4, if appropriate.

10... $\mathbb{Q}c5$

10...f6 is dangerous. White can make use of the c4-square to disturb the opponent's development: 11. $\mathbb{Q}c4+!?$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}bd2$, and if 12...fxe5 (what else?) 13. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ (13...d5 14. $\mathbb{Q}a4!$ c5 15. $\mathbb{Q}df3\pm$) 14. $\mathbb{Q}b3\pm$.

11.c4



We might say that this move is the latest fad, although it was introduced in 1989. To put things in context, the first example in *Mega Database* with 9.c4 is a game Zukertort-Andersen, from their match in 1868.

11... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$

We have no choice but to select this move as our main variation, considering that both Erdös and the Russian GM Malakhov (currently the other great specialist in the Old Berlin) have used it recently. Either of the central breaks is playable:

a) 12...f6 13. exf6 $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ d6 The more aggressive plan 14... $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}ab1$ d5 16. $\mathbb{Q}ed1$ $\mathbb{Q}a6$ (Cosulich-Olsson, Siegen 1970) can be more or less refuted by 17. $\mathbb{Q}c2!$, and if 17... $\mathbb{Q}xc4?!$, 18. b3 $\mathbb{Q}a6$ (18... $\mathbb{Q}b5$ 19. a4) 19. $\mathbb{Q}xc6\pm$. 15. $\mathbb{Q}ad1\pm$ Black still has not solved his problems. The c4-c5 break is pretty strong, for example after 15... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 16. c5! d5 17. $\mathbb{Q}xf6+$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ and $\mathbb{Q}d4$, with a pleasant advantage;

b) 12...d5 looks dangerous, but Black can survive the central pressure. 13. exd6 It is

not easy to keep the tension; for example, if 13. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ $\mathbb{Q}a6\infty$. However, 13. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ is interesting. **13...cxd6 14. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$** After 14. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}f3!$? d5 18. cxd5 cxd5 19. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$, White is hardly able to profit from his microscopic advantage. Many years ago, the great Mihai Suba told me that an isolated pawn is usually not a serious weakness if it is a passed pawn, since there are no enemy pawns that can pile up more pressure on it. **14... $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}e4\pm$** With the pawn on c4, the central pressure is more uncomfortable than in the old main line, although Black should be able to equalise provided he defends carefully.

13. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}a6$

Almasi-Malakhov, Croatia tt 2014, continued 13... $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ c5 15. $\mathbb{Q}e4!?$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}g4$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}d2$. The black position lacks any realistic counterplay, and the exchange of queens did not prevent White's plan to advance the f-pawn: 18... $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ 20. f4 $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 21. g3 f5 22. exf6 gxf6 23. f5 $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ d6 26. g4 \pm

14. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ d5 15. cxd6 cxd6



16.a3

White also maintains annoying pressure after 16.b3 \pm . The natural 16...d5?! is met by 17. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}g4!$ (better than the strategically solid 18. $\mathbb{Q}a4\pm$), threatening 19. $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ and 19. cxd5.

16... $\mathbb{Q}c5$

16... $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ d5 18. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ seems better; White has a small but stable advantage.

17. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ d5! 19. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xe8+$ $\mathbb{Q}xe8$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xe8+$ $\mathbb{Q}xe8$ 22. cxd5 $\mathbb{Q}e2$

22... $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ cxd5 24. $\mathbb{Q}c6\pm$

23. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ cxd5 24. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}e6\pm/\pm$

Bok-Erdős, Biel 2015. Black has simplified to an endgame in which the opposite-coloured bishops give reasonable drawing chances.

CONCLUSION

The Old Berlin is a perfectly playable defence, and leads to interesting and double-edged positions. Perhaps it is not as solid as the endgame after 5... $\mathbb{Q}d6$, but it is worthy of being included into any serious opening repertoire. Black currently experiences certain difficulties, especially in the modern variation D, but the bishop pair always is a reliable defensive trump.

4.0-0 ♜xe4 5.d4 ♜d6: Alternatives to the endgame

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♜c6 3.♗b5 ♜f6 4.0-0 ♜xe4 5.d4 ♜d6



In this chapter, we will study two less critical alternatives to 6.♗xc6, both of which allow either player to sidestep the famous Berlin endgame, whether because they are not in the mood, or due to a lack of technique or knowledge to enter it confidently: 6.dxe5 (variation A) and 6.♗g5!? (variation B).

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♗f6 4.0-0 ♗xe4 5.d4 ♘d6

A) 6.dxe5 ♘xb5 7.a4



The drawish reputation of this line is quite justified, but recently some resources have been found for White which, although not enough to recommend this variation as the basis for an ambitious player's opening repertoire, can make Black at least sweat a little.

A1) 7...♘d6?

I was working on this chapter when I decided to go to the theatre, and let the book rest for a little while. While the audience were being asked to switch off their mobile phones, I began to wonder what White could do after this knight move. After all, Black wants to keep an extra pawn, and after the obvious

8.♗g5! f6

White must prove that his attack compensates for the material. 8...♗e7 9.♗xe7 ♗xe7 10.exd6± is relatively straightforward.

9.♖e1! fxg5?

More prudent is 9...♗e7 10.exd6 cxd6, but after 11.♗f4 ♘e5 12.♗d4 0-0 13.♗f5± (A.Horvath-Naiditsch, Mainz rapid 2009), Black can hardly develop the queenside.

10.exd6+ ♔f7

10...♗e7 11.dxe7 ♗xe7 12.♗d5+–

11.♗d5+ ♔g6



It was not difficult to get here, but for several minutes I was unable to find any reinforcements to keep the attack going. Then, on the stage, a door opened, imitating the light of day and, whether a coincidence or not, the ♜e1 became the main character of the position:

12. ♜e5!

At this moment, inside the Palacio de Festivales, the beautiful performing arts theatre in the city of Santander, at least three figures experienced a moment of sheer bliss: the author of chess books for finding an unexpected solution to a problem, Joanna the Mad for remembering her wedding night with Philip the Handsome, and the gentleman sitting next to me (he would soon doze off).

To be more precise, the idea occurred to me after the capture on c7: 12.dxc7 ♔f6 (12... ♔xc7 13.♕xg5+ ♔f7 14.♕f5+ ♔g8 15.♕d5#) 13.♜e5! ♔e7 14.♜xg5+ ♔xg5 15.♜xg5 ♔xg5 16.f4+–

12...h6

12...♜xe5 13.♜xe5+ ♔f6 14.♜c3 leads to a quick mate. Back home, it did not surprise me to find that the combination was part of theory, and that Black could resign with confidence. A recent example is Sevian-A.King, Los Angeles 2012, which continued:

13.♕e4+ ♔f7 14.♖f5+ ♔g8 15.♕d5+

Even more accurate is 15.♜xg5! ♔xg5 16.♜xg5 hxg5 17.♕c4+ ♔h7 18.♖a3 g4 19.♕xg5+–.

15...♔h7 16.♖xg5+ hxg5

16...♕xg5 17.♖xg5 hxg5 18.♖a3 g4 prolongs the battle a little longer.

17.♖a3 ♜e5 18.♖xe5 ♔g6 19.♕e4+ ♔f7 20.♖f3+ ♔f6 21.♖xg5 1-0

A2) 7...d6



A more reasonable method, although White has a strong resource at his disposal, exploiting his lead in development.

8.e6!?

8.axb5 ♜xe5 9.♖e1 takes the life out of the position. Black has nothing better than 9... ♜e7 10.♘xe5 dx5 11.♗xd8+ ♜xd8! (more comfortable than 11...♜xd8 12.♖xe5+ ♜e6 13.♘c3 0-0 14.♘c5, which should also be just about equal) 12.♖xe5 ♜d6=.

8...fxe6

Less riskier than 8...♜xe6?!. After 9.axb5 ♜e5 10.♘d4, the advance of the f-pawn gives Black considerable headaches: 10...♜d7 11.f4 ♜g6 12.♘c3! Stronger than 12.♗f3 ♜e7 13.♗xb7 0-0 14.♘c6 ♜xc6 15.♗xc6 ♜f6 (Milliet-Koziak, France tt 2015), although after 16.♘c3 (instead of 16.♗c4) 16...♜e8 (16...♜e7 17.♗c4±) 17.♘d5 ♜d4+ 18.♔h1 ♜e7 19.♗c4, Black has not fully equalised either. 12...♜e7 Too risky is 12...c5 13.bxc6 bxc6 14.♗f3 ♜b6 15.♗e3 ♜b7 16.b4!∞. 13.♘d5 0-0?! 13...♜f6 14.♖e1+ ♜f8 is unattractive, but in the game, the king is headed for the eye of the tornado. 14.f5 ♜e5 In Marin-Castro, Medellin 2007, White broke immediately with 15.f6, and won quickly after 15...gxf6? (15...♜xf6!∞) 16.♘f5 ♜xf5 17.♘xf5 ♜e8 (17...c6 18.♘a3!+) 18.♘a3 c6 19.♗h5 1-0. Even stronger was 15.♘a3?!, to bring the rook to g3 or h3, and if 15...c6, 16.♘xe7+ ♜xe7 17.f6, with a strong attack.

9.axb5



9... $\mathbb{Q}b4!?$

At first sight, an odd move, but Black faces problems with his development after 9... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ (10. $\mathbb{Q}g5!?$ can also be considered):



analysis diagram

a) 10... $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ (somewhat better is 11...e5 12. $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}d5\mathbb{Q}$) 12. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ c5?! (12... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ gives better chances to defend) 13.bxc6 bxc6 14. $\mathbb{Q}e1$, and the black position was miserable in Guseinov-Aleksandrov, Dubai 2005, reflected by Black's next move: 14...a6 (Black is a Belarusian GM and a faithful advocate of the Berlin);

b) In the event of 10... $\mathbb{Q}g6$, 11. $\mathbb{Q}d4!$ is quite annoying. Black's results have been reasonable, but White's play is not difficult to improve upon. For example, Kalegin-Aleksandrov, Kazan 2013, continued 11... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ (11...h6, as in Lacasa-Granda Zuniga, Barcelona 2006, could have landed the brilliant Peruvian GM in serious difficulties after 12. $\mathbb{Q}d3!?$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 13.b6! cxb6 14. $\mathbb{Q}e4\mathbb{Q}$) 12. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ e5, and 13. $\mathbb{Q}c4!$ (instead of the game continuation, 13. $\mathbb{Q}d5!?$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}g5\mathbb{Q}$) gives White a very strong attack against the uncastled king. For example, 13...c6 (13... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}g5! \rightarrow$) 14.bxc6 bxc6 15.h4! \pm , and if now 15...d5?!, 16. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ e4 17. $\mathbb{Q}xe4!$ dxe4 18. $\mathbb{Q}xe4+$, followed by 19.h5, gives White a decisive advantage.

10. ♜g5!?

Playing in gambit style. Less aggressive is 10. ♜e1 ♜e7 11.b6!? a5 (11... ♜c6 12. ♜d4 ♜xd4 (Barrientos-Bruzon Batista, Toluca 2011) 13. ♜xa7!∞; 11... cxb6 12. ♜d4 a5 13. ♜xg7 ♜f6 14. ♜g4 ♜e7∞) 12.bxc7 ♜xc7 13.c3?! (13. ♜d4 e5 14.c3! ♜c6 15. ♜b5 ♜b8 16.c4 ♜e6 17. ♜1c3∞) 13... ♜c6 14. ♜a3 0-0 15. ♜b5 ♜d7 16.c4 d5∞ Ghaem Maghami-Navara, Khanty-Mansiysk 2010.

10... ♜e7

Virtually forced. 10... ♜f6? is too dangerous after 11. ♜a4!∞, preparing to swing the rook over to the kingside. In Nayhebaver-Cabezas, Spain tt 2016, the strong player from Extremadura, a Berlin specialist, saved himself by a hair's breadth after 11... ♜d5 12. ♜e1 ♜e7 13. ♜ae4 0-0 14.f3? ♜d8 15. ♜xe6 ♜xe6 16. ♜xe6 ♜f5, but 14.f4 would have decided the game, since at the end of the variation, 17.g4 would win a piece.

11. ♜h5+ g6 12. ♜h6 ♜f8 13. ♜h3 ♜f6



14.b6!

This typical resource in the variation is an improvement with reference to Rahal-Gongora, Barbera del Valles 2010, which continued 14. ♜a4 ♜d5 15. ♜e1 ♜f5?! (after 15...e5 16. ♜g3 ♜g7∞, it seems that White has insufficient compensation for the pawn) 16. ♜xf5 gxf5 17. ♜xe6 ♜xe6 18. ♜d7 ♜e1=.

14...cxb6

Better than 14...a5 15.bxc7 ♜xc2 16. ♜a4↑, and Black is playing with fire.

15. ♜a3∞

Black still has some problems to solve after 15... ♜d7 16. ♜e4 or 16. ♜e1!?.

In short, the risks that Black incurs with 7...d6 do not seem fully justified, provided his opponent plays accurately.

A3) 7... ♜bd4



The most solid reply. Black equalises relatively easily, although his chances to complicate the fight are practically zero.

8. ♜xd4 ♜xd4

Again, choosing the dry move. **8...d5** is more interesting, but I don't believe it's any better: **9.exd6** The position after **9. ♜xc6 bxc6 10. ♜d2!?** is richer, but the a4-pawn reduces the chances to fight for the initiative with c2-c4, having weakened the b-file. Perunovic-Bruzon Batista, Berlin blitz 2015, continued **10...♜e7** (I prefer **10...c5**, and if **11.c4, ♜e6!?**; Black can keep the tension this way, thanks to the advanced rook's pawn) **11. ♜b3 c5 12. ♜a5! ♜e6?!** (**12...♝d7 13.f4∞**) **13. ♜c6 ♜d7 14. ♜xe7 ♜xe7 15.b3±**. After **♜a3**, the black position is slightly uncomfortable. **9...♜xd6 9...♜xd4** leads to the main line. **10. ♜e1+ ♜e7 11. ♜xc6** This leads to an endgame in which the bishop pair provides reasonable compensation for the worse pawn structure. White's advantage is infinitesimal. **11...♝xd1 12. ♜xd1 bxc6 13. ♜f4 ♜f5 14. ♜a3 ♜b8 14...♜d8 15. ♜xc7 ♜d7 16. ♜g3 ♜xa3 17.bxa3 ♜xd1+ 18. ♜xd1 ♜xc2=** **15.b3 ♜xa3 16. ♜xa3 ♜xc2 16...♜d8 17. ♜c1 0-0 18.h3 ♜d7 19. ♜e3 a6 20.b4 ♜b8 21. ♜c5 ♜bd8 22. ♜c3 ♜d1+ 23. ♜xd1 ♜xd1+ 24. ♜h2 f6 25. ♜e3 ♜d7=**, Piorun-Bacrot, Spain tt 2016. **17. ♜c1 ♜f5 18. ♜xc6 ♜b7 19. ♜xc7 ♜xc7 20. ♜xc7 ♜d7 21. ♜f4**, and in Gharamian-Fressinet, Cap d'Agde rapid 2015, the French GM convincingly showed that the extra pawn did not give any winning chances.

9. ♜xd4 d5 10.exd6 ♜xd6



The most common thing to do in this position is to offer a draw by means of 11. $\mathbb{Q}e4+$ $\mathbb{B}e6$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}d4$, and Black has nothing better than to repeat with 12... $\mathbb{Q}d6$. One of the most recent practical examples in grandmaster play is the game Bruzon Batista-Dominguez Perez, Havana 2015. In Andreikin-Kramnik, Nizhny Novgorod 2013, the player with the white pieces, the runner-up in the World Cup that same year, was of a less peaceful disposition and played:

11. $\mathbb{Q}e3+!?$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$

As the American GM Josh Friedel points out in his comments for *ChessBase Magazine*, 11... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ is now pointless, but Black has another, safer option: **11... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ c6** Dominguez Perez-Leko, Tsaghkadzor 2015, continued **13. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 14.b3 0-0=** **14... $\mathbb{Q}e5$** The position isn't as innocent as it looks. In Dzhumaev-Demchenko, Chennai 2016, the Russian GM with the black pieces only needed one careless move to lose the game: 14... $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ 0-0 16. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ c5? (16... $\mathbb{Q}fe8=$) 17. $\mathbb{Q}g3!$ h6 18. $\mathbb{Q}h5$ $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 19.f4 $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 20.fxg5 $\mathbb{Q}xh5$ 21.gxh6, and White has obtained a decisive attack out of the blue. **15. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ 0-0 16. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}h4!$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}ae8!$** , and the dethroned king of draws has managed to eliminate the threats, equalising the position.

12. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ a6

It is necessary to lose a tempo to prevent $\mathbb{Q}b5$, or at least mitigate its effects.

13. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$

The queen looks more poorly placed on c5, an impression that was confirmed in Frolyanov-Alekseev, Sochi blitz 2015: 13... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}e4!$ (stronger than 15. $\mathbb{Q}xg7?!$ 0-0-0 \mathbb{Q}) 15... $\mathbb{Q}xg3$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}a5$ 0-0 19. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$, and now after 20.c3 (instead of 20. $\mathbb{Q}xc7?$ $\mathbb{Q}fc8$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}xc2$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}ab1$ $\mathbb{Q}a2$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}bc1$ $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ \mathbb{T}), the bishop pair did not fully compensate for the missing pawn.



14. \mathbb{N} d3!

An attractive move, the point of which is easier to understand if we analyse the alternatives:

a) 14. \mathbb{Q} g3?! seems strong, but is easily refuted by 14... \mathbb{Q} d6!, since 15. \mathbb{Q} xg7 0-0-0 is too dangerous;

b) In his game against the Ukrainian GM Kryvoruchko (Varadero 2016), Almasi opted for the immediate 14. \mathbb{Q} b5?!. His opponent was untroubled and captured the pawn on offer: 14... \mathbb{Q} xc2! 15. \mathbb{Q} d3 (played after a 30-minute think. 15. \mathbb{Q} d2 would lead nowhere after 15... \mathbb{Q} d8 or 15... \mathbb{Q} c6, with the idea of 16. \mathbb{Q} d4 \mathbb{Q} c5) 15... \mathbb{Q} xd3 16. \mathbb{Q} xc7+ \mathbb{Q} d7 17. \mathbb{Q} f4!! \mathbb{Q} xd1+ 18. \mathbb{Q} xd1+ \mathbb{Q} c6 19. \mathbb{Q} xa8 \mathbb{Q} c5 20. b4!, and White's reward for his 'brilliant' play is a worse endgame.

Now, \mathbb{Q} b5 is more dangerous, thanks to the possibility \mathbb{Q} c3.

14... \mathbb{Q} e7

Black acquiesces to a slightly worse position, but which is not very difficult to defend.

The alternatives are riskier:

a) Kramnik, who did not seem to have analysed every single detail of the line, responded with 14... \mathbb{Q} c8?, preventing 15. \mathbb{Q} b5, but after 15. \mathbb{Q} e2! \mathbb{Q} c5 (15... \mathbb{Q} d6 16. \mathbb{Q} d4 \mathbb{Q} d5 keeps White's advantage within reasonable limits) 16. \mathbb{Q} g3 f6 17. \mathbb{Q} e3 \mathbb{Q} d6 18. \mathbb{Q} f4 \mathbb{Q} xf4 19. \mathbb{Q} xf4, had to give up a pawn in order not to lose immediately, and was much worse after 19... 0-0 20. \mathbb{Q} c3 \mathbb{Q} d6 21. \mathbb{Q} xe6 \mathbb{Q} xe6 22. \mathbb{Q} xc7 \mathbb{Q} xc7 23. \mathbb{Q} xc7 \mathbb{Q} c8 24. \mathbb{Q} xb7 \mathbb{Q} xc2±. You can see how this game ended in Game 13, featured in Chapter 20;

b) In Saric-Korobov, Croatia tt 2014, the player with the black pieces, winner of the 2013 European Blitz Championship, decided to ignore White's threat, and after 14... \mathbb{Q} d6?! 15. \mathbb{Q} b5, sacrificed the queen: 15... axb5 16. axb5 \mathbb{Q} xa1 17. bxc6 bxc6 18. \mathbb{Q} d1 0-0 19. \mathbb{Q} e1 \mathbb{Q} b8 20. b3 \mathbb{Q} a2 21. \mathbb{Q} e4± Black has good drawing chances, but I don't think it's necessary to get involved in this mess;

c) 14... \mathbb{Q} c5 15. \mathbb{Q} g3 f6 16. \mathbb{Q} f4 \mathbb{Q} c8 is an active but riskier alternative. It is likely that

Andreikin's home preparation involved the combination 17.b4! ♕xb4 18.♗d5! ♕xd5 19.♕xg7 ♖f8 (19...♖g8? 20.♖e1+! (deflects the bishop from the defence of e7) 20...♕xe1 21.♖e3+ ♕e6 22.♕xg8+ ♔d7 23.♕xh7+ ♔f7 24.♕f5+ ♕e6 25.♕d3++) 20.♗d2 ♕xd2 21.♖xd2, but after 21...♗e6!, the white attack seems to be good enough only for a draw.

15.♗b5 0-0



16.♗d4

16.♖c3 doesn't work, because of 16...♖ad8! 17.♗d2 ♖d5 18.♖d3 ♖c5+

16...♖d5 17.♗xe6 ♖xe6 18.♗xe6 fxe6 19.♗e3

In this endgame, White's advantage is so small that even the average black player should not lose. It can be compared to a fashionable line in the Open Spanish. Also there, Black has a weakness in the form of an isolated e-pawn. Additionally, White in that variation has the possibility of playing on the queenside, which is weaker than in our line due to the b-pawn having been played to b5, but even so, those advantages are known to be insufficient for White to generate any serious winning chances:



This position occurred in the game Karjakin-Caruana, Shamkir 2016, after 1.e4 e5 2.♗f3 ♖c6 3.♗b5 a6 4.♗a4 ♖f6 5.0-0 ♖xe4 6.d4 b5 7.♗b3 d5 8.dxe5 ♗e6 9.♗bd2 ♖c5

10.c3 ♜e7 11.♕c2 d4 12.♗b3 d3 13.♗xc5 dxc2 14.♗xd8+ ♕xd8 15.♗xe6 fxe6 16.♗e3 ♕d5 17.♖fc1 ♗xe5 18.♗xe5 ♕xe5 19.♖xc2. After 19...♖d5 20.c4 ♕d7 21.cxb5 axb5, the draw is nigh.

19...♜f6 20.c3

Acquiesces to an exchange of rooks. 20.♖b3 b6= doesn't seem very promising either...

20...♜fd8 21.♖ad1 ♕xd3 22.♖xd3 ♕d8 23.♖xd8+ ♗xd8 24.g4 e5!

(Jones-Fressinet, Plovdiv 2012). The position is equal. The black king reaches e6, and according to endgame principles, it is impossible to win with a single pawn on a dark square.

B) 6.♗g5!?



A provocative move: White tries to exploit his lead in development undisturbed by material considerations.

B1) 6...f6

Taking up the gauntlet, but Black is going to face difficult problems with his development. My first impression was that it should be possible to refute the attack, but the longer I tried, the more I failed, and the longer the chapter became.

7.dxe5!

Once you're on the dance floor, you should dance. White cannot stop midway with 7.♗xc6 dxc6 8.dxe5 fxg5 9.exd6 ♗xd6 10.♗e1+ ♔f7, as in Bokros-Postny, Germany Bundesliga 2005/06, when he still has a lot of work to do before he can equalise.

7...♝xb5 8.exf6 gxf6 9.♗f4

The idea advocated by most players of the white pieces, forcing the opponent to lose more time if he wants to hold on to the extra piece. The direct attacking plan 9.♗e1+ ♔f7 10.♗d5+ ♔g7 is also dangerous for Black:



analysis diagram

- a) The spectacular 11. $\mathbb{Q}e8?$ $\mathbb{B}xe8$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}xf6+$ $\mathbb{K}xf6$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}g5+$ $\mathbb{K}f7$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}h5+$ $\mathbb{K}e7$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}g5+$ led to a draw in Harutyunian-Martirosyan, Kirishi 2014, after 15... $\mathbb{K}f7$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}h5+$, but Black is up too much material and can continue the fight, for example with 15... $\mathbb{Q}d6!$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}bd2$ $\mathbb{Q}e5!$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}f6+$ $\mathbb{K}e6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}e4+$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xe5+$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xh8$ $d6-+$;
- b) 11. $\mathbb{Q}f4?!$ was played in B.Socko-Lautier, Leon 2001. The French GM seized the opportunity to hide the king in the corner: 11... $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}h4$ $\mathbb{Q}g8!$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}h8\#$ The compensation for the piece is insufficient, although Black has problems to liberate himself completely, as we will see in Game 14 (Chapter 20);
- c) The recent discovery 11. $\mathbb{Q}d2!$ might make 9. $\mathbb{Q}e1+$ a viable move. I include the main attacking line:

11... $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}h5$ $\mathbb{Q}e7!$ The retreat of the bishop to d2 prevents the black king from hiding in the corner as in B.Socko-Lautier: 12... $\mathbb{Q}g8?$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}g5!$, and the attack is too strong. **13. $\mathbb{Q}h4!$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 13... $\mathbb{Q}g8$** is not to be recommended either: 14. $\mathbb{Q}c3!$ Black is more or less forced to go back with the knight, and after 14... $\mathbb{Q}c6$, White can either force a draw with 15. $\mathbb{Q}g5+$, or continue the attack with 15. $\mathbb{Q}e3!?$, followed by 16. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ and 17. $\mathbb{Q}ae1 \rightarrow$. **14. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}g8!$** Walking a tightrope. 14... $\mathbb{Q}g6?$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}c3! \rightarrow$ is very dangerous. **15. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}c3!?$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}g3\#$** can be considered, followed by developing the knight via d2. **15... $d5!$** Takes away the e4-square from the enemy knight. 15... $d6$ loses after 16. $\mathbb{Q}ae1$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xd6!$ $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xe7+-$. **16. $\mathbb{Q}ae1$ $c6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}a4!$**



analysis diagram

With this unexpected reinforcement, which threatens $\mathbb{Q}c5$, $\mathbb{Q}b4$ and $\mathbb{Q}c3$, Black is still unable to fight off the threats. My temporary conclusion is that White has nothing more than a draw after 17... $b6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}g3+$ (18. $\mathbb{Q}b4!?$ can also be considered: 18... $c5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $bxcc5$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xc5\#$) 18... $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ (19... $d4$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xd4\#$) 20. $\mathbb{Q}ge3$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}g3+=$, but there is plenty of room for further investigation.

Let's go back to the position after 9. $\mathbb{Q}f4$:



9... $\mathbb{Q}d6$

This anti-developing move is the most normal way to keep the extra piece.

a) Black players caught by surprise usually respond with 9... $d5!?$, trying to speed up development and returning back the material. The bad news is that in the resulting positions, Black is far from equal: 10. $\mathbb{Q}e2+$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ (in Solodovnichenko-Tari, Oslo 2014, the promising young Norwegian player with the black pieces preferred 10... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ 0-0 12. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 13. $a3$ $c6$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}fe1$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$, but he was slightly worse due to the position of his king) 11. $\mathbb{Q}xb5+$ $c6$ was played in Naiditsch-K.Georgiev, Kusadasi 2006. Instead of 12. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}d4!?$ 0-0 14. $\mathbb{Q}d2!?$ $\mathbb{Q}g6!$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $f5\mp$, White could have secured himself a considerable advantage with 12. $\mathbb{Q}e2!$, preparing 12...

$\mathbb{Q}g7?!$ 13. $\mathbb{B}e1\pm$;

c) 9... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ is similar to the main variation. White keeps annoying pressure with 10. $\mathbb{B}h4!$ $\mathbb{B}d6$ (10...0-0 11. $\mathbb{B}d5+\mathbb{E}$) 11. $\mathbb{Q}xd6!$ (11. $\mathbb{B}h5+$ $\mathbb{B}f7$ 12. $\mathbb{B}h6$ $\mathbb{Q}g8\mp$) 11... $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 12. $\mathbb{B}h5+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}c3!$ (better than 13. $\mathbb{Q}g6+$ $\mathbb{Q}g7\mp$. Another alternative is 13. $\mathbb{Q}f5$, but then Black has the extra defence 13... $\mathbb{Q}f4!$).



analysis diagram

Here, the only more or less safe defence is 13... $\mathbb{Q}e5!$, bringing the light-squared bishop into play as quickly as possible. White can choose between either (sort of) forcing a draw with 14. $\mathbb{B}f5$ $d6$ 15. $\mathbb{B}h6+$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 16. $\mathbb{B}h5+$, or keep pressing with 14. $\mathbb{B}ae1!?\mathbb{Q}$.

10. $\mathbb{B}e1+$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$

Also possible is 10... $\mathbb{Q}f7?!$, intending to bring the king to h8, but White has time to mount a dangerous attack on the kingside as a result of the opponent's lack of development. Piorun-Wagner, London 2014, continued 11. $\mathbb{B}h4!$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 12. $\mathbb{B}h5+$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $b6?$ (13... $\mathbb{Q}h8$ is slightly better, reaching a position from the game B.Socko-Lautier with an extra tempo for White. Here, 14. $\mathbb{B}d5!$ $b6$ 15. $\mathbb{B}e3\pm$ creates serious difficulties for Black, with the threat 16. $\mathbb{B}h3$) 14. $\mathbb{B}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 15. $\mathbb{B}ae1!$ (even better than 15. $\mathbb{B}d5$) 15... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xd6!$ $cxd6$, and White could have finished off the game immediately with 17. $\mathbb{B}h3$ $h6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}e4+-$, creating decisive threats.

11. $\mathbb{Q}xd6!$ $cxd6$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}c3$



Once more, White doesn't seem to have sufficient compensation for the piece, but his opponent is lacking the two or three tempi needed to complete his development and prevail with his material advantage. The following variation is by no means forced, but illustrates some of the options for both sides:

12...0-0 13. \mathbb{Q} h4! \mathbb{Q} h8 (13...f5?! 14. \mathbb{Q} d5+ \mathbb{Q} h8 15. \mathbb{Q} xf5 does not accomplish the goal of speeding up development) 14. \mathbb{Q} f5 d5! (Black has to annoy the knight that has just settled on f5) 15. \mathbb{Q} xd5 \mathbb{Q} c5 16. \mathbb{Q} g4! \mathbb{Q} g8 17. \mathbb{Q} h4 \mathbb{Q} g6 18. \mathbb{Q} ad1 (a semi-waiting move. Not good is the direct combination 18. \mathbb{Q} xf6? \mathbb{Q} xf6 19. \mathbb{Q} e8+ \mathbb{Q} f8–+) 18... \mathbb{Q} f8 (in fact, it is possible to fall into the trap: 18...d6!? 19. \mathbb{Q} xf6! h6! 20. \mathbb{Q} e8+ \mathbb{Q} xe8, and White can choose between 21. \mathbb{Q} xh6, with a more or less forced draw, or continue the fight with 21. \mathbb{Q} xe8 \mathbb{Q} xf5 22. \mathbb{Q} e1∞), and now White wins back the piece with 19. b4! \mathbb{Q} xb4 20. \mathbb{Q} e7! \mathbb{Q} xe7 21. \mathbb{Q} dxe7 \mathbb{Q} g5 22. f4 \mathbb{Q} g7 23. \mathbb{Q} h6! \mathbb{Q} xg2+ (the only defence) 24. \mathbb{Q} xg2 \mathbb{Q} xh6 25. \mathbb{Q} xh6 d6 26. \mathbb{Q} xd6 \mathbb{Q} g7, although in the resulting endgame, White only has a symbolic advantage.

Assessing all these variations, 6...f6 can hardly be recommended. Black hardly has any prospects of getting more than equality, even after a long series of only moves, which are difficult to find without careful home preparation.

B2) 6... \mathbb{Q} e7!



The good news for Black is that it is possible to sidestep the complications without major inconveniences.

One might think that piece exchanges are unfavourable to him, due to his worse pawn structure, but he has a strong trump in the form of his ‘extra bishop’, which enables him to make use of the blockading squares around the passed pawn and obtain a comfortable game, as long as he manages to prevent the opponent from mobilising his majority.

7. $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ $\mathbb{Q}xe7$

7... $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ 8. $dxe5!$ $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ 9. $a4$ is a slightly less comfortable, but nonetheless perfectly playable alternative. T.R.Hansen-Ponomariov, Tromsø 2013, continued 9... $b6!?$ 10. $axb5$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ (12. $\mathbb{Q}d4!?$) 12... $0-0$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}b7$ $c6=.$

8. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $dxc6$ 9. $dxe5$



9... $\mathbb{Q}f5$

The most common move, but 9... $\mathbb{Q}e4!?$ also has its merits. Exchanging the courageous knight is rather favourable to Black, and although it is forced to retreat, it has a good square on e6 at its disposal. I have not been able to find anything serious for White: 10. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}bd2$ lacks sting. The black position is very comfortable after 10... $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ $0-0$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ (12. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ is more solid, but also means White’s f-pawn can’t move forward) 12... $c5$ 13. $c4!?$ (unnecessarily weakening) 13... $b6!$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $h6$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}fe8$ 17. $f4$ $\mathbb{Q}ad8\#$, Tari-Melkumyan, Doha 2014. The bishop is much stronger than the knight. 10... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ After the prophylactic 11. $h3$ $0-0$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}c3$, the bishop finds an alternative route. 12... $b6!$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}fe1$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 15. $h4!?$ $\mathbb{Q}ab8$, and Black was taking the initiative in Dai-Fang, Shijiazhuang 2015. 11... $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 12. $h3$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ **0-0-0!?** It is always comforting to follow the example of a specialist in the opening. 13... $0-0$ can also be considered, followed by 14... $\mathbb{Q}e6$, preparing ... $b7-b6$ and not fearing $\mathbb{Q}d4$. 14. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 15. $f4$ $f5!?$ Secures the blockading square for the knight. 14... $f6$ also seems sufficient for equality. 16. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $c5$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ We are following the game Shirov-Fressinet, Halkidiki 2011, in which the second magician from Riga was slightly better after 18... $\mathbb{Q}h4$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}d3!$, obtaining advantage via the d-file, because of the

loose f-pawn. After the simple 18...g6=, the monster on e6 protects his army against all evil.

10.♘c3

In Solodovnichenko-Salgado, France tt 2015, the Ukrainian GM started with 10.♘d2!?, only to get back into the main line after 10...0-0 11.♘c3 ♘h4. It was possible to avoid the exchange of knights with 11.♗f4, and after 11...♕e6 12.♘c3, we reach the lines that we will examine in the note to 11...♘h4. In turn, Black could play the immediate 10...♘h4!?, hoping to transpose to the main line after 11.♘xh4 ♘xh4 12.f4 0-0, but instead of 13.♘c3, White has the option to find a better square for the knight, perhaps with 13.♘c3 and 14.♘d2. In any case, all these subtleties are unlikely to alter the evaluation of the line 6.♗g5 ♕e7 as equal.

10...0-0

10...♕e6 is also possible, and will most likely transpose to variations we will see later on. 10...♘d7!? does have independent value, preparing queenside castling. Schachinger-Huber, Austria tt 2015/16, continued 11.♘d3 0-0-0 12.♗e4 g5 13.♖ad1 h5 14.♘d4 ♘h4 15.♖fe1 ♘he8, and Black's counterplay is very dangerous. White did not find anything better than to force a draw with 16.g3 ♘g6 17.e6! ♘xe6 18.♘xc6 bxc6 19.♘xc6 ♔b8 20.♔b5+ ♔a8 21.♘c6+ ♔b8 22.♔b5+ ♔a8 23.♘c6+ ♔b8 ½-½.

11.♘d2

White has also looked for an advantage after 11.♘d3 ♕e6 (the enemy queen is looking at the f5-square, rendering 11...♘h4?! 12.♘xh4 ♘xh4 13.f4± unattractive) 12.♗e4 ♘ad8 13.♖ad1.



analysis diagram

White has preserved both his knights, and will try to set his pawn majority in motion. 13...h6 (perhaps not a necessary move. It is also possible to exchange rooks first) 14.h3 ♘xd1 (I think this is better than trading queens with 14...♗c5 15.♖fe1 ♗c4?!, which was seen in Robson-Harikrishna, Philadelphia 2011. The young American GM maintained some pressure in the endgame: 16.♗xc4 ♘xc4 17.g4 ♘e7 18.♗h2 c5 19.♗g3 ♘c6 20.b3 ♘e6 21.♗b5 ♘c8 22.c4±) 15.♖xd1 ♘d8 16.♖xd8+ ♘xd8. Here, White's best

continuation appears to be 17. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{B}d7$ 18. g4 $\mathbb{B}e7$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}d4$, and if 19... $\mathbb{Q}d5$, 20. $\mathbb{B}e3$, although with the queens on the board, Black should obtain enough play against the somewhat exposed white king.



11... $\mathbb{N}h4$

Black avoids any problems with his knight, which will be replaced by the bishop on the blockading square. But Black also seems OK after 11... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 12. $\mathbb{B}f4$ $\mathbb{L}ad8$ 13. $\mathbb{B}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ (preparing the knight jump to d4. Also playable are 13... h6 14. h4 c5 15. c3 b6, perhaps followed by ... $\mathbb{L}d7$ and ... $\mathbb{B}d8$, as well as the direct 13... c5) 14. c3 (as the Swedish IM Eslon mentioned in an article published by the magazine *Jaque Teoría* back in 1996, the direct 14. $\mathbb{B}eg5$ doesn't get anywhere after 14... $\mathbb{Q}c8!$, and 15. g4? is met by 15... f6!) 14... h6 (securing the position of the bishop. Nunn-Smejkal, Germany Bundesliga 1988/89, continued 14... c5 15. $\mathbb{B}eg5$ h6 (15... $\mathbb{Q}c8!?$) 16. $\mathbb{B}xe6$ fxe6 17. $\mathbb{B}e4$ c6 18. $\mathbb{L}ad1$ $\mathbb{L}d5$ 19. c4, and White can claim a tiny advantage) 15. h4 $\mathbb{L}d3$ 16. $\mathbb{L}ad1$ $\mathbb{L}fd8$ 17. $\mathbb{L}xd3$ $\mathbb{L}xd3$ 18. h5 b6 19. a3 $\mathbb{B}d8=$ Shirov-Slipak, Buenos Aires 2012. White doesn't manage to mobilise his pawns on the kingside to create an attack.

12. $\mathbb{B}xh4$ $\mathbb{B}xh4$ 13. f4 $\mathbb{Q}f5$



The powerful black bishop is stronger than the knight. The pawn majority is blockaded, and we should not forget about the weak white c-pawn either.

14. ♜ d1

An attempt to improve on 14. ♜ f2 ♜ xf2+ (B.Socko-Cyborowski, Warsaw 2001, continued with the weaker 14... ♜ e7 15. ♜ fe1 ♜ b4 16. ♜ ab1 ♜ ad8 17.a3 ♜ c4 18. ♜ bd1 a5 19. ♜ e2 ♜ g4 20. ♜ xd8 ♜ xd8 21. ♜ d2 ♜ xd2 22. ♜ xd2, and according to Stohl, White is a little better. The bishop tends to combine better with the rooks than with the queen) 15. ♜ xf2 ♜ fd8 16. ♜ d1 ♜ d4 17. ♜ e3 ♜ e6, and the control of the file gives Black more than enough play to equalise.

14... ♜ ad8

14...f6!? looks attractive, opening the position while the enemy pieces are busy regrouping. Black is comfortable after 15. ♜ e3 fxe5 16.fxe5 ♜ e6 or 15. ♜ b4!? fxe5 16. ♜ xb7 exf4.

15. ♜ c3 ♜ e7 16. ♜ e3 ♜ c8 17.f5

Acquiesces to a draw. It was still possible to fight for the win with 17. ♜ ad1, preparing the exchange of rooks, or with 17. ♜ ae1.

17... ♜ de8

And **Solodovnichenko-Salgado, France tt 2015**, ended in a forced repetition of moves:

18. ♜ g4 ♜ g5 19. ♜ e3 ♜ e7 20. ♜ g4 ♜ g5 21. ♜ e3 ♜ e7 ½-½

CONCLUSION

Perhaps both lines we have studied in this chapter are somewhat frivolous, or perhaps they lack strategic depth, but they are dangerous enough to create serious problems for an unprepared opponent. The symmetry featured in both lines is interesting: Black must choose between a risky materialistic approach, and a conservative yet safe set-up that brings him close to equality.

CHAPTER 12

The Westerinen-Eslon Variation: 4.0-0 ♕xe4 5.d4 ♕d6 6.♕xc6 dxc6 7.dxe5 ♔e4?

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.0-0 ♕xe4 5.d4 ♕d6 6.♕xc6 dxc6 7.dxe5 ♔e4?!



An adventurous move and not at all easy to refute, which was analysed by Jaan Eslon in an excellent article published twenty years ago in the Spanish magazine *Jaque Teoría*. As a tribute to the Swedish IM, who lived in Spain for many years, I have re-baptised the variation by attaching his name to his colleague's, the Finnish GM Heikki Westerinen, a player with a risky tactical style.

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♗f6 4.0-0 ♖xe4 5.d4 ♗d6 6.♗xc6 dxc6 7.dxe5 ♗e4?!

A) 8.♕xd8+ ♔xd8

Before we delve into the ensuing tactical mess, we should ask ourselves a question: what advantage has Black obtained in relation to the main variation with 7...♝f5 after the trade of queens?



The knight makes way for the ‘extra bishop’, which makes advancing the white pawns on the kingside more difficult (as we will see, this is one of the critical plans in the fight for an advantage in the Berlin endgame), and creates the possibility of ...♝g4, at the same time having the ideal blockading square e6 within reach. However, the downside is that White can prepare the mobilisation of the f-pawn more easily.

In the following variations, we will see all these ideas in action:

9.♗e3

White prepares a rapid ♘d4, which might be his best bet to fight for an edge.

a) 9.h3, the thematic idea in the main variation with 7...♝f5, is answered by the energetic 9...♝c5!. There doesn’t seem to be anything better than 10.♗bd2 ♗xd2 11.♗xd2, after which Black develops without any problems by 11...h6, or even the immediate 11...♝e6, not fearing 12.♗g5 ♔e7 13.♗xe6?! ♔xe6; the piece exchange is not necessarily advantageous for White, unless it can be combined with the advance of his pawn majority;

b) 9.♗e1 seems attractive, dislodging the knight with a developing move, but after 9...♝c5, Black is preparing the blockade on e6, and the rook would actually be better placed on f1, supporting the advance of the f-pawn. In the examples drawn from grandmaster practice, Black has not experienced any problems: 10.♗c3 (10.h3 is possible, but the bishop finds alternative roads: 10...♝f5!? 11.♗d4 ♗d7 12.♗c3 ♔c8!? 13.♗e3 ♗e6 14.♗ce2 ♗xd4 15.♗xd4 ♗e7=, and after ...c6-c5, Black is OK, following the example of the variations with ...♝d7, which we will see in Chapter 19) 10...♝g4 11.♗d4 ♗e6 12.♗e3 (B.Ivanovic-Blagojevic, Cetinje 2009, continued 12.♗e4 ♗h5 13.♗xe6+ fxe6 14.♗e3 ♗e7 15.♗c1 b6 16.♗d4+ ♗c8 17.♗e4 c5 18.♗d2 h6 19.♗c3 ♗b7 20.f3

\mathbb{B} ad8=, and the light-squared bishop frees Black of all danger) 12... \mathbb{B} b4 13.h3 \mathbb{B} xd4 14. \mathbb{B} xd4 \mathbb{B} e6 15.a3 \mathbb{B} xc3 16. \mathbb{B} xc3 b6 17.g4 h5! 18.f3 \mathbb{C} c8! 19. \mathbb{C} g2 \mathbb{B} b7 20. \mathbb{C} g3 \mathbb{B} h7= Black has managed to restrain the advance of the white pawns, and later he created counterplay on the queenside in Panchanathan-Mirzoev, Bratto 2012. The situation of the king on c8, and the move ...h7-h5 are two of Black's typical ideas in these endgames.

9... \mathbb{B} c5

Creating the threat 10... \mathbb{B} g4 11. \mathbb{B} d4 \mathbb{B} e6. Black has a few other, similar options:

a) Antonio-Torre, Manila 1998, saw 9... \mathbb{B} e8 10.h3 (10. \mathbb{B} d4! is better, to answer 10... \mathbb{B} c5 with 11. \mathbb{B} c3 \mathbb{B} e6 (11... \mathbb{B} e7 12.f4 is very dangerous. 12... \mathbb{B} e6 is followed by 13. \mathbb{B} f5±) 12. \mathbb{B} b3! (taking away c5 from the knight), and f2-f4, with initiative. 10... \mathbb{B} c5 would transpose to the next variation) 10...h5! 11. \mathbb{B} d4 h4! 12. \mathbb{B} e1 \mathbb{B} h5, and the kingside is in the process of being blockaded. After 13. \mathbb{B} d2 \mathbb{B} xd2 14. \mathbb{B} xd2 \mathbb{B} c5 15. \mathbb{B} c3 \mathbb{B} xd4 16. \mathbb{B} xd4 \mathbb{B} e6 17.b3 a5, the veteran hero of Philippine chess had more than equalised;

b) 9... \mathbb{B} c5 works well after 10. \mathbb{B} xc5 \mathbb{B} xc5 11. \mathbb{B} c3 \mathbb{B} g4! 12. \mathbb{B} d4 \mathbb{B} e6=, but 10. \mathbb{B} d4 is stronger. 10... \mathbb{B} xd4 11. \mathbb{B} xd4 is not very good: the opposite-coloured bishops do not guarantee a draw if White manages to advance the pawns, as is shown by the variation 11... \mathbb{B} g5?! 12.f4! \mathbb{B} e6 13. \mathbb{B} e3±, and Black must choose between allowing f4-f5, and the no less worrisome 13...g6 14. \mathbb{B} c3 and \mathbb{B} e4. Black has better prospects for equality with 10... \mathbb{B} b6, even though it is possible to prepare, little by little, the march of the f4-pawn, for example with 11.f3 \mathbb{B} c5 12. \mathbb{B} d1 \mathbb{B} e8 13. \mathbb{B} c3, not fearing 13... \mathbb{B} e6 14. \mathbb{B} f5±.

10.h3

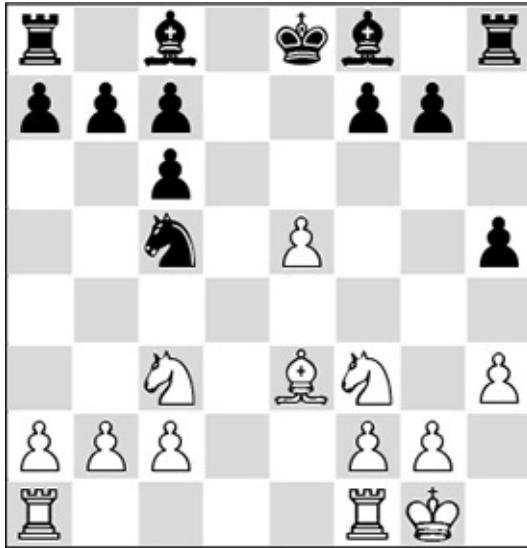
Preventing 10... \mathbb{B} g4, which would be the answer to 10. \mathbb{B} c3. Another option is 10. \mathbb{B} bd2, which was played in A.Sokolov-Torre, Leningrad 1987, but the knight is slightly better placed on c3, and h2-h3 is bound to be a useful move anyway to mobilise the pawn majority.

10... \mathbb{B} e8

10... \mathbb{B} d7 11. \mathbb{B} c3 \mathbb{C} c8 12. \mathbb{B} g5 \mathbb{B} e8 13.f4± is uncomfortable. Usually, \mathbb{B} f5 hinders the advance of the f-pawn in the Berlin endgame.

11. \mathbb{B} c3 h5!?

11... \mathbb{B} e6 is answered by 12. \mathbb{B} d2!± and the pawns coming to f4 and g4, but not 12.g4? straight away, on account of 12...h5! 13. \mathbb{C} g2 b6, and White regrets his premature expansion.



In this position, there is a lot of tension revolving around the manoeuvre ♔d4 and f2-f4. White might opt for the immediate 12.♔d4, and if 12..♗e6, 13.♗b3!, followed by the advance of the f-pawn, or he might choose to operate more subtly:

12.♖ad1±

If now 12...♗e7 13.♔d4 ♗e6, 14.♔f5 gains a tempo by attacking the bishop, while 12...♗e6 is answered by 13.♔d2 and f2-f4. In all cases, White is calling the shots.

The next chapters will equip you better to understand these ideas, but I can already disclose that White's chances of an advantage in the endgame with the knight on e4 are no worse than in the main variations.

B) 8.♗e2



Starting the hunt for the knight.

8...♘f5 9.♖d1

A quieter approach is not enough to fight for the initiative. In Jakovenko-Korneev, France tt 2007, 9.♗e3 ♘c5 10.♗xc5 ♘xc5 11.♘c3 ♗e6 12.♖ad1 ♗e7 13.♔e4 ♗b4 14.♔g3 ♗g4 was played, and Black had equalised using a method similar to the variation 6.♗g5 ♗e7!.

9...♗c8 10.♔d4

Again, the sharper the better.

a) 10. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 11. $\mathbb{B}d2$ (11. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 0-0 12. $f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}a4$ 14. $b3$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 15. $c4$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $f6$ $\frac{1}{2}-\frac{1}{2}$, Guseinov-Mirzoev, Nakhchivan 2012) allows the defender to quietly complete his development. In S.Zhigalko-Sulskis, Bilbao 2014, the Belarusian GM who handled the white pieces got some advantage after 11...0-0 12. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ $c5$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ 15. $f4\pm$, but Black's play can be improved with 13... $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 14. $f4$ $c5=$, or even earlier with 11... $\mathbb{Q}c5!?$;

b) 10. $g4?!$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}h4$ looks dangerous, but Black equalises with 11... $\mathbb{Q}e6!$, as pointed out by Eslon in his article from twenty years ago, with the possible continuation 12. $f3$ (12. $f4?$ loses to $\mathbb{Q}c5+$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}f2!$ 14. $f5$ $\mathbb{Q}e7-$, as in Savic-Blagojevic, Paracin 2014) 12... $\mathbb{Q}c5+$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3+$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6!\infty$.

10... $\mathbb{Q}c5$

Continuing development. 10... $\mathbb{Q}g6?!$, intending to keep the pair of bishops, is met by an elegant pawn sacrifice: 11. $e6!$ $fxe6$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}d2$



analysis diagram

Black cannot complete his development without making important concessions. Even with best defence, 12... $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ (12... $c5$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $cxsd4$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ (14. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 15. $g4$ might be even stronger) 14... $\mathbb{Q}e7?!$ (14... $c5$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}e7\pm$) 15. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xe4+-$, McShane-Hjelm, Stockholm 2001) 13. $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$, White piles up the pressure with 15. $\mathbb{Q}d3!$, and after 15...0-0 (15... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xe6!$ $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $gxf6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ 0-0 (not good is 18... $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}h5+$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}ae1+-$) 19. $\mathbb{Q}xe6\pm$) 16. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xc6!$ $bxcc6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}c3$, Black's position is very difficult.



11.b4!

White tries to energetically exploit the unstable situation of the black pieces. A quieter approach with **11.♗e3** has also been tried. Another interesting plan is **11.c3**, preparing to capture on **d4** with the pawn. In Djukic-Blagojevic, Petrovac 2015, the Montenegrin GM with the white pieces obtained a significant advantage after **11...h6?!** **12.♗e3 ♗h7 13.f3 ♗g5 14.♗d2 ♗xd4 15.cxd4 ♗f5?!** **16.♗f1** (**16.♗b3±**) **16...0-0-0 17.♖ac1±**, but after the more accurate **11...♗b6**, preparing to retreat of the knight via **c5**, the black position is reasonable. **11...0-0 12.f3!?** Once again, exchanging bishops does not favour White: **12.♗b3?!** **♗xe3 13.♗xe3 ♕e8=** **14.♗a3** (**14.♗1d2 ♗xd2 15.♗xd2 b6 16.h3 c5 17.f4 f6 18.g4 ♗g6** (**18...♗d7** is somewhat more accurate, to bring the bishop to **c6**) **19.♖ad1 fxe5 20.f5! ♗f7 21.♖d7∞**, Spraggett-Matamoros, Dos Hermanas 2006) **14...♗e6 15.f3 ♗d6! 16.f4 ♗g6 17.♗d4 ♗g4 18.♗e1 ♗f5 19.♗xf5 ♗xf5**, and the black position was slightly for choice in Bologan-Matamoros, Khanty-Mansiysk 2005. **12...♗xd4 13.♗xd4 ♗c5 14.♗c3**



analysis diagram

White prepares to mobilise the kingside pawns, and wants to attack with opposite-coloured bishops; a double-edged yet quite promising plan. D.Khamrakulov-Kasyan, Tashkent 2006, continued: **14...♘e6?!** **14...♕e8** is better. Still, **15.g4 ♗e6** (neither **15...**

$\mathbb{Q}g6$ 16.f4 nor 15... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}ad1!$ are any better) 16. $\mathbb{Q}d2!$ disturbs the coordination between the black pieces. 15.g4 $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 16.f4 f5 17.exf6 $\mathbb{Q}xf6?$ 17... $\mathbb{Q}fe8!$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 19.f5 $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}f2\pm$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}c4+$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 19.f5 1-0

11... $\mathbb{Q}b6$

11... $\mathbb{Q}xb4?!$ 12.e6! is too dangerous. Black can stumble on with 12... $\mathbb{Q}g6$ (12...fxe6 13. $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ exf5 14.f3+–) 13.exf7+ $\mathbb{Q}f8$, but after 14. $\mathbb{Q}b2!$ (an improvement over 14. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}e6+$ $\mathbb{Q}e7!$ 16.f8 $\mathbb{Q}+$ (16. $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ $\mathbb{Q}g4!$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}xh2+$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xh2$ $\mathbb{Q}h4+=$) 16... $\mathbb{Q}xf8$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xf8$ $\mathbb{Q}xf8\pm$, and Black obtained some compensation for the exchange in Sulskis-Westerinen, Gausdal 1995) 14... $\mathbb{Q}d6$ (14... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}c4+–$) 15. $\mathbb{Q}e1!$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}e6+$ $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}c4$, the attack is winning.

12.f3

12.c4 c5 13. $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ 14.b5 $\mathbb{Q}a5!=$ is not so strong since the white bishop dominates the black knight. Magem-Eslon, Terrassa 1996, ended in a draw after 15.f3 $\mathbb{Q}c3!$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ 0-0 19. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ ½-½. You might think that the kingside pawns give White some options, but an opportune ...a7-a6 will exploit the advanced pawn to achieve counterplay. It's interesting (or maybe not) that Eslon only analysed the losing 14... $\mathbb{Q}xe5?$. So let us remember Petrosian's motto: trust, but verify!

12... $\mathbb{Q}d7!$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ 0-0-0



The black king will become a little exposed to attack, but Black has an urgent need for a rook on the d-file, and there is no time to castle kingside. After 13... $\mathbb{Q}d8$, the accurate sequence 14. $\mathbb{Q}e1!$ $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}ce2$ h6 17.h4 $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ leaves Black in a miserable position.

14.a4

The best move, based on the method of elimination. Black has enough defensive resources against other White tries to win a piece:

- a) 14.fxe4? $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 15.e6! appears winning, but the brilliant resource 15... $\mathbb{Q}xd4!$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ saves the day. In fact, the endgame after 17. $\mathbb{Q}xd8+$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ axb6 19.exf7 $\mathbb{Q}h5$ is somewhat favourable for Black thanks to his powerful bishop and White's

weak queenside;

b) After 14.c4?! c5!, all White can do is enter the combination from the previous variation: 15.fxe4 ♜g4 16.e6 ♜xd4! 17.♕xd4 ♜xe2 18.bxc5 ♜a5 19.exf7, and here, instead of 19... ♜df8 20.♔f2 ♜h5 21.♕d2 ♜xf7+ 22.♔e3 ♜xd2+ 23.♕xd2±, as in P. Johansen-Westerinen, Gausdal 2003, Black can play 19... ♜h5∞, with more than enough compensation for the pawn;

c) It is better to advance the pawn only one square, obtaining a more solid central position than in the previous variations: 14.c3 c5! (14... ♜he8 15.fxe4 ♜g4 16.♔f1 ♜xd1 17.♔xd1 ♜xe5 18.♕d2±, Stefansson-Westerinen, Reykjavik 2002) 15.fxe4 ♜g4 16.e6! ♜xd4! 17.♕xd4! ♜xe2 18.bxc5 ♜a5 19.exf7 ♜h5 20.♕xd8+ ♜xd8 21.f8♔! ♜xf8 22.♕d4 ♜d8 23.♕a3∞. In any case, the bishop pair means that White doesn't have any real winning chances.

14...♝g5

Now, there is no time for 14...c5 15.a5 cxd4 16.axb6 cxb6 17.♕xd4+-.

15.♞c3

If the gruesome main line does not come to fruition for White, he has another interesting alternative: 15.♝a3 ♜xd4 16.♝xd4 ♜e6 17.♝xa7 ♔e7, and now the development of the knight via the edge of the board makes it possible to defend the b-pawn comfortably with 18.c3.



analysis diagram

Black obtains some advantage in return for the pawn. For example, one possibility is 18... ♜f4 19.♝e3 ♜d5 20.♝e1±, but now 20...b6? 21.a5! ♔b7 22.axb6 cxb6! 23.♝c4+- does not trap the bishop, and White can hope to consolidate his extra pawn.



15... ♜xd4!

Better than 15... ♜g6. After 16.b5! cxb5 17.a5! (17. ♜dx b5? ♜c6 18.a5 ♜c5 19.a6 bxa6 20. ♜xa7+ ♜xa7 21. ♜xa7 ♜xd1+ 22. ♜xd1 ♜e6 23. ♜b1 ♜d8 24. ♜e3 ♜d7 25. ♜d2+ ♜e8 26. ♜b4∞ ½-½, Almasi-Matamoros, Turin 2006) 17... ♜xd4 18. ♜xd4 ♜e7 (18... ♜c6 19. ♜xb5+–) 19. ♜xd8+ ♜xd8 20. ♜xb5 a6 21. ♜a7+! ♜d7 (21... ♜b8 22. ♜c6+!+–) 22. ♜b1, White's attack is virtually decisive, e.g. 22... ♜e8 23. ♜xb7! ♜xe5 24. ♜e1!+–.

16. ♜xd4!?

An attempt to improve on 16. ♜xd4 ♜e6 17. ♜xa7 (17. ♜c5 ♜e8 18. ♜xd8+ ♜xd8 19. ♜xa7 ♜h4 does not change the situation) 17... ♜e7, and Black has enough counterplay. Hanssen-Westerinen, Gausdal 2006, continued 18.b5 ♜b4 19. ♜e3 ♜xc2 20. ♜d2 ♜xd2 21. ♜xd2 ♜g6 22.bxc6, and here the Finnish veteran GM lost track with 22... ♜d8?? 23. ♜d5+–, when 22... bxc6∞ would have left him in perfect shape.

16... ♜e7 17. ♜c4!



Avoiding exchanges. The threat is to win a piece with 18.f4 ♜e6 19.g4.

17... ♜e6!

The only possible defence. 17... ♜e6? also loses a piece: 18.g4 (18. ♜xa7+– is not bad

either) 18... ♜g6 19.f4+–

18. ♜c5

The rook occupies an aggressive, yet slightly risky position. Initially, I got excited thinking that the attack with 18. ♜xc6!? bxc6 19. ♜c5 was winning, but Stockfish shows that 19... ♜xf3+!! leads to a draw. One possible variation is: 20. ♜h1! ♜h4 21. ♜a6+ ♜d7 22. ♜d1+ ♜d5 23.gxf3 ♜h3 24. ♜g1 ♜xf3 25. ♜xd5+ cxd5 26.e6+=

18... ♜d5 19. ♜b1!

This modest move entertains attacking ideas, by advancing the pawn it is defending.

19... ♜he8!

Black continues a narrow path on the brink of the abyss.

a) 19...b6? 20. ♜a6+ ♜b8 21. ♜a5!+– justifies White's previous manoeuvres;

b) 19... ♜e6 is somewhat stronger, but 20. ♜a5 continues the attack: 20... ♜h4 21. ♜xd5 ♜xd5 22. ♜xa7 ♜b8 23. ♜a5± allows White to win a pawn, while 20...a6 21.b5 ♜a3 22. ♜e1!+– perfectly coordinates White's pieces. I cannot resist sharing the following variation with you: 22... ♜c4 23.bxc6! b6 24. ♜b5!! ♜xb5 25.axb5 ♜xa5 26. ♜xa5 bxa5 27.bxa6, and the pawn can only be stopped with 27... ♜d1+, giving back the rook with interest.

20.f4

Continuing the irrational complications. My efforts to make matters 'more human' after 20. ♜xd5 cxd5 21. ♜d2 h6 did not give the desired result:

a) 22.a5!? d4 (after the weaker 22...a6? 23. ♜f2 c6 24.b5, White's attack is very strong. The point is 24... ♜e6 25.bxa6!! ♜xc5 26.axb7+ ♜xb7 27.a6+–) 23. ♜xg5 (23... ♜e6 has to be prevented) 23...hxg5 24. ♜e1 ♜e6! 25. ♜d3. White can claim some advantage thanks to his pressure on the d-pawn, but I do not think he can get anything significant against correct play;

b) It would seem that 22. ♜xd5 ♜xd5 23. ♜xd5 ♜xe5 (23... ♜d8 24. ♜b3±) 24. ♜xe5 ♜xe5 25. ♜d4



analysis diagram

would lead to an endgame in which the bishop might secure an important advantage, with lines such as 25... $\mathbb{R}e2$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ $h5$ 27. $\mathbb{R}c1\pm$, but either 25... $\mathbb{R}f5!$ or 25... $\mathbb{R}e8!$ leaves White feeling he got cheated. In both cases, 26. $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ is answered by 26... $\mathbb{Q}xf3+!$, and I don't see a way for White to get anything after 27. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}d2$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}e4=.$

20... $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}a5$ $\mathbb{Q}e6!$

The best way to avoid the threat of 23. $\mathbb{Q}c5$.

23. $\mathbb{Q}xa7$

The idea behind Black's previous move is 23. $b5$ $\mathbb{Q}a2!$, interfering with the enemy plan of attack.

23... $\mathbb{Q}b8$



The situation is not clear yet. White has won a pawn and keeps chances to attack the opponent's king, but the peculiar position of his advanced rook, the strong black bishop on e4 and Black's counterplay with ... $\mathbb{Q}a2$ complicate the task. Despite analysing for hours, I am only able to point you in the right direction, so you can continue analysing for yourself:

a) 24. $\mathbb{Q}a5$ $\mathbb{Q}a2!$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $f5\infty$ keeps the extra pawn but loses the initiative. At least in

this variation, White has a safe path to a draw by repeating moves with 26. $\mathbb{Q}a7+$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}f2$;

b) 24.a5 $\mathbb{Q}a2!$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ f5! (more accurate than 25... $\mathbb{Q}xc2$ 26.a6) leaves White without anything concrete; 26.a6 b6 only leads to a draw, and Black even has 26... c5!? ∞ ;

c) 24.b5!? is the most interesting attempt. After 24... c5 (here 24... $\mathbb{Q}a2?$ loses by K.O. after 25. $\mathbb{Q}xb7+!$), White can continue the attack in sacrificial style: 25.b6! cxb6 26. $\mathbb{Q}xc5!$ $\mathbb{Q}g6!$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}a6!!$. However, the counter blow 27... $\mathbb{Q}xg2!$ might still hold.

What can be said in the face of such a demonstration of defensive resources? Analysis engines have made almost any dubious defence against 1.e4 possible, with the exception of the Alekhine...

CONCLUSION

I still believe Black risks a lot trying to achieve such a modest goal, i.e. reaching the Berlin endgame with a knight on e4 instead of f5, but a good tactical player can enter the variation in the hope of confusing his opponent in the complicated main line.

The Berlin endgame: from Lasker to Kramnik

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♗f6 4.0-0 ♗xe4 5.d4 ♗d6 6.♗xc6 dxc6 7.dxe5 ♗f5 8.♗xd8+ ♔xd8



After a long introduction, we have arrived at the endgame (more precisely, the queenless middlegame) that occupies an honorary position among the world chess elite. Not only has Black lost castling rights with many pieces still on the board, but he also experiences serious development problems. Moreover, his queenside doesn't look very good, whereas White threatens to expand on the kingside with f2-f4 and g2-g4. On the plus side, however, he has a great trump in the form of the light-squared bishop, which might enable him to blockade the kingside and exploit the advanced position of the e-pawn. Over the past fifteen years, the best players in the world have developed subtle methods of play from this rich position, which I hope you will be able to understand better after the following brief historical overview.

By the turn of the 19th century, masters preferred the complex positions of the Old Berlin with 6...♝e7, and when they played the endgame, they did so with the intention of exchanging the dark-squared bishop and suffer for a draw. One exception is the first game of this chapter, in which a young Lasker envisaged some of the more modern ideas in this system.

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.0-0 ♗xe4 5.d4 ♘d6 6.♗xc6 dxc6 7.dxe5 ♘f5 8.♗xd8+ ♔xd8

Siegbert Tarrasch

Emanuel Lasker

Hastings 1895 (19)

9.♘c3 h6

Today, this is still one of the most important continuations.

10.♗d2?!

A modern player raises an eyebrow at the sight of this developing move. The bishop might be better on b2, but at the time of the game, fianchettoing a bishop was frowned upon. One famous example is the epic game Capablanca-Janowski, San Sebastian 1911, in which the then inexperienced Cuban saw that the strongest moves were g2-g3 and ♗g2, but he decided to play the weaker ♗e2-f3, fearing that he would be strongly criticised for setting up his pieces in such an ‘unusual’ fashion.

We will see in this chapter that the strongest move is 10.♘d1+!, avoiding the set-ups that allow the black king to go to the queenside. However, we should not be too harsh on Tarrasch for not finding this; in fact, it took another century to come to this conclusion.

10...♔e6

Now, the king can go to c8 if checked.

11.♘e2!

Aiming to get to the bishop.

11...c5?!

Lasker prevents ♘d4, but the knight might hop via the other side. The most accurate move is 11...♗d5!, threatening to exchange on f3, and if 12.♘e1, 12...g5, with an improved version of the positions we will see in Chapter 19. Black stands well.

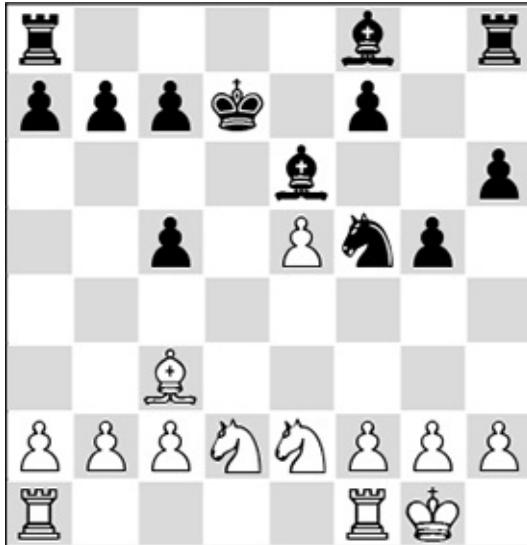
12.♘c3?!

Renounces, for no apparent reason, 12.♘f4±, and if 12...♗d7, 13.♘fe1, with the idea of e5-e6.

12...g5!

Tarrasch won’t get a second chance to annoy the ♗e6.

13.♘d2 ♗d7?!



Nimzowitsch, in his famous book *My System*, was right to claim that Lasker was a modern player! Any modern Berlin player would approve of the black set-up: the light-squared bishop is safe, the king is going to c6 and the g5-pawn is disturbing White's kingside play.

14.f4?!

This break achieves nothing. It was better to try 14.g4 ♜h4 15.f4∞.

14... ♜c6 15. ♜f2 ♜g8 16.fxg5 hxg5 17. ♜e4 ♜d8! 18. ♜2g3

And here, Lasker allowed his foe to complicate matters by 18... ♜d4?! 19. ♜d2! ♜xc2 20. ♜c1∞, when the simple 18... ♜xg3 followed by ...g5-g4 gave him a comfortable edge. He went on to lose a better endgame, due to a serious miscalculation. Perhaps this contributed to the fact that many players seemed to be reluctant to follow his opening play.

From WWI until well into the 20th century, any opening that wasn't a Closed Morphy fell into oblivion, and the Berlin endgame was no exception. One of the rare outings in elite level play was authored by none other than the brilliant David Bronstein, who was always mindful of the theory from the 19th century:

Herman Pilnik

David Bronstein

Amsterdam/Leeuwarden ct 1956 (4)

9. ♜c3 ♜e8

The sorcerer's apprentice chooses the solid approach endorsed by the old masters.

10.b3

White players at the time weren't sure how to react to this 'obscure defence'. Sixty years later, almost everybody prefers 10.h3.

10... ♜e6

The bishop reaches its best square undisturbed. As we will see in the theory section, had 10.h3 been played, White could now have followed up with 11.g4 ♜e7 12. ♜d4, with good prospects.

11. ♜b2 ♜b4 12. ♜fd1?!

The Argentinian GM of German origin is angling for a position with opposite-coloured bishops, but in which he won't be able to mobilise his kingside pawns. A similar thing happens after 12. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}d5=$, although it would still be possible to complicate matters with 12. $\mathbb{Q}e2\infty$.

12... $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ c5= 14. h3 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ b6 16. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ h6 17. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}hd8$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 23. f4 $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\frac{1}{2}-\frac{1}{2}$

It is unsurprising that this short-lived appearance did little to popularise the defence, although it cannot be denied that theoretically speaking, the opening was a success (let's for a moment forget that Pilnik was the weakest player in the field, ending last with 5/18).

Let's move a little further into our age: Oleg Romanishin, one of those pioneers responsible for pushing opening theory forward, played the Berlin endgame several times between 1975 and 1982, defending the position with relative success against fierce opposition featuring the likes of Tal, Geller, Kavalek and Gulko. The following game enables us to appreciate just how modern his treatment of this opening was.

Boris Gulko

2480

Oleg Romanishin

2485

Yerevan URS-ch 1975 (9)

9. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ h6 10. b3

Gulko, as Tarrasch eighty years earlier, foregoes 10. $\mathbb{Q}d1+$ and allows Black to reach his ideal set-up.

10... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}b2$

Hulak-Romanishin, Krk 1976, continued 11. h3 c5 12. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ b6 14. c4 $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$.



analysis diagram

If you look up this position in *Mega Database*, you will find as main reference the game Polgar-Topalov, Mexico City rapid 2010, in which 16. $\mathbb{Q}c3!$? was played. This is not due

to an error in the database: to reach this position, Topalov had to play first ... $\mathbb{B}d7$ and later bring the bishop to e6, as we will see in Chapter 19. Romanishin continued with the rather pointless 15...g6?!; a modern Berlin player would have chosen to reroute the knight via e7, after 15...a5 16.a4, or perhaps after 15...g5, following Lasker's treatment.

11... $\mathbb{B}c8$ 12.h3

The best methods of play were being developed very slowly, something that could be expected from a sideline. Without this move, it is difficult to get anything.

12...c5 13. $\mathbb{N}ad1$



13...b6?!

Forty years later, we know that 13... $\mathbb{B}e7$ 14. $\mathbb{B}e2$ g5 \mathbb{T} is better. Romanishin did not find the manoeuvre ... $\mathbb{B}f5-e7-g6$, but then again, we cannot criticise him for it.

14. $\mathbb{B}e2$

Sharper than 14. $\mathbb{B}d5$ g5 15.c4, which would lead to positions from the World Championship match Carlsen-Anand, Sochi 2014, with an extra tempo for Black.

14...g5 15. $\mathbb{B}d2!$

Gulko's great strategic understanding allows him to appreciate that quiet development would give Black time to reorganise. Time is almost always a factor in favour of the bishop pair, and the Berlin is no exception.

15... $\mathbb{B}g7$ 16.g4 $\mathbb{B}h4$ 17.f4 h5 18. $\mathbb{B}g3$ hxg4 19.f5 $\mathbb{B}d5$ 20.hxg4 $\mathbb{B}g2$ 21. $\mathbb{B}h5!$ $\mathbb{B}xf1$ 22. $\mathbb{N}xf1\infty$



In return for an exchange, White has mobilised his majority and the ♟h4 is not just out of the game, it is also in danger.

22... ♜d8 23. ♜e4 ♜h6 24. ♜c1 ♜b7?

Necessary was 24... ♜e8.

25. ♜hf6 ♜d4 26. ♜xg5 ♜xg5 27. ♜xg5 ♜f8 28. ♜h2 ♜d2+ 29. ♜g3+-

Contrary to other ideas by the Ukrainian GM, such as the Nimzo-Indian with g2-g3, or the plan ...♘xd5-...♘f5 in the Nimzo-Indian with 4. ♜c2, this treatment of the position did not attract much of a following. As a result, the Berlin endgame was to remain in the dustbin of forgotten chess openings, despite some occasional efforts by such great players as Karpov, Kortchnoi or Spassky.

However, in the 1990s, the strong GMs Miles, Aleksandrov and Almasi began venturing into this endgame on a more regular basis. Their main ideas included combining the king going back to e8 coupled with the knight rerouting via e7, as well as making life difficult for White with the move ...a7-a5. The next game by the Belarusian GM Aleksandrov shows the strength of this approach if the opponent has no clear idea of how to combat it:

Vladimir Nevostreyev

2472

Alexei Aleksandrov

2606

Russia tt 2000 (1)

9. ♜c3 ♛e8 10. h3

Throughout the 1990s, defenders of the white cause concluded that, since it was almost impossible to achieve anything without inviting the g-pawn to the party, the best idea was to play h2-h3 as soon as possible.

10...a5!?



A typical ‘Larsen pawn’, creating interesting strategic problems without visibly weakening the position.

11.♘e2

Although 10...a5 has not been clearly refuted, it has become less popular since the beginning of the 21st century, perhaps due to the game Anand-Almasi, Germany Bundesliga 2002/03, which continued: 11.a3 (more concrete than 11.a4. Black can choose the transposition that most favours the position of his rook pawns. For instance, 11...♝b4 is better for Black than in the next game) 11...h6 12.♗e1 (Anand exploits the fact that the a3-pawn avoids any pin on the knight) 12...♝e7 13.♗e4 ♝e6 14.g4 ♘h4 15.♘xh4 ♝xh4 16.♗c5 a4 17.♗xe6 fxe6 18.♗e4!±

11...♞e7

The knight is shadowing its enemy counterpart on e2. In the event of 12.♗f4, there follows 12...♞g6.

12.♘g3?!

This manoeuvre would probably make Tarrasch turn in his grave: the knight cannot be better on g3 than it is on c3. I prefer 12.♗e1, preparing the advance of the pawn.

12...a4 13.a3 h6 14.♗d2 c5 15.♗ad1

The Swedish GM Tom Wedberg, who did thorough research into the Berlin during the early years of its popularity, suggests 15.♗e4!? in his notes for *ChessBase Magazine*, which says enough about the previous knight manoeuvre.

15...♝e6

The bishop, even more powerful thanks to the a-pawn, feels secure in its position after the prophylactic moves ...h7-h6 and ...c6-c5.

16.♗c1 ♞d8 17.♗h5

It has to be accepted that the knight is annoying on this square.

17...♝c4! 18.♗xd8+?

Lets the king go to the queenside. Perhaps White was afraid of 18.♗fe1 ♞xd1 19.♗xd1

\mathbb{Q} e2, but what happens in the game is even worse.

18... \mathbb{Q} xd8 19. \mathbb{Q} e1 \mathbb{Q} c8! 20.g4 \mathbb{Q} c6 21.c3 g6

With the king on e8 it would have been harder to get rid of the knight.

22. \mathbb{Q} f4 \mathbb{Q} e7!

Another sharp prophylactic measure. Not good is 23.e6? g5-+.

23. \mathbb{Q} d2 \mathbb{Q} a2!†



After ... \mathbb{Q} e8 and ... \mathbb{Q} e7-f8-g7, White was unable to defend his e-pawn and went on to lose the game.

Of course, not all White players were so cooperative as the Russian player Nevostruyev, now a grandmaster: the triumphs of the above-mentioned Berlin Trio led to their opponents preparing stronger and stronger attacking plans. In the next game, Scottish GM Rowson convincingly punishes the great Tony Miles for taking too many liberties:

Jonathan Rowson

2499

Anthony Miles

2579

Southend 2000 (1)

9. \mathbb{Q} c3 \mathbb{Q} e8 10.h3! \mathbb{Q} b4

Old-school development. Of course, White must avoid the exchange of his knight if he wants to fight for the advantage.

11. \mathbb{Q} e4 \mathbb{Q} e6



12.c3!

Ugly yet effective. White gains time and frees e1 for the rook at the cost of a small weakness, that is unlikely to be felt. In Plaskett-Miles, England tt 1999/2000, played before this game, Black equalised more or less easily after the weaker 12.♗d2 ♗d5 13.♕fe1 ♘xd2 14.♘fxd2 h5=.

12...♝f8?!

More natural and better is 12...♝e7. Miles probably thought that the exchange of bishops would be unfavourable for him, but as Rowson shows, after 13.g4 (better is 13.♖e1±) 13...♝h4 14.♝xh4 ♘xh4 15.♝g5?! ♘xg5 16.♝xg5 ♗d5, Black stands well, since the king on e8 is ready to blockade ‘the candidate’ on e5.

13.g4! ♘e7 14.♝g3

You may think that White is playing more or less as in the previous game, but here, White is about to set up an attacking position by making use of tempo-gaining threats on the bishop on e6. Even so, Black’s position is far from desperate.

14...♝g6 15.♖e1 ♗d5 16.♝d4 ♘h4?!

Miles is going too far with his policy of neglecting development. There is no point in getting the dark-squared bishop out, but it was possible to improve the position of the king with the spectacular 16...♔d7! (16...c5? 17.♝b5 is too dangerous). After 17.b3 c5 18.♝df5 ♗e6, the king is headed toward Lasker’s position on c6, and 19.f4 h5!∞ is not dangerous.

17.♗g5 ♘f3+ 18.♝xf3 ♗xf3 19.c4!



19...c5?

Losing pretty much by force. It was better to play first 19...h6 and only advance the c-pawn after 20.♘d2, even though 21.♗c3 followed by e5-e6 leaves Black in a difficult position.

20.♗h5! h6 21.♗h4!

Better than 21.♘d2.

21...g5 22.♗g3 ♗e7 23.e6! fxe6 24.♖xe6+–

We are rapidly approaching the Berlin's Big Bang. As explained in the magnificent book *From London to Elista* (Bareev and Levitov, New in Chess 2007), in 2000, the Hungarian GM and outstanding theoretician Zoltan Almasi essayed a new idea, which convinced Kramnik and his team of seconds to use it as a weapon to kick off the match against Kasparov.

Garry Kasparov

2849

Vladimir Kramnik

2770

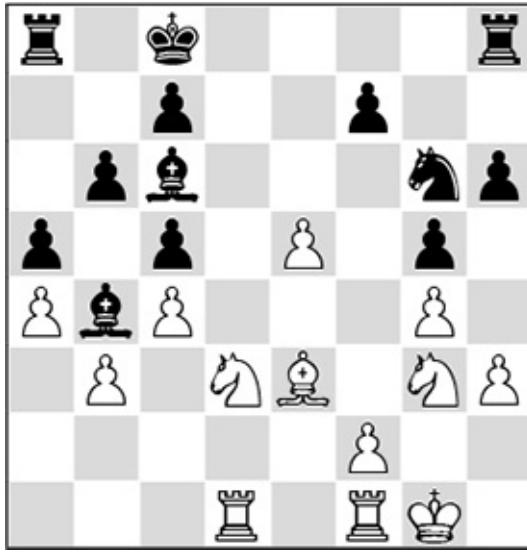
London Wch m 2000 (1)

9.♗c3 ♗d7?!

The bishop frees c8 for the king, but prefers not to occupy the e6-square.

10.b3

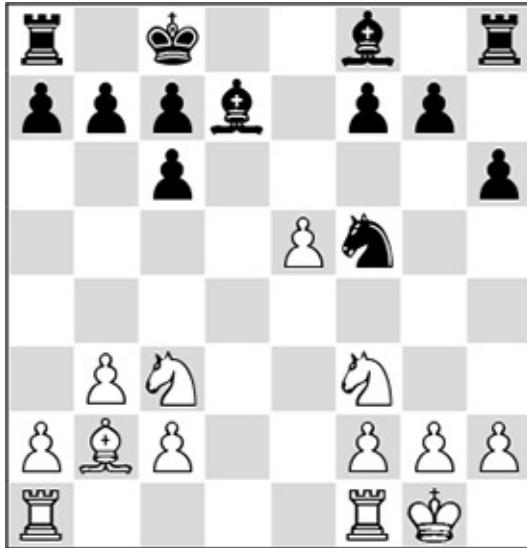
Shirov-Almasi, Polanica Zdroj 2000, continued 10.h3 h6 11.♗f4 (the bishop will not be doing a great deal on this square) 11...b6 12.a4?! a5 13.♗ad1 ♛c8 14.b3 ♗b4! 15.♗e4 ♗e6 16.c4 (16.g4 ♗d5) 16...c5 17.g4 ♗e7 18.♗e1 ♗d7 (preparing ...h7-h5. Also interesting is 18...h6) 19.♗g3 g5! 20.♗e3 ♗g6! 21.♗d3 ♗c6.



analysis diagram

The weakness of the e5-pawn gives us the right to speak of an advantage to Black. Here, Shirov lashed out with 22.f4, and after 22...gxf4 23.Qxf4 Qc3! 24.Qfe2?! (24.Qd5! Qxe5 25.Qh5+ keeps some control over the position) 24...Qxe5 25.Qxf7 Qb7 26.Qff1 Qae8+, he miraculously escaped defeat.

10...h6 11.Qb2 Qc8



12.h3

In the third game of the match, Kasparov played 12.Qad1, also without obtaining any meaningful advantage.

12...b6 13.Qad1 Qe7

Preparing ...c6-c5 by defending the d5-square. We will see in the theory section that nowadays it is recommended to play 13...c5 immediately.

14.Qe2

14.Qd4! gives better chances of an advantage.

14...Qg6 15.Qe1

Preparing the advance of the f-pawn. Bareev states that during this game, Kasparov only created one-off threats, but couldn't find any clear plan.

15...h5

Since there hasn't been time to prevent the f2-f4 advance with ...g7-g5, the tension is transferred to the g4- and f5-squares.

16.♘d3

Neither 16.♘f3 ♜e7 nor 16.f4 ♜e7 doesn't lead to anything either.

16...c5 17.c4 a5 18.a4 h4 19.♘c3 ♜e6 20.♘d5 ♜b7 21.♘e3 ♜h5

Kramnik, by controlling the f5-square, has equalised without any problems. The fight didn't last much longer:

22.♘c3 ♜e8 23.♘d2 ♜c8 24.f4 ♜e7 25.♘f2 ♜f5 ½-½

I imagine you already know how the story ended: Kasparov suffered a bad loss in the second game of the match, and throughout the rest of the match, he was never able to get any advantage against the Berlin, resulting in a convincing victory by the challenger. Members of the influential club of Kasparov worshippers embraced their photo albums dedicated to their idol, and as soon as they had dried their tears, they started flooding the chess media with their message: Kramnik's win was a fluke, mainly due to him boring the champion to death with a negative approach to chess, playing a drawish defence that would eventually go out of fashion.

What can I add, more than fifteen years later? The battle regarding public opinion has been won. However, the world chess elites don't seem to mind that very much, and you will rarely see a top-20 player who hasn't tried the Berlin.

Let's go back to the assessment of the Kasparov-Kramnik match: it seems clear that Kasparov and his team made a serious mistake by not foreseeing the possibility of the Berlin being essayed. After all, it is a solid defence that does not depend very much on computer-assisted preparation, something that was becoming fashionable around the year 2000. On top of that, Kasparov's team must have been aware that Kramnik had already played the Berlin the year before:

Veselin Topalov

2700

Vladimir Kramnik

2751

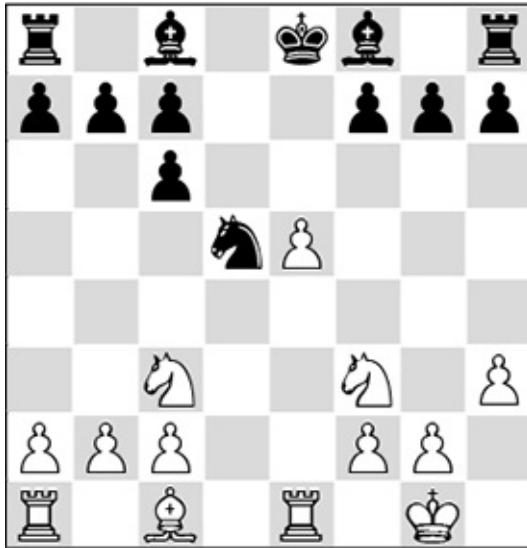
Wijk aan Zee 1999 (3)

9.♘c3 ♜e8 10.h3 ♜e7

Another idea of Almasi's, which we will examine in Game 22 (Chapter 20).

11.♗e1 ♜d5

This leads to an almost forced simplification. 11...♗g6 is a more common method of development. Later, the knight usually goes to e6 via f4.



12. ♜e4 ♜b4 13. ♜e2 ♜f5 14. ♜d4

Wedberg mentions the alternative 14. ♜d2!?, and if 14... ♜xc2?!, 15. ♜c1 ♜b4 16. ♜d6+! cxd6 17.exd6+ ♜e6 18. ♜xb4 ♜d8 19. ♜d1↑.

14... ♜xe4 15. ♜xe4 c5 16.a3 cxd4 17.axb4 ♜xb4 18. ♜xd4 ♜e7

White is somewhat better (if you doubt this evaluation, remember that Black cannot castle), but Kramnik managed to overcome the difficulties.

19. ♜e3 a6 20. ♜ad1

20. ♜d3!, followed by ♜b3, creates more problems.

20...h5 21.c3 ♜d8 22. ♜xd8+ ♜xd8 23.f4 f5!=

This is my personal theory: Kasparov felt it was never necessary to study the Berlin deeply, as masters from the old generation (mine, I may add wistfully) relied on their ability to refute any ‘inferior lines’ over the board. One example of this is Michael Adams’ opinion, picked up by Rowson in the notes to his game against Miles, stating that a strong player will always win the Berlin endgame with white. During the 2015 Sinquefield Cup, an incident occurred that confirms my theory: during the eighth round of the tournament, the Beast from Baku appeared as a special guest in the commentators’ room. Among all the topics that were being discussed, his impressions of the game between the tournament leader and the strongest of the old masters still active in competitive chess, are of particular interest to us:

Levon Aronian

2765

Viswanathan Anand

2816

St Louis 2015 (8)

1.c4 e5 2. ♜c3 ♜f6 3. ♜f3 ♜c6 4.g3 ♜b4 5. ♜g2 0-0 6.0-0 e4 7. ♜g5 ♜xc3 8.bxc3 ♜e8 9.f3 exf3 10. ♜xf3 d5

Kasparov says that he analysed this position for his World Championship match in Seville versus Karpov, and he had found a strong novelty:

11.d4!

Ivanchuk, against Kasparov, played 11... $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 12. $\mathbb{B}c2$ $dxc4$ 13. $\mathbb{B}b1$ $f5$ 14. $g4!!$, and went down in flames shortly thereafter. Twenty-seven years later, Anand preferred a simpler approach:

11... $dxc4$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $h6$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 14.e4



Anand had analysed all of this at home, concluding that the position was defensible. What does Kasparov think of this position?

In those days, we wouldn't waste our time analysing this, because naturally White is better, so, why bother? Why waste time? And I still believe, at the risk of being stigmatised as being old-fashioned, that White is better.

CONCLUSION

'The old world is dying, and the new world struggles to be born; now is the time of monsters.' (Antonio Gramsci)

Seventeen years have passed since the Kasparov-Kramnik match. We are all older now and, I'm afraid, more cynical. Great men die, and an entire world dies with them: David Bowie, Dvoretsky, Kortchnoi, Fidel Castro... Kramnik keeps playing the Berlin with reasonable success while his legendary foe has been retired for twelve years, and in his absence, a radical change has taken place in the study of openings. Anand is only six years younger than Kasparov, but he has adapted well to these difficult new times, bereft of any moral points of reference. In chess terms: 'good' is anything that cannot be refuted by computers.

CHAPTER 14

9...h6

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.0-0 ♘xe4 5.d4 ♘d6 6.♗xc6 dxc6 7.dxe5 ♘f5 8.♗xd8+ ♔xd8 9.h3 h6



Here White continues 10.♗d1+ ♔e8 11.♘c3, after which we will study the following options: A) 11...♗d7 and B) 11...♗e7.

1.e4 e5 2.♗f3 ♜c6 3.♗b5 ♜f6 4.0-0 ♜xe4 5.d4 ♜d6 6.♗xc6 dxc6 7.dxe5 ♜f5 8.♗xd8+

8.♗e2?! doesn't make a lot of sense: Black virtually forces the endgame without losing castling rights with 8...♝d4! 9.♝xd4 ♛xd4 10.♕d1 ♜g4= (also good is 10...♝g4, and if 11.f3, 11...♝g6 followed by ...♝f5). Plaskett-K.Georgiev, Jaén rapid 2011, continued 11.♕xd4 ♜xe2 12.♗c3 ♜h5 13.♗g5?! h6 14.♗h4 ♜e7! 15.♗xe7 ♛xe7 16.f3 ♜hd8 17.♕ad1 ♜g6#. The white position might be defensible, but the weakness of the c-pawn forces him permanently on the defensive.

It is important to realise that unless the opponent's 'extra bishop' is involved, piece exchanges don't favour White in this pawn structure.

8...♛xd8



Finally, we start our theoretical study of the endgame, armed with the ideas that we've learned in previous chapters.

9.h3

Normally, we will consider this as the main move. 9.♗c3 is still the most common move, but super GMs believe that the modest pawn move h2-h3 will sooner or later be necessary to mobilise the white pawn majority, while the knight might be used later via d2-f3, especially in the variations with 9...♝d7. In any case, it is common for different move orders to occur without any significant finesse.

9...h6

A subtle prophylactic move.

10.♕d1+!

We already know that without this check, Black could bring his king to c8 after ...♝e6 and achieve the ideal position in the variation. If you don't believe me, ask Fabiano Caruana, who in his annotations to this move says that the black king is better on c8 than on e8.

10...♚e8 11.♗c3



A) 11...♝d7

Carlsen used this modest move in his game against **Caruana** in the **Gashimov Memorial 2014**, which continued:

12.♞f4

One of the most common ways to develop, preparing to advance the e-pawn further. A brief study of the alternatives will help us to become familiar with the typical plans in the variation:

- a) 12.g4?! is usually premature when the knight can go back, since after 12...♝e7, the threat is ...h6-h5;
- b) 12.b3 is the other common method to develop the dark-squared bishop. Svetushkin-Balogh, Greece tt 2013, continued 12...♝d8 13.♝b2 h5!. The blockading plan we will see in Chapter 15. Black has lost a tempo, but now the bishop should be on f4 to fight for the dark squares. 14.g3 Prevents the blockade with 14...h4. 14...♝e7 15.♛g2 b6 16.♝e2 c5 17.♝f4 ♚c6 This shows the downside of White moving the g-pawn. 18.♝xd8+ ♛xd8 19.c4 ♚c8 The king has reached its ideal position. 20.♝d1 a5 21.♝d5 ♜d8= In this type of position, White doesn't have a lot to show if he doesn't manage to mobilise his majority with g2-g4;
- c) 12.♝e2 seeks to bring the knight to f4 and force the break with e5-e6, but Black has a comfortable game after 12...c5. This advance is easier to achieve if d5 is not within the knight's reach. 13.♞f4 ♜c6! It is not necessary to defend d5 with 13...♝e7?!, as in Del Rio-Rizouk, Albacete 2002: 14.e6 ♜xe6 15.♝xe6 fxe6 16.♝e1 gave the Spanish-Argentinian GM who handled the white pieces dangerous compensation, while 14.b3 and 15.♝b2 look even stronger. Black has fallen too far behind in development. 14.♝d5 ♜d8!=, since if 15.♝xc7+ ♛e7 the knight is in danger.

12...♝d8

The main idea behind the development of the bishop.

13.♝e4

A self-improvement over Caruana-Ponomariov, Paris 2013, which continued 13.e6 ♜xe6

14. $\mathbb{Q}xc7$ $\mathbb{R}xd1+$ (14... $\mathbb{R}c8$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 16. $g4$ $\mathbb{Q}h4$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}d4\pm$, A.Muzychuk-Pogonina, Novi Sad 2016) 15. $\mathbb{R}xd1$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 16. $g4$ $\mathbb{Q}h4$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 18. $\mathbb{R}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}g3$. White's initiative seemed dangerous, but the former World Champion found an adequate defence: 19... $g5!$ (19... $\mathbb{Q}g6?$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ would create serious difficulties) 20. $\mathbb{Q}xh4$ $gxh4$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{R}d8$ and the two bishops more than offset the weak pawns on the kingside.



13... $\mathbb{Q}e7$

In his notes for *ChessBase Magazine*, Caruana comments that after the exchange of knights, the white position is very comfortable and that 13...c5!? is the most critical move. After 14.e6 $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xc7$ $\mathbb{R}c8$ (it is not possible to exchange rooks: 15.. $\mathbb{R}xd1+?$ 16. $\mathbb{R}xd1$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xc5!\pm$) 16. $\mathbb{Q}h2$, a fairly common situation is reached: it looks as though Black stands well, but in practice he's going to suffer a bit, because of his lack in development. Play could continue 16...f6 (f7 is the best spot for the king) 17. $\mathbb{Q}c3!$? (neither 17.g4 $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $cxd4$ 19. $\mathbb{R}xd4$ $\mathbb{R}xc2$ 20. $\mathbb{R}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}f7=$, nor 17.c3 h5 18. $\mathbb{R}e1$ $\mathbb{R}c6$ 19. $\mathbb{R}ad1$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 20.g4 hxg4 21.hxg4 $\mathbb{Q}h4$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xh4$ $\mathbb{R}xh4=$ can worry Black very much) 17... $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{Q}e7!$ (18...a6 19. $\mathbb{Q}c7\pm$) 19.g4 $\mathbb{Q}c4!$, and both 20. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $cxd4$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{R}hd8$ and 20. $\mathbb{Q}xa7$ $\mathbb{R}a8$ 21. $gxf5$ $\mathbb{R}xa7$ give good compensation for the pawn, thanks to the bishop pair.

14.g4 $\mathbb{Q}h4$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xh4$ $\mathbb{Q}xh4$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 17. $f3$ $b6$ 18. $b3$



We will see quite a few positions like this one in the next couple of chapters. Here, Carlsen started to lose track with 18...c5?!, which unnecessarily weakens the d5-square, and after 19.c4 ♕d7 20.♗g3 ♗e7 (after the exchange of bishops, White can prepare the advance of the kingside pawns at his leisure) 21.♕xd7 ♗xd7 22.♗c3 ♔d8?! 23.♗d5, his position was very unpleasant. After 23...c6 (better than 23...♗e8, which was played in the game), White has good possibilities to win the opposite-coloured bishops endgame that follows after 24.♗xe7 ♔xe7 25.f4, if necessary followed by ...♗h4+.

Caruana expected

18... ♕d7 19.c4 ♔d8

Intending to play ...♔c8 and ...♗d8.

20.♗g3! ♗e7 21.f4 g6 22.♗f1!±

Trading a pair of knights has proven beneficial for White, who is getting ready for f4-f5.

B) 11...♗e7



This immediate rerouting of the knight was practised quite a lot in 2015. Black prepares ...♗g6, or perhaps ...♗f5, according to how White develops his initiative.

12.b3

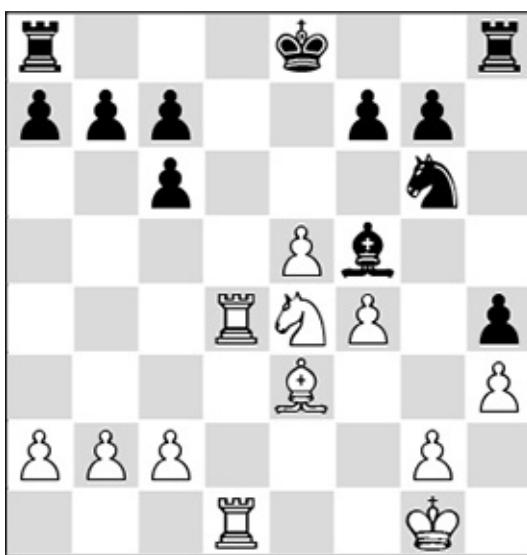
White has tried other alternatives.

a) **12.♗f4** was essayed in another Caruana-Carlsen game. Carlsen foiled White's plan with an attractive manoeuvre: **12...♗g6 13.♗h2** In Vachier-Lagrange-Bruzon Batista, Gibraltar 2016, the young French superstar preferred the less natural **13.♗g3!?**. The idea behind this strange move is revealed if Black had followed up as Carlsen did: **13...♗b4 14.♗e2 ♗e7 15.♗fd4 ♗f8 16.f4**, and the bishop is headed for a good position on f2. Bruzon Batista preferred **13...♗e7 14.♗d4 ♗f8 15.♗d3 h5 16.♗ad1 h4** (pinpointing the downside of the bishop on g3) **17.♗h2 ♗e6**, with a solid position. **13...♗b4!?** Shunts the knight, since **14.♗e4** allows **14...♗f5**. **13...♗c5** seems unnecessarily provocative; after **14.♗e4** (**14.e6!?** **♗xe6 15.♗xc7 ♗c8**) was played in Vachier-Lagrange-Aronian, Paris blitz 2016. Instead of **16.♗e4!?** **♗xf2+**, which left White with meagre compensation, **16.♗h2** would keep some pressure) **14...♗b6 15.c4! ♗f5 16.♗g3 ♗e6 17.♗ac1 c5 18.♗h5**

$\mathbb{Q}g8$ 19.g4 $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xd8+$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}d2!$, White advanced the f-pawn, and the position became dangerous for Black in Swiercz-Bruzon Batista, Atlantic City 2016. 14. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}fd4$ $\mathbb{Q}f8!?$ An interesting knight manoeuvre. 16.g4 h5 17. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ b6= The development of the bishop via b7 discourages White to advance the f-pawn two squares. 19.f3 c5 20. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}g5!$ And in the face of the threat 21...g6, Caruana decided to force a draw: 21.h4 hxg4 22.hxg5 gxf3+ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ $\mathbb{Q}xg5+$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}h3+$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}g5+$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}h3+$ $\frac{1}{2}-\frac{1}{2}$ Caruana-Carlsen, Baden-Baden 2015;

b) In Vachier-Lagrave-Topalov, St Louis 2015, White prepared the rapid advance of the f-pawn: 12. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 13.f4 The downside of the plan is that it allows the pawns to be blockaded. 13... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ h5! 15. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ h4? Black cannot afford so many luxuries. 16...b6= defends c5, preventing the break that happened in the game.

17. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$



analysis diagram

18.e6! $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}c5$ Opens the game before the opponent consolidates his position. One careless move has been enough to make the opposite-coloured bishops a factor in favour of the attacker. 19... $\mathbb{Q}h5$ It is important that after 19...b6 20. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ fxe6 21. $\mathbb{Q}d7$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xc7$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$, the bishop is indirectly defended. 20. $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 21.b3 $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ cxd5 23. $\mathbb{Q}c5$ c6 24. $\mathbb{Q}d4! \pm$

Although Black has parried the immediate threats, his position is very bad, with $\mathbb{Q}a4$ and c2-c4 in the pipeline.

12... $\mathbb{Q}f5!?$

Quite an original manoeuvre. The standard 12... $\mathbb{Q}g6$ is also possible, as in Svetushkin-Kryvoruchko, Greece tt 2012, which continued 13. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ (15. $\mathbb{Q}e1!?$ creates the threat 16. $\mathbb{Q}d6$, which Black could prevent with 15... $\mathbb{Q}e6\infty$) 15... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ (16. $\mathbb{Q}c1!?$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}f5\pm$) 16...c5 17. $\mathbb{Q}de2$ (17. $\mathbb{Q}df5\pm$) 17... $\mathbb{Q}xe2+$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ $\mathbb{Q}d8\infty$.

13. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}ce2$ a6

Preparing ...c6-c5. In Caruana-Carlsen, Stavanger 2015, the champion preferred 15...

$\mathbb{Q}d5?!$, which doesn't seem such a great idea without an enemy knight on c3. His opponent promptly got a significant advantage: 16.c4 $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 18.g4 $\mathbb{Q}a6?!$ (somewhat better is 18... $\mathbb{Q}c2$, but White has won several tempi to develop his initiative on the kingside, and he enjoys a typical advantage) 19. $\mathbb{Q}f5\pm$, and the black position is passive and unpleasant. You can find more detailed analyses in Game 15, in Chapter 20.

16.c4 c5 17. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}c2!$

A brilliant defensive move, alleviating the situation on the d-file. White was ready to play 19.e6 or 19. $\mathbb{Q}d5$.

19. $\mathbb{Q}xd8+$

Not better is 19. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$.

19... $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 20.e6!?

Hits before Black consolidates the position with 20... $\mathbb{Q}e6$.

20...f6

20... $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}g8!$ is simpler. 22. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ fxe6 23. $\mathbb{Q}xe6+$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}e5+$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$, and Black shouldn't have any serious problems to hold the game.

21. $\mathbb{Q}c1$



So far, we have been following the game **Grischuk-Fressinet, Reykjavik 2015**. The very strong French GM, a passionate defender of the Berlin, continued 21... $\mathbb{Q}f5?$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}h4!$ (Fressinet probably missed this intermediate move) 23... $\mathbb{Q}c2$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}h5$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 25.f4 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 26.g4 $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 27.f5=–, and the white pawn chain decided the outcome of the fight. Black is in danger, but a different, more modest retreating move gave better chances to defend:

21... $\mathbb{Q}h7!∞$

Black has prevented the opponent's manoeuvre, and it is unclear how White should continue the pressure on the kingside.

CONCLUSION

Unless you regularly play against strong grandmasters, it is quite likely that your opponent

doesn't know that 10. $\mathbb{Q}d1+$ is the only strong reply to 9...h6. It's a calculated risk, since the positions we have studied in this chapter are perfectly playable, especially the ones in line B.

CHAPTER 15

Eljanov's Repertoire

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.0-0 ♘xe4 5.d4 ♘d6 6.♗xc6 dxc6 7.dxe5 ♘f5 8.♗xd8+ ♔xd8 9.h3 ♘e7



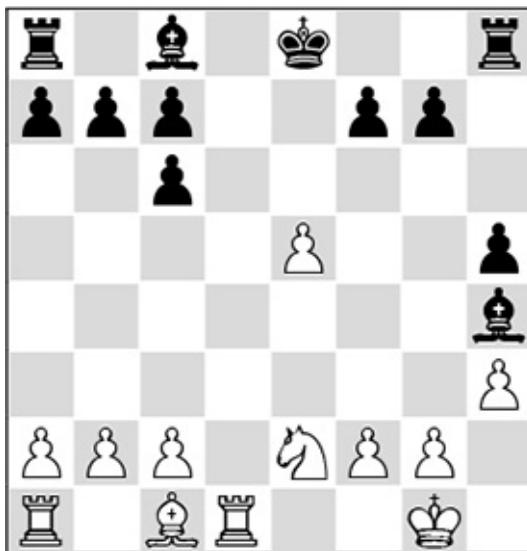
By the end of 2014, Eljanov began to adopt this developing move routinely, provoking the trade of a pair of knights. You might find this surprising, as we already know that Caruana advised against it, but the Ukrainian GM has found some interesting resources to avoid positions such as the one Carlsen had to endure in section A in the previous chapter.

A) 10.♘d1+ and B) 10.♗c3 are the white replies we will study in this chapter.

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♗f6 4.0-0 ♗xe4 5.d4 ♗d6 6.♗xc6 dxc6 7.dxe5 ♗f5 8.♗xd8+ ♔xd8 9.h3 ♗e7

A) 10.♗d1+ ♔e8 11.g4

White doesn't have to move the g-pawn just yet: 11.♗c3 ♗h4 12.♗xh4 Also possible is an approach based on advancing the f-pawn: 12.♗d4!? ♗g6 13.f4 h5 (restraining a white expansion on the kingside. Safer is 13...♗c5 14.♗e3 h5!, transposing to the game Vachier-Lagrave-Topalov, which we saw in line B from the previous chapter; the tempo spent on ...♗e7-c5 is offset by ...h6-h5, played by Topalov) 14.♗e4 h4 15.♗e3 a6 16.c4 ♗h5, as in Shirov-Aronian, Zurich rapid 2016, which continued 17.♗d3 f6 18.exf6 gxf6 19.♗f1 ♗d7 20.f5 ♗e5 21.♗c3 ♗f7∞. 17.♗e1 might be stronger, preparing the tactical idea 17...f6?! 18.exf6 gxf6 19.f5! ♗e5 (not good is 19...♗xf5? 20.g4!+-) 20.♗f4, with pressure. 12...♗xh4 13.♗e2 h5!



analysis diagram

The g-pawn hasn't moved forward, which limits White's active possibilities. From this position, which is more commonly reached with the move order from Chapter 16 (9.h3 ♗e8 10.♗c3 h5 11.♗d1 ♗e7 12.♗e2 ♗h4), different plans have been tried, none of which seem to be very dangerous:

a) Anand-Carlsen, St Louis 2015, continued 14.f3, intending to get back into a set-up with g2-g4. Carlsen avoided it with 14...♗f5 (also possible is 14...♗e7 15.g4 hxg4 16.hxg4 f5 17.exf6 ♗xf6!=, as in Dominguez Perez-Almasi, Havana 2014. Without a white knight on c3, the bishop does not have to worry about ♗e4). 15.♗d4 ♗g6 16.♗f4 ♗e7 17.g4 17.e6 ♗d6! is not dangerous, as is usually the case if e5-e6 does not come with an attack on the king. 17...♗d8 18.♔g2 hxg4 19.hxg4 ♗c5, and a drawn endgame was reached after exchanging on d4;

b) Hou Yifan-Adams, Wijk aan Zee 2016, saw 14.♗f4 ♗e7 15.a4 (Marin suggests the variation 15.♗d4 a6 16.e6 ♗d6! 17.exf7+ ♔xf7) 15...g5!? (the minority attack is a valuable weapon in this structure. Black takes action, supported by the light-squared bishop pointed at the opponent's majority that is in the process of being blocked) 16.♗e3 a5 17.f3 g4 18.♔h2 ♗d7 19.♗d2 ♗d8 20.♗ad1 gxf3 21.gxf3 h4 22.♗g1 c5∞, and Black's counterplay is quite dangerous;

c) In Sutovsky-Bacrot, Ashdod 2015, the Israeli GM with the white pieces, a formidable attacking player, preferred 14. $\mathbb{B}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 15. a4 a6 (preparing ...c6-c5 by ruling out $\mathbb{B}b5$) 16. $\mathbb{Q}f4!$? c5 17. e6 (this break would probably be stronger with the rook on e1 instead of d1) 17...fxe6 18. $\mathbb{B}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xc7$?! (19. $\mathbb{B}e5=$) 19... $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ 20. $\mathbb{B}ab1$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 21. $\mathbb{B}xb7$ $\mathbb{Q}xa4$, and White has trouble justifying the pawn sacrifice.

11... $\mathbb{B}h4$ 12. $\mathbb{B}xh4$ $\mathbb{Q}xh4$ 13. $\mathbb{B}c3$ h5

In Korneev-Aleksandrov, Khanty-Mansiysk 2013, the great Berlin specialist chose an interesting plan that so far hasn't attracted much of a following: 13...b6 14. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 15. f3 $\mathbb{B}d8$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ The great Olegario, as he is known in Spain, the country he represents, got little after 17. e6 $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xc7$ $\mathbb{B}xd1$ 19. $\mathbb{B}xd1$ $\mathbb{B}c8$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}xg3$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xg3$ f6=, but you might be more fortunate. One of the beautiful things about the Berlin is that, in spite of all the thorough analysis it has been submitted to, we can still find almost new, unexplored roads!

14.f3

Traditionally, in similar positions, the bishop would retreat to e7 before playing ...h7-h5, perhaps out of fear for 14.g5!?. However, the bishop escapes easily with 14...f6! (14... $\mathbb{Q}xh3$? 15. $\mathbb{B}d4$ loses a piece) 15. exf6 gxf6, and White has nothing after 16. $\mathbb{B}e4!$ fxg5 17. $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ 18. $\mathbb{B}xg5$ $\mathbb{Q}e7!$ and ... $\mathbb{Q}f6$. The bishop on f5 more than compensates for the pawn structure.



14...f5!?

We are following the game Adams-Eljanov, Wijk aan Zee 2016, which represents the latest trend with the ideas ... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ and ... $\mathbb{B}h4$.

a) A few years ago, Black was reluctant to touch his kingside. Most games (in the line 9. $\mathbb{B}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 10. h3 $\mathbb{Q}e7$) would continue more or less according to the following pattern: 14... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 16. $\mathbb{B}e2$ $\mathbb{B}d8$ 17. $\mathbb{B}xd8+$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 18. $\mathbb{B}f4$



analysis diagram

This position was reached in Jakovenko-Alekseev, Moscow 2008. The Chinese GM Wang Yue would allow the capture on e6 in similar situations, while Alekseev preferred 18... hxg4 19.hxg4 ♜c8±. We will examine the subtleties and the merits of both plans in Chapter 16, line C;

b) Already back in 2008, Eljanov was convinced that in this type of position, it is necessary to break up the pawn structure on the kingside. 14...f5 is an improvement over the plan with reference to his game against Grischuk (Elista, 2008), which continued 13... ♜e7 14.♕g2, and with the dark-squared bishop already secure, he followed up with 14... h5 15.f3 (reaching the same position as in line a) 15...hxg4 16.hxg4 f5 17.exf6 gxf6 18.♗f4, which gave him a slightly worse version of our main line. The game continued: 18...♜e6 18...f5 19.♖h1!± is too dangerous. 19.♖h1! Pointed out by the German GM Leonid Kritz as more accurate than 19.♗xc7, Grischuk's risky choice. After 19...f5 20.gxf5 ♕g8+ 21.♔f2 ♜c5+ 22.♗e2 ♕g2+ 23.♔d3 ♜xf5+ 24.♗e4, Eljanov kept excellent drawing chances. 19...♚f7 20.♗e4±;

c) In Sutovsky-Lysyj, Poikovsky 2015, the Russian GM played 14...f6, transposing to the main line after 15.exf6. In principle, 14...f5 seems slightly more accurate, since it avoids the extra option of 15.♗f4.

15.exf6

15.g5 is critical, intending to trap the bishop, but Black saves himself with 15...f4! 16.♗xf4 ♕f8, exploiting the fact that the rook is not defending the f-pawn. After 17.♖d4 (in case the bishop gets in trouble, it will be able to escape via f2, e.g. in the variation 17.♗e2 ♜xh3 18.♗h2 ♜e6 19.b3?! ♜f2†), it is possible to force a draw with 17...c5 (if you want to look for winning tries for Black, you might analyse 17...♜xh3!?) 18.♗e4 ♜f5 19.♗e2 ♜e6=.

15...gxf6 16.♗e2?!

White keeps chances of an edge with 16.♗f4 hxg4. In Villanueva-Krysa, Villa Martelli 2016, the alternative 16...♚f7 was played. Instead of the game continuation, 17.♖d2?! ♜e6 18.♗xc7 ♕ag8 19.♗f4? hxg4 20.hxg4 ♜xg4 21.fxg4 ♕xg4+ 22.♖g2 ♕hg8†,

the simple 17. $\mathbb{Q}xc7$ f5 18. gxf5 $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ was better, and now 19. $\mathbb{B}d4!$ disturbs the coordination between the bishops, although the bishop pair should give full compensation for the sacrificed pawn. 17. hxg4 f5! 18. g5! $\mathbb{B}g8$ Also possible is 18... $\mathbb{B}h5$, although in that case 19. $\mathbb{B}e2!$ introduces the possibility $\mathbb{B}g3$. Black is likely to obtain enough compensation by sacrificing the exchange after 19... $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}xg5!$ 21. $\mathbb{B}g3$ (21. $\mathbb{B}h1$ $\mathbb{B}xh1$ 22. $\mathbb{B}xh1$ $\mathbb{Q}xf4$) 21... $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ 22. $\mathbb{B}xh5$ $\mathbb{Q}d6\infty$. 19. $\mathbb{B}d2!$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 20. $\mathbb{B}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ The c7- and g5-pawns are equally tender. 21. $\mathbb{B}d1$ Unless anything strange happens, White is ready to consolidate his advantage by retreating the bishop and playing f3-f4. 21... $\mathbb{B}ae8!$



analysis diagram

Black has in mind 22. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}d5!$ 23. $\mathbb{B}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$, when his activity should compensate for the offside bishop. Also possible is 22.b3!?, with the idea of $\mathbb{B}d3$, although in that case Black will play ...b7-b6 and possibly ...c6-c5, preparing to transfer the bishop to the long diagonal. Here is an appropriate moment for the traditional comment: ‘the position requires further practical tests’. You might also feed this position to the computer and wait for several hours until finally ‘0.00’ appears (or not).

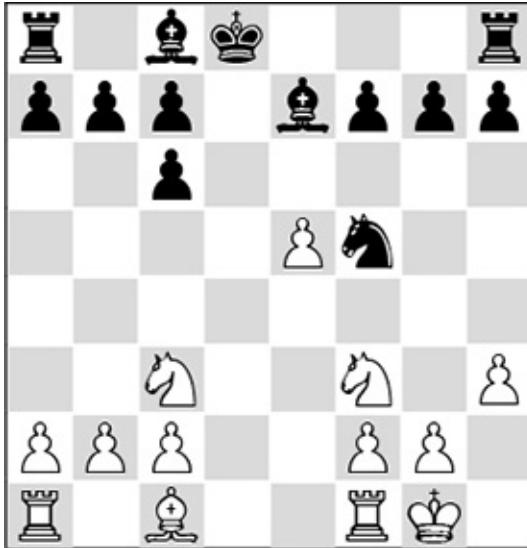
16... $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 17. b3

Sutovsky-Lysyj, Poikovsky 2015, continued 17. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ hxg4 18. f4xg4 f5 19. g5 $\mathbb{Q}e6$ (19... $\mathbb{B}e8!$? $\mathbb{B}f7$ is even stronger) 20. $\mathbb{B}d4$ $\mathbb{B}ag8$ 21. $\mathbb{B}xe6$ (not good is 21. $\mathbb{B}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 22. $\mathbb{B}e5+?$ $\mathbb{Q}e6-$ +) 21... $\mathbb{B}xe6$ 22. $\mathbb{B}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ 23. $\mathbb{B}e1+$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ $\mathbb{B}f7$.

17... $\mathbb{B}e8$ 18. $\mathbb{B}f4$ hxg4 19. f4xg4 f5 20. $\mathbb{B}f1!$

White maintains the balance, thanks to the somewhat exposed position of the enemy king.

B) 10. $\mathbb{B}c3$



We are in almost virgin territory: there are only forty-eight games with this position in *MegaDatabase 2017*. White abstains from the check on d1, arguing that this square can be occupied by the other rook, and that the black king may be worse on d8 than on e8.

10...♞h4

Eljanov's opening plan includes offering the exchange of knights even if White doesn't play g2-g4. As our main line, we are following the game **Grischuk-Eljanov, Reykjavik 2015**.

11.♝xh4

In Fressinet-Eljanov, Reykjavik 2015, the French GM avoided the exchange of knights with **11.♞d4!?**. Our shining lodestar, our Great Helmsman of the variation, had prepared an original idea: 11...c5 Also possible is 11...♞f5, but after 12.♞de2, the knight wants to hassle a bishop on e6 via f4, and also enables White to rapidly advance the f-pawn.

12.♞de2 c6! 13.♝e4 ♛c7



analysis diagram

This is not a very common position for the black king. Eljanov has analysed that the weakness on d6 will not be a major cause for concern. **14.♝f4** It is difficult to resist playing this move. 14.♝g5 ♜xg5 15.♝xg5 ♜e8 is not dangerous for Black, but 14.b3

was worth considering. **14...♝e6** **15.♝h2 ♕ad8** The immediate **15...g5!?** is also possible. **16.♞f4 ♝f5** **17.♛fe1 ♔b6** **18.♝g3 g5∞**

11...♝xh4

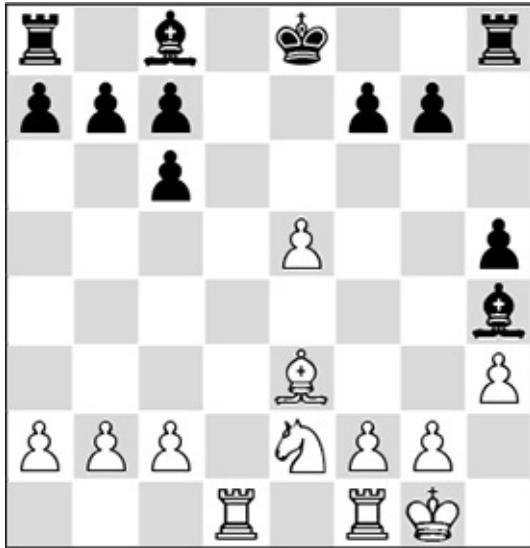


12.♝e2!?

A novelty! White keeps his developing options open, still defining neither the position of the bishop nor which kingside pawn will go forward. In this virtually unexplored position, analysis may be continued in several directions:

a) **12.g4** creates slightly different problems compared to variation A above. After giving it quite some thought, I have decided to recommend a more or less new plan: **12...h5** In Caruana-Garcia Palermo, Italy tt 2012, the veteran Argentine-Italian GM with the black pieces continued passively and allowed his opponent to achieve a typical advantage: **12...♝e7** **13.♝e3 h5** **14.f3 b6** **15.♔g2 ♔e8** **16.♕fd1 a5** **17.a4 ♘e6** **18.♝e2 c5** **19.♝f4 hxg4** **20.hxg4 ♛d7** **21.b3± 13.f3 ♔e7!?** With the king on d8, breaking in the centre is not that attractive: **13...f6!?** **14.exf6 gxf6** **15.♝f4 ♘e6** (**15...f5** **16.♕ad1+** is too risky), and White is better if he manages to prevent any ideas based on ...f6-f5. A good plan for that purpose is **16.♔h2!?**, preparing **♝g3**. **14.♝e3** Or **14.♝f4!?**, preparing e5-e6. **14...b6** The **♝h4** doesn't seem to be in any danger of being trapped, and meanwhile Black prepares ...c6-c5. A possible continuation is **15.♔g2 ♛b7** **16.♕fd1** (if the other rook is brought to d1, there will always be ...a6) **16...♕ad8** **17.♝e2 c5** **18.♝f4 hxg4** **19.hxg4 g5!?** **20.♝h5 ♔e6∞**;

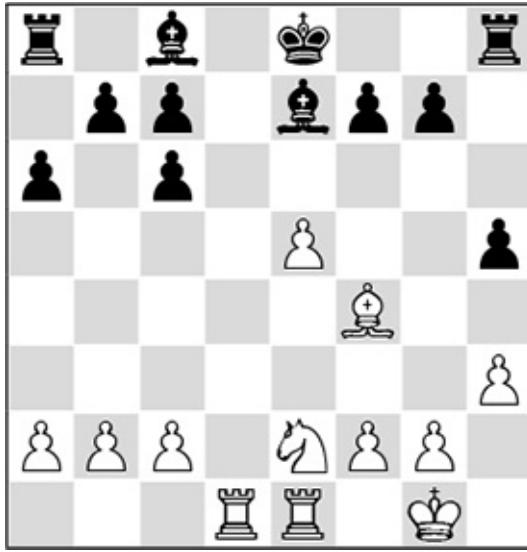
b) Vachier-Lagrange-Eljanov, Stavanger 2016, continued **12.♝e3 h5** **12...♝f5** **13.g4!?** is dangerous: **13...♝xc2** **14.♕ac1 ♛g6** **15.f4=** **13.♕ad1+ ♔e8** **14.♝e2**



analysis diagram

14... ♕e7 In Bacrot-Harikrishna, Spain tt 2016, the Indian star preferred the more passive 14... ♕d7. His opponent used the position of the ♕h4 to change the plan: 15.f3! (now, 15...h4 is not possible) 15... ♕d8 16.g4 ♕e7 17.♕g2 a5 18.b3 a4 19.♕g3 hxg4 20.hxg4 c5 21.♕h5 ♕g8 22.♕h1, and Black has landed into one of those passive positions in the style of Caruana-Carlsen, Gashimov Memorial 2014 (see variation A in Chapter 14, or variation C in Chapter 17), with the king in the centre disturbing the coordination between the rooks.

Vachier-Lagrave-Adams, Gibraltar 2017, continued with 14...b6 15.a4!. Vachier-Lagrave in *New in Chess 2017/2*: ‘An idea I had used the day before, in a different position against Abhijeet Gupta. The point here is either to get to play a4-a5, which could be a serious achievement for White, or force Black to play ...a7-a5 himself, when only in this particular position White gets any serious benefits out of it.’ 15...c5 (15...a5 16.♕d4 ♕d7 17.♕f4 and e5-e6 is unavoidable, since 17...c5 is met by 18.♗b5) 16.♘c3 (after ...c6-c5 has been played, the knight obviously belongs on either b5 or d5) 16... ♕f5 17.♗b5 ♕d8 18.♗d2 a6 19.♗c3± **15.♕fe1** The rooks are placed optimally for a central break. Also interesting is 15.f4, to which Eljanov was likely to respond with 15...f5 16.exf6 (otherwise, the bishop would reach e6, with a rock-solid blockade) 16...gxf6 17.f5 ♔f7 18.♗d4 (18.c4 b6 19.b3 ♕e8∞) 18... ♕d6∞. **15...a6** Prepares 15...c5 in response to 15.♕d4. 15... ♕d7 might be more accurate, with the idea of 16... ♕d8. **16.♕f4!?** Perhaps threatening to play e5-e6.



analysis diagram

16...g5!? Once again, we see this active move. 16... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}d4$; 16... $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 18.e6±; it is also possible to allow the break with 16...h4. **17. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 17...g4!?** 18.hxg4 hxg4 19. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}f8!$ ∞ **18. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 19.e6 $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 20.exf7+ $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}f3!$ $\mathbb{Q}xc2$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xg5+$ ± We will analyse all of this in further detail in Game 16 (Chapter 20).**

12... $\mathbb{Q}f5!?$

Perhaps 12... $\mathbb{Q}e8!?$ was safer: 13.f4 (13. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ and ... $\mathbb{Q}c8$) 13... $\mathbb{Q}f5$ ∞

13. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 14.f4

The Russian super GM always treats the Berlin endgame aggressively. The rapid advance of the f-pawn creates dangerous threats.

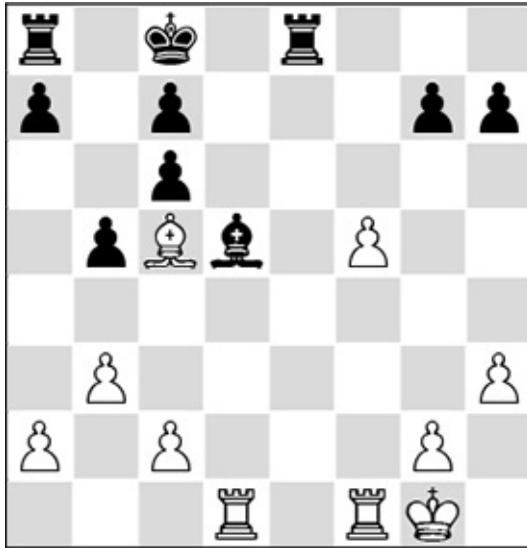
14... $\mathbb{Q}e7?!$

This retreat was not yet necessary. I prefer 14... $\mathbb{Q}c8!?$ ∞, avoiding future checks, and preparing to answer 15.f5! with 15...c5 16. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}g3$ ∞.

15.f5! $\mathbb{Q}c5$

White is well prepared for the action, but after 15...c5 16. $\mathbb{Q}f3!$ ±, White consolidates his space advantage on the kingside.

16. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 17.e6 fxe6 18. $\mathbb{Q}xe6+$ $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ b5 21.b3 $\mathbb{Q}c8$



Here, Grischuk continued 22. $\mathbb{Q}d1+!$, which allowed Black's king to get closer to the danger zone. After 22... $\mathbb{Q}d7!$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $g6$ 24. $f6$ $\mathbb{Q}xe1$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}xe1$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}xe8$ $\mathbb{Q}xe8$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}xa7$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$, the opposite-coloured bishops ending is a draw. However, White would keep some winning chances, either after 22. $\mathbb{Q}fe1$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 23. $g4\pm$, or after 22. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}f7!$ (22... $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}g4$ $g6$ 24. $fxg6$ $hxg6$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}xg6$ $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}f8+$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}xa8$ $\mathbb{Q}xa8$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 29. $h4+-$) 23. $\mathbb{Q}h4$ $h5$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}d4\pm$.

CONCLUSION

In this fascinating chapter, one of the most difficult to write, we have taken a peep into how a top-20 GM builds his opening repertoire. The theory of this variation is still in its infancy, but I believe I have managed to properly arrange the most important ideas.

If you want to play this variation with black, you must be sure that everything works well in the critical line 10. $\mathbb{Q}d1+$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 11. $g4$, and check out the latest plans with 10. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}h4$.

CHAPTER 16

The Blockade Variation

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♗f6 4.0-0 ♗xe4 5.d4 ♗d6 6.♗xc6 dxc6 7.dxe5 ♗f5 8.♗xd8+ ♔xd8 9.h3 ♔e8 10.♗c3 h5



This blocking pawn move is the most solid line for Black. In this chapter we will look at four white replies: A) 11.♖d1, B) 11.♗g5, C) 11.♗e2, and D) 11.♗f4.

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♗f6 4.0-0 ♖xe4 5.d4 ♗d6 6.♗xc6 dxc6 7.dxe5 ♗f5 8.♗xd8+ ♔xd8 9.♗c3

In this chapter, we will start with this knight move instead of the move h2-h3, to examine Black's idea explained below.

9...♔e8

The king goes back to his original square. As we saw in the historical introduction, one advantage of the king's new position is that it is better placed to deal with piece exchanges.

It is also possible to advance the h-pawn immediately, with usually a direct transposition to the variations that we will study in this chapter. However, Wei Yi-Giri, Bilbao 2016, followed an independent path: 9.h3 h5 10.♗c3 ♗e7 11.♗f4 ♗e6 12.♖ad1+ ♔c8!?



analysis diagram

This position with the king on e8 is the main starting point, and will be thoroughly analysed in section C of this chapter. With the king on the other half of the board, the position is essentially very different, as you will see in Game 17 (Chapter 20).

10.h3

10.♗e2 is a quite common alternative, but it doesn't seem particularly dangerous. Caruana-Giri, London 2014, continued 10...b6. The fianchetto is usually a good idea when the white knight moves away from d5. Also interesting is 10...♗e7 11.h3 ♗g6, when the white knight would probably have loved to be able to move to e4. 11.♖d1 ♗b7 The alternative is 11...♗a6!?, forcing the knight to make a choice. After 12.♗ed4 ♗xd4 13.♗xd4, Black can play 13...c5 now that b5 is defended, and after 12.♗f4 ♗b7 we reach a position that you will find later on in the chapter with the moves h2-h3 and ...h7-h5. The break 14.e6 leads nowhere after 14...♗d6!. 12.b3 ♕c8!? Preparing ...c6-c5 when White plays ♗d4. I don't see any anything wrong with 12...c5 and 13...♗xf3, a plan that we will see later. 13.♗b2 ♗e7 14.♗ed4 ♗xd4 15.♗xd4 ♕g8 16.♗f5 c5 17.c4 17.♖e1!, and if 17...♗d5, 18.♗e3 and 19.f4 would create more problems. 17...♗e4 18.♗g3 ♗g6 19.f4 h5! 20.f5 h4 21.fxg6 hxg3 22.gxf7+ ♗xf7 23.hxg3 ♗e6=

10.♗e2 leads to an interesting game, but I don't believe it is bound to shake the Berlin's

solid foundations in the variation with 9... $\mathbb{Q}e8$.

10...h5



The most solid plan, which began to become fashionable a few years ago. Instead of looking for greener pastures for the knight, Black decides to make use of its current position on f5, and proceeds to keep the opponent's pawn majority under control. White has tried several plans of development, but at the time of writing this chapter, Black seems to be holding his own against all of them.

A) 11. $\mathbb{Q}d1$

White waits for the bishop to be developed in order to play 11. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ and exchange bishops. If you want to know what the drawback of this idea is, ask the $\mathbb{Q}a1$.

11... $\mathbb{Q}e7$

If 11... $\mathbb{Q}e6$, 12. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ is annoying. In the line with 10...h5, Black is not very concerned about the exchange of his 'extra bishop', as long as he manages to secure the blockade of the pawns.

12.g3!?

Preventing a future 12...h4. Top GMs have tried two other methods to draw some water from this rather dry pit:

a) We understand the main move better after analysing the old-fashioned sequence 12. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 13.b3 (Game 18, Navara-Karjakin, Wijk aan Zee 2012, in Chapter 20). 13. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ h4 doesn't achieve anything either (Leko-Alekseev, Elista 2008), and 13.g4? hxg4 14.hxg4 $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xh6$ gxh6!+, opening the g-file, is suicidal rather than aggressive.

13...h4 14. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ Later on in the tournament, Ivanchuk rather unsuccessfully tried to improve on White's play: 14. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ a5 15.a4 $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}d8=$ Ivanchuk-Karjakin, Wijk aan Zee 2012. 14... $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ As Marin rightly points out, Black has no interest in bringing the bishop to g5. 17. $\mathbb{Q}f4!$? 17. $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ leads to equality: the king approaches his future blockading square.



analysis diagram

In the diagram position, Karjakin could have kept the position under control with 17... $\mathbb{R}h5=$, but instead he preferred the more ambitious 17... $\mathbb{R}g8!?$. The outcome of that game can be found in the sample games section (Chapter 20);

b) The manoeuvre 12. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ is more dangerous. Since after 12... $\mathbb{Q}e6$, 13. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ is unattractive, defenders of the black pieces have preferred 12... $\mathbb{R}h4$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xh4$ $\mathbb{Q}xh4$, transposing to Eljanov's Repertoire, which gives better chances to make the opponent's life more difficult than the main line.

12... $\mathbb{Q}e6$

Simple moves are often best. White's previous move seems to call for 12... b6, but with the knight still on c3, the future advance ...c6-c5 will always be met by $\mathbb{Q}d5$. Meanwhile, White has to find something useful, and in Adams-Anand, London 2014, England's number one player decided he should advance the a-pawn: 13.a4! $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 14.a5 c5 15. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}d8!?$ (15... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ is simpler, but Black recognises he is slightly worse) 16. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{R}f8$ 17.c4? (17.c3, controlling the d4-square, would maintain annoying pressure on the enemy position) 17... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 18. $\mathbb{R}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$, and the knight jumps to d4, with equality.

13. $\mathbb{Q}g5$

Nothing is achieved by 13. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{R}h6$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ $\mathbb{R}g6$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}f5=$, as in Karjakin-Akopian, Ohrid 2009.

13... $\mathbb{R}g8!?$

13...f6 was played in Anand-Kramnik, London 2010. Black equalised comfortably after 14.exf6! gxf6 15. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{R}c8!$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 17. $\mathbb{R}d2$ $\mathbb{R}cd8$ (17... $\mathbb{Q}b4!?$ 18. $\mathbb{R}e1$ $\mathbb{R}he8$, pointed out by Mihail Marin in his analyses for *ChessBase Magazine*, might be even stronger), but 14. $\mathbb{Q}f4!?$ $\mathbb{R}c8!$ (14...g5 15.exf6! gxf4 16. $\mathbb{Q}g5!$ fxg3 17. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 18.fxe7 gxf2+ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ 20. $\mathbb{R}e1+$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 21. $\mathbb{R}ad1$ $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ 22. $\mathbb{R}d7$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xd5+$ cxd5 24. $\mathbb{R}ee7\pm$, Marin) 15. $\mathbb{R}e1$ would keep some pressure in the position. The mysterious rook move seeks to reinforce the effect of moving the f-pawn.

14. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ f6! 15.exf6

The effects of the rook on the g-file are felt after 15. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ g5! 16. exf6 gxf4 17. fxe7 fxg3+ 18. fxg3 $\mathbb{R}xg3$, and Black stands well.

15...gxf6 16. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{R}c8!$



The bishop pair compensates for the bad pawn structure. We are following the game **Kamsky-Ragger, Bilbao 2014**:

17. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}d6?$!

Preserving the knight. 17...c5 and 17... $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}ed4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}d5=$ seem more comfortable.

18. $\mathbb{Q}ed4$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}h4$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ $\mathbb{Q}ge8$

Black now expanded with 22...c5, and his position was perfectly satisfactory.

B) 11. $\mathbb{Q}g5$

A relatively neutral try, preparing to exchange the bishop. The problem is that the black king will be well placed on e7, and it will be difficult to prevent the pawn majority from being blocked. We are following the game **Caruana-Karjakin, Wijk aan Zee 2013**:

11... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$



13. b3

A useful move to control the opponent's play on the queenside. Navara-Babula, Czechia tt 2012/13, continued **13. ♕d2 ♕d8 14. ♕xd8+ ♔xd8 15. ♕d1+ ♔e8! 16. ♘e2**. Nearly a quarter of a century ago, The Russian IM Gorbatov already experimented with the ideas in the Blockade Variation: 16. ♘xe7 ♔xe7 17. ♘g5 h4 18. ♘e2 g6!? (an interesting rerouting plan, keeping an eye on the blockade) 19. ♘f4 ♘g7 20. ♘f1 ♘f5 21. ♕d2 ♘e6 22. ♘fxe6 ♘xe6, and Black stood well in Gufeld-Gorbatov, Moscow 1992. When doing research, I always get the awkward impression that I am following in the footsteps of some master from the former Soviet Union, who years ago had already drawn the same conclusions as the ones I am currently desperately trying to reach. **16... ♘d5** A standard reply when the knight moves away from c3. **17. ♘xe7 ♔xe7 18. ♘g5 f6 19. ♘f4 ♕h6 20. exf6+ ♔xf6 21. ♘xd5+ cxd5 22. h4 c6 23. g3 ♔e7=**

13...h4

The normal blocking move, which carries the seal of approval of Kramnik and Karjakin. In Vachier-Lagrange-So, St Louis 2016, The Filipino-American superstar deviated with **13...a5**, trying to get to grips with the white queenside, made possible by White's previous move. The game continuation is instructive, as it shows how to fight with and against a pawn majority. **14. ♕d3 ♕d8 15. ♕xd8+ 15. ♕fd1 ♕xd3 16. ♕xd3**, which was played in Alsina-Glud, Spain tt 2011, allowed the extra option **16...h4=**, returning to the solid main line. **15... ♘xd8 16. ♕d1 ♘xg5 17. ♘xg5 ♔e7**



analysis diagram

Vachier-Lagrange continued **18. ♘e2 ♘h4! 19. g3 ♘g6**, and his opponent, having built a solid defensive position, went on to win the tournament. In *Informant* 129, A.Colovic mentions the instructive variation **18. ♘xe6 ♔xe6! 19. f4 b6 20. ♘f2 h4=**, but White maintains some chances of an edge with **18. g3!?**, avoiding the manoeuvre ... ♘f5-h4-g6.

14. ♘e4

14. ♘e2 ♘d5= is uncomfortable.

14...a5

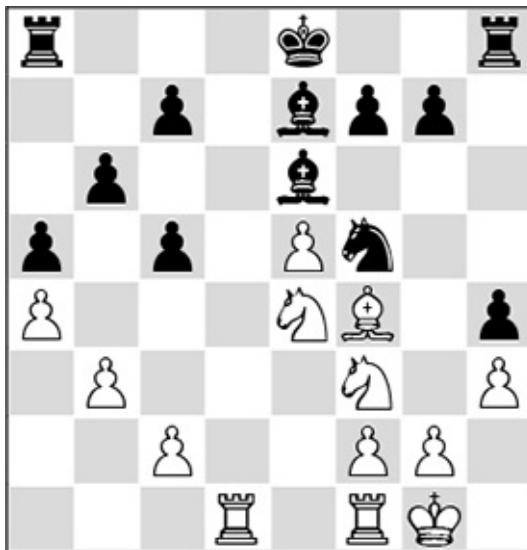
Aronian-Kramnik, London 2012, continued along the lines of the previous chapter: **14... b6 15. c4 a5 16. ♕d2 ♕d8 17. ♕fd1 ♕xd2 18. ♘xd2 c5 19. ♘f4 a4 20. ♘c3 axb3 21. axb3**

$\mathbb{Q}d8$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}g8!?$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}a1$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}eg5$ f6 26. exf6 gxf6, with good counterplay.

15.a4

Caruana decides to prevent the pawn advance from the previous note. The drawback is the weakness of b3.

15...b6 16. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ c5!



Threatening 17...c5-c4, and, even more importantly, supporting a later ... $\mathbb{Q}d4$.

17. $\mathbb{Q}eg5$ $\mathbb{Q}xg5!$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xg5$

It is important to note that the black king doesn't get trapped on e8 after 18. $\mathbb{Q}xg5$, thanks to the tactical trick 18... $\mathbb{Q}h5!=$, and the threat 19... $\mathbb{Q}d4$ either chases away the bishop or blocks the d-file.

18... $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}fe1$ $\mathbb{Q}e7=$

The blockade is impenetrable. Honestly, I'm not sure what Vachier-Lagrange had in mind to improve on White's play.

C) 11. $\mathbb{Q}e2$

This manoeuvre, which we have already seen in the introduction to this chapter, is stronger when the opponent's kingside has been slightly weakened by the advance of the h-pawn. I have chosen as a main line **Carlsen-Anand, ninth World Championship match game, Sochi 2014**.

11...b6!

Taking advantage of the fact that the knight has moved away from the d5-square. 11... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ is Aronian's favourite move, which gives White better chances to develop his initiative. Adams-Aronian, Reykjavik 2015, continued 12. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}h4$ (we already know that this is the common follow-up of ... $\mathbb{Q}e7$) 13. $\mathbb{Q}xh4$ $\mathbb{Q}xh4$ leads to typical positions from Eljanov's Repertoire, which we studied in the previous chapter. 14. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ (14. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ transposes to Vachier-Lagrange-Eljanov, Stavanger 2016) 14... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ g5!? 16. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}c5\infty$, Grischuk-Aronian, Beijing blitz 2012. 12... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $cxd5$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ c6 16. $\mathbb{Q}fe1$ Not so much threatening to play e5-

e6, but rather preventing the possibility 16...f6, which would free up a good square for the king. It looks as if Black has equalised, but we should bear in mind that he has lost the right to castle. Another interesting continuation is Inarkiev-Jakovenko, Novosibirsk 2016: 16. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ h4 (16...f6!?) 17. $\mathbb{Q}fd1$ $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 19. c4 d4 20. c5 $\mathbb{Q}hd8$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}d5!$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}e6!$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ cxd5 25. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}c8!$ In the rook ending, the centralised king and the passed pawn fully compensate for the pawn deficit, and Inarkiev went on to lose control, as well as the game. 16...h4 17. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}ed1$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 20. c4! d4 20... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}a3!$? (21.g4 hxg3 22.fxg3±) 21...a6 22.cxd5+ cxd5 23.g4± 21.b4 b6 22. $\mathbb{Q}f1\pm$

12. $\mathbb{Q}d1$

By the end of 2015, Grischuk introduced a subtle move order: 12. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ c5

Grischuk-Caruana, Skopje 2015, continued 12... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ $\mathbb{Q}e7?$! 14. $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ c5 16. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 17. c3 (takes away d4 from the knight) 17...f6? 18. exf6+ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}fe6!$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ (Caruana, who had analysed this position with the other rook on d1, realised too late that 19... $\mathbb{Q}e8?$ loses to 20. $\mathbb{Q}e4+!$) 20. f4 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}d7$ $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ $\mathbb{Q}xf1$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xf1$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 24. g4 hxg4 25. hgx4, and the white attack is decisive. Super GMs commit this kind of error quite often. 13. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$



analysis diagram

14... $\mathbb{Q}xf3!$ In Vachier-Lagrange-Kramnik, Dortmund 2016, Kramnik preferred 14... $\mathbb{Q}e7?$! 15. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ (15. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{Q}d8!$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xc7+$ $\mathbb{Q}e7\#$) 15... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xd8+$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$, and he proved that the black position is perfectly playable, as you can see in Chapter 20, Game 19. 15. gxf3 $\mathbb{Q}d4!$ More accurate than 15...c6, which was played in Grischuk-Giri, London 2015. After 16. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 17. f4 $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ 18. fxg5 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}d6$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 20. f4 $\mathbb{Q}ad8?$! (better is 20... $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$, with excellent drawing chances; in rook endgames, active play is paramount) 21. $\mathbb{Q}fe1$ g6 22. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 23. c3 $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}ed1$, Grischuk's advantage was already considerable, but his chronic time trouble prevented him from finishing the job. 16. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 17. f4 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 18. c4 $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}fe1$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}h4$ $\mathbb{Q}f5=$ (Ponomariov-So, Doha 2015) Black ignores the knight on d5, and keeps the kingside

blockaded.

12... ♜a6!

Prophylaxis: by defending b5, ...c6-c5 is possible if White moves a knight to d4.

13. ♜f4 ♜b7



14.e6

In Adams-Nakamura, Baku 2015, Adams tried to improve on White's play with 14.a4 ♜e7 15.e6 ♜d6, but the tempo gained was not enough to rock the boat: 16.exf7+ (16.a5 c5=) 16... ♛xf7 17. ♜g5+ ♛f6 18. ♜e4+ ♛f7 19. ♜g5+ ♛f6 20. ♜e4+ ♛f7 21.a5 c5 22. ♜xd6+ cxd6 23.c4 ♜a6 24.b3 b5 25.cxb5 ♜xb5 26.b4 cxb4 27. ♜b1 ♜ac8 28. ♜xb4 ♜c5 29. ♜b2 ♜c6= It's funny that Nakamura relies on the Berlin when he has to play for a draw, voluntarily foregoing castling: a powerful weapon that he used against Nepomniachtchi in the World Cup.

14... ♜d6!

Again we see, contrary to what was thought during the early years of the Berlin's popularity, how advancing the e-pawn does not per se guarantee any specific advantage to White. The game didn't last much longer:

15.exf7+

15. ♜e1 f6! 16. ♜g6 ♜g8

15... ♛xf7 16. ♜g5+ ♛f6 17. ♜e4+ ♛f7 18. ♜g5+ ♛f6 19. ♜e4+ ♛f7 20. ♜g5+ ½-½

If White declines the repetition, the black bishops will threaten to rule the board.

D) 11. ♜f4

The most common move, which Carlsen used in the seventh game of the World Championship match (Sochi, 2013).

11... ♜e7 12. ♜ad1 ♜e6 13. ♜g5

In Caruana-Navara, Skopje 2015, another interesting and relatively new idea was essayed: 13.b3 h4 14. ♜e4 a5 15. ♜eg5, going after the enemy bishop. After 15... ♜h6 (15... ♜xg5!?) 16. ♜xe6 ♜xe6 17.a4 c5 18. ♜fe1 ♜d8 19. ♜xd8+ ♜xd8 20. ♜e4, White has

achieved a little more than in the main variation, even though, in all honesty, it doesn't look that there are many options to get an effective kingside advance going.

13... ♜h6



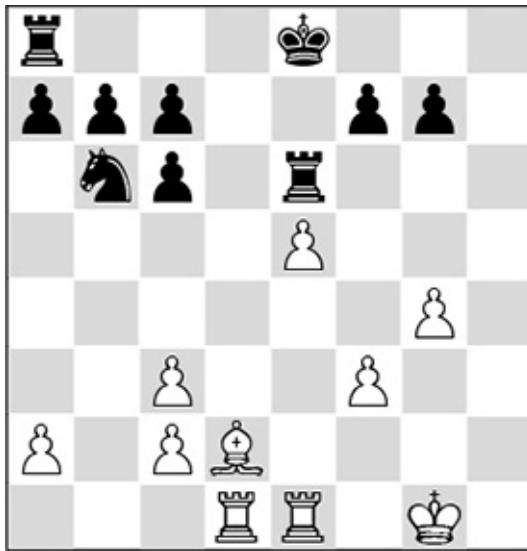
An essential link in the blockading plan. Besides the capture on e6 with the rook, Black prepares the exchange on g5, followed by ... ♜g6 and ...f7-f6.

14.g3

Intending to interfere with the opponent's ideas, and at the same time avoiding ...h5-h4. White has tried other ideas from the previous diagram position:

a) The straightforward plan 14. ♜xe6 ♜xe6 15. ♜fe1 ♜d8 16. ♜xd8+ ♛xd8 17. ♜e4 c5 18. ♜g5 ♜xg5 19. ♜xg5+ ♛d7 did not give anything bankable in Dominguez Perez-Alekseev, St Petersburg rapid 2012. The blockade is virtually unassailable;

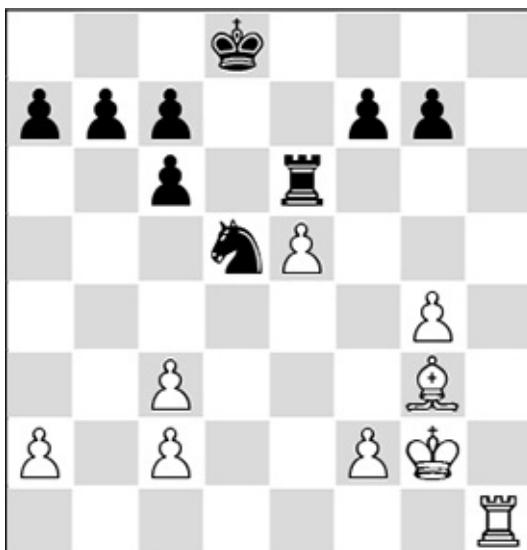
b) Right here, the most intense theoretical debates revolve around **14. ♜fe1**, which prevents 14... ♜xg5 15. ♜xg5 ♜g6 16.h4 f6. Black's most common reply is **14... ♜b4!**, seizing the opportunity to get rid of the dangerous knight at the cost of enabling the advance of the kingside pawns. **15.g4 hxg4 16.hxg4 ♜e7 17. ♜xe6** The alternative 17.f3, keeping the knight alive, actually involves a pawn sacrifice, but Black can block the queenside and equalise completely: 17... ♜xc3 18.bxc3 ♜d5! (safer than 18... ♜xa2 19. ♜e4 ♜h8 20.e6! ♜xe6 21. ♜xc7, which has been played in several high-profile games, e.g. Vachier-Lagrave-Carlsen, Stavanger 2016. As we will see in Game 20 in Chapter 20, White has enough compensation for the pawn, but his winning chances aren't so great) 19. ♜d2 ♜b6 20. ♜xe6 ♜xe6



analysis diagram

21. ♔f2 (21. ♔g5 ♕g6 doesn't lead anywhere, since if 22.f4? ♔f8! wins a pawn with ... f7-f6) 21... ♕d8 22. ♔g5 ♕xd1 23. ♕xd1 ♕d7=, Vachier-Lagrave-Nakamura, St Louis 2016.

17... ♕xe6 18. ♔g2 18. ♔d2 is an ambitious idea, intending to advance the f-pawn without weakening the queenside, but Black can neutralise it with 18... ♕d8! 19.f4 ♔xc3 20. ♔xc3 ♕d5 21. ♔d2 g5!=. **18... ♕xc3** Less safe is 18... ♕d8, as in Caruana-Nakamura, St Louis 2014, which continued 19. ♕xd8+ ♔xd8 20. ♕d1+ ♔c8 (Krisztian Szabo points out that 20... ♔e8 is weaker on account of 21. ♔e2! ♕g6 22. ♔g3 ♕xe5 23. ♕d4±) 21. ♔g3 (now, not good is 21. ♔e2, since at the end of the previous variation, the black rook has the e8-square) 21... ♕xc3 22.bxc3 ♕g6 23. ♕d4±. Black keeps excellent drawing chances, but his king has ended up on c8 rather than on e8, further away from the opponent's majority. **19.bxc3** White prepares f4-f5 after the bishop drops back, but there seem to be enough defensive resources. **19... ♕d8!** Better than 19... ♕d5 20. ♔d2 b5 21.f4 ♔d7 22.f5 ♕ee8 23. ♕e4±, Caruana-Karjakin, Sao Paulo/Bilbao 2012. **20. ♕xd8+** 20. ♕b1 b5 21. ♔g3 ♕d5 22.c4 ♕c5 23. ♕e4 a6=, Karjakin-Grischuk, Moscow rapid 2013. **20... ♔xd8 21. ♕h1 ♕d5 22. ♔g3**



analysis diagram

I bet this endgame has appeared on more than one super GM's computer screen, or rather, on that of their seconds, who must work for their masters as modern galley slaves, rowing at the pace of the engines' suggestions. After studying it quite deeply, I have come up with an interesting plan to press a little. **22...g5** This apparently risky move, which prevents the f-pawn from moving forward, has been Black's choice in all games in which this endgame was reached. If anything goes wrong, you might want to analyse **22...h6!?**. **23.c4** In Wei Yi-Wang Hao, Xinghua 2015, the player with the white pieces, the youngest member of the 2700+ club, preferred **23.h8+** **d7** **24.c4 b6** (**24...f4+** **25.xf4 gxf4** **26.h5 c5!** looks risky, but Black is just in time to create enough counterplay with ...**a6**) **25.f8 e7** **26.b8** (another possibility is **26.g8!?** **xc4** **27.xg5**). It looks like Black can force a draw with **27...g6** **28.xg6 fxe6** **29.f3 g5!**) **26...xc4** **27.xb7 d7** **28.xa7 xe5** **29.a4 g6** **30.a7 e5** **31.f3 f6=.** **23...c3?!** Here, **23...f4+?** **24.xf4 gxf4** **25.h5** is even more dangerous than in the Chinese encounter from the previous note, with the black king further back, but more solid is **23...b6**, which would transpose to Wei Yi-Wang Hao after **24.h5** (**24.h8!?** deserves attention). **24.f3** **24.f4!** creates more complicated problems, both after **24...gxf4** **25.h4+ d7** **26.f6!**, and after **24...e2** **25.f5 g8** **26.h2!**, which keeps e5-e6 as an imminent threat, and if ...fxe6, f6. **24...g6** **25.a3 a4** **26.e4 c5+** **27.f5 e6** **28.h8+ d7** **29.c3 g7+ 30.e4 e6=** The best defensive player in the world has built an impregnable fortress. **31.f3 c5** **32.f2 a6** **33.e3 b6** $\frac{1}{2}-\frac{1}{2}$, Anand-Karjakin, Khanty-Mansiysk 2014.

14...xg5

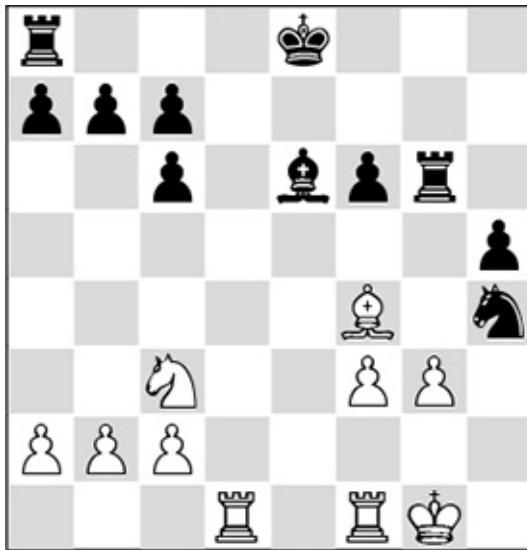
Also possible is **14...c4**. In Vachier-Lagrave-Giri, London 2015, Black seemed to equalise relatively easily: **15.fe1 g6** **16.ce4 d8** **17.xd8+ xd8** **18.b3 d5** **19.c4 d4!** (a temporary piece sacrifice that improves on Kramnik's play in his game against Adams from the London Chess Classic 2014: **19...xg5** **20.xg5 e6** **21.g2 c5** **22.xe6 xe6** **23.d1 d4** **24.g4 hgx4** **25.hxg4 a6** **26.d2 a3** **27.e3 a5** **28.xd4 cxd4** **29.f3**, and Black experienced certain problems in the rook endgame) **20.cxd5 cxd5** **21.d6+ cxd6** **22.exd6+ e6** **23.f3 f6** **24.e3 d7=.**



15.Qxg5 g6 16.h4

White sacrifices a pawn to avoid the forced draw that would follow after 16. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}h4$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}f3+$.

16...f6 17.exf6 gxf6 18. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}xh4$ 19.f3



White has more than enough compensation for the pawn here, but Black should have enough defensive resources to hold the game.

19... $\mathbb{R}d8$

In Ngoc Truong Son Nguyen-Karjakin, Doha 2015, Black preferred a more passive defence: 19... $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{R}c8$ 21. $\mathbb{R}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}e2!$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ a6, and here, instead of 24. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ 25. $\mathbb{R}d7+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 26. $\mathbb{R}xh5$ $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}gxf4$ $\mathbb{R}g7$ 28. $\mathbb{R}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}f7=$, it was possible to keep the initiative with the preliminary 24.b3!?, and if 24...c5, 25. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ 26. $\mathbb{R}d7+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}e3\pm$, exploiting the fact that d5 is free for the rook to drop back to; not a big deal, but in this variation, novelties are only played in the hope of creating perhaps a minor mishap, rather than any serious problems.

20. $\mathbb{Q}f2$

It is possible to keep both rooks with 20. $\mathbb{R}de1!?$, as in Bacrot-Anand, Baden-Baden 2015, which continued 20... $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 22. $\mathbb{R}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{R}c8$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$, and here, instead of 25.c4 b6 26. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{R}e8=$, White could have kept some pressure with 25. $\mathbb{R}d1$, and if 25...b6, 26. $\mathbb{Q}a6\infty$.

20... $\mathbb{R}xd1$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xd1$

Better than 21. $\mathbb{R}xd1$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3!$, and White has no prospects of any advantage in the endgame with two pieces for a rook.

21... $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 22. $\mathbb{R}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}xa2!$

Exploiting the fact that White's pieces aren't well placed to trap the bishop.

23. $\mathbb{R}xh5$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 24.g4

24. $\mathbb{Q}xc7$ $\mathbb{R}h6$ led to a quick draw in the game Solak-Bacrot, Yerevan 2014. The engines' evaluation is around +0.30 in similar positions, which may have discouraged grandmasters from exploring the 13th and 14th move alternatives more deeply.

24... ♜d6 25. ♖h7



Defenders of the white cause have tried flogging this dead horse, although without too much success. This proves how deeply the Berlin has been analysed, as well as how solid the variation with 9... ♛e8 and 10...h5 is.

25... ♜f7

25...f5 was played in Giri-Radjabov, Tashkent 2014. White could have obtained some advantage with 26. ♖xc7 ♜b5 27.gxf5!.

26. ♜e3 ♜d8?!

In Anand-Giri, London 2015, the Dutch GM decided that exchanging rooks was a priority, and did not defend the c-pawn, obtaining a quick draw: 26...b6 27. ♜g2 (27. ♜xc7 ♖h6=) 27... ♖g8 28. ♜xc7 ♖h8 29. ♖xh8+ ♜xh8 30. ♜e3 ♜f7 31. ♜g3 ♜h6!. Without the possibility of playing f4-f5, it makes no sense to continue the struggle: 32. ♜f4 ♜f7 33. ♜g3 ♜h6 ½-½

27. ♜f5 c5 28. ♜g3 ♜e5

No doubt taking into account the following piece sacrifice. The Macedonian GM Aleksandar Colovic, who commented on the Sochi match in his blog, believes a safer line is 28... ♜d5 29. ♜e4 b6 30. ♜c3 (30. ♛e3 c4 doesn't give anything) 30... ♜e6 31. ♜b5 c6 32. ♜xa7 ♜d7, but after 33. ♖h1!, the knight gets out. Objectively the endgame must be a draw, although Black will suffer a bit.

29. ♖h8+

29. ♜xe5 fxe5 30. ♜e4!? is possible, even though after 30...b6, the sacrifice on g4 cannot be averted.

29... ♖g8 30. ♜xe5 fxe5 31. ♖h5



31... ♕xg4!

After the game, Anand denied having studied the endgame resulting from this sacrifice as part of his preparation for the match, but then, World Championship contenders are by no means legally bound to reveal all their secrets during press conferences... After

32.fxg4 ♕xg4 33. ♕xe5 b6=

Anand managed to resolutely defuse his opponent's winning tries, which were based on transferring the king to the queenside, putting the knight on d5 and looking for a winning rook exchange with ♕e7.

CONCLUSION

The solid Blockade Variation has had a remarkable theoretical development since the variation became fashionable five years ago, resulting in variations with semi forced moves beyond move 25. Without a doubt, this is due to the great difficulties White faces to obtain even the slightest of advantages. Right now, I only see a few possibilities to pester Black in the line with 12. ♔e2, as well as in the alternatives to the 13th and 14th moves in line D.

CHAPTER 17

9... ♕e8, lines without ...h7-h5

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♗f6 4.0-0 ♗xe4 5.d4 ♘d6 6.♗xc6 dxc6 7.dxe5 ♗f5 8.♗xd8+ ♔xd8 9.h3 ♕e8
10.♘c3



Black has several alternatives to the solid 10...h5, which in general give White better chances to seize the initiative. In this chapter, we will analyse 10...♗e6, 10...b6 and 10...♗e7, but these are not the only moves worth mentioning: 10...a5 and 10...♗b4 were briefly analysed in the historical introduction, while we will deal with 10...♗e7 in Game 22, Nakamura-Topalov.

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♗f6 4.0-0 ♗xe4 5.d4 ♗d6 6.♗xc6 dxc6 7.dxe5 ♗f5 8.♗xd8+ ♔xd8 9.h3 ♔e8
10.♗c3

A) 10...♗e6!

This move became fashionable during the last quarter of 2015, mainly as a result of efforts by Nakamura and Mamedyarov, two aggressive players who are happy to defend the black side of the Berlin. Black simply develops the bishop, hoping that White will compromise his position by chasing it around.

11.g4

Starting thematic play on the kingside. A more modest treatment with 11.♗d1 was tried in Anand-Carlsen, London 2015. The World Champion followed up with the original 11...♗c5!?. Black is not far from equality after 11...♗b4 12.♗e2 ♗d5!. Shirov-Hracek, Jurmala rapid 2016, continued 13.♗fd4 ♗xd4 14.♗xd4 ♗d8 15.c3 ♗f8 (more comfortable is 15...♗c5, and if 16.♗f5, 16...♗g8) 16.♗f4 ♗c5 17.e6 ♗xd4! 18.exf7+ ♗xf7 19.cxd4 ♔d7 20.♗e5 ♗hg8, and White has nothing. 12.g4 ♗e7 13.♗g5 ♗d5!? 14.♗ge4 14.♗xd5 cxd5 15.e6 f6 16.♗f7 ♗f8 17.♗f4 ♗c8 18.♗g3∞ looks attractive. In his notes for *Informant* 127, endgame guru Karsten Müller claims that White is better, but the knight might be left offside. 14...♗b6 15.♔g2 ♗d8 16.♗f4 ♗g6 17.♗g3 h5 18.f4 hxg4 19.hxg4 ♔e7 More or less equivalent is 19...♗h4+ 20.♗xh4 ♗xh4 21.♔g3 ♗h8± . 20.♗h1 ♗d4 21.♗xd5+ cxd5 22.♗c3 ♗xc3 23.bxc3 ♔d7 24.f5± The pawns in combination with the strong bishop gave Anand the edge, even though the position remains difficult.

11...♗e7 12.♗d4 ♗d7



Black has been forced to retreat, but he has prepared the thematic move ...h7-h5 in return.

13.f4

The sharpest approach, gaining space on the kingside, is more promising than the other alternatives that have been tried at the highest level:

a) Grischuk-Nakamura, London 2015, continued 13.♔h2, a typical manoeuvre, preparing to support the g-pawn: 13...c5! 14.♗db5!? 14.♗de2 is safer, although Black is comfortable after 14...h5 15.♔g3 ♗c6!, and if 16.f4?! there may follow 16...♗b4. 14...

8) d8 Black's play seems extremely dubious, with both the king and the light-squared bishop losing tempi, but the fact that the knight is going to be out of play on a3 compensates for all the disadvantages. 15. ♜e3 a6 16. ♜a3 b6 17. ♜e4? 17. ♜c4∞ 17... h5! 18. ♜g3 hxg4 19. hxg4 ♜c6 20. ♜g5 ♛e8 21. f4 f5!, and Black is taking the initiative thanks to the somewhat exposed situation of the white king. Don't miss the exciting continuation in Game 21 (Chapter 20).

b) In Caruana-Nakamura, London 2014, the greatest exponent of the white cause forced play with 13. ♜e1 h5 14. e6 fxe6 15. ♜xe6, but his opponent responded cold-bloodedly: 15... ♜xe6 16. ♜xe6 ♛d7! 17. ♜e2 hxg4 18. hxg4 ♜g6 19. ♜g5 ♜d6 20. ♜e4 ♜h7= Black's activity stymies White's plans to do anything purposeful with his pawn majority.

13... h5 14. f5 hxg4 15. hxg4 ♜h4

Black's activity makes it difficult for White to get in e5-e6 under favourable circumstances.

16. ♜f4



16... ♜d5

More solid than 16... ♜d8?!. Ni Hua-Maze, Gibraltar 2016, continued 17. ♜e3 ♜c8?!, and instead of 18. ♜e4? g6, which gave Black very strong counterplay, White could have won a pawn with 18. ♜f3 ♜h8 19. ♜xa7! (even better than 19. ♜e1±), for if 19... b6, there follows 20. ♜b8!.

17. ♜xd5 cxd5 18. ♜f3 ♜h8 19. ♜d2!?

An attempt to improve on Karjakin-Mamedyarov, Baku 2015, where Black equalised completely after 19. ♜e3 c5 20. c3 g5! (radically solving the problem of his lack of space) 21. ♜xg5 ♛h6 22. ♜f2 ♜g8=.

19... c5 20. e6 fxe6 21. fxe6 ♜c6

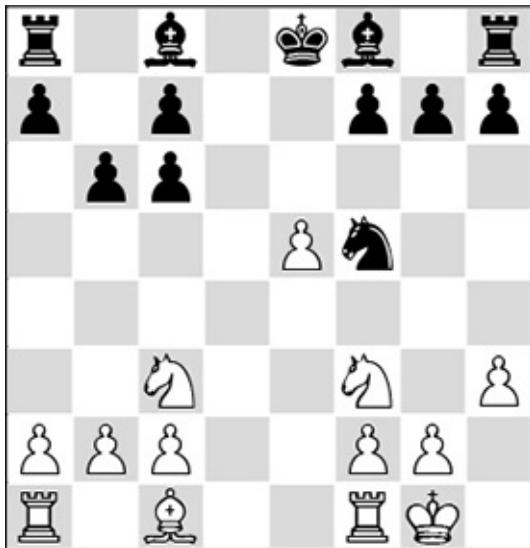
After 21... ♜xe6 22. ♜e1 ♛d7 23. ♜e5+ ♜d6 24. ♜f7+ ♜xf7 25. ♜xf7∞, Black has a very difficult defence.

22. ♜f7! d4 23. ♜f1

An interesting position to analyse. White's initiative looks dangerous, but his king is not

very safe.

B) 10...b6



The bishop fianchetto is an attractive yet dangerous method of development, since Black will need several tempi to defuse the possibility of $\mathbb{B}b5$ or $\mathbb{B}d5$ after the advance of the c-pawn. The fianchetto had gone out of fashion, until Caruana restored it against Vachier-Lagrange in the 2015 London Chess Classic.

11. $\mathbb{Q}d1$

In Radjabov-Carlsen, Kallithea 2008, quite an old game if we take into account how fast the theory of this variation has developed, the Azeri GM continued with the passive 11.a3?!, using a tempo to prevent the possibility ... $\mathbb{Q}b4$, and soon saw his opponent equalise against him without any major trouble: 11... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ c5 13. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3!$ (this is usually what the end of the fianchettoed bishop's short-lived existence looks like. The white pawn majority loses its dynamism after the pawns get doubled) 14.gxf3 c6 15. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 17.f4 f6=

11... $\mathbb{Q}b7$

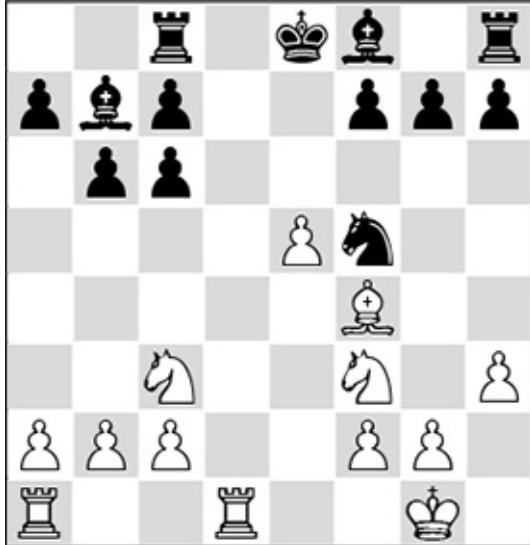
During the second half of 2016, some important games were played with the alternative **11... $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$** , which loses a tempo but diverts the white knight from the d5-square. Vachier-Lagrange-Vallejo Pons, Baku 2016, continued: 13. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}ed4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 16.g4 h5 17. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ (17. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ hxg4 18.hxg4 f6! 19. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}c8=$) 17...g6 18. $\mathbb{Q}h6$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ bxc5 20.g5 $\mathbb{Q}c8$ was played in Anand-Topalov, St Louis 2016. Black's activity compensates for his tripled pawns. **13... $\mathbb{Q}e7$** The bishop must retreat before playing ...c6-c5. **14. $\mathbb{Q}ed4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$**



analysis diagram

16.a4!? 16.e6 $\mathbb{Q}f6!$ is not very dangerous; we already know that e5-e6 isn't usually troublesome for Black. 16. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ g5! and ... $\mathbb{Q}g8-g6$ don't seem to give a great deal either, so Vachier-Lagrave employs a typical reinforcement. **16...g5!?** **17. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ a6** Taking the sting out of a4-a5, but now the b-pawn is weaker. **18.e6** $\mathbb{Q}d6$ **19. $\mathbb{Q}xd6$** **19.b4!?** might be a better bet for an advantage. **19... $\mathbb{Q}xd6$** **20. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ fxe6** **21. $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$** **22. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd1+$** **23. $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ c5 ∞/\pm** . In the game, the 'extra bishop' once again saved Black, by creating threats against the white queenside pawns at the critical moment.

12. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$



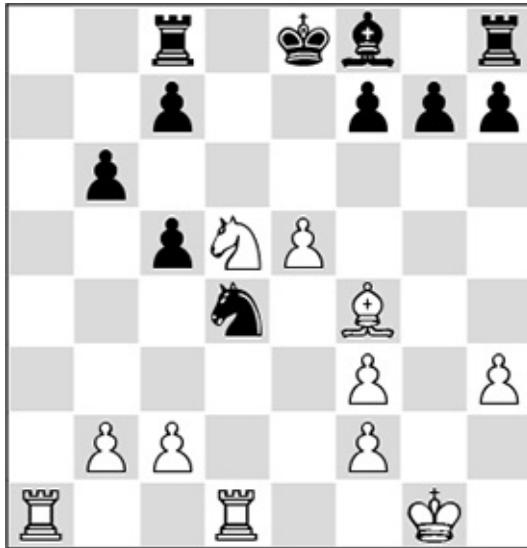
13.a4!

An important contribution to the white attack when the enemy rook has abandoned the a-file. The aforementioned game Vachier-Lagrave-Caruana continued with the obvious 13.e6, but the quiet 13... $\mathbb{Q}d6!$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 15.exf7+ $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}e5+$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ leaves White without any real threats against the exposed king. After 17. $\mathbb{Q}g4+$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 18.a4 a5 19. $\mathbb{Q}e5+$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}g4+$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}e5+$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 22.f4 $\mathbb{Q}ce8$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ g6 24. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$, Black has consolidated his position, and as soon as he activates his bishop he won't have any problems. The fight ended peacefully: 25. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}ed1$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ ½-½

13...c5

The slower 13... $\mathbb{Q}e7$?! 14.a5 c5, as in J.Polgar-Carlsen, Kristiansund rapid 2010, is met by 15.axb6 axb6 16. $\mathbb{Q}b5$! (instead of the direct 15. $\mathbb{Q}b5$, as played by Polgar), and Black is in serious trouble. Somewhat better is 13...a5, but after the inevitable ...c6-c5, White has the additional option of plonking the knight on b5.

14.a5 $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 15.gxf3 $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 16.axb6 axb6 17. $\mathbb{Q}d5$!



The position looks dangerous for Black. Saric-Efimenko, Khanty-Mansiysk 2010, continued 17...c6 18. $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$, and, instead of the unsound exchange sacrifice 19. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$?, White had the brilliant 19. $\mathbb{Q}d7$!, and if 19... $\mathbb{Q}xd7$, 20.e6+ with advantage. Regardless of whatever it was that Caruana had prepared against this plan, Stockfish recommends the following:

17... $\mathbb{Q}xc2$!? **18. $\mathbb{Q}a7$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$!**

With the c2-pawn off the board, the knight can defend everything from b5, e.g. in the event of 19. $\mathbb{Q}g2$. If White wants to seek any advantage, he must sacrifice two pieces for a rook.

19. $\mathbb{Q}xc7+$ $\mathbb{Q}xc7$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xc7$ $\mathbb{Q}e2+$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}h2$

Other king moves don't seem to make any difference.

21... $\mathbb{Q}xf4$

White can make a draw whenever he wants, but it is unclear how he can achieve more. 22. $\mathbb{Q}c8+$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}d6$ is pretty scary if you don't have an engine at hand, but after 23...g5! 24. $\mathbb{Q}c7+$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$!, with the idea of ... $\mathbb{Q}d8$ and perhaps ... $\mathbb{Q}e7$, the rook can get out via g8-g6, and Black is holding his own. How lovely to see that comforting 0.00 evaluation on the screen after coming back from the shower.

What can be said about this? Modern opening preparation looks more like scientific management and mass production rather than art, but industrial coating is often better than the handmade stuff from the old days.

C) 10... $\mathbb{Q}e7$



The Cinderella from Eljanov's Repertoire. In this line, the king has lost a tempo by going to e8, which gives White time to arrange his set-up on the kingside. Even so, Black's position is playable, as long as he doesn't play passively.

11.g4

It is also possible to play in the style of Eljanov's Repertoire: 11.♘e2!? ♘h4 (11...h5 transposes to Chapter 16, variation C), a line in which Black currently faces some difficulties.

12.♗xh4 ♗xh4



analysis diagram

In this practically unexplored position, White can play 13.♕f4, as in Bruzon Batista-S.B.Hansen, Esbjerg 2002; 13.♕e3, in the style of Vachier-Lagrange-Eljanov; or 13.f4!? ♕f5 14.♗d4 ♕e4∞.

Not so good is 13.♗d4?! c5, preparing Lasker's king manoeuvre: 14.♗b5 ♕d7!=
11...♘h4 12.♗xh4 ♗xh4 13.♔g2!

The best move order to get to the ideal piece arrangement. 13.♗d1 h5 14.f3 f5! transposes to Adams-Eljanov, Wijk aan Zee 2016, which we analysed to equality in Chapter 15, whereas 13.♗e2 h5 14.f3 allows 14...b6!?, always an attractive developing scheme when

the knight moves away from c3. Shirov-Steingrimsson, Germany Bundesliga 2011/12, continued 15. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $hxg4$ 17. $fxg4$ (if 17. $hxg4$, Black might consider 17... $g5!?$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}h5$ $\mathbb{Q}e2$, and White has nothing better than to force a draw with 19. $\mathbb{Q}f6+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}d7$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 21. $e6=$), and instead of 17... $\mathbb{Q}e7!?$ 18. $b3$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 19. $e6!$ $\mathbb{Q}hd8$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}f1$, after which Shirov managed to display some of his trademark magic, Black would actually be for choice after 17... $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $c5\bar{=}$. 19. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ is not annoying, because of 19... $\mathbb{Q}d7$.

13...h5 14.f3 $\mathbb{Q}e6$

Kotronias-Kritz, Port Erin, 2007, continued 14... $a5$ 15. $a4$ $b6$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ (the bishop doesn't go to e6, so as to avoid any trouble with a knight appearing on f4) 18. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $c5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 20. $c4$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 21. $b3$ $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xd1\pm/\mp$. White can pile up the pressure by manoeuvring the knight via g3-h5.

The time lost in moving the king back to e8 makes 14... $f6!?$ too risky a move. After 15. $exf6$ $gxf6$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $f5$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}g3!$, the black king feels uncomfortable in the centre.



15. $\mathbb{Q}e3$

a) 15. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $f6!$ 16. $exf6$ $gxf6$ looks reasonable for Black, who can ignore the threat on the c-pawn: 17. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $hxg4$ 18. $hxg4$ $f5!;$

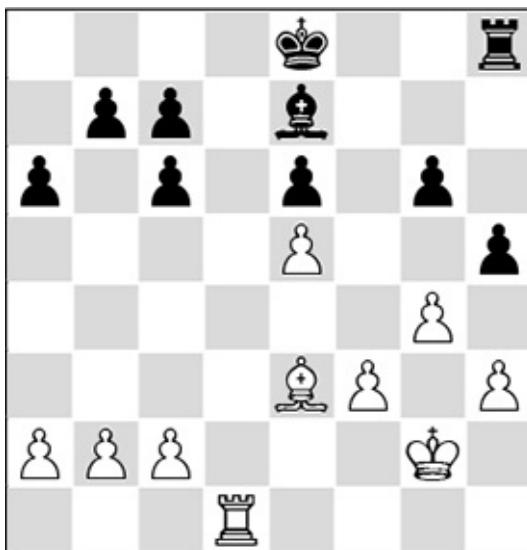
b) 15. $\mathbb{Q}f4!?$, as in Sutovsky-Onischuk, Poikovsky 2008, might be a better try. The bishop takes away the best square from the knight, but it prevents ... $f7-f6$. 15... $a5$ A common resource to create tension on the queenside, where Black, it should not be forgotten, has a pawn majority of his own. 16. $b3$ In the game, White allowed ... $a5-a4$, and after 16. $\mathbb{Q}fd1$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $a4$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $fxe6$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xd8+$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}d1+$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$, he was unable to press in the endgame. 16... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 17. $a4$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}fd1$ $hxg4$ 19. $hxg4$ $f6$ Otherwise, White will improve the position of the knight, following the scheme from Kotronias-Kritz, which we analysed in the note to 14... $\mathbb{Q}e6$. 20. $exf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xd8+$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}d1+$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}e4\pm$ It may not be a big deal, but White can still press.

15... $\mathbb{Q}d8!$

We are following a classic chess encounter from Catalonia: **Lopez Martinez-Oms Pallisse, Barcelona 2008**. Oms's fine strategic sense allowed him to find the best way to

prepare central activity.

a) The Catalan derby is now our main line, but at the time, Black would remain passive and allow the bishop trade on e6, as in Sutovsky-Howell, Antwerp 2009, or Adams-Wang Yue, Dresden 2008. This last game continued **15...♝e7 16.♞e2 ♜d8** Neither **16...♝c4 17.♝fe1 ♜d8 18.♝f4 hxg4 19.hxg4±**, mentioned by Kritz, nor **16...f6?! 17.♝f4 ♜c4 (17...♚f7 18.exf6 ♜xf6 19.♝xh5±) 18.♝fe1 hxg4 19.hxg4 fxe5 20.♝g6 ♜h7 21.♝xe5↑ work.** **17.♝f4 g6 17...hxg4 18.hxg4 ♜c8 19.♜h1± 18.♜fd1 a6 19.♜xd8+** Better than Adams' choice **19.b3 ♜d7 20.♜d3?!**. **19...♛xd8 20.♜d1+** And here the two games converged. Wang Yue brought the king to c8, whereas Howell preferred to bring it to e8; with the pawn still on f7, the king should be on e8 to block the majority, but in this case, there are no major differences. Let's follow the game Sutovsky-Howell, where the Israeli GM showed an elegant plan to break Black's resistance. It is important not to move the pawns on the queenside, as far as possible. **20...♚e8 21.♝xe6 fxe6**



analysis diagram

22.f4 ♜h7 23.♜d2 ♜h8 24.♜d1 ♜h7 25.♝f2 ♜h8 26.♛f3 hxg4+ 27.hxg4 ♜h2 28.♛g3 ♜h7 29.♛g2 ♜h8 30.♜h1 ♜xh1 31.♛xh1 ♜b4 32.♝e3 b5 33.♛g2 ♛f7 34.♛f3 ♛e8 35.♛e4 ♜e1 36.♛d3 ♜b4 37.♝d2 ♜e7 38.♛e4 ♜c5 39.♝a5!



analysis diagram

An excellent position for the bishop. After the f4-f5 break, the c-pawn will fall, and the white king will go to the queenside to finish off the game. Perhaps the endgame can be defended differently, e.g. without playing ...b7-b5, but Berlin players have abandoned this passive and depressing plan of defence;

b) The immediate 15...f6!? is also playable after 16.exf6 gxf6. It may not seem like a big deal, but White is a bit better after the trade of bishops: 17. \mathbb{Q} f2 \mathbb{Q} xf2 18. \mathbb{R} xf2 \mathbb{Q} f7 19. \mathbb{R} e1 \mathbb{R} ae8 20. \mathbb{Q} g3±



16. \mathbb{R} fd1 f6!

16... \mathbb{Q} e7?! 17. \mathbb{R} xd8+ and 18. \mathbb{Q} e2± leads to positions similar to the one that we examined in the previous note. An important detail is that the immediate 17. \mathbb{Q} e2?! allows Black to equalise with 17...hxg4 18.hxg4 \mathbb{R} d5! and the only way to defend the e-pawn is by trading rooks.

17. \mathbb{R} xd8+

Now 17. \mathbb{Q} f2 cannot be played, since the black rook penetrates via the h-file. White annoys a bit more with 17.exf6!? gxf6 (possible is 17... \mathbb{Q} xf6 18. \mathbb{R} xd8+ \mathbb{Q} xd8 19. \mathbb{R} d1+ \mathbb{Q} e7 20. \mathbb{Q} d4, with only a symbolic advantage to White) 18. \mathbb{Q} e2 \mathbb{Q} f7 19. \mathbb{Q} f4 hxg4 20.hxg4, even though the position is certainly defensible.

17... \mathbb{Q} xd8 18.exf6 gxf6 19. \mathbb{R} d1+ \mathbb{Q} c8



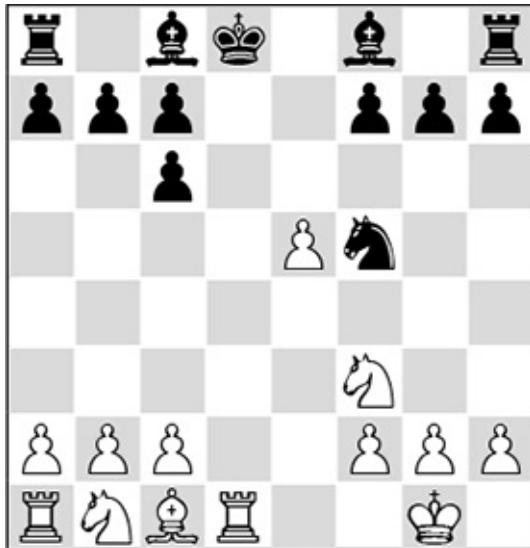
And Black managed to equalise, even though Super Lopez kept some pressure in the endgame after 20. $\mathbb{Q}d4!?$ $b6$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ (21... $\mathbb{Q}g8!?\infty$ might be somewhat better) 22. $\mathbb{Q}e4$.

CONCLUSION

In the somewhat risky variations A and B, Black must be careful, and you should thoroughly check the most critical variations before you venture going down the path GMs have laid out in recent times. Line C is playable yet passive, and more of educational rather than theoretical interest; white players would do well to look into Sutovsky's idea, 15. $\mathbb{Q}f4$.

The Check Variation

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♗f6 4.0-0 ♗xe4 5.d4 ♗d6 6.♗xc6 dxc6 7.dxe5 ♗f5 8.♗xd8+ ♔xd8 9.♖d1+



A relatively fashionable continuation. White avoids any ideas based on ...♗d7 and ...♔c8, and reaches less well-trodden positions than the ones stemming from 9.h3 or 9.♗c3, albeit at the cost of prematurely defining the position of the rook, which now occupies its colleague's most natural square.

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♗f6 4.0-0 ♗xe4 5.d4 ♗d6 6.♗xc6 dxc6 7.dxe5 ♗f5 8.♕xd8+ ♔xd8 9.♖d1+ 9...♚e8

9...♝d7? doesn't lose outright, but the black position is deplorable after the simple 10.♗g5 (not good is 10.e6? fxe6 11.♗e5 ♗d6) 10...♝h6 11.♗c3 ♕c8 12.♝f4±.

10.♗c3

Of course, 10.h3 is also possible, and is very likely to transpose to some of the lines either from this chapter, Eljanov's Repertoire (Chapter 15), or, after 10...h5, to the Blockade Variation (Chapter 16).

From this position, we will analyse two options in which Black tries to show that the rook is not too well placed on d1:



A) 10...♝e7

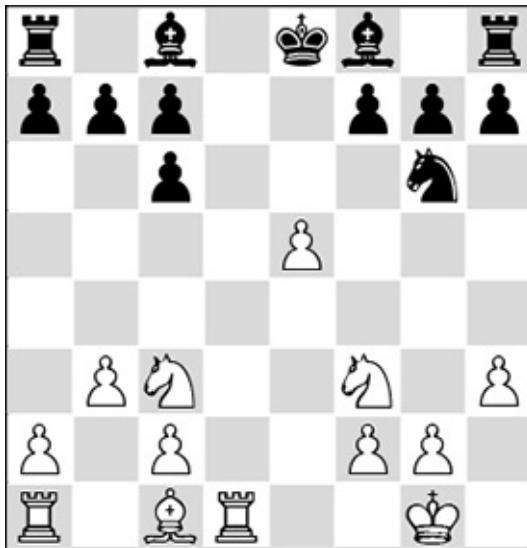
It is natural to reroute the knight in this position, now that White must lose a tempo to place the rooks on d1 and e1, which is the most dynamic set-up.

11.h3

Necessary to prevent the annoying 11...♝g4.

11...♝g6 12.b3

The strongest and most common plan. After the fianchetto, White will relocate his rooks, and ♘e4 will create threats in the centre. In the game Bologan-Karjakin, Baku 2016, the Moldavian GM with the white pieces achieved less than nothing after 12.♗e2 ♜e7 13.♗f4 ♜xf4 14.♗xf4 c5 15.c4 h5 16.♗g5 ♜f5 17.f3 h4 18.♗f2 ♜h6!=, and the black rook became very active on the queenside.



12... ♕e7

Delaying the development of the light-squared bishop. In Xiong-Bruzon Batista, Chicago 2015, the Cuban GM who handled the black pieces preferred the immediate **12... ♕d7 13. ♔b2 ♖f4**. This typical manoeuvre, bringing the knight to e6, is a novelty in this position. **13... ♖d8**, in the style of the aforementioned game Nakamura-Topalov, worked out well for Black in Goloshchapov-Aronian, Istanbul 2003, which continued **14. ♖d2 (14. ♖e2 and 14. ♖e4 are stronger, with similar ideas as in the main line) 14... ♖f4 15. ♖ad1 ♕e7 16. ♖e2 ♖xe2+ 17. ♖xe2 c5=**. White, a very young American GM, replied with **14. ♖d4 (14. ♖e4 ♖d8 15. ♖e1 ♕e6∞ looks more dangerous) 14... ♖e6 15. ♖d2 ♖d8 16. ♖ad1**. Here, Bruzon Batista could have equalised with **16... ♖b4**, but since he was fighting an opponent rated 200 points below him, he preferred **16... ♖e7 17. ♖e2 c5 18. ♖c3 ♕c6 19. ♖d5 h5 20. c4**, which leaves Black solid but under some pressure. The whole variation with **9. ♖d1+** is relatively unexplored, and leaves ample space for further research.

13. ♔b2

The immediate **13. ♖e4**, as in Volokitin-Kryvoruchko, Lviv 2015, allows Black to develop more comfortably: **13... b6! 14. ♖e1** (nothing is achieved with **14. ♖d4 ♕d7**, and the e-pawn is en prise) **14... ♕f8 15. ♔b2 c5 16. ♖ad1 ♖f4** (another typical manoeuvre, accomplishing the knight's deployment) **17. ♖d6 ♕a6!** (**17... ♕e6?** is weaker, on account of **18. ♖b5 c6 19. ♖d6±**) **18. ♖f5 ♖e6 19. ♖d7** is not dangerous, and otherwise Black is going to play ...g7-g6 and ... ♗g7.

13... ♖f5

Unless there is anything immediate, it is good to provoke the knight to go to d4, since later, the tempo invested can be won back with ...c6-c5.

Bologan-Leko, Reykjavik 2015, shows the strength of White's plan: **13... h5 14. ♖e4 a5 15. ♖e1!** (White accepts the loss of time, but the rooks on the central files will create threats, such as e5-e6 and ♖d6) **15... ♕f8 16. ♖ad1 h4 17. ♖d6! ♖xe5 18. ♖xe5 ♖xd6** gives the advantage to White with either capture on d6, and otherwise White manages to trade the light-squared bishop in favourable circumstances. We will see the instructive

continuation of this encounter in Game 23 in Chapter 20.

Another option would be 13...b6 14. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}e1$,



analysis diagram

reaching the position from the main line but with the b-pawn on b6, which favours White in this position, as the c6-pawn is undefended. Black would be forced to play 15... $\mathbb{Q}f4$, with similar ideas as in the following note.

14. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}d8!$

15... $\mathbb{Q}f4$ is perfectly playable but less comfortable. After 16. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$, White can incorporate the f-pawn into the attack with 19.g3 or 19. $\mathbb{Q}c1!?$, with promising play.

16.e6

The thematic break looks particularly dangerous in this position. However, Black defends cold-bloodedly:

16... $\mathbb{Q}c8!$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$



18. $\mathbb{Q}a4$

This may look surprising, but there is nothing better.

18... ♜xb2 19. ♜xb2 ♕g8!

A small improvement over 19... ♜d5 20.exf7+ ♔xf7 21. ♜e3 ♜e5 22. ♜d3 ♜e7 23.f3=, which was played in Volokitin-Vocaturo, Jerusalem 2015.

20.exf7+ ♔xf7 21. ♜e3 ♜f4

Black's idea: there is time to activate the knight.

22. ♜ad1 ♜ge8 23. ♜xd8

And a draw was agreed in Fedorchuk-Ipatov, Turkey tt 2015. After 23. ♜xd8 ♜xd8 24. ♜d1 ♜e8 (trading rooks seems unwise), it is not easy to chase away the knight, since if 25.h4, there comes 25... ♜e2+!, followed by an annoying visit on g3 or c3, and otherwise Black will play ...g7-g5. In this type of position, the light-squared bishop compensates for the doubled pawns on the queenside.

B) 10... ♜e7

A solid plan, with the additional attraction of constituting a complete repertoire for the Berlin endgame, in combination with Chapter 15 (Eljanov's Repertoire), so it shouldn't surprise you to meet Eljanov again here.



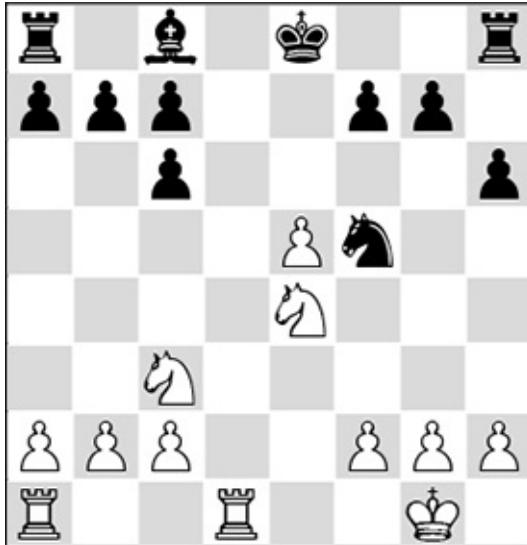
11. ♜g5

As we already know, trading bishops doesn't guarantee any advantage per se, but White relies on the future mobilisation of his kingside pawns. 11.g4 ♜h4 transposes to line A from Eljanov's Repertoire, whereas 11.h3 allows Black to choose between Eljanov's Repertoire with 11... ♜h4!? and variation A from Chapter 16. In fact, in the game Kamsky-Ragger, which I took there as our main line, this move order was used.

11... ♜xg5

11...h6 isn't bad either, but after 12. ♜xe7 ♜xe7 13. ♜d4, White keeps better chances to mobilise his pawns than in the main line.

12. ♜xg5 h6 13. ♜ge4



13...g5!

A radical solution to the problem of the position, more commonly seen in the plans based on the king going to c8. Now, the e-pawn is isolated, and it is difficult for White to exploit the weakness created on the kingside. You may not be surprised to find that this is the first choice of Maestro Stockfish... White keeps a slight edge both after 13... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 14.f4 $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 15.g3 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}hd8$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ h5 20. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ (Shankland-Eljanov, Doha 2014), and after 13... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ b6 17.f4 $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ h5 21. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ c5 22. $\mathbb{Q}ce4$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 23.c3 (Volokitin – Aleksandrov, Wroclaw rapid 2014).

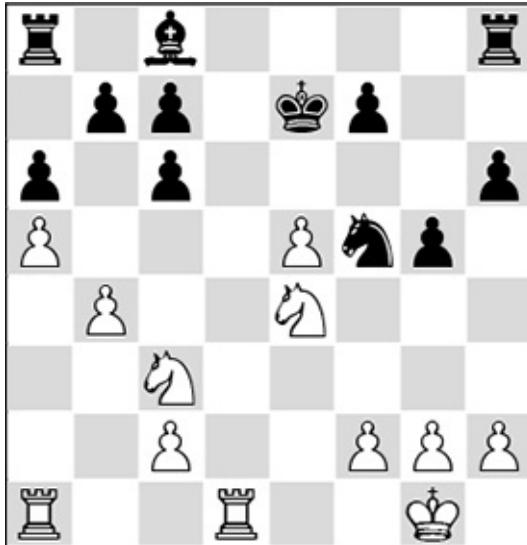
14.b4

White tries to fix the enemy pawns on light squares, but this plan is not very dangerous. If Black plays accurately, he can also neutralise any attempts based on f2-f4, e.g. after 14. $\mathbb{Q}d3?$, $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ $\mathbb{Q}h4!=$ (but not 15...b6 16. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 17.f4! $\mathbb{Q}xf4\pm$).

14...a6 15.a4 $\mathbb{Q}e7$

The knight can also be rerouted straight away: 15... $\mathbb{Q}h4$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}c5$ b6 17. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}e1?!$ (19.a5? ∞) 19...a5! 20.b5 c5 21.e6 cxd4 22.exd7+ $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ $\mathbb{Q}ad8$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}xd4+$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}ed1?!$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4!$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}d8\mp$, Naroditsky-Hovhannisyan, Riga 2015.

16.a5



16... $\mathbb{Q}h4!$ 17. $\mathbb{B}c5$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 18. $f3$ $b6$ 19. $\mathbb{B}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 20. $\mathbb{B}a4$ $\mathbb{R}hb8!$ 21. $\mathbb{B}ab2$ $\mathbb{R}d8$

And in Vachier-Lagrange-Eljanov, Biel 2015, Black maintained the balance because of his strong bishop and the weak e5-pawn.

CONCLUSION

The fact that 9. $\mathbb{R}d1+$ is relatively booming can be explained on the ground that White is in need of creating some new problems. However, I don't believe that it will become more important than the main idea based on $h2-h3$ and $\mathbb{B}c3$, since Black can choose between different plans, rendering the rook not optimally placed on the d1-square.

The Almasi-Kramnik Variation

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♗f6 4.0-0 ♗xe4 5.d4 ♗d6 6.♗xc6 dxc6 7.dxe5 ♗f5 8.♗xd8+ ♔xd8

A) 9.♘c3 ♗d7



B) 9.h3 ♗d7



In this final chapter, we will analyse the plan that meant the end of the chess world as we knew it in the year 2000. Black's plan of development is ambitious, but always within the limits that the Berlin naturally imposes on any black player's aspirations. At the cost of a tempo, Black makes sure he reaches the structure with the king on c8 and the bishop on e6, which, if White doesn't react carefully, will give him good counter-attacking chances on the queenside.

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♗f6 4.0-0 ♗xe4 5.d4 ♗d6 6.♗xc6 dxc6 7.dxe5 ♗f5 8.♗xd8+ ♔xd8

A) 9.♘c3 ♘d7: plans without h2-h3

In the Almasi-Kramnik Variation, Black develops more slowly than in the line with ...♔e8, which has prompted the attacking side to try aggressive set-ups which, as of yet, don't involve moving the g-pawn.

A1) 10.♗d1 ♔c8 11.♗g5 ♗e8



This plan began to be debated soon after the Kasparov-Kramnik match. At first, it was considered very dangerous for Black, but there seem to be enough defensive resources.

12.b3

12.♘ge4 is less logical, moving the knight before it is forced to do so, but at one point it may be useful to be able to play ♗g5. Inarkiev-Romanov, Vladivostok 2012, continued 12...b6 13.f3!?. Little by little preparing to advance on the kingside. After 13.b3, Black can choose between the main line or do without ...♔e7. In *From London to Elista*, Bareev analyses the variation 13...c5 14.♗b2 ♗d4 15.♗d5!? (15.♗d2 ♔b7 16.♗d5 ♗d8 17.c4 ♗c6 18.♗xd4 cxd4 19.♗xd4 ♗a3 20.♗d2 ♗he8∞, Leko-Kramnik, Budapest rapid 2001) 15...♗xc2 16.♗ac1 ♗b4 17.♗xb4 cxb4 18.♗d6+ ♗xd6 19.exd6 c5 20.♗e1 ♗b8=. 13...h5 13...c5 14.♗d5 ♔b7 15.c4 h6!∞ is also interesting. 14.♗g5 ♔b7 15.b3 15.♗f2 seems more useful, but it is unlikely that White gets any advantage. 15...c5 16.♗f4 Prepares to play ♗g5 against ...♗c6. Not better is 16.♗d5 ♗c6 17.c4 ♗e8. 16...♗d4 17.♗d2 And here, instead of 17...♔e7? 18.♗d5 ♗d8 19.b4, which gave the initiative to White, Black could have ignored White's idea: 17...♗c6!∞, and 18.♗g5?! doesn't lead anywhere after 18...f6.

12...b6

It is possible to play 12...a5 first, which worked well in Svidler-Almasi, Khanty-Mansiysk 2010, after 13.a4 b6 14.♗b2 ♗e7 15.♗ge4 ♔b7 16.♗d3 ♗d8 17.♗xd8 (in the main line, White doubles up on the d-file, but now 17.♗ad1 ♗xd3 18.♗xd3 c5, and ...c5-c4 might be coming very soon) 17...♗xd8 18.♗d1 ♗c8 19.f3 h5, and Black is doing well. After 20.♗e2 ♗d7 21.♗f2 c5 22.c4 ♗e8 23.♗f4 h4, the seven times Russian Champion acquiesced to a draw by repetition with 24.♗d5 ♗e6 25.♗f4 ♗e8 26.♗d5 ♗e6 27.♗f4,

assessing 27.g4 hxg3+ 28.hxg3 ♕h6 as not promising him any advantage.

Things are not so clear if White continues his development: 13.♕b2 c5!? (otherwise White doubles on the d-file, and it is unclear how useful ...a7-a5 was) 14.♘d5 h6! 15.♗e4 a4∞

13.♖d3

Doubling rooks is a typical method to increase the pressure.

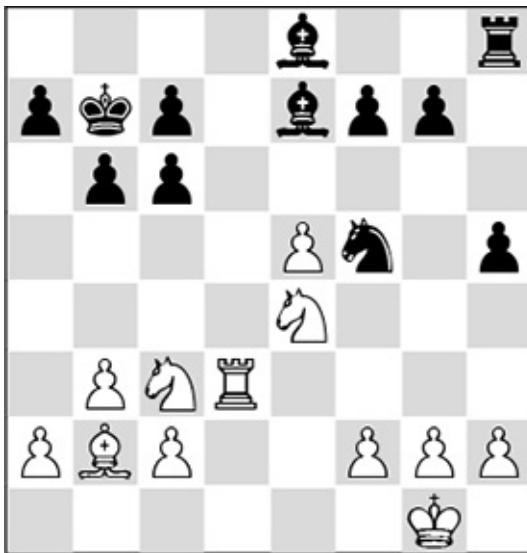
13...♚b7 14.♕b2 ♜e7 15.♗ge4 ♖d8

Black is on time to trade a pair of rooks. White's initiative seems to be petering out, despite many efforts to keep it going.

16.♖ad1 ♖xd3

16...♚c8 is also playable, preparing a later ...♝d7, as in Ponomariov-Grischuk, Thessaloniki 2013. The Russian Super GM with the black pieces delayed the advance of the h-pawn and didn't experience any major problems: 17.g3 (I prefer the plan f2-f3, ♚f2, ♜e2 without moving the g-pawn) 17...♖xd3 18.♖xd3 ♜d7 19.f3 ♜e8 20.♚f2 ♜d8=

17.♖xd3 h5



This position has been reached in several elite games, among which Leko-Kramnik stands out, from their 2001 rapid match:

18.♝c1!?

Trying to exploit the weakness created on g5. 18.♘e2 c5 19.♘f4 ♜c6 or 18.g3 (or 18.f3) 18...♚c8, preparing ...♝d7 and waiting with ...c6-c5 until the knight moves away from c3, don't seem to create any problems to Black.

18...f6

18...c5!? might be even better, not weakening the pawn structure. Black prepares to meet 19.♗g5 (19.♘d5 ♜c6=) with 19...♝xg5 20.♘xg5 ♘d4, and if 21.b4!?, 21...♝c6! 22.bxc5 ♘xe5=.

19.exf6 gxf6

We have reached a similar position to the one from Chapter 16, line A, with the difference

being that the black king is on b7 rather than f7.

20. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}d6!$

Better than 20... c5? 21. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}f4\pm$, which was played in Leko-Kramnik. Black suffered to defend his weaknesses.

21. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}d6=$

So far, we have been following the game **Hovhannisyan-Pashikian, Yerevan 2013**. The two bishops compensate for the worse structure.

In spite of White's showy display, the black defence is solid; after kicking the knight out of g5, Black's chances aren't worse.

A2) 10. $\mathbb{Q}e2!?$



A relatively new idea. White intends to force the move e5-e6 before his opponent can organise his position.

10... $\mathbb{Q}e7$

The knight is rerouted straight away, reacting to the opponent's plan. Other lines are more troublesome:

a) 10... $\mathbb{Q}c8$ looks a little premature. In Grischuk-Aronian, Beijing blitz 2013, White managed to mobilise the majority with 11. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}g3!$, taking advantage of the fact that the king cannot defend f7. The game continued 12... $\mathbb{Q}h4$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ b6 14. f4 $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}ae1$, with a typical advantage;

b) Black can ignore the enemy plans and play 10... c5, as in Jakubowski-Kryvoruchko, Poland tt 2015, which continued 11. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ h6 12. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 13. e6 fxe6 14. $\mathbb{Q}xe6+$ $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$.



analysis diagram

Black has allowed the opponent to trade off his light-squared bishop, which should be advantageous to White, but Kryvoruchko managed to avert the danger with active play:
 16. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 17. $\mathbb{B}e2$ $\mathbb{B}ae8$ 18. $\mathbb{B}d1+$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 19. $\mathbb{B}xe8+$ $\mathbb{B}xe8$ 20. c3 g5 21. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ g4
 22. $\mathbb{B}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 23. $\mathbb{B}xg5$ hxg5 24. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ c6 25. $\mathbb{B}c2$ $\mathbb{B}h8$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{B}e8$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{B}h8$
 28. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{B}e8$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{B}h8$ $\frac{1}{2}-\frac{1}{2}$

c) With 10... $\mathbb{Q}e7$, Black prepares to meet 11. $\mathbb{B}f4$ with 11... $\mathbb{B}e8$, but 11. h3, returning to the ideas with g2-g4, creates certain difficulties. J.Polgar-Kramnik, Geneva rapid 2013, continued 11... h5, changing plans (11... $\mathbb{Q}c8$ is less attractive with the bishop on e7, since the knight has lost its retreat square; White is somewhat better after 12. $\mathbb{B}f4$ (more refined than 12. g4 $\mathbb{B}h4$) 12... $\mathbb{B}e8$ 13. b3, preparing g2-g4 and defending the e-pawn) 12. $\mathbb{B}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ c5 14. $\mathbb{B}f4$ (14. $\mathbb{B}xe7$ $\mathbb{B}xe7$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}g5\pm$) 14... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 15. $\mathbb{B}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ 16. $\mathbb{B}xg5$ $\mathbb{B}d8$ 17. $\mathbb{B}f4$ $\mathbb{B}d4$ 18. $\mathbb{B}xd4$ cxd4, and instead of 19. $\mathbb{B}d1$ h4!, White could have kept the advantage with 19. g3 \pm .

11. $\mathbb{B}e1$

The idea behind Black's 10th move is to offer a trade of knights: 11. $\mathbb{B}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 12. $\mathbb{B}xg6$ hxg6 13. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ does not seem dangerous for Black.

11... $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 12. $\mathbb{B}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 13. h3 $\mathbb{B}xf4$

This deals with the annoying possibility of 14. $\mathbb{B}h5$.

14. $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$



It is also possible to change the defensive scheme with 14...c5 15.Qad1 ♕e8 (now, 15...♕c8?! is not very good, on account of 16.♗g5! ♕e8 (without the pawn on c5, Black could have avoided the trade of bishops) 17.♗xe7 ♕xe7 18.♗g5±, and too many pieces have been exchanged with the black king on the wrong side of the board), and Black is solid. The break 16.e6 ♗xe6 17.♗xc7 ♕c8 doesn't look very dangerous.

15.♕ad1 h6 16.♗d4 ♕d8

Here, in Adams-Buhmann, Germany Bundesliga 2013/14, the English GM settled for 17.♕d3 c5 18.e6 cxd4 19.exd7+ ♕xd7 20.♗e5 f6 21.♗xd4 b6=, and despite the fact that he won the game, it would be very optimistic to speak of any white advantage.

It was possible to fight for something more concrete with a typical resource:

17.g4!? c5 18.♗f5 ♗f8 19.♗g3±

White has an improved version of the position from variation B1.

Although far from being the refutation of the plans based on ...♗d7, this idea poses interesting problems.

B) 9.h3 ♗d7

The immediate h2-h3 introduces the most natural attacking plan, although Black appears to have enough resources to hold the balance for the time being.

B1) 10.♕d1

The most critical line, preparing to move the g-pawn. The immediate 10.g4 is met by 10...♗e7, and after ...h7-h5, Black's counterplay would be very strong.

B11) 10...♕c8

The sharpest reply, preparing to defend f7 with the bishop. White must not resist the temptation to gain space if he wants to fight for the advantage.

11.g4 ♗e7 12.♗g5 ♗e8 13.f4



A key position for the evaluation of the variation.

Black must seek play before his opponent manages to complete his development and consolidate his kingside gains.

13...h5

Consistent, but the h-file might turn against him. The alternatives do not seem to solve all the problems:

a) 13...f5 was played in Caruana-McShane, London rapid 2014, which continued 14.exf6 gxf6 15.Qe6 Qd7 16.Qxf8 Qxf8 17.f5! (fixes the weakness) 17...h5 18.Qf2 Qg8 19.Qg1 b6 20.Qd2 Qb7 21.Qe4 Qaf8 22.Qd2, and White is slightly better because of his pressure on f6, which is more difficult to defend, due to the opposite-coloured bishops;

b) 13...c5 is the most recent try, preparing to transfer the knight to d4. In Dominguez Perez-Melkumyan, Baku 2015, the Cuban number one foiled the manoeuvre with 14.Qc3 b6 15.Qf2 Qc6 16.Qe3 Qd4 17.Qxd4! cxd4 18.Qe2 c5 19.c3±, and later on he showed that the knights, coupled with his space advantage, were stronger than the bishops.

14.Qf2

The king prepares to support the pawns.

14...b6 15.f5 Qb7



16.c4

Avoiding the complications that arose in Caruana-Adams, Dortmund 2013, in which the 2016 US Champion preferred 16.♗c3 hxg4 17.hxg4 ♖h2+! 18.♕g3 ♖xc2; Black gives up his dark-squared bishop, but gets good counterplay after 19.♗h7 (19.e6 f6 20.♗h7 c5 21.♗xf8 ♗c6 22.♗g6 ♗xg6 23.fxg6 ♖g2+ 24.♔f4 ♖f2+ leads to approximate equality) 19...c5! 20.♗xf8 ♗c6 21.f6? (21.♗g5! ♗xf5+ 22.gxf5 ♖g2+ 23.♗f4 ♖f2+ 24.♗g4 ♖g2+=, Adams) 21...♖g2+ 22.♗f4 gxf6 23.exf6 ♖f2+ 24.♔e3 ♖xf6! 25.♗h7 ♖f3+ 26.♗d2 ♖d8+ 27.♗c2 ♖xc3+! 28.bxc3 ♗a4+ 29.♗b2 ♖xd1–+. This is Caruana's only defeat as White in the Berlin endgame so far.

16...c5 17.♗f4 ♗c6 18.♗c3



Here, Nakamura, faced with the danger of death by suffocation, continued to seek play on the kingside:

18...g6! 19.e6 fxe6

The immediate 19...♗h6!? might be a better defensive try, but after 20.fxg6 fxg6 (20...fxe6 21.♗xe6 ♗xf4 22.♗xf4 ♖f8 23.g7 ♖g8 24.g5 h4 25.♗cd5±) 21.♗d5 hxg4 22.hxg4 ♗xg5 23.♗xg5 ♖h2+ 24.♕g3 ♖xb2 25.♗d2 ♖xd2 26.♗xd2∞, Black is going to suffer.

20.♗xe6 hxg4

So far, we have been following the game **Giri-Nakamura, Paris 2013.**

Instead of 21. $\mathbb{B}xc7?!$ $\mathbb{Q}h6!$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xh6$ $\mathbb{Q}xc7$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}f4+$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 24. $hxg4$ $gxf5$ 25. $g5$ $\mathbb{Q}h4! ,$ which let all the advantage slip, our super GM and favourite analyst could have maintained the pressure with 21. $hxg4\pm$.

B12) 10... $\mathbb{Q}e7$

Black acquiesces to the trade of bishops, which in principle favours White in his eagerness to expand on the kingside.

However, Black's resources seem sufficient to keep the balance.

11.g4

The white pawns are a dynamic force, although White must always be careful, due to the possibility of ...h7-h5.

The fourth game in the World Championship match Anand-Carlsen, Chennai 2013, saw **11. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}g5$** . Caruana-Adams, Dortmund 2014, continued **12.g4 $\mathbb{Q}h4$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xh4$ $\mathbb{Q}xh4$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}e3$** (14. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ transposes to the main variation, note to 14. $\mathbb{Q}f3$) 14...b6 15. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ c5 (Krisztian Szabo points out the alternative 15...h5!?∞, exploiting the fact that 16.f3? is not good on account of 16... $\mathbb{Q}g3!$) 16. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ h6 19. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 20. c4 a5 (another idea is 20... $\mathbb{Q}e6!?$, with the idea of ...f7-f6) 21. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}ad8$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}g3$, and White has a small advantage, regardless of whether or not Black trades the bishop. **12...h6 13. $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ c5 15. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ $\mathbb{Q}e6=$** With the black knight on the board, trading bishops does not guarantee White any advantage, since his knights cannot find good squares and it is difficult to mobilise the pawn majority.

11... $\mathbb{Q}h4$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}xh4$ $\mathbb{Q}xh4$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}d2!$



The knight uses his lag in development to support the pawn advance by means of a more promising route than the traditional c3-e4. Now, Black must move his king because of the possibility of $\mathbb{Q}f3$ and $e5-e6$.

13... $\mathbb{Q}c8$

We already know that Caruana, the greatest expert in the Berlin endgame with the white pieces (beating Carlsen on more than one occasion), believes that the king is better placed

on the queenside, but in So-Harikrishna, Turkey tt 2015, Black preferred 13... ♕e8. After 14. ♘e4 ♖d8 15. ♘f4 ♕e7 16.b3 ♕e6 17.c4 h6 18. ♔g2 a5 19. ♘e3 h5 20.f3 hxg4 21.hxg4 f5 22.exf6 gxf6 23. ♖xd8+ ♖xd8 24. ♖d1 ♔f7 25. ♘d4 ♖g8 26. ♔f2, his position was slightly worse, but 26...f5 27.gxf5 ♕xf5 28. ♕e5 ♕xe4 29.fxe4 ♔e6 liquidates to a drawable endgame.

14. ♘f3

Made possible by developing the knight to d2, rather than to c3. Karjakin-Carlsen, Stavanger 2014, continued 14. ♘e4 b6!? 15. ♘g5 ♖xg5 16. ♘xg5 h6!. It is common that knights capturing on f7 get trapped, as was the case here: 17. ♘xf7 (17. ♘e4 h5 is at least equal for Black) 17... ♖e8! 18.f4 ♕e6 19. ♖xh6 gxh6 20.f5 ♕xf5! 21.gxf5 ♖xe5 22. ♖f1 ♔d7!, and Black's activity secured the draw.

14... ♕e7 15. ♖d3?

An intelligent multi-purpose move, preparing to trade bishops on e3, as well as to double the rooks. It is possible to invade g5 with either minor piece, but White does not obtain any advantage with such direct play:

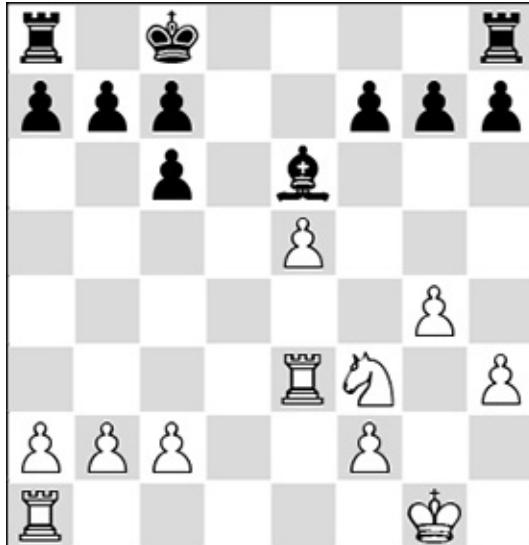
a) 15. ♘g5?! is met by a familiar resource: 15...h6! 16. ♘e4 (16. ♘xf7?! ♖e8! (16... ♖f8? 17.e6! ♖xe6 18. ♖e1±) 17.e6 ♖xe6 18. ♘e5 ♖f6±) 16...b6±, and Black has no problems whatsoever. The continuation from the game Matinian-Goganov, Khanty-Mansiysk 2015, is instructive: 17.c4 ♕e6 18.b3 ♔b7 19. ♘e3 a5 20. ♖d3 h5 21. ♘g5 ♖a3 22.f3 hxg4 23.fxg4 a4 24. ♖ad1 ♖a5±;

b) In Leko-Adams, Dortmund 2014, White tried the alternative 15. ♘g5 ♕c5 16. ♖d3. Preparing the trade of bishops. Recently, White has experimented with the immediate 16. ♕e3, obtaining tactical chances in return for the doubled pawns. Sevian-Quesada, Varadero 2016, continued 16... ♕xe3 17.fxe3 ♖e8 (the engine variation 17...b6 18. ♖d2 h5?∞ is interesting: 19. ♘g5 hxg4 20. ♖f1 f6! 21.e6 ♕e8 22.e7! looks dangerous, but 22...gxh3! seems to suffice for a draw) 18. ♖d2 b6 19. ♖f1! ♖e7 20. ♖fd1 h6 21. ♔f2 c5 22.e4. The Cuban GM freed his queenside with an elegant manoeuvre: 22...a5! 23. ♔g3 a4! 24.a3 ♖a5 25.h4 ♕c6 26. ♔f4 ♔b7±. Apparently Black isn't suffering very much, but there is something you should be mindful of: the Israeli GM Sutovsky essayed 16. ♕e3 in November 2016, five months after this game. 16... ♕e6 There is no time for 16...h6??, on account of 17. ♖ad1+-.

17. ♕e3 The intermediate 17. ♖ad1 b6 18. ♕e3, cutting off the black king, allows 18... ♕c4 19. ♖c3 ♕e2!. The opposite-coloured bishops ending that results after 20. ♖d2 ♕xf3 21. ♖xc5 ♕e4 22.f3 ♕g6 23. ♘f2 offers very few winning chances.

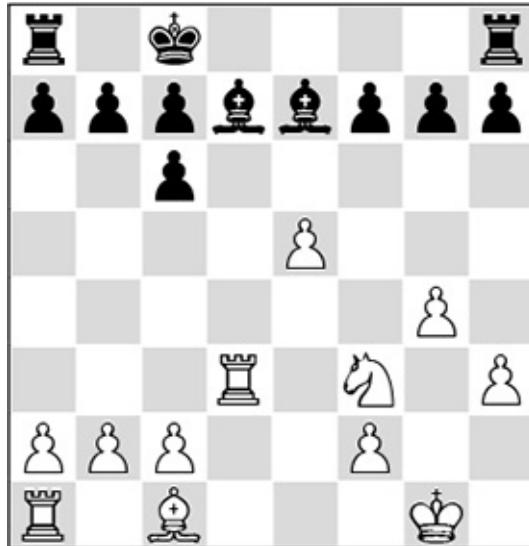
17... ♕xe3 17... ♕e7?! is weaker, on account of 18. ♘d4; after the trade of light-squared bishops, the endgame becomes dangerous for Black.

18. ♖xe3



analysis diagram

18... ♕d7! An important moment. After the piece exchange, the king must be in front of the opponent's pawn majority and avoid being cut off on the wrong side of the board.
19. ♜d1+ ♔e7 20. ♜d4 ♜ad8 21. ♜ed3 g6 22. ♜xe6 ♜xd3 23. ♜xd3 ♔xe6= As usual, the rook endgame promises hardly any winning chances if the black king is able to reach the blockading square. The game ended in a draw after 24.f4 h5 25. ♔g2 hxg4 26.hxg4 a5 27. ♔g3 ♜h1 28. ♜d8 g5! 29.fxg5 ♜g1+ 30. ♔f3 ♜f1+ 31. ♔g3 ♜g1+ 32. ♔f3 ♜f1+ 33. ♔g3 ♜g1+ ½-½.



15...h6

The most natural and solid continuation, avoiding the trade of bishops. Let's analyse the alternatives:

a) White's previous move involves a sharp idea against his opponent's strategic threat:
15...h5?! **16. ♜g5! hxg4?** Black should settle for 16... ♜xg5 17. ♜xg5 hxg4, although many pieces have been exchanged with the king on the wrong side of the board. White can demonstrate he has an advantage with 18. ♜ad1!? (18.hxg4 is also very strong) 18... ♜f5 19. ♜3d2! b6 20. ♜xf7 ♜xh3 21. ♜e1 ♜e6 22. ♜g5 ♜h6 23. ♜xe6 ♜xe6 24. ♜d4 g3 25.f4!± 17. ♜xe7 ♜e8 17...gxf3 18. ♜ad1+- **18. ♜ad1! ♜xe7 19.e6! gxf3 20. ♜xd7 ♜xd7 21. ♜xd7**, and White is winning, for if 21...fxe6 22. ♜xg7 and after the trade of

rooks, the h-pawn queens;

b) In Caruana-Negi, Tromsø 2014, the young Indian star tried to solve his strategic problems in an aggressive way: 15... c5?! 16. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ c4 17. $\mathbb{N}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$, but after 18. $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{N}e8$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}h4$ c6 21. $\mathbb{N}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 22. f4=, the opposite-coloured bishops did not guarantee a draw vis-à-vis the mobile white pawn majority;

c) 15... b5!? 16. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ is the slightly artificial solution Radjabov chose in his game against Kasimdzhanov (Baku, 2014). After 18. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ h6 19. $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ $\mathbb{N}f8$, the knight escapes via a surprising square: 20. $\mathbb{Q}d8!!$, and White maintains some advantage. The extra piece is lost in the event of 20... $\mathbb{N}xd8$ 21. $\mathbb{N}ad1$.

16. $\mathbb{N}d4$

The best square to make way for the f-pawn. 16. $\mathbb{Q}f4$?! is clearly worse, on account of 16... c5!, and the white knight has no prospects on f3. Abdumalik-Pashikian, Al-Ain rapid 2014, continued 17. $\mathbb{N}ad1$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 18. b3 b5 19. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ c4 22. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ a5=. In this variation, Black has real prospects of getting an advantage if his opponent doesn't adjust to the situation.

In Vachier-Lagrave-Topalov, Stavanger 2016, the French super GM tried 16. $\mathbb{Q}g2$?!. The king is headed for g3 to support the pawn majority, but his strong opponent reacted accurately: 16... c5 17. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{N}e8$! (prevents 18. $\mathbb{Q}h4$ followed by f4) 18. c4 a5 19. a4 f6=, and Black seizes the initiative.



16... $\mathbb{N}e8$!

Black eyeballs the e-pawn, while preparing to drop the bishop back to f8. The less consistent 16... b6 was also proven to be playable in the game Wei Yi-Ding Liren, Xinghua 2015. White didn't get very much after 17. $\mathbb{N}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 18. $\mathbb{N}f5$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 19. b3 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 21. $\mathbb{N}d4$ =, although the young Chinese prodigy with the white pieces went on to win in great style, as we will see in Game 24 (Chapter 20).

17. $\mathbb{Q}f4$

White has other, more or less harmless alternatives:

- a) The black defence is based on the fact that 17. $\mathbb{N}f3$ c5! doesn't lead anywhere after

18. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ or after 18. $\mathbb{Q}de2$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$;

b) 17. $b3!?$ was played in G.Papp-Volokitin, Austria Bundesliga 2015/16. In December of 2015, when this chapter was destined to become part of a book with games by Carlsen, I analysed this position after 17... $\mathbb{Q}f8!$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ (there is no time to play 18. $f4$ $h5!$ \mathbb{T}), and I concluded that it was perfectly possible to play 18... $\mathbb{Q}xe5!$, since there aren't any dangerous discoveries. Hungarian GM Papp surely reached the same conclusion, but decided it was worth the effort to try the idea for a single game. Volokitin, caught by surprise, dared not capture the pawn, preferring the prudent 18... $h5$, and after 19. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $hxg4$ 20. $hxg4$ $g6$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 23. $f3$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $b6=$, he didn't experience any difficulties either.

17... $c5$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 19. $c4$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$

The bishop occupies its best square. In Caruana-Grischuk, Warsaw 2013, a struggle between two great Berlin specialists, Black began immediate activity on the queenside and obtained good counterplay: 19... $a6$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ (20. $a4$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ is very likely to transpose to the main line) 20... $b5$ 21. $b3$ $\mathbb{Q}e6=$ You can see how this game continued in the comments to Game 24 (Chapter 20).

20. $b3$ $a6$ 21. $a4$

White intends to put the breaks on any ... $b7$ - $b5$ ideas.

21... $b6$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $g5!$

An important idea: the kingside is slightly weakened to stop $f2$ - $f4$, and to leave its colleague on $e5$ isolated.

23. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$



White can prepare his kingside play by advancing the f- and h-pawns, but the opponent's activity is faster.

24. $h4$ $\mathbb{Q}ad8$

An alternative plan to the move 24... $b5$, which also gives Black a good game.

25. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ $\mathbb{Q}d4!$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $cxd4$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ $\mathbb{Q}xg4$

And Black had equalised in Robson-Shimanov, Las Vegas 2015. Also in this variation, the ball is in White's court.

B2) 10.♘c3



A quieter line, but also more modest than 10.♗d1. White postpones his ambitions on the kingside, and gives his opponent time to arrange the desired set-up. We are following the 11th game from the match **Carlsen-Anand, Sochi 2014**:

10...h6 11.b3 ♘c8

More accurate than the straightforward 11...c5 12.♗d5 (12.♗d1 is weaker, since the rooks are better on d1 and e1. Kamsky-Zhou Jianchao, Moscow 2011, bears a striking resemblance to the game we are analysing: 12...♘c8 13.♗d5 g5 14.c4 ♗e6 15.♗b2 b6 16.g4 ♗e7 17.♗g2 ♗g6 18.♗g3 ♗g7 19.♗f6 ♗b7 20.♗d2 a5 21.a4 ♗hd8 22.♗ad1 ♗xd2 23.♗xd2, and here the Chinese GM executed the break 23...b5!, getting good counterplay) 12...c6 13.♗f4 g5 14.♗b2 ♗g8 15.e6∞, Karjakin-Kramnik, Monaco rapid 2011.

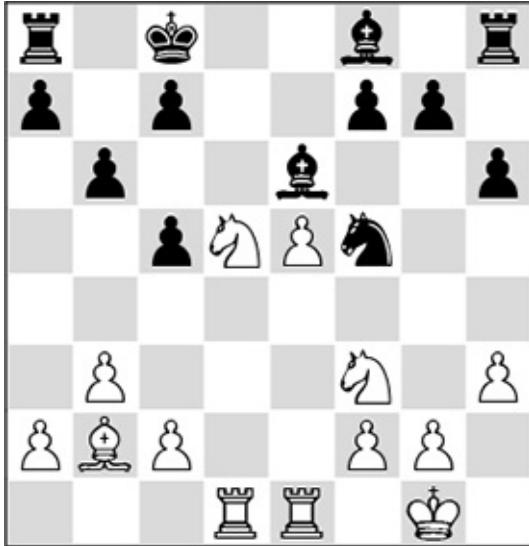
12.♗b2 c5

As we saw in the historical introduction, Kramnik rerouted the knight before this move to defend d5 first, but after 12...b6 13.♗ad1 ♗e7, White has quite a dangerous plan at his disposal: 14.♗d4!? (instead of 14.♗e2 ♗g6 15.♗e1 h5 16.♗d3 c5 17.c4 a5 18.a4 h4=, Kasparov-Kramnik, London 2000). Efimenko-Naiditsch, Subotica 2008, ended in a quick disaster for the Azeri GM (then German) after 14...c5 15.♗de2 a5?! (the most common, but I prefer 15...♗f5 16.♗d2 h5!, slowing down the advance of the white pawns: 17.♗g3 ♗e6 18.♗ge4, seeking to trade off the light-squared bishop, can be met by 18...g6!∞, preparing ...♗h6, as in Solodovnichenko-Hagen, Borup 2012) 16.♗d2! ♗c6 17.♗fd1! ♗e6 18.♗f4 ♗f5? (it was necessary to accept the bishop trade, although we already know that the black position is then quite precarious with the king on c8) 19.g4 ♗e6 (19...♗h7 20.♗b5+–) 20.♗xe6 fxe6 21.♗b5+–.

13.♗ad1 b6 14.♗fe1

White must be careful before occupying d5: if 14.♗d5 a5 15.a4 c4, Black is better.

14...♗e6 15.♗d5



15...g5!

A key move in the black scheme, protecting the bishop against the ♜f4 jump. It is true that it weakens the kingside, but it also isolates the e5-pawn.

16.c4 ♕b7 17.♔h2

A familiar prophylactic manoeuvre: after g2-g4, the king is ready to support the pawns from g3.

17...a5

17...♝e7 18.♝f6 ♝g6 19.g4 b5!?, sacrificing a pawn in the style of the Benko Gambit, gives Black good counterplay, according to the Macedonian GM Alex Colovic.

18.a4 ♝e7 19.g4 ♝g6 20.♔g3 ♝e7!

More accurate than 20...♝g7 21.♝f6! (21.h4 h5!∞) 21...♜hd8 22.h4±.

21.♝d2

21.♝f6 ♜hd8 22.h4?! ♜xh4 23.♝xh4 gxh4+ 24.♚xh4 ♜xd1 25.♜xd1 b5!∞, Colovic.

21...♜hd8 22.♝e4

Giri suggests 22.♝xe7!? ♜xe7 23.♝e4 ♝g6 24.f3, and White might have some chances of an advantage, preparing a later breakthrough on the kingside.

22...♜f8 23.♝ef6?!

23.♝c3= White has no clear plan, but with a careful waiting policy, he runs no risk either. For example, 23...b5? is met tactically by 24.axb5 a4 25.bxa4 ♜xa4 26.♝e7!!±.



23...b5!??

And this surprising move triggered the crisis in the match earlier than expected. You can check out what happened in Game 25, the final game in Chapter 20.

CONCLUSION

The Almasi-Kramnik plan still has a good reputation, but its popularity among the world chess elite has begun to decline a little in recent months. In the critical line B1, Black does not seem to suffer much, especially if we look at the game Vachier-Lagrange-Topalov, Stavanger 2016, so the explanation for this decline in popularity must be either because of some difficulty in the sidelines (perhaps 9.♘c3 and 10.♘e2), or simply because of the fickleness of chess fashion.

CHAPTER 20

Game collection

Game 1

Urii Eliseev

2606

Denis Khismatullin

2609

Russia tt 2016 (5)

1.e4 e5 2.♗f3 ♗c6 3.♗b5 ♗f6 4.d3 ♗c5 5.♗xc6 dxc6 6.♗bd2 ♗e6



One of the two critical variations from Chapter 4. The bishop is developed only to give its life for a knight.

As we discussed in the theory section, Black avoids the complications that have recently arisen in the variation 6...0-0, accepting a solid position in which it is difficult for his opponent to make any progress.

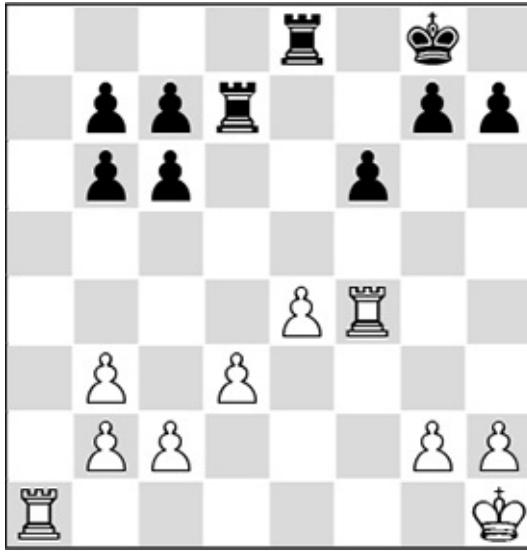
7.0-0 ♗d7 8.♗b3 ♗b6 9.♗g5 ♗xb3 10.axb3 f6 11.♗f3 ♗c5 12.♗d2 0-0 13.♗c4 ♗e6 14.♔h1 ♗d7 15.♗g4 ♗ad8 16.f4

16.♗e3 ♗d4 17.♗xd4 ♗xd4 18.♗xd7 ♗xd7 19.♗xa7 (19.♗e3 a6 20.f4 f5=) 19...♗xc2 20.♗xb7 ♗xd3 led to nothing in Nakamura-Kramnik, Zurich rapid 2016.

16...♗xf4 17.♗xd7 ♗xd7 18.♗xf4 exf4 19.♗xf4

19.♗xb6 immediately is more accurate, ruling out the possibility 19...♗d4.

19...♗e8 20.♗xb6 axb6



A typical endgame with the pawn structure of the Exchange Variation, except for the issue of the magical square on the queenside. A hundred years ago, Rubinstein or Capablanca would have carried out a minority attack, and their brilliant technical play would subsequently be cited in endgame books, but defenders today don't sit around watching the attacker make strides.

21.g4

Starting the plan while making luft. 21. $\mathbb{Q}a7$ fails to 21... $g5!$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $f5!$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ or 23. $exf5$ $\mathbb{Q}e2$, and Black equalises immediately.

21...c5

Gaining space and preparing to defend the b-pawn.

22. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $h6$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}dd8!?$

Preparing not only counterplay on the a-file, but also a deeper defensive idea.

26. $\mathbb{Q}d2?!$

Something else should be prevented first. 26. $h4!$ $\mathbb{Q}a8$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}af1! \pm$ would keep some pressure, since 27... $\mathbb{Q}a2?!$ 28. $g5!$ $fxg5$ 29. $hxg5$ $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}d2!$ is far from equal. Perhaps the best defence is the prophylactic 27... $\mathbb{Q}h8$, although White can still make a little progress with $\mathbb{Q}d2$, followed by $\mathbb{Q}c3$ and $b3-b4$.

26... $\mathbb{Q}a8$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 28. $h4$ $\mathbb{Q}e5!$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}ef1$ $\mathbb{Q}e6=$ 30. $c3$

The $\mathbb{Q}e5$ saves Black of all evil, since the pawn break does not give anything: 30. $g5$ $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ $hxg5=$

30... $\mathbb{Q}a2$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}a8$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}5f4$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}a1$ $h5!$ 34. $gxh5$ $\mathbb{Q}xh5$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $g5$ 36. $hxg5$ $\mathbb{Q}h2+$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $fxg5$ 38. $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ $\mathbb{Q}h1+$ 39. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}h2+$ 40. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}h1+$ 41. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\frac{1}{2}-\frac{1}{2}$

I bet you thought that all sample games were going to be brilliant examples of tactical chess! The reality is that the grandmaster's average day at the office consists of games such as this one: solid, well-played and sometimes a little boring. Whole wheat bread and butter instead of caviar.

The endgame shows just how little advantage White can hope for in this variation. Black's task, however, is not too pleasant, as he must defend patiently, with very few prospects to

play for a win.

Game 2

Wei Yi

2706

David Navara

2730

Wijk aan Zee 2016 (9)

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.d3 ♗c5 5.♗xc6 dxc6 6.♗bd2 0-0 7.♗c4 ♘d7 8.♗e2!?

One of the fashionable lines in the Anti-Berlin complex, which we have discussed in considerable detail in Chapter 4, variation B3.

8...♖e8 9.♗d2 ♘d6 10.h4!?

In the theory section, I have chosen 10.0-0-0 as the main line, but objectively that move may not be superior to this one.



10...c5

Caruana-Karjakin, played in the same round of the tournament, continued with the more prudent 10...♗f8 11.h5 ♗e6 12.0-0-0 c5 13.♗f1 f6 14.♗h4 ♗d4 15.c3 ♘c6 16.♗f5 ♗xf5 17.exf5 h6 18.g4 ♗f8 19.♗e2 ♗d7 20.♗e3±.

11.h5 h6 12.0-0-0 ♗b8?

The optimistic Czech GM underestimates the strength of the white attack. 12...♗f8 13.g4 f6±, and a future ...♗e6, would allow Black to organise a better defence.

13.♗dg1

The immediate 13.g4! is more accurate. Capturing the pawn is suicide, and after 13...f6 14.♗dg1, White transposes back to the game.

13...♗c6

With 13...♗g4, Black accepts a worse position after 14.♗e3 ♗d7 15.♗xg4 ♗xg4, but at least the attack is slowed down, since 16.♗h4 ♗e6 17.g4?! ♗xa2 is unclear. Instead,

13...b5 14.♘xd6 ♕xd6 15.g4 f6 16.g5! fxg5 17.♘xg5 hxg5 18.♗xg5 gives White a strong attack.

14.g4 f6



15.g5!!

The young Chinese prodigy creates a new immortal game to add to his growing collection, exploiting his lead in development in great style.

15...fxg5 16.♘xg5 ♘d4 17.♗d1 hxg5 18.♗xg5

The attack could also be continued with 18.h6, but the idea in the game is simpler.

18...♗e7 19.♗e3 ♘f6

This allows h5-h6. Despite the somewhat slow appearance of the white attack, it is difficult to find a satisfactory defence. For instance, if 19...♕h7, 20.♘xe5 ♗e6 (20...♗f6 21.♘g6 is no improvement) 21.♘g6+–, and h5-h6 is decisive.

20.h6 ♘e7

It is still possible to try 20...g5. After 21.♗xg5! (an alternative way to conduct the attack is 21.♗h5 g4 22.f4!) 21...♗xg5+ 22.f4! ♘e6 (22...exf4 23.♗h5 ♔h8 24.♗xg5+–) 23.fxg5 ♘f4, the white pawns should win the game. However, there are some practical chances to defend.

21.hxg7 ♘xg7 22.♗h5

The attack is winning. I offer the rest of the game without any further comments:

22...♗e6 23.♗h6 ♘f7 24.♗xg7! ♘xh5 25.♗xf6+ ♔f8 26.♗xd8 ♘e2+ 27.♗b1 ♘xg1 28.♗xc7 1-0

I chose this game for its aesthetic pleasure, rather than its objective theoretical interest. This book should not be all work and no play. White's attacking plan is very interesting, but Navara's sloppy defence helped a great deal to make it work so decisively.

Game 3

Magnus Carlsen

2863

Viswanathan Anand

2792

Sochi Wch m 2014 (2)

The comments to this game appeared earlier in my section of *Magnus Carlsen's Secret*, one of the latest releases of Editorial Chessy.

The World Champion jump-started his title defence: in the first game he drew from a good position, which was followed by a splendid victory, typical of his style.

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.d3 ♘c5 5.0-0 d6

The champion used to prefer castling to the more common 5.c3, thus allowing the alternative 5...♝d4... That is, until his defeat against Aronian, as we shall see in Game 4.

6.♖e1 0-0 7.♗xc6!? bxc6 8.h3 ♖e8

Classical players like Anand tend to opt for central strategy whenever they can. Also possible is 8...h6.

9.♗bd2 ♘d7 10.♗c4



A relatively new approach, instead of the usual manoeuvre ♘f1-g3. It gives the impression that Carlsen might have prepared a few ‘harmless’ plans in the Anti-Berlin with 4.d3, which he has been using over the past two years. Anand was most probably already out of book.

10...♝b6

Preventing the knight’s visit to a5. Nothing bad is happening after 10...♝f8 11.♗a5 (11.c3 ♘e6 12.♗a4 ♘d7): the pawn can be defended by the simple 11...♙d7 or by 11...♝d7?∞, according to Inarkiev in *Informant* 122.

11.a4 a5 12.♗xb6 cxb6 13.d4

White plays for a microscopic advantage. As once stated by IM Javier Moreno Ruiz, from Madrid: that's exactly why you can't see it!

13... ♜c7 14. ♖a3!



Creating a bit of play in an equal position. The following comment from Giri in *New in Chess 2014/08* sums up the World Champion's approach to the opening: 'You need one such move to create "a game", to exert some pressure. It's not enough to just play 'some trashy sideline'. Many try, but only Magnus succeeds. Nor is it enough for your first name to be Magnus and your last name Carlsen (although it does help a lot). The key is that at some point, in an equal position in which nothing is going on, you need to come up with one creative idea, find this one little threat or little manoeuvre.'

14... ♜f8 15. dx5 dx5 16. ♜h4! ♖d8 17. ♜h5 f6 18. ♜f5 ♜e6?

Anand opts for the most natural development, preparing to defend g7 mechanically with ... ♜g6, but misses that the knight will be vulnerable there. He could have fully equalised with 18... ♜h8!. Then, 19. ♜g3 ♜e6 20. ♜g4 ♖a7 21. ♜h4 ♜f8 leads nowhere, and after a natural developing move such as 20. ♜e3, the bishop can be fianchettoed, with full equality.

The game is objectively equal, but from a practical point of view still not so.

19. ♜g3 ♜g6 20. h4!

It seems that Anand missed this idea when deciding to go for the plan with ... ♜g6.

20... ♜xf5?!

Anand acquiesces to a worse position. During the live broadcast, Peter Svidler found the brilliant defensive idea 20... ♜h8! 21. ♜xg6 ♜f7, but such things are hard to find when the World Championship is at stake.

21. exf5 ♜f4

Already, Black has to choose between the devil and the deep blue sea. 21... ♜f8 is more solid, but the knight is clearly inferior to the bishop, and after 22. ♜h6 ♖d7 23. ♜g4 ♜h8 24. h5 ♖ad8 25. c3, the black position is passive and unpleasant.

22. ♜xf4 exf4 23. ♖c3! c5 24. ♖e6



Even with a symmetrical pawn structure, the more active major pieces give Carlsen a practically winning advantage.

24... ♜ab8?!

24...h6 25.♘f3! is somewhat better for White after 25...♜ac8 26.♞c4 ♜d4 27.c3! ♜xc4 28.♞d5± (Giri's variation). With only one pair of rooks, Black suffers less than in the game.

25.♞c4 ♜d7 26.♕h2!

Prevents 26...♜d1, which can now be met by 27.♜e8+.

26... ♜f8 27.♞ce4 ♜b7 28.♗e2 b5!

Anand tries his only chance. If he stayed passive, his chances of survival would be very small after losing the f-pawn.

29.b3?!

29.♜e7 ♜d6! 30.f3! is the simplest solution, but Carlsen, who overlooked the defence based on a discovered check, is reluctant to move the f-pawn. After 30...♜xe7 31.♜xe7 bxa4, White wins with 32.♗e4!, threatening 33.♗b7, and after 32...♝b8 (32...♚h8 33.♜e8!+–), there follows 33.♝xa4+–.

29...bxa4 30.bxa4 ♜b4! 31.♜e7 ♜d6!

31...♝xf5 fails in a typical manner: 32.♜xb4 cxb4 33.♗c4+ ♚h8 34.♗f7+–

32.♗f3?!

As pointed out by Inarkiev, 32.f3!+– is again the most comfortable option.

32... ♜xe4 33.♝xe4 f3+ 34.g3



Black's combative defence, coupled with a few inaccurate moves by the champion, have given Anand some drawing chances. He just needs to find 34... \mathbb{N} d2!. The critical variation is 35. \mathbb{N} c4+ \mathbb{Q} h8 36. \mathbb{N} f7?! (36. \mathbb{N} xc5±) 36... \mathbb{N} xf2+ 37. \mathbb{Q} h3 \mathbb{N} f1+ 38. \mathbb{Q} g4.



analysis diagram

This looks winning, but Black saves himself with 38...h5+! 39. \mathbb{N} xh5+ \mathbb{Q} g8 40. \mathbb{N} g6 \mathbb{N} c4+ 41. \mathbb{Q} h5 (41. \mathbb{N} xf3 \mathbb{N} f1+ 42. \mathbb{Q} g4 \mathbb{N} d1+=) 41... \mathbb{N} f7 42. \mathbb{N} e8+ \mathbb{N} f8 43. \mathbb{N} e7 \mathbb{N} f7=. Giri said that Svidler had seen all this during the live broadcast.

In mild time trouble, the candidate now overlooked that g4 is not the only square from which the g-pawn can be attacked...

34...h5?? 35. \mathbb{N} b7 1-0

Carlsen likes to go his own way in the opening, using tiny novelties that only apply to one game. The set-up with the knight on c4 must have surprised Anand, which helped the champion score a very important win. This approach is attractive, provided you have the technique of the World Champion, coupled with his ability to create problems for his opponents in equal positions.

Game 4

Magnus Carlsen

2850

Levon Aronian

2781

Reykjavik Ech-tt 2015 (3)

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.d3 ♘c5 5.0-0 ♘d4!

At the time of writing this book, the exchanging manoeuvre that Aronian here chooses seems to ensure equality for Black, as we saw in Chapter 5.

6.♘xd4 ♘xd4 7.c3 ♘b6 8.♘a3 c6 9.♗a4 d6 10.♗b3 a5 11.♘c4 ♘a7!

We know from the theory section that this novelty is preferable to 11...♘c7 12.♗g5 h6 13.♗h4 g5 14.♗g3 h5 15.f3 ♘e6 16.♘e3± (Karjakin-Caruana, Zurich 2015).

12.a4 0-0 13.♗g5 h6! 14.♗xf6

Carlsen gambles, hoping to get some advantage.

14...♗xf6 15.♘xa5 d5!



Black has fantastic compensation for the pawn.

16.♘c2

16.exd5 cxd5 17.♗xd5? (better is 17.♘c2, but Black enjoys a good game for a pawn) 17...♗d8! 18.♗xb7 ♘xb7 19.♗xb7 ♗c7 20.♗f3 ♘ab8, and the piece outweighs the three pawns.

16...dxe4 17.dxe4 ♘d8 18.♗e1?!

18.♗d3 gives more possibilities to construct a decent defence.

18...♗g5 19.♗h1 ♘d2 20.♗d1 ♘e6 21.b4 ♘ad8



22. $\mathbb{Q}xb7?$

The decisive mistake. If 22. $\mathbb{Q}b3$, $\mathbb{Q}h3!!$ 23. $gxh3$ $\mathbb{R}f4$, followed by ... $\mathbb{R}8d3$, and the attack is decisive. However, 22. $\mathbb{Q}e2!$ gives good possibilities for survival, according to Aronian in *New in Chess 2015/08*.

22... $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ $\mathbb{Q}xf1$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}xf1$ $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}a2!$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}xa2$ $\mathbb{Q}xg1$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}xg1$ $\mathbb{Q}c1$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}xd1-$ +

Aronian solves the technical difficulties flawlessly:

29. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{Q}b3$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}d6$ $\mathbb{Q}b2+$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}a3+$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}xa4$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}c2+$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}f3$



35... $f5!$

Carlsen has fought bravely, but with this last precise move, Aronian decides the game.

36. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $fxe4+$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}xg2+$ 38. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}g4+$ 39. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $g5$ 40. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 41. $\mathbb{Q}d8+$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 42. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $g4$ 43. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 44. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}c6+$ 0-1

This excellent game has confirmed the positive theoretical evaluation of 6... $\mathbb{Q}d4$, forcing Carlsen to abandon his favourite schemes based on exchanging on c6 after 6... $d6$.

Game 5

Peter Svidler

2741

David Navara

2706

Prague m 2012 (2)

Svidler shows an interesting plan in this game, which gives possibilities of obtaining an advantage in positions that arise from the exchange on c6, discussed in Chapter 5, variation A.

1.e4 e5 2.♗f3 ♗c6 3.♗b5 ♗f6 4.d3 ♗c5 5.c3 0-0 6.0-0 d6 7.♗bd2 a6

Currently, most elite GMs' efforts focus on 7...♗e7!, the temporary results of which you can see in Chapter 7.

8.♗xc6 bxc6 9.♖e1

We analysed 9.d4 in the theory section, but Svidler's idea is not bad. In summary, you get a scheme similar to that of the game Carlsen-Radjabov, Wijk aan Zee 2015 (Chapter 5, variation A), but with the useless move ...a7-a6.

9... ♕e8 10.h3 ♗b6 11.♗f1

The beginning of the standard developing manoeuvre.

11...h6?!

Again, combining ...♕e8 and ...h7-h6, following Cue's uncertainty principle, which we know from Carlsen-Radjabov. We could ask ourselves whether the pawn is really useful, and whether it would be more convenient to start with 11...a5; the pawn could go to a4, and if White stops it, the plan in the game will be less effective, since the queenside is blocked.

12.♗g3 ♗e6?!

This is not a good square for the bishop after the advance of the d-pawn.

12...a5! 13.♗e3 ♗xe3 14.♗xe3 c5 leads to a better version of the game, although White's game seems preferable after 15.d4 cxd4 16.cxd4 exd4 17.♗xd4 ♗d7 18.♘c2 a4 19.♗d1 ♗b8 20.♗c3. This position is relatively closed, but because Black has lost a tempo with ...a7-a6, White has good prospects in the centre now.

13.♗e3 ♗xe3 14.♗xe3 c5 15.♘c2



The prelude to d3-d4. Navara is about to try to set up a blockade with the knight on c5, but he has no time to consolidate.

15...♝d7

15...a5 16.d4 cxd4 17.cxd4 exd4 18.♛xd4±

16.d4! cxd4

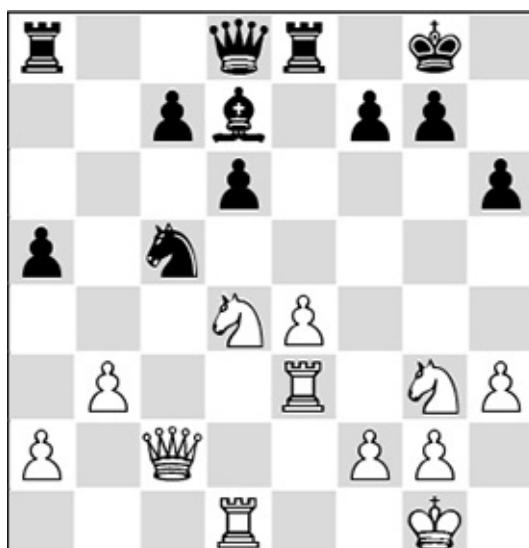
16...f6!? 17.d5 ♜f7 leads to a solid yet passive position.

17.cxd4 exd4 18.♛xd4 a5 19.b3

19.♜d1 a4 (19...♝c5 20.e5±) 20.♝gf5!± is sharper. Black has no time to capture the pawn: 20...♜xa2 21.♜g3 g6 22.♝xh6+ ♛g7 23.♝g4, with a virtually decisive attack. Here we see how ...h7-h6 represents a weakness once the centre is open.

19...♝c5 20.♜d1 ♜d7

20...♝f6!? is a defensive move suggested by Stockfish. 21.e5 dxe5 would not be as strong as in the game.



21.e5! dxe5 22.♝f3

22.♝df5!? ♜xf5 (22...♝e6 23.♝h5, with a winning attack) 23.♝xf5 ♜f6 24.♝xg7! ♛xg7 25.♝xc5 leads to a position with major pieces, in which the open king and the

weak pawns leave Black in a very precarious situation.

22... ♜b7 23. ♜xe5 ♜d6 24.a4!?

Fixing the weak a5-pawn. The engine solution, 24. ♜c3 a4 25. ♜h5 ♜g5 26.g4!!+–, is too complicated for a position as advantageous as this one.

24... ♜e6

24...f6 25. ♜xd7 ♜xd7 26. ♜c3±

25. ♜c3 ♜g5 26. ♜f3! ♜d8 27. ♜d4 ♜h8

27... ♜d7 28. ♜df5 ♜xf5 29. ♜xf5+–

28. ♜h5

Now, 28. ♜df5 ♜g5 is not so clear.

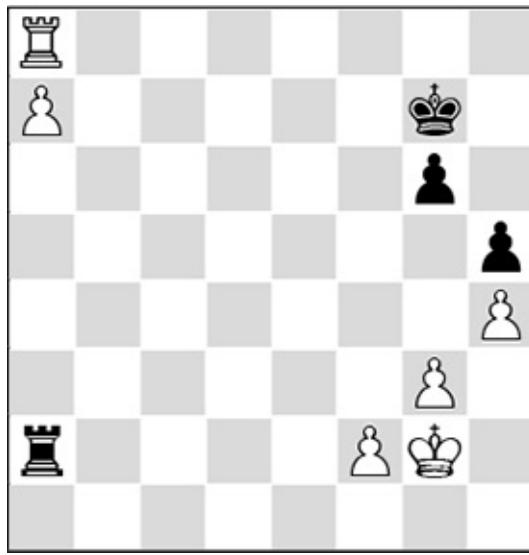
28... ♜g5 29. ♜xe6 ♜xe6 30. ♜xe6 fxe6 31. ♜xc7! ♜xh5 32. ♜xd6 ♜e2 33. ♜d3 ♜xd3 34. ♜xd3+–



A top-20 player wins this rook endgame with elementary technique, especially if he is Russian.

34... ♜c8

More stubborn was 34... ♜b8 35. ♜e3 ♜b6. White can choose between two plans: one is to bring the king to the queenside after consolidating the kingside, and another is to exchange the b-pawn for the black a-pawn, advance the passed pawn to a7, and then manoeuvre to capture the black e-pawn. In this case, you should take care to avoid h3-h4, which could lead to the following drawn position, from Aronian-Morozevich, Mexico City 2007:



analysis diagram

White can only win if he creates a passed pawn on the f-file, but this can be avoided with due care. The game continued 51. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{L}a3!$ 52. f3 $\mathbb{Q}h7$ (52... $\mathbb{L}a1??$ 53. g4 hxg4+ 54. $\mathbb{Q}xg4+-$) 53. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{L}a2+$ 54. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{L}a1+$ 55. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{L}a2+$ 56. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 57. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{L}a1$ 58. $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $\mathbb{L}c1+$ 59. $\mathbb{Q}d6$ $\mathbb{L}d1+$ 60. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{L}a1$ 61. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{L}a4+$ 62. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{L}a1$ 63. f4 $\mathbb{L}a2$ 64. f5 gxf5 65. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{L}a5$ 66. $\mathbb{L}e8$ $\mathbb{L}xa7$ 67. $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ $\mathbb{L}f7+$ 68. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{L}f1$ 69. $\mathbb{L}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ $\frac{1}{2}-\frac{1}{2}$.

Our game ended without so much drama:

35. $\mathbb{L}e3$ $\mathbb{L}c1+$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{L}c2$ 37. f3 $\mathbb{L}c6$ 38. $\mathbb{L}e5$ $\mathbb{L}a6$

38... $\mathbb{L}b6$ 39. $\mathbb{L}b5$

39. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 40. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 41. $\mathbb{L}b5$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 42. h4 $\mathbb{L}a8$ 43. g4 $\mathbb{L}a7$ 44. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ g5 45. hxg5+ hxg5 46. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{L}d7+$ 47. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{L}a7$ 48. b4 axb4 49. $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 50. $\mathbb{L}xg5$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 51. a5 $\mathbb{L}f7$ 52. a6 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 53. $\mathbb{L}a5$ $\mathbb{L}f4+$ 54. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{L}xf3+$ 55. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ 1-0

The plan based on d3-d4 after trading bishops on e3 gave White the edge, but only because his opponent lost some tempi along the way. Black's most effective counterplay seems to be based on ...a6-a5 etc.

Game 6

Magnus Carlsen

2853

Sergey Karjakin

2772

New York Wch m 2016 (10)

For friend and foe alike, Carlsen was the clear favourite to win this match, but Karjakin showed his great defensive skills and nerves of steel, which had won him the 2015 World Cup, as well as the Candidates Tournament the year after. After nine games, Karjakin led by 5-4, and seemed well on his way to be crowned as the new World Champion, but the Norwegian genius reacted just in time, in a struggle that I have annotated based on Wesley So's comments for ChessBase.

1. e4 e5 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 3. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 4. d3 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 5. c3 0-0 6. $\mathbb{Q}g5!?$



Carlsen, in need of a win, does not try to go after his opponent in the opening, and, as pointed out by Giri on Twitter, looks for a worse version of a known position, which is playable nonetheless, at least for a single game. This is typical of the World Champion: Giri also points out that the concept is similar to that of the second game from the second Carlsen-Anand match (Game 3). As was to be expected, detailed analysis of the variation (Chapter 6C) shows not even a wee advantage for White.

6...h6 7.Qh4 Qe7 8.0-0 d6 9.Qbd2 Qh5 10.Qxe7 Qxe7 11.Qc4 Qf4

An obvious move. 11...f5 is more active and more complicated. 12.Qfxe5 Qxe5 13.Qxh5 Qxd3= gives White nothing, whereas 12.Qxc6?! bxc6 13.Qfxe5 Qf4! 14.Qxc6 Qg5 leads to a strong attack for Black.

12.Qe3 Qf6 13.g3 Qh3+ 14.Qh1 Qe7

Both sides start their manoeuvring play, which is typical of these positions. The knight on h3 is a double-edged sword; it is active, but it may be left out of play.

15.Qc4 c6 16.Qb3 Qg6

It is not clear that the knight is better placed on g6, so the immediate 16...Qe6 may be preferable. On the other hand, Karjakin had an aggressive option here to generate counterplay: 16...d5!? 17.exd5?!(17.Qe2=) 17...cxd5 18.Qxd5? Qxd5 19.Qxd5 Qd8 20.Qe4 Qg4!+, and the pin is very annoying.

The challenger probably went too far with his policy of ‘safety first’, thus losing a unique opportunity to beat the champion, who wasn’t in his best form during the match.

17.Qe2 a5 18.a4

An automatic move. 18.d4 was also worthy of consideration.

18...Qe6 19.Qxe6?!

Traditionally, 1.e4 players would be unbothered by their pawns getting doubled after the exchange on e6, relying on the bolstering of the centre and the opening of the file, but the assessment of the position has changed, and now the doubled pawns are seen as an inconvenience, making the position more rigid and vulnerable to the d3-d4 push. From this point of view, the exchange is good, since it gives Carlsen something concrete to work

with in the medium term. However, tactics trump strategy...

19. $\mathbb{Q}d2!$, and if 19... $\mathbb{Q}xb3$, 20. $\mathbb{Q}xb3$, relying on the dynamic advantages of the position, specifically the better position of the knights. Faced with the possibility of losing a pawn by $\mathbb{Q}c4$, it could be that the most accurate defence is 20... $\mathbb{Q}d8\pm$, followed by retreating the h3-knight.

19...fxe6 20. $\mathbb{Q}d2$

We have reached the critical moment in the match.



20...d5?

Karjakin misses his first chance. 20... $\mathbb{Q}xf2+$ virtually forces a draw:

A) 21. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}h4+$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ (22. $gxh4?$ $\mathbb{Q}g6+-+$) 22... $\mathbb{Q}h3+$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}f2+$, with perpetual check;

B) 21. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}h3+$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}hf4+$ 23. $gxf4$ $\mathbb{Q}xf4+$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ $exf4$ leads to an unbalanced position that concerned Carlsen during the game. In an interview for Chess.com, he stated that he wanted to avoid this position, as it wouldn't have given him any winning chances.

Tactical issues aside, however, it is far from clear to me that it is a good idea to weaken the pawns with this move.

21. $\mathbb{Q}h5?!$

A new tactical error, this time more difficult to calculate. The modest 21. $f3!$ $\mathbb{Q}ad8$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}ae1\pm$ gives White a reason to keep working for a couple more hours.

21... $\mathbb{Q}g5?!$

This time 21... $\mathbb{Q}xf2+$ forces a merciless draw: 22. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ (22. $\mathbb{Q}g1?$ $\mathbb{Q}g5!$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ $\mathbb{Q}h3+$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}xg5\mp$) 22... $\mathbb{Q}f7!$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ (23. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}h4+$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}h3+=$)



analysis diagram

23... $\mathbb{N}f6!$, and the threat of ... $\mathbb{N}g5$ leaves his opponent with nothing better than 24. $\mathbb{K}g2$ $\mathbb{N}f7$ with equality. To be fair to Karjakin, Black's 23rd move is very difficult to see from afar.

22.h4

Happy to reach a slightly better endgame, Carlsen overlooks the more accurate 22. $\mathbb{N}ae1!$, recommended by So, along with the sample variation 22... $\mathbb{N}f3$ 23. $\mathbb{N}g4$ $\mathbb{N}g5$ 24. $\mathbb{N}xg5$ $hxg5$ 25. $\mathbb{N}xf3$ $\mathbb{N}xf3$ 26. $\mathbb{N}d1\pm$.

22... $\mathbb{N}f3$ 23. $\mathbb{N}xf3$ $\mathbb{N}xf3+$ 24. $\mathbb{N}xf3$ $\mathbb{N}xf3$ 25. $\mathbb{N}g2\pm$

The pawns will clearly show their weakness in the endgame, especially now that ...d6-d5 has been played.

25... $\mathbb{N}f7$ 26. $\mathbb{N}fe1?$!

26. $\mathbb{N}g4$ $h5$ 27. $\mathbb{N}h2$ and 28. $\mathbb{N}f3$ is a finesse.

26...h5

26... $\mathbb{N}af8$ would most likely be answered by 27. $\mathbb{N}f1$, which is typical of Carlsen's flexible style, since 27. $\mathbb{N}e2$ allows ... $\mathbb{N}f4+$, either immediately or perhaps after exchanging pawns on e4.

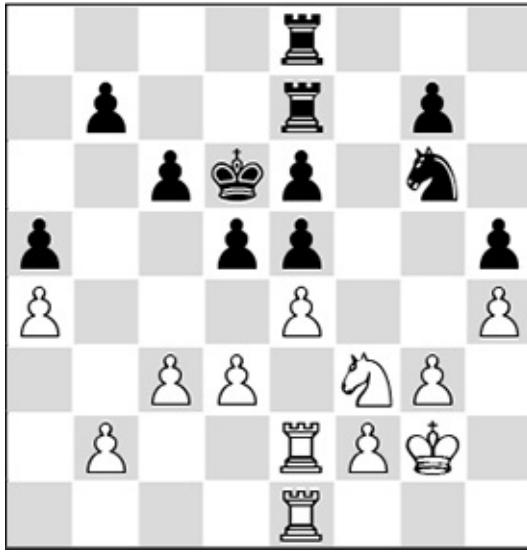
27. $\mathbb{N}f1$

The knight is on a circuit towards f3 and g5.

27... $\mathbb{N}f8!$

Karjakin finds a good defensive idea: the king is going to d6 to protect the weak pawns. The downside is that there are still many pieces on the board, and the king might end up in danger.

28. $\mathbb{N}d2$ $\mathbb{N}e7$ 29. $\mathbb{N}e2$ $\mathbb{N}d6$ 30. $\mathbb{N}f3$ $\mathbb{N}af8$ 31. $\mathbb{N}g5$ $\mathbb{N}e7$ 32. $\mathbb{N}ae1$ $\mathbb{N}fe8$ 33. $\mathbb{N}f3$



33...Nh8!

Black seizes the opportunity to improve the position of the knight.

34.d4!?

White opens the centre while the black knight is far away from the action, giving his opponent the chance to get rid of his doubled pawns. In return, he obtains squares for his pieces, a conversion very much in the style of Fischer. So prefers 34.b4 axb4 35.cxb4 Ngf7 36.a5±.

34...exd4 35.Nxd4 g6

Black continues defending carefully. By protecting f5, 35...Nf7 36.exd5!? cxd5 37.c4 is ruled out, which would open up the position, and the black king might start to feel the wind in his hair.

36.Ne3 Nf7 37.e5+

37.Nf3 Ne5 38.Nf6 Nf7 does not work.

37...Nd7 38.Nf3

More accurate is 38.b4!, which is similar to what occurs later in the game.

38...Nh6?!

38...c5 would have allowed Karjakin a defence with better chances of success, although White would keep the pressure after 39.Nb3 b6 40.Nd2±. According to the engines, Black solves his problems with the complicated 40...Nh8!, preparing 41.Nf6 Nf7!, but analysing with computers is one thing, playing a practical game is another.

39.Nf6 Ng7 40.b4 axb4 41.cxb4

Now, White controls the position and has plans available on both sides of the board. At this stage, the commentators were almost unanimously predicting a victory for Carlsen, but the challenger kept defending tenaciously.

41...Ng8! 42.Nf3 Nh6 43.a5 Nf5 44.Nb3 Nc7 45.Nc5?!

So indicates that this is not the most accurate move. White could have struck before the black king reaches a7 with 45.Nc1, threatening 46.b5, and if 45...Nb8, 46.a6, and the

black pawn chain collapses.

45... ♜b8! 46. ♜b1 ♜a7 47. ♜d3 ♜c7 48. ♜a3

48.b5 cxb5 49. ♜xb5 ♜ee7 leads to nothing, as the rooks defend b7 from c7 and e7, and the c5-knight is loose, meaning that White must start a new manoeuvring phase.

48... ♜d4 49. ♜d1 ♜f5 50. ♜h3 ♜h6 51.f3!

A subtle move, hinting at the possibility of opening a second front.

51... ♜f7 52. ♜d4 ♜f5 53. ♜d2 ♜h7 54. ♜b3 ♜ee7?!

A first slip. Karjakin should have prepared the transfer of one rook to the c-file while the other defends the e-pawn. The best waiting move was 54... ♜h6, when, given that neither b4-b5 nor g3-g4 are easy to execute with advantage, Black has good drawing chances.

55. ♜dd3?!

Objectively better was 55.b5! cxb5 56. ♜xb5, taking advantage of the fact that the second rook cannot go to the c-file. Surely, Carlsen wants to prevent 56... ♜e3, but after 57. ♜d3 ♜c4 58.f4±, with the black rooks passive, White can prepare the a5-a6 break.

55... ♜h8 56. ♜b1!



56... ♜hh7?

The decisive mistake. Karjakin himself indicates 56... ♜h6!±, with the ideas discussed in the note to the 54th move.

57.b5! cxb5 58. ♜xb5+–

Now the black rooks cannot reach the c-file. Carlsen has prevented the manoeuvre ... ♜f5-e3-c4, and pawns begin to fall, despite his opponent's desperate attempts to create counterplay.

58... d4 59. ♜b6 ♜c7 60. ♜xe6 ♜c3 61. ♜f4 ♜hc7 62. ♜d5!?

The 'human' method to realise the advantage, simplifying the endgame. The engines cry out for 62. ♜xg6 ♜xd3 63. ♜xd3 ♜c3 64. ♜f6 ♜e3 65. ♜f4+– to be played, winning a second pawn.

62... ♜xd3 63. ♜xc7 ♜b8 64. ♜b5 ♜c8 65. ♜xg6 ♜xf3 66. ♜g2! ♜b3 67. ♜d6+ ♜xd6 68. ♜xd6 ♜e3

69.e6 ♜c7

The rook endgame is hopelessly lost, a pawn down and with passive pieces. But it is never easy to resign, especially when you are about to lose the advantage in a World Championship match.

70.♖xd4 ♖xe6 71.♖d5! ♖h6 72.♗f3 ♖b8 73.♗f4 ♖a7 74.♗g5 ♖h8 75.♗f6 1-0

This was by no means a model game. Carlsen did not show his best form in the technical part, but the defender's task is usually more complicated, and so finally Karjakin succumbed, and Carlsen was able to level the match score.

Game 7

Viswanathan Anand

2752

Sergey Karjakin

2760

Moscow ct 2016 (11)

The brief notes to this game, which could have been decisive, are based largely on the notes of Maxime Vachier-Lagrave on Chess.com.

1.e4 e5 2.♗f3 ♞c6 3.♘b5 ♘f6 4.d3 ♘c5 5.c3 0-0 6.0-0 d6 7.h3 ♗e7 8.d4 ♗b6 9.♘d3

As we saw in the theory section in Chapter 7, the alternative is 9.♕e1.

9...d5

9...♗g6 10.♕e1 ♕e8 can also be played, as in our main reference game, Vachier-Lagrave-Kramnik, Stavanger 2016. In short, 9.♕e1 is a little more promising if Black keeps the centre, as the bishop can go directly to f1, but in the simplifying line with 9...d5, as Karjakin chose in this game, the knight goes to d6 with gain of time, which should help Black to equalize more easily.



10.♗xe5!?

A novelty that Anand gives one of his seconds, Polish GM Grzegorz Gajewski, credit for. Karjakin had already played this line: 10.dxe5 ♗xe4 11.♗bd2 f5 12.exf6 ♗xf6 13.♗e1

$\mathbb{Q}f5$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}e4=$, Ivanchuk-Karjakin, Beijing rapid 2012.

10... $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$

11... $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ (14. $\mathbb{Q}g4!?$) gives White a mini-advantage. In the position after 14... $\mathbb{Q}h4$ (14... $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}g4!?$) 15. $\mathbb{Q}g4$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}ae1$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}xg4$ 18. $hxg4$ $\mathbb{Q}fe8$ 19. $g5$, the h-file, combined with advancing the pawns, would allow White to annoy his opponent a little bit.

12. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $c6$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $\mathbb{Q}g6!?$

It is easy to attach a chess symbol to a move if you have seen it played before, as Vachier-Lagrave does here to Karjakin's 13th move. It could be that while this book is at the printer's, some GM from the former Soviet Union tries 13... $\mathbb{Q}f5$ and manages to equalise after 14. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 15. $dxc5$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$, or after 14. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}cxd3$. But even in that event, I will not regret not having chosen 9... $d5$ as a main line: an opening book is in part a snapshot of the current state of theory.

14. $\mathbb{Q}h5$ $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 15. $dxc5$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $dxe4$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}d1!$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xg6$ $hxg6$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}g5!$

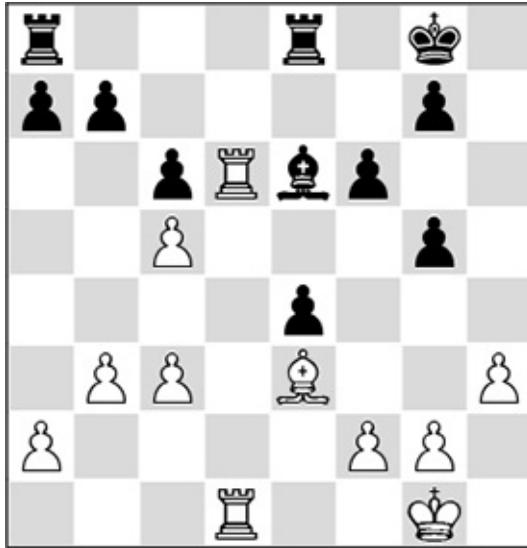


The endgame reached is not as innocent as it seems; in fact, Anand and his seconds had prepared at least up to here.

19... $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ $f6$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $g5$

To be able to defend the e-pawn. Not that losing it would be such a big deal...

22. $\mathbb{Q}d6$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 24. $b3$



According to the rule saying that the attacker should place his pawns on the same colour squares as the colour of the opponent's bishop so as to limit its scope. Later, a queenside expansion will be prepared. Of course, Black must have defensive resources, but things are not so easy.

24... ♕f7

24...g4?! does not look good. After 25.h4, the diagonal gets opened for the bishop, as well as a pathway for the white king.

25. ♜1d4 ♝f5 26.a4 ♜e7 27.g4! ♝h7

Vachier-Lagrave indicates the possibility 27...♝e6 28.c4 (28.b4 a5!) 28...♜h8 (indirectly defending the weak pawn) 29.♛g2 a6 30.b4±.

28.b4 ♝g8?!

Misses the first chance to equalise: 28...a5! 29.b5 cxb5 30.axb5 a4, and the pawn is dangerous. Vachier-Lagrave gives the variation 31.♜d2 a3! 32.♜a2 ♛g6 33.♝c1 e3! 34.fxe3 ♜e5 35.♜xa3 ♜b8. Black has become active and is very close to a draw.

29.b5 ♜c8 30.♜d7 ♜ce8 31.b6! a6 32.♜c7 ♛f8 33.c4 ♝e6!?

This precipitates the crisis. Karjakin has no desire to sit and wait for Anand to play ♔h2-g3 and progress little by little with after h3-h4 etc.

34.♜xe4 ♛f7 35.f4 ♜xc7 36.bxc7



36... $\mathbb{Q}c8?$

36...f5! was still a draw, as indicated by Anand in the press conference after the game. Vachier-Lagrave analyses the opposite-coloured bishops endings that are reached after this move:

A) 37. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 38. fxg5 $\mathbb{Q}xc7$ 39. h4 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 40. $\mathbb{Q}d6$ $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 41. cxd6 f4! 42. $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ $\mathbb{Q}xg4=$;

B) More interesting is 37. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 38. $\mathbb{Q}xe8$ $\mathbb{Q}xe8$ 39. fxg5 fxg4 40. h4 g6 41. a5 $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 42. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 43. $\mathbb{Q}g3!$ (preventing the pawn sacrifice ...g4-g3, enabling the bishop to get to h5, which would be a dead draw) 43... $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ 44. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}a2$ 45. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}b1$ 46. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}c2$



analysis diagram

47. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ (47. $\mathbb{Q}d6$ g3!= and ... $\mathbb{Q}c2-d1-h5$) 47... $\mathbb{Q}xc7$ 48. h5 (48. $\mathbb{Q}e6+$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 49. $\mathbb{Q}f7$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 50. h5 gxh5 51. g6 $\mathbb{Q}b3+$ 52. $\mathbb{Q}f8?$ $\mathbb{Q}e6\#$) 48... gxh5 49. $\mathbb{Q}f6+$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 50. g6 $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 51. g7 $\mathbb{Q}h7=$. The g-pawn is usually easy to stop in opposite-coloured bishops endings; for example, with an f-pawn, the white king would still have the h-file at his disposal to support it.

37.f5 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 38.h4! g6

38... $\mathbb{Q}xc7$ 39. hxg5 fxg5 40. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 41. $\mathbb{Q}d8+-$

39. $\mathbb{Q}d4+$

In case you don't trust my assessment, trust Anand's instead: he believes the game has already been decided.

39... $\mathbb{Q}xc7$ 40. $hxg5$ $fxg5$ 41. $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 42. $f6$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 43. $\mathbb{Q}f4$

43. $\mathbb{Q}h6+$ is easier according to Anand: 43... $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 44. $\mathbb{Q}d8$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 45. $\mathbb{Q}b8+-$, but in the game, with the passed pawn on f6 and the possibility of creating play on both sides of the board, victory is only a matter of time.

43... $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 44. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 45. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 46. $\mathbb{Q}d8+$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 47. $\mathbb{Q}b8$ $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ 48. $\mathbb{Q}xb7+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 49. $\mathbb{Q}b8+$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 50. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 51. $\mathbb{Q}e8+$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 52. $\mathbb{Q}c8$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 53. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 54. $\mathbb{Q}e8+$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 55. $\mathbb{Q}a8$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 56. $\mathbb{Q}e8+$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 57. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $a5$ 58. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 59. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 60. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 61. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 62. $\mathbb{Q}e8+$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 63. $\mathbb{Q}a8$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 64. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$



65. $\mathbb{Q}h4!$

At last, the king penetrates and decides the game.

65... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 66. $\mathbb{Q}e8$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 67. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 68. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 69. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 70. $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 1-0

An impressive technical exhibition by the great Indian champion, who managed to take advantage of his opponent's slight hesitation in a remarkable way! Garry Kasparov commented after the game that Karjakin does not belong to the same category as Anand, which is a bit of an exaggeration if we look at the players' Elo instead of their career achievements. I am afraid that for the now political scientist, that famous photo of the Crimea-born GM with an image of Putin on his t-shirt was like a red flag to a bull.

The game itself shows that Black can equalise in this variation, although it is true that he must suffer. Opposite-coloured bishops endings with rooks are less drawish than ever!

Game 8

Eric Hansen

2582

Samuel Shankland

2679

This important and recent game, played in the last round of the tournament in the middle of a frantic race between Ukraine and the United States, clearly shows the difficulties of getting even the slightest of advantages in the whole Anti-Berlin complex with 4.d3, and more specifically, in the variation with 5.c3. Furthermore, it also shows the thorough lab work that is being done in this respect.

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.d3 ♗c5 5.c3 0-0 6.0-0 d6 7.h3 ♘e7 8.d4 ♗b6 9.♗d3 ♘g6 10.♕e1 ♘e8



11.♗bd2

In the theory section (Chapter 7B1), we focused on the analysis of 11.♗c2, which also does not promise too much. In this game, Black is going to play ...d6-d5, leading to a symmetrical position in which it is not clear whether White's pieces are more effective than Black's after the centre opens up.

11...c6 12.♗f1

In Topalov-Kramnik, Paris rapid 2016, Black took the initiative after 12.♗c2?! ♗c7 13.a4 a5 14.♗f1 d5! 15.exd5 e4! 16.d6 ♗xd6 17.♗h2 h5, which is not so surprising if we take into account that after his 14th move, Black virtually has an extra tempo (...♗g6 versus h2-h3).

12...d5 13.♗g5! dxе4 14.♘xe4



An interesting attempt to maintain some initiative, but it wouldn't be surprising if in a few years, in a hypothetical second edition of this book, instead of this game, a brief comment in the theory section appears, with a laconic '=' attached to it.

14...h6

This is the move that has been experimented with in the second half of 2016, but there are other alternatives:

A) As a last resort, the weakness created on the kingside does not seem so serious after 14...exd4?! 15. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $gxf6$ 16. $\mathbb{R}xe8+$ $\mathbb{K}xe8$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xd4\pm$, but Black should be able to avoid it;

B) In Efimenko-Ponomariov, Khanty-Mansiysk (tiebreak) 2011, the former World Champion preferred the very natural 14... $\mathbb{Q}f5$, and took the initiative after 15. $\mathbb{R}e1?$ $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ h6 17. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}f4\mp$, but 15. $\mathbb{R}e3!$ would have created some difficulties for Black. The idea behind moving the rook back to the e3-square is clear if followed up as in the game: 15... $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ h6 17. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 18. $\mathbb{R}ae1$

15. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 16. $\mathbb{R}e1$

A small improvement (or not, it is difficult to tell without a good microscope at hand) over Karjakin-So, Bilbao 2016, played a month earlier. 16. $\mathbb{R}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7!$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 20. $\mathbb{R}xe5$ $\mathbb{R}xe5$ 21. $dxe5$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$, and the fact that Black has the better minor piece, coupled with the weakness of the e-pawn, compensates for the small material disadvantage. After 22. $\mathbb{Q}h5$ g6! 23. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ (23. $\mathbb{Q}xh6$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ \mathbb{Q}) 23... $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 25. $\mathbb{R}e1$ $\mathbb{R}e8$, White cannot make any progress.

16... $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}h5$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}h5$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$



22.g4!

After a repetition of moves, the Canadian GM decides to continue the fight.

22... $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 24. $dxe5$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{R}ad8$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}f4$



26... ♕d7?!

Prepares to double the rooks, but White has a good antidote. In *New in Chess 2016/7*, the American GM Alejandro Ramirez, originally from Costa Rica, speaks of unsuccessful preparation by Shankland, but 26... ♕e7!, preparing to put pressure on the e5-pawn with ... ♜c7 or ... ♜g5, gives good possibilities of equalising:

A) 27. ♜ad1 ♜xd1 28. ♜xd1 ♜g5! 29. ♜d3 ♜d8 leaves Black with sufficient compensation for the pawn, since in the event of 30. ♜e2? ♜h4, White is powerless in the face of the threats;

B) 27. ♛g2 unpins the e-pawn, but then 27... ♜c5! is strong, avoiding 28. ♜d3. White has nothing better than to force a draw with 28.e6 g5! 29.exf7+ ♛xf7 30. ♜c2! gxf4 31. ♜h7+=;

C) Stockfish suggests 27.a4, but Black should equalise after 27... ♜c7 28. ♜d3 f6 or 28... ♜d5=.

27. ♛g2 ♛h8?

It may be a knee-jerk reaction, rejecting the obvious (and better) 27... ♜ed8 in the face of the push 28.e6?! (28. ♜e4±, and if 28... ♜d2, 29. ♜e2), which would be answered by 28... ♜d2! 29.e7! ♜xe2 30.exd8 ♜+ ♜xd8 31. ♜xe2 ♜g5∞.

28. ♜ac1!

An important move, which prepares the defence of the second rank from c2, and at the same time a future doubling on the e-file.

28...a6?!

Shankland continues the game without a plan, without a doubt affected by time pressure, as well as by the importance of the game.

29. ♜c2 ♜d8 30. ♜f3 ♜c7 31. ♜ce2+-

Hansen has consolidated his extra pawn. The e5-pawn is now very strong, supported by the rooks and threatening to move forward at any point.

31... ♜d2 32. ♜xd2 ♜xd2 33. ♜e2 ♜d7?!

More stubborn is 33... ♕d8, preventing the advance of the e-pawn.



34.e6! fxe6 35.♘xe6 ♕d6

35... ♕xe6? loses immediately to 36.♘f8+ and 37.♘f5+, but now the white knight is cemented on e6 and the black position is lost.

36.♘f5 ♕e7 37.f4 ♕e8 38.♘f3 ♕g8 39.♘d3! ♕b8

39... ♕xe6? 40.♘c4

40.f5 ♕d7 41.♘e4 ♕e7?!

Speeding up the outcome.

42.♘c5 1-0

A good game by the strong Canadian grandmaster, better known for his work as a commentator on Chess24.

Despite this loss, the USA won the golden medal on tiebreak, by a minimum Bucholtz margin, when on tournament board 28, the German grandmaster Matthias Blübaum defeated the Estonian master Tarvo Seeman in a drawn position.

Game 9

Magnus Carlsen

2826

Viswanathan Anand

2800

Nanjing 2010 (7)

The comments to this game are loosely based on those written by the Czech GM Stohl for *ChessBase Magazine*, with the necessary cuts to keep the weight of this book within reasonable margins. I shan't forget thee, veteran reader, fellow sufferer of ailments!

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♜c6 3.♗b5 ♜f6 4.0-0 ♜xe4 5.♖e1 ♜d6 6.♘xe5 ♜e7 7.♘f1 ♜f5 8.♘f3! 0-0 9.d4 d5 10.c3 ♜d6 11.♘d3



We have already seen this line in the theory section. The black knights are not in ideal positions, but this should not be a serious obstacle to achieving equality.

11... ♜ce7 12. ♜bd2 c6 13. ♜f1 ♜g6 14. ♜c2

This makes Anand justify the previous manoeuvres. 14.g3!? prevents exchanges, at the cost of making this square unavailable for his f1-knight.

14... ♜fh4 15. ♜xh4 ♜xh4 16.g3 ♜d8?!

Too passive. More rational seemed 16... ♜h3!=, hindering the knight manoeuvre to f5.

17. ♜e3 ♜e8 18. ♜d2 ♜f8 19. ♜f5 ♜c7

19... ♜xf5 20. ♜xe8 ♜xe8 21. ♜xf5 g6 22. ♜e1 ♜d8 23. ♜h3 is not very comfortable, especially because Black is struggling to contest the open file. Therefore, Anand, the World Champion at the time of this game, tries to make do without exchanging bishops for the time being.

20. ♜xe8 ♜xe8 21. ♜e1 ♜e6 22. ♜c1

Every little advantage may count later. With this move, Carlsen creates the threat 23. ♜xg7 and provokes the advance ...f7-f6.

22...f6 23. ♜d1! ♜d7 24. ♜f3 ♜e8 25.h4 ♜f7?!

It is better to remove the annoying knight immediately, which would also force the exchange of rooks: 25... ♜xf5 26. ♜xf5 ♜xe1+ 27. ♜xe1 ♜e8 28. ♜d2±



26.♘f1!

A typical procedure to maintain the tension: White can afford to keep the rooks on the board thanks to his bishops, which cover all entry points on the open file.

26...♝g6 27.h5 ♝xf5 28.♝xf5

Anand decides that he cannot tolerate the knight any longer, but the exchange comes at the worst possible time, now that the opponent's rook is supporting play on the kingside.

28...♞f7 29.♛g2 g6 30.♝d3 f5 31.♞h1?!

Allowing his clever opponent to obtain counterplay just in time. It was necessary to strike without further delay with 31.g4!..

31...♝e6 32.hxg6 hxg6 33.g4 ♝f4! 34.♝e3 fxg4?

34...♝xe3 35.fxe3 ♜g5 36.♝f4 fxg4!= liquidates the white pressure.

35.♝xg4 ♜g7 36.♞h5!

The threat of 37.♞f5 forces Black to give up the f4-square.

36...♝xe3 37.fxe3 ♜f8 38.♞h3 ♜g8 39.♞f3 ♜e6 40.♝f4 ♜g7?!

40...♝e7± avoids the loss of a pawn.

41.b3?!

Preparing the advance of the c-pawn, but overlooking 41.♞h3 ♜f6 42.♝h6+ ♜g8 43.♝xg6!+, winning a pawn.

41...♝e7 42.c4 ♜d8 43.♞h3 ♜d6 44.♝h6+ ♜g8 45.cxd5 cxd5 46.e4! ♜g7 47.♝e3 ♜e7 48.e5±



The better pawn structure and the powerful bishop give White a virtually winning advantage. Carlsen improves his position over the next moves, while the counterplay his opponent seeks only leaves his rook out of the game.

48... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 49. $\mathbb{Q}h6$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 50. $\mathbb{Q}h4$ $a6$ 51. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 52. $b4$ $b5$ 53. $a3$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 54. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 55. $\mathbb{Q}b1!$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 56. $\mathbb{Q}a2$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 57. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}c1$ 58. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}b1$ 59. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}b2$ 60. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$



61. $\mathbb{Q}g3$

Stohl points out the winning idea 61. $e6!$ $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ 62. $\mathbb{Q}c7+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 63. $\mathbb{Q}h6+!$ (63. $\mathbb{Q}xh7$ $\mathbb{Q}e2+$ 64. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}b3+!$ leads to perpetual check) 63... $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 64. $\mathbb{Q}xh7+-$.

61... $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 62. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 63. $\mathbb{Q}d8?$

Carlsen's prodigious talent for prophylaxis seemed to have abandoned him in this game. 63. $\mathbb{Q}f6$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 64. $\mathbb{Q}f2+-$ would have prevented the black queen from becoming active.

63... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 64. $\mathbb{Q}f2?!$ $\mathbb{Q}a2$ 65. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}g4=$

Now the white king is too exposed for him to have any realistic winning chances.

66. $\mathbb{Q}e7+$ $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 67. $\mathbb{Q}d8$ $\mathbb{Q}h5+$ 68. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}g4+ \frac{1}{2}-\frac{1}{2}$

The greatest danger for Black in this variation is Tedium, that terrible monster that would happily turn land into rubble and, amid a yawn, devour the world (Baudelaire). You are waiting for your opponent to offer you a draw so you can go and do something more

interesting, perhaps watch a curling tournament on Eurosport or take an online bobbin lace course, when all of a sudden, one tiny inaccuracy is enough for the symmetrical position to become unpleasant.

Game 10

Maxime Vachier-Lagrave

2766

Anish Giri

2750

Biel 2014 (5)

For the notes to this excellent victory by Vachier-Lagrave, I have relied on the work of the Indian IM Shah Sagar, who commented the game for *ChessBase Magazine*, but also on the work of Lagrange, Legendre, Laplace or Lebesgue, also Frenchmen, mathematicians, and with last names that sound so similar to our hero's. 'Maths is a pleasure' could be the motto for this game.

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♗f6 4.0-0 ♗xe4 5.♖e1 ♘d6 6.♗xe5 ♗e7 7.♗f1 ♗xe5 8.♖xe5 0-0 9.♗c3 ♗e8 10.♗d5 ♗d6 11.♖e2!?



A logical novelty: the rook keeps the e1-square free for the queen or the other rook.
11.♖e1 is usually played.

11...c6

Vachier-Lagrave's idea had upset the geometry: in Motylev-Fedoseev, Moscow blitz 2014, Black equalised easily with 11...♗f6! 12.♗e3 (12.♗xf6+ ♗xf6 13.d4 gives some advantage with the rook on e1, thanks to a timely ♗d3) 12...♗e8 13.d4 ♗f8 14.♗c4 d5 15.♗e5 ♗e4=, and proves that the rook, at the crossing of the d1-h5 and f1-a6 diagonals, is clumsily placed.

12.♗e3 ♗c7 13.♗f5 d5 14.♗e7+ ♗h8 15.♗xc8 ♗xc8

White has lost time and space to get the bishop pair.

16.d3 f5

As we saw in Chapter 8, Black usually looks for counterplay on the kingside with the help of the f-pawn. Sagar shows a variation in which we see the usefulness of having the rook on e2: 16... ♕d6 17.c3 ♔f6 18. ♔a4 a6 19. ♔e3 ♕ce8 20. ♕ae1±

17.g3 ♔f6

We have been following parallel lines of 11. ♕e1. 17... ♔f6 was possible, as in the main variation of our theoretical analysis, and I do not believe this changes the evaluation (=).

18. ♔d2!

Taking advantage of the fact that the capture of the pawn is followed by 19. ♕b1 and 20. ♕xb7.

18... ♕d6 19. ♔c3!



A little provocation.

19...d4?

It is difficult to understand an error like this from a classical player such as Giri: now the ‘extra bishop’ sees a future path opened up. In spite of all the subtleties, White still has not obtained anything serious after 19... ♔f7=, intending to play 20... ♕b5 or 20... f4.

20. ♔d2 ♕f7 21.f4!

As is usual in positions with the pair of bishops, pawns are placed on squares of different colour to the bishop that has been left without a direct opponent, taking away squares from the knights.

21... ♕ce8 22. ♔g2 ♕d6 23.a3!?

He defends the pawn before exchanging rooks.

In this position, moving the rook, as Carlsen did in the previous game, is not very convincing, as there wouldn’t be any clear path for it to become active outside the file.

23... ♕b6 24. ♕xe8 ♕xe8 25. ♔f1 ♔g8 26. ♕e1 ♕e6 27.a4!

Gaining space on the queenside.

27...a6 28. ♔f3 g6 29. ♔g2 ♔f7 30. ♕xe6 ♔xe6



Normally, endgames reached from this variation end in draws, but Vachier-Lagrave has achieved something that is not that common: not only has Black opened the game for White's light-squared bishop with the move ...d5-d4; also, the pawn itself is a weakness.

Now, White must answer this question: how to create any real threats against the solid black position?

31.♘a1!!

A variation of Nimzowitsch's famous concept: the 'mysterious move' is performed by the queen instead of a rook.

31...♝c5?

Sagar suggests 31...♝d8!? 32.b4 ♘f6, but the bishop is not the piece that needs to be improved: 31...♞e8! 32.b4 ♞c7±, and the knight is ready to jump to d5, while also preventing b4-b5. I don't see clearly how White can make any progress.

32.b4 ♘b6 33.♗e1!

Showing that the queen's route was not pointless. Now, the d-pawn is in danger.

33...♞c8 34.♗f2 ♘d7 35.h3!



Creating play on both flanks! In addition to the breakthrough on the queenside, Black has to reckon with the possibility of g3-g4.

35...h5

A small concession, trading safety for solidity.

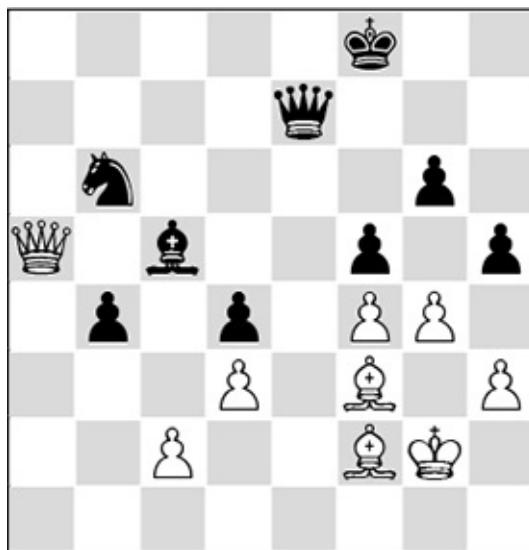
36.b5! axb5 37.axb5 cxb5 38.Qa8 Qc5

After 38...Qd6 39.Qd5+ Qe7 40.Qg8+-, we see that provoking the weakening of the kingside was useful.

39.Qxb7 Qb6 40.Qa2+ Qg7 41.Qa6 b4 42.Qf3

White has created two weaknesses (the b- and d-pawns), but they are very close to each other, so it is necessary to get something on the other flank, if possible with the opponent's pieces engaged in defending the queenside.

42...Qf8 43.Qa5 Qe7 44.Qf1 Qf7 45.Qg2 Qf8 46.g4!



Breaking through after repeating moves: a fine display of Soviet technique.

46...hxg4 47.hxg4 fxg4

A choice between weak pawns. Giri's choice seems better than 47...Qd6 48.gxf5 gxf5, as the g-pawn will be easier to defend, but Black loses space, and in an endgame, the opponent's king can get in using the e4-square. One classic commentator said that a bad position is like a blanket that's too short: you can't cover both your head and feet at the same time.

48.Qxg4 Qc7 49.Qf3 Qg7 50.Qb5 Qc8 51.Qc4 Qb6?!

Slightly better was to defend the pawn with 51...Qd6±, which prevented the entry of the queen. In any case, the position looks bad.

52.Qd5!+-

Forcing Black to choose between a mating attack or a lost endgame.

52...Qd6 53.Qe5+!

Reaching the endgame with a passed pawn on e5.

53...Qxe5

Unplayable is 53...Qh7 54.Qe8+--.

54.fxe5 ♜a7

A last attempt at counterplay.

55.♕d5?!

More accurate was 55.♕h4, with the possible continuation 55...♝b5 56.♕f6+ ♔f8 57.♕d5 ♜a3 58.♕b3+–, as pointed out by Sagar.

55...♝b5?

55...g5! was a bit more stubborn.

56.♕h4 g5

A desperate measure. Otherwise, the passed pawn advances, the king reaches e4, and the black position collapses.

57.♕xg5 ♔g6 58.♕d8 ♔f5 59.e6 ♜a3 60.♕b3 ♜xc2 61.♕xc2 ♔xe6 1-0

11.♖e2!? is not a novelty that wins the game outright, but I imagine that you were not expecting any miniatures to follow from such a scheme. If you want to play for a win in these lines with 5.♖e1, you must follow the steps of Vachier-Lagrange, not by playing his novelty (Berlin fans already know how to fully equalise against it), nor by enrolling in exact sciences (it would take away time to study chess), but rather by looking for small novelties that complicate the defender's life, who is surely bored by having to defend such a dull and symmetrical position.

Game 11

Vasili Ivanchuk

2751

Magnus Carlsen

2733

Morelia/Linares 2008 (8)

The following comments are loosely drawn from the notes by the Romanian GM Mihail Marin for *ChessBase Magazine*.

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♜c6 3.♗b5 ♜f6 4.0-0 ♜xe4 5.d4 a6?! 6.♕xc6 dxc6 7.♗e2 ♜f5



8. $\mathbb{Q}e1!$

A few years ago, Ivanchuk seemed to know absolutely everything, even this move, which is almost a novelty. We have already analysed this ‘refutation’ in Chapter 9 more extensively than it deserved.

8... $\mathbb{Q}b4?!$

Not a very successful improvisation. Black only has realistic hopes of survival with 8... $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ 0-0 10. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ f5 12. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ e4, or with 8... $\mathbb{Q}f6!?$, following our analysis.

9.c3 $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 11. $dxe5$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 0-0-0±



White experiences small development problems, but Carlsen’s only real compensation was the clock, as Ivanchuk was low on time.

13. $\mathbb{Q}bd2$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}f1!$ $\mathbb{Q}he8$ 15. $b3$

Marin points out the simple 15.c4! $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}b3$, followed by developing the queenside. I hope that the distinguished writer doesn’t mind me replacing his ± with +-.

15...g5!

Continuing to create problems, either real or imaginary ones.

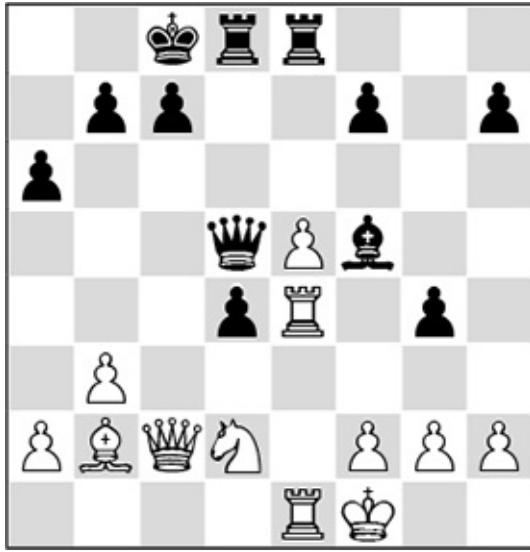
16. $\mathbb{Q}b2$

16.g4!? $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 17.b4 is a variation to analyse at home, not to play in a tournament game when you’re a piece up.

16...g4 17. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4!?$

17... $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ may give drawing chances, but the future World Champion seeks to muddy the waters in time trouble.

18. $cxd4$ $c5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}ae1$ $cxd4$



20. ♕c4?!

Better is 20. ♕d1!±. After 20... ♔xe4 21. ♕xe4, either the g- or the d-pawn falls.

20... ♔xe4 21. ♕xe4 ♕xe5 22. ♕xg4?

22. ♕xd5 and 23. ♕xg4 still gives White an edge.

22... ♕de8 23. ♕f3 ♕xc4+ 24.bxc4 ♕e2 ±

In the endgame, a rook is not necessarily inferior to the bishop and knight duo, especially in positions with pawn races. The a-pawn will be quite difficult to stop.

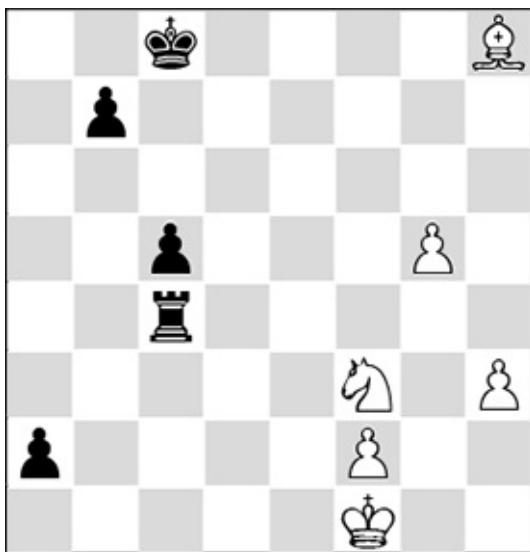
25. ♕xd4 ♕xa2 26. ♕g7 a5 27. ♕xf7 ♕c2 28.g4 a4 29.g5 a3 30. ♕xh7 a2 31. ♕h8 ♕xh8 32. ♕xh8 ♕xc4

It is now clear that it is White who is struggling for a draw.

33.h3

33. ♕e2 c5 34. ♕d2 ♕g4 35. ♕b3 ♕xg5 36. ♕c1± might have been safer.

33...c5



34. ♕e1?

In desperate time trouble, Ivanchuk misses his last chance: 34. ♕d2! ♕c1+ 35. ♕e2 c4! (35...a1) 36. ♕xa1 ♕xa1 37. ♕e4=) 36.h4! ♔d7 37.g6 b5 38.f4, and both 38... ♕e6 39.h5 and 38... ♕c2 39. ♕a1! c3 40. ♕d3 ♕xd2+ 41. ♕xc3 may still lead to a draw.

34... ♜c1 35.g6 ♜d7-+ 36.♕b2 ♜e6 37.h4 c4 38.h5 c3 39.♕xc1 a1♛ 40.♕d3 0-1

The transpositional line with 5...a6 is very risky, especially if you don't know the details well, as happened to the young Carlsen in this game. Another valuable lesson is that you should never give up; always keep looking for any chances you might get, no matter how small.

Game 12

Anatoly Karpov

2700

Viktor Kortchnoi

2695

Merano Wch m 1981 (2)

There's nothing better than to resort to the classics to illustrate the Old Berlin. Originally, I annotated an attractive game from the match Zukertort-Anderssen from 1868. However, I have decided to share with you another, less venerable, example that might be more useful to you, if you want to include this variation in your repertoire.

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♜c6 3.♗b5 ♜f6 4.0-0 ♜xe4 5.d4 ♜e7

A surprise for Karpov in his first game with white in the match: there will be no Open Spanish nor French. The main variation of the Berlin, at the time of this game, returns to a World Championship match after being absent for seventy-three years.

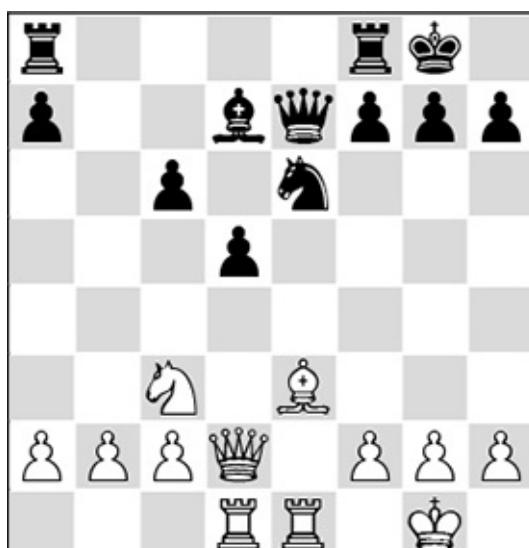
6.♗e2 ♜d6 7.♕xc6 bxc6 8.dxe5 ♜b7 9.♘c3 0-0 10.♖e1 ♜c5 11.♘e3

Our main variation (and also the one Tarrasch chose in his match against Lasker in 1908), 11.♘d4, gives quite reasonable chances for an advantage, as we saw in Chapter 10, variation A. Kortchnoi was very careful not to repeat the same defence in the next game of the match, fearing that his opponent's seconds might find some sharper line.

11... ♜e6 12.♖ad1 d5 13.exd6 cxd6 14.♘d4 ♜d7

In the theory section, we saw that Black also equalises after 14... ♜xd4 15.♕xd4 ♜e8!.

15.♘f5 d5 16.♘xe7+ ♜xe7 17.♘d2!



Karpov shows his legendary positional skills. The white bishop is a little better, but that's by far not enough to create any real winning chances. The seemingly harmless queen move prevents 17... $\mathbb{Q}b4?$, thanks to the possibility 18. $\mathbb{Q}xd5!$, and at the same time frees up the e2-square for the knight. It might not be such a big deal, but White is a little more comfortable.

17... $\mathbb{Q}h4?!$

In Jakovenko-Malakhov, Moscow 2010, the modern specialist in the variation improved Black's game with 17... $\mathbb{Q}fe8$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}f6!?$ (there is no need to prevent what does you no harm) 19.c4 $\mathbb{Q}ed8$ 20.cxd5 cxd5, and it is common knowledge that White's edge, based on Black's isolated pawn, is only symbolic.

18. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}fe8$ 19.b3 $\mathbb{Q}e7?!$

Now, 20.c4 had to be prevented, but 19... $\mathbb{Q}ed8\pm$ puts the pieces on better squares.

20. $\mathbb{Q}g3!$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 21.f3

Karpov likes having things under control.

A more dynamic player might have opted for the alternative 21.c4!? dxc4 22.bxc4, and the knight enters via e4-d6.

21... $\mathbb{Q}e8?!$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}e2$

And again, there was a more incisive option: 22.f4±

22...h6 23. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$

The German GM Unzicker recommends 23... $\mathbb{Q}d7$, with the idea of ... $\mathbb{Q}d8$.

24. $\mathbb{Q}c1!$



24...d4?

Kortchnoi has been forced to defend against both real and imaginary threats, and with little time on the clock, commits a serious strategic error, handing over several squares to his patient opponent. Perhaps he was thinking that he could later play ...c6-c5, but he will not have the time to do so.

25. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$

26...c5? is wrong, due to 27. $\mathbb{Q}d6$.

27. $\mathbb{Q}e5\pm \mathbb{Q}d8$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}de1 \mathbb{Q}d5$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}xd5 \mathbb{Q}xd5$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}e5 \mathbb{Q}d7$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}e1 \mathbb{Q}c8$ 32. b4?!

More prophylaxis. Once more, Karpov refuses to force matters with the objectively better 32.f4!?, possibly influenced by the lack of time of his arch-enemy: forced play is easier in time trouble.

32... $\mathbb{Q}d8$

Giving up the pawn with 32...c5!? gives more hope.

33. $\mathbb{Q}a5 \mathbb{Q}d7$ 34. h3



Karpov's careful play contributes to his opponent's decisive error.

34...f6? 35. $\mathbb{Q}xa7!+- \mathbb{Q}d5$

35... $\mathbb{Q}xa7$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}xe6++-$

36. $\mathbb{Q}a5 \mathbb{Q}d7$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}a7 \mathbb{Q}d5$ 38. $\mathbb{Q}a5 \mathbb{Q}d7$ 39. $\mathbb{Q}e4 \mathbb{Q}f7$ 40. $\mathbb{Q}f5 \mathbb{Q}e8$ 41. $\mathbb{Q}h2 \mathbb{Q}b7$ 42. a3 $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 43. h4 h5
44. $\mathbb{Q}f2 \mathbb{Q}d7$ 45. $\mathbb{Q}a6 \mathbb{Q}e8$ 46. $\mathbb{Q}a5 \mathbb{Q}g6$ 47. $\mathbb{Q}d3 \mathbb{Q}h7$ 48. $\mathbb{Q}b6 \mathbb{Q}c8$ 49. a4 $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 50. a5 c5 51. bxc5 $\mathbb{Q}xd3$
52. cxd3 $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 53. $\mathbb{Q}a7 \mathbb{Q}g6$ 54. $\mathbb{Q}c7 \mathbb{Q}xc7$ 55. $\mathbb{Q}xc7 \mathbb{Q}xd3$ 56. $\mathbb{Q}xd4 \mathbb{Q}e5$ 57. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$

Black resigned.

Karpov, surely the champion of the past whose style is most similar to Magnus Carlsen's, shows us that this kind of middlegame with opposite-coloured bishops, so typical of the Old Berlin, is not as innocent as it seems.

Game 13

Dmitry Andreikin

2706

Vladimir Kramnik

2796

Nizhny Novgorod ch-RUS 2013 (3)

This game illustrates a typical feature of master chess of our days: sidelines are not employed to cut down on the amount of work, but rather to create problems for the opponent based on sharp and specific preparation, good for a single game, i.e. unless you

somehow manage to convince your federation not to publish your game.

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♗f6 4.0-0 ♗xe4 5.d4 ♘d6 6.dxe5 ♗xb5 7.a4 ♘bd4

We saw in the theory section of Chapter 11, variation A2, that 7...d6 8.e6!? is playable but a little risky. Kramnik almost never likes to show off in the opening.

8.♗xd4 ♘xd4 9.♕xd4 d5 10.exd6 ♗xd6 11.♘e3+!?

Avoiding a more or less forced draw after 11.♔e4+ ♔e6 12.♔d4, a variation that could be worth considering in the last round of a tournament, or some similar situation.

11...♔e6

As we already know, this is even safer than 11...♕e7 12.♘c3 c6.

12.♘c3 a6 13.♖d1 ♗c6 14.♖d3!



Planning ♘b5 in combination with ♖c3.

14...♖c8?

Avoids 15.♘b5, but there's no time for such luxuries. We saw in the theory section that 14...♕e7 equalises without too many problems.

15.♘e2!

The knight hits from the other side. It is possible that Kramnik did not appreciate the strength of this move, and was only counting on 15.♗g3?! f6!, with a quite safe position after ...♗f7.

15...♕c5?

15...♗xc2 16.♘d4 is too risky, but as the American GM Josh Friedel points out in his notes for *ChessBase Magazine*, it was still possible to defend after 15...♕d6! 16.♘d4 ♗d5 17.♗xe6 ♗xe6 18.♗xe6+ fxe6±. A similar endgame is reached to that of our main theoretical line with 14...♕e7, although the time lost with 14...♖c8 gives White better chances to press. A possible variation is 19.a5 (fixing b7) 19...♖f8! (better than 19...0-0, as the king on e8 defends against a possible invasion on the seventh rank) 20.♖b3 (20.♗e3 ♗f5, and if 21.c4, ♗c5 or 21...♗b4; here, it becomes obvious why the king must be on e8) 20...♗c5! 21.♗e3 ♗xe3 22.♖xe3 ♗b8) 22...♖f6±.

16. ♕g3 f6 17. ♔e3!

Simple and strong. Andreikin completes his development and keeps his opponent busy with the threat 18. ♜c3.

17... ♜d6 18. ♜f4 ♜xf4

There is no choice but to give up the c-pawn if Black wants to get his king out of the centre. Directly losing is 18... ♜c5? 19.b4! ♜a7 20. ♔e3+–.

19. ♜xf4 0-0 20. ♜c3 ♜d6 21. ♜xe6 ♜xe6 22. ♜xc7 ♜xc7 23. ♜xc7 ♜c8 24. ♜xb7 ♜xc2 25. h3±



We have a major-piece endgame in which Kramnik is quite active, but he does not have sufficient compensation for the pawn.

25... ♜e2 26. ♜b8+ ♛f7 27. ♜a7+ ♛g8?!

27... ♛g6! 28.b4 h5± would throw a spanner in the works for White. White doesn't have the check that he used in the game to bring the queen to f4.

28.b4 h6 29. ♜b8+ ♛h7 30. ♜f4!

A good square for the queen: active and at the same time defending the pawns.

To better understand the struggle of the major pieces we must bear in mind that White is happy to exchange rooks, but exchanging queens is only good either if it dooms the opponent's rook to passivity, or if the rook can move behind the b-pawn.

30... ♜e6 31. ♜d4 ♜e2 32. ♜f4 ♜e6



33.♘b1!

After a repetition that shows us that he is a GM from Russia, Andreikin prepares the advance of the pawn.

33...♗a2?

It is not a good idea to move the pieces away from the centre. Still resisting was 33...♖c4 34.♗d2 ♗e4 35.♕e1 ♗f5 (35...♗d4? 36.♗xd4 ♕xd4 37.♘b1+-) 36.♕c1 ♕e4±.

34.♗f5+ ♔g8 35.♕d1+-

Once more, we see the principle of two weaknesses at work: the centralised major pieces begin to create play against the king.

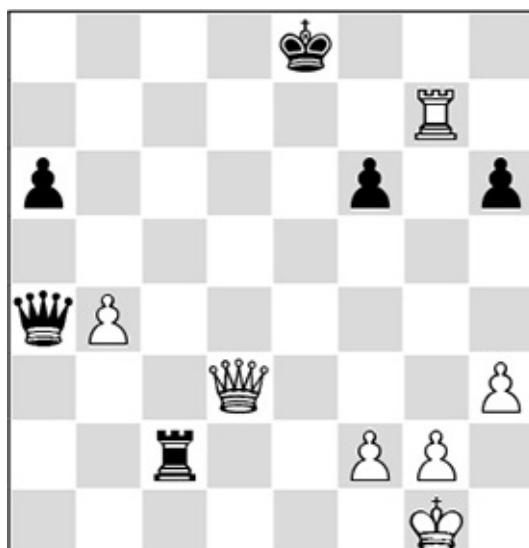
35...♗xa4

35...♕d2 36.♕xd2 ♗xd2 37.♗b1+-

36.♕d8+

According to Friedel, 36.b5! wins outright, because 36...axb5 37.♕d8+ ♔f7 38.♗h5+ leads to mate.

36...♔f7 37.♗d5+ ♔g6 38.♗d3+ ♔f7 39.♕d7+ ♔e8! 40.♕d8+ ♔f7 41.♕d7+ ♔e8 42.♕xg7



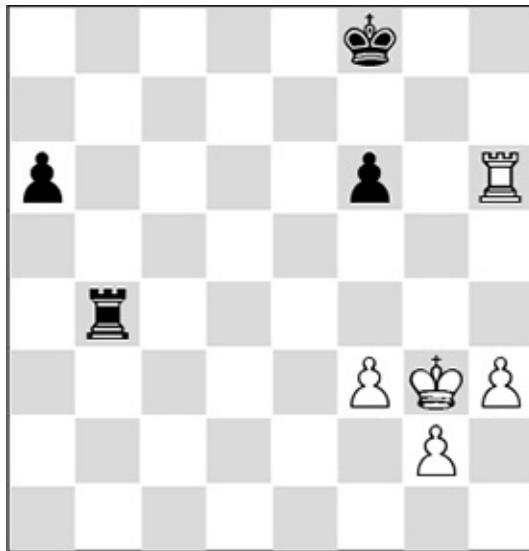
In time trouble, Andreikin finally stops looking like Alekhine and commits some

inaccuracies. Now, Black manages to escape into a rook endgame, but with two extra pawns on one flank against an opponent's passed pawn on the other, the win is usually trivial.

42... $\mathbb{Q}a1+$ 43. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}e5+$ 44. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}xg3+$ 45. $\mathbb{Q}xg3$ $\mathbb{R}b2$ 46. $\mathbb{R}b7$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$

46...a5 47. $\mathbb{R}b6!$ axb4 48. $\mathbb{R}xf6$ h5 49. $\mathbb{R}h6$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 50. $\mathbb{R}xh5$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 51. $\mathbb{R}h8$ $\mathbb{R}d2$ 52. $\mathbb{R}b8+-$, Friedel.

47. $\mathbb{R}h7$ $\mathbb{R}b3+$ 48. f3 $\mathbb{R}xb4$ 49. $\mathbb{R}xh6+-$



If the defender is unable to place the rook behind the a-pawn, or if he cannot advance it quickly enough, he is faced with a lost cause.

49... $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 50. $\mathbb{R}h5$ $\mathbb{R}a4$ 51. h4 $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 52. $\mathbb{R}c5$ a5 53. h5+ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 54. f4 $\mathbb{R}a2$ 55. $\mathbb{R}f3$ a4 56. $\mathbb{R}a5$ a3 57. g4 $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 58. $\mathbb{R}a6$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 59. $\mathbb{R}a7+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 60. $\mathbb{R}e4$ $\mathbb{R}g2$ 61. $\mathbb{R}f5$ a2 62. h6 $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 63. g5 fxg5 64. fxg5 $\mathbb{R}b2$ 65. $\mathbb{R}g6$ $\mathbb{R}b6+$ 66. $\mathbb{Q}h5$ $\mathbb{R}b5$ 67. $\mathbb{R}xa2$

When that sad moment of resignation draws near, chess players behave in one of two ways: some decide to drink up that bitter cup of defeat slowly over the board, while others sign their score sheets and head straight to the nearest pub, where they are likely to drink up several cups filled with a different kind of bitterness, a colder, more enjoyable one. Kramnik chooses the first method, but he only succeeds in showing how to lose a rook endgame against two connected pawns.

67... $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 68. $\mathbb{R}a7+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 69. $\mathbb{R}g7+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 70. $\mathbb{R}f7$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 71. $\mathbb{R}f6$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 72. $\mathbb{R}e6$ $\mathbb{R}a5$ 73. $\mathbb{R}e7+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 74. $\mathbb{R}g6$ $\mathbb{R}a6+$ 75. $\mathbb{R}f5$ $\mathbb{R}a1$ 76. g6 $\mathbb{R}f1+$ 77. $\mathbb{R}e5$ $\mathbb{R}e1+$ 78. $\mathbb{R}d6$ $\mathbb{R}d1+$ 79. $\mathbb{R}c5$ $\mathbb{R}c1+$ 80. $\mathbb{R}b4$ $\mathbb{R}c8$ 81. $\mathbb{R}b5$ $\mathbb{R}a8$ 82. $\mathbb{R}b6$ $\mathbb{R}b8+$ 83. $\mathbb{R}a7$ $\mathbb{R}d8$ 84. $\mathbb{R}b7$ 1-0

In this game, we have seen a new trend in opening preparation, and the variations that we studied in Chapter 11 can be very useful for that purpose. Surely, Andreikin knew that Kramnik could equalise against him with correct play, but even so, he carried out this attractive idea, with the well-founded hope that Kramnik would not be so well prepared against it compared to the main lines.

Game 14

Bartosz Socko

2564

Joel Lautier

2653

Leon Ech-tt 2001 (3)

The notes to this game are based on the ones by the Czech GM Igor Stohl, an excellent and thorough chess writer. Despite the difference in level between the engines of fifteen years ago and now, Stohl did a good job understanding the general lines of the tactical fight that we enter into in Chapter 11, variation B1 (alternatives to the endgame).

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.0-0 ♗xe4 5.d4 ♘d6 6.♗g5 f6



Lautier goes ahead and captures the piece; this is what the Cantabrian master Julio Velasco called an ‘inward gambit’. We know from the theory section that greedily taking the piece is to run the same risk as a boa constrictor trying to digest an elephant. We also know that 6...♝e7= is an alternative; while not necessarily better, at least simpler.

7.dxe5!? ♗xb5 8.exf6 ♗xf6 9.♘e1+

Helping the black king to flee from the centre. 9.♗f4!?, the main theoretical battlefield in this variation, is more logical, since the black king still cannot escape.

9...♔f7 10.♗d5+ ♔g7 11.♗f4?

Lets the black king hide for good. My novelty 11.♗d2!? ♗d6 12.♗h5∞ keeps it quite busy thanks to the tactical issue 12...♗g8? 13.♗g5! → .

11...♗d6 12.♗h4 ♗g8 13.♗c3 ♗h8† 14.♗h5



Despite the extra piece, the situation is still not entirely clear, since Black has to find a way to develop his queenside. Additionally, White has the possibility $\mathbb{R}e1-e3-h3$.

14... $\mathbb{Q}d4?$

Returning material; a good idea to execute sooner rather than later. Black obtains a virtually decisive advantage after 14...b6 15. $\mathbb{Q}d5 \mathbb{Q}a6!$ (threatens 16... $\mathbb{Q}c4$; 15... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}ad1!$ leaves Black without a clear plan) 16.b3 $\mathbb{Q}d4!$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xf6 \mathbb{Q}xf6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}e5 \mathbb{Q}g7$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xf6 \mathbb{Q}xf6\#$. The three pieces are stronger than the queen.

15. $\mathbb{Q}d5!$ b6 16. $\mathbb{Q}xf6?$

Stohl indicates the stronger 16. $\mathbb{Q}ad1!$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ (16... $\mathbb{Q}c6?$ even loses after 17. $\mathbb{Q}d3$) 17. $\mathbb{Q}xf6 \mathbb{Q}xf6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}e5 \mathbb{Q}xe5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xe5+ \mathbb{Q}g7$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}e3\infty$. White is better coordinated, thanks to the threat of 21. $\mathbb{Q}g6$.

16... $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}e5 \mathbb{Q}g7$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xf6 \mathbb{Q}xf6\#$



Black has achieved an advantage similar to that of the note to move 14. The threat is 19... $\mathbb{Q}xc2$, and the black centralization contrasts with the white pieces in the corner, ashes of an attack gone awry.

19. $\mathbb{Q}e3?$

Stohl shows the continuation 19. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xd4!$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}e7 \mathbb{Q}e4$ 22.c3 $\mathbb{Q}f6$

23. $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ $\mathbb{Q}ad8\#$.

19... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}ae8$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}g6+$

A rather desperate tactical operation.

22... $\mathbb{Q}xg6!?$

Another, probably better, solution is 22... $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}f4+$ $\mathbb{Q}xg3+$ 24. $f\times g3$ $\mathbb{Q}e7-$ +

23. $\mathbb{Q}xg6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf2+$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}e2+!$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}f1$

25. $\mathbb{Q}xf2?!$ $\mathbb{Q}d4+$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}f4$ loses more quickly, which might actually be preferable compared to the terrible suffering that awaits the Polish GM in the game.

25... $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xh5$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ $\mathbb{Q}g7-$ +

As Stohl rightly points out, with two pieces for a rook and without any weaknesses, the endgame is a relatively straightforward win. I give the French GM's instructive technical display without further commentary:

28.c4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ a5 32. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ h5 34. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 35. h4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $d\times e6$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 38. c5 b5 39. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ e5 40. c6 $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 41. $\mathbb{Q}g3+$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 42. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}xa2$ 43. $\mathbb{Q}a3$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 44. b3 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ 45. $\mathbb{Q}xa5$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 46. $\mathbb{Q}a8$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 47. $\mathbb{Q}c8$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 48. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 49. $\mathbb{Q}h8$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 50. $\mathbb{Q}h6$ b4 51. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ e4 52. g3 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ 53. $\mathbb{Q}h8$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 54. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 55. $\mathbb{Q}h6+$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 56. $\mathbb{Q}g6$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 57. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}c3$ 58. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}e3$ 59. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 60. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ e3 61. $\mathbb{Q}g8$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 0-1

This game shows the type of compensation that White gets in the aggressive line with 6. $\mathbb{Q}g5!?$. In this game, Black experienced serious development problems, even worse than the ones we studied in the theory section.

Game 15

Fabiano Caruana

2805

Magnus Carlsen

2876

Stavanger 2015 (2)

1. e4 e5 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 3. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 4. 0-0 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 5. d4 $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 6. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $d\times c6$ 7. $d\times e5$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 8. $\mathbb{Q}xd8+$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 9. h3 h6 10. $\mathbb{Q}d1+!$

A necessary check so that the black king does not sneak to c8. I know I have repeated myself many times, but a good teacher also has to be a little boring at times.

10... $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 12. b3

As we saw in Chapter 14, the alternatives 12. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ and 12. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 13. f4 are possible.

12... $\mathbb{Q}f5!?$

Quite an original manoeuvre: the bishop is headed for h7, an active square, but from which it loses control of e6. In the theory section, we also analysed the standard 12... $\mathbb{Q}g6$.

13. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}ce2$

In recent years of the Berlin's popularity, we find a radical tendency to ignore the move

e5-e6, which in general is not as dangerous as it was thought to be a decade ago. In J.Polgar-Howell, Warsaw 2013, the now retired heroine of chess played 15.e6 and was somewhat better after 15... $\mathbb{Q}c8$?! 16. $\mathbb{Q}ce2$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 17.c4 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}ac1$ b6 19.g4, but her opponent could have calmly responded with 15... $\mathbb{Q}d5$, e.g. 16. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ cxd5 18.c3 $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ f6∞.



15... $\mathbb{Q}d5$!?

Changing an original plan into something obscure. Better is 15...a6, preparing ...c6-c5, as in Grischuk-Fressinet, Reykjavik 2015, the main game from Chapter 14, line B.

16.c4 $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 18.g4 $\mathbb{Q}a6$!?

The natural 18... $\mathbb{Q}c2$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xc2$ $\mathbb{Q}xd1+$! 20. $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ $\mathbb{Q}xc2$ has a familiar drawback: piece exchanges generally make it easier for White to advance his pawn majority. In this case, an additional issue is that the light-squared bishop may be left out of the game after f4-f5. White keeps a nagging edge after 21. $\mathbb{Q}c1$! (21. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}b1$! 22. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}a3$ and ... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ is less promising) 21... $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}h5$ ± and f4-f5.

19. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xd8+$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}d1+$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$

Perhaps 22... $\mathbb{Q}e8$ gives better chances to defend.

22. $\mathbb{Q}a3$!



22... ♜e6?

Passive defence with 22...b6± was unpleasant but necessary. Now, Caruana decides the game with the kind of little combination his opponent is so fond of too:

23. ♜xe6 ♜xa3 24. ♜exg7! ♜f8 25.e6! ♜xf5 26. ♜xf5 fxe6 27. ♜g3 ♜e7 28. ♜g2+-

Without the bishop pair and with the kingside structure weakened, Black has nothing to counterpose the advance of his opponent's majority.

28... ♜f8 29. ♜d3 ♜f7 30. ♜h5 ♜d6 31. ♜f3 ♜h7 32. ♜e3 ♜e7 33.f4 ♜a3 34. ♜f3 ♜b2 35. ♜e2 ♜c3 36.g5 ♜d7 37. ♜g4 ♜e8 38. ♜g3 ♜h8 39.h4 b6 40.h5 c5 41.g6 ♜e8 42.f5 exf5+ 43. ♜f4 ♜h8 44. ♜xf5 ♜f6 45. ♜g2 1-0

A bad game by Carlsen in what was probably his worst tournament so far this decade. Its theoretical value is null (Black should play 15...a6 instead of 15...♜d5), but the game teaches us the strength of advancing the kingside pawns if Black fails to take appropriate measures to restrain it.

Game 16

Maxime Vachier-Lagrave

2788

Pavel Eljanov

2765

Stavanger 2016 (3)

Eljanov's Repertoire (Chapter 15) shows that it is still possible to approach the Berlin endgame in a different way, in spite of having been subjected to such exhaustive scrutiny in the past 16 years. The Ukrainian GM came up with an almost unexplored idea that he has made his own, refining every little detail of it. First, the idea was presented to the society at large, but then the time came to put it to the test in elite play. The following game against the formidable Maxime Vachier-Lagrave constitutes a very critical test indeed.

1.e4 e5 2. ♜f3 ♜c6 3. ♜b5 ♜f6 4.0-0 ♜xe4 5.d4 ♜d6 6. ♜xc6 dxc6 7.dxe5 ♜f5 8. ♜xd8+ ♜xd8 9.h3 ♜e7 10. ♜c3 ♜h4 11. ♜xh4 ♜xh4



Surely, these positions with a pair of knights traded and with the king still on d8 are critical to assess the viability of Eljanov's Repertoire.

12. $\mathbb{Q}e3$

In the theory section, we saw that 12. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ and 12. g4 also pose major challenges to the black position.

12... h5 13. $\mathbb{Q}ad1+$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}fe1$

In the post-mortem, MVL (the widely used initialism to refer to the French star) suggested that 15. f4 could be answered by 15... f5!?, a blockading idea that you might remember from Chapter 1. If White does nothing, Black will continue with ... $\mathbb{Q}f7$ and ... $\mathbb{Q}e6$, when he is unlikely to lose the game. 16. exf6 gxf6 17. f5 is slightly more troublesome, although my faithful buddy Stockfish tells me that Black is OK after 17... $\mathbb{Q}f7$, following up with ... $\mathbb{Q}d6$, ... $\mathbb{Q}e8$ or ... b7-b6, depending on the opponent's reaction.

15... a6

Also possible is 15... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$.

16. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ g5!?

The minority attack, which is becoming typical in this structure, has the extra merit of delaying e5-e6. 16... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ leads to a standard white advantage, but it is possible to ignore the opponent's threat, for example with 16... h4!?; 17. e6 $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xc7$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ does not seem too dangerous.

17. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$

Allows the e5-e6 break. 17... g4 18. hxg4 hxg4 19. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ renews the threat to advance the pawn and prepares a blockade, but 19... $\mathbb{Q}f8!?$, in anticipation of e5-e6, is playable for Black.

18. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 19. e6 $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 20. exf7+ $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}xc2$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xg5+$



White has made considerable progress with his majority on the flank, but the bishop pair remains an important defensive asset.

23... $\mathbb{Q}f6!?$

A better version of the endgame could be reached with 23... $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}e6$ $\mathbb{Q}d1$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}c5$ (26. $\mathbb{Q}xc7$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}e6!$ $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}c5$ is better, but I do not believe that the endgame can be won), but Black does not even have to go in for the opposite-coloured bishops ending: 26... $b6!$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}xa6$ $\mathbb{Q}d6\infty$

24. $\mathbb{Q}e6$ $\mathbb{Q}d1$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}g5+$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}xe7?$

27. $\mathbb{Q}d8+!\pm$ would lead to the ending from the game, but capturing the c7-pawn in the process. Black does not have many chances to save himself.

27... $\mathbb{Q}xe6$



During the press conference after the game, both opponents discussed White's winning chances, but Vachier-Lagrave wasn't able to work anything out concretely.

28. $\mathbb{Q}d8$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 29.f3?!

Stronger is to threaten the c-pawn from the front, for example with 29. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ c5 30. $\mathbb{Q}f4+$. Let me share with you the following sample variations: 30... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ (30... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 31.f3 b5 32. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ b4 33.g4 hxg4 34.fxg4 a5 35. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ a4 36.a3, and the pawns cannot break through) 31.f3 c4 (31...b5 32. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ b4 33. $\mathbb{Q}e3$, and the black king cannot help the pawns) 32. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ c5 33. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ b5 34.a3 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 36.g4, and the tempi gained give White real winning chances.

29...c5! 30. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ b5 31. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ b4

The activity that Eljanov now deploys on the queenside saves the game.

32.g4 hxg4 33.fxg4 a5 34. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ c4 35. $\mathbb{Q}f6$ c5 36.h4 $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}h8$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 38.h5 a4 39.a3 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ 40. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ c3 41.bxc3 bxa3 42.c4 $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ 43.g5 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ 44.g6+ $\mathbb{Q}xg6$ 45.hxg6+ $\mathbb{Q}xg6$ 46. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ c4 47. $\mathbb{Q}a1$ c3 48. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ a2 49. $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ a3 50. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 51. $\mathbb{Q}xa2$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 52. $\mathbb{Q}xa3$ ½-½

One possible moral of the story is that White has good chances to win many opposite-coloured bishops endings, thanks to his opponent's devalued majority. Another one is that these pawns can also create threats when moving forward...

Game 17

Wei Yi

2696

Anish Giri

2785

Bilbao 2016 (6)

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♗f6 4.0-0 ♗xe4 5.d4 ♗d6 6.♗xc6 dxc6 7.dxe5 ♗f5 8.♕xd8+ ♔xd8 9.h3 h5 10.♗c3 ♗e7

A very rare but perfectly playable move order; as we already know from the theory section, blockading plans with ...h7-h5 are usually played with the king on e8.

11.♗f4

Anand-Carlsen, St Louis 2015, continued 11.♖d1+ ♔e8 12.♗e2 ♗h4 13.♗xh4 ♗xh4 14.f3 ♗f5∞, transposing to Eljanov's Repertoire (variation 15A, note to 11.g4).

11...♗e6

Of course, it is also possible to play 11...♗h4, followed by the ideas from Chapter 15.

12.♖ad1+ ♔c8!?

The first truly original decision. 12...♔e8 leads to line 16D, which can be considered the main line of the defence.

13.♗g5



13...♗xg5

The position changes completely with the king on the queenside rather than on the kingside, where it usually goes to. Now, 13...♖h6?!, the typical method with the king on e8, would make less sense, since the blockade isn't as strong and the king is on the 'wrong' side of the board to stop the e-pawn.

14.♗xg5 b6

The king, which would be very badly placed on e8 after the exchange on g5, is now in a comfortable location on b7. Worse is 14...h4?! 15.♗e2, and the h-pawn is in danger.

15.g4!?

This may seem a bit premature, but it is difficult to see a constructive way of preparing this move.

15...hxg4 16.hxg4 ♜h4 17.♕xh4

It is not possible to make progress without this capture: 17.f3 ♜b7 18.♕f2? ♜g6 loses a pawn.

17...♜xh4 18.f3 ♜b7 19.♕g2 ♜ah8?!

Giri is not afraid of the minor-piece endgame, a courageous and objectively correct decision. However, it is safer to keep a pair of rooks on the board: 19...a5 20.♖h1 ♜xh1 21.♕xh1 ♜e8 (21...b5!?) 22.♕g2 ♜c8 23.♖e1 g5!?∞

20.♖h1 ♜xh1 21.♖xh1 ♜xh1 22.♕xh1



22...c5?!

Natural, but not as strong as 22...b5!? 23.a3 ♜b6, activating the king via c5. Detailed analysis shows that Black's activity allows him to maintain the balance:

A) 24.♘e4 ♜d5 25.♘d2 ♜c5 26.c3 fails to restrict the activity of the opponent's king, since 26...♘e6! gives it access to d5. White would do well to prevent ...g7-g5, and force a draw with 27.g5 ♜d5 28.f4=;

B) Stronger is 24.♕g2 ♜c5 25.♕g3 ♜d4 26.♕f4 (26.f4? ♜e3 27.f5 ♜d7+) 26...a5. The white knight creates more weaknesses in the black camp after 27.♘e2+! ♜d5 28.♘g3! g6 29.♘e4, but Black seems to maintain equality with 29...♗d4 (29...b4? 30.♘g5) 30.c3+!? ♜c4 (30...♗d3? 31.♘c5+ ♜c2 32.♘xe6 fxe6 33.♕g5 ♜xb2 34.f4! leads to a lost queen endgame, as I am sure you will be able to analyse on your own) 31.♕e3 ♜c8! 32.♘g5 ♜b3 33.♘xf7 ♜xb2, and the analysis, which would go beyond the scope of any opening book, shows that Black keeps the balance. Believe me, chess players, O ye of little faith!

23.♕g2 ♜c6 24.a4!

A brilliant prophylactic move that Giri probably had not anticipated. It seems that it weakens the queenside, but there is no way to attack the pawn, and after ...a7-a6 and ...

b6-b5, the queenside is easier to defend.

24...a6 25.♕g3 b5 26.axb5+ axb5 27.f4 b4 28.♗e4 ♜a2 29.♗d2!?

As Stamenkovic mentions in his notes for *Informant* 129, a good alternative is 29.♔f3, and if 29...♝b1, 30.c4!, controlling d5.

29...♗d5 30.c3 bxc3 31.bxc3



31...g5?

Black would have maintained excellent possibilities of defence after 31...c4, preparing an escape square for the bishop on b3.

32.♔f3?

Missing a difficult winning line: 32.c4+! ♔d4 (otherwise, the bishop is trapped, as happened in the game) 33.e6! gxf4+ 34.♔h4!! fxe6 35.g5 ♔e5 36.♔h5+–

32...♔e6?

An unrecognisable Giri once again fails to look after the future of his bishop, and this time his brilliant young opponent is not letting him off the hook. After 32...c4, with the possible continuation 33.♗e4 gxf4 34.♔xf4 ♜b1 35.♗f6+ ♔e6, Black is not far from a draw.

33.c4!+– gxf4 34.♔xf4 f6 35.exf6 ♔xf6 36.g5+ ♔g6 37.♔g4 ♔h7 38.♔h5 ♔g7 39.g6 c6 40.♔g5 ♔g8 41.♔h6 1-0

Once again, we see how the Berlin endgame allows Black to approach the game in relatively new and perfectly playable ways, such as the plan that Giri tested in this game, based on ...h7-h5 and ...♔c8. The Dutch prodigy's defeat must not lead us to overestimate White's chances: in this type of endgame, the superiority of the bishop over the knight should be sufficient for Black to hold, provided he plays correctly.

Game 18

David Navara

2712

Sergey Karjakin

2769

Wijk aan Zee 2012 (6)

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.0-0 ♘xe4 5.d4 ♘d6 6.♘xc6 dxc6 7.dxe5 ♘f5 8.♗xd8+ ♔xd8 9.♘c3 ♘e8 10.h3 h5 11.♗g5 ♘e6 12.♗fd1 ♘e7 13.b3?!

This move neither arranges active play, nor takes any action to prevent his majority from being blockaded. As we saw in Chapter 16, variation A, White can only fight for an edge in this line with 13.♘e2. Of course, almost five years have gone by since this game: a world of evolution for this variation.

13...h4 14.♗d3 ♘d8 15.♗xd8+ ♔xd8 16.♗d1 ♘e7

Marin, who annotated this game for *ChessBase Magazine*, draws attention to the fact that both sides are keeping the tension: Black does not want to bring the opponent's knight to g5, nor does White want the black king to reach e7.

17.♘f4 ♘g8!? 18.♗g5

Preventing ...g7-g5, a potentially dangerous weapon against the blocked pawn majority.

18...♘c8 19.♗ce4 ♘h8

The rook returns to its starting square and aims to annoy the opponent from h5. Black now has two reasons why he can no longer castle kingside!

20.c4 b6 21.♗f3 ♘h5 22.♔f1



22...♗d8!?

Karjakin manoeuvres like a fish in water. The bishop defends the c-pawn, rendering pointless any attempts to advance the e-pawn, and at the same time, it frees the e7-square for the knight.

23.♗fg5

The threat of 24. $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ interrupts Black's plans.

23... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}fg5$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}d3$

A key moment in the game. Navara rejects the repetition of moves and continues in pursuit of victory. This kind of ambition is always praiseworthy, especially for the viewers, but objectively, White is by no means better, due to the fact that his kingside is blocked.

26...c5!

This thematic move is a good idea now that the white knight is unable to go to d5, as pointed out by Marin.

27. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}c3$

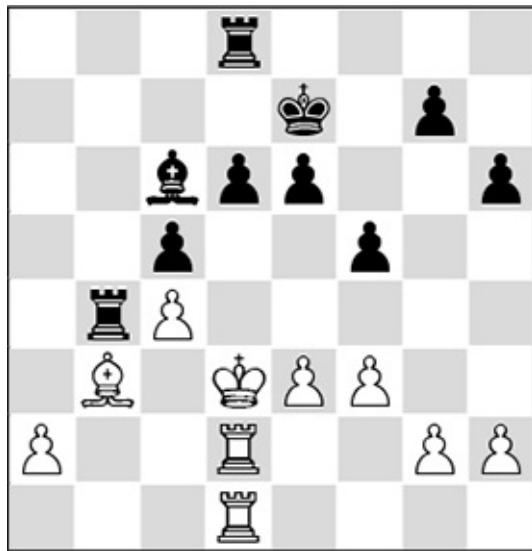


28... $\mathbb{Q}xf3!?$

In the theory section, we saw this resource to double the opponent's pawns, whereas here, White can capture back with the rook. The justification behind Black's play is that the white pawns will not be able to move forward. Furthermore, Black's knight will achieve a comfortable blockading position on e6, and, finally, without the light-squared bishop, it will be easier to play ...c7-c6.

29. $\mathbb{R}xf3$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 30. $\mathbb{R}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ a6

A move that shows the difficulties for Black to make further progress. It is possible to question the stability of the e-pawn with 31... $\mathbb{Q}g5!?$, and to proceed with ... $\mathbb{Q}f4$ if allowed, and exchange White's bad bishop. You may feel this kind of manoeuvre is blasphemy or, even worse, a suggestion directly taken from Stockfish, but before you come to any conclusions, I ask you to let me digress a little; I mean, if you've made it all the way to this point in the book, you may well be used to that by now...



analysis diagram

The diagram position is from the game Sämisch-Alekhine, Dresden 1926. The white queenside fell like a house of cards after a manoeuvre similar to my suggestion in our main game: 28...♞a4!?

In *New in Chess* 2016/03, Mihail Marin wrote an article about Alekhine's tactical play that seemed the result of engines; this could be a good example for him to address the topic of non-stereotypical strategic decisions by the legendary Russian champion.

32.f4 c6 33.♕f2 ♜d4 34.♕e3 ♜h6

Preparing to attack the g-pawn.

35.♘e2

Even though it may look as if White is worse, he isn't. Here, Navara could get rid of the annoying knight without undoubling the opponent's pawns: 35.♖d2 ♜g6 36.♖f2!, followed by ♘e2=.

35...♜g6! 36.♘xd4 cxd4+ 37.♕f3 c5 38.g4?!

Not good is 38.f5? ♜g5, but 38.b4! still gave enough counterplay.

38...hxg3 39.♘xg3 f5?

Black is better because of his more compact pawn structure.

40.exf6

More or less necessary. Otherwise, Black could break with ...g7-g5 sooner or later.

40...♜xf6 41.b4! ♜h6 42.♕g4 ♜e6 43.♕f3 g6 44.♘f2 ♕d7



Karjakin is patiently making progress in the true spirit of the Soviet school of chess. However, I am not sure whether he could have won the game without the serious error his opponent now commits:

45. ♜a3?

After 45.bxc5 bxc5 46. ♜b3 ♛d8 47. ♜b1 ♛c7 48.h4! (preventing ... ♜f6 and ...g6-g5), I don't know how to improve the black position.

45... cxb4! 46. ♜d3

Navara had missed 46. ♜xa6? d3–+.

46... ♛f6–+ 47. ♜xd4?

Committing hara-kiri in a lost position.

47... ♜d6 48. ♛e3 ♛xd4+ 49. ♜xd4 ♜xd4 50. ♛xd4 ♛d6 51. ♛d3 a5 52.a3!? bxa3

52...b3 53.a4 ♛e6 54. ♛c3 ♛f5 easily wins the pawn race.

53. ♛c3 ♛c5 54.h4 a2 55. ♛b2 ♛xc4 56.f5 gxf5 57.h5 f4 58.h6 f3 59.h7 f2 60.h8 ♛ a1 ♛+! 0-1

Karjakin's play in this game is a model for Black in the Blockade Variation. His victory in the end was only because of a serious error by Navara. Therefore, if you need to win at all costs, I am afraid that 9... ♛e8 and 10...h5 is not your cup of tea.

Game 19

Maxime Vachier-Lagrave

2798

Vladimir Kramnik

2812

Dortmund 2016 (2)

1.e4 e5 2. ♜f3 ♜c6 3. ♜b5 ♜f6 4.0-0 ♜xe4 5.d4 ♜d6 6. ♜xc6 dxc6 7.dxe5 ♜f5 8. ♜xd8+ ♛xd8 9.h3 ♛e8 10. ♜c3 h5 11. ♜e2 b6 12. ♜g5 c5 13. ♜ad1 ♜b7 14. ♜c3

This line was analysed in considerable detail in Chapter 16, line C. There, we saw that Wesley So seemed to solve his opening problems with 14... ♜xf3 15.gxf3 ♜d4 (15...c6

is also playable) 16. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}d7!$, bringing the king to Lasker's square.

It is possible that Kramnik has found some difficulty in the complications (honestly, I have no idea where), since he introduces a new concept in the current game:

14... $\mathbb{Q}e7!?$



15. $\mathbb{Q}d5$

Vachier-Lagrave could have won a pawn with 15. $\mathbb{Q}b5$, but Black would have obtained sufficient compensation after 15... $\mathbb{Q}d8!$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xc7+$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 18. c4 (necessary to find a good escape route for the knight) 18... $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 19. gxf3 $\mathbb{Q}d4\infty$. It is interesting to note that, at least in the Berlin endgame, white knights often do not feel safe after capturing pawns on a7.

15... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xd8+$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$



The evaluation of this position is important, if not from a theoretical point of view (14... $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ seems to equalise), then at least for the overall understanding of the variation. Piece exchanges have allowed Kramnik's king to occupy an ideal position, but he has been forced to part with his 'extra bishop' without getting to double pawns on the f-file. Will Vachier-Lagrave be capable of mobilizing his kingside majority?

20.c3

Taking d4 away from the knight. Other, more direct, attempts do not lead anywhere:

A) 20.g4 hxg4 21.hxg4 ♜h4! 22.f3 ♜e3 is premature, with some problems for White;

B) The ‘scientific’ 20.g3 is answered in typical fashion: 20...h4! 21.g4 ♜d4 22.c3 ♜e6 23.♘xe6 fxe6! 24.f4 (the only way to mobilise the pawns: 24.f3 ♜f8 25.♕f2 g5=) 24...♜f8! (using the newly opened file) 25.♞f1 ♜d8 26.f5 ♜f7, and Black cannot lose.

20...♜h4!

An elegant blockading idea, as well as the engine’s first choice; how awesome it is to have both Nimzowitsch and Stockfish on your side! Kramnik was in all likelihood still in familiar territory, or at least working with ideas already studied in similar situations. 20...h4 is also possible, but Black’s position is more passive, and White can make some progress with f2-f4 and ♜g1-f2-f3, forcing the weakening ...g7-g6 or threatening to advance the e-pawn at the appropriate moment.

21.g3 ♜g6 22.f4

The pawn must be defended, but now Kramnik has time to both weaken and block the pawn majority.

22...h4! 23.♕f2 hxg3+ 24.♕xg3 ♜h4 25.♕g4



25...♝g2!

Because Black hasn’t moved the g-pawn, he still has the possibility ...f7-f6 in reserve.

26.♔f3

26.♜d3? plans the trap 26...♜h4+? 27.♕g3 ♜xf4 28.♜f3+-, but after 26...f6!, the hunter is now the prey: 27.♝f3 c4!, and the knight check wins the exchange.

26...♜h4+ 27.♕g4 ♜g2 28.♜g1!?

Objectively, White is not better, but the former world number two is still trying to create some problems.

28...♝e3+ 29.♔f3 ♜f5 30.♔e4 ♜h4

Allowing f4-f5. 30...g6 31.♕d5 is more comfortable.

31.f5

With the sixth rank unobstructed, 31. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}h6$ achieves nothing.

31... $f6$ 32. $exf6+$

More interesting is 32. $\mathbb{Q}e6!$? $g6$ 33. $exf6+$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 34. $fxg6!$ $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ (34... $\mathbb{Q}xg6?$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}xc7\pm$) 35. $g7$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}g4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}xh4$ $\mathbb{Q}xg7$, but the rook endgame also ends in a draw.

32... $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $g6$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}e4+$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 35. $fxg6+$ $\mathbb{Q}xg6+$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{Q}h4+$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $a5!?$ 38. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $a4$

Black's queenside counterplay will prevent White from making any real progress with his passed pawn.

39. $\mathbb{Q}g5$

39. $\mathbb{Q}g4$ $\mathbb{Q}g6=$ is no improvement.

39... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 40. $\mathbb{Q}f6$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 41. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 42. $\mathbb{Q}g6$ $\mathbb{Q}c4!$ 43. $\mathbb{Q}g7$ $\mathbb{Q}h4$ 44. $b3$ $axb3$ 45. $AXB3$ $\mathbb{Q}d2$ 46. $\mathbb{Q}e3+$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 47. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $c4$

Creating a bit of drama in the position. 47... $\mathbb{Q}xb3$ leaves White with nothing better than to force a draw with 48. $\mathbb{Q}e7+$ $\mathbb{Q}f4$ (but not 48... $\mathbb{Q}g5??$ 49. $\mathbb{Q}g6!$, and the king is in a mating net) 49. $\mathbb{Q}d5+$.

48. $\mathbb{Q}e7+$

48. $bxc4!?$ $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ (48... $\mathbb{Q}xc4?$ 49. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}f1$ 50. $\mathbb{Q}e1!+--$) 49. $\mathbb{Q}e7+$ $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 50. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ also leads to a draw; if you still doubt me after so many pages together, well, then please trust Kramnik and the engines instead...

48... $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 49. $\mathbb{Q}d5+$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 50. $\mathbb{Q}e7+$ $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 51. $\mathbb{Q}d5+\frac{1}{2}-\frac{1}{2}$

It is very difficult for White to win any endgames stemming from the variation with ... $h7-h5$, provided that Black defends accurately. On the one hand, the e-pawn is easily blockaded, especially in positions with the king on e8; on the other hand, the black pawns on the queenside are not entirely harmless and can help to create counterplay at the opportune moment.

Game 20

Maxime Vachier-Lagrave

2788

Magnus Carlsen

2851

Stavanger 2016 (6)

This game is all the rage in the Blockade Variation. Carlsen himself felt uncomfortable for a few moves, although it seems that fans of the variation should not panic.

1. $e4$ $e5$ 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 3. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 4. 0-0 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 5. $d4$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 6. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $dxcc6$ 7. $dxe5$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 8. $\mathbb{Q}xd8+$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 9. $h3$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $h5$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}fe1$

It seems that after the 2015 London Classic, white players have grown tired of trying to extract some juice from the dry main line with 14. $g3$ $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 16. $h4$ $f6$.

14... $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 15. $g4$ $hxg4$ 16. $hxg4$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 17. $f3$

In the theory section (Chapter 16, line D), we studied the endgame reached after 17. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}g2$.

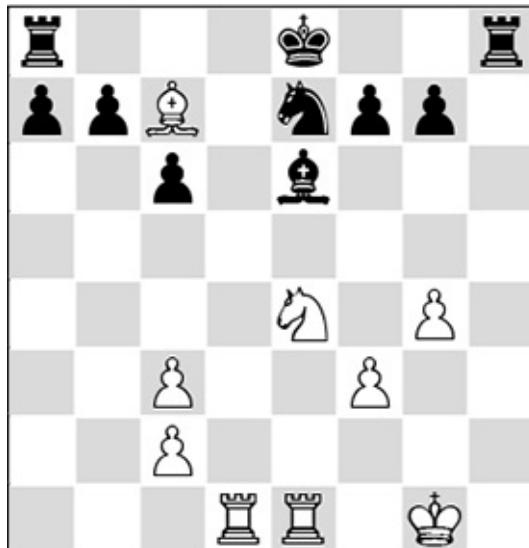
17... $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ $\mathbb{Q}xa2$

Nakamura's idea, 18... $\mathbb{Q}d5$ with the idea of ... $\mathbb{Q}b6$ might be an even safer way toward equality.

19. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}h8?!$

In the press conference, Carlsen explained that he began to see problems for Black in all lines after e5-e6 during the game, and that he even considered giving up the exchange: 19... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}c5$ b5, but White gets an edge by ignoring the rook with 21. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ a5 22. $\mathbb{Q}h1$. It seems that it is more accurate to play 19... $\mathbb{Q}h7$, as in Volokitin-Bacrot, Germany Bundesliga 2013/14, a game that saw 20.e6! fxe6! 21. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ (a harmless repetition) 23. $\mathbb{Q}xc7$ b5 24. $\mathbb{Q}a1$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}a6$ $\mathbb{Q}h6\infty$. Certainly, the line deserves more analysis.

20.e6 $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xc7$



21... $\mathbb{Q}d5$

In Giri-Karjakin, Beijing 2013, 21... b5 22. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ (22... $\mathbb{Q}h7?!$) was played, and instead of 23. $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 24. f4? $\mathbb{Q}xg4$ (this happens in rapid play), it was better to play 23. $\mathbb{Q}d6!?$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}d4! \mathbb{Q}$.

22. $\mathbb{Q}e5?!$

Vachier-Lagrave can't remember all of his preparation either. 22. $\mathbb{Q}d6!?$ is more accurate, with the possible continuation 22... b5 23. c4 bxc4 24. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}c5 \mathbb{Q}$; the more passive pieces, coupled with the problems related to bringing the h-rook into the game, created some difficulties for Black.

22... $\mathbb{Q}f8$

The worst is over.

23. $\mathbb{Q}c5$ b5 24. c4! bxc4 25. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}e8?!$

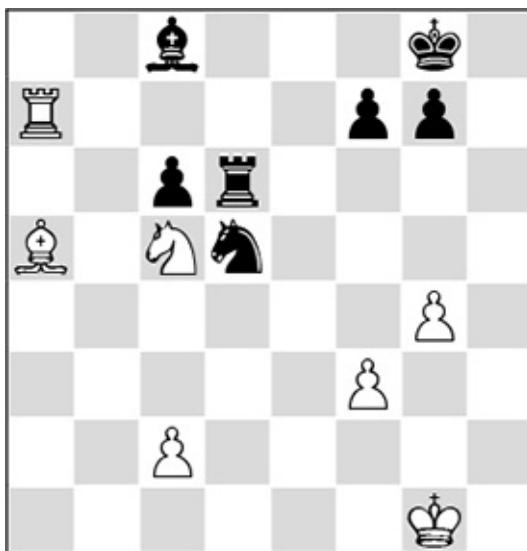
Abandons the a-pawn for no good reason. Better is 25... $\mathbb{Q}h6\infty$.

26. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}xa7$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}g3$

29. $\mathbb{Q}a8$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}g3\pm$ might have been more accurate.

29... $\mathbb{Q}xe1+$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}xe1$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}a5$

Not anticipating Carlsen's plan. It is possible to avoid it with 31. $\mathbb{Q}f2$, but then the defence is easier with 31... $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}a8$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$. Black should be able to equalise with a bit of patience.



31... $\mathbb{Q}xg4!$

A shock for Vachier-Lagrave, already excited with the prospect of torturing Carlsen in the endgame after 31... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}a6$ (33. $\mathbb{Q}a8+!?$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}a6$ might be stronger).

32. $f \times g4$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}xg4$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}d2?!$

The pawn could be kept with 34. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}e1$, but the pin after 35... $\mathbb{Q}a4$ is very uncomfortable, and there do not seem to be many winning chances.

34... $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}a8+$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}d7$ $\mathbb{Q}xc2$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $f6$ 38. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}b2$ 39. $\mathbb{Q}f8+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 40. $\mathbb{Q}e6+$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 41. $\mathbb{Q}a7$ $\mathbb{Q}b3+$ 42. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}g3$ 43. $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $\mathbb{Q}g2$ 44. $\mathbb{Q}a5$ $\mathbb{Q}e3$ 45. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 46. $\mathbb{Q}b4$ $\mathbb{Q}e2$ 47. $\mathbb{Q}d7$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 48. $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 49. $\mathbb{Q}a1$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$

Definitely renounces the only winning try: the endgame with R+B+N versus R+N is winning for the stronger side, but there seems to be no way to remove or attack the kingside pawns, in particular the g7-pawn.

50. $\mathbb{Q}d6$ $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 51. $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ $\mathbb{Q}b5$ 52. $\mathbb{Q}g1+$ $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 53. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 54. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $g5$ 55. $\mathbb{Q}e6$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 56. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}a5$ 57. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 58. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}a6+$ 59. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}a8$ 60. $\mathbb{Q}e7+$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 61. $\mathbb{Q}h1+$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 62. $\mathbb{Q}g1+$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 63. $\mathbb{Q}h1+$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 64. $\mathbb{Q}g1+$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 65. $\mathbb{Q}h1+\frac{1}{2}-\frac{1}{2}$

The variation with 9... $\mathbb{Q}e8$ and 10... $h5$ continues to have a reputation of being bombproof. White has made some small progress during recent years, yet these are no more than tiny advantages, such as the one Vachier-Lagrave pursued in this game.

Game 21

Alexander Grischuk

2750

Hikaru Nakamura

2793

London 2015 (1)

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♗f6 4.0-0 ♗xe4 5.d4 ♗d6 6.♗xc6 dxc6 7.dxe5 ♗f5 8.♗xd8+ ♔xd8 9.h3 ♗e8 10.♗c3 ♗e6!?

The sharp variation we saw in Chapter 17, line A, a favourite of Nakamura and Mamedyarov during 2015.

11.g4

Starting thematic play without further ado.

11...♗e7 12.♗d4 ♗d7



Black has been forced to retreat, but he is ready for his standard counterplay with ...h7-h5.

13.♔h2

A no less typical king manoeuvre, preparing to support the g4-pawn. The alternative 13.f4, which we analysed as our main line in the theory section, can also be dangerous if he cannot stop Black's counterplay, as Ni Hua found out in his game against Maze in the Gibraltar Open this year: 13.f4 h5 14.f5 hxg4 15.hxg4 ♗h4 16.♗f4



analysis diagram

16... ♜d8?! 16... ♜d5 is our main variation. **17. ♜e3 ♜c8?!** **18. ♜e4?** 18. ♜f3 ♜h8 19. ♜xa7! simply nets a pawn, since if 19...b6, there follows 20. ♜b8!. **18...g6!** **19. ♜f1 ♜h3** 19...gxf5! 20.gxf5 ♜h3† **20.e6?** 20.fxg6! ♜xg6 (20...fxg6 21. ♜ce2∞) 21.e6∞ still holds. **20... ♜xe3!** **21.exf7+ ♜xf7** **22. ♜xe3 ♜xd4** **23.fxg6+ ♜g8!** **24. ♜xf8+** 24. ♜f7 ♜xg4+ 25. ♜f1 ♜xg6 26. ♜xc7† **24... ♜xf8** **25.g7+ ♜f7!** **26. ♜xe7+ ♜xe7** **27.g8 ♜** **28. ♜xg4 ♜xg4** **29. ♜b1 ♜f5**, and the 4 vs 3 endgame is winning, because of the awful position of the white knight. A word of warning to those who overextend too confidently!

13...c5! 14. ♜db5?!

14. ♜de2 is safer, although Black is comfortable after 14...h5 15. ♜g3 ♜c6!, and if 16.f4?! (16. ♜f4∞), there may follow 16... ♜b4.

14... ♜d8

Black's play seems extremely dubious, with both king and light-squared bishop losing tempi, but the knight that will be out of play on a3 compensates for all the disadvantages.

15. ♜e3 a6 16. ♜a3 b6 17. ♜e4?

17. ♜c4∞

17...h5! 18. ♜g3 hxg4 19.hxg4 ♜c6 20. ♜g5 ♜e8 21.f4



21...f5!±

Black is taking the initiative, thanks to the exposed situation of the opponent's king.

22.♖ad1?

This looks attractive, but Nakamura will refute it in great style. Better is 22.exf6 gxf6 23.♗f3 (23.♗e6 ♛f7! 24.♗xf8 ♕axf8 25.f5 ♕fg8→) 23...♛f7 24.♕h1 ♗h6! 25.♗c4 ♕ag8±.

22...g6! 23.♗e6 fxg4!

Black's attack is virtually winning.

24.♗xc7+ ♛f7 25.e6+ ♛g8 26.♗xg4

26.♗xa8? loses immediately to 26...♗f5+ 27.♔f2 ♕h2+ 28.♔e1 ♗xe3+.

26...♕a7?

It is not at all easy to see, but 26...♕c8! 27.♕d7 ♗f5 28.♗f2 ♗d6 is winning. It is a pity that the American GM missed this finish, as it would have made this game one of the best of the tournament.

27.♕d7 ♗f5 28.♗f2 ♗h6+

Now, not good is 28...♗d6 29.♗d5!, but 28...♗xd7 29.exd7 ♗e7 30.♗d5 ♕xd7 31.♗xb6 maintained serious winning chances.

29.♔g3 ♗f5+ 30.♔g4 ♗e7!? 31.♕fd1 ♗h6+

31...♕h5± 32.♕d8+ ♗xd8 33.♕xd8+ ♛g7 still gives a significant advantage.

32.♔g3 ♗f5+ 33.♔g4 ♗h6+ 34.♔g3 ♕h7 35.♗c4 ♗f5+ 36.♔g4 ♗h6+ 37.♔g3 ♗f5+ 38.♔g4 ♗h6+ ½-

The 2015 London Chess Classic was a genuine Berlin trade fair, with no less than thirteen games played in this opening, all of which ended in draws. Cynics (or hardcore members of the Club of Kasparov Worshippers) will say that this was to be expected, but this game, as well as some others, shows that it would be unfair to blame only an opening trend; the truth is that modern super GMs are so strong and so well prepared that draws emerge as the most natural result, whether they play the King's Gambit or the Modern Benoni.

Game 22

Hikaru Nakamura

2787

Veselin Topalov

2772

St Louis 2014 (8)

In this game, we will see one of Almasi's ideas from the mid-1990s, based on immediately rerouting the knight. I decided not to dedicate a separate theory section to it, because of lack of recent material, as it, for no apparent reason, practically disappeared from tournament play about ten years ago, with the following brilliant game by Topalov being a welcome exception. Some of the ideas that we will now see are reminiscent of the Check Variation (Chapter 18).

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.0-0 ♘xe4 5.d4 ♘d6 6.♗xc6 dxc6 7.dxe5 ♘f5 8.♗xd8+ ♔xd8 9.h3 ♘e8 10.♗c3 ♘e7!?



11.♘e4

White could also react with the fianchetto, following the scheme from the game Bologan-Leko (Game 23): 11.b3 ♘g6 12.♗b2 ♘d7 13.♘ad1 ♘d8 14.♘d4 Also possible is 14.♘e4 ♘f4 15.♗fe1 ♘e6; Black is passive, but it is not easy to increase the pressure. 14...♘f4, and here, instead of 15.♘ce2 ♘xe2+ 16.♗xe2 h5 17.c4 h4 18.f4 ♘f5, which was comfortable for Black in S.Zhigalko-Alekseev, Jurmala rapid 2016, 15.♘c1!? would be interesting. 15...♘e6 (15...♘g6 16.f4∞) 16.♘de2, followed by moving the f-pawn.

11...♘g6 12.♗e1 h6

The bishop is going to e6 to prevent any threats in the centre.

13.♔h2

We have already seen this plan many times: the king is available to fill the gap on g3 created by the move g2-g4.

Robson-Onischuk, St Louis 2014, went 13.b3 c5 14.♗b2 (14.h4!? is an original idea that might work, because the c-pawn would be hanging in the event of ...♘e7, e.g. 14...b6

15.h5 ♜e7 16.♗f6+ gxf6 17.exf6 or 14...♝g4 15.♗h2 ♜e6 16.h5 ♜e7 17.g4!∞) 14...♜e6 15.♗g3 a5 16.a4 ♜f4 17.♗c1 ♜d5∞.

13...c5 14.c4?!

Surely thinking about securing d5 for the knight, but that doesn't seem to be the most urgent issue in the position.

More interesting is 14.♗e3 b6 15.♖ad1 ♜b7 (15...♝f5!? 16.♗fd2 h5!?, unclear) 16.♗c3 ♜d8 (16...♝xf3 17.gxf3 c6 18.f4 ♜h4 19.♗g3 does not manage to blockade the pawns) 17.♗b5 ♜d7∞, as in Radjabov-Alekseev, Skopje 2015.

14...♜e6 15.b3 b6 16.g4



16...h5! 17.♗g3 ♜d8

Topalov has generated good counterplay, and his position begins to be preferable.

18.♗eg5?!

Krisztian Szabo, a regular commentator for *ChessBase Magazine* for Berlin games, rightly criticizes this move.

Better is 18.♗g5, not worried by 18...♜d3 (18...♝e7 19.♗e3=) 19.♗e3 ♜xe3 20.♕xe3=.

18...♝c8! 19.♗b2

Ivan Sokolov, in his notes for *Informant* 122, points out a nice variation that Nakamura most probably had overlooked in his calculations: 19.e6 ♜d6+ 20.♗g2 f6! 21.♗f7 hxg4 22.hxg4 ♜b7 23.♗xh8 ♜xh8! 24.♗e3 (it is difficult to see another way of wriggling out of the pin) 24...♝g6 25.♔f1 ♜f4, and the only way to prevent 26...♜d1 is 26.♔e2†.

19...♝e7 20.♖ad1 ♜xd1 21.♖xd1 hxg4 22.hxg4 f6!

Because of the somewhat exposed white king, it is a good idea to open the position.

23.exf6 gxf6 24.♔e1

An implicit confession that White is worse: Nakamura is looking to stir up tactical trouble.

24...♚f8!

It is not worth getting involved in 24...fxg5 25.♕xh8 ♜xh8 26.♗xg5∞.

25.♗e4 ♛f7 26.♗c1 ♜g8!



27.♖h1?!

The g-pawn is difficult to defend, but this pseudo-active move makes things worse. In Informant 122, 27.♗d2 ♜b7 28.♗f4 is quoted, but the position is none too pleasant.

27...♜b7! 28.♖e1

The rook returns with its tail between its legs. 28.♖h7+ ♔e6 leads nowhere.

28...♜e8!

When Topalov enjoys dynamic advantages, as in this position, he hits people as if with a sledgehammer.

29.♖fd2

There is no other way to prevent the threat of ...♝xe4 and ...♝d6+. 29.♔g2 loses after 29...♝f8.

29...♝e5! 30.♗b2 ♜d3 31.♖b1 ♜g8 32.♗f3 ♜xb2 33.♖xb2 ♜c8–+

The g-pawn falls, and with it the entire white house of cards.

34.g5 f5 35.♗f6 ♜xg5 36.♗d5 ♜b7 37.♖b1 ♜g4 38.♖h1 ♜d6 39.♗e2 ♜d4 40.♖h7+ ♔g6 41.♖d7 ♜xd5 42.cxd5 ♜xd5 43.♗c4 b5 44.♗xd6 cxd6 45.♖xa7 b4 46.a4 bxa3 47.♖xa3 ♜e5+ 48.♗d3 ♔g5 49.♖a6 ♜e1 50.♗d2 ♜e6 51.♖b6 ♜g4 52.b4 cxb4 53.♖xb4+ ♜f3 54.♗d1 f4 55.♖d4 ♜e4 56.♖d2 d5 57.♖a2 ♔g2 0-1

The plan with 10...♝e7 seems risky, but the same could be said a year ago about 9...♝e7, which we know from Eljanov's Repertoire. The bottom line is that the Berlin endgame is full of half-explored ideas that, with a little bit of work and knowledge of typical plans, may become part of your repertoire.

Game 23

Viktor Bologan

2630

Peter Leko

2708

Reykjavik Ech-tt 2015 (1)

In this model game, Bologan, one of those GMs below 2700 whose level of chess understanding is certainly on par with that of most superstars, shows us the strongest plan against the rerouting of the knight to g6, as discussed in the Check Variation (Chapter 18, line A).

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.0-0 ♗xe4 5.d4 ♘d6 6.♗xc6 dxc6 7.dxe5 ♘f5 8.♗xd8+ ♔xd8 9.♗d1+ ♕e8 10.♗c3 ♘e7

A good idea, now that the white rooks must lose a tempo to get to e1 and d1. We have also studied the alternative 10...♗e7, which is consistent with Eljanov's Repertoire.

11.h3 ♘g6



12.b3

Together with 12.♗d4, this is the most dangerous plan.

12...♗e7 13.♗b2 h5?!

13...♗f5 14.♗d4 ♗d7 allowed Black to equalise in Fedorchuk-Ipatov, Turkey tt 2015, the game that we chose as our main variation. The secret for Black is not to be afraid of e5-e6.

14.♗e4 a5?!

This will turn out to be a waste of time, as there will be no time to break with ...a5-a4. Bologan had already played this position before (Bologan-Aronian, Beijing rapid 2012), but Leko does not seem very well prepared for it: 14...h4 15.♗e1 ♔f8 (another idea is 15...♗e6 16.♗eg5 ♗xg5 17.♗xg5 ♘d8±) 16.♗ad1 ♗f5 17.♗d4 ♗xe4 18.♗xe4 ♘d8 19.♗de1 ♘h5, and instead of 20.♔f1, which allowed 20...♔g8! and 21...♗f8, White

was better with the immediate 20. $\mathbb{B}f3$, followed by e5-e6.

15. $\mathbb{R}e1!$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$

To avoid the threat 16. $\mathbb{B}d6+$.

16. $\mathbb{R}ad1$ h4

White's pressure is very dangerous. The alternative method of defence, 16...b6, is met by the elegant attacking continuation 17. $\mathbb{B}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 18.e6!? fxe6 19. $\mathbb{R}e3$!. Here, e5-e6 does seem very strong, as Black is far behind in development.



17. $\mathbb{B}d6!$

The thematic idea.

17... $\mathbb{R}h5$

17... $\mathbb{B}xe5$!? is a little scary, but might not be such a bad defence. After 18. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ (not good is 18... $cx d6$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xg7+$), White can choose between 19. $\mathbb{Q}xd6+$ $cx d6$ 20. $\mathbb{R}xd6$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 21. $\mathbb{R}e5\uparrow$ and 19. $\mathbb{R}xd6$!? $cx d6$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xd6+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 21. $\mathbb{R}e8+$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}g5+$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 23. $\mathbb{R}xh8$ $\mathbb{Q}xg5$, which most probably wins the h-pawn, but not necessarily the game.

18. $\mathbb{B}xc8$ $\mathbb{R}xc8$ 19. $\mathbb{R}e4!$ ±

The exchange of the powerful light-squared bishop justifies Bologan's tactical operation. This position is ideal for the rook, now that the bishop is no longer there to annoy it.

19... $\mathbb{R}d8$ 20. $\mathbb{R}xd8+$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ c5 22. $\mathbb{Q}g5$!

Threatening e5-e6.

22... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}g5$



The simple threat of 24. $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ is impossible to stop without making concessions.

23...f5

Black defends in precarious conditions after 23...b6 24. $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ 25. e6+ $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}xg6+$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $gxf6$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}g7$, although there are almost always drawing chances in rook endgames.

24. exf6+ gxf6 25. $\mathbb{Q}e4+$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}e6$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}g7!$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$

Stronger is 27... $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}c1\pm$.

28. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}e2$

An alternative is 29. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}d1+$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}d5!?$ $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}c1+-$, winning a pawn, but there is no need for this type of mess when you have such a comfortable advantage.

29... $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}g4$ $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}xg6$ $\mathbb{Q}e6?!$

Putting the king on a bad square. 31...b6 or 31...b5 maintain the material balance, although only for a short time, I'm afraid.

32. $\mathbb{Q}h6$ $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}xh4$ $\mathbb{Q}d2$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}e4+$

This is why the king was bad on e6.

35... $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}e2+-$

The endgame is an easy win. Bologan does not conduct the technical phase with the same level of brilliance, but he manages to score the full point anyway.

36... $\mathbb{Q}d1+$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}d2$ 38. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $c4$ 39. $bxc4$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 40. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 41. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 42. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $a4$ 43. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $a3$ 44. $g4$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 45. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 46. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}b1$ 47. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 48. $g5$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 49. $gxf6$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 50. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 51. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}c1$ 52. $c5$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 53. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 54. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 55. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 56. $fxe3$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 57. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}h1$ 58. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 59. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}xh3$ 60. $\mathbb{Q}xa3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 61. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 62. $\mathbb{Q}d3+$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 63. $a4$ $b6$ 64. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 65. $a5$ $bxc5$ 66. $\mathbb{Q}c6$ $c4$ 67. $\mathbb{Q}a3$ $c3$ 68. $a6$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 69. $a7+$ $\mathbb{Q}a8$ 70. $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 71. $\mathbb{Q}a3$ $\mathbb{Q}e6+$ 72. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}d6+$ 73. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}d2$ 74. $c4$ $c6$ 1-0

This game explains why Ipatov develops the bishop to f5, provoking $\mathbb{Q}d4$. The entry of the knight on d6 is incredibly difficult to neutralise, and if White manages to exchange Black's light-squared bishop, he will have good chances of winning the game.

Game 24

Wei Yi

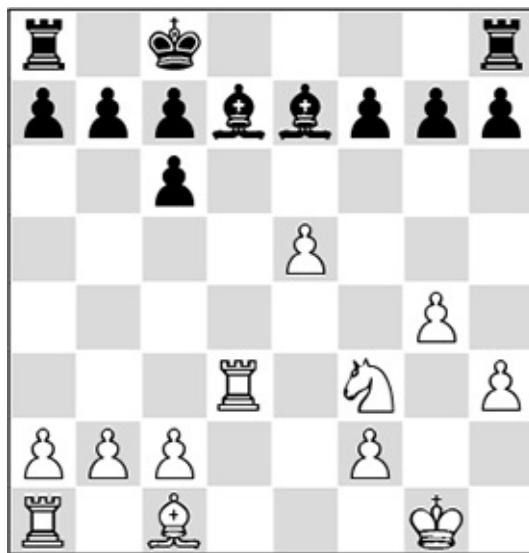
2718

Ding Liren

2757

Xinghua ch-CHN 2015 (4)

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♗f6 4.0-0 ♗xe4 5.d4 ♗d6 6.♗xc6 dxc6 7.dxe5 ♗f5 8.♗xd8+ ♔xd8 9.h3 ♗d7
10.♖d1 ♗e7 11.g4 ♗h4 12.♗xh4 ♗xh4 13.♗d2! ♔c8 14.♗f3 ♗e7 15.♗d3!?



We are following the most critical test for the sharp Almasi-Kramnik Variation (Chapter 19, variation B1). I'm sure you remember that this rook move is a prophylactic measure against 15...h5?, which would be met by 16.♗g5! hxg4? 17.♗xe7 ♕e8 18.♖ad1!+, and the purpose of this rook move becomes clear.

15...h6

More prophylaxis, now aimed against anything landing on g5.

16.♗d4 b6

While this is perfectly viable, 16...♕e8!, our main line, is a more effective measure to stymie White's activity, and at the same time preparing to threaten the e-pawn after ...♗f8. One good example is Caruana-Grischuk, Warsaw 2013, which continued 17.♗f4 c5 18.♗f5 ♗f8 19.c4 a6 20.♗e3. 20.a4 was better, preventing ...b7-b5, as in Robson-Shimanov, Las Vegas 2015, the main game in the theory section. 20...b5 21.b3 g5 22.♗g3 ♗e6 23.♖ad1 ♕b7 24.h4 24.f4 gxf4 25.♗xf4 ♗g7 26.♗d5 ♕h8!? is good for Black. 24...♗c6 25.h5 ♕eb8 26.f3 a5 27.♗d5 bxc4 28.bxc4 ♕b2 29.♖3d2 ♕ab8 30.♗f2 a4 31.♗e2 a3 32.♗e3 ♗g7 33.f4 gxf4 34.♗xf4



analysis diagram

34...f6?! Grischuk had been playing the game magnificently, but here, he didn't find the best way to take advantage of his initiative with the difficult 34... $\mathbb{R}d8$! 35. $\mathbb{R}xb2 axb2$ 36. $\mathbb{R}b1 f6\#$. 35. $\mathbb{Q}xf6 \mathbb{Q}xf6$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}f3!= \mathbb{R}f8$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}e4 \mathbb{Q}c3$ 38. $\mathbb{R}d3 \mathbb{Q}d4$ 39. $\mathbb{R}xa3 \mathbb{Q}xe3$ 40. $\mathbb{Q}xe3 \mathbb{Q}xg4$ 41. $\mathbb{R}d2 \mathbb{Q}f3+$ 42. $\mathbb{Q}d3 \mathbb{R}d8+ \frac{1}{2}-\frac{1}{2}$

17. $\mathbb{R}f3$

It's not all doom and gloom for Black: the rook on its initial square supports the possibility of ...h6-h5, which might be useful against 17.b3.

17... $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 19. $b3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$

Black is effectively untangling, and White has just about nothing.

21. $\mathbb{Q}d4$

21.c4 h5! is more dangerous for White than for Black.

21... $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 22. $\mathbb{R}e3$

22. $\mathbb{R}d3?$ is worth considering.

22... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 23. $c4$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 24. $f4$ $g6$ 25. $\mathbb{R}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}g2$

26.f5 gxf5 27.gxf5 $\mathbb{Q}d7\infty$ is interesting, yet risky.

26... $\mathbb{R}ad8$ 27. $\mathbb{R}d3$

Now, Black would maintain similar possibilities with 27... $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 28. $\mathbb{R}fd1$ h5=, but he prefers to immediately attack his opponent's advanced pawns:

27...h5?



Nobody should regret this error by the Chinese number one, because now the teenage chess star from the Orient will create his second instant classic from 2015 (the first one was his game against Bruzon Batista, with a brilliant king hunt).

28.♘xe6!! ♖xd3

Relatively better is 28...fxe6 29.♖fd1 ♖xd3 30.♖xd3 hxg4 31.hxg4±, but the endgame is very bad, with the king cut off on c8.

29.♗xc5+ bxc5 30.e6 ♖hd8 31.exf7 ♖d2+ 32.♖f2 ♖xf2+ 33.♕xf2 ♖f8 34.f5 ♖xf7 35.♕g3 gxf5 36.g5 1-0

The passed pawn is unstoppable. Don't underestimate the power of White's kingside majority, especially if your opponent is called Wei Yi!

Game 25

Magnus Carlsen

2863

Viswanathan Anand

2792

Sochi Wch m 2014 (11)

The notes to this game are an abridged version of those written for the book *Magnus Carlsen's Secret* (Editorial Chessy, 2016), which I co-authored.

With a one-point advantage to Carlsen with two games to play, a peaceful encounter was to be expected, deferring the final decision for the last round. The first moves did not seem to show the opposite, but Anand found a weak spot in the white position, and suddenly the game became sharp, thus becoming an instant classic.

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.0-0 ♘xe4 5.d4 ♘d6 6.♗xc6 dxc6 7.dxe5 ♘f5 8.♗xd8+ ♔xd8 9.h3 ♘d7 10.♗c3

Feeling comfortable with the advantage on the scoreboard, Carlsen avoids the more critical 10.♖d1.

10...h6 11.b3 ♕c8 12.♗b2 c5 13.♖ad1 b6 14.♗fe1 ♘e6 15.♗d5



15...g5!

A key move, as we have seen in the chapter on the history of the variation. The bishop needs to find play on the queenside, hence this advance, preventing ♜f4. It is true that this move weakens the kingside, but the e5-pawn is now isolated.

16.c4 ♜b7 17.♕h2

Preparing to go to g3, after g2-g4.

17...a5 18.a4 ♜e7 19.g4 ♜g6 20.♕g3 ♜e7

This makes White's only constructive plan, the h2-h4 break, more difficult to execute. The seemingly more active 20...♜g7 allows 21.♞f6! (21.h4 h5!∞) 21...♜hd8 22.h4±, exploiting the weaknesses created by ...g7-g5.

21.♘d2 ♜hd8 22.♘e4

22.♗xe7!? ♜xe7 23.♘e4 ♜g6 24.f3 (Giri) might give some chances to get an advantage, preparing a future breakthrough on the kingside.

22...♝f8 23.♞ef6?!

Keeping the knight on e4 with 23.♞c3 or f2-f3 leads to a kind of positional draw. White does not have a clear plan, and 23...b5 is answered tactically by 24.axb5 a4 25.bxa4 ♜xa4 26.♗e7!!.



It is easy to criticise Carlsen from the comfort of our sofas, going through the variations suggested by Stockfish or Komodo while enjoying a cold beer, but honestly, who would be capable of finding Black's next move? None of the GMs commenting the game live could.

23...b5!!

One of the best moves of the year, in the decisive game of the World Championship! Anand hits the champion's fragile position from the queenside.

24.Qc3

In the event of 24.axb5, Black takes the initiative with 24...a4 25.bxa4 ♕xa4 26.♕c1 (26.♗e3 ♕xd1 27.♕xd1 ♖xc4 28.♗xc4 ♕xc4 is dangerous for White) 26...♗f4!? or 26...♗e7!?.

24...bxa4 25.bxa4 ♕c6



26.♔f3!

The king is going to help defend the centre that is about to collapse, as in some devilish puzzle by Dvoretsky.

26...♖db8

26...♗e7! would have posed serious problems for Carlsen. After 27.♔e4 ♗xf6 28.exf6 ♗xd5+ 29.cxd5+ ♔d6 30.♗d3 ♔xd5, White can hardly avoid the loss of a pawn. However, according to Giri, after 31.♔c2+ ♔c6 32.♖xd8 ♕xd8 33.♖e4, the loose black pawns leave White with good drawing chances.

27.♔e4



The king has reached the centre, making his position more stable. Now, Anand loses the thread of the game with a series of nervous decisions, based more on aesthetics than on calculation.

27... ♜b4?!

27... ♜b3 28. ♜b1 ♜a3!? 29. ♜a1 ♜xc3!! 30. ♜xc3 ♜xc4 gives the advantage to Black, according to the engines.

28. ♜xb4 cxb4?

28...axb4 was necessary, opening the file for the rook. After 29. ♜h5, preventing ... ♜g7 as in the game, Black has the following idea, pointed out by Giri: 29... ♜xa4! (29... ♛b7 also gives hope of salvation) 30. ♜a1 ♜xd5+! 31.cxd5+ ♔b5



analysis diagram

The passed pawns give good drawing chances. You can find more detailed analysis of this position in the book on Carlsen.

29. ♜h5!

Preparing the demolition of the black position by means of pushing the f-pawn.

29... ♔b7 30.f4

White, an exchange up, goes on the attack with decisive effect. The key to the position is that Black might have been able to prove some compensation for the exchange by creating active play on the queenside. However, after Black's 28th move this is impossible.

30...gxf4 31.♘hxf4 ♘xf4 32.♘xf4! ♗xc4 33.♖d7!



As usual, Carlsen flawlessly realises his advantage. The c7- and f7-pawns will fall before Anand manages to achieve anything concrete on the queenside.

33... ♕a6 34.♘d5! ♕c6 35.♘xf7! ♗c5 36.♘xc7+

Simple and elegant. Little combinations in the style of Capablanca are the technical player's best friend.

36... ♕xc7 37.♘xc7 ♔c6

37...b3 38.♘d5 b2 39.e6 ♗a2 40.♘c3 ♗b4 41.e7 ♗f7 42.♘d4+–

38.♘b5! ♗xb5 39.axb5+ ♔xb5 40.e6 b3 41.♔d3 ♗e7 42.h4 a4 43.g5 hxg5 44.hxg5 a3 45.♔c3 1-0

Instructive Berlin positions

We finish our tour of the Berlin Defence with a series of typical positions for both sides. In some cases, the solutions offered may not be the best moves in the given position, but they will always be in agreement with the ideas that we have studied throughout the book.

ANTI-BERLIN

Position 1



Position after 10. ♜c3.

Position 2



Black played 8... ♝b6. Would 8... ♞e7 have been better?

Position 3



Position after 7. ♘ f3.

Position 4



Position after 7. ♘ h4.

Position 5



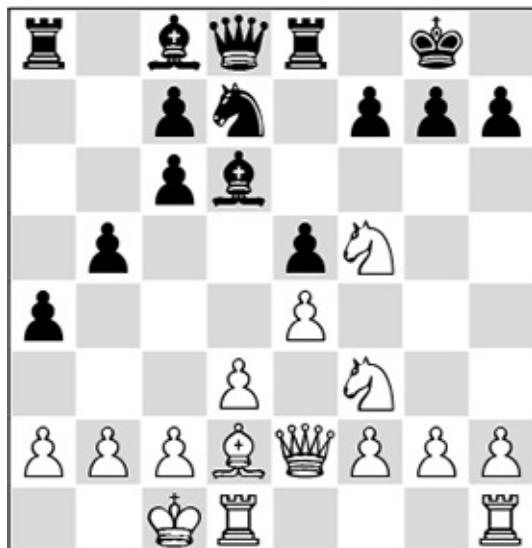
Position after 8...Qd6.

Position 6



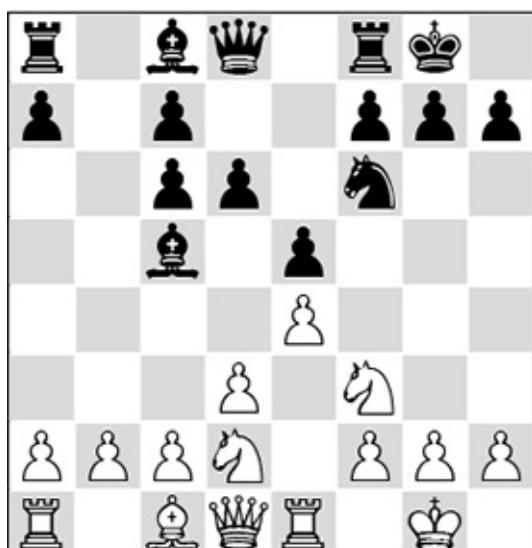
Position after 12.Qh4.

Position 7



Position after 12...a4.

Position 8



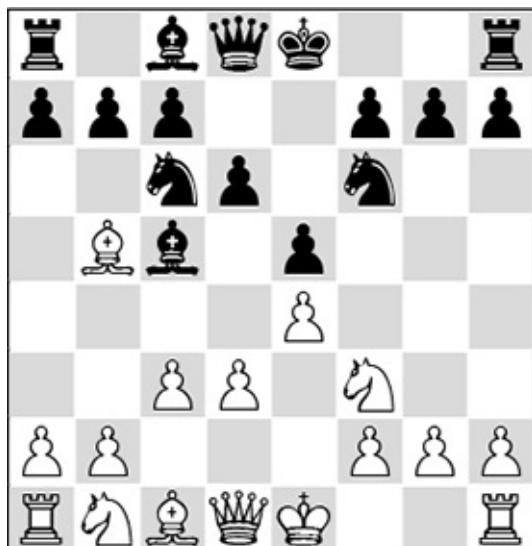
Position after 8. ♜f1-e1.

Position 9



Position after 15... \mathbb{Q} d7.

Position 10



Position after 5...d6.

Position 11



Position after 9. ♘ bd2.

Position 12



Position after 9...d6.

Position 13



Position after 11.h3.

Position 14



Position after 9.h3.

SIDELINES

Position 15



Position after 14. $\mathbb{Q}d3$.

Position 16



Position after 19. $\mathbb{Q}c3$.

Position 17



Position after 8... ♕xh2+.

Position 18



Position after 9... ♘d6.

Position 19



Position after 12.Qe3.

Position 20



Position after 13...Nf6.

Position 21



Position after 12. ♜c3.

Position 22



Position after 12. f3.

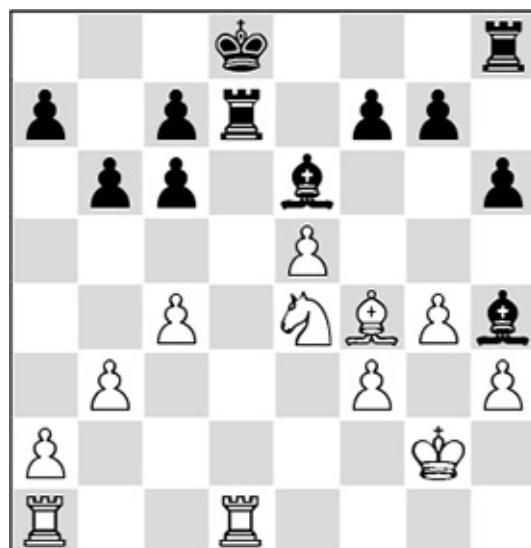
Position 23



Position after 14.c3.

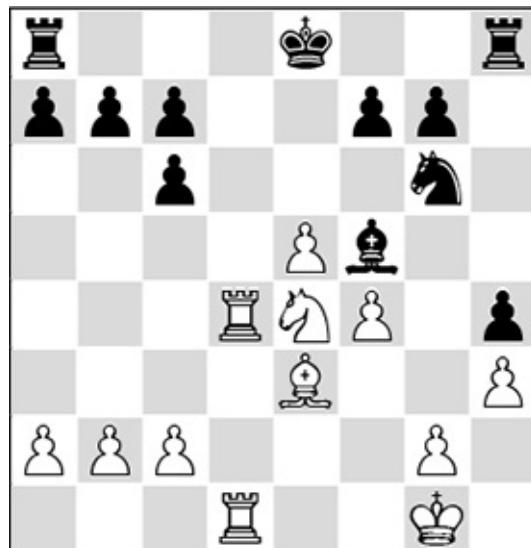
THE BERLIN ENDGAME

Position 24



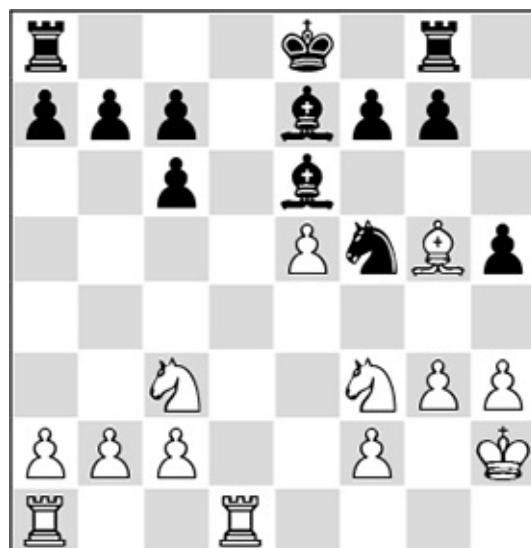
Position after 19... \mathbb{Q} d8.

Position 25



Position after 17... ♟f5.

Position 26



Position after 14. ♛h2.

Position 27



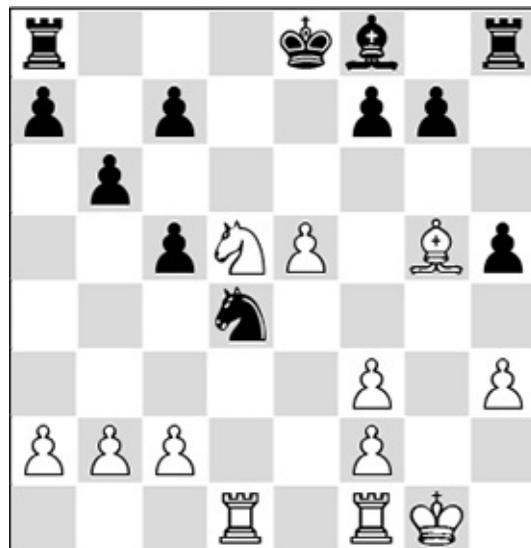
Position after 15.a4.

Position 28



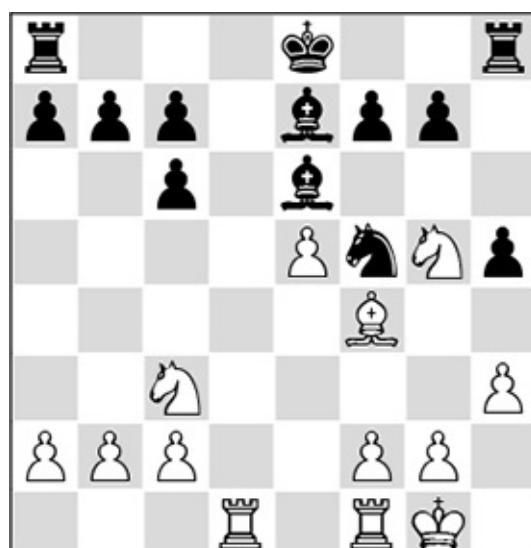
Position after 14.Qc3.

Position 29



Position after 16. ♜d5.

Position 30



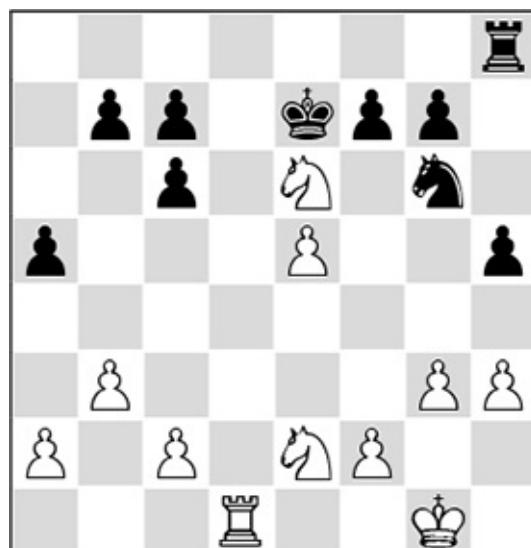
Position after 13. ♜g5.

Position 31



Position after 18. ♜xe6.

Position 32



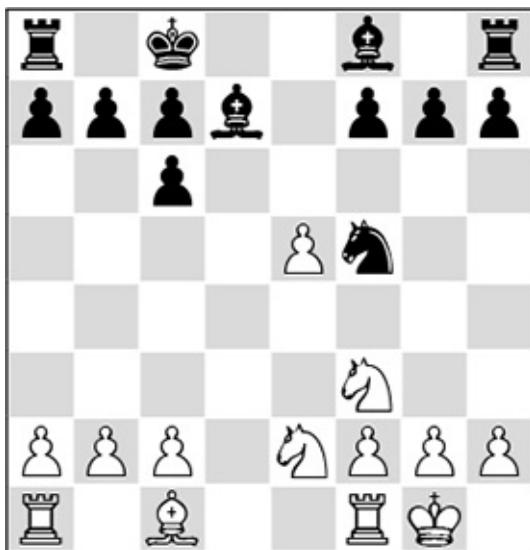
Position after 20. ♜xe6.

Position 33



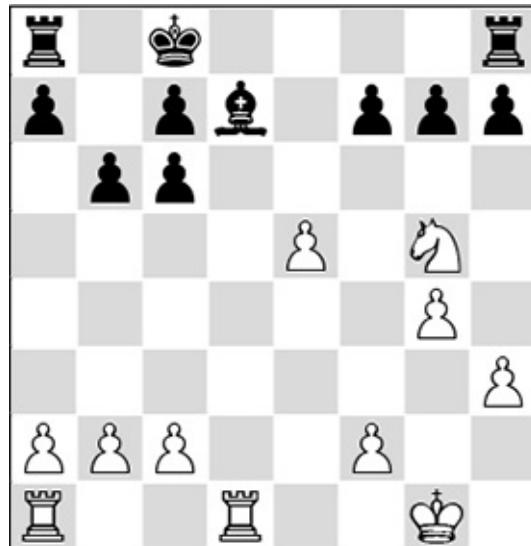
Position after 16...h4.

Position 34



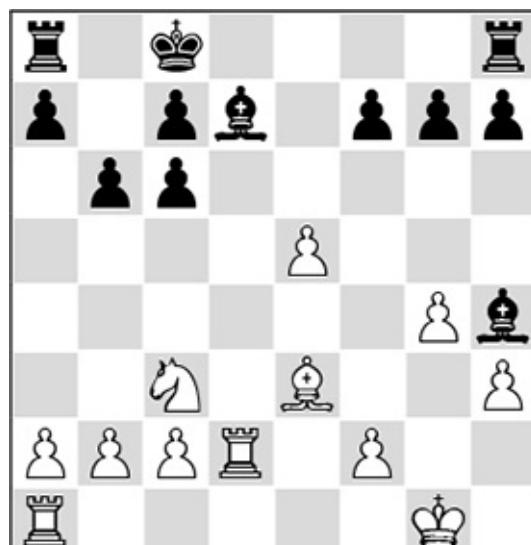
Position after 10...♚c8.

Position 35



Position after 16. ♜xg5.

Position 36



Position after 15. ♜d2.

Position 37



Position after 18. ♕xe3.

Position 38



Position after 15. ♘d5.

Solutions

POSITION 1

Vugar Gashimov

2757

Ruslan Ponomariov

2723

Beijing blindfold 2011 (3)

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.d4 exd4 5.e5 ♘e4 6.0-0 ♘e7 7.♗xd4 0-0 8.♗xc6 dxc6 9.♖e1 ♘c5
10.♗c3



The former World Champion limited White's options in the centre with an elegant resource that was examined in Chapter 1.

10...f5! 11.exf6

Otherwise Black blocks the pawn on e5 and White just has nothing: 11.♘ce2 ♘e6 12.♗xe6 ♗xd1 13.♗xd1 ♘xe6 14.♗f4 ♔f7 15.♗xe6 ♔xe6=

11...♗xf6 12.♗e3 ♘e6 13.♗ce2 b6!?

Also sufficient is 13...♗xd4 14.♗xd4 ♘e6 15.♗xf6 ♗xf6 16.♗d4 ♕ad8 17.♗xf6 ♗xf6=, as in Lobron-Gulko, Biel 1987. The black bishop compensates for the white majority.

14.♗xc6 ♗xd1 15.♗axd1 ♗xb2 16.♗ed4 ♗xd4 17.♗xd4 ♘e8=

POSITION 2

Alan Pichot

2528

Leandro Sergio Krysa

2464

Buenos Aires ch-ARG 2015 (7)

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.♘e2 ♘c5 5.c3 0-0 6.d3 h6!? 7.0-0 d6 8.h3



The Argentine IM with the black pieces played 8...♗b6, a correct move, although surely 8...a6 or 8...♗d7 are subtler. On the other hand, it is wrong to start the knight manoeuvre at this moment:

8...♘e7? 9.d4 exd4 10.cxd4 ♘b6 11.♘c3±

Giving up the centre is not recommended if White's b1-knight can be developed to c3.

POSITION 3

Sergei Movsesian

2653

Laurent Fressinet

2700

Huai'an 2016 basque (3)

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.d3 ♘c5 5.♗bd2 ♘d4 6.♗xd4 ♘xd4 7.♗f3

7.c3 is slightly more accurate.



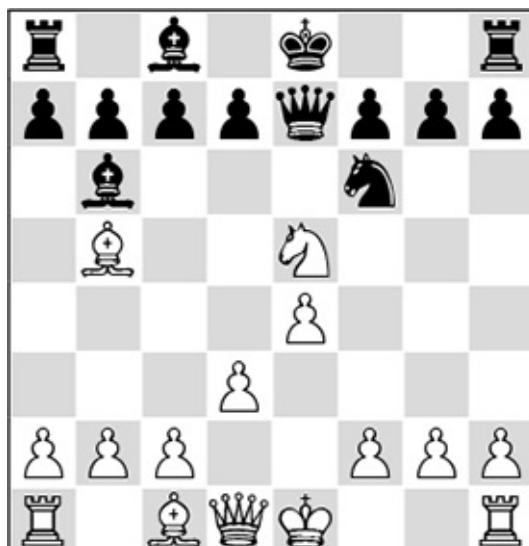
It seems as if Black should give up the bishop. 7...0-0 is not the end of the world, but there's no need to lose the minor exchange:

7...♝b6!

In the game, the Armenian GM continued 8.0-0 0-0!? (8...c6 9.♝a4 d6 is also possible) 9.♝a4 (9.♞xe5 d5 wins back the pawns with full equality) 9...d6=. The black position is more comfortable after the knight exchange.

The e-pawn is poisoned:

8.♞xe5?? ♛e7



And the loss of a piece is inevitable.

POSITION 4

David Navara

2730

Konstantin Landa

2625

Minsk Ech rapid 2015 (8)

In the present game this position was reached from a Four Knights Game:

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.♘c3 ♘c6 4.♗b5 ♘c5 5.d3?! 0-0 6.♗g5 h6 7.♗h4



And by transposition we have reached Chapter 3, variation A, in which we saw the typical and attractive reaction of the Russian GM:

7...♝d4! 8.♝xe5

8.♝xd4 ♘xd4 gives Black comfortable equality.

8...♞e8 9.♘f3

The d-pawn would stand better on d2, leaving this square for the retreat of the knight.

9...c6 10.♕a4

10.♗xf6?! ♗xf6 11.♕a4 d5 or 10.♝xd4? ♘xd4 11.♕a4 ♘xe4!+ are even more dangerous.

10...♝xe4 11.♝xe4 ♘xf3+ 12.♗xf3 ♘xh4 13.0-0 ♔f8

With his bishop pair, Black is at least equal.

POSITION 5

Dmitry Svetushkin

2561

Danyyl Dvirnyy

2572

Skopje 2016 (7)

This position was reached after

**1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♘b5 ♘f6 4.d3 ♘c5 5.♘xc6 dxc6 6.♗bd2 ♘e6 7.0-0 ♔d7
8.♗b3 ♘d6?!**

A weaker retreat than the standard 8...♗b6 9.♗g5 ♘xb3 10.axb3 f6, and White's doubled pawns make the defence easier.



9.♗a5!

The knight improves its position while avoiding doubling of the pawns.

9...♞b8

9...♝b4? 10.♗xb7 ♞b8 11.a3! with a winning advantage for White.

10.♗g5 ♞e7 11.♗xe6 ♞xe6 12.a4

Another interesting plan is 12.a3 with the idea of b2-b4.

12...0-0 13.♗c4±

It is not the end of the world, but Black has a position with few options for active play. In the game, White increased his advantage thanks to the g2-g3/f2-f4 advance.

POSITION 6

Yu Yangyi

2715

Pavel Eljanov

2718

Havana 2015 (2)

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.d3 ♗c5 5.♗xc6 dxc6 6.♗bd2 ♗e6 7.0-0 ♗d6 8.b3

Sharper alternatives are 8.d4 and 8.♗b3.

8...0-0 9.♗b2 ♘d7 10.♗e2 c5 11.♗c4 f6 12.♗h4



Black completes his regrouping by using one of two typical knight manoeuvres (the other one being ...♘f8-e6):

12...♘b8!

Heading for d4. Yu tried to force matters, but obtained no advantage.

13.♘xd6 ♔xd6 14.f4 exf4 15.e5 fxe5 16.♗xe5 ♔d7 17.♗xf4 ♘c6 18.♗e3 ♘d4=

POSITION 7

Fabiano Caruana

2794

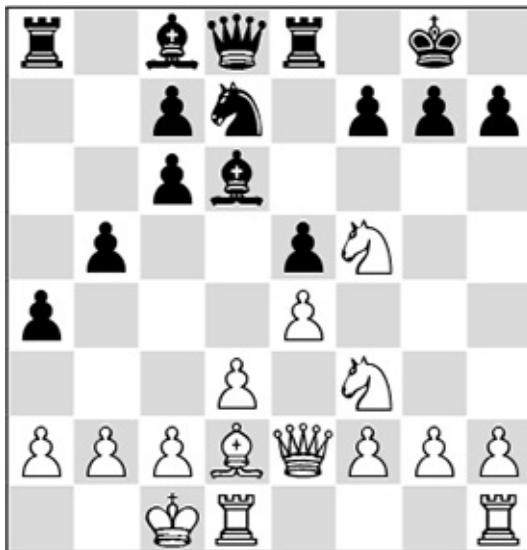
Hikaru Nakamura

2790

Moscow ct 2016 (8)

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.d3 ♗c5 5.♗xc6 dxc6 6.♗bd2 0-0 7.♔e2 ♕e8 8.♗c4 ♘d7 9.♗d2 ♘d6 10.0-0-0-0!? b5 11.♗e3 a5 12.♗f5 a4?!

12...♗f8



The aggressive plan with opposite castling, which we analysed in Chapter 4, variation B3, is harder if pawn breaks are created:

13.♗g5! f6 14.♗e3

Now g5 will be more dangerous.

14...♗c5 15.g4 ♗e6 16.♗b1 b4?!

Caruana, in *New in Chess 2016/3*, points out the variation 16...♗d7 17.♗hg1 ♗f7 18.g5!? ♗xf5 (18...♗xa2+? 19.♗a1) 19.exf5 a3 20.b3 e4 21.g6∞.

17.g5 b3?! 18.♗hg1!±

POSITION 8

Magnus Carlsen

2862

Teimour Radjabov

2734

Wijk aan Zee 2015 (9)

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.d3 ♗c5 5.0-0 d6 6.♗bd2 0-0 7.♗xc6!? bxc6

Now Carlsen played

8.h3

If White tries to save a tempo with the immediate 8.♖e1:



analysis diagram

Black takes the initiative with a common manoeuvre known from the Italian Game: 8...
♗g4! 9.♖e2 f5=

POSITION 9

Peter Svidler

2741

David Navara

2706

Prague m 2012 (2)

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.d3 ♗c5 5.c3 0-0 6.0-0 d6 7.♗bd2 a6

In Chapter 7 we mainly examined the fashionable move 7...♗e7!.

**8.♕xc6 bxc6 9.♖e1 ♖e8 10.h3 ♗b6 11.♗f1 h6?! 12.♗g3 ♗e6?! 13.♗e3 ♗xe3
14.♖xe3 c5 15.♗c2 ♘d7**



Black is unprepared for the opening of the position.

16.d4!

The only realistic option to get an advantage in this type of structure. White liquidates the doubled pawns but pinpoints the weaknesses on the c-file.

16...cxd4 17.cxd4 exd4 18.♗xd4 a5 19.b3

19.♖d1 a4 (19...♗c5 20.e5±) 20.♗gf5!± is sharper.

19...♗c5 20.♖d1 ♗d7 21.e5!±

You can see how things ended in Game 5 (Chapter 20).

POSITION 10

Bartłomiej Macieja

2624

Maciej Rutkowski

2405

Warsaw ch-POL 2010 (3)

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♗f6 4.d3 ♗c5 5.c3 d6?!



Black usually plays 5...0-0. We saw in Chapter 6 that Black need not fear the capture of the e-pawn.

6.d4!

The reason why you should not move the d-pawn before castling. White gets a comfortable central advantage.

6...exd4

6...♗b6? 7.d5 a6 8.♗a4+–

7.cxd4 ♗b4+ 8.♗d2

It is unnecessary to get into the mess related to 8.♔f1!?.

8...♗xd2+ 9.♗bxsd2 ♗d7 10.0-0 0-0 11.♖e1 ♗e7 12.♗f1! c6 13.b4!±

Black has given up the centre in far worse conditions than in the fashionable variations we studied in Chapter 7.

POSITION 11

Ilya Smirin

2655

Victor Bologan

2607

Poikovsky 2015 (4)

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.d3 ♗c5 5.c3 d5!? 6.♔e2?! 0-0 7.♗g5 dxе4 8.дxe4 ♗e7 9.♗bd2



As we saw in Chapter 6, the new idea 5...d5!? leads to rather quiet positions despite its almost suicidal appearance. Here Bologan found a good plan to get rid of the annoying pin, incidentally showing the dark side of the position of the white queen:

9...♝d8! 10.b4 ♗b6 11.♗c4 ♗e6 12.♗xb6 axb6 13.0-0

13.♗d2 ♗f4 is no improvement, according to Branko Tadic in *Informant 126*.

13...♝xg5 14.♝xg5 ♗g4 15.♔e3 h6 16.♗f3 ♗fd8

Black's position is already slightly more comfortable.

POSITION 12

Veselin Topalov

2800

Hannes Stefansson

2573

Gibraltar 2015 (4)

1.e4 e5 2.♗f3 ♗c6 3.♗b5 ♗f6 4.d3 ♗c5 5.c3 0-0 6.0-0 ♕e8 7.♗g5 h6 8.♗h4 ♗e7 9.♗bd2 d6



The position of the bishop on e7, without a doubt the best way to unpin the knight in this line, introduces a hidden threat:

10.♗g3!

Perhaps the bishop is not on its ideal square on g3, but at least it avoids what happened in Shabalov-Gupta, Reykjavik 2016: 10.♕e1?! ♗d7 (10...g5 11.♗g3 g4 12.♗h4 ♗xe4 13.♗xe4 ♗xh4 14.d4∞ might be premature, as in Inarkiev-Aronian, Moscow 2014) 11.a4? g5! 12.♗g3 g4 13.♗h4 ♗xe4! 14.dxe4 ♗xh4 15.♗xh4 ♗xh4 and White is a pawn down for no compensation.

10...♗d7 11.a4 ♗f8 12.♗e1 a6 13.♗c4 g6 14.d4 ♗g7?! 15.♗b3±

This position is analysed in more detail in Chapter 6, section D.

POSITION 13

Peter Svidler

2758

Viswanathan Anand

2770

Khanty-Mansiysk ct 2014 (7)

1.e4 e5 2.♗f3 ♗c6 3.♗b5 ♗f6 4.d3 ♗c5 5.c3 0-0 6.0-0 d6 7.♗bd2 ♗e7 8.♗e1?!

8.d4 is far worse – the critical line of the Anti-Berlin with 5.c3.

8...c6 9.Qa4 Qb6 10.d4 Qg6 11.h3



Black is OK if he maintains the centre. But with the bishop on a4, a different, more aggressive plan is preferable:

11...exd4!

Black surrenders the centre but in return creates concrete problems.

12.cxd4

12.Qxd4 Ne8 13.Qc2 d5=

12...d5! 13.e5 Qh5!



The knight is going to f4 and after ...f7-f6, Black takes the initiative. In Chapter 7, section B, we analysed the same plan with the bishop on f1, where it is much better placed.

14.Qf1 Qhf4 15.Qc2 f6=

POSITION 14

Dmitry Andreikin

2709

Sergey Karjakin

2766

Khanty-Mansiysk ct 2014 (3)

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.d3 ♗c5 5.c3 0-0 6.0-0 d6 7.♗bd2 ♘e7 8.d4 exd4 9.cxd4 ♘b6 10.h3?!

10.♗e1 is tougher.



In the notes to his game we saw in Position 10, Macieja stated that White's centre would be strong if Black could be prevented from playing ...d6-d5 and ...♗e4 in response to e4-e5. Here we see this principle in action, but you would do well not to take these general ideas too literally; just look at the previous position, or line B of Chapter 7.

10...d5! 11.e5 ♘e4 12.♗d3 ♘f5 13.♗e2 ♘c6!= 14.♗d1 ♘xd4 15.♗xe4 dxe4 16.♘xe4 ♘xe4 17.♗xd4 ♘d5

The position is completely equal. The theory of the Anti-Berlin with d2-d3 is growing exponentially, and two years later all GMs know that it is necessary to defend e4.

POSITION 15

Magnus Carlsen

2870

Viswanathan Anand

2775

Chennai Wch m 2013 (8)

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♗f6 4.0-0 ♗xe4 5.♕e1 ♘d6 6.♗xe5 ♗e7 7.♗f1 ♗xe5
8.♗xe5 0-0 9.d4 ♗f6 10.♗e1 ♗e8 11.c3 ♗xe1 12.♗xe1 ♗e8 13.♗f4 d5 14.♗d3



The method Anand uses to solve the problem of his c8-bishop is typical in the boring variations of Chapter 8:

14...g6!

14...♗d6? allows the position to be unnecessarily weakened: 15.♗xd6 cxd6 (15...♖xd6 16.♗e8+ ♔f8 17.♗xh7+) 16.♗d2±

15.♗d2 ♗g7 16.♗e2 c6! 17.♗e1 ♗f5 18.♗xf5 ♗xf5 19.♗f3 ♗g7 20.♗e5 ♗e6

Here Carlsen continued with exchanging operations and the position was completely equal after

21.♗xf6 ♗xf6 22.♗e5 ♗e8 23.♗g4 ♗d8=

As we learned in Chapter 8, the Egyptian GM Amin argues that 21.♗e3 can give White a small advantage, but I do not think that Black can lose, provided he defends with some care.

POSITION 16

Maxime Vachier-Lagrave

2766

Anish Giri

2750

Biel 2014 (5)

**1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♗f6 4.0-0 ♗xe4 5.♕e1 ♘d6 6.♗xe5 ♗e7 7.♗f1 ♗xe5
8.♗xe5 0-0 9.♗c3 ♗e8 10.♗d5 ♗d6 11.♗e2!? c6**

11...♗f6! equalises, as we saw in Game 8.

**12.♗e3 ♗c7 13.♗f5 d5 14.♗e7+ ♔h8 15.♗xc8 ♕xc8 16.d3 f5 17.g3 ♗f6 18.♗d2
♗d6 19.♗c3!**



White tries to provoke the advance of the d-pawn, which would increase the scope of his light-squared bishop, the only triumph achieved in the opening. In the game, Giri made a serious positional mistake for his level: 19...d4?! 20.♗d2 ♗f7 21.f4! ♕ce8 22.♗g2 ♗d6 23.a3 ♗b6 24.♗xe8 ♕xe8 25.♗f1 ♗g8 26.♗e1 ♕e6 27.a4!±

Black should retreat the queen:

19...♔f7 20.a4

The threat was 20...♗b5, and 20.♗e5 ♕ce8 does not leave many hopes either to keep the bishop pair.

20...f4∞

The advance of the f-pawn gives Black good counterplay in this variation.

POSITION 17

Vugor Rasulov

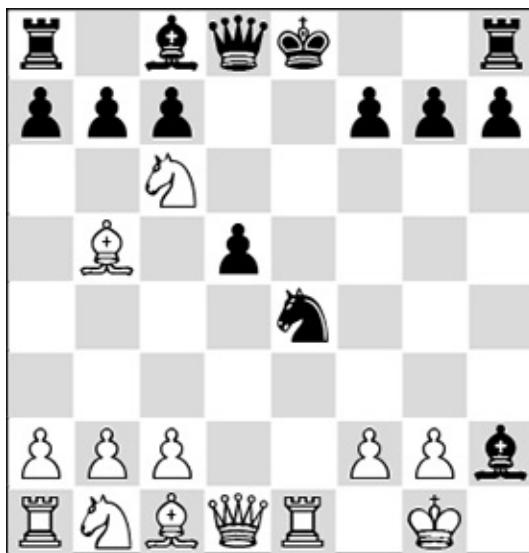
2499

Nijat Abasov

2504

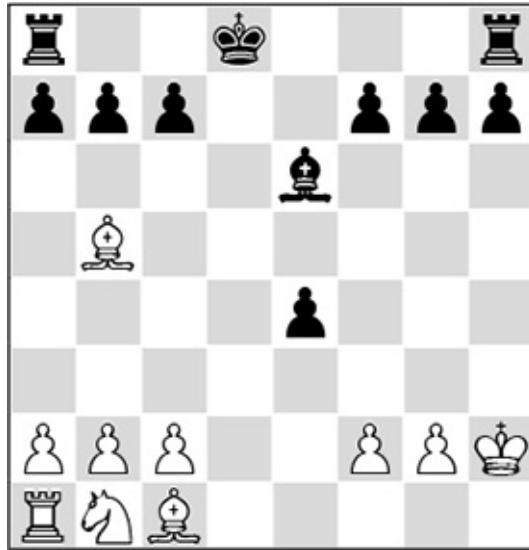
Baku ch-AZE jr 2011 (2)

1.e4 e5 2.♗f3 ♗c6 3.♗b5 ♗f6 4.0-0 ♗xe4 5.d4 exd4? 6.♗e1 d5 7.♗xd4 ♗d6!
8.♗xc6 ♗xh2+



9.♔xh2 ♗h4+ leads to a draw, whereas 9.♔f1? ♗h4 10.♗e3 bxc6! 11.♗xc6+ ♔f8 is even worse. White has only one way to continue the game:

9.♔h1! ♗h4 10.♗xe4+! dxe4 11.♗d8+ ♔xd8 12.♗xd8+ ♔xd8 13.♔xh2 ♗e6



A typical endgame: a kingside blockade is in the air, so the bishops promise to be stronger than the rook and the two black pawns. White obtains an advantage with both 14.♗c3 as in the game, and my recommendation in Chapter 9, section A:

14.♗d2 f5 15.♗b3±

POSITION 18

Vasily Ivanchuk

2751

Magnus Carlsen

2733

Morelia/Linares 2008 (8)

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.0-0 ♘xe4 5.d4 a6?! 6.♗xc6 dxc6 7.♘e2 ♘f5 8.♗e1! ♘b4?!

We saw in Chapter 9 that both 8...♘d6 and 8...♗f6!? offer better chances to equalise.

9.c3 ♘d6



10.♔c2!

It is interesting that Black does not have a good method to save the piece. 10...♗g3? is answered by 11.♗b3+–.

10...♝d7 11.dxe5 ♘c5 12.♗xe4 0-0-0 13.♗bd2±

The young Carlsen had insufficient compensation for the material, but managed to turn things around in his opponent's time trouble, as we saw in Game 9 (Chapter 20).

POSITION 19

Siegbert Tarrasch

Emanuel Lasker

Düsseldorf/Munich Wch m 1908 (10)

One of the main positions of the Old Berlin is reached after

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.0-0 ♗xe4 5.d4 ♗e7 6.♗e2 ♗d6 7.♗xc6 bxc6 8.dxe5 ♗b7 9.♗c3 0-0 10.♗e1 ♗c5 11.♗d4 ♗e6 12.♗e3



Black should break the tension.

12...♗xd4!

12...♗b8 13.b3! ♗b4 is a somewhat inferior alternative. White can change the character of the game with the exchange on e6: 14.♗xe6 fxe6 15.♗d2!± (Aseev-Marciano, Paris 1996) and after chasing away the b4-bishop Black will suffer with his passive light-squared bishop.

13.♗xd4 c5! 14.♗e3 d5 15.exd6 ♗xd6 16.♗e4 ♗b7 17.♗xd6 cxd6±

In Chapter 10, section A, we examined the methods of play in this position, which is less equal than it appears at first sight.

POSITION 20

Inna Agrest

2220

Anastasia Savina

2398

Chennai Wch-W jr 2011 (7)

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♗f6 4.0-0 ♗xe4 5.d4 ♗d6 6.dxe5 ♗xb5 7.a4 d6 8.e6! fxe6 9.axb5 ♗b4!? 10.♗g5 ♗e7 11.♗h5+ g6 12.♗h6 ♗f8 13.♗h3 ♗f6



We discussed in Chapter 11, section A2, that White keeps the initiative with a typical pawn sacrifice:

14.b6! ♘c6?

Our main line 14...cxb6 15.♗a3∞ is much better.

15.♗c3 cxb6?

The (by now) IM goes down without much resistance. It was still possible to continue the fight with 15...h6 16.♗ge4 ♗f5 17.g4 ♗e5 18.f4 ♗g7 19.♗b5 cxb6 20.♗bx6+ ♗xd6 21.♗xd6+ ♗f8 22.♗e3± Dilmukhametov-Ovetchkin, Tyumen 2014.

16.♗b5 ♗f5 17.♗c7+ ♔d7 18.♗xa8

With a winning advantage.

POSITION 21

Changren Dai

2330

Yuxiang Fang

2445

Shijiazhuang 2015 (7)

We are following the solid line B from Chapter 11:

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.0-0 ♗xe4 5.d4 ♗d6 6.♗g5 ♗e7!

Avoiding the crazy complications after 6...f6.

7.♗xe7 ♗xe7 8.♗xc6 dxc6 9.dxe5 ♗e4!? 10.♘e2 ♘c5 11.h3 0-0 12.♗c3



White has restricted the development of the opponent's bishop; for example, if 12...♗f5 13.♗d4 and the f-pawn is mobile, but the long diagonal can be a good alternative destination:

12...b6!

Incidentally threatening 13...♗a6.

13.♗fe1 ♘e6

Avoiding 14.♗d4.

14.♗e4 ♘b7 15.h4 ♕ab8!

Black has developed harmoniously and his bishop is going to give him at least equality, as is often the case in the variation 6.♗g5 ♗e7.

POSITION 22

Hannes Stefansson

2604

Heikki Westerinen

2412

Reykjavík 2002 (3)

In these two positions we examine the complications that arise in the main line of Chapter 12, the dubious but exciting Westerinen-Eslon Variation:

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.0-0 ♘xe4 5.d4 ♘d6 6.♗xc6 dxc6 7.dxe5 ♘e4?!
8.♗e2 ♘f5 9.♗d1 ♗c8 10.♗d4 ♘c5 11.b4! ♘b6 12.f3



The knight seems to be in danger, but Black can rescue it with a quiet developing manoeuvre:

12... ♗d7! 13.♗e3 0-0-0 14.c3

The choice of the Icelandic GM leads us to position 23. Our main line might promise (and indeed promises) advantage after 14.a4, but in life, promises often blow with the wind, as can be seen after electoral campaigns.

POSITION 23



Here the veteran hero of the variation opted for

14... ♜he8?! 15.fxe4 ♜g4 16.♕f1 ♜xd1 17.♕xd1 ♜xe5 18.♗d2 c5

and he obtained good compensation for the material, but only because his opponent missed the simple 19.bxc5±.

It was possible to obtain equality with a brilliant resource:

14...c5 15.fxe4 ♜g4 16.e6! ♜xd4! 17.♖xd4! ♜xe2 18.bxc5 ♜a5 19.exf7 ♜h5∞ Black wins back one of the pawns and the bishop pair is a good life insurance.

POSITION 24

Fabiano Caruana

2783

Magnus Carlsen

2881

Shamkir 2014 (4) (analysis)

We started the assessment of the Berlin endgame with a typical position, which we discussed in Chapter 14, section A:

**1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.0-0 ♗xe4 5.d4 ♘d6 6.♗xc6 dxc6 7.dxe5 ♘f5
8.♗xd8+ ♔xd8 9.h3 h6 10.♗d1+ ♔e8 11.♗c3 ♘d7 12.♗f4 ♘d8 13.♗e4 ♘e7?!
14.g4 ♘h4 15.♗xh4 ♗xh4 16.♔g2 ♘e6 17.f3 b6 18.b3 ♘d7**

Caruana's suggested improvement to the game continuation 18...c5?! 19.c4 ♘d7 20.♗g3 ♘e7 21.♗xd7 ♗xd7 22.♗c3 ♔d8?! 23.♗d5±.

19.c4 ♔d8



Black tries to solve the problem of the king in the centre with the manoeuvre ...♔c8 and ...♗hd8. Caruana points out that White must act quickly:

20.♗g3! ♘e7

20...♗xg3 21.♗xg3 h5 might be slightly better, as with fewer pieces the lack of space is more easily dealt with.

21.f4 g6 22.♗f1↑

The advance of the f-pawn leaves Black in a precarious situation.

POSITION 25

Maxime Vachier-Lagrave

2731

Veselin Topalov

2816

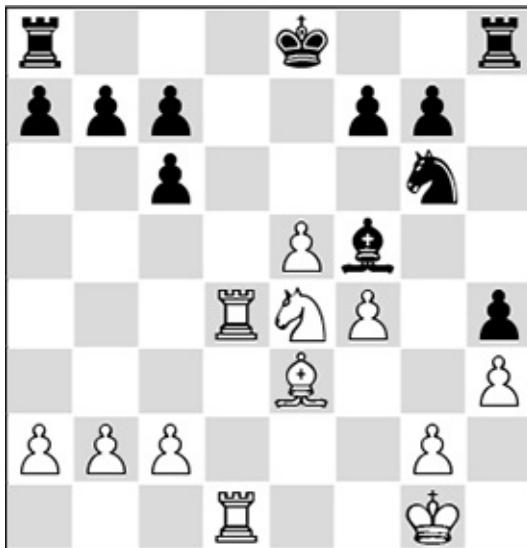
St Louis 2015 (6)

Line B of Chapter 14 leads to interesting positions, although White's initiative may be dangerous. This position was reached after

**1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.0-0 ♗xe4 5.d4 ♘d6 6.♗xc6 dxc6 7.dxe5 ♘f5
8.♗xd8+ ♔xd8 9.h3 h6 10.♗d1+ ♔e8 11.♗c3 ♘e7 12.♗d4 ♘g6 13.f4!? ♘c5
14.♗e3 h5! 15.♗e4 ♗xd4 16.♗xd4 h4?!**

Safer is 16...b6, defending the c5-square.

17.♗ad1 ♘f5



Topalov has blocked the kingside and its medium-term prospects are very good, but White can hit at the centre before Black finishes reorganising:

18.e6! ♗xe6 19.♘c5 ♗h5

19...b6 20.♗xe6 fxe6 21.♗d7±

20.♘xb7 ♗d5 21.b3±

In this open position the somewhat exposed black king and the black queenside weaknesses are more important than the blocked kingside.

POSITION 26

Gata Kamsky

2681

Markus Ragger

2657

Bilbao tt 2014 (4)

In the game, a model for Chapter 16, line A (Blockade Variation), the diagram position was reached after

**1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.0-0 ♗xe4 5.d4 ♘d6 6.♗xc6 dxc6 7.dxe5 ♘f5
8.♕xd8+ ♔xd8 9.♗d1+ ♔e8 10.h3 ♘e7 11.♗c3 h5 12.g3 ♘e6 13.♗g5 ♘g8!?
14.♔h2**



With his previous move, Black has prepared the central lever:

14...f6! 15.exf6 gxf6 16.♗f4 ♘c8!

The advance of the f-pawn has gained space, while at the same time freeing f7 for the king. With active play the weakened pawn structure can be disguised:

17.♘e2

And here instead of

17...♘d6?! 18.♗ed4 ♘d7 19.♗h4

which got the Austrian GM into some difficulties, 17...c5 or 17...♔f7 18.♗ed4 ♘xd4 19.♗xd4 ♘d5 could be played, with equality.

POSITION 27

Hou Yifan

2673

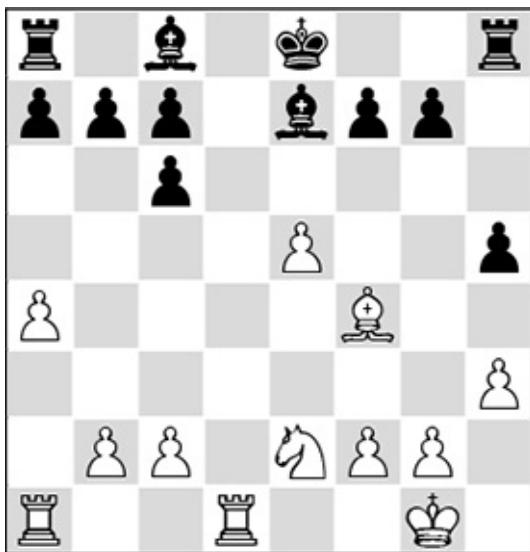
Michael Adams

2744

Wijk aan Zee 2016 (12)

This game is a crossroads of Eljanov's Repertoire (Chapter 15) and the Blockade Variation (Chapter 16).

**1.e4 e5 2.♗f3 ♗c6 3.♕b5 ♗f6 4.0-0 ♗xe4 5.d4 ♗d6 6.♕xc6 dxc6 7.dxe5 ♗f5
8.♗xd8+ ♔xd8 9.h3 ♔e8 10.♗c3 h5 11.♗d1 ♗e7 12.♗e2 ♗h4 13.♗xh4 ♗xh4
14.♗f4 ♗e7 15.a4!?**



The Women's World Champion has opted for a prophylactic treatment of the position: the c8-bishop does not yet have a clear destination, the pawn break ...f7-f6 has been prevented by the bishop on f4, and if the a-pawn advances, the e5-e6 break can be strong. Fortunately for Black there is another sharp plan:

15...g5!?

The minority attack makes a lot of sense, with the white kingside half blocked, as well as the activity of the light-squared bishop. Another positive by-product of the pawn advance is that g7 is free for the king.

16.♗e3 a5

16...♗f5!? is another playable idea. The bishop is going to g6 and the black king is headed for g7.

17.f3 g4 18.♔h2 ♗d7 19.♗d2 ♗d8 20.♗ad1 gxf3 21.gxf3 h4∞

Black has become active thanks to the advance of the g-pawn.

POSITION 28

Ruslan Ponomariov

2710

Wesley So

2775

Doha 2015 (7)

1.e4 e5 2.♗f3 ♗c6 3.♕b5 ♗f6 4.0-0 ♗xe4 5.d4 ♗d6 6.♕xc6 dxc6 7.dxe5 ♗f5
8.♘xd8+ ♔xd8 9.♗c3 ♔e8 10.h3 h5 11.♗e2 b6 12.♗g5 c5 13.♗ad1!? ♗b7 14.♗c3



A typical situation has been reached. Despite losing two tempi the white knight is headed for d5, a typical problem related to the advance ...c6-c5.

14...♗xf3!

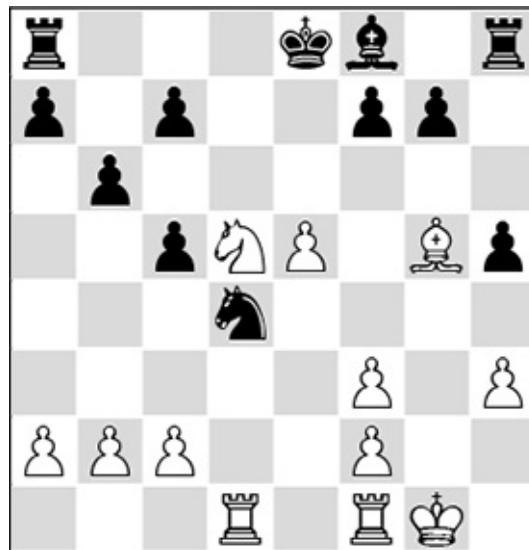
This is the usual destination of the fianchettoed bishop in the Berlin endgame. In exchange for its heroic suicide mission, the kingside pawn majority is devalued.

15.gxf3 ♗d4!?

In Grischuk-Giri, London 2015, the Dutch prodigy continued with the most solid 15...c6; another advantage of exchanging the bishop is that a move like this hurts less... After 16.♗e4 ♗e7 17.f4 ♗xg5 18.fxg5 ♔e7 19.♗d6 Grischuk made use of the d6-square to create certain problems, which his opponent was unable to solve in the best way possible.

16.♗d5

POSITION 29



So seems to have complicated life unnecessarily: 16... ♕xf3+ loses, while 16... ♕e6 17.f4 allows White to mobilise his pawns.

16... ♕d7!

The king solves the problems himself, by going to the excellent c6-square.

17.f4

17.c3!? ♕xf3+ 18.♕g2 ♕xg5 19.♕xb6+ ♔c6 20.♕xa8 ♔e7 leads to a position with two pieces for a rook, which So assessed as at least equal.

17... ♔c6=

The opponent's majority will be almost impossible to move forward.

POSITION 30

Magnus Carlsen

2863

Viswanathan Anand

2792

Sochi Wch m 2014 (7)

I have taken as a reference the seventh match game between Carlsen and Anand in 2014, one of dozens that have been played in line D of the Blockade Variation.

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.0-0 ♗xe4 5.d4 ♘d6 6.♗xc6 dxc6 7.dxe5 ♘f5 8.♗xd8+ ♔xd8 9.h3 ♔e8 10.♗c3 h5 11.♗f4 ♘e7 12.♗ad1 ♘e6 13.♗g5



In this variation Black does not need to keep the bishop pair, as long as he maintains the blockade. A good example is Game 18 in Chapter 20, in which Karjakin voluntarily gave up his light-squared bishop without getting any doubled pawns in return.

13... ♜h6!

The rook is developed with a dual purpose: on the one hand it prepares to capture on e6, on the other it prepares sharp counterplay, which we analysed comprehensively in the theory section.

14.g3

Our Game 20, Vachier-Lagrange-Carlsen, Stavanger 2016 (see Chapter 20), has put 14.♖fe1!? in the spotlight, preventing a future ...f7-f6.

14... ♗xg5 15.♗xg5 ♜g6! 16.h4 f6 17.exf6 gxf6 18.♗f4 ♜xh4∞

POSITION 31

Maxime Vachier-Lagrave

2819

Wesley So

2771

St Louis 2016 (9)

This and the following position will serve to look at concepts relating to the blockade of the white majority.

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.0-0 ♗xe4 5.d4 ♘d6 6.♗xc6 dxc6 7.dxe5 ♘f5 8.♗xd8+ ♔xd8 9.h3 ♔e8 10.♗c3 h5 11.♗g5 ♘e6 12.♗ad1 ♘e7 13.b3 a5

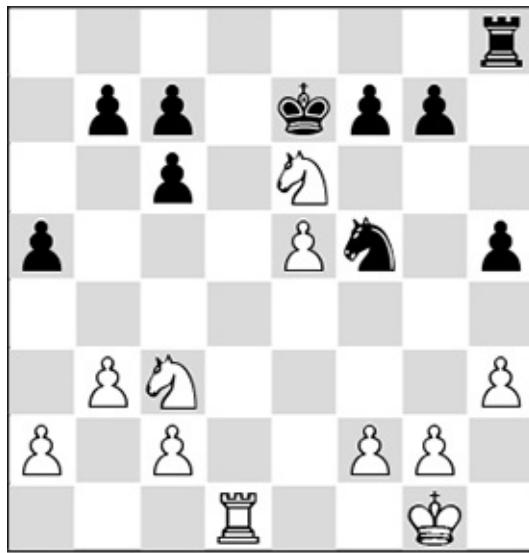
In the theory section (Chapter 16, variation B) we examined 13...h4 as a main move.

14.♗d3 ♘d8 15.♗xd8 ♘xd8 16.♗d1 ♘xg5 17.♗xg5 ♔e7

In the game the French super GM played

18.♘e2

The Macedonian GM Alex Colovic analyses in *Informant 129* what would happen after 18.♘xe6:



analysis diagram

18...♔xe6! (in general this is the correct square for the king) 19.f4 b6 20.♗f2 h4= The blockade is easier to put into effect after the advance of the pawn to f4.

We are continuing the game Vachier-Lagrave-So:

18.♘e2

Instead of 18.♘xe6.

18...♘h4! 19.g3 ♘g6 20.♘xe6

POSITION 32



20...fxe6!

This time Colovic shows us that 20... \mathbb{Q} x e6 21.f4 c5 (22. \mathbb{Q} d4 was threatened) 22. \mathbb{Q} f2 \mathbb{Q} e7 23. \mathbb{Q} c3 \mathbb{Q} f5 24. \mathbb{Q} b5 \mathbb{Q} c8 25. \mathbb{Q} f3, preparing the g4-advance, is inferior.

21.f4 \mathbb{Q} f8

Threatening 22...h4.

22. \mathbb{Q} d4 c5 23. \mathbb{Q} e4 \mathbb{Q} d8=

The capture with the pawn is justified for tactical reasons: the king on e6 would be exposed, and after the opening of the f-file White did not have time to consolidate the pawns while maintaining control of the d-file. You can find the same plan in Game 19 (Vachier-Lagrange-Kramnik, Dortmund 2016, note to 20.c3).

POSITION 33

Victor Bologan

2630

Peter Leko

2708

Reykjavik Ech-tt 2015 (1)

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.0-0 ♗xe4 5.d4 ♘d6 6.♗xc6 dxc6 7.dxe5 ♘f5 8.♕xd8+ ♔xd8 9.♖d1+ ♔e8 10.♗c3 ♘e7 11.h3 ♘g6 12.b3 ♘e7 13.♗b2 h5?!

In Chapter 18 we studied 13... ♘f5 14.♗d4 ♘d7, which seems to lead to equality.

14.♗e4 a5?! 15.♖e1! ♔f8

15...a4 16.♗d6+

16.♖ad1 h4



Bologan found a tactical blow that gave him the advantage:

17.♗d6! ♕h5

17...♗xe5!? 18.♗xe5 ♘xd6 19.♗xd6+ (19.♖xd6!?) 19...cxsd6 20.♖xd6 ♘f5 21.♖e5↑

18.♗xc8 ♕xc8 19.♖e4!±

It may not seem like much, but after the exchange of the bishop White's advantage is important; you can see how Bologan exploited it in Game 23.

POSITION 34

Alexander Grischuk

2783

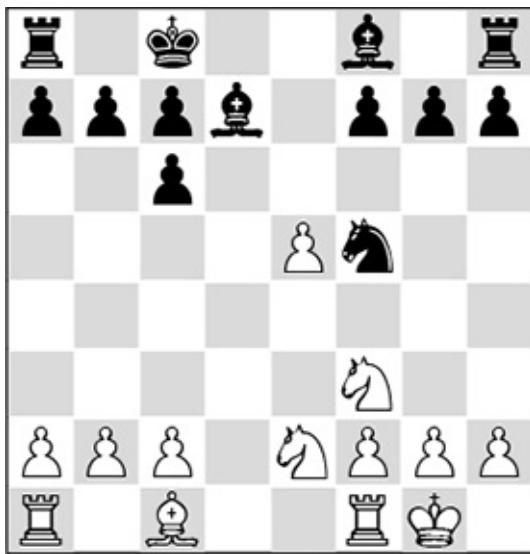
Levon Aronian

2803

Beijing blitz 2013 (11)

**1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.0-0 ♗xe4 5.d4 ♘d6 6.♗xc6 dxc6 7.dxe5 ♘f5
8.♕xd8+ ♔xd8 9.♘c3 ♘d7 10.♘e2 ♔c8?!**

10...♘e7 is the main line we studied in Chapter 19, variation A2.



11.♘g5! ♘e8 12.♘g3!

Grischuk exploits the position of the black king to accelerate the advance of the f-pawn by tactical means.

12...♘h4

Not good is 12...♘xg3 13.fxg3 and the f-pawn hangs.

Now 13.♗e3 b6 14.f4 ♘g6 15.♗ae1 c5 16.♗c1 maintained some advantage to White, who has mobilised the central pawns. Alternatives are 13.f4!? or 13.e6.

POSITION 35

Sergey Karjakin

2771

Magnus Carlsen

2881

Stavanger 2014 (6)

We enter into the critical positions of the Almasi-Kramnik Variation (Chapter 19, line B1):

**1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.0-0 ♗xe4 5.d4 ♘d6 6.♗xc6 dxc6 7.dxe5 ♘f5
8.♕xd8+ ♔xd8 9.h3 ♘d7 10.♗d1 ♘e7 11.g4 ♘h4 12.♗xh4 ♘xh4 13.♗d2 ♘c8**

14. ♜ e4

14. ♜ f3 ♛ e7 15. ♜ d3 is our main line.

14...b6 15. ♜ g5 ♛ xg5 16. ♜ xg5



The threat on the f-pawn is often more apparent than real, as the World Champion demonstrates in great style:

16...h6! 17. ♜ xf7 ♜ e8!

Even more accurate than 17... ♜ f8 18.e6 ♛ xe6 19. ♜ e5∞.

18.f4 ♛ e6 19. ♜ xh6 gxh6 20.f5 ♛ xf5 21.gxf5 ♜ xe5 22. ♜ f1



22... ♔ d7!=

The king is going to block the passed pawn, after which Black runs no risk of losing.

POSITION 36

Fabiano Caruana

2789

Michael Adams

2743

Dortmund 2014 (6)

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.0-0 ♗xe4 5.d4 ♘d6 6.♗xc6 dxc6 7.dxe5 ♘f5 8.♕xd8+ ♔xd8 9.h3 ♘d7 10.♗d1 ♘e7 11.♗c3

Supposedly 11.♗d2 is more flexible, but Caruana wants to try a new idea.

11... ♕c8 12.g4 ♘h4 13.♗xh4 ♘xh4 14.♗e3!? b6 15.♗d2



15...c5 16.♗d5

16.f4!?

16... ♘e8 17.♗ad1 ♘c6 18.♗f4 h6 19.♔g2 ♘b7

And Black's position was quite reasonable, though slightly passive. Black has another, more aggressive option, indicated by Krisztian Szabo in his notes for *ChessBase Magazine*: 15...h5!? 16.♗ad1 (not good is 16.f3? ♘g3!, winning the e-pawn) 16...♗e6 17.g5 f6∞ Black breaks the opponent's centre, in accordance with the scheme of Eljanov's Repertoire (Chapter 15).

POSITION 37

Peter Leko

2737

Michael Adams

2743

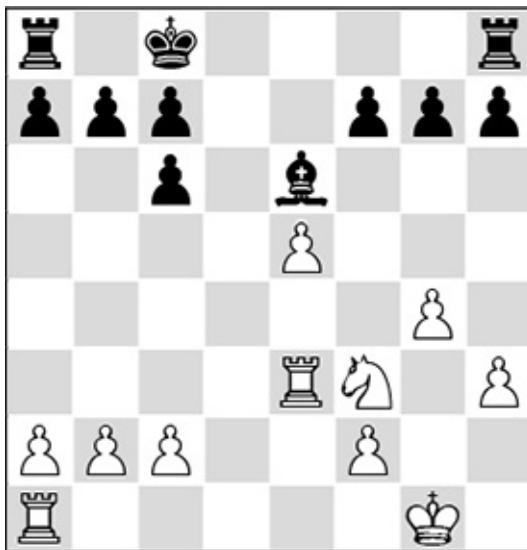
Dortmund 2014 (3)

We are taking a new tour through the vicinity of the main line of Chapter 19:

**1.e4 e5 2.♗f3 ♗c6 3.♗b5 ♗f6 4.0-0 ♗xe4 5.d4 ♗d6 6.♗xc6 dxc6 7.dxe5 ♗f5
8.♘xd8+ ♔xd8 9.h3 ♗d7 10.♗d1 ♗e7 11.g4 ♗h4 12.♗xh4 ♗xh4 13.♗d2 ♗c8
14.♗f3 ♗e7 15.♗g5**

Perhaps not a bad alternative to 15.♗d3, which we analysed in detail in the theory section.

15... ♗c5 16.♗d3 ♗e6 17.♗e3 ♗xe3 18.♗xe3



Too many pieces have been exchanged, which allows the king to get closer to the opponent's majority:

18... ♔d7!

The same idea that we saw in the notes to Position 31, albeit with a couple of minor pieces on the board. After the exchange of the bishops, e7 is a comfortable square for the king, from where it will be able to deal with the candidate on e5.

19.♗d1+ ♔e7 20.♗d4 ♗ad8 21.♗ed3 g6 22.♗xe6 ♗xd3 23.♗xd3 ♗xe6=

In the rook endgame, White has no real advantage.

POSITION 38

Magnus Carlsen

2863

Viswanathan Anand

2792

There is no better way to close the book than with the Berlin's modern classic:

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♗f6 4.0-0 ♗xe4 5.d4 ♗d6 6.♗xc6 dxc6 7.dxe5 ♗f5
8.♕xd8+ ♔xd8 9.h3 ♗d7 10.♗c3 h6 11.b3 ♔c8 12.♗b2 c5 13.♗ad1 b6 14.♗fe1
♗e6 15.♗d5



The white knight is preparing to annoy the e6-bishop from f4.

15...g5!

This move, which was discussed in the historical introduction, closes the circle of the Berlin endgame, bringing together Lasker and Anand. Black preserves his light-squared bishop in addition to isolating the e5-pawn, and prepares ...♗e7-g6, which compensates for the weakening of the kingside.

16.c4 ♕b7 17.♗h2 a5 18.a4 ♗e7 19.g4 ♗g6 20.♗g3 ♗e7=



Black has a comfortable position, with pressure on the e-pawn and has secret ambitions on the queenside, as you could see in Game 25 in Chapter 20.

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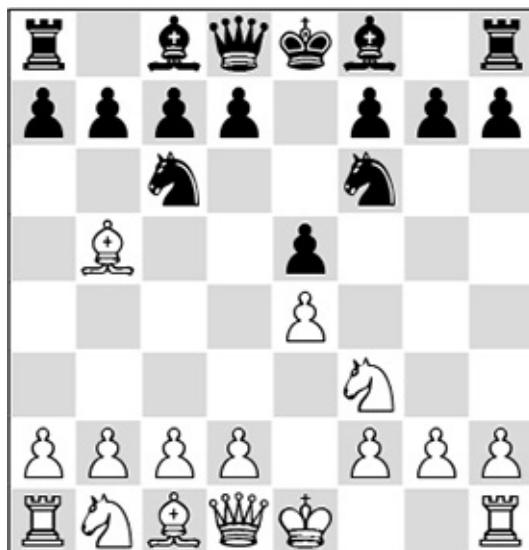
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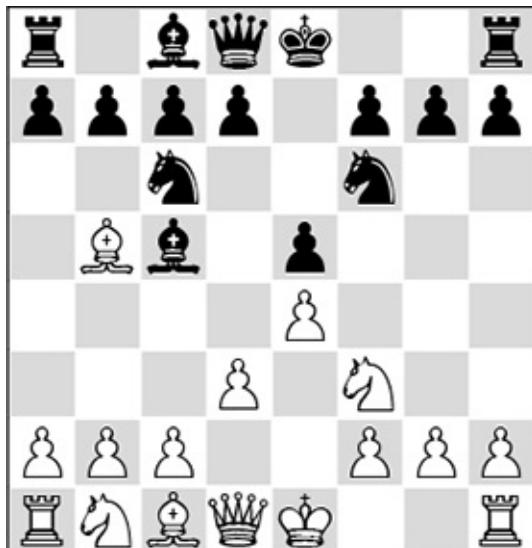
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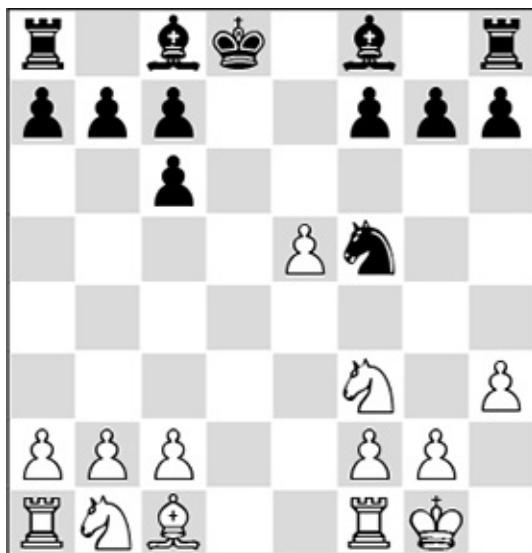
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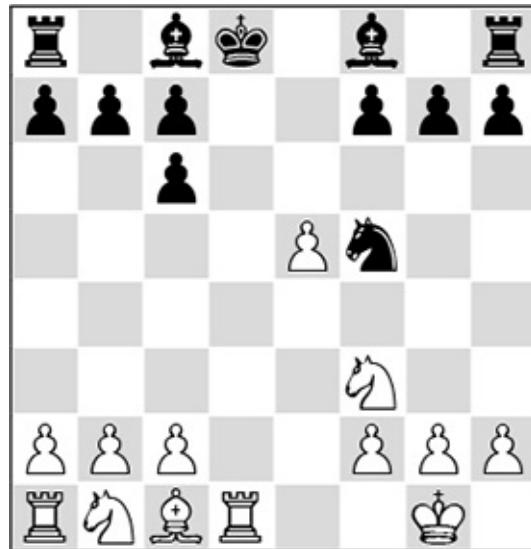
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