

Grandmaster Repertoire

Antonios Pavlidis
The Sicilian Taimanov



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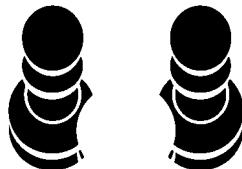


Grandmaster Repertoire

The Sicilian Taimanov

By

Antonios Pavlidis



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Grandmaster Repertoire – The Sicilian Taimanov

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Key to symbols used

| | |
|--------------|--------------------------------|
| + | White is slightly better |
| = | Black is slightly better |
| + | White is better |
| + | Black is better |
| +− | White has a decisive advantage |
| −+ | Black has a decisive advantage |
| = | equality |
| ≈ | with compensation |
| ⇄ | with counterplay |
| ? | unclear |
| → | with attack |
| ↑ | with initiative |
| corr. | correspondence game |
| ? | a weak move |
| ?? | a blunder |
| ! | a good move |
| !! | an excellent move |
| !? | a move worth considering |
| ?! | a move of doubtful value |
| # | mate |

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Preface

Through my chess career, the majority, if not all, of my chess trainers have recognized my dynamic playing style and advised me to employ aggressive openings. In 2003, when I was around ten years old, my trainer Giorgi Khomeriki started working with me on my repertoire more seriously and taught me the Sicilian Dragon. About a year later, my next high-level trainer, Jovan Petronic, advised me to avoid the Dragon and instead taught me about other thematic Sicilian structures. At first I was reaching these structures through sidelines such as the Pin Variation, Grivas Sicilian and others; but looking back now, I can see that everything I learned around that time proved to be of value when I started employing the Taimanov System (or Paulsen, as it is sometimes known) some years later.

In 2007 I started working with my next trainer, Spiros Kapnisis, who suggested a switch against 1.e4 from the Sicilian to 1...e5, as he believed that learning and playing classical Ruy Lopez lines would help to improve my general understanding of chess. After a period of work on 1.e4 e5, he bought for me as a present the book *The Safest Sicilian: A Black Repertoire with 1.e4 c5 2.Qb3 e6* by Alexander Delchev and Semko Semkov. This was my first specific introduction to the Black side of the Sicilian Taimanov, which would go on to become my favourite chess opening. Immediately I started studying the ideas in the book – which I regard as one of the best Sicilian books on the market at that time. I discovered a lot of variations which suited my dynamic style, and also noticed that, despite its excellent theoretical reputation, the Taimanov contained noticeably fewer forcing theoretical lines than sharp systems such as the Najdorf. My early results with the Taimanov were quite favourable, especially against fellow juniors. I soon realized that the Taimanov was going to be my main weapon against 1.e4 for years to come.

The next stage of my chess career was a challenge, as I strived to make the jump from IM to GM. During this phase of competing in GM-level tournaments, I decided to put the Taimanov on the back burner and switched to 1...e5 as my primary defence, as I wanted to play more solidly with Black against higher-rated opponents. After becoming a GM in 2014, I kept 1...e5 as my main defence but decided to bring the Taimanov back into my repertoire as a secondary choice. Thus I started working on it again, but in a more professional way than before. In addition to being a good fit for my playing style, the Taimanov has long been a popular choice among Greek GMs, since the time when Igor Miladinovic was playing for the Greek national team, through to the next generation of GMs such as Banikas, D. Mastrovasilis, Halkias, Kapnisis and others. Being among such players, the Taimanov was a natural opening to play and study. It was in 2015, after a couple of poor-quality 1.e4 e5 games with Black against Firman and Gopal, that I decided to commit to the Taimanov as my primary response to 1.e4. By then, I was mature enough to understand that my style was much more suited to the dynamic battleground of the Taimanov than the positional struggles which are typically associated with the Ruy Lopez or the Italian Game.

In general, I regard the Sicilian Taimanov as an opening which can largely be played by understanding, without much need for long, forcing computer lines. With that being said, we live in an era in which a certain amount of memorization is required to play any opening against strong opposition, and the Taimanov is no exception. This is especially true since many top GMs such as Anand, Caruana, Giri and others have incorporated it into their repertoires. Repeated testing of the Taimanov at the elite level, not to mention correspondence games, has naturally led to a lot of new discoveries.

In this book, you will find a number of lines which have been analysed in great depth. This does not mean you have to memorize every move of the analysis to play this opening! Obviously there are certain details which are essential to know, but most players will only have to remember a small fraction of the material contained in these pages. When I have analysed deeply, it has mostly been to meet my own standards for checking that a certain line is objectively correct. For the great majority of readers, the longer lines of analysis may be of interest for their illustration of certain tactical resources, thematic piece manoeuvres and so on, but attempting to memorize every move would be unnecessary, and perhaps even counterproductive.

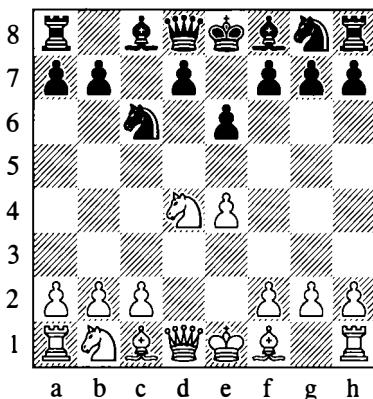
As a final remark, I would say it is not without reason that the Sicilian is Black's most popular response to 1.e4 – and although I may be biased, I cannot think of a better Sicilian variation for a practical player than the Taimanov. It blends a number of the positive features of other Sicilians: excellent theoretical soundness, a flexible pawn structure and dynamic counterattacking prospects. It lends itself fairly well to an ideas-based approach as opposed to endless memorization of computer lines, and it is flexible enough to allow you to vary your responses to each of White's main tries, in case a problem arises in one line, or you simply feel like expanding your options. In short, it is an opening which can serve you well for a lifetime.

I hope you will find the ideas in the book useful, and I wish you success in your Taimanov games.

Antonios Pavlidis
Kavala, April 2019

Introduction

The Sicilian Taimanov occurs after the opening moves **1.e4 c5 2.Qf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Qxd4 Qc6**, making the following position the starting point for our repertoire. The purpose of this introductory section is to preview the main pathways and whet your appetite for what is to come later in the book.



Before we go any further, it is worth pointing out that the Taimanov can also be reached via a different move order with **2...Qc6**, so it is important to recognize the pros and cons of each option. Most Taimanov players tend to prefer **2...e6**, for the simple reason that it avoids the prospect of the Rossolimo (**2...Qc6 3.Qb5**), which is generally regarded as one of White's most challenging alternatives to the Open Sicilian.

Another point to take into consideration is that White can meet both **2...e6** and **2...Qc6** with **3.c3**, the Deferred Alapin, so you should be sure to have a repertoire choice against it which is consistent with your preferences against **2.c3**. Both versions are playable for Black, and it's a matter of taste regarding how you prefer to play against the Alapin. Personally I have always been happy with the **...e6** lines. If you are supplementing this book with *Grandmaster Repertoire 6A – Beating the Anti-Sicilians* by Vassilios Kotronias, you will find the **2...e6** move order a better fit, as Kotronias recommends **...e6** but avoids an early **...Qc6** against the Alapin.

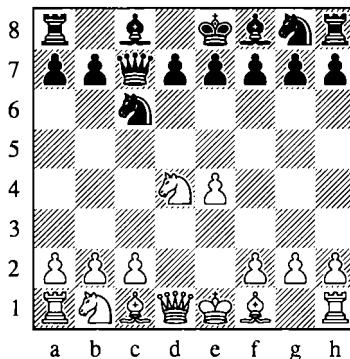
I have, on just a few occasions, opted for the following move order:

1.e4 c5 2.Qf3 Qc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Qxd4 ♜c7!?

4...e6 would be a normal Taimanov.

The text move is an interesting alternative. Both times when I played it, the rationale for doing so was that my opponents seemed to be comfortable meeting the standard Taimanov with **5.Qb5**. Even though there is nothing too scary about this (see Chapters 2-4 for more details), I felt it was a more effective strategy to discourage this option, as the knight move makes less sense when **...e6** has not been played and the queen can conveniently drop back to **b8**.

Although it sounds good so far, White can cause problems with:



5.c4!

The great majority of games have continued with 5.Qc3, when 5...e6 reaches our repertoire. Unfortunately, the early c2-c4 is more venomous here than in the analogous situation in variation C of Chapter 1. Here is a brief illustrative line:

5...Qf6 6.Qc3

White has the makings of a pleasant game with a useful space advantage. If Black wants to justify the early development of the queen to c7, he should try:

6...Qxe4!? 7.Qxe4 W e5

The critical continuation, utilizing a small tactical trick to win a pawn. Unfortunately, White obtains a strong initiative after:

8.Qb5 Wxe4† 9.Qe2 W e5 10.f4!

After analysing this in some depth, I do not trust Black's position.

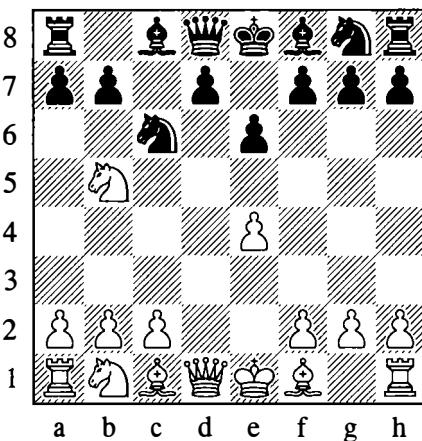
Summing up, I would say that the move order with 1.e4 c5 2.Qf3 Qc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Qxd4 Wc7!? might be worth using as an occasional surprise weapon against opponents who seem comfortable playing one of the 5.Qb5 lines covered in Chapters 2-4, as they will not be able to follow their normal path here. (You will of course have to conduct your own research into lines such as 5.Qb5 Wb8 6.c4; Black should be fine, but to explore this any further would be to stray too far from our topic.) However, I would advise you not to use 4...Wc7 as your main move order, as I believe 5.c4! to be promising for White. Obviously you could just play 4...e6 with a normal Taimanov – but if that is your intention, you have to consider the prospect of facing the Rossolimo against 2...Qc6. On the other hand, if Black prefers 2...e6, he only has to prepare for some relatively minor alternatives to 3.d4, such as the King's Indian Attack, 3.b3 and a few others. I think the Rossolimo is among White's most credible tries for an advantage aside from the Open Sicilian, so I choose to avoid it with 2...e6. I imagine that most readers will see things the same way, but obviously you should make your own decision.

That brings to an end our discussion of the different move orders that Black may employ to reach the Taimanov. From now on, I will take the position after 1.e4 c5 2.Qf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Qxd4 Qc6 as the basis for our investigation. The book contains 22 chapters, which are divided into five approximate categories, as per the contents page where they are listed in bold type above the relevant batch of chapters.

Early Deviations

The first category is the smallest and easiest to deal with: it comprises only one chapter, which shows how Black should deal with White's assorted alternatives to the two main options of 5.♗b5 and 5.♗c3. The second section is where the more serious work begins.

5.♗b5

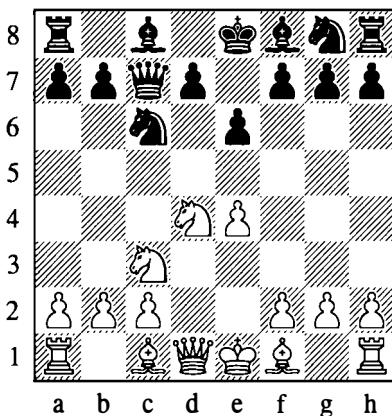


To prevent the possibility of a knight invasion on d6, we play 5...d6, when White has two serious options:

6.♘f4 e5 7.♗e3 sees White force a change in the pawn structure, but develops his bishop a little earlier than he would ideally want to. See Chapter 2 for full details.

6.c4 is more common, when 6...♝f6 7.♗1c3 a6 8.♗a3 is the main line. Black is theoretically fine, although the game has a completely different character from most of the variations in this book, so I recommend a careful study of Chapters 3 and 4 to ensure that you will be ready to handle it.

5. $\mathbb{Q}c3 \mathbb{W}c7$



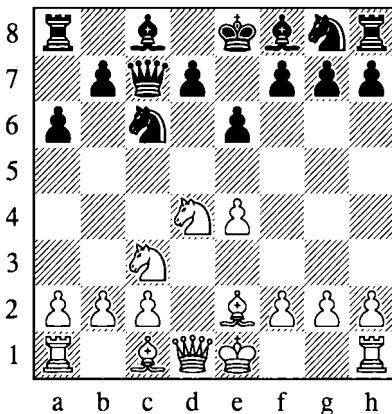
This is where the real fun begins! Unlike the 5. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ lines, White develops quickly and will generally aim for active piece play in one way or another.

If you are new to the Taimanov, you may be wondering why Black moves the queen to c7 so early – aren't there more important developing moves to make? One reason for moving the queen to this square is to prepare ...a6 (and possibly ...b5), while being ready to meet $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ with ...dxc6, without allowing White to make a favourable queen exchange. Another point is to prepare ... $\mathbb{Q}f6$, having prevented the plan of $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ followed by e4-e5, as occurs in the Four Knights Variation (which would arise after 5... $\mathbb{Q}f6$).

The next four chapters deal with a variety of interesting options, excluding the absolute main lines. The active 6.f4 can be found in Chapter 5; the surprising 6. $\mathbb{W}d3!$? is Chapter 6; 6. $\mathbb{Q}db5$ and 6.g4?! are analysed in Chapter 7; and finally, 6.g3 will be the subject of Chapter 8.

Once those options are out of the way, we will progress to the first of White's 'big two' options on the sixth move.

6. $\mathbb{Q}e2 a6$

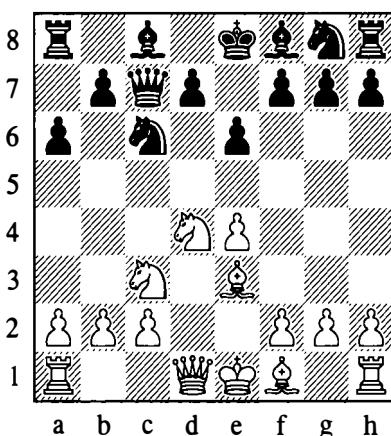


This is a major branch of the Taimanov. The study material is organized in a pretty straightforward way: Chapter 9 deals with White's minor options on move 7. We then progress to the usual continuation of **7.0–0 ♜f6**, with Chapter 10 covering White's sidelines on move 8. The main theoretical battleground arises after **8.♗e3 ♜b4**, when the path once again divides.

Chapter 11 deals with **9.♘xc6 bxc6**, with particular emphasis on **10.♕d4??**, a really interesting move which I believe to be underrated.

The big main line continues **9.♘a4 ♜e7 10.♘xc6 bxc6 11.♘b6** (11.♘b6 is an important option which is found in Chapter 12) **11...♝b8 12.♘xc8 ♜xc8** and now **13.e5** is the topic of Chapter 13, while **13.♘d4** can be found in Chapter 14.

6.♗e3 a6

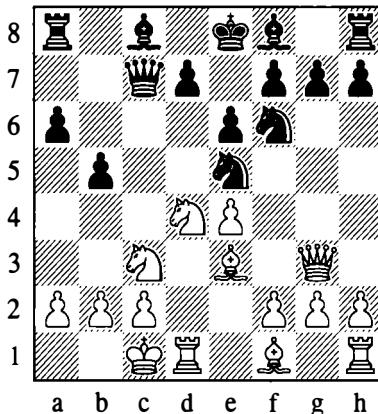


The final group of chapters will deal with this important tabiya. First we look at **7.♘d3 ♜f6 8.0–0 b5 9.♘xc6 ♜xc6**, when I believe the unusual **10.♗e2??** to be White's most challenging option. You can find this in Chapter 15, along with some deviations from moves 8-10. In terms of popularity, **10.a3** is the main line, and we will cover it in Chapter 16.

We then come to the most aggressive and theoretically challenging lines in the whole book. **7.♕d2** is a natural way to prepare queenside castling. **7...♜f6** is our response, after which **8.f4??** is an interesting option covered in Chapter 17.

Then we move on to the more popular set-up with f2-f3 and 0–0–0, which introduces the English Attack. The play will almost always be sharp as opposite-sides castling and mutual pawn storms are the norm. As we shall see, White's move order makes an immediate difference. After **8.f3** we go **8...♝e5** while after the more usual **8.0–0–0** our choice is **8...♞b4 9.f3 ♜e5!** when **10.♘b3 b5** leads to a key branching point. **11.♗f2**, **11.♕d4**, **11.♘d4** and **11.♘b1** are covered in Chapter 18, while the most commonly played move **11.♗e1** is Chapter 19.

Finally, 7. $\mathbb{W}f3$ is a move which was almost completely neglected by both players and theoreticians until just a few years ago, yet is now widely considered to be the most critical test of the Taimanov. When I started seriously analysing it in 2017, I found 7... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 8.0–0–0 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 9. $\mathbb{W}g3$ b5 to be the most appealing continuation.



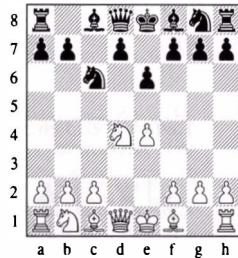
At the time, a few important games had been played from this position, but it was not widely regarded as one of Black's top choices. Today though, it can arguably be considered the absolute main line of the whole system, and the fact that many top GMs have chosen it as Black confirms that my initial instinct was correct.

The position is lively to say the least, and in Chapter 20 we will consider White's attempts to seize the initiative by brute force with 10. $\mathbb{Q}dxb5!?$ (or 10. $\mathbb{Q}cxb5!?$) and 10. $\mathbb{Q}xb5!?$, followed by the recently fashionable 10. a3!?, which is more venomous than it may first appear.

10. f4 is the most popular move of all, with 10... $\mathbb{Q}eg4$ our natural reply. In Chapter 21 we analyse the rare but quite challenging 11. $\mathbb{Q}d2!?$, before beginning our analysis of the more popular 11. $\mathbb{Q}g1$. Finally, Chapter 22 analyses what I believe to be the absolute main line of 11. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ h5! 12. e5 b4 13. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 14. h3 $\mathbb{Q}h6$. The 7. $\mathbb{W}f3$ system is such a recent invention that new ideas are still being tested almost daily, making it an exciting proposition for both sides. Rest assured, I have presented a wealth of new ideas and improvements – in all parts of this book, but the last one in particular – and I hope and believe that my recommendations will serve you well for a long time to come.



Early Deviations



Rare 5th Moves

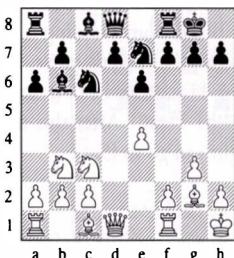
Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2. \mathbb{Q} f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4. \mathbb{Q} xd4

4...2c6

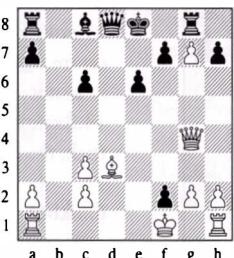
| | |
|-----------|----|
| A) 5.a3 | 14 |
| B) 5.g3!? | 16 |
| C) 5.c4 | 18 |
| D) 5.♗e3 | 20 |
| E) 5.♕xc6 | 22 |

B) note to 7... \natural f6



10 d512

D) after 14.bxc3



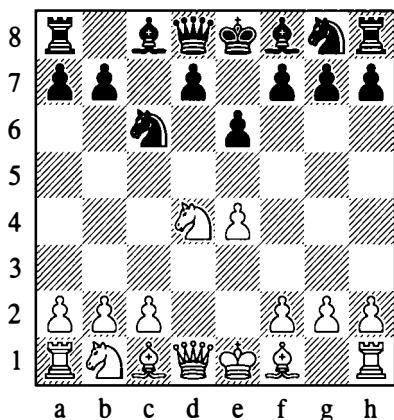
14 εΣΠΝ

E) note to 8.4d2



12 3512N

1.e4 c5 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ e6 3.d4 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 4. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$

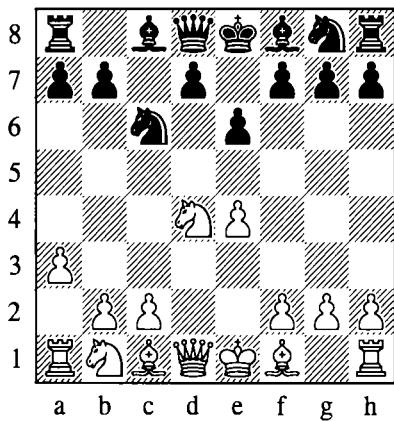


We shall start our journey in the Taimanov gently, with rare 5th moves. The rest of the book will be about the more common and critical 5. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ and especially 5. $\mathbb{Q}c3$.

In this chapter we will consider A) 5.a3, B) 5.g3!?, C) 5.c4, D) 5. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ and E) 5. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$.

Instead 5. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 6. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ is likely to transpose to the 6. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ line, as covered in Chapters 9-14. There is no serious alternative to 6. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ in this move order. 6.f3 and 6. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ are feeble, while after 6. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ bxc6, the bishop is misplaced; we shall see in Variation E that in this structure the bishop belongs on d3, not e2.

A) 5.a3



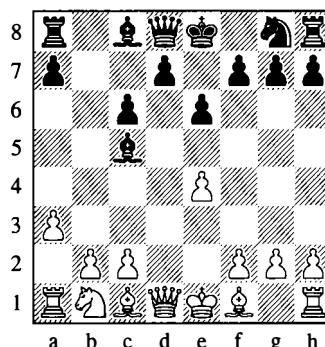
We will see various a3-systems throughout this book, to stop the ... $\mathbb{Q}b4$ move which is a key part of many Taimanov lines. White's gain is thus obvious and so is his loss – one tempo on a non-developing move.

5... $\mathbb{Q}c5!$

An idea borrowed from the Sicilian Kan and the choice of Vitiugov and Ragger. One of its benefits is that it avoids possible transpositions to other a3-systems; in contrast, after a neutral move such as 5... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ Black would need to consider possible transpositions every move.

6. $\mathbb{Q}b3$

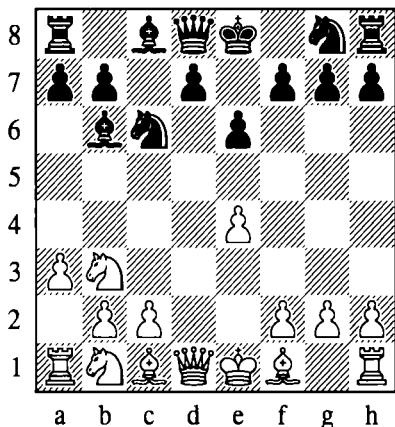
The retreat with tempo is most natural, but we should also look at the exchange: 6. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ bxc6



7.e5 This is the critical move though it has yet to be tested. (7. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ e5! is very pleasant for Black; compare with variation E below) 7... $\mathbb{W}c7$ 8.f4 $\mathbb{Q}h6$! The following line is not forced, but shows a useful idea. 9. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ 0–0 10. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ d5! 11.exd6 Preventing Black from building a big centre was the point of White's 7th move, but it is not a problem. 11... $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 12.0–0 $\mathbb{Q}a6$! 13. $\mathbb{Q}xa6$ $\mathbb{W}b6$ † 14. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{W}xa6$ † After this neat trick, the black knight can go to f5.

6... $\mathbb{Q}b6$!

We will stay as active as possible. Retreating the bishop to e7 is not absurd, but we will save that square for the g8-knight.



7.♘d3

The alternative is similar: 7.♘c3 ♗ge7 (7...♗f6 is suboptimal because of 8.♗g5) 8.♗e2 (8.♘d3 transposes to the main line) 8...0–0 9.0–0 f5 With very active play for Black.

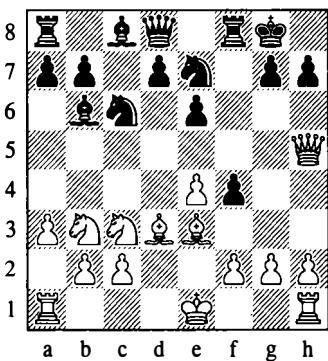
7...♗ge7 8.♘c3 0–0

Black's usual plan will be ...f7-f5 with a lively and harmonious set-up. But there is one line where we need a different idea.

9.♗e2!

This is White's best move, with the idea of playing the bishop to e3.

9.♗h5?! Trying for a kingside initiative, but it does not work. 9...f5 (9...d6 is an engine suggestion, intending ...e5 and ...♗e6) 10.♗e3 f4

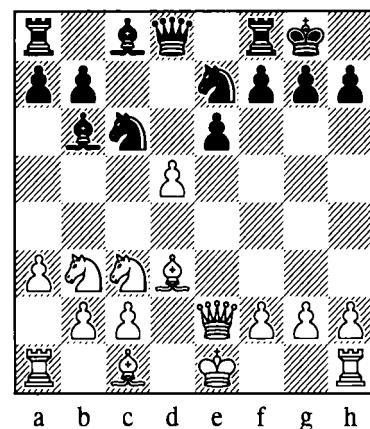


11.♗d2 Too passive. (A better try was 11.♗xb6 ♖xb6 12.0–0–0 but Black is comfortable. For example: 12...♗g6 13.f3 ♗ce5 14.♗e2 a6 Stopping any ♗b5 ideas. 15.♗d4 ♖c7 16.♗hd1 b6 Black is at least equal with ...♗b7 and ...♗c8 coming.) 11...♗g6 12.g3? Black's position was already more pleasant, but now White has a massive hole on f3. 12...♗ce5 13.♗e2 f3? Black's play was flowing in Zsifkovits – Ragger, Koeflach 2006.

9...d5!

We switch plans, as now 9...f5 would be met by 10.♗e3± when Black's dark squares could prove weak.

10.exd5



10...♗xd5

The solid option.

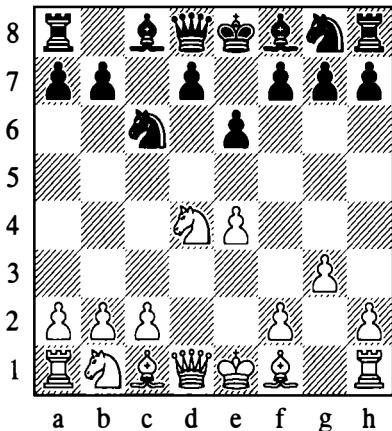
Instead 10...exd5 11.0–0 d4 12.♗a4 ♖c7? is a more complex option.

One of various possible continuations is:

11.♗d2 ♗xc3 12.♗xc3 e5

Black has no problems.

B) 5.g3!?



This line is potentially problematic as we need to make sure we avoid transposing to a version of the real Fianchetto variation that is outside our repertoire (see Chapter 8).

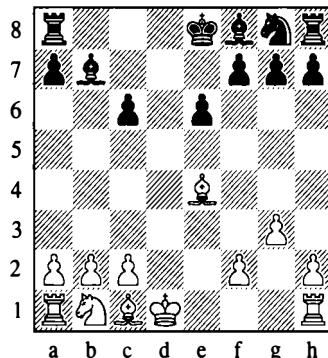
5...c5!?

This is a fighting option, and avoids any transpositional tricks; so it's in similar style to the previous variation.

If we play according to the fianchetto proper with: 5... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 6. $\mathbb{A}g2$ a6 (or 6...e5!?) is another way, but 7. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ d6 8. $\mathbb{A}g5$ a6 9. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ gxf6 10. $\mathbb{Q}c3\pm$ was an edge for White in Nakamura – Yu Yangyi, Las Vegas [rapid] 2015) 7.0–0
 $\mathbb{W}c7$ Now, instead of 8. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ transposing to the fianchetto chapter, White can choose the annoying possibilities of 8. $\mathbb{A}e1!$? or 8.c4.

A simple way to (almost) equalize the game is:
 5...d5! 6.Qg2 dxe4 7.Qxc6 Qxd1† 8.Qxd1
 bxc6 9.Qxe4 Qb7±= Simplistic logic implies
 that White should be a little better due to his
 better structure. However, practice has proven
 that Black is fine and indeed, after the black
 king goes to the queenside, White cannot put
 any pressure on the queenside, while our two
 pawns easily stop White's three-pawn majority.
 On the other hand, Black's own majority in

the centre and kingside is mobile enough with moves such as ...e5-e4, ...h5, ...g5 etc. and that gives good practical counterplay.



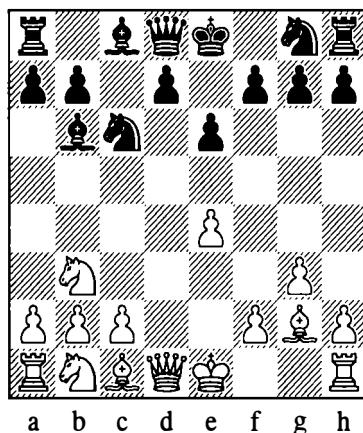
For example, after 10. $\mathbb{Q}d2 \mathbb{Q}f6$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ 0–0–0 Black was fine in the complicated position that arose in Vitiugov – Van Wely, Jurmala (rapid) 2016, and even went on to win.

So I can recommend 5...d5!! as an easy-to-learn backup line, but my top choice is 5...♞c5!!.

6. ♜b3 ♛b6!

This is more active compared with the alternative 6... $\mathbb{Q}e7$; again in similar style to the previous line.

7.g2



Z...2f6

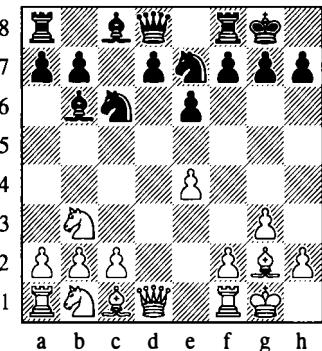
Black's usual set-up after the text move will involve ...d7-d6, ...e6-e5 and ... $\mathbb{Q}e6$, with a Kalashnikov/Sveshnikov structure, except with a dark-squared bishop that is excellent on b6 instead of restricted on e7.

Black can also keep playing in the same style as the previous variation:

7... $\mathbb{Q}ge7!$

This retains the option of playing ...f5 at some point. For example:

8.0–0 0–0



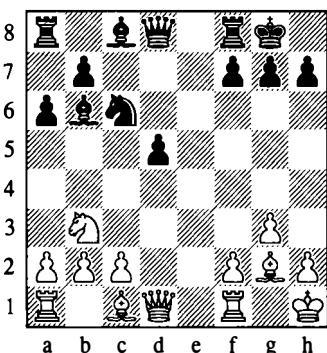
9. $\mathbb{Q}c3$

Or 9.c4 restricts any ...d5-breaks but Black instead has the usual plan from the main line: 9...d6 10. $\mathbb{W}e2$ e5 \rightleftarrows With ... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ to follow, and possibly ...a7-a5.

9...a6! 10. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ d5 \rightleftarrows

The text move is interesting, as is 10...f5! with typical play.

11.exd5 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ exd5 \rightleftarrows



This pawn sacrifice is strong enough that White should decline it and allow Black to play ... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ next, with good counterplay. But let's see what happens if White is greedy:

13. $\mathbb{W}xd5$

Or 13. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$? $\mathbb{Q}b4\rightleftarrows$ is pleasant for Black.

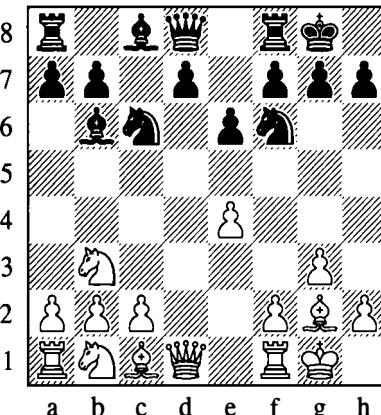
13... $\mathbb{W}xd5$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}e4$!?

Testing the sacrifice, but instead White should retreat to g2 and hope to be *almost* level after c2 drops.

15... $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 16.f3

Black is much better after either 16... $\mathbb{Q}h3\rightleftarrows$ or 16...f5! \rightleftarrows .

8.0–0 0–0



9. $\mathbb{Q}c3$

As in the line above, White can decide to clamp down on ...d5 with 9.c4. And Black can react similarly: 9...d6 10. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ a5 11.a4 e5 \rightleftarrows I would describe Black's position as an improved Kalashnikov.

9...a5

Or 9...h6 is similar.

10.a4 h6 \rightleftarrows

This is highly playable and in our style; Black will likely continue with ...d6, ...e5, ... $\mathbb{Q}e6$.

C) 5.c4

Usually this line arises in practice via the move order 3.c4 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 4. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 5.d4 cxd4 6. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$. This used to be a popular way to meet the 2...e6 Sicilians by many of the other youngsters in my chess club, who were of course influenced by their coaches. But I was not so fond of playing such sidelines.

The line can also be reached from a Symmetrical English move order: 1.c4 c5 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 3.d4 cxd4 4. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 5. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ e6 and so on.

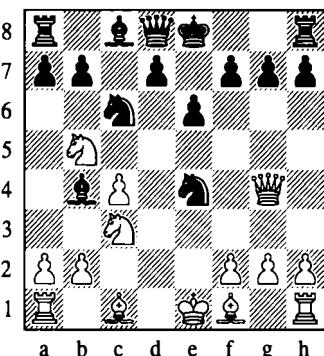
5... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 6. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$

This is a sensible and easy-to-remember equalizer.

7. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$

Other moves are pretty harmless.

7. $\mathbb{Q}db5?$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 8. $\mathbb{W}g4$ is not a sound approach:



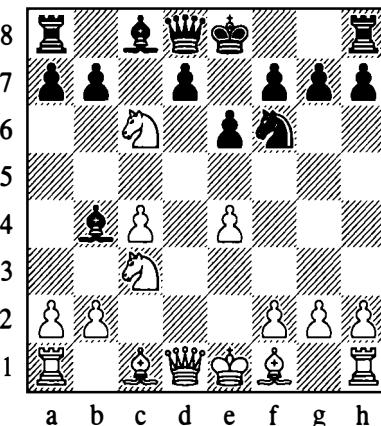
8... $\mathbb{Q}f6!$ 9. $\mathbb{W}xg7$ $\mathbb{E}g8$ 10. $\mathbb{W}h6$ $\mathbb{E}g6\#$ The most natural of several good options. Black has a lead in development and much greater activity. White's queen can go to various squares, but Black does not need to know any more theory, as his next moves are easy to find; moves such as ...a6, then ...d5 or ...e5 are likely.

After 7. $\mathbb{Q}c2?$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3\#$ 8.bxc3 the move to remember is 8... $\mathbb{W}a5!$ with an edge. (And not

8... $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ which is suboptimal due to 9. $\mathbb{W}g4$ with a mess. In contrast to the previous line, Black no longer has a threatening pin against the c3-knight.)

7.f3?! d5 \bar{z} allows Black good play.

7. $\mathbb{W}d3?$ d5 \bar{z} is similar to the above line.

**7...bx $c6$!**

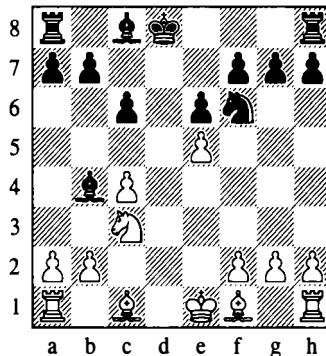
Natural and best, though the alternative has also been chosen by many strong players.

7...dx $c6$

This was the great Ivanchuk's pet line for quite some time.

8. $\mathbb{W}xd8\#$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 9.e5

For our general Taimanov understanding, it is worth seeing why this endgame favours White.



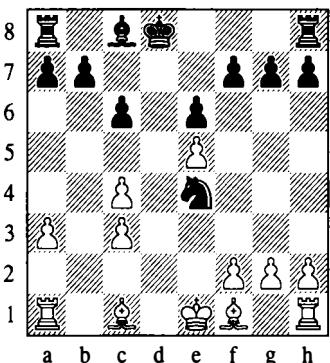
9... $\mathbb{Q}e4$

9... $\mathbb{Q}d7?$ is probably objectively best, but White gets a small edge without much trouble starting with 10. $\mathbb{B}f4$ and if 10... $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ † 11.bxc3 b6 then 12.h4!± is reminiscent of a world championship encounter between Carlsen and Anand in 2013.

The problem with the text move is that White does not need to worry about the pin after:

10.a3! $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ † 11.bxc3

White's bishop pair and budding initiative more than make up for the doubled pawns.



11...b6

If Black is greedy and tries 11... $\mathbb{Q}xc3?$ then after 12.a4! $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ b6 14.a5 $\mathbb{B}b8$ 15.axb6 axb6 16. $\mathbb{A}a7$ White's activity is powerful enough to force a clear advantage; the h1-rook will quickly join the fight.

12.a4?!

12. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ is also promising.

12... $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 13.h4

In general Black is under a lot of pressure in such positions. For example:

13...f5 14. $\mathbb{B}g1!$ $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 15.g4 $\mathbb{B}hg8$ 16.a5 $\mathbb{Q}c5$

17. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ ±

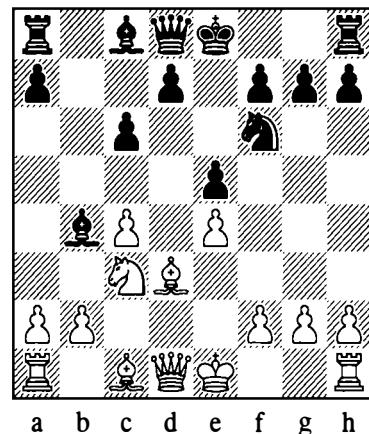
Dubov – Sjugirov, Kaliningrad 2015.

8. $\mathbb{Q}d3$

The only sensible move, as instead 8.e5?! $\mathbb{Q}e4$ already favours Black.

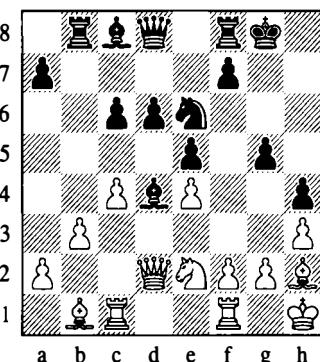
8...e5!

The text move is more reliable than the alternative plan with a quick ...d7-d5 break. After 8...e5 Black usually continues with ...d6 and ... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ with a fine game.



9.0–0

In this non-forcing position many moves are possible. For example: 9. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ 0–0 10.0–0 d6 11. $\mathbb{B}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ h6 13. $\mathbb{Q}h4$ g5 With the centre closed, Black has no reason to worry about advancing pawns in front of his king. We can follow a game further, just to see typical play. 14. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{B}b8$ 15.b3 h5 16. $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 17.h3 h4 18. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 19. $\mathbb{E}ac1$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}e2$



Black had played a near-perfect game so far in Ki. Georgiev – Zhang Pengxiang, Internet (blitz) 2004, but now fell victim to a neat

tactical shot after 21...f6?! 22.f4!. Black can simply avoid this with 21... $\mathbb{Q}c5!$ N when he is dominating the whole board.

9... $\mathbb{Q}c5!?$

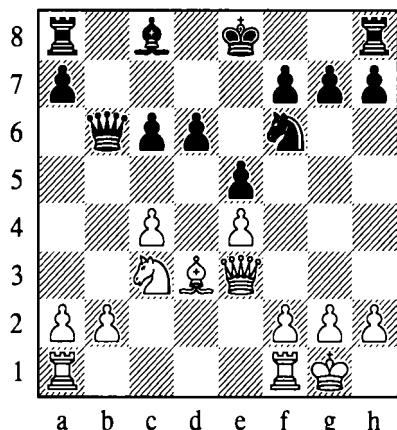
Rather than castling, Black steps onto the correct diagonal immediately. Now any $\mathbb{Q}a4$ ideas can be met by ... $\mathbb{Q}d4$, staying on the favoured diagonal.

10. $\mathbb{W}e2$ d6 11. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3$

Grischuk has played 11... $\mathbb{Q}g4$, trying to provoke f2-f3, which is also logical. But the simple and direct text move works fine.

12. $\mathbb{W}xe3$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$

The logical follow-up to the exchange on e3. If the queens disappear, the black king can sit comfortably on e7.



13. $\mathbb{W}d2$

The gambit 13.c5 $\mathbb{W}xb2!$ is not threatening; White might find enough compensation to equalize, but Black is in no danger.

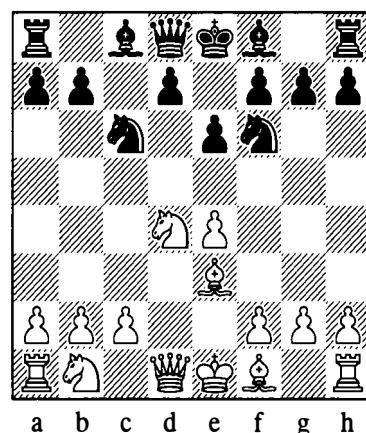
13...0-0 14. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{E}d8$ 15.b3 $\mathbb{Q}e6=$

Sjugirov – Hou Yifan, Doha 2015, was a hard-fought draw; the backward d6-pawn is easy to defend.

D) 5. $\mathbb{Q}e3$

An odd move to commit to at this stage. The simplest reaction is rapid development, not allowing White to transpose to the more logical $\mathbb{Q}e3$ ideas of Chapters 15-22.

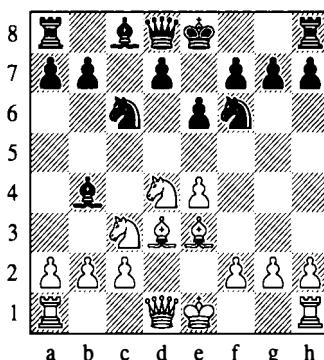
5... $\mathbb{Q}f6$



6. $\mathbb{Q}d3$

Trying to make sense of the previous move by avoiding the more natural $\mathbb{Q}c3$ move; after the bishop move in some lines White might dream of c2-c4 ideas.

After 6. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$ we are no longer in a Taimanov; instead it is a Four Knights where the bishop on e3 makes no sense. After 7. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ Black has a choice.

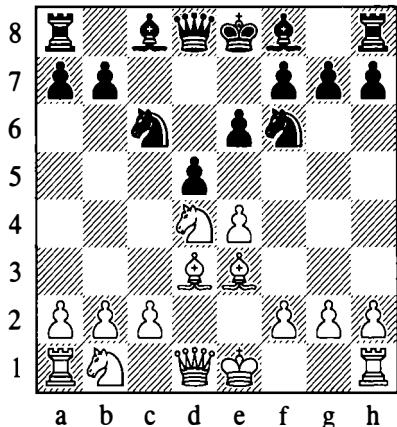


The standard move is 7...d5 transposing to the main line below. But in this move order Black has an additional option with the rare move: 7...e5!! Now 8.♗xc6 bxc6 is comfortable for Black, but probably the best White can do. Instead after 8.♗f5 0–0 9.0–0 ♜xc3 10.bxc3 d5 White was already slightly worse in Baptista – M. Muzychuk, Baku (ol) 2016.

6.f3?! weakens White's position for no reason. 6...d5! Black should immediately hit the centre. Black's position is already superior since White's dark squares will be very weak. Possible continuations are: 7.♗xc6 (or 7.♗c3 ♜b4! keeps the pressure on the dark squares) 7...bxc6 8.♗d2 ♜d6† With promising play for Black, who will develop an initiative along the b8-h2 diagonal.

6...d5!

Our traditional break works as well as ever.



7.♗c3

White heads back towards a more popular position; but as above, it's an unpromising line against the Four Knights variation.

After 7.exd5 ♜xd5 8.♗xc6 bxc6 Black's queenside pawn structure might be ruined but Black's active knight on d5 and potential play on the b-file definitely compensates for

his broken structure. 9.♗d2 ♜b8 was fine for Black in Sahl – Mikhalevski, Gibraltar 2018.

7...♗b4

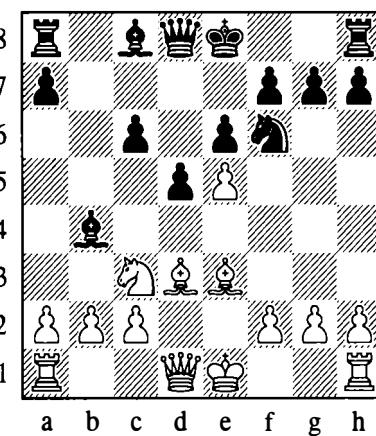
This may not be a Taimanov but we get to play good active Taimanov-style moves, but without any need for slow moves such as ...a7-a6.

8.♗xc6

Or 8.exd5 ♜xd5 9.♗xc6 bxc6 has often been played, but is not dangerous for Black. For example, 10.♗d2 0–0= or 10.♗g4 0–0 leaves White without a real threat.

8...bxc6 9.e5

An old pet line of GM Jonny Hector.



9...d4

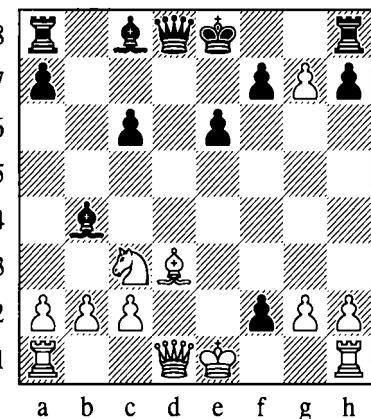
This forcing line is the clearest antidote.

Also popular is 9...♗d7 10.♗g4 ♜f8∞ when White has plenty of development while Black's central pawns could be a long-term asset.

10.exf6 dxе3

White's dark-squared bishop is the correct minor piece to capture, as Black's kingside will be weakened on the dark squares by the disappearance of the g7-pawn.

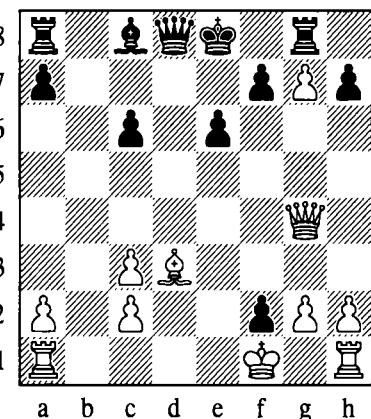
11.fxg7 exf2†



12.Qf1

White must side-step as 12.Qxf2? Wd4† 13.Qf1 Wxg7† clearly favours Black.

12...Bg8 13.Wg4 Qxc3 14.bxc3



14...e5!?N

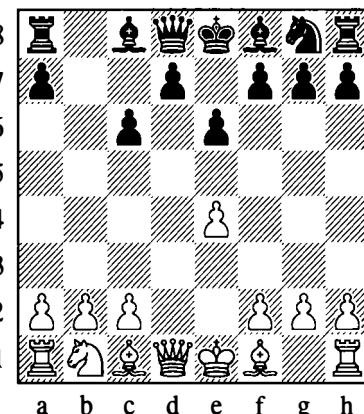
A novelty that makes Black's position easier to play than the known line.

14...Wf6 15.Qc4∞ was objectively okay in Hector – Sax, Vejle 1994, but tricky to play for Black, who quickly ran into trouble.

After the text move the difference is that 15.Qc4 Wd5! is simple, when Black's position is slightly preferable.

Also untroubling are 15.Qf3 Wxg7 16.Qxc6† Qd7 and 15.Qg3 Wf6 with level chances in both cases.

E) 5.Qxc6 bxc6



The early exchange on c6 is not dangerous for Black, but we will see the resulting structure often, so it is instructive to study it in a pure form.

6.Qd3

The arising structure is also debated in variation A of Chapter 9, where the bishop is on e2.

Another position which is not mentioned elsewhere but leads to the same type of structure arises after: 1.e4 c5 2.Qf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Qxd4 Qc6 5.Qc3 Wc7 6.Qxc6 bxc6

6.e5? might be positionally desirable but it allows 6...Wa5† as every Sicilian player knows.

6.c4 Qf6 7.Qd3 is harmless after 7...d5. For example: 8.cxd5 cxd5 9.Qb5† Qd7 10.Qxd7† Wxd7 11.exd5 Qxd5= Damjanovic – Jansa, Houston 1974.

6...d5

When it is possible, we should opt to challenge White's centre directly.

I am less keen on 6...e5 due to 7.0–0 ♘f6 8.♗f3!. For example, 8...d6 9.h3 ♖e7 10.c4 0–0 11.♕c3 ♖e6 was Mrvova – M. Muzychuk, Rijeka 2010, and now 12.♗d1N± looks pleasant for White.

7.0–0 ♘f6 8.♗d2

The most flexible choice.

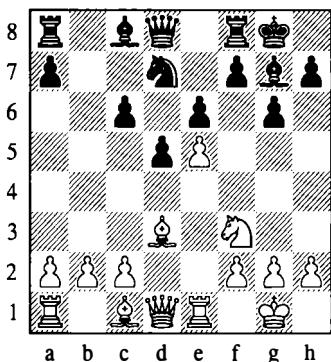
8.e5

The second most popular, but in general I consider this move to be harmless when Black's pawn is already on d5. Now it is more difficult for White to attack Black's central pawns. On the other hand, Black is the one who can choose if and when he wants to change the structure in the centre with the ...f6-break.

8...♗d7 9.♗e1

Now we need to choose a set-up. I quite like the continuation with ...g6, blunting forever White's light-squared bishop.

9...g6 10.♗d2 ♖g7 11.♗f3 0–0



12.♗f4

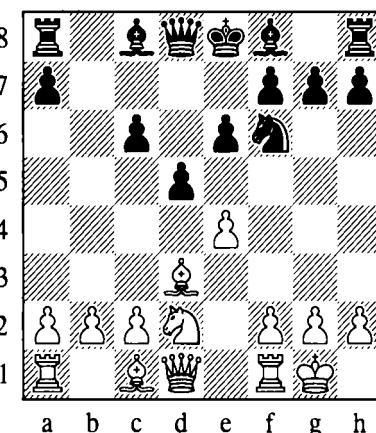
More popular in practice is 12.♗g5?! but I consider this inaccurate due to 12...♗c7 when White may be forced to put his bishop back to f4 at some point, effectively winning a tempo for us on the main line. Practice has seen 13.♗e7? (better is: 13.♗e2N c5 14.c3 a5?) 13...♗xe5! 14.♗xf8 ♖xf8± With fantastic compensation for the exchange in

Kovanova – Khurtsidze, Belgrade 2013.

So far we have been following Kislov – Antoshin, Moscow 1970, and now I like:

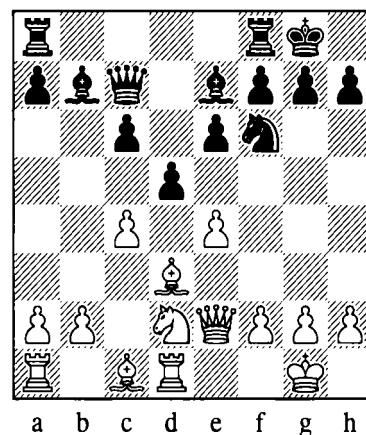
12...a5?!

And after exchanging the light-squared bishops via a6, Black will gain a lot of play on the queenside. Once again we should point out that Black is the one who will choose when to break with ...f6. On the other hand, it isn't so effective for White to go c2-c4 since after ...dxc4 Black will have a strong outpost on d5.



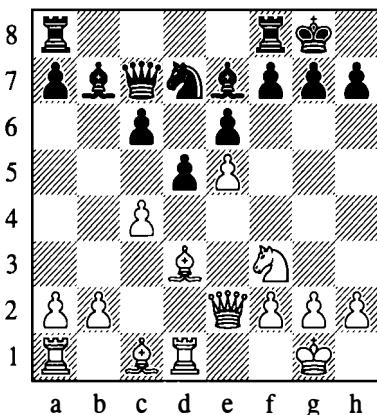
Returning to the main line, many move orders are possible, but a logical continuation is:

8...♗e7 9.♗e2 0–0 10.c4 ♖b7 11.♗d1 ♗c7



This is a sensible set-up for both sides. Here the engines prefer the feeble 12.cxd5 with a pretty comfortable game for Black. However, in practice the usual continuation is:

12.e5 ♕d7 13.♕f3



Now Black's positional task is to activate his b7-bishop, so I can suggest two equally good options:

13...c5!! 14.cxd5 ♕xd5 as in Svidler–Yakovich, Maikop 1998.

Or 13...dxc4!! 14.♕xc4 c5⇒ followed by ...♕b6 with excellent play for Black.

Conclusion

The rare fifth moves against the Taimanov are not threatening, so this chapter was an easy start to building our repertoire.

A) 5.a3 and B) 5.g3!! can both be met in similar style with 5...♗c5 6.♕b3 ♗b6, avoiding any worries about transpositional tricks to other chapters. Then one common plan is ...♗ge7 with ideas of ...f7-f5 or ...d7-d5. In the 5.g3 variation we also saw ideas of ...♗f6, ...d6 and ...e5, with an improved Kalashnikov.

C) 5.c4 looks a logical space-gainer, but Black can reply actively with 5...♗f6 6.♕c3 ♗b4. There usually follows 7.♕xc6 bxc6 8.♗d3 when the move to remember is 8...e5!. Our b4-bishop then belongs on c5, getting a grip on the hole on d4.

D) 5.♗e3 is a strange move to commit to so soon, and the main line transposes to the Four Knights variation. Objectively Black has no problems, but learning the antidote to Hector's old pet line would be wise, as it would be tough to work out over the board.

E) 5.♕xc6 is not a theoretical threat, but it leads to our first look at a vital structure, so the typical ideas are well worth a look.



5. $\mathbb{Q}b5$

6. $\mathbb{Q}f4$



Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ e6 3.d4 cxd4 4. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 5. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ d6 6. $\mathbb{Q}f4$

6...e5

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A) note to 10. $\mathbb{Q}c3$



15... $\mathbb{Q}g4!N$

B1) note to 12. $\mathbb{Q}c2$



12...b5!N

B22) after 12. $\mathbb{Q}xd6$



12... $\mathbb{Q}c8!N$

1.e4 c5 2.Qf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Qxd4 Qc6 5.Qb5 d6 6.Qf4

With this, White aims to provoke Black into committing his central pawns to a rigid formation.

We will consider 6.c4 in the next two chapters.

6...e5

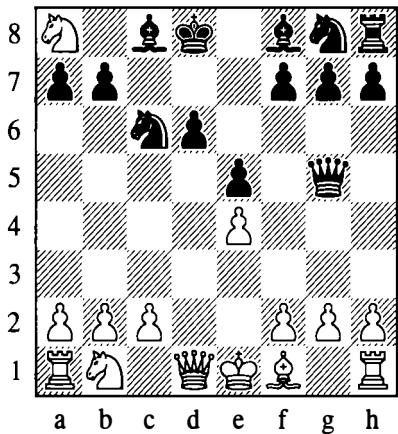
We should be happy to oblige, as the weakness of the d5-square is counterbalanced by White's loss of time with the bishop.

White may react with the unsound A) 7.Qg5? or the altogether saner B) 7.Qe3.

A) 7.Qg5?

This gives Black the chance to make an excellent exchange sacrifice.

7...Wxg5! 8.Qc7† Qd8 9.Qxa8



9...Qf6!

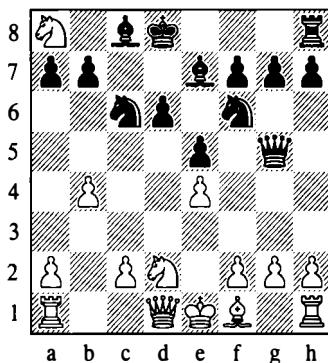
This is the best out of several promising moves. Black has a lead in development and the initiative, plus good chances to trap the knight in the corner. White's position may already be objectively losing.

10.Qc3

Occasionally White tries the other knight move:

10.Qd2 Qe7 11.b4

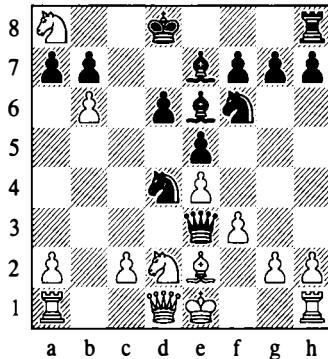
Another one-sided game continued: 11.We2 Qe6 12.h4 Wg4 13.Wd3 Qc8 14.Qe2 Wf4 15.g3 Wh6 16.g4 Qxg4 17.Qxg4 Qxg4 18.Qg1 Wf4 19.Qg3 Wxg3 20.Qxg3 Qh5 21.Qh3 Qb8+– Brunner – Effertz, email 2005.



11...Qg4 12.f3 Qe6 13.b5 Qd4 14.b6

14.Qf2 can be met by 14...d5!+– among others.

14...We3† 15.Qe2

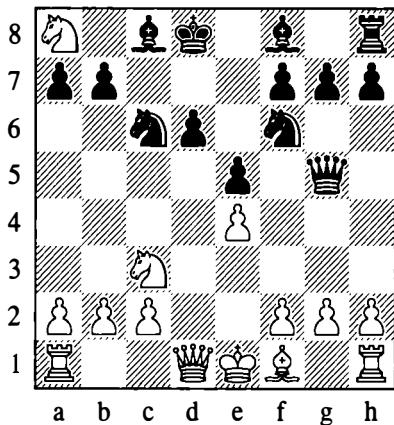


15...Qg4!N

15...Qh5+– was also good enough for Black in Grafl – Jansa, Fuerth 2002, but the text move wins more directly.

16.fxg4 Wh4†! 17.g3 Qxg4+–

White will soon be mated.

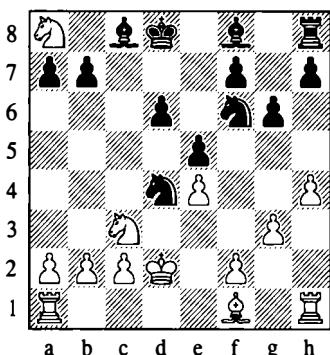


10...♞d4!

The strong knight is extremely annoying for White.

11.♗d3

Black's last move ensures that 11.h4 can be met conveniently by 11...♝f4 12.g3 ♝f3, since the queen exchange brings no relief for White: 13.♛xf3 ♜xf3† 14.♚e2 ♜d4† 15.♚d2 g6



16.♗d3 ♖h6† 17.♔e1 ♗g4 18.♗b5 ♜xb5
 19.♖xb5 ♜xe4 20.♗e2 ♜xe2 21.♗xe2 ♜d7+
 Black picked up the trapped knight and won easily in Pereira – Pallett, corr. 2010.

11...d5!

This is the last accurate move which is worth knowing in order to refute White's 7th move. Most of Black's moves from here are relatively straightforward. In all variations, Black will

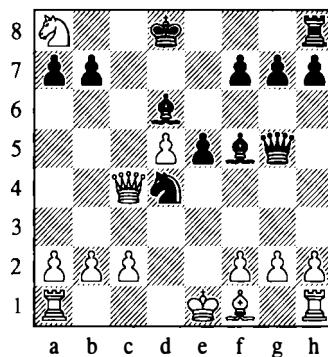
either collect the knight on a8 or inflict some other kind of serious harm on White's position.

12.♗d1

Alternatives make things easier for Black, for instance:

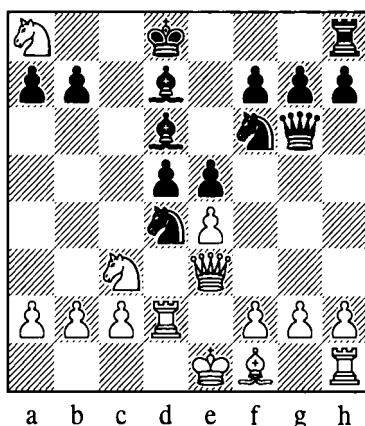
12.exd5? ♜f5 13.♗c4 ♜xc2† 14.♗d1 ♜g4†!
 wins.

After 12.♗xd5?! ♜xd5 13.exd5 ♜f5 14.♗c4 ♜d6 Black has a lead in development and will soon collect the knight on a8. For instance:



15.♗d3 ♜e7 16.♗xf5 ♜xf5 17.0–0 ♜xa8
 18.♗ae1 ♜f8+ Black's minor pieces were far stronger than White's rook in Mueller Toepler – Salminen, corr. 2015. (A nice additional detail is that 19.c3? b5! would trap the queen!)

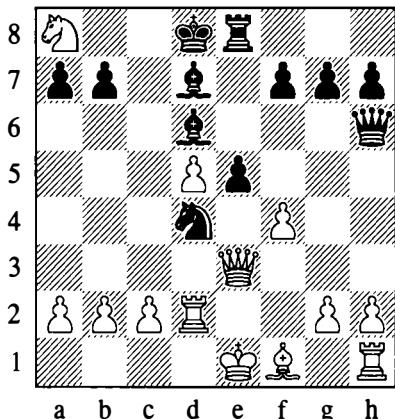
12...♞d6 13.♗d2 ♜d7 14.♗e3 ♜g6



15.f4

White is doing everything he can to cause problems, but Black remains in control.

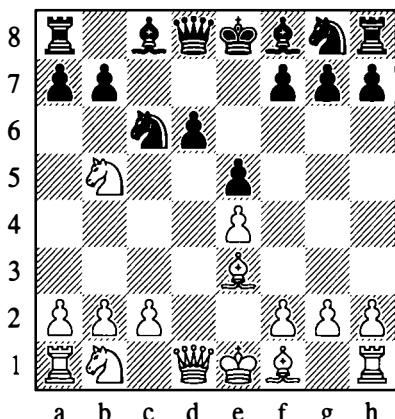
15... $\mathbb{W}h6!$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 17. $exd5$ $\mathbb{E}e8$



18. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}g4!$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xg4$ $exf4$ 20. $\mathbb{W}xe8\#$ $\mathbb{Q}xe8$

Black won smoothly in Khorunzhy - Kirpikov, corr. 2014.

B) 7. $\mathbb{Q}e3$



This move introduces the ‘serious’ part of the chapter. The position on the board is a version of the so-called Kalashnikov Variation (1.e4 c5 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 3.d4 cxd4 4. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ e5 5. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ d6), where White has played 6. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ instead of the more logical options of 6. $\mathbb{Q}1c3$ or 6.c4. (And of

course the move count is different, as each side has wasted a tempo.) So essentially, White has forced us to play a different Sicilian variation, but he paid a price for it in committing himself to an inferior option against it.

7... $\mathbb{Q}e7!$

This is only Black’s fourth-most-popular option, behind 7... $\mathbb{Q}e6$, 7... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ and 7... $a6$, the last of which is recommended by Delchev & Semkov. It was actually GM Spiros Kapnisis, the trainer of the Greek national team, who gave me the idea to play this move while I was preparing for my game against the Spanish GM Oleg Korneev in the 2017 European Team Championship.

The idea of the text move is simple: Black continues the development of his pieces but avoids the early ... $a6$, which helps White to reroute his knight via c3 to d5. Similarly, an early ... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ has the drawback of allowing the $\mathbb{Q}g5$ pin, which again improves White’s control over d5. So instead, we make a useful developing move and postpone ... $a6$ until White has committed the b1-knight to c3.

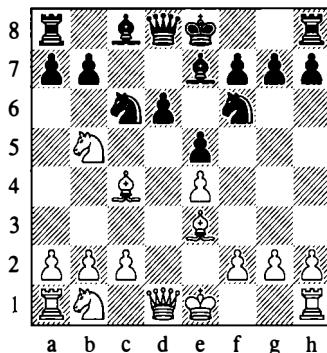
We will examine B1) 8.c4, B2) 8. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ and B3) 8. $\mathbb{Q}1c3$.

A rare sideline is:

8. $\mathbb{Q}c4$

White is fighting for the d5-square.
8... $\mathbb{Q}f6$

Black is doing the same of course.



9.0–0

9.♗g5? ♗xe4 gave White no real play for the lost pawn in Malzinskas – Andriulaitis, corr. 1996.

9.f3 is slightly inaccurate, as the e4-pawn was not truly threatened. 9...0–0 10.0–0 was seen in Shankland – Strenzwilk, Ledyard 2009, when 10...♗a5!N would have been a good way to fight for the light squares. After 11.♗b3 a6 12.♗c3 ♗xb3 13.axb3 ♗e6 Black is ready to play ...d5 next, and if 14.♗d5?! ♗xd5 15.exd5 ♗d7 then Black is better with the pair of bishops and ...f5 coming next. Black's set-up by this stage looks much more like a favourable Najdorf than a Taimanov.

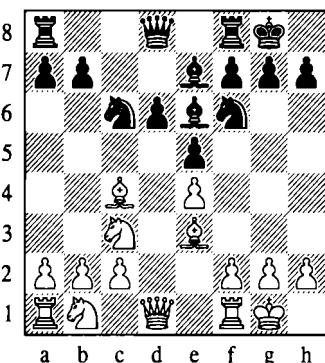
9...0–0

9...♗xe4?? 10.♗d5 would be disastrous.

10.♗c3 ♗e6

10...♗g4!? could be investigated, but normal development is fine.

After the text move an exchange on e6 would make life easy for Black by covering his only weakness, so we will see what happens if White maintains the tension.



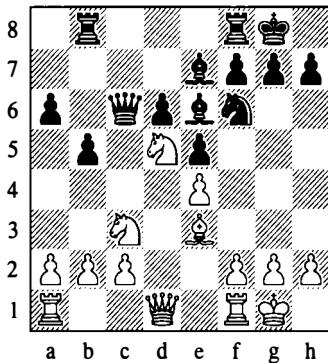
11.♗a3

11.♗b3 ♗a5 was fine for Black in Sciupokas – Mesquita, corr. 2016.

The text move looks logical but Black can fight back on the queenside with:

11...a6! 12.♗d5 ♖c7 13.♗c4 b5 14.♗b6 ♖ab8 15.♗xc6 ♖xc6 16.♗bd5

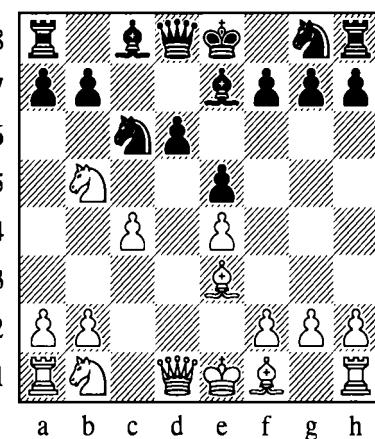
We have been following Balabaev – Minchev, email 2005. A simple and strong continuation would have been:



16...♗xd5N 17.♗xd5 ♗xd5 18.exd5 ♖d7†

Black has an obvious positional edge due to his more mobile pawn majority.

B1) 8.c4



8...♗f6!

As mentioned, I want to postpone ...a6 until White has committed the b1-knight to c3.

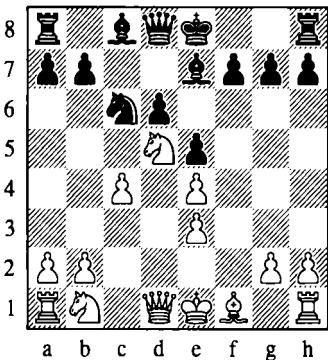
9.f3!

It is important for White to both protect the e4-pawn and take control of the g4-square.

9.♗d3?! is never played, for good reason, as 9...♗g4 gives Black a better version of the lines examined below.

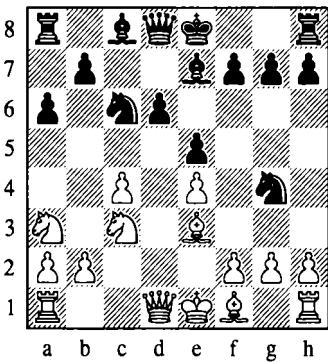
9.Qd3 is not such a bad move, although it has only been played in one game so far, P. Lewis – Rozybakiyev, Sherbrooke 2004. 9...0–0N (9...Qg4?N 10.Qc1 d5! 11.exd5 Qc5 is given as “0.00” by the engines, but I am not so interested in learning such a complicated and risky line only to secure a draw!) 10.0–0 Qg4 11.Qc1 Qg5= As usual, in these positions, Black gets a good game after activating his bad bishop.

9.Q5c3 Qg4 10.Qd5 Qxe3 11.fxe3!? sees White improve his control over the dark squares at the expense of his pawn structure. A sensible continuation is:

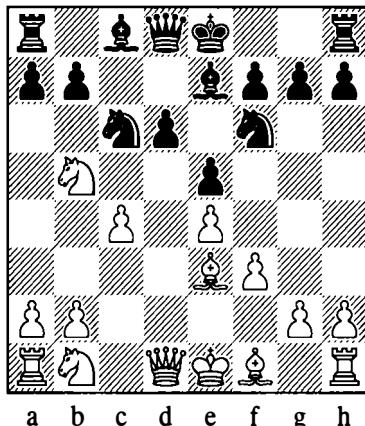


11...0–0 12.Qe2 Qg5 13.Qbc3 Qe7 14.0–0 Qxd5 15.Qxd5 Qe6= Ciesielski – Jankowiak, corr. 2008.

9.Q1c3 a6 10.Qa3 Qg4! presents White with some problems. A good example continued:



11.Qc2 0–0 12.Qe2 Qxe3 13.Qxe3 Qg5 Black was at least equal in J. Jackson – Zhou, Aberystwyth 2014, due to his bishop pair and prospects on the dark squares.



9...0–0

Although I believe 9.f3 was White’s most challenging option, the fact that he has made another pawn move and weakened the dark squares opens up some interesting opportunities for Black. One thematic idea is to play ...a6 to drive the knight away, then immediately follow up with ...Qd4, offering a pawn sacrifice in order to obtain counterplay on the dark squares. Another possible plan involves ...Qh5 followed by any of ...Qg5 to exchange the dark-squared bishops, ...f5 to open the kingside, or ...Qf4. Although the ...Qh5 plan can work well in certain situations, it is best to think of it as a ‘Plan B’, as moving the knight away from the centre and weakening the d5-square carries some risks. A final point is that Black can follow ...a6 with ...b5 in several variations, intending to sacrifice a pawn to obtain dynamic counterplay.

10.Q1c3

I will take this as my main line, although there are three other moves which deserve attention.

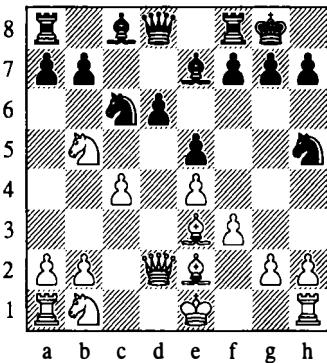
10.♗c3?! has the advantage of avoiding the ...a6/...b5 pawn sacrifice. On the other hand, retreating the knight voluntarily loses time against other plans. Thus, a good reply is 10...♝e6!N intending ...♝c8, followed by a thematic ...♞d4 sacrifice.

10.♗e2

This is one occasion where ‘Plan B’ works well.

10...♞h5! 11.♗d2

11.g3 f5 offers Black plenty of counterplay.



11...♞f4!

It looks like Black is offering a pawn sacrifice with a view to eliminating White’s dark-squared bishop and controlling the dark squares. It’s not a real sacrifice though, as accepting it leads to an instantly losing position for White.

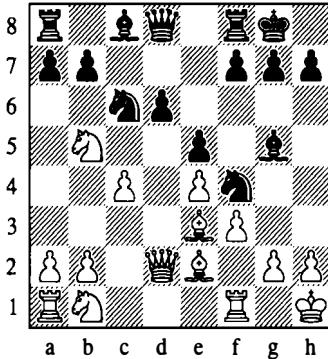
12.0–0

12.♗xf4?! exf4 13.0–0 (13.♗xf4? loses to 13...a6!, since retreating the knight will allow ...♝g5, winning the queen) 13...♝f6! Black has an obvious advantage due to his mighty dark-squared bishop, which will go to e5 next.

12...♝g5!

Activating the bishop. For the moment the d6-pawn is untouched, but Black is preparing a genuine pawn sacrifice.

13.♔h1

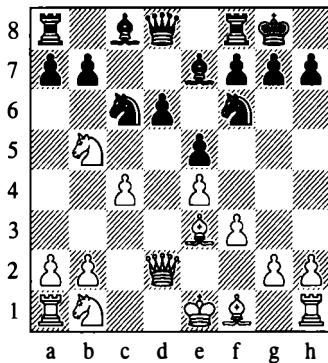


13...a6! 14.♗xd6 ♜d4!∞

It is quite thematic in this variation for Black to sacrifice the d6-pawn in order to open the d-file and control the d4-square. In this instance, his active minor pieces give him ample compensation.

10.♗d2

This move is flexible but rather slow. I found an interesting new way to utilize Black’s lead in development.



10...a6!?

10...♝e6 11.♗c3 a6 12.♗a3 has occurred in a few games. I would like to point out that 12...♞h5 13.♗c2 is slightly better for White, despite her eventual defeat in Kosteniuk – Konovalov, Moscow 2008. However, 12...♞d4?! was a more promising idea in Jovanovic – M. Szabo, corr. 2008, with Black sacrificing a pawn in order to exploit his lead in development and strong

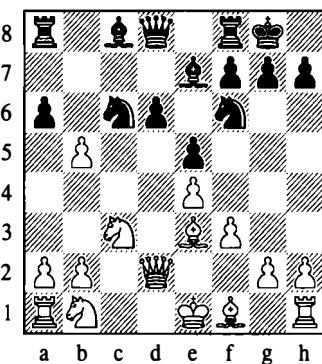
dark-squared bishop. This is a valid way of playing but I have chosen to concentrate on my new idea, which involves a different, yet equally thematic, pawn sacrifice.

11.Qc3 b5!

Black wants to open the position at the cost of one, or perhaps even two pawns!

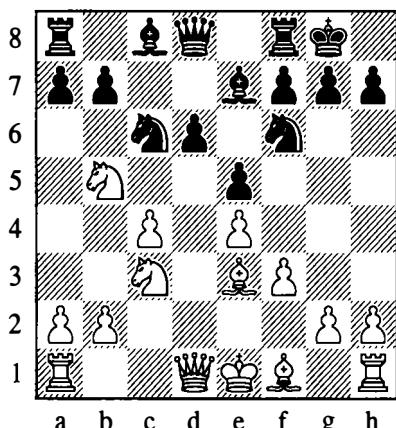
12.cxb5

Black has a number of interesting ideas which could be analysed. Personally I like Black's dynamic counterplay and I believe he has good compensation after the simple:



12...Qb4? 13.b6 d5! 14.a3 d4 15.axb4 Qxb4
16.Qf2 Qxb6=

Black will soon restore material equality.



10...a6!

We continue to follow the rule of playing this move as soon as the b1-knight comes to c3.

11.Qa3 Qe6!

Before taking direct action, Black develops his last piece.

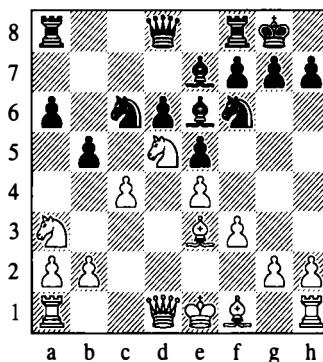
12.Qe2

This developing move has been the usual choice. I analysed two other possibilities:

12.Qd5 b5!N

This thematic move offers Black more than enough counterplay.

12...Qd7 is a playable alternative, with ideas of ...Qg5 and ...Qc5, with good prospects on the dark squares. It is worth knowing about such plans, in case you reach a position where the more dynamic methods don't work so well and slower manoeuvres are needed.



13.Qc1 Qd4!

Combining both pawn sacrifices!

14.Qxd4 exd4 15.Qxe7†

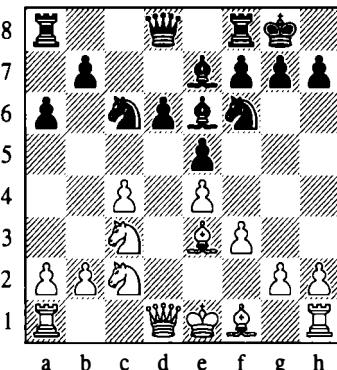
After 15.Qxd4? Qxd5 16.cxd5 Qd7† Black is dominating in the dark squares. His bishop will emerge on f6 or g5 and his queen on a5 or b6, with tremendous play.

15...Qxe7 16.Qxd4 bxc4 17.Qf2 d5!?

White will most probably have to sacrifice back the b2- or a2-pawn in order to complete his development.

12.Qc2?

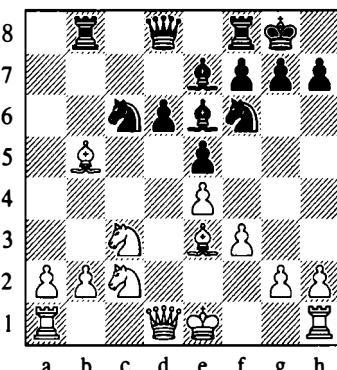
This is an interesting attempt by White to control the d4-square.



12...♝b8!?

12...♝c8 13.♗d2 ♛d7 is a fully playable alternative which was seen in Garcia Ramos – Munoz Pantoja, Barcelona 2016. Black will follow up with ...f5, having in mind the typical follow-up of ...♝g6, possibly with ...♛c5 thrown in somewhere.

13.♕e2 b5 14.cxb5 axb5 15.♕xb5



15...♛a5! 16.0–0 d5!

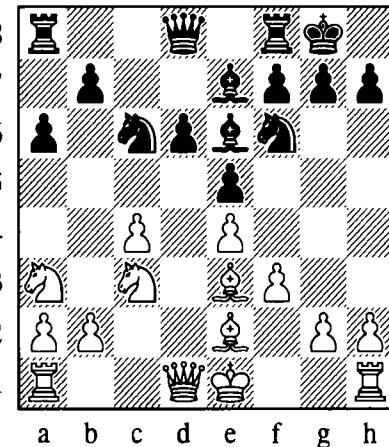
Once again, we see that the ...b5 break is closely connected with the ...d5 break.

17.exd5 ♛xd5 18.♛xd5 ♜xd5

Black has no reason to fear the exchange of queens, for instance:

19.♝xd5 ♛xd5 20.a4 ♜c4!=

Black will soon regain the pawn to reach a balanced endgame.



12...b5!?

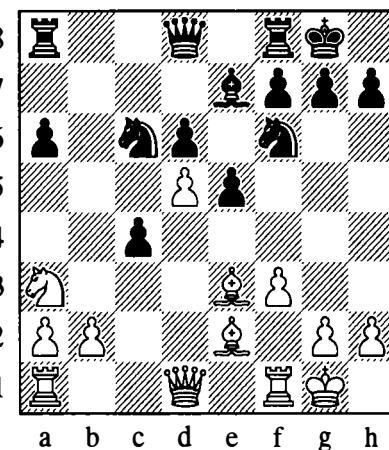
My personal preference in these structures is to carry out the ...b5 break whenever possible.

With that being said, there is nothing wrong with 12...♝c8 13.0–0 ♛d4. See for example Indjic – Kovalenko, Warsaw 2016, where Black went on to win an excellent technical game.

13.♛d5!

13.cxb5 ♛b4! 14.0–0 d5! sees Black combine the two thematic pawn breaks to excellent effect.

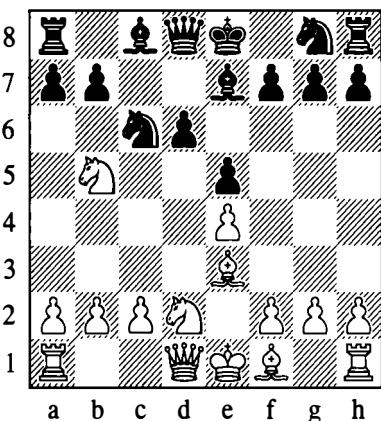
13...bxc4 14.0–0 ♜xd5 15.exd5



15... $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $\mathbb{W}a5!$

Black has a fine position; his last move prepares to exchange the dark-squared bishops with the ... $\mathbb{Q}d8$ -b6 manoeuvre.

B2) 8. $\mathbb{Q}d2$



Although I do not believe that this move causes any theoretical problems, it does have some interesting ideas hidden behind it. First, White creates the obvious but powerful threat of $\mathbb{Q}c4$. Secondly, White makes a flexible developing move, as it is not yet clear if his light-squared bishop will be best placed on c4 or e2. Moreover, the c3-square is kept clear for the other knight, in case Black chases it with ...a6. Last but not least, White is waiting for Black's move, and keeps in mind the typical $\mathbb{Q}g5$ idea in order to control the d5-square.

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

8...a6 is more common but I would rather not drive White's knight back towards the d5-square. I guess that most players were put off by the prospect of the d6-pawn coming under fire, but it turns out that Black can sacrifice it to good effect.

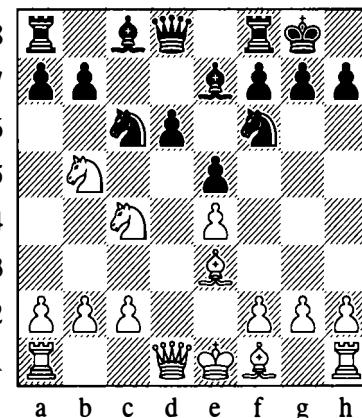
We will now consider B21) 9. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ and B22) 9. $\mathbb{Q}g5$.

B21) 9. $\mathbb{Q}c4$

This is a natural attempt to take advantage of Black's refusal to play 8...a6, but we are not bluffing.

9...0-0!

As we have already seen, it is absolutely thematic for Black to sacrifice the d6-pawn in the 6. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ line. White has spent several tempos in creating the backward pawn weakness and moving his knights into position to attack it, so it is quite reasonable for Black to sacrifice it to increase his lead in development.



10. $\mathbb{Q}bx d6$ $\mathbb{Q}c6!$

Black will keep pressure on the e4-pawn and take advantage of the open d-file. Moreover, the dark-squared bishop may find an active role on c5 or b4.

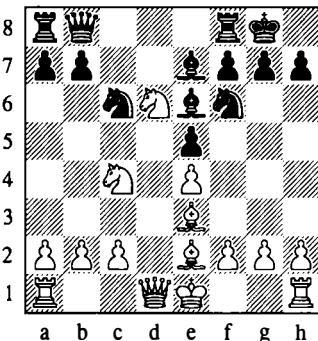
11.c3?!

This untested move seems to be White's best. It is important for him to control the d4-square.

11.f3?! is too slow, and 11... $\mathbb{W}b8$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{E}d8$ gave Black a promising initiative in Rodriguez Suarez – Hillebrand, corr. 2013.

11. $\mathbb{Q}c2$?! $\mathbb{W}b8$

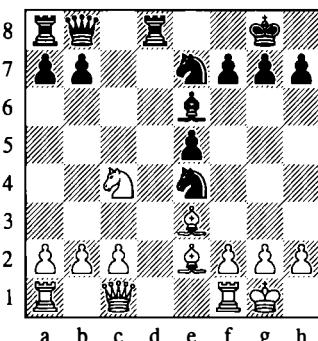
This is also excellent for Black, for instance:



12.♕f5 ♜d8 13.♕xe7† ♜xe7 14.♗c1 ♜xe4
15.0–0

15.f3 is no improvement: 15...♝c7! 16.♕xe5 ♜xe5 17.fxe4 ♜xe4 18.♕f3? Under pressure, White committed a serious mistake on his last move in Westerinen – Gausel, Stavanger 1989. The accurate 18...♝c4!N would have left White without a good way of getting his king to safety, and after something like 19.♕e2 ♜h4† 20.♕f2 ♜e4 Black should win.

After the text move a draw was agreed in Brunner – Gausel, Haifa 1989, but Black had every reason to play on:



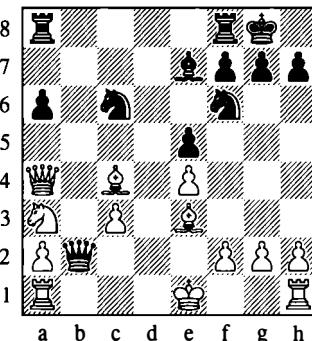
15...♝c7N†

It is obvious that Black's position is preferable. He will continue with the ...♕f5-d4 manoeuvre, and all his pieces will be well placed.

11...♝c7

This is simple and good. Black will at least restore material equality by picking up the e4-pawn.

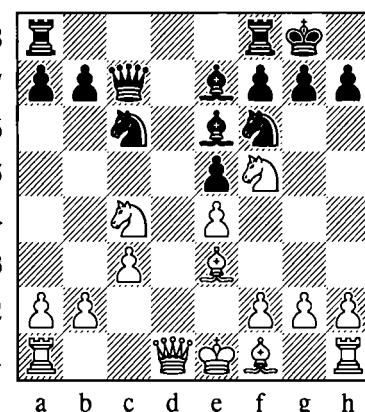
11...b5!? is an interesting pawn sacrifice which looks wild, but should result in equality with best play: 12.♕xb5 ♜b8 13.♗a4 ♜xc4 14.♕xc4 a6 15.♗a3 ♜xb2



16.0–0 ♜xa3 17.♕xc6 ♜fc8 18.♕b7 ♜cb8= A repetition of moves is likely.

12.♕f5

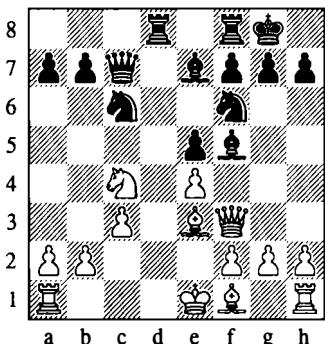
12.♕f5 allows 12...♝b8! when Black has a promising initiative. The e4-pawn is under attack; ...a6 followed by ...b5 is one simple plan, and even tactical ideas like ...♝d8 followed by ...♞b4 are on the table.



12...♞xe4

The simple solution.

More ambitious is: 12... $\mathbb{E}ad8!?$ 13. $\mathbb{W}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}xf5$



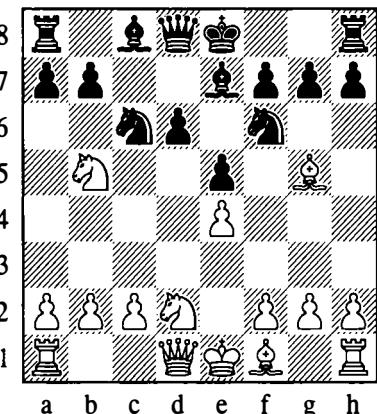
14. $\mathbb{W}xf5$ (or 14. $\mathbb{E}xf5$ b5!?) 15. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ e4 \mathbb{Q} likely with ... $\mathbb{Q}e5$ to follow) 14... $\mathbb{Q}b4!$ 15. $\mathbb{E}c1$ (15. $\mathbb{C}xb4?$ $\mathbb{Q}xb4\uparrow$ is a rout as White cannot play either block on d2 without allowing huge material losses) Black has plenty of play in messy positions after either 15... $\mathbb{Q}xa2$ or 15... $\mathbb{Q}d3\uparrow$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ $\mathbb{E}xd3$.

13. $\mathbb{W}g4$ $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ 14. $\mathbb{W}xf5$ $\mathbb{Q}f6=$

White has the bishop pair, but Black has a lead in development plus active plans such as ...b7-b5-b4, or ... $\mathbb{Q}d5$ to harass the bishop.

B22) 9. $\mathbb{Q}g5$

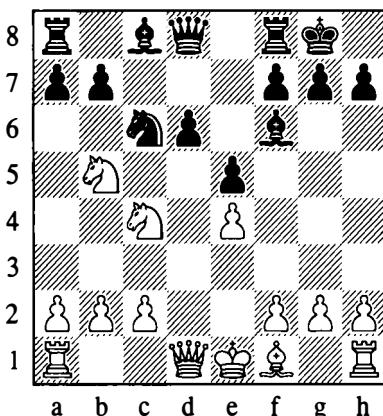
This is safer and more sensible than the previous line, as White makes a useful developing move rather than chasing pawns.



9... 0-0 10. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}c4?!$

Although this has achieved a plus score for White and is the only move to have been played in this position to date, I consider it to be dubious, for reasons that will be shown.

I believe that White's best move is 11. $\mathbb{Q}c4N$, intending to complete the development and try to control the d5-square. Nevertheless, White's knights are oddly placed and his chances are equal at best.



11... $\mathbb{Q}e6!$

11... $\mathbb{Q}d4$ has been Black's usual choice. In that case Black is fine and even has chances to push for more than equality, but the text move is even stronger. Strangely enough, this move was only played once, by Andrei Sokolov in 2009. However, the number of games immediately jumps to more than forty in the resulting position, due to transpositions arising from the 7... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ and 7... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ lines, as opposed to the less common 7... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ which I recommend.

Regardless of the move order, analysis shows that White's position is dangerous. Other players appear to have reached the same conclusion, as there are no games from this position since 2013, and no grandmaster has played the White side of it since more than a decade ago. Indeed, Black has a significant lead in development and a strong pair of bishops, which should produce

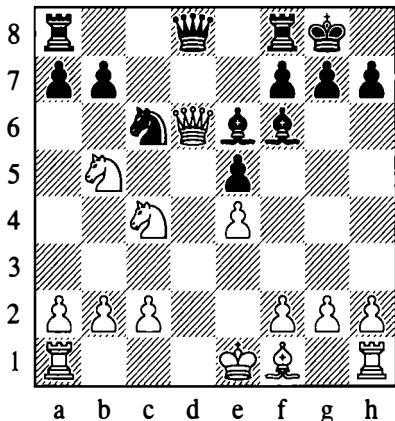
more than enough compensation for the pawn which is about to be captured.

12.♗xd6

This seems most consistent. If White declines the pawn sacrifice, his previous few moves will not make much sense.

12.♕e3?! is too passive, and after 12...♗b6 13.♕d5?! ♗xd5 14.exd5 ♔e7 15.♗b1 e4! White was falling into serious trouble in Petrisor – A. Sokolov, Cappelle-la-Grande 2009.

12.♕c3 was the choice of the highest-rated player to have reached this position with White. Clearly this was an admission that his opening play had not been a success, and indeed after 12...♗g5!! Black was better in Korneev – Damaso, Evora 2008.



12...♗c8!N

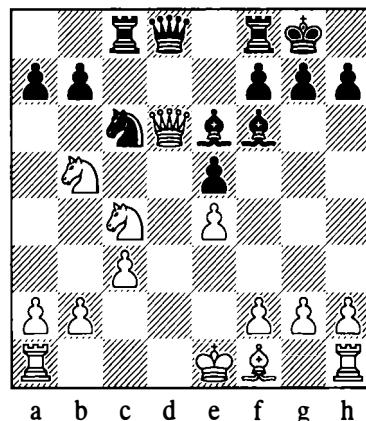
This is a strong novelty, which is likely to transpose to a couple of games after a few more moves.

12...♗c8 has been played in lots of games, with generally fine results for Black. One noteworthy example continued 13.c3 ♕xc4 14.♕xc4 ♘g4 15.0–0 ♘ad8 16.♗c5 ♘xe4 and a draw was soon agreed in Nunn – Tal, Reykjavik 1988. Although equalizing from

the opening with Black is not a bad outcome in itself, I firmly believe that Black should be pushing for an advantage in this variation.

13.c3

White hardly has anything better than this consolidating move, as ...♗d4 was a strong threat.



13...♗e7!

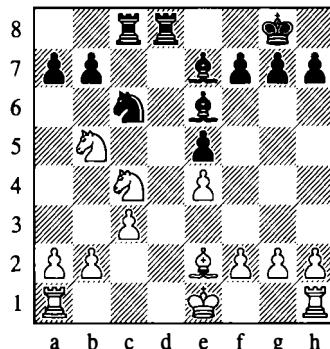
Forcing the trade of queens. Once again we see that, after sacrificing the d6-pawn, Black's bishop can find an active role on the f8-a3 diagonal.

14.♗xd8 ♘fxd8

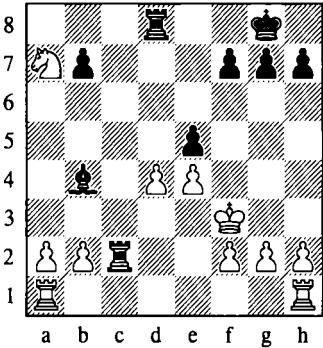
With this move, we transpose to two existing games.

15.♗ba3

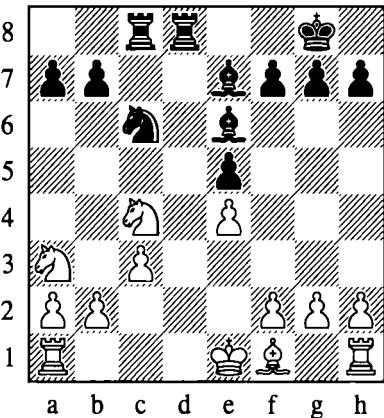
15.♗e2?! runs into tactical problems:



15...Qd4! White has real difficulties. A nice illustrative line continues: 16.cxd4 Qxc4 17.Qxa7 Qb4† 18.Qf1 Qxe2† 19.Qxe2 Qc2† 20.Qf3



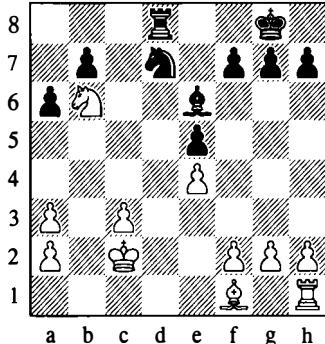
20...f5! 21.Qhc1 (21.exf5 Qxd4†) 21...fxe4†
22.Qxe4 Qxf2†



15...Qd4!

Despite the defensive measures White has taken, this tactical shot still works well.

The other game continued: 15...Qb8? This is a typical regrouping manoeuvre when c2-c3 has been played. The knight is heading for c5, where it will attack the e4-pawn and the d3-square. Meanwhile White's pieces are stuck in a defensive mode. 16.Qd1 Qxd1† 17.Qxd1 a6 18.Qb6 Qd8† 19.Qc2 Qxa3 20.bxa3 Qd7

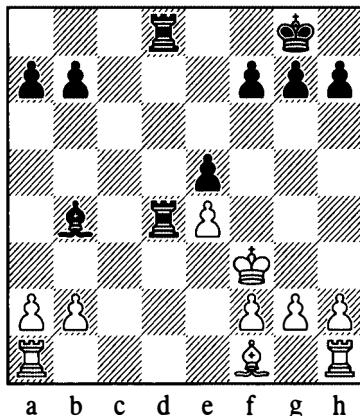


21.Qxd7 Qxd7 22.Qe2 Qxa2 A draw was agreed in Bissmann – Polishchuk, corr. 2009. In a practical game, Black's slightly better structure would enable him to keep the game going while being on the safe side of a likely draw. At correspondence level though, there would be no real chances.

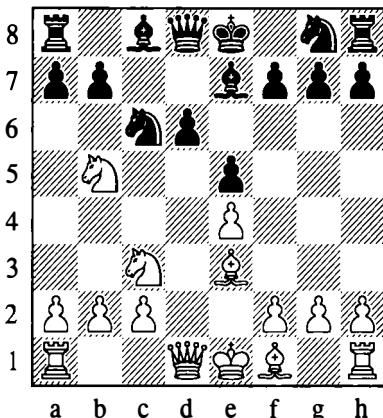
16.cxd4

16.Qd1 is well met by ...a6!, with ...b5 coming next if White continues to postpone taking on d4.

16...Qb4† 17.Qe2 Qxc4† 18.Qxc4 Qxc4
19.Qf3 Qxd4†



White's position should be defensible but it is far from pleasant. In Borisek – Navara, Balatonlelle 2003, Black went on to win.

B3) 8.♘1c3

This has been White's most popular choice, developing the knight and creating an immediate threat of ♘d5. Black only has one acceptable reply.

8...♞f6

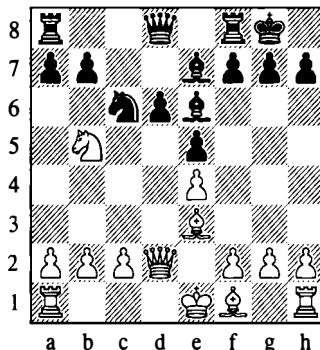
Incredibly, 8...a6?? has been Black's most popular choice, but 9.♘d5! is an instant refutation.

After Black's last move White has tried virtually everything at least once, but we will concentrate on the two main options of B31) 9.♘d5 and B32) 9.♗g5.

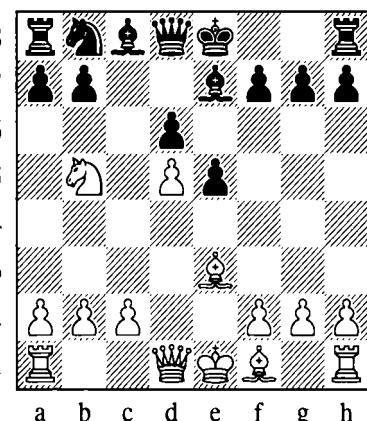
B31) 9.♘d5 ♘xd5 10.exd5

I don't believe in this capture, even though it is the most principled and popular choice.

I think White should generally recapture on d5 with a piece when possible. In this particular case that means opting for the rare 10.♗xd5?!, even though 10...♝e6 11.♗d2 0–0 leaves Black with no problems obtaining a good game. For instance:



12.♘c3?!N (12.c4?!! ♜c8 gave Black good prospects in Somlai – Polak, Hungary 2009. A likely follow-up is ...a6 followed by either ...♘d4 with a thematic sacrifice, or ...h6 and ...♗g5 with a positionally favourable bishop trade.) 12...♜c8 13.♗e2 ♘d4?∞ Once again, this typical sacrifice looks promising.

10...♝b8

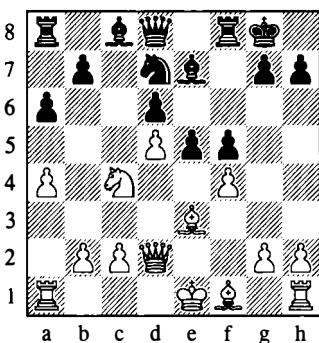
Retreating the knight to its original square is no problem. On the contrary: we have actually transposed to a well-known variation of the Sveshnikov Sicilian, which is reached after 1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 e5 6.♘db5 d6 7.♘d5 ♘xd5 8.exd5 ♘b8! (8...♘e7 is also playable but most experts prefer the text move) 9.♗e3 (9.c4 is more popular but both moves are likely to be played

at some point) 9...Qe7. The general assessment of the position is that Black is theoretically fine and has a lot of attacking possibilities thanks to the mobile kingside pawn majority.

Considering that the move order in the present chapter only occurs in a tiny minority of Taimanov games, it would hardly be an appropriate use of space in this book to subject this variation to a comprehensive analysis. For readers looking for detailed coverage, I strongly recommend the work of my compatriot Vassilios Kotronias, who devoted more than forty pages to the Qd5! exd5 structures in *Grandmaster Repertoire – The Sicilian Sveshnikov*. In this section I will restrict myself to a few instructive examples to show the general character of the play.

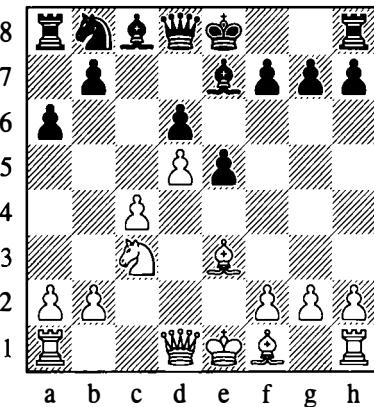
11.c4

11.Wd2 threatens the a7-pawn, as Black will no longer have the ...Wa5! resource. Thus we continue: 11...a6 12.Qa3 Qd7 13.Qc4 0-0 14.a4 (14.Qe2 f5 is similar) 14...f5 15.f4



15...exf4 (15...Qf6!? 16.fxe5 Qe4 17.Wd3 dx5? is another interesting line analysed by Kotronias) 16.Qxf4 Qc5 17.Qe2 Qd7 18.a5 Qe4 19.Wb4 Qb5? Van Kempen – Sevecek, corr. 1999. One could analyse such lines in more detail of course, but in general Black has plenty of activity for his pieces.

11...a6 12.Qc3

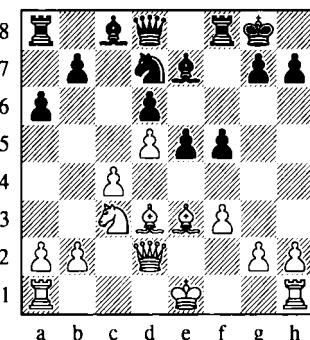


The first time I really paid attention to this type of structure was in 2008, when my good friend Georgios Ketzetzis played the Black side of it against Axel Rombaldoni in the European Under-16. Although Georgios was rated only 2099 at the time (nearly 300 points less than his opponent!), the quality of Black's play was extremely high and I remember being impressed by my friend's calculation. It was a great example which helped me to appreciate the tactical possibilities which can arise for Black on the kingside.

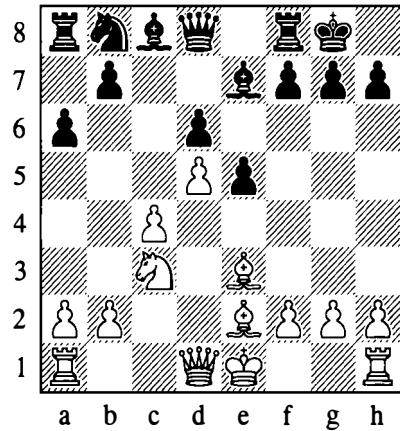
12...0-0 13.Qe2

White can arrange his pieces in a few different ways.

An example of a slightly different set-up is: 13.Wd2 f5 14.f3 (14.f4 can be met by 14...exf4 15.Qxf4 g5!?) 14...Qd7 15.Qd3 (15.Qe2 transposes to 15.Wd2 in the notes to the main line below) Here Black can try an interesting positional pawn sac:



15...e4?! 16.fxe4 fxe4 17.♗xe4 ♖e5≈ Jurcisin – Salai, Hlohovec 1998.



13...f5 14.f3 ♖d7 15.0–0

I also analysed:

15.♗d2

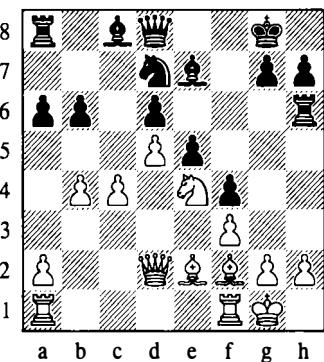
This way White prevents ...♗g5 but spends a tempo moving his queen, which might otherwise have been used mobilizing his queenside pawns.

15...b6! 16.0–0 f4! 17.♗f2 ♜f6

Black plays for a brutal attack, with the idea of ...♝h6 followed by transferring the queen to the h-file.

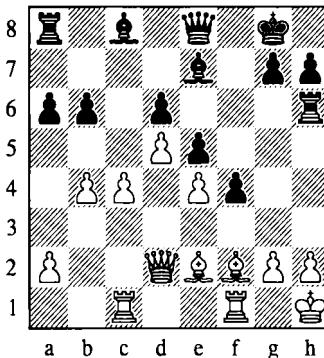
18.♗e4 ♜h6 19.b4

This occurred in Garcia Pino – Sueiro Coronado, Cuba 2000. According to my analysis, best play continues as follows:



19...♗f6N 20.♗ac1 ♜e8 21.♗h1!

Planning to meet ...♝h5 with ♗g1 – a typical defensive motif in some King's Indian lines.
21...♗xe4 22.fxe4



22...♗h4!

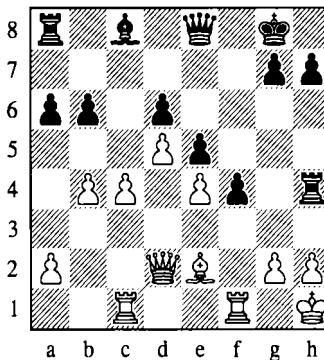
Exchanging one of White's key defensive pieces, which might also have played a role in supporting his queenside advances.

22...g5?! is well met by 23.♗d1! when White succeeds in holding up the kingside attack.

23.♗xh4

23.♗g1? ♜g3† puts White in serious trouble on the kingside.

23...♝xh4



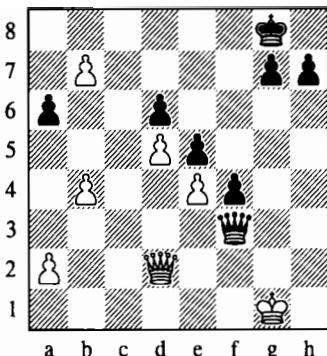
24.c5!

White has to press ahead with his counterplay, otherwise he will be brutally attacked by ...♝g6.

24...♝g6! 25.cxb6 ♜g3

The remaining moves are more or less forced.

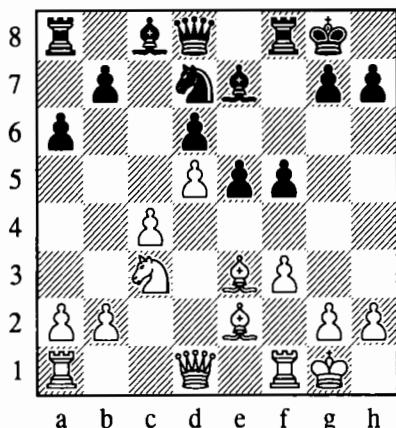
26.♗xc8† ♜xc8 27.h3 ♜xh3† 28.gxh3 ♜xh3† 29.♗g1 ♜c3 30.♗f3 ♜xf3 31.♗xf3 ♜xf3 32.b7



32... $\mathbb{W}g3\#$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{W}h3\#$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{W}h1\#$
35. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{W}h5\#$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{W}h1\#$

The crazy computer variation ends in a draw!

The text move transposes to the 2008 Ketzetzi game, which I will include for illustrative purposes. (The game actually featured the Sveshnikov move order and took one less move to reach this position, but I will keep the move count in line with the present chapter.)



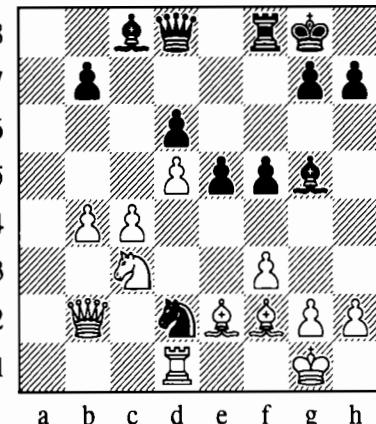
15... $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ a5!!

Black wants to hold up the advance of the enemy pawns. If White insists on forcing through a quick b2-b4 as in the game, he will have to reckon on a rook exchange, which will lure his queen away from the centre.

Kotronias analyses two alternatives: 16... $\mathbb{R}f6$!! is an extremely aggressive move offering good

attacking chances, while 16... $\mathbb{W}f6$ is a more positional alternative, intending ... $\mathbb{W}h6$ and ... $\mathbb{Q}e3$ with a favourable bishop trade.

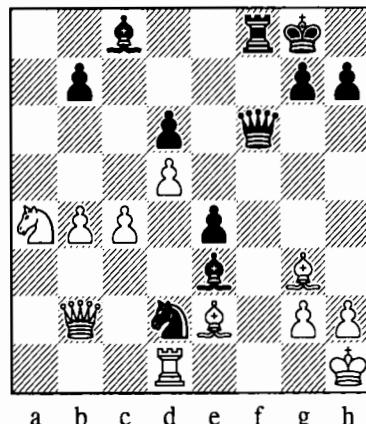
17.a3 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 18.b4 axb4 19.axb4 $\mathbb{E}xa1$
20. $\mathbb{W}xa1$ $\mathbb{Q}b3$ 21. $\mathbb{W}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}d2$ 22. $\mathbb{E}d1$



22...e4! 23.fxe4?

This allows Black's pieces to become tremendously active. White had to allow the pawn to advance to e3, with unclear consequences.

23...fxe4 24. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{W}f6$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}e3\#$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}h1$



26... $\mathbb{Q}f1$!!

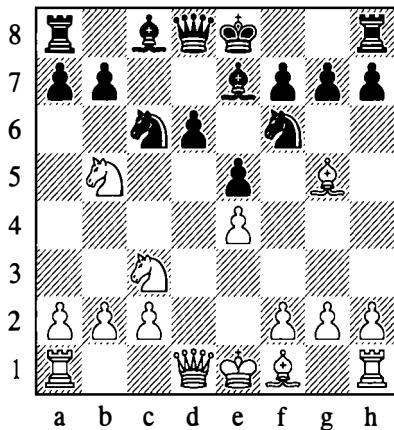
A beautiful killing move.

27.♕xd6

After 27.♕xf6 ♗xg3† 28.hxg3 ♕xf6 White cannot escape mate along the h-file.

27...♛f2**0–1**

A. Rombaldoni – Ketzetzis, Herceg Novi 2008.

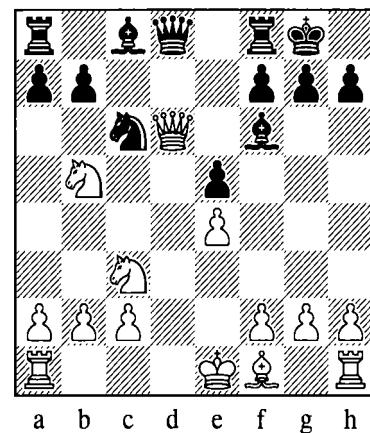
B32) 9.♗g5

Finally we come to what I believe to be White's best move. His idea is to trade the bishop for the knight on f6 in order to win control over the d5-square.

9...0–0!

Yet again we see the same concept of sacrificing the d6-pawn for the sake of a lead in development and active piece play.

A much more common continuation has been: 9...a6 10.♗xf6 (but not 10.♘a3? b5 11.♗xf6 12.♘d5, reaching a major Sveshnikov variation except here it is Black to move instead of White!) 10...gxf6 11.♘a3 f5∞ A weird version of a Sveshnikov has arisen. The main difference is that Black has gained the ...♗e7 move, which seems like an advantage, except that the bishop would normally go to g7 in this structure, so the position is unclear and double-edged.

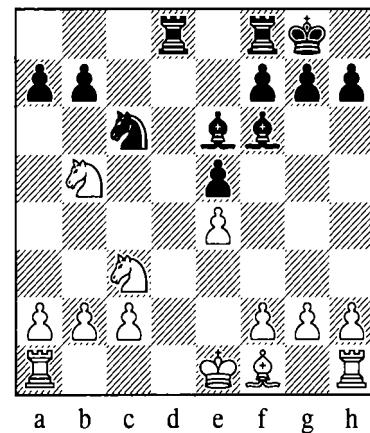
10.♗xf6 ♕xf6 11.♗xd6**11...♗e6!**

Nisipeanu came up with this idea back in 2003 but, for some reason, it has never been repeated.

11...♗a5 12.♗a3 ♜xa3 13.♘xa3 ♗e7 14.♘ab5 was less convincing for Black in Neubauer – D’Israel, Santos 2003.

12.♗xd8 ♜axd8

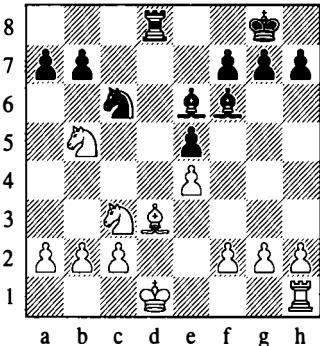
In this almost untested position I think White should go for a new idea.

**13.a3!?**

It is useful to take the b4-square under control. The only disadvantage of this move,

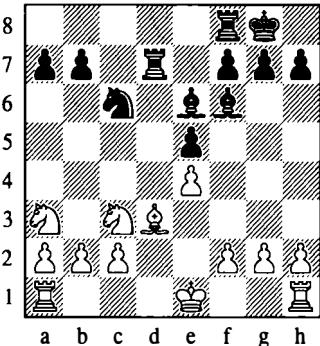
aside from the fact that it does not develop a piece, is that White's knight no longer has a retreat square on a3.

The game continued: 13. $\mathbb{B}d1$ $\mathbb{B}xd1\#$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ $\mathbb{B}d8\#$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}d3$

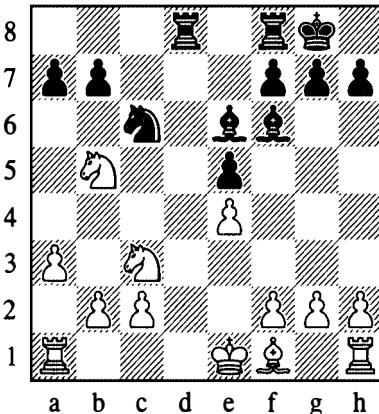


15... $\mathbb{B}d7!\#$ Guarding the c7-square. Black's bishop pair and active pieces provide him with at least enough compensation for the pawn, and he went on to win a nice game in Costantini – Nisipeanu, Valle d'Aosta 2003.

I also considered: 13. $\mathbb{Q}d3N$ $\mathbb{B}d7!$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}a3$



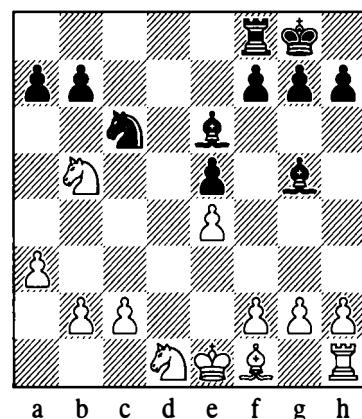
14... $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 15. 0–0–0 $\mathbb{B}c8\#$ It is hard to find an active plan for White. Black intends ...a6 next, and may even think about playing ... $\mathbb{B}dc7$ and manoeuvring his bishop from f6 to d4.



13... $\mathbb{B}g5!$

White's plan is to play $\mathbb{B}d1$ and, after exchanging the rooks, to come back with the knight to d1 and continue consolidating. The text move improves the bishop while preparing to counter White's plan.

14. $\mathbb{B}d1$ $\mathbb{B}xd1\#$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xd1$



15... $\mathbb{Q}c1!$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{B}c8\#$

Black retains full compensation. His plan for the next few moves will be to bring his king to e7 in order to threaten ...a6. White's pieces are almost paralysed by their defensive duties. In the event that White tries to safeguard some pawn by moving it, additional weaknesses will surely be created. For example, c2-c3 will leave

the b3-square uncovered; b2-b3 will weaken a3 and c3, and a3-a4 will allow a knight jump to b4.

What I really enjoy about these positions is that, despite being a pawn down, Black has full compensation and realistic prospects of playing for a win. It is fitting that the dark-squared bishop goes from being the worst minor piece on the board (when stuck behind the d6-e5 pawn wall) to the most active one!

Conclusion

After 5.♘b5 d6 this chapter focussed on 6.♗f4 (in the next two chapters we will see 6.c4). Following 6...e5 we started with an easy move in 7.♗g5? which allows Black an excellent exchange sacrifice.

Far more serious is 7.♗e3 when I recommend the relatively unusual 7...♝e7!. For a Taimanov player the challenge of the lines that follow is that White often induces us to play a different Sicilian – sometimes a Kalashnikov, sometimes a Sveshnikov. The plus side is that we will not face the most critical lines of these openings. And the lines I give in this chapter should give you a solid understanding of how to play the resulting positions.



5. $\mathbb{Q}b5$



6.c4 – Introduction

Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ e6 3.d4 cxd4 4. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 5. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ d6 6.c4

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

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| B12) 9.exd5 | 54 |
| B2) 8. $\mathbb{Q}a3$ | 56 |

A2) note to move 10



12...d5!N

A22) note to 11. $\mathbb{Q}d2$



14...g5!N

B12) after 12. $\mathbb{Q}c4$!



12... $\mathbb{Q}e7\#$ N

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♘c6 5.♗b5 d6 6.c4

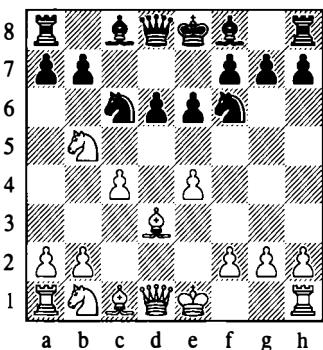
Here we see White giving up two tempos with his knight ($\text{d}4\text{-b}5$ is one tempo so far, and it will soon have to retreat to $a3$, $c3$ or $d4$) in order to provoke ... $d6$ and establish the Maroczy pawn centre. Personally I have never regarded this variation as harmful for Black, although White may claim that the characteristic Maroczy space advantage has never been connected with speed of development.

6...♗f6

White has two main options. A) $7.♗5c3$ is a significant sideline but B) $7.♗1c3$ is the most popular move by a wide margin.

A minor alternative is:

$7.♗d3$

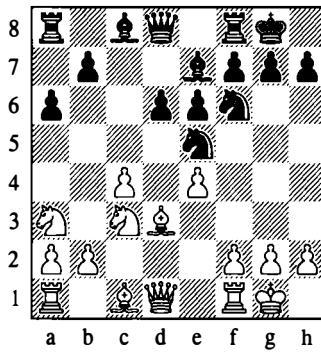


White postpones the development of his knights, since he is not sure which are the ideal squares for them. Moreover, White's bishop might turn out to be useful in the event of a future $e4\text{-e}5$ break. On the other hand, the bishop may prove to be a target for Black's typical ... $♗e5\text{-d}7$ manoeuvre.

$7...♗e7$ 8.0–0 0–0 9.♗1c3

White has to develop his knights at some point; but now Black gets a pleasant version of the main line.

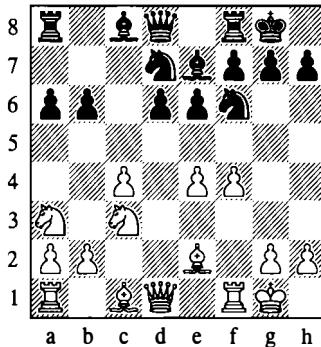
9...a6 10.♗a3 ♘e5



11.♗e2

I also considered $11.f4N$ $♗xd3$ $12.♗xd3$, when $12...d5!$ is a thematic break. Here it is even stronger than normal, since White lacks a light-squared bishop and the $f2\text{-f}4$ advance has created more weaknesses. $13.exd5$ $b5!$ A second break! $14.cxb5$ $♗xd5$ $15.♗xd5$ $♗c5†$ $16.♗h1$ $♗xd5$ Black compensation is more than sufficient. Moreover, he does not risk much, as he will probably have the option of liquidating to a drawish endgame with opposite-coloured bishops.

$11...b6$ 12.f4 $♗ed7$

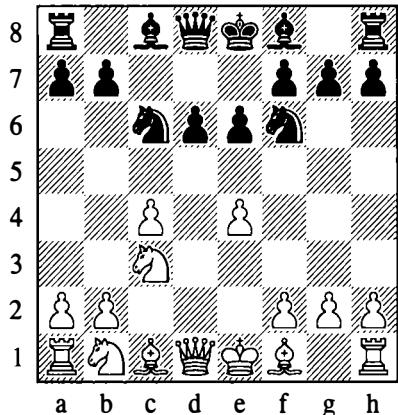


13.♗f3 ♗b7 14.♗e3 ♜c8

Black has a pleasant version of a popular variation, as White has lost a whole tempo with $♗d3\text{-e}2$. In this set-up, Black can even consider playing ... $e5$. Other standard regrouping plans are ... $♗e8$ and ... $♗f8$, perhaps with ... $g6$ and ... $g7$, and transferring the queen to $b8$ or $a8$ via $c7$. There is only one game on the database

from this position, Kosashvili – Wegner, London 1986, where a draw was soon agreed.

A) 7. $\mathbb{Q}5c3$



The point of this move is that White wants to avoid suffering from a misplaced knight on a3. He can, of course, switch plans by developing the b1-knight to a3 at some point over the next few moves, but that will only give Black an improved version of the main lines, as he can try to save a tempo by omitting ...a6. Thus, in this section I will focus on lines where White develops the b1-knight via the d2-square.

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

White must decide how to develop his kingside pieces. We will consider A1) 8.g3 and A2) 8. $\mathbb{Q}e2$.

A1) 8.g3

Usually I would hardly pay attention to such a move but, when I saw that Bobby Fischer himself employed it in a game from his 1992 match against Spassky, I could not ignore it. Despite Fischer's eventual win, I don't believe that Black has anything to fear from the opening, especially if he reacts with the following move.

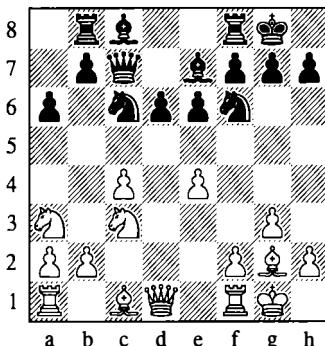
8...h5!

I found four games in which this move was played, with White only scoring a single draw so far.

The aforementioned game continued:

8...0–0 9. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ a6 10.0–0 $\mathbb{E}b8$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}a3$ $\mathbb{W}c7$??

11... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ is a better choice.



12. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 13. $\mathbb{E}c1$

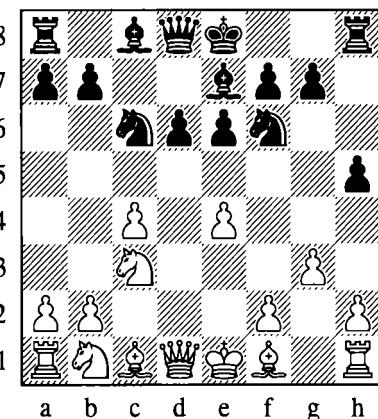
Threatening $\mathbb{Q}d5$ – a typical motif in lines where Black has a knight on c6 and queen on c7.

13... $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 14.h3 $\mathbb{E}fc8$ 15.f4 $\mathbb{Q}g6$

15... $\mathbb{Q}xc4$? 16. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $\mathbb{W}xc4$ runs into 17. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ of course.

16. $\mathbb{W}d2$

In Fischer – Spassky, Sveti Stefan/Belgrade (21) 1992, White had the slightly easier position to play, although Black was not without chances.

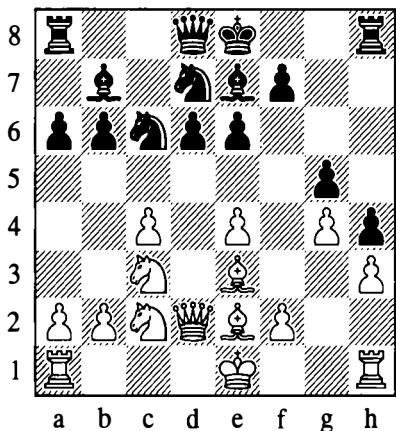


9.h3 h4 10.g4 ♜d7 11.♗e3 g5! 12.♗e2

Another game continued 12.♗b5 ♜de5† and Black was dominating on the dark-squares in Espineira Gonzalez – Lopez Martinez, Linares 2014. Taking a long-term view, the h3-pawn may prove weak in an eventual endgame.

12...a6 13.♕a3 b6 14.♗d2 ♛b7 15.♗c2

We have been following Nastase – Filip, Cap Aurora 2016. The game was agreed drawn a few moves later, but I find it hard to understand why Black did not play more ambitiously. A good continuation is:

**15...♝ce5N**

Black will follow up with ...♝g6 and possibly ...0–0. The position remains complicated and the engine calls it equal, but I believe Black's dark-square control must count for something.

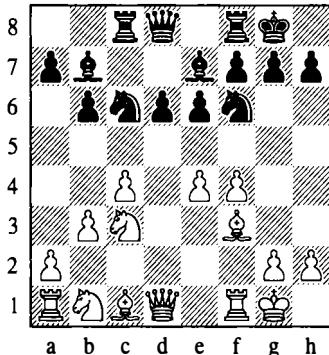
A2) 8.♗e2

This has been much more popular than the previous line.

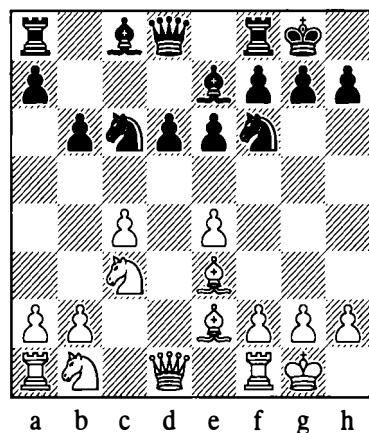
8...0–0 9.0–0 b6

We will analyse A21) 10.♗e3 and A22) 10.♗f4?.

10.f4 ♛b7 11.♗f3 ♜c8 12.b3 occurred in Tatai – Jansa, Madonna di Campiglio 1973, and several subsequent games. In each case, Black overlooked a good opportunity:



12...d5!N 13.e5 (13.cxd5?! is excellent for Black after the simple 13...exd5 or the more showy 13...♝d4!?) 13...♝e4† Black is already better; the tactical point is that 14.♗xe4? dxe4 15.♗xe4 ♛c5† 16.♔h1 ♜d4! wins material.

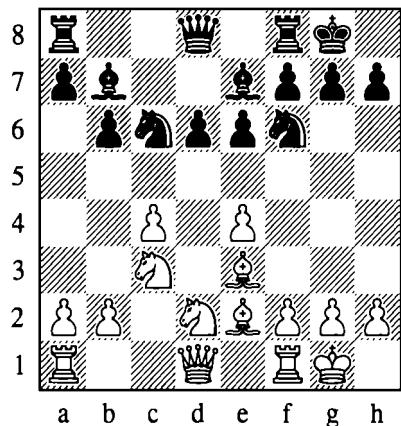
A21) 10.♗e3

As mentioned above, I find this the most logical developing move for White. Still, he has little chance of obtaining an opening advantage with it.

10...♝b7 11.♗d2

11.f4 allows a similar idea: 11...d5! 12.cxd5 (12.e5? d4! 13.exf6 ♜xf6† is a thematic idea which is worth knowing) 12...exd5 13.♗xd5 (13.e5? d4 14.exf6 ♜xf6†; 13.exd5 ♜b4 14.♗f3 ♜fxd5† Di Fonzo – Lanzani, Bratto 1999) 13...♝xd5 14.exd5 ♜b4

15. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5=$ Black equalized effortlessly in Paczuski – W. Schmidt, Szczecin 1967, and several subsequent games.



11...d5!

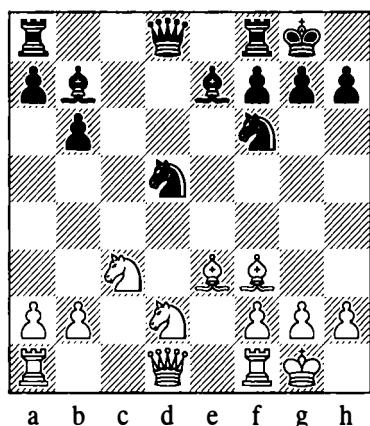
This move equalizes immediately.

12.cxd5 exd5 13.exd5

13. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 14. $\mathbb{exd5}$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5=$ did not change much in Bednarski – Langeweg, Kecskemet 1964.

13... $\mathbb{Q}b4!$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}bx d5$

14... $\mathbb{Q}fxd5$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5=$ is also completely fine.

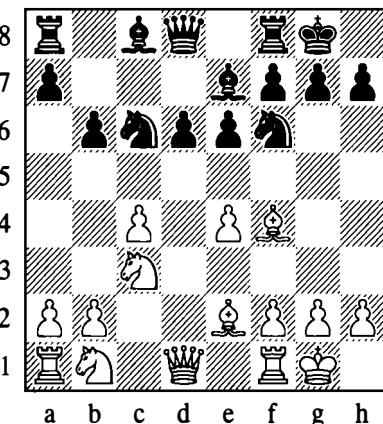


15. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 16. $\mathbb{Wa4}$

A draw was agreed here in Di Fonzo – Sbarra, Corsico 2004, though of course an ambitious

Taimanov player could still aim to outplay the opponent from an equal position.

A22) 10. $\mathbb{Q}f4!?$



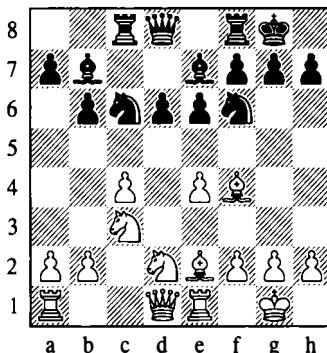
For some reason, this move has been played in more than twice as many games as the more logical 10. $\mathbb{Q}e3$. I think that the reason has to do with the fact that a ...d5 break can now be met by e4-e5. Nevertheless, the bishop is not particularly threatening on f4 and White loses control of the d4-square, which will become relevant when the knight goes to d2.

10... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}d2$

White has scored over 60% with this move so it is worth seeing how Black should handle the ensuing positions.

Black has an easier time after:

11. $\mathbb{E}e1$ $\mathbb{E}c8$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}d2$



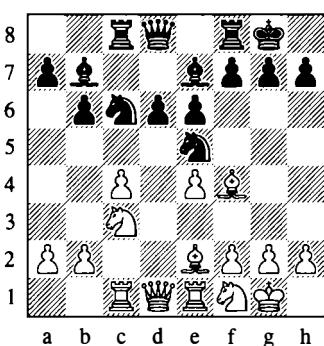
12... $\mathbb{Q}d7!$

12... $\mathbb{Q}d4$ is playable although it doesn't have the same appeal as in our main line, since White has the convenient option of dropping his bishop back to f1.

I was so eager to prove that White's dark-squared bishop is misplaced that I even started looking at 12... $\mathbb{Q}e8?$! intending ...g5, ... $\mathbb{Q}g7$ and ...f5. This leads to lively play and would be fun to try in a blitz game, but objectively it's not completely correct.

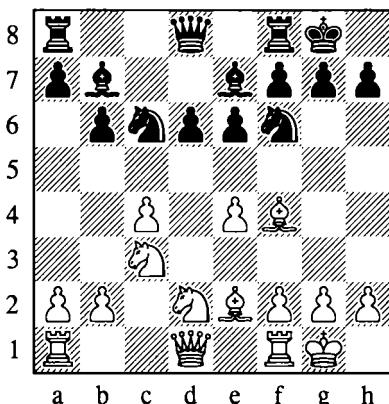
13. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}de5$ 14. $\mathbb{E}c1$

We have been following Bojkovic – Andrijevic, Kragujevac 2000. The note above gives a strong hint as to how I would like to handle Black's position.



14...g5!N 15. $\mathbb{E}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}g6\rightleftharpoons$

Black has excellent counterplay on the dark squares. Later, a timely ...f5 may open the diagonal for the b7-bishop with deadly effect.



11... $\mathbb{Q}d4!$

Several other moves have been tried but I find the text the most interesting.

12. $\mathbb{Q}d3$

White intends to regroup with $\mathbb{E}c1$ and $\mathbb{Q}b1$, and/or $\mathbb{Q}b3$ to challenge the strong knight.

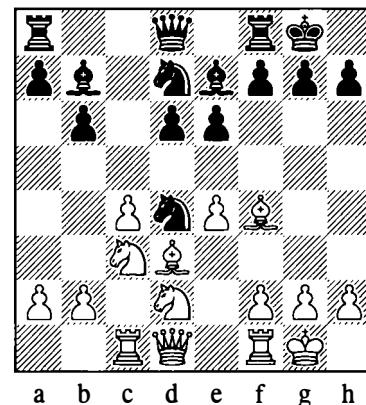
12... $\mathbb{Q}d7$

Black gets ready to deploy his knight on c5 and bishop on f6, supporting the d4-knight and generating activity across the board.

13. $\mathbb{E}c1$

The immediate 13. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ can be met by 13... $\mathbb{Q}c6!$ when Black has spent a few tempos moving his knight back and forth, but the knight on b3 is misplaced and Black can continue with the standard plan of ... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ and ... $\mathbb{Q}f6$.

This position has been reached in a few games. I like the following new plan for Black:



13... $\mathbb{Q}c5N$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ a5!

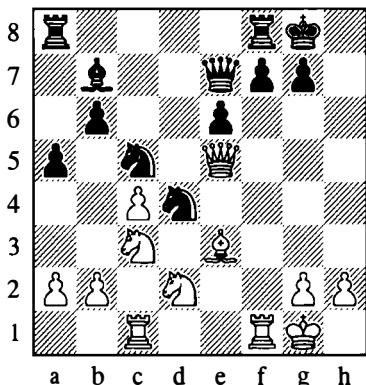
Weakening the b5-square is a small price to pay to secure the future of Black's active queenside pieces.

15. $\mathbb{E}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 16.f4 $\mathbb{W}e7$

Black is ready to play ...g6 to secure his kingside. It is not easy for White to improve his position further, and e4-e5 and f4-f5 will create weaknesses. Here are some interesting lines I analysed:

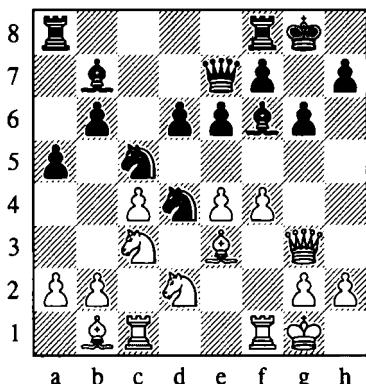
17. $\mathbb{W}e1$

17.e5 fails to create any problems after the forcing continuation: 17...dxe5 18.fxe5 $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xh7\#$ $\mathbb{Q}xh7$ 20. $\mathbb{W}h5\#$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 21. $\mathbb{W}xe5$

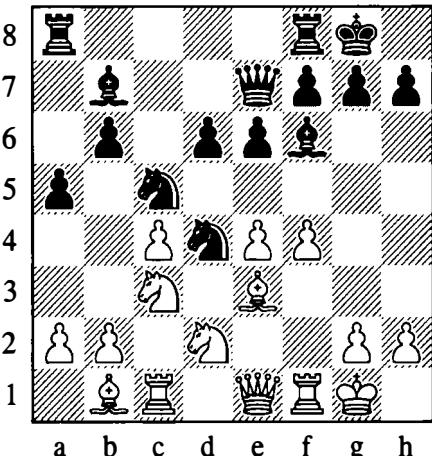


21... $\mathbb{Q}f5!$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{W}xc5\#$ 23. $\mathbb{W}xc5$ bxc5 Black is at least equal thanks to his strong bishop and central pawn majority.

17. $\mathbb{W}g4$ g6 18. $\mathbb{W}g3$



18...a4!! Creating a square for the knight after:
19. $\mathbb{W}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}a5\#$ With pressure on the c4-pawn.

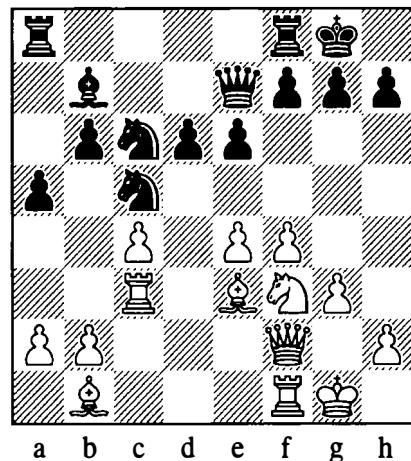


17... $\mathbb{Q}h4!$ 18. g3 $\mathbb{Q}f6$

It is worth losing a tempo to weaken White's light squares. For instance:

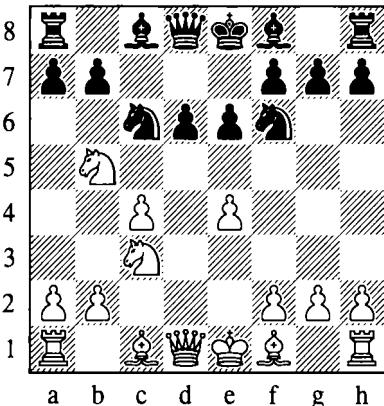
19. $\mathbb{W}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3!$ 21. $\mathbb{E}xc3$

This line was far from forced but I want to show a great positional idea:



21... $\mathbb{Q}b8!!$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}bd7\#$

Transferring the knight to f6 in order to press the weak e4-pawn!

B) 7.♘c3

This is the main line of course.

7...a6

Black should chase the knight away immediately, otherwise ♘f4 will be unpleasant. We will consider the sideline of B1) 8.♘d4 followed by the normal B2) 8.♘a3.

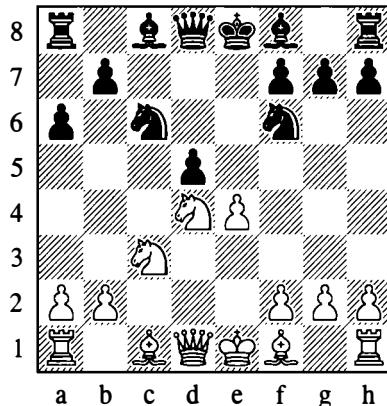
B1) 8.♘d4

I have never really considered this move as a serious option for White, as moving the knight to its previous square at the cost of two tempos feels too slow.

8...d5!?

Black can, of course, get a decent position with normal developing moves. However, I like to adhere to the principle of always carrying out the ...d5 break when the opportunity presents itself.

We will now analyse B11) 9.cxd5 and B12) 9.exd5.

B1 1) 9.cxd5 exd5

Now 10.exd5 or 10.♘xc6 will transpose to lines considered under variation B12 below; but White can also try to exploit the present move order with:

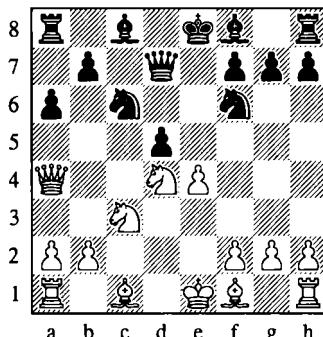
10.♗a4!?

10.♗g5 has been tried a couple of times but after the accurate 10...♗e7! 11.exd5 ♘xd5 12.♘xc6 bxc6 13.♗d2 ♗b8 14.♗a4 ♗b4† Black had won the opening battle in Kudischewitsch – Zifroni, Herzliya 2016.

10...♘d7!?

An interesting pawn sacrifice.

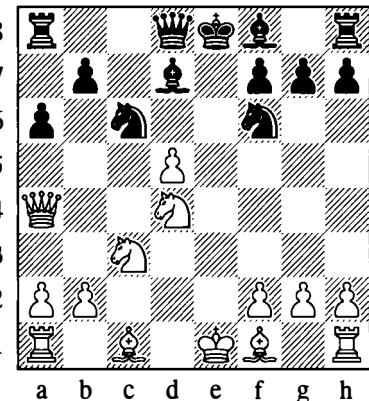
10...♗d7!?N looks like a safe alternative.



If 11.exd5 ♘xd5 12.♘xc6 ♗xc6 13.♗xc6† bxc6 14.♘xd5 cxd5= we reach a position

covered in the 12. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ line in the notes to variation B12 below, but with one less move played.

11. $exd5$

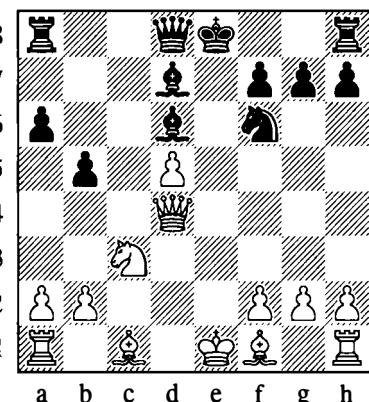


11... b5!N

After 11... $\mathbb{Q}b4$ Black was able to hold the balance in Studen – Costigan, corr. 2014, but the text move is more straightforward for a human to understand.

12. $\mathbb{W}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 13. $\mathbb{W}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$

In return for the pawn, Black has a lead in development, active pieces and a nice blockade on d6. His immediate plan is ...0–0 followed by ... $\mathbb{E}e8$, and later he may consider ... $b4$ to undermine the defence of the d5-pawn.

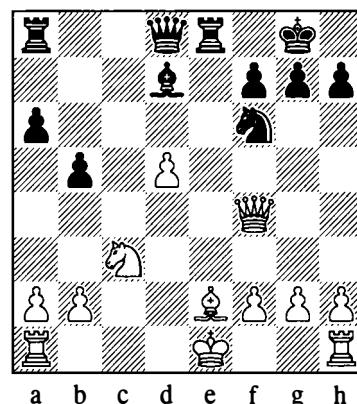


14. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ 0–0 15. $\mathbb{Q}f4$!?

I also considered 15.0–0 $b4$! 16. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 17. $\mathbb{W}xe4$ $\mathbb{E}e8$ 18. $\mathbb{W}f3$ $\mathbb{W}e7$ 19. $\mathbb{E}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}b5$! 20. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{W}e5$ 21. $g3$ (or 21. $\mathbb{W}g3$ $\mathbb{W}xd5$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{W}e6$ =) 21... $\mathbb{W}xb2$ when Black regains the pawn with an equal game.

15... $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ 16. $\mathbb{W}xf4$ $\mathbb{E}e8$

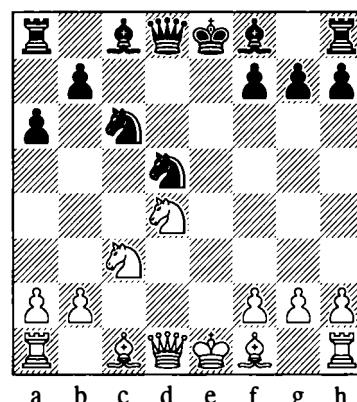
This is not the engine's first choice, but from a human perspective it is enough to show that Black has the safe option of restoring material equality.



17. 0–0 $\mathbb{W}b8$! 18. $\mathbb{W}xb8$ $\mathbb{E}axb8$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $b4$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}b5$!=

Black will soon pick up the d-pawn to reach a drawish endgame.

B12) 9. $exd5$ $exd5$ 10. $cxd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$



11.♕xc6

In Jurcik – Stefansson Prague 2018, the players took a day off by agreeing a draw here. However, it would be a mistake to read too much into this result: as we will see, the position is quite lively.

11...bxc6 12.♗c4!

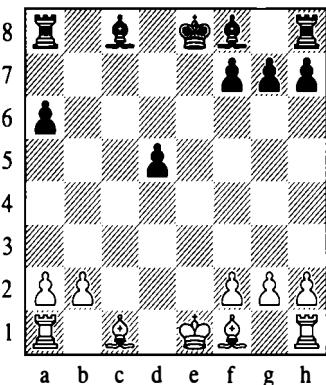
This forces Black to be careful.

There is not much to fear after:

12.♕xd5 ♕xd5!N

After 12...cxd5 13.♔e2 ♔e7 14.0–0 0–0 15.♕e3 ♕b8 16.♕d4= White held a small, risk-free edge in Malakhov – Potkin, Serpukhov 2008. Obviously Black should be able to hold with decent defence, but this is not an ideal outcome from the opening, especially against a non-threatening sideline from White.

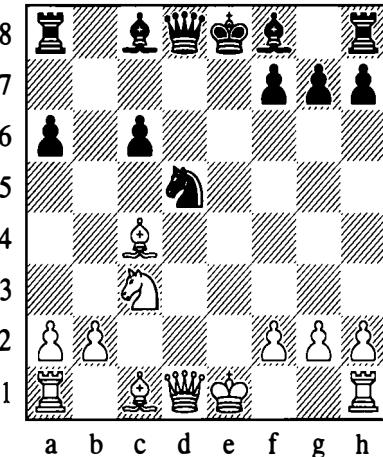
13.♕xd5 cxd5



Black benefits from the queen exchange, since the passed d-pawn is more significant in the endgame. Black has many ways to continue but the simplest is:

14.♔e2 ♔e7 15.0–0 ♔f6!=

Black has an active game with pressure against the b2-pawn, which makes up for the slight weakness of the d5-pawn.



12...♕e7!N

After 12...♕e6 13.♕a4! Black came under some pressure and subsequently fell apart in Koren – Lasic, Zagreb 2005.

13.♔f1?!

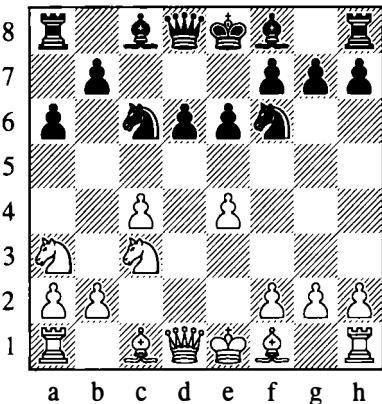
This seems to be White's only real chance to cause problems.

13...♔e6!

The other option for Black is to enter a slightly worse endgame after: 13...♕xc3 14.bxc3 ♔e6 15.♕e2! ♕xc4 16.♕xc4 ♕c5 17.♕e4! ♔e7 18.♔a3! f5! 19.♔xc5 fxе4 Black is marginally worse but he should be able to hold. For instance, 20.♔xe7 ♔xe7 21.♔e1 ♕ab8 22.♔xe4! ♔d6= and Black's activity will secure him the draw; one rook will invade on b2 and the other can go to f8, targeting the f2-pawn.

14.♕xd5 cxd5 15.♔xd5 ♕d7! 16.♔b3 ♕xd1† 17.♔xd1 ♕c5=

Black has excellent compensation for the sacrificed pawn. He will bring his rooks to b8 and d8, and the bishop can go to d4 at the right moment.

B2) 8. $\mathbb{Q}a3$ 

This is the clear main line. There are a few reasons for choosing the a3-square: White keeps control over d5, and the knight overprotects the c4-pawn, anticipating potential counterplay with ... $\mathbb{E}c8$ and ... $\mathbb{Q}e5$. Once White is fully developed, he may look to reroute the knight via c2.

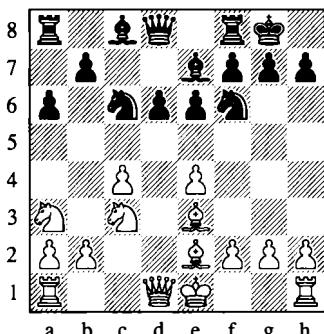
8... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}e2$

Other moves exist, but do not require much attention from us.

After 9. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ 0–0 White hardly has anything better than 10. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ b6 11. 0–0, transposing to the 11. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ line on page 58.

An inferior move order is:

9. $\mathbb{Q}e3$?! 0–0 10. $\mathbb{Q}e2$

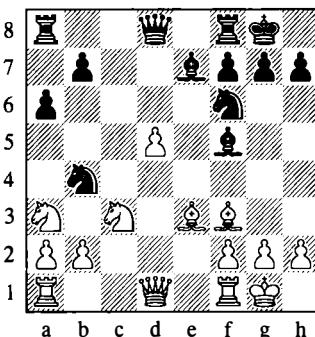


If Black develops normally, we will transpose to the main lines after White castles, so the first player cannot hope to gain anything from this move order. However, he gives Black a great opportunity to fight for the initiative with a thematic pawn sacrifice:

10...d5!

This is a typical break for this variation of the Taimanov, as well as the Maroczy structure in general. Black's main idea, after White captures on d5, is to activate his pieces with moves like ... $\mathbb{Q}b4$, ... $\mathbb{Q}f5$, ... $\mathbb{E}c8$, and possibly ... $\mathbb{Q}d6$ and ... $\mathbb{E}e8$. Sometimes he will recapture the d5-pawn; or he may continue playing for compensation. Another important point is that the a3-knight is out of the game.

11. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{E}xd5$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$
14. 0–0

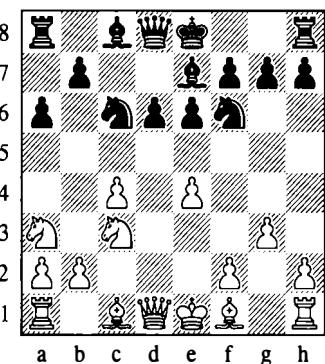


14... $\mathbb{E}c8$! 15. $\mathbb{W}b3$ $b5!$ \mathbb{Q}

We have been following Dahl – Y. Vovk, Fagernes 2016. Black remains a pawn down but his chances are at least equal. His pieces are dominating on the queenside, since the a3-knight cannot move and White lacks the option of a2-a4. Black's plan from here will be to continue with ... $\mathbb{Q}d6$ and try to create play against the enemy king. White only has one piece protecting his king (the f3-bishop) so a logical plan will be to exchange it with ... $\mathbb{Q}g4$ or ... $\mathbb{Q}g4$.

9.g3!?

This is the only really interesting alternative to the main line, but I like the following reply, which echoes variation A1 at the start of the chapter.



9...h5!?

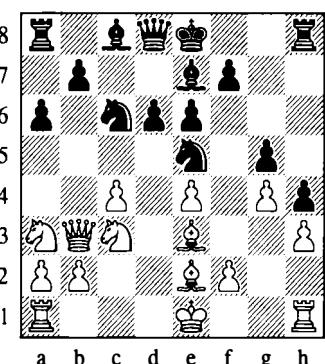
Once again, this strong move has been a surprisingly rare choice.

10.h3

10.♕e2N h4 11.g4 is the engine's strange suggestion. With such weak dark squares in his camp, White cannot dream of being better. A good plan for Black is 11...0–0, with ideas of ...e5, ...h7 and ...g5.

10...h4 11.g4 ♕d7?! 12.♕e3 g5?! 13.♕e2 ♕de5 14.♗b3

So far, Black had methodically taken control over the dark squares in Nastase – Shishkin, Alba Iulia 2016. Here the most accurate continuation would have been:

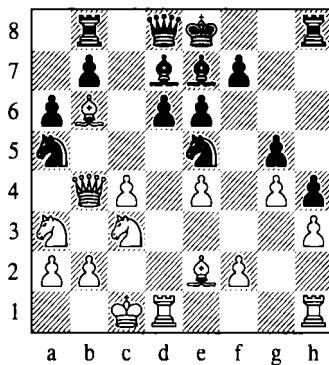


14...♕d7!N

The point is to counter White's plan of castling queenside, as illustrated by the following line.

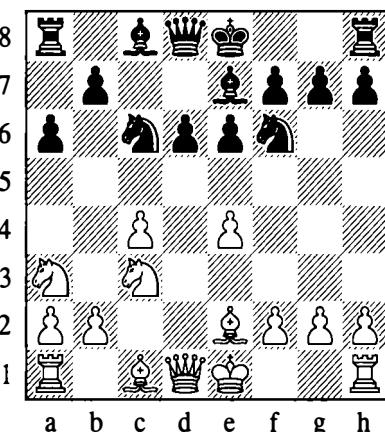
15.0–0–0?! ♔a5! 16.♗b4 ♕b8! 17.♔b6

17.♔b1?! b6† leaves White's queen in jeopardy.



17...♕ac6 18.♗b3 ♕c8 19.♔b1 ♕g6†

Black has the easier play, with ideas of ...♕ce5, ...♕f4 and ...0–0 on the horizon.

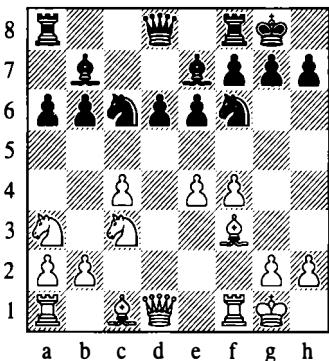


9...0–0 10.0–0 b6

White's best and most popular continuation is 11.♕e3, and we will analyse it separately in the next chapter. Before then, we will consider some lesser, but still quite significant alternatives.

11.♕f4

11.f4 $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ has been tried by several strong players. When White goes for such a set-up, I often favour the following reply:

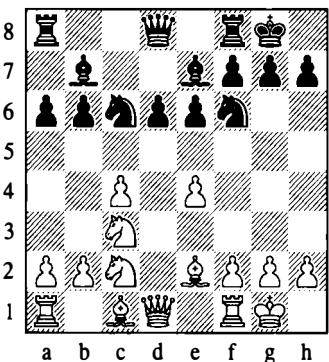


12...e5! Weakening the d5-square but killing the prospects of the bishop on f3. Play may continue 13. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ and Black is slightly better, with ...exf4 and ... $\mathbb{Q}e5$ a tempting plan. The c4-pawn is a permanent weakness and the bishop on f3 is not doing much, to put it mildly.

11. $\mathbb{Q}c2$

Centralizing the knight is reasonably sensible, but not too scary.

11... $\mathbb{Q}b7$



12. $\mathbb{Q}e3$

12. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ is covered on page 62 – see the note on 12. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ at the start of the next chapter. The text move continues White's plan of centralizing the knight and clamping down on the ...d5 break, but his dark-squared

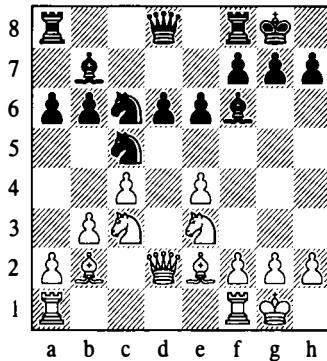
bishop remains undeveloped and the d4-square is weakened.

12... $\mathbb{Q}d7$

For some reason this thematic regrouping has only been played once, but I like it.

13.b3 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 15. $\mathbb{W}d2$

Here I found an interesting, though by no means essential, novelty:



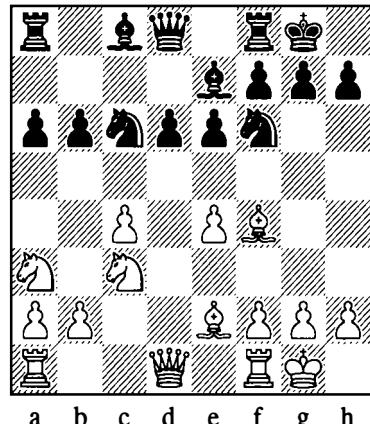
15... $\mathbb{Q}d4!?$ N

15...a5 also gave Black a reasonable position in Gazis – Nikolaou, Athens 2013.

15... $\mathbb{Q}d4!?$ N is another idea.

16. $\mathbb{E}ad1$ $\mathbb{W}g5!?$ 17.f4 $\mathbb{W}h6\rightarrow$

Depending on White's reaction, Black may either win a pawn with ... $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ (since his queen now guards g7 against a potential checkmate) or play ...e5 with pressure in the centre.



Usually White's dark-squared bishop belongs

on e3, so the text move seems like a strange choice to me. Nevertheless, it has achieved a plus score for White, with Anand among the victims. For the moment, Black's plan remains the same as in the main line, as covered in the next chapter.

11... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 12. $\mathbb{W}d2$

I also checked:

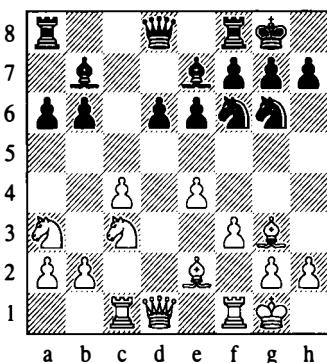
12. $\mathbb{E}c1$?

This has been tried by a few strong players but Black gets a good game by following a typical plan.

12... $\mathbb{Q}e5$! 13.f3

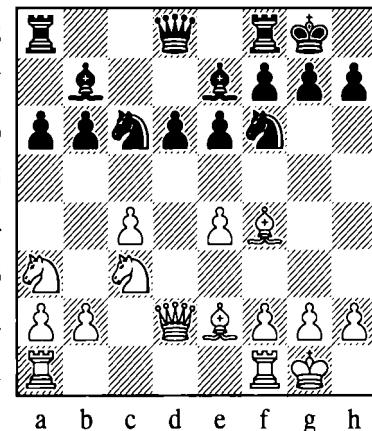
13. $\mathbb{W}d4$? is the only way for White to play for an advantage but I can state from experience that d4 is not the ideal square for the queen in these set-ups! After 13... $\mathbb{W}c7=$ Black had a pleasant game in Kholmov – Kakharov, Volgodonsk 1983. I don't see a convincing plan for White, whereas Black can improve his position with typical moves like ... $\mathbb{E}ac8$, ... $\mathbb{E}f8$ and perhaps ... $\mathbb{Q}ed7$. Depending on circumstances, the knight may also go to c6 or g6 to chase the enemy pieces.

13... $\mathbb{Q}g6$! 14. $\mathbb{E}g3$



14...d5! 15.cxd5 exd5 16.exd5 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$

The position is close to equal but Black has the easier play. All of his pieces are more active and White has slightly weakened his kingside with f2-f3, while the a3-knight is still out of play.



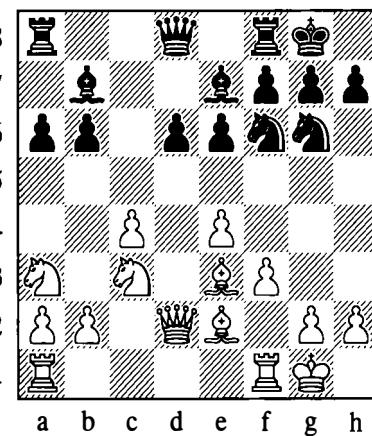
12... $\mathbb{Q}e5$

The typical manoeuvre.

13.f3 $\mathbb{Q}g6$!

13... $\mathbb{W}c7$ led to an eventual defeat for Black in Charbonneau – Anand, Turin (ol) 2006. Of course his position was still fine at this stage but he later got into trouble after – presumably due to an intense desire to win – choosing an ultra-aggressive plan with ... $\mathbb{Q}h8$, ... $\mathbb{E}g8$ and ...g5-g4. I would strongly advise you to avoid this plan, even if you are desperate to win, because Black weakens his own kingside too much and often leaves his queenside unprotected when attacking in this manner.

14. $\mathbb{E}e3$

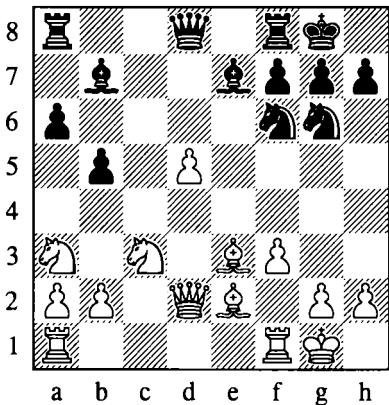


14...d5!N

14... $\mathbb{E}e8$ gave Black a perfectly decent game in Fedorov – Svetushkin, Eforie Nord 2009, but I favour the more direct ...d5 break!

15.cxd5 exd5 16.exd5 b5!

There will be time to recapture the d5-pawn later. First, Black safeguards the b-pawn and plays against the enemy knights on the queenside.

**17... $\mathbb{B}c8!+$**

Threatening d5-d6, but Black has a good response.

17... $\mathbb{B}c8!+$

Black keeps the upper hand; ...b4 is a strong threat and, once Black recaptures on d5, all of his pieces will be more active than their counterparts.

Conclusion

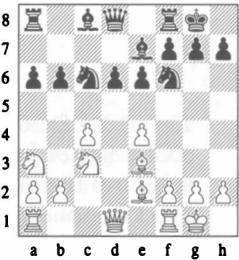
This version of the Maroczy structure offers White some space advantage in the early stages, but it comes at a price as he must waste time misplacing his knight. After 6... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ we considered the sideline 7. $\mathbb{Q}5c3$, which does not offer White much, especially after 7... $\mathbb{E}e7$ 8.g3, when 8...h5! offers Black excellent counterplay.

More common is 7. $\mathbb{Q}1c3$ a6, when White has two options. 8. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ gives Black a lot of freedom. My personal preference is to liquidate the centre immediately with 8...d5, which should equalize convincingly as long as Black knows a few key details. We then began our coverage of the most popular 8. $\mathbb{Q}a3$, and we will move on to analysing the main lines of it in the next chapter.



5. ♜b5

11. ♜e3



Variation Index

**1.e4 c5 2. ♜f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4. ♜xd4 ♜c6 5. ♜b5 d6 6.c4 ♜f6
7. ♜c1 c3 a6 8. ♜a3 ♜e7 9. ♜e2 0-0 10.0-0 b6 11. ♜e3**

11... ♜b7

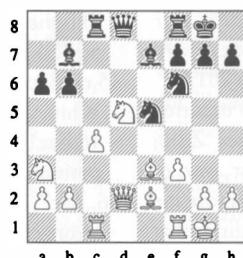
| | |
|--|----|
| A) 12. ♜d2 | 63 |
| B) 12. f4!? | 63 |
| C) 12. f3 ♜e5 13. ♜d4 ♜ed7 14. ♜fd1 ♜e8! | 66 |
| C1) 15. ♜f2 | 67 |
| C2) 15. ♜d2 | 69 |
| D) 12. ♜c1 ♜e5! | 71 |
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| D21) 14. ♜b3 | 74 |
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| E2) 13. ♜fd1 | 80 |

C2) after 19.a3



19... ♜b8!N

D22) after 16. ♜xd5



16... ♜xd5!N

E1) after 17. ♜ab1



17... ♜a7!N

- 1.e4 c5 2.Qf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Qxd4 Qc6
 5.Qb5 d6 6.c4 Qf6 7.Q1c3 a6 8.Qa3 ♜e7
 9.Qe2 0-0 10.0-0 b6 11.Qe3

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, this is the most logical and popular way for White to develop.

11...♞b7

With this move Black develops the last of his minor pieces; although it is worth mentioning that the c6-square is generally not the ideal home for the knight, so in many lines we will see Black transferring this piece via e5 to d7, or occasionally g6.

The database shows that White has tried practically every legal move from this position, but we will focus on the five most plausible and popular options: A) 12.♗d2, B) 12.f4!?, C) 12.♗f3, D) 12.♗c1 and E) 12.♗b3.

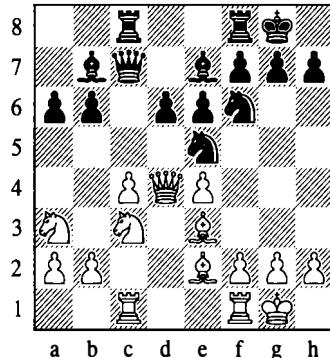
A minor alternative is:

12.Qc2

This is a slight inaccuracy, as White should look to improve his queen and rooks before spending any more time moving the knight around. Nevertheless, it is worth playing through the following examples and analysis as it provides a great example of how Black, when given sufficient time, can organize one or both of his two classic pawn breaks: ...d5 and ...b5.

12...♝c8 13.b3

13.f3 ♜e5 14.Qa4 ♜xc4 15.Qxc4 ♜xc4
 16.Qxb6 ♜c8 17.Qa3 ♜c6 18.Qe3 ♜c7
 19.Qc1 d5 was great for Black in Al Ghamdi – Inarkiev, Riyadh (rapid) 2017.
 13.♗c1 ♜e5 14.♗d4 ♜c7 15.Qa3 occurred in Olszewski – Hnydiuk, Polanica Zdroj 2006. This may be White's best way of playing, but the fact that he had to move the knight back to a3 so soon only confirms that his 12th move was premature.

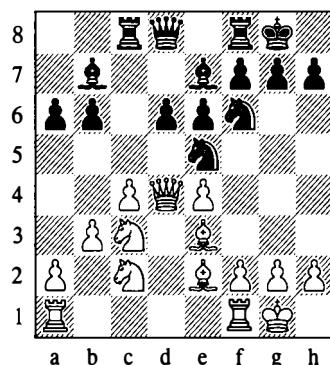


Black has several good options but 15...d5!?!N is the most direct. Play may continue 16.exd5 ♜c5 17.♗d1 ♜xe3 18.fxe3 exd5 19.cxd5 ♜c5 20.Qc2 ♜xd5= and the simplifications result in equality.

13...♝e5 14.♗d4

14.f4 ♜ed7 15.Qd3 b5 was excellent for Black in Ljubicic – Drei, Kastav 1999.

Now in Dardha – Admiraal, Vlissingen 2015, Black missed an excellent opportunity:



14...b5!N

This thematic break is based on the following tactical point.

15.cxb5 axb5 16.Qxb5?!

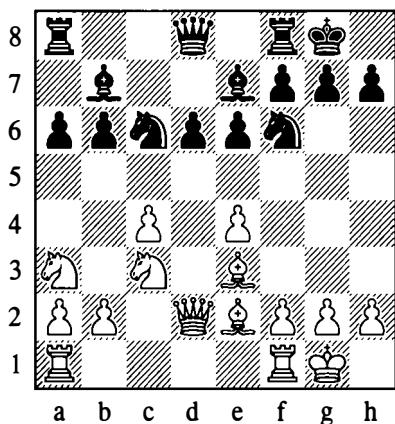
White should prefer something like 16.Qac1, with chances to hold his inferior position.

16...♝c7 17.Qd2 ♜fg4!

Stronger than 17...♜xe4 18.Qxe4 ♜xc2??.

18.Qe3 ♜f6??

White is in trouble.

A) 12.♗d2

This move does not have much independent value, as White's plans remain about the same as in later lines. However, this particular move order gives Black a useful extra resource.

12...♝e5! 13.♗3 d5!

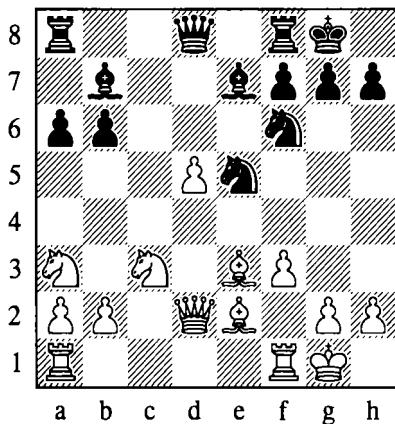
This thematic break effortlessly equalizes.

14.♗xd5

14.cxd5 exd5 will quickly transpose.

14...exd5 15.cxd5

15.♗fd1!? occurred in Fogarasi – Portisch, Hungary 1995. Black has several decent replies but 15...♝xa3!!N 16.bxa3 ♛xc4 17.♗xc4 dxc4 18.♗xd8 ♗fd8 19.♗xb6 ♗d3= seems like the most clear-cut way to prove equality.



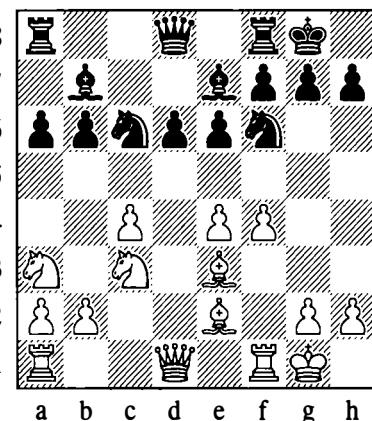
In the fairly recent game Vasquez Schroeder – Shankland, Sitges 2017, the players were already willing to agree a draw after the text move, but we will extend the analysis a little further.

15...♝xd5 16.♗xd5 ♛xd5 17.♗fd1 ♗e6 18.♗xd8

In one of the earliest games to feature 13...d5!, Browne – R. Byrne, San Juan 1969, the players agreed a draw here. However, we will finish the line with a slightly more inspiring example.

18...♗fd8 19.♗xb6 ♗xd1† 20.♗xd1 ♗xa2=

The position remains absolutely equal, but Black eventually ground out a win in Z. Szabo – J. Horvath, Hungary 2001.

B) 12.f4!!

I have always disliked this early show of aggression from White's side, since it leaves the e4-pawn slightly weak. There are many ways for Black to continue but I especially like the following idea.

12...e5!

Amazingly, this move has only been played in one game out of more than a hundred. Despite its rarity, analysis shows that Black's position is excellent.

Of course, a normal developing move such as 12...E8 would be fine as well. Since White will most likely play Qf3 to protect the e4-pawn in the near future, Black can look to exert pressure against the c4-pawn, perhaps with a timely ...Qa5.

13.Qc2!!N

This seems like the most interesting continuation.

The game continued:

13.f5 Qd4!

Black is more than happy to sacrifice a pawn to weaken the enemy dark squares.

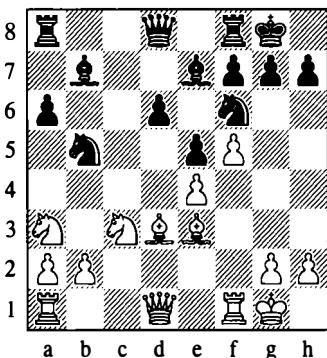
14.Qd3

14.Qxd4 exd4 15.Qd5 (15.Qxd4? d5+) gives Black more than one good continuation. Both 15...Qxd5 16.exd5 Qd7 17.Qxd4 Qf6 18.Qd2 Ee8↑ and 15...Ee8?! 16.Qxd4 Qxd5 17.exd5 Qg5↑ offer Black more than enough play for a pawn.

Instead White sensibly tries to keep things solid, but Black's next move effectively shatters that dream.

14...b5! 15.cxb5 Qxb5!

15...axb5 is a decent alternative which may or may not transpose, but the text move is more forcing.

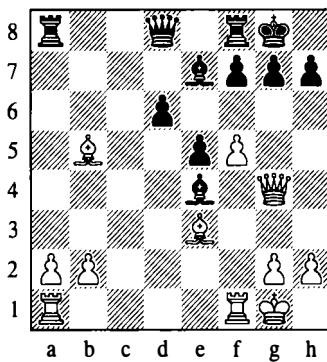


16.Qaxb5

16.Qb3N is the computer's suggestion and may be a better try, but 16...Qxc3 17.Qxb7

Eb8 18.Qc6 Ec8 19.Qxa6 Qcxe4+ is still excellent for Black.

16...axb5 17.Qxb5 Qxe4 18.Qxe4 Qxe4 19.Qg4



19...d5!N

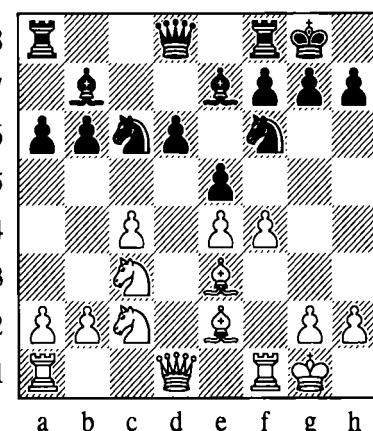
19...Qb7? led to a swift reversal of fortunes after 20.Qh6, when Black was under pressure and went on to lose in D. Coleman – Stebbings, London 1985. The text move is an obvious improvement.

20.a4

20.Qh6?? now loses to 20...Qb6† of course.

20...f6†

Black's central pawns are far more influential than White's queenside ones.



13...exf4 14.Qxf4

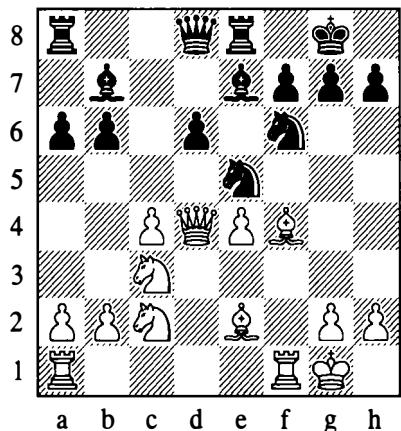
After 14.Qxf4 Qe5 15.Qd4 Ec8 16.Qaf1 Qc7! it is impossible for White to protect the c4-pawn.

14...♞e5

The knight takes up an ideal outpost, while reminding us of the drawback of White's 12th move: the e4-pawn is forever weak!

15.♗d4 ♞e8

At first I thought that 15...♞c6?! might be a way to force the queen back to f2 or d1, with a repetition of moves to follow. However, aside from the fact that an early draw will not suit everyone, White can avoid it with 16.♗e3!, and if 16...d5 (my original idea) 17.♗f3! dxе4 18.♗g3 White has a lot of activity for the pawn and Black has to be slightly careful, although his position remains playable.

**16.♘e3**

I also considered 16.♗ad1 ♞g6 17.♗c1?! (17.♗e3 ♜c8! also leads to a double-edged battle, with ...♗e6 possibly coming next) 17...♜c8 with the simple idea of ...♗c7-c5. If White plays b2-b4 to control the c5-square, he will have to reckon on the possibility of ...♞e5 to attack the c4-pawn.

The text move is an active try for White, who intends to transfer his knight to f5 as quickly as possible.

16...♞g6 17.♗f5 ♗xf4 18.♗xf4 ♛f8!

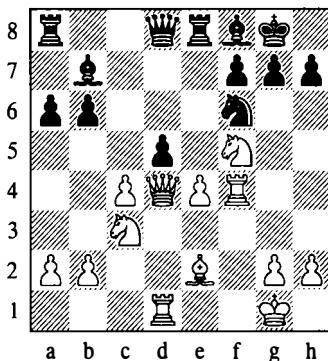
Intending ...d5.

19.♕h6†?!

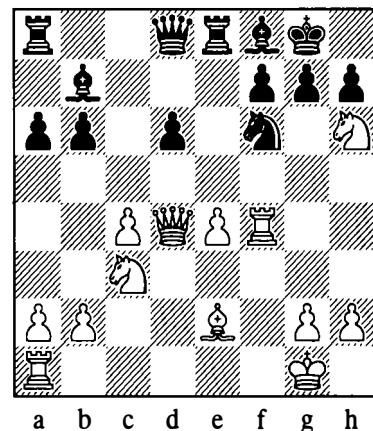
The most forcing. I checked two other ideas:

19.♕h1?! is too slow and allows Black to stabilize with: 19...g6! 20.♗g3 ♛d7† Black's dark-squared bishop is powerful and he can easily improve his position with moves like ...♗g7, ...♞e5, ...♝c8 and perhaps ...h5-h4.

19.♗d1 can be met by 19...d5! threatening ...♞c5, when my analysis continues:



20.♔h1 ♛c7 21.♕h6† ♕h8 22.♗xf6 gxf6 23.♗xf6† ♜g7 24.♗xf7† ♜g8 25.♗h6†= The game should end in perpetual check.

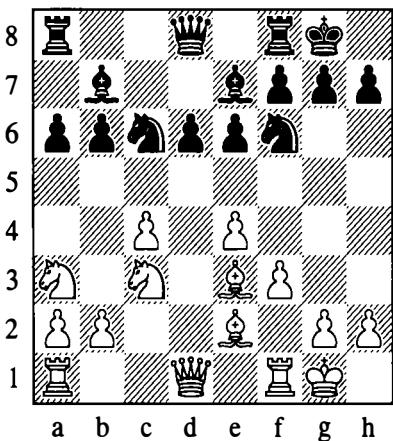
**19...gxh6 20.♗xf6 ♜xf6 21.♗xf6 ♜ad8†?**

Black's bishop pair and more active pieces fully compensate for his ruined kingside structure.

Instead 21... $\mathbb{Q}g7$!?, 22. $\mathbb{B}xd6$ $\mathbb{B}ad8$! 23. $\mathbb{B}ad1$ $\mathbb{B}xd6$ 24. $\mathbb{B}xd6$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 25. $\mathbb{B}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$

$\mathbb{Q}xe4$ is a forcing route to an endgame which should be drawn with decent play, but where White's favourable pawn structure enables him to play on for a while without taking any risk.

C) 12.f3



When I was first taught how to play the Maroczy structure from White's side, I was strongly advised that I should put my pawn on f3 in order to support the e4-pawn. At the time of writing (roughly thirteen years later!), I still believe this to be generally true. In this specific case, it is a safer and better choice than the previous line with f2-f4.

12... $\mathbb{Q}e5$

This move is a typical part of our plan in this structure. The knight unblocks the b7-bishop and prepares to drop back to d7, or occasionally g6, if needed.

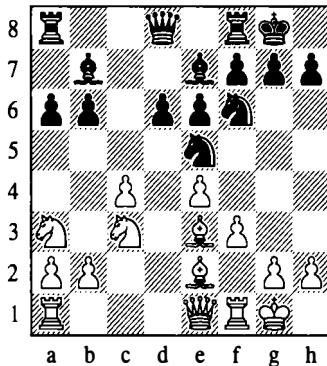
13. $\mathbb{W}d4$

Other possibilities either transpose elsewhere or are less challenging. For instance:

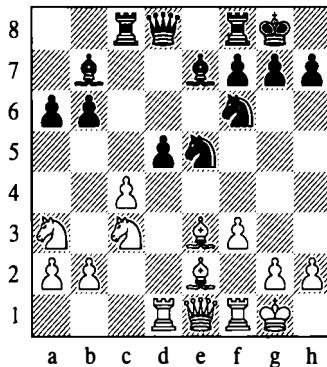
13. $\mathbb{W}d2$ leads back to variation A, where it was shown that 13...d5! equalizes easily.

13. $\mathbb{E}c1$ transposes to variation D2 on page 74.

13. $\mathbb{W}e1$ has been played in several high-level games. White's idea is to transfer the queen to f2 in order to develop pressure against b6. Surprisingly, nobody has yet found the following resource:



13...d5!N Once again, I believe Black should go for the central break. 14. $\mathbb{exd}5$ $\mathbb{exd}5$ 15. $\mathbb{E}d1$ Presumably players have been put off by the pin along the d-file, but Black can simply ignore it and continue developing with 15... $\mathbb{E}c8$. A logical continuation is:



16. $f4$ $\mathbb{Q}ed7$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 18. $cxd5$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$!
19. $d6$ $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{E}c6$ = The fact that White has weakened his light squares with f3-f4 compensates for Black's loss of the bishop pair.

13. $\mathbb{W}b3$

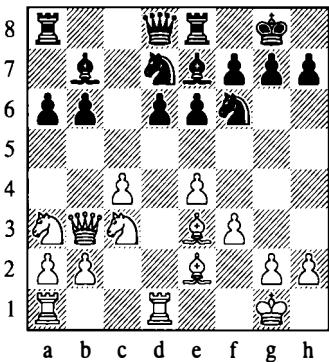
This resembles the more popular $\mathbb{W}b3$ plan covered in variation E, but here Black can arrange his knights in a different way.

13... $\mathbb{Q}ed7$

13...b5?!N is an interesting pawn sacrifice; after 14.cxb5 axb5 15. $\mathbb{Q}axb5$ d5 ∞ Black has reasonable compensation. I will leave it for readers to investigate this in more detail if they wish.

14. $\mathbb{E}fd1$ $\mathbb{E}e8$

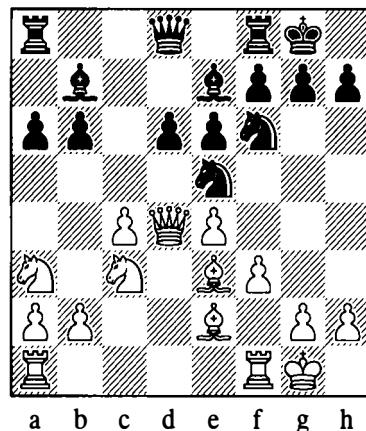
Black can also start with 14... $\mathbb{E}c8$ or 14... $\mathbb{W}c7$; the exact move order doesn't matter too much. By the way, it may not look as if the rook is doing anything useful on e8, but it can make a big difference to the effectiveness of a future ...d5 break.

15. $\mathbb{E}ac1$ $\mathbb{E}c8$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{W}c7\infty$

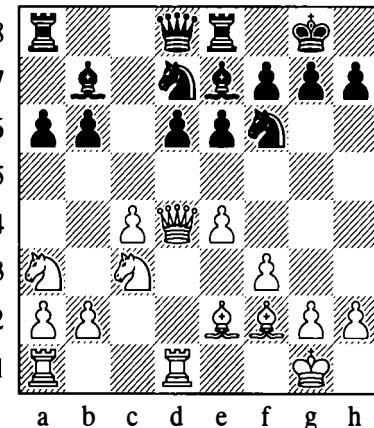
Both sides have developed their pieces to good squares. Black will follow up with ... $\mathbb{W}b8$ and perhaps ... $\mathbb{W}a8$, while White generally resorts to prophylactic measures such as $\mathbb{Q}h1$ and $\mathbb{Q}g1$, anticipating any tactics in the centre. Beyond that, it is hard to suggest an obvious way for either side to improve their position. In general though, Black should remain vigilant about attacks on the b6-pawn, while White must watch out for the pawn breaks of ...b5 and especially ...d5.

At first I believed the text move to be harmless, since it helps Black to regroup his knight to a

better square. Nevertheless, it has been tried by several strong players and forces Black to arrange his pieces slightly differently from my recommended set-up in the other main lines seen in variations E1 and E2.

13... $\mathbb{Q}ed7$ 14. $\mathbb{E}fd1$ $\mathbb{E}e8$!

Black is preparing the customary ...d5 break. It seems to me that White has two main ways to prepare for it: C1) 15. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ and C2) 15. $\mathbb{W}d2$.

C1) 15. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ 15... $\mathbb{E}c8$!

One last preparatory move before the big break.

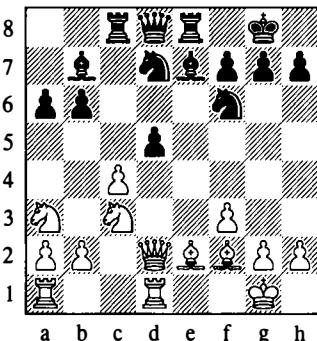
16. $\mathbb{Q}f1$

I also checked:

16. $\mathbb{W}d2$ $d5!$

The typical pawn sacrifice is so effective here that White could easily get into trouble if he accepts it.

17. $exd5$ $exd5$



18. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$

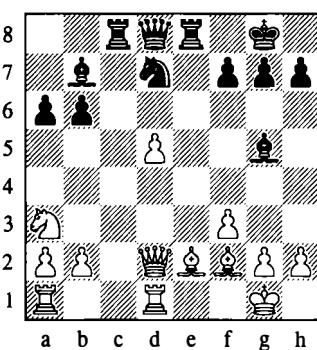
18. $cxd5?$ fails due to the simple tactic:

18... $\mathbb{Q}xa3$ 19. $bxa3$ $\mathbb{B}xc3!$ 20. $\mathbb{W}xc3$ $\mathbb{B}xe2\#$

18. $\mathbb{Q}f1?$ is one of the engine's top choices, which says something about the effectiveness of our pawn sacrifice. 18... $\mathbb{Q}xa3$ is the simplest reply, though course Black has other reasonable moves. (18... $\mathbb{Q}d6$ is a thematic alternative, playing for compensation after White takes on d5) 19. $bxa3$ $dxc4$ 20. $\mathbb{B}ab1$ $\mathbb{B}e6=$ White has some compensation for the pawn but no advantage; Black can unpin with ... $\mathbb{W}f8$ or ... $\mathbb{W}c7$, and the passed c-pawn is strong.

18... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 19. $cxd5$ $\mathbb{Q}g5!$

Once again, Black takes advantage of White's weakness along the e-file.

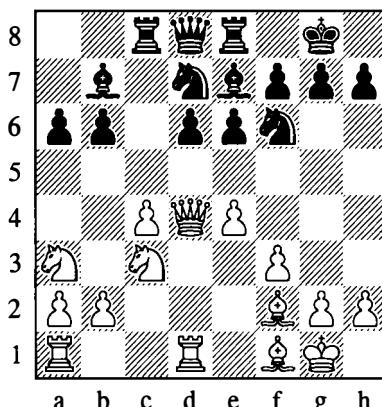


20. $f4$

After 20. $\mathbb{W}e1$ $b5!\#$ White is virtually paralysed, with several of his pieces out of play. Black can continue with ... $g6$, ... $\mathbb{Q}f6-e5$ and ... $\mathbb{W}g5$, creating serious threats against White's king.

20... $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ 21. $\mathbb{W}xf4$ $\mathbb{B}xe2\#$

Black has regained the pawn while keeping the upper hand in piece activity and king safety.



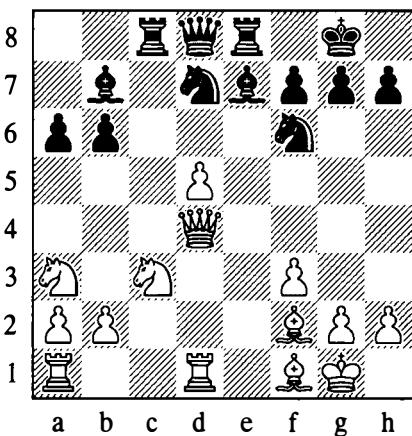
16... $d5?N$

The quieter 16... $\mathbb{W}c7$ was seen in U. Nielsen – Kruszynski, Lyngby 1989, and there is nothing wrong with such a move if you are in the mood for a slower-paced game.

Once again though, I favour the active approach. Remember, the ... $d5$ break is our most important source of counterplay in this structure.

17. $cxd5$ $exd5$ 18. $exd5$

White can also trade a pair of knights with: 18. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 19. $exd5$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 20. $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{B}e5!$ Going actively after the d-pawn. 21. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{B}xc5$ 22. $d6$ (22. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{B}exd5$ 23. $\mathbb{W}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ is fine for Black) 22... $b5!$ Keeping the knight out of the d6-pawn; the one I like most is ... $\mathbb{Q}f8$ followed by one of the rooks to d5.

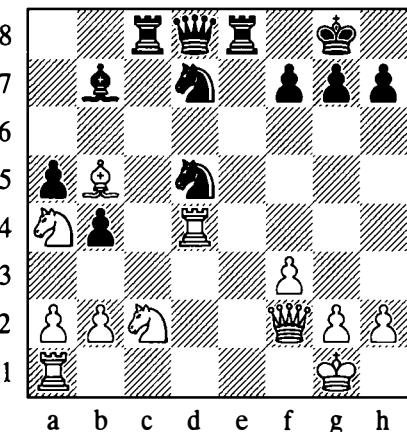


18...♜c5 19.♝d2 b5!

Threatening ...b4 and going after the d5-pawn.

20.♞xc5

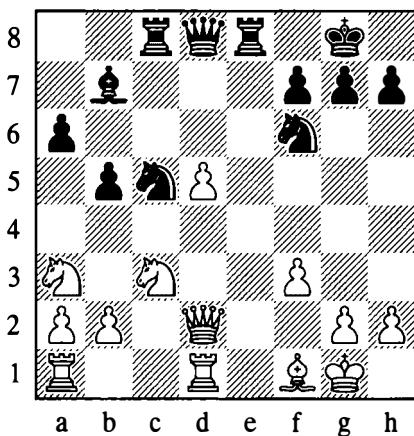
The alternative is: 20.♛c2 b4! 21.♚a4 ♜xf2† 22.♝xf2 ♛xd5 23.♝d4 a5 24.♝b5



24...♝e6!= Unpinning the d7-knight. Black will continue with ...♞f6 and ...♝e7, with a pleasant game.

20...♞xc5

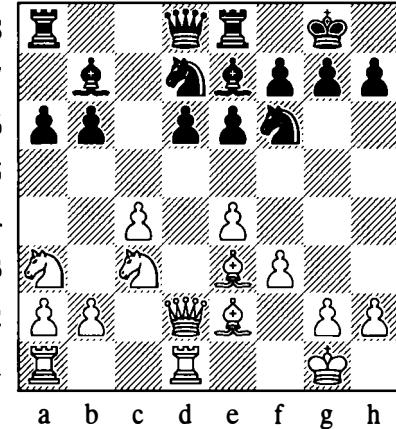
20...♞xc5?! is also playable, intending ...♝b8-d6. If White advances his pawn to d6, Black can collect it with ...♝c6 and ...♝e6.



21.♝d4 ♜b6=

Black will continue with ...♝ed8 and ...♞cd7, exchanging the queens and transferring the knight to b6, so it is highly likely that White's extra pawn will soon fall.

C2) 15.♝d2



15...d5!

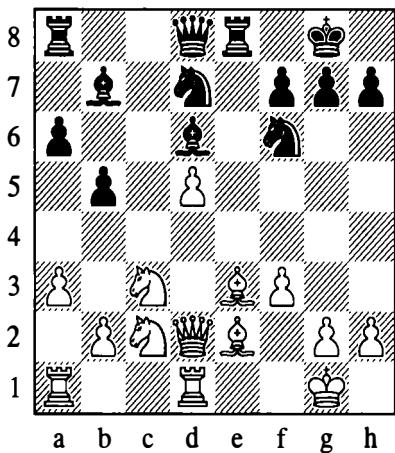
15...♝c8 was seen in Kramnik – Svidler, Dortmund 2005. In that game Black drew fairly comfortably after arranging the ...d5 break a few moves later, but it would have been even more convincing to play it immediately.

16.cxd5 exd5 17.exd5 b5

By now, we have seen so many examples of this type of position that Black's compensation

requires little explanation. In this particular case, an especially attractive plan is to target the kingside dark squares as follows.

18.Qc2 Qd6 19.a3



19...Wb8!N

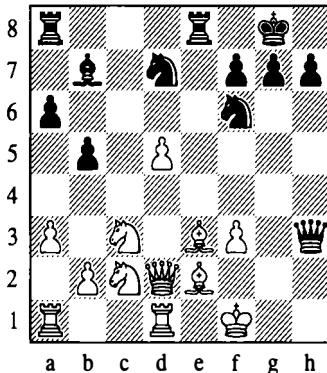
This novelty improves over 19...Wc7, when 20.Qh1! defended h2 indirectly in Naiditsch – L. Milov, Griesheim 2002. The text move is directed against this resource.

19...Qb6 led to an eventual victory for Black in the later game S. Peter – L. Milov, Selestat 2006, but 20.Qb4!N would have challenged Black's plan of recapturing on d5.

20.f4

The main point of Black's last move is seen after 20.Qh1? Wxh2† when d5-d6 does not win a piece for White.

20.g3 gives Black the option of forcing a draw: 20...Wxg3 (20...Qc5!W is also playable if Black wishes to keep the game going) 21.hxg3 Wxg3† 22.Qf1 Wh3†



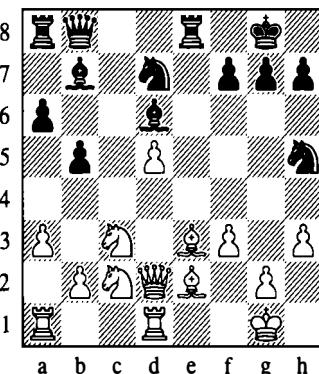
23.Qg1 (23.Qf2? avoids the perpetual but 23...Wh2† 24.Qe5 Qe5 is close to winning for Black) 23...Wg3†=

20.h3

This avoids an immediate draw but seriously weakens the dark squares.

20...Qh5!

With the immediate threat of ...Wh2† and ...Qg3†(†).

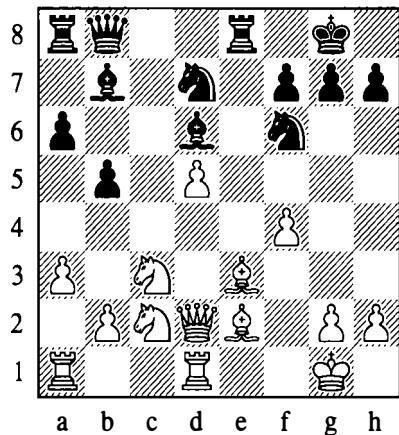


21.Qf2

White does not have much choice.

21...Qdf6=

Against virtually any move, Black will continue 22...Wh2† 23.Qh1 Qg3† 24.Qxg3 Wxg3, followed by infiltrating with the other knight on the dark squares. Black obviously has at least enough compensation for the pawn.

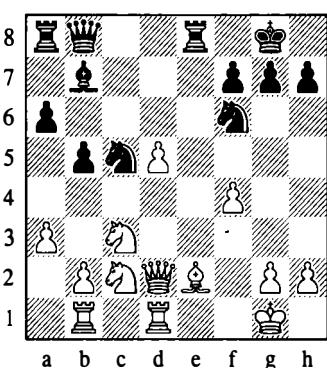


20...♞c5!?

This is a logical reaction to White's last move. The immediate threat is ...♝xf4.

21.♝d4!

21.♝xc5?! ♜xc5 helps to activate Black's pieces; he already threatens a fork on b3. 22.♝ab1

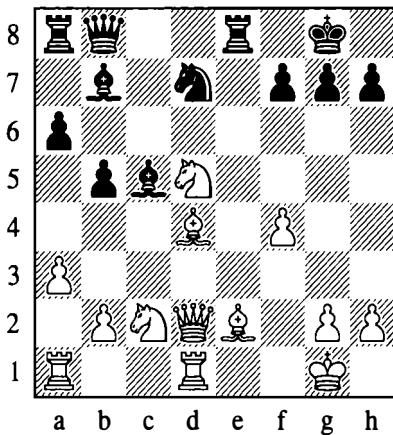


22...♝b3! (22...♞ce4 23.♝xe4 ♜xe4 24.♝d4 ♜xf4= is a safe way to regain the pawn but the text move is more accurate) 23.♝el ♜xf4= Black's pieces are more active and the d-pawn remains vulnerable.

21...♜xd5!

Regaining the pawn, thanks to some simple tactics.

22.♜xd5



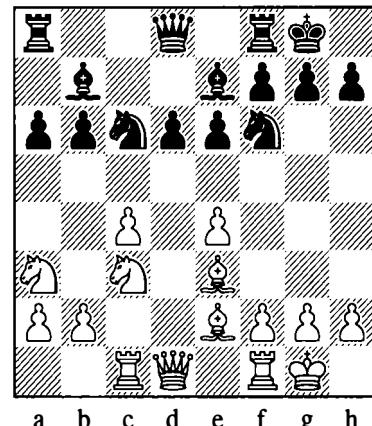
22...♝xd4†!

A vital intermediate move, once again highlighting the importance of the open e-file.

23.♝xd4 ♜xd5 24.♝xb5 ♜xb5 25.♝xd5 ♜xb2=

With a balanced position.

D) 12.♝cl



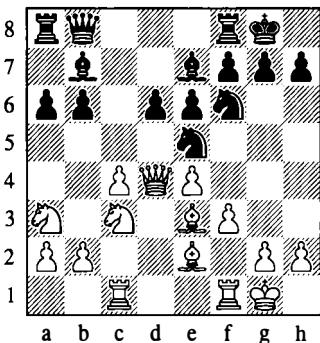
12...♞e5!

With this thematic move, Black attacks the e4-pawn and aims to transfer the knight to a more effective square than c6.

We will analyse two contrasting approaches:

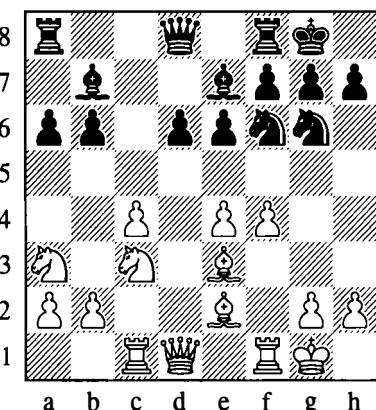
D1) 13.f4 and D2) 13.f3.

13. $\mathbb{W}d4$ can be met by 13... $\mathbb{W}b8!N$ (rather than the frequently played 13... $\mathbb{Q}ed7$) when White is not really threatening to take on b6, since the e4-pawn is hanging. Keeping the knight on e5 gives Black some extra options, a good example of which can be seen after: 14. f3



14...d5!! Yet again, this move works well. 15. cxd5 exd5 16. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 17. exd5 $\mathbb{A}c5$ 18. $\mathbb{W}c3$ (18. $\mathbb{A}xc5!?$ bxc5 19. $\mathbb{W}xc5$ $\mathbb{E}c8!$ 20. $\mathbb{W}d4$ $\mathbb{E}d8$ 21. $\mathbb{A}f4$ $\mathbb{E}xd5$ offers White decent compensation for the exchange, but not enough to claim any advantage) 18... $\mathbb{A}xe3\#$ 19. $\mathbb{W}xe3$ $\mathbb{E}xd5$ Black has equalized.

D1) 13. f4 $\mathbb{Q}g6$

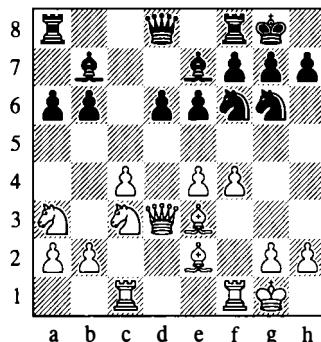


White's centre is rather loose, and we will see how Black can exploit it.

14. $\mathbb{W}c2$

I checked two other options:

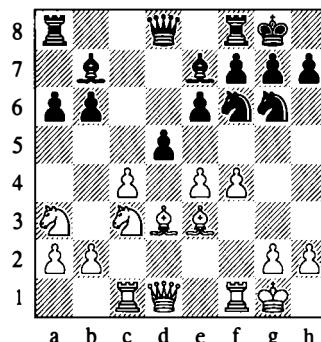
14. $\mathbb{W}d3$ was seen in Sengupta – Neelotpal, Mumbai 2011, when 14... $\mathbb{W}c7$ led to a normal kind of position. I believe it is more promising to challenge White's central pawns with:



14...e5!N 15. f5 (after 15. g3 exf4 16. gxf4 White's pawns look more weak than strong after 16... $\mathbb{E}e8$ or 16... $\mathbb{Q}d7$) 15... $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ exf4 17. $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}ff1$ $\mathbb{E}c8\#$ Black has fantastic compensation due to his control over the dark squares and the weakness of the e4-pawn. The computer calls it equal but in a practical game Black has the better chances, and can easily improve his position with moves like ... $\mathbb{E}e8$, ... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ (or ... $\mathbb{Q}e5$) and ... $\mathbb{Q}f6$.

14. $\mathbb{Q}d3$

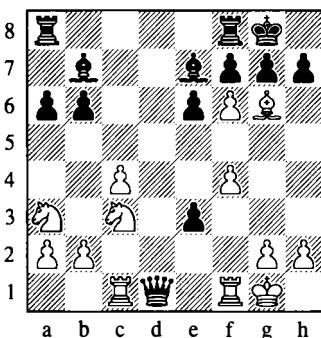
This natural-looking move is well met by: 14...d5!



15.e5!?

The critical reply, but the ensuing complications are certainly not unfavourable for Black.

15...d4! 16.♕xg6 dxe3 17.exf6 ♜xd1

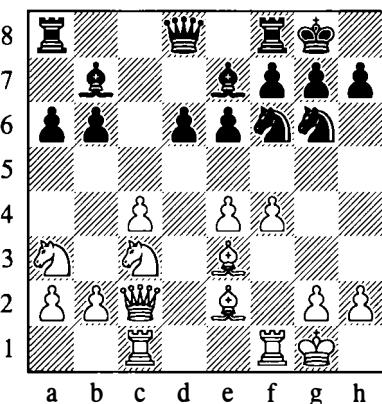


18.fxe7?!

After the correct 18.♕fd1N ♜xa3! 19.♕xf7+ ♜xf7 20.bxa3 ♜xf6 Black has an optical advantage due to his better pawn structure and bishop versus knight, but the game should end in a draw.

18...♛d2 19.♕c2 ♛d4 20.exf8=♛ ♜xf8=♛

Black's queen and pawns were stronger than White's pieces in Piculjan – Ketola, corr. 2004, and the rest of the game was a model demonstration of how to convert such an advantage.



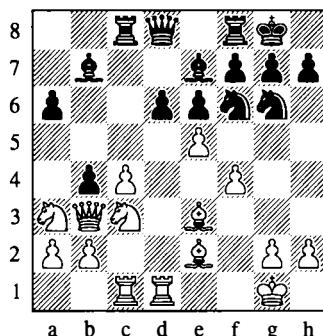
14...♝c8!

Introducing the idea of ...b5. The drawbacks of the f2-f4 advance are becoming clear, and White has to find some accurate moves.

15.♗b1

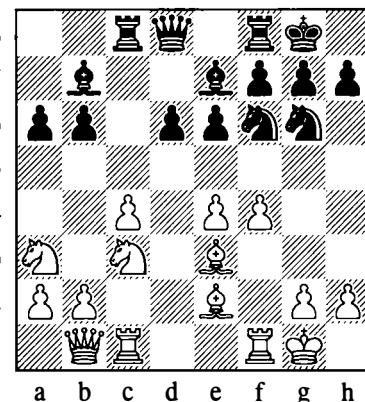
Moving the queen off the c-file looks natural, but it does not fully solve White's problems.

15.♗fd1!N looks more accurate although 15...b5?! leads to complications which are not unfavourable to Black: 16.e5 b4! 17.♗b3



17...♜a5! 18.exf6 ♜xf6 19.♕c2 bxc3 20.♗xb7 cxb2 21.♗b1 ♜xa2=♛ Black's three pawns are at least a match for White's extra piece, especially since one of them is on b2.

We have been following Salem – Wojtaszek, Tromso (ol) 2014, where Black played 15...♜c7. Instead he could have caused more immediate problems with the following central hit:

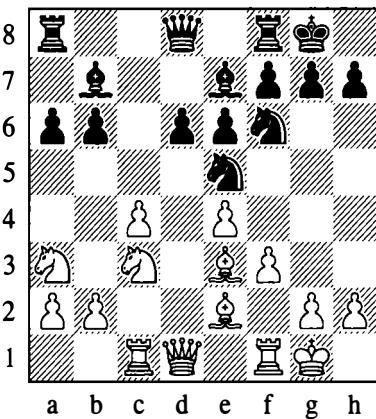


15...d5!N 16.e5

16.cxd5 exd5 (16...b5?! is also good) 17. $\mathbb{E}fd1$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{E}xc5$ also favours Black.

16... $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $dxe4$ 18. $\mathbb{E}cd1$ $\mathbb{W}c7\#$

Black will regroup with ... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ and then ... $\mathbb{Q}e7-f5$.

D2) 13.f3**13... $\mathbb{E}c8$**

In most games, White has proceeded with one of the following queen moves: D21) 14. $\mathbb{W}b3$ or D22) 14. $\mathbb{W}d2$.

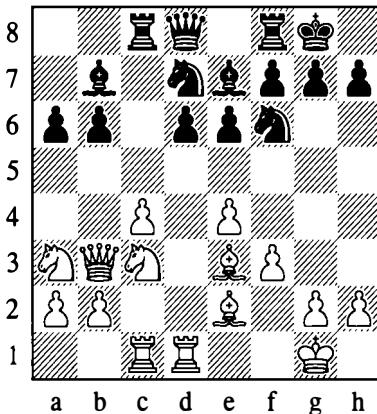
14. $\mathbb{W}e1$?! d5! was excellent for Black in Douthwaite – Martel, Canada 1985.

D21) 14. $\mathbb{W}b3$

This has been played in several games, but never at GM level according to the database. White's set-up is similar to the main 12. $\mathbb{W}b3$ line from variation E, but Black will have to regroup his knights in a different way.

14... $\mathbb{Q}ed7$ 15. $\mathbb{E}fd1$

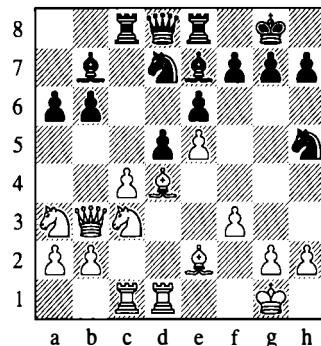
In most games Black has continued 15... $\mathbb{W}c7$ with a decent position, but I found a strong novelty.

**15... $\mathbb{E}e8$!N**

It is now impossible for White to prevent the ...d5 break, since both of his bishops are liable to be under strong pressure.

16. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ **16. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ d5! 17. e5 $\mathbb{Q}h5$!**

Heading for f4. Moving the knight to the edge of the board is not to be taken lightly, but Black has enough dynamic resources to justify the decision.

**18.g3 $\mathbb{Q}h4$!!**

There are other decent moves for Black, but who could resist the chance to play this one?

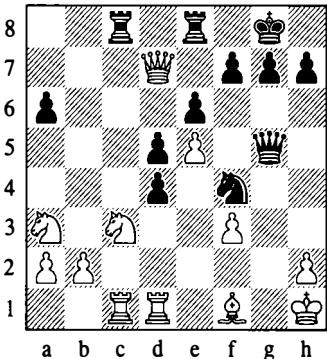
19. gxh4 $\mathbb{W}xh4$

Engines evaluate the position as 0.00 but, honestly, who wouldn't prefer Black's position?

20. c5!?

White is trying to keep the a8-h1 diagonal closed.

20...♘f4 21.♗f1 bxc5 22.♗xb7 cxd4 23.♗xd7 ♗g5† 24.♔h1

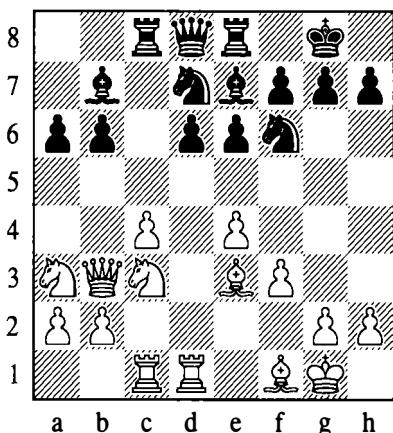


24...♗h5! 25.♗g2 ♗g5 26.♗g1

26.♗f1=

26...♗ed8 27.♗a4 dxc3 28.♗xc3 ♗xc3 29.bxc3 ♗xe5≈

This line was not forced as Black had many other options along the way, but it's a good illustration of how things could play out.



16...d5! 17.cxd5 exd5 18.♗xd5

18.exd5?? loses to 18...♗xa3 as the e3-bishop hangs.

18...♗xd5!

Black can cause his opponent more problems with a knight than the light-squared bishop.

18...♗xd5 is also playable but after 19.♗xc8? (rather than 19.exd5?! ♗xc1! 20.♗xc1 b5 followed by ...♘f6 and picking up the d5-pawn) 19...♗xc8 20.exd5 Black has to be accurate to find sufficient counterplay.

19.exd5 ♗xc1 20.♗xc1

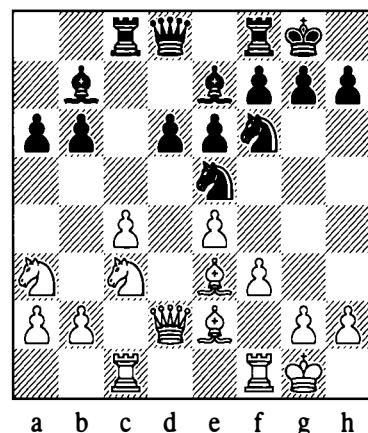
An alternative of roughly equal merit is: 20.♗xc1 b5 Intending ...♘c5. 21.d6 (Or 21.♔h1 ♗d6 22.g3 ♗b6 23.♗g2 h5≈ intending ...h4, aiming to create targets on the dark squares.) 21...♗f8 22.♗c2 ♗e6= Black regains the d-pawn and White's bishop pair is nothing special.

20...♘c5 21.♗c2 ♗xd5 22.♗f2 ♗b4 23.♗b1 ♗e6≈

Black intends ...♘c5 next, and his knights will find good squares in the centre.

D22) 14.♗d2

Yet again, we will adhere to the principle of carrying out our thematic central pawn break when it works.



14...d5!

This is virtually a novelty, having only been played by an 1800 player in an otherwise unimportant rapid game in 2018.

It is true that Black can also play a waiting game and improve his pieces in a noncommittal way, which is how many GMs have handled the position. In an ideal world, this might lead to an opportunity to execute the ...d5 break under better conditions, but the risk is that White may be able to take control of the game if he plays accurately.

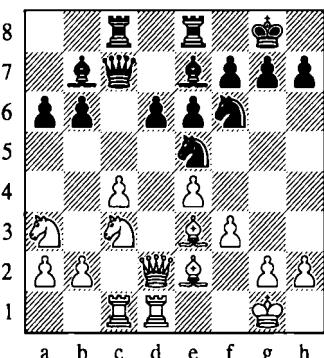
14...Wc7

This has been the most common continuation and it has scored well for Black. I will present my analysis of it, to show why I believe Black should deviate from it with my main line.

15.Qfd1 Qfe8

As I mentioned earlier, this tends to be the best square for the rook, having in mind a potential ...d5 break which could lead to an open e-file.

15...Qh8 has been tried by some strong players, preparing the attacking plan of ...Bg8 and ...g5-g4. I would like to repeat the earlier advice from the previous chapter (see page 59), which is that this plan should almost always be avoided! It usually proves to be too slow and it only helps White to gain control of the centre and queenside, while the chances of smashing through along the g-file are slim if White plays sensibly.



16.Qa4!

A slower continuation such as 16.Qf1 Wb8

17.Qh1 allows 17...d5! Nf2 when Black should be fine.

16...Qfd7

16...Qed7 was played in Kelbl – Verstreken, email 2007, when 17.b4N Wb8 18.Qf4! would have been a good way to prevent ...d5.

17.b3

In the event of 17.b4 Wb8 it is hard for White to prevent ...d5.

17...Wb8N

This is the most thematic move.

17...Qg6 was played in Tikkannen – Schekachikhin, Stockholm 2016, and now 18.Qc2N± seems most logical.

18.Qc2!

Avoiding any discovered attack after ...d5.

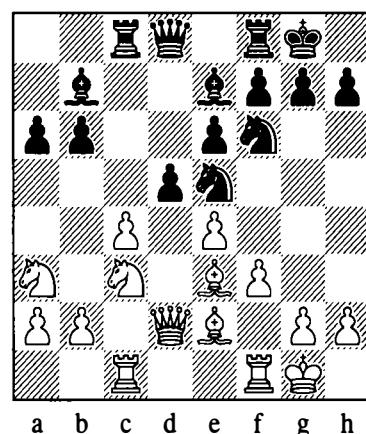
18...Qa8

Since White's last move reduced his control over the b5-square, it seems natural to prepare ...b5.

18...d5? has no chance of working effectively here; 19.exd5 exd5 20.f4 Qg6 21.Qg4± is one good reply.

19.Qc3±

White continues to prevent the two main pawn breaks.



15.exd5

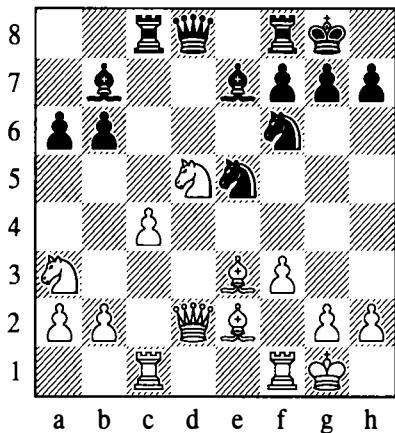
15.cxd5N is a marginal improvement although Black has nothing to fear. 15...exd5 16.Qxd5 Black has two reasonable moves:

a) 16...Qxd5 17.Qxc8 (17.exd5 transposes to

the Kruszynski – Marczak game below, where it is noted that 17... $b5\bar{N}\infty$ is reasonable for Black) 17... $\mathbb{W}xc8$ 18. $exd5$ $b5\bar{\infty}$ Black has good play for the pawn.

b) 16... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xc8$ (17. $exd5$ transposes to our main line below) 17... $\mathbb{W}xc8$ 18. $exd5$ gives White a minutely better version of the main line, but 18... $b5$ 19. $d6$ $\mathbb{Q}d8=$ is still fine for Black.

15... $exd5$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$



16... $\mathbb{Q}xd5!N$

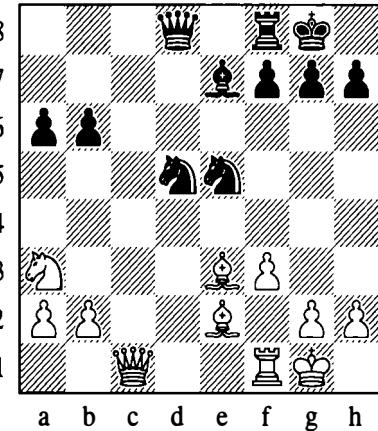
This is another of those moments where I prefer to trade off the bishop and keep the knight.

That said, there is nothing wrong with 16... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 17. $cxd5$ as in Kruszynski – Marczak, Katowice 2018, when 17... $b5\bar{N}\infty$ would have given Black decent play. (In the game Black erred with 17... $\mathbb{Q}xa3?$ when White was clearly better.)

17. $cxd5$ $\mathbb{B}xc1$ 18. $\mathbb{W}xc1$

18. $\mathbb{B}xc1?$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ (19. $\mathbb{Q}f2?? \mathbb{Q}g5!+$ is an important detail) 19... $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 20. $\mathbb{W}xd8$ $\mathbb{B}xd8$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 22. $\mathbb{B}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}d4!$ leads to an endgame where White will suffer.

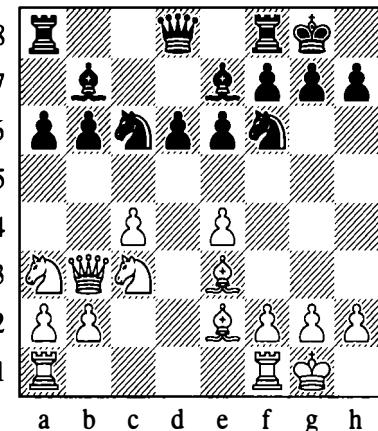
18... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$



19. $\mathbb{B}d1$ $\mathbb{W}a8!!\bar{c}$

The position remains about equal but I really wanted to show this attractive unpinning manoeuvre. Black will continue with moves like ... $b5$ and ... $\mathbb{Q}g6$, fighting for the f4-square.

E) 12. $\mathbb{W}b3$



This has been the main line for a long time. Karpov played it several times in the 70s and 80s (including a win over Kasparov in their 1984 World Championship match), while Ivanchuk and Naiditsch are two leading players who have regularly employed it in more recent years. White's plan is simple: he develops his queen with tempo and prepares to bring a rook to the d-file in the near future. On the other

hand, Black gets a chance to regroup his pieces and the queen will most likely have to move to another square at some point.

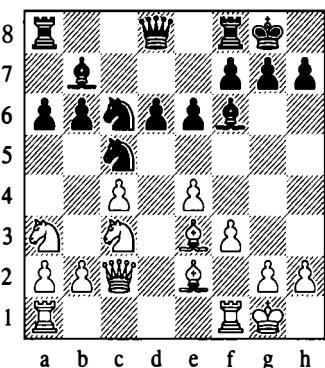
12...Qd7

Now E1) 13.Qad1 is worth considering, but the main line by far is E2) 13.Qfd1.

13.f3

This is not in the spirit of White's previous move. His next task should be to mobilize one or both of his rooks, and he might not need to defend e4 at all. Thus, the text move should not be his first priority, and could prove a wasted tempo in some lines.

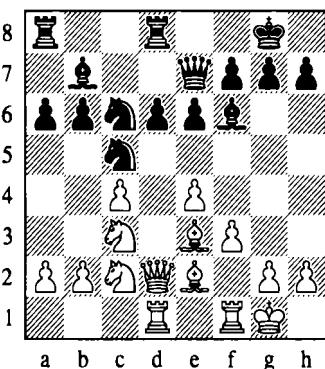
13...Qc5 14.Qc2 Qf6



15.Qad1

15.Qfd1 transposes to 15.f3 in the notes to variation E2 on page 81.

15...We7 16.Qd2 Qfd8 17.Qc2



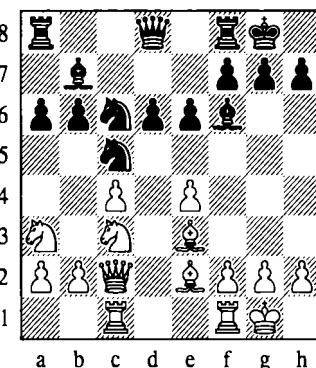
17...a5!

We have been following Belter – Van Houten, corr. 2009. Black's last move gives away the b5-square but, on the other hand, takes control of the dark squares, while stabilizing the position of the excellent knight on c5. In the long run, the b2-pawn may prove to be a target. Black can follow up with moves like ...Qe5 and ...Qac8, with a comfortable game.

13.Qac1

This move may transpose to our main line after a subsequent Qfd1, but there is also an independent possibility.

13...Qc5 14.Qc2 Qf6



15.Qab1

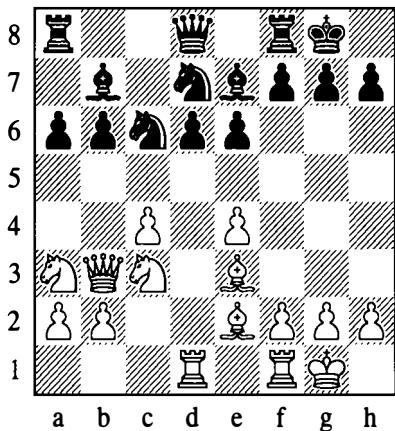
This can be compared with the 15.Qab1?! line mentioned in the notes to variation E2 on page 81. White is trying to improve his knight without leaving his rook stuck in the corner, but he gives Black time to take over the central dark squares with:

15...Qd4!

Another typical manoeuvre in this pawn structure.

16.Qd2 e5!?

It is hard to see how White will continue. His knights are stuck on c3 and b1, and the e4-pawn is weak. Black has plenty of time to manoeuvre and can look to prepare ...b5.

E1) 13.♖ad1

This choice of rook may seem surprising, but White wants to leave the king's rook to support a future advance of the f-pawn. In such positions it is always difficult to know *a priori* which are the best squares for your rooks.

13...♗c7!

I consider this an important detail.

The point can best be understood if we compare the natural continuation of 13...♘c5 14.♗c2 ♖f6, when 15.♘ab1! reveals the point of White's play: he has rerouted his knight while defending c3 and e4, and guarding the d4-square.

14.♗d2

This move has been the most popular and has achieved a plus score for White so far.

14.♗c2 ♖b4! 15.♗d2 ♖fd8= reaches a typical situation for this line. Black intends ...♘c5 and ...♗f6, while it is not clear how White can get rid of the annoying knight on b4 without offering an exchange.

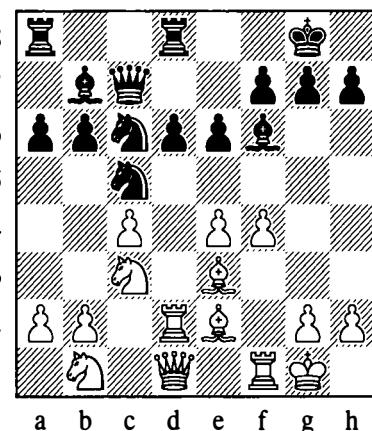
14...♘c5 15.♗d1

White's previous move vacated this square for the queen.

15.♗c2 loses more time, and after 15...♕b4 16.♗b1 ♖f6 Black can continue improving with ...♖fd8 and ...♗e5. White's pieces are stuck and it is not easy for him to make progress.

15...♖fd8 16.f4 ♗f6 17.♘ab1

I never studied this particular position until I played through an interesting game, Azarov – Potkin, Czech Republic 2016, where Black continued 17...♘e7 and the game soon ended in a draw. Although Black didn't seem to have any problems, I believe that White's position was slightly easier to play. Fortunately, I found a significant improvement:

**17...♘a7!N**

Black's plan is both obvious and impossible for White to prevent! He attacks the e4-pawn while preparing to free his position with ...b5.

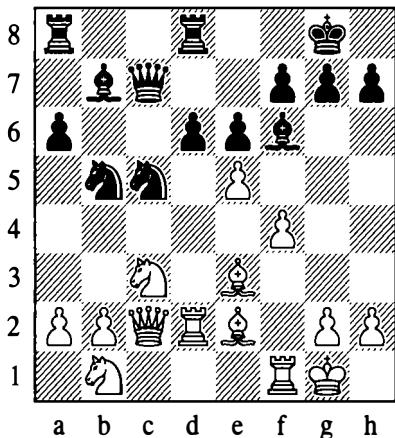
18.♗c2 b5 19.cxb5

I also considered 19.b4!? ♘d7 20.cxb5 ♘xb5 21.♘xb5 ♗xc2 22.♗xc2 axb5 23.♗d3 ♗db8= when Black has a lot of activity on the a-file to compensate for White's play along the c-file.

19...♘xb5 20.e5

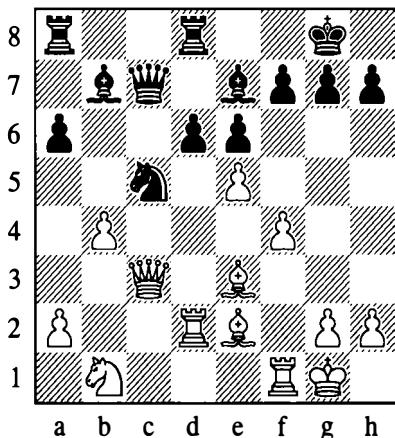
After 20.♘xb5 axb5 21.♘xb5 ♗c6 22.♗xd6!? ♗xd6 23.♗xc5 ♗xd2 24.♗xd2 ♗xc5 25.♗xc5 ♗xa2= Black will pick up the b2-pawn and the game will be drawn.

I also checked 20.Qxb5 axb5 21.e5 Qe7 22.exd6 Qxd6 when Black is at least equal. All of his pieces are ideally placed and he has the more compact pawn structure. 23.Qxb5 Qe4 24.Wc3 Qxa2=



20...Qxc3 21.Wxc3 Qe7! 22.b4

22.Qc1 can be met by 22...Wb8! intending ...Qe4, and after 23.Qxc5 dxc5 our bishop pair gives us more than enough play.



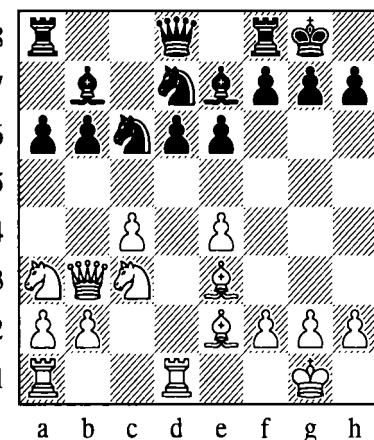
22...Wc6!

A small intermediate move to ensure that the queen will be defended, thus enabling the knight to move.

23.Qf3 Qe4 24.Wxc6 Qxc6 25.Qc2 Qd5=

Black has no worries and can aim for a minority attack on the queenside.

E2) 13.Qfd1



This natural move has been the most popular choice by a wide margin.

13...Qc5!

13...Wc7 is less accurate, for a few reasons. First, there is no need to prepare the ...Qc5 jump, as White is unable to win material for the simple reason shown in the next note. And secondly, the queen may find a better home on the d8-h4 diagonal, as we will see in some of the lines below.

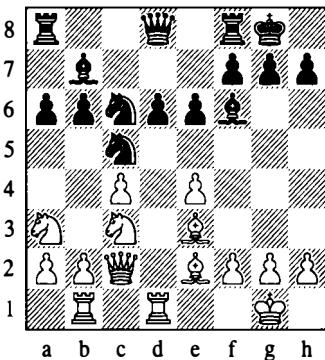
14.Wc2

After 14.Qxc5? bxc5 15.Wxb7? Qa5 White's queen was trapped in Labra Carreno – Caceres Vasquez, Santiago de Chile 2004.

14...Qf6 15.Qa1

Bringing the last piece into play is the obvious choice. I checked three alternatives:

15.Qab1! has been tried by Negi among others, but I consider it less challenging than our main line. A simple solution is:

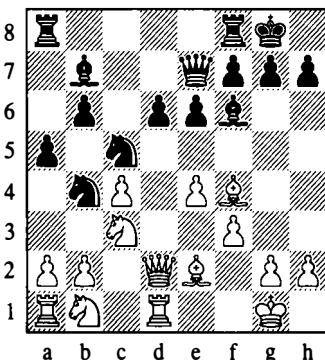


15...♗xc3?! 16.bxc3 This seems like the logical choice with the rook on b1. (In the event of 16.♗xc3N ♗xe4 17.♗b3 ♗e7 18.♗xb6 f5? the position of White's rook makes little sense.) 16...♗c7 17.f3 ♗ab8= Djuric – Perunovic, Palic 2014.

15.♗ab1!?

This move leads to coordination problems for White.

15...♗b4 16.♗d2 a5 17.f3 ♗e7 18.♗f4



18...♗e5

This is the most straightforward, but not the only good continuation.

18...d5?!N 19.e5 ♗h4 is a more ‘computery’ idea which could also be considered. Black’s bishop is temporarily out of play but the immediate 20.g3?! is well met by 20...d4!, and against other moves Black can play ...f6 to open things up. Meanwhile the a1-rook is out of play and needs a lot of time to get into the game.

19.♗a3N

19.♗xe5?! is a positional error, since after 19...dxe5 Black has full control of the d4-square.

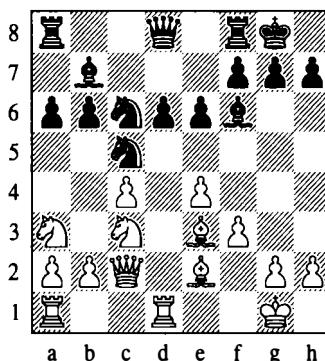
19.♗g5 occurred in Gajsin – Zakhartsov, St Petersburg 2002. Instead of retreating the bishop to f6 and offering a repetition, Black could have seized the initiative with 19...f6!N 19.♗e3 f5.

19...♗ad8 20.♗ab5 h6

I don’t see a convincing way for White to improve his pieces. Black, on the other hand, can think about the simple plan of ...♗c6 and ...♗xb5, followed by ...d5.

15.f3

In conjunction with the earlier ♗fd1, this move allows:



15...♗e5!

Black has excellent prospects on the kingside and has no need to fear any f3-f4 ideas.

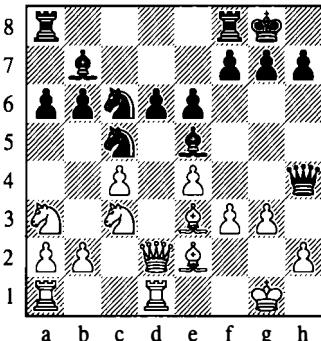
16.♗d2

16.♗f1 f5!→ was also promising for Black in Yudasin – Rublevsky, Moscow 1991.

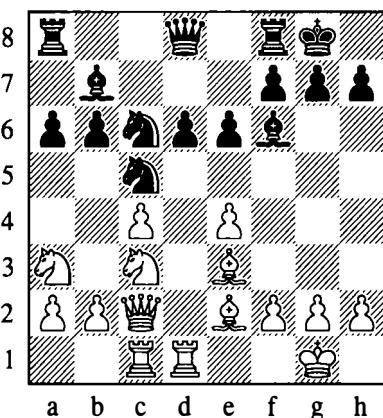
16...♗h4! 17.g3?

17.f4 seems preferable although 17...♗xc3 18.bxc3 ♗xe4 would be a rotten outcome of the opening for White.

This position was reached in F. Berkes – Makarov, Moscow 2004, and a few other games. For some reason, Black never went for the simple and crushing continuation:



17...Qxg3! 18.hxg3 Qxg3† 19.Qf1 f5+
With an overwhelming attack.



15...We7!

This is the most accurate choice.

15...Qxc3?! 16.Wxc3 Qxe4 17.Wb3! regains the pawn and leaves Black slightly worse.

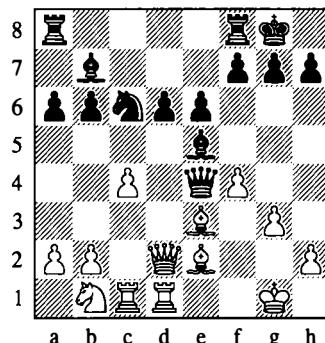
15...Qe5?

This ambitious move has been tested at the highest level but I am not altogether happy with Black's prospects.

16.Qab1 Wh4

16...f5 is the other main option, which was employed against Naiditsch by both Mamedyarov and Navara, in 2006 and 2011 respectively. Best play continues 17.f4! Qxc3 18.Qxc3 fxe4 and now 19.Wd2!± was Naiditsch's choice against Navara, which

improved on his game against Mamedyarov.
17.g3 Wf6 18.Wd2 Wg6 19.f4 Qxe4 20.Qxe4
Wxe4



21.Qf2! Wf5 22.g4 Wf6 23.g5 Wf5 24.Qe1
We4 25.fxe5 Wh1† 26.Qf1 Qxe5 27.Qf2 b5

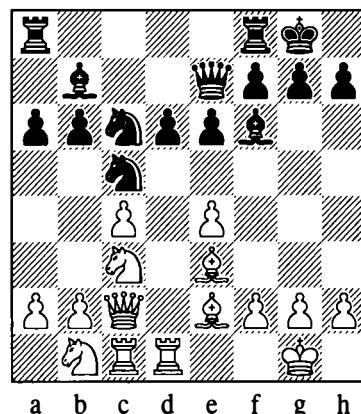
In Ivanchuk – Wang Yue, Beijing 2013, the most accurate continuation would have been:

28.Qd2!±

Although the whole line is rather complicated, I find it hard to believe that White is not better.

16.Qab1

16.f3 was seen in Hermansson – Al Khateeb, Decin 1998, and a few subsequent games. White's last move invites the thematic 16...Qe5!N→ when ...Wh4 is a powerful threat.

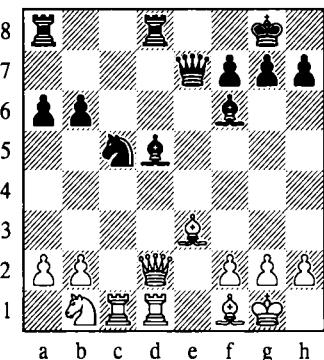


16...♝b4! 17.♔d2 ♘fd8 18.♕e1

I checked a few other moves:

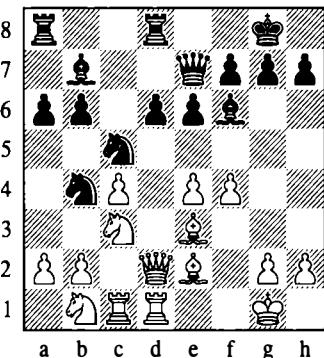
18.♗d4?! ♔e5! 19.♕e3 ♜c6= was promising for Black in Svetushkin – Ducarmon, Roquetas de Mar 2014.

18.♗f1 occurred in Lengyel – Mihok, Budapest 2009, when 18...d5!N would have been a good solution. For instance: 19.cxd5 exd5 20.♗xd5 ♜xd5 21.exd5 ♔xd5

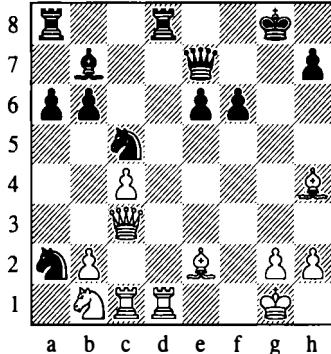


22.♗b4 ♔xa2 23.♗c3 ♔e6 24.♗xb6 ♜b3= Black is not worse at all.

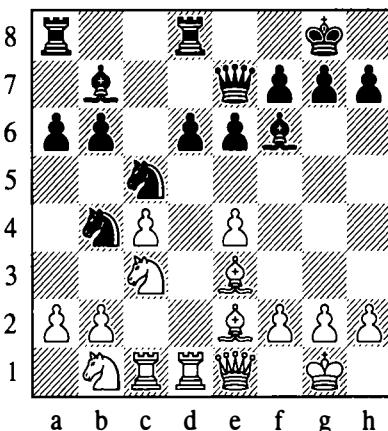
18.f4 was seen in Acs – Z. Almasi, Hungary 2001. Here I suggest:



18...d5!N Yet again, this thematic move works well, although it is necessary to check the following forcing line: 19.e5 ♔xe5! 20.fxe5 d4 21.♗g5 f6 22.exf6 gxf6 23.♗h4 dxc3 24.♕xc3 ♜xa2



25.♕g3† ♕g7 26.♗xd8† ♕xd8 27.♗f1 ♜e4 28.♗xg7† ♔xg7 29.♗f3 ♔g6 30.♗xf6 ♜xf6 31.♗xb7 a5 The endgame is essentially equal but marginally preferable for Black, as White's bishop is not great.



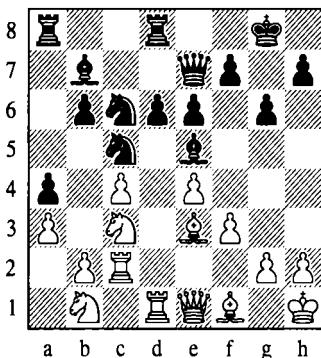
18...a5!?

18...d5! is the ‘no-nonsense’ approach to simplify the position. For instance, 19.exd5 exd5 20.cxd5 ♜xd5 21.♗xd5 ♜xd5 22.♗xd5 ♜xd5 23.♗c3 ♔b7= and a draw soon followed in Magem Badels – Rubio Mejia, Linares 2013.

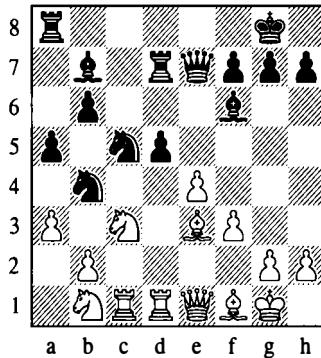
The text move breaks our ‘rule’ about always carrying out the ...d5 break when the opportunity arises. This approach has achieved good practical results though, and I believe it is fully justified. Black intends to strengthen his position and look for an opportunity to play ...d5 under even better circumstances.

19. $\mathbb{Q}f1$

19.a3 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 20. $\mathbb{B}c2$ a4 gives Black excellent control over the queenside. The game continued: 21. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{E}e5$ (21... $\mathbb{Q}a5!$?N is also sensible) 22.f3 g6 23. $\mathbb{Q}h1$



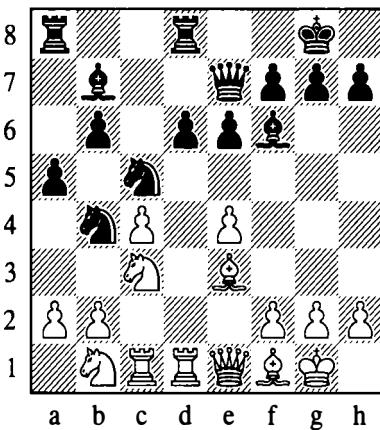
23... $\mathbb{B}d7$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{B}f8$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}1c3$ f5 \rightarrow Llaudy Pupo – Oliva Castaneda, Havana 2014.



22... $\mathbb{Q}b3!$ 23.axb4 $\mathbb{Q}xc1$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}xc1$ dx e 4# Dambrauskas – Van Oosterom, corr. 2003.

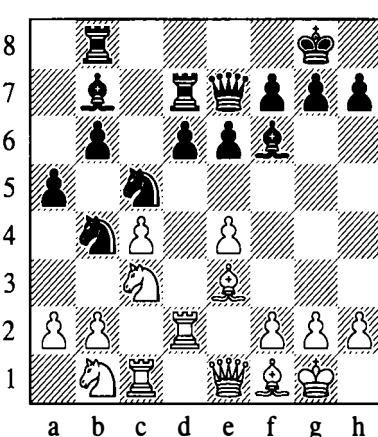
20... $\mathbb{B}b8$

Black can also capture the e4-pawn at the expense of b6. However, I like the idea of making ... $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ a real threat in order to provoke White's next move.

**19... $\mathbb{B}d7$ 20. $\mathbb{B}d2$**

20. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ was seen in J.C. Olivier – Karr, Aix-les-Bains 2003, when 20... $\mathbb{Q}e5!$?N would have been best, since an exchange on e5 would give Black an excellent outpost on d4.

After 20.f3 d5! Black has at least equalized and can hope to gain the upper hand in the complications, as happened in the following game: 21.cxd5 exd5 22.a3

**21. f3 $\mathbb{B}bd8!$**

Black was doing well in Krebs – Winckelmann, corr. 1999. Once f2-f3 has been played, the ...d5 break tends to become even stronger, although White is still not worse.

Conclusion

This chapter has dealt with the main line of the 5. ♘b5/6.c4 set-up, where the moves 6... ♘f6 7. ♘c3 a6 8. ♘a3 ♜e7 9. ♜e2 0–0 10. 0–0 b6 11. ♜e3 ♜b7 see both sides developing logically. We analysed a number of variations, each with their own nuances.

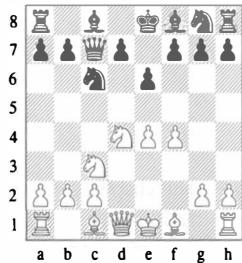
I would like to reiterate that, as a general rule, I consider an early f2-f4 to be risky for White. If he plays it immediately, then 12...e5! is a strong reply. And in the later variation D1, when Black's knight was further away from the d4-square, the weakness of the e4-pawn was still significant, and Black had a lot of tactical opportunities.

This leads conveniently to the next general point: in almost all variations, opportunities to carry out the thematic ...d5 break abound. This is true even in some positions where strong grandmasters have preferred a slower manoeuvring continuation. This is good news for us, as the ...d5 break can be used to liquidate White's pawn centre and potentially take over the initiative; and the added element of surprise value can only enhance its effectiveness.



5. $\mathbb{Q}c3 \mathbb{W}c7$

6. $f4$



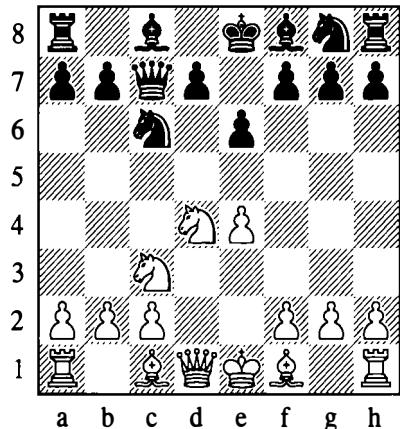
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6. $f4$ (6.a3 a6 7.f4 page 87) 6... $\mathbb{Q}xd4?$ 7. $\mathbb{W}xd4$

7... $b6!$

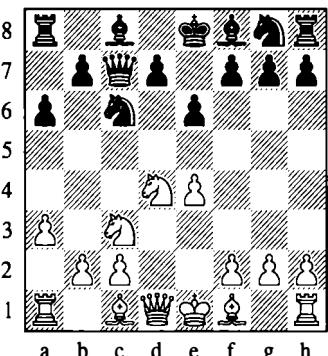
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1.e4 c5 2.Qf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Qxd4 Qc6
5.Qc3 Bc7



This chapter will focus on 6.f4, but first there is a related system with 6.a3 a6 inserted and then 7.f4. We have already seen one a2-a3 system in Chapter 1 on page 14 using the 5.a3 move order. And we will see more a3-ideas in various later chapters, as White's set-up will usually be defined by where he places his other pieces and pawns, not when he plays a2-a3. The exception is the aforementioned 5.a3 line, as our reply to it prevents any transpositions.

6.a3 a6



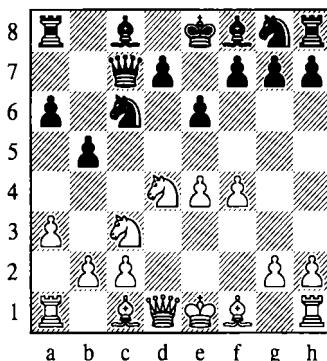
7.f4

Of course White has other options. For example:

a) 7.g3 The Fianchetto variation is harmless in this move order. 7...Qf6 8.Qg2 b5! This is the point: Black can continue in ideal Taimanov style with no tactical problems. If White had played 0-0 instead of a2-a3, as in the real Fianchetto variation of Chapter 7, then 8...b5 would lose to 9.e5. But here e5 would be en prise with check! 9.Qxc6 dxc6 10.0-0 e5 11.Qe3 Qe6 → Ristic – Strikovic, Vrnjacka Banja 1999.

b) 7.Qe3 b5 8.Qxc6 (for 8.f4 see the line below; 8.Qd3 Qf6 9.0-0 transposes to variation B1 of Chapter 15 on page 309) 8...Bxc6 9.Qe2 Qb7 This is a harmless version of the 7.a3 line covered in Chapter 9.

7...b5



8.Qe3

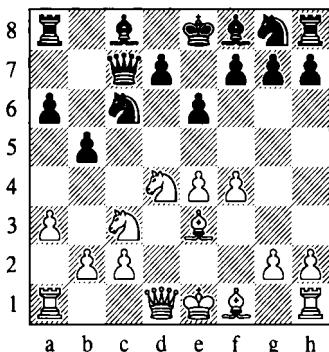
Again White has a range of options.

a) 8.Qe2 Qb7 9.Qe3 Qa5! 10.Wd3 Qc4 11.Qc1 Black is clearly happy, but we shall follow a few more moves of a game, simply because it is by Taimanov himself. 11...E8 12.Qd1 Qf6 13.Qf2 e5! 14.fxe5 In Keres – Taimanov, Tbilisi 1959, Black recaptured with the knight, which is fine, but even better was: 14...Wxe5+

b) 8.Qf3 Qb7 9.Qd3 In Yurtaev – Kunte, Kolkata 2000, the most active continuation would have been: 9...Qc5! 10.We2 Qd4 →

c) 8.Qxc6 dxc6! The right recapture (after 8...Wxc6 9.Qd3 Qb7 10.We2 White is very flexible and can choose to castle either way).

9. $\mathbb{Q}e2 \mathbb{Q}b7$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}f3 \mathbb{Q}d8$ 11. $\mathbb{W}e2 \mathbb{Q}f6$ This is merely an illustrative line to show that Black is fine. He can develop and later play ...c5. For example: 12. $\mathbb{Q}e3 \mathbb{Q}e7$ 13. 0–0 0–0 14. e5 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}e4 c5\text{?}$



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

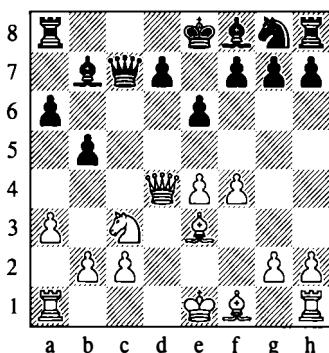
This is the safest choice.

My problem with 8... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ is 9. $\mathbb{Q}b3!$. For example: 9... $\mathbb{Q}a5?$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}xa5 \mathbb{W}xa5$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}d3 \mathbb{W}c7$ 12. 0–0 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 13. $\mathbb{W}e2 \mathbb{Q}c5$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xc5 \mathbb{W}xc5\text{?}$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ Black has ended up in a line which is favourable for White. 15...d5 (or 15...d6 16. e5 is also good for White) 16. e5 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ This is Nakamura – Harikrishna, Palma de Mallorca 2017. The engines, given some time, propose 17. $\mathbb{W}e1!$ N with the idea of playing b2-b4 and rerouting the knight to d4 with a huge advantage.

9. $\mathbb{W}xd4$

Instead 9. $\mathbb{Q}xd4?$! $\mathbb{W}xf4$ is not a convincing pawn sacrifice.

9... $\mathbb{Q}b7$



10. $\mathbb{Q}e2$

The normal choice.

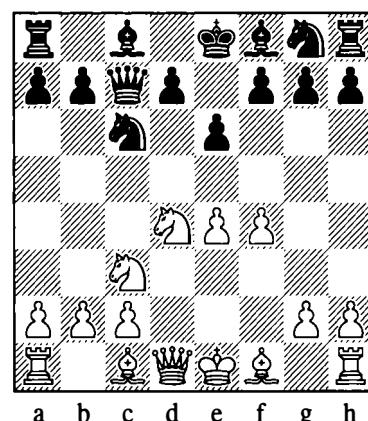
Also possible is 10. 0–0–0 $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}d3 \mathbb{Q}f6\text{?}$ but any Taimanov player should be happy in this fighting position.

10... $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}f3$

This position is reached in the note to the 10th move of variation C1 in Chapter 9 on page 173, where I will give more detail about how Black should continue.

6.f4

This move is a lot less popular than the main lines but it has achieved a higher percentage score than almost any other sixth move. It has actually been one of my pet lines for White, since it is relatively unexplored and offers plenty of attacking chances to White. So far I have had this position in my practice four times: twice with each colour.



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

After taking a fresh look at the different options when researching this book, I decided to recommend this slightly unusual move. It offers Black a relatively simple route to positions which are totally in the spirit of the Taimanov, without requiring Black to know excessive amounts of theory.

By far the most popular choice is:

6...a6

I played this in both of my Black games in this line, and also faced it once from the other side. One of the critical lines continues:

7.♕xc6 bxc6!

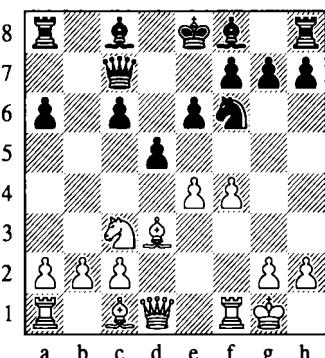
I think Black should play for a strong pawn centre with ...d5. This was my choice against Jolanta Zawadzka in the 2017 European Individual Championship.

7...♛xc6 8.♗d3 b5 9.♗e2 was seen in Pavlidis – Dragomirescu, Kocaeli 2013. I like White's chances here, due to the simple plan of ♘d2 and 0–0–0, followed by developing a kingside initiative.

8.♗d3

In the event of 8.e5 d6! 9.exd6 ♗xd6 10.♗e4!? ♔e7! (but not 10...♗xf4? 11.♗xf4 ♖xf4 12.♗d4!+) Black will continue with ...♗f6 and fortify his kingside with ...g6 if necessary.

8...d5 9.0–0 ♗f6



10.♗e2!

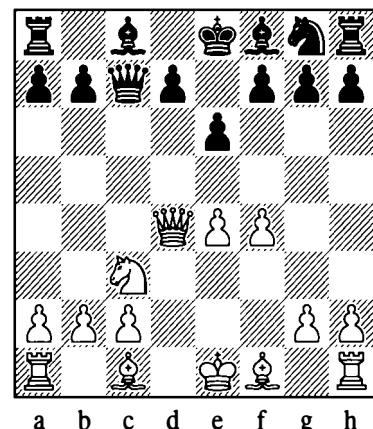
After 10.e5 ♗d7 I am happy with Black's prospects, and I went on to win a long, technical game in Zawadzka – Pavlidis, Minsk 2017. I think the text move is more problematic for Black.

10...♔e7 11.♗d2

This has been played successfully by Mickey Adams, among many other strong players. Although I have faith in the soundness of

Black's position, I have to admit that the statistics favour White heavily, which indicates that his position tends to be easier to play in practice.

7.♗xd4



7...b6!

7...a6 has been by far the most popular choice. White has several ways of playing against it, including 8.♗e3 (as I played in 2013) combined with ♗e2 or ♘d3, as well as 8.a4!? to prevent ...b5, which would probably be my choice for White today.

What are the ideas behind the text move? The most obvious of them is to develop the bishop to b7 as fast as possible. An important point is that the immediate attempt to harass the black queen with 8.♗b5 is not at all dangerous. (There are some other instances, most notably variations D2 and E2, when the ♘b5 move should be taken more seriously, but Black always has enough resources to maintain the balance.)

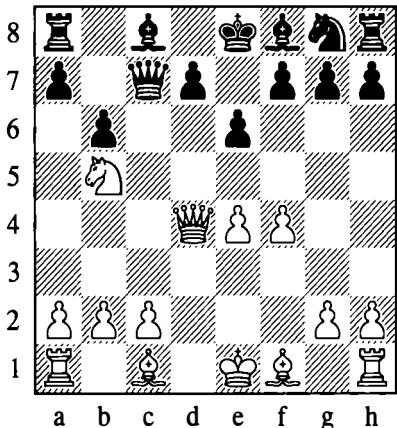
It is worth mentioning that this chapter contains some variations in which Black follows up with a later ...a6 and ...b5, apparently losing a tempo. However, matters are not that simple, since we will only resort to ...b5 in certain situations, usually having

already developed quickly with ... $\mathbb{Q}b7$, ... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ and ... $\mathbb{Q}c5$. Note that the pawn on b6 supports a possible ... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ even if the white bishop goes to e3, which would not have been the case if Black had gone for a straightforward ...a6/...b5 plan.

When checking the database I noticed something interesting: when sorting by the rating of the White player, the top six games all ended in wins for White, some of them against similarly strong opponents. However, a closer inspection reveals that Black had the advantage in a number of those games and generally had no problems out of the opening.

I decided to analyse five main moves:
A) 8. $\mathbb{Q}b5!$, B) 8. $\mathbb{Q}e2$, C) 8. $\mathbb{Q}e3$, D) 8. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ and E) 8. $f5$!?

A) 8. $\mathbb{Q}b5$!?



By choosing ...b6 instead of ...a6 on the previous move, we gave White the option of harassing our queen with this move. In certain situations, the knight on b5 combined with a bishop arriving on f4 could cause problems, but on this occasion the idea is premature.

8... $\mathbb{W}c6$!

A key move to remember. Instead after 8... $\mathbb{W}b8$? 9. $\mathbb{Q}c3$! in order to stop White from

playing his knight to c7, Black needs to play the ugly 9... $\mathbb{Q}d8\pm$ when there is nothing to like about Black's position.

9. $\mathbb{W}c4$

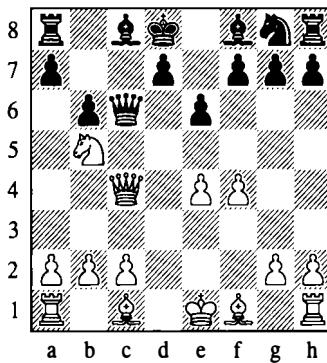
Casual development with 9. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ gave Black an excellent game in Yamnov – Kiselev, Azov 2010.

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

Dann – A. Horvath, Germany 2015, instead continued:

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

At first, I thought this a strange choice. In the game White exchanged queens and justified the king move, but what happens after:



10. $\mathbb{W}d3N$

I think that then Black can play:

10... $\mathbb{Q}b7$

And White's best is to exchange queens anyway.

11. $\mathbb{Q}c3$

Or 11.e5 $\mathbb{W}e4\pm$ and the queens get exchanged.

11... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 12.e5 $\mathbb{Q}e4=$

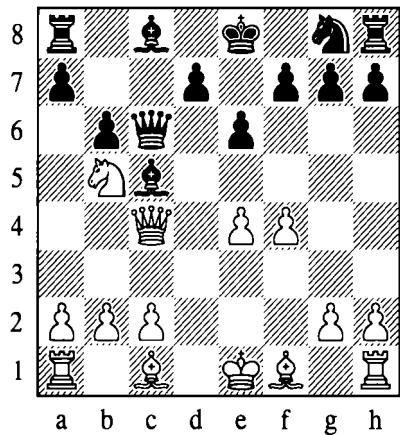
White should take on e4 and accept it's just equal. If he tries to be more ambitious, it will backfire:

13. $\mathbb{Q}d2$!? $\mathbb{Q}xd2$!?

13... $\mathbb{Q}c8$! or even 13...h5 planning to push this pawn all the way to h3 both certainly make sense and have some appeal.

14. $\mathbb{W}xd2 \mathbb{Q}b4\#$

By continuing to refuse an exchange of queens, White risks getting a really bad position. Next comes ... $\mathbb{E}c8$ and Black can even play ... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ to connect his rooks.



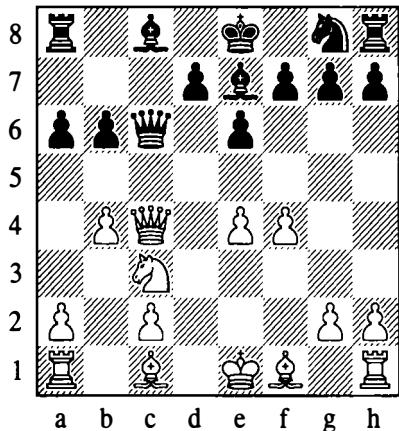
10.b4!

Otherwise Black will gain the initiative after ...a6 and ...b5 with tempo.

10. $\mathbb{Q}d3$?! was Bernard – Gonzalez Pereira, San Sebastian 2014, when the obvious choice is best: 10...a6!N 11. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ b5 12. $\mathbb{W}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}b7\#$

10...a6 11. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$

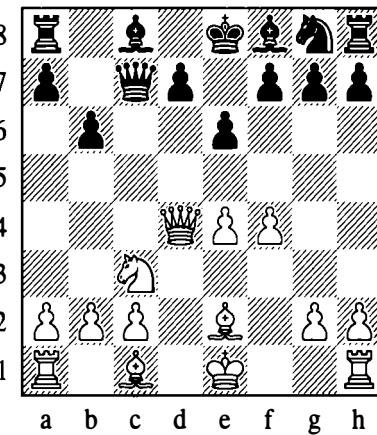
And White had nothing better than:



12. $\mathbb{W}xc6$ $\mathbb{D}xc6=$

Black was fine in Roser – Lazarev, Nancy 2013.

B) 8. $\mathbb{Q}e2$



This move was employed by Delgado in his game against Barbosa, but it will often transpose to variations beginning with 8. $\mathbb{Q}e3$. Since it is not possible for White to castle after 8... $\mathbb{Q}b7$, White will probably have to play $\mathbb{Q}e3$.

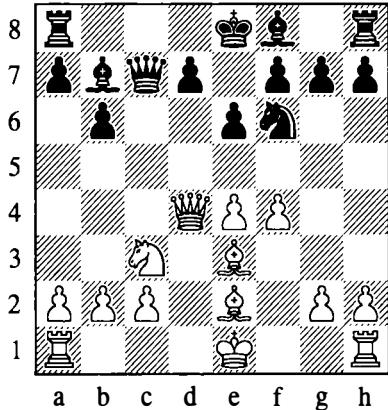
8... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}e3$

I also studied what happens if White avoids this move.

9.0–0?? $\mathbb{Q}c5$ and 9. $\mathbb{W}d3$?! $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 10.0–0 $\mathbb{Q}c5\#$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ d5 are not to be recommended for White, though in the latter case at least it's a slight disadvantage rather than a lost queen.

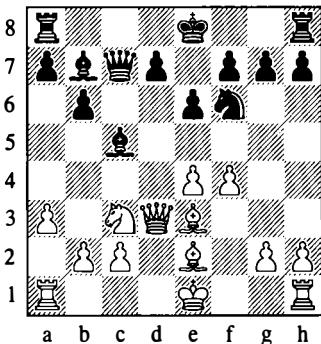
9. $\mathbb{g}4$?N is an engine suggestion which seems interesting. I suggest 9...0–0–0! when I don't see anything better than 10. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ planning to castle at some point soon (less accurate is 10. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{W}c5$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}xa7\#$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{W}xd4$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4\#$). 10... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 11. $\mathbb{W}d3$ I slightly prefer Black after 11...d5 or the engine suggestion 11... $\mathbb{Q}b4$!?

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

5. $\mathbb{Q}c3 \mathbb{W}c7$ 

10.0-0-0

10.a3 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 11. $\mathbb{W}d3$ was Delgado Ramirez – Barbosa, Praia da Pipa 2014.



11... $\mathbb{Q}a6$!N We will see this tactical idea again in the main line below. A likely continuation is: 12. $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 13. $\mathbb{W}xe3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ 14.e5?! Otherwise White's position is simply unpleasant. 14... $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 15. $\mathbb{exf}6$ $\mathbb{gxf}6$ 16.0-0-0 0-0-0 ∞

10. $\mathbb{Q}f3$

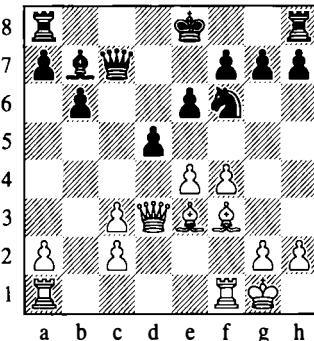
This was tried once by my team-mate Ivan Saric who is a very strong player, so it's worth checking.

10... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 11. $\mathbb{W}d3$

11. $\mathbb{Q}b5$!N has the idea of establishing the knight on d6 but Black has a very nice resource: 11... $\mathbb{W}b8$ 12. $\mathbb{W}d3$ 0-0 13. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{bxc5}$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}d6$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$! ∞

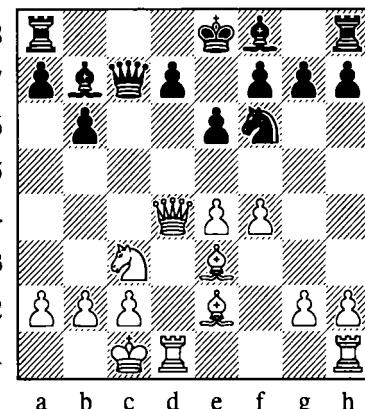
11... $\mathbb{Q}b4$! 12.0-0 $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 13. $\mathbb{bxc3}$ d5!

13...0-0-0?N might seem more flexible, but it is difficult to evaluate the position after: 14. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ d5! 15. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{gxf6}$ 16. $\mathbb{exd5}$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$! ∞



14.e5!N

14.exd5 was seen in Arakhamia-Grant – Cramling, Sochi 2015. This is not so critical and among the several continuations which seem promising for Black, I like the simple: 14... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ N 15. $f5$ 0-0 16. $\mathbb{fxe6}$ $\mathbb{fxe6}$? The engines evaluate this as slightly better for Black, due to her active pieces and White's bad structure.

14... $\mathbb{Q}e4$!=14... $\mathbb{Q}d7$?! is also fine.10... $\mathbb{Q}c5$

10... $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 12. $\mathbb{W}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ † 13. $\mathbb{W}xe3$ 0-0 followed by ...d5 was solid for

Black in Shen – Quesada Perez, Arlington 2013, but I like the more active approach of the text move, which leads to the exchange of both bishops; this gives Black clearer counterplay with the heavy pieces.

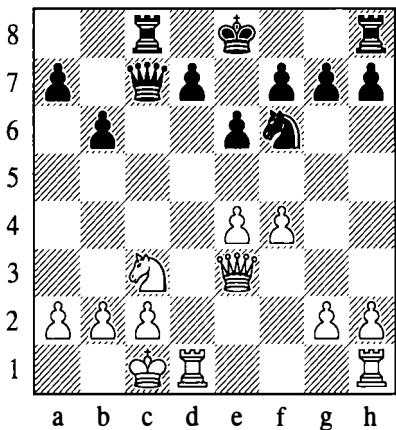
11.♗d3

11.♗b5?! ♜c6 12.♗d3 ♜xe3† 13.♗xe3 ♜xe4 14.♗he1† gives White only partial compensation for his pawn minus.

11...♝a6! 12.♗d2 ♜xe3 13.♗xe3 ♜xe2
14.♗xe2

Of course not 14.♗xe2?! ♜xf4†.

14...♝c8 15.♗c3



15...b5!

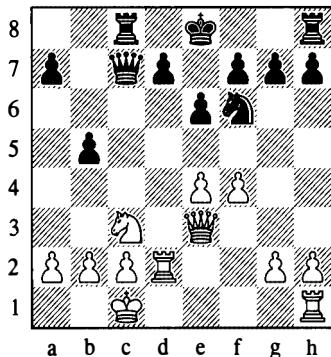
Black should play actively as quickly as possible. This was a novelty when I first analysed it, but it was then played later in 2018.

15...0–0 16.♗d2 d6 17.♗hd1 ♜fd8 as in Tari – Manea, Oslo 2014, can only favour White if anyone.

16.♗d4

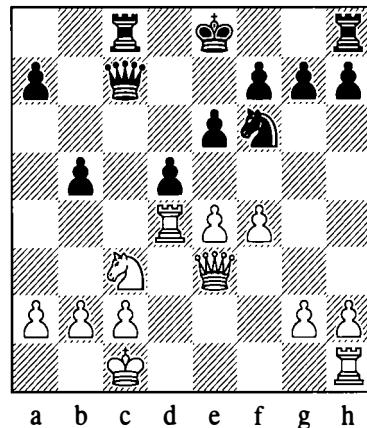
16.a3?! a5 is obviously a worse version for White.

16.♗d2?! has been tested:



16...♝a5!N (also reasonable but less direct is 16...♗b7 as in G. Yilmaz – Galperin, Manavgat 2018) 17.♗b1 b4 18.♗e2 0–0† And ...d5 comes next. If 19.g4?! then Black should not get distracted and simply play: 19...d5! 20.exd5 b3! A typical sacrifice clearing the b4-square for the knight. 21.cxb3 ♜xd5†

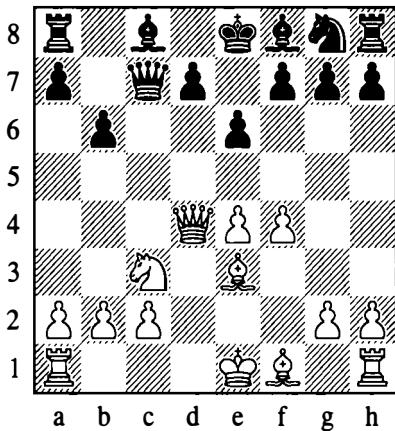
16...d5!∞



The position is dynamically equal. Black should be happy with the outcome of the opening. A sample line goes:

17.♗d2 ♜xe4 18.♗xe4 dxе4 19.♗xb5 ♜c5
20.♗d6† ♜e7 21.♗xc8† ♜xc8 22.♗d1 f5!

Not only defending the passed pawn, but also making the f6-square safer for the king in the event of a check from d7. The position remains dynamically equal.

C) 8. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ 

One of the more natural moves at White's disposal as it allows possibilities of both long and short castling, although long castling makes much more sense here. Black can play ... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ of course, but he must do it after some preparation – the g7-square will need to be covered. Also the knight hop to b5 must be taken into account every move.

8... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 9.0–0–0

9. $\mathbb{Q}b5N$ is possible as taking on c2 looks dangerous. On the other hand 9... $\mathbb{W}c6!$ 10.e5 $\mathbb{Q}h6!?$ seems fine for Black.

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

Instead 9... $\mathbb{E}c8$ was played by Harikrishna against Piorun. There is nothing wrong with this move but I prefer to first complete development with ... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ and ... $\mathbb{Q}c5$.

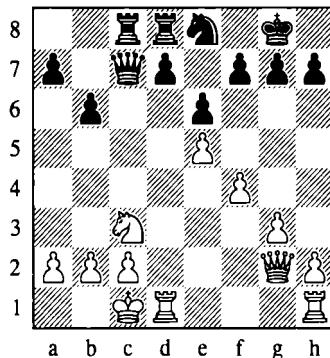
After the text move Black at last creates the threat of ... $\mathbb{Q}c5$. White has played two moves: 10. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ (which transposes to the 8. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ line) and 10. e5.

10.e5

The normal move in my database, but we will also look at a couple of untested alternatives.

10.g3N addresses the issue of the weak f4-pawn

and, quite sensibly, it is a top choice of the engine. A typical Taimanov continuation would be: 10... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 11. $\mathbb{W}d3$ 0–0 12. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3\#$ 13. $\mathbb{W}xe3$ $\mathbb{E}ac8$ 14. $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{E}fd8$ 15. e5 $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ 16. $\mathbb{W}xg2$ $\mathbb{Q}e8=$

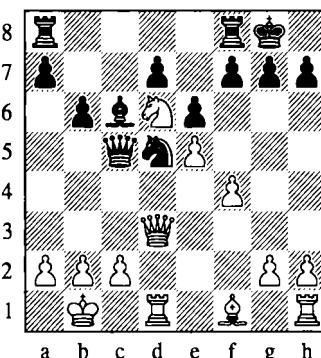


Next comes ...d6 and Black is fully equal.

10. $\mathbb{Q}b1N$

A useful waiting move. Black can continue in various ways, with one example being: 10... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 11. $\mathbb{W}d3$ 0–0 12. e5 $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}b5!$ $\mathbb{W}c8$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{W}xc5$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}d6$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$

White's f4-pawn is under serious pressure.

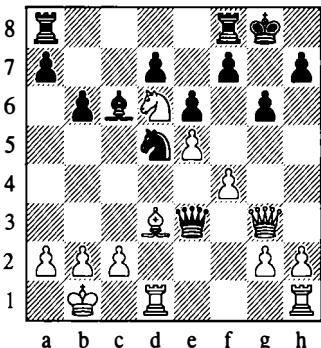
16. $\mathbb{W}g3$

Of course not 16.g3? $\mathbb{Q}b4$.

16... $\mathbb{W}e3!$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}d3$

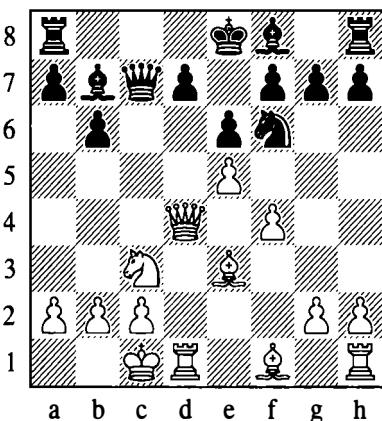
17. c4 $\mathbb{W}xg3$ 18. $\mathbb{H}xg3$ $\mathbb{Q}e3$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}xf1$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xf1$ f6! Once again Black will create play against White's e5-pawn.

17...g6



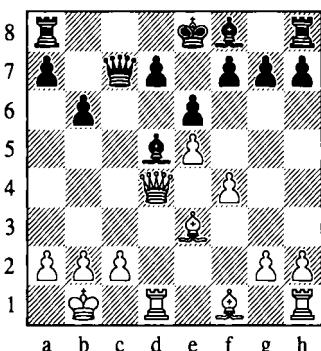
18.c4 $\mathbb{Q}xg3$ 19.hxg3 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}xg2\infty$

Black has an extra pawn but White has a very strong knight on d6. The position is double-edged.



10... $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}e4$

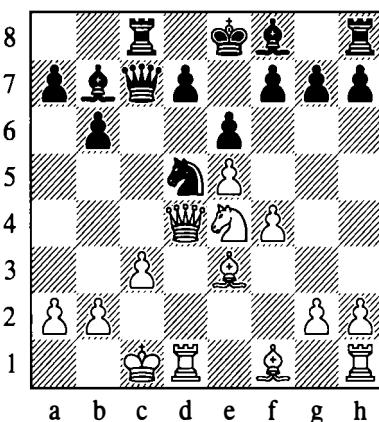
11. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ was Wang Jue – Yuan, Beijing 2017:



12... $\mathbb{Q}c6!N$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ (13. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ would not change much since now ... $\mathbb{Q}b4$ is our threat!) 13... $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}b4!$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ 0–0
Black will eventually play ...d6 with an even game.

11... $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 12.c3

This was seen in Balogh – Safarli, Baku 2015. Safarli played 12... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ and the position was quite unbalanced with mutual chances. I like the way Balogh defended in this game, and he managed to win quite easily. Instead I think Black should continue with:



12... $\mathbb{Q}c6!N$

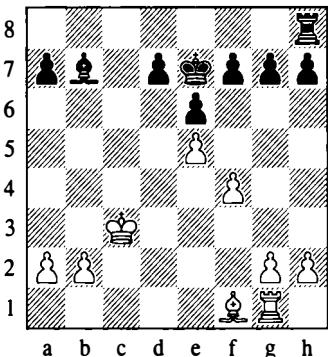
Black creates the immediate threat of ... $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ and ... $\mathbb{Q}xe4$.

13. $\mathbb{Q}f2!$ b5 ∞

The position remains unclear. Black will continue with ... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ and castle short. At some point he will consider ...b4, or ...a5 then ...b4 (maybe with ...a4-a3 to come). The f4-pawn is also under attack. A sample line is:

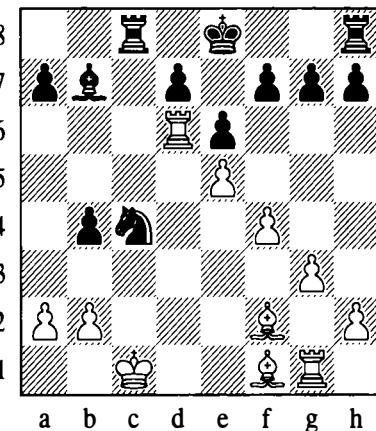
14. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$

14... $\mathbb{Q}xc3?$ is also interesting, leading to an equal endgame. 15. $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ (15.bxc3 $\mathbb{Q}a3\uparrow$! 16. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4\infty$) 15...b4 16. $\mathbb{Q}d3!$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ bxc3 \uparrow 20. $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$

5. $\mathbb{Q}c3 \mathbb{W}c7$ 

And Black is in time to play ...d7-d6. Black has to be a little careful. We will discuss such endgames in greater detail on pages 319 and 320, with the conclusion that White is usually a little better. In this particular position we should take into account two serious factors. Firstly, our pawn is placed on a7 and not on a6 (so it is not a potential weakness) and Black can get rid of the d7-weak pawn very easily by playing ...d6 and creating play in the centre.

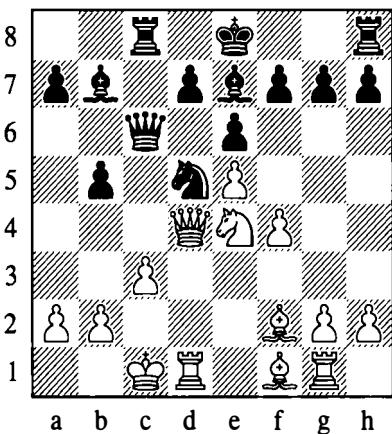
16. c4 $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}d6\text{?!$ } $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 18. $\mathbb{W}xd6$ $\mathbb{W}xd6$
19. $\mathbb{E}xd6$ $\mathbb{Q}xc4$



20. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $\mathbb{E}xc4\text{!}$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 22. $\mathbb{E}d4\text{!=}$

The final move prevents White drifting into trouble if Black's rooks were allowed to control the c-file. Now it's dead equal.

D) 8. $\mathbb{Q}d2$

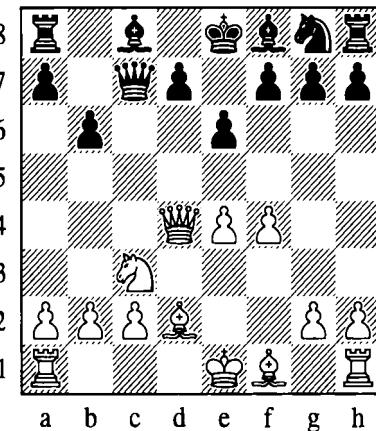


15. g3!

Provoking Black into taking drastic measures since the f4-pawn is now protected and White could continue with $\mathbb{Q}d3$.

15...b4

Forcing the play. Black has other moves as well, such as 15...0-0 or 15...a5.



8... $\mathbb{Q}b7$

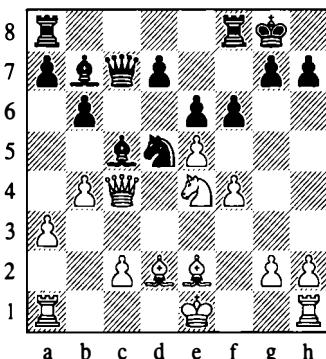
After Black's obvious move, the main moves to consider are D1) 9. 0-0-0 and D2) 9. $\mathbb{Q}b5$. But first there is a minor alternative.

9. $\mathbb{Q}e2$

This move was employed once by GM Naiditsch in 2014. I suppose it was a surprise

weapon since Naiditsch played the 9.♕b5 variation against Nisipeanu.

9...♝f6! 10.e5 ♜c5 11.♗c4 ♔d5 12.♔e4 0–0
13.a3 f6! 14.b4



14...fxe5!N

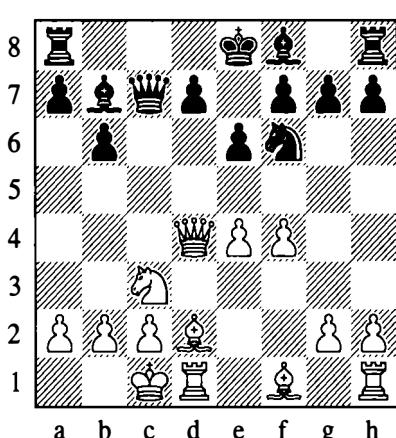
A highly promising piece sacrifice.

14...♝e7 was the game Naiditsch – Li Di, China 2014. Black is slightly better but White's position is playable and Naiditsch eventually won.

15.bxc5 ♔xf4! 16.♔d6 bxc5 17.♔xb7 ♛xb7
18.♗f3 ♛xg2† 19.♔xg2 ♛xg2 20.0–0–0
♛b7!→

Black has a powerful attack.

D1) 9.0–0–0 ♘f6

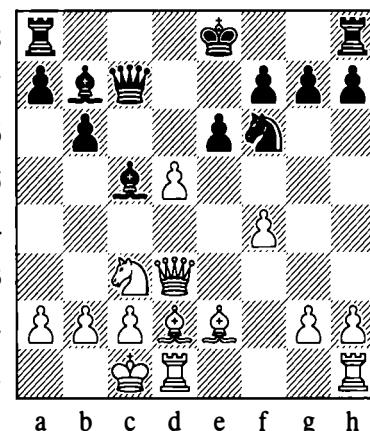


10.♗e2

The other tested move is: 10.e5 ♜c5!N

(Also fine is: 10...♝d5 11.♗xd5 ♜xd5 12.♗b1 This was Gulyev – Manea, Plancoet 2013. Black was fine in the game, but I think he had better moves now such as 12...♜c5N.) 11.♗c4 ♔d5 Black will simply castle and play ...♜ac8, ...a6 and ...b5. Black's position is much easier to play over the board.

10...♜c5 11.♗d3 d5! 12.exd5



12...♝xd5

We are following a game in which Black gained the better position after a few more moves.

12...exd5!N Perhaps it is more interesting to keep the knights on, since our knight will land on e4. Anyway, with or without the knights, our position is playable.

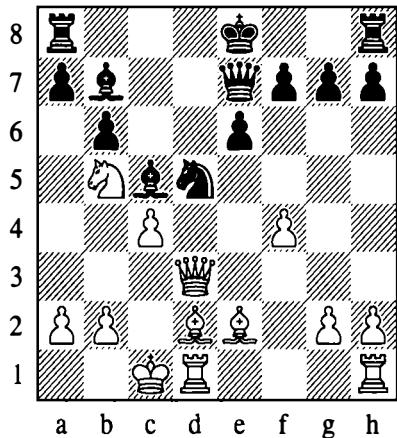
13.♗b5

More testing is: 13.♗b5†!N ♜c6 14.♗xd5 exd5 15.♗d3 0–0–0 But I can't imagine Black being worse after simply placing his rooks on e8 and c8 and creating threats against the c2-pawn. The position is dynamically equal.

13...♛e7 14.c4?

We have been following Tate – Yuan, Barcelona 2016. I understand why White wanted to “do something” as if Black is

allowed to play ... $\mathbb{Q}d8$ next, then White will not be able to speak of any sort of advantage. Now though, this backfires:



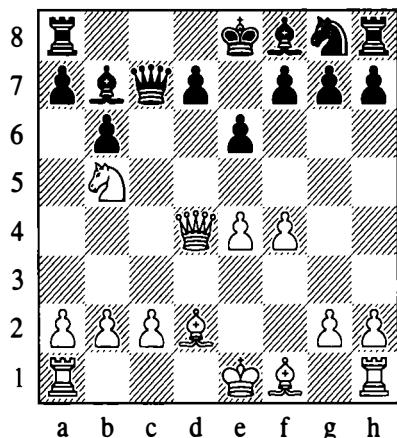
14... $\mathbb{Q}c7!?$ N 15. $\mathbb{Q}c3!$

White should be active, as otherwise he risks getting a clearly worse position

15... $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ 0-0 17. $\mathbb{W}g3$ g6 18. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ f6? 20. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{E}ad8$?=

Black has the better structure and must be optimistic about the future.

D2) 9. $\mathbb{Q}b5$



In my opinion this should be considered the main line.

9... $\mathbb{W}b8!$

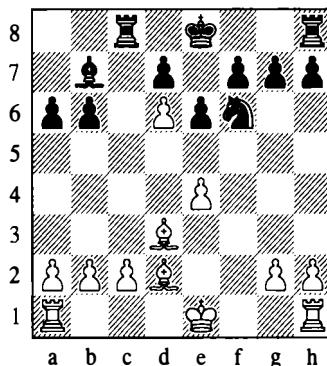
9... $\mathbb{W}c6$ is considered to be the main line and was employed by Nisipeanu in his game against Naiditsch in 2014. It was repeated in 2016 by Ganguly against Quesada. In both games White managed to win after holding a small edge from the opening. I believe that after 10. $\mathbb{Q}b4$?± White holds a small but stable advantage. For example: 10... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}xf8$ (or 11.e5?! is also promising, but not as clear) 11... $\mathbb{Q}xf8$ 12. e5 $\mathbb{W}e4\uparrow$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{W}xd4$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}f3$?± Beerdsen – Gerlagh, Groningen 2015.

10. $\mathbb{Q}d3$

We can also check out a few untested alternatives:

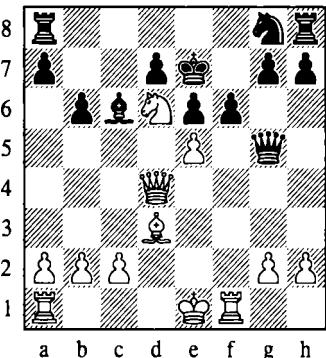
10. $\mathbb{W}c3N$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 11. $\mathbb{W}e5!$ $\mathbb{W}xe5$ 12. $fxe5$ $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ $\mathbb{Q}e7=$ It is impossible to believe that White, with his doubled e-pawns, can be better here.

10. $\mathbb{W}e5N$ $\mathbb{W}xe5$ 11. $fxe5$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ a6 13. $\mathbb{Q}d6\uparrow$ $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 14. $exd6$ $\mathbb{Q}f6!$ Immediately challenging White's centre.



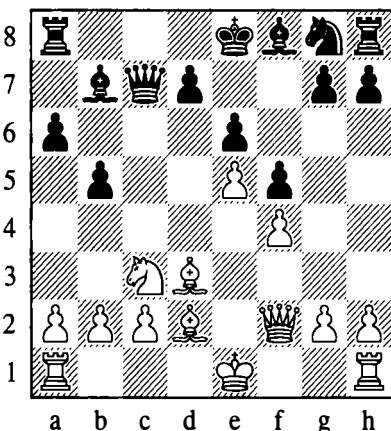
15. e5 $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ (16. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ g5!?) 16... $\mathbb{Q}e3!$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}c4\uparrow$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ f6! 19. $exf6$ $gxf6$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 22. g3 $\mathbb{Q}e4!=$ Black manages to exchange the bishop pair and will try to slowly advance his pawns.

10.♗b4! N Black should pay close attention to this move, as it leads to tricky forcing play.
 10...♝xf4 11.♝xf8 ♚xf8 12.♝d3 ♜c6! 13.♝f1
 ♜g5 14.♝d6 f6 15.e5 ♜e7? White will soon have to make a decision about the e5-pawn, which will help Black finish his development.



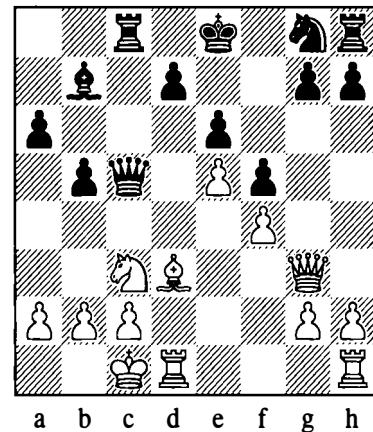
One key line is: 16.♝e4 ♜xe4 17.♝xe4 ♜xe5 18.♝b4† d6 19.0–0–0 a5 20.♜c4 d5 21.♜c6 ♜e8 Black is holding, and may later be able to use his extra material.

10...a6 11.♝c3 ♜c7 12.♝f2 b5 13.e5 f5!



Once again we see this typical move. When White plays e4–e5 and Black is underdeveloped and cannot challenge e5 with ...d6, he opts for ...f7–f5. His dark-squared bishop will develop to c5 and his knight will probably go to e7. One correspondence game continued:

14.0–0–0 ♜c5 15.♝e3 ♜c8 16.♝xc5 ♜xc5
 17.♝g3

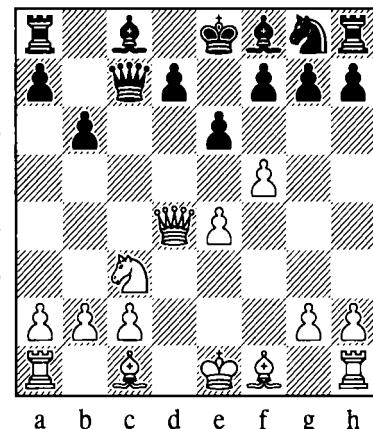


17...g6! N

I think this is slightly stronger than the game. The knight will go to e7, the rook to g8 and the king to f7 if needed, while on the other wing Black is ready to begin his counterplay with ...a5, ...b4 etc.

17...♝e7 18.♝xg7 ♜g8 19.♝xh7 ♜e3†
 20.♝b1 ♜xf4= was Justesen – L. van Damme, corr. 2009.

E) 8.f5!?



This move aims to open White's position.

The main reason behind this move is that Black hasn't played the usual move ...a7-a6 so the b5-square is weak. White is threatening fxe6 and Black will have to reply with ...fxe6 since ...dxe6 would fail to ♕b6†.

8... ♕b7 9. fxe6 fxe6!

As mentioned above 9...dxe6?! allows 10.♗b5†+– or even 10.♗f4!+–.

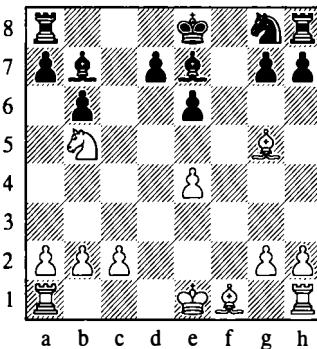
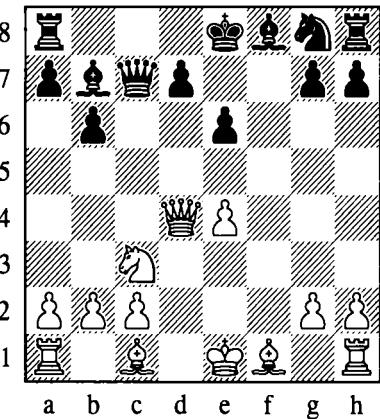
seen in just one game: Milde – Pachurka, email 2006.

10... ♕c5!?

After 10... $\mathbb{W}d6$ 11. $\mathbb{W}e3$ $\mathbb{W}e5$ Black had no problems equalizing in the game. But I wish to offer a more dynamic and interesting approach.

11. 同上

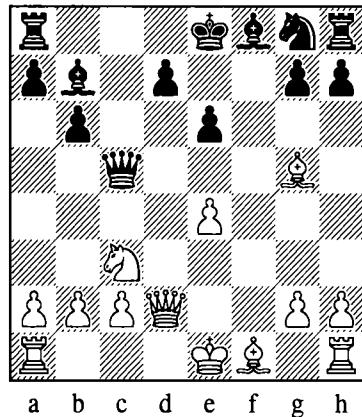
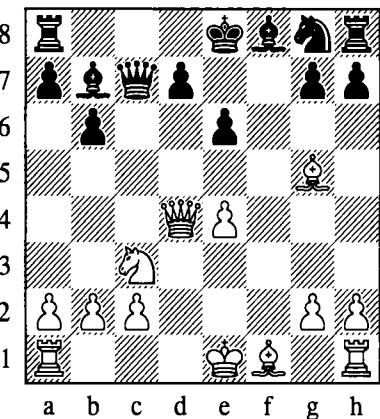
Exchanging queens does not cause Black a problem: 11. $\mathbb{W}xc5$ $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{Q}e7!$ This is an idea to remember.



In this rare but critical position the two lines to consider are E1) 10. ♜g5 and E2) 10. ♛b5!?.

13. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ (after 13. $\mathbb{Q}c7\#!$? $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xe7\#$ $\mathbb{Q}xc7$ both the bishop on e7 and the e4-pawn are under attack) 13... $\mathbb{B}c8$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6\infty$

E1) 10. ♕g5

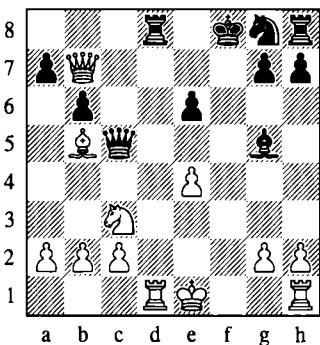


The idea behind this move is to prevent Black from playing ... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ and for White to develop his queenside as fast as possible. This move was

11... ♕e7! 12. ♕e3

The alternative 12. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ looks wild, but it's not dangerous for Black. 12... $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ 13. $\mathbb{W}xd7+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 14. $\mathbb{W}xb7$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ (15. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6\infty$ is

rather unclear. But I like Black's position after ...h7-h6 and ... $\hat{g}g8$ and Black's king can be secure on h7.)



15... $\hat{Q}d2!$! 16. $\hat{Q}xd2$ $\hat{W}e3!$! 17. $\hat{Q}e2$ $\hat{W}c1$!
18. $\hat{Q}f2$ $\hat{W}f4!$ = The game will finish in a perpetual.

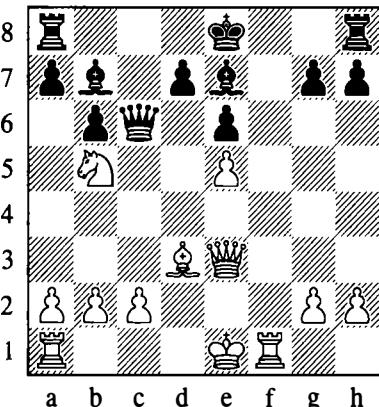
12... $\hat{W}d6$! 13. $\hat{Q}d3$

The only reasonable move that might create problems for Black. If White decided to exchange queens, Black would have decent play in the endgame against the e4-pawn.

13... $\hat{Q}f6$ 14. $\hat{Q}b5$

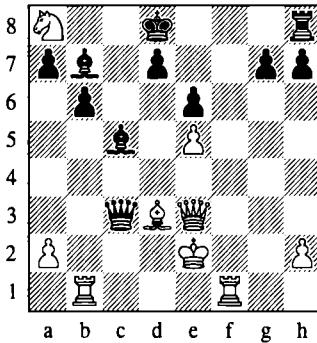
Less forcing is: 14.0–0–0 0–0 15. $\hat{Q}f4$ $\hat{W}c5$ ∞ Once again Black will try to continue with ... $\hat{Q}d6-e5$ and blockade White's e4-pawn.

14... $\hat{W}c6$ 15.e5 $\hat{Q}d5$ 16. $\hat{Q}f1$ $\hat{Q}xe3$ 17. $\hat{W}xe3$

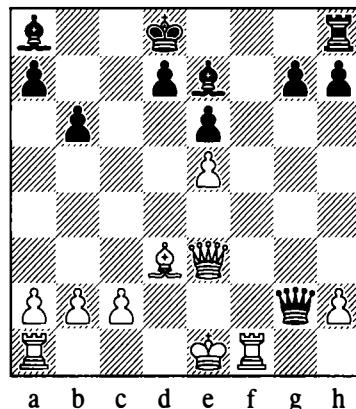


17... $\hat{W}xg2$! 18. $\hat{Q}c7$ † $\hat{Q}d8$ 19. $\hat{Q}xa8$ $\hat{W}xa8$ ∞

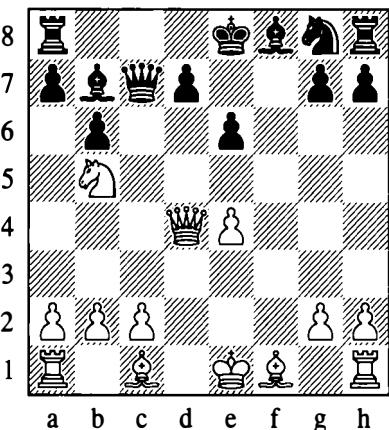
19... $\hat{Q}b4$ †? is tempting and leads to some fun lines, but White has a fantastic defence which saves him and secures a slight advantage. 20.c3 (20. $\hat{Q}d1$ $\hat{E}f8$!! 21. $\hat{E}xf8$ † $\hat{Q}xf8$ ∞) 20... $\hat{W}xb2$ 21. $\hat{E}b1$! $\hat{W}xc3$ † 22. $\hat{Q}e2$! $\hat{Q}c5$



23. $\hat{E}fc1$!! $\hat{A}xe3$ 24. $\hat{E}xc3$ $\hat{Q}d4$ 25. $\hat{E}c7$ ± It's still messy, but White has slightly the better of it.



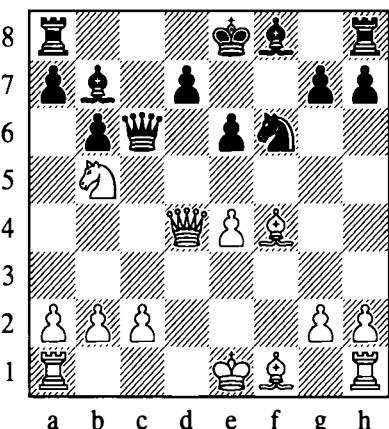
The position is evaluated by the engines as "0.00" but I prefer to evaluate it as unclear. Black has a bishop and a pawn for the rook, but his biggest advantage is the fact that White's king is stuck in the centre.

E2) 10. $\mathbb{Q}b5!!$ 

By playing 8.f5 and 9.fxe6 White has created a weak pawn-island on e4. So he should proceed with active play in order to develop an initiative. If White plays quiet moves he will probably have to suffer in an endgame where he will have to watch out for his e4-pawn.

10... $\mathbb{W}c6!$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}f4$

In this sharp position we will look at E21) 11... $\mathbb{Q}f6!!N$ and E22) 11... $\mathbb{Q}c5!!$.

E21) 11... $\mathbb{Q}f6!!N$ 

We have been following the game Timofeev - Bukavshin where Black played 11... $\mathbb{Q}c5$, which will be our main line, but I would like

to take a small look at this interesting exchange sacrifice.

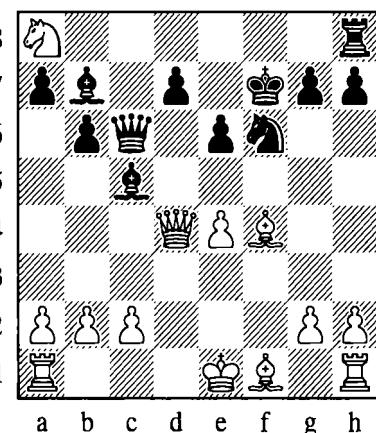
12. $\mathbb{Q}c7!! \mathbb{Q}f7$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xa8!!$

Greedily grabbing the material is the right call.

Black is fine after: 13.0–0–0 $\mathbb{Q}c5!$ 14. $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{E}ad8$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $d6!$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ (16.e5? $dxe5$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{W}xg2!=$) 16... $a6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{E}hf8$ Black will play ...b6-b5 and retreat his king to g8, with a balanced position.

13... $\mathbb{Q}c5!!$

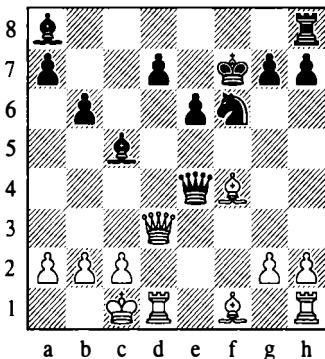
We have reached a truly weird position. White can retreat his queen to d3 or c4. In the first case Black has to capture on a8 with his bishop and in the other case with the rook. Although in general Black's compensation is quite decent, I have to admit that White has a small but stable advantage, since Black doesn't even have a pawn for the exchange.

**14. $\mathbb{W}c4$**

This move has the idea of defending the e4-pawn with $\mathbb{Q}d3$.

After 14. $\mathbb{W}d3$ Black can't capture on a8 with the rook for tactical reasons that we will soon see. White is aiming to continue pressing on d7 and h7. 14... $\mathbb{Q}xa8$ (after 14... $\mathbb{E}xa8?!$

15.e5!± both the h7- and d7-pawns are weak)
15.0–0–0! Securing the king and pressing the d7-pawn even more. 15... $\mathbb{Q}xe4$

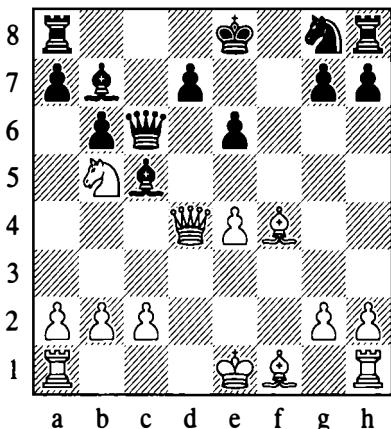


16. $\mathbb{W}d2!$ $\mathbb{E}f8$ 17. $\mathbb{W}b1$ $\mathbb{W}d5\infty$ Once again the position is rather unbalanced, but with White having slightly better chances.

14... $\mathbb{E}xa8$ 15. $\mathbb{W}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 16. $\mathbb{W}f1!$ $\mathbb{W}g8$
17.0–0–0 $\mathbb{E}f8$ 18. $\mathbb{W}xe4$ $\mathbb{W}xe4$ 19. $\mathbb{W}xe4$ $\mathbb{W}xe4$
20.g3 d5!∞

We have reached an endgame which is *almost* equal but White is slightly better. Although I believe Black's drawing chances are really good, it would not be much fun to play this position as Black.

E22) 11... $\mathbb{W}c5!$

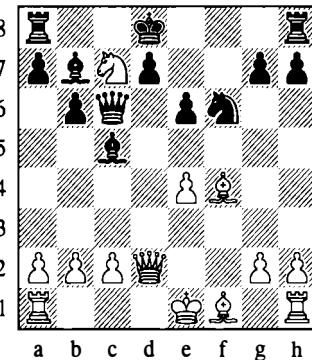


This sharp position has been tested just once, so a lot of what follows is analysis that is still to be tested over the board. I have included many "N" signs to emphasize that point. The main lines to consider are E221) 12. $\mathbb{W}xg7$, E222) 12. $\mathbb{W}d3N$, E223) 12. $\mathbb{W}c4N$ and E224) 12. $\mathbb{W}e5N$. But we will start with two minor options.

12. $\mathbb{W}d2?N$ $\mathbb{Q}f6!$

It is possible to sacrifice the exchange in this case, since the ... $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ capture will be with tempo on the queen.

13. $\mathbb{Q}c7†$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$



14.0–0–0?!

After the greedy 14. $\mathbb{Q}xa8?!$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 15. $\mathbb{W}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}f2†$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{E}f8!+$ Black's attack is simply crushing.

14... $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 15. $\mathbb{W}e1$ e5!

It is very important to play ...e5 in order to create the threat of ... $\mathbb{W}h6$.

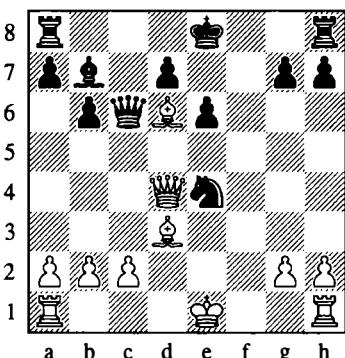
16. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$

After 16. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}f2$ 17. $\mathbb{W}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}e3$ 19. $\mathbb{E}e1$ a key move is 19...h6, guarding the g5-square. Black will be an exchange up in an admittedly messy position.

16... $\mathbb{E}c8$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{W}h6†$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{E}xc7$
19. $\mathbb{Q}xc7†$ $\mathbb{Q}xc7$ 20. $\mathbb{E}xd7†$ $\mathbb{Q}c8\mp$

White's attack leads nowhere.

12. $\mathbb{Q}d6\#N \mathbb{Q}xd6$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xd6 \mathbb{Q}f6!$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}d3 \mathbb{Q}xe4$



15. $\mathbb{Q}e7!!$

The 12. $\mathbb{Q}d6\#N$ variation is nothing special, but I wanted to show this fantastic move!

15... $\mathbb{E}g8$ 16.0-0-0 $\mathbb{W}d5!$ 17. $\mathbb{W}b4$

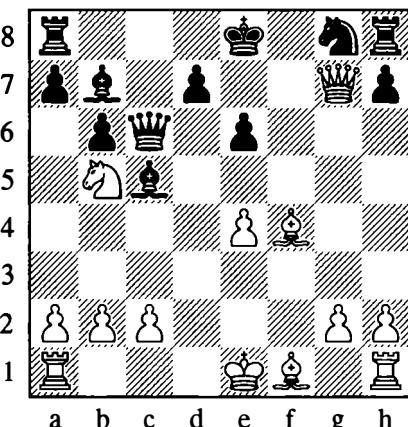
Or 17. $\mathbb{W}a4 \mathbb{W}a5!$ holds the balance.

17... $\mathbb{W}xa2$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xe4 \mathbb{Q}xe4$ 19. $\mathbb{W}xe4 \mathbb{Q}xe7$

20. $\mathbb{W}h4\# \mathbb{Q}e8=$

Black is two pawns up and threatens checks on a1 then a5, so the game should end in a perpetual.

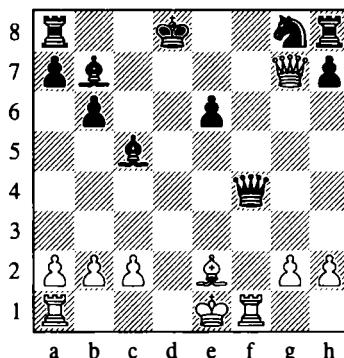
E221) 12. $\mathbb{W}xg7$



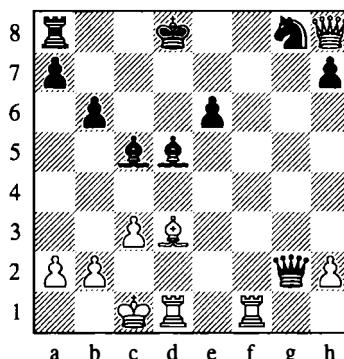
Now there is a forcing line where both players need to be prepared. In Timofeev – Bukavshin both players were indeed well prepared and the game ended in a draw, but there are many more positions that should be tested.

12... $\mathbb{W}xe4\# 13. \mathbb{Q}e2 \mathbb{W}xf4 14. \mathbb{E}f1$

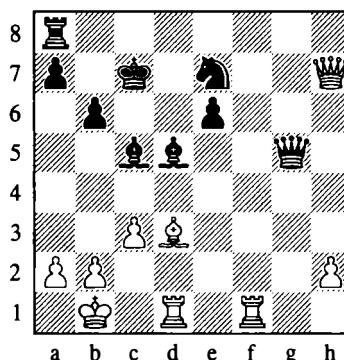
One of the untested options is: 14. $\mathbb{Q}c7\#?$ $\mathbb{Q}d8!$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xe6\#$! $dxe6$ 16. $\mathbb{E}f1$



16... $\mathbb{W}b4\#!$ It is useful for Black to weaken White's queenside structure. 17. $c3 \mathbb{W}e4$ 18.0-0-0-0 $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}d3 \mathbb{W}xg2$ 20. $\mathbb{W}xh8$



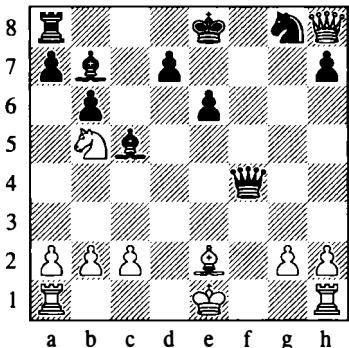
20... $\mathbb{W}g5\#!$ An important intermediate check in order to control the e5-square! 21. $\mathbb{Q}b1 \mathbb{Q}c7$ 22. $\mathbb{W}xh7\# \mathbb{Q}e7\#$



The position is unclear, but I believe that Black's chances in a practical game are better.

14. $\mathbb{W}xh8$

This is nothing special since Black can play against White's queen.

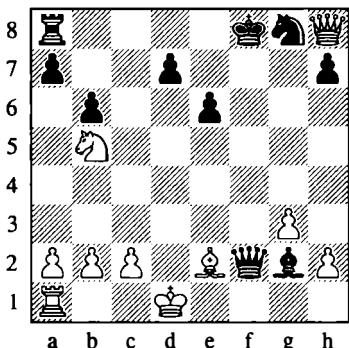


14... $\mathbb{Q}f2\text{!}$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}f8\text{!!}$

Not an easy move to find over the board, but it is the only way for Black to defend the knight on g8. Now Black is threatening ... $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ and gaining the initiative. White should continue with:

16.g3! $\mathbb{W}e3$ 17. $\mathbb{E}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}g2$! 18. $\mathbb{E}xf2\text{!}$ $\mathbb{W}xf2\text{=}$

The position is rather unclear; Black has the immediate threat of ... $\mathbb{Q}f1$. White has many ways to continue which lead to "0.00" according to the engine, but over the board I would definitely prefer to be Black since White's pieces lack coordination. An interesting line leading to complications is:



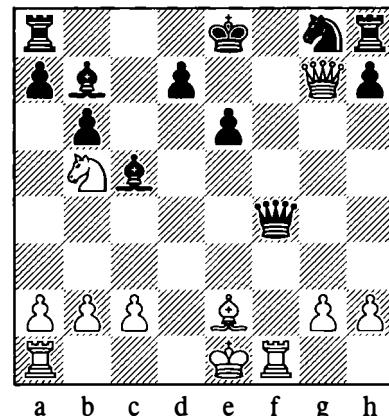
19. $\mathbb{Q}d2\text{!}$

Protecting the f1-square and opening a path for White's rook.

With White I would probably choose to play safe with 19. $\mathbb{W}d4$ and trade the queens.

19... $\mathbb{Q}f3$ 20. $\mathbb{E}e1$ $\mathbb{W}xh2\text{=}$

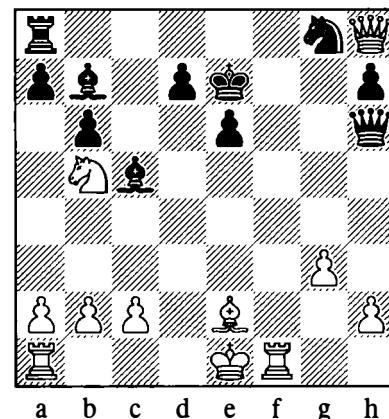
Black has gained a pawn but most likely the game would end in a perpetual.



The main line that follows is one to remember.

14... $\mathbb{W}h6\text{!}$ 15. $\mathbb{W}xh8$ $\mathbb{Q}e7\text{!}$ 16. $g3$

There is no better way to save the g-pawn.

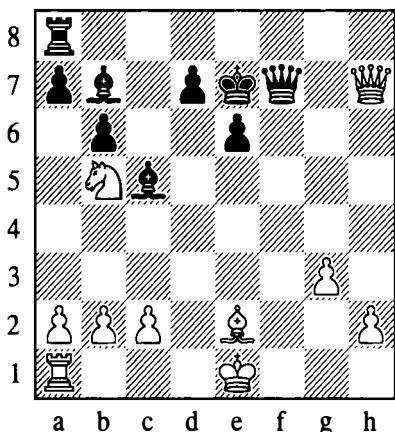


16... $\mathbb{Q}f6$

Black could consider 16... $\mathbb{Q}g2\text{!N}$ 17. $\mathbb{E}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 18. $\mathbb{E}xf6$ $\mathbb{W}xf6$ with similar play to the line

below. Having the bishop on g2 rather than b7 has the benefit of later preventing $\mathbb{E}f1$. The resulting positions are still rather balanced.

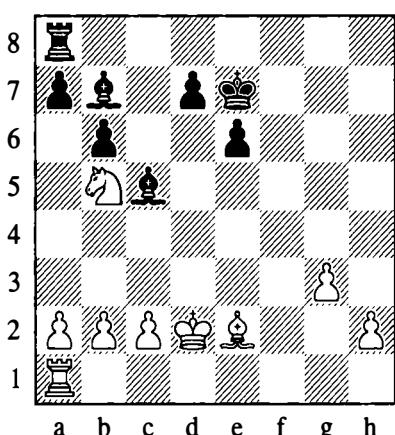
17. $\mathbb{E}xf6!$ $\mathbb{W}xf6$ 18. $\mathbb{W}xh7\#$ $\mathbb{W}f7$



19. $\mathbb{W}xf7\#?$ N

19. $\mathbb{W}h4\#$ $\mathbb{W}f6$ 20. $\mathbb{W}h7\#$ $\mathbb{W}f7$ was Timofeev – Bukavshin, Khanty-Mansiysk 2015, which was shortly agreed drawn.

19... $\mathbb{W}xf7$ 20. $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{W}e7$



This position is White's only real chance for an advantage. At first I thought that White's extra pawn is enough to claim a small advantage for White. After my initial evaluation I tried to

figure out how White could actually improve his position. I have to admit that I didn't find a clear way for White to advance his pawns. This of course doesn't mean that White cannot push his pawns, but it does mean that Black will have his own chances of advancing his central pawns and, with the help of the bishop pair, Black may create his own chances of winning.

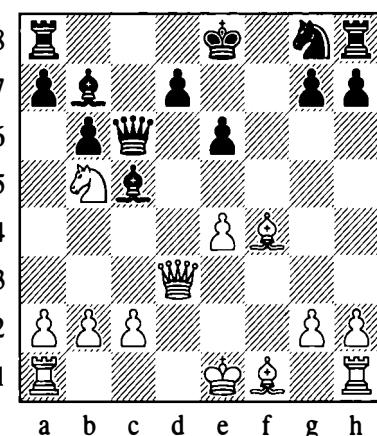
21. $\mathbb{E}f1$

It is important for White to try to activate his rook. This move emphasizes the significance of Black's potential novelty at move 16.

21... $a6$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $b5\#$

We will stop the analysis here since there are many possible continuations for White; it is not a forcing position. Black will continue with ... $\mathbb{E}h8$ (or to g8) push ... $d5$ and either go for ... $\mathbb{Q}d6$ to attack the g3-pawn or maybe ... $e5-e4$. In every case I like Black's practical chances, and it is no longer a mystery to me why Timofeev went for the repetition in his game against Bukavshin.

E222) 12. $\mathbb{W}d3$ N



White keeps an eye on e4 and threatens a fork with $\mathbb{Q}c7\#$.

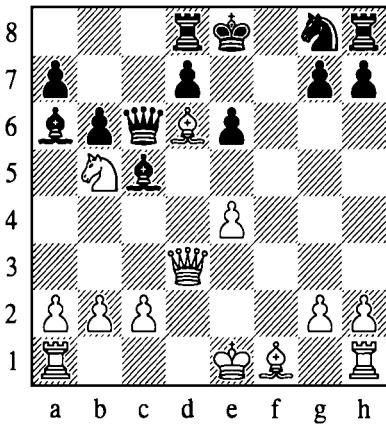
12... $\mathbb{E}d8!$

Ideally Black would like to play 12... $\mathbb{E}c8?$ but then White plays $\mathfrak{Q}xa7$ with another fork.

13. $\mathfrak{Q}d6!$

After 13. $\mathfrak{Q}c7$ $\mathbb{W}xe4\#$! 14. $\mathbb{W}xe4$ $\mathfrak{Q}xe4$ 15. $\mathfrak{Q}xd8$ $\mathfrak{Q}xd8$ 16.0–0–0 $\mathfrak{Q}f6\#$ Black's bishop pair and the central pawns will definitely compensate for the sacrificed exchange.

13... $\mathfrak{Q}a6!$



14. $\mathfrak{Q}c7\#$

Less testing is: 14. $\mathfrak{Q}xc5$ $\mathfrak{Q}xb5$ 15. $\mathbb{W}xb5$ $\mathbb{W}xe4\#$! 16. $\mathfrak{Q}e2$ $\mathfrak{B}xc5$ 17. $\mathbb{W}xc5$ $\mathfrak{Q}e7=$ Objectively it's equal, but I would prefer Black's position. It is important to place the knight on e7 with the idea at some point to go ... $\mathfrak{Q}f5-d4$ (or e3).

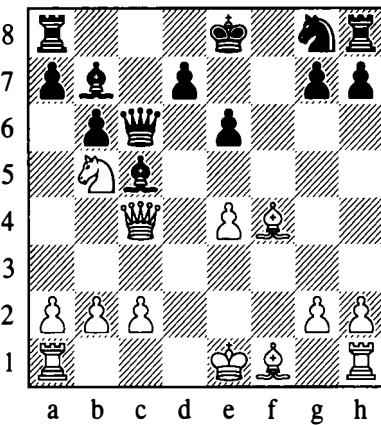
14... $\mathfrak{Q}f7$ 15. $\mathfrak{Q}xa6$

After 15. $\mathbb{W}f3\#$! $\mathfrak{Q}f6$ 16. $\mathfrak{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{W}xc7$ 17. $\mathfrak{Q}d4$ $\mathfrak{Q}b7$ 18. $\mathfrak{Q}d3$ e5! Black will continue with ... $\mathfrak{E}hf8$ and ... $\mathfrak{Q}g8$, completing the artificial castling. White has the bishop pair but Black has long-term pressure on e4.

15... $\mathbb{W}xd6$ 16. $\mathfrak{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{W}xc5=$

Once again Black will play ... $\mathfrak{Q}f6$, ... $\mathfrak{E}hf8$, ... $\mathfrak{Q}g8$, ... $\mathbb{W}e5$, ...d7-d6 and find play with lasting pressure against the e4-pawn.

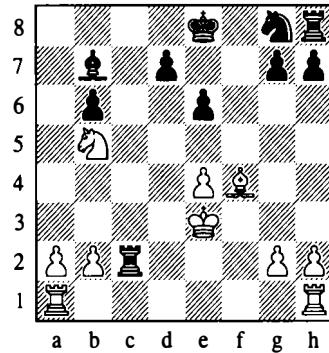
E223) 12. $\mathbb{W}c4N$



12... $\mathfrak{Q}f7!$

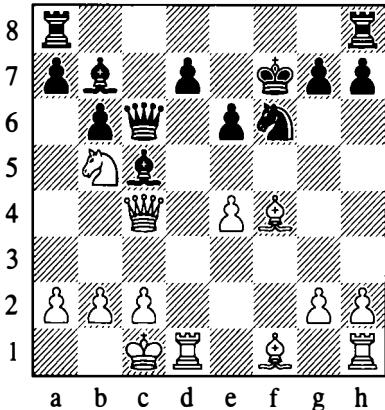
Once again we are protecting our king from the double attack and we are going to "castle" by playing ... $\mathfrak{Q}f6$, ... $\mathfrak{E}hf8$ and ... $\mathfrak{Q}g8$.

12... $\mathfrak{E}c8?$ is interesting and leads, more or less by force, to an endgame. 13. $\mathfrak{Q}xa7$ $\mathfrak{Q}f2\#$! 14. $\mathfrak{Q}xf2$ $\mathbb{W}xc4$ 15. $\mathfrak{Q}xc4$ $\mathfrak{E}xc4$ 16. $\mathfrak{Q}b5$ $\mathfrak{E}xc2\#$ 17. $\mathfrak{Q}e3$



17... $\mathfrak{Q}c6!$ 18. $\mathfrak{Q}d4$ $\mathfrak{E}xb2$ 19. $\mathfrak{E}hb1!$ $\mathfrak{E}xb1$ 20. $\mathfrak{E}xb1$ $\mathfrak{Q}e7$ 21. $\mathfrak{E}xb6$ $\mathfrak{Q}f7$ 22. $\mathfrak{E}a6!?$ $\mathfrak{E}a8=$ Black should not find it difficult to hold this endgame, but I understand that not many players would find it appealing to defend this endgame.

13.0–0–0 $\mathfrak{Q}f6$

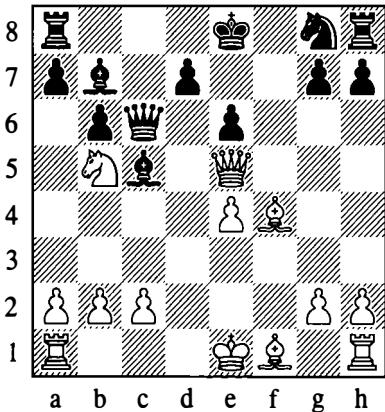
5. $\mathbb{Q}c3 \mathbb{W}c7$ 

14.e5!!

White should opt for a dynamic approach or else Black will complete his development.

14... $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}d4 \mathbb{W}c8!$

Black is threatening ... $\mathbb{Q}f2$ and if White prevents it, then we will go for ... $\mathbb{E}hf8$ and then simply ... $\mathbb{Q}g8$ with decent play. We have seen this 'neatening up' of Black's king position several times.

E224) 12. $\mathbb{W}e5N$ 

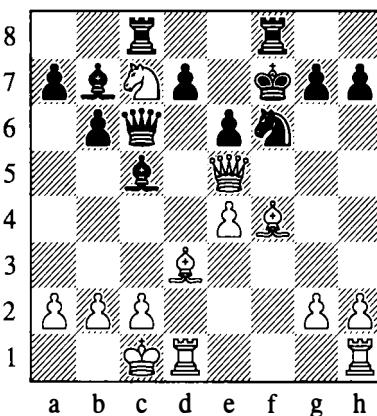
White seems to have threats on c7 and g7, but the former is not a real threat, so:

12... $\mathbb{Q}f6$! 13. $\mathbb{Q}c7\# \mathbb{Q}f7$ 14.0-0-0

The consistent 14. $\mathbb{Q}xa8??$ is a disaster after 14... $d6!+$. When the queen moves, e4 drops with check then the f4-bishop is next. For example: 15. $\mathbb{W}g5$ $\mathbb{W}xe4\#$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $h6$! 17. $\mathbb{W}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$ We can now see the f4-bishop is lost, then the white king will be next.

14... $\mathbb{E}ac8$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}d3 \mathbb{E}hf8$

As usual, Black simply wants to continue with ... $\mathbb{Q}g8$. The game could continue in many ways so let's see a couple of examples.

16. $\mathbb{Q}b1$

After 16. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ Black can effectively force a draw with a clever exchange sacrifice. 16... $a6!$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}a7$ $\mathbb{W}a4$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xc8$ $\mathbb{W}xc8$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 20. $\mathbb{W}d6$ (White has no choice as 20. $\mathbb{W}g5??$ $\mathbb{E}c5!$ 21. $\mathbb{W}g3$ $\mathbb{E}a5$ 22. $a3$ $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ is fatal) 20... $\mathbb{Q}c5!=$ With a repetition.

16... $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}b5 \mathbb{E}a8!!$

With a really double-edged position.

Conclusion

We started this 6.f4 chapter with a brief digression into the related system 6.a3 a6 7.f4. In general Black is fine, though some accuracy is needed. For example, note the early knight exchange on d4 to avoid a transposition to the Nakamura game where Black is suffering.

I am fond of the 6.f4 line: it's rather rare and often effective if Black is unprepared. We will avoid that fate by choosing 6... $\mathbb{Q}xd4!$? 7. $\mathbb{W}xd4$ then 7...b6! which is an efficient solution. We saw various developing tries, but by far the critical test is the direct E) 8.f5!? $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 9.fxe6 when we need to reply 9...fxe6!. Of the options that follow, the key position is reached after 10. $\mathbb{Q}b5!$? $\mathbb{W}c6!$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}c5!$. Since this position has been reached only once, almost all my analysis is untested in praxis. Black should pay attention to at least half a dozen queen moves in response and some memorization is needed.

Thus 6.f4 demands that Black do his homework, but I am satisfied that Black will have good chances with the lines I suggest.



5. $\mathbb{Q}c3 \mathbb{W}c7$



6. $\mathbb{W}d3!!$

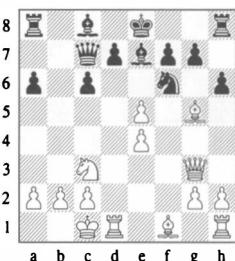
Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ e6 3.d4 cxd4 4. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 5. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{W}c7$

6. $\mathbb{W}d3!!$

| | |
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| B1) 7. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ | 113 |
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B2) note to 12. $\mathbb{Q}xf6N$



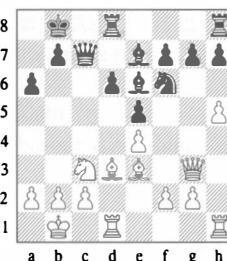
12... $\mathbb{Q}h5!!$

B3) note to 8. $\mathbb{W}g3$



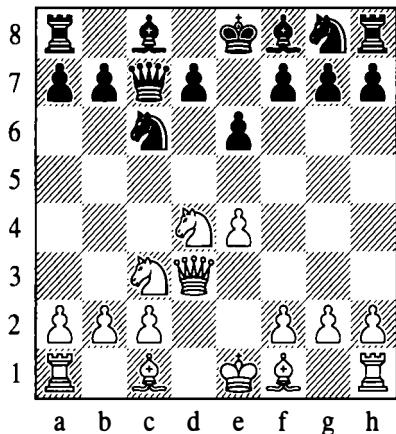
10... $\mathbb{Q}xd4!!N$

B33) after 17. $\mathbb{Q}b1$



17... $\mathbb{g}5!!$

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘c6 5.♘c3 ♜c7 6.♘d3!?

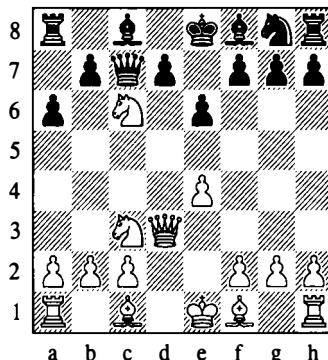


This move was tried in a correspondence game in 2011, then it was repeated in 2012. But both games were played by rather lowly-rated players. It was in 2014 when Vallejo Pons introduced this idea against the Indian GM Adhiban that this move attracted lots of attention. Many top GMs have employed it and I really like the fact that a 6th move introduced as recently as 2014 could become a new main line. There are still plenty of fresh ideas to be found early in the opening!

What is White's idea behind this move? Well, I believe this variation has a lot in common with the trendy 7.♗f3 variation which was introduced many years earlier but only became popular in 2013. In fact I believe Vallejo was inspired by 7.♗f3 in order to come up with the new idea. One of the basic ideas of the 7.♗f3 line is to trade queens by playing ♗g3. So White is trying to make use of this plan but does not want to waste a tempo by playing 6.♗e3 before exchanging queens. It is also not clear if he will develop his bishop on e3 or f4, so the bishop can benefit from this flexibility. The problem for White is that his knight on d4 will lack protection, so he will probably have to exchange first on c6 and then play ♗g3.

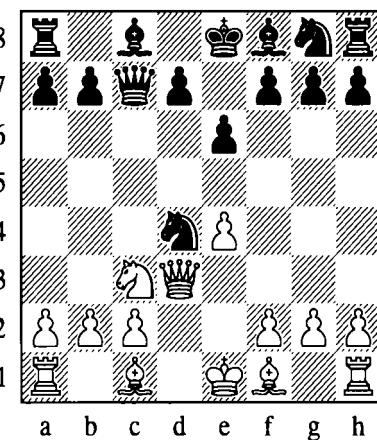
Black has two good ways to continue:
A) 6...♘xd4!? and my favourite B) 6...♗f6!.

6...a6?! is the most common move, but it is imprecise as it allows White to show his idea.
7.♘xc6!



7...♗xc6 (The other way leads to an exchange of queens: 7...bxcc6 8.♗g3! ♜xg3 9.hxg3 d5 10.♘a4!± There have been a number of games where White had an advantage. In this type of position ...a6 is useless since it weakens the b6-square. White can also develop an initiative on the kingside by playing f2-f3 and g3-g4.)
8.♗g3 This is one simple way White can continue. 8...b5 9.a3! Securing the knight on c3. 9.♘f6 10.♗d3±

A) 6...♘xd4!?



Exchanging on d4 is a standard strategy in the Taimanov and winning a tempo in the process cannot be a bad idea.

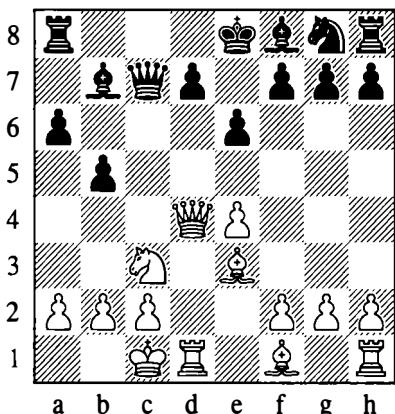
7. $\mathbb{W}xd4$ a6

There is nothing wrong with this position. In fact I would have recommended it, except I was greatly impressed by a recent game of Korobov with 6... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ and chose to go for that as my main line. But if the reader wishes a sound alternative, then let's briefly see how the game might unfold from here.

8. $\mathbb{Q}e3$

8.g3 might transpose to some Fianchetto variations a tempo down for White, but another solid way to play for Black was shown after 8...b5 9. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{W}a7$ in Sulskis – Kantans, Vilnius 2017.

8...b5 9.0–0–0 $\mathbb{Q}b7$



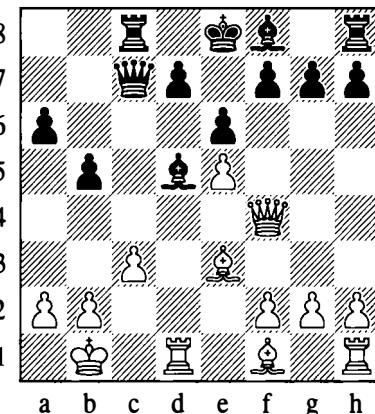
10. $\mathbb{Q}b1$

Another game continued: 10.f3 $\mathbb{E}c8$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$?!? (or 12... $\mathbb{Q}e7N$ is the engine suggestion which leads to a more unclear position) 13. $\mathbb{W}xc5$ $\mathbb{W}xc5$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{E}xc5$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}hd1$ E. Hansen – Tillis, Internet 2017, had reached a typical Sicilian endgame which is fine for Black after 15... $\mathbb{Q}e7$!?

10... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 11.e5?!

Or 11.f3 here as well would be the lesser evil, but White wants to be ambitious.

11... $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 13. $\mathbb{W}f4$ $\mathbb{E}c8$ 14.c3

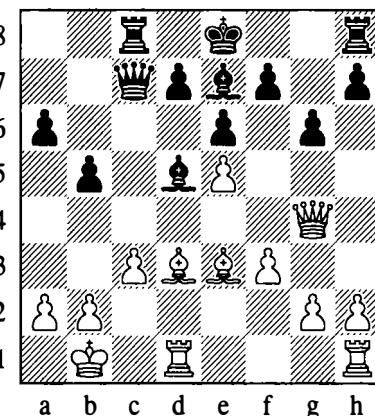


14... $\mathbb{W}b7$!?

Instead 14... $\mathbb{W}a5$! planning a quick ...b5-b4 looks even stronger, but Black was probably afraid of 15. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{W}xd5$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ followed by $\mathbb{Q}d3$, and maybe $\mathbb{Q}c2$, and a general push of the white pawns. But I don't believe in White's compensation after 16... $\mathbb{W}b6$! insisting on opening lines against the white king with ...a5 and ...b4.

We shall follow the game for a few more moves just to see a typical tactical idea.

15.f3 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 16. $\mathbb{W}g4$ g6 17. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{W}c7$



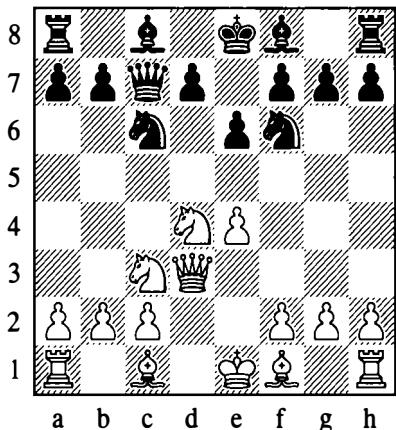
18.h4??

A fatal oversight.

Instead a move such as 18.♗e4 would have kept the game balanced.

18...♛a5!

Now 19.a4 was obviously never going to save White in Eljanov – Neiksans, Germany 2016. Perhaps White had originally relied on 19.a3 before spotting that 19...♝xa3 20.bxa3 ♜xc3! is killing.

B) 6...♞f6!

As I said, although I like the idea of 6...♞xd4, it seems more ambitious to develop a piece, because White's main idea of ♜xc6 and ♛g3 is not yet a threat and a move such as ♜db5 does not lead anywhere for White. And 6...♞f6 meets the above criteria, as it's a fine developing move, so it is my preference.

I shall examine B1) 7.♞xc6, B2) 7.♗g5 and the main line B3) 7.♗db5.

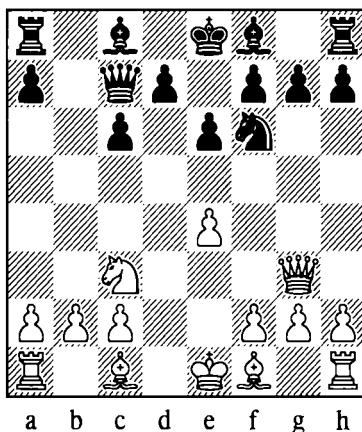
B1) 7.♞xc6

This is not a threatening continuation.

7...bxcc6

Taking towards the centre is Black's most ambitious choice when the move e4-e5 is not an option for White.

But 7...dxc6 8.♗g3 ♛xg3 9.hxg3 e5!= as in Haast – Keetman, Amstelveen 2017, should also be fine for Black.

8.♗g3**8...♛xg3!**

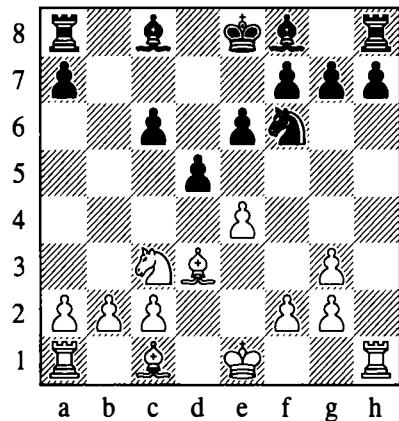
If Black avoids the exchange with 8...d6, then White's queen is excellently placed on g3 for the upcoming battle.

That being said, after 8...e5!! 9.♗e2 ♜e7 10.0–0 0–0 11.♗h6 ♜e8 12.♗ad1 ♜h8 13.♗e3 d6∞ Black can methodically prepare ...d5 with ...♞f6, ...♝b7 and ...♛a5, or strike at the centre with a timely ...f5.

9.hxg3 d5 10.♗d3

With the queens gone, there are many possible lines. For example: 10.exd5 cxd5 11.♗f4 ♜b7 12.0–0–0 (or 12.♗b5 ♜d7 easily stops the forking threat) 12...♝c5 13.f3 ♜e7 14.g4 h6 The endgame is balanced but not at all dull.

So far we have followed Kollars – Uksini, Hamburg 2016, but now I suggest we vary:



10...Qd6?N

This is more active than placing the bishop on e7, as in the game.

11.Qd2

Perhaps in the game Black was worried about 11.f4 but after 11...Qc5 \rightleftarrows White has weakened some squares on the kingside.

The following line is only for illustration, and certainly not forced:

11...h6!?

12.0–0–0 Qg4!?

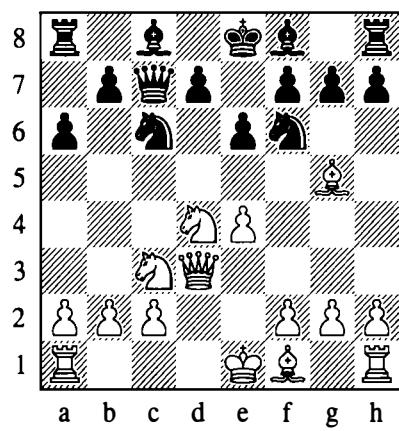
13.Qh1 d4

14.Qa4 Bb8 15.Qe2 e5 16.c3 c5 17.f3 Qf6

18.b3 Qe6 19.g4 Qe7 20.Qc2 Bh8 21.Qb2 Qd7 \rightleftarrows

Black has no reason to complain in this endgame, as he has plenty of counterplay.

B2) 7.Qg5 a6



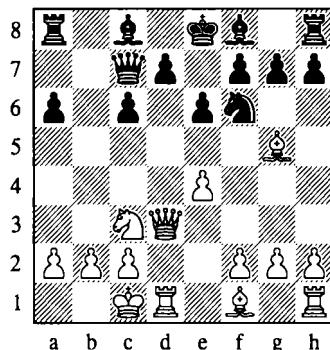
White is developing actively, but Black has little to fear.

8.0–0–0

We should also check out the exchange on c6, which we already know is a common theme in this line:

8.Qxc6 bxc6 9.0–0–0

9.Wg3 doesn't work here because White has a bishop on g5: 9...Qd6! Unlike other lines, White cannot take on g7 as his bishop blocks the path.



9...d5!N

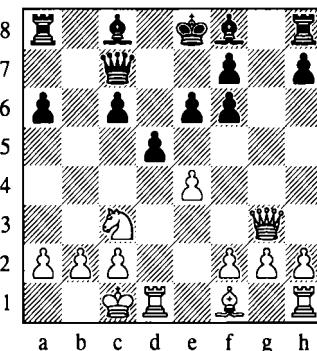
Black intends to put his bishop on d6.

10.Qxf6?!

This is a concession; the dark squares are more significant than the doubled f-pawns. White should prefer 10.f4. It stops Black's original plan but that's not a serious problem.

For example: 10...Qc5 ∞

10...gxf6 11.Wg3



11...♗d6!

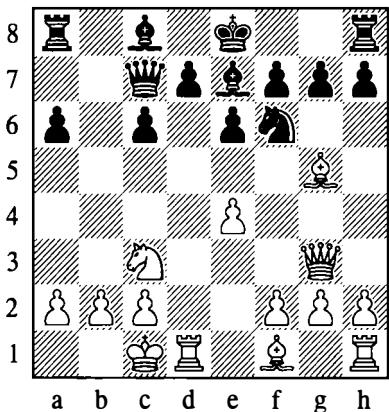
The safe and practical choice. Black can exchange on g3 at a time of his choosing.

Instead 11...♗d6 12.♗g7 might be a half-decent idea for White, although I doubt it. It is a potential mess though.

After the text move a plausible sample line is: 12.♗b1 ♘b8 13.♗a1 ♗xg3 14.hxg3 ♘c5 15.f3 h5 16.♗d3 ♘e7

In the 2017 European Rapid Championship Bartel played the text move against me. The game continued:

8...♗e7 9.♗xc6 bxc6 10.♗g3



10...e5

10...♗xg3?!N was actually my first thought, but I didn't want to exchange the queens since I wanted to attack. But objectively this move is best and leads to equality after 11.hxg3 d5 12.exd5 cxd5. In such structures White's bishop is rather misplaced on g5, and Black will have the time to improve his pieces; probably Black will continue with ...♗b7 and ...♗d7. If White decides to exchange the dark-squared bishops then Black's rooks will come to d8 and c8. Otherwise Black will play ...♗f6 and try to increase the pressure on b2.

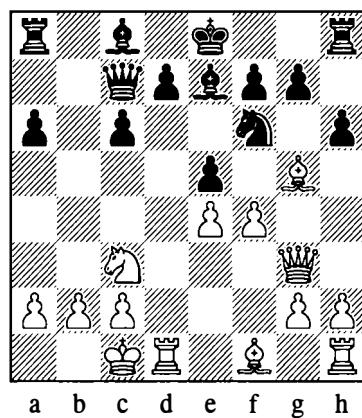
What follows is not so relevant to our repertoire, but there's plenty of interesting

instructive chess, so I will continue the line briefly.

11.f4

Worth noting is 11.♗e2?N taking away the crucial h5-square. After 11...d6 12.♗b1 0–0 13.f4 ♘h8! the position remains unclear, with both sides having attacking chances. By playing ...♘h8, Black has created the defensive idea of ...♗g8.

11...h6!

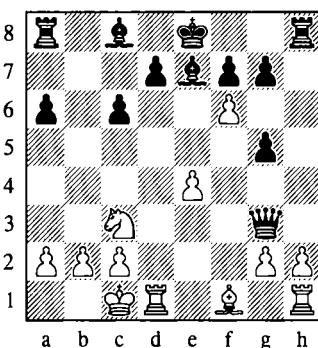


12.♗xf6N

Instead the game continued:

12.fxe5?!, ♘h5!

12...hxg5?? At first this move looks winning for Black since the h2-pawn is pinned and the queen on g3 looks vulnerable, but White has a fantastic idea and is actually winning. 13.exf6 ♗xg3

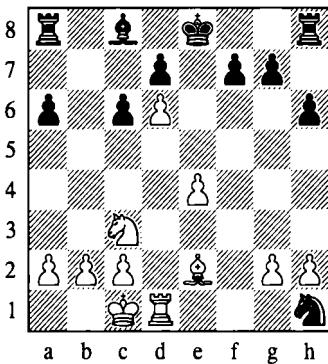


14.hxg3!! ♜xh1 15.fxg7+– White will promote to a queen with a winning position.

13.♕xe7 ♔xg3 14.♗d6

A very interesting queen sacrifice by White. I don't know if this was preparation of my opponent, but according to my understanding Black should be better.

14...♛xd6! 15.exd6 ♜xh1 16.♗e2



16...a5!N

Black will simply go ...♗a6 and enjoy a big advantage.

16...♗f2 was instead what I played. 17.♗f1 ♜xe4 (there was still time for: 17...a5!N 18.♗xf2 ♗a6??) 18.♗xe4 0–0 19.♕c5∞ Bartel – Pavlidis, Katowice (rapid) 2017. The computer still slightly prefers Black's chances, but engines tend to like material more than a positional advantage which might prove dangerous in a human game. In the game I managed to defend well to reach an equal position, then took advantage of a serious blunder by my opponent to win the game.

12...♗xf6 13.♗s

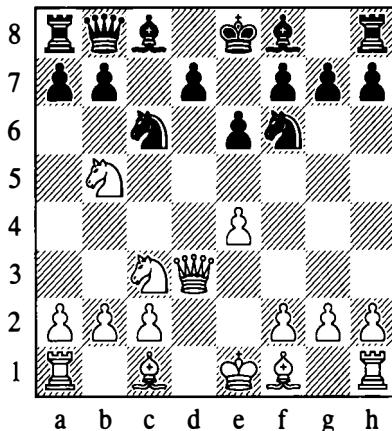
This would have been my opponent's best choice, but I don't think he was in the mood to give up the bishop pair.

13...a5! 14.♗c4 a4!∞

Black will continue with ...0–0 and ...♗a6 and then develop an attack against the b2-pawn. White will try to go for an attack himself

with h2-h4 and, after moving his queen, g2-g4-g5. It's wild.

B3) 7.♗db5 ♜b8

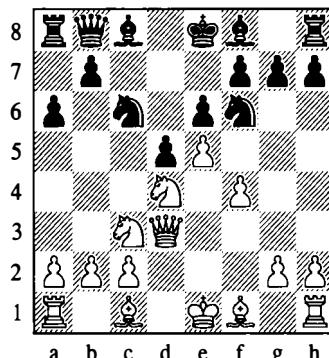


8.♗g3

The text move is the thematic idea, but another approach has also been tested:

8.f4? a6 9.♗d4 d5 10.e5

This looks like an odd type of French. I suggest Black vary now.



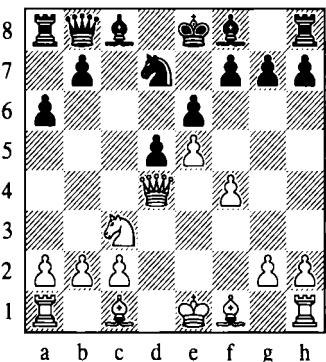
10...♗xd4!N

Drawing the queen to a vulnerable square. In Motylev – Mirzoev, Minsk (rapid) 2015, the game continued 10...♗d7 11.♗e3 when any exchange on d4 would be met by a bishop recapture.

11.♗xd4

Instead 11.exf6 could be simply met by 11... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ when White will soon be swapping a centre pawn for a wing pawn, or Black can try the flashier 11...e5∞ with tactical ideas including ... $\mathbb{Q}f5$.

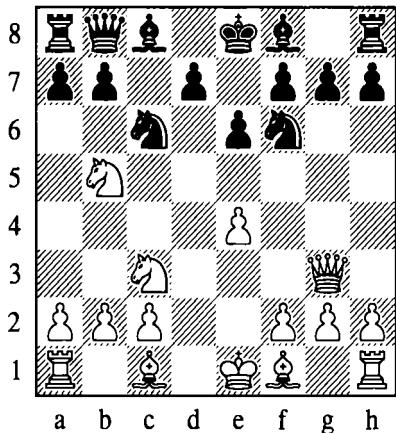
11... $\mathbb{Q}d7$



Black is eyeing ... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ so a plausible sample line is:

12. $\mathbb{W}f2$ f6! 13. exf6 $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 15. 0–0
0–0

Black plans ... $\mathbb{Q}d7$. It is a typical French structure where Black has counterplay against the f4-pawn.



8... $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}e3$

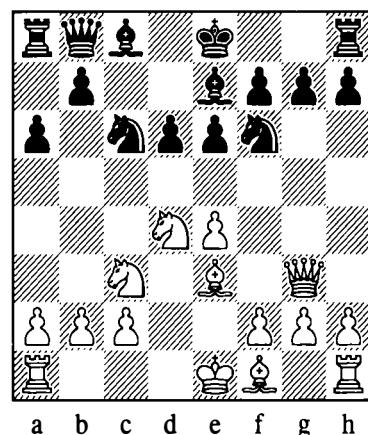
The text move is almost universally played, as the b5-knight needs a good retreat square such as d4.

9...a6 10. $\mathbb{Q}d4$

I believe that this is exactly the type of position that most disturbs White players in the 6. $\mathbb{W}d3$ line. Black players have tried many interesting moves such as 10... $\mathbb{Q}d7$, 10... $\mathbb{W}c7$ and 10...h5, but I was really impressed by Korobov's choice against Tari:

10... $\mathbb{Q}e7$!

Korobov simply played this, threatening to castle. I suppose that Korobov was not in a mood to go for wild play with ...h5 or a quick queenside attack with ... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ and ...b5, so he chose simple development and then ...0–0. His approach asks: 'Are you really threatening something on the kingside? Then prove it to me!'



The three main moves to consider are B31) 11.0–0–0, B32) 11.f4 and B33) 11.h4.

Instead 11. $\mathbb{W}xg7$?! gives Black too much play: 11... $\mathbb{E}g8$ 12. $\mathbb{W}h6$ $\mathbb{E}g6$ 13. $\mathbb{W}h4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ e5 15. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ b5∞ Next comes ...b4 with excellent chances for Black.

B31) 11.0–0–0 0–0 12. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$!

We wish to continue our queenside play but we also need to control the e5-point for a few more moves.

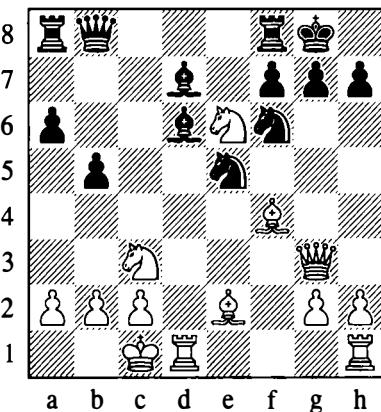
For example, 12... $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ b5?! 14.e5!± was highly unpleasant for Black in Nigmatov – Makarian, Moscow 2018.

13.f4 b5 14.e5

A forcing and critical test.

14...dxe5 15.fxe5 $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}f4 \mathbb{Q}d6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$

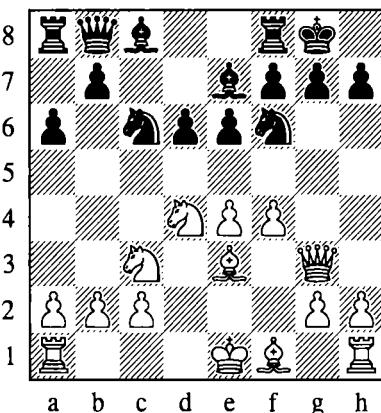
This looks scary, but with simple moves we arrive at an equal position.



17... $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ $\mathbb{W}xd6$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{W}e7$
20. $\mathbb{Q}d6$ $\mathbb{W}a7$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}g8$ $\mathbb{B}xf8=$

Objectively it is equal, but I am optimistic about Black's practical chances in this type of position, so I would advise you not to agree a draw just yet.

B32) 11.f4 0–0



Now we need a further split: B321) 12. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ or B322) 12. $\mathbb{Q}e2!?$ N.

B321) 12. $\mathbb{Q}d3$

This move was chosen by Tari in his game against Korobov. Black has many ways to continue but I like very much Korobov's reaction.

12... $\mathbb{Q}h5!$

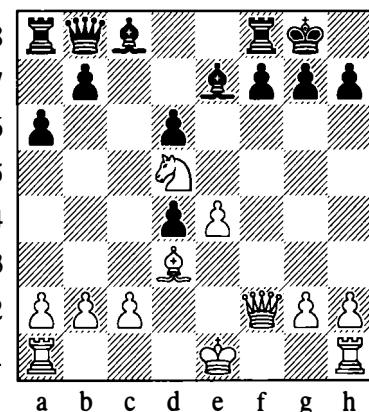
We will soon see that this move has a clever tactical idea in mind.

13. $\mathbb{W}f3$

After 13. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ N $bcx6$ 14. $\mathbb{W}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ Black's queen is excellently placed on the b-file. Black can continue with either ...e5 or even ...a5 combined with ... $\mathbb{Q}a6$ ideas.

13... $\mathbb{Q}xf4!$ 14. $\mathbb{W}xf4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ e5 16. $\mathbb{W}f2$ $exd4$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}d5$

White must try this move, as instead 17. $\mathbb{W}xd4?$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ is obviously horrible.

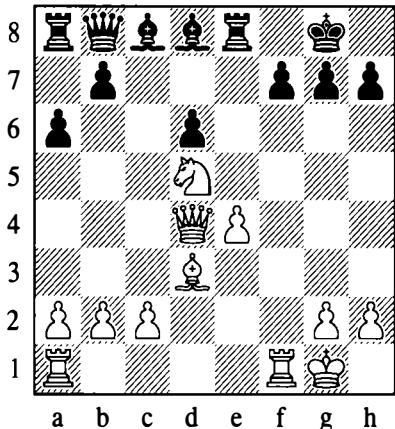


17... $\mathbb{Q}d8!?$ N

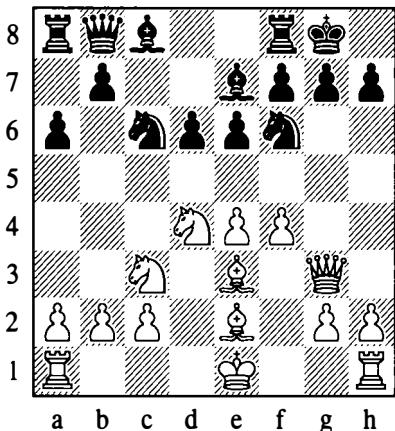
17... $\mathbb{Q}g5$ was Korobov's choice in Tari – Korobov, Khanty-Mansiysk 2017. He didn't have any problems in equalizing, but I like even more the idea of placing the bishop on d8 in order to control the b6-square.

18. $\mathbb{W}xd4$ $\mathbb{E}e8$ 19.0–0

Or after 19.0–0–0 b5 20. $\mathbb{E}hf1$ $\mathbb{E}e5\infty$ Black can continue with ... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ and sooner or later he will eliminate the knight on d5.

**19... $\mathbb{W}a7$!**

The position is very similar to the Tari – Korobov game with the only difference that our bishop is on d8 controlling the b6-square. Black is comfortably level, and can hope to press later.

B322) 12. $\mathbb{Q}e2$?!N

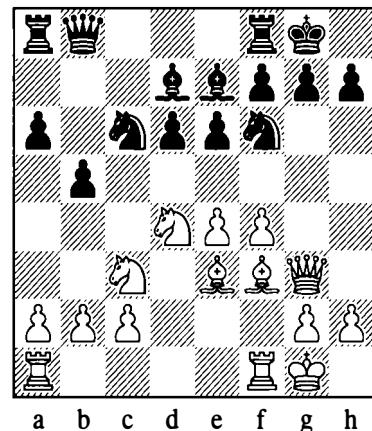
This is suggested by the engines in order to avoid the ideas shown in the Tari – Korobov game; White protects against the ... $\mathbb{Q}h5xf4$ tricks since he controls the h5-square.

12... $\mathbb{Q}d7$! 13.0–0

Or 13.0–0–0 transposes to variation B31 above.

13...b5!

We have reached a typical Scheveningen line where Black has a tempo more. His position is perfectly fine in the Scheveningen position itself, so with an extra tempo it should be even better. In the Scheveningen Black usually plays ... $\mathbb{W}d8-b8$ in one move and here he has played ... $\mathbb{W}d8-c7-b8$ wasting a tempo. But White has wasted two tempos by playing $\mathbb{Q}d4-b5-d4$. So we can conclude that Black's position is excellent. His play is also quite easy, and he is already threatening ...b4. A sample line could be:

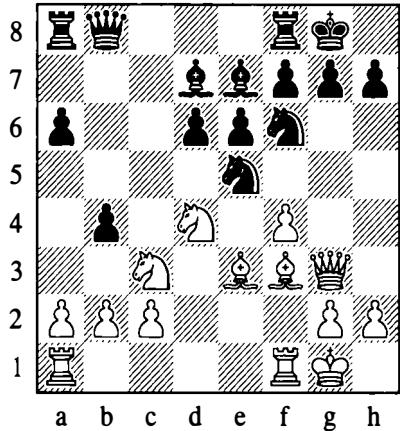
14. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ **14...b4!**

Or 14... $\mathbb{E}c8$ 15.e5 $dxe5$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ 17. $fxe5$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 18. $exf6$ $\mathbb{W}xg3$ 19. $hxg3$ $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6\infty$ is another unclear position where Black will collect a lot of pawns for the piece, leading to an unclear position.

14... $\mathbb{W}c7$! might also be interesting; since White has played $\mathbb{Q}f3$, Black can continue with ... $\mathbb{E}ab8$ (or $c8$).

15.e5!?

The text move is a direct test. Instead after 15. $\mathbb{Q}ce2$ $e5!$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $a5\infty$ Black is very close to being better. The bishop on f3 is misplaced and Black can continue with ...a4, ... $\mathbb{E}c8$ and ... $\mathbb{Q}a5$.

15... $\mathbb{Q}xe5!$ **16. $\mathbb{Q}xa8$**

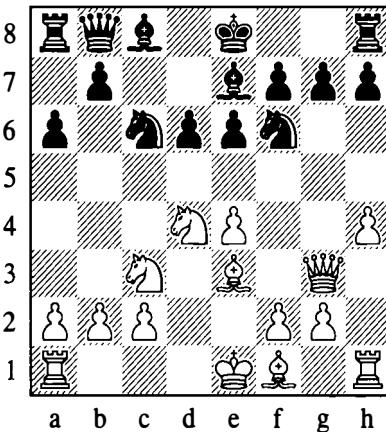
After 16. $fxe5$ $dxe5$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xa8$ $exd4$ 18. $\mathbb{W}xb8$ $\mathbb{E}xb8$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{E}xa8\infty$ the arising endgame is unclear. Black has the bishop pair and a passed e-pawn to compensate for the exchange sacrifice.

16... $\mathbb{Q}c4!$

The following line is not the only possible path, but it is a plausible and typical example:

17. $\mathbb{Q}c6$ $bxc3$ 18. $b3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 19. $\mathbb{W}xe3$ $\mathbb{Q}g4!$
20. $\mathbb{W}xc3$ $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ 21. $\mathbb{W}xc6$ $\mathbb{W}a7\bar{w}$

Black can take advantage of the pin on the g1-a7 diagonal by playing ...e5 and also play ... $\mathbb{Q}e3$ taking advantage of the weak e3-square.

B33) 11.h4

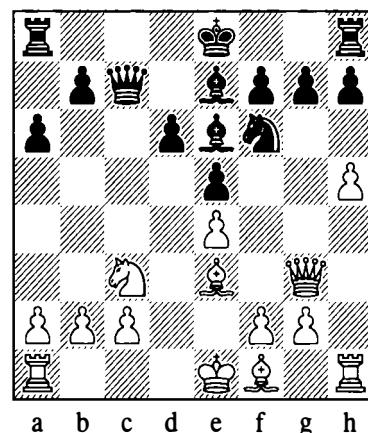
The engines really like the idea of pushing h4-h5. The hidden idea behind this move is to develop an attack *before* White castles, since the white king might be safer on e1 than on c1 (or b1).

11... $\mathbb{Q}xd4!$

Once again our reaction remains the same. White attacks on the kingside, so we must try to create play on the queenside or in the centre.

12. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $e5$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 14. $h5!$ $\mathbb{W}c7!$

Black creates the idea of queenside castling himself, since his king might not be totally safe on g8.



15. $\mathbb{Q}d3$!!

This is the most testing line. In many positions White is threatening to go $\mathbb{Q}d5$ and then capture on g7. Black needs to play a couple of accurate moves to avoid any problems.

15.a3

This is not a thematic move, but it allows us to see Black's plans to improve his position:

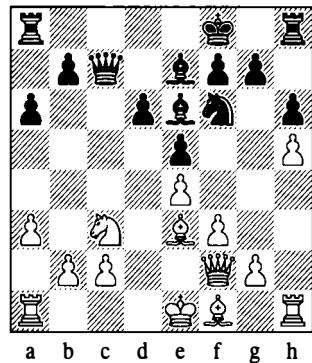
15...h6!

Defending against White's h5-h6.

16.f3 $\mathbb{Q}f8$!

Protecting the g7-pawn and creating the idea of ... $\mathbb{Q}g8-h7$ in the future.

17. $\mathbb{W}f2\infty$



A possible continuation is:

17...b5 18. $\mathbb{Q}b6$ $\mathbb{W}b7$ 19.0–0–0 $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}a5$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$!

Exchanging the dark-squared bishops is helpful for Black.

21. $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ $\mathbb{B}xd8$ 22. $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$!

The black king may seem indecisive, stepping one way then the other, but it all makes sense; once the dark-squared bishops are gone, the black king will be safe on e7.

15. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ is in the same spirit as 15.a3. For example, 15...h6 16.f3 $\mathbb{Q}f8$ with similar play to the line above.

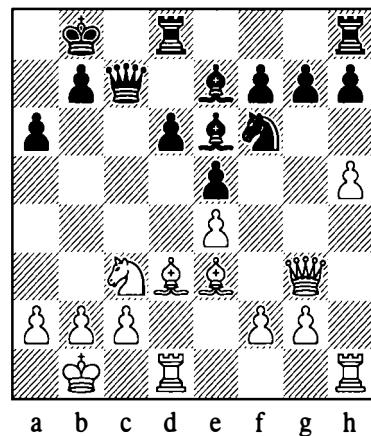
15...0–0–0!

Strange as it might look, it is quite common

for a Sicilian player to leave his king on e8, or even castle queenside. White's kingside play has made plenty of progress with his h-pawn advance, so Black's king would not be safe on g8.

16.0–0–0

16.a4? is another interesting idea for White, trying to fix Black's queenside with a4-a5 and then take advantage of the b6-square. The disadvantage of this move is that White's king is stuck on e1 and Black should try to open the kingside with ...g6 or the centre with ...d5. For example: 16...d5 17.exd5 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{B}xd5\infty$

16... $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ 

17...g5!!

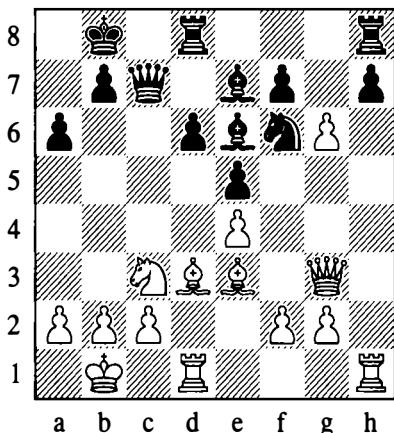
A surprising move, but once you start to analyse it, then it makes perfect sense. Black takes control over the f4-square and is now threatening to push ...d6-d5. If White stays passive then this central break will be very strong for Black.

18.hxg6??

White should capture on g6 and exchange a pair of rooks in order to gain some time and regroup to control the ...d6-d5 break.

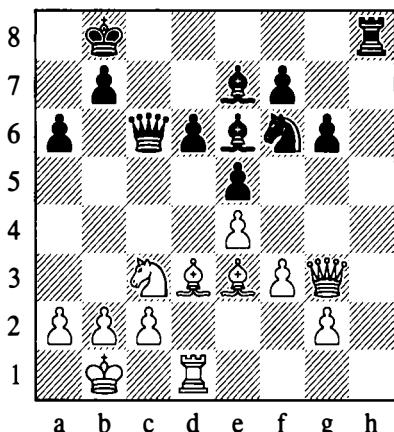
After 18. $f3$ $d5!$ 19. $exd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{B}xd5$ Black will continue with ... $\mathbb{B}hd8$, ... $h6$ and ... $f5$ and can even hope for the better chances if White fails to find some accurate moves.

And of course White must avoid 18. $\mathbb{B}xg5??$ $\mathbb{B}hg8$ 19. $\mathbb{W}h4$ $\mathbb{B}xg5$ 20. $\mathbb{W}xg5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ when White's king position will soon be ripped open.



18... $h \times g 6$ 19. $\mathbb{B}xh8$ $\mathbb{B}xh8$ 20. $f3$ $\mathbb{W}c6!!$

Black would like to play the typical manoeuvre with ... $\mathbb{B}d8-b6$ (or $a5$) and exchange his weakest piece.



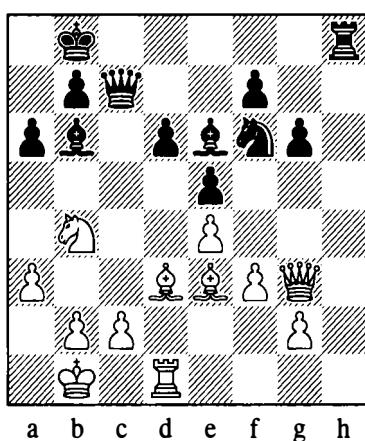
21. $a3!?$

This is probably the most interesting try for White in order to continue with $\mathbb{Q}a2-b4$.

Instead 21. $\mathbb{B}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 22. $\mathbb{W}f2$ is a crude battery, with 22... $\mathbb{Q}c5! \infty$ a good defence. Black plans to reroute his bishop via $d8$ to $b6$ or $a5$.

21. $\mathbb{B}d8$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}a2$ $\mathbb{B}b6$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}b4$ $\mathbb{W}c7$

The only move, but one good move is enough.

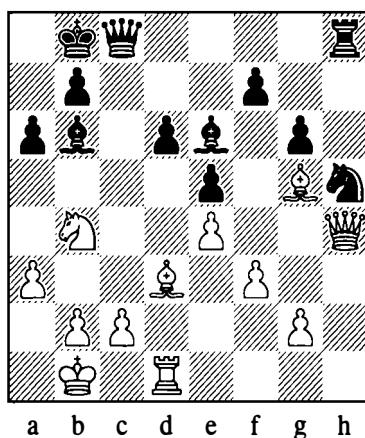


24. $\mathbb{B}g5!$

If White decides to exchange the dark-squared bishops, then Black would have no problems since he has solid control of the $d5$ -square. 24. $\mathbb{B}xb6$ $\mathbb{W}xb6=$

24... $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 25. $\mathbb{W}h4$ $\mathbb{W}c8!$

Once again creating the idea of exchanging the dark-squared bishops, this time with ... $\mathbb{B}d8$.



26.♖h1 ♖d8! 27.♕xd8 ♕xd8∞

The position remains double-edged. Black will probably go for ...a6-a5 at some point and when White retreats to a2 he can consider playing ...♘xa2, then playing a position with a knight versus a light-squared bishop. There is no reason Black should be afraid of such a position, since his knight may be more active than White's restricted light-squared bishop.

Conclusion

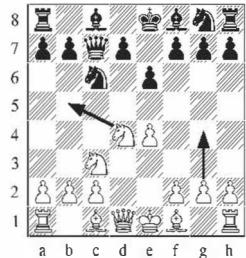
6.♗d3 is a recent addition to White's anti-Taimanov options. It's a clever idea that works especially well if Black plays on Taimanov autopilot with the most common move 6...a6?!. But we have two better options in 6...♗xd4!? and 6...♗f6!.

6...♗xd4!? makes perfect sense as it's a normal Taimanov move with an extra tempo due to the queen's interrupted journey from d1 to d4.

But my favourite is 6...♗f6! simply developing and inviting White to show his hand. The critical test is 7.♗db5 ♗b8 8.♗g3 d6 9.♗e3 a6 10.♗d4 ♗e7! when Black has fully equal chances. The downside for a Taimanov player is that we are now playing a Scheveningen! But Black's extra tempo more than makes up for this. I gave several lengthy continuations so that the reader will feel more at home in these Scheveningen-style lines.



5. $\mathbb{Q}c3 \mathbb{W}c7$



6. $\mathbb{Q}db5$ & 6. g4!?

Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ e6 3.d4 cxd4 4. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 5. $\mathbb{Q}c3$

5... $\mathbb{W}c7$

| | |
|------------------------|-----|
| A) 6. $\mathbb{Q}db5$ | 125 |
| B) 6. g4!? a6! | 130 |
| B1) 7. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ | 131 |
| B2) 7. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ | 132 |
| B3) 7. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ | 133 |
| B4) 7. h4 | 134 |

A) note to 13. $\mathbb{W}g4$



17... $\mathbb{Q}e7!N\mp$

B1) after 8. $\mathbb{Q}g2$



8... d5!N

B2) after 10. $\mathbb{W}d2$



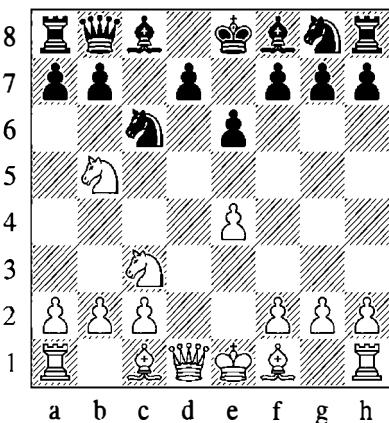
10... $\mathbb{Q}f6!N$

1.e4 c5 2.♗f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘c6 5.♘c3 ♗c7

In this chapter we will analyse two options, both of which have active intentions, albeit in completely different ways: A) 6.♘db5 and B) 6.g4!?

I will mention in passing that 6.♘xc6 is harmless, and requires no special analysis. Black has a pleasant choice between 6...bxc6, which resembles variation E from Chapter 1, and 6...dxc6, reaching a structure which is covered in more detail in the notes to variation A of Chapter 9 on page 165.

A) 6.♘db5 ♗b8



7.♗e3

This is the only move which requires serious attention.

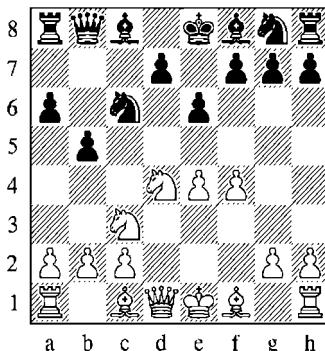
7.g3 a6 8.♘d4 gives Black a choice. 8...♗c7 is a simple way of transposing to Chapter 8, but he can also play ...♗e7 combined with ...♘f6 and ...0–0.

Also harmless is:

7.f4 a6 8.♘d4 b5!

8...♗c7 is the most common move but I don't see a reason to move the queen again so soon; besides, this would reach a line from

the 6.f4 variation which falls outside of our repertoire.



9.♘xc6

This is the only move that makes sense to my eyes. Against anything else, Black continues with ...♗b7 and White can hardly justify the loss of time with his knight.

9...dxc6 10.♗e3

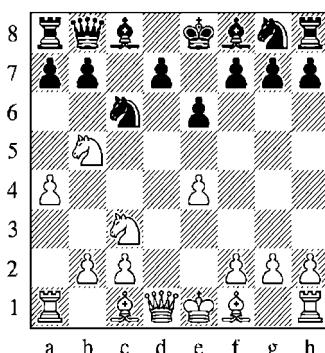
This occurred in Pretto Diego – Duarte, Bento Goncalves 2000, and now a logical continuation would have been:

10...♗b7N

Black will continue with ...♗e7, ...♗c7 and ...c5. If White plays a quick e4–e5, Black's knight will be developed on h6; otherwise Black will play ...♘f6 and meet e4–e5 with ...♘d5. Chapter 9 contains further advice about how to handle such positions.

7.a4

This has been played in more than 150 games but it is not impressive at all.



7...a6 8. $\mathbb{Q}a3 \mathbb{Q}f6$

White's position already looks suspicious to me. The knight is poorly placed on a3, and Black has a lot of ideas involving ... $\mathbb{Q}b4$, ...d5 or even ...b5!?

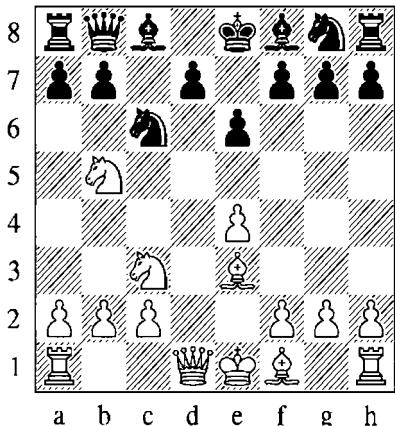
9. $\mathbb{Q}d3$

9.g3 d5 10.exd5 occurred in Dutina – Jankovic, Biograd 2018, when 10...exd5!N would have kept the a3-knight out of the game.

The text move allows the same dynamic response:

9...d5 10.exd5 exd5! 11.0–0 $\mathbb{Q}e7$

Black was fine in Sinkevich – Tunik, St Petersburg 2000. After castling on the next move, he can mobilize his pieces with moves like ... $\mathbb{Q}e8$, ... $\mathbb{Q}d6$, ... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ and ... $\mathbb{W}c7$, perhaps followed by doubling rooks along the e-file and creating threats on the kingside. White will most probably have to continue with a plan such as $\mathbb{Q}e2$, c2-c3 and $\mathbb{Q}c2$ to improve his problem knight, but in general his pieces are too passive for him to think of being better.



7...a6 8. $\mathbb{Q}b6$!?

This piece sac is what gives White's set-up a unique character.

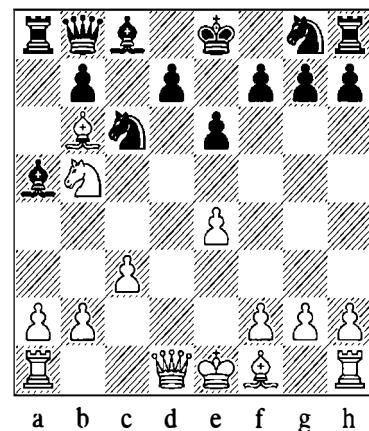
8. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ is harmless as usual. Black can transpose to normal paths with 8... $\mathbb{W}c7$ if he wishes,

but it looks more ambitious to opt for fast development with 8... $\mathbb{Q}f6$.

8...axb5 9. $\mathbb{Q}xb5 \mathbb{Q}b4\#$

9... $\mathbb{E}a5$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}c7\#$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ is playable but I prefer the text move. Rather than clinging to the extra material, Black heads for a promising middlegame with three minor pieces against a queen and pawn.

10. $c3 \mathbb{Q}a5$



11. $\mathbb{Q}c7\#$

11. $\mathbb{Q}d6\#$?! is not so good in view of 11... $\mathbb{Q}f8$! 12. $\mathbb{Q}c5 \mathbb{Q}ge7$ 13. $\mathbb{W}h5$ $\mathbb{Q}d8\#$ as seen in Lugo – Gulamali, Internet (rapid) 2017. Black has dealt with the immediate threats and intends ... $\mathbb{Q}c7$ in order to get rid of the strong knight.

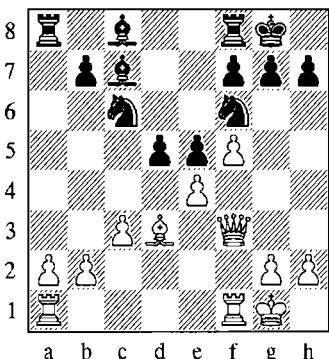
11... $\mathbb{W}xc7$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}xc7 \mathbb{Q}xc7$ 13. $\mathbb{W}g4$

Other moves fail to put any pressure on Black, who can follow pretty much the same plan regardless of how White plays.

13. $g3 \mathbb{Q}f6$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ 0–0 15. 0–0 has been played in a couple of games, and now 15...d5!N would have opened the position with at least equal chances for Black.

13. $\mathbb{Q}c4 \mathbb{Q}f6$ 14. $\mathbb{W}e2$ is well met by 14...0–0N, followed by ...d5 with tempo.

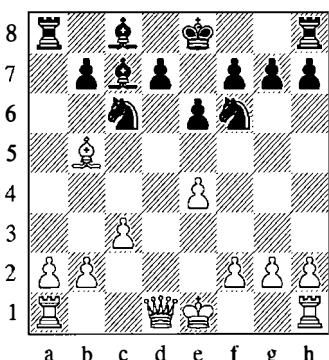
13.Qd3 Qf6 14.0–0 0–0 15.f4 (otherwise ...d5 comes again) 15...e5! 16.f5 d5 17.Wf3 occurred in Koelber – Prato, Austria 2014, when Black could have obtained a great position with:



17...Qe7! N+ Intending to increase the central pressure with ...Qd7-c6, or even ...Ra4.

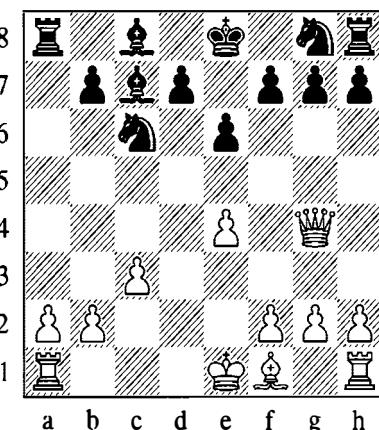
13.Qe2 Qf6 14.Wc2 0–0 15.0–0 d5 16.exd5 exd5 was slightly better for Black in P. Nguyen – Bui, Can Tho 2001. A good plan for the next few moves will be ...Qe6 and ...Qe5, with lots of active possibilities for the minor pieces.

Finally, 13.Qb5 should also be met by 13...Qf6 when play may continue:



14.0–0N This seems most flexible, as Black is not really threatening to take on e4 yet. 14...0–0 (14...Qxe4?! 15.Wg4 regains the pawn and leads to a messier position where the queen's power could make itself felt.) Now White can

defend the central pawn in a few ways, but the general assessment is the same. The computer thinks White is okay for the time being, but it seems to me that by following the familiar plan of ...d5 followed by ...exd5, Black has good chances to make his three minor pieces dominate the queen in the long run.



13...g6!

I believe this to be the strongest move. The weakening of the dark squares is not too significant, since White has given up the three minor pieces which could have been used to attack them. Moreover, the king can artificially castle via f8-g7, which should keep things solid.

13...Qe5

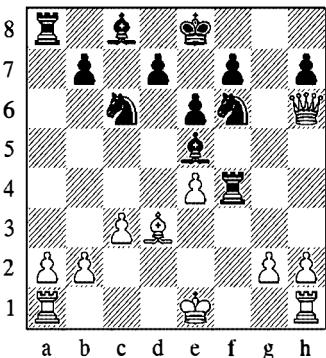
This move is also playable. I will say something about it because I have fond memories of it from my childhood, after I studied it with the help of *The Safest Sicilian* by Alexander Delchev and Semko Semkov, as I mentioned earlier. I will not go into much detail but I would just like to show one of my favourite variations:

14.f4 Qf6 15.Wxg7?

15.Wf3 Qc7 is the main line, which brought me an eventual victory in Mihalinec – Pavlidis, Rijeka 2010. I was rated a bit under 2400 when the game was played, but I was

still one of the strongest players to test this variation.

15...Bg8 16.Wh6 Bg6 17.Wh4 Bg4 18.Wh6 Bxf4 19.Qd3



At this point, Delchev and Semkov proposed the fancy solution:

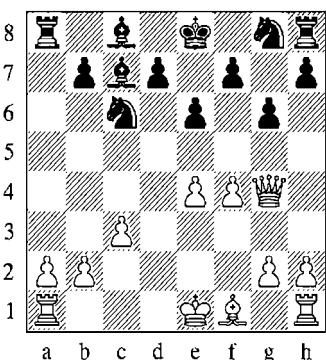
19...Bf2!?

They evaluate this move as “!” and the position as better for Black. The engines of today cast doubt on this verdict (19...Qg4!+ is actually much stronger) but I still want to pay tribute to this fantastic move, which was one of the big inspirational factors which motivated me to take up the Taimanov.

14.Qb5

I regard this as the main line, although there are several other options worth mentioning.

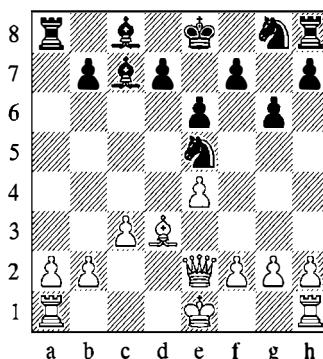
14.f4?! should be met by the following novelty:



14...d5!N Once again, I believe that Black should opt for the most direct approach and hit White's centre. 15.e5 Qge7† Black's minor pieces have much better prospects than White's queen. One useful move is ...Bb6 to prevent White from castling on the kingside; another obvious idea is to play ...Qf5 and ...h5.

After 14.Wh4 I suggest the same approach as in our main line below: 14...Qf8!N (rather than 14...Qge7, which has been chosen by a few strong players) White's queen on h4 is intended to monitor the dark squares on the kingside, so it looks completely logical to post the king on g7 and follow up with ...Qf6 and the typical ...d5 break.

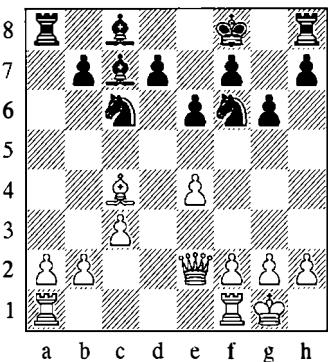
14.Qd3 Qe5 (14...Qf8!N could be considered here too) 15.We2 has been played in a bunch of games, with Black trying a few different responses. My suggestion is:



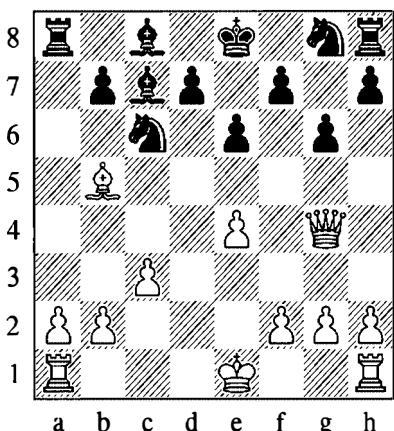
15...Qxd3† The simplest move. By exchanging a knight for White's last bishop, Black minimizes the risk of losing, while still keeping some chances for his minor pieces to outclass the queen. After 16.Wxd3 a logical line continues 16...Qe7 17.0–0 0–0 18.a4 d5! and once again Black's position is easier to play.

Finally, 14.Qc4 should be met by a familiar idea: 14...Qf8! Threatening ...d5, since there will be no check along the e-file. (14...Qge7 is more popular but once again I prefer the plan

of transferring the king to g7.) 15.We2 Qf6 16.0–0



16...d5 17.exd5 exd5 18.Qb5 Qg7 I believe that Black is already slightly better. He will continue with ...Qf5 or ...Qe6, followed by centralizing his rooks. The king is not only safe on g7, but also plays a useful role in defending the dark squares.



14...Qf8!

Most games have continued with 14...Qge7 but it should be obvious by now that I prefer the set-up with the king on g7 and knight on f6, in conjunction with ...d5.

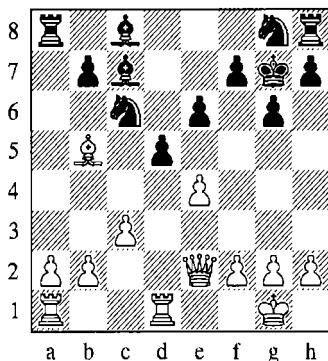
15.0–0

15.f4 d5 16.e5 Qge7 was excellent for Black in Lucchini – Martins, corr. 2007, which was the stem game with 14...Qf8!.

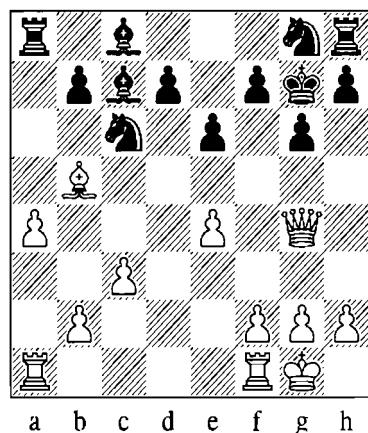
15.Wh4 Qg7 16.0–0 d5 was also fine for Black in Kushagra – Saravana, Hyderabad 2017; his general plans and ideas for such positions have already been discussed.

15...Qg7 16.a4

A model game for Black continued: 16.We2 d5 17.Qfd1 (17.exd5N exd5 18.a4 Qf6 transposes to our main line below)



17...Qf6 18.f3 dxе4 19.fxе4 Qe5! Black had excellent control on the dark squares in Snuverink – Van Kampen, Hinckley 2014.

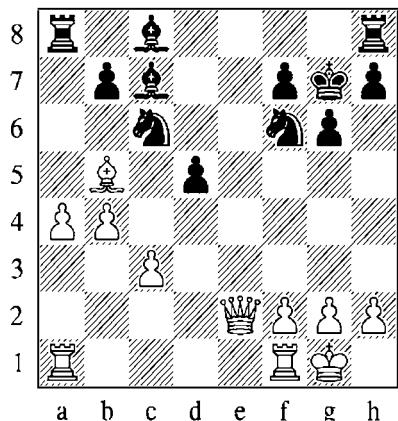


16...Qf6 17.We2 d5 18.exd5 exd5

Black has reached his standard set-up for this variation.

19.b4

If White does not do something active, he will simply be worse after Black brings his pieces into play. Therefore he tries to advance a pawn to a6 in order to create some disruption.



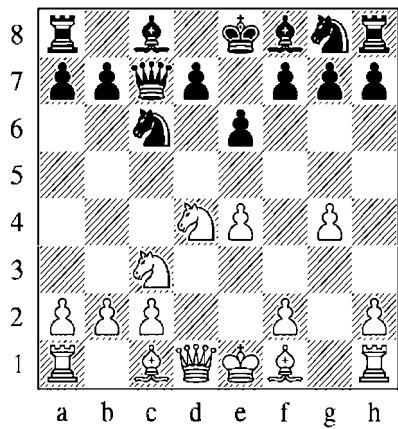
19... $\mathbb{E}e8!N$

This is my improvement over 19... $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 20. a5 $\mathbb{Q}e4\infty$ as played in Low – Ganguly, Pattaya 2015.

20. $\mathbb{W}b2 \mathbb{Q}d7!$

I prefer to develop the bishop in this way so that the knight on c6 will be safe. The position is challenging for both sides but I prefer Black's chances; one possible plan is to target the c3-pawn with ... $\mathbb{Q}e5$ and ... $\mathbb{Q}e4$.

B) 6.g4!?



This move came as a huge surprise to me when I saw it employed by Magnus Carlsen in his game against Kasimdzhanov in the 2017 World Rapid Championship. Although I had long been an active Taimanov player with both colours, this move had neither featured in my games nor attracted my attention in any way beforehand.

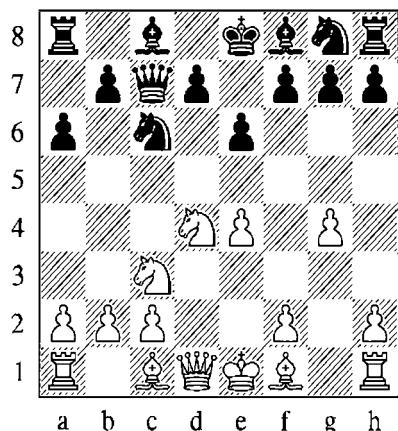
Obviously the plan of advancing the kingside pawns is common in many Sicilian variations, but usually White only goes for g4-g5 once Black's knight has moved to f6. However, there is a definite parallel with the Scheveningen Variation (1.e4 c5 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ e6 3.d4 cxd4 4. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 5. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ d6) when 6.g4 is the Keres Attack, one of White's most challenging ways of meeting Black's system. To avoid it, some Scheveningen fans prefer a modified version (reached after 1.e4 c5 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ e6 3.d4 cxd4 4. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 5. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ d6) in which the king's knight stays on g8 for the time being, in order to take the sting out of White's plan. However, even without the knight on f6 as a target, 6.g4 remains a reasonable option for White.

I believe White's general idea is similar to that of the modified Keres Attack mentioned above. However, whereas that line has a long history, having been played in a Karpov – Kasparov game in their 1985 World Championship match, the Taimanov variant is relatively new and unexplored.

6...a6!

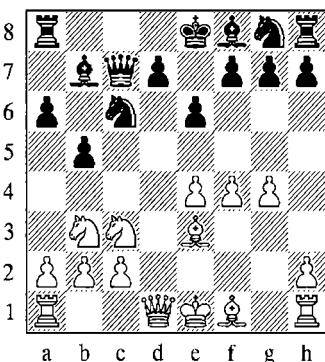
We should continue in our typical way. Since the g4-line is fresh, with not many games played, I would like to grab the opportunity to give some practical advice. When you play the Taimanov and face an unusual move which you have never studied, try to make practical moves which improve your own position and then try to figure out what your opponent's plan is. In the present case, moving the pawn to a6 is something which we usually do at some point. Besides, it is hard to think of anything

more useful to do, as developing the knight to f6 would make no sense at all with g4-g5 on the cards.



We will analyse four moves: B1) 7.Qxc6, B2) 7.Qe3, B3) 7.Qg2 and B4) 7.h4.

A rare alternative, once employed by the strong Russian GM Shomoev before the whole variation became fashionable, is: 7.f4 b5 8.Qe3 (8.Qxc6 Qxc6! Once again I would advise you to recapture with the queen in this structure. Black's position is easy to handle, thanks to the simple plan of ...Qb7 and ...b4 to hit the e4-pawn.) 8...Qb7 9.Qb3 Here Black continued with 9...d6 in Shomoev – Bocharov, St Petersburg 2006, but I found an improvement:

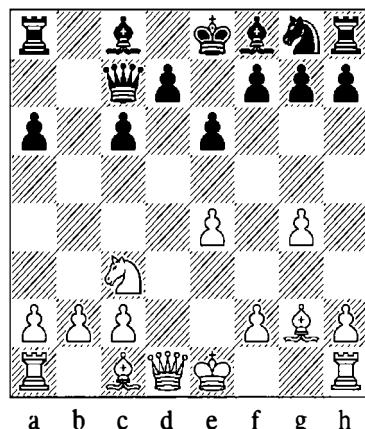


9...d5!N I prefer Black's chances, as White's kingside has too many holes.

B1) 7.Qxc6 bxc6!

7...dxc6 was employed back in 2002, in a high-level game between Ehlvest and Lautier. However, I prefer to support the ...d5 advance in order to gain space in the centre.

8.Qg2



8...d5!N

8...Qd6 has been played in both of the existing games. Although there is nothing particularly wrong with fighting for the dark squares in that manner, I prefer to seize space in the centre before deciding how to develop the bishop.

9.0–0 h5!

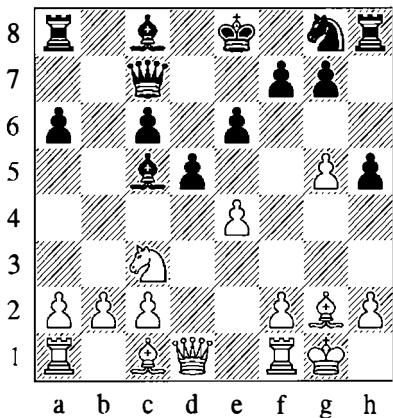
It makes a lot of sense to strike at White's strange kingside structure.

10.g5

After 10.gxh5 Qf6 Black has an easy initiative on the kingside.

10...Bc5

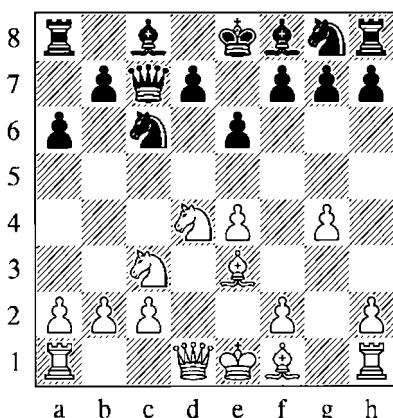
The dark-squared bishop is well placed on the same diagonal as White's king. My illustrative line continues:



11. $\mathbb{Q}a4 \mathbb{Q}a7$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}e3!?$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 13. $fxe3 \mathbb{Q}e7$

Both sides have their trumps. White has seriously weakened his pawn structure in order to trade off Black's strong bishop, and he will now have to find some activity along the f-file or by arranging a timely c2-c4. Meanwhile Black's structure is better, and he will continue with moves like ...h4, ... $\mathbb{Q}g6$ and ...0-0. Black also benefits from a strong outpost on e5, as well as the safer king. Objectively the position is about equal but I would prefer to play with the black pieces.

B2) 7. $\mathbb{Q}e3$



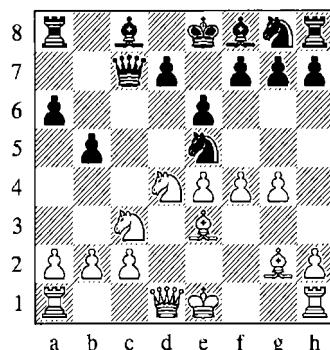
This time White plays in the spirit of the English Attack; indeed, it is possible to reach this position via the move order of 6. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ a6 7. g4.

Obviously Black should continue to delay the development of the g8-knight, so the following move is completely natural.

7... $b5!$ 8. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$

I checked two other moves:

8. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ gives Black a few good options but my favourite is 8... $\mathbb{Q}e5!$ to exploit the newly weakened c4-square. 9. f4 I found nothing better than this move, but Black can respond with:



9... $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}c1 \mathbb{Q}c5!$ Black had a slightly better position in Nichols – Wosch, email 2011, with ... $\mathbb{Q}e7-c6$ an obvious plan.

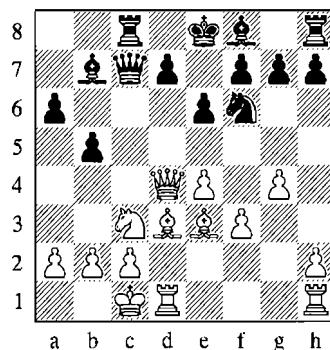
Another instructive line is:

8. $\mathbb{W}d2 \mathbb{Q}xd4!$

Now that White has moved his queen, it is a good time to make this exchange, since the following recapture will cost White a tempo.

9. $\mathbb{W}xd4 \mathbb{Q}b7$ 10. 0-0-0 $\mathbb{B}c8$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}d3 \mathbb{Q}f6$ 12. f3

Here I found a useful improvement:



12...b4!

12...Qc5 13.Wxc5 Wxc5 14.Qxc5 Bxc5

was seen in T. Horvath – Wyss, Silvaplana 2003, and one other game. Even though this endgame should be fine for Black, there is no need to force the queens off so soon, as Black's attacking chances are at least as good as White's.

13.Qe2 d5! 14.Qf4 Wc6 15.exd5 Wxd5=

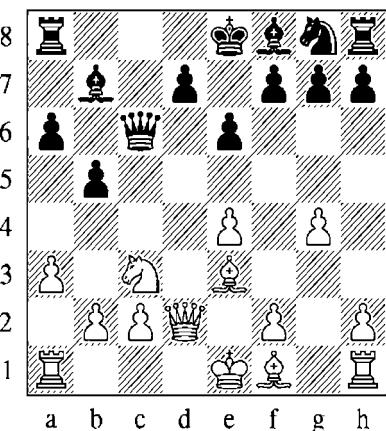
The queens are likely to be exchanged soon, giving Black an improved version of the Horvath – Wyss game. The removal of Black's d-pawn and White's e-pawn makes the f3-pawn a clear target for Black's bishop.

8...Wxc6!

Once again I recommend recapturing with the queen. Actually I would go so far as to say that White's whole opening concept only really makes sense if Black recaptures with the d-pawn. See the comments on the Carlsen – Kasimdzhanov game on page 134 for a more detailed discussion about this point.

9.a3 Qb7 10.Wd2

Here I found a logical novelty.



10...Qf6!

10...Bc8 11.f3 reaches a position where it is not so easy for Black to equalize, as evidenced by the game continuation: 11...Qf6 12.g5 Qh5

13.Qh3! b4 14.axb4 Bxb4 15.Qg4 g6 16.Wd4±

Mekhitarian – Barbosa, Buenos Aires 2015.

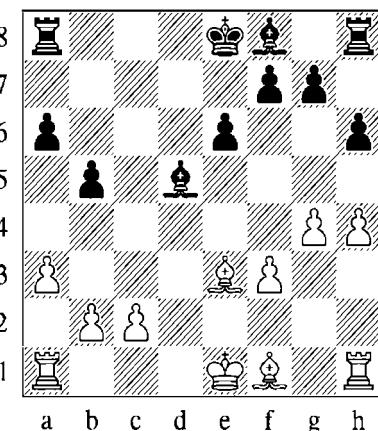
11.B h6!

Black stabilizes the knight's position for just long enough to arrange ...d5. An illustrative line is:

12.h4 d5! 13.exd5 Qxd5 14.Qxd5 Wxd5

15.Wxd5 Qxd5

Black should be fine, as long as he keeps in mind an important positional motif:



16.Qf2 h5! 17.g5 Qe7=

Black has a comfortable game after fixing White's kingside structure, rather than allowing the cramping h4-h5.

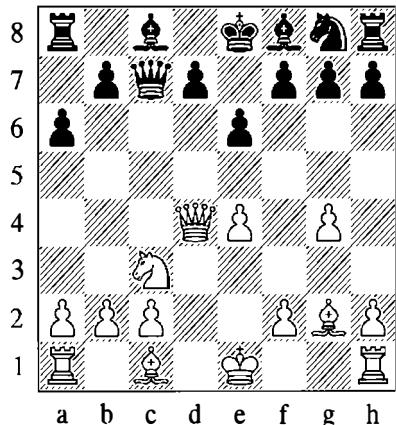
B3) 7.Qg2

This has been White's most popular choice and personally I find it the most natural move. White continues in a similar manner to the 6.g3 variation, but in a slightly more aggressive spirit, keeping the option of castling on either side.

7...Qxd4!?

This has only been played in a small minority of games but I like it.

8.Wxd4

**8...b5!?**

8... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ has been played in all three games thus far, but if I wanted to develop the knight here so quickly I would have preferred 7... $\mathbb{Q}ge7$, which happens to be the main line.

9. $\mathbb{Q}e3$

In the event of 9.0–0 we can develop our knight in the typical way: 9... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ =

9... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 10.0–0–0

10.0–0 can be met by 10... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ and ... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ (or 10... $\mathbb{E}c8$ first) with comfortable play. I will take the text move as the main line though, with the reasoning that if White wanted a quieter game with short castling, he would probably have opted for 6.g3.

10... $\mathbb{E}c8$

Threatening ...b4.

11. $\mathbb{W}d2$

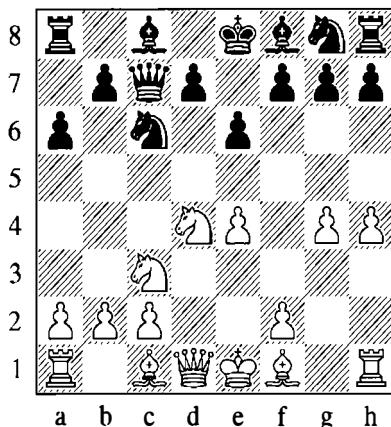
11. $\mathbb{E}d2$?! is well met by 11... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 12.f3 d5! when it is not clear what the bishop is doing on g2.

11...b4 12. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}b6$ $\mathbb{W}b8$

In view of the nasty threat of ... $\mathbb{Q}c6$, White has nothing better than:

14. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ =

It is up to Black whether he wishes to repeat the position with 14... $\mathbb{W}c7$ or play on in some other way.

B4) 7.h4

This has not been the most popular move, but it was played by Carlsen and has also been used successfully by some other strong GMs, so I will take it as my main line.

7... $\mathbb{Q}xd4$!

An important moment. Before continuing the analysis, it is useful to compare the following alternative to appreciate why I prefer the text move.

7...b5 8. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{W}xc6$

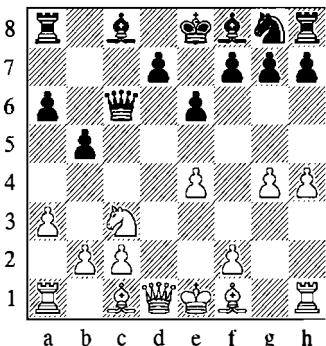
8... $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ is well met by the simple plan of 9. $\mathbb{W}f3$ followed by developing the c1-bishop and castling long. 9...e5 10.g5! Restricting Black's knight and introducing the idea of exchanging the light-squared bishops. 10... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}h3$! White had an easy initiative and Black was unable to solve his problems in Carlsen – Kasimdzhanov, Riyadh (rapid) 2017.

The text move is a better choice, leading to relatively normal play.

9.a3!N

This has not yet been played but it is likely to transpose to some existing games, and I

think it is most accurate for White to avoid having his knight driven away by a quick ...b4.



9...Qb7 10.Qg2 h5!N

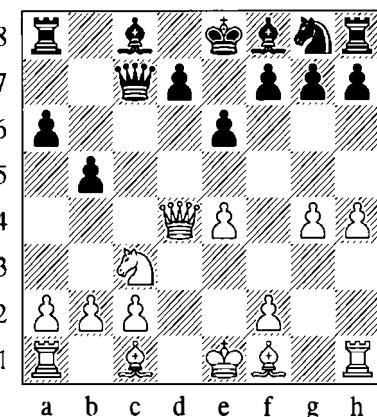
10.Qc5 11.Qf4 Qe7 12.h5! gave White a serious space advantage on the kingside in Gharamian – Pelletier, Brest 2018. Obviously Black has some resources as well, but I don't fully trust his position.

11.gxh5!

This is more challenging than 11.g5 Qe7, when Black is pretty solid. I will end my analysis here, with the assessment that White's last move opens the g-file while giving him an extra pawn, for a while at least, but it would take a much deeper investigation to determine if he can claim a genuine advantage.

Having explored the 7...b5 line, we can start putting into context the benefits of my recommended approach. The pawn structures are the same in both lines (assuming Black avoids the ...dxc6 structure), so the question is whether the exchange should take place on d4 or c6. It seems to me that in the 7...b5 8.Qxc6 Qxc6 lines, Black will most probably want to retreat his queen to c7 at some point, in order to control the e5- and f4-squares and to make space for the knight to come to c6. Moreover, the queen is less vulnerable on c7 than c6. Taking all that into account, it makes perfect sense to start with 7...Qxd4.

8.Qxd4 b5



9.Qc3 Qb7 10.a3!?

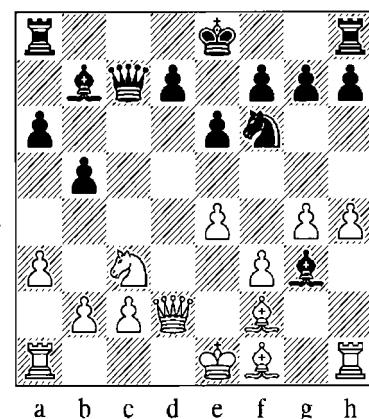
10.0–0–0N is a slight improvement although it leads to forcing play where Black is fine. 10...Qc8! Threatening ...b4. 11.Qd3 Qf6 12.f3 b4 13.Qe2 d5! We have already seen this thematic break. Once again, the weakness of the f3-pawn should give Black a lot of play.

So far the position looks normal, but here Sethuraman comes up with a thematic yet still easy-to-miss idea.

10...Qd6!

Emphasizing the fact that White's early g2-g4 has permanently weakened his kingside dark squares.

11.Qd2 Qf6 12.f3 Qg3† 13.Qf2



13...d5! 14.g5?

The lesser evil is 14. $\mathbb{Q}xg3 \mathbb{W}xg3\#$ 15. $\mathbb{W}f2$ when White can fight for a draw in a slightly worse endgame.

14... $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}e3 \mathbb{Q}g3\#$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}f2 \mathbb{Q}h5\#$

Black had clearly won the opening battle in Volokitin – Sethuraman, Riyadh (blitz) 2017. He has succeeded in controlling the dark squares and getting active with ...d5, while White's pawn advances have only created holes in his kingside.

Conclusion

This chapter has dealt with a couple of interesting sidelines. We started with 6. $\mathbb{Q}db5 \mathbb{W}b8$ 7. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ a6 8. $\mathbb{Q}b6!$? axb5 9. $\mathbb{Q}xb5$, which is an interesting attempt to catch Black with a quick raid on c7. Fortunately, 9... $\mathbb{Q}b4\#$ followed by ... $\mathbb{Q}a5$ is a good solution, leading to an interesting situation where Black has three pieces against a queen and pawn. I think Black's chances are at least equal, especially with the help of the strong plan of ...g6 followed by artificial castling.

6.g4!? is a recently fashionable idea. Obviously Black should be wary of developing the g8-knight for the time being, so the typical Taimanov move 6...a6! makes a lot of sense. We looked at four main options for White, of which 7.h4 is the most likely to appear on the board, considering Carlsen's successful use of it. Fortunately, after my suggested move-order finesse of 7... $\mathbb{Q}xd4$! 8. $\mathbb{W}xd4$ b5, Black appears to be in excellent shape.



5. $\mathbb{Q}c3 \mathbb{W}c7$

6. $g3$

Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ e6 3.d4 cxd4 4. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 5. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 6. $g3$

6...a6! 7. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}f6!$ 8. 0-0 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 9. $\mathbb{W}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$

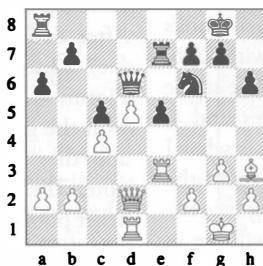
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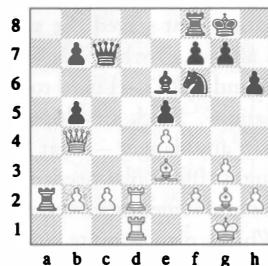
13... $\mathbb{W}b8$?N

C12) note to 20. $\mathbb{E}e2$!



20... $b5$?N

C22) note to 18. $f3$!

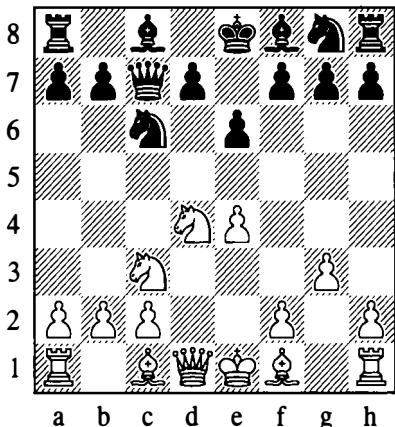


18... $\mathbb{Q}g4$?N



**1.e4 c5 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ e6 3.d4 cxd4 4. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$
5. $\mathbb{Q}c3 \mathbb{W}c7$ 6.g3**

The Fianchetto variation is a serious test of the Taimanov.



When I started playing the Taimanov I had as a guide Alexander Delchev and Semko Semkov's book *The Safest Sicilian*. I carefully studied all the variations they suggested. There were very few of them which I did not like to employ as Black, but this became less true in their second book *The Most Flexible Sicilian* after Delchev & Semkov changed their proposed lines. I don't know whether they changed because they wanted to offer something new or whether they were not fully happy with their first choices, but I have a lot of doubts about those second variations. Alas, this seems to be the ultimate fate of all opening books, mine included...

Anyway, back to our subject. One proposed variation that stayed the same in both books was after 6.g3 when Black replied with ...a6, ...d6 and ... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ – I used to call this “the stable variation”. Black develops his pieces and is not in any danger – or at least, this is what I thought. Black just needed to understand the plans and remember a few developing moves.

White's plan is quite simple: we will see in many variations with the white bishop on e2 that he usually plays f2-f4, g2-g4 and then

manoeuvres with $\mathbb{Q}f3$ -g2 in order to attack with his queen from h5. So in the Fianchetto variation if Black plays in traditional Scheveningen style with ... $\mathbb{Q}f6$, ...d6, ... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ then short castling is now dangerous. With the bishop sent directly to g2, many new ideas are possible for White; for example, he often takes on c6 and plays a quick e4-e5. This is particularly successful if Black has played a quick ...d6 and ... $\mathbb{Q}f6$, but even with the pawn on d7 then $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ and e4-e5 is an idea worth remembering.

Now, what are the drawbacks of White's set-up? White leaves the c4-square unprotected and this is relevant in many cases, especially if White plays slowly, then Black's usual queenside counterplay is stronger. Also, with the white pawn already on g3, Black may launch his own h-pawn as a counterattacking weapon. In practice, this plan can be dangerous.

6...a6!

The safe choice as 6... $\mathbb{Q}f6$! allows 7. $\mathbb{Q}db5$ which is pleasant for White, as the g3-pawn can help the bishop go to f4.

7. $\mathbb{Q}g2 \mathbb{Q}f6$!

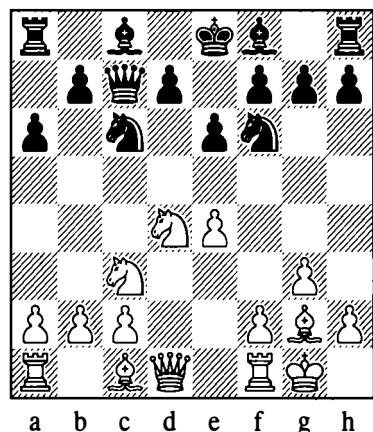
After having studied this variation in great depth, I have to admit that this natural move is Black's best.

Above I talked about my childhood love of 7...d6 followed by a quick ... $\mathbb{Q}d7$. I thought I knew this system inside out, but when I recently faced the move 8. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$! I soon had a hard time. After 8... $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ 9.0–0 c5 10. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 11.c4 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ White had persistent pressure in Piorun – Pavlidis, Katowice (blitz) 2017, and won the game. I checked Delchev & Semkov and they dismiss 8. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ with an irrelevant note. Then I checked theoretical articles and other publications, as well as game annotations and of course ChessBase and correspondence games databases – I was shocked to learn that this move is extremely rare. Then I switched on

my engine and 8.♕xc6 was the top choice... I tried to find a set-up for Black which offers him good chances, and I even asked for help from my friend Nikos Ntirlis, but in vain. Of course Black is not lost here, but the whole line seems unpleasant. What can I say? Sometimes modern engines can rewrite whole chapters of theory!

In *The Taimanov Bible* the authors mention 7...h5!? which is designed to avoid the passive play Black gets in many of the other lines after 6.g3. But after 8.0–0 h4 it seems to me that Black has nothing to show for the time he has lost pushing his pawn, as he cannot take advantage of the h-file and the play in the centre is more important. For example, after 9.♗e1 hxg3 10.hxg3 d6 11.♕xc6! bxc6 12.e5 d5 13.♔a4! ♖b7 14.c4 dxc4 15.♕c3! ♖e7 16.♕e4 White is better, as in Adams – Ivanisevic, Tromso (ol) 2014.

8.0–0



8... ♗xd4

This is Black's most solid variation and has been widely recommended, for example in *The Taimanov Bible* and in the Chess24 series by Robin van Kampen. I also decided to follow this path, after a thorough examination of the alternatives didn't satisfy me.

Every Taimanov player should know that the move to avoid is 8...b5?? as 9.e5! is crushing. After 9...♗g8 10.♕xc6 dxc6 11.♕e4 White has scored a perfect 13/13 in my database.

8...♗e7 9.♗e1 0–0 10.♕xc6 dxc6 11.e5 seems unpleasant to defend against.

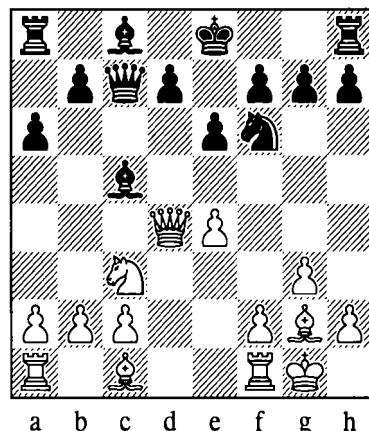
8...h5 is not a great idea here either, as after 9.♕xc6! dxc6 10.e5! White sacrifices a pawn to emphasize that Black lost a move playing ...h5. 10...♗xe5 11.♗f4 ♖a5 12.♗e1 ♗e7 13.♗e5 ♖d8 14.♗f3 0–0 15.♗d1± White had more than adequate compensation for his sacrificed pawn in Bartel – Maletin, Dubai (rapid) 2014.

8...♗c5?! I was close to recommending this move, but I must admit that after 9.♕xc6 dxc6 10.♗a4 Black is not fully equal after either 10...♗a7 11.c4! or 10...♗e7 11.e5!.

9.♗xd4 ♗c5

The white queen has to move from her dominant central position.

9...d6?! 10.♗a4! is one example of how White can use the centralized queen to harm Black's position.



I will examine A) 10.♗d1 and B) 10.♗d3, as well as the most critical C) 10.♗f4.

A) 10. $\mathbb{W}d1$

A simplistic approach which has some venom, especially in the continuation 11. $\mathbb{Q}g5!$.

10...d6

After Black's obvious reply, the two main moves are A1) 11. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ and A2) 11. $\mathbb{Q}g5!$.

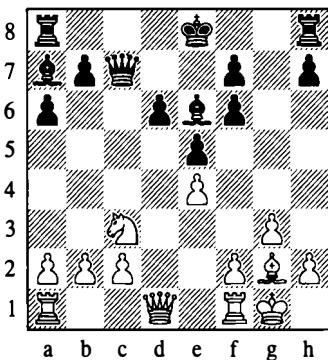
I also looked at some rare alternatives:

11. $\mathbb{Q}a4 \mathbb{Q}a7$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ e5 13. $\mathbb{Q}g5$

White is willing to waste some time to weaken the d5-square and double our f-pawns.

13... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ gxf6 15. $\mathbb{Q}c3$

We have a position more like a Sveshnikov than a Taimanov.



15...h5!N

A slightly risky attempt to be livelier than De Armas – Maric, Smederevska Palanka 1987, which featured the safe and reliable 15... $\mathbb{Q}d4$, preventing White from occupying d5 with a piece.

16. $\mathbb{Q}d5!$

The critical test.

The idea of the novelty is after 16.h4 then 16... $\mathbb{Q}d4$ with an improved version of the old game. Now for example 17. $\mathbb{W}f3$ can be met by 17... $\mathbb{Q}h6$ after which the king will be safe on e7 or f8, while on the other side of the board we can start our counterplay with ... $\mathbb{Q}c8$ and ...b5.

16... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 17. $\mathbb{W}xd5$ h4

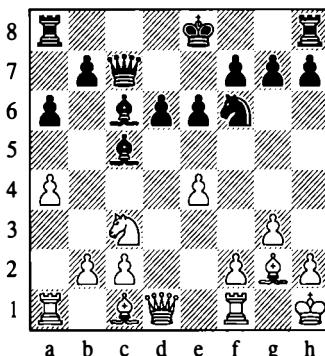
Black is asking some questions on the kingside.

11. $\mathbb{Q}h1$

This was recently tried by a super-GM.

11. $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 12. a4

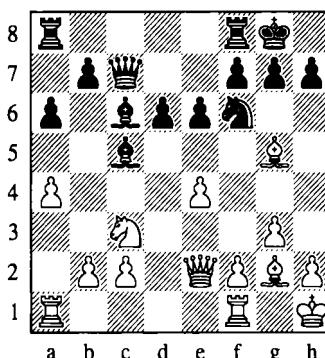
Or 12. $f4!!$ h5! → and Black's attacking chances look great!

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

Black had reacted well and was equal, at least. White tried to confuse his opponent by playing first $\mathbb{Q}h1$ (hinting at f2-f4) and then playing $\mathbb{W}e2$, a typical move with the idea of $\mathbb{Q}e3$. But Black is fine after those attempts as well.

13. $\mathbb{W}e2$ 0–0 14. $\mathbb{Q}g5$

Also no trouble for Black is: 14. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 15. $\mathbb{W}xe3$ b5?!



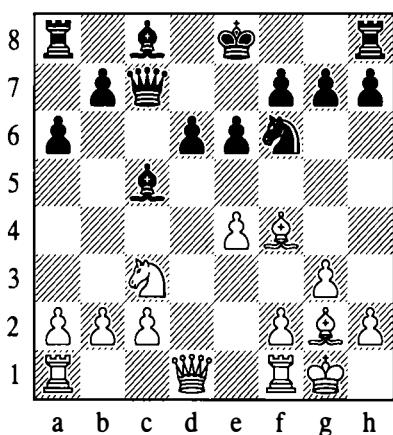
In Movsesian – Hambleton, Reykjavik 2017, Black should have played:

14... $\mathbb{Q}d4N\rightleftarrows$

Planning ...h6 with a fine game.

Instead 14... $\mathbb{W}e7??$ was a fatal slip after 15.e5! as when the white knight reaches e4, the pin is too strong.

A1) 11. $\mathbb{Q}f4$



One of the most popular moves in the position.

11...h6!

We are planning to play ...e5 before White brings more forces to attack d6.

12. $\mathbb{Q}a4$

12. $\mathbb{W}d2?!$ loses a tempo compared with variation C and so after 12...e5 13. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ as in Srbis – Plenkovic, Bol 2015, we can play 13... $\mathbb{Q}xe3N$ 14. $\mathbb{W}xe3$ b5 \rightleftarrows when Black obviously has no problems.

12...e5 13. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ exf4 14. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ fxe3 15.hxg3 $\mathbb{Q}e6$

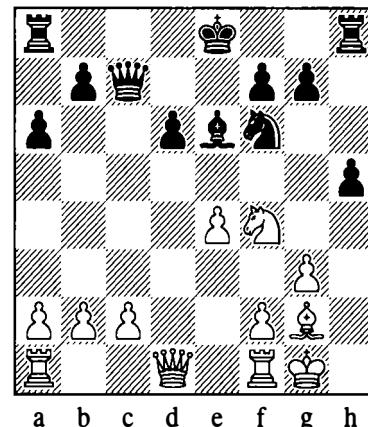
The text move is the start of an ambitious but risky idea to castle long.

15...0–0 is a safer option for Black and was played in Polgar – Delchev, Ohrid 2001, which continued: 16. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}d7?$ Transferring the light-squared bishop to the h1-a8 diagonal to press against the e4-pawn.

After the text move we have a typical position which is similar to other lines of the 6.g3 system (I have in mind for example the 6.g3 a6 7. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 8.0–0 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ line) where plenty of games have been played and the correct plans for both sides are well known. For example, the key idea for Black is:

16. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ h5! \rightleftarrows

Black will castle queenside and soften up White's castled position with ...h4 and ...hxg3.



17. $\mathbb{W}d4N$

This is probably White's best attempt. In other lines I think that he will have to fight for survival.

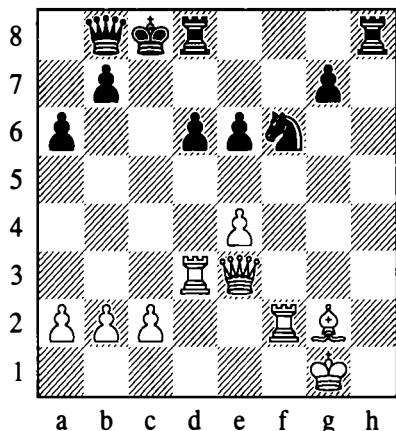
For example: 17. $\mathbb{Q}f3?!$ h4 18.g4 0–0–0 19.c4 $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{W}d7$ 21.g5 $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 22.g6 $\mathbb{Q}g5\#$ Nikolov – Kessler, Porec 2015.

17...h4 18. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ 0–0–0

An easier option to remember is 18...hxg3?!! 19. $\mathbb{W}xd6$ $\mathbb{W}xd6$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ which is fine for Black as well. But I had fun analysing the richer option, so I made it my main line. But don't bother trying to memorize what follows!

19. $\mathbb{W}a7$ $\mathbb{W}b8$ 20. $\mathbb{W}e3$ hxg3 21. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ gxf2+ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ fxe6 23. $\mathbb{Q}d3$

Grabbing the pawn seems to have led Black's king into trouble but it's all under control.



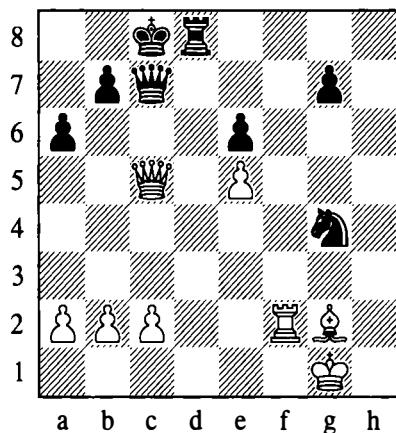
23... $\mathbb{E}h5!$ 24. $\mathbb{E}c3\#$ $\mathbb{E}c5$ 25. $e5$

The text move is more testing than 25. $\mathbb{E}xc5\#$ $dxc5$ 26. $\mathbb{W}xc5\#$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 27. $\mathbb{W}xc7\#$ $\mathbb{Q}xc7$ which should be drawn, though White has to be more careful.

25... $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 26. $\mathbb{E}xc5\#$

Or 26. $\mathbb{W}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ 27. $\mathbb{W}xe6\#$ $\mathbb{E}d7$ is a forced draw in various ways, including 28. $exd6$ $\mathbb{E}xc3$ 29. $\mathbb{W}e8\#$ $\mathbb{E}d8$ 30. $\mathbb{W}e6\#$.

26... $dxc5$ 27. $\mathbb{W}xc5\#$ $\mathbb{W}c7$



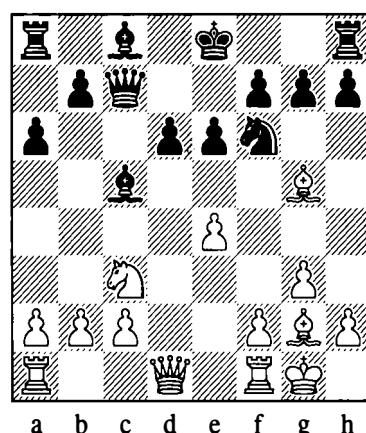
28. $\mathbb{W}xc7\#$

The most reliable drawing path at this point is 28. $\mathbb{A}xb7\#$ $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ 29. $\mathbb{W}b4\#$ = picking up the knight. With both kings exposed, a draw by perpetual check is the likely end.

28... $\mathbb{A}xc7$ 29. $\mathbb{E}f7\#$ $\mathbb{E}d7$ 30. $\mathbb{E}xd7\#$ $\mathbb{Q}xd7$
31. $\mathbb{A}xb7$ $a5=$

After some lively moves we have arrived in a sharp endgame which engines say is "0.00". Black will have some pluses though after restoring material equality by taking on e5: his slightly more active king, the outside passed g-pawn and his tricky jumpy knight. This is objectively a draw, but a human can play on with an optimistic attitude!

A2) 11. $\mathbb{A}g5!$



A move which bothered me a lot before I discover a strong antidote.

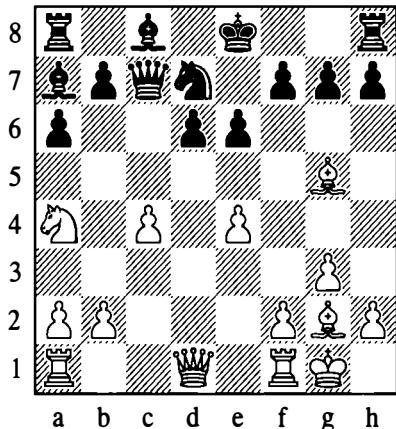
11... $\mathbb{Q}d7$

We need to do this.

12. $\mathbb{Q}a4$

Instead 12. $\mathbb{W}e2$ 0-0 13. $\mathbb{E}ad1$ as in Wedberg – Karlsson, Lund 1974, allows Black good play after: 13... $\mathbb{Q}e5N$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{A}a7$ 15. $b3$ $b5$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $a5\rightarrow$

12... $\mathbb{Q}a7$ 13. $c4$



13...Wb8!N

This is a strong move, preparing ...b5 next.

13...h6 14.Qd2

I had the idea of the 13...Wb8 move while I was analysing the following line:

14...b5?!

14...0–0 15.Qb4 Qc5 16.Qc3± was a bit more comfortable for White in Bartel – Erenberg, Jerusalem 2015.

Unfortunately this doesn't work as well after:

15.cxb5

15.e5 is another move, but Black is okay here after 15...Qb7 16.exd6 Wb8∞.

15...axb5 16.Qc3 Wb8 17.Wg4!±

I was unable to find a completely satisfactory reply for Black.

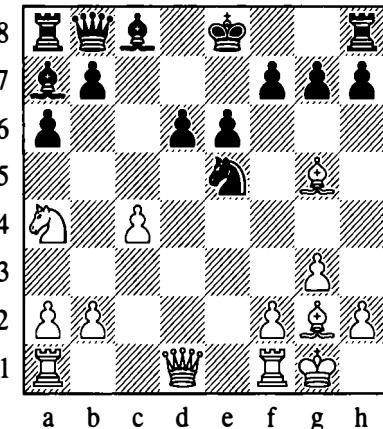
14.e5!

A clever and testing sacrifice. The point of this move will become clearer after White's next move.

14.Qf4?! is not so strong, as after 14...e5 15.Qd2 b5± Black is fine.

14.Qc3 is slightly more logical, but Black is okay after: 14...Qe5 15.b3 (15.We2 Qd7 16.b3 b5±) 15...b5±

14...Qxe5



15.c5!

This is White's idea behind the pawn sacrifice.

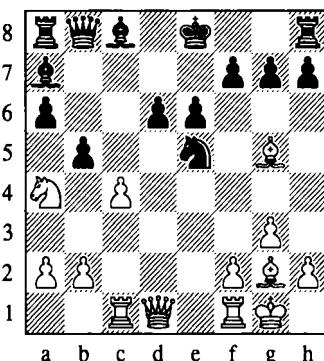
15.Qc1

This is not as strong.

15...b5

This thematic move can end up in a perpetual check.

15...f6?! is a sound alternative if you want to avoid the draw from the main line: 16.Qd2 0–0 17.Qb4 Qf7?! 18.c5 a5 19.Qa3 Qd8=



16.cxb5

This looks wild, but it peters out to a draw with precise play.

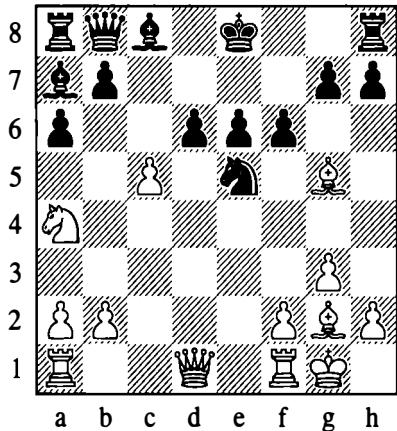
16.Qc3?! leads to a fun line: 16...bxc4 17.Qf4! Qb7 18.Qxe5 Qxg2 19.Qxg7 Qb7! 20.Qxh8 Qh1!! 21.Qd5 Qxd5 22.Qxd5 Qxd5± Black's central mass of pawns would

be tricky for White to stop in the endgame. 16.c5?! is another move that leads to complications. For example: 16...Qb7 17.c6! Qxc6! 18.Qxc6 bxa4 19.Qf4! 0-0 20.Qxd6 Wd8 21.Qxf8 Wxd1 22.Qxd1 Qxc6 23.Qxc6 Qxf8= With an equal endgame. 16...axb5 17.Qxc8† Wxc8 18.Wxd6 f6 19.Qxa8 Wxa8 20.Wxe6† Qf8 21.Qc1 Qf3† 22.Qf1 Qxh2† 23.Qg1 Qf3†

With a draw.

15...f6!

15...Qd7 might be playable for Black, but I think that White preserves a small edge after the forcing sequence: 16.Qf4 0-0 (Possible is 16...f6?! but it also fails to equalize. For example: 17.Qc1 d5 18.Qb6 Qxb6 19.cxb6 Qc6 20.Qe1 0-0 21.Wd4 Wd6 22.Qxe5 fxe5 23.Qxe5 Qac8 24.Qd1±) 17.Qxe5 Qxa4 18.Wxd6 Qd8 19.Wxb8 Qxb8 20.Qc3 Qc6 And now several moves are good. For example: 21.b4?±



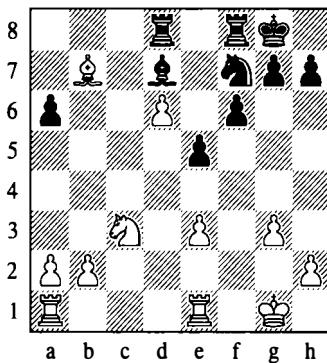
16.Qe3

The other bishop retreat is easier to meet:

16.Qf4 0-0 17.cxd6 Qd7 18.Qc3 Qf7 19.Wb3 e5 20.Qe3 Qxe3 21.fxe3 Wa7
21...a5?! is another adequate defence, but the text is simpler.
22.Qf1 Wad8 23.Wxb7

After 23.Qad1 b5? it is White who has to be more careful.

23...Wxb7 24.Qxb7



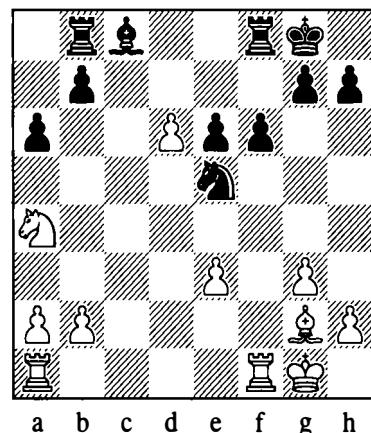
24...a5?±

Keeping some pieces on the board.

24...Qc8?! is also roughly equal, but White retains some nominal pressure after: 25.Qxc8 Qxc8 26.Qd5 Qcd8 27.Qe7† Qh8 28.Qad1 Qxd6 29.Qxd6 Qxd6 30.b4! Playing to create a passed pawn on the queenside, although Black will defend after 30...Qc4?.

16...0-0 17.Wxd6 Wxd6 18.cxd6 Qxe3 19.fxe3 Qb8!

This is the key move after which Black is fine. I will give plenty of detail below to prove that claim is true, though remembering every move is not necessary.



20.♕b6

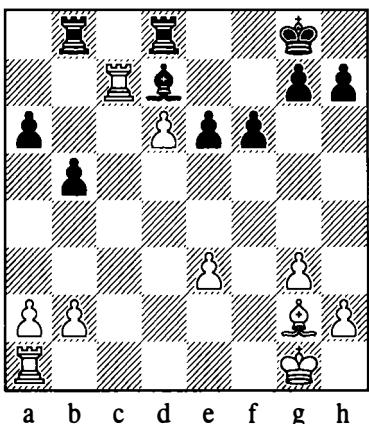
After 20.♖ac1 b5 21.♕c5 a5= the rook comes to d8 and the king to f7.

20...♕d7 21.♕xd7

21.♕xc8 is an interesting try to exploit the bishop versus knight advantage, but White should take into account that the d6-pawn is well blockaded and might turn out to be weak. 21...♗fcx8 22.♖ac1 b5! An important move. 23.♗c7 ♕e5!= Black now simply wants to go ...♗d8 and ...♗b6 and then pick up the d6-pawn. For example: 24.♗d1 ♗d8 25.♔h3 ♗b6! 26.♔xe6† ♗f8 And there is no way for White to keep the d6-pawn. 27.♗c8 ♗xc8 28.♗xc8 ♗e8! And Black can even opt for ...♘d7 and ...♗d8 in order to force White to exchange the minor pieces.

21...♗xd7 22.♗fc1

The d6-pawn is strong indeed, but there is no forcing way for White to take advantage of it and in practice White risks losing it as our king is close by.

22...♗fd8 23.♗c7 b5!**24.♗d1**

24.♗b7 is the most forcing continuation. 24...♗c8 25.♗xc8 ♗bxc8 26.♖ac1 ♗xc7 27.dxc7 ♗c8 28.♗c6 ♗f7 29.♗f2 ♗e7=

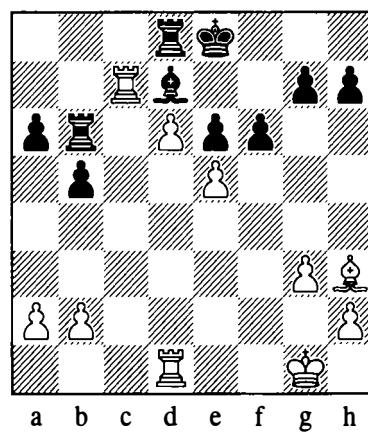
Most likely our a-pawn will be exchanged for White's d-pawn and then the position will be dead equal.

24...♗b6 25.♔h3!

Otherwise we play ...e5 and ...♗e6.

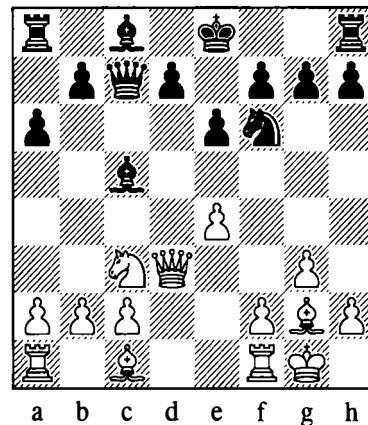
25...♗f8 26.e4! ♗e8 27.e5

Otherwise Black once again plays ...e5 and is playing for the win.



27...fxe5 28.♗f2 b4 29.♗e3 ♗b5 30.♗e4 ♗c6† 31.♔xe5 ♗b5† 32.♗f4 g5† 33.♗e3 ♗e5† 34.♗f2 ♗d5=

The position is still sharp, but Black has no complaints.

B) 10.♗d3

White's second most popular option. Now White at any point can play $\mathbb{B}d1$ and put pressure on d6 or exchange Black's strong bishop with $\mathbb{Q}e3$.

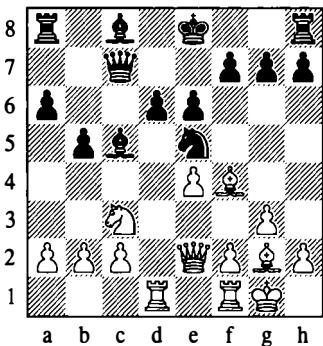
10... $\mathbb{Q}g4!$

But this is the drawback of the queen move! Black puts his knight on e5 with tempo.

11. $\mathbb{W}e2$

Or 11.h3 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 12. $\mathbb{W}e2$ b5 is totally fine for Black. For example, Dvoiry - J. Geller, Khanty-Mansiysk 2012, continued: 13. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{B}b7$ 14.f4 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 15.a4 $\mathbb{W}b6$ 16. $\mathbb{B}d1$ $\mathbb{B}c8\#$

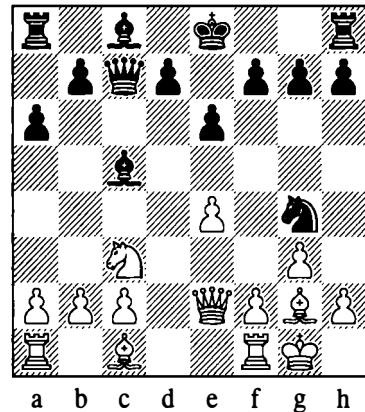
11. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 12. $\mathbb{W}e2$ d6 13. $\mathbb{B}ad1$ b5 is also comfortable for Black, as in Kiefer - Wyss, Switzerland 2001.



And now I should point out that the engine's tricky-looking suggestion 14.b4N only leads to an equal position after: 14... $\mathbb{B}xb4$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ $\mathbb{W}e7$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{W}d7$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xd6\#$ $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 18. f4 0-0 19. $\mathbb{fxe}5$ $\mathbb{Wa}7\#$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}c5=$

11. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}a7$ 12. c4 (or 12. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 13. c4 d6 14. $\mathbb{W}d1$ as in Schmittiel - Luther, Germany 1992, is best met by: 14... $\mathbb{Q}d7\#N$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ h5! 16. h4 0-0-0#) 12... $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 13. $\mathbb{W}c3$ d6 14. b3 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ 0-0 White has a rather poor version of a Maroczy and thus Black can afford to play slowly: 16. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3$

17. $\mathbb{W}xe3$ Now Black came up with a good reorganization: 17... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 18. $\mathbb{W}d2$ e5 19. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ So far we have been following Saberi - Chigaev, Mashhad 2017, and now it was a good time for: 20... b5! N



11... $\mathbb{h}5!$

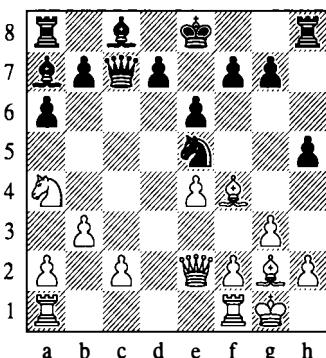
11... $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ d6 13. f4# is the other direction, but I like the text move better, as played recently by Robin van Kampen, a Taimanov expert.

12. $\mathbb{Q}h1$

Stepping out of the c5-bishop's pin, but White has several alternatives:

12.a4 d6 13. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xh5$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ gives Black excellent compensation as he has opened a dangerous file against White's king. Wang Hao - Gopal, Abu Dhabi 2014, continued 15. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ and here I like: 15... f6! N 16. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ g5 17. h3 $\mathbb{Q}e7\#$ Black has full compensation and can continue for example with ... $\mathbb{Q}e8-h5$.

12. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ (13. $\mathbb{Q}h1\#N$ as in Lauridsen - Wadsworth, England 2016, is a bit curious when White cannot play f2-f4 yet. Here I'd play 13... d6N asking White what his next move is. Black is about to play ... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ and ... h4 at any time.) 13... $\mathbb{Q}a7$ 14. b3



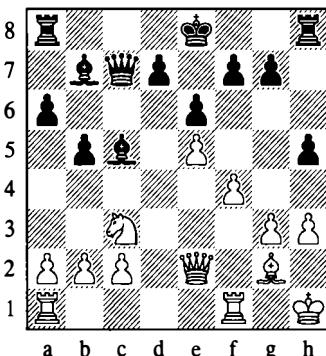
In Weiss – Schlosser, Austria 1994, Black would have had dynamic counter-chances after 14...d6N 15.c4 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ when the knight has to go to the miserable b2-square, because after 16. $\mathbb{Q}c3$?! Black gets the initiative after 16...b5 or 16...h4.

12. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ N $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xh5$ b5 14. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ d6 16. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{W}c6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ b4 18. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ a5∞ is given by Van Kampen on Chess24. Black indeed has excellent compensation for his pawn deficit.

12...b5! 13.e5

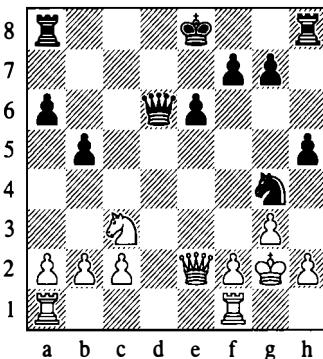
As usual in this variation, White has several options:

13.h3 $\mathbb{Q}b7$? A downside to putting the king on h1. 14. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{W}xe5$ 16.f4 $\mathbb{W}c7$ 17.e5



In Vogt – Muhren, Porto Mannu 2015, one messy option was: 17... $\mathbb{E}c8$?N 18. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ h4 19.g4 0–0∞

13. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ N is no problem for Black after: 13...d6 14.e5 $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 15.exd6 $\mathbb{Q}xg2\#$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ $\mathbb{W}xd6$

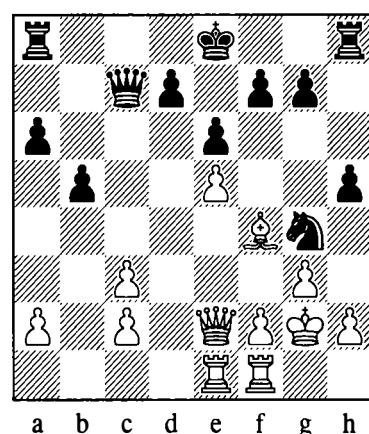


18. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{W}c6$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{E}d8$ 20. $\mathbb{E}ad1$ 0–0=

13... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$??

Black is willing to give up his bishop for a knight to shatter White's queenside structure.

15. $\mathbb{E}ae1$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 16.bxc3 $\mathbb{Q}xg2\#$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xg2$



In Adams – Van Kampen, Hoogeveen 2013, the Dutch GM took on c3 which was okay, but I'd prefer keeping the tension with:

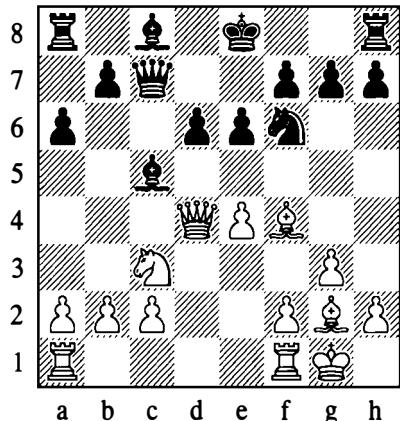
17... $\mathbb{W}c6\#$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ f6?!

Threatening ...g5 and if:

19.exf6 $\mathbb{Q}xf6\#$ =

I slightly prefer Black's position due to his structure.

C) 10. $\mathbb{Q}f4 d6$



11. $\mathbb{W}d2$

11. $\mathbb{W}d1$ transposes to variation A1 above.

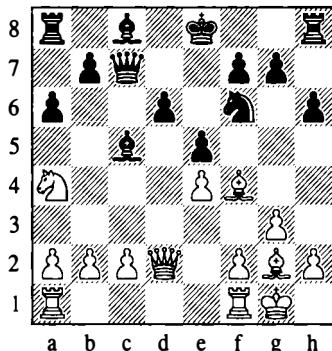
11. $\mathbb{W}d3 \mathbb{Q}g4!$ Some strong GMs have opted to transfer their knight to e5 via d7 but I prefer the more active route. 12. $\mathbb{Q}a4 e5$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ (13. $\mathbb{Q}xc5 exf4$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}b3 \mathbb{Q}e5$ 15. $\mathbb{W}d2 f3$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ was seen in Dzagnidze – Graf, Athens 2008, and now pretty scary for White is 16...h5!N) 13... $\mathbb{Q}d4!$ Escaping the knight's attentions. Black's moves in the game we are following were logical and clear: 14.c4 0–0 15.h3 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 16. $\mathbb{E}ac1 \mathbb{Q}e6$ 17.b3 $\mathbb{W}d7$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}h2 b5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}c3 bxc4$ 20. $bxc4 \mathbb{E}fc8=$ Black was fine in Gostisa – Kiik, Debrecen 1992.

11...h6

Next comes ...e5 so first we take away the g5-square from the bishop.

12. $\mathbb{E}ad1$

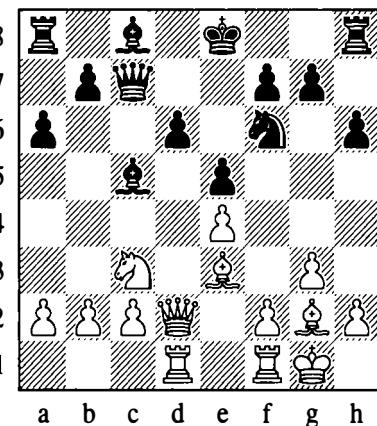
12. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ is a typical way for White to react in this position. 12...e5!



13. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ (Or 13. $\mathbb{Q}xc5 dxcc5$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}e3 \mathbb{Q}g4!$ and once Black captures the dark-squared bishop he won't have any problems.) 13... $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 14. $\mathbb{W}xe3 b5!$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}b6 \mathbb{E}b8$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xc8 \mathbb{W}xc8??$ It is more useful for us to stay with the rook on b8 in order to fight against a2-a4 breaks. 17.c3 0–0 18. $\mathbb{E}fd1 \mathbb{E}d8$ Black's plan is to continue with ...a5, ... $\mathbb{W}c7$, ... $\mathbb{E}b6$, and then try to transfer his knight. White's position might look a bit better due to the bishop but Black doesn't have any weaknesses and can just hold the balance comfortably.

After 12. $\mathbb{E}fd1 e5$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}e3 \mathbb{Q}xe3$ 14. $\mathbb{W}xe3 0–0$ we have a typical Sicilian position. Our set-up is very stable and we can continue with ... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ and place our rooks on d8 and c8, or c8 and b8.

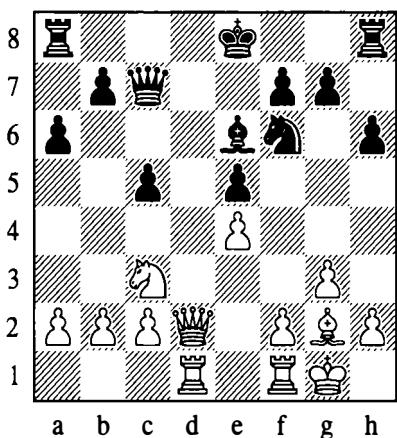
12...e5 13. $\mathbb{Q}e3$



This is a vital tabiya in the Fianchetto variation. I decided (after some nudging by my editors!) to give two options: C1) 13... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ is the traditional main line by far and makes a reliable back-up repertoire, but my favourite is the extremely rare move C2) 13... $\mathbb{Q}b4!!$.

13... $\mathbb{Q}e7$?! has been played by some strong players but it has largely been abandoned because the direct 14. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ is strong. 14...dxc5?? 15.f4 is instantly disastrous so instead Black must play 14... $\mathbb{W}xc5$ when 15. $\mathbb{Q}a4$! is the key move. Now whether the queen goes to c6 or c7, White responds with 16.f4! with serious pressure.

C1) 13... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ dxc5



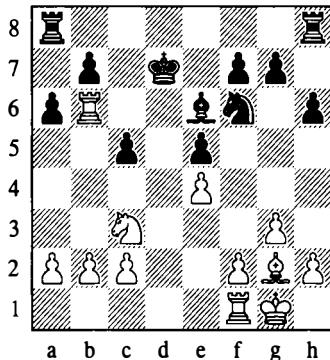
15. $\mathbb{Q}d5$

By far the most common move, and also the most testing.

15. $\mathbb{W}d6$

The ending offers White no advantage, if Black remembers the following clever idea. White can force a draw, which might be the sensible choice, as otherwise the endgames tend to be slightly better for Black due to White's passive light-squared bishop.

15... $\mathbb{W}xd6$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}b6$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$!



The line is based on trapping White's rook!

18. $\mathbb{Q}d5!$

White keeps asking questions.

18. $\mathbb{Q}xb7\#$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}e7$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ wins the exchange at the expense of a pawn and a weakened structure, so it's roughly balanced (or 19... $\mathbb{Q}d6$ is a way of forcing the draw).

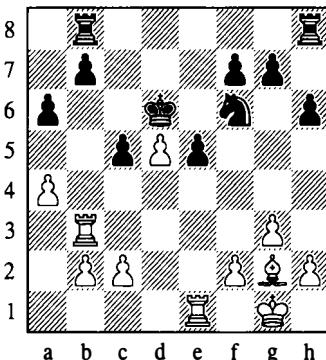
18... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 19.exd5 $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}ab8$!

It's vital to free the king.

21. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 22.a4

22. $\mathbb{Q}b6\#$ was the game Sharbaf – Gopal, Al Ain 2013, which ended in a repetition.

The text was Guseinov's try for a win in the game Guseinov – Friedrich, Eilat 2012.



22...b5!N

Black needs to be active.

22...b6? 23. $\mathbb{Q}f1$! was the game; Guseinov converted his advantage into a win.

23.axb5 axb5 24. $\mathbb{Q}a1$ $\mathbb{Q}a8$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}xa8$

After 25. $\mathbb{Q}ba3$ $\mathbb{Q}xa3$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}xa3$ e4! Black cannot be worse with such an active king!

25... $\mathbb{B}xa8$ 26. $\mathbb{B}xb5$ $\mathbb{B}a1\uparrow$ 27. $\mathbb{B}f1 \mathbb{B}xd5$
 27...e4 Black takes advantage of White's passive light-squared bishop. This is more or less a forced draw after: 28.c4 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 29. $\mathbb{B}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 30. $\mathbb{B}b6\uparrow$ $\mathbb{B}c7$ 31. $\mathbb{B}b5 \mathbb{B}d6$ 32. $\mathbb{B}g4 \mathbb{Q}f3$ 33. $\mathbb{B}b4$ $\mathbb{C}xb4$ 34. $\mathbb{B}xb4$ $\mathbb{Q}d2$ 35. $\mathbb{B}b6\uparrow$ $\mathbb{B}d7=$
 28. $\mathbb{B}b4 \mathbb{Q}d7$

With a balanced position.

15.f4

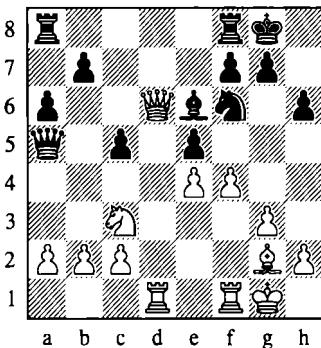
This is definitely a more active alternative than the above line, but it is not what White should opt for in these types of positions. That is, if White plays this as an independent line; it could instead transpose to the main line.

15...0-0 16. $\mathbb{W}d6$

Instead 16. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ heads back to the main line.

16... $\mathbb{W}a5!$

Black takes advantage of White's misplaced queen on d6 and avoids the exchange of the queens.



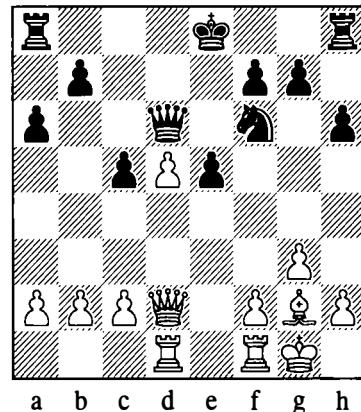
17. $\mathbb{W}d2$

The fact that White has retreated to d2 in the majority of the games shows that 16. $\mathbb{W}d6$ wasn't the right choice.

17.f5 was tried once by GM Tiviakov but he was soon worse after 17... $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 18. $\mathbb{B}fe1$ $\mathbb{B}fe8\uparrow$ in Tiviakov – Van der Sterren, Rotterdam 2000. White's light-squared bishop is still passive and Black has controlled all his weaknesses. The game continued 19. $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{B}ad8$, with the rook

heading for d4, and Black enjoyed a slight edge.

15... $\mathbb{B}xd5$ 16. $\mathbb{exd}5$ $\mathbb{W}d6$



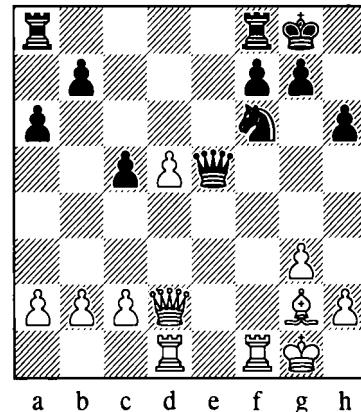
We have a split: C11) 17.f4 and C12) 17.c4.

17. $\mathbb{B}fe1$ 0-0 18. $\mathbb{B}h3$ $\mathbb{B}fe8$ 19. $c4$ transposes to variation C12.

C11) 17.f4

This used to be the main line but has rarely been played recently by strong GMs.

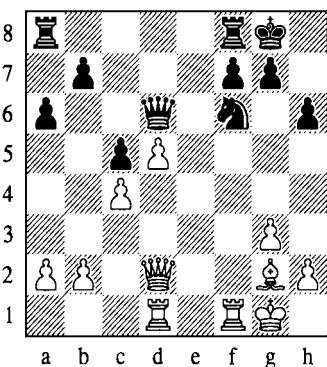
17...0-0 18. $\mathbb{fxe}5$ $\mathbb{W}xe5$



19.d6

In my opinion the most critical continuation, since White activates his light-squared bishop. On the other hand Black can and should grab the b2-pawn.

19.c4 ♕d6



20.♕f4

20.♕f1 ♜e8 is simple and comfortable. 20.♕f4 ♜ae8 21.♗df1 ♖d7 was fine for Black in A. Rombaldoni – Gupta, Durban 2014. Black might even consider going ...♜e7 and then starting his counterplay with ...b5. Black has a lot of useful moves such as ...♜e8 or either rook to d8. It becomes clear that if Black manages to blockade on d6 then White has no advantage at all and Black can even fight for the advantage since White's light-squared bishop is out of the game.

20...♜e8

This is the move I like most: threatening to exchange queens then place our knight on d6.

21.♗f2? ♖f6

White has not achieved anything.

19...♝xb2! 20.c4

White tries his luck in an ending.

The middlegame option is: 20.♗b1 ♜xa2 21.♗xb7 ♜ad8 Black will go after

White's d-pawn. Black's blockade has been transferred to d7 or d8. Black, in his fight to win White's d6-pawn, may even try sacrificing his a-pawn; a good example is the game Matikozian – Kovalyov, Internet 2014.

20...♝xd2 21.♗xd2 ♜ab8! 22.a4

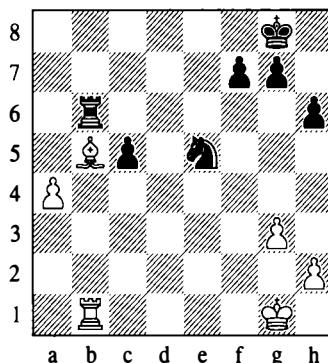
The other option to have been tested is:

22.♗b1

This was once played by Nevednichy but is not threatening.

22...b5 23.d7 ♜fd8 24.cxb5

24.♗c6?! ♜b6N This is the easiest way for Black to deal with the d7-pawn. 25.cxb5 axb5 26.♗xb5 ♜xd7 27.♗xd7 ♖xd7 28.a4 ♖e5 And Black will find counterplay with his c-pawn.



29.a5 (Or 29.♗f2 ♜b8 30.♗c1 ♜c8 is also safe. We can extend the line to show a typical liquidation: 31.♗e3 ♜f8 32.a5 ♜e7 33.a6 ♜d6 34.a7 ♜a8 35.♗a1 ♜c7 36.♗e4 ♜c6 37.♗xc6 ♜xc6=) 29...♜b8 30.a6 c4 31.♗f2 c3 32.♗a4 ♜a8=

24...♜xd5

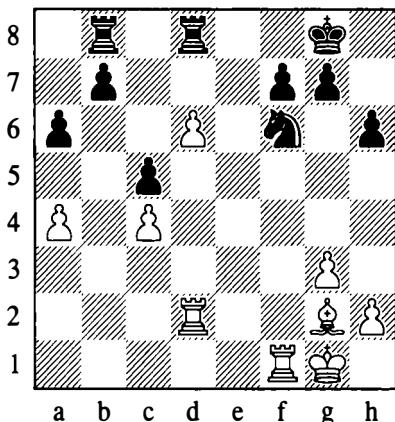
Black is out of danger. He even had an extra pawn after:

25.♗c1 c4! 26.♗xc4 ♜xd7 27.♗c8† ♜h7

28.♗e4† g6 29.♗xd7 ♖xd7 30.♗d3 ♜a5†

Nevednichy – Filip, Plancoet 2015.

22...♝fd8

**23. $\mathbb{E}b1$**

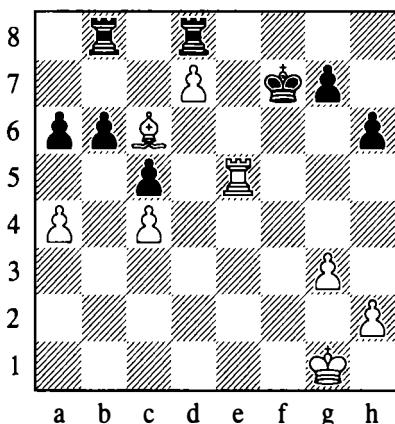
Instead 23. $\mathbb{E}e1$ was once played by a young Magnus Carlsen but after: 23... $\mathbb{B}f8$ 24. $\mathbb{E}e5$ (24. $\mathbb{E}b1N$ was White's best choice, admitting that 23. $\mathbb{E}e1$ was pointless) 24... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 25. $\mathbb{E}e4$ $f6\bar{f}$ Black was slightly better in Carlsen – Pelletier, Biel 2006.

23... $\mathbb{B}b6$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}c6$

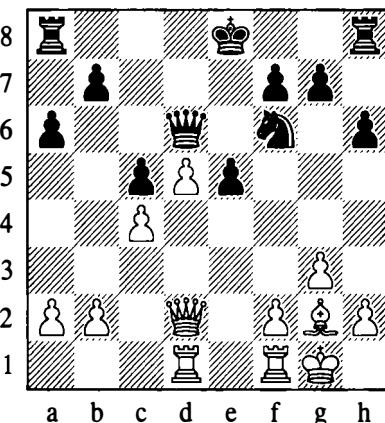
Or 24. $\mathbb{E}e1$ $\mathbb{E}e8$ was Della Morte – Macieja, Villahermosa 2014. Black has managed to avoid any danger regarding the d-pawn but White is active enough to secure a draw.

24... $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 25. $\mathbb{E}e1$ $f6$ 26. $d7$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$

Forcing White to give up the exchange.

27. $\mathbb{E}xe5$ $fxe5$ 28. $\mathbb{E}e2$ $\mathbb{B}f7$ 29. $\mathbb{E}xe5$ 

This was later drawn in Holmsgaard – Al-Modiahki, Andorra 2003. Black has an exchange more but in return White has a strong passed pawn on d7. Black's simplest defensive idea is to continue with ... $\mathbb{E}f8$, ... $\mathbb{B}bd8$, ... $\mathbb{B}f6$ and ... $\mathbb{E}f7$ intending to sacrifice back the exchange on d7. White, in order to defend against this idea, can try for a repetition. The easiest way for White to hold a draw is once Black plays ... $\mathbb{B}f6$ he can play $\mathbb{E}e8$ preventing Black from playing ... $\mathbb{E}f7$. In the game White used this ploy, but with the white king misplaced on the f-file; both players missed that ... $\mathbb{E}f7$ was thus possible and strong, as $\mathbb{E}xd8$ could be met by ... $\mathbb{B}e7$ with check, then ... $\mathbb{B}xd8$.

C12) 17. $c4$ 

A move not mentioned by Van Kampen.

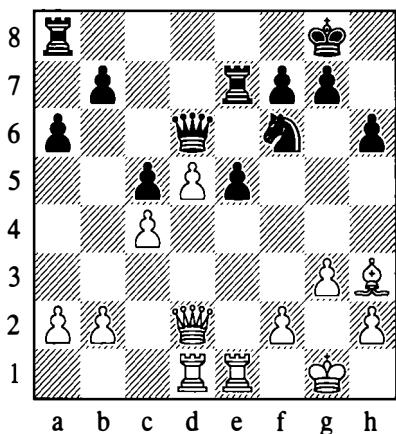
17... $0-0$ 18. $\mathbb{B}h3!$

This seems like the correct move order for White; as we will see below, White should retain the option of rerouting his bishop via f5 to c2, where it will no longer be shut out by the d5-pawn.

18.. $\mathbb{E}fe8!$ 19. $\mathbb{E}fe1$ $\mathbb{B}e7!$

Before writing this book, I considered this position to be slightly better (at least) for

White. Although my objective assessment hasn't changed much, due to pressure from my editor to propose an alternative to the better theoretical equalizer 13... $\mathbb{B}b4$, I now realize that Black's practical chances are not so bad here. Also, it is White, at least at the sub-GM level, who might face more problems as Black's position is easy to play and White could easily end up strategically worse. After all, White has the "bad bishop"; his passed pawn is securely blockaded for now and there are many scenarios where Black advances his kingside majority and creates an attack.



20. $\mathbb{B}e2!$

This is White's most dangerous plan: double on the e-file, move his bishop to the b1-h7 diagonal and later try to open the queenside in his favour, or create attacking possibilities on the kingside if Black does something stupid there.

20. $\mathbb{B}e3?!$

Adams chose to go to e3 instead of e2. White's rook will become active through the 3rd rank on b3.

On the other hand, this is tactically flawed due to:

20... $b5!?$

I am always a fan of this active approach.

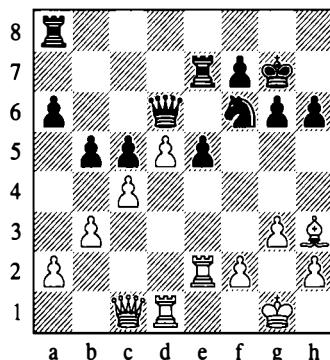
20... $b6$ is frequently played in this variation,

with the idea of denying the white queen a possible entrance via the a5-square. In general I don't think we should bother with that option, but it is useful to keep the idea in mind as it might be good in certain positions. 21.a3 $\mathbb{E}ae8$ 22.b4 $\mathbb{E}c7$ 23. $\mathbb{B}b3$ $b5!=$ Adams – Spoelman, Germany 2018. White's plan of b2-b4 and $\mathbb{B}b3$ seems rather rushed to me; White should play with more patience in order to break Black's defences.

21. $b3$ $g6!$

This is the difference! The h6-pawn isn't hanging, so Black has time to deny the bishop the f5-square. The engine's suggestion is:

22. $\mathbb{E}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 23. $\mathbb{W}c1!?$



The only reason I am showing this line is to note a curious idea we should take into account. Now White is threatening $b3-b4!$ – an idea we should always keep in mind as a potential threat. Like the Adams game above, this can usually be met safely, but we should definitely know it exists! So Black is advised to play:

23... $\mathbb{B}b8!$ 24. $\mathbb{E}de1$

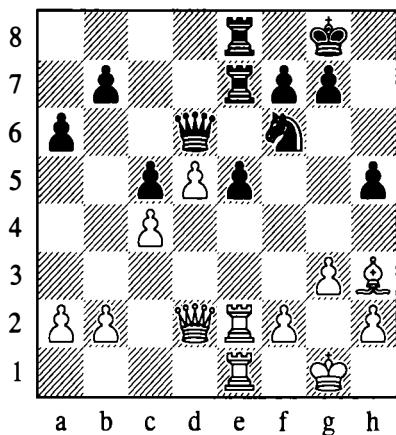
24. $b4?$ is now met by: 24... $\mathbb{E}c7!?$

24... $h5\rightleftarrows$

20... $\mathbb{E}ae8$ 21. $\mathbb{E}de1$ $h5!$

This idea has the seal of approval of the great Russian GM Malakhov. It is essential for Black to keep chances for counterplay and pushing the h-pawn gives plenty of those for the future.

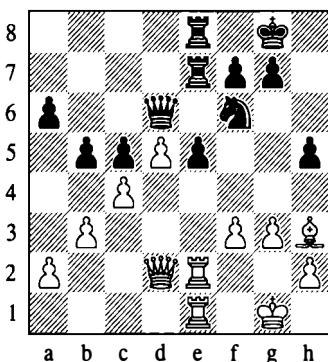
We will annoy White at some point with ...h4, but for now the main idea is to play ...g6 without blundering our h-pawn!



22.Bf5!

Before Black plays ...g6 it makes sense for White to manoeuvre his bishop to a more dangerous diagonal.

A smart strategic try is: 22.b3 b5 23.f3!



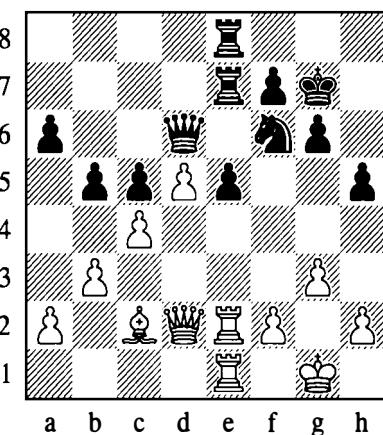
And at first I thought this was very strong. White has stopped the ...e4 idea and the ...g6 idea (as ...g6 is met with Wh6 for now) but I discovered that Black has enough counterplay after 23...h4 possibly even followed by ...a5! and ...a4. And if White takes on b5 then the d5-pawn hangs. If 24.Wg5 then 24...hxg3 25.hxg3 Wh7# followed by ...g6 and ...f5 gives Black excellent counterplay.

22...g6 23.Qc2 b5!

As ever, we should be as active as possible.

24.b3 Qg7

24...e4 might be another idea to keep in mind. The rook comes to e5 and future ...h4 ideas gain in strength.



25.a3!?

Again the b3-b4 idea. From another move order we have transposed to an important game in this line.

The engines prefer once again the move 25.f3 to restrain any possible ...e4. Now I like 25...Qd7 26.Wg5 Qf8# when the queen will be driven away from g5 with ...Qh7 or ...f6 and then Black can continue with ...f5; he has nothing to fear.

25...h4!! 26.Wc3 Qg8

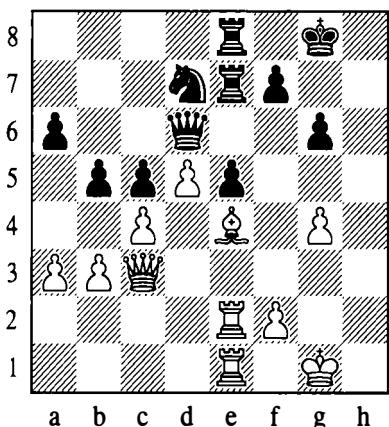
Black is ready to play ...Qh5 with pretty strong counterplay, this possibly explains White's next.

27.Qe4

Now ...Qh5 can be met with Qf3, but Black has other ways to continue.

27...hxg3 28.hxg3 Qd7 29.g4

Otherwise Black plays ...f5.

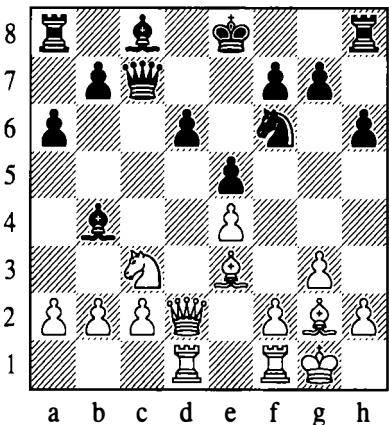


So far we are following Dernchenko – Matlakov, Kaliningrad 2015. Here Black equalizes after:

29...bxc4!N 30.bxc4 ♜f6!

Taking control over the h4- and f4-squares.

C2) 13...♝b4!?



A very rare move, but one that I believe comes very close to completely solving Black's problems. I discovered this possibility out of despair; none of the alternatives seemed to be attractive!

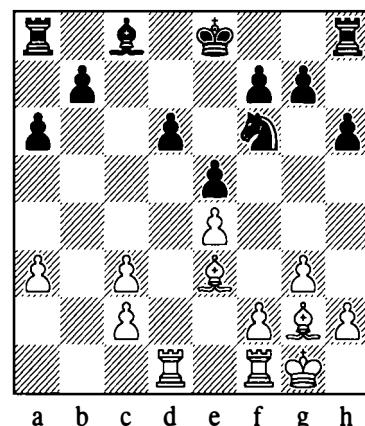
C21) 14.a3 is the alternative to **C22) 14.♝b5.**

C21) 14.a3 ♜xc3 15.♛xc3

15.bxc3?! is misguided as 15...♝e7 is promising for Black; unlike the queenless line at move 16, White lacks the option of a c5-break.

Instead of the king move Black could even play 15...♝g4!! as if White grabs on d6 then his structure would be laughable after Black later takes on e3.

15...♛xc3 16.bxc3



16...♝e6

The materialistic 16...♝e7? is unwise as 17.c4! planning c4-c5 is highly unpleasant.

17.♜xd6 ♜c8

This endgame should be okay for Black. White's queenside is in ruins while Black has a weakness-free position and easy play. His moves in a practical game should be easy to find. Some sample analysis follows:

18.♜fd1

There are many ways the game could continue so I will emphasize again that what follows are some examples to give a feel for the position and show typical ideas; they are not lines that must be memorized.

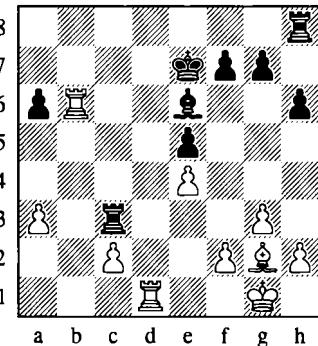
18.♜d2 ♜c4! 19.♜e1 ♐d7 20.♜f1 ♜a4

21. $\mathbb{A}c1 \mathbb{W}e7$ 22. $\mathbb{E}ed1 \mathbb{E}c8\#$ All Black's pieces are working hard.

18. $\mathbb{A}b6 \mathbb{Q}d7$ 19. $\mathbb{A}a5 b6!$

Swapping a healthy b-pawn for a doubled c-pawn may seem odd, but activating Black's rook is the key factor.

20. $\mathbb{A}xb6 \mathbb{Q}e7$ 21. $\mathbb{E}fd1 \mathbb{Q}xb6$ 22. $\mathbb{E}xb6 \mathbb{E}xc3\#$



23. $\mathbb{E}b7\#?$

Or 23. $\mathbb{E}xa6 \mathbb{E}xc2$ and sooner or later Black will activate his h8-rook as well.

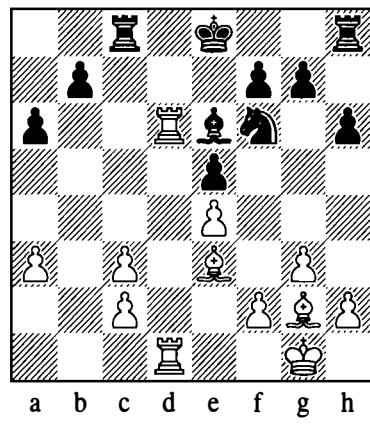
23... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 24. $\mathbb{E}d6 g5!$ 25. $\mathbb{E}xa6$

After 25. $\mathbb{A}h3 \mathbb{E}xa3$ 26. $c4 \mathbb{E}a4$ 27. $c5 a5\#$ both sides have passed pawns.

25... $g4=$

The trick to avoid is 25... $\mathbb{E}xc2\?!$ 26. $\mathbb{A}h3\#$ when Black faces an unpleasant defensive task.

After the text move, Black is free to capture on c2 and then activate his h8-rook. His compensation is easily enough for a draw.

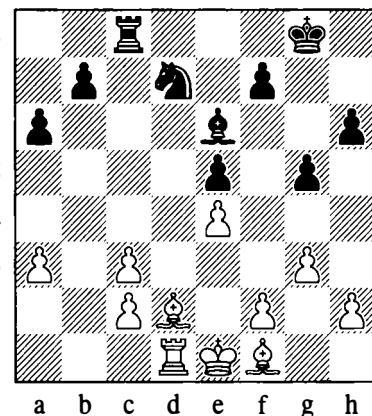


18... $0-0$ 19. $\mathbb{A}d2 \mathbb{E}fd8$ 20. $\mathbb{E}xd8\#$ 21. $\mathbb{A}f1$

White slowly builds up his position and an essential step is to bring his king closer to his weaknesses.

21... $\mathbb{E}c8$ 22. $\mathbb{A}e1 \mathbb{Q}d7$ 23. $\mathbb{A}f1 g5!$

A typical move, gaining space on the kingside and making room for the king on g7.



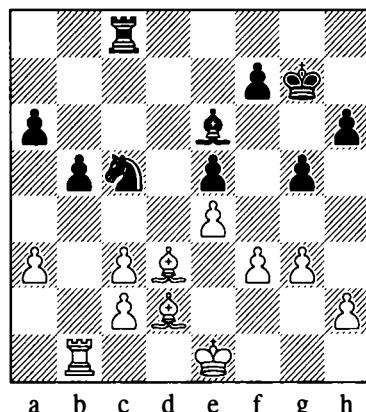
24. $\mathbb{F}3$

No better is: 24. $h4 \mathbb{Q}g7$ 25. $h\times g5 h\times g5$ 26. $f3 g4\#$

24... $\mathbb{Q}g7$

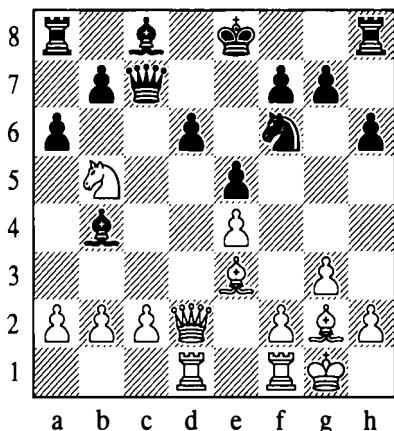
I cannot find a sensible way here to further improve the position for White. Every move allows Black easy counterplay. For example:

25. $\mathbb{A}d3 \mathbb{Q}c5$ 26. $\mathbb{E}b1 b5=$



Black can certainly play ... $\mathbb{Q}a4$ and target the c-pawn, but it's not even essential, as White is not threatening anything.

C22) 14. $\mathbb{Q}b5$



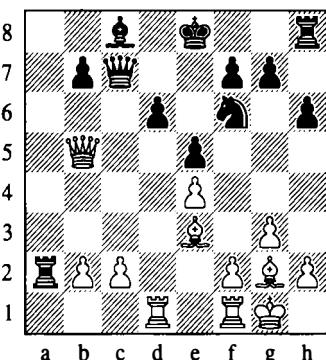
In all four games I have in my database, this move was played. It does indeed appear to be the critical attempt.

14...axb5 15. $\mathbb{W}xb4$ $\mathbb{B}xa2$

Black must take on a2 while he has the chance, as instead 15...0–0?! 16.a3 $\mathbb{W}xc4$ 17. $\mathbb{B}xd6\pm$ was much better for White in Hase - Herrera, Mendoza 2002.

16. $\mathbb{B}xd6$

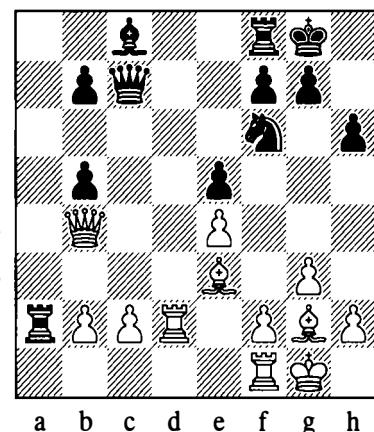
Instead 16. $\mathbb{W}xb5\uparrow$ creates a trap Black should know.



16... $\mathbb{Q}e7??$ 17. $\mathbb{B}xd6!$ was already resignable in De la Riva Aguado – F. Berend, Andorra 2017.

The correct reply is 16... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ when Black is comfortable after a line such as 17. $\mathbb{W}b4$ $\mathbb{B}a6$.

16...0–0 17. $\mathbb{B}d2$



17... $\mathbb{Q}e6!$

This is the idea I have put my faith in. Black's game is simple. He plays ... $\mathbb{B}fa8$ and ... $\mathbb{W}c4$ and has enough counterplay against White's queenside.

The same plan, albeit in a much less active way, was employed in an old game: 17... $\mathbb{Q}d7?!$ 18. $\mathbb{B}fd1$ $\mathbb{B}fa8$ 19.f3 $\mathbb{B}a1$ 20.c3 $\mathbb{W}c4$ 21. $\mathbb{W}xc4$ $\mathbb{B}xc4$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $\mathbb{B}xd1\uparrow$ 23. $\mathbb{B}xd1$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}a3$ g5 25. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ Black managed to draw in Bisguier - Penrose, Hastings 1961, but at this point White is clearly better due to the potential of his bishop pair; the g2-bishop may not look great now, but it will soon find play via f1.

18.f3!

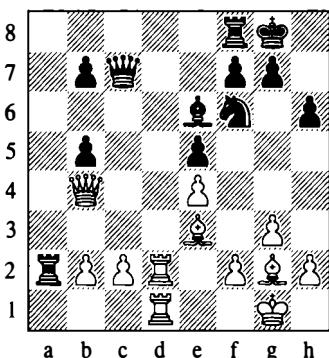
White has to cover the g4-square and this move is best as it also protects e4. This is the way the great Steinitz taught us to play when we have the advantage of the two bishops. Slowly take away all the possible influential squares for the knight and move forward,

gaining space and stopping any possible counterplay from the opponent. So, what can Black do in this position to make the above-mentioned method not so effective? The key word is “counterplay”! Black needs to find targets of attack and activate his pieces so that White needs to defend all the time. In this position this can be achieved by combining the moves ...Qfa8 and ...Wc4. This makes the first target for our counterplay the white pawns on b2 and c2. Another type of defensive plan we should keep in mind is the possibility to force an opposite-coloured bishop endgame. In such endgames, even with a pawn less, we can expect to defend successfully.

18.Wxb5? is simply a blunder as 18...Qc4 shows.

18.Qfd1

I have faced this move.



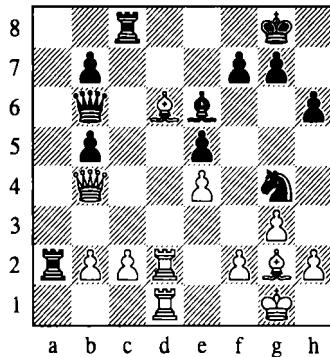
18...Qg4!?

Instead of finding 18...Qg4!?, I went for the less exciting 18...Wc4 19.Wxc4 bxc4 and drew comfortably in Iuldachev – Pavlidis, Batumi (ol) 2018.

After the novelty, Black has counterplay. The following forcing line is full of fun tactical ideas:

19.Qc5 Ec8 20.Qd6 Wb6

Black is threatening to trap the queen with ...Ra4, but that is not our only idea.



21.Qf1!

The only move to avoid defeat.

21...Qxf2! 22.Qxf2 Rxc2 23.Qdd2 Rxb2

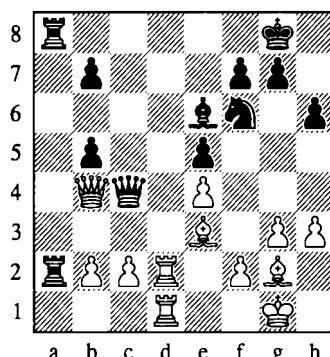
Again White must find an only-move.

24.Qc5! Wc6 25.Rxc2 Rxb4 26.Qxb4 Wxe4=

A weird material imbalance of queen and four pawns versus two rooks and a bishop; the engine is not excited and just says “0.00”. Black can put his bishop on c4 then try to advance some pawns, though the engine’s assessment must be correct.

18.c3 allows 18...Qg4 in an even more dangerous fashion for White, as after 19.Qc5 Ec8 20.Qd6! (going to e7 was correct and level) 20...Wd7! the white queen is in trouble! The threat is ...Ra4 and it is a difficult threat to parry.

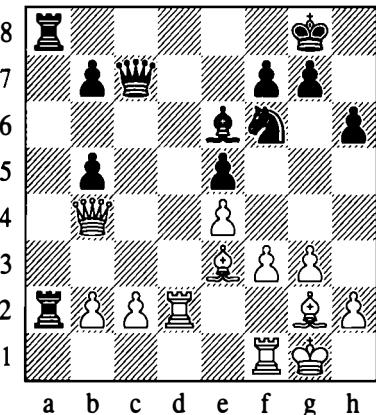
18.h3 is the other logical alternative, but 18...Rfa8 19.Qfd1 Wc4 gives Black the required counter-chances.



20... $\mathbb{W}xc4$ (20. $\mathbb{Q}c5?$ works in our main line, but here the e4-pawn is not defended adequately. After 20... $\mathbb{E}8a4!$ 21. $\mathbb{W}xc4$ $\mathbb{E}xc4$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}d6$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{E}xe4$ 24.f3 $\mathbb{E}d4$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{E}xd2$ 26. $\mathbb{E}xd2$ f6 27. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}xh3\#$ it should be a draw, but I'd take Black anytime with his extra pawn.) 20... $\mathbb{B}xc4$ 21.c3 $\mathbb{E}8a5!\Rightarrow$ A move to remember. The rook can come to b5 to attack b2.

18... $\mathbb{E}fa8$

What I like about Black's position is that his moves are easy to remember. As we saw above, one key idea is ... $\mathbb{W}c4$ and then ... $\mathbb{E}a5-b5$. White has various ways to protect his queenside and then try to push forward.



19. $\mathbb{E}b1!$

I think this move is best, although I suspect it won't be easy to figure out over-the-board for your opponents!

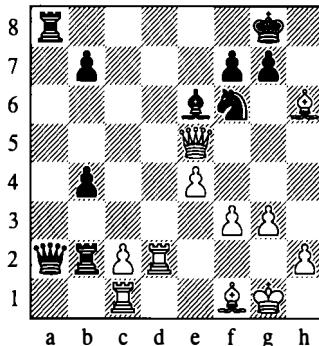
19. $\mathbb{E}cl$

This might seem more logical, but Black has a good solution.

19... $\mathbb{W}c4$ 20. $\mathbb{W}d6!$

20. $\mathbb{W}xc4$ $\mathbb{B}xc4$ 21.c3 gives Black a fine game if he remembers all the typical moves: 21... $\mathbb{E}8a5!$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{E}b5$ 23. $\mathbb{E}b1$ g5!= White is tied up defending, so he cannot claim any sort of advantage.

20... $\mathbb{E}xb2$ 21. $\mathbb{W}xe5$ $\mathbb{W}a2$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ b4 23. $\mathbb{Q}xh6$



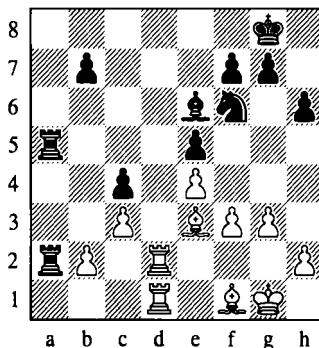
This is what the engines come up with and they are enthusiastic for a while about White's chances, but after the simple:

23... $\mathbb{Q}e8!$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ b3! 25. $\mathbb{W}d4$ $\mathbb{E}xc2$ 26. $\mathbb{E}dxc2$ $\mathbb{B}xc2$

Black can never be worse with such a huge pawn on c2. For example:

27. $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{E}c8$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}b3=$

19. $\mathbb{E}fd1$ $\mathbb{W}c4$ 20. $\mathbb{W}xc4$ $\mathbb{B}xc4$ 21.c3 $\mathbb{E}8a5$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}f1$



This is the other sensible attempt. Now the best course for Black is:

22... $\mathbb{Q}a1!$

In order to take on d1 and put his other rook to a2. A sample line goes:

23.h4 $\mathbb{E}xd1$ 24. $\mathbb{E}xd1$ $\mathbb{Q}a2$

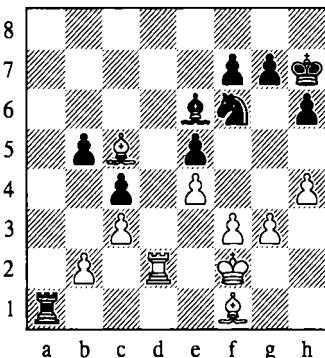
Now, if the white rook goes to the second rank, we immediately take the first rank.

25. $\mathbb{E}d8\#$

As stated above, if 25. $\mathbb{E}d2$ then 25... $\mathbb{Q}a1$.

25... $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 26. $\mathbb{B}d2 \mathbb{B}a1$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}f2 b5$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}c5$

Otherwise at some point the move ... $b4$ will be an idea.



28... $g5!$

Black has not needed to do anything crazy; he just played typical moves and is already fine.

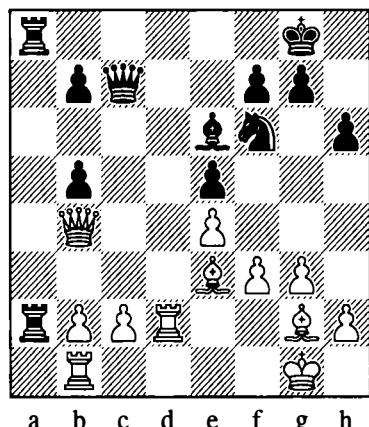
29. $\mathbb{Q}d6 \mathbb{Q}d7$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}e7 \mathbb{Q}g6$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}e2 g4!$

Time for further counterplay!

32. $f4x$

32. $f4 exf4$ 33. $gxf4 f5\#$ Let's see how White can run into trouble: 34. $e5?$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}a3 \mathbb{Q}h1\#$ This line shows why we should keep our pieces active!

32... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 33. $h5\# \mathbb{Q}g7\#$



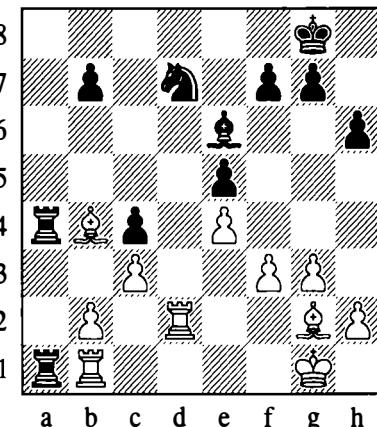
19... $\mathbb{W}c4$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}c5!$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 21. $\mathbb{W}xc4 bxc4$

22. $\mathbb{Q}b4$

This is the best White can do in the position.

22... $\mathbb{B}8a4$ 23. $c3 \mathbb{B}a1!$

But we play by analogy with the line we saw above after 19. $\mathbb{B}fd1$.



24. $\mathbb{B}bd1$

Instead 24. $\mathbb{B}f1$ tries to boost the power of f3-f4, but Black has an easy answer: 24... $g5!?$ 25. $h4$ (Or 25. $\mathbb{Q}a3$ allows Black to continue with: 25... $\mathbb{B}1xa3$ 26. $bxa3 \mathbb{B}xa3$ 27. $\mathbb{B}c2 \mathbb{Q}c5\#$ Black will continue with ... $\mathbb{B}b3$, ... $b5$ and maybe even ... $\mathbb{Q}a4$. It is hard for White to create any real threats.) 25... $\mathbb{B}xf1\#$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}xf1$ $gxh4$ 27. $gkh4 \mathbb{B}a1\#$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}f2 \mathbb{Q}g7\#$ Black can limit his opponent's options by playing ... $\mathbb{B}b1$ to hit b2.

24... $\mathbb{B}4a2!$

Instead after 24... $g5!?$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}a3!$ it is impossible for Black to play ... $\mathbb{B}xa3$ (as in the variation after 24. $\mathbb{B}f1$) since the d7-knight is now under attack. So Black's rook will be left on a4 without any real threats.

Thus in this case it is vital for Black to play ... $\mathbb{B}a2$ before going for the typical ... $g5$. Now at any point Black can exchange on d1. Also the move ... $g5$ is still on the agenda. The best the engines have to offer here is:

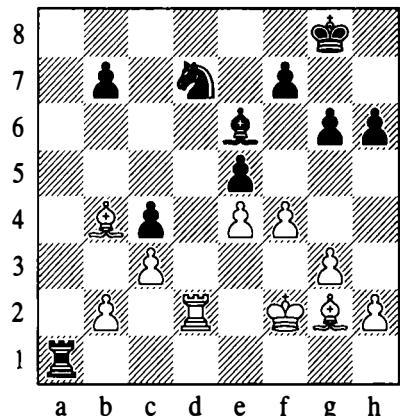
25. $f4!$

This does indeed seem like a good try. We need to reply:

25...g6

So now in order to continue building up, White must play:

26.♗xa1 ♜xa1† 27.♗f2



And we need to remember the key move:

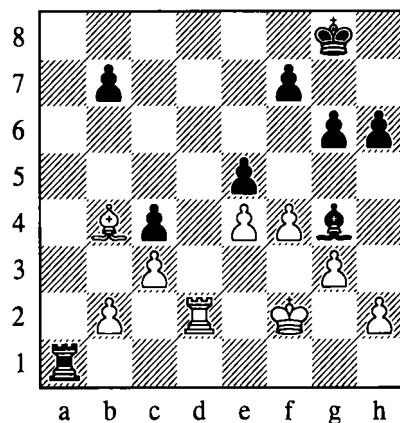
27...♝f6!

With the threat of ...♝g4† and taking on h2.

28.♝f3

Instead 28.h3 can be met by 28...♝h7! (but not 28...♝xh3? due to 29.♝d8†). Now there is a real threat of ...♝h3 and ...♝xe3† (not the only idea for counterplay, but the most forcing one). For example: 29.♝e3 ♜e1† 30.♝f2 ♜a1 White cannot make progress.

28...♝g4† 29.♝xg4 ♜xg4

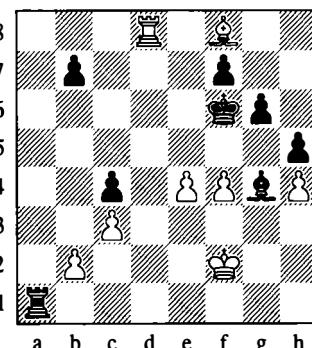


Black is fine in this opposite-coloured bishop endgame. I know this is an opening book, and we are already far into analysing a line that included a novelty many moves ago, but familiarizing yourself with some details in this type of endgame is essential in order to play this line with Black. When the opponent has the bishop pair, it is typical to try to relieve the pressure by going into such an endgame. I will offer some analysis, trying to pinpoint some key characteristics of this position, and possible plans for both sides. Black only needs to be careful of not being checkmated, since his dark squares are weak.

30.♝e7

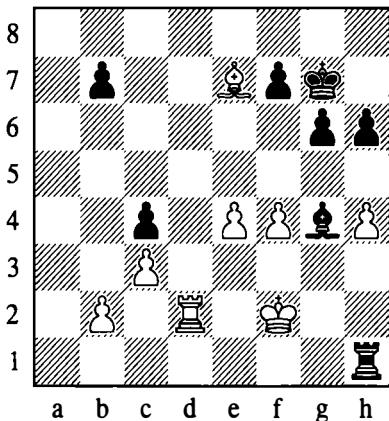
Black is not afraid of 30.fxe5 g5= as then he puts his bishop on e6 and his king on g6.

Another typical line is: 30.h4 exf4 31.♝d8† ♜g7 32.♝f8† ♜f6 33.gxf4 h5!



Now the h4-pawn is a target, as is b2, for our active rook. 34.♝d6† ♜e6 35.♝h6 ♜b1 36.♝g5† ♜g7 37.e5 ♜xb2† 38.♝e3 ♜g4! A typical device. We threaten a check on e2 to lure the white king forward. 39.♝f6† ♜h7 40.♝d8 White is ready to deliver checkmate, however... 40...g5! 41.♝xg5 ♜e2† 42.♝d4 ♜e6=

30...♝g7 31.h4 exf4 32.gxf4 ♜h1

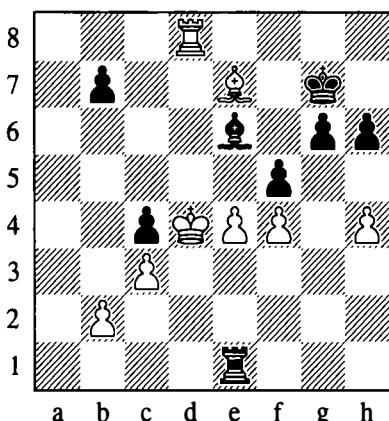


33.Qd6

Or 33.e5 g5! is a typical break in order to make space for our king. Remember that in the endgame, piece activity is often more important than material. 34.fxg5 h5!= is safe, keeping the h4-pawn as a target.

33...♜e6! 34.Qe3 ♜b1! 35.Qd8 ♜e1† 36.Qd4 f5!

As usual, if we can be active, then we go for it.



37.exf5

Certainly not 37.e5?? b6!–+ and the “active” white king is ready to be checkmated.

37...♝xf5 38.Qd6 ♜e2 39.Qe5† ♜f7 40.Qh8 ♜xb2 41.Qxh6 ♜d3=

Even I must admit that we have analysed far enough.

Conclusion

The Fianchetto variation is a serious challenge to the Taimanov. Black does not have a wide choice of antidotes, as I explained at the start of the chapter. The right choice is 6...a6! 7.Qg2 Qf6! with the standard continuation 8.0–0 Qxd4 9.Qxd4 Qc5. This is a major branching point.

A) 10.Qd1 and B) 10.Qd3 are well-known tries, but Black is safe enough.

By far the most critical challenge is C) 10.Qf4 d6 11.Qd2 h6 12.Qad1 e5 13.Qe3 when we branch once again.

C1) 13...♜e6 is the traditional main line. White can expect a slight edge, but Black is solid and can hope for counterplay later. I only offer this line as a back-up because my main recommendation is so rare that it has barely been tested.

C2) 13...♝b4!? is by far my favourite move in this position. As I said, it is very rare, so offers excellent surprise value. And objectively it offers excellent equalizing chances. True, Black may need to defend some endgames with care, but I have offered more than ample analysis to illustrate how that may be done.



6. ♘e2



Various 7th Moves

Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2. ♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4. ♘xd4 ♘c6 5. ♘c3 ♜c7 6. ♘e2

6...a6

| | |
|---------------|-----|
| A) 7. ♘xc6 | 164 |
| B) 7.a3 | 169 |
| B1) 7...b5!? | 170 |
| B2) 7...♘f6! | 171 |
| C) 7.f4 | 173 |
| C1) 7...♘xd4 | 173 |
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| D) 7.♗e3 ♘f6 | 182 |
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| D2) 8.a3 b5!? | 185 |
| D21) 9.f4 | 185 |
| D22) 9.0-0 | 186 |
| D23) 9.♘xc6 | 189 |

A) note to 8.0-0



10...♘f6!N

A) after 12. ♘a4



12...♘b6!N

B2) after 13. ♘d3



13...♗a7!N

1.e4 c5 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ e6 3.d4 cxd4 4. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 5. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 6. $\mathbb{Q}e2$

White's second-most common move, some way behind 6. $\mathbb{Q}e3$. With 6. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ White hints that he will castle short and try to play a controlled classical game.

6...a6

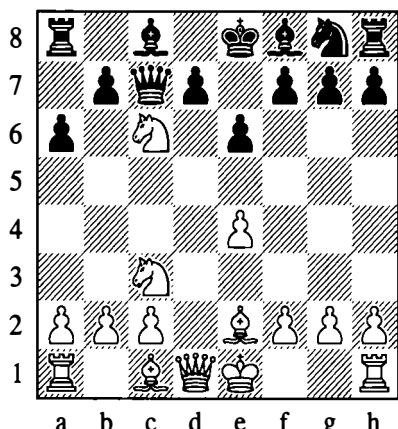
This is a vital tabiya in the Taimanov. The options to consider in this chapter are

A) 7. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$, B) 7.a3, C) 7.f4 and D) 7. $\mathbb{Q}e3$.

7.a4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ will transpose to the 7.0-0 lines sooner or later as White, having pushed his a-pawn two squares, cannot afford to castle long.

7.0-0 will be covered in the next five chapters.

A) 7. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$



I wish to explain some basic points regarding White's capture on c6. Firstly, and most obviously, how should Black recapture? Before we start debating the advantages and disadvantages of each recapture, I would like to give a name to each of them that describes the kind of positions that arise later. In this specific position of course you only need to have one recapture prepared to have a reliable repertoire, but you will face captures on c6 in

many different positions, so it is wise to be familiar with the characteristics of all three recaptures.

First of all, the "Strategic Capture" is ...dxc6, as the play after ...dxc6 usually consists of typical knight manoeuvres. Black will probably have to play ...e5 and accept a symmetric position. There is nothing wrong with this capture, but usually it's the one I would choose last, as it is not so flexible.

The second capture I will call the "Taimanov Capture". Black captures on c6 with the queen and then plays ...b5, ... $\mathbb{Q}b7$, ... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ (or ... $\mathbb{Q}e7$), ... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ (or ... $\mathbb{Q}c5$) and the game continues in typical Taimanov style; Black combines both ...d5 and ...b4 breaks. It is also quite typical that Black will play ... $\mathbb{W}c7$ in order to defend against the e4-e5 push and to protect himself against $\mathbb{Q}f3$, $\mathbb{Q}e1$ and $\mathbb{Q}d5$ tricks.

So as this book is a Taimanov repertoire, I would normally propose the "Taimanov Capture" and then continue the analysis. But I personally believe more in the "Dynamic Capture" which is ...bxc6. One can very easily understand the name of this capture; Black creates an imbalance in the pawn structure and wishes to build a strong centre with ...d7-d5. We will go into further details in the analysis.

7...bxc6!

The Dynamic Capture. In this chapter we will study the basic concepts of this pawn structure. For a start, White's pieces are not ideally placed. The light-squared bishop would be better placed on d3, as it can do more to help the attack from that square; probably White will have to move the bishop again to d3. So we will not consider this position to be the tabiya. We will just explain here the basic plans for Black and White.

7... $\mathbb{W}xc6$

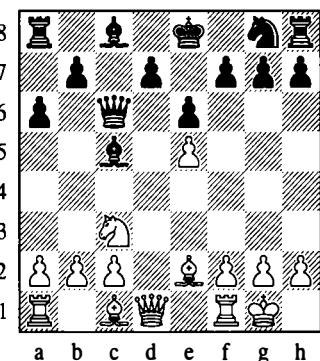
The Taimanov Capture.

8.0-0

A sample line could continue:

8... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 9.e5!?

Gaining some space and creating threats of $\mathbb{Q}f3$ and $\mathbb{Q}e4$.



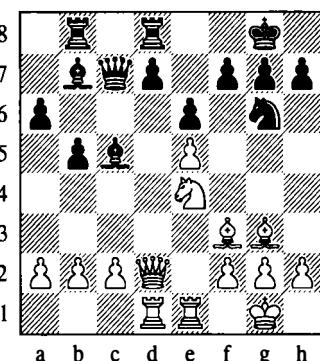
We can follow a correspondence game to get a better idea of the position.

9... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 0–0 11. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$

Such a position is typical when Black captures on c6 with the queen. Black will try to go for ...f5 next and the e5-pawn will stay rather unprotected. White's pieces look more comfortably placed, but it isn't clear how White will continue.

13. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{B}b8!$

Creating the immediate threat of ...b5.
14. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ b5 15. $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{B}b7$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ $\mathbb{B}fd8$



17.h4!?

Or 17.c3!? $\mathbb{Q}f8\infty$ is also unclear, with Black planning a minority attack on the queenside.
17... $\mathbb{Q}xe4!$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ f5!?

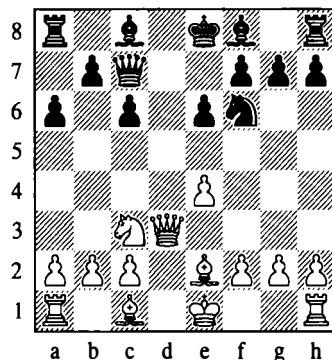
Grabarchuk – Giobbi, email 2012, had reached a sharp position.

7...dxc6

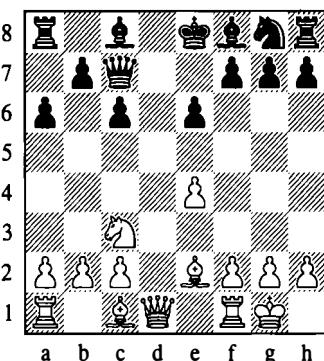
The Strategic Capture. We will not go deeply into this capture. But I will mention that Black not having played ...b5 helps him, as White cannot exploit it with a quick a4-break. We will continue by analysing two plans which have been seen in high-level games.

8.0–0!?

Or 8. $\mathbb{W}d3$, planning to put the queen to g3, also seems strong to me. 8... $\mathbb{Q}f6$



9. $\mathbb{W}g3!$ N (instead after 9. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ Black is fine and won a very nice game in Eyesee – Meinit, United Kingdom [rapid] 2010)
9... $\mathbb{W}xg3$ 10.hxg3 e5 11. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 12.f3 $\mathbb{Q}e6$
13. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}b6$ $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$
16. $\mathbb{Q}e3!$ White has a slightly more favourable endgame.

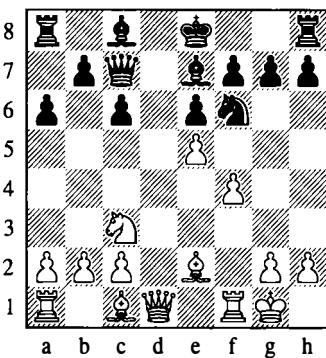


8...Qf6!?

- a) 8...Qd6?! 9.f4! e5?! 10.f5! Qf6 11.We1!N (instead in Osmanodja – Bulmaga, Cappelle-la-Grande 2016, White chose the slower 11.Qe3 when Black was okay after 11...b5) 11...Qc5† 12.Qh1 b5 13.Wg3 Qf8 14.Qd1± White has not achieved anything amazing, but Black's king is stuck in the centre and White certainly has a slightly better position.
- b) The best try might be 8...b5 but even so 9.a4! gives White some pressure.

The text is not disastrous for Black, but White keeps a small edge after:

9.f4 Qe7 10.e5



10...Qd5

If Black has to play ...Qd5 and capture with a pawn then something has gone wrong. Of course this only applies if White has castled short. If White has castled long, then it makes sense to open the c-file!

After 10...Qd7?! 11.Qe4 White gains the initiative.

11.Qxd5

11.Qe4!? is also promising.

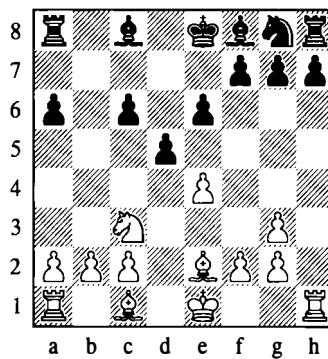
11...cxsd5 12.Qe3 Qc5 13.Qd4 Wb6 14.c3±

8.0–0

After 8.Qe3?! Eb8 9.Qb1 d5! Black was already comfortable as in Friedrich – Tydecks, Sebnitz 1998.

8.Wd3 is an annoying modern trend in the Taimanov; the idea is to offer a queen exchange

next with Wg3. 8...d5 In Lara – Silva, Brazil 1994, White exchanged on d5, which is harmless. Instead after the critical 9.Wg3, Black has nothing better than: 9...Wxg3 10.hxg3

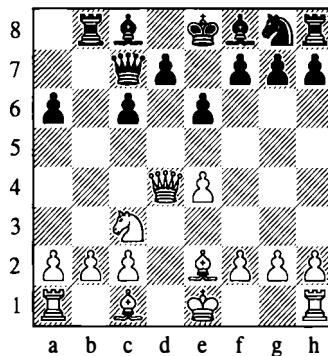


Now I suggest: 10...Qf6!N The most flexible development, waiting before committing our dark-squared bishop or a8-rook. (Instead 10...Eb8 11.b3 Qb4 12.Qd2 Qf6 13.0–0–0! earned White an edge in Motylev – Iljushenok, Sochi 2018. The b8-rook was later vulnerable to Qf4 ideas.) For example, 11.Qe3 Qb4 when I think Black has good counterplay.

8.Wd4!?

As explained in the main line, from e2 the bishop does not help White to go for the standard plans with 0–0 and f2-f4 because he will have to lose precious time by playing Qd3. So correspondence players have tried the Wd4 approach in order to find some energetic play.

8...Eb8!



9.a3

Instead 9.0–0 can be met by a lively idea:

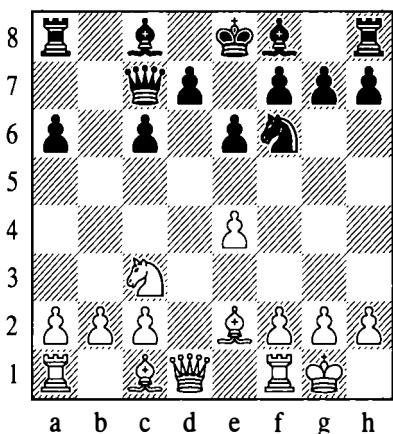
9... $\mathbb{A}d6$ 10. $\mathbb{W}xg7$ $\mathbb{A}xh2\ddagger$ 11. $\mathbb{A}h1$ $\mathbb{A}e5$

12. $\mathbb{W}g5$ h5 13. $\mathbb{W}h4$ d6! Mary – Bleker, email 2012, reached an unclear fighting position.

9... $\mathbb{A}e7?$

This was employed by the strong correspondence player Neto in 2012.

Also playable is 9...e5?! N 10. $\mathbb{W}d3$ $\mathbb{A}f6$ with standard play for Black: ...d6, ... $\mathbb{A}e7$, ... $\mathbb{A}e6$, castle etc...

8... $\mathbb{A}f6$ 

9.f4

9. $\mathbb{A}g5$ should not worry Black as he can play 9...d5 without being afraid of 10. $\mathbb{A}xf6$ gxf6, as with such a strong central pawn mass, Black should be happy.

9...d5

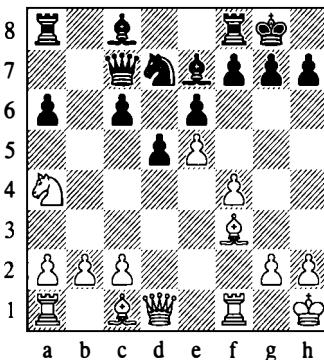
We now see that White's light-squared bishop would be better placed on d3.

10. $\mathbb{A}d3$

White is giving away a tempo but it is not important for the time being, as our goal is to look at both sides' plans.

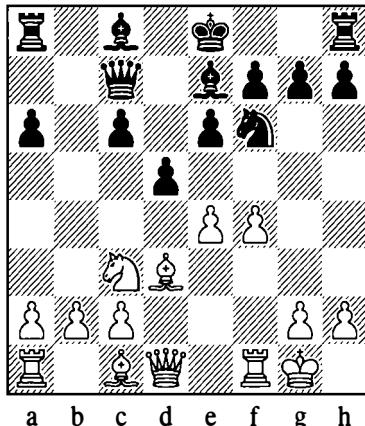
10. $\mathbb{A}f3$ is an independent try to use the bishop's development to e2, but it is unconvincing.

10... $\mathbb{A}c5\ddagger$ 11. $\mathbb{A}h1$ 0–0 12.e5 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}a4$

 $\mathbb{A}e7$ 

14.c4?! (more reliable was 14. $\mathbb{A}e3$ but after 14...a5 \rightarrow Black will follow up with ... $\mathbb{A}a6$) 14... $\mathbb{A}b6$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ $\mathbb{W}xb6$ 16.f5?! Trying to make sense of the bishop being on f3, but it does not work. 16...exf5 17.cxd5 cxd5 18. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{B}b8$ 19. $\mathbb{W}f3$ $\mathbb{A}e6\ddagger$ Aitken – Portisch, Munich (ol) 1958.

10.e5 $\mathbb{A}d7$ is similar to the main line.

10... $\mathbb{A}e7$ 

White has two different plans. The first involves the e4-e5 push and in the second White tries to hold the tension in the centre.

A) White plays e4-e5. White usually tries to combine attacking ideas on the kingside with a queenside breakthrough. White will try:

1) To keep the light-squared bishop in order to be able to attack on the kingside.

2) To exchange the dark-squared bishops. This exchange will let him have a better blockade on the c5-square if Black has not pushed his c-pawn, or attack the c5-pawn more effectively if Black has pushed the c-pawn. Moreover if Black has played the move ...g6 in order to defend his king, the f6-square will become even weaker.

3) White's basic plan is to play ♘a4, b2-b3, c2-c4. If Black has played ...c5 and ...d4 then there is a powerful manoeuvre with ♘e4 and ♘b2-d3 coming. The dark-squared bishop might be developed to a3 in order to attack the c5-pawn. White's knight is ideally placed on b2 as it both blockades the passed d4-pawn and prevents the ...a5-a4 pawn breakthrough.

Black has to try to defend against White's above-mentioned plans.

1) Black will try to defend his king by playing ...g6 or ...f5 at the appropriate moment. It is also quite possible to defend with the manoeuvre ...♞fd8 and ...♝f8 (or ...♝f8 and then ...g6, ...♞g7).

2) Black should try to put some pressure on the b2-pawn. If White goes b2-b3, then try to attack on the queenside with the typical minority attack ...a5-a4 or even ...c5-c4. The light-squared bishop should be placed either on b7 in order to put long-term pressure on g2, or should be exchanged from a6. One key point is that if Black wants to go for ...f5 (or ...f6 in some cases) the bishop should be placed on c8 to defend e6.

3) A final very important detail is that Black should try to exchange the knights. It may not seem obvious why Black should try to exchange the knights (in contrast, all of us would try to exchange the light-squared bishops immediately, as we understand that White's light-squared bishop is more useful than Black's). But to understand why Black should try to exchange knights requires some experience of playing the position. If you have not been tortured playing a position with the above-mentioned set-up b3, c4, ♘e4, ♘d3 then you will not fully appreciate why exchanging the knights frees Black's hands.

B) In the second plan White doesn't push the e-pawn and tries to keep the tension. In this situation there is no single standard plan for White or Black, as the position remains flexible and there are many possible plans for each side. We will give some typical examples.

White's plans are:

1) White usually plays standard waiting moves in order to improve his pieces. Moves such as ♘h1, ♘e2, b3, ♘b2, ♘ae1.

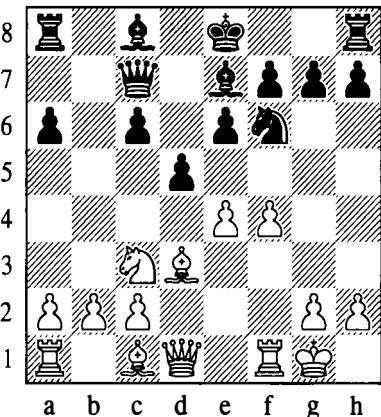
2) After having playing most (or all) of the waiting moves above, White usually continues with e4-e5 and tries to enter a better version of Plan A, or plays exd5 and tries to continue the attack with f4-f5.

Black's standard plans are:

1) Black could continue with standard moves such as ...♞e7, ...0-0, ...♝b7, ...♝fe8 and ...c5.

2) Black should always be prepared to meet the e5-push with the plans described under Plan A.

3) Black could always think about playing ...dxe4, exchange the knights, and then play ...g6, ...♝f6 and slowly go for ...c5-c4 or ...a5-a4.



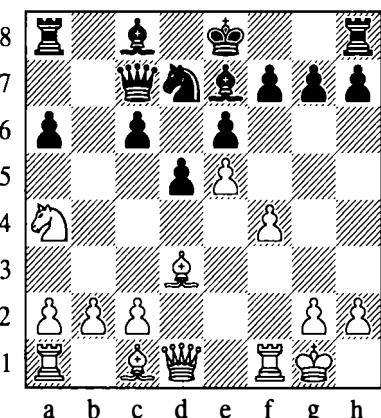
11.e5

I will show a sample line of the e5-push with the above-mentioned plans.

11... $\mathbb{W}e2$ is the plan with waiting moves. For example: 11...0–0 12.b3 $\mathbb{A}b7\infty$

11... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}a4$

After a waiting move such as 12. $\mathbb{Q}h1$, Black can play 12...c5?! or wait a little longer with a useful move such as 12... $\mathbb{A}b7$!?.

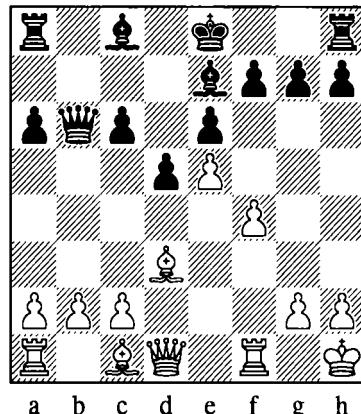


12... $\mathbb{Q}b6$!N

So far, only 12...0–0 13.b3 g6 has been seen. I will show a few more moves from this game as it is instructive (13... $\mathbb{Q}b6$ would still lead to the main line). 14. $\mathbb{A}b2$ c5 15.c4 dxс4 16. $\mathbb{A}xc4$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ $\mathbb{W}xb6$ 18. $\mathbb{W}g4$ a5 Black had

excellent counterplay and went on to win in Zolnierowicz – Sliwicki, Poland 2016.

13. $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ $\mathbb{W}xb6\infty$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}h1$



And now Black can take advantage of not having castled, and play:

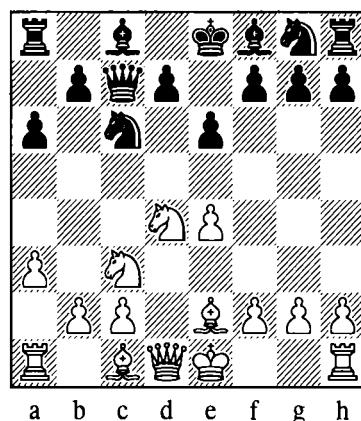
14...a5

But even the simple approach is fine. For example: 14...0–0 15.b3 g6 ∞

15. $\mathbb{W}e2$ g6 16. $\mathbb{E}b1$ c5 17. $\mathbb{A}b5\infty$ 18.a4 h5?!

The king will sit safely on g7, while the rook might be more useful on h8 than f8.

B) 7.a3

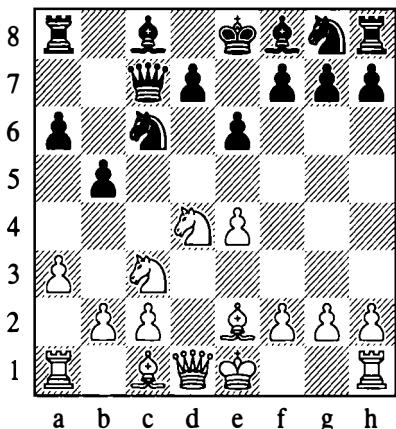


White's idea is to prevent Black from playing the standard move ... $\mathbb{Q}b4$. The only drawback is that White gives away precious time for development. Black has two ways to continue.

In general I like to play the standard move **B1) 7...b5!!** when it is possible. At this point ...b7-b5 is certainly playable, so we will take a brief look at it.

The other move is **B2) 7... $\mathbb{Q}f6$!** which is liable to transpose to lines with 7. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ and 8.a3 (see variation D2), or 7.0-0 and 8.a3 (see variation B of Chapter 10). I consider this move to be Black's best, as then there is no need for Black to study separate theory.

B1) 7...b5!!



8. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$!

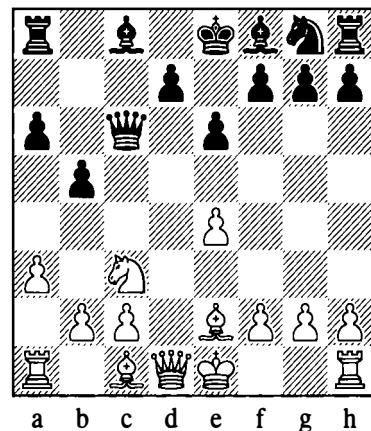
When Black plays the move ...b5, White has to capture on c6 if he wishes to try for an initiative. Otherwise Black gets a standard position after ... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ and can potentially try to press along the long diagonal.

8.0-0 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$?? Black can try something weird which seems to work fine for him (or 8... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ is also okay and quite typical). 9. $\mathbb{W}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$?? 10. $\mathbb{W}xg7$ $\mathbb{Q}xh2+$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xc7$ $\mathbb{Q}b7\infty$ Black will continue with ... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ and maybe ...h5-h4-h3. The fact that he has fianchettoed both of his bishops might offer long-term pressure.

8. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 9.f4 $\mathbb{Q}f6\infty$ We have transposed to variation .D21. Black intends simply ... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ (or ... $\mathbb{Q}c5$, if he wants to be more aggressive). There is no need for Black to fear the e4-e5 push as he would simply exchange on d4 and place the knight on d5 (or e4). Then a break with ...d6 will create an imbalance in the centre which Black might exploit in an endgame. See pages 185 and 186 for some typical continuations.

8... $\mathbb{W}xc6$??

The safest choice is: 8...dxc6! We have already talked about the "strategic capture" in the previous section. Black is very stable.



Although there is no real refutation of the text move, and I consider it quite playable, I believe White has a very small edge after:

9. $\mathbb{W}d3$!

One of the 'novelties' I discovered while working on this book. It was spotted, during the editing phase, as having some games played with it. To understand this "computer" move better we might take a look at the main line, which is 9.0-0, and the way Black can react and easily equalize.

9.0-0 $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 11.e5 $\mathbb{Q}c8=$ The knight comes to g6 or f5, the bishop to e7,

then continue with castling. Black has long-term pressure against the c2-pawn and should try to exploit it with the minority attack ...a5 and ...b4. The break ...d6 should also be considered. Last but not least Black can often try to break with ...f6, which might lead to a worse pawn structure but the bishop will be very active on f6.

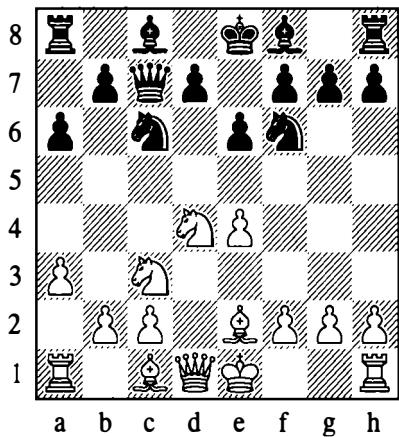
9... $\mathbb{W}c7?N$

A prophylactic move against the $\mathbb{Q}f4$ plan; White can continue with several moves which are connected with the above-mentioned plan. We will just mention three moves for White, all of which give him a slightly more pleasant game.

- A) 10. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ with the idea $\mathbb{Q}h4-g3$.
- B) 10.g3 with the idea $\mathbb{Q}f4$.
- C) 10. $\mathbb{W}g3$ with the idea of exchanging queens and then trying to play $\mathbb{Q}f4$ and $\mathbb{E}d1$.

The known line is: 9... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}f4!$ The whole idea of 9. $\mathbb{W}d3$ is to play against the d6-square. White will next go $\mathbb{E}d1$ (or 0–0–0) and then maybe $\mathbb{W}g3$ to keep control of the d6-square. From g3 the queen will also attack the g7-pawn. 10... $\mathbb{E}c8$ 11.0–0 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}fd1\pm$ Smirnov – Wang Yue, Internet (rapid) 2018.

B2) 7... $\mathbb{Q}f6!$



Now 8. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ transposes to variation D2, while 8.0–0 transposes to variation B of the next chapter. So we will look at the only serious alternative which is 8.f4.

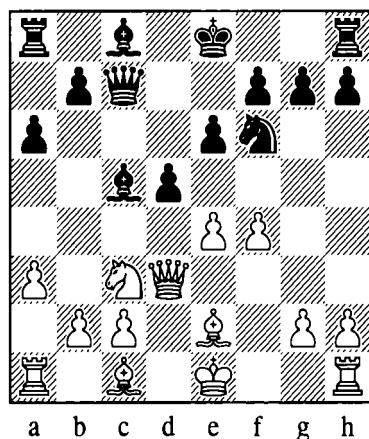
8.f4

8. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ exists, but it is not as critical: 8... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 9. $\mathbb{W}d2$ (instead 9.0–0?! accidentally gives up the bishop pair: 9... $\mathbb{Q}g4$! 10. $\mathbb{Q}xg4$ $\mathbb{Q}xg5\bar{=}$ Benedetti – Flores, Villa Martelli 2014) 9...0–0 10.0–0–0 b5 $\bar{=}$ White must be careful as a2-a3 and castling long is a risky mixture. For example: 11. $\mathbb{Q}f3?$! (the standard reply to ...b5 was correct: 11. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ dxc6=) 11... $\mathbb{Q}e5$! 12. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ b4? $\bar{=}$ Constantin – Kabanova, Techirghiol 1998.

8... $\mathbb{Q}xd4!$

Naturally we will play in Taimanov style. Instead 8...d6 9. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ transposes to the Scheveningen System.

9. $\mathbb{W}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 10. $\mathbb{W}d3$ d5!



11.e5

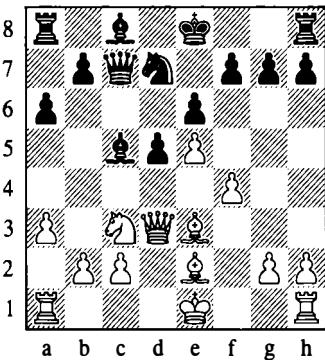
Instead opening the position with 11.exd5 looks risky for White with his king stuck in the centre, but it is still balanced. For example: 11...exd5 12. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$! 13. $\mathbb{W}xf5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 14. $\mathbb{W}e5\bar{=}$ $\mathbb{W}e7=$

11... $\mathbb{Q}d7$

We have reached a typical French structure where White has not placed a piece on d4, so Black temporarily controls the a7-g1 diagonal.

12. $\mathbb{W}g3$

The alternative is to fight for the diagonal:

12. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ 

12... b6!

Black secures the c5-bishop forever; now White will never be able to swap bishops on c5, as the pawn roller would be too strong. Instead 12...b5 allows White his ideal plan: 13. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{W}xc5$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}f3$!± With the idea $\mathbb{Q}e2-d4$.

13. $\mathbb{Q}f3$

Still trying for the idea $\mathbb{Q}e2-d4$.

13... $\mathbb{Q}b7$

It is not clear how White can manoeuvre the knight to d4. If he moves the knight then the c2-pawn is hanging. If he castles long then Black can go ...b5 and ...b4. The fact that White has played a2-a3 gives Black a nice target if White castles long.

14. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{W}xe3$

The greedy option.

Or 14...g5!? leads to wild play. For example:

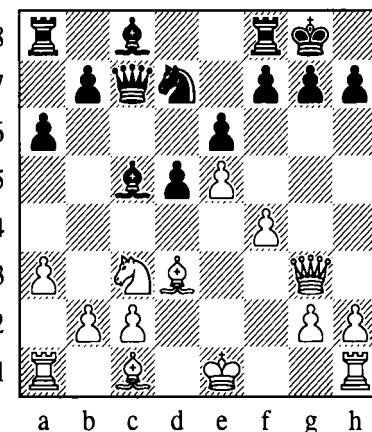
15. $\mathbb{Q}h5$ $\mathbb{G}xf4$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 17. $\mathbb{W}h3$ 0-0-0
18. $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ $\mathbb{Q}f3\#$ 19. $\mathbb{G}xf3$ $\mathbb{W}xf7\infty$ The position remains unbalanced.

15. $\mathbb{W}xe3$ $\mathbb{W}xc2$

Black has gained a pawn, but the game goes on. Of course White has decent compensation.

12... 0-0 13. $\mathbb{Q}d3$

So far this is Vallejo Pons – Bokros, Novi Sad 2016. We have already seen quite a few times that in this pawn structure, White loses a tempo with this bishop move, but there is nothing better to do.

13... $\mathbb{Q}a7$!N

This might look strange but actually has a very nice idea behind it; Black wants to challenge the d3-bishop with ... $\mathbb{Q}c5$.

Instead the game continued 13...f5?! 14. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ b5 15. $\mathbb{Q}e3$. White had used a plan we saw above to gain a small edge due to his grip on d4.

14. $\mathbb{Q}e2$

This is the first choice of the engines and we still could meet it with ... $\mathbb{Q}c5$, but I'd like to show you what the silicon beasts come up with:

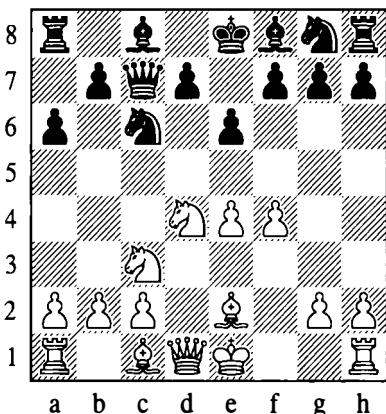
14... f6!

With the idea:

15. $\mathbb{W}h3$ g6 16. $\mathbb{W}xe6\#$ $\mathbb{Q}h8\#$

Despite being a pawn down, Black is better as White cannot castle soon, and Black threatens ... $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ with a fully mobilized army.

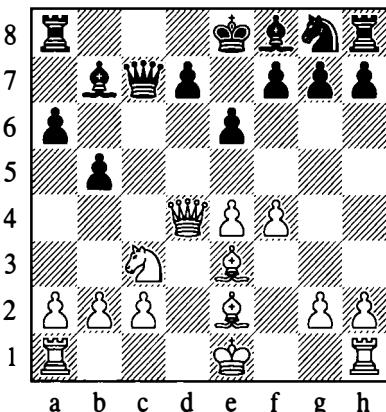
C) 7.f4



In my opinion an early f2-f4 advance does not offer White much play in the $\mathbb{A}e2$ system. In practice this position is often seen via the move order 6.f4 as after ...a6 then $\mathbb{A}e2$ is an option. But after 6.f4 (Chapter 5) I recommend taking on d4 at once, so our repertoire does not allow such transpositions.

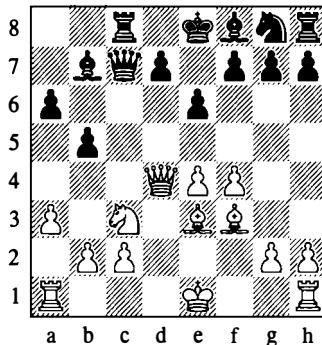
Black has two interesting plans: C1) 7... $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ and later going for the ...b5 push, or the immediate C2) 7...b5? push, which allows the typical $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ capture.

As a typical Taimanov player, I usually prefer the second plan, but we will see that the variations can often transpose.

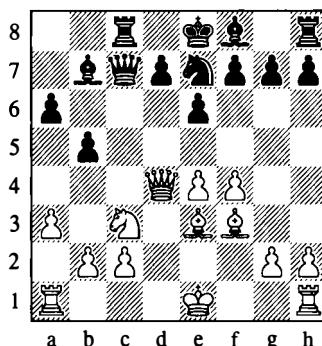
C1) 7... $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 8. $\mathbb{W}xd4$ b5 9. $\mathbb{A}e3$ $\mathbb{A}b7$ 

10.0–0

The text move is one of several options. I will also look at 10. $\mathbb{A}f3$ and 10.0–0–0.

10. $\mathbb{A}f3$ $\mathbb{E}c8$ 11.a3

Black's positional challenge is how to develop his knight, as the immediate 11... $\mathbb{Q}f6?$ fails to 12.e5. So I will offer two good options: i) 11... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ is sound and full of interesting ideas, but my favourite is the ambitious and creative ii) 11...h5!?.

i) 11... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 

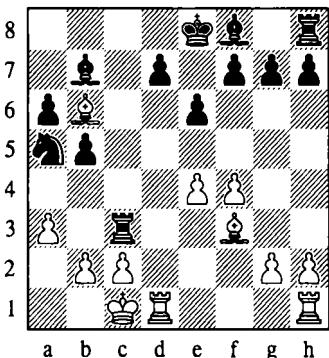
12.0–0–0

12.0–0 could be an interesting plan in principle, but it allows a neat tactical shot: 12...d5!. Black will exchange on e4 and then place the knight on f5. The tactical justification is: 13.exd5?? $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 14. $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 15. $\mathbb{W}xe3?$ $\mathbb{A}c5+$

12...Qc6 13.Wb6 Qa5!?

Black is willing to offer an exchange sacrifice to start typical queenside play. The line is quite forcing so we can follow it for several more moves.

14.Wxc7 Exc7 15.Qb6 Exc3



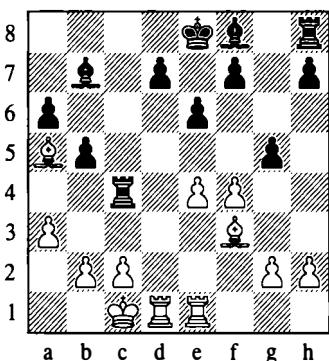
16.Qxa5

Declining the exchange.

After 16.bxc3 Qc4# the a3-pawn will drop with check, giving Black enough compensation for at least equality, with his active minor pieces and better structure.

16...Exc4 17.Qhe1 g5!

A typical ploy in Sicilian endgames and well worth noting.



Black's idea is:

18.fxg5 h6 19.gxh6 Exh6!N

Instead the bishop recapture was unsuccessful in an internet game.

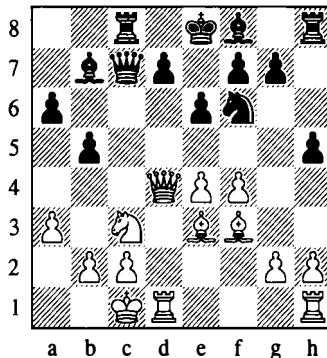
20.h3 Exh4

Black has enough play against e4 to hold the balance.

ii) 11...h5!?

A clever way for Black to gain counterplay; it allows the knight to go to f6 as now the g4-square is available.

12.0-0-0 Qf6

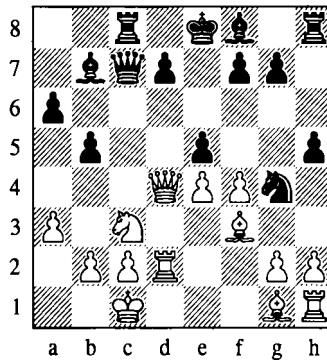


13.Ed2

The usual move, covering the c2-pawn.

13.e5 Qg4 is comfortable for Black. For example: 14.Ed3 Exf3 15.gxf3 In Nijboer – Swinkels, Haaksbergen 2009, Black retreated to h6, planning to use the outpost on f5, but White's play against the backward d-pawn was too fast. The correct path was: 15...Qxe3!N 16.Wxe3 d5 Black has solved any potential problems with his d-pawn. And 17.f5 a5!, with ...b4 to come, looks promising for Black.

13...Qg4 14.Qg1 e5!



15.fxe5

Now the knight will be happy on e5 forever.

But 15... $\mathbb{Q}a7$ b4 \mathbb{N} is also fine for Black.

15... $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 17. $\mathbb{W}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$

18. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{W}xc5$

Black has the better minor piece, but probably White should be able to hold the balance. But it will not be easy. For example:

19.h4 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}hd1$ f6 21. $\mathbb{W}a2!$? $\mathbb{W}c4\mathbb{F}$

Simmelink – Cabrera Pino, email 2007.

10.0–0–0

Black has to react instantly.

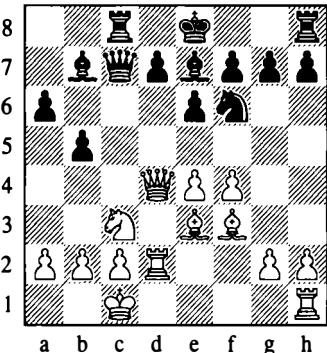
10... $\mathbb{Q}c8!$

With the immediate threat of ...b4.

11. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$

Once again ...b4 is the threat.

12. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}e7\infty$



The position remains unclear. White will attack on the kingside and Black on the queenside. It is vital for Black that White's queen is placed on d4 and so the e5-push is ineffective because of the following tactic:

13.e5

Instead 13.g4! is well met by: 13...d5!

14.g5 Despite the aggression, the position soon quietens down to equality (but instead 14.exd5 b4 \mathbb{N} is wild). 14...dxe4

15. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 0–0 17. $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ $\mathbb{W}xb7$

18. $\mathbb{Q}hd1=$

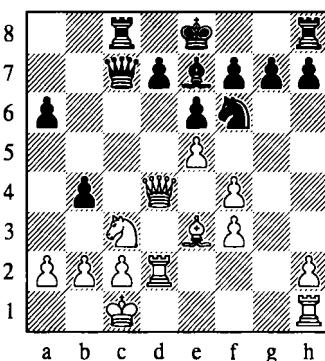
13... $\mathbb{Q}xf3!$ 14.gxf3

Of course not: 14.exf6?? $\mathbb{Q}xf6\mathbb{F}$ Remember

the dubious location of White's queen on d4.

14...b4!

A typical intermediate move. If White's knight moves then Black will usually respond with ... $\mathbb{Q}d5$ when the knight is powerful on d5.



15. $\mathbb{Q}e4!$

What Black wants is 15. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}d5!$ when he has the upper hand due to his better pawn structure.

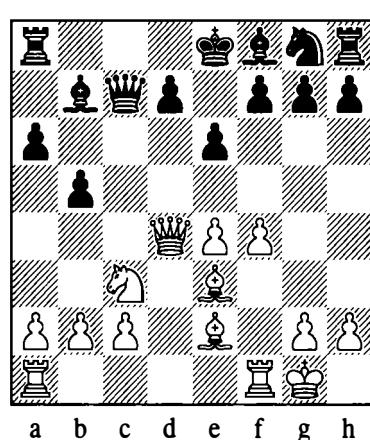
15... $\mathbb{Q}xe4$

Improving White's structure, but the safest choice.

White's idea is 15... $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}d6\mathbb{F}!$ exploiting that g7 will be en prise after captures on d6.

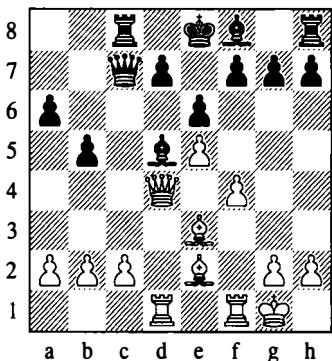
16.fxe4 0–0 ∞

Black plans ... $\mathbb{Q}fd8$ then ...d6, and uses the tactic 17. $\mathbb{W}xd7??$ $\mathbb{W}c4\mathbb{F}$ hitting a2 and e4.



10...♝c8 11.♝ad1 ♝f6 12.♗f3

The immediate central advance does not trouble Black after 12.e5 ♞d5 13.♗xd5 ♜xd5.

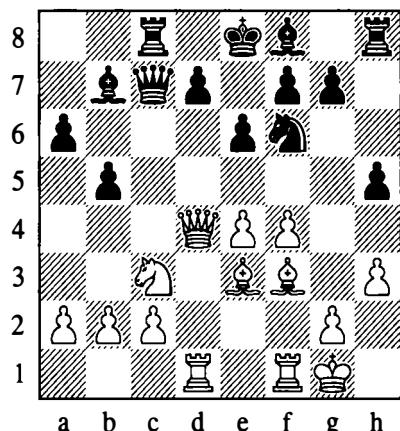


For example: 14.c3 ♜c5 15.♗xc5 ♜xc5 16.♗xc5 ♜xc5 17.♗d4 ♜e7∞ Objectively the position is equal, but with plenty of play for each side. White can try to exploit the slightly weak a6-b5 structure and Black can try to attack the f4- and e5-pawns.

12...h5!

A typical Taimanov move, just like in the 10.♗f3 line above. If White goes e4-e5, then the manoeuvre ...♝g4-h6-f5 is quite possible.

13.h3!

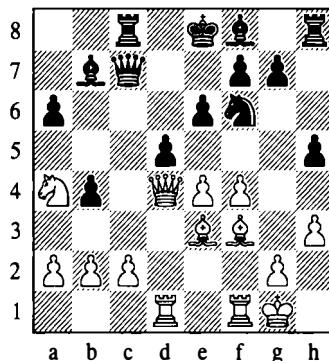


13...h4!∞

Creating space for Black's knight. The text move is almost always played, but there is an untested alternative:

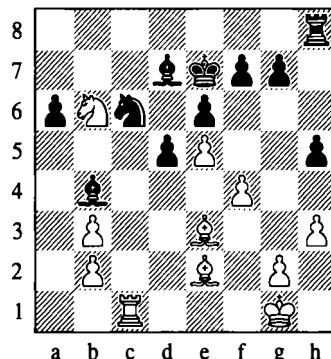
13...b4!N 14.♗a4 d5

This leads to sharp play, so I will give a lot of detail.



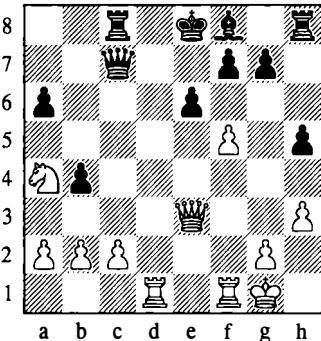
15.exd5

a) 15.e5 ♜d7 16.c4! A tricky try, but Black can defend. 16...♜xc4 17.♗c1 ♜xd4 18.♗xc8† ♜xc8 19.♗xd4 It looks as though ♗c1 will cause trouble, but Black has a defensive resource: 19...♝b8!! 20.♗c1 ♜d7 21.♗b6 b3! Making room on b4 for the bishop. 22.axb3 ♜c6 23.♗e3 ♜b4 24.♗e2 ♜e7



25.♗a1 (After 25.♗xa6 ♜b8∞ Black would create counterplay both with the passed d5-pawn and with the rook on the half-open file. Actually if Black can exchange the dark-

squared bishops, he can try to play for an advantage.) 25... $\mathbb{Q}a5!$ I will extend the line to extreme length, to illustrate that some of the play can be quite forcing. 26. $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 27. $\mathbb{B}a4$ $\mathbb{B}b8$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}xh5$ $\mathbb{Q}xb3$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ d4 30. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ a5 31.f5 $\mathbb{Q}e7!$ 32.fxe6 $\mathbb{B}b5$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ g5 34.h4 $\mathbb{Q}c1$ 35.hxg5 $\mathbb{Q}e2t$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}xg3$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}xg3$ $\mathbb{B}xe5$ 38. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{B}e2=$
b) If 15. $\mathbb{Q}b6$ then 15... $\mathbb{Q}c5!=$ saves the day.
15... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 17.f5 $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 18. $\mathbb{W}xe3$



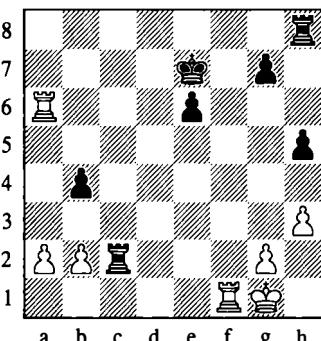
18... $\mathbb{Q}c5!$

Bailing out into a rook ending.

19. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{W}xc5$ 20. $\mathbb{W}xc5$ $\mathbb{B}xc5$ 21.fxe6 fxe6

Black will draw, but I will give some more analysis in case anyone doubts that verdict.
22. $\mathbb{B}d6$ $\mathbb{Q}e7!$ 23. $\mathbb{B}xa6$ $\mathbb{B}xc2$

Black holds due to the counterplay given by the e-pawn.



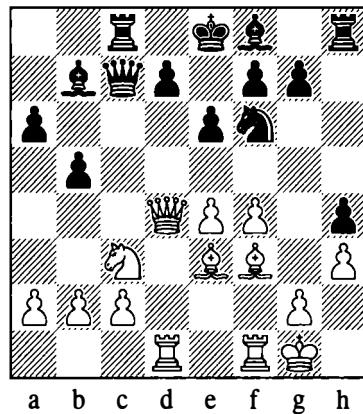
24. $\mathbb{B}a7t$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 25.b3 e5! 26. $\mathbb{B}e1$

Also holding is: 26. $\mathbb{B}a6t$ $\mathbb{Q}c5!$ 27. $\mathbb{B}e1$ $\mathbb{B}e8=$

26... $\mathbb{B}f8!!$

Black could also consider 26... $\mathbb{B}e8?$ supporting the pawn push.

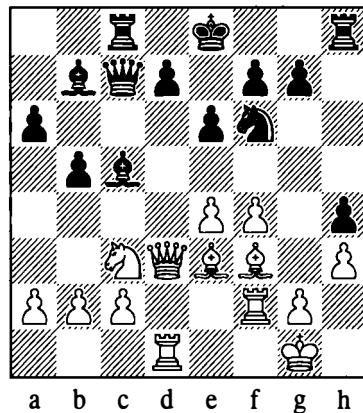
27. $\mathbb{B}xg7$ $\mathbb{B}xa2$ 28. $\mathbb{B}g5$ $\mathbb{B}b2$ 29. $\mathbb{B}gxe5$ h4
30. $\mathbb{B}5e3$ $\mathbb{B}g8$ 31. $\mathbb{B}1e2$ $\mathbb{B}xe2$ 32. $\mathbb{B}xe2$ $\mathbb{B}g3$
33. $\mathbb{B}e4=$



14. $\mathbb{B}f2??$

Instead 14.e5 $\mathbb{Q}h5!$ shows the point of Black's previous move. White can drift into an inferior position if he is not careful. For example, 15. $\mathbb{Q}xb7??$ $\mathbb{W}xb7$ 16. $\mathbb{W}e4$ $\mathbb{W}xe4$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ was Velimirovic – Andersson, Reggio Emilia 1986. After 17...f5!N Black has an edge. Instead the game continued 17... $\mathbb{B}xc2$ 18. $\mathbb{B}c1!$ and White had enough counterplay to equalize.

14... $\mathbb{Q}c5!$ 15. $\mathbb{W}d3$

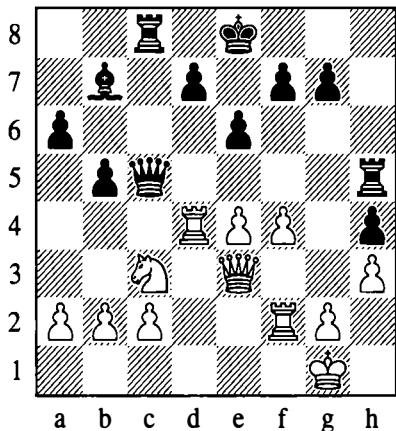


Instead the endgame would not trouble Black.

15... $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 16. $\mathbb{W}xe3$ $\mathbb{W}c5$ 17. $\mathbb{E}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}h5!$

Black's liveliest option.

18. $\mathbb{A}xh5!$ $\mathbb{B}xh5$

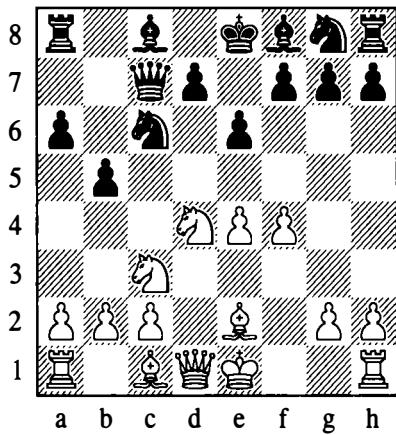


White has many options in this unclear position, so I will offer one example:

19. $\mathbb{W}d3$ b4 20. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{W}a5$ 21. b3 d5 22. e5 $\mathbb{Q}c6$

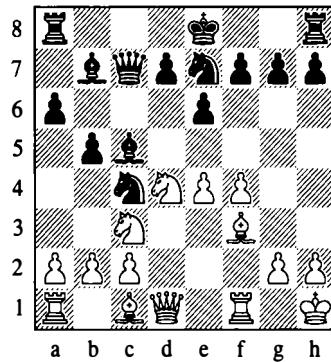
The position remains unclear, with just a slight initiative for White. Gurmen – Jenkinson, email 2011, ended in a draw.

C2) 7... b5!?



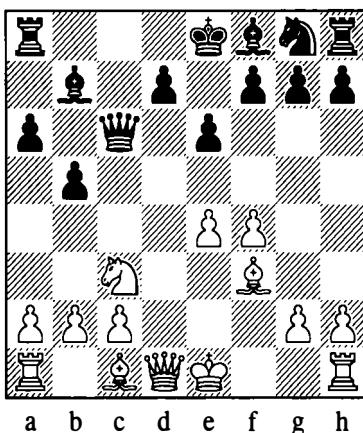
8. $\mathbb{Q}xc6!$

After 8. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}b7!$ now $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ can be met by ... $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ with an excellent game. The position after 9. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ has arisen many times in practice, but Black has a strong move that takes full advantage of White's set-up: 9... $\mathbb{Q}a5!$ Let's see two good examples: 10.0–0 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$



13.b3 (13. $\mathbb{W}d3$ 0–0 14. a4 was seen in Bacrot – A. Sokolov, Pau 2008, and now 14... d5!N was very strong) 13... $\mathbb{Q}d6!$ 14. $\mathbb{W}d3$ $\mathbb{E}c8$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ 0–0 16. $\mathbb{E}ad1$ $\mathbb{E}fd8$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}ce2$ f5 Black had an excellent game in So. Polgar – Taimanov, Amsterdam 2001.

8... $\mathbb{W}xc6!$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$



10. $\mathbb{Q}e3$

10.e5 is nothing special. For example: 10... $\mathbb{W}c7$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}h6!$ The knight heads for f5, then ...d6 or ...d5 may soon be an option.

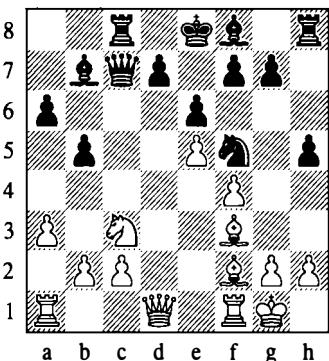
10... $\mathbb{B}c8$

In general White should play $\mathbb{W}d4$ and try to make it difficult for Black to develop. Otherwise Black will sooner or later play ... $\mathbb{B}c5$ exchanging the dark-squared bishops. The knight will then come to e7 (or f6 to keep the pressure against the e4-pawn) and help either the ...d5 (or maybe ...f5) break.

11. $\mathbb{W}d4$

After 11.0–0 $\mathbb{B}c5!$ the knight will then come to e7 and maybe later c6.

11.a3 $\mathbb{W}c7$ Black then will go ... $\mathbb{B}c5$ and is perfectly fine. An example which I find very instructive is: 12.e5?! $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 13.0–0 $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 14. $\mathbb{B}f2$ h5!?

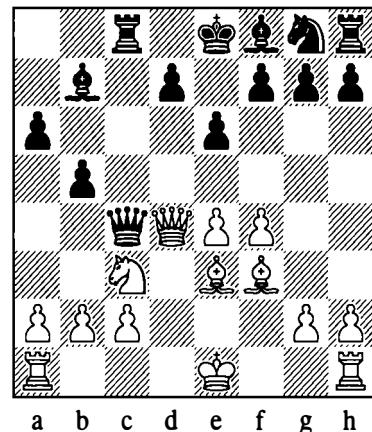


15. $\mathbb{B}xh5?!$ I understand the temptation to take this pawn, as otherwise it might go all the way to h3 and open up the king, but now things are even worse: 15... $\mathbb{B}c5!$ 16. $\mathbb{B}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}e3\#$ Socko – Movsesian, Warsaw 2011.

11... $\mathbb{W}c4!?$

Although I generally don't advise Black to trade queens, there is a general concept that Sicilian endgames are quite playable for Black, and offer him good winning chances

in practice. The hidden idea behind this move is that the black queen has left the f3-bishop's diagonal, so now ... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ might be a threat.



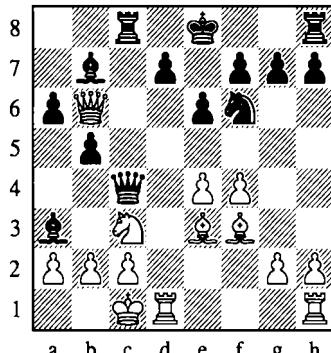
12.a3

After 12. $\mathbb{W}a7$ $\mathbb{W}c7\infty$ it is not clear whether the queen on a7 helps White or Black. I believe it has its pros and cons, but it is not a reason for Black to worry.

12.0–0–0 $\mathbb{Q}f6!$

Black is ideally placed. White should now either exchange the queens on c4 or go for the straight e4-e5; in both cases Black's play is quite reasonable. Instead I will give a wild example line just to show some tactical motifs.

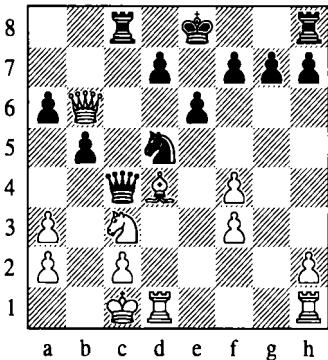
13. $\mathbb{W}b6$ $\mathbb{B}a3!!$



14. $\mathbb{B}d4!$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4!$ 15.bxa3!

I know it's a lot of exclamation marks, but the last three moves are only-moves.

15... $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 16. $gxf3$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$



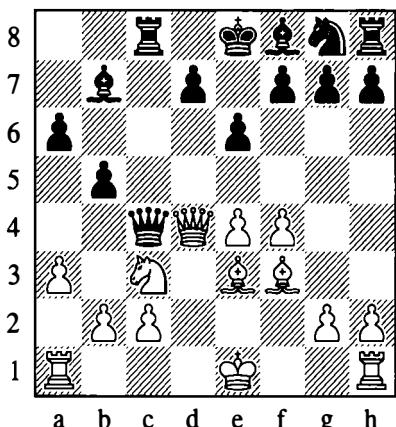
17. $\mathbb{Q}d6$

To prevent Black from castling.

After 17. $\mathbb{Q}b7??$ 0-0!!+ it is impossible for White to protect against Black's huge threats. The knight on c3 is really weak and Black's pieces are ideally placed on the c-file to attack the crucial c2-pawn.

17... $\mathbb{B}c6$ 18. $\mathbb{B}b8\infty$ $\mathbb{B}c8$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}d6$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ $\mathbb{W}xc3$ 21. $\mathbb{W}xd7\#$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 22. $\mathbb{W}d6\#$ $\mathbb{Q}e8=$

This is a sample draw; maybe the only one that saves White.



12... $\mathbb{W}xd4$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$

I consider this position a very important one for the whole line; computers seem to slightly prefer White. What I personally find very

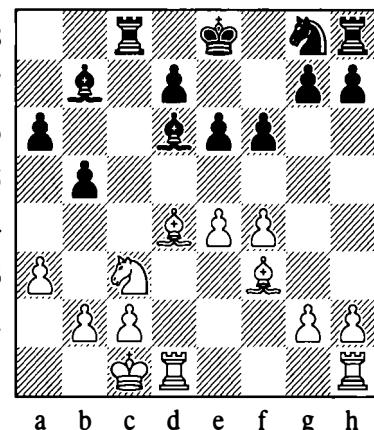
attractive about this position is that the first game played was by GM Mark Taimanov – in 1986 in Moscow against Yuri Balashov.

13... $f6\?!$

This strange-looking move offers Black quite unusual play; I consider it to be quite playable.

13... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ is the move Taimanov chose, but I believe White has an advantage.

14. 0-0-0 $\mathbb{Q}d6$



15. $g3$

White has other options but no clear path to an advantage. For example:

15. $e5\?!$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 16. $gxf3$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $fxe5$
18. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}f6=$

15. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{B}b8\infty$ Black will try to go ... $e5$ and then play against White's light-squared bishop and the $e4$ -pawn.

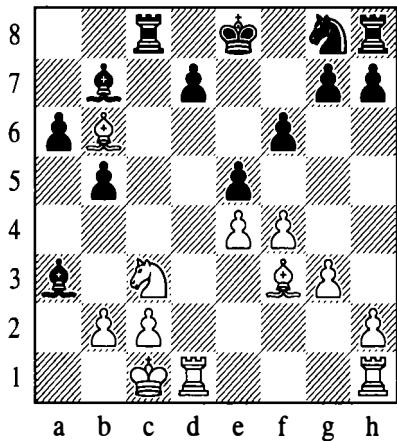
15... $e5$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}b6\?N$

This is another critical line, and perhaps the only variation where Black has to play very accurately.

16. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 17. $fxe5$ $fxe5$ was seen in a correspondence game: 18. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{B}d8$ (or

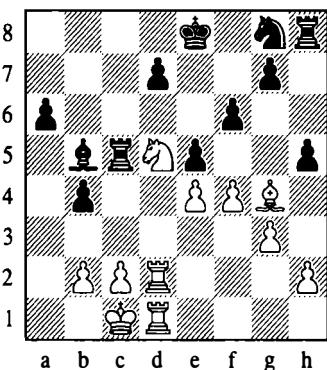
18... $\mathbb{Q}e7!N$ and next Black will go ... $\mathbb{B}f8$ and try to play against the weak e4-pawn) 19. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ (19. $\mathbb{B}hf1!?$ $\mathbb{Q}h6!?\infty$) 19... $\mathbb{Q}f6!=$ Godat – Hassim, email 2009, continued: 20. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 0–0 21. $\mathbb{Q}d6$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 22. $\mathbb{B}hf1$

16... $\mathbb{Q}xa3!$



17. $\mathbb{Q}d5!$

The more “strategic” move 17. $\mathbb{B}d3!?$ fails to create problems for Black: 17... $\mathbb{Q}c5!$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 19. $\mathbb{B}hd1$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 20. $\mathbb{B}g4$ b4! Black is just in time for everything! 21. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}b5!$ 22. $\mathbb{B}3d2$ h5



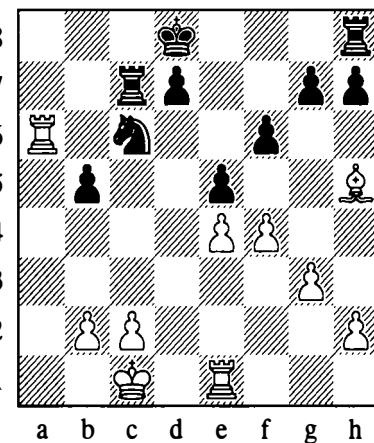
23. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ (23. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{Q}e7!!$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}xb8$ $\mathbb{B}xd2$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ $\mathbb{Q}xb5=$; 23. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ h4! ∞) 23... $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ 24. $\mathbb{B}xe2$ b3 25.c3 h4! ∞ Black seeks activity along the h-file to create the counterplay he needs.

17... $\mathbb{Q}d6!$ 18. $\mathbb{B}he1!?$

18. $\mathbb{Q}xf6\uparrow$ fails to create any problems for Black after: 18... $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 19. $\mathbb{B}xd6$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4!$ 20. $\mathbb{B}dd1$ 0–0 21. $\mathbb{B}xd7$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 22. $\mathbb{B}a7$ $\mathbb{Q}f6=$

18... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 19. $\mathbb{B}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xc7$ $\mathbb{B}xc7$ 21. $\mathbb{B}d6$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}h5\uparrow$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 23. $\mathbb{B}xa6$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$

The position is very close to equal. If Black had the time to go ... $\mathbb{Q}e7$, ... $\mathbb{B}hc8$, ... $\mathbb{Q}d4$, ... $b4$ he could even be optimistic about his winning chances. This is why I believe White needs to react quickly to try to create some problems.



24. $\mathbb{B}xe5!?$

Or 24. $\mathbb{B}a8\uparrow$ is the other move White can try to simplify his position and opt for a bishop vs knight advantage: 24... $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 25. $\mathbb{B}xc8\uparrow$ $\mathbb{Q}xc8$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 27. $\mathbb{B}a1!$ It is important for White to take control of the only open file. 27... $\mathbb{B}xf4$ 28. $\mathbb{B}xf4$ g5! ∞ Playing for a typical dark-square domination. This ...g5 move is thematic in such structures in order to take control of the e5-square; a knight on e5 would be a monster in such positions.

24... $\mathbb{Q}xe5$

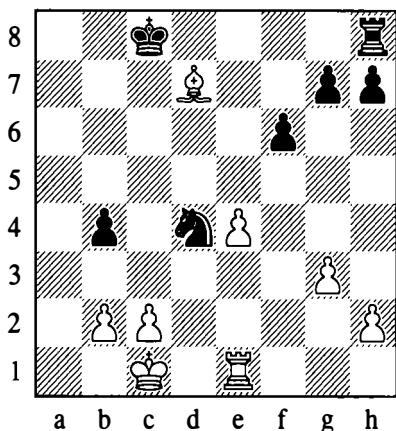
As noted above, Black’s knight on e5 is really strong. White needs to create some tactical threats quickly.

25.♗e2 b4 26.♗a4 ♗c6 27.♗b5!

Continuing the pressure.

27...♗d4 28.♗a8† ♗c8 29.♗xc8† ♗xc8 30.♗xd7†!

If it wasn't for this move, I wouldn't have given the line to this depth. White is trying to break through with tactical resources because strategically Black is very stable.



30...♗c7! 31.♗h3

Black is also holding after: 31.♗d1 ♗e2†! 32.♗b1 (32.♗d2 ♗xg3 33.♗e3 ♗f1†! When such moves are possible it is fun to point them out! 34.♗xf1 ♗xd7=) 32...♗d8 33.♗e1 ♗d4 34.♗g4 ♗e8 35.♗d1 ♗d6 When the king reaches e5, it is powerful.

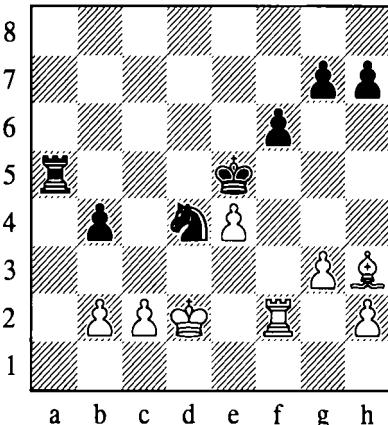
31.♗g4 h5 32.♗d1 ♗d6! Once again, when Black's king reaches e5 he will have enough activity not to be in any danger, despite the pawn minus.

31...♗a8 32.♗f1

Or 32.♗b1 ♗d6 33.♗d1 ♗e5 is also heading for a draw.

32...♗a5 33.♗f2 ♗d6 34.♗d2 ♗e5

White is a pawn up, but all three of Black's pieces are working hard; unless either side blunders, it will be a draw.

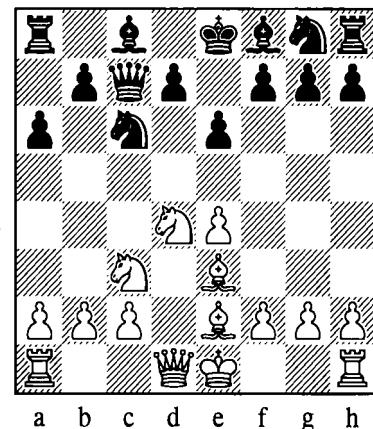


35.♗e3

Or 35.♗d3 ♗a2 36.c3 bxc3 37.♗xc3 ♗a1= is fine for Black.

35...♗c5 36.♗d3 g6 37.c3 bxc3 38.bxc3 ♗b5 39.c4 ♗d6=

D) 7.♗e3



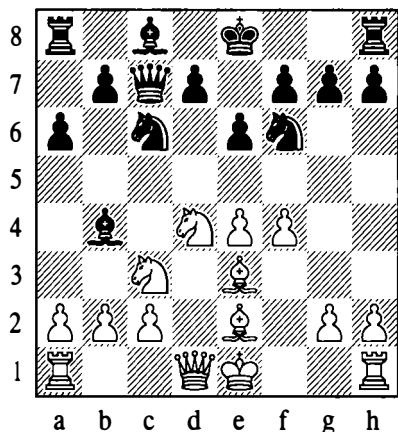
This is not a bad move, but it gives additional options to Black.

7...♗f6

Now 8.0–0 transposes to the main line seen in Chapters 11 to 14, but here I'll examine the alternatives D1) 8.f4 and D2) 8.a3. They might not be critical theoretically, but they give us a chance to examine several instructive

Taimanov structures and compare them with the Taimanov's "sister Sicilian system" – the Scheveningen.

D1) 8.f4 ♜b4!



9.♘f3

The most common way to cover e4, but there is an alternative:

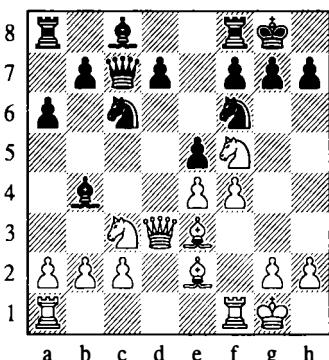
9.♗d3 e5!?

9...d5!? is the typical breakthrough in such positions and by far the most common move, but let's investigate the equally good text move.

10.♘f5

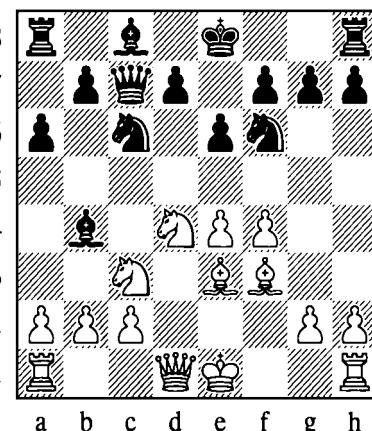
After 10.♘xc6 dxc6 11.fxe5 ♜xe5 Black has at least equalized.

10...0–0! 11.0–0



In Senner – Epishin, Bad Woerishofen 1999, Black played 11...d6 which is the simplest practical choice, with fully equal chances.

The alternative 11...♝xc3!N 12.bxc3 d5 looks highly promising at first glance, but White can create a mess with the piece sac 13.♝h6†! gxh6 14.exd5 ♜d8 15.c4∞. White has enough compensation to give equal chances in a position that would be tough to play without computer assistance.



This position has been reached several times by strong GMs. The typical way to continue is:

9...d5

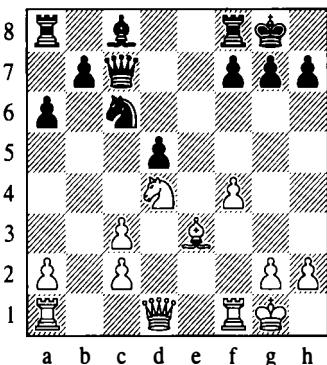
9...♝a5!? is a different way to exploit White's last move, as he left the c4-square unprotected. Now Black has several threats connected with ...♝c4 and then ...♝xb2 taking advantage of the pin on the c3-knight.

10.e5

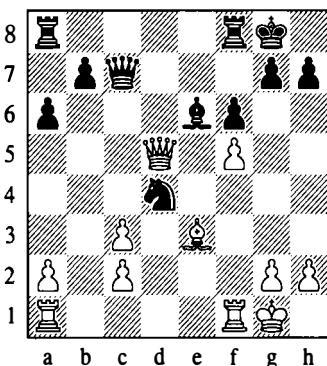
This pawn advance is the most common move and the most testing.

The exchange on d5 is rather harmless: 10.exd5 ♜xd5 11.♝xd5 ♜xc3† 12.bxc3 exd5 13.0–0 0–0 White's queenside is shattered, so he must try to create some trouble on the kingside. One theme to note is that Black is often happy to let the d5-pawn drop, as it opens lines for

his unopposed bishop. Let's see two tries for White.



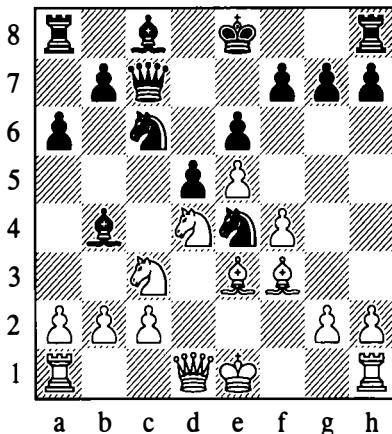
a) 14. f5 f6! is the simplest way to stop White's threat of f5-f6. Now 15. $\mathbb{W}f3$ was Britton – Flesch, Charlton 1983, when 15... $\mathbb{Q}xd4N$ is interesting, with the idea: 16. $\mathbb{W}xd5\# \mathbb{Q}e6!$



With a split: i) 17. $\mathbb{W}xd4 \mathbb{Q}c4$ Black is a pawn down in an opposite-coloured bishops position, but due to his greater activity and better structure, only Black can try to press. ii) Or 17. fxe6?! $\mathbb{E}fd8!$ 18. $\mathbb{W}e4$ f5 when the tactics work for Black as ... $\mathbb{Q}xc2$ is a threat if the white queen is kicked away.

b) 14. $\mathbb{W}h5 \mathbb{Q}d7!N$ is another illustration of the theme. Black should avoid passive play such as 14... $\mathbb{Q}e7?!$ 15. f5!N f6 16. $\mathbb{W}f3$ when White has promising kingside play.

10... $\mathbb{Q}e4$



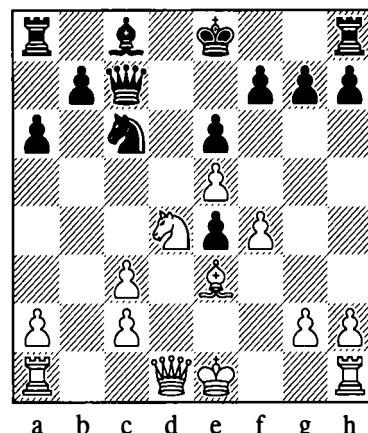
11. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$

11. $\mathbb{Q}de2$ was successfully employed to beat a strong player but despite the final result, Black held an edge from the opening. 11... $\mathbb{Q}xc3?!$ 12. bxc3 was Krejci – Laznicka, Hustopece 2012, when I think Black should try to exchange bishops with 12... $\mathbb{Q}a5?N$.

11... $\mathbb{Q}xc3\#$!

The imprecise 11... dxe4 gives White an extra option: 12. $\mathbb{Q}de2!$ with a tiny edge.

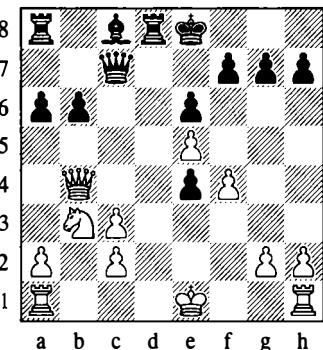
12. bxc3 dxe4



13. $\mathbb{Q}xc6N$

The text move is untested, but looks the safest way for White to maintain equality.

Instead 13.♕b3 ♔e7! looks more difficult to play for White, even though he might not be objectively worse yet. One game continued: 14.♔c5 b6 15.♔xe7 ♕xe7 16.♗d4 ♘d8 17.♗b4† ♔e8



In Britton – Arkell, Paris 1994, White needed to play accurately with 18.♗d2N when he might have clung onto equality.

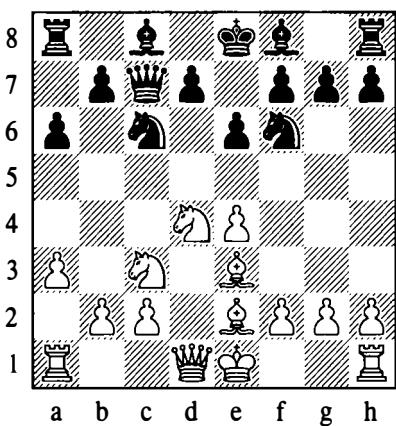
Instead after 18.0–0? ♘b7 19.♗d4 Black would have been much better after: 19...♝ac8!N†

13...♗xc6

The position is solidly equal, and the opposite-coloured bishops mean it is likely to stay that way. For example:

14.♗d4 0–0 15.♗f2 b5=

D2) 8.a3

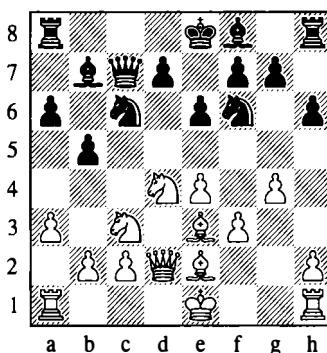


8...b5!?

Instead 8...♘e7 transposes to the Scheveningen, which is certainly playable for Black, but leads to different types of positions from our normal Taimanov.

I will look at the less dangerous alternatives D21) 9.f4 and D22) 9.0–0, before examining White's most dangerous try of D23) 9.♗xc6. There is also one minor line to deal with first:

9.g4 This advance often offers White many attacking ideas, but in this particular case I believe Black has no problems, which is probably why it was employed just once in a high-level game and hasn't been seen since.
9...h6! 10.f3 ♘b7 11.♗d2



In Brkic – Bui, Harkany 2009, Black eventually only drew despite being better for the whole game. 11...♔e5?N 12.♗f4 ♜c8† looks even more promising than putting the rook on c8 at once, as was played in the game.

D21) 9.f4

The text move allows Black time for the usual Taimanov set-up.

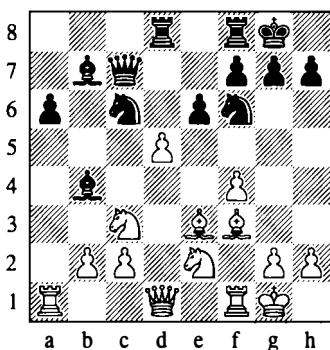
9...♘b7

And now ♘xc6 will be met by ...♗xc6 with a fine game for Black. In addition e4-e5 is no longer a threat as Black has the d5-square available for his knight. As this is a typical

Taimanov position, I will provide several instructive examples of standard play.

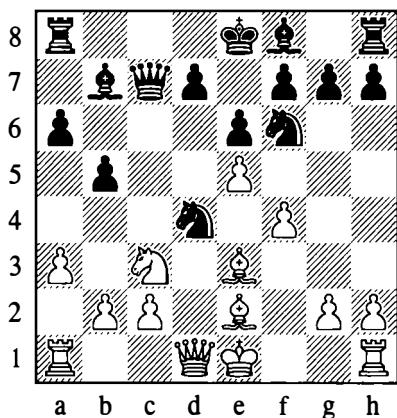
10.e5

Or 10. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ has frequently been seen in practice with the dominant reply being 10...d6, which is fine of course. I investigated a more forcing option which seems correct: 10...b4! 11.axb4 $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}de2$ d5! 13.exd5 $\mathbb{Q}d8!$ 14.0-0 0-0



Black already has a very comfortable position, but let's see a few more moves of this instructive encounter: 15. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ exd5! Now the rook can come to e8 with great effect while the f4-pawn looks out of place 16. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ Black was also threatening ...d5-d4 and White stops it, but this allows: 16... $\mathbb{Q}xc3!$ 17.bxc3 $\mathbb{Q}fe8$ 18. $\mathbb{W}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}a5!$ White was already on the verge of collapse in Eichert – Teske, St Veit 2002.

10... $\mathbb{Q}xd4!$



11. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$

The other recapture is also not a problem for Black. 11. $\mathbb{W}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ Black is fine in such positions, which are quite common in the Taimanov. His plan is to exchange dark-squared bishops, put a rook on the c-file and employ the traditional Sicilian minority queenside attack. For example, 13.0-0 $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 14.c3 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ with at least equal play in Gonzalez Arribas – Cordero Pedrosa, Palma de Mallorca 2000.

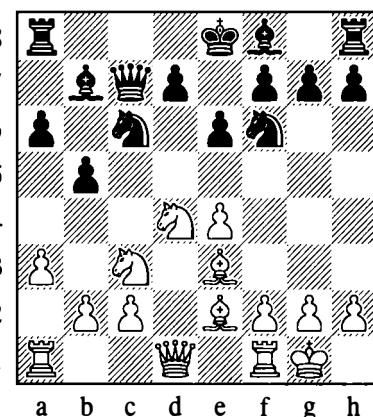
11... $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 13.0-0

13. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{W}c6?$ 14.0-0 Maylott – Bevan, email 2015, and here the typical move would be 14... $\mathbb{Q}c5N=$.

13... $\mathbb{Q}c5=$

This position has been reached several times, including in Sigfusson – Maze, Reykjavik 2004; Black is comfortable level.

D22) 9.0-0 $\mathbb{Q}b7$



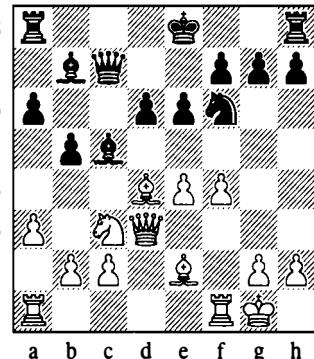
10. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$

This exchange is in principle ‘too late’, as Black is ready for the ideal bishop recapture. We can also look at a couple of alternatives:

A well-played model game was:

10.f4 $\mathbb{Q}c5!$ 11. $\mathbb{W}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ d6

A position worth remembering; Black plays a Scheveningen formation with the bishop more active on c5 compared with the usual e7-square.



13.♗ad1 0–0 14.♗h1 ♜xd4 15.♕xd4 ♘fd8

Black is already slightly better as the e4- and f4-pawns do not provide any sort of attacking chances. On the contrary, they give Black targets for his counterplay.

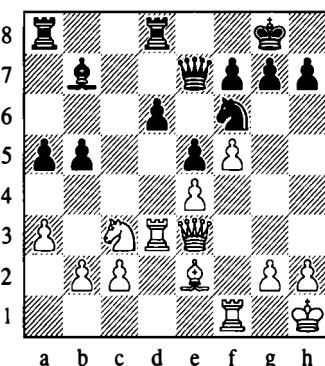
16.♗d3

White is trying to attack Black's only seemingly vulnerable point, the d6-pawn. But this is a distant dream.

16...e5!?

Now e4 is fixed as a target.

17.♗e3 ♜e7 18.f5 a5



Black combines play in the centre and on the queenside. I must stress again how instructive and thematic Black's play is here.

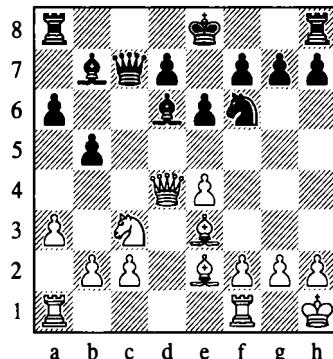
19.b4

White is trying to stop any further expansion, but now Black's next break gains strength.

19...axb4 20.axb4 ♜ac8 21.♗dd1 d5†

White survived and drew in Kondratiev – Suetin, Minsk 1962, and looking at his position at this point, that was a great achievement.

10.♗h1 ♜xd4 11.♕xd4 ♜d6!

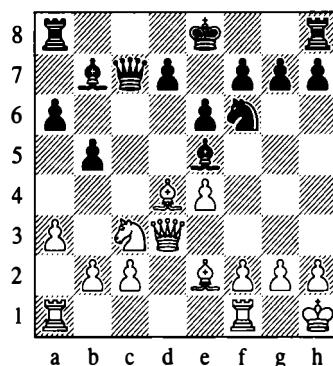


Another typical and instructive Taimanov manoeuvre. The bishop goes to e5 with tempo and will help to attack White's queenside.

12.♗d3

Instead 12.f4 would of course be met by 12...e5!.

12...♗e5 13.♗d4 ♜xd4!?



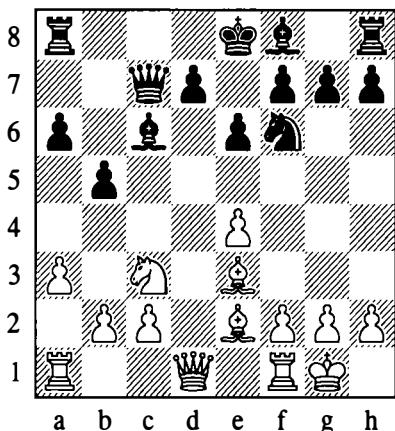
This is a simple solution.

But I also admire Black's imaginative play in Short – Piket, Istanbul (ol) 2000: 13...g5!?, 14.f3 ♘g8†

14. $\mathbb{W}xd4$ 0–0

Black is going for the equalizing ...d5-break.

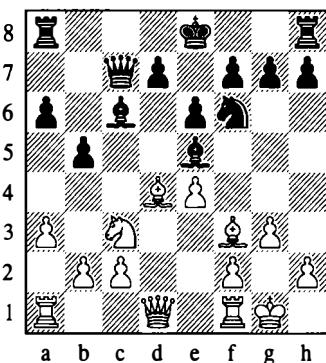
10... $\mathbb{Q}xc6!$



11. $\mathbb{W}d3$

This is White's best move in this position as the move $\mathbb{B}ad1$ will add greatly to White's coordination.

11. $\mathbb{Q}f3?$! $\mathbb{Q}d6!$ is excellent for Black as the typical counter f2-f4 is not available to White now. 12.g3 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}d4$



And now the simple 13...d6 is of course fine, while the speculative 13...h5 as in V. Petrov – Perunovic, Skopje 2015, is more fun but also riskier.

11. $\mathbb{Q}d3$

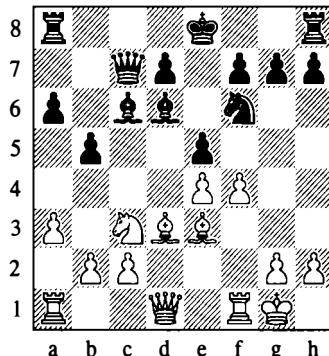
This move seems more natural, but is also suboptimal.

11... $\mathbb{Q}d6!$?

Another good option is 11... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ and ...d6, reaching a healthy Scheveningen set-up with interesting play.

Instead 11...d5 equalizes, but the game is rather dry.

12.f4 e5!?



Black is fine. For example:

13. $\mathbb{F}5 \mathbb{Q}b7!$ 14. $\mathbb{W}f3 \mathbb{Q}c5$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}h1 \mathbb{Q}xe3$ 16. $\mathbb{W}xe3$ h5!?

With a rich game where Black is certainly not worse, as in Stanciu – Morea, Mamaia 2015.

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

Now the Scheveningen set-up would be my choice, because White's position is not threatening against it. In general against the Scheveningen set-up, the bishop should be on d3 and the queen somewhere on the kingside, optimally on g3; White is a long way from achieving something similar here.

Instead 11...d5 as in Socko – Macieja, Warsaw 2002, probably equalizes for Black, but I prefer the richer play offered by the text move.

This time White can counter 11... $\mathbb{Q}d6!$? with 12.f4 e5 13.g3!± keeping control of e5, and the rook will come to d1.

12.f4 d6

The position is roughly level, but I prefer Black's chances over the board. He can create play with ...d5 or ...e5, and with ...a5, ...b4.

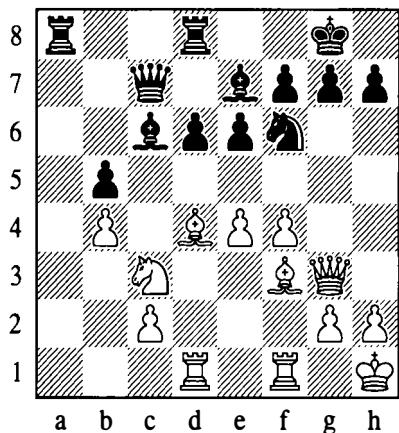
13.Qd4

Or 13.Qad1 0–0 14.Qh1 Qfd8 15.Qf3 d5 16.e5 Qe4 17.Qd4 Qac8 18.Qe3 Qb7 as in Weiner – Weiss, email 2015, shows typical play for Black, who is ready to start pushing on the queenside.

13...0–0 14.Qg3

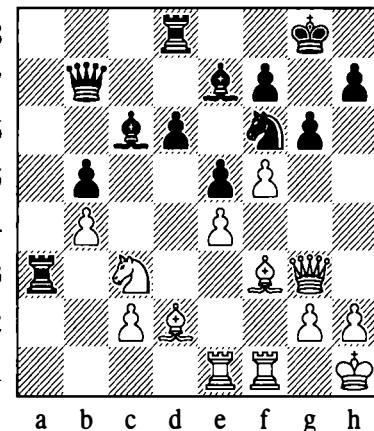
This represents White's most natural way of playing, but he is two or three tempos down compared with a similar Scheveningen position. Thus Black is under no pressure at all. For example:

14...Qfd8 15.Qad1 Qac8 16.Qf3 a5 17.b4 axb4 18.axb4 Qa8 19.Qh1

**19...Qb7!?**

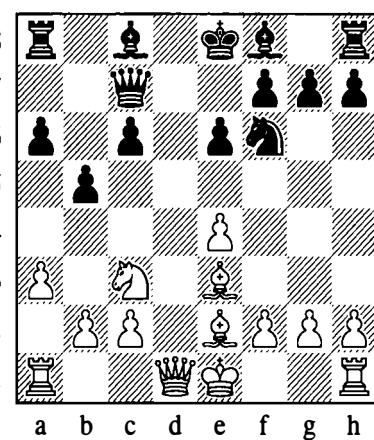
In Ermolaev – Weeks, email 2011, Black instead played 19...Qa6, but I think the text move is more natural. A line which might not represent optimal play by both sides but it is definitely instructive, goes:

20.Qde1 g6 21.f5 e5 22.Qe3 Qa3 23.Qd2



23...Qxc3! 24.Qxc3 Qxe4 25.Qxe4 Qxe4

I would definitely prefer playing Black here.

D23) 9.Qxc6 dxc6**10.f4**

This position is the real test for Black. If Black can hold this position, then he should in general be fine in the whole chapter.

10.0–0 will almost certainly transpose to the main line as White needs to play the move f2-f4 in order to fight for an advantage. We will not go much deeper into this move here, as it offers an additional option to Black which is highly playable: 10...c5!! 11.f4 Qb7 We examine the same position in the note to White's 11th move below.

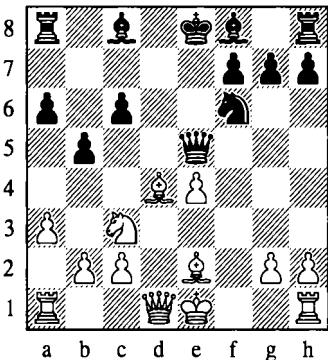
10...♝b7!

There is a vital detail to note about this position: Black has gained time because White lost a crucial tempo with the move a2-a3 in order to prevent Black from playing the ...♝b4 plan. So now White does not have effective ideas with the a4-advance, as he would not really be threatening anything on b5. No matter what White's next move is, he needs to play e4-e5 very soon in order to develop an initiative. If White simply 'passes' with moves such as ♘h1, ♘f3, ♜e2 then Black will continue with the simple plan ...♝e7, ...0-0, ...♝fd8 (or ...♝ad8) and ...b4 ideas will come as e4 will be a target. This is why we are going to continue with the move 11.e5 as our main line.

10...e5?!

This is ineffective for Black after:

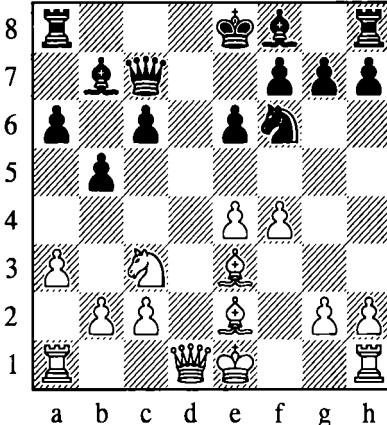
11.fxe5 ♜xe5 12.♗d4!

**12...♜e6**

Or 12...♝g5 13.e5! ♘d5 14.♗f3 ♜e6 15.♘e4 ♜h6 16.0-0± when Black faced some problems in Ortiz Suarez – Cori, Montcada 2013, and eventually lost.

The text move is a better try, but White keeps a small edge due to his space advantage:

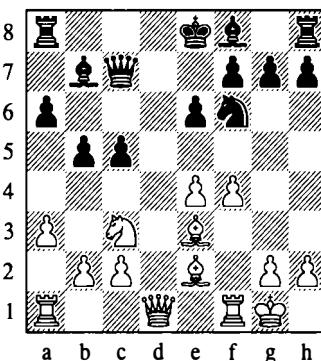
13.e5! ♘g4 14.♗f3!N ♘xe5 15.0-0 ♘d6 16.♗e1 0-0 17.♗xc6 ♜b8 18.♗d5±

**11.e5!**

Going for a direct attack.

11.0-0 c5!?

This is a line we mentioned above. The delay in playing the e4-e5 advance means Black is comfortable.

**12.e5**

Too late to cause Black any serious trouble.

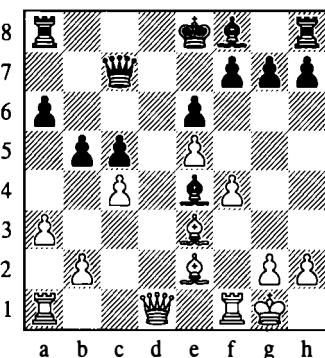
Or 12.♗f3 ♜e7 13.e5 ♜d8 14.♗e2 ♜xf3 15.♗xf3 ♘d5 16.♘xd5 ♜xd5 is obviously easy for Black. For example: 17.a4 b4 18.♗fd1 ♜xd1† 19.♗xd1 0-0= Black's next moves are likely to be ...g6, ...h5 and ...♝d8.

12...♞e4

Certainly not the only move, as 12...♝d8 and 12...♞d5 are more common and are sound options. But the text move leads to some interesting play. I will also use this line

to show some typical tricks and tactics Black must watch out for.

13. $\mathbb{Q}xe4 \mathbb{Q}xe4$ 14. c4



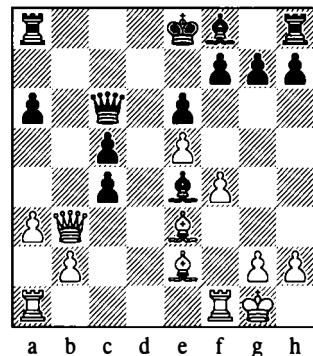
The only way White can try to create problems before Black castles kingside safely.

14... $\mathbb{W}c6$ 15. $\mathbb{W}b3$!

Instead 15. $\mathbb{E}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}e7=$ is harmless for Black, especially as 16. $\mathbb{W}b3$ can now be met safely by 16... b4.

15... bxc4

Weakening Black's structure, but essential as 15... b4? runs into trouble after 16. axb4 cxb4 17. c5!.



16. $\mathbb{W}xc4!?$ N

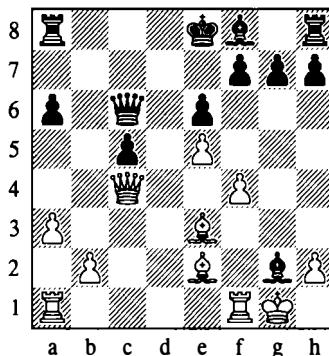
Setting a nasty trap.

16. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ can be met safely by 16... g6 as in Hirneise – R. Mueller, Boeblingen 2009, stopping any dangerous f4-f5 ideas. Instead 16... $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ is also possible, but risky to play, as it allows the f5-break either after 17. $\mathbb{E}f2$

or even immediately with 17. $\mathbb{F}5!!$ as an exchange sac.

16... $\mathbb{Q}xg2?$

The correct choice is the modest 16... $\mathbb{Q}e7=$, as getting castled is the key.



The greedy capture is refuted by a move that is tough to spot:

17. $\mathbb{E}f3!!$

The bishop is trapped so Black has no choice.

17... $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ $\mathbb{W}xf3$ 19. $\mathbb{W}a4\#$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$

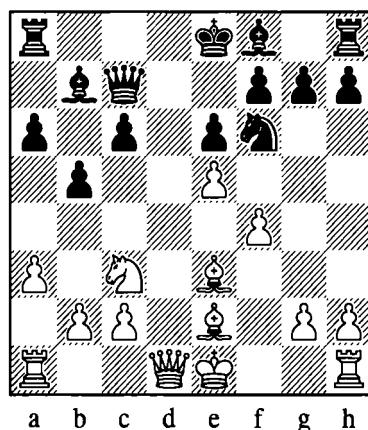
20. $\mathbb{B}d1\#+$

Black must give up his queen now to save his king, but the position is hopeless anyway; Black will have enough material for the queen, but his king is too exposed.

Not taking on d1 is even worse:

20... $\mathbb{Q}c7?$ 21. $\mathbb{W}d7\#$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 22. $\mathbb{E}d3\#$

Black can try a few spite checks, but then everything falls apart.



11... $\mathbb{B}d8$

I would advise Black to avoid playing 11... $\mathbb{Q}d5?!$ because after 12. $\mathbb{Q}xd5!$ $cxd5$ the arising pawn structure is in White's favour. For example: 13. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 14. $c3! \pm$ The problem is that the b7-bishop is shut in by the d5-pawn, and that d5-pawn is going nowhere, as White has a secure blockade on d4. So I advise you to play ... $\mathbb{Q}d5$ only when you can recapture with the light-squared bishop, which means after you have played ... $c6-c5$.

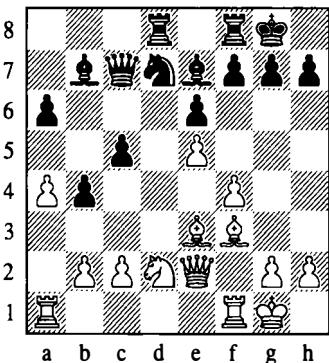
We will see this bad pawn structure again in Nevednichy – Firat, Kavala 2013.

A different move was played in the most recent game between strong GMs, so we will also study it briefly:

11... $\mathbb{Q}d7$

The game continued:

12. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{B}d8$ 13. $\mathbb{W}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 14. 0–0 0–0 15. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ c5! 16. a4 b4 17. $\mathbb{Q}d2!$



White's knight belongs on c4.

17... $\mathbb{Q}b6!$

And Black should fight against White's plan. 18. $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ $\mathbb{W}xb7$ 19. a5 $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 20. b3 f5?!

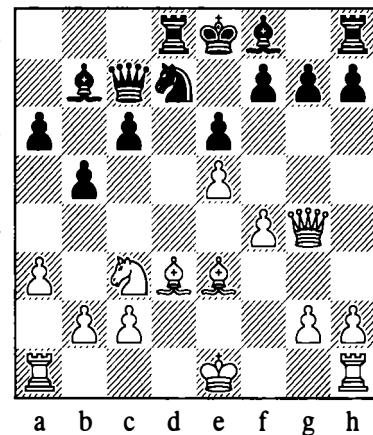
A. Zhigalko – Neiksans, Baku (ol) 2016, was roughly balanced. The last move, though not forced, has a triple aim. Firstly, it protects Black against a potential kingside attack connected with the f4-f5 advance. Secondly, it takes the e4-square away from White. Last but not least, it fixes a slightly more preferable pawn

structure for Black on the kingside; Black will be able to attack White's centre with ...g5.

12. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7!$

Creating the immediate threat of ... $\mathbb{Q}c5$.

As mentioned above, 12... $\mathbb{Q}d5?!$ is best avoided. 13. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $cxd5$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}d4 \pm$ was Nevednichy – Firat, Kavala 2013. White quickly gained an advantage and, despite mutual inaccuracies, Black later lost as he had to struggle the whole game with a passive bishop on b7.

13. $\mathbb{W}g4$ 

Black has two options which are highly likely to transpose. I cannot see any practical difference between 13...g6 and 13...c5, but let's see a high-level example of the latter.

13...c5? 14. 0–0 g6 15. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}h4$ $\mathbb{Q}xh4$ 17. $\mathbb{W}xh4$ 0–0

In Inarkiev – Socko, Moscow 2012, Black was very comfortable; he could even think about pressing for an advantage. The light-squared bishop will always create counterplay on the long diagonal. And Black can continue with ...c4 or ...b4, or even with the manoeuvre ... $\mathbb{Q}b6-d5$.

Conclusion

6. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ is one of the main lines against the Taimanov, but this introductory chapter mainly focused on its less threatening sidelines.

After our standard 6...a6 the unchallenging A) 7. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ allowed me the chance to explain the standard ideas behind all three of Black's possible recaptures.

B) 7.a3 cuts out the usual Taimanov development of ... $\mathbb{Q}b4$ but is clearly a slow move. B1) 7...b5!? is fine, but B2) 7... $\mathbb{Q}f6$! is my favourite, as it is the most efficient. The play is highly likely to transpose to lines with 8.a3 (variation D2, or variation B of Chapter 10) so Black does not need to learn an independent line.

After C) 7.f4 I again offered two replies: C1) 7... $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ or C2) 7...b5!?. The latter line often leads to an endgame, which I analysed in extreme depth to prove that Black is fine. Fortunately not every move needs to be memorized!

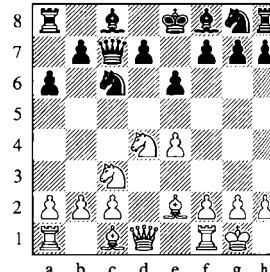
After D) 7. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ we saw that D1) 8.f4 allows the excellent 8... $\mathbb{Q}b4$! when Black has no problems, which explains why White often likes to play D2) 8.a3 instead. Then after 8...b5!? we saw that D21) 9.f4 and D22) 9.0–0 are both unthreatening as Black's bishop reaches b7, ready to make the ideal recapture if White takes on c6.

Thus the critical test is D23) 9. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ before Black has a bishop on b7, so our reply is 9...dxc6. The battle is based on a quick e4-e5 from White, and where the f6-knight moves in response. Remember that Black should only play ... $\mathbb{Q}d5$ when he can recapture with the bishop, not the c6-pawn; that means Black must have already played ... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ and ...c6-c5. You do not want the grim experience of playing a long game with a dead bishop on b7 locked in by a black pawn on d5.

Chapter 10

6. $\mathbb{Q}e2$

7. 0-0 $\mathbb{Q}f6$



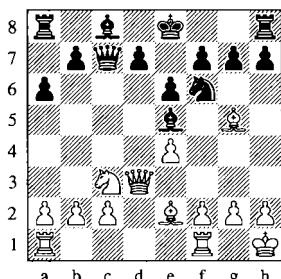
Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ e6 3.d4 cxd4 4. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 5. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 6. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ a6 7.0-0

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

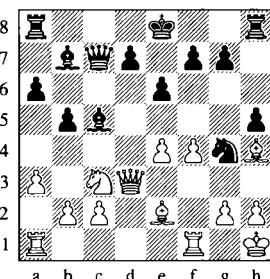
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| C) 8.a4 | 200 |
| D) 8. $\mathbb{Q}h1!?$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4!$ 9. $\mathbb{W}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ | 202 |
| D1) 10. $\mathbb{W}d2$ | 202 |
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| D212) 12.f4 | 206 |
| D22) 11.f4 $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ d5! | 210 |
| D221) 13.e5!? | 210 |
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A) after 11. $\mathbb{W}d3$



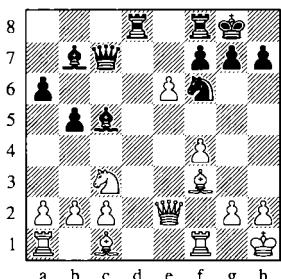
11...b5!N

D211) after 14. $\mathbb{Q}h4$



14... $\mathbb{Q}c8!N$

D222) after 15. $\mathbb{W}e2!$



15... $\mathbb{Q}de8!N$

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♘c6 5.♗c3 ♖c7 6.♗e2 a6 7.0–0

Having looked at several non-threatening alternatives in the previous chapter, we now take a step closer to the main line.

7...♗f6

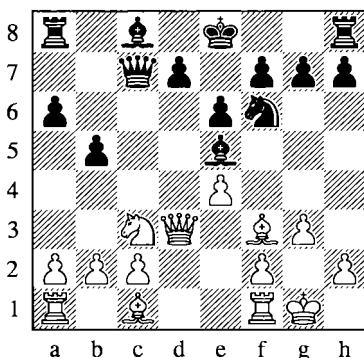
From this position 8.♗e3 is by far White's most popular continuation and it will be thoroughly analysed over the following four chapters. Before then, we must of course consider a selection of other moves. Naturally some of them are not dangerous, but others contain a fair amount of poison.

Our four main branches will be: A) 8.♗g5, B) 8.a3, C) 8.a4 and D) 8.♗h1!?.

8.♗xc6 bxc6 leads back to variation A of the previous chapter on page 164.

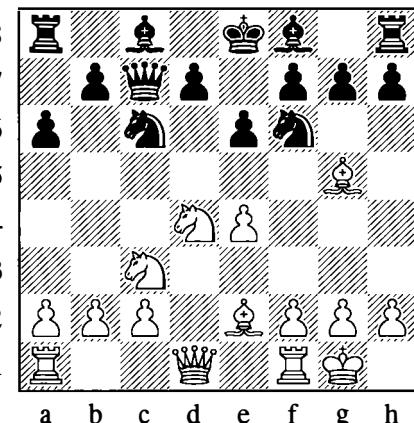
8.♗b3 b5 9.a3 is the kind of passive set-up which Black should always be happy to see. We should continue with 9...♗b7, after which 10.f4 is the most frequent move in my database. Now the commonly played 10...d6 leads to equal play, while the untested 10...♗e7!N also looks interesting, with ideas of ...d5.

Finally, 8.♗f3 ♗d6 9.g3 ♘xd4 10.♗xd4 ♗e5 11.♗d3 b5 offers Black similar play to many other lines from this chapter. A good example continued:



12.♗g2 ♗b7 13.f4 ♗xc3 14.bxc3 0–0 15.♗d2 Hoeck – S. Nikolaev, Bad Ragaz 1990, and now 15...d5!N would have been great for Black.

A) 8.♗g5!?



Before I started writing this book I had no idea that this move was played, and especially at a high level. It was only when I started doing the research that I noticed that Pavel Eljanov had employed it in a rapid game against Judit Polgar.

8...♗d6!?

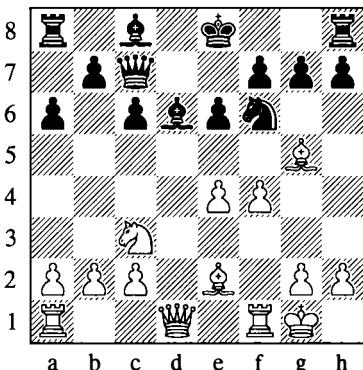
Polgar was successful with 8...♘c5, and this move also transposes to some other high-level games. Although it is perfectly playable for Black, the text move is my personal preference.

9.♗h1

9.♗xf6 gxf6 is excellent for Black.

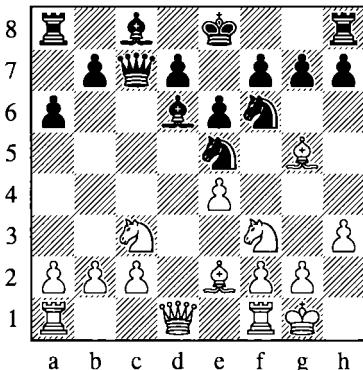
9.g3 ♘xd4 10.♗xd4 ♗e5 is active game in Gavrilovic – G. Pavlovic, Vrnjacka Banja 2014; and 9.h3 can be met in exactly the same way.

9.♗xc6N has not yet been played but is worth considering. I recommend: 9...dxc6 10.f4

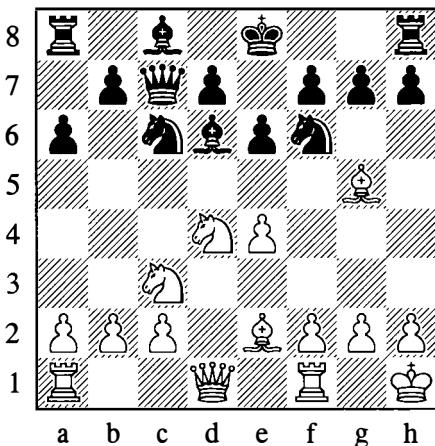


10...h6! 11.♕xf6 gxf6 12.♗d2 ♔d7∞ Black will castle long, after which the real battle will begin. White has a healthier pawn structure but that is unlikely to matter for a long time. I prefer Black's prospects due to his bishop pair and open g-file, which could form the basis of an attack, especially in conjunction with a timely advance of the h-pawn.

Finally, 9.♘f3 ♕e5?! is a clever idea in order to trade off the enemy knight. Remember that the e5-square belongs to our dark-squared bishop! 10.h3 (Engines suggest 10.♘d4 as White's best, when Black can either repeat with 10...♘c6= or play for a win with 10...♘g6!?) This position was reached in Grazinys – A. Hernandez, email 1998, and now I like:



10...♘xf3†!N 11.♕xf3 ♘h2† 12.♔h1 ♕e5 With an active game for Black.



9...♘xd4 10.♗xd4 ♕e5 11.♗d3

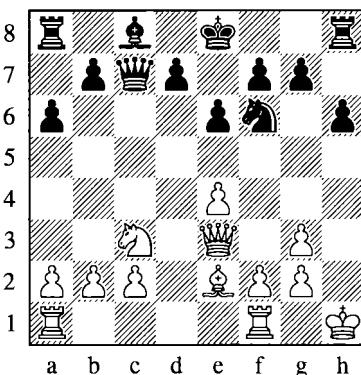
I also considered:

11.♗e3 h6!N 12.♔h4 ♘f4 13.♗g3

After 13.♗d3 b5∞ it is not clear what White should do next.

13...♘xg3 14.hxg3

14.♗xg3 should be met by 14...♗xg3 15.hxg3 d6† followed by ...♔e7 and ...♔d7, with the better endgame for Black. One rook will come to c8 and the other either to b8 for a ...b5 push, or to d8 in preparation for ...d5.



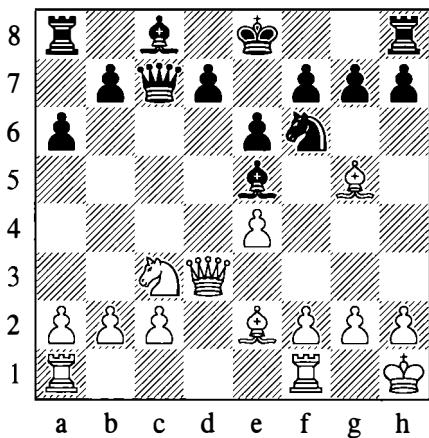
14...d6

Black's position looks perfectly fine. The only thing Black has to be careful about is the f2-f4 push. Otherwise he can easily continue with ...b5, ...♗b7, ...0-0.

15.f4 0-0 16.g4 b5 17.a3 ♘b7 18.♗ad1 ♘ad8

The position is roughly equal, but Black's pieces are so well placed that I would already slightly prefer his chances.

I consider the text move to be the main line as, unlike the option noted above, now White is ready to meet ...h6 with ♔d2. Here I found an improvement over T. Horvath – Arquint, Pontresina 2000:



11...b5!N 12.f4 ♕xc3 13.bxc3 ♔b7 14.♕xf6 gx6 15.♖ad1 ♘g8

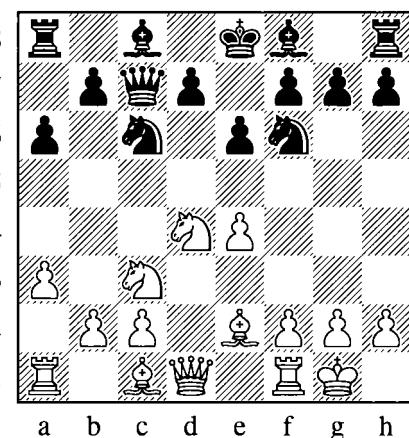
15...d5?! leads to highly forcing play; I analysed it in depth and found it should lead to a draw after a number of sharp variations. Although this is theoretically sound, there is no need for us to choose such a complicated route to equality against this relatively harmless sideline.

The text move is much simpler: Black avoids opening the position with his king in the centre, and intends to improve his pieces. For example:

16.♗f3 ♘d8!

The chances are balanced. Black's last move prepares ...d6, with the queen going to c5 and perhaps ...h5-h4 coming later.

B) 8.a3



With this move, White invests a tempo to prevent the typical ...♗b4 move, while also stabilizing the c3-knight in anticipation of a possible ...b5-b4 advance.

8...♗xd4 9.♗xd4 ♘d6!

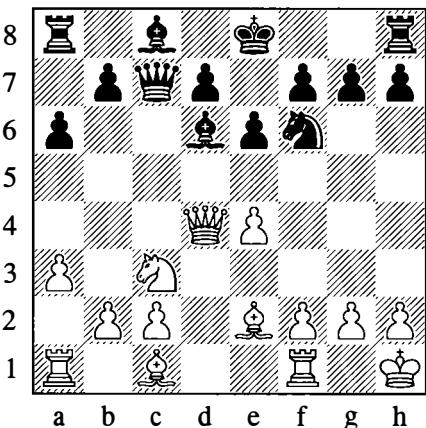
I have already pointed out that the dark-squared bishop should be placed on e5 when possible in these positions.

The other playable line is 9...♘c5?! 10.♗d3 0–0, intending ...b5 and ...♔b7 followed by rooks to c8 and d8. Usually in such positions, the bishop will drop back to e7 in order to safeguard the kingside and avoid suffering any structural damage after a possible exchange on f6.

10.♔h1!

I would like to say something about the different ways in which White can deal with the threat to the h2-pawn which arises after ...♗c7 and ...♘d6. He has three such options: he can move the attacked pawn with h2-h3, block the diagonal with g2-g3, or defend indirectly with ♔h1. (Of course in some variations f2-f4 is possible, but here it would lose the queen to ...♘c5.)

Personally I believe that moving the king to h1 is the correct way for White to play. The advantages are that it avoids weakening the kingside structure, while preparing f2-f4 to challenge the d6-bishop. The problem of h2-h3 is that it weakens the g3-square, which may make it harder to carry out f2-f4 in favourable circumstances. The other option is g2-g3, but this weakens the light squares. White can follow up with ♘f3 and ♘g2, but if he wanted such a set-up he could have just played the Fianchetto System to begin with! The g3-pawn might also give Black a target to attack with ...h5-h4.



10...♝e5 11.♗d3

This has been the most popular choice by far.

I also considered:

11.♗e3?

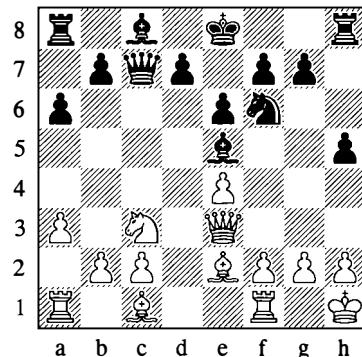
As played in Short – Miladinovic, Elenite 1995, and a few other games. It looks slightly strange to block the dark-squared bishop, but this move does have the advantage of preparing the ♘a4-b6 manoeuvre.

11...h5?N

I like the idea of preparing ...♝g4.

Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that 11...♝xc3 12.bxc3 d5! 13.e5 ♝e4 was also fine in Berg – Hallberg, Haninge 1997. For instance, 14.a4!N ♘d7 15.♗a3 0-0 16.c4 ♞ac8 when Black has a healthy pawn

structure and White can hardly claim any advantage.



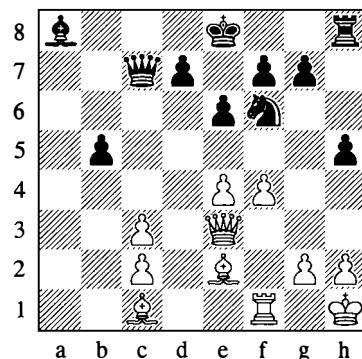
12.f4 ♘xc3 13.bxc3 b5

Black has various ideas involving ...♝b7, ...♞c8 and ...h4-h3 threats. A sample line is:

14.a4 ♘b7! 15.axb5

15.♗f3 0-0! gives Black good prospects of playing against White's ruined pawn structure.

15...axb5 16.♗xa8† ♘xa8

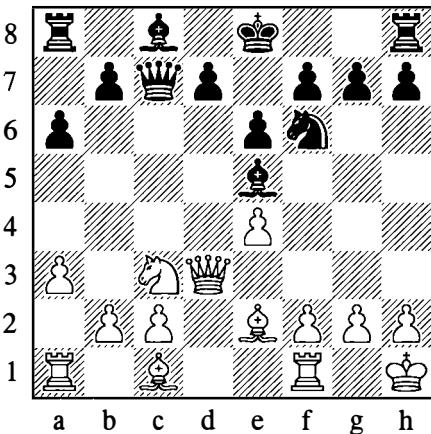


It is not obvious how White should protect the e4-pawn, since ♘f3 gives Black the opportunity to castle and play against the weak queenside pawns, while ♘d3 hangs the c3-pawn. Playing e4-e5 also might look interesting for White but it opens the a8-h1 diagonal and gives away a nice outpost on d5 for Black's pieces. Probably White should try to sacrifice the e4-pawn and play for long-term compensation. For instance:

17.♗a3!? ♘xe4 18.f5 f6 19.fxe6 dxe6

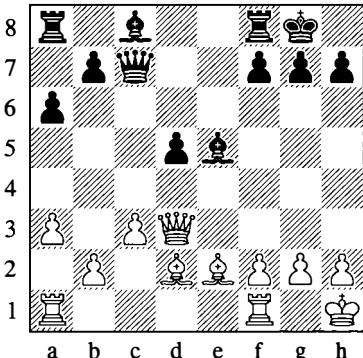
20.♗f3 f5∞

White has reasonable play for the pawn but Black is certainly not worse.



11...0–0 12.f4

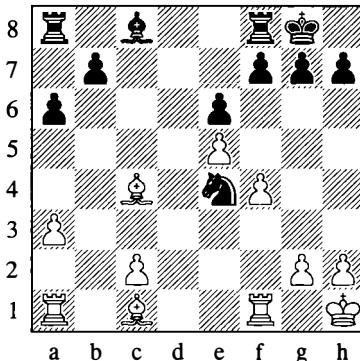
12.♗d2?! keeps the pawn structure unharmed but Black can equalize with the following accurate line: 12...d5! 13.exd5 ♘xd5 14.♘xd5 exd5 15.c3 (15.♗f3N can be met by 15...♗e6 16.c3 ♘b6 17.♗ab1 ♘ad8= followed by ...d4 with equal play)



15...♗d7!N (15...♗b6?! occurred in Waterfield – Pitcher, Llandudno 2017, when 16.♗xd5N would have been good for White, since 16...♗xb2?? is refuted by 17.♗fb1+–) 16.♗e3 ♘fe8 17.♗d2 ♘c6 Black has enough activity, with ...♗ad8 and ...d4 in the pipeline.

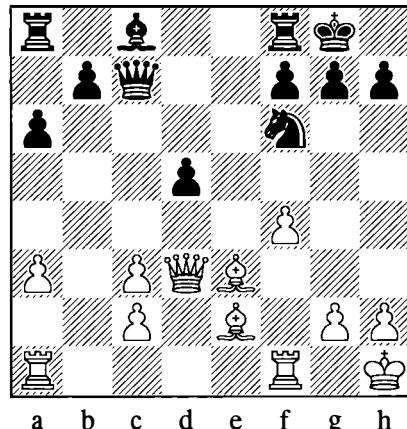
12...♘xc3 13.bxc3 d5 14.exd5

14.e5 ♘e4 15.c4 ♘xc4 16.♗xc4 dxc4 17.♗xc4 was seen in Stein – Suetin, Moscow 1964, when Black should have played:



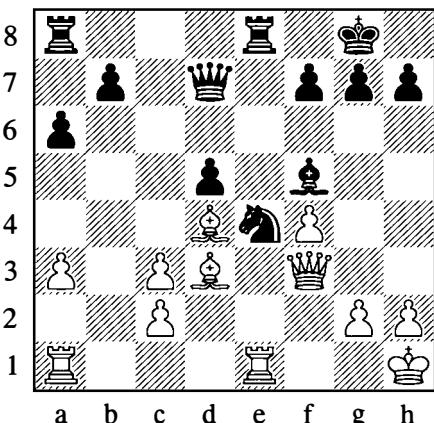
17...b5N 18.♗d3 ♘c5! Leading to an somewhat advantageous opposite-coloured bishop ending.

14...exd5 15.♗e3



15...♗e8! 16.♗d4 ♘e4 17.♗f3 ♘f5 18.♗d3 ♘d7 19.♗fe1

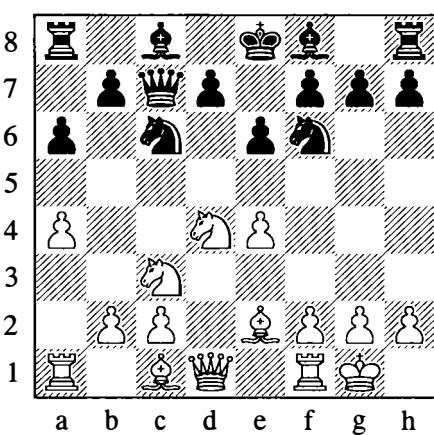
We have been following a correspondence game, Sherwood – Van den Cruyce, email 2008. The game score ends here with a mysterious 1–0 result but Black's position is absolutely fine, and over the board I am sure most players would slightly favour Black's superior pawn structure over White's bishop pair. My suggestion would be:



19...♝e6!

Black should play actively in an attempt to gain the initiative. Engines in such positions tend to give Black a small advantage but they often exaggerate, as they don't fully recognise the defensive recourses associated with opposite-coloured bishops. Although I don't believe too much in the evaluation of the engines in such positions, it is clear that Black has chances to exert long-term pressure without much risk. Next he will play ...♝ae8 and then at the right moment ...♝d6, giving White the choice between exchanging light-squared bishops and letting Black's bishop come to e4. Even if the light-squared bishops are exchanged, Black has good chances to create threats against the g2- and c2-pawns.

C) 8.a4



White tries to fight against the ...b7-b5 push but gives away the b4-square forever! Moreover, the thematic ♘a4-b6 plan is no longer possible.

8...♝d6!?

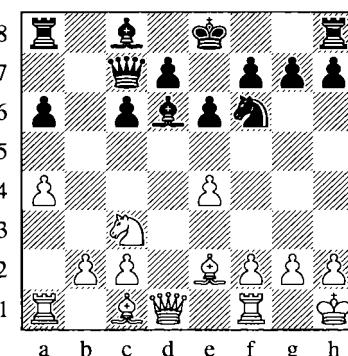
8...♝b4 is the main line and the typical reaction but it offers White numerous choices such as 8.♗g5, 8.♗d3 and 8.♗xc6.

9.♔h1

9.f4?? was a blunder in Zawadzka – Jamrozik, Krakow 1996, when 9...♝xd4N 10.♗xd4 0–0 would have been similar to our main line, with ...♝e5 coming next.

9.h3 was seen in Sdunzik – Schlosberg, Willingen 2001, when 9...♝xd4N 10.♗xd4 0–0 would have been similar to our main line, with ...♝e5 coming next.

I also considered: 9.♗xc6 bxc6 10.♔h1 (10.g3?! only invites 10...h5!)



10...♝f4!? 11.♗xf4 ♜xf4 12.♗d4 0–0 13.♗f3 d5 I prefer Black's position, Mokry – Kogan, Zlin 1995.

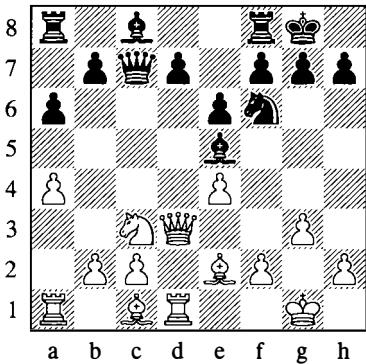
9.g3

I suggest meeting this with:
9...♝xd4N 10.♗xd4 0–0 11.♗d3

White cannot stop ...♝e5, as 11.f4?? loses the queen to 11...♝c5.

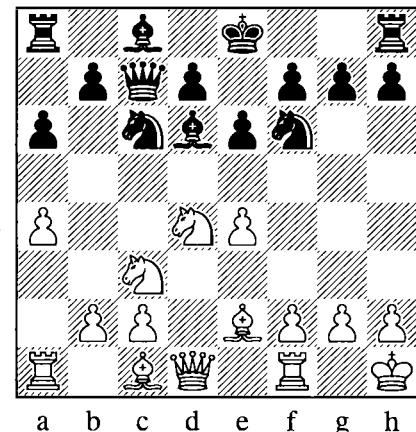
11...♝e5 12.♗d1

I also checked: 12.f4 ♜xc3 13.bxc3 d5 14.e5 ♜e4 15.c4 ♜d7 16.cxd5 exd5 17.♗b2 ♜ac8 18.♗d4 ♜c5 19.♗fc1 a5∞ Black's last move fixes the a4-pawn as a weakness; aside from that, he intends to follow up with ...♗fd8, ...♗f5 and ...♗e6.



12...♜xc3 13.bxc3 d5! 14.exd5 exd5 15.♗f4 ♜c6 16.♗f3 ♜e6 17.♗e5 ♜d7 18.♗d4 ♜ac8

Black's superior pawn structure and the active plan of ...♜c5-e4 are at least enough to compensate for White's bishop pair.

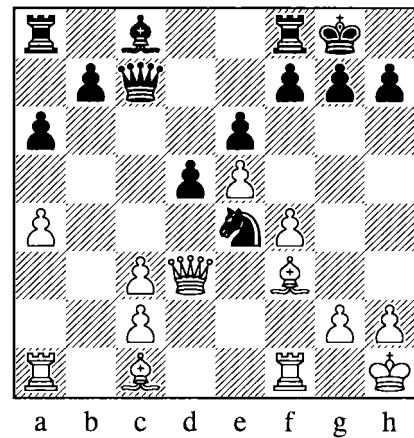


9...♝xd4 10.♝xd4 0–0! 11.♝d3 ♜e5 12.f4 ♜xc3 13.bxc3 d5 14.e5 ♜e4 15.♗f3N

This seems to be White's best.

15.♗f3?! ♜d7! 16.♗d4 (16.c4 ♜c6!) 16...b5! 17.a5 occurred in Latreche – Mir Mahmoud, Abu Dhabi 2008, when 17...♗fc8N

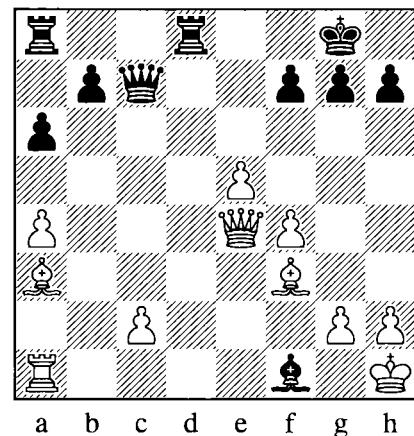
18.♗b2 ♜c5∞ would have put White under lasting positional pressure.



15...♜d7! 16.c4! ♜fd8∞

Black's position is fine, thanks to the following tactical point:

17.cxd5 exd5 18.♝xd5?! ♜b5 19.♝xe4 ♜xf1 20.♗a3!



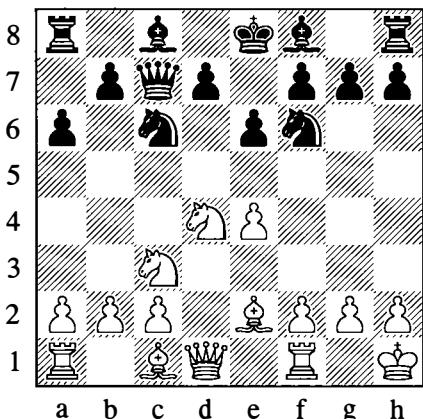
20...♛c3! 21.♔e1 ♛xe1 22.♚xe1 ♜c4 23.♗d6!

23.♗xb7? ♜ab8 24.♗f3 ♜d2 activates the rooks.

23...♝a7

Planning ...b5. White has enough compensation to draw, but no more than that.

D) 8.♔h1!?

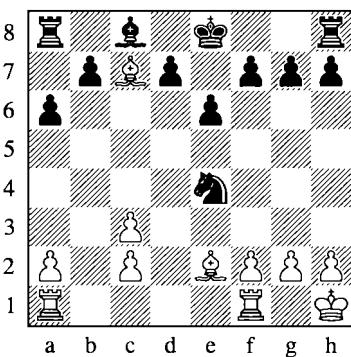


White opts for a quick attacking plan with f2-f4. We have seen in previous variations that a possible way for Black to handle such positions was to play ...♝d6, ...♝xd4 and then ...♚e5. The text move fights against this plan, as ...♝d6 will no longer threaten to take on h2 with check. Instead I suggest:

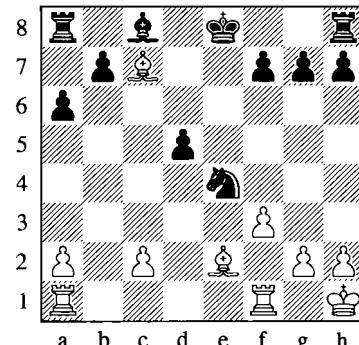
8...♝xd4! 9.♗xd4 ♚c5

White has two main options: D1) 10.♗d2 and D2) 10.♗d3.

10.♗f4?! occurred in three games in the 1990s but has not been repeated since, for good reason. 10...♝xd4 11.♝xc7 ♜xc3 12.bxc3 ♘xe4 reaches a pretty thematic situation for the Taimanov, especially for ♜e2/♜e3 systems, where White sacrifices a pawn (or perhaps two) and plays for long-term compensation based on the dark squares.

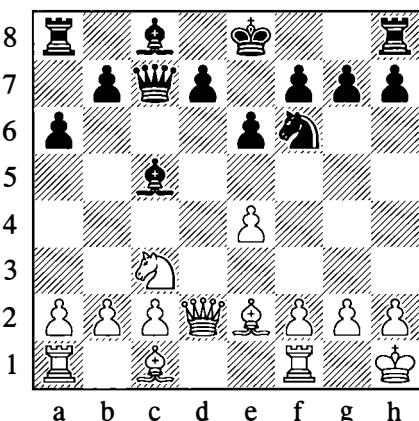


This is not the best version of the concept for White, as he would ideally like to have a knight remaining to exploit the dark-square weaknesses on b6 and d6. Play might continue: 13.c4! d5! 14.cxd5 exd5 15.f3 This position was reached in Payen – Srokowski, Enghien-les-Bains 1995, and one other game. Both times Black played 15...♝f6 and went on to draw, but a clear improvement is:



15...♝c3!N 16.♗d3 White threatens ♜e5, but 16...f6! 17.♗fe1† ♜f7† consolidates and leaves White struggling to prove his compensation.

D1) 10.♗d2



It may appear strange to block the c1-bishop, but White intends ♜g5 when the queen could enjoy active prospects on the kingside.

10...0–0 11.♗g5 d6 12.♗h4!?

Making space for the bishop to come to g5.

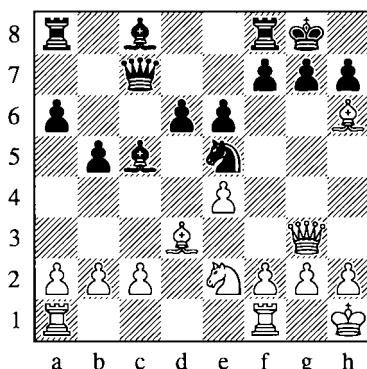
Black has no problems after: 12.♗g3 b5 13.♕h6 ♔e8 14.♗ad1 ♕b7 15.♗d3 ♘h8 16.♗c1 ♕f6 Having dealt successfully with White's threats, Black was ready to continue with the typical Taimanov plans in Pesotsky – D. Mastrovasilis, Plovdiv 2008.

White's attack also looks pretty harmless after: 12.♗d3 ♕d7! 13.♗e2

After 13.f4 ♕d4! the bishop enters the defence and Black is fine, C. van Oosterom – Giri, Enschede Twente 2009.

13...♗e5! 14.♗g3 b5 15.♕h6

Here I found a natural improvement:



15...f6N

Instead after 15...f5?! 16.exf5 exf5 17.♗d2 ♕b7 18.♗f4 the position was still balanced, but Black's 15th move was a clear concession and the position subsequently turned against him in Arnason – Stefansson, Reykjavik 2010.

16.♗e3?

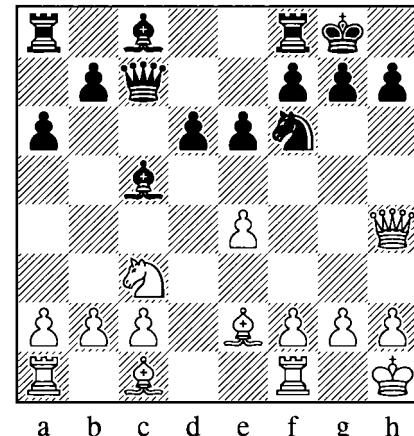
This is not forced, but I see no additional purpose for the bishop on h6.

16...♗b6! 17.♗xc5 dxc5

White's bishop on d3 is a bit misplaced and there is a huge direct threat with ...c4.

18.f4 ♕xd3 19.cxd3 ♕b7†

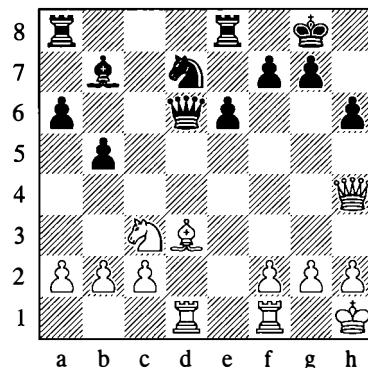
Black has the better prospects due to his superior minor piece and the vulnerable d3-pawn.



12...b5 13.♗d3 ♕b7 14.e5??

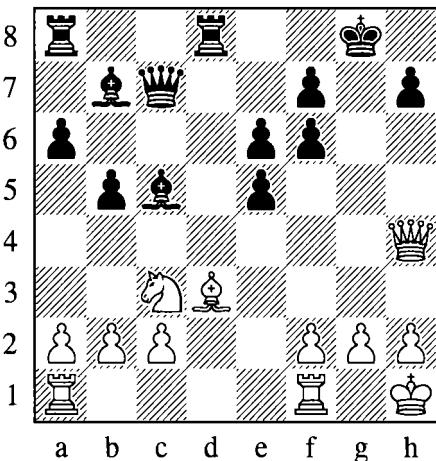
This is clearly the critical move to check.

Another game continued 14.♗g5 ♕d7 15.♗e7 ♕fe8 16.e5 h6 17.exd6 ♕xd6 18.♗xd6 ♕xd6 19.♗ad1 when a draw was agreed in Kravtsiv – Neiksans, Riga 2016.



I believe Black has the better chances. A good continuation is 19...♗b6, with the knight coming to f6 next. Afterwards he might consider ...♗c6 and ...♗b7 to threaten g2, or concentrate on queenside play with ...b4 and ...a5. Another idea is to mobilize the e-pawn if a favourable opportunity arises. The rooks may go to a combination of the b8-, c8-, d8- and e8-squares, depending on Black's other plans.

14...dxe5 15.♗g5 ♕fd8 16.♗xf6 gxsf6



17.♗xh7†?N

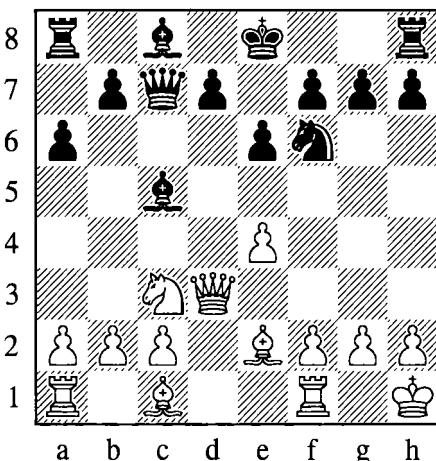
This is an obvious move to check.

The game continued 17.♘e4 ♕xe4 18.♕xe4 ♜ac8 19.♗xf6 ♜f8 20.g4 ♜e7 when a draw was agreed in Koch – Figura, email 2011, while 20...♝g7N also looks equal.

17...♝f8 18.f3 ♜e7 19.♗g6 ♜f8 20.♘e4 ♜e3 21.♖ae1 ♜xe4 22.fxe4 ♜g5∞

This position is pretty unclear but I like Black's chances: his king is actually slightly safer than White's, and his pawn structure is more compact.

D2) 10.♗d3



10...b5!

10...h5 has achieved decent results but I prefer to develop on the queenside before making a big commitment on the other flank.

We will now analyse D21) 11.♗g5 and D22) 11.f4.

Less dangerous is:

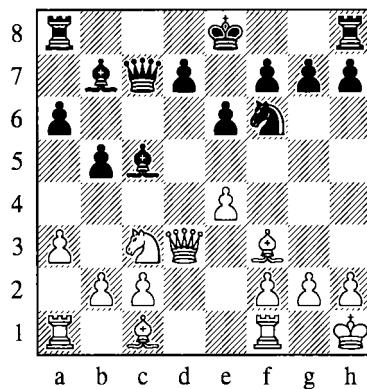
11.a3

White's idea is obviously to keep the knight safe but the move wastes crucial time.

11...♝b7 12.♗f3

12.♗g5 transposes to variation D211 below.
12.f4 is the other main possibility but it does not really combine well with the slow a2-a3, and after 12...d5! Black is doing well.

The text move threatens e4-e5 so a good reply is:



12...♝b8!

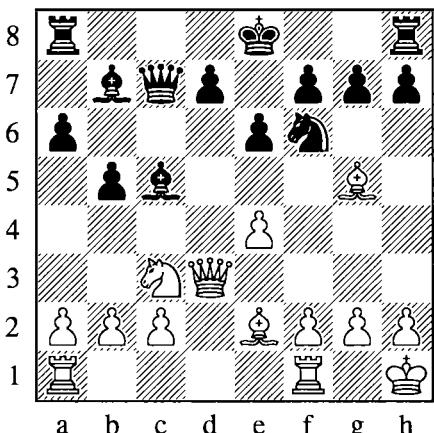
Protecting the b7-bishop forever.

13.♗e3N

13.♗g5 occurred in Liubavin – Kudelya, Belorechensk 2010, when 13...0–0!N would have been fine, as Black has nothing to fear from doubled f-pawns.

13...0–0

White has no real threats that should worry Black in this position.

D21) 11.♗g5 ♖b7

White has tried a bunch of moves but we will concentrate on the most popular options of **D211) 12.a3** and **D212) 12.f4**.

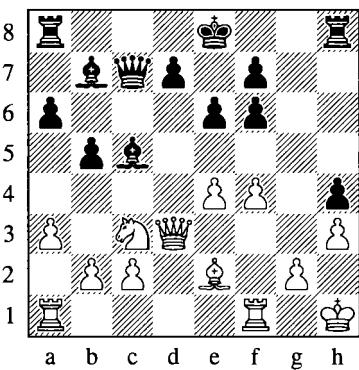
D211) 12.a3

This secures the knight on c3 but gives away some time, which justifies the following reaction.

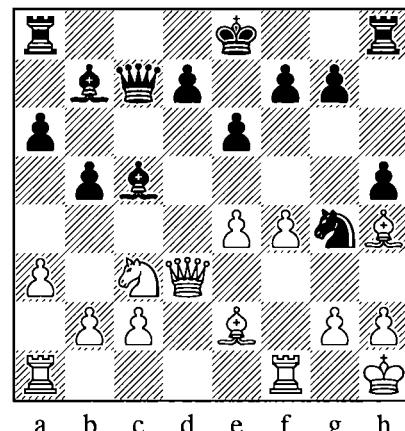
12...h5! 13.f4

After 13.♗h4 ♖d6! Black intends ...♘e5, when it is not clear how White should deal with the threat to the e4-pawn.

I also checked 13.♗xf6 gxf6 14.f4 h4! 15.h3, when Black's play can be improved with:



15...♗g8!N Getting ready for the attack. (15...0–0–0? led to serious trouble for Black after 16.b4! followed by a3-a4 in Chua – Liang, Singapore 2006). Now White doesn't seem to have a useful move, for instance: 16.♗g4 (16.b4?! ♖b6 17.a4 f5! is even worse) 16...0–0–0 17.b4 f5!+

13...♗g4! 14.♗h4**14...♖c8!N**

Black needs to be ready for direct counterplay against the knight on c3.

14...f6 has been played at GM level, but the strong reply 15.e5! left Black's position looking shaky in Djukic – Macieja, Budva 2009.

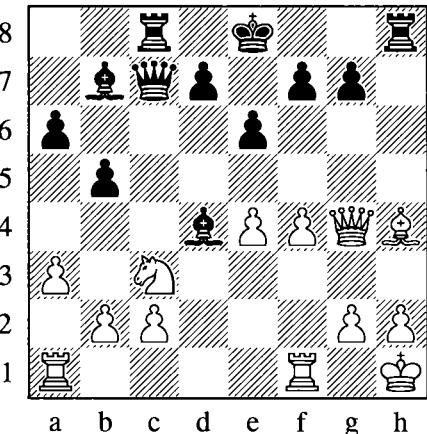
15.♗g3 ♖d4! 16.♗xg4?!

Grabbing the pawn is objectively dubious but still the critical continuation for us to consider.

16.♖ae1 ♖f8 does not change much.

16.♗d3 may be White's best try but a good reaction is: 16...♘f8 17.♗d1 e5! 18.f5 d5! The position is complex but it seems to me that Black has the upper hand.

16...hxg4 17.♗xg4



17...♗xc3 18.bxc3 ♗xc3

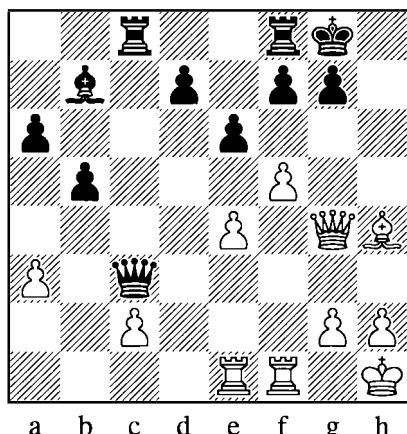
18...♔f8?! 19.f5 ♗c4 20.♔ae1 ♗xe4! 21.fxe6 dxе6 22.♔f4 f5 23.♗g3 ♔g8 24.♔f6 ♔h7∞ is an interesting line but I prefer the text move.

19.♔ae1 0–0!

This may seem surprising, but I found in my analysis that Black is not getting mated and will be in time to create the counterplay he needs.

20.f5

20.♔e7 ♕fe8 21.♔d6 f5?! 22.♗g5 ♕f6! is better for Black.

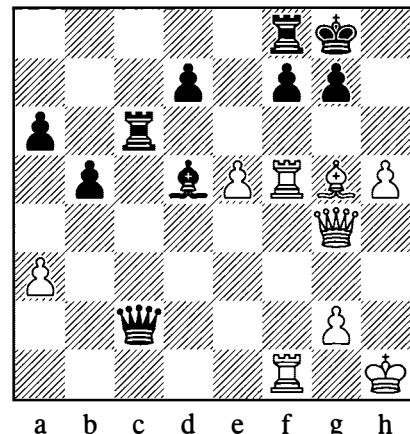


20...exf5 21.♔xf5 ♕ce8 22.e5 ♕e6 23.♔ef1 ♕g6 24.♔g5

24.♗xg6? fxg6 25.♕xf8† ♔h7 favours Black, due to the weakness of the c2- and g2-pawns.

24...♗xc2 25.h4 ♕d5 26.h5 ♕c6

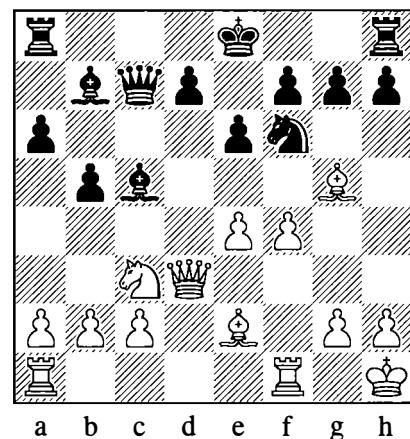
White is still a pawn down, with no way through on the kingside. Best play continues:



27.♔f6 ♕xg2†! 28.♗xg2 ♕xg2† 29.♔xg2 gxf6 30.♔xf6 a5†

I believe White can hold the pawn-down rook endgame, but Black would certainly have some winning chances in a practical game.

D212) 12.f4



This is more challenging than the previous line, as White goes on the offensive without wasting time on a2-a3.

12...h6?!

Many other moves have been tried but I like this one the most.

12...b4?! is worth mentioning, if only to show why a2-a3 is not yet necessary for White. The forcing line continues: 13.e5! bxc3 14.exf6 cxb2 15.fxg7 bxa1=♕ 16.♗xa1 ♔g8 17.♔xh7 ♔xg7 18.♔xg7 ♔f8 19.♔h7 ♔c6 20.♔g1 ♔e4 21.♔h5! White was somewhat better in Tonkov – Bastian, Merzig 1996.

13.♗xf6

Another important line is:

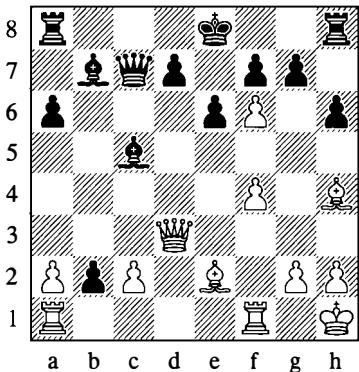
13.♗h4 b4!

The inclusion of ...h6 and ♗h4 makes a big difference compared to the line above.

14.e5

White has to respond actively, otherwise he will simply be worse.

14...bxc3 15.exf6 cxb2

**16.♗ab1!**

White must deviate from the analogous line with 12...b4?! above.

The difference is felt after 16.fxg7? bxa1=♕ 17.♗xa1 ♔g8 18.♔h7 ♔xg7 19.♔xg7 ♔f8! when Black's h-pawn is protected, and after 20.♔g3 ♔xc2 21.♔d3 ♔d2 he is much better.

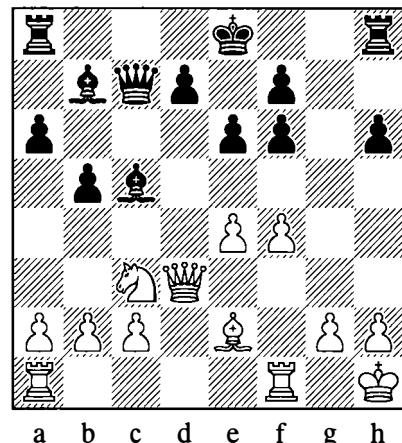
16...g6!

16...g5?! is an interesting idea but after 17.fxg5 hxg5 18.♔g3 ♔b6 19.♔e5 ♔b4!

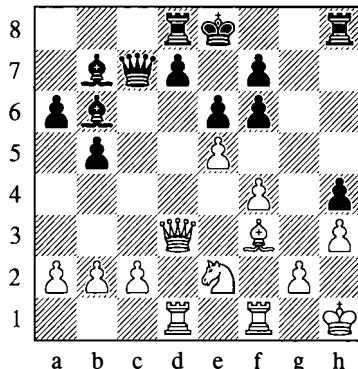
20.♗xb2 ♔e4 21.♗xb7! ♔xb7 22.♔f3 d5 23.c4∞ I believe White's position is safer and easier to play.

17.♗xb2 ♔c6

Black has a good, safe position as the f6-pawn blocks White's bishop and may become weak in a future endgame.

13...gxh6**14.♔h5**

A neutral move such as 14.♗ad1 allows Black to improve his position with 14...h5?! when, despite the loss of tempo associated with ...h6 and then ...h5, because of the closed nature of position I see no way for White to take advantage of it. For example: 15.♔f3 h4 16.h3 ♔d8?! 17.♗e2 ♔b6 18.e5

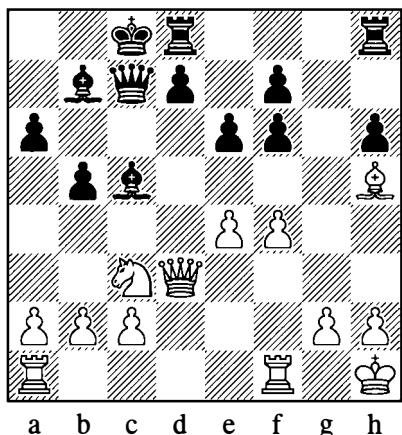


18...f5! 19.c3 ♔g8 20.♔d2 ♔c5 Black's chances

are not worse in this double-edged position. Note that the bishop can easily drop back to e7 to protect the h4-pawn if needed.

14...0–0–0!

Black preferred 14...♝g8 in four of the five games on my database, but the text move is more accurate.

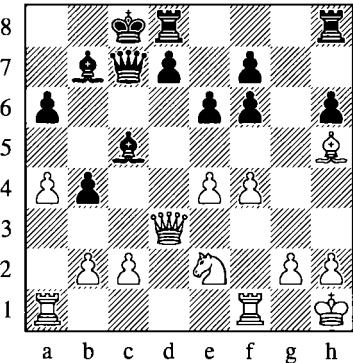


15.♗xf7

This seems like a principled move and was played in the game, but Black is well placed to deal with it. I checked several other moves as well:

15.♗ad1N d5! 16.exd5 b4 17.♘a4 ♘xd5
18.♗e2 ♘hd8 19.♗xd5 ♘xd5 20.♗f3 ♘d4= leads to a balanced position.

15.a4N b4 16.♗e2

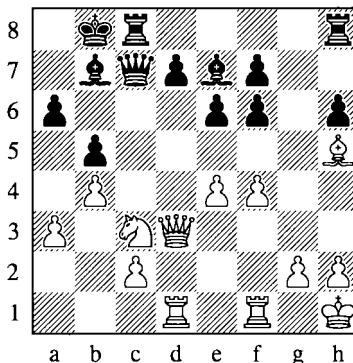


16...d5! 17.e5! fxe5 18.fxe5 ♘xe5 19.♗xf7 ♘hf8 20.♗ae1 ♘xb2 21.♗xe6† ♘b8 22.♗xf8 ♘xf8 23.♗xd5 ♘f6 24.♗g3 ♘d4! Black creates a lot of counterplay against the c2-pawn.

15.a3N ♘b8 16.b4 ♘e7

The loosening of the c3-knight means that ...♝c8 is now a threat.

17.♗ad1 ♘c8



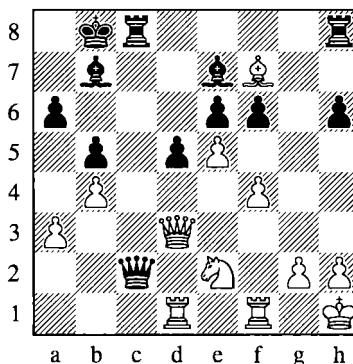
18.♗e2

18.♗xd7 ♘hf8! leaves White with nothing better than 19.♗f3 ♘xd7 20.♗xd7 ♘xb4!
21.axb4 ♘xc3 when Black is obviously better.

18...d5! 19.e5

19.exd5 ♘hd8 20.♗xf7 ♘xd5 21.♗d4 ♘cd8
22.♗e3 e5 23.fxe5 fxe5 24.♗xd5 exd4
25.♗xd4 ♘xd5† gives Black some winning chances with the two strong bishops against rook and two pawns.

19...♘xc2 20.♗xf7



20...d4!!

Opening the long diagonal and creating direct threats.

21.♗g1!

The only move.

21...fxe5 22.fxe5 ♘hf8 23.♗xe6?!

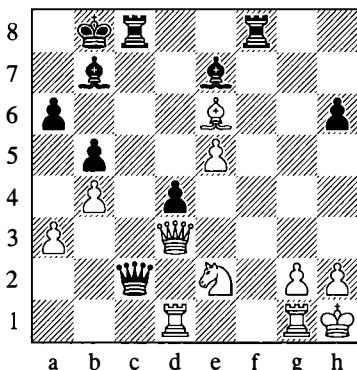
This looks critical, but it turns out that the bishop is not safe on e6.

White should prefer 23.♗h5! when 23...♗f2!

24.♗xd4 ♘xg2 25.♗xc2 ♘gxc2† 26.♗f3

♗xf3† 27.♗xf3 ♘c2c3 28.♗g7 ♘xb4 29.axb4

♗xf3 results in a level endgame.



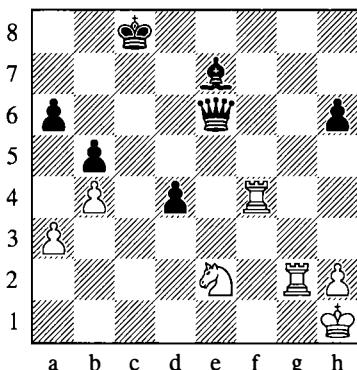
23...♗xg2†!! 24.♗xg2

24.♗xg2? ♘c6† 25.♗g3 ♘xe6 wins for Black.

24...♗f1†! 25.♗xf1 ♘xd3 26.♗xc8 ♘xc8

Black's strong d-pawn and safer king add up to a clear advantage, for instance:

27.e6 ♘e4 28.♗f4 ♘xe6

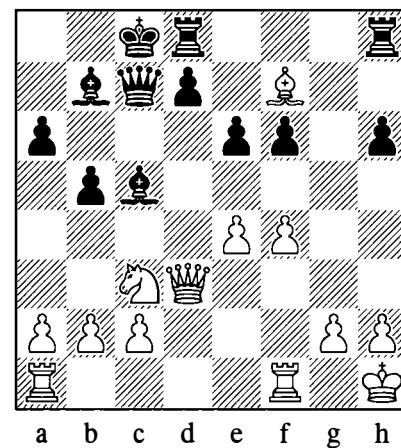


29.♗xd4!

29.♗xd4 is met by 29...♘a2!† when Black will collect the a3- and b4-pawns.

29...♘e1† 30.♗g1 ♘e5! 31.♗gf1 ♘d6 32.♗c2
♘xf4 33.♗xf4 ♘xf4†

The ending looks a disaster for White.



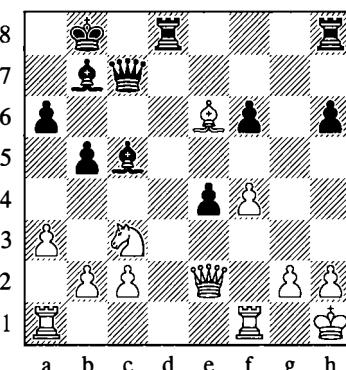
15...♔b8!

Black can also begin with 15...h5?!N but sooner or later he is going to need to move his king.

16.♗h5!N

This seems like White's best.

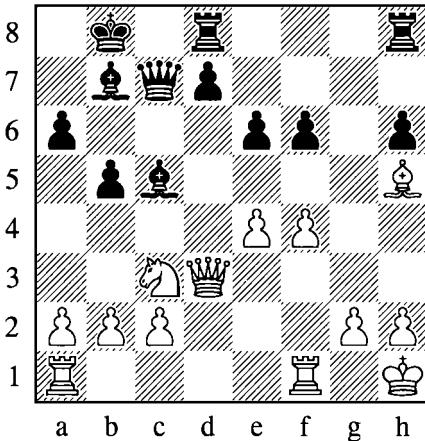
16.a3 d5! 17.♗xe6 dxe4 18.♗e2 occurred in Perpinya Rofes – Kleinman, Sabadell 2016, when Black should have chosen one of the following improvements:



18...♗he8!N 19.♗b3 ♘d4 20.♗ad1 ♘xc3
21.bxc3 ♘xd1 22.♗xd1 ♘xc3† Black has a clear plus. Alternatively, there is 18...♗d6!N

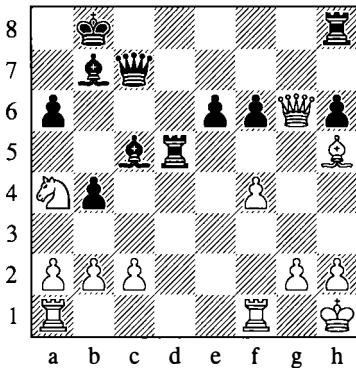
19.♕f5 e3!! 20.♘e4 ♜g8!! \mp and Black's attack looks crushing.

16.♗ad1N is another option but 16...h5 \bar{w} gives Black plenty of play for the pawn, with White's bishop stuck awkwardly on f7.



16...d5! 17.exd5 b4 18.♘e2

Here is a beautiful line I analysed: 18.♘a4? ♜xd5 19.♗g6 (19.♗e2 will lead to the same position)

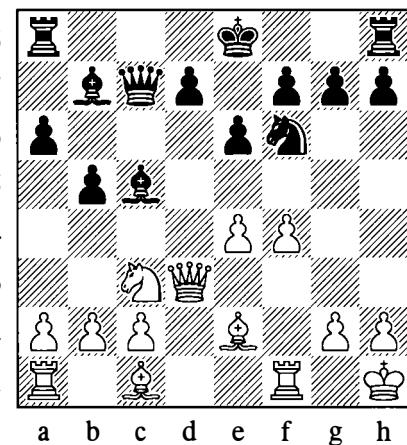


19...♜xh5!! 20.♗xh5 ♜a7! 21.♗e2 ♜g8 22.♗f3 ♜xf3 23.♗xf3 ♜xc2 24.b3 h5 25.h3 h4 \mp
White is paralysed.

18...♜xd5 19.♗h3 ♜d2 \bar{w}

Black has more than enough activity for the pawn, and it seems to me that White will have to struggle to hold the balance.

D22) 11.f4 ♜b7



12.♗f3

12.a3?! was mentioned briefly on page 204 under the 11.a3 ♜b7 12.f4 move order.

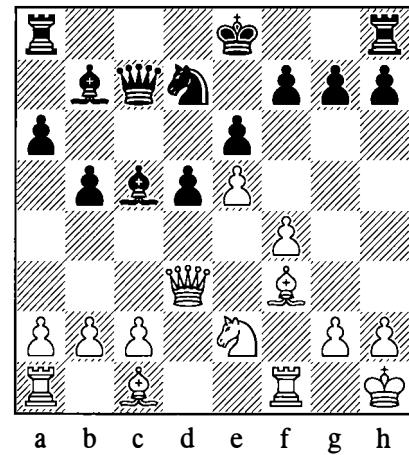
12.e5 is the only reasonable alternative but giving away the d5-square is a concession from White. 12...d5 13.♗xd5 (after 13.♗f3 ♜xc3 14.♗xb7 ♜xb7 15.♗xc3 ♜c8! Black may have scored poorly but his position is at least equal, or perhaps even slightly better) 13...♜xd5 14.♗g3 g6 Black was comfortable in Szelag – Miton, Poznan 1995, with ...d6 and ...0–0 on the way. (14...d6?!N also looks quite promising, as 15.♗xg7? 0–0–0 gives Black a dangerous initiative.)

12...d5!

This move has only been played in a small minority of games but I find it Black's most convincing idea. We will analyse the untested D221) 13.e5?!N followed by D222) 13.exd5.

D221) 13.e5?!N ♜d7 14.♗e2

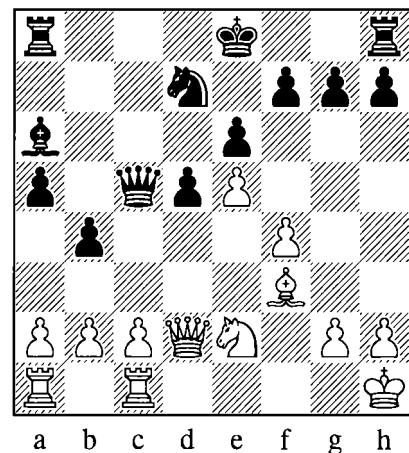
In this thematic French structure, White will aim to keep control of the d4-square. Black's main job will be to activate (or exchange) his light-squared bishop, so his next few moves are easy to understand.



14...b4! 15.♗e3

I also checked 15.a3?! 0–0 16.axb4 ♖xb4 17.♘d4 (or 17.c3 ♜e7 18.♘d4 a5∞) 17...a5 18.♗d1 ♜e7 19.♗e2 a4∞ when Black intends either ...♘c5-e4 or ...♘b6-c4.

15...a5 16.♗xc5 ♜xc5 17.♗fc1 ♜a6 18.♗d2



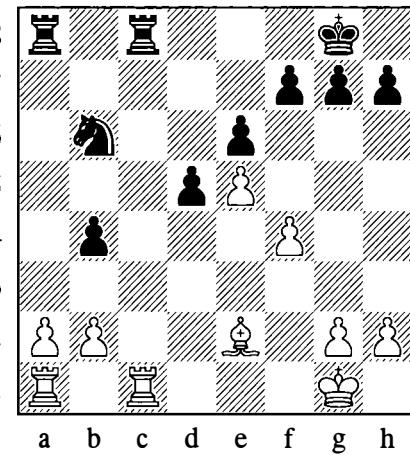
18...♗xe2!

Getting rid of the problem bishop before White establishes a perfect knight on d4.

19.♗xe2 ♘b6 20.c3 0–0 21.cxb4 ♜xb4

22.♗xb4 axb4 23.♔g1 ♜fc8

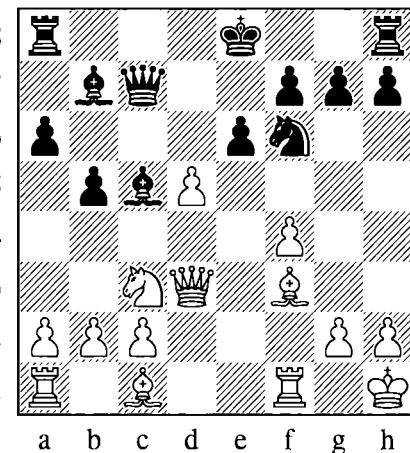
Both sides have certain pluses and the overall evaluation is equal. A sample line is:



24.♗xc8† ♜xc8 25.a4 bxa3 26.bxa3 ♘a4!

Black can obtain counterplay with ...f6 next. The position remains balanced and any result is still possible.

D222) 13.exd5



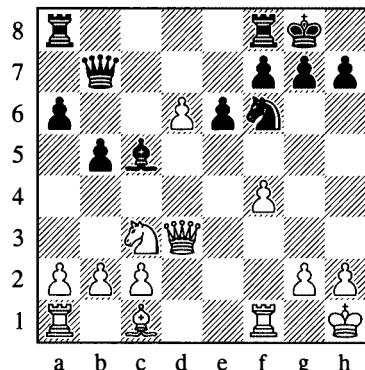
13...0–0!

The engines indicate that Black has many playable moves including 13...0–0–0, 13...♗d8 and 13...b4?!, but I prefer the calmest one.

14.dxe6

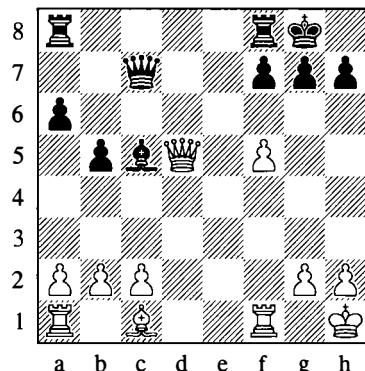
Two other moves are worth considering:

After 14.d6 I suggest 14...♗b8N 15.♗xb7 ♜xb7 with the possible continuation:

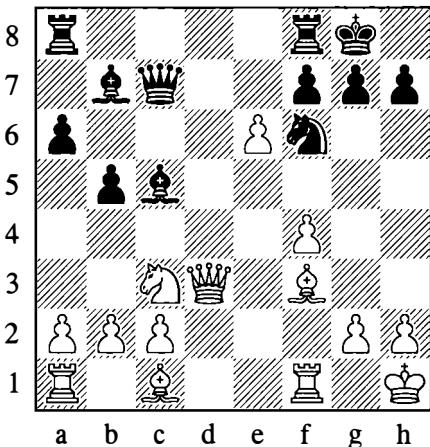


16.f5! ♜ad8! This is my favourite out of a few decent options. 17.♗f4 (17.fxe6 ♜xd6 18.♕f3 ♜xf3 19.exf7† ♜xf7 20.gxf3 ♜d4!!) is double-edged but I prefer Black's activity to White's extra pawn) 17...♜fe8! 18.fxe6 ♜xe6 19.♗ae1 ♜d7 20.♗xe6 ♜xe6 Sooner or later the d6-pawn will fall, leading to an equal game.

I also checked: 14.f5! N ♜xd5! 15.♗xd5 ♜xd5 16.♗xd5 exd5 17.♕xd5 Accepting the pawn sacrifice seems critical but Black gets enough play after:



17...♜ad8 18.♕f3 (after 18.♗b3 ♜fe8! White may be a pawn up but he has a hard time finding good squares for his pieces, for instance: 19.♗g5 ♜d4! 20.♕f3 ♜de4 21.♗ad1 ♜d6!!) 18...♜d6! 19.g3 ♜xc2 I imagine White would have a hard time defending this position over the board.



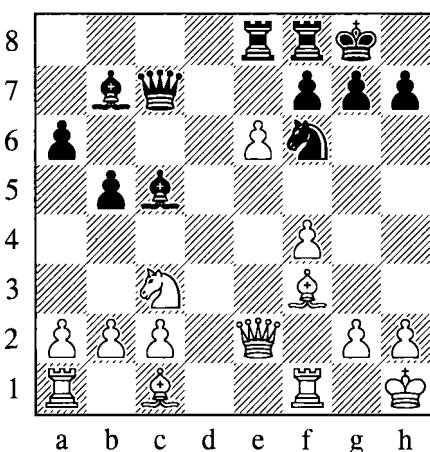
14...♜ad8 15.♕e2!

15.exf7†?? ♜xf7 16.♕e2 ♜e7+ would be a disaster for White.

15.♕f5 ♜xf3! 16.gxf3 ♜de8!! gives Black a promising initiative.

15...♜de8!N

15...♜fe8 was played in Baghdasaryan – Carbone, Athens 2012. Even though Black should have no difficulty equalizing here, I prefer the idea of keeping a rook on the f-file which will soon be opened.



16.f5

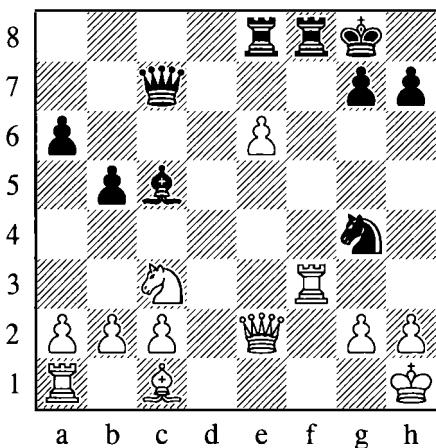
16.♗d1 does not change much after 16...♜d8?!!.

16...fxe6 17.fxe6 ♕xf3 18.♕xf3

18.gxf3 ♜c6 shows the benefit of having the rook on the f- instead of the d-file; Black clearly has the upper hand.

18...♔g4!

White has to be accurate to survive. He can do so with:



19.♔f4 ♜xf4 20.♕d5 ♜xf3 21.♕xc7 ♔f2†
22.♔g1 ♔h3† 23.♔h1=

Conclusion

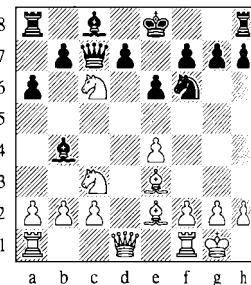
This chapter has dealt with a number of interesting sidelines after 7.0–0 ♔f6. Conveniently, we can meet the first three of them, 8.♗g5, 8.a3 and 8.a4, with the same plan of ...♗d6 (either before or after a knight exchange on d4) attacking the h2-pawn, followed by ...♗e5.

8.♔h1!? is more challenging, as White indirectly defends the h2-pawn in advance. Therefore we switch plans with 8...♗xd4! 9.♗xd4 ♜c5, leading to a position rich in possibilities for both sides. I would say the most critical lines occur after 10.♗d3 b5! followed by either 11.♗g5 ♜b7 12.f4, or 11.f4 immediately. Black has a full share of the chances though, and I was able to find a number of attractive resources.

Chapter 11

6.♘e2

8.♘e3 ♘b4 9.♗xc6



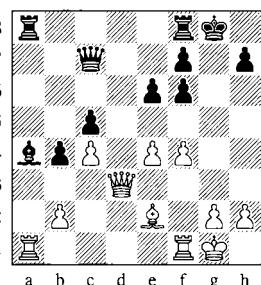
Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘c6 5.♘c3 ♘c7
6.♘e2 a6 7.0–0 ♘f6 8.♘e3 ♘b4 9.♗xc6

9...bxc6

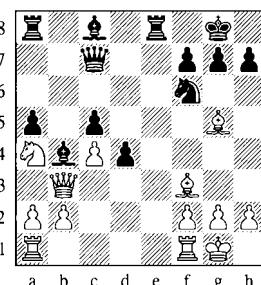
| | |
|---|-----|
| A) 10.f4 0–0! 11.e5 ♘d5 12.♘xd5 cxd5 | 215 |
| A1) 13.♘d3 | 216 |
| A2) 13.♘d4 | 217 |
| A3) 13.c3 | 219 |
| B) 10.♘d4?! c5! 11.♘c4 0–0 | 220 |
| B1) 12.♘f3?! | 221 |
| B2) 12.♘a4! a5! | 223 |
| B21) 13.♘d3 | 224 |
| B22) 13.♘b3! d5! 14.exd5 exd5 15.c4! ♘g4! | 227 |
| B221) 16.♘d3N | 229 |
| B222) 16.♘d1! | 233 |

B21) after 19.f4



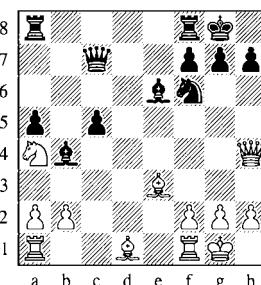
19...♘d8!N

B22) note to 15...♘g4!



17...♗g4!N

B222) note to 17.♘c2?N



18...♗ad8!N

1.e4 c5 2.♗f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♗c6 5.♗c3 ♖c7 6.♕e2 a6 7.0–0 ♘f6 8.♕e3 ♕b4 9.♗xc6

This is an important option, second in popularity only to 9.♗a4, which will be analysed over the course of the next three chapters.

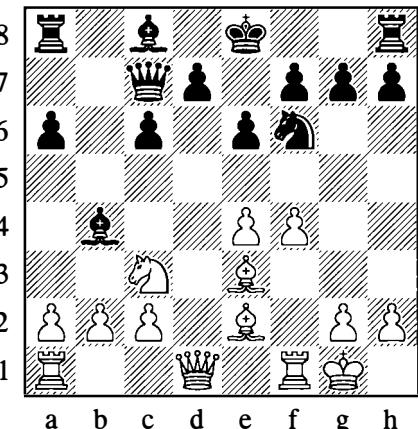
9...bx_c6

White's two main options are A) 10.f4 and B) 10.♗d4!?

Many other moves have been tried, but most neutral developing options offer Black comfortable play with a strong pawn centre after ...d5.

10.♗a4 has actually been the most frequent choice in the database but it requires no special attention here, as 10...♗e7 transposes to variation B of the next chapter while 10...♗b8!? can also be considered.

A) 10.f4



10...0–0!

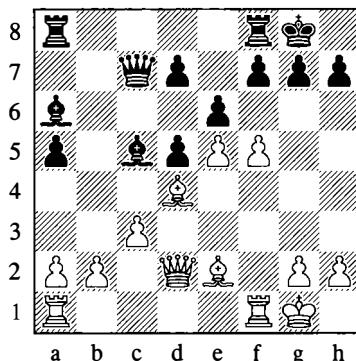
10...♗xc3 and 10...d5 have been more popular, but both moves have certain drawbacks. I find the text move more convenient and flexible, as there is no need to fear the following change in the pawn structure.

11.e5 ♗d5 12.♗xd5 cxd5

White has three main continuations:

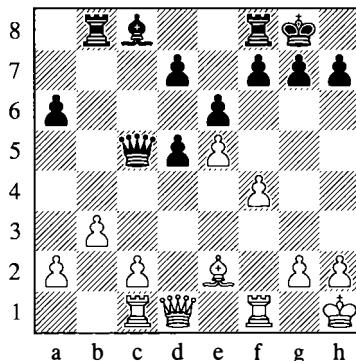
A1) 13.♕d3, A2) 13.♗d4 and A3) 13.c3.

13.♗d4 should be met by 13...a5!N with the simple idea of exchanging the light-squared bishop. 14.c3 ♗c5 15.♗d2 ♗a6 Now 16.f5 seems like White's only serious attempt to cause problems, but Black is fine after:

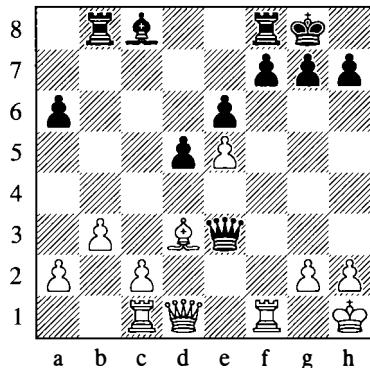


16...exf5 (16...♗xe2 17.♗xe2 ♗xd4† 18.cxd4 ♗ac8 19.f6 ♗c2! is also objectively fine for Black, but I would prefer not to let White's pawn land on f6) 17.♗xf5 ♗xe2 18.♗xe2 ♗xd4† 19.cxd4 ♗b6 20.♗f4 ♗e6= Black will fix his pawn structure with ...d6 next, with no problems.

13.♗c1!N has not been played but it is fairly logical to open the c-file. 13...♗b8! is the most accurate reply, keeping an eye on the b2-pawn while preparing to trade dark-squared bishops. My analysis continues: 14.♗h1 ♗c5! 15.♗xc5 ♗xc5 16.b3

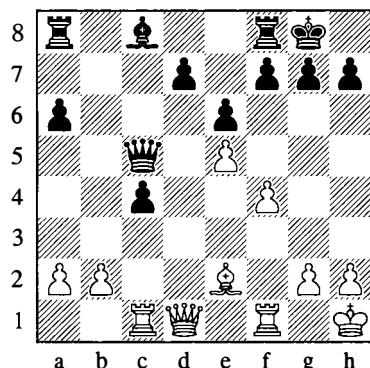


16...d6! Eroding White's pawn centre.
17.♗d3!? (or 17.exd6 ♜xd6 18.c4 ♜a3! and Black is fine) 17...dxe5 18.fxe5 ♜e3!



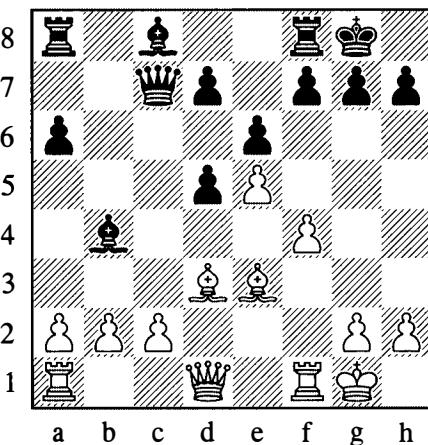
To defend the e5-pawn, White must either play ♜e1 and take the rook away from the open file, or exchange queens. In both cases Black has a solid position and can proceed with ...a5 and ...♗d7 in order to create counterplay on the queenside.

13.c4?!N is an idea in the same spirit as the line above, but 13...♗c5! gives Black a fine game, for instance: 14.♗xc5 ♜xc5† 15.♔h1 dxс4 16.♗c1



16...♗b7! 17.♗xc4 ♜b6 18.♗e2 a5 Black's bishop will go to c6 next, leaving him extremely solid and ready to play against the b2-pawn. Advancing the a-pawn may help to increase the queenside pressure. Depending on how the play develops, Black may or may not wish to trade the light-squared bishops.

A1) 13.♗d3

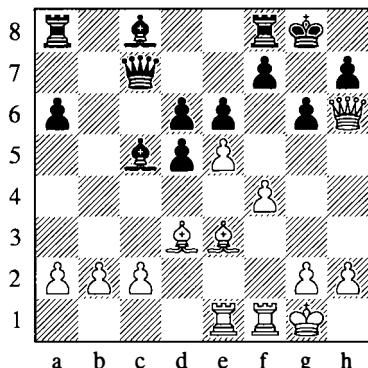


13...d6!

Black's plan is quite simple: he just wants to exchange all the bishops in order to secure the safety of his king and then try to advance the a-pawn and create counterplay against the b2-pawn. If for some reason the light-squared bishops cannot be exchanged, Black can shut down the activity of the d3-bishop with ...g6.

14.♔h1

14.♗h5?!N g6 15.♗h6 creates the direct threat of ♘f3-h3, but an excellent reply is: 15...♗c5 16.♗ae1



16...♗a7! A super prophylactic move, intending to defend along the 7th rank. 17.h4?! (17.♘f3 a5 18.♗h3 f5!= shows Black's concept in action) 17...a5! It is important to

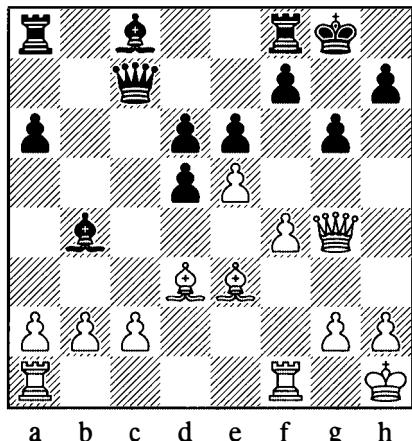
exchange the light-squared bishops. 18.h5 ♗a6 19.hxg6 fxg6! Black's queen and rook both participate in the defence along the 7th rank, and the queen can come to g7 at any time to chase away the intruder on h6.

14...g6

14...dxe5?!N is certainly playable but it was a sensible practical decision not to open too many lines for White's pieces.

14...♗c5?!N looks like a solid alternative to the game continuation.

15.♗g4



15...♗c5!N

This is much safer than 15...a5, after which 16.♗d4 ♗c5 17.exd6 ♘xd6 18.♗f6 e5 19.♗h4 e4 was complex and unclear in Plenkovic – D. Mastrovasilis, Budva 2009. Black's position is objectively still fine here, but I would consider it practically dangerous to allow White's dark-squared bishop to become so active.

16.♗xc5 dxс5! 17.♗f3

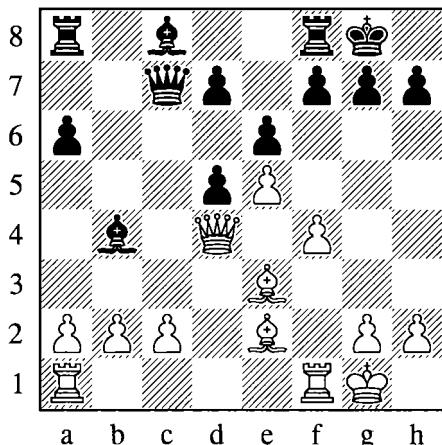
17.h4 h5! kills White's attack.

17...c4 18.♗e2 ♘e7!

Black will follow up with ...♗b8 to create counterplay against b2, while it is hard to

believe that White will be able to develop serious kingside threats with only two pieces really participating in the attack.

A2) 13.♗d4



This move is quite logical and demands an accurate response.

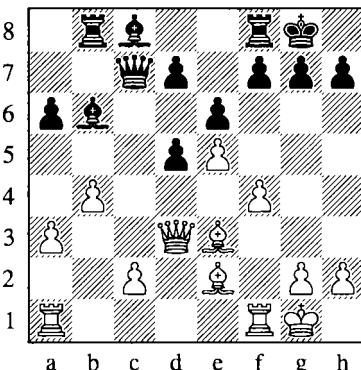
13...a5!

To understand the importance of this move, we should first take a good look at the alternative:

13...♗b8

I would have been happy to recommend this, if it were not for the following interesting possibility:

14.a3!N ♗a5 15.b4 ♗b6 16.♗d3



16...d6

16...♛a7!? might be playable but after 17.♗xb6 ♛xb6† 18.♔h1 ♜b7 19.c3± Black's position looks stuck, and White's side appears easier to play over the board.

17.exd6 ♛xd6 18.♗ad1 ♔xe3† 19.♛xe3

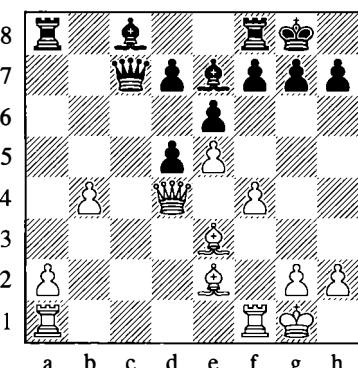
Engines seem to prefer White slightly, mainly because Black did not advance his a-pawn in time. If he tries ...a5 now, then b4-b5 will give White a strong passed pawn, and most probably a pleasant endgame.

14.c4

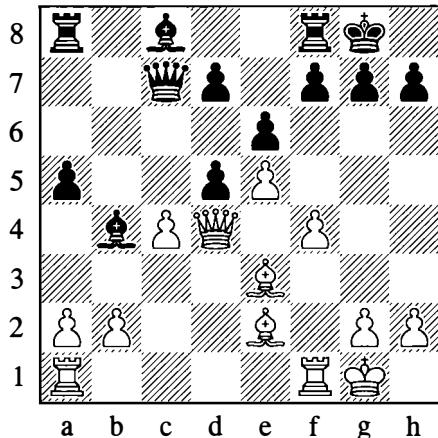
I checked a couple of untested possibilities:

14.a3N ♔e7 15.b4 is less effective here than in the note above, and 15...axb4 16.axb4 ♘xa1 17.♗xa1 ♛xc2 18.♗d3 ♛b3 19.b5 f6∞ offers Black decent play.

Another interesting plan is 14.c3?N ♔e7 15.b4 axb4 16.cxb4, and now an important move is:



16...♝a3! Preventing White from advancing his passed pawns in unison. 17.♗fc1 ♛b8 18.b5 ♜b7∞ The position remains dynamic and offers both players a lot of possibilities. White will try to remove the blockade of his pawns, while Black will strive for counterplay in the centre with ...d6 and/or ...f6, which could lead to threats against the white king.



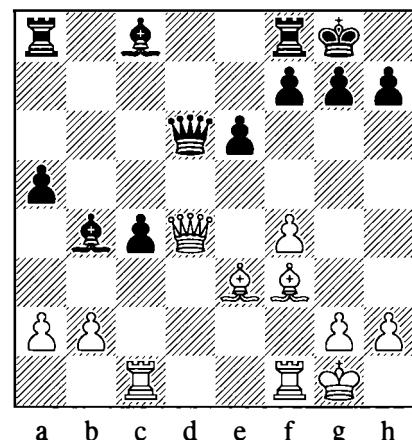
14...dxc4 15.♗ac1

15.♛xc4 ♛xc4 16.♗xc4 d5 is also fine for Black.

15...d5! 16.exd6 ♛xd6 17.♗f3

17.♛xd6 ♛xd6 18.♗xc4 ♔e7 is just equal.

We have been following Pulkkinen – Bergstrom, Stockholm 1994. Here I would suggest the simple continuation:

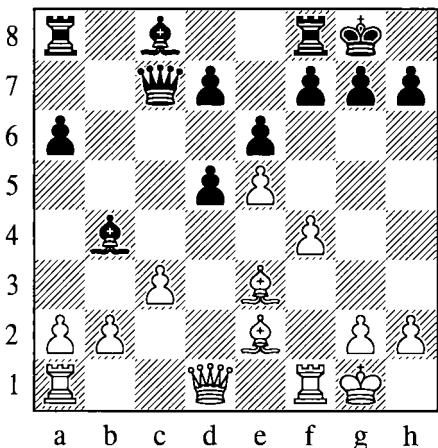


17...♛xd4N 18.♗xd4 ♜b8 19.♔a7 ♜b5

19...♔a6?! 20.♗xb8 ♜xb8∞ gives adequate play for the exchange although it is hardly necessary.

20.♗xc4 ♔e7 21.b3 ♜b7=

With a level endgame.

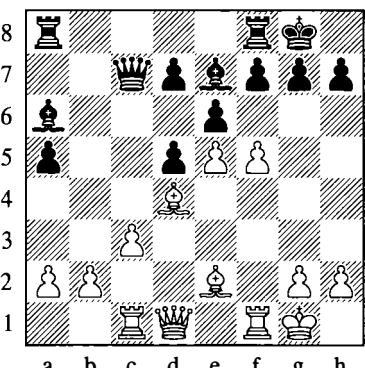
A3) 13.c3

13...♝e7!

This is more accurate than 13...♝c5, after which 14.♗d2 d6 15.b4! ♜xe3† 16.♗xe3± gave White an edge in Valenzuela Gomez – Hernandez Amura, San Luis 2016.

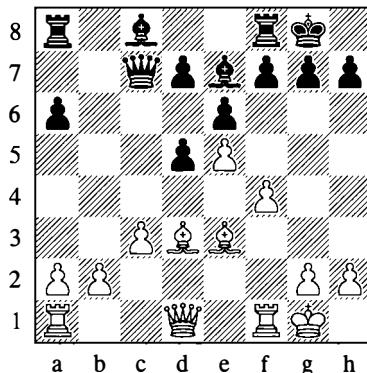
14.f5?

14.♗d4 is met by the thematic 14...a5!, when a well-played game continued: 15.♗c1 ♜a6 16.f5



16..f6 17.♗xa6 ♜xa6 18.exf6 ♜xf6 19.fxe6 dxе6 20.♗xf6 ♜xf6 21.♗xf6 gxg6 A draw was soon agreed in Speisser – Di Marino, email 2015. Black has the small theoretical disadvantage of an extra pawn island, but this is compensated by his strong centre.

14.♗d3!? was a new idea introduced in Mason – Gourlay, Telford 2018, when Black should have responded thematically with:

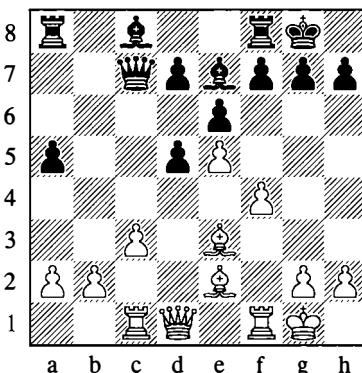


14...a5!N Again! 15.♗e2 ♜c5 16.♗d4 (perhaps White should prefer 16.♗xc5 ♜xc5† 17.♗h1 d6 with equality) 16...♗xd4† 17.cxd4 ♜b6 Once White protects the d4-pawn, Black will play ...♝a6 and trade the light-squared bishops. In the resulting major piece endgame, Black has slightly better chances due to his more compact pawn structure.

14.♗c1 a5!N

Once again this typical move is best. Black gains space on the queenside and prevents b2-b4, while making room for the bishop to go to a6.

14...♝b8 gave White the chance to obtain a small edge with the thematic 15.b4! d6 16.♗d3 g6 17.♗d4± in Duda – Cori, Pune 2014.

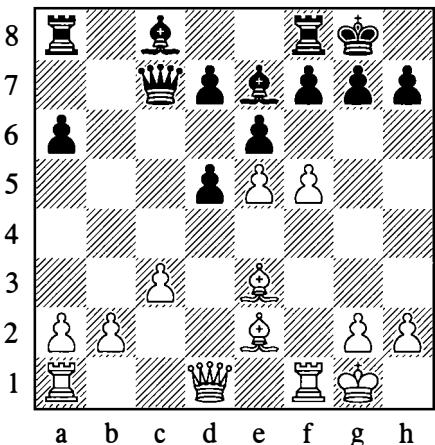


15.c4

This seems the most natural follow-up to White's previous move.

15...dxc4 16.♗xc4 ♜b8! 17.♗d4 ♜a6=

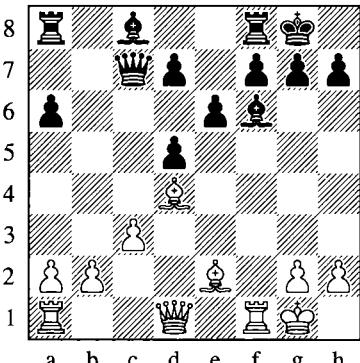
The text move is a logical attacking try, but we can take the sting out of it with the help of a simple novelty.



14...exf5!N

Definitely the safest way to play.

The game continued 14...♜xe5 15.♗d4 ♜c7 16.f6! ♜xf6 and although Black's position remains sound, I am not so keen on giving White the following choice of continuations:



17.♗xf6 (17.♗xf6?!N gxf6 18.♗d2 e5! 19.♗h6 d6 20.♗d3 f5 21.♗g5†= forces a draw, if White wants it) 17...gxf6 This occurred in Krumova

- Baumstark, Bydgoszcz 1978, and now best play seems to be: 18.♗d2!N ♜c5†! 19.♗f2 (19.♗h1?! ♜e7! leaves Black a safe pawn up) 19...d4! 20.cxd4 ♜g5 21.♗b4≈ The chances are roughly equal and any result is possible.

15.♗xd5!

15.♗xf5?! is worse in view of 15...d6! 16.e6 fxe6 17.♗xf8† ♜xf8 18.♗d3 ♜d7† when White does not have enough for the pawn.

15...♗b7! 16.♗d4 g6!

Not only stabilizing the kingside, but also preparing the following regrouping.

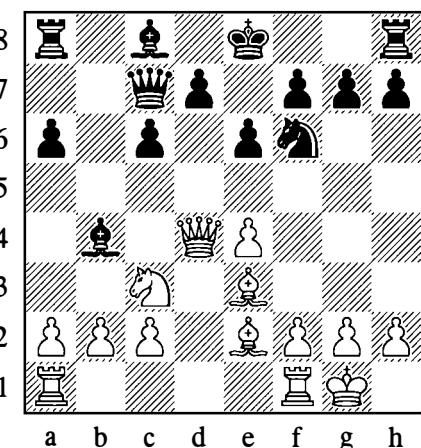
17.♗ad1 ♜fe8 18.♗c4

18.♗xd7? ♜xe5 only helps Black.

18...♗f8=

Followed by ...♗g7, with pressure against the e5-pawn.

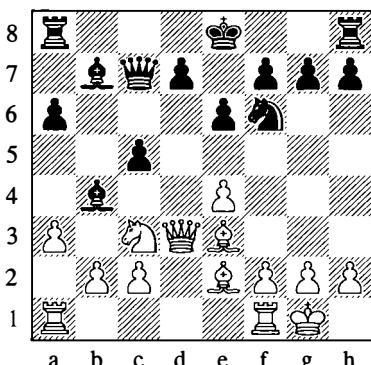
B) 10.♗d4!?



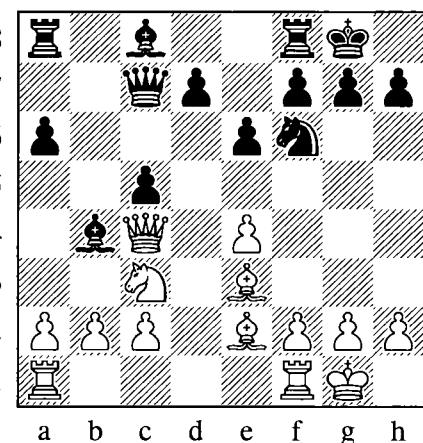
This variation attracted my attention when the young Chinese GM Wei Yi employed it to defeat Indian GM Karthikeyan Murali in 2017. Previously I considered this variation to be harmless but, after taking a closer look at it, I realized that Black needs to play some accurate moves to avoid trouble.

10...c5! 11.♕c4

11.♕d3!? is another idea, claiming that ...c5 harms Black's chances. Indeed, he can no longer play ...d5, while ...a5 would leave the b4-bishop without an escape route. On the other hand, the queen is not so great on d3, and Black gets a good position after: 11...♗b7 12.a3!N (12.f3 has been the usual continuation but after 12...d5! 13.exd5 exd5 Black is already fighting for the advantage)



12...c4! 13.♗xc4 ♗xc4 14.♗xc4 ♗xc3 15.bxc3 ♗xe4= White's bishop pair is of some value, but Black's superior pawn structure at least makes up for it. Black may also benefit from not having castled, as his king is already well centralized for the endgame.

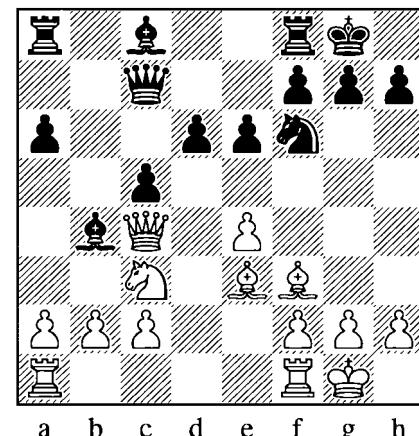
11...0–0

We have come to a split: **B1) 12.♗f3!?** is an interesting move but I believe Wei Yi's choice of **B2) 12.♗a4!** to be the most challenging idea.

12.a3 ♗xc3 13.bxc3 ♗b7 14.f3 d6 was fine for Black in Loginov – Neiksans, Tallinn (rapid) 2016. (14...♗fc8!N might be another idea for Black to go for ...d5!)

B1) 12.♗f3! d6!

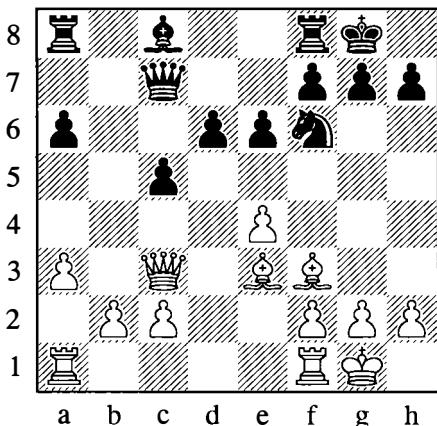
12...♗b7? would be a mistake in view of 13.e5!, for instance: 13...♗xc3 14.♗xc3 ♘d5 15.♗xd5 ♘xd5 16.♗xc5± Van Harten – De Ruiter, Haarlem 2013.

**13.a3**

The point of Black's last move was to meet 13.e5 with 13...d5! when there is no en passant possibility.

13.♗fd1 should be met by 13...♗d7!, taking aim at the misplaced bishop on f3. After the obvious 14.♗f4, Black can choose between 14...♗e5 15.♗xe5 dxе5, reaching a structure which I will discuss in more detail in the note to move 15 below, and 14...♗b6 15.♗d3 e5 16.♗e3 c4 17.♗d2 ♗b8 when Black had a decent position in Krabbe – Traut, email 2012.

13...♗xc3! 14.♗xc3



14...♝b7!N

14...e5 has been played in four games from this position but Black's results have been poor. My analysis indicates that Black is actually under no obligation to fix the central structure. Although the text move is a novelty, it transposes to an older game which we can follow for a while.

15.e5

This is clearly the critical continuation.

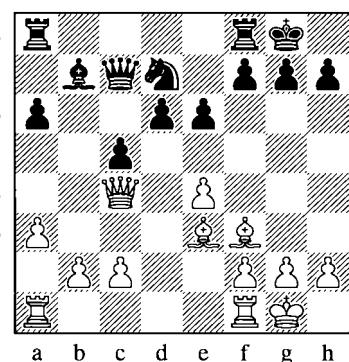
Obviously White can also simply defend the e-pawn.

15.♗c4N ♝d7?!

I quite like this idea, although Black has a number of good ways to continue. For example:

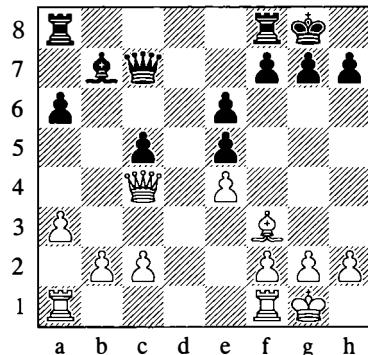
15...♝ac8 is perfectly logical, with ...d5 to follow.

15...h6 is a useful prophylactic move, intending ...♝fd8 with equal play.



16.♗f4 ♞e5 17.♗xe5 dxe5=

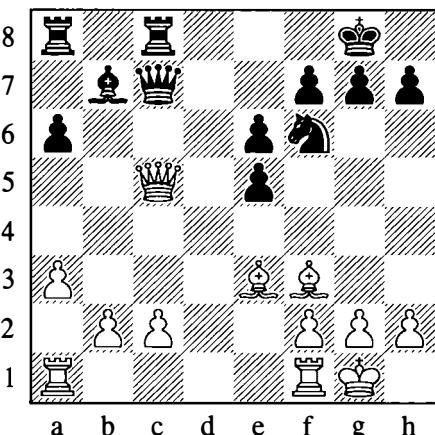
Black will continue with moves like ...♝fd8, ...a5 and ...♝ab8. White will sooner or later have to play c2-c3 to protect the d4-square, after which the b2-pawn will be even weaker, as b2-b3 will no longer be possible.



At this moment I would like to say a few things about the pawn structure. At first glance White's position may seem more pleasant, since Black has doubled pawns and White has a majority on the queenside. However, the doubled e-pawns are actually quite common in the Sicilian and Black often goes for such structures as the e6-pawn covers the hole on d5 and may lead to opportunities along the open d-file. An important point about this specific position is that White's bishop is passively placed. If White had time to carry out the plan of ♘e2, f3, ♜c3 and ♜c4, he would be able to claim a slight edge, but he has no time for it because Black is threatening to double his rooks along the d-file.

15...dxe5 16.♗xc5 ♜fc8

An interesting position has been reached, where Black's active pieces and mobile centre offer enough compensation for White's bishop pair and structural superiority.



17.♗xc7 ♜xc7 18.♗b6!N

White's only real attempt to fight for the advantage involves keeping the bishop pair.

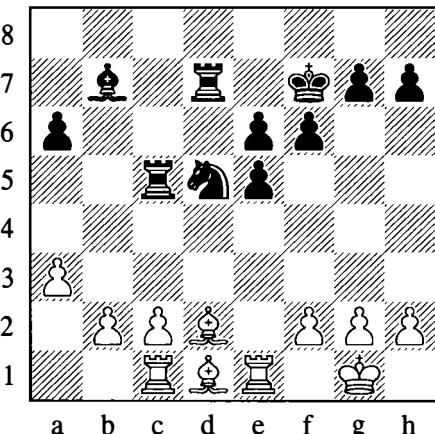
18.♗xb7?! ♜xb7 19.♗ab1 ♜c8 20.♗fc1 ♜bc7 21.c3 ♜d5 gave Black some advantage in Van Baarle – Janssen, Wehl 1980, with White's queenside majority having been immobilized.

18...♜d7 19.♗d1 ♜d5 20.♗a5 ♜c8!

It is important to prevent White from pushing his c-pawn.

21.♗e1 f6 22.♗c1 ♜c5 23.♗d2 ♛f7

In order to gain some breathing room on the kingside, White will have to play either f2-f3 or g2-g3 at some point, with each move having its own pros and cons.



24.g3

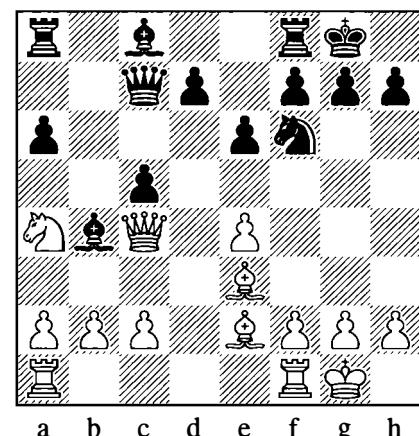
The advantage of this move is that White prevents a possible ...♝f4 jump; the downside is that his kingside light squares are weakened.

24.f3 makes the bishop on d1 even more passive, and after 24...g5= Black can follow up with ...h5 and ...♝f4, with good prospects on the kingside.

24...♝c8=

White keeps the bishop pair and better pawn structure, but I don't see a convincing way for him to improve his position, as it is hard to play c2-c4 without creating weaknesses. White has a hard time finding good squares for his bishops and Black has an easy plan of improving his knight with ...♞e7-f5-d4, targeting both the c2-pawn and the f3-square.

B2) 12.♗a4!



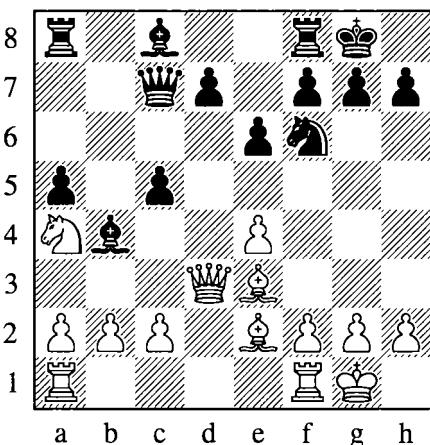
This is the critical continuation, targeting the c5-pawn.

12...a5!

Threatening ...♝a6. White may respond with B21) 13.♗d3 or B22) 13.♗b3!.

B21) 13.♗d3

There is nothing wrong with this move, but Black's path to equality has been pretty well mapped out.

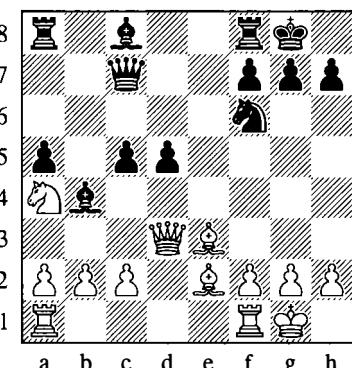
**13...d5!**

I spent some time looking at 13...c4N 14.♗xc4 ♗xc4 15.♘xc4 ♖xe4 but concluded that Black still has to work to prove full equality, while White risks little.

14.c4

An interesting alternative is:

14.exd5 exd5

**15.c4!N**

The only challenging move, preventing Black from playing ...c4 himself.

15.a3?! does not make much sense, since

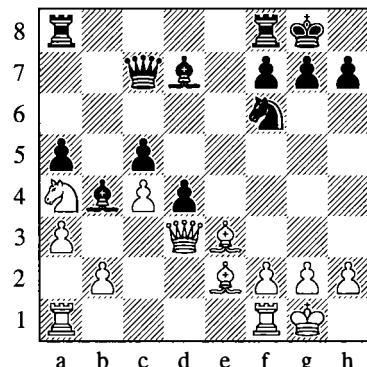
Black's plan was to play ...c4 and ...♝d6 anyway. After 15...c4 16.♗d4 ♜d6 Black was already slightly better in Lobanov – Neiksans, Tallinn 2016. White's knight is misplaced on a4 and Black's pieces are more active in general.

15...♝d6?

Since ...c4 has been prevented, Black switches to his secondary plan of targeting the knight on the rim.

16.a3! d4!

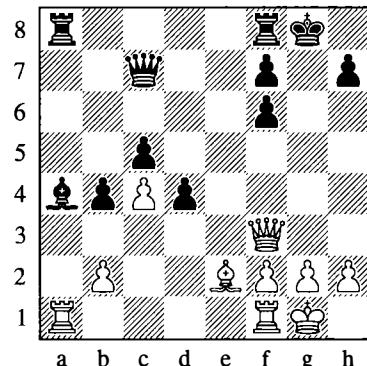
We will see something similar in our main line below. The disappearance of the e-pawns changes some details, but the overall evaluation remains equal.

**17.♗g5 ♜xa4 18.axb4 axb4 19.♘xf6 gxf6**

Black has an extra pawn, which is both protected and passed, but White has real attacking chances on the kingside.

20.♗f3

Hitting the f6-pawn while threatening ♜d3.



20...♗c6!

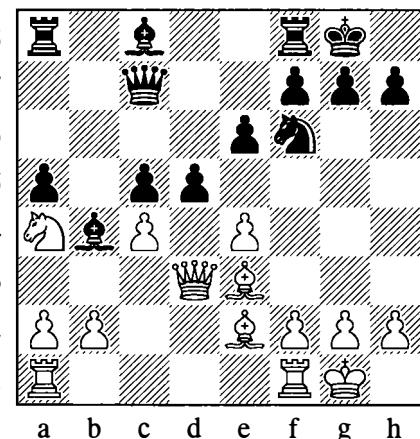
An accurate move, bringing the bishop into the defence. This reminds us of an important chess concept: in many positions, material is less important than piece activity and king safety. By manoeuvring his bishop to g6, Black improves both of these elements of his position, in return for a pawn which was not so great anyway.

21.♗xf6 ♗ae8!

21...♗xa1 22.♗xa1 (22.♗g5† forces a draw obviously) 22...♗e4 is the other way of continuing. Once Black places his bishop on g6, he can think about advancing his d-pawn.

22.♗d3 ♗e4! 23.♗xe4 ♗xe4 24.♗g5† ♗h8=

I don't see anything better for White than taking the perpetual – which of course he could have done at a few different moments in this line.



14...♗d7!

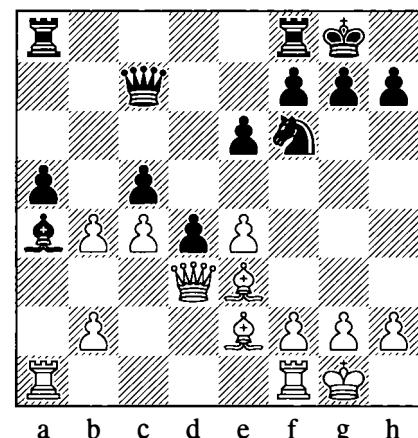
Once again we continue in the same spirit. White's knight is misplaced, and this compensates for the trapped bishop on b4.

15.a3 d4!

A vital intermediate move.

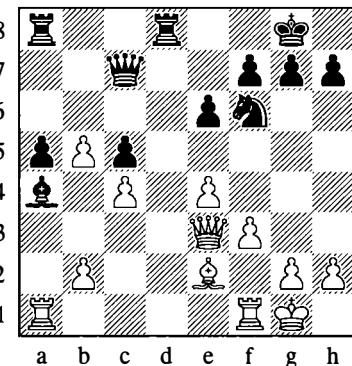
15...♗xa4? 16.exd5! (but not 16.axb4? dxе4† 16...exd5 17.axb4 is clearly better for White.)

16.axb4 ♗xa4



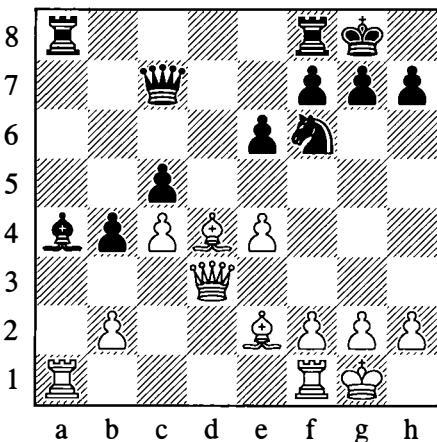
17.♗xd4

17.b5?!N is an amazing idea: White simply wants to capture the trapped bishop within the next few moves and claim a positional advantage due to the passed b-pawn. 17...dxе3 18.f3! White can afford to take a tempo to keep his structure intact. 18...♗fd8 19.♗xe3



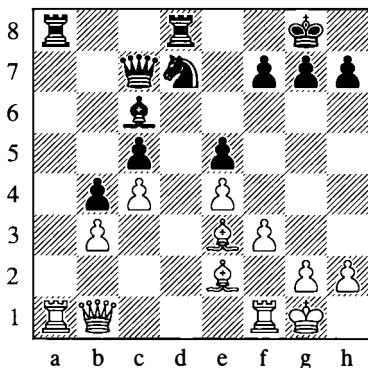
19...♗c2?! (19...♗xb5 20.cxb5 ♗e5 is also quite playable, but I prefer the more dynamic position which occurs after the text move) 20.♗fc1 ♗xe4 21.fxe4 ♗e5→ White has a protected passed pawn on b5 and a target on a5, while Black enjoys a strong outpost on e5 and a target on e4. Objectively the position is around equal but I would prefer Black, as White's dark squares are weak and there are chances to develop an attack against White's king.

17...axb4



18.♕xf6

18.♗e3?!N is an interesting attempt to exploit the bishop pair but I found an effective regrouping plan for Black. 18...♝fd8 19.♛b1 e5! With the simple plan of ...♝d7-f8-e6-d4. 20.f3 ♜d7 21.b3 ♜c6

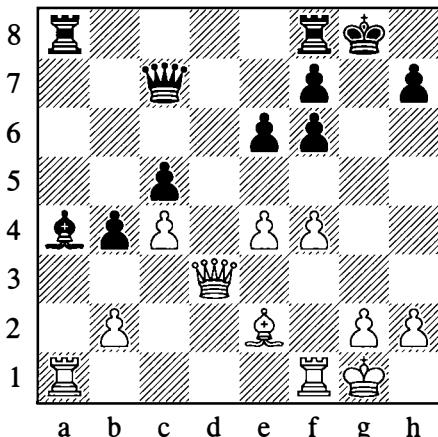


22.♗xa8 ♜xa8 23.♗d1 ♜b7 Protecting the c5-pawn before moving the knight. 24.♛d3 ♜f8 25.♛d6 ♜xd6 26.♗xd6 ♜e6= Black completes his regrouping and has no problems.

18...gx f6 19.f4

At first glance, it may look as though Black is under some pressure due to his doubled f-pawns and exposed king. However, he has a useful outpost on d4 which may be solidified by ...e5 – so the doubled pawns may prove

to be of some value in strengthening Black's central control. The open g-file may also be useful after ...♝h8 and ...♝g8. White's bishop also lacks mobility and his pawns may turn out to be weak in the endgame.



19...♛d8?!N

I find this the simplest way to kill White's attacking chances.

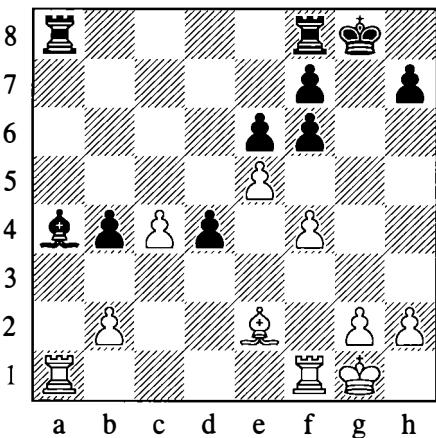
19...♝h8?! is an interesting move if Black prefers a complex middlegame battle, although all four of the correspondence games which arrived here ended in draws anyway.

20.♛e3

White cannot afford to lose control over the d-file.

20...♛d4! 21.♛xd4 cxd4 22.e5?!

22.♗d3 ♜c6 makes things tricky for White, who must take into account the possibility of ...b3 followed by ...♝a2.



22...♗c2!

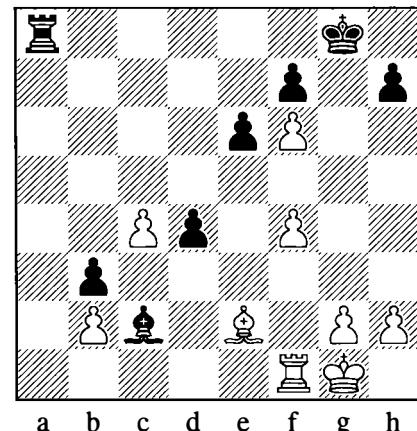
Once again we see that activity is more important than material.

22...fxe5? would lose material after 23.♗f3!+– due to the terrible pin along the a-file.

23.exf6 b3!

Black takes full advantage of his powerful pawns. The threat is ...♗a2.

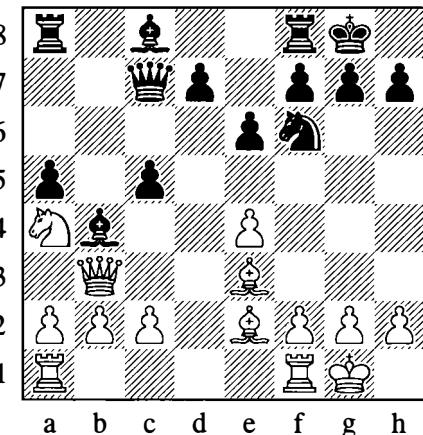
24.♗xa8 ♗xa8



25.c5 ♗c8 26.♗a1 h6=

Black will collect the c-pawn and then advance the d-pawn to force the draw.

B22) 13.♗b3!



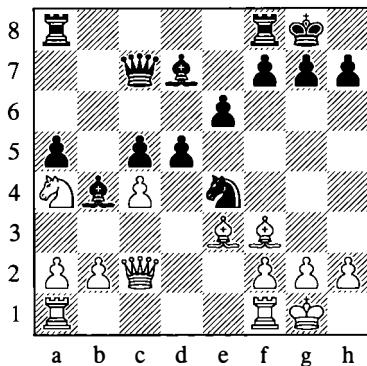
Despite being less popular than the previous line, I consider this move to be more challenging. White's plan is simply to target the misplaced bishop with a2-a3 or c2-c3, so Black must react dynamically.

13...d5!

This move prepares ...c4, after which the bishop can return to d6, so White should obviously prevent this.

14.exd5

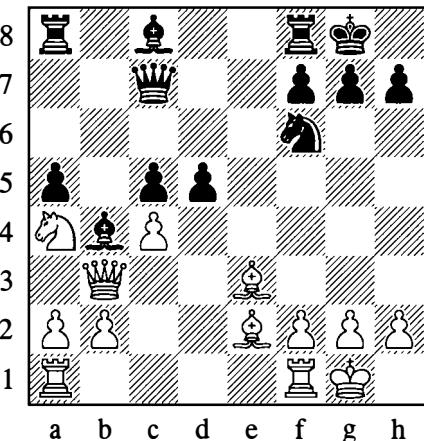
14.c4?!N is an interesting pawn sacrifice which deserves to be analysed more deeply. 14...♗xe4! is the correct response, not only capturing a pawn but also securing the d2-square for the bishop; hence White's next move. 15.♗c2 ♗d7! 16.♗f3



16...♝d2! Not the only playable move, but definitely the simplest way to avoid danger. 17.♗xd2 ♜xa4 18.♗xa4 ♜xd2= White will take on d5 to restore material equality, then place his bishop on c4. Meanwhile Black's queenside pawns are split, but he is not worse at all, as he can regroup with ...♝f4 (conveniently gaining a tempo against h2), followed by ...♜e5-d4, when his bishop will be superbly placed.

14...exd5 15.c4!

15.c3?! is pointless in view of 15...c4! 16.♗c2 ♜d6 17.h3 ♜b8† when Black's pieces are active and White's knight is misplaced.



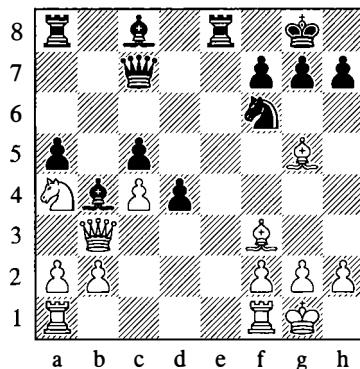
It is worth stopping for a moment to consider the position. At first sight it may not look particularly dangerous for Black, but he has to deal with the concrete threat of having his bishop trapped by a2-a3, which could require him to make some sort of positional concession. The first time I analysed this position, I followed a correspondence game which was won by Black, but only after White blundered from a slightly better position. I found an improvement on that game, but was ultimately not quite satisfied with Black's chances in that line either. For a while I was quite pessimistic about the whole variation, but then I came back to the present position and found a new idea.

15...♝g4!

Before we analyse the text move in detail, here is the alternative in brief:

15...d4 16.♗g5 ♜e8 17.♗f3!

17.♗xf6 ♜a6! 18.a3 ♜xf6 19.axb4 ♜xe2 20.♗xc5 axb4 21.♗xb4 h6† gives Black excellent compensation due to his active rooks, strong passed d-pawn and safer king.



17...♝g4!N

17...♝e4 18.a3 ♜b8 19.♗xe4 ♜d2 20.♗xh7† ♜h8 21.♗f3 ♜xg5 22.♗h5 ♜h6 23.♗c2† should have been a risk-free edge for White in Leijen – Lichte, email 2015, irrespective of the eventual 0–1 result.

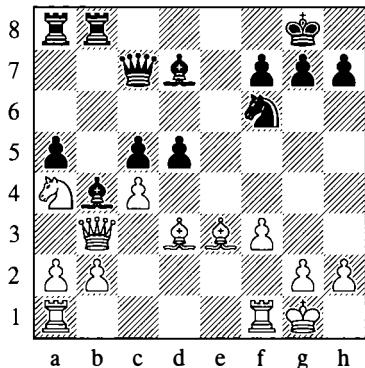
The text move is a better try for Black. I analysed it deeply and found that it leads to wild complications, but with White retaining an edge after accurate play. I will leave it for readers to carry out their own analysis, should they find this line interesting.

Let's now consider the position after 15...♝g4!, my novelty which I was able to play in July 2018.

After becoming pessimistic about Black's prospects I came up with this move. The main idea is to utilize the g4-square and jump there with the knight. This can occur not only in the obvious scenario following an exchange of light-squared bishops, but also in certain lines where Black retreats the bishop to d7, as occurs in variation B221 below, for example.

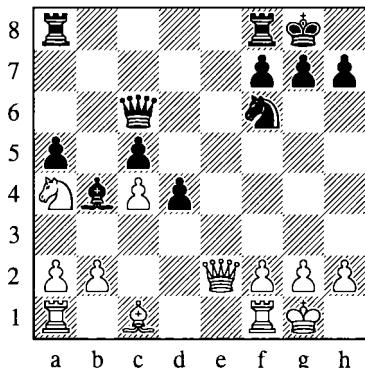
White's two most challenging options are B221) 16.♗d3N and B222) 16.♗d1!.

16.f3?! ♗d7! only helps Black. 17.♗d3 is White's best try, after which 17...♝fb8! is the most accurate choice, as it is worth leaving the other rook on a8 to protect the a-pawn. My analysis continues:



18.♗d1 ♛e5 19.♗f2 (19.♗c1?? ♜xa4 20.♗xa4 ♛d4†+ shows why f2-f3 is a weakening move which White should have avoided) 19...♜xa4 20.♗xa4 ♜d2† Black solves the problem of his bishop and has an excellent position.

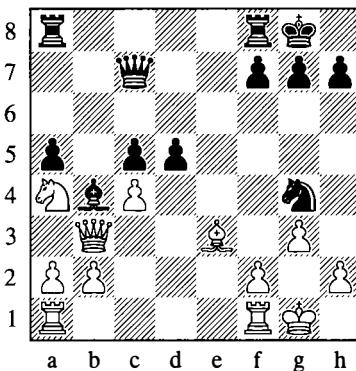
16.♗d1 avoids weakening the kingside but still fails to cause Black problems after: 16...♝xe2 17.♗xe2 d4 18.♗c1 ♜c6



19.b3 (19.♗d1 ♜e4! is also fine for Black; he can play either ...♞d2 or ...♝d2 next, taking advantage of the misplaced knight on a4)

19...♝fe8 20.♗d3 ♛e4 21.♗xe4 ♜xe4=

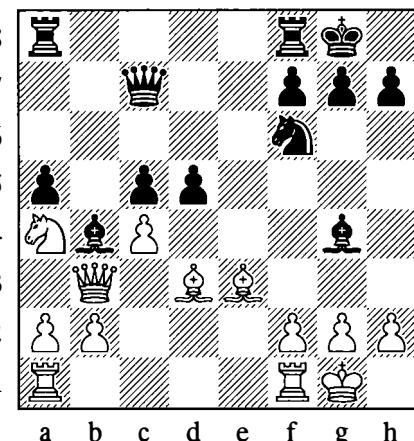
Finally, 16.♗xg4 ♜xg4 17.g3 is a simplistic continuation which gives Black comfortable play after:



17...dxc4 18.♗xc4 ♜xe3 19.fxe3 ♛ae8 Black is doing well; White's kingside has been weakened, and there is still no way to trap the bishop on b4, especially as Black may at any moment play ...♜c6 to attack the knight on a4.

B221) 16.♗d3N

Although this remains untested for the time being, it is a natural and challenging move which forces Black to respond accurately.



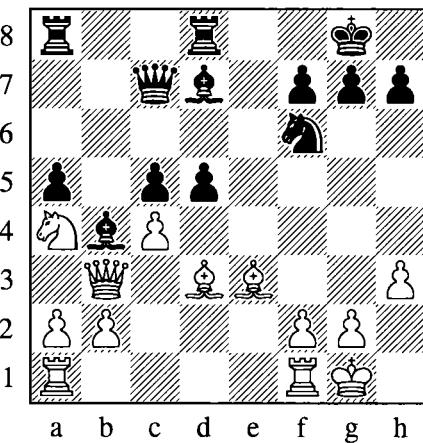
16...♝d7!

It took me a lot of time and energy to find the ... $\mathbb{Q}g4-d7$ manoeuvre and ascertain that it worked in the way I wanted it to. Black combines pressure against the knight on a4 with the serious threat of ... $\mathbb{Q}g4$, which virtually forces White's reply.

17. $\mathbb{R}fd8$

This move creates a possible escape plan of ... $\mathbb{Q}xa4$, ... $dxc4$ and ... $\mathbb{Q}d2$ to save the dark-squared bishop.

17... $\mathbb{Q}ae8?$! is another possible continuation, with more aggressive intentions: 18.a3 White has nothing better than forcing the play. 18... $\mathbb{Q}xe3$! 19.axb4! (19.fxe3 $\mathbb{Q}d2\rightarrow$ gives Black a strong initiative on the dark squares) 19... $\mathbb{Q}e5$ Interested readers may wish to analyse this position more deeply. With best play, the outcome should be equality, either after simplifications leading to a drawish endgame, or a ... $\mathbb{Q}xh3$ sac leading to a repetition of some kind.

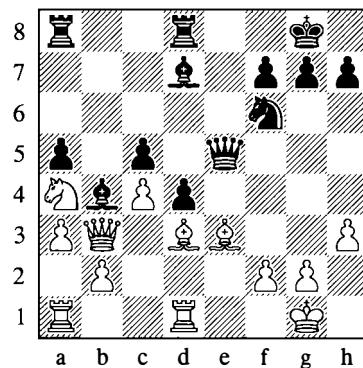


18. $\mathbb{R}ad1$

I decided to take this logical move as the main line. White not only develops the rook, but also takes away the d2 escape square from Black's bishop.

18. $\mathbb{R}fd1$ could be played with the same idea, while hoping that the other rook will play

a useful role on the queenside. However, it weakens White's kingside, especially the f2-square. 18... $\mathbb{W}e5$! is an important resource, when my analysis continues: 19.a3 d4

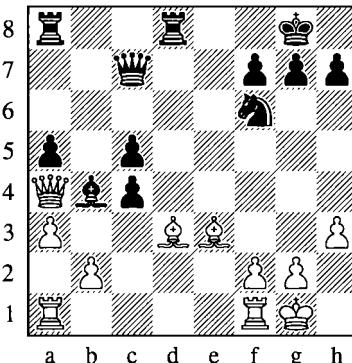


20. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$! (20. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}e1\rightarrow$ is an important point; Black targets the f2-pawn and White is in some danger) 20... $\mathbb{Q}xa4$! 21. $\mathbb{W}xa4$ $\mathbb{R}xd4$ 22. $\mathbb{A}xb4$ $cxb4$ 23. $\mathbb{W}b5$ $\mathbb{W}xb5$ 24. $\mathbb{C}xb5$ $\mathbb{Q}f8=$ With a balanced endgame.

18. a3

Obviously this is a forcing option which should also be considered.

18... $\mathbb{Q}xa4$ 19. $\mathbb{W}xa4$ $dxc4$



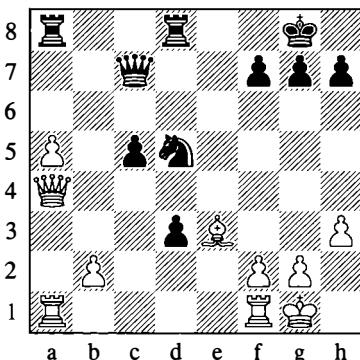
20. $\mathbb{A}xb4$!

This way White obtains a passed a-pawn, but Black will have a strong passed pawn on d3 which secures him enough counterplay. In the event of 20. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $\mathbb{Q}d2$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ $\mathbb{R}xd2$ White will try to take advantage of his superior minor piece, but Black has plenty

of activity with his rook already on the 2nd rank. 22.♗b3 a4 23.♗c3 ♜ad8 24.♕ae1 ♜d6 Black's domination over the d-file gives him enough counterplay, and he can improve his king's position with ...g6 next.

20...cxd3 21.bxa5 ♜d5

The knight is heading for b4, where it will support the d-pawn while helping to restrain the a-pawn.



22.♗g5!?

This seems like White's most challenging idea.

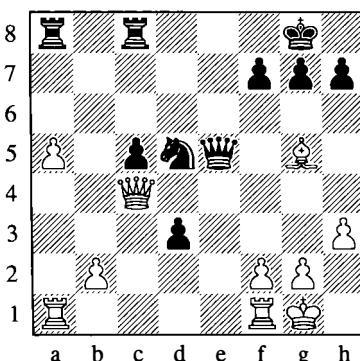
22.♗d2 can be met by 22...♝b4! 23.♗xb4 ♜d4 intending ...cxb4 with an equal position. For instance: 24.♕fe1 ♜d8 25.♗c6 cxb4 26.a6 d2=

22...♜dc8 23.♗c4!

Preventing ...c4.

23...♝e5!

Guarding the knight while exploiting the fact that White's bishop does not have an ideal square.



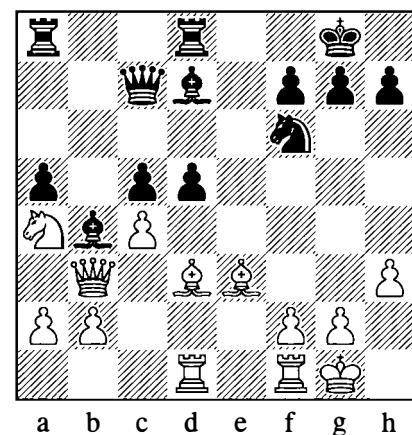
24.♗c1

24.♗d2 ♜xb2 25.♗xd3 ♜b4= is fine for Black.

24...♝b4 25.♗d2 h5!=

The last move is not the only playable option, but I consider it the most accurate. Black gives his king some breathing room, while also taking away the g4-square from White's queen.

Let's return to our main line. Unlike the 18.♕fd1 line analysed above, White avoids weakening the f2-pawn and prevents the ...♕e1 resource, so Black needs to come up with a different solution.



18...d4! 19.♗g5

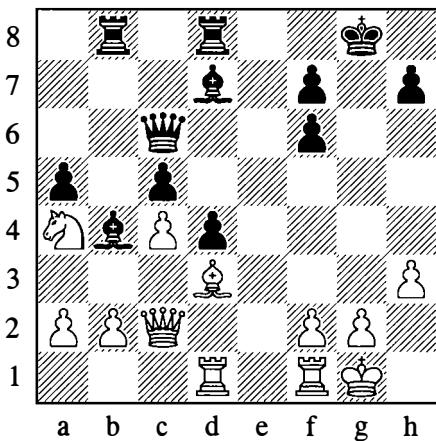
In the event of 19.♗c1 ♜ab8 20.♗c2 ♜c6! 21.b3 ♜b7= Black's bishop is out of danger, so his position is fine.

After the text move White threatens a2-a3, so Black has to continue with:

19...♜ab8 20.♗c2 ♜c6! 21.♗xf6 gx6

White has managed to ruin Black's kingside structure and the h7-pawn is under fire. Moreover, the b4-bishop remains under threat from a2-a3. Despite all that, Black has succeeded in creating counterplay by threatening the a4-knight, and it is worth pointing out that his dark-squared bishop is

not an entirely bad piece, as it prevents White's rooks from occupying the e-file. A final point is that the open g-file might prove to be an important source of counterplay.



22.b3

22.♗xh7† ♜g7 is nothing to worry about, as the open kingside files can be used to threaten White's king. Play continues 23.b3 ♜e6∞ when Black threatens ...f5 to trap the bishop, and he may follow up with ...♗xa4 to damage White's queenside structure and safeguard the dark-squared bishop.

22...♝g7!

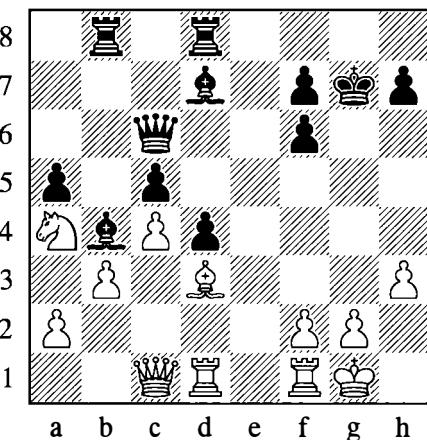
A useful prophylactic move. Obviously White can transpose to the note above by capturing on h7, but he also has some other ideas.

23.♘c1!

This seems like White's most challenging idea, threatening a2-a3 while keeping an eye on the kingside.

23.♗f5 can be met by 23...♗xf5 24.♘xf5 ♜g8?!? when, despite the ugly appearance of his position, Black is safe enough and can obtain plenty of activity after moves like ...♗be8 and ...♔h8.

23.♗a1 threatens a2-a3 but 23...♗a3! is a simple solution. The bishop may appear out of play, but is White's knight any better? It is worth adding that 24.♗xh7 can be met by 24...♗d6∞, transferring the queen to the kingside and preparing ...♗xa4 once again.

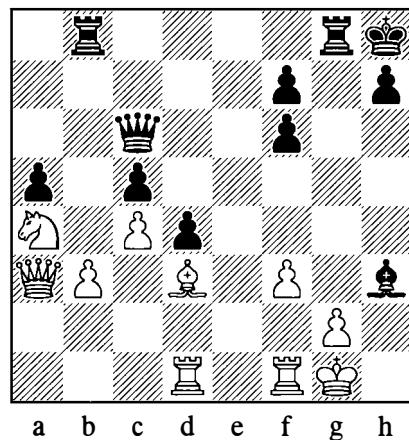


23...♝g8

Preparing to utilize the open g-file.

24.a3 ♔h8 25.f3 ♗xa3! 26.♗xa3 ♔xh3

Clearly the ...gxsf6 structure has its advantages for Black.



27.♗d2 ♜e6!

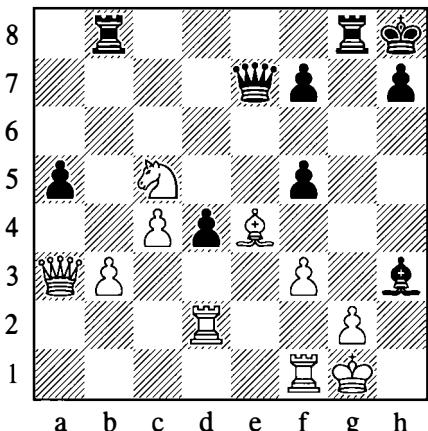
Bringing the queen into the attack.

28.♗e4 f5 29.♘xc5

29.♗xc5 ♜f6! → secures the d4-pawn, leaving White with not only a bishop hanging on e4, but also the threat of ...♗xg2 to worry about.

29...♝e7

White has a lot of pieces under attack and his only decent idea is to give back some material in order to simplify.



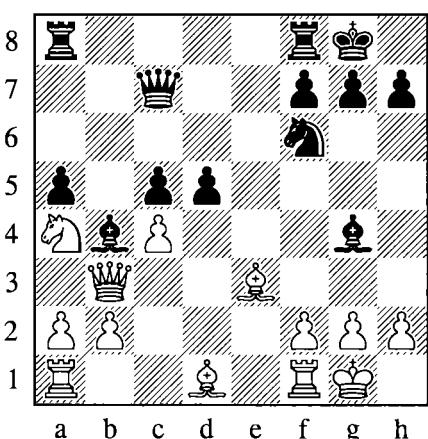
30.♗b2! ♞xe4 31.♗xd4† ♜f6

Now ...♝bd8 is a nasty threat.

32.♗e3 ♜bd8→

The position is objectively balanced, but I would prefer Black's attacking chances in a practical game.

B222) 16.♘d1!



This seems like a surprising choice but I think it is the most challenging option of all. It was also the move which GM Mastrovasilis played against me when I tested this line against him in July 2018. White moves the bishop to a protected square and – unlike the previous variation – keeps control over the g4-square in the event that Black retreats his bishop to d7.

16...dxс4!

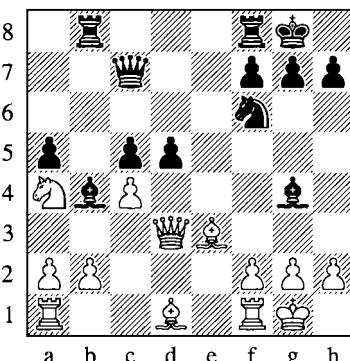
Interestingly, my original analysis continued with 16...♜ab8?!, which seemed most natural at the time. The two moves are similar and indeed they transpose to each other in the main lines of my analysis. During the game, I remembered the general ideas but forgot the move order – but having compared the two moves again, I now believe the game continuation to be a tad more accurate, as it reduces White's options slightly.

Here is a heavily shortened version of my notes on the alternative move:

16...♜ab8?!N 17.♗d3!

17.cxd5 ♜d7! is fine for Black, who is likely to follow up with ...c4 and ...♞d6.

17.♗c2?! is a reasonable alternative, when 17...d4! is Black's best. I analysed this in detail and concluded that Black should be fine, but the variations are pretty complicated and it makes more sense to remove this possibility by exchanging on c4 earlier.



17...dxс4

After 17...d4? 18.Qg5!— Black can only save the b4-bishop by making terrible positional concessions.

18.Wc2!

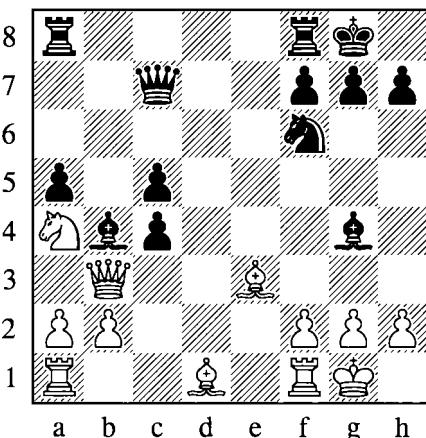
18.Wxc4 Qe6 is almost identical to the Mastrovasilis – Pavlidis game noted below; the only difference is the position of Black's rook on b8 instead of a8, which hardly matters at all, since the rook should move to d8 soon anyway.

The text move completes a clever triangulation of the white queen. The point of it is to provoke ...dxc4 rather than allowing ...d4.

18...Qxd1 19.Bxd1 Qg4 20.g3 Bd8!

We have reached a critical position, which will be analysed in our main line below.

Abstractly, I can think of some minor pros and cons of having the rook on either a8 or b8, but since the rook goes to d8 anyway in our main line, the differences are not so important. So ultimately, it was just the existence of the 17.Wc2?! alternative noted above which swung the decision for me; we already have enough lines to analyse in these positions, so if we can eliminate one more complex possibility, it makes sense to do so.



17.Wc2?!N

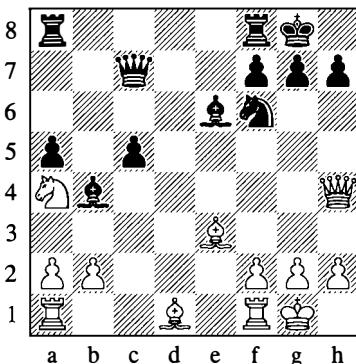
I believe this is the most challenging move.

The game continued:

17.Wxc4 Qe6 18.Wh4

18.Wf4N is met by 18...Wxf4 19.Qxf4 Rad8 when Black is fine, having made the d2-square available for his bishop.

In D. Mastrovasilis – Pavlidis, Rio Achaea 2018, I continued with 18...c4 and went on to draw. I believe it is slightly more accurate to play:



18...Rad8!

Once again, making the d2-square available for the bishop in the event of a2-a3. My analysis continues:

19.a3 Qd2 20.Qxc5 h6!! 21.Qxf8 Qxf8=

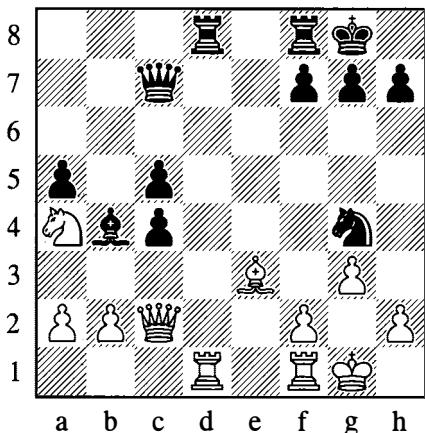
We have reached a strange situation where White is the exchange and a pawn up, but all of his pieces are misplaced. His bishop and both rooks are stuck on the first rank with no active prospects, while his queen only has one square available on g3, from where it can immediately be attacked by ...Qf4. Among other ideas, Black may play ...Qc4 next, immediately winning back the exchange.

17...Qxd1 18.Bxd1

18.Bfxd1 can be met by 18...Qg4 19.g3 Wc6! 20.a3 Qe5 21.axb4 and now Black can either force an immediate draw with 21...Qf3† or play on for a little longer with 21...cxb4?..

18...Qg4 19.g3 Rad8!

19...♝xe3!? 20.fxe3 ♜ae8 21.a3 ♜xe3 22.axb4 cxb4 23.♝d5∞ is also interesting but I prefer the text move.



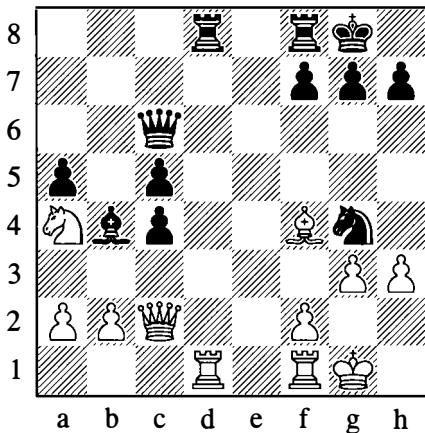
20.♗f4

20.a3 should be met by 20...♛c6! when White has a choice between allowing an immediate draw with 21.axb4 ♜e5 or playing 21.♗f4, which transposes to the 21.a3 line in the next note.

20...♛c6 21.h3

21.♜xd8 ♜xd8 22.h3 ♜f6 transposes to the main line below.

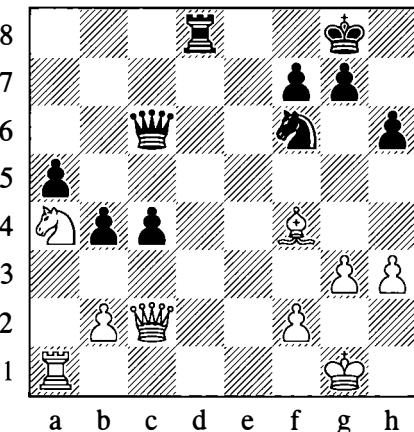
Also after 21.a3 h6 22.axb4 cxb4 23.h3 ♜f6 I see nothing better for White than exchanging rooks, with the same transposition.



21...♝f6 22.♜xd8 ♜xd8 23.a3 h6 24.axb4 cxb4 25.♝a1!

25.♜c1 ♜d5! 26.♜d2 ♜e7 27.♜e1 h5 also offers Black full compensation for the piece.

Now Black has several ways to maintain the balance, but I prefer the following weird-looking idea:

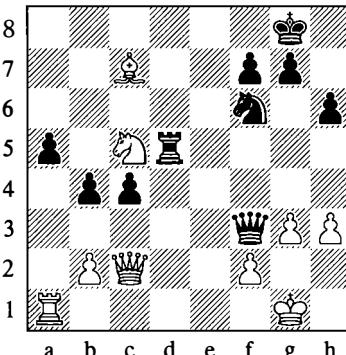


25...♝h5!

Another sensible plan is 25...♜d5 to kick the bishop away, followed by ...♜d6, asking White how can he improve.

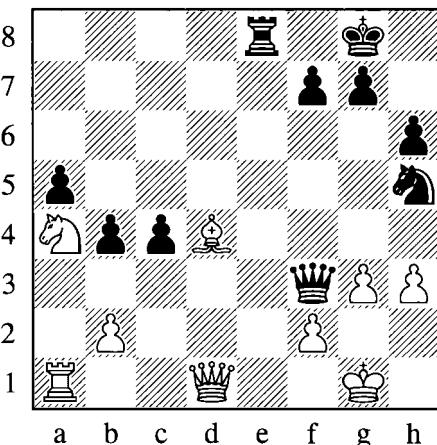
26.♗e5

I also checked: 26.♗e3 ♛f3! 27.♗b6 ♜d3 28.♗c7 ♜f6 29.♗c5 ♜d5 (29...♝e4? is also playable)



30.♛xc4 ♜h5! 31.♛d3 ♛c6= Black either regains the piece or picks up the h3-pawn.

26...♝e8 27.♔d4 ♝f3 28.♗d1



28...♝e2! 29.♗f1

Otherwise ...♝xg3 will be crushing.

29...♝xg3 30.♗g2 ♝e4! 31.♗xe4 ♘xe4∞

Black now has three pawns for the piece and all three results are possible, but a draw is the correct and most likely outcome.

Conclusion

This chapter on the 9.♘xc6 bxc6 variation proved to be a lot more demanding than I first anticipated.

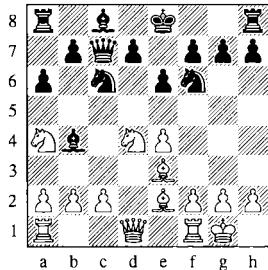
First we analysed the sideline of 10.f4 0–0! 11.e5 ♘d5 12.♘xd5 cxd5, when Black's position is fine but we still had three main lines to check.

Then there was the more challenging option of 10.♗d4? c5! 11.♗c4 0–0, when 12.♘a4! a5! is critical. Black has plenty of dynamic counter-chances but his b4-bishop is under constant threat of being trapped, so it is essential that we know our lines and remain alert at the board. We analysed a few options but the main line continues 13.♗b3! d5! 14.exd5 exd5 15.c4!, after which 15...♝g4! is my improvement which I was able to test in a practical game. Black is in good shape theoretically, and there are plenty of attacking resources in the ensuing lines which could be used to catch an unsuspecting opponent.

Chapter 12

6. ♕e2

9. ♔a4



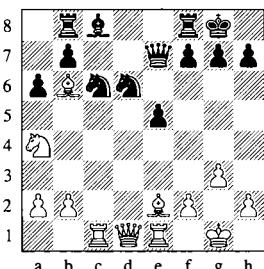
Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2. ♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4. ♘xd4 ♘c6 5. ♘c3 ♜c7
6. ♕e2 a6 7.0–0 ♘f6 8. ♜e3 ♜b4 9. ♔a4

9... ♜e7

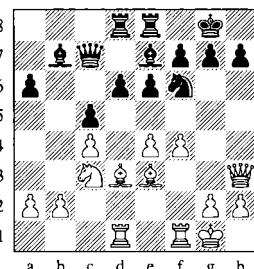
| | |
|------------------|-----|
| A) 10.c4!? | 238 |
| A1) 11. ♘xc6 | 239 |
| A2) 11.c5 0–0 | 240 |
| A21) 12.g3!? | 240 |
| A22) 12. ♜c1 | 243 |
| B) 10. ♘xc6 bxc6 | 244 |
| B1) 11. ♜d3 | 244 |
| B2) 11. ♜b6 ♜b8 | 248 |
| B21) 12. ♜d3 | 248 |
| B22) 12. ♜f3 | 249 |

A22) after 18. ♜e1



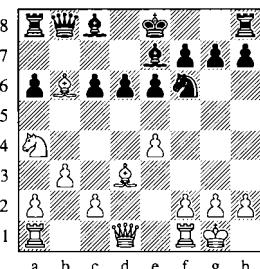
18... ♜f5!N

B1) after 17. ♜ad1



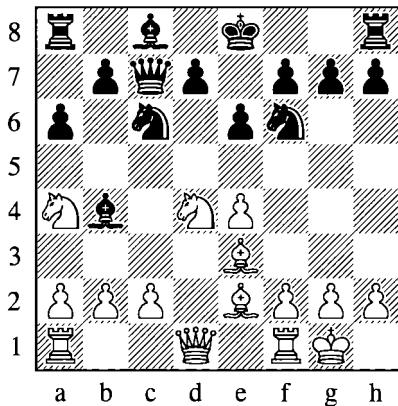
17... ♜c6!N

B21) after 13.b3



13... ♘d7!N

1.e4 c5 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ e6 3.d4 cxd4 4. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$
 5. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 6. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ a6 7.0–0 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 8. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$
 9. $\mathbb{Q}a4$

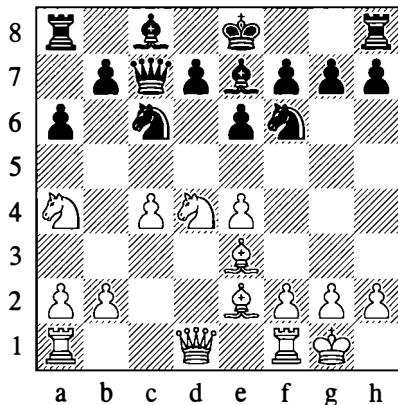


This is the main line, and it will be covered over the course of this and two more chapters.

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

We will start by examining A) 10.c4! before concentrating on the most common continuation of B) 10. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$.

A) 10.c4!!



White sacrifices the e4-pawn in the hope of developing some initiative. This used to be considered an interesting line but modern computer-assisted analysis has demonstrated it

to be harmless. The fact that it has virtually disappeared from correspondence praxis reinforces this view.

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

Black should accept the sacrifice. We will analyse A1) 11. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ followed by the more popular A2) 11.c5. Other moves are of little concern, for instance:

11. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ wastes precious time, and 11... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ is good for Black. (11...f5 has been played a few times but I prefer not to make such a committal move without a pressing reason.)

11. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ does not have much independent value: after 11...0–0 White has nothing better than 12.c5, transposing to variation A22.

11. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}g5$?

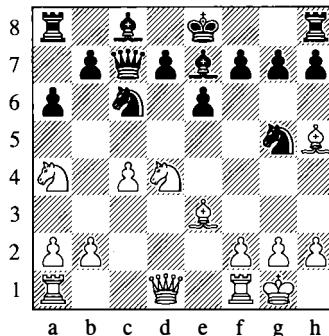
This seems like the simplest solution.

11... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ should be fine, as White is likely to follow up with c4-c5 and $\mathbb{Q}c1$, with similar play to the main lines below.

12. $\mathbb{Q}h5$?

12. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ bxc6 13.c5 0–0 is perfectly fine for Black.

12.c5 should be met by 12... $\mathbb{Q}xf3\#N$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ d5! when White has enough play to claim equal chances, but nothing more.



12...0–0 13.c5

After 13.f4 $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6\infty$ Black does

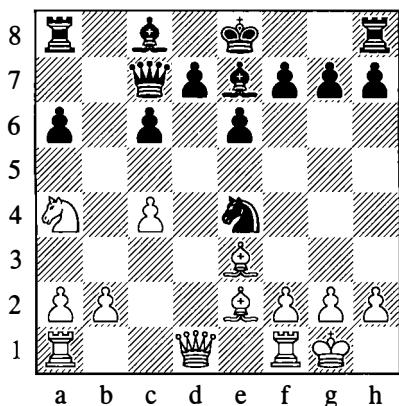
not seem worse at all.

We have been following Arutinian – Panagiotopoulos, Litohoto 1999. Here I suggest:

13... $\mathbb{B}b8N$

The position resembles variation A22, the only difference being that White's bishop is placed on h5 and Black's knight on g5. The play is likely to develop in a similar way to the main line, and may well transpose.

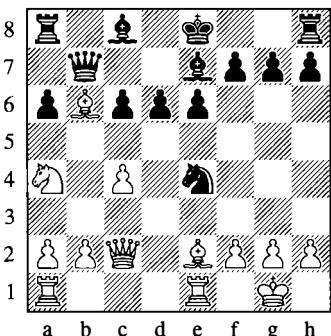
A1) 11. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{B}xc6$



Black should recapture this way in order to strengthen his centre and open the b-file.

12. $\mathbb{W}d4$

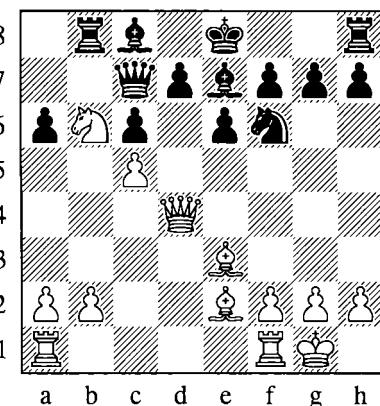
Another game continued 12. $\mathbb{B}b6$ $\mathbb{W}b7$ 13. $\mathbb{E}e1$ d6 14. $\mathbb{W}c2$ when I found the following improvement:



14... $\mathbb{Q}f6!$ N (14...f5 gave White every reason to be happy after 15. $\mathbb{E}ad1$ 0–0 16. $\mathbb{Q}d3!$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}a5$ $\mathbb{B}b8$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}b6$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xc8$ $\mathbb{W}xc8$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ when he had two strong bishops and a weak e6-pawn to target, Kudryavtsev – Steinman, email 2011) 15. $\mathbb{E}ad1$ 0–0 16. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{B}b8!$ Black is at least equal and it is not easy for White to prove his compensation.

12... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}b6$ $\mathbb{B}b8$ 14. c5

Here Black must make an important decision between two playable options.



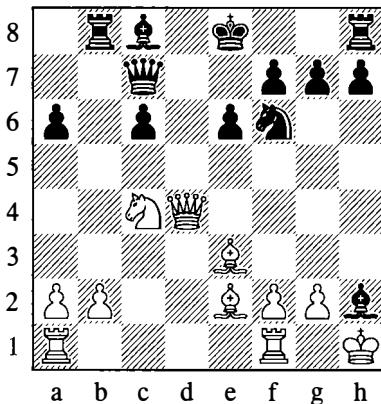
14... d6!

The more popular 14... e5! is also objectively fine, despite yielding quite poor practical results for Black. However, I prefer the idea of breaking White's clamp on the dark squares when I get the chance.

15. cxd6!

15. $\mathbb{Q}xc8$ should be met by the simple 15... $\mathbb{E}xc8$ 16. $cxd6$ $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ with a threat against h2, and after something like 17. g3 0–0 18. $\mathbb{Q}xa6$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 19. $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{B}b8\#$ White may have regained his pawn, but Black has better centralized pieces and his rooks have a choice of open files.

15... $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}xh2\#$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}h1$



17...c5! 18. $\mathbb{W}xc5$ $\mathbb{W}xc5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$
20. $\mathbb{E}ac1!$ $\mathbb{Q}e4!$

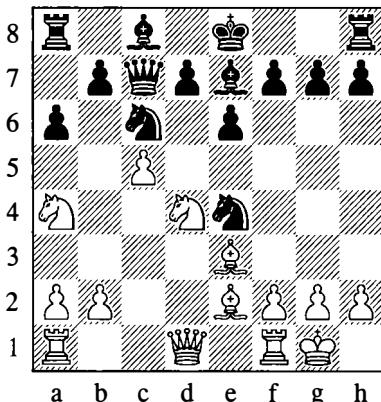
It is important to challenge the strong bishop.

21. $\mathbb{Q}a7$
21. $\mathbb{Q}a3!?$ N $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{E}d8=$

21... $\mathbb{E}b7$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ 0-0 23. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ f5=

Black had no problems in Lobo – Costa, corr. 2000.

A2) 11.c5



This is the main line. White's simple plan is to clamp down on the b6-square and make it hard for Black to develop his light-squared bishop.

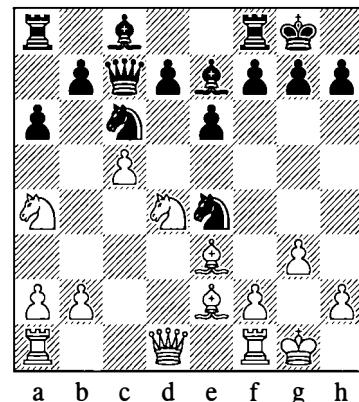
11...0-0

We will analyse the interesting sideline of A21) 12. $\mathbb{Q}g3!?$ before tackling the main line of A22) 12. $\mathbb{E}c1$.

12. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ can once again be met by 12... $\mathbb{Q}g5!$, when 13. $\mathbb{Q}h5$ $\mathbb{E}b8$ is nothing special for White, as the bishop on h5 does not make a big difference.

A21) 12. $\mathbb{Q}g3!?$

The idea of this move is to improve the prospects of both of White's bishops: the light-squared one may go to f3 and retreat to g2 in the event of ... $\mathbb{Q}g5$, and the dark-squared one may go to f4 at a suitable moment.



12...e5!

I like this direct approach for Black.

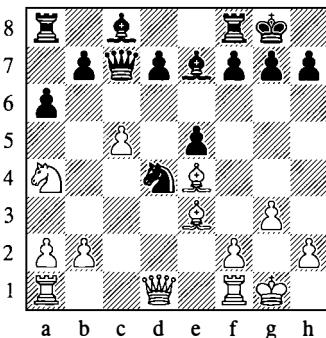
I also analysed 12... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ and found it to be playable, but the text move seems like a better choice all round.

13. $\mathbb{Q}f5$

13. $\mathbb{Q}f3!?$ N

This untested move is worth mentioning but Black has a nice way of meeting it.

13... $\mathbb{Q}xd4!$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$



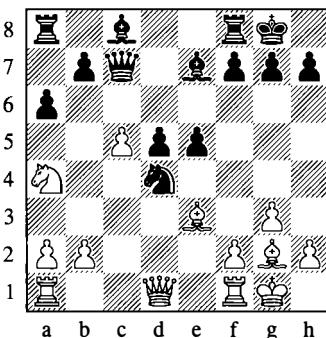
14...d5!

Black opens the position for his light-squared bishop, highlighting the weaknesses created around white's king after g2-g3.

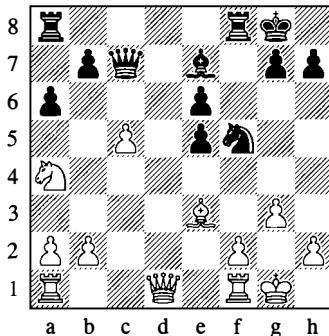
15. $\mathbb{Q}g2$

After 15. $\mathbb{Q}xd5?!$ $\mathbb{Q}h3!$ Black intends ... $\mathbb{B}ad8$ with excellent play. The attempt to change the course of the game with 16. $\mathbb{Q}xd4?!$ $\mathbb{Q}xf1$ 17. $\mathbb{W}xf1$ $exd4$ 18. $\mathbb{W}c4$ $\mathbb{B}ad8$ leaves Black with an extra exchange and a better position but it is worth mentioning the following nice idea: 19. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5?!$ 20. $\mathbb{W}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 21. $\mathbb{W}e4$ (21. $\mathbb{W}c4??$ b5! –+ exploits the pin along the c-file) 21... $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ Black keeps an extra passed pawn.

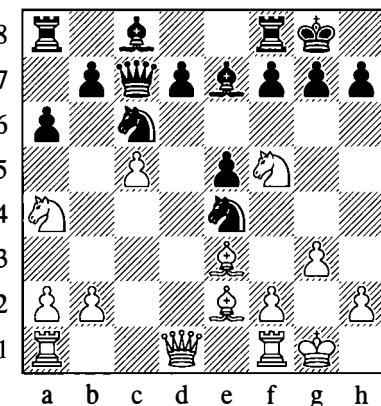
After the text move White intends to exchange on d4 and obtain a positional advantage, so we should remove the knight and threaten to advance the central pawns.

15... $\mathbb{Q}f5!$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}e6!$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $fxe6$

Black's doubled e-pawns may appear weak but they help to control some important central squares, as well as providing an open f-file. White would love to reroute his knight to e4, but this seems to be impossible due to the need to protect the c5-pawn. Play might continue:

18. $\mathbb{W}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 19. $\mathbb{W}xe3$ $\mathbb{W}c6$ 20. $b3$ $\mathbb{Q}f5=$

Followed by ... $\mathbb{B}af8$. Black has a stable position with activity along the f-file, and he may be able to generate additional play with ...h5-h4 later.

13...d5 14. $cxd6$ $\mathbb{Q}xd6!N$

14... $\mathbb{Q}xd6?!$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ $\mathbb{W}xd6$ 16. $f3\pm$ left Black with serious coordination problems in A. Kovacevic – Perunovic, Lazarevac 1999.

15. $\mathbb{Q}xe7\#$ $\mathbb{W}xe7$

For the moment, Black has an extra pawn on e5, along with a possible outpost on d4 and some light-square targets on the kingside. Obviously White has some compensation in the shape of the bishop pair and his generally active pieces. Perhaps most importantly, he can establish a seemingly powerful pin, which may have been the reason why Perunovic rejected this line in the aforementioned game, but Black has enough resources to deal with it.

16.♗c5!

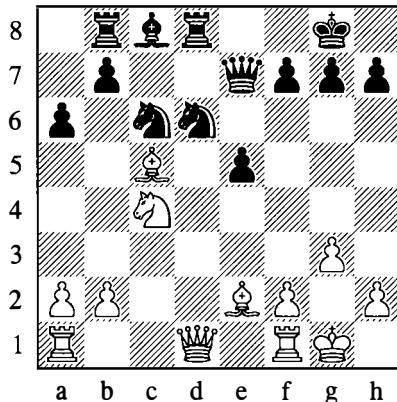
Definitely the critical continuation.

16.♗b6 allows 16...♗h3! when Black easily simplifies to an equal position: 17.♗xa8 ♗xf1 18.♗xf1 ♗xa8 19.♗c5 ♗d8= Followed by ...♗e6 and ...♗b5, heading for d4.

16...♗d8 17.♗b6

Bringing the knight into play with tempo.

17...♗b8 18.♗c4



18...♗d4!

Black is in time to relieve the pin and avoid losing a piece. True, White will still win the exchange, but Black keeps a strong pawn on e5 and a mighty centralized knight.

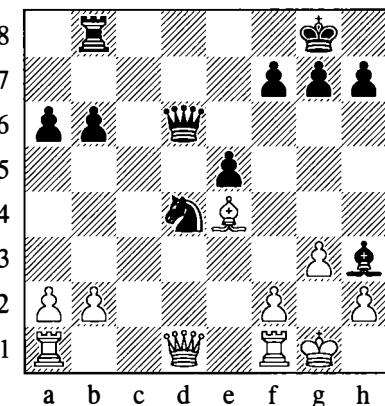
19.♗d3

Safeguarding the bishop seems the most natural choice. White has some other playable moves but the general character of the position will remain similar.

19...b6 20.♗xd6 ♗xd6 21.♗xd6 ♗xd6

22.♗e4 ♗h3

Developing with tempo and forcing White to make a decision.



23.♗e1?!

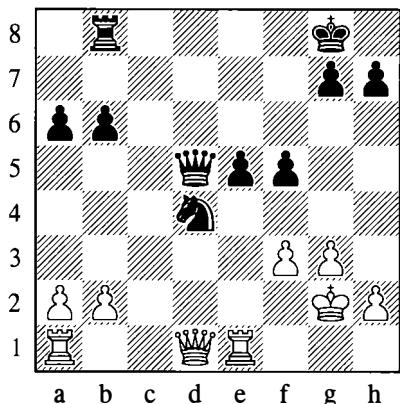
White should prefer 23.♗h5, although after 23...♗xf1 24.♗xh7† ♗f8 25.♗xf1 ♗h6!= Black's strong knight ensures him of decent chances in the endgame.

The text move is more ambitious and therefore critical, but it seems to me that the position could turn more dangerous for White than for Black.

23...♗f5!

Not only attacking the bishop, but also introducing ...♗g4 ideas. Therefore White has nothing better than offering the following exchange.

24.♗g2 ♗xg2 25.♗xg2 ♗d5† 26.f3



26... $\mathbb{E}c8!$

26... $\mathbb{E}c8!?$ is another good option, intending ... $\mathbb{E}g4$ to win the f3-pawn.

The text move seems even better though, as the deadly threat of ... $\mathbb{E}c2\#$ forces White's reply:

27. $\mathbb{E}c1$ $\mathbb{E}xc1$ 28. $\mathbb{W}xc1$ $\mathbb{W}xf3\#$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{W}d5!?$

Black has some winning chances due to his strong pieces and safer king. (29... $\mathbb{W}g4\#$ forces a draw if Black wants it.)

Black has tried a few other options but I think it is most useful to move the rook away from a future $\mathbb{Q}b6$ attack.

13.g3

13. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}g5!$ is fine for Black, as usual.

13...e5!

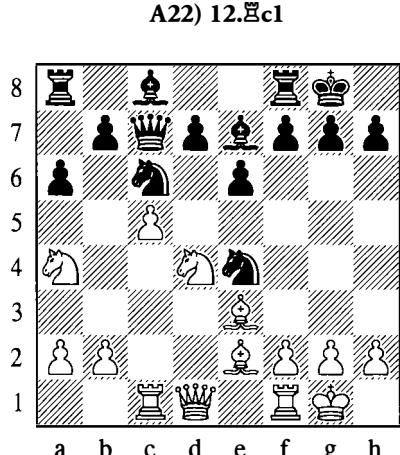
Once again I like the forcing approach.

14. $\mathbb{Q}f5$

14. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $d5!$ works in much the same way as in the 13. $\mathbb{Q}f3!?$ N line in the notes to variation A21 above.

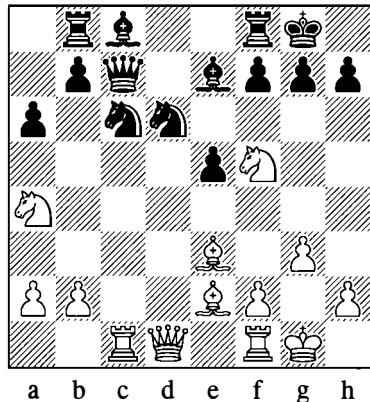
14...d5 15.cxd6 $\mathbb{Q}xd6$

The position is the same as the previous variation, except that the moves $\mathbb{E}c1$ and ... $\mathbb{E}b8$ have been played. Although White's rook is actively placed on the c-file, I would say that the change in the position actually makes Black's life slightly easier, as $\mathbb{Q}b6$ will no longer come with tempo, which means that White does not have the $\mathbb{Q}b6$ -c4 resource available.



This is by far the most common move.

12... $\mathbb{E}b8$

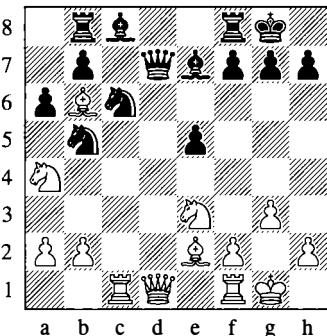


16. $\mathbb{Q}b6$

16. $\mathbb{Q}xe7\#$ $\mathbb{W}xe7$ 17. $\mathbb{E}e1$ occurred in Brenjo – Tadic, Ruma 2017, when 17... $\mathbb{W}f6!?$ N would have made it hard for White to justify his pawn sacrifice.

16... $\mathbb{W}d7$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xe7\#$

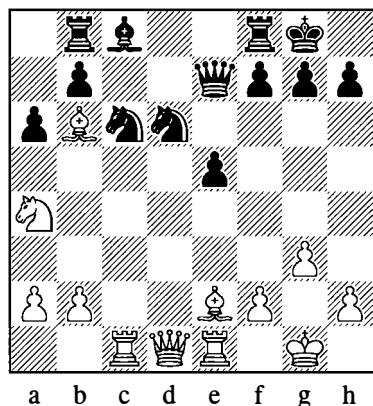
17. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ is well met by 17... $\mathbb{Q}b5!$ when Black will establish a powerful knight on d4. For instance:



18. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ (18. $\mathbb{Q}d5?!$ occurred in Tukhaev – Hambleton, Stockholm 2017, when 18... $\mathbb{Q}bd4!N$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xe7\#$ $\mathbb{W}xe7$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $\mathbb{W}g5$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xf8$ $\mathbb{W}xc1\#$ would have been great for Black) 18... $\mathbb{Q}bd4$ 19. a3 Now in Lamoureux – Fierz, Switzerland 2006, 19... $\mathbb{Q}d8?N\#$ would have left White with inadequate compensation for the pawn.

17... $\mathbb{W}xe7$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}e1$

Here I found a promising new idea:



18... $\mathbb{Q}f5!N$

18... $\mathbb{Q}h3$ is certainly playable, and 19. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}fe8$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $\mathbb{Q}bd8$ led to an eventual win for

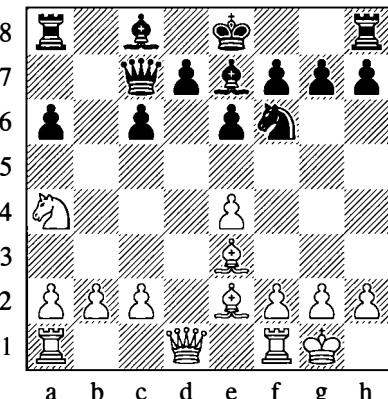
Black in A. Horvath – Ivanisevic, Hungary 2016, but White had the option of 21. $\mathbb{Q}xc6?N$ $\mathbb{Q}bcx6$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}b6$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}c5=$ when Black has nothing better than repeating moves.

The point of the text move is seen after:

19. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ e4 20. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}bc8\infty$

The e4-pawn nullifies White's light-squared bishop. White has some compensation with the two bishops and may still be able to claim equal chances, but I would take Black's position with the extra pawn.

B) 10. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{Q}bcx6$



In the remainder of this chapter, we will consider B1) 11. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ and B2) 11. $\mathbb{Q}b6$.

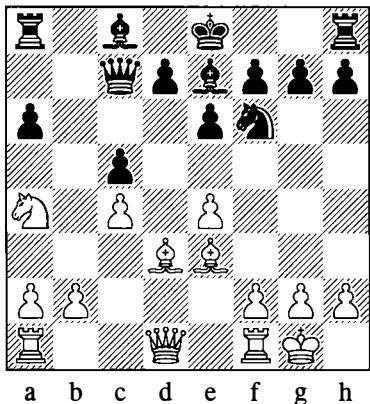
11. $\mathbb{Q}b6$ is the big main line, and will be examined in the following two chapters.

B1) 11. $\mathbb{Q}d3$

This move is usually connected with a kingside attacking plan. Black should be able to avoid any serious danger, but he needs to know a few key ideas and manoeuvres. There are a few decent moves here but I have chosen what I consider the most principled continuation.

11... $c5$ 12. $c4$

Having defined his central structure, White will follow up with $\mathbb{Q}c3$ and f2-f4, and usually $\mathbb{W}f3-h3$ before launching his attack. The arising positions have a lot in common with certain variations of the Scheveningen.

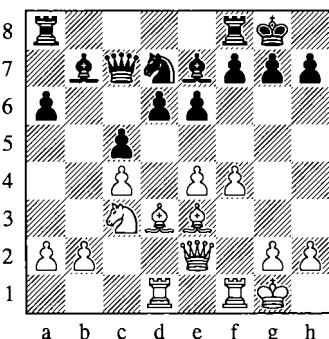


12... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ 0–0 14. $f4$ d6

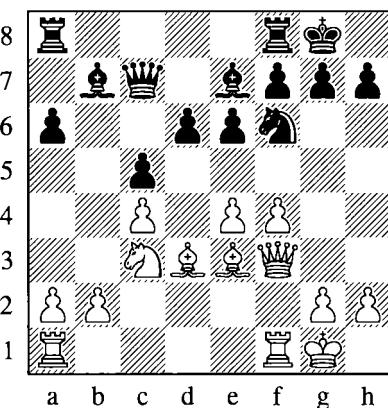
Having made their obvious developing moves, both sides must decide how to position their pieces. As mentioned above, White will usually transfer his queen to the kingside and play for an attack. Generally Black should position his rooks on e8 and d8, followed by the defensive manoeuvre ... $\mathbb{Q}d7-f8$, which also has the benefit of vacating the f6-square to activate the dark-squared bishop.

15. $\mathbb{W}f3$

15. $\mathbb{W}e2$ is a bit slow and allows Black a few decent options. I suggest 15... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ and now a slight refinement:



16... $\mathbb{Q}ad8$!N I like the idea of developing the rook before committing the dark-squared bishop. (16... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ was played in Liss – Tsesarsky, Kfar Sava 1997, and a few other games. Black's plan involves ... $\mathbb{Q}d4$ followed by ...e5, but White has the interesting option of 17.e5!N, when my analysis continues: 17...dxe5 18.f5 e4! 19. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ $\mathbb{W}xb7$ 21. fxe6! fxe6 22. bxc3 $\mathbb{W}c6$ We reach a dynamically balanced position where White's advantage of bishop over knight is balanced out by Black's better pawn structure. Nevertheless, I would prefer to bring my rook into play first, rather than giving White the e4-e5 option in the first place.)



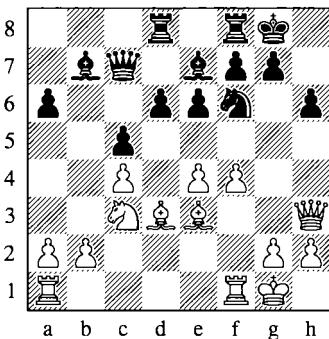
15... $\mathbb{Q}ad8$ 16. $\mathbb{W}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}fe8$

This natural move has been Black's usual choice, and it deserves to be our main line.

With that being said, an interesting second option is:

16...h6?

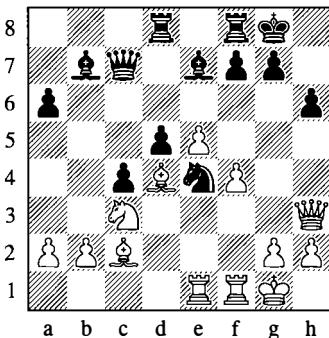
The idea of this move is to prepare ...d5. It is necessary to put the pawn on h6 first, so that if White answers ...d5 with e4-e5, we have the powerful rebuttal ... $\mathbb{Q}d4$, followed by $\mathbb{exf6}$, ... $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ when we regain the piece with a positional advantage, and without allowing a nasty accident on h7.

17. $\mathbb{Q}ae1$

I also checked: 17. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ d5! 18. cxd5 exd5 19. e5 $\mathbb{Q}c8!$ 20. $\mathbb{W}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ c4 22. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ d4! 23. $\mathbb{Q}xg4$ dxc3 24. bxc3 $\mathbb{Q}xg4$ 25. $\mathbb{W}xg4$ $\mathbb{Q}a5\infty$ Black creates counterplay against White's weak pawns on the queenside.

17... d5 18. cxd5 c4! 19. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ exd5 20. e5 $\mathbb{Q}e4$
21. $\mathbb{Q}d4$

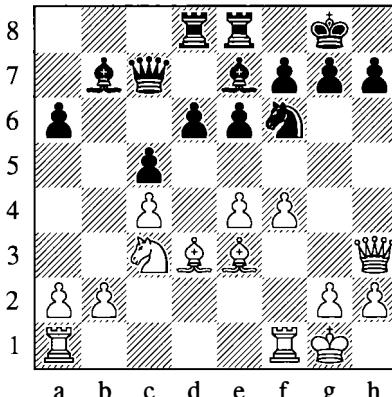
All of this happened in Kuhne – Neytusch, corr. 2009. My improvement is:

21... f6!N 22. $\mathbb{W}e3$ $\mathbb{W}c6$

White has a nice blockade and well-placed pieces, but Black is well placed to contest the central squares. I believe the position should be roughly equal with mutual chances. Best play seems to be:

23. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ fxe5 24. fxe5 $\mathbb{Q}h4!$ 25. g3 $\mathbb{Q}xf1\uparrow$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}xf1$ $\mathbb{Q}e7\infty$

I see nothing wrong with Black's position; he can consider regrouping with ... $\mathbb{Q}g5$ -e6, when his knight will be superbly placed.

17. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$

There are three other options worth considering:

17. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ is a little slow. In Stefansson – Oral, Varadero 2000, Black could have played 17... h6!N to get an improved version of the idea mentioned in the previous note. Play might continue 18. f5? (18. $\mathbb{Q}ae1$ and 18. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ are both met by 18... d5 of course) 18... exf5 19. $\mathbb{W}xf5$ $\mathbb{W}d7\geq$ with active play for Black.

17. $\mathbb{Q}ae1$ should be met by 17... $\mathbb{Q}d7!$ when the knight can either defend the king from f8 or take an active route via b8-c6-d4 if the position demands it. 18. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ shows White's aggressive intentions, so 18... $\mathbb{Q}f8!$ is the appropriate response, as in Shirov – Anand, Wijk aan Zee 1999. Just one piece is enough to protect the king, and Black will continue with ... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ -d4.

I also considered an untested idea:

17. $\mathbb{Q}g4!?$ N

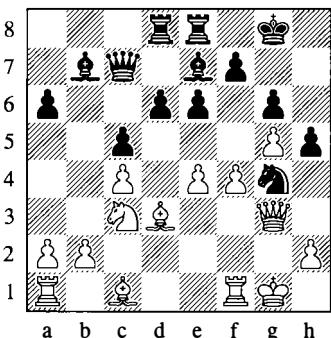
Here I discovered a fantastic resource.

17... h5!! 18. g5

18. gxh5 d5! is rather unclear but I believe Black has the upper hand due to his impressive centralization.

18... $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ g6 20. $\mathbb{W}g3$

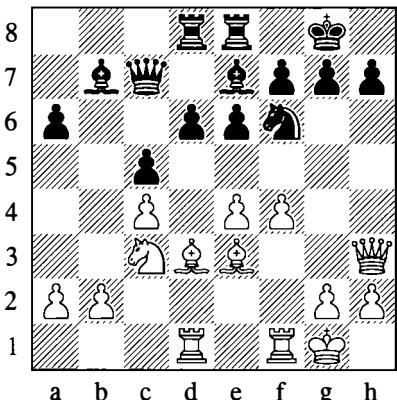
White has created the threat of h2-h3 so Black has to react dynamically.



20...d5! 21.h3 d4! 22.Qe2 Qe3 23.Qxe3 dxe3
24.Qxe3 Qd7 $\bar{=}$

Black's bishop pair, active rooks and White's overextended pawn structure add up to more than enough counterplay for the sacrificed pawn. Black can continue with ...Qd8, ...Qf8-g7 and maybe establish a battery on the a8-h1 diagonal.

After the text move I found an interesting new idea.



17...Qc6! N

Threatening a double attack with ...Qb7, pressing both the e4- and b2-pawns. The combination of ...Qc6 and ...Qb7 is quite thematic for this type of position, although Black should think carefully before making the queen move, as will become clear in the next note.

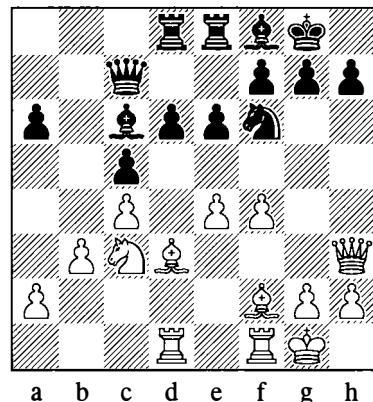
18.b3 Qf8

18...Qb7? would be a mistake in view of 19.e5 dxe5 20.fxe5 Qe4 when the machine points out the surprising 21.Qd2! and White is clearly better due to the threat of Qf4. (Compare the line 21.Qf4 Qg5 22.Qg3 Qe4! when Black survives thanks to the pin along the d-file.)

The text move avoids any such troubles and prepares to fortify the kingside with ...g6 and ...Qg7, followed by ...Qb7 and/or regrouping the knight. In the future, Black can also consider a5-a4 to weaken White's queenside.

19.Qf2?

White discourages ...g6 by preparing to go to h4 with the bishop.



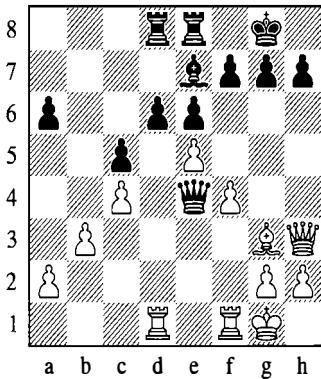
19...Qe7!?

A slightly surprising choice, but there is nothing wrong with it. White's bishop is not doing anything special on f2. If White wants to play for more than a draw, the continuation might be:

20.Qg3 Qb7 21.f5!?

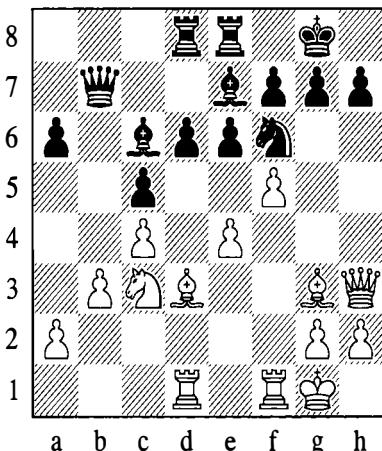
21.Qde1 Qb4! offers enough counterplay.

Another interesting line is: 21.e5 Qe4!
22.Qxe4 Qxe4 23.Qxe4 Qxh4



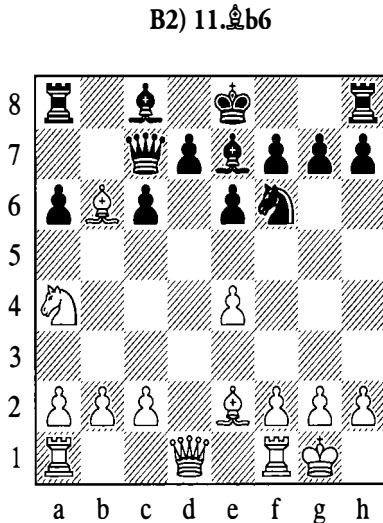
24.f5 dx5 25.fxе6 f6!∞ With double-edged play.

The text move is a reasonable attacking try but Black has sufficient resources against it. My analysis continues:



21...exf5 22.♕xf5 ♖d7 23.♗f2 ♗e6 24.♘d5 ♘g4! 25.♗f3 ♘e5 26.♗xe5 dx5∞

Engines seem to like White's position but I really believe in Black's bishop pair and stable pawn structure. He has a few possible plans from here, the most ambitious being ...f6, ...♗h8 and ...♗f8. Later, a well-timed ...a5-a4 could also prove useful.



With this move White tries to profit from displacing Black's queen, but the idea has never gained much popularity or created any serious problems for Black.

11...♗b8

Now White can point to the fact that ...♗b8 is impossible. On the other hand, it is not clear what purpose the bishop serves on b6.

I considered two pathways, with B21) 12.♗d3 being the main alternative to B22) 12.♗f3.

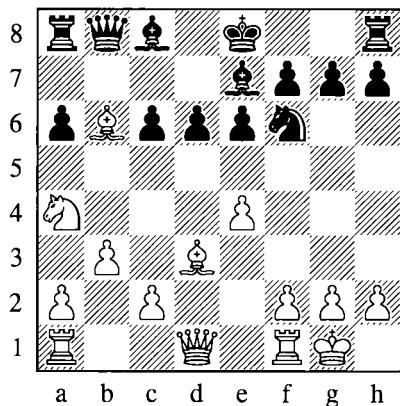
B21) 12.♗d3

This move came to my attention after GM Landa played it. I quite like the way Black responded in the game:

12...d6!

Fighting for the dark squares while preparing ...♗d7 in order to kick the annoying bishop from b6.

13.b3

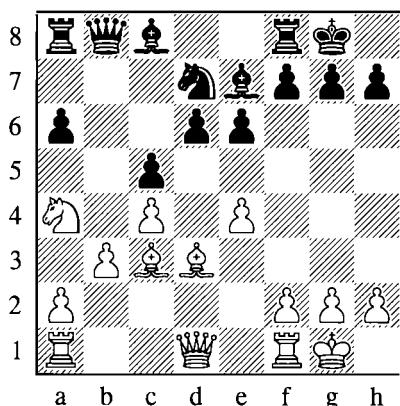


13... $\mathbb{Q}d7!?$ N

I find this the most logical and flexible continuation.

The game continued 13...e5 14.c4 c5 15. $\mathbb{Q}a5$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ and here White can improve with: 16. $\mathbb{Q}b6!$ N (16.b4 cxb4 was fine for Black in Landa – Nanu, France 2013, with the c4-pawn a long-term target) 16... $\mathbb{Q}d8!$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}c3!$ ± Is it important for White to keep the bishop pair, or at least avoid exchanging the dark-squared bishops. In the resulting position, his chances are slightly better.

14. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 0–0 15.c4 c5 16. $\mathbb{Q}c3$



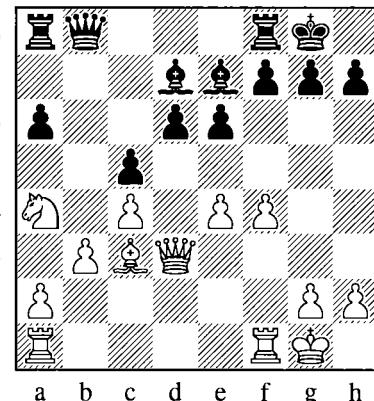
16... $\mathbb{Q}e5!$

A highly thematic manoeuvre. If White exchanges on e5 then Black will have the bishop pair, a strong outpost on d4 and control over the d-file. If White ignores the knight, Black will either swap it for the bishop on d3 or reroute it to d4. In all these scenarios, it is not obvious what the knight on a4 is doing.

17.f4 $\mathbb{Q}xd3!$

17... $\mathbb{Q}c6!?$ would be the wrong choice here in view of 18. $\mathbb{W}h5!$ followed by $\mathbb{E}ae1-e3$ with a dangerous attack.

18. $\mathbb{W}xd3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$



19. $\mathbb{E}f3!?$

If 19. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{W}b7$ Black always has the prospect of counterplay with ...a5-a4.

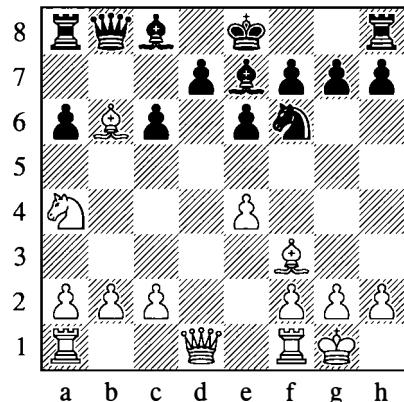
The text move is rather aggressive, but Black has a decent position after:

19... $\mathbb{Q}xa4$ 20.bxa4 $\mathbb{W}d8!$

Intending ... $\mathbb{Q}f6$. White has an active position and a better bishop, but his weakened structure could be an issue in the long run.

B22) 12. $\mathbb{Q}f3$

This is the main line and has achieved good results for White, but I don't see anything scary about it.



12...0-0 13.c4 d6!

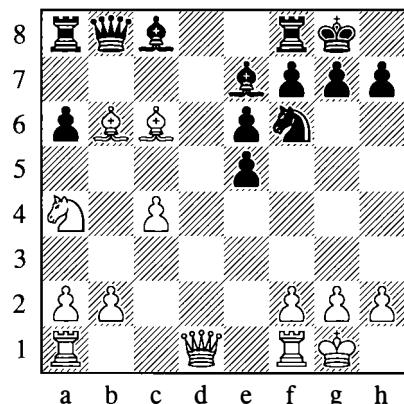
Otherwise White might play c4-c5 with a bind.

14.e5!?

Another good example continued 14.b4 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}a5$ $\mathbb{Q}a7!$ followed by ... $\mathbb{Q}b7$, with sufficient counterplay for Black in Baranowski – Stephan, email 2008.

14...dxe5 15. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$

15. $\mathbb{Q}e2N$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 16.c5 is an interesting attempt by the engines, but it seems to me that after 16... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ followed by ...f5 and ... $\mathbb{Q}f6-d5$ Black has an excellent game.



15... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$

The position remained double-edged in Kravtsov – Venkatesh, Metz 2011. Once again. White has an edge on the queenside with his 3-1 pawn majority, but Black controls the centre with his doubled e-pawns. A natural plan would be ...f5, ...e4 and ... $\mathbb{Q}e5$, combining piece activity with a possible direct attack with ...f4-f3.

Conclusion

This chapter introduced the important topic of 9. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ by dealing with a few secondary lines after 9... $\mathbb{Q}e7$. We started with 10.c4!?, $\mathbb{Q}xe4$, whereby White sacrifices a pawn for some initiative. 11.c5 0-0 is the normal continuation, and now 12.g3! is an interesting move which deserves more attention, and forced me to find a lot of original ideas, whereas the more common 12. $\mathbb{Q}c1$, though still playable, is not quite so challenging.

We then moved on to the most popular 10. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ bxc6 variation, the main lines of which will be covered in the next two chapters. Among the minor options covered here, 11. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ is a reasonable move connected with a kingside attacking plan, but Black gets a solid game with my prescribed plan. Finally, we saw that 11. $\mathbb{Q}b6$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ can lead to a dynamic situation with an unusual pawn structure, where Black's activity and central control provide him with plenty of compensation for the doubled e-pawns.



6.♘e2

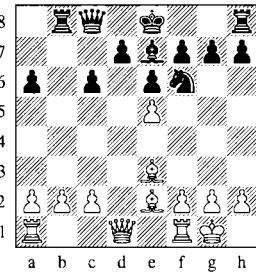
13.e5

Variation Index

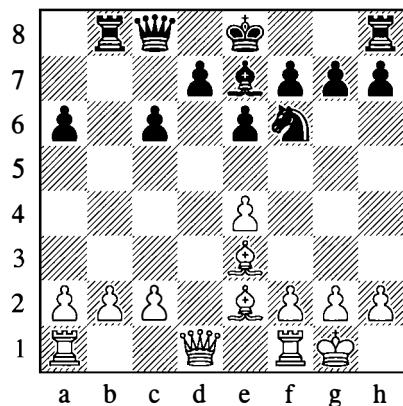
1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘c6 5.♘c3 ♗c7 6.♗e2 a6 7.0-0 ♘f6
8.♗e3 ♘b4 9.♘a4 ♘e7 10.♘xc6 bxc6 11.♘b6 ♘b8 12.♘xc8 ♗xc8 13.e5!?

13...♘d5

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- 1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♗c6
 5.♘c3 ♖c7 6.♗e2 a6 7.0–0 ♘f6 8.♗e3 ♖b4
 9.♘a4 ♕e7 10.♘xc6 bxc6 11.♘b6 ♖b8
 12.♘xc8 ♖xc8



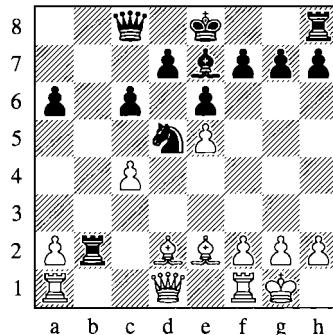
13.e5!?

This is a serious alternative to the main line of 13.♗d4, which is covered in the next chapter. Although the text move has not been played in as many games or scored as well, I consider it to be objectively just as strong. In many of the ensuing lines, White enjoys either the bishop pair or a bishop-versus-knight advantage, as well as a slightly better pawn structure. Black, on the other hand, tends to benefit from slightly more active pieces and a central pawn majority.

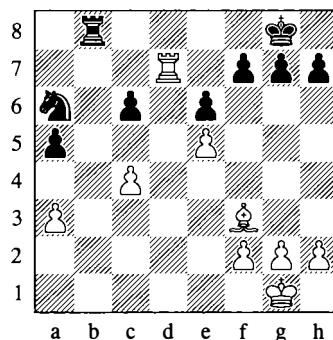
13...♘d5

We will consider the not-so-challenging A) 14.♗d4 followed by the main line of B) 14.♘c1.

14.♗d2?! ♖xb2 15.c4 is dubious in view of:

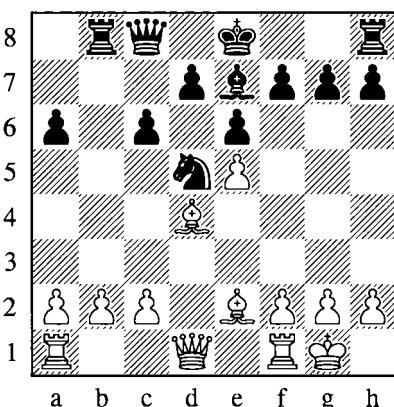


- 15...♗b4! 16.♗xb4 ♖xb4 17.♗f3 ♖b8 18.♗b1
 ♖xb1 19.♗xb1 a5 20.♗d1 0–0 21.a3 ♘a6
 22.♗xb8 ♖xb8 23.♗xd7



- 23...♘c5 24.♗d1 g5! White had to be careful to hold the draw in Gora – Sliceanddice, Internet (freestyle-rapid) 2006.

A) 14.♗d4

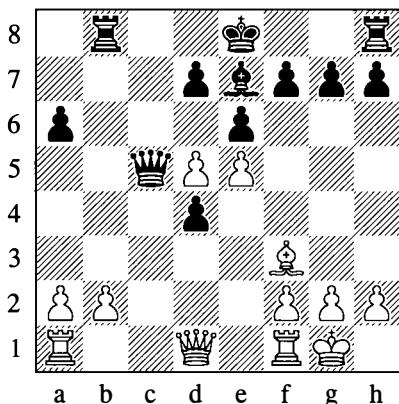


This move allows Black to fight for the initiative with:

14...c5! 15.c4 cxd4 16.cxd5 $\mathbb{W}c5!$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}f3$

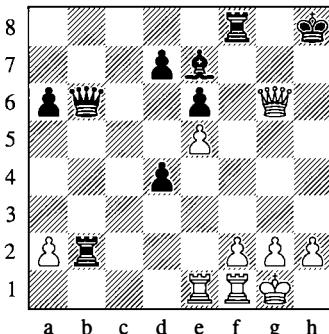
17. $\mathbb{Q}xa6$ $\mathbb{W}xd5$ 18. $\mathbb{W}e2$ 0–0 was fine for Black in Cuesta Bustos – De la Riva Aguado, Ubeda 1997.

17.dxe6 has been played in several games, all of which saw Black recapture with the f-pawn. 17...dxe6N seems easier to me, and after 18. $\mathbb{Q}xa6$ $\mathbb{W}xe5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{W}a5$ Black's central pawns are no less valuable than White's queenside ones.



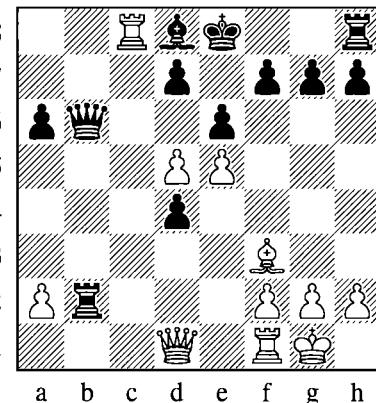
17... $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{W}b6$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}c8\ddagger$

Here is another nice line I analysed: 19.dxe6 fxe6 20. $\mathbb{Q}e4\text{?N}$ (20. $\mathbb{Q}c8\ddagger$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ transposes to our main line below) 20...0–0 21. $\mathbb{W}h5$ g6 22. $\mathbb{Q}xg6$ hxg6 23. $\mathbb{W}xg6\ddagger$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}ce1$



24... $\mathbb{Q}bx2\text{!}$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ d3= White gives perpetual.

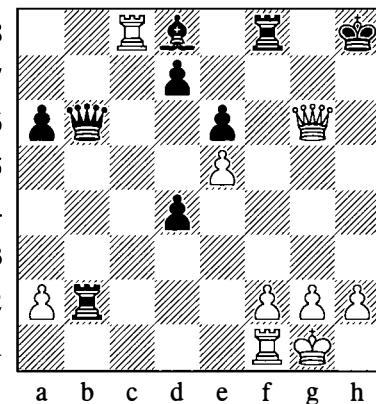
19... $\mathbb{Q}d8$



20.dxe6 fxe6 21. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 0–0 22. $\mathbb{W}h5$ g6

The players agreed a draw here in Kravtsiv – Brodsky, Cappelle-la-Grande 2008, in view of the following finish.

23. $\mathbb{Q}xg6$ hxg6 24. $\mathbb{W}xg6\ddagger$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$



25. $\mathbb{W}h6\ddagger$

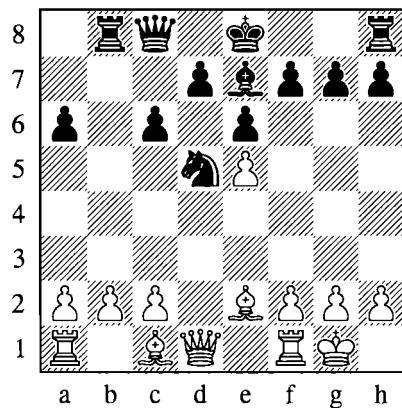
25.g4 d3 gave White nothing better than forcing the draw in the same way in Dimitrijevic – Andrijevic, Belgrade 2003.

25... $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 26. $\mathbb{W}g6\ddagger$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$

$\frac{1}{2}-\frac{1}{2}$ Miralles – Lautier, Escaldes 1998.

B) 14.♗c1

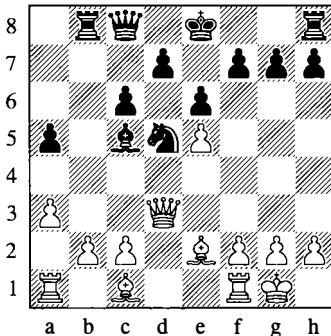
This is the normal move. The bishop retreats out of harm's way while defending b2.

**14...♞c5!**

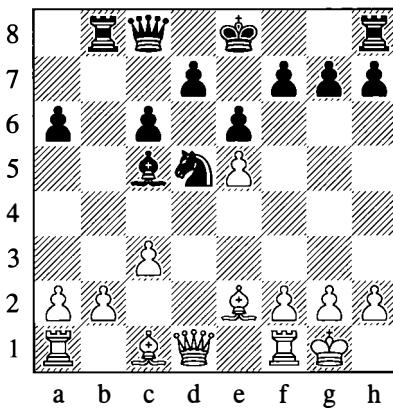
An important move, making room for the knight to retreat to e7 in the event that White kicks it away with c2-c4.

We now have **B1) 15.c3!?, B2) 15.♗h1, B3) 15.♗d3, B4) 15.c4 and B5) 15.♗d3!.**

It is also possible for White to play 15.a3!?, with similar ideas as in variation B1. Black can proceed in the same way as explained in that variation below: 15...a5 16.♗d3 (16.♗d3? ♜c7 17.♗e2 ♘d4 18.c4 ♔e7 19.♗g4 ♗xe5† saw Black gain a free pawn in Bosboom – Boersma, Amsterdam 1985) Here I found an improvement over Martinez Duany – Lettieri, Sitges 2010:



16...♛c7N 17.♗e4 0–0 18.♗d3 f5† Black has a healthy position with plenty of active play.

B1) 15.c3!?

Although this move is not seen too much in practice, engines seem to like it at first glance. White's idea is to avoid the committal c2-c4 push, and instead take control of some dark squares in preparation for ♘d3 and ♛e2, preparing a kingside attack while incidentally gaining a tempo against the a6-pawn.

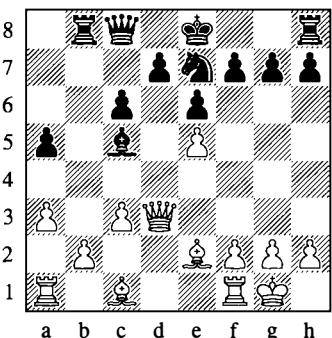
15...a5!

15...♛c7 has been played a few times but after 16.♗xa6 ♛xe5 17.a4!† White held an edge in Sacerdotali – Sherwood, corr. 2012, as his bishop pair and passed a-pawn are more significant than Black's central superiority. One of the surprising themes of these positions is that Black should not trade his a-pawn for the seemingly more valuable e5-pawn, without obtaining concrete counterplay in return.

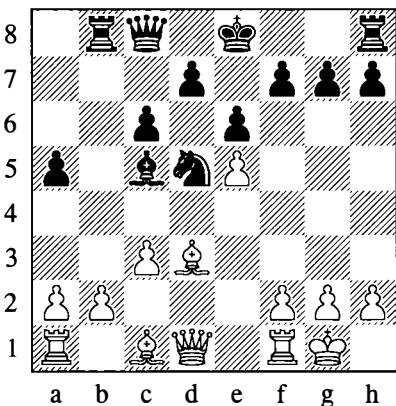
16.♗d3!?

16.♗d3 is another idea, intending to transfer the queen to h3 or g3 before moving the bishop to d3. I suggest the thematic regrouping move 16...♘e7, intending to post the knight on g6 where it protects Black's king and challenges White's centre. Later, Black can play ...d6 to

open lines for his pieces. 17.a3 was played in Eris – Pranitchi, email 2005, and now I suggest:

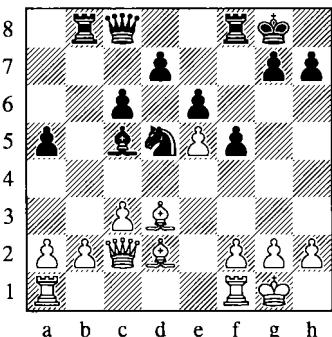


17...0–0N 18.b4 ♜b6 19.♗h1 ♜c7 20.f4
♜bd8→ With ...d6 to follow.

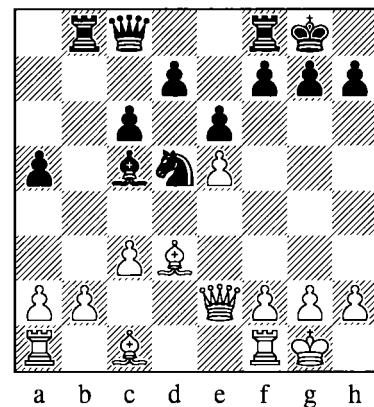


16...0–0 17.♗e2

17.♗c2?! is another way to play on the diagonal, but Black is doing fine after: 17...f5 18.♗d2 (or 18.exf6 ♜xf6→ and Black is just in time to continue with ...d6 and ...e5)



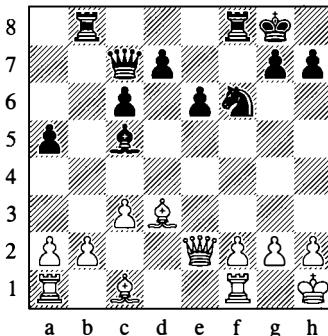
18...d6! 19.♗ae1 dxe5 20.♗xe5 ♜d6 21.♗e2 e5 22.f3 ♜e6 The position is dynamically balanced; White has the bishop pair but Black has a strong centre and active pieces.



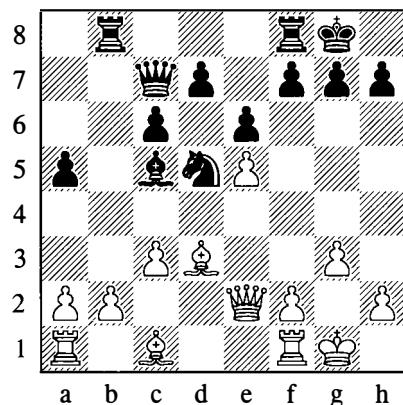
17...♜c7 18.g3!

Taking away the f4-square from Black's knight.

Instead 18.♗h1 enables Black to take advantage of the weak f4-square with energetic play: 18...f6! 19.exf6 (or 19.♗h5 f5! and Black will continue with ...d6, again fighting for the f4-square) 19...♝xf6! Black intends ...e5 with lots of counterplay. For instance:



20.f4 ♜be8! Now ...e5 is unstoppable and the position remains double-edged; White has the bishop pair but I prefer Black's activity.



18...d6!

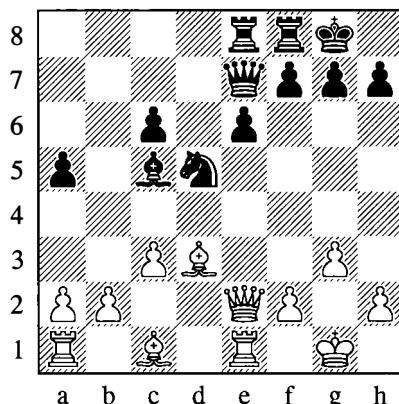
18...f6 is the other thematic try but Black seems to fall short of equality after: 19.exf6 $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ (or 19... $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}f4! \pm$ and once again the f4-square plays a crucial role: I would go so far as to say that whoever controls this square will tend to have the better chances in these positions) 20. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}g2! \pm$ White can claim a small plus. A good plan for the next few moves could be $\mathbb{Q}ae1$, $\mathbb{Q}c1$ and f2-f4.

19. exd6 $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}d1$

20. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}be8$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ e5 22. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ f5 23. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ also leads to a double-edged battle.

20... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}be8$

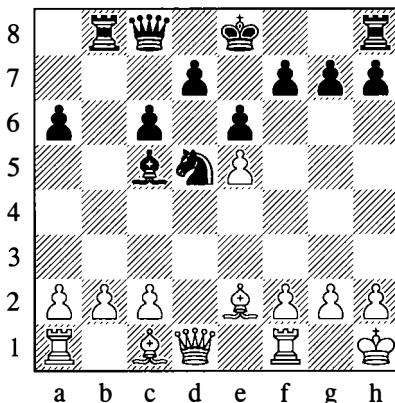
Black intends ...e5 and ...f5 with the usual counterplay, for instance:



22. $\mathbb{Q}h5$ f5 23. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ e5 25. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}a7\infty$

The position remains dynamically balanced.

B2) 15. $\mathbb{Q}h1$



15...0-0

15... $\mathbb{Q}c7?!$ seems less attractive in view of 16. $\mathbb{Q}xa6!$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 17. a4 \pm as played in Louro – Martucci, corr. 2008. Compared with the later variation B52 on page 270, White's king is safer on h1 than g1.

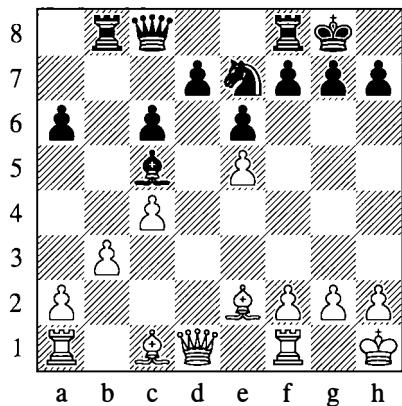
16.c4

16. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}c7!$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ a5 gave Black a good game in Fejzullahu – Fierz, Switzerland 2004, as he was just in time to follow up with ...d6.

16... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 17. b3

17. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ is met by the typical 17... $\mathbb{Q}c7!$ with good play for Black.

This position was reached in Van den Doel – Hendriks, Dieren 2008, and a few other games. My improvement is:



17...Bg6!N

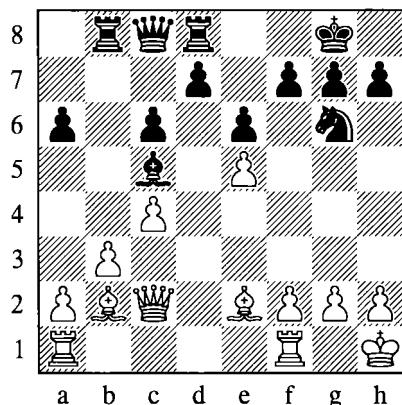
Intending to free Black's game with ...d6 in the near future. In most games Black has placed his queen on c7 first, but I would prefer to avoid possible problems on the h2-b8 diagonal.

18.Qb2 Qd8!

Now there is not much that White can do to prevent Black's plan of ...d6 followed by exchanging the dark-squared bishops.

19.Qc2

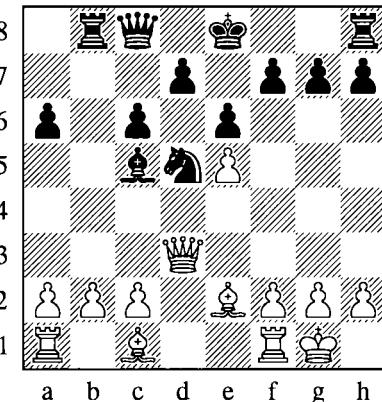
19.Qd3 d6 20.exd6 Qxd6 21.Qf3 Qd4! is fine for Black.



19...d6 20.exd6 Qxd6 21.Qd3 Qc7=

Black has no problems, and will play ...Qe5 next in order to exchange the dark-squared bishops.

B3) 15.Qd3



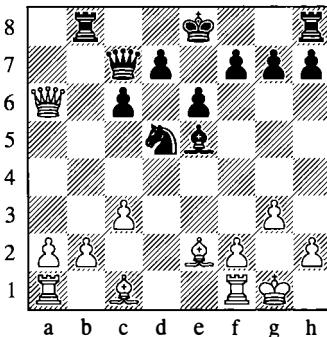
This time White mobilizes his queen before making any committal pawn moves.

15...Qc7!

On this occasion, rather than moving the a6-pawn, Black should create a counter-threat against e5.

16.Qe4

16.Qxa6 was played in Mazarov – Wolter, Germany 2011, when Black took on e5 with the queen. My improvement is: 16...Qd4!N 17.c3 Qxe5 18.g3



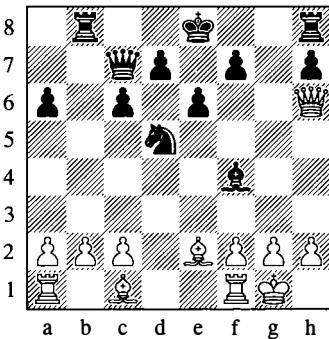
18...h5! In the note to move 15 in variation B1, I commented that Black should not trade the pawn on a6 for the one on e5 unless he has concrete counterplay – as is exactly the case right now! 19.Qf3 h4 20.Qe2 hxg3 21.fxg3 f6∞ Black has good prospects with his powerfully centralized pieces and open files for the rooks.

16.Qg3

This is well met by the same motif:

16...Qd4! 17.Qxg7 Qxe5 18.Qh6 Qf4!

White must struggle to equalize. His best try seems to be:



19.Qh5N

19.Qg7? Qxh2† 20.Qh1 Qe5 21.Qh6 occurred in Oliveira – Vivaldo, Sao Paulo 2006, when 21...Qg8!N† would have been depressing for White.

19.Qxf4?! Qxf4 20.Qxf4 Qxf4 21.Qxa6 Qxb2 22.Qfb1 Qxb1† 23.Qxb1 Qe7† gave Black the better endgame due to his superior pawn structure and more active king in Perisic – Tokovic, Kac 2014.

19...Qxc1 20.Qfxc1 Qf4=

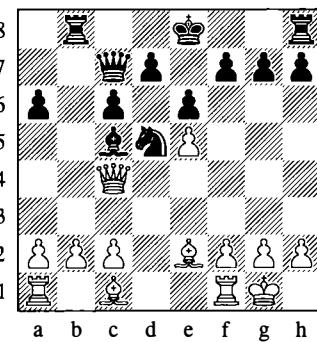
With a comfortable game for Black.

A more interesting alternative is:

16.Qc4?

This rare move was played in Kaminski – Miladinovic, Moscow (ol) 1994, as well as in a later correspondence game. Black has to

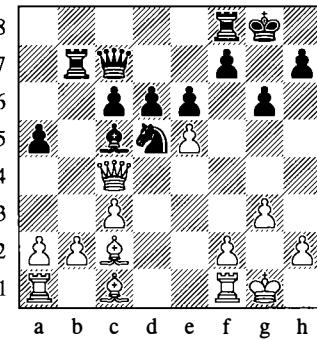
take a serious decision as regards his bishop. The respective games continued with 16...Qa7 and 16...Qe7, but I recommend a different solution:



16...d6!N 17.c3 a5

We have reached a typical situation where White will sooner or later have to exchange on d6.

18.Qd1 0–0 19.Qc2 Qb7! 20.g3 g6

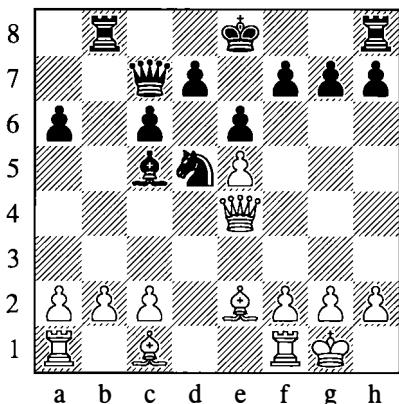


21.a3!?

21.Qb1 Qfb8 22.Qg2 Qb6! 23.exd6 Qxd6 24.Qe4 c5= seems fine for Black.

21...Qb6 22.exd6 Qxd6 23.Qe2 Qfb8∞

Black remains active, with ...Qe5 and ...Qd5 coming next. By maintaining pressure against White's queenside pawns, he should be able to prevent White from mobilizing his pawn majority.



16...a5

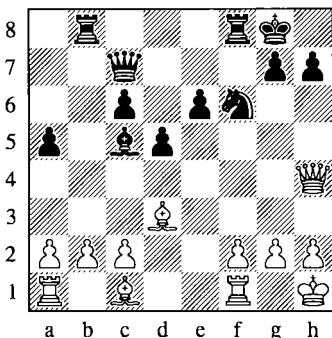
Black should safeguard the a-pawn before doing anything committal.

17.c4

17.Qd3

This was played in Rogic – Ribli, Porec 1998, and a couple of other games. I recommend:
17...f5!N 18.exf6 Qxf6 19.Qh4 0–0 20.Qh1 d5!

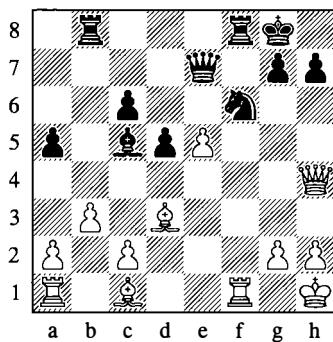
The position remains dynamically balanced. The following sample line shows some nice tactics:



21.f4 Qe7 22.b3

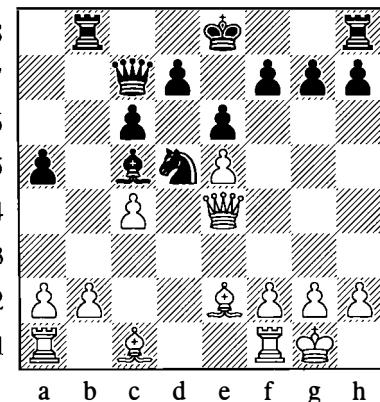
22.Qh3 e5 23.fxe5 Qe4 is equal.

22...e5 23.fxe5



23...Qe4! 24.Qxe7 Rxf1† 25.Qxf1 Qf2†
26.Qg1 Qh3†=

With a perpetual.



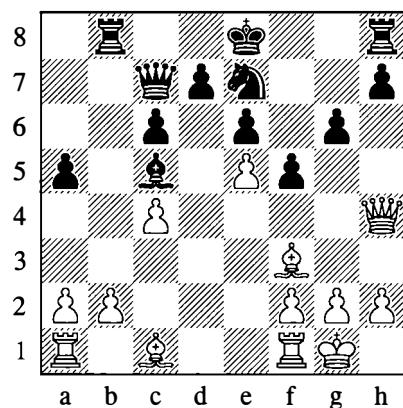
17...f5!N

17...Qe7 is also playable. 18.b3 occurred in Djoric – Marjanovic, Vrnjacka Banja 1996, when 18...a4N 19.Qd1 Qf5 20.Qb2 axb3 21.axb3 Qb6 would have given Black a good game, with fine control over the d4-square. Nevertheless, I like the text move even more.

18.Qh4 Qe7 19.Qh5†?!

In the event of 19.b3 Black must avoid taking on e5 due to Qh5† followed by Qf4 winning the rook on b8, but the simple 19...0–0 gives him a good position.

19...g6 20.Qf3

20... $\mathbb{W}xe5!$

If you wish to keep things simpler, 20...0–0 is perfectly playable. However, it seems to me that Black does not have to shy away from an unbalanced game.

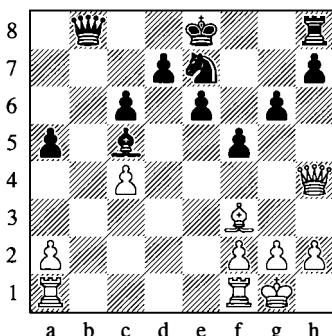
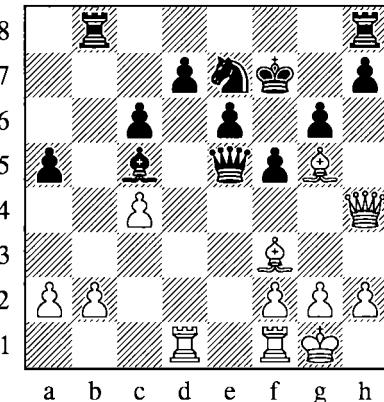
21. $\mathbb{Q}g5!?$

This is the sharpest move, aiming for rapid development rather than taking material.

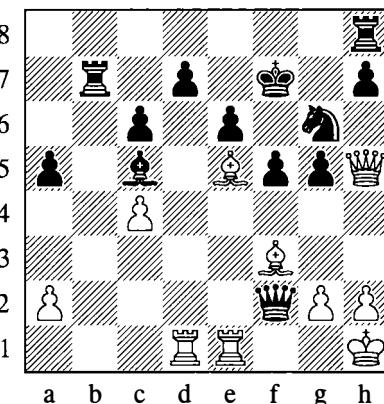
Obviously I also considered:

21. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{W}xb2$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xb8$ $\mathbb{W}xb8\infty$

The position is complicated, but it seems to me that Black should be fighting for the advantage if he finds time to castle and play ...e5. Therefore White's safest course of action is to force a draw as follows:

23. $\mathbb{W}f6!$ $\mathbb{E}f8$ 24. $\mathbb{W}g7$ 24. $\mathbb{W}h4$ h5! is good for Black.24... $\mathbb{E}f7$ 25. $\mathbb{W}h8\#$ $\mathbb{E}f8$ 26. $\mathbb{W}g7=$ 21... $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 22. $\mathbb{E}ad1$ 22... $\mathbb{E}b7!$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}fe1$ $\mathbb{W}xb2$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ g5!!

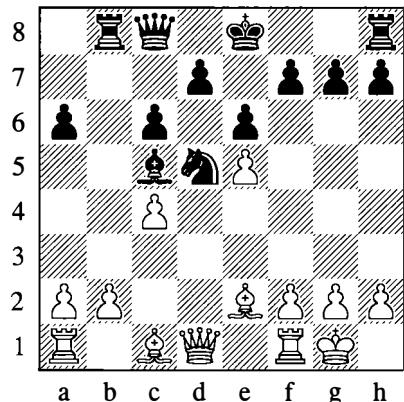
The tactics seem to work fine for Black.

25. $\mathbb{W}h5\#$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{W}xf2\#$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ 27... $\mathbb{Q}g8!$

The only way to safeguard the rook on h8.

28. $\mathbb{W}xg5$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 29. $\mathbb{W}h5$ $\mathbb{W}xa2$ 30. $g4$ $\mathbb{W}c2$
31. $gx5$ $\mathbb{W}xf5$ 32. $\mathbb{W}xf5$ $exf5\infty$

The final position (and the whole line of analysis) is tricky for both sides, but it seems to me that Black gives as good as he gets, and there are more peaceful alternatives on moves 17 and 20 in case the complications are too much.

B4) 15.c4

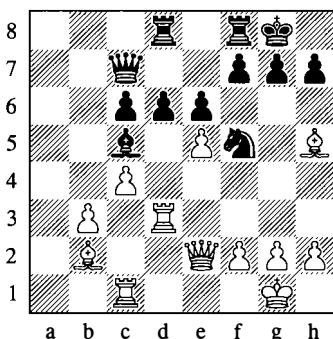
Even though this is White's most popular move by a wide margin, I do not consider it to be particularly dangerous for Black. By moving our bishop from e7 to c5 on the previous turn, we prepared ourselves to meet it with the following strong plan.

15...Qe7 16.b3 Wc7 17.Qb2 d6!

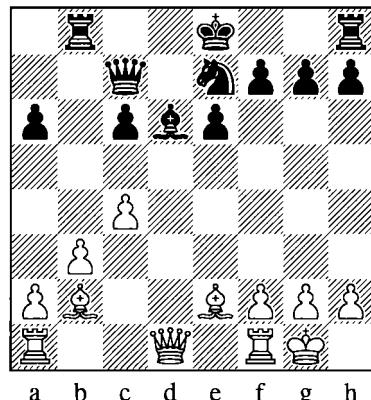
Black should not waste any time freeing his position and creating counterplay.

18.exd6

18.Qh5?! was played in a high-level game which is definitely worth mentioning: 18...0–0! 19.We2 a5 20.Qac1 Qf5 21.Qfd1 a4 22.Qd3 axb3 23.axb3 Qbd8



24.exd6 Qxd6 25.g3 Qc5 (25...Qe7?N is a decent alternative) 26.Qcd1 Qxd3 27.Wxd3 Wb6!= Black had no problems in Svidler – Polgar, Tilburg 1997. Both of these great players opted for the top engine choices on most moves of this game, reminding us how strong the top GMs are.

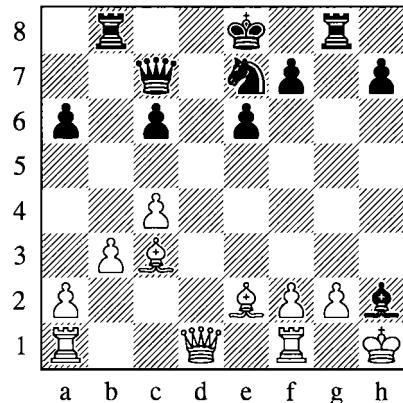
18...Qxd6

Black's plan from here will be to exchange the dark-squared bishops and take control of the d-file. Ideally, he will also manoeuvre his knight to the d4-square and solidify the outpost with ...c5 or ...e5.

From here, there are three main options for us to consider. **B41) 19.Qxg7** is not dangerous, but it's a forcing option which should definitely be considered. We will then move on to **B42) 19.Wd4?**, followed by the main line of **B43) 19.g3**.

19.h3 Qh2† 20.Qh1 Qe5! requires no further analysis, as Black carries out his plan and enjoys a more comfortable version of variation B43.

B41) 19.Qxg7 Bg8 20.Qc3 Qxh2† 21.Qh1

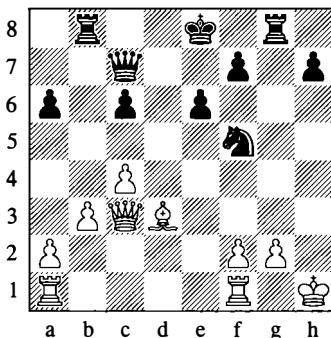


21...Qe5!

Black carries out the desired bishop trade, while conveniently centralizing his queen after the following exchange.

22.Qxe5

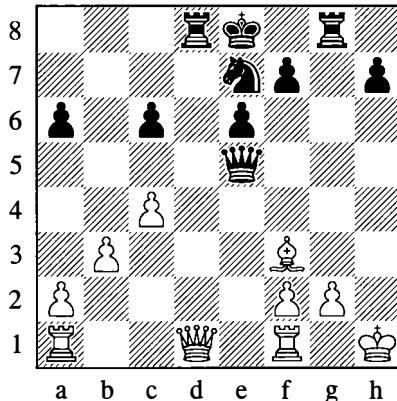
22.Qe1 was played in Stolz – Hassim, corr. 2008, when 22...Qf5!N would have been best. Play continues: 23.Qd3 Qxc3 24.Qxc3



24...Qf4! White has nothing better than trading minor pieces, and after 25.Qxf5 Qxf5 26.Qad1 Qe4!∞ Black has enough activity to offset his inferior pawn structure.

22...Qxe5 23.Qf3 Qd8

We will be following a correspondence game for a few moves.

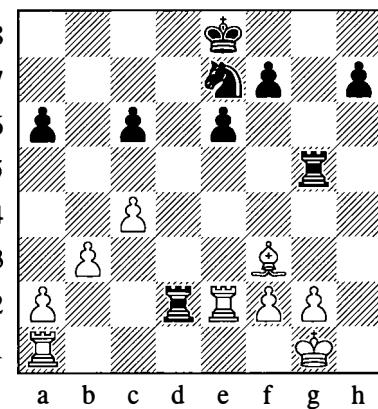


24.Qe1 Qxe1 25.Qfxe1 Qd2! 26.Qg1

26.Qe2 is met by 26...Qxe2 27.Qxe2 Qf5! when our knight reaches the d4-square.

26...Qg5! 27.Qe2

27.b4?!N is a reasonable alternative although 27...Qd7! is fine for Black.

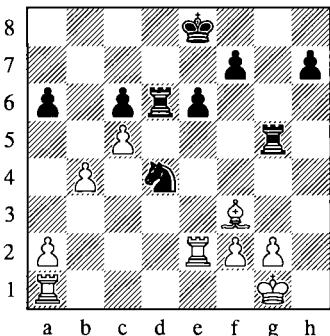


27...Qd6!N

Black opted for 27...Qd4 in Posada – Crapulli, corr. 2013, but I believe that placing the rook on d6 is more accurate, since it will protect the c6-pawn and thus save time for the following knight manoeuvre.

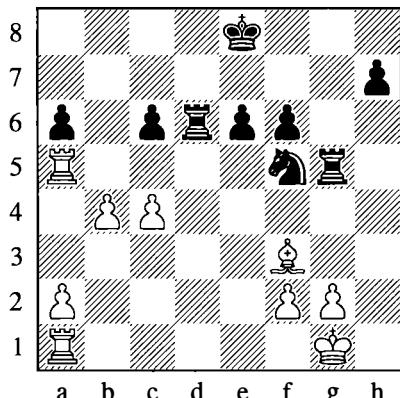
28.b4 Qf5! 29.Qe5

29.c5 Qd4! is a nice tactic, with the following justification:



30.cxd6?! $\mathbb{Q}xf3\#$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}h5\#$ Black regains the exchange to reach an advantageous rook endgame.

29...f6 30. $\mathbb{Q}a5$



30... $\mathbb{Q}d4!$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}h5\#$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 32... $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ $f \times g =$

The endgame is balanced, although plenty of play remains.

B42) 19. $\mathbb{W}d4?$

This is a more challenging option, which demands an accurate response.

19... $\mathbb{Q}f5!$

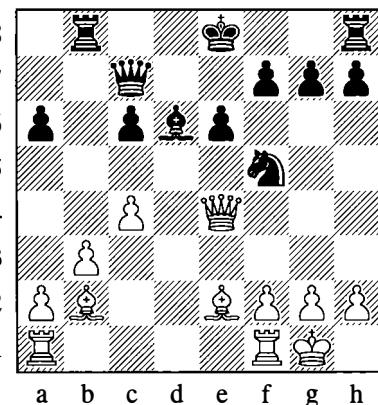
19... $\mathbb{Q}xh2\#$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ is the alternative, but I see two problems with it. Firstly, after the most common reply of 21. $\mathbb{W}e4$, we transpose to the note to Black's 20th move below, which

I am not recommending. Secondly, White has a significant extra option in 21. $\mathbb{W}c3!?$, which yielded him an eventual victory in A. Mueller – Burov, email 2013.

20. $\mathbb{W}e4$

In the event of 20. $\mathbb{W}c3N$ we do not have to transpose to the above game by capturing on h2, and can instead play 20...c5!, securing the d4-square for the knight while maintaining the attack on h2.

After the text move I found a useful novelty.



20...c5!N

This seems safest. By the way, it also transposes to an existing game which will be mentioned in a note below.

20... $\mathbb{Q}xh2\#$

This is the main line. It is playable, but a bit too risky for my taste.

21. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ c5!

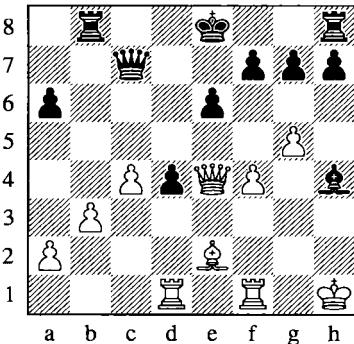
This seems better than 21...h5, when 22. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ c5 23. $\mathbb{Q}d3\#$ yields a dangerous initiative for White.

22.g4

22. $\mathbb{Q}g4!?$ 0–0! led to a fine position for Black in Motzer – Solf, email 2007.

22... $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 23.f4 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ $\mathbb{Q}h4$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ cxd4 26.g5

We are following another correspondence game, where Black was able to neutralize White's initiative after:



26...h6

I also analysed 26...0–0!N and found it to be playable, but will spare you the long analysis as there is no real reason to play this way over the board.

27.g6 ♜f6 28.♗h5 fxg6 29.♘xe6† ♜d8 30.♗xg6 ♜d7! 31.♗fe1 ♜c7 32.♗g2 a5 33.♗e2 h5=

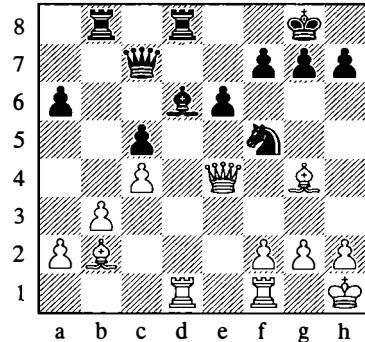
Pachnicke – Grossi, email 2014.

21.g3!N

This is the best way to deal with the threat to the h2-pawn, as White takes control over at least a few of the dark squares.

21.♗ad1 occurred in Zvara – Chloupek, Czech Republic 2001, when the simple 21...♗xh2†!N 22.♔h1 ♜d6 would have been pleasant for Black. The position will resemble our main line after a subsequent ...♝d4, but Black's chances can only be improved by the disappearance of the h2-pawn.

21.♔h1!N is another idea, but it's hard to believe that placing the king in the corner is more useful than g2-g3. In any case, here is my illustrative line: 21...0–0 22.♗ad1 ♜fd8 23.♗g4 (23.g4 ♜d4! 24.♗xd4 cxd4 25.♗xd4 ♜c5 26.♗d3 ♜xd3 27.♗xd3 g6 28.f4 ♜d8=)



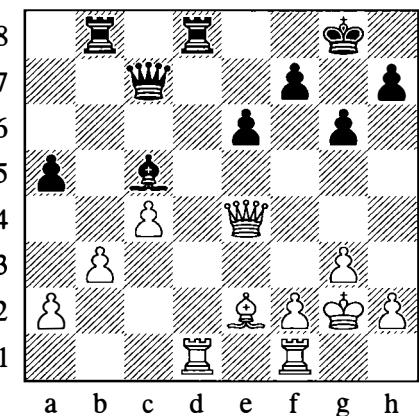
23...♝d4! 24.♗xd4 cxd4 25.♗xd4 ♜c5! 26.♗xd8† ♜xd8= Black easily has enough compensation for the pawn.

21...0–0 22.♗ad1 ♜fd8 23.♗d3 ♜d4!

This positional pawn sac is the easiest route to safety.

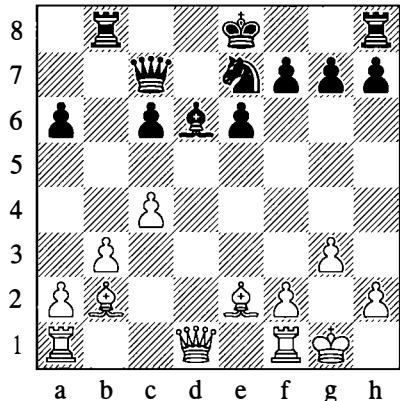
24.♗xd4 cxd4 25.♗xd4 ♜c5 26.♗dd1 g6 27.♗g2 a5

Black is solid on the kingside and has a firm blockade of the queenside, making it impossible for White to capitalize on his extra pawn. An illustrative line is:



28.♗c2 ♜xd1 29.♗xd1 ♜d8 30.♗f3 ♜xd1 31.♗xd1 ♜d6 32.♗xd6 ♜xd6 33.♗c6 f5=

White has no way to create a passed pawn or penetrate with his king, so the draw is effortless.

B43) 19.g3**19...♝e5!**

Once again we carry out the thematic plan of exchanging bishops.

20.♝xe5

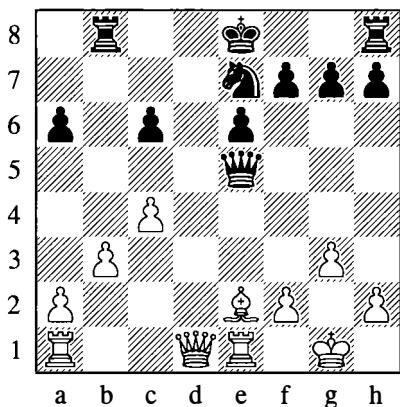
20.♛c2 ♛xb2 21.♛xb2 0–0 leads to a similar type of position where Black has little to fear.

20...♛xe5 21.♝e1!?

This seems like White's best try.

21.c5 a5! 22.♝f3 ♛xc5 23.♝c1 ♛a3 24.♝xc6 ♛xc6 25.♝xc6 0–0 gave Black effortless equality in Smeets – Straub, Amsterdam 2000.

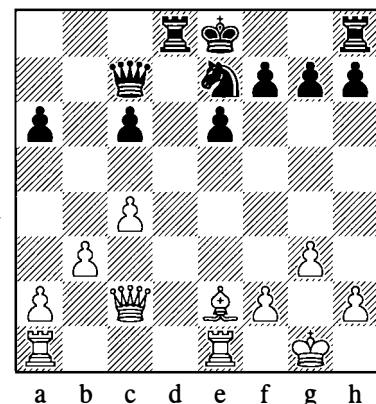
21.♝f3 has been the most common choice, but 21...c5 22.♝e1 ♛c7 23.♝e4 0–0 24.♛c2 h6 was fine for Black in Polgar – Milos, Sao Paulo (3) 1996.



Here I will cover two options for Black.
B431) 21...♝d8 is a reliable equalizer, while
B432) 21...a5!? is an interesting novelty which is more ambitious, and leads to a double-edged game.

B431) 21...♝d8 22.♛c2 ♛c7

This position has been tested in a number of correspondence games. White has achieved a small plus score, but his wins have only come when Black chose a suboptimal set-up, rather than the path which I recommend in the line below.

**23.♝ad1**

23.b4!?

N seems playable, but after 23...0–0 24.♝d3 g6 White hardly has anything better than placing a rook on the d-file, transposing to one of the lines below.

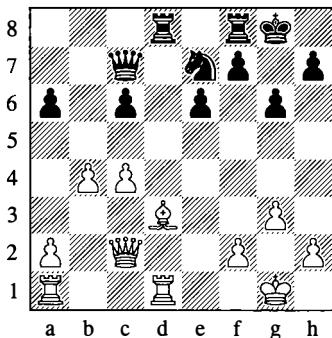
23.♝ed1

White tried this move in one game, but the choice of rook does not really change the evaluation.

23...0–0 24.♝d3 g6 25.b4

25.c5 a5! is fine for Black.

The text move was played in Ganiev – Galje, corr. 2013. Black played 25...♝d4 and drew soon afterwards, while a second decent option is:

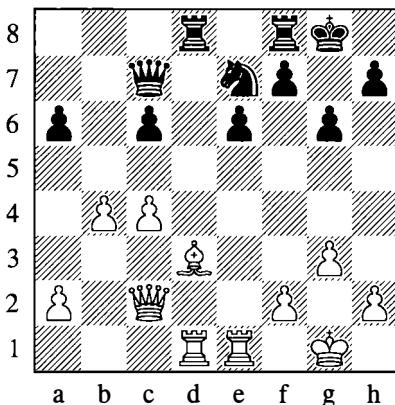


25...a5! N 26.b5

26.a3 axb4 27.axb4 can be met by 27...Qf5 28.Qxf5 exf5 when Black's damaged structure is of no consequence. For instance: 29.Qxd8 Qxd8 30.Qd1 Qb8 31.Qc3 Qe7 32.c5 h5 33.h4 f4= 26...cxb5 27.cxb5 Qxc2 28.Qxc2 Qd5 29.a4 Qc3 30.Qxd8 Qxd8 31.Qa3 Qc8=

The endgame should be a draw, although there is still room for either side to make a mistake.

23...0–0 24.Qd3 g6 25.b4

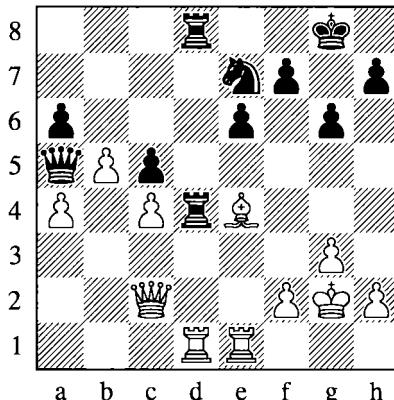


25...c5! 26.b5 Qd4!

This is the key idea which solves all of Black's problems in this line. The point is that White will never be able to make effective use of his strong passed pawn, due to Black's powerful dark-square blockade.

27.a4 Qfd8 28.Qe4 Wa5 29.Qg2!?

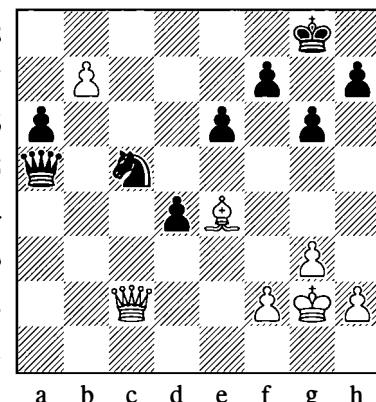
Another game continued 29.Qb7 axb5 30.axb5 Qc7 31.Qg2 Qc8 32.Qxd4 Qxd4 33.Qf1 Qb6 and the players soon agreed a draw in Korze – Bjuhr, email 2012. Black has a solid blockade on the queenside.



29...Qc8!

Once again, the knight heads for the blockading square on b6. Another correspondence game continued:

30.Qxd4 Qxd4 31.Qd1 Qb6 32.Qxd4 cxd4 33.c5 Qxa4 34.b6 Qxc5 35.b7

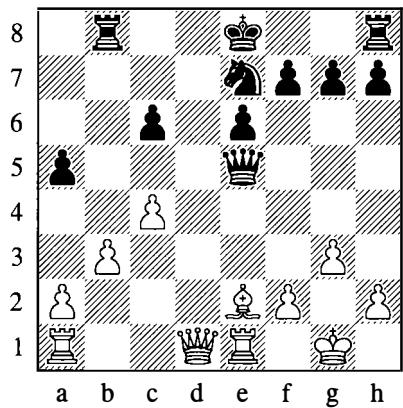


35...Qxb7 36.Qxb7 Qd8 37.Qc5 a5=

Despite White's best efforts to break through on the queenside, the resulting position with

three pawns against a bishop was still an easy draw in Kover – Pyrich, email 2012.

B432) 21...a5!?

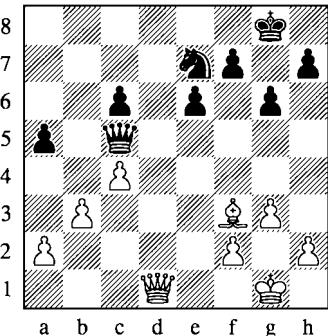


With this rather ambitious move, Black tries to seize control of the dark squares and make it harder for White to advance his queenside pawns.

22.♗d3

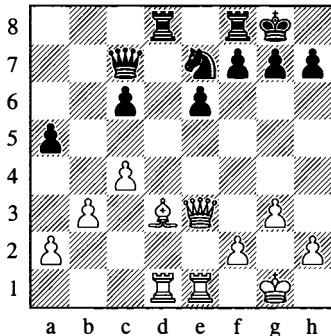
I considered two alternatives:

22.♗f3 ♖c5 23.♗c2 0–0 24.♗ad1 ♘bd8
25.♗xd8 ♘xd8 26.♗d1 ♘xd1† 27.♗xd1 g6



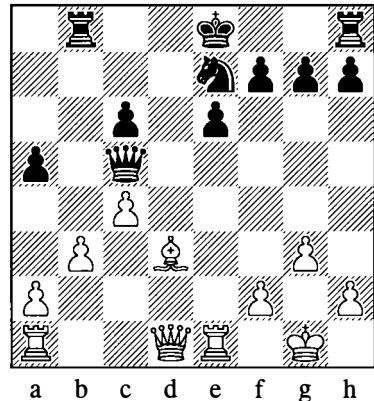
This reaches an endgame where only Black can be better. His queen and knight cooperate better than White's queen and bishop, especially if he manages to establish the knight on d4 and gradually mobilize his pawn majority.

Another plausible line of play is: 22.♗d2 ♘d8
23.♗d3 ♘c7 24.♗e3 0–0 25.♗ad1



25...c5! Creating an outpost on d4. 26.♗e4 ♘b6 27.♗g5 ♘c7!= Neither side can really claim any advantage. White has to monitor the d-file and prevent the knight from coming to d4, while Black has a solid position but cannot do much to improve his pieces, unless White commits an error of some kind.

22...♘c5



23.♗c2

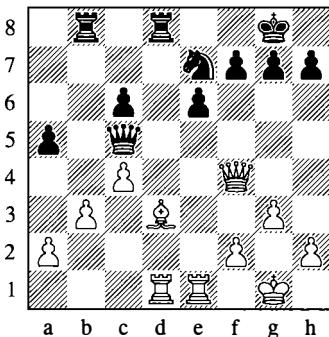
This move prepares ♗d3 and ♘ad1, which seems like a natural way to mobilize White's forces.

Another possible plan is:
23.♗d2 0–0 24.♗f4

24. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ $\mathbb{B}f8$ 25. $\mathbb{W}f4$ is the same.

24... $\mathbb{B}fd8$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$

White has activated his pieces but Black has a solid position with good control over all the key squares. Best play seems to be:



25... $\mathbb{Q}g6!$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}xg6$

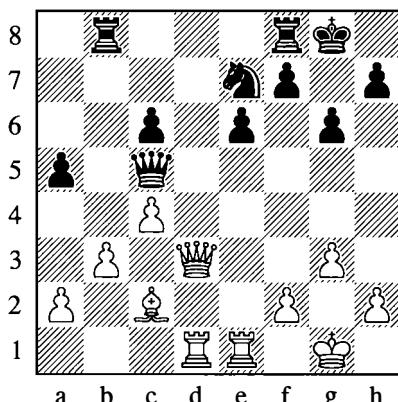
26. $\mathbb{W}e3$ $\mathbb{W}xe3$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 28. $f4$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$ is fine for Black.

26... $hxg6$ 27. $\mathbb{W}c7$ $\mathbb{Q}dc8$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}xc7$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$
a4!=

Black is just in time to liquidate his weak pawns, leading to a drawn rook endgame.

23... 0-0 24. $\mathbb{W}d3$ $g6$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$

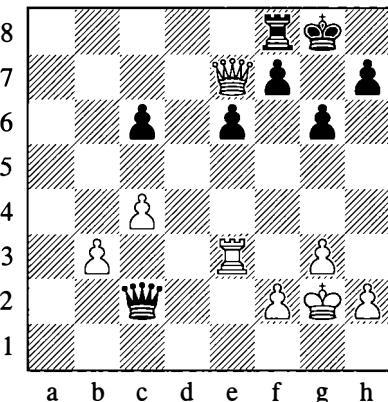
White has carried out his plan, but Black can obtain useful counterplay as follows.



25... $\mathbb{W}b4!$ 26. $\mathbb{W}f3$ $a4$ 27. $\mathbb{W}f6$

27. $h4$ $h5!$ does not really change anything.

6. $\mathbb{Q}e2$
27... $\mathbb{B}bd8$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $axb3$ 29. $axb3$ $\mathbb{Q}d2!$
30. $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ $\mathbb{W}xd2$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{W}xc2$ 32. $\mathbb{W}xe7$



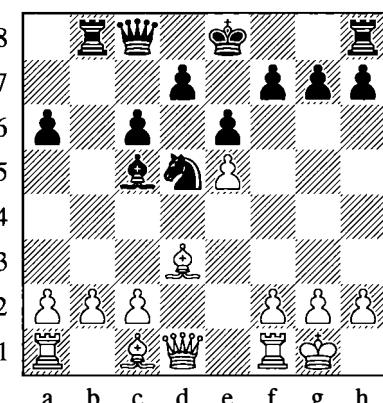
32... $\mathbb{W}d1!$ 33. $\mathbb{W}c7$ $c5!$ 34. $\mathbb{W}xc5$

34. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{W}d4$ also maintains the balance.

34... $\mathbb{B}a8!\mathbb{B}$

Black obtains enough counterplay on the first rank.

B5) 15. $\mathbb{Q}d3!$



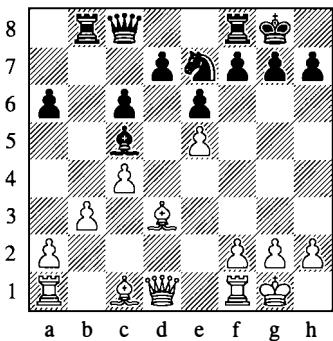
I believe that this move deserves to be far more popular than it actually is, since Black needs to be extremely accurate to solve the problems which can arise after correct play by White. For a while, I was almost ready to

give up on the entire 8... $\mathbb{Q}b4$ system because of this line, and it was only after uncovering a fantastic resource that my confidence in Black's set-up was restored.

White's plan is fairly clear: he wants to play c2-c4 (or first $\mathbb{W}g4$) and then develop his bishop to b2. Compared to the much more common 15.c4 line, the big difference is that White's bishop is still eyeing the a6-pawn.

Since I had so much trouble finding the correct way to deal with this line, I will present my analysis of the moves I rejected before moving on to the one I recommend. **B51) 15...a5!?**N was my first attempt, but eventually I realized that **B52) 15... $\mathbb{W}c7!$** is best.

I was not satisfied with Black's prospects after: 15...0–0?! 16.c4! $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 17.b3



White's set-up resembles that of variation B4, but the difference is that Black has spent a tempo castling while White has placed his bishop on d3. The inclusion of these moves helps White, as we will see.

17... $\mathbb{W}c7$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ d6N

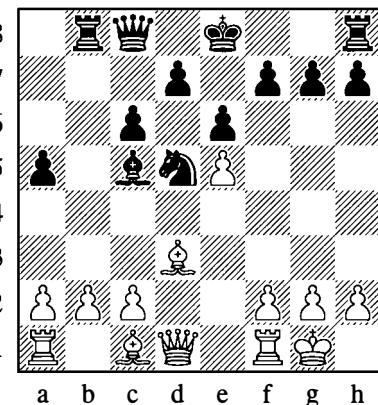
I briefly looked at this attempted improvement, but it does not really help.

18... $\mathbb{Q}g6$ was played in Suetin – Pytel, Biel 1995, when 19. $\mathbb{W}e1!$ would have sent the queen to e4 via an unusual route, when White maintains his advantage.

19.exd6 $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 20. $\mathbb{W}h5!$

Black faces serious problems protecting his king. The engines suggest 20... $\mathbb{Q}f5$ as his best try, but it is obvious that the position after 21. $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ exf5 will be no fun for him.

B51) 15...a5!?N

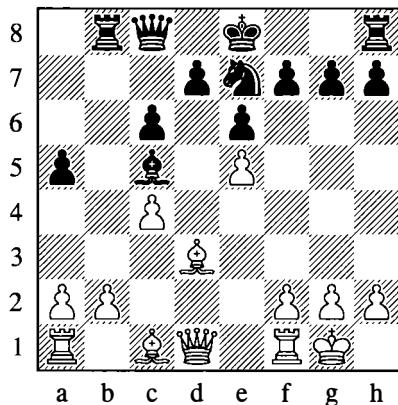


I considered this move as an interesting novelty. It is logical to remove the pawn from the sights of the d3-bishop, while also preparing to exchange it after White plays b2-b3.

16.c4! $\mathbb{Q}e7$

16... $\mathbb{Q}b4$? is not really in the spirit of the position since the knight moves to an awkward square. After 17. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 18. $\mathbb{E}e1$ I analysed the position deeply and found that White has a variety of ways to develop the initiative. For instance: 18... $\mathbb{Q}a6$! The best try, keeping the bishop stuck on c1 for the time being. (18...0–0?! runs into 19. $\mathbb{Q}g5$! threatening $\mathbb{Q}f6$ with a dangerous attack) 19. $\mathbb{W}g4$! g6 20.h4! With the better chances for White.

The text move is more in the spirit of the official main line covered in variation B4, but the inclusion of the moves $\mathbb{Q}d3$ and ...a5 enables White to develop a quick initiative.



17.♗g4! 0–0 18.b3 ♜c7 19.♗b2 ♜g6

Compared to the more popular main line of variation B4, Black's main problem is that he lacks the time needed to exchange the dark-squared bishops – and even if he could somehow carry out this objective, his knight is passive on g6 and there is no clear way for it to reach the d4-outpost.

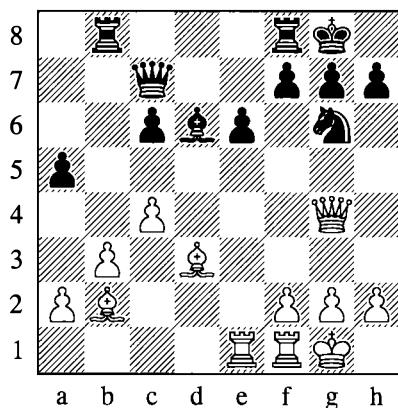
20.♗ael

20.♗ad1 is also good. In general, White's position is better and the exact placement of his pieces does not matter too much.

20...d6

20...a4 21.♗c2 axb3 22.axb3 ♜a8 23.♗c3‡ also looks good for White.

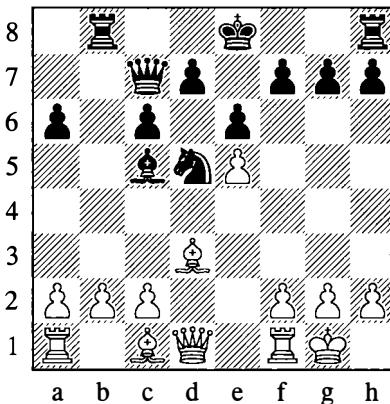
21.exd6! ♜xd6



22.g3!‡

White has the initiative, and Black still lacks the time to exchange the dark-squared bishops.

B52) 15...♛c7!



After spending many hours comparing this move to Black's other options, I finally concluded that this is the best of them, and much stronger than I had initially thought. I should explain that the text move is actually the most popular choice in the database and it has scored well for Black; so why was my early impression of it not so favourable? The answer is that White's most accurate follow-up has not been tested in practice or mentioned in any books of which I am aware.

16.♗xa6!

16.♗g4? has been played a couple of times but 16...♛xe5 leaves White with no real compensation for the pawn.

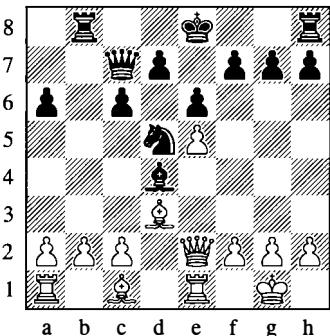
16.♗e1? is also weak, as 16...♝d4! enables Black to pick up the pawn while centralizing his bishop.

16.♗e2??

This has been White's usual choice in practice but I believe Black's chances are slightly better after the following forcing sequence:

16... $\mathbb{Q}d4!$ 17. $\mathbb{E}e1$

After 17.c4?! $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ c5 Black picked up the e5-pawn in Vass – Andreeva, Budapest 2001.



17... $\mathbb{Q}xb2$

17... $\mathbb{Q}xb2$?!N is also promising: 18. $\mathbb{W}g4$ (after 18. $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xa6$ 0–0! \mp Black will win back the exchange and pick off one of the weak pawns on e5 or a2) 18... $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ 20. $\mathbb{E}ab1$ $\mathbb{Q}c3$ 21. $\mathbb{W}g3$ $\mathbb{W}xg3$ 22.hxg3 $\mathbb{Q}e7\mp$ With two pawns for the exchange and good coordination, Black has the preferable endgame.

18. $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xa6$ 0–0 20. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{E}b7$!N

I believe this last move is slightly more accurate than 20... $\mathbb{E}b4$ and 20... $\mathbb{E}bb8$, which have been played in the two existing games. Black certainly holds the better chances, due to the weak pawns on a2 and e5.

16... $\mathbb{W}xe5$

I must also mention the remarkable alternative move order:

16...h5?N

This was actually my initial idea. Best play continues:

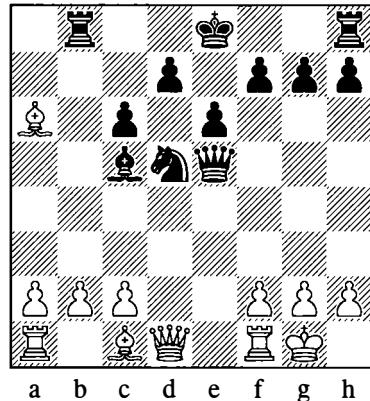
17.a4!

White is unable to remain a pawn up, as 17. $\mathbb{W}e2$ is met by 17... $\mathbb{Q}d4!$ and 17. $\mathbb{E}e1$ by 17... $\mathbb{Q}xf2\ddagger$.

17... $\mathbb{W}xe5!$

Transposing to our main line below. Even

though this surprising move order seems objectively playable, it seems more correct in principle to capture the e5-pawn first.



I would go so far as to say that this is the most important position for the evaluation of the entire 13.e5 variation. Strangely enough, it has only occurred twice over the board, in 1995 and 1996, and White played 17. $\mathbb{W}e2$ both times. However, the following move is much more challenging.

17.a4!

White has the bishop pair and an outside passed pawn, so he aims to advance it as fast as possible. Black, on the other hand, has a dynamic position with active pieces, a central pawn majority and attacking chances against the enemy king.

It is understandable that White avoided playing this way in the past. Trading a flank pawn for a central one while offering attacking chances to the opponent is an approach which most strong players would instinctively shy away from. But nowadays with the help of computers, it is easier to determine the best ways for White to safeguard his kingside and aim to exploit his positional advantages.

Black has little to fear after the alternative:

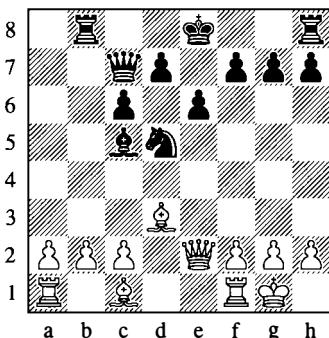
17. $\mathbb{W}e2$ $\mathbb{W}c7$!

This is the ideal square for Black's queen. It keeps an eye on the h2-pawn for a potential attack, and also on the a5-square in order to help the rook blockade the passed a-pawn if needed.

18.Qd3

18.a4 Qa8! 19.c3 Qd6∞ offers Black plenty of counterplay.

The text move led to an eventual victory for White in Yandemirov – Dremin, Ekaterinburg 1996, but Black can improve with:



18...Qf4!N 19.Qxf4 Wxf4 20.c3 h5∞

Black will follow up with ...d5 and ...Qe7, when the position remains double-edged. Personally I prefer Black, since I believe more in his dynamic position than in White's potential endgame chances with the outside passed pawn.

In general, I don't believe that 17.Qe2 is at all dangerous for Black, as the e2-square belongs to the bishop rather than the queen. That's another reason why 17.a4!N is an improvement – so let's return to that move now.

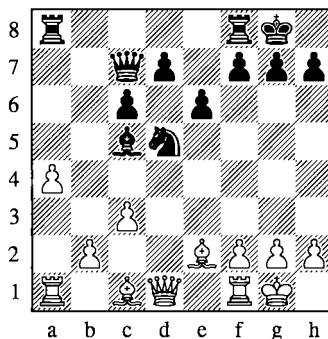
17...h5!

To show how I arrived at this move, I will once again show a couple of alternatives which I analysed then dismissed.

17...Qa8 18.Qe2 0–0 19.c3 Wc7

In this quite critical position, it took me a lot of time to determine whether or not Black

has enough counterplay. At first glance I thought his position looked okay, but when I looked deeper with the engine, I found ways for White to neutralize Black's counterplay in every variation, after which he can try to exploit his queenside majority. The strongest continuation for White is:



20.Qd2!

Preparing b2-b4, or possibly c3-c4 in some lines.

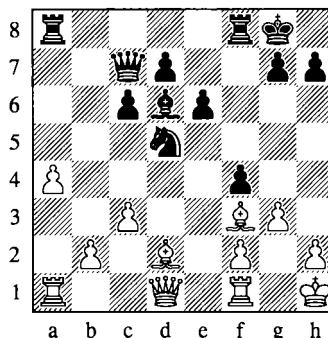
20...Qd6 21.g3!

21.h3 allows 21...Qh2† 22.Qh1 Qe5!∞ when Black's bishop is superbly placed, and he can create counterplay with counterplay with ...Qf6, ...d5, ...c5 and ...Bfb8.

The text move avoids giving Black the use of the f4-square, while also preparing Qf3 with a secure and harmonious kingside set-up.

21...f5 22.Qf3! f4 23.Qh1!

An excellent prophylactic move. White has a lot of defensive resources and Black's attack is unlikely to succeed. Play may continue:



23...fxg3

23... $\mathbb{E}f6$ is met by a simple defence: 24. $\mathbb{W}e2!$
 $\mathbb{E}af8$ 25.c4! $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}c3!$ $\mathbb{E}h6$ 27.g4! \pm
 White is out of danger on the kingside and can proceed with his own active ideas on the queenside and/or in the centre.

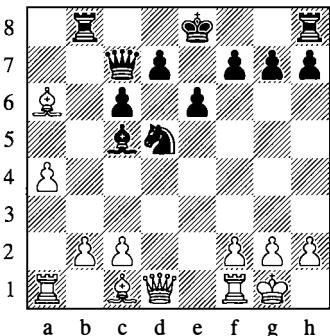
24.fxg3 $\mathbb{W}b6$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}c1?$ $\mathbb{Q}e3$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ $\mathbb{W}xe3$

27.a5! \pm

White has a safe edge.

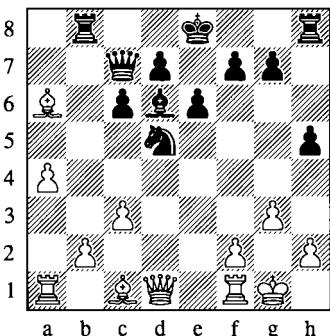
The second idea that came to my mind was:

17... $\mathbb{W}c7$



18.c3! $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 19.g3 h5

Compared with the line above, Black has avoided castling in order to meet the strong g2-g3 move with an aggressive advance of the h-pawn. Unfortunately, White has an effective way of dealing with this plan:



20. $\mathbb{E}e1!$ h4 21. $\mathbb{W}f3!$ $\mathbb{Q}a8$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ hxg3

Black does not have to make this exchange

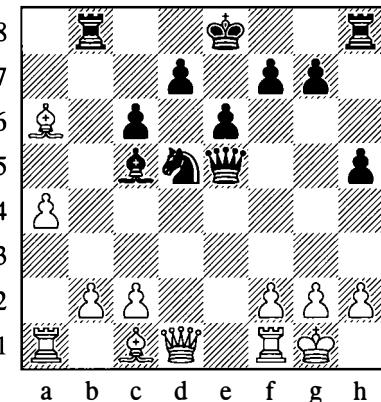
immediately, but delaying it does not really change anything.

23.hxg3 $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ f5 25. $\mathbb{Q}g2\pm$

It seems to me that White's king is safer than Black's, so it is fair to say that Black's ...h5-h4 plan has not succeeded.

After concluding that the ...h5-h4 plan did not work in the above line, I hit upon the idea of the text move. Rather than retreat the queen to c7 voluntarily, Black simply intends to threaten mate with ... $\mathbb{Q}d6$, then meet g2-g3 with ...h4.

There are also some advantages compared to the 17... $\mathbb{E}a8$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ 0-0 line mentioned above. Delaying castling not only gives us the option of ...h5-h4, but also helps us in the event of a queen exchange, since Black's king will be better placed in the centre.



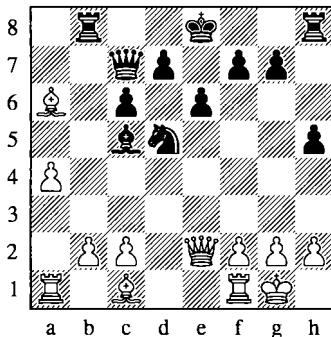
At this point White must make an important decision. **B521) 18.a5?** is a logical attempt to exploit the passed pawn as quickly as possible, but I believe the more patient **B522) 18.c3!** to be the critical test.

18. $\mathbb{E}e1$ does not make much sense, as 18... $\mathbb{W}f6$ gains a tempo by hitting f2. White can defend with 19. $\mathbb{W}e2$ or 19. $\mathbb{E}e2$, but in both cases White takes away his bishop's best square, and Black can play 19...g5! with promising counterplay.

Another harmless option is:

18.♗e2 ♖c7!

The position is similar to that of the Yandemirov – Dremin game, as referenced on page 272.



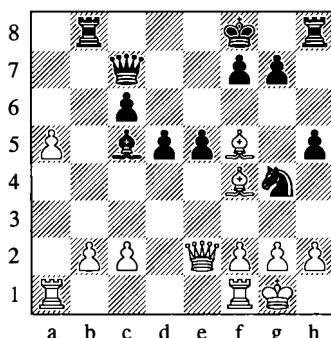
19.♗c4

19.c3 ♗d6! 20.h3 g5 looks scary for White, with ...g4 coming next.

19...♝f6! 20.a5

20.c3 d5 21.♗d3 ♗d6! 22.h3 e5 reaches an unclear situation where I prefer Black's chances.

20...d5 21.♗d3 e5 22.♗f4 ♛g4 23.♗f5 ♗f8

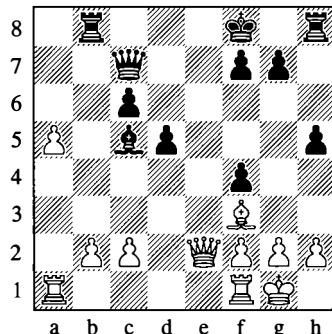


24.♗xg4

I also checked 24.♗g3 h4, when 25.♗f4! is a clever idea. Still, after 25...exf4 26.♗xg4 ♘xb2 27.a6 ♗g8!∞ the king will come to h7 and the h8-rook will get active.

24.♗c1? is also possible, but 24...♝f6 is a good reply, intending ...g6 and later ...e4.

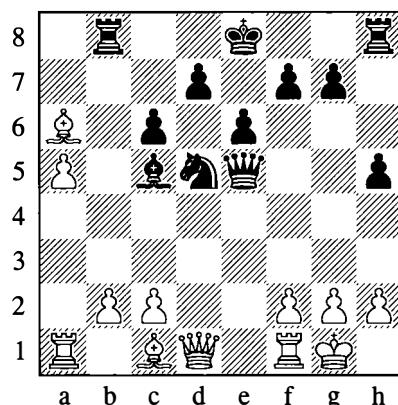
24...exf4 25.♗f3



25...♝xb2!∞

Black is at least equal. (I cannot resist mentioning that if Black wants to make the game wild, then 25...g5?! is also playable, for instance: 26.♗xh5 g4! 27.♗xg4 ♗e5! White's bishop is trapped, so 28.♗xf7 is forced, and then 28...♝xf7 or even 28...f3?! leads to double-edged play, with a draw being the most probable outcome.)

B521) 18.a5!?

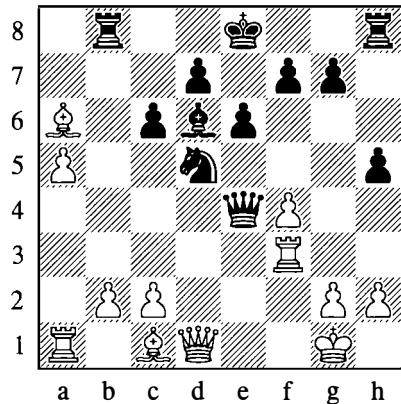


18...♝d6! 19.f4!

19.g3?! h4! gives Black a much-improved version of the 17...♖c7 line noted earlier, with real attacking chances on the kingside.

19...♗e4! 20.♗f3

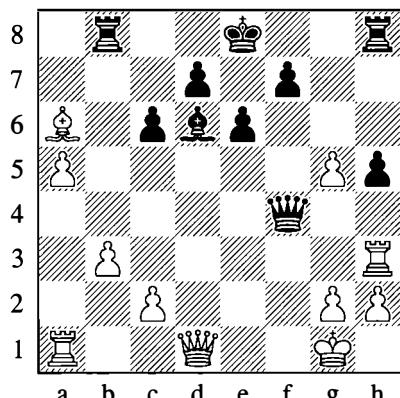
20.♗d3 ♜c5†! 21.♔h1 ♜xd3 22.♕xd3 ♖b4 23.♖f3 ♖xd3 24.♖xd3 ♜b4!∞ is fine for Black. White no longer has the bishop pair, and there are too many pieces on the board for the distant passed a-pawn to decide the outcome. Another vital point is that Black's king is better centralized than its counterpart.



20...g5!! 21.fxg5 ♜e5!

This dynamic resource gives Black good attacking chances. My analysis continues:

22.♗h3 ♖f4 23.♕xf4 ♜xf4 24.b3

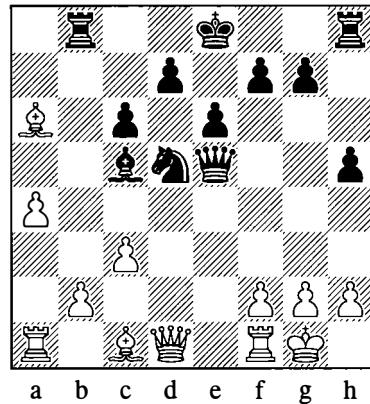


24...♝g8! 25.♔h1 ♞xg5 26.♕e2 ♜e7!∞

White's passed a-pawn is under control, and Black is active enough to claim at least equal chances.

B522) 18.c3!

This seems like White's most logical choice.



18...g5!

For a while I thought that Black's play was all about attacking the white king – and this plan could certainly prove dangerous, if White makes a mistake. However, the text move is also connected with a deeper strategy, which I only appreciated after a lot of thought and deep analysis. Black also has to be ready for a queen exchange, after which it is important for Black to advance his kingside pawns, in order to obtain counterplay and fix White's pawns where they can be attacked.

19.♕e2!

19.♕e1 is the only alternative which makes sense, but after 19...♜f5! White's queen is poorly placed and Black can continue his attack with moves like ...h4, ...g4 and ...♝f4. I don't see a better move for White than returning to d1 with his queen.

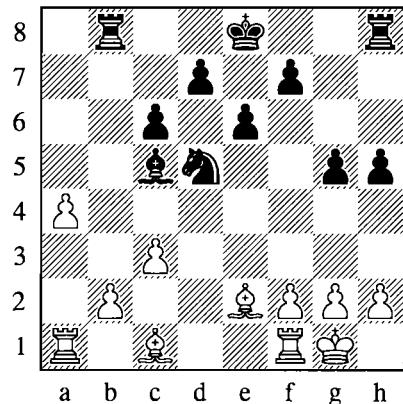
19...♜xe2!

I reluctantly concluded that this is objectively the right decision.

I would have preferred to keep the queens on with 19...♝g7!? but White can defend

with the help of a spectacular idea: 20.a5! h4 21. $\mathbb{Q}a4!$ The rook joins the action via the 4th rank and it is not clear how Black will develop his attack. If you believe you can outplay your opponent in a complex middlegame then this could be worth considering, but personally I do not fully trust Black's position.

20. $\mathbb{Q}xe2$



20...g4!

Continuing the strategy described in the note to Black's 18th move above.

21. $\mathbb{Q}c4!$

After long analysis, I believe this to be the most challenging option. I considered three other possibilities. You certainly don't have to memorize all of the following analysis; just playing through the different lines should be enough to develop some understanding of how both sides should handle the rather complex endgame.

21. $\mathbb{Q}a2?$!

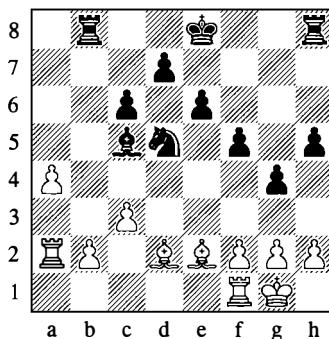
This move prepares the simple plan of $\mathbb{Q}d2$ followed by b2-b4, but Black gets an excellent position if he reacts energetically.

21...f5! 22. $\mathbb{Q}d2$

Continuing the plan.

22. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ is actually the best move for White,

but playing this would offer Black a kind of moral victory. Play may continue 22... $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 23.a5 $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 24.b6 $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ (or 25.g3 h4 ∞) 25...h4! 26.b4 f4 ∞ with plenty of counterplay for Black.

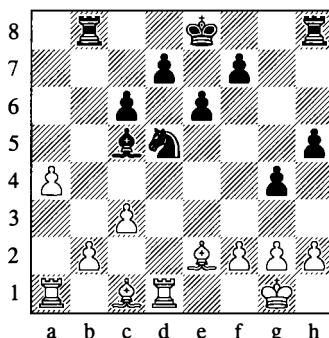


22...h4! 23.b4 $\mathbb{Q}a7$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ g3! \uparrow

The position remains complicated but White has the more difficult problems to solve.

21. $\mathbb{Q}d1$

This move can be met in a similar way.



21...f5! 22.a5

22. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ f4! gives White a choice:

a) 23. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ threatens ...g3; play continues 24.b4 $\mathbb{Q}a7$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}a2$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ followed by ... $\mathbb{Q}c7$ to safeguard the king, with a good game for Black.

b) 23. $\mathbb{Q}xd5?$ exd5 24.b4 $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 25.c4 is an interesting way to play against Black's pieces, including the king. With that being said,

it is easy to forget that we can still castle:
25...0–0!! 26.cxd5 ♜xb4 27.dxc6 dxc6 28.a5

♝bd8= Black has no problems.

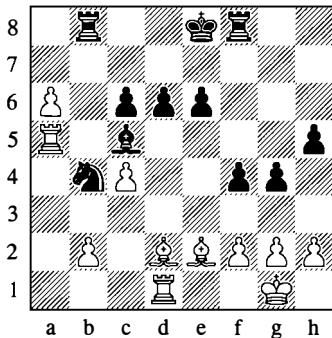
22...♝f8!

Supporting the further advance of the f-pawn.

23.a6 f4 24.c4!

I also checked 24.♔f1 ♜e7 25.♕a4 e5! when Black's pawns look pretty intimidating.

24...♝b4! 25.♕a5 d6 26.♔d2



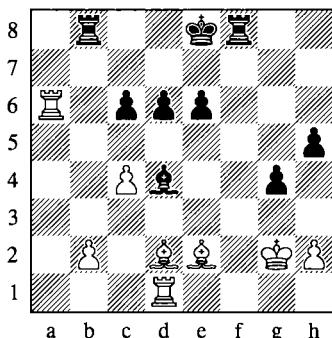
26...f3! 27.♔f1 ♜xa6!!

A great tactical resource, with the following justification:

28.♜xa6 fxg2 29.♜e2!

The only playable move.

29...♜xf2† 30.♚xg2 ♜d4



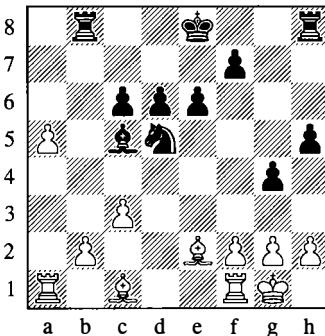
31.♚e1 ♜xb2 32.♜a8† ♜f7 33.♜xf8† ♜xf8
34.♜d2 ♜xd2 35.♜xd2 ♜f7=

The complications peter out to an easy draw.

A final option is:

21.a5 d6!

Black is making space for his king to go to d7, where it will be ideally placed to support the central pawns while being ready to approach the a-pawn if needed.



22.♚c4!

22.♚a2?! is too slow in view of 22...f5!

23.♜d2 h4! with dangerous counterplay.

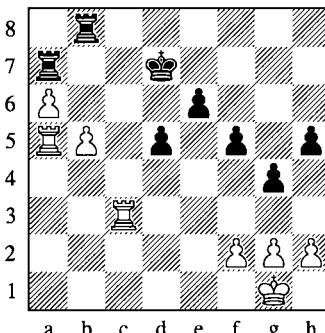
22...♜a7! 23.♜xd5

23.♜e1 ♜d7 24.♚f1 h4 25.h3 g3 26.fxg3
(26.f3 f5 27.b4 ♜f2 28.♜e2 e5 29.♜d2 f4!! is objectively level but practically more dangerous for White) 26...hxg3 27.♜xd5 cxd5 is fine for Black, who will look to advance his central pawns.

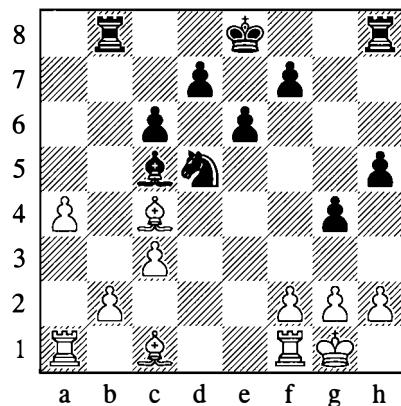
23...cxd5 24.a6 ♜d7 25.♜e3 ♜a8 26.b4 f5
27.♜xa7 ♜xa7

The rather unusual double-rook endgame should result in a draw. A sample line is:

28.♚fe1 ♜b8 29.♜a5 d4 30.b5 dxc3 31.♚c1 d5
32.♜xc3



32... $\mathbb{B}c7!$ 33. $\mathbb{B}xc7\#$ 34. a7 $\mathbb{B}a8$ 35. $\mathbb{B}a6$ $\mathbb{B}b7$ 36. $\mathbb{B}xe6$ $\mathbb{B}xa7=$

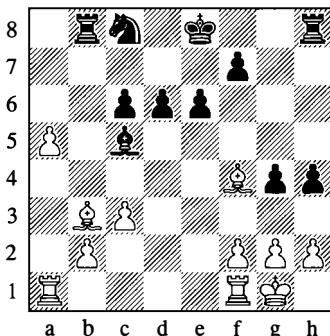


21... $\mathbb{Q}b6!$

It is worth driving the active bishop away.

22. $\mathbb{Q}d3$

I also checked: 22. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ h4 23. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ d6 24. a5 $\mathbb{Q}c8!$



25. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ (25. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{B}xb2$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}xc6\#$ $\mathbb{Q}e7\infty$ leaves Black actively placed, while White's passed pawn is under control) 25... g3 26. hxg3 hxg3 27. $\mathbb{Q}xg3$ $\mathbb{B}xb2$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ Once again, Black's position looks fine.

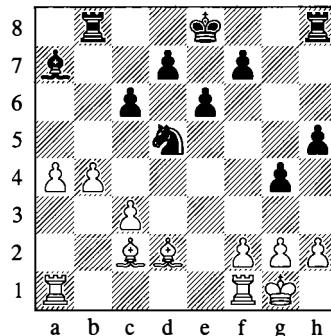
22... $\mathbb{Q}d5$

Ideally I would prefer not to move the knight back to its previous square, effectively offering a draw. However, it seems like the objectively

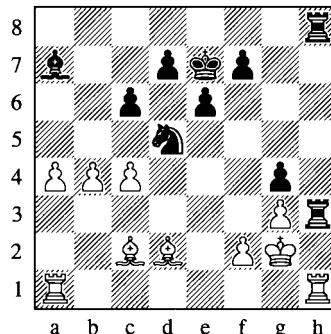
correct way to play. Now the onus is on White to show that moving his bishop from e2 to d3 could be useful to him.

23. b4

In the event of 23. $\mathbb{Q}e4!!$ it is once again important for Black to kick White's bishop from its active square. Thus 23... $\mathbb{Q}f6!$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ is correct, when my analysis continues: 25. b4 $\mathbb{Q}a7$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}d2$



26... h4! 27. g3 hxg3 28. hxg3 $\mathbb{Q}h3$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{B}bh8$ 31. c4 (31. $\mathbb{Q}xh3$ gxh3# 32. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 33. c4 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}c3!=$ also seems to lead to a draw)

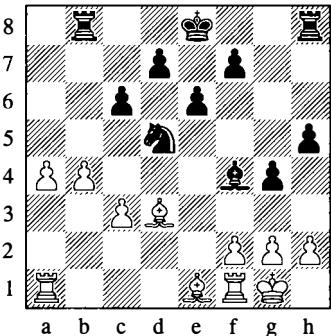


31... $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}af1$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ d5 34. cxd5 cxd5 35. $\mathbb{Q}xh3$ gxh3# 36. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}c4=$ Black is not worse at all.

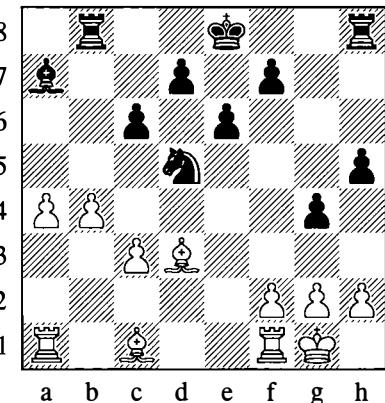
23... $\mathbb{Q}a7!$

I believe that keeping the bishop on the diagonal is the most accurate choice.

23... $\mathbb{Q}d6$? 24. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}f4$ is a second playable option, trying to deprive White of the bishop pair. The critical continuation is: 25. $\mathbb{Q}e1$! (25. $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}fd1$ $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ d5= is fine for Black, who will bring his king to c7 and then aim to advance his own pawns)



25... $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}a3$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 27.a5 $\mathbb{Q}c7$ Black should be okay, but he has to be slightly careful. Best play seems to be 28. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ c5 30.g3 $\mathbb{Q}e2\uparrow$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ cxb4 32.cxb4 $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}hc8$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$! with equality.

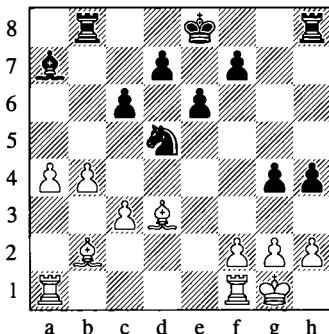


24.b5!

Definitely the most challenging move.

24. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ h4! 25.g3 f5 26. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}e7\infty$ offers Black plenty of counterplay.

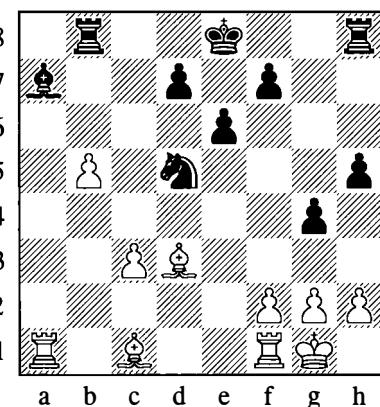
24. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ h4! sees Black playing for an attack. Both sides have to be tactically vigilant:



25. $\mathbb{Q}e2$! (25.c4? $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}xh8$ $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}f6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}xh4$ $\mathbb{Q}e4\uparrow$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ f5 gives Black fantastic play for the exchange) 25... $\mathbb{Q}h7$! 26. $\mathbb{Q}xg4$ $\mathbb{Q}xb4$!=

24...cx b5! 25.axb5!

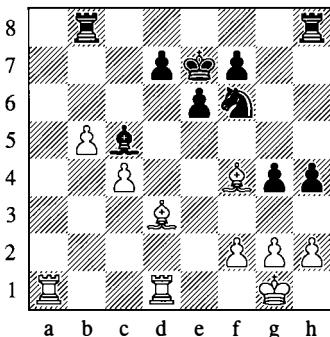
I also checked 25. $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3$! 26. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ (26... $\mathbb{Q}e7$? is also playable) 27. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 0–0! ∞ when we are once again reminded that Black can still castle!



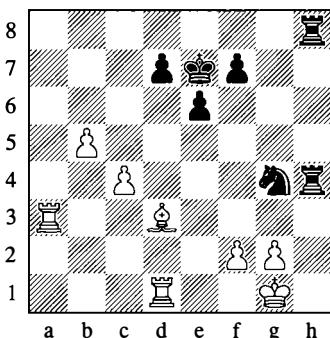
25... $\mathbb{Q}c5$! 26.c4

I also considered the regrouping plan of 26. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}fd1$, making room for the bishop to drop back to f1. Black can obtain strong counterplay by means of: 27...h4! 28.c4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}f4$

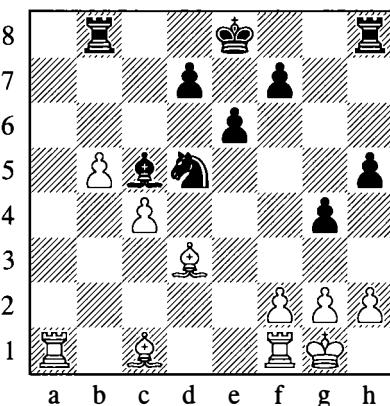
6.♔e2



29...g3! 30.hxg3 ♜bg8! 31.gxh4 ♜xh4 32.♗c1 ♜g4! 33.♗a3 ♜xa3 34.♗xa3 ♜gh8



35.♔f1 ♜h1+ 36.♔e2 ♜xd1 37.♔xd1 ♜xf2+ 38.♔e2 ♜xd3 39.♔xd3 ♜g8= With a drawn rook endgame.



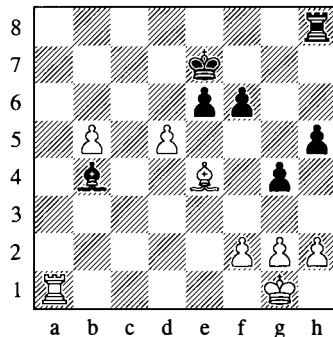
26...♜b4 27.♗b2

27.♗f4 d6 28.♗e2 ♜e7 29.♗fb1 ♜a8!= gives

Black no problems.

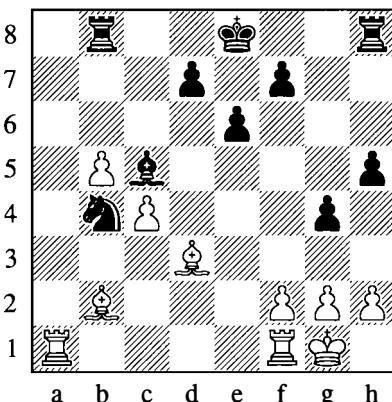
27.♗e2 ♜e7 28.♗b2 ♜hd8 29.♗c3 ♜a8 is also equal.

27.♗b1!? is more subtle but Black is still fine after: 27...♜e7 28.♗g5† f6 29.♗d2 ♜a8 30.♗e4 d5 31.♗xb4 ♜xb4 32.cxd5 ♜xa1 33.♗xa1



33...f5! 34.♗d3 ♜d8 35.b6 ♜xd5 36.b7 ♜d6 37.♗f1 ♜d4 38.♗a7 ♜f6= Once again, the endgame is a draw.

After the text move Black seems to have a hard time finding a good square for his rook, but he has another splendid resource.



27...f6! 28.♗e4!

Obviously 28.♗xf6? 0–0! is the tactical point of Black's last move.

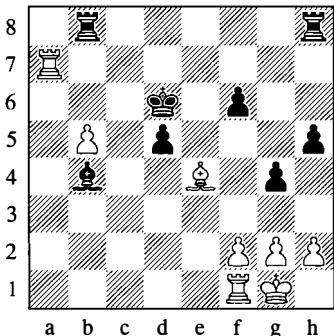
28.♗g6† ♖e7 29.♕c3 ♕a8 30.♗e4 ♕xa1 31.♕xa1 d5 32.♕xb4 ♕xb4 33.cxd5 transposes to the 27.♗b1?! line noted above.

Finally, 28.♗e2 should be met by 28...♔e7 connecting the rooks, and after 29.♗fd1 ♕a8 30.♗f1 ♕hc8= Black has no problems.

28...0–0!

Normally I would prefer to keep the king in the centre, but here we make an exception because it is more important to play a quick ..f5, getting rid of the powerful bishop on e4.

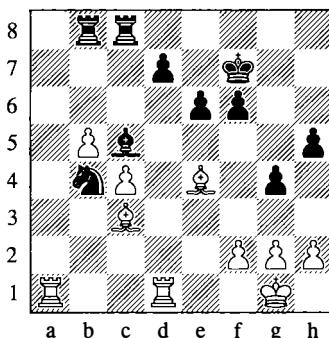
28...♔e7?! may run into a surprising tactical problem: 29.♕c3! d5 (the aforementioned problem occurs after 29...♕hc8? 30.♕a4! when White wins a piece; compare the next line below, where having the king on f7 enables Black to survive...) 30.♕xb4 ♕xb4 31.♗a7† ♔d6 32.cxd5 exd5



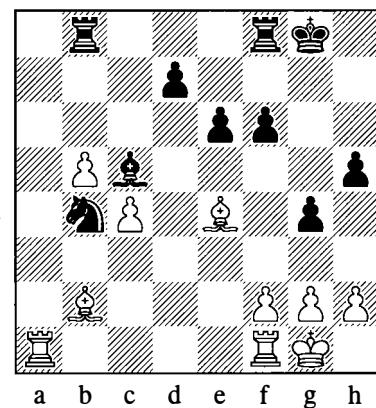
33.♗a6†! (33.♗d3 ♕a8 would only be equal)
33...♔e5 34.♗d3 ♕a8 35.g3 h4 36.♗b1 ♕xa6
37.bxa6 ♕c5 38.♗e1† ♔d6 39.gxh4 ♕xh4
40.♗f5 Black is still not losing, but he will have to suffer to make a draw.

If Black wishes to keep his king in the centre then 28...♔f7?! is a better way to do it, although tactical sharpness is required: 29.♕c3 ♕hc8!

30.♗fd1 (30.♗a4 allows a fantastic saving resource: 30...♔e7!! 31.♕xb4 ♕xc4 32.♗d6! ♕xa4 33.♕xb8 ♕xe4 34.♗b1 ♕c5 35.♗c7! ♕e2 36.b6! ♕xf2 37.♗b5=)



30...d5! 31.♕xb4 dxe4 32.♗ab1 ♕b7 33.♗f1 f5 34.♕xc5 ♕xc5 35.♗b4 ♕bc7 36.b6 ♕b7 37.♗e2 ♔e7 38.♗a1 f4 39.g3 e5 40.♗a8 ♕f6 The double-rook endgame should be a draw, but Black still has to be slightly careful.

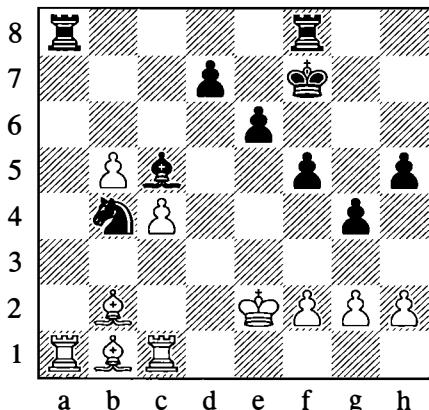


29.♗fc1!

29.♗fd1 d5![∞] would be fine for Black, so White plays prophylactically.

29...f5 30.♗b1 ♕a8 31.♗f1 ♕f7 32.♗e2

6.♗e2



32...♝xa1 33.♝xa1 ♜a8 34.♝b2 ♜e7∞

Black has a safe position and will sooner or later play ...d5 to erode White's queenside majority.

Conclusion

This chapter was noteworthy for the amount of original analysis I had to produce in the 13.e5 ♛d5 variation. Certainly 14.♗d4 is no threat to us, with several games having demonstrated that best play leads to a forced draw. Instead 14.♗c1 is more challenging, when 14...♝c5! reaches a major branching point.

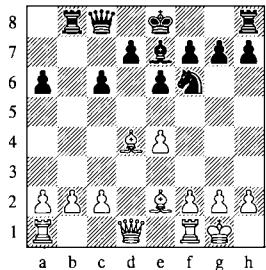
The minor options of 15.c3?!, 15.♔h1 and 15.♗d3 all have certain ideas behind them, but I don't see any real problems for Black after my recommendations against each of them. 15.c4 ♛e7 16.b3 is more challenging, although the accurate sequence of 16...♝c7 17.♗b2 d6! 18.exd6 ♛xd6 gives Black a satisfactory position, although it is worth knowing a bit about all three of White's options from here.

The most interesting positions of the chapter occur after 15.♗d3!, which I believe has been unjustly neglected by players and theoreticians until now. After a massive analytical effort, I concluded that 15...♝c7! 16.♗xa6! ♛xe5 17.a4!N h5! is the critical continuation. White certainly has some chances connected with his bishop pair and passed a-pawn, but Black maintains enough dynamic counterplay on the kingside – not only in the middlegame, but also after a queen exchange, provided he plays ...g5-g4 quickly enough.

Chapter 14

6. $\mathbb{Q}e2$

13. $\mathbb{Q}d4$



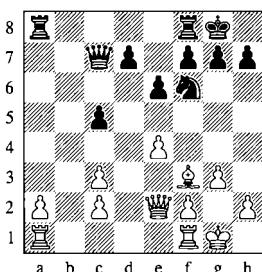
Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ e6 3.d4 cxd4 4. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 5. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 6. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ a6 7.0-0 $\mathbb{Q}f6$
8. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ bxc6 11. $\mathbb{Q}b6$ $\mathbb{B}b8$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}xc8$ $\mathbb{W}xc8$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}d4$

13...c5

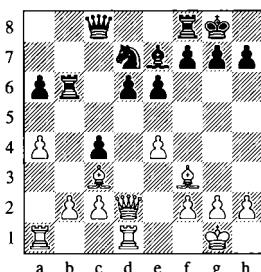
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| B) 14. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{B}b6$ | 286 |
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| B2) 15. $\mathbb{Q}f3$?? | 288 |
| B3) 15.b3 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ $\mathbb{B}g8$ | 290 |
| B31) 17. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ | 290 |
| B32) 17. $\mathbb{Q}b2$?? | 293 |
| B4) 15. $\mathbb{W}d3$ d6! 16. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ 0-0 | 296 |
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A) note to 18. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$??N



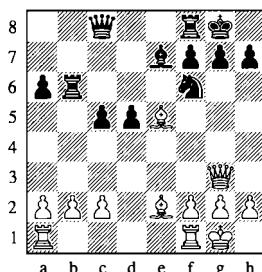
20...e5.N

B2) note to 17.a4



19...h6??N

B4) note to move 17



19...g6??N

1.e4 c5 2.♗f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♖c6
 5.♗c3 ♜c7 6.♕e2 a6 7.0–0 ♗f6 8.♗e3 ♜b4
 9.♗a4 ♜e7 10.♗xc6 bxc6 11.♗b6 ♜b8
 12.♗xc8 ♜xc8 13.♗d4

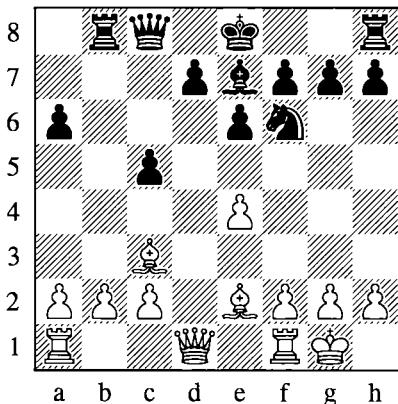
This has been White's most popular choice and it remains quite fashionable to this day. Compared to the 13.e5 line from the previous chapter, White keeps things more fluid in the centre and avoids having his bishop driven back to its original square.

13...c5

This is the most popular move and I think it is best. White may react with the rare but interesting A) 14.♗c3!? or the more typical B) 14.♕e5.

A) 14.♗c3!?

It seems to me that this move has a right to exist, and deserves to be much more popular.



14...♜c7!

This is the best move, yet it has only been played in one out of nearly twenty games.

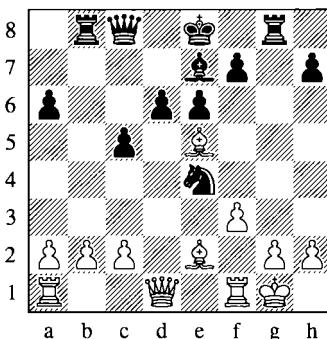
I also considered the ambitious alternative:

14...♗xe4?! 15.♗xg7! ♜g8

Unfortunately, it looks like White can develop a strong initiative after a forced sequence of moves:

16.♕e5! d6 17.f3!

Leading to a position with opposite-coloured bishops where White has a clear advantage in king safety.



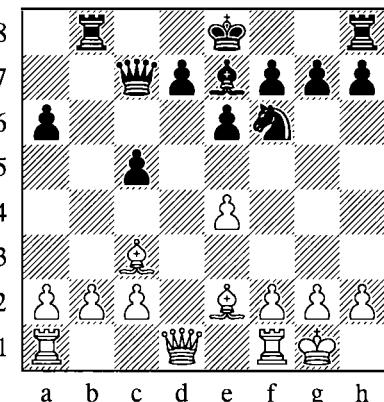
17...♝f2!?

17...dxe5 18.fxe4± gave White easy attacking play along the open f-file in Cawdery – Steel, Cape Town 2011.

The text move is a clever attempt to keep the f-file closed but it does not fully solve Black's problems.

18.♝xf2 dxe5 19.b3±

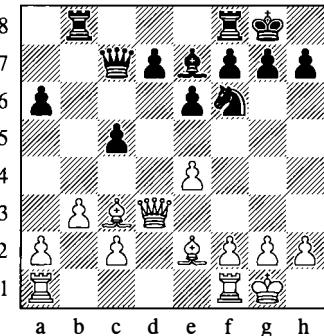
Bogachkov – Tunik, Minsk 2005. White has a simple plan of ♜c4, ♘h1 and ♜e2, after which he will either double his rooks on the d-file or open the f-file with f3-f4.



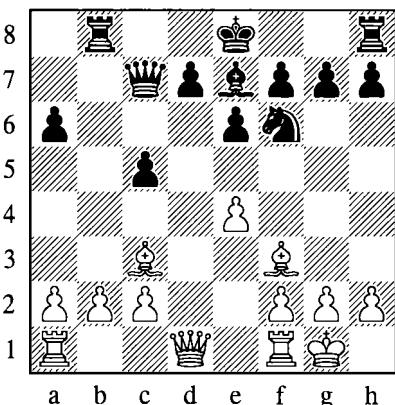
15.♗f3N

This novelty seems to me to be the most logical choice.

I also considered: 15.♗d3 0–0 16.b3!N (16.♕f3 ♘d6 17.g3 ♖e5 was the move order of the Kovalev – Aczel game noted below, but 17...c4!N is a possible extra option for Black)



16...d5! 17.exd5 ♗xd5 18.♗b2 a5 Black has enough activity to offset White's bishop pair, and he has many possible ways to continue. One obvious plan is to play ...♗f6 to exchange the dark-squared bishops, and later try to exploit White's dark-square holes with various knight manoeuvres. Another natural idea is ...a5-a4 to swap off one of his weak pawns. Finally, simply doubling rooks on the d-file could be good, and of course the possibility of a ...♗f4 jump is also in the air.



15...♗d6! 16.g3 ♖e5!

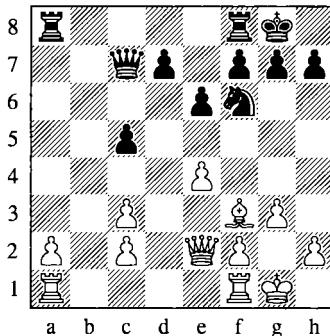
Trading the dark-squared bishops is obviously a good positional plan.

17.♗d3 0–0

With this move, we transpose to an existing game. I think White's most interesting continuation is:

18.♗xe5?N

In the game White grabbed the loose pawn, but Black has a nice resource to justify the sacrifice: 18.♗xa6 ♘xc3 19.bxc3 ♕a8 20.♗e2 (or 20.♗c4N ♕a3!∞ piling up against the a-pawn) Now in A. Kovalev – Aczel, Balatonboglár 2016, the most accurate continuation would have been:



20...e5!N 21.a4 ♕a5 Black picks up the a-pawn, after which he will have no problems.

18...♗xe5 19.b3 a5! 20.♗fd1

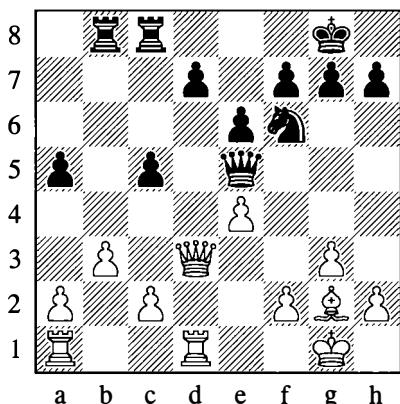
Another possible line is 20.♗g2 ♕fc8 21.♗ab1 ♕c7 22.♗fe1 d6 23.♗bd1 ♗e8?! when Black's position is secure and he is poised for active play on the queenside with ...c4 or ...a4.

20...♕fc8

Black has a healthy position; he is ready to exchange his only weakness with ...a4, and he may also look to damage White's structure with ...c4. White's bishop is not doing much, so the following move looks like his most logical try.

21.♗g2

Threatening f2-f4.

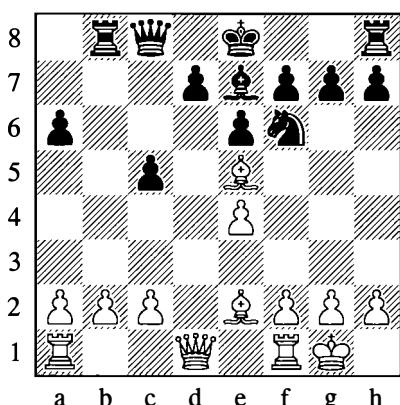


21...c4! 22.♗d6 ♗c3 23.♗d2 ♗xd2 24.♗xd2
♝c5! 25.f4 e5∞

Both sides have weaknesses and overall the chances remain about equal.

B) 14.♗e5

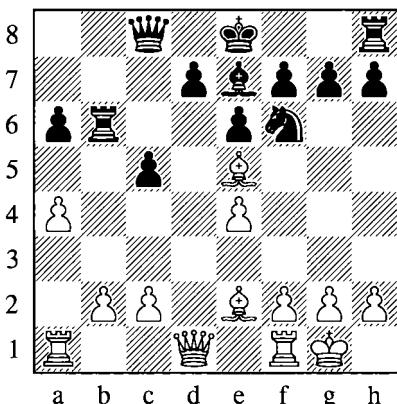
This is the usual move; it is certainly natural to gain a tempo by attacking the rook.

**14...♝b6**

We have reached the main branching point of the chapter. White has several plans which we will analyse further in the rest of this chapter: **B1) 15.a4**, **B2) 15.♗f3!?**, **B3) 15.b3** and **B4) 15.♗d3**

15.f3?! has been a deservedly rare choice. After 15...d5!N 16.exd5 exd5 17.c4 d4 Black will castle and double his rooks on the e-file, with an excellent position.

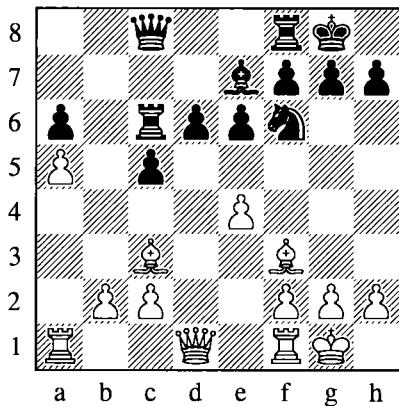
15.c4 0–0 seems fine for Black. A possible continuation is 16.♗d3 d6 17.♗c3 ♛d7 followed by ...♝f6, exchanging the dark-squared bishops and intending to manoeuvre the knight to d4.

B1) 15.a4

This fairly rare move was played by both of the Kosintseva sisters in 2006 and 2007 against strong GMs. White's idea is to pretty simple: Black's rook is currently well placed on b6, so the coming a4-a5 will force it to either give up the open b-file or relinquish control of the 6th rank.

15...d6 16.a5 ♘c6 17.♗c3 0–0 18.♗f3

18.♗d3 was Nadezhda Kosintseva's choice against Vitiugov in Moscow 2007, but the accurate 18...d5! solved all Black's opening problems, leaving White having to play accurately to maintain the balance. Black has active pieces and is poised to complete development with ...♝d8.

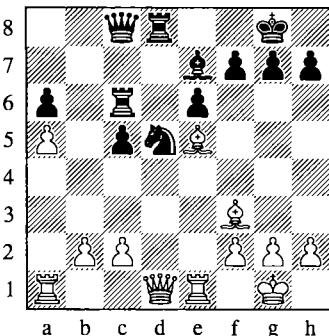


18...♝d8!

Bringing the final piece into play, in preparation for ...d5.

19.♕e2

19.♕e1?!N is a natural alternative but Black can secure equal chances with: 19...d5 20.exd5 ♜xd5 21.♗e5



21...♝d6! 22.♗xd5 ♜xe5 23.♗xe5 ♜cd6 24.c4 exd5 25.cxd5 g6! Next Black will play ...♝b7 and take back either the d5- or the b2-pawn.

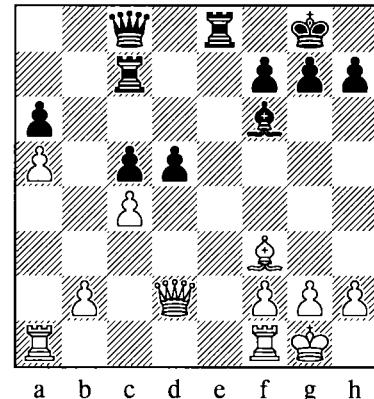
19...d5 20.♗xf6 ♜xf6 21.exd5

I found a brief example which continued 21.e5 and ended abruptly with 1–0, Trofimov – Kramer, corr. 2005, but Black clearly has no problems after 21...♝e7.

21...exd5 22.c4 ♜e8

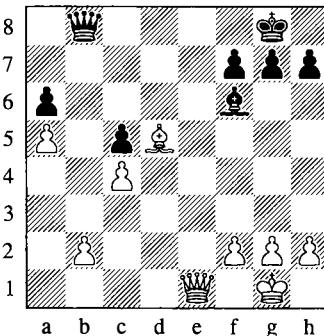
22...♜e6N 23.♗c2 ♜e7 is another way to transfer the rook to the b-file, but the game continuation is fine.

23.♗d2 ♜c7



24.cxd5

24.♗xd5?!N is a reasonable alternative but White has no real winning chances after: 24...♜ce7 25.♗a1 ♜xe1 26.♗xe1 ♜xe1† 27.♗xe1 ♜b8

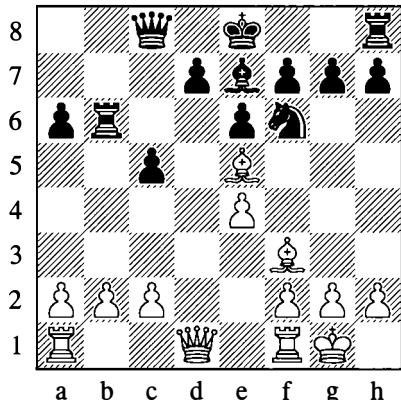


28.b3 g6 29.g3 ♜e5!=

24...♜b7 25.♗ab1 ♜b8 26.♗e2 ♜xb2 27.♗xb2 ♜xb2 28.♗xb2 ♜xb2 29.♗xa6 ♜c3 30.d6 ♜e1=

The draw was clear in Mmmagnificent – Fanami, corr. 2007.

B2) 15.♗f3!?



This has not been such a popular choice but it has been tried by a few strong GMs, with decent results for White. Often White follows up with a4-a5, but for the time being he remains more flexible than in the previous line. Another advantage of delaying a4-a5 is that ♜c3-a5 remains an option.

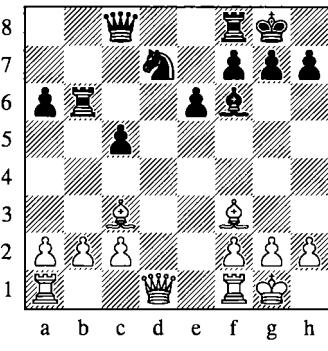
15...d6 16.♗c3 0-0

This position has mostly arisen in correspondence games. Black's plan is to play ...♝d7 and ...♝f6 to exchange the dark-squared bishops, then play with the knight against White's weaker bishop.

17.a4

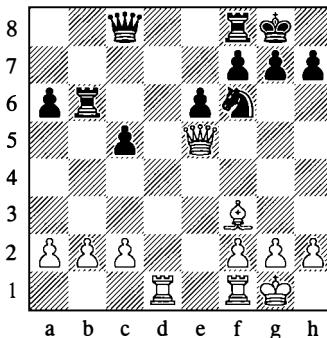
I checked three other moves:

17.e5!? dx5 18.♗xe5 ♐d7 19.♗c3 ♐f6



20.♗d2!N (20.♗xf6 ♐xf6 21.b3 ♘d8 was level in Nithander – Blomqvist, Linkoping 2014) 20...♝d4! 21.♗xd4 ♘d6 is a nice simplifying tactic. 22.c3 cxd4 23.cxd4 ♐e5! 24.♔e2 ♐c6 The position will be about equal after ...♝xd4, although Black's position looks easier to handle due to the powerful knight.

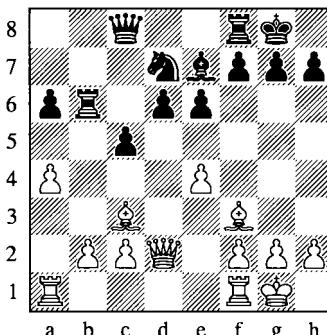
17.♗e2 ♐d7 18.♗ad1!N (18.b3 ♐f6 was fine for Black in Vicol – Bochis, Baden 2013) 18...♝f6 19.♗xf6 ♐xf6 20.e5 dx5 21.♗xe5



21...♝b8! 22.♗xb8 ♘bx8 23.b3 ♘fd8= The endgame should be a draw, although each side can still try to outplay the other. Black's queenside pawns are split but White cannot really attack them. Over the next few moves, Black will bring his king to e7 (or d6, in the event that White swaps all the rooks off) and try to use his knight to exploit the holes in White's queenside.

Finally, one correspondence game continued:

17.♗d2 ♐d7 18.a4



18...c4!?

Fixing the b2-pawn.

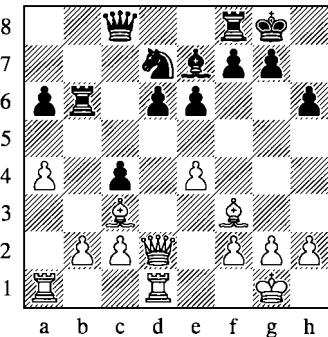
18...♗f6? would be a mistake as the d6-pawn is insufficiently protected. Black gets into trouble after 19.a5! ♗xc3 20.bxc3! ♜c6 21.c4!± with the nasty threat of e4-e5.

19.♗fd1

In Schueppel – Stephan, corr. 2008, Black played 19...♗f6 and went on to draw. Although that move is playable, I would prefer:

19...h6!?

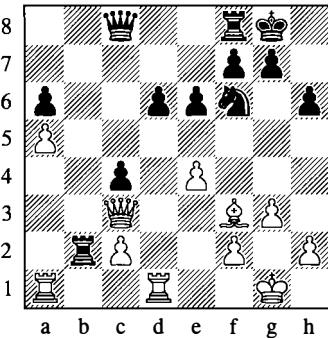
This is a generally useful waiting move, which has particular value in the following line:



20.g3

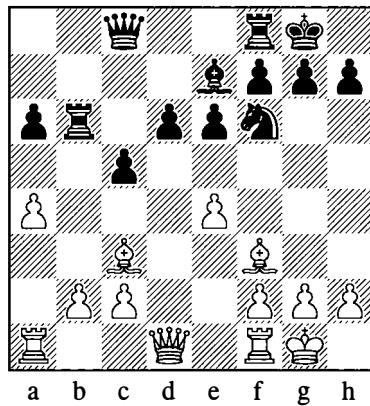
20.a5 ♜b5 21.g3 drives the rook away from the defence of the d6-pawn, preventing ...♗f6 for the time being, but 21...♜c7 22.♗e2 ♛f6 is decent enough for Black.

20...♗f6! 21.♗xf6 ♛xf6 22.a5 ♜xb2 23.♛c3



The same sequence of moves occurred in the aforementioned game, and Black had to play quite accurately to neutralize the pressure. But here, the inclusion of ...h6 and g2-g3 makes his task much easier after:

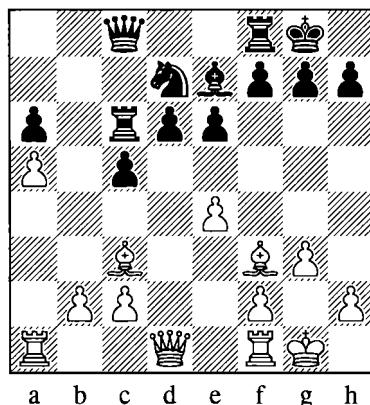
23...♛b8 24.♛xc4 ♛c8! 25.♛xc8 ♜xc8
26.♝xd6 ♜cxc2=



17...♝d7 18.a5 ♜c6!

18...♜b8 has been played several times but I believe it is more important to keep the rook on the 6th rank in order to safeguard the a6- and d6-pawns.

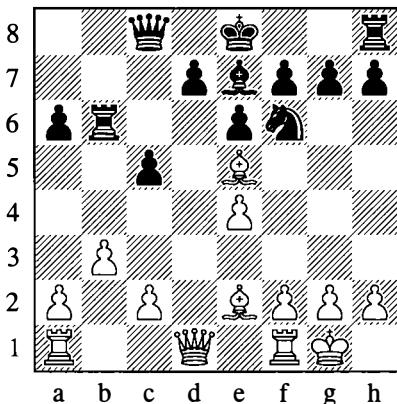
19.g3



19...c4! 20.♛e2 ♛c7 21.♝fd1 ♜b8

In Talpak – Cardelli, corr. 2015, the players agreed a draw on move 35, after mostly just shuffling their pieces around and finding that neither side could make much progress. Engines seem to favour White slightly, presumably because of the bishop pair and the potential vulnerability of the a6-, d6- and c4-pawns, but all these weaknesses are well protected and Black will always have the b-file to provide counterplay. We will see some further examples of how to handle such structures later in the chapter.

B3) 15.b3



15...♝xe4!

Unlike in variation A at the start of the chapter, here I do believe Black should trade the g7-pawn for the one on e4. Having the rook on b6 instead of b8 makes a big difference, as White is unable to force matters by attacking the rook with ♜e5.

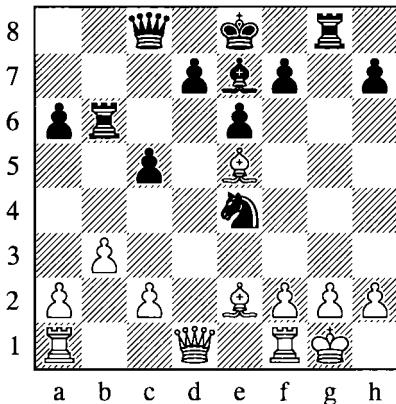
16.♜xg7 ♜g8

White may proceed with B31) 17.♗e5 or B32) 17.♗b2?.

B31) 17.♗e5

This has been the more popular choice although I don't regard it as being especially

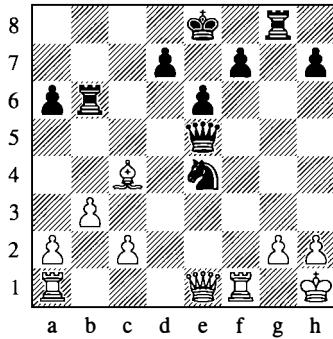
dangerous. Depending on how Black plays, White intends to either exchange the bishop on d6 or retreat it to g3 to shield the kingside.



17...♝d6! 18.♗g3

This is the thematic way to protect the white king.

18.f4 was once played GM Miladinovic, a Taimanov expert. Just as in many other games, Miladinovic reacted in the right way, showing his deep understanding of this system.
 18...c4! 19.♔e1 ♜xe5 20.fxe5 ♜c5† 21.♔h1 ♜xe5 22.♔xc4

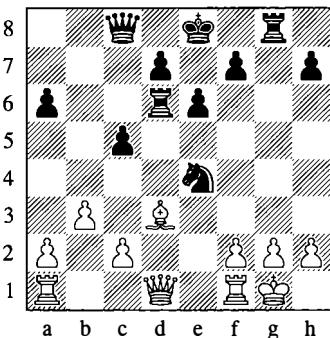


22...♝d6! 23.♗d3 f5∞ Black was at least equal in Marjanovic – Miladinovic, Chania 1999.

A more common alternative has been:

18.♝xd6 ♜xd6 19.♗d3

19.♕c1N allows Black to establish a most surprising knight outpost: 19...♝d2 20.♗d1 ♜c6! 21.g3 ♜d5!∞ Black is active and White's pieces are stuck on the first rank.

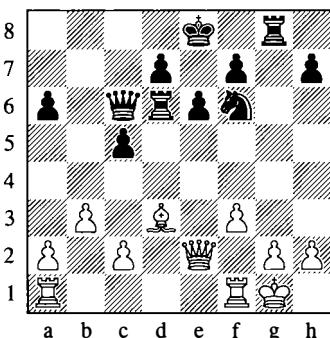


19...♜c6! 20.f3

20.♗f3 ♜f6 21.♗xc6 ♜xc6 leaves Black with a stable position and he had no problem demonstrating equality in Fischer – Wichert, email 2013.

20...♝f6 21.♗e2

A few games have continued 21.♗e1 ♜d4!, with Black's last move taking away the active h4-square from the white queen. Black can continue with ...♝e7 and ...♝d6, before thinking about the thematic minority attack with ...h5-h4-h3, or manoeuvring his knight to a better square. I prefer Black's position and I believe it to be almost risk-free to play.



21...♜d4!

Once again I prefer to activate the rook

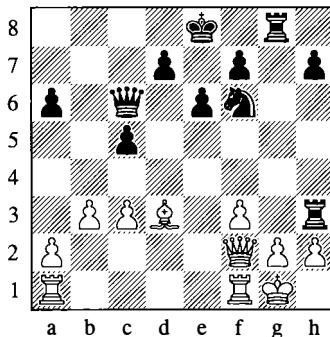
along the 4th rank. It is important to note that the a6-pawn is poisoned.

22.c3

22.♗xa6? runs into 22...♝d5!– with the deadly threat of ...♝f4. For instance, 23.g3 ♜f4 24.♗b5 ♜d6 25.♗h1 ♜d2 (threatening ...♝xh2†) and White is doomed.

22...♝h4 23.♗f2 ♜h3!

Threatening ...♝d6.



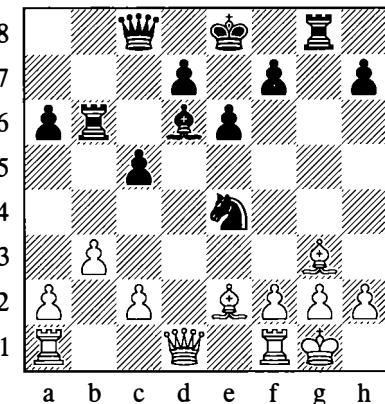
24.♗h1!

The only move.

24.♗ad1? defends the bishop but 24...♝d6! wins anyway: 25.g3 (25.f4 ♜xd3!–) 25...♝gxf3†! 26.hxg3 ♜xg3† 27.♗h1 ♜h3† 28.♗g1 ♜f4 Now Black threatens ...♝g5†, and if 29.♗fe1 ♜xf3!– White can almost resign.

24...♝h5∞

White started to encounter difficulties and eventually lost the game in Lubas – Grammatica, email 2013.



18... ♔xg3 19.fxg3

The correct recapture, activating the rook.

19... \mathbb{Q} e5! 20. \mathbb{Q} h5!?

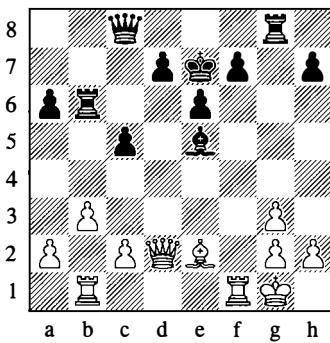
This seems like the most active and interesting try.

20.ঞ্চাল

This move has scored well for White, but Black should have no serious problems.

20... $\hat{\text{e}}7$ 21. $\hat{\text{Wd}}2!?$

21.♗d3 ♜g5 22.♗f3 ♜g8! was fine for Black in Radjabov – Cori, Tromso 2013.



21...f6 22. Wh6 Wf8 23. Wxh7† Wg7

23... $\mathbb{W}g7!?$ N 24. $\mathbb{W}xg7\#$ $\mathbb{E}xg7$ 25.g4 a5 ∞
leads to a similar type of endgame.

24. $\mathbb{W}h6$ $\mathbb{B}g8$ 25. $\mathbb{W}xf8\#$

The endgame was subsequently drawn in Tunisson – Walczak, email 2016, without Black ever being in real danger. Black is a pawn down, but this does not mean he is merely hoping for a draw. In a practical game, the position could just as easily turn against White, as Black can look to mobilize his central pawn majority.

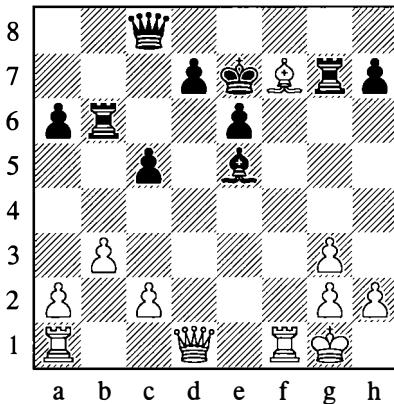
20...Bg7 21.Qxf7+! N

This new move seems like the critical choice.

21.c3 ♔e7 22.♔d3 c4! was fine for Black in Rolle – Wieringen, email 2015. Once again, the strong central pawns prove their worth.

21... ♔e7!

The bishop cannot be touched, as 21... $\mathbb{B}xf7?$ 22. $\mathbb{W}h5!+-$ would be crushing.

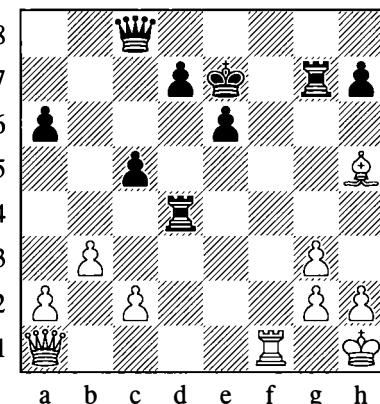


22. ♜h5 ♞d6!

Yet again, the rook comes to the centre at the perfect time. We will see in a couple of moves why this detail is so important.

23. $\mathbb{W}e1 \mathbb{Q}d4\#$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}h1 \mathbb{Q}xal$ 25. $\mathbb{W}xal \mathbb{E}d4\#$

The rook saves the day by blocking the queen's diagonal. Next Black can either centralize his queen via b8-e5 or activate his pieces with ... $\mathbb{Q}g5$ and ... $\mathbb{W}h8$, while his king should be safe enough on d6. Meanwhile White has a pawn for the exchange, and the position remains unclear.

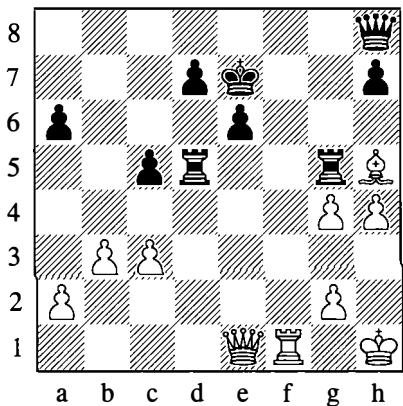


26.♕e1

26.♕c1 should be met by 26...♕c7! intending ...♕e5. Play might continue 27.♕e3 ♘d5 28.g4 ♕e5 29.♕f3 ♖d6∞ when the position remains dynamically balanced. Contrary to the way it may appear at first glance, I would say Black's king is actually safer than White's.

26...♝g5! 27.c3 ♘dd5 28.g4 ♕h8!

Once again the queen will be centralized on e5, offering Black's king a safe place on d6.

29.h4**29...♝xh5!**

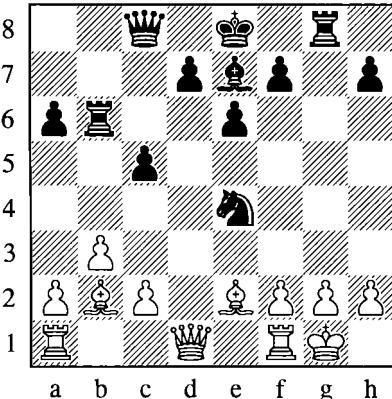
29...♝g8 and 29...♝e5 are both quite playable but, since White has weakened his kingside, it would seem a good moment to return the extra material and play for an attack.

30.gxh5 ♘xh5 31.g4 ♘d5 32.♕e3 ♕g7∞

The position remains about equal, although perhaps slightly more dangerous for White due to his exposed king.

B32) 17.♗b2?!

This has been less popular than the previous line but it has scored really well for White so far.

**17...♝d6! 18.♕d3 ♘f6!**

Strangely enough, only a few games have continued this way, but Black's last two moves are clearly logical.

19.♕xf6! ♘xf6

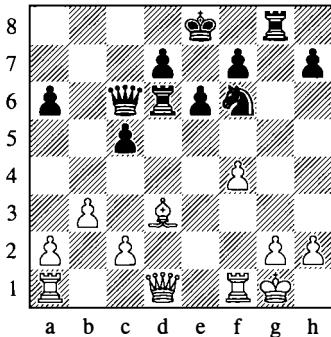
I found four games from this position, including a couple which arrived here via a slightly different move order. Despite a 100% score for White, I believe Black's position is perfectly playable, and that his defeats have only occurred as a result of later errors.

20.♕e2

I also considered:

20.f4 ♘c6!N

This improves over 20...♕c7, as played in Fedorchuk – C. van Oosterom, Deizisau 2008.

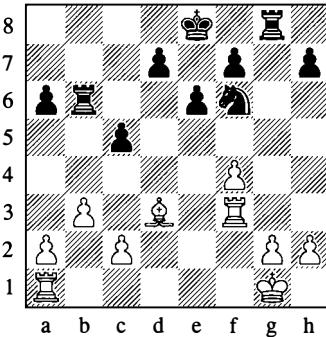


21.♗f3

21.♗f3 is similar to the main line below, and is likely to transpose sooner or later. The text move seems like the only serious alternative.

21...♝xf3 22.♝xf3 ♜b6!

A nice move to free the d-pawn.

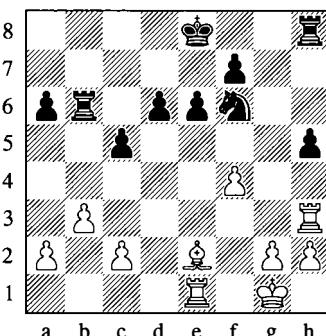


23.♗e1 d6!

It is important to be able to meet f4-f5 with ...e5.

24.♗h3 h5 25.♗e2 ♜h8∞

White has the healthier pawn structure and his bishop may prove superior to the knight in certain types of endgame. On the other hand, Black's knight is pretty useful in the current position, and he will always have some dynamic possibilities connected with his mobile central pawns.



26.♗f2

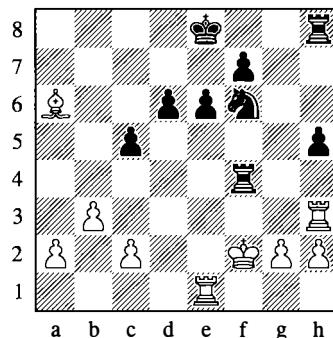
26.g4? would be a serious mistake in view of 26...♝xg4! 27.♝xg4 ♜g8!†.

I also checked: 26.♘h1 ♜b4 27.c4 (Black is fine after 27.f5 ♜e4!; or 27.♗xa6 ♜xf4 28.a4 d5=) 27...♜h7!∞ A nice prophylactic idea to avoid trouble after g2-g4.

26...♜b4!? 27.♗xa6!?

27.c4 can be met by 27...♜h7!∞ just like in the note above.

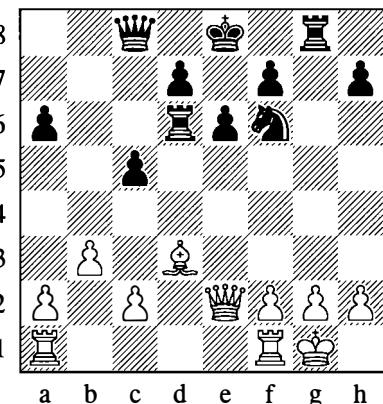
27...♜xf4†



28.♗f3 ♜xf3† 29.♗xf3 ♜g4 30.h3 ♜e5†

31.♗f2 ♜d7=

The endgame remains dynamically equal. A natural plan for Black involves ...♞c7 and ...♞c6, followed by advancing his pawns.



20...♝c6 21.f4 ♜d4

Here too, Black's position is perfectly fine. Generally, his plan for the next few moves will involve ...h5, ...♞e7, ...♝d6 and possibly ...a5. I considered three possible plans for White,

but found no real problems for Black against any of them.

22.♗f3?!N

The idea of this new move is to transfer the rook to h3.

22.♗f2

This was played in the one game from this position. By overprotecting the g2-square, White prepares to move his queen.

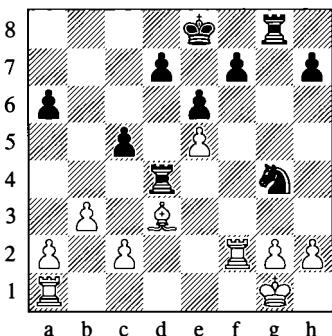
22...♛d6!N

This improves over 22...♝g4?!, when 23.♗f3 left Black's knight misplaced in Hernandez Estevez – Garcia Martin, Linares 2018.

23.♛e5

If 23.♗af1 then 23...♝d5! renews the threat to the f4-pawn.

23...♝xe5 24.fxe5 ♚g4!



25.♗e2 ♜g5 26.♗ae1

26.♗xa6?! ♜xe5 leaves Black with an impressive central majority, while his king is ready to rush to the queenside to keep the a-pawn under control.

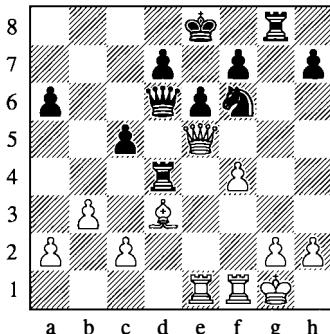
26...♝d5 27.♗xa6 ♜xe5 28.♗f1 c4!∞

The position remains dynamically level, with chances for both sides.

22.♗ae1?!N

This is another sensible option, preparing either a central breakthrough or a queen exchange.

22...♛d6 23.♗e5



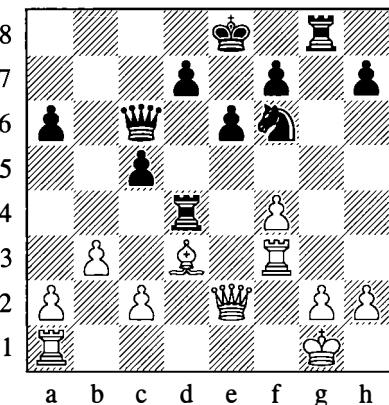
23...♚e7! 24.♗f3 h5! 25.♗xd6† ♜xd6 26.f5 h4
26...a5?! is a valid alternative to safeguard the a-pawn.

27.fxe6 fxe6 28.♗e5

28.♗ef1 ♜d5! is also about equal.

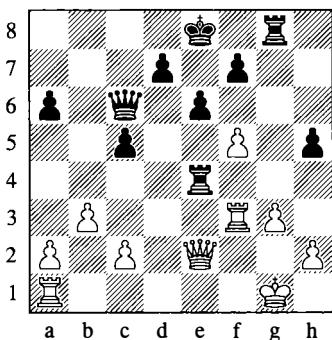
28...♝d5! 29.♗xd5 ♜xd5∞

The endgame remains dynamically balanced, although I find Black's position more attractive to play, as his central pawns have the potential to cause problems for White.



22...h5! 23.♗af1

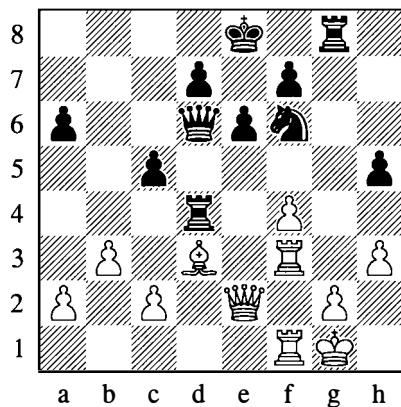
23.f5 is possible but Black gets plenty of activity after: 23...♝dg4! 24.g3 ♜e4! 25.♗xe4 ♜xe4



26. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 27. $\mathbb{W}xe3$ $h4!^\infty$ Black can exchange on g3 or he may even play ...h3, setting up mating motifs on g2.

23... $\mathbb{W}d6$ 24. $h3$

Other moves are also playable but the general evaluation remains about equal after decent play by both sides.



24... $\mathbb{Q}d5!$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}h7!?$

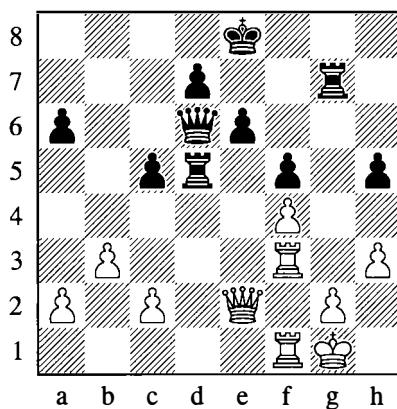
Again, other moves are playable but I found nothing better for White.

25... $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $f5$!

26... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ seems acceptable but the text move is more forcing.

27. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$

Black is well centralized and White has little chance of making inroads into his position. One possible finish could be:

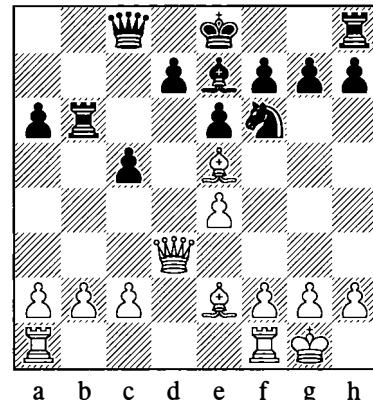


28. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ 29. $\mathbb{W}xh5\#$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 30. $cxd3$ $\mathbb{W}xd3$
31. $\mathbb{W}h8\#$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 32. $\mathbb{W}h5\#$ =

With a draw.

B4) 15. $\mathbb{W}d3!?$

This is the most popular option of all. White makes room for a rook to come to d1, and the queen may be transferred along the third rank to g3 at some point.



15... $d6!$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ 0-0

In this important position, White must decide how best to mobilize his pieces, with a view to capitalizing on his bishop pair.

We will analyse two main options.

B41) 17. $\mathbb{R}ad1$ has been used successfully by

some strong players, but **B42) 17.b3!** is by far White's most popular move, and the most challenging according to my analysis.

Quite a rare choice is:

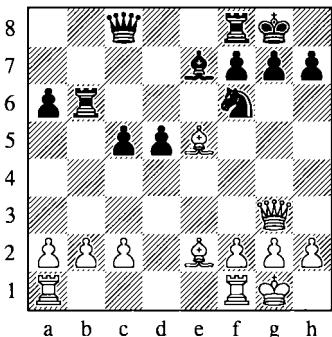
17.♕g3 d5!

In keeping with classical principles, when one player tries to attack on the flank, the other should counter in the centre. Note that the following pawn exchange also clears the sixth rank for Black's rook to join the action.

18.exd5 exd5 19.♗e5

19.b3 was soon agreed drawn in Fedorchuk – Tregubov, Paris 2007. My choice would be 19...♝e6N intending ...♗d6 and ...♝fe8, with a harmonious set-up for Black.

The text move was played in L. Sanchez – Bednay, Budapest 2006, and a few other games. My improvement is:



19...g6!N

Freeing Black's knight to move to e4.

20.b3

Black also has a comfortable position after 20.f4 ♜f5 21.♗d3 ♜e4∞ followed by ...♝f6. 20...♝e4 21.♗d3 ♜e6 22.f4 c4! 23.bxc4 ♜xc4∞

With a dynamically balanced game.

17.♗f3

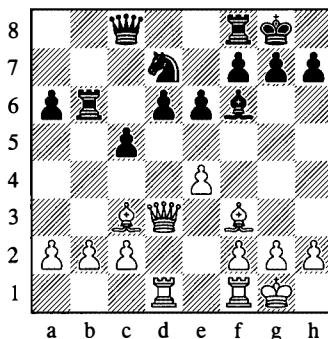
This was once played by GM Bauer, but it does not pose Black any great problems.

17...♝d7!

I think Black has an easier version of the main line covered in variation B42 below.

18.♗ad1 ♜f6

18...♝e5!!N 19.♗e3 ♜xf3† 20.♗xf3 f5!! is an interesting alternative, when Black has just enough activity to compensate for the looseness of his central pawns, but there is no real need to change the position in this way.



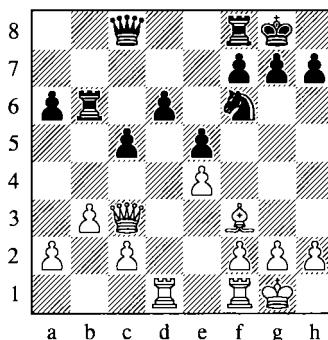
19.♗xf6 ♜xf6 20.♗c3 e5!!

20...♝d7N is a good alternative, intending ...♝c7 and moving the f8-rook to any of the b8-, c8- or d8-squares, followed by ...♝e5-c6.

The text move was also fine for Black in Bauer – Shneider, Paris 2001. I would like to add the following important point:

21.b3?N

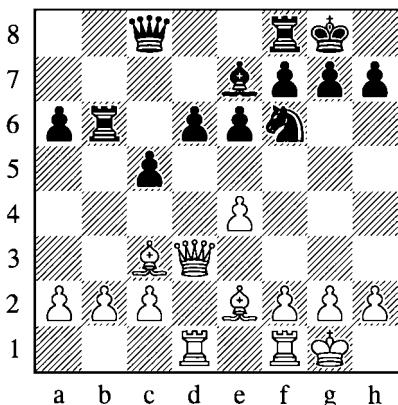
It seems to me that White's only really dangerous plan is to regroup with ♜e3 and ♜e2-c4, with a bind. Black can fight against this with:



21...♝d8 22.♗e3 ♝c6!

By maintaining pressure against the e4-pawn, Black prevents White's intended bishop manoeuvre, and may look to carry out a ...c4 break in the near future.

B41) 17.♗ad1



17...d5!

17...♝c6?! can sometimes be a good move in these positions, but here it is well met by 18.e5!?, as occurred in Ponomariov – Neiksans, Tallinn (blitz) 2016.

18.exd5 ♜xd5 19.♗e5!

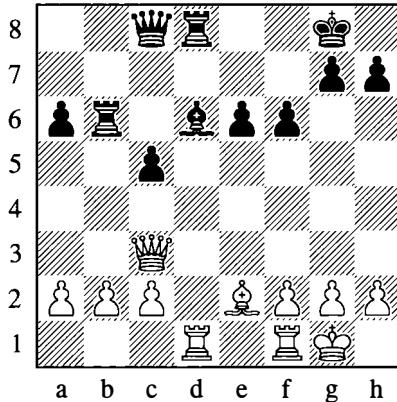
Keeping the bishop is White's only chance for an advantage, but Black has enough resources.

19...♝d8! 20.♗g3

20.c4 gives Black a few decent options. 20...f6?! seems to me to be a straightforward equalizer, for instance: 21.♗e4 ♜b4 22.♗c3 ♜xa2 23.♗a5 ♜xd1 24.♗xd1 ♜d6=

20...f6 21.♗c3 ♜d6 22.♗f3 ♜xc3 23.♗xc3

23.bxc3?! f5! gave Black no real problems in Garbar – Fritz, email 2012.

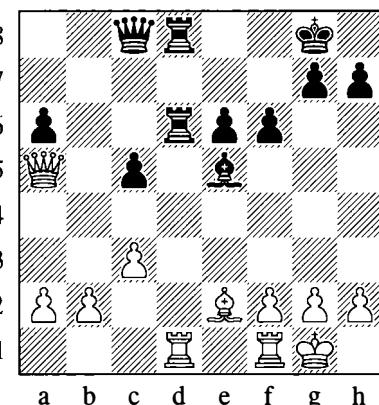


23...♝e5 24.♗a5 ♜bd6

Black only has to solve some mild coordination issues in order to claim full equality.

25.c3

Another game continued: 25.b3 ♜xd1 26.♗xd1 ♜xd1† 27.♗xd1 c4! 28.g3 cxb3 29.cxb3 ♜c7 30.♗a4 a5!= Black held the position comfortably in Gnutov – Altrichter, email 2011.



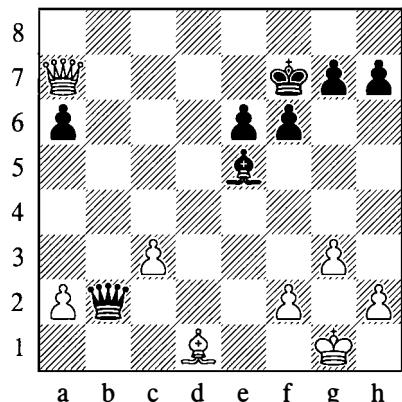
25...♜xd1?!

This simplifying move seems clearest to me, although 25...♝d2 is also fine, and led to a fairly quick draw in Valinova – Sheretyuk, corr. 2013

26.♗xd1 ♗xd1† 27.♔xd1 ♔f7 28.g3

28.♔e2 ♗b8! secures full equality.

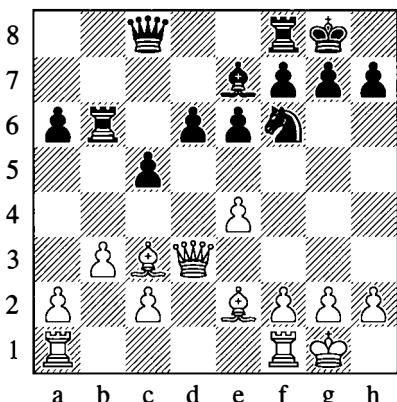
28...♗b7! 29.♗xc5 ♗xb2 30.♗a7†



30...♔f8! 31.♗xa6 ♗a1 32.♗c8† ♔e7
33.♗b7† ♔d8=

White can choose between forcing a draw immediately and allowing Black to capture either the a2- or the c3-pawn, with an equal endgame.

B42) 17.b3!



With this strong prophylactic move, White safeguards the b-pawn and creates a safe retreat square for the bishop.

17...♗c6!

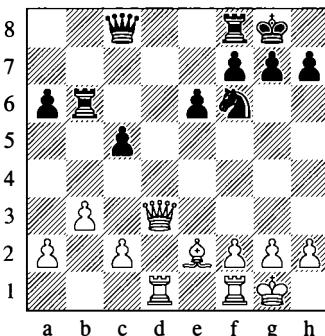
This is an important moment. The text move is relatively rare, but I believe it is the best choice.

Here is why I was not entirely happy with the most common continuation:

17...d5 18.exd5!

18.e5 ♘d7 has also occurred in lots of games but I believe Black is doing fine. Instead, White should open the centre in order to improve the scope of his bishops.

18...♘xd5 19.♔e5! ♔f6 20.♕xf6 ♘xf6 21.♗ad1



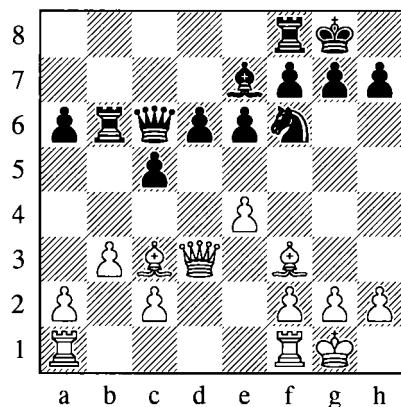
I believe this to be a critical position. Although Black has a playable game and has gone on to draw most correspondence games without major issues, it seems to me that in a practical game White can exert lasting pressure with little risk, if he continues in the most precise way. If Black was given time to regroup with ...♗c7, ...♗bb8 and ...a5, he would be completely fine, but White has a nice manoeuvre that kills all Black's active ideas and limits him to a passive defence.

21...♗c7

21...a5? was seen in Fier – Banikas, Internet (blitz) 2009. This pawn move prevents the idea mentioned below, but it gives White a chance to activate his queen with 22.♗c3!N ♘b8 23.♗e5! when, once again, I consider Black's position to be slightly uncomfortable.
22.♗d2!

This little move has only occurred in one game, Matugin – Grammatica, corr. 2013, but it has a nice idea behind it. The queen is heading for a5, where it adds to the pressure on Black's queenside, giving White a small but lasting advantage.

18.Qf3



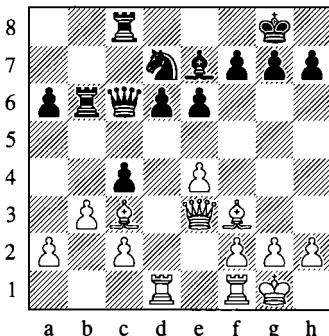
18...Qd7!

White enjoys the advantage of the bishop pair but one of his bishops is, for the time being, passively placed on f3.

19.Qe3

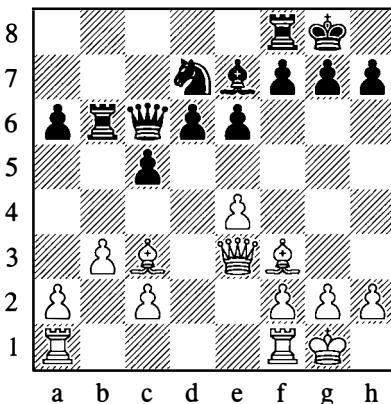
It is useful for White to remove his queen from a possible ...c4 attack.

A few games have continued with: 19.Qad1 c4!
20.Qe3 Rc8



21.Qd4! Rbb8 22.Qe2 cxb3 23.cxb3 Rb7
Black had no problems in Karachurin – Schoen, email 2010 (and 23...a5 also proved fine in a subsequent correspondence game).

19.Qe2?!N might be an interesting way to move the queen out of harm's way while keeping an eye on the a6-pawn. Nevertheless, Black is fine after 19...Rc8, followed by ...Rbb8 and an eventual ...c4 break.



19...h6!

A nice prophylactic move which supports a possible ...Rg5 in many variations. Black has opted for 19...c4 in a few games, with reasonable results, but the pawn advance comes with less power when the queen is not on d3, so I would prefer to strengthen Black's position before committing to it.

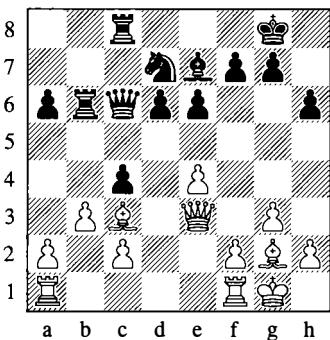
20.Qad1

Some other games have continued with:

20.g3 c4 21.Qg2
21.Qd4 Rbb8 22.Qe2 cxb3 23.cxb3 Rfc8 was also fine for Black in Sherwood – Champion, corr. 2016.

21...Rc8

21...Rfb8?! also gave Black decent queenside counterplay in Kajol – Beep, email 2009.



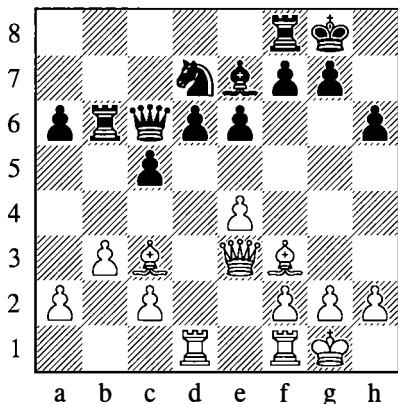
22.♗ac1

22.b4 ♜a4∞ stirs up some trouble for White on the queenside.

After the text move, Black continued with 22...♜b7 and went on to draw in Tiits – Champion, corr. 2009. Although that move is quite playable, my personal preference would be:

22...♝bb8?N 23.♝fd1 ♜c7

Taking the queen off the long diagonal, and thus preparing ...♝f6 to exchange the bishops.



20...♝g5

It is worth driving the queen to a worse square.

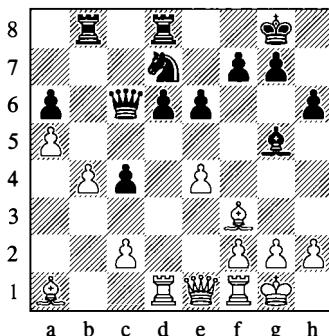
21.♛e1

21.♛e2 ♜c8 leads to similar play, with equal chances, as shown in a few correspondence games.

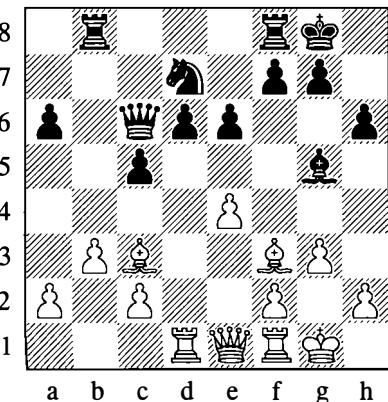
21...♝bb8 22.g3

If 22.♗b2N I would favour 22...♜c7, taking the queen off the h1-a8 diagonal and thus preparing ...♝f6, while keeping the ...c4 break in reserve. If White tries attacking the a6-pawn with 23.♔e2, Black can play 23...♝f6! anyway.

I found another correspondence game, which continued: 22.♔a1!? ♜b6! (if 22...♜c7 then 23.♔e2! would be slightly annoying; with the bishop on a1 instead of b2, White can meet 23...♝f6 with 24.♝xa6 as his dark-squared bishop is not hanging) 23.a4 c4 24.a5 ♜c6 25.b4 ♜fd8



26.♗d4 (26.g3 ♜b5∞) This was chessnewblet – saufbruder, email 2013, and now 26...♜b5!N would be my choice. If White defends the b4-pawn with 27.♔c3, then 27...♝f4! defends the d6-pawn while preparing ...♝e5, with a good game for Black.



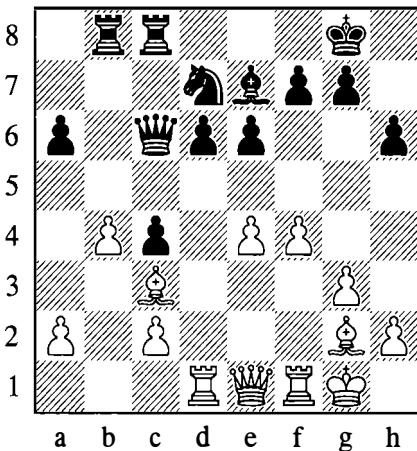
22...♝fc8 23.♝g2 ♜e7 24.f4 c4

Now White must decide whether or not to close the queenside.

25.b4

25.♗a1 was tried in a later game, when 25...cx b3 26.cxb3 ♜b5 27.♗f2 a5!∞ gave Black good play on the queenside in Adam – Lunek, email 2016.

I believe that closing the queenside is a more ambitious and challenging try for White. However, Black can obtain plenty of counterplay with the help of an excellent knight manoeuvre.



**25...♞b6 26.a3 ♞a4 27.♗d4 a5! 28.e5 d5
29.c3 ♞b2!∞**

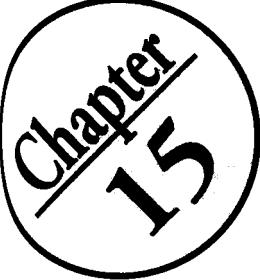
The knight's unusual journey to the d3-square gave Black plenty of play in Sazon – Kaupert, email 2015.

Conclusion

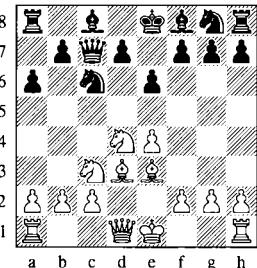
This concludes our coverage of White's classical set-up with ♜e2 and ♜e3. The 13.♗d4 variation examined in this chapter remains a topical choice in both grandmaster praxis and correspondence play. The resulting positions are complex and challenging, with White having the bishop pair and Black the central pawn majority. After our standard response of 13...c5, play usually continues 14.♗e5 ♜b6 when White must make a pivotal choice.

15.b3 ♞xe4 16.♗xg7 ♜g8 leads to a dynamic situation, where Black's kingside has been weakened but he obtains compensation in the form of the open g-file and additional extra central pawn. Although concrete details are important in all the main variations we looked at, there are a few overarching themes to keep in mind: exchanging the dark-squared bishops usually features in Black's plans, and another important theme is the activation of the rook on b6 via the d6-square, from which it often moves to d4 and may even swing across to assist in a kingside attack.

White's other main option is 15.♗d3, which leads to more of a manoeuvring game after 15...d6! 16.♗c3 0–0. Once again, the exchange of dark-squared bishops is likely to feature in Black's plans, and the possibility of a timely ...c4 break should be enough to stop White from building an advantage with the two bishops the way he would like to.



6. ♕e3



Introduction to 7. ♔d3

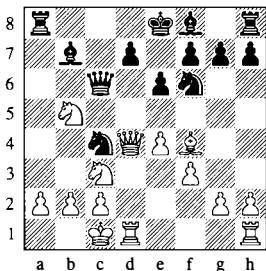
Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2. ♦f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4. ♦xd4 ♦c6 5. ♦c3 ♜c7 6. ♕e3 a6 7. ♔d3

7... ♜f6

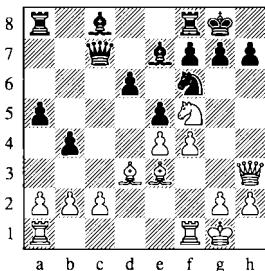
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| B22) 10. ♔e2!? ♔d6!? 11. ♜d4! ♔b7 | 315 |
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note to move 8



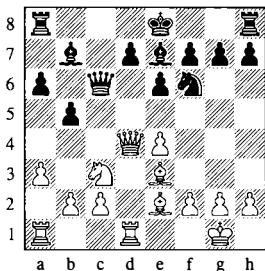
14... ♜a6!N

A) note to 12. ♜ael1!?



16... ♜xf5!N

B222) after 13.a3!?

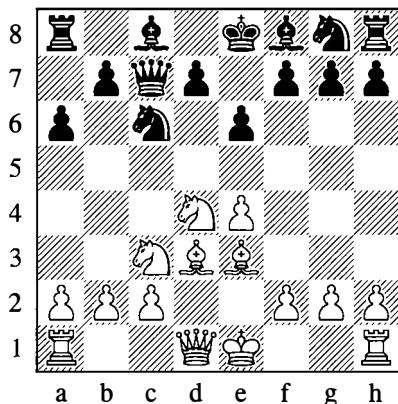


13... ♜c7!N

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘c6 5.♘c3 ♜c7 6.♕e3

This is the first we have seen of White's most common 6th move against the Taimanov; it is also White's most aggressive option.

6...a6 7.♗d3

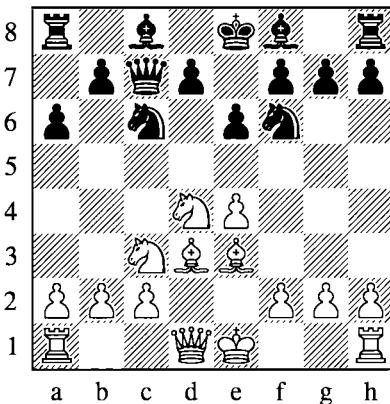


This move was recommended by GM Sune Berg Hansen in *Experts vs. the Sicilian* and it is still popular today. According to Hansen it is one of the most attacking lines at White's disposal against the Taimanov. In my understanding, this system is especially designed to avoid possible transpositions to Scheveningen set-ups, as if Black plays ...d6, White will castle short, play f2-f4 and ♘f3 and enjoy a much more active version of the classical set-ups where the bishop is on e2 at first and later goes to d3. Still, as we are going to see, Black's position remains pretty flexible and he has many ideas to fight against this system. Among the many antidotes that are considered reliable today, I have my own favourite and in this chapter and the next I'll share it with you!

In later chapters we will see White's three other main options, which are 7.♗d2, then the English Attack with f2-f3 ideas, and finally the trendy 7.♗f3.

7...♗f6

We will choose this natural developer, which is the most common move, though the alternative 7...b5 quite often transposes.



We will study two main lines: firstly
A) 8.♘b3 though **B) 8.0-0** is the most common move.

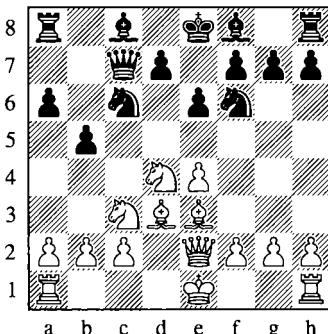
It doesn't hurt to have an idea about how to meet the less popular alternatives:

I don't see any point in: 8.♘xc6?! This capture is acceptable if Black has played ...b5 or ...♗d6. But as things stand, after 8...bxc6 Black plays ...d5 next with an excellent game.

8.♗e2

This move gives White some ideas of castling long, but they should not work out well after:

8...b5!?



9.0–0–0

Also possible is 9.♗xc6 ♖xc6 and now:

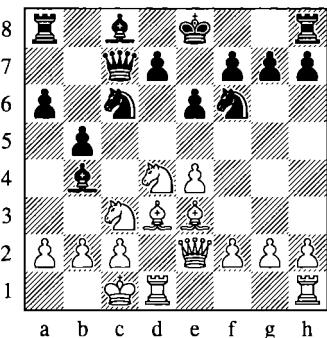
a) 10.0–0–0?! is needlessly risky for White after 10...b4, when there are two options:

a1) 11.e5 offers White some hope of not ending up completely lost while still in the opening. After 11...bxc3 12.exf6 ♗b8! 13.b3 gxf6† Black is a pawn up and the c3-pawn is pretty annoying.

a2) The best practical try is 11.♕d5 though after 11...exd5 12.exd5 ♘xd5 White's compensation for the missing piece is rather speculative.

b) 10.a3 ♘b7 And still White cannot castle long. 11.0–0–0? ♘xa3! Therefore, White should castle short and transpose to the lines we'll see after 8.0–0 b5.

9...♘b4!?



10.♕d5?

The text move is unsound in this case, but Black should always be ready for ♕d5 sacs.

Instead 10.♗xc6 dxc6!† is strong for Black. He has several ideas including ...♘xc3 and ...c5 and/or ...e5 with ...♗e6 coming.

10...exd5 11.exd5 ♘xd4 12.♕xd4† ♘f8+–

White did not have enough for the piece in Safarli – Volodin, Kirishi 2006.

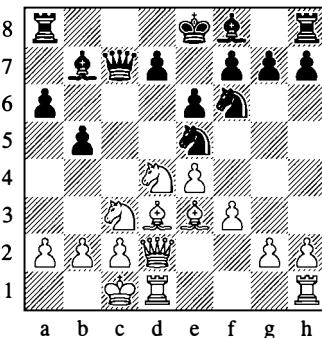
Another queen move that has been seen in practice is:

8.♗d2

But after:

8...b5 9.f3 ♘b7 10.0–0–0 ♘e5

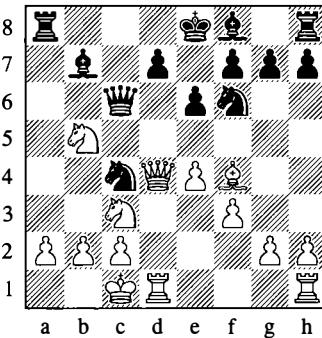
Black enjoys excellent counterplay with the immediate threat being ...b4 followed by ...d5.



This is why in one high-level encounter White tried to change the course of the game with a typical Sicilian sacrifice:

11.♗xb5?! axb5 12.♗dxb5 ♖c6 13.♗d4 ♘c4
14.♗f4

So far we are following Cao – A. Horvath, Szekesfehervar 2006. Here Black missed his chance to play:



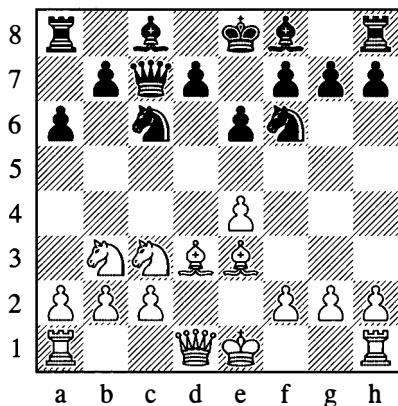
14...♗a6!N 15.♗d6†

A key point is that 15.♗c7† ♘d8 16.♗xa8 fails to: 16...♗c5! 17.♗d3 ♘xb2+–

15...♗xd6 16.♗xd6 ♖b7 17.b3 ♘xd6 18.♗xd6 ♖c8+–

With a decisive advantage as White doesn't have nearly enough for the piece.

A) 8.Qb3



As Delchev & Semkov point out, this move is designed to avoid the lines with 8.0–0 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$. In this case however, the Scheveningen set-up is not so dangerous for Black. If White wishes to attack on the kingside, then relocating a centralized knight from d4 to the more passive b3-square is not helpful.

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

Another possible move order is 8...b5 9.f4 $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 10.0–0 d6 11. $\mathbb{W}f3$ and now Black can even play 11...g6!? \rightleftarrows with the idea of putting the bishop on the more active g7-square. This position has scored excellently for Black in practice.

9.f4 d6 10.0–0 0–0 11. $\mathbb{W}f3$ b5

White has achieved his desired set-up, but how should he continue?

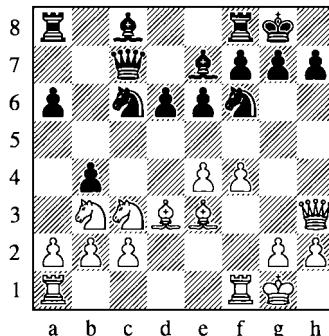
12. $\mathbb{R}ae1$?

The most popular move and not by accident. It is better for White to put the rook on e1 and leave his queen on f3 for now in order to keep e4–e5 ideas in play and perhaps meet Black's ...b5–b4 with the manoeuvre $\mathbb{Q}d1-f2$!

12.a4 b4 13. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ e5!? 14.f5 $\mathbb{Q}a5$! left Black in great shape in Alikulov – O. Ivanov,

Moscow 2016 (14...d5!? as in Spassky – Tal, Tbilisi [2] 1965, is more complex).

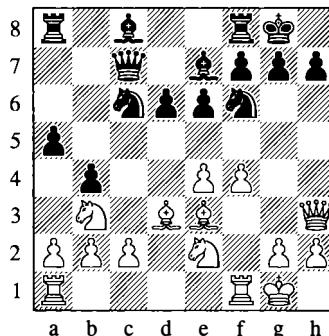
12.g4 $\mathbb{E}e8$!? (this is slightly more flexible compared with 12... $\mathbb{Q}b7$) 13.g5 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ \rightleftarrows This is a typical Sicilian position. Black will try to either break in the centre or attack on the queenside with ...a5 and ...b4 or ...a4. He can defend on the kingside with the manoeuvre ... $\mathbb{Q}f8$, ...g6, ... $\mathbb{Q}g7$, ... $\mathbb{Q}f8$.

12. $\mathbb{W}h3$ b4!13. $\mathbb{Q}e2$

White could try 13. $\mathbb{Q}d1N$ but Black still has enough play: 13...a5 14. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ (14.g4 e5!?, 15.f5 d5! \rightleftarrows) 14...a4 15. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}a6$ \rightleftarrows

13...a5!

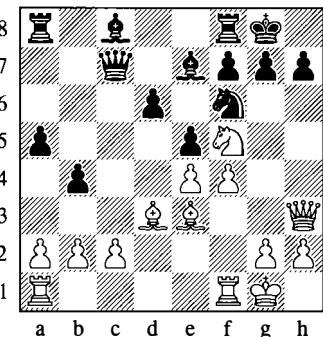
Black is already playing for an edge.

14. $\mathbb{Q}bd4$!?

The engines give as best the thrust 14.g4, but this can be met by the typical 14...e5!?

15.f5 d5! with excellent counterplay for Black. If we continue a bit further: 16.exd5 e4 17.dxc6 exd3 18.cxd3 ♜xc6 19.♖ac1 ♜d6 20.♗c5 ♜d8 Black has sacrificed a pawn, but the weak white king and the weakness on d3 provide plenty of compensation.

14...♝xd4 15.♝xd4 e5 16.♝f5



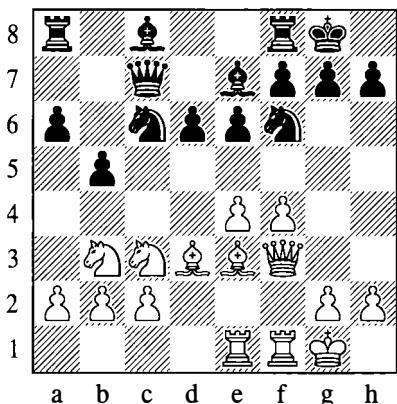
16...♜xf5!N

This dynamic option is Black's best course of action.

16...♝h8!! was my choice against Pikula. The novelty is stronger, but I did come up with a simple and effective plan: 17.fxe5 dx5 18.♗g5 ♜g8!!+ Pikula – Pavlidis, Belgrade 2014.

17.♜xf5 g6! 18.♝h3 d5!!

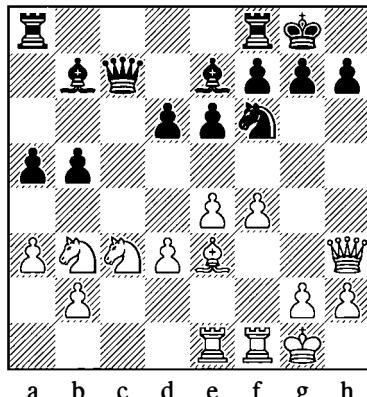
One way or another, Black wishes to place a pawn on e4, putting White's bishop and queenside under fire.



12...♝b7 13.♝h3 ♜b4?

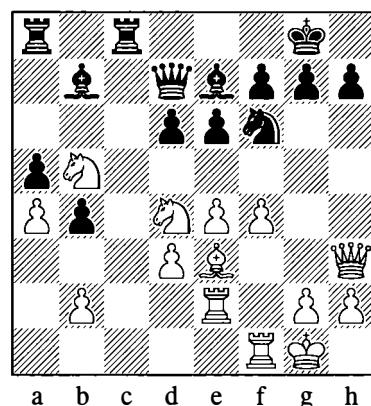
In order to eliminate White's most dangerous attacking piece – the d3-bishop. This makes a lot of sense now that the rook has moved to e1. With the rook on a1, White might consider allowing (or even encouraging with a2-a3) the exchange on d3 and then put his rook on c1. Now, this would simply lose a whole tempo.

14.a3 ♜xd3 15.cxd3 a5!



16.♝d4 b4 17.♝cb5 ♜d7 18.a4 ♜fc8
19.♝e2

We have been following the game Shanava – Kotanjian, Jermuk 2011.

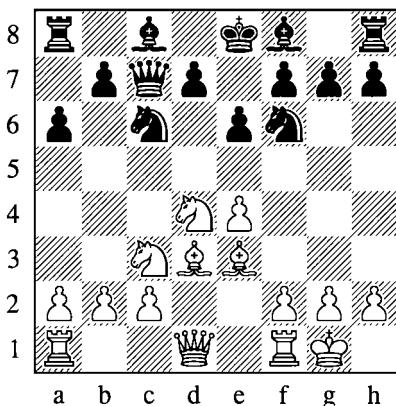


19...♝a6!N

To keep pressure on the knight on b5.

20.g4 ♗e8! 21.g5 d5!?

The position is objectively unclear, but Black certainly has enough counterplay for at least equality.

B) 8.0–0**8...b5**

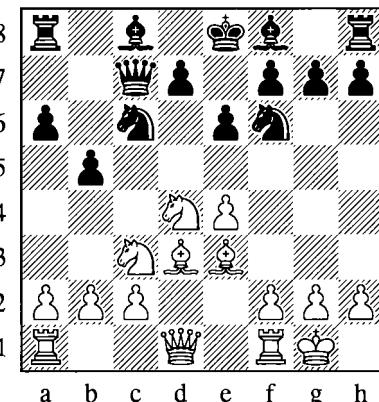
A few years ago, when I had to build my own repertoire with White, I tried to employ the 6.♗e3 and 7.♗d3 system since it offers many aggressive positions. So by employing this variation both with White and Black, I had to study very carefully the most important positions. At that time the main lines were considered to be 8...♗e5, 8...♗xd4, and 8...h5. I played those positions many times with both colours. It was back in 2014 while I was watching live a game between Huschenbeth and Le Quang Liem from the US college team championships when I realized that 8...b5!? is a playable move. Actually, my first reaction was to try to refute it. But after a short time I realized that Black's last move offers him a playable position, which he can even play for a win in many cases.

As I mentioned above, other moves that have been tried here include 8...♗e5, 8...♗xd4 9.♗xd4 ♗c5 (which allows 10.♗xf6 gxf6 11.♗g4 which I don't fancy for Black),

8...♗d6, and the slightly weird 8...h5 (threatening ...♗g4) which is actually a rather typical move in the Sicilian Taimanov/Paulsen/Kan complex. Most of these lines offer interesting play and you can find many high-level GM games in the database, but I prefer to focus on 8...b5 for the reasons explained above.

As I said above, it is *not* a good idea to transpose to a Scheveningen-type of position with 8...d6 as after 9.f4 ♗e7 10.♗f3 practice has shown that White enjoys great attacking potential.

On the other hand 8...♗e7 is not so bad as after 9.f4?! (Karjakin has preferred the more flexible 9.♗h1?! which creates another world of complications) Black has the nice retort 9...♗c5!? with interesting complications that are worth exploring.



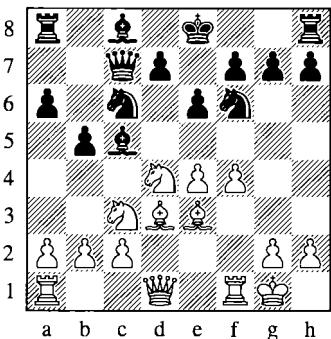
The two main options are B1) 9.a3 and B2) 9.♗xc6.

I will mention some of the alternatives:

9.♗b3 doesn't look any different than 8.♗b3.

9.f4?!

This is premature because of:
9...♗c5!



10.♘f5

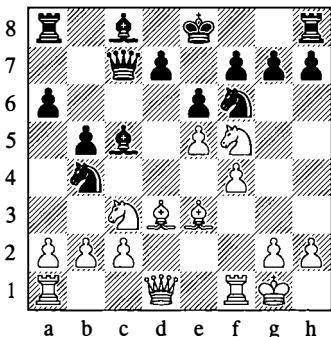
Even worse is: 10.e5? ♘xe5! 11.fxe5 ♜xe5† 10...♝b4!

The strong move has been played only once according to my database.

11.e5

After 11.♘xg7† ♜f8 White simply loses a piece without much to show for it.

11.♘d4 ♜a7! 12.♘ce2 ♘g4 13.♘d2 d6!+ planning ...e5 leaves White in desperate trouble.



In Durao – Kupper, Enschede 1963, Black could have played:

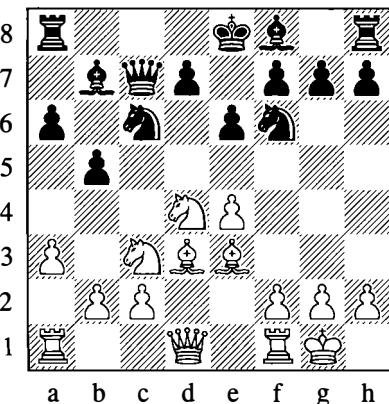
11...exf5!N 12.exf6 ♘xe3† 13.♘h1 0–0 14.fxg7 ♜e8+–

With a winning position.

9.♘h1 avoids all the above, but after 9...♝b7 I don't see how White can avoid a transposition elsewhere as 10.♘xc6 or 10.♗e2 or 10.a3 are the only logical continuations he has.

I am not a fan of the move 9.♗e2 either. After 9...♝b7 White should take on c6 or play a2-a3, and again we have a transposition to a position we will see later.

B1) 9.a3 ♜b7



10.♗e2

White's 9th move secured the c3-knight against harassment from b4 by either the pawn or bishop, but it's too slow a move to trouble Black, no matter which 10th move White chooses.

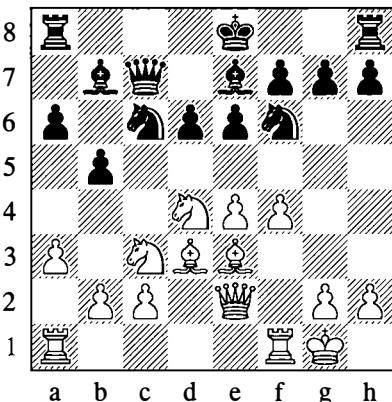
Once again 10.f4? ♜c5! is problematic for White.

10.♘h1 allows: 10...♝xd4! 11.♘xd4 ♜c5! 12.♘xc5 ♜xc5 13.f4 d6† We have reached a typical position where Black's chances look preferable. Since Black has exchanged the dark-squared bishops it is quite possible for him at some point to play ...e6-e5 leaving White with a weak e4-pawn.

10...♝e7

Now 10...♝xd4?! 11.♘xd4 ♜c5 allows White to play the strong 12.♘xc5! ♜xc5 13.e5† when the d6-square is weak. White will play ♜e4 next then try to quickly install a knight on d6.

11.f4 d6

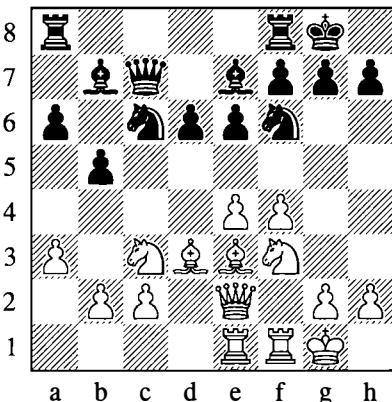


This is a great Scheveningen for Black as the queen is misplaced on e2 and it will have to move again to f3 or h5 in order to create attacking chances, or White can try something original. Let's follow a high-level game for a while.

12.♕f3!?

If White tries 12.♕ae1 0–0 13.♔h1 then two good options are 13...♕ae8?!? and 13...♗d7?.

12...0–0 13.♕ae1

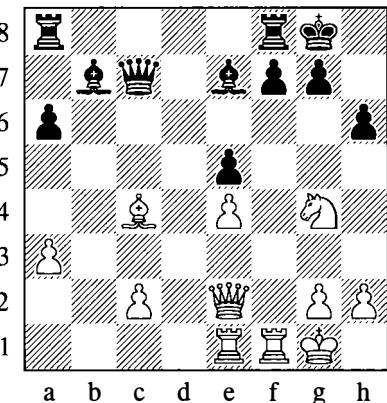


13...b4!?

As I am not sure how White wants to build her attack, I might have considered more neutral moves such as 13...♕ac8?! or 13...♗d7?.

We do not need to analyse in detail the moves below, but I do think it is worth playing through how top-class players handle a messy Sicilian middlegame.

14.♗d1 bxa3 15.bxa3 e5!? 16.♗f2 exf4 17.♕xf4 ♗e5 18.♗xe5 dxe5 19.♗g5 h6 20.♗xf6 ♗xf6 21.♗g4 ♗e7 22.♗c4

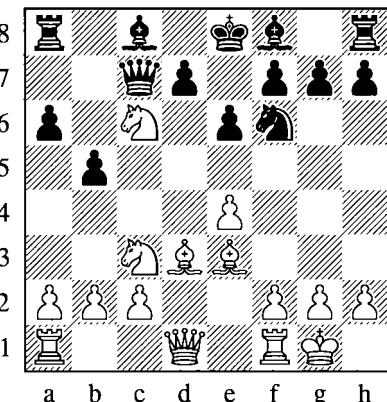


So far we have followed Polgar – Ljubojevic, Buenos Aires 1994. I think that the easiest for Black would have been:

22...♖ad8N

Planning to put the rook on d4. Black may be objectively slightly better already, but in a practical game it is still an unclear mess.

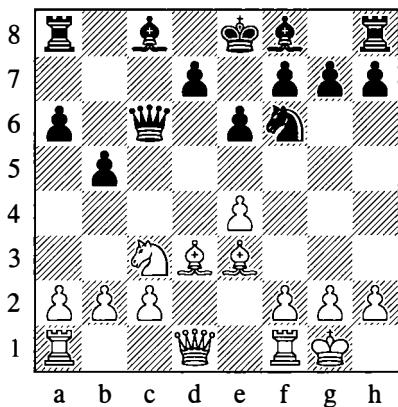
B2) 9.♗xc6



Here this move makes a lot of sense and is the most popular response. In general, if White wants to capture on c6 then the appropriate moment to do so is after Black plays ...b5 and before Black plays ...♗b7. There is a very simple reason for this: White wants Black's queen to be on c6 in order to leave the e5-square unprotected. If Black's pawn is on b7 then Black can always consider ...bx_c6 after White captures on c6, and if Black's bishop is on b7 then quite often Black will play ...♗x_c6.

9...♛xc6

After 9...dx_c6 10.f4 e5 (otherwise White plays e4-e5 himself) 11.f5 ♗b7 12.a4! both the statistics and the engine evaluations favour White. Not only that, but I find the play less exciting here compared with my main line.

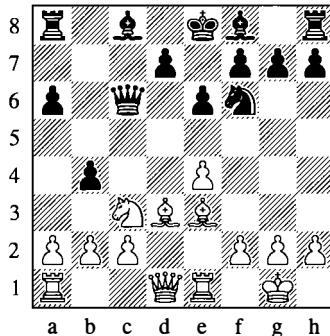


Here White has tried many moves. I'll touch upon several rarities, but I'll mainly concentrate on what are considered the three most critical ones. **B21)** 10.f3?! was the set-up recommended by Sune Berg Hansen in the above-mentioned *Experts vs. the Sicilian*, so it deserves special attention. **B22)** 10.♗e2? is the trendy move, with the obvious idea of placing the bishop on the long diagonal.

10.a3 is actually the most popular choice, though in my opinion not the most dangerous, and it will be examined in the next chapter.

Before we move on, I will examine several rare options. Please note that all three of the main lines defend the vulnerable e4-pawn, in one way or another, against the move ...b5-b4, so as you might already have guessed, this will be our choice against most of these rare alternatives.

10.♗e1 hasn't gained any popularity since Black can win a pawn by playing: 10...b4!



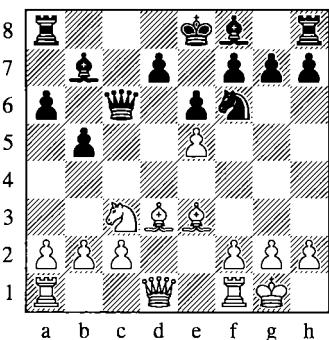
11.♗d5?!N As so often after an early ...b5-b4, this knight sac is the move Black must be ready for. (Instead 11.♗e2 ♗xe4 12.♗d4 ♗d5!† safely grabs a pawn [but not 12...♗b7?? 13.♗xe6! when White wins, as either recapture on e6 allows a winning tactic. For practice, I will let you find the solutions on your own!]) 11...♗xd5 12.exd5 13.♗d2! ♗b7 14.♗e4 ♗b5 15.c4 ♗b6 16.♗e3 ♗c7∞ White's activity gives him some compensation, but I prefer Black's chances in this messy position.

10.♗h1 Once again Black should go for the e4-pawn: 10...b4! 11.♗e2 ♗xe4 12.♗d4 ♗d5 Black's position is already slightly better.

10.e5

This move has not been tried in any recent high-level games, which is a sign that it should not cause us any problems.

10...♗b7!



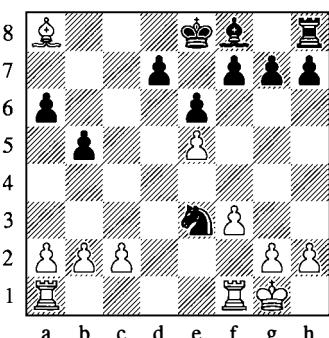
11.f3

Also untroubling is: 11. $\mathbb{W}f3$ $\mathbb{W}xf3$ 12. $gx\mathbb{f}3$ $b4!$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}d5!$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $\mathbb{Q}f4! \mp$

11... $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}e4$

Or 12. $\mathbb{Q}xd5?!$ $\mathbb{W}xd5$ and White cannot defend the e5-pawn!

12... $\mathbb{Q}xc3!$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3$
15. $\mathbb{Q}xa8$

15... $\mathbb{Q}c5?N$

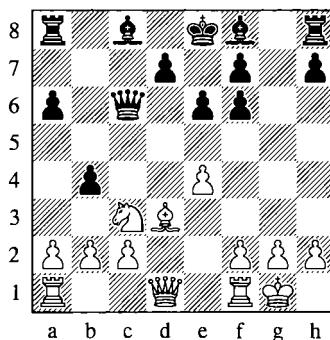
After 15... $\mathbb{Q}xf1$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xf1$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 17. $c3$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ Black has the slightly more favourable side of an equal endgame! As in Zuidema – Matulovic, Hamburg 1965.

16. $\mathbb{Q}fc1$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}d1\uparrow$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}xb2\mp$

Black's counterplay is so strong that he can claim an edge, despite having only knight and pawn for a rook.

10. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $b4!$

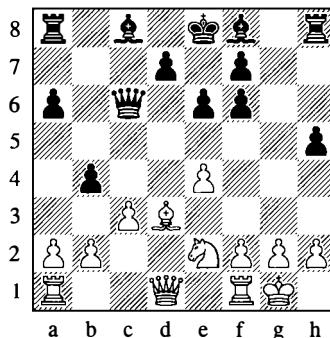
As usual.

11. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $gxf6$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}e2$

Once again we should look at the knight sac, though this is not a good version: 12. $\mathbb{Q}d5?!$ $exd5$ 13. $exd5$ $\mathbb{Q}d6?$ Certainly not the only option, as taking on d5 or moving directly to b6 are also promising. 14. $\mathbb{E}e1\uparrow$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 15. $c4$ $\mathbb{W}b6?!$ 16. $\mathbb{W}h5$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 17. $\mathbb{E}e2$ So far this is Ovetchkin – Hayrapetyan, Moscow 2012. 17... $\mathbb{Q}c7!N$ 18. $\mathbb{E}ae1$ $\mathbb{Q}b7\rightarrow$ White doesn't have enough for his piece, especially as Black's king is the safer one!

12... $h5$ 13. $c3$

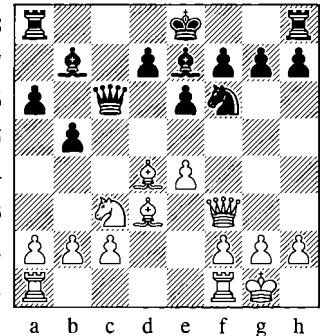
So far we have followed Ruiz Aguilar – Sanchez, Bucaramanga 2008.

13... $\mathbb{Q}b7!N$ 14. $\mathbb{E}c1$ $\mathbb{W}b6\mp$

A typical Taimanov scenario. The black king is well covered by our pawns in the centre, while we have open lines along with the bishop pair.

10. $\mathbb{W}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}d4$

This is a better implementation of the idea above. White is ready for Scheveningen-type play (assuming Black will play ...♝e7) after putting a rook on e1, and playing ♘h3, f2-f4 etc. Still, Black has proved to be fine after: 11...♝e7



12.♗fe1

12.♗ae1 b4 is a slightly worse version.

12...b4! 13.♘d1 d6

Black is threatening ...e5, winning the e4-pawn.

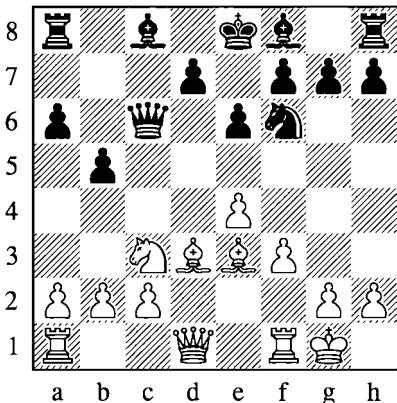
14.b3

14.a3 is the first choice of the engines, but after 14...e5 15.♗e3 ♗xe4 16.axb4 d5? Black is not worse.

14...0–0 15.♗b2 ♗d7!

As ...♝f6 can be played to neutralize White's strong bishop, Black was fine in Polgar – Leko, Dortmund 1996.

B21) 10.f3!!?



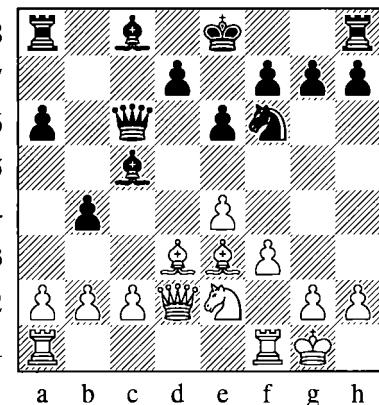
This set-up, which seeks to restrict Black's play along the a8-h1 diagonal and aims for a positional advantage, was recommended by the Danish GM Sune Berg Hansen in *Experts vs. the Sicilian*, and since then it has enjoyed a fair amount of popularity.

10...b4!

There is nothing wrong with playing ...♝b7 or ...♝c5 but I really like the most dynamic approach. This has the added benefit that the above-mentioned repertoire by Hansen doesn't examine this move at all! White's knight might look restricted on c3 since both the b5- and d5-squares are well covered, but after White plays e4-e5 he will find a very nice square on e4. Black has the opportunity to avoid this manoeuvre by chasing the knight, and I don't see any good reason why Black shouldn't opt for this.

11.♗e2 ♘c5 12.♗d2??

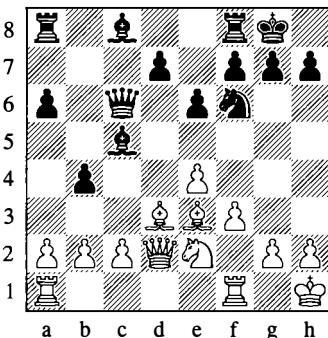
Or 12.♗xc5 ♗xc5† 13.♔h1 ♘b7?! and Black is totally fine; White's pieces look very passive (13...a5? is another possibility which will probably lead to the same position). 14.c3 (14.a3 can be met by 14...a5!) Sergin – Chrobak, Korbach 2008. 14...a5!N Black will castle kingside, put the f8-rook on c8 and use another queenside file for the other rook.



12...a5!?N

I really like this move. The explanation is simple – Black supports his b4-pawn and can later play ... $\mathbb{Q}a6$. Often Black will play ...d7-d5 and White's best reply is likely to be e4-e5, leading to a French-type position. So having played ...a5 will be useful for Black since he will then be able to play ... $\mathbb{Q}a6$ and exchange his "bad" bishop.

Practice has seen 12...0-0 but by playing a quick a2-a3 White can gain a positional advantage. I found the following game quite instructive, as it clearly shows what we should strive to avoid. 13.♔h1 (13.a3! is the most accurate move order)



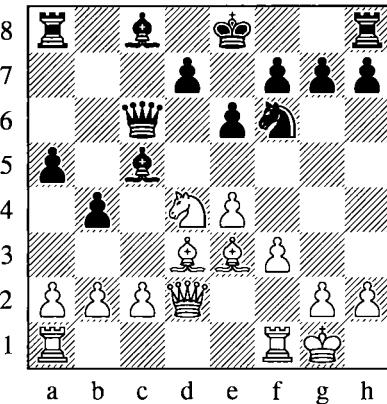
13... $\mathbb{Q}xe3$?! (13...a5! was called for) 14. $\mathbb{W}xe3$ e5 15.a3! bxa3 16. $\mathbb{A}xa3$ $\mathbb{B}b8$ 17.b3 White is dominating. 17... $\mathbb{A}e8$ 18. $\mathbb{A}a5$! d6 19. $\mathbb{A}fa1$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 20. $\mathbb{W}d2$! $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 21. $\mathbb{A}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ fxe6 23.b4± White's advantage was already close to decisive in Fedorov – Teterev, Minsk 2006.

13. $\mathbb{Q}d4$

13.a3 makes no sense if the bishops haven't been exchanged: after 13...bx_a3!= White cannot recapture with the rook, as he would like to.

After 13. $\mathbb{B}fc1!?$ 0–0 14. c3 $\mathbb{W}b6!$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{W}xc5\#$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}a6!=$ Black's position is simply fine. The light-squared bishop has been

exchanged, so Black can sooner or later go for a ...d5 break.



13... $\mathbb{W}b6!$

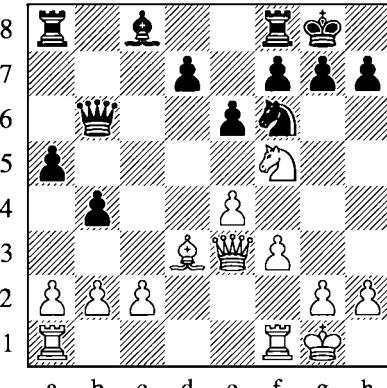
Obviously this is the most active option.

14. $\mathbb{W}f2$ 0-0 15. $\mathfrak{Q}f5$

If White does not play this, then Black should think about either ...d5 or ...d6, with ... $\mathbb{Q}a6$ next. In either case he has a great game.

15... \hat{Q} x e3 16. \hat{W} x e3

Or 16. $\mathbb{Q}xe3 \mathbb{Q}a6!?$ activates our bishop in standard fashion.

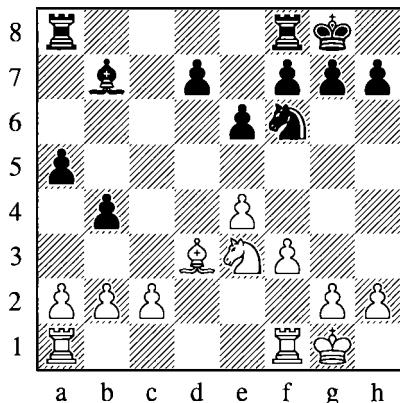


16 $\text{Mg}_{x_0}3\ddagger$

I analysed what happens in the resulting queenless position, but 16... $\mathbb{W}d8!$? planning

...♝a6 next might be a viable alternative for those who would like to keep more life in the position.

17.♕xe3 ♜b7



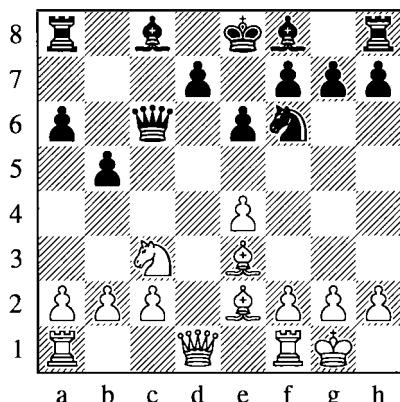
Black will go ...d5 with an equal endgame, for example:

18.♝c4 d5 19.exd5 ♜xd5 20.♕xd5 ♜xd5 21.♝xd5 exd5

There is no need to worry about the IQP because the backward c2-pawn is just as vulnerable as the d5-pawn.

22.♗ad1 ♜fc8 23.♗f2 ♜c5=

B22) 10.♗e2!?



I consider this to be White's most critical continuation. The direct threat is e4-e5, clearing the long diagonal for a nasty ♜f3.

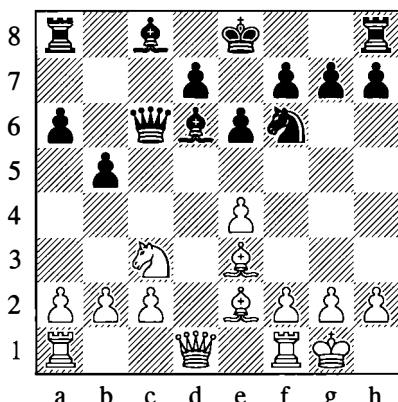
10...♜d6!?

This very interesting move attracted my attention when Le Quang Liem employed it against the German GM Huschenbeth in 2014.

An obvious point to note is that 10...b4!? allows White's threat of 11.e5!.

And 10...♜b7 11.♜f3 leaves Black needing to spend a tempo meeting the threat of e4-e5.

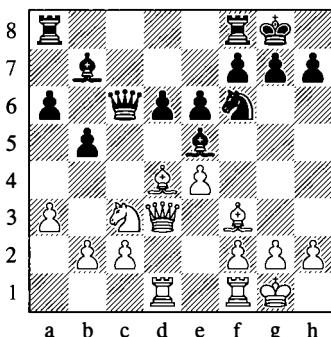
10...♛c7 was Saric's choice. His opponent, Solak, responded in the correct way and developed a strong initiative, but blundered in time trouble. 11.♛d4! d6 (11...e5!?) 12.♛d3 ♜b7 13.a3!± This is always a useful prophylactic move. White will continue with the simple plan of ♜g5 and ♜fd1, and enjoy a slightly more pleasant position, controlling the d5-square.) 12.a4! White was doing well in Solak – Saric, Heraklion 2017, for example: 12...b4 13.♛xb4 d5 14.♛d4±



11.♛d4!

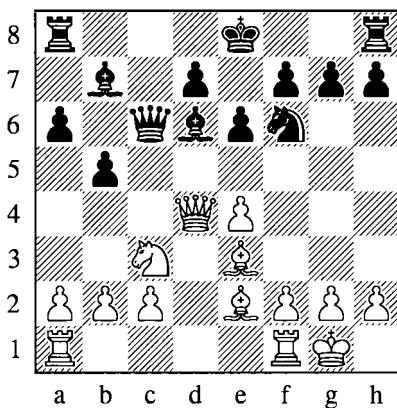
Renewing the threat of e4-e5.

Instead after 11. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}e5!?$ we use our dark-squared bishop to close the h1-a8 diagonal. One GM game continued: 12. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ d6! 13. a3 $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 14. $\mathbb{W}d3$ 0–0 15. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$



15... $\mathbb{Q}d7!?$ N (There is also nothing wrong with 15... $\mathbb{Q}ac8$ N or 15... $\mathbb{W}c7$ as in Huschenbeth – Le Quang Liem, New York 2014, but it is possible for Black to start regrouping immediately.) A typical line is: 16. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 17. $\mathbb{W}xd6$ $\mathbb{W}xd6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}d7$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}c7$ $\mathbb{Q}fc8$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xc8\#$ $\mathbb{Q}xc8$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}b7!$ \mathbb{Q} Black will soon win back his pawn. It is impossible for White to protect against the threats of ... $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ and ... $\mathbb{Q}xa3$, especially as if White moves his knight from c3 then Black has ... $\mathbb{Q}d2xe4$.

11... $\mathbb{Q}b7$

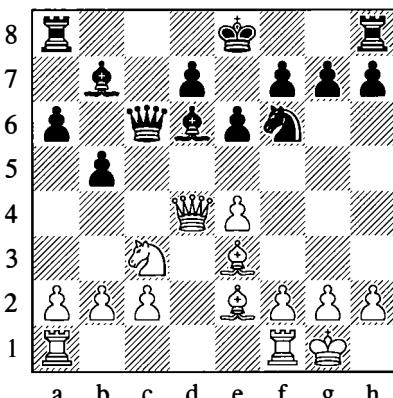


And next we will examine B221) 12. $\mathbb{Q}ad1!?$ and B222) 12. $\mathbb{Q}fd1!?$. Before that I will look at some alternatives:

12. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{W}c7!$ and 12. $f3$ $\mathbb{W}c7!$ both represent no problem for Black.

12. $f4$ $\mathbb{Q}c8!$ (instead 12... $\mathbb{Q}xe4!?$ allows 13. $\mathbb{W}xg7$ with a messy position that favours White) 13. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 14. $\mathbb{W}xc5$ $\mathbb{W}xc5$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 16. e5 $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ We have a typical Sicilian double-rook endgame. Black places his king on e7, the other rook on the queenside and enjoys at least equal play.

B221) 12. $\mathbb{Q}ad1!?$



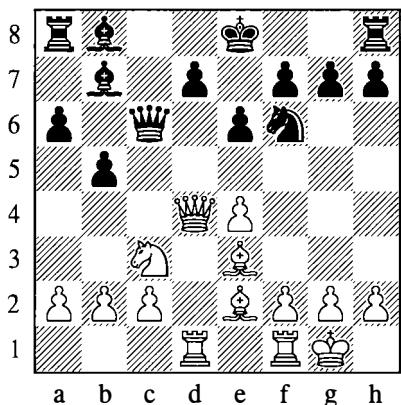
At first this might look the best rook move for White. The bishop on d6 is misplaced so White should take advantage of this misplacement and develop a lead in the development. Placing a rook on d1 is the most natural way of exploiting the bishop.

12... $\mathbb{Q}b8!?$

12... $\mathbb{Q}e7!?$ N is quite possible and probably the safest option, but I prefer the idea of exchanging the dark-squared bishops through the manoeuvre ... $\mathbb{Q}b8-a7$. Still, we can follow a plausible line after the novelty: 13. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{W}c7!$ 14. e5 $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 15. $gxf3$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ f6 17. $f4\infty$ This leads to a position very similar to the lines

we will examine after 12.♗fd1 (see variation B222 below). The only difference is that White's rook is on f1 instead of a1.

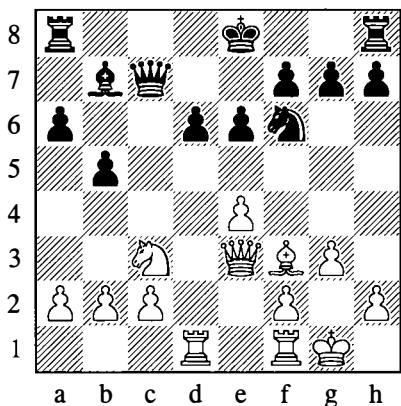
The question is whether White's ideal set-up for his rooks is a1 and d1, or d1 and f1. It is hard to answer this question since both set-ups have their pros and cons. With the set-up a1 and d1, White will be able to create typical play on the queenside with the move a2-a4. However, with the set-up d1 and f1, the f1-rook might find play along the f-file after playing ♘g3 to exchange knights and recapturing with fxe3.



13.♗f3 ♜c7!

Of course the black queen needed to vacate the long diagonal. The next few moves are obvious and natural.

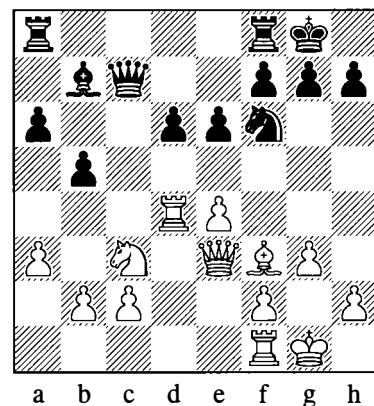
14.g3 ♜a7 15.♗d3 ♜xe3 16.♗xe3 d6



17.a3

Instead 17.♗d4 ♜d8! is fine for Black, though the following line is worthy of careful attention. 18.e5 is not so strong because White was forced to play g2-g3 and so Black can continue with: 18...♗xf3 19.exf6 ♜c5! 20.fgx7 ♜g8 21.♗f4 A lively-looking move, but the drama is short-lived. 21...♗xd1 22.♗e4!? ♜e5 23.♗f6† ♜e7 24.♗xg8† ♜xg8 25.♗h4† ♜d7 26.♗xd1 ♜xg7∞ With the reduced material on the board, our king is in general safe in the centre. Black will continue by regrouping his rook with the manoeuvre ...♗g8-c8-c5 (or c4) and we might even opt for ideas such as ...h5-h4.

17...0-0 18.♗d4



18...♗fd8N

A simple but useful novelty.

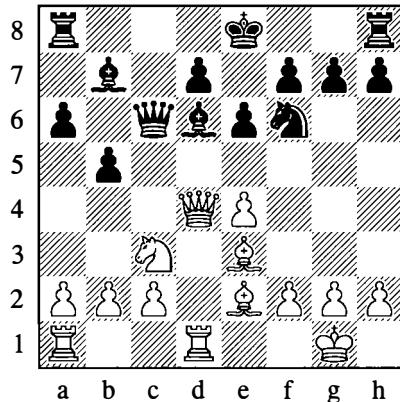
18...e5?! was seen in Siva – Kononenko, Marianske Lazne 2016, but it fixes the d6-pawn as a target. Instead of 19.♗d2, White should have opted for 19.♗d3!N± in order to use the d2-square for the queen. White's idea is to triple with ♗fd1 and ♜d2, pressing on the d6-pawn.

19.♗fd1 ♜d7=

With the idea of ...♗ad8. It is possible for Black to consider ...d6-d5 in some positions,

and it can also be useful for Black to play the prophylactic move ...h7-h6. I don't see an effective way for White to improve his position.

B222) 12.Qfd1!?



In the previous line I came to the conclusion that White should try to exploit the misplacement of Black's bishop on d6. After checking 12.Qad1 I concluded that Kononenko's idea with ...Qb8-a7 and the exchange of the dark-squared bishops is very effective for Black. So White should take measures against this plan. Playing 12.Qfd1 is a good way, since after the manoeuvre ...Qb8-a7 White would use the lever a2-a4! to exploit Black's lagging development.

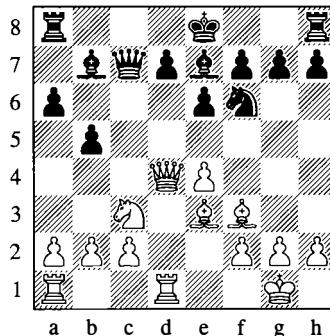
12...Qe7

Instead 12...Qb8 13.a4! shows the point behind 12.Qfd1!? – the rook is useful on the a-file. 13...Qc7 14.e5? Qxe5 (Or 14...bx a4 15.Qf4 Qd5 16.Qxd5 Qxd5 17.Qb4!?) might be defendable for Black, but the bishop does not belong on b8.) 15.Qxe5 Qxe5 16.axb5 axb5 17.Qxa8† Qxa8 18.Qc5! White's position is at least more pleasant to play, and may also be objectively better.

13.a3!?

The text is the not the only testing move:

13.Qf3?N Qc7

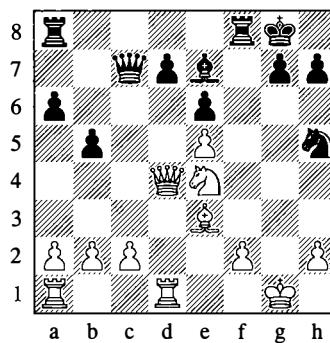


If Black is in time to play ...0-0 and ...d6 then he can even try to be better. So White has to try to react quickly.

14.e5? Qxf3! 15.gxf3 Qh5 16.Qe4 f6! 17.f4 fxe5

Or 17...Qd8?!, planning to castle, is another branch with rich play leading to double-edged positions.

18.fxe5 0-0



Black's position is fine. White's king is exposed and Black will eventually find counterplay to compensate for the weak d7-pawn. White's best line is to try to protect his king by mending his pawn structure on the kingside with:

19.Qg3

Instead 19.Qxd7, grabbing the pawn immediately, also does not lead to an advantage for White since Black can once again create dynamic play. 19...Qxe5!

20.♕g3 ♜c5! 21.♗xc5 ♜xc5 22.♗xe6† ♜h8
 Black has sacrificed a pawn but his active pieces fully compensate for the pawn. In fact, White should exchange pieces and head into an equal endgame to avoid being worse:
 23.♗e3! ♜xe3 24.fxe3 ♜xg3 25.hxg3 ♜f3!=
 19...♜xg3 20.hxg3

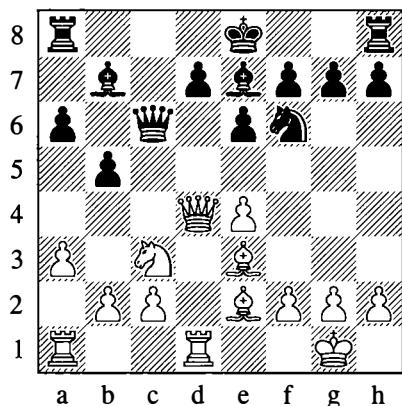
White's position looks better at first glance, so Black should be accurate.

20...♝ac8!

Black ignores the threat of ♜xd7 and creates his own threats. Black puts even more pressure on c2 and threatens to exchange the bishops by playing ...♜c5. Our play in the Taimanov should be based on dynamic concepts.

21.♗xd7 ♜xd7 22.♗xd7 ♜c5! 23.♗xc5 ♜xc5
 24.♗d2 ♜xe5=

The game should soon end in a draw. Black will quickly play the typical endgame idea ...h5, ...g5, ...h4 creating an outside passed pawn and weakening White's king.



13...♝c7?!N

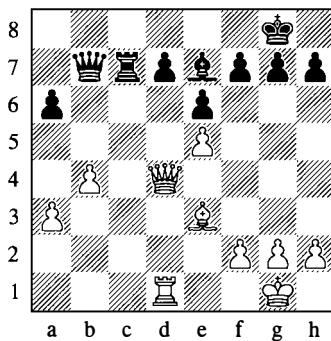
The point of this novelty is to avoid a plan that was annoying in the following email game: 13...♝c8 14.f3! ♜c7 15.♗f2 0–0 (Black cannot solve his problems with 15...d5?! since after 16.exd5 recapturing with the f6-knight is impossible because g7 would be hanging) 16.♗g3 ♜c6 17.♗d6 ♜xd6 18.♗xd6 ♜c5† 19.♗xc5

♜xc5 20.♗d4 d5 21.exd5 ♜xd5 22.♗xd5 ♜xd5
 23.c3 This endgame at first sight looks quite drawish and despite the fact that White won in Bell – Gerards, email 2012, I believe it should be drawn. But we have to admit that White's position is more pleasant to play.

14.♗f3

Instead 14.f3, following the same plan as the Bell game above, is ineffective now since Black has saved a tempo and will react with ...d7-d5. For example: 14...0–0 15.♗f2?! d5! 16.exd5 ♜xd5! Castling has covered the g7-pawn, so Black is already fighting for an edge.

14.e5 ♜d5 15.♗xd5 ♜xd5 Black is fine, but let's follow White's most logical try: 16.c4? bxc4 17.♗ac1 ♜c8! Black should exchange a few pieces to reduce the pressure. 18.♗xc4 ♜xc4 19.b3 0–0 20.♗xc4 ♜b7 21.♗xc8 ♜xc8 22.b4 ♜c7!=



At this point I would like to stop the analysis and say a few words about the nature of the position above. I have been playing the Taimanov for approximately ten years and there are a few things I realized after playing many games in such structures. Computers will give the objective evaluation of such positions as level, but often it is hard for humans to play the position over the board. According to the computers, the structure is equal no matter which pieces are left on the board, but

the main reason we are fine in this particular position is that we have exchanged the light-squared bishops and we have kept the dark-squared bishops. For an advanced player such a statement is very logical and we can come to this conclusion within a few seconds. Imagine the same structure with the light-squared bishops on the board instead of the dark-squared ones. White would have lasting pressure against a6, the d7-pawn would be a permanent weakness, and White could even consider advancing the queenside pawns in order to create a passed pawn. But with the dark-squared bishops on the board instead of the light-squared ones, White cannot attack a6 with any piece other than the queen, his pawns are stuck in the a3-b4 structure, and Black in many variations can either create play against the e5-pawn or play ...d7-d6 exchanging his weakness.

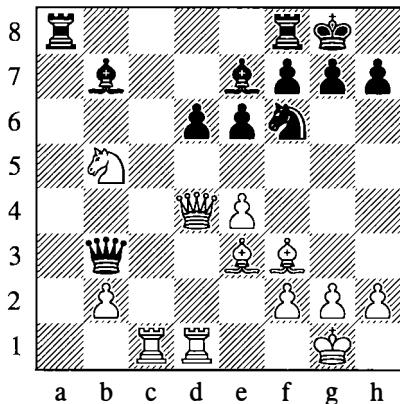
14...d6!

Of course 14...0-0? allows White's threat: 15.e5 ♘xf3 16.gxf3± and Black is in trouble along the d-file.

15.a4 0-0!

Now Black ignores White's threat since he will go for the c2-pawn!

16.axb5 axb5 17.♘xb5 ♖xc2 18.♖ac1 ♖b3



Normally I would stop the analysis here and claim that Black is fine. He can play for an advantage since he can press against the b2-pawn and his minor pieces are better placed than White's. Unfortunately for Black (and for me) I cannot stop here as White has a powerful move that leads to forcing play for both players.

19.♘a7!!

With this knight move White takes away the important c8-square. Moreover, White now has multiple threats such as his rook penetrating to the 7th rank via c7 or chasing Black's queen with ♔d3.

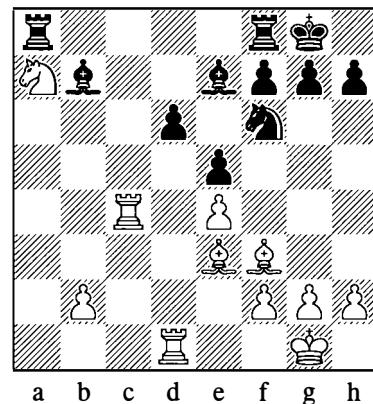
19...e5!

Black should react immediately.

20.♕c4!

White's only chance to play for an advantage.

20...♖xc4 21.♖xc4



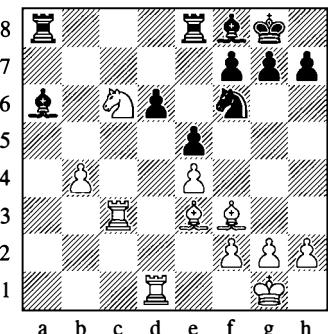
Another critical position, which at first looks better for White. He has an outside passed pawn and Black has created a hole on d5 by playing ...e6-e5. However, with active play Black can solve all the problems:

21...♗fb8!

Keeping the rook on a8 and placing the other rook on the b-file to pressure the b2-pawn.

22.b4! ♖a6 23.♗c6

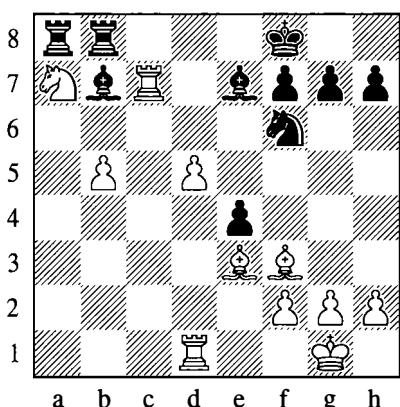
23.♗c3!? is interesting for White in order to use the c6-square for the knight. But Black can equalize quite easily by playing: 23...♗f8 24.♕c6 ♗e8



Black aims to play ...♗b5 sooner or later and then start chasing White's pieces. 25.♗g5 ♘b5 26.♗xf6 gxf6 Black's plan for equality is simple. He will go for the b4-pawn and at the right moment he will exchange his light-squared bishop for the c6-knight. For example: 27.♗g4 ♗a4 28.♗d7 ♗ea8 29.♘xe5 dxe5 30.♗xb5 ♗a1! 31.♗cc1 ♗xc1 32.♗xc1 ♗xb4=

23...♗b7 24.♗c7 ♖f8 25.b5! d5!

Once again, even without the queens, we see that Black should opt for dynamic play.

26.exd5 e4**27.♗e2**

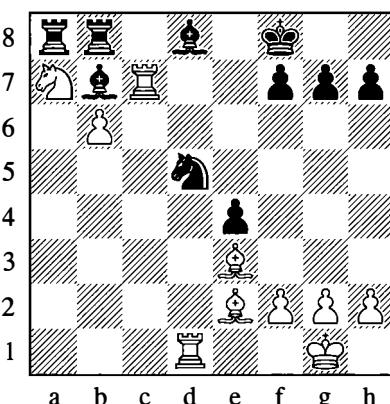
Another wild line is: 27.♗xe7?! ♖xe7 28.d6† ♕e6 29.♗e2 ♗d8! 30.♗c5 ♗d7 31.♗c4† ♖f5 32.g4† ♖xg4 33.♗d4 ♗e5 34.♗xe5 ♗xa7∞ The position is really unclear but it is hard to believe that White has the upper hand since all his pawns are blocked.

27...♘xd5 28.b6

Also interesting is: 28.♗xb7?! ♗xb7 29.♗xd5 ♗bxa7 30.♗xa7 ♗xa7 31.♗e5?! It looks like White is winning a pawn and can actually press a bit, but Black has a fantastic manoeuvre to kill White's ideas. 31...♗a1†! 32.♗f1 ♗e1! 33.b6 e3! The most concrete way to force the draw. 34.fxe3 ♗b1! 35.♗b5 ♗xb5 36.♗xb5 ♗c5 37.b7 ♗xe3† 38.♗f1 ♗f4=

28...♗d8!

We have reached an equal position where both sides should remember the forcing lines.

**29.♗xb7?**

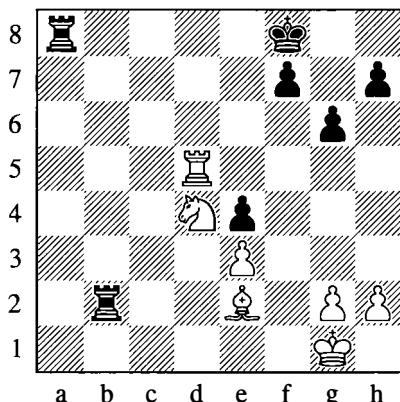
A similar line is: 29.♗c5† ♗g8 30.♗xb7 ♗xb7 31.♗xd5 ♗xb6! After these forcing moves, there are various ways the game could head for a draw. For example: 32.♗b5 g6 33.g4 ♗xc5 34.♗xc5 ♗a1† 35.♗g2 ♗e1 36.♗c4 e3 37.f4 e2 38.♗e5 ♗f1 39.♗xe2 ♗xf4=

29...♗xb7 30.♗xd5 ♗xb6 31.♗c6 ♗xe3!

32.fxe3

At first White's position looks slightly better, but Black should continue with a simple plan: the ideal set-up is ...g6, ...f5, ...h5, ...♝b2 and ...♜aa2 (or ...♜a1).

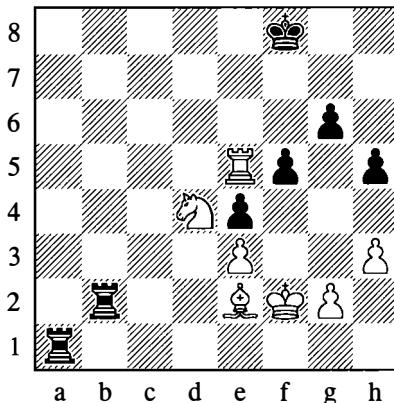
32...♝b2 33.♕d4 g6

**34.♗f2**

34.♗g4!? is an interesting-looking try to defend against the ...f5 and ...h5 ideas, but it weakens the h-pawn, which Black can exploit: 34...♜a1! 35.♗g2 ♜e1 36.♗f2 ♜h1! White has nothing better than taking the repetition.

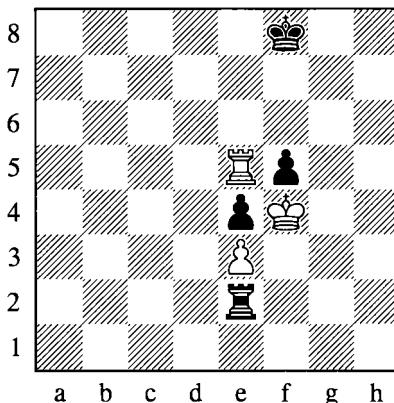
34...h5! 35.♝e5 f5 36.h3 ♜a1!

This is the easiest way for Black to equalize. White's idea was to play g2-g4 and now after this move we create threats with ...♜h1 at the proper moment.

**37.g4**

If White doesn't play g2-g4, then Black can consider playing ...h4 and White's position at least optically looks in a sort of zugzwang!

**37...hxg4 38.hxg4 ♜h1 39.gxf5 ♜h2†!
40.♗g3 ♜bxе2 41.♕xe2 ♜xe2 42.♗f4 gx5=**



All Black needs to know is the Philidor position, or any other drawing defence in the rook against rook and pawn endgame! I know it's crazy that a line from an opening book finishes in a position from an endgame book, but that's sometimes the case with forcing lines in the computer era.

Conclusion

6.♘e3 a6 7.♗d3 is a sensible anti-Taimanov line, and one I have played regularly with both colours.

After 7...♝f6 we started with A) 8.♗b3 when play takes on a Scheveningen flavour. But we Taimanov players should not be concerned, as it's a rather harmless version with the knight passive on b3.

The usual move is B) 8.0–0 when I recommend 8...b5. Then B1) 9.a3 ♘b7 tends to lead to another comfortable Scheveningen set-up, as White's options are limited on move 10 by Black's tactical ideas, which often involve ...♝c5. 10.♔e2 avoids the tricks, but will later prove to be an uninspired square for the queen.

Thus the toughest test is B2) 9.♗xc6 ♜xc6 when White has three main options. 10.a3 will be seen in the next chapter, so we started with B21) 10.f3!? and B22) 10.♗e2!?.

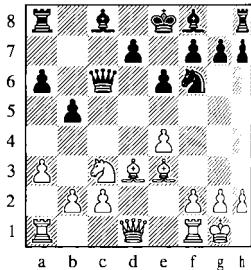
Against B21) 10.f3!? I recommend the rare 10...b4! as an effective antidote.

B22) 10.♗e2!? has some poisonous ideas involving e4-e5 and ♘f3, so I recommend 10...♗d6!? covering the key square. Following 11.♔d4! ♘b7 we have a split, depending on which rook White places on d1 – B221) 12.♖ad1!? or B222) 12.♖fd1!?. Black's choice of bishop retreat should be different in each variation. Go to b8 against the former and go to e7 against the latter. The point is that with a rook still on a1, the ...♝b8-a7 idea runs into a nasty a2-a4.

I analysed the final variation in painstaking depth, as forcing play can last all the way to a simple endgame. This is not what a Sicilian fighter dreams of, but sometimes we need to be ready with deep theory.

Chapter 16

6.♗e3



7.♗d3 – Main Line

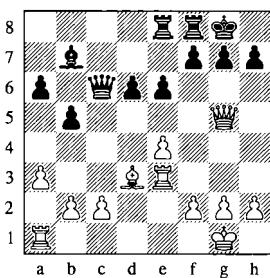
Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘c6 5.♘c3 ♗c7
6.♗e3 a6 7.♗d3 ♘f6 8.0–0 b5 9.♘xc6 ♗xc6 10.a3

10...♗b7!

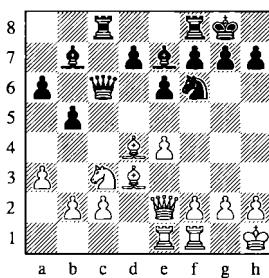
| | |
|---|-----|
| A) 11.♗e1 | 325 |
| B) 11.♗f3!? | 328 |
| C) 11.♗e2 ♘c8! 12.f4 ♗c5! 13.♘xc5 ♗xc5† 14.♗h1 d5! 15.exd5 ♘xd5 16.♘e4 ♗b6! 17.f5! e5! C1) 18.f6N | 330 |
| C2) 18.♘c3!? | 333 |
| C3) 18.♗ae1N | 334 |
| | 335 |

B) note to 12.♗d4!?



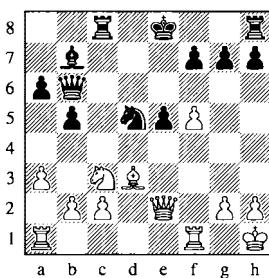
20...h6!?

C) note to 12.f4



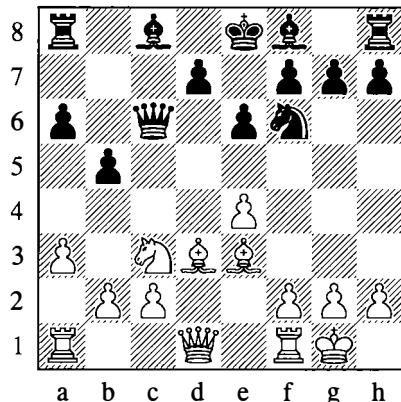
14...♘e8!!?

C2) after 18.♘c3!?



18...♘c3!?

1.e4 c5 2.♗f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♖c6
 5.♗c3 ♜c7 6.♗e3 a6 7.♗d3 ♗f6 8.0-0 b5
 9.♗xc6 ♜xc6 10.a3



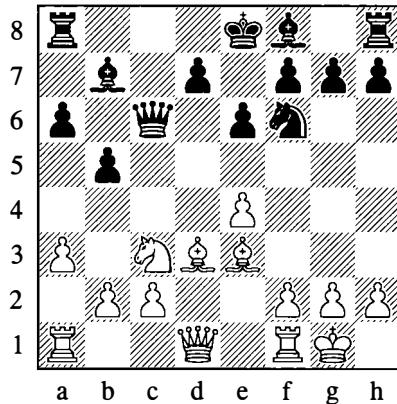
Strangely enough, this is the most popular move in this position. Objectively I believe the best move for White is 10.♗e2!?, as examined in the previous chapter, but that move has not gained as much popularity as it deserves.

White's plan after 10.a3 is simple – he wants to continue with ♜e2, ♘h1, f2-f4, ♘ae1 and then play for an e4-e5 break. Quite often White does not need all these moves in order to continue his attack.

10...♝b7!

Keeping the pressure on the a8-h1 diagonal and leaving the f8-a3 diagonal open for now, as Black's main strategic idea is to exchange the dark-squared bishops.

The above exchanging idea shows why 10...d6! is bad. White then has a few promising ways, but I find the following line instructive: 11.♗e2! With the immediate threat of ♘xb5 (11.f4! also looks like a good Scheveningen for White). 11...♜c7 12.♗f4! ♘d7 Otherwise e4-e5 is strong. 13.a4! b4 14.♗a2 a5 15.c3± Black is way behind in development and will soon experience huge problems on the queenside.



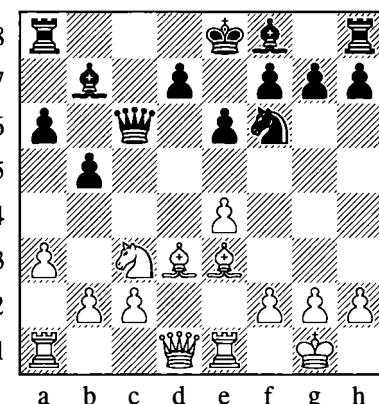
Now we have a split: A) 11.♗e1, B) 11.♗f3!? and C) 11.♗e2 deserve a closer look, which is why I examine them separately. Below are a few lesser options:

11.♗h1 ♜c5! 12.♗e2 ♜xe3 13.♗xe3 d6→ gives the type of position we are always happy to get, as seen many times in this line.

11.f3 ♜c5!→ is the same story...

11.f4 ♜c5 is once again the same idea. There have been many games after 12.♗xc5 ♜xc5† 13.♗h1 d6 14.♗e2 and now Black usually stops White's intended e4-e5 with 14...♘d7!? or even 14...e5, in both cases with a good game.

A) 11.♗e1



This move has been used a few times by strong players, but it is not so dangerous.

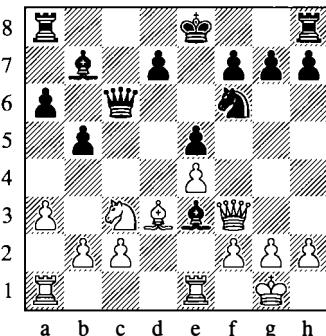
11...♝e7

White cannot reach his optimal set-up if we enter a Scheveningen-type position, so we are happy with simple development.

The not-so-hidden idea behind White's last move is shown after: 11...♝c5? 12.♗xc5 ♜xc5 13.e5!±

Even though it is not part of our repertoire, I must mention in passing a beautiful example after:

11...♝d6 12.♗d4 e5 13.♗e3 ♜c5 14.♗f3 ♜xe3



15.♗xe3?!

Unfortunately, it seems that White keeps a rather dangerous edge after 15.♗xe3, as all the modern engines suggest.

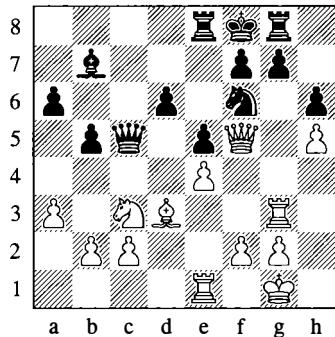
15...♜c5!

This wouldn't have been possible if White had recaptured with the queen.

16.♗f5 ♜f8?!

Petrosian-style! The sensitive point in Black's position is g7, so Black will also defend this with the rook, which wouldn't have been possible if Black had castled.

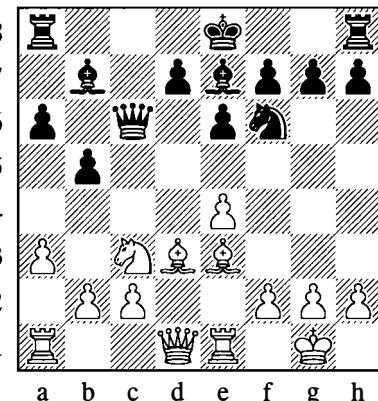
17.♗g3 h6 18.h4 d6 19.h5 ♜g8 20.♗e1 ♜e8?!



This might not have been strictly needed, but maybe Anand had not yet convinced himself to play the following idea.

21.♗f3 ♜e7? 22.♗d1 ♜c8? 23.♗e3 ♜e6?→

Macieja – Anand, New Delhi/Teheran 2000. Black's king on e7 is not in any danger and Black can play on both sides of the board with ...g5 (or ...g6) or with ...♝b8 and ...a5.



12.♗f3

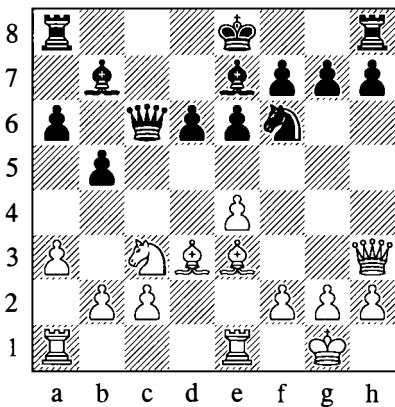
I think that by this point it should be clear that 12.f4 is met by 12...♝c5!.

A neutral move such as 12.♗h1 can be met by 12...♝c8? (or castles first) 13.f4 0–0 and now ...d7-d5 becomes an option. A trick to remember is that after 14.♗f3 we can safely play 14...♝c5! as after 15.♗xc5 ♜xc5 White cannot play e4-e5.

12.♗d4 0–0!? (a more sophisticated idea is 12...♝d6 but let's not complicate our lives if we don't need to) 13.♗d2 d6 14.f3 ♔d7 15.♔ad1 This was seen in Hübner – Leko, Frankfurt 1996. Black has an excellent Sicilian position at this point. Now I like the slight improvement 15...♝c7!?!N \rightarrow with a promising middlegame ahead.

12...d6 13.♗h3

White is trying to play typical Scheveningen moves without worrying about the tempo-loss with ♕e1. Okay, this is a decent attempt, but what I like in the following example is the dynamic idea Polgar came up with.



13...h5!

For a Scheveningen player, playing the move ...h5 (or ...g6) is quite typical in order to protect his castled king from a potential checkmate on h7. For a Taimanov player, playing ...h5 is very typical *without* castling. We quite often see that Black's king is safer on e8 than on the kingside! Moreover, White's queen now looks badly placed on h3, and the queen could soon be under pressure.

There is also nothing wrong with 13...0–0. After 14.f4 the threat of e4-e5 can be met simply with 14...♝c7 although I can understand that many players would feel a bit anxious about having to display a high level of

accuracy to avoid getting mated.

14.♗g5 ♛c5!?

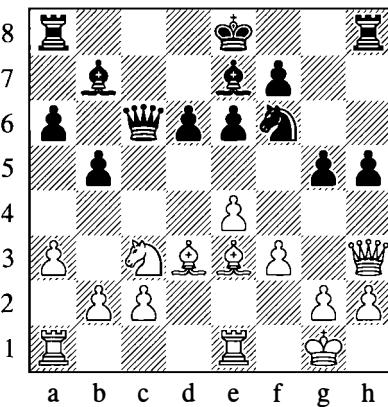
Or 14...h4!! gives the black queen a square on h5 after, for example: 15.♔ad1 ♛c5 16.♔e3 ♛h5 \rightarrow

15.♔e3 ♛c6 16.f3

16.♔g5 invites a repetition, but Black can play on with 16...h4, as seen in the previous comment.

16...g5!?

Again we see Black's dynamic play on the kingside, and White's queen on h3 as a target.

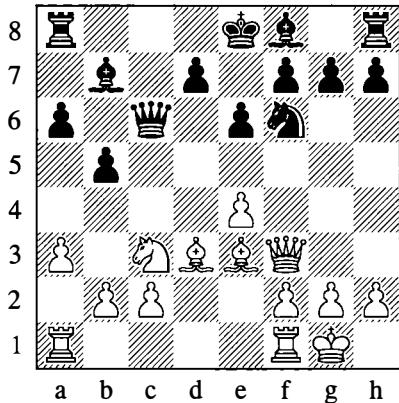


17.a4

Instead 17.♕xg5 ♔g4! was Polgar's idea. 18.fxg4! (and not 18.♔xe7?? ♛c5† leading to a quick checkmate) 18...♕xg5 ∞ White will probably end up with an extra pawn, but Black will have compensation with the bishop pair and the two open (or semi-open) g- and h-files for his rooks.

17...b4 18.♘a2 g4! 19.fxg4 d5! \rightarrow

Black had fantastic play in Topalov – Polgar, Novgorod 1996, but Topalov was in great form and managed to win in the end. Still, Black shouldn't complain about the outcome of the opening.

B) 11.♗f3?

A refinement of the previous idea, as White can still enter a favourable Scheveningen-type of position after ...d6 when White has an attack with ♘h3, f2-f4, ♕ae1 etc.

11...♝d6!

This time 11...♝c5? is not good because of 12.♗g3.

12.♝d4!?

Striving for e4-e5 while stopping the annoying threat of ...♝e5. This is the most logical move to my eyes.

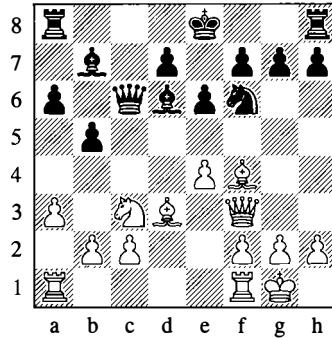
After 12.♗h3 we can use an idea that the Polgar game above showed us: 12...h5!?? (see Topalov – Polgar in variation A)

12.♕ae1?! allows Black to execute his main idea with 12...♝e5 (but also allows the tactical operation starting with 12...♝xa3 13.bxa3 ♖xc3, which might look risky, but the ruthless engines evaluate it as better for Black).

12.♝f4

This leads to a typical position where Black will exchange bishops, followed by castling, and then place his rooks on c8 and d8. After that he might consider regrouping the

knight from f6 to c5 via d7. Let's follow an example where White gave Black concrete problems to solve.



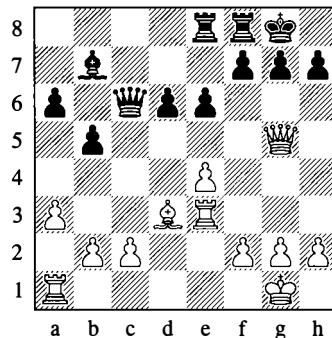
12...0-0? 13.♗fe1 ♗xf4 14.♗xf4 d6 15.♗e3!
16.♗d7 16...♝h4

With the nasty threat of ♘d5.

16...♝e5

Kramnik finds an economical solution.

17.♘d5 ♗g6! 18.♗e7† ♗xe7 19.♗xe7 ♕ae8
20.♗g5



But now he went wrong:

20...h6!?

20...f6!?

with similar ideas was also possible.
20...♝c5?! 21.♗xc5 dxc5 was seen in Leko – Kramnik, Dortmund 2005, and now White missed the strong 22.c4!N± when Black's queenside pawns are under pressure.

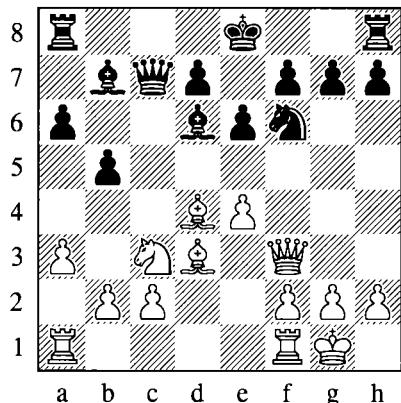
21.♗h4 e5!??

Black can easily meet any attempts to put pressure on his kingside. For example, he can

place his rook on e6 in order to defend with ...♜g6, or in some cases play ...g6 and ...♝g7.

12...♛c7!

Our idea remains to prevent e4-e5 and in general to play on the dark squares. In passing we threaten h2 with check – a nice little bonus!



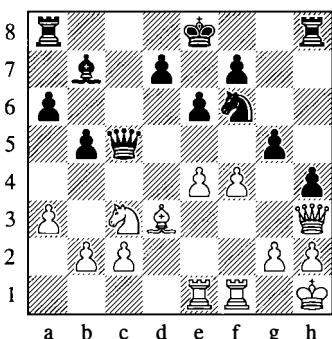
13.♝h1!

Definitely the best defence. Let's have a quick look at the lesser options:

13.g3?! h5!?? gives Black obvious counterplay.

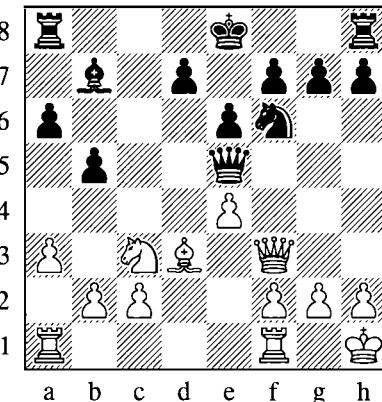
13.h3?! is a time-wasting weakener: 13...♝h2! (the more adventurous 13...h5! is playable as well) 14.♔h1 ♛e5??

13.♛h3 h5! This should be familiar by now. 14.f3 (14.♔h1 h4??) 14...h4 (14...♝c5?!) 15.♝ae1 ♜c5 16.♝xc5 ♛xc5† 17.♔h1 g5! 18.f4



In Stany – Venkatesh, New Delhi 2010, Black played 18...♝h5!? which is lively and promising, but he also had a simple path to a better endgame: 18...g4!N 19.♝xe3 ♛xe3 20.♝xe3 d6† Black will probably play ...♝e7 and ...♝ac8, then he has many ways to improve his position, with his far-advanced kingside pawns a long-term asset.

13...♝e5 14.♝xe5 ♛xe5



Once again we see that Black has total control of the dark squares.

15.♛e2??

Creating the threat of f2-f4.

Or 15.♛h3 ♛f4!∞ is more or less the same as the main line.

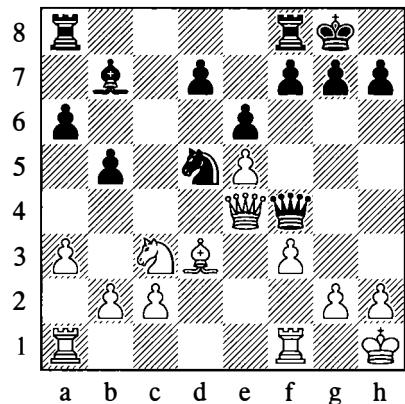
15...♛f4! 16.f3?!

Preparing e4-e5!

It is necessary for White to protect the g4-square, as illustrated by the fact that 16.e5?? loses to 16...♝g4.

16.g3?! does not allow any instant kills, but obviously leaves the white king unhappily placed, facing a fine bishop on b7.

16...0-0 17.e5 ♐d5 18.♛e4



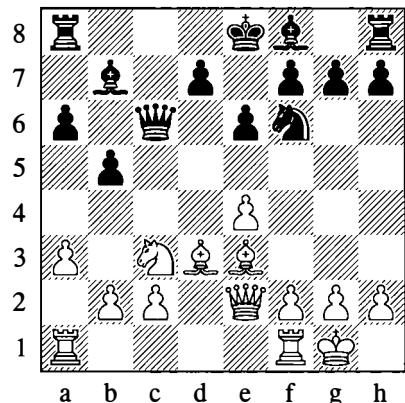
18...♝xe4

18...♝h6?! is a playable alternative, with ...f5 coming next.

19.♕xe4 ♕f4=

Black's position is perfectly fine. Black will continue with ...♝d5 and either place his rook on c8 or go for an ...f6 break.

C) 11.♘e2



A sneaky move! It stops the move ...d6 because of the tactic ♜xb5 and at the same time prepares f2-f4 and e4-e5, or ♜f4 and e4-e5, while keeping flexibility for the development of the a1-rook. This rook might go to e1, or stay where it is in order to annoy us with the possibility of a3-a4.

11...♝c8!

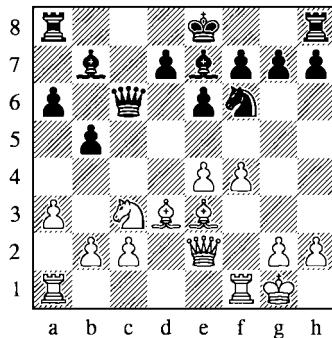
A very important move. Black should aim to exchange the dark-squared bishops and thus we must keep our position flexible while preparing ...♝c5.

Studying the resulting positions after the alternative will help you understand why there is a need for the rook move:

11...♝e7

This is the most popular move, but I prefer White's position after:

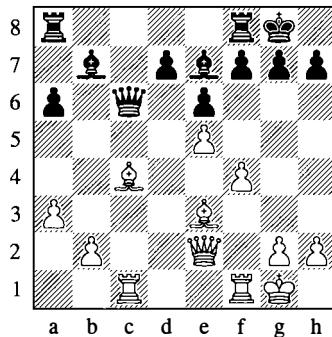
12.f4!



12...0-0

12...d6?! would be very nice if it was possible, but it fails to the tactic I already warned you about: 13.♜xb5!±

13.e5 ♜d5 14.♕xd5 ♜xd5 15.c4! bxc4
16.♖xc4 ♜c6 17.♖ac1

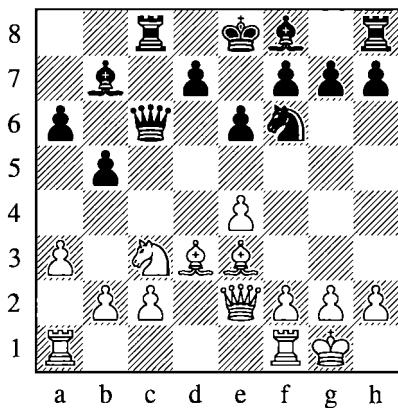


17...♝c5

If Black tries to continue in the usual way then he faces problems after: 17...♝f8
18.♗c3!N

18.♗xc5 ♜xc5† 19.♕f2!±

We have reached the critical endgame where the light-squared bishops are left on the board. In this type of endgame White holds the better chances. See the discussion on pages 319 and 320 and also the example on page 96.



12.f4

12.♗ad1 has been seen in a few games, but it allows the typical tactic: 12...♝xa3!†

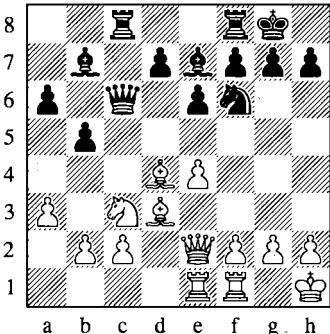
12.♗d4 ♜e7

12...h5?! is a playable option, for those who feel adventurous!

13.♗ae1

13.f4 ♜c5?!

13...0–0 14.♗h1



This is a vital moment because I would like the readers to take a mental note of the following idea:

14...♝e8!!‡

This move is fully playable because e4-e5 is not possible. There are several ideas behind it. Black can exchange bishops with ...♝f6, restrict the enemy bishop with ...f6, or even counterattack with ...f5 or ...d5, while the knight can enter the game via d6 or later go back to f6.

In contrast, 14...d6?! allows White to use his harmonious piece placement to cause some concerns. For example, 15.f4 ♜ce8 16.e5† and Black experiences several problems.

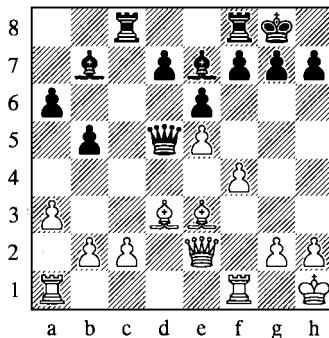
12.♗h1

This is the most flexible alternative to my eyes. White prepares a favourable e4-e5 push, while preventing Black from exchanging the bishops.

12...♝e7

An alternative is 12...h5, but White has done nothing weird to deserve being treated like this. Somehow Black should be worse, but the move is nevertheless not absurd.

13.f4 0–0 14.e5 ♜d5 15.♗xd5 ♜xd5



In comparison with the position after 11...♝e7, we have added the moves ...♝c8 and ♜h1. So now c2-c4 is not possible for White. I think White should take advantage of this and try to exploit the weak a6-pawn by playing:

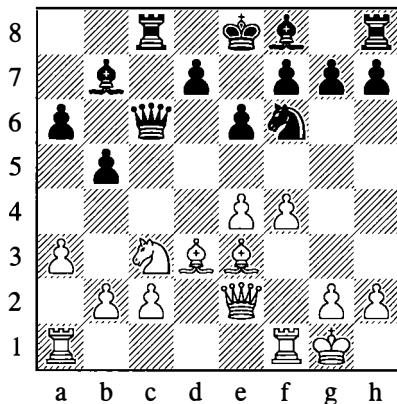
16.a4!

After 16.c3?! d6!∞ it is hard to believe that White has any advantage.

16.Qad1 was seen in Penrose – Franklin, Hastings 1965. After 16...Qc6!‡ Black's counterplay can come after the ...f6 break, or he can simply exchange the bishops with ...Qc5 and play ...d6.

16...Qc6!‡

According to my analysis, Black keeps the balance here as well.



12...Qc5!

Instead 12...h5 is a typical Taimanov move, but after 13.e5 Qg4 14.Qe4 Qc7 15.Qxb7 Qxb7 as in Zarnicki – V. Milov, Buenos Aires 1996, Ribli's suggestion of 16.Qd4?!N± gives White some edge.

13.Qxc5 Qxc5† 14.Qh1 d5!

This risky-looking idea by the strong Austrian correspondence player Helmund Grabner looks an ideal solution.

For those who prefer not to enter the mess that follows, a calmer alternative exists in the playable 14...Qh5?! which has been tested just a handful of times, and only in correspondence chess. I challenge the reader to analyse on his own if interested!

15.exd5

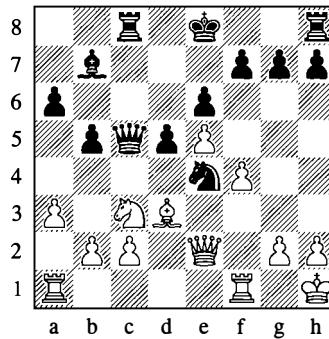
We should also examine the e4-pawn's other option:

15.e5

Unfortunately for White, he doesn't gain anything by closing the centre since Black has the powerful:

15...Qe4!

This is an important point of Black's idea with 14...d5.

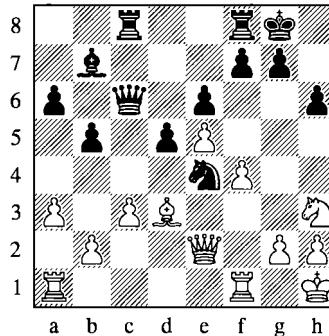


16.Qd1

16.Qxe4 is harmless after: 16...dxe4 17.Qxe4 Qxe4 18.Qxe4 Qxc2=

16.f5?! is effectively refuted by 16...exf5 17.Qxf5 g6! (the trick to avoid is 17...0–0?! 18.e6!= when White escapes due to tricks based on the rook and queen's shared location on the 5th rank) 18.Qf3 0–0 19.Qaf1 Qce8† Shelke – Koustav, Gujarat 2016.

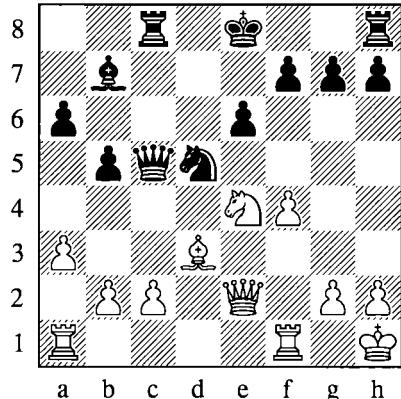
16...0–0 17.Qf2 Qc6 18.Qh3 h6 19.c3



19...f6?

Black was fine in the stem game of the 14...d5 idea: Togeby – Grabner, email 2001.

15...♝xd5 16.♝e4



16...♛b6!

The text move has only been tested once in practice, but it leads to an important position.

16...♛e7 has been seen in practice, but my analysis indicates that White is better.

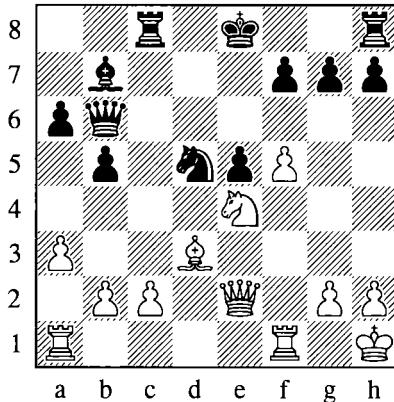
17.♗5!

White has to react actively in order to create problems for Black. If Black has the time to castle then his position would even be preferable!

Thus 17.♕a1 is not good enough, since Black can simply castle: 17...0–0 18.f5 exf5 19.♕xf5 ♜ce8!?

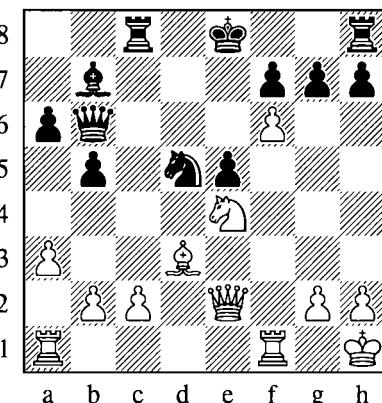
17...e5!

Now it becomes clear why 16...♛b6 is preferable to 16...♛e7. White cannot at any point play f5-f6!? with tempo and it is quite possible that Black's king will land on e7 in many variations. Moreover, from b6 Black's queen defends the a6-pawn which becomes relevant in quite a number of lines.



Here I have analysed deeply three continuations: C1) 18.f6N, C2) 18.♝c3?!, and C3) 18.♕ae1N.

C1) 18.f6N



18...♝xf6!

The only move, as 18...gxf6? blunders into an endgame a pawn down after 19.♝xf6†. ♕xf6 20.♛xe5†.

19.♝xf6† gxf6 20.♕f2

Doubling on the f-file is the only challenging option to my eyes.

20...♚e7!

The safest square for the king, and also covering the vital f6-pawn.

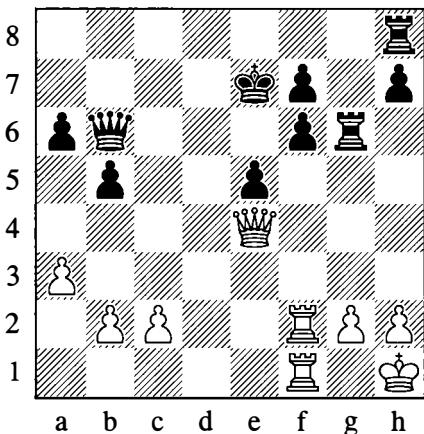
21. $\mathbb{R}af1$ $\mathbb{E}cg8$

Putting the other rook on g8 gives up the h7-pawn. It might not be bad, but I do not see any reason to give up a pawn yet, as the h8-rook can be activated after pushing the h-pawn.

22. $\mathbb{Q}e4$

The b7-bishop is strong, so it makes sense to exchange it. Also White is struggling to find a plan, while Black has multiple ways to improve his position (the ...h7-h5-h4 idea, for example).

22... $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 23. $\mathbb{W}xe4$ $\mathbb{E}g6!?$

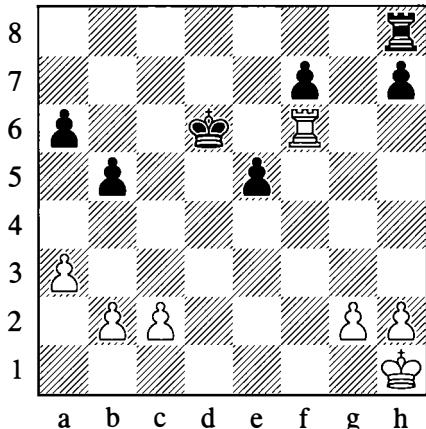


An important move, as the tactical threat was $\mathbb{E}xf6$ followed by $\mathbb{W}b7\#$. Let's take a look at the position. First of all, our king is safe on the e7-square – such positions are quite typical in the Taimanov. Take into account that the only true dangerous piece left on the board is the queen, since all the minor pieces are gone. Once the queens are exchanged, it will become even more obvious that the centralized black king is more valuable than White's king on h1.

24. $\mathbb{W}b4\#$ $\mathbb{W}d6!?$

Or 24... $\mathbb{Q}e8!?$ 25.c4 $\mathbb{E}hg8\#$ is a riskier, but also more ambitious, way to continue.

25. $\mathbb{W}xd6\#$ $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 26. $\mathbb{E}xf6\#$ $\mathbb{E}xf6$ 27. $\mathbb{E}xf6\#$

**27... $\mathbb{Q}e7$**

The safe and simple way.

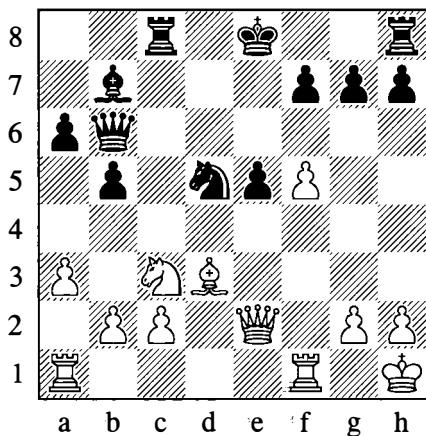
Playing for compensation with 27... $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 28. $\mathbb{E}xf7$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$ is also totally valid. Black can put his king on e3 and then push his passed pawn. It should still be a draw of course.

28. $\mathbb{E}xa6$ $\mathbb{E}c8$ 29. c3 $\mathbb{E}d8=$

Black will soon win back the lost pawn. A sample continuation is:

**30. g4 $\mathbb{E}d1\#$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{E}d2\#$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{E}xh2$
33. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{E}xb2$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{E}e2\#$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{E}g2$**

Material is equal and both sides are active. We are heading for a draw.

C2) 18. $\mathbb{Q}c3!?$ 

The only move to have been tried in correspondence praxis.

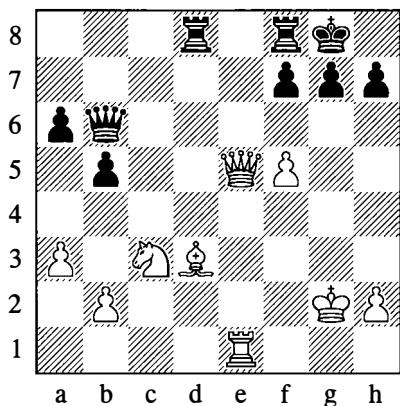
18...♝e3!?

18...♝xc3? is a crass blunder, as 19.♛xe5† shows.

18...f6 is okay and is the move that has been played, but after 19.♝xd5N ♜xd5 20.a4 Black will manage to draw, but can never hope for more; instead my recommendation keeps some imbalance.

19.♝fe1 ♜xg2† 20.♝g1 ♜xc2† 21.♝xg2 ♜xe1† 22.♝xe1 0–0 23.♛xe5 ♜cd8=

There were no significant alternatives on the previous moves. Material is about equal and the white king is exposed. The position is balanced, but at least more interesting than the earlier alternatives.



24.♝d5

Best. Otherwise the queen goes to f6.

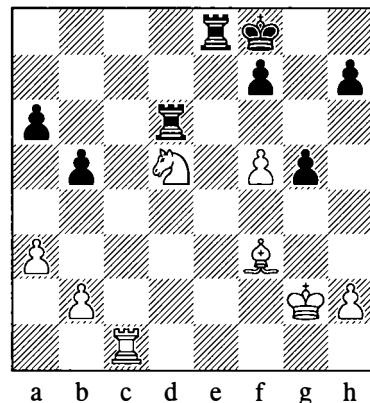
24...♛d6 25.♜xd6 ♜xd6 26.♝e4 ♜e8 27.♝c1

After logical and best play by both sides we have arrived at a position where I recommend that the reader memorizes the following idea:

27...♝f8! 28.♝f3 g5!?

The key move which gives Black long-term

counterplay. If White does not capture en passant, then after ...f6 and ...♝f7 Black's rook would come to e5, and Black has play against the f5-pawn as well as a majority on the kingside for the future.



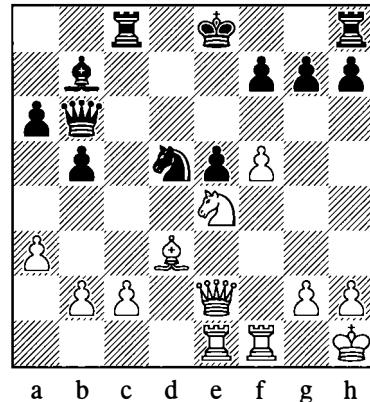
29.fxg6

Instead 29.♝g3 f6 is potentially riskier for White.

29...hxg6?

Black can try ideas such as ...♜e5 then gradually advancing his kingside pawns. It should be a draw, but there is some life left in the position.

C3) 18.♜ae1N



18...0-0!

Black has a centralized knight, which controls a lot of squares, and a passed e5-pawn which offers him potential winning chances in an endgame. It would not be exaggeration to say that the e5-pawn and d5-knight control the position for Black. Were it Black's turn to move again, he would play ...f6 and stabilize the position forever – Black would be better. So White has to be fast in creating counterplay!

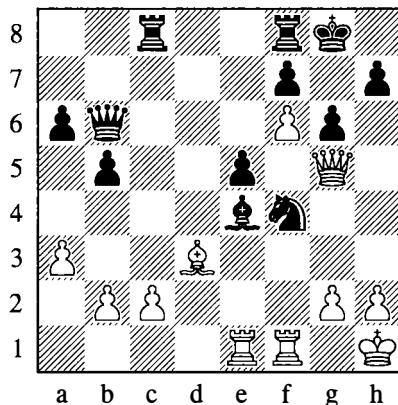
Unfortunately the immediate 18...f6? does not work for Black, as White can develop an initiative by opening up the position for his pieces. 19.c4! bxc4 20. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ 0-0 21. $\mathbb{Q}d1!$ $\mathbb{Q}fd8$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ The only move. 23. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}xa6\pm$ White enjoys an extra pawn.

19.f6! $\mathbb{Q}f4?$

I prefer this move to 19...g6 since then White would have additional options for his queen, including 20. $\mathbb{W}f2$.

20. $\mathbb{W}g4$ g6!

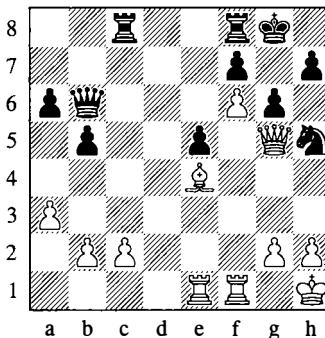
White must play for checkmate. Black will be forced, sooner or later, to capture on e4 in order to defend his king.

21. $\mathbb{W}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4!$ **22. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$**

The other recapture is also an option:

22. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}h5!$

Black creates an ultra-defensive fortress; it is almost impossible to imagine White giving checkmate. Black's simple plan is to play ... $\mathbb{Q}fd8$ -d6 and go after for the f6-pawn.



I will offer a couple of sample lines:

23.b3

Or 23. $\mathbb{W}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}fe8!$ 24. $\mathbb{W}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}ec8$ and Black will capture the f6-pawn with his knight. Then it will be White's king which is rather unsafe. White will always have to take into account the knight manoeuvres with ... $\mathbb{Q}g4$, ... $\mathbb{Q}e4$, or ... $\mathbb{Q}d5-e3(f4)$. The reader should also note that, in general, a queen and knight is more effective than a queen and bishop in the endgame.

23... $\mathbb{Q}fe8!$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}f5$

Or 24. $\mathbb{Q}d5!$? $\mathbb{Q}f4!$ is also fine.

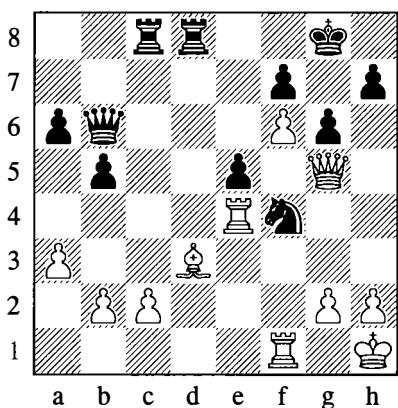
24... $\mathbb{Q}cd8$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}g4$ h6! 26. $\mathbb{W}xh6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{Q}h5!$??

With a position that is close to equality, but with a lot of play for both sides.

22... $\mathbb{Q}fd8!$

Once again Black can employ a simple plan of playing ... $\mathbb{Q}d6$ and capturing on f6.

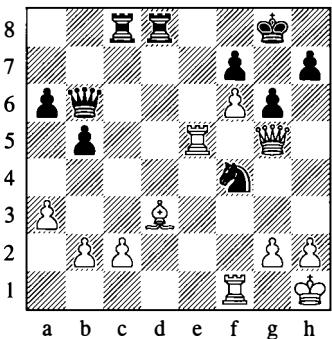
22... $\mathbb{Q}h5$?? now fails since White's rook can very quickly join the attack: 23. $\mathbb{Q}h4!$ –

**23.g3**

Nudging the knight back while creating a lauf for the white king.

23.♘xe5

This direct option fails to win due to a series of back-rank issues:

**23...♝xd3! 24.cxd3**

And not: 24.♔h6?? ♜f2†!+ Black takes advantage of White's back-rank problems.

24...♝xd3 25.h4??

And once again: 25.♔h6?? ♜xf6!+ White still has back-rank problems!

25...♜d6!

Black is very active. Black is combining defensive plans (...♜f8) and aggressive ideas (...♝d1).

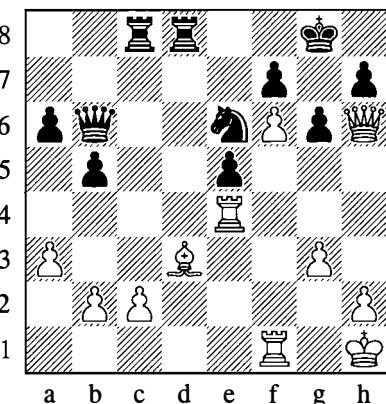
26.h5 ♜d1 27.♝xd1 ♜xd1† 28.♔h2 ♜xh5†
29.♜xh5 gxh5 30.♝g5† ♜f8 31.♝xh5 ♜c6=

23...♝e6!

Instead 23...♝xd3?? is an immediate disaster after 24.♔h6 as there are no back-rank tricks to save Black.

24.♔h6??

This is White's most aggressive try. White has managed to get rid of his back-rank problems and has placed all his pieces ideally in order to create threats – both ♘h4 and ♜xe5 are deadly threats. Black has to be very accurate to save the position.

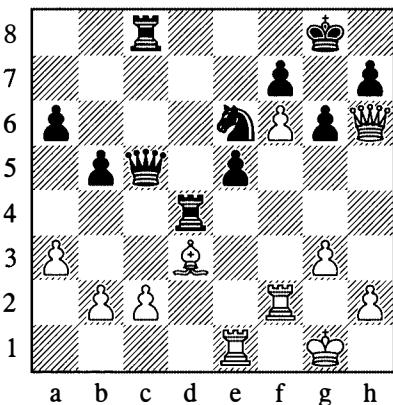
**24...♜c6! 25.♝g1 ♜c5†!**

Black has used a nice triangulation to switch his queen from b6 to c5. From c5 Black's queen can immediately join the defence via f8 and also defend the e5-pawn.

26.♝f2

After 26.♗g2 ♜d4! 27.♝fe1 ♜d5∞ it is not easy for White to get rid of the pin, since ♜h3 runs into ...♜d7.

26...♜d4! 27.♝e1



Black has many ways to continue; White's rook leaving the 4th rank has rendered his position rather harmless. I can't find a dangerous way for White to continue the attack, since Black can opt for ...♝cd8, ...♝d6 and bring his knight into the game from c5 if White's queen leaves the attack. One logical move to start with is:

27...♝cd8?

Conclusion

10.a3 is the most common main line in the 6.♗e3 a6 7.♗d3 system, but as I said in the previous chapter, it is not White's most promising option. After 10...♝b7! White must be careful not to allow Black an easy ...♝c5 when an exchange of bishops followed by ...d7-d6 would secure Black a comfortable position.

A) 11.♗e1 cuts out that option for Black by preparing e4-e5, but 11...♝e7 offers Black a pleasant Scheveningen-style position, as the kingside rook is not ideally placed on e1 for a kingside attack; the more aggressive set-up is with rooks on e1 and f1.

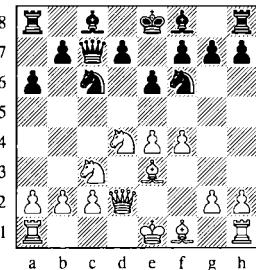
B) 11.♗f3!? sidesteps ...♝c5 by the threat of ♜g3, but 11...♝d6! offers Black promising play.

The main test is C) 11.♗e2 when 11...♝c8! 12.f4 ♜c5! 13.♗xc5 ♜xc5† 14.♗h1 d5! leads to sharp play (though remember the safe opt-out of 14...♝h5?!). The main line continues 15.exd5 ♜xd5 16.♗e4 ♜b6! 17.f5! e5! when we studied three options: C1) 18.f6N, C2) 18.♗c3!? and C3) 18.♗ae1N. Black is fine in all cases, though some precision is needed to look after the black king. In the final line, for example, Black's survival depends on a series of back-rank resources, so studying these lines carefully would be wise.



6. $\hat{Q}e3$

7. $\hat{W}d2$ & 8. f4!?



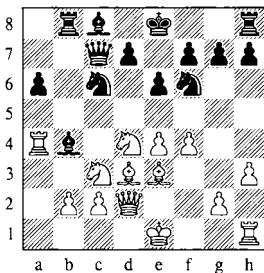
Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2. $\hat{Q}f3$ e6 3.d4 cxd4 4. $\hat{Q}xd4$ $\hat{Q}c6$ 5. $\hat{Q}c3$ $\hat{W}c7$ 6. $\hat{Q}e3$ a6 7. $\hat{W}d2$ $\hat{Q}f6$ 8. f4!?

8... $\hat{Q}b4$ 9. $\hat{Q}d3$

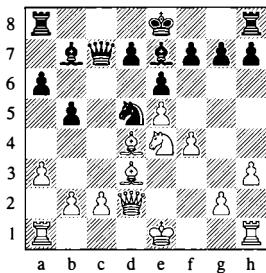
| | |
|---|-----|
| A) 9... $\hat{Q}a5$ | 340 |
| B) 9... b5! 10.a3 $\hat{Q}e7$ 11.e5 $\hat{Q}g4$ 12. $\hat{Q}xc6$ dxc6 | 342 |
| B1) 13. $\hat{Q}e4$ | 344 |
| B2) 13. $\hat{Q}g1$ 0-0!N | 346 |
| B21) 14. $\hat{W}e2$ | 347 |
| B22) 14. 0-0-0!? | 348 |

B) note to 10.a3



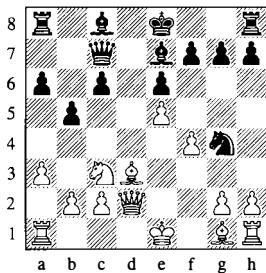
12... 0-0-0!N

B) note to 11.e5



14... f5! N \rightleftarrows

B2) after 13. $\hat{Q}g1$

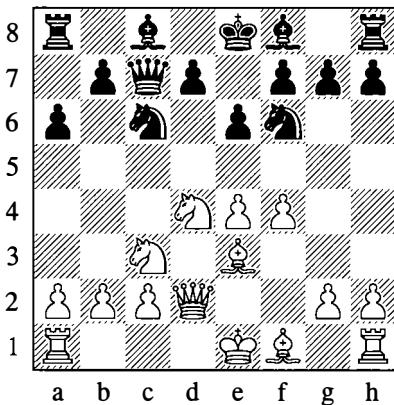


13... 0-0-0!N

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♘c6 5.♗c3 ♖c7 6.♕e3 a6 7.♗d2 ♘f6

I always called this the “road to the English Attack”. That well-known system continues with 8.0–0–0 (or 8.f3!?, if White takes the inaccurate route) and you can find it analysed in the next two chapters. Before then, we will consider the following alternative:

8.f4!?



This is quite an interesting hybrid system, combining the ♕e3 and ♗d2 moves, which are normally characteristic of the English Attack, with the active f2-f4. Black also has to take into consideration the fact that White may castle on either side.

8...♗b4 9.♗d3

There is no other sensible way to guard e4.

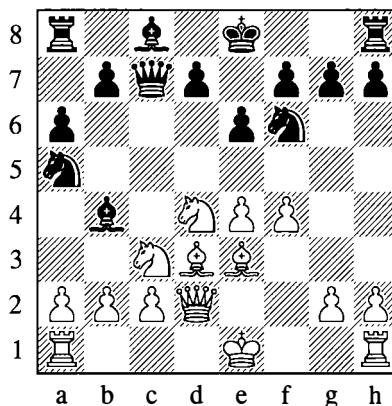
9.♘xc6?! gives Black an easy game after any recapture but my favourite is 9...♖xc6, after which White loses a pawn by force: 10.e5 ♘e4 11.♗d4 ♘xc3† (11...♘a5!? also favours Black) 12.bxc3 ♘xc3 White's bishop pair offers insufficient compensation for his missing pawn and fractured structure.

After the text move Black must make an important decision. I will start by showing

you why I am not entirely satisfied with Black's chances after A) 9...♘a5, which has been his most popular choice. After that brief digression, we will analyse my recommended option of B) 9...b5!.

A) 9...♘a5

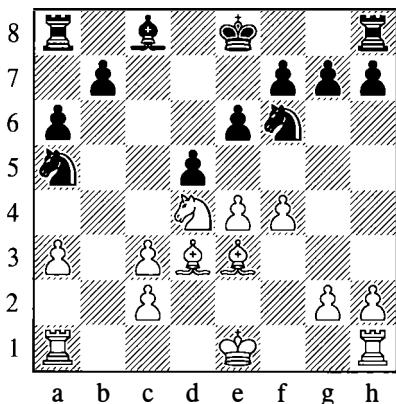
After this variation became trendy for White, I made an effort to look at it deeply in order to understand White's ideas. The text move was the obvious starting point, as it is Black's most popular continuation and is generally regarded as the main line.



The ideas behind Black's last move are quite clear. By opening the c-file for the queen, he prepares to meet a2-a3 with ...♖xc3, damaging White's pawn structure. The other main point is to prepare ...♘c4, which will practically force White to trade his light-squared bishop for the knight, thus weakening the e4-pawn. Because of this, White should clarify the position as follows:

10.a3 ♖xc3 11.♗xc3 ♖xc3† 12.bxc3 d5!

After studying this variation and focusing on the usual continuation of 13.e5, I came to the conclusion that Black's position is extremely stable and it is hard for White to create much trouble. However, it turns out that White has something better.



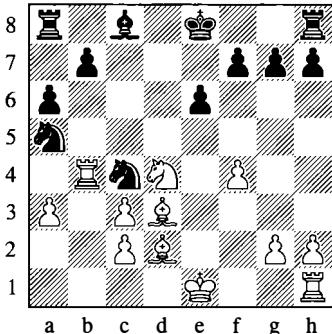
13.exd5!

This move came to my attention in September 2017 when GM Ramirez prepared and played it against me. Before then, I had never really considered it.

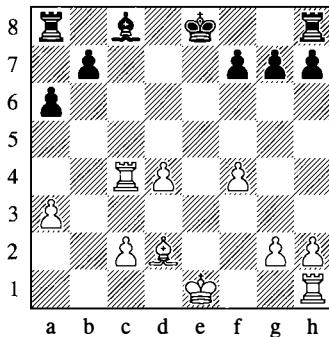
13.e5 $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $dxc4$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}a5$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ has been played in lots of games. Despite White's good statistical results, it seems clear to me that Black is fine. Even if White wins a pawn, the doubled c-pawns and the limited mobility of the bishop on d4 should offer Black enough compensation. A good illustrative game is Cornette – Van Kampen, Germany 2015, where Black gained the upper hand and White had to play well to draw.

13...exd5

13... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ was my choice against Ramirez but 14. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}b1!$ $\mathbb{Q}bc4$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}b4\pm$ gave White a pleasant position. Play continued:

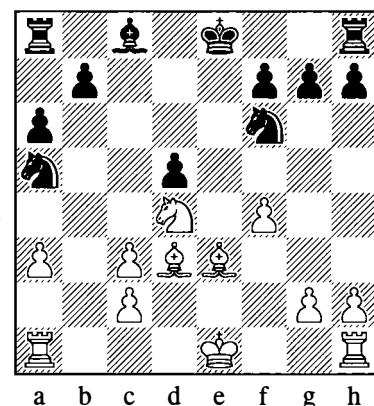


16...e5?! This seemed like a decent practical try. (16...b5?! 17.a4 is unpleasant for Black, while if 16... $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ White has a simple plan of $\mathbb{Q}hb1$ and $\mathbb{Q}e4$) 17. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $exd4$ 19. $cx d4$

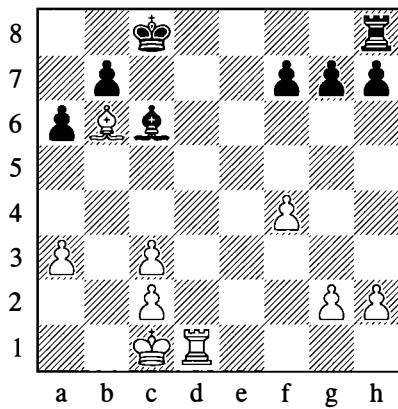


White has some advantage due to his extra pawn, and I went on to lose in Ramirez – Pavlidis, St Louis 2017. Even though the position should be tenable for Black, the fact that he is simply defending, with no realistic hope of winning, means this line is not something I can recommend.

After my game against Ramirez I realized that 13... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ fails to equalize and took a closer look at 13...exd5. However, I remain unconvinced that Black can fully equalize here as well. Here is a recent example where Carlsen was able to grind out a win with White:



14. $\mathbb{Q}b3!$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $\mathbb{Q}xc5$
 17. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 18. 0–0–0 0–0–0 19. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$
 $dxc4$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}b6$ $\mathbb{Q}de8$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$
 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xc6\#$ $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}d1$



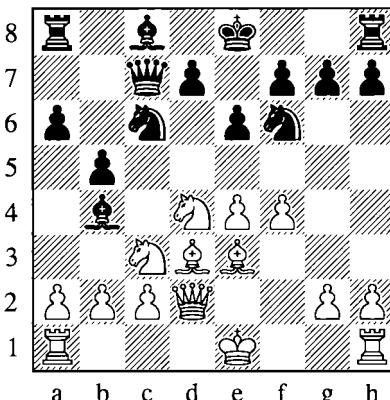
White went on to win in Carlsen – Matlakov, Wijk aan Zee 2018. In the game Black played 24... $\mathbb{Q}xg2$, which attracted criticism from some commentators on the basis that it allows White's rook to become extremely active after 25. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ and $\mathbb{Q}xg7$. While it is true that 24... $\mathbb{Q}e8N$ seems like a better choice, the fact remains that we have a one-sided endgame where Black faces a long struggle for a draw – and facing the World Champion only adds to the difficulty.

Carlsen offered his own insight into the endgame in the post-game interview: “The thing about this position, is that it is always kind of drawish but as long as you don't find a forced draw it's not so easy. I wasn't thrilled that we ended up in this line, since although White is slightly better it should be a draw, but after the time control it was really unpleasant for him and since he cannot force a draw I can play forever. It should still be much closer to a draw than a win for me but as happened in the game it can easily go south for him.”

For all the above reasons, I recommend that you stay away from these inferior endgames, unless there are some exceptional circumstances, for

instance if you believe that you have a significant skill advantage over your opponent in this area of the game.

B) 9... b5!



10.a3

This is the most popular and best move.

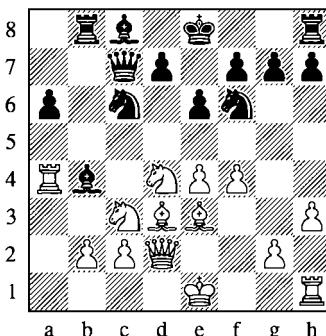
10.0–0–0?! has been tried by two strong players but 10... $\mathbb{Q}a5!$ is an effective reply, and after 11. $\mathbb{Q}de2$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $\mathbb{W}xc4$ Black could already claim a small advantage in A. Muzychuk – Van Delft, Wijk aan Zee 2014.

10.a4!?

This may appear strange if you were expecting Black to castle on the queenside, but remember what was said earlier about the flexible nature of his position, and that he may also opt for short castling.

10...bxa4 11. $\mathbb{Q}xa4$ $\mathbb{Q}b8!$ 12. h3

The immediate 12.0–0?! allows 12... $\mathbb{Q}g4$.



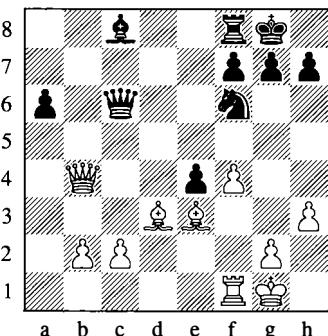
12...0–0!N

12...d6 is a bit too passive and White was able to claim a slight edge in Qiyu Zhou – Olde, Porto Carras 2015.

13.0–0 d5! 14.♕xc6 ♜xc6 15.♗xb4?!

This seems like the only serious attempt to cause problems for Black.

15...♗xb4 16.♕xd5 exd5 17.♗xb4 dxe4



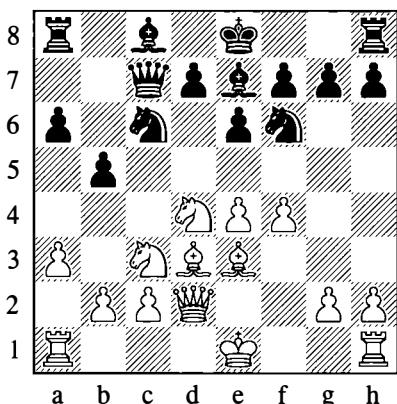
18.♗c4

White needs to safeguard the c2-pawn. However, this move gives Black the chance to make a useful trade.

18...♝e6! 19.♝xe6 ♜xe6 20.c4 ♘d8!=

White's position may appear slightly better due to having a bishop versus knight, plus the passed c-pawn – but don't forget that Black has a passed pawn of his own, and that a queen and knight often work together better than a queen and bishop.

10...♝e7

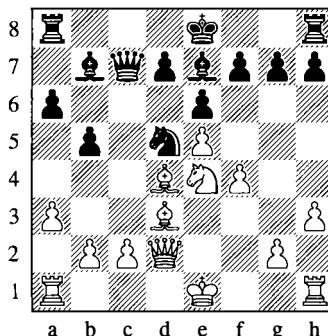


11.e5

This pawn advance is White's only dangerous idea.

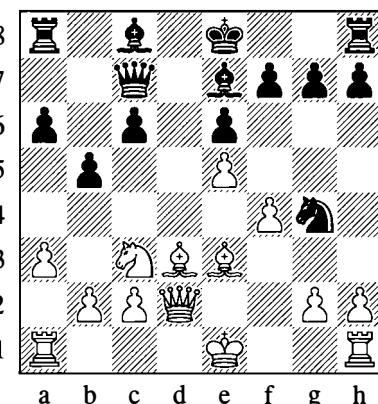
He can also start with 11.♕xc6 dxc6, after which 12.e5 ♘g4 transposes to the main line below.

11.h3 prevents the knight from going to g4 but the loss of a tempo makes the e4-e5 advance less scary for Black, and 11...♝b7 12.e5 ♘xd4! 13.♗xd4 ♘d5 gives him an excellent position. 14.♗e4 Now in Schippers – Bai Jinshi, Groningen 2016, both sides castled short before Black played ...f5. A useful improvement is:



14...f5!N Unlike in the game, White does not have the option of 15.♘g3? here, as 15...♝h4! is awkward for him.

11...♞g4 12.♕xc6 dxc6



We have reached a critical moment, where White must make an important choice. Interestingly, GM Solak reached this position twice against GM Ashwin in 2014.

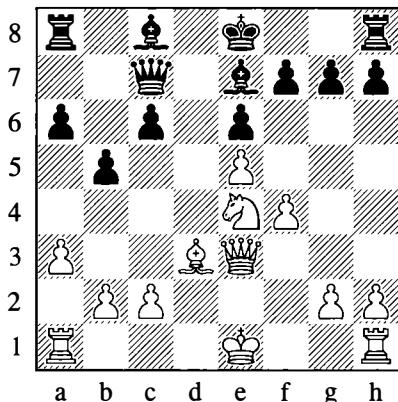
White's two most challenging options are **B1) 13.♗e4** and **B2) 13.♗g1.**

13.♗f1 is certainly playable, but 13...♗xe3 14.♔xe3 ♗b7 15.0–0–0 0–0–0 16.g3 g6 17.♗e4 c5 left Black with no real problems in Kazoks – Quinones Borda, corr. 2016.

B1) 13.♗e4

Solak chose this move in his second game against Ashwin. Perhaps after analysing the position he believed it was the stronger move; on the other hand, he may have simply wanted to be the first to deviate and avoid his opponent's preparation.

13...♗xe3 14.♔xe3

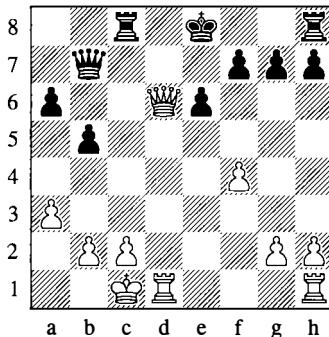


14...♗b7!

I found this move as an improvement over the GM game, and it was subsequently used in a correspondence encounter.

14...c5?! led to problems for Black after: 15.♗d6† ♗xd6 16.exd6 ♗xd6 17.0–0–0 ♗c7

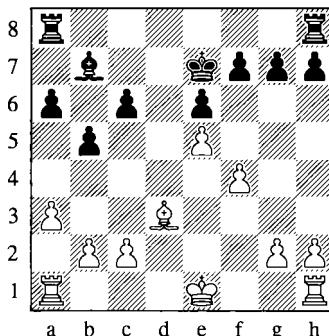
(17...♗e7N looks slightly more accurate although 18.♗e4! is likely to transpose to the game anyway) 18.♗e4 (18.f5!N is also promising for White) 18...♗b7 19.♗xb7 ♗xb7 20.♗xc5 ♗c8 21.♗d6 Black is under pressure. His best survival chance is:



21...♗c6!N (21...a5?! 22.♗he1± was even more unpleasant for Black in Solak – Ashwin, Golden Sands 2014) 22.♗d2 ♗xd6 23.♗xd6 ♗a8 24.♗hd1 ♗e7 25.♗d7† ♗f6 26.♗1d4± White has a risk-free endgame advantage due to his more active rooks.

15.b4

15.♗c5!N forces Black to react on the spot with: 15...♗xc5! Otherwise White plays b2-b4 and our bishop may spend the rest of the game stuck on b7. 16.♗xc5 ♗e7 17.♗xe7† ♗xe7



18.♗e4 ♗ad8 19.♗e2 ♗d4! 20.♗e3 ♗hd8 Black has enough time to play ...♗d7 followed by ...c5, with an equal game.

15...c5!

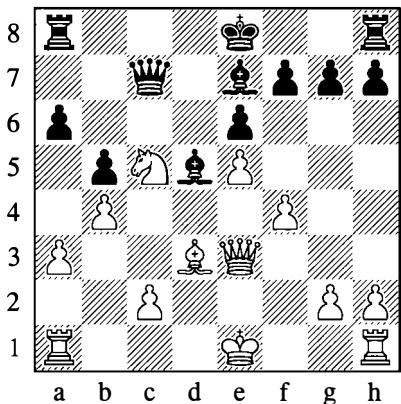
An excellent pawn sacrifice to provide oxygen to Black's light-squared bishop.

16.♗xc5

16.bxc5 leads to an equal position after: 16...♝xe4 17.♝xe4 ♜c8 18.a4 ♜xc5 19.axb5 axb5 20.♗e2 b4=

16...♝d5?N

After 16...♝xc5 17.♝xc5 ♜xc5 18.bxc5 ♜e7 19.♗f2 ♜hc8 20.♗hb1 ♜c6 White was unable to do much with his extra pawn, and Black held the endgame fairly comfortably in Pheby – Sherwood, corr. 2018. Although this seems playable, I would prefer a middlegame position with two bishops and the initiative for a pawn, rather than an endgame where Black merely plays for a draw with no real hope of winning.

**17.0–0 0–0 18.♗e4 ♜fd8=**

Black has long-term compensation for the sacrificed pawn. Both of his bishops are active, the light-squared one standing proudly in the centre and the dark-squared one keeping an eye on White's queenside pawns, as well as helping to monitor the kingside in case White gets any attacking ideas. Moreover, Black has two open lines for his rooks, with the possibility of opening another with the ...a5

break. Finally, it is worth mentioning that even if things go wrong for Black, he always has the possible idea of exchanging on e4, when the opposite-coloured bishops should offer him reasonable chances to save the game a pawn down – although hopefully we will not have to resort to this! Here are some sample lines.

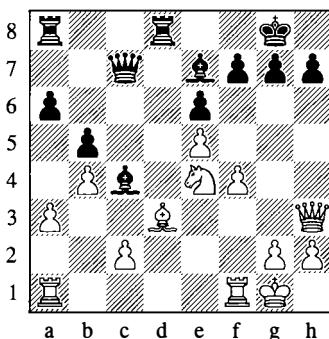
19.♗ab1!?

This is the sneakiest idea I was able to find for White. The idea is to prevent ...a5 for the time being, due to a tactical detail.

19.♗ae1 a5 offers Black good play – as does 19.♗h1 a5, when 20.♗c3 can be adequately met by 20...♝c4.

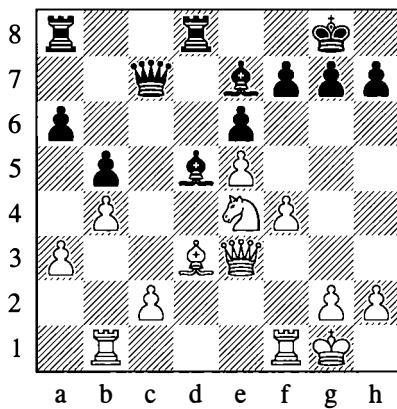
19.♗g3 is a reasonable move, considering that our only real weakness is our slightly bare kingside, but 19...g6! keeps things solid. For instance, 20.♗f6† (20.h4 a5! gives Black enough counterplay) 20...♝xf6 21.exf6 ♜c3 22.♗g5 ♜c4= White has no way through on the kingside, and his extra pawn on the queenside is pretty meaningless.

A final interesting line is: 19.♗h3 ♜c4!? (19...g6 is perfectly playable but it turns out that Black does not actually have to defend h7 yet)



20.♗h1 (20.♗f6† ♜xf6 21.♗xh7† ♗f8 22.exf6 gxsf6= is not dangerous for Black) 20...♜ac8 Black has plenty of counterplay,

for instance: 21.f5 ♕xe5 22.♖ae1 ♕d4 23.♗xc4 ♕xc4 24.fxe6 f6!?. The position remains complex and dynamically balanced.



19...h6!

This is a useful prophylactic move. Moreover, it is hard for White to improve his pieces without allowing ...a5.

19...a5? allows White to seize control with 20.♗c3! ♗c4 21.♗xb5 ♗xb5 (21...♗xd3? does not work in view of 22.♗xc7 ♘xe3 23.♗xa8 ♗xf1 24.♗xf1+) 22.♗xb5 axb4 23.axb4 ♗xc2 24.♗fc1± when he has excellent chances of converting his extra pawn.

20.♗h1

20.♗e2 can be met by 20...a5!?, when ♗c3 is no longer possible.

20...a5!?

With the king on h1, this move works much better, due to the following detail:

21.♗c3 ♗c4 22.♗xb5 ♗xd3! 23.♗xc7 ♘xe3 24.♗xa8 ♗xf1

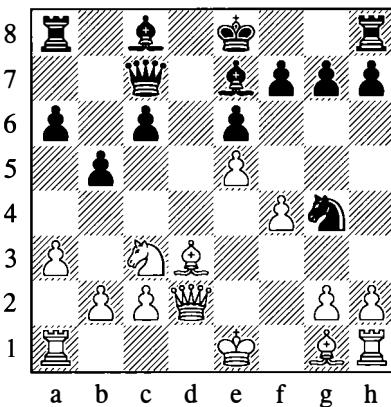
Here's the difference: unlike the analogous line after 19...a5? above, White cannot recapture with the king.

25.♗xf1 axb4=

Black has no problems.

B2) 13.♗g1

After this move I found it necessary to improve Black's play.



13...0–0!N

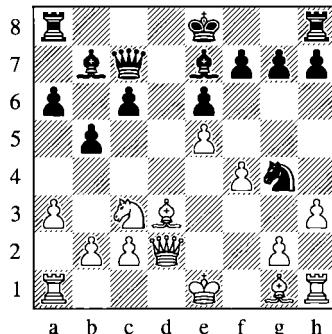
Black must avoid the following error:
13...♗b7?

Interestingly, this has been played in two GM games, but White failed to find the best continuation in either of them.

14.h3!N

The check on h4 is of no concern to White. 14.♗e2? ♗h6 15.0–0–0 was the continuation of Solak – Ashwin, Dubai 2014.

14.♗e4? 0–0 15.♗e2 ♗h6 was the actual move order of a blitz game I played against Fressinet in 2018. We will come back to this shortly, as the same position occurs in variation B21 below – but please be sure to get the move order right!



14... $\mathbb{Q}h4!$

14... $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}e4\pm$ is also great for White.

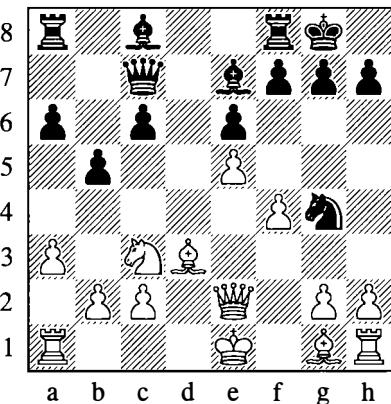
15. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}e4\pm$

White's position is dominant and his king will transfer to h2 via g1, where it will be quite safe. Black's light-squared bishop is well blockaded and White has the initiative.

Before moving on, I will briefly mention that 13...c5 has been played in one correspondence game, but I would rather not invite 14. $\mathbb{Q}e4!?$ N 0–0 15. $\mathbb{Q}d6$.

After the text move White has two main options. **B21)** 14. $\mathbb{W}e2$ is a reasonable move which is likely to transpose to my game against Fressinet, but **B22)** 14.0–0–0?! seems most critical.

B21) 14. $\mathbb{W}e2$



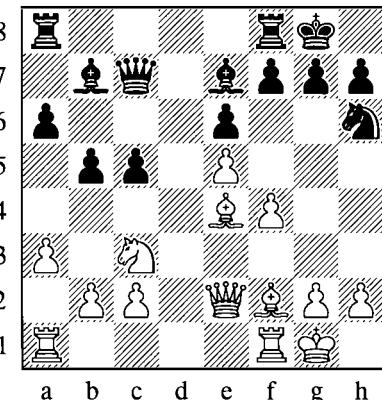
14... $\mathbb{Q}h6$

14...f5?! could also be investigated but I am happy with the text move.

15. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$

We have now transposed to my game with Fressinet. Even though it was only a blitz encounter, it is worth including a few more moves, as both of us continued to play pretty logically.

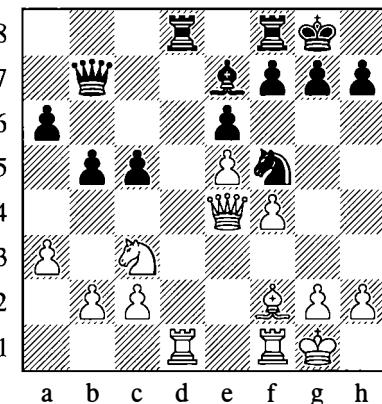
16. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ c5 17.0–0



17... $\mathbb{Q}f5!$

With the knight heading for d4, Black starts to take over the initiative.

18. $\mathbb{E}ad1$ $\mathbb{E}ad8$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ $\mathbb{W}xb7$ 20. $\mathbb{W}e4$



20... $\mathbb{W}c7!$

It is important to keep the queens on the board.

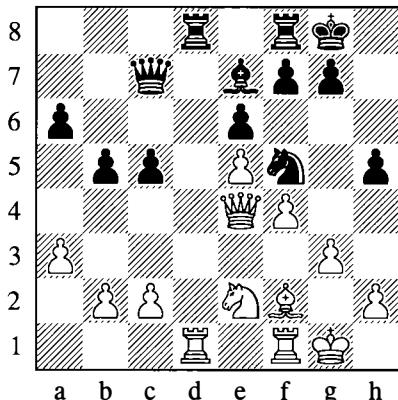
21. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ h5!

Securing the knight on f5 forever.

22.g3

In Fressinet – Pavlidis, Orsay (blitz) 2018, I played 22... $\mathbb{E}xd1$ 23. $\mathbb{E}xd1$ $\mathbb{E}d8$ with

comfortable equality. More ambitious would have been:

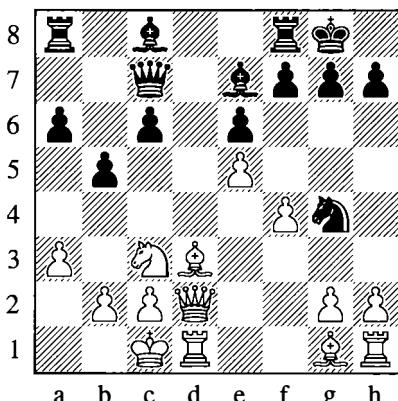


22...c4!?

Followed by ...♘c5, intending to take control over e3, when White has some problems to solve.

B22) 14.0–0–0?!

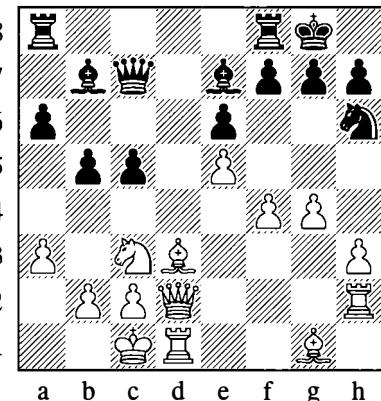
This seems to me to be the most dangerous option, which forces Black to be careful. The next few moves are natural enough:



14...c5 15.h3 ♘h6 16.g4 ♘b7 17.♗h2

This is one of the most critical positions of the chapter. The situation is clearly double-edged, with attacking chances for both sides. I did a lot of work analysing this position and

discarding several tempting options before arriving at the best one.

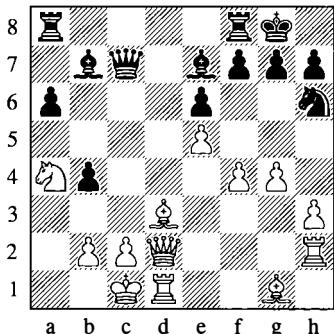


17...♗h8!

Making space for the knight to retreat to g8 if required, while keeping all of our attacking options open on the queenside.

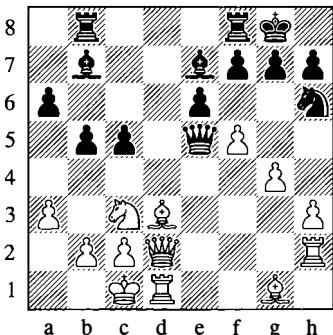
Before we continue analysing this move, I would like to take you through the different options I analysed in order to point out the drawbacks of each of them, as it's not the kind of position where you can simply switch on an engine to understand everything that's happening. Aside from my recommended move, I checked four options: a) 17...b4?!, b) 17...♗ab8?!, c) 17...f6 and d) 17...♘c6?!

a) 17...b4?!! is easy to dismiss as premature, in view of 18.axb4 cxb4 19.♕a4 when White controls the queenside. For instance:



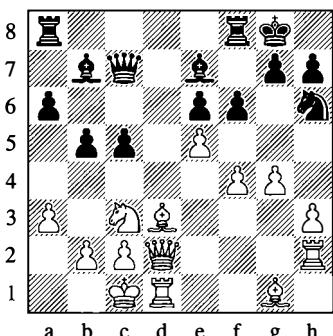
19... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}b6$ $\mathbb{Q}ab8$ 21. $\mathbb{W}e3\pm$ It is not clear how Black can continue his attack. The fact that the engine's suggestion is to play 21... $\mathbb{Q}h8$ followed by ... $\mathbb{Q}g8$ speaks for itself.

b) 17... $\mathbb{Q}ab8$ seems like a natural way to prepare ... $b4$, but the drawback becomes clear after 18. $f5!$. The point is that after 18... $\mathbb{W}xe5$ the h2-b8 diagonal has been opened, which gives White the possibility of gaining a tempo by attacking the rook with a timely $\mathbb{Q}h2$ in some lines. A sample line is:



19. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{W}f6$ 20. $fxe6$ $fxe6$ 21. $\mathbb{W}e1$ $\mathbb{W}f7$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{W}e8$ 23. $\mathbb{W}xe6\uparrow$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}g5\uparrow$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{W}xe6$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $c4$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{W}f8$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}xa6\pm$

c) 17... $f6!?$



This is the move I had in my notes when I first analysed this variation in 2015, when my conclusion was that it should lead to

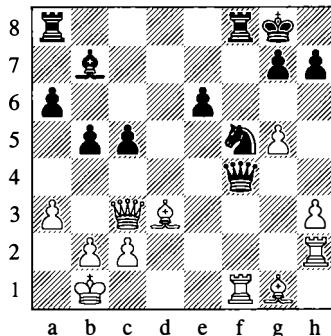
unclear positions. However, I now believe White has slightly better chances after:

18. $exf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 19. $g5$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 20. $\mathbb{W}xc3$ $\mathbb{W}xf4\uparrow$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$

If 21... $\mathbb{W}xg5$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{W}f6$ 23. $\mathbb{W}xc5$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}f2\pm$ White will transfer his bishop to $c3$, with lasting pressure against the kingside.

22. $\mathbb{Q}f1!$

22. $\mathbb{W}xc5$ $\mathbb{W}xg5$ should be fine for Black. One of the themes of this line is that White should try to establish his bishop on either $c3$ or $c5$.



22... $\mathbb{W}xg5$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xc5!$

23. $h4!?$ is interesting but I believe Black can equalize against it.

23... $\mathbb{Q}ac8$ 24. $b4$ $\mathbb{W}g3$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}hf2\bar{\infty}$

Black's position is not so easy. White has more than enough compensation for the pawn due to his strong bishops and open files which can be used to attack the black king. After reaching this conclusion, I decided Black should avoid changing the kingside structure and therefore turned my attention back to the queenside. This led me to the following method of preparing ... $b4$.

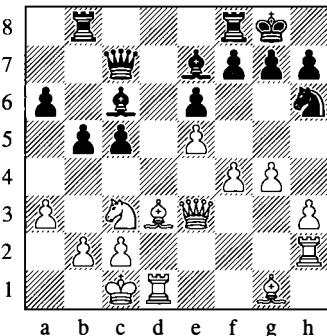
d) 17... $\mathbb{Q}c6!?$

Preparing ... $b4$ by preventing the $\mathbb{Q}a4$ idea, which proved problematic in line a) above. For a while I was satisfied with the arising positions, until John Shaw pointed out a precise line leading to a slightly favourable endgame for White.

18.♗e2 ♜fb8!

prepares ...b4 while vacating the f8-square, which is important if White continues with f5-f6. I analysed further and concluded that Black should be fine.

18...♜ab8



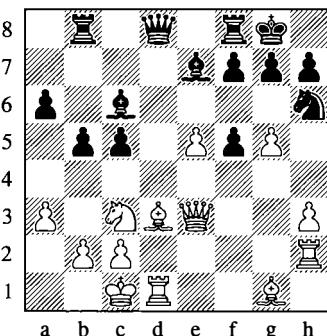
19.f5!

This is the problem line which John Shaw brought to my attention.

Originally I considered two moves: 19.♗e4 b4 when Black has enough counterplay; and 19.♗hd2?! ♜h8! making way for the knight to rejoin the game via g8 and e7.

19...exf5 20.g5 ♜d8?!

Taking aim at g5 was my best idea for Black, but I still was not fully satisfied after:



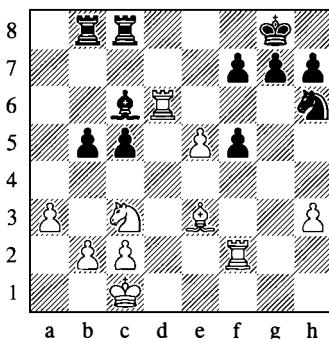
21.♗xb5!

Obviously 21.gxh6?? ♜g5!+ would win the queen.

21...♜xg5 22.♗xd8 ♜xe3† 23.♗xe3 axb5

24.♗d6 ♜fc8 25.♗f2!

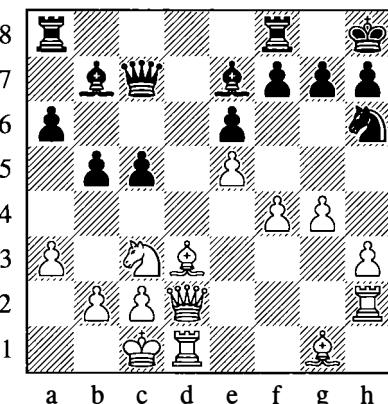
I will spare you my detailed analysis of the alternatives; suffice to say that 25.♗xc5 and 25.♗xh6 both enable Black to equalize.



25...b4 26.♗d5 ♜xd5 27.♗xd5 bxa3 28.bxa3±

Although I believe the endgame should be drawn with best play, it would not be much fun defending Black's side with no real hope of anything more than a draw.

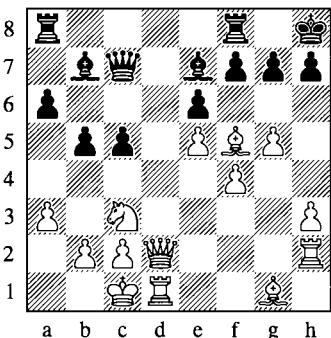
After studying the above variation closely, it was noticeable that the plan of f4-f5, meeting ...exf5 with g4-g5, was an important part of White's plans. Another significant point is the brief note on 19.♗hd2?! ♜h8!, when Black intends to improve his misplaced knight. Once I appreciated this, it led me to investigate the idea of playing 17...♜h8 immediately – so let's now turn our attention to the analysis of this move, which I am recommending for Black.



18. $\mathbb{W}e3$!

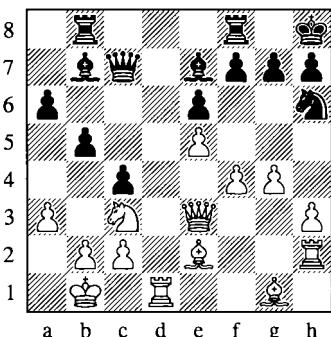
This seems like White's most constructive move, taking the queen off the open d-file and onto a more active square.

I also analysed a direct attacking try: 18. $g5$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ (18... $\mathbb{Q}g8$! is playable, intending to combine queenside counterplay with the eventual re-emergence of the knight via e7, but ultimately I prefer the more active alternative, which is connected with a pawn sacrifice) 19. $\mathbb{Q}xf5$

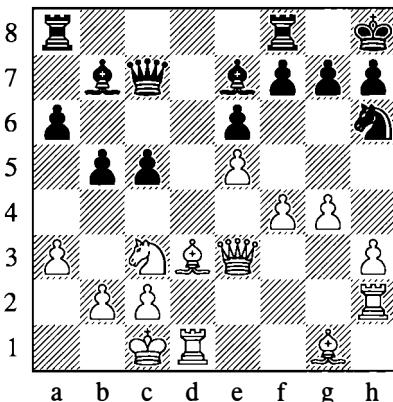


19... $\mathbb{Q}fd8$! (avoiding 19... $exf5$ 20. $\mathbb{W}d7$!±) 20. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $c4$ 21. $\mathbb{W}e3$ $cxd3$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ 23. $\mathbb{W}xd3$ $\mathbb{Q}d8\mathbb{Q}$

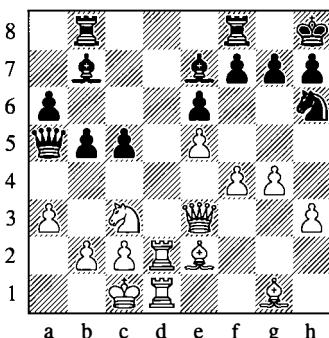
18. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ is another natural option to consider. This prophylactic move certainly has some value, but I do not believe it is the best use of a tempo in such a dynamic position. Play may continue: 18... $\mathbb{Q}ab8$ 19. $\mathbb{W}e3$ $c4$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}e2$



20... $b4$ 21. $axb4$ $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}a2$ Now Black has a pleasant choice between 22... $\mathbb{Q}e7$, threatening ... $\mathbb{Q}d5$, and the immediate 22... $\mathbb{Q}d5$!?. Engines tend to evaluate these positions as equal but the open b-file makes things more dangerous for White in a practical game.

**18... $\mathbb{Q}ab8$ 19. $\mathbb{W}f1$!?**

Playing along the d-file with 19. $\mathbb{Q}hd2$ is a natural idea but Black can respond actively with: 19... $\mathbb{Q}a5$! 20. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ (20. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $c4$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ → gives Black serious attacking chances with ... $b4$ and ... $c3$ breaks in the air)



20... $b4$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ → Once again, Black's attack is well underway and White is left playing strange moves trying to survive.

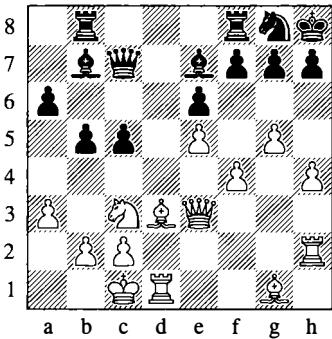
Another important line is:
19. $g5$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$!

19...Qf5 20.Qxf5 exf5 21.Qhd2 is slightly better for White, due to the d-file and the weakness of the d5-square.

20.h4

20.Qe2 b4 21.axb4 cxb4 22.Qa4 Qfc8 looks pleasant for Black, who will continue with ...Qc6 and a pawn march to a3.

Now White is threatening h4-h5 and g5-g6, so Black has to react quickly.

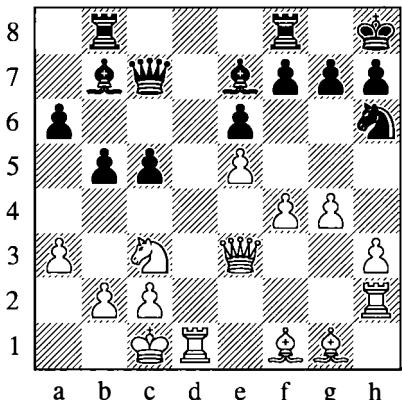


20...c4!

20...Qa5!? also looks interesting but the direct approach looks fine.

21.Qe2 b4 22.axb4 Qxb4

Once again, the position is messy but more dangerous for White.

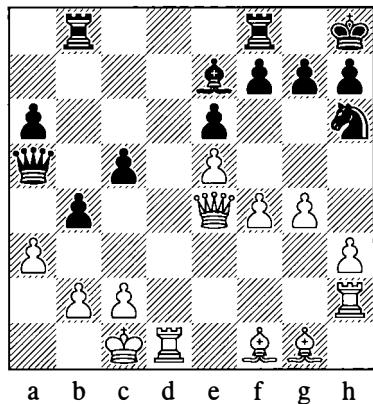


19...Qa5 20.Qe4

White should move the knight to lessen the impact of ...b4.

20.Qb1 Qg8! sees Black improve his knight before continuing his attack, with at least equal chances.

20...Qxe4 21.Qxe4 b4

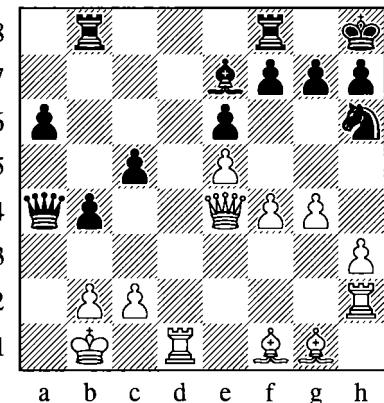


22.a4!

This was the subtle idea behind White's 20th move.

22...Qxa4 23.Qb1!

In return for the sacrificed a-pawn, White has blunted Black's attack, while his queen controls a lot of squares and his bishops are excellent. Black needs a special kind of move to maintain the balance.



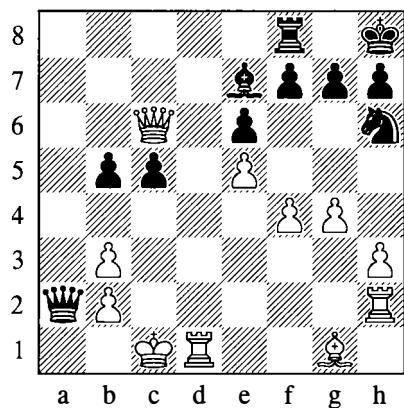
23...♝b5!!

The only way for Black to continue his attack! Now he threatens ...♝a5, and if White takes the rook then ...axb5 will introduce the deadly threat of ...♝a8.

24.♗c6

24.♕d3 g6 leads to a similar situation after 25.♗c6 b3; it is doubtful that the inclusion of ♕d3 and ...g6 has really helped White.

24...b3! 25.♕xb5 ♝a2† 26.♔c1 axb5
27.cxb3

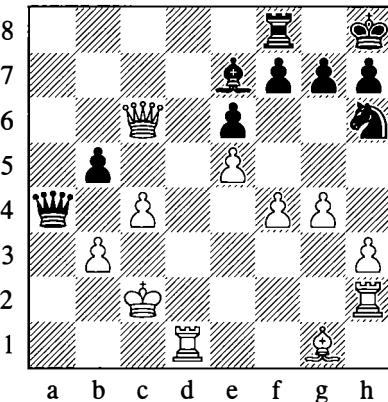


27...c4! 28.bxc4

After 28.♕d4 ♝xb3 Black will eventually regroup with ...♝g8, and it seems to me that White faces the more difficult challenges ahead.

28...♝a1† 29.♔c2 ♝a4† 30.b3?!

White's safest course of action would be to force Black to take a perpetual with 30.♔c1 ♝a1†. The computer points out that the text move is playable, but it seems pretty risky for White.



**30...♝a2† 31.♔d3 ♝xb3† 32.♔e2 bxc4
33.♕e3 ♝g8#**

I would definitely prefer Black if this ever occurred over the board. The ...f6 break is always in the air, and in a practical game it would be easy for White to go wrong.

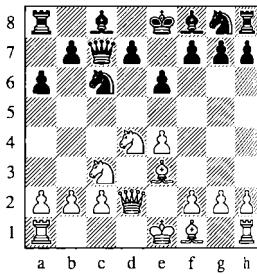
Conclusion

8.f4!? is an interesting move and I would not be surprised to see it become more popular, as it leads to lively and relatively unexplored positions. After the standard continuation of 8...♝b5 9.♕d3, Black already has to make an important decision, and I started the chapter by showing why I was not so happy with the most common 9...♝a5.

We then moved on to my recommendation of 9...b5!, when 10.a3 ♘e7 11.e5 ♘g4 12.♗xc6 dxcc6 reaches a critical position. 13.♗e4 is one serious option and 13.♗g1 the other, when it is important to remember that 13...0-0!N is the correct move order. A rich middlegame lies instore, with 14.0-0-0!? the critical test, and 17...♗h8! the key idea for Black a few moves later.

Chapter 18

6. $\mathbb{Q}e3$



English Attack

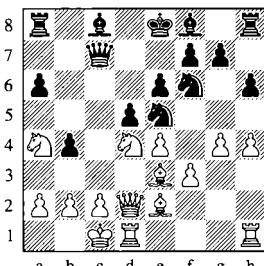
Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.Qf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Qxd4 Qc6 5.Qc3 Qc7 6.Qe3 a6 7.Qd2

7...Qf6

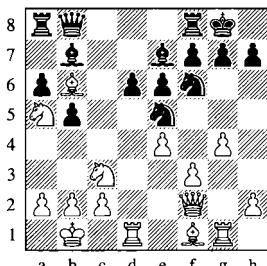
| | |
|-----------------------------|-----|
| A) 8.f3 | 355 |
| B) 8.0-0-0 Qb4 9.f3 Qe5! | 359 |
| B1) 10.g4!? | 360 |
| B2) 10.Qb3 b5 | 364 |
| B21) 11.Qf2 | 364 |
| B22) 11.Qd4 | 366 |
| B23) 11.Qd4 | 367 |
| B24) 11.Qb1 Qe7! 12.Qf2 Qb7 | 369 |
| B241) 13.Qb6 Qb8 | 370 |
| B2411) 14.Qa5!? | 370 |
| B2412) 14.Qd4 | 372 |
| B242) 13.Qa5!? | 374 |

A) after 13.Qe2



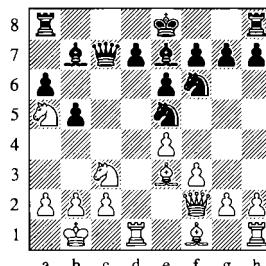
13...Qexg4!N

B2411) after 16.Qg1



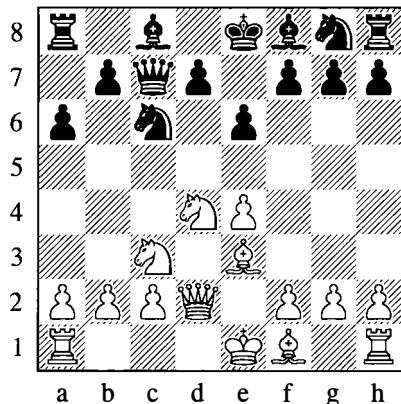
16...Rc8?N

B242) after 13.Qa5!?



13...Rc8?N

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘c6
5.♘c3 ♖c7 6.♗e3 a6 7.♗d2

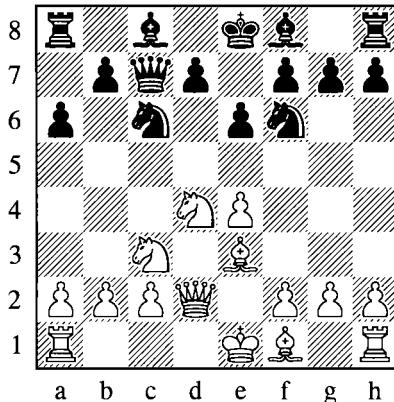


The so-called English Attack. It is impressive that White can employ this system with ♘e3, ♖d2 and f2-f3 (and probably 0-0-0) against almost all the Sicilians. It is especially popular against the Dragon since there it is the most promising line for White. Sometimes it is combined with the move ♘c4 in order to secure better control of the d5-square.

The English Attack is also seen frequently against the Scheveningen where White opts for f2-f3 and ♘e3, or in the Najdorf where White once again chooses 6.f3 or 6.♗e3, frequently transposing to the Scheveningen variation.

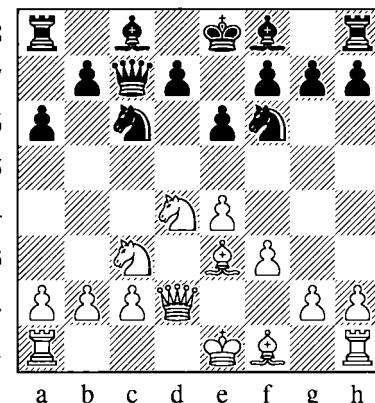
In general it is considered to be one of White's most aggressive approaches. White usually opts for opposite-sides castling and often tries to attack with g2-g4, h4-h5, then g5, gaining the initiative on the kingside. On the other hand, Black usually tries to exploit the queenside with ...b5-b4 and ...a5-a4, or tries to increase the pressure along the c-file against the c3-knight and the c2-pawn. Keep in mind that Black usually has more targets for his attack, but White is usually faster with his pawn-storm attack and has more pieces defending his king than Black.

7...♘f6



After Black's obvious developer we have a split: A) 8.f3 is an interesting and tricky line for White, while B) 8.0-0-0 is the main line.

A) 8.f3



8...♘e5

Black seeks a transposition to the main line.

As the e4-pawn is already defended, 8...♗b4?! would fall into the trap set by White's previous move. After the simple 9.a3 ♘e7 10.g4± White can continue his attack *without* castling first. Later his king might feel safer on e1 rather than on c1 (or b1).

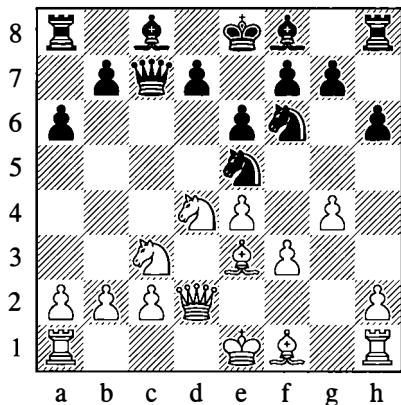
9.g4!?

9.0–0–0 ♜b4 is a transposition to the main line.

Or 9.♘b3 b5 10.0–0–0 (Instead an independent option is 10.♗d4, which cuts out ...♗b4 but is a slow and unthreatening move. After 10...♗e7 11.0–0–0 d6? Black is fine.) 10...♗b4 is another transposition to the main line.

9...h6

In this move order, White's g-pawn is arriving earlier than usual, so Black is well-advised to slow it down with ...h7-h6. This will *not* be our usual response to a g4-advance.



10.0–0–0

It is very interesting for White to go for long castling right now, since Black has played the move ...h6, which he usually tries to avoid since it gives a target for White to attack.

Also interesting is:

10.h4 b5 11.♗g1!

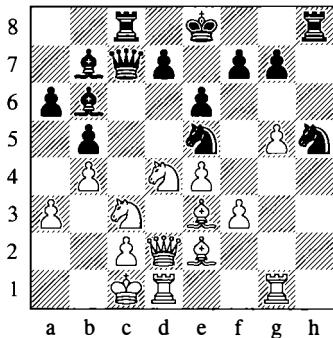
The most testing option, going for a quick g4-g5.

10...♗b7!

The text move has never been played in this position, but it immediately transposes to a game.

11...♗b4 was Gareev's choice, but is not

good enough for equality since White can continue with: 12.a3 ♜a5 13.♗e2 ♜b7 14.g5 (14.♘b3!N would be even stronger) 14...hxg5 15.hxg5 ♘h5 16.b4! ♜b6 Our bishop is misplaced on b6; it obviously would be better placed on e7. 17.0–0–0 ♜c8



18.♘cxb5?? The text move quickly lost in Saidov – Gareev, Tashkent 2007. Presumably White missed that after 18...axb5 his intended 19.♘xb5 loses to 19...♗xc2† 20.♗xc2 ♜xe3† (instead 18.♗b2!N would have kept an advantage for White).

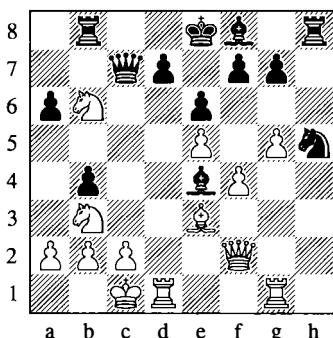
12.g5 hxg5 13.hxg5 ♘h5 14.f4

The most direct try; instead in Coratella – Collutiis, Castellana 2000, White castled.

14...♘c4 15.♘xc4 ♗xc4

The position is unclear and double-edged. White has managed to advance his kingside pawns but has also weakened his central pawn on e4. A fun sample line is:

16.♘b3 ♗c7 17.e5 b4 18.♘a4 ♜c6! 19.♘b6 ♜b8 20.♗f2 ♜e4 21.0–0–0



20... $\mathbb{Q}xf4!!$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ $\mathbb{Q}d3\#$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{W}xd7$
24. $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}xb8$ $\mathbb{Q}h2$

With a double-edged position.

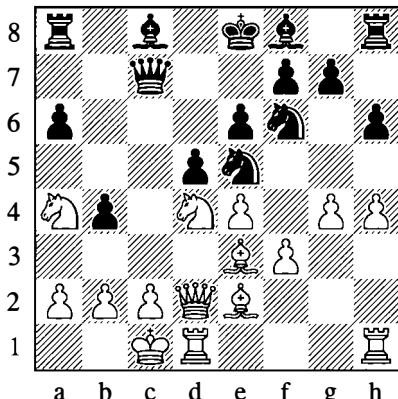
10...b5 11.h4 b4 12. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ d5

This, and the previous two moves, is thematic and obvious. Black wishes to expand on the queenside and break with ...d7-d5 if possible; to play anything else would be misguided.

13. $\mathbb{Q}e2$

13. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ was once employed by GM Borisek but Black soon developed a dangerous initiative: 13... $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 15. $\mathbb{W}xb4$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 17. $\mathbb{W}a3$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 18. $\mathbb{W}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 19.b4 a5↑ Borisek – Cvek, Turin (ol) 2006.

The position after the text move has been employed with White by strong GMs such as Cheparinov, Robson and Kovchan. In all the above-mentioned games Black reacted either with ... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ or ... $\mathbb{Q}d7$. Instead Black can opt for a very interesting sacrifice with:



13... $\mathbb{Q}exg4!$ N

13... $\mathbb{Q}d7?$! would allow: 14.g5!→

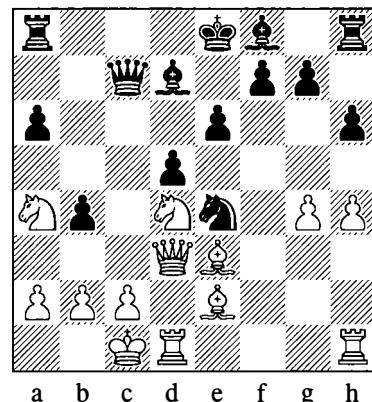
14.fxg4

14. $\mathbb{Q}f4?$! is an interesting idea, but Black is okay after: 14...e5! 15.fxg4 exf4 16.exd5 $\mathbb{Q}d6$! 17. $\mathbb{Q}hg1$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$! 18. $\mathbb{W}e1$ 0-0→ Once our

knight lands on g3 it will be hard for White to create any play. On the other hand, it will be much easier for Black to continue his attack with ... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ and then advancing the a-pawn, or instead play positionally with ... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ and ... $\mathbb{Q}e8$.

14... $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 15. $\mathbb{W}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$!

The idea of the knight sacrifice is based on the misplacement of the a4-knight!



16. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$!

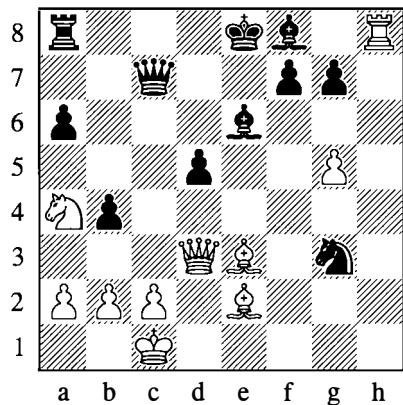
The best way to fight back.

Instead after the uninspired 16.b3?! Black plays 16... $\mathbb{Q}xa4$ 17.bxa4 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 18. $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}xa4\#$, with three pawns and a powerful initiative for the piece.

16... $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ 17.g5!?

Instead 17. $\mathbb{Q}b6$ must be met with total precision in the next two moves: 17... $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 18. $\mathbb{W}xa6$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$! The only move, but safe enough. 19. $\mathbb{W}b5\#$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xc5\#$ $\mathbb{W}xc5$ 21. $\mathbb{W}xc5=$ The position is equal, but White needs to be more careful holding the balance, due to Black's dynamic chances.

17...hxg5! 18.hxg5 $\mathbb{Q}xh1$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xh1$ $\mathbb{Q}g3$
20. $\mathbb{Q}h8$



20...d4!!

This brilliant move is followed by a brilliant variation.

21. $\mathbb{Q}d2!$

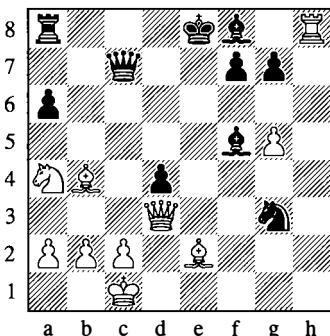
Instead 21. $\mathbb{Q}xd4??$ $\mathbb{Q}d8+$ would be lost for White, since he cannot unpin himself.

21... $\mathbb{Q}f5!$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}c4$

The text move looks the obvious choice, but there is a wild alternative:

22. $\mathbb{Q}xb4?$

An enterprising try, but if Black is perfectly accurate then he can secure a slightly more pleasant endgame.



22... $\mathbb{Q}f4\#$!

Choosing to play on.

22... $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ is only enough for a repetition after 23. $\mathbb{Q}xf8\#$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}xf7\#$ $\mathbb{Q}d8!$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}f8\#$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$.

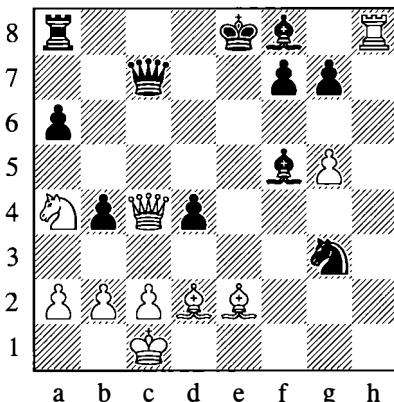
And White has to take the perpetual, or else face an endgame an exchange down.

23. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}xe2\#$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ 0–0–0! 25. $\mathbb{Q}xf4$

The only move.

25... $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}xf8$ $\mathbb{Q}xf8$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}xf8$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}b4$ $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}c5$

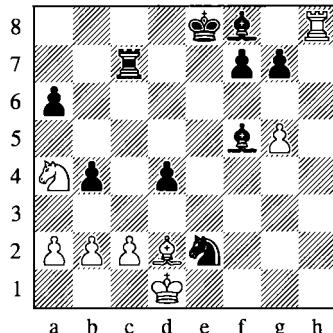
White will regain the missing pawn, but then will need to play well to hold the ending, as Black's two connected passed pawns are dangerous.



22... $\mathbb{Q}xe2\#$

This leads to a drawish position, as does 22... $\mathbb{Q}c8$, but at least after the text move White is the one who needs to find some more difficult moves.

22... $\mathbb{Q}c8$ reaches a drawn endgame. Black creates direct threats so the following line is essentially forced: 23. $\mathbb{Q}xc7$ $\mathbb{Q}xe2\#$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}xc7$

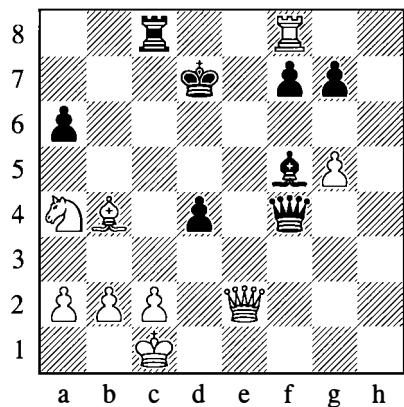


25.♗xb4 (not 25.♗xe2? ♜xc2+ and Black is winning) 25...♜xc2† 26.♗xe2 ♜xa4 27.♗xf8† ♜d7 28.♗xf7† ♜c6= The opposite-coloured bishops make this a draw, even after White wins the d4-pawn, but the main line is a better practical choice for Black.

23.♗xe2† ♜d7 24.♗xb4! ♜c8!

The most direct and most aggressive.

25.♗xf8 ♜f4†!



26.♗d2

Or 26.♗d1 ♜xc2†! 27.♗e1 ♜h4†= with a perpetual.

26...♜xc2† 27.♗d1 ♜xd2†!

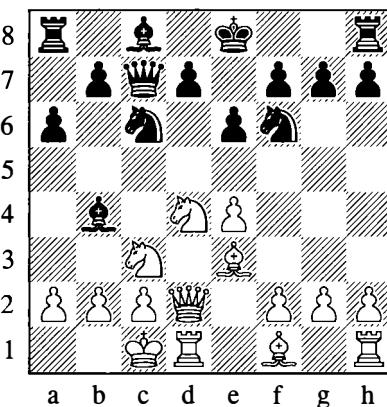
With a perpetual on the light squares. For example:

28.♗xd2 ♜f1† 29.♗e1 ♜d3† 30.♗d2 ♜f1†=

B) 8.0–0–0 ♜b4

Instead 8...♝e7 is generally considered to be the main line for Black nowadays. I have also employed this move, but in my opinion Black has few winning chances after 9.f3 b5 10.g4 ♜xd4 11.♗xd4 ♜b7 12.g5 ♜h5 13.♗e5 ♜xe5 14.♗xd7† ♜f8 15.♗xb7. This line is of course not forced; both White and Black can

deviate. But mainly it is White who can try other moves, such as 10.♗b1, which has been employed for example by Caruana, Anand and Karjakin. In the final position of that line, although Black's score is really impressive (just over 50%) I believe that White is a little better, with the most likely result a draw. To be clear, this other line is certainly playable for Black, but in this book I aim to offer Black dynamic play and, where possible, I wish to keep the positions more unbalanced.



9.f3 ♜e5!

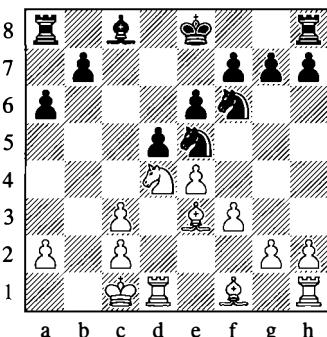
This move was for many years the main line. Lately many Black players have switched to 9...0–0, which is also very interesting. Some top players who still employ 9...♝e5 are Vachier-Lagrave, Perunovic, Giri and of course Potkin, who was my inspiration for following this line.

B1) 10.g4? is underrated and deserves its own section. **B2) 10.♗b3** is overwhelmingly the most common move.

Other alternatives are:

10.♗b1 is not dangerous as Black becomes very active after 10...♜xc3 11.♗xc3 ♜xc3 12.bxc3 d5. Black is totally fine.

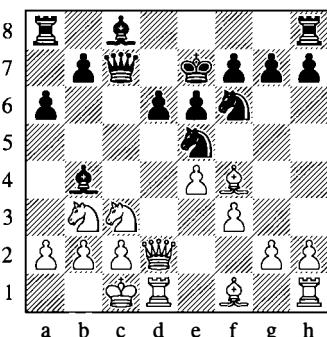
10. $\mathbb{W}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3!$ 11. $\mathbb{W}xc3$ (11. $bxc3$ d6 was Gashimov – Vachier-Lagrave, Lausanne 2006; Black is happy in the middlegame as he has the safer king.) 11... $\mathbb{W}xc3$ 12. $bxc3$ d5



The thematic pawn break. The endgame can continue in many ways, but let's follow one typical example: 13. $exd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ b5 15. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $bxcc4$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 0-0 18. $\mathbb{Q}d6$ $\mathbb{Q}d7=$ Fedorchuk – Jaracz, Warsaw (rapid) 2008. Although White won the game, Black's position is very stable. Black will probably continue with ... $b5$, then try to kick out White's knight from d6. Once Black develops all of his pieces, he can continue with a kingside pawn advance.

10. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ d6 11. $\mathbb{Q}b3$

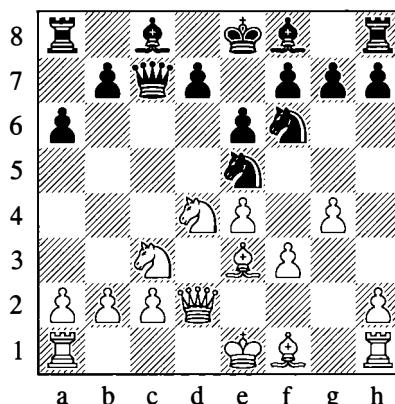
This is the only reasonable move to my eyes. White increases the pressure on d6.
11... $\mathbb{Q}e7!!$



When I first found this move, I thought it would be a novelty, but strangely enough it was played back in 2003, as well as in a few more recent email games. Black's idea is to offer protection to the d6-pawn and since Black will soon continue with ... $\mathbb{Q}xc3$, his king will be more useful in the centre than on the kingside. One typical line is:

12. $\mathbb{Q}e3?$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 13. $\mathbb{W}xc3$ $\mathbb{W}xc3$ 14. $bxc3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7=$
With an equal endgame.

B1) 10. g4??



A rare but super-critical continuation! In fact, after trying my best, I couldn't find a fully dynamic solution for Black. I think we should place our hopes in an endgame a pawn down, but with clear counterplay. Such endgames might seem dry, but I have witnessed many cases (especially in club-level play) where players get frustrated and lose such positions with White by simply trying to "do something".

10... $b5!$ 11. $a3!$

The critical move.

11. $\mathbb{R}g1$

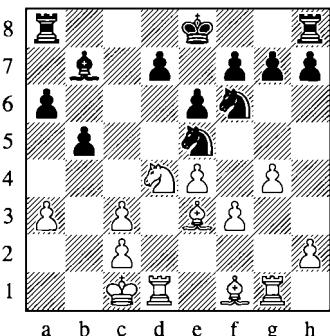
This is a useful move in order to gain better control of the g4-square after the kingside advance with f4 and g5.

11... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 12.a3

For 12.g5 $\mathbb{Q}h5$ – see 11.g5 below.

12... $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 13. $\mathbb{W}xc3$ $\mathbb{W}xc3$ 14.bxc3

This endgame could easily go wrong for White since his structure looks rather suspicious.



14...h6!

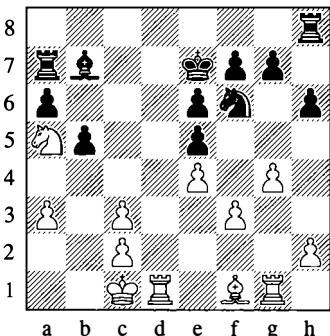
It is important to keep the knight on f6 as long as possible. Moreover if White wants to continue with h2-h4 and g4-g5 then Black will get a lot of play along the h-file.

15. $\mathbb{Q}f4$

White tries to be active.

15...d6 16. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ dxe5 17. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}a5$

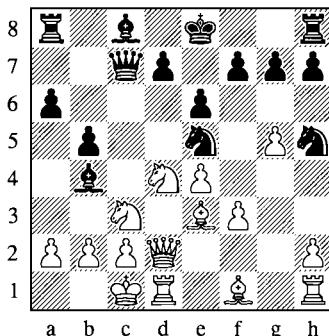
$\mathbb{Q}a7=$



It is objectively about level, but I would rather have Black, whose idea is simply to continue with ... $\mathbb{Q}a8$, ... $\mathbb{Q}c8$, ... $\mathbb{Q}ac7$. It is also important to remember that in such structures the f4-square is a fine outpost for the black knight.

11.g5 $\mathbb{Q}h5$

From this position Black has scored well in practice.



12. $\mathbb{Q}b1$

One of several options.

a) 12. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ White has secured the g4-square and is clearly going for f3-f4, so Black should target e4. 12... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 13.f4 $\mathbb{Q}xc3?$ 14. $\mathbb{W}xc3$ $\mathbb{W}xc3$ 15.bxc3 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ bxc4 17.e5 g6= Black will simply continue with ... $\mathbb{Q}g7$ and control the light squares. At the right moment Black might even consider going ...h7-h6 to open the h-file.

b) 12.a3 $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 13. $\mathbb{W}xc3$ $\mathbb{W}xc3$ 14.bxc3 0–0 White's structure on the queenside is ruined but in return White has the bishop pair and potentially can chase Black's knights. 15. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ f5! Black is challenging White's centre and trying to control the f4-square. 16.gxf6 $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}h5!$ Going for the f4-square! 18. $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $\mathbb{Q}e8!$ It is important to leave the f7-square clear for our knight. 19. $\mathbb{Q}d6$ $\mathbb{Q}f7=$

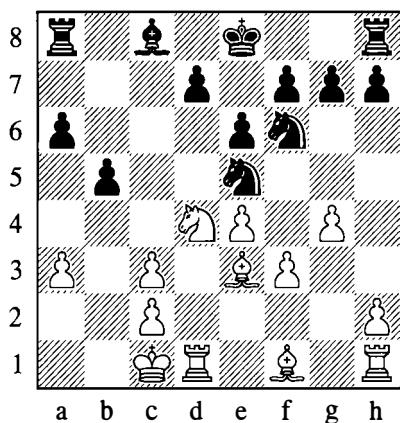
12... $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 13. $\mathbb{W}xc3$ $\mathbb{W}xc3$ 14.bxc3 0–0 15. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ f5=

In Vehi Bach – Iturriaga Bonelli, Ets La Massana 2012, the play was similar to the 12.a3 variation we saw above.

11... $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 12. $\mathbb{W}xc3$ $\mathbb{W}xc3$ 13.bxc3

Another version of the queenless positions we saw in the move 11 alternatives above; in

this case Black should answer with particular care.



13...h6!N

Black plans ...d7-d5 with a great game, and in order to do so Black needs to secure the f6-square for his knight.

If 13... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ then 14.g5N is an obvious improvement. 14... $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}b3!$ Heading for the dark squares. For example, after 15... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}a5$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 17.a4! \pm White holds a small but stable advantage.

14. $\mathbb{Q}f4$

Instead 14. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ d5 15. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ gives Black at least equality, since the e4-pawn will be a clear target.

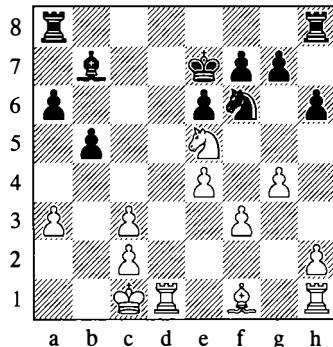
14...d6

Instead, with the pawn still back on d7, 14... $\mathbb{Q}g6?$ would be a fiasco after 15. $\mathbb{Q}d6$.

15.c4

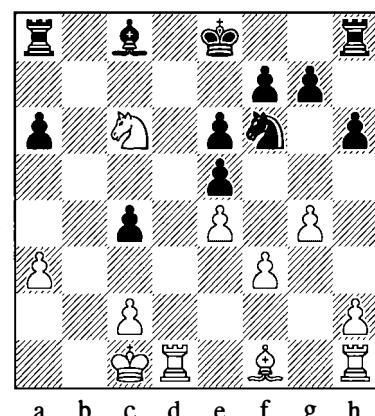
After this clever move White gets annoying pressure.

The simple and direct line is: 15. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ dx e 16. $\mathbb{Q}c6$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$



White has an extra pawn but Black can create easy counterplay with ... $\mathbb{Q}hc8-c5$ and ... $\mathbb{Q}ac8$, then go for the c3-pawn. It is also important that after White plays $\mathbb{Q}d3$ in order to defend on c3 his centralized knight on e5 doesn't have any retreat square. 18.c4 The most challenging try, but White opens the position around his king and Black will definitely develop counterplay. 18... $\mathbb{Q}hc8!$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ (or 19.cxb5 will lead to similar play after 19...axb5 20. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ with ... $\mathbb{Q}d7-b6$ planned) 19... $\mathbb{Q}c5!$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}c7\bar{m}$ Black has good compensation for the pawn; he will manoeuvre with ... $\mathbb{Q}d7-b6$.

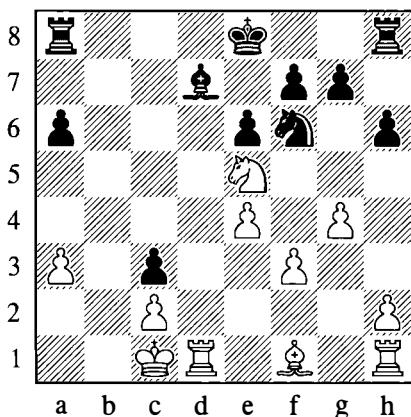
15...bxc4 16. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ dx e 17. $\mathbb{Q}c6$



Compared to the 15. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ sideline, White has managed to get rid of his doubled c-pawns and will try to collect the c4-pawn later.

17...♝d7 18.♛xe5 c3!

The key move. It is important for Black to hold the c-pawn as long as possible in order to gain activity with his other pieces. Until this point White played active chess and managed to create a target, which will later lead him to win a pawn. Now it is Black's turn to gain the initiative and it is White's turn to defend, if he wants to maintain any kind of winning chances.

**19.♝d3**

White continues in the same spirit, going after Black's c-pawn.

Less challenging is: 19.h4 ♜e7 20.♝d3 ♜ac8=

19...♜c8

With the simple plan of ...♝e7 after which the c8-rook can go to the optimal square on c5, and the other rook can join the action from one of the queenside open files.

20.♝d6!

Once again the only critical move.

20...♝e7 21.♜xa6 ♜a8!

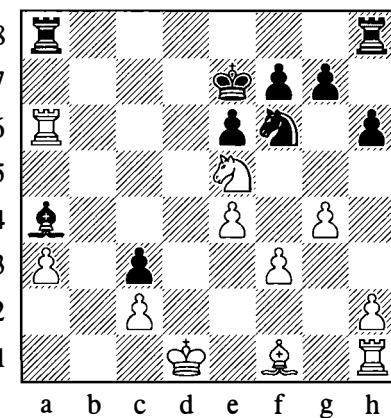
White captured the a-pawn but his king is now almost in a mating net.

22.♚d1!

Let's see a "nothing move" to illustrate that White can be in danger if he doesn't react well. 22.h3?! ♜xa6 23.♜xa6 ♜a8 24.♝d3 ♜xa3 25.♝b1 ♜e8?! With the idea of ...♝d7 and Black is pushing a little.

22...♜a4

Keeping the king stuck at d1 for the time being and pressing against the c2-pawn.

**23.♜xa8**

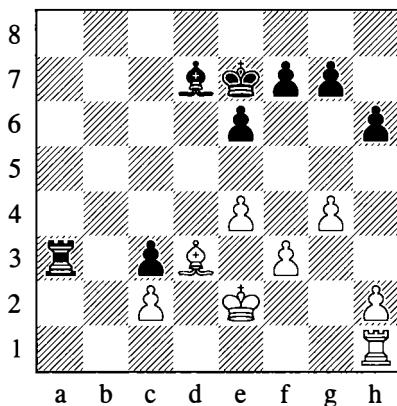
After 23.♝d3 Black's idea becomes clearer: 23...♜xa6 24.♜xa6 ♜d8† 25.♝d3 ♜d7! Heading to c5, taking advantage of the misplacement of the bishop on a6. 26.♝e2 ♜xc2 27.♝c1 ♜xd3† 28.♝xd3 ♜c8= Black simply wants to continue with ...g5 and then ...♝e5.

23...♜xa8 24.♝d3 ♜d7!

An important move so that we get rid of the annoying e5-knight and open the way for our rook to enter the opponent's camp.

25.♝xd7 ♜xd7 26.♝e2 ♜a3

Computers evaluate this position as slightly better for White due to the vulnerable c3-pawn. For me it is clear that with almost all White's pawns placed on light squares it will be easy for Black to find counterplay, even if he ends up a pawn down. I will offer some sample lines to illustrate the point.



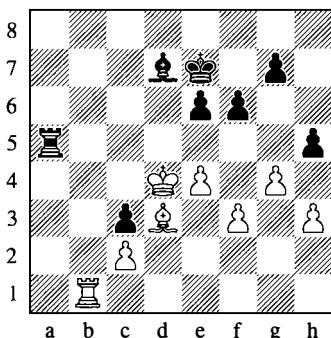
27. $\mathbb{R}b1$ $\mathbb{R}a5$

Transferring the rook to c5 to defend the c3-pawn. Black should be careful before playing ...e6-e5 since it would allow White to activate his bishop with $\mathbb{B}c4$. Black's usual idea is to play ...h5, perhaps to exchange as many pawns as possible, or instead to push on to h4, gaining space and perhaps fixing a weakness on h3.

28. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ h5

Creating immediate counterplay.

Also playable is: 28...f6!?, 29. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ h5 30. h3



30...h4 Creating at least the possibility of playing for the win by fixing the h3-pawn as a potential target. 31. f4 g5 32. f5 $\mathbb{R}a3$ 33. $\mathbb{R}b7$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ (certainly not 33...e5?? 34. $\mathbb{Q}c5$ with $\mathbb{Q}b5$ to come) 34. fxe6 $\mathbb{Q}xe6=$

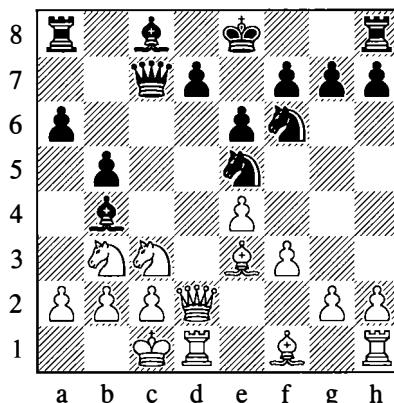
29. h3 h4!?

Once again, I prefer the more enterprising advance to h4, rather than exchanging on g4.

30. f4 f6

The h3-pawn is a permanent weakness and if White's rook leaves the first rank then Black will be able to manoeuvre ... $\mathbb{R}a1-h1$ and create problems. Of course it should be a draw with good play by both sides.

B2) 10. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ b5



Black continues with his normal plans, expanding on the queenside.

I will examine various moves: **B21)** 11. $\mathbb{W}f2$ and **B22)** 11. $\mathbb{W}d4$ where the main lines lead to a queen exchange which should be fine for Black, if he knows what to do and what to avoid. **B23)** 11. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ is another respectable line. **B24)** 11. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ was Negi's proposal. The most frequently played move is 11. $\mathbb{W}e1$, which will be examined in the next chapter.

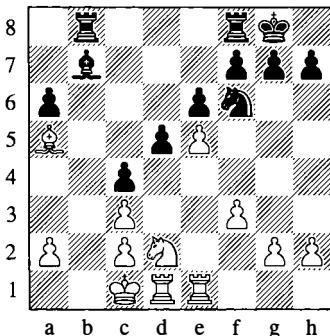
B21) 11. $\mathbb{W}f2$

Although this move is not very popular, it was employed by the top GM Dominguez. I figured out that Dominguez and Quesada really like the idea of manoeuvring White's queen to f2 and getting rid of the pin. White tries to control the dark squares but on the

other hand leaves the c3-knight unprotected. So it becomes clear that White cannot afford to employ a slow plan with g4-g5, h4-h5 since Black will capture on c3 at some point.

11...0-0!

Unfortunately 11... $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ leads into a slightly worse endgame after: 12. $\mathbb{Q}b6!$ $\mathbb{W}b8$ 13. $bxc3$ d6 14. $\mathbb{Q}a5!$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xc4!$ $bxc4$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ 0-0 17. $\mathbb{W}b6$ d5 18. $\mathbb{W}xb8$ $\mathbb{B}xb8$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}he1$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 20.e5



20... $\mathbb{Q}h5$ (it would be perfect if 20... $\mathbb{Q}d7?!$ worked, but it fails for a simple tactical reason: 21. $\mathbb{Q}xc4\pm$) 21.g3± White can claim an advantage in the opposite-coloured bishop endgame.

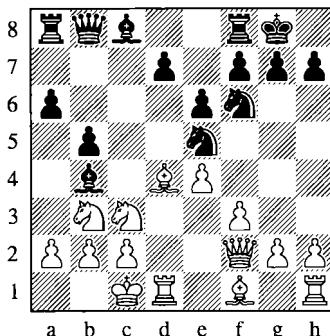
12. $\mathbb{Q}c5$

More popular, but less critical, is:

12. $\mathbb{Q}b6$ $\mathbb{W}b8$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}d4$

White should avoid 13. $\mathbb{Q}c5?!$ $\mathbb{Q}xc5$

14. $\mathbb{W}xc5$. So far this position has been seen in a handful of games but not a single Black player played: 14...b4!N 15. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ d5=



13... $\mathbb{Q}b7!N$

This is a handy novelty, planning ...d5 next. More usual is 13... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ planning ...d6 to create space on d7 for the f6-knight. But after 14.f4 $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 15.e5 $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 16. $\mathbb{W}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 17.g3 $\mathbb{Q}f5$ as in Tseshkovsky – Kaufman, Condino 2009, the simple 18. $\mathbb{Q}f2N$ would have secured an edge for White.

14.a3 $\mathbb{Q}d6\rightarrow$

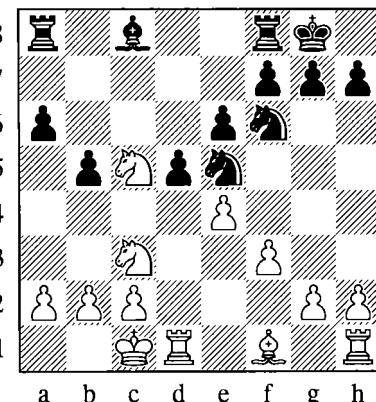
Black is fine, and has ideas of ... $\mathbb{Q}c8$, ... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ and then ...a6-a5. White has failed to control Black's attack and has also failed to push his own pawns as he should have.

12... $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 13. $\mathbb{W}xc5$

13. $\mathbb{Q}xc5?!$ has never been tried, and for good reason: 13...d6= followed by ... $\mathbb{Q}c4$ favours Black.

13... $\mathbb{W}xc5$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ d5!

Our typical Taimanov pawn break solves any problems.



15.f4

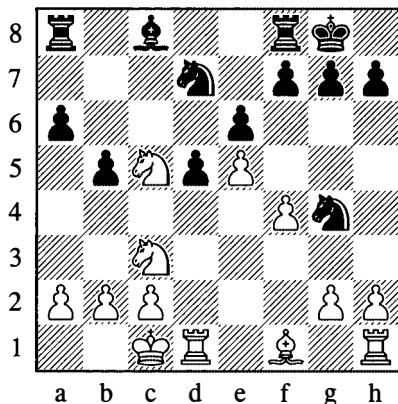
Instead 15.exd5 leads to a drawish endgame after 15...b4 16. $\mathbb{Q}3a4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5=$ as in Volokitin – Bosiocic, Budva 2009.

15... $\mathbb{Q}eg4$

The threat of ... $\mathbb{Q}f2$ is easy to meet but will cost White a tempo to stop.

16.e5 $\mathbb{Q}d7=$

Black is comfortably level.

**17. $\mathbb{Q}xd7$**

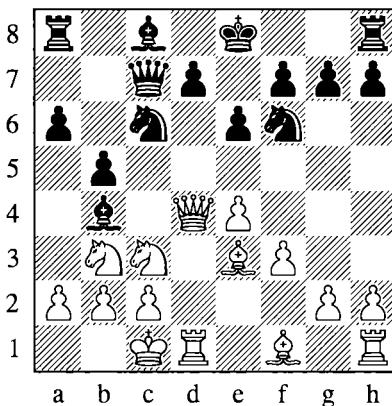
The retreat with 17. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ is also roughly level, but allows Black more options. 17... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ was fine in Socko – Ribli, Austria 2010, but even more interesting is 17... $b4!?$ N taking advantage of the fact that the d3-knight needs to cover f2; Black can continue with ...a6-a5 and ... $\mathbb{Q}a6$.

17... $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}d4?!$

Putting the rook on a vulnerable square. Instead 18. $\mathbb{Q}d2N=$ would have been more accurate in order to defend the g2-pawn, but after ... $\mathbb{Q}e3$, ... $\mathbb{Q}fc8$, ... $\mathbb{Q}c4$ and then ... $b4$, ... $a5$ Black is obviously fine.

18... $\mathbb{Q}e3!$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $b4\#$

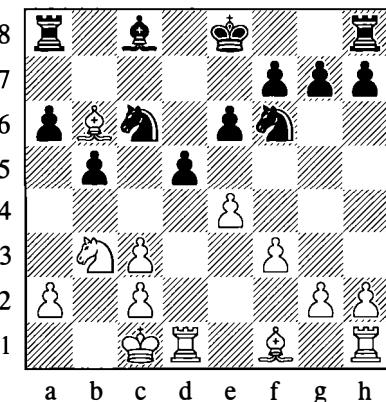
In Dominguez Perez – Topalov, Thessaloniki 2013, Black had seized the initiative, with ... $\mathbb{Q}b5$ an option.

B22) 11. $\mathbb{W}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ **12. $\mathbb{W}b6$**

Instead 12. $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ (12...0-0 is a way to avoid the repetition, e.g. 13. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ e5 14. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}e8!?\infty$) 13. $\mathbb{W}d4$ is a well-known repetition of moves.

12... $\mathbb{W}xb6$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ $d5=$

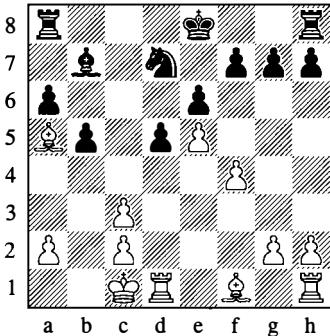
Black has managed to ruin White's queenside structure and by playing the thematic ...d5 is trying to take over the initiative.

**15. $\mathbb{Q}e2$**

This is the most common choice, but I will show a few alternatives to illustrate typical ideas. There is no need to memorize every move below, as it is a fairly harmless endgame.

15. $\mathbb{Q}c5$ fails to create any problems for Black. 15... $\mathbb{Q}e5$ Creating the idea of ... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ and kicking back White's pieces. 16. a4 bxa4 17. exd5 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xa4$ $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ $\mathbb{B}b8$ Klengel – Coleman, email 2007, was heading for a draw, despite Black's nominal edge.

15. $\mathbb{Q}a5$ Trading pieces in this manner actually helps Black. 15... $\mathbb{Q}xa5$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xa5$ $\mathbb{B}b7$ 17. e5 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 18. f4



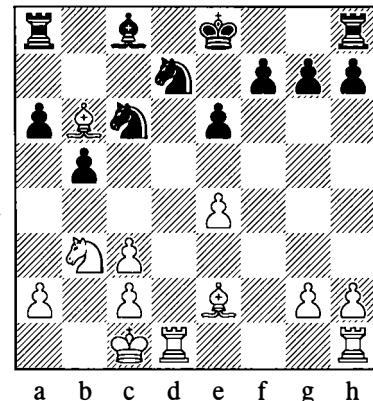
In Ragger – Laznicka, Yerevan 2007, Black broke with 18... f6, but a more promising option was 18... $\mathbb{Q}c5!?$ N when the knight might find prospects on e4 or a4.

15. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ is also premature since White will be stuck with a terrible pawn structure. 15... dx e 4 16. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 17. fx e 4 White has isolated a- and e-pawns, and doubled pawns on the c-file. With so many targets, it's just a matter of taste where Black is going to attack. For example: 17... 0–0 18. $\mathbb{Q}he1$ f6 19. $\mathbb{Q}d6$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}a5$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}c6$ e5= Landa – Chuchelov, Germany 2008.

15... dx e 4 16. fx e 4 $\mathbb{Q}d7$

The structure of the position has changed. I tend to prefer Black in such structures, even though the objective evaluation is rough equality. Black will place a knight on e5 and both the e4-pawn and the whole queenside will be weak for White. On the other hand,

White has more active pieces and the bishop pair in order to hold the balance.



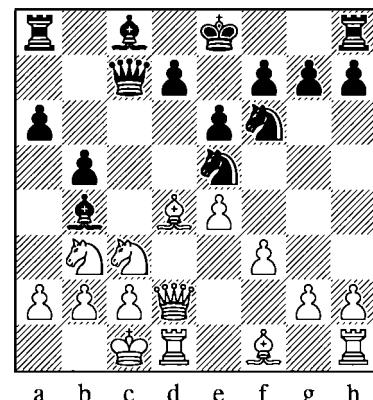
17. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{B}b7$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}hf1$ $\mathbb{Q}ce5$

A model game continued:

19. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}a5$ $\mathbb{Q}a8$

In Blauhut – Coleman, email 2007, Black had managed to reach the ideal set-up. We keep our bishop on the a8-h1 diagonal, our rook on the c-file and our knights are protecting each other.

B23) 11. $\mathbb{Q}d4$



This is a solid move. White avoids the doubling of the pawns for the time being.

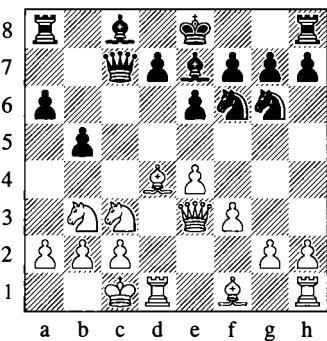
11... $\mathbb{Q}e7$

With his last move, White secured the c3-knight, so it is pointless for our bishop to remain on b4. By playing 11... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ we are making room for the advance ...b5-b4!

12. $\mathbb{W}f2$

The text move is normal, but we will also consider a couple of alternatives:

12. $\mathbb{W}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 13. $\mathbb{W}e3$ (Instead 13. $\mathbb{W}g3$ e5 14. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ is nothing special for White. For example: 14... $\mathbb{Q}b7!$ 15. $\mathbb{W}f2$ 0-0 16. h4 b4 17. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ d5 18. h5 $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 19. h6 g6=)



This was employed with success by Cheparinov, but mainly because his opponent responded with the awkward-looking 13... $\mathbb{Q}d6$. The correct response is: 13...d6! 14. a4 b4 15. $\mathbb{Q}a2$ a5 16. $\mathbb{Q}b6$ $\mathbb{W}b8$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xa5$ $\mathbb{Q}d7!$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ 0-0 19. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}a6\bar{c}$ Black had sufficient compensation for the material deficit in Sikorsky – Ebert, corr. 2009.

12. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ has also been tried by a number of strong GMs and after Black's reply 12...d6 White has nothing better than 13. $\mathbb{W}f2$, which is likely to transpose to the main line. Note that with our last move we intend to reply to 13. f4 with 13... $\mathbb{Q}ed7!$.

12...d6

As in the 12. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ line above, we have made room for our f6-knight to go to d7 if needed.

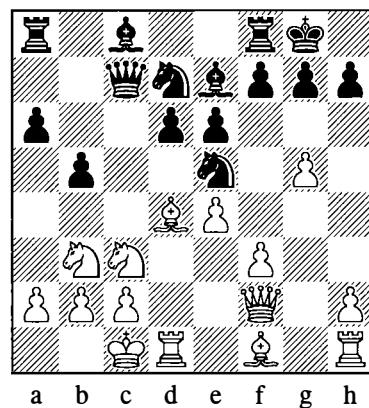
12...b4N seems playable, but I decided to examine the well-tested main move.

13. g4

13. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ was Kasparov's move back in 2002 and we should mention it in passing, although after 13...0-0 White has nothing better than playing 14.g4.

13...0-0 14. g5 $\mathbb{Q}fd7\bar{c}$

Black has good counterplay in this type of position. I will extend the line to show some instructive ideas.

**15. $\mathbb{E}g1?!$**

Too slow a move.

15. f4 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}a5$ (There is also an interesting possibility of an exchange sacrifice: 17...b4 18. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}a5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}b6$ $\mathbb{Q}xb3$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xa8$ $\mathbb{Q}xa8$ 21. axb3 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}f5\bar{c}$) 18. $\mathbb{Q}xa5$ $\mathbb{W}xa5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{E}ac8=$ Sakaev – Xu Jun, Moscow 2004.

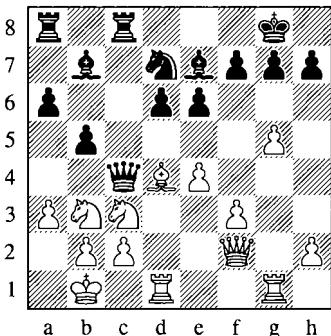
15... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{E}fc8$ 17. $\mathbb{E}g3?!$

It is essential for White to delay ...b4, as the c3-knight has no good squares.

17. a3 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $\mathbb{W}xc4!?$

This is stronger than the more common 18... $\mathbb{B}xc4$. The problem is 19. $\mathbb{Q}d2!$ $\mathbb{E}ab8$

20.♕a1!N± when White can easily cover b2. Instead after 19.♕c1 ♜ab8? Black had good play in Kasparov – Ye Jiangchuan, Bled (ol) 2002, as b2 is more difficult to cover.



19.♕a5

19.♗g4?! was tried in Lagno – Goloshchapov, Kharkov 2004, but Black could have ignored White's planned tricks along the fourth rank with: 19...a5!N 20.♕c5 ♜xc5 21.e5 ♔e4 22.♕xe4 ♜xe4 23.♕xe4 ♜c7??

19...♜c7 20.♕xb7

The obvious move but not the only path. The computer mentions 20.b4!N which may look bizarre, but trying to block the queenside is a logical plan. After 20...e5 21.♕xb7 ♜xb7 22.♕d5 ♜d8 23.♕b2 a5∞ a sharp fight is ahead.

20...♜xb7 21.f4!

Any other move would be too slow.

21...b4 22.axb4 ♜xb4∞

We have a typical opposite-sides castling battle.

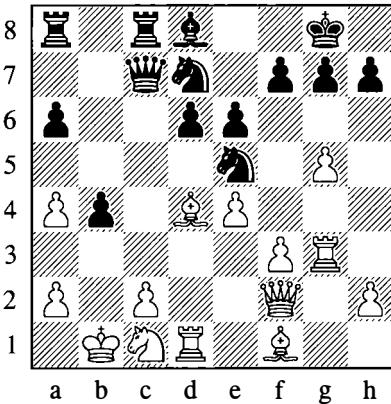
17...b4 18.♕a4 ♜d8!

Covering White's hoped-for entry point on b6.

19.♕c1 ♜c6

White's biggest problem in the structure is the misplaced knight on a4!

20.b3 ♜xa4 21.bxa4



Now 21...♕c6 was good in Cheparinov – Ivanchuk, Sofia 2008, but even stronger was:

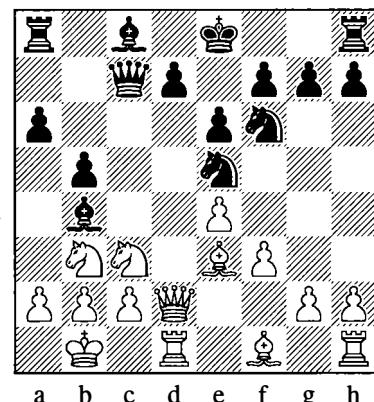
21...♞c4!N

With the direct threat of ...♞a3†.

22.♕xc4 ♜xc4†

White's structure is horrible. Black can play whatever he wants: ...♝b6 is one idea, ...♝c6 going after the a4-pawn is also possible, or simply tripling on the c-file.

B24) 11.♔b1



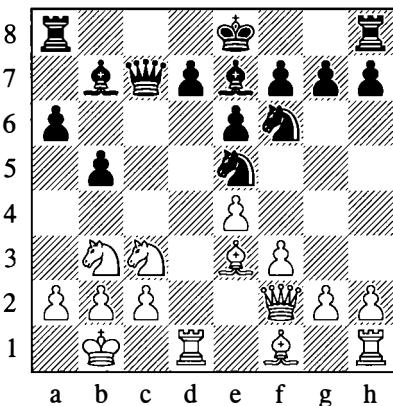
Negi's recommendation for White. The first point to note is that now ♜xb5 is a threat.

11...♚e7!

Retreating is the right choice, as becomes clearer when we check out the alternatives:

11...♝c4 fails to equalize since White has the nice manoeuvre: 12.♗xc4 bxc4 13.♝c1!± Another benefit of playing ♜c1-b1. There are many practical examples that indicate White is slightly better, with Cheparinov – Pelletier, Heraklion 2007, a particularly good example.

11...♝xc3?! White is well prepared against this capture. 12.♗xc3 ♛xc3 13.bxc3 d5 (after 13...♝b7?! 14.♕a5! then ♜c5 will come next, with a dominating position for White) 14.♗d4! Black is clearly worse. 14...♝c6 (Instead 14...♝c4 is the best try, but White can simply continue with: 15.♗xc4! bxc4 16.♕a5!± White will soon capture on f6 and then the d5-pawn will be weak.) 15.♗xf6 gxf6 16.exd5 exd5 17.♗xd5± White has tremendous compensation.

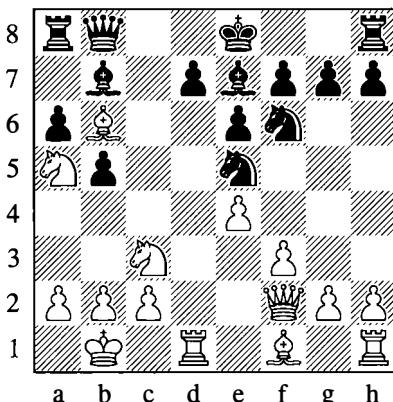
12.♗f2 ♜b7

We need a split: **B241) 13.♗b6** and **B242) 13.♕a5!?**. The model game here is Akopian – Giri, Doha 2014, as analysed extensively by Giri in *New In Chess* 2015#1 (as we shall see in variation B2412).

Instead the natural 13.g4? is a blunder as shown by 13...b4 14.♕a4 ♗xf3! and White's structure collapses. The point of course is: 15.♗xf3? ♜xe4+–

B241) 13.♗b6 ♛b8

And yet another split is required: trying to block Black's play with **B2411) 14.♕a5!?** or the recentralizing **B2412) 14.♗d4**.

B2411) 14.♕a5!?**14...0–0**

I like this move, though the following alternative is also interesting:

14...d6? 15.g4 ♗fd7 16.♔e3

After 16.♔d4 a timely ...♝c6 will give Black enough counterplay. 16...0–0 17.f4 (also playable for Black is: 17.h4 b4! 18.♕a4 ♜c6 19.♗xb7 ♗xd4 20.♕a5 ♛c7→) 17...♝c6 18.♗xb7 ♛xb7 19.♔e3 ♜a5 Black now gets good counterplay. For example: 20.g5 ♜ac8 21.h4 b4 22.♕a4 ♜c4 23.♗d3 ♛b5 24.b3 ♜a3† 25.♗a1 ♛c6 26.♗c1 ♜c5→

16...0–0

In this line Black's quickest counterattack is with ...♝c5 (threatening ...b5-b4) and ...♝fc8. It is important for Black to go ...♝c5 before playing ...b4 in order to take away the a4-square from White's knight.

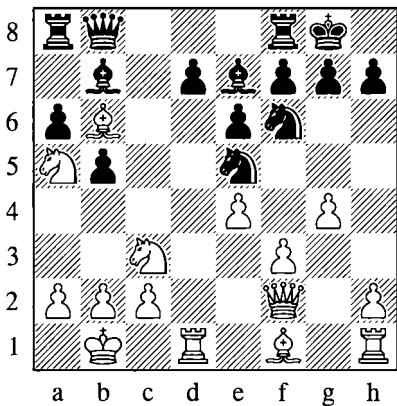
17.h4

Similar is 17.g5 $\mathbb{Q}c5$.

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

As mentioned above, 17...b4?! is the wrong move order due to: 18. $\mathbb{Q}a4\pm$ This makes no sense for Black when the bishop is not on d4.

15.g4



15...d6!

I like this move in order to respond to g4-g5 with the typical ... $\mathbb{Q}fd7$.

15... $\mathbb{E}c8$ was later drawn in Komodo – Stockfish, TCEC Final 2014, but in my opinion White's position was a bit more pleasant for the whole game. It continued: 16.g5 $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 17. $\mathbb{E}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{W}xa5$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}b6$ $\mathbb{W}b4$ 22. $\mathbb{E}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 23. $\mathbb{E}xb4$ $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ White has the bishop pair and some targets on the queenside. On the other hand, Black has a nice outpost on f4. Once White pushes his kingside pawns so far (g4-g5) if he doesn't checkmate, they might turn out to be weaknesses in the endgame.

16. $\mathbb{E}g1$ $\mathbb{E}c8?!$ N

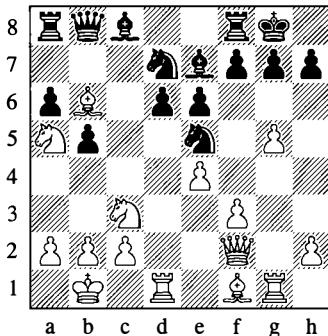
The most natural move, in my opinion, but not yet tested in practice. I will also show an alternative, mainly to share some useful ideas

about such positions:

16... $\mathbb{Q}c8$

Keeping the light-squared bishop.

17.g5 $\mathbb{Q}fd7$



18. $\mathbb{Q}e3$!N

A precise move. It is hard to spot the difference right now, but White needs the d4-square for his knight in one important line.

18. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ was Savchenko – Kovalyov, Abu Dhabi 2016, when an improvement is 18... $\mathbb{Q}d8$!N 19. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ b4. After 20. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$! the position is unclear, with ... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ coming soon. Or instead after 20. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ a5 \Rightarrow planning ...a5-a4, both sides have advanced their pawns, creating a doubled-edged position.

18... $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ b4 20. $\mathbb{Q}a4$!

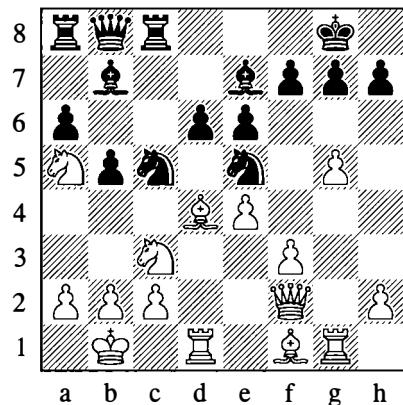
This blocking move is now safe, since after 20... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ White can play: 21. $\mathbb{Q}d4\pm$ Controlling the c6-square. Now it's clear why on move 18 it's better to retreat the bishop to e3, not d4.

17.g5

Of course White can take on b7 at any point. For example, 17. $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ $\mathbb{W}xb7$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}fd7\rightleftharpoons$ will give similar play to the main line. Black will likely play ... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ planning ...b5-b4.

17... $\mathbb{Q}fd7$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$!

Taking away the a4-square from White, thus preparing ...b5-b4.



19.♗g2

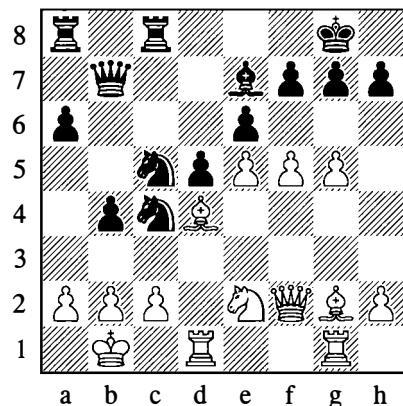
The usual continuation in order to go for the f3-f4 break. The following moves are logical and thematic, with few good alternatives for either side.

19...b4 20.♕e2 ♖c7 21.♘xb7 ♖xb7

This position is an exception to the above comment, as Black has a decent alternative in 21...♘xb7∞. It may look illogical to retreat the excellent knight, but the attack on c2 gains a tempo, allowing Black time for ...a6-a5-a4.

22.f4 ♘c4 23.e5 d5 24.f5

It looks as if White is ahead in the race, since the manoeuvre ...a5-a4 then ...b3 requires lots of time.



24...b3!!

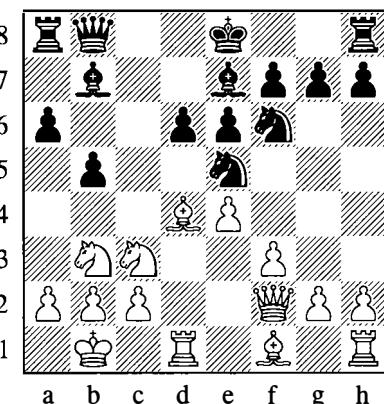
A fantastic resource for Black. Black tries to open the b- and c-files at any cost! This idea should be a part of every Sicilian player's arsenal.

Black can also choose 24...♖ab8!, planning ...b4-b3 next move, or perhaps even ...♘a3† bxa3 ...b4-b3! If White is careful, again a draw is most likely, as is normal in many sharp lines.

25.cxb3 ♘xb3! 26.axb3 ♖xb3=

With an attack for Black which will probably lead to a perpetual with ...♘a3† and ...♘c2†.

B2412) 14.♔d4 d6



Once again Black makes room for ...♘fd7, as we can be sure that White intends g2-g4-g5.

15.g4

The most direct option, but it allows tactical ideas on the long diagonal.

15.♗g1 avoids the tactical issues, but is rather slow. For example: 15...0-0 16.g4 b4 17.♘a4 ♘fd7 Controlling the b6-square and threatening ...♗c6. 18.f4 ♘g6! 19.f5 ♘ge5 This is a line given by Giri. Black's chances are definitely preferable since the a4-knight is out of play.

15...b4 16.Qa4

Retreating to e2 gives Black a lot of time to continue his attack after 16.Qe2 0–0. Black covers the g7-pawn before continuing with ...a6-a5-a4.

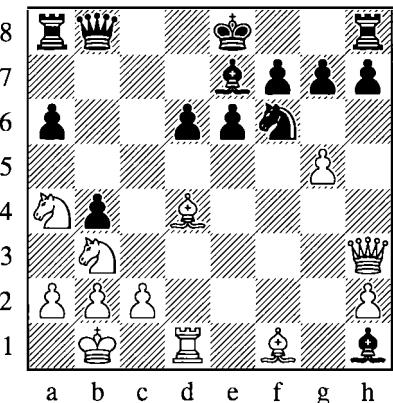
White's safest continuation is: 16.Qxe5 dx5 17.Qa4 Wc7 18.Qe2 0–0=. The doubled e-pawns both secure Black's king and give good control over the dark squares. White will probably have to exchange queens with Wb6 in order to keep the balance.

16...Qxf3

This idea is the downside to leaving the rook on h1.

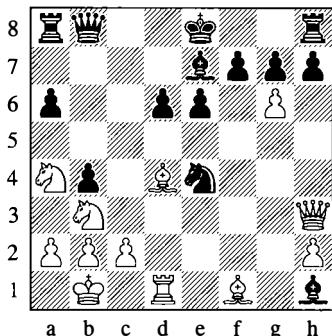
17.Wxf3

Instead after 17.Qxf6 Wxf6 White should avoid 18.Wxf3? Qc6! when Black is clearly better. A messier try is 18.Qb6, but Black had various promising options including 18...Qg5!? with slightly the better chances. So White's best is the main line.

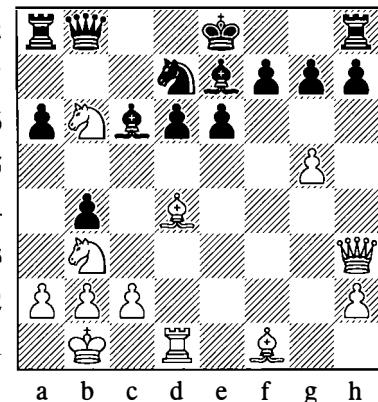
17...Qxe4 18.Wh3 Qxh1 19.g5**19...Qc6!**

Practically, this is the best choice for Black to equalize without major concerns.

19...Qe4 is the other possibility which leads to a highly unclear position after: 20.g6!

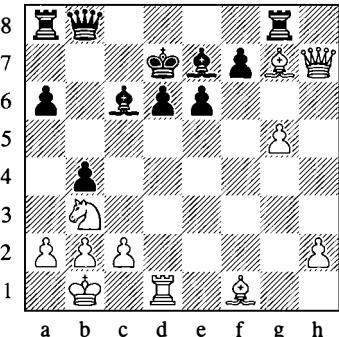


20...Qg5! As given by Giri (20...f6? was the game Akopian – Giri, Qatar 2014, and now 21.Qe3!!N+– as pointed out by Giri; White clears d4 for his knight). 21.gxf7† Qxf7 The situation remains unclear after 22.Wg3 or 22.We3.

20.Qb6 Qd7**21.Qxa8**

The most reliable option.

Instead 21.Qxd7 is well met by: 21...Qxd7! (instead 21...Qxd7?? 22.Qxg7 traps the rook) Black is at least level. For example: 22.Qxg7 Eg8 23.Wxh7

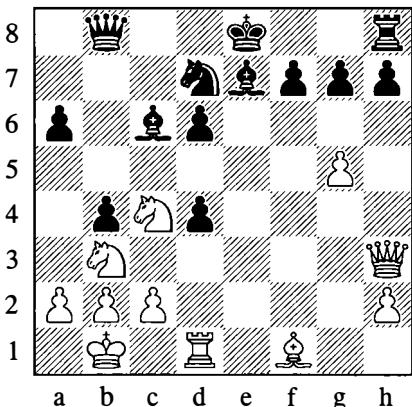


23...♗f3! 24.♗e1 ♗d5∞ The position remains unclear, but White's compensation may not be quite enough for equality. One idea for Black is ...♗xg7 and then ...♗g8, trading the queens and heading for a slightly better endgame.

21...e5!

A very important intermediate move.

22.♘b6 exd4 23.♘c4

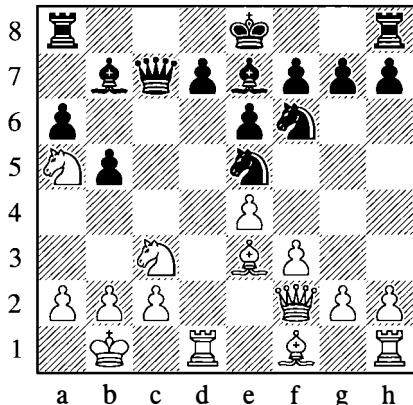


This is equal, according to Giri. I believe the most direct route to equality is:

23...♘e5 24.♘xd4 ♘d7! 25.♘f5 ♘xf5 26.♗xf5 0-0 27.h4 a5!?

Black could play ...g7-g6, trying to fix the h4- and g5-pawns for the endgame.

B242) 13.♘a5!?



As suggested by Negi. The obvious tactical point is that 13...♗xa5?? loses the queen after 14.♗b6 ♗b4 15.a3.

White's plan is to start pushing his pawns on the kingside after first slowing Black's counterplay on the queenside. We must make sure we find counter-chances quickly, as otherwise White will destroy us with simple play. The lines below are mainly new analysis and not based on practical examples (which I hope will follow after this book's publication).

13...♗c8!?

Now Black can meet ♘b6 with ...♗b8 not blocking in the a8-rook. White is also encouraged to take on b7 at once, as otherwise ...♗a8 is a good option, leaving the a5-knight a target rather than an asset.

Note that 13...0-0 is also possible, when 14.♗b6 ♗b8 transposes to variation B2411 above. But in such a potentially wild position, I wish to offer Black more than one option.

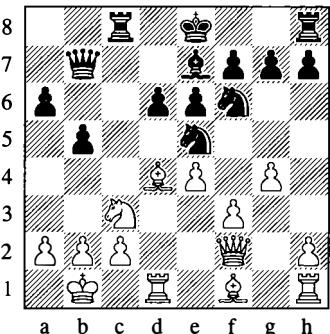
14.♘xb7 ♗xb7 15.g4

The text move is the direct option, but obviously not the only path.

15.♗d4

This move is high-level prophylaxis, lending support to the c3-knight.

15...d6 16.g4



Negi states that White gets an initiative with the typical pawn-pushing h2-h4, g4-g5 and h5. While I think that Black gets decent counterplay. Objectively, it is an unclear position, and it remains unclear even after deep computer analysis; this is because both sides have options on most moves. But at this point, there is one key move:

16...♘fd7!

With the idea of putting the knight on c5 and then pushing ...b4 when ♘a4 will not be possible. We have seen this idea several times.

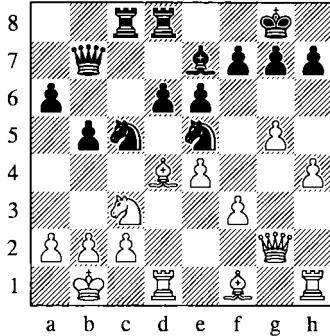
17.h4 ♘c5 18.g5 0–0→

I set up an engine match between Stockfish and Komodo on several critical positions of the English Attack. The following was one of those games:

19.♔g2

White could also try the sophisticated 19.♔e2!!? ensuring that ...b5-b4 does not arrive with tempo, but then Black can adjust his plans with 19...♘c4!? threatening ...♘a4. The engine says 0.00, as usual, and that will be a reliable verdict, but Black's position looks more fun to me.

19...♗f8

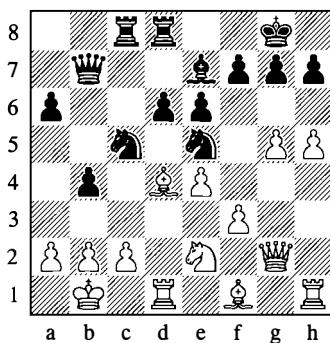


20.h5?!

A logical follow-up, but misguided as it allows a thematic resource.

A better choice was 20.f4 when a rather forcing line shows typical play: 20...b4!? Livelier than retreating the knight to c6, although that is also playable. 21.♔e2 ♘c4 22.♗g3 ♘a4 Black has threats on a3, c3 and b2. The best defence is 23.♔a1 but even then Black can force a draw if he wishes: 23...♗axb2!! 24.♗xb2 ♘e3 25.♗f3 ♘xc2† 26.♗b1 ♘a3† 27.♔a1 ♘c2†= The engine's assessment holds, but it was a scary ride for White.

20...b4 21.♔e2



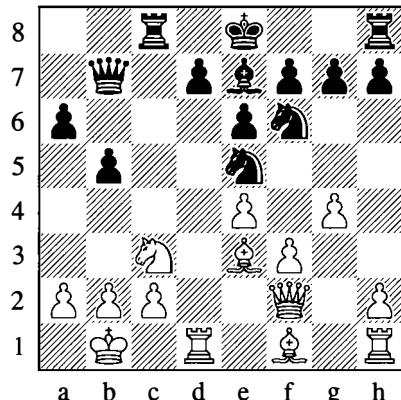
21...b3! 22.axb3 ♘xb3

Once again the typical pawn-followed-by-knight sacrifice on b3 in order to gain time!

23.g6 ♘f6 24.♗xe5 dxе5 25.♗xd8† ♘xd8 26.gxh7† ♘h8

And Black won in Komodo – Stockfish,

Computer Game 2016. Of course this is an illustration rather than any proof of Black being better in this line. The position after move 16 looks a fine fighting position, which the typical Sicilian player would be happy to play – on either side!



15...0–0

According to Negi, White should try to force Black to play the move ...d7-d6.

15... $\mathbb{E}xc3$?! is always a move to consider, but it does not work well here: 16.bxc3 $\mathbb{Q}exg4$ 17.fxg4 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ The problem for Black is that White has a dangerous way to use his extra piece: 18. $\mathbb{Q}g2$! $\mathbb{Q}xc3\uparrow$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}xd1\uparrow$ 20. $\mathbb{E}xd1$ d5 21.h4†

15...d6 does not feel optimal, as there is no need to commit the d-pawn to a square just yet, but it is still playable. For example: 16.g5 $\mathbb{Q}fd7$ 17.h4 0–0 18.h5 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ (Also interesting is 19. $\mathbb{Q}g1$, preparing f3-f4. After 19...b4 20. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ we have another wild position.) 19... $\mathbb{E}xc5$ 20.f4 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{E}fc8\rightarrow$ Black has just enough counterplay to stay in the game.

16. $\mathbb{Q}g1$?

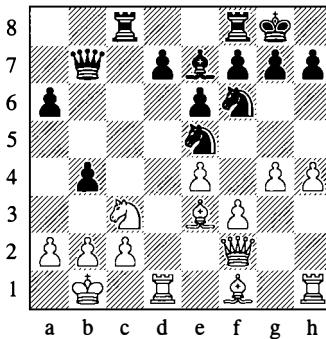
This stops any ... $\mathbb{Q}xg4$ ideas, but it looks rather slow, doesn't it?

16.h4?

I will analyse this move to show what happens if White overlooks the threats:

16...b4!

Black is much better no matter where the knight goes.



17. $\mathbb{Q}a4$

Or 17. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}fxg4$! 18. $\mathbb{E}xc2$! with the tactical justification being: 19. $\mathbb{Q}xc2$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4\uparrow$ Surprisingly, Black has even better targets than the h1-rook. 20. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}c4\uparrow$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3\rightarrow$ White's best try at move 19 is 19. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ but after 19... $\mathbb{E}fc8$ Black is still clearly better.

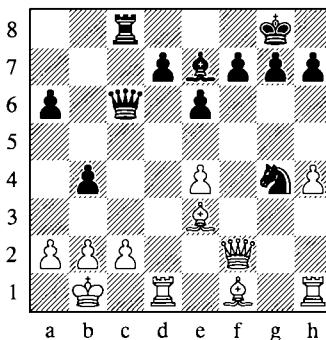
17... $\mathbb{W}c6$!

Obviously hitting the a4-knight, but also eyeing c2, which is vital as we will soon see that White's queen is overloaded, covering c2 and the e3-bishop.

18. $\mathbb{Q}b6$ $\mathbb{Q}fxg4$

Taking with the other knight is also fine.

19. $\mathbb{Q}xc8$ $\mathbb{E}xc8$ 20. $\mathbb{F}xg4$ $\mathbb{Q}xg4$



21.♗d2 ♗xe3

The queen remains tied to c2, so White has nothing better than:

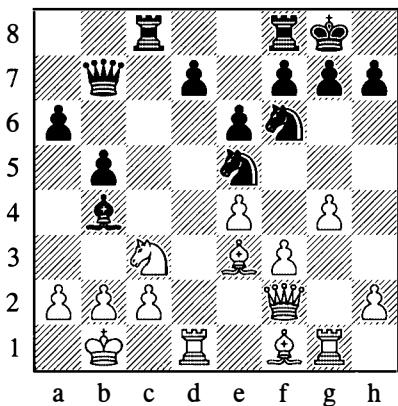
22.♗c1 ♗g4+

Black has two pawns for the exchange, so material is roughly level, but Black's pieces are far more active and his pawn structure is sounder. The knight can be dominant on e5, while the bishop will have fine prospects from f6.

16.g5 ♗h5 followed by ...f6 is not a problem. Black is doing fine, as he has not wasted time playing ...d7-d6. And 17.♗d4 is too late to force this advance as instead Black has 17...f6! with excellent chances.

16...♗b4!?

Putting immediate pressure on the c3-knight.



17.♗d4

The bishop defends c3 but if it can be attacked with ...♗c6 then Black will gain the initiative.

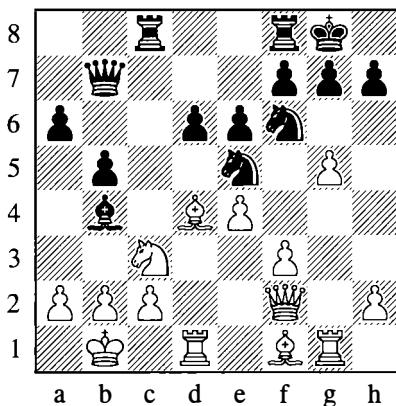
17...d6

Now Black wants to move the f6-knight in order to threaten ...♗c6 while keeping our kingside intact.

18.g5

If White wishes to push the g-pawn then now is the moment.

Also possible is 18.h4 ♗fd7 but then White needs a different follow-up as 19.g5?! ♗c6+ collapses his queenside defences. One of many wild options is: 19.h5?! ♗c6 20. h6∞



18...♗fd7!?

The position is wildly unclear, with options for both sides on almost every move. So complete analysis would be impossible. For example, equally interesting is 18...♗h5?! with another set of unclear options.

I will offer a sample line to show many useful ideas:

19.♗g3

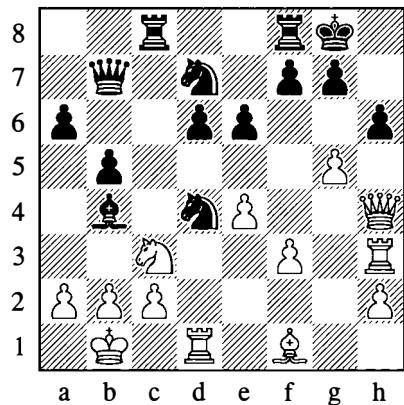
Aiming to double on the h-file.

19...♗c6

Not the only path, but a logical choice.

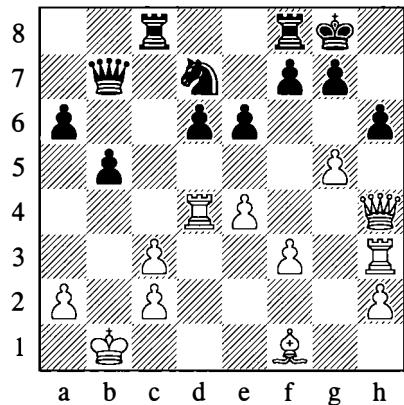
20.♗h3 ♗xd4 21.♗h4 h6

Soon both kings will be exposed, though of course Black will keep the h-file closed by always meeting gxh6 with ...g7-g6.

**22.Qxd4**

The most flexible choice, as the knight must be taken at some point.

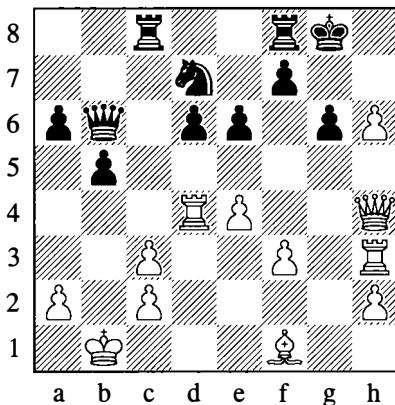
22.gxh6 forces 22...g6 of course, but then after 23.Qxd4 Qxc3 24.bxc3 this move order has given Black the added option of 24...Qh7!. Black does not need to worry about 25.Qxd6? as after 25...Qc7 26.Qd3 Qe5 the tactics work out in Black's favour. One funny point is that after 27.Qf6 Qg8 28.Qe3? g5! the white queen will be trapped by ...Qg6.

22...Qxc3 23.bxc3**23...Qb6!**

In this move order, Black does need to look after the d6-pawn. From b6 the queen also eyes the d4-rook, so ...Qxc3 is a threat even if White tries to defend with f3-f4.

The immediate 23...Qxc3? fails to 24.gxh6 g6 25.Qxd6 and Black's dark squares collapse. For example, 25...Qh7 26.Qe7! wins everything.

23...Qc7? 24.f4! is also disastrous, with Qhd3 one threat, though pushing the e4- or f4-pawns can also be nasty.

24.gxh6 g6

In this sharp position, White's safest option is to steer towards an ending with:

25.Qe7 Qxc3 26.Qxd6 Qxd6 27.Qxd6 Qc5=

For the moment White has an extra pawn but the balance will soon be restored due to Black's far greater activity.

Conclusion

The English Attack is a set-up used against various Sicilians, and involves ♕e3 and ♖d2. Then the usual plan is f2-f3 and castling long, followed by a kingside pawn storm. In the Taimanov the specific move order is 6.♕e3 a6 7.♖d2 ♘f6 when we have a split between A) 8.f3 and B) 8.0–0–0. They can transpose but demand a different reply from Black on move 8, so we need to pay close attention.

8.f3 should *not* be met by 8...♗b4?! as the e4-pawn is already defended. Thus White can play 9.a3 ♜e7 10.g4± and continue his attack *without* castling first. So the correct reply to 8.f3 is 8...♘e5 when 9.0–0–0 ♗b4 is a transposition to the main line below, but 9.g4! is an interesting independent line. Unlike our main line, we should slow the g4-pawn with 9...h6 when 10.0–0–0 b5 11.h4 b4 12.♘a4 d5 is the likely follow-up. It is a sharp position, so best to study my lines with care. My main continuation involves a knight-sacrifice novelty where if both sides play perfectly the game is balanced.

In reply to B) 8.0–0–0 I recommend 8...♗b4 9.f3 ♘e5! when we have another split.

B1) 10.g4?! is rare but one of the toughest tests a Taimanov player can face. The best defence I could find is an endgame line where Black is often a pawn down. It's not quite as grim as it sounds, because Black's position is objectively fine and there are hopes of playing for a win if White over-presses. These lines are reached after 10...b5! 11.a3! ♜xc3 12.♖xc3 ♖xc3 13.bxc3 when White needs to find, or know, a few more accurate moves just to reach the endgames I mention above.

Normal is B2) 10.♘b3 b5 when we have a major branching point. Firstly, let's note that the most common move 11.♖e1 will be covered in the next chapter. That leaves B21) 11.♗f2, B22) 11.♗d4, B23) 11.♗d4 and B24) 11.♘b1.

11.♗f2 is well met by 11...0–0?! when 12.♗c5 ♜xc5 13.♗xc5 ♖xc5 14.♘xc5 d5! is a typical Taimanov pawn break which solves any problems.

In reply to 11.♗d4 the moves are different from above, but Black's concept is similar. After 11...♘c6 12.♗b6 ♖xb6 13.♗xb6 ♜xc3 14.bxc3 d5 the pawn break again solves everything.

11.♗d4 prevents Black from damaging White's pawn structure on c3, so the correct reply is 11...♘e7, clearing a path for the b5-pawn. The usual outcome is a tense middlegame where Black has plenty of counterplay, as for example after 12.♗f2 d6 13.g4 0–0 14.g5 ♘fd7 where I showed many ideas for both sides.

The first point to note about 11.♘b1 is that White is threatening ♘xb5, so again our reply is 11...♘e7!. Then after 12.♗f2 ♜b7 we saw a mass of variations after both 13.♗b6 and 13.♘a5?!. In general, Black is fine, but there are many sharp forcing lines for both sides, so a close study of every line is essential. This is a variation where hard work and a good memory will be rewarded – a rough idea of the general plans is not enough in this case.

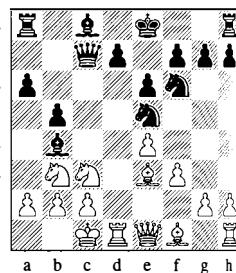


6. $\mathbb{Q}e3$

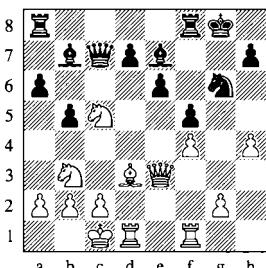
English Attack – 11. $\mathbb{W}e1$

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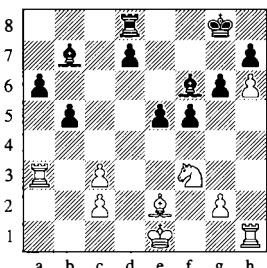


B1) after 20. $\mathbb{Q}ec5$



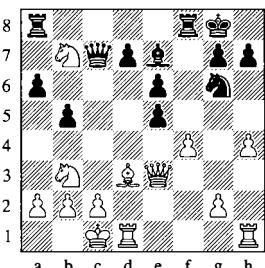
20... $\mathbb{Q}xg2!N$

B21) after 32. $\mathbb{Q}e2$



32...d5!N

B221) after 19. $\mathbb{Q}d3$



19... $\mathbb{E}ac8!N$

- 1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘c6
- 5.♘c3 ♗c7 6.♗e3 a6 7.♗d2 ♘f6 8.0–0–0
- 9.b4 9.f3 ♘e5 10.♘b3 b5 11.♗e1

This is the most frequently played move by a significant margin, so it is vital we meet this line of the English Attack convincingly. As with 11.♘b1, which we saw in the previous chapter, this move also creates the threat of taking on b5.

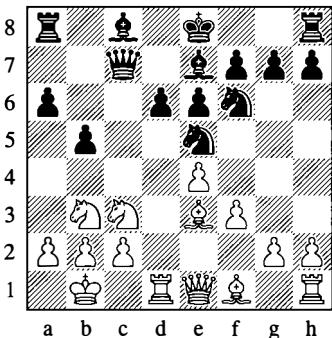
11...♗e7

And again this reply is best for Black, securing the bishop while making way for the b5-pawn to advance.

12.f4

The text move is almost universally played, and for good reason. Otherwise Black plays ...d7-d6, making room for the knight to go to d7, and then pushes his queenside pawns with a strong attack. I will offer an example below.

12.♘b1 d6



Black has scored superbly from this position.

13.♗f2

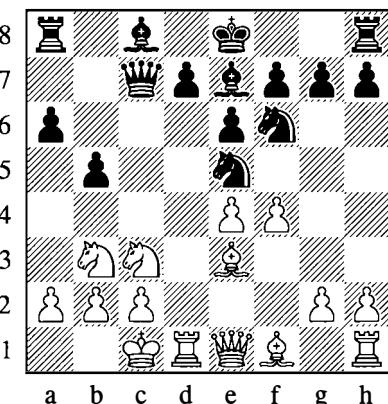
Even worse is 13.♗d4?! 0–0 14.f4 when Black is spoiled for choice. 14...♘g6! (also excellent is 14...♘c6!! 15.♗f2 ♗b7 16.♗d3 ♗ac8 17.♗e2 ♘b4= as in Jakubiec – Short, Gibraltar 2013) 15.g3 b4 16.♘a4 ♗b8 White's blockade on a4 is shaky, whereas Black is perfectly placed to stymie White's

kingside advance. For example: 17.h4 h5! Black plans ...e6-e5, fixing a weakness on e4 while increasing the grip on g4; plus the a4-knight is in danger.

The best try to hold the balance is 13.f4, but after 13...♘c4 14.♗xc4 bxc4 15.♗d2 0–0 Black is comfortably level; playing ♘b1 then opening the b-file is a strange concept.

- 13...♗b8 14.g4 0–0 15.g5 ♘fd7 16.h4 b4
- 17.♘e2 a5=

In Rizouk – Baklan, Balaguer 2006, Black was ahead in the race.



12...♘g6!

It may appear more natural to advance the knight to the queenside, but the knight retreat is certainly the right choice.

12...♘c4?!

This line fails for very specific reasons.

13.e5 ♘g4 14.♗d4 ♗b7 15.♗xc4!

A key move; in some cases this capture allows Black good play along the b-file, but not here, as White is far too fast.

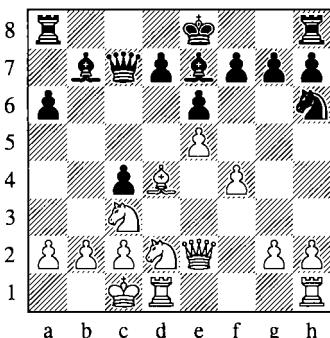
15...bxc4 16.♗d2

White has an excellent blockade and especially is ready to attack the c4-pawn by playing ♗e2.

16...♗h6 17.♗e2

Even though this is *not* part of our repertoire, I will give some detail to show why White is

doing so well, because it is important for a Taimanov player to be able to assess various positions. And here White's dynamic play overwhelms any static considerations.



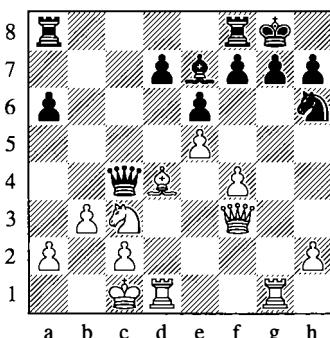
17...0–0

Relying on tactics to keep the material level. White's task is even easier after 17...Bc8 18.Qde4 Qf5 19.g4 Qxd4 20.Bxd4± as in Volokitin – Macieja, Bermuda 2005, and several other games. White's attack is crushing; the c4- and d7-pawns are weak and there are even checkmating ideas with g4-g5 and Qf6†.

18.Qxc4 Bxg2 19.Bhg1 Bf3 20.Wxf3 Bxc4

At first glance, Black's position looks decent, as maybe a knight on f5 will hold everything together? In reality, White's initiative forces concessions before Black can consolidate.

21.b3!



21...Wc7

If instead Black retreats to c6, with or without a check on a3 first, then White exchanges queens and plays Qe4, with an endgame advantage; his pieces are more active, with Qc5 then installing the knight on c5 an effective plan.

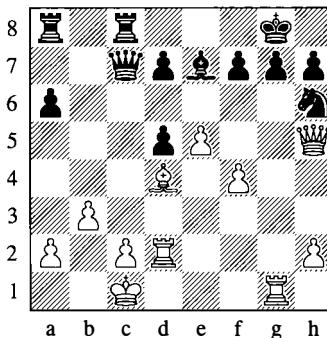
22.Qd5!!

A lovely tactic enabled by White's greater activity; it wakes up the d4-bishop while taking away the black knight's outpost on f5.

22...exd5 23.Wh5

Going to h3 also works.

23...Bfc8 24.Bd2



24...g6

Black must give back the piece, due to the multitude of threats.

For example, 24...Bh8? 25.Bxg7! is immediately over, or 24...Bc6? 25.e6! is just as bad.

25.Wxh6 Bf8 26.Wh3±

White is close to winning. If Black manages to avoid being mated then his weak d-pawns will drop off in the endgame.

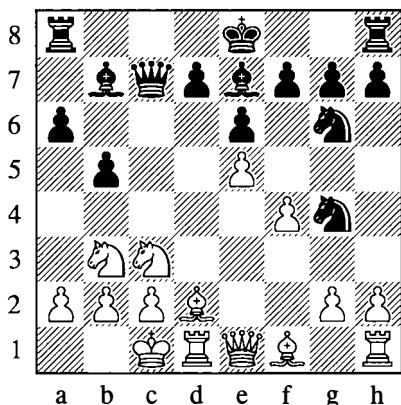
13.e5 Qg4

This is a major branching point. We shall consider retaining the bishop with A) 14.Qd2 and then the faster-paced B) 14.Qe4.

Far too slow is 14.h3?! Qxe3 15.Wxe3 Bb7 when Black has achieved everything he wanted. After Black castles he will break with ...d7-d6

and then his bishop pair will dominate. For example: 16.♗h2 0–0 17.g4?! d6= White's last move was a doomed attempt to change the momentum, but Black had at least an edge anyway.

A) 14.♗d2 ♜b7



15.♗d3

The text move is White's best option.

15.h3?!

This is effectively an unsound exchange sac.

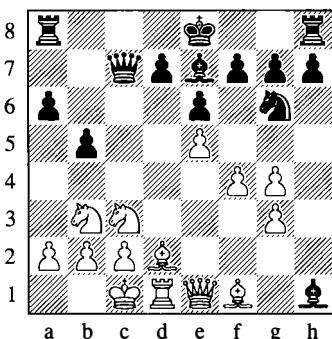
15...♗h4! 16.g3

White has no choice, as 16.♗e2? ♗f2 is hopeless.

16...♗xh1 17.hxg4

After 17.gxh4 ♗h6= Black will have a fine outpost on f5 for his knight to defend his king.

17...♝e7



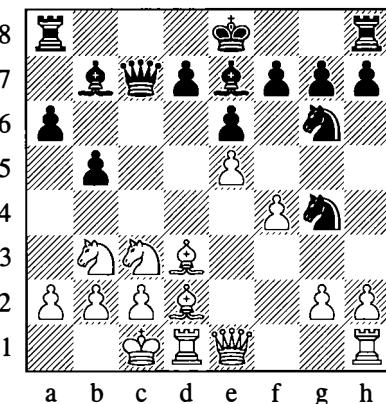
18.♗xb5

The over-aggressive 18.f5?! is convincingly refuted by: 18...♝xe5!N (instead 18...exf5 was soon messy in Khairullin – Motylev, Tomsk 2006) For example: 19.♗f4 f6 20.fxe6 dxe6 21.♗d4 ♜b6! 22.g5 0–0–0= 18...axb5 19.♗xb5N

Niemi – Karttunen, Helsinki 2006, continued 19.♗xh1 when 19...♝c8N would have left Black clearly better. Instead 19...♝c6?! allowed the equalizing trick 20.♗xb5.

19...♝b8 20.♗xh1 ♜xa2 21.♗c3 ♜a6=

Black can calm the position with ...♝a8, when his rook will be worth more than White's knight and pawn.



15...♝c8

The text move is by far the most common choice, but 15...0–0 is also perfectly fine for Black. The important point for Black to remember is that after ♜e2 Black must react with ...f7-f5 since the set-up with Black's pawn on f5 and his knights on g6 and h6 is very safe. For example: 16.♗e2 f5 17.a3 ♜b6 18.♗df1 b4 19.axb4 ♜xb4 20.h3 ♗h6= Carroll – Almeida, corr. 2011.

16.♗e2

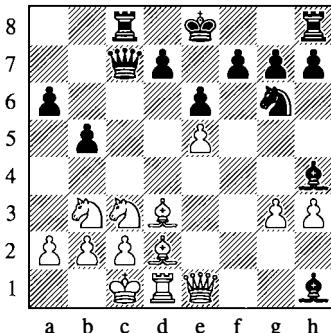
The text move is again the most common choice and the safest.

16.h3?!

This advance is not as clearly bad as it was on the two previous moves, but it is still needlessly risky for no gain.

16... $\mathbb{Q}h4$!

The straightforward 16... $\mathbb{Q}h6$ is also okay, especially as 17. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ is well met by 17... f5!.

17.g3 $\mathbb{Q}4xe5$ 18.fxe5 $\mathbb{Q}xh1$ 

19.gxh4

Equally valid is 19. $\mathbb{W}xh1$ when after 19... $\mathbb{Q}xg3$ Black will soon win e5, with rook and three pawns for two minor pieces. Black's chances should be slightly preferable, but it will be a messy fight.

19... $\mathbb{Q}f3$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ 0-0=

In this case, Black has rook and two pawns for two minor pieces, but White's doubled h-pawns are not worth much. Once again, it will be a tough fight between Black's central pawn mass and White's minor pieces.

16... f5! 17.exf6

A double-edged choice: Black's kingside is now more exposed but his pieces are activated.

17.h3

This innocent-looking move leads to forcing lines where Black equalizes.

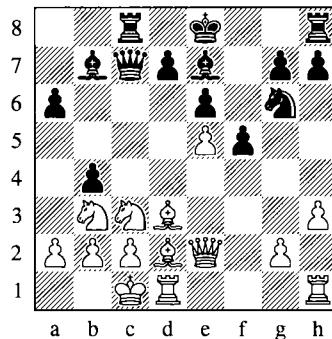
17... $\mathbb{Q}4xe5$!

Remember this knight sacrifice, as it will be used a lot in the future in this variation!

The more common 17... $\mathbb{Q}h6$ allows White to try for an edge.

18.fxe5 b4!

Exploiting the c3-knight's lack of a good retreat square.

19. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{W}c6$

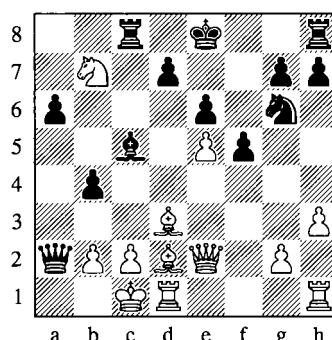
Still chasing the knight.

20. $\mathbb{Q}ac5$

After 20. $\mathbb{W}f3$ $\mathbb{W}xf3$ 21. $gxf3$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ White has various options but no path to an advantage. The material count will soon be Black's rook and pawns against White's two minor pieces.

20... $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}a5$ $\mathbb{W}a4$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ $\mathbb{W}xa2=$

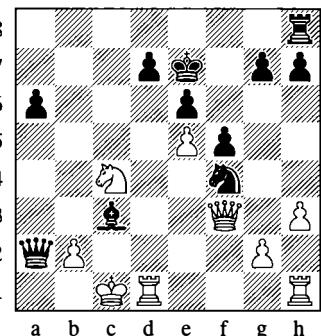
It may not look obvious yet, but the complications lead to equality; in fact, a perpetual for one side or the other is quite normal.



23.c4

Or 23. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}d6\#$ $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 25. $exd6$ b3 is also heading for a draw. For example, 26.c4 $\mathbb{Q}xc4\#$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $\mathbb{W}a1\#$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{W}a5\#$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ with a repetition.

- 23... $bxc3$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 25. $\mathbb{W}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$
 Forcing White to find three only-moves in a row to keep it level.
 26. $\mathbb{Q}d6\#$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{W}xc4$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3$



Finally White has a choice of two moves:
 29. $\mathbb{Q}xd7\#$

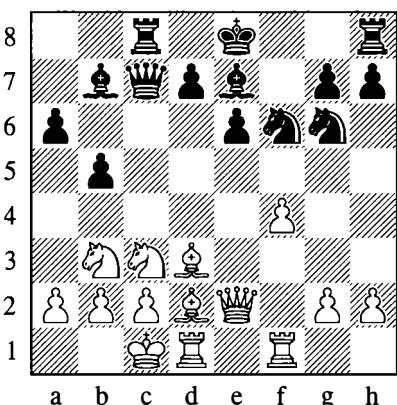
After 29. $\mathbb{W}xf4$ Black can draw by putting the rook on c8 or b8. For example: 29... $\mathbb{R}c8$ 30. $bxc3$ $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ 31. $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{W}b3!$ 32. $\mathbb{W}xd7\#$ $\mathbb{Q}f8=$ White can choose to play perpetual checks or allow Black to play them.

29... $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 30. $\mathbb{W}b7\#$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}d1\#$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$

32. $\mathbb{W}b6\#$

A draw was agreed in Tesic – A. Bjuhr, corr. 2009. A fearsome line, even just to play through, but the verdict is clear: Black can equalize against 17.h3 with forcing play.

17... $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}hf1$



The only reasonable move for White, not only defending the f4-pawn but also preparing the f4-f5 advance.

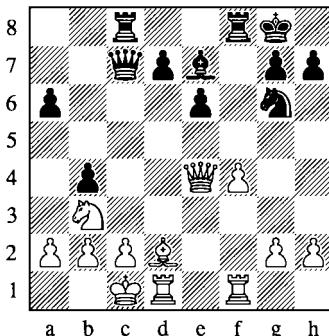
18...0–0

The text move is logical and strong, but if Black wishes to use a ...b5-b4 plan then making the advance now limits White's options:

18...b4? N 19. $\mathbb{Q}e4$

Unlike the main line below, going to a4 is impossible here: 19. $\mathbb{Q}a4??$ $\mathbb{W}c6$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}a5$ $\mathbb{W}xa4$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ fails as a2 is en prise.

19... $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 21. $\mathbb{W}xe4$ 0–0



22. $\mathbb{Q}b1$

The text move makes sense in general, and also specifically prepares the f4-f5 advance. The immediate 22. $f5?!$ fails to a neat tactic: 22... $exf5$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ $\mathbb{W}xc2\#$! 24. $\mathbb{W}xc2$ $\mathbb{Q}xc2$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}xc2$ $\mathbb{Q}xf5\#$ Black will play the endgame with an extra pawn.

Black is planning a queenside advance, so a slow passive move such as 22. $g3?!$ is misguided. Black is ahead in the race after 22... $a5$.

After the text move a plausible sample line is:

22... $a5$ 23. $f5$ $exf5$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ 25. $\mathbb{W}xf5$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$

Black has plenty of play, but White can hold the balance with accurate defence.

19. $\mathbb{Q}b1$

As in the line above, 19.g3?! is too slow. After 19...b4! 20. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ a5= Black was slightly better in Svidler – Vitiugov, Moscow 2006. And on the last move, 21... $\mathbb{Q}xe4$?N 22. $\mathbb{W}xe4$ a5= was a marginal improvement, limiting White's options.

19...b4?

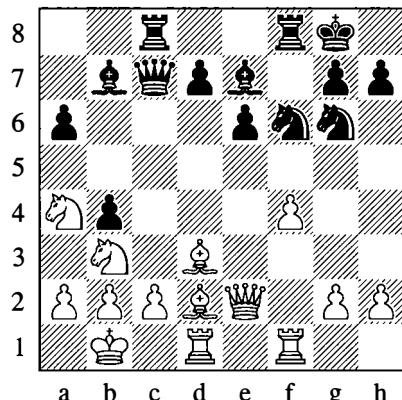
The text move is the consistent choice, but tends to lead to an ending.

If Black is determined to stay in a middlegame then 19... $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 20.g3 $\mathbb{Q}e7=$ is a weird but effective regrouping.

20. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ N

This is a novelty but at least as strong as the known move. This is the option cut out by making the ...b5-b4 advance on move 18 rather than 19.

20. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 22. $\mathbb{W}xe4$ a5 would transpose to the variation mentioned in the note to Black's 18th move.



20... $\mathbb{Q}c6$?

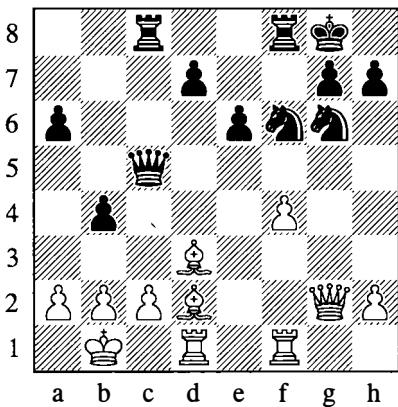
The text move is a forcing way to prove that Black is not worse. It leads rather directly to an ending.

Note that 20... $\mathbb{W}c6$? does not work after 21. $\mathbb{Q}a5!$ $\mathbb{W}xa4$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ with advantage to White; we see the benefit of $\mathbb{Q}b1$ covering a2.

But if Black wishes to play an unclear middlegame without forcing lines stretching into the endgame, then there are plenty of options. 20... $\mathbb{Q}d5$! and 20... $\mathbb{Q}fe8$! are just two examples of messy and promising options. At every move, White will have to be careful about his offside knight.

21. $\mathbb{Q}ac5$ $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{Q}xg2$! 23. $\mathbb{W}xg2$ $\mathbb{Q}xc5$

If Black has one move he will probably play ... $\mathbb{Q}d5$ with the idea of attacking the f4-pawn and ... $\mathbb{Q}c3$ †. Another idea is to play ... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ and control the f5-square. So White should probably attack directly with f5 now.



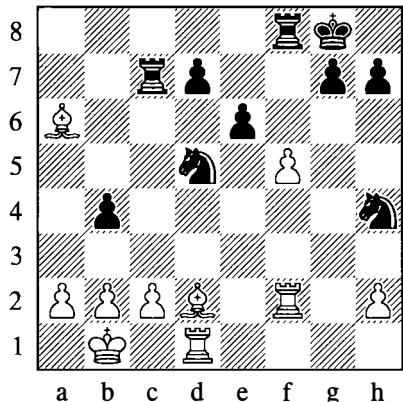
24.f5

Instead taking twice on g6 would win back the pawn, but offer no hope of any advantage after Black plays ... $\mathbb{Q}d5$. If g7 needs support then ... $\mathbb{Q}f7$ is available, while Black's d5-knight dominates the d2-bishop.

24... $\mathbb{Q}h4$ 25. $\mathbb{W}f2$ $\mathbb{W}xf2$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$! 27. $\mathbb{Q}xa6$

Or 27. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ looks tricky, but Black escapes with: 28... $\mathbb{Q}e3$! Another nice tactical idea. After 29. $\mathbb{Q}xh7$ † $\mathbb{Q}xh7$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ $\mathbb{Q}xc2$ = we have an equal endgame.

27...♝c7

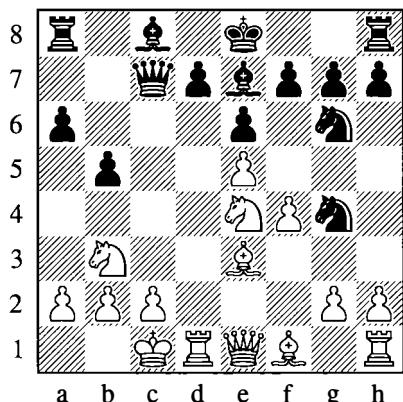


The next moves are likely to be much easier to find. A likely line continues:

28.♕f4 ♜a7 29.fxe6 dxe6 30.♕g3 ♜xf2
31.♕xf2 ♜xa6 32.♕xh4 ♜f7=

The position looks easy for Black to play. His idea is to go ...♝g6-f5, ...g5, ...h5 and push his kingside pawns. In such positions White cannot easily take advantage of the 3 versus 1 on the queenside since our pawn on b4 with the help of our knight on d5 controls all three White's pawns. But it should be a draw of course. If a safe ending does not appeal, remember the middlegame options earlier.

B) 14.♘e4



This is the main line. White does not bother to save his dark-squared bishop, instead centralizing his knight as quickly as possible. The immediate positional threat is ♘d6† (which may be preceded by ♜c5, if Black does not exchange on e3); and if Black avoids this by castling, the knight may assist in White's kingside plans by jumping to g5 or even f6.

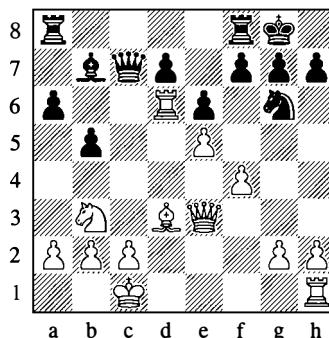
14...♞xe3

14...0-0? 15.♗c5 favours White, as he takes control of the dark squares. Simply put, if Black does not take the opportunity to eliminate the dark-squared bishop, his preceding moves will make little sense and the knight on g4 will be misplaced and vulnerable.

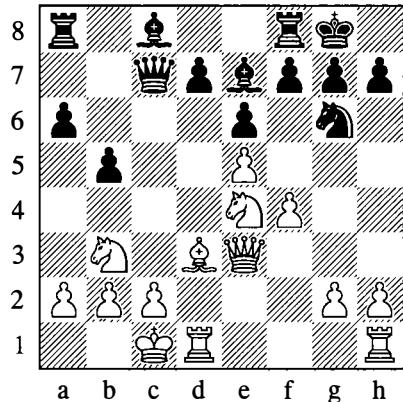
15.♗xe3 0-0

White's most important options are the developing move B1) 16.♘d3 and the more aggressive B2) 16.h4.

16.♘d6 should not be too dangerous after:
16...♗xd6 17.♗xd6 ♜b7 18.♘d3



18...♝ac8 (18...f5?! was too passive in Caruana – Javakhishvili, Aix-les-Bains 2011) 19.♗d2 ♘d5 20.h4 f6! 21.h5 ♘e7⇒ The position was dynamically balanced in Rubio Doblas – Noire, corr. 2008.

B1) 16. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ 

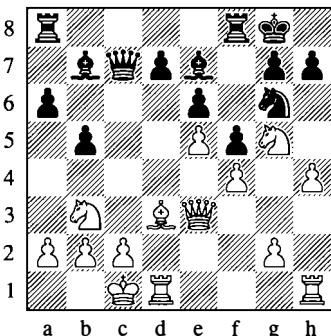
Although this is a perfectly sensible move, its only drawback is that White will generally want to start an attack with h2-h4 soon anyway. By delaying it for one more move, White gives Black the free tempo he needs to complete his development and obtain counterplay with ...f5.

16... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 17. h4 f5!

It is important to challenge the perfectly placed knight, as it currently controls a lot of important squares.

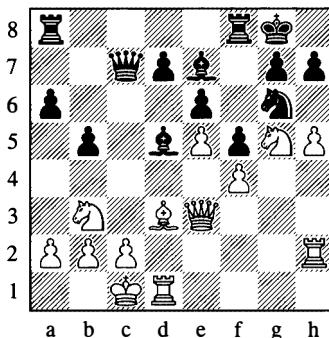
18. exf6

18. $\mathbb{Q}g5?$! may appear tempting but the tactics work well for Black after:

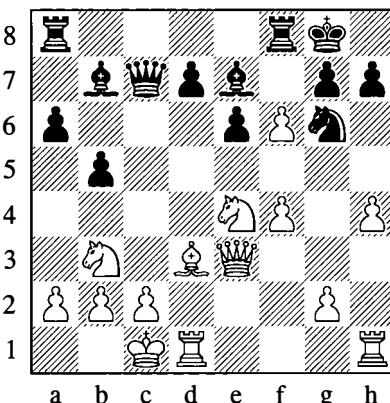


18... $\mathbb{Q}xg2!$ N Black failed to play this move in

all three games so far. 19. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ Black is simply threatening to play ...a5 and carry out his attack on the queenside, so White nothing better than forcing the play with: 20. h5



20... $\mathbb{Q}xf4!$ 21. $\mathbb{W}xf4$ d6= For the moment Black only has two pawns for the piece, but his position looks dominant while White's pieces seem uncoordinated and weirdly placed.



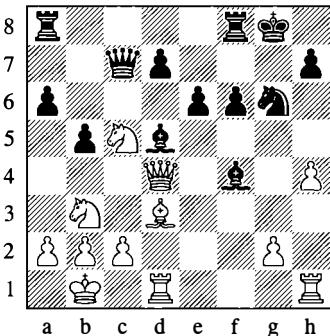
18... gxf6!

Thematically capturing towards the centre. This move takes control over a couple of important squares, and Black's king will find a safe home on h8.

19. $\mathbb{Q}hf1$

19. h5? would be a blunder, as 19... $\mathbb{W}xf4+$ simply wins a pawn for Black.

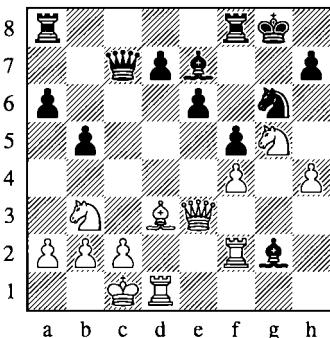
19.♗ec5?!N is an interesting move, creating some pressure against the d7- and e6-pawns. 19...♝d6! is a good reply which wins a pawn, although the story doesn't end there because White will try to exploit the open lines in the centre. My analysis continues 20.♔b1 ♛xf4 21.♗d4 ♜d5 when Black's bishops are strong and his king is safe enough, so White has nothing better than simplifying with:



22.♗xg6? hxg6 23.♗xd7 With this trick White regains his pawn, but Black is fine after 23...♝e5 or 23...♗xd7. White has no real attack and Black can look to develop some play on the queenside, starting with ...♝ac8 in the near future.

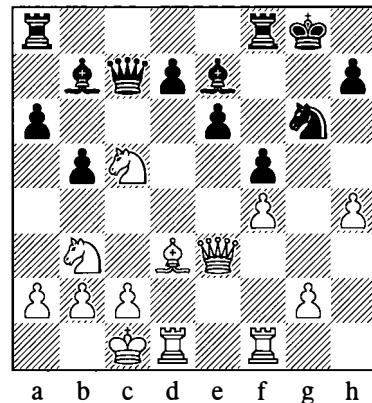
19...f5 20.♗ec5

20.♗g5? ♛xg2 21.♗f2 occurred in Sevdimaliev – Gusev, Bogoroditsk 2011, when both players overlooked:



21...♝d6!N–+ Tactically refuting White's play.

We have been following Nanjo – Djukic, Tromso (ol) 2014. I found an important improvement for Black:

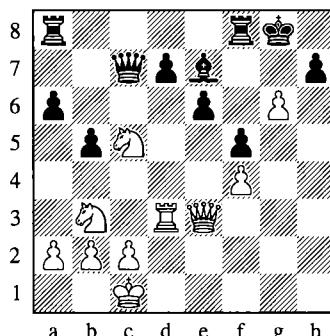


20...♝xg2!N

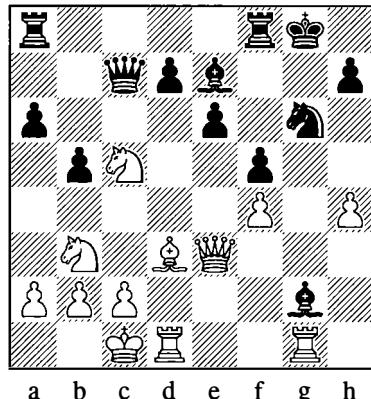
Capturing this pawn may appear scary, but Black has a lot of concrete threats and tactical resources which justify the decision.

21.♗g1

21.h5?! is an interesting exchange sacrifice but Black can avoid all danger with: 21...♝xf1 22.hxg6 (22.♗xf1? is a typical mistake, allowing 22...♝xf4! 23.♗xf4 ♜g5 24.♗g4 fxg4 25.♗xg5† ♜h8–+ when White pays the price for the loss of his dark-squared bishop and weakness of the c1-h6 diagonal) 22.♗xd3 23.♗xd3



23...♝xc5 Simplifying the position is the easiest route to safety. 24.♝xc5 hxg6 25.♝xd7 ♜c6= Black will defend with either ...♝f7 or ...♝f6, depending on whether White plays ♜h3 threatening mate on h7, or ♜g1 attacking the g6-pawn.



21...♝xf4 22.♝xf4 ♜xf4 23.♝f1

White exploits the pinned bishop, and it looks as though Black will find himself a piece for two pawns down. However, on closer inspection he is not losing a piece, but rather two pieces for a rook after:

23...♞f7

Now if White captures on g2 with his bishop, he will allow a knight fork on e2.

23...♞h8?! is an interesting alternative which avoids the potential drawing line in the note to move 27 below, but obviously in an ideal world we would prefer to position our king nearer the centre in the endgame.

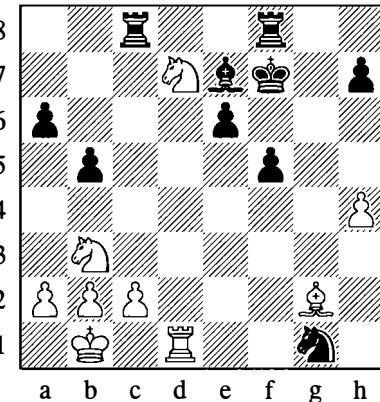
24.♝xg2

24.♝xg2?! ♜xg2 25.♝xg2 ♜a7 leads to an endgame with some winning chances for Black due to the strong central pawns.

24...♜ac8!

An important intermediate move.

25.♝xd7 ♜e2† 26.♚b1 ♜xg1



27.♝xf8

27.♝e5† ♜f6 28.♝d7†= is White's safest continuation, with a perpetual.

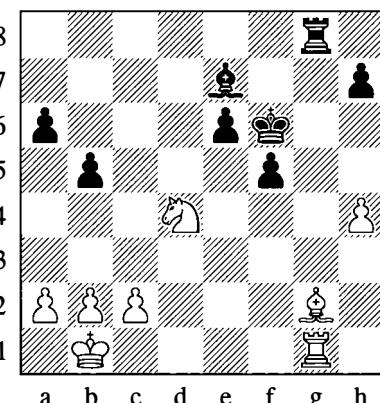
27...♝xf8 28.♝xg1 ♜g8!

Black establishes a powerful pin and threatens ...f4-f3.

29.♝d4! ♜f6!

Avoiding tricks connected with ♜xf5.

29...♞c5?! looks tempting but 30.♝xf5! sees White escape from danger to reach a risk-free endgame where Black still has to work to secure the draw.

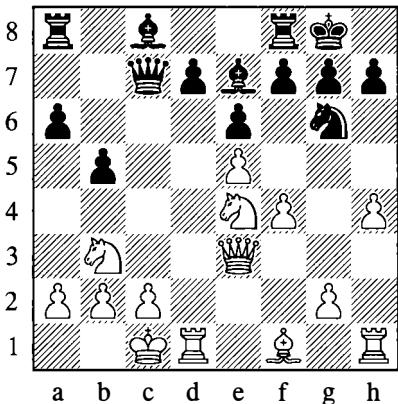


30.♕xe6 ♜g4!

The final accurate move, winning back the piece with no further problems.

**31.♕g5 h6! 32.♕h3 ♜c5 33.♕f3 ♜xg1†
34.♕xg1 ♜xg1=**

With an obviously drawn endgame.

B2) 16.h4

This is a more forceful attacking try. Unlike the previous line, 16...f5?! is not a good answer here, as the open d-file enables White to play 17.♗d6 with a bind.

16...♝b7

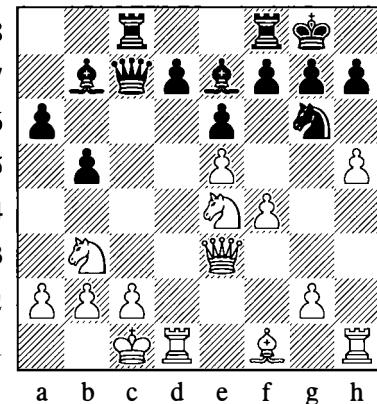
16...f6? 17.h5 ♔xf4 18.♗xf4 fxe5 19.♗g3 d5 20.h6 g6∞ is an interesting piece sacrifice which led to an eventual draw in one correspondence game, but I prefer the main line.

White has two important options, of approximately equal value: **B21) 17.h5** and **B22) 17.♗d6**. Interestingly, my recommended response against each of them involves sacrificing a piece for two pawns plus the initiative.

B21) 17.h5 ♜ac8!

It is important to include this intermediate move. It is not so much about bringing the rook into the game, but rather to provoke White's bishop to move to d3.

The immediate 17...♕xe5 18.fxe5 ♜xe5 is premature in view of 19.♗e1!N (19.♗xd7?? ♜xe4+ was disastrous for White in Grigoryan – Perunovic, Rome 2017, since 20.♗xe4 would have been met by an intermediate check on g5) 19...f5 20.♗ed2 and because the pawn on g2 is defended, Black does not have enough compensation, as Potkin points out. That is why we should encourage White to put his bishop on d3 first!

**18.♗d3**

18.c3N can be met by the same type of sacrifice: 18...♕xe5? (18...♕h4? is also playable, intending ...f5 next) 19.fxe5 ♜xe5 20.♗e1 (20.♗xd7?? loses to 20...♜xe4 21.♗xe4 ♜g5†, just like in the Grigoryan – Perunovic game referenced above) 20...f5∞ The position and evaluation is similar to our main line.

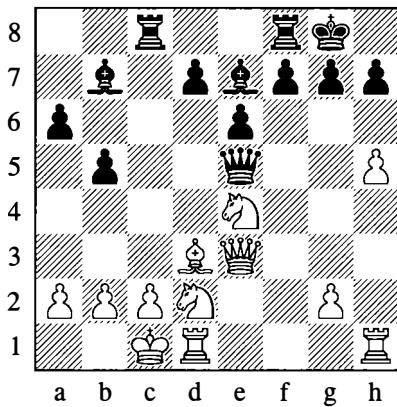
18...♕xe5! 19.fxe5 ♜xe5

This piece sacrifice is one of the key ideas to this whole variation. It works because the h4-h5 advance has not only used up two

valuable tempos, but also weakened White's control over important squares such as g3, g4 and g5.

20.♗bd2!

20.♗e2 gives away a third pawn after 20...f5 21.♗ed2 ♘xe2 22.♗xe2 ♘xg2 23.♗hgl ♖c6 when the engine calls it equal, but I agree with Potkin's assessment that Black's multitude of pawns makes his position more attractive.

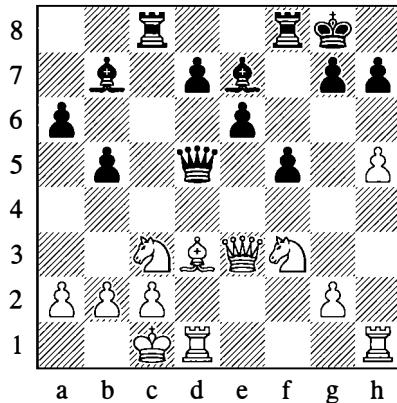


20...f5 21.♗f3 ♘d5!

21...♘c7 led to a good position for Black after 22.♗eg5?! ♘d5 in Ter Sahakyan – Potkin, Aix-les-Bains 2011, but 22.♗c3! ♘f6 23.♗e2 would have been stronger. Without going into details, computer analysis indicates that Black has a hard time proving his compensation.

The text move leads to fascinating positions. At first the engines are not convinced by Black's compensation but a deeper investigation convinced me that Black is doing fine.

22.♗c3



22...♗xc3!

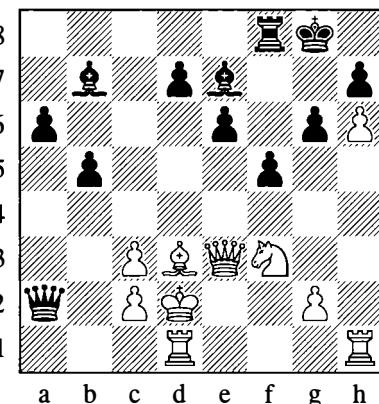
This is the main idea behind Black's last move.

23.bxc3 ♘xa2 24.h6 g6

If Black had time to follow up with ...♗f6 and ...♗c8, his attack would be crushing. Fortunately for White, he has a way to exchange queens.

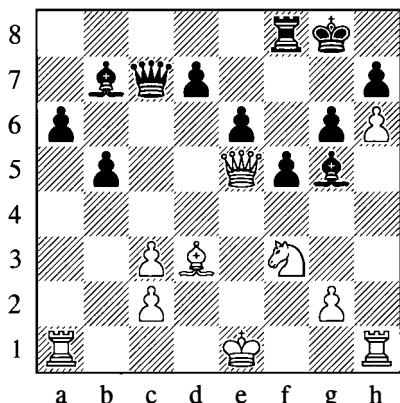
25.♔d2!

Threatening ♔a1.



25...♗a5 26.♔a1 ♘c7 27.♗e5 ♗g5†!

Before making the inevitable exchange on e5, Black should take the opportunity to drive White's king to the first rank, where it disrupts the coordination between his rooks.

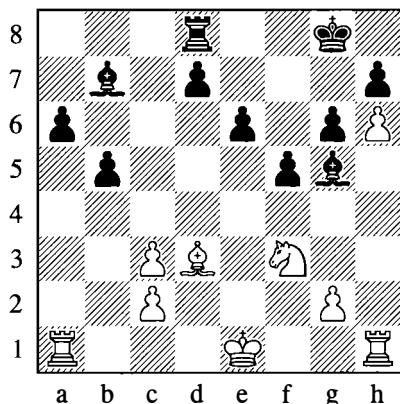
28.♔e1**28...♗xe5† 29.♕xe5 ♜d8!**

The hasty 29...♝f6?! is met by 30.♕xd7 ♜xc3† 31.♔e2 ♜d8 and now both 32.♜a3 and 32.♛c5 maintain an advantage for White.

After the text move Black only has three pawns for a rook, but his strong bishops and sturdy pawn chain provide sufficient compensation. Black's simple plan is to continue with moves like ...♝f6, ...e5, ...d5, ...♝f7, exactly as he would do if the material was equal!

30.♝f3

30.♝f1N ♜f6 31.♜e1 d6 32.♝f3 e5 threatens ...e4, and after 33.♔e2 d5∞ the position resembles our main line.

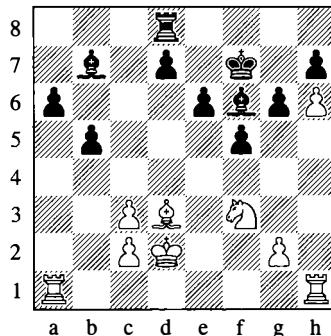
**30...♝f6 31.♜a3**

White unpins the c3-pawn, hoping to break with c3-c4 at some point.

I also considered:

31.♝d2 ♜f7?!

With the simple plan of ...g5-g4 and ...♝g6. 31...♜c8 is also playable, and after 32.♜a3 e5 33.♝e2 ♜f7 the situation is similar to our main line below.

**32.♜a3 g5! 33.c4**

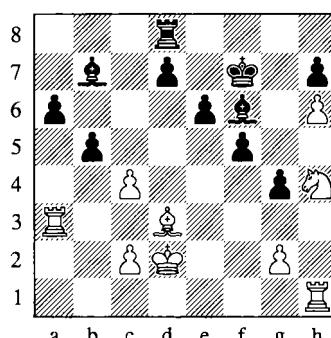
White has to do something active on the queenside.

33...g4

33...b4? is also possible, intending ...♜c3† and ...g4.

34.♝h4 ♜e7!

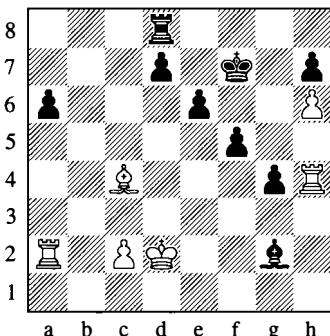
An important move, driving White's rook to an inferior square.

**35.♜a2 bxc4 36.♝xc4 ♜xh4**

36... $\mathbb{B}c8!$? is an interesting alternative but the text move seems simplest.

37. $\mathbb{B}xh4 \mathbb{Q}xg2$

Now we have three potentially dangerous passed pawns.

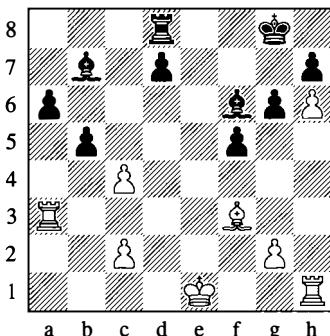


38. $\mathbb{B}h2 \mathbb{Q}c6$ 39. $\mathbb{B}xa6 \mathbb{Q}f6$

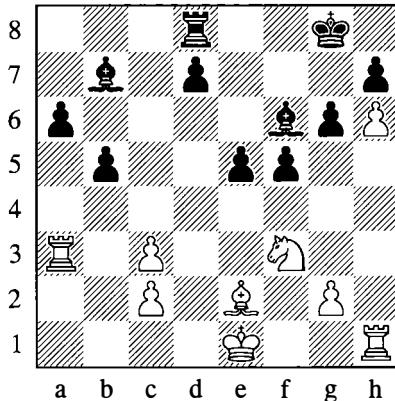
The position should be a draw with best play, but who wouldn't prefer Black? He has a simple plan of ... $\mathbb{Q}g5$ followed by advancing his pawns. In a practical game, I would find it difficult to defend with White.

31... $e5$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}e2$

32. $c4!?$ $e4$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $exf3$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ is an interesting way of giving back some material, but Black is doing well after:



34... $b4!$ Ensuring that White will remain with doubled c-pawns. 35. $\mathbb{B}a4 \mathbb{Q}c8!$ Black is more than okay; his light-squared bishop may look passive but it secures the weak pawns, and he may continue with ... $\mathbb{Q}c3(\dagger)$ and ... $\mathbb{Q}e8$.



32... $d5!?$ N

32... $e4$ led to an eventual draw in Corbat – Pfiffner, corr. 2008. Although that move seems playable, I would prefer not to rush with it, as giving White's knight the d4-square makes his position easier to play.

It is more principled to place the pawn on d5 and follow up with ... $\mathbb{Q}f7$, intending ... $g5-g4$. It seems to me that White has two main plans available, and on the next move he will position his king according to which one he intends to follow.

33. $\mathbb{Q}d1$

This move has two purposes: it frees the e1-square for the rook, and prepares to bring the king to a safer spot on b2, or perhaps b1.

An important alternative is:

33. $\mathbb{Q}d2!?$

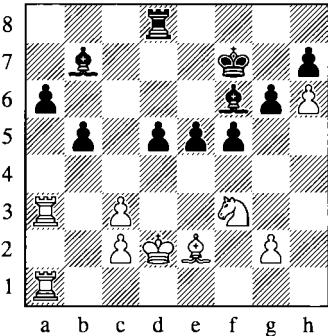
This is similar to the main line, but it places the king on a more exposed square. On the other hand, White can try to profit from the transfer of the second rook to the queenside.

33... $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 34. $\mathbb{B}ha1!$

Threatening to break through on the queenside by sacrificing the exchange on a6.

34. $\mathbb{B}b1$ prepares a piece sac on b5 but this

plan is less dangerous, and 34...g5 gives Black excellent prospects. (Black could also start with the prophylactic 34...♝d7!?, and continue with ...e4 and ...♝g5†, picking up the h6-pawn) 35.♝xb5 axb5 36.♝xb5 ♜d7 37.♝a7 ♜c6 38.♝xd7† ♜xd7 39.♝xd5 ♜e6 40.♝a5 g4 Black will follow up with ...♜c6 and ...♝g5† with at least equal chances in the double-edged endgame.



34...♝d6!

34...g5!? 35.♝xa6 ♜xa6 36.♝xa6 g4 may be playable but I see no reason to allow White to carry out his plan.

35.♝e1!?

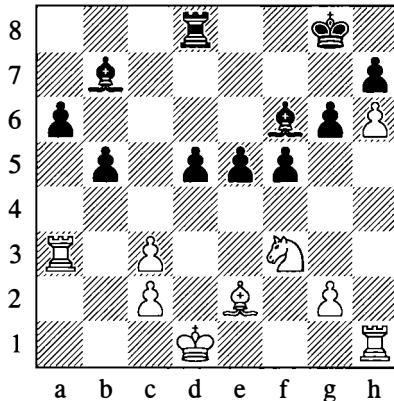
35.♝e1 can be met by 35...g5 and ...g4, followed by picking up the weak pawn on h6.

35...e4!

The careless 35...g5? would be refuted by 36.♝xb5! axb5 37.♝a7 ♜d7 38.♝xe5† ♜xe5 39.♝xe5+– when the reason for White's 35th move becomes clear.

36.♝d4 ♜c8

It is not clear how White can make progress. Meanwhile, the idea of ...♝g5† followed by ...♝xh6 is always lurking, as is the prospect of a general kingside advance with ...f4 and ...g5-g4.



33...♝f7 34.♝e1

Another possible continuation could be:

34.♝f1 e4!?

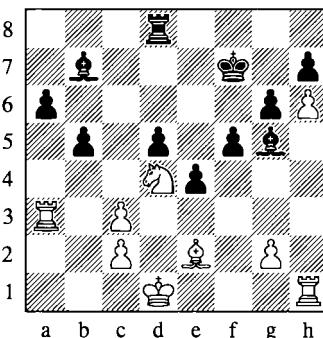
Engines seem to like this move, although personally I would be tempted to play 34...♝e6!?, intending to walk the king to b6 to bolster the queenside.

35.♝d4 ♜g5

Black is not yet threatening to take the h6-pawn, but the text move is still useful in preparing ...♝f6. Black may also place his rook on d7 at some point, prophylactically guarding the b7-bishop and h7-pawn, and possibly thinking about ...♝c7 to press along the c-file.

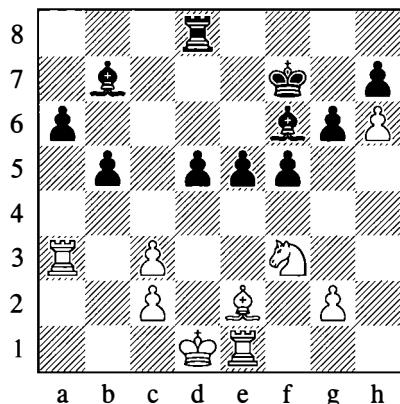
36.♝h1

36.g3 ♜d7 37.♝h1 ♜c7 38.♝b3 ♜f6 39.♝f1 ♜e5 also seems fine for Black.



36...♝f6 37.♝b3 ♜c8 38.♝d4 ♜e3!?

Not the only good move, but an interesting way of placing the bishop before playing ...f4 and ...g5. Once again, Black's chances do not seem worse at all.



34... $\mathbb{Q}e6$

Improving the king seems logical.

34...e4!? 35. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ is another possibility, with the idea of displacing the rook. Play may continue: 36. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ Maintaining the defence of the c3-pawn seems normal, but now the rook no longer exerts pressure along the open a-file. 36... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ Black has a good position and can improve with moves like ... $\mathbb{Q}e5$, ... $\mathbb{Q}c8-c7$ and ... $\mathbb{Q}g5$.

35. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$

Black has a few possible ways of handling the position, but my personal preference is to keep ...e4 in reserve and transfer the king to b6 in order to stabilize the queenside.

36. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$

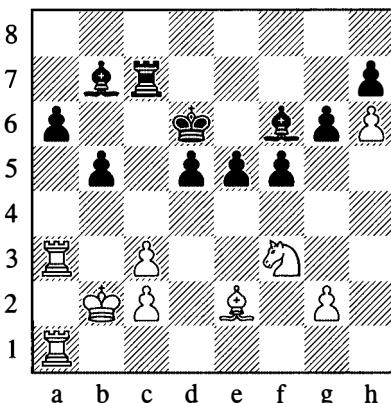
36...e4!? 37. $\mathbb{Q}d4\#$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 38. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 39. $\mathbb{Q}aa1$ b4!? is an interesting way of taking the game in a different direction.

37. $\mathbb{Q}ea1$ $\mathbb{Q}c7!$

It is important to defend the 7th rank before completing the king walk to the queenside.

37... $\mathbb{Q}c6??$ would be a blunder, allowing 38. $\mathbb{Q}xa6\#$.

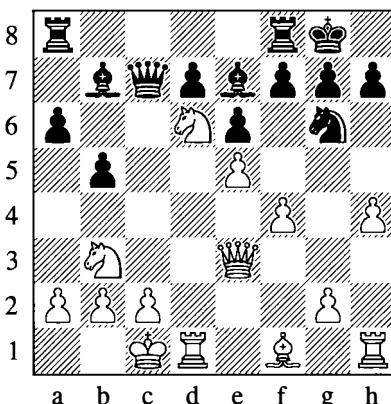
37... $\mathbb{Q}c5?$ would also be a mistake in view of 38. $\mathbb{Q}xa6!$ $\mathbb{Q}xa6$ 39. $\mathbb{Q}xa6$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 40. $\mathbb{Q}a7\pm$ when h7 falls. That explains why our rook should go to c7 first.



38. $\mathbb{Q}a1$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 39. $\mathbb{Q}aa1$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$

Black's queenside is completely safe and he can follow up in various ways. Obviously ...e4 can be considered at any time, and another tempting option could be ...f4! with ideas of ...e4, ... $\mathbb{Q}c8$ and ...g5 to follow.

B22) 17. $\mathbb{Q}d6$



This has been White's most popular choice, at least in classical games. The knight takes up a strong outpost, and at the same time prevents the ...♝xe5 idea that we saw in the previous variation. Now h4-h5 is a serious threat, so Black's next move is more or less forced.

17...f6

It is essential to fight back in the centre.

18.♗xb7

It is worth having a quick look at the inferior alternative:

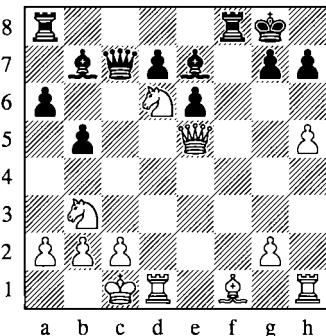
18.h5?

Nobody has played this – with good reason, as it allows Black to obtain an advantage by force.

18...♝xf4! 19.♗xf4

19.♗xb7 fxe5† gives Black a powerful centre.

19...fxe5 20.♗xe5



20...♞f5!

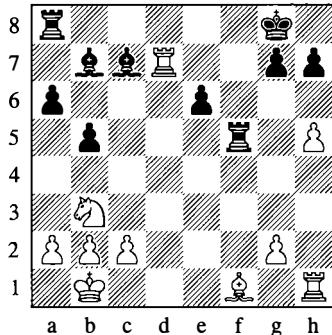
The only move, and an excellent one. Black exploits the pin and prepares to target the d6-knight.

21.♗g3 ♞g5† 22.♔b1 ♛f4

Winning back the piece.

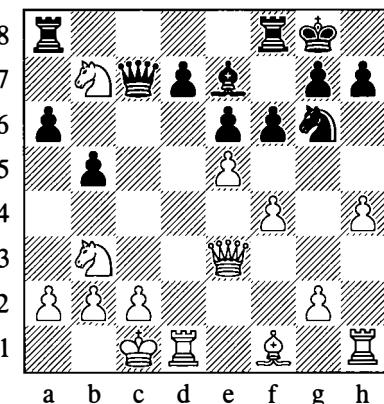
23.♗c3 ♛xd6 24.♗xc7 ♛xc7 25.♗xd7

Material is level but Black enjoys the upper hand after:



25...♝f7 26.♗xf7 ♛xf7 27.♗c5 ♛d5†

Black has excellent prospects in the endgame, thanks to his bishop pair, passed e-pawn and enemy pawn weaknesses on g2 and h5.



18...fxe5

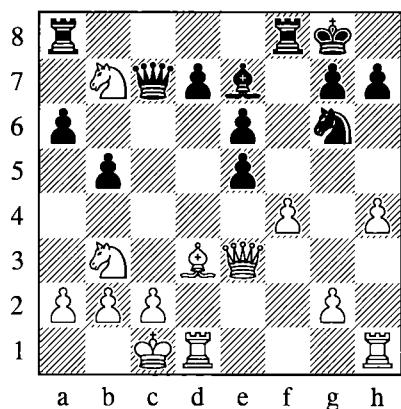
Black ignores the knight on b7 for the moment, as it is more important to destroy the enemy centre and give the knight some decent options in the event of h4-h5.

The main moves we will analyse are B221) 19.♔d3 and B222) 19.♗5.

The simple 19.fxe5 is a concession, as now h4-h5 can easily be met by ...♝f4, or even ...♞f5 threatening ...♞g5 in some cases. One example concluded: 19...♝xb7 20.♔d3 ♛c7 21.♗xg6 hxg6 22.♗d4 ♛ac8 23.♗b1 ½-½ Mezera – Piecusch, email 2010. The draw agreement was fair, as 23...♞c5 is dead level.

B221) 19. $\mathbb{Q}d3$

This has only been played once but should definitely be considered.

19... $\mathbb{Q}ac8!$ N

19... $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}7c5\pm$ made life more difficult for Black in Rojas Alarcon – Patil, Chennai 2011.

The text move is an important improvement. The big difference compared to the above game is that White's knight will not be able to come back towards the centre, but will instead have to escape to the less active a5-square.

20. $f \times e5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}7a5$

Now Black has a choice: he can regain the sacrificed material to reach a safe position, or remain a piece down and play for an attack against the enemy king.

21... $\mathbb{Q}c4!?$

Naturally, I am attracted to the double-edged option.

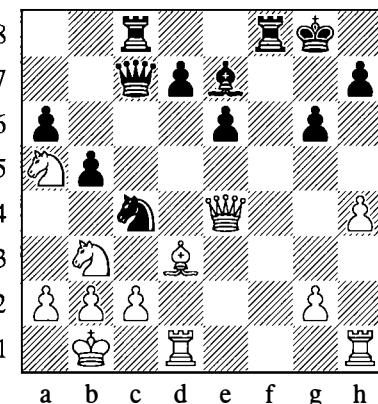
21... $\mathbb{Q}xd3\uparrow$ 22. $\mathbb{W}xd3$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}cd8!=$ is the safe alternative; the last move is an important detail to safeguard the d7-pawn, keeping in mind that the a5-knight is not going anywhere.

22. $\mathbb{W}e4$ $g6$

The position looks unclear; Black is poised to develop an attack against White's king, and is likely to win some material back. I will offer a sample line to illustrate Black's attacking potential.

23. $\mathbb{Q}b1$

White tries to play prophylactically, but...

23... $\mathbb{Q}xb2!$

Concrete play begins!

24. $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ $\mathbb{Q}f4!$

Misplacing White's queen and controlling the important b4-square. Remember that if White does not control the a1-h8 diagonal then Black will simply win the game with ... $\mathbb{W}c3$ and ... $\mathbb{Q}a3$ then an inevitable mate on b2. So White has only one move that defends:

25. $\mathbb{W}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}b4!$

Keeping chasing White's queen.

26. $\mathbb{Q}d2$

Every other move loses at once.

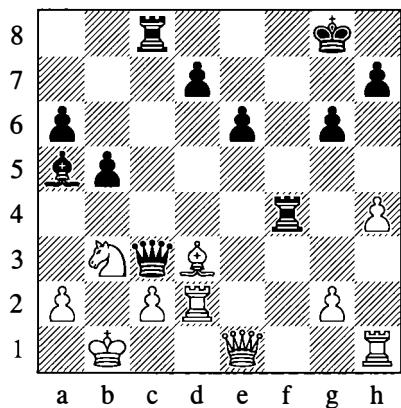
26... $\mathbb{W}c3\uparrow$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}c1$

Instead 27. $\mathbb{Q}b1??$ $\mathbb{Q}a3$ is hopeless.

White has done everything he could to avoid the checkmate but now Black can simply reply with:

27... $\mathbb{Q}xa5$

Gaining back one of the sacrificed pieces. For the moment we have just two pawns for the knight, but the compensation is enough for at least equality. There are ideas connected with ... $\mathbb{E}a4$, or ... $\mathbb{E}b4$ then ... $\mathbb{E}xb3$, or ... $\mathbb{Q}b4-a3$, or simply moving the queen from c3 and capturing the d2-rook. A plausible continuation is:

28. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ **28... $\mathbb{Q}b4!$**

Heading for the b2-mate.

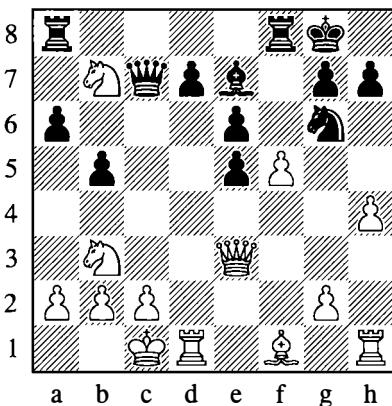
29. $\mathbb{W}c1$

Yet another only-move.

29... $\mathbb{Q}f8\#$

Black has a promising attack along the h8-a1 diagonal. A well-known chess concept states that having opposite-coloured bishops favours the attacking side; because the attacking bishop cannot be opposed. Clearly this works in Black's favour in the current position.

I believe that with perfect play White can hold, so the ultimate verdict may be equality. But certainly I prefer Black's practical chances in the present position.

B222) 19. $f5$ **19... $\mathbb{E}ac8$**

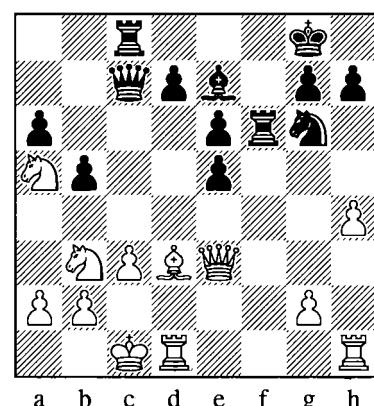
An important intermediate move, controlling the c5-square before going after the f5-pawn. Capturing immediately on f5 with the rook would allow the knight to return to c5 and then $\mathbb{Q}d3$ would come with a tempo, without White having to waste a tempo with c2-c3 to protect himself from the checkmate.

20. $c3$

And not 20. $\mathbb{Q}d3?$ $exf5!\#$ when the threats of ...e5-e4 or ... $\mathbb{Q}f4$ are strong.

20... $\mathbb{E}xf5$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{E}f6$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}7a5$

White has managed to consolidate his position somewhat, and remains a knight up for two pawns, but the a5-knight is still awkwardly placed.



22...d5!

Creating the threat of ...d5-d4, so White is obliged to move his king away from the c-file.

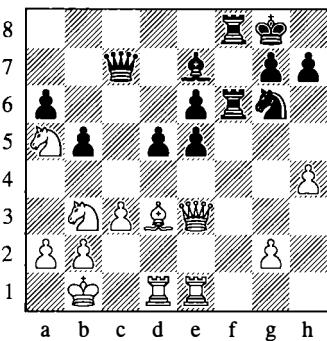
23.♔b1 ♜c8

The best way to build up Black's play.

I also looked in detail at 23...♝f4 and 23...e4 but I trust them less.

24.♗xg6

This is the only move to have been tested, but I also checked out a plausible alternative.

24.♗he1!?N

Black has at least two options:

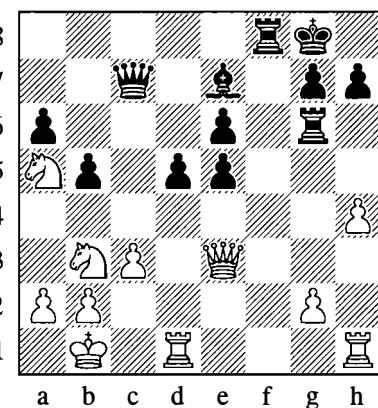
24...e4 is the safest choice, as White has nothing better than simplifying with 25.♗xe4 dx4 26.♗xe4 when Black should play 26...♜c8. An important move to take away the c6-square from the knight. A likely continuation is: 27.h5 ♐f4 28.g4 h6 Black has managed to consolidate his position and his knight has many fine squares. In contrast, White's knights are still out of the game and White will need to exchange queens in order to free them; this in turn will make it easier for Black to attack the kingside pawns.

24...♝d6 is an attempt to play for more. Black's idea is ...♝f4 so White is encouraged

to exchange the bishop for the knight. 25.♗xg6 But now Black can play ...e5-e4 without "fearing" that White will give back his piece to reach a more drawish position. After 25...♜xg6 Black should be fine, with his strong centre and active rooks on the kingside.

24...♜xg6

Despite the material deficit, Black is comfortable.

**25.h5 ♜gf6 26.♗c1!?**N

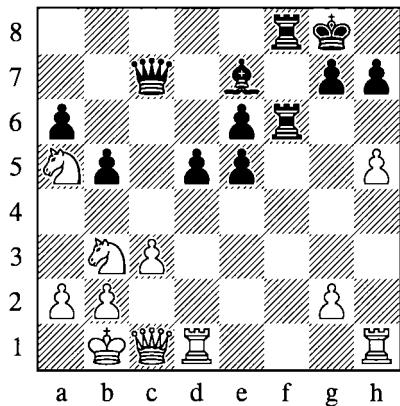
The best try, even though Black is still fine. White is planning to challenge Black's control of the f-file.

26.h6 g6 does not change anything significant. I will offer two brief continuations:

Mihailovs – V. Tasic, email 2015, continued 27.a3 ♜f7= and was later drawn; for the remaining moves White mainly shuffled his rooks, without a productive plan. This is understandable, as both White's knights remain stuck.

I set up a Komodo – Stockfish game which continued: 27.♗d2 e4= The engines could not find any way for White to make progress.

Another untested option is: 26.a3N h6!? Fixing the h5-pawn and creating a strong outpost on g5 for our rook or bishop. I created my own test with a computer-versus-computer game which continued: 27.♗c1 ♘f2 28.♗df1 ♗b6 29.♗hg1 e4= Black is very active and in no way worse, as White's extra material is as useless as ever.



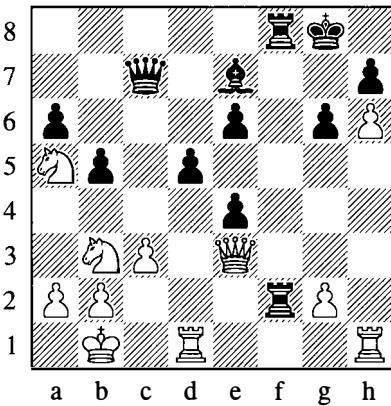
26...♝f2

With the simple idea of ...♗b6 supporting the rook, and maybe ...h7-h6. Black is extremely active and White's knights are once again out of play.

Instead after 26...h6?! 27.♗df1! e4 28.♗xf6 29.♗e1 White has improved his chances, even though the position remains rather unclear.

27.h6 g6 28.♗e3 e4

White has not managed to achieve anything special, and must look out for a ...b4-break, opening a path for ...♗c2† and mate.



29.a3 ♘8f7=

The immediate 29...b4? would have failed to 30.♗d4!, threatening mate on g7, and planning axb4 when the mate is prevented. But now ...b5-b4, axb4 ...♗xb4 is back on the agenda. White can stop that in various ways, but has no hope of any advantage, as neither of his knights cannot move.

Conclusion

11. ♜e1 is the most common move in the English Attack, so of vital importance. After 11... ♜e7 12. f4 I spent some time explaining the problem with 12... ♜c4, as it is useful for our general understanding of the Taimanov. But the correct repertoire move is 12... ♜g6 when play continues 13. e5 ♜g4, reaching a key branching point. White has the slower A) 14. ♜d2 retaining the bishop, or the more direct B) 14. ♜e4.

After 14. ♜d2 ♜b7 we saw various examples, both on this move and the next few, of how h2-h3 ideas generally backfire on White. So instead the main line continues 15. ♜d3 ♜c8 16. ♜e2 f5! when I showed many ideas. I offered long forcing lines to show that Black's position is theoretically sound, but I also showed some less explored options for those who simply wish to play.

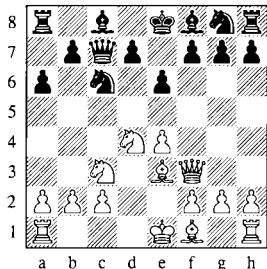
14. ♜e4 ♜xe3 15. ♜xe3 0-0 reaches a critical position, where we analysed two main pathways. 16. ♜d3 is a decent move but it gives Black time for 16... ♜b7 17. h4 f5!, when he has plenty of counterplay in the centre. 16. h4 denies Black this resource and is therefore critical. I recommend meeting it with 16... ♜b7 when we have a further split.

17. h5 ♜ac8! is followed by ... ♜xe5, a positional piece sacrifice for two pawns. Not only is this theoretically sound, but it also forces White to switch from an attacking approach to one of careful consolidation, which may prove difficult for some players. In our main line, Black gives up a further exchange on c3 and even allows a queen exchange, reaching a fascinating endgame with three pawns plus positional compensation against a rook. Even after deep computer analysis I found no advantage for White, and many of the lines seem more pleasant for Black in a practical game.

17. ♜d6 should be met by 17... f6 when it is essential to remember that 18. ♜xb7 is met not by recapturing but by 18... fxe5, to break up White's centre and secure our knight better options in the event of h4-h5. We looked in detail at 19. ♜d3 and 19. f5 but Black is fine in all cases. Often White remains a piece up, but in return Black usually has two pawns and fine compensation. We saw various cases where White's knights are frozen on a5 and b3, with neither able to move without losing the other.



6. ♕e3



The Trendy 7. ♘f3

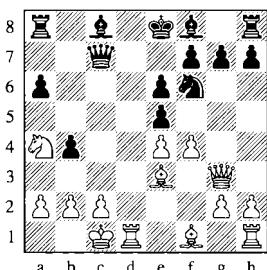
Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2. ♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4. ♘xd4 ♘c6 5. ♘c3 ♜c7 6. ♕e3 a6 7. ♘f3

7... ♘f6 8.0-0-0 ♘e5 9. ♜g3 b5

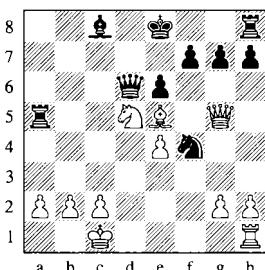
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A1) after 13. ♘a4



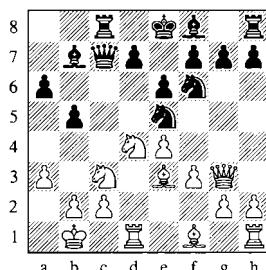
13...exf4!N

C) after 18. ♘d5!



18... ♜c5!N

D1) after 12. ♘b1



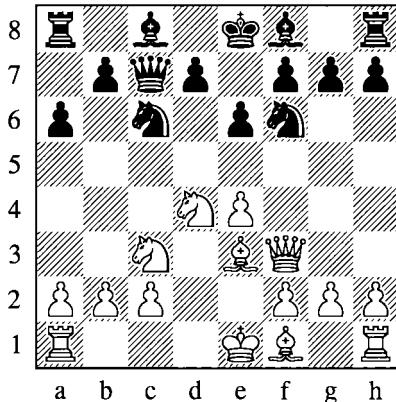
12...h5!N

**1.e4 c5 2. ♦f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4. ♦xd4 ♦c6
5. ♦c3 ♜c7 6. ♕e3 a6 7. ♜f3**

It was the summer of 2017 when I first started writing about this increasingly popular variation. At first I was apprehensive since I didn't have much experience playing against it, and its popularity was exploding due to its aggressive nature and the fact that White had achieved several impressive wins. In some ways White's set-up resembles the English Attack, but the queen on f3 adds a different flavour, especially due to the possibility of ♜g3, when the queen either supports an attack or gets exchanged, in which case hxg3 will open the h-file for White's rook. It is no surprise that this system has been recommended in two relatively recent, highly-regarded White repertoire books: *Attacking the Flexible Sicilian* by Kotronias & Semkov (2017), and *Playing 1.e4 – Sicilian Main Lines* by Shaw (2018).

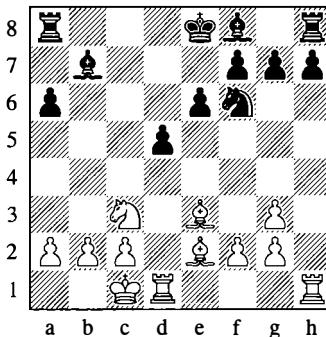
7... ♜f6

7... ♜d6 is another main line, and the first option I investigated. White has many options but I think Black is okay against all of them. However, my attention was drawn to the text move after I saw the analysis of an impressive win by Morozevich with White against Bukavshin in a rapid game from 2015. Despite the unfavourable outcome from our perspective, Black has improvements available, and since the ensuing positions are rich in possibilities for both sides, I decided to focus on this direction.



8.0–0–0

8. ♜xc6 bxc6 9.0–0–0 is a pretty harmless alternative. Play might continue: 9...d5 10.exd5 cxd5 11. ♜g3 ♜xg3 12.hxg3 ♜b7 13. ♜e2



This occurred in Tokhirjonova – Shamima, Chengdu 2017. Since White is clearly preparing to advance her g-pawn, it seems logical to pre-empt this with 13...h6! N 14.g4 ♜g8! when Black is fine. The odd placement of her rook is of little consequence, and she is ready to complete development with ... ♜d6, or perhaps ... ♜d7 followed by ... ♜c5.

8... ♜e5

Several other moves are playable but I like this active and ambitious choice.

9. ♜g3 b5

This is the consistent move, and actually Black's only decent follow-up, since anything else would be strongly met by f2-f4. We are following in the footsteps of several strong players, including Giri, Wang Yue, Caruana, Anand and many more. Personally I will always think of this as the "Bukavshin Variation", since he was one of the first to play it (in a blitz game in 2014) and his 2015 game against Morozevich was what led me to analyse it.

The logic behind Black's play is obvious. For the time being he is stuck on the kingside, as

the queen on g3 prevents his dark-squared bishop from moving. Therefore he aims to create counterplay both on the queenside and in the centre with some combination of ...b4 and ...b7.

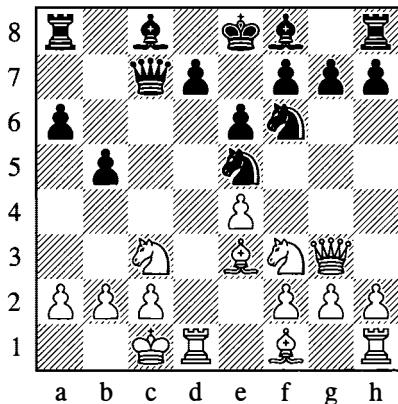
We have reached a major branching point, with A) 10.♗f3, B) 10.♗dxb5?!, C) 10.♗xb5?! and D) 10.a3?! the four options to be analysed in this chapter.

10.f4 is the most popular move of all, and we will examine it in the next two chapters.

10.♗cxb5?! axb5 11.♗xb5 is a simple transposition to variation B.

A) 10.♗f3

This simple exchanging operation does not look too threatening, but it has been tried by a few strong players so it is worth checking.

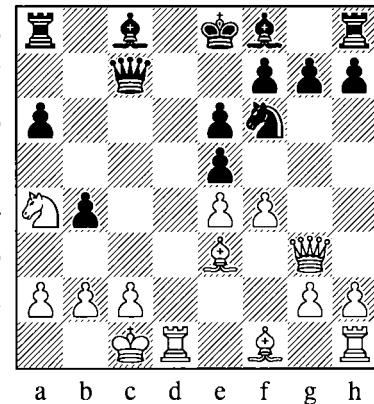


10...d6 11.♗xe5 dxе5

We will consider the overoptimistic A1) 12.f4?! followed by the more sensible A2) 12.f3!.

A1) 12.f4?! b4 13.♗a4

I found a useful improvement:



13...exf4!N

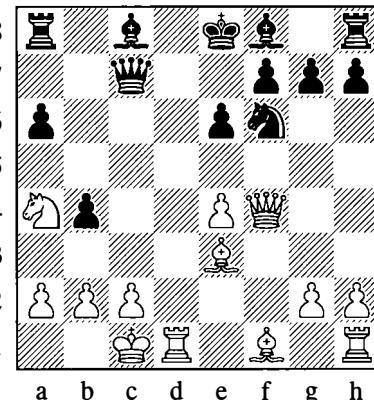
This offers Black a simple route to a positional edge.

13...♗xe4?! is too greedy, and after 14.♗b6! ♗xb6 15.♗xb6 ♗xg3 16.hxg3 ♘b8 17.♗xc8 ♘xc8 18.♗xa6 White regained the pawn while keeping a slight initiative in Durarbayli – Anurag, Albena 2015.

13...♗b7?!N leads to a complex position where Black is fine, but the text move is simpler and stronger.

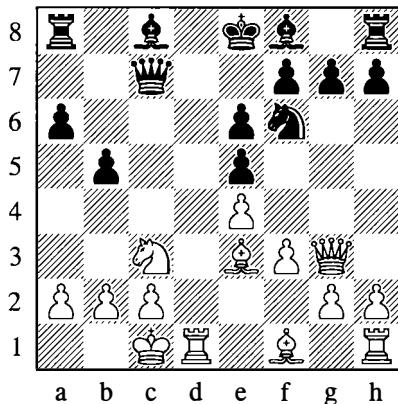
14.♗xf4

14.♗xf4 ♗c6! 15.b3 ♗b7! gives Black excellent prospects.



14...♝xf4 15.♝xf4 ♟d7=†

We have reached a typical Sicilian endgame which is close to equal, but Black stands a little better because of the weak e4-pawn and the misplaced knight on a4. His plan for the next few moves will involve ...♝e7 and ...♝b7, after which he will be threatening ...♝c6.

A2) 12.f3!

This move was first played back in 2016 in a relatively low-rated game, but I paid closer attention after Vallejo Pons used it in the 2018 European Individual Championship. White's idea is to secure his e4-pawn and then retreat his queen to f2, followed by attacking with the g- and h-pawns.

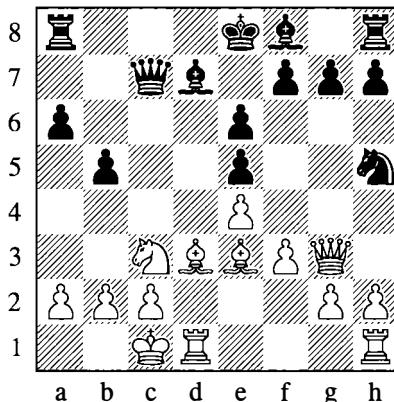
12...♝d7!

12...♝b7 was played in the earlier game but what future does the bishop have on the square? White's last move barricaded the long diagonal, so Black should find a better role for the bishop. On d7 it controls the a4-square and can exchange itself with ...♝b5 in some lines.

13.♝d3 ♜h5!

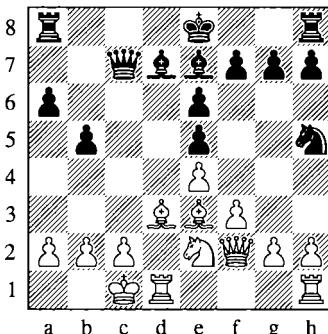
13...♝c8 was played in Vallejo Pons – Bosiocic, Batumi 2018. There is nothing wrong with Bosiocic's move, which brought

him an eventual victory in the game, but my advice would be to avoid committing the rook for the moment, as it may prove more useful on b8 or even a8. Instead I like the idea of being ready to place the knight on the strong f4-outpost in response to g2-g4.

**14.♛g5**

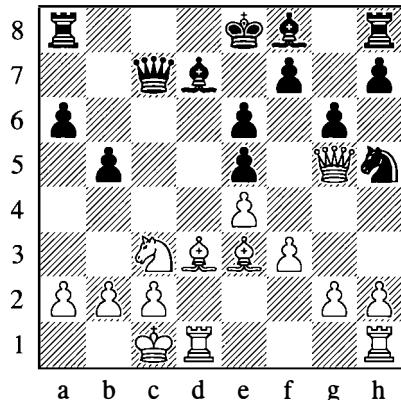
In the event of 14.♛g4 Black could play 14...♞f6 angling for a repetition, but I would prefer 14...g6! when Black's attack looks more promising.

14.♛f2 can be met by 14...♝e7 when White has trouble progressing his attack, since g2-g4 will allow ...♞f4 when Black's knight will be a monster. Thus 15.♞e2 seems logical, when play may continue:



15...0–0 16.g4 ♗f4 17.♗xf4 exf4 18.♗b6
 ♜c6 → I prefer Black's chances, as it is simpler for him to create meaningful threats against the enemy king.

14...g6!



15.♗e2!N

This is the move I had in my original analysis. It is stronger than 15.♗h4?!, as played in Nomin Erdene – Uriintuya, Senta 2018, when 15...♗f4!N would have been excellent for Black.

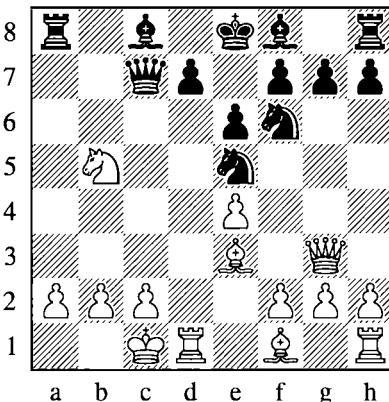
15...♗e7 16.♗h6

16.♗g4?! 0–0! leaves White's pieces a bit misplaced.

16...♗f8=

White has nothing better than accepting the repetition.

B) 10.♗dxb5!? axb5 11.♗xb5



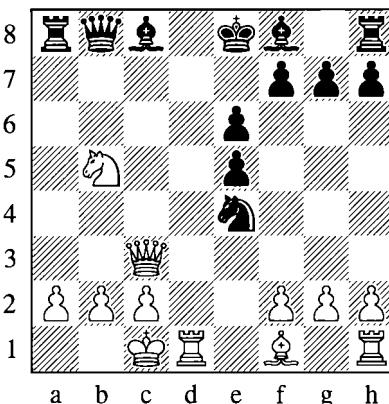
11...♗b8 12.♗d4 d6 13.♗xe5 dxе5 14.♗c3

This is the justification for White's sacrifice: he threatens a nasty check on c7.

14...♗xe4!

I analysed this improvement myself before finding a correspondence game in which it was played. Black returns the extra piece in order to obtain counterplay against the white king.

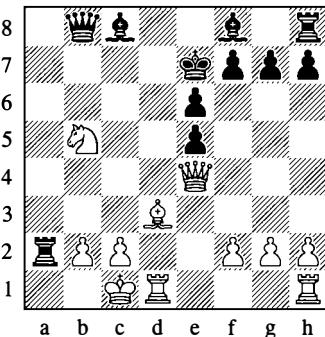
A previous game continued 14...♗e7 15.♗c7† ♜f8 16.♗xa8 ♜xa8 17.f3 with slightly better chances for White due to his three passed pawns, Triapishko – Landa, Kaliningrad 2015.



15. $\mathbb{W}c6\uparrow \mathbb{Q}e7$ 16. $\mathbb{W}xe4 \mathbb{E}xa2$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}b1$

I checked two other ideas:

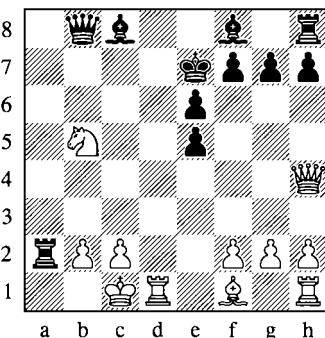
17. $\mathbb{Q}d3?!$ leads to trouble for White after the precise reply:



17...f5! 18. $\mathbb{W}c4 \mathbb{E}a1\uparrow$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}d2 \mathbb{E}a6!$ With ...e4 coming next, Black has an obvious initiative while all of White's pieces are misplaced.

17. $\mathbb{W}h4\uparrow N$

This is a more reasonable move than the above line, but Black has a choice of good replies. My preference is:

**17...g5!**

17...f6 is equally playable but it is worth giving up the g-pawn to gain a tempo.

18. $\mathbb{W}xg5\uparrow f6$ 19. $\mathbb{W}h4 \mathbb{E}a1\uparrow$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}d2 \mathbb{E}xd1\uparrow$
21. $\mathbb{Q}xd1 \mathbb{W}a8$

Black activates his queen and will find at least a perpetual. For example:

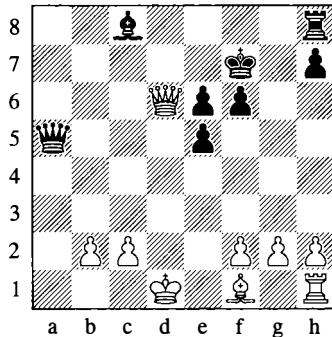
22. $\mathbb{W}b4\uparrow$

After 22. $\mathbb{Q}d2 h5!$ White's position looks suspicious.

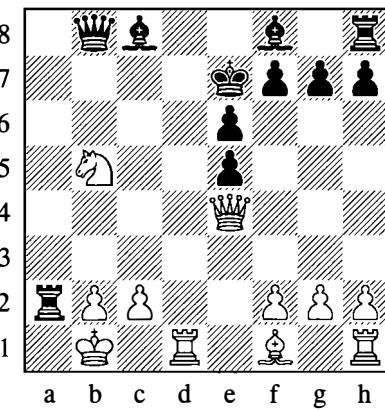
22. $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}d6\uparrow \mathbb{E}xd6$ 24. $\mathbb{W}xd6 \mathbb{W}a5?!$

Threatening ... $\mathbb{E}d8$.

24... $\mathbb{W}a1? 25. \mathbb{Q}d2 \mathbb{W}a5\uparrow 26. b4 \mathbb{E}d8 27. bxa5 \mathbb{E}xd6\uparrow 28. \mathbb{Q}c3 \mathbb{E}d1=$ is another route to a drawn endgame.

**25. $b4! \mathbb{E}d8!$ 26. $bxa5 \mathbb{E}xd6\uparrow$**

Black will pick up the a-pawn, with another level endgame.

**17... $\mathbb{W}a8!$ 18. $\mathbb{W}xa8 \mathbb{E}xa8$**

White has the advantage of two connected passed pawns, but this is counterbalanced by Black's central control and bishop pair.

19. $\mathbb{Q}d6! f5$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xc8\uparrow N$

This is the move I had in my original notes, so I will keep it as my main line.

The game continued 20.f3 ♘f6 (20...h5!N is also possible, by analogy with the main line below) 21.♗xc8 ♜xc8 22.c3 ♜c5= with a level endgame and a draw agreement not long after in De – Silva Filho, corr. 2016.

20...♜xc8 21.f3!

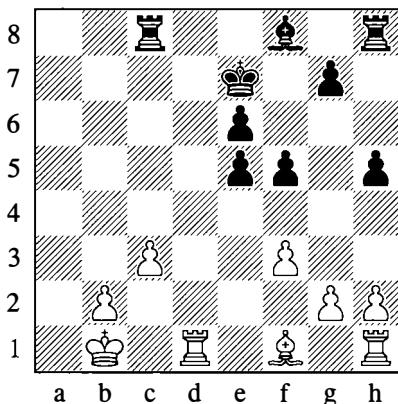
Other moves would allow Black to play ...e4 and target the f2-pawn.

21...h5

Black should develop some play on the kingside before White can get coordinated and advance his passed pawns.

22.c3

22.h4!? stops Black's pawns from advancing but the h4-pawn is left as a weakness. A logical reply is 22...♞f6 23.c3 ♜c5∞ followed by ...♞f2, when Black is not worse at all.



22...g5!

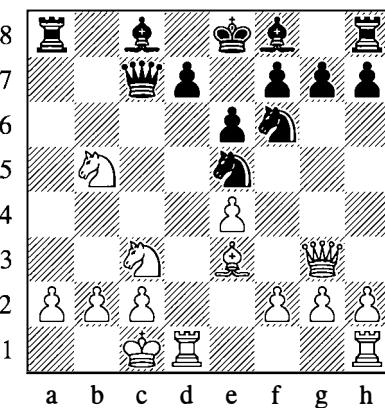
Activity is paramount.

23.h3 ♘f6 24.♗c2 ♜c5 25.♗b5 ♜e3=

The endgame is balanced. Black may or may not exchange a pair of rooks with ...♜hd8 in the near future. His other main idea is to create a passed pawn and/or counterplay, either with a rook on g8 supporting a ...g4 push, or with ...e4 followed by ...♞e5.

C) 10.♗xb5!? axb5 11.♕dxb5

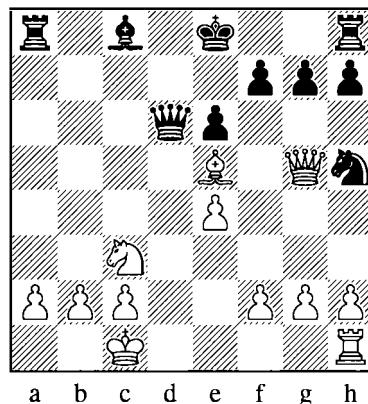
This sacrifice was introduced by Morozevich in the fantastic game referred to at the start of the chapter. Although Bukavshin played accurately for a while, he subsequently went wrong and lost, so we will see later where Black's play should be improved. The next five or six moves are more or less forced for both sides.



11...♛b8 12.♗f4 d6 13.♗xd6!

13.♗xd6†! ♜xd6 14.♗xd6 ♔h5 15.♗g5 ♜xd6 is an equally valid route to the same position. Without the trick of taking on d6, White would have no real compensation for the sacrificed piece.

13...♔h5! 14.♗g5 ♜xd6 15.♗xd6† ♜xd6 16.♗xe5



16...Ba5!

16...Bc5? was a surprising error in one game, after which 17.Bxh5 Ba5 18.f4 Be3† 19.Qb1± gave White a big advantage in Gajwa – David, Bhopal 2017. Presumably Black knew about the ...Ba5 idea but somehow mixed up his lines and played the wrong move over the board.

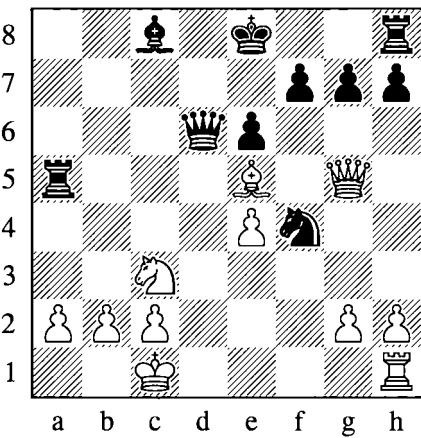
17.f4!

We are still following the stem game, where Morozevich played the most challenging move, either through excellent home preparation or simply being an extremely strong player.

Perhaps surprisingly, the less dangerous 17.Qd5 has been played in two follow-up games. This should lead to a relatively simple draw after 17...Bd7 18.Bxh5 exd5 19.Qxg7 Bg8 20.Bxh7 Bxg7 21.Qxg7 Bxa2= when White has nothing better than taking a perpetual, as occurred in D. Fischer – Haag, Lenzerheide 2018.

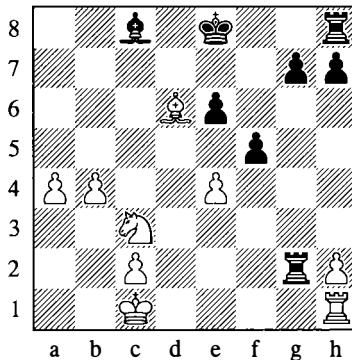
17...Qxf4!

I also analysed 17...Ba6?!N which leads by force to an interesting endgame: 18.Bxh5 0–0 19.b4! g6 20.Be2! Bxe2 21.Qxe2 Bxa2 Engines initially evaluate this endgame as equal, but I consider it to be risk-free for White; and since Black has no clear way to force a draw, my advice would be to avoid it.

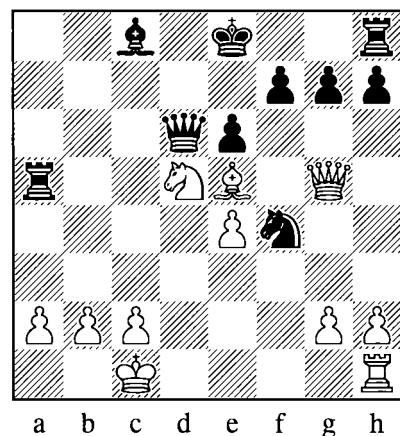
**18.Qd5!**

A spectacular move, which even engines underestimate at first.

18.Qxf4?!N is less threatening, but is nonetheless a playable alternative which is worth considering. My analysis continues: 18...Bxg5 19.Qxd6 Bxg2 20.a4 f5 21.b4



21...Qf7! 22.b5 Bd8 23.e5 White should keep the d-file blocked in order to stop the rook from penetrating to d2. 23...g5 24.a5 g4 25.Qb2 h5 (or 25...f4∞) 26.a6 h4∞ Black has enough counterplay. The ending should be a draw with accurate play, although any result would be possible over the board.

**18...Bc5!N**

I am quite proud of this improvement. Engines evaluate a lot of Black's moves as equal,

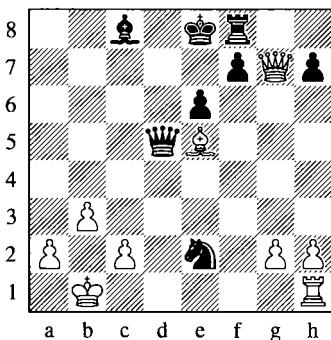
but the text is the most accurate for a practical player, since it limits White's options and virtually forces him to head for a position where he must settle for a draw by perpetual check.

Although it is not relevant to our repertoire, let me show you a few more moves of the game which made such an impression on me:

18...♝e2† 19.♔b1 ♕xd5

19...♕d8? N is an interesting alternative but White obtains a risk-free endgame after the precise sequence: 20.♕xg7! exd5 21.♕xh8† ♔d7 22.♕xh7 d4 23.♕xf7† ♕e7 24.♕f5† ♕e6 25.♕h7† ♕e7 26.♕h3† ♕e6 27.♗xd4 ♕xh3 28.gxh3 Black may be able to hold this endgame with precise play, but it would be a difficult and unpleasant task over the board.

20.exd5 ♕xd5 21.♕xg7 ♕f8 22.b3



22...♝b7

22...f6?! N is another idea but, without going into too many details, I don't consider it a fully adequate solution for a practical player.

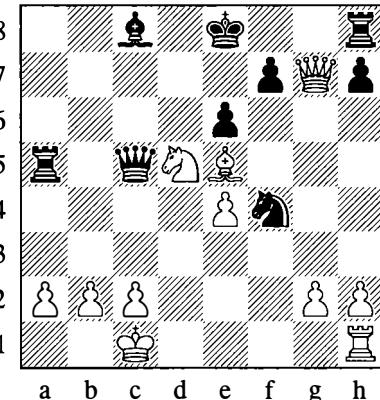
23.♗f1!

Although computers assess the position as equal, I consider it difficult for Black to play over the board, and even the engines change their assessments when going deeper into some lines.

23...♕d2?! 24.♗b2!

White had the advantage and Black was unable to solve his problems in Morozhevich – Bukavshin, Moscow (rapid) 2015.

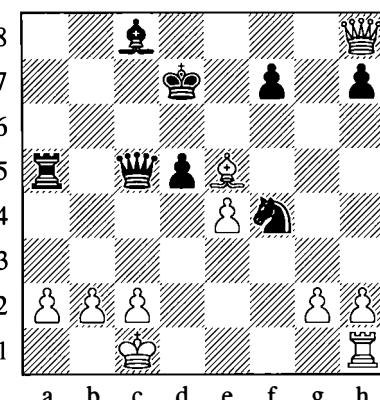
19.♕xg7



19...exd5!

19...♝g6?! is another interesting try but I consider it slightly less accurate in view of: 20.♗f1 (20.b4?! ♕f8 21.bxa5 exd5 22.♕f6?! ≈ also looks like a dangerous try in a practical game) 20...exd5 21.♕xf7† ♔d8 22.♗xh8 ♕xh8 23.♕xh7 ♕xa2 24.♕xh8† Once again we have a position which is equal for a computer but practically easier for White, who has a lot of pawns for the piece. With more precise play, Black can reach similar situations to this, but with more pawns and/or attacking chances.

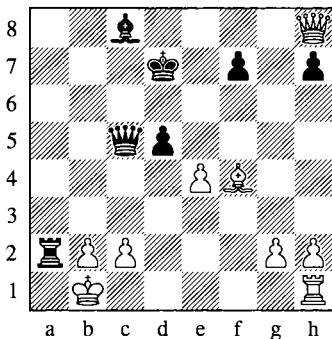
20.♕xh8† ♔d7



The position is highly irregular, and thus quite difficult to analyse and comment upon. Materially speaking, for the moment White has three pawns for a piece, and the black knight is hanging – although as we will soon see, White should definitely not capture it. Taking that into consideration, along with the fact that Black has multiple threats including ... $\mathbb{E}xa2$, ... $\mathbb{Q}g6$, ... $\mathbb{Q}d3\#$ or even just ... $dxe4$, it is obvious that White has to act rapidly in order to continue his attack.

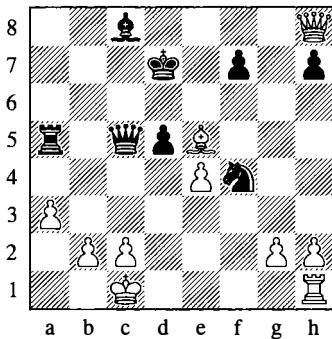
White's two best tries are C1) 21. $\mathbb{E}d1$ and C2) 21. $\mathbb{Q}f6$.

As mentioned above, 21. $\mathbb{Q}xf4??$ is a blunder. The refutation is: 21... $\mathbb{E}xa2$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}b1$



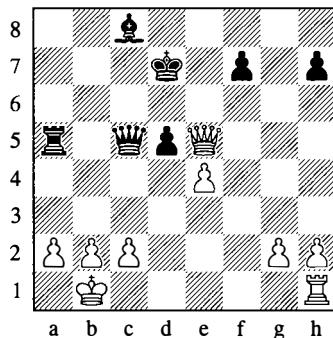
22... $\mathbb{E}a7!$ 23. b3 d4! – With decisive threats against the king.

21.a3?! guards the a-pawn but allows another of the ideas mentioned above:



21... $\mathbb{Q}g6!$ 22. $\mathbb{W}f6$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 23. $\mathbb{W}xe5$ $\mathbb{W}e3\#$
24. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{W}xe4\#$

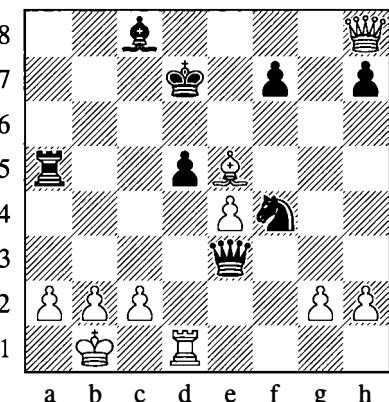
21. $\mathbb{Q}b1$?! avoids the queen check on e3 but nevertheless allows Black to gain some advantage using a similar theme as in the above line: 21... $\mathbb{Q}g6!$ 22. $\mathbb{W}f6$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 23. $\mathbb{W}xe5$



23... d4! An excellent move, keeping the d-file closed in order to force a queen trade. If White moves his queen away somewhere, he will stand much worse after ... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ and ... $\mathbb{Q}e6$. 24. $\mathbb{W}xc5$ $\mathbb{E}xc5$ 25. $\mathbb{E}d1$ $\mathbb{B}h5$ 26. $\mathbb{E}xd4\#$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 27. h3 $\mathbb{E}g5$ 28. g4 (28. $\mathbb{E}d2??$ $\mathbb{Q}xh3\#$) 28... h5 29. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{H}xg4$ 30. $\mathbb{H}xg4$ $\mathbb{E}xg4\#$ Black has some winning chances, as White's pawns are a long way back and the e4-pawn is weak.

C1) 21. $\mathbb{E}d1$ $\mathbb{W}e3\#$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}b1$

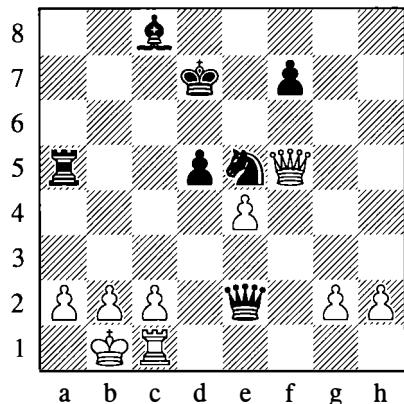
Activating the rook is a natural way to try and develop some pressure against Black's king.



22...♝e2?

22...♝xe4 is playable but it seems to me that White has some practical chances to cause problems for Black's king. Thus I prefer the more aggressive option which forces White's rook to take on a more passive role.

23.♖c1 ♛g6! 24.♕xh7 ♛xe5 25.♕f5†

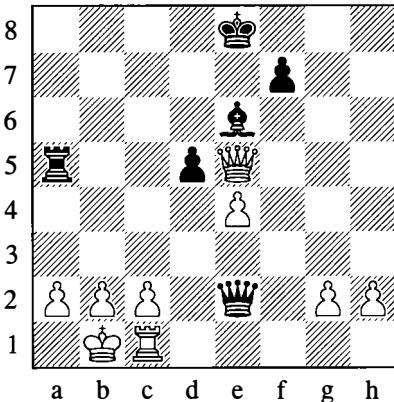
**25...♞d8!**

The alternative is 25...♝d6 to save the knight. I prefer to save the bishop instead, as it is more useful in guarding our king, and can also assist in attacking the a2- and c2-pawns.

26.♕f6†

26.♕xe5 ♜e6! is similar to our main line, but the king is on d8 instead of e8. This way Black's bishop is not pinned, though on the flip side he does not have the option of ...♝c5 due to the check on d6. Play might continue: 27.a3 (or 27.b3 ♛d2! 28.a4 ♘d7∞) 27...♝d7 28.♗c3 ♜a6 29.exd5 ♜xd5 30.g3 ♜c6 31.♕d4 ♜e6∞ White has four pawns for the piece but they are a long way back, and Black has a lot of activity.

26...♝e8 27.♕xe5† ♜e6



The outcome remains uncertain, but it seems to me that Black should be fine and his position is not too difficult to handle, as his attacking ideas against the white king and the pin along the e-file secure him plenty of play. Generally, Black should strive to avoid piece exchanges and create counterplay against c2 or a2, often with the help of a timely ...♜a6. Black's king is a bit exposed but White cannot threaten mate with just his queen, and it is not clear how his rook can be activated. You certainly don't need to memorize any further than this, but I will provide some sample lines anyway for illustrative purposes.

28.b3!

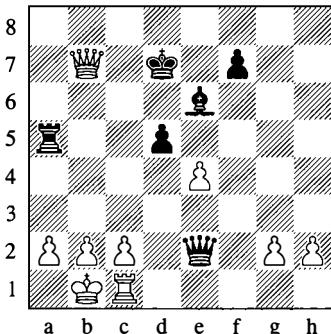
A sensible prophylactic move, which also sets a devious trap.

28.♗c3 ♜a6! is a typical motif, guarding the rook while threatening the a-pawn. Play continues 29.exd5 ♜xd5 30.b3 ♜e2∞ with plenty of activity for Black.

28.♗c7 looks tricky but 28...♜a6! works well again, and after 29.exd5 ♜xa2= White can and must take a draw by perpetual.

28.♗b8† is another idea, intending to give a few checks and force us to make some decisions. 28...♝d7 happens to be forced – but it is still worth pointing out the general rule that when

our rook is on a dark square and unprotected, the king should remain on a light square whenever possible in order to prevent a fork or other tactical accident. Play may continue: 29. $\mathbb{W}b7\uparrow$ (29.b3 dx e4 gives Black a strong passed pawn, so White should accept the draw by perpetual: 30. $\mathbb{W}b7\uparrow$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 31. $\mathbb{W}b8\uparrow$)



29... $\mathbb{Q}e8$! The only move. 30. $\mathbb{W}c6\uparrow$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ This time we go to a dark square, as White has no damaging checks available. 31. $\mathbb{W}b6$ $\mathbb{W}a6!=$ This is a good time to offer a queen trade. The point is that White will not be able to take on d5, as ... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ will create a double attack on g2 and a2.

28... $\mathbb{B}c5!$

The sneaky point of White's last move is revealed after 28... $\mathbb{W}xe4??$ 29. $\mathbb{W}b8\uparrow$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 30. $\mathbb{W}b7\uparrow$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 31. $\mathbb{W}b6!+$ — when Black's rook will soon be lost. After the text move, however, ... $\mathbb{W}xe4$ is a real threat.

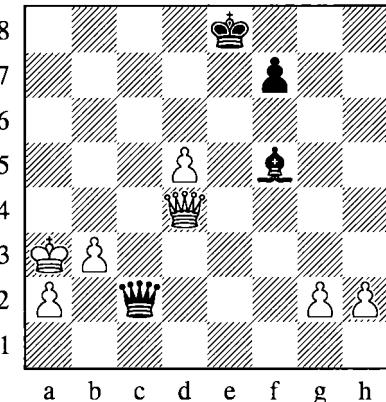
29. $\mathbb{W}d4$

I also checked 29. $\mathbb{W}h8\uparrow$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 30. $\mathbb{W}d4$ $\mathbb{B}c7$ 31. $\mathbb{W}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}f5-$ when the threats against c2 mean that White's king is in danger, so he will have to accept a perpetual.

29... $\mathbb{B}c8$ 30. $\mathbb{W}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}b2!!$

White's only realistic winning chance is to go for an endgame with several pawns against a bishop, but Black has enough resources.

31... $\mathbb{B}xc2\uparrow$ 32. $\mathbb{B}xc2$ $\mathbb{W}xc2\uparrow$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}a3$

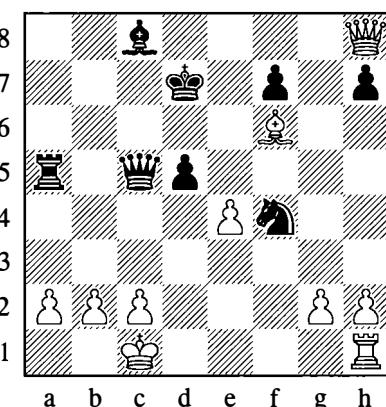


33... $\mathbb{Q}d7!$

Despite the rook exchange, White's king remains uncomfortable on a3. Black's queen is eyeing the pawns on g2 and h2, as well as the perpetual checking plan which occurs after:

34. $\mathbb{g}3$ $\mathbb{W}c1\uparrow$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}b4$ $\mathbb{W}e1\uparrow$ 36. $\mathbb{W}c3$ $\mathbb{W}e7\uparrow=$

C2) 21. $\mathbb{Q}f6$



21... $\mathbb{W}b6!$

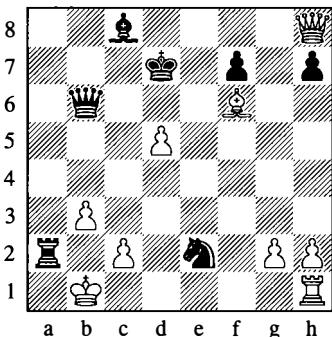
Once again, out of several acceptable moves indicated by the engine, I favour the one which I consider the most practical choice for a human game, as it forces the play and thus

limits White's options. Apart from preventing the threatened check on d8, the queen also sets up attacking motifs against the b2-pawn. This may seem an unlikely weak spot in White's position, until you notice the important motif of ...d4, blocking White's diagonal defence.

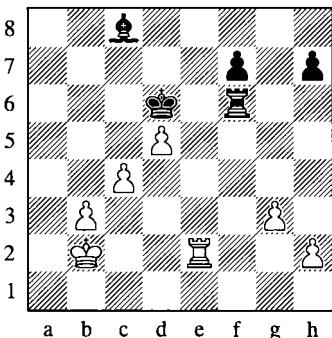
22.♗d1!

22.♗b1?! dxe4! is better for Black.

Black is also happy after: 22.exd5 ♜xa2 Now ...♜a1† is threatened, so the next few moves are forced. 23.b3 ♔e2† 24.♗b1 Here Black has a powerful idea.



24...♜a6! This move creates a double threat and leaves White with only one way to save himself: 25.♖e1! Otherwise Black will either capture the bishop on f6 or play ...♜a5 with a mating attack. 25...♜xf6 26.♜xf6 ♜xf6 27.♜xe2 ♜h6 28.g3 ♔d6 29.c4 ♜f6 30.♗b2



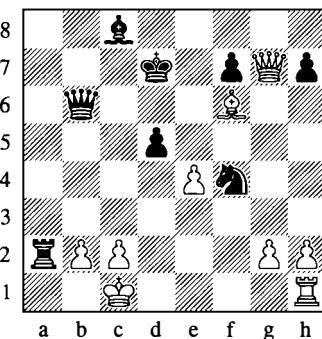
30...♝c5! Blockading the pawns and threatening ...♝b4. A logical finish would be 31.♗a3 ♜a6† 32.♗b2 ♜f6= with a repetition.

Another fairly harmless alternative is:

22.♗g7 ♜xa2

This direct approach should lead to a forced draw.

If Black wishes to keep the game going then 22...♝c6?∞ is an interesting way of doing so.

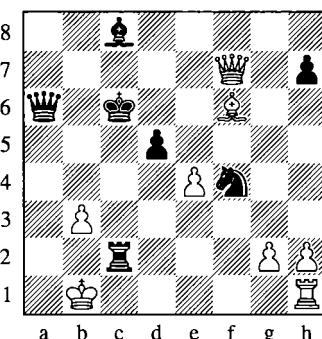


23.♗b1 ♜a6! 24.♗xf7†

24.b3 ♜xc2! draws in the same way.

24...♝c6 25.b3 ♜xc2!

The exposed position of White's king enables Black to check continuously on e2, d3 and a6.

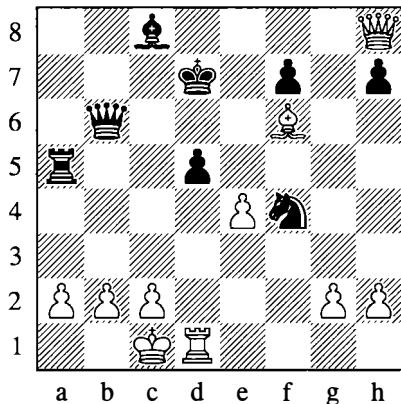


26.♗xc2

26.exd5† ♔xd5 27.♗xc2 ♔f5† 28.♗b2 ♜e2†= is another possible draw.

26... $\mathbb{W}d3\#$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{W}e2\#$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}a1$ $\mathbb{W}a6\#$
 29. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{W}e2\#$ =

With perpetual check.



22... $\mathbb{R}xa2$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}b1$

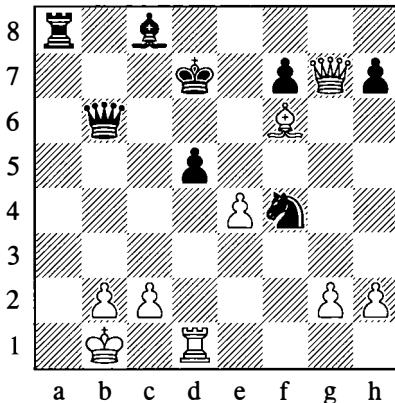
23. $b3$?! is well met by 23... $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 24. $\mathbb{W}g7$ $\mathbb{W}e3\#$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{W}xe4$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{R}a7\#$ with better prospects for Black.

23... $\mathbb{R}a8!$

This is an important detail. In one of the notes above we saw the rook retreat to a6 with good effect, so why choose a different square now? The answer is that White's rook is already actively placed on d1 here, and one of our objectives should be to play ... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ and kick White's queen away. Placing the queen on the a-file to threaten the white king is still our main plan though.

Although it is quite late in the game to expand the variation tree (and you certainly don't have to memorize all the details of what follows), I would like to show some nice ideas after C21) 24. $\mathbb{W}g7$ and C22) 24. $b3$.

C21) 24. $\mathbb{W}g7$



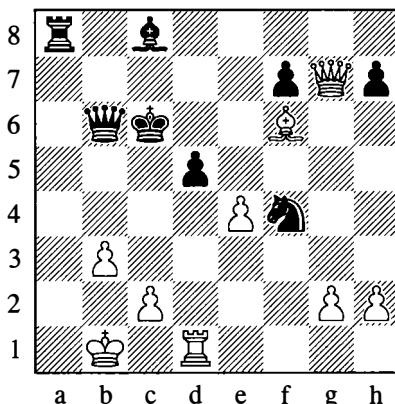
Obviously this threatens to capture on f7 with check – but rather than defending the pawn, we will move our king out of the way and open a path for our bishop.

24... $\mathbb{Q}c6!$ 25. $b3$

White intends to secure his queenside by bringing his bishop to b2.

If 25. $\mathbb{Q}e7$ $\mathbb{Q}e6\#$! Black will place his queen on the a-file, with powerful threats.

25. $\mathbb{W}xf7$ is also ineffective after 25... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 26. $\mathbb{W}e7$ $\mathbb{W}a7!$ when White is forced to exchange queens, leading to a worse ending.



25...♛a6!

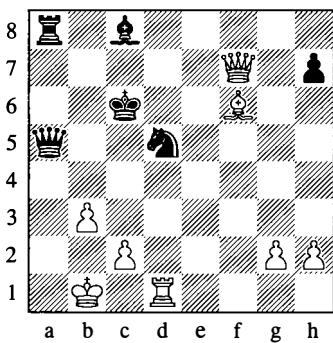
25...♜e6!? is a reasonable move which I analysed out to a drawn endgame, but I find the direct attacking try more attractive.

26.♝b2

The alternative is:

26.exd5† ♜xd5 27.♛xf7 ♛a5!

Black's king may appear exposed due to the lack of pawn cover, but the pieces are doing a great job securing him. Black has covered all the important squares and is now ready to counterattack with ...♝f5.



28.♝b2 ♛f5!

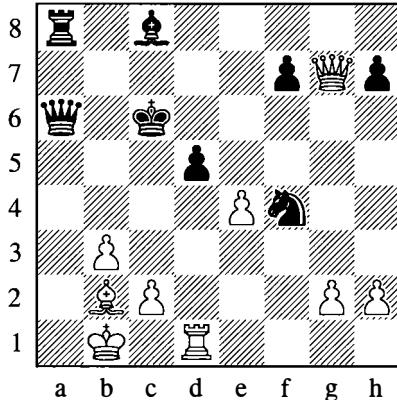
Exploiting a small tactical point: the bishop is indirectly defended by the prospect of ...♞c3† with a discovered attack.

29.♝c1

29.b4 is the other way for White to save himself but 29...♞xb4 leaves his king weak, so he should settle for 30.♛f6† ♜b7 31.♛f7†= with a perpetual.

29...♞e3=

Once again Black is protecting the important squares and intends ...♛c7 followed by hiding the king on b7. In view of the mounting pressure against c2, White should once again take a perpetual while he has the chance.



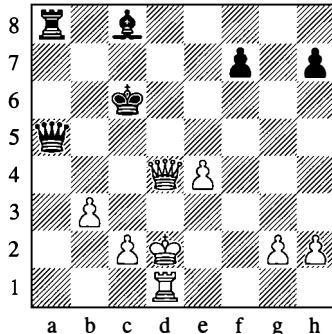
26...♛a2† 27.♝c1 ♜e2† 28.♝d2 d4!

Disrupting the coordination between White's queen and bishop.

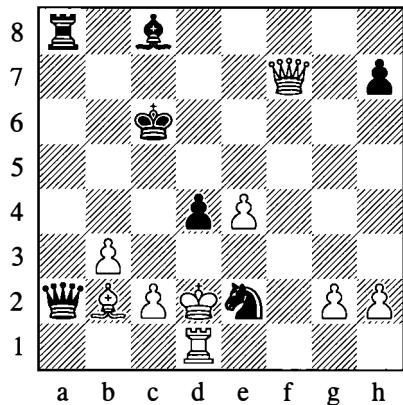
29.♛xf7

If 29.♝a1 ♜xb2 30.♝xa8 ♜c1† 31.♝xe2 ♜e3†= Black makes a perpetual by checking on c1 or g1.

29.♝xd4 is an obvious possibility but 29...♞xd4 30.♛xd4 ♜a5†! turns out well for Black:



31.b4 (31.♝e3 ♜e6 32.♝d6† ♜b7 33.♝e7† ♜c7 forces the queens off, with some winning chances for Black in the endgame) 31...♛b5 32.♝c3 ♜a3† 33.♝b2 ♜a6 34.♝d5† ♜b6! Black has slightly better chances.



29...♛xb2

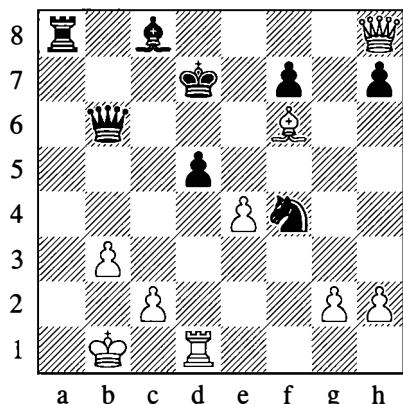
29...♛a5† 30.♗xe2 ♛g4† 31.♗f1 ♛xd1= is an equally valid alternative, when White must force a draw by perpetual.

30.♗d5† ♕c7 31.♗xa8 ♛c3† 32.♗xe2 ♛g4† 33.♗f1 ♛xd1=

White should take the perpetual while he has the chance.

C22) 24.b3

This is a logical attempt to defend with the bishop and/or queen on the long diagonal.



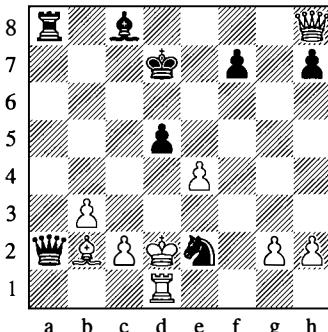
24...♛a5

Other moves are certainly playable, but attacking along the a-file is my preferred plan.

I will present some sample lines showing what I consider Black's most important plans and resources.

25.♗xh7

25.♗b2 can be adequately met by: 25...♛a2† 26.♔c1 ♔e2†! 27.♔d2



27...d4! An important motif, eliminating White's bishop. 28.♗xd4 (or 28.♗xh7 ♛xb2= and White must force a draw) 28...♔xd4 29.♗xd4† ♔e8 30.♗h8† ♔e7= Again, White has nothing better than perpetual check.

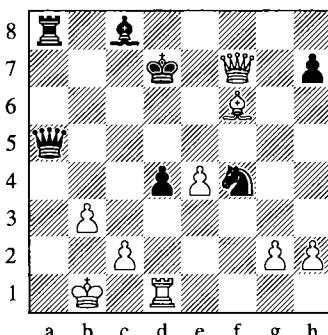
The same motif also arises after:

25.♗g7 d4!

Once again shutting down White's dark-squared bishop.

26.♗xf7†

After 26.♗xd4 ♛a2† 27.♔c1 ♔e2† 28.♔d2 ♔xd4 29.♗xd4† ♔e8= we threaten ...♔e6 followed by activating our rook, so White has no real choice but to take the draw.

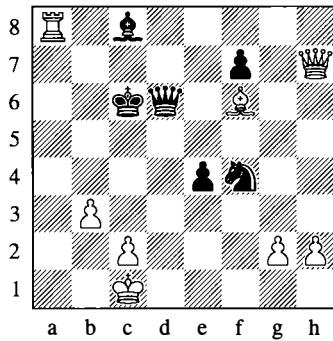


26...♝c6 27.♛c4† ♜b7

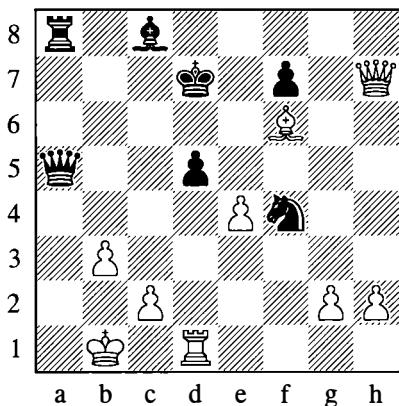
With the king safe, Black is ready to focus on counterattacking. Apart from the immediate threat of mate on a1, he is also ready to develop his bishop with gain of tempo.

28.♕xd4 ♜e6 29.♕c5 ♜xc5 30.♕xc5 ♜xg2

The endgame should be a draw, but Black has chances to press for a win by targeting White's pawns placed on light squares.

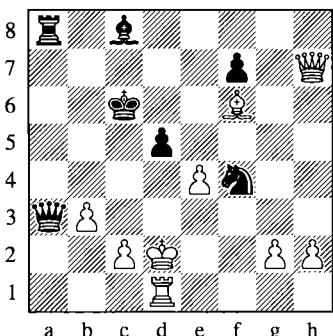


30...♝e2† 31.♔b1 ♛d1† 32.♔b2 ♛c1†
33.♔a2 ♜xc2† 34.♔a3 ♜e6!= Black will force a draw by checking on c1 or c5 next.



25...♛a2† 26.♔c1 ♛a3† 27.♔b2

27.♔d2 ♜c6! is a familiar way to safeguard the king. My line continues:

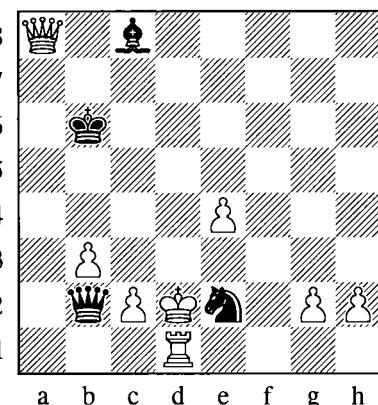


28.♖a1 ♛d6 29.♖xa8 dxec4† 30.♔c1 (30.♔e1
♜xg2† 31.♔f1 ♛xf6† 32.♔xg2 ♛f3†= is another perpetual)

27...♝e2†! 28.♔d2 ♛xb2

Eliminating the bishop is a useful achievement. White's rook is blocked by his king, and his queen can only achieve a certain amount working alone.

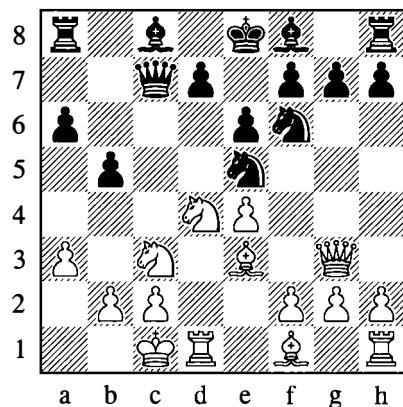
29.♛xf7† ♜c6! 30.♕xd5† ♜b6 31.♛xa8



31...♛c3† 32.♔xe2 ♜a6† 33.♔f2 ♛xc2†
34.♔g3 ♛xb3†=

Black will pick up the rook next, with a drawn endgame.

D) 10.a3!?



This seemingly unassuming move was introduced by Borisek in 2016 and it has picked up an increasing number of followers in the past year or so. I guess this is due to a number of factors: MVL used it to win a fine game over Anand in April 2018, and GM Shaw subsequently recommended it as a secondary option for White in *Playing 1.e4 – Sicilian Main Lines*. Lastly and most importantly, it is simply a good move! White stabilizes the position of the knight on c3, making the e4-pawn more secure. More concretely, it sets up a tricky idea of taking on b5.

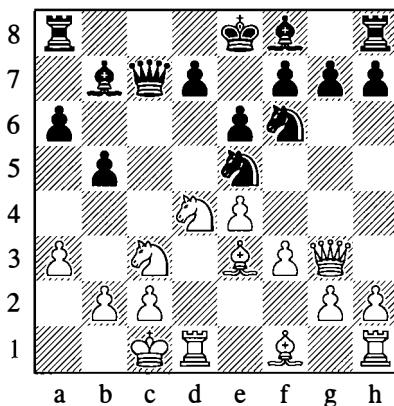
10...♝b7

This is the only really acceptable continuation.

10...h5? was played in the stem game, Borisek – Ribli, Slovenia 2016, when White overlooked 11.♗f4!N d6. From here, Shaw points out that 12.♗xb5†!± leads to a big advantage for White. I would like to add that even if this tactical shot had not been available, a more measured continuation such as 12.♗g5!? ♝b8 13.f4 ♞ed7 14.e5!↑ would also have been good enough to show that the early ...h5 is too weakening in this particular variation.

White has two serious options: D1) 11.f3!?

D1) 11.f3!?



Shaw recommended this as a novelty, and it received a practical test not long before this book went to print.

11...♝c8

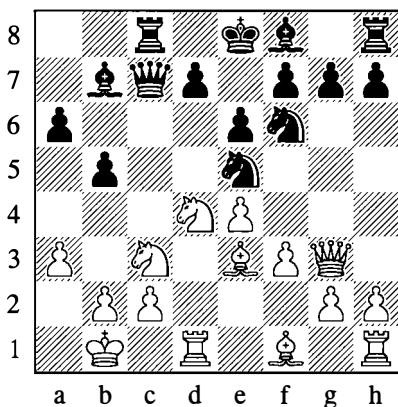
This logical developing move threatens ...♗xa3.

I spent many hours analysing 11...♝h5!? in great depth, and perhaps got a bit too carried away with the many beautiful possibilities that may arise for both sides. The average player has no need to study in such depth for a variation which has still never been played, so we will stick to the more straightforward approach.

12.♗b1

12.♗f4 achieves nothing after 12...d6, when ...♝h5 is threatened. 13.♗g5 is therefore logical, but after 13...♝fd7!‡ Black is gathering his forces on the queenside, while White's kingside attack is several tempos away from materializing.

Here I found an interesting new idea.

**12...h5! N**

It is important to point out that 12...♝xa3? does not work. Play continues 13.bxa3 ♜xc3 14.♗xe5 ♜xe3 when the value of White's 12th move becomes clear, as he is not in check. This enables him to go on the attack with 15.♘f5!, hitting both the queen and the g7-pawn, with big problems for Black.

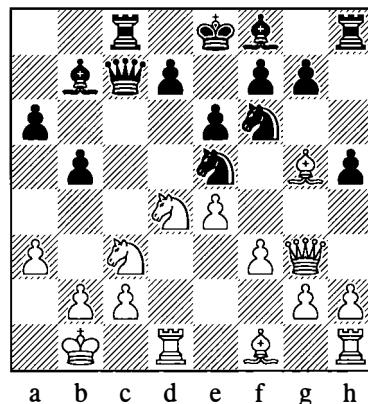
The recent game continued 12...♝c4?! 13.♝xc4 ♜xc4?! (13...bxc4 looks better although I do not fully trust Black's position) 14.♝b3± when Black suffered from dark-square weaknesses in Banik – Mishra, Charlotte 2019.

Shaw mainly focused on 12...♝h5! N, a sensible option which resembles the 11...♝h5! idea mentioned earlier.

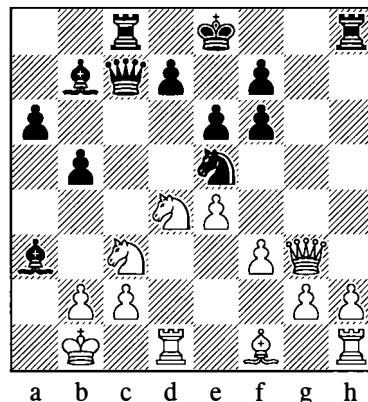
13.♝g5

13.♗h4 prevents the further advance of the h-pawn but leaves White's kingside structure more rigid than he would like. A logical continuation is 13...♝c4! when Black has an improved version of the Banik – Mishra game, not least because White's queen is undefended. Play continues 14.♗xc7 ♜xc7 15.♝xc4 ♜xc4! when Black has a decent version of a thematic Sicilian endgame.

The text move looks natural but Black can carry out his plan regardless:

**13...h4! 14.♝xh4 ♜xa3!**

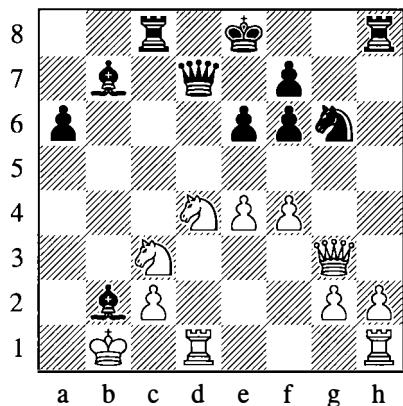
There are two reasons why it was necessary to lure White's bishop to h4 before taking on a3. Firstly, White does not have the winning reply of ♜f4 available; and secondly, in the event that Black takes on a3 and meets ...♜xc3 with ♜xe5, the bishop will be hanging on h4. Instead, best play continues:

15.♝xf6 gxsf6**16.f4 ♜g6 17.♝xb5! ♜xb2! 18.♝xd7†**

In the event of 18.♝xb2 axb5 19.♝dxb5 ♜b6→ White's king looks unsafe. Black will

continue with ...♗a6 and ...♗f8 (or ...♗e7), with a lot of attacking potential.

18...♝xd7



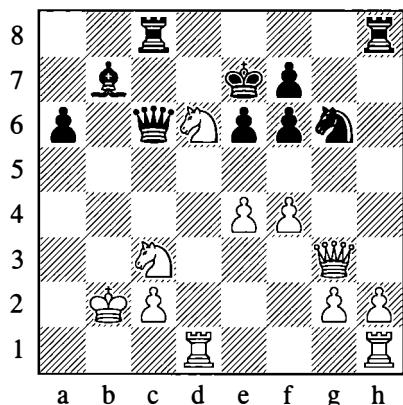
19.♗db5 ♜c6 20.♗d6† ♜e7!?

This is the most ambitious option, sacrificing the exchange in an attempt to seize the initiative.

20...♝f8 is a safe alternative.

21.♗xb2

White can also take the material immediately with 21.♗xc8† ♜xc8 22.♗xb2 ♜b6† 23.♗c1, and now 23...♜c5 transposes to the end of our main line below, while 23...♜a5!?? is another decent option.



21...♝b6† 22.♗c1 ♜c5!

22...♜a5 is playable, but it has the minor drawback of allowing 23.♗b1!? ♜c7 with unclear play, whereas the text move prevents this option.

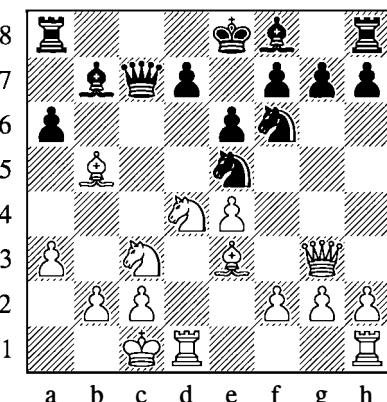
23.♗xc8†

23.♗d3 gives Black a few good options, including a guaranteed draw with 23...♜a3† 24.♗b1 (24.♗d2?? ♜xc3–+) 24...♜b4† if he wants it.

23...♜xc8=

The position is objectively equal but I would prefer Black's side due to his initiative and safer king.

D2) 11.♗xb5!?



This move poses a serious threat. Interestingly, Shaw mentioned it briefly in *Playing 1.e4 – Sicilian Main Lines*, but rejected it after finding no advantage against the move I recommend below – which was given as a novelty in the above book, but has since been tested in several games, highlighting the fact that this is a topical, up-and-coming variation.

11...♜c8!

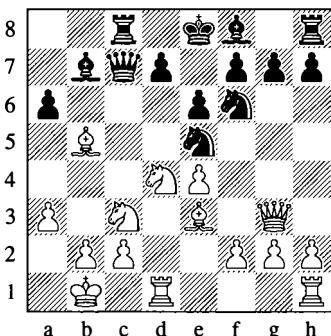
The only good move.

Please note that Black must avoid 11...axb5? on account of 12.♕dxb5 ♘b8 13.♗b6!± when the c7-square cannot be protected, as first seen in Hector – Johansson, Gothenburg 2018.

11...♗xa3? is another move which leads to nothing but pain for Black: 12.♗f4 ♗d6 13.♗xe6 fxe6 14.♗xd6! ♘xd6 15.♗xe5 ♘e7 16.♗d6 ♘f7 17.♗d3 ♜c8 18.f3! (most accurate, although 18.♗e1 ♘g6 19.♗e3± was also good enough in Admiraal – Leenhouts, Belgium 2017) 18...♜c6 19.♗a3+– Frolyanov – Khanin, Kazan 2017.

I analysed two serious options for White: D21) 12.♗e2?!N and D22) 12.♗a4.

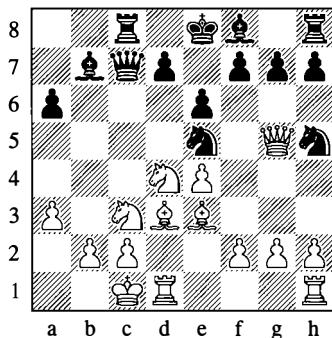
12.♗b1?! runs into a surprising riposte:



12...h5! Black will continue with either ...h4 or ...♝eg4, with a preferable position. (The immediate 12...♝eg4 allows 13.♗xd7†! ♘xd7 14.♗db5; with the pawn on h5, we would simply be able to recapture on d7 with the knight, as the g4-knight would be defended. Please also note that 12...axb5? is still not an option in view of 13.♗dxb5 ♘c4 [13...♞b8? 14.♗a7! ♘a8 15.♗xe5+–] and now 14.♗d4!± is most accurate, although even the prosaic 14.♗xe5 gives White a clear advantage.)

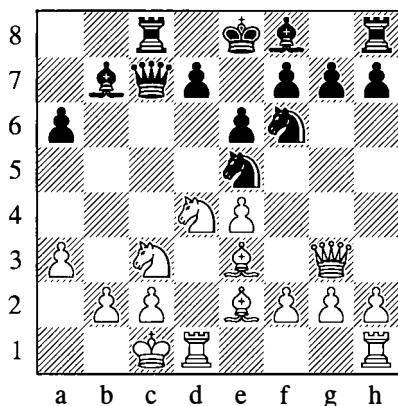
12.♗d3 has only been played once, in Gantner – Jakslsland, Porto Carras 2018. Black's cleanest

reply looks to be: 12...♝h5!N 13.♗g5 (after 13.♗h3 ♘f6 White has nothing better than repeating moves)



13...g6. 14.♗f4 f5! Giving up a piece in order to rob the white queen of an escape route. The point is revealed after: 15.♗xe5 (15.♗xf5? ♘e5 forces White to give up the queen for insufficient compensation) 15...♝e7 16.♗h6 ♘f8= With a perpetual attack on the queen.

D21) 12.♗e2?!N

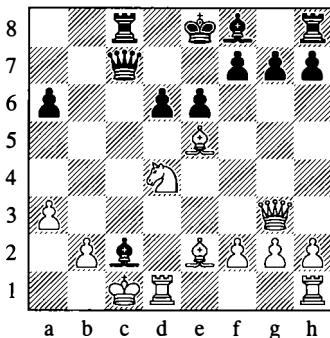


This may be a novelty but when I first analysed this variation (at which point 11...♜c8! was still a novelty), this seemed like the most natural move to me.

12...♝eg4!!

It was far from easy to find this fantastic move. Rather than grabbing the e4-pawn to equalize the material balance, Black strives to seize the initiative.

12...♝xe4 looks natural but I found a problem in the following forcing line: 13.♝xe4 ♜xe4
14.♞f4! ♜xc2! 15.♝xe5 d6



16.♝b5!! ♜a5 17.♞a7 ♜xd1† 18.♝xc8 ♜xe2
19.♝xd6† ♜xd6 20.♝xd6± Material is level but White keeps a slight initiative due to Black's more exposed king.

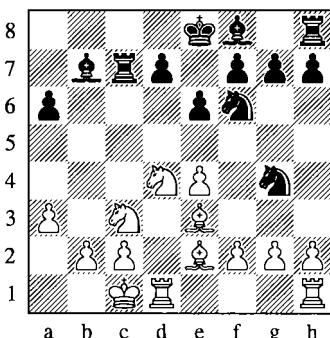
13.♝f4

13.f4? ♜xa3! is trouble for White.

13.e5?! is not stupid although 13...♝xe5 gives Black equal play, since 14.♝f4 d6 is no problem.

White's other obvious idea is:

13.♛xc7 ♜xc7



Black has at least enough compensation for the pawn. He is poised to exchange on e3, when he will benefit from the bishop pair and from White's poor structure. Here are some sample lines:

14.♝xg4

In the event of 14.♝f3 ♜c5! 15.h3 ♜xe3 16.fxe3 d6 17.♞d3 ♜e7∞ White looks stuck for a plan, whereas Black's play flows easily, with ...♝hc8 and ...♝d7 coming soon.

14.e5 ♜xe3 15.fxe3 ♜xc3! is a nice exchange sacrifice; after 16.bxc3 ♜e4 Black has full compensation, with multiple threats such as ...♜xa3†, ...♝xc3 and ...♝f2.

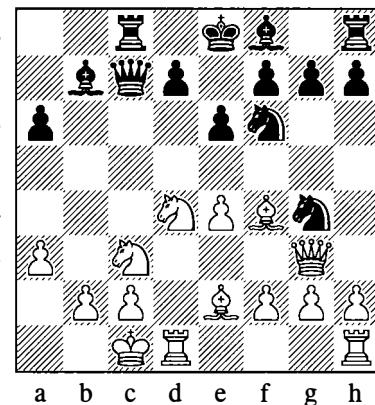
14...♝xg4 15.♝he1 ♜xa3!

This demonstrates another typical tactical motif. A possible continuation is:

16.♞d5?! exd5 17.♝f4 ♜c4 18.exd5† ♜d8 19.bxa3 ♜xf2 20.♝d2 ♜xd5

White is a pawn down, with enough activity for equality, but nothing more.

The text move leads to interesting tactical play after:

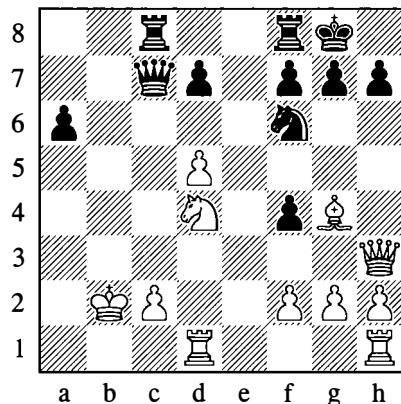


13...e5 14.♝xg4 exf4 15.♛h3 ♜xa3!
16.♞d5?

This seems like the only move which might offer White some initiative, but I still like Black's chances after:

16...♜xb2† 17.♝xb2 ♜xd5 18.exd5 0–0

Black has just one pawn for the piece, but White's king will not feel safe for a long time.



19.♗d3 h5!!

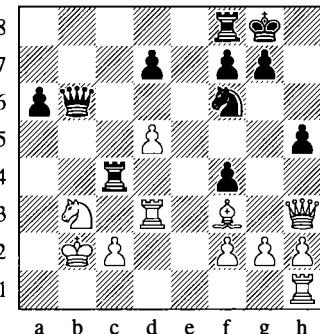
Black has other playable moves but this computer suggestion made a strong impression on me. The subtle point is that White must sacrifice his coordination, since every bishop move has a drawback of some kind.

It is worth noting that 19...♝e4? is strongly met by 20.♞f5!. This helps to explain the text move, as several of White's replies enable ...♝e4 under more favourable circumstances.

20.♕xh5

Taking the pawn seems critical. I checked three other options:

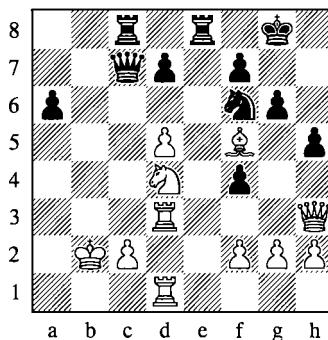
20.♗f3?! ♘b6† 21.♔b3 ♘c4 gives Black easy attacking play, for instance:



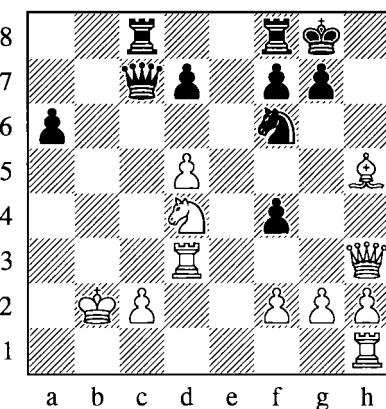
22.♗a1 ♘fc8 23.♗d1 ♘e4 24.♗xh5 ♘xf2
White remains under pressure.

20.♗e2 leaves the e4-square unprotected, and after 20...♝e4 21.♗f3 ♘e5! 22.♗xh5 f5† Black will continue with doubling on the c-file.

20.♞f5 guards the e4-square but 20...g6 traps the bishop while White's king remains weak. Nevertheless, White can maintain the balance as follows: 21.♗hd1! ♘fe8! Black is preparing two moves in advance. He intends to capture on f5 and follow up with ...♝e4, using his knight to assist with the attack on White's king.



22.♗c1 gxh5 23.♗h4 (23.♗xf5 ♘e4 24.♗e1 ♘xf2 25.♗xe8† ♘xe8= leads to the same type of draw) 23...♝e4 24.f3 ♘c3 25.♗g5†= White can and must deliver perpetual check.



20... $\mathbb{Q}e4$

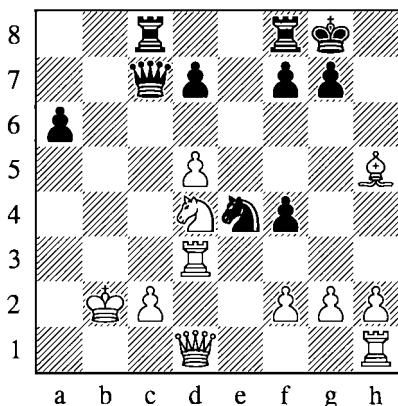
Let me remind you that the main purpose of the ... $h5$ move was to be able to activate the knight in this way without allowing $\mathbb{Q}f5$ in response.

21. $\mathbb{W}f3$

21. $\mathbb{E}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ 22. $\mathbb{W}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}xd3\#$ 23. $\mathbb{W}xd3$ $\mathbb{W}d6$ should be equal according to the computer, although White has the trickier task due to his exposed king.

21... $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 22. $\mathbb{W}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$

If White wants to avoid a repetition after 23. $\mathbb{W}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}g5$, he will have to defend f2 in a different way.

**23. $\mathbb{W}f1$ $\mathbb{E}b8\#!$**

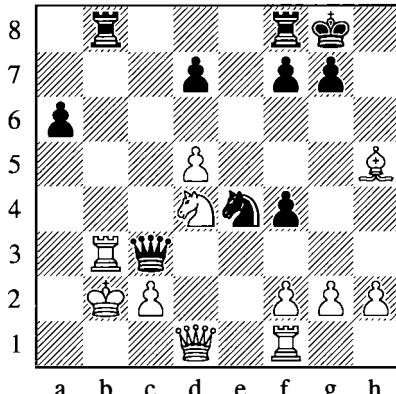
Taking advantage of the fact that White's queen has left the 3rd rank and the c3-square is weak.

24. $\mathbb{B}b3$

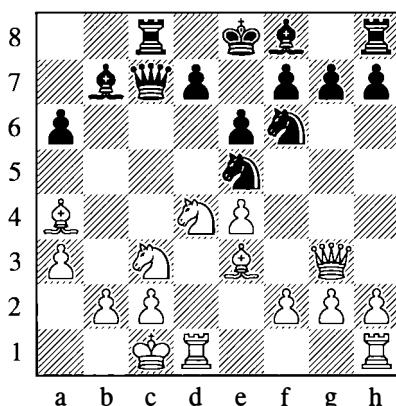
24. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ can be met by 24...a5 when it is hard to see how White can avoid giving back material after ...a4.

24... $\mathbb{W}c3\#!$

This move is the reason why it was important to drive White's queen away from the 3rd rank.

**25. $\mathbb{Q}a2$ $\mathbb{W}a5\#$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{W}c3\#$ =**

With a perpetual. (In the final position, Black could also consider 26... $\mathbb{Q}d2?$ as a double-edged attempt to play for more.)

D22) 12. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ 

This has been played in most of the games so far. The bishop overprotects c2 while exerting pressure against the d7-pawn and the black king behind it. Unlike the previous variation, Black has nothing better than capturing the e4-pawn here.

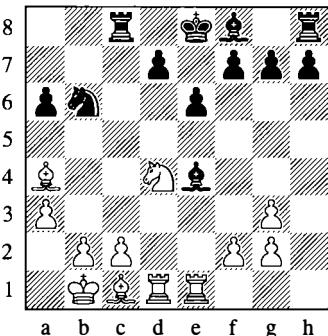
12... $\mathbb{Q}xe4$

12... $\mathbb{Q}xa3$ is not a disaster, although 13. $\mathbb{Q}de2!$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ gave White a slight

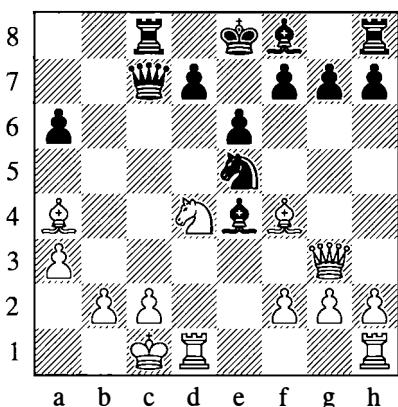
edge in Le Quang Liem – Munguntuul, Isle of Man 2018.

13.♕xe4 ♜xe4 14.♗f4

I also considered 14.♗b1?!N when 14...♝c4! is an easy, effective way to trade the queens. My analysis continues: 15.♗c1 ♜xg3 16.hxg3 ♜b6?! 17.♗he1



17...♝xa4 (17...♝g6?! is an alternative if Black wants to avoid simplifications, but my personal view is that Black's position becomes safer when the light-squared bishops are gone) 18.♗xe4 d5 19.♗e3 ♜c5 Black will continue with ...g6, ...♝e7 (or ...♝g7) and ...h5, then look for a suitable way to activate the h8-rook. It is clear that White's pawn majority on the queenside is paralysed for the time being.



14...♝a5!

14..♝c4 was played by Anand against MVL, as well as in a few subsequent games, all of which transposed to our main line after 15.♗xe5 ♜xa4. However, I would prefer not give White the extra option of 15.♗b3?!N and therefore consider the text move to be more accurate.

15.♗xe5

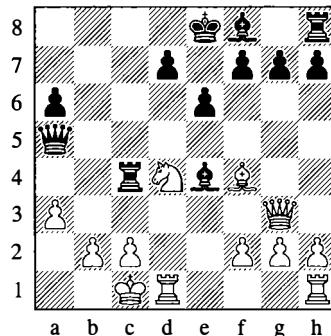
It is also worth mentioning:

15.♗b3

This move is less threatening with the queen on a5, since Black can now continue with:

15...♝c4! 16.♗xc4 ♜xc4

Given the chance, Black will play ...♝c5 and preserve the bishop pair, so the following move looks logical:



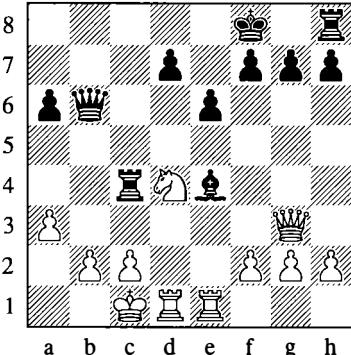
17.♗d6 ♜b6

This provides an easy route to equality, but perhaps Black should aim for more with 17...f6?!, intending ...♝f7 followed by bringing the h8-rook into play.

18.♗xf8 ♜xf8 19.♗he1

19.c3 h5! looks preferable for Black, who intends ...h4 to activate his rook. His bishop will either retreat to g6 or be supported by ...d5, and his king will find safety by walking to h7.

The text is White's best move but it allows a forced draw after:

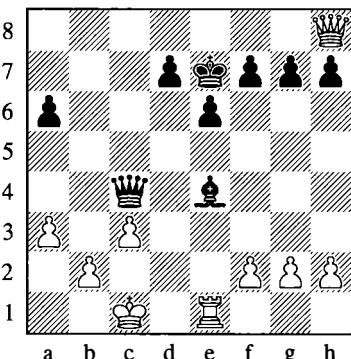


19... $\mathbb{B}xd4$ 20. $\mathbb{B}xd4$ $\mathbb{W}xd4$ 21. $\mathbb{W}b8\#$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$
22. $\mathbb{W}xh8$ $\mathbb{W}c4!$

This is the cleanest way to force the draw.
22... $\mathbb{W}xf2$ is also adequate: after 23. $\mathbb{B}xe4$ $\mathbb{W}f1\#$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{W}xg2\#$ = White has a lot of moves, all of which lead to a perpetual.

23. $c3!$

23. $\mathbb{B}xe4?$! $\mathbb{W}xe4$ 24. $b4$ $\mathbb{W}xg2$ 25. $\mathbb{W}xh7$ $\mathbb{W}g5\#$ has the potential to be dangerous only for White.



23... $\mathbb{W}d3!$ 24. $\mathbb{B}xe4$ $\mathbb{W}xe4$

The difference is that White has included the move $c2-c3$ and his king is not in a mating net anymore.

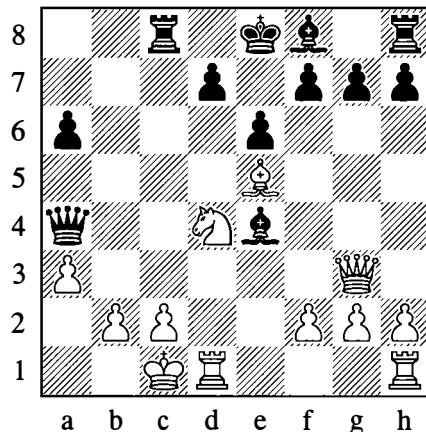
25. $\mathbb{W}xg7$ $\mathbb{W}e1\#$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{W}xf2\#$ =

Material is equal and the game seems likely to end in perpetual check, one way or another.

15... $\mathbb{W}xa4$

This position has been tested in several games, the first of which involved MVL and

Anand. I believe that the following several moves are the best for both sides, and I find it really impressive how these two great players were able to find so many accurate moves, since they were the first to test this line and were presumably out of preparation by this point.



16. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $f6$!

Black has also tried 16... $h5$ and 16... $\mathbb{Q}g6$, but I prefer Anand's move.

17. $\mathbb{Q}d6$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 18. $\mathbb{B}e1$

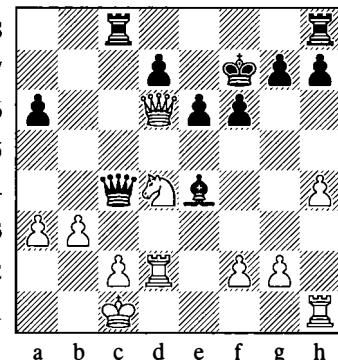
18. $\mathbb{Q}xf8N$ has not been played but it is likely to transpose to the main line anyway.

I also analysed:

18. $h4!?$ N

An interesting idea, directed against Black's $\mathbb{Q}g6$ move.

18... $\mathbb{W}c4$ 19. $b3$ $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 20. $\mathbb{W}xd6$



20...♛c3! 21.♔b1!

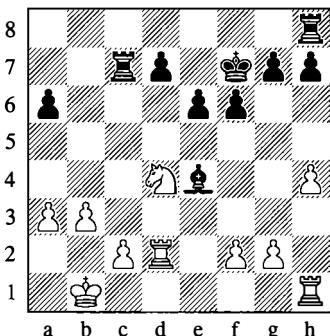
21.♕xd7?? ♔g6 22.♔b1 ♕cd8 wins for Black.

21...♛c7

21...♛xd2?? loses the queen to 22.♕xd7† ♔g6 23.h5† followed by a knight check with a discovered attack.

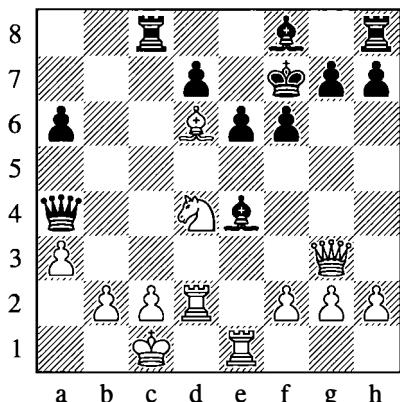
22.♕xc7 ♕xc7

The point of Black's queen shuffle is that White's king is slightly worse on b1 than c1. Play might continue:



23.f3 ♘b7 24.♖hd1 ♘hc8 25.♘b2 g6!

The endgame remains double-edged, but I like Black's active prospects with ...e5 and ...d5.



18...♝g6 19.♗xf8

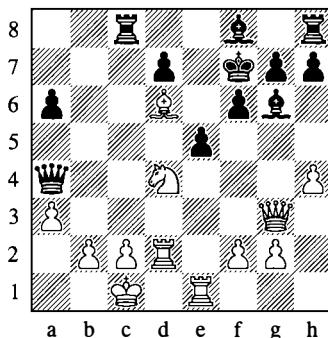
White has made this exchange in all three games from this position, but it is not the only reasonable option.

19.♗ee2 allows Black to play in a similar fashion to the previous note: 19...♛c4!N (this is better than 19...e5?!, which occurred in Vachier-Lagrange – Harikrishna, Germany 2019) 20.b3 ♜c3 21.♕xc3 ♜xc3 22.♗xf8 ♜xf8 Intending ...♜fc8, with ...e5 and ...d5 to follow.

19.h4?N

This is quite a challenging option, playing against the bishop on g6. Black must continue actively with:

19...e5!



20.b3!

20.♗xf8?! exd4 21.b3 ♜b5 22.♗b4 a5! is better for Black.

20...♛a5! 21.♗h3?!

After 21.b4 ♜a4 22.♗xf8 ♘xf8 23.♗b3 ♜xb3 24.♗xb3 ♘e7! Black will play ...d6 and double his rooks on the c-file.

21...♛c3! 22.♕xc3

22.♕xd7†? does not work due to 22...♝g8! when White has too many pieces under attack: 23.♗d3 ♜xe1† 24.♔b2 exd4 25.♕xc8 ♜e8 26.♕xe8 ♘xe8 27.♗xd4 g5!† Black has good winning chances; his plan will be to create a passed pawn on the kingside as quickly as possible.

22...♜xc3 23.♕xf8 ♜xf8 24.♗e2 ♜c7

Once again Black has a safe endgame and will carry out the usual plan of ...♜fc8 and ...d5.

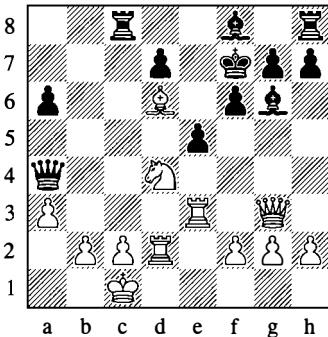
Finally, White's most interesting alternative is the following prophylactic move:

19. $\mathbb{E}e3!?$ N

Since one of Black's main ideas in the above lines was to play ... $\mathbb{W}c4$ and meet b2-b3 with ... $\mathbb{W}c3$ to trade queens, it is quite logical to guard the c3-square.

19...e5!

Once again we continue with this active plan.

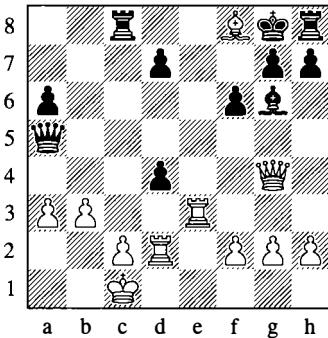


20.b3 $\mathbb{W}a5$ 21. $\mathbb{W}g4$!

21. $\mathbb{W}h3?$ has a similar idea but is less accurate, since White's queen will be left out of play after: 21... $\mathbb{Q}g8!$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xf8$ exd4 23. $\mathbb{Q}b4$ dxе3!

24. $\mathbb{Q}xa5$ exd2† 25. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{E}xc2$ †

21... $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xf8$ exd4



23. $\mathbb{Q}b4!$ dxе3! 24. $\mathbb{Q}xa5$ exd2† 25. $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ $\mathbb{E}xc2$ †

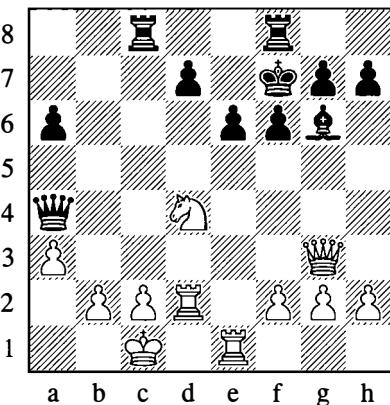
26. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{E}c5$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}d4$!

This is why the queen had to go to g4 rather than h3 earlier.

27... $\mathbb{E}e5\infty$

We reach a double-edged endgame. I don't believe that White can claim any advantage, as Black will quickly get coordinated with ...h5 and ... $\mathbb{Q}h7$, and White's king is a bit exposed.

19... $\mathbb{E}hxg8$



20. $\mathbb{W}d6$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 21. $f4$

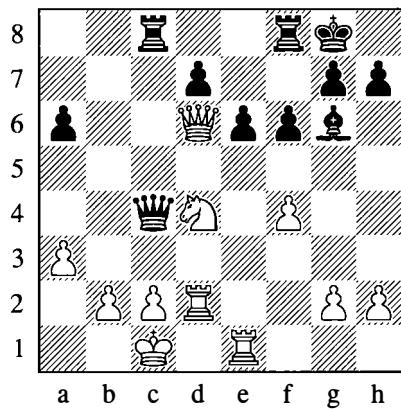
21. $\mathbb{W}b4?N$ is an interesting alternative but after 21... $\mathbb{W}xb4$ 22. axb4 $\mathbb{E}c7$ I don't see a realistic way for White to advance his queenside pawns. Play may continue 23.c3 $\mathbb{E}b8$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{E}b6$ when Black intends ... $\mathbb{Q}f7$ and ...d5, mobilizing his central majority.

21... $\mathbb{W}c4!$

Finally we deviate from Anand's play! I analysed this as a novelty but it was played in a 2019 game (referenced below), not long before the book went to print.

21... $\mathbb{E}fe8$ 22. $\mathbb{E}e3\pm$ reached a position which, in the post-game press conference, Vachier-Lagrave described as offering White has a slight but pleasant edge. The game continued 22... $\mathbb{W}c4$ 23. b3 $\mathbb{W}c7$ 24. $\mathbb{W}xc7$ $\mathbb{E}xc7$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{E}b8$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}g4!$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 27. a4± and White eventually converted his advantage in Vachier-Lagrave – Anand, Karlsruhe/Baden-Baden 2018. The difference between this and some of the

endgames in the earlier notes is that here White has already established a bind with f2-f4, which prevents Black from mobilizing his central majority with ...e5.



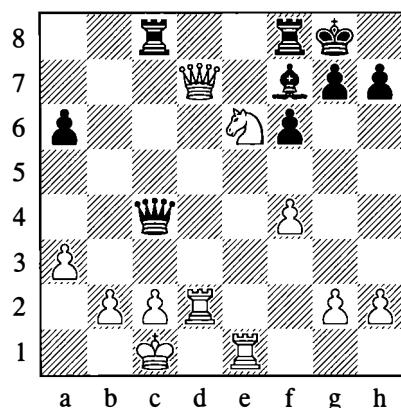
22.♝xd7

22.♗b1? allows a tactical refutation:
22...e5! 23.fxe5 fxe5 24.♘f3 (24.♕xe5?? ♜ce8–+) 24...♜xc2†+

22...♝f7

I also analysed 22...♗h8N and found it to be playable. White has a choice between 23.♘xe6?, which should lead to a forced draw, and 23.♗b1, which keeps the game going but is also ultimately equal.

23.♘xe6



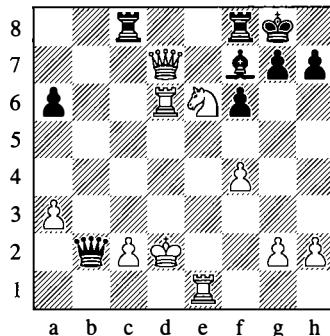
23...♛a2!?

23...♝fe8 was fine for Black in Vignesh – Nandhidhaa, Ho Chi Minh City 2019, but I prefer the text move, which I analysed for this book some time before that game took place. Black plays for direct threats against the enemy king.

24.♝d3

In the event of 24.♝de2 ♛a1† 25.♗d2 ♜xb2 White has nothing better than 26.♘xf8, when 26...♛c3† followed by 27...♛a1†= is a perpetual.

24.♝d6?! is playable but risky, and after 24...♛a1† 25.♗d2 ♜xb2 White has to find an only move:



26.♘c6! ♜xc6 27.♛xc6 Now 27...♝e8!?

∞ would be my choice, with some initiative for the pawn. White's king is unlikely to feel safe for a long time. (Black also has the option of forcing a draw: 27...♝d8† 28.♗d2 ♜d4† 29.♗c1 [29.♗e2?? loses the queen after 29...♝c4† 30.♗f3 ♜d5†–+] 29...♛a1†=)

24...♛a1†

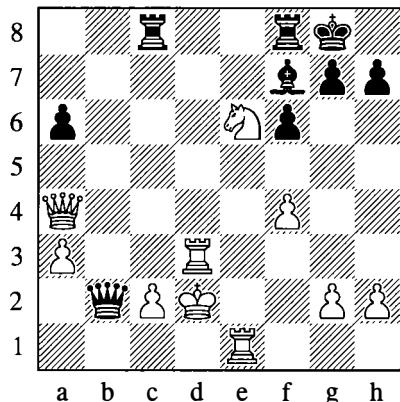
24...♝fe8 25.f5 would transpose to Vignesh – Nandhidhaa as referenced above.

25.♗d2 ♜xb2

Once again, White has to find an only move in order to stay alive.

26.♕a4!

The only acceptable way to defend the c2-pawn.

**26...♗g6!**

The most direct approach.

27.♘xf8 ♖xd3 28.♗xd3 ♜c3† 29.♗e2 ♘xf8=

Black will at least pick up the c2-pawn to reach a level endgame.

Conclusion

7.♗f3 can be regarded as the ultimate main line against the Taimanov these days. White develops actively and aggressively, and has a variety of attacking plans at his disposal. I recommend an active set-up with 7...♘f6 8.0–0–0 ♘e5 9.♗g3 b5, when White has a number of choices. Leaving aside the main line of 10.f4, which will be covered in the final two chapters, we have dealt with four other options in these pages.

10.♗f3 is playable, but after 10...d6 11.♗xe5 dxe5 the doubling of the e-pawns is not much of an achievement for White, and Black has no problem equalizing (at least) in all the variations we looked at. Next was 10.♗dxb5?!, which leads to some interesting tactics but has been reliably analysed out to an equal endgame.

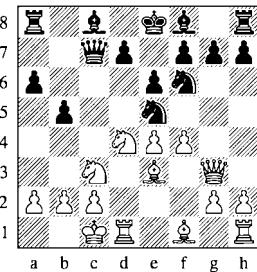
10.♗xb5?! has attracted surprisingly few followers, despite a highly impressive win by Morozевич in the original game from 2015. Black has enough resources to maintain the balance, although the analysis runs pretty deep and both sides should know their lines well if they are to avoid falling into difficulties.

Finally, 10.a3?! is a recently trendy option which has been scoring well for White. 10...♘b7 is the best response, when White has two main ideas. 11.f3?! was recommended by Shaw and it certainly contains a drop of poison, but Black has enough resources and my new idea of 12...h5?!N is worth knowing. We then looked at the rather critical 11.♗xb5?!, when the bishop is untouchable but 11...♝c8! is a good reply. The ensuing positions are tricky for both sides but ultimately balanced, with many lines resulting in either a perpetual check or a balanced endgame after accurate play on both sides.

Chapter 21

6. $\mathbb{Q}e3$

10. f4



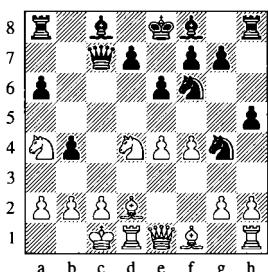
Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ e6 3.d4 cxd4 4. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 5. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{W}c7$
6. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ a6 7. $\mathbb{W}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 8. 0-0-0 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 9. $\mathbb{W}g3$ b5 10.f4

10... $\mathbb{Q}eg4$

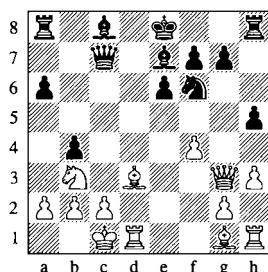
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B) note to 13. $\mathbb{Q}d3$



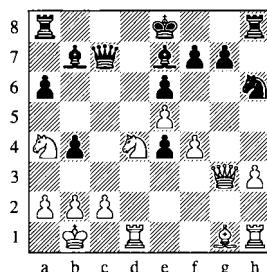
13... $\mathbb{W}d6$! N

C1) after 17. $\mathbb{Q}b3$



17... h4! N

C2) note to 13.e5

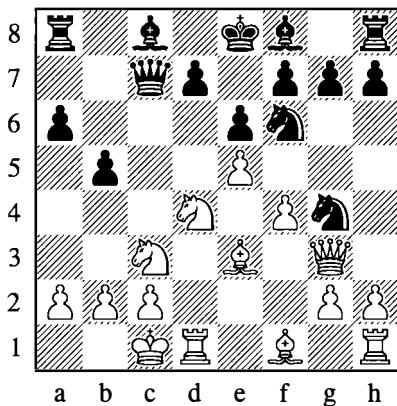


21... 0-0-0! N

- 1.e4 c5 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ e6 3.d4 cxd4 4. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$
 5. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 6. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ a6 7. $\mathbb{W}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 8.0-0-0
 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 9. $\mathbb{W}g3$ b5 10. f4 $\mathbb{Q}eg4$

This has become one of the most important tabiyas in the Taimanov, which is continually being debated at GM level nowadays. We will start by considering the minor option of A) 11.e5?!, followed by the rare but interesting B) 11. $\mathbb{Q}d2$?! and finally the most popular C) 11. $\mathbb{Q}g1$.

A) 11.e5?!



This blunt approach has been tried by some strong players, but with generally poor results for White.

11... $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 12. $\mathbb{W}xe3$

12.exf6? $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ wins an exchange for Black, and after 13.fxg7 $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}d5$! exd5 15.gxf8= $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 16. $\mathbb{W}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ + White had no compensation in Popilski – Adhiban, Gibraltar 2015.

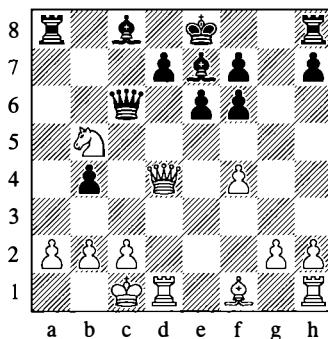
12... b4!

This is an important resource, which leads to Black's advantage.

13. $\mathbb{Q}e4$

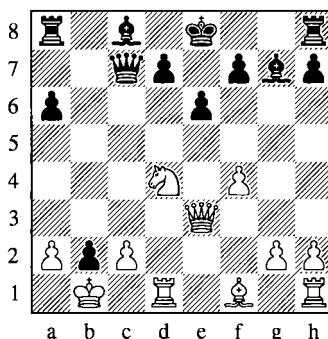
I checked two other options:

13. $\mathbb{Q}cb5$ axb5 14. $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ $\mathbb{W}c6$ 15. exf6 gxf6 16. $\mathbb{W}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ gives Black a positional advantage due to his extra central pawn and pressure on the queenside. White failed to find equality in either of the games that reached this position:



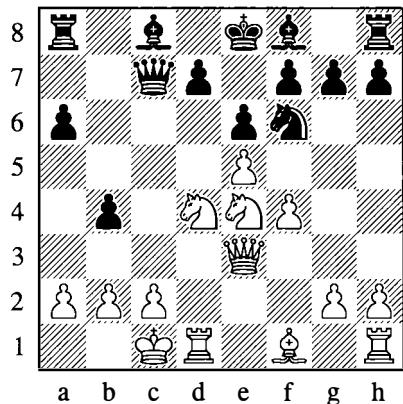
17. $\mathbb{Q}a7$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xc8$ $\mathbb{Q}xc8$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ (19. $\mathbb{Q}d2$?! $\mathbb{Q}c5$ did not help White in Kacharava – Quparadze, Tbilisi 2018) 19... $\mathbb{W}c5$! There followed a queen exchange, with an endgame advantage for Black in Heinemann – Zanan, Gibraltar 2018. An important point is that White's three queenside pawns are being effectively restrained by the b4-pawn supported by the bishop. Black's pawns, on the other hand, are much more flexible and mobile.

White's other natural try is: 13. exf6 bxc3 14. fxg7 cxb2† 15. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}xg7$



16. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ In Vasquez Schroeder – Munguntuul, Sitges 2017, Black

had the better chances due to his extra pawn and bishop pair, while his king was no less safe than White's.

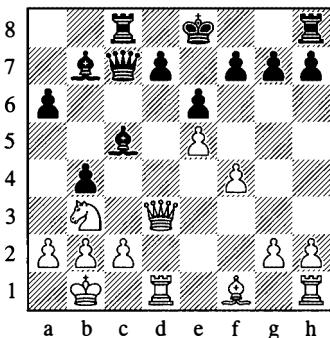


13...♞xe4 14.♕xe4 ♜b7

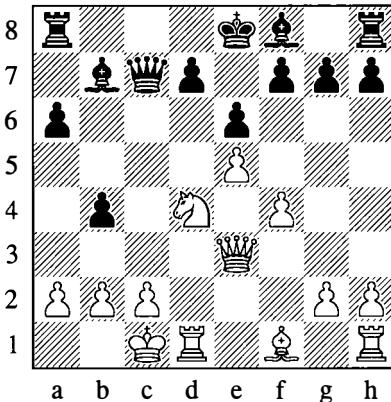
Black's opening has clearly been a success, having just developed a piece with tempo and with the bishop pair as a useful asset for the middlegame.

15.♗e3

A high-level blitz game soon turned out badly for White: 15.♗d3 ♜c5 16.♔b1 ♜c8 17.♗b3



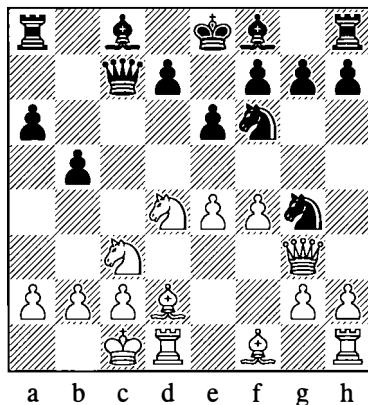
17...♜e3!+ Vachier-Lagrave – Grischuk, Internet (blitz) 2017. With his last move Black simply threatens to capture on f4, and if 18.f5 ♜f4! the e5-pawn will be lost.



15...♜c5?

I found a few games from here but I don't see any serious reason to keep analysing. It is obvious that Black's opening has been a success and he has a choice of attractive plans, including ...a5-a4, followed by ...a3 or ...b3, or a ...d6 break, which may come before or after castling.

B) 11.♗d2?



This move was introduced in 2016 by Edouard in his game against Neiksans. It has since been tested by a few other strong GMs, and was also Shaw's primary recommendation in his *Playing 1.e4* repertoire.

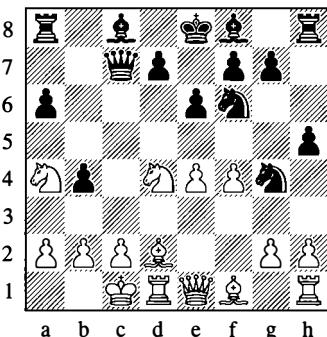
11...b4 12.Qa4 h5!

12...Wd7 13.e5 Wxd4 14.exf6 Qf2 15.Wf3 was seen in the stem game, Edouard – Neiksans, Drancy 2016. Interested readers may wish to analyse this for themselves and/or check the notes of Edouard in *ChessBase Magazine* 173, as well as the analysis in Shaw's book; suffice to say I prefer White's chances.

Both Edouard and Shaw identified the text move (which was a novelty when both their analyses were published) as Black's strongest. At the time of writing, it has been tested in two practical games.

13.Qd3

13.We1? was played in Nakar – Simonsen, Sandavagur 2018, when Black missed a surprising way to win a pawn:



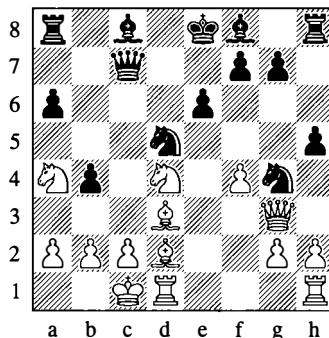
13...Wd6!N† White has no good way of dealing with the attack on his knight, since 14.Qe3 Qxe4 and 14.Qf3 Wc6 15.b3 Qxe4 both see Black pick up the e4-pawn.

13...d5!

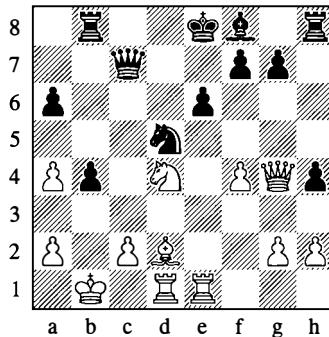
Edouard does not mention this move but Shaw analyses it all the way to a draw – which is exactly how my main line ends as well. The text was also the choice of Shankland against Caruana in March 2019 – clearly a game of some significance for us.

14.e5

14.exd5?! Qxd5 is not a good idea for White, but it is still worth considering, as some players may be tempted to open the centre to expose our king. However, the activation of the f6-knight and the exposed knight on a4 turn out to be more important. My analysis continues:

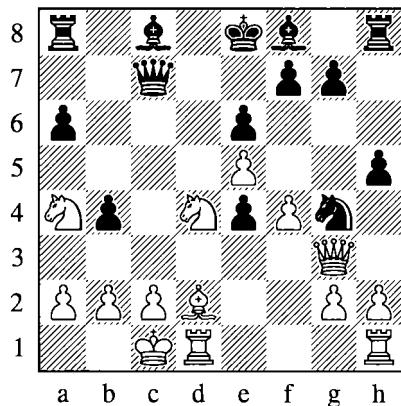


15.Qb1! This is White's trickiest move. (15.Qhe1 Qd7! is excellent for Black) 15...Bb8! (15...Qd7 16.c4! was White's idea) 16.Qhe1 Qd7 17.Qe4 Qgf6 18.Qxd5 Qxd5 19.b3 Qxa4 20.bxa4 h4 21.Wg4



21...Wc4! 22.Qxe6 This is the only playable move for White. However, after 22...fxe6 23.Wg6† Qd7 24.Qxe6 Qd8 25.Qxa6 Qh6 26.Wf7† Qe7 27.Qxh6 gxh6† Black's king has escaped to relative safety and his extra piece is more significant than White's pawns.

14...Qe4 15.Qxe4 dxе4

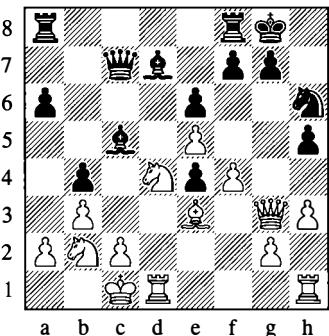
**16.h3**

After 16.b3N $\mathbb{Q}d7$ White has nothing better than kicking the knight with h2-h3 within the next few moves, with a likely transposition to Caruana – Shankland, as noted below.

16... $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xb4!$?N

Shaw recommends this move, on the basis that it leads to some tricky problems, though he admits that best play should result in a clear draw.

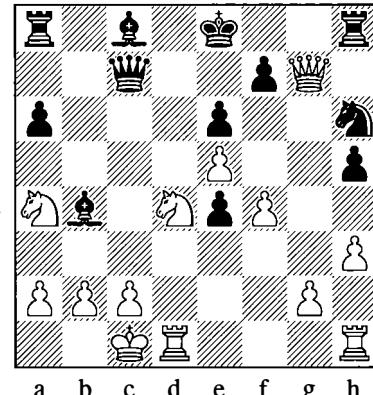
The aforementioned game continued: 17.b3 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ 0–0



Interestingly, Shaw gets this far in a note and assesses the position as at least equal for Black, which seems fair to me. After 20. $\mathbb{W}f2$ a5↑ Black enjoyed the easier play in Caruana – Shankland, Berlin 2019. Obviously the game

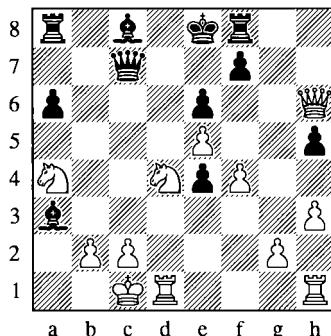
goes on and you can analyse deeper if you wish, but I think this is all you need to know to get through the opening.

In our main line, on the other hand, the play becomes extremely forcing and one mistake could prove fatal for either side, so let's see how best play continues.

17... $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ 18. $\mathbb{W}xg7$ **18... $\mathbb{W}f8!$ 19. $\mathbb{W}xh6$**

The following alternative leads more easily to a forced draw:

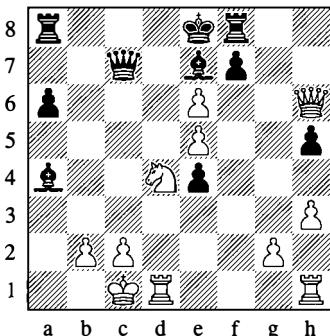
19.a3 $\mathbb{Q}xa3$ 20. $\mathbb{W}xh6$
 20.bxa3 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 21. $\mathbb{W}xh6$ $\mathbb{Q}xa4$ 22. $\mathbb{W}h7$ $\mathbb{W}c3$
 23. $\mathbb{W}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ (or 24. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}b8\#$
 25. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}d8=$) 24... $\mathbb{Q}xb3$ 25. $\mathbb{W}xd8\#$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$
 26. $\mathbb{W}a8\#$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 27. $\mathbb{W}a7\#$ $\mathbb{Q}c6=$ White can and must take the perpetual.



20...♝d7! 21.f5

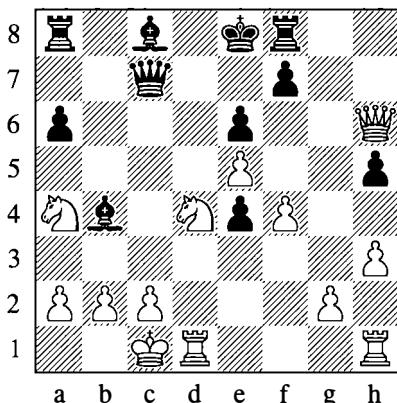
21.bxa3 ♜xa4 22.♔h7= and 21.♔h7 ♜xa4 22.bxa3 ♜c3= are different routes to the same result.

21...♜xa4 22.fxe6 ♜e7



23.exf7† ♜xf7 24.♕g6 ♜xe5 25.♕g8† ♜f8=

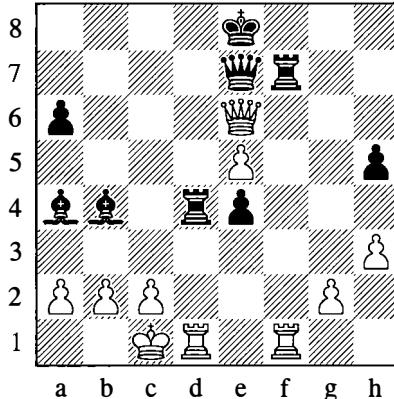
White's only decent continuation is 26.♕g6, after which Black can either repeat the position immediately with 26...♝e7= or take the slightly more complicated route with 26...♝d8?!, which should also lead to a draw.



19...♝d7 20.f5! ♜xa4 21.fxe6 ♜d8 22.♗h1† ♜xd4!

Killing White's attacking ideas. Now White is forced to enter the endgame after:

23.exf7† ♜xf7 24.♕e6† ♜e7



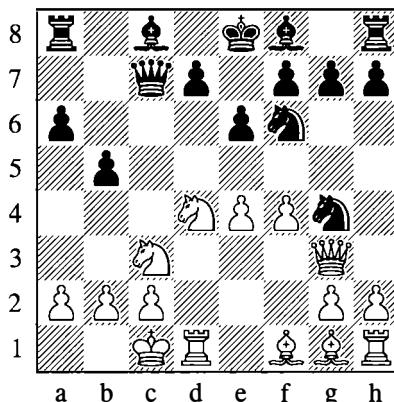
25.♕c8† ♜d8 26.♗xd8† ♜xd8 27.♕xd8†

27.♔e6† ♜e7 28.♕c8† is White's safest route to a draw, which Shaw recommends taking.

27...♝xd8 28.♗xf7 e3→

The endgame should be drawn with accurate play on both sides, but Black's strong passed pawn makes the situation slightly trickier for White.

C) 11.♗g1



This is a natural and aggressive choice, and it was recommended by Kotronias & Semkov.

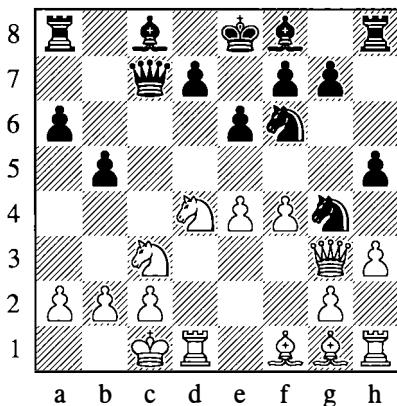
11...h5!

After a lot of consideration, I concluded that this is Black's most accurate continuation.

11...b4 is the main alternative but I don't really like the position after: 12.♕a4! h5 (12...♗h6 does not appeal to me when ...h5 has not been played) 13.♗d3 d5 14.e5± Obviously the analysis runs much deeper, suffice to say I prefer White's chances; see for instance Leko – Kantans, Germany 2017.

White has tried meeting my recommended move in three main ways: **C1) 12.h3**, **C2) 12.♗d3** and **C3) 12.e5**. The last two options can transpose to each other, but there are plenty of independent possibilities of course.

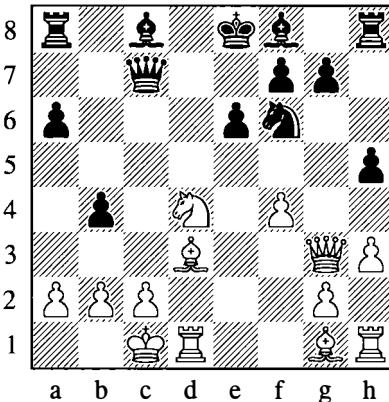
C1) 12.h3



12...b4!

Not for the first time, we leave one of our own knights hanging in order to carry out this counterattacking thrust. White's only good response is:

13.♗d5! ♗xd5 14.exd5 ♗f6 15.dxe6 dx6
16.♗d3



16...♗e7!

16...h4? proved to be a serious mistake after 17.♘f3! ♘b8 (17...♗b7 runs into 18.♗xe6!) 18.f5! when Black was already in considerable trouble in Padmini – Dauletova, Hamedan 2018. Dauletova clearly did some homework on this line, as she improved with the text move just a couple of months later. She went on to lose against a strong opponent, but the opening would have turned out fine had she found the correct follow-up.

17.♗b3

Another logical continuation is:

17.♗b1!N

It is always useful for White to take the king away from the c-file and the h6-c1 diagonal, as well as to protect the a2-pawn.

17...♗b7

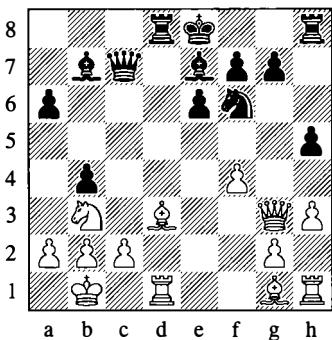
Black develops the bishop and creates some pressure on the long diagonal, which could be especially important if White decided to take the g7-pawn in return for the one on g2.

18.♗b3

This has the idea to bring the bishop to d4. Against most other moves, Black is likely to proceed with either ...0–0 or ...♗f8.

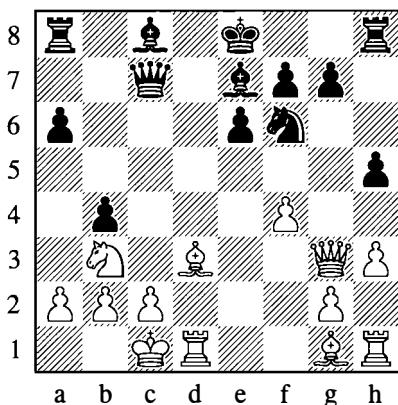
18...♗d8!

With the following idea:



19. $\mathbb{Q}d4 \mathbb{B}xd4!?$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 0–0∞

Black's powerful minor pieces offer at least enough compensation for White's extra exchange. Black's easy attacking plan consists of ...a5-a4-a3, with threats on the dark squares around White's king.



17...h4!N

An important improvement, forcing White to take a decision regarding her queen.

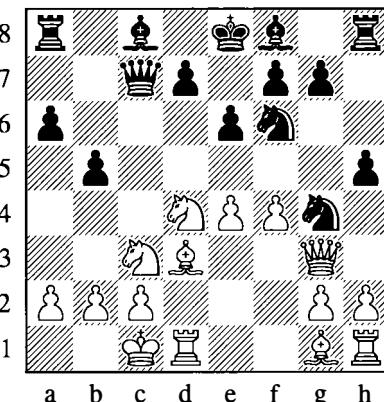
17...g5? 18. $\mathbb{W}xg5 \mathbb{B}g8$ 19. $\mathbb{W}a5!±$ gave White an endgame advantage in Lei Tingjie – Dauletova, Batumi (ol) 2018.

18. $\mathbb{W}e1 \mathbb{B}b7\rightleftharpoons$

The position is close to equal but I slightly prefer Black, who threatens the g2- and f4-pawns and can also attack on the queenside with ...a5-a4 at any time.

C2) 12. $\mathbb{Q}d3$

This developing move has been White's second-most-popular choice. As I mentioned earlier, it can transpose to some of the big main lines – especially when White follows up by chasing both knights with e4-e5 and h2-h3.



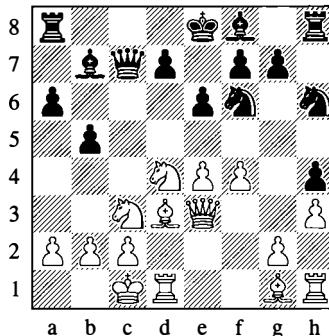
12... $\mathbb{B}b7$ 13. e5

I will take this as my main line.

White has also tried holding the e-pawn back:
13. h3 h4

13...b4 has been played a few times and also looks acceptable, but we will follow another example.

14. $\mathbb{W}f3 \mathbb{Q}h6$ 15. $\mathbb{W}e3$



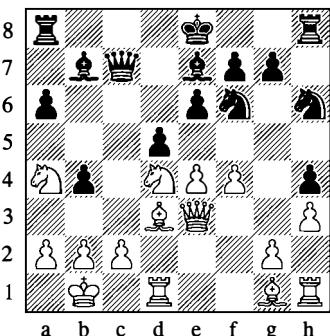
15...b4

15... $\mathbb{B}c5$ N is a logical alternative, when
16. $\mathbb{Q}b1 \mathbb{B}c8$ 17. e5 $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{B}xd5$

19.♗d2 g6 \Rightarrow reaches a normal position. Black will continue with typical regrouping moves such as ...♗b7, ...♝e7 and ...♞f5. The choice between that line and the text move is a matter of taste. I have chosen to focus on the game continuation, mainly to show an interesting improvement on Black's play, which would be worth adding to your arsenal of ideas in these positions.

16.♘a4 ♘e7 17.♗b1 d5!

Black is playing accurately so far, with a well-timed strike in the centre.

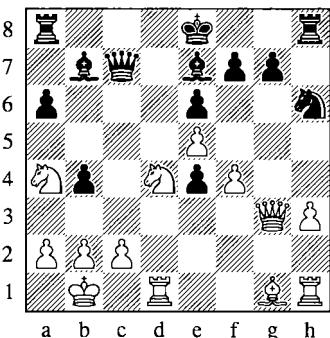


18.e5 ♘e4

Black has closed the centre and established her knight on a commanding outpost. Given time, she will complete development with ...0–0 and ...♞f5, so the game continuation looks quite logical for White.

19.g4!? hxg3 20.♗xe4 dxe4 21.♗xg3

We have been following Haast – Hortensius, Amsterdam 2018. Black has more than one playable continuation but the following idea is my favourite:



21...0–0–0!N

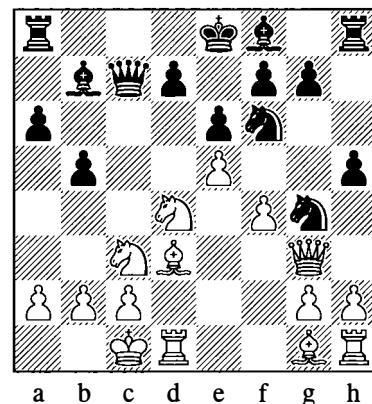
It's not often that Black castles long in this variation, but here it is justified by concrete considerations: Black not only indirectly defends the g7-pawn, but also prepares to target the a4-knight with ...♞c6.

22.♗e3 ♘c6 23.b3

After 23.♘xc6 ♗xc6 the knight is still under fire and Black is ready to follow up with ...♞f5, with a great game.

23...♗xa4 24.bxa4 ♘c5

Black has a fine position; the plan is to exchange on d4 and establish a mighty knight on f5.



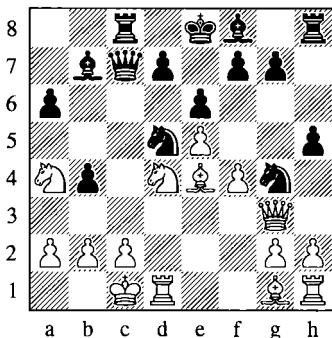
13...b4! 14.♘a4 ♘d5

This position has occurred in a bunch of games, via different move orders – and further transpositions are possible, as we will see below.

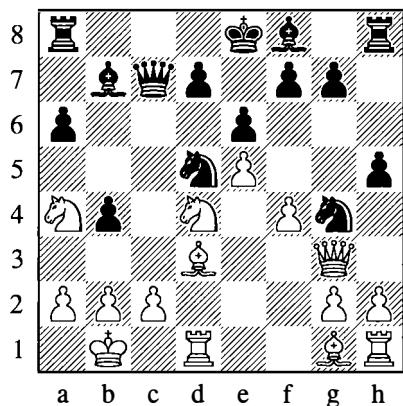
15.♗b1

15.h3 has been played in three of the five games I found from this position, and after 15...♞h6 we reach the main tabiya of the next chapter; see page 451 where White chooses between 16.♘e4 and 16.f5!.

15.♗e4 ♜c8 reaches an interesting situation, where White should improve with:



16.h3N (16.♗f3? was played in Bacrot – Bocharov, Riyadh [blitz] 2017, and now 16...g5!!N would have created huge problems for White, since all of his pieces are on bad squares) 16...♝h6 I don't see anything better for White than 17.♔b1 g6 18.♗f3, transposing to variation A of the next chapter, which can be found on page 451.



15...g6

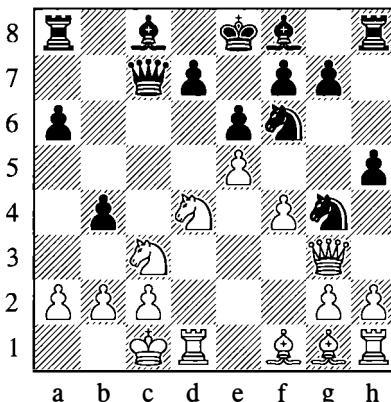
White's move order gives Black some additional options such as the aggressive 15...♗a5N, but the move carries certain risks and ultimately the text move is simpler and sounder.

I only found one game from this position, Oparin – Matlakov, Moscow (rapid) 2018. Play continued logically with:

16.h3 ♐h6 17.♔e4 ♖c8 18.♗f3

This position will be covered under variation A of the next chapter; see page 452 for the continuation.

C3) 12.e5 b4



This typical reaction should come as no surprise. White may respond with C31) 13.♗b1 or C32) 13.♗a4.

C31) 13.♗b1

This has been a rare choice and it has scored poorly so far, but it may not be as bad as the statistics would seem to indicate. Illingworth gives it the briefest mention in the updated edition of *Dismantling the Sicilian*, offering it as a secondary option in a note, with a '?' symbol and no further moves or comments.

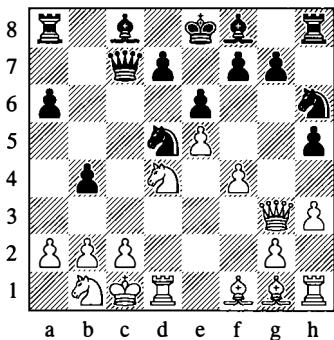
13...♝e4

I also considered:

13...♝d5!?

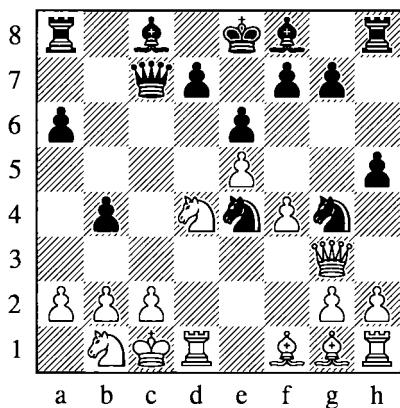
This carries the positional threat of ...g5, so White should react quickly. A sample line is: 14.h3 ♐h6

If Black has time to play ...g6 he will have no problems, so the following line looks critical:



15.f5! Bb7

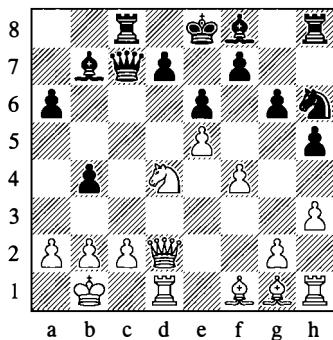
I continued analysing and found that Black should be fine with accurate play, but there are lots of lines which he would have to prepare after both 16.Qd2 (intending Qc4) and 16.fxe6. Ultimately, 13...Qe4 seems to me a safer and more convenient choice. It resembles variation A of Chapter 22, though with a pair of knights being exchanged, and Black still carries out the thematic plan of ...g6 and ...Qh6-f5



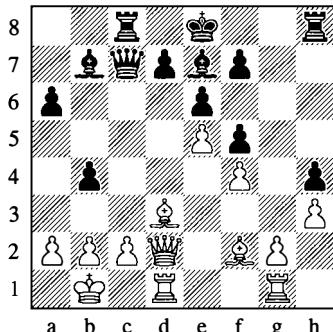
14.Wel Bb7 15.Qd2

Swapping the passive knight for Black's active one seems logical.

15.h3N Qh6 16.Qd2 Qxd2 17.Wxd2 Wc8 18.Qb1 g6 leads to a typical set-up for Black, where he exerts pressure against both flanks. An illustrative line is:



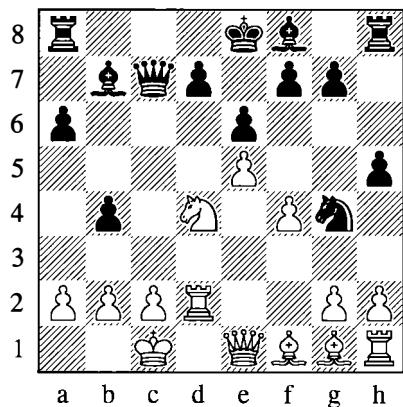
19.Qf2 Qe7 20.Qg1 h4! Another thematic move. Now if White ever wishes to open lines on the kingside, he will have to risk being left with a ruined pawn structure. 21.Qd3 Qf5! 22.Qxf5 gxf5



Having exchanged the dark-squared bishops, Black has a simple plan of targeting the c3- and b2-squares. 27.Wg3 a4 28.h4 a3=

15...Qxd2 16.Wxd2

I also checked 16.Wxd2N Wc8 17.Qb1 g6 when Black will continue with the standard plan of ...Qh6, ...We7, ...Qf5 when all of his pieces will be ideally placed. 18.h3 Qh6 19.Qe3 We7 20.b3 Qf5∞ is a brief sample line showing this plan. Please make a mental note of this regrouping plan, as we will see it time and time again throughout the rest of the chapter.

**16...g6!**

Black follows the standard plan of preventing f4-f5 and regrouping his pieces onto better squares.

17.♗b1

This was played in a game between strong GMs in 2017, so I take it as my main line.

White has also tried:

17.♘d3 ♘e7

17...♘h6 is also perfectly playable, and led to an eventual draw in another correspondence game.

18.♗e2

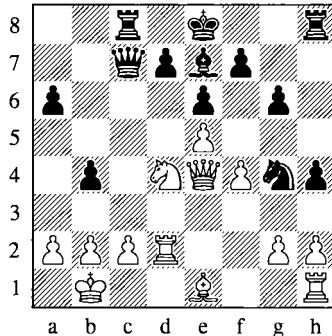
18.♘e4N ♘c8 19.♗xb7 ♘xb7 20.♗e2 ♘h6 is another line which demonstrates our typical regrouping. If 21.♗e3 ♘g4!? we employ the same idea as in the correspondence game noted below. White must either accept a repetition or try something like 22.♗hd1 ♘xe3 23.♗xe3 a5 24.♗b1 a4 25.♗f3 ♘b8!?, when Black avoids a queen exchange and will look to attack on the dark squares with ...a3.

18...♘h6 19.♗b1 h4 20.♗e4 ♘xe4 21.♗xe4 ♘c8 22.♗f2 ♘g4!?

The idea is to force White's bishop to an inferior position before transferring the knight to f5.

23.♘e1

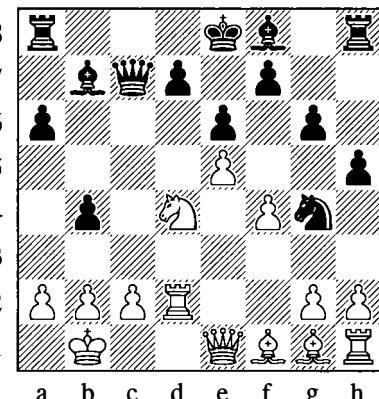
After 23.♘e1N ♘xf2 24.♗xf2 a5 (24...d5!?) is interesting, but one good option is enough) Black has nice prospects on the dark squares.

**23...♘h6**

Black intends ...♘f5 with a solid position, and the onus is on White to find something better than repeating moves with 24.♗f2. The game continued:

24.♗e2 ♘b7 25.♗g1 ♘c5 26.♗f1 ♘f5 27.♗b3 d5=

The position is balanced and play could proceed in a number of different ways. In Marez – Vasconcellos, corr. 2017, there followed a tactical skirmish followed by a draw agreement.

**17...♘e7 18.♘d3 ♘h6 19.♗e4**

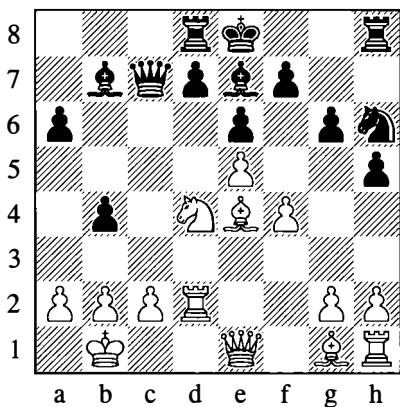
I also considered: 19.♗e2N h4 Keeping the options of both ...h3 and ...♘f5. 20.♗e4 ♘c8

21.♕f2 ♕xe4 22.♔xe4 We have transposed to Marez – Vasconcellos, as referenced in the note to White's 17th move above.

19...♝d8!?

This interesting move was Najar's choice.

19...♝c8N is a thematic and equally playable alternative, which may be followed by ...♝f5 – although if White plays 20.♕f2 or 20.♕e3, I would suggest the familiar plan of 20...♝g4 to either exchange the bishop or repeat the position.



20.♕f2 ♕xe4

20...♝g4N is playable here too, but in the game Black had a different idea in mind.

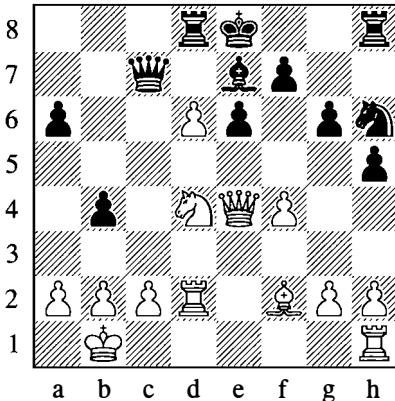
21.♔xe4 d5!

Having placed the rook on d8, Najar unsurprisingly follows up by striking in the centre.

22.exd6?!

This was White's choice in the game but I am not a fan of it.

22.♔d3N was better, although Black is fine after 22...♝b7, with ...♝f5 to follow.



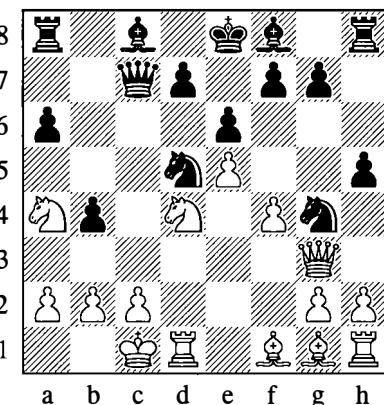
22...♝xd6 23.♔a8† ♘d8!?

23...♝d8N is a decent alternative but sacrificing the a-pawn is quite logical.

24.♔xa6 0–0

In Oparin – Najar, Sochi 2017, Black had more than enough play for the pawn, due to the simple attacking plan of ...♝a8 and ...♝fc8.

C32) 13.♗a4 ♘d5



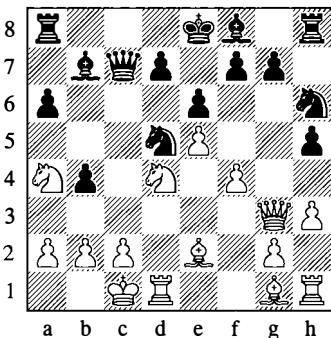
In the remainder of this chapter, we will consider the untested C321) 14.b3!N followed by C322) 14.♗b3, which has occasionally been tried by strong players.

14.h3 can be considered the main line, and the next and final chapter will be devoted to it.

Apart from that, I checked a few minor alternatives:

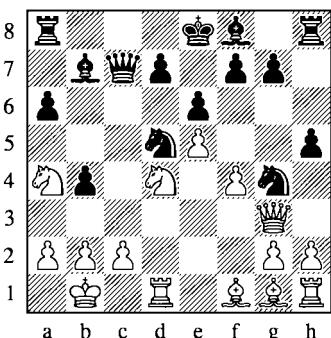
14. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ takes us back to variation C2.

The untested 14. $\mathbb{Q}e2N$ is playable, but 14... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 15. $h3$ $\mathbb{Q}h6$ seems fine for Black, especially as the $h5$ -pawn is not really hanging:



16. $\mathbb{Q}xh5?$ $\mathbb{Q}c8!$ Threatening ... $\mathbb{Q}f5$. 17. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ is virtually forced, after which 17... $\mathbb{W}c4!$ 18. $b3$ $\mathbb{W}f1\#$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{W}xf4\#$ sees Black regain the pawn with an obvious positional advantage.

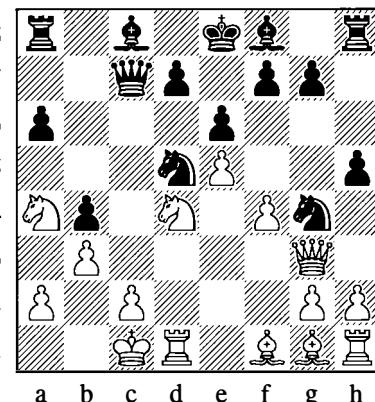
14. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ is a rare but quite sensible option. I suggest: 14... $\mathbb{Q}b7!N$ (Black played 14... $\mathbb{W}a5$ in Narayanan – Swathi, Kolkata 2015, but I prefer to complete development before starting an attack)



15. $h3$ $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 16. $b3$ $g6!$ Black reaches a thematic set-up with solid prospects, and may look to continue with ... $\mathbb{Q}c8$, ... $\mathbb{Q}e7$, ... $\mathbb{Q}f5$ and ... $h4$.

C321) 14. $b3!N$

With this prophylactic move, White stabilizes his queenside while retaining some flexibility. However, Black has an excellent resource available:

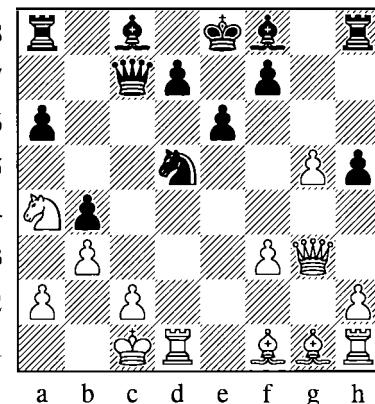


14... $g5!!$

We saw a similar idea in the notes to variation C2 on page 442. Here it is not quite so devastating, but it still offers Black plenty of counterplay. A good rule of thumb is that the longer White delays $h2-h3$ and allows the knight to remain on $g4$, the greater the chance of this move working well. Here are a few sample lines:

15. $f\#g5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 17. $gxf3$

A similar situation occurs after 17. $\mathbb{W}xc7$ $\mathbb{Q}xc7$ 18. $gxf3$ $\mathbb{Q}b7\#$ followed by ... $\mathbb{Q}d5$.

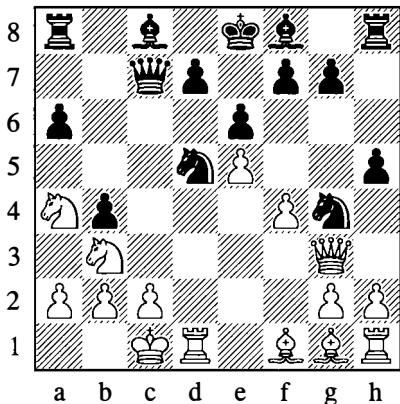


17... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ h4 19. $\mathbb{W}xc7$ $\mathbb{Q}xc7$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}b6$
 $\mathbb{Q}b5\#$

We reach a double-edged endgame which Sicilian players should be happy to play.

C322) 14. $\mathbb{Q}b3$

This move has been tested in a few noteworthy games. White tries to play on the dark squares.



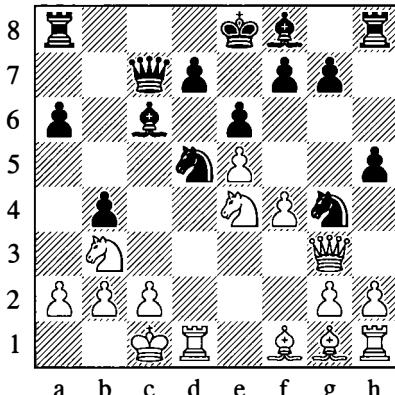
14... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}ac5$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$!

15... $\mathbb{Q}c8$?! 16. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ was clearly better for White in Nepomniachtchi – Wang Yue, Beijing (blitz) 2014.

A few years ago I analysed the text move as a novelty to improve Black's play, but Caruana subsequently used it to score an excellent victory over Karjakin.

16. $\mathbb{Q}e4$

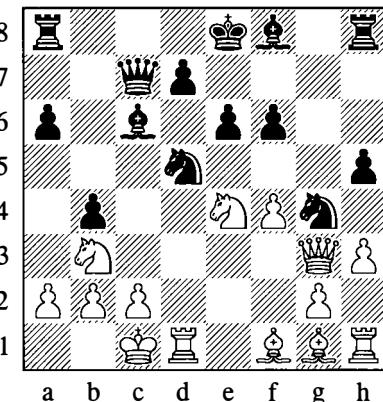
The timid 16. $\mathbb{Q}e2$? was played more recently in Makaraci – Cevrin, Konya 2018, when 16...a5!N would have led to huge problems for White.



16...f5! 17.exf6!

White needs to improve on the game continuation of 17.h3?, after which 17...h4 18. $\mathbb{W}e1$ fxe4 19.hxg4 $\mathbb{Q}xf4\#$ was great for Black in Karjakin – Caruana, London 2017.

17...gxf6 18.h3



18... $\mathbb{W}xf4\#$!

This is the last important detail which more than justifies Black's opening play.

19. $\mathbb{W}xf4$ $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ 20. $\mathbb{E}e1$ f5 21.hxg4 fxe4?

The endgame is messy but I would tend to prefer Black's chances with the strong central pawns.

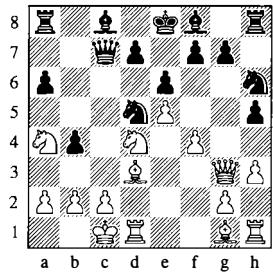
Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the main line of the 7.♗f3 system, whereby 7...♝f6 8.0–0–0 ♘e5 9.♗g3 b5 is followed by 10.f4 ♗eg4. Then 11.e5?! is a hasty attacking try which hands Black at least a slight advantage, but 11.♗d2?! is a much more serious sideline which is worth studying closely.

11.♗g1 is the most popular move of all, when 11...h5! is most accurate. Several move orders and transpositions are possible from here, including some which can lead to the big main line covered in the next chapter. The most common move order is 12.e5 b4, which illustrates an important theme: most of the time in this variation, when White plays e4-e5 to chase our knight away, we should not move it immediately but instead play ...b4 to drive White's knight away from the centre, if we have not done so already. Apart from that, it is hard to offer many rules of thumb, as a lot of the variations are rather concrete and dynamic. I would like to remind you of one important theme though: in lines where the moves e4-e5 and ...♝d5 occur (with White's knight already having been driven away by ...b4 of course) and White avoids driving the other knight away with h2-h3, you should always be on the lookout for the remarkable ...g5 resource.



6. $\mathbb{Q}e3$



Main Line with 14.h3

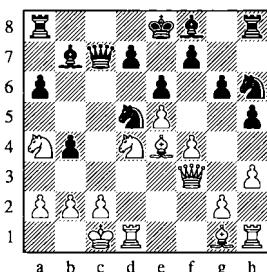
Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ e6 3.d4 cxd4 4. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 5. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 6. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ a6 7. $\mathbb{W}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 8.0-0-0
9. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 9. $\mathbb{W}g3$ b5 10.f4 $\mathbb{Q}eg4$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ h5! 12.e5 b4 13. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 14.h3 $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}d3$

15... $\mathbb{Q}b7$

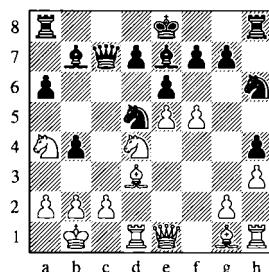
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| B2) 17. $\mathbb{Q}b1!$ h4! 18. $\mathbb{W}e1!$ $\mathbb{Q}f4!$ N | 458 |
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A) after 17. $\mathbb{W}f3$



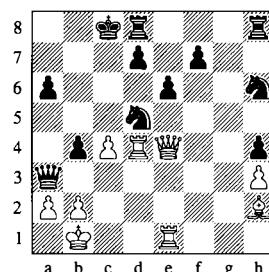
17... $\mathbb{Q}c8!$ N

B2) after 18. $\mathbb{W}e1!$



18... $\mathbb{Q}f4!$ N

B233) after 30. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$

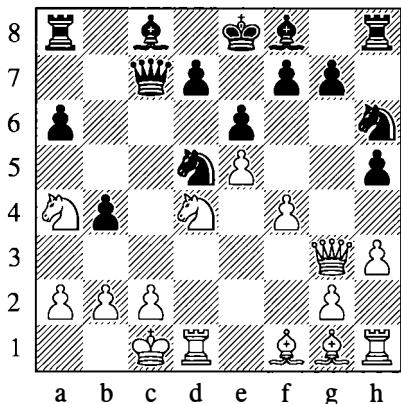


30...b3!!

1.e4 c5 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ e6 3.d4 cxd4 4. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$
 5. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 6. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ a6 7. $\mathbb{W}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 8. 0-0-0
 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 9. $\mathbb{W}g3$ b5 10.f4 $\mathbb{Q}eg4$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ h5! 12.e5
 $b4$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 14.h3

This has been played in most games – with good reason I think. We saw a couple of instances in the previous chapter where delaying h2-h3 enabled Black to obtain powerful counterplay with ...g5.

14... $\mathbb{Q}h6$



15. $\mathbb{Q}d3$

This natural developing move has been White's usual choice.

15.f5 $\mathbb{Q}b7$ gives White nothing better than 16. $\mathbb{Q}d3$, transposing to variation B below.

I also considered:

15.b3!?

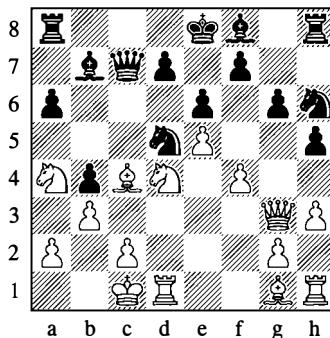
This is similar to the 14.b3!?

N line noted towards the end of the previous chapter on page 446, but here White has already driven the knight back, preventing the ...g5 idea. On the other hand, by spending a tempo chasing the knight to h6, White has facilitated our thematic regrouping plan involving ... $\mathbb{Q}f5$.

15...g6 16. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$

This position is untested but Black's set-up is quite thematic. His plan for the next few

moves is likely to include some combination of ... $\mathbb{Q}e7$, ...h4 and ... $\mathbb{Q}f5$. Usually his king will stay in the centre for a while; but if he believes his attacking conditions on the queenside are especially favourable, he may consider castling in order to bring the h8-rook into play. Here is an interesting sample line I analysed:



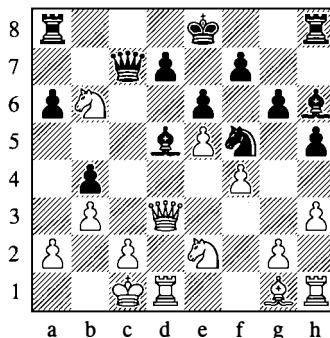
17. $\mathbb{Q}e2!?$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 18. $\mathbb{W}d3$

Here Black can offer an interesting exchange sacrifice.

18... $\mathbb{Q}h6!?$

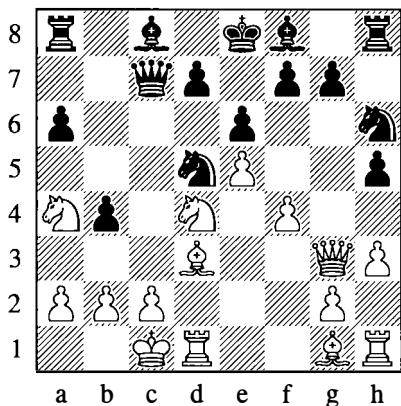
If Black does not feel like giving up material, then 18... $\mathbb{Q}b8$ is a good move offering equal chances.

19. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}b6$



20... $\mathbb{Q}xg2!$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xa6$ $\mathbb{Q}xa8\infty$

Black has good compensation, with one extra pawn for the exchange and strong minor pieces.

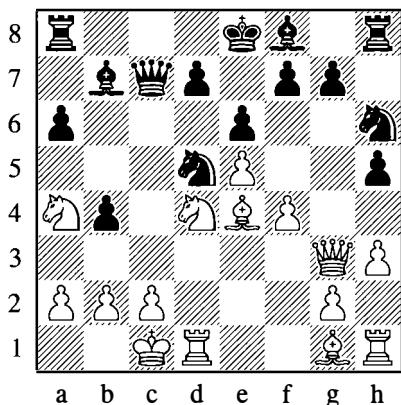


15...Qb7

We have reached another important branching point. At the time of publication only six games have been played from this position, but the number is surely set to rise.

We will consider the positional
A) 16.Qe4 followed by the more direct
B) 16.f5!. Interestingly, the former move was recommended by Kotronias & Semkov in their 2017 book, but the latter was played by Kotronias the following year (via the 15.f5 Qb7 16.Qd3 move order), so presumably he analysed the line again and concluded that the quick f4-f5 was the most dangerous plan – which is my assessment as well.

A) 16.Qe4



This has only been tested in one game so far.

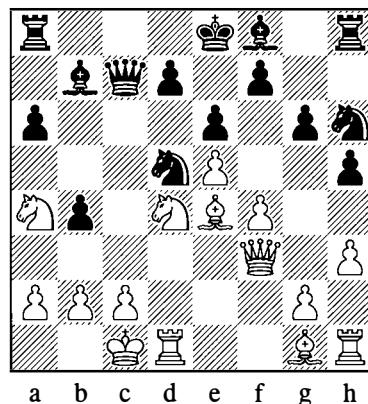
16...g6!

Black could also play something like 16...Rc8, but I consider ...g6 an essential part of his plans so it seems best to play this move first. Having taken the f5-square under control, Black can continue developing with ...Rc8 and ...Re7, and will look for opportunities to target the a4-knight with ...Ra5 and/or ...Rc6.

17.Wf3

This was recommended by Kotronias & Semkov, and it reaches the kind of position which Bacrot was probably aiming for in the blitz game that was referred to in the previous chapter on page 442, where both players overlooked Black's fabulous ...g5!! resource.

I should mention that White has some other playable moves, but they don't require any special analysis because Black's general ideas remain the same. Here it is important for Black to improve on the game continuation.

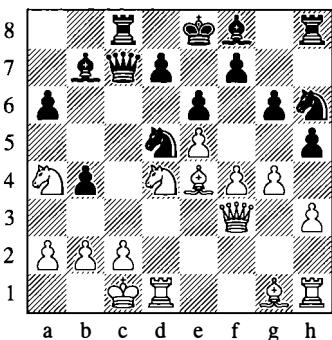


17...Rc8!N

It is vital to avoid 17...Qf5? in view of 18.Qxf5 gxf5 19.Qxd5 Rxd5 20.Qxd5! exd5 21.Qb6 Rb8 22.Qxd5± when White had fantastic play for the exchange in V. Nielsen – Sylvan, Fredericia 2018.

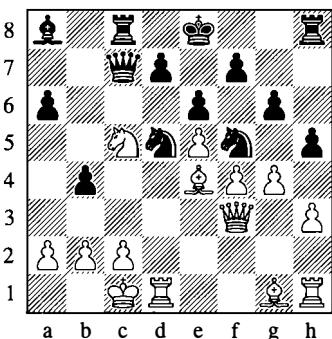
18. $\mathbb{Q}b1$

It is worth pointing out that 18.g4? is beautifully refuted:



18... $\mathbb{Q}f5!!\dagger$ White is in a mess.

18. $\mathbb{Q}b3!?$ N is a reasonable move but there is a nice tactical line leading to equality: 18... $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}ac5$ $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{Q}a8$ 21. g4



21... $\mathbb{Q}fe3!$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}xc5=$ As pointed out by Kotronias & Semkov.

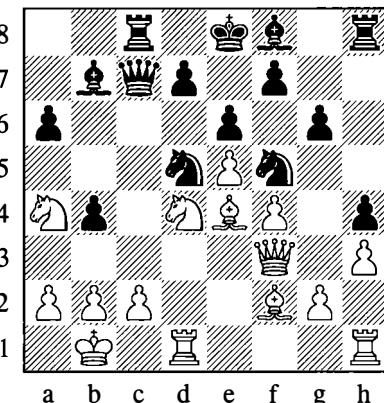
18...h4

Kotronias & Semkov only mention this move in a note, instead concentrating on 18... $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ as their main line. Illingworth quotes a few more moves of their analysis in the updated edition of *Dismantling the Sicilian*, but does not mention the text move at all.

Kotronias & Semkov comment that fixing the kingside structure does not seem to be Black's first priority, but I believe it is a worthy way to invest a tempo.

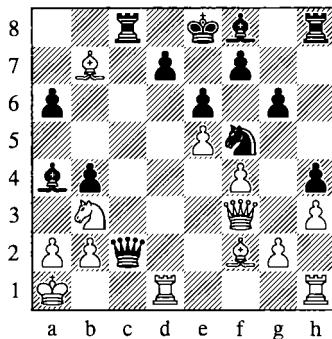
19. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$

Having stabilized the kingside, Black may improve his position in a number of ways. One simple idea is to develop with ... $\mathbb{Q}e7$. Another option is to target the knight on a4, either with ... $\mathbb{Q}a5$ or ... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ (perhaps after exchanging on d4 to prevent $\mathbb{Q}xc6$). After provoking b2-b3, Black may be able to target the c3-point and other dark squares on the queenside.

**20. $\mathbb{Q}hel$**

Kotronias & Semkov offer this move for White, so I will take it as my main line.

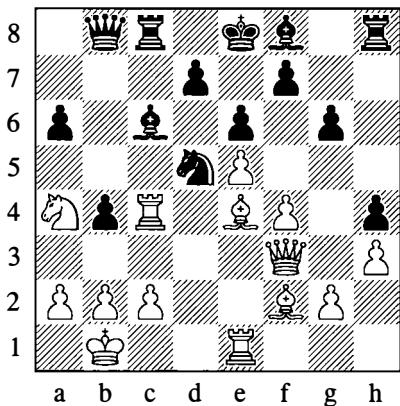
20. $\mathbb{Q}b3!?$ is another reasonable try. My analysis continues: 20... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xa4$? 22. $\mathbb{Q}b7$ (22. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ d5! seems fine for Black) 22... $\mathbb{Q}xc2\dagger$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}a1$



23... $\mathbb{Q}c6$! Forcing the trade of the light-squared bishops. 24. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{W}xc6$ 25. $\mathbb{E}c1$ $\mathbb{W}a8$ 26. $\mathbb{E}xc8\uparrow$ $\mathbb{W}xc8$ 27. $\mathbb{E}c1$ $\mathbb{W}b8=$ White has good compensation for the pawn but it is hard to believe that it can yield more than a draw. Black will continue simply, with ... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ and ...0–0.

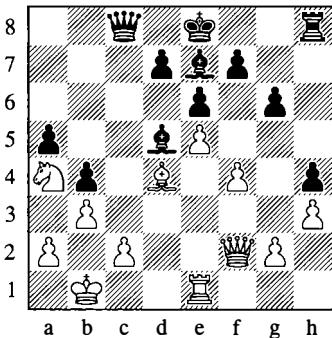
20... $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 21. $\mathbb{E}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 22. $\mathbb{E}c4$ $\mathbb{W}b8$

These moves are not all forced, but I believe they represent accurate play on both sides, and the whole line is a good illustration of how these positions may develop.



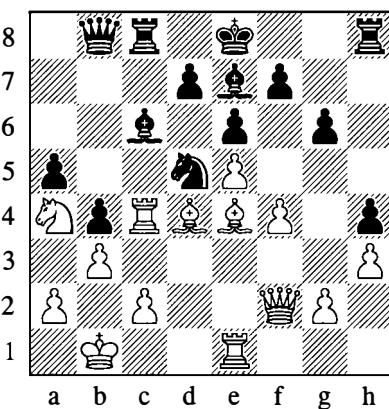
23.b3 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ a5 25. $\mathbb{W}f2$

25. $\mathbb{Q}xd5\text{?!$ } would be a misguided attempt to play on the dark squares. Black takes over the initiative as follows: 25... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 26. $\mathbb{E}xc8\uparrow$ $\mathbb{W}xc8$ 27. $\mathbb{W}f2$



27... $\mathbb{W}c6$ 28. $\mathbb{E}e2$ $\mathbb{E}h5\uparrow$ Intending ... $\mathbb{E}f5$. White's pawns on f4, g2 and h3 are all weak in the long term.

Kotronias & Semkov end their impressively detailed analysis here, with the assessment that White preserves a slight pull with his dark-square strategy. I consider it a typical Taimanov situation where Black has a full share of the chances. Here are some lines to support this assessment:



25... $\mathbb{Q}xa4!$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$

26. $\mathbb{E}xc8\uparrow$ $\mathbb{W}xc8$ 27. $\mathbb{E}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ gives Black at least equal chances. There is no way for White to force matters on the kingside, while Black has the simple plan of ...a4 followed by castling and bringing the rook to c8 or a8. Under certain conditions, the ...d6 break may be an option later.

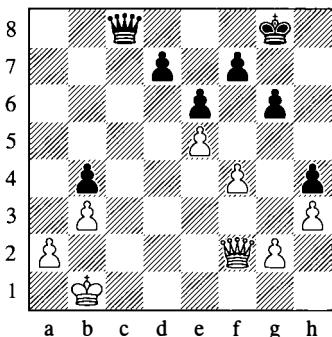
26... $\mathbb{E}xc4$ 27. $\mathbb{E}xc4$ $\mathbb{Q}b5$

We are well past the limits of any normal opening preparation, but I will include a few computer lines anyway, just to illustrate that Black is fine.

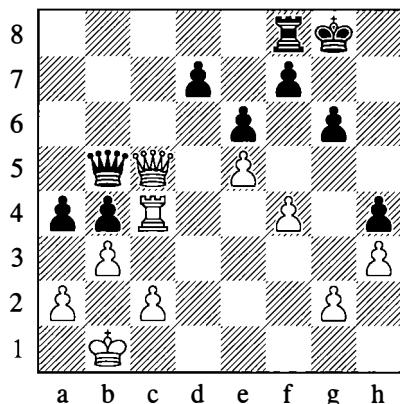
28. $\mathbb{Q}a7$ $\mathbb{W}b7$ 29. $\mathbb{E}xb5$ $\mathbb{W}xb5$ 30. $\mathbb{E}e4$ 0–0 31. $\mathbb{E}c4$ a4 32. $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 33. $\mathbb{W}xc5$

I also checked 33. $\mathbb{E}xc5$ $\mathbb{W}a6$ 34. $\mathbb{E}c4$ axb3 35.cxb3 $\mathbb{E}c8$ 36. $\mathbb{E}xc8\uparrow$ $\mathbb{W}xc8$ when the game

is most probably heading for some kind of perpetual. For instance:



37. $\mathbb{W}xh4$ $\mathbb{W}c3$ 38. $\mathbb{W}f2$ $\mathbb{W}d3\#$ 39. $\mathbb{W}c2$ $\mathbb{W}f1\#$
40. $\mathbb{W}c1$ $\mathbb{W}d3\#$ =

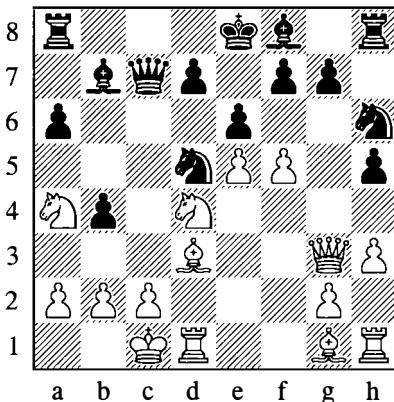


33... $\mathbb{W}b7!$ 34. $\mathbb{W}f2$ $\mathbb{E}a8$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbf{axb}3$ 36. $\mathbf{cxb}3$ $\mathbb{E}c8$

Black is not worse at all. Note the superb placement of the pawn on h4, which fixes the g2-pawn (and, to a lesser extent, the f4-pawn) as a weakness and forces White to keep an eye on his kingside.

B) 16. $f5!$

I believe this is White's most dangerous move, and it forces Black to tread carefully. At the time of publication, this position has occurred in ten games, and Black has chosen the same unsound move in four of them! The best reply is:



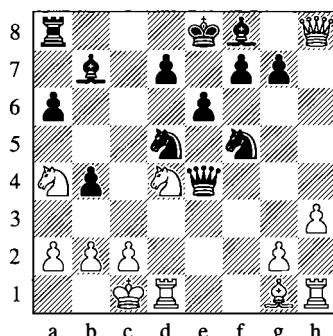
16... $\mathbb{Q}e7!$

Let me show you the problems with Black's other ideas:

16... $\mathbb{Q}c6?$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{W}xc6$ 18. $fxe6$ $dxe6$ 19. $b3\pm$ gave White an easy initiative in Drygalov – Grachev, Sochi 2018.

16... $\mathbb{E}c8?!$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $h4?$ occurred in Knudsen – De Boer, Dortmund 2018, when 18. $\mathbb{W}xh4!N$ would have refuted Black's play, since 18... $\mathbb{W}xe5?$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{W}f6$ 20. $\mathbb{W}f2+-$ leads to an overwhelming initiative for White.

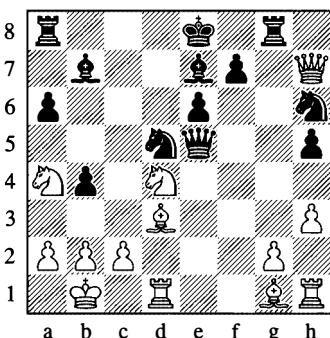
16... $h4?$ is the move which has tempted some strong players, and has actually yielded a positive score for Black so far, but it can be refuted as follows: 17. $\mathbb{W}xh4$ $\mathbb{W}xe5$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}e4!$ (18. $fxe6?$ $dxe6\infty$ has led to a couple of Black victories) 18... $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ 19. $\mathbb{W}xh8$ $\mathbb{W}xe4$



20.♕c5!N (20.♕xf5 ♜xf5 led to messy play and an eventual win for White in Aravindh – Kulaots, Stockholm 2018, but the text move is a clear improvement) 20...♜f4† 21.♔b1 0–0–0 22.♕xb7 ♜xb7 23.♕xf5 ♜xf5 24.♕h4± The forced line ends with White being the exchange for a pawn up, as well as having the safer king.

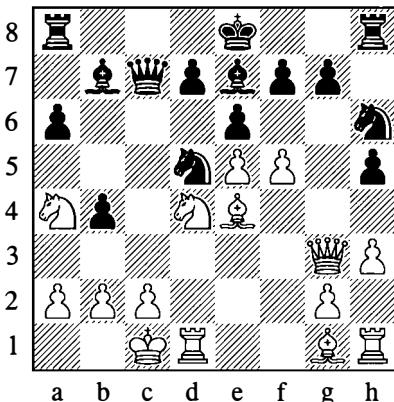
After the text move White has to make another important choice. **B1) 17.♗e4** has been played in three of the four games so far, but I believe **B2) 17.♔b1!** deserves to take over as the main line.

17.♗xg7N is playable but it is not a try for an advantage, as Black can force a draw as follows: 17...♝g8! 18.♕h7! Capturing the knight would obviously lose the queen to a bishop fork. 18...♛xe5 19.fxe6 dxe6 20.♔b1



20...♝f4! Other moves may be playable but this is the cleanest option, as White has no choice but to force a repetition with: 21.♔h2 ♜h8! 22.♗xf4 ♜xd4 23.♗e3 ♜e5 24.♗f4 ♜d4=

B1) 17.♗e4



17...0–0!

17...♝c8?!N is playable but I see no advantage to this move order: after 18.♕f3 Black has nothing better than transposing to our main line by castling, and 18.fxe6 dxe6 19.♗xe6?! is another idea to take into account. (Even though Black should be fine in the latter line, we already have enough to study without allowing White any additional options.)

18.♕f3 ♜ac8

White has no way to break through on the kingside, and Black always has enough counterplay to maintain the balance. The correct result seems to be a draw with accurate play, as shown in the following lines.

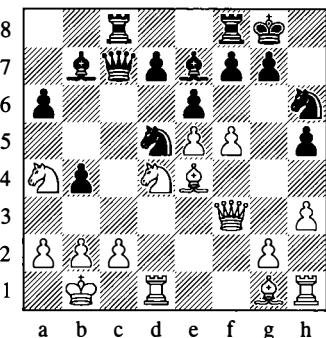
19.f6!?

This is certainly the most obvious attacking try. Interestingly, the Russian IM Semen Khanin has faced this move twice with Black.

In the first of the three games to reach this position, White went for a more patient approach:

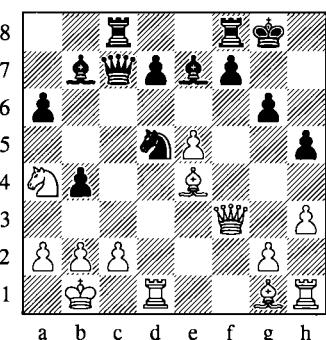
19.♔b1

This enables Black to simplify matters.



19...♝xf5! 20.♝xf5 exf5 21.♗xf5 g6 22.♗f3

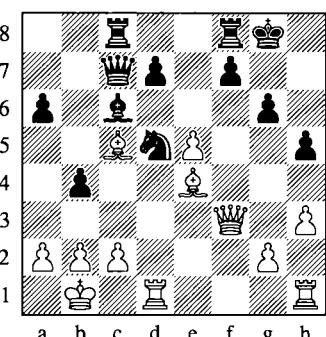
At first glance White seems to be winning a piece, but Black can counter by hitting the misplaced knight on a4.



22...♝c6! 23.♝c5

23.b3 ♜xa4 24.♗xd5 ♜c6∞ reaches another balanced position.

23...♜xc5 24.♜xc5



24...♝c3†!

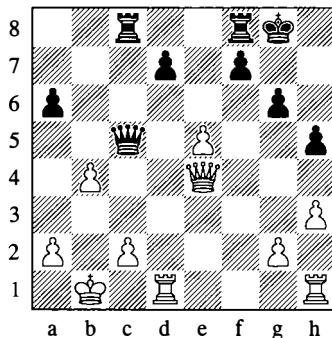
Using simple tactics to open up the queenside.

25.bxc3 ♜xe4 26.♗xe4 ♜xc5

White's king is rather exposed, and he will have to look for a way to force a draw.

27.cxb4

27.♗d6 bxc3 28.♗xg6† fxg6 29.♗xg6†= leads to an immediate draw.



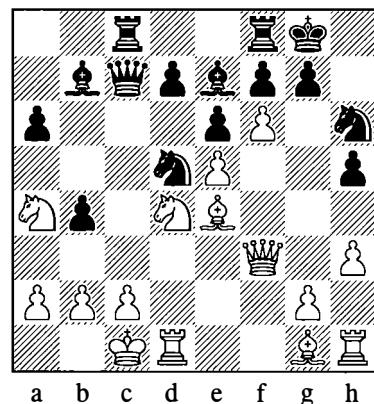
27...♗b8 28.a3 a5 29.♗d6!

Without this resource, the position would only be dangerous for White.

29...axb4 30.♗xg6† fxg6 31.♗xg6† ♔h8

32.♗h6† ♔g8

½–½ Kacharava – Bellaiche, Batumi 2018.



19...gxg6 20.exf6 ♜xf6 21.♔h2 d6!

21...♗d8? 22.♗d6! gives White the advantage, and after the further error 22...♔g5†?! 23.♗b1 Black was already losing in Lomasov – Khanin, Loo 2018.

The text move was Khanin's improvement which he played when reaching this position for the second time – just two rounds later in the same tournament! Black's king may appear to be in danger but there is no easy way for White to continue his attack.

22.g4

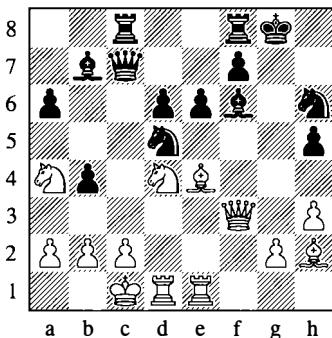
This seems as good a choice as any.

22.♗xd5? does not win a piece due to 22...♝xd4! (but not 22...♝g5?? 23.♔b1 ♐xd5 24.♗g3+–) threatening mate on c2, and after 23.♔e4 ♘g7 24.♗xd6 ♗c4! White's position is a disaster.

White's other main candidate is:

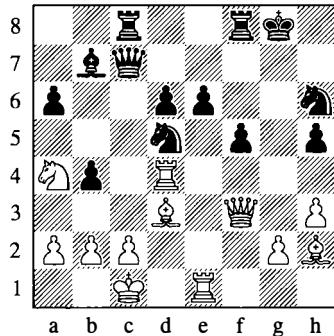
22.♗he1N

Black has a forcing way to equalize.



22...♝xd4 23.♗xd4 f5! 24.♗d3

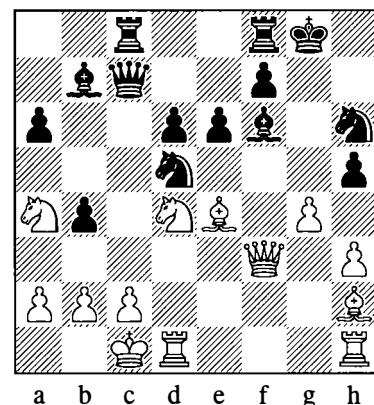
24.♗g3†?! is well met by 24...♝g4! when White's best continuation looks to be: 25.♗xd6 (25.hxg4? fxе4 26.gxh5† ♘h8 is horrible for White) 25...♝xh2 26.♗xe6† ♘g7 27.♗xf5 ♗f6! 28.♗e5 ♗xe5 29.♗xe5 ♘c7† After a mostly forcing sequence, we reach an endgame where Black has some winning chances with the extra piece.



24...♝g7!

Hitting the rook. White has nothing better than steering the game towards a draw with: 25.♗xh5 ♗xd4 26.♔e5! dxе5 27.♗g6† ♘h8 28.♗xh6†=

With a perpetual.



22...♝xd4!

This move, in connection with the accurate follow-up, forces White to abandon all hope of obtaining an advantage.

23.♗xd4 ♗f6!

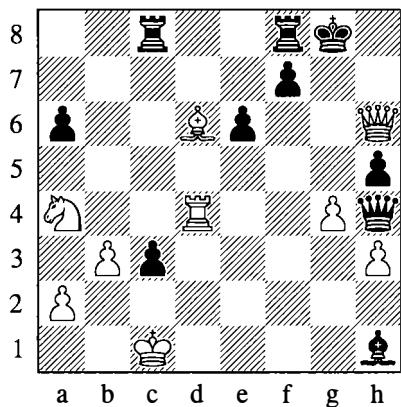
A beautiful tactical idea, exploiting the potential mate on c2 as well as White's vulnerable pieces on the a8-h1 diagonal.

24.♗xf6 ♘xe4 25.c3 bxc3 26.b3 ♘xh1

White will have to simplify the position in order to get some material back.

27. $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ $\mathbb{W}d8$ 28. $\mathbb{W}xh6$ $\mathbb{W}h4!$

Black is not the only player with a vulnerable king.



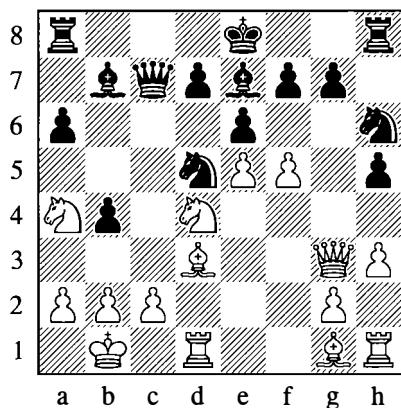
29. $\mathbb{W}e3$ e5!

Opening the central files for the rooks.

30. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{B}cd8$ 31. $gxh5$ $\mathbb{B}xd4$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $f6=$

The position remains balanced and a draw soon ensued in Vavulin – Khanin, Loo 2018.

B2) 17. $\mathbb{Q}b1!$



It would be easy to underestimate this prophylactic move, but I believe it is the most challenging option for Black to face. So far, only Kotronias has played it. The multiple-

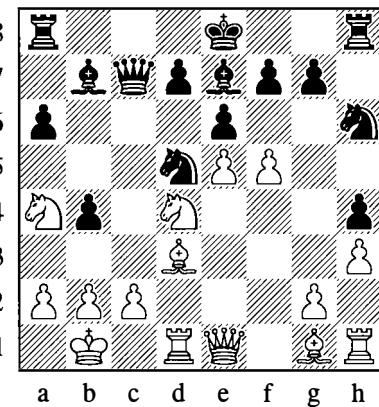
time Greek Champion is an outstanding theoretician, and when he plays something new in the opening there's a good chance that it will improve on previous theory.

17... $\mathbb{h}4!$ 18. $\mathbb{W}e1!$

The point of Black's last move is that 18. $\mathbb{W}xg7?!$ 0–0–0! 19. $f6$ $\mathbb{B}dg8$ forces White to give up his queen for insufficient compensation.

When I was checking the database, I noticed that after the text move we briefly transpose to a second game. In that encounter, Black met 16. $f5$ with 16... $\mathbb{h}4?$ (rather than 16... $\mathbb{Q}e7?$ which I recommend). White then played 17. $\mathbb{W}e1?$ (missing the refutation with 17... $\mathbb{W}xh4$ as detailed on page 454) and after 17... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ the game arrived here. The main lesson to take from this is that you should always pay attention to move-order nuances in these positions.

Moving on, I believe that this will soon become a main line in the whole variation, so the following novelty is an important one.

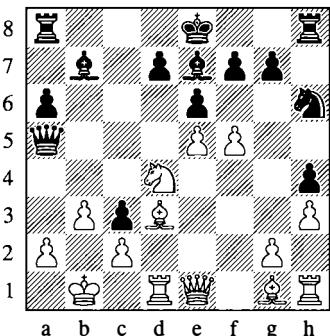


18... $\mathbb{Q}f4!N$

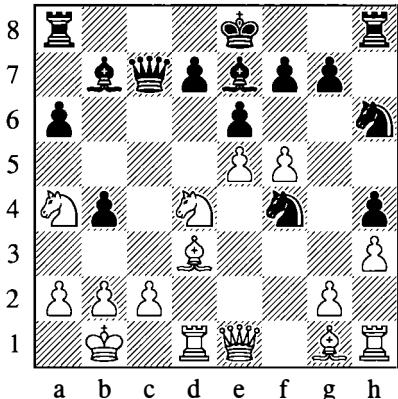
Black has to find a concrete solution, since neither of the moves tested in practice are fully satisfactory.

18... $\mathbb{E}c8$ was strongly met by 19. $\mathbb{g}4! \pm$ (but not 19. $\mathbb{f}xe6? \mathbb{d}xe6 20.\mathbb{Q}b3 0-0 \mp$) and White was in control in Pichot – Cori Quispe, Montevideo 2018.

The other game continued 18... $\mathbb{W}a5$ 19.b3 $\mathbb{Q}c3\#$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ $bxc3$ and Black eventually won, but White has a clear improvement:



21. $\mathbb{Q}e3!N$ (21. $\mathbb{Q}h2?$ $\mathbb{Q}g5!$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}a1$ $\mathbb{E}c8$ was better for Black in Kotronias – Bellaiche, Moscow 2018) 21... $\mathbb{W}xe5$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ 0–0 23. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ $exf5$ 26. $\mathbb{W}f2! \pm$ Black temporarily has two extra pawns but four of his pawns (c3, d7, f5 and h4) are in imminent danger. With best play, White will win back two pawns and then be positionally better. Most endgames should favour White, since his queenside pawns can be advanced easily (after the c3-pawn falls).



White has a variety of possible ways to continue. We are in uncharted territory, but since this is such a critical variation I have analysed three moves in detail: **B21** 19. $\mathbb{Q}h2$, **B22** 19. $\mathbb{Q}b6!?$ and **B23** 19. $\mathbb{Q}e4$.

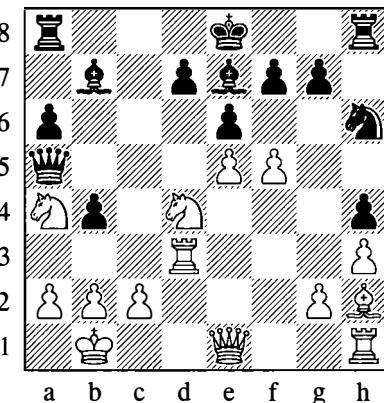
19.f6 is playable but Black's king is safe enough on e8. Black has more than one reasonable response, but the simplest is 19... $\mathbb{g}xf6$ 20. $\mathbb{exf6}$ $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$, when 22. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{W}a5$ transposes to variation B21 below.

B21 19. $\mathbb{Q}h2$

Although this is in no way a bad move, I consider it the easiest of the three main options for Black to deal with. He has some concrete ways to force the play, and most of his ideas are relatively easy to understand and remember.

19... $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ $\mathbb{W}a5$!

Going after the wayward knight, while also removing the queen from the dangerous diagonal opposite the enemy bishop.

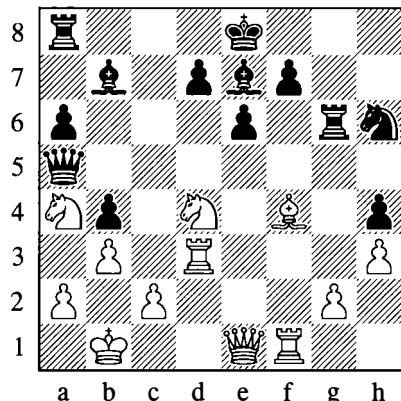


21.f6 $\mathbb{g}xf6$ 22. $\mathbb{exf6}$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 23.b3 $\mathbb{E}g8$

Eyeing the g2-pawn. For the time being Black has an extra pawn and the bishop pair, so White has to make something happen quickly.

24. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{E}g6$

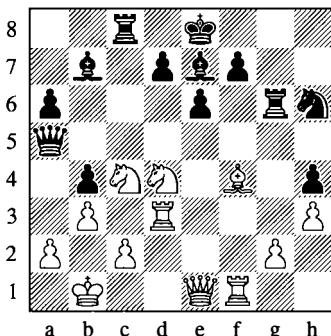
The last couple of moves were forced. Another benefit of Black's 23rd move was that it enabled the rook to protect the h6-knight from an active post on the open g-file, rather than being stuck on h8.



26.a3!?

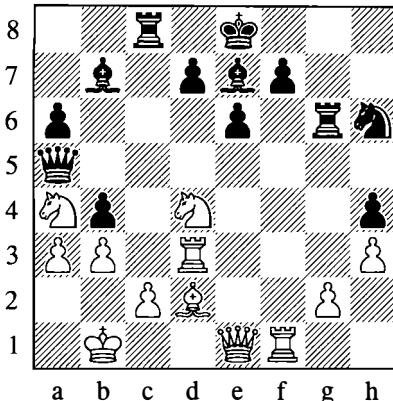
White is looking to take advantage of the pin along the a5-e1 diagonal.

26.♘b2 is a natural attempt to regroup with the knight, but Black has an interesting way to counter it: 26...♝c8 27.♞c4



27...♝xc4! 28.bxc4 ♘f5 29.♗xf5 exf5∞ Black intends ...♝e6 and ...♝e4, with excellent compensation due to his piece activity and safer king.

26...♝c8 27.♞d2



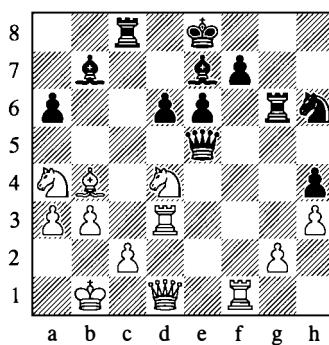
27...d6!

An important move. Black cannot save the b4-pawn anyway, so it is logical to make the e5-square available for the queen.

28.♖f2!?

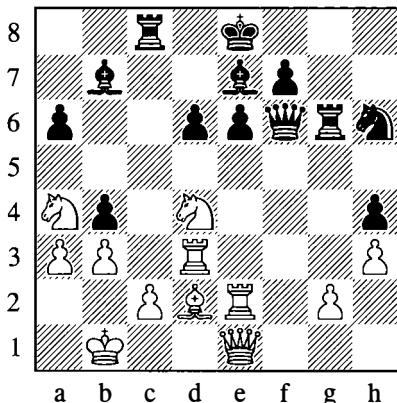
Transferring the rook to the e-file seems like White's most interesting plan.

28.♖xb4 should of course be met by 28...♛e5, a possible continuation being: 29.♔d1



29...♝e4! 30.♗e1 ♘f5 31.♗c3 d5∞ Black has a full share of the chances, with his uncastled king being shielded by his central pawns and well-placed pieces.

28...♛e5 29.♔e2 ♛f6



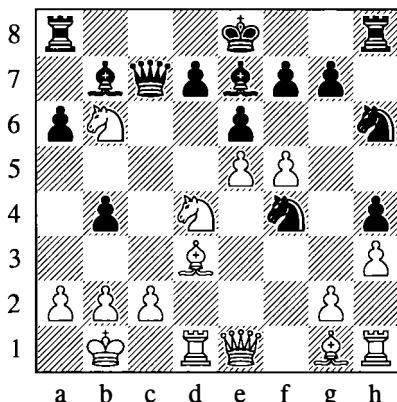
30.Qb6

30.Qxh6 Bxh6 31.Wxb4 Bc7!∞ is also dynamically balanced. Sicilian players should feel at home in such situations, with White's slightly safer king being countered by Black's central pawn majority and bishop pair.

30...Bc7 31.Qc4 Bd5!∞

Black's central structure remains solid and there is no easy way for White to progress his attack.

B22) 19.Qb6!?



This is an important option to consider. White sets up various attacking ideas, while improving the misplaced knight.

19...Bd8!

19...Bb8 20.Qf1! is complicated, but somewhat better for White. The rook is better placed on d8 where it protects d7.

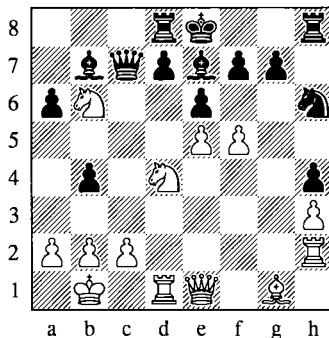
20.Qc4

I also considered:

20.Qf1?!

Please note that 20.Qe4?! Qxg2 comes to the same thing.

20...Qxg2 21.Qxg2 Qxg2 22.Qh2 Qb7



23.Qhd2

White seems to have the makings of a serious initiative for the sacrificed pawn, but I found a nice defensive resource.

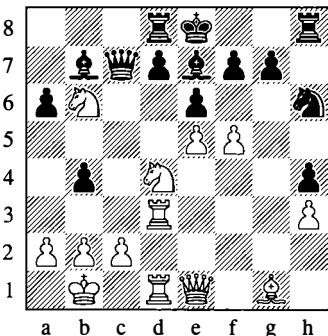
23...Bg5!

23...Qxf5 24.Qxf5 exf5 25.Qxd7 makes life harder for Black.

24.Qd3 Be7!

Surprisingly, the rook is much worse on d3 than d2, so much so that it justifies the use of two tempos with the bishop. The biggest difference is that Black now threatens 25...Qxf5 26.Qxf5 exf5, since 27.Qxd7? allows Black to exploit the weakness of the c2-pawn with 27...Bc8 or 27...Be4. White could avoid the worst by playing 27.Qxd7 instead, but after 27...Bd7 28.Qxd7 Wc6 Black would be at least equal.

Thus, White has a choice between repeating the position with 25.Qd2= or trying something else. Here is a sample line:



25.f6!? ♗xf6 26.exf6 ♔xf6 27.♗b3 d6∞

Black intends ...♗f5 next, defending d6 and bringing his knight back into the game. White has no advantage and the engine indicates that he should play accurately to avoid becoming worse.

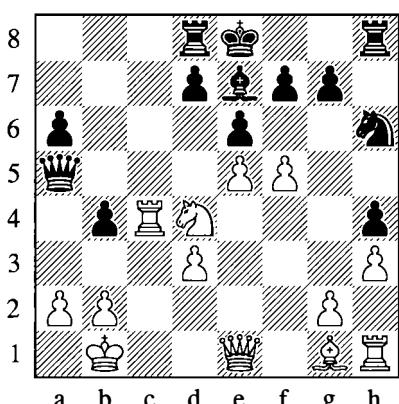
20...♗xd3 21.cxd3 ♗d5 22.♗c1

White should obviously try to create some initiative along the c-file.

22...♗xc4!

Eliminating White's most dangerous piece.

23.♗xc4 ♗a5



24.fxe6

24.♗e4 allows simplification with 24...♗xf5 25.♗xf5 exf5 26.♗xf5, after which the engine gives 26...d6!? as its top option, with fully

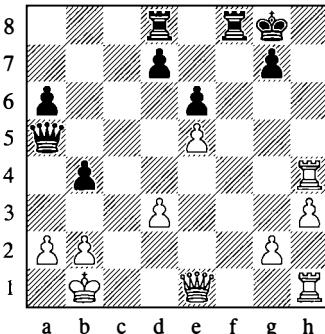
equal chances, while 26...♗d5 is an alternative of roughly equivalent strength, which keeps the position more closed for the time being.

24...fxe6 25.♗f3 ♗f5 26.♗f2 0-0!

Black can afford to leave the h4-pawn hanging.

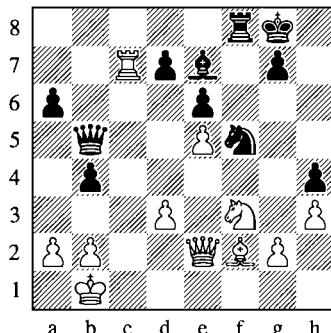
27.♗e4

27.♗xh4 leads to equality after: 27...♗xh4 28.♗xh4 ♗xh4 29.♗xh4

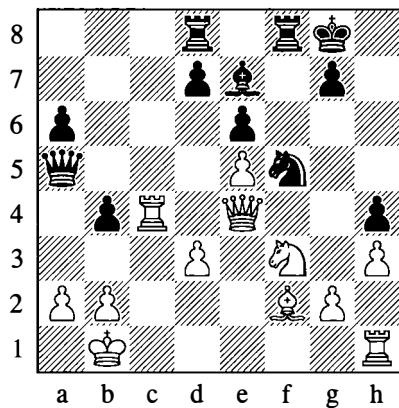


29...♗b8 30.♗d4 ♗b5 31.♗e4 a5= Having stabilized his queenside, Black will play ...♗f5 to target the e5-pawn.

I also checked White's possible plan of playing on the c-file with 27.♗e2 ♗c8 28.♗hc1 ♗xc4 29.♗xc4 ♗b5 30.♗c7, when a nice resource for Black is:



30...♗g3! With the idea of regrouping the knight, as shown after: 31.♗c2 (31.♗xg3 hxg3=) 31...♗h5! 32.♗c4 ♗f4∞

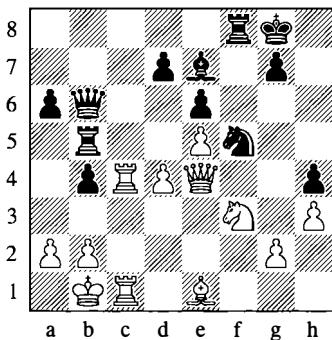


27...Bb8!

Black intends to regroup with ...Bb5-d5, ...Bd8 and perhaps ...Be8 or ...Ba8, depending on circumstances.

28.Bhc1 Bb5 29.b3

29.Qe1 Bd6! threatens ...Be3, so 30.d4 is logical. Black's most accurate continuation seems to be:



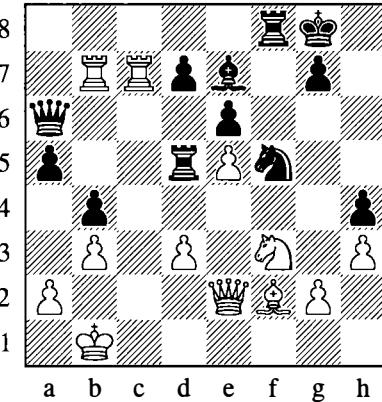
30...Bd8! Now we are ready to regroup with ...Bd5 and ...Ba8. 31.Bc7 Bd5 32.Qd2 a5 33.Qc1c4 Be8= White cannot improve further.

29...Bd8 30.Bc7 Bd5 31.Ba7 a5

Black has carried out the intended regrouping and the chances are equal. The rest of the line is just for illustrative purposes.

32.Qe2 Be8 33.Bc4 Bb8 34.Bcc7 Bb5

35.Bab7 Wa6



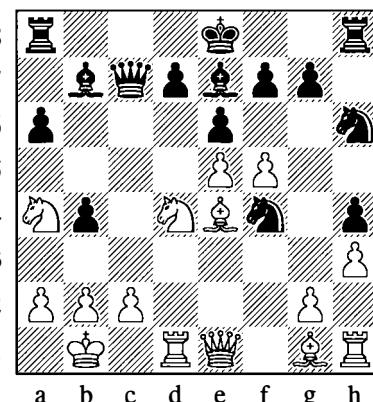
36.Wc2

The d7-pawn is indirectly defended, as shown after 36.Bxd7?? Bxd7 37.Bxd7 Wc6 38.Qa7 Bc8 39.Wd2 Qc5 40.Qxc5 Wxc5 when Black has a deadly attack.

**36...Wxd3 37.Wxd3 Bxd3 38.Bxd7 Bxd7
39.Bxd7 Bb8 40.Qa7 Bb5 41.Qa6 Qf7=**

The endgame is clearly equal.

B23) 19.Qe4



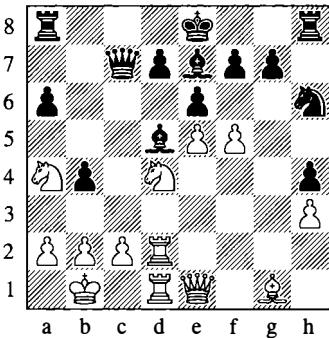
This is perhaps the most dangerous line of all.

19...Qxg2 20.We2!

The following alternative is interesting, but ultimately less dangerous.

20. $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ 21. $\mathbb{B}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 22. $\mathbb{B}hd2$

White has given the bishop pair and a pawn in order to bring the h1-rook into the game with great speed.



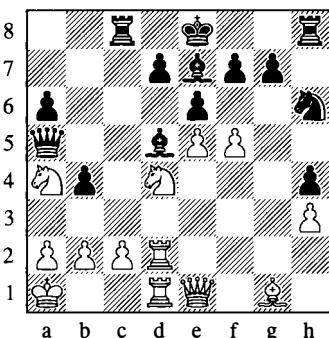
22... $\mathbb{B}c8$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}a1!$?

An interesting waiting move.

23. $b3$ $exf5$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}b6$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$! is a strong exchange sacrifice; the mighty bishop on e4 will be worth at least a rook. 25. $\mathbb{Q}xc8$ $\mathbb{W}xc8$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $g5$! 27. $\mathbb{W}e2$ $\mathbb{B}g8\infty$ Black has a nice initiative and White must take care not to fall into trouble.

23... $\mathbb{W}a5$!

Black's idea is to provoke b2-b3 and then target the weakened dark squares.

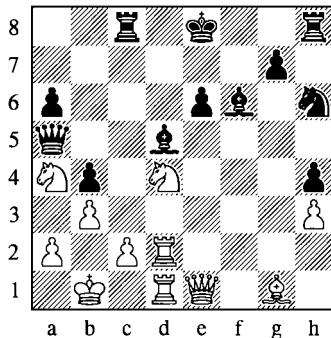


24. $b3$ $f6$!

With White's king on a1, it makes a lot of sense to place our bishop on the long diagonal.

25. $exf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 26. $fxe6$ $dxe6$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}b1$

White's king will have to step off the dangerous diagonal at some point.

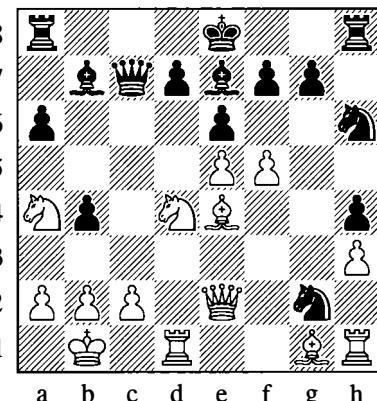


27... $0-0-0$!

Evacuating the king from the centre, in the nick of time.

28. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ 29. $\mathbb{W}xe6\#$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$

Black has nothing to fear. He may force the queens off with ... $\mathbb{W}e5$ next, and the weakness of h3-pawn will always be a source of counterplay in the endgame.

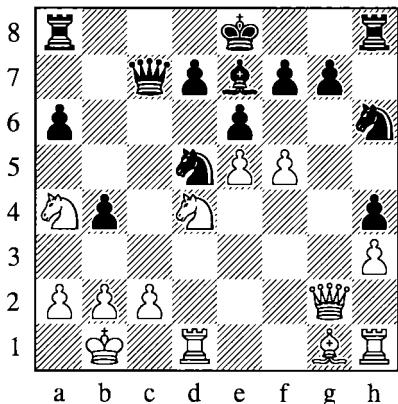


20... $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 21. $\mathbb{W}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 22. $\mathbb{W}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$

Black has managed to gain a pawn, trade a pair of bishops and bring his knight back to the excellent d5-square. On the other hand, White has found a superb square for his queen and the sacrifice of the g-pawn has provided him with an open file.

I analysed three main options: B231) 23.♗g2, B232) 23.♕f2 and B233) 23.f6!?

B231) 23.♗g2



23...♝f8!

Undeveloping the bishop is the best way to keep things solid.

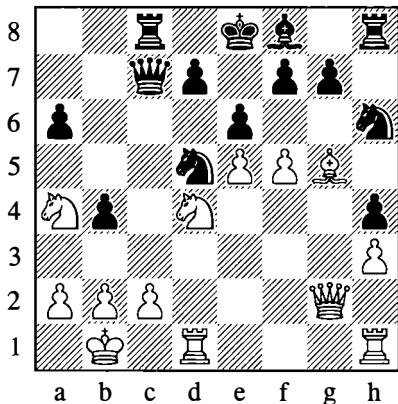
24.♕e3

White utilizes the pin on the long diagonal to activate his bishop and free the h1-rook.

24...♝c8 25.♕g5!?

25.♕c1 ♔e7 looks fine for Black, since White will probably have to play f5-f6, which will make it harder for him to open further lines of attack.

The text move is more challenging, but Black has a remarkable way of fighting back.



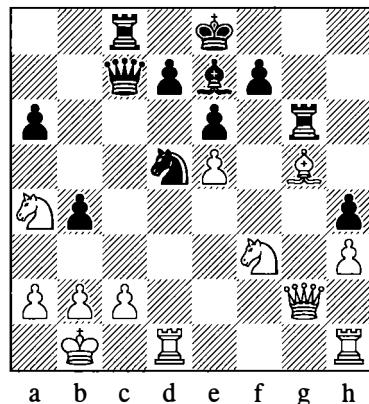
25...g6!!

Forcing White to make a decision regarding the f5-pawn.

26.fxg6 ♜g8!

Seizing the opportunity to create counterplay along the g-file.

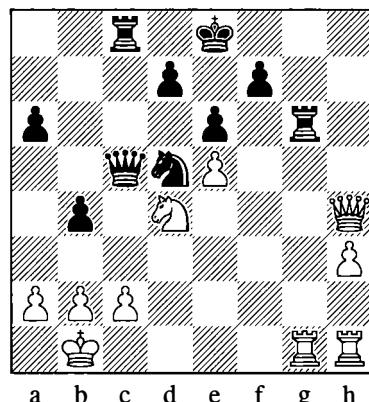
27.♕xh6 ♜xg6! 28.♕g5 ♔e7 29.♔f3



29...♛c6!

This excellent move ties together a variety of motifs: the misplaced knight on a4, pressure along the a8-h1 diagonal, the pin along the g-file and the vulnerability of the c2-pawn. White only has one way to survive.

**30.♜dg1! ♛xa4 31.♕f2 ♛b5 32.♔d4 ♛c5
33.♖xh4 ♛xh4 34.♖xh4**



34...♝e3!

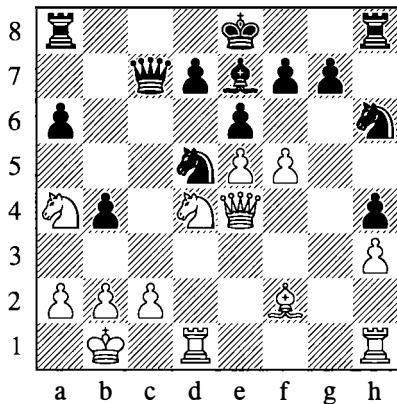
Leading to a level endgame.

35.♕xg6 fxg6 36.♔e4 ♜f5=

The game continues, but neither side can claim the upper hand.

B232) 23.♗f2

This is another natural idea, activating the bishop and attacking the h4-pawn while freeing the rook in the corner.



23...♝c8

Initially I thought that Black's position should be easy enough, due to the strong threat of 24...♛a5, intending to meet 25.b3 with 25...♛xa4! 26.♛xd6 ♛xa2†!. However, White can avoid this by means of:

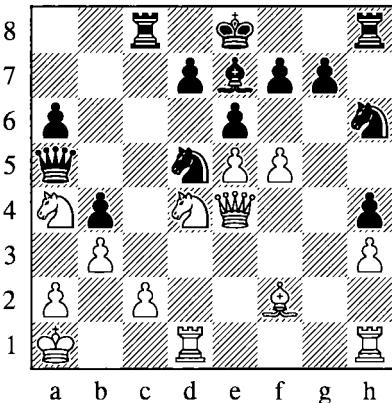
24.♔a1!

Simply moving the king away from the potential knight fork on c3. White intends to continue building his attack with ♘hg1 or ♘hf1 next, so Black has to find a purposeful continuation.

24...♛a5!

Even without the aforementioned tactical resource, it is worth playing this to provoke a weakening of White's queenside.

25.b3



25...♝c7!

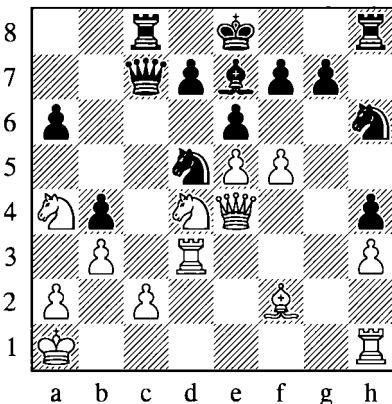
Now White will have to worry about ...♞c3 ideas.

25...♞c5?! appears tempting but it runs into a nice refutation: 26.c4! ♞c3 (26...bxcc3? 27.fxe6! wins for White) 27.♘xc3 bxc3 28.fxe6 dxe6 29.♖xh4 ♖b6 30.♖e1±

26.♗d3!

Defending along the third rank is a pretty common occurrence for White in the Open Sicilian.

26.♗b1 ♞xf5 27.♗xf5 ♞c3†! is an important intermediate move, and after 28.♗xc3 exf5 29.♗xf5 ♗xc3 Black is fine.



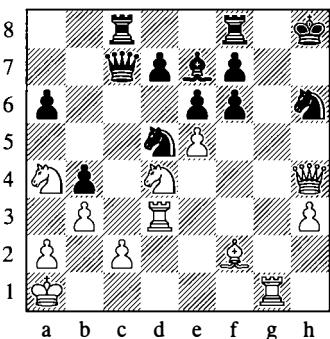
26...0–0!

26...g6? 27.fxg6 f5! is a fancy idea, but after 28.♔f3? I do not fully trust Black's position. For instance, 28...♚xe5 29.♕b1 ♜g8 30.♗e1 ♜f4 31.♗g2± and the strong g6-pawn is annoying.

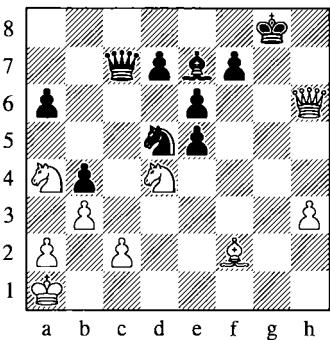
27.♖g1

Activating the rook seems like White's most natural plan. I checked two other ideas:

27.f6 looks like an obvious try, but Black can handle it easily enough: 27...gxsf6 28.♖g1† ♔h8 29.♗xh4

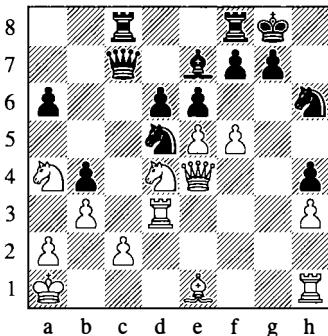


29...♔h7! Black is just in time to defend against the mating threats. 30.♗dg3 ♜g8! 31.♗xg8 ♜xg8 32.♗xg8 ♔xg8 33.♗xh6 fx5 Having reached the endgame, Black may start to feel optimistic, as White has to find only moves to survive. He can force a draw with:

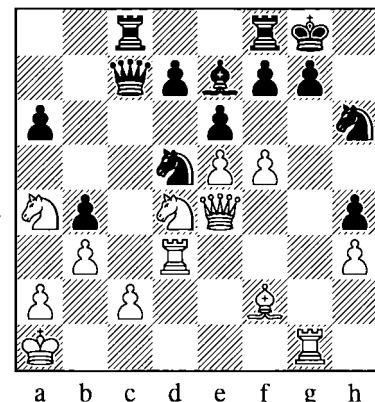


34.♗g3 ♜f4 35.♗b2! ♜a7 36.♗e2 ♜e3 37.♗xf4 ♜d4†= With a perpetual.

27.♗e1?? threatens to target the h6-knight with ♔d2, but 27...d6! is a good answer, for instance:



28.f6 dx5 29.fxe7 ♜fe8!∞ Black's king is safe and he will soon have three, or possibly even four, pawns for the piece, as c2 may fall after the d4-knight moves.

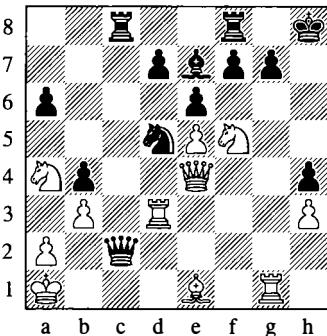
**27...♔h8**

White's last move threatened f5-f6, so the king steps off the open file. The position remains dynamically balanced, and it was hard to decide which of White's options to present as my main line.

28.♗dd1!?

This is certainly not the first move you would consider; but once I checked the alternatives and found no advantage for White, the text move seemed like an interesting attempt to cause problems.

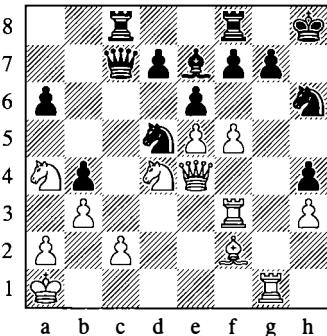
28. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ threatens $\mathbb{Q}d2$, but Black is ready with a tactical solution: 28... $\mathbb{Q}xf5$! 29. $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ $\mathbb{W}xc2$!



30. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}c3$! Once again, it is White who has to force a perpetual: 31. $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ $exf5$ 32. $\mathbb{W}f3$ $bxcc3$ 33. $\mathbb{W}h5\#$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 34. $\mathbb{W}h6$ $g6$ 35. $\mathbb{W}xg6\#$ $fxg6$ 36. $\mathbb{W}xg6\#$

28. $\mathbb{Q}f3$

Threatening f5-f6. Black has only one defence, but it is adequate:



28... $\mathbb{Q}g8$!

I found no way through for White. Here is my illustrative line:

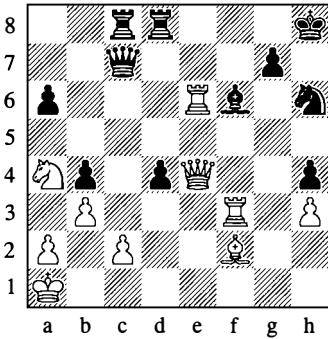
29. $\mathbb{Q}g2?$! $f6$!

Dissolving the centre.

30. $\mathbb{E}g6$

The following moves are mostly forced captures, which result in an equal position.

30... $fxe5$ 31. $fxe6$ $dxe6$ 32. $\mathbb{E}xe6$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 33. $\mathbb{W}xd5$ $\mathbb{E}gd8$ 34. $\mathbb{W}e4$ $exd4$



35. $\mathbb{E}xf6\#$?

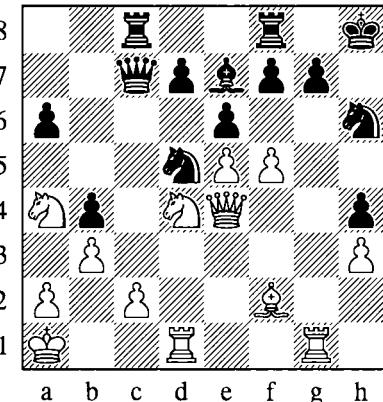
An interesting try, but it does not promise White any advantage.

35... $gxsf6$ 36. $\mathbb{W}xh4$

36. $\mathbb{E}xf6$ $\mathbb{W}xc2$! 37. $\mathbb{E}xh6\#$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 38. $\mathbb{W}xd4$ $\mathbb{E}xd4$ 39. $\mathbb{W}xd4\#$ $\mathbb{Q}xh6$ is another route to a draw.

36... $\mathbb{W}h7$ 37. $\mathbb{E}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 38. $\mathbb{E}f4$ $\mathbb{W}xh4$ 39. $\mathbb{E}xh4\#$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 40. $\mathbb{W}xd4\#$ $\mathbb{Q}g6=$

With an equal endgame.



28... $\mathbb{E}g8$!

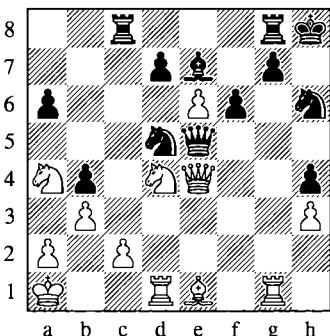
This is stronger than 28... $\mathbb{Q}c3$, after which

29.♕xc3 ♜xc3† 30.♔b1 ♔xf5 31.♔xf5 exf5 32.♔xf5 g6 33.♗e4 ♜c6 34.♗d5† reaches a slightly better endgame for White

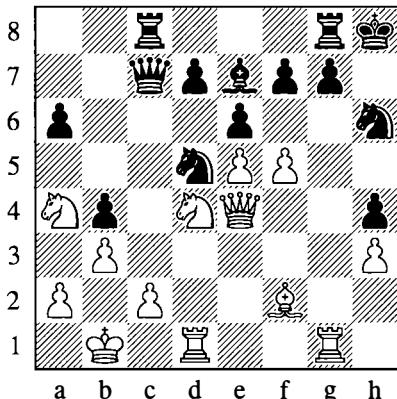
29.♔b1

One of Black's main ideas is to play ...f6 or ...d6 to open the long diagonal for his bishop, so it makes sense for White to remove his king from it.

29.♗e1 f6! is a direct way for Black to solve his problems: 30.fxe6 ♜xe5



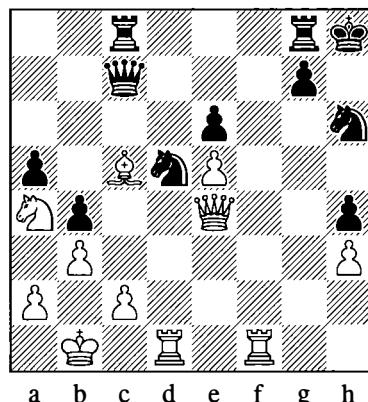
31.♗xe5 fxe5 32.exd7 exd4 33.dxc8=♗ ♜xc8 34.♔b1 ♔f5∞ Black has fine play for the exchange.



29...a5

It is not clear how White can continue his attack. One line that engines tend to like is:

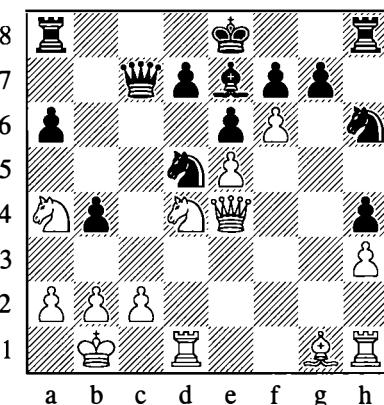
30.♗g1? ♜c5! 31.fxe6 dxe6 32.♔xe6 fxe6 33.♔xc5



33...♗gd8! 34.♔d6 ♔c3† 35.♔xc3 ♜xc3=

Black has a safe position; a likely follow-up will be ...♗f5, possibly followed by ...♗c6 and a queen exchange.

B233) 23.f6!?



This is the most obvious attacking move. Black will certainly have to be on guard against the direct threats; on the other hand, White has to give up all of his central pawns. Moreover, releasing the central tension makes Black's life easier in a way, as he no longer has to worry about whether fxe6 or f5-f6 might come next.

23...gx f 6 24.ex f 6 $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}h2$

We have seen a few lines in which White activated his bishop via f2 or e3; but here it makes sense to gain a tempo against the black queen.

We must also consider the following direct approach:

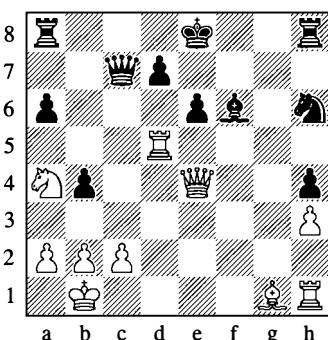
25. $\mathbb{Q}xe6?$

Although this looks dangerous, the release of tension and ensuing piece exchanges should ease Black's task, as long as he avoids a few tactical pitfalls.

25...fx e 6!

25...dx e 6? must be avoided, as 26. $\mathbb{B}xd5+$ gives White a crushing attack. The key point is that Black does not have the vital ... $\mathbb{W}c6$ move available, due to the $\mathbb{B}d8\#$ trick.

26. $\mathbb{B}xd5$



26... $\mathbb{W}c6!$

This is the only move, but it's a great one! Black safeguards his a8-rook, attacks the knight on a4, attacks the rook on d5 and pins it to the undefended queen on e4, while also eyeing the rook on h1. What more could you ask for from one move?

27. $\mathbb{Q}b6 \mathbb{Q}d8??$

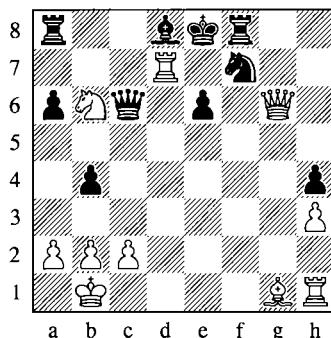
Not the only playable move, but I like this method of challenging the knight.

28. $\mathbb{W}g6\#$

28. $\mathbb{Q}xa8$ $\mathbb{W}xd5$ forces a queen exchange, after which the endgame will not be at all dangerous for Black.

28... $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 29. $\mathbb{B}xd7 \mathbb{Q}f8!$

The position may look scary but Black is actually pretty safe. The vital squares are defended and ... $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ is threatened, so White's options are limited.



30. $\mathbb{B}d1??$

30. $\mathbb{B}xf7$ leads to a quick perpetual: 30... $\mathbb{B}xf7$

31. $\mathbb{W}g8\#$ $\mathbb{B}f8$ 32. $\mathbb{W}g6\#$ $\mathbb{B}f7=$

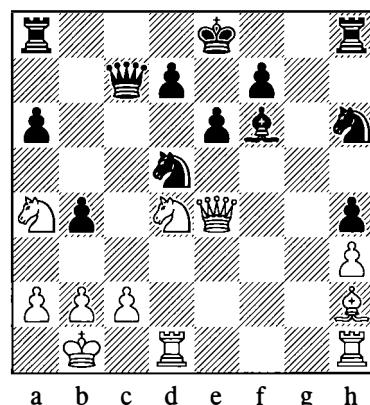
30... $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ $\mathbb{W}xb6$ 32. $\mathbb{B}he1$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$

33. $\mathbb{B}f1\#$

White has some initiative for the piece but there is no way for him to break through. Black can simply continue with:

33... $\mathbb{B}a7??$

Defending along the 7th rank and preparing ... $\mathbb{B}d7$ if circumstances permit. Counterplay with ...a5-a4 is also on the agenda, so White will most likely have to force a draw.



25... $\mathbb{W}a5!$

Black had to move the queen somewhere, and striking at the misplaced knight on a4 is the best option.

26. $\mathbb{Q}he1$

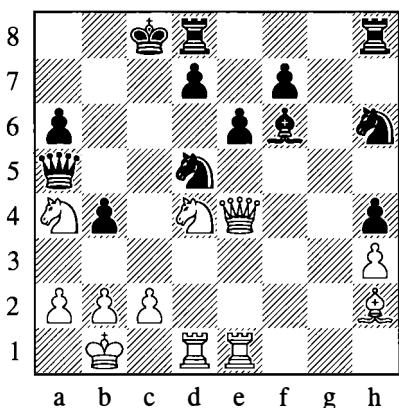
26.b3?! gives Black a pleasant choice. 26... $\mathbb{W}xa4$ is an obvious tactical idea, and 27. $\mathbb{W}xd5$ $\mathbb{W}xa2\uparrow$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}xa2$ exd5 reaches an endgame where White has some compensation for the pawns, but certainly no advantage. This prospect alone is likely to deter White – but Black also has a second good option in 26... $\mathbb{Q}e7!$, which offers him more chances of an advantage if he is ready to forgo the temptation of a queen exchange.

After the text move it looks as though Black's king is in great danger. Please note that 26... $\mathbb{W}xa4??$ 27. $\mathbb{W}xd5+-$ would be disastrous, and in the meantime there are many threats including c2-c4, $\mathbb{Q}xe6$, $\mathbb{Q}f5$ and $\mathbb{Q}b3$. Fortunately Black has a fantastic defensive resource with:

26...0–0–0!

Black's king is safe on the queenside and White is still facing problems with his knight on a4.

26... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ is almost a good defence, but 27. $\mathbb{Q}d6!$ poses some problems.

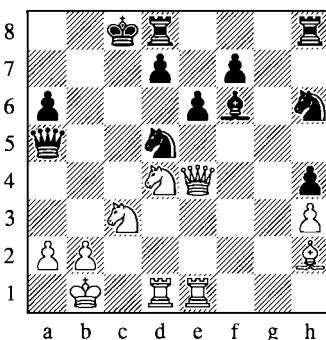
**27. $\mathbb{Q}b3$**

27.b3?! allows a familiar tactical solution: 27... $\mathbb{W}xa4!$ 28. $\mathbb{W}xd5!$ $\mathbb{W}xa2\uparrow$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}xa2$ exd5 White will have to struggle for a draw.

An interesting alternative is:

27.c4? bxc3 28. $\mathbb{Q}xc3$

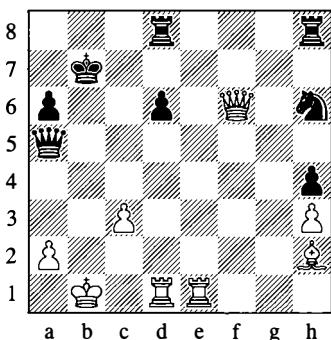
28. $\mathbb{Q}b3$? is another idea, based on the fact that the en passant capture has cleared the fourth rank for White's queen to defend the a4-knight. My analysis continues: 28... $\mathbb{W}b5$ 29. $\mathbb{E}xd5?$ exd5 30. $\mathbb{W}f4!$ White is playing for a direct attack but Black has more than one defence, the simplest being: 30... $\mathbb{W}d3\uparrow$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}a1$ cxb2 \uparrow 32. $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ $\mathbb{Q}xb2\uparrow$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ d6!= Blocking the dangerous diagonal. Black's king may look exposed but it is actually White's king which could find itself in more danger after ... $\mathbb{E}hg8-g2$ or ... $\mathbb{E}he8$. So as with many of these sharp lines, White's best approach is to force a draw.

**28... $\mathbb{Q}xc3\uparrow$ 29.bxc3 d6!**

Once again shutting out the h2-bishop. Don't forget that Black already has two extra pawns, so White is under pressure to prove that his attack is worth the investment.

30. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ fxe6 31. $\mathbb{W}xe6\uparrow$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 32. $\mathbb{W}xf6$

In restoring material equality, White permits us to exchange queens.



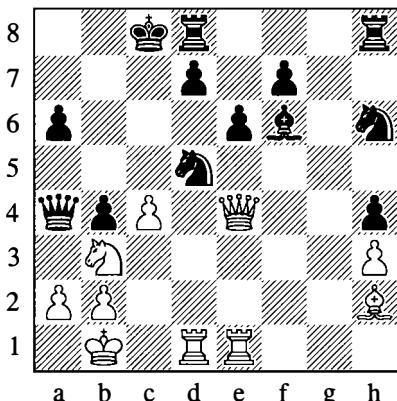
32... $\mathbb{W}f5\#$ 33. $\mathbb{W}xf5$ $\mathbb{Q}xf5=$

Black is absolutely safe; his plan will be to exchange one pair of rooks along the e-file and keep his knight on f5, where it protects the d6- and h4-pawns.

27... $\mathbb{W}xa4$ 28. c4!

I considered 28. $\mathbb{B}xd5?$ exd5 29. $\mathbb{W}f4$ d6 30. $\mathbb{W}xf6$ $\mathbb{W}d7$ when White has some compensation for the exchange but no advantage, since Black's king is adequately defended.

The text move is the most dangerous idea of all. In fact, White would be winning on the spot if it were not for the following fantastic idea.



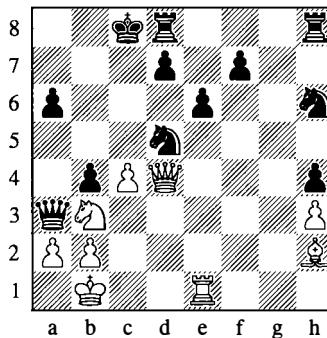
28... $\mathbb{W}a3!!$

Threatening mate on b2, while exploiting the fact that White cannot capture on a3 because ... $\mathbb{Q}c3\#$ will be strong.

29. $\mathbb{Q}d4$

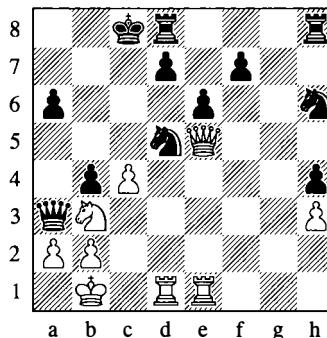
White has to block the bishop's diagonal somehow. There are two other possible ways of doing it:

29. $\mathbb{B}d4?$ leads to forcing play after: 29... $\mathbb{Q}xd4$
30. $\mathbb{W}xd4$



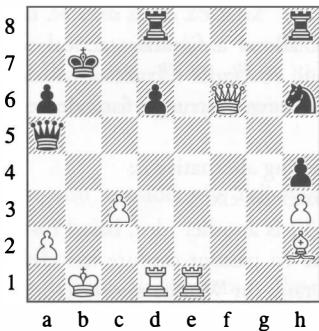
30... $\mathbb{Q}c3\#$! 31. $bxc3$ $bxcc3$ 32. $\mathbb{W}xc3$ $\mathbb{W}a4$ The position is double-edged but Black has the extra material, and the better chances in my opinion.

29. $\mathbb{Q}e5?$ is met by the same motif: 29... $\mathbb{Q}xe5$
30. $\mathbb{W}xe5$



30... $\mathbb{Q}c3\#$! 31. $bxc3$ $bxcc3$ 32. $\mathbb{W}xc3$ $\mathbb{B}hg8$ Black is in time to create counterplay with ... $\mathbb{B}g2$ or ... $\mathbb{B}g3$, and the game should result in a draw, which could happen in a few different ways.

29... $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 30. $\mathbb{B}xd4$



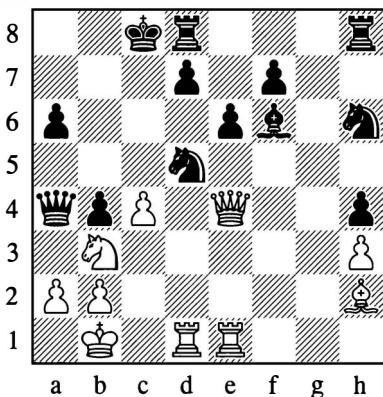
32...Rxf5! 33.Qxf5 Qxf5=

Black is absolutely safe; his plan will be to exchange one pair of rooks along the e-file and keep his knight on f5, where it protects the d6- and h4-pawns.

27...Ra4 28.c4!

I considered 28.Qxd5?! exd5 29.Qf4 d6 30.Rxf6 Rd7 when White has some compensation for the exchange but no advantage, since Black's king is adequately defended.

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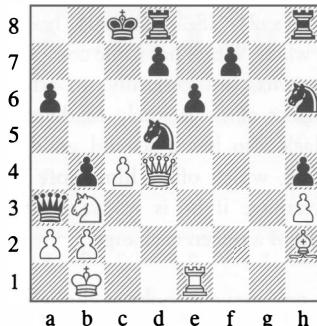
28...Ra3!!

Threatening mate on b2, while exploiting the fact that White cannot capture on a3 because ...Qc3† will be strong.

29.Qd4

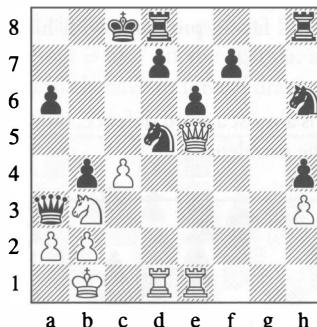
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30.Qxd4



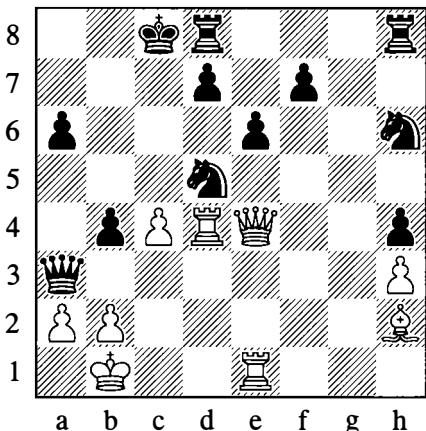
30...Qc3†! 31.bxc3 bxc3 32.Qxc3 Ra4 The position is double-edged but Black has the extra material, and the better chances in my opinion.

29.Qe5? is met by the same motif: 29...Qxe5
30.Qxe5



30...Qc3†! 31.bxc3 bxc3 32.Qxc3 Rhg8 Black is in time to create counterplay with ...Rg2 or ...Rg3, and the game should result in a draw, which could happen in a few different ways.

29...Qxd4 30.Qxd4

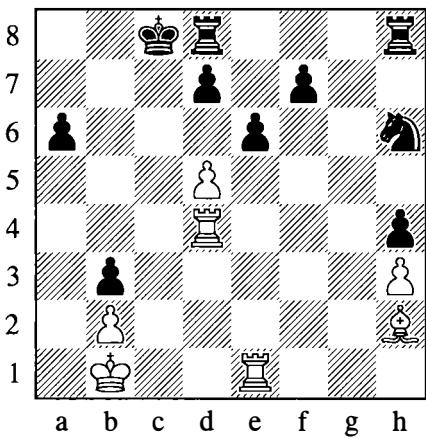
**30...b3!!**

This is one of the most beautiful moves I have ever seen. Despite the fact that the queen has been en prise for a few moves already, Black simply ignores it and brings another attacking unit into play, creating additional threats against a2.

31.cxd5!

31.axb3 is met by 31... $\mathbb{Q}c3\#$! 32.bxc3 $\mathbb{W}xb3\#$ and now White should settle for 33. $\mathbb{Q}a1$, when Black has at least a draw, as the alternative 33. $\mathbb{Q}c1?$ $\mathbb{W}b7$ is better for Black.

**31... $\mathbb{W}xa2\#$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{W}a1\#$ 33. $\mathbb{W}b1$ $\mathbb{W}xb1\#$
34. $\mathbb{Q}xb1$**

**34...d6!**

Once again, it is important to close off the path of White's bishop. Now he has no choice but to start taking back some material in order to maintain the balance.

35.dxe6 fxe6 36. $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 37. $\mathbb{E}c4\#$ $\mathbb{W}b7=$

White has enough activity to claim equality, but Black is in no danger.

Conclusion

This concludes our coverage of the 7. $\mathbb{W}f3$ system. The starting point of the chapter occurred after 7... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 8.0–0–0 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 9. $\mathbb{W}g3$ b5 10.f4 $\mathbb{Q}eg4$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ h5! 12.e5 b4 14.h3 $\mathbb{Q}h6$, making it the latest tabiya of any chapter in the book. After the standard continuation of 15. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ (remember that this position can be reached via a few different move orders), we started by analysing the calm 16. $\mathbb{E}e4$ and found that the chances should remain balanced after accurate play on both sides.

Next we considered the critical 16.f5!, when Black already has to show some accuracy with 16... $\mathbb{Q}e7$!. Then 17. $\mathbb{E}e4$ has been the usual choice, but Kotronias's 17. $\mathbb{Q}b1$! is more venomous. Play continues 17...h4! 18. $\mathbb{W}e1$! and now 18... $\mathbb{Q}f4$!N is my improvement over the two existing games. The position is full of challenges for both sides, but also rich in dynamic opportunities. I have analysed many of the ensuing variations in great detail, partly due to the complexity of the resulting positions, but also because I believe this whole variation is likely to be one of the next big trends in the Taimanov. Future high-level games will surely reveal more secrets of this key battleground, but I believe in the soundness of Black's position, and I am confident that the analysis in these pages contains everything you will need to know about these positions for a good while to come.

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The Sicilian Taimanov arises after the opening moves 1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♘c6, and is an ideal weapon for Black in the modern era. It is theoretically sound, and strikes a perfect balance between solidity and dynamic counterattacking potential, which makes it a popular choice among club players and top grandmasters alike.

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