

Grandmaster Repertoire

Lubomir
Ftacnik

**The Sicilian
Defence**



Tired of bad positions? Try the main lines!

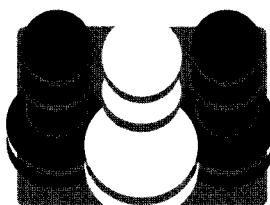
QUALITY CHESS



The Sicilian Defence

By

Lubomir Ftacnik



Quality Chess
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Grandmaster Repertoire 6 - The Sicilian Defence

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Series Foreword

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

John Shaw & Jacob Aagaard
Quality Chess

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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 |
| (x) | xth match 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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- Chess Informant*
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Introduction

From Russia Sicily with Love

First I would like to express my gratitude to the reader for opening this book on the Sicilian Defence. Credit must go to the Quality Chess team and their excellent authors whose efforts resulted in the creation of a real buzz about the Grandmaster Repertoire series. To follow in the footsteps of the previous titles made for a daunting challenge and I hope that the present book, the sixth volume in the series, will live up to the readers' high expectations.

The unparalleled popularity of the Sicilian has led to the creation of an entire chess galaxy that is too vast for even the best and brightest minds to comprehend fully. Each player chooses his Kan, Sveshnikov, Dragon or other pet variation, around which he creates his own Sicilian world. My own modest expertise lies in the domains of the Najdorf and Scheveningen systems, which I have been playing and studying over the past two decades. The Scheveningen system represents a kind of foundational core, from which virtually all knowledge about thematic Sicilian structures and plans can be traced. Although the official subject of this book is the Najdorf variation, the two systems share many common themes and can often transpose to one another. In certain places, such as Chapters 12 and 13 (which deal with the variations 6.f4 and 6.Qe2 respectively), the decision to recommend the response 6...e6, instead of equally valid alternatives such as 6...e5, was influenced by my fondness for the Scheveningen set-up. I make no apologies for this, as I believe that an author can make the most useful contribution when writing about his own areas of expertise.

At the end of the day this repertoire book is about cherry-picking the best and brightest ideas from the enormous jungle of variations available. In some sense the repertoire is notable not only for the recommendations that were included, but also for the attractive ones that (sometimes after agonizing deliberations) did not make the final cut. The whole Sicilian Defence creates something of a 'win-win' situation, in the sense that the unbalanced positions often result in bloodshed for one side or the other. In some variations Black may have to defend for a while, but it rarely kills his chances for a subsequent counterattack and ultimate success.

I have tried to address all the most important ideas in every chapter, but practice will inevitably bring some new challenges, so please be prepared for some surprises. Nobody can foresee the future – it is often difficult enough to 'predict' the past (just ask any decent historian).

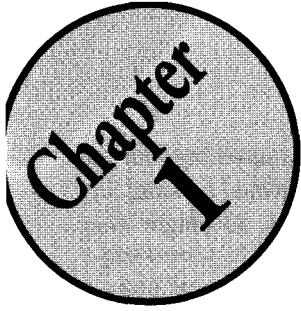
I have often hankered for a bit of colour in our seemingly dry, black and white world of technical annotations, symbols and diagrams. As a young man I came across a game that is played in social situations, involving association with the names of films. Movies can often be symbolic, full of cultural references and associative bridges – evoking colours and emotions unlike any other form

of media. I hope for some readers the chapter titles will evoke some positive feelings and help to place the struggle to master chess into a broader perspective.

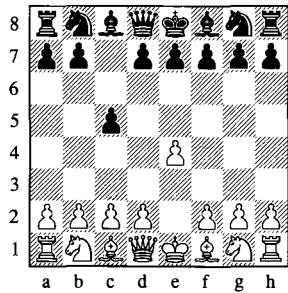
This entire project has at times threatened to pull me down and drag me under the deep waters of endless lines and multiplying ideas. I am greatly indebted for the help and encouragement of John Shaw, Jacob Aagaard and Andrew Greet of Quality Chess. The love, care and understanding of my wife Katarina went so far that she is happy to be woven between the lines.

I appreciate the attention of any reader who glances beyond this preface. The main rule of the survival guide in Black's Sicilian galaxy is to *Die Another Day* – be prepared to go under at any moment, but try to resist and strike back. The final (or should that be *Fatal?*) attraction of the Sicilian is the fact that it is truly dangerous – for both sides!

Lubomir Ftacnik
Bratislava, June 2010



Minor Systems



Pandora's (Chess) Box - Miscellaneous 2nd moves

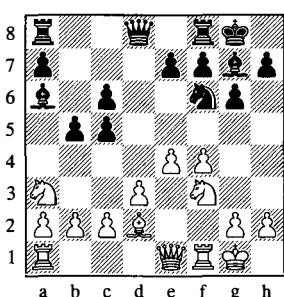
Variation Index

1.e4

1...c5

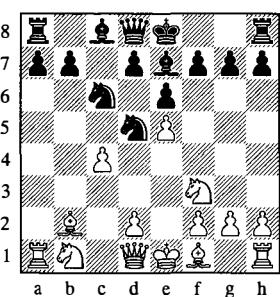
| | |
|---|----|
| A) 2. $\mathbb{Q}a3!?$ | 10 |
| B) 2.b3 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 3. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ e5 | 12 |
| B1) 4. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ | 12 |
| B2) 4. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ | 13 |
| C) 2.b4 cxb4 | 15 |
| C1) 3.d4 | 15 |
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| D2) 3.exd5 | 21 |
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A) note to 3.c3



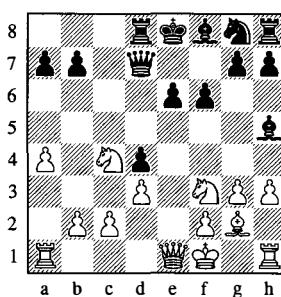
10... $\mathbb{Q}xe4!?$

C2) after 9.c4

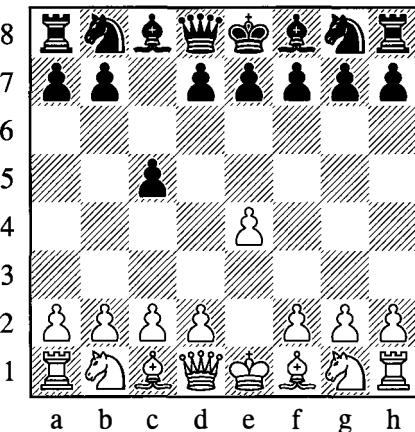


9... $\mathbb{Q}db4!N$

F) note to 9.g4!?



14...b6!N

1.e4 c5

They say that a happy ending makes earlier troubles fade away, but what should we do about a scary beginning? The present chapter, featuring chess horrors of all imaginable forms was impossible to avoid; it is a true Pandora's box of manifold troubles Caissa is storing for her devoted followers. Fortunately, most of these sidelines are not so dangerous and in comparison with the sharpest and most complicated Sicilian variations they lack some sparkle. Nevertheless we should still take some time to find out how best to greet these exotic visitors.

In this Chapter we will consider the following moves: A) 2.♘a3!?, B) 2.b3, C) 2.b4, D) 2.d3, E) 2.♗e2 and F) 2.g3.

A) 2.♘a3!?

This kinky idea came into the limelight at the end of 2005 after Zvjaginsev used it three times in the Russian Championship, defeating Khalifman and drawing with Dreev and Motylev. Many games later, one has to admit that it is much more sensible than an initial glance might suggest.

2...g6

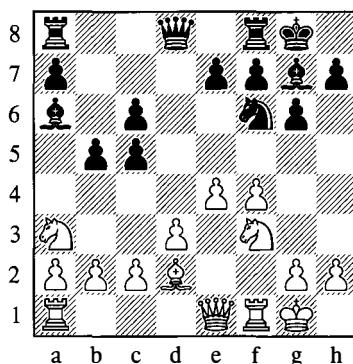
Black can play just about anything, but the text move is logical as it avoids creating any kind of weakness that the a3-knight may exploit.

3.c3

Once again White can play just about anything, so we will limit ourselves to a couple of instructive examples to show how the game might develop.

3.g3 ♗g7 4.♗g2 ♘c6 5.d3 d6 6.f4 ♘f6
7.♗f3 0-0 8.0-0 ♘b8 9.♗c4 b5 10.♗e3 ♘g4
11.♗d5 (11.♗b1 b4 12.♗c4 ♗c7?) 11...e6
12.♗c3 b4 13.♗e2 a5? White's knight has used an extraordinary amount of time to reach a normal square, Zvjaginsev – Kobalia, Novokuznetsk 2008.

3.f4 ♗g7 4.♗f3 ♘c6 5.♗b5 ♘f6 6.♗xc6 bxc6
This is the more ambitious recapture, although the alternative can also lead to interesting play:
6...dxc6 7.d3 0-0 8.0-0 b5 9.♗e1 ♗a6
10.♗d2N (10.e5 ♘d5?) Popelyshev – Viliavin, Moscow 2007)



10...♘xe4!? (10...♗d7=) 11.♗a5! ♗e8
12.♗xe4 ♗xb2 13.f5 ♗d7 14.♗ael ♗xa3
15.♗e5 ♗d4† 16.♗xd4 cxd4 17.♗xc6 ♗fe8
18.♗xd4 The explosive sequence has only resulted in equality.

7.d3 0-0

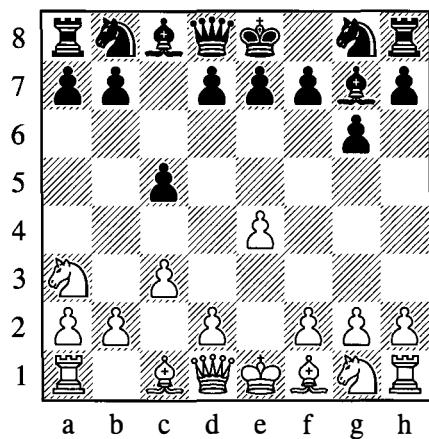
Also promising is 7...d5 8.e5 ♜g4 9.h3 ♜h6 10.g4 f6 11.exf6 exf6 12.♔e2† ♜f7 13.0–0

♝e8± Black has the more harmonious position, and the slight compromising of his pawn structure is of little consequence.

8.0–0 ♜b8 9.♕e1 d6 10.♗h4 ♜d7 11.f5 e6 12.♗xd8 ♜xd8 13.fxe6 fxe6 14.♘c4 d5 15.♘a5 ♜b6±

Black's position is already slightly more pleasant, Popelyshev – Arakelov, Kostroma 2008.

3...♜g7



4.♘f3

Alternatives are possible, but there is no particularly convincing way to make use of the position of the knight on a3.

4.f4 ♜c6 5.d3 d5 6.♘f3 e6 7.♗e2 ♜ge7 8.0–0 0–0 with equal chances.

4.d4 cxd4 5.cxd4 d6 (Also interesting is 5...d5! 6.exd5 ♜f6 7.♗b5† ♜bd7 8.d6 0–0! 9.dxe7 ♜xe7† 10.♘e2 ♜d8 11.0–0 ♜c5 when Black can claim sufficient compensation for the missing pawn.) 6.h3 ♜f6 7.♗d3 0–0 8.♘f3 ♜c6 9.0–0 e5 10.d5 This position was reached in Papa – Wirthensohn, Switzerland 2007, and here I suggest 10...♜b4N 11.♗b1 ♜a6 12.♗e3 b6 with roughly equal chances.

Black has a solid position with enough scope for counterplay.

4...♜c6

Black should wait for the most suitable moment before developing the other knight. After 4...♜f6 5.e5 ♜d5 6.d4 cxd4 7.♗xd4! ♜b6 8.♗h4 White had slightly easier play in Shabalov – Izoria, Philadelphia 2006.

5.d4

This seems like the most natural move.

5.♗b5 ♜f6 6.e5?N

This energetic move has not yet been tested. 6.d3 0–0 7.0–0 d5 is at least equal for Black.

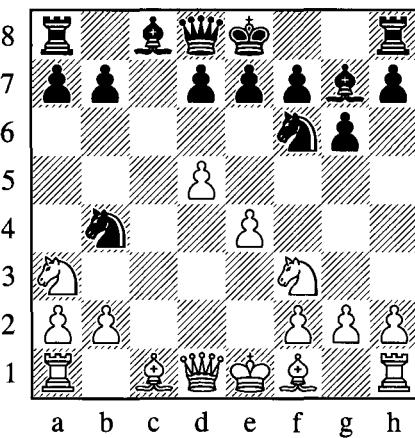
6...♜d5 7.d4 cxd4 8.♗b3

Or 8.cxd4 0–0 with equality.

8...♞c7 9.cxd4 ♜xb5 10.♗xb5 a6 11.♘c3 d6

The position is equal although White must play carefully, lest the light-squared bishop eventually achieve his “15 minutes of fame”.

5...cxd4 6.cxd4 ♜f6 7.d5 ♜b4



8.♘d3!?

8.♗a4 a5 9.♘c2 ♜xc2† 10.♗xc2 0–0 intending ...d6 was equal in Hole – Bekkesletten, e-mail 2006.

8...0–0 9.0–0 ♜xd3N

Eliminating the opponent's bishops is usually a good policy for Sicilian players, and the present case is no exception. Nevertheless Black was also okay after 9...d6 10.♗c4 ♗g4 11.h3 ♗xf3 12.♗xf3 ♘c8, Zvjaginsev – Bocharov, Tomsk 2006.

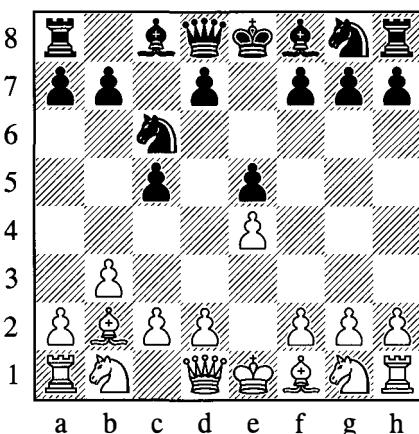
10.♗xd3 d6 11.♗e3 ♗d7

Black has already equalized comfortably.

B) 2.b3

Black may sleep soundly in the knowledge that the system with fianchetto of the bishop to b2 is not going to refute the Sicilian. At the same time the idea is certainly not completely stupid, and has been used with success by some strong players including Short.

2...♗c6 3.♗b2 e5



The advance of the pawn to e5 is a provocative, yet entirely sound strategy, as the proud bishop is now biting into granite. We will consider two main moves for White: **B1) 4.♗c4** and **B2) 4.♗b5**.

4.f4?

This pawn sacrifice has been White's most popular choice, but I do not believe it to be a really serious option. Black should simply accept the gift and develop naturally. I will not

mention every possible White continuation, just offer a few illustrative lines.

4...exf4 5.♗f3 ♗f6 6.e5 ♗h5

6...♗d5 is also okay, but I prefer not to obstruct the d-pawn. The knight is far from dim on h5.

7.♗e2 d5 8.0–0 g6 9.e6

I tried to improve White's play with 9.♗c3N, but after 9...d4 10.♗e4 ♗e7 11.♗e1 ♗f5 12.♗xh5 ♗xe4 13.♗f3 ♗xf3 14.♗xf3 g5+ White remains a pawn down, and the bishop on b2 is still a miserable piece.

9...♗g7 10.♗xg7 ♗xg7 11.exf7+ ♗xf7 12.♗e1 ♗e6 13.♗d3 ♗g7+

Black remained a pawn up in Romanov – Kurnosov, Minsk 2006. In the event of:

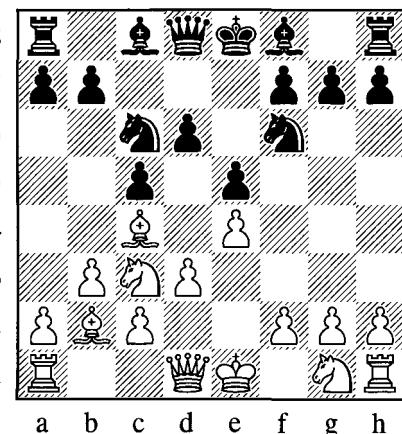
14.♗xf4 ♗xf4 15.♗xf4 ♗d6

Black keeps a clear advantage, thanks to his better mobilization.

B1) 4.♗c4

This is a sensible plan. White plays to control the light squares that were weakened by Black's last move. The b2-bishop is still bad, but White hopes to prepare f2-f4 after completing development and castling. If Black reacts too passively then he might end up in a difficult position, but if he plays accurately then he should be fine.

4...♗f6 5.d3 d6 6.♗c3



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

Another decent approach is 6...a6 7.a4 g6 8. $\mathbb{Q}ge2$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 9.0–0 0–0 10.h3 $\mathbb{B}b8$ 11.f4 exf4 12. $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 13. $\mathbb{W}c1$ (13. $\mathbb{B}b1$!?) $\mathbb{Q}de5$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}ce2$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ looks about equal) 13... $\mathbb{Q}de5$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 15. $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{W}g5\bar{f}$ Black's position was somewhat more pleasant in Kosten – V. Rajlich, Internet 2006.

7. $\mathbb{Q}ge2$ 0–0 8.0–0 $\mathbb{Q}e6$!

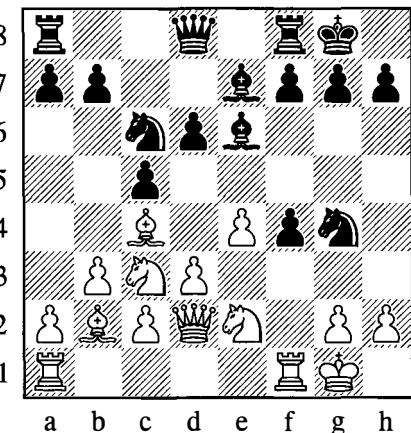
Black wastes no time in fighting for the central squares. Instead the following encounter illustrates the potential dangers: 8...a6 9.a4 $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 10.h3 $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 11.f4 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 12.f5 $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ 13.dxc4 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}ec3$ with a stable advantage for White, Short – Prasad, Mumbai 2004.

9.f4

9. $\mathbb{W}d2$ was played in Gelashvili – Gabrielian, Gyumri 2008, and now I suggest 9...d5!N. This central break solves all Black's problems. 10.exd5 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 12.f4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ Black is holding his own in the centre with full equality.

9... $\mathbb{Q}g4$!?

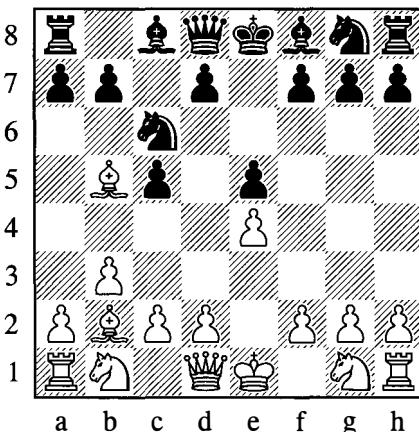
This must be better than the cooperative 9...exf4 10. $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ $\mathbb{W}d7$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}cd5$ with some initiative for White, Shengelia – D. Eggleston, Banyoles 2007.

10. $\mathbb{W}d2$ exf4**11. $\mathbb{Q}xf4$**

White does not gain much from 11. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ g5!? (11... $\mathbb{Q}g5$ is also fine) 12.h4 (12.g3?! $\mathbb{Q}xd5$! 13.exd5 $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 15.gxf4 cxd4 16.fxg5 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ is dangerous for White) 12... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 13.exd5 $\mathbb{Q}ce5$ 14.hxg5 $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ $\mathbb{W}f6$ with equal chances.

11... $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ 12.bxc4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}fe2$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}ab1$ $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{W}a5$

Black's active piece play was enough to balance his opponent's central majority, Blazeka – Idani, Kemer 2009.

B2) 4. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ **4... $\mathbb{Q}d4$**

There is nothing much wrong with allowing doubled c-pawns, but perhaps out of general principle I prefer to prevent White's idea and break a certain opening principle.

5. $\mathbb{Q}c4$

At first glance the following alternative does not look like a serious option for White:

5. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$!?

However, Black will need to play with a certain amount of care as he is behind in development.

6. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 7.0–0 a6 8. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{W}a5$ 9.c3 dxc3 10. $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$!

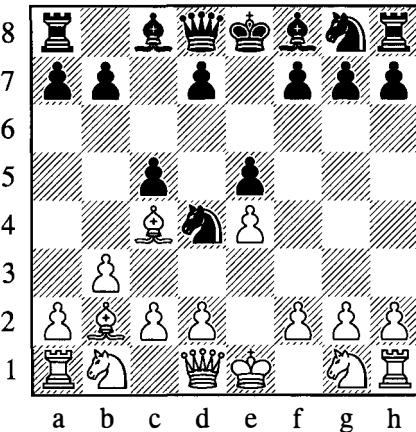
This looks better than 10... $\mathbb{Q}a3$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ d6 12. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 0–0 14.d4± The bishop on d5 shines brightly.

11. $\mathbb{W}c2$

Or 11. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 12.dxc3 $\mathbb{W}c5$ 13. $\mathbb{W}d3$ (13.a4 b6 14. $\mathbb{W}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}b7=$) 13...b5 14. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 15.exd5 f6= Black will soon catch up on development and then enjoy a healthy position.

11...d6 12.a3 $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 13.dxc3 0–0 14. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 15. $\mathbb{E}fc1$ $\mathbb{Q}ac8$ 16.c4 $\mathbb{Q}d7$

Black has obtained comfortable equality, Wohl – Palac, Metz 2001.



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

Should the reader feel more adventurous he might wish to consider the following daring queen foray, which is intended to derive some benefit from the pesky knight on d4. (Disclaimer: This would be done on the readers' own risk!)

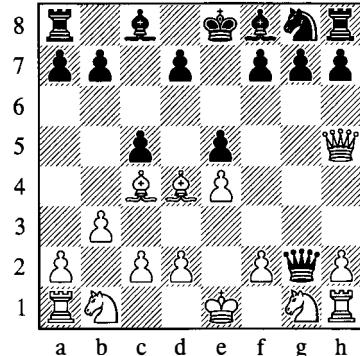
5... $\mathbb{W}g5?$ 6. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$

This looks more critical than 6. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 7. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{W}h5$ 8. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}d6?$ 9.h4 a6∞.

6.. $\mathbb{W}xg2$ 7.. $\mathbb{W}h5$

7. $\mathbb{W}f3$ $\mathbb{W}xf3$ 8. $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ exd4 9.0–0 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ leaves White with insufficient compensation.

So far we have been following the game Gelashvili – Thoma, Panormo 2001, which did not continue in a pleasant way for Black. So I found an interesting new idea:



7... $\mathbb{Q}f6!$?N

The game continued 7... $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 8. $\mathbb{W}xe5†$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{W}xh1$ 10.f3 $\mathbb{W}g2$ 11.Qc3 d6 12. $\mathbb{W}d5$ with a dangerous initiative for White.

8.. $\mathbb{Q}xf7†$

8. $\mathbb{W}xe5†$?! $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{W}xh1$ turns out badly for White. Compared with the aforementioned game, the black knight is much better on f6 than h6.

8... $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 9. $\mathbb{W}f3$ $\mathbb{W}xf3$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ cxd4 11. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 12.Qf3 Qxe4 13.Qg1∞

We have reached a somewhat irregular queenless position, with approximately balanced chances.

6.Qc3 $\mathbb{Q}e7$

The position is essentially the same as line B1, except for the inclusion of the 'free' move ...Qc6-d4.

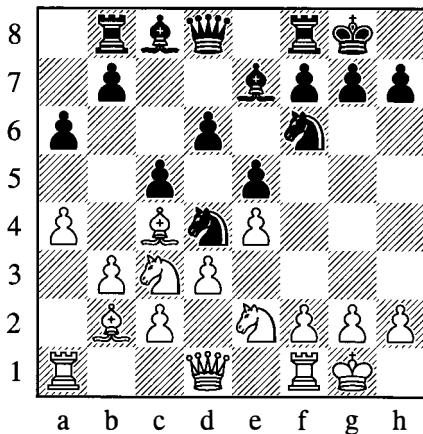
7.Qge2 0–0 8.d3 $\mathbb{E}b8$

Playing for ...b5 is the most natural way to utilize the knight's presence on d4.

9.0–0

White can also try 9.a4 a6 10.a5, although in this case the a-pawn might become a target. Play continues 10...d6 11.Qd2 Qc6 12.Qd5 Qxd5 13.Qxd5 Qe6 14.0–0 Qxd5 15.exd5 Qd4 16.f4 Qf6 with roughly even chances, although White may have to be slightly more careful due to his pawn weaknesses, Gelashvili – Najer, Panormo 2001.

9...d6 10.a4 a6



11.a5!?

White pushes his a-pawn into a precarious position in order to prevent ...b5 for good.

Another possibility is 11.f4 ♜g4 12.h3 ♜d7 13.a5 ♜c7 14.♗d2 h6 with mutual chances.

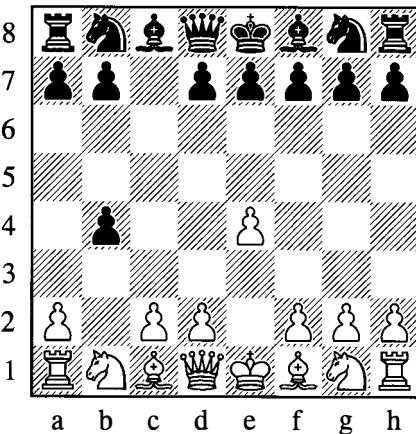
11...♝c6 12.♝d5 ♜xd5 13.♝xd5 ♜xa5 14.f4 ♜f6 15.♝c3

15.fxe5 ♜xe5 16.♝xe5 dxe5 17.♗d2 b6 18.b4 cxb4 19.♗xb4 ♜e6 looks about equal. White has enough positional compensation for the sacrificed pawn, but not more.

15...b6 16.♝xa5 bxa5 17.♗5 ♜d7 18.♝c3 g6 19.♗f3 ♜h8

We have been following the game Ivanisevic – Fercec, Ljubljana 2005. The position is complex and difficult for both sides. White seems to have good positional compensation, although it should be remembered that only one of his pieces can occupy the d5-square. Black, on the other hand, can hope to activate his bishop pair in the long run. In the game the second player eventually prevailed after a tough fight.

C) 2.b4 cxb4



The Sicilian is often associated with pawn sacrifices. This one is earlier than most, and is not considered theoretically promising although Black should play cautiously and treat it with respect. We will consider three options for White: C1) 3.d4, C2) 3.♗b2 and C3) 3.a3.

C1) 3.d4 ♜f6!

3...d5 is not a bad move and should probably give Black some advantage, but I believe the text to be slightly more accurate.

4.♝d3 ♜c6 5.♝e2

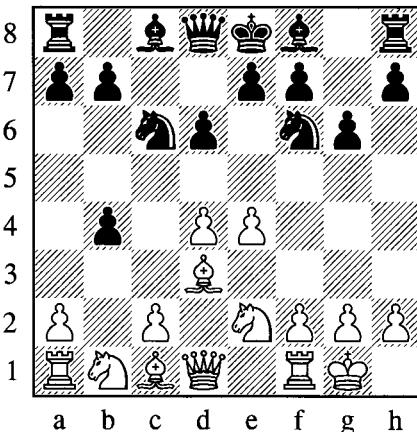
White struggles to find a set-up that could justify his sacrificed pawn. For instance:

5.e5 ♜d5 6.♝e4 e6 7.♝f3 d6 8.0–0 ♜e7 9.a3 dxe5 10.dxe5 was Schneider – Schenk, Germany 2004, and now Black could have secured a clear advantage with the simple 10...0–0N.

5.♝f3 d5 6.e5 ♜e4 7.0–0 ♜g4 8.♝b2 e6 9.♗e2 ♜g5 10.♝bd2 ♜e7 was also clearly better for Black in Philippe – Lerner, Metz 1996.

5...d6 6.0–0 g6!

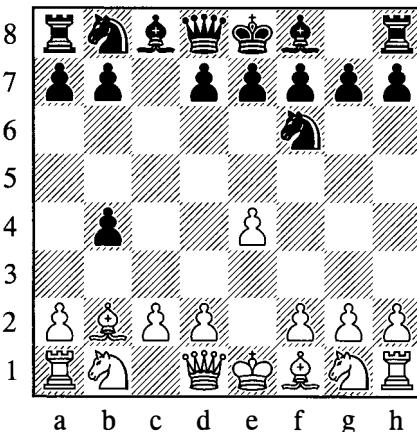
The bishop will be well placed on g7, and the solid fianchetto formation will bolster the kingside against any attacking ideas.



7.♘d2 ♗g7 8.f4 0–0 9.♗h1 ♗g4 10.♗b2
♘d7 11.♘f3 ♘c5 12.♗b1 ♘xd3 13.♗xd3
d5†

White is not only a pawn down, but also overexposed in the centre and generally in deep trouble, Jurkovic – Dvoiry, Oberwart 1999.

C2) 3.♗b2 ♘f6



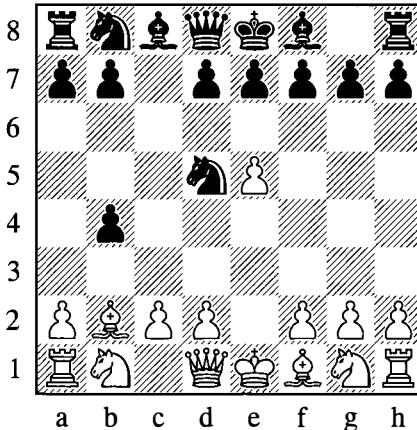
Just as in the previous line, I believe this to be slightly more accurate than the immediate central strike with 3...d5.

4.e5

After 4.♗c4 Black should not hesitate to enter the complications with 4...♘xe4 5.♗xf7† ♗xf7 6.♗h5† ♗g8 7.♗d5† e6 8.♗xe4 ♘c6 9.♘f3 d5

10.♗e2 ♗e7 when he was already much better in Rogers – Hoeksema, Groningen 1991.

4...♘d5



5.♘f3

The evaluation is not changed by:

5.♗c4 ♘b6 6.♗b3 ♘c6 7.a3

Compared with the previous note, GM Rogers had a more favourable experience on the black side of this opening in the same tournament after 7.d4 d5 8.exd6 ♘xd6 9.♗f3 ♗e6 10.♗e2 ♗d5 11.♗xd5 ♘xd5 12.♗xd5 ♘xd5 13.0–0 ♘a5 14.♗d2 ♘c8† Houtman – Rogers, Groningen 1991.

7...e6 8.axb4 ♘xb4 9.♗a3 0–0 10.♗f3 d5 11.exd6 ♘xd6†

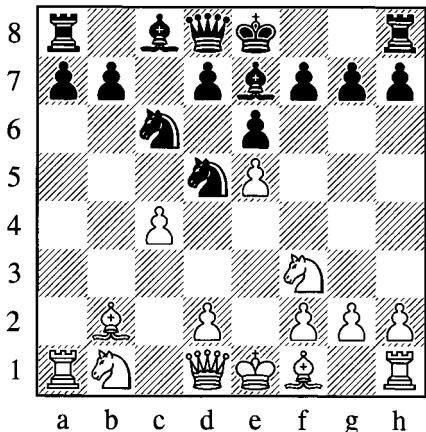
White remained a pawn down with not much to show for it, Cierny – Lanc, Topolciaky 1994.

5...♘c6 6.a3 e6

Also promising is 6...d6!N for instance: 7.♗c4 ♘b6 8.♗b3 a5 9.0–0 a4 10.♗a2 e6 11.exd6 ♘xd6 12.axb4 ♘xb4† White will struggle to get anything real for the missing pawn.

7.axb4 ♘xb4 8.c3 ♗e7 9.c4

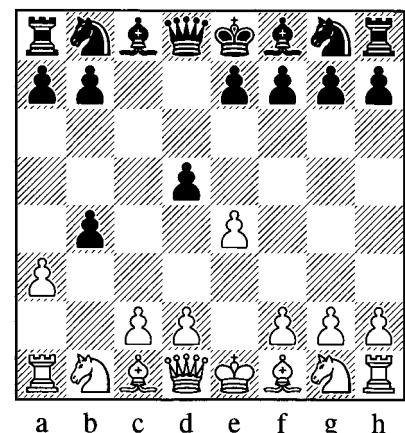
This was Baumert – Kovalev, Berlin 1993, and now I suggest:

**9...Qdb4!N**

This looks stronger than the game continuation of 9...Qf4 10.g3 Qg6 11.Qg2 0–0 12.0–0 d6 13.exd6 Qxd6 14.d4 when White had reasonable compensation.

10.Qc3 0–0 11.Qb5 a6 12.Qe2 Qb8 13.Qd6 f6#

Black's position remains solid, and as long as he stays alert he will have good chances to make his extra pawn count in the long run.

C3) 3.a3 d5!

This has for a long time been known as an effective response to White's plan.

4.exd5 Qxd5 5.Qf3

The simple trap of 5.axb4?? Qe5† has embarrassed a few Wing Gambit practitioners over the years.

5...e5

The solid 5...e6 is a reasonable alternative, but the text is more ambitious.

6.axb4**6.c4!?**

This has not been the most common move, but it requires accurate handling from Black.

6...Qe6

I think this is the best square for the queen.

7.d4!?

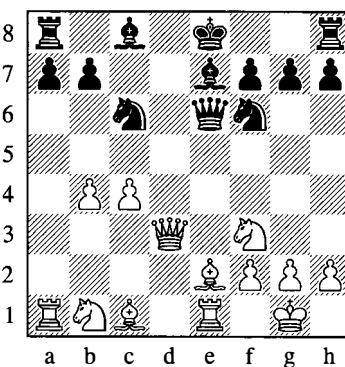
This is the critical continuation, seeking to blast open as many lines as possible.

7...exd4? 8.Qe2 d3!

It is important to play this here in order to disrupt the harmony of White's position before he can castle.

9.Qxd3 Qf6 10.0–0 Qc6 11.Qe1 Qe7 12.axb4

This position was reached in Shirazi – Tregubov, Livry Gagran (rapid) 2009, and here I found an improvement for Black:

**12...Qxb4!N**

The game continuation of 12...Qxb4? 13.Qd2 0–0 14.Qf1 Qd6 15.Qxe7! Qxe7 16.Qa3 gave Black serious problems.

13.Qd2 0–0#

White will have a hard time demonstrating compensation for the missing pawn.

6... $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ 7.c3

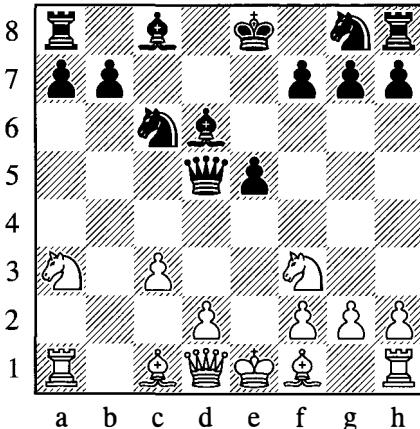
7. $\mathbb{Q}a3$ $\mathbb{Q}xa3$ followed by ... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ does not give White much.

7... $\mathbb{Q}d6!$

The point of this slightly unusual move is to defend the c7-square. The obvious 7... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 8. $\mathbb{Q}a3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{W}d8$ 10.d4 exd4 11. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}c7$ $\mathbb{B}b8$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ is playable for Black but not so pleasant in practice.

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

Also possible is 8... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 10.c4?! (Better was 10. $\mathbb{Q}c4N$, although after 10... $\mathbb{W}e4\uparrow$ 11. $\mathbb{W}e2$ $\mathbb{W}xe2\uparrow$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}g4\uparrow$ 14.f3 $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 15.d3 a6 Black has no worries at all.) 10... $\mathbb{W}e6$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}xd6\uparrow$ $\mathbb{W}xd6$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}a3$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ e4 14. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ h6 15. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}xh3$ 16.gxh3 0-0-0 And Black was already clearly better in Grcic – Malpas, Australia 1997.



9. $\mathbb{Q}c4$

White needs something crisper than either of the following moves:

9. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}ge7$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{W}e4\uparrow$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{W}g6$ 13.d4 0-0 14.d5 $\mathbb{Q}d8\bar{F}$ Rombaldoni – Miladinovic, Assisi 2003.

9. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{W}d8$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ e4 12. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}a3$ $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ White was struggling for compensation in Balakanova – Chernenko, Pavlodar 2008.

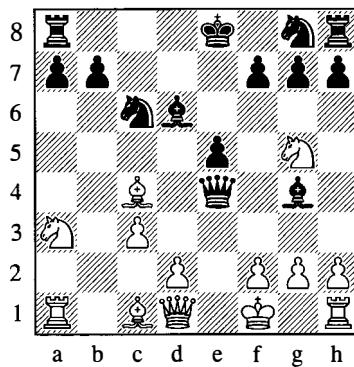
9... $\mathbb{W}e4\uparrow$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}e2$

I also considered the untested:

10. $\mathbb{Q}f1\?N$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$

Black can also try 10... $\mathbb{Q}h6\?!$ 11.d4 $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ with a very lively game.

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



11... $\mathbb{W}f4\!?$

This is perhaps the most accurate.

11... $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ leads to a roughly level ending after 12. $\mathbb{Q}xf7\uparrow$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}xa3$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xa3\uparrow$ $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ b6.

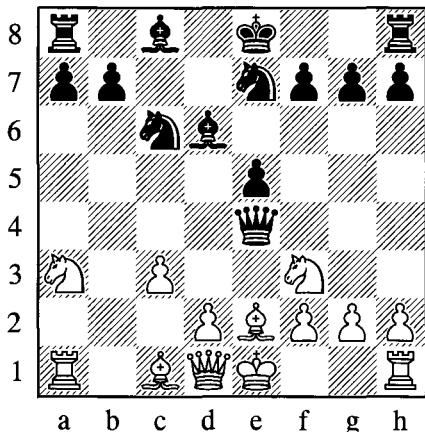
Black can even try the surprising 11... $\mathbb{W}d3\!?$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xd6\uparrow$ $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ with complex play.

12.d4 $\mathbb{W}xg5\!?$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ a6

White has a hard time demonstrating compensation.

10... $\mathbb{Q}ge7$

This looks like the most natural move, although the following game showed another way to deal with White's activity: 10... $\mathbb{W}g6$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 12.d4 exd4 13.cxd4 $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}ge7$ 15.0-0 $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}a3$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 17. $\mathbb{W}a4$ 0-0 18. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{W}f6$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{Q}xc6\bar{F}$ Bronstein – Comp Chess Master 4000, The Hague 1995.



11...Qc4

After 11...Qc4 $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 12.d4 exd4 13.Qbx d4 14.cxd4 0–0 15.0–0 $\mathbb{W}d5$ 16.Qe1 Qd6 17.Qb1 Qd7 18.Qd3 Qc6 19.Qe4 Wh5 Black was a pawn up for not much, WindPower – Traka, Internet 2007. Even on the Internet this gambit is ineffective!

11...Qc7 12.Qa3 0–0 13.0–0 Qe6 14.Qg5 Wg6 15.Qxe6 Wxe6 16.Wb3 Bab8 17.Qfb1 Qfd8

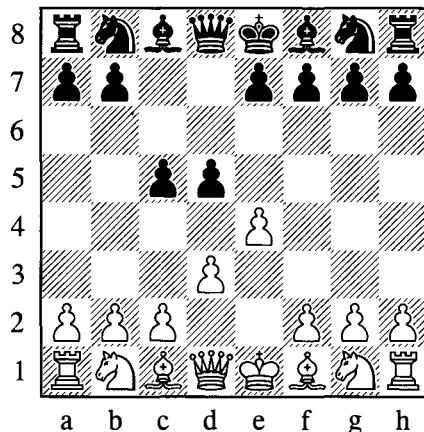
White kept some positional compensation, which gave him reasonable chances to equalize in Haub – Lukov, Giessen 1994.

D) 2.d3

This is a modest move, although unlike some others at least it does not lose a pawn! Jokes aside, there is nothing much wrong with the text move and White may have ideas such as playing a Closed Sicilian set-up without committing the knight to c3.

2...d5?

I rather like this energetic response. In fact, I decided to make it a theme for the present chapter to play energetically with ...d5 whenever White played quietly enough to allow it.



We will now consider two main options:

D1) 3.Qd2 and D2) 3.exd5. Of course, there are other playable moves and it would be pointless to analyse every one of them in detail. In most cases Black can simply develop his pieces in a normal fashion to obtain a comfortable game. One point, worth mentioning briefly, is that he should normally resist the temptation to exchange on e4 and d1 in the early stages, as the pawn structure with e4 versus c5 with an open d-file favours White slightly.

D1) 3.Qd2 Qc6 4.g3

White elects to play a King's Indian Defence with an extra tempo.

4...Qf6

Another playable set-up is 4...e6 5.Qg2 g6 6.Qgf3 Qg7 7.0–0 Qge7, but that is a different story.

5.Qg2 g6

The fianchetto system is one of White's best choices against the standard King's Indian, and is one of those lines that can be played a tempo down without any severe drawbacks, as long as we avoid any really sharp variations.

I will mention one other line, which might appeal to creative players:

5...e6 6.f4 e5!?

This surprising move looks really interesting, as White is not ideally placed to deal with a quick opening of the centre.

7.♕gf3 exf4 8.gxf4 ♕e7 9.0-0 0-0?

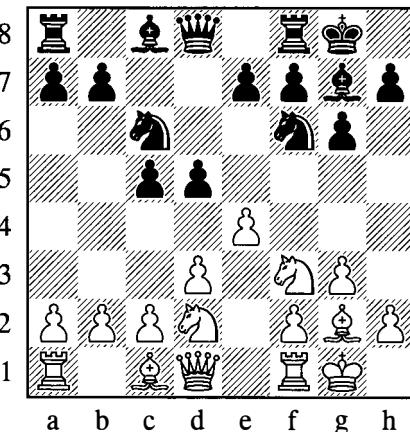
The position of the first player is more dangerous than it may appear at first glance.

6.♕gf3

It looks too risky for White to play 6.f4? dxе4 7.dxe4 e5 8.♕gf3 exf4 9.gxf4 ♕h5 10.♕b3 ♕xd1† 11.♔xd1 b6 12.e5 ♕g4 with unpleasant pressure for Black, Movsesian – Kamsky, Moscow 2008.

6...♕g7 7.0-0 0-0

We have reached a well-known King's Indian position, which you can find analysed in great detail in the second of Boris Avrukh's 1.d4 volumes in the same *Grandmaster Repertoire* series. Of course it is not as much fun to play a tempo down, but even with this liability Black's position is quite alright.



8.♕e1

Another option is:

8.c3 e5

I think Black should take some space in the centre.

In the event of 8...♕c7 9.♕e1 e6 10.♕e2 b6 11.♕f1 dxe4 12.dxe4 ♕b7 13.e5 ♕d5 14.h4

a5 15.♕1h2 a4, Movsziszian – Ivanchuk, Calatrava 2007, 16.♕g4N± Black might have to endure some nervous moments on the kingside.

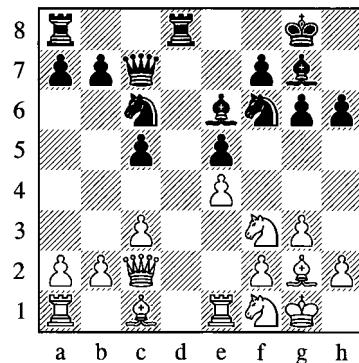
9.♗b3 dxе4!?

It would be a bit too risky to try and maintain the big centre while playing a tempo down. This exchanging move may not be the most ambitious attempt for an advantage in the position with reversed colours, but it is enough for comfortable equality here.

10.dxe4 h6!

It is useful to prevent White's minor pieces from gaining access to g5.

11.♕e1 ♕c7 12.♕f1 ♕e6 13.♕c2 ♕fd8



14.♕h4!?

The start of a dubious plan. Still, even after the more sensible 14.♕e3 ♕d6 15.♕d2 ♕ad8 16.♕ed1 b5 Black has the more comfortable position.

14...♗c4! 15.f4 ♕d3

White had a difficult position and went on to lose badly in Fedorov – Movsesian, Las Vegas (4.5) rapid 1999.

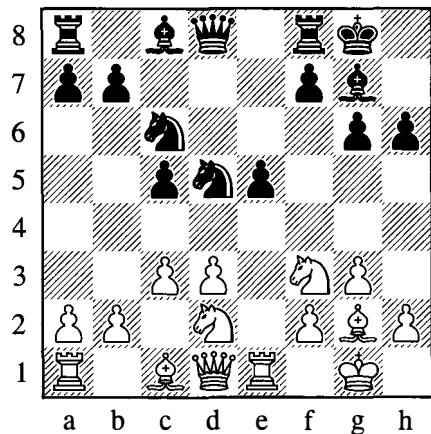
8...h6 9.c3 e5

Without the queen on b3 Black is less exposed to immediate tactical threats, so he can maintain the central tension for a little longer.

10.exd5

Opening the centre must be the critical test of Black's play. Otherwise, depending on White's next move, Black might exchange on e4, advance with ...d4 (when the rook on e1 would be misplaced), or continue developing with ... $\mathbb{Q}e6$.

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



11. $\mathbb{W}a4!$?

This is perhaps the most aggressive way for White to try and exploit his extra tempo.

Another possibility is 11. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{E}e8$ 12.a4 b6 13. $\mathbb{Q}fd2$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 15.a5 $\mathbb{E}ed8$ 16. $\mathbb{W}a4$ $\mathbb{E}ab8$ 17.axb6 axb6 18. $\mathbb{W}b5$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 19.h4 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 20. $\mathbb{W}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ with equal chances, Bologan – Ruck, Mainz 2007.

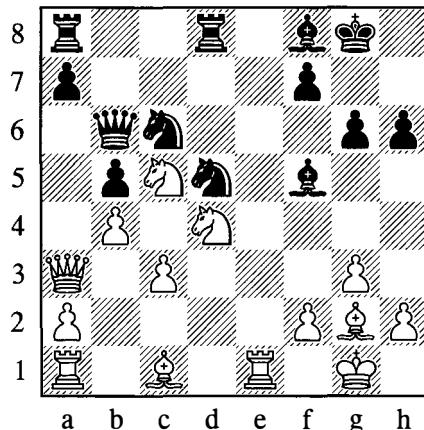
11... $\mathbb{W}c7$ 12. $\mathbb{W}c4!$

If Black is allowed to complete development with ... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ and ... $\mathbb{Q}ad8$ then he will almost always stand better. The text move wins a pawn, but Black obtains decent compensation.

12... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 13. $\mathbb{W}xc5$ $\mathbb{E}fd8$ 14. $\mathbb{W}a3$ b5!

Taking the a4-square away from White's queen.

15. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 17.d4 $\mathbb{exd}4$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{W}b6$ 19.b4



19... $\mathbb{Q}dxb4!$

Regaining the pawn.

20.cxb4

White is certainly not helped by: 20. $\mathbb{Q}xf5$? $\mathbb{Q}c2$ 21. $\mathbb{W}a6$ $\mathbb{W}xa6$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xa6$ $\mathbb{Q}xe1$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{E}ac8+$

20... $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{E}ac8$

After some exciting complications the position is now equal, Nisipeanu – Volokitin, Istanbul 2003.

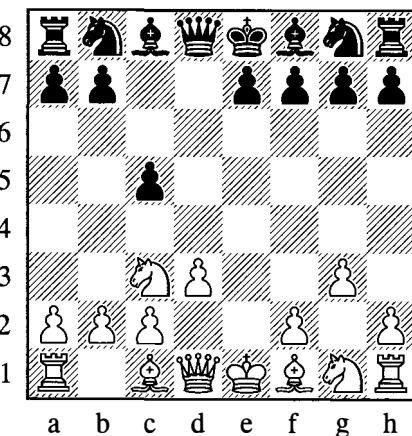
D2) 3. $\mathbb{exd}5$ $\mathbb{W}xd5$

The gambit approach with 3... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 4.c4 e6 is possible, but I do not see much point in it, as Black will mainly be playing to regain his pawn rather than truly fighting for the initiative.

The present position can be compared with the line 1.d4 d6 2.c4 e5 3. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{exd}4$ 4. $\mathbb{W}xd4$. Once again Black is playing a known opening with reversed colours and a tempo down, but it is not a situation in which a single tempo is likely to make a huge difference.

4. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{W}d8$

Another possibility is 4... $\mathbb{W}d7$?, intending to develop the bishop on b7, but I choose to focus on the text move instead.

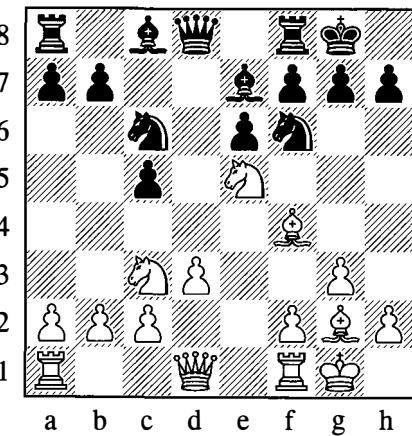
5.g3**5...d7**

The most common approach has been 5...d7. Contesting the h1-a8 diagonal is an attractive idea, but it seems a little artificial and I think White has good chances to obtain an edge, for instance: 6.g2 c6 7.f3 d7 8.0-0 e6 9.e2 e7 10.d1 0-0 This position was reached in Kuang Yinghui – Ju, Jinan 2005, and now after the natural 11.d4N b7 12.f4 cxd4 13.xd4 xg2 14.xg2 a6± Black has no weaknesses, but White has more active pieces and controls the centre.

6.g2 e6 7.f3 d6 8.0-0 e7 9.f4 0-0

10.e5

Another sensible continuation is 10.e1 d5 11.xd5 exd5 12.e5 e6 13.xc6 bxc6 with equality, Zaynard – Schmid, Austria 2008.

**10...b4**

10...d4!N also looks like a reasonable move.

11.e1

11.g4 fd5 12.g3 f6 13.c4 d7 14.xd5 xd5 15.e2 e8 16.a4 f8 was equal in Zakic – Barlov, Tivat 1995.

11...bd5 12.d2 xc3 13.bxc3 d7 14.c4 b6 15.a5 b8 16.b1 d6 17.d4

This was Vesselovsky – Ostrowski, Frydek-Mistek 1997, and now I suggest:

17...wc7N

Black's position is fine.

E) 2.e2

This is a flexible approach. White intends to wait before deciding whether to keep the position closed with d3 or revert back to an Open Sicilian with d4.

2...f6 3.bc3 d5!

This cuts across White's plan. Once again we are playing the desired ...d5 break.

4.exd5

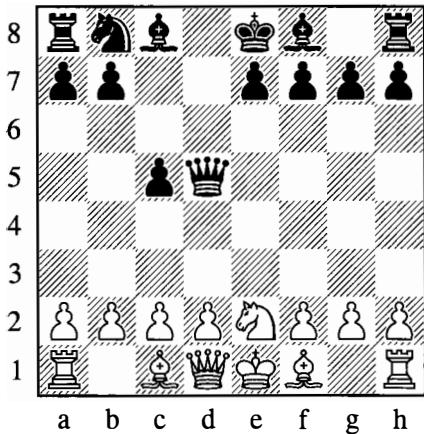
It is not so logical for White to play 4.e5 dg4 5.f4, as the knight belongs on f3 in this structure. One high level game continued 5...h5 (Black can also consider 5...e6 6.h3 dh6 7.f2 d6 8.g4 e7 with at least equal chances.) 6.d4 e6 7.h3 h6 8.e3 f5 9.d2 c6 10.dxc5 wa5 11.wd3 xc5 12.xc5 xc5 13.0-0-0 d7 14.a3 h4 Black keeps a very comfortable French-type position, Jobava – Sutovsky, Moscow 2007.

4...xd5 5.xd5

After 5.g3 d6 6.g2 xc3 7.xc3 g6 8.d3 g7 9.e4 c4 Black equalizes easily.

White also achieves nothing with 5.d4 $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 6.bxc3 cxd4 7.cxd4 g6 8.g3 $\mathbb{W}d5!$ It is not quite the same type of fianchetto for both sides. 9. $\mathbb{E}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ This was Kurnosov – Simon, Cappelle la Grande 2006, and here perhaps the simplest continuation would have been 10... $\mathbb{W}d7!N$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ 0–0 12. $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}c6\bar{f}$ when White will sorely miss his ability to castle on the kingside.

5... $\mathbb{W}xd5$



We will consider E1) 6. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ and E2) 6.d4.

E1) 6. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{W}e5\bar{t}$ 7. $\mathbb{Q}e2$

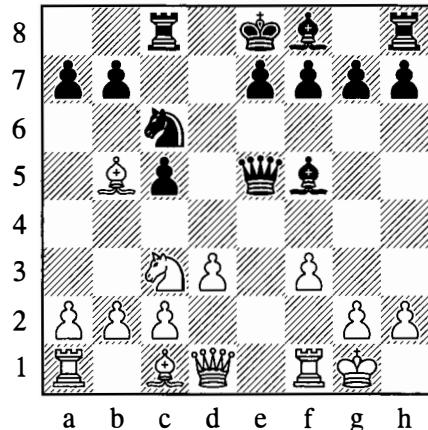
The queen exchange brings White nothing: 7. $\mathbb{W}e2$ $\mathbb{W}xe2\bar{t}$ 8. $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 10.b3 e6 11. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ Having solved the problem of his temporarily misplaced king, Black is absolutely fine.

7... $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 8.f3!!

This is the most ambitious move, hoping to keep more complexity in the position by avoiding exchanges.

Other continuations such as 8.0–0 $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$, or 8.d3 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ 10. $\mathbb{W}xe2$ e6, lead to equal play.

8... $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 9.0–0 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 11.d3



11...e6N

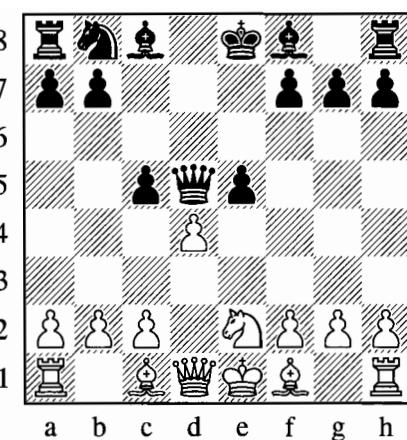
This seems like the most natural choice to me, although there is also nothing wrong with 11... $\mathbb{W}d4\bar{t}$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ a6 13. $\mathbb{Q}xc6\bar{t}$ $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{W}d7$ 15.b3 e6 16. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ f6 17. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 18.f4 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ with balanced chances, Dzindzichashvili – Browne, Chicago 1982.

12. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{W}d8$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$

Black has no problems whatsoever.

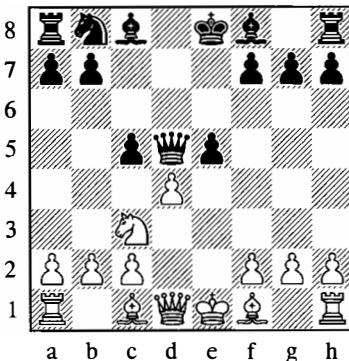
E2) 6.d4 e5!

This radical action may seem surprising, but the slower approach is not fully satisfactory. After 6... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 7. $\mathbb{Q}e3!$ cxd4 8. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}b5!$ I was unable to find a path to equality.



7.dxe5

We should also consider the gambit:
7.♕c3!?



This is an interesting idea, although it will be testing Black's nerves more than his actual position, as the latter is absolutely fine.

7...♗xd4 8.♕e3

There is also 8.♗b5† ♗d7 9.♗e2 ♗c6 10.0–0 0–0–0 11.♗d1 ♗g4 12.♗xc6 ♗xe2 13.♗xb7† ♗xb7 14.♗xe2 ♗e7 15.♗e3 ♗f5†. The game Keres – Filip, Helsinki 1952, was agreed drawn here, but Black's bishop pair gives him a definite advantage.

8...♗xd1† 9.♗xd1 ♗e6 10.♗e4 ♗d7 11.♗b5 11.♗g5 ♗f5 12.♗b5 f6 13.♗e4 ♗xe4 14.♗xd7† ♗f7 was a bit better for Black in Kupreichik – Vaulin, St Petersburg 2001.

After the text move, the game Grigoriants – Vorobiov, Moscow 2007, was agreed drawn.

The continuation might have been:

11...a6 12.♗xd7† ♗xd7 13.♗xc5 ♗f5 14.♗xf8 ♗xf8

The position is equal, although if Black is feeling ambitious he might try to make something of his superior minor piece.

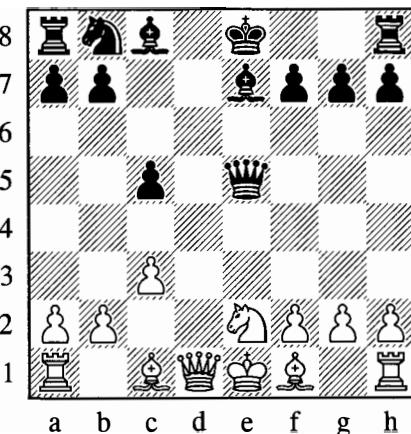
7...♗xe5 8.c3

In also checked the following untested line: 8.f4!!N ♗e7 9.♗f2 ♗c6 10.♗c3 ♗d7 11.♗d5 ♗d6 12.♗e3 0–0–0 13.c4 g6 14.♗d3 ♗g7 15.♗a3 (15.♗b6† ♗c7 16.♗xd6† ♗xd6

17.♗d1† ♗d4 18.♗xd7 ♗xd7 is equal) 15...b6 16.♗d1 ♗b8 17.♗e2 ♗he8 with level chances, as Black manages to bring his pieces into play in time.

8...♗e7

8...♗c6 9.♗f4 ♗f6 also looks fine, for instance: 10.♗a4 ♗e7 11.0–0–0 0–0 12.♗e3 ♗f5 13.♗g3 ♗g6 14.♗e2 ♗ad8 with easy equality.



9.♗f4 ♗f6 10.♗e3 0–0–0 11.♗f4 ♗d8 12.♗d5 ♗e5 13.♗xe7† ♗xe7

After a logical sequence White has acquired a two-bishop advantage, but lost some time.

14.♗h5 b6!

Exchanging one half of the bishop tandem is the best way to prevent any future problems.

15.♗e2 ♗a6 16.♗xa6

16.♗f3 ♗b7 17.0–0 ♗xf3 18.♗xf3 ♗d7 does not change the evaluation.

16...♗xa6 17.0–0 ♗c7 18.♗fe1 ♗e6=

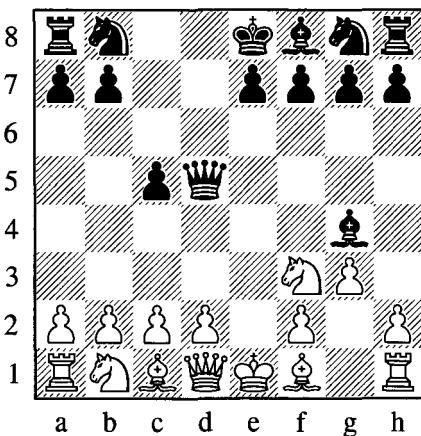
These moves were played in Sepp – Fressinet, Gothenburg 2005. Black's knight has found an ideal home, and in the present situation it is no worse than the enemy bishop. Therefore the chances are equal.

F) 2.g3 d5!

Once again we are wasting no time in fighting for the centre. This is considered to be Black's most principled reaction to White's unusual second move.

3.exd5

3.d3 is not ridiculous, but is hardly threatening either. There is nothing much wrong with exchanging the queens off, although it is perhaps even more promising to play 3... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ intending to develop in similar fashion to line D1 above, while retaining the option of simplifying with ...dxe4 depending on how White plays.

3... $\mathbb{W}xd5$ 4. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ **5. $\mathbb{Q}g2$** **5. $\mathbb{Q}e2$??**

This is seldom seen, and with good reason.

5... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 6.h3 $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 7. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{W}d7$ 8.g4 $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 9.d3 e6

9...e5 is also not bad, but I prefer the text.

10. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 11. $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 12.0-0-0 0-0-0
13. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$

White is not helped by: 14. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 15.h4 $\mathbb{W}b6$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}fg5$ h6 17.h5 hxg5 18.hxg6 f5†

This position was reached in the game Yudasin – Milman, New York 2003, and

here Black should have played:

14... $\mathbb{W}xd5N$

In the game Black took with the pawn, which I do not understand. The text move keeps his queen and rook happy on the d-file.

15. $\mathbb{W}c3$ e5†

Black dominates the centre and his chances are to be preferred.

5... $\mathbb{W}e6$ †!

This is an important move, taking the opportunity to disrupt White's development.

6. $\mathbb{Q}f1$

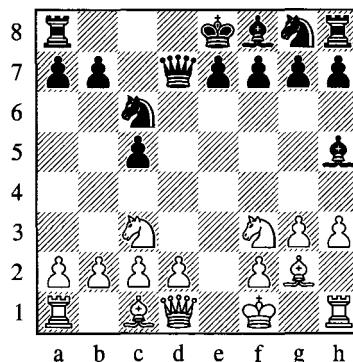
6. $\mathbb{W}e2$?? is toothless. 6... $\mathbb{W}xe2$ † 7. $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 8.c3 e5 9.h3 $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 10.g4 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}a3$ This was Petrov – Seeman, Tallinn 2001, and now it looks interesting for Black to try 11...h5!N (The game continuation of 11...f6 12.d3 0-0-0 was equal, but Black can try for more.) 12.g5 $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 13.d3 0-0-0 14. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}ge7$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}h4$ (15. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ †) 15... $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ g6 17. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ † Black controls the centre, so it is White who must try to fight for equality.

6... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 7.h3 $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 8.d3

We should also consider an alternative that might lead to an unusual tactical motif.

8. $\mathbb{Q}c3$

The point is seen after:

8... $\mathbb{W}d7$ **9. $\mathbb{Q}e5$!!**

The quiet 9.d3 reaches the note to White's ninth move below.

9... $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ $\mathbb{Q}xc2$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 0–0–0
12.b4!

White needs to generate some activity, otherwise he will stand worse on account of his isolated d-pawn.

12...e6 13. $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ 14.b5 $\mathbb{Q}ge7$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}a3$
 $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 16.bxc6 $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xf8$ $\mathbb{Q}hx8$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}c1$

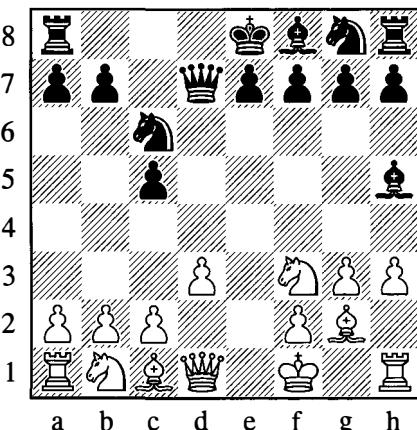
After 18. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}d3\uparrow$ the first player will struggle to hold the endgame.

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

This was Mozes – Loginov, Budapest 1990. Black maintains slightly better chances thanks to his superior structure. His king is slightly exposed, but on the other hand it could become extremely active in the event of a few more piece exchanges.

8... $\mathbb{W}d7$

The queen retreats to clear the path of the e-pawn.



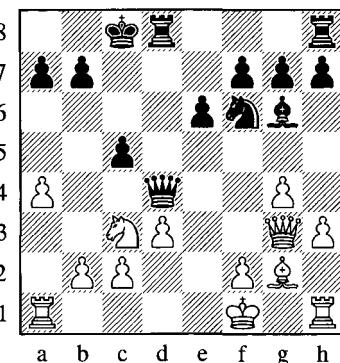
9.g4?

This is White's most ambitious approach. Eliminating an enemy bishop is an achievement, although the drawback is that it costs time and creates weaknesses. Of course we should also check a few other options as well.

9. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ e6 10. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 11.g4 $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}e5$
 $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 14. $\mathbb{W}e2$ 0–0–0!?

This aggressive choice works well, although it was also quite alright to play more solidly with 14... $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 15. $\mathbb{W}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ 0–0
17. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{W}d4$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{W}xe5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ c4 20.h4
h6 with equality, Chandler – Hübner, Wijk aan Zee 1982.

15.a4 $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 16. $\mathbb{W}xe5$ $\mathbb{W}d4$ 17. $\mathbb{W}g3$



17...c4!

This dynamic move presents White with difficult problems.

18. $\mathbb{Q}b5$

I also considered 18. $\mathbb{Q}f3\uparrow$ h5!. It would be too risky to open the c-file just now. 19.g5 (or 19. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{W}c5$ 20.g5 h4 21. $\mathbb{W}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 22. $\mathbb{W}xc4$ $\mathbb{W}xc4$ 23.dxc4 a6 \bar{F}) 19... $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 20.dxc4 h4 \bar{F} Neither king is ideally situated, but Black's forces have the edge in coordination.

18... $\mathbb{W}c5$ 19.dxc4 $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ a6 22. $\mathbb{Q}a3$ $\mathbb{Q}d2\bar{F}$

We have been following the game Short – Chandler, Dortmund 1983. Black has more than enough play for a pawn, and White was unable to hold the position.

9. $\mathbb{Q}a3$

This is a sensible move, heading for c4 and possibly e5.

9...e6 10. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ f6

Covering e5 is the natural choice.

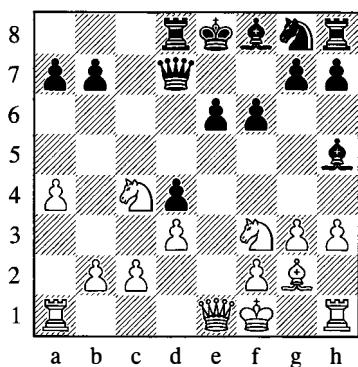
In Karjakin – Grischuk, Moscow 2009, Black was successful with 10... $\mathbb{Q}d6$, but I do not see any reason for Black to relinquish the bishop pair just now.

11.♗e3 ♘d8 12.a4

Another game continued 12.g4 ♔f7 13.a4 b6 14.♔e2 ♗ge7 15.♗f4 ♘d5 16.♗g3 ♔e7 Black succeeded in organizing his pieces harmoniously and obtained the better prospects, Flower – Aseev, London 1994.

12...♗d4 13.♗xd4 cxd4 14.♔e1

This position was reached in Sepp – Yakovich, Leeuwarden 1993. Here I found a natural improvement for Black.



14...b6!N

In the game Black played 14...♗e7?!, almost certainly overlooking the strong reply 15.♔a5!, forcing 15...♗xf3 16.♗xf3 b6 17.♔b5 ♔f7 18.♗g2 ♘d5 19.♗h1± Without the light-squared bishop Black was facing a tough defensive task.

15.♗g1 ♘h6 16.c3?

Opening the position carries certain risks when playing against two bishops, but if White does not do something active Black's position will just get stronger and stronger. 16...dxc3 17.bxc3 ♘c5 18.d4 ♗e7

Black can look to the future with optimism. The e6-pawn may be slightly weak, but it can easily be defended and the bishop pair provides excellent long-term prospects.

9...♗g6 10.♗h4 e6 11.♗xg6

White is not obliged to make this exchange immediately, but it is doubtful that he has anything to gain from postponing it.

Another game continued 11.♗a3 ♗e7 12.♗xg6 hxg6 13.♗c4 ♗f6 14.a4 (14.♗f4 ♗d5 15.♗g3 f5!) 14...♗d5 15.♗d2 g5! Black follows a simple and efficient strategy: keep the centre closed and increase his control over the dark squares. 16.a5 ♘d8 17.c3 (17.♗e4 0–0 18.♗g2 f5!) 17...g6 18.♔e2 ♘f8 19.♗e4 ♗g7 Both sides have certain advantages, but overall Black's kingside control gave him the better prospects in King – Sveshnikov, Neu Isenburg 1992.

11...hxg6 12.♗c3 ♗f6 13.♗e3 ♗e7

White would like to generate some activity for his two bishops, but is hampered by the position of his king, which makes it hard to connect the rooks and coordinate his army.

14.♗e4

This has been the most popular move, although we will consider a few other options as well. 14.♔g1 does not seem to have been tried. Play might continue 14...♗d4 15.a4 ♘d8 16.h4 e5 17.g5 ♘h5 with equal chances.

14.h4!?

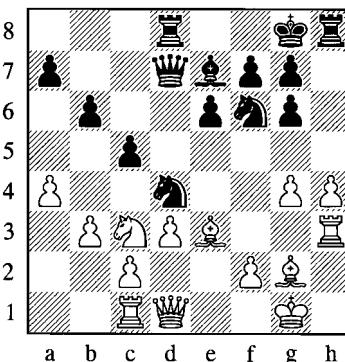
White hopes to find a role for the rook on the h-file, either by pushing the h-pawn further or swinging the rook via h3.

14...♗d4 15.a4 ♘d8 16.♗h3 ♘f8

Black sensibly opts for a kind of artificial castling, leaving his rook on the vital h-file.

17.♗g1 b6 18.♔c1 ♘g8 19.b3

These moves were played in Hort – Ribli, Baden-Baden 1992, and here I think Black could have played more energetically with:



19...e5!N

It is hard for White to defend the g-pawn without creating further weaknesses, for instance:

20.g5 ♖h5 21.♘d5 ♜e6 22.c4 ♘f4

Black has the better chances thanks to his two superb knights.

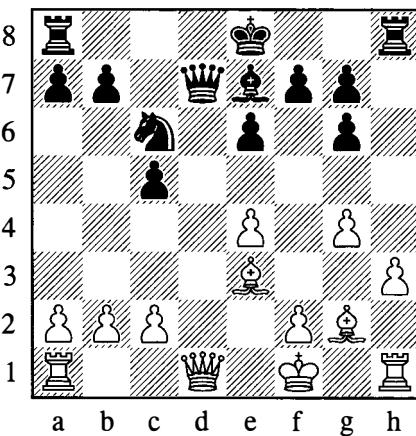
14...♞xe4!

14...b6 has been more popular, but the straightforward knight exchange ensures Black of a comfortable game with minimal fuss.

15.dxe4

After 15.♞xe4 Black stays on top with 15...f5 16.♗f3 0–0–0 17.a4 g5.

The present position was reached in Korolev – Nimtz, Corr. 1990, as well as a few others. Black has a few decent continuations, but the following would be my first choice:



15...♝d6!N

Black takes control over a few more dark squares while avoiding the exchange of queens, which would probably be of more use to White in view of his compromised king position.

It should also be noted that 15...0–0–0, Antonov – Lew, corr. 1991, is also perfectly fine.

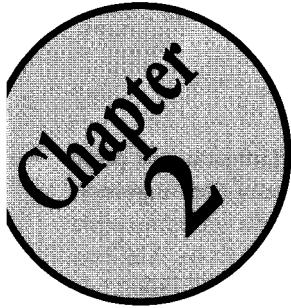
16.♝e2 0–0–0†

White is not doing so badly, but Black's position is easier to handle.

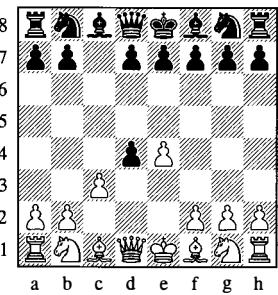
Conclusion

In this chapter we have investigated several variations that could prove challenging over the board, especially when mixed with the element of surprise. Some of them are a bit odd, but all should be respected. Where applicable I have tried to suggest an active reaction involving an early ...d7-d5, which I hope will provide a semblance of consistency and congruency to our choices.

Out of all the options considered here, I would consider 2.♘a3 and the gambit 2.b4 to be the most dangerous for the unprepared player, so I would advise the reader to pay particularly close attention to these two moves. The good news is that after a correct reaction Black will have nothing to fear, and should be able to enter the middlegame with at least equal prospects.



Minor Systems



Some Like It Hot - The Morra Gambit

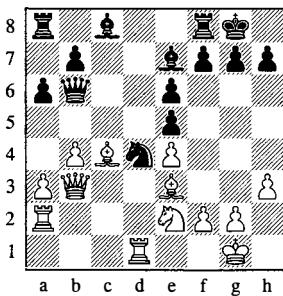
Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.d4 cxd4 3.c3

3...dxc3 4.♘xc3 ♘c6 5.♘f3 d6 6.♗c4 a6 7.0-0 ♘f6

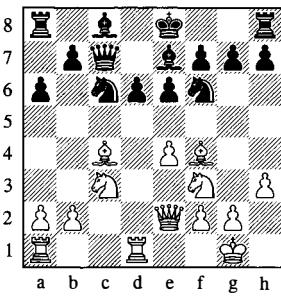
| | |
|-----------|----|
| A) 8.b4!? | 31 |
| B) 8.h3 | 32 |
| C) 8.♗g5 | 33 |
| D) 8.♕e2 | 34 |

A) after 16.♗e2



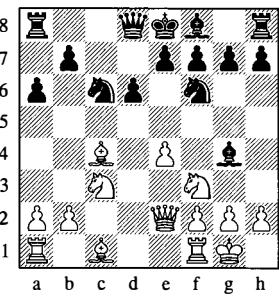
16...♝d8N

B) after 11.♗f4



11...♝e5!?

D) after 8.♕e2



The refutation of the Morra

One of the great mysteries of the Sicilian Defence is the evaluation and fate of the Morra Gambit. Upon first impressions, it looks – to put it bluntly – like a cheap opening. White sacrifices a pawn on the third move for the simple idea of enhancing the speed of his development. It sounds like something that might be fun for internet blitz games but not much else. Because the gambit comes so early in the game, Black has complete freedom to choose any set-up he wishes. It would seem as though Black merely has to develop sensibly and avoid any traps to reach a position from which he can consolidate and exploit his extra pawn, and yet somehow the gambit remains a tough, perhaps impossible one to refute.

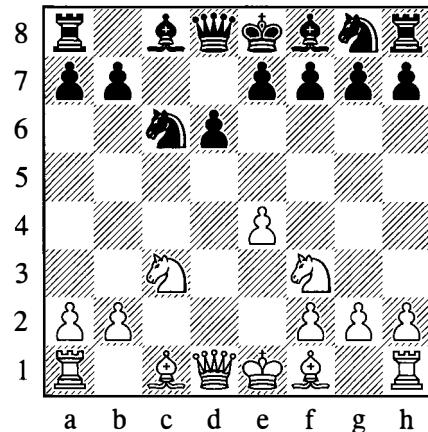
Many players resort to meeting 3.c3 with 3... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 4.e5 $\mathbb{Q}d5$, transferring the fight to the 2.c3 variation. In chapter 3 you can see I have recommended two different lines against 2.c3, so this option will not serve as a viable response to the Morra for the purposes of our repertoire. In any case, I would not wish to offer such a craven approach when White is, after all, offering to donate a pawn.

After considering several different defensive set-ups, I finally found an answer that satisfied me. The set-up I am recommending avoids most of White's early attacking ideas and leads to a solid position in which Black will have decent chances to retain his extra pawn. Despite all that I believe the Morra to be a “nearly correct” gambit that should not be underestimated.

1.e4 c5 2.d4 cxd4 3.c3 dxc3 4. $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 5. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ d6

The defining feature of the recommended system is the intended development of Black's light-squared bishop on g4, followed by its subsequent exchange for the knight on f3. This will take away some of White's tactical chances, for instance by reducing the support

for the e4-e5 break. Exchanging a minor piece will also help to relieve some of the congestion in Black's position.



Before going any further I would like to emphasize the following point. It is *essential* that Black executes his plan using the correct move order shown below, otherwise he can easily expose himself to tactical difficulties as we will soon see.

6. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ a6

Let us briefly note that 6... $\mathbb{Q}g4??$ allows the simple trick of 7. $\mathbb{Q}xf7\#$.

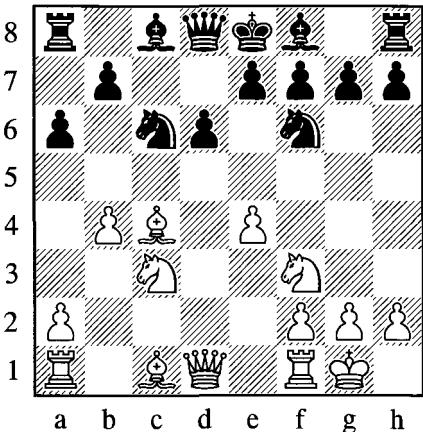
A slightly more subtle mistake is 6... $\mathbb{Q}f6??$. The problem with this move is seen after 7.e5! $dxe5$ (7... $\mathbb{Q}xe5??$ loses the queen after 8. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $dxe5$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}xf7\#$) 8. $\mathbb{W}xd8\#$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ (or 8... $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}g5$) 9. $\mathbb{Q}b5!$ With a strong initiative for White, despite the queen exchange. Thus Black must first cover the b5-square before developing the knight to f6, and only then place the bishop on g4.

7.0-0 $\mathbb{Q}f6$

Finally Black is ready for ... $\mathbb{Q}g4$. In this position we will examine four main ideas: A) 8.b4??, B) 8.h3, C) 8. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ and D) 8. $\mathbb{W}e2$.

With the crucial b5-square now under Black's control, 8.e5?! does not give White enough compensation after 8...dxe5 9.♗xd8† ♗xd8 10.♗xe5 e6 (10...♝e6 is also good) 11.♗d1 ♗d7.

A) 8.b4!?



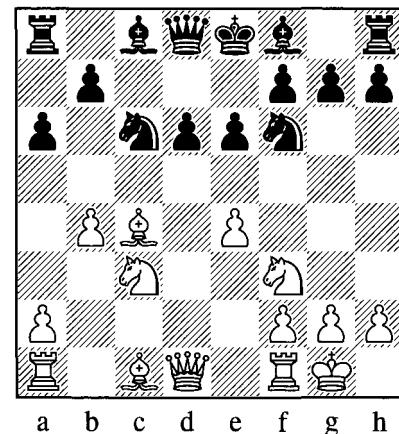
The move is less exotic than one's first impression might suggest, and has been the choice of several Morra specialists. White is in a hurry to create havoc before the defender can put his house in order with speedy development.

8...e6!?

Now that White is in a position to open up the queenside, there is something to be said for keeping the c8-bishop at home. Black should certainly steer clear of options like 8...♝xb4? 9.e5! ♗d7 10.exd6† and 8...b5 9.♝e2! ♗d7 10.a4 bxa4 11.♗xa4†.

The only serious alternative to the text move is 8...♝g4, but in that case it will be harder for Black to develop his kingside pieces conveniently. Play continues: 9.b5 ♘xf3 Black should take the opportunity to damage his opponent's structure. 10.gxf3 axb5 11.♗xb5! (11.♗xb5 g6 should be better for Black) 11...♝e5 12.♗b3 e6 13.♗a3 (13.♗b2!N also

looks interesting) when White had reasonable compensation in A. Stuart – Hoynck van Papendrecht, corr. 1995.



9.♗b3

9.♗e2, Mezera–Necesany, corr. 2005, should be met by the straightforward 9...♝e7N.

9.a4 ♘e7 10.♗a3 was seen in Doucet – De Jonghe, Teeside 1973. White is preparing to push his b-pawn, so it looks sensible to preempt that idea with 10...♝e5!N when Black stands well.

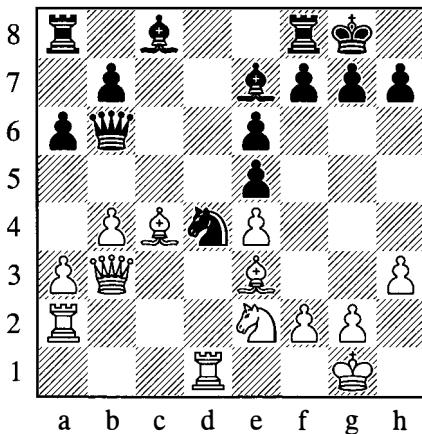
9.b5 was White's choice in Regan – A. Lutz, Germany 1999, and here Black should have played 9...axb5N 10.♗xb5 (10.♗xb5 fails to impress after 10...♝xe4 11.♗e1, and now the simplest route to an advantage would be 11...♝e7 [According to the computer, Black is also doing very well in the complications resulting from 11...d5 12.♗f4 ♘c5 13.♗c7† ♘e7.] 12.♗xe4 d5 regaining the piece with advantage.) 10...♝b6 preventing the troublesome e4–e5, with an edge for Black.

9...♝e7 10.♗d1 ♘b6 11.a3 ♘g4 12.♗a2 0–0 13.h3!?

White would have been better off with 13.♗c2 ♘d7 14.♗f4, when his pieces coordinate quite well and he is only slightly worse.

**13...Qge5 14.Qxe5 dxe5 15.Qe3 Qd4
16.Qe2**

This position was reached in Fanha – Pinheiro, Lisbon 2000, and now Black should have played:



16...Qd8N

Keeping a clear advantage.

B) 8.h3

This prevents Black's intended bishop development, at the cost of an important tempo.

8...e6

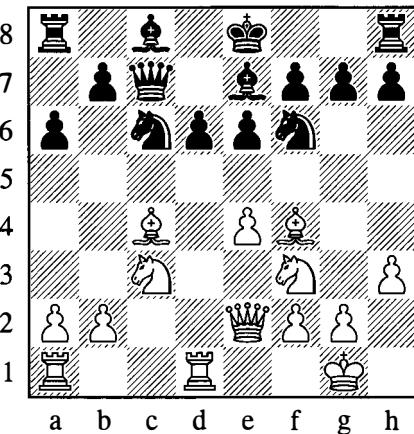
Now we reach a normal-looking position. The same set-up has been used by Black in a great many games, but the difference is that White would not normally have wasted time on h2-h3. It is hardly surprising that this loss of time reduces his attacking prospects.

9.We2 Qe7 10.Qd1 Wc7

It looks riskier to accelerate the development of the queenside with 10...Qd7 11.Qf4 b5 12.Qb3 Wb8 due to 13.e5! dxe5 14.Qxe5 Qxe5 15.Qxe5 Wb7 16.Qxf6 Qxf6, Manhardt – Pelletier, Medellin 1996, 17.Qe4N with some initiative. I actually analysed this line a bit deeper and concluded that Black should be

able to hold the balance, but overall the text move is a much safer practical choice.

11.Qf4



11...Qe5?

This is a pragmatic choice. Black prevents any e4-e5 trickery once and for all, while also forcing the exchange of a pair of minor pieces. True, he ends up with doubled pawns, but one of them is an extra pawn so his situation is still pretty healthy. Besides, the doubled e-pawns will help to control several important central squares.

There is a playable alternative in 11...0-0 12.Qac1 Qd7 13.Qb3 Wb8. Black's position is a bit passive, but he has no real weaknesses and can gradually try to exploit his extra pawn. Still, the main line seems much more straightforward.

12.Qxe5

A few players have exchanged with the knight, but in that case White would be forced to lose a tempo moving the bishop again. In the majority of games White has preferred to relinquish the bishop pair in order to avoid this loss of time.

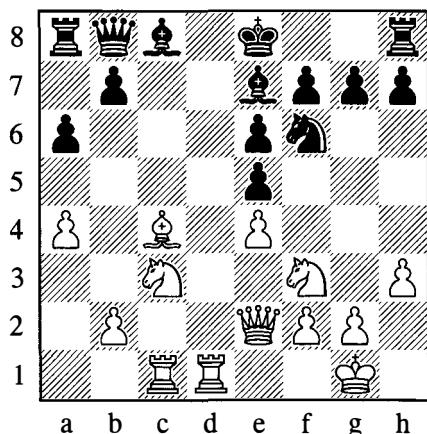
12...dxe5 13.Qac1 Wb8!

Vacating the c-file is a sensible precaution. For instance, after 13...0-0 14. $\mathbb{Q}xe6!$ $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 16.exd5 $\mathbb{W}d6$ 17.dxe6 $\mathbb{W}xe6$ 18. $\mathbb{W}xe5$ $\mathbb{W}xe5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}fd8$ 20.b3 White regained his pawn to reach an equal endgame in Massie – Solomon, Elista 1998.

The text move may appear a bit passive, but it works well.

14.a4

White is not in much of a position to launch an attack, so it makes sense for him to restrict any queenside advance from his opponent.



14...0-0

Another game continued 14... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 15. $\mathbb{W}e3$ 0-0 16. $\mathbb{W}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 17. $\mathbb{W}xe5$ $\mathbb{W}xe5$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ b5 20.axb5 axb5† White regained his pawn but still suffered from the lack of a dark-squared bishop, Roeder – Gawehtns, Germany 1981.

15. $\mathbb{W}e3$ h6 16.g4 $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ b6†

White could only dream of obtaining any compensation for the missing pawn in I. Horvath – Golikov, Hungary 1992.

C) 8. $\mathbb{Q}g5$

This ambitious move has yet to be tested extensively.

8...e6!

Once again Black abandons the ... $\mathbb{Q}g4$ plan in order to reach a favourable version of a different set-up. In this case the point is that the bishop would not normally go to g5 in such a position.

9. $\mathbb{W}e2$ h6

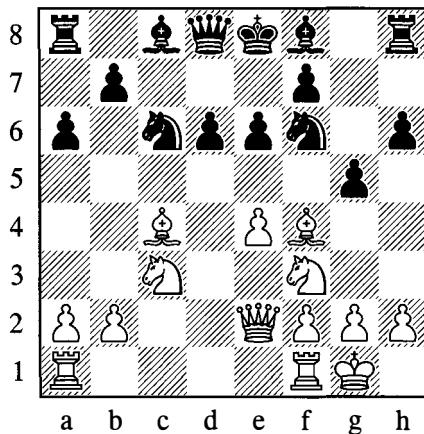
The solid 9... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ is reasonable, but the immediate attack on the bishop is more forcing and has scored excellently in practice.

10. $\mathbb{Q}f4$

10. $\mathbb{Q}h4$ g5 11. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ reaches the main line below.

10...g5!?

This is the most ambitious move. Black can also proceed in more solid fashion with 10...e5 11. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$, although in that case White's control over the d5-square would offer him some compensation.



11. $\mathbb{Q}g3$

If White insists on preserving his bishop with 11. $\mathbb{Q}e3$, there might follow 11... $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ b5 13. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}ge5$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}d4!$ 15. $\mathbb{W}d3$ dxe5 16. $\mathbb{Q}fd1$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ when Black kept an extra pawn and full control of the game in Kissick – W. Gray, corr. 2000.

11...♝h5 12.♗ad1 ♝xg3 13.hxg3

In the event of 13.fxg3, Dreke – Hertel, corr. 1994, 13...♝g7N White is unlikely to achieve much on the f-file.

13...♛f6

Black is spoiled for choice, with a good alternative being 13...♝g7 (the cheeky 13...h5!N† also looks dangerous for White) 14.e5 d5 15.g4 ♜c7 16.♝xd5 exd5 17.♝xd5 ♜b8 18.♜fe1 0–0 19.♝b6 ♜xg4 when White did not have enough for the sacrificed piece in Zelic – Saric, Zagreb 2007.

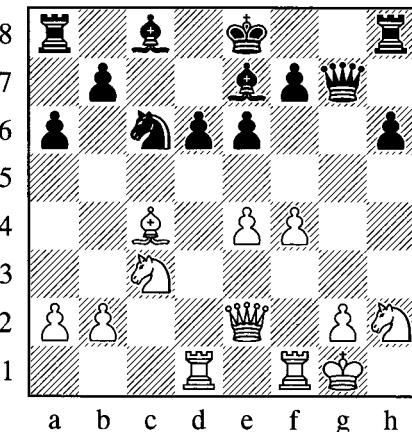
14.♝h2

14.e5 dx5 15.♝e4 ♜g7 16.♛d2 f5 17.♝c3 ♜c5 18.♜fe1 e4 19.♝xe4 fxe4 20.♜xe4 0–0 was another failure for White in Costa – Gallagher, Lisbon 2000.

14.♛e3!N g4 15.♝d4 ♜xd4 16.♝xd4 h5 seems sensible for White, but still not good enough for equality.

14...♝e7 15.f4 gxg4 16.gxf4 ♜g7

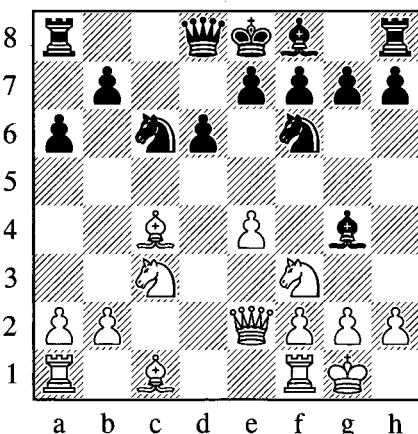
The position is quite sharp, but there is no question that Black's chances are higher. He has a pawn in the bank and an open g-file, while his bishop pair is also an important factor.

**17.♚h1 ♜d7 18.♛e3 ♜c8 19.♛e2 ♜g8 20.g4 ♜d8**

Black's king is safe enough in the centre and the second player eventually capitalized on his advantage in Lendwai – Lutz, Graz 1993.

D) 8.♛e2

Finally we arrive at the most common continuation. White continues with his usual scheme of development but also allows Black to carry out his plan.

8...♝g4**9.♝d1 e6**

It may seem tempting to exchange pieces and simplify the position, but after 9...♝xf3?! 10.♛xf3 ♜e5 11.♛e2 ♜xc4 12.♛xc4 Black suffers from retarded development.

It should also briefly be noted that 9...♝e5?? 10.♝xe5! would be embarrassing for Black.

10.♝f4

Sometimes White plays 10.h3, when 10...♝xf3 11.♛xf3 ♜c7 12.♝f4 ♜b8 reaches the main line. (Please note that Black would not really benefit from 11...♝e5 12.♛e2 ♜xc4 13.♛xc4 when once again his development is a little slow.)

10... $\mathbb{W}b8!$

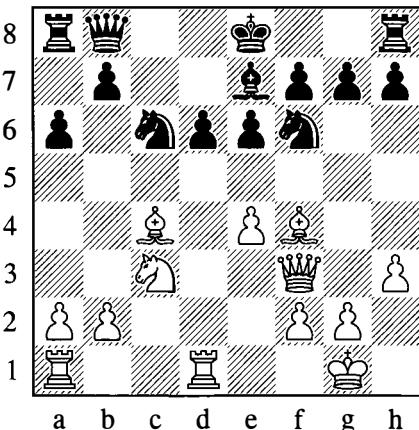
White was threatening e5 so the queen should vacate the d-file, and this is the best location for her.

11.h3

11. $\mathbb{W}d3$ gives Black a pleasant choice. 11... $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ (also promising is 11... $\mathbb{Q}e7!?$) N 12. $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ $\mathbb{W}xd6$ 13. $\mathbb{W}xd6$ $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ $\mathbb{Q}e7\bar{F}$ 12.gxf3?! (White should prefer 12. $\mathbb{W}xf3$ with the same position as the main line, except for the position of the pawn on h2 instead of h3.) 12... $\mathbb{Q}h5!$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 14. $\mathbb{W}xd6$ $\mathbb{W}xd6$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ $\mathbb{Q}hd8$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ with a serious advantage in the ending, Al Badani – Sanjay, Beirut 2009.

11... $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 12. $\mathbb{W}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$

Again Black should not waste time on unnecessary exchanges. For instance, 12... $\mathbb{Q}e5!?$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ dx e 14. $\mathbb{W}g3$ made his task much more complicated in Tsereteli – Matnadze, Tbilisi 2001.

**13. $\mathbb{Q}e2$**

Removing the bishop from potential attacks from ...b5 or ... $\mathbb{Q}e5$. Some other moves have also been tried, but in all cases White has trouble justifying the missing pawn. Here are a few other examples:

If White spends an additional tempo on 13. $\mathbb{Q}d3$, then 13... $\mathbb{Q}e5!$ becomes a good answer.

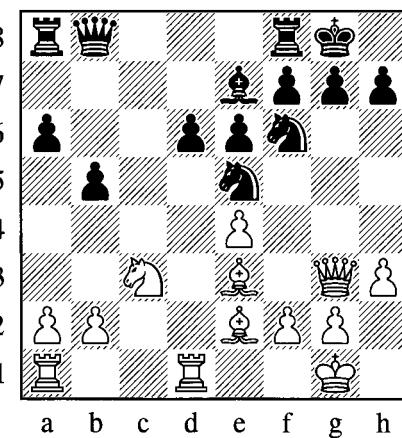
13. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ 0–0 14. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 16.g4? $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 17. $\mathbb{W}e2$ This was Regan – Paehtz, Dresden 1998, and here I suggest: 17... $\mathbb{Q}ac8N$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{W}a5\bar{F}$ White's kingside activity does not succeed in producing enough counterplay.

13...0–0 14. $\mathbb{W}g3$

Another plausible continuation would be 14. $\mathbb{Q}ac1N$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 15. $\mathbb{W}e3$ b5 16. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ h6 \bar{F} . In most respects White has a healthy position, except he is missing a pawn.

14... $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}e3$

Also after 15. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ b5 17.a3 $\mathbb{Q}a7\bar{F}$ White has no real compensation.

15...b5**16. $\mathbb{Q}h6!?$**

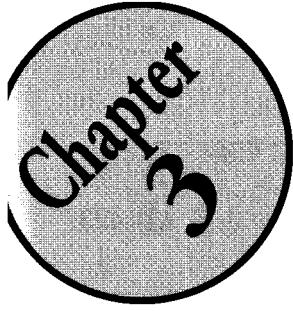
Unable to find a constructive plan, White embarks on a reckless attack.

16... $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 17.f4? b4 18.f5 bxc3 19.fxg6 hxg6 20. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ cxb2 21. $\mathbb{Q}ab1$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$

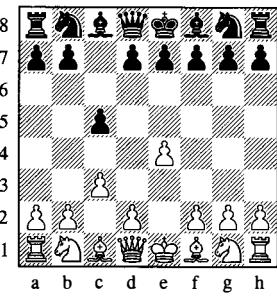
White was soon forced to resign in Watzdorf – Buhr, Germany 1994.

Conclusion

All gambits are tainted with a chance of failure, since the violent way of breaking the balance can sometimes backfire on the active side. The Morra Gambit has all but disappeared from high-level chess, despite never having been completely refuted. Black must play with great precision in order to tame the opponent's early initiative, which results from the rapid development of the pieces. The proposed antidote is one of the most promising and safest lines the defender can choose. It avoids the most dangerous attacking possibilities, while providing realistic chances for Black to capitalize on his extra pawn.



Minor Systems



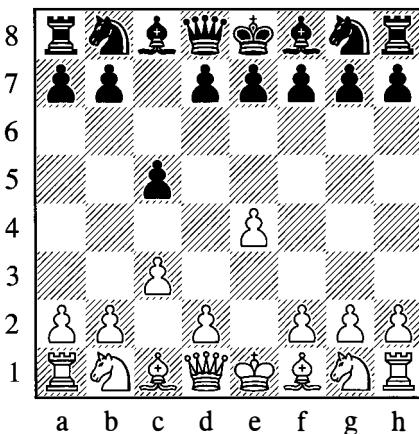
Forrest Gump - The c3-Variation

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1.e4 c5 2.c3

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1.e4 c5 2.c3



The 2.c3 Sicilian is without a doubt the enfant terrible of the whole Sicilian complex. The system was not really taken seriously until the stubborn efforts of Sveshnikov transformed it into one of the most fashionable lines ever invented. Some 90,000 games later the theory of the system could fill several volumes.

Black's two most popular choices are 2... $\mathbb{Q}f6$, with a somewhat improved version of Alekhine's Defence, and 2...d5 3.exd5 $\mathbb{W}xd5$, aping the main feature of the Scandinavian Defence. The biggest problem for Black is not so much finding a route to an acceptable position, but rather to find a fully sound line that offers him enough chances to play for a win. For this reason I decided to cover two options for Black, so that the reader can choose one that suits his own attitude to risk as well as the specific tournament or match situation that might arise on a given day.

The first option will be **A) 2...d6**, a somewhat underestimated line but in my opinion not a bad one at all. We will then turn our attention to **B) 2...d5**, in connection with a kingside fianchetto. This leads to sharper play and is often used by players who are looking to win with the black pieces.

A) 2...d6 3.d4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$

Now White has three main ideas: **A1) 4.f3**, **A2) 4.dxc5** and **A3) 4. $\mathbb{Q}d3$** .

A1) 4.f3

This has been seen in quite a lot of games, but the problem for White is that now both his knights are deprived of their most natural squares. A witty solution for the second player is the immediate counterblow in the centre.

4...d5! 5.e5 $\mathbb{Q}fd7$ 6.f4 cxd4 7.cxd4 $\mathbb{Q}b6$

Black has good chances to obtain a pleasant version of the French Defence, since the bishop on c8 is not blocked.

8. $\mathbb{Q}c3$

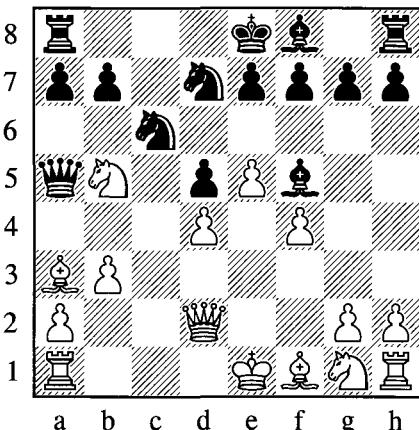
8. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 10.0–0 e6 11. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$. 12. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ dxc4 13. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ h5 15. $\mathbb{W}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ was more than comfortable for Black in Basanta – Hodgson, Winnipeg 1994.

8. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ should be met by 9...g6!N (9... $\mathbb{Q}b4$?! 10.f5! was troublesome in Alavkin – Malaniuk, Kstovo 1997.) 9. $\mathbb{Q}bc3$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ gxf5 11.0–0 (11.e6 fxe6 is nothing for White; the knight on e2 is useless, while Black can always hide his king on d7 if needed, and later he can easily manoeuvre a knight to e4.) 11...e6 with roughly equal chances. Black will develop his dark-squared bishop on e7 and might aim for active play on either side of the board.

8... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 9.b3?

White wants to delay $\mathbb{Q}f3$ in order to prevent the convenient development of the enemy bishop on g4.

9... $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}a3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 11. $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{W}a5$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}b5$



12...Bb6!?

There was a straightforward solution in 12...Bxd2†N 13.Qxd2 Bc8 14.Qd3 Qxd3 15.Qxd3 a6 16.Qc3 e6 with equality, but Black is hoping for more.

13.Qf3Bg4 14.Bd1 a6 15.Qc3 Ba5 16.Qb2 Qf3 17.gxf3 g6 18.e6!?

White decides to complicate the game before Black can stabilize the position with ...e6, when the doubled f-pawns could become a long-term liability.

18...fxe6 19.Qh3Bg7 20.We3 Bb4 21.Qxe6 Qxd4 22.Bxd4 Bxd4

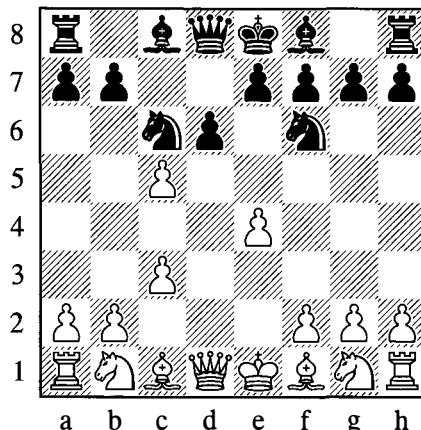
White must think about safety, otherwise he can lose the battle as in Rogers – Sadler, London 1992.

A2) 4.dxc5

This should not trouble Black too much, although he should certainly take care to avoid 4...Qxe4?? 5.Wa4†.

4...Qc6!

It would not be so terrible to play 4...dxc5 5.Wxd8† Qxd8 6.f3 e6 7.Qe3 Qc6, but Black would have to play carefully to equalize. The text move leads to more interesting play.



In this position White has a wide choice. We will consider the following options in detail:
A21) 5.cxd6, A22) 5.Qc4, A23) 5.Wc2 and A24) 5.f3.

The modest 5.Qd2 offers White very little, for instance: 5...dxc5 6.Qgf3 g6 7.g3 Qg7 8.Qg2 Qd3 9.Qf1 Wd7 10.Qg2 b6 11.0–0 0–0 12.e5 Qd5 13.We2 Qc7 14.Qe1 Qb7 15.We4 This was Sveshnikov – Dorfman, Volgodonsk 1981, and now 15...Qe6N 16.We2 Wad8 would have given Black a slight plus.

5.Qd3 also makes a timid impression. 5...d5!? Recapturing on c5 is also okay, but the text seems even easier. 6.Qd2 e6 (If Black is feeling ambitious he might consider 6...e5!?, which has scored well.) 7.Qgf3 This was Goloshchapov – Nevednichy, Miskolc 2004, and now 7...Qxc5 8.exd5 Wxd5 would have been fine for Black.

A21) 5.cxd6

This amounts to an exchanging of what was, just two moves ago, White's proud pair of central pawns. In other words, it is not a serious try for an advantage.

5...Qxe4 6.Qd2

White had better avoid 6.dxe7? Wxd1† 7.Qxd1 Qxf2† 8.Qe1 Qxh1 9.exf8=W†

$\mathbb{E}xf8\#$ White is in trouble here, as he will have a hard time capturing the trapped knight on h1. Meanwhile Black intends to arrange long castling followed by ... $\mathbb{E}fe8\#$ with powerful play in the centre.

If White does not take on e7 he has several different ways to develop his pieces, but in all cases Black will get a comfortable position after ... $\mathbb{Q}xd6$, when he will have two well-placed knights and a central pawn majority. I do not see much point in analysing every possible plan at White's disposal, so we will just consider one example from Grandmaster praxis featuring accurate play from both sides.

6... $\mathbb{Q}xd6$

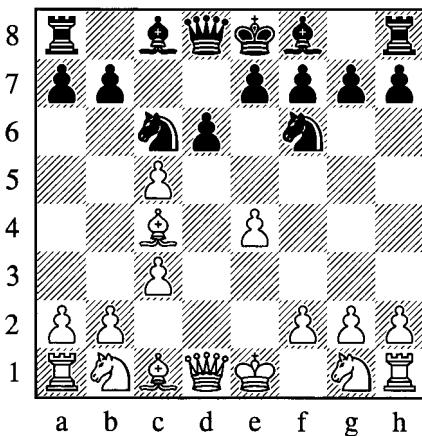
6... $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 7. $\mathbb{W}xd2$ e5 is equally playable and leads to similar positions.

7. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ e5 8. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ f6 9. $\mathbb{Q}xd6\#$ $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{W}e7$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 12. $\mathbb{W}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ 13. $\mathbb{W}xc4$ $\mathbb{W}f7$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ 0-0 15. $\mathbb{E}d1$ $\mathbb{E}fd8$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 17. $\mathbb{W}xf7\#$ $\mathbb{Q}xf7$

The endgame is equal, Smagin – Dorfman, Paris 1990.

A22) 5. $\mathbb{Q}c4$

This is one of the few moves that can put some excitement into White's play. However, it will cost him one half of his bishop pair.



5... $\mathbb{Q}xe4!$

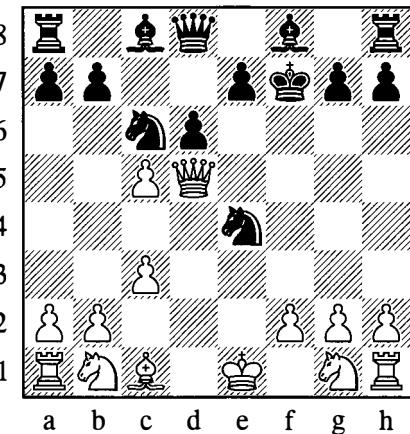
Black should not be afraid to accept the challenge.

6. $\mathbb{Q}xf7\#$

6. $\mathbb{W}d5$ is well met by 6... $\mathbb{Q}e6$! 7. $\mathbb{W}xe4$ d5 with better chances for Black.

6... $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ 7. $\mathbb{W}d5\#$

The other possibility is 7. $\mathbb{W}h5\#$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 8. $\mathbb{W}d5\#$ e6 9. $\mathbb{W}xe4$ d5 10. $\mathbb{W}e3$ b6 11.cxb6 axb6 12. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 13. $\mathbb{W}g5$ $\mathbb{W}f6$ 14.0-0 (It is a similar story after 14. $\mathbb{W}xf6$ gxf6 15. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 17.0-0 $\mathbb{Q}a6$) 14... $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 15. $\mathbb{W}xf6$ gxf6 16. $\mathbb{E}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}f7\#$ Black has superb compensation for the missing pawn, Khmelnitsky – Goldin, Philadelphia 1992.



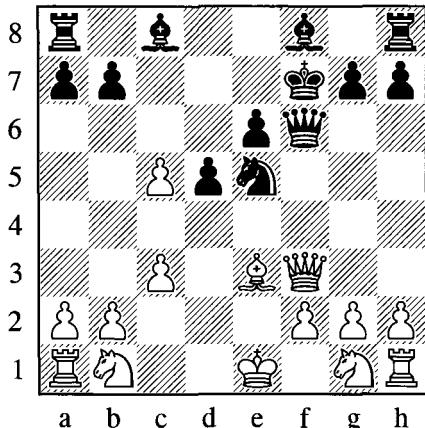
7... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 8. $\mathbb{W}xe4$ d5 9. $\mathbb{W}f3\#$ $\mathbb{W}f6$

This looks like the most natural move, although 9... $\mathbb{Q}g8$? is also playable. For instance, 10. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ b6 11.cxb6 axb6 12. $\mathbb{W}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 14.fxe3 $\mathbb{W}h4\#$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}a6$ was dangerous for White in Sveshnikov – Tseshkovsky, Frunze 1981.

10. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}e5!$

10...b6 11.cxb6 axb6 12. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 13.cxd4 $\mathbb{Q}a4$ 14. $\mathbb{W}xf6\#$ gxf6 15. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}b4\#$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}bc3$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3\#$ 17.bxc3 $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ $\mathbb{W}ha8$ brought Black easy equality in

Azmaiparashvili – Topalov, Elenite 1995, but I think it is quite realistic for Black to aim for more.



11. $\mathbb{Q}e2$

Immediately White is facing a difficult choice. Several queen moves are possible, but none of them seem to offer much for him.

11. $\mathbb{Q}h5\#$ g6 12. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3\#$
14. $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 15. $gxf3$ e5 is similar to the main line, Christensen – Paunovic, Copenhagen 1989.

11. $\mathbb{Q}xf6\#$ gxf6 12. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ b6 13. $cxb6$ $AXB6$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}a6\#$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}d3$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ e5
17. $\mathbb{Q}gf3$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ gave Black great value for the pawn in Stasenko – Vol. Andreev, Odessa 2005.

11... $\mathbb{Q}f5!$

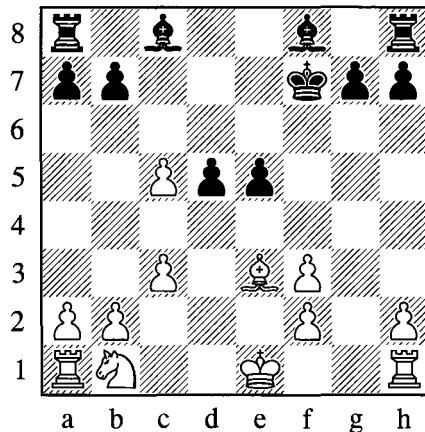
Threatening an awkward check on d3.

12. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3\#$

Now Black switches plans, in order to compromise White's kingside structure.

13. $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 14. $gxf3$ e5

With two bishops, a strong centre and a sounder structure, Black has full compensation for a pawn.



15. $\mathbb{Q}d2$

Perhaps White should settle for 15. $\mathbb{Q}a3!?$, when the following sequence leads to equality:
15... b6 16. $cxb6$ $\mathbb{Q}xa3$ 17. $bxa3$ $AXB6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ $\mathbb{Q}xa3$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ d4 20. $\mathbb{Q}hc1$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$, Hoffmann – Schmitz, Germany 1991.

15... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}g1$

The following encounter also turned out pleasantly for Black: 16. 0–0–0 $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ a5 18. $\mathbb{Q}he1$ a4 19. $\mathbb{Q}a1$ g5 20. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}b4$ $\mathbb{Q}ac8$ as in Holstein – Bator, Copenhagen 1994.

16... $\mathbb{Q}g5!?$ 17. 0–0–0 h6 18. b4 a5 19. b5 a4 20. h4 $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 21. $hxg5$ $hxg5$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$

Black maintains excellent compensation for the reasons already stated, Brynell – Bator, Malmo 1986.

A23) 5. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $dxc5$

Black has a pleasant choice between this and: 5... d5!?

Active play in the centre should also ensure a satisfactory game.

6. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ e6 7. $exd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$

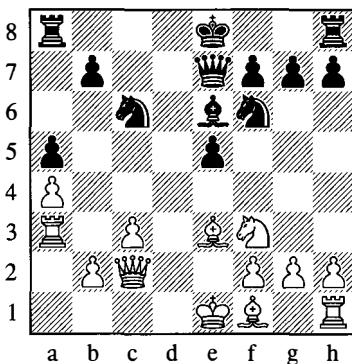
7... $exd5!?$ is a bit too optimistic, and after 8. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ 0–0 10. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ a5 13. a4 $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 14. 0–0 $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ Black was struggling to demonstrate

compensation for the pawn in Godena – Aronian, Batumi 2002.

8. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $a5$ 9. $a4$ $e5$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}a3$ $\mathbb{Q}xc5$
11... $\mathbb{Q}g4!?$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $e4$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}fd4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe2$
14. $\mathbb{W}xe2$ $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ is equal.

12. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{W}xc5$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{W}e7$

Black should not have too many problems here, as his central control should more or less balance the strength of White's bishop pair.



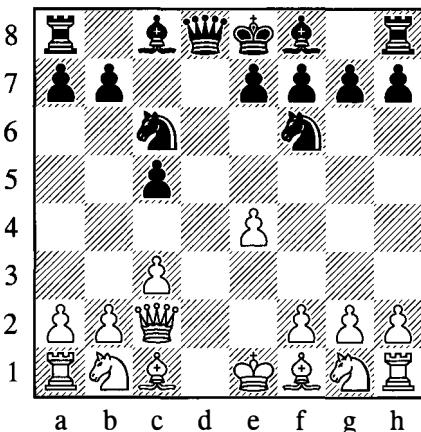
14. $\mathbb{Q}g5$

14. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 15. $0-0$ $0-0$ 16. $\mathbb{W}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}fd8$ is also about level.

14... $h6$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}h4$ $0-0$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 17. $0-0$ $e4$

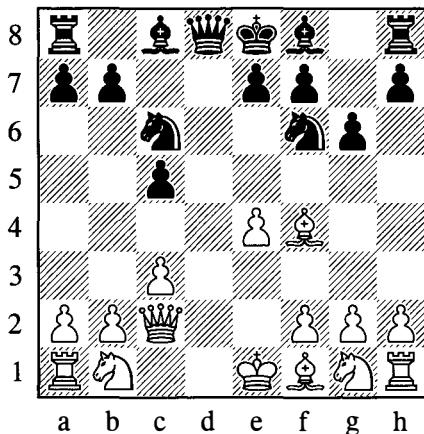
18. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}fe8$

Black has obtained a healthy and active position, Mukhametov – Tregubov, Berlin 1997.



Now White's two most popular choices are:
A231) 6. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ g6 and **A232) 6. $\mathbb{Q}B3$** . Other moves have been tested as well, but in most cases Black will develop in a similar way as in the two main lines.

A231) 6. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ g6



7. $\mathbb{Q}f3$

It is also important to consider the queenside development:

7. $\mathbb{Q}a3$ $e5!N$

This daring advance looks to me like the best option.

I initially looked at the following continuation, but concluded that it was not so desirable:

7... $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 8. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{W}a5$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $0-0$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}d8N$
(10... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}xa2!?$ 12. $0-0$ $e5$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}e3$
 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ was seen in Sveshnikov – Shabalov, Neu Isenburg 1992, and now White could have won the battle for the light squares with:
14. $\mathbb{Q}c4N$ $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}dxc4$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}b5\pm$)
11. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 12. $f3$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 13. $0-0-\pm$ Black's problems should be manageable, but this is hardly an ideal outcome from the opening.

8. $\mathbb{Q}e3$

8. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{W}e7$ is equal.

8... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{W}c7!$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $0-0$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $a6$

The pieces of first player are not well organized and thus Black has comfortable play.

7... $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 8. $\mathbb{Q}bd2$ 0-0 9. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$

Also worth considering is 9... $\mathbb{Q}h5!$? 10. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ Maksimenko – Ermenkov, Yugoslavia 1994, 10... $\mathbb{Q}d4!$ N (Much better than the game continuation of 10... $\mathbb{Q}xf4$?! 11. $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ b6 13.h3±) 11.cxd4 $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ 12.dxc5 $\mathbb{Q}c7$ with equal chances.

10. $\mathbb{Q}b3$

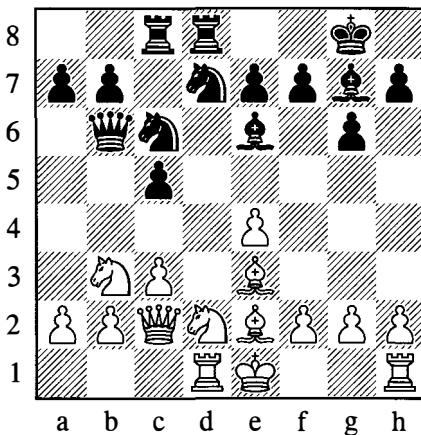
Also harmless is 10. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ b5 13. $\mathbb{Q}ce5$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$.

10... $\mathbb{W}b6$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}fd2$ $\mathbb{Q}fd8$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}e3$

After 12. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ it looks interesting for Black to try 12... $\mathbb{Q}g4$?! 13.0-0 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ with active play.

12... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}ac8$

Black has succeeded in mobilizing his forces, and will enter the middlegame with equal chances.

**14. $\mathbb{Q}c4$**

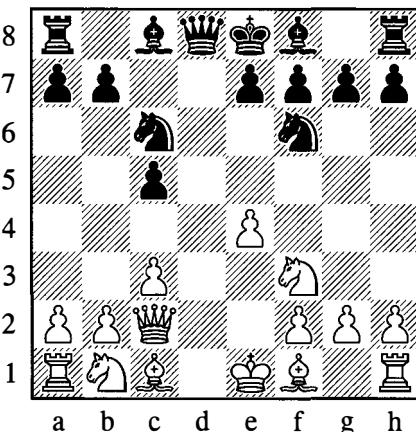
White should take care to avoid: 14.0-0? $\mathbb{Q}d4$!?

14... $\mathbb{W}c7$ 15.0-0 b5!?

Black embarks on an ambitious plan based on advancing his queenside pawns.

16. $\mathbb{Q}cd2$ c4 17. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 18.cxd4 $\mathbb{Q}b6$
19.d5 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ b4 21. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{W}b7$

Black keeps a full share of the chances in this unbalanced position and eventually went on to win, Petrov – Kempinski, Ohrid 2001.

A232) 6. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ **6... $\mathbb{W}c7$**

This is a nice flexible move. The queen will not want to remain on the d-file forever, so it makes some sense to solve that issue before deciding how best to deploy the other pieces.

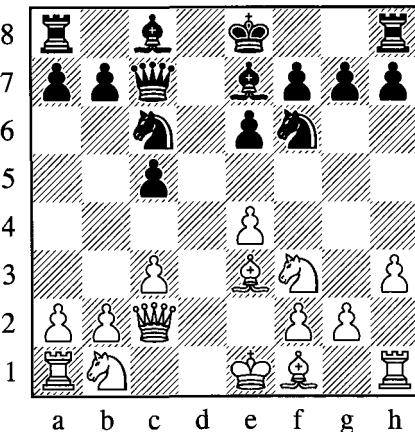
7. $\mathbb{Q}e3$

Just as before, White has tried several different moves, but none of which are especially threatening. Here are a few examples:

7. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 8. $\mathbb{Q}bd2$ e6 9. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 10. $\mathbb{W}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 11.0-0 a6 12. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}fe1$ 0-0 with equal chances, Markovic – Damljanovic, Subotica 2000.

7.a4 g6 8. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ b6 9. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 10.h3 $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 11.0-0 0-0 12. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ a6 13. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}a5$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}bd2$ e5 15.b3 h6 16. $\mathbb{W}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 17.b4 $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 18.b5 axb5 19. $\mathbb{Q}xb5$!?(19.axb5 $\mathbb{Q}d6$ =) 19...c4! Black began to take over the initiative in Kurajica – Movsesian, Sarajevo 2001.

7...e6 8.h3 $\mathbb{Q}e7$



9.Qe2

Another game continued 9.Qbd2 0-0 10.Qe2 b6 11.0-0 Qb7 12.Qfe1 h6 13.Qf1 Qad8 14.g3 Qc8 15.Qf4 Qh5 16.Qe3 Qf6 17.Qad1 Qd6 18.Qg2 Qc7 19.Qf1 Qa8 Black has positioned his pieces harmoniously and it is White who must work to maintain the balance, Cherniaev – Conquest, Hastings 2004.

9...0-0 10.0-0 b6 11.a4 Qb7 12.Qbd2 Qfd8 13.Qfe1 Qd7 14.Qad1 Qad8 15.Qg5

15.Qc4 Qa5 16.Qxd7 Qxd7 17.Qcd2 is also equal.

15...Qh5 16.Qe3 Qf6

White obtained no advantage from the opening, and after a further repetition of moves the players agreed to a draw in Sveshnikov – Khalifman, Kujbyshev 1986.

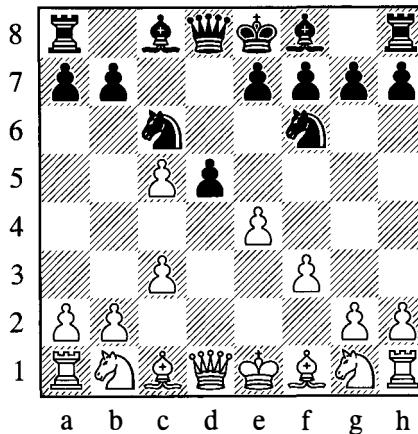
A24) 5.f3

This seems like a natural move. White supports his centre and hopes for a typical slight edge in a position without queens. However, Black does not necessarily have to fall in with that plan.

5...d5!

It is of course possible to take on c5 and be just a little worse, but the text move is much

more interesting, and probably just a better move overall.

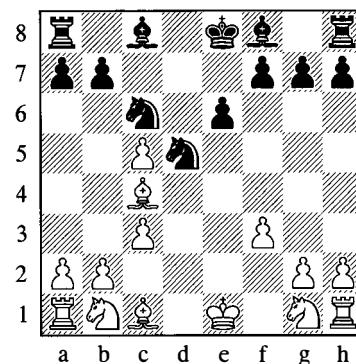


6.exd5 Qxd5

It is also quite acceptable for Black to play: 6...Qxd5?!

It may seem paradoxical, but Black also enjoys full compensation in the position without queens.

7.Qxd5 Qxd5 8.Qc4 e6



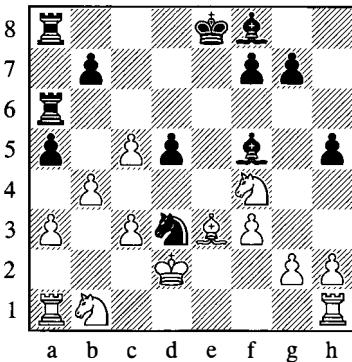
9.Qxd5

After 9.b4 a5 10.Qxd5 exd5 11.b5 Qe5 12.Qe3, Panic – Lovric, Obrenovac 2008, 12...Qd7N 13.Qa3 Qd3† 14.Qd2 Qxc5= White faces a tough fight for survival.

9...exd5 10.Qe3 Qe5 11.b3

The safest approach is to return the pawn. The greedy 11.b4?! looks too risky after 11...a5, for instance: 12.Qd4 Qd3† 13.Qd2

$\mathbb{Q}f5$ 14.a3 h5 15. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}h6!$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}ha6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}f4?$ (Better was 17. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ although Black is still doing well after 17... $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ [18. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ axb4 19.cxb4 $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ 20.axb4 $\mathbb{Q}xa1$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xa1$ $\mathbb{Q}xa1+$] 18... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}d7\#$)



17...d4! and White's position soon fell apart, Klinger – Cebalo, Biel 1986.

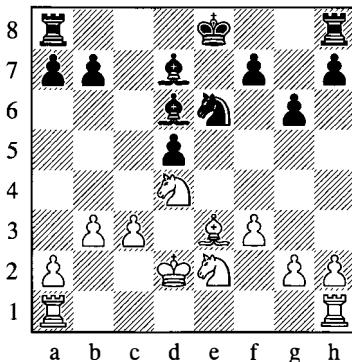
11... $\mathbb{Q}d3\#$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}xc5$

Material is equal. Black has an isolated pawn, but this is more than balanced by his bishop pair. The position is close to equal, but I would say it is White who has to be more careful.

13. $\mathbb{Q}a3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$

13... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ f6 15. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}cd4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ h5 was also fine for Black in Turov – Sotnikov, Ekaterinburg 1996, although it looks more logical for Black to avoid a straightforward knight exchange for the time being, since he only has one knight left.

14. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}cd4$ g6



17. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$

White should not improve his opponent's structure with 17. $\mathbb{Q}xe6?$ fxe6, when 18.f4 0–0 19.g3 b5 20.b4 a5 21.a3 $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}fa8\#$ meant just suffering for White in Prudnikova – Khurtsidze, Vrnjacka Banja 1996.

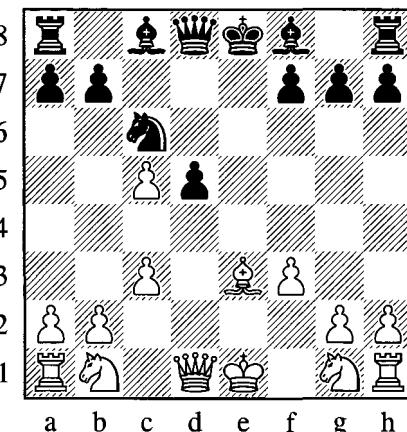
17...0–0 18. $\mathbb{Q}he1$ $\mathbb{Q}fe8$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ fxe6 20.f4 e5 21.fxe5 $\mathbb{Q}xe5$

Black's bishop pair gave him the edge in Manca – Gelfand, Arnhem 1988.

7. $\mathbb{Q}c4$

Less common, but still playable, is 7.c4 $\mathbb{Q}a5\#$ 8. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}db4$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ (White soon fell into trouble after the slow 9.a3? $\mathbb{Q}f5!$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}c2\#$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}xa1$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xa1$ e5 14.b4 $\mathbb{Q}a4\#$ Kharlov – Smirin, Oviedo 1993.) 9... $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 0–0–0 11.a3 $\mathbb{Q}c2\#$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}xc2$ $\mathbb{Q}xc2$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xa5$ $\mathbb{Q}xa5$ 14.b4 This was Vulicevic – Olesen, New York 1993, and now I suggest 14... $\mathbb{Q}c6N$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ e6 when Black has enough play for the pawn.

7...e6 8. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ exd5 9. $\mathbb{Q}e3$



9...b6!

With this excellent move Black clears the way for his pieces to develop on the most favourable squares. He relinquishes any hopes of regaining the sacrificed pawn in the

foreseeable future, but his tremendously active pieces should more than make up for that.

10.cxb6 ♜d6?

10...axb6 11.♗e2 ♜d6 12.0–0 0–0 is another route to the main line.

11.♗e2

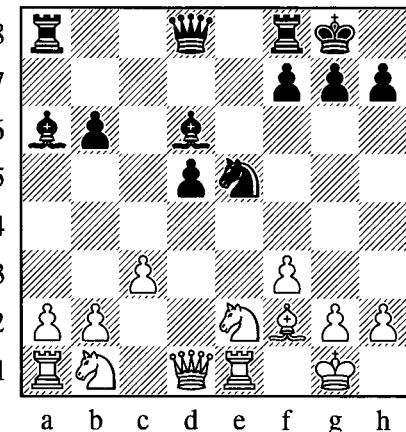
11.bxa7?! looks too greedy, and after 11...0–0 12.♕f2 ♜e8 13.♗e2 ♜xe3 14.♕xe3 ♜g5† 15.♕f2 ♜c5† 16.♗d4 ♜xd4 17.cxd4 ♜h4† 18.g3 (18.♗e3 ♜f5–+) 18...♜xd4† 19.♗e1 ♜f6 20.♗c3 ♜a6 White was under serious pressure, Gusev – Rychagov, Tula 2006.

11...0–0 12.0–0 axb6

Another possibility is 12...♜e8 13.♗f2, Roeder – Halbritter, Bavaria 2006, 13...axb6N 14.♗e1 ♜a6 15.♗d2 ♜e6 with full compensation.

13.♗e1 ♜e5 14.♗f2 ♜a6

Here we see another advantage of Black's ninth move. The bishop has excellent prospects here, and overall it is quite clear that Black's activity represents full value for a pawn.



15.♗c1?!

Better was 15.♗f4, although after 15...♝c4 16.♗d3 ♜c7 17.f4 ♜fe8 Black still has good chances.

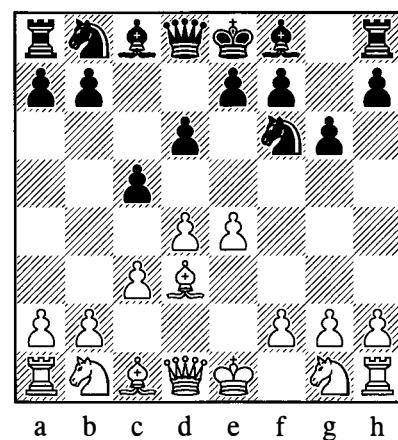
15...♜c7 16.♗g3 ♜ae8 17.♗d2 ♜e6†

Black succeeded in increasing his initiative while White's extra pawn fails to make its presence felt, Sermek – Loncar, Rabac 2003.

A3) 4.♗d3

This is White's most popular move, and arguably his best chance to obtain an opening advantage.

4...g6!



This is an important moment. Often Black has preferred to exchange on d4 before making this move, in order to avoid the response 5.dxc5. The problem with this approach is that it frees the c3-square for the white knight, thus enabling the first player to develop his pieces in the most harmonious way possible. After careful study I came to the conclusion that the exchange on c5 is not something that Black should worry about, meaning that the text move is the most accurate.

We will analyse two responses: A31) 5.dxc5 and A32) 5.♗f3.

A31) 5.dxc5 dxc5 6.e5

Now Black must make a difficult choice. The following move may appear surprising, but I believe it to be the strongest.

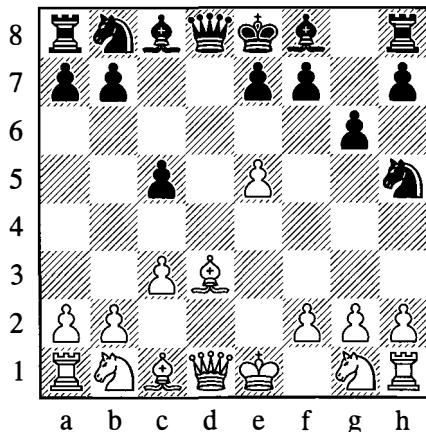
6... $\mathbb{Q}h5!$

This has not been played in many games, but based on the available evidence, it looks like this move has taken the sting out of White's chosen set-up.

It is worth mentioning that the natural 6... $\mathbb{Q}g4?$ is a bad idea, as after 7. $\mathbb{Q}b5!$ Black must accept a terrible weakening of his pawn structure with 7... $\mathbb{Q}c6$, because 7... $\mathbb{Q}d7??$ loses material immediately after 8.e6!.

There is an interesting, but ultimately inadequate alternative in 6...c4?! 7. $\mathbb{W}a4\uparrow \mathbb{Q}d7$ 8. $\mathbb{W}xc4$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$. Black hopes to obtain some compensation for the pawn, but after 9.f4! practice and analysis have demonstrated that White's chances are higher.

The other knight retreats have also been tested, but each has its own drawbacks and I believe the text move to be clearly the most reliable choice. The knight is not so badly placed on h5, and will often retreat to g7 to help control the light squares on the kingside.



7. $\mathbb{Q}b5\uparrow?!$

This is perhaps White's most direct approach, although it is hard to say if it is any better than the alternatives as there have not been many games. Up to now, at least, the results seem

encouraging for Black. Here are a few other examples of how the play might unfold:

It is worth briefly mentioning that 7.g4?! achieves nothing after 7... $\mathbb{Q}xg4!$ (Even if this move were not viable for tactical reasons, Black could still obtain excellent chances by retreating to g7 and threatening to counter with ...h5.) 8. $\mathbb{W}xg4$ $\mathbb{W}xd3$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}c8\uparrow$ $\mathbb{W}d8$ 10. $\mathbb{W}xb7$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ Both sides have weaknesses, but White's are more serious as they affect the safety of his king.

7.h3 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 8. $\mathbb{W}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 10.0–0 0–0–0 11.c4 $\mathbb{Q}g7$ A series of natural moves has led to a comfortable position for Black, and after the further 12. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ cxd4 14. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ it was White who was struggling to equalize in Lenic – Mamedov, Urgup 2004.

7. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ The early queen exchange suits Black quite well. 7... $\mathbb{W}xd1\uparrow$ 8. $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ Compared with certain other variations, the fact that White's e-pawn has advanced to e5 makes it slightly vulnerable, as well as creating some light-squared outposts for the black pieces. 9.f4 $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}xh5$ gxh5 11. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ 0–0–0 13. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}d3$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}bd2$ $\mathbb{Q}hd8$ 15.h3 $\mathbb{Q}e6$ Black kept a full share of the chances, Alexopoulos – Rohde, Mineola 1994.

7. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 8.f4 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ Black begins the process of securing some light squares on the kingside. 10. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ h5 11. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 12. $\mathbb{W}f2$ 0–0–0 13. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ b6 14.h3 $\mathbb{Q}e6$ With a balanced position, Guseinov – Mamedov, Moscow 2004.

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

This seems like the most reliable move. In Denny – Shabalov, Bridgetown 2009, Black preferred 7... $\mathbb{Q}c6$?! 8. $\mathbb{W}xd8\uparrow$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ bxc6 and although he eventually triumphed,

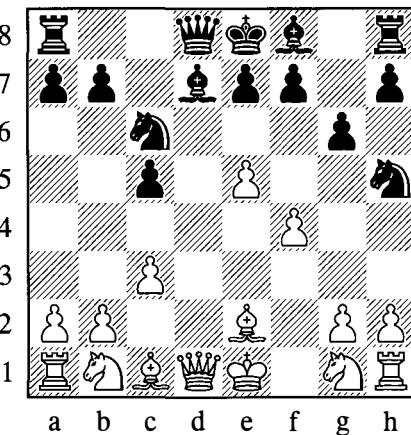
I do not completely trust his position at this stage of the game.

8.♕e2

8.e6 fxe6 9.♕e2 ♔f6 offers White some compensation for the pawn, but I doubt it can be considered a real try for an advantage.

8...♔c6 9.f4

This position was reached in the game Dempster – Noble, corr. 2005. Now after the simple:



9...♔e6N

Black looks to be fine. (9...♔g7N also seems quite reasonable.)

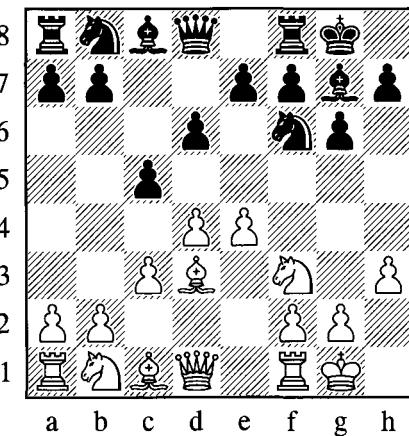
A32) 5.♘f3

As it is by no means clear if White can benefit from exchanging on c5, a lot of players prefer this standard developing move. The drawback from White's point of view is that his other knight will not have access to the desirable c3-square.

5...♗g7 6.0–0 0–0 7.h3

White usually makes this prophylactic move, either here or on the previous turn. It is not completely clear how the other pieces should best be developed; for instance, moving the

queen's knight could be met by ...cxd4 when the knight will dream of being on c3.



7...♗c7

This is the most flexible approach, preparing ...b7-b6 and ...♗d8. I will just mention one other interesting idea that deserves attention.

7...d5!? 8.e5 ♔e4 9.♗e1 ♔f5 10.dxc5?! (Perhaps White should have tried 10.g4 ♔c8 11.c4, although after 11...f5! 12.cxd5 ♗xd5 13.♗c2 ♔h8 14.♗xe4 c4 15.♗f4 cxd3 16.♗xd3 ♔c6= Black's strong play on the light squares gives him full compensation.) 10...♔d7 11.♗f4 ♔dxc5 12.♗f1 ♗b6 13.♗e2 ♗ad8 White was already uncomfortable in Adams – Tkachiev, Cannes 2001.

8.♗e1

White has a nice-looking centre, but putting it to use is another matter. Here are a few other examples:

8.♗e2 ♔c6 9.♗e3 b6 10.♗bd2 (10.d5 ♔e5 11.♗xe5 dxe5 12.c4 ♔h5 13.♗c3 ♔f4 gives Black counterplay) 10...e5 11.dxe5 dxe5 12.♗a6 ♔d7 13.a4 h6 14.♗fd1 ♗ad8 15.♗ac1 was fairly equal in Degraeve – Movsesian, Pula 1997.

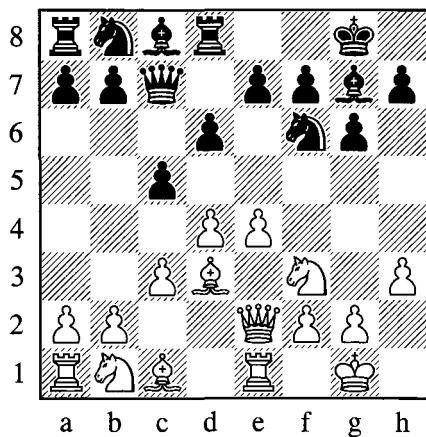
8.♗e3 ♗d8 (8...b6 is also quite playable) 9.♗bd2 e5!? 10.♗e1 h6 11.dxe5 dxe5 12.♗c2

b6 13.a4 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ Black has equalized comfortably, Sulypa – Tkachiev, France 1996.

8... $\mathbb{E}d8$

This is a flexible move, which could become especially useful in the event that the centre opens up.

9. $\mathbb{W}e2$



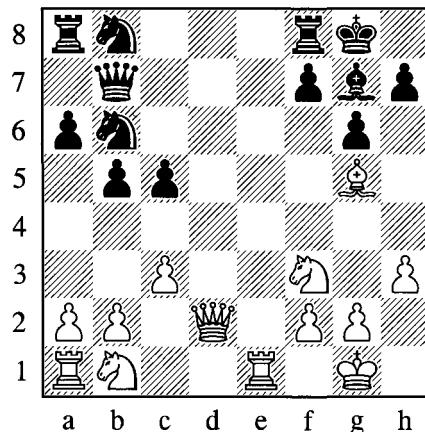
White continues to develop flexibly, delaying the development of his queenside pieces until their best locations become apparent.

Another game continued 9. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ e5 10.dxe5 dx e 5 11. $\mathbb{W}e2$ h6 12. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}bd2$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ This was Torre – Anand, Manila 1992. Black is slightly sensitive on the light squares, but as long as he plays carefully he should not have to suffer, and perhaps one day his bishops might feel their presence felt.

9...a6 10. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ b5 11.e5

This is the natural follow-up to White's previous play, but it should not concern Black unduly.

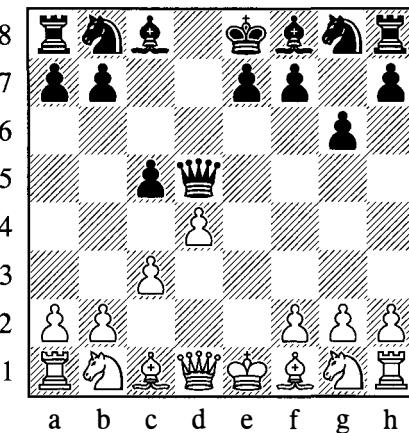
11... $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 12.exd6 exd6 13. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{E}f8$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 15.dxc5 dxc5 16. $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ $\mathbb{W}xb7\#$



Black keeps a fair share of the chances, Karpov – J. Polgar, Monte Carlo (rapid) 1994.

That concludes our coverage of 2...d6. Let us now turn to the second of our featured systems.

B) 2...d5 3.exd5 $\mathbb{W}xd5$ 4.d4 g6!?



This is one of Black's most active ways of meeting the c3-Sicilian. It is considered slightly risky but still perfectly playable, and has proven to be an especially good choice when needing to win with the black pieces. We will consider four responses in detail: B1) 5. $\mathbb{Q}e3$, B2) 5.dxc5, B3) 5. $\mathbb{Q}a3$ and B4) 5. $\mathbb{Q}f3$.

B1) 5.♗e3 cxd4

Occasionally Black allows dxc5, hoping to obtain compensation after exchanging on d1. The idea might be playable, but overall I would regard the text move to be a sounder option. We will now consider **B11) 6.cxd4** and **B12) 6.♗xd4**.

B11) 6.cxd4 ♗g7

Unlike most of the lines occurring after 2...d5, here the bishop is perfectly placed to apply direct pressure to the isolated pawn.

7.♘c3

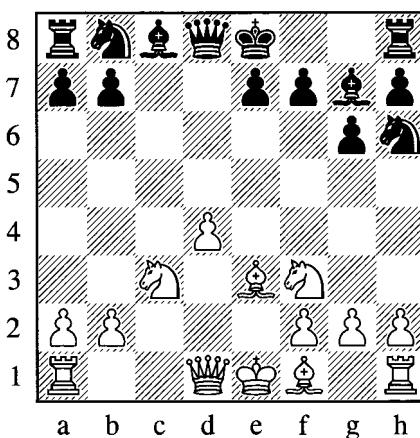
7.♘f3 reaches line B44 below.

7...♗d8

It is worth noting that this modest retreat of the queen fares better than the seemingly active line 7...♗a5. Black has to exercise patience in the quest of fighting against the isolated pawn.

8.♘f3 ♗h6!?

By moving to this square the knight avoids blocking the long diagonal while preparing to jump to f5 to attack the d4-pawn. 8...♘f6 is also playable, and actually transposes to line B44. (With the particular move order used to reach line B44, the development of the knight to h6 was impossible due to a tactical flaw.)

**9.♗c4**

This seems natural; besides, the alternatives are not particularly threatening.

9.♗a4† looks rather artificial. 9...♝d7 10.h3 ♜f5 11.♗f4 0-0 12.0-0 a6 13.g4 b5 14.♗b4 ♜b7 15.♗g2 ♜d6 16.♗xd6 exd6 17.♗xd6 ♜b6 18.♗xd8 ♜axd8 Black soon regained the sacrificed pawn while keeping some initiative, Bergez – Shchekachev, Evry 2002.

9.♗b5† ♜d7 10.0-0 0-0 11.♗e1 ♜f5 12.♗f4 ♜b6 13.♗f1 ♜e6 14.♗e5 ♜c8 15.♗xg7 ♜xg7 16.♗e2 ♜g8 17.♗ad1 ♜d5 18.♗g5 ♜xc3 19.bxc3 ♜d5 Black achieved a harmonious position and successfully exploited his opponent's pawn weaknesses, Plachetka – Ftacnik, Kaskady 2002.

9.d5!? looks slow, but White is trying to gain space and centralize his pieces. 9...♝f5 10.♗f4 0-0 11.♗c4 a6 12.0-0 b5 13.♗b3 ♜d7 14.♗e1 ♜b7 15.♗e2 This was Padeiro – Guerra Costa, Gaia 2004, and here I think Black should have played 15...♘c5!N (The game continued 15...♘f6 16.♗ad1 b4 17.♗a4 ♜xd5 [17...♗a5!N is a probable improvement: 18.♗e5 ♜ad8∞] 18.♗e5 e6 19.♗c5 with pressure for the pawn.) Now in the event of 16.♗c2, it looks safe enough for Black to play 16...♘xc3 17.bxc3 ♜xd5 when White's compensation is questionable.

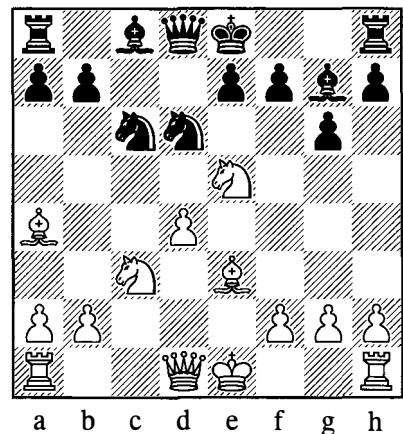
9...♝f5

9...0-0 is equally playable, as the following attempt to 'exploit' Black's move order is too optimistic: 10.♗xh6! ♜xh6 11.h4 ♜g4 12.h5 ♜g7 13.d5 ♜b6 14.♗h4 ♜xf3 15.♗xf3 ♜d7 It is already becoming clear that White's king is the one in danger. 16.♗b3 ♜c5 17.♗a4 ♜a5† 18.♗f1 ♜g5 19.♗g4 ♜f6 20.♗xc5 ♜xc5 Black kept a slight initiative and went on to win in Buchal – Degraeve, Cappelle la Grande 2008.

10.♘e5!?

White can play more quietly, although a modest approach is hardly likely to cause Black many problems either.

10...♝d6 11.♗b3 ♘c6 12.♗a4



12...0-0!

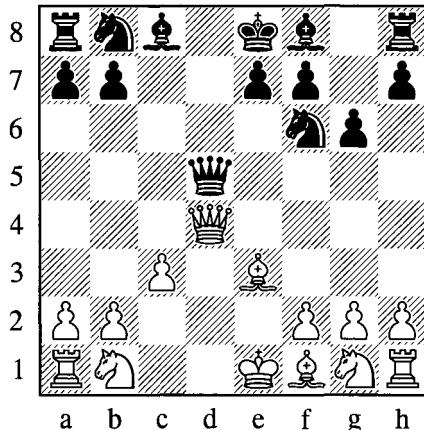
Black should have no qualms about sacrificing a pawn here, as his speedy development and harmoniously placed pieces will ensure a full share of the chances.

**13.♗xc6 bxc6 14.♗xc6 ♜d7 15.♗e5 ♜b7
16.0-0 ♜xb2 17.♗d5 ♜b7 18.♗c6 ♜f5
19.♗a4 e6**

We have been following the game Pirrot – Nemeth, Germany 1992. Black has restored material equality, and under normal circumstances his bishop pair would guarantee his advantage. However, in this case White's active knights enabled him to maintain the balance.

B12) 6.♗xd4 ♜f6

This seems like the principled reaction, although there is nothing much wrong with 6...♜xd4 7.♗xd4 ♜f6 8.♗f3 ♘c6 9.♗b5 ♜d7 with balanced chances.

**7.♗a3**

7.♗xd5 ♘xd5 8.♗d4 f6 gives White nothing. The following game is an instructive example of how Black may steadily improve his position. 9.♗c4 ♜e6 10.♗a3 ♘c6 11.♗f3 0-0-0 12.♗d1 ♜g8 13.♗c5 b6 14.♗e3 e5 Finally Black's extra central pawn makes its presence felt. 15.♗c2 ♘c7 16.♗b3 ♘a5 17.♗c1 g5+ Rozentalis – D. Gurevich, Toronto 1998.

7...♘c6 8.♗a4

Once again 8.♗xd5?! ♘xd5 only helps to activate the black pieces; perhaps even more so here, as the white bishop cannot gain time by moving to d4. 9.♗d2 e5 10.♗b5 ♜e6 11.c4 (Perhaps 11.♗f3 would be the lesser evil, although Black is obviously happy after 11...♗d8 12.c4 ♘db4+) 11...♗db4 12.♗c7 ♘d7 13.♗xe6 ♘xe6+ White may have achieved a favourable minor piece exchange, but aside from that small accomplishment his position stinks.

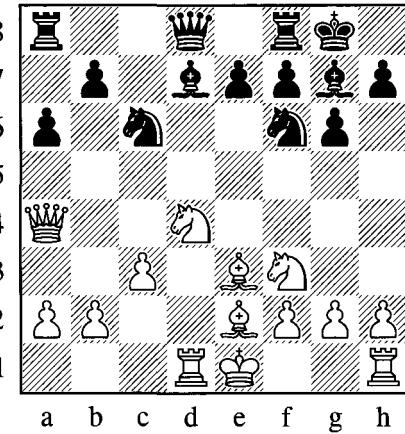
8...♗g7 9.♗b5

If Black is given time to complete his development calmly, he will be absolutely fine. Therefore White tries to generate threats immediately.

Slow play brings White nothing, for instance: 9.♗f3 0-0 10.♗c4 ♘a5! 11.♗b3 ♘g4?+

Perhaps White's best would be 9. $\mathbb{E}d1$, although even here after 9... $\mathbb{W}h5$ (9... $\mathbb{W}xa2$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{W}xb2$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ is a bit too risky for Black) 10. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 11. $\mathbb{W}b5$ $\mathbb{W}xb5$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ 0–0 it becomes obvious that Black is doing fine.

9... $\mathbb{W}d8$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ 0–0 11. $\mathbb{E}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ a6
13. $\mathbb{Q}bd4$

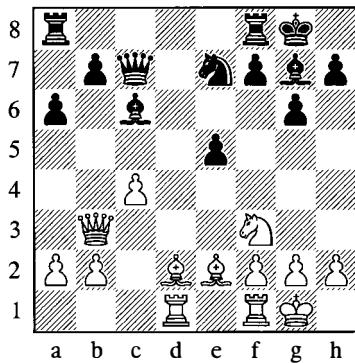


13... $\mathbb{Q}d5$

Another decent option was 13... $\mathbb{Q}xd4N$ 14. $\mathbb{W}xd4$ $\mathbb{W}a5$ 15. a3 $\mathbb{Q}a4$ 16. $\mathbb{E}d2$ $\mathbb{W}ad8$ White is not doing too badly here, but he is still the one fighting for equality.

14. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ 15. $\mathbb{W}b3$ $\mathbb{W}a5$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{W}c7$
17. 0–0 e5 18. c4 $\mathbb{Q}f4$

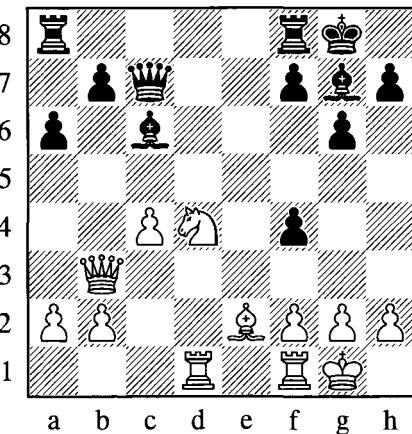
The following suggestion from Rogozenko also looks promising: 18... $\mathbb{Q}e7!?$ N



19. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ b5! With some initiative for Black, who intends ... $\mathbb{W}b7$.

19. $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ exf4 20. $\mathbb{Q}d4$

This position was reached in the game Kharlov – Dautov, Tripoli 2004. Here Black should have played:



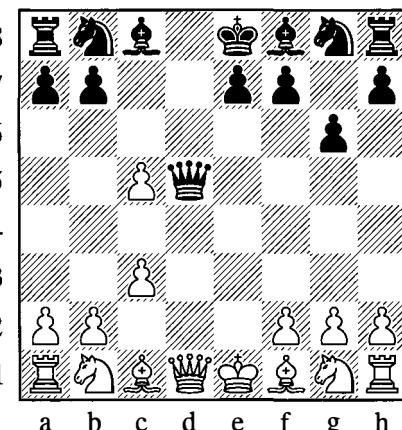
20... $\mathbb{E}fe8N$

White will have to play well to neutralize his opponent's initiative. For example:

21. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}xg3$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ $\mathbb{E}e2$ 23. $\mathbb{E}d2$ $\mathbb{E}ae8$

Black keeps an edge, for instance: 24. $\mathbb{E}fd1?$ $\mathbb{W}c5!$ (analysis by Rogozenko).

B2) 5. $dxc5$



5... $\mathbb{W}xc5$

5... $\mathbb{W}xd1\#$ 6. $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ has been played a few times, but I am not convinced that Black has full compensation for the sacrificed pawn.

6. $\mathbb{Q}e3$

Another possibility is

6. $\mathbb{Q}a3$ $\mathbb{Q}h6?$

This is an important motif. Black's idea is to prevent $\mathbb{Q}e3$ once and for all.

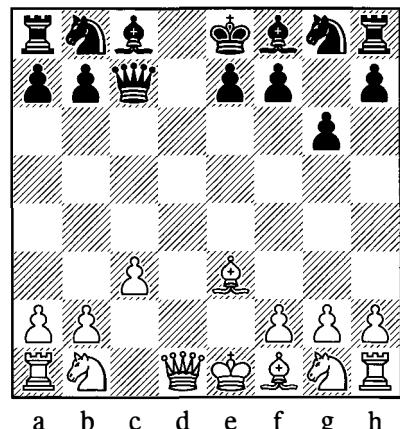
7. $\mathbb{Q}f3$

We should also consider 7. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{Q}xc1$ 8. $\mathbb{Q}xc1$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 9. $\mathbb{W}d4$ $\mathbb{W}c6$ 10. $\mathbb{W}c4$ (10. $\mathbb{Q}xa7$ $\mathbb{W}e6\#$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}d7\#$ only helps Black) 10... $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 11. $\mathbb{W}xc6\#$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 13.b3 c5 14. $\mathbb{Q}c6$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xa7$ $\mathbb{Q}b7\#$ Black's compensation is quite real, and White will need to spend some time completing development.

This position was reached in Markovic – Ivanisevic, Herzog Novi 2005, and here I suggest:

7... $\mathbb{Q}xc1N$ 8. $\mathbb{Q}xc1$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 9. $\mathbb{W}d4$ $\mathbb{W}f5$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}c7\#$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 12. $\mathbb{W}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$

Black will soon complete the artificial castling to reach a level middlegame.

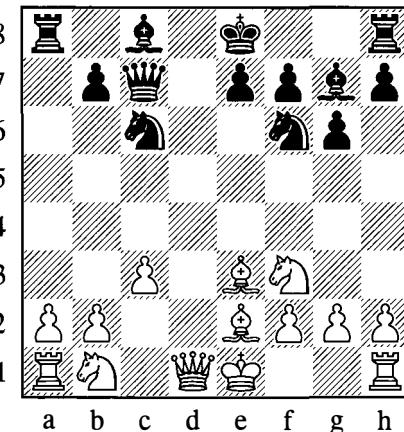
6... $\mathbb{W}c7$ **7. $\mathbb{Q}xa7?$**

This slightly cheeky pawn grab is the critical continuation.

The following queenside demonstration does not achieve much: 7. $\mathbb{Q}a3$ a6 8. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 9.a4 $\mathbb{Q}gf6$ 10.a5 $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}b6$ $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ $\mathbb{W}d7$ White has spent a lot of time securing b6 as an outpost, but it is not clear what kind of benefits this is likely to yield. 13. $\mathbb{Q}e2?$ (White could still have maintained equality with 13. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 0–0 15. $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ 16. $\mathbb{W}d4\#$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$) 13... $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ 15.axb6 $\mathbb{W}e6$ 16. $\mathbb{W}a4\#$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 17. $\mathbb{W}b4$ 0–0# White was in serious trouble due to the weak b-pawn and lagging development in Antonio – Nataf, Montreal 2005.

7... $\mathbb{Q}c6$

It would be much too optimistic for Black to try: 7... $\mathbb{Q}xa7?$ 8. $\mathbb{W}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 9. $\mathbb{W}xa7$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 10. $\mathbb{W}a4\#$

8. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ **10... $\mathbb{Q}g4!$**

Black takes the opportunity to force some kind of concession before White finishes developing.

11. $\mathbb{Q}d4$

This is not a move White ideally wants to make, but allowing the exchange on e3 would create a pawn weakness, and alternative bishop retreats have their own drawbacks.

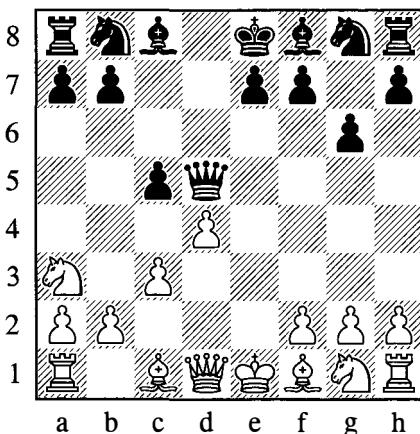
11...♝xd4 12.♝xd4 ♜f4!

Combining attack and defence.

**13.♛b5† ♜f8 14.♝f3 ♜f6 15.0–0 ♛g7
16.h3 ♜e5 17.♝d4 ♜d8**

Black maintained full compensation for the missing pawn thanks to his powerful dark-squared bishop and other active pieces, Vajda – Nevednichy, Iasi 1999.

B3) 5.♝a3

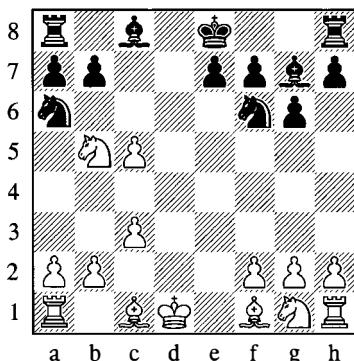


5...♜g7??

There is also nothing wrong with 5...cxd4, for instance: 6.♝b5 ♜a6 7.♝xd4 ♜xd4 8.♝xd4 ♜f6 9.♝gf3 ♜g7 10.♝b5† ♜d7 11.0–0 ♜c7 12.♝c4 ♜fd5 13.♝e1 f6 14.a4 a6 with equal chances, Simacek – Karjakin, Kemer 2007.

6.♝e3

In the event of 6.♝b5 ♜a6 7.dxc5, it looks quite promising for Black to sacrifice a pawn with 7...♝xd1† 8.♝xd1 ♜f6:



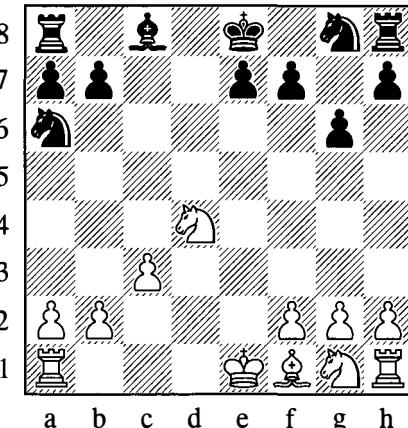
9.♝e3 (After 9.♝f3 0–0 10.c6 bxc6 11.♝bd4 ♜b8 12.♝d3 ♜g4 13.♝e3 e5 Black has nothing to complain about.) 9...♜g4 10.b4 ♜xe3† 11.fxe3 0–0 12.a3 ♜d8† 13.♝c2 ♜d7 14.♝f3 b6! 15.cxb6 axb6 16.♝d1 ♜ac8 Black's compensation was obvious in Vajda – Lajthajm, Herzog Novi 2008.

6...cxd4 7.♝b5 ♜a6 8.♝xd4 ♜xd4

Black can also consider the daring pawn sacrifice 8...♝f6! 9.♝xa7, Chole – Suresh, Chennai 2004, and now 9...♝e4†!N 10.♝e2 0–0 11.♝f3 ♜d7 12.♝d4 ♜f5 with interesting play for Black.

9.♝xd4 ♜xd4 10.♝xd4

In general, this type of queenless position should not be too troublesome for Black. As long as he can finish developing comfortably, his extra central pawn should ensure a comfortable middlegame.



10...♝f6

There is no reason for Black to fear doubled a-pawns. It looks less promising to play 10...♝c7 (10...♝c5 11.♝b5 is awkward) due to 11.♝gf3 ♜h6 12.♝c4 ♜f5 13.0–0–0 with a slight initiative for White, Baklan – Edouard, Andorra 2007.

11.♝gf3 ♜c5

Compared with the previous note, the black knight is more active on c5.

12.♘e5

12.♗b5† ♜f8 13.0–0 a6 14.♗c4 b5 15.♗b3 ♜g7 16.♘e5 e6 is equal.

12...0–0 13.♗e2 ♘fd7 14.♘xd7 ♜xd7

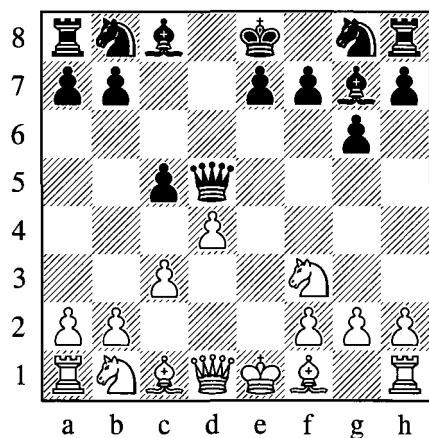
15.0–0–0 ♜ac8

Black has already equalized comfortably, I. Naiditsch – Kunte, Dortmund 2001

B4) 5.♘f3

This natural move has been White's most common choice.

5...♗g7



Now we will consider the following moves in detail: B41) 6.c4?, B42) 6.♗e2, B43) 6.dxc5, B44) 6.♗e3 and finally the main line of B45) 6.♘a3.

6.♘bd2 is rather modest, and Black is fine after 6...cxsd4 7.♗c4 ♜d8 8.♘xd4 ♜h6 9.♘f3 0–0 10.0–0 ♘f5 11.♗e1 ♘xd4 12.♘xd4 ♜c7 13.♗b3 a6 14.♗g5 e6 15.♗f3 ♘d7 16.♗e4 ♘c6= Onischuk – Kudrin, Tulsa 2008.

B41) 6.c4?

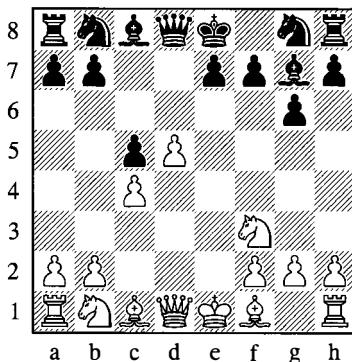
This surprising move poses some interesting problems for the defence.

6...♗e4†

I consider this the most reliable antidote, although I will also mention the following reasonable alternative:

6...♗d8 7.d5

White hopes to exploit his space advantage in the centre. 7.dxc5? ♜xd1† 8.♗xd1 ♘a6 is already better for Black.



7...e5!?

This is interesting, but not necessarily best. Another option is 7...♘h6 8.♗c3 0–0 9.♗e2 ♘f5 10.0–0 e5 11.dxe6 ♜xe6 12.♗g5 ♘d7 13.♗ge4 ♘d4 14.♗b5 ♘xb5 15.cxb5 ♘d7 when Black's mobile pieces gave him decent play in Michalczak – Nevednichy, Senden 2003.

8.♗c3 ♘e7 9.♗g5

There is also 9.♗d3 0–0 10.♗e3 b6 11.♗d2 ♘f5 12.♗xf5 ♘xf5 13.♗de4 ♘xe4 14.♗xe4 ♜h4 15.g4 f5 16.♗g5 ♜xg4 17.♗xg4 fxg4 18.♗e2 ♘f3 19.♗ag1 with a slight edge for White, Lim Yee Weng – Zugic, Turin (ol) 2006

9...f6 10.♗e3 ♘a6 11.♗d3N

After 11.♗e2? ♘f5 Black was more than happy in Shaw – Dreev, Gothenburg 2005, as the black knight was set to become a monster on d4.

11...♗f5 12.♗xf5 ♘xf5 13.0–0 0–0 14.♗e2 b6

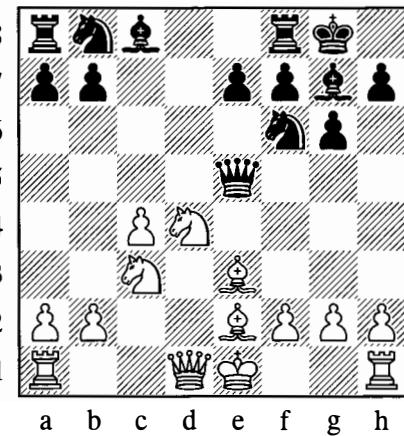
15.♕d2

With an edge for White (Finkel).

7.♔e3 cxd4 8.♕xd4 ♕f6 9.♕c3 ♕e5

Black is not losing too much time with the queen.

10.♔e2 0–0



11.0–0

White gets nowhere with: 11.♕db5 ♕c6 12.♕c1 ♔g4 13.f3 ♔e6 14.♕f4 ♕h5 15.♕c7 ♕ad8! An instructive moment – Black is willing to accept a pawn weakness in order to increase his dynamic potential. 16.♕xe6 fxe6 17.0–0 ♕d4 18.♕e1 ♕f5 19.♕d1 ♕d7 20.♕e3 ♕c5 Black was on top in Arngrimsson – Carlsen, Reykjavik 2004.

11...♕c6 12.♕xc6 bxc6 13.♕c1

Another game continued 13.♕f3 ♔e6 14.♕a4 ♕d7 15.♕fe1 ♕b8 16.b3 ♕g4 17.♕xg4 ♕xg4 18.♕ac1 ♕c7 19.♕c5 ♕fe8 when the Black pieces were working quite harmoniously, Courtial – Calotescu, France 2005.

13...♕f5 14.♕a4N

This is an improvement over 14.♕d4?!, Hanley – Dvorak, Millfield 2003, at which point the surprising 14...♕b8!N would have put White in a difficult situation due to the

dual threats of ...♕xb2 and ...♕g4.

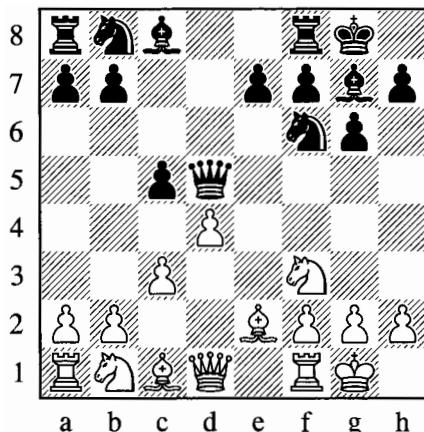
14...♕c7

The outcome of the fight is open.

B42) 6.♔e2

This modest development is hardly likely to trouble Black.

6...♕f6 7.0–0 0–0



8.♕e5

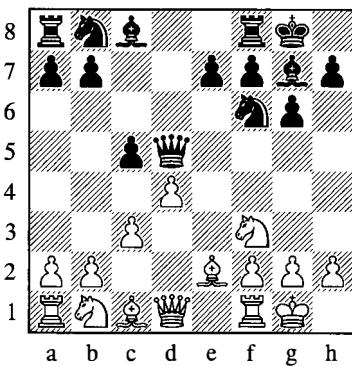
White has plenty of alternatives, none of which are really likely to trouble the second player.

8.♕e1 cxd4 9.cxd4 ♕c6 10.♕c3 ♕a5 reaches a normal-looking position. It is worth paying attention to the following sequence, in which a world-class player builds up a serious positional advantage. 11.h3 ♕f5 12.♕d2 ♕d8 13.♕g5 ♕e4 14.♕e3 ♕c8 15.♕c1 ♕a5 16.♕d3 ♕xc3 17.bxc3 ♕xd3 18.♕xd3 ♕d5 Black obtained a textbook blockade of the opponent's c3-d4 pawn duo and was soon in complete control, Sebag – Radjabov, Kemer 2007.

8.dxc5 ♕xc5 9.♕e3 ♕c7 10.♕a3 ♕c6 This type of position should be fine for Black, whose extra central pawn might prove to be

a valuable asset. 11.♕a4 (11.h3 a6 12.♕a4 h6 13.♖ad1 ♜f5 was no problem for the second player in A. Ledger – Baburin, Isle of Man 1997.) 11...♝d5! 12.♔g5 (Perhaps White should have preferred 12.♗b5N ♘b8 13.♘h4 a6 14.♗bd4 e5 with approximate equality.) 12...h6 13.♗d2 e5 14.♖ad1 ♔e6 15.♘h4 ♘e7 16.♗xe7 ♜cxe7 17.♗c4 e4 Black's central control and harmonious pieces gave him the better chances in Shorokhov – Zvjaginsev, Moscow 2004.

8.c4 ♘d6 9.♗c3 cxd4 10.♗b5 (10.♗xd4 ♘xd4 11.♗xd4 was seen in Felsberger – Benda, Finkenstein 1999, and now after 11...♝c6N 12.♗d1 ♘xd4 13.♗xd4 ♔e6 Black should feel quite content, with no weaknesses and all his pieces in play.)



This position was reached in Fernandes – Rocha, Santo Antonio 2003, and now the most accurate retreat looks like 10...♘d7?N 11.♗xd4 ♜c6 with no problems for Black, for instance 12.♘h4 ♘g4.

8.♗e3 ♜g4!

Black is immediately fighting against the optimal setup of enemy pieces.

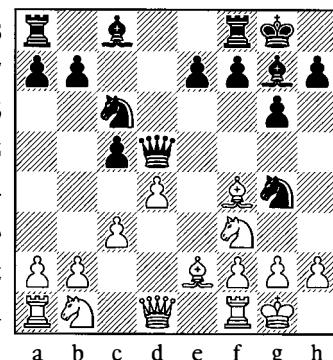
9.♗f4

9.♗g5 ♜c6 10.h3 ♜f6 11.c4 ♘d6 (The text is much easier than the nervous 11...♘f5?!)

12.♗d3 ♘d7 13.d5 ♜b4 14.♗c3 e6 15.♔e2 b6 16.a3 ♜a6 17.♗e5 ♘e8 18.♗f3 exd5

19.♗e1 when Black was facing catastrophe in Neelotpal – Ehlvest, Dhaka 1999.) 12.d5, Pickles – Gavela, Sydney 1992, 12...♝d4N 13.♗c3 e5 with strong central control.

9...♝c6



10.h3

After 10.dxc5 ♘xc5 Black has good chances to seize control over the centre, for instance: 11.h3 e5! 12.♔g3 ♘h6 13.♗bd2 ♘e7 14.♗e1 f6 15.♗e4 ♘d8 16.♗a4 ♘f7 17.♗ad1 ♘d7 18.♗c2 ♘e6 19.♗xd8† ♘xd8 with some advantage for Black, Murariu – Nevednichy, Bucharest 2001.

10...♝f6 11.♔e3 cxd4 12.cxd4 ♘d6

Black has emerged from the opening unscathed and now just has to play sensible moves.

12...♗d8 13.♗c3 ♘a5 14.♔c4 ♘b4 15.♗e2 ♘a5 16.♗d3 ♘e6 17.a3 ♘d6 18.b4 ♜c6 was also fine in Pedzich – Maciejewski, Warsaw 1998.

13.♗c3 ♘f5 14.♗b5?!

This nervous show of aggression soon backfires. Still, even after the superior 14.♗c1N ♘fd8 15.♔c4 ♘b4 White cannot claim even a trace of an advantage.

14...♗d8 15.♔f4 ♜d5 16.♗g3 ♘c8 17.♗c1 a6 18.♗c3 ♘h6 19.♗a1 ♜cb4 20.♗b3 ♘c2 21.♗a3 ♘b6

Black's active pieces dominate the board, Al. Toth – Boros, Balatonlelle 2006.

8...cxd4 9.cxd4 ♜c6 10.♗c3

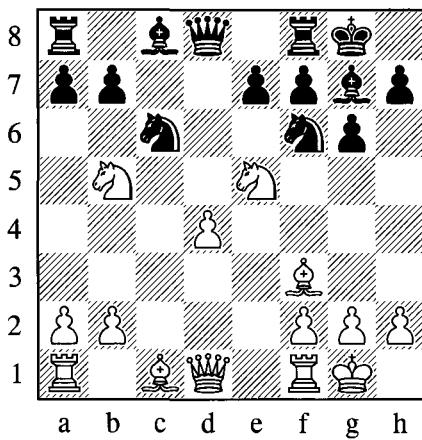
Black also has nothing to fear after 10.♗f3 ♜d6 11.♗xc6 (11.♕f4 ♜xd4 12.♗xc6 ♜xf4 13.♗xe7† ♜h8 Without the dark-squared bishop White can only dream about an advantage.) 11...bxc6 12.♗c3 Ask – Carlsson, Stockholm 2008. Here my preferred continuation would be 12...♗f5N 13.♗e1 ♜d5 with equal chances.

10...♝d6

10...♝a5N 11.♗f4 ♜d8 also looks fine.

11.♗b5 ♜d8 12.♗f3

So far we have been following the game Mamedyarov – Kulaots, Moscow 2004. Here I think the strongest continuation would have been:

**12...♝b6!N**

The queen makes lot of moves, but it is justified as White's pieces are unstable.

13.a4

13.♗xc6 bxc6 14.♗c3 ♜d8 was evaluated as equal by Erenberg, but it seems to me that Black has the better chances thanks to the weakness of the d4-pawn.

13...a6 14.♗xc6 bxc6 15.♗c3 ♜d8

Compared with the previous note, the extra

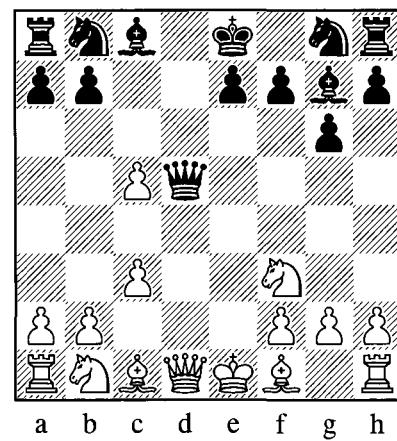
moves a2-a4 and ...a7-a6 give White one additional possibility, but it is still not enough to solve his problems completely:

16.a5 ♜xd4 17.♗xc6 ♜xd1 18.♗xd1 ♜xd1† 19.♗xd1 ♜b8†

White still has some work to do before he can claim full equality.

B43) 6.dxc5

We have already seen several instances in which this capture failed to cause Black problems, and the present case is a similar story.

**6...♜xc5**

6...♜xd1† 7.♗xd1 ♜f6 may give Black a degree of compensation, but I am not altogether convinced.

7.♗a3?!

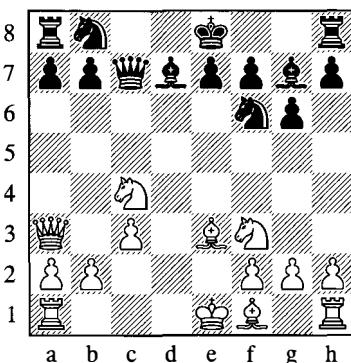
This has been a relatively rare choice, but it looks to me like the most challenging. Before chasing the queen, White brings the knight into position in order to make for more effective harassment.

7.♗e3 has been more common, but after 7...♝c7 I see no problems for Black, for instance: 8.♗a4† (Perhaps White should just play something calm like 8.♗e2, although this

will hardly give Black nightmares.) 8... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 10.0–0 a6 11. $\mathbb{Q}bd2$ $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}fe1$ 0–0 13. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ 14. $\mathbb{W}b4$ a5 15. $\mathbb{W}b6$ $\mathbb{W}d7$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xh6$ $\mathbb{Q}xh6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{W}d8$ $\frac{1}{2}-\frac{1}{2}$ Epishin – Zvaginsev, St Petersburg 2004. After 19. $\mathbb{W}xd8$ $\mathbb{Q}fxd8$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ e6 the endgame is equal, although an ultra-ambitious player might have tried to make use of Black's slightly better minor piece.

7... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 8. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{W}a5$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}b5$

Another interesting option is 9. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 10. $\mathbb{W}a4!?$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 11. $\mathbb{W}a3$ Tong Yuanming – Kudrin, Beijing 1998. White's idea is to obtain the advantage of the two bishops. And I say... let him!



11... $\mathbb{Q}c6$! 12. $\mathbb{Q}b6$ $\mathbb{B}d8$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ White has achieved his objective, but paid the price in terms of the time taken. 14. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ Bangiev evaluates this position as slightly better for White, but after 14...0–0 15.0–0 $\mathbb{Q}d5$ I rate Black's chances as at least equal thanks to his harmonious development and superb central control.

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

This accurate move solves all Black's problems.

10. $\mathbb{Q}e5!?$

White stakes his hopes on the two bishops. Other continuations are harmless, for instance:

10. $\mathbb{Q}fd4$ a6 11. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{W}d8$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}a3$ b5 13. $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 0–0 14. $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ $\mathbb{Q}bxsd7$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 16.0–0 $\mathbb{Q}fd8$ 17. $\mathbb{W}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 18. $\mathbb{W}h4$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}ab8$ White has the two bishops but Black's well-centralized pieces control plenty of squares, so overall the chances are balanced, Stevic – Morovic Fernandez, Pula 2000.

10...0–0

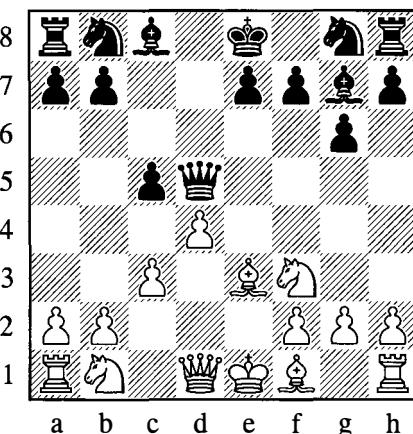
White's idea was to meet 10... $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ with 11. $\mathbb{W}b3$, regaining the material and keeping an edge after 11...0–0 12. $\mathbb{W}xb5$ thanks to the two bishops.

11. $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ $\mathbb{Q}bxsd7$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ a6 13. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}b3$

We have been following the game Turov – Volokitin, Copenhagen 2002, which was agreed drawn here. The continuation would have been 14... $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xa5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$, with an equal endgame.

B44) 6. $\mathbb{Q}e3$

This time White wants to take on c5 without allowing the queen to recapture.



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

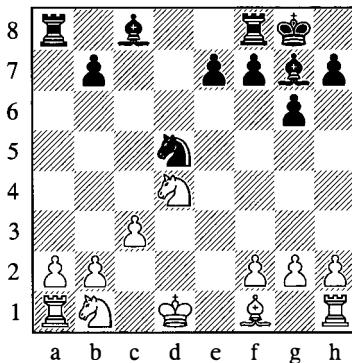
Black can also gambit the c-pawn, but I consider the text move to be the sounder response.

7.cxd4

The alternatives are toothless:

7.♕xd4 ♕f6 8.♗b3 Otherwise the bishop will soon be targeted by ...♕c6. 8...♗e4† 9.♔e3 0–0 10.♗bd2 ♘f5 11.♗d4 ♘d7 12.♗f3 ♘c6 13.0–0–0 ♖c7 14.h3 ♗a5 15.♗b4 b6 16.♗b3 ♘xb3† 17.axb3 ♘f5 The position of White's king gives the first player some cause for concern, Vajda – Areshchenko, Plovdiv 2008.

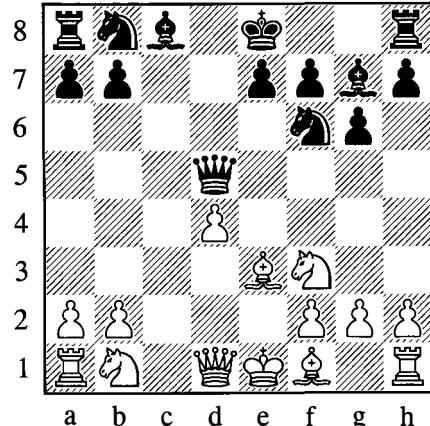
7.♗xd4 ♕f6 8.♗b5 White's greedy strategy does not make a positive impression. 8...♗xd1† 9.♗xd1 ♘d5 10.♗xa7 ♘c6 11.♗d4 ♘xd4 12.♗xd4 0–0 With two great bishops and a lead in development, Black has more than enough for the pawn.



13.♗d2 ♘d8 (Another reasonable option is 13...e5!N 14.♗4b3 ♘d8 15.♗c4 ♘b6 16.♗b5 ♘a4 with ongoing compensation, although the game continuation is simpler.) 14.♗c4 ♘b6 15.♗b3 ♘xd4 16.cxd4 ♘xd4 17.♗e2 ♘d7† Black regained his pawn while keeping the more active position, Zhang Pengxiang – Conquest, Cala Mayor 2008.

7...♗f6

Please be sure to avoid 7...♗h6?? 8.♗c1!, which has occurred in quite a number of games; even one of my own, although fortunately on that occasion my opponent did not notice my blackout.

**8.♗c3 ♘d3**

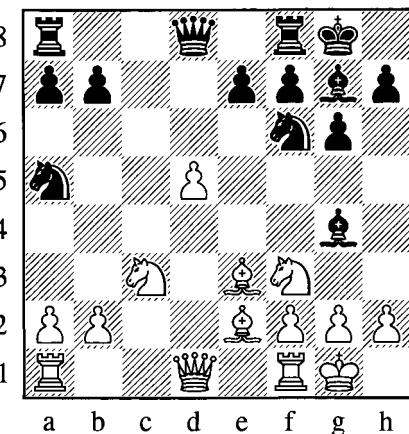
Just as in line B11 above, the queen is better off retreating to her original location rather than the seemingly more active a5-square.

9.♗c4 0–0 10.0–0 ♘c6

This position appears in quite a lot of games in the database, but usually with Black to move. Despite this slight disadvantage his position is still quite reliable. (With an extra tempo he would be comfortably equal with chances to play for more, whereas now the position is 'only' balanced.)

11.d5!?

This energetic move seems to be White's best attempt to place his opponent under pressure. The slower 11.h3 ♘a5 12.♗d3 b6 looks fine for Black.

11...♘a5 12.♗e2 ♘g4

13.♗e1

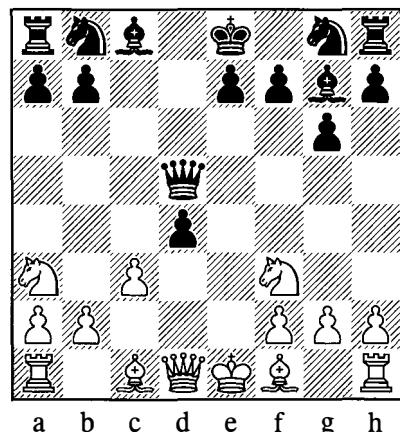
I also considered 13.♗a4?! Nc8 14.♗fd1 b6 15.♗ac1 ♗xf3 16.gxf3? (16.♗xf3 ♗c4=) White is trying to extract the absolute maximum from the position. Nevertheless after 16...♗e8! intending ...♗d6, Black keeps a decent share of the chances in an unclear position.

13...♝c8 14.♗d4 a6 15.h3 ♗c3 16.♗xf3 ♗c4 17.♗e2 b5

We have been following the game Zifroni – Kengis, Eupen 1997. The position is dynamically balanced. White has more space and the two bishops, but Black has a harmonious set-up with a sounder structure and stable squares for his knights.

B45) 6.♗a3

Finally we come to White's most popular and highest-scoring move.

6...cxsd4

In this position White can choose between B451) 7.♗b5 and B452) 7.♗c4!.

B451) 7.♗b5

The most obvious active idea, but it fails to put the black position under any serious pressure.

7...♗a6

7...♗d8?! is too modest, and after 8.♗f4 ♗a6 9.♗c4 ♗f6 10.♗bx4 White enjoys a pleasant initiative.

8.♗e3

White continues developing. Alternatives are not dangerous:

8.♗fd4 ♗f6 9.♗e3 0–0 10.c4 ♗d7 11.♗e2 ♗d8 12.0–0 e5 13.♗b3 ♗e7 14.♗c1 b6† Black's pieces are working in a more harmonious manner.

8.♗bx4

It is hard to believe that White can fight for the advantage having just made three consecutive moves with the same piece.

8...♗f6 9.♗b5†

9.♗xa6?! Strategically this is a very risky decision as the light-squared bishop might be badly missed. 9...bxa6 10.0–0 0–0 11.♗e1 ♗e8 12.♗b3 (12.♗f4 ♗h5?! 13.♗e5 f6† gave Black an edge in C. Werner – Riff, Switzerland 2007.) 12...e5! 13.♗xd5 N White should be content to play for equality. (13.♗c2?! ♗b7 14.♗g5 ♗ab8 15.♗xd5 [15.♗b4 ♗a5 16.♗d2 e4†] 15...♗xd5 16.♗ad1 h6 17.♗c1 g5! Black maintained a strong initiative in Karpatchev – Galliamova, St Petersburg 1998.) 13...♗xd5 14.♗c6 f6 15.c4 ♗b6 16.b3 ♗f8

9...♗d7 10.♗xd7† ♗xd7 11.0–0 0–0

Black had no problems in Karalkin – Matlakov, St Petersburg 2007.

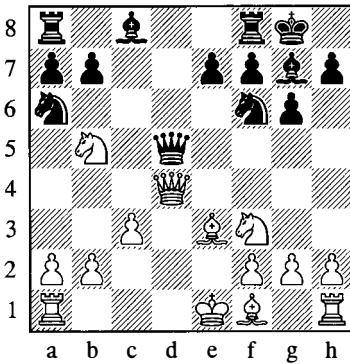
8...♗f6 9.♗xd4

Keeping the level play after 9.♗xd4 0–0 10.♗e2 ♗g4 is not so difficult for Black.

9...♗xd4

The pawn a7 is hanging so the defender should not underestimate the seemingly peaceful position without queens. It is worth mentioning a second playable option:

9...0–0!?



10.♕e2

10.♕c4 ♘h5 11.♗h4 ♘xh4 12.♗xh4 b6 13.h3 ♖b7 14.0–0–0 ♘fc8 15.♗e2 ♖c5 16.♗f3 a6 17.♗xb7 ♖xb7 was comfortable enough for Black in Nezad – Ward, Gibraltar 2005.

White can also snatch the a-pawn with 10.♗xa7 ♖e6 11.♗b5, Stummer – Manso Gil, e-mail 2006. Here I would suggest 11...♘fc8?N with the possible continuation 12.♗xd5 ♖xd5 13.♗d4 ♖c5 14.♗xg7 ♔xg7 15.♗fd4 ♖f4 16.♗xe6† fxe6 when Black's compensation is very real.

10...b6 11.0–0 ♖b7 12.♗fd1 ♘h5 13.♗f4 ♖d5 14.♗g5 ♘xg5 15.♗xg5 h6 16.♗d2 ♖c5

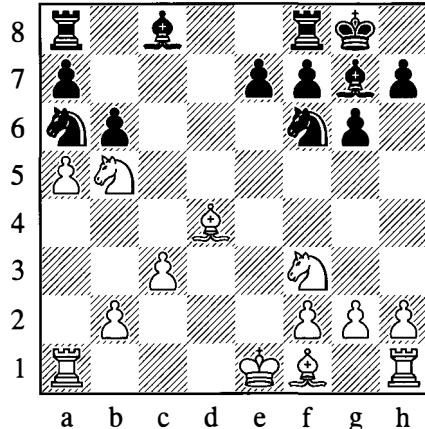
In principle such a middlegame without queens tends to be fine for Black, and the present game Rausis – Rasik, Czech Republic 2008, was no exception.

10.♗xd4 b6 11.a4

White is trying to exploit his might on the queenside. Quieter continuations achieve nothing, for instance 11.♗e2 0–0 12.0–0 ♖b7 13.♗fd1 ♖c5 14.c4 ♘fc8 15.h3 ♖h5 16.♗xg7 ♔xg7 with easy play for Black, Guido – Djuric, Genoa 2003.

11...0–0 12.a5

Here I found a promising new idea:



12...♗b7!N

Black is building an impressive lead in development and can thus afford to sacrifice a pawn. This seems more attractive than grovelling with 12...♗d7, although Black was more or less able to equalize after 13.♗xg7 ♔xg7 14.b4 ♖b7 15.♗d3 ♘fc8 16.♗d2 ♖c7 in Degraeve – Relange, Belfort 1997.

13.axb6 axb6 14.♗xb6 ♖d5 15.♗d4 e5

15...♗xd4 16.♗fxd4 ♖c5 also looks promising.

16.♗a7 ♘fd8=

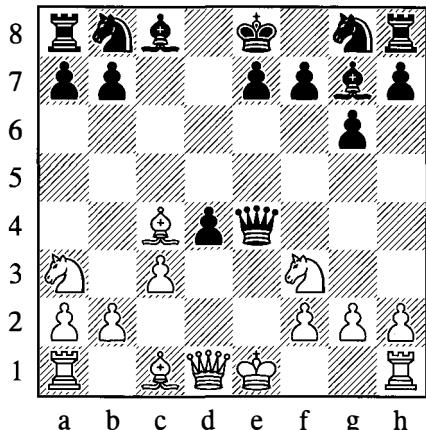
Black has full compensation, and if anything it is White who is running the greater risk here.

B452) 7.♗c4!

This is the critical continuation, which is justified by certain tactical features of the position, as we will shortly see.

7...♘e4†

7...♘d8 is certainly playable, but after 8.♗b5 ♖f6 9.♗bx4 (but not 9.♗f4 0–0 10.♗c7? ♖h5+) 9...0–0 10.0–0 White has reasonable chances of obtaining a slight edge as his pieces are quite active.



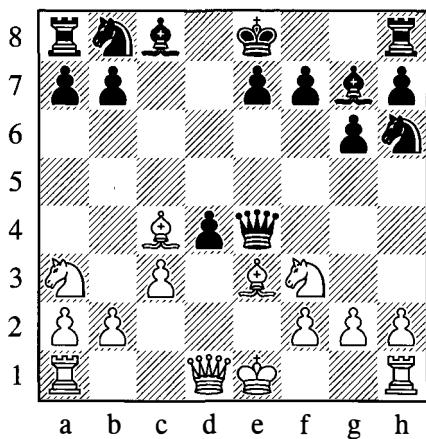
8.♘e3!

This is the clever point behind White's play. 8.♘f1 can hardly be viewed as a serious option, for instance: 8...♝h6 9.♗b3 0–0 10.♗xh6 ♛xh6 11.♗e1 ♜f4 12.cxd4 ♜c6 13.♗e3 ♜d8 14.h4 ♘xd4 And White was already the grieving party in Sveshnikov – Sax, Bled 2000.

8...♝h6!

Hopefully the reader will have smelled a rat after White's last move, and sure enough 8...dxe3?? leads to disaster after 9.♘xf7† as Black will lose his queen.

Fortunately the text move solves Black's problems conveniently. Of course, the development of the knight to h6 is not only a defensive measure; this piece will often play a valuable role after shifting to f5 in the not too distant future.



9.cxd4

There are two alternatives to consider:

9.♗d3

This is no longer considered a serious try for White, but it important to understand why this is the case.

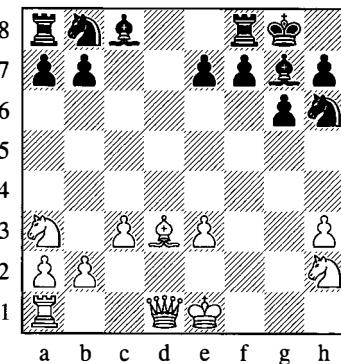
9...♛g4 10.h3

This seems like the principled try. Instead 10.♗xd4 ♛xd4 11.♗b5† ♜c6 12.♗xc6† bxc6 13.♗xd4 0–0 is equal.

10...♛xg2!

Black allows his queen to be trapped, having correctly judged that he will receive full compensation.

11.♗h2 ♛xh2 12.♗xh2 dxe3 13.fxe3 0–0



Svetushkin – Hamdouchi, Ubeda 1999. With rook, bishop and pawn for a queen, Black has full material equality. His pieces will develop harmoniously and his sounder structure should ensure excellent long-term chances.

9.♗b5 0–0!

Finally Black is really threatening to take on e3, so there is no time for ♘c7.

10.♗d3

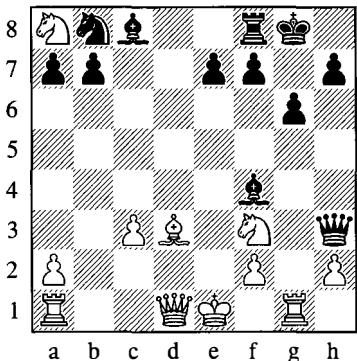
10.cxd4 ♜c6 reaches the note to White's 10th move below.

10...♛g4

10...♛d5 is another good option.

11.♗xh6 ♛xh6 12.♗c7 dxc3 13.bxc3 ♛xg2 14.♗g1 ♛h3 15.♗xa8 ♛f4!

Preventing the knight from escaping. Once Black captures this piece he will be close to equal on material, with considerable positional advantages.



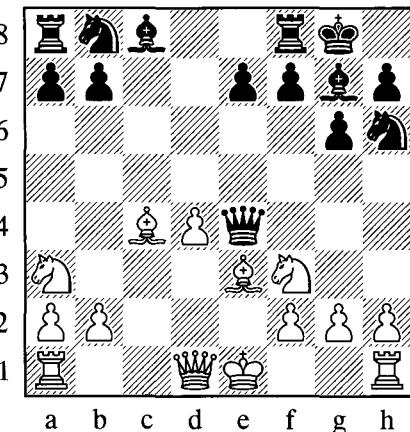
16. $\mathbb{Q}e2 \mathbb{Q}c6$ 17. $\mathbb{W}b3 \mathbb{Q}e6$ 18. $\mathbb{W}a4$

18. $\mathbb{W}xb7 \mathbb{Q}d5+$

18... $\mathbb{W}h6$ 19. $h4 \mathbb{E}xa8+$

The aggressive approach left White with a broken position in Hamdouchi – Kudrin, Tripoli 2004.

9...0–0



10.0–0

White can also postpone castling:

10. $\mathbb{Q}b5 \mathbb{Q}c6$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}c3?$

The alternatives are less dangerous:

11. 0–0 $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}e2 \mathbb{Q}f5$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}g5N$
(13. $\mathbb{Q}c3?$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xe4 \mathbb{Q}xd1$ 15. $\mathbb{E}fxd1$)

$\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xf3 \mathbb{Q}xd4$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}c3 \mathbb{Q}xf3\#$ 18. $gxf3$
 $\mathbb{Q}fd8\#$ The endgame was beyond hope for White in Zumsande – Gelfand, Internet 2004.) 13... $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 14. $\mathbb{E}e1 \mathbb{Q}xf3$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xf3 \mathbb{W}f5$

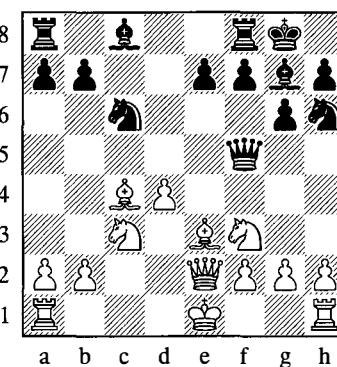
16. $\mathbb{Q}xd6 \mathbb{W}xg5$ with an edge for Black.
11. $\mathbb{W}d2 \mathbb{Q}f5$ 12. 0–0 $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xe3 \mathbb{W}g4$
14. $\mathbb{Q}c3 b6$ 15. $h3 \mathbb{W}d7$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ This was Howell – Rodshtain, Yerevan 2007, and here I suggest 16... $e6N$ 17. $\mathbb{E}ac1 h6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}ge4 f5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}g3 \mathbb{Q}b7$ With the help of the bishop pair Black maintains dynamic equality.

11... $\mathbb{W}f5!$

This looks safer than 11... $\mathbb{W}g4$ 12. $h3! \mathbb{W}d7$ (12... $\mathbb{W}xg2??$ 13. $\mathbb{E}h2$) 13. $g4? \mathbb{Q}h8$ 14. $\mathbb{W}d2 \mathbb{Q}g8$ 15. 0–0–0↑ Moser – Hagarova, Plovdiv 2003.

12. $\mathbb{W}e2$

This position was reached in Juroszek – Hagarova, Trinec 2003. Now Greet mentions the following improvement:



12... $\mathbb{W}h5!N$

Intending ... $\mathbb{Q}g4$ and ... $\mathbb{Q}f5$. The same author also mentions the possibility of 12... $\mathbb{Q}g4!N$ intending either ... $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ or even ... $\mathbb{Q}f6$, centralizing the knight.

13. $d5 \mathbb{Q}e5$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xe5 \mathbb{W}xe5$

Black's position is even a bit more pleasant.

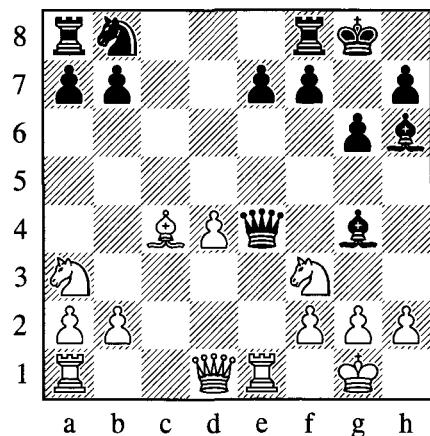
10... $\mathbb{Q}g4$

10... $\mathbb{Q}f5$ has also been played, but I think it is better to develop the bishop first, in order to amplify the pressure against d4.

11.♕xh6

For a while this move was believed to be enough for a white advantage, but it eventually transpired that Black can obtain a fine game by means of a pawn sacrifice.

Another possibility is 11.♕g5?! ♖xe3!? (11...♗xd1 12.♗xe4 ♗g4 13.f3 looks slightly more comfortable for White) 12.fxe3 ♗xd1 13.♗axd1 ♗c6 Sauto - Ronchetti, Cattolica 2005. Chances are approximately equal. White has fine activity, including slight pressure on the f-file, but Black has no serious weaknesses and White will have to spend some energy on servicing his slightly weakened central structure throughout the game.

11...♗xh6 12.♗e1**12...♔f4!**

From this excellent square the queen influences the whole board.

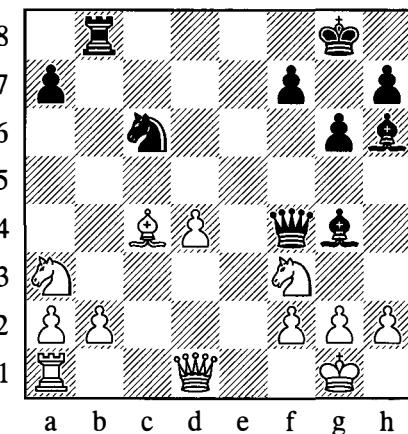
13.♖xe7 ♗c6 14.♗xb7 ♕ab8!

Black does not hurry to regain the sacrificed material, but instead takes a moment to exchange his opponent's most active piece.

15.♗xb8

Perhaps White should have considered 15.♗b3!N, although Black is doing fine after

15...♗xb3 16.axb3 ♔g7 17.♗c2 ♔xf3 18.♗xf3 ♔xf3 19.gxf3 ♗xd4 20.♗e1 ♗c6 21.♗d3 a5 with equality. White's extra doubled b-pawn is balanced by his damaged structure on the opposite flank.

15...♗xb8

It is time for White to start thinking about how to equalize the position.

16.♗b5N

In the game he soon found himself in trouble after 16.♗e2?! ♔xf3 17.♗xf3 ♗xd4 18.b3? (Better was 18.♗b1, although Black still keeps an edge after 18...♔g7 19.♗d5 ♗d8 20.g3 ♖e5 21.♗f3 ♖e6 22.♗g2 ♖xa2±; analysis by Finkel.) 18...♔g7! 19.♗b1 ♔e5 and White was unable to defend h2, Hamdouchi - Kudrin, Tripoli 2004.

Even 16.h3N would have been better than the game continuation, although Black is obviously comfortable after 16...♔xf3 17.♗xf3 ♖xf3 18.gxf3 19.♗xd4 (Finkel).

16...a6 17.♗d5 ♗e7 18.♗c3 ♗xd5 19.♗xd5 ♗f3 20.♗xf3 ♖xf3 21.♗g3 ♖xb2

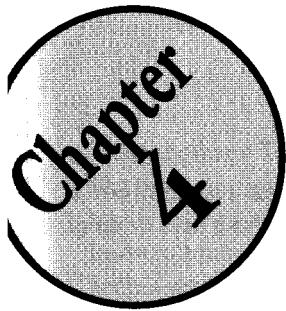
We have been following the analysis of Finkel. White can hardly hope to retain his extra pawn as Black's pieces are so active.

Conclusion

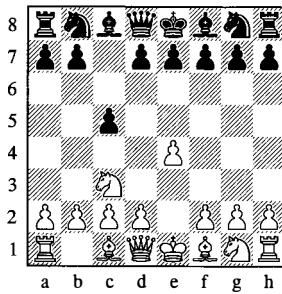
Discovering new perspectives in the 2.c3 Sicilian is not easy, as just about every sensible continuation has already been tested and analysed extensively. Both of the systems covered in this chapter seem quite sound, with each having its own advantages.

The first, 2...d6 3.d4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$, leads to very interesting play after 4.dxc5 $\mathbb{Q}c6!$. Depending on White's response, Black can sometimes follow up with the interesting 5...d5, sacrificing a pawn to fight for the initiative. The lines after the more solid 4. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ g6 are rich and eminently playable, and make for an interesting departure from the typical Sicilian positions.

The second idea, 2...d5 3.exd5 $\mathbb{W}xd5$ 4.d4 g6, is rather provocative. Black elects to fianchetto in a position in which a central strategy would seem more natural. Nevertheless the idea has held up well against White's attempts to demonstrate an advantage, and players who are willing to venture a surprise weapon will be rewarded with rich pickings in reasonably fresh positions.



Closed Systems



Up Close(d) and Personal - Without g3

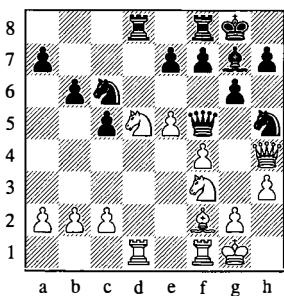
Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.♘c3

2...d6

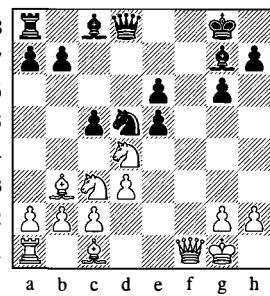
| | |
|--|----|
| A) 3.♗ge2 | 68 |
| B) 3.d4 | 70 |
| C) 3.f4 g6 4.♗f3 ♗g7 | 71 |
| C1) 5.d4 cxd4 6.♗xd4 ♗c6 7.♗e3 ♗f6 8.♗e2 0-0 | 72 |
| C11) 9.0-0?! | 72 |
| C12) 9.♗b3 | 74 |
| C2) 5.♗b5† ♗d7 6.♗xd7† ♘xd7 7.0-0 ♗c6 8.d3 ♗f6 | 75 |
| C21) 9.h3 | 75 |
| C22) 9.♗d2 | 77 |
| C3) 5.♗c4 ♗c6 6.0-0 ♗f6 | 77 |
| C31) 7.♘e1 | 78 |
| C32) 7.d3 0-0 8.♘e1 ♗d4 | 79 |
| C321) 9.f5?! | 79 |
| C322) 9.♗xd4 | 81 |
| C323) 9.♗b3 | 82 |

C21) after 17.♗d5



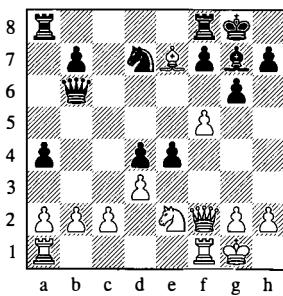
17...♗xd5!

C31) after 14.♘xf1



14...cxd4!N

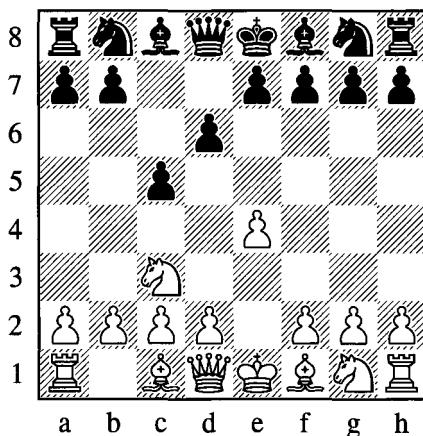
C323) 17.♗xe7



17...♗fe8N

1.e4 c5 2.Qc3 d6

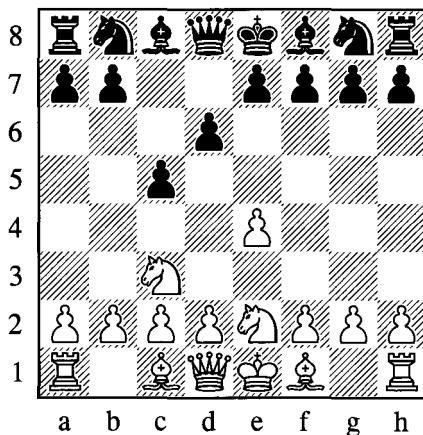
Black has many different answers, but this one fits in well with our repertoire. Now if White switches plans with 3.Qf3, Black can calmly reply with 3...Qf6, knowing that 4.d4 will lead us back into our desired Najdorf variation. Had we instead chosen 2...Qc6, this would not have been the case.



In this chapter we will deal with the following moves: A) 3.Qge2, B) 3.d4 and C) 3.f4.

A) 3.Qge2

This is sometimes known as the Chameleon variation. White wishes to keep his opponent guessing as to whether he intends to play an open or closed variation.

**3...e5!?**

This is a somewhat radical reaction, but it simplifies the defensive tasks to a narrow set of positional problems.

It is worth mentioning 3...Qf6 as a sensible alternative. In that case 4.d4 cxd4 would take us back into the Najdorf, so White would have to play 4.g3 to keep us guessing. After the natural 4...g6 5.Qg2 Qg7 White would have two main plans:

Keeping the position closed with d3 would not be dangerous as, compared with line B in Chapter 5, White's knight is less well-placed on e2 than f3.

Opening the centre with d4 leads to a rather innocuous variation of the Dragon. This is outside the proposed repertoire but theoretically fine for Black.

Overall, since one is unlikely to encounter the 3.Qge2 variation very often, I decided 3...e5 would be the most suitable line to recommend, as it limits White's options and thus reduces the number of variations we need to learn.

4.Qd5**4.g3**

Considering the central structure, it seems illogical to develop the bishop on g2 when the c4-square is available.

4...Qc6 5.Qg2

5.Qd5?! does not combine well with White's last move, and after 5...Qg4 6.Qg2 Qd4 White already has to waste time retreating with 7.Qdc3.

5...g6 6.d3 Qg7 7.Qe3 Qge7

The same set-up was recommended with reversed colours in the first of Mihail Marin's three volumes on the English Opening in the *Grandmaster Repertoire* series. Here Black is playing a tempo down but should still be absolutely fine.

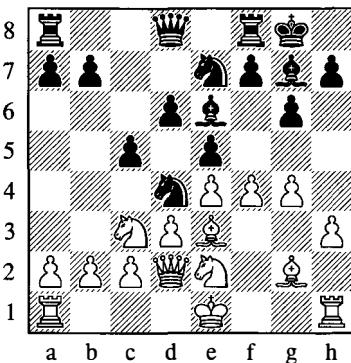
8.Qd2?!

This is perhaps White's most ambitious plan. He postpones castling, hoping to build an attack on the kingside. 8.0–0 is also fine, and leads to normal positions with chances for both sides.

8... $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 9.h3 0–0 10.g4 $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 11.f4

This position was reached in Movsesian – Tischbierek, Germany 2007.

Here I recommend a simple improvement:



11... $\mathbb{Q}xe2!$ N

The game continuation of 11...f5 12.gxf5 gxf5 13.0–0–0 was dangerous for Black.

12. $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ exf4 13. $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xb8$ $\mathbb{Q}xb8$

White is unable to aspire for anything more than equality.

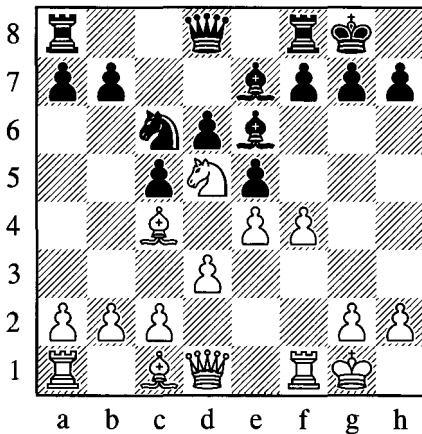
4... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 5. $\mathbb{Q}ec3$ $\mathbb{Q}bc6$ 6. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 7. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 8.d3 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 9.0–0–0–0

Both sides have developed sensibly. Black has a slight hole on d5, but apart from that his position is perfectly healthy, with harmonious development and plenty of space in the centre. We will see that the opponent's slight initiative can soon be extinguished with minimal hassle.

10.f4

Playing on the queenside is also not dangerous: 10.a3 $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 11.c3 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}h5$ $\mathbb{Q}xc1$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}fxc1$ b5 14. $\mathbb{Q}a2$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ White has kissed goodbye to any aspirations for the advantage,

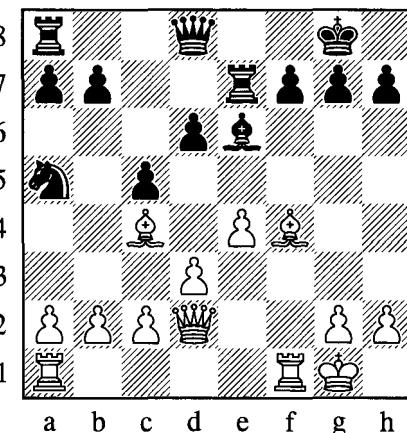
and after 15. $\mathbb{Q}xe7\#$ a draw was agreed in Mokry – Ftacnik, Sumperk 1984.



10...exf4 11.Qxf4 Qa5!

This has only rarely been played, but it seems to solve Black's problems almost effortlessly.

12. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xe7\#$ $\mathbb{Q}xe7$



14. $\mathbb{Q}d5$

14. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ does not change the overall assessment.

14... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ 16.e5

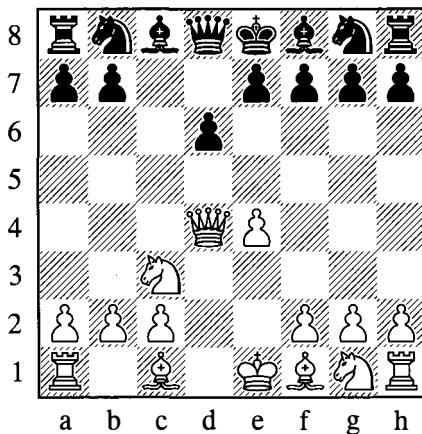
Also after 16.b4 cxb4 17. $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ c5 18. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ f6 the position is equal.

16...dxe5 17. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ f6 18. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ c4

Black rids himself of his pawn weakness, leading to full equality, Mortensen – De Firmian, Copenhagen 1985.

B) 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4

This centralization of the queen is much less common than the version examined in Chapter 8.



4...♗b5 5.♘e3

Rare is:

5.♗e3

The retreat of the queen costs time, and she might also become exposed on her new location.

5...♘f6 6.♘d2 e6 7.0–0–0 ♘e7 8.f3 0–0

9.♗ge2N

This seems to be White's best.

In the event of 9.g4?!, Schmalz – Soffer, Internet 1999, it looks strong for Black to play 9...d5!N The counterpunch in the centre is clearly the best reaction to White's premature kingside demonstration. 10.exd5 exd5 11.♗e2 (11.♗d3 d4 12.♘e4 ♘e5+) 11...d4 12.♘e4 ♘e6 13.♘h3 ♘xe4 14.♗xe4 ♘xa2+ The first player has got into serious trouble.

9...d5 10.♘d4 ♘xd4 11.♗xd4 dxe4 12.♗xd8 ♘xd8 13.♘xe4 ♘xe4 14.fxe4 b6 15.♘d3 ♘b7

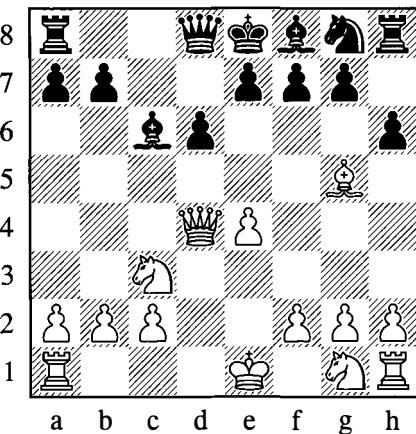
Black seldom enjoys such an easy ride in the

opening. He has equalized easily, and even has an (admittedly mostly symbolic) advantage of fewer pawn islands.

5...♗d7 6.♗xc6 ♘xc6 7.♗g5

This is the independent try. Instead 7.♗f3 transposes to Chapter 8.

7...h6



8.♗e3

Please pay attention to the following trick: 8.♗h4?? e5! and Black wins a piece.

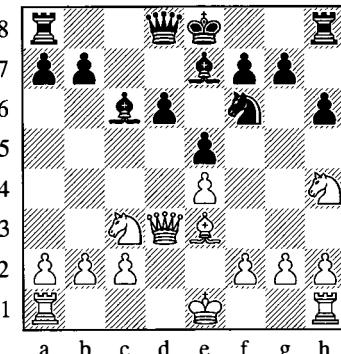
8...♘f6 9.0–0–0

Another game continued:

9.♘f3 e5!

Thanks to the "gift" of the ...h7-h6 move Black does not have to worry about ♗g5.

10.♗d3 ♘e7 11.♗h4



11...d5

Black could even have considered 11... $\mathbb{Q}xe4!$?N 12. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ d5 13. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xg7\#$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 15. $\mathbb{W}xd8\#$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xa7$ $\mathbb{Q}hg8\#$, not that this is really necessary as the position reached in the game is more than fine.

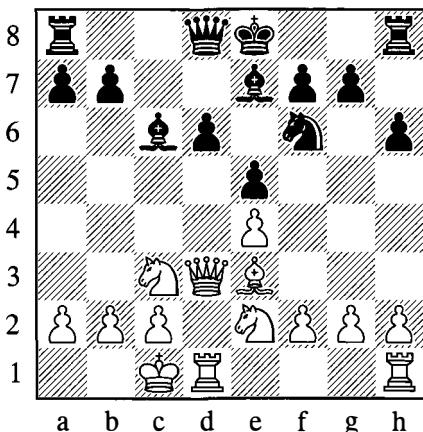
12.exd5 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{Q}b4!$ 14.0–0–0 14. $\mathbb{Q}xg7\#$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 15.0–0–0 $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 17. $\mathbb{W}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}a5$ 18. $\mathbb{W}xe5$ f6 19. $\mathbb{W}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xh6\#$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 21. $\mathbb{W}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}g6\#$

14... $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 15.bxc3 0–0 16.c4 $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 17. $\mathbb{W}xd8$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ f6#

Black's ambitious play in the centre proved to be fully justified, Gashimov – Karjakin, Baku 2008.

9...e5 10. $\mathbb{W}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}ge2$

11. $\mathbb{Q}f3$?! seems less logical as the knight has fewer prospects here. Play might continue 11...0–0 12. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ b5 13. $\mathbb{Q}h4$ b4 14. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 15.exd5 e4 16. $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{W}d7\#$ with fine prospects for Black.



11...0–0N

This seems like the most natural move, although there is also nothing wrong with 11... $\mathbb{W}a5$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}g3$. Now 13...g6 14.h4 b5 15. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 16.exd5 h5 17.f4 $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 18.f5 gave White some initiative in Guseinov – Gabrielian, Moscow 2008, but the

improvement 13... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ N 14. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ 15. $\mathbb{W}xf5$ 0–0 leads to equality, with similar play to the main line below.

12. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ 14. $\mathbb{W}xf5$ $\mathbb{W}d7$

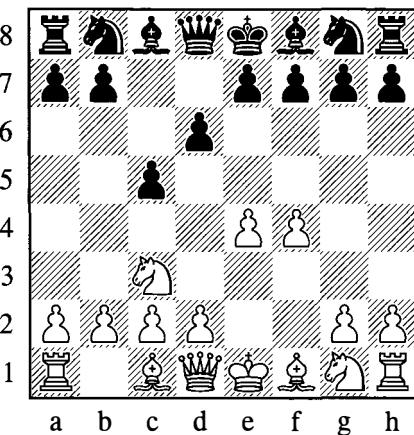
Both sides have achieved certain things. Black has a healthy central majority, but for the time being it is being restrained by White's pieces. Overall the chances are balanced, for instance:

15. $\mathbb{Q}hel$ $\mathbb{Q}fd8$ 16.f3 $\mathbb{W}c6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$

18. $\mathbb{W}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}g5$ =

Black exchanges his bad bishop and intends ... $\mathbb{Q}ac8$ followed by centralizing his king.

C) 3.f4



Some Sicilian players are reluctant to answer 2. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ with 2...d6 on account of this very move. The point is that, compared with the positions reached after 2... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 3.f4, there can arise certain situations, specifically in line C3 below, in which Black might have been glad for the opportunity to play ...d7-d5 in one move rather than two. As I mentioned previously, the problem from the perspective of our repertoire occurs after 2... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 3. $\mathbb{Q}f3$, when Black must play something like 3...e5 in order to avoid entering a different variation of the Open Sicilian. This is not a bad line, but it

is highly theoretical and would require a great deal of attention. Overall I consider the 2...d6 move order to be the lesser evil, as Black still gets a fully satisfactory game, even after losing the ...d7-d5 option in certain positions.

Enough talk – let's see some moves!

3...g6 4.Qf3 Qg7

Now we will consider three options:
C1) 5.d4, C2) 5.Qb5† and C3) 5.Qc4.

5.g3 and 5.d3 are both likely to transpose to the following chapter.

C1) 5.d4

This takes us into a variation of the Dragon. White's approach has seldom been used in this position, as most exponents of the system with 2.Qc3 and 3.f4 employ it precisely in order to avoid the main Open Sicilian variations. Nevertheless we should still pay attention to it, as you never know when you might encounter one of those versatile players who decides to 'move-order' you into a different system,

5...cx d4 6.Qxd4 Qc6

Please note that the immediate 6...Qf6 would be risky in view of 7.e5!.

7.Qe3 Qf6 8.Qe2

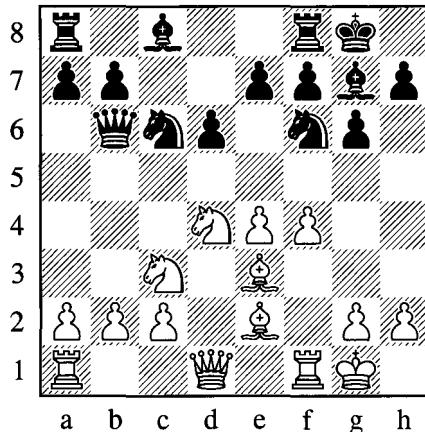
White has occasionally tested some alternatives on the previous few moves, but since you will only rarely (if ever) be encountering this position, it would be counterproductive to spend too much time examining sidelines.

8...0–0

Now we will consider the risky **C11) 9.0–0?!** followed by the more reliable **C12) 9.Qb3.**

C11) 9.0–0?! Qb6!

This clever move highlights the instability of White's pieces in the centre. Now the first player must play with great accuracy to hold the balance.



10.Qd3

The parade of White moves (most of them quite frustrating) neatly evokes the *Boulevard of Broken Dreams*. Most of the alternatives lead to trouble for him, and in general he must tread a narrow path to equality.

10.Qf5? Qxb2! 11.Qa4 Qa3 12.c3 Qxe4 (but not 12...gx5? 13.Qc1) 13.Qc1 Qxc3 14.Qxa3 Qxd1 15.Qxe7† (15.Qxg7 Qe3+) 15...Qxe7 16.Qaxd1 Qd7 17.Qc5 Qc6 18.Qb3 (18.Qxd6 Qf5 is similar) 18...Qd5 19.Qxd6 Qfe8 White is effectively bankrupt, Casas Saez – Ruiz Jarabo Pelayo, e-mail 2007.

10.Qh1?! Qxe4 (10...Qxb2 11.Qdb5 Qb4†) 11.Qxc6 Qxc6 12.Qd5 Qe8! 13.Qd3 (Nothing much is changed by 13.Qf3 f5 or 13.a4 Qd7 14.Qb5 Qc8) This was Chemin – Resende, Sao Paulo 1995, and now after 13...Qf5N† White does not have nearly enough for the sacrificed pawn.

10.Qd2?! Qxe4 11.Qxc6 Qxc6 12.Qxe4 Qxe4 13.Qf3 Qc4 14.c3 Qc7 15.Qf2 Qb8 leaves White with no compensation, Zambrana – Sorokin, Elista 1998.

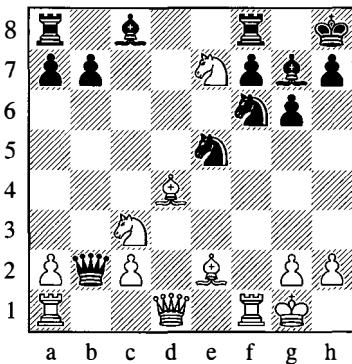
10.e5?!

This is a bit more challenging, although Black is still doing well.

10...dxe5 11.fxe5 ♜xe5 12.♗f5 ♜xb2

There is no reason for Black not to gobble another pawn.

13.♕xe7† ♖h8 14.♗d4



14...♝b4! 15.♕xe5

15.♕xc8 should be met by 15...♝d8!N (Black should pay attention as the advantage could slip away after 15...♝axc8, Slater – Donaldson, Seattle 1987, 16.♗b1!N ♜e7 17.♗b5) 16.♗b5 ♜axc8 when White's position is in disarray.

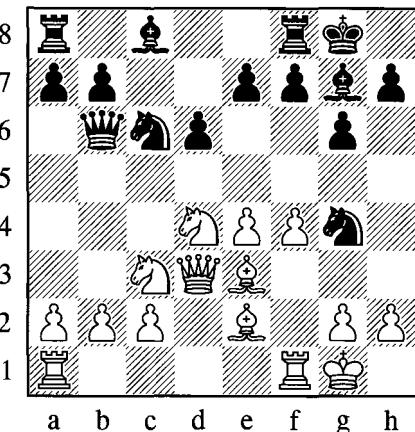
15...♝xe7 16.♝d4 ♖h5 17.♗xg7† ♜xg7 18.♗f3 ♜e6 19.♗ab1 ♜fd8 20.♗d5 ♜d6 21.c4 b6

Once again White has a hard time demonstrating compensation for the missing pawn, Mills – Braun, e-mail 2001.

10.♗a4?! looks odd, although at least White avoids losing material. 10...♝b4 (Black can also repeat the position with 10...♝a5 11.♗c3 ♜b6) 11.c3 ♜a5 12.b4 ♜c7 13.♗f3 ♜d7 14.♗c1 ♜b8 This position has been reached in several games, such as Westerinen – Miles, Metz 1985. The knight on a4 is less than ideally placed, and Black has made a high score from this position although objectively he is no more than equal.

10...♝g4!

This poses tricky problems for the first player, although he can still maintain equality if he plays carefully.



11.♗d5?!

This is a principled but risky move, which should ultimately lead to equality after accurate play from both sides.

Worse is 11.♗xc6?! ♜xe3 12.♗xe7† ♖h8 White has won a pawn, but he will soon lose an exchange for questionable compensation. 13.♗a4 (White is not helped by 13.♗xc8 ♜axc8 14.♗a4 ♜d4 15.♗xd4 ♜xd4 16.c3 ♜xf1† 17.cxd4 ♜d2 and Black eventually converted his extra exchange in Just – Jaumandreu Llopis, e-mail 1998.) 13...♝d4 14.♗xd4 ♜xd4 15.c3 ♜xf1† 16.cxd4 ♜e3 17.♗c1 ♜d7 18.♗c3 ♜ae8 19.♗f2 ♜xe7 20.♗xe3 This position was reached in Poesch – R. Jacobs, e-mail 2001, and here I suggest 20...♝c8N when White will face a difficult ending.

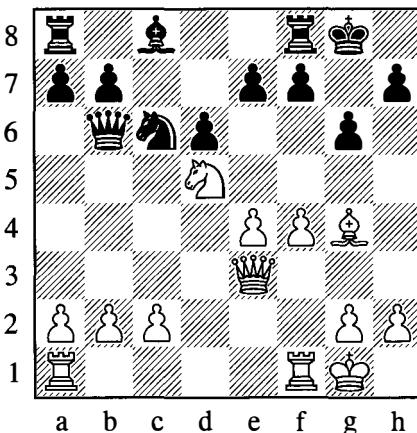
White's safest continuation is probably 11.♗xg4 ♜xd4 12.♗xd4 ♜xd4† 13.♗xd4 ♜xd4 14.♗d1! (14.♗xc8 ♜fxc8 gives Black slight pressure on the c-file and after 15.♗f2 ♜f8 he eventually ground out a win in Stock – Kacheishvili, Dubai 2006.) 14...♝e6 15.♗f2 ♜ac8 16.♗d2 ♜c4 With an equal endgame, Podlesnik – Beliavsky, Portoroz 1996.

11...Qxd4!

This provides the justification for Black's previous move.

12.Qxg4

After 12.Qxb6?! Qxe3† 13.Qh1 Qxb6 Black's three pieces are more valuable than White's queen. White's only challenging continuation is 14.Qxg4 Qxg4 15.f5, but after 15...Qh5! 16.a4 (16.h3 gxf5 17.exf5 f6†) 16...Qe5 17.Qg3 Qe2 18.Qfe1 Qa6 19.Qa3 Qac8 Black was better and went on to win in Olofsson – Isaev, e-mail 2007.

12...Qxe3† 13.Qxe3**13...Qxe3†**

If Black desperately wants to play for win he can consider the slightly risky capture of the b2-pawn. 13...Qxb2 14.Qab1 Qxa2 15.Qxc8 Qfxc8 16.Qxb7 This was Grosar – Kutzner, Bad Woerishofen 1991, and now, according to my analysis, best play continues 16...Qxc2N 17.f5! (17.Qc1 Qa4 18.Qxe7 Qb4 19.Qxc8† Qxc8†) 17...Qc5 (17...Qab8?! 18.Qh6 Qxe4 19.Qxe7 Qd4† 20.Qe3 Qg7 21.Qh4 looks too risky for Black) 18.Qxc5 dxcc5 19.Qc1 Qab8 20.Qxb8 Qxb8 21.Qxc5 Qb4 22.Qxe7† Qf8= The excitement peters out into an equal ending.

14.Qxe3 Qxg4 15.Qxg4 Qac8 16.Qe3 f6

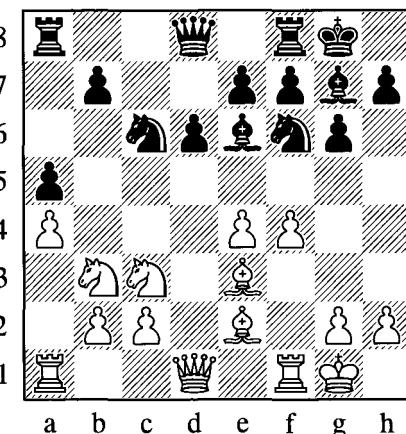
We have been following the game Cramling – Keene, London 1982. The ending is equal, although I suspect most players would prefer Black's position ever so slightly, thanks to the open c-file and possibility of launching a minority attack on the queenside.

C12) 9.Qb3

Having witnessed the effectiveness of a well-timed queen sortie to b6, the rationale for this move becomes clear.

9...a5?!

Many other moves are possible, but I chose to focus on the text, which aims to question the position of the knight.

10.a4 Qe6 11.0–0**11...Qd7?!**

This has seldom been seen, but has been tested by a few Dragon specialists and has scored highly for Black.

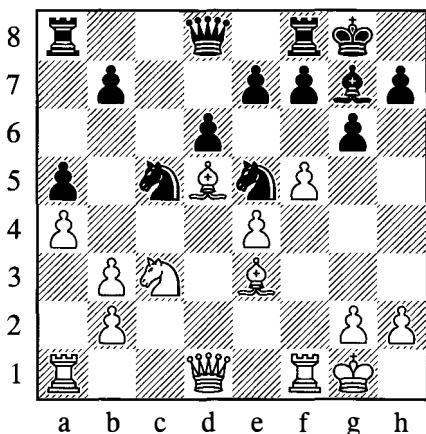
12.f5

White gains nothing from the slower approach: 12.Qh1 Qc8 13.Qd2?! (Better was 13.f5N, although Black should still be fine after something like 13...Qxb3 14.cxb3 Qc5 15.Qg4 Qb8=) 13...Qd4 14.Qxd4 Qxd4 15.f5

gxf5 16.♗d3 f4 17.♗xf4 ♜e5 18.♗g1 ♜dc6 19.♗d5 ♜b4! Black's dark-squared control gave him slightly better chances in Timman – Browne, Lucerne 1982.

12..♗xb3 13.cxb3 ♜c5 14.♗c4 ♜e5 15.♗d5

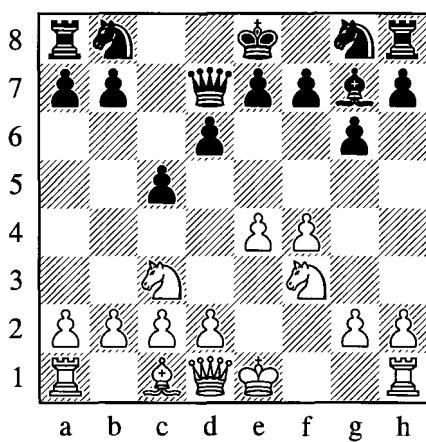
This position was reached in Fedorov – Makarov, Smolensk 2000, and now the following continuation looks like the most logical to me:



15...♗d7N 16.♗d2 ♜ac8 17.♗b5 ♜g4

White's bishop pair is balanced by Black's healthier pawn structure and dark-squared control.

C2) 5.♗b5† ♜d7 6.♗xd7† ♜xd7



The bishop exchange brings certain advantages for both sides. White will employ a set-up with central pawns on d3 and e4, so it makes a certain amount of sense to exchange his light-squared bishop. On the other hand, Black has slightly less space, so an exchange of minor pieces will relieve any congestion in his position.

7.0-0 ♜c6 8.d3 ♜f6

This is the most natural move, although Black can also consider:

8...♝h6!?

Intending to use the f-pawn in an active role.

9.♗h1 f5 10.♗d5

White does not achieve much with 10.exf5 ♜xf5 11.♗e4 0-0 12.c3 e6 (It was worth considering 12...b6!N 13.♗d2 d5 14.♗g3 e5 Black is doing well, with strong central control and perfectly coordinated pieces.) 13.♗d2 b6 14.♗a4 d5 15.♗eg5 h6 16.♗h3 d4 (16...♝ab8N deserved attention, for instance: 17.♗f2 b5 18.♗c2 b4!) 17.♗ael dxc3 18.bxc3 ♜d5 19.♗f2 ♜fe8 20.♗e2 ♜e7 ½-½ Adams – Gelfand, Dortmund 1996.

10...0-0 11.♗e1 ♜ae8 12.♗h4 ♜f7

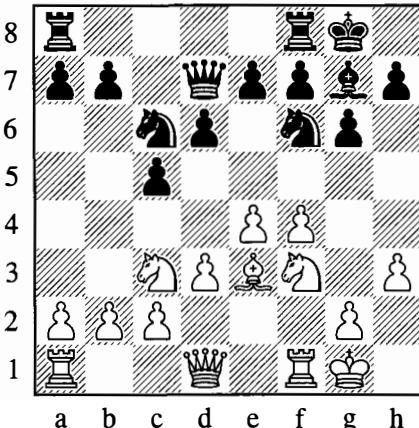
Also fine was 12...♝d4N 13.♗acl ♜f7 14.♗e3 ♜d8 with equal chances.

13.exf5 ♜xf5 14.♗ael ♜f6 15.♗f2 ♜d4

White could claim no advantage against the well-coordinated enemy forces in Hebden – Novikov, Isle of Man 1996.

After 8...♝f6 White has tried a variety of responses. Instead of considering every possible move order, I think it makes sense to categorize the positions based on how White chooses to develop his remaining bishop. Thus we will consider C21) 9.h3 (intending ♜e3) and C22) 9.♗d2.

C21) 9.h3 0-0 10.♗e3

**10...b6**

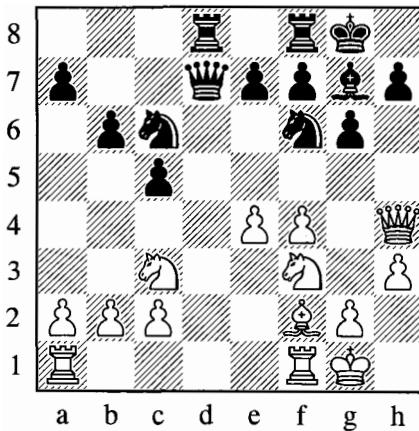
This has been the most popular move, although it is really a matter of taste as there are several satisfactory continuations. One alternative is 10... $\mathbb{Q}e8!$?, clearing the long diagonal and intending ... $\mathbb{Q}c7$, while another is 10...b5 11. $\mathbb{W}d2$ b4 12. $\mathbb{Q}e2$, Padavsky – Browne, Amsterdam 1972, and here I would suggest 12...e6N 13. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{E}fe8$ with equal chances.

11. $\mathbb{W}e1$ $\mathbb{E}ad8$ 12. $\mathbb{W}h4$ d5 13. $\mathbb{Q}f2$

The variation 13.e5 d4! 14.exf6 $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ 16.fxg5 dx e 3† shows that Black is well prepared for a tactical confrontation.

13...dx e 4 14.dx e 4

So far we have been following the game Radulski – Popov, Batumi 2002. Here I found an interesting new idea:

**14... $\mathbb{Q}h5!$ N**

I must stress that there was also nothing wrong with the game continuation of 14...h6 15. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 16. $\mathbb{W}f2$ $\mathbb{W}b7?$ 17. $\mathbb{E}ae1$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ † 18. $\mathbb{W}xf3$ e6 19. $\mathbb{E}d1$ $\mathbb{W}a8$, when the chances were balanced.

15. $\mathbb{E}ad1$

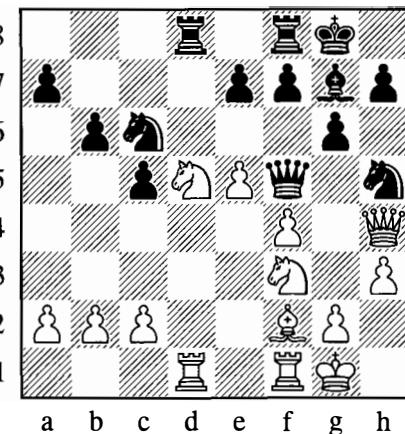
It is not so easy for White to develop his attack, so the text looks logical. White certainly achieves nothing with 15.f5 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 16. $\mathbb{W}g4$ $\mathbb{W}b7$ †.

15... $\mathbb{W}c8$ 16.e5 $\mathbb{W}f5!$

Black can afford to put his queen on this seemingly dubious square, as 17.g4? is refuted by the simple 17... $\mathbb{W}xf4$. Meanwhile White must find a way to deal with the threats against f4 and c2.

17. $\mathbb{Q}d5$

Looks critical, but Black has a strong retort:

**17... $\mathbb{E}xd5!$**

17... $\mathbb{W}xc2$ is also playable, but the text is more ambitious.

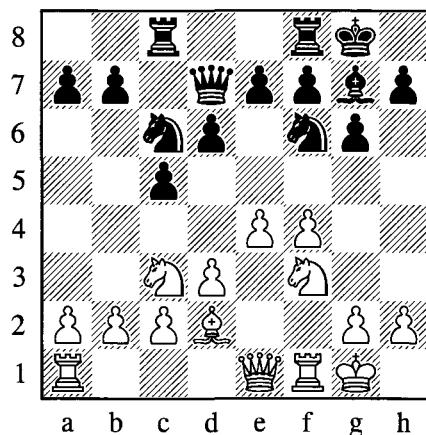
**18. $\mathbb{E}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ 19. $\mathbb{E}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$
21. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ g5 22. $\mathbb{W}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ ∞**

With two pawns for the exchange Black is doing fine from a materialistic standpoint.

Furthermore, his well centralized pieces may give him some chances to fight for the advantage.

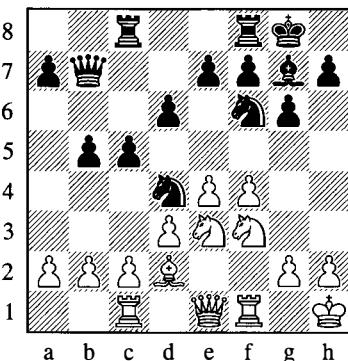
C22) 9.♗d2 0-0 10.♗e1 ♜ac8

This move, which prepares a knight hop to d4, is a nice way to make use of the earlier bishop exchange.



11.♗h4

White should not be too lethargic in his approach. For instance: 11.♔h1 ♜d4 12.♕c1 b5 13.♗d1 ♜b7 (Also strong was 13...♝fe8!N intending 14.f5 d5†) 14.♗e3 Cu. Hansen – Van Wely, Cap d'Agde 1996.



14...♝h5!N Thanks to his well-placed pieces the second player can become quite active. 15.♗xd4 (15.c3?! ♜xf4! 16.cxd4 ♜xd3†)

15...cxd4 16.♗g4 ♜c6† The vulnerable c2-pawn is more real than White's dreams about a successful kingside attack.

11...♜d4 12.♕ac1 ♜g4

There is also nothing wrong with 12...b5N 13.♗xd4 cxd4 14.♗e2 ♜g4 15.♗g3 f5 with equality.

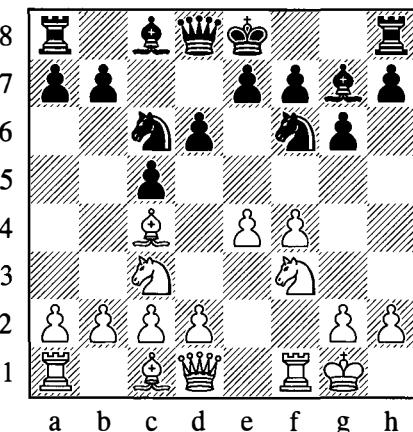
13.♗xg4 ♜xg4 14.h3 ♜f6 15.♗e3 ♜xf3† 16.♕xf3 ♜d7 17.♗e2 b5 18.c3 e6

Objectively the position is equal, although Black's position is just a little more comfortable and in Kosten – Gavrikov, Budapest 1989, he was eventually able to grind out a win.

C3) 5.♗c4

This is the most aggressive line at White's disposal. Instead of exchanging his bishop, he hopes to use it for attacking purposes.

5...♜c6 6.0-0 ♜f6?!



Many players prefer to develop this piece on e7 (after 6...e6), but after investigating the text move I believe it to be just as strong. Being the less popular choice, it might also provoke some opponents into playing over-ambitiously. We will consider two options: C31) 7.♗e1 and C32) 7.d3.

7.♗b3 0–0 8.♗e1 ♗d4 9.d3 a5 reaches line C323.

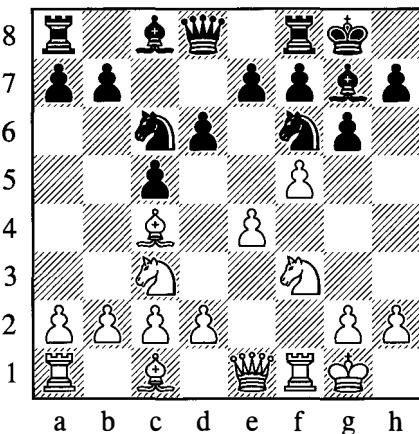
C31) 7.♗e1

With this move White intends a quick f4–f5, intending to catch up on queenside development a bit later.

7...0–0

7...♗b4!? 8.♗d1 0–0 9.d3 d5 10.exd5 ♗fxd5= seems like an eminently playable solution too.

8.f5



8...e6!

Preparing to strike back in the centre. Theoretically it is okay for Black to grab the pawn with 8...gxf5, but after 9.d3 White always has a certain amount of practical compensation.

9.fxg6

9.fxe6 fxe6 is the same.

9...fxg6

It would be too dangerous for Black to play 9...hgx6! 10.d3, for instance: 10...♗d4 11.♗g5! ♗xc2 12.♗h4 ♗xa1 13.e5!+– Greedy lines seem even more absurd when you notice

Black making so many moves with one of his already developed pieces. His kingside was neglected and the punishment was severe.

10.e5?!

This tempting move is a mistake. White compromises his opponent's pawn centre, but cannot tame his pieces. Better was 10.d3 ♗g4 11.♗g5 ♗b6 with equal chances, Leustean – Chiricuta, Sovata 1997.

10...dxe5 11.d3 ♗d4 12.♗b3

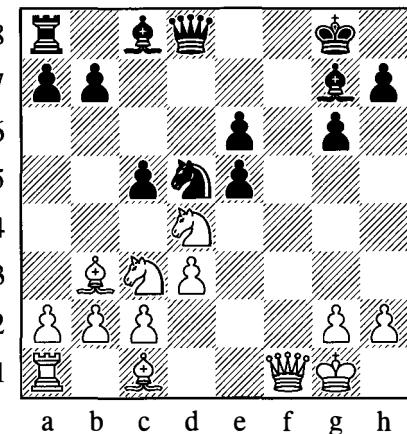
No better is: 12.♗xd4 cxd4 13.♗e4 ♗xe4 14.♗xf8† ♗xf8 15.♗xe4 ♗f5†

12...♗d5!

The doubled e-pawns play a valuable role in supporting the powerful knights.

13.♗xd4 ♗xf1† 14.♗xf1

This position was reached in Dorfman – Polugaevsky, Moscow 1976. Here I found a natural improvement:



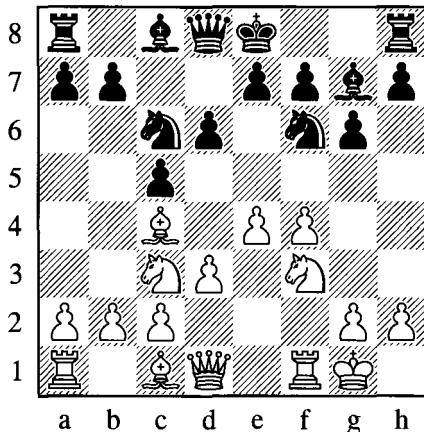
14...cxd4!N

Black should not be overly concerned about "correcting" his pawn structure. In fact it turns out that the e5-pawn plays an important role in taming White's initiative.

15.♗e4 ♗d7 16.♗g5 ♗c7†

Black has an extra pawn and healthy central control. True, the extra e-pawn may not be hurting White directly, but it certainly improves Black's control over the important central squares.

C32) 7.d3



This is the standard developing move.

7...0-0 8.♗e1

White's entire system is geared towards a kingside attack, and this move plays a key role. White's typical plan involves some combination of f5, ♘h4, ♖h6, ♗g5 followed by mate on h7. It is all rather crude, but can certainly be dangerous if Black does not know how to respond.

Sometimes White switches things around with the immediate:

8.f5 e6

As mentioned previously, it would be risky to accept the pawn, although it may be theoretically okay.

9.fxg6

9.♗e1 is well met by 9...d5!, which gives Black good chances to fight for the advantage, for instance: 10.♗b3 c4! 11.dxc4 dxе4 12.♗xe4 ♗xe4 13.♗xe4 exf5, Vo Hong Phuong – Xu Yuhua, Istanbul (ol) 2000.

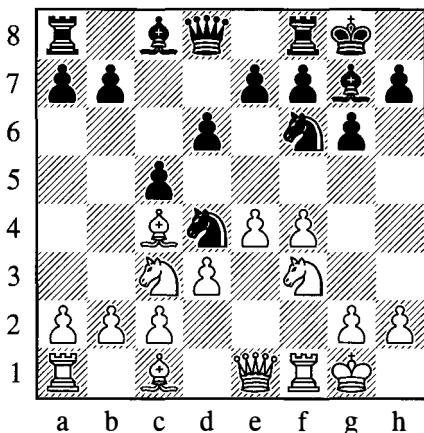
9...fxg6 10.♗g5 h6 11.♗h4

It is a similar story after 11.♗d2 d5 12.exd5 exd5 13.♗b3 ♘h7 14.♗e1 ♘g4±. Black has all his pieces in play and the b3-bishop has trouble finding a useful role.

11...g5 12.♗e1 d5 13.♗b3 ♗a5±

White's position was already becoming uncomfortable, Meulner – Ploetz, Wildflecken 1988.

8...♗d4



Here we will consider the ultra-aggressive but not quite sound C321) 9.f5?!, followed by the calmer alternatives of C322) 9.♗xd4 and C323) 9.♗b3.

C321) 9.f5?!

This was tried in Gofshtein – Pigusov, Bourbon Lancy 1997, and does not appear to have been repeated since.

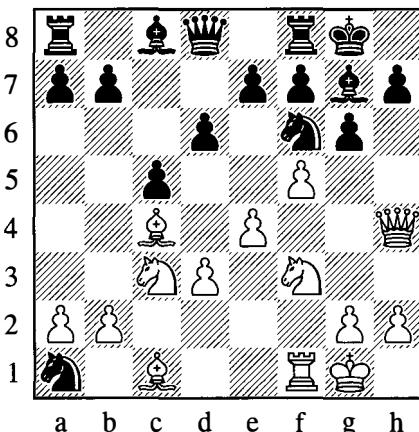
9...♗xc2!N

Black must not be intimidated. He should be able to survive the attack and win with his extra material, although strong nerves may be required at certain key moments.

10.♗h4 ♗xa1

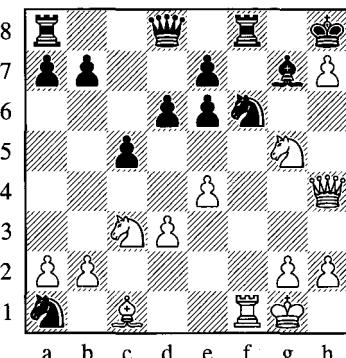
From this point on, the key to Black's defence will be to neutralize the c4-bishop.

The goal might be achieved by capturing the bishop outright, diverting it away from the a2-g8 diagonal, or blocking the said diagonal. Once this had been achieved, the remaining defensive moves should not be too difficult to find, as you can see in the following variations.



11.♕h6

11.fxg6 should be met by 11...♝e6!, immediate going after the bishop. 12.gxh7† (After 12.gxf7† ♜xf7 Black should defend without much difficulty, for instance: 13.♕xf7† ♜xf7 14.♗g5 ♜c2 15.♗d5 [15.♗xf7 ♜xf7 16.♗xh7 ♜d4-+] 15...♝f8-+) 12...♝h8 13.♗xe6 fxe6 14.♗g5



14...♗g4! 15.♗xe6 ♜d4† 16.♗xd4 cxd4 17.♗xf8† ♜xf8 18.♗xg4 dxc3 19.bxc3 ♜f7 and Black should win.

11...b5!

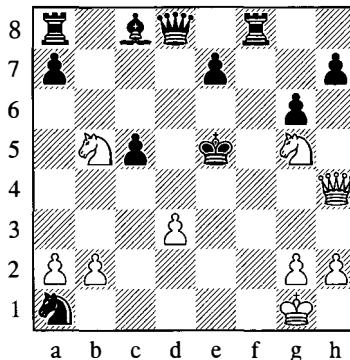
Once again, the c4-bishop is the target. 11...e6!? seems to be playable, but the text move is so obviously strong that there is no point in analysing anything else in detail.

It should briefly be noted that 11...d5? is much worse, for instance: 12.♗xd5 ♜xd5 13.♗g5! ♜f6 14.fxg6 hxg6 15.♗xg7 ♜xg7 16.♗xf6+-

12.♗xb5

12.fxg6? bxc4 gives White nothing; alternatively after 12.♗d5? ♜xd5 13.♗xd5 Black kills the attack with 13...f6!-+.

The following line is more interesting: 12.♗xb5 d5! Having drawn the knight away from the centre, this becomes an excellent move. Once again we are targeting the bishop. 13.♗d5 ♜xd5 14.♗g5!? The best try. 14...♗f6 15.fxg6 fxg6 16.♗xg7 ♜xg7 17.♗xf6 ♜xf6! 18.e5† ♜xe5



The king is surprisingly safe, for instance: 19.♗e4† ♜f6 20.♗xh7† ♜g7 21.♗xf8 ♜f5 and Black wins.

12...♞c2!

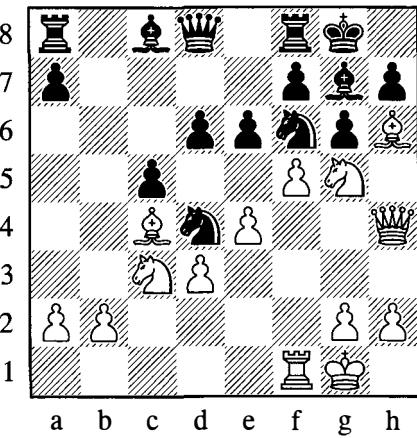
The knight is not only safeguarding itself from a potential capture, but also playing an active role in the defence.

13.♗c4

Other moves are no better, for instance: 13.♕g5 ♔e3! Not only attacking the rook, but also threatening ...♔xh6 followed by ...♕eg4.

13...♗d4 14.♗g5 e6!

Thanks to the lost tempo involved in White's ♖xb5-c4 manoeuvre, Black had enough time to recentralize his knight, supporting the pawn on e6 and thereby preventing the bishop on c4 from playing an active role in the attack.



15.fxg6

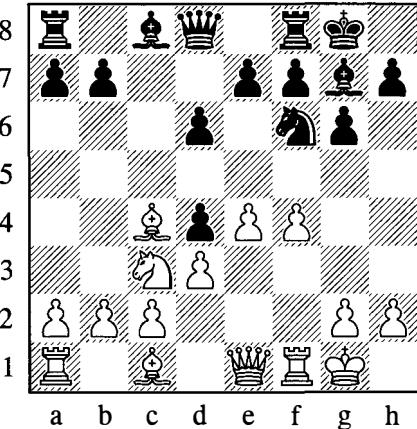
There is not much else that White can do.

15...fxg6 16.♗xg7 ♔xg7 17.♗xf6 h6!+–

The attack runs out of steam. As you can see, a certain amount of precision was required in order to defend correctly. At the same time, the ideas were quite easy to understand and follow: just take away the influence of the bishop on c4, and everything else more or less falls into place.

C322) 9.♗xd4 cxd4

The direct exchange in the centre may be White's best option, although it is not much of a try for an advantage.



10.♗d5

White should avoid 10.♗e2?! d5! 11.exd5 ♗xd5 when the resulting pawn structure favours Black. Here is one example: 12.♗f2 ♔e3 (Also interesting is 12...b5!N 13.♗xb5 ♗b6 with promising compensation.) 13.♗xe3 dxe3 14.♗xe3 ♗xb2 15.♗ab1 ♗g7 16.♗f3 ♗b8 17.♗g3 e6 18.♗h1 b6 With the bishop pair and a sounder structure, Black was in full control in Kolosowski – Nedilko, Warsaw 2006.

10.♗d1 is not so bad, although Black should be able to obtain a comfortable game after 10...d5 11.♗b3 dxe4 12.dxe4, Armbrust – Fruebing, Willingen 2006. In this position it looks promising to pre-empt the possible e5-push with 12...♗d7!N 13.♗f2 ♗c7 14.♗d3 a5! 15.a4 ♗c5 16.♗xc5 ♗xc5 when Black has good chances on the queenside.

10...♗xd5 11.♗xd5

White can also consider 11.exd5, J. Peters – D. Lee, Los Angeles 1999. White wants to attack along the e-file, but the downside is that his bishop has a restricted view of the board. Black should develop calmly with 11...♗d7N with the possible continuation 12.a4 a5 13.♗d2 ♗e8, with roughly even chances.

11...e6 12.♗b3 a5 13.a4 ♗h8!?

This is a sensible precaution.

14.♗d2 ♗d7 15.♗g3 ♖c7 16.♗h4 f5!
17.♘fe1 ♖ae8=

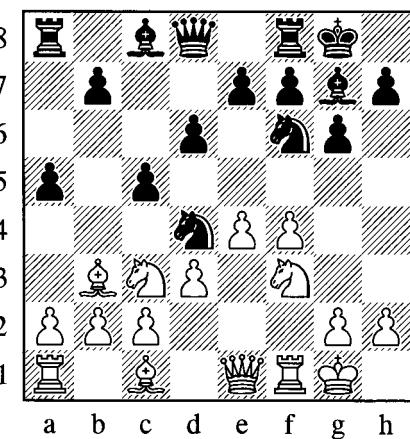
Black's defences were holding firm in Klimov – Trofimov, Satka 2005.

C323) 9.♗b3

This natural-looking move has been White's most popular choice, but it runs into an unpleasant counter.

9...a5!

Suddenly the b3-bishop has become a serious target.



10.♗a4

Already White must search for the best way to avoid problems.

10.♗e3? is definitely not the answer in view of 10...♝g4!±.

10.♗d2 ♗d7 (10...e6?!N is also promising)
11.a4 ♘xb3 12.cxb3 ♘e6 13.♗a3 ♖b6 14.♗b5
♝e8 15.f5 ♘d7± Black's bishop pair and healthier structure gave him the better chances in Bauer – Pelletier, Aubervilliers 2002.

10.♗xd4 cxd4 is just an inferior version of line C322, from White's point of view. 11.♗e2 (11.♗d5 ♘xd5 12.♗xd5 e6 13.♗c4 [13.♗b3?? a4 14.♗c4 d5 15.exd5 exd5 16.♗b5 ♖a5+–]

13...a4 14.a3 d5 15.♗a2 dxе4 16.dxe4 ♖c7±
(The weak pawn c2 is hurting White's position.)
11...a4 12.♗c4 d5 13.exd5 ♘xd5 14.a3
(14.♗f2 b5! 15.♗xb5 ♖b6 16.♗c4 [or 16.c4]
♝e3 looks excellent for Black, for instance:
17.♗xe3 dxе3 18.♗g3 a3±) 14...♗b8 15.♗g3
e6 with an obvious plus for Black thanks to his superior structure, Wei – Stojic, Tuggeranong 2007.

10.♗h4

This was played in Hernandez – Anand, Merida 2001.

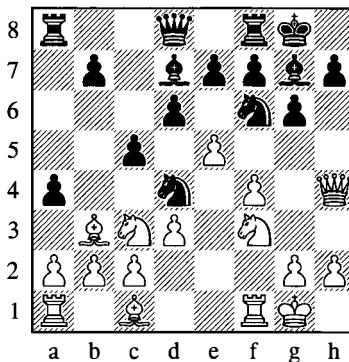
10...♗d7!N

In the game Black sacrificed a pawn with 10...a4 and obtained good compensation, but the text move, which was subsequently given as an improvement by Anand, should ensure an advantage without much risk and should therefore be preferred.

11.e5

White should try to create problems for his opponent. The passive 11.a4 gives Black a simple route to an advantage with 11...♝xb3 12.cxb3 ♘c6 13.f5 ♖b6±.

11...a4!



12.♗c4

The immediate capture on f6 does not solve White's problems, and the same can be said for the following alternatives:

12.♗xd4 cxd4 13.♗d5 (or 13.♗xa4 b5
14.♗b6 ♖xb6 15.exf6 ♘xf6+) 13...axb3
14.exf6 exf6 15.cxb3 ♖a5+–

12. $\mathbb{Q}g5 \mathbb{Q}f5!$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xf7\#$ 14. $\mathbb{W}h3 \mathbb{Q}d4$
 15. $\mathbb{W}h4 \mathbb{Q}xc2$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xf7 \mathbb{Q}xf7$ 17. $exf6$ $exf6$
 18. $\mathbb{B}b1 \mathbb{Q}f5\#$

12... $b5!$

Continuing to fight against the dangerous light-squared bishop.

12... $\mathbb{Q}xf3\#$ would let White off the hook:
 13. $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ (13. $gx f3?$ $\mathbb{Q}h5\#$) 13... $dxe5$ 14. $fxe5$
 $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}g5 \mathbb{Q}xe5$ 16. $\mathbb{B}f1 \mathbb{E}e8$ (16... $\mathbb{Q}xc4$
 17. $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ would be unclear) 17. $\mathbb{Q}d5 \mathbb{Q}xc4$
 18. $\mathbb{Q}xe7\#$ $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 20. $dx c4$ $\mathbb{Q}xb2$
 21. $\mathbb{Q}ael \mathbb{Q}d4\#$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ with roughly equal chances.

13. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$

13. $\mathbb{Q}xf7\#$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}g5 \mathbb{Q}xc2$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xf7 \mathbb{Q}xf7$
 16. $exf6$ $exf6$ 17. $\mathbb{B}b1 \mathbb{Q}f5\#$ is similar to the
 12. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ variation noted above.

13... $cxd4$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xb5 d5!$ 15. $exf6 \mathbb{Q}xf6$ 16. $\mathbb{W}f2$
 $dx c4$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $cx d3$ 18. $cxd3$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}e3$
 $\mathbb{W}d5$

Black has emerged from the complications with a definite advantage.

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

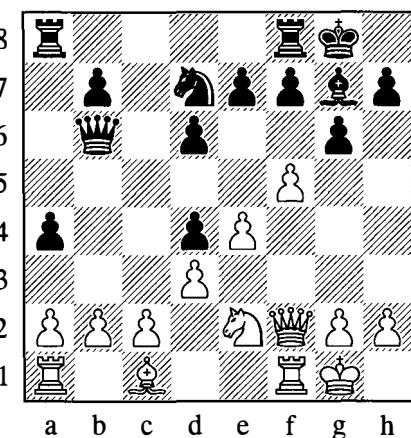
10... $\mathbb{Q}g4$ is not a bad alternative, but I prefer to focus on the text move.

11. $\mathbb{Q}xd7 \mathbb{Q}xd7$ 12. $\mathbb{W}f2 a4$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xd4 cxd4$

14. $\mathbb{Q}e2 \mathbb{W}b6$

14... $e5$ is fine as well, but I would prefer not to obstruct the view of the g7-bishop.

15. $f5$



15... $d5!!$

This is a really interesting and creative idea. Black is looking to take the sting out of the possible $\mathbb{Q}f4-d5$ manoeuvre.

16. $\mathbb{Q}g5$

Obviously we should also consider the consequences of accepting the bait.

16. $exd5 e6??$

This can lead to interesting complications, although the straightforward 16... $\mathbb{E}ac8!!?$ might actually be a stronger move. Black has fine compensation thanks to his pressure on the c-file.

17. $c4$

17. $c3$ gives Black the extra option of 17... $exf5!!$, for instance: 18. $\mathbb{Q}xd4 \mathbb{Q}xd4$ (18... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}c2 \mathbb{W}xf2\#$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xf2 \mathbb{Q}xd5$) 19. $\mathbb{W}xd4 \mathbb{W}xd4\#$ 20. $cxd4 \mathbb{Q}f6$ with better chances for Black.

17... $dx c3$

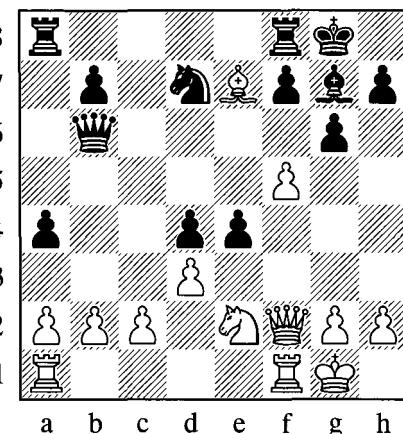
17... $exf5!!?$ is possible, albeit slightly less attractive with the pawn on c4 instead of c3.

18. $\mathbb{W}xb6 \mathbb{Q}xb6$ 19. $f6$ $cx b2$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xb2 \mathbb{Q}h6$
 21. $dxe6 \mathbb{Q}e3\#$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}h1 fxe6$

Black is not worse in the ending.

16... $dxe4$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xe7$

17. $dxe4 \mathbb{E}ac8$ 18. $\mathbb{E}ac1 \mathbb{Q}c5$ is clearly better for Black.



We have been following the game Mitkov – Vera Gonzalez, Merida 2005. At this point Black exchanged on d3, but there was no need to release the tension so soon. Instead he could have kept the upper hand with:

17...♝f8N 18.♞a3

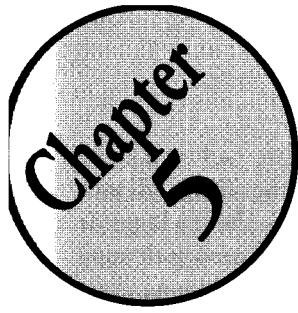
In the event of 18.f6, the reply 18...exd3 suddenly becomes very strong, as 18.cxd3 runs into 18...♝xf6! when the knight on e2 will be hanging.

18...♞e5!

With some initiative, as 19.dxe4?? is refuted by 19...♝g4 followed by d3†.

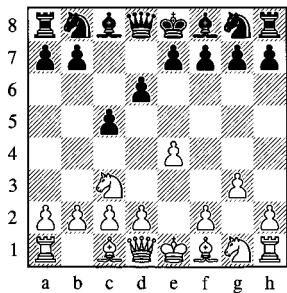
Conclusion

The contents of the present chapter seem quite disparate, with numerous types of positions being analysed. Line C1 even took us as far afield as a line of the Dragon variation involving the early f2-f4. In those positions it seems like the first player is aiming for too much from the very beginning and puts (at least some part of) the carriage ahead of the horse. Line C2 featured a closed set-up combined with an exchange of light-squared bishops. White's set-up is sound enough, although the early bishop exchange creates additional breathing space for the black pieces, and the defender should have little trouble equalizing the game. Variation C3 with the bishop on c4 is rather more threatening, although there is also a potential downside for White as the same piece might become a target, as was vividly demonstrated in the final variation C323) 9.♝b3 a5!. Overall, if Black comes to the board well-prepared, there will be little reason for him to fear any of the lines examined in this chapter.



Closed Systems

A Bridge Too Far - 3.g3



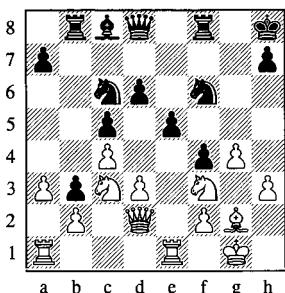
Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.♘c3 d6 3.g3

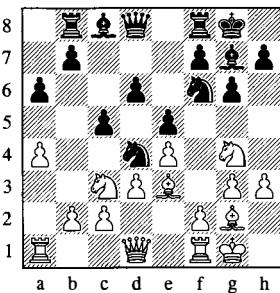
3... ♘c6 4.♗g2 g6 5.d3 ♗g7

| | |
|--|-----------|
| A) 6.♘f3 ♘f6 7.0-0 0-0 8.h3 ♘b8 | 86 |
| A1) 9.♗e3 | 87 |
| A2) 9.a4 | 89 |
| B) 6.f4 e6 7.♘f3 ♘ge7 8.0-0 0-0 | 91 |
| B1) 9.♗d2 | 92 |
| B2) 9.♗e3 b6!? 10.d4 ♘a6 | 92 |
| B21) 11.♗f2 | 94 |
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| C1) 8.f4 | 96 |
| C2) 8.♘f3 | 97 |
| C3) 8.♗ge2 | 97 |

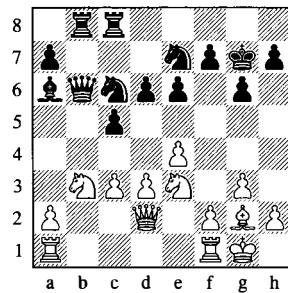
A1) after 20.♘c3



A2) note to 10...b5



C3) after 18...♗fc8



20... ♘xg4!

12... ♘xg4N

The Closed Sicilian defused

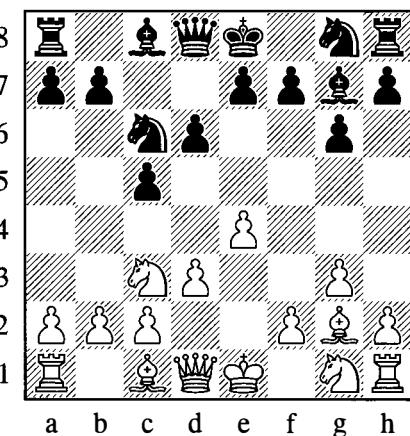
When choosing the Closed Sicilian with 2. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ and 3. $g3$ White avoids any early opening of the position or even direct contact of the pieces, and instead seeks to accumulate energy to be unleashed later in the game. His dream scenario would involve a devastating kingside attack, while the opponent keeps himself occupied by winning an odd pawn or two on the opposite side of the board.

The reader may laugh or cry about this idea, but it is actually more realistic than it sounds. Black has to rush his queenside counterplay without delay and at the same time be mindful of the consequences of any possible opening of the centre.

1.e4 c5 2. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ d6 3. $g3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 4. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ g6

The kingside fianchetto is Black's most respected system.

5.d3 $\mathbb{Q}g7$



Here we will consider three moves in detail:

A) 6. $\mathbb{Q}f3$, B) 6. $f4$ and C) 6. $\mathbb{Q}e3$.

A) 6. $\mathbb{Q}f3$

Most Sicilian repertoire books do not even mention this move, but it is worth considering as White is playing with an extra tempo over a set-up that is commonly used by Black against the English Opening.

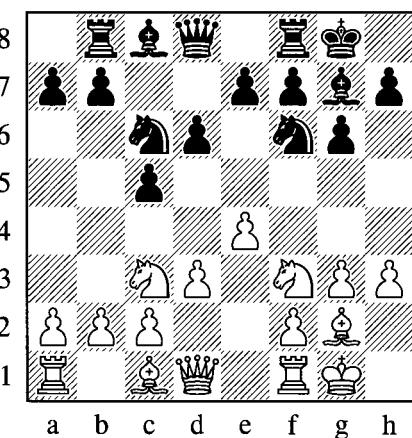
6... $\mathbb{Q}f6$

In variations without the f2-f4 advance Black does not have to worry about a kingside pawn storm, so there is no real need to develop the knight on e7. Instead the text move saves time and positions the knight on a more active square.

7.0-0 0-0 8. $h3$

A database search reveals that just about every legal move has been tried here, but since the whole line is not hugely popular, I will just focus on the main line, the point of which is to prepare $\mathbb{Q}e3$ without allowing harassment with ... $\mathbb{Q}g4$.

8... $\mathbb{E}b8$



The defender loses no time and aims for immediate counterplay on the queenside. Now White can decide between the immediate A1) 9. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ and the same idea, with the addition of an open a file, with A2) 9. $a4$.

I will mention just one other interesting line:

9. $\mathbb{E}e1$

White tries to play in the centre using his pieces.

9... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ b5 11. $d4$

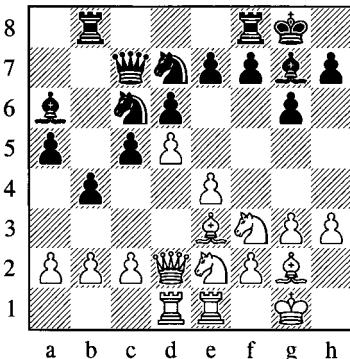
White's strategy is not without logic, as his f-pawn will be better on f2 than f4 in a position with an open centre.

11...b4 12.Qe2 a5!

Black does not want to cooperate, and avoids ...cxd4 for the time being.

13.Wd2 Qa6 14.Bad1 Wc7 15.d5

Unsure how else to make progress, White drives forward.



15...Qa7

It was worth considering 15...Qce5?!N 16.Qxe5 Qxe5 17.b3 a4 18.f4 Qd7 19.e5 Qb7=.

16.Qh6?!

This allows a strong sacrifice.

16.Wc1 Qxe2 17.Bxe2 Qb5= was also not great for White.

However, the first player could have maintained the balance with 16.Bb1 Qf6 17.Qh4 Qb5 18.Qg5, when he has no serious weaknesses.

16...Qxb2! 17.Qxf8 Bxf8 18.Wh6 Qg7 19.Wh4 Qxe2 20.Bxe2 Qb5+

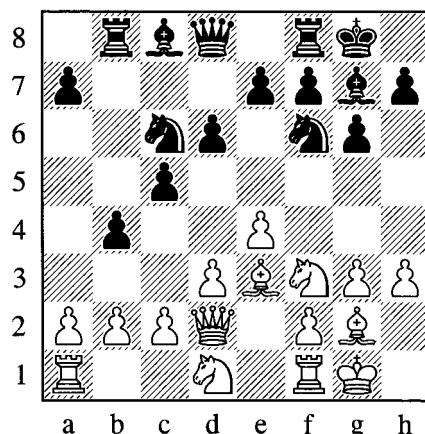
Black had a fantastic position for a small material investment in Golovin – Khismatullin, Voronezh 2008.

A1) 9.Qe3 b5 10.Wd2

10.e5?! White's pieces are not fully prepared for the opening of the centre. 10...dxe5 11.Qxc5 b4 12.Qe4 (12.Qa4?!N Wc7 13.Qd2 Qe6=) 12...Qxe4 13.dxe4 Wa5 14.Qe3 Qa6 15.Bd8 15.Wc1 Qd4= Reinhard – Fischer, Bay City 1963.

10...b4 11.Qd1

In the event of 11.Qd5, Galego – Damaso, Portugal 1994, it looks interesting to try 11...Qe6?!N 12.Qf4 (After 12.Qxf6† Qxf6 13.d4 cxd4 14.Qxd4 Qxd4 15.Qxd4 Qxd4 16.Wxd4 Wb6= The endgame will be rather painful for White.) 12...Qd7 13.Qd5 Wc8 14.Qh2 e6 15.Qxf6† Qxf6= Black has the more pleasant position without any hint of troubles.



11...e5?!

This ambitious advance not only gains space, but also robs White's centre of much of its dynamism by preventing any e4-e5 ideas.

Anyone who feels that the last move is too committal might also consider 11...Qd7, when play may continue 12.Qh6 Qd4 13.Qxg7 Qxg7 with no problems for Black.

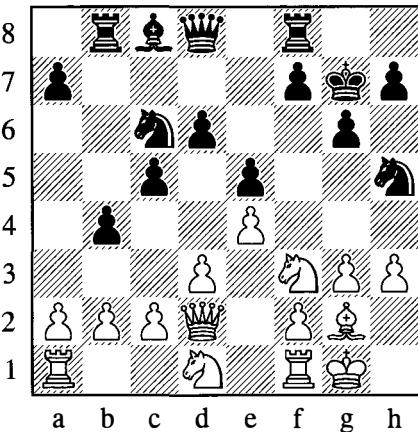
12.Qh6

White does not achieve much with 12.c3 Qe6 13.Qg5 Qd7 14.cxb4 (14.f4? Qh5=) 14...cxb4=.

Also unimpressive is 12.b3 Qd4 13.Qxd4 cxd4 14.Qb2 Wc7 15.Qc4 Qe6= White has managed to mask his weakness on the c-file, but Black's extra space and bishop pair are important trumps.

12...♞h5

Black already enjoys a space advantage on the queenside and in the centre, and now he prepares to fight for the kingside as well.

13.♝xg7 ♛xg7**14.a3**

14.♘h4?! is an instructive mistake. 14...♝f4 15.♘f5† gx5 16.gxf4 Ristoja – Maeder, Haifa 1970. Now Black could have seized the initiative with the natural 16...♝g8!N The opening of the g-file will favour the player who can occupy it first. 17.fxe5 ♛h8 18.♗h1 (18.exd6? ♜xd6 19.♘e3 f4 20.♘g4 ♜xg4 21.hxg4 ♜xg4–+) 18...dxe5 19.f4 fxe4† White has only succeeded in opening the position against his own king.

14...b3!

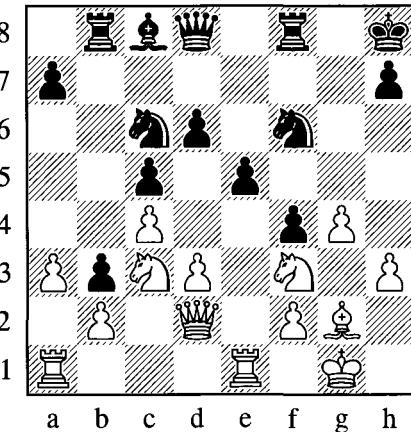
Black should keep the a-file closed, preventing any counterplay, as he is already in a position to seize the initiative on the opposite flank.

**15.c3 f5 16.exf5 gx5 17.♗e1 f4 18.♗g4 ♘f6
19.c4**

Making room for the knight to return to c3, although d4 now becomes an inviting target for its counterpart on c6.

19.d4 e4 20.♘h2 f3 21.♗f1 cxd4 22.cxd4 d5

looks unpleasant for White due to his severe lack of space and unsafe king.

19...♝h8 20.♘c3**20...♞xg4!**

This brilliant sacrifice works because White's position is too cramped to allow the smooth transfer of defenders to the kingside.

21.hxg4 ♜xg4 22.♘h2 ♜g8 23.♗h1 ♘d4

It is not even clear if ...♘c2 should be called a "threat", as the monstrous knight can claim to be stronger than either of the enemy rooks.

24.f3 ♜h5 25.♗f2

Preventing ...♝h4.

25...♝b7

This was the end of the game Engelhard – Schnabel, e-mail 2006. It seems bit early to resign, so it is possible that the game ended in some other way, such as White defaulting on his next move. In any case, it is obvious that Black's initiative more than compensates for the sacrificed piece. A plausible continuation is:

26.♘e4 ♜bg7 27.♗h3

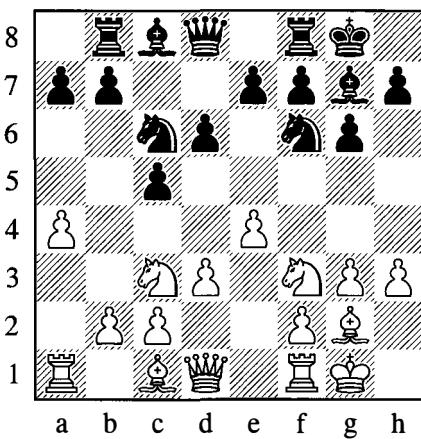
27.♗g1 is refuted by 27...♞f5!.

27...♝g3 28.♗g4 ♜xg4 29.fxg4 ♜a8!

Threatening ... $\mathbb{E}g6-h6$. Black can also restore approximate material parity with ... $\mathbb{E}xd3$ at any moment. His position is clearly better, and quite possibly winning.

A2) 9.a4

The opening of the a-file should be beneficial for White as he kept his rook on the a-file.



9...a6

This is the most natural move, although Black can also consider 9...b6!?, making use of the fact that the rook is no longer tactically vulnerable on the h1-a8 diagonal. 10. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 11. $\mathbb{W}d2$ d5 This should be enough for a satisfactory game, for instance: 12. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ (Perhaps White should have settled for the equal position resulting from 12.exd5 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}h6$.) 12...dxe4 13.dxe4 $\mathbb{W}xd2$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ $\mathbb{E}bd8$ 15. $\mathbb{E}fd1$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ Markowski – J. Polgar, Oviedo 1993, 16... $\mathbb{Q}b4!N$ 17.g4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}dc1$ h5=.

10. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ b5

I will keep this as the main line in order to maintain some consistency between this and the previous variation A1.

However, I will also mention a fully viable alternative:
10...e5!?

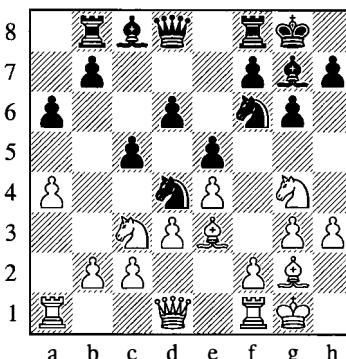
We have already encountered this idea in line A1 above. It may not be quite as strong with the white knight on c3 instead of d1, but it should still suffice for equality.

11. $\mathbb{Q}h2!$

This is a logical idea. The knight wants to exchange itself for its counterpart on f6, thus enabling the other knight to occupy the d5-outpost at a suitable moment.

11. $\mathbb{W}d2$ is not dangerous, for instance:
11... $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ b5 13.axb5 axb5 14. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}h4$ h6 16. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 18. $\mathbb{W}a5$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 19. $\mathbb{W}xd8$ $\mathbb{E}fxd8$ 20.c3 $\mathbb{Q}a8=$ Wahls – De Firmian, Novi Sad 1990.

11... $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}g4$



12... $\mathbb{Q}xg4N$

A natural improvement over 12... $\mathbb{Q}h5?!$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}h6\#$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 15.c3 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}f5!$ when Black was under pressure in Kogan – Belov, Moscow 2002.

13.hxg4 $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 15.exd5 f5 16.gxf5
16.c3 is met convincingly with 16...f4!
16... $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}h6$

Black is doing just fine, and might well claim to have the stronger minor piece after the likely exchange of bishops.

11.axb5 axb5 12. $\mathbb{W}d2$

By contrast with the analogous position from line A1 in which the a-pawns were still

on the board, here it is more reasonable for White to play:

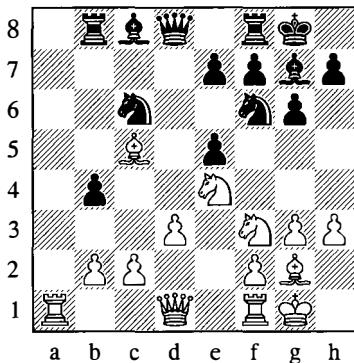
12.e5!?

The conflict in the centre makes more sense when White is already dominating the open a-file with his rook. Nevertheless Black still has nothing to fear.

12...dxe5 13.Qxc5 b4 14.Qe4

In the event of 14.Qa4, Sandner – Rogulj, Austria 2003, it looks quite promising for Black to play 14...Wc7 intending ...Qd8.

The present position was reached in Muench – Derlich, Bad Neustadt 1990, and here there are a couple of promising ideas for Black:



14...Qb5!?

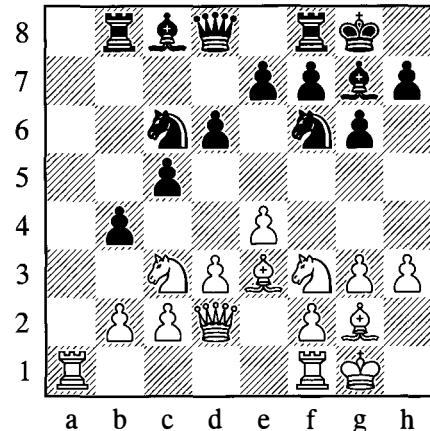
The straightforward 14...Qxe4N 15.dxe4 Wc7 also looks quite satisfactory.

15.Qxf6† Qxf6 16.Qe3 Wc7 17.We2 Qd8 18.Qfc1 Ra5

With equal chances. The e5-pawn is not weak, and is helping to control the central squares.

12...b4

The opening of the a-file could potentially benefit either player. In the short term it is ruled by White's rook, but since Black controls more space on the queenside, he should be able to mount a successful challenge for it in the not too distant future.



13.Qe2

This has been the most common move, although the knight does have rather limited prospects from this square.

13.Qd5 Qxd5! (Black could also consider 13...Qe6!? but the text move enables him to highlight one of the drawbacks of White's decision to open the a-file.) 14.exd5 Qd4 15.Qxd4 cxd4 16.Qh6 Qxh6 17.Wxh6 b3! Had White chosen to leave the a-pawns at home, this would not have been possible. 18.c4 dxc3 19.bxc3 Qf5 The strong passed b-pawn was the most salient feature of the position in Hertzog – Weis, Germany 1992.

13.Qd1 temporarily disrupts communication between the rooks, but White hopes that the knight will emerge to play an active role on e3. Still, in the time it takes to accomplish that goal, Black can simplify the position to reach easy equality as follows: 13...Qb7 14.Qh6 Ra8 15.Qxg7 Qxg7 (But not 15...Ra1? 16.Wh6! Re8 17.Qg5 Wc7 18.f4+–) 16.Qe3 Ra1 17.Qxal Wc7 18.c3 Ra8= Black was not suffering at all in Zvjaginsev – Dreev, Krasnoyarsk 2007.

13...Qb7 14.Qh4

14.Qh6 Ra8 15.Qab1 e6 16.Qfe1 Wc7 17.We3 was played in Inarkiev – Van Wely,

Dagomys 2008, and here it looks good to play 17... $\mathbb{Q}a5!N$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}a1$ $\mathbb{Q}fa8$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xa5$ $\mathbb{Q}xa5\bar{f}$ Thanks to his control over the only open file, Black can feel optimistic about the future.

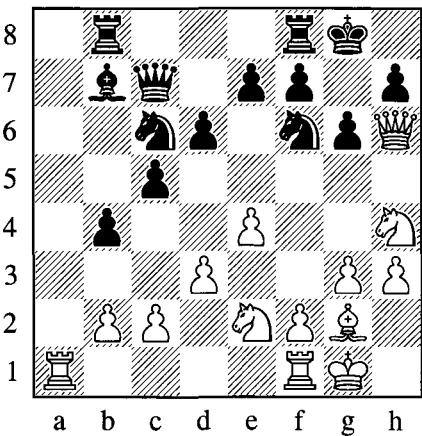
14... $\mathbb{W}c7$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}h6$

15. $\mathbb{Q}a2$ $\mathbb{W}b6$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}fa1$ b3 17.cxb3 $\mathbb{W}xb3$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}a3$ $\mathbb{W}b4\bar{f}$

15... $\mathbb{Q}xh6!?$ N

This is a promising new idea. Instead 15... $\mathbb{Q}a8$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ 17. $\mathbb{W}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}xal$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xal$ e6 was equal in Kritz – Alekseev, Biel 2005.

16. $\mathbb{W}xh6$



16...b3!

Black times his counterplay at a moment when White's pieces are ill-prepared for the conflict on the queenside.

17.c3

17.cxb3 leaves White with a shattered structure and Black should be better after something like 17... $\mathbb{W}b6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}a3$ $\mathbb{Q}a8$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}fa1$ $\mathbb{Q}xa3$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xa3$ $\mathbb{Q}a8$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xa8\bar{f}$ $\mathbb{Q}xa8$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{W}b4\bar{f}$.

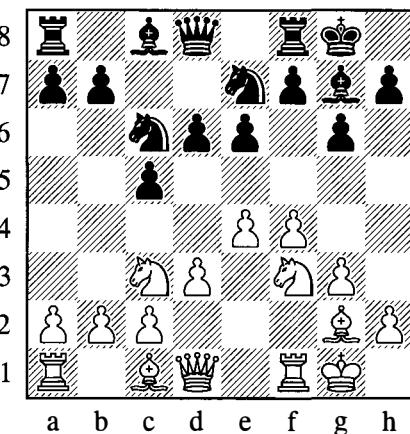
17... $\mathbb{Q}a8$ 18. $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}fc8\bar{f}$

White will struggle to equalize.

B) 6.f4 e6

As White is hinting at a possible pawn storm, I have chosen to recommend a solid set-up with the knight on e7, thus enabling Black to fight for some kingside territory with ...f5 if needed.

7. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}ge7$ 8.0–0 0–0



This is the basic starting position for the present variation. In general terms, we can say that Black can quickly finish his mobilization and is well prepared for most scenarios. White's main choice concerns the development of his dark-squared bishop, so we will divide the material between B1) 9. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ and B2) 9. $\mathbb{Q}e3$.

It is too early for an immediate pawn advance: 9.g4 f5! A useful rule of thumb for this whole variation is: if it looks like White may be threatening f5, then play ...f5 yourself! 10.gxf5 exf5 11. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$ (11... $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 13. $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{W}d7$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}ael$ b6 15. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ h6 17. $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ was comfortably equal for Black in Manor – Gelfand, Israel 1999, but he can even play more ambitiously.) 12. $\mathbb{W}d2$ Medina Garcia – Gadia, Malaga 1965. Here it looks good to play 12... $\mathbb{W}b6!N$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}abl$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}fe1$ $\mathbb{Q}ae8\bar{f}$ Black has completed the mobilization of his pieces, with pleasing results.

B1) 9.♕d2 b6!?

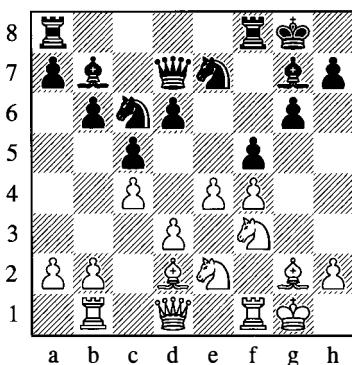
The standard 9...♝b8, intending ...b5, has been much more common, but the more modest text move is also quite attractive.

10.♝b1

This is a typical idea in the 9.♕d2 variation. The usual intention will be to prepare a3 and b4, although a secondary purpose might be to defend the b-pawn in order to facilitate the transfer of the c3-knight to the kingside.

10...♝b7 11.a3

Another popular continuation has been:
11.♘e2 ♜d7 12.g4 f5 13.gxf5 exf5 14.c4

**14...♞d8**

Black is spoiled for choice as he can meet White's challenge with different manoeuvres of his queen knight. There is also 14...♞b4!? 15.♗xb4 cxb4 16.♘fd4 (16.♗d2 ♜ae8 17.♗g3 a5+) 16...♞c6 17.♗a4 fxe4 18.dxe4 Menetrier – Mittag, corr. 1990, and now 18...♝ad8N 19.♗xc6 ♜xc6 20.♗c2 ♜de8 would have left Black with the more comfortable position.

15.♘c3 ♜e6 16.♗g5

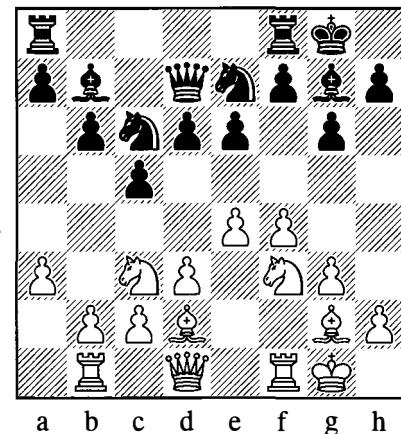
16.♗h3 ♜ae8 17.♗e1 ♜d8+

16...♞xg5 17.fxg5 fxe4!N

17...♝f7 18.♗f3 ♜af8 was more pleasant for Black in Spassky – Portisch, Mexico 1980, but the text is even better.

18.♗xe4 ♜d4† 19.♔h1 ♜xf1† 20.♗xf1 ♜f8
21.♗e2 ♜f5+

Black has a dream position, with all his forces active and working in perfect harmony.

11...♜d7**12.b4**

This is the most consistent move. In some games White has tried pre-empting the following knight jump with 12.♘e2, but Black can still play 12...♞d4! 13.♘exd4 (13.b4 transposes to the main line below) 13...cxsd4 14.♗e2 ♜ac8 with the better prospects, as seen in Balashov – Adorjan, Munich 1979. In the resulting structure the moves a2-a3 and ♜a1-b1 are almost completely redundant.

12...♞d4 13.♘e2

13.bxc5 bxc5 does not really alter the evaluation.

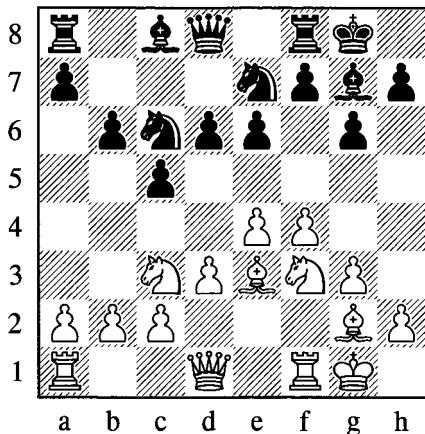
13...♜ac8

With a comfortable game for Black, Haenisch – Stillger, Bad Zwischenahn 1997.

B2) 9.♗e3 b6!?

For many years 9.♗e3 was almost an automatic choice, as d3-d4 was considered a significant positional threat. But eventually

players began to realize that this was not necessarily the case, and nowadays many experts believe the text move to be the most accurate at Black's disposal.



10.d4

This is the most principled continuation, although it turns out that Black is well-placed to meet it.

White can also aim for a more patient build-up on the kingside:

10.♕f2 ♔a6 11.♗d2 ♕d7 12.♗ae1

This looks more natural than 12.♗fe1 ♔ac8 13.g4, Starostits – Kulaots, Tallinn 2006, 13...♔d4N 14.♗ab1 ♔ec6 15.♗e2 ♔xf3+ 16.♔xf3 ♔d4 17.♔g2 ♔fe8† 12...♗ae8 13.g4 f5!

This is an important motif, which stems logically from Black's preparation for conflict in the centre and kingside.

14.gxf5

14.exf5 exf5 15.g5 d5 16.♗e5 ♔xe5 17.fxe5 d4 18.e6 (18.♗e2 ♔c6†) 18...♕d6+ Starostits – Almeida Quintana, Oviedo 2008.

14...exf5 15.♔h3

No better is 15.e5 dxe5 16.fxe5 ♔d8!† Black's pieces have great fluidity and can easily manoeuvre to the best squares, in this case e6.

15...d5! 16.e5 ♔d8 17.♗e2 d4 18.♔g2 ♔e6 19.h4 ♔b7†

Black kept the more harmonious position in Spassky – Atalik, Tallinn 1998.

It is also worth mentioning:

10.♗h1 d5!

This is a try for an advantage. There is also nothing wrong with 10...♔b7 11.d4 d5 12.exd5 ♔xd5 13.♗xd5 cxd4 14.♗xd4 ♔xd4 15.♗xd4 ♔xd5 16.♔xg7 ♔xg2† 17.♔xg2 ♔xg7 18.♗xd8 ♕fxd8 with complete equality, J. Polgar – Kramnik, Paris 1994.

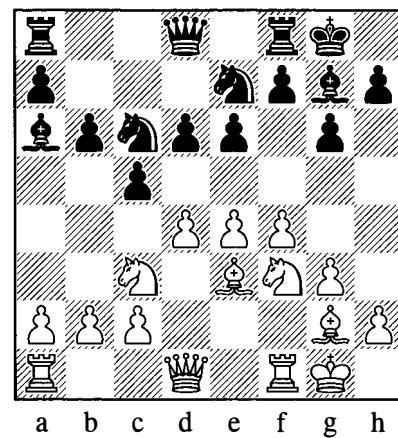
11.♔g1

11.exd5 exd5 12.d4? ♔g4† 11...dxe4 12.dxe4 ♔a6 13.♗f2 ♕xd1 14.♗xd1 ♕xc3 15.bxc3 ♕ad8 16.♗fd2 ♔e2 17.♗xd8 ♕xd8 18.♗xd8† ♔xd8

Black went on to exploit his opponent's shattered queenside in Augustin – Boensch, Leipzig 1979.

10...♔a6

Tournament practice has also revealed 10...d5!? to be a reliable solution, but I have chosen to concentrate on the preliminary bishop development. In certain positions Black may be able to benefit from a delayed but more effective advance of the d-pawn, backed up by a fully developed army of pieces.



We will consider both rook moves: **B21) 11.♗f2** and **B22) 11.♗e1.**

B21) 11.♗f2 ♖c7

11...cx d4 12.♕xd4 ♜c8 is also quite playable, but I think it is more interesting to maintain the tension.

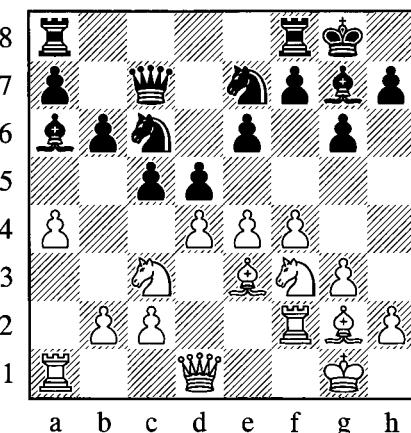
12.a4

This has been White's usual choice, with the obvious intention of ♜b5. At this point I found a strong novelty for Black – quite a surprise, considering that this position has been tested in a few dozen games.

12...d5!

This is the perfect timing for the thematic central advance, as White's pieces are in the wrong positions to deal with the early conflict.

In all the games on my database Black played 12...♝ad8, when best play looks to be 13.♗b5 ♜b8 14.♗d2 ♜b7 with approximate equality, Dovramadjiev – Liangov, Sofia 1996.



13.exd5

White has nothing better, as 13.dxc5? is refuted by 13...d4! 14.♕xd4 ♜xd4 15.♕xd4 ♜ad8 16.cxb6 axb6 when White drops a piece.

13...♝f5!

Black does not have to recapture immediately, but can instead take the opportunity to activate his knight while driving the enemy bishop to a passive square.

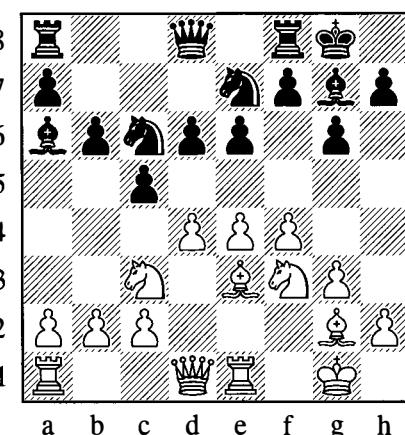
14.♗d2 ♜cxd4 15.dxe6

15.♗e5 ♜ad8 also maintains some initiative for Black.

15...♜xe6 16.♗d5 ♜d6 17.♗c3 ♜ed4†

Black's pieces are much more harmonious, and White faces a difficult battle for equality.

B22) 11.♗e1



11...♝c8

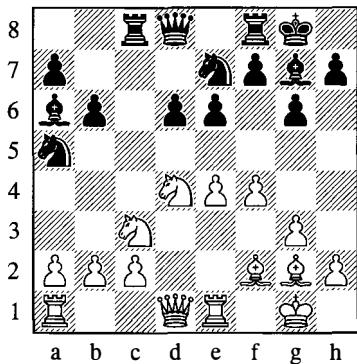
The position is exceptionally rich, and Black can try several different ideas leading to a variety of possible structures. One option is 11...cx d4 12.♕xd4 ♜c8, leading to a lively position in which the result is wide open. However, just as in line B21 above, I prefer to maintain the tension for a move or two longer.

12.a4

This has been the most common choice so I will take it as the main line, although many other moves have been tried. Here are a few alternatives:

12.d5 exd5 13.exd5 $\mathbb{Q}a5!$ (In the event of 13... $\mathbb{Q}b4$, playing to win the d5-pawn, White can respond with the tricky 14.f5!?) 14. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ This position was reached in Melendez Fierro – Martin Catalan, Spain 2006, and now Black could have secured a slight advantage with 14... $\mathbb{E}e8N$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{W}d7\#$ thanks to his more harmoniously placed pieces.

12. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ is another popular move, which makes a certain amount of sense as this piece can often become a target on e3. Play continues 12...cxd4 13. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ and now 13... $\mathbb{Q}a5!$ sets up the awkward prospect of ... $\mathbb{Q}c4$. Compared with the 11...cxd4 line noted above, you can see how useful it is that the black rook already sits on c8. The following recent game shows how quickly White may fall into trouble:



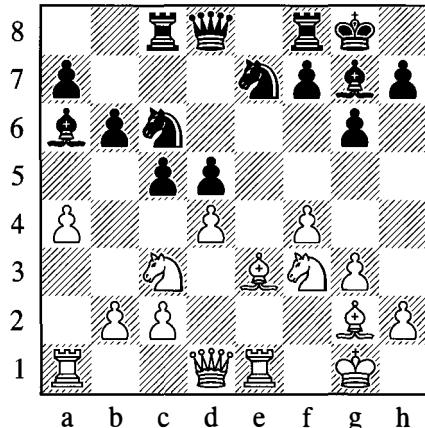
14. $\mathbb{W}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}d1?!$ e5! 16.fxe5 dx5 17. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ Inonu – Matlakov, Antalya 2009, and now after 17... $\mathbb{W}d2N$ White's position is close to collapsing.

12...d5!

Black has no reason to delay the pawn advance.

13.exd5 exd5

Black enjoys active prospects in the centre and has achieved good practical results from this position.



14. $\mathbb{Q}f2$

After the inexplicable blunder 14.dxc5?? d4 White was losing a piece and resigned immediately in Britton – Ward, Swansea 2006.

14. $\mathbb{Q}h3?$ only seems to have been played once. 14... $\mathbb{E}b8$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xc8$ $\mathbb{E}xc8$ 17.dxc5 $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 18.cxb6?? (White had to play 18. $\mathbb{Q}f2N$ when the position remains unclear after 18...a6!?) 18... $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 19. $\mathbb{E}xe3$ $\mathbb{W}xb6$ and White resigned in Torres – Niebergall, e-mail 2005.

14... $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 15.dxc5 d4 16. $\mathbb{Q}e4$

16. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ bxc5 17. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$ was pleasant for Black in Loevkvist – Sogin, e-mail 2007.

16... $\mathbb{Q}b4!$ 17. $\mathbb{W}d2$

17. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ bxc5 18.c3 was played in Rogulj – Jovanic, Zagreb 2008. Now after 18... $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{E}e8$ Black's strongly centralized pieces give him slightly better chances.

17...bxc5 18. $\mathbb{Q}xc5?$

Better was 18. $\mathbb{Q}e5N$, although after 18... $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{E}e8$ Black's strongly centralized pieces give him slightly better chances.

18... $\mathbb{E}xc5$ 19. $\mathbb{W}xb4$ $\mathbb{E}xc2$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ d3 21. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 22.fxe5 $\mathbb{E}e8$

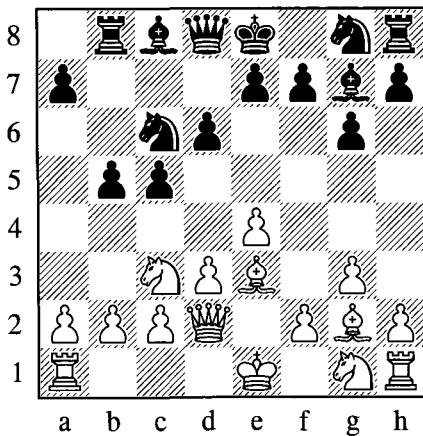
Black's advantage was close to decisive in Tischbierek – Avrukh, Biel 2004.

C) 6. $\mathbb{B}e3$

One of the great modern concepts for White in the Closed Sicilian involves the clever idea of exchanging the mighty bishop on g7, not only reducing Black's dynamic potential but also eliminating a key defender of the kingside. Fortunately for Black, the whole line has lost a lot of its sparkle as practical testing revealed the effectiveness of an early b-pawn advance.

6... $\mathbb{B}b8$ 7. $\mathbb{W}d2$

White seldom chooses to insert the moves 7.a4 a6 here, as the open a-file would almost certainly fall into Black's hands in the not too distant future.

7...b5

For the time being Black deliberately postpones the development of the g8-knight in order to frustrate White's intended bishop jump to h6. We will now consider three options, starting with C1) 8.f4, followed by the two knight moves: C2) 8. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ and C3) 8. $\mathbb{Q}ge2$.

C1) 8.f4

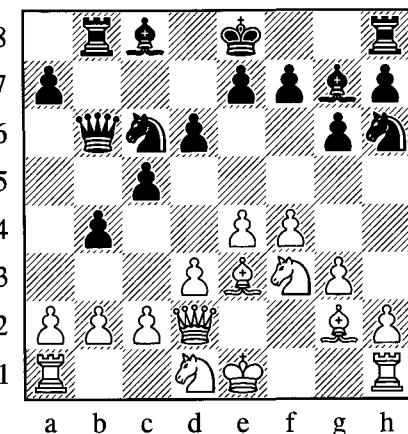
White abandons the $\mathbb{Q}h6$ dream in order to press ahead on the kingside.

8...b4 9. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{W}b6$

There are several good lines for Black, but this would be my choice.

10. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}h6?$

It is not only White who can aspire to kingside activity. The text move prepares ...f5, while incidentally preventing castling which would now cost White his valuable dark-squared bishop after ... $\mathbb{Q}g4$.

**11.a3!?**

Opening the a-file is a double-edged strategy, but in this position Nigel Short considered it to be worthwhile.

The main alternative is 11.h3 f5 12.0–0 0–0, leading to the same position but with the a-pawns still on the board. Play may continue 13.exf5 (or 13. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ e6 14. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 15.exf5 gxf5 16.g4 $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ cxd4 18. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{W}c5$ 19. $\mathbb{E}ae1$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ with approximate equality, Krapivin – Krylov, Vladimir 2008.) 13... $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}fd4$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 16.c3 bxc3 17.bxc3 $\mathbb{W}a5$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}b5$ Black was in control as his pieces became very active in Krapivin – Frolyanov, Zvenigorod 2008.

11...a5 12.axb4 axb4 13.h3 f5 14.0–0 0–0 15. $\mathbb{Q}f2$

15.e5 does not achieve anything after 15... $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 16.d4 $\mathbb{W}b5$!.

15...e6 16.Qe3 Qf7 17.Qc4 Wc7 18.Bf1 Qd8 19.exf5 exf5 20.c3 bxc3 21.bxc3 d5

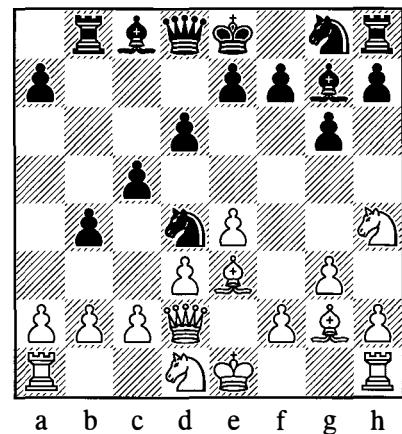
Both sides have manoeuvred logically, with White never coming close to any sort of advantage, Short – Kramnik, Wijk aan Zee 2005.

C2) 8.Qf3

If you feel this move is clumsy you are definitely not far off the mark. The knight will have to jump away in order to make way for the advance of the f-pawn.

8...b4 9.Qd1 Qd4 10.Qh4

The most ambitious move, although objectively it may already be time for White to admit he achieved no opening advantage and settle for a safe continuation like 10.0–0 Qg4 11.Qe1.



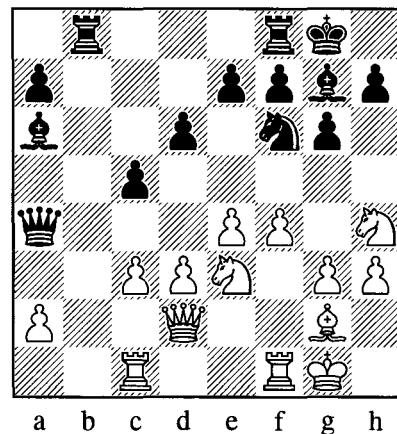
10...Wa5

Black's biggest problem is that he is spoiled for choice, with virtually any reasonable move leading to a comfortable game. Here are two such examples:

10...e5 11.f4 exf4 12.Qxf4 Qe7 13.0–0 h6 14.Qe3 g5 15.Qf3 Qxf3† 16.Qxf3 Qc6 17.Qg2 Qe6 18.a3 a5 19.axb4 axb4 20.c3 bxc3 21.bxc3 Qe5= Black's defence was a pleasant task in Smyslov – Portisch, Portoroz 1971.

10...e6 11.0–0 Qe7 12.c3 bxc3 13.bxc3 Qdc6 14.Qh6 Qxh6 15.Wxh6 Qa6 16.Wg7 Qg8 17.Wxh7 Qxd3 and Black was on top in Krapivin – Grachev, Moscow 2006.

11.0–0 Wa4 12.c3 bxc3 13.bxc3 Qc2 14.Qcl Qxe3 15.Qxe3 Qf6 16.f4 0–0 17.h3 Qa6

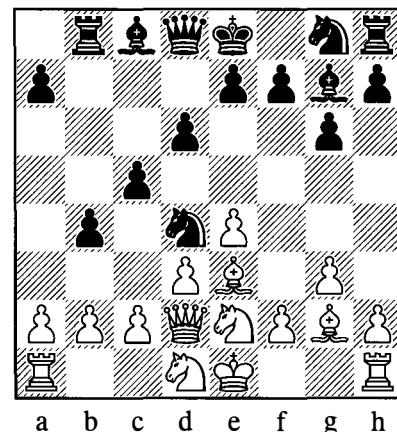


Black has clearly better chances thanks to his bishop pair and queenside pressure, Krapivin – Ulko, Moscow 2009.

C3) 8.Qge2

Of the three main options, this one fits in best with White's previous moves and has been by far the most popular choice.

8...b4 9.Qd1 Qd4



10.0–0 e6

Black can also consider the more creative 10... $\mathbb{Q}g4!$? 11.f3 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}a4!$? 13. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ when the two sides are experiencing a kind of stalemate on the queenside. One interesting game continued 13... $\mathbb{W}c7$ 14.f4 $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 15.h3 f5 16. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ 0–0 17. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ e6 18. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ with a full-blooded fight in store, A. Ledger – Neverov, Port Erin 2002.

11. $\mathbb{Q}c1$

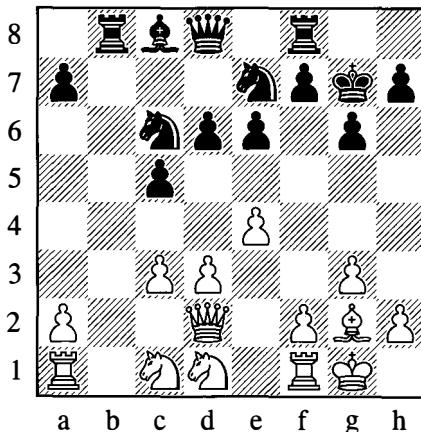
If White wishes to expel the enemy knight from d4, then he should almost always retreat the e2-knight first. Instead after 11.c3?! bxc3 12.bxc3 Black avoids any loss of time with 12... $\mathbb{Q}xe2\#$, and after 13. $\mathbb{W}xe2$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ White has made a dismal score from this position.

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

Having forced his opponent to make a couple of quiet moves, Black no longer needs to fear the bishop exchange. The b-file will soon be opening, and so Black should hurry to finish mobilizing his forces in order to fight for the initiative on the queenside.

**12.c3 bxc3 13.bxc3 $\mathbb{Q}dc6$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 0–0
15. $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ $\mathbb{Q}xg7$**

White has fulfilled his dream, but it did not bring him any hint of an advantage.

**16. $\mathbb{Q}e3$**

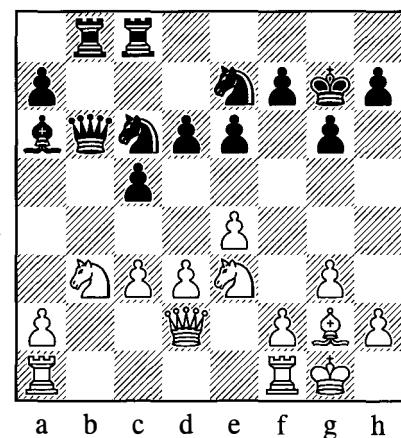
16.f4 f5 17. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{W}b6$ was fine for Black in Lorenzo de la Riva – Gelashvili, Balaguer 2007.

16... $\mathbb{W}b6$

Once again Black must choose between a few tempting continuations:

16... $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 17. $\mathbb{B}d1$ $\mathbb{W}a5$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{W}a3$ gave him nice play on the queenside in Brooks – Benjamin, Las Vegas 1992.

16...e5!? 17. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 18.f4 f6 19. $\mathbb{B}ac1$ $\mathbb{W}a5$ 20. $\mathbb{B}c2$ $\mathbb{B}b7$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{B}fb8$ Black combined control of the b-file with an ambitious central set up in Short – Hossain, Dhaka 1999.

17. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 18. $\mathbb{B}fd1$ $\mathbb{B}fc8$ 

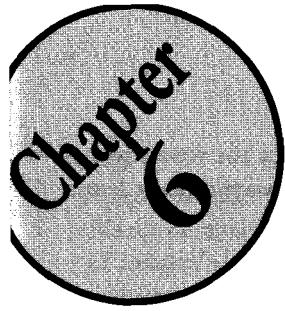
Black had every reason to feel satisfied with the outcome of the opening in Ljubojevic – Sosonko, Tilburg 1981.

Conclusion

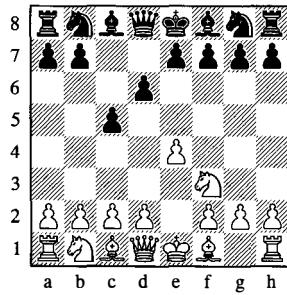
The closed system examined in this chapter contains potential that should not be taken lightly. Anybody who thinks that nothing bad can happen to the second player should take a look at the games from the Candidates match Spassky – Geller from Sukhumi 1968. Geller (one of the few players with a plus score against Fischer!) lost the second, fourth and sixth games in the 6.f4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ line, before switching to 6.f4 e6 7. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}ge7$ in the eighth game, which he managed to draw. In more recent times the danger for the defender has diminished, with deeper understanding and more clever play by Black.

I have presented three distinct defensive set-ups, each of which has been carefully chosen to counteract White's chosen method of development. Variation A, involving the somewhat clumsy knight move 6. $\mathbb{Q}f3$, was met with 6... $\mathbb{Q}f6$, enabling Black to develop rapidly and fight for the centre. Against the more popular variation B with 6.f4, I recommended the somewhat more robust and flexible 6...e6 7. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}ge7$, enabling Black to fight for space on the kingside with ...f5 when necessary. The third and final variation C involved the sophisticated plan of 6. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ and 7. $\mathbb{W}d2$. In that case we saw the g8-knight remaining at home for a while, while Black accelerated his queenside counterplay with a quick ... $\mathbb{B}b8$ and ...b5.

In all three cases, we have seen that sensible play combined with a few useful tricks should enable Black to look forward to a pleasant middlegame.



Anti-Open Systems



Fight Club - Various

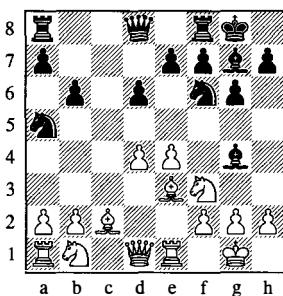
Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3

2...d6

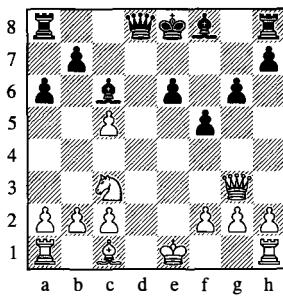
| | |
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| B1) 4.♗d3 | 105 |
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| C) 3.♗c3 ♗f6 4.e5 dxe5 5.♗xe5 ♗bd7 | 112 |
| C1) 6.♗b5 | 112 |
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A) note to 9.♗bd2



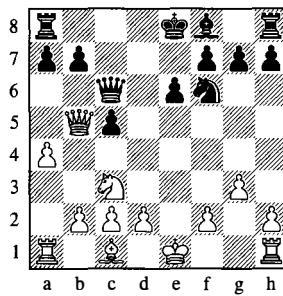
12...♗c4!N

C2) note to 11.♗e3



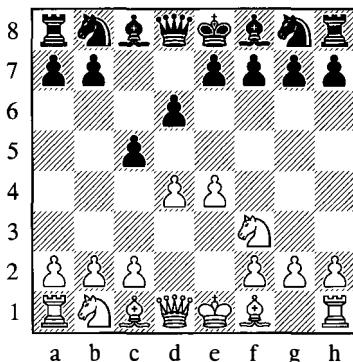
13...♗xc5!N

C32) after 13.♗b5



13...♗c8 or the cheeky 13...♗d7?

After the opening moves **1.e4 c5 2.Qf3 d6**, I imagine most readers would be shocked to see the following punctuation: **3.d4!?**



Despite being unjust, it may serve as a reminder of the strategic dangers associated with the white side of the Open Sicilian. White forgoes the slow attempts to win the centre and in a flash of inspiration opens the game – only to find himself bound to the concept of attacking Black's ramparts or risking a loss of his initiative followed by suffering in the endgame!

The present chapter should give comfort to all those who grew up on the games of Capablanca and Rubinstein and prefer a slower strategic fight to short-term gunfights that might win or lose the game before move 20. All three of the systems presented are primarily positional and solid, but fortunately for the Sicilian player, also a bit timid and not dangerous against a well-versed opponent.

A) 3.Qc4

The development of the bishop to c4 used to be sneered at, as players tended to perceive the line as too simplistic. However, in modern praxis even the strongest players have occasionally been known to turn to this positional treatment.

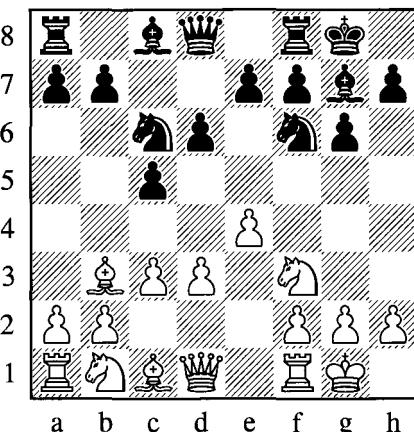
3...Qf6 4.d3 Qc6 5.c3 g6

5...e6 is also possible, but the set-up with a kingside fianchetto has brought Black better practical results.

6.Qb3

White can vary his move order, for instance by castling first, but in most cases the same position will be reached.

6...Qg7 7.0-0 0-0



8.Qe1

The alternative 8.Qbd2 b6 9.Qe1 only leads to a transposition.

8.h3

White prevents the pin along d1-h5 diagonal, but we should feel quite happy to see this move as I am recommending a set-up with the bishop on b7 or a6 anyway.

8...b6 9.Qe1

The immediate central advance does not bring much for White: 9.d4 Qa6 10.Qe1 e6 (The careless 10...Wd7?! allows White to obtain some initiative with 11.e5! dx5 12.dxe5 Wxd1 13.Qxd1 Wh5 14.Qe1) 11.Qbd2 (11.Qg5 cxd4 12.cxd4 h6=) 11...cxd4 12.cxd4 Qb4 13.Qc4?! (13.Qe3 looks like White's best chance for equality) Lowitz – Sommer, Bavaria 2008, and now 13...Qxe4!N would have won a pawn for Black.

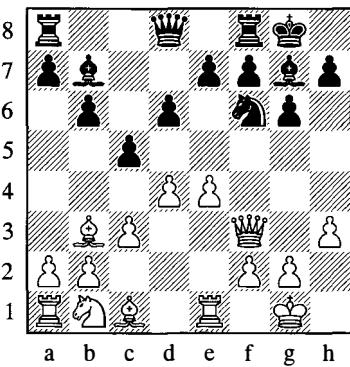
9... $\mathbb{Q}e5?$

9...e6 10. $\mathbb{Q}bd2$ $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ also brings Black a decent position, but exchanging a pair of knights should make his position more comfortable by reducing any congestion in his ranks.

10.d4

Exchanging on e5 would only saddle White with a backward d-pawn.

10... $\mathbb{Q}xf3\#$ 11. $\mathbb{W}xf3$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$



12. $\mathbb{Q}g5$

12. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ b5 13. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 14.dxc5 $\mathbb{Q}xc5$
 15. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 16. $\mathbb{E}ac1$ (Perhaps White should have preferred 16. $\mathbb{Q}b3N$ $\mathbb{Q}a4$ 17. $\mathbb{E}ab1$ $\mathbb{E}ac8=)$ 16...e5! 17. $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ $\mathbb{W}xb7$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ f5=

White was already struggling in Mainka – Edouard, Bad Wiessee 2008.

12...h6

Black can also do without this move: 12...b5 13. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{W}b6$ 14. $\mathbb{W}e3$ e6 15. $\mathbb{E}ad1$ cxd4 16. $\mathbb{W}xd4$ $\mathbb{W}xd4$ 17.cxd4 $\mathbb{E}fc8$ 18.f3 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 20. $\mathbb{E}cl$ d5 21.e5 a5 and Black had excellent prospects on the queenside, Totsky – Zvjaginsev, Samara 2000.

13. $\mathbb{Q}h4$ b5 14. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ cxd4 15.cxd4 $\mathbb{W}b6$ 16. $\mathbb{W}e3$ g5!

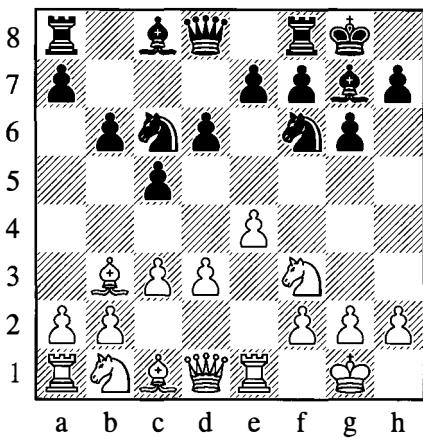
Black seizes the opportunity to force a favourable trade of minor pieces.

17. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}xg3$ 19.fxg3 $\mathbb{E}ac8=$

Without the dark-squared bishop it is White who is struggling for equality, Cicak – Popov, Sweden 2006.

8...b6

8... $\mathbb{Q}g4$ has also been tried in several games, but in general I prefer not to play this move except in response to d3-d4, when White's centre could become vulnerable.



9. $\mathbb{Q}bd2$

9.d4

This should also be considered as it forces Black to make an important decision.

9...cxsd4 10.cxd4 $\mathbb{Q}g4!?$

This might seem inconsistent with ...b6, but it is still the best way to exert pressure against White's centre.

11. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}a5$

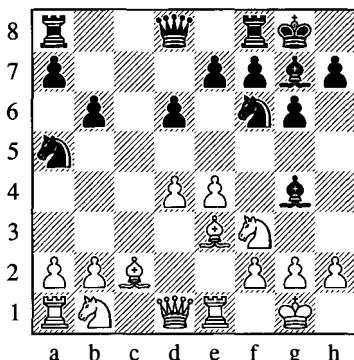
A couple of alternatives are also worth considering.

11...e5!N 12.d5 (12.dxe5 $\mathbb{Q}xe5=$)

12... $\mathbb{Q}d4!?$ This is risky, but very interesting. (It looks as if Black has a simple route to equality with 12... $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 13. $\mathbb{W}xf3$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ exd4 15. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$, but the position is also a bit sterile.) 13. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ exd4 14. $\mathbb{Q}bd2$ (14. $\mathbb{W}xd4??$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 15.gxf3 $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 16. $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}e5-+$) 14... $\mathbb{Q}d7!$ (14... $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 15.h3 $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 17.e5!?) 15.h3 $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ (16... $\mathbb{W}f6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}a4!±$) 17. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{W}f6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}c6$ $\mathbb{W}xb2$ with unclear play and mutual chances.

11... $\mathbb{Q}d7!N$ with the idea of ... $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ also deserves attention.

12.♗c2



12...♝c4!N

Black played artificially with 12...e5 13.♗bd2 ♘h5?! (13...♝c8?N 14.♗c1 exd4 15.♗xd4 ♜e7=) 14.h3± in Balinov – Salmensuu, Budapest 1999.

13.♗c1

After 13.♗b3 ♘xe3 14.♗xe3 b5 Black is at least equal.

13...♝c8 14.h3!

14.b3?! ♘a5! 15.♗d3 ♘c6?

In the event of 14.♗c3 ♘h5! 15.♗b3 ♘xf3 16.gxf3 e6 Black has promising play on the dark squares.

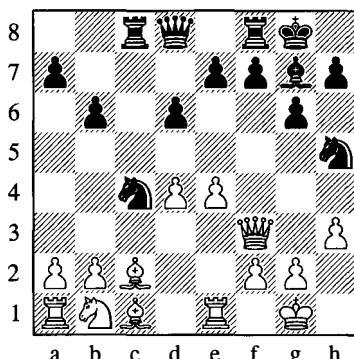
14...♞xf3

The cheeky 14...♞h5?! is amusing but probably not entirely correct.

15.♗xf3 ♘h5

15...♗xb2? 16.♗xb2 ♞xc2 17.♗c3 is promising for White.

15...b5?! looks reasonable though.



16.♗d1

Or 16.♗d3 e5 17.d5 ♘f4 18.♗f1 b5, with decent counterplay for Black.

16...e5 17.d5

Black is well ahead in development, although he will need to play energetically in order to avoid suffering on the weakened light squares on the kingside. Here is a sample continuation:

17...♘f4?! 18.b3 ♘a5 19.♗a3 ♘b7?!

19...a6 leads to roughly equal chances.

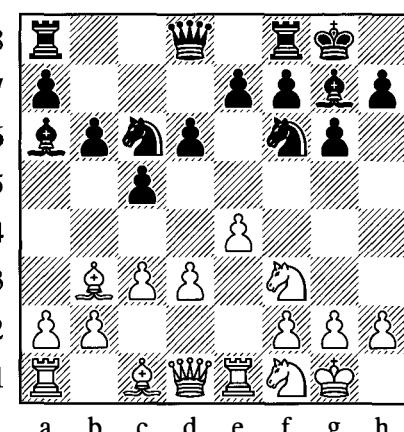
20.♗b5 a6 21.♗a7 ♜c3!

This leads to fascinating complications, with one key motif being the potential sacrifice on h3.

9...♞a6

It also looks quite reasonable for Black to play 9...♝b7 10.♗f1 ♜c8 11.♗c2 b5 The queenside counterplay is coming before White was able to take any action in the centre. 12.h3 ♘d7 13.♗d2 b4 14.♗c1 This was Delgado Ramirez – Dziuba, Internet 2009, and now Black could have fought for the advantage with 14...♞a6! 15.♗e3 ♘de5 16.♗xe5 ♘xe5 17.♗b1 bxc3 18.♗xc3 ♜b8? White is under unpleasant pressure on the queenside.

10.♗f1



10...♝e5!

Again we see this thematic move. It is all the more effective in conjunction with the bishop on a6.

11.♕c2

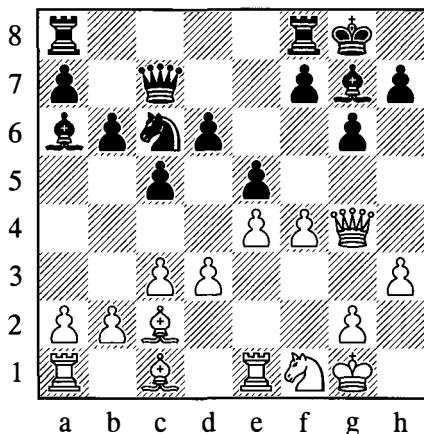
White is practically forced into this defensive move thanks to the weakness of the d3-square.

11...♗c7

It is also quite good for Black to play 11...♝c8, anticipating the subsequent opening of the c-file. The following example illustrates his chances quite well: 12.♕g5 h6 13.♕f4 ♜h5 14.♕e3 g6 15.♕c1 ♛f6 16.h3 ♜xf3† 17.♔xf3 ♛xf3 18.gxf3 d5 White was fighting to maintain the balance, Benjamin – Baklan, Moscow (2) 2001.

12.h3 e6 13.♗3h2 ♜c6 14.f4 e5 15.♗g4 ♜xg4 16.♔xg4

Here I found an interesting new idea:



16...c4!?

This looks promising, although it is not the only decent move:

16...exf4 leads to a relatively dry position after: 17.♗xf4 ♜e5 18.♗xe5 dxе5 19.♗e3=

16...f5?! is a daring move that sharpens the

conflict. 17.exf5 gxf5 18.♗f3 (18.♗g3 ♜ae8 19.♗d2 ♜e7=) 18...♜e7 19.♗g3 ♜b7 20.♗f2 ♜h8 This was Benjamin – Baklan, Moscow (4) 2001. The position is tense with approximately equal chances, and everything still to play for.

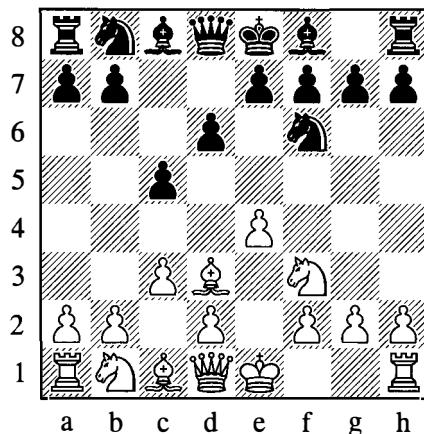
17.dxc4 exf4 18.♗f4 ♜e5 19.♗e2 ♜xc4 20.♗f2 ♜e6

Black has reached a pleasant Sicilian position with very little stress.

B) 3.c3 ♜f6

The attack on e4 holds up White's intended d2-d4, although please do remember that Black is not threatening to capture the e-pawn immediately due to the check on a4. In this position White normally chooses one of the following three moves: B1) 4.♗d3, B2) 4.♗e2 and B3) 4.h3.

B1) 4.♗d3



White intends to drop the bishop back to c2, followed by d2-d4, somewhat in the style of the Ruy Lopez. Perhaps he can even dream of a superior version of that opening, since the bishop will reach its intended square in just two moves, instead of the more arduous route it often undergoes via ♜b5-a4-c2.

4...♝g4

This highlights the drawback of White's set-up. The pin will make it harder for White to carry out his intended d2-d4 advance.

5.h3

White can also delay this move, in order to recapture on f3 with the other knight:

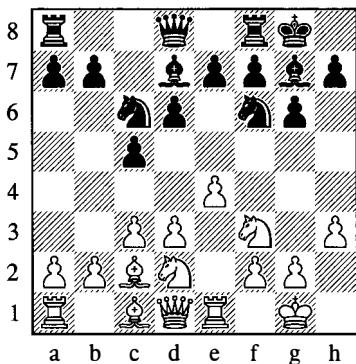
5.♞c2 ♝c6 6.d3 g6

Another reliable option is 6...e6, intending ...d5 leading to a comfortable French-type position with the bishop outside the pawn chain. However, I decided to focus on the set-up with a kingside fianchetto in order to maintain some thematic consistency.

7.♝bd2 ♛g7 8.h3 ♛d7!

Taking on f3 would fall in with White's plans.

9.0–0 0–0 10.♜e1



10...♞h5

Another decent option is 10...b5 11.d4 cxd4 12.cxd4 ♜h5 (12...♝c8!N was worth considering) 13.d5 ♜b4 14.♛b1 a5 15.a3 ♜a6 16.♝b3 a4 17.♝bd4 This was Akopian – Sutovsky, Moscow Rapid (2) 2002, and now after 17...♝c8 18.♛g5 ♜c5 Black's pieces are working fine and the chances are even.

11.♝f1 e5

Now the position strongly resembles a Ruy Lopez. In principle the present version should not be unfavourable to Black, as he has benefitted from developing his bishop

directly to g7, as well as the c-pawn to c5, both of which would usually cost additional time in the main line of the Spanish.

12.♛g5 ♜b6

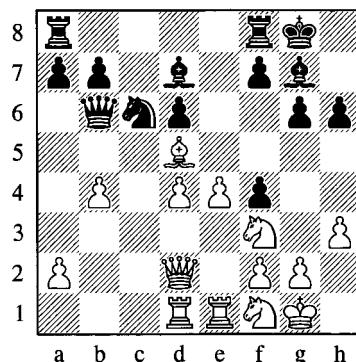
There is also nothing wrong with 12...♝f6N, for instance 13.♛h6 ♜g7 14.♛xg7 ♜xg7 15.♛e3 ♜c8 with equal chances.

13.♛b3 ♜a5 14.♛d5 h6 15.b4 cxb4 16.♛e3 ♜d8 17.cxb4 ♜c6 18.♛d2 ♜f4!

Black succeeds in justifying his 10th move.

19.♛xf4 exf4 20.d4 ♜b6 21.♛ad1

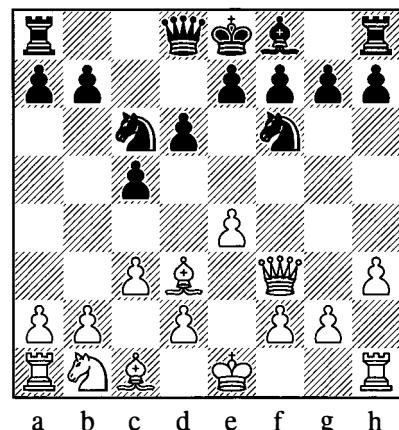
This position occurred in Akopian – Sutovsky, Moscow Blitz (4) 2002. Now Black should have played:



21...g5N∞

Black has a full share of the chances, and in the long term he might hope for some advantage based on the bishop pair.

5...♝xf3 6.♛xf3 ♜c6



7.♘c2

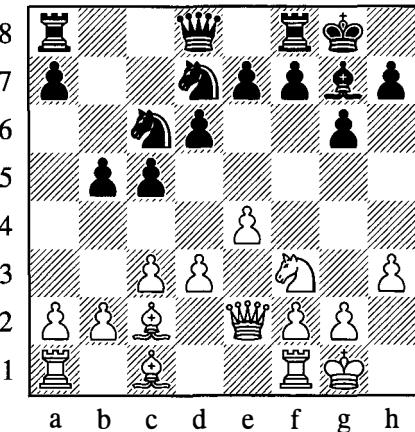
White does not achieve much with 7.0–0 ♘d7? (7...g6 is also fine) 8.♗b5 This looks a bit artificial, although Black should be fine regardless. 8...g6 9.♗d1 ♗g7 10.♘a3 0–0 11.♗xc6 (11.♗e3 a6 12.♗e2 e6= The second player has obtained a harmonious set-up and his pieces are working together. Can the same be said for White?) 11...♗e5 12.♗e3 ♘xc6 13.d4 cxd4 14.cxd4 ♖b6 15.♘c4 ♖a6 16.b3 ♘ad8 17.♘a3 d5= Black had the more harmonious set-up in Svidler – Vallejo Pons, Monte Carlo 2005.

7...g6 8.0–0 ♗g7

As usual, the kingside fianchetto works well. Black's control over the central dark squares, combined with the removal of the f3-knight, will make it hard for White to achieve the desired d4 advance.

9.♗e2

It is a similar story after 9.d3 0–0 10.♗d1 ♘b8 11.♘d2 b5 12.a3 ♘d7 13.♗f3 ♘de5 14.♗xe5 ♘xe5 15.♗e3 ♖b6 16.♗h1 ♗g7 17.f4 a5 18.♗c1 b4 19.♗a4 ♘fc8 Black's queenside counterplay gave him decent chances, Kasparov – Bosboom, Wijk aan Zee (blitz) 1999.

9...0–0 10.d3 b5 11.♘d2 ♘d7 12.♗f3**12...b4**

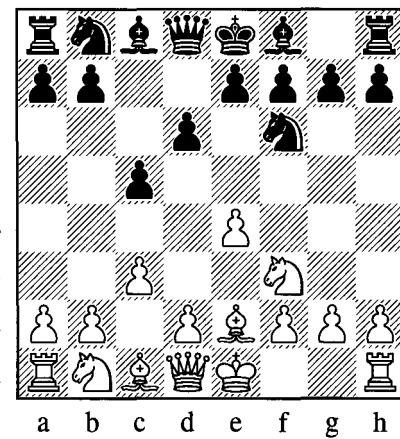
This immediate queenside strike seems natural, although there is also nothing much wrong with the slower 12...♗b6 13.♘d2 ♘ab8 14.♗fd1 b4 15.♘b3 ♖b5 16.♗ac1 ♘a5 17.♘c2 (17.cxb4 ♘xb3 18.axb3 ♘xb2 19.♗c4 ♗g7=) 17...♗fc8 18.♗g5 e6 19.♗f4 ♖a6 with a pleasant position for Black, Svidler – Popov, Tomsk 2001.

**13.♘d2 ♘b8 14.♗a4 ♖c7 15.♗fc1 ♘fc8
16.d4 bxc3 17.bxc3 ♘b2 18.♗a6 ♘cb8
19.♗d3 ♘b6**

We have been following the game Svidler – Van Wely, Polanica Zdroj 2000. The outcome of the opening can be evaluated as fully satisfactory for Black, who has succeeded in taking the fight to the queenside, preventing his opponent from utilizing his bishop pair and pawn centre in a truly effective way.

B2) 4.♗e2

Modesty is said to be a great virtue, so this fine move must have some merit...

**4...♗bd7**

By blocking the potential check from a4, Black makes the attack on the e4-pawn into a real threat.

5.d3

White does not benefit much from:

5.♕c2 ♕c7!

This ensures that White's dream pawn centre (e4-d4) remains a fantasy.

6.0–0 b6 7.c4?

This might appear strange, but the reason for it can be seen after 7.♕e1 ♕b7 8.d3 c4! 9.♗bd2 cxd3 10.♕xd3 e6 11.♕d4 ♕e7 when White's hopes for an advantage were nothing more than a pipe dream in Vujacic – Predojevic, Tivat 2001.

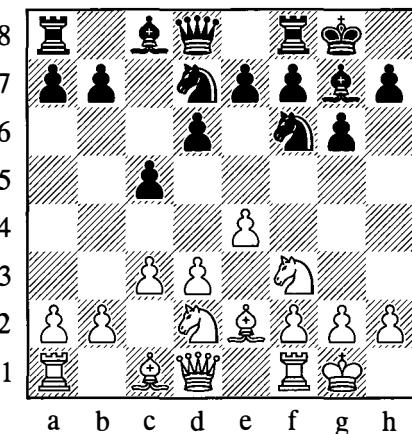
7...♕b7 8.♗c3 e6 9.d4 cxd4 10.♗xd4 a6

Black sets up the well-known Hedgehog formation.

11.♕e3 ♕e7 12.♕ac1 0–0 13.f3 ♕ac8 14.♕fd1 ♕fe8=

The queen on c2 is less than ideally placed, and Black generally has a harmonious position with equal chances, Azmaiparashvili – Kasparov, London 1993.

5...g6 6.0–0 ♕g7 7.♗bd2 0–0



8.d4

8.♕e1 b6 9.d4 ♕c7 leads to the same position. In general, it is hard to believe that White has anything better than establishing his strong pawn centre.

The slower approach does not bring White much joy: 8.a4 b6 9.♗c4 ♕b7 10.♗e3 ♕c7

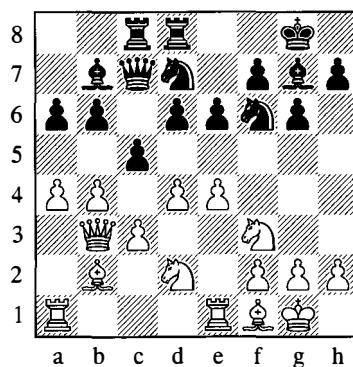
11.♕e1 (11.♕b3 e6 12.g3 d5=) 11...d5!

12.exd5 ♕xd5 13.♕xd5 ♕xd5 14.d4 cxd4

15.♕xd4 ♕c5= Black has managed to open the centre at just the right moment with very encouraging consequences, Kengis – West, Sydney Cepacol 1991.

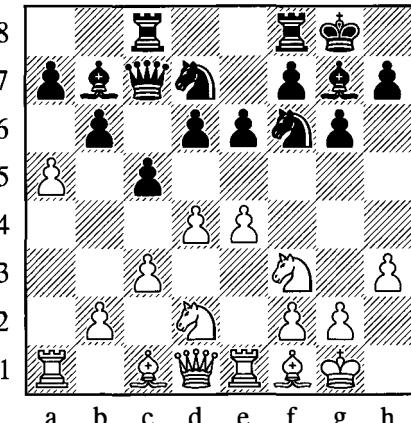
8...♕c7 9.♕e1 b6 10.♕f1 e6 11.a4

Another game continued 11.b3 ♕b7 12.♕b2 ♕fd8 13.a4 a6 14.b4 ♕ac8 15.♕b3, Pakleza – Wojtaszek, Krynica 2003:



Here it looks interesting for Black to try 15...h6?!N Black has a harmonious position, and tries to irritate his opponent with this unusual bishop development. Play might continue 16.bxc5 bxc5 17.♕ab1 ♕b8 with equal chances.

11...♕b7 12.a5 ♕ac8 13.h3



The game Kengis – Gulko, Vienna 1991, was agreed drawn here. This does not tell us much about the position, but it seems to me that Black should be fine. A plausible continuation might be:

13...cxd4N 14.Qxd4

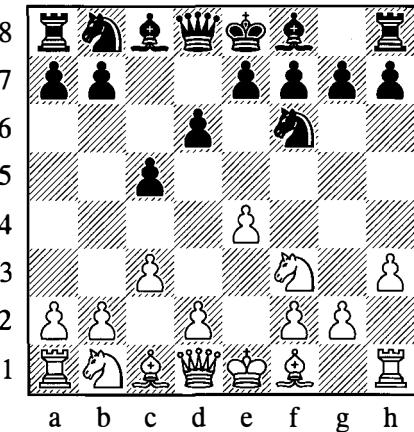
Taking with the c-pawn does not look too attractive as Black is in full control of the open c-file.

14...Qfd8 15.axb6 axb6 16.Qb5 Qb8=

White made some modest achievements on the queenside, but the b6-pawn is not really weak and the knight on b5 is not hurting Black. Meanwhile the second player has a harmonious position and can look for a suitable moment to break in the centre.

B3) 4.h3

White is aiming for an improved version of line B1. He intends to put his bishop on d3 after first preventing ...Qg4.



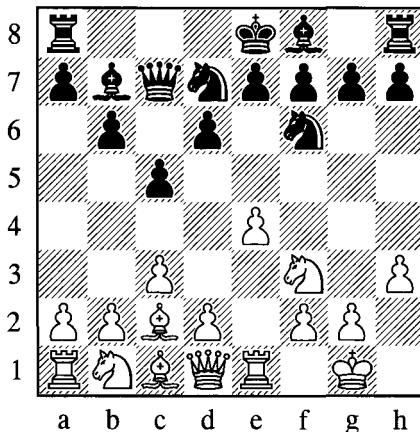
4...Qbd7

There are other good moves, but I would like to recommend a related set-up to that seen in the previous variation, but with something of a twist.

5.Qd3 b6

Here is the first small refinement: Black is developing his queenside before the kingside.

6.0-0 Qb7 7.Qe1 Qc7! 8.Qc2



8...Qc8!

With this, Black's strategy becomes clear. The second player is exploiting the position of the bishop on c2 to hinder White's intended d2-d4.

I also investigated 8...c4, as played in Arapovic – Stohl, Medulin 1997, but eventually decided it was slightly risky after 9.b3!N (The game continuation of 9.d4 was completely harmless, and after 9...cxd3 10.Qxd3 Qc8 Black obtained a comfortable Sicilian position.) White is trying to undermine his opponent's advanced c-pawn. Black's position is playable, but not quite as comfortable as he would like. A possible continuation is 9...a6 10.Qe2 Qc8 11.Qa3 cxb3 12.axb3 g6 13.Qb2 Qg7 14.d4± The asymmetry of the pawn chain is in White's favour.

9.Qa3

This must be the critical path, intending to play d2-d4 in one move.

In the event of the slower 9.d3, Black should play 9...g6 with comparable play to line B2 above.

9...e6

On this occasion the kingside fianchetto would be less appropriate. The point is that after d2-d4, Black may wish to react with a timely ...d6-d5.

10.b3!?

White continues with his queenside development before occupying the centre. Of course, we should also pay attention to the immediate:

10.d4

This principled move might lead to a small storm.

10...cxd4 11.cxd4

11... $\mathbb{Q}b5$ should be met by 11... $\mathbb{W}c5!N$ (This is clearly better than 11... $\mathbb{W}b8?!$ 12.cxd4 $\mathbb{Q}e7$, Andriasian – Garza Marco, Benasque 2009, at which point 13.d5! \pm would have been unpleasant.) 12. $\mathbb{Q}bx d4$ a6, when Black has a pleasant version of a normal Open Sicilian.

11...d5 12.exd5!?

This looks like White's only chance to put his opponent under any pressure.

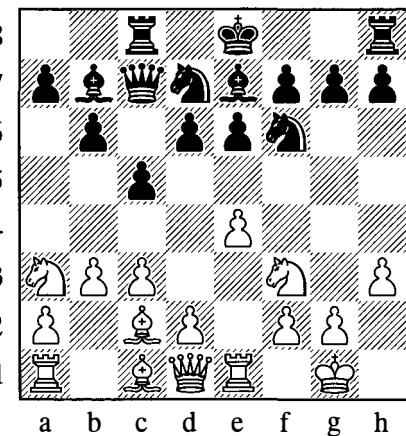
12.e5 achieves nothing after 12... $\mathbb{Q}xa3$ 13.exf6 $\mathbb{W}xc2$ 14.fxg7 $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 15.bxa3 $\mathbb{W}xd1$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ $\mathbb{Q}xg7=$ Black has nothing to worry about in the middlegame without queens.

12... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}xa3$

White should have preferred 14. $\mathbb{Q}e5!N$ $\mathbb{Q}5f6$ 15.bxa3 0–0 16. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{W}e7$ with mutual chances. White's bishop pair is balanced by Black's superior structure and firm control over the d5-square.

14... $\mathbb{Q}c3$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xd7+$ $\mathbb{W}xd7$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 17. $\mathbb{W}xf3$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 0–0–

White faces a difficult defence, Ovetchkin – Golubev, Internet 2006.

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

11.Qb2

It is also important to consider the consequences of the immediate:

11.d4!?

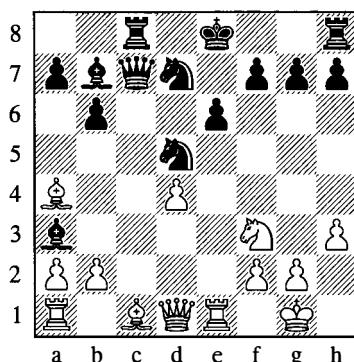
Compared with the previous note, the inclusion of the move b2-b3 leads to some significant differences as we will see.

11...cxd4 12.cxd4 d5 13.e5 $\mathbb{Q}e4$

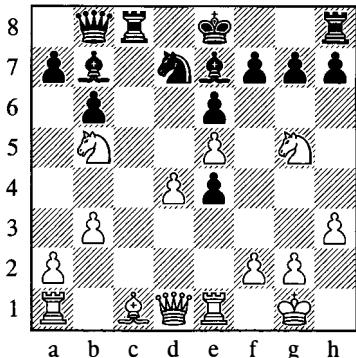
It is important to recognize that 13... $\mathbb{Q}xa3?$ is no longer a good move due to: 14.exf6 $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xa3$ $\mathbb{W}xc2$ 16. $\mathbb{W}xc2$ $\mathbb{Q}xc2$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}ec1\pm$

14. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$

This is the most forcing continuation, although perhaps White would be better off settling for the quieter 14. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{W}c3$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ (15. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{W}a5!$ is awkward) 15...0–0 when Black has sufficient counterplay thanks to the nuisance value of the queen.

14...dxe4 15. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{W}b8$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 

14.bxa3!



16...a6!

16... $\mathbb{Q}xe5?$ 17.dxe5 $\mathbb{W}xe5$ is possible, and after a lengthy analysis I concluded that it leads to equality. The text is more straightforward, and probably just a better move overall.

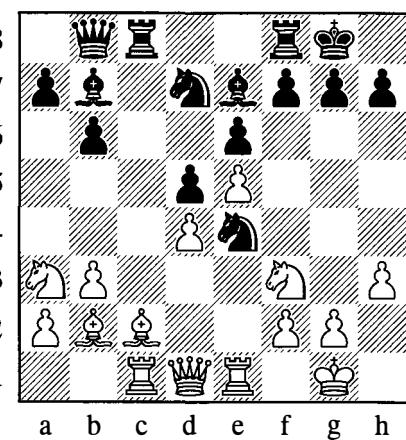
17. $\mathbb{Q}d6\uparrow \mathbb{Q}xd6$ 18.exd6 $\mathbb{W}xd6$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xe4 \mathbb{Q}xe4$
20. $\mathbb{E}xe4$ 0–0

With a bad bishop and isolated pawn, White faces a challenging defence.

11...0–0 12. $\mathbb{E}c1 \mathbb{W}b8$

By now White is fully prepared for d4, so Black anticipates the opening of the c-file.

13.d4 cxd4 14.cxd4 d5 15.e5 $\mathbb{Q}e4$



16. $\mathbb{W}e2N$

I believe this untested move to be White's best.

The first player must show some patience, as the immediate strike against the knight on e4 backfires: 16. $\mathbb{Q}xe4?$ dxe4 17. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ f5 18.exf6 $\mathbb{Q}xf6\uparrow$ Black's two bishops are a powerful force.

16. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ was played in Golod – Gershon, Ramat Aviv Modiin 2000. At this point I think Black should have played 16... $\mathbb{Q}b4!$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}bd2$ f5! 18.exf6 $\mathbb{Q}dx6\uparrow$ Black's active pieces give him the better chances.

16...h6?

This is a somewhat useful waiting move. From here I analysed a few possible lines, eventually concluding that the chances are about equal with accurate play from both sides.

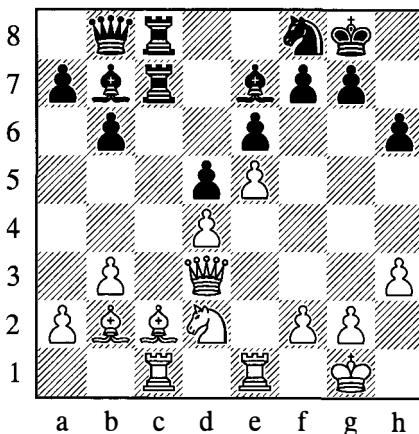
17. $\mathbb{Q}b1$

The cheap solution 17. $\mathbb{Q}c4?!$ does not work well for White after 17...dxc4 18. $\mathbb{Q}xe4 \mathbb{Q}xe4$ 19. $\mathbb{W}xe4$ b5 \uparrow .

17... $\mathbb{E}c7$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}fd2$

White is not helped by 18. $\mathbb{W}d3?!$ $\mathbb{W}c8$ 19. $\mathbb{W}d1$ f5 \uparrow .

18... $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ $\mathbb{E}fc8$ 20. $\mathbb{W}d3 \mathbb{Q}f8=$



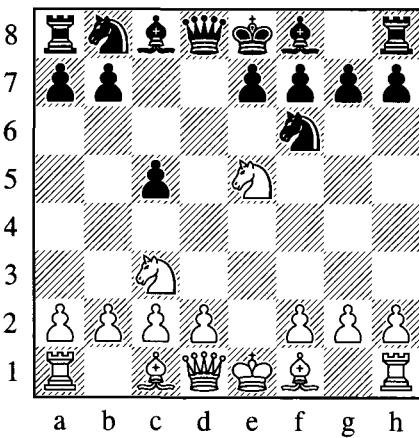
Black has successfully limited the dangers, and the position remains approximately equal.

C) 3.♘c3 ♘f6

From here, the play frequently transposes to the main lines after 4.d4 cxd4, but White can also keep the position in independent territory with:

4.e5 dxe5 5.♘xe5

White is aiming for active piece play, helped by his minimal development advantage.



5...♗bd7

Black immediately challenges the active knight. Now we will consider the following three moves: C1) 6.♗b5, C2) 6.d4 and C3) 6.♘c4.

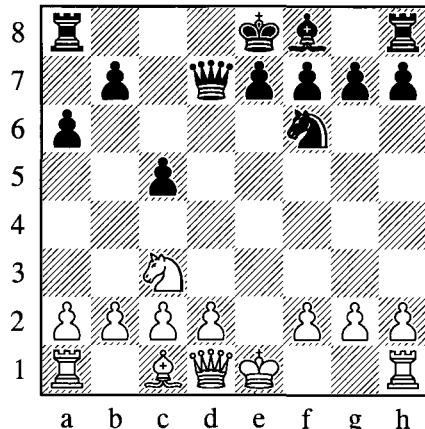
C1) 6.♗b5

Trading the bishop means express development, but White's chances for an opening advantage become negligible.

6...a6 7.♗xd7

It is hardly any better for White to play 7.♗xd7† ♗xd7 8.♗e2 (8.♗xd7 ♗xd7 looks like nothing to worry about) 8...e6 9.d3 ♘xe5 10.♗xe5 ♗d4 11.♗f4 ♗xe5† 12.♗xe5 f6 when Black has no problems at all, Hammer – Nordahl, Oslo 2005.

7...♗xd7 8.♗xd7† ♗xd7



9.0–0

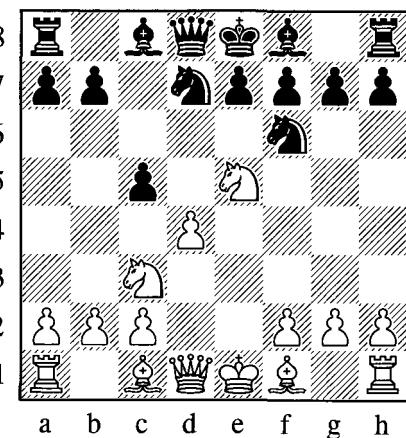
9.a4 e6 10.♗f3 ♗e7 11.d3 0–0 12.0–0 ♘d5 13.♗xd5 ♗xd5 14.♗xd5 exd5 15.♗e3 ♗ac8 led to dull equality in Landenbergue – King, Switzerland 2001.

9...e6 10.b3 ♗e7 11.♗b2 0–0 12.♗e2 ♗fe8 13.♗ad1 ♗c6 14.♗fe1 ♗ad8 15.d3

At this point the players agreed a draw in Teske – Bischoff, Germany 1999. The position is clearly equal, and there is not much else to say.

C2) 6.d4

This move demonstrates a bit more fighting spirit than the previous one. Black must take it seriously as all the White pieces suddenly enjoy great freedom and mobility.



6...e6

After 6... $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 7.dxe5 $\mathbb{W}xd1\uparrow$ 8. $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}b5\uparrow$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 10.e6 fxe6 11. $\mathbb{Q}xd7\uparrow$ $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ Black should be able to hold the balance but can hardly hope for anything more, Balogh – Mamedov, Budva 2003.

7. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ a6

I also spent some time looking at 7...cxd4 8. $\mathbb{W}xd4$ a6 9. $\mathbb{Q}xd7\uparrow$ $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}f4$, but eventually concluded that it was too risky for Black. There is no reason to assist with the opponent's development.

8. $\mathbb{Q}xd7\uparrow$

8. $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}xd7\uparrow$ $\mathbb{W}xd7$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{E}c8$ 11.dxc5 $\mathbb{W}xd1\uparrow$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{E}xc5$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ led to an absolutely level endgame in Tseshkovsky – Polugaevsky, Tbilisi 1978.

8... $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 9. $\mathbb{W}h5$

The threat of mate may appear alarming, but calm defence should enable Black to defuse his opponent's initiative.

9...g6

9... $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 10.dxe5 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ is solid enough for Black as long as he does not play ... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ before ... $\mathbb{Q}c6$, preparing to eliminate the white knight which might appear on e4. The positions are rather dull though, so I decided to focus on a slightly riskier, but still sound continuation, which leads to more combative play.

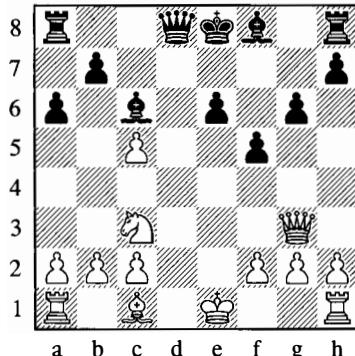
10. $\mathbb{W}f3$ f5!

This looks better than 10... $\mathbb{W}f6$ 11. $\mathbb{W}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ exd5 14. $\mathbb{Q}f6$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 15.dxc5 $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ when Black faced a tenable but slightly unpleasant endgame in Kotsur – Zhang Zhong, Jodhpur 2003.

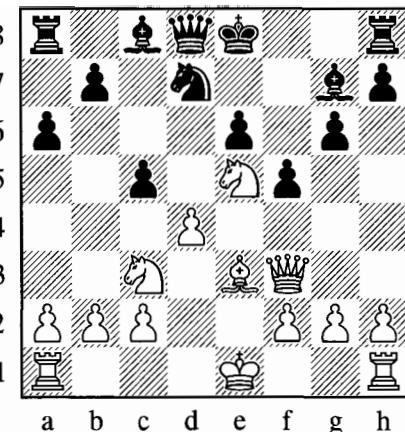
11. $\mathbb{Q}e3$

It is often White's prerogative to take the life out of the position. Here this can be

accomplished with 11. $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 12.dxc5 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 13. $\mathbb{W}g3$



13... $\mathbb{Q}xc5!N$ (13... $\mathbb{Q}f7?$ was the risky try in Sorensen – Aagaard, Denmark 2009. Now White should have played 14. $\mathbb{Q}e3N$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 15.0–0±, when Black has some problems proving compensation.) 14. $\mathbb{W}e5$ Black has to rely on the bishops in the following roughly equal ending. 14... $\mathbb{Q}d4!$ 15. $\mathbb{W}xe6\uparrow$ $\mathbb{W}e7$ 16. $\mathbb{W}xe7\uparrow$ $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ with sufficient compensation.

11... $\mathbb{Q}g7$ **12. $\mathbb{W}g3!$**

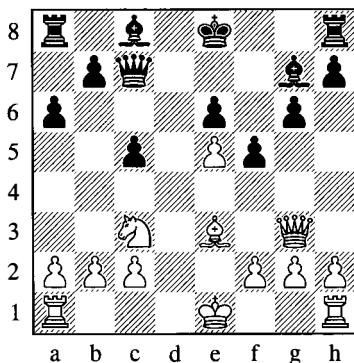
This is stronger than the more natural-looking 12.0–0–0?! cxd4 13. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{W}g5\uparrow$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 16.gxf3 h6 17. $\mathbb{Q}d8\uparrow$ (or 17. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ g5 18. $\mathbb{Q}d6$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}he1$ $\mathbb{Q}f7\mp$) 17... $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xh8$ $\mathbb{Q}xh8$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xh6$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$

when White faced a difficult endgame in N. Davies – Navara, Birmingham 2005.

12...0–0

12...cxd4?! leads to difficulties for Black after 13.♕xd4 ♜c7 14.♘f3 ♜xg3 15.hxg3 ♜xd4 16.♘xd4 ♜f6 17.0–0–0 ♜d7 18.♖he1 ♜f7± Black should be able to hold the ending, but it will not be much fun.

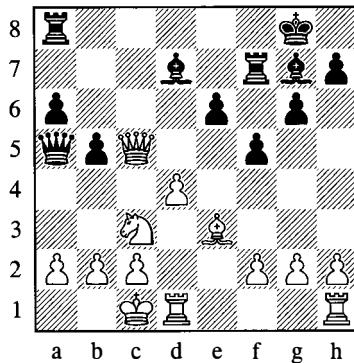
However, there was a viable alternative in 12...♘xe5!!N 13.dxe5 ♜c7



14.f4 ♜d7 15.♗g5 ♜f8 16.0–0–0 ♜e7 17.♗h6 ♜f8 18.♗h3 b5?! (18...♘e7 19.g4 fxg4 20.♗xg4 0–0–0 should be equal too.) 19.♗b1 b4 20.♘e2 ♜e7 21.g4 0–0–0 with chances for both sides.

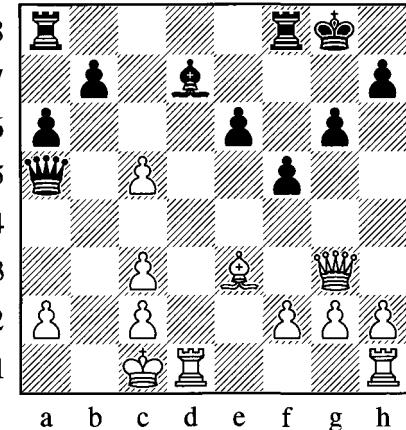
13.0–0–0 ♜a5 14.♘xd7 ♜xd7 15.dxc5

Another critical line might also end with a perpetual: 15.♗d6 ♜f7 (15...♘c6?! 16.♗xe6† ♜f7∞) 16.♗xc5 b5!



17.d5 ♜c8 (17...exd5?) 18.dxe6 ♜xe6 19.♗b6 ♜xc3 20.♗xe6 ♜xb2† 21.♗xb2 ♜c3† 22.♗b1 ♜xc2† with a draw.

15...♘xc3 16.bxc3



16...f4!

Preventing White's intended attacking plan with ♜e5 and ♜d4.

17.♗xf4 ♜c6 18.♗b2 ♜xg2 19.♗xg2 ♜xf4

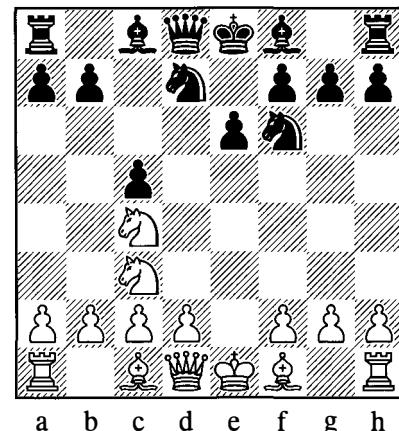
19...♗b5†? was the last chance to prolong the game.

20.♗xb7 ♜ff8 21.♗d7 ♜fb8 22.♗g7† ♜f8 23.♗f7† ½–½

Ruefenacht – Moser, e-mail 2006.

C3) 6.♘c4 e6

This natural move is the main line, although 6...♘b6 also seems fully viable.



Now White's main decision concerns the development of his kingside, thus we will analyse: C31) 7.♗e2 and C32) 7.g3.

7.d4

This move is nowhere near as threatening here as it was on the previous turn.

7...cxd4 8.♗xd4 ♜c5 9.♗d6†!

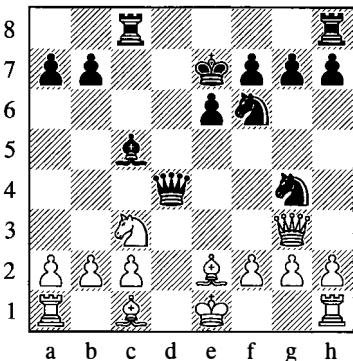
The check looks tempting, but only succeeds in helping the opponent to bring his pieces into play.

A safer approach for White would be to play for equality with 9.♗d3N 0–0 10.♗e2 ♜b6 11.♗e3 ♜xe3 12.♗xe3 ♜xd3 13.♗xd3 ♜d7 Black can complain about the weather, but certainly not about the position.

9...♝e7 10.♗xc8† ♜xc8

Strangely enough, the database shows that White has made a perfect score of 3/3 from this position. It just shows that statistics are not always to be trusted, as in reality Black has the upper hand.

11.♗h4 ♜e5 12.♗e2 ♜d4 13.♗g3 ♜eg4



14.♗xg4

14.0–0 runs into 14...♗d6 15.♗h4 ♜xh2† 16.♔h1 ♜f4 when White will have a hard time demonstrating compensation, especially given that his own king is now exposed. 17.♗b5 ♜e4 18.♗xg4 ♜xc1 19.♗g3 ♜xg4 20.♗a3† ♜d8 21.♗d3† ♜d5 22.♗axc1 ♜e7† The shooting exercise is partly over, the black king has survived and White will have to suffer.

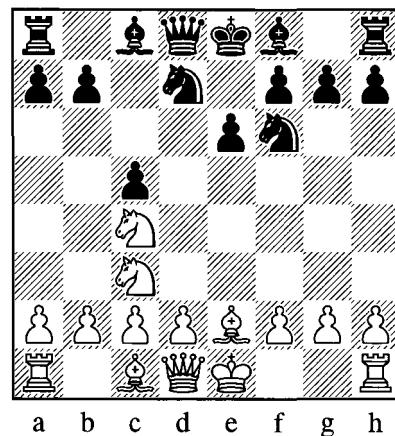
14.♗d1 ♜hd8 15.♗f3 was played in Andreikin – Mladenov, Plovdiv 2008, and now Black could have maintained the pressure with 15...♗d5!N, hoping for a favourable endgame, or 15...♗d7, intending to double rooks while keeping queens on the board.

14...♗xg4 15.♗xg4 ♜xg4 16.♗e4 ♜b6 17.f3 ♜f6 18.♗xf6 ♜xf6 19.c3 ♜hd8†

White must play with great care to hold the balance. He may have gone on to win eventually, but this had nothing to do with the objective merits of the opening, Browne – Mecking, Mar del Plata 1971.

C31) 7.♗e2

The bishop will usually head for the h1-a8 diagonal; the real question is whether it will be on g2 or f3.

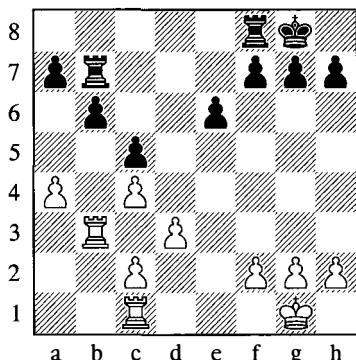


7...♝e7 8.0–0 0–0 9.♗f3

Alternatives are no better, for instance: 9.b3 ♜d5 10.♗b2 ♜xc3 11.♗xc3 ♜f6=

9...♗b6 10.b3 ♜bd5

The following game was an instructive example of the potential dangers lying in wait for Black. 10...♗fd5 11.♗b2 ♜xc3 12.♗xc3 ♜xc4 13.bxc4 ♜f6 14.♗xf6 ♜xf6 15.♗c1 ♜f4 16.d3 ♜xc1 17.♗fxc1 ♜b8 18.♗ab1 b6 19.♗b3 ♜b7 20.♗xb7 ♜xb7 21.a4

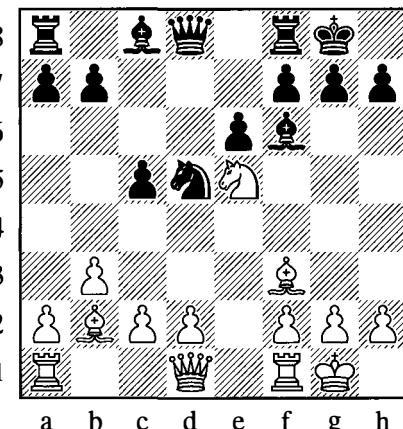


This was McShane – Gordon, British League 2009. Black should be able to hold this endgame, but at the same time it is a somewhat unpleasant task due to his slightly weak queenside, and in the game Gordon (a talented young Grandmaster) was unable to withstand the pressure.

11. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3$

This is the no-nonsense route to equality. It looks riskier for Black to play 11... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $exd5$ 14. $d4$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 15. $dxc5$ $\mathbb{Q}xc5$, Balashov – Loginov, St Petersburg 1998, 16. $\mathbb{Q}d3!$ N $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 17. $a4$ $\mathbb{Q}c6\pm$.

12. $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}e5!$



14... $\mathbb{Q}xe5!?$ N

This has never been played, but it looks to me like the simplest route to equality. Nevertheless, if the reader feels uncomfortable

relinquishing the two bishops, then he can also consider:

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

This is also quite acceptable, although it was necessary to improve over previous games.

15. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}b8N$

This idea of Psakhis looks like the most reliable method for Black, who intends to finish developing his queenside.

The following may serve as an instructive example of what to avoid: 15... $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xg6$ $hxg6$ 19. $d3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}e3\pm$ White had a nasty pull in Zvjaginsev – Wojtkiewicz, Tripoli 2004, and eventually won after massing his heavy pieces on the kingside.

16. $a4$ $b6$ 17. $a5$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$

I also looked at the riskier 17... $bxa5$ 18. $d3$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$, which may be playable but is hardly necessary.

18. $axb6$ $axb6$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}a7$ $\mathbb{Q}fd8\infty$

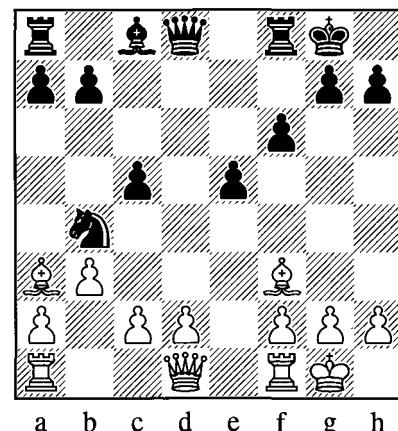
Black keeps a fair share of the chances (analysis by Psakhis).

15. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $f6$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $e5$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}a3!?$

This is an attempt to put the black position under immediate pressure before the second player finishes developing. The idea is interesting, but the black position holds up just fine.

Psakhis mentions the possibility of 17. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}b8!?$ With unclear play.

17... $\mathbb{Q}b4!$



18.c3

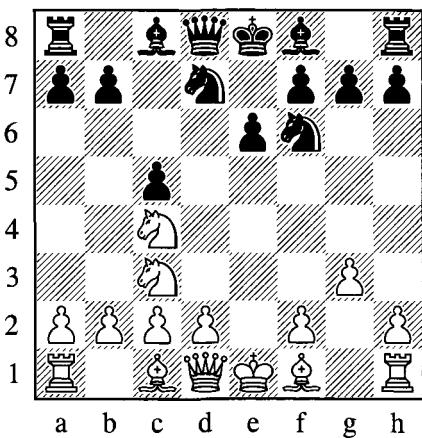
This certainly looks like the consistent follow-up.

18... $\mathbb{W}a5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}d3$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}d5\#$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 21. $\mathbb{W}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f4$

Black is doing fine here, for instance 22. $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ 23. $\mathbb{W}xb7$ $\mathbb{Q}d3$, with more than enough compensation for the pawn.

C32) 7.g3

White has similar ideas to those seen in the previous section. The positioning of the bishop on g2 instead of f3 introduces some minor differences, without altering the fundamental character of the position.

**7... $\mathbb{Q}b6$**

Black can also play 7... $\mathbb{Q}e7$, with similar play to the previous section, but I have chosen to show how the game might proceed after a different continuation.

8. $\mathbb{W}e2$

This move in some way justifies the decision not to place the bishop on e2, although it is not at all dangerous for Black – just like the alternatives:

8. $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ $\mathbb{W}xb6$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 10.a4 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 11.a5

$\mathbb{W}c7$ 12.0–0 $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ h5?! Black tries a speculative idea. He should be able to get away with it, although most players would probably have chosen a quieter continuation. 14. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ a6 15.d3 This was Sutovsky – Popovic, Internet 2004, and here Black should have played 15...h4N 16. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ h3† 17. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ with equal chances.

8. $\mathbb{Q}e3$

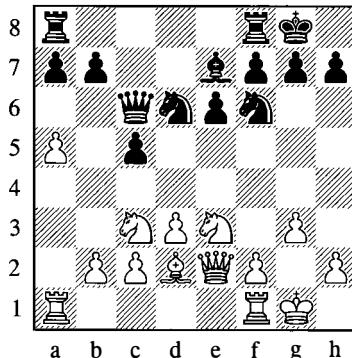
This has been the most common choice. White avoids simplifications and intends a4-a5, perhaps followed by returning with the knight to c4.

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

Black takes the opportunity to neutralize his opponent's powerful bishop.

9. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 10.a4 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 11.a5
11.0–0 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 12.d3 0–0 13.a5 $\mathbb{Q}bd7$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ b5 15.axb6 axb6 16. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ was played in Shaposhnikov – Shomoev, Dagomys 2008, and here I suggest 16... $\mathbb{W}b7N$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{W}xc6$ with a harmonious set-up for Black.

11... $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}xc6\#$ $\mathbb{W}xc6$ 13.0–0 $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 14.d3 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ 0–0 16. $\mathbb{W}e2$

**16...b5!**

There were quieter alternatives, but there is no reason for Black to be modest.

17.f3 $\mathbb{Q}fe8$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}g4$

This does not work out well, but it was not easy to find a constructive plan for White.

18... $\mathbb{Q}xg4$ 19.fxg4 c4!

Black succeeded in taking over the initiative in Bartel – Sandipan, Germany 2007.

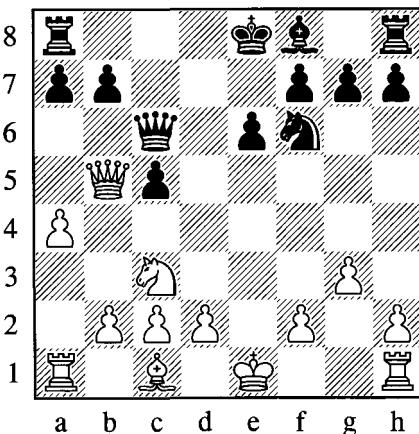
8...♝xc4 9.♛xc4 ♜d7!

Once again Black wastes no time in contesting the h1-a8 diagonal.

10.♝g2 ♜c8 11.a4

White secures some light squares and dreams of a favourable endgame. Other moves are possible, but in any case Black will just continue with normal development and equal chances.

11...♜c6 12.♝xc6† ♜xc6 13.♝b5



13...♜c8

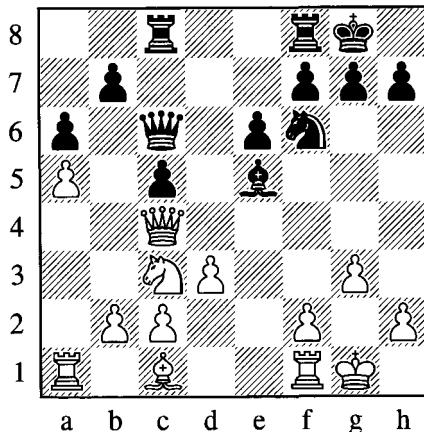
It was also possible to play 13...♝d7?!, as the attempt to ‘punish’ the cheeky king with 14.♝d3†?! is well met by 14...♝d6! with at least equal chances for Black.

14.d3

This position was reached in Hübner – Petrosian, Seville (5) 1971, and here I suggest:

**14...♝d6N 15.0–0 a6 16.♝c4 0–0 17.a5
♝e5**

The slight hole on b6 does not cause Black any real discomfort.

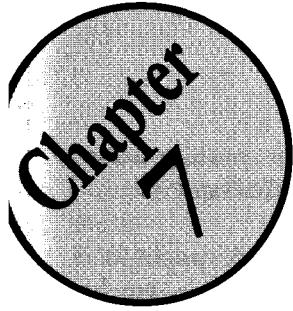


18.♝e3 ♜fd8 19.♝a4 ♜d4=

White is not getting anywhere in this structure.

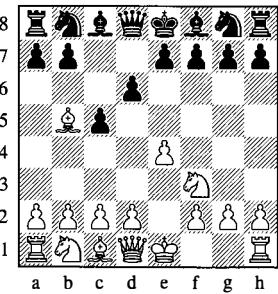
Conclusion

All three of the lines presented in this chapter have attracted their own loyal band of followers. The underestimated 3.♝c4 gives the impression of an Italian Game reappearing on the scene in different clothes. We have seen that the kingside fianchetto serves Black well here, and often leads to slower fighting in the style of the Ruy Lopez. The tricky line 3.c3 leads to an interesting struggle, but over time skilled defenders managed to prepare for the coming advance of White’s forces and avoid any problems. The last idea of 3.♝c3 ♜f6 4.e5 is suffering from its own ailment, since after the partial elimination of the pawn centre Black just needs to combine sensible moves with a bit of precise knowledge to obtain a pleasantly playable position.



Anti-Open Systems

Blade Runner - 3.♗b5†



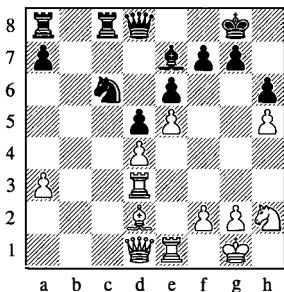
Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.♗b5†

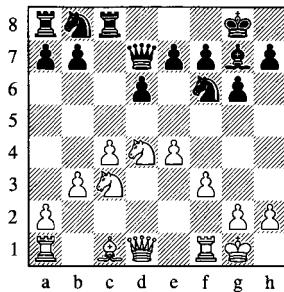
3...♗d7 4.♗xd7† ♕xd7

| | |
|---|-----|
| A) 5.0–0 ♜c6 6.c3 ♜f6 | 120 |
| A1) 7.♗e1 | 121 |
| A2) 7.♗e2 | 123 |
| A3) 7.d4!? | 125 |
| B) 5.c4 ♜c6 6.d4 cxd4 7.♗xd4 g6 8.♗c3 ♛g7 | 127 |
| B1) 9.♗e3 | 128 |
| B2) 9.♗de2 | 129 |

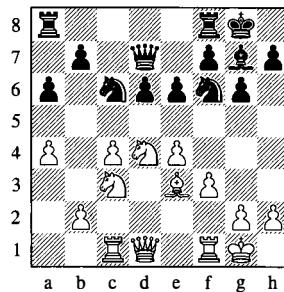
A1) after 20.bxa3



B) note to 5...♜c6



B1) after 13.♗c1



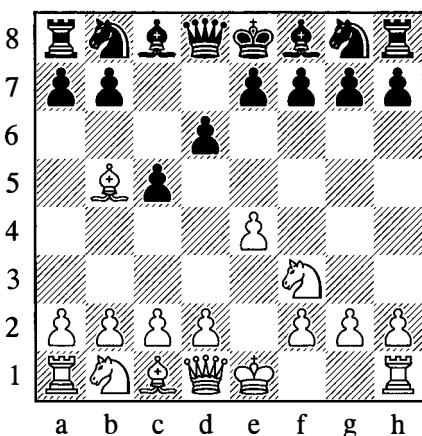
20...♝ab8N

11...d5!

13...♝fc8?N

Chess can be a brutal game – not only players, but also moves and ideas have to fight for recognition in a crowded and increasingly competitive field. Take the line forming the subject of the present chapter:

1.e4 c5 2.♗f3 d6 3.♗b5†



White's seemingly modest idea of an early bishop check has never really excited the crowds in the same way as the more aggressive alternatives. Nevertheless, despite the lack of obvious spark the system grew into a comprehensive concept with strong strategic features and independent challenges for the defender. I have chosen to recommend a tried and tested defence:

3...♗d7 4.♗xd7†

White players are occasionally testing two other moves as well.

Somewhat unimpressive is 4.c4 ♗xb5 5.cxb5 ♗f6 6.♗c3 g6 7.0–0 ♗g7 8.d4 cxd4 9.♗xd4 ♗bd7 10.♗e2 0–0 11.♗d1 ♗c7 (Black is also enjoying easy equality after 11...♗c8 12.♗h1 ♗c7 13.♗g5 h6 14.♗h4 e6 15.f3 d5 16.exd5 exd5 17.♗g3 ♗c4, Moutousis – Macieja, Aghia Pelagia 2004.) 12.♗e3 ♗e5 13.♗ac1 ♗fc8 14.h3 ♗a5 15.♗b3 ♗d8 16.♗d4 ♗h5 17.g3 e6 18.♗g2 ♗c4 Black has no problems thanks

to his opponent's inferior pawn structure, Romanishin – Kupreichik, Yerevan 1982.

More popular, though still not dangerous, is 4.a4 ♗c6 (4...♗f6 is also playable, but has given worse results in practice.) 5.0–0 (Another game continued 5.d3 g6 6.0–0 ♗g7 7.♗bd2 ♗f6 8.♗c4 0–0 9.♗e1 a6 10.♗xc6 ♗xc6 11.a5 d5 12.exd5 ♗xd5 13.c3 ♗c7 14.♗fe5 ♗b5 Black's bishop pair enabled him to fight for more than equality in Wall – Shirov, West Bromwich 2005.) 5...♗f6 6.♗e1 e6 7.d3 ♗e7 8.♗bd2 0–0 9.b3 b6 10.♗b2 a6 11.♗xc6 ♗xc6 12.d4 d5 13.exd5 ♗xd5 14.♗e2 cxd4 15.♗xd4 ♗b7 16.♗ad1 ♗c7 17.c4 ♗b4 White already had to work for equality in Becerra Rivero – Arun Prasad, Philadelphia 2008.

4...♗xd7

This is known to be one of the most reliable systems at Black's disposal. It has only one small Achilles' heel: the light-squared bishop is gone and the major part of Black's central control pawn chain is, for the time being at least, based on the dark squares. Fortunately Black can adapt the defence accordingly, with good chances to obtain an interesting position with bright prospects. White has to choose between two different worlds, involving either c3 or c4. The build-up on the light squares tends to be more popular, but in both cases Black keeps a very sound position. Prejudices aside, White's third move might be a bit bland after all!

Now White must chose between A) 5.0–0 and B) 5.c4.

A) 5.0–0 ♗c6 6.c3

Attempting to take over the centre is White's most natural and logical plan. Nevertheless he occasionally tries:

6.b3 ♗f6 7.♗e1 g6

Black prepares to counter his opponent's impending fianchetto.

8.c3?

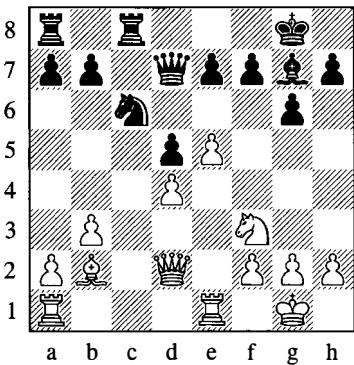
White switches plan, hoping that in the ensuing structure Black's bishop will be less than ideally placed in g7.

8...♝g7 9.d4 cxd4 10.cxd4 d5

Despite the slightly unusual position of the bishop, this standard reaction works fine.

11.e5 ♘e4 12.♗b2 0–0 13.♗bd2 ♖xd2
14.♖xd2 ♜fc8!

It is important to use this rook, for reasons that will soon be revealed.



15.h3

15.♖ac1 ♘d8! This is why it was better to move the f-rook to c8; Black executes the thematic knight manoeuvre without breaking the coordination of his rooks. 16.♕a3 ♘e6 17.♗e3 (17.♗b4? ♘f4!) 17...h6 18.h3 a5= Degraeve – Lautier, Marseille 2001.

15...♘d8

Once again the knight is headed for the ideal e6-square. This thematic manoeuvre solves all Black's problems and ensures a comfortable game.

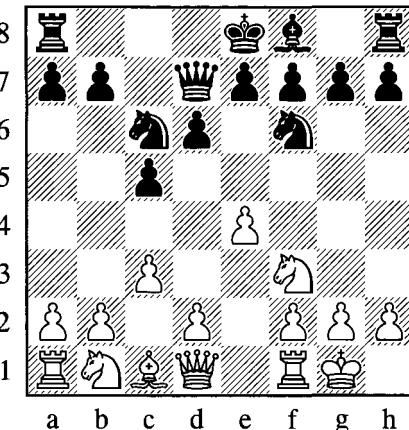
16.♖ac1 ♘e6 17.♕a3 ♘f8 18.♗h2 ♕xc1
19.♕xc1 a5

Also perfectly fine was 19...♕c8 20.♕xc8 ♕xc8 21.♗g4 ♕c6 22.♗e3 b6= Adams – Ftacnik, Germany 1999.

20.♗f1 a4 21.♗b4 axb3 22.axb3 h5=

Black had no problems in Adams – Anand, Dortmund 2001.

6...♝f6



Now White can defend his e-pawn with either A1) 7.♗e1 or A2) 7.♗e2, or sacrifice it with A3) 7.d4!?.

A1) 7.♗e1 e6

This is the typical response to White's planned expansion in the centre. Black intends to position his pawns on the light squares in the style of the French Defence, having already exchanged his bad bishop for the opponent's good one.

8.d4 cxd4 9.cxd4 d5 10.e5

Other moves would see White fall into a dubious IQP position.

10...♘e4

Players wishing to keep more complexity in the position may choose to investigate 10...♘g8!?, but I have chosen to focus on the main line.

11.♗bd2

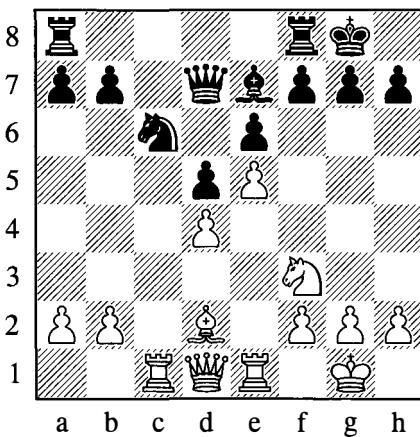
White has tried a few other ideas, but most can be met with simple, common sense replies.

11...♖xd2 12.♗xd2 ♘e7 13.♗c1

13.♗g5 0–0 14.♗xe7 ♖xe7 is close to equal but marginally favourable to Black, as the d4-pawn is slightly weak.

13...0–0

Black has the makings of a significantly improved French-type position. The exchange of light-squared bishops is a serious achievement, and the removal of a pair of knights helps to reduce any feelings of congestion within his position. If White does not come up with an active plan then he will simply be a bit worse, so the following move is critical.



14.♖c3!

The rook prepares to swing to the kingside to assist in an attack. This is the only way to challenge the black position, although the drawback of this plan is that if the attack fails, the white pieces might end up misplaced on the kingside.

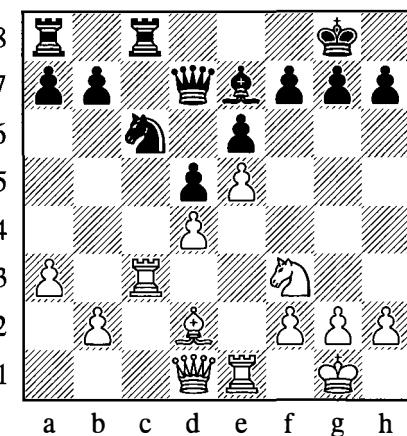
14...♖fc8

I think this is the right rook. It might appear dangerous to move a defender away from the kingside, but it is actually quite useful to free the f8-square for the bishop or even the queen.

15.a3

This has been the usual choice, taking a

moment to restrict Black's minor pieces. Another option is 15.h4 ♖f8 16.a3 b5! The advance of the b-pawn is one of Black's key resources in this line, which makes for an effective distraction before White's kingside attack gathers steam. 17.♗d3 b4 18.♗g5 h6 19.♗h3 (or 19.♗f3 ♕ab8 20.axb4 ♖xb4??) 19...bxa3 20.bxa3 ♗e7?? Colovic – Arizmendi Martinez, Malaga 2005.



15...b5

Again this typical move works well, although I will mention in passing that the alternative 15...♗d8!! has also scored highly for Black.

16.♗d3 ♖d8

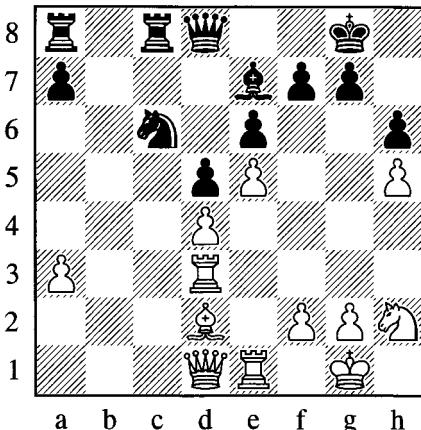
From this square the queen can influence events on either side of the board.

17.h4 h6

The greedy 17...♗xh4?? was seen in Laurent – Van der Stricht, Namur 2006, and a few subsequent games. The move is certainly playable, although such an approach carries obvious risks. Here I find it strange that no-one seems to have tried 18.♗xh4N ♖xh4 19.♗c3, intending to bring the heavy pieces into the attack, for instance: 19...♕ab8 20.♗h3 ♖g5 21.♗g3 ♖d8 22.♗g4 g6 23.♗h3?? The number of defenders around the black king is quite modest.

18.h5 b4 19.♕h2 bxa3 20.bxa3

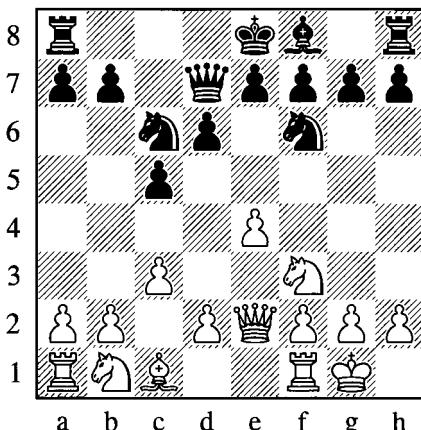
We have been following the game Mamedov – Sjugirov, Kirishi 2005. At this point I found a simple improvement for Black:

**20...♝ab8N 21.♛g4 ♜h8#**

Black's queenside pieces are ideally placed to control that side of the board, while his kingside is not in serious danger. It is worth noting the useful manoeuvre ...♝g8-h7, for active and defensive purposes.

A2) 7.♛e2

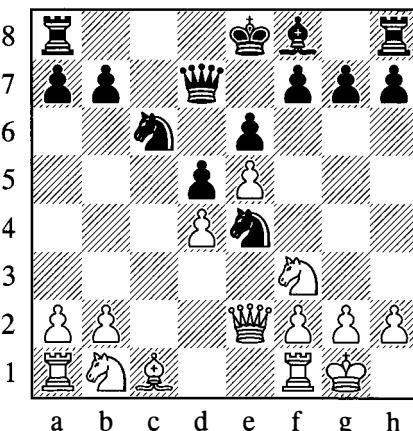
This time White hopes that his queen will be well placed in the centre, while keeping some other options open for the rook.

**7...e6**

Black sticks to the same plan as in the previous line. However, we will see that White's seventh move will facilitate an entirely different way for him to approach the position.

8.d4 cxd4 9.cxd4 d5 10.e5 ♔e4

Once again this is the main line, although 10...♝g8? is also possible and was once tested by Topalov.

**11.♗e3!**

11.♗bd2 ♔xd2 12.♗xd2 ♔e7 is harmless and can be compared with the previous section. The text move is more challenging – instead of merely exchanging the centralized enemy knight, White is hoping to expose that piece as misplaced by preparing f3. This certainly keeps the game interesting although Black should be okay with correct defence.

11...♔e7 12.♗e1 f6!

Securing a safe retreat for the knight on g5 and, if necessary, f7.

13.f3 ♔g5 14.♗d3 fxe5

Black can also block the centre with 14...♗f7 15.f4 f5 16.♗d2 0-0 17.♗f3 ♛ac8, Iuldachev – Hracek, Calvia (ol) 2004. Now a logical continuation would be 18.♗ac1N (the game continuation of 18.♗c5? lost a pawn after

18... $\mathbb{Q}xd4$! 19. $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ $\mathbb{Q}xe2\#$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}fd8\#$
 18... $b6$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{W}b7$ 20. $\mathbb{W}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 21. $b4$ $\mathbb{Q}fc8\#$

With such a central structure Black obviously benefits from the exchange of light-squared bishops. Nevertheless White has a solid space advantage which promises him slightly better chances.

It should be mentioned that Black often castles before exchanging on e5; this is perfectly fine and will usually transpose to the main line below.

15.dxe5

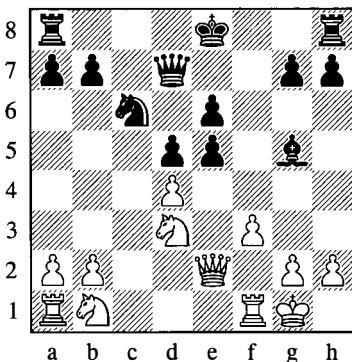
Occasionally White has taken with the knight, but this seems illogical as the d3-knight is certainly not weaker than the one on c6.

It is also worth considering:

15.xg5

This should not worry Black at all, but we will check a few lines all the same.

15... ♕xg5



16.f4?

This looks like a principled move, but in reality it is just a mistake. Nevertheless it has been White's most popular choice in the diagram position, so I will consider it as the main line in order to focus the spotlight on refuting it.

16.dxe5 is toothless, and after 16...0–0 17.f4 ♕d8± Black's bishop had the potential to

become the dominant piece on the board in Ribeiro – Ulrich, e-mail 2001.

White's best continuation is 16. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$, although after 16... $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 17. $\mathbb{W}xe5$ $\mathfrak{Q}f6$ 18. $\mathbb{W}e3$ 0-0 Black had equalized easily in Dalmau - Tokmachev, Budapest 1999.

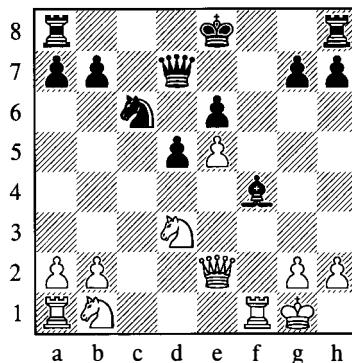
16... ♕xf4!

This natural move leaves White struggling to demonstrate compensation.

17.dxe5

After 17. $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ $exf4$ 18. $\mathbb{E}xf4$ $\mathbb{E}f8$ 19. $\mathbb{E}xf8\#$ $\mathbb{Q}xf8$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}g8\#$ White has no compensation for the missing pawn.

Another game continued 17.g3 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 18. $\mathbb{W}f2$, Wong – Rosin, corr. 2000, and now the clearest refutation of White's play would have been 18... $\mathbb{W}b5!$ N 19. $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ 0–0 20. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{W}b6$ 21. $\mathbb{E}ad1$ g5! when Black is close to winning.



17... $\text{Qd}4!$ 18. $\text{Wf}2$

18. $\mathbb{W}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}e3\#$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ 0–0 was no better, Fusthy – Shirov, Budapest 1989.

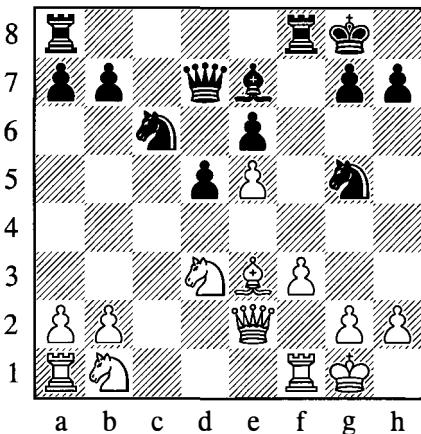
18...0-0

This final accurate move leaves the result in no doubt.

although

Apart from his extra pawn Black also has a decisive initiative and won quickly in Micic – Jovanovic, Yugoslavia 1994

15...0-0



16.♘d2

Some players were unhappy with the position of the knight on d2 and started experimenting with 16.♘f2?! intending ♘c3. Despite a few successes, this idea should not be too dangerous after 16...♝e8 (There is also 16...♝ac8 17.♘c3 ♘b4 18.♗ad1, Godena – Negi, Moscow 2006. Here instead of 18...♝c7 19.♗b5 ♘a5 20.♗d6 when White stood better, Black should have preferred 18...b6N with a fine position.) 17.♘c3 ♘g6 18.♗h1 h5 19.♗b5 ♘f5 20.♗ael ♘f7 21.♘c5 ♘xc5 22.♗xc5 b6 23.♗d3 ♘ad8 Black had no cause for complaint in Chebotarev – Sakaev, Kazan 2005.

16...♝f7 17.♗f2?!

The more popular 17.f4 lends more stable support to the e5-pawn, but restricts White's bishop. Later Black may try to exploit the light-square weaknesses. One illustrative game continued 17...♗h6 (There is also 17...b6 18.♗ac1 ♘h6 19.♗f3 ♘f5 20.♗f2 ♘a5 21.♗d4 ♘xd4 22.♗xd4 ♘a4 23.♘c3 ♘xa2 24.♗a1 ♘b3 25.♗g4 ♘f5 Black's enterprising play was enough for equality but not more in Bulmaga – Mar, Chisinau 2005.) 18.g4?! This is too weakening; instead White should be playing for equality with something more modest. 18...d4 19.♗f2 ♘b4 20.g5

♘f5 21.♗xb4 ♘xb4 22.♗b3 ♘ac8 23.♗ad1 ♘c5 24.♗d3 ♘b6† Black was convincingly outplaying his opponent in Andreikin – Zhou Jianchao, Moscow 2004.

17...♝ac8N

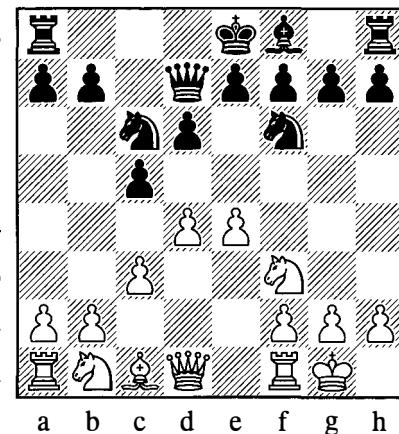
This seems like a logical move, although I must stress there is nothing wrong with 17...♝b4 18.♘c5 ♘c8 19.♗fc1 b6 20.♗cb3 ♘a6 21.♗xa6 ♘xa6 with equality, Sedlak – Velimirovic, Herceg Novi 2007.

18.♗ac1 b6 19.♗b3 ♘c7

Black is holding his own on both flanks, and overall the position is in a state of dynamic equilibrium.

A3) 7.d4?!

With this move White sacrifices a pawn for the initiative as Black needs a few more moves to bring his king to safety.



7...♘xe4

Black should certainly accept the offer. Occasionally he exchanges on d4 first, but it seems more logical to keep the position closed since Black is temporarily behind in development.

8.d5 ♘e5 9.♗e1

9. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $dxe5$ 10. $\mathbb{E}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ leads to the same position.

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

I also analysed 9... $\mathbb{Q}xf3\#$ 10. $\mathbb{W}xf3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$, whereby Black hangs on to the extra pawn for the time being. However, in most cases he will eventually be forced to return the pawn in order to neutralize White's initiative, resulting in equal play. Therefore I decided to focus on the present line, which simplifies Black's task by conveniently providing a solution against both 9. $\mathbb{E}e1$ and 9. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$.

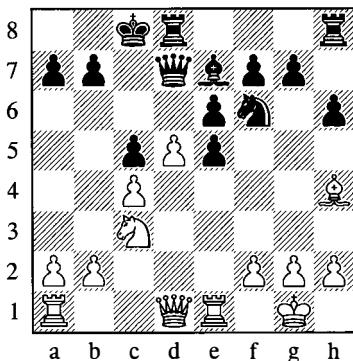
10. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $dxe5$ 11. $\mathbb{E}e5$

White is not obliged to recapture immediately, and sometimes tries to cause problems by accelerating his development:

11. $c4$ $e6$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ 0–0–0 13. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $h6!$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}h4$

Harmless is 14. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $gxf6$ 15. $\mathbb{W}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ (After 16. $\mathbb{W}h5$ $\mathbb{W}e8$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$ White has enough activity for a pawn, but not more.) 16... $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 17. $d6$ $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{W}e7$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ $\mathbb{W}xd6$ 21. $\mathbb{W}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ Black had no problems in Ulibin – N. Kosintseva, Moscow 2005.

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



15. $\mathbb{E}e5$

Another reasonable continuation is 15. $\mathbb{W}f3$ $exd5$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$, although after 16... $e4!$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ $\mathbb{W}xe7$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{W}g5$ 20. $\mathbb{W}xf7$ $\mathbb{W}xd5$ 21. $\mathbb{W}g6$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ Black held the

balance without any problems in Klosterfrau – Flyingfatman, Internet 2007.

15... $\mathbb{Q}xd5!$

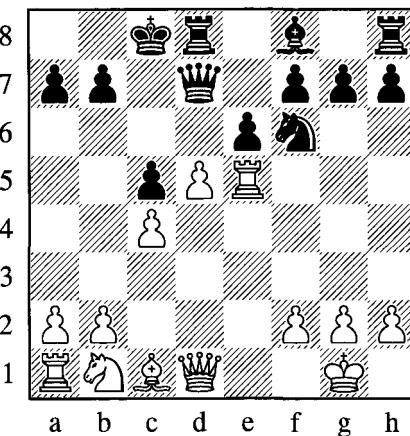
This accurate tactical shot removes all dangers from Black's world.

16. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xh4$ 17. $\mathbb{W}g4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 18. $dxe6$ $fxe6$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xc5\#$ $\mathbb{Q}b8=$

Black's slightly compromised pawn structure was balanced by his superior minor piece in Sahl – Shneider, Isle of Man 1999.

11... $e6$ 12. $c4$ 0–0–0

We have reached a fairly typical scenario for a gambit line: Black has returned the extra pawn in order to catch up on development, and overall the chances are about equal.



13. $\mathbb{Q}c3$

Black is fine after 13. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $gxf6$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}h5$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $f5$, Gurgenidze – Mchedlishvili, Tbilisi 2001.

13... $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 14. $\mathbb{E}e1$

It is worth pointing out that 14. $dxe6?$ leads to trouble for White after 14... $\mathbb{W}c7!$ 15. $e7$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 16. $exd8=\mathbb{W}$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8=\mathbb{W}$ Sosna – Voller, Czech Republic 1994.

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

15. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ is playable but riskier, as the d-pawn might become weak. Black has scored highly

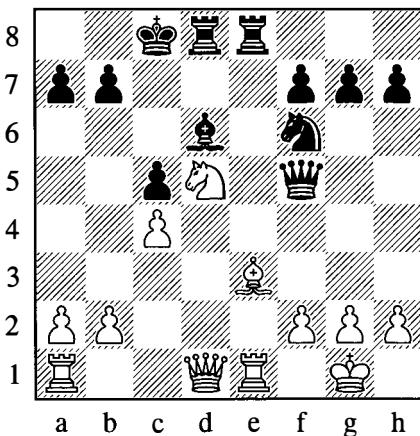
after 15...Wf5 when play may continue 16.h3 h5 17.Qe3 Bh8 18.Wa4 a6 19.b4? This overambitious move leads to problems. (White could and should have maintained the balance with: 19.Wa3N Qxd5 20.Qxc5 Qxc3 21.Qxd6 Qb5 22.Qc5† Wxc5 23.Qxc5=) 19...cxb4 20.Qb5 Wxd5 21.Qxd6† Wxd6 22.Qed1 Qd5† Black can live with a somewhat exposed king having received the gift of several pawns, Bergez – Abergel, Evry 2002.

15...Wf5

15...Qxd5 16.cxd5 Bh8 is very safe, but promises less scope for Black's ambitions.

16.Qe3 Bh8

This position should be equal with correct play, although in practice White's position has proven to be more dangerous.



17.h3

The dangers facing the first player are everywhere. Look at the following abrupt finish: 17.b4? Qg4 18.g3? Be3! 0–1 Zarnicki – Ramirez Alvarez, Buenos Aires 2003.

Perhaps White's safest continuation would be 17.Wb3N, evacuating the queen from the watchful gaze of the d8-rook, although after 17...Qxd5 18.cxd5 Be4= Black certainly has nothing to fear.

17...Qxd5 18.cxd5 Bb8

18...b6!N looks interesting, threatening ...Qc7 to round up the d5-pawn.

19.b4 Qc7 20.Wa4 Wxd5 21.Qac1!!

Evidently not satisfied with the equal position resulting from 21.Qxc5N Bxe1† 22.Qxe1 b6, White tries to maintain some tension in the position. He should not be risking much, as Black can hardly hope to save the c5-pawn.

21...Wd7 22.Wa3 Wd3!

Setting a cunning trap, into which White unwittingly falls.

23.Qc3??

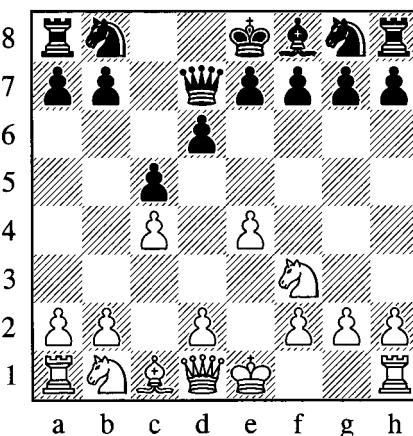
It was time to accept the equal endgame that would have resulted from 23.Wxd3N Bxd3.

23...Bxe3! 24.fxe3 Wd6+–

Hokkanen – A. Shneider, Chalkidiki 2002.

B) 5.c4

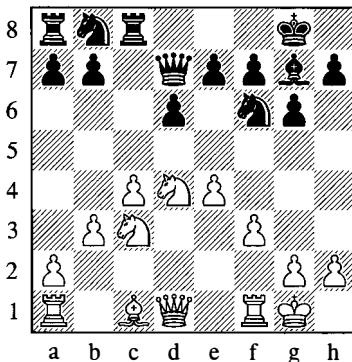
With this move White aims for a Maroczy Bind set-up, having already made a positionally favourable bishop exchange.



5...Qc6

The currently fashionable treatment of this line involves delaying the development of

this piece in order to facilitate a clever tactical sequence. The key line runs as follows: 5... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 6. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ g6 7.d4 cxd4 8. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 9.0-0 0-0 10.f3 (10. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ reaches line B1 below.) 10... $\mathbb{E}c8$ 11.b3



11...d5! This kills all White's chances for an opening advantage. Best play now leads to an equal endgame as follows: 12.exd5 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ e6 14. $\mathbb{Q}h6$ exd5 15. $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ dxc4 17. $\mathbb{Q}d6$ $\mathbb{E}d8$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ $\mathbb{W}xd1$ 19. $\mathbb{E}fxd1$ $\mathbb{E}xd1\uparrow$ 20. $\mathbb{E}xd1$ cxb3 21.axb3 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ as seen in Lupulescu – Colovic, Subotica 2003, and several subsequent games, all of which ended in draws.

Theoretically this is all completely fine, and if the reader wishes to play this way then I have nothing bad to say about Black's opening strategy. However, since the above line has been analysed extensively by other commentators, I thought it would be more interesting to cover the old-fashioned way of handling the position. A secondary reason is that although an easy drawing line might count a theoretical success for Black, it may not suit the ambitious player who wishes to strive for a win with the black pieces.

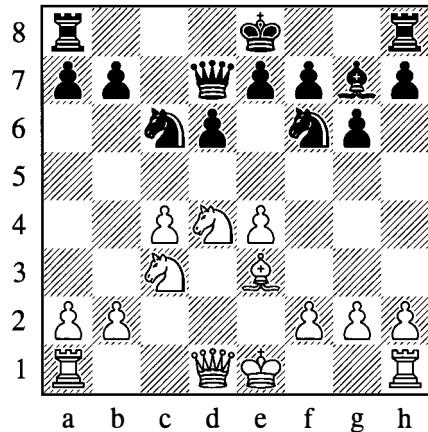
6.d4

6. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ g6 will almost certainly transpose, as White can hardly benefit from omitting d2-d4.

6...cxd4 7. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ g6 8. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$

Here White must choose between B1) 9. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ and B2) 9. $\mathbb{Q}de2$. The former looks natural and is not bad, but the latter is considered more ambitious and is the usual choice of 3. $\mathbb{Q}b5\uparrow$ specialists.

B1) 9. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$



10.f3

White should safeguard his bishop from harassment by ... $\mathbb{Q}g4$. He can also achieve this with:

10.h3

Compared with the main line the e4-pawn lacks any secure protection; on the other hand, perhaps White can aim for active play with a timely f2-f4.

10...0-0 11.0-0 a6 12.a4

This is a typical reaction, clamping down on the possible freeing break ...b5.

12... $\mathbb{E}ac8$ 13.b3 e6

This is almost always a useful move for Black in this system. It prevents the enemy knight from utilizing the d5-square while also preparing a possible ...d5 break in the future.

14. $\mathbb{E}c1$ $\mathbb{W}d8$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}de2$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 16.f4!!?

White embarks on a kingside adventure. In the event of quieter play, the position would resemble the main lines of variations B1 and

B2 below.

16... ♕fd8!?

Black prepares the ...d5 break. It might look risky to move a piece away from the kingside, but the black position is resilient enough.

17.f5 ♔a5

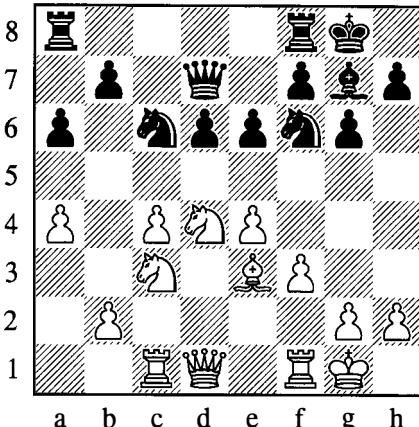
It was also possible to fight back with
 17...gxf5! N 18.exf5 d5! 19.fxe6 dxс4
 20.е1 fxe6 21.bxc4 e5 with approximately
 equal chances.

18. ♔f4 gx f5 19. ♕f3?!

The objectively correct continuation would have been 19.exf5 $\mathbb{W}xf5$, which surprisingly leads to a forced repetition after 20. $\mathbb{Q}fd5$ $\mathbb{W}g6$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{W}f5$.

19... $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ fxe4 21. $\mathbb{W}xe4$

We have been following the game Ni Hua – Balogh, Beijing (rapid) 2008. Up to this point Black has played well, and he could have exposed his opponent's dubious pawn sacrifice with:



13...♝fc8!?N

Surprisingly this natural move does not appear to have been tested here.

I spent some time checking the more combative 13... $\mathbb{Q}e5$, when the critical line continues 14. $\mathbb{W}e2$ $\mathbb{K}fc8$ 15.b3 d5 16.cxd5 exd5 17.f4 $\mathbb{Q}xc3??$ (17... $\mathbb{Q}eg4$ 18.e5 $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $dxe4\pm$) 18. $\mathbb{K}xc3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 19. $\mathbb{K}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 20. $\mathbb{K}fc1\pm$ Sadvakasov – Kasparov, Astana 2001. The position is interesting but I am not convinced that Black has full compensation for the material deficit.

14.b3 $\mathbb{W}e7$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathfrak{Q}d7$

The black position remains solid and flexible, and the chances are approximately equal.

B2) 9. $\text{Qd}2$

10...0-0 11.0-0 a6 12.a4 e6!

Once again we see this important pawn move, preparing a timely ...d5.

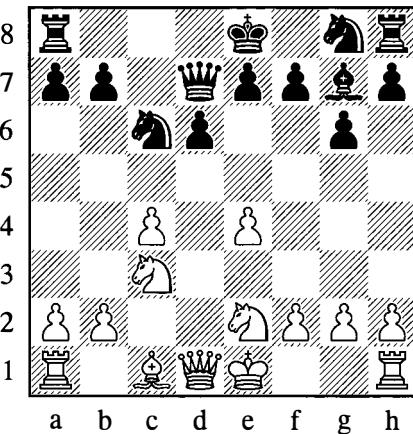
13.8cl

13. ♜de2 ♜c7 is comfortable for Black. The position can be compared with line B2 below.

Though it may look cowardly to retreat the knight from the centre, the set-up examined here is generally considered to be the most ambitious at White's disposal. The main advantage from White's perspective is that his bishop will be free to go to the more active g5-square. The constant possibility of ♘xf6

will make it virtually impossible for Black to carry out the ...d5 break. He has occasionally facilitated this with the help of ...h6 and ...g5 to chase the bishop away, but weakening the kingside brings its own problems.

Despite all this, we will see that the black position still contains sufficient resources to maintain the balance.



9... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 10.f3

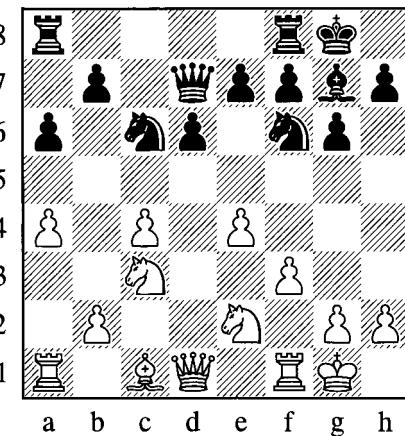
This is White's most accurate move order. In the event of 10.0–0 Black has the intriguing possibility of 10... $\mathbb{W}e6!$?, which rose to fame after featuring in the heavily publicized *Kasparov versus the World* match from 1999. If this line is of interest to the reader then I would encourage him to investigate this independently; there was not much point in analysing it here as White can avoid it so easily.

10...0–0 11.0–0 a6 12.a4

This will be the automatic reaction of most proponents of White's system.

Other moves allow Black to free his position with minimal fuss, for instance: 12. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 13.b3 b5 14. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ (14.cxb5 axb5 is hardly likely to trouble Black.) 14... $\mathbb{W}b7$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}b6$ (or 15. $\mathbb{B}b1$, Favarel – Bartha, France 2003, 15... $\mathbb{B}fd8N$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}ef4$ e6 17. $\mathbb{Q}xf6\#$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6=$)

15... $\mathbb{B}ab8$ 16.cxb5 axb5 17. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ b4 18. $\mathbb{Q}ca4$ $\mathbb{B}fd8$ 19. $\mathbb{W}e2$ d5 20.exd5 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{B}xd5$ 22. $\mathbb{B}ad1$ $\mathbb{B}bd8$ Black kept an active position with at least equal chances in Tseitlin – Lerner, St Petersburg 1992.



12...e6!

As usual, this move forms an integral part of Black's set-up.

13. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 14. $\mathbb{B}h1$

The king sidesteps any potential checks. 14.b3 is another sensible move, which might very well transpose to the following note after 14... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 15. $\mathbb{B}h1$.

14... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 15. $\mathbb{B}b1$

Another possibility is:

15.b3 $\mathbb{W}a5$

15... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ is also playable, when 16. $\mathbb{B}b1$ $\mathbb{B}ac8$ transposes to the main line below.

Black might even contemplate 15...f5! N This outlandish move illustrates the versatility of Black's flexible set-up. 16. $\mathbb{B}b1$ (After 16.exf5 $\mathbb{B}xf5$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{B}d8$ Black's position is full of dynamism.) 16... $\mathbb{B}ae8$ 17. $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{B}f7$ 18. $\mathbb{B}fd1$ $\mathbb{W}a5$ with roughly even chances.

16. $\mathbb{W}d2$

White had better avoid 16. $\mathbb{W}xd6?$ $\mathbb{W}xg5$ 17. $\mathbb{W}xd7$ $\mathbb{W}c5!$ 18. $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{B}fd8$ 19. $\mathbb{W}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}b4\mp$ Black's bishop has become a superpower,

but the other pieces are also playing to their maximum.

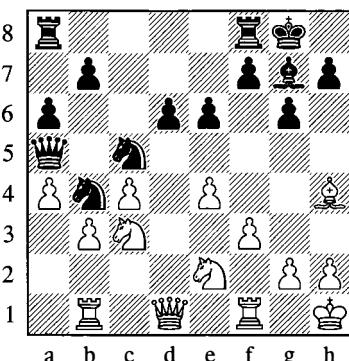
16...♝c5 17.♝ab1 ♜b4

Once again Black might consider 17...f5?! 18.exf5 ♜xf5 19.♗e3 ♜d8 with an unclear position.

18.♗c2 ♜a5 19.♗h4

19.♗d2 ♜ac8 20.♗fd1 ♜c7 looks about equal.

19...♝b4 20.♗d1



20...♜fc8N

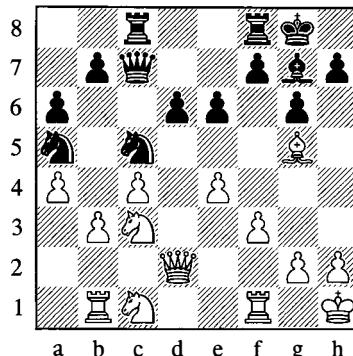
It is worth mentioning that after the pseudo-active 20...♝cd3?!, as seen in Shirov – J. Polgar, Vienna 1996, White could have obtained an edge with 21.♛a2!. I would advise the reader to make a mental note of this resource, as once White exchanges one of the troublesome knights, he will be able to develop the rest of his pieces comfortably, after which he will enjoy a slight but lasting advantage.

After the text move, Black completes his development and keeps enough active possibilities to maintain the balance.

15...♜ac8 16.b3 ♘c5 17.♗h4

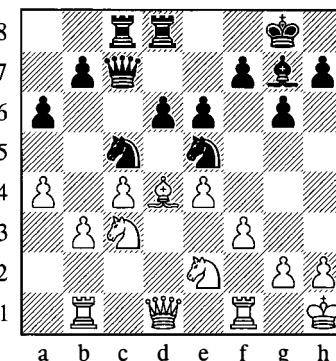
This is a thematic idea for White in this variation. The bishop withdraws to a slightly less vulnerable location, pre-empting possible attacks from a queen on a5, for instance.

The natural 17.♗d2?! leaves the b3-pawn with insufficient defenders, allowing the following tactical solution: 17...♝a5 18.♝c1



18...♝axb3! 19.♝xb3 ♜xb3 20.♝xb3 ♜xc4 21.♝fb1 ♜xc3 22.♗xd6 This position was reached in Ponomariov – Shipov, Lubniewice 1998, and now after 22...a5?N 23.♝xb7 ♜xa4+ White would still have to fight for equality.

17.♗f4? ♘e5 18.♗e3 ♜fd8 19.♗d4 This position was reached in Miroshnichenko – Sakaev, Panormo (blitz) 2002. Here I think Black should have played:



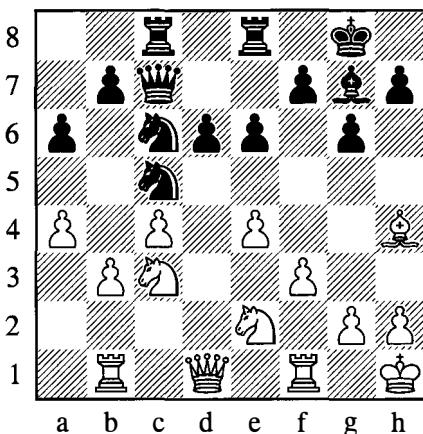
19...♜e7N (After the game continuation of 19...♝c6 20.♗xg7 ♜xg7 21.f4 ♜g8 22.f5 ♘e5 23.♗d2 the Black king became somewhat vulnerable.) 20.f4 ♘g4 21.♗xg7 ♜xg7 22.h3 ♘f6= Black keeps a safe position with mutual chances.

17...♜fe8

In this position 17...♝a5? is unjustified: 18.b4 ♘xc4 19.bxc5 ♘e3 20.♗d3 ♘xf1 21.cxd6 ♜c4 22.♗xc4 ♜xc4 23.♗xf1 ♜xc3

24.♕c1† Black's combination had a nasty hole at the end and he had to part with some material in Ponomariov – Sutovsky, Ohrid 2001.

With the text move Black continues to wait patiently, improving his position slightly and challenging White to do the same. The first player would ideally like to put his queen on d2, but we have already seen that this is a risky policy when...♝a5 is possible.



18.♝g3

In the event of 18.♞f2N, the reply 18...♝b4 looks logical, as a knight invasion to d3 has the potential to be more troublesome with the bishop acting as a target.

18.♛c2 ♘b4 (The computer suggests the interesting 18...♝h6!?) 19.♛d2 was seen in Vescovi – Shomoev, Internet 2004, and here Black should have considered 19...b6 or perhaps even 19...♝c6!?, threatening ...♝a5 and challenging White to find something better than 20.♛c2 repeating the position.

In the game Black erred with 19...♝cd3?!, allowing the familiar exchanging trick of 20.♝a2! ♘xa2 21.♛xd3 ♘b4 22.♛d2 when White was better.

Another interesting game continued 18.h3 ♘a5 19.♛c2 ♘xc3! 20.♛xc3 (20.♝xc3 ♘d4) 20...♛xc3 21.♝xc3 ♘d4 22.b4 ♘cb3 23.e5! Otherwise White loses material. 23...d5? 24.cxd5 ♘xc3 25.d6 ♘f5 26.d7 ♘f8 27.d8=♛ ♘xd8 28.♛xd8 ♘g3† The complications eventually led to a comfortable ending for Black in Greet – Edouard, Hastings 2009.

18...♝e5

Black must avoid 18...♝ed8? 19.b4.

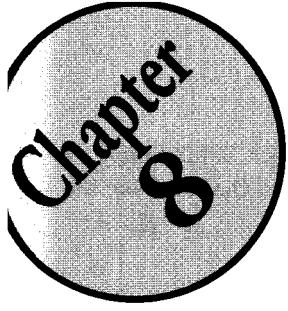
19.♛d2 b6 20.♝fd1 ♘ed8

Black maintained a solid position with level chances in Polaczek – Joao, corr. 2002.

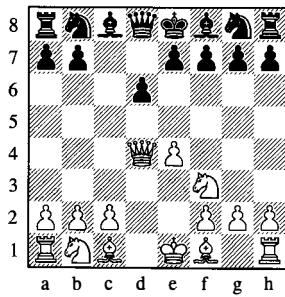
Conclusion

White may still try to dig in line A with 5.0–0 ♘c6 6.c3, using the strategy of occupying the centre with pawns. Despite the slightly simplified nature of the fight, the supporters of White's cause have managed to infuse each of the different lines with interesting ideas. We have seen that precise defence should enable Black to deal with each problem, but the lines are all quite interesting and should be studied carefully.

The more popular variation B, with 5.c4, is not so scary for Black, whose position remains sound and without serious weaknesses. Once again, as long as Black pays close attention to the recommended lines he should be able to obtain a comfortable position with a full share of the chances.



Anti-Open Systems



The Last Samurai - 4. Wxd4

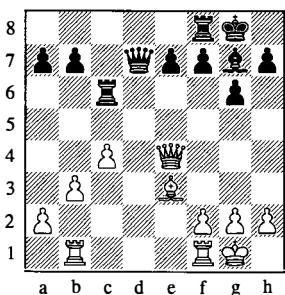
Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2. Qf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4. Wxd4

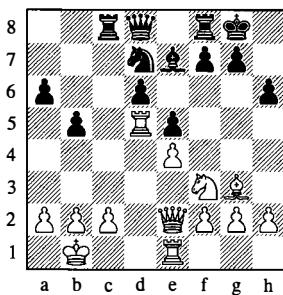
4... Qc6 5. Qb5 Qd7 6. Qxc6 Qxc6

| | |
|--------------------------------------|-----|
| A) 7.c4 | 134 |
| B) 7. Qc3 Qf6 8. Qg5 e6 9. 0-0-0 Qe7 | 136 |
| B1) 10. Wd3 | 137 |
| B2) 10. Whel 0-0 | 139 |
| B21) 11. e5 | 140 |
| B22) 11. Wd2 | 141 |
| B23) 11. Qb1 | 143 |

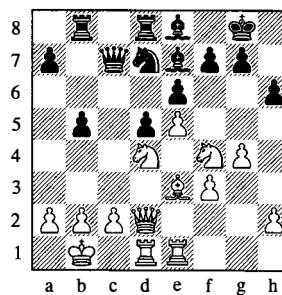
A) after 17. Qe3



B22) after 18. Wxd5



B23) after 19. Qf4!?

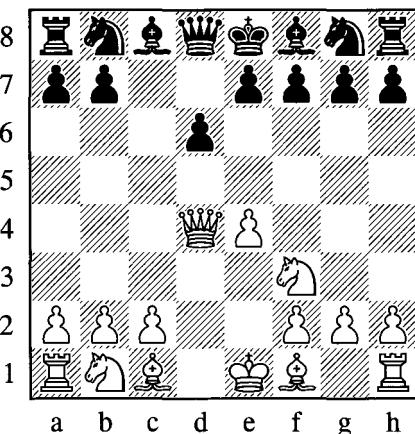


17... Wd8!N

18... Wc6!N

19... Wdc8!N

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♕xd4



Chess novices trying to improve their game will be taught to avoid playing with the queen too early, but experienced players wanting to win the game will occasionally do just that! The variation examined here is one of the exceptions to the general rule, with the White queen appearing boldly in the centre as early as the fourth move. Although the general pawn structure remains the same as in the traditional Open Sicilian, the unusual queen position gives the present variation a unique character so I would advise the reader to study it carefully.

4...♗c6

Sometimes Black prevents the following pin with 4...a6 or 4...♗d7, but the text move is the main line and the one I have chosen to recommend.

5.♗b5

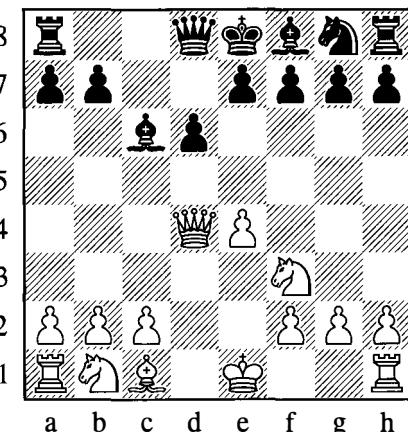
White is ready to part company with his light-squared bishop very early, since it maintains the position of the queen on d4 and facilitates the rapid development of all the remaining pieces.

5...♗d7 6.♗xc6

(I found one game on the database in which

a player with a rating over 2100 forgot to exchange on c6 and allowed Black to take the queen!)

6...♕xc6



Now we will consider the unusual A) 7.c4, followed by the main line of B) 7.♘c3.

A) 7.c4

White can try for a Maroczy Bind set-up, hoping that the centralized queen will support his actions across the board.

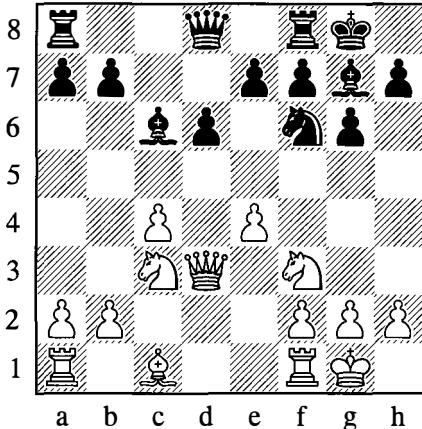
7...♗f6 8.♘c3 g6

I think this is the most convenient solution for Black's development. It will also force the centralized queen to spend time moving, as she will hardly be able to remain on the a1-h8 diagonal for much longer.

9.0–0 ♗g7 10.♗d3

Strictly speaking White is not obliged to retreat the queen immediately, but it will clearly have to happen once Black has castled. In practice most players have chosen to retreat at this turn in order to improve the f3-knight at the earliest opportunity.

10...0–0

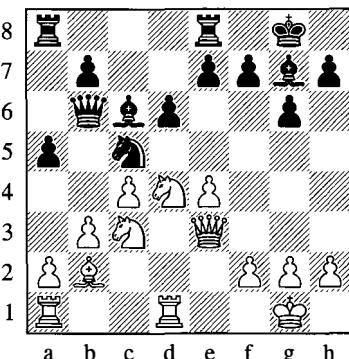
11. $\mathbb{Q}d4$

A glance at the database reveals that White has tried just about every legal move here. It would be pointless to analyse all of them, as in most cases Black will proceed in a similar fashion as seen in the examples given below. The quoted games should be enough to illustrate all of the essential ideas needed to handle the black position.

11... $\mathbb{E}c8$

The text move prepares an interesting tactical motif, which is why I decided to offer it as the main line. However, I also advise the reader to pay close attention to the following plan:

11... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 12. $b3$ $\mathbb{E}e8$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 14. $\mathbb{W}e3$ $\mathbb{W}b6$ 15. $\mathbb{E}fd1$ $a5$



This is a model set-up for Black, which we have 'borrowed' from the Accelerated

Dragon. Black's pieces are all ideally placed, and the ... $a5$ - $a4$ plan is an effective source of counterplay.

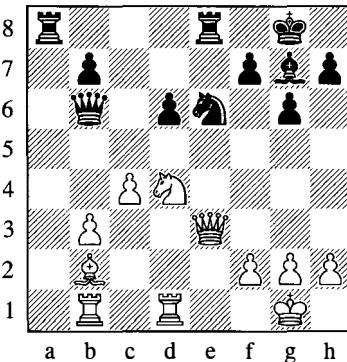
16. $\mathbb{E}ab1$ $a4$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 18. $exd5$ $axb3$
19. $AXB3$

This position occurred in Z. Almasi – Anka, Zalakaros 1992, and now I think Black should have opened the centre with:

19... $e6$!?

Such a move should not be taken lightly, as Black's pawn structure might suffer. In this position, however, it is justified by the improvement in the activity of his pieces.

20. $dxe6$ $\mathbb{Q}xe6$



21. $\mathbb{Q}b5$

21. $\mathbb{Q}f5$?! also leads to equality after
21... $\mathbb{W}xe3$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ (another possibility is
22... $\mathbb{E}ed8$ 23. $h4$ $h5$) 23. $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ $\mathbb{Q}xg7$
24. $b4$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 25. $\mathbb{E}b3$ $f5$ 26. $f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 27. $\mathbb{E}xd6$
 $\mathbb{Q}a1\uparrow$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{E}a2\uparrow$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $f4$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{E}ee2$
31. $\mathbb{E}a3$ $\mathbb{E}ac2$ 32. $\mathbb{E}c3$ $\mathbb{E}a2$ and the game ends in a repetition.

21... $\mathbb{Q}c5$! 22. $\mathbb{W}f3$

The evaluation is not changed by 22. $\mathbb{W}d2$
 $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 23. $\mathbb{W}f4$ $g5$! 24. $\mathbb{W}f5$ (24. $\mathbb{W}e3$ $\mathbb{W}xe3$
25. $fxe3$ $\mathbb{E}a2=$) 24... $\mathbb{E}a2$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ $\mathbb{Q}xg7$
26. $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 27. $\mathbb{W}xg5\uparrow$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 28. $\mathbb{W}h6\uparrow$
 $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 29. $\mathbb{W}g5\uparrow$ with a perpetual.

22... $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3$
25. $\mathbb{W}xc3\uparrow$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$

Black's problems are only optical – in reality his chances are not harmed by his slightly inferior structure.

12.b3

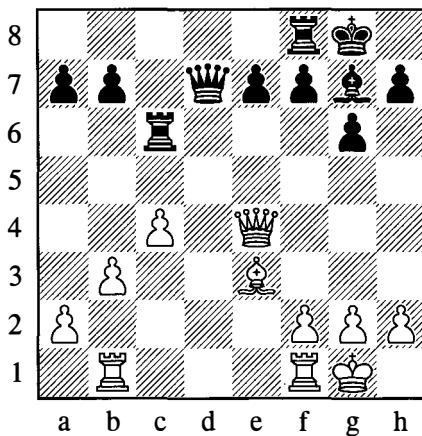
This is the most natural reaction to the appearance of the rook on the c-file, and has been by far White's most common choice. Alternatives should not worry Black, as illustrated by the following example from grandmaster praxis: 12. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{W}a5$ 13.b3 a6 14. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{E}fe8$ 15. $\mathbb{E}ab1$ $\mathbb{W}h5!$? (15... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 16.h3 $\mathbb{Q}c7=$) 16.h3 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 17. $\mathbb{E}e1$ $\mathbb{W}c5$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{Q}xc6=$ White achieved nothing in Predojevic – Timofeev, Sarajevo 2007.

12... $\mathbb{Q}xe4!$

This well-camouflaged combination might come as an unpleasant surprise to some opponents. It has only been played once to my knowledge.

**13. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ d5 14. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{E}xc6$ 15. $\mathbb{E}b1$ $dxe4$
16. $\mathbb{W}xe4$ $\mathbb{W}d7$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}e3$**

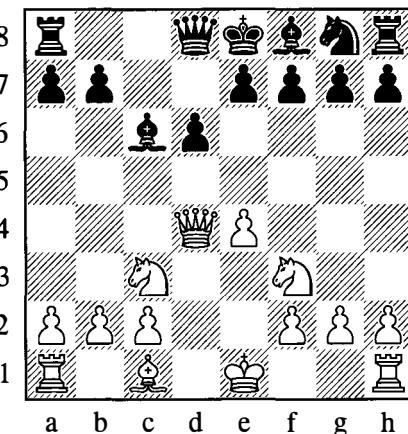
This position was reached in Ni Hua – Li, Xinghua Jiangsu 2009. At this point I found a modest but definite improvement for Black.

**17... $\mathbb{Q}d8!N$**

After taking control of the open file Black immediately achieves comfortable equality. There is no reason to defend a7, as 18. $\mathbb{Q}xa7$ loses to 18... $\mathbb{E}e6!$ when the bishop will be trapped after a subsequent ...b6, for example 19. $\mathbb{W}g4$ h5! –+.

B) 7. $\mathbb{Q}c3$

This is the main line. Indeed, the plan of developing quickly certainly appears more consistent with White's previous few moves.

**7... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 8. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ e6 9.0–0–0**

Black has no reason to fear the doubled pawns arising after 9. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{W}xf6$ 10. $\mathbb{W}xf6$ gxf6 11.0–0–0 $\mathbb{Q}g8$. On the other hand Black's bishop pair could become a tremendous asset later in the endgame.

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

At this point White has two main options:
B1) 10. $\mathbb{W}d3$ and B2) 10. $\mathbb{E}he1$.

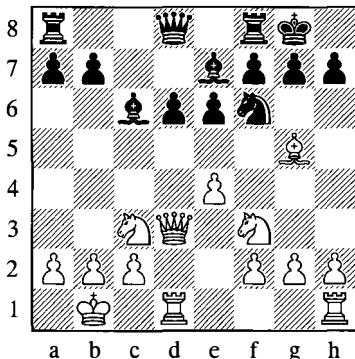
Sometimes he shuffles the move order around with:

10. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ 0–0

From here the most common continuation has been 11. $\mathbb{E}he1$, transposing to line B23. However, some players have experimented successfully with:

11. $\mathbb{W}d3?$

White is angling for an improved version of variation B1, avoiding the plan involving delayed castling which I have chosen to recommend against the earlier 10. $\mathbb{W}d3$. However, White's chosen move order brings its own disadvantages, which can be highlighted by the following accurate move:



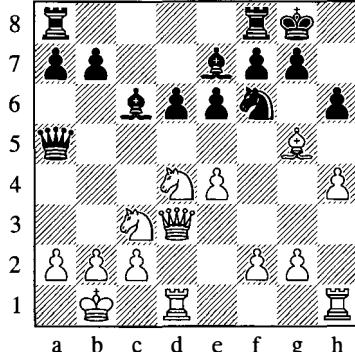
11...h6! 12.h4?

The trouble for White is that the normal 12. $\mathbb{Q}h4$ runs into 12... $\mathbb{Q}xe4!$ as a subsequent capture on c3 would come with check. Instead White has to settle for 13. $\mathbb{Q}xe4 \mathbb{Q}xh4$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xd6$, Madurga Lopez – Noval Toldos, Madrid 2009, and now after 14... $\mathbb{Q}xf2N$ there is no reason why Black should not go on to convert his material advantage.

Another game continued 12. $\mathbb{Q}c1$, Mostertman – Timmerman, corr. 1991, and now after 12...d5!N 13.e5 $\mathbb{Q}e4$ Black is already for choice.

Finally, there is nothing to fear from:
 12. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{W}b6$ 14.f4 $\mathbb{Q}fd8$
 15. $\mathbb{Q}hf1$ $\mathbb{Q}ac8=$
 12... $\mathbb{W}a5$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}d4$

13. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ d5=



13...hxg5!?

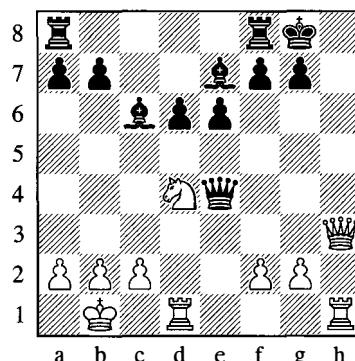
If Black prefers to avoid the resulting complications he can also consider 13... $\mathbb{Q}fd8!N$ with even chances.

14. h5xg5 15. $\mathbb{W}h3$ $\mathbb{W}h6$ 16. $\mathbb{W}g3$ $\mathbb{W}g6$
 16... $\mathbb{Q}h5!N$ 17. $\mathbb{W}f3$ g6 is also possible.
 17. $\mathbb{W}h4?$

It was necessary to play 17. $\mathbb{W}h3!$ $\mathbb{Q}h7!!$
 (If Black is content with a draw he can of course repeat the position) 18. f4 f5 19. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $\mathbb{W}xe6$ 20. $\mathbb{W}xh7†$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 21. exf5 $\mathbb{W}f6$ 22. $\mathbb{W}h5†$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}de1$ $\mathbb{W}xf5!$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ $\mathbb{W}xh5$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}xh5$ $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ 26. b3 $\mathbb{Q}af8$ with equality.

17... $\mathbb{W}h7†$ 18. $\mathbb{W}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{W}xe4$ 20. $\mathbb{W}h3$

Malec – Ivanov, Warsaw 2009. Here Black should have played:

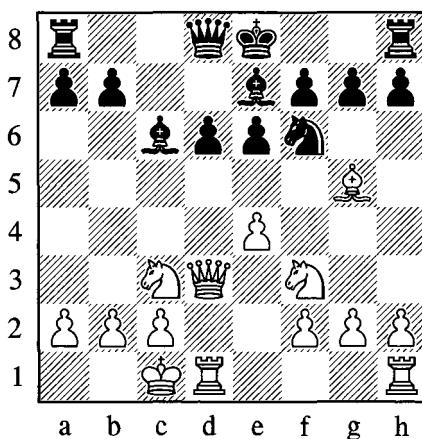


20...f5!N

Black survives the attack and should win with his extra material.

B1) 10. $\mathbb{W}d3$

With this move White intends to reposition the f3-knight on d4, followed by advancing the kingside pawns.



10... $\mathbb{W}a5!$

I believe this to be the most accurate response. By eyeing the bishop on g5, Black inhibits his opponent's plan for the time being, while creating the incidental threat of ... $\mathbb{Q}xe4$.

11.h4

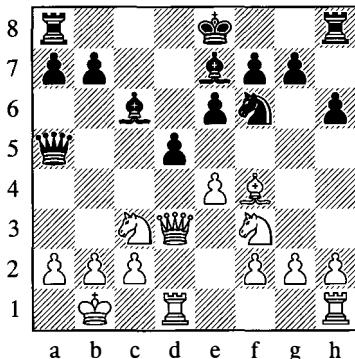
The main alternative is:

11. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ h6 12. $\mathbb{Q}f4$

After 12. $\mathbb{Q}d2$, Pulyaev – Chulivska, Lvov 2007, I suggest 12... $\mathbb{W}a6N=$.

The untested 12. $\mathbb{Q}h4!?$ N looks quite sensible, although Black should obtain satisfactory play after 12...0–0 13. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{W}h5$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}fd8=$.

12...d5



This thematic break equalizes comfortably, although there does not seem to be anything wrong with 12...e5!?

13. $\mathbb{Q}d4$

13.exd5 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 15.c4 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 0–0 17. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ bxc6 18. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ (18. $\mathbb{W}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6=$) 18... $\mathbb{W}h5!$ After this precise move White has no claim to an advantage.

13...dxe4 14. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ bxc6 15. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 0–0

Black's split queenside pawns are balanced by his active pieces and slightly safer king, so the chances were balanced in Macieja – Leitao, Turin 2006.

11...h6

Castling is also possible, but I prefer to take

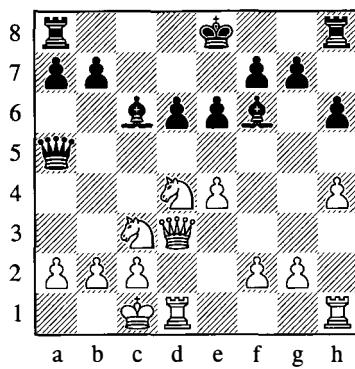
the opportunity to pose an immediate question to the bishop.

12. $\mathbb{Q}d2$

Sometimes White relinquishes his second bishop in order to gain additional time:

12. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}d4$

This plan has made a higher score than the main line, but it should not threaten Black if he responds accurately.



13...0–0–0!

I prefer this over the more common 13...0–0 14.f4. Black should be alright in this position, but White has a clear plan of attacking the kingside and has scored quite well in practice.

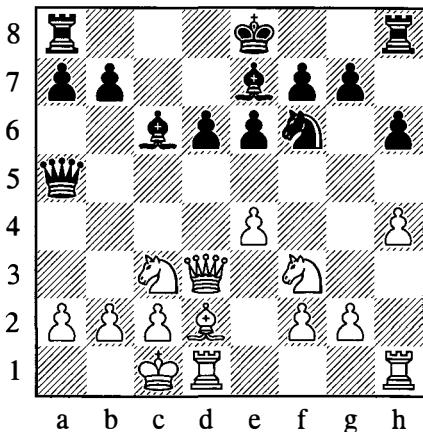
The other main option is 13... $\mathbb{W}b6$, intending to meet 14. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ bxc6 15. $\mathbb{W}xd6$ with 15... $\mathbb{E}b8$, when White must give up the b2-pawn. One game continued 16. $\mathbb{W}d7\#$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}xb2\#$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ $\mathbb{W}xb2\#$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{W}b4\#$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{W}c5\#$ 21. $\mathbb{W}d4$ $\mathbb{W}xd4\#$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$, Zelcic – Brkic, Split 2008. Black should be able to hold this endgame, but he certainly has the worse side of the equal position and has absolutely no winning chances. It might be possible to improve his play around move 19–20, but overall still I find the text move more appealing.

14.f4 $\mathbb{W}c5$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{W}xc6$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ a6 17.g4

These moves occurred in Belkhodja – Movsesian, Cappelle la Grande 2002, and here I rather like the straightforward:

17... $\mathbb{B}b8N$

I see no real problems for Black here, and perhaps one day his unopposed bishop could become a force.



12... $\mathbb{Q}a6$

This virtually forces a queen exchange, thus guaranteeing Black a safe position with some prospects to make his bishop pair count in the long term.

12... $\mathbb{Q}g4$ is a reliable alternative, but I find the text move more straightforward.

13. $\mathbb{W}xa6$ $bxa6$ 14. $\mathbb{E}he1$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$

In some games Black has opted for a set-up with ...e5 either here or in the next few moves. There is nothing wrong with that, but at the same time I think I prefer the treatment seen in the present game, by which Black keeps a flexible centre and gradually strengthens his position on the queenside.

15. $\mathbb{E}e2$ 0-0 16. $\mathbb{Q}d4$

In the event of 16. $\mathbb{Q}f4$, Sanduleac – Golubev, Romania 2003, it looks logical for Black to play 16... $\mathbb{E}fd8N$. The light-squared bishop can drop back to e8 if needed, and the other rook can find an active role on the queenside.

An interesting alternative would have been 16... $e5!?$ N followed by ...f5, hoping to erode

White's centre and activate the light-squared bishop.

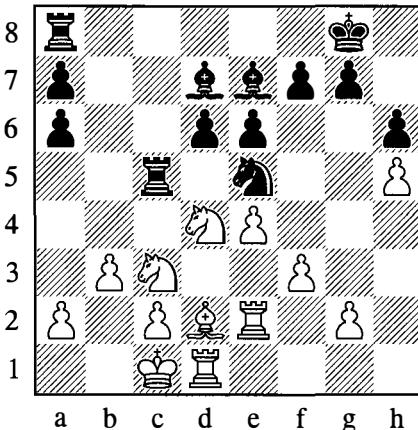
16... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 17. $f3$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 18. $h5$

18. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{E}fc8$ 19. $b3$ has been recommended as an improvement, but it seems to me that Black's chances are still higher after 19... $\mathbb{E}c5!$.

18... $\mathbb{E}fc8$

There is nothing much to be gained from 18... $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}f4!$ (but not 19. $\mathbb{Q}e1!?$ $\mathbb{Q}g5!$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{E}ab8$ 21. $b3$ $\mathbb{E}fc8$ when Black keeps some pressure) 19... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 20. $b3$ $\mathbb{E}fc8$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ with approximate equality.

19. $b3$ $\mathbb{E}c5!$

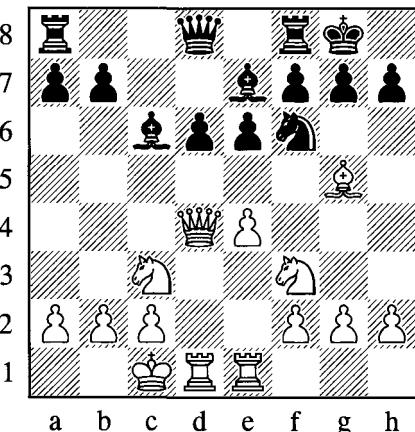


We have been following the game Kaminski – Gelfand, Polanica Zdroj 1997. Black's doubled pawns are not causing him any discomfort, and White was ultimately unable to withstand the pressure on the queenside.

B2) 10. $\mathbb{E}he1$

This is the main line, developing the last piece.

10...0-0



In this position White can choose between immediate action with B21) 11.e5, the queen retreat B22) 11.♔d2 intending ♔d4, and the prophylactic king move B23) 11.♔b1.

Let us briefly note that the feeble 11.♕xf6? brings White nothing but problems after 11...♗xf6 12.♗xd6 ♗xc3 (12...♗a5 is also strong) 13.♗xd8 (13.bxc3 ♗a5) 13...♗xb2† 14.♔xb2 ♘fxd8† White will have to suffer in the ending, Trajkovic – Romani, Caorle 1982.

B21) 11.e5

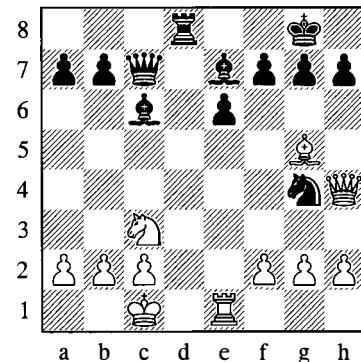
The opening of the centre looks logical since all White's pieces are mobilized and ready for action. Black, on the other hand, benefits from the bishop pair and is only slightly behind in development. Ultimately it seems that these two factors should cancel each other out, resulting in eventual equality.

11...dxe5 12.♗h4

White is unlikely to achieve much with 12.♗xe5, when Black can choose between the solid 12...♗c7 and the ambitious 12...♗xg2!?, which looks risky but is by no means easy to refute.

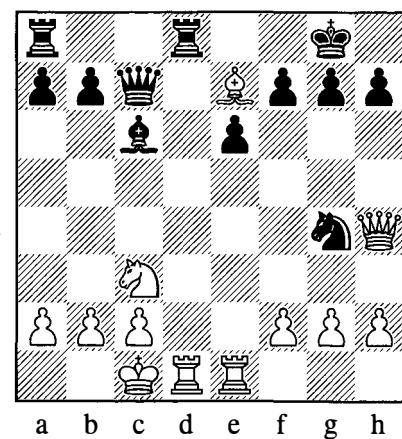
12...♗c7 13.♗xe5 ♘fd8 14.♗g4

Less accurate is 14.♗xd8†?! ♘xd8 15.♗g4 ♘xg4



16.♗xe7? (White should settle for 16.♗xg4 ♘xg5† 17.♗xg5, Sochacki – Alonso Roselli, Belfort 2005, although only Black can be better here.) 16...♗f4† 17.♔b1 ♘d2 18.f3 (18.♗d1? ♗e4! 19.♗c1 ♘xc2†! 20.♔a1, Janaszak – Smolak, Wisla 2000, 20...h6N–+) 18...♗f5 19.♗c1 ♗e3 20.♗g5 (20.♗e4 ♘xg2†) 20...♘xc2 21.♗xe3 ♘xc3† 22.♔a1 ♘xc1† 23.♗xc1 ♘d3 and Black soon won, Jooste – Goze, e-mail 2004.

14...♗xg4 15.♗xe7



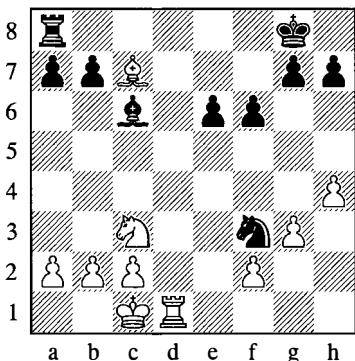
15...♗xd1†

Another safe route to equality is 15...♗f4† 16.♔b1 ♘xd1† 17.♗xd1 ♗f5 18.f3 ♗e3 19.♗d2 h6 20.♗d4 ♗d5 21.♗xd5 ½–½ Adorjan – Tal, Sochi 1977.

16.♗xd1 ♗h6 17.♗d8?

This tricky move is the only way to try for anything, but Black still has no problem staying out of trouble.

17. $\mathbb{Q}d6$ is even more harmless due to 17... $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xc7$ (Only Black can benefit from 18. $\mathbb{W}xh7\#?$ $\mathbb{Q}xh7$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xc7$ $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ due to the split kingside pawns.) 18... $\mathbb{Q}xh4$ 19. g3 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ 20. h4 f6



At first glance the game looks to be heading for a draw, but Black does have certain minor advantages (extra central pawn, more active minor pieces) and in Dueckstein – Sosonko, Amsterdam 1978, the second player eventually prevailed.

17... $\mathbb{W}e5$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}b6!$

After 18. g3 $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 19. $\mathbb{W}g4$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ Black was slightly for choice in Reinders – Parrilla, e-mail 2003.

18... f6!

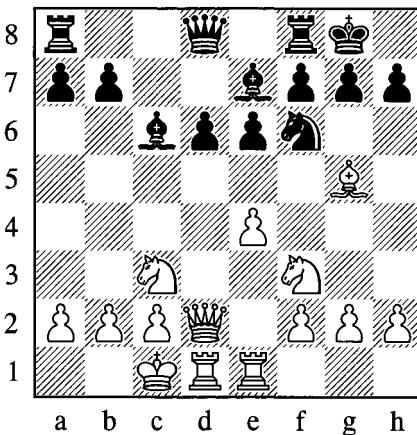
This prevents any tricks, as well as generally improving Black's position by increasing his influence over the dark squares.

19. f4 $\mathbb{W}f5$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ b5

Black has no problems whatsoever, Podkrajsek – Merilo, corr. 1999.

B22) 11. $\mathbb{W}d2$

This move is played with the intention of clearing the d4-square for the knight. This is an absolutely standard idea for the present variation, but in this particular position it exposes White to certain tactical problems.



11... h6!

This perfectly timed move poses awkward problems for White.

12. $\mathbb{Q}f4$

I only found one game in which White was brave enough to venture 12. $\mathbb{Q}xh6?$ gxh6 13. $\mathbb{W}xh6$, when 13... $\mathbb{Q}h7!$ should enable Black to repel the attack. In the game Tomin – Draskovic, Herceg Novi 2006, White's eventual win was certainly not a reflection of the objective merits of his position at this stage.

The main tactical point behind Black's last move is revealed after:

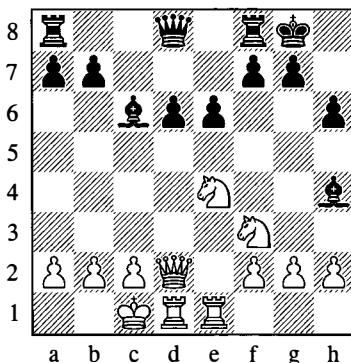
12. $\mathbb{Q}h4?$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4!$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$

After 13. $\mathbb{Q}xe4?$ $\mathbb{Q}xh4$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}g4$ (14. $\mathbb{Q}xh4$

$\mathbb{Q}xf3\rightarrow)$ 14... h5! 15. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 16. gxf3 d5

Black's advantage should already be enough to decide the game, Jedryczka – Grabarczyk, Griesheim 2002.

13... $\mathbb{Q}xh4$



14...Wxd6

Keeping the queens on with 14.Qxd6 Qe7 did little to change the overall evaluation in Vetemaa – Veingold, Jyvaskyla 1999.

14...Wxd6 15.Qxd6 Qe7 16.Rdd1 Rfd8

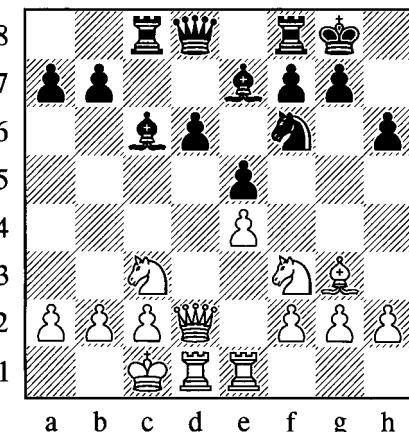
This position was reached in Schoeneberg – Gaponenko, Germany 2006. It is clear that the black bishops have good chances to become a dominant force over the enemy knights.

12...e5 13.Qg3

Once again 13.Qxh6?! gxh6 14.Wxh6 Qh7 can hardly offer White enough for the piece.

13...Bc8!

This is more accurate than the often played 13...b5.



14.Wd3

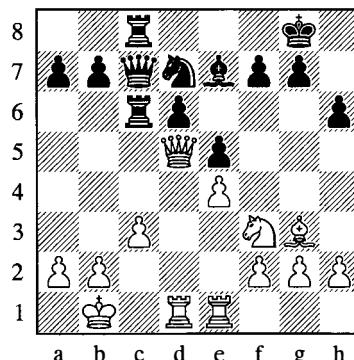
After the slow 14.Qb1?, the reply 14...b5!

becomes extremely powerful. 15.We2 b4 16.Qd5 Qxd5 17.exd5 Qd7 18.Qd2 Wc7 19.Qc1 Qf5+ Black was miles ahead in fulfilling his attacking dreams in Karjakin – Topalov, Dubai 2002.

14.Qh4 is not such a bad move, but Black can still eliminate any hint of an enemy advantage with 14...Qxe4! 15.Qxe4 Qxh4 16.Wxd6 Qxe4 17.Qxe4 Wxd6 18.Qxd6 Qxf2 19.Qxe5 Qfd8= The position is absolutely equal, although ambitious endgame players might try to make use of Black's potentially superior minor piece.

14...Qd7! 15.Qb1

The following game was highly instructive: 15.Qd5 Qxd5 16.Wxd5 Qc6! 17.Qb1 Wc7 18.c3 Qc8



a b c d e f g h

Black has a theoretically bad bishop and White controls the d5-square, so it would be easy to think that White stands better. In reality, the opposite is true. White's main problem is that his minor pieces are not working properly due to the restraining action of the enemy pawns. In the time it takes him to coordinate his position, Black will be able to create unpleasant threats on the queenside.

19.Qh4 Qb6 20.Wd3 g5!

Black continues to restrict the opponent's pieces. It is becoming clearer which side truly has the bad bishop.

21. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}a4$ 22. $\mathbb{E}e2$ b5

It is already hard to suggest a satisfactory defence, and in the game Black was able to smash through quickly.

23. $\mathbb{E}c2$ b4 24. $\mathbb{W}b5$ $\mathbb{Q}xb2!$ 0–1

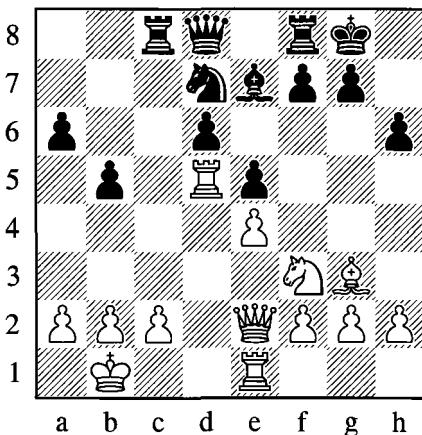
Hasangatin – Yakovich, Krasnodar 2002.

15...a6 16. $\mathbb{W}e2$ b5 17. $\mathbb{Q}d5$

By delaying this knight move, White has managed to obtain a slightly improved version of the position reached in the game from the previous note. Nevertheless Black still has no problems.

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

At this point I found an improvement for Black:



18... $\mathbb{E}c6!$ N

This is a try for an advantage.

A previous game continued 18... $\mathbb{E}c5$ 19. $\mathbb{E}ed1$ $\mathbb{E}xd5$ 20. $\mathbb{E}xd5$ $\mathbb{W}a8$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}h4$ f6 22. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 23. $\mathbb{E}d3$ d5 with equality, David – Tiviakov, Saint Vincent 2000.

Another reasonable continuation would be 18... $\mathbb{Q}b6$ N 19. $\mathbb{E}d3$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}h4$ $\mathbb{Q}a4$ with a comfortable game for Black. The text move is more ambitious.

19. $\mathbb{Q}xe5?$

This looks like the critical continuation. Quieter moves would be met by ... $\mathbb{W}c7$ and ... $\mathbb{E}c8$, with similar play to the Hasangatin – Yakovich game we witnessed earlier.

19... $\mathbb{dxe5}$

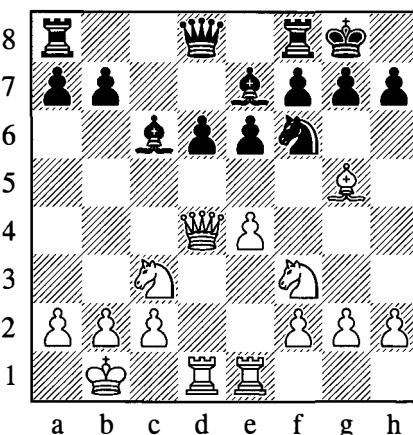
The next few moves are forced:

20. $\mathbb{E}ed1$ $\mathbb{E}c7$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 22. $\mathbb{E}xd8$ $\mathbb{E}xd8$ 23. $\mathbb{E}xd8\#$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$

The computer assesses this endgame as equal, but it is surely Black who will be pushing for the win.

B23) 11. $\mathbb{Q}b1$

This is the main line. Now that we have witnessed the tactical resources available to Black in the previous variation, the need for this prophylactic move becomes clear.



11... $\mathbb{W}c7$

This is the main line, and my primary recommendation. However, I would also like to draw your attention to an interesting and fully viable alternative:

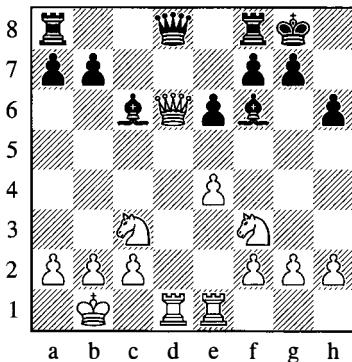
11...h6!?

Readers who are in any way unconvinced by the main line should examine this move closely.

12. $\mathbb{Q}h4$

12.♕c1 makes a strange impression. 12...♛c7 (Also interesting is: 12...♝g4!? 13.♕e2 ♜f6 14.♗xd6 ♛b6 15.♗a3 ♜fd8∞) 13.♗d3 This position was reached in Titova Boric – Gocheva, Cetinje 1991, and now Black could have obtained the better chances with 13...d5!N 14.exd5 ♜xd5 15.♗e5 ♜f6†.

12.♕xf6 ♜xf6 13.♗xd6 The loss of the d6-pawn in this line is far from tragic, as Black usually gets ample compensation. Here I found a new and promising idea:



13...♛b6!N (13...♝xc3 is also fine, but the text is more ambitious.) 14.♗d2 (14.e5 ♜ad8 15.♗a3 ♜xf3 16.gxf3 ♜h4 17.♗e4 ♜xf2†) 14...♝ad8 15.♗e3 ♜xc3 16.♗xb6 ♜xd1† 17.♗xd1 axb6 18.bxc3 ♜xe4† White is the one who must worry about holding the endgame.

12...♝e8!?

The position is brimming with possibilities, with 12...♛c7 and 12...a6 being valid alternatives. The text is the main line though.

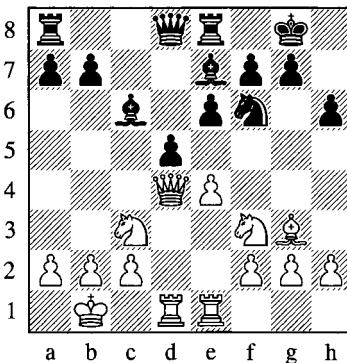
13.♕g3

13.h3 a6 14.♗e3 ♜c8 15.♗g3 ♛c7 16.♗d4 b5 17.f3 b4 18.♗ce2 ♜d7 19.♗d2 ♛b7 20.♗f2 ♜c7 was more promising for Black in Rozentalis – Huzman, Montreal 2007.

13...d5

There is also the unusual 13...e5!? 14.♗d3, S. Martinovic – Pernutz, Seefeld 1999, and

here Black should have played 14...♛d7N. In the event of 15.♗h4, hoping to exchange on f6 in order to control d5, Black can seize the initiative with 15...g5!? 16.♗g3 b5!.



14.e5

So far nobody seems to have tried 14.exd5N ♜xd5 15.♗xd5 ♜xd5 16.c4 with equality.

14...♝e4 15.♗xe4 dxe4 16.♗xd8 ♜exd8 17.♗d4 ♜e8

There is also 17...♝d5 18.b3 (18.♗b5 h5 19.♗f4∞) Ciubara – Huda, Predeal 2007, and now after 18...♝c5N Black is absolutely fine.

18.c3

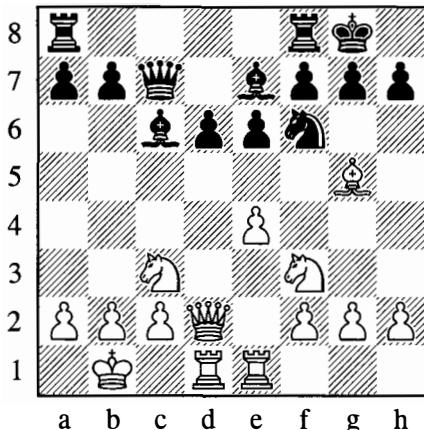
18.♗xe4 ♜c6 19.♗e2 ♜xg2†

18...♜ac8 19.♗c2 b5 20.♗xe4 b4∞

Black kept enough counterplay for the sacrificed pawn in Svidler – Kasparov, Linares 1999.

12.♗d2

White continues with his standard regrouping method, which typically involves ♗d4 next. It seems strange that White should develop his queen to d4 early and relinquish the bishop pair, only to reorganize his position making it resemble something from the standard 4.♗xd4 positions. Still, practice has shown that Black should be on guard in the resulting positions.



12... $\mathbb{E}fd8$

Paradoxically, even in the positions without the early ...h7-h6, Black must remain fully alert to the possibility of allowing a favourable exchange on f6. For instance, after 12... $\mathbb{E}ab8$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ b5 14. $\mathbb{Q}xf6!$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{W}xc6$ 16. $\mathbb{W}xd6\pm$ Black does not have full compensation for the pawn.

13. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{E}ab8$ 14.f3

This looks better than 14.f4?! b5 15.e5 (15.f5 b4 16.fxe6 is not quite sound: 16... $\mathbb{E}xc3$ 17. $\mathbb{E}xf7\#$ $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ 18. $\mathbb{W}xc3$ $\mathbb{E}dc8$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ [19. $\mathbb{W}c4\#$ $\mathbb{Q}g6!$ 20. $\mathbb{W}d3$ $\mathbb{W}b7!-\#$] 19... $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 20. $\mathbb{W}c4\#$ d5 21.exd5 This was Chebotarev – Shomoev, Internet 2004, and now 21... $\mathbb{Q}a8N$ should win easily.) 15...dxe5 16.fxe5 $\mathbb{Q}d5$ (16... $\mathbb{Q}c5!?$) 17. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ 18. $\mathbb{W}xg5$ $\mathbb{W}xc6$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ (19. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ b4#) 19... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ White's active play in the centre amounted to nothing and he was left facing a difficult defence in Vijayakumar – Stojic, Mount Buller 2005.

14...b5 15.g4 $\mathbb{Q}e8$

Another promising continuation is 15...b4 16. $\mathbb{Q}ce2$ $\mathbb{Q}a8!?$, which has scored quite highly for Black.

16. $\mathbb{Q}ce2$

White's typical attacking plan involves transferring this knight to h5, where it can

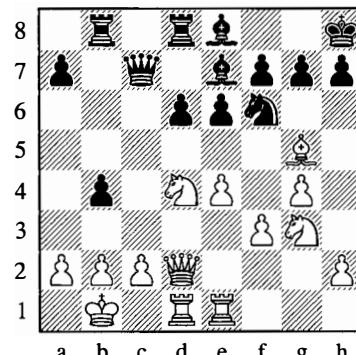
exert unpleasant pressure against the black kingside. Black can of course exchange it, but that would open the g-file.

16...h6?!

The pawn move in front of the king is risky, but the reward might be sweet. The older line goes:

16...b4 17. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}h8!$

The defender is playing cleverly in anticipation of White's attack.



18. $\mathbb{E}g1N!?$

This new idea may bring White some advantage.

The point behind Black's last move is revealed after 18. $\mathbb{Q}h5N$ $\mathbb{Q}xh5!$ (18... $\mathbb{Q}g8$ is playable but a little worse for Black) 19.gxh5 $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ 20. $\mathbb{W}xg5$ h6 21. $\mathbb{W}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}a4!$ 22. $\mathbb{E}e2$ $\mathbb{E}bc8$ 23. $\mathbb{E}g2$ $\mathbb{E}g8$ With g7 firmly under control Black can try to look to advance his own attack on the opposite side.

The only game I found on the database continued with 18.h4 $\mathbb{E}b6$ 19.h5 $\mathbb{E}a6$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{E}c8$ 21.h6 g6 22. $\mathbb{E}c1$ $\mathbb{E}c6$ with chances for both sides Sieiro Gonzalez – Mena Crespo, Cuba 2005.

18... $\mathbb{E}dc8$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}h5$ $\mathbb{Q}g8!$

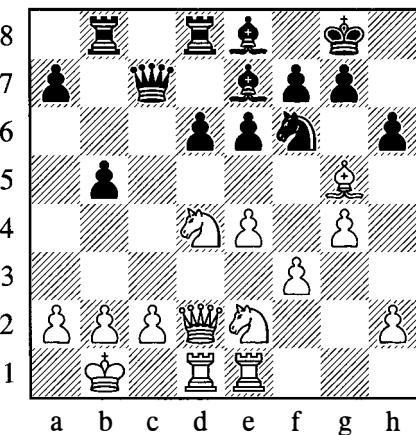
Since the white rook has already moved to the g-file, it is logical for Black to refrain from exchanging on h5.

20. $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ 21.f4 $\mathbb{Q}a4!?$ 22.b3

Also quite promising is 22.f5 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ 24. $\mathbb{E}ge1$.

22... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}de1\pm$

White has somewhat better chances.



17. $\mathbb{Q}e3$

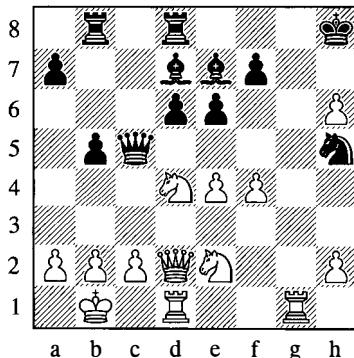
It is also important to consider

17. $\mathbb{Q}xh6!?$ N $\mathbb{Q}xh6$

Both sides will have to display clever ideas in this highly charged position.

18. $\mathbb{W}xh6$

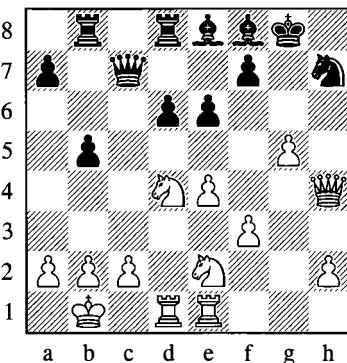
18.g5! is interesting, but ultimately not quite sufficient. 18... $\mathbb{Q}h5$ (18... $\mathbb{Q}xe4$? 19.fxe4 $\mathbb{h}xg5$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}g1\pm$) 19.gxh6 $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{W}c5$ 21.f4 $\mathbb{Q}d7!$ Black must connect the rooks as soon as possible. (Much worse is 21... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 22. $\mathbb{W}e3$ $\mathbb{W}h5$ [or 22... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 23.e5 $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 24. $\mathbb{W}h3\pm$] 23.e5 dxe5 24.fxe5 $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 25. $\mathbb{W}g3$ $\mathbb{W}g6$ 26. $\mathbb{W}h3\pm$ The pressure along the g-file can not be countered by Black.)



22. $\mathbb{Q}f3!?$ (22. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{W}c4$ 23. $\mathbb{W}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$

24. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}g7$ e5 26. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}g8\mp$; 22.f5 exf5 23. $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ 24.exf5 $\mathbb{Q}g8\mp$) 22... $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}bf8$ 24.e5 $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ 26.fxg5 $\mathbb{W}xe5$ Black emerged from the complications with somewhat better chances.

18... $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 19.g5 $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 20. $\mathbb{W}h4$



20... $\mathbb{Q}dc8$

20... $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 21.g6 $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 22.gxf7† $\mathbb{W}xf7$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{W}h5$ 24. $\mathbb{W}f2$ d5 also leads to complex and unclear play.

21. $\mathbb{Q}d2$

21. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 22.g6 fxe6 23. $\mathbb{Q}fxe6$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 24. $\mathbb{W}g4$ (24. $\mathbb{Q}xc7$ $\mathbb{Q}xh4$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}xe8$ $\mathbb{Q}xe8\mp$) 24... $\mathbb{W}c4$ 25.f4 $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 26.b3 $\mathbb{W}c3$ 27.e5 dxe5 28.fxe5 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}d7\mp$ 21... $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 22.f4 $\mathbb{W}a5$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}d3\infty$

The position remains messy and hard to evaluate. White keeps some initiative for the sacrificed piece, although Black might develop counterattacking chances of his own at some point.

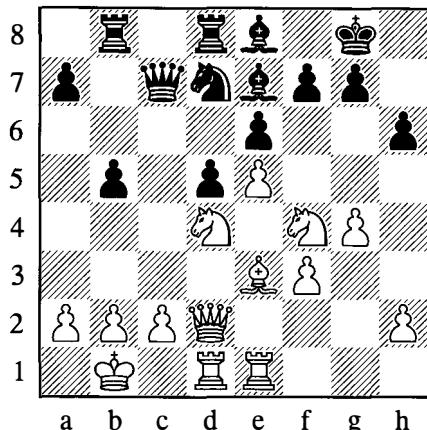
17...d5 18.e5

By now it is too late for the sacrifice: 18. $\mathbb{Q}xh6$? dxe4! 19. $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ 20. $\mathbb{W}g5\pm$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 21.fxe4 $\mathbb{Q}h7\mp$

18... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}f4!?$

This is White's most dynamic approach to the position, leaving the e5-pawn to its fate and hinting at possible sacrifices on e6.

In the event of 19.f4, Titova Boric – Kutuzovic, Pula 1997, I would suggest 19... $\mathbb{E}dc8N$, with similar ideas as given in the main line below.



19... $\mathbb{E}dc8!N$

This is an improvement over 19... $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}h5$ (20. $\mathbb{Q}fxe6$ $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $\mathbb{W}c6$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ $\mathbb{W}xb6$ 24.f4∞) 20... $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 21. $\mathbb{W}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 22.f4 b4 23.f5 With a powerful kingside initiative for White, Stellwagen – Tiviakov, Wijk aan Zee 2004.

One of the main ideas behind the text move is to retain the option of meeting a subsequent f4-f5 with ... $\mathbb{Q}xe5$, although as we will see, this must always be judged carefully.

20. $\mathbb{Q}h5$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$

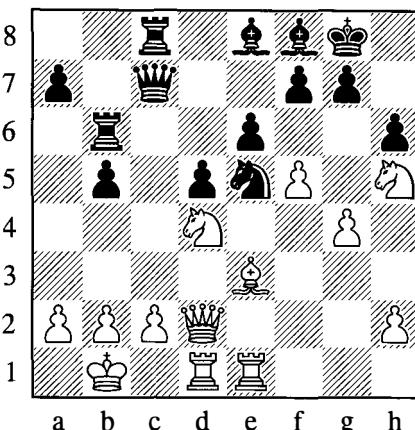
20... $\mathbb{Q}xe5?$ loses to 21. $\mathbb{Q}xh6!$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ $\mathbb{Q}xh6$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}e2+-$. Black needs to play very carefully in order to avoid disaster.

21.f4 $\mathbb{E}b6$ 22.f5

After 22. $\mathbb{E}g1$ $\mathbb{E}a6$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ (23.g5 hxg5 24. $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ g6†) 23... $\mathbb{W}c4$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$ White's pawn-grabbing has only opened lines for his opponent's attack.

22... $\mathbb{Q}xe5!$

This time the complications do not work out badly for Black.



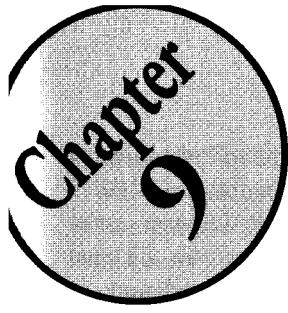
23. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}xc7$ $\mathbb{Q}xd2\#$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ $\mathbb{E}xc7$

26. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{E}c4$ 27.fxe6 $\mathbb{Q}c5$

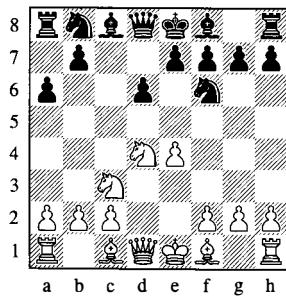
The main complications have subsided to leave a balanced but still lively endgame.

Conclusion

Different chess players are like apples and oranges – each with their own personality, ego and temperament. There will always be those who cherish the unusual challenges connected with moves like 4. $\mathbb{W}xd4$, which continues to prove itself as a potentially venomous challenge to the Sicilian. The brave queen cannot easily be repelled without incurring some kind of positional cost, so Black had better find a coping strategy that really works. The main line analysed in this chapter is not without risks, but Black keeps his own chances to take over the initiative and play for a win.



Open Systems



The Misfits - 6th Move Sidelines

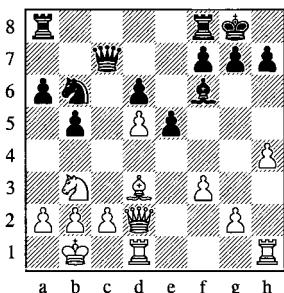
Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♘f6 5.♗c3

5...a6

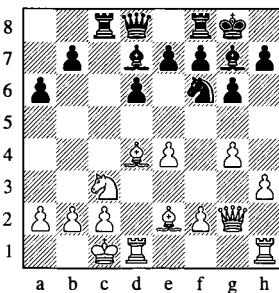
| | |
|------------|-----|
| A) 6.f3 | 150 |
| B) 6.♗f3!? | 151 |
| C) 6.♗g1!? | 154 |
| D) 6.♗d3 | 156 |
| E) 6.a4 | 158 |

A) after 16.♗d3!?



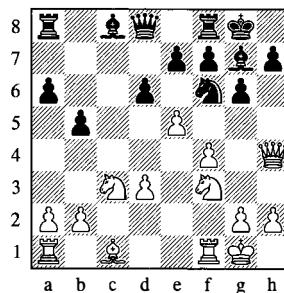
16...e4!N

B) after 13.♗xd4



13...e5!

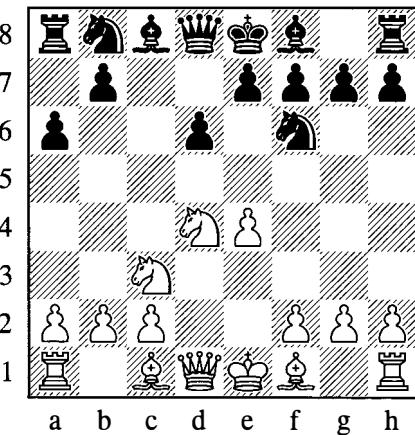
D) after 13.cxd3



13...b4!N

Before we move on to the major lines of the Najdorf, there are a few quirky alternatives to consider. None should be too terrifying for a well-prepared player, although all have claimed their fair share of scalps over the years.

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6



We will consider five options: A) 6.f3, B) 6.♗f3?!, C) 6.♘g1?!, D) 6.♘d3 and E) 6.a4.

A) 6.f3

This move would in 99% of all games be followed by a subsequent ♘e3 during the next few moves against both 6...e6 and 6...e5, thus transposing to the English Attack. In this section I will examine a few cases where White is “being creative”, trying to derive some independent value from this move order.

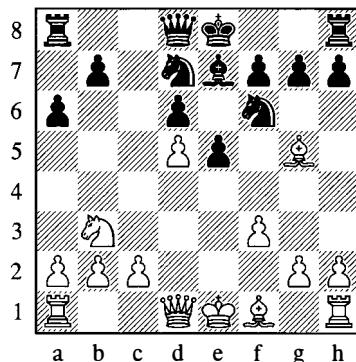
6...e5

Fans of the Scheveningen-style system have little to worry about: 6...e6 7.g4 b5 8.g5?! (8.♘e3 b4 leads us to Chapter 17.) 8...♗fd7 9.♘e3 I would not worry about other moves here; nor do I worry about this one. Black can take advantage of having the knight pushed towards the queenside with: 9...♗b6 10.♗d2

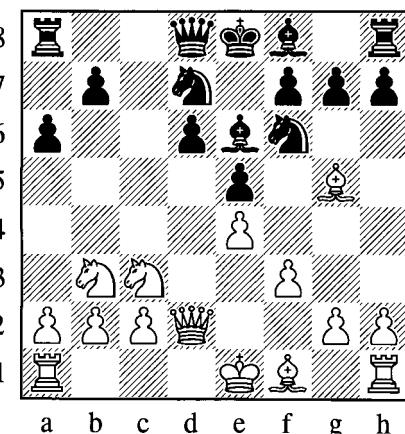
b4!N (10...♗b7 11.0–0–0 ♘d7 would bring us into a different main line in which Black should be fine; the text looks even easier though.) 11.♗d1 d5 It is White who will need to play accurately to maintain the balance.

7.♘b3 ♘e6 8.♗g5 ♘bd7 9.♗d2

9.♘d5 might look natural, but it is a classic example of mixing up the ideas of different set-ups, without keeping the advantages of any of them. 9...♗xd5 10.exd5 ♘e7

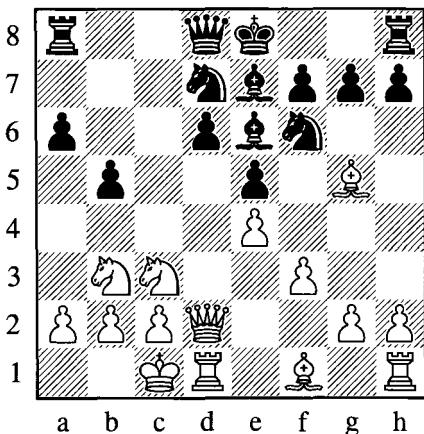


Already White needs to be careful, as he is behind in development with a slightly unfavourable pawn structure. 11.♗d2?N (11.♗e3 has been played in a few games, but I see little reason to spend time on this. White will struggle to keep even chances.) 11...a5! Black is doing very nicely, as 12.a4 is well met with 12...♗e4! 13.♗xe7 ♘xd2 14.♗xd8 ♘xb3 15.cxb3 ♘xd8 when Black has a slightly better ending.



9... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 10.0–0–0 b5

White's 'creative' play has only resulted in an inferior version of the usual positions he would reach in the English Attack. The main problem is that he will find it hard to launch an attack on the kingside, as his bishop will obstruct the g-pawn. Black, on the other hand, is not feeling any such restrictions on the queenside. It is amusing to consider that those relying on database statistics to make their choices would think that the position after 11. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ would give them a good game, with a 68% score. However, those with a bit more chess knowledge will recognize the position in question as one where it is typically White, not Black to move.



Instead of that rather humiliating retreat, White has also tried:

11. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ 0–0

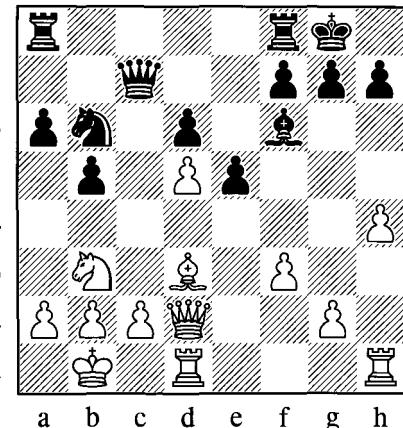
11...b4 12. $\mathbb{Q}a4!$ N is not necessarily progress for Black.

**12.h4 $\mathbb{W}c7$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 14.exd5 $\mathbb{Q}b6$
15. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6=$**

Black has equalized effortlessly, and if anything his position is slightly easier to handle. His knight is about to land on c4 and Black can activate his bishop with ...e5-e4 as well. One practical example continued:

16. $\mathbb{Q}d3?$!

This was played in Salvador – Mendoza, Quito 2003. Here Black did well after 16... $\mathbb{Q}c4$, but even stronger would have been:

**16...e4!N 17.fxe4 $\mathbb{Q}a4$ 18.c3 b4†**

White is very unlikely to survive this position. A tactical line is:

19.cxb4 $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}a5$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}cl$ $\mathbb{Q}c3†$
22. $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 23. $\mathbb{W}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}fb8$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}c6$ $\mathbb{Q}xb4†?$
25. $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 26.a3 a5

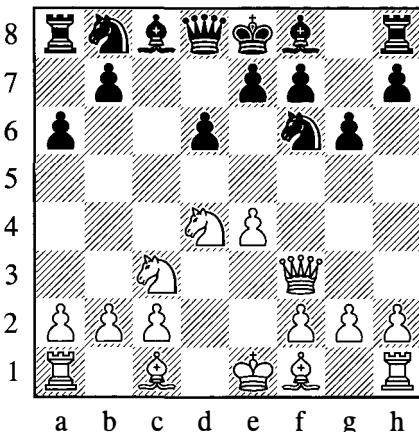
White simply cannot survive in the long run.

B) 6. $\mathbb{W}f3?$

This looks bizarre, but it has been tested by a few strong players, most notably GM Kogan who has used it on numerous occasions. Queen transfers to f3, g3 or h3 are commonplace in certain variations of the Najdorf, so it is certainly not ridiculous that White should consider the same idea in an accelerated form. In the meantime White plans long castling at the earliest convenience.

6...g6

Several other moves are possible, but this one looks especially logical – there are not too many Dragon lines in which White places his queen on f3.



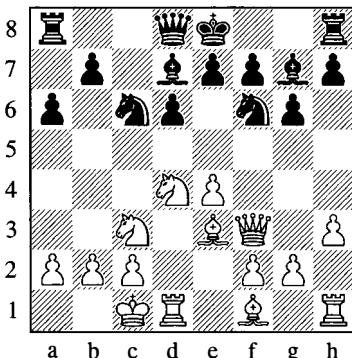
7.h3 ♕g7 8.Qe3 ♕d7 9.g4

Quieter set-ups achieve nothing, for instance:

9.Qd3 ♜c6 10.0–0 0–0 11.a4 ♜c8 when Black had a comfortable Dragon position in Alavi Moghaddam – Magerramov, Abu Dhabi 2006.

The most logical alternative is:

9.0–0–0 ♜c6



10.♕xc6

10.♗g3?! 0–0 11.♕e2 b5± 12.a3? ♜c8 13.f4 b4 14.axb4 ♜xb4+ R. Kaufman – Esserman, Internet 2008.

10.♗e2 ♜c8 11.f4 was seen in Sowray – Simacek, Dresden 2007. Here Black could have created some tricky problems with 11...♜b4!N 12.a3 (12.♗b1 ♜xc3 13.bxc3 ♜xe4 14.♕d2 ♜g3 15.♗e3 ♜xh1 16.cxb4 ♜g3!±; 12.e5 ♜fd5 13.♗xd5 ♜xd5

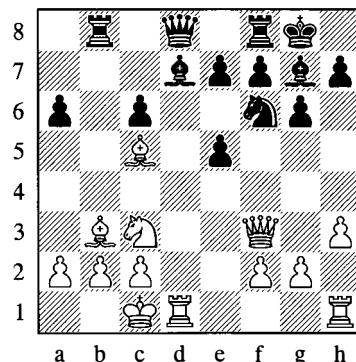
14.♗d2 ♜b6 is also problematic for White.) 12...♜xc3! 13.axb4 ♜c8 with somewhat better chances to Black, due to White's compromised king shelter.

10...bxс6!

This move should secure a decent game for Black.

Instead 10...♜xc6 11.♗d5 gave White some initiative in Kogan – Ortega, Lido Estensi 2003.

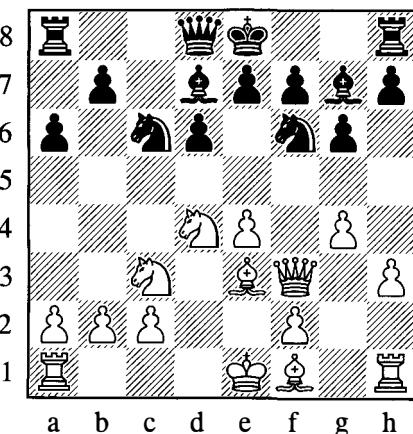
11.e5?! dxe5 12.♗c4 0–0 13.♗c5 ♜b8 14.♗b3 This position was reached in the recent game Howell – Womacka, Rijeka 2010. At this point Black could have obtained an excellent game as follows:



14...♜e8!N 15.g4 ♜c7 16.♗b1 ♜d5!

Black's chances are somewhat higher in this rich middlegame.

9...♜c6



10.0–0–0

Worse is 10.g5 $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}b3$?! Saathoff – Rous, Bavaria 2004, 11... $\mathbb{Q}xc3$!N 12.bxc3 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 13. $\mathbb{W}d1$ (13. $\mathbb{W}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}b5$) 13... $\mathbb{W}c7$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ 0–0 when Black is significantly better.

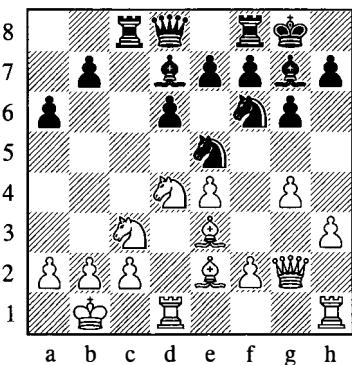
10...0–0 11. $\mathbb{W}g2$

White has tried several other moves here, without coming close to achieving anything against correct defence:

In the event of 11. $\mathbb{Q}f5$?, Holzer – Danner, Vienna 2003, 11...gxf5N 12.gxf5 $\mathbb{Q}h8\bar{F}$ I do not believe in White's compensation.

Retreating the knight from the centre is also unimpressive: 11. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ Peptan – Dzagnidze, Mallorca 2004. Now Black could have obtained an excellent game with 11...b5N intending the simple plan of ... $\mathbb{Q}e5$ -c4.

11. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$!N (11... $\mathbb{Q}e5$?! 12. $\mathbb{W}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 13.g5 $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xh5$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 15.bxc3 gxh5 led to unclear play in Nabuurs – Clemens, Maastricht 2007.) 12. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 13. $\mathbb{W}g2$



13... $\mathbb{Q}xc3$?! (The less ambitious 13... $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ = is also fine.) 14.bxc3 $\mathbb{W}b6$ † 15. $\mathbb{Q}a1$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ Black's compensation is quite real.

11. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 12. $\mathbb{W}g3$ was seen in Ramsurup – Jayaram, Gaziantep 2008, and now Black

could have fought for the initiative with 12...b5!N 13.f3 (13.f4? $b4\bar{F}$) 13... $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ e5 15. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ b4 16. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{W}a5$ 19.b3 $\mathbb{Q}fd8$ with at least equal chances.

Finally, there is:

11.g5 $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 12.h4

The more patient 12. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ gave Black no problems after 12... $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 14. $\mathbb{W}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ with equal play in M. White – A. Hunt, Hastings 2008.

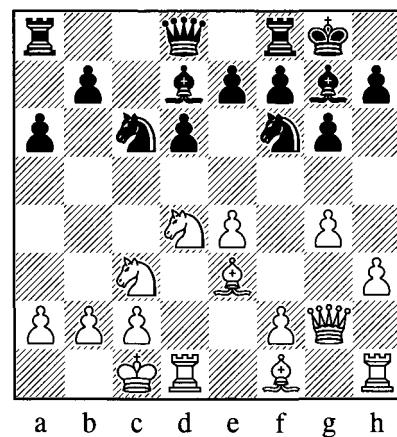
12. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$?! (12... $\mathbb{Q}c8$ N is a good alternative) 13. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ e5 15. $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ $\mathbb{W}xg5$ † should have led to equality, but after 16. $\mathbb{W}e3$?! $\mathbb{W}xe3$ † 17.fxe3 $\mathbb{Q}g3$! Black's chances were somewhat higher in Goumas – Gazis, Heraklio 2007.

12... $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 13. $\mathbb{W}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$

Black has every reason to feel satisfied with the outcome of the opening, and in the following game White immediately faltered:

14.f4?! $\mathbb{Q}g4$ †

Polivanov – Tihonov, Lvov 2007.

**11... $\mathbb{Q}c8$**

Also not bad is 11...b5?! 12. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$?! (12.f4N would have kept the game unclear) 12... $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ 13.h4 $\mathbb{W}a5$ † Van Delft – Burg, Leiden 2008.

12. $\mathbb{Q}e2$?

This move is too slow to meet the demands of the sharp position that stands on the board. Instead White should have preferred one of the following alternatives:

12.f4 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{W}a5$ with typical counterplay for the Dragon.

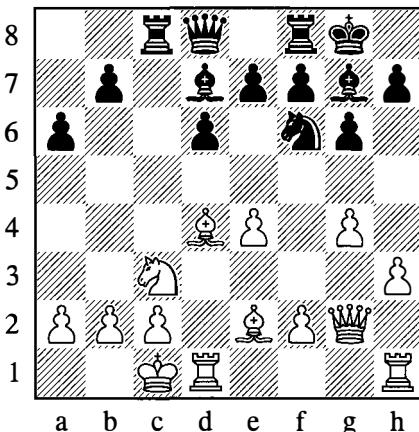
12. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ e5 14. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ (14. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ runs into 14... $\mathbb{Q}xe4!$) 14... $\mathbb{W}a5$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}fd8$ with roughly equal chances.

12... $\mathbb{Q}xd4$!

This leads to Black's advantage after the following precise sequence:

13. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$

13. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ gives Black a pleasant choice between 13...b5 and 13... $\mathbb{Q}e8!?$.

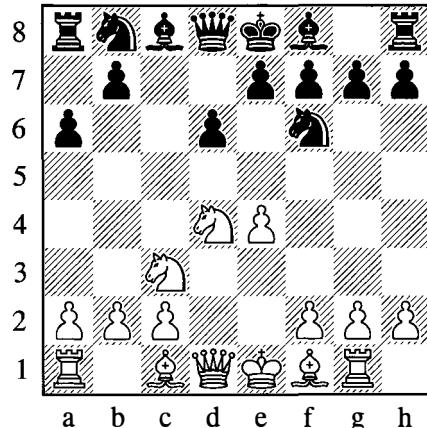


13...e5! 14. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3$! 15.bxc3 $\mathbb{W}a5$ †

The thematic exchange sacrifice brought Black a fantastic position in Abergel – Negi, Cappelle la Grande 2010.

C) 6. $\mathbb{Q}g1?$

Here we have another unlikely-looking move with some logic behind it. Pushing the g-pawn is a typical motif in the Najdorf, and on this occasion White is preparing it in the most direct way possible.



6...e5

This is the simplest strategy. Black does not want to worry about possibilities such as 6...b5 7.g4 $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 8.g5! $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 10. $\mathbb{W}g4$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}g2$. White's compensation is more dangerous than it may initially appear, as confirmed by several practical encounters.

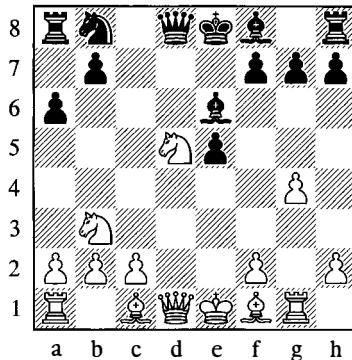
7. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 8.g4 d5!

This highlights the drawback of White's decision to prepare g4 with $\mathbb{Q}g1$ instead of f3: the e4-pawn is lacking support.

9.g5

Despite the aforementioned problem, this remains an interesting move and certainly the only ambitious attempt at White's disposal. The alternative is:

9.exd5 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$



Now Black has a choice between a safe equalizing continuation, and a double-edged one. We will focus on the latter:

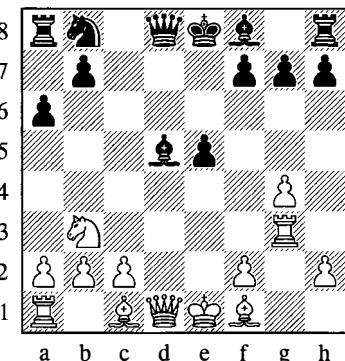
10... $\mathbb{Q}xd5!$?

This has only been played a couple of times, but I think it deserves serious consideration. 10... $\mathbb{W}xd5$ is safe, but also a bit dull: 11. $\mathbb{W}xd5$ (11. $\mathbb{W}e2!$? $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{W}d6$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{B}d8\#$ Simmelink – Wilczek, e-mail 2004) 11... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 13.0–0–0 0–0–0 with an equal and drawish position as in Yemelin – Huzman, St Petersburg 1999, as well as several other games.

11. $\mathbb{Q}g3!$?

This is the critical move, without which Black would not have the slightest cause for concern.

White played worse in the following game:
 11. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 12. $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 13.0–0–0? $\mathbb{Q}b4$?
 14.c4 Farnault – Wang Yue, Calvi 2007. Here Black could have obtained a big advantage with: 14... $b5!$ N 15. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ (15. $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{B}xc5$ 17. $\mathbb{W}xb4$ $\mathbb{W}c7\#$) 15... $bxc4$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}d3$? 17. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{W}xd5\#$



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

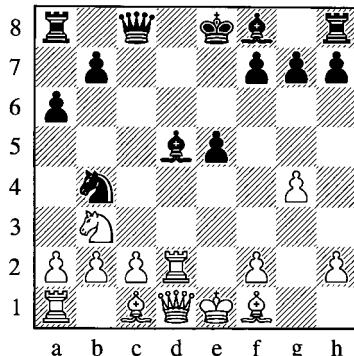
11... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 12. $\mathbb{W}xd8\#$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ was seen in San Juan Rodriguez – Vazquez Igarza, Collado Villalba 2007, and now 13.f4!N might offer White some initiative.

12. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}d2$

This position was reached in Petrosian – Ghaem Maghami, Stepanakert 2004, and here I found an improvement for Black:

13... $\mathbb{W}c8!$ N

I think Black should be okay in this highly irregular position, thanks to White's poor coordination.



14. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$

14.c3 $\mathbb{Q}e6$! 15.cxb4 $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ 16.f3 0–0 gives Black promising compensation.

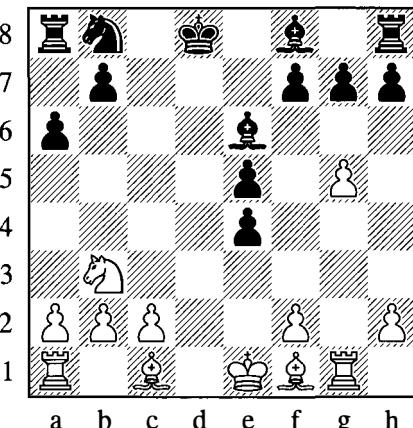
14... $\mathbb{Q}xc2\#$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}xa1$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xe5\#$
 16. $\mathbb{Q}xa1$ $\mathbb{W}xg4\#$ 17.f3 $\mathbb{W}h4$ can be dangerous only to White.

16... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xa1$ $\mathbb{W}xg4\#$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{W}b4$!
 19. $\mathbb{W}d2$ 0–0–0

Any result is possible, but I do not think Black's chances are any worse.

9... $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 11. $\mathbb{W}xd8\#$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$

White's slight lead in development should enable him to regain his pawn, but not to claim any advantage.



12.♕e3

After 12.♕g2 ♜c6 13.♕xe4 ♜c7 14.♕e3 ♜d8 Black was fine in Landa – Nevostruev, St Petersburg 1999.

12...♝c7 13.♕g2 h6!

Forcing a weakening of the white kingside.

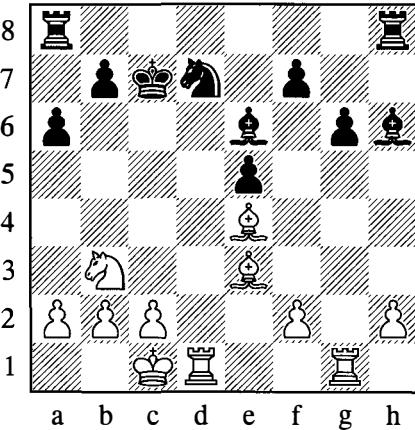
14.gxh6

14.♕xe4 hxg5 15.♕xg5 ♜d7† Branzuela – Sadorra, Manila 2007.

White is also not entirely happy after 14.h4 hxg5 15.hxg5 ♜c6 16.♕xe4 ♜d8 17.♕d1 ♜xd1† 18.♕xd1 ♜h4†.

14...g6

Obviously Black prefers to recapture on h6 with a piece rather than a pawn. Now the rook on g1 will be largely ineffective, and the h2-pawn might become a serious weakness later in the game.

15.♕xe4 ♜d7 16.0–0–0 ♜xh6**17.♕xh6**

This looks better than 17.♕g3 ♜f6 18.♕xh6 (18.♕h1 ♜h5†) 18...♜xe4 19.♕g7 ♜h5 20.♕e3 ♜xf2 21.♕c3† ♜b6 22.♕d6† ♜a7 when White was a pawn down for no real compensation in Prasad – Sasikiran, Nagpur 2002.

17...♜xh6 18.♕g3 ♜c8

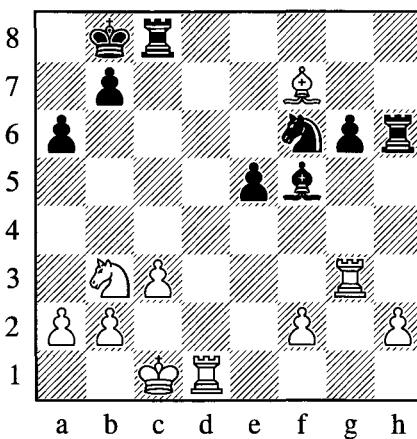
It was also worth considering 18...♜f6?N, although after 19.♕c3† ♜b8 20.♕h1 ♜xh2 21.♕c5 White should have just about enough activity to maintain the balance.

19.♕d5 ♜f5!?

Black offers a temporary pawn sacrifice, hoping to make the most of his active pieces.

20.♕xf7 ♜b8 21.c3 ♜f6

Here I found an improvement for White:

**22.♕d2!N**

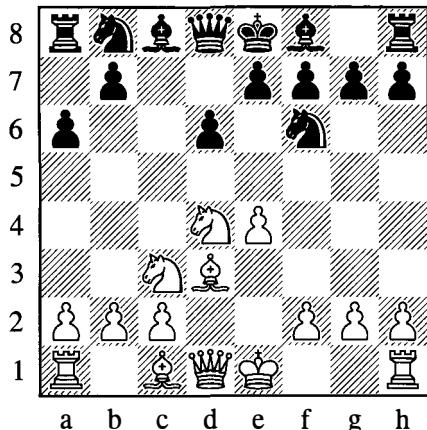
In the following game White soon found himself in trouble: 22.♕dg1? ♜h5 23.♕e3 ♜f4 24.♕d1 ♜xh2† Fontaine – Relange, Clichy 1998.

22...♜f8 23.♕b3 ♜xh2

The position should be equal, although Black's pieces are slightly more active.

D) 6.♗d3

This is not usually played so early, although d3 is clearly not such a bad square for the bishop, and there are several mainstream variations in which it might occupy this square a few moves later.



6...g6

Just about any sensible move is playable, but the fianchetto development seems like one of the most logical set-ups, fortifying the b1-h7 diagonal and thus immediately questioning the usefulness of White's bishop development.

An example of a line that would justify White's play is: 6...b5 7.0–0 ♘b7 8.♗e2! e6 9.a4=

7.f4

This is perhaps the most active plan at White's disposal. The alternatives give Black nothing to fear:

7.h3 ♘g7 8.♗e3 b5 9.a3 This may not be the best move, but it is up to White to prove there is a better one. 9...♘b7 10.f4 (10.0–0 0–0 11.f3 ♘bd7 12.♗d2 ♜c8 13.♗ac1 ♘e5† Maharjan – Timoshenko, Mumbai 2009) 10...♘bd7 11.♗f3 ♜c8 Black already has the more harmonious position, Perdomo – Rodriguez, Las Palmas 1993.

7.0–0 ♘g7 8.♗e1

There is no reason to retreat the knight from the centre voluntarily: 8.♘b3?! 0–0 9.♗e1 (9.h3 b5 10.♗e2 ♘b7 11.♗d1 ♘bd7† Levy – Ljubojevic, New York 1985) 9...♘bd7 10.♘g5 h6 11.♗h4 b5 12.f4 ♜c7 13.a3

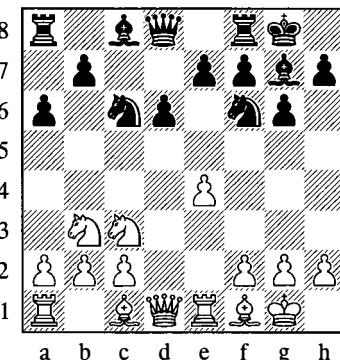
14.♗f3 e6 15.♗h3 ♜fe8 16.♗ad1 h5!?? Desbonnes – Savchenko, Paris 2001.

Also harmless is 8.♗h1 ♜c6 9.♗xc6 bxc6 10.f4 ♘d7 11.♗e1 a5 12.♗e3 a4= Campora – Ehlvest, San Roque 1996.

8...0–0 9.♗f1

White has reverted to a defensive set-up commonly used by Black in the 'reversed Dragon' variation of the English Opening. The extra tempo should be enough to ensure equal chances for him, but not to obtain any advantage.

9...♘c6 10.♗b3



10...b5

This is the most natural move, although some players have also experimented with the disruptive 10...♘g4!?.

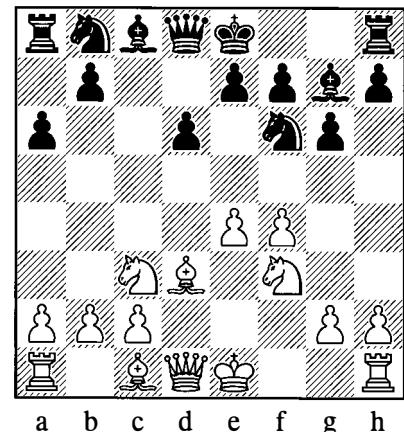
11.a4

The immediate 11.♗d5 can also be met by 11...♗d7, leading to similar positions.

11...b4 12.♗d5 ♘d7

Black intends to complete development with ...♘b7, and can choose the right moment to expel the enemy knight from the centre with ...e6, followed by ...♗c7 or ...♗e7. For an in-depth discussion of such positions (with colours reversed), the reader may refer to the first of Mihail Marin's volumes on the English Opening (number 3 in the *Grandmaster Repertoire* series).

7...♘g7 8.♗f3

**8...0-0**

The disruptive 8... $\mathbb{W}b6!$? could be considered, but the main line is fine.

9.0-0 $\mathbb{Q}bd7$ 10. $\mathbb{W}e1$

There is no need for the slow 10. $\mathbb{Q}h1$, and after 10... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 11. $\mathbb{W}e1$ b5 12.a3 e6 13. $\mathbb{W}h4$ $\mathbb{Q}fd7$ 14. $\mathbb{W}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ 15.cxd3 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ Black had the more comfortable position in Carlsen – Sutovsky, Rishon Le Zion (blitz) 2006.

10... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 11. $\mathbb{W}h4$

After 11. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ the exchange on c5 would lead to a worsening of Black's pawn structure, thus Black should play 11... $\mathbb{Q}xd3!$ 12.cxd3 b5 with a pleasant position as in J. Polgar – Gelfand, Dos Hermanas 1997.

11...b5

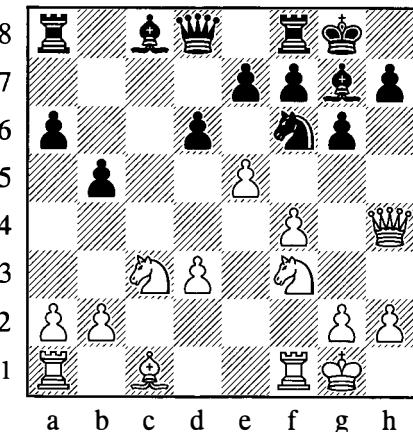
This natural move should be preferred over 11...d5?! 12.e5 $\mathbb{Q}fe4$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ 14.cxd3 $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 15.bxc3± Kindermann – Browne, Thessaloniki 1984. The bishop on g7 will have a hard time finding a meaningful role.

12.e5

12.a3 is rather slow, and after 12... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 13.e5, Paglilla – Klibanski, Buenos Aires 1973, Black can obtain an excellent position with 13... $\mathbb{Q}fd7!$!.

12... $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ 13.cxd3

We have been following the game Delchev – Kolev, Sofia 1996, which – like several of the quoted game references – transposed to our variation through a different move order, in this case beginning with 6.f4. In the present position Black missed a good opportunity:

**13...b4!N 14. $\mathbb{Q}d1$**

White has nothing better, as the reader can easily verify.

14... $\mathbb{Q}d5$

Thanks to Black's small finesse on the previous move, his knight can hop to a purposeful square in the centre.

15. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{W}b6$ 16.d4 $\mathbb{Q}b7\#$

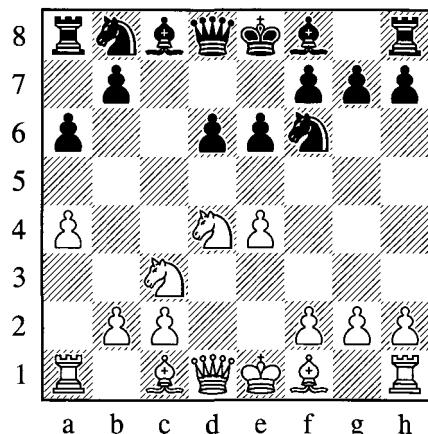
Black's g7-bishop might not be fantastic, but the one on c1 is no better. Meanwhile the rest of Black's pieces are superbly placed, and the arrival of a rook on the c-file will complete the picture of perfect harmony.

E) 6.a4 e6

I find this the most convenient choice for our repertoire. With the pawn on a4 White will hardly be able to contemplate the most aggressive set-ups involving long castling. Instead, in the great majority of games he has

placed his bishop on e2 and castled short, thus transposing to the 6. $\mathbb{B}e2$ system, specifically variation B in Chapter 13.

In this section we will consider a few of the ways in which he can deviate from this plan.



7. $\mathbb{B}e3$

Harmless is 7.g3 b6 8. $\mathbb{B}g2$ $\mathbb{B}b7$, for instance: 9.0–0 $\mathbb{W}c7$ 10.g4 h6 11.f4 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 13.h3 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ and Black's chances were already slightly higher in Felgaer – Fedorchuk, Barcelona 2005.

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

7...b6!? 8.g4!? is another very sharp and interesting line.

8. $\mathbb{Q}d3$

8. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ obviously takes us back to Chapter 13.

8... 0–0 9.0–0 $\mathbb{Q}c6$

Take a look at Chapter 13, and you will see that in several variations White eventually moves his bishop from e2 to d3, so Black must be careful to avoid slipping into such a position a tempo down. Fortunately there are more promising ways to handle the positions with the bishop already on d3.

10. $\mathbb{Q}h1$

Another option is:

10.f4 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ e5!

Here we see one very clear drawback of the bishop's development on d3: the troublesome possibility of ... $\mathbb{Q}g4$.

12. $\mathbb{Q}e3$?

12.fxe5 Ndx e5 13. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ (14. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}e3$) 14... $\mathbb{Q}c5\#$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}f2\#$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ White will struggle to demonstrate compensation.

Possibly best is 12. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$!N (12...exf4 was also not bad in Shah – De Mie, Menorca 1996) 13. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ exf4 with equality.

12... $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 13. $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3$

The loss of this valuable bishop is a serious hardship for White.

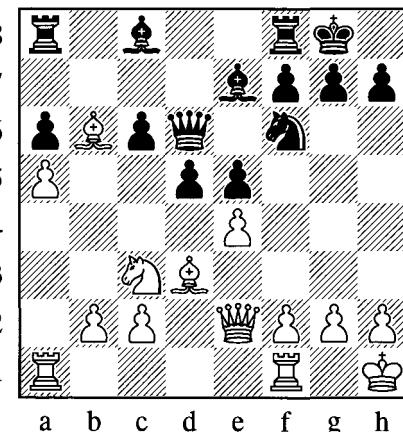
14. $\mathbb{W}xe3$ exf4 15. $\mathbb{W}xf4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}e5\#$

Seifarth – Vaulin, Pardubice 1993.

10... e5! 11. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$

11. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ looks comfortable for Black.

11... bxc6 12. a5 d5 13. $\mathbb{Q}b6$ $\mathbb{W}d6$ 14. $\mathbb{W}e2$



14... d4N

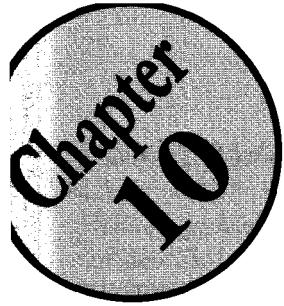
This is a natural improvement over: 14... $\mathbb{Q}b7$?! What is the bishop supposed to do here? 15.f4!± Diamant – Milos, Rio de Janeiro 2007.

15.♘a4 ♘d7 16.b3 c5

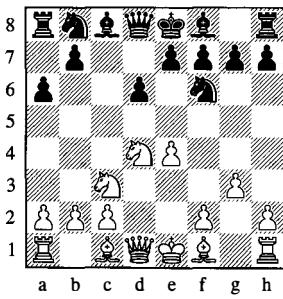
Black has a nice position. He controls the centre, and the bishop on b6 might turn out to be misplaced.

Conclusion

None of the five deviations examined here should be of great concern to us, but they all undoubtedly have the right to exist. Out of the many possible responses, I sought to recommend responses that were both practical and, where possible, problematic for the opponent. Thus, lines A and E will, in the great majority of cases, merely transpose to a different variation in the nearest future. The quirky variation C with 6.♗g1!? is more respectable than it may first appear, but we saw that Black can easily obtain a fine game with the aid of direct action in the centre. Finally, against lines B and D I chose to recommend a transition to a Dragon set-up, in order to question the usefulness of White's sixth move (6.♗f3!? and 6.♗d3 respectively).



Open Systems



Sideways - 6.g3

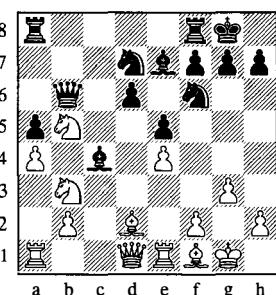
Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6

6.g3 e5

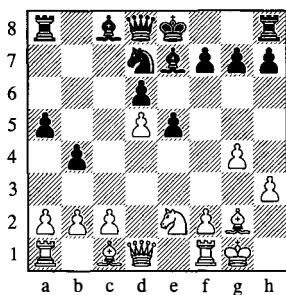
| | |
|-----------------------|-----|
| A) 7.♘b3 ♘e7 8.♘g2 b5 | 162 |
| A1) 9.a4 | 163 |
| A2) 9.0–0 ♘bd7 | 164 |
| A21) 10.♘d2!? | 165 |
| A22) 10.a4 | 167 |
| B) 7.♘de2 b5 | 168 |
| B1) 8.♘g5 | 169 |
| B2) 8.♘g2 | 169 |

A22) after 17.♗f1!?



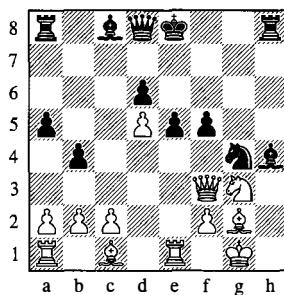
17...d5!

B2) after 13.0–0



13...h5!

B2) note to 14.gxh5



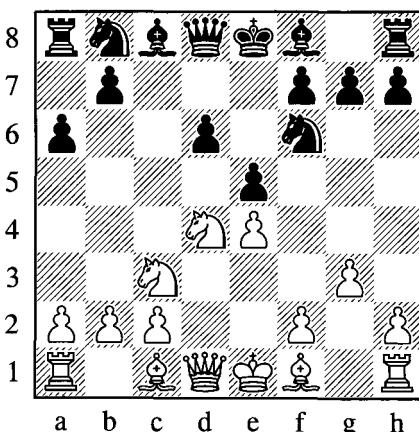
21...♗a7!N

Despite its modest appearance the variation with 6.g3 is not without danger for Black, since the bishop has the potential to exert considerable pressure along the h1-a8 diagonal. How should the defender react?

One option is to revert to a standard Scheveningen set up with 6...e6, intending to develop solidly and hoping to make use of the unguarded c4-square in the middlegame. Black has excellent chances to equalize the position, but playing for a win has proven a bit of a challenge.

For this reason I eventually decided to recommend the more spirited 6...e5, gaining additional space in the centre and driving the enemy knight to a more modest location. Naturally there is a price to pay, in the form of the weakened d5-square, which will have to be guarded carefully against the enemy knights. Studying the intricacies of this complex system helps with understanding other Sicilian lines featured in our book. The reader should pay special attention to the timely ...b7-b5 advance, securing enough counterplay on the queenside.

**1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♘f6
5.♘c3 a6 6.g3 e5**



In this, our basic starting position for the present chapter, White can choose between two

knight retreats: **A) 7.♘b3** and **B) 7.♘de2.**

A) 7.♘b3

The retreat of the knight to b3 can occur in many different Sicilian variations. The advantages are that the knight has found a stable location from which it does not obstruct the rest of the white pieces. However, the drawback – which applies in almost all scenarios involving ♘d4-b3 in the Sicilian – is that the knight suffers from a lack of active prospects.

7...♝e7

Black can also play 7...♝bd7, although White may be tempted to respond with 8.a4!?.

8.♗g2

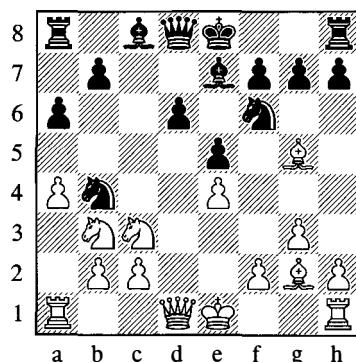
The plan of restricting the enemy queenside does not work so well before Black has committed his queen's knight to d7.

8.a4 ♘c6! 9.♗g2 ♘b4

The knight wastes no time occupying the newly created outpost.

10.♗g5

After 10.0–0 ♘g4 11.♗d2 ♜c8 12.a5 it looks promising for Black to play 12...♛d7!N (This is an ambitious try for an advantage, although there is nothing wrong with 12...♝e6 when Black had nothing to fear in Felgaer – Ricardi, Mendoza 2008.) 13.♗a4 ♛b5 14.♗c3 ♛c6† with some queenside pressure.



10... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 11.0–0 $\mathbb{B}c8$ 12. $\mathbb{B}e1$ 0–0 13. $\mathbb{W}e2$ h6
14. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$

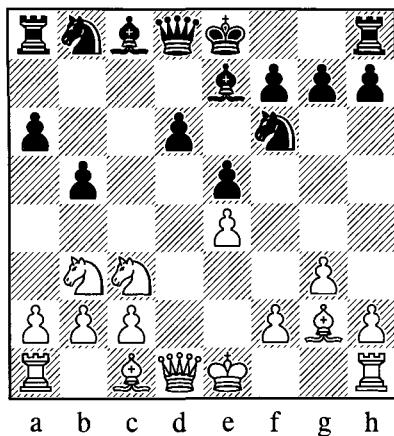
White's problems are even greater after:

14. $\mathbb{Q}e3?$! d5! 15.exd5 $\mathbb{Q}fxd5$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$
17. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{W}xd5\pm$

14... $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 15.a5 $\mathbb{W}d7\mp$

The second player already had the more comfortable game in Lopez Martinez – Dominguez Perez, Barcelona 2006.

8...b5



Black begins his counterplay. We will consider the immediate queenside attack with A1) 9.a4, followed by the more patient A2) 9.0–0.

9. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ is not too dangerous. Pieces alone are unlikely to conquer Black's position despite the obvious hole on d5. One high-level game continued 9... $\mathbb{Q}bd7$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 11. $\mathbb{W}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ The position of the king is of no great concern. 13. $\mathbb{W}d2$ f6 14.0–0 $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 15.c3 (15. $\mathbb{Q}a5$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 16. $\mathbb{B}fe1$ $\mathbb{B}ac8$ 17.c3 $\mathbb{Q}f7=$) 15... $\mathbb{B}c8$ 16.h4 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 17. $\mathbb{W}e2$ $\mathbb{W}b6$ Black had no problems in Alekseev – Nepomniachtchi, Moscow 2006.

A1) 9.a4 b4

This leads to a more or less forced sequence:

10. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 11. $\mathbb{W}xd5$ $\mathbb{B}a7$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$

White must decide where to place his queen.

13. $\mathbb{W}d2$

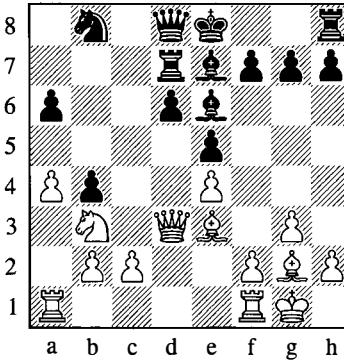
It seems logical to tie the enemy rook to the defence of the b4-pawn. The other main choice is:

13. $\mathbb{W}d3$ $\mathbb{B}d7$

Also playable is 13... $\mathbb{B}b7$ 14.a5 0–0 15.0–0 $\mathbb{W}c7$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}d2$, Lirindzakis – Ornithopoulos, Nikea 1985, and here I suggest 16... $\mathbb{W}c6N$ with the possible continuation: 17.f4 f6 18.f5 $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 19. $\mathbb{B}fd1$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{B}d8=$

14.0–0

This position was reached in Timofeev – Smeets, Amsterdam 2005. At this point I recommend a natural yet untested move:



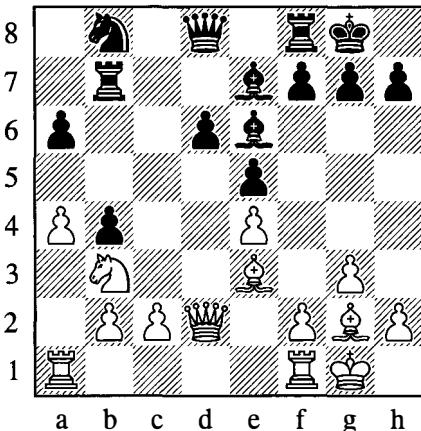
14...0–0N

The game continuation of 14...d5?! was rather risky, as Black is opening the position before finishing development. Objectively his position should still be alright, but in the game he was unable to withstand the pressure. Play continued 15.exd5 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{B}xd5$ 17. $\mathbb{W}e2$ $\mathbb{W}d7$ 18. $\mathbb{B}fd1$ 0–0 19. $\mathbb{Q}c5!$ $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{B}xd1\uparrow$ 21. $\mathbb{B}xd1$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 22. $\mathbb{B}d5\pm$ And White's pieces were dominating the board.

15. $\mathbb{B}fd1$ $\mathbb{W}c8$ 16. $\mathbb{B}ac1$ $\mathbb{W}b7=$

Black has a solid position and can choose the right moment to break with ...d5.

13... $\mathbb{B}b7$ 14.0–0 0–0



15.a5

In one high-level game White tried:

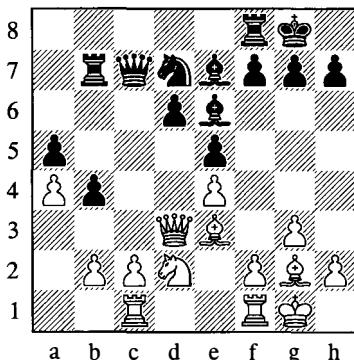
15.Qd3

This loss of tempo does not create much of an impression, and it is no surprise that Black soon gets a comfortable game.

15...Qc7 16.Qd2 a5

16...Rc8!? N 17.Qfc1 a5 18.c3 b3 was also fine.

17.Qacl Qd7



18.b3

After 18.c3 Qc5 19.Qxc5 dxcc5 20.Qc4 bxc3 21.bxc3 Rd8 22.Qe2 Rb3 The second player can benefit from two bishops and active pieces.

18...Rc8

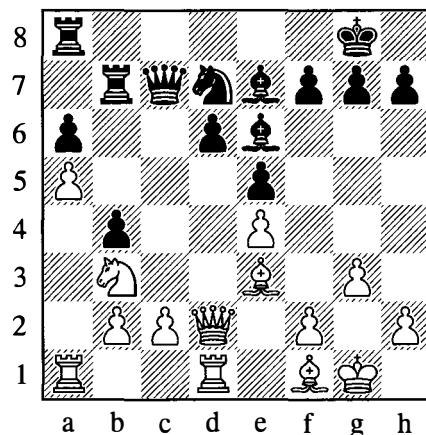
Black obtained excellent control over the queenside and centre in Kasimdzhanov – Karjakin, Tomsk 2006.

15...Qd7 16.Qfd1

White is not helped by 16.Qe2 Rb5 (or 16...Rc7N 17.Qfd1 Rc6 18.Qac1 Qf6=) 17.Qfd1 Rc7 18.Qf1 Rc6 19.f3 Rc8 20.Qac1 h6 when Black had no problems in Lintchevski – Brodsky, Peterhof 2006.

16...Qc7 17.Qf1 Ra8

Black has obtained a solid position, and it is hard to see White achieving much on the queenside. In the one game I found, White now went astray.



18.Ra4?

White should play something less exotic, although he could hardly hope for an advantage in any case.

18...Rc6! 19.Qd1

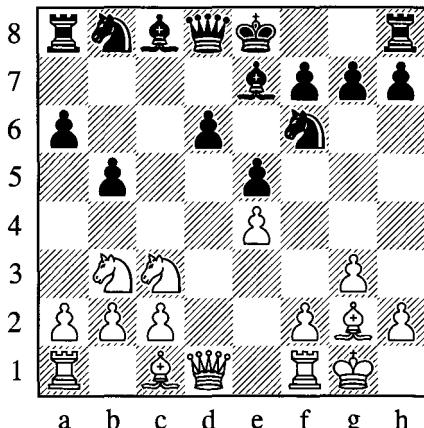
19.Qxb4? Rxb4 20.Qxb4 Rxc2 leaves White in serious trouble.

19...d5! 20.exd5 Qxd5

With the centre open, White's oddly-placed rooks were a real problem in Zagrebelyn – Biriukov, St Petersburg 2006.

A2) 9.0–0

This time White performs the essential task of castling and will choose what he hopes will be a more favourable moment for a2-a4.



9... $\mathbb{Q}bd7$

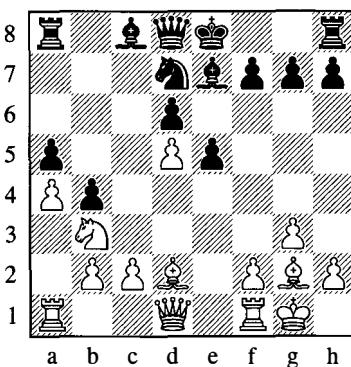
Now we will pay attention to A21) 10. $\mathbb{Q}d2!!$ and A22) 10.a4.

It is also worth mentioning:

10. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 11.exd5 a5!

Black needs to put the pawns on the correct squares before he chooses a place for his bishop. After 11... $\mathbb{Q}b7?$! 12.a4 b4 13. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ a5 14.c3 bxc3 15. $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ White has managed to put pressure on the a5-pawn. The big problem for Black is that after 15... $\mathbb{W}b6$ 16. $\mathbb{E}a3$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ he has defended the pawn, but his pieces are not ready for 17. $\mathbb{Q}d4!!$, which he has to take, otherwise it comes to c6: 17...exd4 18. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 19. $\mathbb{E}e1\uparrow$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ $\mathbb{E}g8$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}d4\pm$ with a strong attack, Civric – Djukanovic, Tivat 1995.

12.a4 b4 13. $\mathbb{Q}d2$



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

Once the bishops are exchanged Black will not have the same problems with the a5-pawn.

14.f4!?

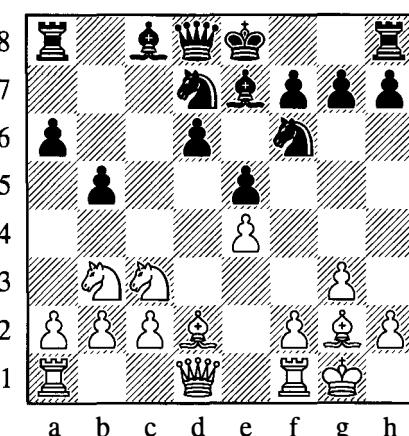
Preventing Black's idea, but making a different kind of concession. The bishop now returns to f6 and is still involved in the fight for the queenside from an active position, rather than sitting passively on d8.

14... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 15.c3 bxc3 16. $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 0–0

The position is about equal with everything to fight for, Movsesian – Kasparov, Prague 2001.

A21) 10. $\mathbb{Q}d2!!$

For a while this spirited idea was robbing Black players of their dreams. White is preparing to undermine the pawn structure on the queenside, so the bishop moves to control the vital a5- and b4-squares.



10...0–0 11. $\mathbb{E}e1$

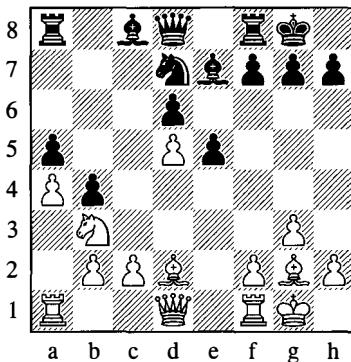
This secondary preparatory move has been White's highest-scoring choice. The immediate queenside strike does not offer much:

11.a4 b4 12. $\mathbb{Q}d5$

The knight can also return to its original square, but this hardly seems like the most principled way to conduct the game. 12. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ a5 13.c3 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 14.cxb4 (14. $\mathbb{Q}xa5$ bxc3

15.♕xc3 ♖c7 16.♔e1 ♕d7 17.♕a3 ♕xa4†)
 14...axb4 15.♕xb4 ♕a6 16.♕xc5! (16.♔e1
 ♕d3 17.♕a5 ♖b8 18.♕e3 ♖xb2 19.♖c2
 ♕c4 20.♖c3 ♕c8†) 16...♕xf1 17.♕xf1 dxc5
 18.♕c3 c4 19.♕xc4 ♖d1† 20.♕f1 ♖c2= With the help of the witty exchange sacrifice White was able to maintain the balance in Felgaer – Dominguez Perez, Havana 2004.

12...♗xd5 13.exd5 a5



14.c3

14.♔e1 ♕f6 15.c3 bxc3 16.♕xc3 ♖b6† The weakness on a5 is well defended and the black pieces have a lot of room for manoeuvres and improvement.

14...bxc3 15.♕xc3 ♖b6 16.♕a3 f5 17.♔e1 ♕d8
 18.♗d2

18.♕e2 ♕f6 19.♕c2 ♕d7†
 18...♕a6 19.♗b3 ♕b7 20.♗d2 ♕c8†

We have been following the game Socko – Karjakin, Mallorca 2004. Black has excellent prospects with his mobile e- and f-pawns, while White will struggle to achieve much with his oddly-placed queenside pieces.

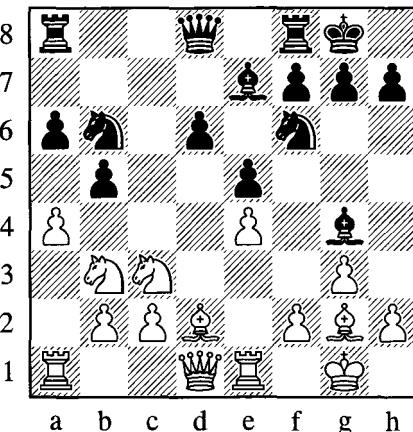
11...♗b6!

This is the perfect antidote to White's concept. There is nothing much wrong with 11...♗b7 12.a4 b4 13.♗d5 ♗xd5 14.exd5 a5 15.c3 bxc3 16.♕xc3 ♖b6, Rodriguez Guerrero – Quezada Perez, Santa Clara 2004, except for the fact that White can practically force a repetition with 17.♗d4 ♖b4 18.♗c3 if he desires it.

12.a4

In view of Black's strong reply, perhaps White should try something different here. On the other hand his whole set-up is geared towards preparing this move, so if he has to abandon the whole idea then Black already has good reason to feel happy with the outcome of the opening.

12...♗g4!



13.♕c1

13.f3 ♕d7† was mentioned by Gelfand in his annotations.

Perhaps White's best continuation would have been 13.♗f3?!N with good chances to equalize, for instance: 13...♕xf3 14.♕xf3 b4 15.♗d1 d5 16.exd5 e4 17.♕e2 ♗bxd5 18.♗e3 when White should be okay.

13...b4?!N

I believe this active move to be an improvement over 13...♕d7, Movsesian – Gelfand, Budapest 2003. Black was absolutely fine in that game, but I think he could have played more ambitiously.

14.♗d5

Another possible continuation would be 14.♗d1 a5 15.♗e3 ♕e6 16.♗f5 ♖c7 17.♗xe7†

$\mathbb{W}xe7$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ h6! Only Black can be better in this position thanks to his harmonious pieces.

14... $\mathbb{Q}fxd5$ 15. $\mathbb{exd}5$ a5 16. c3

16. c4 $\mathbb{Q}d7$! 17. c5 dxc5 18. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}xa4$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ c4! would be quite tragic for the first player.

16... $\mathbb{W}d7!$ 17. $\mathbb{cxb}4$

17. f3 $\mathbb{Q}f5$ does not help either.

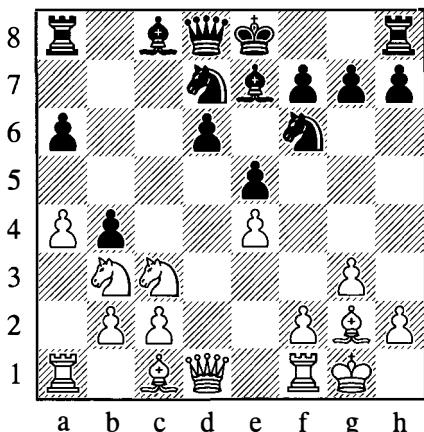
17... $\mathbb{E}fc8$ 18. $\mathbb{W}b1$ $\mathbb{axb}4$

Black's active pieces and sounder pawn structure mean that his chances are higher. A further continuation might be:

19. a5 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 20. $\mathbb{E}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 21. a6 $\mathbb{Q}e2$!

Black maintains some pressure. Overall the sophisticated plan with 10. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ does not seem dangerous if Black responds correctly.

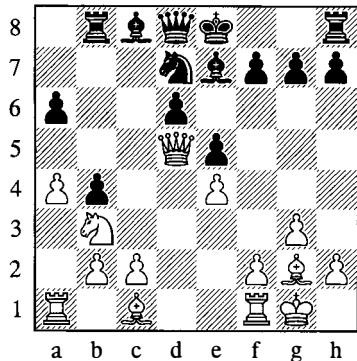
A22) 10.a4 b4



11. $\mathbb{Q}a2$??

This looks a bit timid, but in a way it is quite an ambitious move, as White is avoiding the exchange of knights.

He does not achieve much after: 11. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 12. $\mathbb{W}xd5$ $\mathbb{E}b8$! (Less precise seems to be 12... $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 13. $\mathbb{W}a5$! 0-0 14. $\mathbb{W}xb4$ when it is not clear if Black has enough for the pawn, Vul – Kokanovic, Kladovo 1990.)



13. $\mathbb{W}c4$! N (White should not underestimate the dangers: 13. a5 0-0 14. $\mathbb{E}e1$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ Dvoiryš – Zakhartsov, Pardubice 2007, 15... $\mathbb{E}d8$! N 16. $\mathbb{E}ed1$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 17. $\mathbb{W}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$!) 13... 0-0 14. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$! Black should always be on the lookout for such an opportunity to sacrifice a pawn favourably. 15. $\mathbb{W}xb4$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 16. $\mathbb{E}fd1$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 17. $\mathbb{W}c3$ $\mathbb{E}c8$ Black has fine compensation.

11... a5 12. c3

This is necessary in order to enable the a2-knight to return to an active role in the game.

12... $\mathbb{Q}a6$??

This is an important moment. The more common continuation has been 12... $\mathbb{bxc}3$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xc3$, and although Black should be okay here, White has at least obtained the type of position towards which he was aiming. The text move gives some additional opportunities thanks to the active bishop.

13. $\mathbb{E}e1$ $\mathbb{bxc}3$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 0-0 15. $\mathbb{Q}d2$

15. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ maintains the balance.

15... $\mathbb{Q}c4$!

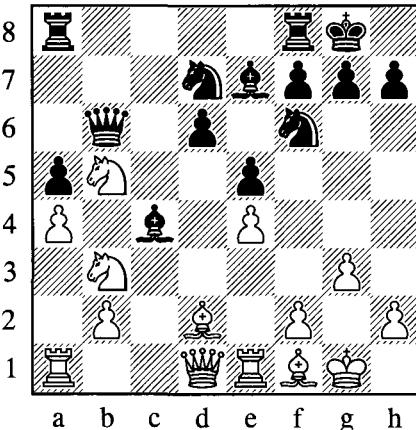
Now we begin to see the value of Black's 12th move. The bishop menaces the unstable knight on b3 while also helping to control the crucial d5-square.

16.♕b5

Another possibility is 16.♖c1!? ♜b8 17.♕d5 ♜xb3 18.♕xe7† ♜h8 19.♗f3 ♜xa4 20.♗a3 ♜b5 White has a degree of compensation, but no claim to an advantage.

16...♛b6 17.♕f1!?

White should have settled for 17.♕e3N, although 17...♛b7 leaves White nothing better than retreating with 18.♕d2. At this point Black can choose between repeating the position with 18...♛b6, and playing for a win with 18...♜xb5 19.axb5 a4 20.♗a5 ♛xb5, although I must admit White should probably not be worse after 21.♕f1!

**17...d5! 18.♕e3**

After 18.exd5 ♜xd5 19.♕e3 ♛b7† Black's central control is the defining feature of the position.

18...♜xb3!?

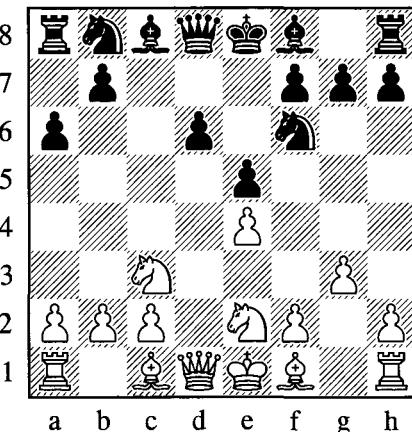
There was also nothing wrong with 18...♛b7 19.exd5 ♜xd5 transposing to the previous note.

19.♛xb3 ♜c5

Less than 20 moves into the game Black had already developed a powerful initiative in Dutreeuw – P. H. Nielsen, Gothenburg 2005.

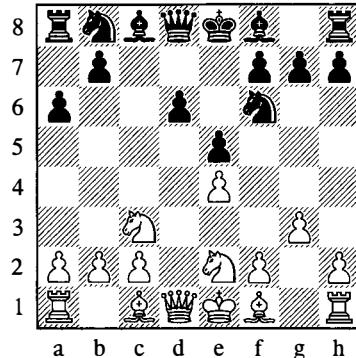
B) 7.♘de2

This time the knight elects to remain closer to the kingside, where White hopes to become active.

**7...b5**

Black wastes no time in commencing his queenside play. Now we will consider the immediate attempt to fight for the d5-square with B1) 8.♗g5, followed by the main line of B2) 8.♗g2.

The immediate occupation of the d5-square is also possible, although it should not be too dangerous.

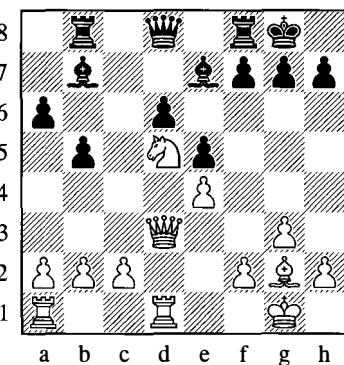
8.♗d5**8...♗bd7**

8...♞xd5!N 9.♛xd5 ♜a7 10.♕e3 ♜e6 11.♗d3 ♜b7 12.♗c3 ♜d7† seems like a

fighting idea, even though White remains a bit better.

9. $\mathbb{Q}ec3 \mathbb{Q}b7$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}xd5 \mathbb{Q}b6$
- 11... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$
14. 0–0± is very similar to the main line.
12. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{W}xg5$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ $\mathbb{B}b8$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{W}d8$
15. $\mathbb{W}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 16. 0–0–0 0–0 17. $\mathbb{Q}fd1$

This type of position should not hold any dangers for Black, as has been established in hundreds of games in the quiet lines of the Sveshnikov variation.



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

17... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$?! would be a mistake, as after 18. $\mathbb{W}xd5$ the opposite-coloured bishops in no way guarantee a draw in the position with White's clear positional advantage.

18. c3 $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 19. $\mathbb{W}e2$ a5 20. a4 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 21. axb5 $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ 22. $\mathbb{W}c2$

½–½ Alekseev – Karjakin, Dagomys 2008.

B1) 8. $\mathbb{Q}g5$

The bishop move is tied with a strong strategic idea of fighting for d5.

8... $\mathbb{Q}bd7$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$

10. $\mathbb{Q}g2N$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ $\mathbb{W}xe7$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ h6= leads nowhere for White.

Also harmless is: 10. $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ $\mathbb{W}xe7$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 13. a4 b4 14. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}bxsd5$ 15. exd5 h6 16. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{W}xf6$ = Ivanov – Kelleher, Natick 2000.

10... $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}ec3 \mathbb{Q}b7$

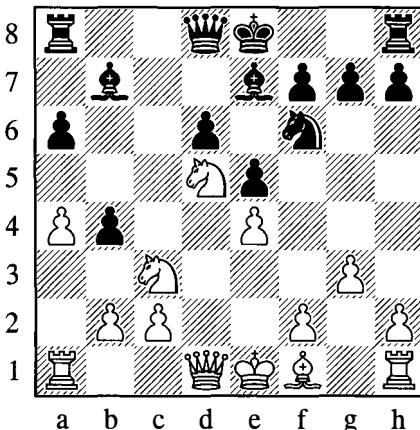
Black should have no real problems here, although he should remain vigilant in order to avoid falling into a slightly worse position with no counterplay.

12.a4

This seems like the most challenging idea. Quieter alternatives can be compared with the Alekseev – Karjakin game given in the note to White's eighth move above.

12... b4

12... 0–0 is also playable, but it looks safest to keep the queenside closed.



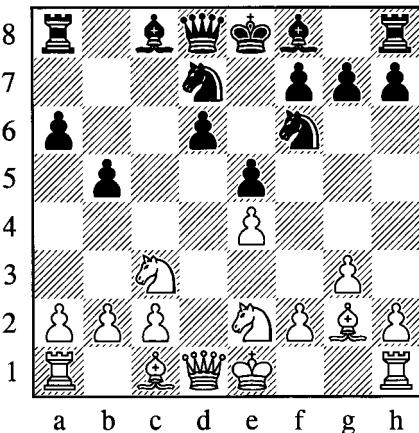
13. $\mathbb{Q}xf6\#$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{W}c8$ 15.b3

15. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 16. exd5 $\mathbb{W}a5$ 17. $\mathbb{W}g4$ was seen in Janev – Meera, Saint Afrique 2007, and now 17... $\mathbb{Q}c7N$ 18. 0–0 g6 would have been at least equal for Black.

15... 0–0 16. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ a5 17. h4 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 18. $\mathbb{W}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$
19. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}c3$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{W}b8$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$
22. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ 23. $\mathbb{W}xd3$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$

The position remained equal and the players soon agreed a draw in Matulovic – Colovic, Subotica 2003.

B2) 8. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}bd7$

**9.h3**

This is White's most active and aggressive continuation; he intends to prepare g4 and is willing to postpone, or sometimes forgo altogether his kingside castling. Obviously we should also pay attention to:

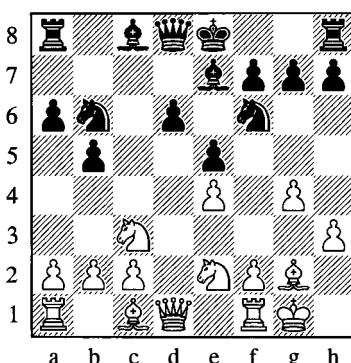
9.0–0 ♜e7 10.h3

There is also 10.a4 b4 11.♗d5 ♜xd5 12.♗xd5? (12.exd5 a5 is equal, as shown in a number of games.) 12...♝b8 (12...♛c7? N=) 13.c4?! (13.♗e3 ♛c7=) 13...♝c5 14.♗d1 ♜b7 15.f3 0–0–0 A. Vuckovic – Maksimenko, Schmiden 1995.

10...♝b6!

Taking control over d5.

11.g4



11...b4

Also very interesting is 11...h5?! 12.g5 ♜fd5 13.f4 (13.h4 b4! [13...♛c7?! 14.a4 b4 15.a5!]

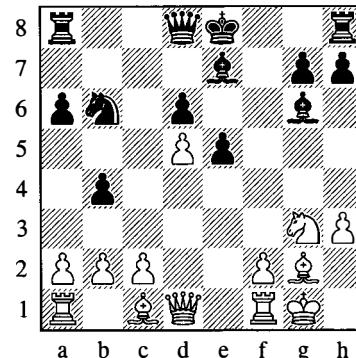
bx_c3 16.♗xc3 ♜c4 17.♗d5 ♛c6 18.b3±] 14.♗d5 ♜xd5 15.♗xd5 ♜b8=) 13...h4∞ Geirnaert – Naiditsch, Belgium 2003.

12.♗d5 ♜fxd5 13.exd5 f5?!

Also not bad is 13...0–0–0N 14.♗g3 a5 with equality.

It should be noted, however, that Black should play these moves in the right order, as the slightly premature 13...a5?! 14.a3! might offer White a slight initiative.

14.gxf5 ♜xf5 15.♗g3 ♜g6



16.♗d2?!

Better was 16.a3, although Black still has no cause for complaint after 16...♛c8.

16...a5 17.♗g4 0–0–0 18.a3 ♜c8±

Varavin – Dvoiry, St Petersburg 2000.

9...♝e7 10.g4

Some players, evidently worried by the prospect of ...b5-b4, have experimented with the modest:

10.a3

Here I suggest an unusual and refined move order:

10...♝b6?!

10...♝b7 has, not surprisingly, been much more popular, but after the natural continuation of 11.g4 ♜b6 (11...♝c5 may be better) 12.♗g3 g6, I find Black's position slightly unpleasant after 13.♗h6?N.

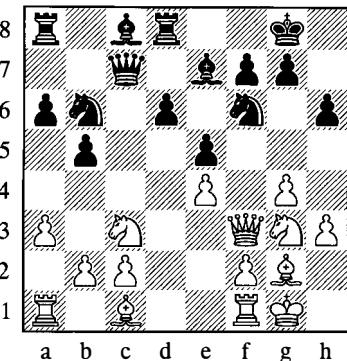
11.g4

11.♗g5 ♜b7 12.0–0–0–0 was equal in Olsson – Lautier, St Vincent 2005.

11...h6 12.Qg3 0-0 13.0-0

13.Qf5 Qxf5 14.gxf5 (14.exf5 d5?) 14...Qc8
15.0-0 Qc4 16.Qe1 Qc7 gives Black
promising counterplay on the c-file.

13...Qc7 14.Qf3 Qd8



15.g5?

White should probably have preferred the less drastic 15.Qf5, when 15...Qxf5 16.Qxf5 Qac8 is about equal.

15...hxg5 16.Qxg5 Qfd5! 17.Qxd5 Qxd5
18.Qd2

This position occurred in Kristol – Nowak, e-mail 2006. At this point Black has a couple of tempting continuations.

18...Qxc2?N

This is the most enterprising, although 18...Qf6N is also at least equal for Black.

19.Qa5 Qf4 20.Qxd8 Qxd8=

With excellent compensation for the exchange.

10...b4!

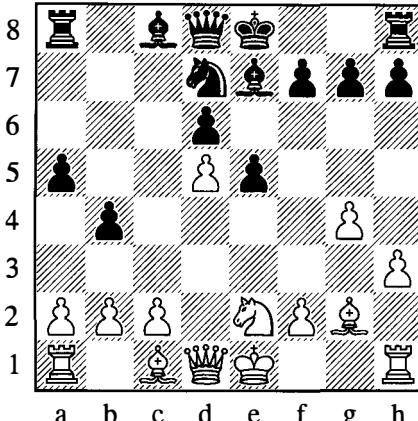
Black can also castle before executing this advance, but we will see that in certain cases he can try to make use of the rook on h8.

11.Qd5 Qxd5 12.exd5

After 12.Qxd5, Himanshu – Ramesh, New Delhi 2007, Black's most convenient reply is 12...Qc7!N since capturing the rook would cost White his queen: 13.Qxa8? Qb6+

12...a5!

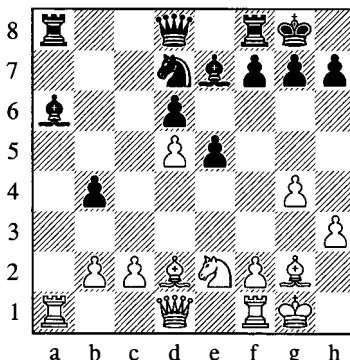
This demonstrates the advantage of postponing the move ...Qb7. Now there is a real chance that the bishop will find a brighter future on the more active a6-square.



13.0-0

The control of the a6-f1 diagonal plays a significant role in limiting White's options.

The straightforward attack on the b4-pawn leads to a balanced position: 13.a3 Qa6 14.0-0 (White does not gain anything by delaying castling. After 14.Qd2 Black can even afford to leave the b-pawn en prise temporarily with 14...0-0, since 15.axb4 axb4 16.Qxb4?! Qb6 gives Black a strong initiative with ...f5 on the way.) 14...0-0 15.axb4 axb4 16.Qd2



This position occurred in Al Modiahki – Sedlak, Biel 2003, and now it looks good

for Black to play 16... $\mathbb{W}c7!N$ with an active position (16... $\mathbb{W}b6$ is also okay) as the threat to the b-pawn is not real: 17. $\mathbb{Q}xb4?$ $\mathbb{W}c4$ wins material.

The other main option is:

13. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 14. $h4!$

14. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 0–0 gives Black no problems; the potential loss of the bishop pair is no big deal, while White must worry about the future of his king.

14...0–0 15. $\mathbb{Q}e3$

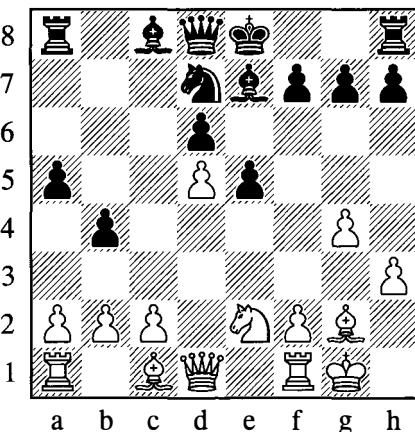
15. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{E}e8$ does not achieve much for White.

15... $\mathbb{W}c7$ 16. $\mathbb{E}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 17. $b3?!$

Better was 17. $c4N$, although after 17... $bxc3$ 18. $\mathbb{E}xc3$ $\mathbb{E}ab8$ Black has every reason to feel optimistic.

17... $a4\bar{F}$

White was playing with a great risk as his king was left in the centre in Ye Jiangchuan – Gelfand, Shenyang 2000.



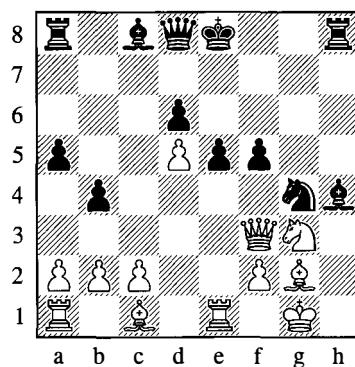
13... $h5!$

This modern idea lends an unexpected twist to the position. The c8-bishop had previously been intending to move to a6, but now that White has castled Black decides to keep this piece on c8 where it will assist with a kingside attack.

Still, it should be mentioned that the less enterprising 13... $\mathbb{Q}a6$ is not a bad move, and after 14. $\mathbb{E}e1$ 0–0 15. $\mathbb{Q}g3$, Lujan – Colovic, Balaguer 2006, Black can equalize with 15... $\mathbb{Q}c5!N$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ g6. Without the knights on the board White should be careful about his exposed kingside.

14. $\mathbb{Q}xh5$

White's attempt to keep his pawn structure intact with 14. $\mathbb{Q}g3?!$ only leads to trouble: 14... $h4$ 15. $h4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ (15... $g6\bar{F}$ is also fine, but Black finds a more dynamic way to seize the initiative.) 16. $g5$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ f5! 18. $gxf6$ $gxf6$ 19. $\mathbb{E}e1$ f5 20. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}h4$ 21. $\mathbb{W}f3$ This position was reached in Inkiov – Ninov, Donostia 2009. Black has several promising continuations here, but I think the strongest would have been:



21... $\mathbb{E}a7!N$ Intending to swing the rook to g7, with a tremendous attack.

14... $\mathbb{E}xh5$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}d4$

It looks tempting to send the knight towards what looks like a dream outpost on c6, although it is hard to say if this move was really best. We should also pay attention to the alternative: 15. $\mathbb{Q}f4?N$

The jump to e6 has the potential to prove disruptive, although it turns out that with accurate play Black keeps good chances here as well.

15... $\mathbb{E}h4!$

Also interesting is 15... $\mathbb{E}h8?$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}e6$ $fxe6$ 17. $dxe6$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xa8$ $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}xh3$ when Black has decent attacking chances in return for the exchange. Nevertheless it seems to me that the main line is even better.

16. $\mathbb{Q}e6$ $fxe6$ 17. $dxe6$ $\mathbb{E}b8$ 18. $\mathbb{W}d3!$

I checked this move in order to find out if White could improve on the following analysis by Stohl: 18. $\mathbb{W}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ (18... $\mathbb{Q}f6?$ 19. $\mathbb{W}g3\uparrow$) 19. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{E}h8$ 20. $exd7\uparrow$ $\mathbb{Q}xd7\mp$ Black is better as the pawns on c2 and h3 are weak.

18... $\mathbb{Q}f8$

18... $e4?$ also looks promising.

19. $exd7$ $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 20. $f4$ $e4!$

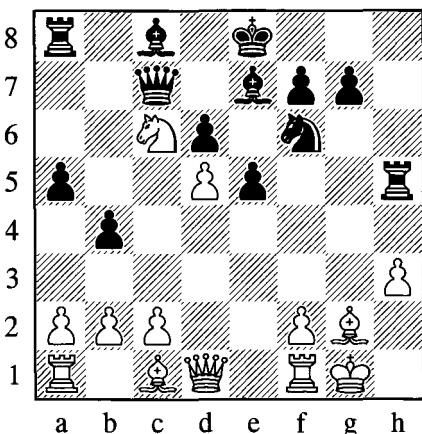
This pawn sacrifice brings Black excellent chances.

21. $\mathbb{W}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$

Despite the pawn minus, Black has the upper hand as his pieces are extremely active.

15... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}c6$ $\mathbb{W}c7$

Both sides have their own pros and cons here, but overall it seems to me that White's weak kingside is the dominant feature of the position.



17. $\mathbb{W}f3$

It would be too risky for White to venture: 17.a3? $\mathbb{Q}xh3$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xh3$ $\mathbb{Q}xh3$ 19. $axb4$ $\mathbb{W}c8\mp$

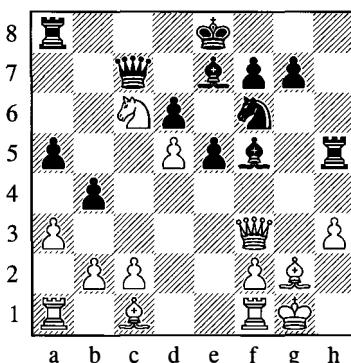
17... $\mathbb{Q}f5$

It also looks tempting to try 17... $e4!?$ N 18. $\mathbb{W}g3$ $\mathbb{E}xd5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{W}c5!$ when White's compensation is in question.

18. $\mathbb{Q}e1$

18. $\mathbb{Q}xe5?$ does not work due to 18... $\mathbb{Q}e4$.

It was worth considering the immediate attempt to obtain counterplay with 18.a3!?. This does not equalize, although it does force Black to make a difficult decision.



One option involves grabbing a pawn with 18... $\mathbb{Q}xc2$ 19. $AXB4$ (or 19. $\mathbb{W}g3$ $bx a3$ 20. $\mathbb{E}xa3$ $\mathbb{Q}g6\mp$) 19... $e4$ 20. $\mathbb{W}g3$ (20. $\mathbb{W}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}d3$) 20... $\mathbb{E}xd5$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ when Black remains on top according to the computer, although the position remains rather murky.

Another promising continuation is 18... $\mathbb{Q}e4!?$ 19. $\mathbb{W}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}g2$ 20. $\mathbb{W}xg2$ $b3!$ 21. $cxb3$ $\mathbb{W}d7$ with somewhat better chances for Black, as pointed out by Stohl.

18... $\mathbb{W}d7$

Black sticks to his main goal of destroying the enemy kingside, rather than being distracted by the c2-pawn.

19.a3 b3! 20.cxb3 $\mathbb{Q}xh3\mp$

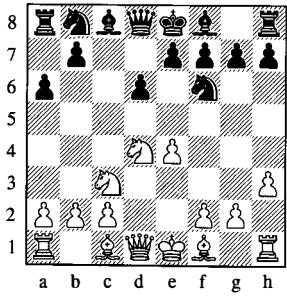
We have been following the game Alekseev – Dominguez Perez, Biel 2008. The position remains complex, but White's position is more dangerous due to his unsafe king.

Conclusion

Black is not obliged to meet 6.g3 with 6...e5, but this system seems much more spirited than the solid but timid 6...e6. White has invested lot of energy into experimenting with 7.Qb3, but at present Black seems to be doing fine there, even against the tricky 10.Qd2 plan. The strategically heavy retreat 7.Qde2 is connected with the plan of h3, g4 and Qg3. In this case Black does well to hurry with ...b5-b4, gaining enough counterplay on the queenside. And in a final twist, we saw how Black could follow the early queenside advance with... an attack on the far side of the board with ...h7-h5! Such ideas are becoming more and more typical in modern chess, and here it leads to rich positions in which Black is more than holding his own.

Chapter 11

Open Systems



The Karate Kid - 6.h3

Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.Qf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Qxd4 Qf6 5.Qc3 a6

6.h3 e6 7.g4 d5

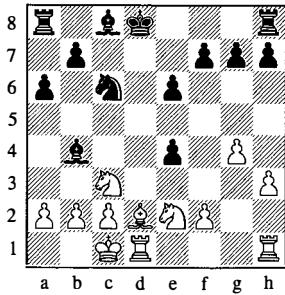
A) 8.Qg2

176

B) 8.exd5

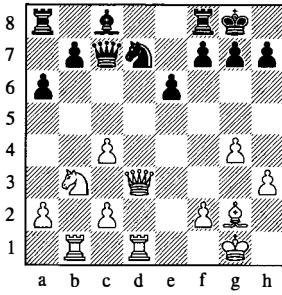
179

A) note to 9.0-0



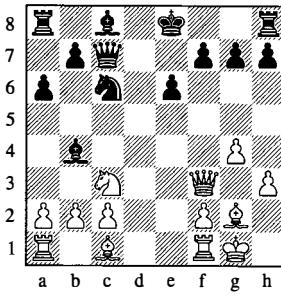
13...Qe7!N

A) after 17.Qb3



17...Ra7!

B) 13.Qf3



13...Qd6!N

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.h3

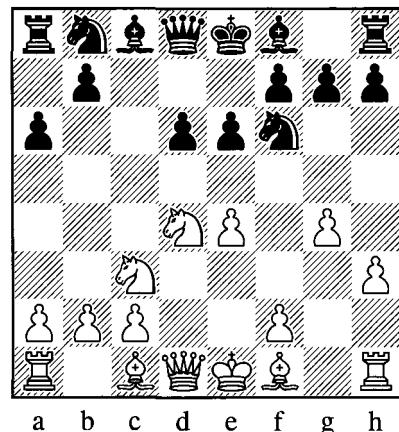
The funny-looking move has become extremely fashionable in recent years. White intends to combine the development of the bishop on g2 with a potential kingside advance; you might think of it as a turbo-charged version of the 6.g3 line from the previous chapter. We already saw that after 6.g3 and ♘g2, White often follows up by playing h3 and g4, so in a way it is quite logical for him to try and save a tempo by playing g2-g4 in one move.

Just about every sensible response has been tested, but I have chosen to recommend:

6...e6

6...e5 is possible, but after 7.♗de2 White would not be far away from reaching his ideal outcome with an extra tempo over the previous chapter. Therefore on this occasion I prefer to revert to a Scheveningen formation.

7.g4

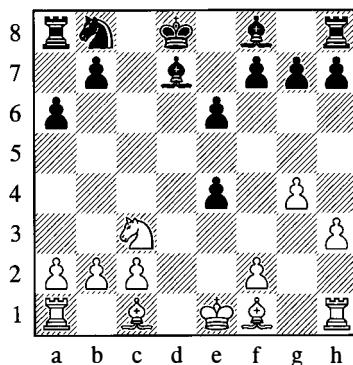


7...d5

The sophisticated 7...♗e7 8.♗g2 ♘fd7?! also leads to interesting play, but it feels more principled to take immediate action in the centre. In this position White's two main choices are A) 8.♗g2 and B) 8.♗xd5, although a few other moves have been tested as well:

8.e5?! looks dubious: 8...♗fd7 9.f4 (9.♗f4 is well met by 9...♗c7! 10.♘f3 [10.♗e2 runs into 10...♗a3! 11.♗d1 ♗xb2 12.♗xb2 ♗c3† 13.♗d2 ♗xb2] This was Koukoufikis – Vlahakis, Athens 2006, and now the most logical continuation seems to be 10...♗c6N 11.♗e2 ♗b4 when White already faces difficult problems.) 9...♗h4† 10.♗e2 ♗c6 11.♗e3 ♗c5 12.♘f3 ♗e7 13.♗xc5 ♗xc5 14.a3 0–0 15.♗d2 f6 Black seized the initiative in Matla – Majcher, Leba 2006.

8.♗de2 is playable, but does not give White much hope for an advantage: 8...♗xe4 9.♗xe4 dxe4 10.♗xd8† ♗xd8 11.♘c3 ♗d7 (The computer says 11...f5?! is okay, but Black's position looks rather risky after 12.gxf5 exf5 13.♗d5†)



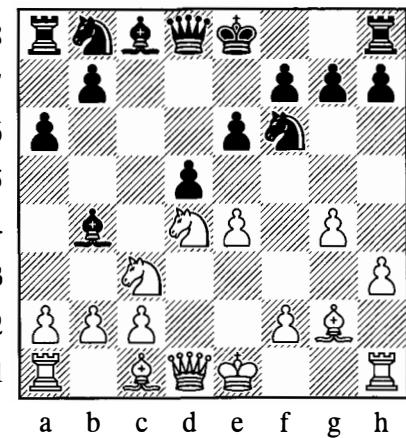
12.♗xe4 (In the event of 12.♗e3?!, Romero Holmes – Ubilava, Subijana de Alava 2001, Black can safely hang onto his extra pawn with 12...♗c6N 13.0–0–0† ♗d7 14.♗g2 f5.) 12...♗c6 13.f3 ♗d7 14.♗d2 ♗c5 15.♗g2 ♗xe4 16.fxe4 ♗c5 The endgame was absolutely level in De Waard – Mrazik, e-mail 2008.

A) 8.♗g2 ♗b4

This seems like the most logical and principled move. A brief glance at the alternatives should be enough to convince us of the need to take White's set-up seriously.

8... $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $dxe4$ 10.0–0 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 12.c3 (or 12. $\mathbb{W}f3?$ 0–0 13. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{W}b6$ 14. $\mathbb{W}b3$ $\mathbb{W}c7\pm$) 12...0–0 13. $\mathbb{W}f3$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ $\mathbb{W}xd6$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 17. $\mathbb{W}g3!$ The queen exchange will force Black to defend his queenside without support of the strongest piece. 17... $\mathbb{W}xg3\#$ 18.fxg3 $\mathbb{B}b8$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ b5 20. $\mathbb{Q}d6$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}a5\pm$ Carlsen – Gelfand, Moscow 2008.

8... $dxe4$ 9.0–0 $\mathbb{W}c7$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 13.c3 0–0 14. $\mathbb{W}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 15. $\mathbb{W}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{B}b8$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 18. $\mathbb{W}g3\pm$ Kamsky – Karjakin, Sochi 2008. Again White will be somewhat better – the queen exchange is an important motif.

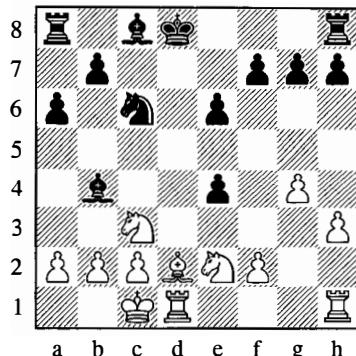


9.0–0

Alternatives should not be too threatening for Black:

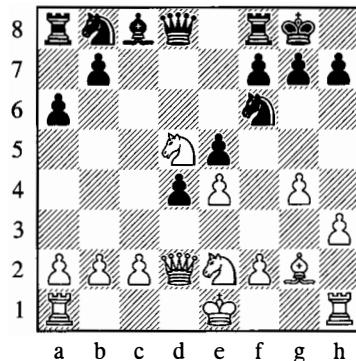
9.e5?! $\mathbb{Q}fd7$ 10.f4 (10.0–0 $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 11.f4 $\mathbb{Q}ec6$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c5\#$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ h5# Miersch – Gruzmann, Willingen 2001) 10... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ (10... $\mathbb{W}h4\#$?) 11. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}a5!$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}de2$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ was better for Black in Miedema – Verkerk, corr. 1989.

9. $\mathbb{Q}de2$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $dxe4$ 11. $\mathbb{W}xd8\#$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 13.0–0–0 Ciuksyte – Petrenko, Warsaw 2001.



13... $\mathbb{Q}e7\#N$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd2\#$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ h5 16.g5 e5=

9. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ e5!N (9... $dxe4$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}xf6\#$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ 0–0 13. $\mathbb{W}d2$ e5 14. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{W}xd2\#$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}e6=$ Tseitlin – Efimenko, Panormo 2001.) 10. $\mathbb{Q}de2$ d4 11. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd2\#$ 12. $\mathbb{W}xd2$ 0–0



13.c3 (13.0–0 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 14.f4 $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 15.c4 $dxc3$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}exc3$ $exf4$ 17. $\mathbb{W}xf4$ $\mathbb{Q}d7=$) 13... $dxc3$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}exc3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xf6\#$ $\mathbb{W}xf6$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{W}d8=$ Black has a comfortable position and White will have to play carefully to avoid a nightmare 'bad bishop' situation.

Finally, there is:

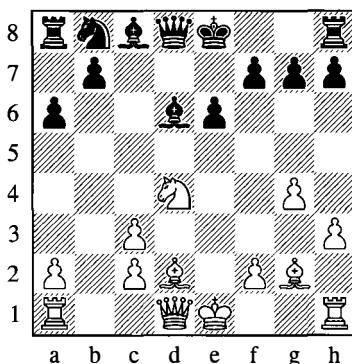
9.exd5 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}d2$

The best move is probably 10. $\mathbb{Q}de2$, transposing to line B.

10.0–0? $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 11.bxc3 $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}xa1$ 13. $\mathbb{W}xa1$ 0–0 gave White no compensation in Arbakov – Efimenko, Alushta 2002.

10. $\mathbb{W}d3$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}de2$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 12. $bxc3$ $\mathbb{Q}d6=$
Schneider – Nakamura, New York 1999.

10... $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 11. $bxc3$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$



Black is already at least equal, for instance:

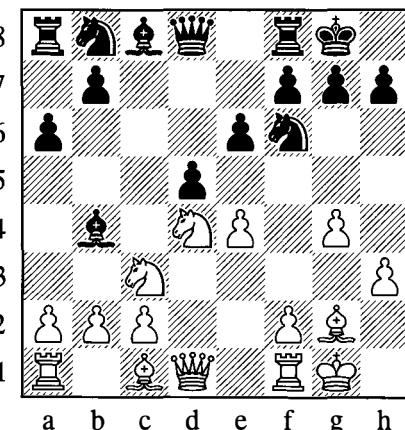
12. $\mathbb{B}b1$

Or 12.0–0 0–0 13. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 14. $\mathbb{W}d3$
Kravtsiv – Vovk, Lvov 2007, 14... $\mathbb{B}d8!N$
15. $\mathbb{B}fd1$ $\mathbb{Q}c6\bar{F}$

12... $\mathbb{W}c7$ 13.0–0 0–0 14. $f4$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 15. $f5$ $\mathbb{Q}c5\bar{F}$
Damjanovic – Kavalek, Salgotrjan 1967.

9...0–0

Black does best to refrain from any pawn-grabbing and instead focus on development.



10. $exd5$

10. $e5$ $\mathbb{B}fd7$ 11. $f4$ is not so bad, although generally speaking Black should not have too many problems in the French-type positions as

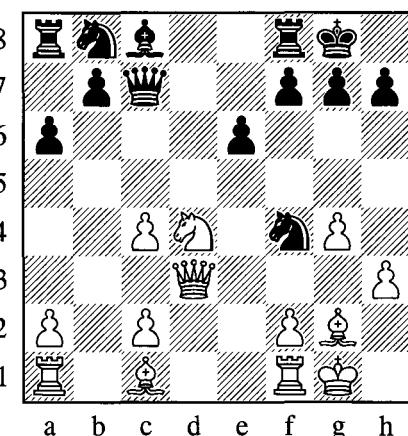
the white bishop is far from ideally placed on g2. 11... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}ce2$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 13. $c3$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 14. $g5$ $g6$ led to a murky position with chances for both sides in Gofshtein – I. Gurevich, Hastings 1991.

10... $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 11. $bxc3$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 12. $\mathbb{W}d3$

12. $c4??$ would be unfortunate due to 12... $\mathbb{Q}c3$ intending ... $\mathbb{W}xd4$.

12. $\mathbb{E}e1$ is playable, but allows Black to equalize comfortably with: 12... $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 13. $\mathbb{W}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}b5!$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $bxc6$ 17. $\mathbb{W}c3$ $f6=$

12... $\mathbb{W}c7$ 13. $c4$ $\mathbb{Q}f4$



14. $\mathbb{Q}xf4$

14. $\mathbb{W}g3!!$ $e5$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ $exf4$ 16. $\mathbb{W}b3$ was mentioned by Mamedyarov. The idea is certainly playable, although I see no real problems for Black after 16... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}ab1$ $\mathbb{B}d8$ 18. $\mathbb{B}fd1$ $\mathbb{B}b8$.

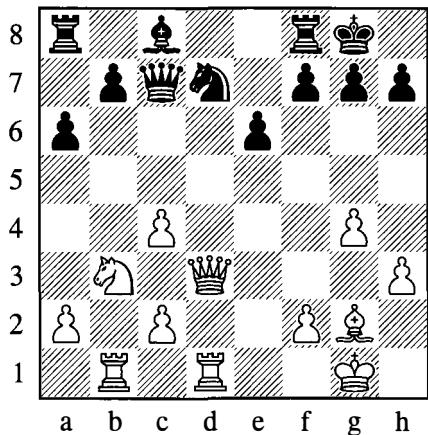
14... $\mathbb{W}xf4$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}ab1$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 16. $\mathbb{B}fd1$ $\mathbb{W}c7!$

16... $\mathbb{Q}c5?!$ enables White to obtain some initiative with 17. $\mathbb{W}f3$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 18. $\mathbb{W}a3$ $\mathbb{B}b8$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}c6$.

17. $\mathbb{Q}b3$

17. $a4$ $\mathbb{B}b8!$ (17... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 18. $\mathbb{W}a3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ was

recommended by Golubev, but White has a strong answer in 19. $\mathbb{Q}b3!$ $\mathbb{Q}xb3$ 20. $cxb3$ $\mathbb{Q}ad8$ 21. $\mathbb{W}e7\pm$ 18. $\mathbb{W}c3$ Now it is safer for Black to play 18... $\mathbb{Q}c5$, for instance 19. $a5$ $e5$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ with equal play.



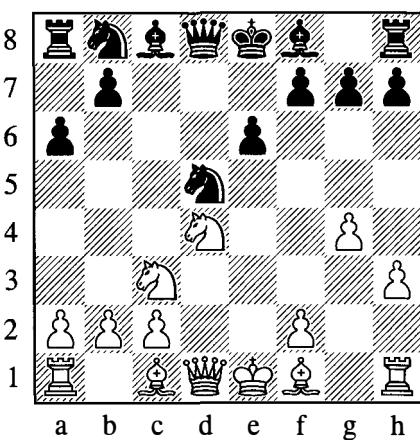
17... $\mathbb{W}a7!$ 18. $\mathbb{W}e3$

Mamedyarov mentioned the line 18. $a4$ $b6$ 19. $a5$ $bxa5$ 20. $\mathbb{W}e3$ $a4!$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}a5$ $\mathbb{W}c5$, with better chances for Black.

18... $b6$

Having solved his development problems on the queenside, Black could feel satisfied with the outcome of the opening in Mamedyarov – Karjakin, Foros 2006.

B) 8. $exd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$



9. $\mathbb{Q}de2$

This is considered critical, and has been by far the most popular choice, although several other moves have also been tried.

9. $\mathbb{Q}g2?!$ is not impressive, as after 9... $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ (Black can also play 9... $\mathbb{Q}b4$ transposing to line A above, but White's inaccurate move order constitutes a gift that Black should not decline.) 10. $bxc3$ White will struggle to justify his pawn weaknesses. A logical continuation is 10... $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 11. 0–0 $\mathbb{W}c7$ 12. $\mathbb{B}b1$ 0–0 13. $\mathbb{W}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 14. $\mathbb{B}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 15. $\mathbb{W}f3$ Manik – Oral, Olomouc 1998, and now after 15... $\mathbb{Q}a4!N$ White will have a hard time protecting his weaknesses.

It is also hard to believe that White can achieve much with 9. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{W}xd5$ 10. $\mathbb{B}g1$ $e5$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{W}xd1\uparrow$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ This was Ninov – Maruejols, San Sebastian 2008, and now after 13... $\mathbb{Q}e6N$ Black is at least equal.

The only serious alternative is:

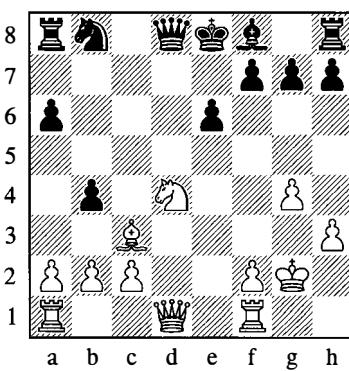
9. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $b5!$

After 9... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}a7$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ 0–0 12. $\mathbb{W}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 14. $\mathbb{B}d1$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 15. 0–0 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 16. $\mathbb{B}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}ad8$ 17. $\mathbb{B}fd1$ White kept some initiative in Smirin – Zhigalko, Panormo 2001.

10. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$

The bishop arrives on the long diagonal in time to neutralize its opposite number.

11. 0–0 $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ $b4$



14.♕e1

14.♕f3 ♜a7 15.♗c6 ♗xc6 16.♕xc6† ♜d7

17.♕xd7† ♜xd7= Black has no problems, even though his rook from h8 needs some time to get into play.

14...♜a7 15.c3 h5 16.f4 hxg4 17.hxg4

This position was reached in Smirin – Mista, Plovdiv 2008. Now instead of the reckless 17...g5?, Black should have played:

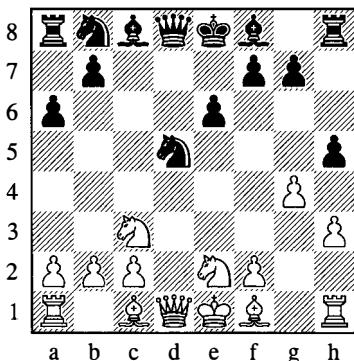
17...♝d7!N 18.♕f3 bxc3 19.bxc3 ♜c8

The position is double-edged, with neither king feeling completely safe. At least Black benefits from having the more compact pawn structure, which should serve him well in the event of a queen exchange.

9...♝b4

9...h5!?

This creative solution has only been tried once at the time of writing, but it offers exceptionally interesting food for thought.



10.♗xd5

10.♗g2 hxg4 11.hxg4 ♜xh1† 12.♗xh1 ♗c6 looks fine for Black.

10...exd5 11.♗f4 hxg4 12.♕xd5

This position was reached in Sutovsky – Najer, Netanya 2009. At this point Black's safest continuation would have been:

12...♗c6N

The game continuation of 12...♝d7 13.♗c4 ♜e7† 14.♗e3 ♗c6 15.♕f5 left Black some

way short of equality, and he was unable to cope with his problems.

However, if Black wishes to keep the game more complicated then he may wish to investigate 12...♛e7†?N.

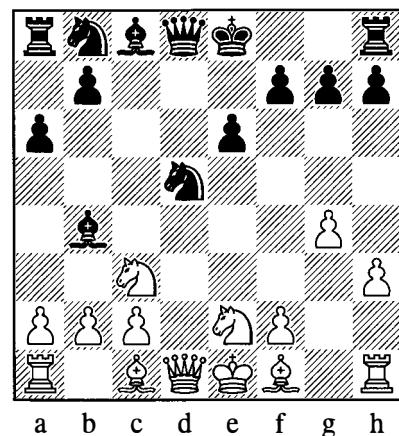
13.♕xd8† ♗xd8 14.♗e3 ♛f5 15.0–0–0 ♜c8

16.♗d3

Harmless is 16.c3 ♗e6.

16...♝xd3 17.♗xd3 ♜e7

Black has no problems; the position is equal.



10.♗g2

Very timid is 10.♗d2 ♗xc3 11.♗xc3 ♜xc3† (If Black is looking for a no-nonsense route to equality he can always opt for 11...♛xd1† 12.♗xd1 ♜xc3† 13.♗xc3 ♜d7 14.♗g2 ♗c6 as in Becerra Rivero – Dominguez, Santa Clara 1999.) 12.♗xc3 ♜b6 13.♗d2 ♜xb2 14.♗b1 ♜a3 15.♗g2 0–0 16.0–0 ♜d7 This was Tseshkovsky – Sakaev, Moscow 2009. White had enough compensation to fight for equality, but certainly nothing more.

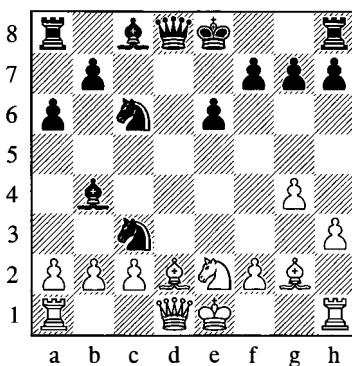
10...♗c6!

I spent some time analysing the more common 10...0–0, but eventually decided not to recommend it on account of the rare, but quite promising 11.a3!? ♗xc3 12.♕xd8 ♜xd8 13.♗xc3 ♜xc3† 14.bxc3 as played in Mihalevitz

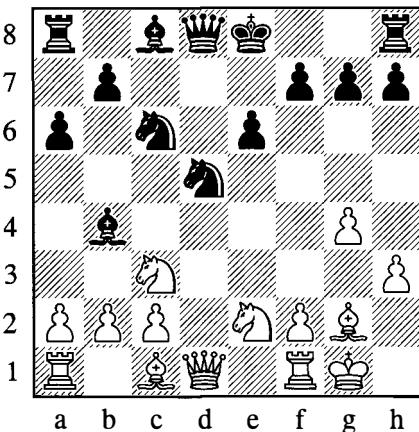
– Hoffmann, Budapest 1998. I am not fully confident that Black is equalizing here – and even if he is, the most he can realistically hope for is a draw.

11.0–0

The alternative is to play 11.♕d2 ♔xc3, giving White an interesting option:



12.♗xc6†? (12.♗xc3 0–0 13.a3 ♕e7 is comfortable for Black, and the second player has scored heavily from this position; 12.♗xc3 is also harmless, and after 12...♝b6 13.♝d2 the players agreed a draw in Pietrusiak – Pytel, Wrocław 1972. Obviously the game is far from dead, but it is clear that neither side can claim an advantage.) 12...bxcc6 13.♗xc3 ♜b6 14.♝d2 c5 15.a3 ♔xc3 16.♝xc3 0–0 17.0–0–0 ♔b7 The position remained dynamically balanced in Fontaine – Kosten, Saint-Affrique 2000.

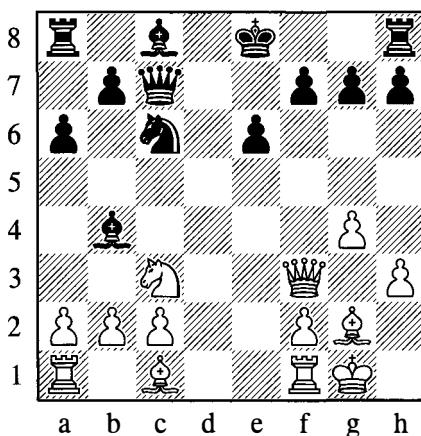


11...♗xc3 12.♗xc3

12.♝xd8† ♔xd8 13.♗xc3 was played in J. Miladinovic – Eric, Zlatibor 2007, and here it looks sensible for Black to play 13...♗xc3!N 14.bxc3 ♜d7 15.♝b1 ♜c8 with a full share of the chances.

12...♝c7 13.♝f3

The position occurred in Vallejo Pons – Dominguez Perez, Oropesa del Mar 2000. Here I suggest a small refinement for Black.



13...♝d6!N

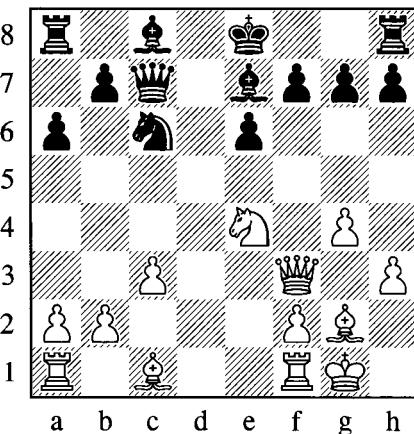
After the game continuation of 13...0–0, White could have obtained a slight initiative with 14.♗f4!N. Instead White missed his chance by playing 14.♝d1, and after 14...♝d6! Black prevented the bishop from developing with gain of tempo. I simply want to do the same thing a move earlier.

14.♗e4

Obviously 14.♝d1 0–0 transposes to the aforementioned game, in which Black was doing fine.

14...♝e7 15.c3

By luring the knight to e4 Black succeeded in taking the sting out of 15.♗f4, as after 15...e5 there is no ♗d5.

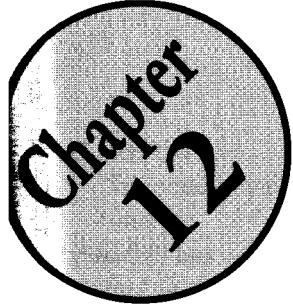


15...0–0

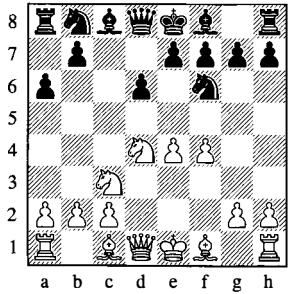
The position is level.

Conclusion

The quirky 6.h3 might appear to be an ugly duckling, but it has truly come into vogue in recent years, with many of the world's top players incorporating it into their repertoires. The plan involving 6...e6 followed by 7...d5 will be music to the ears of classical players – Black responds to his opponent's early flank activity with a strong counter in the centre, just as prescribed in the manual. Unfortunately the story does not end there, and we have seen that the game will often develop into a tense battle in which both sides must solve tricky problems. According to my analysis Black should be holding his own, although you can bet that the cheeky h-pawn will remain a topical subject in the ongoing theoretical debate.



Open Systems



Pulp Fiction - 6.f4

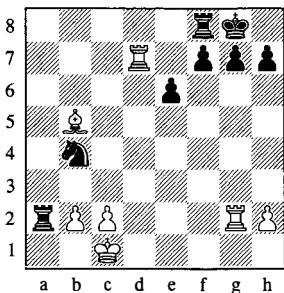
Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♘f6 5.♗c3 a6

6.f4 e6

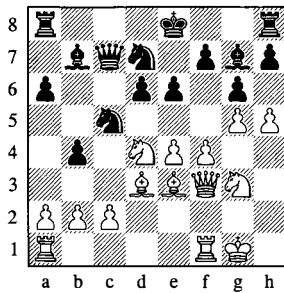
| | |
|-----------------------|-----|
| A) 7.♗d3 | 186 |
| B) 7.♗e3 b5 | 187 |
| B1) 8.e5 | 187 |
| B2) 8.♗d3 | 189 |
| B3) 8.♗f3 | 190 |
| C) 7.♗f3 ♗b6 | 195 |
| C1) 8.a3 ♘c6 | 196 |
| C11) 9.♗b3 ♗c7 | 196 |
| C111) 10.♗d3 | 196 |
| C112) 10.g4 | 197 |
| C12) 9.♗xc6 | 199 |
| C2) 8.♗b3 ♗c7 9.g4 b5 | 200 |
| C21) 10.g5 | 202 |
| C22) 10.♗d3 | 204 |

B1) after 26.♗d7



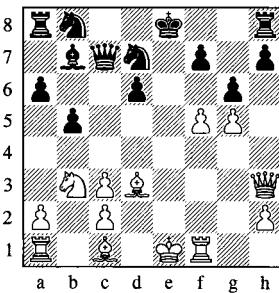
26...♗c8!N

B3) note to 13.0–0



16...h6?N

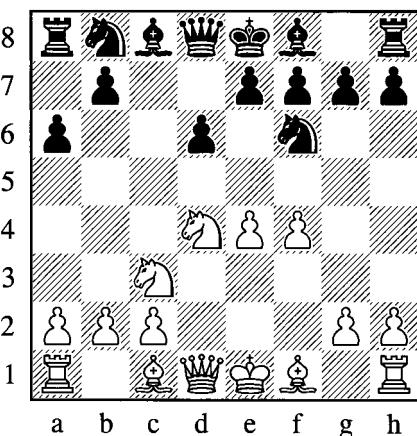
C22) note to 12.♗e3



16...0–0!N

One of the older attacking systems for White features the immediate 6.f4. This became especially popular in the 1990s after being advocated in John Nunn's landmark *Beating the Sicilian* books. The glory days of the system may have passed, but Black still has to be well informed about the most accurate methods of defence; the underlying principles of White's play are as sound as ever.

1.e4 c5 2.Qf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Qxd4 Qf6 5.Qc3 a6 6.f4



6...e6

Several other moves are playable. To mention just a few of them, the most popular response has been 6...e5 although I also spent some time analysing the intriguing and somewhat provocative alternative 6...g6!?. In the end, however, I decided that the Scheveningen-style treatment provided the right balance between solidity and counterattacking potential.

Here White's main choices are A) 7.Qd3, B) 7.Qe3 and C) 7.Qf3, although several other ideas have been tried. Here are the most significant of them:

7.Qe2 will lead to Chapter 13 (6.Qe2).

7.a4 Qe7 is likely to lead to Chapter 13 after a subsequent Qe2 and Qe3, or perhaps line E of Chapter 9 (6.a4 e6) in the event that the white

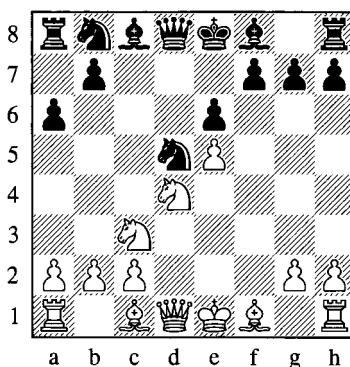
bishop comes to d3.

7.e5

This might seem premature and is rarely seen, but is far from ridiculous.

7...dxe5 8.fxe5 Qd5

I also checked 8...Qfd7 9.Qf4, as occurred in Shook – Sadiq Chanthana, e-mail 2003. Here 9...Qa5!N looks interesting, but White's play now begins to make sense after: 10.Qf3! Qxe5 11.Qg3 followed by 12.0–0–0 with compensation and good attacking chances.



9.Qxd5

9.Qd2?? Wh4† was embarrassing for White in Ivert – Osterberg, Sweden 1992.

9.Qf3 Qb4 10.Qd2 Qxc3 11.bxc3 Qc5† Ratner – Helmbold, Ueberlingen 2000.

9.Qg4 Qxc3 10.bxc3, Rantanen–Paasikangas Tella, Tampere 1998, 10...Qd7!N 11.Qf4 Qa5 12.Qg3 g5! 13.Qxg5 (13.Qd2 h6+) 13...Qg8 14.Qb3 Qxe5† 15.Qxe5 Qxe5† The capture on d5 was played in Jennings – Aldridge, e-mail 1996. Here Black should have responded with:

9...Qxd5N 10.Qf3 Qxd1† 11.Qxd1 Qd7!

The ending should be equal, but it seems that White has to take more care than Black.

7.g4

Another aggressive though slightly premature move that requires careful handling.

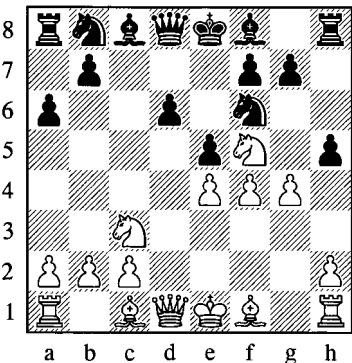
7...e5!?

This is the only real attempt to refute White's concept.

8.Qf5!N

This is the most challenging reaction. In the event of 8.fxe5, D. Jensen – R. Moore, Grand Rapids 1989, Black could have seized the initiative with 8...Qxg4!N 9.Qf3 Qc6 10.Qg5 (10.exd6 Qxd6?) 10...Qb6 11.Qd2 h6 12.Qf4 dxe5 13.Qd5 Qxb2! 14.Qc7+ Qe7 15.Qd1 (15.Qd5+ Qd8!–+) 15...Qe6! 16.Qxa8 exf4 17.Qc7 g5 with somewhat better chances, in an admittedly rather complex and irrational position.

8...h5!



9.fxe5

9.g5?! This idea, borrowed from the Perenyi Attack (see line C of Chapter 16) does not work so well here. 9...Qxe4 10.Qxg7+ Qxg7 11.Qxe4 d5 12.Qc3 (12.Qg3 exf4 13.Qxf4 Qc6 14.Qe2† [14.Qg2 Qe7†! 15.Qe2 0-0-0?] 14...Qf8 15.c3 [15.0-0-0 Qg4?] 15...Qg4 16.Qd2 d4!) 12...Qe6 13.fxe5 Qc6 14.Qg2 Wa5 15.Qxd5 (15.Qd2 Qc5?) 15...0-0-0 16.Qxe6† fxe6 17.Qe2 Qd4 18.Qc4† Qb8 19.0-0 Qxe5?

9...Qxg4 10.Qf4 Qxf5

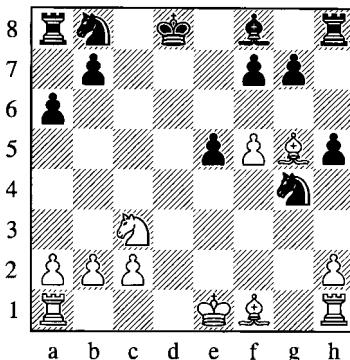
10...Qxe5?! 11.Qd5! (11.Qe2 Qbc6 12.0-0-0 g6 13.Qe3 Qg7?) 11...Qbc6 12.0-0-0 Qe6 13.Qxd6† Qxd6 14.Qxd6 Qxd6 15.Qxd6 0-0=

11.exf5 dxe5

11...Qb6? 12.Qe2! is awkward.

12.Qxd8† Qxd8 13.Qg5†!N

13.Qd1† Qd7 14.h3 exf4 15.hxg4 Qb4? was attributed to a 1989 game from the bulletin during the World Cup in Sweden.



13...f6!?

Safer is: 13...Qe7 14.Qxe7† Qxe7 15.Qd5† Qf8 (15...Qd6 16.Qd1 Qa7 17.h3 Qh6 18.Qg1?) 16.h3 Qf6 17.Qb6 (17.0-0-0 Qc6 18.Qxf6 gxsf6 19.Qd7 Qb8 20.Qc4 Qe7 21.Qhd1 Qg8 22.Qd7b5 [22.Qd8† Qxd8 23.Qxd8† Qg7 24.Qd7 b5 25.Qxb5 axb5 26.Qxe7 Qd8 27.Qb7 Qd5?] 22...Qg5 23.Qxf6 Qxf5 24.Qdd6 Qg7 25.Qxf5 Qxf5 26.Qd7 Qh6?] 17...Qa7 18.Qc8 Qa8 19.Qb6 with equality.

14.h3 fxg5 15.0-0-0-0† Qd7 16.hxg4 h4?

A draw is the most likely result, but I like this passed pawn.

7.Qf3 Qbd7 8.Qd3

This introduces a crude but potentially dangerous attacking plan: White wants to castle and later launch an attack based on e4-e5, unleashing the bishop on d3 and driving the f6-knight away from defensive duties.

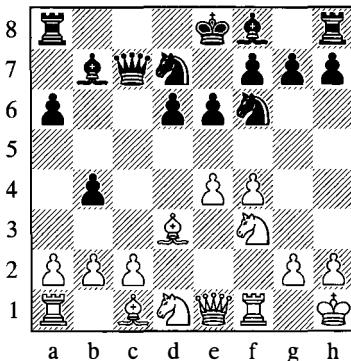
8...Qc7

Black can also provoke the e-pawn into advancing with 8...b5 9.e5! b4! 10.exf6 (10.Qe4 Qxe4 11.Qxe4 d5 12.Qd3 Qb6 13.Qe2 Qc5 14.Qd2 a5 turned out well for Black in L. Schneider – Agrest, Sweden

2006.) 10...bxc3 11.fxg7 ♖xg7 12.b3 ♕c5 13.♕e3 ♖c7 14.0–0 ♕b7∞

9.0–0 b5 10.♗e1 ♖b7 11.♗h1 b4 12.♗d1

12.♗a4 was seen in Dvoiry – Agrest, Budapest 1991, and here the easiest solution for Black was 12...♖c6!N 13.♖xb4 ♗xe4 14.♕e3 ♕e7 with equal chances.



12...♝e7

There is also 12...♝c5?! 13.♗f2 (13.♗xb4 ♜xe4 14.♗xe4 ♗cxe4 15.♗a4† ♖d7= A. Saunders – Lindsalu, e-mail 2003) 13...d5 14.e5 ♗fe4 15.♕e3 ♕e7 16.♕d4 0–0= Arnason – Pliester, New York 1989.

13.♗f2

In the event of 13.♕d2 a5 14.a3, Vasiliev – Dion, Dos Hermanas 2003, it looks good for Black to try: 14...d5!N 15.e5 ♗e4 16.axb4 ♗xd2 17.♗xd2 axb4=

13...a5!N

This seems like the safest solution, although Black also obtained an acceptable position with 13...♝c5?! 14.♕d2 a5 15.a3 b3 16.♕b5† ♗fd7 17.♗c1 bxc2 18.♗xc2 a4 in J. Polgar – Polugaevsky, Roquebrune 1992.

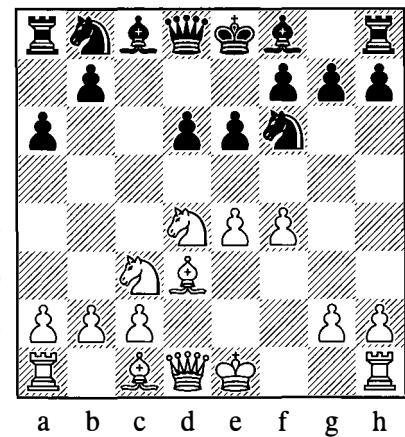
14.a3 bxa3 15.♗xa3 0–0

Black has no cause for complaints.

A) 7.♗d3

White sometimes plays this with the intention of following with ♗f3 and so on, as above. However, by developing the bishop first, White

avoids revealing his intentions and might also opt for a different plan with the knight.



7...♝bd7

Black can also consider the disruptive 7...♖b6?! 8.a3? (8.♗b3 ♖c7 9.♗f3 transposes to the note to move 9 in variation C2; 8.♗f3 is possible, but the queen on b6 has considerable nuisance value and White will have a hard time arranging castling.) 8...♝c6 (8...♝bd7 would be incorrect due to 9.♕e3!, with the point 9...♖xb2?? 10.♗a4+–) 9.♕e3 ♖d7 10.♕e2 (Or 10.♗f5 ♖c7 11.♗g3, Todorovic – Bistic, Banja Vrucica 1991, 11...d5!N 12.e5 d4 13.exf6 dxe3 14.♗h5 g6 15.♗g7† ♗d8?∞) 10...♖c7 11.0–0 ♕e7 12.♗h1 0–0 We have reached something resembling the positions from Chapter 13, without transposing directly.

8.0–0

8.♗f3 transposes to 7.♗f3 above.

8...b5

I do not trust the risky pawn grab: 8...♖b6?! 9.♕e3 ♖xb2 10.♗cb5! axb5 11.♗xb5 Trapping the queen. In return Black obtains enough material, but he still has a hard time coordinating his position. 11...♗a5 12.♗b1 ♖xb5 13.♗xb2 ♖xb2 14.♗a1 ♖b6 15.♗xb6 ♗xb6 16.♗c3 Black was unable to solve his problems in Anand – Kasparov, Tilburg 1991.

9.a3 ♜b7 10.♔h1 ♜e7

We have reached a typical Sicilian position, the likes of which can be found in other parts of this chapter as well as the book in general. I do not want to spend too much time on it in this part of the book, so will just mention a few possible continuations.

11.♗e1

11.♗e2 ♜c5 12.♗d2 0–0= Jakubowski – Cyborowski, Dzwirzyno 2004.

11...♝c5

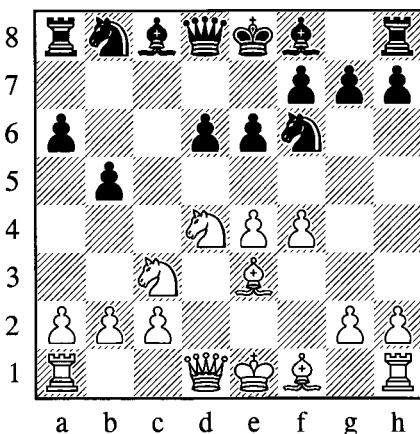
White's most typical attacking plan would be to prepare e5 at some point, so it is always useful to have the option of eliminating the d3-bishop.

12.b4 ♜xd3 13.cxd3 0–0 14.♗e3 ♜c8

With chances for both sides, Schmaltz – Shipov, Internet 2002.

B) 7.♗e3

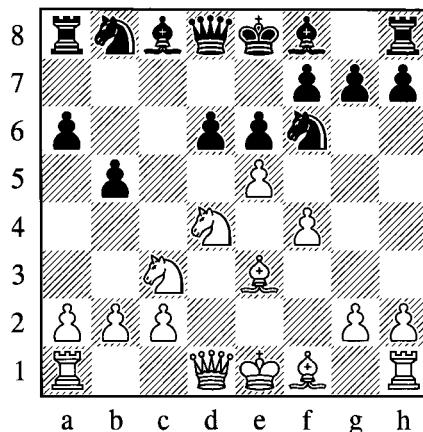
By developing his queen's bishop at an early stage, White hints at the possibility of long castling.

7...b5

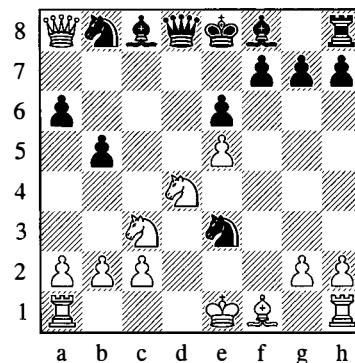
Now we will consider three possibilities: **B1) 8.e5**, **B2) 8.♗d3** and **B3) 8.♘f3**.

B1) 8.e5

Quite often when White feels his opponent is investing too much time into pawn moves he itches to start an attack.

**8...dxe5 9.fxe5 ♜d5 10.♗xd5**

In a few games White has tried 10.♗f3 ♜xe3!? (10...♜b7 is also fine) 11.♗xa8 Borkowski – Kiedrowicz, Piotrkow Trybunalski 1983.



At this point the safest continuation would have been 11...♗xd4N 12.♗xb8 ♜xc2† 13.♔e2 ♜e1 14.♗xc8† ♜e7 when White is more or less forced to take a perpetual.

Instead the game continuation of 11...♝c5!? 12.♗b3 (12.♗xb8 ♜xd4) 12...♝xc2† 13.♔e2 ♜xa1 14.♝xc5 ♜c7 led to rather murky complications, with White eventually coming out on top. The computer likes Black although

it probably does not fully appreciate the misplacement of the knight on a1, so overall I would regard “unclear” as a fair assessment.

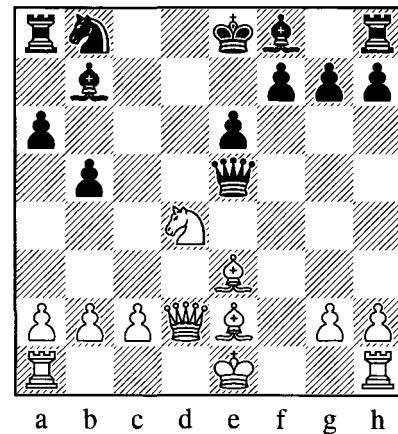
10... $\mathbb{W}xd5$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}e2$

This pawn sacrifice is the only really principled continuation.

The passive 11. $\mathbb{Q}f3$?! $\mathbb{Q}b7$ can hardly trouble Black.

In the event of the aggressive lunge 11. $\mathbb{W}h5$, as played in Zontakh – Najer, Internet 2004, it looks good for Black to respond calmly with 11... $\mathbb{Q}b7$!N (Instead the game continued with the tempting but probably inaccurate 11... $\mathbb{W}e4$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}f2$, leading to complications in which White's chances should be slightly higher according to my analysis.) 12. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ g6 13. $\mathbb{W}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 14.0–0 0–0 15. $\mathbb{W}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 16.a4 b4 17. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7\bar{f}$ White is left with weaknesses and very little to show for them.

11... $\mathbb{W}xe5$ 12. $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$



13. $\mathbb{Q}f4$

In the event of 13.0–0–0 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ N (14. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{W}c5$ reaches the main line) Black keeps the upper hand with 14... $\mathbb{W}c7$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{W}c8$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}d6$ $\mathbb{Q}c6\bar{f}$.

It looks less logical to for White to castle short. One game continued 13. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 14.0–0 0–0 15. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ (This combined with White's next move seems rather slow, but he would also struggle to achieve anything through more energetic means, for instance: 16. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ N $\mathbb{W}c8$ 17.c4 bxc4 18. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 19. $\mathbb{W}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7\bar{f}$) 16... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 17.c3 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ (17... $\mathbb{Q}ad8$ N also looks good) 18. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{W}xe5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}c5\bar{f}$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{W}c6\bar{f}$ Perelshteyn – Ehlvest, Connecticut 2007.

13... $\mathbb{W}c5$ 14.0–0–0 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}b3$

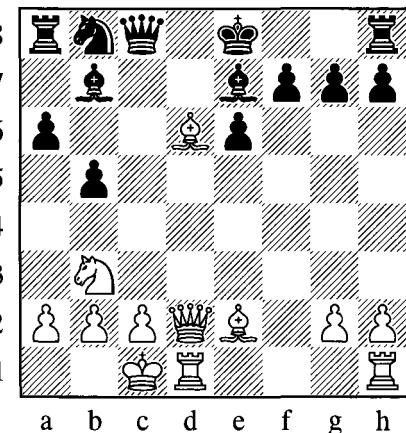
White must try to impede his opponent's castling if he is to have any real chance of demonstrating compensation.

The following game quickly led to disaster for White after an unsound combination: 15. $\mathbb{Q}xb8?$ $\mathbb{Q}xb8$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xe6?$ fxe6 17. $\mathbb{W}d7\bar{f}$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 18. $\mathbb{W}xe6$ $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}he1$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 20. $\mathbb{W}d7$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}f1\bar{f}$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xf6\bar{f}$ gxf6 23. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 0–1 Oll – Smirin, Klaipeda 1988.

15. $\mathbb{Q}he1$ is a more reasonable move but fails to display the necessary urgency, and after 15...0–0 16. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{W}b4$ 19.c3 $\mathbb{W}a4$ Black was clearly better in Schwilk – Zeller, Schwaebisch Gmuend 2000.

15... $\mathbb{W}c8$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}d6$

16. $\mathbb{Q}a5$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ does not help White.



16... $\mathbb{W}d8!$

The queen has had a busy time so far! Now she returns to her original square, solving all Black's problems in the process.

17. $\mathbb{W}b4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ $\mathbb{W}g5\uparrow$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{W}e7$

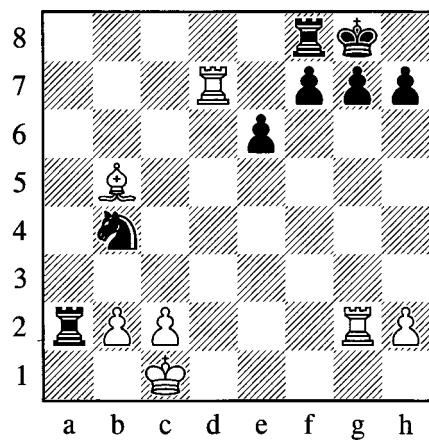
Ensuring that the king will escape to safety.

20. $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 0–0 21. $\mathbb{Q}hd1$ $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xa6$

White needs to allow a queen exchange, otherwise he would have nothing to show for the two-pawn deficit.

22... $\mathbb{W}xb4$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ **25. $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ $\mathbb{Q}xa2$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}d7$**

We have been following the game Gipslis – Sigurjonsson, Amsterdam 1976. Here I think Black should have played:

**26... $\mathbb{Q}c8!N$ 27.c4 $\mathbb{Q}d5!$**

White has insufficient compensation for the missing pawn, and will have to fight for a draw. Note that 28. $\mathbb{Q}b1??$ would lose immediately to 28... $\mathbb{Q}c3\uparrow$.

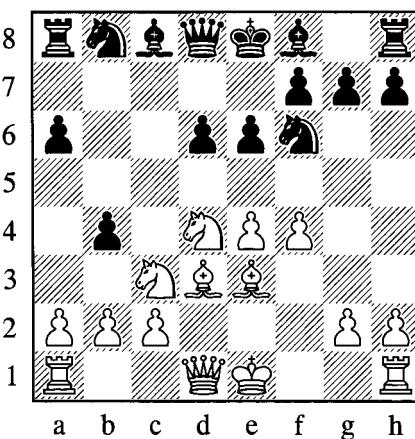
B2) 8. $\mathbb{Q}d3$

With this move White avoids a premature confrontation and instead prefers to continue developing.

8... $b4!!$

Partially inspired by the treatment of the English Attack discussed in Chapter 17, I decided to investigate this rare but enthusiastic lunge with the b-pawn.

I should add that there is nothing at all wrong with 8... $\mathbb{Q}b7$, after which White's most common reaction has been 9. $\mathbb{W}f3$ transposing to line B3 below.

**9. $\mathbb{Q}b1$**

9. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ allows Black to call the knight's position into question immediately with 9... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 10.c4 $\mathbb{W}a5$ 11.b3 $\mathbb{Q}xa4$ 12.bxa4 e5, with a good position.

In the event of 9. $\mathbb{Q}ce2$, Fabregas Fontanet – Perpinya Rofes, Barbera 1997, it looks logical to continue 9... $\mathbb{Q}bd7N$ 10.0–0 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ with a healthy position for Black. It is useful to have the option of eliminating the d3-bishop at a moment's notice.

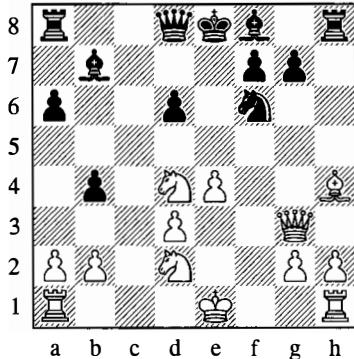
9... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}bd7$

10... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ should be perfectly playable too, for instance 11.0–0 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 12. $\mathbb{W}e2$ 0–0 with a normal Sicilian position.

11. $\mathbb{W}f3$ e5 12. $\mathbb{Q}f5$

The other main option is 12.fxe5 $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 13. $\mathbb{W}g3$, reaching a typically double-edged

position for the Najdorf. Several moves are possible here, but I found the following line particularly intriguing: 13...h5!? 14.Qg5 h4! 15.Qxh4 Qxd3† 16.cxd3



16...Qxe4! 17.Qxe4 Wxh4 18.Wxh4 Exh4 19.Qf5 Qxe4 20.Qxh4 Qxd3= With a pawn for the exchange plus two wonderful bishops, Black has a fully acceptable position. Obviously this whole line was far from forced, but it shows the kind of resources that lie under the surface of such positions. I will leave it to the reader to investigate the above line more deeply if he wishes.

12...g6 13.Qg3

There are no clever sacrifices here, so the knight is forced to retreat.

13...exf4 14.Wxf4 Qe5 15.Qc4 Qfg4!

This move effectively puts an end to Black's opening problems by reinforcing the perfectly-placed knight on e5.

16.Qxe5 Qxe5 17.0-0 Qg7 18.a3

White's only active plan; he can hardly hope to break though Black's rock-solid kingside.

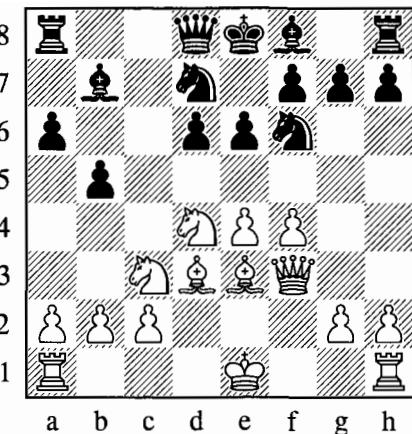
18...bxa3 19.Wxa3 0-0

We have been following the game Heinemann – Stohl, Germany 2006. White can only dream of an advantage, and this particular encounter ended in a draw just two moves later.

B3) 8.Wf3

This has been the most popular choice by far.

8...Qb7 9.Qd3 Qbd7



10.g4

This is the most principled continuation, and the most frequently played.

In the event of 10.a3 Black should play 10...Wc8, when the usual answer of 11.0–0 transposes to 10.0–0 below.

White's most important alternative is:

10.0-0 Wc8 11.a3

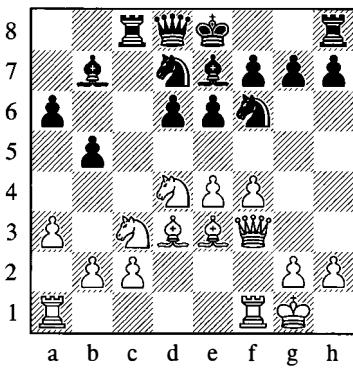
11.Qael Qe7 12.Wh3?! (better was 12.a3 0–0, transposing to the main line) 12...b4 13.Qce2 Qc5 14.Qg3 This was Romanishin – Schmidt, Yerevan 1976, and now after 14...Qfxe4N I do not believe in White's compensation.

11.Qd1 is playable, although it is hardly the type of move that will strike fear in the hearts of Sicilian players. The game Hort – Ribli, Wijk aan Zee 1983, continued 11...g6 12.Qf2 Qg7 13.Qb3 0–0 14.a4 b4 15.a5 Wc7 16.We2 e5 17.fxe5 Qxe5 when the powerful centralized knight ensured a full share of the chances for Black.

11...Qe7

The exchange sacrifice on c3 is a typical motif in many Sicilian positions; not just the Dragon. Unfortunately in this position the tempting 11... $\mathbb{E}xc3!$? 12.bxc3 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ comes at a moment when Black is not fully developed. White can effectively refute his opponent's concept with 13.c4! bxc4 14. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $\mathbb{Q}fxe4$, Radulov – Soos, Sofia 1967, and now 15.f5!N $\mathbb{Q}d2$ 16. $\mathbb{W}h5$ g6 17.fxg6 fxg6 18. $\mathbb{W}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}xf1$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xe6!$ $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{W}e7$ 21. $\mathbb{W}xe6\pm$

After 11... $\mathbb{E}e7$ we will consider two continuations for White:



a) 12. $\mathbb{W}g3$ 0–0!?

The more common 12...g6 is perfectly okay, but I rather like the provocative text move, as Black's position is resilient enough to withstand any acts of aggression.

13.e5

13.f5 meets with the powerful retort 13... $\mathbb{E}xc3!$ 14.bxc3 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ For a tiny material investment Black has obtained excellent piece play and destroyed White's pawn structure.

13...dxe5 14.fxe5 $\mathbb{Q}xe5!$

This clever tactical nuance provides the justification for Black's 12th move.

15. $\mathbb{W}xe5!?$ N

This is clearly the critical continuation, and in any case it looks more challenging than 15. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ fxe6 16. $\mathbb{W}xe5$ $\mathbb{W}d6$ 17. $\mathbb{W}xd6$ $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 18.h3 $\mathbb{E}e5$ 19. $\mathbb{E}ael$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 20.bxc3 e5 A draw was agreed here in Glinz – Starotorzhsky,

e-mail 2008, although it seems to me that Black is just better.

15... $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 16. $\mathbb{W}g5$ $\mathbb{E}c5!$

Surprisingly the queen is embarrassed.

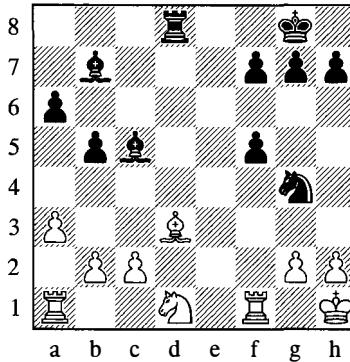
17. $\mathbb{Q}f5$

17. $\mathbb{W}h4?$ loses by force after: 17... $\mathbb{E}h5$ 18. $\mathbb{W}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}xh2\#$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}g4\#$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{E}e5\#$

17. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ is trickier, but Black remains on top with: 17... $\mathbb{E}e8\#$

17... $\mathbb{E}xf5$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{Q}xc5\#$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}g4!$

20. $\mathbb{W}xd8$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}d1$



21... $\mathbb{E}d6$

This forces a draw. If Black is feeling more ambitious then he may consider 21...g6!? with ongoing compensation.

22. $\mathbb{E}xf5$

22. $\mathbb{Q}xf5??$ $\mathbb{E}d2$ would be painful.

22... $\mathbb{E}h6$ 23. $\mathbb{E}xc5$ $\mathbb{E}xh2\#$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{E}xg2\#$

25. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}h2\#$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}f3\#$

The game ends in perpetual check.

b) 12. $\mathbb{E}ae1$

White brings his last piece into play before initiating a conflict.

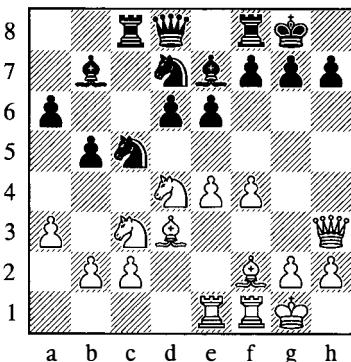
12...0–0 13. $\mathbb{W}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}f2$

14.e5? does not work, and led to an early disaster for White in the following game:

14...dxe5 15.fxe5 $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ 16.exf6 $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $\mathbb{Q}xg2!$ 18. $\mathbb{W}g4$ fxe6 0–1 Diaz – Zapata, Havana 1986.

14... $\mathbb{Q}fd7!$

White was not threatening e5 just yet, but it was still a smart idea to sidestep the possibility while also preparing a kingside regrouping.

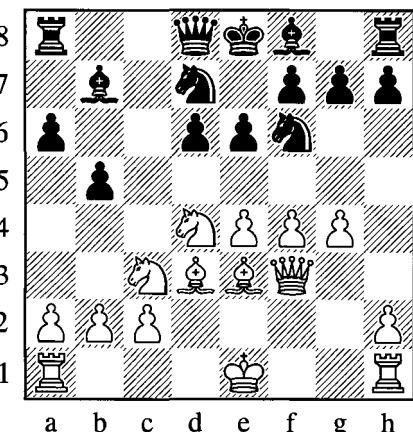


15. $\mathbb{Q}h1$

15.f5 e5 16. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6!?$ was pleasant for Black in Myrvold – Bologan, Oslo 1994. The second player soon obtained the better chances after exchanging on d3 followed by opening the centre with ...d5.

15... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 16. $\mathbb{R}d1$ $\mathbb{R}e8$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ g6 18. $\mathbb{Q}de2$ $\mathbb{Q}g7\#$

Black's set up is proving to be eminently flexible and if White will not make some progress he may fall behind in Yudasin – Kasparov, Moscow 1988.



10...b4

This is generally regarded as the main line, although the following alternative also looks quite tempting:

10...h6!? 11.a3

White's position is not strong enough to justify an immediate assault: 11.g5? $\mathbb{h}xg5$ 12. $\mathbb{f}xg5$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 13. $\mathbb{W}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}fg4$ 14.g6 $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 15. $\mathbb{g}xf7\#$ 16. $\mathbb{W}xe3$ $\mathbb{W}h4\#$ is likely to end in tears for White.

More sensible is 11.h4 b4 12. $\mathbb{Q}ce2$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ (12...e5!N looks quite promising) 13. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ This was seen in Alekhina – Grinfeld, Sochi 1981, and here I suggest 13... $\mathbb{Q}xd3\#$ N 14.cxd3 e5 15. $\mathbb{Q}df5$ g6 16.fxe5 dxe5 17. $\mathbb{Q}xh6$ $\mathbb{Q}xh6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xh6$ $\mathbb{Q}xh6$ 19.g5 $\mathbb{Q}h8$ (This looks better than 19... $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 20. $\mathbb{W}xf6$ $\mathbb{W}xd3$ 21. $\mathbb{W}xe5\#$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 22. $\mathbb{W}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{W}d4$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 26.b3± White keeps an extra pawn and somewhat better chances.) 20. $\mathbb{W}xf6$ $\mathbb{W}xf6$ 21.gxf6 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ The pawn f6 needs constant protection, so Black should have no real problems in this ending.

Finally, there is 11.0–0–0 $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}ce2$ (12.g5 $\mathbb{h}xg5$ 13. $\mathbb{f}xg5$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 14. $\mathbb{W}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}fg4$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ b4 16. $\mathbb{Q}ce2$, Lanc – Mokry, Trnava 1984, 16... $\mathbb{Q}xd3\#$! 17. $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ $\mathbb{Q}e5\#$; 12. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$! 13. $\mathbb{W}g2$ b4 14. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ d5# The tactics can easily turn against White.) 12... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}xd3\#$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$! 15.h4 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}dd1$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ = The bishop pair gives Black bright prospects.

11... $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 12.0–0 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}ael$

Once again 13.g5? is premature: 13... $\mathbb{h}xg5$ 14. $\mathbb{f}xg5$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 15. $\mathbb{W}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}fg4$ 16.g6 $\mathbb{Q}h4$ 17. $\mathbb{g}xf7\#$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 18.f8= $\mathbb{Q}\#$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xf8$ $\mathbb{Q}xg3$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xh8$ $\mathbb{Q}xh8$ 21.hxg3 $\mathbb{Q}xe3\#$ The tactics backfire against White, as the rook on h8 becomes active in the process.

13...g5?

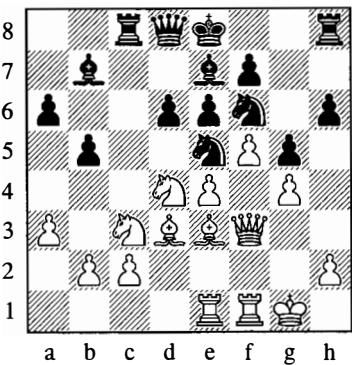
This thematic positional tool should be known by all Sicilian players – and Najdorf fans especially.

14.f5

14.fxg5?! hgx5 15.h3 (15. $\mathbb{W}xg5$ $\mathbb{W}b6$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 17. $\mathbb{W}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}exg4\#$) 15... $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 16. $\mathbb{W}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}fd7\#$ The exchange on g5 is strategically dubious for White.

The attempted ‘improvement’ 14. $\mathbb{W}h3$ brought White nothing but misery: 14...gxh4 15. $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 16.g5 hgx5 17. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ White had nothing to show for his missing pawn, and the desperate sacrifice 18. $\mathbb{Q}xe6?$ sealed his fate after 18...g4!— in J. Dominguez – Zapata, Decameron 2003.

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



15. $\mathbb{W}h3$!?

Better was 15. $\mathbb{W}g2N$ $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ 16.cxd3 e5 17. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{W}d7$ with dynamic equality.

15... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ h5! 17.fxe6† fxe6 18.gxh5 g4 19. $\mathbb{W}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3$!

The celebrated exchange sacrifice on c3 is often very effective.

20.bxc3 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 21. $\mathbb{W}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}xh5\#$

We have been following the game Milos – J. Polgar, Sao Paulo 1996. White has little chance of defending against the intended ...g3.

11. $\mathbb{Q}ce2$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{W}c7$!

The key move in this complex position. Black needs to fight against the threat of White’s long castling.

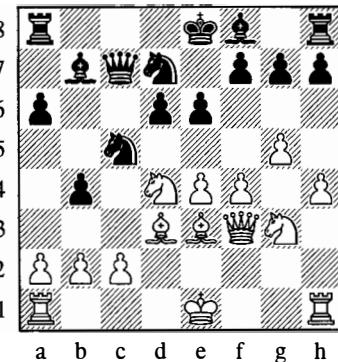
13.0–0

13.0–0–0 $\mathbb{Q}xd3\#$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ was pleasant for Black in Korzubov – A. Sokolov, Vilnius

1984. White would much prefer to recapture with the c-pawn.

13.g5 $\mathbb{Q}fd7$ 14.h4

14.0–0 g6 transposes to the main line below, while 14... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ is also quite reasonable.



14...g6!

This may appear provocative, but the black defences prove to be resilient enough.

14... $\mathbb{Q}xd3\#$ 15.cxd3 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}e2!$ is by no means bad for White.

15.0–0

15.0–0–0 $\mathbb{Q}xd3\#$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ 0–0–0 was fine for Black in Feher – Timoshenko, Cappelle la Grande 1992.

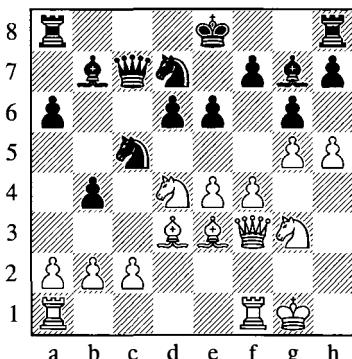
15.h5 is not too dangerous after 15... $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 16.h6 (16.hxg6 hxg6 17. $\mathbb{Q}xh8\#$ $\mathbb{Q}xh8$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ e5 was already more pleasant for Black in Kernazhitsky – Feldman, Kiev 1986.) 16... $\mathbb{Q}f8$ White has gained some space and the h6-pawn might become an important asset in an endgame. On the other hand the blocking of the kingside limits his attacking chances. 17.0–0 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 18.a3 a5 19.axb4 axb4 20. $\mathbb{Q}xa8\#$ $\mathbb{Q}xa8$ White achieved no advantage and a draw was agreed in Cramling – Ilic, Lugano 1983.

15... $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 16.h5

16.a3 e5 17. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ exf4 18. $\mathbb{W}xf4$ 0–0 19. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 20.axb4 $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ (20... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 21. $\mathbb{W}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}ab1$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}ae8\#$ Black has used his chances in the centre for gaining

somewhat better play in Hübner – Portisch, Lucerne 1982.) 21.cxd3 ♕xb2 22.♕ad1 ♔e5†

Up to this point we have been following the game Pyka – Jedrzejowski, corr. 2000. Here I found an interesting new idea:



16...h6!N

It turns out that Black can turn the tables and fight for the initiative on the kingside!

17.hxg6 fxg6 18.♗g4 0–0–0 19.a3!

This is White's best chance. Now the war rages along all fronts.

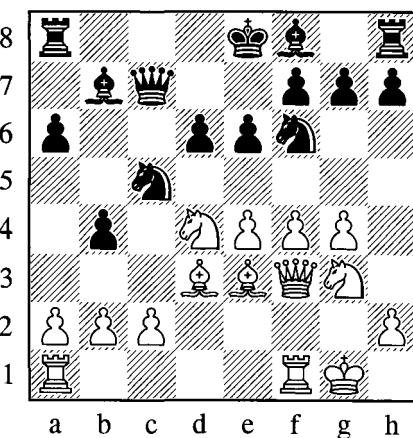
Less challenging is 19.♕xe6 ♔xe6 20.♗xe6 hxg5 21.fxg5 ♕e5 22.♔e2 d5†

19...hxg5 20.axb4 gxf4 21.bxc5

21.♗xf4 ♔e5 22.♗e2 ♔exd3 23.cxd3 e5
24.bxc5 exd4†

21...♗xc5 22.♗a4 fxe3 23.♗c4 ♕xd4 24.♗e2
♔xb2†

Black has succeeded in navigating the complications and keeping an advantage.



13...g6

Black is thinking about striking in the centre with ...e5, but first needs to take control over the f5-square.

13...♗fd7 is also quite playable, for instance:
14.a3 bxa3 15.b4 ♔xd3 16.cxd3 ♕e7 17.♗fc1
♗b8 18.♗xa3 0–0 with equality, Chandler – Olafsson, Reykjavik 1984.

14.g5

Technically this seems to be a novelty, although after Black's response we immediately transpose to several previous games.

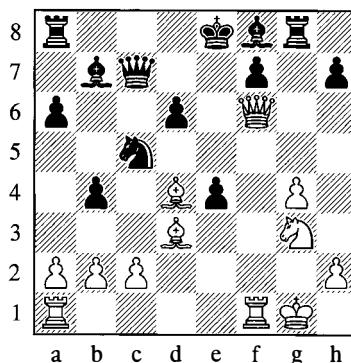
14.a3 bxa3 15.b4 ♔xd3 16.cxd3 gives Black a chance to fight on the kingside with 16...h5! 17.♗ac1? (Better was 17.g5, although after 17...♗g4 18.♗xa3 ♗xe3 19.♗xe3 ♗b6 20.♗ge2 ♕e7† White will sorely miss his bishops in the middlegame.) 17...♗d7 18.g5
♗g4 19.♗d2 This was Kupreichik – Balashov USSR 1976, and here I suggest 19...♗g7N when Black should be clearly better, although the position is still quite tense with the knight on g4 being in some jeopardy.

White would love to break the enemy spine with a violent attack:

14.f5 exf5 15.♗dx5??

This looks dangerous, but with accurate defence Black should be able to neutralize his opponent's initiative and keep some advantage.

15...gx5 16.♗d4 fxe4! 17.♗xf6 ♗g8



18.♕xc5

Feeble is 18.♕c4 d5 19.♕e2 ♕g6†.

18.♕f5?! would have been a bit more challenging, but Black stays on top after: 18...♞e6! 19.♕xe4 ♔xd4 20.♕ael ♔d8 21.♕f6† ♕e7 22.♕xd4 ♕xg4† 23.♔h1 ♕c5†

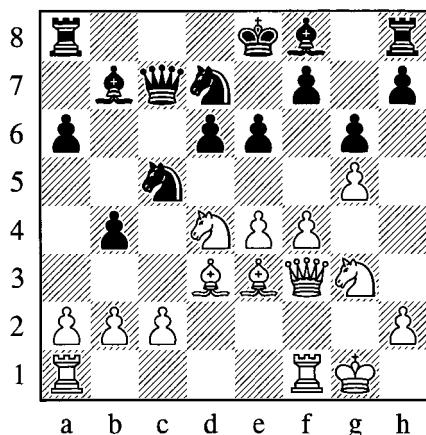
18...♕xc5†

It was even possible to play 18...♕g7?! or 18...♕g6?!, but the straightforward text move is fine.

19.♕f2 ♕e7! 20.♕xf7† ♔d7 21.♕f5

This position was reached in Short – Lukov, Yerevan 1984. At this point Black could have kept a clear advantage with the simple:

21...♕xg4†N 22.♔f1 ♕e8†

14...♞fd7**15.a3**

This looks logical, as it is hard for White to make any inroads on the kingside. For instance, the rash 15.f5? gxf5 16.♕f2 allows Black to seize the initiative with 16...0–0–0! (but not 16...♞xd3? 17.cxd3 ♔c5 18.exf5 e5 19.♕e2±) 17.exf5 e5 18.♔b3 d5† The mighty pawn centre looms like a dark cloud over the white position.

15...bxa3

Another game continued 15...♗b6 16.axb4

(16.♔b3?!N looks more solid.) 16...♗xb4 17.c3?! ♗xb2 18.♕fb1 ♗xc3 19.♔f1 ♗g7 20.♕c1 ♗xd4! (20...♗b2 21.♕ab1 ♗a2 22.♕a1 ♗b2 would be a repetition, but Black can be more ambitious) 21.♕xd4 ♗xd4† 22.♔g2 ♗xa1 23.♕xa1 h6 This was Gdanski – Ki. Georgiev, Stara Zagora 1990. Only Black can be better in this position, with more than enough material for the queen and stable squares for all his pieces.

16.♕xa3

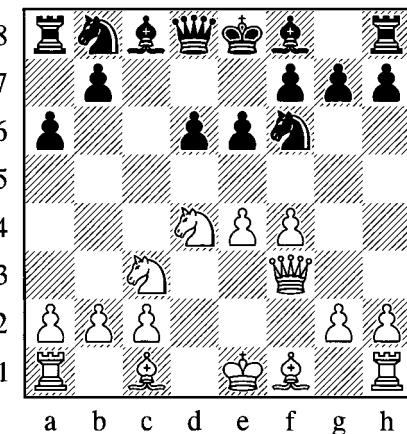
This position was reached in Crisan – Baciu, Sovata 1997, and here I suggest:

16...♗g7N 17.b4 ♔xd3 18.cxd3 ♗c8

Black has a solid position and his bishop pair might become a force one day.

C) 7.♕f3

This is generally regarded as the main line. The advantage of the early queen development is that ...b7-b5 is inhibited.

**7...♗b6**

The main alternative is 7...♗c7, preparing ...b5 after which e5 could be met by ...♞b7. The text move is played with similar intentions, but Black would first like to drive the enemy knight away from the centre. The first player

can respond with either **C1) 8.a3** or **C2) 8.Qb3.**

C1) 8.a3

This witty move defends indirectly against 8...Wxd4??, which would now cost Black his queen after 9.Qe3+-.

8...Qc6

Now White really must move the knight, and can choose between **C11) 9.Qb3** and **C12) 9.Qxc6.**

C11) 9.Qb3 Wc7

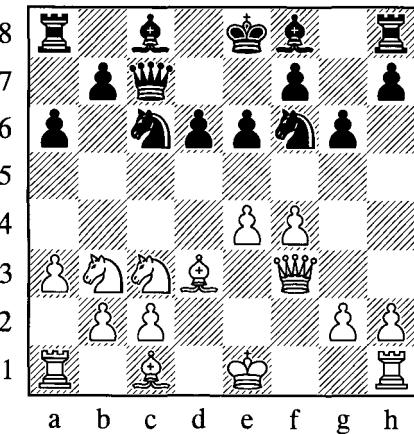
Now we face one further split; White can continue developing and aim for active piece play with **C111) 10.Qd3**, or commence an immediate pawn storm with **C112) 10.g4.**

C111) 10.Qd3

This is not a bad move, although a glance at the database reveals that it has made a dismal score in the region of 20% for White.

10...g6!

Black is not facing any immediate threats, so he has enough time to organize a kingside fianchetto. Not only does this secure an active future for his bishop, but it also provides an automatic barrier against the attacking power of the bishop on d3.



11.0-0

White continues his policy of straightforward development. He does not achieve much with more aggressive actions, for instance:

11.Qe3 Qg7 12.g4 0-0 13.0-0-0 was Lyly – Budlevskis, corr. 1993. Now Black should have played the logical 13...b5N with good attacking chances, as the pawn on a3 will help to facilitate the opening of the b-file.

11.Qd2 Qg7 12.g4 b5 13.g5 Qd7 14.Wf2 (14.f5 Qd4? 15.Qxd4 Qxd4 gives Black good play on the central dark squares, as pointed out by Van Wely.) 14...Qb6 15.We2? Probably concerned about ...Qc4, White commits an error, although Black's position was already the more appealing. 15...Qa4! White already faced serious problems in Lutz – Van Wely, Debrecen 1992.

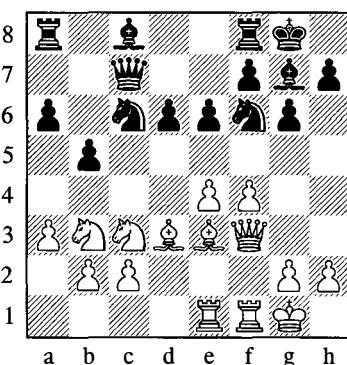
11...Qg7 12.Qd2

White has also tried:

12.Qe3 0-0 13.Qael

13.Qad1 can safely be met by 13...b5, without fearing 14.Qxb5?! axb5 15.Qxb5 Wb8 16.Qxd6 e5! 17.f5 Qd8 18.Qxc8 Qxc8 19.Qg5 Qf8# Black's extra piece should prove stronger than White's three pawns.

13...b5



14.Qh1

White should not rush into a premature

confrontation. 14.e5?! only led to problems for him after 14...dxe5 15.♗c5 ♗b7! 16.♗xf8 ♜xf8 with full compensation for the exchange as in De Firmian – Polugaevsky, Biel 1990. Perhaps shaken by this turn of events, White immediately erred with 17.♗e3?, allowing his opponent to secure a big advantage with 17...♗h6!.

14...♗b7 15.♗h3

This position was reached in Leskur – Sulava, Sibenik 2005. At this point it looks logical for Black to advance his queenside counterplay:

15...b4N 16.axb4 ♜xb4

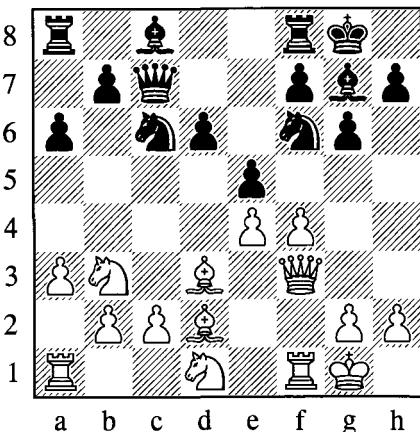
With a comfortable position.

12...0–0 13.♗d1?!

White embarks on a somewhat unusual regrouping. Other moves would be met by the usual plan of ...b5 and ...♗b7, with a comfortable and harmonious set-up for Black.

13...e5?

This is a principled attempt to question White's last move, although it should be mentioned that there was nothing wrong with 13...b5.



14.♗e3

In the event of 14.f5 it looks quite promising for Black to try 14...a5? (Kasparov's annotations

focus on the combative 14...d5? which also looks reasonable for Black and may appeal to players who thrive on complications.) 15.a4 ♜b4 16.♗xb4 axb4 17.♗e3 ♜d7 18.a5 ♜c6= White is unlikely to achieve much without his dark-squared bishop.

14...exf4 15.♗xf4 ♜e6 16.♗h4 ♜d8!

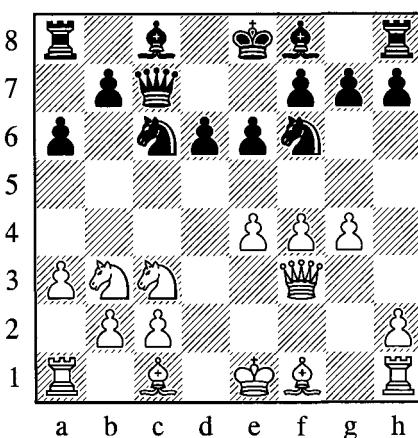
This more or less kills White's dreams of carrying out a successful attack.

The cheeky 16...♗e5?! is a bit too clever for its own good, and after 17.♗xf6 ♜d8 18.♗af1 ♜xd3 19.cxd3 ♜xb3 20.♗c3 White is out of trouble.

17.♗ae1 ♜d7!

We have been following the game Short – Kasparov, Debrecen 1992. Black's last move more or less forces a queen exchange, leading to a position in which Black's chances are clearly better thanks to the great activity of his minor pieces.

C112) 10.g4



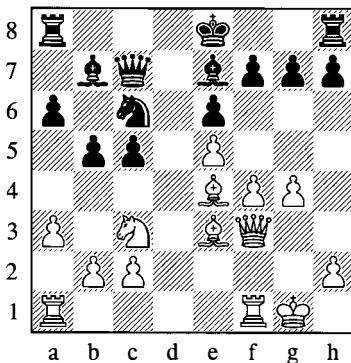
10...b5

In view of White's decision to combine the retreat of his knight from the centre with an early pawn advance on the flank, I wondered if it might be possible to try the central break

10...d5?!N, which seems logical but has, as far as I am aware, never been tested. Eventually I was forced to conclude that White keeps an edge, with my main lines continuing as follows:
 11.exd5(11.e5 ♜d7 12.♗e3 g5?! looks like fun) 11...♝xd5 12.♝xd5 exd5 13.♗e3 ♜d6 (13...♛e7? 14.0–0–0 ♜xg4 15.♗xg4 ♛xe3† 16.♔b1 ♛e6 17.♗g3 ♜e7 18.♔h3 ♛g6 19.♗xd5 ♛xg3 20.hxg3 ♜d8±) 14.0–0–0 0–0–0 15.♔b1 ♛e8 16.h3 ♜d7 17.♗g2 ♜e7 18.♗f2± Still, this could be interesting food for thought for players who like to forge their own paths.

11.g5

This would seem like an automatic choice, although I found one noteworthy game in which White chose to postpone it: 11.♗d3 ♜e7 12.♗e3 ♜d7 13.0–0–0 ♜c5 14.♗xc5 dxc5 15.e5 ♜b7 16.♗e4 This was Onischuk – Cvitan, Yerevan 1996. At this point Black should have played:



16...0–0–0!N 17.♗ad1 ♜d4 18.♗xb7† ♛xb7 19.♗f2 A queen exchange would leave Black with no problems whatsoever. 19...h5 20.g5 ♜c6 21.♗xd4 ♜xd4 22.♗xd4 cxd4 23.♗e2 ♜d8 Black keeps a full share of the chances. The only critical try for White seems to be 24.b4, but then 24...a5! gives promising counterplay.

11...♝d7 12.♗e3

Another game continued 12.♗d3 g6 13.♗e3 ♜g7 14.h4 b4 15.♗a4 bxa3 16.♗xa3 ♜b4

17.♗e2 ♜b7 with a pleasant position for Black in Onischuk – Van Wely, Wijk aan Zee 1997.

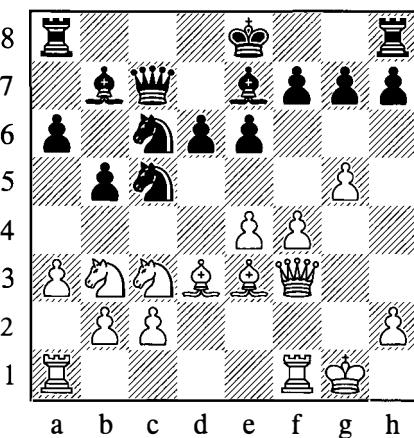
12...♝b7 13.♗d3 ♜c5?!

This looks to me like the most straightforward equalizer. 13...g6 has been more common and is certainly playable, although it does give White an automatic point of attack and in practice the first player has scored well after 14.h4.

14.0–0 ♜e7 15.♗f2

Black has no problems after 15.♗xc5 dxc5 16.♗f2 ♜d4 17.f5 0–0–0!. The option to castle long often plays a significant role in this line.

The present position was reached in the game Mestel – Polugaevsky, Reykjavik 1990. At this point the following idea looks quite promising for Black:



15...♝xd3?

In the game Black exchanged on b3, but it seems to me that exchanging the d3-bishop is more important than compromising White's pawn structure. Besides, the knight on b3 is contributing very little to White's position at present.

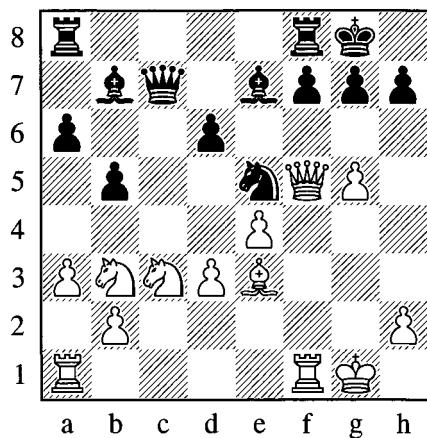
16.cxd3 0–0 17.f5?!

Quieter methods also do not achieve much for White, for instance 17.£acl ♕d7 when Black can look to open the game for his bishops with ...f5 in the nearest future.

17...exf5 18.♕xf5

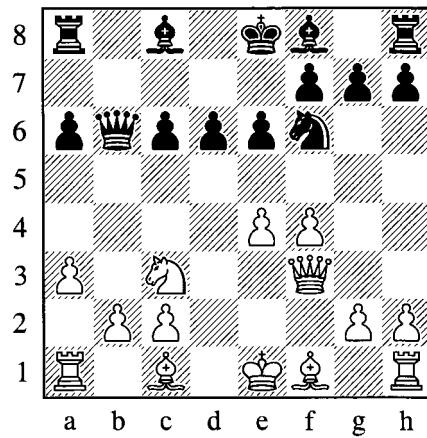
18.♗d5 ♕d7 19.♗b6 ♕e6 works out well for Black.

18...♝e5



I prefer Black's position here. The bishop pair is an important asset, and White's king is not entirely safe on the kingside.

C12) 9.♝xc6 bxc6!



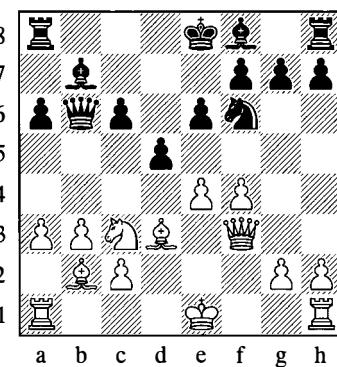
Black should take the opportunity to strengthen his centre and open the b-file.

10.g4!!

White can also play in a more reserved fashion with:

10.b3 ♜b7 11.♗b2 d5 12.♗d3

12.0–0–0 ♕a5 13.e5 (13.b4 ♕c7†) 13...♗d7 14.♗a4 ♕c7 was about equal in Z. Almasi – Kasparov, Lyon 1994.



12...♝e7!!N

There is something to be said for keeping the game less forced than current theory suggests. Having said that, the reason why this whole line is so rarely encountered in tournament play is that it was once played against Kasparov...

12...c5 13.exd5 exd5 14.0–0–0 (14.♕e6=) 14...0–0–0 15.♗a4 ♕c7 16.♗f5† (16.♗e5 ♜d6 17.♗he1 ♜he8∞) 16...♗b8 17.♗e5 ♜d6= 18.♕c3?! d4† J. Polgar – Kasparov, Dos Hermanas 1996.

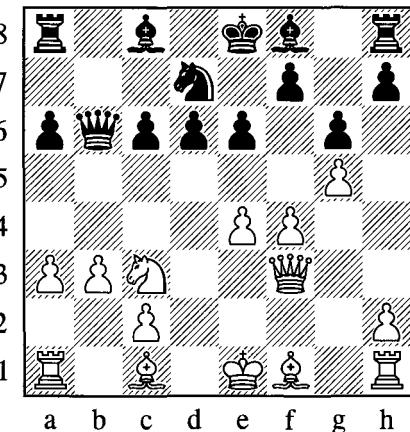
13.0–0–0 0–0

13...♕a5 14.♗a4 0–0 15.e5 ♜d7 16.f5!± is a bit unpleasant for Black once you go deeper into the variations.

14.g4 ♜d7 15.♗a4 ♕c7∞

The white bishops look impressive, but Black is solid and can consider several potential central breaks.

10...g6 11.g5 ♜d7 12.b3



12...h6!

The timid 12...g7 13.b2 0–0 14.0–0–0 d5 15.h4 was excellent for White in Short – Smirin, Debrecen 1992.

13.♗b2

13.♘a4 ♕a5† 14.♗d2 ♕c7 15.♗c3 ♘h7∞

13...hxg5!N

This clever move is an important improvement over 13...♝h7, Oll – Stohl, Manila (ol) 1992, at which point 14.h4N would have brought White some advantage.

14.♘a4

14.♘d5? cxd5 15.♗xh8 dxex4† is certainly not what White wants.

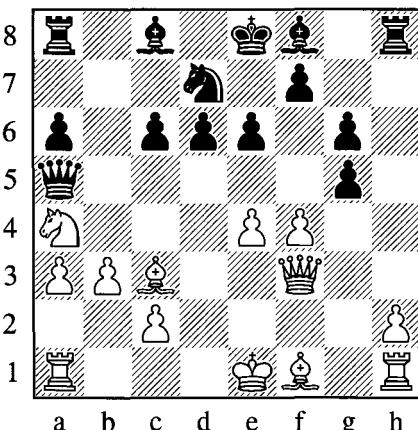
14.fxg5 is possible, although this would constitute something of a moral victory for Black. Play may continue 14...♝e5 (or 14...♝e7 15.h4 ♘e5 16.♗g2 ♘b7=) 15.♗g3 ♘g7 16.♗e2 c5 with a promising position and impressive central control for Black.

14...♕a5† 15.♗c3

The alternative is 15.b4 ♕xa4 16.♗xh8 a5!? (If Black is happy with a draw he can settle for 16...gxsf4 17.♗xf4 ♕xc2 18.♗c1 ♕b3 19.♗g2 ♘b7 20.♗c3 ♕b1† 21.♗c1 ♕d3 White has nothing better than 22.♗c3 ♕b1† repeating

the position.) 17.fxg5 axb4 18.♗e2 ♘e5 19.♗xe5 dxe5 20.0–0 ♕a7† 21.♗h1 bxa3 The position is messy and double-edged, and any result is possible.

After the move played it looks as though Black is losing a rook, but it turns out that the cheeky pawn, which made the audacious capture on move 13, is set to play a starring role:



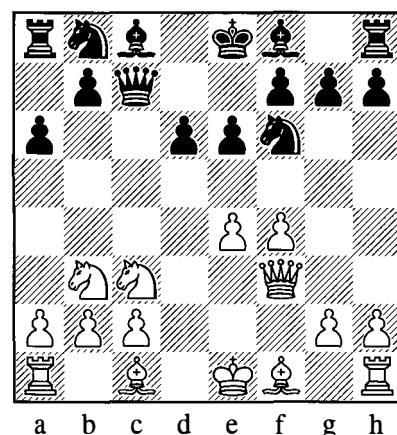
15...g4! 16.♗e3

Alternatively 16.♗xg4 ♘h5 17.♗g3 ♘h7 leads to a position with material equality and chances for both sides.

16...♕h5 17.♗xh8 ♕xh8=

With a pawn for the exchange, two powerful bishops and a healthy mass of central pawns, Black has every reason to feel satisfied.

C2) 8.♗b3 ♕c7



Black is happy to “waste” a tempo with the queen, now that the enemy knight has retreated from its active position in the centre.

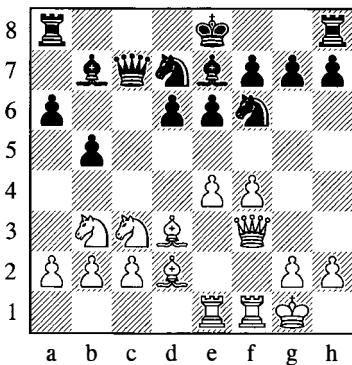
9.g4

This is the most important move, although White can also try to develop an initiative based on piece play.

The most direct way of doing so would be:

9.♗d3 b5 10.0–0 ♗b7 11.♗d2 ♗bd7 12.♗ae1 ♗e7

12...g6 is a perfectly satisfactory alternative. The fianchetto set-up will bolster the kingside, reducing the likelihood of a successful attack from White.



13.♗h3

Another game continued 13.♗g3 g6 14.a3 0–0 15.f5 ♗e5 16.fxe6 fxe6 17.♗d4 ♗c8 18.♗f3 (Perhaps White should have preferred 18.♗h6N, after which 18...♗f7 is about equal.) 18...♗h5! 19.♗h3 ♗f4 20.♗xf4 ♗xf4† Goloshchapov – Kobalia, Ekaterinburg 1999. Having exchanged the important bishop for a knight, White is destined to suffer on the dark squares.

13...h5!?

Here we see an interesting plan by which Black decides to forgo short castling altogether.

14.♗h1 ♗c5 15.♗xc5

15.f5N could be met by 15...b4 16.♗d1 e5, with equal chances.

15...dxc5 16.e5 ♗g4 17.♗e4 0–0–0

Black had a nice position in Romanov – Kurnosov, Chelyabinsk 2007.

White can also opt for a similar set-up after first restraining his opponent's queenside expansion:

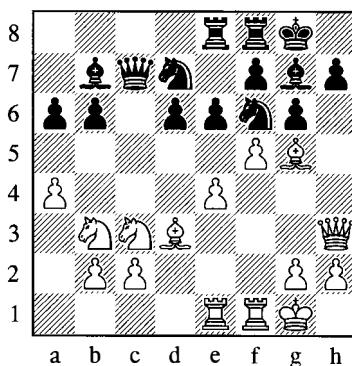
9.a4 b6

Black settles for a more modest queenside fianchetto. Apart from that, his set-up will be more or less the same as in the previous note.

10.♗d3 ♗b7 11.0–0 ♗bd7 12.♗g3

12.♗d4?! does not make much of an impression, and after 12...g6 13.♗h3 ♗c5 14.♗d2 ♗g7 15.♗ae1 0–0 Black's position was already more comfortable in Cladouras – Shabalov, Gausdal 1991.

Another possibility is 12.♗d2 g6 13.♗h3 ♗g7 14.♗ae1 0–0 15.f5 ♗ae8 16.♗g5, Nunn – Stohl, Novi Sad 1990.



At this point Black should have played 16...exf5N 17.exf5 and now either 17...♗e5?! or 17...♗xe1 18.♗xe1 ♗e5 would have kept a fair share of the chances for Black.

12...g6 13.♗e3!?

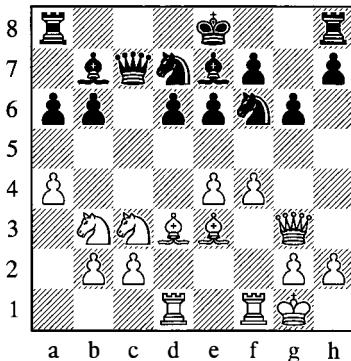
White tried 13.♗d2 ♗g7 14.♗ae1 0–0 15.♗h4, in Adams – Cu. Hansen, Groningen 1995. Now my preference would be 15...♗ae8N, anticipating the f5-advance with a solid, healthy position.

13...♗e7

This is the only move I found on the database, although I do not see anything wrong with 13... $\mathbb{Q}g7$ either.

14. $\mathbb{R}ad1$

Black should consider his options carefully here.



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

In view of White's decision to develop his bishop and rook on e3 and d1 respectively, it looks logical for Black to threaten the now slightly vulnerable e-pawn.

I checked a few alternatives, but was not completely happy with any of them:

14...0-0N is well met by 15.f5! $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}h6$ $\mathbb{Q}fe8$ 17.fxe6 fxe6 18. $\mathbb{W}h3$ $\mathbb{W}d7\pm$ Black is somewhat uncomfortable due to the weakness of e6.

14...h5!N is interesting and somewhat thematic for the Najdorf. Play might continue 15. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ e5 16. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ h4 17. $\mathbb{W}f3$ exf4 Black intends to follow with ... $\mathbb{Q}e5$, when the well-placed knight will be an important asset. Nevertheless I do not fully trust the black position due to the continuing uncertainty regarding the safety of his king.

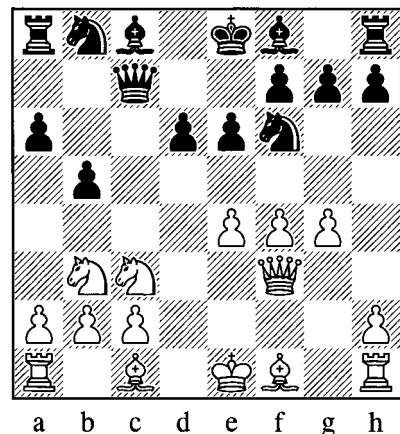
15. $\mathbb{Q}d4$

This position was reached in Vehi Bach – Korneev, Ortiguera 2003. Black opted for long castling, which I do not find fully convincing. Instead I suggest the straightforward:

15...0-0N

Continuing development, while renewing the threat to the e-pawn. The position is balanced, with chances for both sides.

9...b5



Here White can choose between C21) 10.g5 and C22) 10. $\mathbb{Q}d3$, the latter being the main line. The former can lead to the same positions, but provides independent possibilities for both sides along the way.

C21) 10.g5 b4?!

This daring counterattack is what gives the present variation a truly distinct character compared with the main line.

It should be mentioned that there is nothing much wrong with the calmer alternative:

10... $\mathbb{Q}fd7$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}e3$

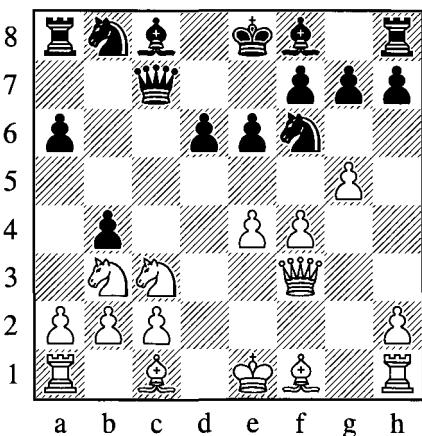
11. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ transposes to line C22 below, but White sometimes tries to do without the bishop on d3.

The main alternative is 11.a3, when 11... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ reached line C112 above, via the move order 8.a3 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 10.g4 b5 11.g5 $\mathbb{Q}d7$. 11...b4 12. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 13.0-0-0 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}ed4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$

Another possibility is 14... $\mathbb{Q}e7$!N 15. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ 0-0, followed by a standard race of attacks on opposite flanks.

15.♗xd4 e5 16.♗e3 exf4 17.♗xf4 ♗e5 18.♗xe5 dxе5 19.♗h3 ♗d6

Thanks to his bishop pair only Black could dream about an advantage in Almasi – Sax, Budapest 1995.



11.♗b5!!

This is generally considered to be the most challenging and principled move.

White must certainly avoid 11.♗d1? (11.♗e2? would meet with a similar fate) 11...♗xe4!, which occurred in Grubbs – Woods, Dallas 2000.

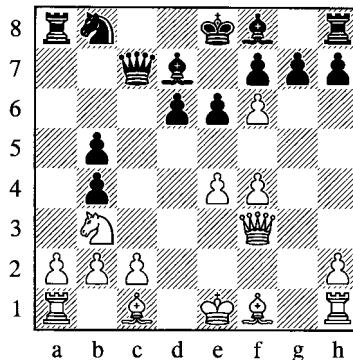
The main alternative is 11.gxf6 bxc3 12.bxc3 (12.♗xc3 is also playable: 12...♗xc3† 13.bxc3 gxf6 14.♗g1 was seen in Bogle – Millar corr. 2000, and here I suggest 14...♗c6N 15.♗e3 ♜b8 with chances for both sides.) 12...gxf6 13.♗g1 ♜b7 14.c4 ♗d7 15.♗b2 This position was reached in J. Polgar – Ljubojevic, Monte Carlo (blind) 1995. At this point it looks logical for Black to continue 15...♗b8N 16.0–0–0 a5 with chances for both sides.

11...axb5 12.gxf6 gxf6

Black has a risky, but perhaps playable alternative at his disposal:

12...♗d7?

This has only been tried once to my knowledge. Black lost the game in question but the opening left numerous questions unanswered.



13.fxg7?

It looks wrong to facilitate Black's development for the sake of a mere pawn. 13.♗g1N is a sensible alternative, although I doubt that Black has much to fear after 13...gxf6, for instance 14.♗d3 ♗c6 15.♗e3 ♜b7 16.♗h5 ♗a5 with approximate equality.

More dangerous is 13.f5!N which was recommended by Sutovsky after the game. His analysis continued 13...gxf6 14.fxe6 fxe6 15.♗g1 ♜e7 16.♗g7 with dangerous compensation for White.

13...♗xg7 14.♗g1 ♜f6 15.e5 ♗c6 16.♗h5
16.♗xb5 is also less than ideal after 16...dxe5 17.c4 bxc3 18.♗xc3 ♜b6 19.♗xc6† ♗xc6 20.♗e3 ♜b4† White will have to defend.

16...dxe5 17.f5 exf5 18.♗g5
18.♗xf5 ♗h4† 19.♗d1 ♗d7 20.♗e3 ♗f6†
18...♗e7 19.0–0–0

This was Sutovsky – Ilincic, Neum 2004, and now Black should have played:

19...♗d7!N

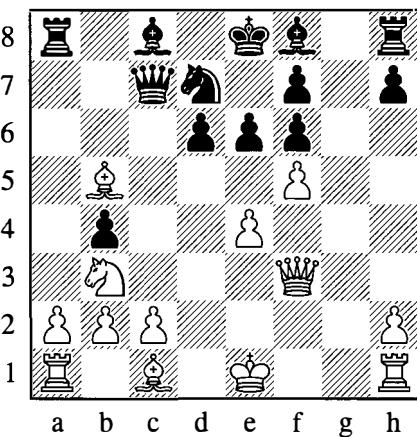
Sutovsky mentioned this in his annotations. The position is highly complex, but overall it seems to me that Black is doing well thanks to his well coordinated cluster of pieces in the centre. Overall 12...♗d7? looks to be worth

considering although I hasten to remind the reader that the most critical challenge may well lie in the notes to move 13 above.

13.♗xb5†

This natural move has been the most popular, although in Timman – Tal, Hilversum 1988, White deviated with 13.♗d4, after which I think Black's best answer would have been 13...♝g8N, taking the open file immediately. A logical continuation would be 14.♗e3 ♗d7 15.♗g1 ♘xg1 16.♗xg1 ♜b7 with equal play.

13...♝d7 14.f5



14...♜b6

In a later game the same player tried to "improve" with 14...♝e7?, but after 15.♗xd7 ♗xd7 16.fxe6 fxe6 17.♗f1 Black's position was already beyond saving in J. Polgar – Van Wely, Amsterdam 1995.

15.♜e2

15.fxe6 is not dangerous after 15...♜xb5 16.exd7† ♗xd7 17.♗g1 ♜e5, when Black's control over the dark squares makes up for his dubious pawn structure.

15...♝b8 16.c4!?

Looks like a surprising choice, but does not change the overall evaluation of the position.

After the more natural 16.♗d3 Black keeps a fair share of the chances with 16...♝e5 17.♗e3 ♗xd3† 18.cxd3 ♜a6∞.

16...bxс3 17.a4

This was White's idea – he stabilizes the bishop on b5 and hopes to open lines for his attack.

17...♞a6!

Black should not be overly concerned with material, and sensibly decides to exchange a pair of pieces while activating his queen. Obviously giving up a bishop for a knight carries certain risks, but overall this should not harm Black's position too much.

18.♗xa6 ♜xb3 19.♗b5 ♜e7 20.fxe6 fxe6∞

We have been following the game Gipslis – Van Wely, Gausdal 1992. The position remains roughly equal but also complex and difficult for both sides, with neither king feeling completely safe.

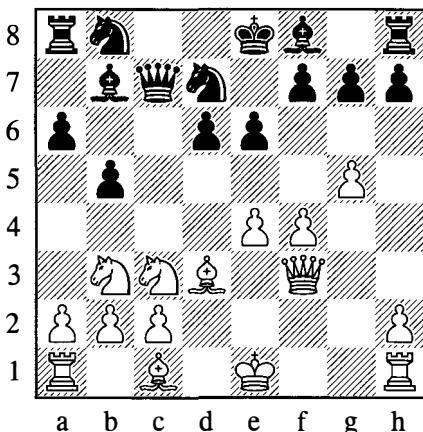
Overall Black seems to be holding his own in the complications arising after 10.g5 b4?. Depending on the reader's personal tastes, he can of course settle for the straightforward 10...♝fd7, with a solid position and a possible transposition to one of the other lines considered elsewhere in this chapter.

C22) 10.♗d3

This also leads to double-edged positions, although they will usually be of a more stable nature than those encountered in the previous section.

10...♝b7 11.g5 ♐fd7

Here there is nothing much to be gained from 11...b4, as White can just play 12.♗e2 if he wishes.



12.Qe3

This natural move has been the most common, although White has some other ways to develop his attack.

The bishop can also take a shorter step with:

12.Qd2 Qc5 13.Qe2

13.0–0–0 Qxd3† 14.Qxd3 Qd7 15.Qh1 0–0–0 was fine for Black in Yudasin – J. Polgar, Groningen 1993.

The more direct 13.f5 is well met by 13...b4 14.Qd1 exf5 15.Qxf5 Qbd7 16.Qxb4 White may as well take the pawn, otherwise the arrival of the knight on e5 will ensure Black of a nice position with no material investment. 16...g6 Here I tried to improve White's play with 17.Qf2!N (After 17.Qf4 Qe5 18.Qe3 h6! Black began to take over the initiative in Wahls – Hracek, Germany 1997.) 17...Qxe4 18.Qxe4 Qxe4 19.Qf1 Qe5 20.Qc3 Qf3† 21.Qd1 d5 22.Qe3 Qxb4 23.Qxe4 0–0–0

24.Qf6 Qxh2∞ The situation is somewhat unclear, although the position of the white king on d1 should prevent the first player from achieving much.

13...Qc6 14.Qxc5 dxc5 15.c3

This looks better than 15.c4 Qb6 16.a4?! bxc4 17.Qxc4 Qxb2 18.Qc3 Qb6 when White had no real compensation in Popovych – Maksimenko, Lvov 1999.

15...0–0–0

15...Wa5!N would prevent long castling.
16.0–0–0 h6 17.Qc2 hxg5 18.Qxg5 Qe5
19.Qf2

This position was reached in Styblo – Urbanek, corr. 1998. Now I think Black should have played:
19...Qd6N 20.Qf4 f6

Reinforcing the powerful knight on e5, with at least equal chances.

Another option is to prepare f5 without completing development, although this might prove risky for the first player as well:

12.Qh3 g6 13.Qf1

13.Qe3 b4 14.Qe2 Qg7 15.0–0–0 was Bernhard – Woischke, e-mail 2000, and now I like 15...h6!N 16.Qxh6 Qxh6 17.Qg2 Qf6 Without the g5 pawn, White's position is losing its bite.

The text move leads to immense complications, but should not be more dangerous than many other lines.

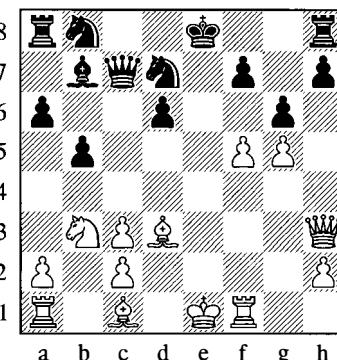
13...Qg7

13...b4 14.Qe2 Qc6 15.f5 gxf5 16.exf5 e5 17.f6 was a bit uncomfortable for Black in Ulibin – Khurtsidze, Oakham 1992.

14.f5 exf5 15.exf5 Qxc3†?!

It is a bit counter-intuitive to give up the 'Dragon' bishop, but it is better than for it to be shut out. 15...0–0 Happened in two games of a very young Wesley So as White in 2006. Here 16.f6!N† would have been a natural improvement. The idea of Qf4-h4 is quite annoying.

16.bxc3



16...0–0!N

16... $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 17. $f\text{g}6$ $f\text{g}6$ occurred in Heinemann – P.H. Nielsen, Germany 2007. Here White could have improved with 18. $\mathbb{Q}e2!$ N $\mathbb{Q}bc6$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}a3\pm$ and it is not so easy for Black to solve his problems. For example: 19... $\mathbb{E}d8$ 20.0–0–0 $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 21. $\mathbb{W}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xf5!$ $gxf5$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}h5\uparrow$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}d4\bar{\bar}$ 17. $f6$

17. $\mathbb{W}h6$ $\mathbb{W}xc3\uparrow$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{E}e8\uparrow$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{W}g7\mp$ does not look dangerous for Black at all.

17... $h5!$

This might look risky, but it is not so easy for White to break through; shortly Black's pieces will become very active.

18. $gxh6!$

18... $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{W}xc3\uparrow$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{W}e5\uparrow$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}c5\mp$

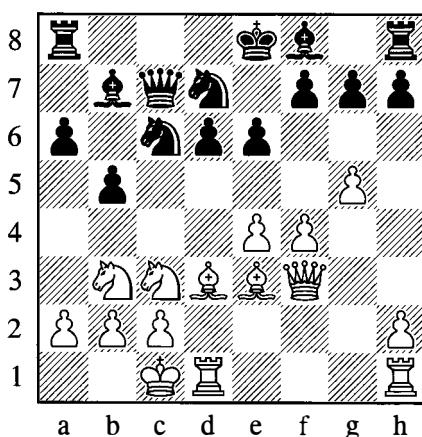
18... $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}b2$

19... $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{W}xc3\uparrow$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 21. $\mathbb{W}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}g4\uparrow$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 23. $\mathbb{W}xe3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7\mp$

19... $\mathbb{E}e8\uparrow$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}bd7\infty$

Black is looking for counterplay in the centre, with ... $\mathbb{E}e5-h5$ being one important resource.

12... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 13.0–0–0



13... $b4!$

Several other moves have been played, but now that White has committed himself to long castling, I see no reason for Black to delay his assault.

14. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ a5

Black continues his aggressive policy.

16. $\mathbb{Q}bd4$

I also checked 16. $\mathbb{Q}ed4$ a4 17. $\mathbb{Q}b5$, and found: 17... $\mathbb{W}b8$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ 0–0 19. $\mathbb{W}h3$ (or 19. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ b3 \mp) 19... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $dxc5\mp$

The present position was reached in Dashko – Weetik, Belorechensk 2007. At this point I suggest a slight improvement for Black:

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

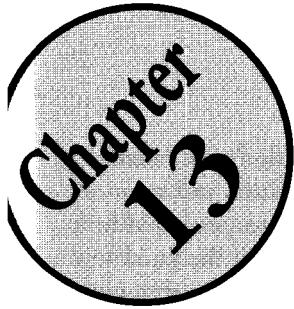
By reinforcing the e6-pawn, Black takes the sting out of any f5 ideas. Naturally the text move is also played with some active intentions as well as defensive ones. A possible continuation might be:

17. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{W}b8$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xc5?!$ $dxc5$ 19. $h4$ a4 20. $h5$ 0–0

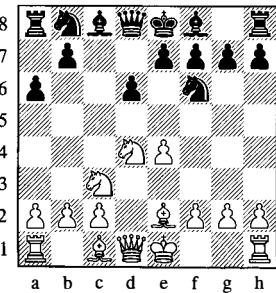
With unclear roughly balanced play.

Conclusion

In the current chapter White plays with a grand plan, which demands an equally well-considered response from the defender. The first major variation of 7. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}bd7$ should not hold too many dangers for the second player, although he should keep an eye on possible transpositions to other lines. We also saw that Black is holding his own in variation B with 7. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ b5, despite the fact that he is making a lot of pawn moves in the early part of the game. Over time, the resilience of Black's set up contributed to the relative loss of White's interest in that system. Matters are somewhat more complicated in variation C with 7. $\mathbb{W}f3$ $\mathbb{W}b6$, when the second player often has to demonstrate some ingenuity to maintain the balance. The scope for creative players is considerable, and both sides can use their imagination and attacking skill to showcase the Sicilian Defence at its dynamic best.



Open Systems



The Rock - 6. ♕e2

Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2. ♘f3 d6 3. d4 cxd4 4. ♘xd4 ♘f6 5. ♘c3 a6

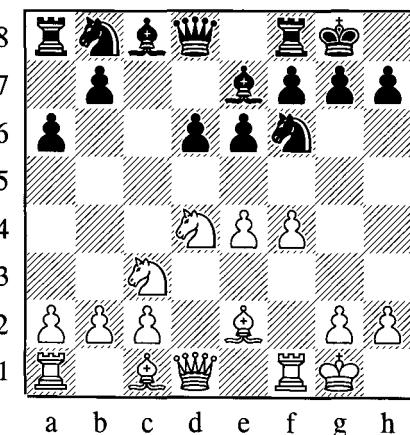
6. ♕e2 e6 7. 0–0 ♘e7 8. f4 0–0

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The Najdorf and Scheveningen set-ups have always been closely linked. Two of White's most popular and dangerous attacking systems against the Najdorf, 6.♕c4 and 6.♕g5, are almost universally met by the response 6...e6, while the alternatives 6.♕e2 and 6.♕e3 can be met equally well by either move of the e-pawn. Is one of these moves really "better" than the other? Both options have their merits, and we could spend a long time debating the question without reaching any kind of ultimate truth. In this chapter I have chosen to focus on the seemingly more modest 6...e6, for two reasons. First, I am aware that 6...e5 is widely seen as the more traditional response for the Najdorf system, so I find it more interesting to focus on the option that has hitherto received less attention in the literature. And more importantly, it is the option with which I have the most personal experience and deeper understanding.

Our basic starting position arises after the following moves:

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6
5.♘c3 a6 6.♘e2 e6 7.0–0 ♘e7 8.f4 0–0



A glance at the database reveals that White has, at one time or another, tried practically every legal option on moves 7 and 8, but I see

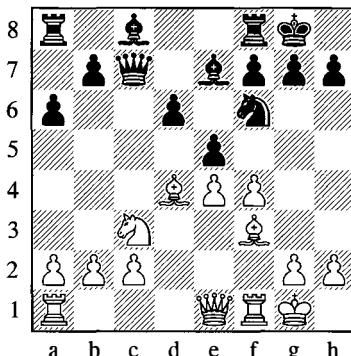
no value in analysing variation after variation, transposition after transposition and so on. A careful study of the main lines presented here should arm the reader with all the knowhow and understanding he needs to deal with most of White's more exotic possibilities.

At this point we will divide the material into two major branches, based on whether or not White chooses to allow ...b5. Thus we will consider A) 9.♗h1 and B) 9.a4.

A) 9.♗h1

White normally includes this prophylactic measure in his plans over the next few moves. I should add that there are numerous possible move orders and transpositions, and it would be counterproductive to try and analyse every last one of them. Instead, by studying the most important lines in detail, the reader should learn enough about the position to be able to deal with most deviations. I will briefly mention a few possible lines in which White tries to save time by postponing or omitting the move ♗h1.

9.♘e3 ♘c7 10.♗f3 ♘c6 11.♗e1 (An altogether different direction is 11.♘xc6 bxc6 12.♗a4 ♘b7 13.c4 c5 14.♗c2 ♘d7 15.b3 ♘ac8 16.♗ad1 ♘b8 17.♗f2 ♘fd8 18.g3 ♘c6 19.♘c3 ♘f6 20.♘e2 ♘b7 21.g4 g6 22.g5 ♘g7 23.♗d2 ♘c6 24.h4 a5 25.h5 a4 Black had enough counterplay in Adams – Van Wely, London 2009.) 11...♗xd4 12.♗xd4 e5



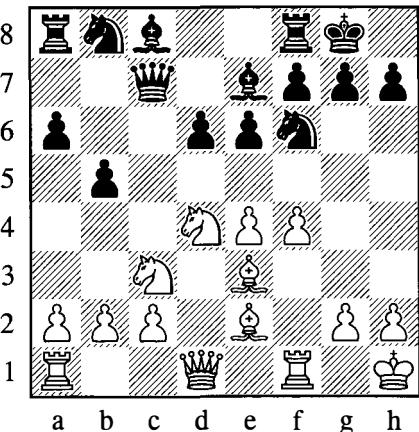
13.♗e3 (13.fxe5 dxe5 14.♔g3 ♔c5! exploits the position of White's king.) 13...exf4 (13...b5 is also quite alright) 14.♕xf4 ♔e6 15.♔h1 ♖d7 with a solid position, as seen in several games. The situation bears a close resemblance to line B42 below.

9...♝c7

Here the principal choices are A1) 10.♗e3 and A2) 10.♗e1, remembering of course that 10.a4 will be considered under line B later in the chapter.

A1) 10.♗e3 b5

Black can be grateful for the chance to play this useful move. The light-squared bishop will soon appear on the long diagonal facing the white king, and the b-pawn is already threatening to drive the enemy knight away from c3.



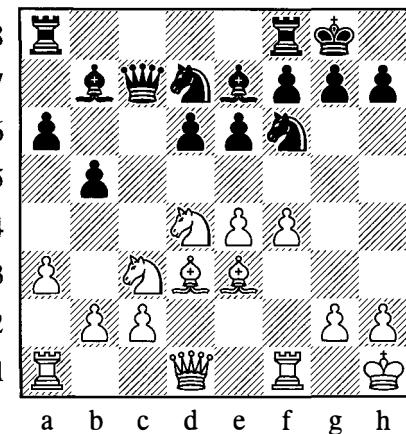
White can now choose between preventing ...b4 directly with A11) 11.a3, anticipating it with A12) 11.♗f3, or commencing his own attack with the aggressive A13) 11.e5.

A11) 11.a3 ♕b7 12.♗d3

12.♗f3 reaches line A12 below.

12...♝bd7

Black has achieved a harmonious set-up and is ready to strike at the enemy centre with a timely ...♘c5.



13.♗e1

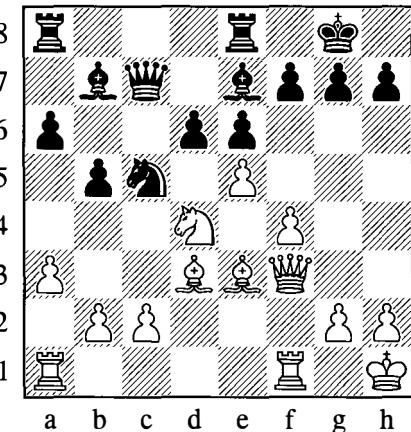
Another possible continuation is 13.♗f3 ♘c5 14.♔a1 ♕ac8 15.♗d2 (15.♗b3 ♕fd8 is also comfortable for Black) 15...d5! The central advance of the d-pawn should always be considered carefully in Sicilian positions. Here it is justified as White will be virtually forced to exchange the knight on e4, relinquishing the bishop pair and improving the scope of Black's pieces. 16.e5 ♘fe4 17.♗xe4 ♘xe4 18.♗xe4 dxe4 19.♔g3 Grosar – Mikhalkishin, Maribor 2000. 19...♔d8!N 20.♗e3 ♕c4 21.♔c3 ♔c5 22.♗d1 ♘c7† The Black pieces are extremely active.

13...♝fe8

Also promising is 13...♝c5 14.♔g1 g6 15.b4 ♘xd3 16.cxd3 ♘fe8 17.♗b3 ♕ac8 18.♗c1 ♘d7† Black has managed to exchange his knight for the enemy bishop without paying any price, Zhrebukh – Shomoev, Plovdiv 2008.

14.♔g3 ♘c5 15.e5 ♘fe4 16.♗xe4 ♘xe4 17.♗f3 ♘c5

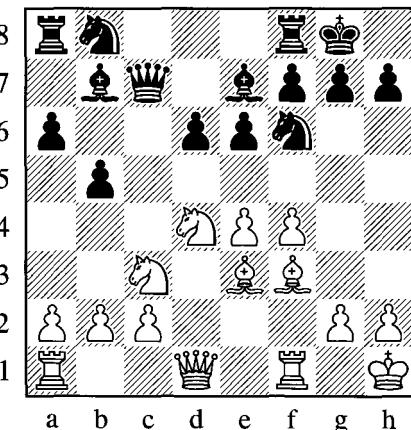
This position was reached in Aagaard – Shipov, Gistrup 1997. Here I think White should have tried:

**18.♗g3N**

In the game he tried a spirited, but unsound sacrifice: 18.♕xh7†? ♔xh7 19.♗h5† ♔g8 20.f5 dxе5 (20...♗f8!N would have been even stronger) 21.fxe6 ♕f6 22.♗xf6 fxе6 and White did not have enough compensation.

18...♗xd3 19.cxd3 ♜ec8 20.♗ac1 ♜d8†

The diagonal a8-h1 will become a source of headache for White.

A12) 11.♗f3 ♔b7**12.a3**

12.e5 dxе5 13.fxе5 ♜fd7 reaches line A133 below.

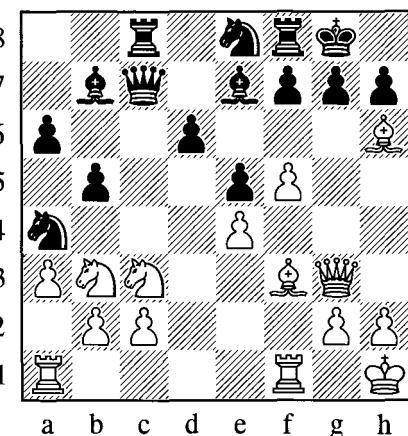
12...♗bd7 13.♗e1 ♜ac8 14.♗g3 ♜c5 15.f5**e5 16.♗h6 ♜e8 17.♗b3**

17.♗de2 ♜h8 18.♗g5 ♜xg5 19.♗xg5 ♜f6 20.♗g3 ♜b6 21.♗ad1 ♜fd8 was comfortable for Black in Ayyar – Tarjan, Saratoga Springs 1980.

I also checked the principled, but insufficient attacking attempt: 17.f6?!N ♜xf6 18.♗f5 ♜h8 19.♗d2 ♜d8† Black will defend carefully and tame White's attack.

17...♙a4!

It is quite common in this variation for Black to accept doubled a-pawns in order to advance his queenside initiative, and in the present position the idea works perfectly.

**18.♗xa4N**

This is an attempt to improve over the following game, which soon ended in disaster for White: 18.f6?! ♜xf6 19.♗g4? ♜xc3 20.bxc3 ♜b8 21.♗d7 ♜xd7 22.♗xf6 ♜xe4 23.♗d1 ♜g6 0–1 Perez Garcia – Spraggett, Lorca 2005.

18...bxax4 19.♗d2 ♜h8 20.♗g5 ♜xg5 21.♗xg5 ♜b6†

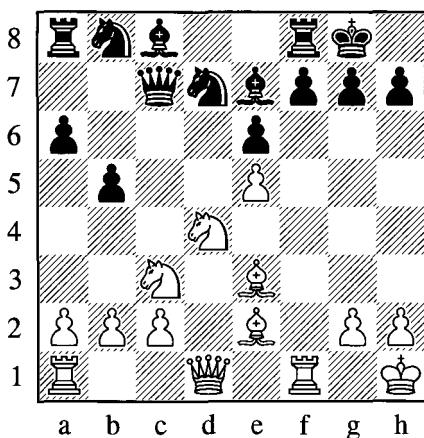
White is under heavy pressure on the queenside.

Finally we come to White's most aggressive option on move 11.

A13) 11.e5 dxe5 12.fxe5 ♔fd7

In the event of 12...♛xe5? 13.♕f4 ♛c5 14.♕f3 ♕d5 15.♕xe6! ♜xe6 16.♕xd5 ♜xd5 17.♕xd5±

White would be overjoyed after his small witty combination.



Now we face a further division between A131) 13.♕d3, A132) 13.♕f4 and A133) 13.♕f3.

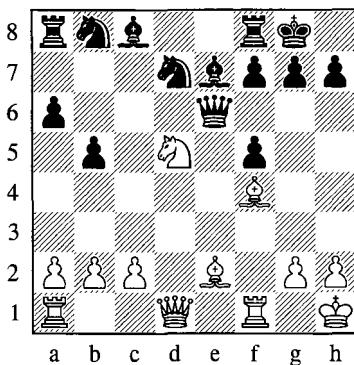
13.♕f5?!

The knight sacrifice is very tempting, but Black can parry it with a clever concept of his own.

13...exf5 14.♕d5

14.♕f3 ♜c6 15.♕d5 ♛b8 16.♕xe7† ♜xe7†

14...♛xe5! 15.♕f4 ♛e6

**16.♕f3**

16.♕xe7† ♛xe7 17.♕f3 ♜a7 18.♕d4 ♜c5

19.♕xb8 ♜d7†

16...♜d8 17.♕e1 ♛g6 18.♕h5

In the event of 18.♕c7, Klundt – Budde, Germany 1982, Black should play 18...♜c6N with a winning position.

18...♛c6 19.♕f3 ♜a7 20.♕e3

20.♕e7† ♜xe7 21.♕xc6 ♜xc6† Black's three pieces clearly outclass the white queen.

20...g5?!

20...a5?!N also looks good, but Black decides to force the issue immediately.

21.♕e7† ♜xe7 22.♕xc6 ♜xc6 23.♕g3 f6

24.♕d5† ♜h8 25.♕xg5?

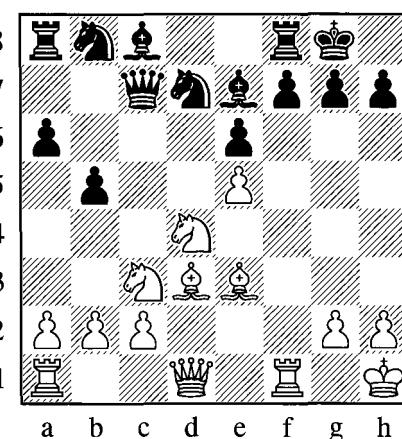
White had to play 25.♕xc6, although 25...gxsf4 should win for Black eventually as his minor pieces will coordinate beautifully.

25...fxg5 26.♕xc6 gxsf4

0–1 Bentancurt – Lozano Kafure, Argentina 2000.

A131) 13.♕d3

This aggressive move forces Black to proceed with caution, as there are numerous sacrifices in the air.

**13...♜c5**

13...♜b7? 14.♕xe6! fxe6 15.♕h5 ♜f5

16.♕xf5 exf5 17.♕e8† ♜f8 18.♕xf5+– Umudova – Gandlerud, Gandrud, Gjovik 2008.

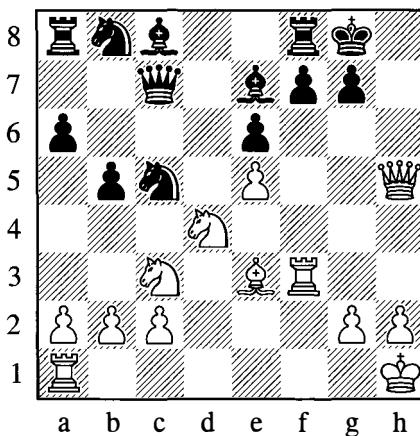
13... $\mathbb{Q}xe5N$ does not appear to have been tried, probably with good reason as White develops a dangerous initiative after 14. $\mathbb{Q}f4$
 $\mathbb{Q}bd7$ 15. $\mathbb{W}h5$ g6 16. $\mathbb{W}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$
18. $\mathbb{Q}g5$, intending to meet both 18...h6 and 18...h5 with 19. $\mathbb{Q}xg6$.

14. $\mathbb{Q}xh7\#?$

In the following game White did not achieve much with a more patient build-up. 14. $\mathbb{W}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 15. $\mathbb{W}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}bd7$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ b4 17. $\mathbb{Q}ce2$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ 19.cxd3 Aveskulov – Levin, Sochi 2008. Now it looks promising to play 19... $\mathbb{Q}xf3!N$ (If Black prefers to hang on to the bishop pair, then 19... $\mathbb{Q}d5N$ also looks good for him.) 20. $\mathbb{W}xf3$ (20. $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ $\mathbb{W}c2!$) 20... $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 21. $\mathbb{W}g3$ f6 \mp Black keeps an extra pawn for the time being, as 22.d4? runs into 22... $\mathbb{W}c4$.

14... $\mathbb{Q}xh7$ 15. $\mathbb{W}h5\#$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}f3$

This position was reached in Petraitis – Chacon, e-mail 2003. Now it is important for Black to defend in the right way:



16...f5!N

Seizing some space. Now the critical continuation looks to be:

17.exf6 $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}dxb5!$ axb5 19. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{W}f7!$
20. $\mathbb{Q}xf6!$ $\mathbb{W}xf6!$

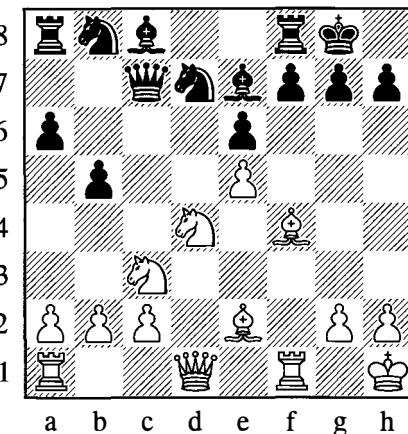
Less convincing is 20... $\mathbb{W}xh5?!$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xf8\#$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xc8$.

21. $\mathbb{Q}xf8$ $\mathbb{W}xf8$ 22. $\mathbb{W}xb5$ $\mathbb{Q}d7\mp$

Black's bishop is worth more than three pawns.

A132) 13. $\mathbb{Q}f4$

White takes a moment to defend the e-pawn, and hopes to make tactical use of the opposition of bishop and queen.



13... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}d3$

14. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ reaches line A133 below.

14... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 15. $\mathbb{W}g4$

White is making no secrets about his ambitions to attack the enemy king, which does not appear to be so well defended.

15... $\mathbb{Q}c6$

Several other moves have been tried here. For instance I consider 15... $\mathbb{Q}bd7$ to be quite playable, but my overall preference is for the text move.

16. $\mathbb{Q}f3$

After 16. $\mathbb{Q}d5?$ exd5 the game Koch – Hoffmann, e-mail 2007, was agreed drawn. However, it seems to me that White will have a hard time justifying his material investment after 17.e6 $\mathbb{W}d8$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe6$.

Another game continued 16. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd3$

17.Qxc6 Qxf4 18.Qxe7† Wxe7 19.Qxf4 Qxe4 20.Qxe4 Rodriguez Guerrero – Castellanos Rodriguez, Mislata 2007. Black has equalized easily, and now after 20...Qad8N it is White who would have to be slightly careful.

Finally, I also analysed the following untested continuation:

16.Qxc6 Qxc6 17.Qael Qh8 18.Qe3 Qxd3

The bishop was too dangerous as can be seen in the line: 18...b4? 19.Qxh7†! Qxh7 20.Wh5†! Qg8 21.Qh6! f5 (21...g6 22.Qg3+–) 22.Qxg7 Qg5 23.Wh8† Qf7 24.Qxf8 and White wins.

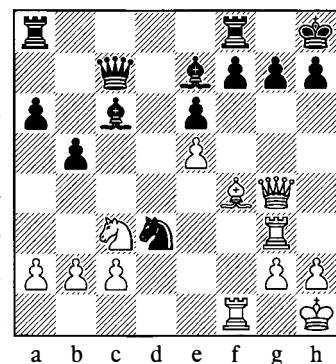
19.Qg3!?

19.cxd3 f5 20.exf6 Qxf6 21.Qxe6 Wc8

22.Qxf6 Wxg4 23.Qxc6 Wd7 24.Qc7 Wxd3†

Black's advantage is defined by his powerful queen.

Also 19.Qxd3 b4 20.Qg3 g6 is pleasant for Black.



19...Qf2†?!

Also not bad is 19...g6 20.cxd3 f5, for instance 21.exf6 Qxf6 22.Wg5 Qxf4 23.Wxf4 Wxf4 24.Qxf4 Qd6 with a modest edge for Black in the ending.

20.Qxf2 g6

Black is doing well here, for instance:

21.Qh6 Wxe5! 22.Qe3 Wc5 23.Qe2 Qg5!

24.Qe5 Wxf2 25.Qxf2 Qxh6

Black has full material equality against White's queen, and with two powerful bishops

and a compact pawn structure, his chances should be evaluated as somewhat higher.

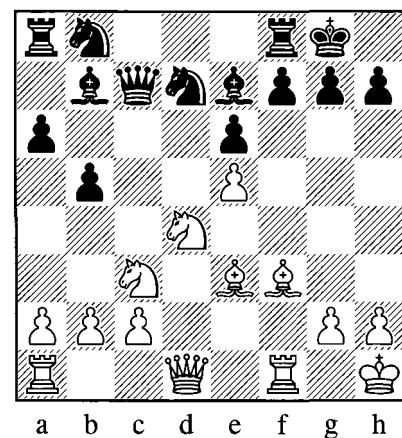
16...Qxd3 17.cxd3 Qh8 18.Qg5

No better is: 18.Qe4 Qb4 19.Qacl Wd7 20.Qd6 Qxa2 21.Qc2 Qb4 22.Qh6 gxh6 23.Wxb4 f6† Black's pieces are springing to life.

18...Qxe5 19.Qxe5 Qxg5 20.Wxg5 f6 21.Qg6† hxg6 22.Wxg6 Wf7

We have been following the game Zelcic – Stohl, Bled 1997. Black has no problems at all, and it was White who had to be careful to avoid becoming worse on account of his inferior minor piece.

A133) 13.Qf3 Qb7



14.Qf4

Alternatives are no better:

14.Qdxb5? axb5 15.Qxb5 was seen in Serafino – Sanchez Almeyra, Rosario 1996, and now Black could have refuted his opponent's idea with either 15...Wxe5!N 16.Qxb7 Wa5!†, or 15...Qxf3!N 16.Qxc7 (16.Qxf3 Wc6) 16...Qxd1 17.Qxa8 Qxc2† with excellent winning chances in both cases.

14.Qxb7 Wxb7 15.Wh5 (15.Qf4 is well met by 15...b4, chasing the knight to a less than

ideal location.) 15... $\mathbb{Q}c6$!? (The more common 15... $b4$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}ce2$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ is also fine, but the text move may be even more promising.) 16. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $g6$ 17. $\mathbb{W}h6$ $\mathbb{Q}cxe5$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $f6$ 20. $\mathbb{W}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 21. $\mathbb{E}ae1$ $\mathbb{E}ad8$ Black had consolidated his extra pawn and was well and truly in the driving seat in Sowray – Lazarev, Biel 1992.

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

In principle Black would welcome the exchange of some minor pieces, as this will bring him closer to a favourable endgame in which he can exert pressure against the weak e5-pawn and along the c-file.

15. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$

The other main option is:

15. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ 16. $\mathbb{W}g4$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 17. $\mathbb{E}ael$ $b4$

Black's counterplay arrives before White can generate any serious attacking chances.

18. $\mathbb{Q}e4$

In the event of 18. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{W}xc6$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}e4$, Martin del Campo – Vera Gonzalez, Linares 1993, I see no reason for Black not to grab an important pawn with 19... $\mathbb{W}xc2N$.

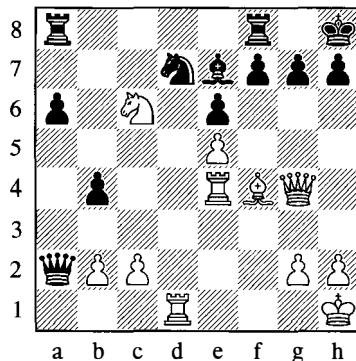
18... $\mathbb{W}xe4$ 19. $\mathbb{E}xe4$ $\mathbb{W}c4$ 20. $\mathbb{E}d1N$

After the dreadful 20. $\mathbb{E}fe1??$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ White resigned immediately in Lau – Stean, Munich 1979.

20... $\mathbb{W}xa2!$

Black has enough tactical resources to justify this seemingly risky move.

21. $\mathbb{Q}c6$



21... $f5$! 22. $\mathbb{E}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 23. $\mathbb{W}xe6$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$!

23... $\mathbb{W}xe6$ 24. $\mathbb{E}xe6$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ is equal, but Black can try for more.

24. $\mathbb{W}xa2$ $\mathbb{Q}f2\#$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ 26. $g3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$

Black's two rooks are at least as strong as the white queen, and his minor pieces also coordinate well.

15... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$

This looks like the most logical idea, making way for the queen to join in the attack. Others can hardly threaten Black:

16. $\mathbb{W}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 17. $\mathbb{E}xf3$ $b4$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{W}xc2$ 19. $\mathbb{E}c1$

This was Barcenilla – Ribli, Manila 1992, and here Black should have played 19... $\mathbb{W}a4!N$ (The game continuation of 19... $\mathbb{W}xb2?$ might have led to problems after 20. $\mathbb{E}d1!N$, not only attacking the knight on d7 but also threatening to trap the queen with $\mathbb{E}d2$.) 20. $b3$ $\mathbb{W}a5$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}d6$ $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 22. $\mathbb{E}xd6$ $\mathbb{E}ac8$ White can hardly justify the loss of the pawn.

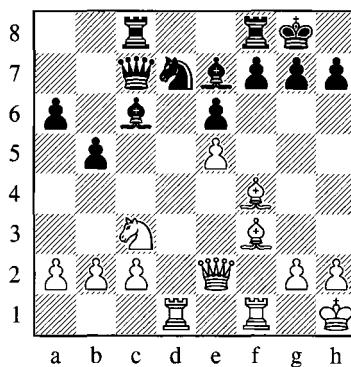
16. $\mathbb{W}e2$

After this sensible but timid move White has little chance of getting his attack rolling.

16... $\mathbb{E}ac8$

After 16... $b4$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{W}xc6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 19. $c3$ the position was level and the players agreed to a draw in Azarov – Brkic, Moscow 2008. This is all well and good, but I think Black can try for more.

17. $\mathbb{E}ad1$



17...♝xf3!N

This is an important improvement over 17...♝b6 18.♕e4! when White developed some initiative in Jor. Kristensen – Cu. Hansen, Aars 1995.

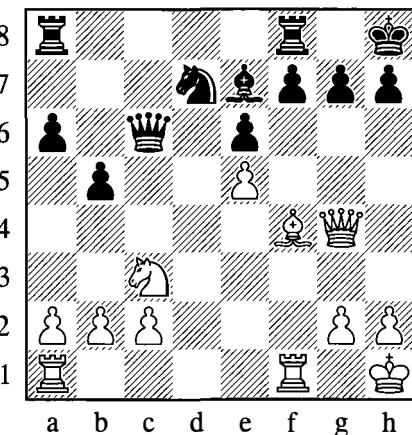
18.♝xf3 ♘b6?

Black's queenside initiative is the dominant feature of the position. The immediate threat is ...b4, while other ideas include ...♝fd8 and perhaps a timely ...♝c4. The earlier exchanges have reduced White's chances for a successful attack.

16...♛xc6 17.♝g4

After 17.♝f3?! ♛xf3 18.♝xf3 ♞ac8? Black obtained a typically advantageous endgame without any effort whatsoever in Slingerland – Janssen, Amsterdam 2005.

17...♚h8



18.♝ad1N

This seems to be untested, but the move is so natural I decided to promote it to main line status.

18.a3 was seen in A. Zude – Rotstein, Bad Wiessee 2003. There is something to be said for stabilizing the knight on c3, nevertheless the move is a little slow and thus it looks promising for Black to react with the forceful

18...f5!N (I also considered 18...♝b6N, but then 19.♝f3! looks tricky) 19.exf6 ♞xf6 Black has obtained some breathing room on the kingside and is well placed to attack on the opposite flank, while the isolated e-pawn is not really an issue.

18...♝b6 19.♝d3!?

Sacrificing a pawn seems like the only chance to justify White's earlier play.

Black would be happy to see 19.♝f3 ♛xf3 20.♝xf3 ♞ac8? Endgames of this type are quite dangerous for White, due to the weaknesses on e5 and c2.

19...b4 20.♝g3 g6 21.♝d1 ♛xc2

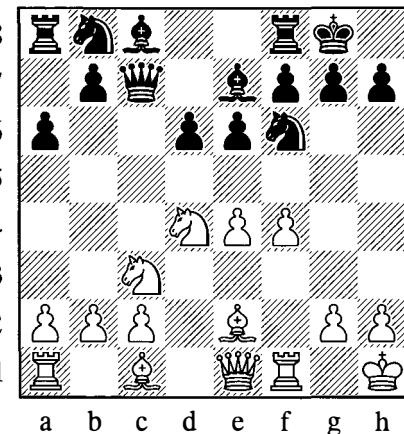
Black's position seems resilient enough, for instance:

22.♝h6 f5! 23.exf6 ♞xf6?

White will have to work hard to justify his pawn sacrifice.

A2) 10.♛e1

We saw that in some of the above lines White chose to move his dark-squared bishop from e3 to f4 after a pawn exchange on e5. With this in mind, it is hardly surprising that many players have preferred to delay the development of this bishop, hoping to save a tempo by moving to f4 directly.



10...b5

Black can also play in real Scheveningen style with 10... $\mathbb{Q}c6$, but the text move is fully reliable and has also been a very heavy scorer for Black, yielding well over 60%. This does not mean that Black stands better of course, but I think it is fair to say we can feel cautiously optimistic about playing it.

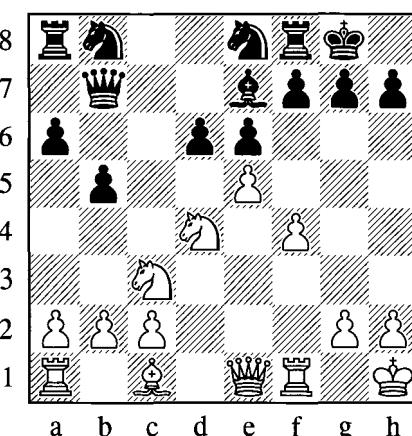
11. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 12.e5

White's whole set-up is geared towards preparing this move, so I will not waste time delving into any obscure alternatives.

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

The retreat of the knight seems rather conservative, but it has a great deal of merit. By avoiding the exchange on e5 Black limits the mobility of the c1-bishop. He intends to follow up with ... $\mathbb{Q}d7$, attacking e5. We will now consider the relatively timid options of A21) 13. $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ and A22) 13. $\mathbb{W}g3$, followed by the more dangerous A23) 13.f5.

The slow 13.a3 is occasionally seen, but this can hardly threaten Black. 13... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 14. $\mathbb{W}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ (14... $\mathbb{Q}b6$ is also reasonable) 15. $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ This was Ermenkov – Ghinda, Albena 1977, and now 15... $\mathbb{Q}b6$ N looks promising.

A21) 13. $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ $\mathbb{W}xb7$ **14.f5!?**

This looks like the most principled attempt to create problems for the defence.

14. $\mathbb{W}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}a7$! 15. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ b4 16. $\mathbb{W}xb7$ $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ dx5 18.fxe5 $\mathbb{Q}c7$ gave Black at least equal chances in Gild. Garcia – G. Timoshenko, Havana 1981.

14. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 15.exd6 (In the event of 15. $\mathbb{Q}g3$, as in Xie Jun – Blazkova, Istanbul 2000, it looks good for Black to play 15... $\mathbb{Q}c8N$ or even 15... $\mathbb{W}c7!?$ N, trying to provoke exd6.) 15... $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}fd8$ Black already had the easier game in Bresciani – Maksimenko, Bratto 2004.

14...dx5 15. $\mathbb{W}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 16. $\mathbb{W}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$

17. $\mathbb{Q}b3!?$ looks too passive. 17...exf5 18. $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$ (19... $\mathbb{Q}b4!?$ N 20. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{W}c6$ also looks promising, but the text is simple and strong.) 20. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 21. $\mathbb{W}g3!?$ (White should probably have settled for 21. $\mathbb{W}e4N$, although the ending is comfortable for Black after 21... $\mathbb{W}xe4$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}c7\bar{F}$) 21... $\mathbb{W}c6$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{W}xc2$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ Black eventually converted his extra pawn in Efimenko – Golod, Lvov 2001.

17... $\mathbb{W}xc6$ 18.fxe6 fxe6

Black can also consider 18... $\mathbb{W}xe6!?$ N 19. $\mathbb{W}xe6$ fxe6 20. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ The ending is equal, but there is plenty of play left in the position.

19. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{W}xc2$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$

This virtually forces a draw. If Black is determined to play for a win he might consider 20... $\mathbb{Q}f7!?$ N, with the possible continuation 21. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ 23. $\mathbb{W}f3\bar{F}$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 25. $\mathbb{W}xa8$ $\mathbb{W}xb2$, when it seems to me that Black's chances are slightly higher, although all three results are possible.

21.♕xf6+ ♜xf6 22.♖xf6 ♜xf6 23.♗xe6+ ♖h8 24.♕c3 b4

In view of the weakness of the first rank, White will never get a chance to exploit his superior minor piece.

25.♗e7 ♜d1+ 26.♔xd1 ♜xd1+ 27.♔e1 ♜d5
28.♕xb4 ♜xa2 29.♕c3 ♜d5 30.♕xf6
½–½

In this equal position the players agreed to a draw in Nevednichy – Mikhalkishin, Moscow 1979.

A22) 13.♗g3

This deployment of the queen looks natural, but White will find it hard to make much progress on the kingside.

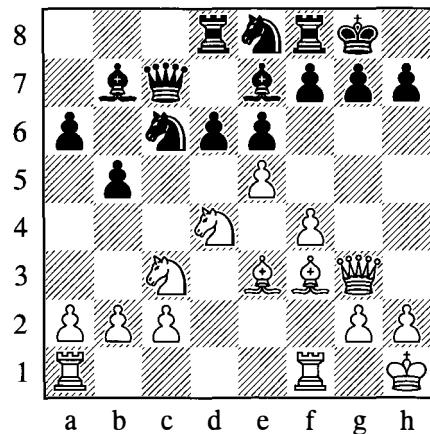
13...♝c6!?

The more common 13...♝d7 is also fine, but as I mentioned previously, it often helps Black to exchange some minor pieces.

14.♕e3

White's position is not strong enough to justify 14.♕xc6 ♜xc6 15.f5? dx5 16.fxe6 exd4 17.♕f4 ♜d6 18.exf7+ ♜xf7 and White soon had to resign in H. Hunt – Aslanian, Moscow 1994.

14...♝d8



15.f5

This does not lead to the desired outcome, although White has not really fared better with any other moves.

15.♕e4 was seen in Har. Schmid – Hellwege, Dresden 2007, and here Black could have won a pawn with 15...d5!N intending ...♝xd4 followed by taking on c2.

15.♗ae1? just leads to the loss of pawn after 15...dxe5 16.♗xc6 ♜xc6 17.fxe5 ♜xf3 18.♕xf3 b4 19.♗e4 ♜xc2 and Black soon won in Formanek – Yudasin, Philadelphia 1991.

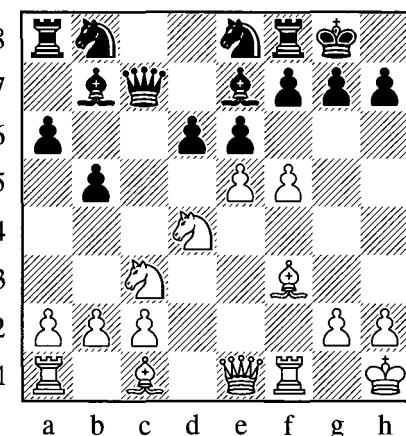
15...♝xd4

Black has a promising alternative available in 15...dxe5!N 16.♗xc6 ♜xc6 17.fxe6 ♜xf3 18.exf7+ ♜xf7 19.♗xf3 ♜f6# Black's pieces coordinate well and he controls the centre.

16.♗xd4 exf5 17.♗ael dxe5 18.♗xe5 ♜d6
19.♗xb7 ♜xe5 20.♗xe5 ♜xb7 21.♗exf5 b4#

White has managed to regain his pawn but only at the expense of the initiative, Aveskulov – Shomoev, Ottawa 2007.

A23) 13.♗f5



13...dxe5

This is the safest and most popular option, although Black can also consider:

13... $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ b4 15.f6!

Opening the kingside, but Black should have enough defensive resources.

15...gxf6 16.exd6

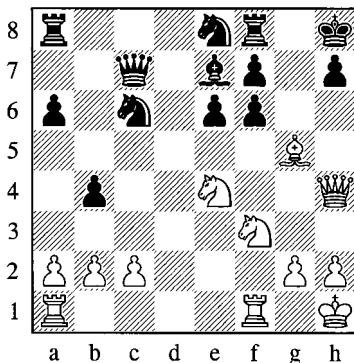
After 16.exf6?! $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ I am not convinced by White's compensation, for instance: 18. $\mathbb{W}h4$, Vogt – Suba, Berlin 1979, 18...d5N Black controls a lot of key central squares and should be able to transfer enough pieces to defend the kingside. He might consider a timely ... $\mathbb{W}xc2$, depositing another pawn in the bank while also facilitating the transfer of the queen to the opposite flank.

16... $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}d2$

18. $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ $\mathbb{W}xd6$ has also been seen in a few games. White should have sufficient compensation for the sacrificed pawn, but not enough to claim an advantage.

18... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 19. $\mathbb{W}h4$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}g5$?

This position was reached in Karpov – Ermenkov, Skara 1980, and now Black should have played:



20...f5!N

Now White has nothing better than:

21. $\mathbb{Q}f6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xf6\#$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 23. $\mathbb{W}xf6\#$ $\mathbb{Q}g8=$

White had better take the perpetual while he has the chance.

14.fxe6 $\mathbb{Q}f3$

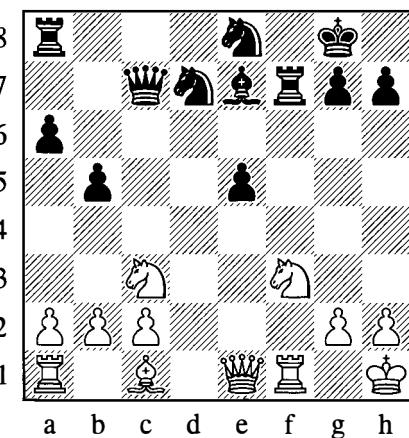
14...exd4? 15. $\mathbb{Q}d5\pm$ should be avoided.

15.exf7†

There is not much point in White playing 15. $\mathbb{Q}xf3\#$! $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ 16. $\mathbb{W}g3$, Illescas Cordoba – Ribli, Dubai 1986, 16... $\mathbb{Q}f5N$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}c6\#$ The position is similar to the main line, but with an extra pawn for Black. It may not be the best pawn in the world, but it still improves his position by controlling some useful squares.

15... $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$

This position has been reached in dozens of games, and the practical results have proven Black's position to be fully viable. The isolated e-pawn is a potential weakness, but also fulfills some useful purposes, controlling the centre and restricting the opponent's minor pieces, especially his bishop. Black's minor pieces will soon be working together in harmony, and the pressure along the c-file may also irritate White.



17. $\mathbb{Q}g5$

Although it is Black's bishop which is theoretically 'bad', it is actually the white one which will have a hard time finding a useful role, hence the offer to exchange. We should also check a few other possibilities.

The following is a good illustration of how Black should arrange his pieces in the event of quiet play from his opponent: 17. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{W}c6$ 18. $\mathbb{W}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}ae1$ (19. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$

20. $\mathbb{W}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 21. $\mathbb{W}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}af8\#$) 19... $\mathbb{Q}af8$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ (20... $\mathbb{Q}f6N$ also looks good, for instance 21. $\mathbb{W}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 22. $\mathbb{W}d5$ $\mathbb{W}xd5$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ e4#) 21. $\mathbb{W}e4$ $\mathbb{W}xe4$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}d4\#$ With easier play for Black, Tal – Suba, Yerevan 1980.

The only move I found which creates any concrete problems for Black is the rare 17.a4!?. It seems that the great majority of players were always focused on the centre and the kingside, and I only found one correspondence game in which the text was played. 17...b4 (17...bxa4N is playable, although White may have some chances for a small plus after 18. $\mathbb{W}e4$.) 18. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{W}xc2$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xe7\#$ $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ 20. $\mathbb{W}xb4$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ This was Spoel – De Jong, corr. 1991, and here it looks logical for Black to play 21... $\mathbb{Q}ef6N$, for instance 22. $\mathbb{Q}a3$ and now the regrouping 22... $\mathbb{W}c6$ (22...a5!?) is also playable, but in principle I would prefer to avoid fixing a pawn on a dark square.) 23. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{W}d5$ Black keeps a harmonious position with equal chances.

17... $\mathbb{Q}f8!$

17... $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ should also equalize, but I believe the text to be a better move as it is not easy for White to find a useful role for his bishop.

18.a3

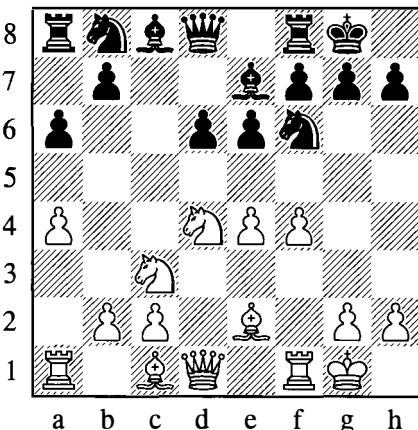
Another game continued 18. $\mathbb{Q}h4$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ (Perhaps White should have preferred 20. $\mathbb{Q}e4$, although after 20... $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 21. $\mathbb{W}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 22. $\mathbb{W}d5$ $\mathbb{W}b7$ Black can look forward to a pleasant ending after a queen exchange.) Haba – Cvitan, Toulouse 1990. Now after 20... $\mathbb{W}c6N$ Black is doing very nicely due to his great control over the centre.

18... $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}xf1\#$ 20. $\mathbb{W}xf1$ $\mathbb{W}c6$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$

At this point a draw was agreed in Karpov – Kasparov, Moscow (43) 1985. Black has coordinated his forces in an optimal way, and is not experiencing any difficulties whatsoever.

B) 9.a4

Here the play takes on a different character. White takes a moment to check his opponent's queenside counterplay.



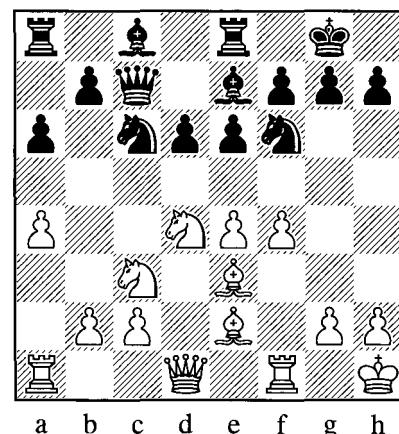
9... $\mathbb{Q}c6$

On this occasion I have chosen to recommend a traditional Scheveningen set-up. The knight is quite well placed on c6, inhibiting a4-a5 and also eyeing the potential outpost on b4.

10. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}h1$

This is not absolutely forced, but it is almost always a useful move for White and has been by far the most popular choice here.

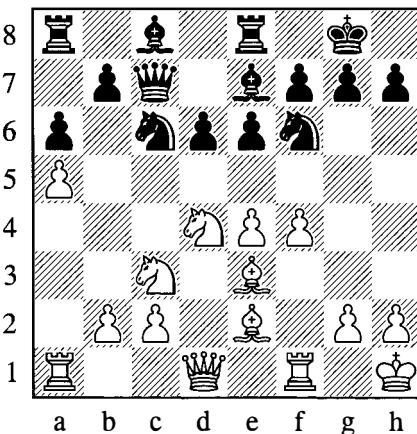
11... $\mathbb{Q}e8!$



Tournament practice has indicated this flexible move to be the most promising option available to Black. The present position is extremely important for understanding the defensive intricacies of the Scheveningen system. Over the years, White players have thrown everything including the kitchen sink in an effort to break the enemy spine, only to encounter increasingly cleverer forms of resistance and counterplay.

We will analyse seven(!) responses in detail:
B1) 12.a5!?, **B2)** 12.Qg1, **B3)** 12.Qd3, **B4)** 12.Qe1, **B5)** 12.Qd2, **B6)** 12.Qb3 and **B7)** 12.Qf3.

B1) 12.a5!?



Funnily enough, it took thousands of games and several decades of practical testing before anyone even realized that the text move was playable at all! I would advise the reader to consider this move with the utmost care and attention. If Black can navigate the complications successfully then he should be at least equal, but precision will be required.

12...Qxa5

If Black wants to avoid then he could consider 12...Qd7 or 12...Qd7, but taking the pawn is obviously the critical test.

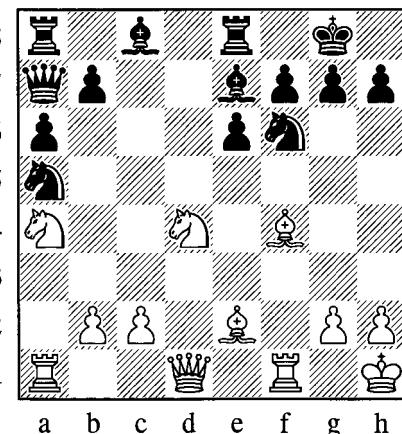
13.e5!

Having given up one pawn, White must proceed energetically.

13...dxe5 14.fxe5 Qxe5

14...Qd7?! is also playable, but taking the second pawn is the most principled reaction.

15.Qf4 Qc5 16.Qa4 Wa7



After some forced moves we reach an important branching point, with two options for White: **B11)** 17.Qc7 and **B12)** 17.Qe3.

B11) 17.Qc7 Qc4!

Chess is full of small paradoxes, but usually we politely decline to point them out!

18.Qxc4 b5

Black's witty mini-combination has turned the tables, and it is now the first player who will have to solve some problems.

19.Qb6

There is nothing better:

19.Qxb5? axb5 20.Qxb5 Qb7 21.Qd6 occurred in Masliak – Aliavdin, Rodatychi 2006, and now after the simple 21...Qxc7N 22.Qxe8 Qxe8–+ Black's bishops will easily outclass the white rook.

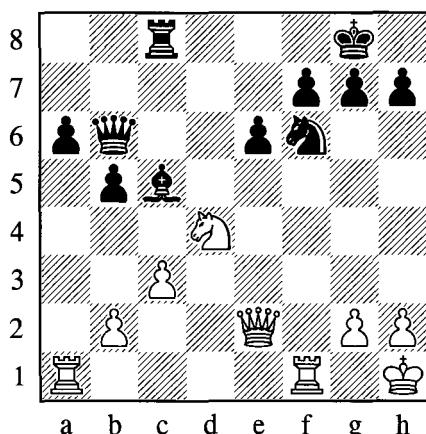
19.♗b6 ♕b7 20.♕a5 bxc4 21.♗b6 ♕b8
 22.♗xc4 ♕d5 23.♗b6 ♕e4 24.♗e1 ♕g6
 25.♗c6 ♕b7 26.♗xe7† ♕xe7† The extra pawn
 and pressure on the long diagonal are mighty
 arguments for the superiority of the second
 player.

19.♗e5 ♕d7! (19...bxc4 20.♗c6 ♕b7
 21.♗xe7† ♕xe7 22.♗b6 ♕a7 23.♗xf6 gxf6
 24.♗xc4 ♕c7= Black is certainly fine, but
 the vulnerable kingside robs him of any
 real aspirations for the advantage.) 20.♗b3
 (20.♕d3 bxa4 21.♕xf6 ♕xf6 22.♗xf6 gxf6
 23.♕g4† ♔f8 24.♗h4 e5! 25.♗f1 ♕b6†)
 20...bxa4 21.♕xa4 ♕xa4 22.♕xa4 ♕d7 23.♕c4
 ♕ac8 24.♗xc8 ♕xc8† White can only dream of
 any compensation for the missing pawn.

19...♕xc7 20.♗xa8 ♕xc4

This looks better than 20...♕c5 21.♗e2 ♕d8
 22.c3 e5 23.♕c1 exd4 24.cxd4 ♕a7 25.♗c7
 ♕xd4 26.♗xb5 ♕e5 27.♗c3 ♕d6 28.g3 ♕c5.
 Black's compensation for the exchange is
 sufficient for equality, but not more.

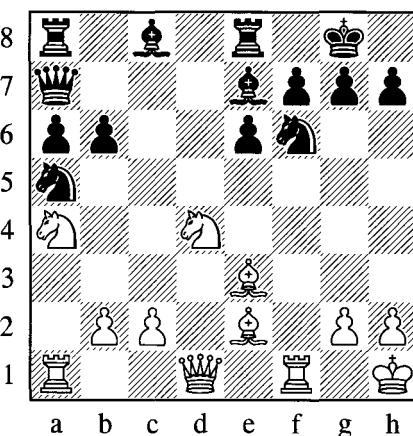
21.♗b6 ♕c5 22.♗xc8 ♕xc8 23.c3 ♕b6
 24.♕e2 ♕c5†



With two pawns for the exchange and a solid structure, Black was in the driver's seat in Paragua – Vovsha, New York 2008.

B12) 17.♗e3 b6

This modest pawn advance puts the onus on White to justify his material investment. 17...♗d8 is a promising alternative, but overall I think that the text puts White under the most pressure.



18.b4!?

White tries to lure the bishop from the defence of Black's kingside. Other moves are possible, although it seems that White is fighting for equality in all cases.

18.♕e1? ♗d5 19.♔g1 ♕c7 20.c4 ♗xc4 21.♗c1
 b5 was already winning for Black in Arnaudov – Vl. Dimitrov, Sofia 2006.

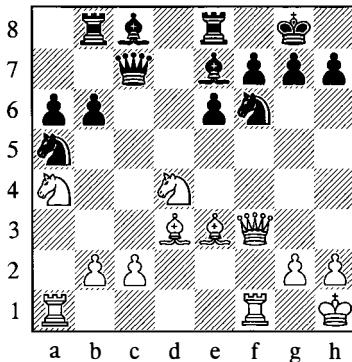
Dubious would seem to be 18.♗f3?! ♗d5
 19.♔f2 ♕d8† White is quite active, but it is
 hardly enough to compensate for the two-pawn deficit.

18.♗d3 ♕c7

There was a promising alternative in
 18...♕b7!N with the possible continuation:
 19.♗f3 ♗d5 20.♕e2 ♗xe3 21.♕xe3 ♕b8
 22.♗f4 b5 23.♗c3 ♗c4 24.♗xc4 bxc4
 25.♗xc4 ♕b4† Every aspect of the position
 is in Black's favour.

19.♗f3

Perhaps a better practical chance was 19.b4!N although Black remains on top after: 19... $\mathbb{Q}b7!$ (but not 19... $\mathbb{Q}xb4?$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $gxf6$ 21. $\mathbb{W}g4\#$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $axb5$ 23. $\mathbb{W}xb4\#$) 20. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ b5 21. $\mathbb{Q}b6$ $\mathbb{B}b8$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xa6$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xc8$ $\mathbb{W}xc8$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}a7$ $\mathbb{B}b7\#$ 19... $\mathbb{B}b8$



20. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ N

This looks like a better try than 20. $\mathbb{Q}xb6$, when for some reason a draw was agreed in Picard – Sandalakis, Caen 2009, even though Black is much better after 20... $\mathbb{B}xb6$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xa5$ $\mathbb{B}xb2$.

20... $\mathbb{B}b7$ 21. $\mathbb{W}h3$ h5 22. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ b5 23. $\mathbb{Q}xh5$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ b4+

White is not getting anywhere with his attack.

The other option is:

18. $\mathbb{Q}xe6?$ $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xb6$

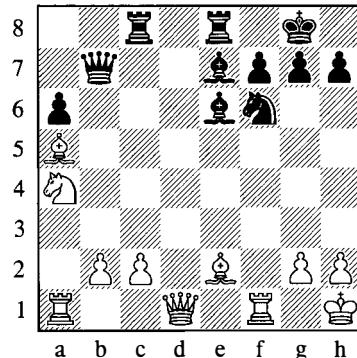
This position was reached in Lejarre – Fomichenko, Villeneuve Tolosane 2007, and a few subsequent encounters. I find it surprising that no-one seems to have tried: 19... $\mathbb{W}b7!$ N

All three of the games on my database continued 19... $\mathbb{W}b8$, but I think the text move is better.

20. $\mathbb{Q}xa5$

White has regained both sacrificed pawns, but his pieces lack coordination.

20... $\mathbb{Q}ac8$



White is fighting to equalize here. I offer the following illustrative lines:

21. $\mathbb{Q}f3$

21. $\mathbb{Q}b6$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ $\mathbb{Q}e4\#$ White can hardly afford to let the opponent's pieces roam the board.

21... $\mathbb{W}b5$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}b6$

22. $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{W}e5$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}xg4$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 25.g3 $\mathbb{Q}xg4$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}b6$ $\mathbb{W}e7\#$ The open diagonal a8-h1 will be ruthlessly exploited by Black.

22... $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}ed8$ 24. $\mathbb{W}c1$

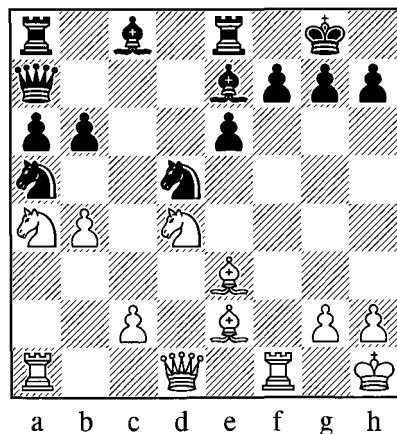
24. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 25. $bxc3$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}fxd1$ h6#

24... $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{W}b8$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}d6\#$

The pieces of the second player are neatly organized and ready to strike anywhere on the board.

18... $\mathbb{Q}d5!$

There is no reason for Black to be drawn into the tricky complications that arise after 18... $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xf6!$ $gxf6$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}d3$.



19.Qg1

19.bxa5? Qxe3 20.Qc6 Wc7 21.Wd3 Qxf1 22.Qxf1 Wxc6 was an early disaster for White in Moingt – Drenchev, France 2005.

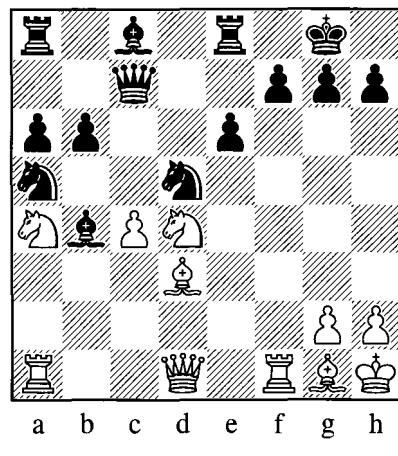
More interesting is 19.Qd3, Gajewski – Dydyshko, Lubniewice 2002. Here Black can call his opponent's bluff with: 19...Qxe3!N 20.Qxh7† Qf8! 21.Qxf7† Qxf7 22.Wh5† Qf8 23.Qg6 Qf6 24.Wh8† Qe7 25.Wxe8† Qd6+– The refutation of White's attack is daring, but at the same time rather convincing.

19...Qxb4

Also very strong is 19...Qxb4N 20.Qf3 Wb8 21.Qxb6 Wxb6 22.Qxa5 Wc7 23.Qxb6 Wxb6† White will be struggling to fight back against Black's magnificent pieces.

20.Qd3 Wc7

Another sensible option is 20...g6N, fortifying the kingside against the dangerous bishop on d3. Play may continue 21.Wf3 We7 22.c4 Qc3 (or 22...Qc7 23.Qc2 Qb7 24.Wh3 Qc6 25.Qxb6 Qd6+ and Black keeps two extra pawns) 23.Qxc3 Qxc3 24.Qxg6 hxg6 25.Wxc3 e5 26.Qb3 Qxb3 27.Wxb3 Qe6+ Black is seriously better with a safe king despite the opposite-coloured bishops.

21.c4**21...Qf4!N**

This is a serious improvement over 21...Qc3? 22.Qxc3 Qxc3 23.Qa3 e5 24.Qxc3 exd4 25.Qxd4 Ee6 26.Qxh7† Qxh7 27.Qg3 Wxg3 28.hxg3+ White's attack can serve as model example for this line, Mastrovasilis – Iotov, Kusadasi 2006.

22.Qxf4 Wxf4 23.Qxb6 Qb7 24.Qxa8 Wxa8 25.Qa4 Wd2 26.Wxd2 Qxd2 27.Qa2 Qc3 28.Qa3 Qb2 29.Qxa5 Qd8 30.Qxe6 fxe6 31.Qe2 Qc3†

Black has good chances to convert his extra pawn in the endgame.

B2) 12.Qg1

White tucks the bishop out of harm's way and clears the third rank for the transfer of the queen to g3.

12...Qd7

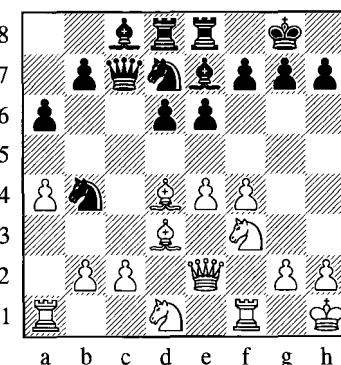
Black continues to mobilize his forces. Here the two main responses are **B21) 13.Qb3** and **B22) 13.Wd3**.

Another possibility is:

13.Qf3 Wad8 14.Qd3 Qc8 15.We2 15.Qd2 d5! 16.e5 Qd7 17.Wh5 g6 18.Wh6 Qf8 19.Wh4 b6 20.Qf3 Qc5 The advance in the centre was played at the right moment, and Black was fine in A. Sokolov – Ftacnik, Evora 2006.

15...Qd7 16.Qd1 Qb4 17.Qd4

A. Sokolov – Van Wely, Bundesliga 2005.



17...e5!

Much more energetic than the game continuation of 17...b6.

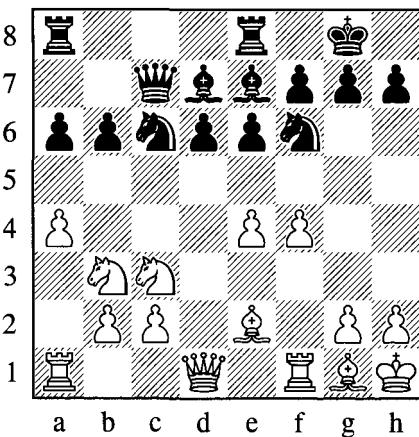
18.fxe5

18... $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ 19.cxd3 exf4†

18...dxe5 19... $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ 20.cxd3 f6†

The two bishops are a great asset.

B21) 13. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ b6

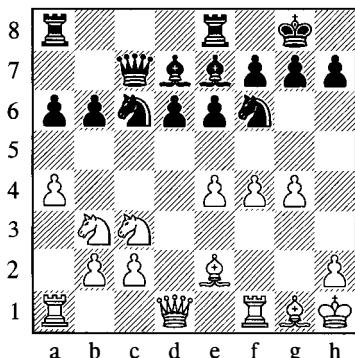


White was intending a5.

14. $\mathbb{Q}f3$

This natural move has been by far the most popular, although in one high-level game White tried an altogether more aggressive approach:

14.g4!?



14... $\mathbb{Q}c8!$

Black demonstrates the ability to think creatively, undeveloping his bishop in order to meet the new demands of the position.

15.g5 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 18. $\mathbb{W}h5$ g6 19. $\mathbb{W}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$

Black opts for solid defence. Also possible was the more active 19... $\mathbb{Q}b4!?$ N.

20. $\mathbb{E}ad1$

I also checked the line 20. $\mathbb{Q}d4!?$ N $\mathbb{Q}c6$ (20... $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}d4\pm$) 21.f5 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ exf5 23.exf5 $\mathbb{E}e5$ 24. $\mathbb{E}f4$ $\mathbb{E}ae8$ 25. $\mathbb{E}af1$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ when Black gets enough counterplay along the e-file.

20... $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ e5 22. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ exf4 23. $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ $\mathbb{Q}e5=$

Black has succeeded in maintaining the balance thanks to a clever regrouping of his pieces, A. Sokolov – Ivanchuk, Moscow 1988.

14... $\mathbb{Q}c8!?$

Once again we see this adjustment in Black's development. It may seem provocative, but the black position proves to be resilient enough. 14... $\mathbb{E}b8$ is also a decent move, but that is another story.

15.e5

This energetic move looks like the most principled attempt to challenge Black's play.

15. $\mathbb{W}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 16. $\mathbb{E}ad1$ $\mathbb{E}ac8$ 17. $\mathbb{W}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ led to a normal-looking Scheveningen position with chances for both sides in Moroz – Pavlov, Alushta 2003.

15...dxe5 16.fxe5 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{W}xc6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{W}b7$ 19. $\mathbb{E}xf7!$

Far from being the start of a devastating kingside attack, this is in fact the correct way for White to equalize before his weak e5-pawn becomes a serious liability.

19. $\mathbb{W}h5!?$ looks too optimistic: 19...g6 20. $\mathbb{W}e2$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 21. $\mathbb{W}f3$ $\mathbb{E}f8$ 22. $\mathbb{E}ae1$ $\mathbb{Q}b7\bar{f}$ The mighty bishop on b7 was tilting the scales in Black's favour in Glek – Sax, Senden 1998.

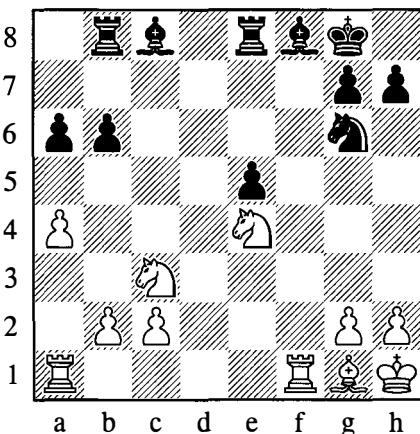
19...Qxe5

Capturing the rook is refuted trivially, as the reader can verify for himself.

20.Qf1 Qg6 21.We2 e5 22.Qf3

After 22.Qf5 Qf4 the players agreed to a draw in Yagupov – Aroshidze, Batumi 2002. The continuation might have been 23.Qxf4 exf4 24.Qd6 Wc6 25.Qxe8 Qb7 26.Qc7 Wxc7= White should be happy to maintain equality against the strong enemy bishops.

**22...Qf8 23.Qg5 Wc6 24.We4 Wxe4
25.Qgxe4 Qb8**



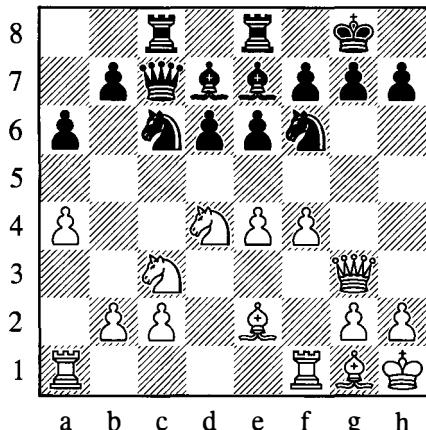
Black's strong bishop pair gave him at least equal chances in Zinchenko – Airapetian, Moscow 2007.

B22) 13.Qd3

This time White focuses on the kingside by means of a queen transfer to g3.

13...Qac8 14.Qg3

In one game White switched plans as follows: 14.Qxc6 Qxc6 15.a5 d5! 16.e5 Qd7 Velickovic – Musil, Yugoslavia 1985. Black has good chances in this French-type position, with one attractive idea being ...Qb4 rounding up the pawn on a5.

**14...d5!**

According to my database this only appeared in two of the eleven games from the diagram position, but it seems to solve all Black's problems with ease.

15.exd5

Perhaps White should already think about maintaining equality with 15.e5 Qe4 16.Qxe4 dxе4 17.c3 Qxd4 18.Qxd4 Qc5 19.Qfd1 Qxd4 20.Qxd4 Qc6= The pawn on e4 will enable Black to organize sufficient counterplay.

15...exd5

15...Qxd5!? also worked out well in the following game: 16.Qxd5 (Perhaps White should forget about this exchange and settle for 16.Qxc6N Qxc6 17.Qd4 with approximate equality.) 16...exd5 17.Qxc6 Wxc6 18.Qd3 Qf6 19.c3 Wd6= Black's isolated pawn is less significant than the activity and harmony of his pieces, Tischbierek – Schlosser, Germany 2003.

16.Qd3

This position occurred in Marjanovic – Sax, Zagreb 1985. At this point I think Black should have taken a moment to fortify his kingside:

16...g6N

16...Qf8?N also looks promising, clearing the e-file.

17.♗xc6

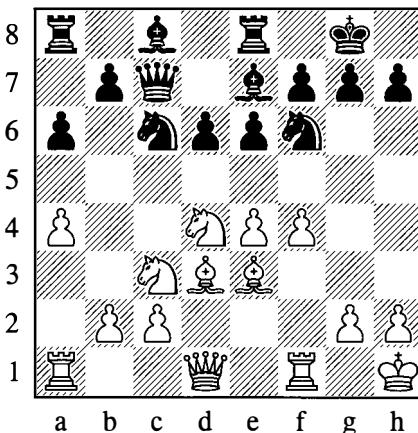
This may not be best, but I wanted to consider the possibility for White to prepare f5.

17...♝xc6 18.♔h3 ♜d6 19.f5 ♜e5†

Black is not in any real danger on the kingside, and his pieces are more active.

B3) 12.♗d3

In some ways this is an ideal location for the bishop. From d3 it supports the sensitive pawns on c2 and e4, while also hinting at veiled threats against h7 after a future e5 push. The only drawback is that the bishop might soon be exchanged after a timely ...♝b4.

**12...♝d7 13.♘f3**

This is the most popular move, although some strong players have also tried:

13.♗f3

White eases the central tension and hopes to use his knight for attacking purposes later.

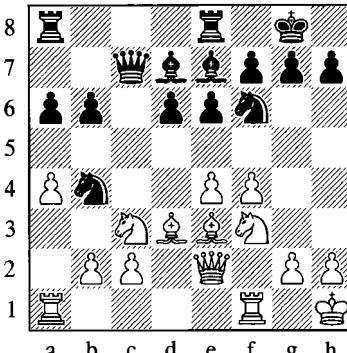
13...b6

There is also not much wrong with 13...♝b4, for instance 14.a5 ♜xd3 15.cxd3 ♜c6 16.♔e1 ♜d7 17.♔d4 ♜f8 18.♗g3 e5 with equality, Ki. Georgiev – Ehlvest, Brussels 1992.

14.♗e2

Another game continued 14.♗e1 ♜b4 15.♗g3 ♜c6 16.e5, A. Muller – Choisy,

Besancon 2006, and now Black should have played 16...♝d7N 17.♔d4 ♜xd3 18.cxd3 ♜ec8 with a good game.

14...♝b4**15.♗ael**

15.♔d4 should also be met by 15...♜c6, without fearing 16.e5?! ♜fd5† when the black pieces are working together seamlessly.

15...♜c6 16.♔d4 ♜d7 17.♔g5

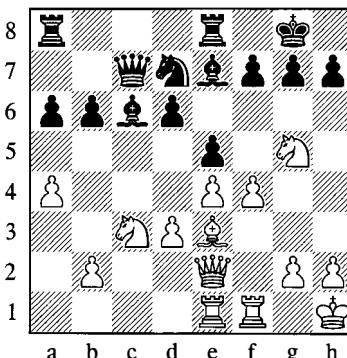
No better is 17.♗f2N ♜xd3 18.cxd3 ♜c5†.

17...♜xd3 18.cxd3 e5

18...h6 19.♗f3 ♜c5 was also pleasant for Black in Psakhis – Cvitan, Debrecen 1992.

19.♗e3

This position occurred in Ki. Georgiev – Stohl, Elenite 1992. Now I suggest the following improvement:

**19...h6!N**

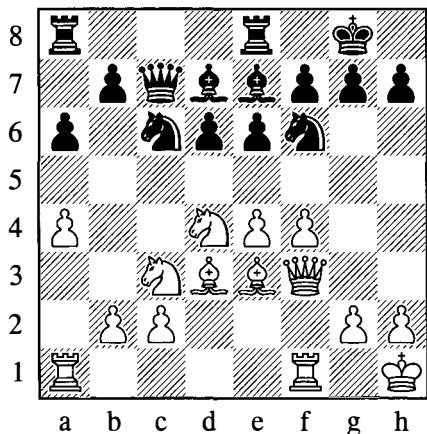
In the game Black exchanged on f4. I prefer to maintain a strong foothold in the centre.

20.♗f3

20.♗xf7? ♗xf7 21.fxe5† ♗g8 does not give White enough.

20...b5!

Commencing counterplay. Maybe the position is only equal, but I would certainly take the black position if given the choice. The potential of the bishop pair should not be underestimated.



13...♗b4

This looks more promising than 13...♗xd4 14.♗xd4 ♜c6 15.♗g3 g6 16.f5 e5 17.♗e3 b5, Westerinen – Tisdall, Helsinki 1986, 18.axb5N axb5 19.fxg6 hxg6 20.♗f3 ♜xa1 21.♗xa1 ♜a8 22.♗f1± and White keeps a grip on the position.

14.a5

A logical reaction to Black's last move.

14...♜c6

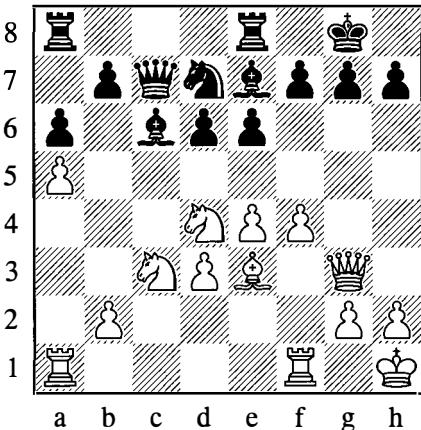
Clearing the d7-square in preparation for ...♗d7-c5. Black is not worried about ♗xc6 as the recapture ...bxc6 would strengthen his centre and open the b-file.

15.♗g3 ♗xd3

The immediate exchange of the bishop may seem to be a simplistic solution, but there is no doubt that it is positionally well-founded.

16.cxd3 ♗d7

16...♝ac8 17.f5 e5 is also playable, but I prefer the text slightly.



17.♗f3

White can also try the more aggressive 17.f5, although any ensuing pawn exchanges might help to open the game for the black bishops in the long run. One interesting game continued 17...♝f6 18.♗ce2 e5 19.♗f3 d5 20.♗c3 dxе4 21.dxe4 b5 22.♗fd1 Timofeev – Vitiugov, Serpukhov 2008. At this point the best continuation looks to be 22...♝ad8N 23.♗acl ♜xa5 24.♗d6 b4 with roughly equal play. After the opening of the centre it is important for Black to win some squares for his pieces.

17...♝f6

Another solid option is 17...♝f8, for example: 18.♗g5 f5 19.♗d4 h6 20.♗f3 ♗c5 21.♗xc5 (21.♗d2 ♜f7 22.♗ac1 ♜ac8=) 21...dxc5 22.♗e5 ♗d6 23.♗c4 ♜ad8= The neatly organized bundle of black pieces secured equal chances in Filippov – Van Wely, Moscow 2009.

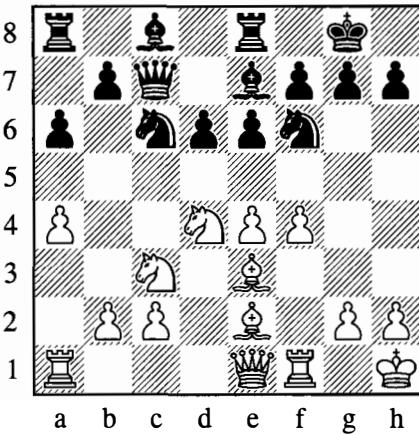
18.♗f2 g6 19.♗d2 ♜g7 20.♗c4 ♜b5

20...d5?N 21.♗b6 ♗xb6 22.♗xb6 ♜d7 23.e5 ♜ac8 looks interesting. Closing the centre may not seem like the ideal strategy with two bishops, but Black still has some chances to activate them later.

21. ♕xb5 axb5 22. ♕b6 ♕xb6 23. ♕xb6

In this equal position the players agreed a draw in Arnason – Polugaevsky, Haninge 1989.

B4) 12. Wel



The queen is heading to the desirable g3-square. From there she hopes to menace the enemy king, while the opposition of queens on the h2-b8 diagonal might lead to some tactical opportunities.

12...♞xd4 13.♝xd4 e5

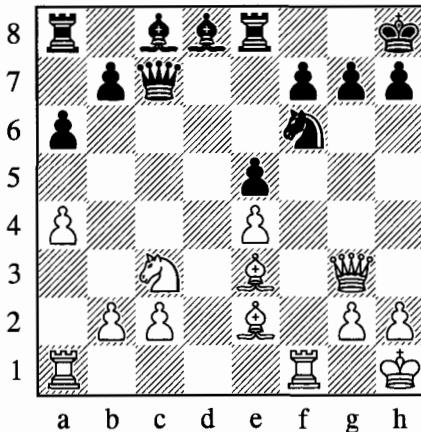
Here we will consider both B41) 14.fxe5 and B42) 14.Qe3.

B41) 14.fxe5 dxe5 15. \mathbb{W} g3

It is logical for White to insert this active move.

15.♕e3 is harmless: 15...♔e6 16.♗g3 ♔h8
 17.a5 ♔c5 18.♗g5 ♔e7 19.♔e3 (19.♗h4 ♕ad8
 20.♗xf6 gxf6 21.♔xf6† ♔xf6 22.♗xf6† ♔g8
 23.♗g5† ♔h8=) 19...♔b4 20.♗h4 ♔e7= In
 the position with a simplified pawn structure
 White has little chance to fight for the
 advantage, Chandler – Psakhis, Sochi 1982.

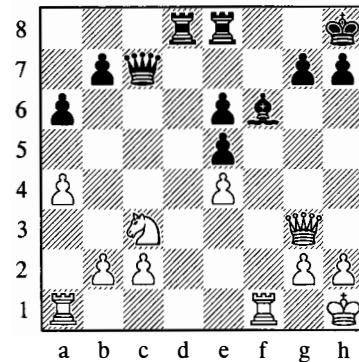
15... $\hat{\text{Q}}$ d8 16. $\hat{\text{Q}}$ e3 $\hat{\text{Q}}$ h8



17.gf2

17. $\mathbb{E}ad1$ $\mathbb{A}e6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ left White with nothing better than repeating moves with 19. $\mathbb{A}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ in Tal – Andersson, Stockholm 1976.

Another instructive continuation was 17. $\mathbb{L}g5$ $\mathbb{L}e6$ 18. $\mathbb{L}xf6$ (18. $\mathbb{W}h4$ is well met by 18... $\mathbb{Q}g8!$) 18... $\mathbb{L}xf6$ 19. $\mathbb{L}g4$ $\mathbb{E}ad8$ 20. $\mathbb{L}xe6$ $fxe6$! Baumegger - Zoler, Graz 2002.



Black does not mind compromising his pawn structure in order to cover the crucial d5-square. His chances are not worse, as his pieces are active and he can look to exert pressure against the enemy queenside.

17... ♔e6 18. ♕afl ♕c6!?

This has only been tested once, but it looks quite promising, although I should add that

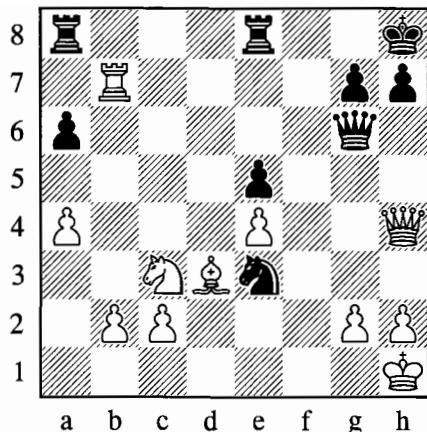
the more natural 18... $\mathbb{B}ac8$ is also absolutely fine.

19. $\mathbb{Q}d3$

Perhaps the critical continuation is 19. $\mathbb{W}xe5N$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 20. $\mathbb{W}c5$ $\mathbb{W}xc5$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{B}ac8$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}b4$ $\mathbb{B}ed8=$ Black can claim sufficient compensation for the missing pawn due to his excellent piece coordination.

19... $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 20. $\mathbb{B}xf7$ $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ 21. $\mathbb{B}xf7$ $\mathbb{W}g6$
22. $\mathbb{B}xb7$ $\mathbb{Q}h4$ 23. $\mathbb{W}xh4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3$

This position was reached in Stanojosi – Cheparinov, Pancevo 2003. White should have tried:



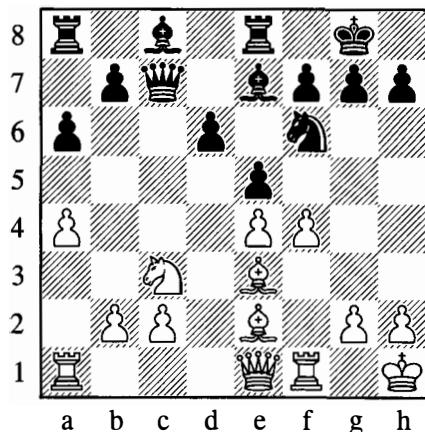
24. $\mathbb{W}f2N$

In the game he soon fell into a lost position after 24. $\mathbb{W}g3?!$ $\mathbb{W}xg3$ 25. $hxg3$ $\mathbb{B}ab8+$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}xa6$ $\mathbb{B}xb7$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ $\mathbb{B}b8-+$.

24... $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 25. $\mathbb{W}e2$ $\mathbb{B}f8$

In material terms White is doing fine, and his knight has a nice stable outpost available on d5. Nevertheless Black is at least equal. His pieces are active and in the event of a possible ... $\mathbb{Q}f2\#$ and ... $\mathbb{Q}xd3$, his spare rook will have good chances to outrun the white knight in the position with pawns on both flanks.

B42) 14. $\mathbb{Q}e3$



14... $\mathbb{exf4}$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xf4$

In some games White has tried 15. $\mathbb{B}xf4$, but after 15... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ intending ... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ Black is no worse off than in the main line.

15... $\mathbb{Q}e6$

From here Black will generally look to follow up with ... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ and ... $\mathbb{Q}e5$. The light-squared bishop will not mind trading its life for a white knight on d5, as Black will maintain excellent control over the dark squares.

16. a5!?

This has only been played in one game on my database, but since the game in question was contested by two top-class grandmasters I decided to elevate it to main line status. Of course we will consider a few other options as well:

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

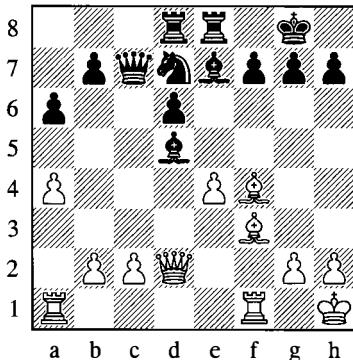
We see the charm of the white queen's flexibility, as she turns back towards the centre. Of course, everyone knows it is a lady's prerogative to change her mind...

16... $\mathbb{B}ad8$

There is not much to choose between this and 16... $\mathbb{B}ac8$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{B}ed8$ 18. a5 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 20. $\mathbb{W}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ (White should probably have preferred 21. $\mathbb{Q}e2N$ $\mathbb{W}c6$ 22. c3 $\mathbb{W}xd5$ 23. exd5 $\mathbb{B}e8=$)

21...dxe5 22.♗b3 ♘d2= Black's pieces were becoming rather active in Barle – Portisch, Ljubljana 1985.

17.♗f3 ♘d7 18.♗d5 ♘xd5



19.exd5

There is no point in risking 19.♗xd5 ♗xc2 20.♗xb7 ♘c5 21.♗d5 ♗xb2=.

After the text move, Tukmakov – Ribli, Amsterdam 1974, was agreed drawn. The next move would almost certainly have been:

19...♗f6

Black is doing fine in this well-known pawn structure, with healthily centralized pieces and pleasant control over the dark squares.

The most popular continuation in the position has been:

16.♗g3 ♘d7

Once again this standard manoeuvre ensures a solid position for Black.

17.♗d3

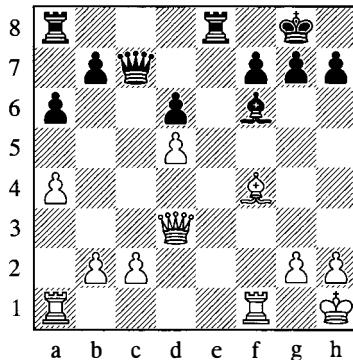
17.♗e3 ♘f8 18.♗f2 g6 19.♗d4 ♘e5 20.a5 ♘g7 21.♗b6 ♗e7 22.♗d1 ♗ac8= Black's only weakness on d6 was fully compensated by Black's perfectly coordinated pieces in Klovans – Magerramov, Moscow 1979.

The position resulting from 17.♗g4 ♘e5! 18.♗xe6 fxe6 19.♗xe5 dxe5 can be compared with the game Baumegger – Zoler in the note to White's 17th move in line B41 above.

17...♗e5 18.♗d5 ♘xd5 19.exd5

19.♗xe5 dxe5 20.exd5 g6 21.♗ael ♘d6 gives Black no problems, as 22.♗f6? e4 23.♗xd6 exd3 only leads to problems for White.

19...♗xd3 20.♗xd3 ♘f6



Black is doing fine here, for instance:

21.c3 ♘e5 22.♗ael

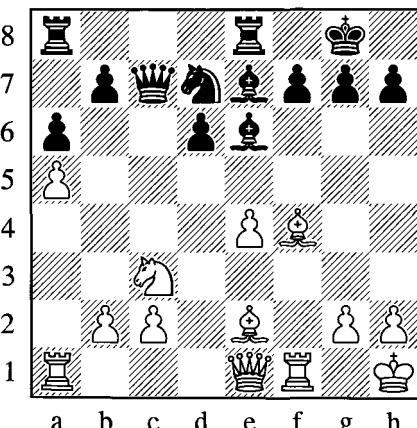
22.h3 g6 23.♗f3 f5=

22...♗xf4 23.♗xe8† ♗xe8 24.♗xf4 ♗el† 25.♗f1 ♘e5=

Only Black can realistically play for a win here due to his control over the only open file, Iskov – Ftacnik, Berlin 1984.

16...♗d7

Again we see this typical manoeuvre.



17.♗g3 ♘e5

Ever since Ulf Andersson showed the world that this type of position could be almost

impossible to break down, Sicilian players have been much more confident. The game now enters a manoeuvring phase, in which both players will subtly try to improve their positions.

**18.♗e3 ♜f8 19.♗b6 ♜c6 20.♗d3 g6
21.♗e2!**

White finds the right time for a positionally desirable manoeuvre, when it is justified by concrete variations.

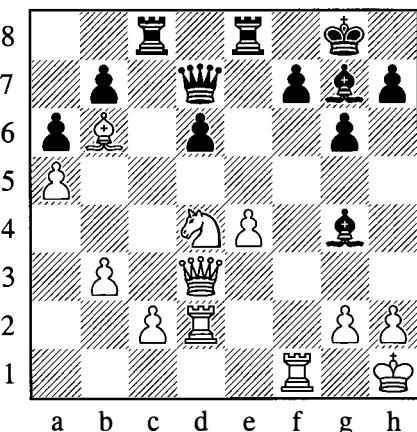
21...♝g7!

Black correctly avoids 21...♝xd3 22.cxd3 ♜c2 23.♗d4 ♜xb2 24.♗ab1 ♜a2 25.♗f4 ♜g7 26.♗a1 ♜b2 27.♗xe6 fxe6 28.♗xd6± White regains the sacrificed pawn, and the pawn on b7 is also likely to fall.

22.♗d4 ♜d7 23.♗ad1 ♜ac8

Also possible was 23...♝c4N 24.♗xc4 ♜xc4 25.♗fe1 ♜e5 26.♗f3 ♜e6 27.h3 ♜ac8 28.b3 ♜e7 29.c4 ♜d7 when Black should be able to cover all his weak spots without serious difficulty.

24.b3 ♜g4 25.♗d2 ♜xd3 26.♗xd3



26...d5!?

Up to this point both players have manoeuvred sensibly, but now Black decides to take concrete action to open the game for his bishops.

It was also quite acceptable to play 26...♜e7, for instance 27.h3 ♜d7 28.♗e2 ♜e5 29.c4 ♜h5 with roughly equal chances. Black has a bit less space, but with two sets of minor pieces exchanged this should not bother him too much.

27.h3

Here I suggest the following improvement:

27...♝h6!?

Angling for a position with rook versus two minor pieces.

The game continuation of 27...dxe4 28.♗e3 ♜e6 29.c4! enabled White to keep a slight plus in Kamsky – Van Wely, Wijk aan Zee 2006.

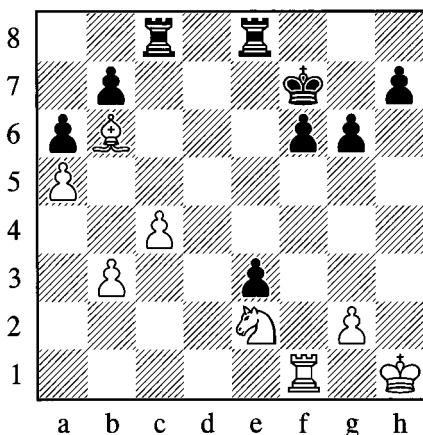
28.bxg4

White is not helped by 28.♗df2? dxe4 29.♗g3 ♜e6 30.♗xe6 ♜xe6±.

**28...dxe4 29.♗e2 ♜xd2 30.♗xd2 ♜xg4
31.♗f2 f6! 32.c4**

After 32.♗xf6?! ♜f8 33.♗e6† ♜xe6 34.♗xf8† ♜xf8 35.♗xe6 ♜f1† 36.♗h2 e3 37.♗d4 ♜f2 only Black can be better.

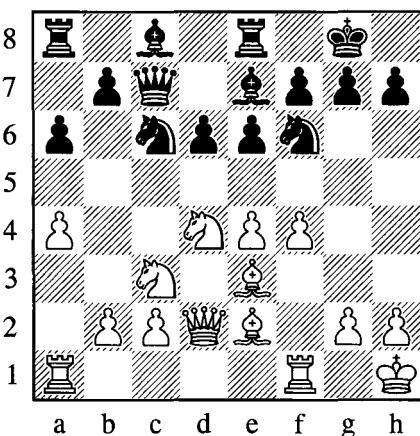
32...e3 33.♗e2 ♜xe2 34.♗xe2 ♜f7



The chances in this type of endgame should be about even, with all three results possible.

B5) 12.♗d2

The queen move is partly born out of frustration with more fancy ideas. White connects the rooks, and after one of them lands on d1 the pressure can be multiplied.

**12...♝d7**

In this position White's most common tries have been **B51) 13.♖ad1**, completing development, and **B52) 13.♗b3** with the idea of a4-a5.

As is usually the case for such positions, several other moves have been tried. I will mention a few of the more relevant ones, remembering that it would be counterproductive to attempt to analyse everything exhaustively.

13.♗f3 ♜xd4 14.♗xd4 e5 15.♗e3 b5 16.axb5 axb5 17.fxe5N (Alternatively after 17.♗d5 White achieved nothing from the opening and a draw was agreed in Gulyev – Ftacnik, Hamburg 2005.) 17...dxe5 18.♗d3 ♜xa1 19.♗xa1 ♜c5 with equality.

13.♗f3 d5!?N

Surprisingly enough nobody seems to have tried the central counterblow at this moment.

After 13...♜ad8 14.♗d3 ♜c8 15.♗e2 ♜d7

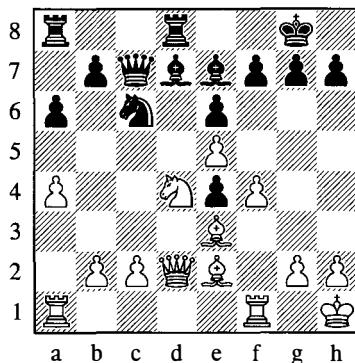
16.f5 ♜f6 17.a5 White obtained some initiative in Volokitin – Lutz, Germany 2006.

14.e5

White gains nothing from 14.exd5 exd5 15.♗xd5 Otherwise we would have a normal-looking IQP position in which the pawn on f4 would be completely out of place. 15...♝xd5 16.♗xd5 ♜f6 White can hardly hope to keep his extra pawn.

14...♝e4 15.♗xe4 dxe4 16.♗d4

16.♗g5 is well met by 16...♝xg5 17.fxg5 ♜ed8 18.♗d6 ♜a5† The pesky black pieces will cause plenty of problems.

16...♜ed8**17.c3**

17.♗fd1 ♜b4! 18.c4 a5†

17...♝xd4 18.♗xd4 ♜c5!

Even though the bishop on d4 is theoretically “bad”, it is rather well-placed and should definitely be destroyed. In the resulting position the strong passed e-pawn should give Black enough counter-chances.

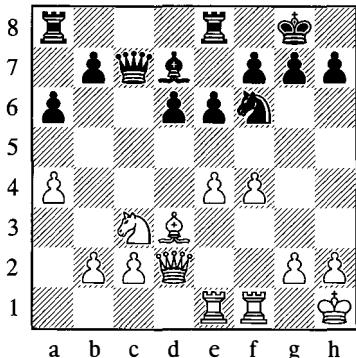
The other most natural move is:

13.♗d3

Here Black can react in an unusual but effective manner with:

13...♝g4? 14.♗g1 ♜xd4 15.♗xd4 ♜f6 16.♗xf6 ♜xf6 17.♗ael

Here I suggest a natural improvement:



17...♞c6N

In Yudasin – Van Wely, Philadelphia 1994, Black preferred the risky 17...e5?!, and after the natural 18.fxe5 followed by ♜xf6! White obtained a dangerous attack. Black may be able to hold the balance with the aid of precise defence, but from a practical point of view it is much easier to avoid such dangers altogether.

18.e5 dxe5!

Yudasin only gave 18...♝d5 19.♞e4 dxe5 20.fxe5† in his annotations.

19.fxe5 ♐d7!

This is a much better square than d5. The knight menaces the e5-pawn, and can later move either to c5 to exchange the opponent's dangerous bishop, or to f8 to help defend the kingside.

20.♛e3 ♞ad8

The chances are about even. White has some attacking chances, but the defender has a sound structure with no weaknesses, and is certainly helped by the absence of dark-squared bishops.

B51) 13.♝ad1 ♞ad8

Black has mobilized all his pieces without paying any special price.

14.♞b3

Alternatives also do not promise White much.

14.♕f3 ♛a5 15.♗e1 ♜c4 16.♗c1 e5! The advance in the centre comes at the perfect moment. 17.♘de2 (17.♘f5 ♜xf5 18.exf5 exf4 19.♗xf4 ♜f8†) 17...b5 18.b3 ♜b6 with a decent position for Black in Wolff – De Boer, Wijk aan Zee 1993. Note that there is nothing to fear from 19.a5N ♜c8 20.♗d2 ♜c6 as the misplacement of the knight is only temporary.

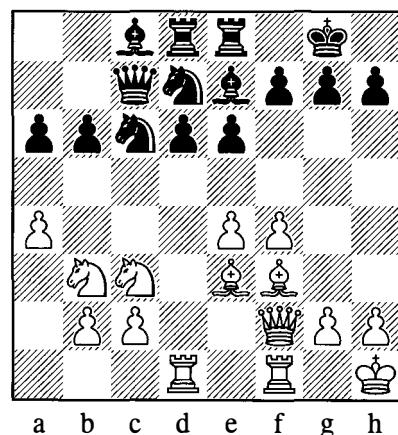
14.♗e1 ♜xd4 (Slightly risky, but nonetheless playable, is 14...d5!N 15.e5 ♜e4 16.♗xe4 dxe4 17.♗c3 ♜c8∞ Despite the danger for the unsupported e4-pawn Black has enough counterplay.) 15.♗xd4 ♜c6 16.♗g3 ♜d7 17.♗d3 ♜d8 18.b4 e5 19.fxe5 dxe5 20.♗xe5 ♜h5 21.♗f3 At this point a draw was agreed in Dolmatov – Zhigalko, Moscow 2004. The continuation might have been 21...♗xb4 22.♗c4 ♜xe5 23.♗xf7† ♜h8 24.♗xd7 ♜xd7 25.♗xh5 ♜d8. Despite all the tension Black ends up with a fully viable position and good counterplay against White's numerous weaknesses.

14...♜c8

Again we see this typical regrouping.

15.♗f3 b6 16.♗f2 ♜d7

Here I decided to examine a novel and direct approach by White.



17.e5!?

In the following game, which was played at the very highest level, White failed to get anywhere with the patient approach: 17.♘d4 ♜b7 18.♗h5!? ♜f8! Anticipating any future opening of the f-file. 19.♗g3 ♘xd4 20.♗xd4 ♜f6 21.♗e2 e5! 22.fxe5 ♜xe5 Black's position is safe and without any real weaknesses, Anand – Kasparov, New York (1) 1995.

17...dxe5

The two armies are more or less equally well mobilized, and the opening of the centre does not change the evaluation of approximate equality.

18.♗xd7!

White should certainly avoid 18.f5? exf5 19.♗d5 ♜b8 20.♗xb6 e4† Black's pawn centre can start playing a key role.

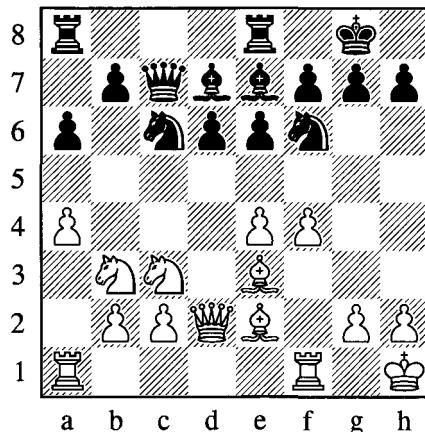
Also unimpressive is 18.♗xc6?! ♜xc6 19.fxe5 f5! (But not 19...♗xe5? 20.♗d4 f6 21.♗xe5 fxe5 22.♗f7† ♜h8 23.♗xd8 ♜xd8 24.♗f8† ♜xf8 25.♗xf8# Clumsy play can easily end up in tears for the defender!) 20.♗d4 ♜c4 21.♗b3 (21.♗g3 ♜xe5!) 21...♗xe5 22.♗xb6† Black has two bishops and a smile on his active pieces.

18...♗xd7

Also interesting is 18...♗xd7 19.♗xb6 ♜b7 20.♗xc6 ♜xc6 21.♗xd8 ♜xd8 22.fxe5 ♜f8∞ Black has enough counterplay against White's weaknesses.

19.♗xb6 ♜b8 20.♗xd8 ♜xd8 21.♗xc6 ♜xc6 22.fxe5 ♜e8∞

Black's two powerful bishops will provide long-term compensation for the missing pawn.

B52) 13.♗b3

Now Black must decide what to do about the positional threat of a5.

13...b6

This natural move is the main line, although Black can also consider:

13...♗a5!?

Black has a safe alternative in swapping the knights.

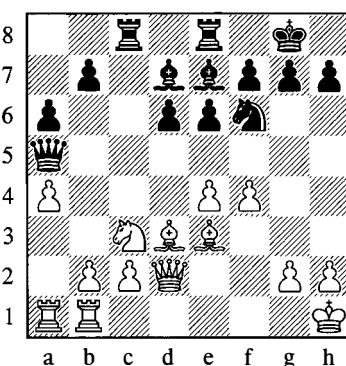
14.♗xa5 ♜xa5 15.♗f3 ♜ac8 16.♗fb1!?

White tries a novel plan involving queenside expansion.

Another sensible continuation is 16.♗fe1 ♜c6 17.♗f2 ♗d7 18.♗d2 ♜c7 19.a5 ♜f6 20.♗a3 ♜b8 when Black had no cause for complaints in Dolmatov – Novikov, Eupen 1994.

16...♗c4 17.♗e2 ♜cc8 18.♗d3

This position occurred in Efimenko – Macieja, Khanty Mansiysk 2005, and here Black should have played:



18...e5N 19.f5 $\mathbb{W}c7$ 20.a5 $\mathbb{Q}c6=$

The second player will focus on obtaining counterplay with ...d5.

14. $\mathbb{Q}f3$

It looks premature for White to play:

14.g4 d5!

We already know the idea of meeting White's flank activity with the counterblow in the centre.

15.e5

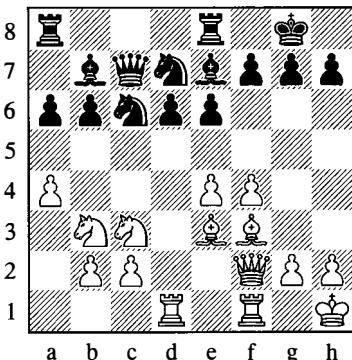
Perhaps White could have considered 15.exd5N $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ exd5 17.c3 $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{W}ad8$ when Black certainly has no problems, although White is not really worse.

15... $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ dxe4 17.c3 $\mathbb{W}ed8$ 18. $\mathbb{W}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}a5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}c4=$

Black managed to support the e4-pawn with some highly energetic play in Corrales Jimenez – Arencibia Rodriguez, Santa Clara 2008.

The other main option is:

14. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 16. $\mathbb{W}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$



We have transposed to a known position where the chances are generally about equal.

17. $\mathbb{Q}d2$

17. $\mathbb{Q}fe1$ $\mathbb{Q}ab8$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}a8=$ Sanijs – Giri, Utrecht 2009.

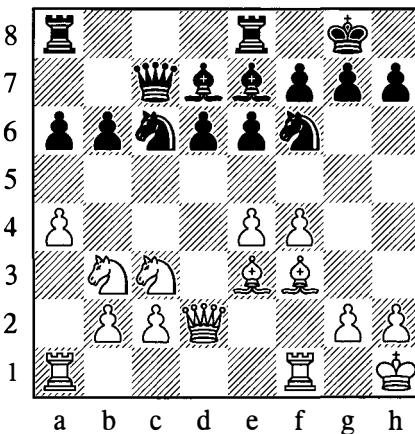
17... $\mathbb{Q}c5$

Another reasonable continuation is 17... $\mathbb{Q}ab8$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}fd1$ $\mathbb{Q}a5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xa5$ bxa5 20. $\mathbb{Q}a7$ $\mathbb{Q}bc8$

21. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}f8\infty$ Jimenez Fraga – Ortiz Suarez, Ciego de Avila 2010.

18. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ bxc5 19. $\mathbb{W}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 20. e5 dxе5 21. fxе5 $\mathbb{Q}e7!$

The position remained balanced in Hawelko – Thorsteins, Polanica Zdroj 1987.



14... $\mathbb{Q}ab8$

The rook vacates the long diagonal while hinting at a possible ...b5 or ... $\mathbb{Q}a5$.

15. $\mathbb{g}4$

Once again a great variety of slightly different set-ups and move orders have been tried. Here are a few of the more interesting examples:

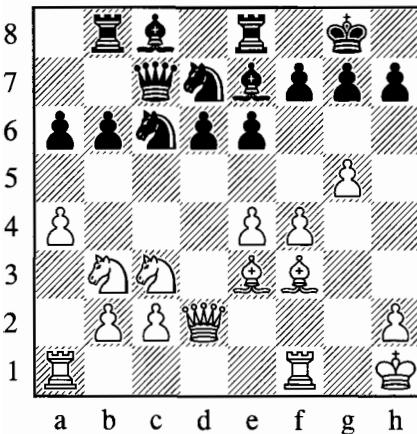
15. $\mathbb{Q}fd1$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ 18. $\mathbb{W}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}a8?$ Returning the rook to its original square does not harm Black's chances. 19. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}d7=$ Black kept a solid and flexible position in El Taher – Lesiege, Istanbul 2000.

15. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ $\mathbb{Q}ec8$ 16. $\mathbb{W}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}a5!$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xa5$ bxa5 This typical ploy gives Black excellent play on the b- and c-files. 18. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 19. e5 $\mathbb{Q}e8$ Black has promising counterplay on the queenside and intends ... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ next, Kharlov – Shipov, Aalborg 1993.

15. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 17. $\mathbb{W}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}ae1$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 19. e5 dxе5 20. fxе5 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}xb3$

22.cxb3 This was Kuzmin – Morozevich, Alushta 1993, and now after the straightforward 22... $\mathbb{Q}c5N$ 23. $\mathbb{W}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}d4\mp$ Black's knight will cause trouble from the f5-square.

15... $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 16.g5 $\mathbb{Q}d7$



17. $\mathbb{Q}g2$

17. $\mathbb{W}f2$

This does not alter the position drastically, although it will obviously lead to some small differences in certain variations.

17... $\mathbb{Q}f8$

The thematic 17... $\mathbb{Q}a5!?$ is also playable, although given that the white queen will no longer be exposed to attack after ... $\mathbb{Q}c4$, White has less of an incentive to capture on a5 and open the b-file.

After the bishop retreat we will examine two continuations in detail.

a) 18.h4 g6!

This move was recommended by Seirawan.

18...b5!? 19.axb5 axb5 Zhukov – Sarkisian, St Petersburg 2007, looks natural, but 20. $\mathbb{Q}e2!N$ b4 21. $\mathbb{Q}b5\pm$ is undesirable.

18... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 19.h5 was dangerous for Black in Beliavsky – Kasparov, Barcelona 1989, and many subsequent games.

19.h5

19. $\mathbb{Q}fd1$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ $\mathbb{Q}ed8$

was solid enough for Black in Postl – Karasek, e-mail 2001. In general, it is only the kingside attack that is really likely to worry the second player.

19... $\mathbb{Q}g7$



20.hxg6

20. $\mathbb{Q}ad1N$ was mentioned by Seirawan, but after 20... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ Black does not appear to be worse. Another possible response is 20... $\mathbb{Q}a5!?$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$, although it is not easy to evaluate whether or not the knight on c4 is truly well-placed.

20...hxg6 21. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$

21. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ does not appear fully realistic.

21... $\mathbb{Q}a5$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}ael$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}xb2!\mp$ is just one of the possible lines.

21... $\mathbb{Q}a5$

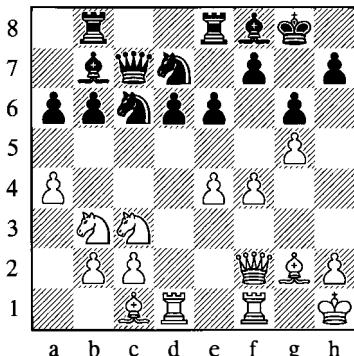
Another good option was 21... $\mathbb{Q}c5N$, just as in the note to White's 20th move above. After the text move the chances are level, but in the following encounter Black soon took over the initiative:

22. $\mathbb{Q}d3!?$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}cl$ b5 24.axb5 axb5 \mp

Plaumann – Freeman, corr. 1990.

b) 18. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ g6 20. $\mathbb{Q}cl$

Correspondence players clearly love chess history, as this position has been reached in a great many correspondence and e-mail games. Overall the chances should be roughly even, but in practice the position has proven quite tricky for White to handle.



20...♝c5

20...♝bc8 21.♗d3 ♝b4 22.♗h3 ♗g7 was played in the famous and decisive 24th game in the 1985 Karpov – Kasparov World Championship match. In the event of 23.f5! Karpov might have set himself on the path to retain his title, but history took another turn.

21.♗xc5 bxc5 22.♗d3

22.f5 might be more challenging, but Black is still holding his own after 22...♝d4 (22...♝e5 N also looks absolutely fine) 23.f6 ♜a5 24.♗d3 e5∞ Rehder – Dietrich, e-mail 2003.

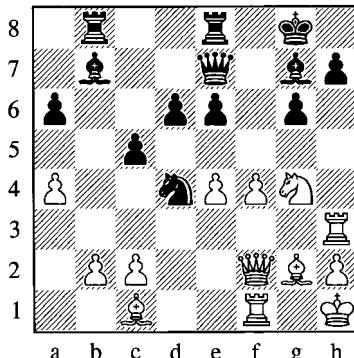
22...♝d4 23.♗h3

23.♗e3 ♗g7 24.♗d2 d5† Gislason – Chmelik, corr. 1990.

23...♝e7 24.♗d1

24.♗e3 ♗g7 25.♗d1 f5!† Stern-Glaser, corr. 1987.

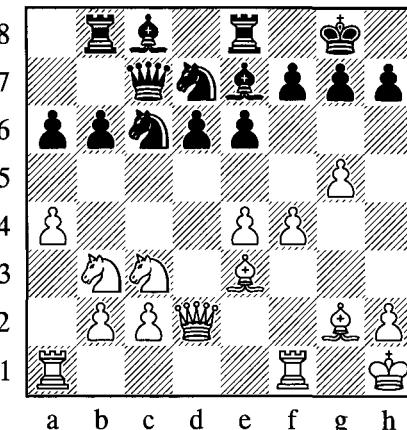
24...f5 25.gxf6 ♜xf6 26.♗e3 ♗g7 27.♗g4 ♜e7



28.♗h6†

28.♗g1 ♜f8 29.♗h6† ♜h8† Bj. Larsen – Stigard, Norway 1989.

28...♜h8 29.c3 ♜b3 30.♗e3 ♜f8 31.♗f3 d5† Kaplan – Konguvil, Andorra 2006.



17...♝a5!

This is a key motif in these positions.

18.♗xa5

The spectre of a knight on c4 could be troubling for the first player, although he can also prepare for it with: 18.♗f2? ♜c4 19.♗cl ♜f8 Now there might follow an amusing dance between the opposing knights: 20.♗d4 ♜a5 21.f5 ♜e5 22.♗ce2 ♜ac6 and Black kept a solid position in Jansa – Ftacnik, Prague 1989.

18...bx a5

The doubled a-pawns are not really weak in anything other than a theoretical sense, but the open b-file is of real concern to White.

19.b3 ♜b7

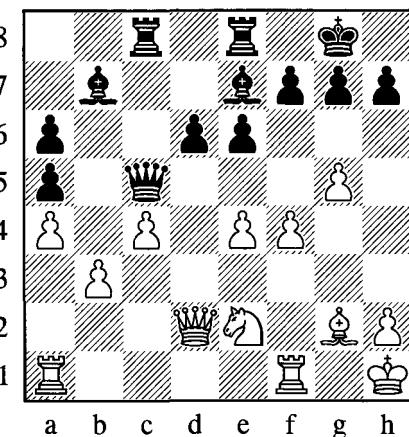
Black switches his focus to the c-pawn. Because both files are open, White will always have at least one weakness on the queenside.

20.♗e2 ♜bc8 21.c4 ♜c5 22.♗xc5

If White gives up his dark-squared bishop then Black must have done something right.

22. $\mathbb{W}c2$ $g6$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{B}b8$ also looks comfortable for the second player. It is doubtful that White can tolerate the knight on c5 indefinitely.

22... $\mathbb{W}xc5$



23. $\mathbb{Q}g3$

Another game continued 23. $\mathbb{E}ad1$ $\mathbb{B}b8$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 25. $\mathbb{E}f3$ $\mathbb{B}b6$ 26. $f5$ $\mathbb{E}eb8$ (26... $g6!N$ 27. $f6$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ intending ... $\mathbb{E}b8$) 27. $f6$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 28. $fxg7$ $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ 29. $\mathbb{W}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}h5$ $\mathbb{W}e5$ Black maintains equal chances, having survived the kingside assault and kept enough counterplay on the opposite flank, Timofeev – Shomoev, Warsaw 2005.

23... $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 24. $\mathbb{E}ae1$ $\mathbb{B}b8$ 25. $\mathbb{E}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}h5$

We have been following the game Radjabov – Svidler, Monte Carlo (rapid) 2007. At this point I suggest a modest improvement:

26... $\mathbb{E}b7$

With the simple idea to double on the b-file. White has no immediate threats on the kingside, so a possible continuation might be:

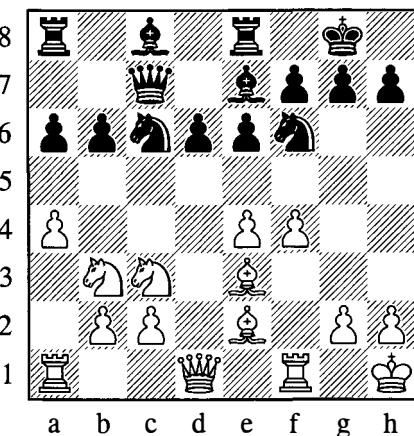
27. $\mathbb{E}d3$ $\mathbb{B}eb8$ 28. $\mathbb{W}a2$ $\mathbb{Q}e7\#$

Black should be able to weather any storm on the kingside, especially with the white queen in such an awkward position. Overall I rate Black's chances as slightly higher due to

his queenside pressure and the latent potential of his bishop pair.

B6) 12. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $b6$

As usual, Black prevents the cramping a4-a5. White can choose between a wide variety of ideas, but none is particularly scary for the second player.



13. $\mathbb{E}f3$

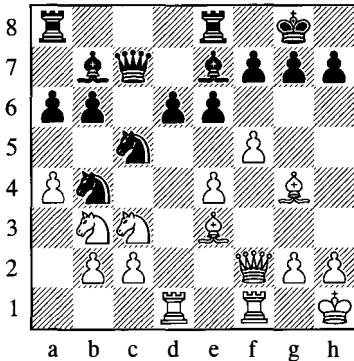
Once again, we will look at some of the more interesting of the many alternatives.

13. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{B}b8$ 14. $\mathbb{W}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 15. $\mathbb{E}ac1$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 16. $\mathbb{W}h3$ $e5$ 17. $fxe5$ $dxe5$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ Lopez Martinez – Korneev, Elgoibar 2005. 18... $\mathbb{E}bd8!N$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 20. $\mathbb{W}xe5$ $\mathbb{W}xe5$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ 22. $cxsd3$ $\mathbb{Q}xd3\#$ Black's two bishops give him the better chances.

13. $\mathbb{E}f3!$ is a slightly unorthodox move which nevertheless deserves attention. 13... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 14. $\mathbb{E}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $g6$ 16. $\mathbb{E}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 17. $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{E}ac8$ Both players are manoeuvring in sensible fashion, without disturbing the equilibrium. 18. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 19. $\mathbb{E}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}a5$ 20. $\mathbb{W}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $e5$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}de2$ $exf4$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ $\mathbb{Q}ce5$ Meijers – Rytshagov, Istanbul 2003. This whole sequence was not forced, but it both sides played logically and consistently. In the

final position the chances are equal, as the vulnerability of the c2-pawn is preventing White from occupying the desired d5-square with the knight.

Finally there is 13.♗e1 ♜b7 (also quite acceptable is 13...♝b4 14.♗d4 ♜b7 15.♗f3 ♜ac8 16.♗g3 ♜f8 17.♗f2 Klovans – Zoler, Schwarzach 2000, 17...♝ed8N 18.♗e1 ♜h8 with approximate equality.) 14.♗f2 ♜d7 15.♗ad1 ♜b4 16.♗g4 ♜c5 17.f5



This position was reached in Klovans – Lesiege, Cappelle la Grande 2002, and now after 17...e5N 18.♗f3 ♜ad8, the position remains balanced and playable for both sides.

13...♝b7

Black can also try the now familiar:

13...♝b8! 14.♗e2 ♜a5! 15.♗ad1

15.♗xa5 bxa5 gives Black typical queenside pressure.

15.♗d2 is well met by 15...d5! 16.exd5 (After 16.e5 ♜d7 the bishop on f3 and knight on d2 are less than ideally placed in this French-type structure.) 16...exd5 17.♗f2 ♜c5 18.♗xc5 ♜xc5 Already it was White who had to worry about equalizing in Smyslov – Kargin, Elista 1995.

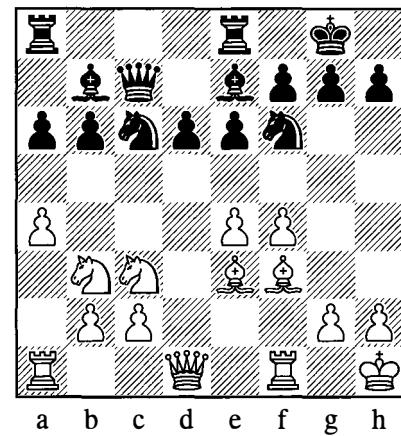
15...♝f8

The immediate 15...♝c4 16.♗c1 b5 should also be fine.

16.♗f2 ♜c4 17.♗c1 b5 18.axb5 axb5 19.♗d4

b4 20.♗cb5 ♜c5 21.b3 ♜a5 22.♗xd6 ♜xd6 23.e5 ♜e7 24.exf6 ♜xf6 25.♗e3 ♜c7=

Without the d6-pawn Black's position was fairly easy to defend in Barua – Teplitsky, Yerevan 1996.



14.♗e2

White should not try to be too sophisticated in his manoeuvring, for instance: 14.♗f2 ♜ad8 15.♗d2 ♜d7 16.♗e2?! (Better was 16.♗e2N, although Black still has no problems after 16...♜a5 17.♗xa5 bxa5 18.♗f2 ♜c6=) 16...♜c5 17.♗bc1 This was Nanu – Damljanovic, Sozina 2004, and now Black could have punished his opponent's strange handling of his pieces with: 17...♜a5!N 18.♗xc5 bxc5+

14...♝d7

Black pre-empts any e4-e5 ideas and prepares to deploy the knight actively on the queenside.

15.♗ad1

15.g4 ♜c5 16.g5 ♜f8 17.♗g2 g6 18.♗f2 ♜ad8 19.♗ad1 was seen in Thorhallsson – Stefansson, Selfoss 2003, and now after 19...♝g7N Black pieces are ready to deal with any of his opponent's ideas.

15...♝c5

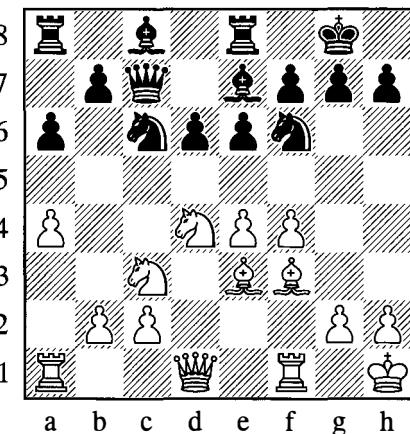
Black could also consider 15...♝a5!? – it is rarely a bad move in these positions.

16.♗f2 ♜f8

The position remained roughly full of tension in Smyslov – Radulov, Leningrad 1977, but Black certainly kept his fair share of the chances.

B7) 12.♗f3

The bishop's relocation to the a8-h1 diagonal has grown to be recognized as the main line in this critical Scheveningen position. The combination of support for the e4-pawn, pressure along the h1-a8 diagonal and preparation for the kingside attacking plan with g4 goes some way towards explaining its popularity.

**12...♞a5!?**

Once again we see this same knight hop to the edge of the board, albeit under slightly different circumstances. (Remember, it does not always have to include an invitation to inflict doubled pawns upon the second player!)

The choice of the present line is consciously provocative, but it sports an excellent statistical score in tournament practice. Black is basing his counterplay around the vulnerable c4-square. White has tried just about every plausible move here, but the most important lines are B71) 13.♕e1, B72) 13.♗g1 and B73) 13.g4.

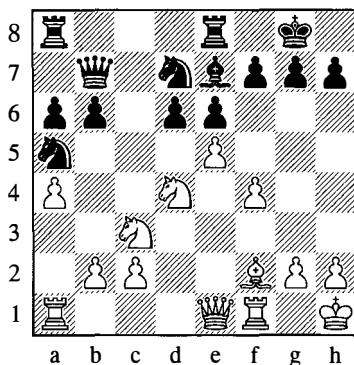
Here is a quick round-up of the alternatives:

13.♗f2

This is played with similar intentions to line B72 below, except that this time White hopes to find a role for the bishop on the e1-h4 diagonal.

13...♝d7 14.♕e1 b6 15.e5 ♜b7 16.♗xb7

This position occurred in Adams – Kempinski, Kemer 2007, and here I would suggest:

16...♝xb7N

I prefer this slightly over the knight recapture, although the latter is also quite playable and soon led to a draw being agreed in the aforementioned game.

17.♕e2 dxe5 18.fxe5 ♜ac8

It is also possible to play 18...♝b4!? 19.♗a2 ♜e7, challenging White to find something better than 20.♗c3 repeating the position. Still, it looks more principled to bring another piece into play, and after the text move Black must be at least equal with ...♝c4 on the way.

13.♗de2

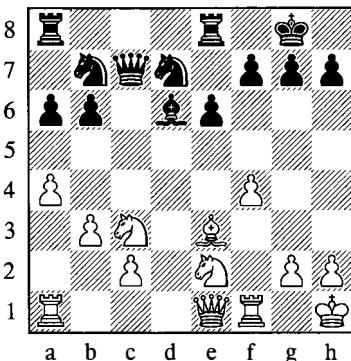
The knight retreat seems to be very modest and does not aspire to much.

13...♝d7

Another logical continuation is 13...♝c4 14.♗c1 ♜b8 15.b3 ♜a5 16.♗d2 ♜d8 17.♕e1 ♜c6 18.♗g3 b5 19.♗ad1, King – Gavrikov, Brocco 1991, and now Black should have

played 19...b4!N 20.e5?! (White should probably settle for a simple retreat, but in that case his knight would have a depressing choice between two poor squares.) 20...bxc3 21.exf6 Qxf6 22.Qxc3 Qxc3 23.Qxc3 Qb4+. The general exchange of pawns and pieces has been kind to the second player.

14.b3 b6 15.e5 Qb7 16.exd6 Qxd6 17.Qxb7 Qxb7 18.Qe1



18...Qf6N

The game continuation was also not bad: 18...Qc5 19.Qxc5 Qbxc5 20.Qg3, Narciso Dublan – Bruzon Bautista, Ayamonte 2006, and now after 20...Qf6N Black can claim a slight plus, as the f4 pawn is weak.

19.Qd1 Qad8 20.Qd4 e5 21.fxe5 Qxe5 22.Qxe5 Qxe5=

Black has no weaknesses and better pieces.

13.Qe2

This queen move prepares for an interesting conflict in the centre.

13...Qc4

There is nothing wrong with straightforward development with 13...Qd7 14.Qa1 Qad8, but the text seems like the most principled way to fight.

14.e5

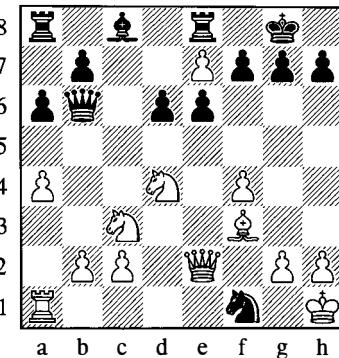
This was White's idea. Instead 14.Qc1?! would lead him into difficulties after 14...e5 15.Qf5 exf4 16.Qxf4 Qxb2=.

14...Qxe3

Black should be careful to avoid 14...dxe5 15.Qdb5! axb5 16.Qxb5 Qd7 17.Qxc4 Qd5 18.Qfe1 exf4 19.Qxf4 Qxf4 20.Qxf4± The defender is in some trouble, as his pieces are playing to a rather limited degree.

15.exf6 Qxf1 16.fxe7 Qb6

Here I found an improvement for White:



17.Qd1!N

This is better than 17.Qd3 e5 18.Qd5 (White is also not helped by 18.Qb3 Qe3 19.a5 Qa7 20.fxe5 dxe5 21.Qe1 Qg4 22.Qxg4 Qxg4+) 18...Qxd4 19.Qxf1 Qb8 Black was able to neutralize his opponent's fleeting initiative and went on to win in Geller – Stangl, Dortmund 1991.

17...Qxb2 18.Qd3 Qxh2!

Black must be precise – the alternatives are unsatisfactory:

18...e5 19.Qb1 Qa3 20.Qb3!±

18...Qxe7 19.Qb1 Qa3 20.Qd5 Qxd3

21.Qxe7† Qf8 22.cxd3 Qd2 23.Qxc8 Qxb1

24.Qb6 Qa7 25.f5± The locked rook on a7 makes for a sorry picture, and White must be better.

19.Qxh2 Qb6!

This looks safest. 19...d5 seems tempting, but White can make a powerful sacrifice with 20.Qxd5! exd5 21.Qxd5 when his knights are simply fantastic. My analysis continues 21...Qg4 22.Qd2 Qac8 23.f5 Qc5 24.c4 Qc1 25.Qe3?! (White can also take a draw with 25.Qb3 Qe1 26.Qxc5 Qh4† 27.Qg1 Qe1†)

25... $\mathbb{W}e1$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}xg4$ $\mathbb{W}h4\#$ 27. $\mathbb{W}h3$ (27. $\mathbb{Q}g1?$ $\mathbb{W}xg4$) 27... $\mathbb{W}xe7$ reaching a double-edged position in which any result is possible.

20. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{B}xe7$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $g6$

Black should be able to withstand any kingside assault, and with a rook and three pawns for a knight, his chances are somewhat higher.

13. $\mathbb{W}d3$

This has been tried by a few strong players, but the queen on d3 looks a bit clumsy, and she can easily fall under some piece attack.

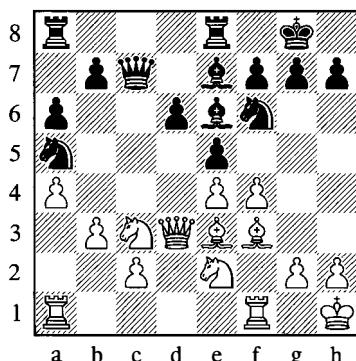
13... $e5$

Another reasonable continuation is 13... $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}cl$ $e5$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}de2$ $exf4$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 17. $\mathbb{W}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{B}ac8$ when Black was holding his own in Karpov – Martinovic, Amsterdam 1985.

14. $\mathbb{Q}de2$

14. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ 15. $exf5$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}cl$ $exf4$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ (17. $\mathbb{W}d4$ $\mathbb{B}ac8$ 18. $\mathbb{W}xf4$ $\mathbb{W}d7$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}d8!\#$ The bishop will improve its location, and Black has a splendid position.) 17... $\mathbb{Q}e3$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ $fxe3$ 19. $\mathbb{W}xe3$ $\mathbb{B}ab8$ 20. $\mathbb{W}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}ae1$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $dxe5=$ Due to the opposite-coloured bishops the chances were perfectly equal in Panchenko – Wojtkiewicz, Katowice 1993.

14... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 15. $b3$



15... $\mathbb{B}ac8!?$ N

This is not necessarily an improvement, but

I want to show that Black is not obliged to release the central tension immediately.

The only practical encounter continued 15... $exf4$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}cd5$ Despite the knight jumping to d5 the position remains balanced and a draw was agreed in Arnason – Wojtkiewicz, Reykjavik 1994.

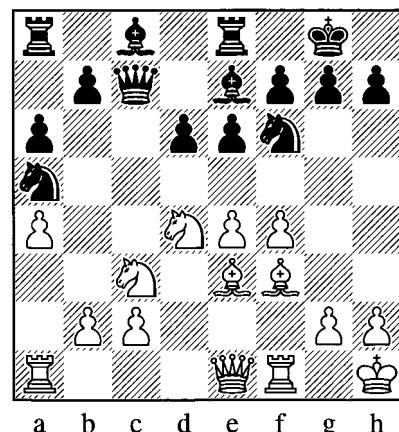
16. $f5$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}fc1$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 19. $\mathbb{W}xd5$ $g6=$

The defence is doing fine with well-coordinated pieces.

Having explored the assortment of minor lines, we will now move on to the three main ones.

B71) 13. $\mathbb{W}e1$

This is a thematic move for these positions.



13... $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}cl$ $e5!$

Once you look closely enough, the black rook on e8 serves as a counterweight for the white queen on the e-file.

15. $\mathbb{Q}de2$

15. $fxe5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ (15... $dxe5$ 16. $\mathbb{W}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ is also quite playable, but it is always nice to have a piece outpost on e5, as well as keeping the rook on e8 happy. 16. $\mathbb{W}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 17. $\mathbb{W}xf3$ This was Kovacevic – Kempinski, Bled 2002, and now the most accurate sequence looks to be

17...♝g4N 18.♗g3 ♜c5! 19.♕e3 ♜e5 with a comfortable position for Black.

15...♜c5!

The queen turns out to be surprisingly well-placed here. It should be mentioned that 15...d5?! is a decent alternative, but I believe the text move to be strongest.

16.♗g3

The alternatives are no better:

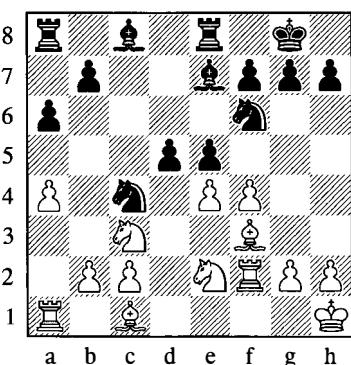
16.♕g3 exf4 17.♗xf4 ♜xb2 18.♕e3 ♜e5
 19.♕e2 ♜e6 (or 19...d5?!N 20.♕f4 ♜d4†)
 20.♗f5 ♜xf5 21.♗xf5 ♜e6 22.♗f4 ♜ac8
 23.♗d4 ♜c4 24.♗g3 ♜e5† Black keeps an extra pawn as well as the better structure,
 Fedorowicz – Arnason, St Martin 1992.

16.f5, Malinovsky – Grandelius, Olomouc 2009, is best met by 16...d5!N 17.exd5 (17.♗g3 d4 18.♗d5 ♜xd5 19.exd5 ♜h4 20.♕e4 ♜d6†) 17...♜xf5 18.♗d1 ♜ad8† It becomes obvious that White faces an uphill struggle for survival.

16.fxe5 ♜xe5 (16...dxe5 is playable, but the text is more ambitious.) 17.♗f4 ♜d7 18.b3 ♜ac8† Black's pressure along the c-file gave him the edge in Babaev – Kempinski, Batumi 2002.

16.♗f2 ♜xf2 17.♗xf2 d5!

After this powerful move White is already in trouble.



18.♗f1

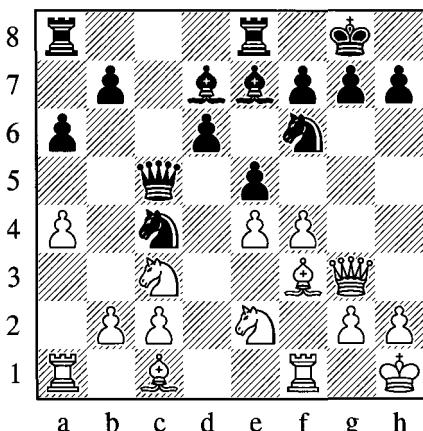
18.exd5?! is not really playable due to 18...e4 19.♗xe4 ♜c5 20.♗d3 ♜xf2 21.♗xc4 ♜g4†. 18.fxe5 was tried in one game: 18...♗xe5 19.♗g3 ♜xf3 20.♗xf3 ♜g4 21.♗f1 (21.e5 ♜e4†) 21...d4 22.♗d1 This was Markin – Grandelius, Pardubice 2009. Black has several strong continuations here, but perhaps the simplest would have been 22...♜xd1?N 23.♗xd1 ♜c5 24.♗e1 ♜d6 when Black wins a pawn and, in all likelihood, the game. The main move was played in L.B. Hansen – Cu. Hansen, Gladsaxe 1994. Black's most convincing reply would have been:
 18...dxe4N 19.♗xe4 ♜g4!

This energetic move maintains Black's initiative.

20.fxe5 ♜gxe5†

It is obvious that the opening of the centre came for at a bad moment for White.

16...♜d7



17.fxe5

This looks like the only way for White to maintain the balance.

17.♗b1 is unimpressive, and after 17...♜ac8 18.♗d1 b5 19.axb5 axb5 20.fxe5 ♜xe5† White position was just a shadow of its usual self in Prasad – Kempinski, Biel 2001.

17.b3 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ $\mathbb{W}xe3$ 19.fxe5 (19.f5 $\mathbb{E}ac8$ 20. $\mathbb{W}e1$ d5 21. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 22.exd5 $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ 23.c3 $\mathbb{Q}d6\mp$ Black's bishop pair was virtually a decisive asset in Jaracz – Kempinski, Polanica Zdroj 2001.) 19...dxe5 20. $\mathbb{E}ad1$ Dalvi – Popov, e-mail 2001, 20... $\mathbb{Q}d8!N$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 23. $\mathbb{E}d3$ $\mathbb{W}g5\mp$ With two healthy bishops, the second player will be the only one smiling in this position.

17... $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3$

It was also possible to maintain the tension with 18... $\mathbb{E}ac8N$, but eliminating an enemy bishop is always a useful insurance policy in case the position opens up later.

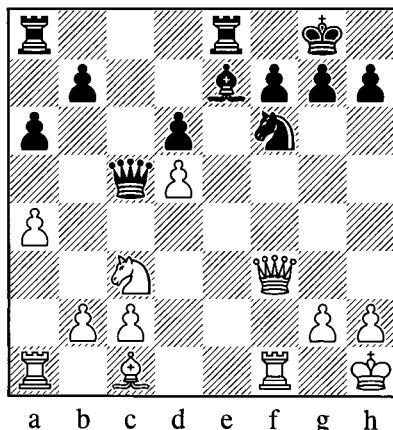
19. $\mathbb{W}xf3$

White could also have considered 19.gxf3?!N, for instance 19... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 20. $\mathbb{E}g1$ g6 with chances for both sides.

19... $\mathbb{Q}c6$

Also interesting was 19... $\mathbb{Q}g4!N$ 20. $\mathbb{W}d3$ $\mathbb{E}ac8$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{W}c4$.

20. $\mathbb{Q}fd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 21.exd5



21...b5

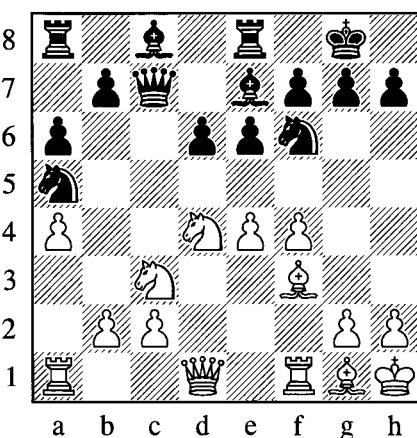
21... $\mathbb{Q}d8!N$ also deserved attention.

22. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{W}b4$ 23.axb5 axb5 24. $\mathbb{E}xa8$ $\mathbb{E}xa8$

Black had enough queenside play to maintain the balance and prevent his opponent from mounting a genuinely dangerous attack in Glek – Sutovsky, Haifa 1996.

B72) 13. $\mathbb{Q}g1$

With this move White pre-empts the possible knight jump to c4. The bishop is not so badly placed on g1, where it keeps its monarch company and avoids obstructing any other pieces.



13... $\mathbb{Q}f8$

Black can also play 13...e5 immediately, but I like the flexibility of the text move.

14. $\mathbb{W}e1$

White can also pre-empt the central advance with 14. $\mathbb{Q}de2$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ (The following game showed another decent approach for Black: 14... $\mathbb{E}b8$ 15. $\mathbb{W}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ e5 18.fxe5 dxe5 19. $\mathbb{W}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{W}d6$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 23. $\mathbb{E}ad1$ $\mathbb{W}c5$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}g4\mp$ Short – Arnason, Vestmannaeyjum 1985.) 15. $\mathbb{W}e1$ b6 16. $\mathbb{E}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 17. $\mathbb{W}f2$ $\mathbb{E}ac8$ 18.b3 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 19. $\mathbb{E}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 20. $\mathbb{E}fd1$ d5! 21.exd5 At this point the players agreed to a draw in Tiviakov – Sax, Chalkidiki 2002. The likely continuation would have been 21...exd5 22. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$

♗xd5 24.♗xd5 ♗f6 25.♗d3 ♜xc2 when the elimination of the centre brings a peaceful situation.

14...e5!?

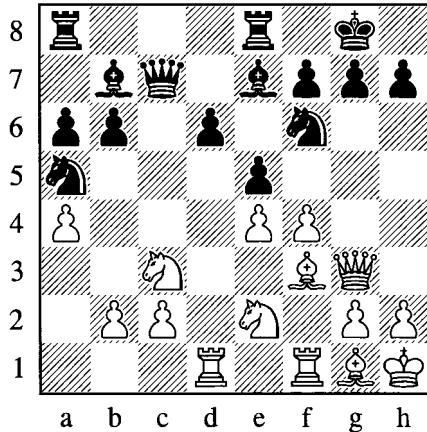
It feels like a good time to play this move, as the white queen might start to feel uncomfortable opposite the enemy rook, even if there is no immediate way to exploit it.

Black can also play more patiently with 14...♗b8, although in the following top-level game he did not quite manage to equalize: 15.h3 ♗d7 16.♗h2 ♗c6 17.♗d1 ♗xd4 18.♗xd4 b5 19.axb5 axb5 20.e5± The bishop on h2 was helping to feed White's initiative in the centre in Kasparov – Topalov, Dos Hermanas 1996.

15.♗de2

White should certainly avoid 15.fxe5? dx5 16.♗f5 ♗xf5 17.exf5 ♗b4 Black is already better, as the bishop on g1 is now misplaced. 18.♗e2 ♗ac8 19.♗b5!? A witty move, but it is not enough to solve White's problems. 19...♗e7 20.c3 ♗b3 21.♗d1 axb5 22.cxb4 bxa4 23.♗b5 ♗ed8 24.♗xd8† ♗xd8 25.♗xa4 ♗d4† The knights proved more valuable than the bishops in Oll – Smirin, Kissimmee 1997.

15...b6 16.♗d1 ♗b7 17.♗h4 ♗e7 18.♗g3



18...♘c4!?

Black embarks on a risky-looking, but nevertheless justified plan involving a daring foray from the knight.

Instead the more sedate 18...♗ac8 would have been equal.

19.b3 ♗a3! 20.♗c1

20.♗d2 would also have been met by 20...b5. Presumably the idea behind the text move was that any subsequent ...♗xc2 would place the knight in an immediate pin.

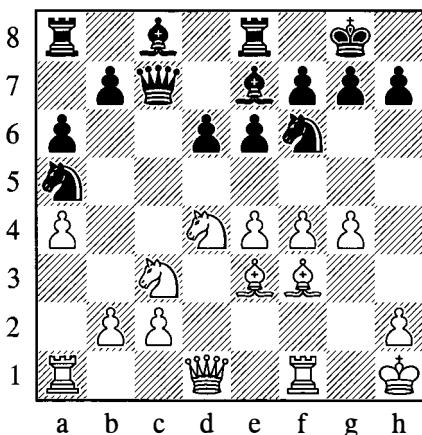
20...b5!

White does not quite have the time to punish the cheeky knight.

21.♗e3 bxa4 22.fxe5 dxe5 23.♗h6 g6 24.bxa4 ♗ad8

We have been following the game Soereghy – Goze, e-mail 2006. Black's enterprising play has paid off. He has succeeded in compromising his opponent's queenside structure and eventually converted his advantage to a full point.

B73) 13.g4



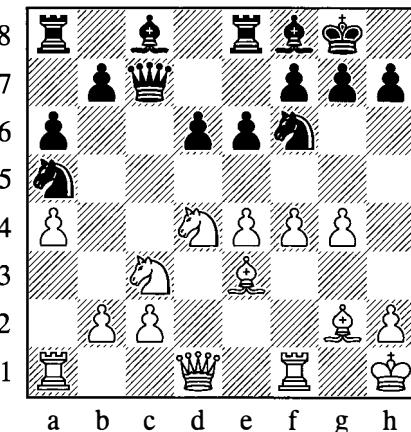
Probably White's most promising idea.

13...♘f8

Now we will consider the subtle B731) 14... $\mathbb{Q}g2$ followed by the main line of B732) 14.g5.

B731) 14... $\mathbb{Q}g2$

By refusing to drive the knight away from f6, White prevents the usually desirable ...b7-b6, which would now lose to e4-e5.



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

Black can also consider 14... $\mathbb{Q}b8!?$, when it is doubtful that White has anything better than 15.g5 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ transposing to the note to Black's 15th move in line B732 below.

15. $\mathbb{W}e1$

Obviously 15.g5 would lead back into B732, so we will only focus on White's attempts to do without this move.

15...b6

It seems logical to keep the knight jump in reserve. Nevertheless it is also not bad to play 15... $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ b6N (16...g6 17.b3 $\mathbb{Q}a5$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 19. $\mathbb{E}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}de2\pm$ Polzin – Kempinski, Germany 2005) 17.b3 $\mathbb{Q}a5$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}b7\infty$ In this typical Scheveningen position Black should have enough time to create counterplay.

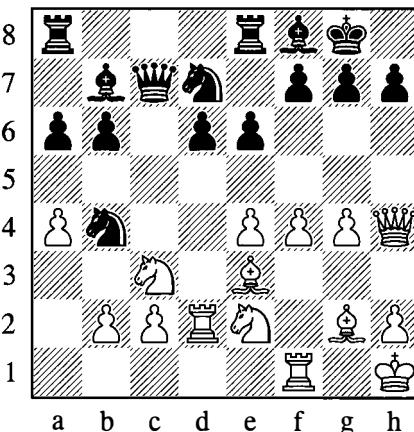
16. $\mathbb{E}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 17. $\mathbb{W}h4$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$

17... $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ g6 19. $\mathbb{E}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ was not a bad alternative, but I prefer the text.

18. $\mathbb{Q}de2!$

This looks like White's most challenging approach, aiming to limit the opponent's counterplay. Instead 18. $\mathbb{E}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ e5 20. $\mathbb{E}h3$ h6 leads to a complex position in which Black's chances are not worse.

18... $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 19. $\mathbb{E}d2$



19...d5!

This is a significant improvement over a high-level game. I found the idea myself, although I later discovered that it had been played in an obscure e-mail game so I could not claim it as a novelty.

19... $\mathbb{W}d8!?$ is unsatisfactory after 20.g5 f6 (or 20...g6 21. $\mathbb{E}f3$ $\mathbb{E}c8$ 22. $\mathbb{E}h3$ h5 23.gxh6 $\mathbb{W}xh4$ 24. $\mathbb{E}xh4$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 25.e5±) 21. $\mathbb{Q}d4\pm$ Black had plenty of weaknesses and little compensation for them in Anand – Topalov, Dortmund 1996.

20.e5

This leads to a position resembling the French Defence, in which neither side's pieces are deployed exactly as they would normally be in that opening. Overall I would say that the

differences favour Black slightly, as he can still pursue a queenside attack, helped in part by the pawn on a4 which provides a ready-made target.

Before moving on, let us note that White is not helped by 20.♗d4 ♜c5 21.exd5 ♜xd5±.

20...♝c5

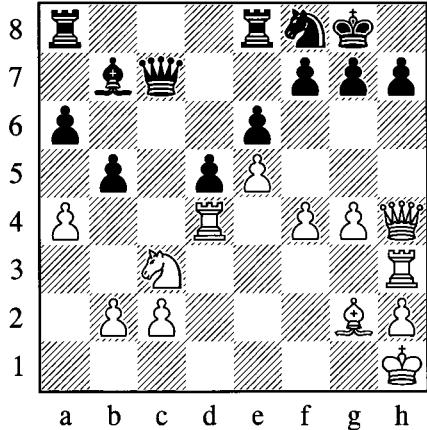
In his annotations to the aforementioned game, Anand only mentioned 20...f6?! which creates too many weaknesses.

However, 20...♝e7?N might be a worthy alternative, for instance 21.♘f2 ♜c6 when I prefer Black's position slightly.

21.♗d4 ♜c6!

The knight has been Black's hardest working piece. Now, finally, it prepares to exchange itself for the important blockader on d4.

**22.♗f3 ♜xd4 23.♗xd4 ♜xd4 24.♗xd4 b5
25.♗h3 ♜f8**



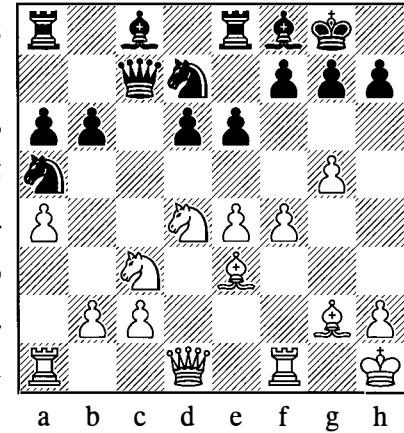
We have been following the game Lagerborg – Romanov, e-mail 2000. Black's queenside offensive is well underway, whereas White is a long way from achieving anything special on the opposite flank.

B732) 14.g5 ♜d7 15.♗g2

This is the normal move in such positions. The bishop makes way for the heavy pieces to get to the kingside.

15...b6

This is the standard move, although it might also be interesting for Black to consider 15...♝b8?!, hoping to play ...b7-b5 in one move. Here are a couple of nice examples: 16.♗e1 (There is also 16.♗h5 ♜c4 17.♗c1 g6 18.♗h3 ♜g7 19.♗de2 b5 20.axb5 axb5 21.b4 ♜b6 22.♗a2 ♜b7± The strong knight from c4 was limiting White's attacking prospects in Hermansson – Kempinski, Stockholm 1999.) 16...♜c4 17.♗c1 g6 18.b3 ♜g7 19.♗de2 ♜a5 20.♗d2 ♜c6 21.♗h4 b5 Black could not complain, as his queenside counterplay was becoming quite real in Nataf – Relange, France 2003.



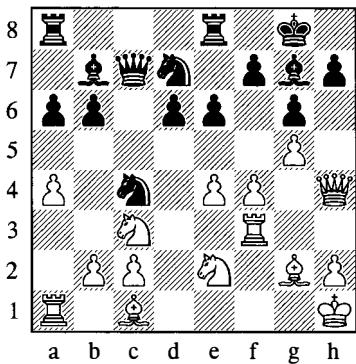
16.♗f3

White's plan will generally involve shifting his queen and rook to the h-file in one way or another. Black will generally place his bishop on g7, after which the knight can always drop back to f8 to defend h7. One of Black's key resources will be the counterattacking thrust ...f5. If the second player can time this move correctly, it should enable him to secure some

valuable breathing space on the kingside and in some cases even fight for the initiative in the centre.

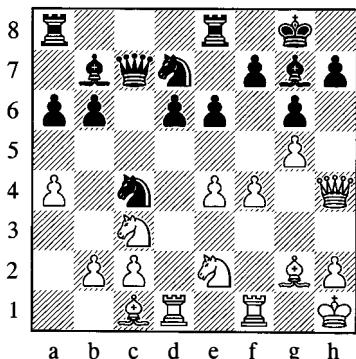
Here are some illustrative examples:

16. $\mathbb{W}h5$ g6 17. $\mathbb{W}h4$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 19. $\mathbb{E}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}de2$



20...d5!? (This plunges the game into unclear complications. A safer alternative would have been 20...f5N 21. $\mathbb{E}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ with a good position for Black.) 21. $\mathbb{E}h3$ d4!? 22. $\mathbb{W}xh7+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ This was Matejovic – Szegi, Slovakia 2006, and here Black could have created unpleasant queenside threats with 23... $\mathbb{Q}a5!$ N.

16. $\mathbb{W}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 17. $\mathbb{E}d1$ g6 18. $\mathbb{Q}de2$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 19. $\mathbb{W}h4$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}c1$



20...f5!?N

This looks like a good time for Black to execute his space-gaining break, although he

can also postpone it as in the following game: 20... $\mathbb{W}c5$ 21. $\mathbb{E}d3$ b5 22. $\mathbb{E}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 24. c3 $\mathbb{Q}bd7$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ f5! 26. $\mathbb{gxf6}$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$

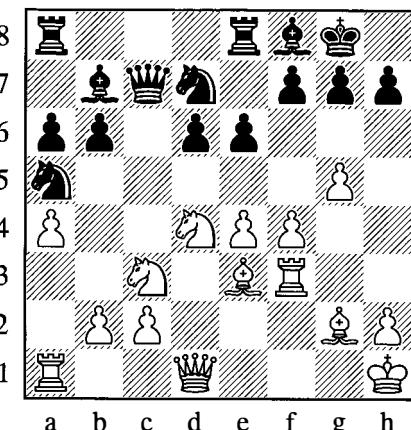
Having outmanoeuvred his opponent for the past five moves, Black has taken over the initiative and went on to win in Polzin – Kempinski, Germany 2005.

21. b3 $\mathbb{Q}a5$ 22. $\mathbb{E}f3$ $\mathbb{E}ad8$ 23. $\mathbb{E}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$

Black's pieces coordinate well, his king is safe and he has every reason to feel confident about the future.

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

I think Black should continue to refrain from the knight hop to c4 for the time being. After 16... $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$, the following game provides an excellent demonstration of why it is not always desirable to drive the white bishop back to c1: 18. $\mathbb{E}h3$ g6 19. b3 $\mathbb{Q}a5$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}a3$! White finds an excellent way to combine his kingside attack with pressure against the d6-pawn. 20... $\mathbb{E}ad8$ (Deserving attention was 20...e5?N 21. $\mathbb{Q}de2$ exf4 22. $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ $\mathbb{W}d8$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}fd5$ $\mathbb{W}xg5$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}c7$ $\mathbb{W}e5$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}xa8$ $\mathbb{Q}xa8$ 26. $\mathbb{E}b1\pm$ The exchange sacrifice promises rich play, but Black's position is still worse.) 21. $\mathbb{W}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 22. $\mathbb{E}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}de2$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 24. $\mathbb{E}hd3$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 25. $\mathbb{W}d2\pm$ Black was unable to hold the d6-pawn and had to fight for survival in Kuczynski – Ftacnik, Germany 2002.



17.♗h3 g6 18.♗g4 ♗g7

Now that White has committed his heavy pieces to the kingside, it starts to become more tempting for Black to consider 18...♘c4!? 19.♗c1 ♗g7 20.♗de2 This position was reached in Hanley – Michielsen, Groningen 2006, and here Black could have obtained at least equal chances with the thematic 20...f5!N 21.♗h4 ♘f8.

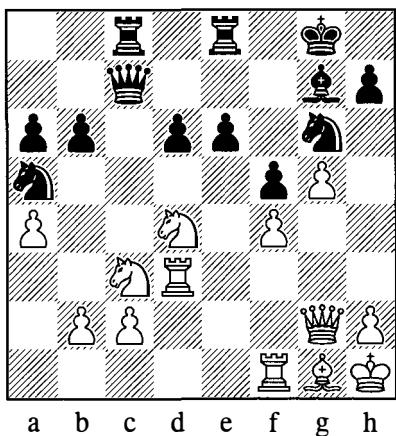
19.♗g1 f5! 20.exf5

After 20.gxf6 ♘xf6 21.♗h4 ♘h5 the knight on h5 is strong.

20...gxfs 21.♗e2

The evaluation would be similar after 21.♗h5 ♘f8 22.♗d1 ♘ac8.

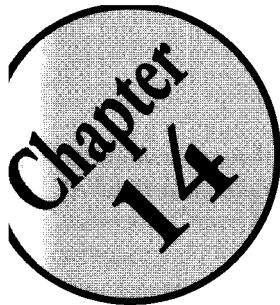
**21...♗f8 22.♗f1 ♘ac8 23.♗d3 ♘xg2†
24.♗xg2 ♘g6**



Black kept a nice position with well-placed pieces in Fedorchuk – Kempinski, Germany 2008.

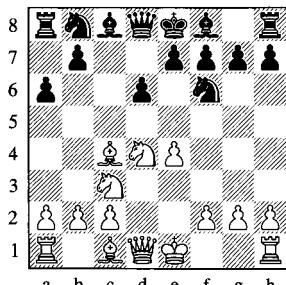
Conclusion

The Scheveningen set-up is a valuable tool in the repertoire of players who are willing to exercise patience with a view to counter-striking at a suitable moment. White has tested umpteen different ways to try and penetrate the opponent's armour, but aggressive operations very often resemble a training exercise with live ammunition – one mistake can see the attacking efforts backfire, with harsh consequences. To play the black side of the Scheveningen system successfully requires many things: a certain level of concrete opening knowledge (as with all openings), knowledge of typical plans and piece manoeuvres, as well as a more subtle feeling for when to manoeuvre, when to defend, when to counterattack and so on. The last of these can take some time and practice to develop, but once you have it, you will truly be the master of an unbreakable defensive system that can last a lifetime.



Open Systems

Midnight Express - 6.♘c4



Variation Index

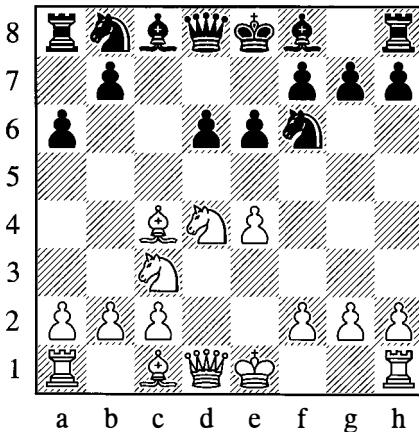
1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6

6.♘c4 e6

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| C222) 12...♘c6!? | 282 |

$6.\mathbb{B}c4$ is one of the most direct attacking systems at White's disposal. The light-squared bishop focuses its aim against the pawn on e6, the cornerstone of Black's entire set-up. The first player will typically look to develop his remaining pieces as quickly as possible before attempting to draw on the power of the light-squared bishop to unleash a deadly attack, often with the help of a sacrifice on the sensitive e6-square. Fortunately Black is not without chances of his own. If White's intended attack fails to materialize, then his active bishop might become a target for Black's advancing queenside pawns. In other cases, the second player may goad his opponent into an unsound sacrificial attack, drawing on the legendary defensive resources of the Najdorf system. It all adds up to a recipe for breathtaking complications, combinations and sacrifices, so without further ado, let's see some action!

1.e4 c5 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ d6 3.d4 cxd4 4. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$
5. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ a6 6. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ e6



A set-up involving ...e5 would be positionally dubious, as White's light-squared bishop would be ideally placed to assist in the fight for the weakened d5-square. Instead Black plays to fortify the a2-g8 diagonal and follow up by harassing the dangerous bishop with ...b5.

White has tried several different moves here, but only three deserve serious attention: **A) 7.a4**, **B) 7.a3** and **C) 7. $\mathbb{Q}b3$** .

7.0-0 has no independent value against our repertoire, as after 7...b5 8. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ we reach variation C1 below.

A) 7.a4

With this move White aims to restrict his opponent's counterplay. It looks slightly odd to combine this restraining approach with the active and aggressive development on c4, and yet the idea has been used successfully by a number of strong players, most notably Emms and Kuzmin.

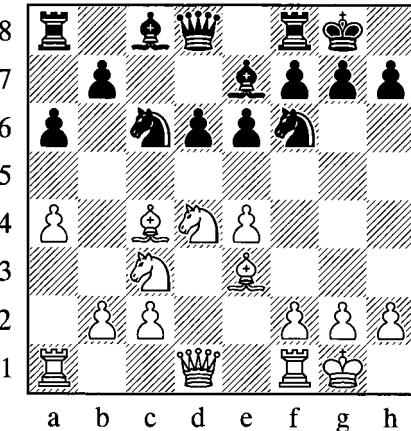
7... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 8.0-0 $\mathbb{Q}c6$

It makes sense to develop the knight here rather than on d7, as the b4-square has been weakened.

9. $\mathbb{Q}e3$

The more aggressive 9. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ 0-0 10.f4 allowed Black to retaliate with 10...d5! 11. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ bxc6 12. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ c5 13.e5 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ with a pleasant position in Gasparian – Anastasian, Yerevan 2006.

9...0-0



10. ♔h1

White intends to play f4 at a suitable moment. Other ideas are not dangerous, for instance:

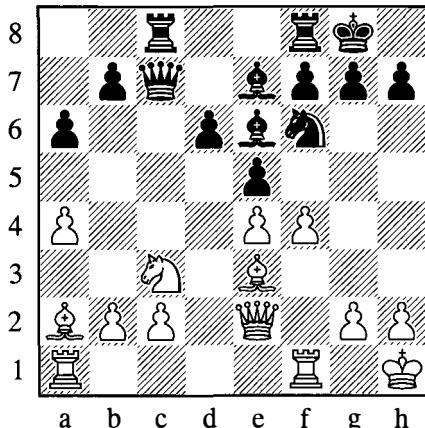
10. $\mathbb{W}e2$ d5 11. $\mathbb{B}fd1$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 12. exd5 exd5
 13. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xh2\uparrow$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xh2$
 $\mathbb{W}xd5$ 16. c4 $\mathbb{W}e4$ was equal in Ivanovic –
 Kasparov, Bugojno 1982.

10.♗a2 ♗b4 11.♗b3 d5 12.exd5 (12.e5?! ♗d7 13.f4 ♗c5† Savon – Jakobsen, Esbjerg 1980) 12...♗bx d5 White had no trace of an advantage in Nepeina Leconte – Bojkovic, Belfort 2002.

10... $\mathbb{W}c7$ 11. $\mathbb{W}e2$ $\mathfrak{Q}d7$ 12.f4

This is the only really threatening plan at White's disposal, but Black is well placed to meet it.

12...♝ac8 13.♛a2 ♝xd4 14.♛xd4 e5 15.♛e3 ♛e6!



16.a5

16. ♔xe6 fxe6 17. fxe5 dxe5 is of no concern to Black (compare the note to White's 17th move in line B41 of Chapter 13, page 228). The doubled pawns control several important squares, and Black's pieces are all working together harmoniously.

Also harmless is 16.fxe5 dxe5 17.♕g5 ♕xa2 18.♖xa2 ♜c4 19.♗f3 ♜c6 20.a5, J. Geller - Zagrebelyn, Krasnodar 2003, 20...♕b4!N 21.♖a4 ♜c5 with advantage to Black.

16... $\mathbb{Q}xa2$ 17. $\mathbb{B}xa2$ $\mathbb{W}c4$ 18. $\mathbb{W}f3$ $exf4$ 19. $\mathbb{B}a4$
 $\mathbb{W}e6$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ $\mathbb{B}c4$ 21. $\mathbb{B}xc4$ $\mathbb{W}xc4$

Black should have no problems from this position. I found two examples on the database.

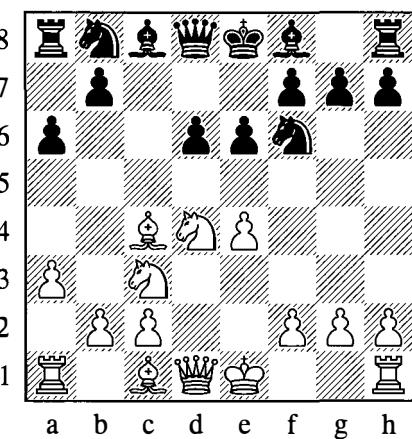
22.e5

A previous game had finished with a quick draw: 22.g4 $\mathbb{W}c6$ 23.h3 $\mathbb{E}c8$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ h6 25. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ ½-½ Kuzmin – Shneider, Enakievo 1997.

22...dxe5 23.Qxe5 Wb4

The position remained absolutely equal in Emms – Grischuk, Esbjerg 2000.

B) 7.a3



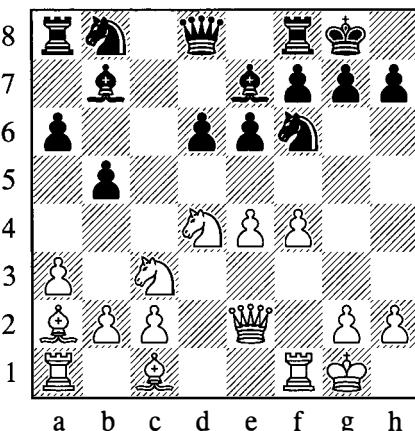
With this move White plans to meet 7...b5 with 8.Qa2, tucking the bishop out of harm's way. The drawback is that, having spent an extra tempo on the queenside, White's attacking prospects are reduced. Of course, it also goes without saying that the most aggressive plans involving long castling will be out of the question due to the ease with which Black can open a file with ...b5-b4.

7... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 8.0-0-0-0 9. $\mathbb{Q}a2$

9.f4 d5! 10.exd5 exd5 11. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{E}e8$ gave Black an easy game in K. Mueller – Hracek, Lippstadt 2000. The f4-pawn would prefer to be on its original square in such a position.

9... $b5$ 10.f4 $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 11. $\mathbb{W}e2$

It looks premature for White to try 11.f5?! $e5$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}de2$ $\mathbb{Q}bd7$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{E}c8$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{E}xc3$! 15.bxc3 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ $\mathbb{W}xe7$ 18.c4 This position was reached in Ermenkov – Portisch, Skara 1980, and here Black could have maintained somewhat better chances with 18... $\mathbb{Q}f6!$?N 19. $\mathbb{W}e2$ $\mathbb{W}d7\#$.

**11... $\mathbb{W}c7$!**

I like this standard (but rare in this specific position) move for its sheer flexibility, and because I cannot see what White is going to play next.

A playable, though somewhat uninspiring alternative is: 11... $\mathbb{Q}bd7$ 12.e5 dxe5 13.fxe5 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3\#$ 16. $\mathbb{W}xe3$ fxe5 17. $\mathbb{W}xe5$ $\mathbb{W}b6\#$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{E}ae8$ Black's position seems okay, even if Arizmendi and Moreno feel that Black has no prospects.

Those authors recommend 11... $\mathbb{Q}c6$, which looks like another good move, and may well

have been my recommendation had it not been for the even more promising main line.

12. $\mathbb{Q}d2$

As I mentioned before, the surprising reality is that it is not at all easy for White to find a convenient move. Here are a few examples:

12.f5 e5 13. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ was played in Gerasimovitch – Stiri, Mureck 1998, and now after 13...h6!N Black is at least equal.

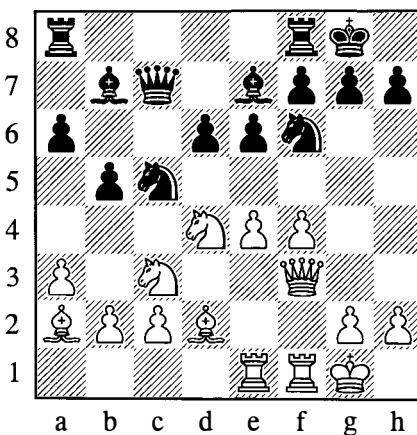
White is not ready to play 12.e5? dxe5 13.fxe5 $\mathbb{Q}fd7\#$ as 14. $\mathbb{Q}f4?$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ wins material.

12. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}bd7$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ does not work either. After 13...fxe6 14. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $\mathbb{W}c6$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xf8$ $\mathbb{E}xf8$ the minor pieces are stronger than the rook, and White is vulnerable on the light squares.

12... $\mathbb{Q}bd7$ 13. $\mathbb{E}ae1$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 14. $\mathbb{W}B$

14.e5 $\mathbb{Q}fe4$ was better for Black in Van der Weide – Tatai, Amsterdam 1967.

The present position was reached in Sanchez – Lloyd, St Rosa 1983. At this point I found an important improvement for Black:

**14...a5!N**

This is a particularly forceful way to exploit the weakness of the e4-pawn and the a7-g1

diagonal. It is also worth mentioning the possibility of 14...♗b6?N This highly ambitious move brings danger for both players. 15.♕e3 ♗fxe4 16.♗xe4 ♕xe4 17.♗g3 b4! The complications seem to favour Black. Nevertheless the text move seems like the better practical choice as it also leads to an advantage, but in a less volatile position.

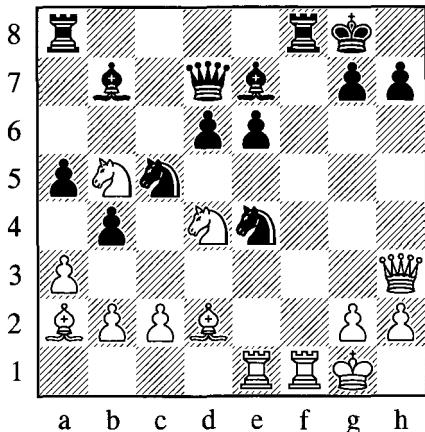
15.f5!

This looks like the best practical chance. After 15.♗cxb5 ♗b6 16.♗e2 ♗fxe4 the exchange of a wing pawn for a central pawn has clearly been to Black's advantage.

15...b4!

15...♔h8?! 16.fxe6 fxe6 gives Black decent prospects in an unclear position, but the text is a try for an advantage.

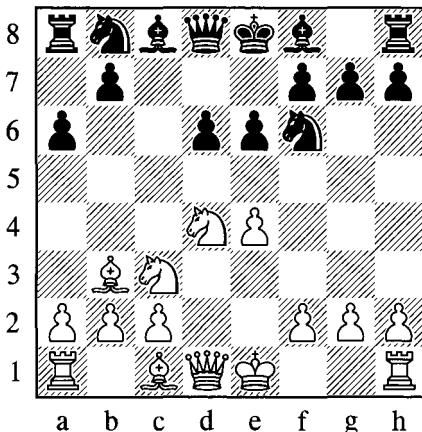
16.♗cb5 ♗d7 17.fxe6 fxe6 18.♗h3 ♗fxe4†



Black's chances are higher, as demonstrated by the following sample variation featuring principled play from both sides:

19.♗xf8† ♗xf8 20.♗xe6 d5! 21.♗xf8 ♗xh3
22.gxh3 ♗xd2 23.♗e6 b3! 24.♗xc5 bxa2
25.♗a1 ♗f8 26.♗g2 ♗c8 27.♗xa2 ♗f3†

C) 7.♗b3



This is by far the most important option at White's disposal. The bishop will have to retreat at some point anyway, so it drops back to a safe spot on b3 without spending time on unnecessary pawn moves on the queenside.

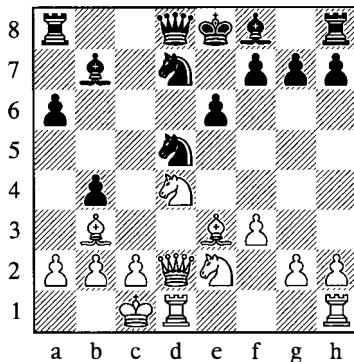
7...b5

The other main line is 7...♗bd7 intending ...♗c5, both reinforcing the sensitive e6-pawn and preparing to eliminate the dangerous bishop at a moment's notice. The choice between the two is largely a matter of taste, although I believe that the text move is a more convenient one around which to build a repertoire. The point is that after the move order with 7.0-0, it would not make much sense for Black to play 7...♗bd7 as the bishop is not yet committed to b3. Therefore Black would have not only have to study 7.♗b3 ♗bd7, but also 7.0-0 b5 8.♗b3. Instead I find it more consistent to play an early ...b5 against both of White's move orders.

At this point White must make a fundamental choice, his main options being C1) 8.0-0 and C2) 8.♗g5. However, we should also pay attention to some less common, but still potentially tricky alternatives.

8.f3 ♗bd7 9.♗e3 ♗b7 transposes to 8.♗e3 below.

8.♗e3 ♗b7 9.f3 White is combining two of the most dangerous attacking systems, but unfortunately he fails to obtain the best of both worlds. 9...♗bd7 10.♗d2 b4 11.♗ce2 d5 12.exd5 ♗xd5 13.0–0–0



This was Ardura Fernandez – Dominguez Perez, San Miguel 1999, and here Black should have taken the opportunity to eliminate one of the enemy's strong bishops with 13...♗xe3!N 14.♗xe3 ♗b6! Preventing any sacrifices on e6. (14...♗c5 15.♗f4 ♗e7 16.♗e1 is not so clear) 15.♗f4 0–0–0 16.♗d3 g6 with better chances for Black, whose dark-squared bishop has the potential to become a monster.

8.f4

When faced with this early show of aggression, Black should remain calm and continue with his normal development.

8...♗b7 9.f5 e5 10.♗de2

Another game continued 10.♗f3 ♗e7 11.♗d3 ♗bd7 12.♗e3 ♗c8 13.♗d2, Milagrosa – Bitoon, Manila 2007, and now after 13...♗c5!N 14.♗xc5 dx5 15.♗d5 c4 16.♗f3 ♗xd5 17.♗xd5 0–0 Black's chances are higher.

10...♗bd7 11.♗g5 ♗e7 12.♗g3 ♗c8 13.♗xf6 13.0–0 h5! This attractive idea is a common theme in positions with this pawn structure. See for instance the note to White's 10th move in variation C13 (page 261). 14.h4 b4 15.♗xf6 ♗xf6 16.♗d5 ♗xh4 17.♗xh5 ♗g5† R. Byrne – Fischer, Sousse 1967.

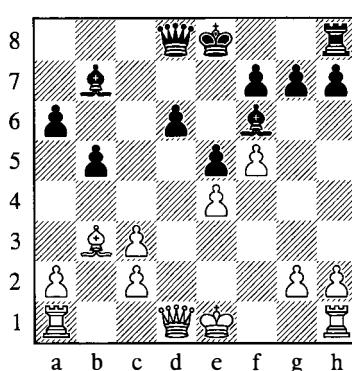
13...♗xf6 14.♗h5 ♗xc3!

The exchange sacrifice on c3 is a well-known motif of the Sicilian, and in this position Black is well-placed to deal with the resulting complications.

15.♗xf6†

Feeble is 15.bxc3? ♗xe4 16.♗xg7† ♗f8 17.♗h5, Hildebrandt – Stewen, corr. 1994, 17...♗b6!N (This is better than 17...♗h4†, although even brought Black a quick victory in the game.) 18.♗e2 ♗c5 19.♗d1 ♗h4† 20.g3 ♗xc3 with a winning position.

15...♗xf6 16.bxc3



16...♗xe6!

More accurate than 16...♗h4† 17.g3 ♗xe4 18.♗f1 ♗f6 19.♗d5 when White escapes to reach a roughly level position.

17.0–0 d5 18.a4 0–0

Black's position was clearly better in Ledic – Szabo, Vinkovci 1970.

8.♗e2

The queen does not really belong here in this system – it has better prospects on f3.

8...♗b7 9.♗g5

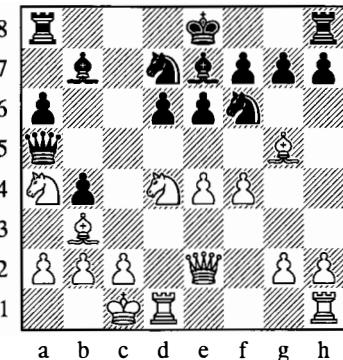
9.f3 looks slightly odd, although the position after 9...♗bd7 10.♗e3 ♗c5 11.0–0–0 ♗c7 12.g4 ♗e7 13.g5 ♗fd7 was interesting and gave chances for both sides in Lind – Wojtkiewicz, New York 1992.

9...b4 10.♗a4 ♗e7 11.0–0–0

11.f3 looks rather slow by comparison, and

after 11...0–0 12.c3 bxc3 13.♕xc3 ♔xe4!
 14.♕xe6! fxe6 15.♕xe7 ♕xe7 16.♕xe4 d5
 17.♕c3 ♔c6 Black had the better chances in
 Feygin – Shirov, Germany 2009.

11...♛a5 12.f4 ♔bd7



13.♕he1

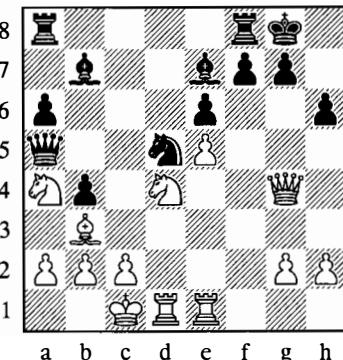
13.♕xf6?! ♔xf6 14.e5 dxe5 15.fxe5 ♔e4+
 Smet – Rooms, e-mail 2003.

13...h6 14.♕xf6 ♔xf6 15.e5 dxe5 16.fxe5 ♔d5

17.♕g4!?

This looks better than 17.♕xe6 fxe6 18.♕h5+ ♔d7 19.♕g4 h5+ Almagro Llanas – Gomez Garrido, Galapagar 2009.

17...0–0



Black has an excellent position, and the following idea does not fully solve White's problems:

18.♕xe6 fxe6 19.♕xe6+ ♔h8 20.♕xd5 ♕xd5
 21.♕xd5 ♕xd5 22.♕xd5 ♕ad8 23.♕f3 ♕h4!
 24.♕f1 ♕f5+

8.♕f3

This is probably the most significant of White's unusual eighth moves.

8...♔b7

Now we will consider two possibilities for White.

a) 9.♕g5 ♔bd7 10.0–0–0 ♕c5 11.♕he1 ♕e7
 12.♕g3 b4 13.♕xf6

13.e5!N is interesting, but not fully satisfactory for White after 13...♔h5!

14.♕xe7 ♕xe7 15.exd6 ♕xg3 16.dxe7 bxc3
 17.hxg3 cxb2† 18.♕xb2 ♕xe7+

13...♕xf6 14.♕a4N

This is a clear improvement over 14.e5? ♔h4!

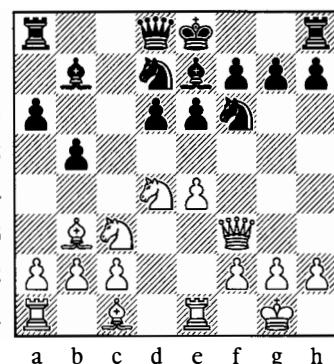
15.♕e3 (15.♕xg7 ♕g5+–+) 15...bxc3+ Ketzetzis – Kanakaris, Kallithea 2009.

14...♔xb3† 15.♔xb3 e5 16.♕ac5 ♕c8 17.♕d3
 a5 18.♕xe5! ♕xe5 19.f4 a4 20.♕d2 ♕xb2†?
 20...a3 21.fxe5 axb2† 22.♕xb2 ♕a5 23.♕a1
 0–0≈

21.♕xb2 0–0≈

Both sides have their chances, but White's vulnerable king is the most salient feature of the position.

b) 9.0–0 ♔bd7 10.♕e1 ♕e7



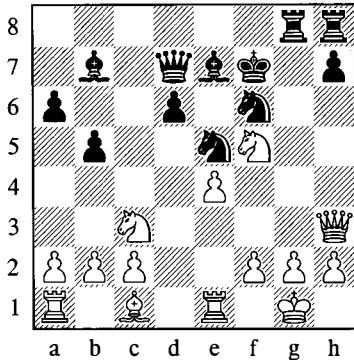
11.♕xe6!?

This is a principled choice. In the event of other moves, Black can benefit from not yet having had to move his queen.

11.♕g3 is of course possible, but there is no reason to fear it. Black has several playable

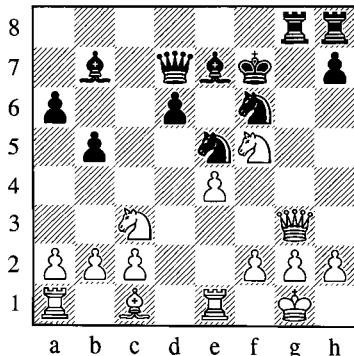
responses, with one of the more interesting examples being: 11... $\mathbb{Q}c5!$? (but not 11... $b4?$)
 12. $\mathbb{Q}d5!$ $exd5$ 13. $exd5\pm$) 12. $\mathbb{W}xg7$ $\mathbb{E}g8$
 13. $\mathbb{W}h6$ $\mathbb{E}g6$ 14. $\mathbb{W}e3$ $b4$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}ce2$ $\mathbb{Q}fxe4\infty$
 11... $fxe6$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 13. $\mathbb{W}g3$

Another interesting line is: 13. $\mathbb{W}h3$ $\mathbb{W}d7$
 14. $\mathbb{Q}xg7\pm$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{E}ag8$



16. $\mathbb{Q}h6\pm$ (or 16. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}f3\pm$) 17. $\mathbb{W}xf3$ $\mathbb{W}xf5$
 18. $\mathbb{E}ad1$ $\mathbb{E}g4$ 19. $g3!N$ [19. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{W}xf3$
 20. $gxg3$ $\mathbb{E}g6\mp$ Lanc – Van Oosterom, corr.
 1992] 19... $\mathbb{W}xf4!$ 20. $\mathbb{W}xf4$ $\mathbb{E}xf4$ 21. $gxg4$
 $b4$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 23. $exd5$ $\mathbb{E}g8\pm$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}f1$
 $a5\mp$) 16... $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xg8$ $\mathbb{E}xg8$ 18. $\mathbb{W}xd7\pm$
 $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 19. $\mathbb{E}e3$ $b4$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 21. $exd5$
 $\mathbb{Q}h4\mp$ 22. $\mathbb{E}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 23. $g3$ $\mathbb{Q}f3\mp$ Grover –
 Hoffmann, Groningen 2009.

13... $\mathbb{W}d7$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xg7\pm$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{E}ag8$



16. $\mathbb{W}f4?N$

16. $\mathbb{W}h3$ soon led to a disaster for White after 16... $b4!\mp$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 18. $exd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$

19. $\mathbb{W}h5\pm$ $\mathbb{E}g6$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{W}g4$ 0–1 Sharma –
 Adly, Dubai 2008.

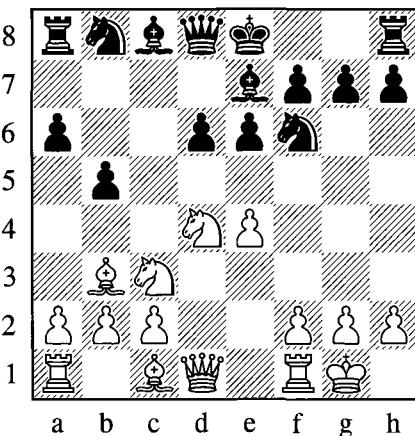
16... $\mathbb{E}g6$ 17. $f3$

Worse is: 17.a3 $\mathbb{E}hg8$ 18.g3 $\mathbb{E}g4!$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}h6\pm$
 $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xg4$ $\mathbb{E}xg4$ 21. $\mathbb{W}e3$ $\mathbb{E}xe4$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$
 $\mathbb{Q}xe4\pm$

17... $\mathbb{E}hg8$ 18.g3 $\mathbb{Q}e8\mp$

Black's extra piece should count for more than White's three pawns.

C1) 8.0–0 $\mathbb{Q}e7$



Now White's main choices are C11) 9.a4,
 C12) 9. $\mathbb{Q}e3$, C13) 9.f4 and C14) 9. $\mathbb{W}f3$.

9. $\mathbb{E}e1$ is not the most accurate, as the e-pawn does not require defending at this time. Play may continue 9...0–0 10. $\mathbb{W}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 11.a3 (11. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $fxe6$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $\mathbb{W}c8$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xf8$ $\mathbb{W}xf8\mp$) 11... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ when Black has no problems.

C11) 9.a4

Attempting to undermine Black's pawn structure is a reasonable idea, but it slows White's development.

9...b4 10. $\mathbb{Q}a2$ 0–0

Black does not need to spend time defending the b-pawn, as White's e-pawn is also under

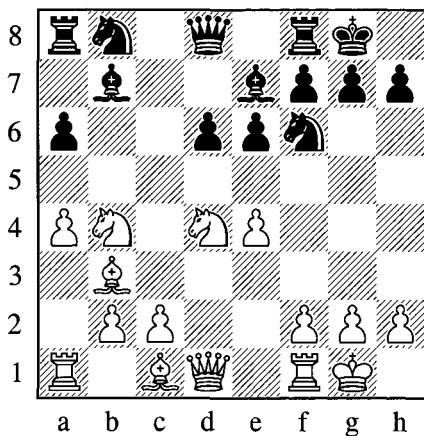
fire. It is possible to capture it immediately, but my own preference is for castling first.

11.♕xb4

11.c3 bxc3 12.♗xc3 ♕d7 13.♗e3 ♗c6 is nothing for White.

11...♗b7!

Black continues to delay the capture on e4. The idea works well, as White can hardly save this pawn anyway. The text move develops another piece while preventing any ♗c6 ideas.



12.c3

Black's last move set a little trap – if White tries to hang on to his extra pawn with 12.f3?, he loses a piece after 12...♗b6 13.c3 a5! (but not 13...e5?? 14.a5!+–) 14.♗bc2 e5+.

12...a5

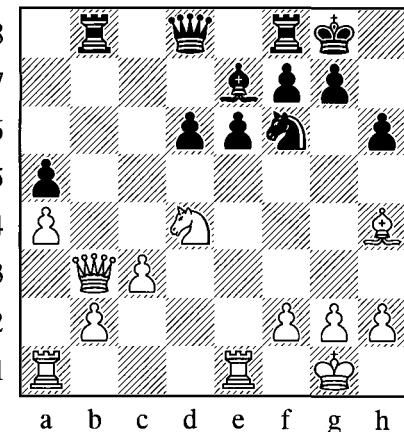
There is also nothing wrong with 12...♗xe4, for example: 13.a5 d5 14.♗c2 (14.f3 ♗c5 15.♗c2 ♕d6=) 14...♗d6 15.♗h5 ♗d7 16.f3 ♗ef6 17.♗h4 ♜c8 Black could not complain in the least in Velimirovic – Pavlovic, Belgrade 1999.

13.♗d3 ♗xe4 14.♗e1

14.f3 ♗b7 15.♗e1 ♗c6 is also equal.

14...♗a6 15.♗g5 ♗xd3 16.♗xd3 ♗c5

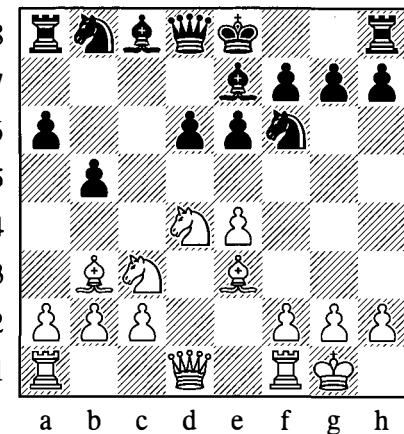
17.♗d1 ♗xb3 18.♗xb3 h6 19.♗h4 ♜b8



Black has equalized comfortably, Kavalek – Andersson, Tilburg 1980.

C12) 9.♗e3

Development of the last minor piece prepares White for action, but Black also gets a chance to finish his own mobilization.



9...♗d7?!

This has not been a popular choice, but it is quite logical and has been shown to work well in this position. Black is preparing to develop the b8-knight but does not want to allow a sacrifice on e6.

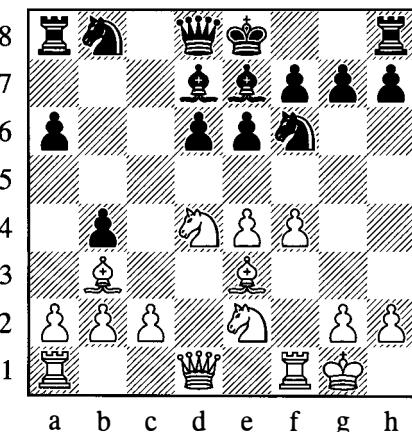
10.f4 b4!

In the game De Firmian – Ftacnik, Polanica Zdroj 1995, I preferred 10... $\mathbb{Q}c6$, but I now consider the text move to be more accurate. I would like to stress that the point of the move is not so much to win the e4-pawn immediately, as this would cost too much time, but rather to drive the white knight to an inferior square away from the centre.

11. $\mathbb{Q}ce2$

11. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ has not yet been tested, and is unlikely to trouble Black. After the natural 11...0–0, a plausible continuation might be: 12.f5 e5 13. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}b5$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}b6$ (14. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}bd7\bar{f}$) 14... $\mathbb{Q}xf1$ 15. $\mathbb{W}xf1$ $\mathbb{Q}bd7$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xa8$ $\mathbb{W}xa8$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{W}xe4$ 19. $\mathbb{W}f3$ $\mathbb{W}xf3$ 20.gxf3 $\mathbb{Q}a8\bar{f}$ White will have to struggle for a draw.

Black is also well-prepared for action in the centre, as seen after 11.e5?! bxc3 12.exf6 $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 13.bxc3 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 14.f5 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ e5 16. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}h5$ (or 17. $\mathbb{W}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 18.c4 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 20.c5 d5 \bar{f}) 17... $\mathbb{Q}b5$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}fd1$ 0–0 \bar{f} Kengis – Kupreichik, Germany 1995.



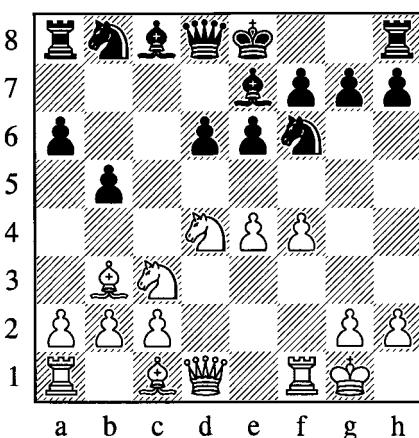
This position was reached in Starace – Lahdenmaeki, e-mail 2006. At this point I suggest the natural continuation:

11...0–0N 12. $\mathbb{W}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$

With a comfortable position.

C13) 9.f4

The advance of pawns in the centre puts the defence on high alert. Fortunately for Black he can meet the challenges with confidence.

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

This move is rather provocative, but so far it has continued to hold up to the most intense scrutiny.

10.e5

This is the main line, although we should certainly consider some alternatives.

10. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ is a bit slow, and Black should be able to obtain at least equal chances as follows: 10...b4 11.e5?! (11. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ does not give White enough for the pawn, so he tries to complicate the game.) 11...bxc3 12.exf6 $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 13.bxc3 (13.f5 e5 14. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ cxb2 15. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ 0–0 16. $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ De Firmian – Pinter, Copenhagen 1985. 16...d5 \bar{f}) 13...0–0 14. $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ d5 16.f5 e5 17. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7\bar{f}$ Biedermann – Bokar, corr. 1996. White is too slow to disturb Black's control over the centre.

10.f5

This is more energetic, but is still not enough to trouble the second player.

10...e5 11.♘de2 ♘bd7 12.♗g5

12. $\mathbb{Q}g3$?! runs into the thematic retort:
 12...h5! 13. $\mathbb{W}f3$ h4 14. $\mathbb{Q}ge2$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}d5$
 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ (16. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}cxe4$ 17. a4 b4+)
 16...b4 17. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ e4+ Slobodjan - Lutz,
 Nussloch 1996.

12. $\mathbb{Q}e3N$ is harmless, for instance: 12...0–0
 13. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{C}c8$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 15. $exd5$ $\mathbb{Q}g5$
 16. $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ $\mathbb{W}xg5$ 17. $\mathbb{W}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ Black averted all the possible problems and his chances are already slightly higher.

12... \mathbb{Q} c8 13. \mathbb{Q} xf6

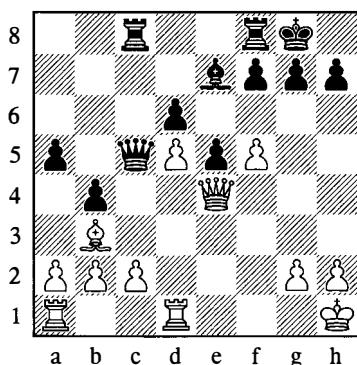
13. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ once again runs into 13... $h5!$, for instance: 14. $h4$ $b4\mp$

13...Qxf6 14.Wd3 0-0 15.Qg3 Wb6† 16.Qh1 Wd4!

This is a convenient way to disrupt the white position before the first player can consolidate his hold over the d5-square.

17. $\mathbb{W}f3$ b4 18. $\mathbb{W}fd1$ $\mathbb{W}c5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$
 20. exd5 a5 21. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 22. $\mathbb{W}xe4$

This position was reached in Kuczynski – Gruenberg, Polonica Zdroj 1989. The position is close to equal, but plenty of play remains. The following idea looks quite tempting:



22... $\mathbb{W}b5!?$ N 23.a4 $\mathbb{W}c5$

By inducing the advance of the pawn to a4, Black has effectively trapped the b3-bishop.

in a cage on the queenside. It is still not such a bad piece as it performs the useful task of defending three important pawns. Nevertheless Black can in some sense claim a strategic superiority.

24.♘d3

White should of course look towards the kingside for some attacking chances.

24... ♕fe8!

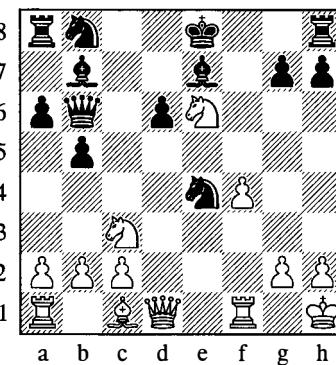
By introducing the possibility of ...e4, Black restricts the mobility of the enemy queen. White should not lose this position, but Black is certainly a bit more comfortable in my opinion.

10. xe6!?

This may not be completely sound, but it is still rather dangerous and must be met with some precision.

10...fxe6 11.♘xe6 ♜b6† 12.♔h1 ♘xe4

12... $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}g5\uparrow$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ is not so promising:
 14.e5 $\mathbb{W}c6$ 15. $\mathbb{W}e2$ $dxe5$ 16.fxe5 $\mathbb{Q}fd7$
 17.e6 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 18.a3∞ The black position is
 uncomfortable and he cannot really hope
 for an advantage.



13. ♔d5!

13. ♔xg7† ♕d8 14. ♔e6† ♕c8 does not give White enough for the piece.

13. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xg7\#$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 15. f5 $\mathbb{Q}f6$
 16. $\mathbb{W}h5\#$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ was also unimpressive for the
 first player in Matushinskij – Kunzelmann,
 corr. 1986.

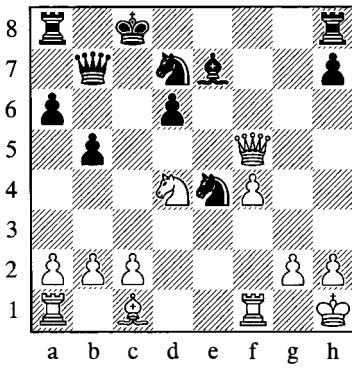
13... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 14. $\mathbb{W}xd5$ $\mathbb{W}c6$

Here I found a way to improve White's play.

15. $\mathbb{Q}xg7\#N$

This looks more challenging than 15. $\mathbb{E}e1?$! $\mathbb{W}xd5$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}c7\#$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 18. $\mathbb{E}xe7$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 19. $\mathbb{E}xg7$ $\mathbb{Q}d7\#$ Black was close to complete consolidation in Petrosian – Papaioannou, Plovdiv 2008.

15... $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 16. $\mathbb{W}f5$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}e6\#$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{W}b7$



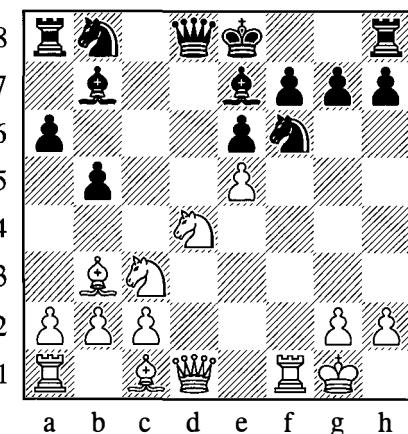
19. $\mathbb{Q}e3$

19. $\mathbb{E}el$ d5 20.a4 $\mathbb{Q}c5\#$

19... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 20.a4 b4#

White does not have sufficient compensation, but Black still has to do some work before his king can feel completely safe.

10...dxe5 11.fxe5

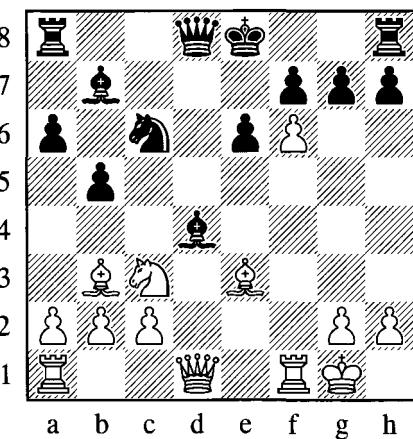


11... $\mathbb{Q}c5!$

This type of counterattacking motif is often seen in the Najdorf. It works well here, despite the fact that Black is moving the same piece twice in the early stages.

12. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6!$ 13.exf6 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$

White has tried several moves here, but only one can really threaten Black.



14.fxg7!

White must sacrifice material if he is to justify his earlier play.

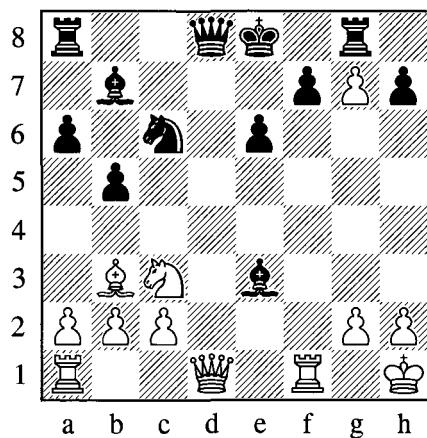
14. $\mathbb{W}e1?$! (14. $\mathbb{W}e2$ is the same) gives Black an easy game after 14... $\mathbb{Q}xe3\#$ 15. $\mathbb{W}xe3$ $\mathbb{W}d4$ 16. $\mathbb{E}ael$ gxf6 17. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{E}ad8$ Simeonov – Ermenkov, Primorsko 1987. The queens will leave the board at any moment and Black will have better chances in the ending, thanks mainly to his excellent central control and superior king.

14. $\mathbb{Q}xd4?$! is also rather compliant. 14... $\mathbb{W}xd4\#$ 15. $\mathbb{W}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 16.fxg7 (16. $\mathbb{E}ad1$ $\mathbb{Q}xb3$ 17.axb3 gxf6 18. $\mathbb{E}xf6$ $\mathbb{E}g8$ 19.g3 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ was similar in Ljubicic – Vaulin, Zadar 2000.) 16... $\mathbb{E}g8$ 17. $\mathbb{E}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}xb3$ 18.axb3 $\mathbb{E}xg7$ 19.g3 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 20. $\mathbb{E}d1$ $\mathbb{E}d8$ 21. $\mathbb{E}xd8$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ Black obtained a slightly favourable endgame position in Iinuma – Sakaev, Dos Hermanas 2003.

14... ♜xe3†

Black could even decline the offer, at least for the moment, with 14... $\mathbb{E}g8!$?, hoping for a slight but safe endgame edge as in the above variations, although White can also opt for 15. $\mathbb{A}xe6$ $\mathbb{A}xe3\#$ 16. $\mathbb{W}h1$, transposing to the main line below.

15. ♔h1 ♕g8



16. xe6!?

This sharp move looks like the best practical chance to create problems, although objectively Black is still doing well.

16. $\mathbb{W}f3$ is not so challenging: 16... $\mathbb{E}xg7$
 17. $\mathbb{W}xe3$ (17. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $\mathbb{W}e7$ reaches the note to
 White's 17th move below) 17... $\mathbb{W}d4$ 18. $\mathbb{E}ael$
 (18. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 0–0–0† Echavarria – Guthrie,
 Medellin 1996) 18... $\mathbb{W}xe3$ 19. $\mathbb{E}xe3$ This was
 Dueball – Cording, Germany 1980, and now
 after 19... $\mathbb{E}d8N$ Black stands better in the
 ending, much as in the two lines given in the
 note to White's 14th move above.

16... \mathbb{Q} xg7!

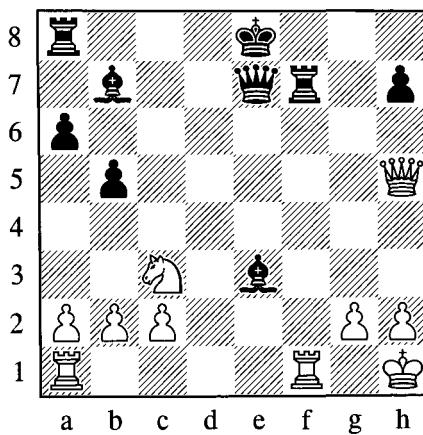
Capturing the bishop is just about playable, but the text enables Black to fight for an advantage and is just a better move.

17. ♕xf7†

17. $\mathbb{W}f3$ more or less loses by force as follows:
 17... $\mathbb{W}e7$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ (No better is 18. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$
 19. $\mathbb{Q}xf7\#$, De Ridder – Van der Drift, corr.
 1983, 19... $\mathbb{Q}xf7N$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}c7\#$ $\mathbb{W}xc7$ 21. $\mathbb{W}xe3\#$
 $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 22. $\mathbb{W}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}g8+$ The second player will
 bring the second rook into play with devastating
 effect.) 18... $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 19. $\mathbb{W}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}d2$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ $\mathbb{W}xb7$
 21. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ This was Zaichik – Lukov, Tbilisi 1988,
 and now the most accurate continuation seems
 to be 21... $\mathbb{Q}g5N$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}e1\#$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ when Black has
 consolidated into a winning position.

17... $\mathbb{B}xf7$ 18. $\mathbb{W}h5$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 19. $\mathbb{W}xe5\#$ $\mathbb{W}e7$
20. $\mathbb{W}h5$

20. $\mathbb{W}h8\#??$ loses by force: 20... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 21. $\mathbb{E}xf7$ (Even more feeble was 21. $\mathbb{E}ad1\#$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 0–1 Cervenka – Schneider, USSR 1974.) 21... $\mathbb{E}xf7$ 22. $\mathbb{W}e5$ $\mathbb{E}xg2\#$ 23. $\mathbb{E}xg2$ $\mathbb{E}g8\#$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{W}f3\#$ 0–1 Kalep – Sostra, corr. 1982.



20... ♕f8!

20... $\mathbb{E}d8$ is also playable, but the text move is the only one that keeps real winning chances alive for Black.

21. $\mathbb{W}xh7$

21. $\mathbb{H}ae1?$ $\mathbb{H}xf1\uparrow$ 22. $\mathbb{H}xf1\uparrow$ $\mathbb{H}g7$ left White with no compensation whatsoever in Bieganowski – Muller, corr. 1988.

21... $\hat{\text{Q}}$ d4 22. $\hat{\text{Q}}$ e4!

Only this witty move can present an obstacle to Black's intended consolidation.

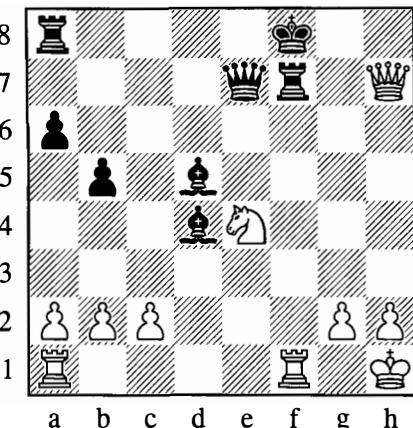
22.♗ael was played in Perez Perez – Brito Zamora, Cuba 1992, and now Black should have played 22...♝e8!N, followed by a careful untangling of his heavy pieces.

22.♗ad1 was not much better in Li Chao – Sadorra, Manila 2007. The simplest solution here looks to be 22...♝e8 23.h4 ♜f6 when White is unlikely to survive.

22...♝d5?!

This is probably the most accurate move.

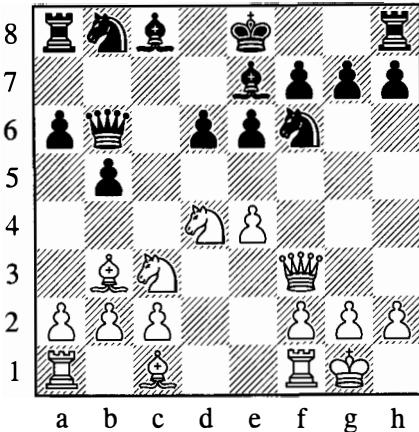
Black can also simplify immediately with 22...♝xe4N 23.♝xf7† ♜xf7 24.♝xe4 ♜d8± although converting his advantage would not be easy.



23.c3 ♜g7 24.♝g6 ♜xe4 25.♝xf7† ♜xf7
26.♝xe4 ♜e8

We have been following the game Pönalis – T. Hansen, e-mail 2001. Compared with the previous note White has trouble coordinating his forces, and Black went on to convert his advantage.

C14) 9.♝f3 ♜b6



The queen is planning to come to b7 – not a common plan for the Sicilian, but it is established as one of the main lines in this particular variation. Now White can choose between the slightly cheeky C141) 10.♝g5?! and C142) 10.♝e3.

C141) 10.♝g5?!

This is justified by the fact that 10...♜xd4? runs into 11.e5, for instance: 11...d5 12.exf6 gxf6 A. Hunt – Stam, Oslo 2004, and now 13.♝e3!N ♜e5 14.♝xd5! kills Black immediately.

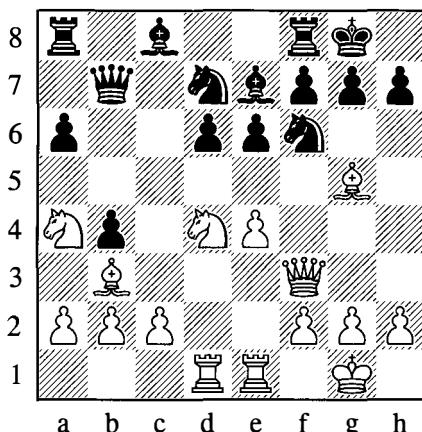
10...♜b7

Black continues with his normal plan. 10...♝bd7 and 10...0–0 are look fine and are decent alternatives.

11.♝fe1 ♜bd7 12.♝ad1 b4

I decided to recommend this as the main line, although the following continuation from one of my own games is also quite playable: 12...0–0 13.♝g3 ♜h8 14.♝e3 b4 15.♝ce2 ♜xe4 16.♝xe4 ♜xg5 17.♝xe6 This was Nunn – Ftačník, Birmingham 2000. Now the most accurate move would have been 17...♝f6!N 18.♝xd6 ♜e4 19.♝f3 (19.♝e5 f6 20.♝d5 ♜xd6 21.♝xd6 ♜g4†) 19...♝xd6 20.♝d5 ♜g4 21.♝xb7 ♜xf3 22.♝xf3 ♜ae8† The tactics worked like magic for Black!

13.♕a4 0-0



14.♕g3

This aggressive deployment of the queen looks natural, although White can also retreat: 14.♕e2 h6 15.♗h4 ♔e5 16.f4 ♘g3 17.♗g6 18.♗e5 ♘g4 19.♗d5!N (19.exf6 ♘xe2 20.fxe7 ♘xd1 21.exf8=♕+ ♘xf8 22.♗xd1 ♘xe4= The queen was on a par with three white pieces in Warakomski – Naiditsch, Warsaw 2005.) 19...♗d7 20.♗b6 ♘a7 21.♗f2 ♘xd5 22.♗xd5 (22.♗xa8 dxе5 23.♗c6 ♘xf2+ 24.♗xf2 ♘f6=) 22...dxе5 23.♗c6 ♘xf2+ 24.♗xf2 ♘g5= Black's creative play has equalized the chances.

Another game continued 14.c3 a5 15.♗c2 ♔e5 16.♗h3 h6 17.♗xh6? (17.♗c1 was better, with approximate equality) 17...gxh6 18.♗xh6 ♘fg4 19.♗h5? (19.♗f4+) 19...♗g7! 20.♗h3 ♘h8 21.♗g3 ♘h4+ Pace – Golichenko, Pardubice 2009.

14...♝e8

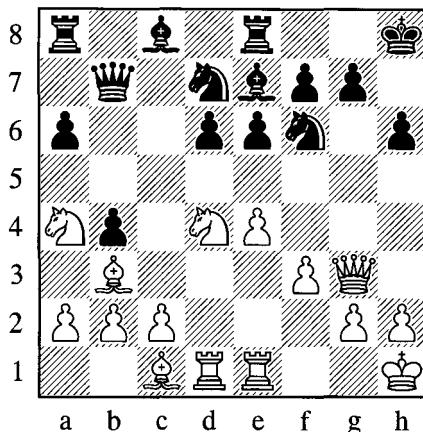
Clearing the f8-square might prove useful in enabling the transfer of one of Black's minor pieces to the kingside.

15.f3 ♘h8

And now he prepares to drive the enemy bishop away.

16.♗h1 h6 17.♗c1

We have been following the game Reinderman – Danailov, Wijk aan Zee 2000. So far Black has played quite sensibly, and at this point he could have obtained a perfectly reasonable position with:



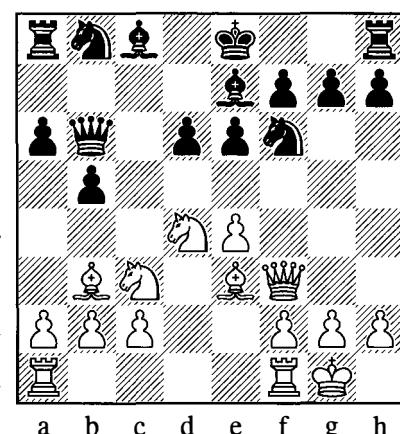
17...♝b8!?

Anticipating the following thematic pawn break.

18.c3 bxc3 19.♗xc3 ♘c5

I see no reason to evaluate Black's chances as inferior.

C142) 10.♗e3



10...♝b7 11.♗g3

White has tried 11.♕fe1 0–0 12.♗g5 in a few games, but this should be of no concern as he is just a tempo down on the previous section.

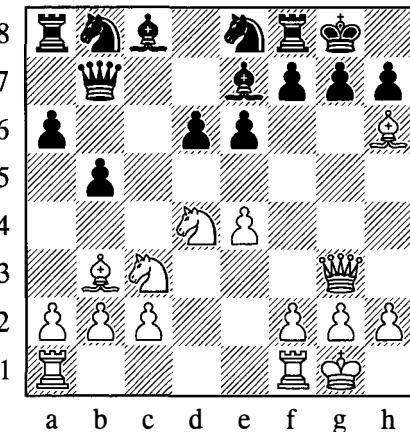
In the event of a slow move like 11.a3, Black should develop normally with something like 11...0–0 12.♕fe1 ♖bd7, with typical play that can be compared to the main line.

11...0–0

Another popular and perfectly playable continuation is 11...b4 12.♔a4 ♖bd7 13.f3 0–0. There is nothing wrong with this, but in certain positions I want to preserve the option of continuing the queenside attack with ...a5 before ...b4.

12.♗h6 ♜e8

Black position may seem endangered, but he has everything under control and with each move the situation will only improve.



13.♕fe1

The quiet 13.f3 should be met by 13...♗d7 intending to complete development. One game continued 14.♔h1 ♗c6 15.♗xc6 ♗xc6 16.a4 b4 17.♗d1 ♔h8 18.♗f4, Wittmann – Sisniega, Manila 1992, and now 18...♗f6N seems pleasant for the second player.

White can also play a different rook move with similar intentions to the main line:

13.♖ad1 ♔h8 14.♗g5

14.♗e3 ♗f6 15.f3 ♗d7 16.♗f2 ♗c6 17.g4 ♗xd4 18.♗xd4 ♗c6 was fine for Black in Stisis – Mashian, Tel Aviv 1994.

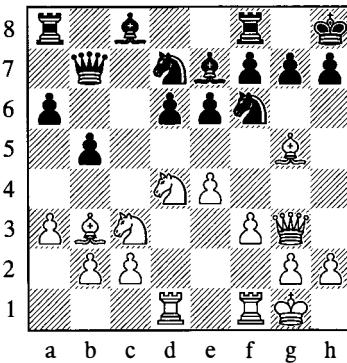
14.♗c1 ♗f6 15.f3 ♗c6 16.♗xc6 ♗xc6 17.♗e2 Van der Wiel – Van den Doel, Wijk aan Zee 1999. Now the most promising continuation would have been 17...♗c5†!N 18.♔h1 a5 with promising counterplay, as pointed out by Van der Wiel.

14...♗f6 15.f3

15.♕fe1 ♖bd7 actually transposes to the Nunn – Ftacnik game mentioned in the note to Black's 12th move in line C141. (In the present position the move count is two higher, due to the time taken on White's ♗e3-h6-g5 and Black's ...♗f6-e8-f6.)

15...♗bd7 16.a3

This was Oral – Colovic, Katowice 1993, and now it looks interesting for Black to try:



16...♗c7!N 17.♔h1 ♗c5 18.♗a2 ♗b7=

After completing development Black will have comfortable equality.

Before moving on, we should also check a couple of aggressive knight jumps:

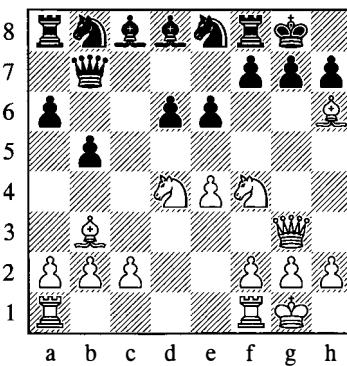
13.♗f5? is much too optimistic, and the sacrifice was easily refuted in the following game: 13...exf5 14.♗d5 ♗c6 15.exf5 ♗xf5

16. $\mathbb{W}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 17. $\mathbb{E}fe1$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}e5+$
Tischbierek – Huenerkopf, Munich 1992.

More interesting is:

13. $\mathbb{Q}d5!$? $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}f4!$?

After 14. $\mathbb{E}fe1$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ b4 17. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ Black completes his development with a solid position, M. Chapman – Booth, Melbourne 1998. I also checked the critical 17... $\mathbb{W}xe4N$, but concluded that after 18. $\mathbb{Q}xe6!$ (18. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{W}xd4$ 19. $\mathbb{E}ad1$ $\mathbb{W}a7$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}b6$ $\mathbb{W}b7$ is okay for Black) 18... $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{W}g6$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ $\mathbb{W}xg3$ 21. $\mathbb{H}xg3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}b6$ $\mathbb{Q}xb3$ 23. $\mathbb{A}xb3$ the ending is a little better for White.



14... $\mathbb{Q}f6!?$ N

This looks like the most straightforward route to a good position, although it is also possible to play 14... $\mathbb{W}xe4$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}dxe6$ $\mathbb{F}xe6$ 16. $\mathbb{E}fe1$, Tsymbalov – Skripko, corr. 1990, and now 16... $\mathbb{Q}xf4!N$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ $\mathbb{W}f5$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 19. $\mathbb{E}ad1$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ Black's chances are not worse in this position with two minor pieces versus a rook.

15. c3

15. $\mathbb{Q}fxe6!?$ gets nowhere after: 15... $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $\mathbb{F}xe6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xe6\#$ $\mathbb{Q}h8\#$

15... $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ 17. $\mathbb{W}xg5$ $\mathbb{A}a7!$ 18. e5

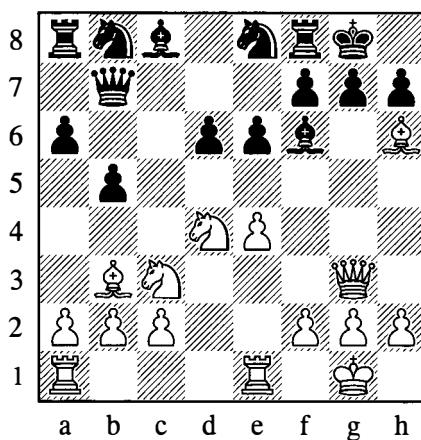
It is hard to suggest anything else against the dual threats of ...e5 and ... $\mathbb{W}xe4$.

18... $\mathbb{d}xe5$ 19. $\mathbb{W}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$

Black will follow up with ...e5, when White will be forced to sacrifice a piece for limited compensation.

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

This has seldom been seen, but it looks quite promising. The most popular move has been 13... $\mathbb{Q}h8$, leading to similar positions to those reached in the 13. $\mathbb{E}ad1$ line mentioned in the previous note.



14. $\mathbb{Q}f3$

This is a standard motif in the 6. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ variation; White hopes to carry out an attack based on fluid piece play.

14. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ (14... b4! N 15. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{W}xe4$ looks risky but is not easy to refute.) 15. a3 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ saw Black complete development with a solid game in J. Smith – Grabski, e-mail 1997.

14... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 15. $\mathbb{E}ad1$ a5!

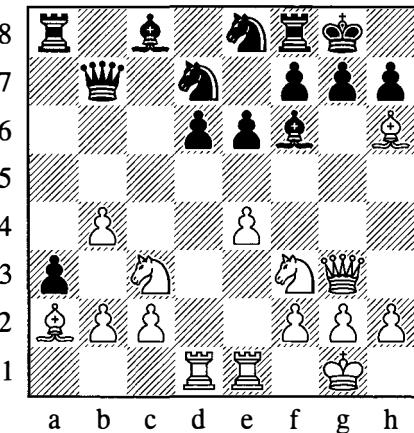
Here we see the idea referred to in the note to Black's 11th move. By eschewing the early ...b4, Black has created the much more serious threat of ...a4, trapping the bishop.

16. a3

16. a4N was the lesser evil, although White may have been put off by 16... $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 17. $\mathbb{B}xc3$ $\mathbb{Q}c5!$ with strong counterplay.

16...a4 17.Qa2 b4 18.axb4 a3!?

This poses awkward problems for White, although there was nothing wrong with the simple recapture on b4 when Black also maintains some initiative.

**19.e5!?**

Already in difficulties, White tries to complicate the game.

19...Qxe5 20.Qe4?

The best chance was 20.Qxe5N Qxe5 21.Qf4 (21.Qxe5?! dx5 22.bxa3 Qxa3 23.Qc1 Qa8 is difficult for White) 21...Qxf4 22.Qxf4 axb2 23.Qb1 White will regain the lost pawn, with some chances to equalize.

20...Qg6!?

20...Qxf3† also looks strong.

21.Qg5 axb2 22.Qxf6 Qxf6 23.Qxf6† gxf6**24.Qb1 Qxb4†**

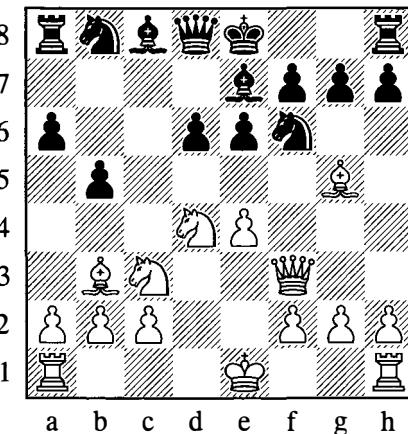
We have been following the game Gdanski – Kempinski, Warsaw 1997. White failed to generate any real attacking chances and soon lost.

C2) 8.Qg5

Here we see White playing more aggressively, retaining the option of long castling.

8...Qe7 9.Wf3

White is applying the well known strategy from the famous 6.Qg5 variation: mobilize in an instant, with the aim of delivering a knockout blow before the opponent completes his development.

**9...Wc7**

Although I fully believe in Black's chances in the main line, the play can become incredibly sharp, and for this reason I would like to mention an offbeat but fully playable alternative, just in case some hot new novelty throws Black's play into question. (I would be surprised if it happened, but you never know...)

Thus I present:

9...Ra7!?

This has seldom been seen, but it seems quite reasonable.

10.0–0–0

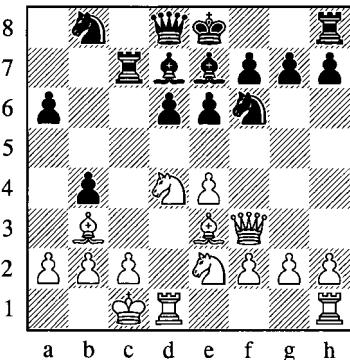
This is obviously the critical continuation.

10.0–0 0–0 might be compared with section C1 above. Play might continue 11.Qfe1 Rc7 12.Wg3 Qc6 13.Qxc6 Rxc6 14.Qh6 Qe8 Black has a solid position and can only be slightly worse, if at all.

10...b4

Amazingly this natural move only appears in two games on my database.

11.Qce2 Qd7 12.Qe3 Rc7



13.g4

The other principled continuation is 13.♗g3 N g6 14.e5 ♘h5! (14...dxe5 15.♗xe5 0–0 16.h4 ♘c8±) 15.♗g4 dxe5 16.♘f3 ♘f6

17.♗h3 ♘c6 18.♗b6 ♘b8 19.♗xc7 ♘xc7∞

The compensation for the exchange is healthier than White would have hoped.

13...♘c6 14.g5

This is consistent, but it turns out badly for White. Still, it is not clear if he could do any better with 14.♗g2 ♘xd4 15.♘xd4 a5 16.g5 a4! 17.gxf6 ♘xf6 18.♗g3 axb3 19.♘xb3 ♘c8† Black's strong bishops give him excellent chances.

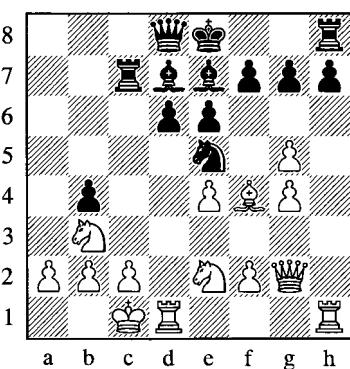
14...♘e5 15.♗g2

15.gxf6 does not work due to 15...♘xf3 16.fxe7 ♘a8! 17.♘xf3 a5† with difficult problems for White.

15...♘fg4 16.♗f4 a5?

Also quite playable was 16...♗xg5N 17.h3 ♘xf4† 18.♘xf4 ♘f6 19.♗xg7 ♘g8 20.♗h6 ♘e7 with equality.

17.h3 a4 18.hxg4 axb3 19.♘xb3



19...♗a8

19...♗c8N also looks good.

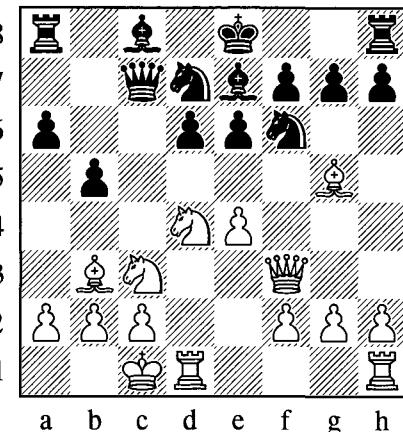
20.♗b1 ♘c6

Black had promising compensation for the sacrificed pawn in Adla – Rotstein, Port Barcares 2005.

After the main move White can choose between C21) 10.0–0–0 and C22) 10.e5.

C21) 10.0–0–0 ♘bd7

Black needs to bring the pieces out very quickly, but he must also be careful about his potentially vulnerable e6-pawn.



We will now consider C211) 11.♗xf6, C212) 11.♗g3 and C213) 11.e5.

The immediate 11.♗xe6? does not work: 11...♘e5 12.♗h3 fxe6 13.♗xe6 ♘xe6 14.♗xe6 ♘d7 15.♗b3 ♘c4 and White had no compensation in Munteanu – Calotescu, Sovata 2001.

The only other move worth mentioning is:

11.♗he1 0–0 12.♗g3

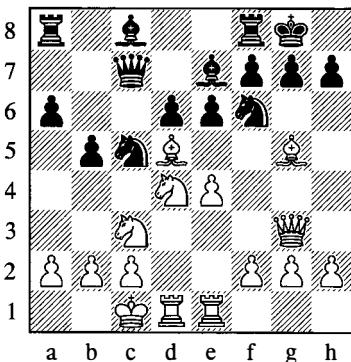
There is also 12.♗h3 ♘c5 13.f4 b4 (or 13...♗b7 14.e5 dxe5 15.fxe5 ♘d5 16.♗xe7 ♘xe7 17.♗xe6 b4! 18.♗ce2 fxe6 19.♗xe6 ♘a5 20.♗xf8 ♘xf8 21.♗b1 ♘d5 22.♗c1

$\mathbb{W}c7\mp$ Finnie – Berclaz, corr. 2002) 14.e5 dx5 15.fxe5 bxc3 16.exf6 $\mathbb{Q}xb3\uparrow$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xb3$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{W}f4\uparrow$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{W}xf6$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ $\mathbb{Q}b7\mp$ The complications have subsided to leave a simplified position with a definite plus for Black, Timmerman – Soltau, corr. 1986.

12... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}d5?$

White finds an interesting way to complicate the game.

He is not really helped by 13. $\mathbb{Q}h6$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 14.h4 $\mathbb{Q}h8!$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}f6\mp$ G. Hernandez – Gelfand, Merida 2003.



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

Also possible is 13...exd5 14. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{W}d8$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}c6$ $\mathbb{Q}h4!$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}de7\uparrow$!N (17. $\mathbb{W}c3?$ Devangi – Saranya, Chakradharpur 2009, 17... $\mathbb{W}g5\uparrow$ N–+) 17... $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ when Black's three pieces are roughly an even match for White's queen and pawn, although either player might try for the win.

14.exd5 $\mathbb{Q}xg5\uparrow$ 15. $\mathbb{W}xg5$ e5 16. $\mathbb{Q}c6$ f6 17. $\mathbb{W}h4$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}e3$

This position was reached in Tuturin – G. Pinter, Budapest 1999, and here I would suggest:

18... $\mathbb{Q}xc6$!N 19.dxc6 $\mathbb{W}xc6$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}a7\infty$

White obviously has some compensation – but is it enough?

C211) 11. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$

The idea of exchanging the attacking bishop was born out of frustration with the main line. White hopes to advance the g-pawn and create havoc before Black can get fully organized.

11... $\mathbb{Q}xf6$

I spent some time analysing the cheeky bishop recapture 11... $\mathbb{Q}xf6?!$, but unfortunately it looks dubious after 12. $\mathbb{Q}xe6!$ (The tempting 12. $\mathbb{Q}dx5?!$ does not work so well after 12...axb5 13. $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ $\mathbb{W}c6$!N 14. $\mathbb{Q}xd6\uparrow$ [14.e5? $\mathbb{W}xf3$ 15.gxf3 $\mathbb{Q}xe5$] 16. $\mathbb{Q}c7\uparrow$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xa8$ $\mathbb{Q}b7\rightarrow$] 14... $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 15. $\mathbb{W}e3$ $\mathbb{W}c5$ 16. $\mathbb{W}xc5$ $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 17.f4 $\mathbb{Q}e7\mp$ Black should have slightly better chances.) 12...fxe6 13. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $\mathbb{W}c6$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}g5\uparrow$ with a dangerous attack, Kovacevic – Palac, Pula 1990.

12.g4 b4 13. $\mathbb{Q}ce2$

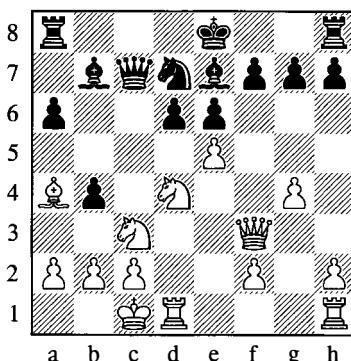
So far nobody seems to have tested the tempting bishop check:

13. $\mathbb{Q}a4\uparrow$!N $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 14.e5

Feeble is 14. $\mathbb{Q}ce2$ 0–0 15. $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ $\mathbb{Q}xd7\mp$. 14... $\mathbb{Q}b7?$

The position is rather volatile, and both players must proceed with great care.

14...dxe5? runs into the powerful retort 15. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ fxe6 16. $\mathbb{Q}xd7!$ $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 17. $\mathbb{W}xa8\uparrow$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 18. $\mathbb{W}xh8$ $\mathbb{W}b7$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ bxc3 20. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{W}b4$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ cxb2 22. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}b5$ 23.h3± Black does not have enough compensation for the missing material.



15.♗e4!

Now it is White's turn to calculate carefully. He had better avoid: 15.exd6? ♗xf3 16.dxc7 ♔g5† 17.♔b1 ♔xh1 18.♗de2 bxc3 19.c8=♔† ♕xc8 20.♔xd7† ♔e7 21.♔xc8 ♕xc8 22.♔xh1 cxb2†

15...d5 16.♗g3!

16.♔xd7† ♕xd7 17.♗d6† ♔xd6 18.exd6 ♕xd6 19.♔he1 0–0†

16...0–0

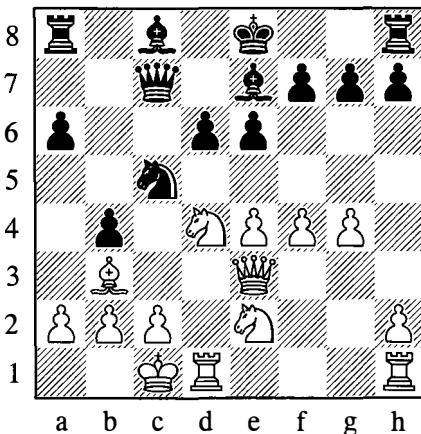
16...♗xe5 might just be playable, although Black will have to endure some tricky moments after 17.♗g5!.

17.♔xd7 ♕xd7 18.♗h5 ♕fc8†

Black's chances are higher in this position involving mutual attacks. The plan of ...a5-a4 and ...b3 is tough to meet, and Black's bishops have tremendous potential.

13...♗d7 14.♗e3 ♗c5 15.f4

We have been following the game Nisipeanu – Blomqvist, Kallithea 2008. Here I suggest a slight refinement for Black:



15...a5!N

This looks more to the point than 15...♗d7, although even this was still enough to bring Black some advantage. The game continued 16.♔b1 a5 17.f5 e5 18.♗f3 ♗xb3 19.♕xb3, and now after 19...♗b8N 20.g5 a4 21.♗d3 a3† Black is clearly ahead in the attacking race.

16.♔c4 a4

White will have a hard time defending his king. His most principled response seems to be:

17.♔b5 ♕b6 18.♗d4

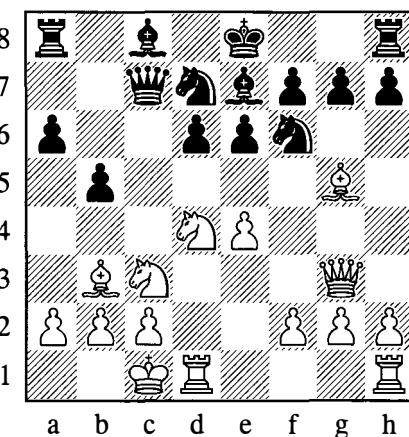
But here Black can calmly sacrifice a pawn:

18...0–0! 19.♔xd6 ♕d8 20.e5 ♔b7 21.♔hf1 b3†

With a strong attack.

C212) 11.♕g3

This smart queen move demands careful handling, but if Black responds correctly he will be in excellent shape.



11...♗c5

Black can also obtain a fine game with 11...b4 12.♔xf6, Zambrana – Alvarez Marquez, Yucay 2001, and now 12...♗xf6!N (The game continuation of 12...♗xf6 might have led to serious complications after 13.e5!N, resulting in eventual equality.) 13.♔a4 0–0 14.♔he1 ♗e5 15.f4 ♗g6† Black's advantage is rather limited, but the two bishops are still worth something.

12.♗d5!?

This looks like the only way to create any serious practical difficulties.

It is worth paying attention to the following trick: 12.f3? b4 13.Qce2 Qfxe4!–+

The thematic 12.Qf5?! is a spirited approach, but ultimately an unsound one. The sacrifice is refuted as follows: 12...exf5 13.Qxf6 Qxf6 14.Qd5 Wd8 15.Qxf6† Wxf6 16.Qxd6 Qxb3† 17.axb3 f4! 18.Wd3 Qe6–+

Finally, 12.Qhe1 looks too slow. 12...Qb7 13.e5 dxe5 14.Qxe5 b4 15.Qf5?! Other knight moves would allow ...Qfe4. 15...exf5 16.Qdel 0–0 Black converted his extra piece in Maslak – Magoo, Dos Hermanas 2003.

12...Qb8!

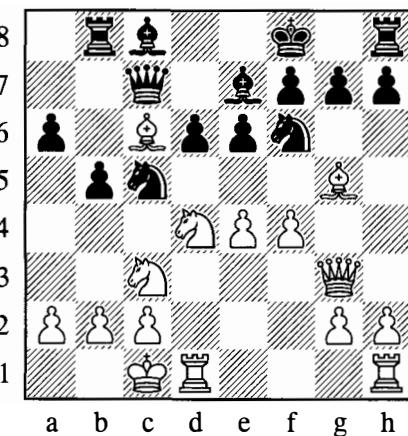
Black should resist the bait: 12...exd5? 13.Qxf6 Qxf6 14.Qxd5 Wd8 15.Qc6 Qh4 16.Wc3 Wg5† 17.f4 Wh6 18.g3 Qb7 19.Qc7† Qf8 20.Qxa8 Qxc6 21.Qhe1±

13.Qc6†

White is not helped by: 13.Qc6 b4! 14.Qxb8 (14.Qxe7 bxc3 15.Qxf6 gxf6 16.Qxc8 cxb2† 17.Qb1 Qxc8–+) 14...bxс3 15.Qc6† Qf8 16.Qxf6 gxf6 17.Wxc3 Wxb8 Not only is White's rook no match for Black's two minor pieces, but he also has to worry about the insecure position of his bishop on c6.

13...Qf8 14.f4

14.Qhe1 h6! leaves White without a good answer.



14...h6 15.Qh4

White can try to complicate the game with 15.e5?!, but ultimately it will not solve his problems: 15...hxg5 16.exf6 Qxf6 17.fxg5 Qxd4 (17...Qe5? 18.Wf3 Qb6†) 18.Qxd4 e5 19.Qh4 Qxh4 20.Qxh4 Wxc6 21.Qh8† Qe7 22.Qd1 Qg4 23.Wxb8 Qxd1† The endgame will be tough for White to hold.

15...b4 16.Qce2!?

I wanted to see if White could improve over 16.Qa4 Qcxe4† as seen in Illescas Cordoba – Gelfand, Linares 1990. White had no compensation and Gelfand duly converted his advantage.

16...Qcxe4

Black should not try to be too clever with 16...e5? 17.fxe5 dxe5 18.Qxf6 Qxf6 19.Qd5 Qb7 20.Qxb7 Wxb7 21.Qb3 Qxe4 22.Wf3 g6† Black is only slightly better as his king is less than ideally placed.

17.Qxe4 Qxe4 18.Qxe7† Wxe7 19.We1 Wc7†

White has no real compensation for the missing pawn.

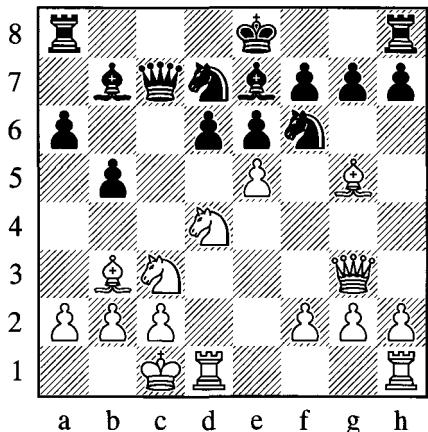
C213) 11.e5

This is White's most aggressive try, and probably the only way to mount a serious challenge to the black position.

11...Qb7 12.Wg3

12.exd6? Qxf3 13.dxc7 Qxd1 14.Qxd1 Ec8 15.Qf4 Qh5† White will not be able to hold onto his proud c7-pawn.

12.Wh3 dxe5 13.Qxf6 Qxf6 14.Qxe6 fxe6 15.Wxe6 Ef8 16.Qhe1 Qc8 (16...Qd8 also looks good enough) 17.Wxe5 Wxe5 18.Qxe5 Ea7 Black soon converted his material advantage in Vovk – Borovikov, Poltava 2008.

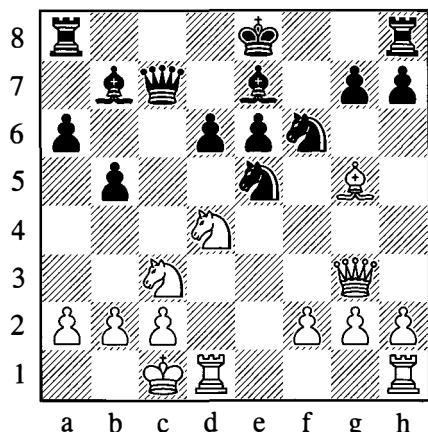


In this sharp position I have chosen to cover two alternatives for Black: C2131) 12...♝xe5 and C2132) 12...dxe5. The former is “safe”, in the sense that the main line seems to lead to a forced draw after accurate play from both sides. The latter is an attempt to play for an advantage, and tends to lead to unclear positions with chances for both sides.

C2131) 12...♝xe5 13.♕xe6

Without this White’s previous play would make no sense, for instance 13.f4? ♜c4 14.♖he1 0–0+ and White is a pawn down for nothing.

13...fxe6



14.f4

In Lahno – Novikov, Montreal 2004, White played the weaker:

14.♗xe6?!

This enables Black to consolidate his extra material, but it is important to be precise.

14...♛d7!N

I will not analyse the game continuation of 14...♛c8 in any great detail. Black should eventually keep some advantage here as well, but it is more useful to keep the queen on the second rank where she helps to defend the e7-bishop as well as keeping the eighth rank clear for the a8-rook to switch to the kingside.

15.♗xg7† ♛f7 16.♖he1

16.♔xf6 ♔xf6 17.♔h5 ♕f5 18.♔xf6 ♕xf6+ 16.f4 ♐g6 17.♔xf6 ♔xf6 18.♔h5 ♔h4 19.♗d3 ♕g4 20.♗xd6 ♕he8+

16...♗ag8! 17.f4 ♐f3! 18.gxf3 ♕xg7 19.♕f2 ♕e8+

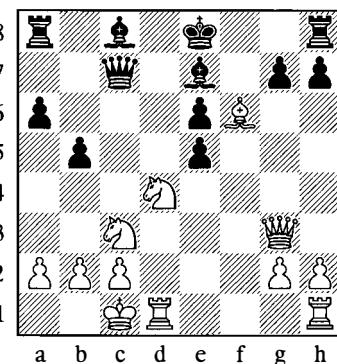
With the help of some accurate moves, Black has reached a position with excellent chances to convert the material advantage.

14...♝f7

This has more or less been analysed out to a forced draw. From a theoretical perspective this can be considered a success for Black; nevertheless if the reader is not satisfied with this he may wish to investigate:

14...♛c8?! 15.fxe5 dxe5 16.♔xf6

If 16.♖he1, Doghri – Bluvshtein, Turin 2006, 16...b4!N 17.♔xf6 gxf6 18.♔e4 ♕f8 19.♔f3 ♔b7+ White has to fight for draw.



16... $\mathbb{Q}xf6$

16... $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ is also playable, for instance:
 17. $\mathbb{W}g7$ $\mathbb{E}f8$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 19. $\mathbb{W}h6$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$
 20. $\mathbb{E}hf1$ $\mathbb{E}f7$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $fxg5$ 22. $\mathbb{W}xe6\#$ $\mathbb{W}e7$
 23. $\mathbb{W}xf7\#$ $\mathbb{W}xf7$ 24. $\mathbb{E}xf7$ $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ 25. $\mathbb{E}d7\#$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$
 26. $\mathbb{E}xb7$ $g4=$ The endgame is about equal,
 but the rook on a8 deserves a better fate.

17. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 0–0 18. $\mathbb{E}hf1$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 19. $\mathbb{E}f3N$

This improves over 19. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ Freydl – Karkuth, e-mail 2004, 19... $\mathbb{W}c4N$ when Black is doing well.

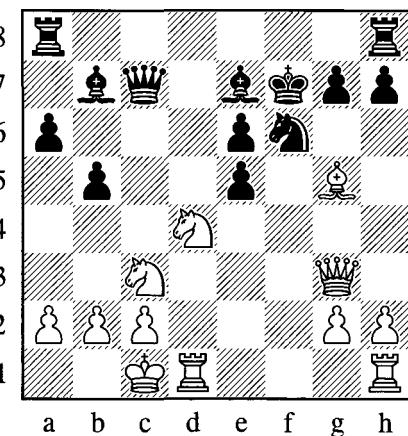
19... $\mathbb{E}a7!$

Defending along the second rank is often an important motif in the Najdorf. Now my main line continues:

20. $\mathbb{E}c3$ $\mathbb{W}b6$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{E}d7$ 22. $\mathbb{E}xd7$ $\mathbb{Q}xd7$
 23. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $gxf6$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$

The chances are approximately equal, but everything is still to play for.

15. $fxe5$ $dxe5$



16. $\mathbb{Q}xe6!$

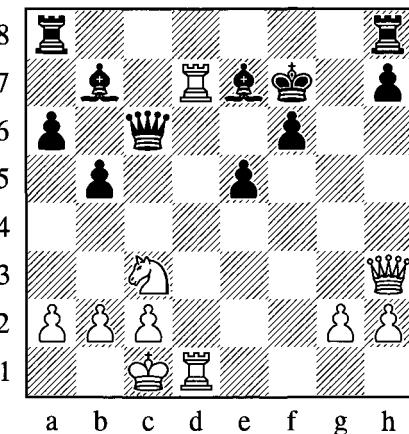
This is the justification for White's play, without which he would be suffering, for instance: 16. $\mathbb{Q}f3?$ $b4$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xe5\#$ $\mathbb{Q}e8!$ (17... $\mathbb{Q}g8$ is unnecessarily complicated after 18. $\mathbb{E}hf1!$) 18. $\mathbb{Q}g6$ $\mathbb{W}xg3$ 19. $hxg3$ $bcx3$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xh8$ $cxb2\#$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ Black will soon round up the trapped knight, with a near-decisive advantage in the endgame.

16... $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ 17. $\mathbb{W}h3\#$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $gxf6$

19. $\mathbb{E}d7$ $\mathbb{W}c6$

Another game finished 19... $\mathbb{W}c8$ 20. $\mathbb{E}hd1$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 21. $\mathbb{W}h5\#$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 22. $\mathbb{W}h6\#$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 23. $\mathbb{W}h5\#$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 24. $\mathbb{W}h6\#$ $\frac{1}{2}-\frac{1}{2}$ Ris – Ibrahimov, Hoogeveen 2006.

20. $\mathbb{E}hd1$



20... $\mathbb{E}ad8$

Black does not have time for 20... $h5??$
 21. $\mathbb{Q}d5\#$

20... $\mathbb{W}xg2$ 21. $\mathbb{E}xe7\#$ $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ 22. $\mathbb{E}d7\#$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$
 23. $\mathbb{W}e6$ $\mathbb{W}g1\#$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{W}g5\#$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{W}g6$
 26. $\mathbb{W}e7\#$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 27. $\mathbb{W}e6\#$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ is another forced draw.

21. $\mathbb{W}h5\#$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 22. $\mathbb{W}h3\#$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$

A slightly more interesting route to the same result would be 22... $f5??$ 23. $\mathbb{W}h6\#$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$, Konguvel – Ramesh, Badalona 2006. At this point White could have secured the half point with 24. $\mathbb{E}1d6!N$ $\mathbb{W}xd7$ 25. $\mathbb{W}h5\#$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ (25... $\mathbb{Q}g8??$ 26. $\mathbb{E}xd7$ $\mathbb{E}xd7$ 27. $\mathbb{W}e8\#$ –) 26. $\mathbb{W}h6\#$ with a perpetual.

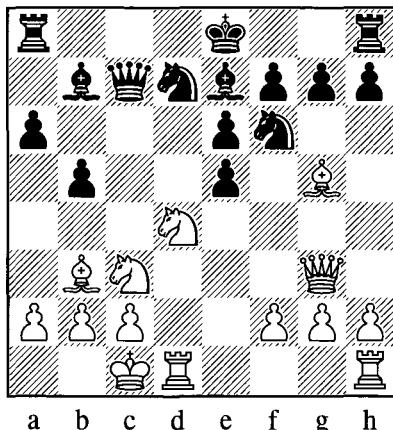
23. $\mathbb{W}h5\#$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$

$\frac{1}{2}-\frac{1}{2}$

Nisipeanu – Karjakin, Foros 2006.

C2132) 12...dxe5!?

This is a slightly riskier continuation, but probably the best bet if Black is determined to play for a win.

**13.Qxe6 fxe6**

The risky 13...Qb6? was seen in L. Williams – Amonatov, Turin 2006, and here 14.Qb3!N would have been strong. The main threat is Qf5, and the tempting 14...Qh5 runs into 15.Qdxb5! axb5 16.Qxb5 Qc5 17.Qxe7 Qxe7 18.Qg4±.

If Black is looking for a simple, low-theory solution then 13...Qc5!? looks fine. Play continues 14.Qxf6 Qxf6 15.Qd5 0–0 with everything to play for, Gallego Alcaraz – Valdes Escobar, Cali 2008.

14.Qxe6 Qc6

14...Qc4 is also playable, but I prefer to focus on the text move.

15.Qxg7† Qf7 16.Qxf6

Another game continued 16.Qf5 Qf8 17.Qhe1?(Better was 17.Qxf6N Qxf6 18.Qxe5, transposing to the main line below.) 17...Qe8 18.Qh3 Qe6 19.f4 e4 20.g4 h5! 21.Qxf6 Qxf6 22.g5 Qc8 23.gxf6 Qxf5+ Saric – Cheparinov, Dresden 2007.

16...Qxf6 17.Qf5

The feeble 17.Qxe5? was played in Hidzoš – Kanakaris, Kallithea Halkidiki 2009, and now 17...Qc5!N would have killed White's compensation.

17...Qf8

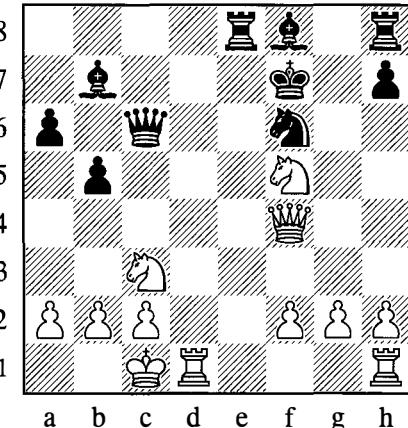
Black should certainly avoid 17...Qxg2? 18.Qxe5 Qg5† 19.f4 Qg4 20.Qd6† Qg6 21.Qe6†+– Bakhmatov – Roeder, Vlissingen 2003.

18.Qxe5

18.Qhe1? Qg8 19.Qxe5 Qe8 20.Qd4 Qxe1 21.Qxel Qxg2 was winning for Black in Shirjaev – Pushkarev, Novokuznetsk 2007.

18...Qe8 19.Qf4

We have been following the game Kilpatrick – Gritsenko, Herceg Novi 2006. Here Black should have played:

**19...Qc8!N**

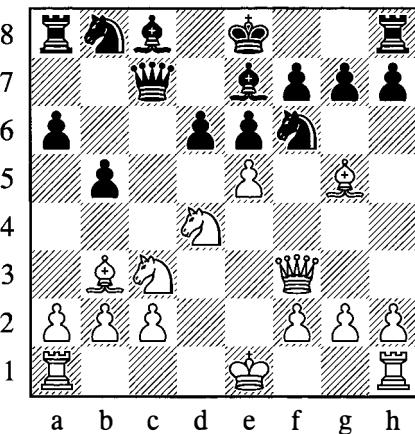
Defending against the threat of Qd6† by ensuring that the recapture Qxd6 will not hit the queen. Instead the game continuation of 19...h5? soon led to disaster after 20.Qd6† Qg6 21.Qf5† Qg7 22.Qg5† Qh7 23.Qxf6 White had regained his piece while keeping three extra pawns, and went on to win easily.

20.f3

20.♕d6† ♜xd6 21.♗xd6 ♜e6 22.♗hd1 ♜he8†

20...♝g8

Black's chances should be slightly higher as long as he continues to play carefully.

C22) 10.e5

White has done everything to prepare for the immediate start of the serious conflict.

10...♝b7 11.exd6

White must swap on d6, otherwise his pieces will not coordinate: 11.♗g3? dx5 12.0–0–0 b4 13.♕xf6 ♜xf6 14.♗ce2 0–0†

11...♜xd6 12.♝e3

The queen controls lots of important squares from e3. 12.♝e2?! ♜c6 13.♗f5 0–0–0 14.♗xd6† ♜xd6 15.♗e3 ♜d4 16.♗xd4 ♜xd4†

At this point I would like to draw your attention to two very different options for Black. The first, **C221) 12...♝c5**, is the main line. It leads to razor-sharp complications, which should not be unfavourable to Black. The second, **C222) 12...♝c6**, is a rare but in my opinion fully playable alternative. I can imagine each

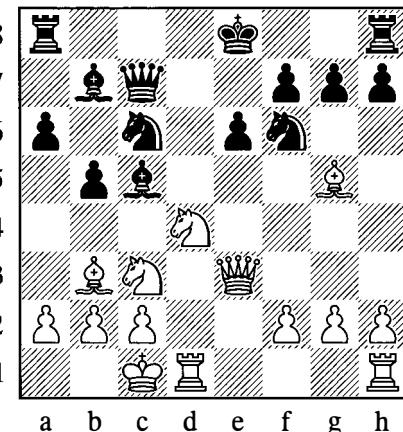
move appealing to different types of players, so please take a look at both and play whichever one you prefer.

C221) 12...♝c5 13.0–0–0

This aggressive move is the only one that is likely to trouble the defender.

13...♝c6

There is an intriguing alternative available in 13...♝bd7?! intending to meet 14.♗xe6 with 14...0–0!, sacrificing a pawn to fight for the initiative. If for some reason the reader is dissatisfied with either of my two main recommendations, he may find this an interesting direction for independent investigation.



Now we will consider the remarkable **C2211) 14.♛xe6†?!**, followed by the main line of **C2212) 14.♕xf6**.

C2211) 14.♛xe6†?!

At first glance this looks like the kind of move that might be fun for a blitz game but not much else. However, it has been in the limelight ever since 2008 when Ivanchuk used it to defeat Karjakin.

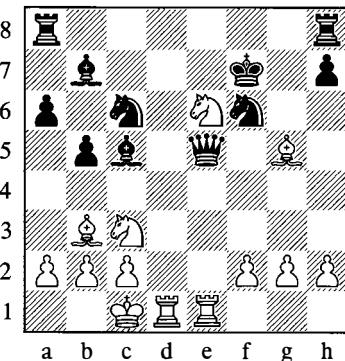
14...fxe6 15.♕xe6 ♜e7

The alternative is:

15...♜e5

This is somewhat risky, as Black relinquishes the defence of the g7-pawn and thus helps the opponent to develop his attack. Nevertheless the move may still be playable.

16.♕xg7† ♔f8 17.♕e6† ♔f7 18.♔he1

**18...♝xf2!N**

Sadly for Black this modest move seems to be the best choice, as it is essential to tame White's attacking enthusiasm.

18...♝xe1? 19.♕xc5† ♔g6 20.♕xe1 ♔xg5 21.♕xb7 ♕d4 22.♕d6† was painful for Black in Ivanchuk – Karjakin, Nice 2008.
18...♝xf2† 19.♕xg5† ♔g6 20.♕ge4 ♜e7 21.♕xf6 ♜xf6 22.♕d7 ♔g5† (22...♜c8 23.♕d6 ♕d4 24.♕d5 ♜a7 25.♕e4†) 23.♕b1 ♕d8 24.♕d5† Such a position full of attacking pieces cannot be pleasant for the defence.

19.♕xe5 ♕xe5 20.♕d8† ♔g6 21.♕xf6 ♜xf6 22.♕xb7 ♜hf8 23.♕e4† ♔g7

The endgame should be about equal.

16.♔he1

The alternative is:

16.♕d5N ♕d4

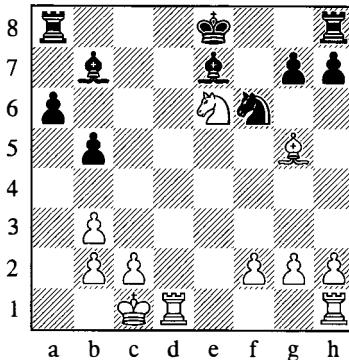
16...♕xd5 should lead to equality as follows:

17.♕xe7 ♜xe7 18.♕xd5 ♕d7?! 19.♕xg7 (19.♔he1 ♜f6 20.♕xg7 ♜xg7 21.♕e6† ♜c7 22.♕d7† ♜b6 23.♕xg7 ♜ae8 24.♕e3 ♜hf8†)

19...♝f6 (19...♜af8 20.f4 ♜xf4 21.♔hel ♜g5 22.♕e6 ♜h6 23.♕xf4 ♜xf4† 24.♕b1 ♜xh2=) 20.♕e6 ♜ae8 21.♔hel ♜c8 22.f4=

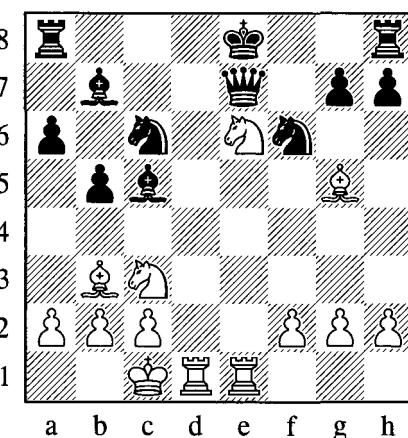
17.♕xe7 ♜xb3†

17...♕xe6 should also be playable, but the text is more interesting.

18.axb3 ♜xe7**19.♕c7†**

19.♕xf6 ♜xf6 20.♔he1 ♜b8 21.♕c5† ♜f8 22.♕d7† ♜f7 23.♕xb8 ♜xb8 24.f3 ♜c8†
19...♔f7 20.♕xa8 ♜xa8 21.f3 h6 22.♕f4 22.♕xf6 ♜xf6 23.♔he1 ♜c6†
22...♕d5 23.♕e5 ♜e8 24.♔he1 ♜c5

Out of several equalizing variations, this seems to be one that offers the most winning chances for Black, although even here I am not sure if the second player can really claim any objective advantage.



16... $\mathbb{W}xe6!$

The amazing ideas are overflowing in this fascinating position. Black kills the most dangerous attacker and remains with an extra piece for two pawns.

17. $\mathbb{E}xe6\ddagger$

No better is 17. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$, for instance: 18. $\mathbb{E}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}g4$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 20. $\mathbb{E}xe7\ddagger$ $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ 21. $\mathbb{E}d7\ddagger$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $gxf6$ 23. $\mathbb{E}xb7$ $\mathbb{E}g8$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{E}a7\ddagger$ Black has good chances to convert his extra exchange.

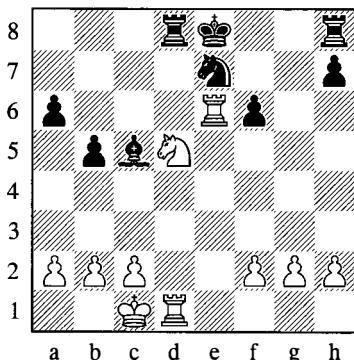
17... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 18. $\mathbb{E}de1$

This looks like White's best chance. Less accurate is:

18. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $gxf6$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}d5N$

This was my attempt to improve over 19. $\mathbb{E}de1$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 21. $\mathbb{E}1xe4$ $f5$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}4e5$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 23. $\mathbb{E}e1$ $\mathbb{E}ad8$ 24. $\mathbb{E}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 25. $\mathbb{E}f6$ $\mathbb{E}df8$ 26. $\mathbb{E}h6$ $\mathbb{Q}c7\ddagger$ Black will have to work hard, but he was the only one aspiring for the point in Andrews – Gopal, Philadelphia 2008.

White is also struggling after 19. $\mathbb{E}xf6N$ $\mathbb{E}f8$ 20. $\mathbb{E}xf8\ddagger$ $\mathbb{Q}xf8$ 21. $f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6\ddagger$.

19... $\mathbb{E}xd5$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{E}d8$ **21. $\mathbb{Q}xf6\ddagger$**

Or 21. $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ $\mathbb{Q}f7!$ 22. $\mathbb{E}del$ $\mathbb{E}de8$ 23. $\mathbb{E}xa6$ $\mathbb{E}xe7$ 24. $\mathbb{E}xe7\ddagger$ $\mathbb{Q}xe7\ddagger$

21... $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 22. $\mathbb{E}xd8$

22. $\mathbb{E}xa6?$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xh7$ $\mathbb{Q}xb2\ddagger$ (23... $\mathbb{E}xh7?$

24.c3=) 24. $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ $\mathbb{E}xd1$ Black should win easily with an extra rook.

22... $\mathbb{E}xd8$ 23. $\mathbb{E}xa6$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$

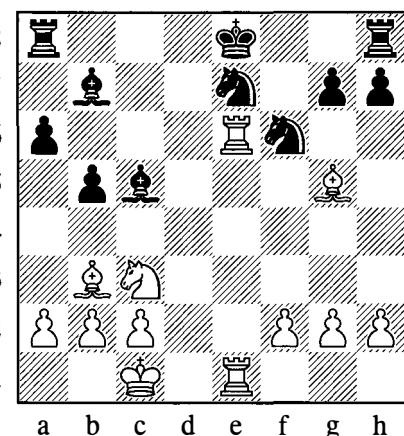
23... $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}g4$ $\mathbb{Q}g1$ 25.a4 $bxa4$ 26. $\mathbb{E}xa4\ddagger$

24. $\mathbb{Q}h5$

24.c4 $\mathbb{Q}f4\ddagger$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{E}d2\ddagger$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{E}xf2\ddagger$

24... $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 25.c3 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 26.a4 \ddagger

White keeps excellent chances to defend to a draw, but never “risks” playing for win.



The present position was reached in the game Novkovic – P. Papp, Rogaska Slatina 2009. Black has a few playable continuations, but my overall preference is for:

18... $\mathbb{E}d8N$

The aforementioned game continued 18... $\mathbb{E}xg2$ 19. $\mathbb{E}1e5!$ $\mathbb{E}c8$, and although Black eventually triumphed, at this point White could have obtained a slight edge with 20. $\mathbb{E}e3N$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3\ddagger$ 21. $\mathbb{E}xe3\pm$.

18...0–0–0N is a playable alternative, but having analysed the different options in some detail I think the king should be happy to remain in the centre.

19.a4!?

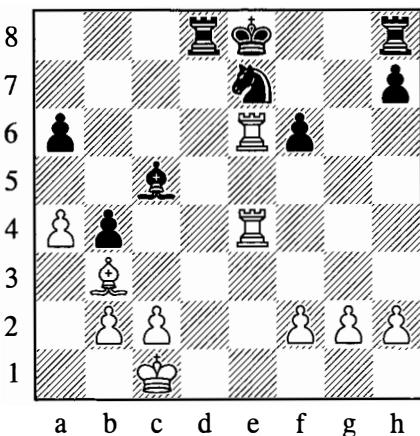
White can obtain a similar ending to that reached in the main line with: 19. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $gxf6$

20.♕e4 ♕xe4 21.♗1xe4 ♕d6 (21...f5 22.♗4e5 ♕d6 23.♗xf5 ♘f8 24.♗xf8† ♕xf8 25.g3=) 22.♗xf6 ♘f8 23.♗xf8† ♕xf8= The absence of the moves a2-a4 and ...b5-b4 does not alter the evaluation in any significant way.

19...b4

This seems simplest, although Black can also consider 19...♗b4?!, for instance: 20.f3 ♕d7 21.axb5 axb5 22.♗d1† ♕c8 23.♗xd8† ♘xd8 24.♗xb5 ♕ed5=

20.♗xf6 gxsf6 21.♗e4 ♕xe4 22.♗1xe4



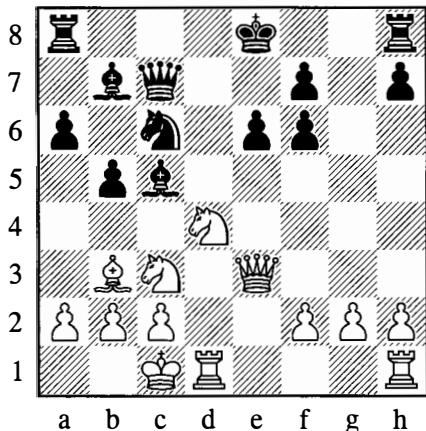
22...♗d6

There is no point in trying to save the f-pawn, as after 22...f5 White has 23.♗4e5 ♕d6 24.♗xf5, as pointed out by Morgado and Alvarez in *New In Chess Yearbook 87*. The same authors mention the possibility of the text move, without further analysis. Having investigated the position, I see no problems at all for Black.

23.♗xf6 ♘f8 24.♗xf8† ♕xf8 25.g3 ♔g7=

The endgame with three pawns versus a piece is balanced, but with some potential for either side to fight for a win.

C2212) 14.♗xf6 gxsf6



In this sharp position White has tried two moves: C22121) 15.♗e4 and C22122) 15.♗d5.

C22121) 15.♗e4

This active move forces Black to accept the sacrifice of the exchange in return for the f6-pawn.

15...♗xd4

15...♗e7? might quickly end in tears for Black after 16.♗f5! exf5? 17.♗xf6† ♕f8 18.♔h6#!

15...♗xd4N sets a nice trap, but is not a great move due to 16.♗xc5 (Black was hoping for 16.♗xf6†? ♕e7 17.♔g5 ♘f4†→) 16...♔xc5 (16...♗xb3† 17.axb3 ♘xg2 18.♔hg1±) 17.♗xd4 ♘e5 18.♔c3 ♘c8 19.♗hd1 0-0 20.♗b4 ♕h8 21.f3 Black's position is more or less playable, but it remains quite dangerous due to his sensitive king.

16.♗xd4 ♗xd4 17.♗xf6† ♕f8

Very enterprising is an attempt to keep the king on e7 in order to connect the black rooks: 17...♔e7? 18.♔xd4 ♘ad8 19.♔h4 ♕d6!N (19...♔f8? Taddei – Roeder, Le Touquet 2006, 20.♔h6†N ♕e7 21.♔e1±) 20.♗d1† ♕c5 Amazingly the king manages to pull off

a chessboard version of a circus trick, dodging bullets while balancing on a tightrope: 21.♗g5† ♜b6 22.♗e3† ♜c6 23.♗c3† ♜b6 24.♗d7†? ♜xd7 25.♗xd7 ♜xd7 26.♗xh8 a5! 27.c3 ♜d3= Black barely keeps equality.

18.♗xd4 ♜d8 19.♗h4

White must play energetically, otherwise Black will have little trouble organizing his position and winning with his extra exchange.

19.♗d7†? soon led to a hopeless situation for White after 19...♝e7 20.♗xe6 fxe6 21.♗d1 ♜d5 in Grimberg – Bromberger, Bavaria 2007.

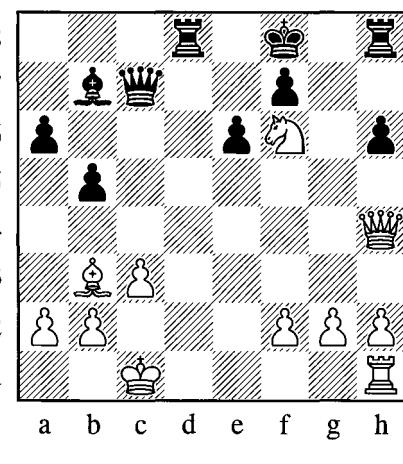
Not much better was 19.♗e3? h6 20.♗e1 ♜xg2 21.f4 (21.♗g4 ♜d5†) 21...♜h3 and Black soon won in Hardy – Oestergaard, e-mail 2001.

19...h6

19...♝e5 could transpose after 20.c3 h6, but White can also try 20.f4? ♜e3† 21.♗b1 ♜d2 22.♗d5!! which I analysed to a draw after 22...♗xd5 23.♗xd5 exd5 24.♗e1 ♜b6 25.♗e7† ♜g7 26.♗e3 ♜g8 27.a3 ♜h8 28.♗xf7 ♜xe3 29.♗f6† ♜g7 30.♗d8† with perpetual check.

The text move reduces White's options while offering a few extra ones for Black on the next move.

20.c3



20...♝e5

The computer wants to try the cheeky 20...♜xg2!N 21.♗g1 ♜h3!, which looks risky, but might appeal to players with strong nerves who trust in their defensive skills.

Another valid possibility is 20...♗d6?N 21.♗c2 ♜c4 22.♗h7† ♜xh7 23.♗xc4 bxc4 24.♗xh7 f5 25.♗g6 ♜xg2 with a roughly equal endgame.

21.♗h7†

21.f4 ♜e3† 22.♗b1 ♜d2 23.♗d1 ♜e4† 24.♗xe4 ♜xe4† 25.♗c1 ♜xd1† 26.♗xd1 ♜e3† 27.♗c2 ♜g7† was not what White was hoping for in Lobron – Novikov, Bad Wiessee 1999.

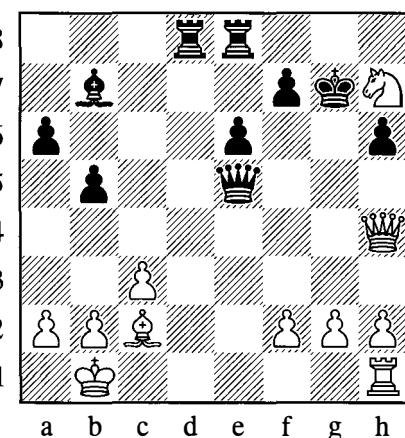
21...♝g7!N

Black has a safe route to a draw in 21...♝e8 when White has nothing better than repeating with 22.♗f6† ♜f8, after which a draw was shortly agreed in Kogan – Sutovsky, Ashdod 2006. The text is an attempt to prolong the game.

22.♗c2 ♜he8

The sobering news for Black is that he should not get carried away with overoptimistic attempts to play for the win, as can be illustrated by the line: 22...f5? 23.♗e7† ♜g6 24.h4 h5 25.g4+–

23.♗b1

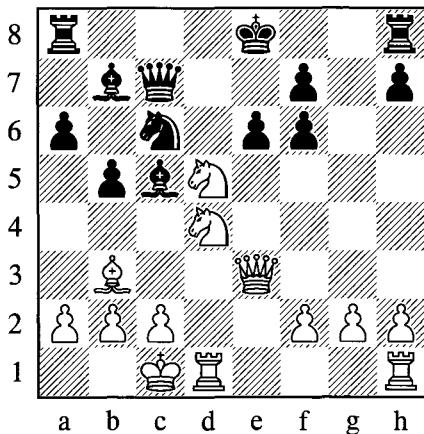


23...f5

Black does best to avoid the witty 23... ♔e4?! 24. ♕xe4 (24. ♜xe4? ♜xe4 25. ♕xe4 f5†) 24...f5 25. ♜c6 ♜d6 26.a3 (26. ♜xe8 ♜d3† 27. ♜c1 ♜d2†=) 26... ♜xc6 27. ♜f6 ♜xg2 28. ♜xe8† ♜xe8 29. ♜d4† ♜f7 30. ♜e1± The black king will remain a target for some time.

**24.f4 ♜c7 25. ♜f6 ♜f8 26. ♜h5† ♜h8
27. ♜e1 ♜d6**

The chances are about even, but the battle rages on.

C22122) 15. ♜d5

This largely unexplored jump of the knight is very interesting.

15... ♜d8

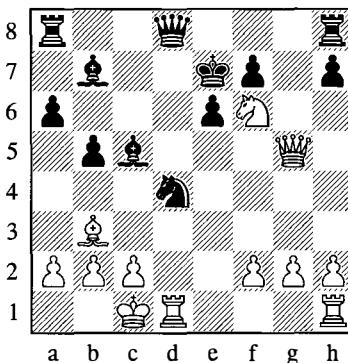
The exchange of queens may not solve all the problems despite the compact position of Black's pieces. 15... ♜e5 16. ♜xe5 ♜xe5 17. ♜c7† ♜e7 18. ♜xa8 ♜xa8 19. ♜he1 ♜xg2 20. ♜e3± White can continue to create problems in the endgame.

16. ♜f4

This is better than 16.c3?! ♜xd4 17.cxd4 ♜a7 18. ♜f4 (or 18. ♜c3 ♜e7) 18... ♜d6 when the mighty bishop pair tilted the scales in Black's favour in Papa – Karjakin, Lausanne 2003.

16... ♜xd4

Black can also consider the rarely-seen 16... ♜xd4?!, which appears risky but should be just about playable. 17. ♜xf6† ♜e7 (better than 17... ♜f8 18. ♜he1 ♜c8 19. ♜b1 h6 20. c3±) From this position I only found one game, which continued 18. ♜g5 (18. ♜h4N might lead to a draw after 18... ♜xg2 [adventurous players may gamble for a win with 18... h5?] 19. ♜he1 ♜f3 20. ♜xh7† ♜e8 21. ♜f6† ♜e7=; Another possibility is 18. ♜he1 ♜c8 [18... h6?] when the computer finds several possible drawing lines, but nothing more than that for White.)



18... ♜b6 (There is also 18... ♜c8!N 19. ♜e4† ♜e8 20. ♜xd8† ♜xd8 21. ♜xc5 ♜xg2 22. ♜he1 ♜e7 23. ♜xa6 ♜f3 Black should be better in this endgame, as his soon-to-be passed h-pawn will be a powerful force.) 19. ♜d5† ♜f8 20. ♜h6† ♜e8 21. ♜g7 This position was reached in Hegarty – Neuhauser, Dieppe 2009, and here Black could have obtained the upper hand with: 21... ♜xb3†N 22.axb3 ♜xd5! 23. ♜xh8† ♜e7 24. ♜xh7 ♜h8†

17. ♜c7†

Insufficient is 17. ♜he1? ♜e5 18. ♜xe5 fxe5 19. ♜f6† ♜e7 20. ♜g5 ♜d4 21.c3 (21. ♜g4† ♜f8 22. ♜xe5 ♜e2†! 23. ♜xe2 ♜g5†) 21... h6 22. ♜h4 (22. ♜xe5 ♜d6) 22... ♜f8 Black was defending successfully and went on to convert his extra material in J. Houska – Palliser, Swansea 2006.

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

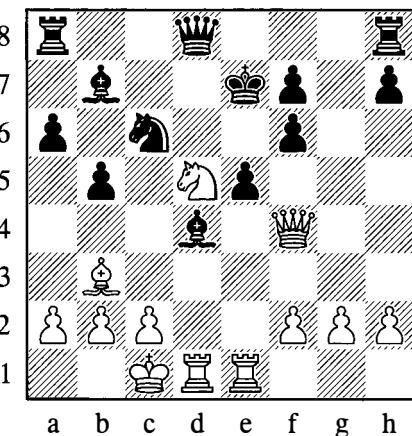
After 17... $\mathbb{Q}e7$?! 18. $\mathbb{Q}hel$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xa8$ $\mathbb{Q}xa8$ 20.c3± Black's life will not be sweet after dropping the exchange.

18. $\mathbb{Q}hel$ e5

Black can sacrifice an exchange in order to eliminate the queens, but the idea does not quite equalize: 18... $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ † $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xa8$ $\mathbb{Q}xa8$ 21.c3 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 22.cxd4† $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ b4 24.g3 a5 25. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ f5 26.b3± Pavasovic – Karjakin, Kallithea 2008.

19. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ †!

The obvious eating of the rook is worse: 19. $\mathbb{Q}xa8$ $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ †! 20. $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ exf4 22. $\mathbb{Q}c7$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ †

**19... $\mathbb{Q}d6$!**

19... $\mathbb{Q}d7$? 20. $\mathbb{W}f5$ † $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 21.c3 $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 22. $\mathbb{W}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ ±

20. $\mathbb{W}f5$

Another possibility is 20. $\mathbb{W}h4N$ a5!? (Or 20... $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 21.c3 f5 22. $\mathbb{W}xh7$ $\mathbb{Q}a5$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}xb3$ † 24.axb3 $\mathbb{W}f6$ 25. $\mathbb{W}xf5$ $\mathbb{W}xf5$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ † $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 27.cxd4 $\mathbb{B}xg2$ and the ending should be a draw.) 21. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 22.c3 $\mathbb{B}a6$ 23.f4 e4 24. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ † (24.cxd4? $\mathbb{Q}b4$ –+) 24... $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 25. $\mathbb{W}h5$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 26. $\mathbb{B}xe4$ ∞ This somewhat irrational position is about equal. White's active pieces

should provide enough compensation for the missing material.

20... $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 21. $\mathbb{W}f3$ h5 22. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 23. $\mathbb{W}d5$ † $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 24. $\mathbb{W}xf7$ † $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 25.f3 $\mathbb{B}f8$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ † $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 27. $\mathbb{W}g7$!

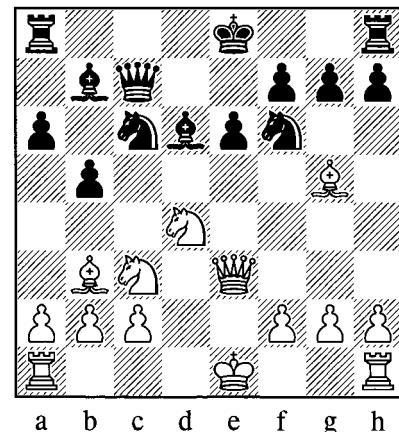
After the less accurate 27. $\mathbb{W}g6$?! $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 28. $\mathbb{W}xh5$ $\mathbb{Q}a7$ 29.f4 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ Black consolidated and eventually won with his extra piece in Marton Bardocz – A. Stephenson, Internet 2004.

27... $\mathbb{B}a7$ 28. $\mathbb{W}h6$ $\mathbb{B}h8$

In this position a draw was agreed in Marton Bardocz – Kuhne, e-mail 2006.

C222) 12... $\mathbb{Q}c6$!?

The main line is hugely fascinating, but there is no denying that it requires a tremendous amount of home preparation, not to mention strong nerves! The present variation is an interesting way for Black to surprise his opponent with a natural yet unusual development of the last minor piece.

**13. $\mathbb{Q}f5$**

Nothing else can remotely threaten Black:

13. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ is feeble, and after 13... $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ 14.0–0–0 0–0–0 Black already has the easier game.

No better is 13. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $gxf6$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 0–0–0 16. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{W}xc6$ 17. 0–0 $f5\bar{f}$ Black has an active position and the superior minor piece.

13...0–0–0 14. $\mathbb{Q}xd6\ddagger$

Obviously we should also pay attention to: 14. $\mathbb{Q}xg7$

After this move White wins material, but pays the price by handing the initiative to his opponent.

14... $\mathbb{Q}e5!N$

In Darvall – Jovanovic, Canberra 2001, Black preferred 14... $\mathbb{Q}e7$. The two moves can lead to the same positions in certain variations, but the main line reduces White's options slightly.

15. $\mathbb{Q}xe6!?$

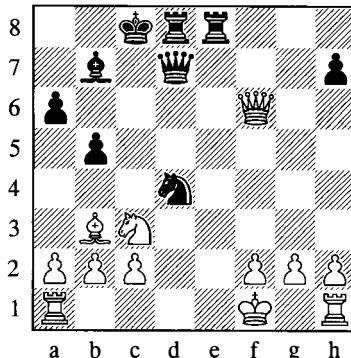
Quieter continuations are not very attractive as the knight on g7 is virtually trapped. One plausible continuation is 15.0–0 $\mathbb{Q}g4$ (The calm 15... $\mathbb{Q}b8!$? also deserves attention) 16. $\mathbb{W}h3$ (16. $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 17. $\mathbb{W}g5$ $\mathbb{B}g8$ 18. $\mathbb{W}xg4$ $\mathbb{B}xg7\bar{f}$) 16... $h5!$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xe6\ddagger$ $fxe6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $\mathbb{W}b6$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{W}c6\bar{f}$ Despite his material disadvantage, Black's tremendously active pieces are the dominant feature of the position.

15... $fxe6$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 17. $\mathbb{W}xe6\ddagger$ $\mathbb{W}d7?!$

Golubev mentioned the more natural-looking 17... $\mathbb{Q}b8$ in *Chess Today*, but the text move helps to set up certain attacking motifs on the light squares; see the note to White's 20th move below for a nice example.

18. $\mathbb{W}xf6$ $\mathbb{B}he8\ddagger$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$

White has three extra pawns, but the question is whether he will survive for long enough to use them. It would be reasonable to finish analysing here, but I decided it would be interesting to explore the position a bit more deeply:



20. $h4!$

White badly needs to get more pieces into play, and I believe this to be the best chance of doing so.

20. $\mathbb{Q}d1?$ is a nice way to set up a mating pattern exercise: 20... $\mathbb{Q}xg2\ddagger$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ $\mathbb{W}g4\ddagger$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{W}h3\ddagger$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}e2\ddagger$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ $\mathbb{Q}xd1\#$

20. $\mathbb{W}g5$ is somewhat more resilient, although Black should still prevail as follows: 20... $\mathbb{Q}xb3$ 21. $axb3$ $b4!$ 22. $\mathbb{W}c5\ddagger$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 23. $\mathbb{W}c4$ (23. $\mathbb{W}xb4$ is refuted by 23... $\mathbb{Q}xg2\ddagger$!) 24. $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ $\mathbb{W}c6\ddagger$ 25. $f3$ $\mathbb{Q}d2+-;$ 23. $f3$ $bxcc3$ 24. $bxcc3$ $\mathbb{W}e6+-$ The first player has all the pawns but Black is dominating the board.) 23... $bxcc3$ 24. $\mathbb{W}xa6\ddagger$ $\mathbb{W}b7$ 25. $\mathbb{W}xb7\ddagger$ $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ 26. $bxcc3$ $\mathbb{Q}d2+-$ White may temporarily have five pawns for a bishop, but his pieces are just pathetic.

20... $b4!$

This poses a tricky question to the opponent.

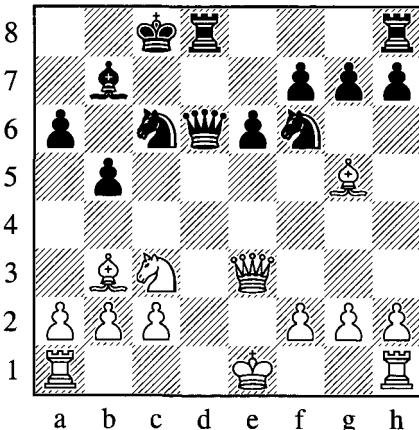
21. $\mathbb{Q}h3!?$

This looks like a better try than 21. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{W}g4$ 22. $f3$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 23. $gxf3$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 24. $\mathbb{W}g5$ $\mathbb{W}xg5$ 25. $hxg5$ $\mathbb{Q}xh1\bar{f}$.

21... $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 22. $\mathbb{W}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 23. $\mathbb{W}h2$ $bxcc3$ 24. $\mathbb{W}xc3\ddagger$ $\mathbb{Q}c6\bar{f}$

White has a slight material advantage, but he will have a hard time dealing with his opponent's continuing initiative.

14... $\mathbb{W}xd6$

**15.f3!**

White is trying to block the b7-bishop from taking an active role in the game. The first player gets nowhere with other moves:

15.0–0 ♕d4 16.♕fd1 was seen in Berbatov – Torrado Quintela, Cambados 2008. Now the best reply would have been 16...♛c5!N 17.♕xf6 (17.♕d3 ♔xb3 18.axb3 ♛xe3 gives Black a comfortable ending after either recapture.) 17...gxg6 18.♕e4 ♛e5 and Black is better.

15.♕d1 ♕d4

15...♛e5!N 16.0–0 ♛xe3 17.♕xe3 ♕xd1 18.♕xd1 ♕a5 is a safe path to equality.

16.f3

After 16.0–0N, 16...♛c5! reaches the above line with 15.0–0. (16...h6!?)

There is also nothing wrong with 16...♛c5, after which a draw was agreed in Alzate – Rohl Montes, Medellin 2003.

17.♕f4 ♛c5 18.♕f2 ♜he8 19.♕e5 ♔xb3 20.axb3 ♛xe3† 21.♕xe3 ♔d5† 22.♕xd5 ♕xd5

Neither player should have realistic winning chances from this position.

15...♕d4 16.♕e4 ♛xe4!N

After 16...♕xe4 17.fxe4 ♛c5 18.c3 ♔xb3 19.axb3 ♛xe3† 20.♕xe3 ♔b7 21.♕g5± Black was unable to solve his problems in Naiditsch – Feller, Germany 2008.

17.♕xd8 ♔f5 18.♕d3 ♕xd8 19.fxe4 ♛f4

This secures a draw, although there is a valid alternative in 19...♛e5? 20.♕c3† ♛xc3† 21.bxc3 ♕xe4 22.0–0 ♕d2 23.♕f2 ♜xf2 24.♕xf2 ♔d6 Black should be fine in this ending, bearing in mind that the white bishop is quite severely restricted.

20.g3 ♕xd3 21.gxf4 ♜e3† 22.♕d2 ♜xe4 23.♕h1 ♜d4† 24.♕e2

White must obviously avoid 24.♕c3?? b4#, while after 24.♕c1? ♜e3 25.♕g1 ♜xf4 White is simply worse.

24...♜e4†

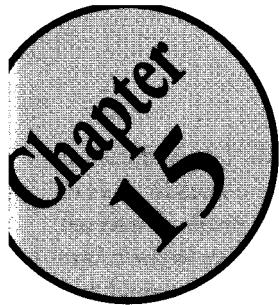
The move repetition results in equality.

Future games will doubtlessly shed more light on 12...♝c6?!, but based on the combination of presently available games and my own analysis, it looks to be fully viable and has the bonus of requiring nowhere near as rigorous preparation as the main line with 12...♝c5.

Conclusion

The 6.♕c4 system has always been known as a sharp and aggressive choice, and even the relatively calm variation C1 with short castling is anything but boring. Black does not have to panic, and his careful and patient development, possibly in conjunction with the manoeuvre ...♝b6–b7, will tame White's initiative.

A different cup of coffee is the wildly popular and ultra-aggressive 8.♕g5 ♜e7 9.♕f3 ♛c7 (C2), in which each move can make or break the result for either player. Certain lines have been analysed out to a final result, but others have barely been tested. Anybody who enjoys adrenalin-fuelled chess should find rich rewards, although I also made an effort to include less wild options such as the final variation C222) 12...♝c6?!, which shows that these rich positions contain something for everyone.



English Attack

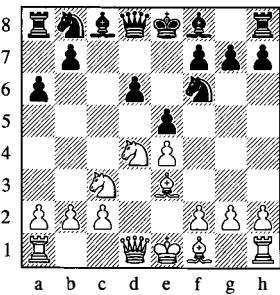
The English Patient - 6. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ e5

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6. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ e5

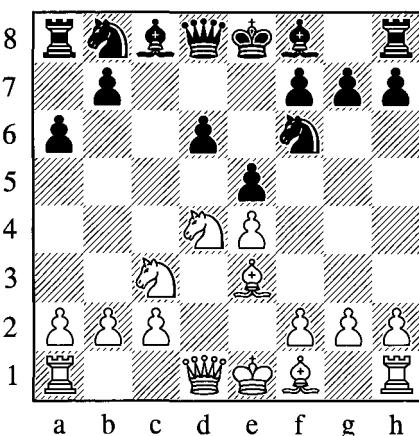
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England became a chess force to be reckoned with in the 1980s thanks to an explosion of good players and many novel opening ideas, including what became known as the English Attack – an aggressive system based on the moves $\mathbb{A}e3$, $f3$ and $g4$, which became a feared weapon against the Scheveningen and Najdorf as well as some other Sicilian variations. In simple terms, White intends to castle long and hurl his g- and h-pawns up the board to threaten the enemy king. It seems a bit crude, but over the years the supporters of White's cause have come up with increasingly sophisticated ways of combining the kingside attacking plan with active operations in the centre and sometimes even on the queenside, depending on his opponent's reaction.

As early as the sixth move, Black faces a fundamental decision regarding whether to advance his e-pawn one or two squares, the choice being largely a matter of personal taste. Given the status of $6.\mathbb{A}e3$ as one of the pre-eminent anti-Najdorf lines at White's disposal, I have decided to offer coverage of both $6...e5$ and $6...e6$, so that the reader can choose the option that best suits his own style. We will begin by investigating the former in the present chapter.

**1.e4 c5 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ d6 3.d4 cxd4 4. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$
5. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ a6 6. $\mathbb{A}e3$ e5**

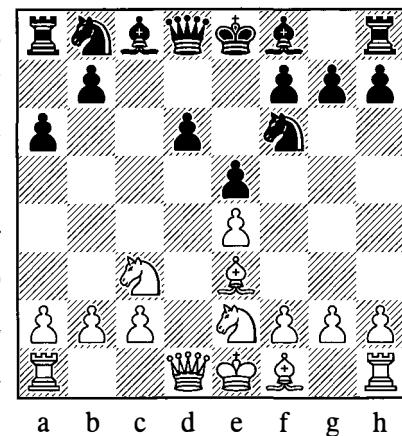


The pawn formation with ...d6 and ...e5 is arguably the more thematic choice for fans of the Najdorf. Compared with the more reserved $6...e6$, Black loses some flexibility in the centre but gains space, while winning a tempo and driving the enemy knight away from its ideal location on d4.

At this point White must make a decision with far-reaching consequences. We will start by considering the slightly quirky A) 7. $\mathbb{Q}de2$, followed by the more orthodox B) 7. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ and finally the main line of C) 7. $\mathbb{Q}b3$.

A) 7. $\mathbb{Q}de2$

This looks like an odd choice, but White hopes to reposition the knight, usually on g3. The idea has been used with success by several strong players, most notably Nisipeanu, and should certainly be respected.



7... $\mathbb{Q}e6$

This standard developing move has been Black's normal choice, although several other moves are playable. Here is an exotic one:

7... $\mathbb{Q}g4!$

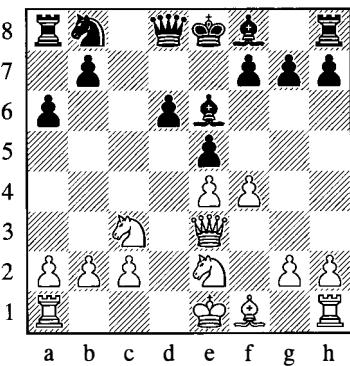
It seems a bit cheeky to move the only developed piece for a second time, but the precious bishop cannot move away from e3 due to the nasty possibility of ... $\mathbb{W}b6$.

8. $\mathbb{W}d2$

8.♗d5 ♗xe3 9.fxe3 ♗c6 10.♗ec3 ♗e6
11.♗c4 ♗e7=

8...♗xe3 9.♗xe3 ♗e6 10.f4

Or 10.0–0–0 ♗e7 11.♗b1 ♗d7 12.f4, Ringel – Hummeling, e-mail 1998, 12...g6N with similar ideas to the main line below.

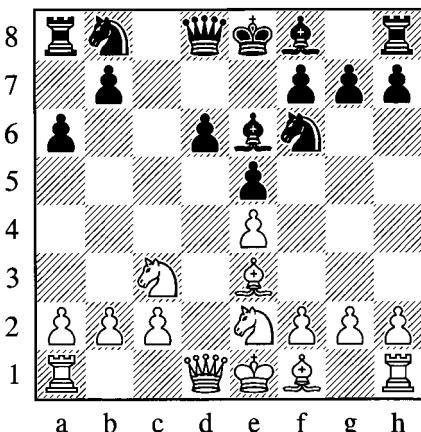


10...g6?N

This looks like a slight improvement over 10...♗e7 11.f5 ♗c4 12.♗g3 ♗xf1 13.♗xf1 ♗d7 14.♗f3 ♗g5 15.♗e3 ♗xe3 16.♗xe3 ♗b6 17.♗xb6 ♗xb6 18.0–0–0± Timman – Vazquez Igarza, Amsterdam 2006.

11.0–0–0 ♗c6 12.fxe5 ♗xe5 13.♗d4 ♗e7=

White will find it difficult to achieve much without the dark-squared bishop.



At this point White can choose between improving his knight with A1) 8.♗g3 and commencing active operations with A2) 8.f4.

A1) 8.♗g3 ♗c6

It is worth mentioning the instructive mistake 8...b5?! as played in Asrian – Thorfinnsson, Kemer 2007. Here White could have punished his opponent's overly eager opening play with 9.a4!N b4 10.♗d5 ♗xd5 11.exd5 ♗c7 12.♗e2† The combination of White's bishop pair and Black's weakened queenside adds up to an unhappy future for the second player.

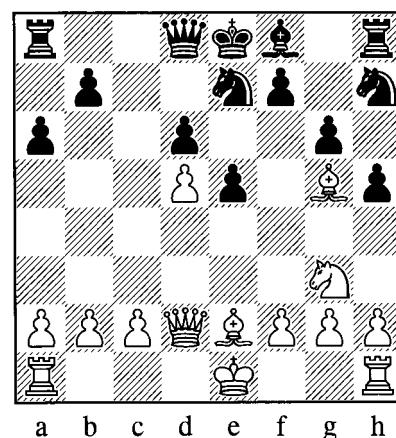
9.♗e2 g6!?

9...d5 10.exd5 ♗xd5 11.♗xd5 ♗xd5 12.♗xd5 ♗xd5 was about equal in Roy Chowdhury – Ramesh, Chennai 2008. Instead the text move aims to keep some complexity in the position, while playing to restrict the knight on g3.

10.♗d2 h5 11.♗d5 ♗xd5 12.exd5 ♗e7

13.♗g5 ♗h7

Black should definitely avoid the greedy 13...♗fxd5? 14.♗e4 f5 15.♗c4 when he has real problems.



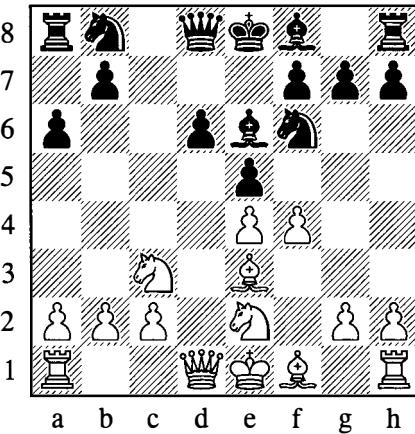
14.h4N

This looks like an improvement over 14.♗e4 f5 15.♗f6† ♗xf6 16.♗xf6 ♗h6 17.♗b4 0–0 when Black already had the upper hand in Haslinger – Efimenko, Port Erin 2007.

14...f5 15.0–0–0 ♗xg5 16.hxg5 ♗b6=

Black has every reason to feel happy with the outcome of the opening.

A2) 8.f4



8...♞bd7

This has been the most popular move, although in practice Black has scored most heavily with:

8...g6!?

By preventing f5, Black maintains more tension in the position.

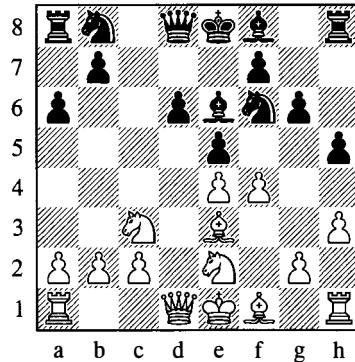
9.h3

Here are a few other possibilities:

9.♗d2 ♞c6 10.♗g3 exf4 11.♗xf4 d5 Very often the advance of the black d-pawn equalizes, as the knight on g3 will not be terribly useful. 12.exd5 (12.♗g5 d4 13.♗d5 ♗g7 14.♗c4 h6=) 12...♝xd5 13.♝xd5 ♘xd5 14.♗xd5 ♘xd5 15.0–0–0 0–0–0= White had no trace of an advantage and a draw was agreed in Jenni – Vitiugov, Biel 2007.

9.g3 ♞bd7 10.♗g2 ♗e7 11.h3 ♜c8 12.0–0 (12.g4 exf4 13.♗xf4 0–0 14.♗xe6 fxe6=) 12...b5 (Black should avoid 12...exf4 13.♗xf4 0–0 14.♗xe6 fxe6 15.h4! ♗e5 16.♗h3 ♘d7 17.♗d5+) 13.a3 Parligras – Kovacevic, Dresden 2008, 13...♞c4N 14.f5 ♘b6 Black benefits from healthy control over the centre.

9...h5



10.fxe5

The untested 10.♗d3!N ♜c6 11.0–0–0 ♜c8 leads to an interesting position with mutual chances.

The other move to have been tried is 10.g3 ♜bd7 11.♗g2 b5 12.b3 This position was reached in Nisipeanu – Dominguez Perez, Foros 2007, and here Black should have played 12...b4N (The game continuation of 12...♞c5?! was insufficient to equalize.) 13.♗d5 ♜xd5 14.exd5 ♗f5 15.0–0 ♜c8 16.♗c1 ♗h6 17.♗d2 0–0 18.♗xb4 ♗e8∞ With sufficient compensation for Black.

10...dxe5 11.♗xd8† ♜xd8 12.0–0–0† ♜bd7

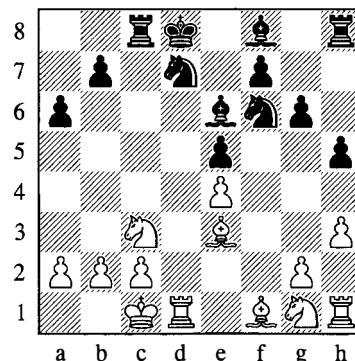
In theory White has a slight development advantage, but his ambitions are hampered by the badly-placed knight on e2.

13.♗g1!?

White decides it is worth investing two tempi to improve the knight.

13.g3N ♜c7 14.♗g2 ♗h6 should be fine for Black.

13...♜c8



14.♗d3

In the event of 14.♗f3, I doubt that Topalov would have hesitated to execute the thematic Sicilian exchange sacrifice: 14...♝xc3! 15.bxc3 ♜a3† 16.♔b1 ♜xe4 17.♗d3 ♜c7† Another possibility is 14.♗g5 ♜h6 15.♗xh6 ♜xh6 16.♗f3 ♜e7 17.♗g5 h4, with no problems for Black.

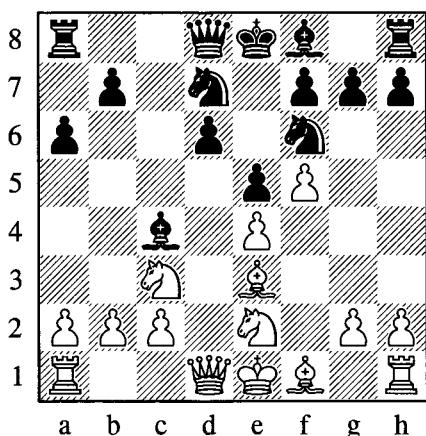
14...♜h6 15.♜xh6 ♜xh6 16.♗f3 ♜e7 17.♗g5 h4 18.♗e2 ♜c5 19.♗hf1 ♜h8 20.♗d3 ♜hc8

Black was at least equal in Nisipeanu – Topalov, Sofia 2007. His pieces are operating in near-perfect harmony, and he went on to win after seizing the initiative with a thematic advance of the queenside pawns.

9.£5

It is doubtful that White can gain much from delaying this advance. One of the rare games in which he attempted to do so continued 9.♗d2 ♜c8 10.f5 ♜c4 11.♗g3 and now 11...h5?! led to an double-edged strategic fight in Borisek – Hulak, Murska Sobota 2006. (More orthodox alternatives such as 11...♜e7 and 11...b5 were also quite satisfactory, and can be compared with the main line below.)

9...♜c4



White can choose between two logical knight moves: A21) 10.♗g3 and A22) 10.♗c1.

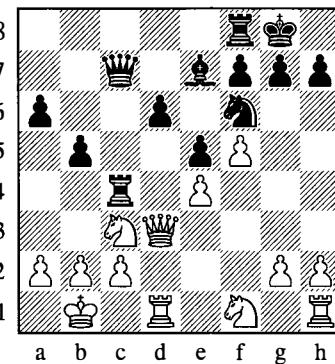
10.b3?! is rather risky due to the destabilizing of the knight on c3: 10...♜xe2 11.♗xe2 ♜c8 (11...♛a5?!N also looks promising, for instance 12.♗d2 ♜c8 13.♗d5 ♜c5 with promising play for Black.) 12.♗d2? This suffers from a tactical refutation. (The only chance was 12.♗d3!N, although Black is still at least equal.) 12...d5! 13.♗xd5 ♜xe4 14.♗d1 ♜h4† 15.♔f1 ♜g3† 16.♗g1 ♜xh1 17.♔xh1 ♜c5 and Black soon won the game Todorovic – Aveskulov, Internet 2006.

A21) 10.♗g3

From White's point of view, the static structure in the centre is crying out for an exchange of the light-squared bishops. For the time being the knight will be rather passive on g3, but White is dreaming of eventually exchanging it for the f6-knight, or perhaps even re-routing it via f1-e3-d5. It all takes time though...

10...♜c8 11.♗xc4 ♜xc4 12.♗d3 ♜c7 13.0–0

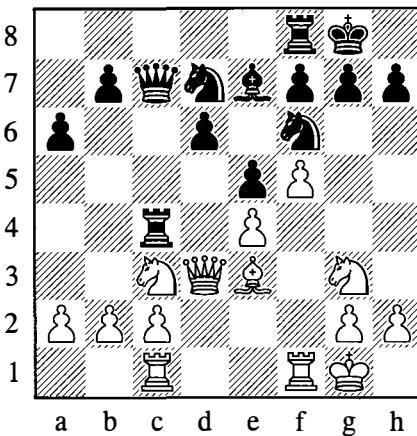
There is also the more ambitious 13.0–0–0?! ♜e7 14.♗g5 (14.♗f1 b5 15.♗d2 ♜c5 16.♗xc5 ♜xc5 17.♗b3 ♜c4=) 14...b5 15.♗b1 0–0 16.♗xf6?! (White should have preferred 16.♗h5, although even here after 16...♗c5 17.♗e2 ♜cxe4 18.♗xf6† ♜xf6 19.♗xf6 ♜xf6 20.♗d5 ♜d8† White should fight for equality in the position with a missing pawn.) 16...♗xf6 17.♗f1 White is so close to achieving his dream central clamp with ♘e3 and ♘cd5, but he is just one tempo too slow.



17...b4! Of course! 18.Qd5 Qxd5 19.Qxd5 Qg5! 20.h4 Bh6 21.Qd3 Qc8† White's plan has failed, and he is left wondering how to solve the problem of his poorly coordinated pieces, Saric – Palac, Zagreb 2009.

13...Qe7 14.Qac1 0-0

White has the makings of a huge positional advantage, if only the knight on g3 could easily teleport itself to within easy reach of the d5-square. But in the absence of such trickery, the reality is that Black's queenside pressure gives him the upper hand.



15.Qd5

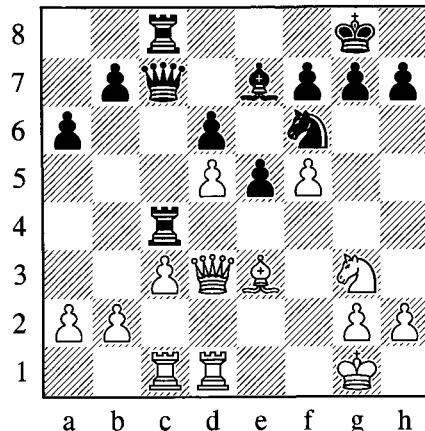
15.Qh5 b5 16.Qxf6† Qxf6 17.a3 Qc8†
Black has strong pressure on the c-file, and a sacrifice on c3 is a real possibility.

15...Qxd5 16.exd5

White has relinquished the piece outpost on d5, in the hope of utilizing the e4-square to activate or exchange what had previously been his misplaced knight. But even this plan turns out not to be perfect.

16...Qf6 17.c3 Qc8 18.Qfd1

This position was reached in Van der Weide – Naiditsch, Belgium 2003, and here Black could have cemented his advantage with:



18...Qa5!N 19.a3 Qd8!

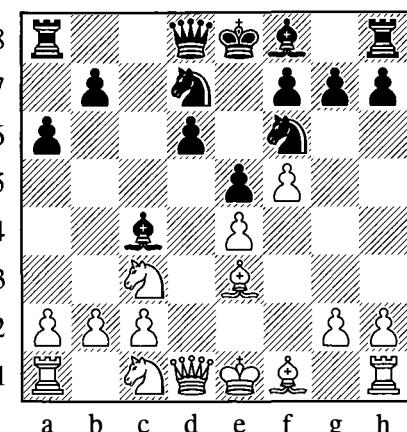
The exchange of Black's worst-placed piece will be a significant achievement.

20.Qf1 Qg4 21.h3 Qxe3 22.Qxe3 Qb6†

White will have a hard time defending his weaknesses while preventing Black's active pieces from infiltrating his position.

A22) 10.Qc1

This looks like a better try for White.



10...d5!

This well-timed strike should solve all of Black's opening problems. I also checked the same idea after the preliminary bishop exchange:

10...♗xf1 11.♗xf1

And now:

11...d5?

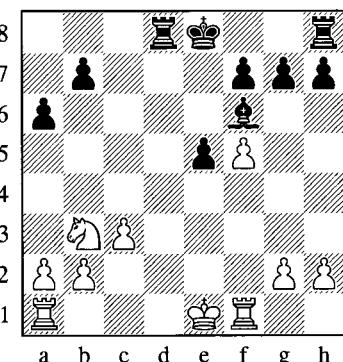
Here is one other example to illustrate the potential dangers for Black: 11...♝c8 12.♞b3 b5 13.a3 ♜e7 14.♗d3 ♜c7 15.0–0–0 ♜c4 16.♗g5 h6 17.♗h4 0–0 18.♗xc4 ♜xc4 19.♘a5 ♜c7 20.♗xf6 ♜xf6 21.♘d5 ♜xd5 22.♗xd5 ♜fc8 23.c3 h5 24.♘c2 With a big advantage for White who went on to win the game Nisipeanu – Areshchenko, Foros 2006.

The text move was tried in one high-level game, but White was able to reach a favourable endgame with minimal fuss:

12.♘xd5

12.exd5 transposes to line A222.

12...♗xe4 13.♘b3 ♜df6 14.♗xf6† ♜xf6 15.♗xd8† ♜xd8 16.♗g5 ♜e7 17.♗xf6 ♜xf6 18.c3



We have been following the game Nisipeanu – Gelfand, Turin 2006, which eventually resulted in a win for White. Perhaps Black could have held the position with perfect defence, but I doubt that this would appeal to many of the readers...

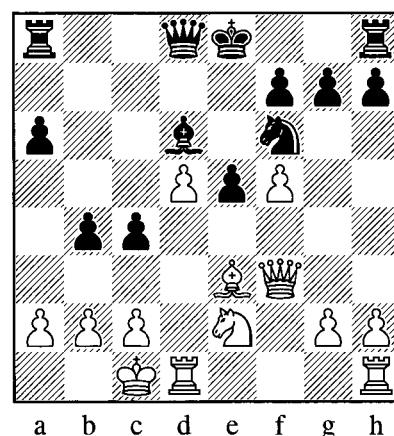
After the recommended move, White has tested two natural responses: A221) 11.♗xc4 and A222) 11.exd5.

A221) 11.♗xc4 dxc4 12.♗f3 b5!?

Black can equalize effortlessly with 12...♝c5 13.♗1e2 ♜xe3 14.♗xe3 b5 (or 14...♜b6N=) as in H. Pedersen – A. Del Vecchio, e-mail 2006. The text move keeps the position more complicated and challenging for both sides.

13.♗1e2 b4 14.♗d5 ♜xd5 15.exd5 ♘f6 16.0–0–0 ♘d6

Another possibility was 16...e4!N 17.♗h3 ♜a5 18.♘b1 0–0–0 19.♗g5 ♜xd5 20.♗g3 with a messy position.



17.♗g4

17.♗g5 might also lead to tricky complications after 17...e4! 18.♗e3 0–0 19.♗d4 c3!? (or 19...♜e8!?) 20.♗xc4 ♜e5, with fair compensation for the pawn) 20.♗xf6 cxb2† 21.♗xb2 gxg6 Both kings have been left exposed and the position remains unclear but roughly balanced.

17...b3!

This is much more interesting than 17...h6 18.h4 ♜a5 19.g5 b3 20.cxb3 cxb3 21.axb3 hxg5 22.hxg5 ♜xh1 23.♗xh1 ♘g4 24.♗f3 ♜xe3 25.♗xe3 ♜c5†± when Black will have to fight for a draw in the endgame.

18.cxb3

After 18.axb3 cxb3 19.g5 (19.cxb3 would transpose to the main line below) 19...bxc2 20.♔xc2 ♔d7 21.♔g3 ♕b8 the white king does not feel especially safe.

18...cxb3 19.axb3!N

This is the most challenging approach. Instead after the timid 19.♔b1 bxa2† 20.♔a1 e4 21.♗g2 ♜e5 Black was at least equal in Nisipeanu – Topalov, Vitoria Gasteiz 2007.

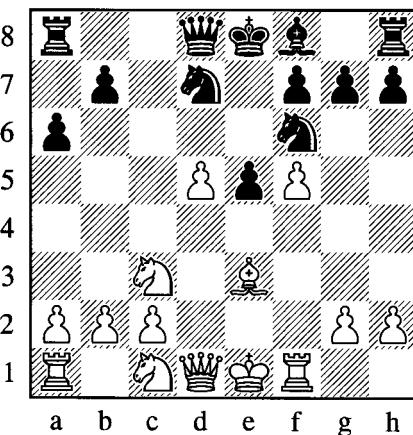
19...h6

It is worth taking a moment to slow White's kingside play. From this position a possible continuation might be:

20.♔b1 ♕b8 21.g5 hxg5 22.♕xg5 ♕b6

Compared with the aforementioned game, White's extra pawn is not especially useful from a materialistic standpoint, but it is extremely helpful in providing additional shielding to his vulnerable king. Nevertheless Black's counterplay should still be sufficient to keep the game in a state of dynamic equilibrium.

A222) 11.exd5 ♕xf1 12.♕xf1



12...♞b6

The untested 12... $\mathbb{Q}b4!?$ N also looks reasonable, for instance: 13. $\mathbb{Q}1e2$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 14. $\mathbb{W}d3$ (14. $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ $\mathbb{W}xb6$ 15. $\mathbb{W}d3$ 0-0 16.0-0-0 $\mathbb{Q}g4=$)

14... ♕ bxd5 15.0-0-0 ♕ xc3 16. ♕ xc3 ♖ xd3
 17. ♕ xd3 ♕ d8= The position is peaceful and quite safe for Black.

13. $\mathbb{W}f3$

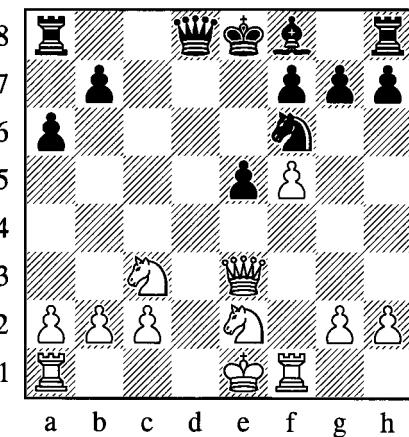
13.♕g5 did not make much of an impression after 13...♗b4 14.♕1e2 and draw was agreed in Sakelsek – Czakon, Aschach 2006. In the final position 14...♗xd5N and 14...♗bx_d5N both look comfortable for Black.

13... ♜bxd5 14. ♜1e2 ♜xe3

Once again the path to a playable position is not narrow, and Black may consider preventing long castling with 14... $\mathbb{Q}b4!!N$ 15. $\mathbb{E}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 16.a3 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 17. $\mathbb{E}d1$ $\mathbb{W}a5$ 18.g4 (18. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ 0-0 19. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}f2=$) 18...h6 19.h4 e4 20. $\mathbb{W}g2$ $\mathbb{E}d8$ 21.g5 hxg5 22.hxg5 $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 23. $\mathbb{W}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 24. $\mathbb{W}xe3$ $\mathbb{W}e5\bar{m}$ With reasonable compensation, thanks to White's exposed king.

15. $\mathbb{W}xe3$

We have been following the game Nisipeanu – Kempinski, Dresden 2007.



15... \mathbb{W} d6!N

After the game continuation of 15... $\mathbb{W}c7$ 16.0–0–0 Black was not doing too badly, but he failed to neutralize his opponent's initiative

and eventually went down. The point of the text move is to prevent White's intended long castling.

16.♗d1 ♖c7

16...♖c5 17.♗f3 ♖d8 also looks about equal. The main point is that it was worthwhile for Black to lose a tempo with the queen in order to prevent the white king from escaping to c1.

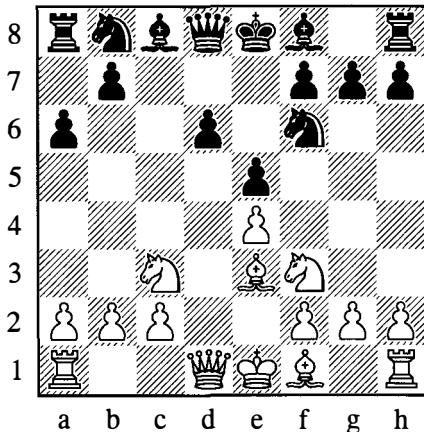
17.♘d5 ♘xd5 18.♗xd5 ♘d6 19.♖c3

White could also consider a more complicated route with 19.f6!? 0–0–0 20.fxg7 ♗hg8 21.♖c3 ♗xg7, although it is hard to say which side is taking the greater risk here.

19...♖e7 20.♔d1 0–0–0

White's artificial castling takes time, and it is doubtful that he will be able to arrange his ideal formation with a knight on e4, rooks doubled on the d-file, and so on.

B) 7.♘f3



The older idea of retreat to f3 is more dangerous than meets the eye. The knight is inhibiting the potential counterplay with ...d6-d5 and can sometimes wreak havoc with jumps to g5 or h4-f5. White generally intends to play a slow positional game with the hope to exploit the minuses of Black's rigid

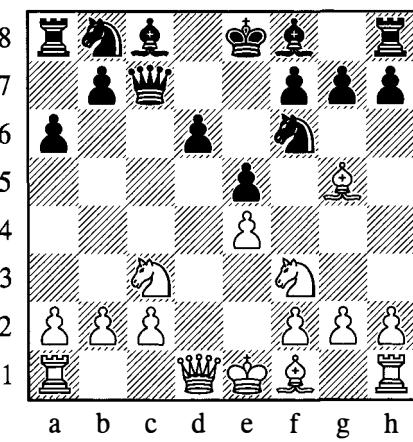
central pawn formation. The antidote I offer has escaped the attention of many players, but it surely equalizes for Black and steals the limelight from White's modest idea.

7...♖c7

Black begins by preventing the active development of the enemy bishop on c4. At this point White's two main ideas are **B1) 8.♘g5** and **B2) 8.a4**.

B1) 8.♘g5

This line used to be tested in the past and the pressure against the f6 knight was seen as a problem. Times and evaluations change, and the current verdict is that Black is doing fine here.



8...♘bd7

A basic rule of thumb for positions involving this pawn structure is that Black should always be ready to meet an exchange of the knight on f6 by recapturing with the other knight, in order to maintain control over d5.

9.a4 h6

9...♕e7 is also playable, but leaves White with more options.

10.♘h4 b6

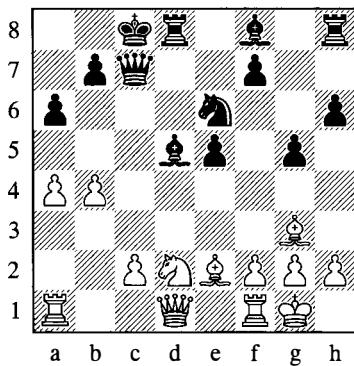
Players who yearn for a full-blooded battle may wish to investigate:

10...g5? 11.Qg3 Qc5 12.Qd2 Qe6 13.Qe2 13.Wf3 Qg7 14.Qc4 Makarichev – Szekely, Frunze 1979, 14...h5N

13...0–0–0 14.0–0 d5

Also interesting is 14...h5 15.h4 Qh6 16.Qa3 g4 with double-edged play, Topalov – Karjakin, Benidorm (rapid) 2003.

15.exd5 Qxd5 16.Qxd5 Qxd5 17.b4 Qe6



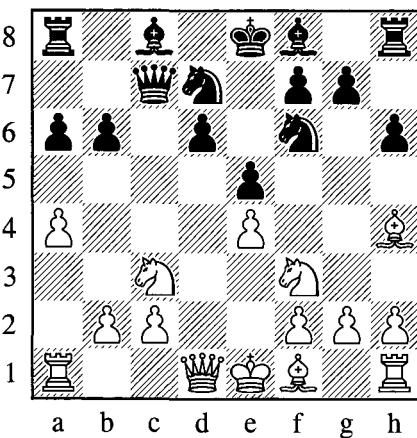
18.c4?

Better was 18.b5N h5 19.bxa6 Qc5 20.Qxh5 f5 21.h3 bxa6∞ In an unbalanced position the black king feels naked and the white one trampled on; the outcome is wide open.

18...Qxg2 19.Qxg2 Qxb4 20.Qa2 h5 21.h3

This position was reached in Kobalia – Onischuk, Moscow 2009, and here Black could have obtained the upper hand with:

21...Qf4!N 22.Qxf4 gxf4 23.Qf3 Qhg8† 24.Qh2 Qxd2 25.Qxd2 Qxd2 26.Wxd2 e4†



11.Qd2 Qb7 12.Qc4

Unimpressive is 12.Wf3 Qe7 13.Qc4 0–0 14.Qe3 d5 15.Qxd5 Qxd5 16.exd5 Qb4† 17.Qd1 e4 18.Wh3 David – Preuss, Cappelle 2009. Here it looks logical for Black to continue 18...Qc5N 19.Qg3 Qe5† With somewhat better chances thanks to White's misplaced king.

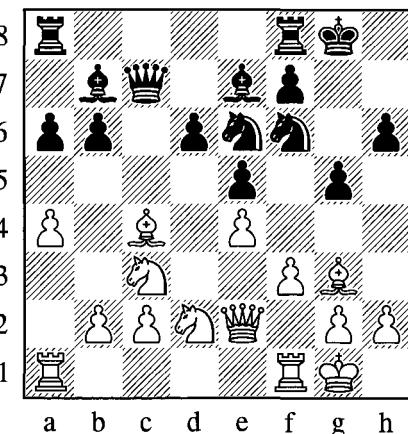
12...Qe7 13.0–0

Sometimes White switches the move order around with 13.We2 0–0 14.0–0, but it makes no real difference either way.

13...0–0 14.We2 g5! 15.Qg3 Qc5

It was necessary to prevent the exchange on f6 before playing this move. White's pieces are in no position to exploit the weakened kingside, and as long as Black plays energetically he should have no problems at all.

16.f3 Qe6



17.Qxe6?

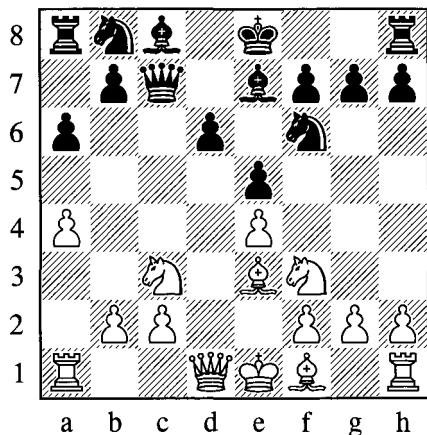
White is parting with the bishop in the hope of exerting pressure against the d6-pawn.

17...fxe6 18.Wc4 Wxc4 19.Qxc4 Qab8

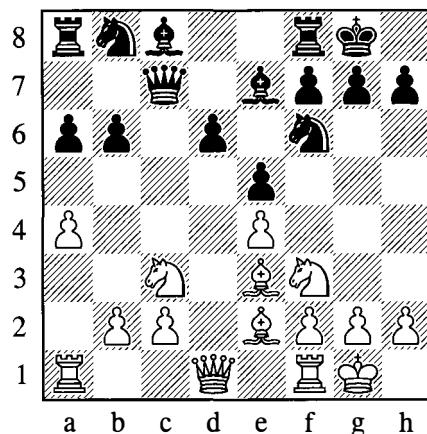
Thanks to this elementary tactical defence, Black has just enough time to cover his weak spots.

20.♗fd1 ♗fd8 21.♗d2 ♗c6

Black is ready to defend the d6-pawn with ...♗e8 and thus kept a fully viable position in Hübner – Hjartarson, Tilburg 1988.

B2) 8.a4 ♗e7

On this occasion white prefers not to spend a tempo moving the e3-bishop for a second time. Now he can choose between developing with **B21) 9.♗e2**, and restricting the enemy queenside with **B22) 9.a5**.

B21) 9.♗e2 0–0 10.0–0 b6**11.♗d3?**

The idea behind this move is to play for a queen exchange, after which White hopes to

profit from the weakness of the b6-pawn and d5-square. He has failed to achieve much with other moves.

11.a5?! The opening the queenside helps to facilitate Black's counterplay. 11...bxa5 12.♗g5 ♗bd7 13.♗d2 h6 14.♗xf6 ♗xf6 15.♗c4 ♘bb4 16.♗xa5 (16.b3 ♘b4 17.♗d3 ♘e6†) 16...♗b4 17.♗a4 ♘xa4 18.♗xa4 ♗xe4 19.♗cb6 ♘b7 20.♗d5 ♘d7 (or 20...♗xd5N 21.♗xd5 ♘f6 22.♗c4 ♘c8†) 21.♗ab6 ♘e6† White's active pieces were not enough to compensate for the missing pawn in Bologan – Naiditsch, Sibenik 2009.

11.♗e1 ♘b7 12.♗d5 ♗xd5 13.exd5 ♗d7 14.c4 a5! After fixing the structure on the queenside Black will be free to direct his attention to the kingside. 15.♗c2 ♗c5 16.♗a3 ♘d8 17.f4 exf4 (or 17...f5N 18.♗b5 ♘f6 19.♗c2 ♘d7 20.♗d3 g6 21.fxe5 ♘xe5†) 18.♗xf4 ♘a6 19.♗c2 ♘f6† Atlas – Gallagher, Switzerland 1996.

11.♗g5 ♗bd7 12.♗d2 (12.♗h4 g6 13.g3 ♘b7 14.♗g2 ♘fe8 15.♗f3 ♘ac8 16.♗e3 ♘b8 17.♗xf6 ♘xf6 18.♗e1 ♘c5 19.♗d3 ♘ec8 20.♗ad1 ♘f8 After a period of logical manoeuvring by both sides the position remained equal in Adams – Svidler, Dortmund 1998.) 12...h6 13.♗xf6 ♘xf6 14.♗c4 ♘e6 15.♗e3 ♘c5 16.♗d3 ♘fc8 17.♗e2 a5 18.♗fd1 g6 19.♗a6 ♘c7 20.♗b5 ♘d7∞ Black was suffering on the light squares but dominating on the dark ones in Gharamian – Morozевич, Zürich 2009.

11...♗bd7

It is worth mentioning that 11...♗b7 is less exact due to 12.♗h4! when the f5-square is a source of concern.

12.♗c4 ♘b8!?

By avoiding the queen exchange Black maintains more tension in the position. Furthermore, the retreat may simply be the

most accurate move. I was unable to find a clear path to equality with the alternative:
 12... $\mathbb{W}xc4$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{W}ac8$
 15. $\mathbb{Q}fd1$

In the event of 15.f3, Moussard – Khachylian, Moscow 2008, Black can consider 15...d5!N (The game continuation of 15... $\mathbb{Q}fd8$ should also be okay.) 16. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ (16.exd5 $\mathbb{Q}b4=$) 16... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 17.exd5 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 20.c3 f5= Black's bishop pair and active pieces give him interesting compensation for the pawn (analysis by Short).

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

This was my attempt to improve over the following passive approach, which soon led to a depressing position for Black: 15... $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 16.f3 $\mathbb{Q}fc8$ 17.b3 h5 18. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ g6 (19... $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ 20.bxc4 $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}d3\pm$) 20. $\mathbb{Q}e3\pm$

Short – Gelfand, Novgorod 1996.

16. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 17.fxe3 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 19.c3 $\mathbb{Q}f6$

Black should hold this ending, but White has some chances to press. The doubled e-pawns are not ideal, but nor are they a serious handicap for White.

13. $\mathbb{Q}h4!$?

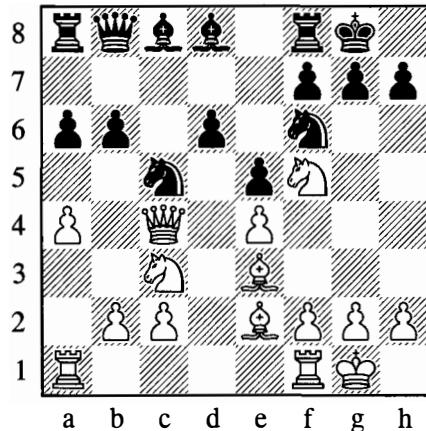
This seems like the most challenging response.

In the event of 13. $\mathbb{W}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 15. $\mathbb{W}xb6$ $\mathbb{Q}cxe4$, the exchange of a wing pawn for a central one is a pleasant bargain for Black.

Another harmless continuation is 13. $\mathbb{Q}fd1$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 14.a5 b5 15. $\mathbb{W}b4$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ with equality.

13... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{Q}d8!$

This retreat may seem a little passive, but we should not forget that the knight on f5 is somewhat unstable and vulnerable to ... $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ tricks.



15. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$

This is not the only playable move, but it is the most forcing continuation at White's disposal and thus the one we should consider most carefully.

15... $\mathbb{b}xc5$!

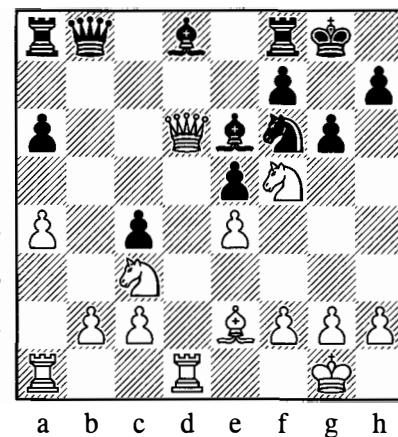
Black should not be afraid to leave the d6-pawn as a weakness, as concrete analysis will show that his position remains fine.

16. $\mathbb{Q}fd1$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 17. $\mathbb{W}d3$ c4 18. $\mathbb{W}xd6$

18. $\mathbb{W}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$! maintains the balance, as it would be too risky for White to try 19. $\mathbb{Q}xd6$? $\mathbb{Q}g4$!

18...g6

Black could also consider 18... $\mathbb{W}xb2$!, as 19. $\mathbb{W}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ 20. $\mathbb{E}ab1$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$! maintains a reasonable position.



19.♗e3

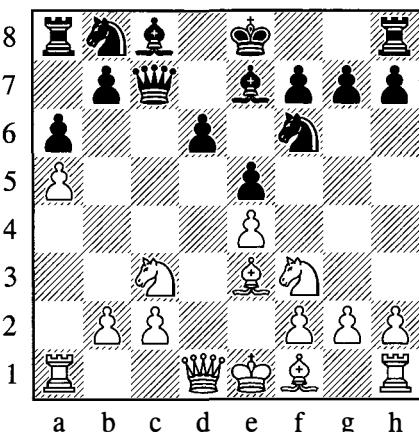
19.♗g3 ♕xd6 20.♕xd6 ♔e7 gives Black decent compensation for a pawn. His dark-squared bishop is strong and the imminent pressure on the b-file will be annoying for White.

19...♘xb2 20.♘xe5 ♗d7 21.♗xd7 ♘xa1† 22.♗d1 ♔c7!

After a logical series of moves from both sides, the game could well be destined to end in a repetition after 23.♗d4 ♕b6, or 23.♗f6 ♕d8.

B22) 9.a5

This has been by far the most popular choice. White wants to fix the queenside structure and rob the opponent of some flexibility.



9...0–0 10.♗e2 ♗c6

Several other moves have been tested, but this is the one I like the most.

11.♗b6

Taking the opportunity to force the queen to an awkward square. White feels happier knowing that the bishop will not be driven away by ...♗bd7.

11...♘d7 12.♗d2

If White is to achieve anything, he must prepare a good answer to Black's intended ...♗d8. Thus he prepares to counter with ♗c4, but this manoeuvre opens up other possibilities for Black as we will soon see.

Here is one example of a different approach:
 12.♗a4 ♗d8 13.♗xd8 ♕xd8 14.♗d5 ♗xd5
 15.exd5 ♗e7 16.0–0 ♗g6 17.♗e1 (17.g3
 ♜e8 18.♗d2 ♜b8 19.♗e1 ♗d7 20.♗a3 f5=)
 17...♗f4 18.♗f1 ♗g4 19.♗a3 ♜c8 20.c4 f5
 with promising counterplay for Black, Arnason – Hellersund 1992.

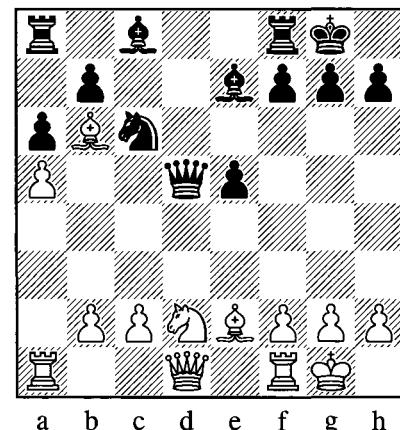
12...d5!

This thematic break more or less frees Black's game. White still keeps something of a bind on the queenside, but it should not be too serious.

13.exd5

13.0–0 ♗b4 gave Black no reason to complain in Agustsson – Browne, Reykjavik 1988.

13...♗xd5 14.♗xd5 ♕xd5 15.0–0

**15...♗e6**

I also spent some time analysing 15...♗f5, but eventually settled on the text move after discovering an interesting new possibility for Black on move 17.

16.c3!

This is the most challenging option, although the second of the following alternatives also demands some attention:

16.♕f3 ♕b5 17.b3 f5 18.♕e2 ♕d5 19.♕c4 ♕d7 ♔f3 ♕c8 was equal in Mestel – Chandler, Southampton 1986.

16.♔c4 ♕b5!

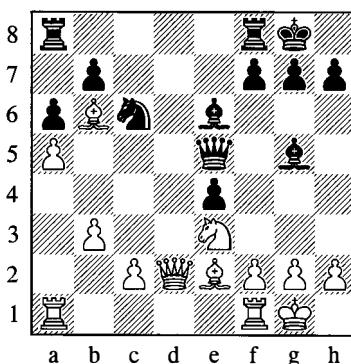
This move is an important resource for Black, and constitutes the main argument in favour of developing his bishop on e6 instead of f5. All other moves lead to a bad position.

17.b3 e4 18.♕d2 ♕g5! 19.♔e3

19.♕d1 ♕fd8? (The straightforward 19...♕e7 is equal) 20.♕xd8 ♕xd8 21.♕e1 ♔d4 22.♔d1 (22.♔d1 f5=) 22...g6! 23.f3 e3 24.f4 (24.♔d3 ♕xc4 25.♕xc4 ♕e5 26.c3 e2 27.♕xd4 exf1=+ 28.♔xf1 ♕xa5=) 24...♕f6 25.c3 ♔xb3 26.♕xd8+ ♕xd8 27.♔xe3 ♕c5 28.♕f2 ♕xa5=

19...♕e5

Black's pieces are beginning to acquire some harmony, and he now threatens to obtain serious counterplay by rolling his f-pawn down the board.



20.♕fd1!N

This is much better than the slow 20.c4? f5 21.♔ad1 f4 22.♔g4 ♕f5 23.f3 e3† Blank – Kover, e-mail 1999.

20...♔d8

20...f5?! is more complicated but roughly as good: 21.♕e1 f4 22.♔c4 ♕f5 23.♔d6 ♕g6 24.f3 e3 25.♔xb7 ♕e7 (25...♕e5 26.♔c5±) 26.♔c5 ♕h3 27.♔c4† ♕h8 28.♕e2 ♔xa5! 29.♔xa5 ♕xc5=

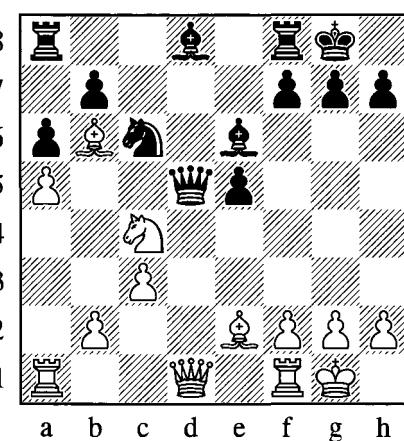
21.♔d6 ♕xd6 22.♔xd6 ♕xb6 23.axb6 ♕fd8 24.♔ad1

24.♔xc6?! does not quite work: 24...bxc6 25.b7 ♕a7 26.♔xa6 ♕b8† 24...♔xd6 25.♔xd6 ♕f8

With an equal endgame.

16...♔d8

I find this to be the only fully playable move. 16...♔ad8?! is unsatisfactory due to: 17.♔xd8 ♕xd8 18.♔c4! ♕e4 19.f3!!±

17.♔c4

17...♕b5?N

This is a slightly risky-looking novelty, but quite a promising one in my view. Black aims to solve all his problems by taking a concrete approach to the position.

17...♔xb6 18.♔xb6 ♕xd1 is playable, but the ending after 19.♔fxd1 is just a little more comfortable for White, with almost zero winning chances for Black.

18.♔d6

The slower approach leads nowhere for White: 18.b3 e4 19.♗c2 ♗b8 (19...f5!) 20.♗xe4 ♗xb3 21.♗d3 g6 22.♗c5 ♗e7 23.♗xe7 ♗xe7=

18...♗xb2 19.♗d3

Black looks to be in great danger, but fortunately there is a way out:

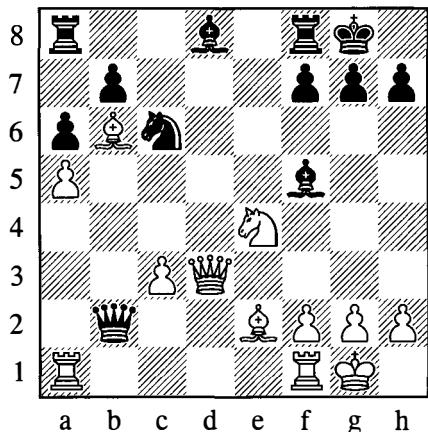
19...e4!

19...♗a2 20.♗e4 ♗xb6 21.axb6 ♗ab8 leads to a position where Black has no sensible moves, so after 22.h4!! he is probably close to losing. For instance, 22...♗h8 23.♗xb7 ♗xb7 24.♗d3! and 22...a5 23.♗b5 are dangerous; 22...♗fd8 23.♗xa2! just wins, and 22...g6 23.h5 looks very uncomfortable.

20.♗xe4

20.♗xe4 ♗xb6 21.axb6 ♗xb6 22.♗fb1 ♗c7=

20...♗f5



21.♗c5

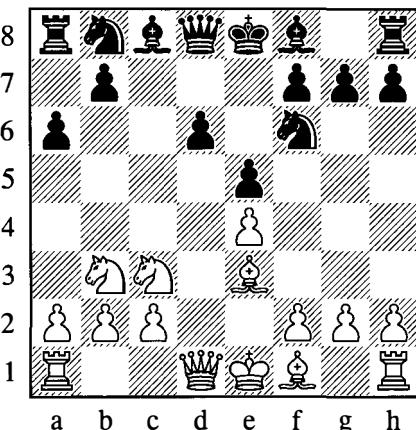
21.♗fb1 ♗xe4 22.♗xb2 ♗xd3 23.♗xd3 ♗e8 reaches a roughly equal endgame.

21...♗e8 22.♗fb1 ♗xe4 23.♗d7 ♗xb1† 24.♗xb1 ♗xa5 25.♗c1 b6

I doubt that Black can lose this position without stupidity.

C) 7.♗b3

Finally we come to White's most ambitious and theoretically challenging move.



7...♗e6

Now we will consider the somewhat non-traditional but still potent C1) 8.f4, followed by the standard moves for the English Attack: C2) 8.♗d2 and C3) 8.f3. The latter two can transpose to one another, although independent possibilities do exist.

8.♗d5 is less effective than in some other positions, as Black does not have to worry about ♗xe7 ideas, so he can reinforce the knight with 8...♗bd7 and threaten the e4-pawn. Here is an example: 9.f3 ♗xd5 10.exd5 ♗f5 11.♗e2 ♗e7 12.♗d2 a5 13.0–0 a4 14.♗c1 0–0= Lukin – Gelfand, Klaipeda 1988.

8.♗e2

Technically speaking, this transposes to the 6.♗e2 e5 line. Given that in Chapter 13 I recommend meeting 6.♗e2 with 6...e6, you may wonder if the text move presents a repertoire problem for readers who prefer to meet 6.♗e3 with 6...e5. I do not see it as an important issue. For one thing, the majority of players who wish to play the white side of this position are more likely to use the 6.♗e2

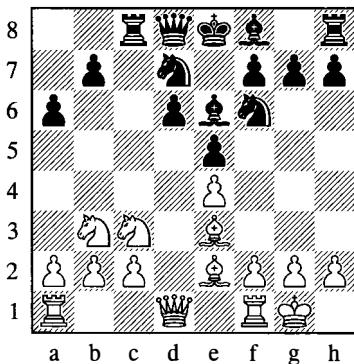
move order instead of 6.♗e3. Moreover, having committed his bishop to e3 so early, White has robbed himself of one of the more dangerous plans involving a quick 0–0 followed by ♘h1 and f4, as a subsequent ...exf4, ♖xf4 would cost White a tempo.

If you do encounter this position, I recommend that you play:

8...♝bd7

The idea is to delay ...♝e7 and play for a quick ...♝c8, and possibly ...♝b6–c4. This steers the game away from a transposition to the normal 6.♗e2 e5 lines, and aims to cast a shadow over the early development of the white bishop on e3. Here are some examples:

9.0–0 ♜c8?



10.a4

10.f3 ♘b6 11.♗h1 ♘c4 saw Black execute his plan with a nice position in Kaderabek – Vokac, Budejovice 1999.

10.♗h1 ♜xc3?! 11.bxc3 ♘xe4 gives Black promising compensation, and in the following encounter White quickly collapsed under the strain of the drastic change in the position: 12.♗f3 ♘df6 13.♗e1 ♜c7 14.♗d4? exd4 15.♗xd4 d5+ Abramov – Nevostruev, Kemerovo 2009.

10.f4 ♜e7 11.f5 ♜c4 12.♗xc4 ♜xc4 13.♗d2 ♜c8 14.♗h1 b5 15.a3 ♜c7 was equal in Smuk – Fercec, Pula 2001.

10...♝b6!

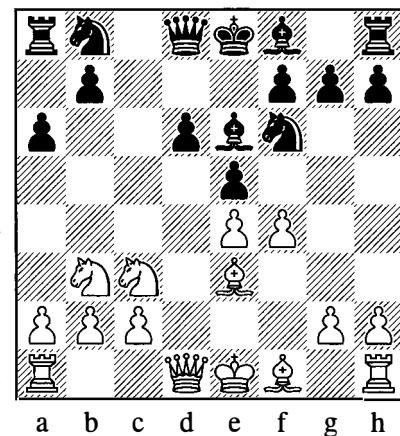
Black has just enough time to execute the desired knight manoeuvre before White seals up the queenside with a5.

11.a5 ♘c4 12.♗xc4 ♜xc4 13.♗e1 ♜e7 14.♗b6 ♜d7 15.♗c1 ♜e6 16.♗1a2 ♜d8

Black has equalized comfortably, Smeets – Karjakin, Wijk aan Zee 2009.

C1) 8.f4

With this move White kisses goodbye to the standard positions of the English Attack. On the other hand the idea of an early conflict could be attractive for many players.



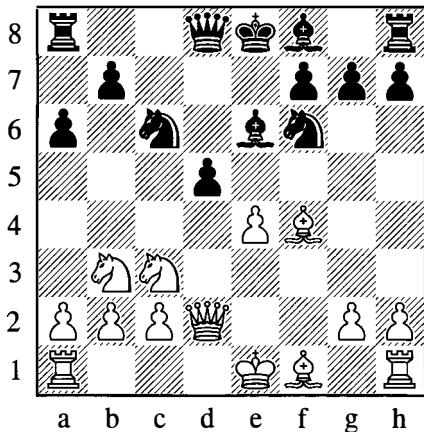
8...exf4 9.♗xf4 ♘c6

At this point White almost always prepares for long castling with either C11) 10.♔d2 or C12) 10.♔e2. Quieter moves such as 10.♗e2 do not need to be taken too seriously, as White will reach a tempo-down version of a standard position, usually reached via a 6.♗e2 e5 move order, in which White's dark-squared bishop would have taken two instead of the usual one move to recapture on f4.

C11) 10.♔d2

White hopes to castle, attack the d6-pawn and start a kingside attack as quickly as possible.

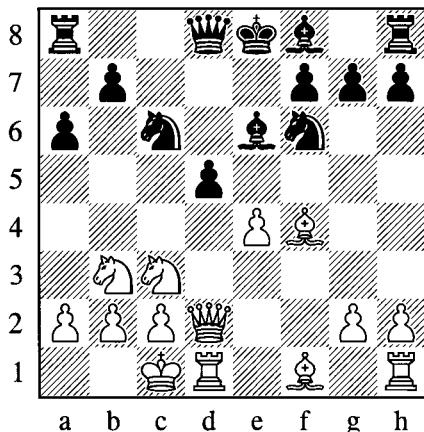
10...d5!?



Can Black really be entitled to play so actively at this stage of the game? I think he can, and the practical results have tended to support this view. White can choose between C111) 11.0-0-0 and C112) 11.exd5.

C111) 11.0-0-0

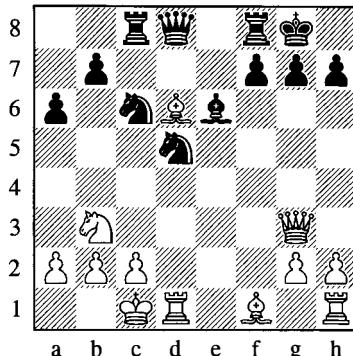
Castling is certainly adding oil to the flames, but fortunately Black is not without resources.



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

11... $\mathbb{Q}b4!?$ is a worthy alternative: 12. $\mathbb{W}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 13. $\mathbb{W}xc3$ 0-0 14. exd5 (Or 14. e5 $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 15. $\mathbb{W}e3$ $\mathbb{E}c8$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ Kaminski – Baburin, Vienna 1995, and now after

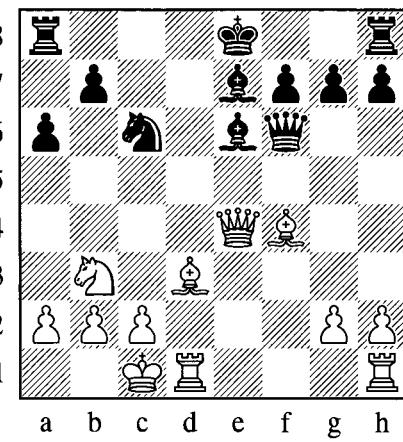
17... $\mathbb{Q}b4!N$ 18. $\mathbb{E}c1$ a5 the white king begins to feel the heat.) 14... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 15. $\mathbb{W}g3$ $\mathbb{E}c8$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}d6$



16... $\mathbb{E}e8$ (16... $\mathbb{Q}cb4!?$, Iordachescu – Van Blitterswijk, Wijk aan Zee 2002, is interesting but perhaps not quite correct: 17. $\mathbb{Q}xb4!N$ $\mathbb{E}xc2\uparrow$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ $\mathbb{E}xd8$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{E}xd3$ 21. $\mathbb{W}xd3$ $\mathbb{E}xb2\uparrow$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ $\mathbb{Q}xd3\uparrow$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 24. g3± Black will struggle to survive, despite having two pawns for the exchange.) 17. $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $\mathbb{W}f6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}d3N$ (18. $\mathbb{E}d2$ $\mathbb{W}h6!$ was awkward for White in Perez Garcia – Cornejo, e-mail 2003.) 18... $\mathbb{Q}cb4$ 19. a3 $\mathbb{Q}a2\uparrow$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}ac3\uparrow$ 21. bxc3 $\mathbb{Q}xc3\uparrow$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}a2\uparrow$ with perpetual check.

12. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ dx $e4$ 13. $\mathbb{W}e3$ $\mathbb{W}f6$ 14. $\mathbb{W}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}d3$

White has a slight edge in activity, but Black should be able to neutralize his opponent's modest initiative without too many problems.



15...♝b4

15...♝d5 has also been played, but eliminating the d3-bishop looks safest to me.

White's pieces are marginally more active, but it is unlikely to lead to anything.

16.♗e5

16.♗d4 ♜d5 17.♗f5 ♜xd3† 18.♗xd3 0–0 gave Black no problems in Iordachescu – S. Hansen, Malmö/Copenhagen 2005.

16...♝g5† 17.♗b1

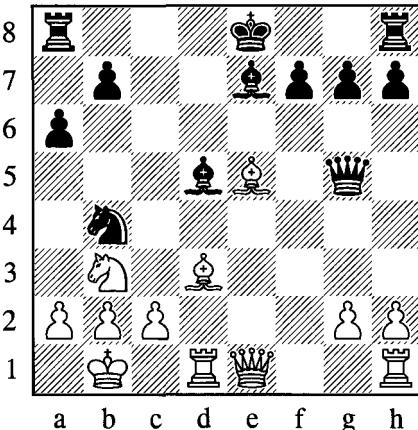
17.♗f4 ♜f6 repeats.

17...♝d5

After 17...♝d8?! 18.h4 ♜g4 19.♗xb7 Black failed to equalize in Recuero Guerra – Perez Garcia, Seville 2009.

18.♗e1

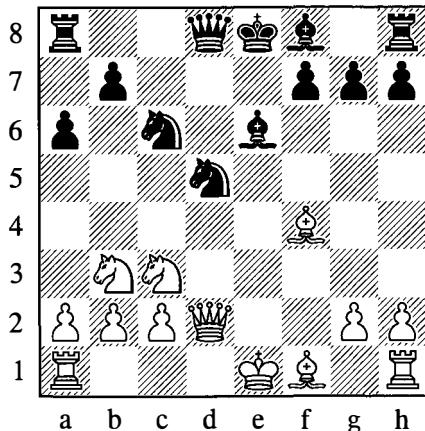
This position occurred in Baramidze – Ringoir, Liverpool 2008. At this point Black should have played:

**18...0–0N**

This natural move equalizes without too many problems, for instance:

19.♕c3 ♜xd3 20.♗xd3 ♜xb3 21.axb3

21.♗g3 ♜xc2† 22.♔a1 ♜fe8 23.♗xg5 ♜xg5 should be fine for Black.

21...♜f6=**12.♗xd5**

12.0–0–0?! allows 12...♝b4!, forcing a damaging of White's pawns. 13.♗e1 ♜xc3 14.bxc3 ♜e7 15.♗d2 0–0!N (In the following game Black soon made an easy perpetual: 15...0–0–0 16.♔b1 ♜a3 17.♗d3 ♜db4 18.cxb4 ♜xd3 19.cxd3 ♜xb3 20.axb3 ♜xb3† 21.♔a1 and a draw in Hellers – Malishauskas, Oslo 1992. The second player can play more ambitiously though.) 16.♗d3 ♜ad8 17.♗b1 ♜fe8† Black's chances are higher as White's king is unhappy.

12...♜xd5 13.♗xd5

After 13.0–0–0 ♜xd2† 14.♗xd2 ♜d8 15.♗xd8† ♜xd8 16.♔e2 ♜e7 17.♔f3 ♜c8 18.♗d1 h5 White failed to get even a symbolic advantage in Leko – Sadler, Budapest 1993.

13...♝xd5 14.0–0–0 0–0–0

All White's attempts to squeeze some advantage have ended up buried in the sand, and Black can look to the future with optimism.

15.♔e2

White gets nowhere with 15.g3 $\mathbb{Q}d6!$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ (Another game continued 16. $\mathbb{Q}h3\uparrow$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}hf1$ $\mathbb{Q}xf4\uparrow$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}fd4$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 23.b3 g6 24. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ f5 25.c4 $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ $\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$ Gallagher – Gelfand, Biel 2000.) 16... $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}xh1$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ Malisauskas – Dvoiry, Biel 1993. Here the most accurate continuation looks to be: 20... $\mathbb{Q}e4N$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}c7=$ Black does not feel any pain due to his perfect coordination.

15...g6

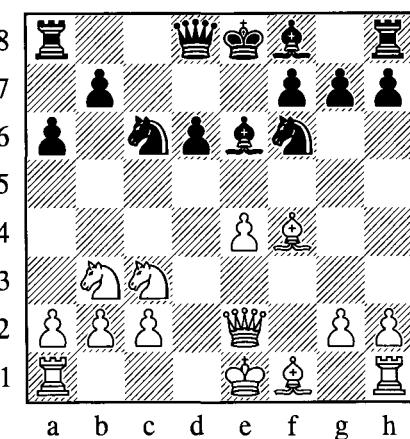
Another decent line is: 15... $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}hf1$ (17.c4 $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}hg1$ $\mathbb{Q}xd1\uparrow$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 21.h4 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 22.h5 $\mathbb{Q}e7\uparrow$) 17... $\mathbb{Q}hd8=$ The rooks doubled on the d-file promise easy equality.

16. $\mathbb{Q}hg1$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 17. g3 $\mathbb{Q}he8=$

Black was absolutely fine and a draw was soon agreed in Yudasin – Gelfand, Biel 1993.

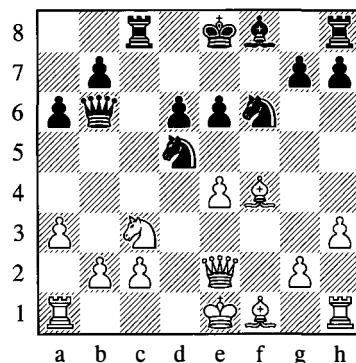
C12) 10. $\mathbb{W}e2$

The queen on e2 is preventing the advance of the d6-pawn. At the same time it will enable e4-e5 threats after long castling. The downside is tied with the need to prevent ... $\mathbb{Q}g4$ before sending the king to the queenside.



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

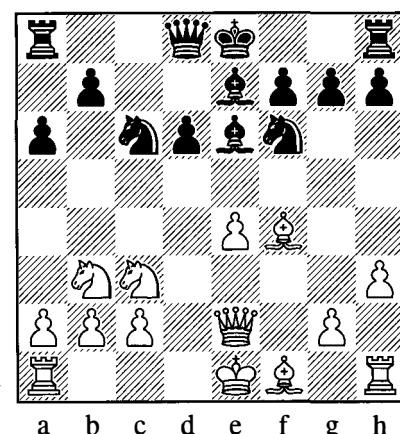
This seems to be the most reliable continuation although Black occasionally finds success with other methods. I will just mention one fairly recent game to demonstrate the type of resources present in the position: 10... $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 11.h3 $\mathbb{Q}b4!$? 12. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{W}b6$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $\mathbb{fxe6}$ 14.a3 $\mathbb{Q}bd5?$ Shirov – Sutovsky, Novi Sad 2009. Unfortunately this fascinating idea is not quite sound. (Objectively Black should have preferred 14... $\mathbb{Q}c6N$ 15.0–0–0 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{W}a5$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ with just a modest edge to White.)



15. $\mathbb{exd5}!N$ $\mathbb{W}xb2$ 16. $\mathbb{W}xe6\uparrow$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{W}xc3\uparrow$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{W}g3\uparrow$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{W}xa3$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ The black king is unlikely to survive the pressure.

11.h3

Preparing to castle.



11...♞d7

This is the main line. Black will transfer one of the knights to e5, seizing the important central outpost while conveniently shielding the d6-pawn. It is also useful to open the d8-h4 diagonal for the dark-squared bishop.

12.0–0–0 ♜ce5

Sometimes Black uses the other knight, but I think it is more logical to clear the c-file for the rook.

13.♞d5

White has tried a few different approaches here, and it is hard to say exactly which is best. Here are some other examples:

13.g4 ♜c8 14.♗e1 ♜c7 15.♘b1 ♜b6 16.♞d4 was seen in the game Amonatov – Slizhevsky, Voronezh 2007, and now after 16...0–0–0 17.♗f2 ♜bc4 Black has promising counterplay.

13.♘b1 ♜c8 14.♞d5 ♜xd5 15.exd5 0–0 (or 15...♝g5N 16.g3 0–0 17.♗d2 ♜xf4 18.gxf4 ♜g6=) 16.g4 ♜g5 The active dark-squared bishop helps the defender to slow down White's progress on the kingside. 17.♘xe5 ♜e8 18.h4 ♜xe5 19.♗g2 ♜e3 20.g5 ♜c5= Movsesian – Palac, Neum 2004.

13...♜xd5 14.♝xd5

14.exd5 ♜g5 15.g3 0–0= seems comfortable enough for Black.

14...0–0

The position is dynamically balanced. White has the two bishops, but Black's pieces have good prospects on the dark squares. The development of mutual attacks could easily see the game sharpen in the near future.

15.h4

The kingside attack is not only a logical plan in itself, but it also provides a convenient way for the theoretically 'undeveloped' kingside pieces to find a useful purpose.

15...♜c8 16.g4

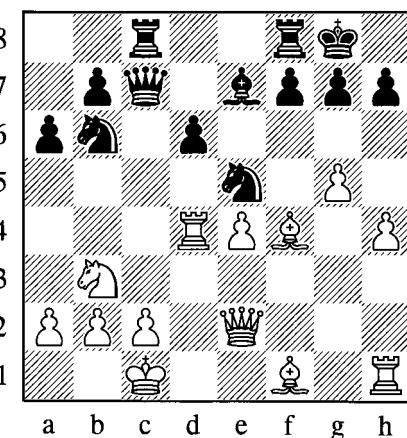
The more modest 16.g3 does not bring White much after 16...♝b6 17.♗d1 ♜f6=.

16...♝c7

Black can even get away with the prankish move: 16...♝xh4!?. 17.♗h2 g5 18.♘xe5 ♜xe5 19.♗e2 ♜e8 with unclear play. Still, I would imagine most players would be more comfortable with the text move.

17.g5 ♜b6 18.♗d4

Another game continued 18.♗d1 ♜a4 19.♘b1 (or 19.♗h3N f6 20.♘xe5 fxe5 21.♘b1 ♜f4= Black is completely safe, with active pieces and opposite-coloured bishops.) 19...b5 20.♘xe5 Exchanging this bishop shows a lack of ambition, but White was obviously fed up with the powerful knight. 20...dxe5 21.♗h3 ♜fd8 with an easy game for Black, Ye – Masse, Quebec 2007.

**18...a5!**

White is suddenly struggling to meet the advance of the daring pawn.

19.Qh3

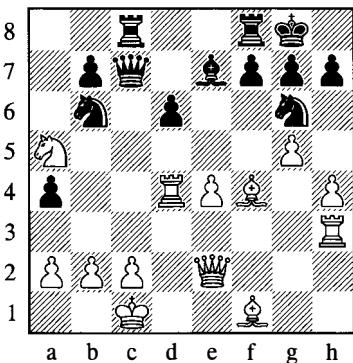
19.Qxa5 is well met by 19...Qa8 20.Qb5 (20.Qb3 Qxa2+) 20...Qfc8! 21.c3 Qbd7 22.Qa4 Qc5+.

19.a3? a4 20.Qa1 Qec4+ is also unappealing for White.

19...a4 20.Qa1

20.Qc3? is refuted by 20...axb3! 21.Qxc7 bxa2+ Reincarnation of the black queen is the last thing White needs.

Perhaps 20.Qa5?!N would have been a better attempt, although Black still remains on top with 20...Qg6!:



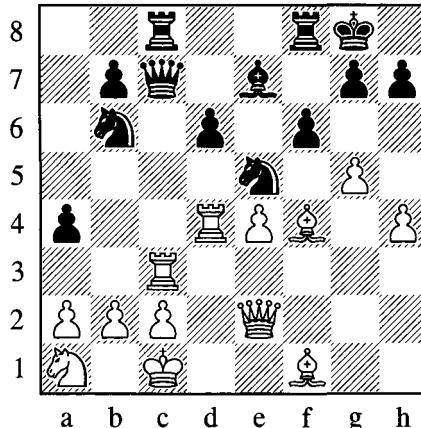
21.Qe3 (I also analysed the following variation 21.Qh2 Qxh4! 22.Qxh4 Qxg5† 23.Qf4 d5 24.Qd2 dxe4 25.Qdx4 Qfd8 26.Qd3 f5 27.Qb4 Qd5 28.Qbc4 Qxf4 29.Qxc7 Qxd3† 30.cxd3 Qxd2† 31.Qxd2 Qxc7 32.Qxc7 Qd7+) 21...a3 22.Qd2 axb2† 23.Qxb2 Qe5+ White's defensive wall has been compromised, and Black's chances are higher.

20...f6!

Black finds a perfect way to introduce another piece to the game.

21.Qc3

21.g6?! Qxg6 22.Qh2 Qe5+

**21...Qb8N**

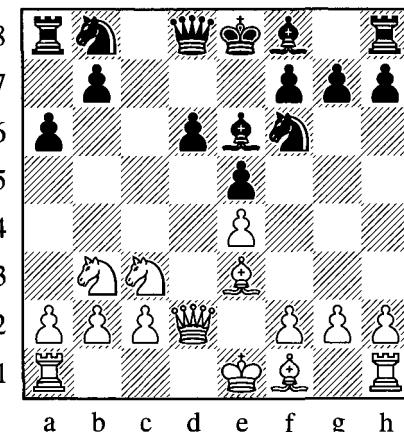
This looks like a slight improvement over 21...Qc6, although after 22.Qd1 f4xg5 23.Qxg5 Qce8 Black still had good reason to feel satisfied in Shirov – Gelfand, Chalkidiki 1993.

22.Qxc8 Qxc8+

The white knight on a1 is a model “anti-piece”, and the first player must battle to equalize.

C2) 8.Qd2

The potential knight jump to g4 is not really a threat at this stage, so White sometimes delays f3 for another move. In the great majority of cases he will follow up with f3, leading to line C3 below. Here we will focus on some independent possibilities.



8...♝bd7 9.f4!?

This shares some obvious similarities with line C1 above, but does not transpose directly to our proposed repertoire.

9.0–0–0 should be met by 9...♝c8, when White almost always reacts with 10.f3 or 10.f4, transposing to either line C33 below, or the main line of the present variation respectively.

9...♝c8!?

The other main option is 9...exf4 10.♝xf4 ♜e5 11.0–0–0 ♜e7 12.♝d4 0–0, when Black should be doing okay. However, I consider the text move to be even more promising and tricky for White to handle.

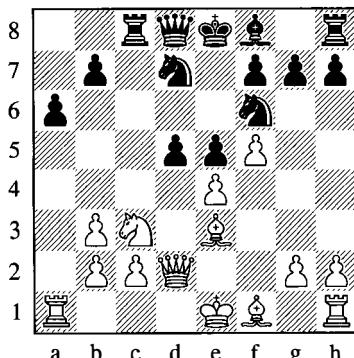
10.0–0–0

Harmless is 10.♝d3 ♜e7 11.f5 ♜c4 12.♝e2 (12.♝xc4 ♜xc4 13.♝d3 ♜c7 14.0–0 0–0=) 12...b5 13.♝d2 ♜xd3 14.cxd3 0–0 15.0–0 b4 16.♝a4 d5 17.♝fc1 ♜a5= Jenni – Baramidze, Olbia 2008.

White is not sufficiently prepared to fight for the central light squares by advancing his f-pawn:

10.f5 ♜xb3 11.axb3 d5!

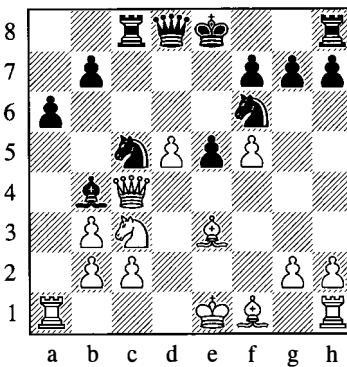
Please note the importance of this thematic advance, which frees Black's position generally, and especially his dark-squared bishop. We will see the same idea on move 13 in the main line below.



White has tested both captures, without achieving anything special at all.

a) 12.exd5 ♜b4 13.♝d3 ♜c5 14.♝c4

14.♝xc5?! ♜xc5 15.0–0–0 ♜a5!N (Even better than 15.♝xc3 16.bxc3 ♜xd5 17.♝f3 ♜xd1† 18.♝xd1 ♜xd1† 19.♝xd1 ♜e4= Rodriguez Vila – Bittencourt, Vitoria 2006.) 16.♝g3 0–0= White will be punished for his reckless play, offering all the trumps to the enemy.



14...♝xc5†

There is a second equalizing line available in 14...♝d6 15.♝xc5 (15.0–0–0 0–0 16.♝b1 ♜xc3 17.♝xc3 ♜fd8 18.♝e1 ♜c7= Mortensen – Matthiesen, Denmark 2009) 15...♜xc5 16.♝xc5 ♜xc5 17.0–0–0 ♜xc3 18.bxc3 ♜xd5 19.♝e2 ♜xd1† 20.♝xd1 ♜e7= The endgame in Kristjansson – Browne, Reykjavik 1986, was perfectly fine for the second player.

15.bxc3N

This is much safer than 15.♝xc3 0–0?! 16.0–0–0 (16.♝xc5 ♜xd5 17.♝d2 ♜xc5 18.0–0–0 ♜b6 19.♝c4 ♜f6=) 16...♝xd5 17.♝e1 ♜xb3† 18.♝b1 ♜c7 19.♝xd5 ♜xc2† 20.♝a2 Gonzales – Hmadi, Thessaloniki 1984, 20...♝e4!N 21.♝xb3 ♜xd5† 22.♝a3 ♜c2=

15...♜xd5 16.♝xd5 ♜xd5 17.♝d2 ♜e7=

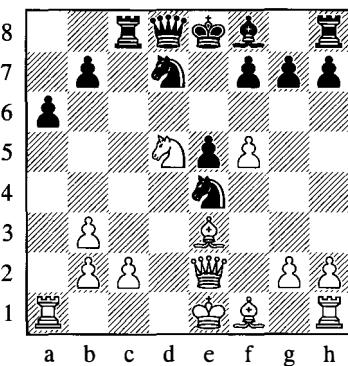
Black's two active knights manage to compensate for the opponent's bishop pair.

b) 12.♕xd5 ♕xe4 13.♗e2

13.♔a5 ♘xa5† 14.♔xa5 ♔d6 15.♔d2
(15.c3 ♔xf5 16.b4 ♕xe3 17.♔xe3 ♔d6†)

This was Paneque – Herrera, Bayamo 1990, and now the simplest route to a big advantage would have been: 15...♗xc2!N 16.♔d1 ♘xb2 17.♔c1 ♘xd2 18.♔xd2 ♘xf5†

The present position was reached in the game Nikolenko – Odeev, Nabereznye Chelny 1988, as well as a few subsequent games.



13...♘b6!N

This great novelty should eliminate all the risk connected with the tempting line 13...♗h4† 14.g3 ♘xg3 15.hxg3 ♘xh1 16.0–0–0, when practice has shown that Black has some difficulties.

14.♗c3

The modest retreat may well be the only way for White to maintain equality.

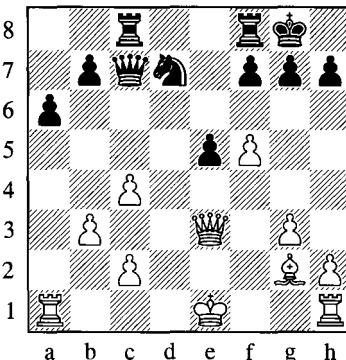
14.♗xb6? loses by force after 14...♗b4† 15.c3 ♘xc3! 16.♔d2 ♘e3 17.♔xb4 ♘xb6+.

Somewhat better, but still uninspiring for White, is 14.♔xb6 ♘xd5 15.c3 ♔d6†.

14...♘xc3 15.bxc3 ♘c7 16.c4

16.0–0–0 allows Black to force a draw with 16...♗a4!? Obviously this is not forced, and ambitious players could continue the fight in the double-edged position. 17.bxa4 ♘a3† 18.♔b1 ♘xc3 19.♔d4 ♘b4† 20.♔a2 ♘xa4 21.♔b2 ♘xb2† 22.♔xb2 ♘b4† with a perpetual.

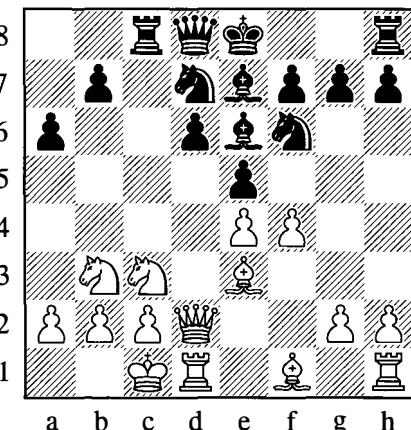
16...♔c5 17.g3 0–0 18.♔g2 ♘xe3 19.♗xe3
♔d7=



The chances should be about even in this interesting middlegame.

10...♗e7

Another possible move order is 10...b5 11.♔b1 ♘e7 12.f5 ♘c4 13.h3, transposing to the main line below.



11.♔b1 b5 12.f5 ♘c4 13.h3

Black should also be ready for the more energetic:

13.g4!?

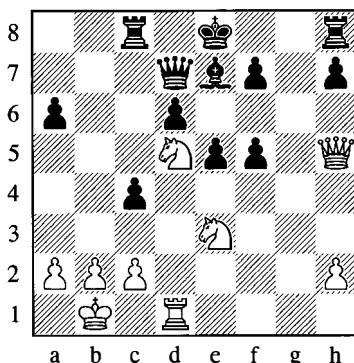
This move first appeared in a rapid game in 2004, when Morozevich used it to inflict a spectacular and devastating defeat on Topalov. Since then it has yielded a 100% score for White in grandmaster games –

that is, when Black captures the g-pawn. I suggest that you avoid that treacherous path, regardless of what the computer might say.

13...h6!

The purpose of this move is twofold. The first and most obvious idea is to safeguard the position of the knight on f6. The second, more subtle point is to prepare to capture the pawn on g4 without suffering positional problems.

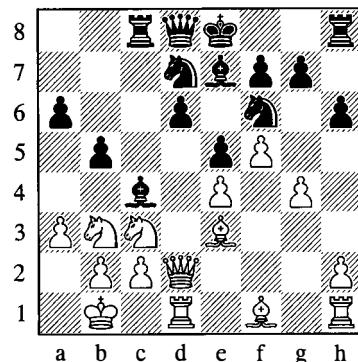
It is worth taking a brief moment to witness the aforementioned game, which ended as follows: 13... $\mathbb{Q}xg4$ 14. $\mathbb{B}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 15. $\mathbb{W}xe3$ g6 16. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ bxc4 17. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 18. $\mathbb{W}h3$ $\mathbb{W}d7$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ gxf5 20. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}cd5$ $\mathbb{Q}f2$ 22. $\mathbb{W}h5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ 23. $\mathbb{B}xd1$ White's pieces are simply tremendous, and in the game Black was unable to offer much resistance, despite his considerable material advantage.



23... $\mathbb{B}c5$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ $\mathbb{W}xe7$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ e4
 26. $\mathbb{Q}g7\#$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 27. $\mathbb{W}h6$ $\mathbb{W}e5$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}f5\#$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$
 29. $\mathbb{Q}xd6\#$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}f5\#$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 31. $\mathbb{W}g5$ $\mathbb{W}c7$
 32. $\mathbb{Q}g7\#$ 1–0 Morozhevich – Topalov, Monte Carlo (rapid) 2004.

14.a3

Black also has no problems after 14. $\mathbb{W}g2$ b4 (14... $\mathbb{Q}b6\?N$ is also interesting) 15. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 16.exd5 $\mathbb{Q}xf1\!N$ (16... $\mathbb{Q}g5=$ Stets – Saulin, Senden 2008.) 17. $\mathbb{B}df1$ a5 with promising counterplay for Black, for instance: 18.h4 a4 19. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{W}c4\#$



14... $\mathbb{Q}xg4!$

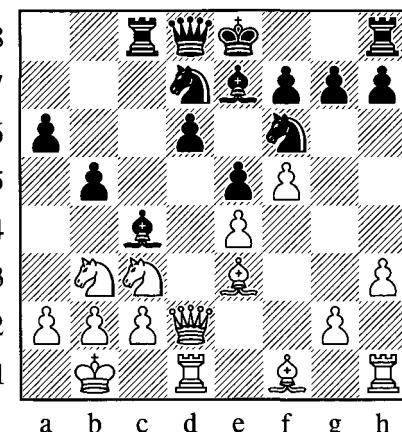
Now we will see what a difference the pawn on h6 makes.

15. $\mathbb{B}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 16. $\mathbb{W}xe3$ $\mathbb{Q}g5$

Now it all becomes clear. Black wins a tempo to play ... $\mathbb{Q}b6$ and can then retreat the bishop to f6 without dropping the d6-pawn.

17. $\mathbb{W}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}xf1$ 18. $\mathbb{B}df1$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 19.h4 $\mathbb{Q}f6\#$

White did not have enough activity for the pawn in Grischuk – Alekseev, Sochi 2006.



13...d5!

The central counterblow is the most unpleasant reaction to White's plan, although quieter alternatives would also have brought the second player a decent game.

14.exd5

This looks safer than:

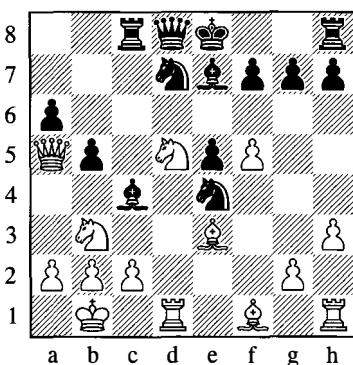
14. $\mathbb{Q}xd5\!?$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$

The first player has to tread carefully since the situation has become dangerous for him.

15.Wa5

- 15.Qc1 Qg3 16.Qb6 Qc7 17.Qxc4 bxc4
18.Qxd7 Qxd7 19.Qxd7 Wxd7 20.Qd1
Wxf5†

Best may have been 15.We1N, although even here after 15...Qxd5 16.Qxd5 Qc7 17.c3 0-0= Black should be somewhat better.



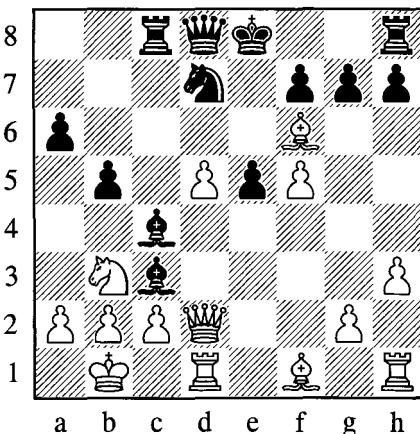
15...Wxa5N

- 15...Qxb3 16.Wxd8† Qxd8 17.axb3 Qg3
18.Qg1 Qxf5 19.Qf2 was equal in Todorovic – Marjanovic, Subotica 2000.

16.Qxa5 Qxd5 17.Qxd5 Qg3 18.Qg1 Qxf5
19.Qf2 Qc5†

14...Qb4 15.Qg5 Qxc3 16.Qxf6

16.bxc3 Qxd5†



16...gxf6!N

This is a try for an advantage. 16...Wxf6 is playable but only good enough for equality after: 17.Qxc3 Wxf5N (17...0-0 18.Qxc4 Qxc4 19.Qd3 e4 20.Qe3 Wxf5 21.Qhf1 Qg6 22.Qd4† Ni Hua – Li Shilong, Beijing 2008)
18.g4 Wf2 19.Qxc4 Qxc4 20.Qd3 0-0=

17.bxc3

With the c8-rook defended, White obviously cannot recapture with the queen. Thus both sides suffer from pawn weaknesses, but White's is more severe.

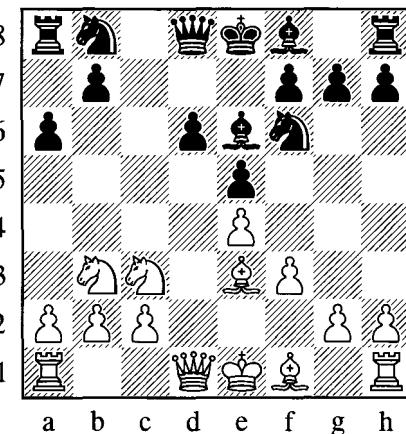
17...Qb6 18.Qxc4

18.d6 Qd5 19.Qe2 Qc6†

18...bxc4 19.d6 Qd7 20.Qc1 Qc5†

White must be prepared for careful defence as the position is becoming quite dangerous for him.

C3) 8.f3



This is the main line of course.

8...h5!?

With this combative move Black prevents the pawn advance g2-g4, one of the key concepts of the English Attack. It compromises Black's kingside to be sure, but I believe that the

potential benefits justify the risks. The idea has been tested repeatedly at high levels, most notably by Topalov who has used it in several important games.

At this point we will pay attention to three main moves: C31) 9.♗d5, C32) 9.♗e2 and C33) 9.♗d2.

C31) 9.♗d5

Since Black has “wasted” a tempo on such an outrageous pawn move, White hopes to benefit from immediate action in the centre.

9...♝xd5

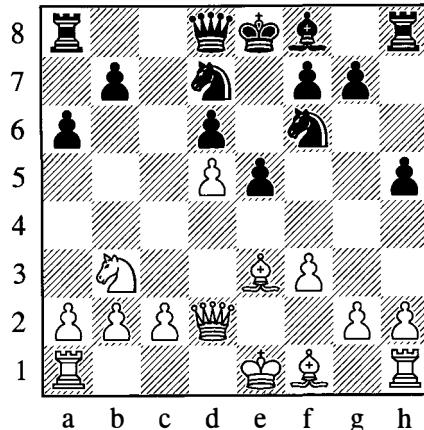
On this occasion it is preferable to wave goodbye to the bishop, rather than lose a tempo moving it after 9...♝xd5 10.exd5.

10.exd5

The fixed central structure gives the game a clearly defined strategic character. Black will base his play around the kingside and the dark squares generally, so in an ideal world the loss of the light-squared bishop will fit in quite well with his plan.

10...♝bd7 11.♗d2

The other main option is 11.c4, when play may continue 11...g6 12.♗d2 (12.♗d3 ♜h6 [Black can also play 12...♝g7, but it looks sensible to exchange these bishops when given the chance.] 13.♗xh6 ♜xh6 14.♗d2 ♜h8 15.♗a5 ♜b6 16.b4 h4? [possibly safer was 16...♝f8N intending ...♝g7] 17.♗b1 ♜h5 with double-edged play, Vertes – Covolo, e-mail 2006.) 12...b6 Preventing ♜a5, which is often a key resource for White in this line. (12...a5!N) 13.♗e2 ♜g7 14.0–0 0–0 15.♗a1 a5 16.♗a1 ♜c5 17.♗c2 ♜fd7 18.♗a3 f5 The players reached a complex, dynamically balanced middlegame in Syska – Benitah, France 2008.



11...♝c7?

This is a clever refinement, directed against White's next move.

12.♗a5

White is hoping that the knight will help to restrict his opponent's queenside pieces by tying at least one of them to the defence of b7. As I mentioned, Black has a special reply in store, but even so, the text move remains playable. Before we see the details, we will first check a couple of alternatives:

12.0–0–0

This position has occurred in a few games, sometimes via a different move order. The next few moves are quite natural from both sides:

12...♝b6 13.♗a5 ♜c8 14.c3 ♜c4 15.♗xc4
15.♗xc7 ♜xc7 16.♗xc4 ♜xc4 17.♗a5 ♜c7
18.♗he1 ♜d7 is equal, for instance: 19.f4
♝e7 20.fxe5 ♜xe5 21.♗b6 ♜d7 22.♗d4 f6=

15...♜xc4 16.♗he1 ♜e7 17.♗g5

This position was reached in Shirov – Ljubojevic, Belgrade 1997, and here I found a new idea which solves all Black's problems:

17...b6!

The game continuation of 17...0–0–0 is also quite playable. After 18.♗xf6 ♜f4† 19.♗d2 ♜xf6 20.♗b6 ♜b8 Black was only

minimally worse and drew without too many difficulties.

18.Wa3 Qxd5

18...0-0 19.Qxf6 Wf4† 20.Qb1 Wxf6
21.Wxa6 Wg6† 22.Wd3 Wxg2 23.Qd2±
19.Qxe7 Qxc3 20.bxc3 Wxc3† 21.Qb1 Wc2†
22.Qa1 Wc3† 23.Wb2 Qxe7

All three results are still possible, but I certainly would not rate Black's chances as inferior.

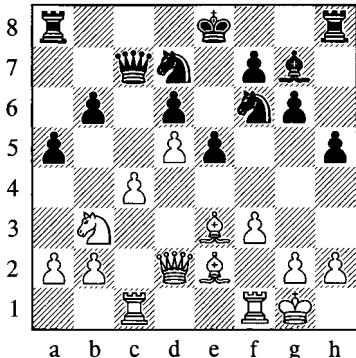
12.c4 a5

Black prevents the knight jump and prepares to build a wall using the dark squares. Still, in view of the knight manoeuvre executed by White between moves 16-19, Black might also consider 12...b6 with similar ideas, as seen in a number of games.

13.Qc1

13.a4?! has actually been the most popular reply, but it looks wrong for White to immobilize his own queenside like this.
13...b6 14.Wf2 g6 15.Qe2 Qg7 16.0-0
0-0 17.h3 Qc5 18.Qa3 Qfd7 19.g4 hxg4
20.hxg4 was seen in Apicella – Areshchenko, Cappelle la Grande 2003, and here after 20...Qxb3N 21.Qxb3 Qc5 Black's position is as solid as a rock without any problems.

13...b6 14.Qe2 g6 15.0-0 Qg7



16.Qa1!

It is time for the knight to search for greener pastures, and it just so happens that the

corner square provides the right path.

16...0-0 17.Qc2 Qc5 18.Qa3 h4 19.Qb5
Wd7!N

19...We7 20.b3 Qh5 21.Qd1 f5 22.a3 h3
23.gxh3 was a little better for White in Goloshchapov – Anisimov, Sochi 2006.
Instead I find it interesting to use the queen on the light squares.

20.We1!?

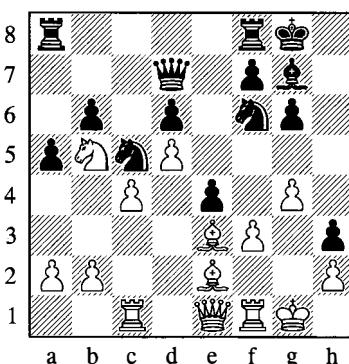
This is the most ambitious idea. White simply aims to win the h-pawn outright.

Another option is: 20.Qg5 h3 21.gxh3
(21.g3 e4∞) 21...We8∞

20...h3 21.g4!?

Now Black had better do something quickly before the h-pawn drops off the board.

21...e4!



22.Wh4

After 22.Wg3 exf3 23.Wxf3 Wa8 24.Wxh3
We7! Black has reasonable compensation.
One possible continuation is 25.Qg5 We8
26.Qxf6 Qxf6 27.Qxf6 We4, with good attacking chances.

22...We8 23.g5

23.Qxc5 bxc5∞

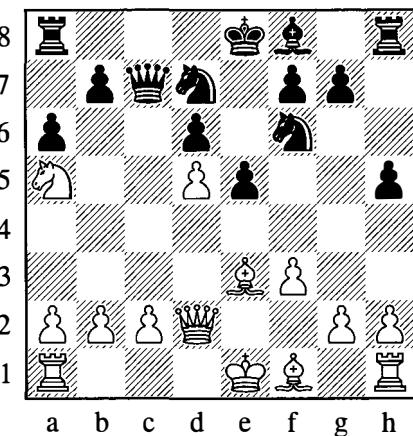
23...exf3 24.Qxf3 We3 25.gxf6 Wd8

Black seems to be holding his own in this complicated position. Here is one example of how the game might end after reasonably accurate play from both sides:

26.Qh1 Qd7 27.Wf4 We5 28.fxg7 Eg5†
29.Qg2 Exg2† 30.Qh1 We5 31.Wh6 Exh2†

32.♔g1 ♔g2†

With perpetual check.



12...b6! 13.♘c6

In a few games White has opted for the somewhat humiliating retreat 13.♘b3, but obviously we need not spend much time on this. One example continued 13...g6 14.♔e2 ♔g7 15.0–0 0–0 16.♖ad1 b5 17.♕a5 ♕b7 with comfortable play for Black, Londyn – Borovikov, Pardubice 2004.

13...♘xd5!

This witty capture reveals the point behind Black's move order.

14.♕xd5 ♘f6 15.♕b3

After 15.♕c4?! b5 16.♕b3 ♕xc6 17.a4 b4 18.0–0–0 d5 19.♔g5 ♕d8 20.♕xf6 gxf6 21.♔d3 ♕b6 22.♔b1 ♕c5 23.♔h1 ♕f8† White had little to show for his missing pawn in Leko – Topalov, Monte Carlo (rapid) 2006.

15...♕xc6 16.♕xb6

White has also tried 16.0–0–0 b5 17.♔g5 ♔e7 18.♔d3 ♕c8 19.♔b1 ♘d7 20.♔e3 d5 21.c3 ♕d8 22.♔h1 0–0 23.♔c2 The pressure against the central pawns gave White good chances to hold the balance in Cvek – Areshchenko, Germany 2007.

16...♗xb6 17.♔xb6 ♜b8 18.♔a5

18.♔f2 ♜xb2 19.♔xa6 d5 20.0–0 ♜d6 21.c4 d4 22.♔b5† ♘d8 23.a4 ♘c7† Black's strong centre gave him the upper hand in Erdogdu – Zakharstov, Olomouc 2009.

18...♗xb2 19.♔xa6 d5

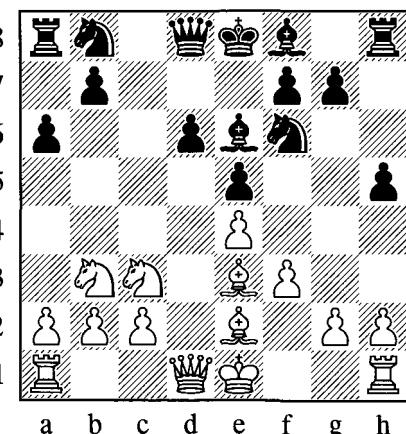
The ending should be approximately equal, as White's bishop pair and passed a-pawn are balanced out by Black's powerful centre, fewer pawn islands and active rook.

**20.♘d2 ♘d7 21.♔h1 ♔a3 22.♗xb2 ♜xb2
23.♔b5† ♘e6 24.♔b1 ♜a8! 25.♗xb2 ♜xa5**

The position remains in balance and the game Bologan – Atalik, Wijk aan Zee 2007, was eventually drawn. This whole line appears to put 12.♘a5 out of commission as a try for an advantage, so future attempts will probably focus on White's alternatives on move 12.

C32) 9.♔e2

Given that g2-g4 is no longer an option, it makes a certain amount of sense for White to abandon all thoughts of aggression and settle for simple development.



9...♘bd7 10.0–0

There is also:

10.♘d5 ♘xd5 11.exd5 ♔f5

It is more reasonable for Black to preserve the bishop on this occasion, as the reply ♖d3 would entail the loss of a tempo for White.

12.♗d2 ♜e7

12...g6 is also quite reasonable: 13.♕a5 ♘c7 14.0–0 ♘g7 15.c4 b6 16.♗c6 ♘b8 17.♗xb8 (17.♗ad1 ♘xc6 18.dxc6 ♜e7 19.♗b4 ♘xc6 20.♗d3 a5= Black's extra pawn compensates for the undesirable position of his king.) 17...♗xb8 18.b4 0–0 19.♗ac1 ♘fd8 20.a4 ♘d7 21.a5 Despite White's progress on the queenside the position remained approximately even in Nijboer – Van Wely, Wijk aan Zee 1998.

13.0–0 ♘c7 14.c4 0–0!

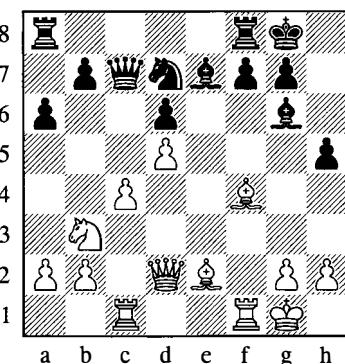
Black should continue mobilizing his pieces without being too worried about the weakness of the h5-pawn.

14...b6?! is a bit too slow. One game continued 15.f4 g6 16.fx5 dx5, Ponomariov – Cvitan, Neum 2000, and here White could have obtained some initiative with 17.♗ac1! N a5 18.c5! bxc5 19.♗b5.

15.f4

15.♗ac1 a5! 16.a4 ♘g6 17.♗h1 b6 was comfortable for Black in De Vreugt – Karjakin, Wijk aan Zee 2003.

15...exf4 16.♗xf4 ♘g6 17.♗ac1



17...♗fe8?N

Black can equalize comfortably with 17...♗b6† 18.♗e3 ♘g5 19.♗xb6 ♘xd2 20.♗xd2 ♘xb6 as in Ponomariov – Karjakin,

Benidorm 2002, but the text move keeps more life in the game.

18.♗f2 ♘h4!

Provoking a slight weakening.

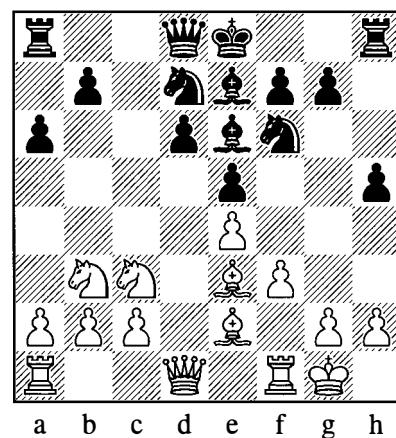
19.g3 ♘f6 20.c5 ♘e5

Black has promising counterplay.

10...♗e7

Black obviously cannot contemplate a kingside fianchetto when the d-file is still open. However, he could have considered 10...b5? 11.♗d2 ♘e7 12.♗fd1 ♘b6 13.♗f1 ♘c7 14.♗f2 ♘a4! This is an important motif in the battle for counterplay. 15.♗xa4 bxa4 16.♗b6 ♘b8 17.♗a5 ♘d7 18.♗e3 ♘xb2 19.♗c4 ♘xc4 20.♗xc4 ♘c3 21.♗e2 0–0 22.♗d2 ♘d4† 23.♗e3 ♘c3 White failed to get any advantage as his queenside was shattered in Ivanchuk – Dominguez Perez, Havana 2006.

It should be mentioned that White can always shuffle his move order around with 10.a4 ♘e7 11.0–0, so Black should not count on being able to play this way.



11.a4 ♘c7

It is hard to choose between this and the equally playable alternative:

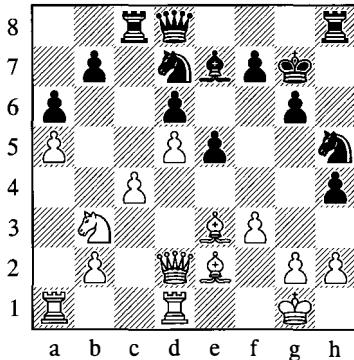
11...♗c8 12.a5 h4 13.♗d2 g6

Black intends to castle artificially by walking his king to g7.

14.♗fd1

There is also 14. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ (or 16. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 18. $\mathbb{W}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ Grischuk – Popov, Elista 2000, 19... $\mathbb{W}c6N$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ d5 21. exd5 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5=$) 16... $\mathbb{W}c6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}a1$ (17. $\mathbb{Q}1a2$ d5 18. exd5 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{W}xa4$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}ac3$ $\mathbb{W}xa5$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}d5\uparrow$ $\mathbb{W}xd5$ 23. $\mathbb{W}b4\uparrow$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}d3=$ With two rooks and a pawn for the queen, Black is not worse.) 17... $\mathbb{W}c7$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{W}c6$ White had a hard time making any progress in Zhigalko – Podolchenko, Minsk 2009.

14... $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 16. exd5 $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 17. c4 $\mathbb{Q}h5$



18. $\mathbb{Q}ac1$

The tempting 18. c5?! does not quite work: 18... dx5 19. d6 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 21. $\mathbb{W}c2$ (21. $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ exf4 22. $\mathbb{W}xf4$ h3 23. g3 $\mathbb{Q}c6$! 24. $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}e5\bar{F}$) 21... $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 22. $\mathbb{W}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ (23. $\mathbb{Q}ac1$ $\mathbb{Q}e8\bar{F}$) 23... $\mathbb{Q}xd6!$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}d4\bar{F}$ Black's pieces turned into unpleasant intruders on the opponent's territory, Nijboer – Sadler, Arnhem 1999.

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

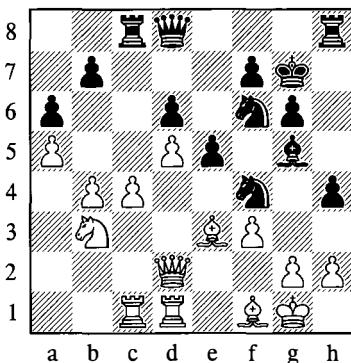
18... $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}g5$ also deserves attention.

19. $\mathbb{Q}a1$ $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 21. b4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$

Another game continued 21... $\mathbb{W}f6$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}ce8$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}d3?$ h3 24. g3 $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ $\mathbb{W}xf3$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ e4 \bar{F} Wang Pin – Zhang Zhong, Shanghai 2000.

22. $\mathbb{Q}b3$

Now in Gadjily – Magerramov, Dubai 2000, Black should have played:

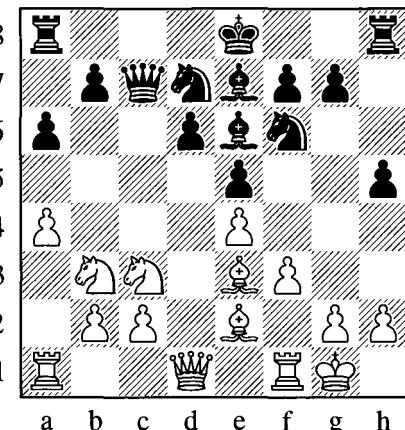


22... $\mathbb{W}d7!N$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}a1$

Otherwise ... $\mathbb{W}a4$ might prove annoying.

23... $\mathbb{W}f5$

In this complex position Black should be at least equal.



12. $\mathbb{Q}d2$

This is the most natural move, although the general character of the play is likely to remain the same in most cases. Here are a few other practical examples:

12. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ 0–0 13. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}fe8$ 14. a5 $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}ac8N$ (This looks better than: 15... $\mathbb{W}c6$ 16. h3 g6 17. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 18. exd5 $\mathbb{W}c7$ Black has lost some time and after 19. c4 White was

a little better in Fedorov – Kovchan, Saratov 2006.) 16. $\mathbb{W}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 17. $\mathbb{W}g3$ $\mathbb{E}d8$ Black has arranged his pieces in a sensible way to reach approximate equality.

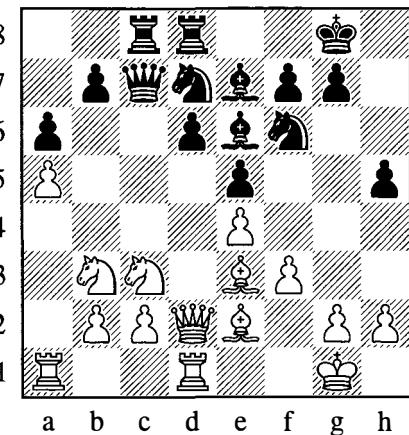
12. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ 0–0 13. a5 $\mathbb{E}fd8$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 15. exd5 b5?! This is something of a double-edged idea. Black leaves himself with a potentially weak a-pawn, but hopes to obtain counterplay using the open b- and c-files. 16. axb6 $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ $\mathbb{W}xb6$ 18. $\mathbb{E}a5$ $\mathbb{E}dc8$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 20. $\mathbb{W}e2$ $\mathbb{W}b8$ Black's counterplay on the dark squares is enough to make up for the weakness on a6, Flores Rios – Quesada Perez, Sao Paulo 2009.

12...0–0 13. a5

13. $\mathbb{E}fd1$ $\mathbb{E}fd8$ 14. a5 $\mathbb{E}ac8$ transposes to the main line, although Black can also consider 14...b5?! as above.

13... $\mathbb{E}ac8$ 14. $\mathbb{E}fd1$ $\mathbb{E}fd8$

With this move Black centralizes his last piece to reach a generally harmonious position, in which the oddly-placed pawn on h5 does not seem to harm his chances.



15. $\mathbb{Q}c1$

15. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ meets with a similar reaction: 15...d5! 16. exd5 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 18. $\mathbb{W}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 19. $\mathbb{W}c4$ $\mathbb{W}xc4$ 20. $\mathbb{E}xd8\#$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $\mathbb{E}xc4$

22. c3 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ With a level endgame, Lupulescu – Schneider, Korinthos 2004.

15. $\mathbb{W}e1$ only delays the inevitable after 15... $\mathbb{W}c6$ (15... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ dx5 has been played, but White is almost always a little better in this pawn structure, Rytshagov – Gadzhily, Elista 1998.) 16. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ (16. $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{W}c7=$) 16... d5! 17. exd5 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{W}e6$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}c5\#$ Having solved the problem of his backward pawn Black's pieces spring to life and his position is already slightly favourable, Jakubowski – Stocek, Pardubice 2006.

15...d5!

Black's pieces all stand on ideal squares, and there will never be a better moment to launch his counterplay.

16. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$

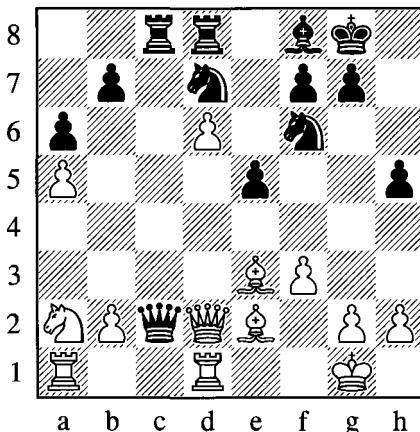
16. exd5 $\mathbb{Q}f8!$ leaves White struggling to equalize, for instance: 17. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ (or 18... $\mathbb{E}xd5\#N$ 19. $\mathbb{W}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}c5\#$) 19. $\mathbb{W}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 22. $\mathbb{E}xd8\#$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $\mathbb{Q}xe6\#$ Shomoev – Zhang Zhong, Ulaanbaatar 2002.

16... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 17. exd5 $\mathbb{W}xc2$ 18. d6

After 18. $\mathbb{W}xc2$ $\mathbb{E}xc2$ 19. b3 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ Black was more than comfortable in Grabner – Vossenkuhl, e-mail 2000.

18... $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}a2$

We have been following the game Hracek – Ftacnik, Germany 1999. It is not hard to determine that the d6-pawn will soon be departing to the next life, but the question is how best to capture it while restricting the opponent's counterplay. In the game I exchanged queens and later won, but White missed an opportunity to make better use of his bishop pair in the endgame. Thus I believe that the best move would have been:



19... $\mathbb{W}b3!$ N

19... $\mathbb{Q}d5?$ N is also interesting, but the text move is strongest.

20. $\mathbb{Q}c1$

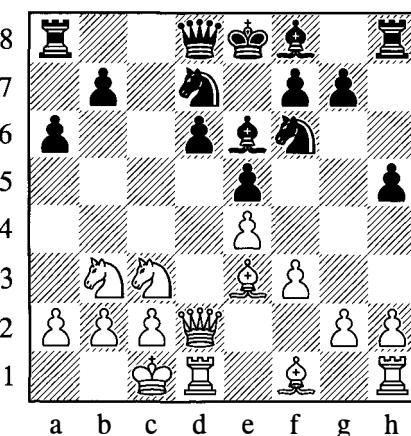
20. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ is also unpleasant for White.

20... $\mathbb{W}e6$

Black will soon collect the d-pawn, after which White's bishop pair will provide only negligible compensation.

C33) 9. $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}bd7$ 10.0-0-0

The plan with the long castling is normal for the English Attack, and probably the most serious test of the whole 8...h5 line. White could also switch plans with 9. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ or 9. $\mathbb{Q}e2$, transposing to variations C31 or C32 respectively.



10... $\mathbb{R}c8$

This is the main move, although Black has also successfully tested:

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

Maintaining some flexibility with the rook. The c-file might seem like an automatic target for it, but that is not necessarily the case.

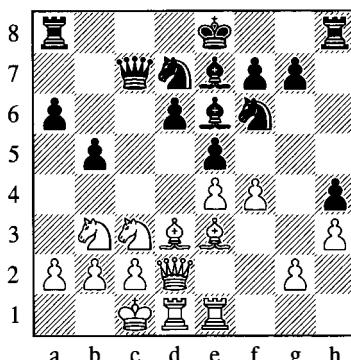
11.h3

This was played in a relevant high-level game, which showcased Black's idea perfectly. I do not intend to try to analyse the whole line exhaustively, but will merely mention in passing that 11. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ has been White's most popular choice.

11... $\mathbb{W}c7$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ h4 13.f4 b5 14. $\mathbb{R}hel$

Fixing the centre is not so clever for White:

14.f5 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 15.a3 0-0 16. $\mathbb{W}e1$ $\mathbb{R}fc8\bar{f}$



14... $\mathbb{R}b8!$?

The great master of the 8...h5 system finds yet another creative idea. This time Topalov anticipates an exchange of one of his minor pieces on c4, and thus places his rook accordingly.

15. $\mathbb{Q}b1$

15.f5 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 16. $\mathbb{W}e2$ b4 17. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ 18. $\mathbb{W}xd3$ 0-0 \bar{f} The e4-f5 structure fails to deliver much for White in this line.

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

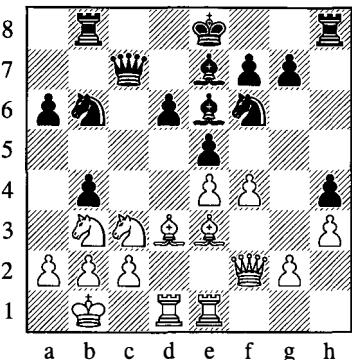
Continuing the plan.

16. $\mathbb{W}f2$

16.fxe5 dxe5 17. $\mathbb{W}f2$ b4 18. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}bx5$ 19.exd5 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $\mathbb{Q}f4$ transposes.

16...b4!?

16...♝c4 also looks reasonable, and was subsequently tested in a couple of high-level encounters.



17.♝d5!N

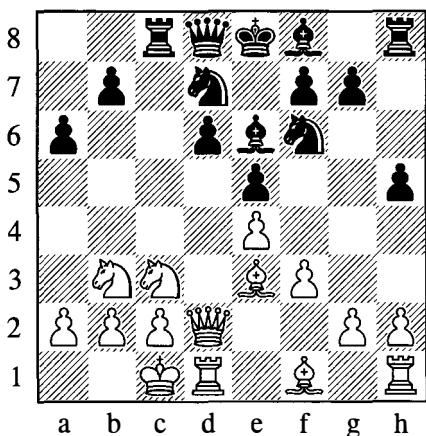
This is more challenging than 17.♝e2 ♝c4 18.♝d2 (18.♝c1 a5 19.f5 ♘d7 20.♝d2 ♘xd2† 21.♝xd2 a4†) 18...♝xe3 19.♗xe3 a5 20.b3 a4† With two bishops a very safe king Black had the upper hand in Svidler – Topalov, Morelia/Linares 2007.

17...♝bx d5 18.exd5 ♘xd5 19.fxe5 dx e5 20.♝c5 ♘f4!?

20...♝c3†? does not work: 21.bxc3 ♘xb3 22.cxb3 ♘xc5 23.♗f5† The opposite-coloured bishops might turn out to be a great blessing for the attacking side.

21.♝xe7 ♘xe7 22.♝c5 ♘bd8=

Black is doing fine despite the location of his king.



11.♔b1

White usually includes this prophylactic king move at some point. Sometimes he begins with:

11.h3

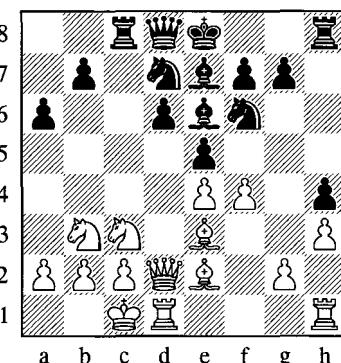
White intends to play f4, but does not want to worry about a knight appearing on g4.

11...♝e7 12.♝e2

12.f4 b5 13.♝d3 ♘c4 14.♝b1 (14.g4 hxg4 15.hxg4 ♘xh1 16.♗xh1 ♘xg4= The opening of the h file is not so dangerous for Black.) 14...♗c7 15.♗hf1 h4 16.♗f2 0–0 17.♗gl b4 18.♗d5 (After 18.♝e2 d5 19.exd5 ♘xd5† the White pieces are ill-prepared for the coming storm.) 18...♝xd5 19.exd5 Thorhallsson – M. Ashley, Bermuda 1999. 19...♝f6N 20.♗d1 ♘xd5 21.♗xc4 ♘xe3 22.♗xe3 ♘xc4† Black is in the driving seat with his good pieces and bishop stronger than the knight.

12...h4 13.f4

13.♝b1 b5 14.♗hel ♘b6 15.♗xb6 ♘xb6 16.f4 0–0 17.♗f3 (After 17.♗d5 ♘xd5 18.exd5 e4 19.♗g4 ♘c4 Black has a stable centre and the d5-pawn might become weak.) 17...♝c4 18.♗d3 ♘fc8 19.fxe5 dx e5 20.♗d5 ♘xd5 21.exd5 ♘d6† Onischuk – Dydishko, Minsk 2006.



13...b5

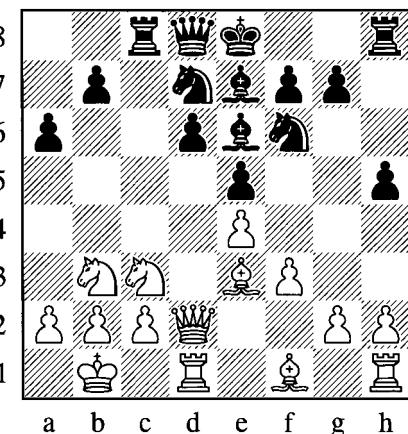
Black should almost always just ignore the pawn on f4 in the 8...h5-line.

14.♗f3 b4 15.♗e2

15.♘a4 ♘c7 16.f5 ♙c4 17.♗xb4 d5†
 15...a5 16.♗b1 ♘c7 17.♗he1 a4 18.♗bc1
 ♘b7†

White is already in big trouble, and his position soon collapsed in Mutschnik – A. Shneider, Alushta 2000.

11...♝e7



At this point several moves have been tried, but I will focus on the two most important ideas, namely **C331) 12.♘d5**, immediately changing the situation in the centre, and **C332) 12.♘d3**, continuing development and intending to follow up with f4.

12.h3 has also been popular, but in most cases it will simply transpose to line C232 after 12...b5 13.♘d3.

One other idea is:

12.g3 b5 13.♘d5 ♘xd5 14.exd5 ♘b6 15.♘h3
 This was the idea behind White's 12th move, but it should not be too dangerous. 15...♘c4
 16.♗e2 ♘c7 17.f4 0–0 18.♗f2N (After the strange-looking 18.♗hg1!?, Lutz – Gommers, Belgium 2004, Black could have obtained good play with both 18...♝e8N and 18...♝a8!!N.)
 18...♝e8 19.♗d2 exf4 20.gxf4 ♘xd2† 21.♗xd2 ♘f8= Black intends ...♝e4 with a healthy position.

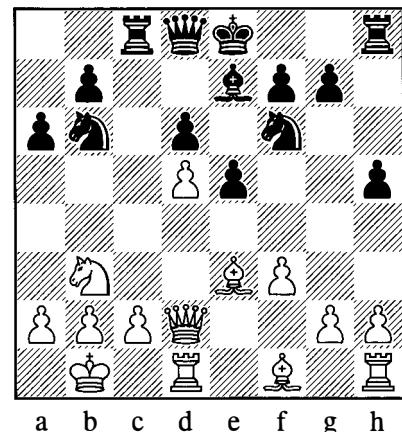
C331) 12.♘d5

The knight jump to d5 introduces a somewhat dangerous concept.

12...♝xd5

12...♝xd5 has been about equally popular, but the text is my own preference. Obviously there are some similarities with variation C31, except for the fact that in that line the white king invariably opted for short castling.

13.exd5 ♘b6



14.♗xb6!

This is more challenging than 14.♗a5 ♘c4 15.♗xc4 (15.♗xd8† ♘xd8= The middlegame without queens poses no great problems.) 15...♗xc4 16.♗d2 ♘d7 17.♗d3 ♘c8 18.g3 0–0 19.h3 ♘a4 20.♗d2 ♘b5 21.c4 ♘b4 22.a3 ♘a4 23.c5 ♘fd8= Black is doing fine despite the smart advance of the white c-pawn, Hracek – Ftacnik, Czech Republic 2000.

14...♗xb6 15.♗d3

The alternative bishop development should not cause too many problems for Black, as long as he makes a correct decision: 15.g3 0–0 16.♗h3 ♘c7! (16...♝a8 has been more popular, but it has scored badly and I think the text move is better.) 17.♗he1 ♘e8 18.f4 e4 19.♗g2

$\mathbb{Q}f8=$ Black was comfortable enough in Liu Dede – Wu Shaobin, Singapore 1998.

15...0–0

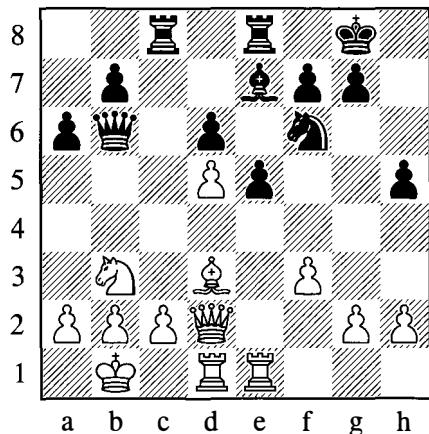
Though it may feel strange to castle with the pawn on h5, practice has shown that Black's defences are still resilient enough.

16. $\mathbb{B}he1$

16. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ leads nowhere for White after 16... $\mathbb{E}c4$ 17. g3 $\mathbb{E}e8$ 18. $\mathbb{B}he1$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 19. c3 a5 20. $\mathbb{W}d3$ $\mathbb{E}c7$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ g6 22. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}g7=$ Balcerak – Ftacnik, Germany 2001.

16... $\mathbb{B}fe8!?$

16... $\mathbb{Q}d8$ has been more popular, but it looks logical to develop another piece and prepare to contest the e-file.



17. f4 $\mathbb{Q}f8!?$

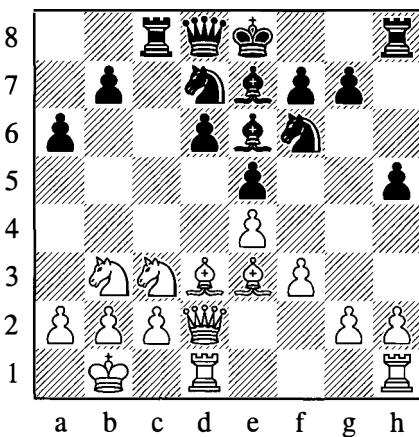
Black could have secured an equal game with 17... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 18. fxe5 dxe5 19. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$, but instead chooses to keep things more complex.

18. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{B}c4$ 19. $\mathbb{W}d3$ $\mathbb{B}xe4$ 20. $\mathbb{B}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 21. $\mathbb{W}xe4$ $\mathbb{W}f2$ 22. f5 $\mathbb{Q}e7$

Black was at least equal in Hynes – Djoudi, e-mail 2003. His bishop is not great, but his queen has considerable nuisance value.

C332) 12. $\mathbb{Q}d3$

With this move White continues his development and prepares f4.



12...b5 13. h3

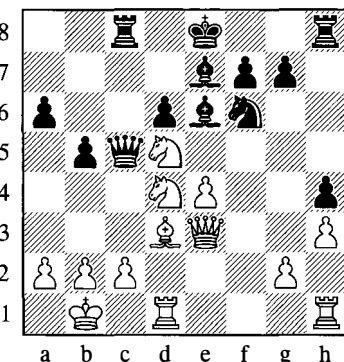
The main purpose of this move is to prepare g4, thus enticing the black h-pawn to take another step forwards. In the event of 13.f4, Black should respond with 13... $\mathbb{W}c7$, with similar ideas to the main line.

13...h4 14. f4 $\mathbb{W}c7$

As usual for the 8...h5 line, Black should simply ignore the f4-pawn.

15. $\mathbb{B}he1$

This has been almost an automatic choice. Immediate action should not lead anywhere for White: 15. fxe5 $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 17. $\mathbb{W}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 18. $\mathbb{W}xe3$ $\mathbb{W}c5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ was seen in Firman – Arshchenko, Sudak 2002, and here Black should have played:

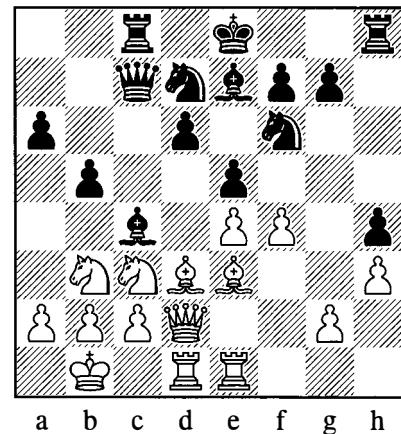


19... $\mathbb{Q}xd5!$ N (The game continuation of 19... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 20.exd5 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ could have been punished by 21. $\mathbb{W}f3!$ \pm when the opposite-coloured bishops greatly enhance White's attack.) 20.exd5 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 21. $\mathbb{E}he1$ $\mathbb{E}c7$ 22. $\mathbb{W}f4$ $\mathbb{E}h5$ Black should be at least equal here.

15... $\mathbb{Q}c4!$

Tournament practice has demonstrated that this is Black's most promising method of handling the position. The idea is simple, but effective: Black intends to play ...b4 and meet $\mathbb{Q}d5$ with ... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$, without having his bishop exposed to attack after the reply exd5.

15...0–0?N 16.a3 $\mathbb{E}b8!$ 17.f5 (17. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 18.fxe5 $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}g3$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xg3$ $hxg3\infty$) 17...a5 18. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ 19. $\mathbb{W}xd3$ b4 20.axb4 $\mathbb{E}xb4$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}a2$ $\mathbb{E}b8$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xh4$ (22. $\mathbb{W}c3$ $\mathbb{E}b5\mp$) 22...a4 23. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{W}c7\infty$

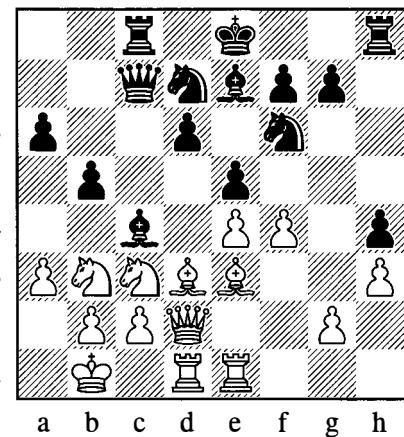


16.a3?

Given Black's intentions, this seems like a principled reply. We should not underestimate the influence that the knight exerts from the c3-square.

An example of what White should avoid is: 16. $\mathbb{W}f2$ b4 17. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 18.exd5 $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ 0–0 20. $\mathbb{E}c1$ a5 \mp Black's activity on the queenside was developing unhindered in Mastrovasilis – Efimenko, Istanbul 2003.

16. $\mathbb{Q}f2?$ might encourage Black to change his plans slightly with 16... $\mathbb{Q}xd3!$ N (16...b4 17. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 18.exd5 $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ 19. $\mathbb{W}xd3$ 0–0 20. $\mathbb{Q}d4$! This reveals the point behind White's clever 16th move. [20. $\mathbb{E}e2$ a5 21. $\mathbb{W}b5$ $\mathbb{Q}f6\infty$] 20... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}c6$ exf4 22. $\mathbb{Q}e7\pm$ $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ 23. $\mathbb{E}xe7$ $\mathbb{W}d8$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}xh4$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 25. $\mathbb{E}xe5$ $\mathbb{W}xh4$ White could claim no more than a negligible advantage in Tiviakov – Quinn, Bratto 1999.) 17.cxd3 (17. $\mathbb{W}xd3$ exf4) 17...b4 18. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{W}b7$ 19. $\mathbb{E}c1$ 0–0 20.fxe5 dxe5 21. $\mathbb{E}xc8$ $\mathbb{E}xc8$ 22. $\mathbb{E}c1$ $\mathbb{E}xc1\pm$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}exc1$ $\mathbb{Q}h5\mp$ Black is completely safe, despite having a few pawns on the dark squares.



16... $\mathbb{E}b8!$

I believe this to be the most promising reaction to White's last move. I was not quite satisfied with the following alternatives:

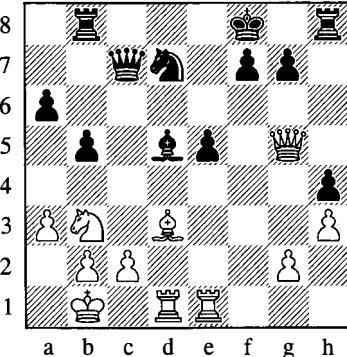
16... $\mathbb{Q}b6!$ 17. $\mathbb{W}f2!$ N (17. $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ $\mathbb{W}xb6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 19.exd5 was seen in Lutz – Ki. Georgiev, Plovdiv 2003, and here after 19...0–0N 20. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{E}cd8\mp$ Black has nothing to fear as his counterplay against the d5-pawn balances the chances.) 17... $\mathbb{Q}a4$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xa4$ bxa4 19. $\mathbb{Q}b6$ $\mathbb{W}b8$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $\mathbb{E}xc4$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}a5$ $\mathbb{E}c8$ 22.fxe5 dxe5 23.c4 \pm Black's activity has badly backfired.

I spent some time analysing 16...0–0?!N 17. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ (17... $\mathbb{Q}xb3$ 18.cxb3 exf4 19. $\mathbb{Q}xh4$

♘e5 20.♗f1±) but did not find a clear route to equality after 18.cxd3!.

17.♗f2!N

This looks critical, and is certainly more challenging than the plan seen in the following game: 17.♗d5 ♘xd5 18.exd5 ♗xd5! 19.fxe5 dxe5 20.♗g5 ♗xg5 21.♗xg5 ♖f8!



22.♗f5 (22.♗e4 ♘xe4 23.♗xe4 ♘c8 24.♗e2 ♘e8 25.♗e4 ♘f6 26.♗xh4 ♘xh4 27.♗xh4 ♖g8+) 22...♘f6 23.♗e3 ♘xb3 24.cxb3 g6 25.♗d3 ♘d8 26.♗xe5 ♘xe5 27.♗xe5 ♘h5 28.♗xh5 ♘xh5 With a clearly better endgame for Black, Claridge – Krueger, e-mail 2004.

17...0–0!?

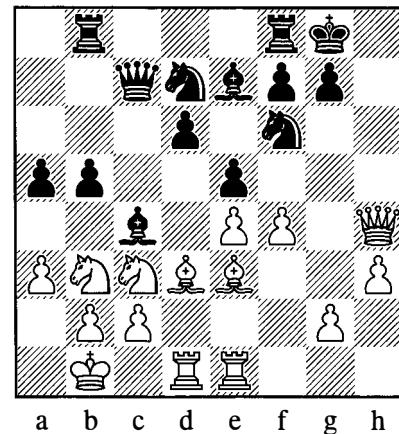
This interesting pawn sacrifice should result in promising compensation for Black.

17...b4 is interesting, but I do not quite trust it. Play may continue: 18.axb4 ♘xb4 (Perhaps 18...♗xb3? could be considered, although exchanging this bishop for a knight brings its own problems.) 19.fxe5 (19.♗xc4 ♘xc4 20.♗d2 a5 gives Black enough counterplay) 19...dxe5 20.♗xc4 (20.♗f1 0–0 21.♗xc4 ♘xc4 is fine for Black, as 22.♗xh4? is refuted by 22...♗xc3 23.bxc3 ♘d5+) 20...♗xc4 21.♗d3 0–0? 22.♗xh4 ♘b8 23.♗f1±

18.♗xh4 a5!

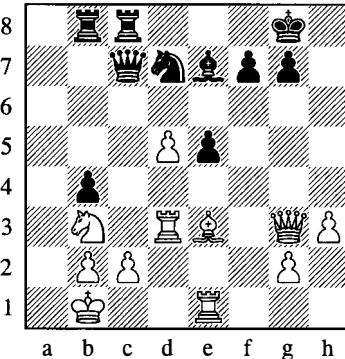
18...b4 is not quite sufficient to equalize: 19.axb4 ♘xb3 20.cxb3 ♘xb4 21.♗c2 (21.♗c4

♘xe4 22.♗xe7 ♘xc3† 23.bxc3 ♘xc4+) 21...♘c5 22.fxe5 dxe5 23.♗xc5 ♘xc5 24.♗g3±



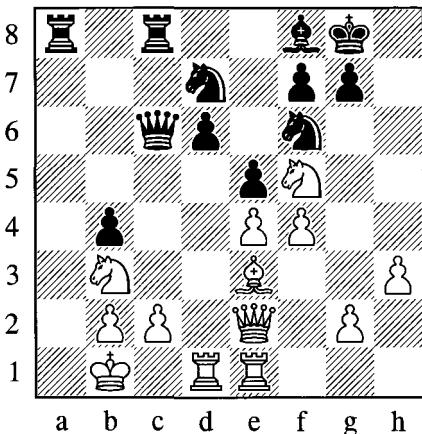
19.♗f2

I also checked the following line: 19.fxe5 dxe5 20.♗g3 b4 21.axb4 axb4 22.♗d5 ♘xd5 23.exd5 (23.♗h6 ♘f6 24.exd5 ♘xd3 25.♗xd3 ♘fc8 26.♗d2 ♘a8 27.♗f2 ♖f8∞) 23...♘xd3 24.♗xd3 ♘fc8



Black maintains decent compensation and White must tread carefully, for instance: 25.♗c1 ♘a8 26.c4 bxc3 27.♗dx3 ♘d8 28.♗xc8 ♘xc8 29.♗xc8 ♘xc8∞

19...b4 20.axb4 axb4 21.♗e2 ♘fc8 22.♗g3 ♘a8 23.♗f5 ♘f8 24.♗xc4 ♘xc4 25.♗e2 ♘c6∞



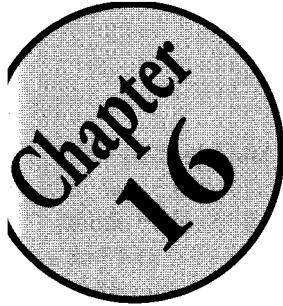
With a couple of open queenside files and pressure against the e4-pawn, Black has a promising position.

Conclusion

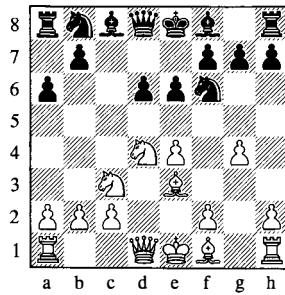
Variation A with 7.Qd2 fails to produce many sparks under closer scrutiny, which is perhaps not surprising given its artificial appearance. Nevertheless the move is by no means bad, and should be studied carefully.

The positional 7.Qf3 is also not to be underestimated. The various branches of variation B revealed that Black succeeds in maintaining the balance, but needs to combine a sound positional understanding with resolute action in certain critical positions.

Finally, the most aggressive and popular retreat is variation C with 7.Qb3, which will undoubtedly continue to be tested in competitive situations ranging from club chess all the way up to super-GM level, for years to come. My overall conclusion is that the recommended solution of 7...Qe6 8.f3 h5!? leads to rich and dynamic positions in which Black should be able to maintain a fair share of the chances, although once again it was necessary to find some creative new ideas in certain key variations. The whole line is characterized by deep strategic play combined with a simmering cauldron of potential tactical fireworks lying under the surface – a perfect battleground for fans of the uncompromising Najdorf variation.



English Attack



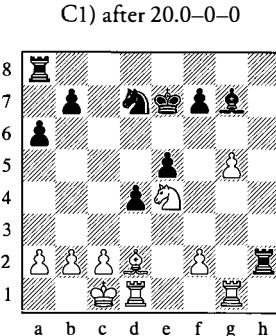
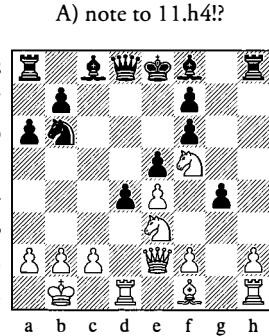
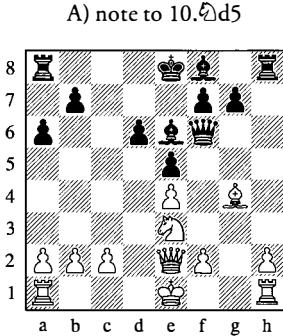
Predator - 6.♗e3 e6 7.g4

Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.♗e3 e6

7.g4 e5 8.♘f5 h5

| | |
|--|-----|
| A) 9.♗g5 | 324 |
| B) 9.gxh5 | 325 |
| C) 9.g5 ♘xe4 10.♘xg7† ♘xg7 11.♘xe4 d5 12.♘g3 d4 13.♗d2 ♖d5 | 327 |
| C1) 14.♗g1 | 328 |
| C2) 14.c4!? | 330 |

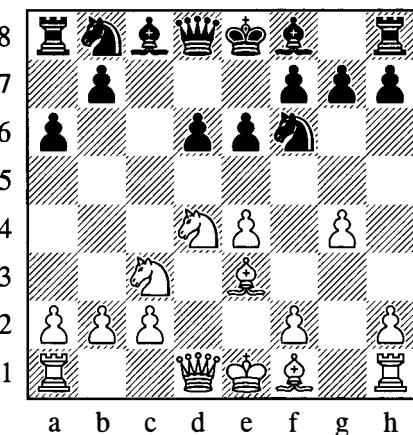


16...♗f4!N

15...♘a4!N

20...♗ah8N

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6
5.♗c3 a6 6.♗e3 e6 7.g4



This extremely sharp line, known as the Perenyi Attack, is related to the Keres Attack (5...e6 6.g4), but White hopes that his ♘c1-e3 will prove more useful than Black's ...a7-a6 in the ensuing battle. Matters are not so simple though, as Black can begin an immediate counterattack against the g4-pawn, while it is quite helpful to have prevented a possible check on b5.

7...e5

7...h6 has been more popular, but I believe the text move to be the most challenging response.

8.♗f5 h5!?

I believe this to be a better practical choice than the more popular 8...g6, when play continues 9.g5 gxf5 10.exf5! d5 11.♗f3 d4 12.0-0-0 with a hugely complicated and irrational position. It is not clear if Black will get a chance to enjoy his (often huge) material advantage, as hardly any of his pieces are playing. Instead our recommended solution is much safer and is gradually winning followers.

White has three main responses: A) 9.♗g5, B) 9.gxh5 and C) 9.g5.

A) 9.♗g5 hxg4 10.♗d5

It is too early for White to give up his dark-squared bishop:

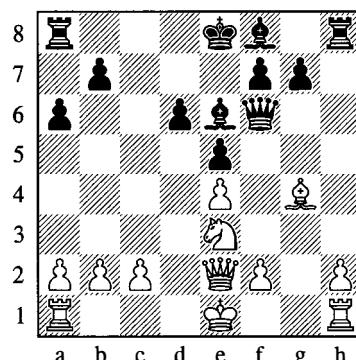
10.♗xf6 ♗xf6 11.♗d5

11.♗xg4 ♗e6 gives Black an easy game, for instance: 12.♗f3?! (12.0-0-0 looks better, although Black is still doing nicely after 12...♗d7 13.♗f3, Mijovic – Krivokapic, Bar 2005, 13...0-0-0N) 12...♗d7 13.♗e2 g6 14.♗e3 ♗xf3 15.♗xf3 ♗h6 16.♗cd5 ♗c8 17.c3 ♗xe3 18.♗xe3 ♗h4 19.0-0 ♗e7

White was already positionally lost in Bellin – Hillarp Persson, Guernsey 2007.

11...♗d8 12.♗fe3 ♗e6 13.♗e2 ♗d7 14.♗xg4 ♗f6 15.♗xf6† ♗xf6 16.♗e2

This position was reached in Alcazar Jimenez – Martin Rueda, Mondariz 2003, and here Black could have created problems with:



16...♗f4!N 17.♗xe6

17.0-0-0 ♗xe4 looks like a safe pawn, while after 17.f3 White would have to reckon with 17...♗e7, when the bishop could become rather active.

17...fxe6 18.♗g4 ♗xg4

18...♗h6?! could also be considered.

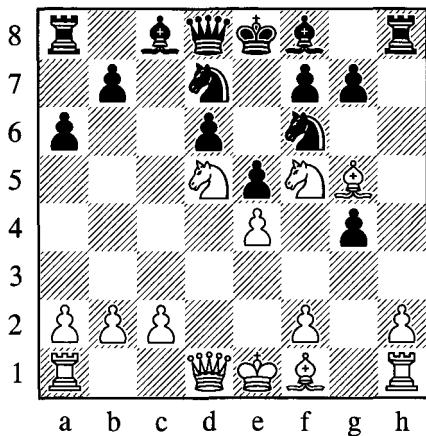
19.♗xg4 ♗c8 20.c3 ♗e7

White's kingside weaknesses will give him some problems in the ending.

10...♗bd7

There is a second satisfactory continuation in 10...♗xf5 11.♗xf6 gxf5 12.exf5 ♗d7 13.♗g2

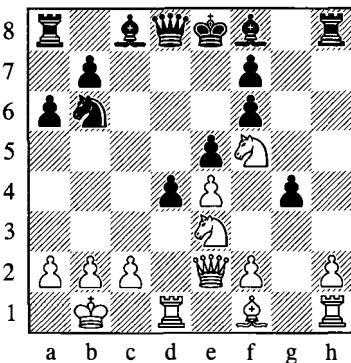
♗h4 14.♗d3 ♜b6. From here, best play seems to be 15.0–0–0N (This is stronger than the meek 15.♗c3?! ♜c7 16.0–0–0 0–0–0 17.♗d5 ♜h6† 18.♗b1 Swinkels – Palac, Dresden 2007, since now 18...♗h3!N 19.♗e4 ♜f4 would be very pleasant for Black.) 15...♗xd5 16.♗xd5 ♜d7 17.♗b1 ♜c8 With roughly even chances.



11.h4!?

This was the choice of a high-level grandmaster, but it is unlikely to cause Black many problems.

The more natural 11.♗e2 is also not dangerous after 11...♗b6 12.♗xf6 (Perhaps White should prefer 12.♗de3, A. Heinz – Tiemann, Boeblingen 2009, although after 12...♗xf5N [this is better than the game continuation of 12...g6?! 13.♗xg4] 13.exf5 ♜e7 14.♗g2 ♜c7 Black is at least equal.) 12...gxf6 13.♗de3 d5 14.0–0–0 d4 15.♗b1



15...♗a4!N (This is a simple improvement over 15...♗c7 16.♗xg4 ♜c6? [Black could still have maintained the balance with 16...♗xf5N 17.exf5 ♜e7] 17.f4 and Black was suffering in Barrientos Chavarriaga – Brkic, Turin 2006.) 16.♗c4 b5 17.♗d5 ♜e6 18.♗xd8† ♜xd8 19.♗xg4 ♜e7 Black's sounder structure gives him the better chances.

11...g6

Black should exchange or repel his opponent's active pieces. First there is the knight...

12.♗fe3 ♜h6

And now the bishop.

13.♗xh6 ♜xh6 14.♗c4!?

The routine 14.♗xg4 ♜xg4 15.♗xg4 ♜b6 16.♗d1 ♜e6 gives Black a pleasant and easy game.

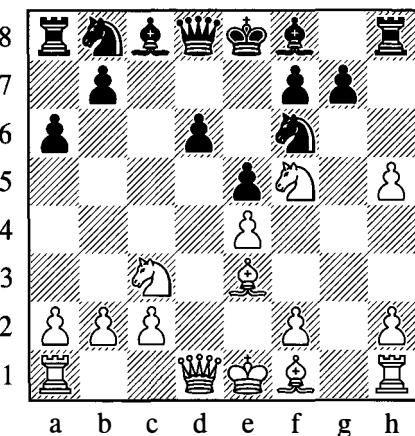
14...♗xe4!

Black could have equalized with the solid 14...♗c5, but instead he opts for the most principled and ambitious move.

15.♗g2 ♜df6 16.♗xf6† ♜xf6 17.♗d2 ♜h5 18.♗xd6† ♜f8 19.0–0–0 ♜e7

Black has weathered the storm and emerged with an excellent position in Naiditsch – Cvitan, Kusadasi 2006.

B) 9.gxh5



I cannot imagine many scenarios in the Sicilian Defence in which this meek reaction to ...h7-h5 could aspire to be the best line.

9...d5!

Now that g4-g5 is no longer an option for White, this becomes quite awkward to meet.

10.♗g5

A couple of other moves have also been tried:

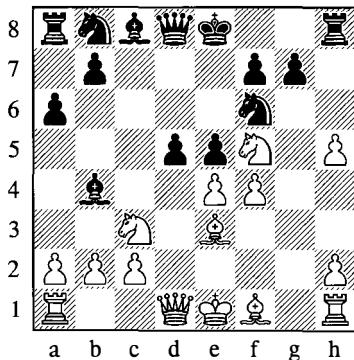
10.♗f3 d4 11.0–0–0 ♗xf5 12.♗xf5 (12.exf5 ♗bd7 also looks pleasant for Black) was seen in Pikula – Jakovljevic, Niska Banja 1996. Here it looks promising to play 12...♗bd7N 13.♗g5 ♘xh5, with an excellent game.

10.f4?

White tries to provoke huge complications.

10...♗b4!?

Black might also have done well to consider 10...d4N, when my main line runs as follows:
 11.fxe5 ♗xe4 12.♗xe4 ♗xf5 13.♗g3 ♗a5†
 14.♗d2 ♗xe5† 15.♗e2 ♗xe2† 16.♗xe2
 ♗xc2 17.♗c1 d3 18.♗d1 ♗c6 19.♗xc2 dxc2
 20.♗xc2 ♗d8 Black has a safe position with slightly better chances.



11.♗g2!?

White should have preferred 11.♗xg7†?!N ♗f8 12.exd5, leading to a wildly unclear position with umpteen possibilities.

11...♗xf5 12.exf5 e4 13.0–0 ♗c6 14.a3 ♗xc3 15.bxc3

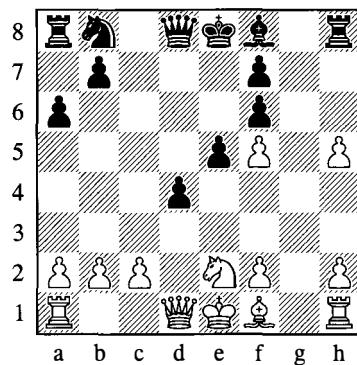
This position was reached in Ionov – Vachier Lagrave, Moscow 2008, and here Black should have played:

15...♘xh5N

With a clear advantage.

10...d4 11.♗e2

It is doubtful that White gains anything with the preliminary minor piece exchange: 11.♗xf6 gxf6 12.♗e2 (or 12.♗b1, Frolochkin – Fedoseev, Peterhof 2008, 12...♗c6N 13.♗d2 ♗b6 with a good game for Black) 12...♗xf5 13.exf5



This position was reached in De Jong – Goudriaan, Hoogeveen 2008, and here it looks logical for Black to play 13...♗c6N 14.♗g2, and now either 14...♘xh5 or perhaps even the disruptive 14...♗a5†?..

11...♗f5 12.exf5 ♗d5 13.♗g1

This looks better than 13.♗g3?! ♘xh5 14.♗g1 ♗xg3 15.hxg3 ♗e4† (15...♗h2?N may have been even stronger) 16.♗e2 ♗xf5 17.♗d2 ♗d7 18.0–0–0 ♗c8 when White did not have much to show for the missing pawn in Giri – Kozlov, St Petersburg 2007.

13...♗bd7N

This simple move is an improvement over 13...♗e4?! 14.♗g2 ♗a5† 15.♗d2 ♗xd2

16.♗xd2 when White was fine in Cheng – Ftačník, Las Vegas 2006.

14.♗g2 ♖b5!

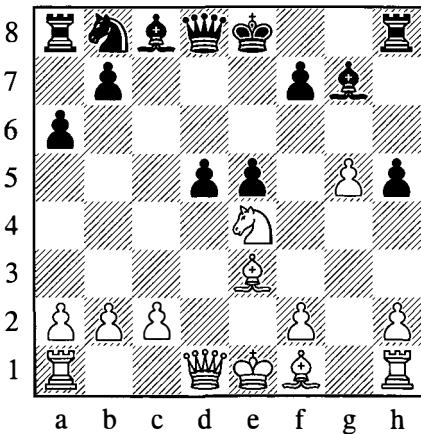
The attack on the b-pawn is a bit annoying for White. True, Black may not be threatening to capture the pawn immediately as the white rook would penetrate to b7, but the real point is that the natural plan of ♖d2 and 0–0–0 is prevented. Overall I would rate Black's chances as at least equal.

C) 9.g5

This has been by far the most popular choice, and leads to a rich position after the following brief tactical exchange.

9...♝xe4 10.♞xg7† ♜xg7 11.♝xe4 d5

We have quite an unusual situation for the early stages of the Sicilian Defence. Black has seized the centre and his pieces have plenty of space; his only concerns are connected with the slight looseness of his pawns.



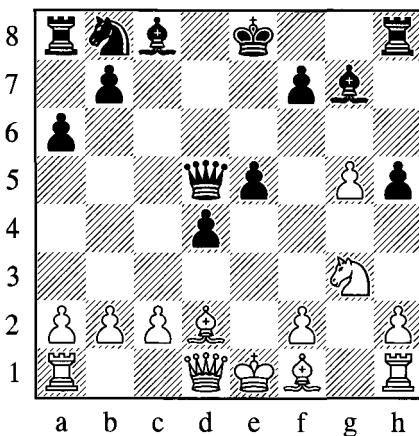
12.♝g3

Harmless is 12.♞f6† ♜xf6 13.gxf6 ♜e6 14.♗g1 ♜c6 15.♗g2 d4 when a draw was agreed in Todorović – Aleksić, Budva 2004. A likely continuation would have been 16.♗g5 ♖b6 when Black is more than happy.

12...d4

The expansion in the centre seems a bit daring, but the alternatives fare worse. For instance: 12...♜g4 13.♗e2 d4 14.♗d2 ♜xe2 15.♗xe2 ♖d5 16.0–0 h4 17.♗h5 ♜f8 18.f4 ♜c6 Pelletier – Jaracz, Warsaw 2005, and now after 19.f5!N h3 20.♗f2 Black is in trouble.

13.♗d2 ♖d5



Here we will pay close attention to C1) 14.♗g1 and C2) 14.c4!, after first checking a couple of bishop moves:

14.♗e2

This does not look too threatening and has never been played at GM level, but that does not mean it is a bad move.

14...e4 15.c4

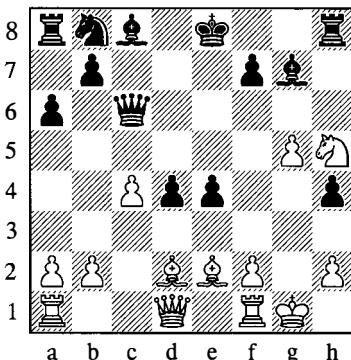
A few other moves have been tried:

15.♗f4 h4 16.♗h5 ♜h7 17.♗g1 ♜c6 18.♗f6† ♜xf6 19.gxf6 ♜h8 20.♗g5 ♖d8 21.♗d2 ♖xf6 22.0–0–0 ♜e6 Black was a pawn up with good prospects in Oortwijn – Kund, e-mail 2007.

15.f3 has been played a few times, but the tense position soon peters out to equality after 15...d3 16.cxd3 exd3 17.♗c3 ♜xc3† 18.bxc3 ♖xg5 19.♗xd3 ♜c6 20.♗b1 ♜h6 21.♗f2 ♜h3 when a draw was agreed in Perez – Blanco Gramajo, e-mail 2006.

15... $\mathbb{W}c6$ 16.0–0 h4 17. $\mathbb{Q}h5$

This position was reached in Yordanov – Grigorov, Plovdiv 2008, and here I suggest:



17... $\mathbb{Q}e5N$

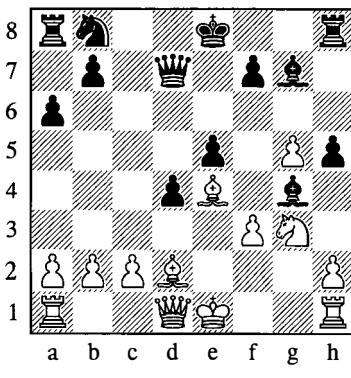
In the game Black opted for the questionable exchange sacrifice 17... $\mathbb{Q}xh5?!$, and although he went on to win, I do not think the idea was fully justified.

18.f4? $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}f6\#$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$

Black is not worse in this double-edged position.

14. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{W}d7$ 16.f3

This was White's improvement over a previous game which continued 16. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 17. $\mathbb{W}e2$ 0–0–0 18. $\mathbb{Q}xg4$ $hxg4$ 19.0–0–0 $\mathbb{W}e6$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 21.f4 exf4 22. $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ $\mathbb{W}xe2$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ when Black was defending successfully in Korneev – Wojtaszek, Evora 2007.



16... $\mathbb{Q}e6?!$

Another game continued 16... $\mathbb{Q}h3$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}g1$, and here Black should have played 17... $\mathbb{Q}c6N$ (Instead in Korneev – Mogranzini, Porto Mannu 2008, Black erred with 17... $h4?!$, inviting the strong manoeuvre 18. $\mathbb{Q}h1!$ followed by $\mathbb{Q}f2$ hitting the bishop, and later $\mathbb{Q}d3$ when the knight was ideally placed.) The knight on g3 is not so well-placed, so there is no reason to drive it to a better square. Nevertheless, after 18. $\mathbb{W}e2$ (Black should certainly not be afraid of 18.f4? $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ 0–0–0 when White is in trouble.) 18... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 19.0–0–0 it seems to me that White's chances are slightly higher.

17.h4

This looks better than 17. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ (Also interesting is 17... $h4N$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{W}c7?!$ intending ... $\mathbb{Q}d7-c5$.) 18. $\mathbb{W}e2$ 0–0–0 when Black had a comfortable position in Lagarde – Stephan, Pau 2008.

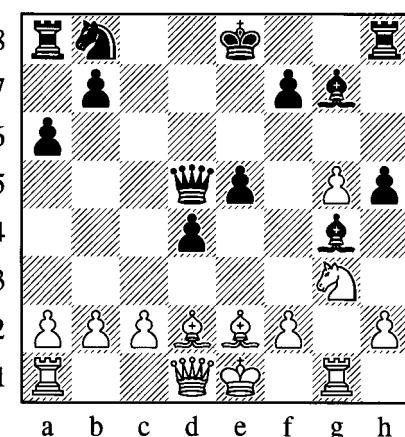
17... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 18. $\mathbb{W}e2$ 0–0–0

The position remains tense, with roughly equal chances. Korneev – Meneses Gonzales, Spain 2010.

C1) 14. $\mathbb{Q}g1$

This older move appears logical, but Black soon obtains a promising position.

14... $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}e2$



15...♞d7

Black intends to position the knight on c5, where it will control some of the vital central squares. In the following high-level encounter Black succeeded with a different approach, although I would caution the reader not to read too much into this as it was only a blitz game: 15...♝c6 16.h4 e4 17.♗xg4 hxg4 18.♗xg4 e3 19.fxe3 dxe3 20.♗xe3 ♞e5 21.♗e4 ♗xe4 22.♗xe4 ♜f3† 23.♗e2 ♜xg1† 24.♗xg1 ♘xh4 and Black went on to win the ending in Ponomariov – Gelfand, Moscow (blitz) 2008.

16.♗xg4

This is not much of a try for an advantage, but the alternative is risky:

16.f3

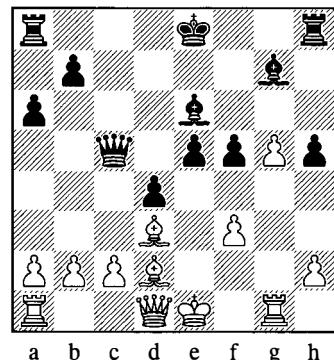
After this move Black is unable to claim the best pawn structure, but his pieces can become very active.

16...♝e6 17.♗e4 ♜c5 18.♗xc5

18.♗c4 ♗c6 19.♗xe6 ♜xe4 (19...♝xe6 20.g6=) 20.♗f5 (20.♗xf7† ♜xf7 21.g6† ♜e6 22.fxe4 ♗xe4† 23.♗e2 ♗xe2† 24.♗xe2 e4 centralized set up promises advantage to the second player) 20...♞d6 21.♗d3 ♜c4 22.♗c1 the outcome of the bishops dance is an equal position.

18...♗xc5 19.♗d3 f5

Black is doing fine also after 19...0–0–0N 20.♗e2 ♜b8.



20.gxf6?

It looks tempting to open the g-file, but now Black's dark-squared bishop enters the action with powerful effect.

20.♗e2 was better, when 20...0–0–0 21.0–0–0 ♜d6 is roughly equal.

20...♝xf6 21.♗e2

21.♗g6 ♜h4† 22.♗f1 ♜h3† 23.♗g1 0–0–0 24.♗e2 ♜hg8 is also not great for White.

21.♗h4† 22.♗d1

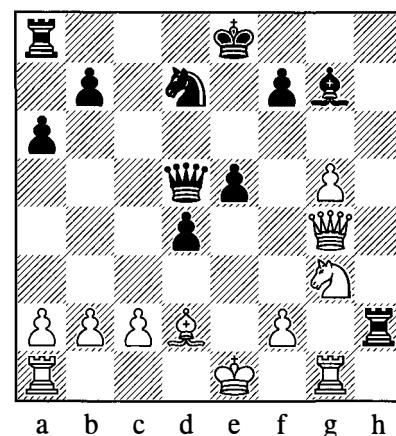
22.♗f1? ♜h3† would have been even worse.

22...0–0–0

White's poor king position proved to be her undoing in T. Kosintseva – Wojtaszek, Lausanne 2006.

16...hxg4 17.♗xg4 ♜xh2

The outcome of the opening can be evaluated as positive for Black, who benefits from active pieces and healthy control over the centre. In fact it is already White who must work for equality.

**18.♗e4**

Alternatives are no better:

18.♗b4?! ♜c8 (Black could also consider 18...♗b5!N 19.a3 ♜f8 with the better position.) 19.♗f5 was seen in Koch – Andruet, Marseille 1989, and now Black could have obtained clearly better chances with 19...♜f8!N.

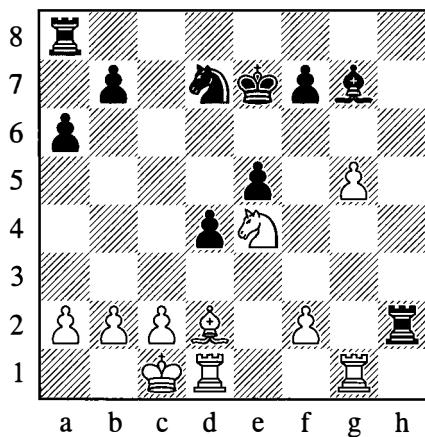
White's position is not yet strong enough to justify a direct attack, and after 18.♕f5 ♕f8 19.g6 fxg6 20.♗xg6† ♖d8 Black once again had the better chances. The game continued with the slow 21.♗g3?!, and after 21...♝c8 White had real problems in Zhrebukh – Brodsky, Cappelle la Grande 2008.

18...♗xe4†

18...♝b6?N also deserves consideration.

19.♗xe4 ♕e7 20.0–0–0

We have been following the game Hracek – Solak, Mallorca 2004. At this point I think Black's most accurate continuation would have been:



20...♜ah8N

Followed by activating the king. A possible continuation is:

21.c3

It looks logical for White to exchange one of the dominant central pawns.

21...♝e6 22.cxd4 exd4 23.♜ge1 ♕d5

With an edge for Black.

C2) 14.c4!?

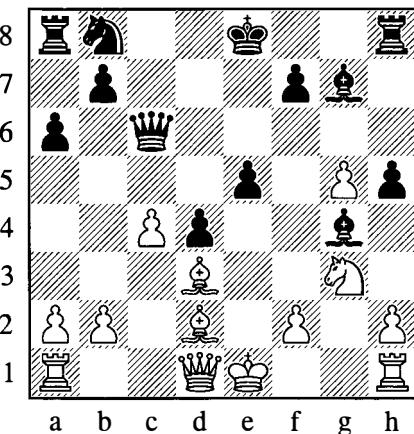
This is a modern idea, with most of the available games having been played over the past three

or so years. It is a tricky move, which forces the defender to play with some precision.

14...♝c6

Opening the centre is not good enough for full equality: 14...dxc3 15.♕xc3 ♕e6 (Black should not help the enemy with his development: 15...♝xd1† 16.♜xd1 h4 17.♗e4 ♜c6, Balogh – Doric, Vogosca 2007, and now after 18.♗c4!N ♜g4 19.♗d6† ♜e7 20.f3 Black has serious problems.) 16.♗e2 ♜c6 17.♝xd5 ♜xd5 18.0–0 h4 19.♗h5 ♜g8 20.♗xg7† ♜xg7 21.f4 White's bishop pair gave him a pleasant edge in Amonatov – Grachev, Moscow 2007.

15.♗d3 ♜g4



16.♗c2

Another game continued 16.♗e4 ♜xd1 17.♕xc6† ♜xc6 18.♜xd1 Gaponenko – Chulivska, Nikolaev 2008. Here I suggest the immediate 18...f6!N (In the game Black played 18...0–0–0 followed by ...f6 on the following move, but it looks much more logical to use the king actively in the centre.) Possible continuations include 19.♗e4 ♜e7, 19.♜g1 ♜f7, and 19.f4 exf4 20.gxf4 ♜xf6 21.♗xf4 ♜d7, none of which look at all bad for Black.

16...♝f3 17.♜g1!?

This critical move was introduced just a few months before publication. The alternatives also warrant close attention:

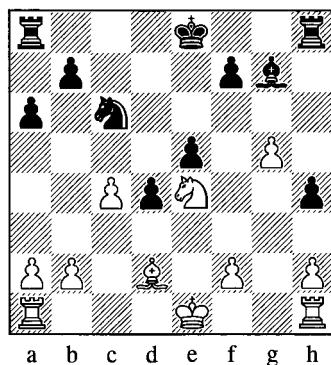
17.Qe4

This should not be too dangerous.

17...Qxe4 18.Wxe4

The knight capture is no better: 18.Qxe4 Qd7 19.0-0-0 0-0-0 20.Bhe1 (Or 20.Qb1 Qb8 21.Qb4 Qf8 22.Qxf8 Bhxf8 23.Bhe1 f5 24.gxf6 Qxf6 25.Qxf6 Wxf6 with an edge for Black in Ehlvest – Ludwig, Internet 2009.) 20...Qb8 21.Qb1 This was Balogh – Sasikiran, Beijing (blitz) 2008, and now after 21...Qc5!N 22.Qxc5 Wxc5 Black has nothing to fear.

18...h4 19.Wxc6† Qxc6 20.Qe4



We have been following the game Pruijssers – Moranda, Enschede 2009, in which Black now decided to castle on the queen's wing. Instead it looks promising to look for an active role for the king in the centre with:

20...Qe7!N

With decent prospects for Black.

17.0-0-0!

This only seems to have been tried in a few obscure e-mail games, but it leads to extremely rich and complex play so I would not be surprised if it starts to appear in high-level over-the-board chess in the near future.

17...Qd7 18.Qf5 Qf6!?

The undeveloping move 18...Qf8, Brunsek – Avotins, e-mail 2006, does not look quite as attractive.

19.h4

19.gxf6 is actually possible, although Black gets plenty of activity after 19...Bg8† 20.Qg3 (or 20.Qg7?! Qd8 21.Qg5 Qxf6 22.Bfe1 Bxg7 23.Bxe5 Qc7†) 20...h4.

19...0-0-0 20.c5

Harmless is 20.gxf6 Bdg8† 21.Qg5 (21.Qg3? e4 is too dangerous for White) 21...Wxf6 22.Qg3 Bxg5 23.hxg5 Wxg5 24.Qe4 Qxe4 25.Wxe4 h4 26.Qf5 Bg8 27.Wxg5 Bxg5 Black should be fine in the ending.

20...Bhg8 21.b4 Qb8 22.Bfe1 Bdf8!

Preparing a nice regrouping and counterattacking plan.

23.a4

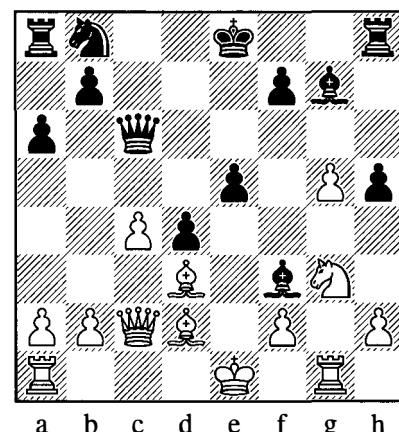
23.Qe4 Qxe4 24.Wxe4 Wxe4 25.Bxe4 Qd8 looks okay for Black, who intends ...f6.

23...Qd8 24.Ba3 f6!

Black succeeds in executing his plan, just in the nick of time before White sets up a breakthrough on the queenside.

25.b5 We6 26.Qc4 Qd5 27.Qxd5 Wxd5 28.Qh6 Bg7 29.Qf5 Bgg8

Neither player found any reason to avoid the move repetition, so a draw was agreed in Spiridonov – Djoudi, e-mail 2005.



17...h4!?

The subtle idea is to prevent the enemy knight from making use of the h4-square! In the following game Black ran into problems:

17...Qd7 18.Qf5 Qf8

I considered 18...Qg8N but this also fails to equalize after 19.Qh4! This is an important resource for White. 19...Qc5 (also unsatisfactory is 19...Qg4 20.Qh7!? Qf8 21.Qe4 Qc7 22.Qf5) 20.Qxf3 Qxf3 21.Qe2 Qh3 (21...d3 22.Qa4! Qxa4 23.Qxf3 e4 24.Qxe4 0-0-0 25.Qf1 gives White a clear advantage in the ending) 22.Qh7 0-0-0 23.b4! Black does not have a satisfactory continuation, for instance: 23...e4? (23...Qe6 24.Qxh5; 23...Qa4 24.Qxh5; 23...Qxh2 24.Qf5† Qe6 25.0-0-0 e4 26.g6!) 24.bxc5 e3 25.Qg3 Black does not have enough compensation: 25...Qxh2 (after 25...exf2† 26.Qxf2 White should consolidate easily) 26.Qf5† Qb8 (26...Qd7 27.c6!) 27.Qb1 and White keeps a big advantage in all variations.

19.g6! fxg6 20.Qh4!

Again we see the knight making effective use of the h4-square.

20...e4

Black could have kept his disadvantage to a minimum with 20...0-0-0N 21.Qxg6 Qf6, although his situation still does not represent an ideal outcome from the opening.

21.Qxf3 exd3 22.Qxd3 Qe6† 23.Qd1 0-0-0 24.Qxg6 Qxg6 25.Qxg6

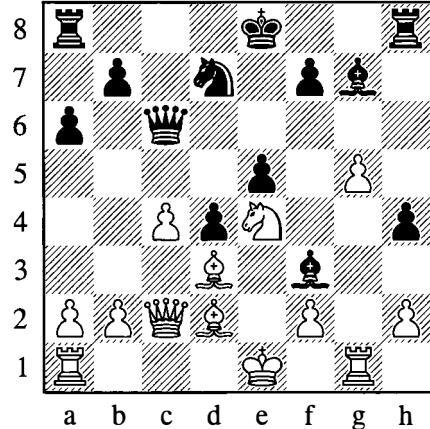
White went on to convert his extra pawn in Sutovsky – Cvitan, Rijeka 2010.

18.Qe4

18.Qf5 Qf8 looks okay for Black, now that the resource of g6 followed by Qh4 is unavailable.

18.Qe4 Qxe4 19.Qxe4 Qd7 is also fine for the second player.

18...Qd7



The position remains complex and full of tension, but I do not see why Black should be worse. Here is one possible continuation:

19.c5

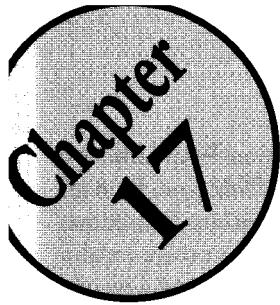
It looks natural to prepare a check on d6.

19...0-0-0 20.Qd6† Qb8 21.Qe4 Qxe4 22.Qxe4 Qxe4† 23.Qxe4 Qc8

The queen exchange has not altered the evaluation – both sides have their chances.

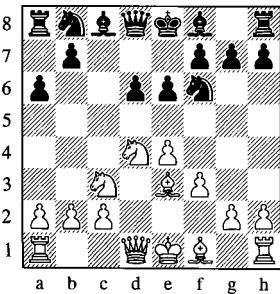
Conclusion

The Perenyi Attack continues to create plenty of headaches for players and analysts on both sides of the board, especially in the jungle of tactical complications resulting after 7...e5 8.Qf5 g6 9.g5 gxf5 10.exf5 d5 11.Qf3 d4 12.0-0-0. Instead I believe most players will be happier testing the calmer 8...h5?!, which leads to complex but somewhat less wild positions. Of the three responses we considered, only line C with 9.g5 is likely to create any real problems for the second player. The whole line is still quite fresh, and is steadily gaining in popularity so there is no doubt that future games will reveal new ideas for both sides. At this stage, after reviewing the available games and finding some key improvements for Black, I believe the second player should be holding his own in the complications.



English Attack

Four Weddings and a Funeral - 6. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ e6 7.f3



Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ d6 3.d4 cxd4 4. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 5. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ a6 6. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ e6

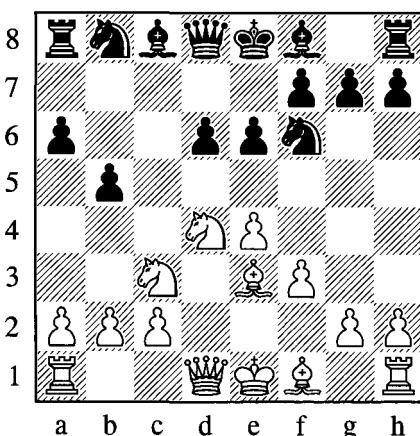
7.f3 b5

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Although the Perenyi Attack remains a genuine challenge to Black's Najdorf/Scheveningen set-up, the traditional English Attack with 7.f3 remains White's most popular choice at all levels. White's strategy is both direct and effective. By advancing his g-pawn up the board, he aims to drive the knight away from the f6-square and, if all goes to plan, proceed to smash up the opponent's entire structure with h4-h5 and g5-g6, opening some kingside files and undermining the e6-pawn. (The demise of this pawn usually precedes the funeral march for Black's game.)

In order to fight against White's plan, I have chosen an aggressive counter involving the immediate advance of the black b-pawn. This approach has achieved encouraging practical results, and has most notably been favoured by Topalov, who has enriched the theory with several innovative ideas. The expulsion of the c3-knight is genuinely troubling for White as he loses part of the natural coordination of his pieces. This often means that, instead of furthering his attack, he has to worry about solving other problems. It goes without saying that the whole line is far from a walk in the park for Black as well though...

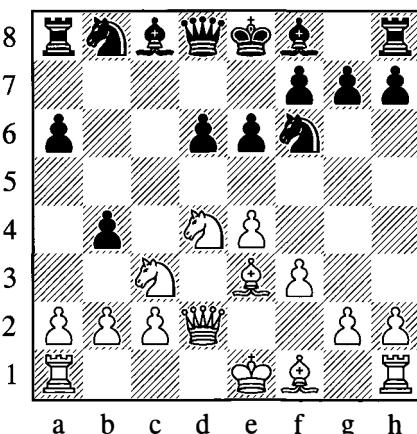
**1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6
5.♘c3 a6 6.♗e3 e6 7.f3 b5**



From this standard position White has two principal ideas, with A) 8.♗d2 and B) 8.g4 both deserving serious attention. Sometimes the two moves can transpose, but there are also some independent possibilities that lead certain players to prefer one move over the other.

Against both moves, I am recommending the energetic response of 8...b4. However, Black's subsequent follow-up will depend firstly on which of the two main candidates White has chosen on move 8, and secondly on whether he moves his knight to a4 or e2. Naturally we will address all these options over the course of the chapter.

A) 8.♗d2 b4



This daring move seemingly defies any strategic logic. Black is continuing his queenside advances well before finishing the development of his own pieces. We will analyse both sensible knight moves in detail, starting with A1) 9.♘a4 followed by A2) 9.♘ce2.

A1) 9.♘a4

Here the knight moves away from the centre, but on the other hand White hopes it may play an active role on the queenside.

9...♗bd7

In this position we have to be prepared for three main options: A11) 10.♗c4, A12) 10.c4 and A13) 10.0–0–0.

We should briefly note the almost untested line: 10.♗xb4 d5 11.♗d2 dxе4 12.0–0–0 ♗b7∞ The position is murky, but not especially appealing for White.

A11) 10.♗c4

The bishop develops actively, perhaps hoping to strike a blow against e6. However, tournament practice has demonstrated that Black has no problems if he plays carefully.

10...♝c7

Black has also achieved decent results with 10...♝e5 11.♗b3 ♜b8, but my personal preference is for the text move.

11.♗b3 ♜b7 12.c3

Black was ready for ...d5, so White had better play either this or 12.c4, which leads to the same position.

12...bxс3

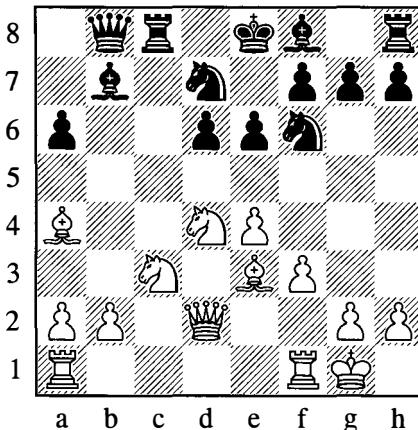
12...d5 would now be too risky due to 13.cxb4 dxе4 14.♗c1 with some initiative for White.

13.♗xc3 ♜c8 14.0–0–0 ♜b8

Not only removing the queen from the c-file, but also ensuring that ♜xe6 tricks will not work after the bishop comes to e7.

15.♗a4!?

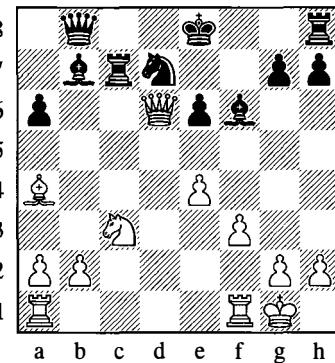
This was White's choice in both of the games I found on the database from this position, although there are plenty of other reasonable options. In the event of quieter play, the position can be compared to those examined in line A12 below.



15...♝e7 16.g4!?

Once again White can keep equal chances with quiet moves, but it is interesting that in both of the practical encounters that took place from this position, he played much more aggressively. It should be quite instructive for us to observe how the black position holds up against such direct methods.

The other game continued: 16.♗g5 ♜c7 17.♗xf6?! White has found a creative, but ultimately flawed idea. 17...♝xf6 18.♗xe6!?, fxe6 19.♗xd6



19...♜c6! This clever defence leads to a slightly better endgame. 20.♗xb8† ♜xb8 21.♗fd1 ♜e7 22.♗xc6 ♜xc6† Al Modiahki – Sasikiran, Doha 2006. This position would have made for an interesting example in Esben Lund's *Rook vs. Two Minor Pieces*. White's rook is

accompanied by two extra pawns, and the g2-f3-e4 pawn chain does a nice job of restricting the b7-bishop. Nevertheless Black's chances are higher due to the immense potential of the bishop pair, and in the game he eventually ground out a win.

16...h6!

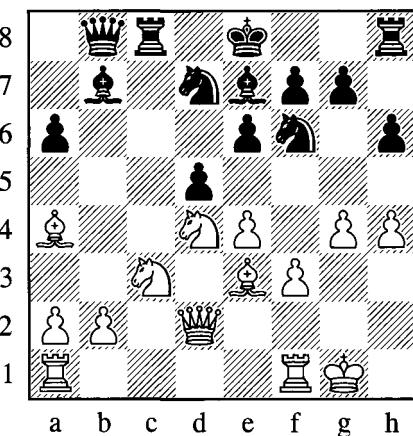
If White is going to play g5, he will have to open the h-file for the enemy rook.

17.h4!?

This is the consistent move, but it leads to a difficult position. After a quiet move like 17... $\mathbb{Q}ac1N$ the pawn on g4 looks strange, but overall White's position is acceptable enough.

17...d5!

This central counter-strike works perfectly.



18.g5

It is worth pointing out the following tactical point: 18.e5 $\mathbb{W}xe5!$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ The queen is trapped, but Black has a simple exchanging resource: 19... $\mathbb{W}xd4\#$! 20. $\mathbb{W}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$, leading to an ending with an extra pawn.

18...hxg5 19.hxg5 $\mathbb{Q}xc3!$

19... $\mathbb{Q}xe4\#N$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $dxe4$ was also playable, despite the apparent vulnerability of the knight on d7. But the text move is simpler.

20.bxc3 $\mathbb{Q}xe4!$ 21. $\mathbb{W}g2$

After 21.fxe4 $\mathbb{W}g3\#$ 22. $\mathbb{W}g2$ $\mathbb{W}xe3\#$ Black has more than enough for the exchange, and White's position is practically in ruins.

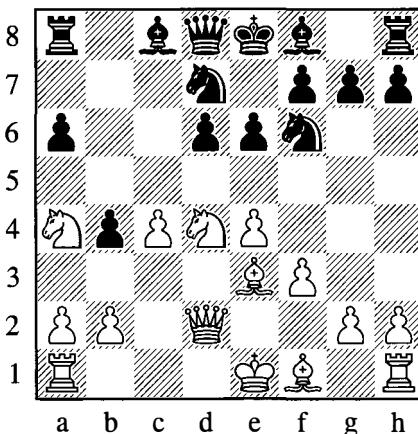
Up to this point we have been following the game Soumya – Konguvel, Gurgaon 2009. Here I found a simple improvement:

21... $\mathbb{Q}xc3N$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xd7\#$ $\mathbb{Q}xd7\#$

Black's king is safe, despite appearances, and overall White is suffering.

A12) 10.c4

This leads to the same structure as seen in the previous variation, but in this case White reasons that his bishop will be better off developing modestly and aiming at the queenside, where the first player will likely direct most of his attention.



10...bxc3

Black takes the opportunity to exchange a flank pawn for a more central one.

11. $\mathbb{Q}xc3$

11. $\mathbb{W}xc3$ does not appear to have been tested – hardly a surprise, as exposing the queen so early in the game is unlikely to promise White much. Play may continue 11... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ (12. $\mathbb{Q}c6\#!$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4!$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ [13.fxe4 $\mathbb{W}h4\#$]

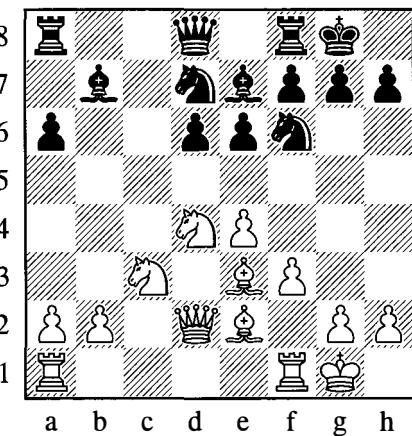
14.♗d1 ♜c8†] 13...♝xc3 14.♝xb7 ♜xa4 15.b3 ♜c3 16.♗d2 ♜b5 17.♗c1 d5 Black is a pawn up, and the two bishops do not offer much compensation.) 12...♜c8 13.♛b3 ♜xc1† 14.♝xc1 ♛b8 15.♗c4 d5 16.exd5 ♜xd5 With a comfortable position for Black.

11...♝b7 12.♗e2

12.♗c4 was played in Al Modiahki – Sasikiran, Doha 2006, and now Black's simplest solution would have been 12...d5! N 13.exd5 ♜b6 14.♗b3 ♜fxd5 15.♝xd5 ♜xd5 with no problems whatsoever.

12...♝e7 13.0–0 0–0

Both sides have completed their standard developing moves, and the next job will be to decide on a plan. We can see that Black enjoys healthy control over the centre and will usually look for a timely ...d5 break. White, on the other hand, will look to make inroads on the queenside, either through active piece play or by creating a passed pawn.



14.♝ac1

This has been the usual choice. Evidently most players believe that the other rook will be best placed on the d-file.

14.b4 does not appear to have been tested. The natural answer seems to be 14...d5 15.exd5,

and now 15...♝xb4? (15...♝xd5 should also be fine) leads to interesting complications: 16.dxe6 ♜d5! 17.e7! (17.♝acl ♜c8 gives Black no problems at all) 17...♝xe7 18.♝fb1 (18.♝ab1 ♜xc3 19.♛xc3 ♜d5 20.♛a3 ♜xe3 21.♛xe3 ♜e8 is equal) 18...♝xc3 19.♛xc3 ♜d5 20.♛a3 ♜xe3 21.♝xb7 ♜e8 Black has enough activity to compensate for White's theoretical advantage of bishop versus knight.

14.♝fc1 has been much less popular than the text move, but deserves to be taken seriously. I believe the most accurate response to be 14...♜c8 (If Black continues analogously to the main line with 14...♛b8 then his queen might become uncomfortable after 15.♝ab1! ♜c8 16.b4 intending b5 to open the b-file, Erenburg – Vovsha, Pawtucket 2008.) 15.♝b3 ♜e8 16.♗h1 This position was reached in Lupulescu – Papp, Hungary 2007, and here I suggest 16...d5N with the likely continuation 17.exd5 exd5 18.♗a4 ♜xc1† 19.♝xc1 ♜d6 when Black has enough activity and central control to make up for the isolated d-pawn.

14...♛b8 15.♝fd1

Alternatives do little to alter the overall character of the play.

15.♝c2 ♜d8 16.♛c1 ♜e5 17.b3 was seen in Fedorov – Gabrielian, Voronezh 2008. Now a sensible continuation seems to be 17...♝c6N (In the game Black opted for the strange 17...h5?! and soon found himself in trouble.) 18.♗a4 ♜b4 19.♝b2 ♜d7 20.a3 ♜c8 21.♛d2 ♜c6 Black keeps a solid position with balanced chances.

15.b4 ♜d8 16.a3 (16.a4 d5 17.exd5 ♜xd5 18.♝xd5 ♜xd5 19.b5 axb5 20.♝xb5 ♜c5 gave Black healthy piece play in Kornev – Vera Gonzalez, La Roda 2009.) 16...d5 17.exd5 ♜xd5 18.♝xd5 ♜xd5 19.♗c4 (19.♝c3 ♜d6 20.h3 ♜e5 21.♝fc1 ♜g6∞) 19...♝e5 20.♝xd5

$\mathbb{E}xd5$ 21. $\mathbb{W}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ Black keeps a full share of the chances thanks to his strong central control, Najer – Belov, Krasnoyarsk 2007.

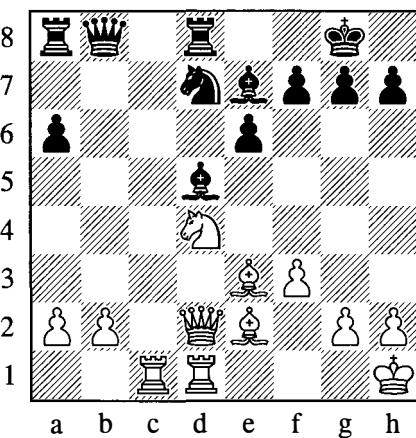
15... $\mathbb{E}d8$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}h1$

In the event of 16. $\mathbb{Q}f2$, Brkic – Rezan, Split 2008, Black obtains a fine game with 16... $d5!N$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$.

16... $d5$

This thematic move destroys White's remaining central pawn while increasing the scope of both Black's bishops.

17. $exd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$



Black has better control over the centre, but on the other hand his queenside is slightly weak. Overall the position is balanced.

19. $\mathbb{Q}c4$

19. $a3$ is harmless in view of 19... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 20. $\mathbb{W}c3$ (20. $b4?$ $\mathbb{Q}b3$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xb3$ $\mathbb{Q}xb3-$ +) 20... $a5=$.

A critical alternative is 19. $\mathbb{Q}c6!N$ $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ 20. $\mathbb{E}xc6$. The point is that after 20... $\mathbb{Q}e5$ White can play 21. $\mathbb{E}b6$, hoping to simplify into an advantageous ending in which his bishop pair would be a huge asset. Fortunately Black can counter that idea with 21... $\mathbb{W}c8!$ 22. $\mathbb{W}c1$ $\mathbb{E}xd1\#$ 23. $\mathbb{W}xd1$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $\mathbb{W}xc4$

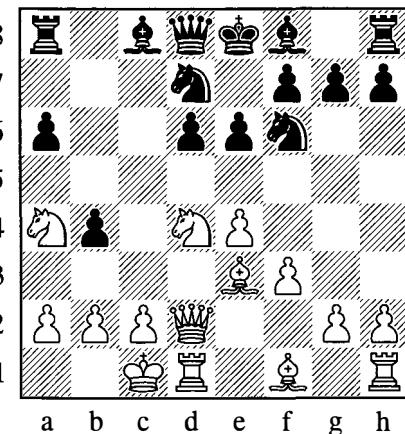
White no longer has the two bishops, and if anything it is Black who has a slight initiative thanks to his active queen, although ultimately the position should be level.

19... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 20. $\mathbb{W}e2$ $\mathbb{W}b7$ 21. $b3$ $h6$

We have been following the game Leko – Topalov, Morelia/Linares 2008. The position is equal, but at the same time unbalanced enough for either side to outplay the opponent, and in the end Topalov went on to earn a hard-fought victory.

A13) 10.0–0–0

This time we see White playing more aggressively.



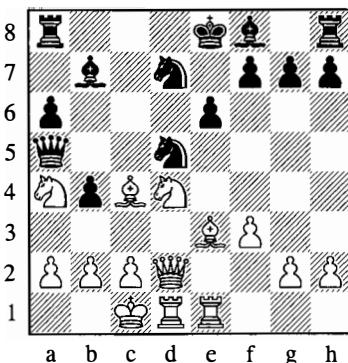
10... $\mathbb{W}a5$

This move has established itself as the most reliable, although it is also worth checking the alternative briefly in order to learn about the potential dangers lurking in the position: 10... $d5!?$

Readers who are not yet versed in this variation may be wondering what could be wrong with this natural move. Black tries to seize the initiative in the centre in thematic fashion, but his lagging development turns out to be his undoing.

11. $exd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}7f6$

Another game continued 12...Qb7 13.Qhe1 Qa5 (13...Qe7 leads to a difficult position for Black after a forced sequence: 14.Qxd5 Qxd5 15.Qf5! 0-0 16.Qb6! Qxb6 17.Qxe7+ Qh8 18.Qxb6 Qxb6 19.Qxd5 exd5 20.Qxd5 [20.Qe5!] 20...Qh6+ 21.Qd2 Qxh2 22.Qh1 Qe5 23.Qh4+ White's pieces are extremely active.) Unfortunately for Black, a nasty surprise lay in store:



14.Qxe6! fxe6 15.Qb6 Qxa4 (15...Qxb6 16.Qxe6+ Qe7 17.Qxb6+) 16.Qxd5 Qe7 17.Qxb7 Qxb6 18.Qxe6 0-0 19.Qxe7 Qxa2 20.Qd4 Qf6 21.Qxa8+- 1-0 Wang Hao – Nava, Istanbul 2005.

13.Qg5

13...Qf5! is also strong, but there is no need to spend time examining multiple refutations.

13...Qc7

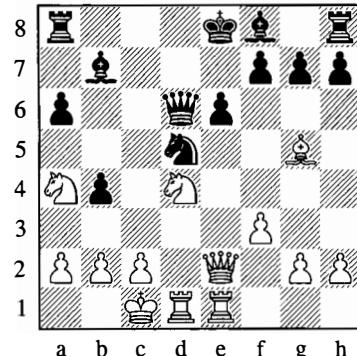
13...Qb7 14.Qhe1 Qe7 15.Qf5! 0-0 16.Qxd5 Qxd5 17.Qxe7+ Qxe7 18.Qb6 Qad8 19.Qxd5 Qxd5 20.Qxd5+– The centralized pieces have triumphed with the help of pins.

14.Qxd5!

White should maintain the momentum of his attack rather than worry about trivialities such as the bishop pair.

14...Qxd5 15.Qhe1 Qb7 16.Qe2 Qd6

Leko – Topalov, San Luis 2005. At this point White could have obtained a huge attack as pointed out by numerous commentators shortly after the game:



17.f4!N g6

17...Qxf4 18.Qg4 Qd5 19.Qxe6+–

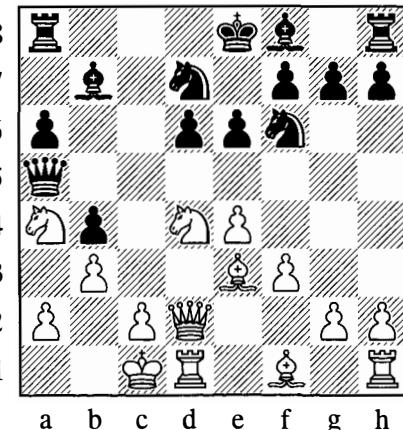
18.f5

It is hard to suggest a decent defence, for instance:

18...Qg7 19.Qxe6! fxe6 20.Qc5

Black is busted.

11.b3 Qb7



12.a3

This is the most straightforward attempt to question the placement of the black queen. It wins a pawn (at least temporarily) but the black position still turns out to be quite reliable.

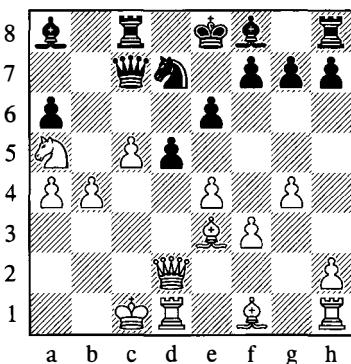
A few other moves have been tested. Curiously, in both of the following examples we will follow the example of the Indian Grandmaster and Najdorf expert Sasikiran.

12.g4 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 13.a3 $\mathbb{Q}xa4$ 14.axb4 $\mathbb{W}c7$ 15.bxa4
White has won a pawn, but his airy king fortifications will cause plenty of headaches in the middlegame.

15... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}b3$

16. $\mathbb{Q}b2?$ N The king move could be a topic for future investigations, but White is still playing with fire due to his exposed queenside. 16... $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{B}c8$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$
Black will calmly complete development by castling, followed by creating threats on the queenside.

16...d5 17. $\mathbb{Q}a5$ $\mathbb{B}c8$ 18.c4 $\mathbb{Q}a8$ 19.c5



19... $\mathbb{Q}xc5!$

This attractive sacrifice creates serious problems for White.

20.bxc5

20. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 21.bxc5 $\mathbb{W}b6!$ Also poses difficult problems for the defence.

20... $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{W}b6!$

Perhaps White had overlooked this clever tactical motif. Now it becomes clear that capturing on c5 with the rook will really hurt.

22. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{W}xc5$ 23. $\mathbb{W}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 24. $\mathbb{W}xc5\#$ $\mathbb{Q}xc5$
25. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{dx}c4\#$

Black went on to win the ending in E. Andreev – Sasikiran, Cappelle la Grande 2006.

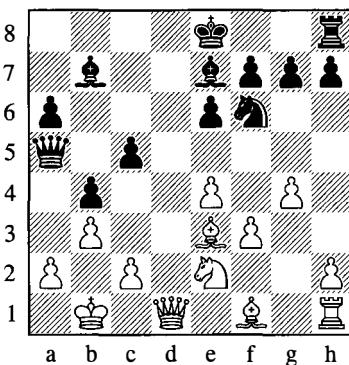
12. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 13.g4 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$

Once again after 14.a3 $\mathbb{Q}xa4$ 15.axb4 $\mathbb{W}c7$

16.bxa4 0–0 17.g5 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 18.h4 $\mathbb{Q}b6$ Black has excellent compensation due to his attacking chances.

14...dxc5 15. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{B}d8$ 16. $\mathbb{W}e1$ $\mathbb{B}xd1\#$

This position was reached in Erdogdu – Sasikiran, Beijing (blitz) 2008. Here I suggest a modest improvement for Black:



17...0–0N

In the game Black was successful with 17...c4 18. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ c3 19.g5 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 20.h4 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ 0–0∞ but at this stage of the game White has fair chances to maintain the balance.

18. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{B}d8\#$

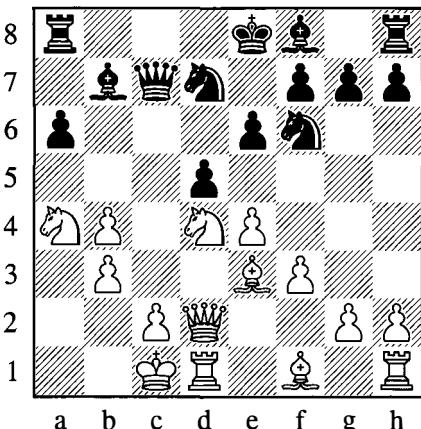
Black is slightly ahead in development and possesses some attacking chances.

12... $\mathbb{W}c7$ 13.axb4

It is hardly surprising that no-one has yet ventured 13. $\mathbb{W}xb4?$ d5 when White is struggling, for instance: 14. $\mathbb{W}c3$ $\mathbb{W}xc3$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ e5 16. $\mathbb{Q}de2$ d4 17. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ exd4 18. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}xa3\#$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}c5\#$ With only two pawns for the piece, White is in trouble.

13...d5

We have reached a critical position. The situation is certainly complicated, but based on the evidence so far, Black's position seems to be fully viable.

**14.c4**

Several other moves are possible:

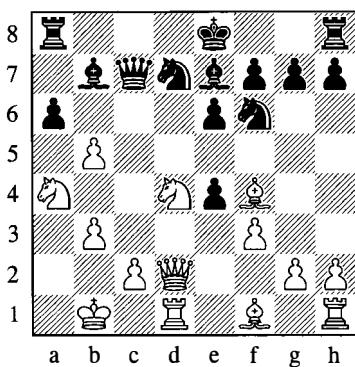
14.exd5 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 15.c3 $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ gives Black no problems at all.

14. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ has not been tried, but Black is doing well after 14...e5 15. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ h5!? (15...dxe4 also looks fine) 16.h4 g6 17. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ dxe4 19.fxe4 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ Black has at least equal chances thanks to his excellent central control.

14.b5 e5 15.b6 (15. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ d4 16. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ axb5 17. $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{Q}xc6\#$) 15... $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}e6$ fxe6 17. $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ $\mathbb{Q}a3\#$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}a5$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}d6\#$ Black had a powerful centre and the makings of a promising attack, Brodsky – Cheparinov, Hoogeveen 2006.

14. $\mathbb{Q}b1?$ dxe4 15.b5

This results in rather murky complications. 15... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}f4$

**16... $\mathbb{Q}c8$**

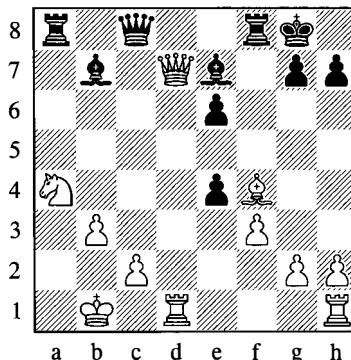
Black could also have considered 16...e5!N 17. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ g6! (This is safer than 17...exf3 18. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ 20. b6 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}b4\#$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}c4\#$ fxe2 23. $\mathbb{Q}he1$ when Black's position may be technically playable, but is also risky and difficult to handle in practice.) 18. $\mathbb{Q}h6$ (18. bxa6 $\mathbb{Q}xa6$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xa6$ $\mathbb{Q}xa6\#$) 18... $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ and it is doubtful that either side has anything better than accepting the repetition.

17. $\mathbb{Q}c4$

In the event of 17. bxa6 $\mathbb{Q}xa6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ 0–0 21. fxe4 $\mathbb{Q}b6$ Black's attacking chances will make up for the pawn deficit.

17... $\mathbb{Q}axb5$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ 0–0 19. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ fxe6 20. $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xd7$

So far we have been following the interesting game Szabo – Kulaots, Budapest 2008. At this point I suggest a modest improvement for Black:

**21... $\mathbb{Q}f7!$!N**

I prefer this slightly over the game continuation of 21... $\mathbb{Q}f6$, which still led to a comfortable ending for Black but had the drawback of obstructing the f-file.

22. $\mathbb{Q}xc8\#$ $\mathbb{Q}xc8$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}d7$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}a7$ $\mathbb{Q}a8$

24...exf3 leads to equality after: 25. gxf3 $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ $\mathbb{Q}xa4$ 27. bxa4 $\mathbb{Q}b4\#$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}xa4$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}ac4$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}h4\#$

25. $\mathbb{Q}xa8\#$ $\mathbb{Q}xa8$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ exf3 27. gxf3 $\mathbb{Q}xf3\#$

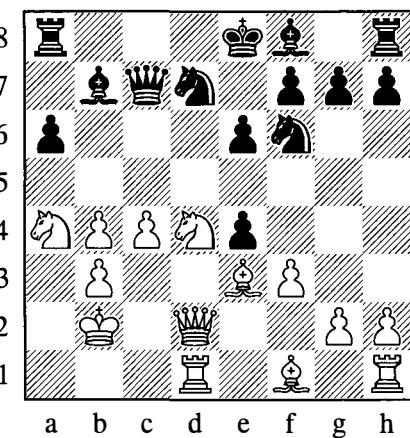
In the resulting endgame White benefits from having connected passed pawns on the queenside, but Black's chances are still slightly higher thanks to his mighty pair of bishops.

14...dxe4

Destroying White's centre is more important than chipping away at his queenside. Thus 14...dxc4?! makes little sense, and after 15.bxc4 ♘e7 16.c5 0–0 17.♗c2 White is clearly better.

15.♘b2

The need for this move was highlighted in the following game: 15.f4 ♘d5! 16.♗c2 ♘xe3 17.♗xe3 ♘e7 18.♗xd7 ♗xd7 19.♗b6 ♗c7 20.♗xa8 ♘xa8 21.♗e2 0–0 Black was clearly better in Ponomariov – Grischuk, Sochi 2006, and only lost after a subsequent blunder.



15...♗e7

Black can also consider the untested 15...e5!N 16.♗f5 exf3 It may look too greedy, but I am not convinced by White's compensation although the position is of course very complicated. 17.c5 is one idea, when Black should continue 17...♗b8??.

16.♗e2 0–0 17.♗f4

The peaceful approach does not help White: 17.f4 ♘fd8 18.♗c3 (18.♗e1 ♘ab8??) 18...♗ac8??

17...e5 18.♗g3

18.♗f5 is well met by 18...♗xb4! 19.♗xb4 exf3 20.♗d6 ♘xd6 21.♗xd6 ♘fe8?? White must struggle to equalize.

18...g6

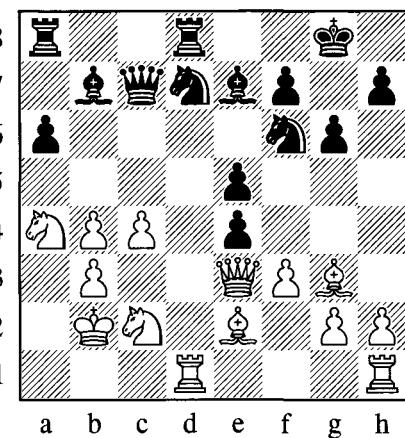
We don't want a knight hopping onto f5.

19.♗c2 ♘fd8

19...a5 20.b5 would simplify White's task by stabilizing his position on the queenside.

20.♗e3

We have been following the game Motylev – Cheparinov, Wijk aan Zee 2006. I had already annotated this game for Chessbase, but when I re-examined it in the course of writing this book I found an important improvement:



20...♗ab8!N

The game continuation of 20...♗c6 led to roughly equal chances after 21.♗c3, and after the further inaccuracy 21...♗ab8? White even took over the initiative with 22.f4!.

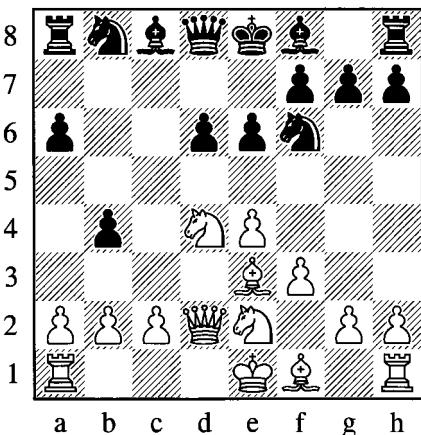
21.♗c3 exf3 22.gxf3 ♘h5

20...♗c6?! also looks sensible. In general it seems to me that Black's chances are somewhat higher, as White's queenside pawns and his king might both become vulnerable. After the text move, a possible continuation is:

23.Qd5 Qxd5 24.Qxd5 a5 25.b5 Qe8†

Black keeps some initiative.

That concludes our coverage of 9.Qa4, so it is time for us to consider the other knight retreat.

A2) 9.Qce2**9...e5**

This is the main line. Somehow it feels appropriately thematic to make yet another pawn move!

10.Qb3

10.Qf5 is almost never seen. The move is not completely ridiculous, although Black will certainly have no complaints after 10...d5.

10...Qc6

We will take a brief look at a couple of other options. The first is dubious, and is merely being included as an example of what to avoid. The second looks like a genuinely viable alternative though.

10...d5?! was seen in Bhawoodien – Mauba, Cape Town 1995, as well as a few other games. Just as in variation A13, it is too risky for Black to open the centre while lagging in development. Here Black's concept can be

called into question as follows: 11.0–0–0! N Qe6 (11...d4?! 12.Qexd4! exd4 13.e5 Qfd7 14.Wxd4 Wc7 15.Qf4 Qc6 16.We4 Wb7 17.Qc4 Qb6 18.Qd6±) 12.exd5 Qxd5 13.f4! Qc6 14.f5 Qxe3 15.Wxe3 Qd7 16.Qg3± Black's position is uncomfortable.

10...a5!?

This cheeky pawn move is a different story entirely. Black can get away with yet another non-developing move as the knight on b3 has no good squares left.

11.Qg3

An alternative is 11.a4 bxa3 12.Wxa3 d5 13.Wxa5 Wxa5 14.Qxa5 (14.Wxa5 Wxa5 15.Qxa5 dxe4 16.Qc4 Qc6 17.fxe4 Qxe4 18.g3 Qb4 19.Qd1 f6 20.Qg2 Qf5 Black has brought the pieces out and his activity offers good chances against White's passed pawns, Balogh – Cheparinov, Warsaw 2005.) 14...dxe4 15.Wxd8† Qxd8 16.Qb6† Qe8 17.Qc4 exf3 18.gxf3 Qbd7 19.Qc7 Qb7 20.Qxe5 Qd5 21.Qxd7 Qxc7 22.Qe5 f6 23.Qd3 Qxf3 Black has every reason to feel satisfied, Daubenfeld – Shtyrenkov, Pardubice 2004.

11...a4 12.Qc1 d5!

Now the central break works well as White's pieces are passive.

13.exd5

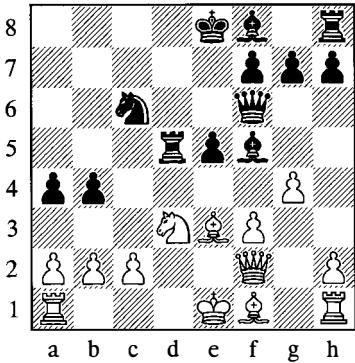
13.Qb5† Qd7 14.Qxd7† Qbxd7 15.exd5 Wa5! 16.Qd3 Qxd5 17.0–0 a3 18.bxa3 Qxe3 19.Wxe3 Wxa3 Black will soon catch up on development while keeping a fine position.

13...Wa5 14.Qd3 Wxd5 15.Qe4 Qc6 16.Wf2 Qf5 17.Qxf6†

17.Qb6 Wc8 18.Qxf6† gxf6 19.g4 Qe6† White is also exposed and his pieces do not harmonize at all.

17...Wxf6 18.g4

This position was reached in Anand – Gelfand, Turin (ol) 2006, and here I suggest an improvement:

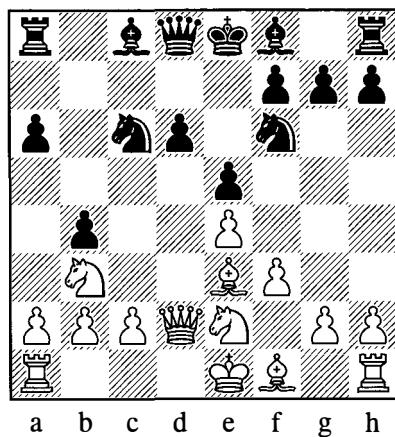


18... $\mathbb{Q}e6!$?N

The game continuation of 18... $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ soon led to a draw after 19. $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ a3 20. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ axb2 21. $\mathbb{E}b1$ $\mathbb{E}d7$ 22. $\mathbb{E}xb2$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 23.0–0 ½–½, but Black can try for more.

19.g5 $\mathbb{W}g6$ 20.h4 $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 21.h5 $\mathbb{W}e6$?

White has lost the battle for the centre.



At the moment 10...a5! looks like a fully playable move. Nevertheless it somehow seemed appropriate to focus on the established main line as a primary recommendation. In this position White has tested three different moves in the quest to challenge Black's set up: A21) 11.c4, A22) 11. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ and A23) 11.g4.

It should briefly be noted that after 11.0–0–0?! a5! White already faces some difficulties on the queenside.

A21) 11.c4

This space-gaining move leaves the white position looking quite rigid, as Black is not forced to exchange on c3.

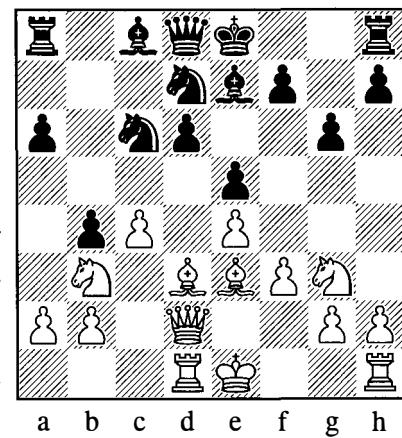
11... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ g6 13. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$!

The knight begins to take aim at its ideal home on c5, while also hinting at a possible activation of the dark-squared bishop.

14. $\mathbb{E}d1$

14.0–0 a5 15. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ also does not give White much, as his knights have very little to do.

The present position was reached in the game Kramnik – Topalov, Sofia 2005. Here I suggest a small refinement for Black:



14...a5!N

After the game continuation of 14...0–0 15. $\mathbb{W}f2$ a5, White had the interesting possibility of 16.c5!N, when play might continue 16...dxc5 17. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$ (18... $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 19. $\mathbb{W}xc5$ $\mathbb{W}f6$ 20.0–0 $\mathbb{E}d8$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ ±) 19. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ exd4 20. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xa6$ $\mathbb{E}xa6$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ when the knight will find an ideal home on d3 or d5. Black has a passed pawn and will take control over the c-file, so his position is not altogether bad,

although White must be at least a little better.

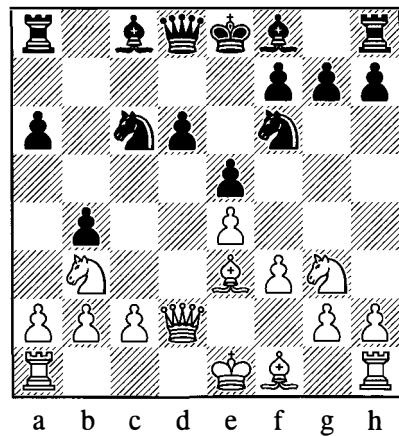
By changing the move order slightly, Black eliminates the c4-c5 possibility altogether.

15.0–0 0–0

Black will follow up with ...a4 and later ...♝c5, with a healthy position.

A22) 11.♝g3

With this move White avoids blocking the centre and strives to activate his pieces as quickly as possible.



11...♝e6 12.0–0–0 ♜c7

Another game continued 12...♝e7 13.♝f5 ♜xf5 14.exf5 d5 15.♝g5 ♜b6 16.h4 d4 17.♝xf6 ♜xf6 18.g4 This was Morozevich – Grischuk, Monte Carlo (rapid) 2006, and now Black should have played 18...a5N 19.♝d3 0–0 20.g5 a4 21.♝d2 ♜d8 leading to an unclear position, in which neither king can feel completely safe.

13.f4

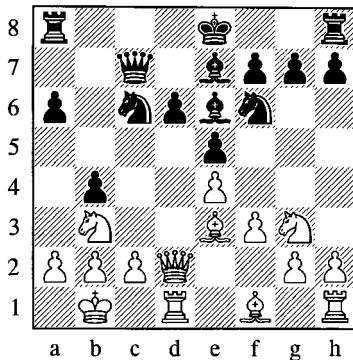
13.♛b1

This move was played in Borisek – Gallagher, Gothenburg 2005, and here I found a logical improvement for Black:

13...♝e7!N

In the game Black preferred 13...a5, and

although he obtained a reasonable position, I do not see any reason to allow the f1-bishop to come to b5 just yet.



14.♝f5

14.f4 should be met by 14...h6! in order to prevent the positional threat of f5 followed by ♜g5. Play may continue 15.f5 ♜d7 16.♝e2 a5 with some initiative for Black.

14...♜xf5 15.exf5 a5

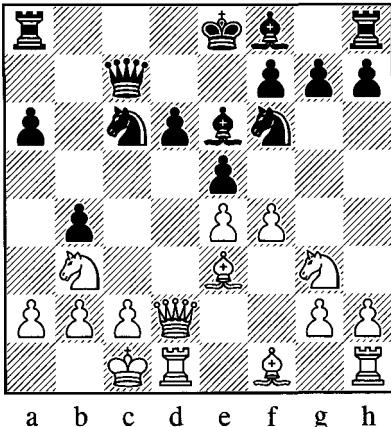
Having exchanged the knight that had previously been standing on g3, White is now ready to start advancing his kingside pawns, so Black should not delay his counterplay.

16.♝b5 a4 17.♝c1 0–0 18.♝d3 b3 19.cxb3 axb3 20.axb3

20.a4 is well met by 20...♝fb8, when sacrifices on b5 are in the air.

20...♝fb8 21.♝a4 ♜a5→

Black has promising attacking chances.



13...h5!

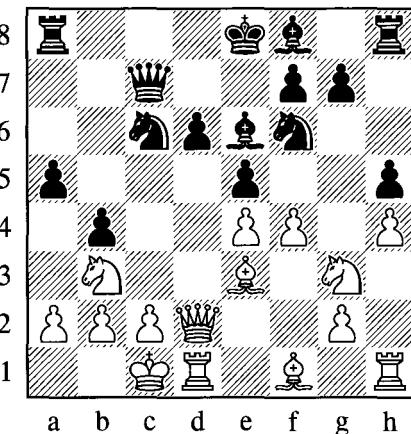
Black takes the opportunity to target the knight on g3 and consequently the pawn on e4.

14.h4

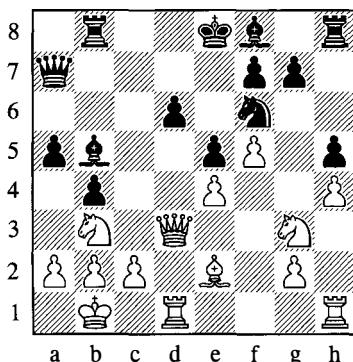
This leaves a hole on g4, but from White's perspective that seems to be the least of the evils.

14...a5

One move of a rook's pawn is followed by the other!

**15.fxe5N**

This untested move looks better than 15.f5?! $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{E}b8$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}a7$!? (17...a4 18. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ a3 ∞) 18. $\mathbb{Q}xa7$!? $\mathbb{W}xa7$ 19. $\mathbb{W}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}b5$



20. $\mathbb{W}f3$ (20. $\mathbb{W}xb5$ † $\mathbb{E}xb5$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ † $\mathbb{Q}e7$ +) 20... $\mathbb{Q}c6$! 21. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{W}c5$ Svidler – Topalov, Sofia 2006. Black has the bishop pair and attacking chances on the queenside, while White is a long way from making any use of the outpost squares of d5 and g5.

15...dxe5 16. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$

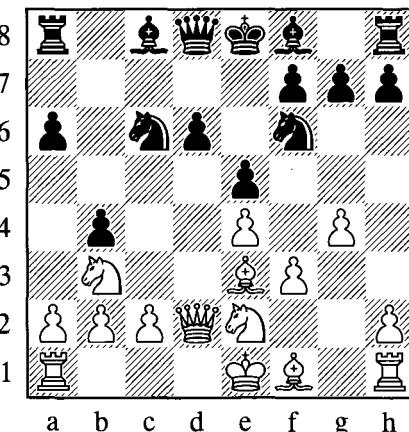
Another option is 16...a4 17. $\mathbb{Q}a5$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ 19. $\mathbb{W}d3$ $\mathbb{E}b8$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ † $\mathbb{W}xc6$ with equality.

17. $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 19.exf5 0–0

Finally the king vacates the centre. Black has active prospects for his pieces, and can look to the middlegame with confidence.

A23) 11.g4

With this move White commences immediate hostilities.

**11...h6**

It is useful to preserve the position of the knight on f6 for the time being. Now we should consider A231) 12.0–0–0 followed by what I consider to be the main line of A232) 12. $\mathbb{Q}g3$.

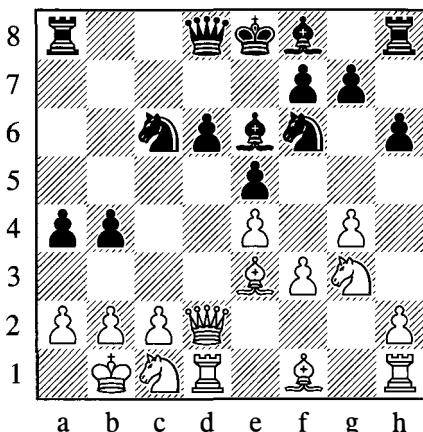
A231) 12.0–0–0

The early castling is somewhat provocative, as Black can start an immediate attack.

12...a5 13.♘b1

This has been the usual choice, although I found one game in which White allowed the knight to be driven to the corner: 13.♘g3 a4 14.♘a1 ♘a5 15.c4 g6 16.♘b1 ♘e6 17.♘c2 ♗b8 with a nice position for Black, Perez Candelario – Sasikiran, Zafra 2007.

13..a4 14.♘bc1 ♘e6 15.♘g3



15...♗b8!?

15...♗a5 has been the most popular move and is certainly not bad, but the subtle rook move might be even more promising. One advantage is that a subsequent ...b3 will not permit a queen exchange.

16.h4 d5!

Good timing – White is not in an ideal position to counter with 17.g5, as the subsequent rook exchange would force his knight to retreat to the dismal h1-square.

17.♘d3

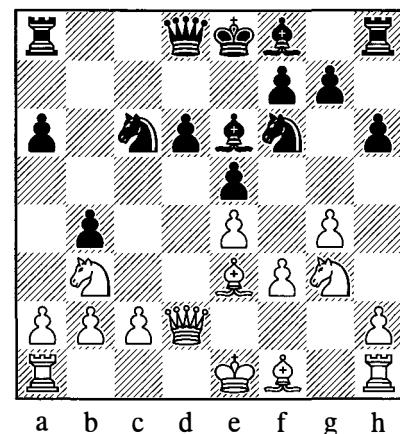
After 17.♗g2 d4 18.g5 ♘d7 19.♘d2 ♗b6± White's timid play lands him in grave difficulties.

17...d4 18.♗f2 b3 19.cxb3 axb3 20.a3 ♘d7 21.g5 ♘c5±

Black was clearly on top in Hermansson – Agrest, Gothenburg 2004.

A232) 12.♘g3 ♘e6

It looks risky and premature for Black to open the centre with 12...d5 13.exd5 ♘xd5 14.0–0–0, Michielsen – Grigorov, Belfort 2005. I tried to improve Black's play with 14...♗e6N, but concluded that White stays on top after 15.♘h5 ♗e7 (or 15...g6 16.♘c4±) 16.♘c5 ♗g5 17.h3±.



After the text move we reach a final branching point for this line, with A2321) 13.0–0–0 and A2322) 13.h4 being the main options.

In a few games White has tried:

13.♘d1

This does not seem especially threatening.

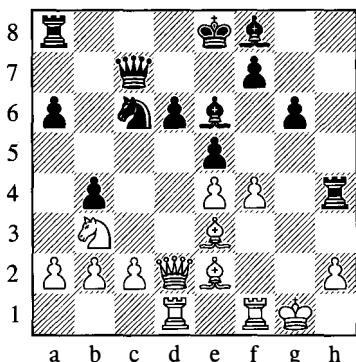
13...g6 14.♗e2

14.♗f2 ♗c7 15.h4 h5 16.g5 ♘d7 17.♘d3 ♘e7± Black has stabilized the kingside and could focus on the centre and the queenside in Papp – Valeanu, Belfort 2005.

14...♗c7 15.0–0 h5!? 16.gxh5

White does not achieve much with 16.♗g5N ♘h7 17.♗h6 h4 18.♗h1 ♘xh6 19.♗xh6 a5±.

It seems to me that White's most logical continuation would have been 16.g5N, although Black should have no problems after 16... $\mathbb{Q}d7$, for instance: 17.f4 h4 18. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ exf4 19. $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ $\mathbb{Q}de5$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}e7=$ 16... $\mathbb{Q}xh5$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xh5$ $\mathbb{Q}xh5$ 18.f4 $\mathbb{Q}h4$



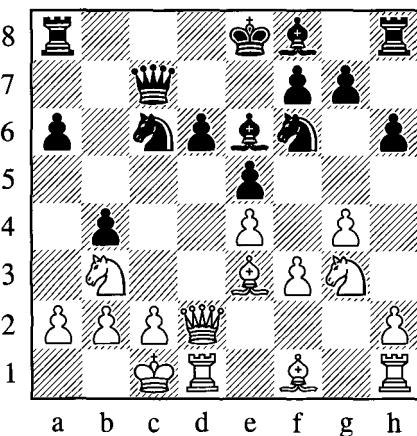
19. $\mathbb{W}e1?$

Better was 19. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ N, although after 19... $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xg4$ $\mathbb{Q}xg4\#$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}xg2\#$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ Black does not have to worry in the slightest.

19... $\mathbb{Q}h3$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3!$ 22. $\mathbb{W}xe3$ $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ exf4 24. $\mathbb{W}xf4$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$

Black had achieved some positional advantages (better bishop, outpost on e5, queenside minority attack) and went on to win in Savchenko – Gabrielian, Moscow 2008.

A2321) 13.0–0–0 $\mathbb{W}c7$



The queen vacates the d-file in preparation for opening the centre.

14. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ d5!

Timing this move correctly is a delicate matter of the utmost importance. Strangely enough, the text move only seems to have been tried in e-mail and correspondence encounters, and never over the board.

Before going any further I will show why I was not satisfied with the more frequently-played alternative.

14...a5 15. $\mathbb{Q}b5!$ a4 16. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{W}b7$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xc6\#$ $\mathbb{W}xc6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ d5

18... $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ $\mathbb{W}b5$ 20.a3 d5 was seen in Quezada Perez – Dominguez Perez, Santa Clara 2006, and now White should have played 21.exd5N $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ (21... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 22. $\mathbb{W}xd5!$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xd5\pm$) 22. $\mathbb{W}xb4$ $\mathbb{W}xb4$ 23.axb4 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}e4\pm$ Black has not managed to equalize from the opening.

This position was reached in Najar – Grigoriants, Moscow 2006. Black went on to obtain a nice position and later won the game, but at this stage White could have obtained the advantage with a natural improvement:

19. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ N

This is much more promising than the game continuation of 19. $\mathbb{Q}xb4$?

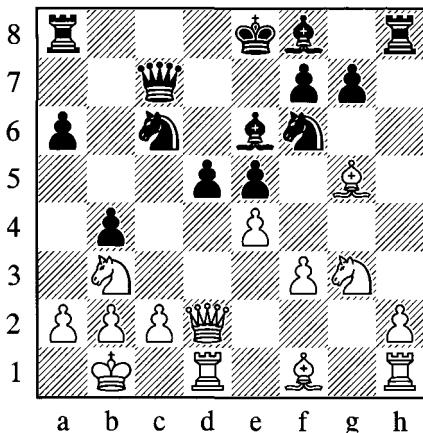
19... $\mathbb{W}c7$ 20.exd5 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 0–0 23. $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ $\mathbb{W}xd6\pm$

Black has some chances for counterplay with a timely ...a4-a3, nevertheless White's chances must be evaluated as somewhat higher.

15.g5

15.exd5 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 17. $\mathbb{W}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ (17... $\mathbb{Q}e7$, F. Silva – Knoll, e-mail 2007, is also quite reasonable.) 18. $\mathbb{W}xe3$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ 20.gxf5 a5∞ Black could look confidently to the future in Janusonis – Johansson, e-mail 2006.

15...hxg5 16.♗xg5



We have reached a critical position, rich in resources for both sides. Having analysed it in some detail, I have concluded that Black has a number of moves that more or less equalize, although in all cases the position remains rather unclear and tricky for both sides – not an uncommon scenario in the Najdorf.

16...d4?N

This is one of the more promising options, although as I mentioned previously, it is hard to offer a cast-iron recommendation in such a double-edged position.

I spent some time looking at 16...♝d8N, but eventually concluded that Black's position was not so appealing after 17.♗xf6! (17.♗e2 ♜e7 18.♗xa6 0–0 19.♗b5 ♖d4 gives Black promising counterplay) 17...gxh6 18.♗xa6.

16...dxe4?! is playable, and one 'freestyle' (computer-assisted) encounter continued: 17.♗xf6 gxh6 18.fxe4 ♘d8 19.♗e2 ♗b6 20.♗xd8+ ♗xd8 21.♗xa6 ♗xa6 22.♗xa6 ♘h4∞ Arturchix – Pandini, Internet 2006. Black has good compensation for the pawn because his bishops are strong and his rook is

well-placed on h4. Still, the whole line feels a bit shaky for me, and I suspect White can improve.

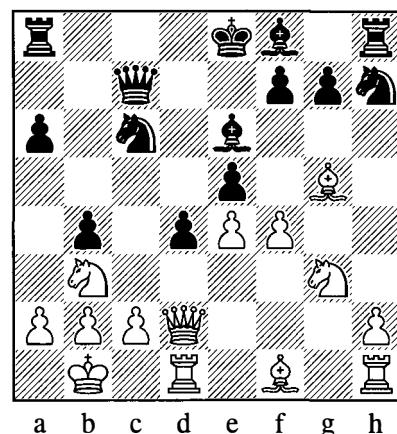
Finally, another option is 16...♝e7?!N with the possible continuation 17.♗f5 (Harmless is: 17.♗xf6 ♗xf6 18.exd5 ♗xd5! The bishop is poisoned, and after 19.♗e3 ♜e6 Black is fine.) 17...♗xf5 18.exf5 ♗b7 Once again the position remains complicated, with chances for both sides.

17.f4

Clearly this is the critical response.

17...♝h7!

17...♝d6 18.♗f5 is a bit unpleasant.

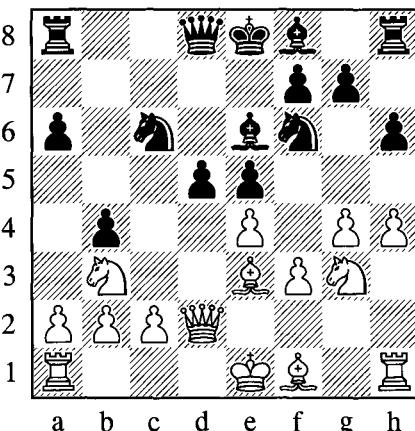


18.♗h4

White can grab a pawn with 18.fxe5, but pays the price in allowing his valuable bishop to be exchanged: 18...♗xg5 19.♗xg5 g6 20.♗f6 ♗xe5 21.♗xe5 ♗xe5 22.♗xd4 ♗g4 23.♗e2 ♗xe2 24.♗dxe2 ♗g4 Black has no worries.

18...exf4 19.♗f5 g5! 20.♗f2 ♗f6 21.♗bx d4 ♗e5

Once again the position is approximately equal, but at the same time double-edged and challenging for both sides.

A2322) 13.h4 d5**14.exd5**

White should not play too timidly:
14.0–0–0?! d4 15.♘f2 ♖c7 16.g5 hxg5
17.hxg5 ♕xh1 18.♕xh1 ♘d7 19.♗g3 ♘d6†
The mighty centre favours the second player as
White will struggle to find a decent plan.

Another harmless continuation is 14.g5?!
hxg5 15.hxg5 ♕xh1 16.♕xh1, Warakomska –
Przybylski, Mielno 2007, and here Black could
have obtained the upper hand with the typical
response: 16...d4!N†

14...♘xd5 15.0–0–0 ♖c7 16.♗d3 ♕d8

Black had better avoid: 16...a5 17.♘c5 ♘xc5
18.♘xc5 0–0–0 19.♗f5 g6 20.♗g7!± The
white knight achieved a great feat in Naiditsch
– Palac, Warsaw 2005.

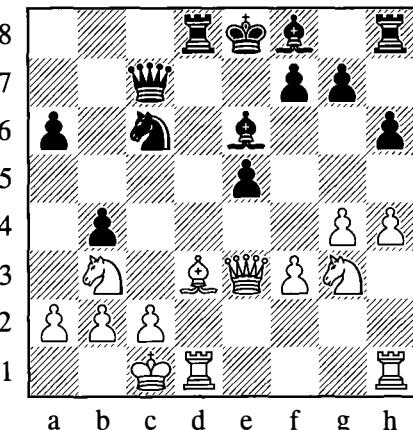
However, the following alternative is more
reasonable: 16...♘a5!N 17.♗b1 (17.♗xa5
♖xa5 18.♗c4 ♕d8 19.♗f2 ♘e7 20.♗e2 0–0
21.♗f5 ♘f6∞) 17...♘c4 18.♘xc4 ♖xc4 19.♗e4
♘xe3 20.♗xe3 ♕c8∞ 21.♗d2 ♘e7 22.♗a7 ♘d5
23.♗hd1 ♘xe4 24.♗d7† ♔f8 25.fxe4 ♘xh4
26.♗d6† ♔g8 27.♗xe5 ♔h7=

17.♗f2

17.♗e2 ♘xe3 reaches the same position.

17...♘xe3

I also considered 17...♔e7, but eventually
concluded that it made more sense to eliminate
the bishop on e3 when given the opportunity.

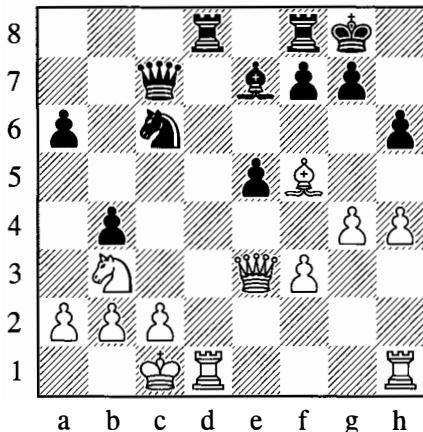
18.♗xe3**18...♔e7!N**

18...♘d4?! has been played in a couple
of games, but this looks much too risky.
Play continues: 19.♗h5! g6 (or 19...♗xb3N
20.axb3 ♘xb3† 21.♗b1 ♘d4 22.f4 with some
initiative) 20.♗f6† ♔e7 21.♗e4 ♘xb3 22.axb3
♘xb3† 23.♗b1 ♘d4 24.♗hf1 ♘e6 25.h5
Black had won a pawn but was nonetheless
under pressure in Pieri – Bergmann, e-mail
2006.

19.♗f5

White gets nowhere with 19.♗h5 ♔f8! This
move looks odd, but once Black follows up
by ...g6 and ...♗g7, it becomes clear that the
king is neither in danger nor as stupidly placed
as it may first appear. 20.♗g3 (20.♗b1 a5
21.♗b5 ♘xd1† 22.♗xd1 ♘a7 23.♗a4 ♘c8 also
looks promising for Black) 20...a5 21.♗b1
a4 22.♗d2 ♘d4 With promising attacking
chances for Black.

19...♗xf5 20.♗xf5 0–0



The impending kingside attack may look scary, but Black's counterplay arrives just in the nick of time.

21.g5 ♕xd1† 22.♕xd1 hxg5 23.bxg5 ♔d4!
24.♘xd4

24.♕d3 ♔e6 is not dangerous for Black.

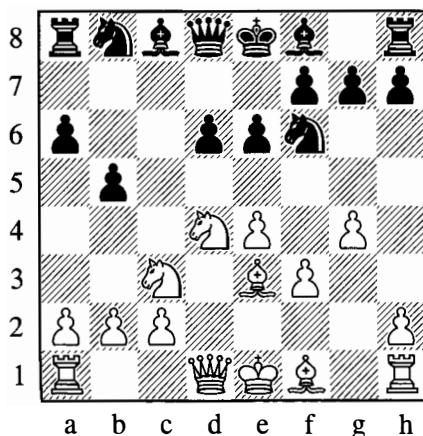
24...exd4 25.♕h1!?

25.♕d3 g6 is nothing for White, so he may as well settle for a draw.

25...dxe3 26.♕h7† ♔h8 27.♕g6†

After a series of logical moves on both sides, the game ends in a perpetual check.

B) 8.g4



8...b4

Once again Black wastes no time in driving the knight away. Compared with the previous section, obviously the inclusion of the move g2-g4 in place of ♘d1-d2 will lead to some changes in the character of play, especially in the event that the knight decides that its future lies at the edge of the board. Just as before, we will consider **B1) 9.♘a4** and **B2) 9.♘ce2**. It is worth mentioning that in the present variation the latter move has been far more popular, compared to the analogous 8.♘d2 variation in which the knight has preferred the a4-square in roughly five out of eight games.

B1) 9.♘a4 ♕d7!

Here we see the first major difference, which probably accounts for the lack of popularity of the present variation from White's point of view. The point is that with the queen on d2, this move would have left the b-pawn hanging, whereas now the attack on the knight is rather awkward.

10.c4

There is also a second option, which I believe to be underrated:

10.b3!?

This has scored unimpressively for White, but it seems to me that the few existing games have not accurately reflected the reality of the position. Therefore I am immediately recommending a new idea:

10...♘c6N

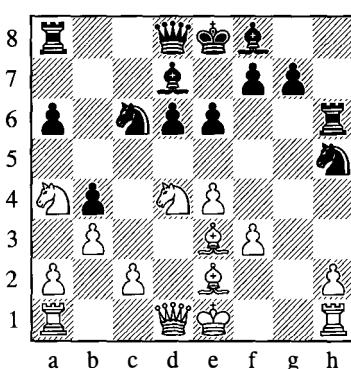
Unsurprisingly, in most games Black has been unable to resist the temptation of wrecking the enemy queenside with 10...♗xa4. However, swapping the bishop for the knight is a kind of sacrifice in itself. 11.bxa4 ♗c7 This position was reached in G. Garcia – Bruzon Bautista, Cali 2000, and several subsequent games. At this point White could have obtained chances for an advantage with

12.♗c1!N ♗bd7 13.g5 ♗h5 14.♗d2 ♗e7 15.c3± White succeeds in exchanging one of his weak pawns while opening the queenside for his pieces. In the resulting position his bishop pair should count for more than the doubled a-pawns.

With the text move Black continues developing while reserving the possibility of exchanging on a4 at a later stage of the game. There are many possible continuations, but I will just give a few lines that appeared critical to me.

11.g5 ♗h5 12.♗e2
 12.♗g1 ♗e7 13.f4 ♗xd4 14.♗xd4 ♗xa4
 15.bxa4 ♗xf4 16.♗xg7 ♗g6 17.0–0–0
 ♗a5∞ Black has enough counterplay on the dark squares.

12...h6 13.gxh6 ♗xh6!



14.♗d2

Taking the exchange is risky: 14.♗xh6 gxh6 15.♗xc6 ♗xc6 16.♗g1 ♗h4† 17.♗d2 ♗xh2† Without the dark-squared bishop White will have a hard time defending his weaknesses.

14...♗xd4 15.♗xd4 ♗g3 16.♗xh6 ♗xh1 17.0–0–0 gxh6 18.♗b6 ♗b8 19.♗xd7 ♗xd7 20.♗xh1 ♗b6=

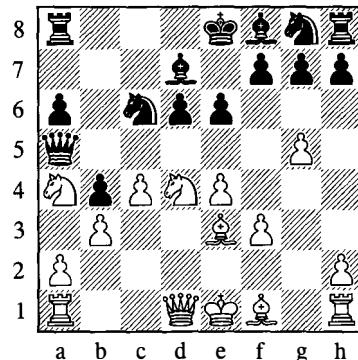
Black has no problems at all.

10...♗a5 11.b3 ♗xa4

This time Black does best to make the exchange. Compared with the previous note,

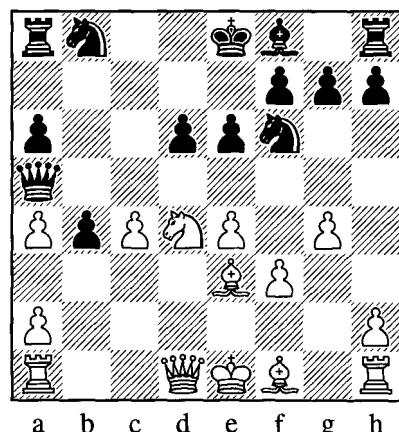
White will no longer have the attractive possibility of c2-c3.

I also considered 11...♗c6!N 12.g5 ♗g8.



This would actually have led to a fine position for Black, were it not for the unpleasant rebuttal of 13.♗b5! axb5 14.cxb5 (But not 14.♗b6? bxa4 15.♗xa5 ♗xa5, when White's queen is no match for Black's three pieces.) 14...♗b8 15.bxc6 ♗xc6 16.♗c1 ♗d7 (16...♗xa4 17.bxa4 b3† 18.♗f2 also looks good for White) 17.♗d4! ♗xa4 Otherwise ♗b6 could be annoying, with ideas of ♗xd7 or ♗c4. 18.bxa4 ♗xa4 19.♗c7 with a very strong initiative. The primary threat is ♗a7, followed by ♗xa7 and a check on b5.

12.bxa4



12...h6!

This move seems to be the one that put White's set-up out of business, at least with regards to popularity.

13.♗g2

A more challenging continuation is:

13.♗e2?!N ♜c7 14.♗d2 ♜bd7 15.0–0 ♜e7

But I think Black is okay here too. For example:

16.♗fd1

16.a5 should be met by 16...g5! intending ...h5 with decent counterplay.

Another possibility is 16.♗ab1 a5 17.♗b5 ♜c6 18.♗fd1 0–0 19.♗xd6 ♜fd8 20.♗d4 e5 21.♗f5 ♜f8 22.♗d2 ♜xa4 with equality.

16...♗e5 17.a5

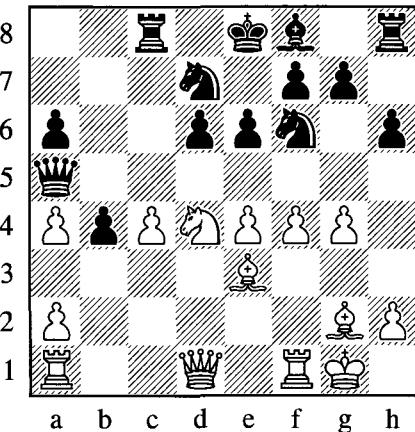
Or 17.♗ac1 ♜b8 with even chances.

17...♜b8 18.♗db1 ♜fd7

Black is holding his own here, and the attempt to grab a pawn backfires on White:

19.♗xb4?! ♜xb4 20.♗xb4 d5 21.♗b3 dxe4 22.f4 ♜c6?

13...♜bd7 14.0–0 ♜c8 15.f4



15...h5?!N

This is an attempt to fight for the advantage. The continuation seen in the following game is also quite acceptable for Black:

15...♜e7 16.g5

16.h4? h5?

16...hxg5 17.fxg5 ♜h5

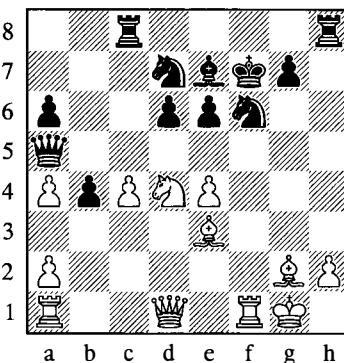
There is also 17...♝e5?!N 18.♗f3 (18.♗f4 ♜c5 19.gxf6? [White had better settle for a draw with 19.♗e3=] 19...♜xf6 20.♗e3 ♜e5 21.♗f2 ♜xc4 22.♗b3 ♜xh2† 23.♔f1 ♜xa1 24.♗xa1 ♜c5–+) 18...♝xe4 19.♗d4 ♜g4 20.♗e5 (20.h3 ♜e3 21.♗e2 ♜xg5 22.♗ad1 ♜f4 23.♗fe1 ♜e5 24.♗xe3 ♜xe3† 25.♗xe3 ♜xe3† 26.♗xe3 ♜xc4 27.♗e2 ♜h5=) 20...♝xe5 21.♗xe5 ♜dxe5≈

18.g6 ♜hf6 19.gxf7†

19.♗g4?! ♜f8!

19...♔xf7

Despite the suspicious-looking king, Black is doing fine.



20.♗g4

20.♗xe6? ♜xe6 21.♗d5† ♜xd5! wins for Black – Lutz.

20...♜f8 21.♗g3 ♜e5

21...♜xc4 22.♗ac1† is dangerous for Black.

22.♗xe5

Perhaps White should have preferred: 22.♗ac1?!N=

The game Bacrot – Lutz, Biel 2003, was agreed drawn here, although Black could have considered playing on with:

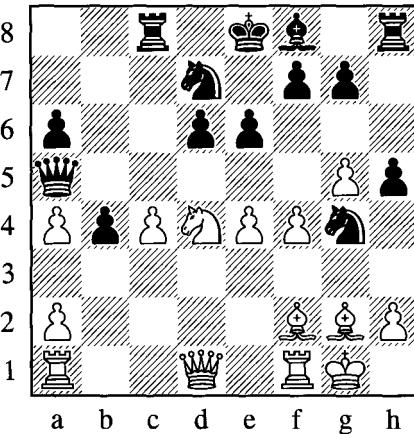
22...dxe5?

16.g5

The following is not an improvement for White: 16.h3 hxg5 17.hxg5 e5 18.♗f5 ♜xc4 19.♗xd6† (19.♗e2 ♜c3†) 19...♜xd6 20.♗xd6

$\mathbb{Q}xg4$ 21. $\mathbb{E}ad1$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 22. $\mathbb{W}xc7$ $\mathbb{E}xc7$ 23. $\mathbb{E}c1$
 $\mathbb{E}xc1$ 24. $\mathbb{E}xc1$ $\mathbb{E}h6$ 25. $\mathbb{E}d2$ a5+

16... $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}f2$



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

This is better than 17...g6 18.f5! when White has decent attacking chances.

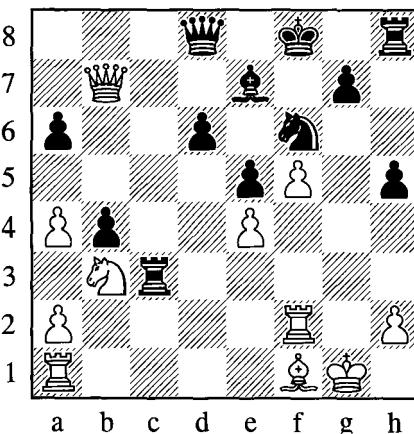
18.g6

This is clearly the critical move, but Black's defences hold firm.

18... $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ 19. $\mathbb{E}xf2$ $\mathbb{E}xc4$ 20. $\mathbb{g}xf7\#$ $\mathbb{Q}x7$
21. f5 e5 22. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 23. $\mathbb{W}d5\#$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}f1$
 $\mathbb{E}c3$

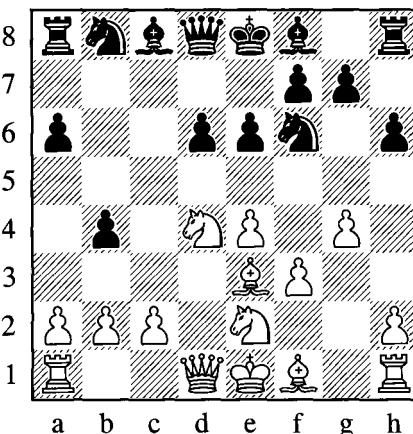
24... $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 25. $\mathbb{W}d3$ a5 26. $\mathbb{Q}xa5$ $\mathbb{E}c3$ 27. $\mathbb{W}b5$
d5 28. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ dxe4 29. $\mathbb{E}d1$ $\mathbb{E}h6\infty$

25. $\mathbb{W}a8\#$ $\mathbb{W}d8$ 26. $\mathbb{W}b7$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$



In this murky position Black's chances are at least equal, and probably somewhat higher.

B2) 9. $\mathbb{Q}ce2$ h6



In general I prefer to maintain the position of the knight on f6 for as long as possible. White has tried several different moves here, the most important being B21) 10. $\mathbb{Q}g3$, B22) 10. c4 and B23) 10. $\mathbb{W}d2$.

10.g5 is not bad, but looks a bit strange and has only been tried once. Play continued 10...hxg5 11. $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ e5 12. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 13. h4 $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ fxe6 16. $\mathbb{W}d3$ $\mathbb{W}b6$ 17. 0-0-0 $\mathbb{W}b5$ 18. $\mathbb{W}xb5$ axb5 19. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{E}d8$ with decent chances for Black, whose pawn structure is more effective than a quick glance may suggest, Talla – Wojtaszek, Chotowa 2007.

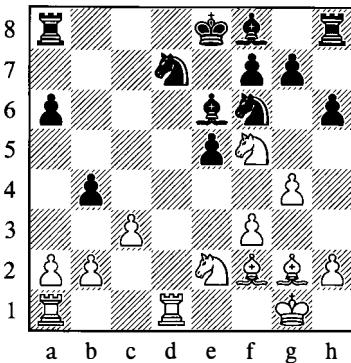
10. $\mathbb{Q}g2$

This has been tested by a few strong players, but Black can obtain fine chances by playing in the centre.

10... e5 11. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ d5 13. exd5 $\mathbb{W}xd5$
14. 0-0 $\mathbb{Q}bd7$ 15. c3 $\mathbb{W}xd1$

Another perfectly playable line is 15... $\mathbb{E}c8N$ 16. cxb4 g6 17. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{W}xd1$ 18. $\mathbb{E}fxd1$ $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ with equality.
16. $\mathbb{E}fxd1$

This position occurred in Motylev – Shipov, Elista 2001, and here I suggest a straightforward improvement:



16...bxc3N

In the game Black took the strategically risky decision of exchanging on f5 and went on to lose.

17.♕xc3 ♜b8 18.b3 h5!

This resolute move leads to interesting complications.

19.♕d6† ♜xd6 20.♕xd6 hxg4 21.♕xa6 0–0∞

Both sides have certain advantages and a tough battle lies ahead. Overall I would rate the position as approximately equal.

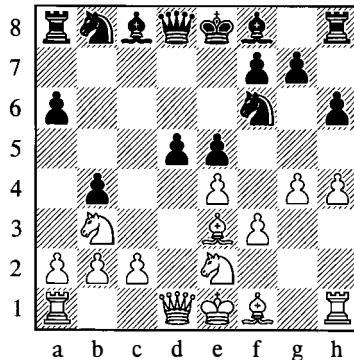
10.h4

This is the most significant of the minor alternatives. White obviously wants to prepare g5, so Black should strike at the centre before f6-knight is driven away from its present location.

10...e5! 11.♕b3

So far nobody seems to have tried 11.♕f5N, although the move does not seem so bad. Play might continue 11...♘c6 12.♕g2 g6 13.♕xh6? ♜xh6 14.g5 ♜g7 15.gxf6 ♜xf6 16.♕d5 ♜b7 17.0–0–0 ♜xh4 18.♕xh4 ♜xh4 19.♕xd6 when White has maintained the material balance, but can hardly hope for any advantage.

11...d5!

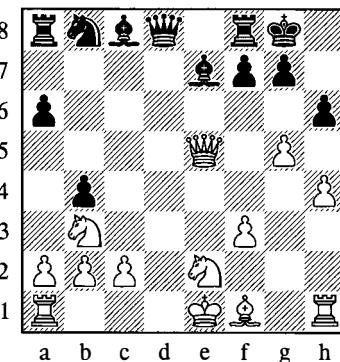


Now White has two main moves.

a) 12.exd5?!

It turns out that White is playing with fire here.

12...♜xd5 13.♕d2 ♜xe3 14.♕xe3 ♜e7!
15.♕xe5 0–0 16.g5



16...♜e8!N

16...♞d6 17.♕d4 ♜c6 gave Black sufficient compensation, but no real advantage in Frolov – Novikov, Simferopol 1991.

17.♕d1 ♜b6 18.♕f4

18.♕d4 ♜g6 19.♕d3 ♜f5†

18...♞c6 19.gxh6 ♜e5!!

Much stronger than 19...♞f6, which only leads to messy complications after 20.hxg7 ♜xb2∞.

20.♕g2

20.hxg7 ♜d6! 21.♕e4 ♜b8†

20...♞f6! 21.hxg7

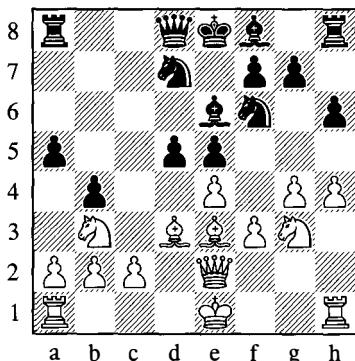
21.h5 is strongly met by 21...♜a7! 22.hxg7

$\mathbb{E}ae7$ with a strong initiative, for example:
 23. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3\#$ 24. $\mathbb{W}xf3$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 25. $\mathbb{W}f2$ $\mathbb{W}xf2\#$
 26. $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ $\mathbb{Q}xh1\#$
 21... $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 22. $\mathbb{W}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}xh4\#$ 23. $\mathbb{E}xh4$ $\mathbb{W}g1\#$
 24. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{W}g3\#$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{W}xh4\#$

White has survived the attack, but paid the price in material.

b) 12. $\mathbb{Q}g3$

This is a more reliable move, maintaining the e4-pawn as a foothold in the centre. Nevertheless Black is still doing just fine.
 12... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}bd7$ 14. $\mathbb{W}e2$ a5



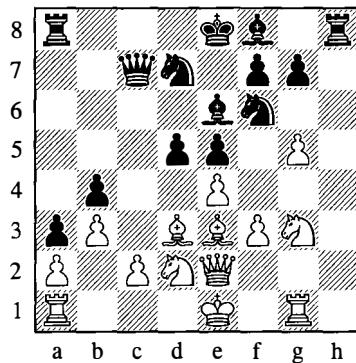
15. $\mathbb{E}g1$

15. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ seems a little inconsistent, and Black easily obtains a comfortable game as follows:
 15... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{E}c8$ 18. $\mathbb{E}d1$
 We have been following the game Horvath – Kulaots, Budapest 2004. Here Black should have played: 18... $\mathbb{Q}xe3N$ 19. $\mathbb{W}xe3$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 20. 0–0 0–0 21. $\mathbb{Q}xa5$ $\mathbb{W}xa5$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ $\mathbb{Q}d8!$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ $\mathbb{W}xa2\#$ Black will have every reason to play for a win from this excellent position.

15... a4 16. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ a3

In the following high-level game Black also did well using a more flexible approach:
 16... $\mathbb{W}c7?$ 17. g5 $\mathbb{H}xg5$ 18. $\mathbb{H}xg5$ $\mathbb{D}xe4$ 19. $\mathbb{G}xf6$ $\mathbb{D}xd3$ 20. $\mathbb{F}xg7$ $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ 21. $\mathbb{W}xd3$ This was Anand – Gelfand, Linares 1994, and here Black could have obtained some advantage with 21... $\mathbb{E}c8!N$ 22. 0–0–0 $\mathbb{Q}f8!$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}de4$ $\mathbb{E}h2$, for instance: 24. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{E}xd2$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$

26. $\mathbb{W}b5\#$ $\mathbb{W}d7$ 27. $\mathbb{W}xd7\#$ $\mathbb{Q}xd7\#$
 17. b3 $\mathbb{W}c7$ 18. g5 $\mathbb{H}xg5$ 19. $\mathbb{H}xg5$



19... $\mathbb{W}c3!N$

This is an improvement over 19... $\mathbb{D}xe4$, Wedberg – Agrest, Osterskan 1994, at which point 20. $\mathbb{Q}c4!N$ would have kept the position unclear.

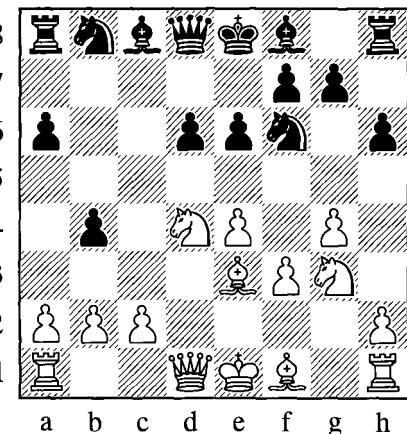
20. $\mathbb{E}b1$ $\mathbb{D}xe4$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}gxe4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$

A fascinating, though somewhat extravagant alternative is: 22... $\mathbb{E}c8$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{W}xe3\#?$ (23... $\mathbb{Q}c5\#$) 24. $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ (24. $\mathbb{W}xe3$ $\mathbb{Q}c5\#$) 24... $\mathbb{Q}c5\#$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}xg1$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 28. $\mathbb{E}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}d4\#$

23. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{W}xc5$ 24. $\mathbb{W}f2$ $\mathbb{E}c8\#$

Black keeps an obvious positional superiority.

B21) 10. $\mathbb{Q}g3$



10...e5 11.Qb3

There is an important alternative available:

11.Qdf5 Qe6

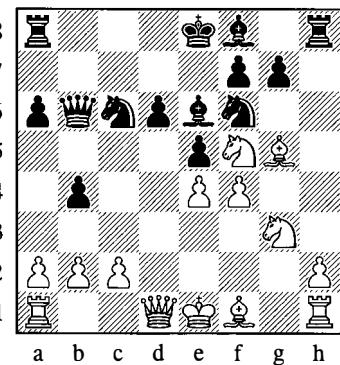
11...d5?! 12.f4! is dangerous.

12.Qh5!

Clearly the most challenging.

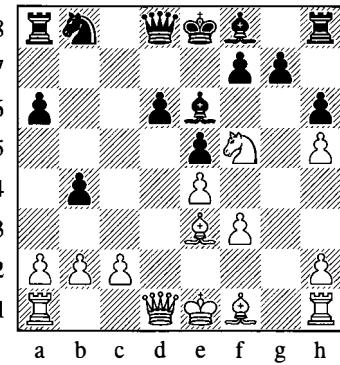
12.Wd2 d5 gives Black a comfortable game.

More challenging, but ultimately unimpressive, is 12.g5?! hxg5 13.Qxg5 Qc6 14.f4 Wb6! (14...exf4?!)



15.fxe5?!N (15.We2 was seen in Gonzalez Vidal – Vera Gonzalez Quevedo, Las Tunas 2001, and here Black should have played 15...Qh7!N†; 15.Qxf6N gxf6 16.Qh5 is good for White according to Vera, but it turns out that the opposite is true after 16...0–0–0!! 17.Qxf6 d5†) 15...dxe5 16.Qxf6 gxf6 17.Qh5 White seems to have played quite logically, but his concept can be refuted in spectacular style: 17...Qxh5!! 18.Wxh5 b3! 19.axb3 Wb4† 20.Qf2 Wxe4 21.Qd3 Qc5† 22.Qg3 Wf4† 23.Qg2 Qd7 24.Qhf1 Qg8† 25.Qg3 Qd5† 26.Qh3 Qf2!–+

12...Qxh5 13.gxh5

**13...g6!N**

It is important for Black to improve over the following game: 13...d5 14.Qg1 Qxf5 15.exf5 d4 (15...Wa5 16.Wd2 Qc6 17.0–0–0 d4 18.Qc4†) 16.Qf2 Qd7 17.We2 Qc5 18.Wxg7± Craciunescu – Mendez, e-mail 2006.

14.hxg6 fxg6 15.Qg3 Qc6∞

Both kings are somewhat unsafe, but Black is certainly not lagging behind in terms of activity. In the near future he will develop his bishop on e7 and then make a decision regarding his king according to circumstances.

16.Wd2 Qe7

16...h5?! 17.Qg1 (17.0–0–0? Wa5†) 17...Qe7 18.Qh1 Qf7 19.Qf2 d5=

17.Qg1

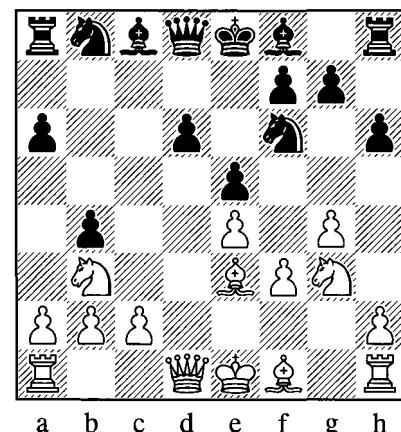
17.Qxh6? g5–+

17...Wc7

The position remains approximately balanced, for instance:

18.Qe2 Qg5! 19.Qxg5 hxg5

Black is doing fine, as 20.Wxg5? is refuted by 20...Qd4!.

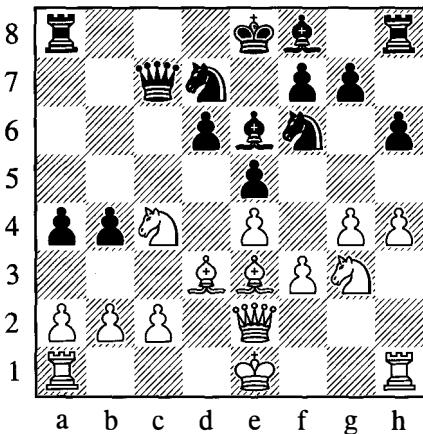


11...Qe6 12.Qd3 Qbd7 13.We2 a5 14.h4

14.Qc4 is harmless, and after 14...Wc7 15.Qd2 d5 16.exd5 a draw was agreed in Korneev – Vera Gonzalez, Coria del Rio 2001. The continuation might have been 16...Qxd5

17.♗xd5 ♗xd5 18.♘de4 ♖c6 19.♗d1 ♖d8 with at least equal prospects for Black.

14...♖c7 15.♘d2 a4 16.♘c4



16...♗c8!N

This is an improvement over 16...♘c5 17.♘d2 ♕b8 18.b3 d5 19.exd5 ♘xd5, Lutz – Anand, Germany 2003. Black eventually won this game, but at this stage White's position is perfectly playable (though not necessarily preferable). The critical continuation looks to be 20.♗xe5 N ♕xe5† 21.♘xe5 ♕d6 22.f4 0–0 23.♗c4 ♕bd8 when Black certainly has full compensation for the missing pawn, but I doubt that he is objectively better.

17.b3 d5! 18.exd5 ♘xd5 19.♗d2 ♕a8†

Black is well and truly in the driver's seat.

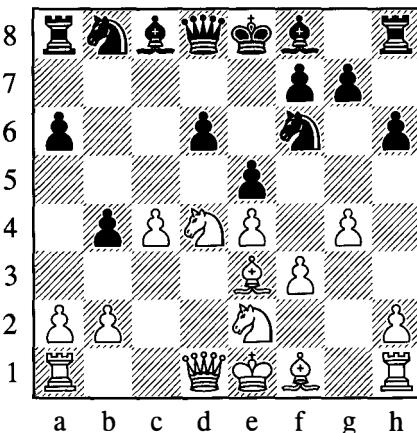
B22) 10.c4

With this move White tries for more of a positional strategy. We have already seen a similar idea in variations A11, A12 and A21.

10...e5!

This is an excellent decision. Black seizes some space centre and takes control over the f4-square. Note that both of the white knights are several moves away from the key d5-square.

I also spent some time analysing 10...♕c7, but concluded that there is no need to play this committal move so early.



11.♘c2

Another game continued 11.♗f5 g6 12.♗fg3 ♕c6 13.h4 ♕e6 14.b3 h5 15.g5 ♘d7 16.♗g2 ♕e7 17.0–0 Gomez Garrido – Ortiz Suarez, Albacete 2009. Here I suggest 17...0–0N 18.f4 exf4 19.♗xf4 ♘de5 20.♘d5 ♘g4 With the kingside closed, there is no reason why Black should be worse.

11...♗c6 12.♘g3 ♕e6 13.h4 a5 14.♗f2

Another game continued 14.♗d2 ♖b8 15.♗e2 (15.0–0–0 a4 16.a3 ♘a5 17.♗xb4 ♘xc4=) 15...h5 16.g5 ♘d7 17.f4 exf4 18.♗xf4 ♘ce5 19.♗e3 ♘g6 20.♘d5 ♘xf4 21.♗xf4 g6 And Black's dark-squared bishop became a real force, Sjol – Pasko, e-mail 2007.

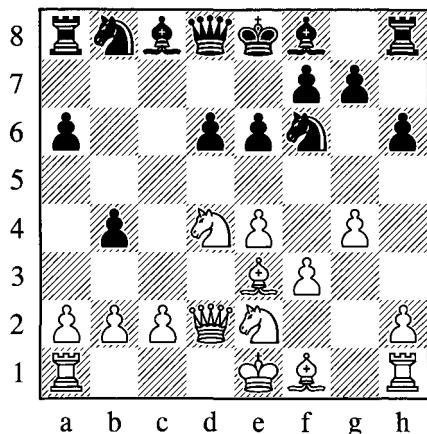
14...g6 15.♗e3 ♕g7 16.♗c1 0–0 17.♗d3 ♘d4 18.♗c2

We have been following the game Vallejo Pons – Anand, Monte Carlo (rapid) 2006. In this position Anand chose to retreat his knight to c6 and although he later won, I think the most straightforward continuation would have been:

18...♘xc2†N 19.♗xc2 a4

Black has a decent position, with fair prospects for counterplay on the queenside.

B23) 10.♗d2



The same position can also be reached via the move order 8...h6 9.♗d2 b4 10.♘ce2, but our chosen sequence avoids the potentially troublesome option of 10.♘a4.

The present position is critical for the evaluation of the entire 6...e6 7.f3 variation. In view of its importance, I decided to cover two separate continuations: **B231) 10...♘bd7** and **B232) 10...e5**. Both moves are playable, but lead to markedly different position types, thus the reader will be able to choose the one that best suits his own style. The former is riskier and can lead to almost unfathomable complications. The latter is more reliable and leads to less chaotic play, although it is still far from dull.

B231) 10...♘bd7

Passengers are instructed to fasten their seatbelts.

11.0–0–0

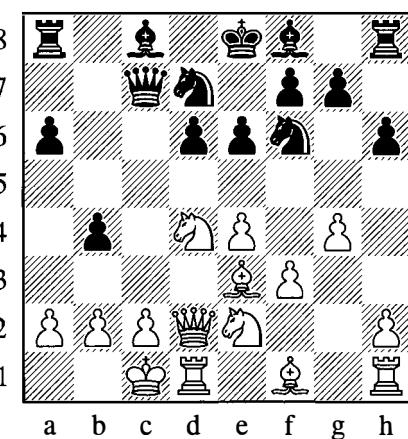
It is hardly surprising that no-one has been attracted by 11.♗xb4, when play might

continue 11...d5 12.♗a4 dxе4 13.0–0–0 ♘c5 14.fxe4 0–0 when Black has enough counterplay.

11...♗c7

11...d5 has been the most frequently played move, but White has scored highly after 12.exd5 ♘xd5 13.♘f4 intending ♘c4, when sacrifices on e6 are in the air.

There is an interesting and modern alternative available in 11...♗a5!?, when the critical continuation is 12.♗b1 ♘b7 13.♗b3 ♗c7 14.♗xb4 d5 as was seen in Svidler – Gelfand, Monte Carlo 2005. I have chosen to focus on the established main line, but if the reader wishes to explore something different, this could be one viable idea.



12.h4

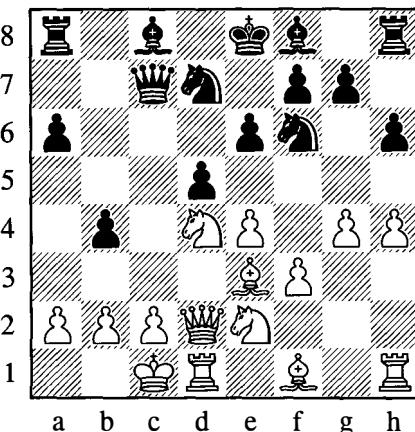
This has been by far the most popular move; White hurries to prepare g5.

I only found one game in which White was brave enough to grab the b-pawn, although the idea is certainly not completely stupid: 12.♗xb4 d5 13.♗a4 This was Kovchan – Solodovnichenko, Kharkov 2007, and here I am not sure why Black refrained from the obvious 13...dxе4N (The game continuation of 13...♘c5 14.e5! ♘h7 15.f4 ♘b8 16.c3 0–0

17. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 18. $\mathbb{W}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}d3\pm$ left Black well and truly on the road to extinction.) 14. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{exf}3$ (And not 14... $\mathbb{Q}b7?!$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 16. $fxe4$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}hf1$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 20. $\mathbb{W}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}b1\pm$ Despite Black's heroic efforts, his position remains distinctly dubious.) 15. $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ with equal chances.

12. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ is a rare move, but was played in the fairly recent high-level encounter Szabo – Vachier Lagrave, Gibraltar 2009. It seems to me that Black should have taken the opportunity to strike at the centre with 12... $d5!N$ 13. $\mathbb{exd}5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}7f6$ By contrast with the analogous position occurring in the 11... $d5$ variation mentioned in the note to Black's 11th move above, the c4-square is unavailable to White's bishop, limiting his attacking chances considerably. Play might continue 15. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}b7=$ when White is not getting anywhere.

12...d5!



With this principled move Black implements his central counterplay before his knight is driven away from the centre. White has a plethora of interesting responses at his disposal, and we will consider five principal continuations: **B2311) 13. $\mathbb{Q}g2$, B2312)**

13. $\mathbb{exd}5$, B2313) 13. $\mathbb{Q}f4?!$, B2314) 13. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ and B2315) 13. $\mathbb{Q}f4?!$.

It is also worth mentioning the surprising sacrifice:

13. $e5?!$

This is an enterprising idea, but ultimately a flawed one.

13... $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 14. $b3$

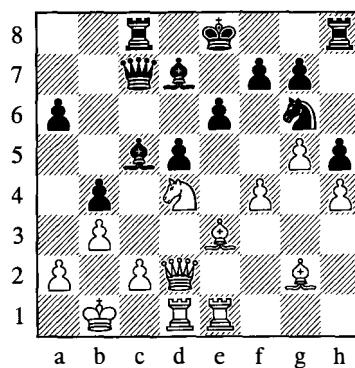
White hopes to stifle his opponent's central activity and press ahead with his kingside play, but he can hardly hope for full compensation against accurate play from Black.

14... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $h5$

Another good option was 17... $\mathbb{Q}g6N$ 18. $g5$ $hxg5$ 19. $hxg5$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 20. $f4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}b5\mp$.

18. $g5$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}ge1$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}8e7$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xg6$ $\mathbb{Q}xg6$ 22. $f4$

This position was reached in Najar – Shomoev, Tomsk 2006, and now Black should have played:

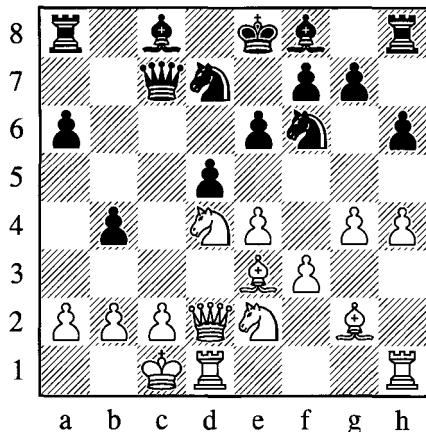


22... $\mathbb{Q}xh4N$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $exd5$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}f2\pm$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}xh4$ $g6\mp$

Black has stabilized his kingside and ensured the safety of his monarch. Meanwhile White will have problems dealing with the impending counterplay on the opposite flank.

B2311) 13. $\mathbb{Q}g2$

White prepares $g5$ and hopes to find a useful role for the bishop on the long diagonal.



13...dxe4 14.g5 hxg5

14...♝d5 is also playable, but my personal preference is for the text move.

15.hxg5 ♕xh1 16.♕xh1

It looks more threatening to keep the rook on the d-file. After 16.♕xh1 I analysed the following line: 16...♝d5 17.fxe4 ♜xe3 18.♕xe3 e5 19.♝f5 ♜b7 20.♝h7 ♜c5 21.♕xc5 ♜xc5 22.♝xg7† ♜xg7 23.♝xg7 ♜e6 24.♝g8† ♜d7 25.♕xa8 ♜xa8= Black has no reason to fear this endgame.

16...♝d5 17.♝f4

17.fxe4 ♜xe3 18.♕xe3 ♜e5 Black can fall back on bishop pair and if he is able to complete development his chances might turn out to be better. 19.♕g3 (19.♝f4 g6 20.♝b1 ♜b7 [20...♜g7 21.♝h3 ♜d7 22.♝h7 ♜f8 23.♝g2∞] 21.♝dxe6 fxe6 22.♝xe6 ♜e7 23.♝b3 a5†) 19...g6 20.♝c6 ♜xc6 21.♕xe5 ♜c5 22.♕f6 ♜b7† Two bishops are an important asset in this defendable position.

The undermining move 17.g6 looks natural, except that the rest of White's army is not ideally placed to follow up the attacking efforts of the enthusiastic foot soldier. The following game demonstrated accurate play on both sides: 17...♝e5 18.fxe4 ♜c4 19.♝f4 ♜xf4 20.♕xf4 ♜xf4† 21.♝xf4 ♜c5 22.gxf7† ♜xf7 23.e5 ♜a7

And White faced a difficult defensive task in the endgame in Elburg – Hadet, e-mail 2007.

17...♝c3!!

This is a combative move, although ultimately it seems that the position will remain in a state of dynamic equilibrium.

Black can also maintain the balance in more mundane fashion: 17...♝xf4N 18.♕xf4 e5 19.♕g3 ♜c4 20.♝b3 a5 21.♝b1 a4 22.♝cl b3 23.axb3 axb3 24.cxb3 ♜b4 25.♕xb4 ♜xb4 26.fxe4 ♜e7 With an equal ending.

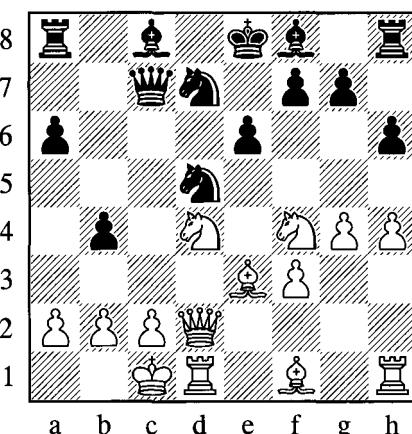
18.bxc3 bxc3 19.♕e1 e5 20.♝d5 ♜a5 21.♗xc3 ♜xd5 22.♝c6 ♜e6 23.fxe4 ♜b7

The position is messy, with chances for both sides, Pawnstriker1978 – Intagrand, Internet 2007.

B2312) 13.exd5

This is another typical method of attacking; White hopes to develop threats using the open e-file.

13...♝xd5 14.♝f4



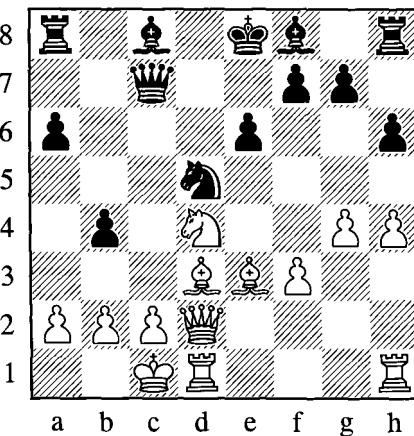
14...♝b6

This demonstrates one advantage of delaying the move ...♝b7 – the bishop guards against any pesky ♜xe6 sacrifices.

It was also possible to play 14... $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 15. $\mathbb{W}xe3$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ (Another possible line is 16. $\mathbb{W}e4?N$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ 0–0 18. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ f5 19. $\mathbb{gxf5}$ $\mathbb{exf5}$ 20. $\mathbb{W}e3$ $\mathbb{W}d6$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}hg1$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{W}xd5=$ Fighting back with active pieces can yield a pleasant dividend for Black.) 16... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 17. $f4$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}e5N$ (After 19. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 20. $\mathbb{W}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}d6\mp$ Black's advantage is not huge, but his position was certainly more pleasant in Tissir – Brodsky, Cappelle la Grande 2008.) 19... $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 20. $\mathbb{W}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ with equal chances.

15. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}d3$

This position occurred in Talla – Stocek, Havlickuv Brod 2008, and here the most sensible move would have been:



16... $\mathbb{Q}c5N$

With the possible continuation:

17. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 18.g5

18. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ is equal.

18... $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 19. $\mathbb{W}xe3$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 20. $\mathbb{gxh6}$ $\mathbb{Q}xh6$

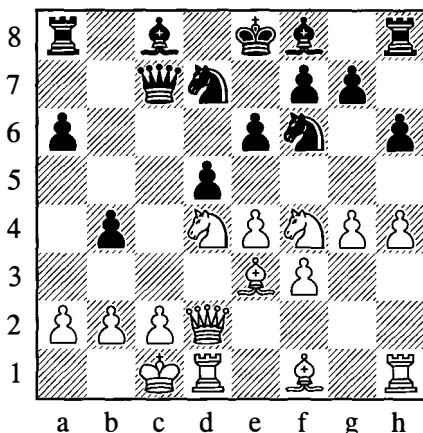
21. $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ $\mathbb{W}xb7$ 22. $\mathbb{W}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$

24. $\mathbb{W}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 26. $\mathbb{W}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd1\uparrow$

27. $\mathbb{Q}xd1=$

The endgame is certainly not dangerous for Black.

B2313) 13. $\mathbb{Q}f4?!$



This was a fantastic idea from Morozevich. After lengthy analysis I have come to the conclusion that the sacrifice is objectively dubious, although it will require great accuracy (not to mention strong nerves!) for Black to prove it.

13...e5!

This direct approach appears to be best, although I will mention a second playable continuation just in case any unexpected improvements appear for White in the main line.

13...dxe4?!

This appears risky but according to my analysis it should be playable.

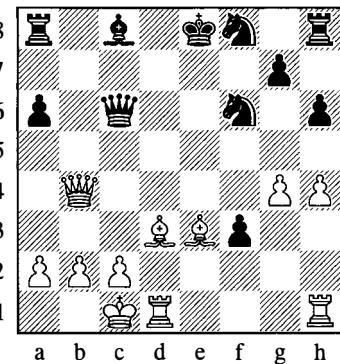
14. $\mathbb{Q}fxe6!$

This is certainly the most principled and dangerous-looking continuation. White can also try a quieter alternative like 14. $\mathbb{Q}e2$, although it is hard to believe that Black should have much to fear from such a move.

14...fxe6 15. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $\mathbb{W}c6$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xf8$ $\mathbb{Q}xf8$
17. $\mathbb{W}xb4$ $\mathbb{exf3}$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}d3?!$

We have been following the analysis of Golubev. Black's position certainly looks precarious, but the Najdorf is a resilient beast and I am not absolutely convinced that

White has enough compensation. The best continuation looks to be:



18...♗e6! 19.♗d4 ♘d8 20.♗hf1!

There are immense complications in store, and I will leave it to the readers to investigate this position in more detail if they so desire.

14.♘fe6

White can also sacrifice the piece with 14.♘xd5?! ♘xd5 15.exd5 exd4 16.♗xd4, but in this case it seems Black can repulse the attack with 16...♗d6!, when White is lacking a decent follow-up. The only try is probably 17.♗xg7 to complicate matters. Still, even here after 17...♗f4 18.♗e1† ♘d8 19.♗e3 ♗g8 20.♗d4 ♘b7 White does not have enough for the sacrificed material.

An altogether more dangerous proposition is:
14.♘f5?! exf4!

Black should certainly accept the challenge. The position looks dangerous, but in reality it should be pretty safe.

15.♗xf4 ♘a5!

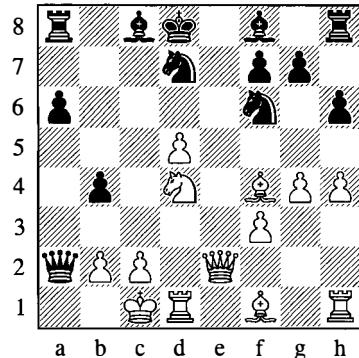
Again this resource is important.

16.exd5

16.e5 is insufficient after 16...♘xa2 17.♗e1 ♘g8 18.♗d6† ♘xd6 19.exd6† ♘f8 20.♗xb4 ♘b8 and White will be a piece down in an ending before too long.

16...♘xa2 17.♗e2† ♘d8 18.♗d4!

This looks like White's best chance, but I am still not convinced.



18...♗xd5!

This is a winning attempt, and in my view a justified one.

18...♗b7 is possible and leads to a forced draw after: 19.♗c6† ♘c8 20.g5! hxg5 21.hxg5 ♘a1† 22.♗d2 ♘xb2 23.♗xh8 ♘c3† with perpetual check.

19.♗b1 ♘b7

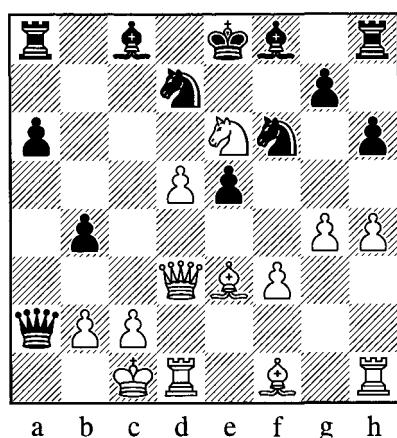
The position remains complex, but objectively I doubt that White has enough for the sacrificed piece.

14...fxe6 15.♘xe6 ♘a5!

This is the only good square for the queen.

16.exd5 ♘xa2 17.♗d3!

White has no other threatening moves. This position was reached in Morozevich – Vachier Lagrave, Biel 2009, and here Black should have played:



17...e4!N

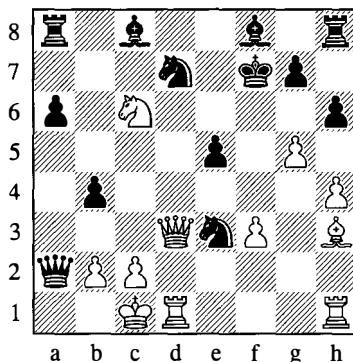
The game continued with what looked like an impending catastrophe for Black:

17... $\mathbb{Q}f7?$ 18.g5 $\mathbb{Q}xd5?$

18... $\mathbb{W}a1\#$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{W}xb2$ was necessary, but Black no longer equalizes. I do not want to spend time analysing this and other alternatives in detail, since I am recommending a different path for Black. However, I do think it is worth a brief diversion to witness the beautiful winning line that was missed by White in the game.

19. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}d8\#!$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}c6\#$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$

It was here that Morozевич missed a delicious winning combination, which was first pointed out by Korotylev.



22. $\mathbb{Q}e6\#!$ $\mathbb{Q}xe6$

22... $\mathbb{W}xe6$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}d8\#$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $\mathbb{Q}xd1$

25. $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ is a winning position. Black is slightly ahead on material, but White can combine threats to the king with plucking pawns or harassing the pieces.

23. $\mathbb{W}g6\#$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 24.gxf6 gxf6 25. $\mathbb{W}e8\#$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$

Most computers would have trouble finding 22. $\mathbb{Q}e6\#$ without considerable time on their hands, as this position from afar can appear unattractive to them. But when seen up close, it turns out that White can win by force:

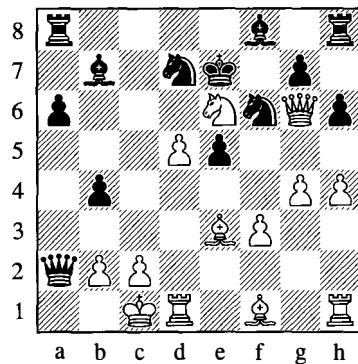
26. $\mathbb{Q}d4\#$ $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}e2\#$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}d4\#$!

Black is helpless against the mating threats, for example: 28... $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}f4\#$ exf4 30. $\mathbb{W}e4\#$

It is worth mentioning another plausible, but ultimately flawed alternative:

17... $\mathbb{Q}b7?$ 18. $\mathbb{W}g6\#$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$

Recommended by Vachier-Lagrave in *New in Chess Yearbook 94* as a correct way for Black to play. However, his suggestion of 19.d6# does not deserve an exclamation mark. White can refute his opponent's idea with:



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

Also losing is: 19... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}c5\#$ $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}b3!!$ and with the queen out of the game, Black does not have a reliable defence against 23. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ and 24. $\mathbb{W}e4$.

20. $\mathbb{Q}c7$ hxg5 21. $\mathbb{Q}xd5\#$!

21. $\mathbb{Q}xd5?$ looks tempting, but fails to 21... $\mathbb{Q}c8!!$ and White has no good move.

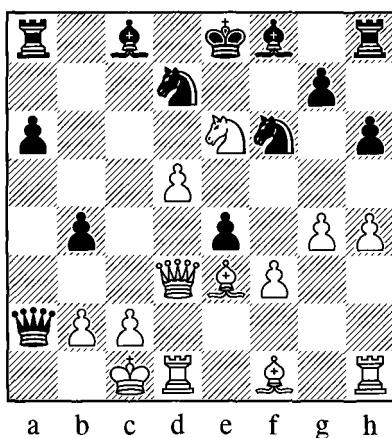
21... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}7f6!$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}c5\#$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$

24. $\mathbb{Q}xd5\#$ $\mathbb{W}xd5$

24... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 25. $\mathbb{W}c6$ with mate.

25. $\mathbb{Q}xf8$ $\mathbb{W}xf8$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}d1$

And White wins.

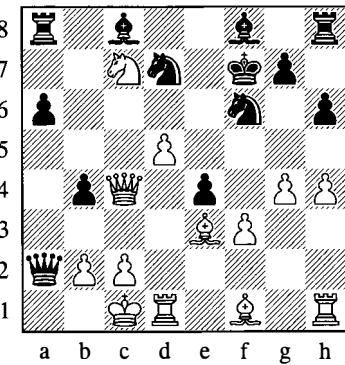


18.Qd4

What else should White play? Certainly not 18.fxe4?? when 18...Qe5 wins for Black.

18.Qc7† Qf7 19.Qc4

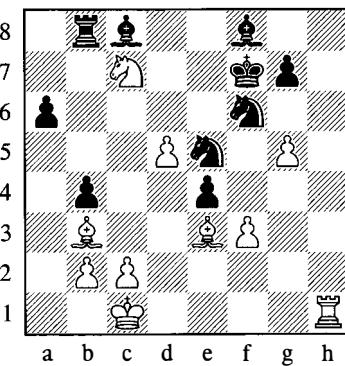
This is not entirely bad, but still leads to a sharp endgame with slightly better chances for Black:

**19...Wxc4**

Black should not get too greedy with 19...Wa1†? 20.Qd2 Wxb2 21.d6† as the white attack is too dangerous.

20.Qxc4 Qe5 21.Qb3 Wb8 22.g5 hxg5

22...Qd6? is playable, but after 23.gxf6 Qxf6 24.f4 Qg4 25.Qd4† Qf5 26.Qe6 Qxe6 27.dxe6 the evaluation is not so clear.

23.hxg5 Whxh1 24.Whxh1**24...Qe8! 25.d6† Qg6 26.f4?**

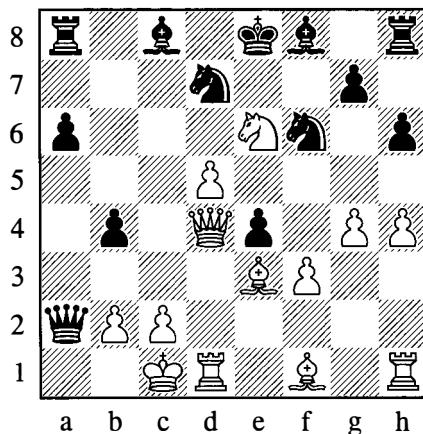
The more normal 26.Qxe8 Qd7 also favours Black.

26...Qg4 27.Qh8 Qxe3 28.Qxe8 Qc6! 29.Qxf8 Qxb3 30.cxb3 Qd8 31.Qg8 Qf5

Now White has nothing better than:

32.Qf6 Whxg8 33.Qxg8 Qxd6

White has to attempt to draw the ending, which might very well prove difficult. This line is of course not forced, and both parties have alternatives on the way. Nevertheless my overall feeling is that Black's chances are higher.

**18...Qd6!**

Clearly the most ambitious move. 18...b3 is a playable alternative which should lead to a draw as follows: 19.Qc7† Qf7 20.d6 (20.Qxa8? Qd6 hands Black the initiative) Now Black has to take the perpetual after 20...Wa1† 21.Qd2 Wa5† 22.Qc1 Wa1† etc.

Instead if he tries for more with 22...Qe5? he might easily end up in trouble after 23.cxb3! Whb8 24.g5. One spectacular line runs 24...Whb4 25.Wc3 hxg5 26.Qc5! Qc6 27.h5!! and White has a winning attack after 27...Qg8 28.h6!.

19.Qc4

19.f4 b3! is also dangerous for White. A possible line runs: 20.cxb3 (20.Qc4 transposes to the main line below) 20...Qb7 21.Qc4 Whc8! 22.Qxg7† Whf7 23.Qf5 Whb4 24.Qc2 Whxd5 25.Qa1 Whc4† 26.bxc4 Whxc4† 27.Whc4 Whxc4 and White will have a tough job fighting for a draw in the ending.

19...b3!

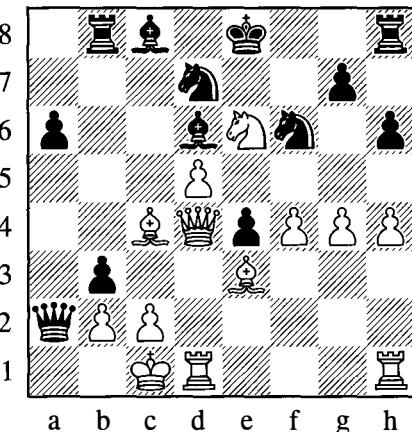
This powerful move was first suggested by Korotylev. Black is taking over the initiative.

20.f4

20.♗xb3 is simply poor. Black has some nice tactics: 20...♛a1† 21.♔d2 ♛a5† 22.♔e2 exf3† 23.♔xf3 ♔e5† 24.♔g2 ♔xe6 25.dxe6 ♔exg4 and White is close to being busted. Not even winning things with check works: 26.♔a4† ♔f8 27.♔xd6†?! ♔g8 Black keeps an extra piece and should win without too many problems.

20...♝b8!

This is not the only promising option, but I think it is the strongest. Vachier-Lagrave only considered the weaker 20...♛a1†? but it seems to me that the text move is much more consistent with the spirit of the Najdorf.

**21.cxb3**

21.♗xb3 is poor. Black is a piece up, and in a dynamic position it is not too important what sort of piece this is. Thus the second player can decide the game with 21...♝xb3! 22.cxb3 ♔b7 23.♔xg7† ♔f7 24.♔f5 ♔c8† 25.♔d2 ♔c5 26.♔c3 ♔f8 27.♔a1 ♔xc3 28.♔xa2 ♔d3† 29.♔e2 ♔xg4 and Black wins.

21...♝b6

Although the position remains sharp, I see no reason why Black's extra piece should not decide the game as long as he plays with reasonable accuracy. Here is a possible line:

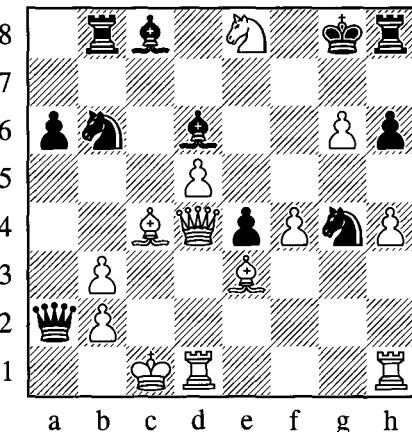
22.♔xg7†

This is not objectively the best way to play for White, but it is the only way he can really try to hurt us, which is why we should consider it carefully.

22.g5 ♔g4! leads nowhere for White, as 23.♔xg7? is refuted by 23...♛a1†! 24.♔d2 ♔xc4†.

22...♔f7 23.g5 ♔g4 24.g6† ♔g8! 25.♔e8

Black appears to be on the verge of defeat, but in fact the opposite is true thanks to the following beautiful combination:

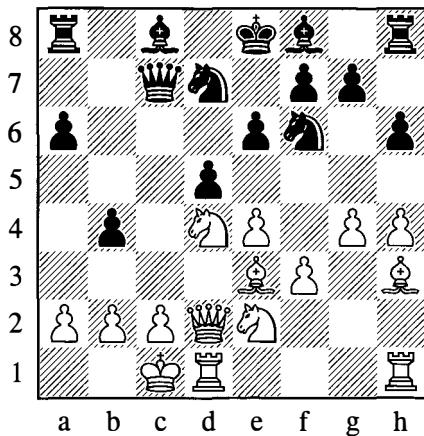
**26...♛a1† 27.♔c2 ♔xe3† 27.♔xe3 ♔xb2†!!**

And Black wins.

To summarize, Morozevich's 13.♔f4 does not appear to be fully sound, but it certainly demands accurate handling so I would advise the reader to study this section carefully before entering this labyrinth of complications over the board.

B2314) 13.♗h3

This bishop development is another critical line for us to consider. White prepares g5 and takes aim at the sensitive e6-square.

**13...♝b6**

Tempting, but ultimately inferior, is:

13...♝e5?!

Unfortunately I was unable to find a satisfactory solution to the following idea:

14.♗f4!N

14.b3?! would not be as effective here due to 14...dxe4 15.g5 hxg5 16.hxg5 exf3 with a better game for Black. If you want to try out this interesting move order, you need to be prepared for White's strongest response.

14...dxe4 15.g5 ♘d5 16.fxe4 ♘xf4 17.♘xf4

Black has a hard time catching up on development, and is destined for some nervous moments with his king in the centre.

17...♛c4 18.♕f2

Black may not be losing outright, but I find his position rather unpleasant. Here are a few sample lines:

18...♝d6!

This seems to be the most resilient defence. 18...hxg5 19.hxg5 ♘d6 is well met by 20.♗d3! White has a solid grip on the centre, and ideas such as e5 and g6 are in the air.

19.♗d3!

19.♗h5?! ♘e5 20.♗f1 with the idea 20...♝d6

21.♗f3! looks tricky, but Black has a brilliant solution in 20...♝xb2!! 21.♗xb2 ♘b7 22.♗b1 0–0–0 with powerful compensation for the piece.

After the text move I prefer White's chances. I am not sure how to prevent White's ideas of g5-g6 or e4-e5. He should definitely avoid:

19...g6? 20.h5!

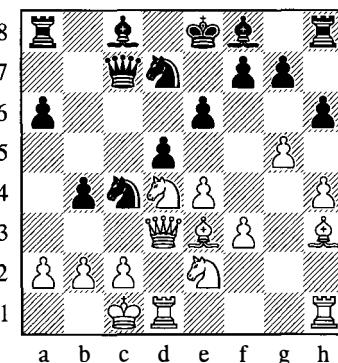
When White crashes through on the kingside. However, I would encourage the reader to investigate this variation independently and form his own conclusions. Authors can be mistaken, so if you think you have found an improvement for Black then go for it!

14.b3!**14.g5?!**

I believe this to be ultimately weaker, although proving it with analysis is not easy.

14...♝c4 15.♗d3 ♘d7!

15...dxe4? 16.fxe4 ♘e5 17.♕b3 hxg5 18.hxg5 ♘xe4 19.♗f4 looks like a classical murder scenario.

**16.♗xe6!N**

White has to try this to stay in the game.

16.♗f4? ♘de5 17.♕e2 ♘xe3 18.♕xe3 ♘c4 was already winning for Black in Ashwin – Banikas, Rethymno 2009. White had to try a futile knight sacrifice and was without a real chance.

16...fxe6

16... $\mathbb{W}a5$! does not work in this position, as 17. $\mathbb{Q}d4!!$ fxe6 (17... $\mathbb{W}xa2$ 18.b3 defends against Black's threats) 18.exd5 gives White a huge attack.

17.exd5 $\mathbb{Q}de5!$

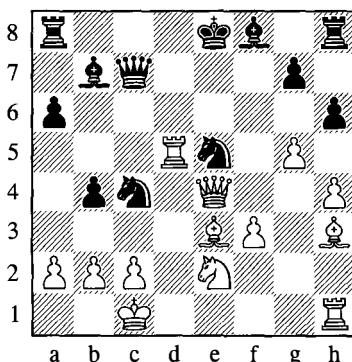
17...exd5? 18. $\mathbb{W}g6\uparrow$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ gives White a strong attacking position.

18. $\mathbb{W}e4$ exd5

18... $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ looks riskier in view of 19. $\mathbb{W}xe3$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 20. $\mathbb{W}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 21. $\mathbb{W}e5$ (21. $\mathbb{W}xb4$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 22. $\mathbb{W}c3$ exd5 23. $\mathbb{W}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xh3$ 24. $\mathbb{W}xh3$ hxg5 25. $\mathbb{W}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 26.f4 $\mathbb{Q}xh4$ 27. $\mathbb{W}g6\uparrow$ $\mathbb{W}f7$ 28. $\mathbb{W}e4\uparrow$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ Black's defences hold together) 21... $\mathbb{Q}b5$ 22. $\mathbb{W}e3$ e5 23. $\mathbb{Q}e6$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 24. $\mathbb{W}e4$ with ongoing compensation for White.

19. $\mathbb{W}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$

19... $\mathbb{Q}xh3$? is another possibility, which leads to dynamic equality. My analysis continues as follows: 20. $\mathbb{W}xh3$ (20. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ is sharper, but not more dangerous. Black plays 20... $\mathbb{Q}d6$. 21. $\mathbb{W}xd6$ [21. $\mathbb{W}xh3$ 0-0-0 22.b3 hxg5 23. $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ $\mathbb{Q}de8$ 24.bxc4 $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ 25. $\mathbb{W}d3$ is roughly equal as well, but if anyone has the chances, it is Black.] 21...0-0! 22. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 23. $\mathbb{W}xb4$ $\mathbb{W}c4$ 24. $\mathbb{W}xd6$ $\mathbb{W}xe2$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}xf8$ $\mathbb{Q}xf8$ 26.gxh6 $\mathbb{W}xf3$ 27. $\mathbb{W}b3\uparrow$ as the ending is a draw.) 20... $\mathbb{W}d8$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ This looks very dangerous for Black, but there is a brilliant solution: 21...b3!! 22.axb3 $\mathbb{W}xd5$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{W}a5$! and neither player can reasonably avoid 24. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{W}e1\uparrow$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}a2$ $\mathbb{W}a5\uparrow$ with a draw.



20.b3!

Only with this move can White maintain significant attacking chances.

20... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 21. $\mathbb{W}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 22. $\mathbb{W}e6\uparrow$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$!

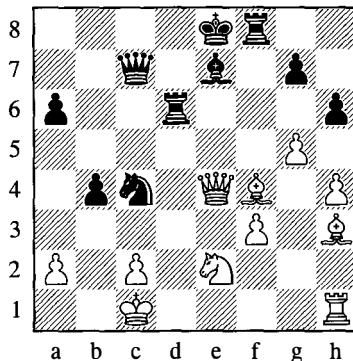
Rybka's first choice is not always the best. After 22... $\mathbb{W}e7$ 23.bxc4 $\mathbb{W}xe6$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ hxg5 25. $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 26.f4 the sharp fight finally results in a peaceful and roughly equal position.

23.bxc4 $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 24. $\mathbb{W}f5$ $\mathbb{Q}f8!$ 25. $\mathbb{W}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}xc4$!

26.gxh6!

White has to seek an inferior ending at all cost.

The computer wants to play 26. $\mathbb{Q}f4$, but Black has a wonderful combination:

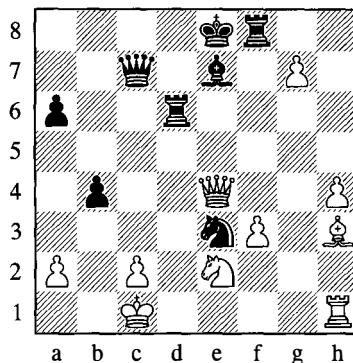


26... $\mathbb{Q}xf4!!$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ b3!! 28.axb3 $\mathbb{W}a5$ Black has a winning attack. My main line runs as follows: 29. $\mathbb{W}a8\uparrow$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 30.g6! $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}a3\uparrow$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{W}e5\uparrow$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}a2$ $\mathbb{Q}b5!$ With decisive threats.

26... $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 27.hxg7!

27. $\mathbb{W}xe3?$ $\mathbb{Q}xh6$ is poor.

Here Black is at a crossroads.



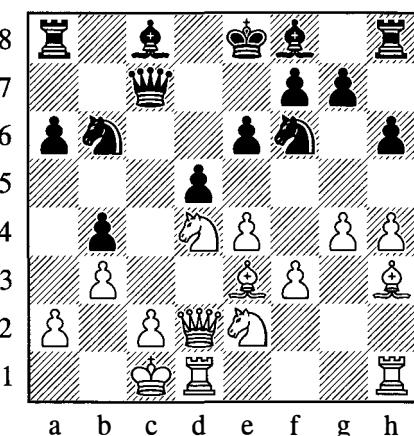
27...♝g8!?

This is the most ambitious move, and probably objectively strongest. He can also play safer with 27...♝xc2 28.gxf8=♛+ ♚xf8, but accept that White can more or less equalize with 29.♕f5† ♜f6 30.♕c8† ♜xc8 31.♕xc8 ♛e3 32.♕h3 ♜xh4 33.♕e6 ♜f6 34.♕b3, when it is unlikely that Black will have genuine winning chances.

28.♛xe3 ♜xg7

I would rate Black's chances as slightly higher, although all three results are possible.

Returning to the main line, we have arrived at a position that the Russian GM Alexei Fedorov has employed twice with the white pieces.



14...dxe4!

In a previous game Black preferred 14...e5 15.♗f5 ♜xf5 16.exf5 ♜c5 17.♗xc5 ♜xc5 18.g5 ♜fd7 Here I would improve on White's play with 19.♗b1!N (19.f4 e4 20.♗d4 a5 21.♗b1 was unclear in Fedorov – Annaberdiyev, Abu Dhabi 2005. White eventually won this game, but at this stage Black's position is quite healthy.) After this new move it is not easy for Black to continue constructively. If he plays a normal move, such as 19...a5, White can strike with 20.f6!, with a possible line being: 20...gxsf6 21.gxh6 a4 22.♗g3 d4 23.♗e4 ♜e7 24.♗hg1! and Black is attacked all over the board.

15.g5 ♜fd5 16.fxe4

16.g6? e5 17.gxf7† ♜xf7 18.♗f5 exf3 was already winning for Black in Bittencourt – Molina, Brazil 2009.

16...♝xe3 17.♛xe3 hxg5 18.hxg5 g6!

Black needs to keep his structure intact. Now I found an improvement for White:

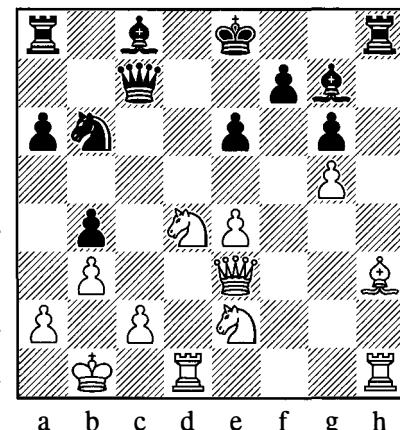
19.♗b1!N

White needs to maintain the pressure against e6. Instead after 19.♗g2? ♜exh1 20.♗xh1 ♜b7 21.♗h7 ♜e5! White was in danger of losing the strategic fight in Fedorov – Ashwin, Dubai 2009.

19...♝g7

This natural developing move is strong.

Black should not be lured by 19...e5?!, even if the consequences of the following tactical sequence are not altogether clear: 20.♗d7†! ♜xd7 21.♗xh8 exd4 22.♗xd4 0–0–0 23.♗f2! ♜e7! 24.♗xd8† ♜xd8 25.♗xf7 ♜g4 26.♗f2 and Black is just marginally worse.



20.♗d2!?

White continues to try to kill us.

Another possibility was 20.c3 bxc3 21.♗xc3 ♜b7 with unclear play. Black might not get

to castle, but the g7-bishop is a tremendous asset.

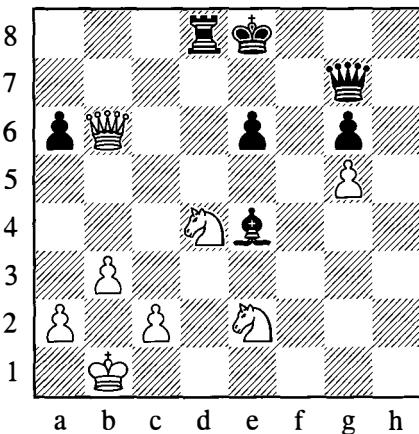
20... $\mathbb{Q}b7!$

When playing such a move, Black must of course anticipate the following strike:

21. $\mathbb{Q}xe6!$ $\mathbb{B}xh1$ 22. $\mathbb{B}xh1$ $\mathbb{B}d8!$

Thanks to the strong bishop on g7 it is unlikely that Black is in trouble. According to my analysis the critical continuation runs as follows:

23. $\mathbb{W}xb4!$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4!$ 24. $\mathbb{B}h7!$ $fxe6$ 25. $\mathbb{B}xg7$ $\mathbb{W}xg7$
26. $\mathbb{W}xb6$



26... $\mathbb{W}e7!?$

The safer option is 26... $\mathbb{W}e5$ 27. $\mathbb{W}xa6$ $\mathbb{B}xd4$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{W}xd4$ 29. $\mathbb{W}xe6\#$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 30. $\mathbb{W}c8\#$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 31. $\mathbb{W}c7\#$ with a draw.

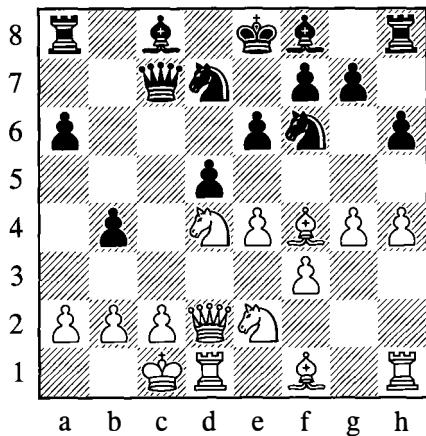
27. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $\mathbb{B}d1\#$

Or 27... $\mathbb{B}d6$ 28. $\mathbb{W}b8\#$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}6d4$ with even chances.

28. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{W}d6$ 29. $\mathbb{W}xd6$ $\mathbb{B}xd6$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $\mathbb{B}d2$
31. $\mathbb{Q}d4\#$ $\mathbb{B}xd4$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{B}d1$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$

This ending should probably result in a draw, although a strong endgame technician might try to win from either side of the board.

B2315) 13. $\mathbb{Q}f4!?$



This modern move was first played in 2009, and it may well be the most critical line of all.

13... $\mathbb{W}a5!?$ N

This interesting idea is given in the latest version of Aquarium. So far White's 13th move has only been played in a few games, and the text move has yet to receive a practical test. After analysing it in some detail I believe it is the most promising option, although in view of the freshness of the position and the scope for new ideas, I will also provide some coverage of the alternatives.

13... $\mathbb{Q}e5!?$ N is playable, although I prefer White's position slightly after 14. $\mathbb{Q}g2$.

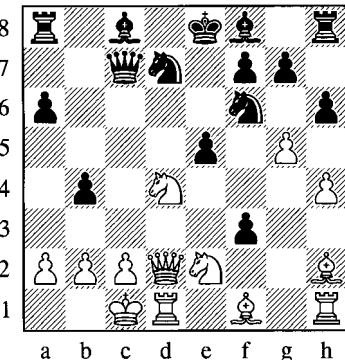
The other critical idea is:

13... $e5$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $dxe4$

I also spent some time analysing 14... $\mathbb{Q}b6$ N but was not entirely happy with Black's position after 15.g5.

15.g5 $exf3$

It seems amazing that Black can continue eating pawns while behind in development with his king in the centre, but for a Najdorf player it is just another day at the office.



16.gxf6

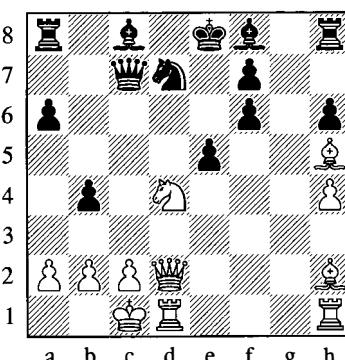
The alternative is 16.♘xf3 ♘g4 17.g6 f6 18.♗ed4, when Black must be precise: 18...♗xh2!N (And not 18...♗b6? 19.♕c4!!± Szabo – Kislik, Budapest 2009.) 19.♗xh2 ♔b7 20.♔h3 (20.♗e6 ♗b6 21.♔h3 ♗xf3 22.♗c7† ♗xc7 23.♗xd7† ♗d8 24.♗c6† ♗xd1 25.♗xd1† ♗d6 26.♗xa8 ♔e7±) 20...♗c5 21.♗e2 ♔d6 22.♗e6 ♗xe6 23.♗xe6 ♗d8 White keeps some compensation for the pawn, but no advantage.

16...fxe2 17.♗xe2

Perhaps the critical continuation is 17.♗xe2?!N gxf6 18.♔h3∞ when White has compensation for the two pawns, but how much is not clear.

17...gxf6 18.♔h5

In this sharp position I found an improvement for Black:



18...♗c4!N

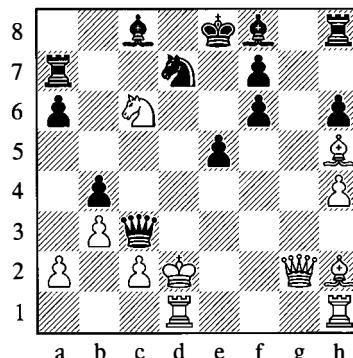
This looks better than 18...♗b8 19.♗e6

♗c4, Aroshidze – Banikas, Kavala 2009, 20.♗d5!N ♗xd5 21.♗c7† when White's compensation remains quite potent even in the position without queens.

19.♗g2

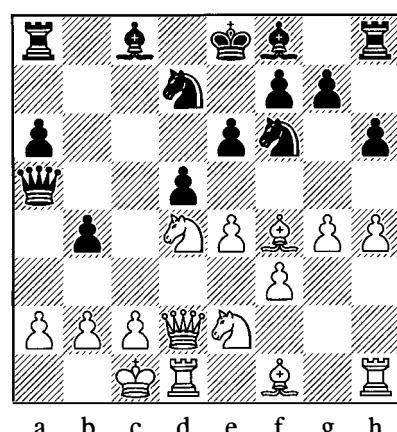
19.♗b3 a5 20.♗hf1 ♔c7 is complicated, but not unfavourable to Black.

19...♗a7 20.b3 ♗c3 21.♗c6 ♗a1† 22.♗d2 ♗c3†=



The game should end in a perpetual, as the attempt to run with the king only leads to trouble for White:

23.♗e2? ♗c5!± 24.♗xa7 ♗e3† 25.♗f1 ♗b7+–



14.♗b1 dxе4

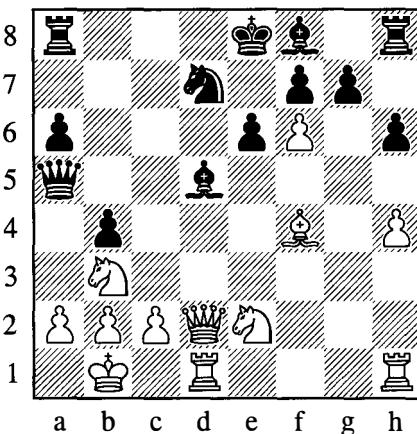
14...e5?! is a bit risky: 15.exd5 ♔b7 (15...exf4 16.♗xf4 ♗c5 17.♔h3 0–0 18.g5) 16.♗c6 ♗c7 17.♗ed4→

15.♗g2! ♗b7 16.g5 exf3 17.♗xf3 ♗xf3

18.gxf6

18.♗xf3 hxg5 19.hxg5 ♘xh1 20.♗xh1 ♖d5 is about equal.

18...♗d5 19.♗b3



19...♗b6

Another intriguing possibility is: 19...♗a4!? 20.fxg7 ♗xg7 21.♗hg1 ♗f6 22.♗d6 ♘c8 23.♗xb4 ♘xc2! 24.♗xc2 ♗xb4∞ Black has reasonable compensation for the exchange, and his king should be able to survive in the centre.

20.fxg7 ♗xg7 21.♗hg1 ♗f6!

This is an improvement over 21...♗e5 22.c4!, with an edge to White according to Aquarium. Black does best to preserve his dark-squared bishop, which can be useful for both attacking and defensive purposes.

22.c4

22.♗xh6 0–0–0 23.h5 ♗c5 24.♗f4 ♗e4 reaches a double-edged position in which Black's prospects are not worse.

Another possibility is 22.♗e3 ♗b7 23.♗c5 ♗xc5 24.♗xc5 0–0–0 25.♗f4 ♗e7 with approximate equality.

22...♗c6

From this position White should have enough activity to compensate for the missing pawn, but not enough for an advantage.

23.♗d6

23.♗ed4 ♗a4∞

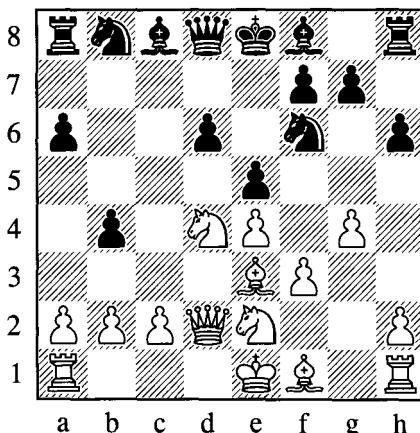
23...a5 24.c5 ♗b7 25.♗bd4 ♗e4† 26.♔a1 a4∞

The position remains balanced. Obviously the whole line requires much more practical testing, but at this stage I see no reason to evaluate Black's chances as inferior.

Summing up, the 10...♗bd7 line can lead to mind-boggling complications posing no end of complex problems for both sides. According to my analysis Black should hold his own, although both sides will have to walk a tightrope. If you are the type of player who thrives in a tactical minefield then look no further.

We now move on to the less volatile approach.

B232) 10...e5



11.♗f5

In some Sicilian lines the jump of the knight to f5 smacks of extreme measures, but here it is more justified thanks to the inclusion of the move ...h7-h6.

11.♗b3 ♗c6 transposes to line A23 (8.♗d2 b4 9.♗ce2 e5 10.♗b3 ♗c6 11.g4 h6), although with the present move order Black has also scored highly with 11...a5!?.

11...d5

This is the consistent follow-up to Black's previous move. Now White's two principal responses are **B2321) 12.exd5** and **B2322) 12.0–0–0**.

Inferior is:

12.g5?! hxg5 13.♗xg5

White is exerting pressure against the centre, but has seriously compromised his pawn structure.

13...♗xf5

This looks like the most straightforward path to a good position, although 13...♗e6 is also perfectly decent.

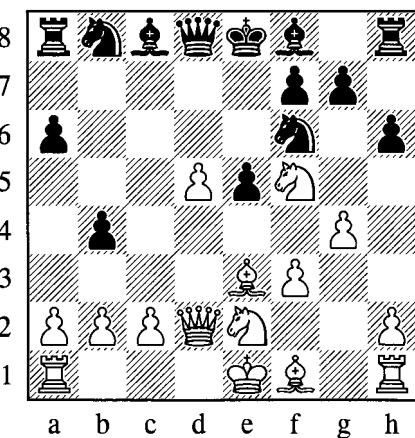
14.exf5 ♘a5 15.♗xf6 gxf6 16.0–0–0 ♗h6 17.f4 ♗c6

Also deserving consideration is 17...♘xa2?!! N 18.♗xd5 ♘xd5 19.♗xd5 ♗d7 20.♗b1 exf4 21.♗g2 0–0–0 \mp The first player needs to worry about equalizing.

18.♗xd5 ♘xd5 19.♗xd5 exf4 20.♗d1 f3 21.♗d4 ♗e5 \mp

White's pieces were poorly coordinated in Goloshchapov – Sakaev, Dubai 2003.

B2321) 12.exd5



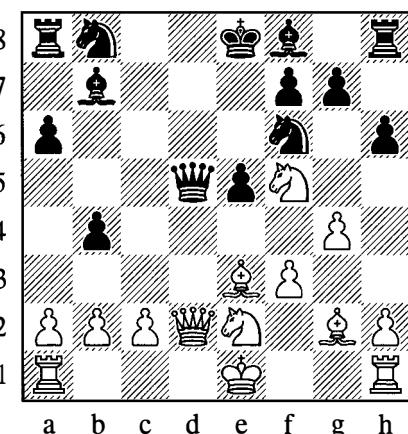
With this move White releases the tension and exposes his kingside slightly, which should enable Black to count on a comfortable game.

12...♗xd5 13.♗g2

13.0–0–0 ♗e6 transposes to line B23221 below (Black can also consider 13...♗b7?!).

Sometimes White exchanges queens immediately with 13.♗xd5 ♘xd5, but this almost always leads back to the main line within a few moves, as both light-squared bishops are likely to settle on the h1-a8 diagonal.

13...♗b7



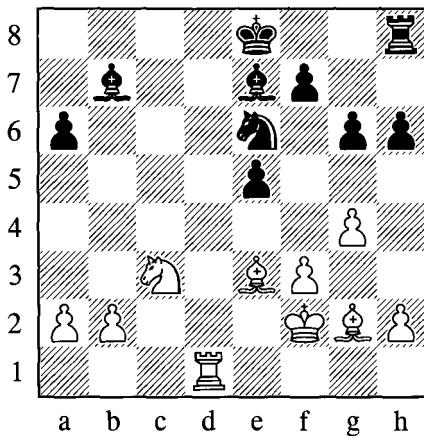
14.♗xd5

White can also delay this exchange with 14.0–0 ♗bd7 15.♗fd1 g6 16.♗fg3 (After 16.♗xh6?! ♘xd2 17.♗xd2 ♘xh6 18.♗xh6 ♘xh6 19.g5 ♘h4 20.gxf6 ♘xf6 \mp White would be struggling to equalize due to his inferior pawn structure.) 16...♗c5 17.♗f1 ♘xd2 18.♗xd2 e4 19.fxe4 ♘xg4 20.♗xc5 ♘xc5 21.♗f4 0–0= The queenless middlegame is fine for Black as the e4-pawn remains vulnerable, Kovacevic – Ilincic, Herceg Novi 2000.

14...♗xd5 15.♗f2 g6 16.♗e3 ♘xe3 17.♗xe3 ♗d7 18.♗f2

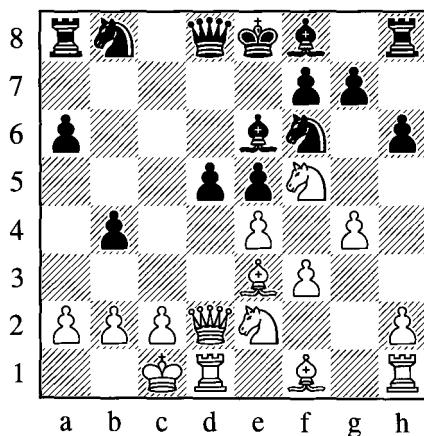
Another game continued 18.♗g1 ♖c5 19.♕xc5 ♗xc5 20.f4 e4 21.0–0–0 h5 22.g5 ♘d8 23.♗xd8† ♖xd8 The endgame was fine for Black in Papadopoulos – Wojtaszek, Thessaloniki 2007.

18...♝c8 19.c3 ♖c5 20.♗hd1 ♖e6 21.♗ac1 bxc3 22.♗xc3 ♖xc3 23.♗xc3 ♖e7



The endgame is balanced, Azarov – Ehlvest, Moscow 2005.

B2322) 12.0–0–0 ♖e6



In this position we arrive at a final division between **B23221) 13.exd5** and **B23222) 13.♘b1**.

B23221) 13.exd5

The inclusion of the previous move of each side does little to change the verdict that the early exchange on d5 promises White very little.

13...♛xd5 14.♗g2

Other moves are no better:

14.♛xd5?! is feeble: 14...♛xd5 15.♗g2 This was Hotting – Teichmeister, e-mail 2004, and now Black could have obtained the upper hand with 15...g6N 16.♗fg3 ♗bd7†.

14.f4?! is no better: 14...♛xd2† 15.♗xd2 ♗xg4 16.♗g2 ♗a7 17.h3 ♗xf5 18.hxg4 ♗xg4† Life is easy for Black in a pleasant endgame.

14...♗bd7 15.♛xd5

With the bishop ready and waiting on g2, this exchange has become rather more purposeful than on the previous turn. Nevertheless Black still has little to fear.

15...♗xd5

Also quite playable is:

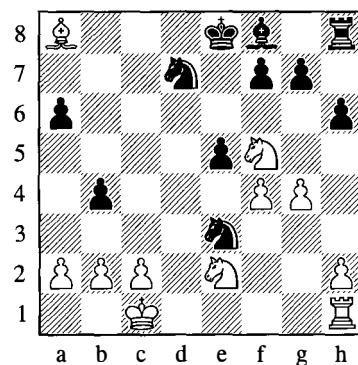
15...♛xd5 16.♗xd5??

More challenging than 16.♗hg1 g6 17.♗fg3 ♗c8 18.♗b1 ♖c5 19.♗xc5 ♗xc5 20.h4 ♘e6† when Black controls most of the board, Chadaev – Belov, Moscow 2006.

16.♗xd5 17.f4 ♗xe3

17...♗f6?? 18.fxe5 ♗xe3 19.♗xe3+–

18.♖xa8



18...♝xf5

Another possibility was 18...♝xg4 19.♕c6!?

(19.h3 ♜gf6 20.fxe5 ♜xe5 21.♘f4†)
 19...exf4 20.♝xf4 ♜ge5 21.♖e1 White's active pieces give him full compensation, but no real advantage.

19.gxf5 ♜d6

Or 19...exf4 20.♝xf4 ♜d6 21.♖e1† ♜d8 22.♝d5 ♜xh2 23.♝xb4 with approximately equal chances.

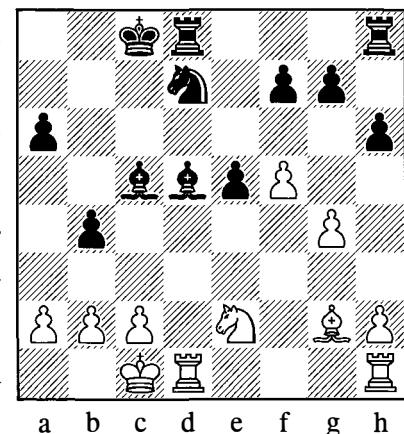
20.♕c6 ♜e7

Black has nothing to fear, Sandipan – Lutz, Germany 2005.

16.f4

Harmless is 16.♗f2 0–0–0 17.♝eg3 (17.♗d2 g6 18.♗hd1 h5† The tension would be too challenging for White.) 17...♝c7 18.h4 g6 19.♗e3 ♜f4 20.♗f1 ♜c5 with comfortable play for Black, Rainer Zufall – Team Aldersbach, Internet 2006.

16...♝xe3 17.♝xe3 0–0–0 18.f5 ♜c5
 19.♝d5 ♜xd5



20.♗xd5

White is not helped by 20.♗xd5 ♜f6!
 21.♗xf7 ♜xg4† Black's active pieces make a strong impression, especially the powerful bishop on c5.

20...♗e3† 21.♔b1 ♜he8 22.♗hd1 ♜f6

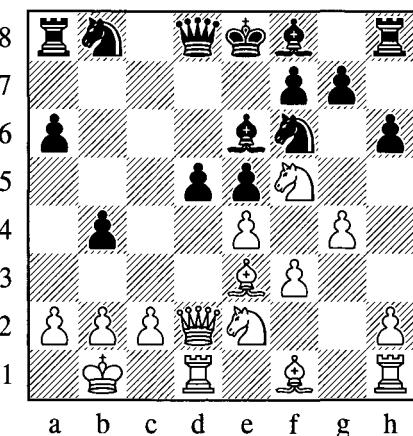
23.♗xd8† ♜xd8 24.♗xd8†

The evaluation is similar after 24.♗b7†, Boucqueau – Weber, e-mail 2002, 24...♝c7 25.♗xd8 ♜xd8 26.h3 a5.

24...♝xd8

Black has marginally the better of this drawish ending, Erkens – Vonhoff, Internet 2004.

B23222) 13.♔b1



13...♝bd7

13...♝c6 has also proven to be quite reliable, but I have chosen to concentrate on the text move.

14.exd5

White can also maintain the central tension with 14.♝c1 ♜c7 15.♗d3 d4 16.♗f2 g6 17.♗g3 ♜c5 18.h4 This was Moreno Carnero – Vera Gonzalez, Seville 2001, and here it looks logical for Black to play 18...h5!N 19.g5 ♜fd7 20.f4 ♜g4 21.♗df1 ♜e7= Black's king remains safe and his overall position quite healthy.

14...♝xd5 15.f4!N

This looks critical, but is still untested. I found the move suggested in a book of John Emms, although he in turn refers to previous analysis by Ilincic.

The alternatives present few problems for Black:

15. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{B}b8$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}a1$ was seen in Uribe – Arencibia, Cali 2001, and now Black could have obtained an excellent position with 17... $g6!$ N 18. $\mathbb{Q}xh6$ (18. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ a5 gives Black good attacking chances, for instance: 19. $h4$ a4 20. $h5$ $gxh5$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xh5$ a3 22. $\mathbb{Q}del$ $axb2\#$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ $\mathbb{Q}c3-$ +) 18... $gxf5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xf8$ $fxg4$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}g7$ $\mathbb{Q}g8\#$ Black should be the favourite in this complex position.

15. $\mathbb{Q}f2$

It is perfectly natural that White should wish to preserve this important bishop, but the loss of time enables Black to solve his problems.

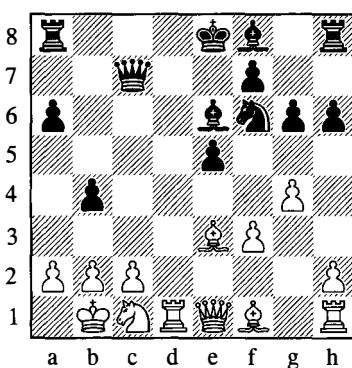
15... $g6!$

This improves over 15... $\mathbb{W}a5$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{B}d8$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{W}a4$ (17... $\mathbb{W}c7$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xa6\pm$) 18. $\mathbb{Q}c4!$ The black queen on a4 is rarely a good piece when the pawn is already on b4. Black was under some pressure in Baramidze – Wojtaszek, Chalkidiki 2001.

16. $\mathbb{Q}e3$

16. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}7b6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{B}d8$ 20. $\mathbb{E}he1$ h5 21. g5 $\mathbb{Q}d6=$ White has a centralized army, but little chance of getting anywhere.

16... $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 18. $\mathbb{W}e1$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}c1$
This position was reached in Von Saleski – Nenciulescu, Internet 2005. Now the simplest continuation would have been:



19... $\mathbb{Q}e7N$

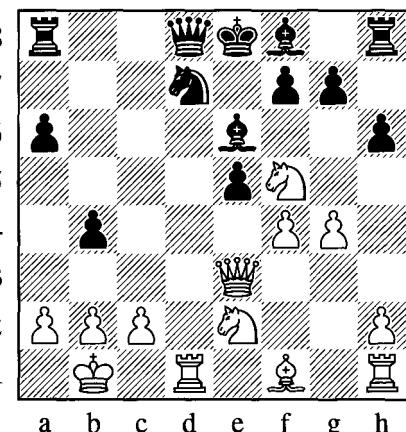
Black has no problems.

15... $\mathbb{Q}xe3$

I also considered 15... $\mathbb{W}a5$, but unfortunately this looks dubious in view of 16. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{B}d8$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}b3!$. This was a suggestion of Jacob Aagaard who shared his analysis with me. Play continues as follows: 17... $\mathbb{W}a4$ (or 17... $\mathbb{W}c7$ 18. $\mathbb{F}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $g6$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}g2!$ with a powerful initiative) 18. $\mathbb{F}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 20. $\mathbb{W}e2$ With his king stuck in the centre Black is unlikely to survive, for instance: 20... $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}fxd4$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $fxe6$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}xd8\#$ 25. $\mathbb{W}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ 26. $\mathbb{W}xe6\#$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 27. $\mathbb{W}c8\#$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}d1+$

16. $\mathbb{W}xe3$

Black must certainly take care here, but overall his position is resilient enough.



16... $g6!$

Black cannot tolerate such a knight indefinitely.

The black position is not yet strong enough to justify such an extravagant move as 16... $h5?$ which loses almost by force. The main line runs as follows: 17. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $hxg4$ (or 17... $\mathbb{E}c8$ 18. $\mathbb{F}xe5$ $\mathbb{W}a5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{W}xe5$ 20. $\mathbb{W}d2$ $hxg4$ 21. $\mathbb{E}he1$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{E}h6$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}c6$ $\mathbb{B}d8$ 24. $\mathbb{W}g5$ $\mathbb{E}f6$

25.Wxg4+–) 18.Bxd7 Wxd7 19.Qxa8 Wc8
 20.Qg2 Qxf5 21.Wxe5† We6 22.Wb8† Wc8
 23.Qc6† Qe7 24.Wxb4† Qf6 25.Wb6 Qd6
 26.Qg3+–

17.Qg2!

This must be the critical test. Emms only mentioned the rather cooperative 17.Qd6†? Qxd6 18.Bxd6 We7 when Black already stands better, for instance 19.fxe5 Qxe5! 20.Wxe5?? Qxa2†.

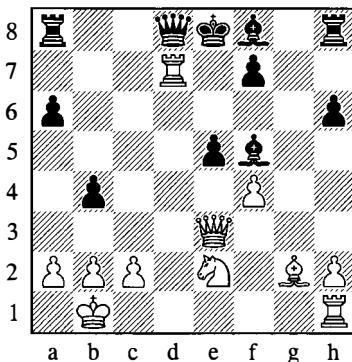
17...g5

Black should accept the challenge, otherwise he will come under a strong attack without the benefit of any extra material. A sample continuation is: 17...Bc8 18.Qd6† Qxd6 19.Bxd6 Wa5 20.Qc1 exf4 (20...0–0 21.f5 gxf5 22.gxf5 Qxf5 23.Qe4+–) 21.Bxe6† fxe6 22.Wxe6† Qd8 23.Bd1 Wb5 24.Wf6† Qc7 25.Wxf4† Qd8 26.Wf6† Qc7 27.Wd6† Qd8 28.Qb3 Bh7 29.Qd4+–

18.Bxd7?

This is the most challenging move, although it is not clear which side is running the bigger risk. The alternative leads practically by force to a drawn ending:

18.gxf5 Qxf5 19.Bxd7



19...Qxc2†! 20.Qxc2
 20.Qa1?!, Bxd7 21.Qxa8 Qg7 22.fxe5 0–0
 23.Qf3 Be8 24.Qg1 Qg6+

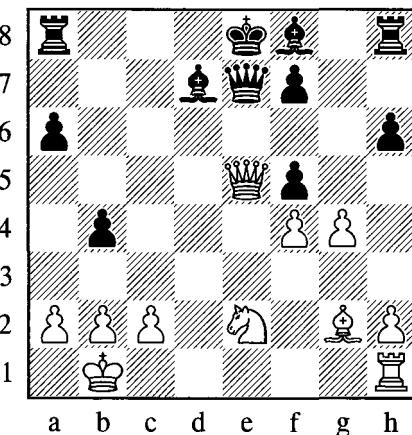
20...Bc8† 21.Qb1 Wxd7 22.Wxe5† We6
 23.Wxh8 Wxe2
 23...Wg6†? 24.f5 Wxg2 25.We5† Qe7
 26.Qe1+–
 24.We5† Wxe5 25.fxe5 Qg7 26.Qb7 Bc7
 27.Qxa6 Qxe5

With equal material, opposite-coloured bishops and few pawns remaining, it is hard to see this ending resulting in anything other than a draw.

18...Bxd7!

And not 18...Wxd7? 19.Qxa8 Wc8 20.gxf5 Wxa8 21.Qd1±.

19.Wxe5† We7



20.Wxh8

20.Qxa8? leads to a difficult endgame for White: 20...Wxe5 21.fxe5 fyg4 22.Qf4 Qg7 23.Qd5 Qe7 24.Qe1 Be8 25.e6 fxe6 26.Qxe6 Qxe6 27.Qxe6† Qd7 28.Qxe8+ Qxe8+

20...0–0–0

Black has a safe position. True, his king's shelter is a little draughty, but the white pieces are not well-placed to exploit this. On the other hand the two bishops could become a major force in the future.

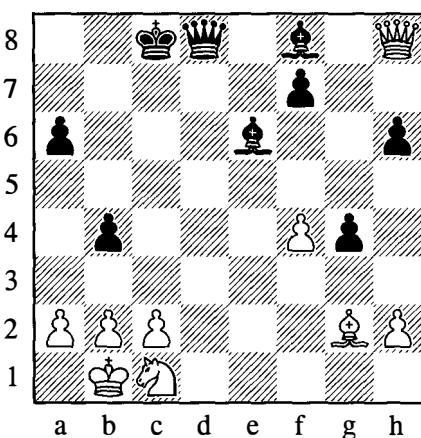
21.Qc1

The tempting 21... $\mathbb{W}d4!$? does not work: 21... $\mathbb{W}xe2$ 22. $\mathbb{W}d5$ $\mathbb{E}e8$ 23. $\mathbb{B}d1$ $\mathbb{W}b5$ 24. $\mathbb{W}a8\#$ $\mathbb{B}c7$ 25. $\mathbb{W}a7\#$ $\mathbb{B}d8$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{W}c6$ 27. $\mathbb{W}b8\#$ $\mathbb{W}c8$ 28. $\mathbb{W}b6\#$ $\mathbb{E}c7$ 29. $\mathbb{W}f6\#$ $\mathbb{E}e7!$ (This looks stronger than 29... $\mathbb{E}e7$ 30. $\mathbb{W}xf5$.) White remains a piece down with limited compensation.

21...fxg4 22. $\mathbb{B}d1$

Another continuation of roughly equal value is 22. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{W}d6$ 23. $\mathbb{W}e5$ $\mathbb{B}b7$ 24. $\mathbb{W}a5$ $\mathbb{E}c8$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{W}b6$ 26. $\mathbb{W}h5$ $\mathbb{W}f6$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}e4\#$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 28. $\mathbb{B}e1$ $\mathbb{W}xf4$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 30. $\mathbb{W}xg4$ with approximate equality.

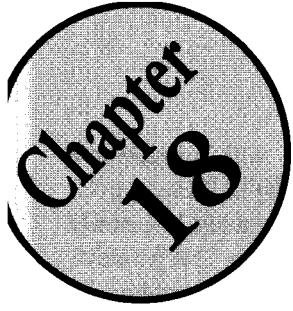
22... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 23. $\mathbb{B}xd8\#$ $\mathbb{W}xd8$



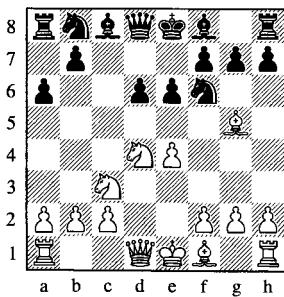
If the queens were removed then Black's bishop pair combined with the weakness of White's kingside pawns would give the second player a near-decisive advantage. As it stands, however, Black's airy king will provide a source of counterplay for the first player. Overall the chances are about equal, but everything is still to play for.

Conclusion

The English Attack continues to be regarded as one of the most dangerous attacking systems at White's disposal, although the devotees of Black's side have learned plenty of tricks themselves. In this chapter we have seen how Black can base his counterplay around a fascinating, and in some ways logic-defying concept from Veselin Topalov involving an unusually rapid pawn advance to b4. White's pieces can often find themselves forced into uncomfortable positions, although on the other hand, Black is temporarily behind in development and must take great care when planning to open the centre. Overall, I would conclude that as long as Black plays accurately his chances for dynamic equality and active counterattacking play are quite high.



Classic Main Line



License to Kill - 6.♗g5 e6

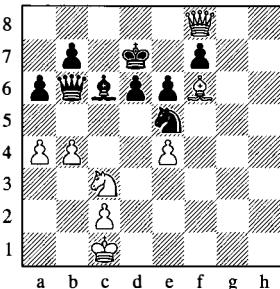
Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.♗g5

6...e6

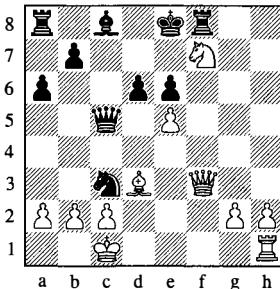
| | |
|--|-----|
| A) 7.♗d3 | 380 |
| B) 7.♗f3 | 381 |
| C) 7.♗d2 382 | |
| D) 7.f4 h6!? 8.♗h4 ♗e7 9.♗f3 ♘bd7 10.0-0-0 ♗c7 | 383 |
| D1) 11.♗g3!? | 386 |
| D2) 11.♗d3 | 389 |
| D3) 11.♗e2 b5 | 394 |
| D31) 12.e5 | 395 |
| D32) 12.♗xf6 | 400 |

D1) note to 22...♗c5!



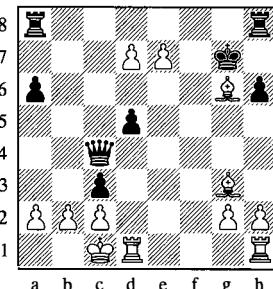
31...♗d3†!!

A) note to 11.h4!?



21...dxe5!N

D31) after 22.exd7



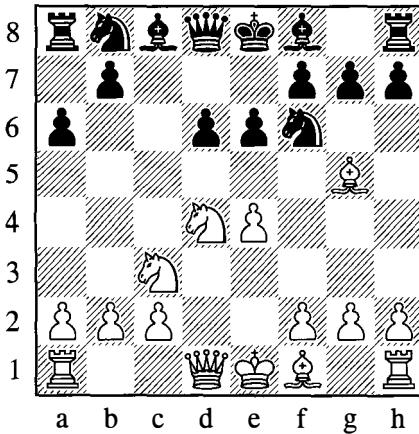
22...♗xg6!N

The attacking system introduced by the moves 6. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ e6 7.f4 is far from easy for Black to handle. The first player wastes no time in moulding his small band of wooden soldiers into a vicious army of bloodthirsty assassins, with a licence to kill and the collective firepower to do just that. The task of playing against such a system is rather like picking up a venomous snake from the floor – the handler must keep razor-sharp wits and use a sound strategy to avoid the opponent's fatal bite.

Many defensive set-ups have been tried, the most famous being the Poisoned Pawn variation with 7... $\mathbb{W}b6$ 8. $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{W}xb2$, and the traditional main line of 7... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 8. $\mathbb{W}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}bd7$ 9.0–0–0 $\mathbb{W}c7$, when both 10. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ and 10.g4 lead to a tough battle to put it mildly.

My own proposed solution will hopefully come as a refreshing change from these well-known and exhaustively analysed battlegrounds. The recommended plan involves striking at the enemy bishop with an early ...h6, which opens the door to some colourful counterattacking possibilities based on a subsequent ...g5 in certain positions. Black's system fell out of fashion for a while, but it has recently started attracting more followers, and at the moment I see no reason why it should not continue its resurgence into mainstream acceptance.

**1.e4 c5 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ d6 3.d4 cxd4 4. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$
5. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ a6 6. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ e6**



From this position we will consider the sidelines of A) 7. $\mathbb{W}d3$, B) 7. $\mathbb{W}f3$ and C) 7. $\mathbb{W}d2$, followed by the big main line of D) 7.f4.

A) 7. $\mathbb{W}d3$

Just as with the other two sidelines, White intends to castle without delay and then start some kind of attack.

7...b5 8.0–0–0

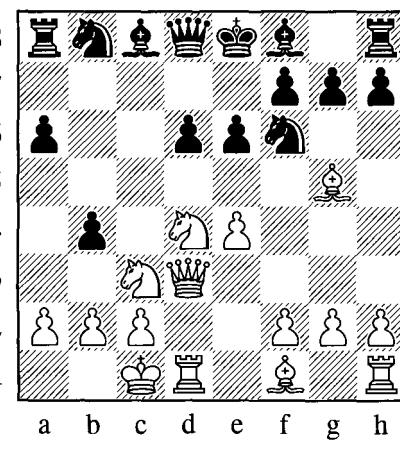
Nothing else is likely to trouble Black.

8.f4 b4 9. $\mathbb{Q}ce2$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ h6 11. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{W}xf6$ Palekha – Loskutov, Serpukhov 2003.

8. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}bd7$ 9.f4 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ highlights a drawback of White's seventh move: the queen is forced to waste time. 10. $\mathbb{W}e3$ b4 11. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ (White is not helped by: 11. $\mathbb{Q}d5N$ exd5 12.e5 $\mathbb{W}e7$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}c6$ $\mathbb{W}e6$ 14.f5 [14. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$] 14... $\mathbb{W}xf5$ 15.exf6† $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}h4$ $\mathbb{W}xc2$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{W}e4$) 11... $\mathbb{W}xf6$ Black is at least equal, for instance: 12. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ bxc3 13.e5 cxb2 14. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ dxе5 15.fxe5 $\mathbb{W}d8$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xa8$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}a4$ L. Anderson – Karasalo, e-mail 2007.

8...b4!

This energetic approach is not easy for White to counter.



9.♘xf6!N

This interesting move is directed against the transfer of the b8-knight to c5. For instance, 9.♗b1 ♘bd7 gave Black easy play in Soylu – Hauchard, Istanbul 2000. (White does not want to exchange on f6 at a time when Black can conveniently recapture with the other knight.)

Another game continued 9.♗ce2 ♘bd7 10.f4?! (White should have settled for the modest 10.♗3, although such an approach can hardly threaten Black.) 10...♘c5 11.♗e3 Vukovic – Pavlovic, Vrnjacka Banja 1999, and now I see no reason not to gobble the loose pawn with 11...♘cxe4N.

9...♗xf6

I prefer this over 9...gxsf6 10.♗ce2, with unclear play.

10.♗c4 ♗g5†

Another option is 10...♘d7 11.♗xb4 ♗xf2, with a murky position.

11.f4!?

11.♗b1 ♗c5 is comfortable enough for Black.

11...♗xf4† 12.♗b1 ♘d7 13.♗xb4

With two powerful bishops and a better pawn structure, Black's long-term chances are excellent. For the time being, however, he lags in development and will need to play carefully to reach an acceptable middlegame.

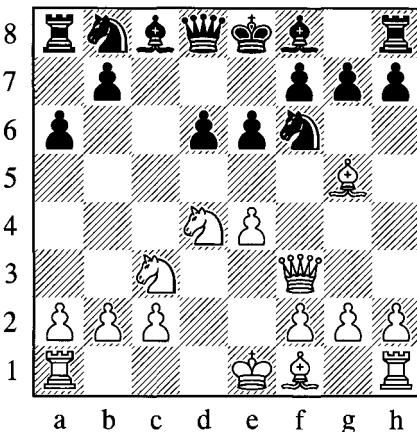
13...♗e5!

The queen would soon have been chased from the f-file in any case, and it turns out that her presence may be required on the queenside.

14.♗a4 ♗c5!

This accurate move takes the sting out of any troublesome ♗c6 invasions. From here

Black should have good chances to complete development, and the onus is on White to prove something before his positional defects make themselves felt.

B) 7.♗f3**7...h6!?**

Out of numerous playable options, I like the idea of forcing the bishop to define its intentions immediately.

8.♘e3

There is no reason to fear 8.♘xf6 ♗xf6 9.♗xf6 gxsf6. Generally speaking, this structure with doubled f-pawns is more dangerous for Black in the middlegame, when his centralized king would be a liability. With the queens exchanged his king will be ideally placed, and he can aim to exploit the power of the bishop pair. One high-level game continued 10.f4 h5 11.f5 ♘c6 12.♗d1 ♘d7 and Black was quite happy in Short – Kasparov, Sarajevo 2000.

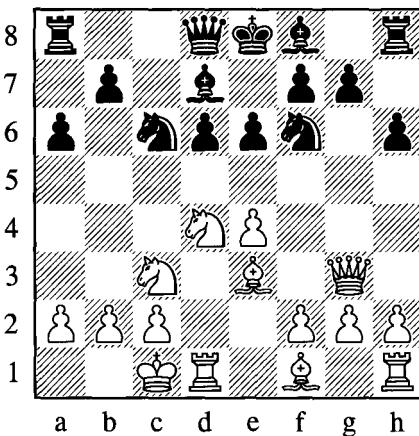
The only other reasonable option is 8.♗h4, when Black can obtain a decent position with 8...♗d7!? 9.0–0–0 ♘c6 10.♗xc6 ♘xc6 11.♗d3 ♘e7= Wibe – Olafsson, Gluecksburg 1977.

8...♗d7!?

This is an effective way of preparing ... $\mathbb{Q}c6$, although there are other decent ways to handle the position, for instance: 8...e5 9. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ (9. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ g6 10. $\mathbb{Q}h4 \mathbb{Q}g7=$) 9... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ 0-0 11. $\mathbb{W}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 12.0-0 b5= Saenko – Van der Hoeven, e-mail 2005.

9.0-0-0 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 10. $\mathbb{W}g3$

10. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ b5∞



10... $\mathbb{Q}xd4$!?

I prefer this over 10... $\mathbb{E}c8$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$! (Better than 11.f4?! when 11... $\mathbb{Q}b4$! enabled Black to seize the initiative in Morozevich – Shirov, Frankfurt 2000.) 11... $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ (or 11... $\mathbb{E}c6$ N 12. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ ±) 12. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ ± Oliveira – Valinova, e-mail 2006.

11. $\mathbb{E}xd4$

11. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ e5 12. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{E}c8$ 13.f3 b5 14.a3 $\mathbb{Q}e6$ is fine for Black.

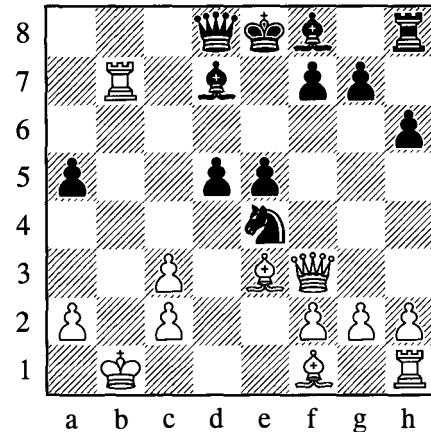
11... $\mathbb{E}c8$

Black has decent prospects for counterplay, as demonstrated by the following illustrative line:

12. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{E}xc3$! 13.bxc3 e5 14. $\mathbb{E}b4$ a5

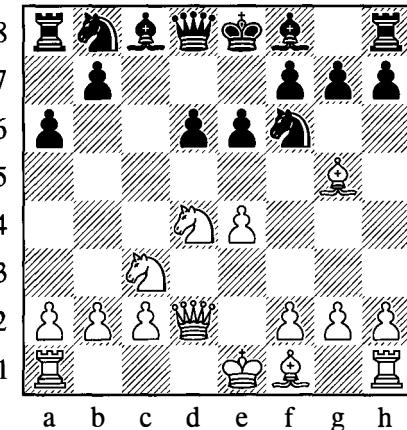
15. $\mathbb{E}xb7$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 16. $\mathbb{W}f3$ d5=

And not 16... $\mathbb{Q}c6$? 17. $\mathbb{W}xf7$ #!



The resulting position is one that every Najdorf player should be happy to reach.

C) 7. $\mathbb{W}d2$



7...h6!

Once again this well-timed move causes problems for White.

8. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$

The first point to appreciate is that 8. $\mathbb{Q}h4$? loses a pawn to the thematic riposte: 8... $\mathbb{Q}xe4$!†

8. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ is also less than ideal due to 8... $\mathbb{Q}g4$!, for instance: 9. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 10. $\mathbb{W}xe3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 11.0-0-0 $\mathbb{W}b6$ 12.g4 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 13.h4 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 14. $\mathbb{W}xd4$ $\mathbb{W}xd4$ 15. $\mathbb{E}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ † Naimanye – Ki. Georgiev, Manila 1992.

8...♝xf6 9.0–0–0

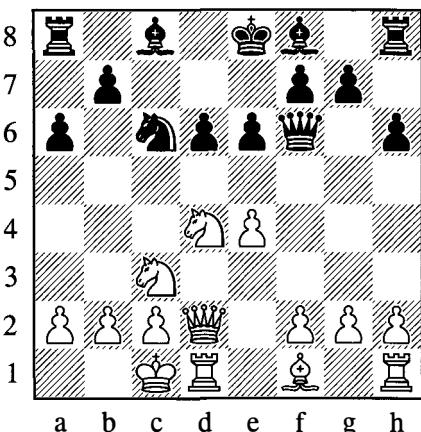
White needs to play actively and aggressively, otherwise it will be hard to justify the loss of the bishop pair.

9.a4 ♜c6 10.♗b3 ♜d8 11.♔e2 ♜e7 12.0–0 0–0 13.f4 b6 14.♗f3 ♜b7 15.♘ad1 b5 16.♗h1 ♜b6 was just a normal-looking Sicilian position in which Black was obviously benefitting from the bishop pair in Panakus – Loginov, Budapest 1994.

9.f4 is harmless, and transposes to the note to White's eighth move in line D.

9...♜c6

This is a good way to make use of the queen's presence on f6. Now White will have to worry about a possible queen exchange, which would kill his early initiative and leave Black with a very pleasant ending thanks to the bishop pair.

**10.♗b3**

10.♗b1 ♜xd4 11.♗xd4 ♜xd4 12.♗xd4 ♜d7 gave Black a slight but stable advantage in Piorun – Kempinski, Warsaw 2007.

10.♗xc6 is possible, although the pawn structure after 10..bxcc6 is obviously more favourable for Black due to his increased

central control and open b-file. One practical encounter continued: 11.f4 ♜d8 12.♗a4 ♜e7 13.♗e3 ♜b8† Bryzgalin – Makarov, Samara 2002.

10...♜d8 11.f4 ♜e7 12.♗f2

This position was reached in Vesterinen – Smyslov, Amsterdam 1954, and now I like the following idea:

12...b5N

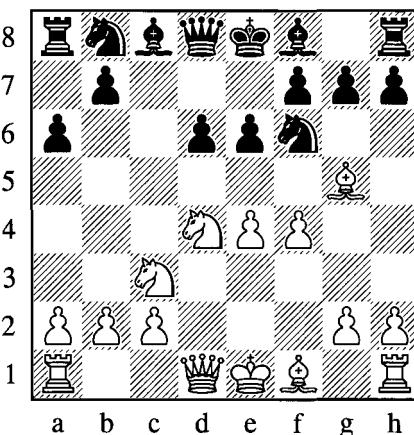
This typical counterattacking move gives Black an excellent game, for instance:

13.g4 b4 14.♗a4 ♜b8 15.h4 ♜c7 16.♗b1 ♜d7†

White's attack is a long way from achieving anything, and in the meantime the knight on a4 is beginning to feel distinctly uncomfortable.

D) 7.f4

Finally we reach the main line, which has been played in thousands of games and continues to produce no end of spectacular fighting games, not to mention headaches for players on both sides of the board.

**7...h6?**

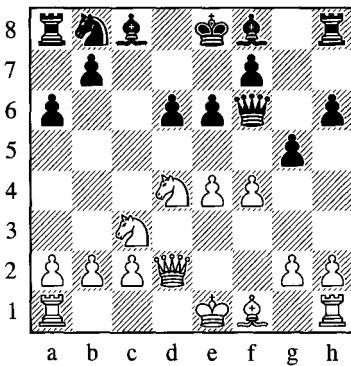
This is the slightly quirky idea I am recommending. As I mentioned in the

introductory paragraphs, I believe this move is underrated and possibly due for a resurgence in the near future.

8.♗h4

White gains nothing by exchanging on f6:
8.♗xf6 ♕xf6 9.♗d2 g5?

9...♝c6 is perfectly okay, but the text is more ambitious. Black is determined to make his opponent suffer on the dark squares.



10.f5

The only good thing about White's position is his lead in development. For this reason Black would love to exchange queens, which would enable him to exploit his positional advantage in the endgame without fear of a sacrificial attack. Here are two examples to show what White should be striving to avoid at all costs:

10.g3 gxf4 11.gxf4 ♘h4† 12.♗f2 Novkovic – Korbut, Dresden 2008 12...♕xf2†N 13.♗xf2 ♜c6 and White has nothing to compensate for the missing dark-squared bishop.

10.fxg5 hxg5 11.0–0–0 ♜c6 12.♗e2 ♜xd4 13.♗xd4 ♕xd4 14.♗xd4 ♜d7 The bishop pair combined with the central pawn majority gave Black clearly better chances in Kummerow – Pavlovic, Biel 1997.

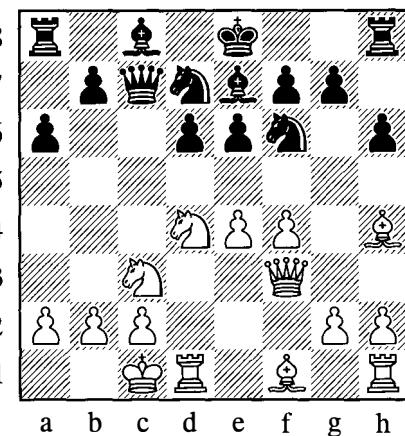
10...♝c6 11.♗xc6 bxc6 12.0–0–0 ♕e5 13.g3 Preventing ...♕f4. This position was reached in Vouldis – Milu, Mangalia 1992, and here

the most logical continuation would have been:

13...♝b8N

Black's chances are higher, thanks to his dark-squared domination.

8...♝e7 9.♗f3 ♜bd7 10.0–0–0 ♕c7



From this position White has tried various ideas, three of which warrant close attention. First we will consider the comparatively rare but still quite challenging D1) 11.♗g3??, followed by the two most popular options of D2) 11.♗d3 and D3) 11.♗e2.

Before we analyse the three main lines, we will first check some of the less common alternatives.

A bit artificial seems to be 11.♗g1?! b5 12.♗d3 b4 13.♗ce2 (or 13.♗xf6 ♜xf6 14.e5 ♜b7 15.♗e4 dx5 16.fxe5 ♜d5†) 13...♝b7 14.♗b1 ♜c5 15.♗xf6 ♜xf6 16.g4 0–0–0 17.♗e3 ♜b8 Black enjoyed two bishops and some advantage in Fontaine – Ni Hua, Cannes 2004.

White was advancing too slowly with 11.♗f2 b5 12.a3 ♜b7 13.♗d3 ♜c5 14.♗b1 ♜c8 15.♗hel 0–0 16.♗h3 (16.♗e3 ♜fd8 17.♗h3 ♜d7 is also very pleasant for the second player.) 16...d5 17.e5 ♜fe4 and ended with worse chances in Shabalov – Dominguez Perez, Cali 2001.

11.g4! b5!

11...g5 12.e5! dx5 13.fxg5 hxg5 14.♗g3 has proven to be quite dangerous for Black in practice, so I consider it prudent to avoid this. However, if you like to take chances and wish to investigate this in more detail, I will simply mention the critical line as a basis for further investigation: 14...♗b8 15.h4 gxh4 16.g5 ♗d5 17.g6 ♗g5† 18.♔b1 ♗xc3† 19.bxc3 ♘f8 20.♗xh4 ♗xh4 21.♗xh4→ fxg6? 22.♗g3 ♘b6† 23.♗b3 ♘f2 24.♗xg6† ♘f7 25.♗d3 ♘f3 26.♗d6 ♘c6 27.♗d2 ♘d5 28.♗d3 e4 29.♗xe4 e5 30.♗e3 b6 31.♗e2 1–0 Claridge – Ingersol, e-mail 2000.

12.♗xf6

Nothing else makes much sense.

12...♗xf6

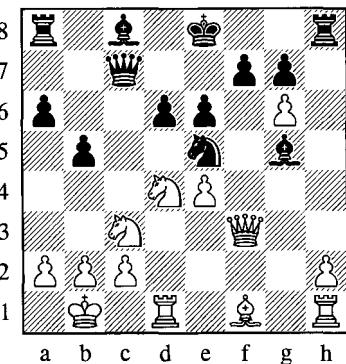
12...♗xf6 should be avoided on account of 13.♕xb5±.

On the other hand 12...gxsf6?! is not entirely stupid, and leads to unclear play.

13.g5

White should not delay his attack.

13...hxg5 14.fxg5 ♗d7 15.g6 ♗g5† 16.♔b1 ♘e5



17.gxf7†

Worse is 17.♗g2?! f6! 18.♕xb5†?! axb5 19.♗dx5 ♘c5 20.♗xd6† ♘e7† 21.h4 ♘h6 22.♗f5†?! exf5 23.♗d5† Alves – Tsuboi, Garanhuns 1986, and here 23...♗f8!N would have left White with nowhere near enough to show for his two-piece deficit.

17...♗xf7 18.♗g2

This position was reached in Perruchoud – Schweizer, Biel 2000, and now the most accurate move would have been:

18...♗f6N=

Black has a solid position and can look to exploit his bishop pair later in the game.

Perhaps the most important of the minor alternatives is:

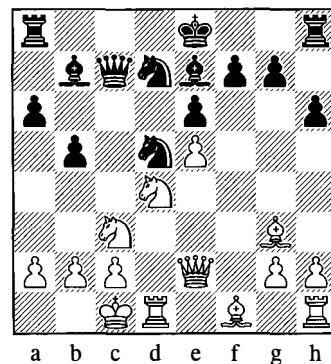
11.♗g3

White prepares e5 and hopes to make use of the X-ray attack on the black queen.

11...b5 12.e5 ♘b7 13.♗e2 dx5

13...♗d5 is also playable, but I prefer the text move slightly.

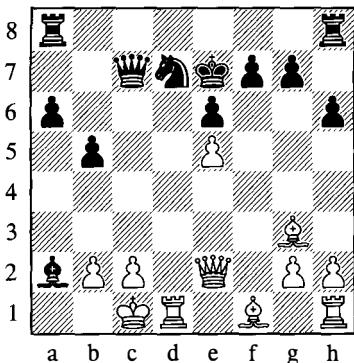
14.fxe5 ♗d5



15.♗e4

15.♗xe6?! is not quite sufficient, although Black must take care. 15...fxe6 16.♗xd5 ♘xd5 17.♗xd5 exd5 18.e6 ♘c6 19.♗h5† (19.exd7† ♘xd7 20.♗d1 ♘ae8 21.♗d3 ♘g5† 22.♗b1 ♘hf8 saw Black consolidating in Van den Berg – Bobotsov, Beverwijk 1964.) 19...♗d8 20.exd7 This position was reached in Karup – Rasic, Neum 2003, and now after 20...g6!N 21.♗d1 ♘xd7 22.♗d3 ♘c8 Black will shelter his king on b7 and should eventually consolidate his material advantage.

Another aggressive try is 15.♗xd5 ♘xd5 16.♗f5, when Black should react bravely with 16...♗xa2! 17.♗xe7 ♘xe7:



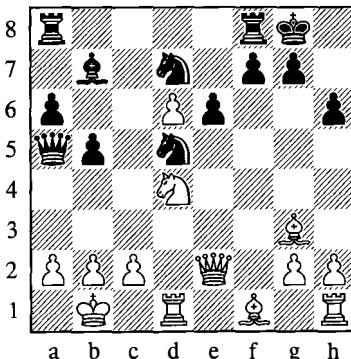
White does not have sufficient attacking resources, for instance: 18... $\mathbb{W}f3$ (Or 18... $\mathbb{W}g4$ $\mathbb{E}hc8$ 19. $\mathbb{E}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 20. $\mathbb{W}b4\uparrow$, L. Bronstein – Rubinetti, Zarate 1973, 20... $\mathbb{Q}c5N$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ [21.b3? $\mathbb{Q}xb3$ 22.cxb3 a5] 21... $\mathbb{Q}d5$ Black is a pawn up with a safer king; although on the last move he must be sure to avoid 21... $\mathbb{Q}g8?$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{W}xc5$ 23. $\mathbb{E}d8\uparrow$ +–.) 18... $\mathbb{E}hc8$ 19. $\mathbb{W}a3\uparrow$ (19. $\mathbb{E}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 20. $\mathbb{W}g4$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 21. $\mathbb{W}b4\uparrow$ $\mathbb{W}c5$ Ostos – Duran, San Felipe 2008; 19. $\mathbb{E}xd7\uparrow$ $\mathbb{W}xd7$ 20. $\mathbb{W}a3\uparrow$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 21. $\mathbb{W}xa2$ $\mathbb{E}xc2\uparrow$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xc2$ $\mathbb{E}c8\uparrow$ +–) 19... $\mathbb{W}c5$ 20. $\mathbb{W}xc5\uparrow$ (20. $\mathbb{W}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 21. $\mathbb{E}d2$ b4 22. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{W}a5$ 23. $\mathbb{E}e2$ $\mathbb{W}a1\uparrow$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{W}xb2$ Black soon won in Grishchenko – Morev, Lipetsk 2007.) 20... $\mathbb{E}xc5$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{E}c6$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}b4\uparrow$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}d6$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ Black gradually converted his extra pawn in Bolado Saez – Alvarez Fernandez, Barcelona 2006.

15... $\mathbb{W}a5\uparrow$!

15...0–0 is okay if Black does not mind his opponent forcing a draw. One such example, featuring accurate play on both sides, continued as follows: 16. $\mathbb{Q}f6\uparrow$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 17. $\mathbb{W}d3$ $gxf6$ 18. $\mathbb{W}d2$ f5 (18... $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 19.exf6 $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}d3\uparrow$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 21. $\mathbb{E}df1$ was rather dangerous for Black in Weinzell – Karner, Austria 2004) 19. $\mathbb{W}xh6\uparrow$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ (20. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ fxe6 21. $\mathbb{W}g6\uparrow$) 20... $\mathbb{W}b6$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{W}d8$ 22.h4 $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ exf5 24. $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}xg6$ fxg6 27. $\mathbb{W}xg6\uparrow$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 28. $\mathbb{W}h6\uparrow$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ ½–½ Velimirovic – Minic, Umag 1972.

16. $\mathbb{Q}b1$

16. $\mathbb{Q}d6$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{W}ad8=$
16...0–0 17. $\mathbb{Q}d6$ $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 18.exd6



White has the bishop pair and a potentially strong passed pawn, but neither is hurting Black in the present position.

18... $\mathbb{Q}b4\uparrow$?

Provoking a weakness.

19.a3 $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{W}b6$ 21. $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}5f6$

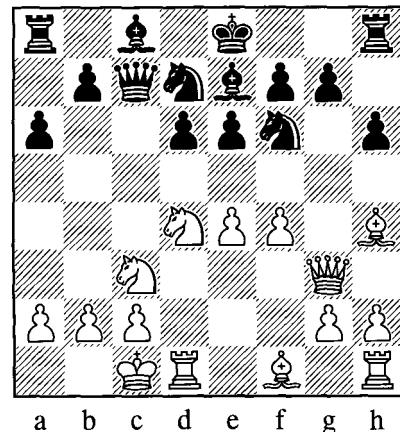
21... $\mathbb{E}ac8N$ also looks reasonable.

22. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 24. $\mathbb{W}d4$ $\mathbb{W}xd4$
25. $\mathbb{E}xd4$ f5?

Sulskis – Kanep, Tallinn 2008.

D1) 11. $\mathbb{W}g3?$

This has not been as popular as the other two main lines, but it is no less dangerous. I will mention in passing that the present position has usually occurred via the move order 7... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 8. $\mathbb{W}f3$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 9.0–0–0 $\mathbb{Q}bd7$ 10. $\mathbb{W}g3$ h6 11. $\mathbb{Q}h4$.



11...g5

This is the thematic and principled reaction.

12.fxg5 ♘h5 13.♗e3 ♗c5!

This important resource enables Black to regain his pawn, but the real battle is just beginning. Once Black has recaptured on g5 he will enjoy good long-term prospects thanks to his superior pawn structure and control over the e5-square. On the other hand, his king might turn out to be vulnerable in the middlegame and the open f-file will be a useful attacking resource for White.

14.♘b1!

Due to the factors explained above, a position without queens would be fine for Black:

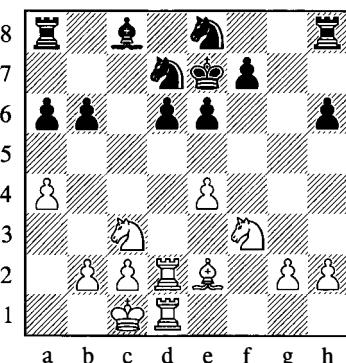
14.♗d2 ♘xg5 15.♗xg5 ♗xg5 16.♗e2 ♘hf6
17.♘f3 ♗xd2† 18.♗xd2 ♘e7

Were it not for the vulnerability of the d6-pawn, Black might even claim some advantage, but as it stands the position is balanced.

19.♗hd1 ♘e8 20.a4

20.♗d4 b6 21.♗d2 ♘e5 22.♗c4 ♘xc4
23.♗xc4 ♘b7 was also comfortable for Black in Poulin – Lehnberger, e-mail 2000.

20...b6



21.b3

After 21.♗d4 ♘a7 22.♗d2 ♘e5 23.♗b4 ♘d7 24.♗d4 ♘e5 the players soon settled for a repetition in Pilgaard – Gallagher, Cappelle la Grande 2002.

Another harmless continuation was 21.♗f1 ♘b7 22.e5 d5 23.b3 ♘g8= Kapstas – Stepanov, corr. 1986.

21...♗a7 22.♗b2 ♘c7 23.♗d4 ♘b7=

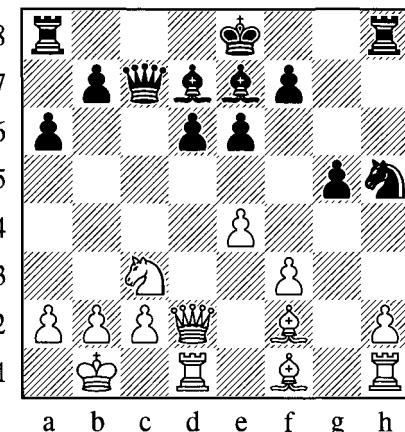
The position remains equal and a draw was soon agreed in Short – Ki. Georgiev, Elenite 1995.

14...hxg5

Black does best to avoid 14...♗xg5?! on account of 15.♗xg5 hxg5 (or 15...♗xg5 16.♗f2 with some initiative) 16.♗h3! as in Taiana – Rshaid de Retes, corr. 1985.

**15.♗f2 ♘e5 16.♗d2 ♘c7 17.♗f3 ♘xf3
18.gxf3 ♘d7**

The computer likes White, and indeed the first player has scored quite highly from this position in practice. Nevertheless, my analysis indicates that if Black plays carefully he should be quite alright.

**19.h4**

This is clearly the most logical move, opening the h-file while exchanging off a long-term weakness. Instead after 19.♗g1?! 0–0–0 20.♗e3 f6 21.♗f2 ♘f4 22.♗xf4 gxf4 23.♗g4 ♗c5 Black stood better in Kupreichik – Beliavsky, Leningrad 1974.

19...gxh4 20.♗xh4!

20.♔e2 0–0–0 21.♕xh4 ♔c6 gave Black no problems in Westerinen – Petursson, Reykjavik 1976.

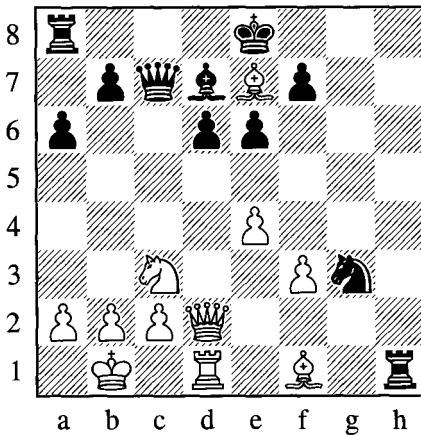
20...♝g3!

This leads to complications in which both sides must tread carefully.

21.♔xe7!

Less critical is: 21.♗d4 f6 22.♗g1 ♕xh4 23.♗xg3 0–0–0 24.♗g7 ♕e8=

21...♜xh1



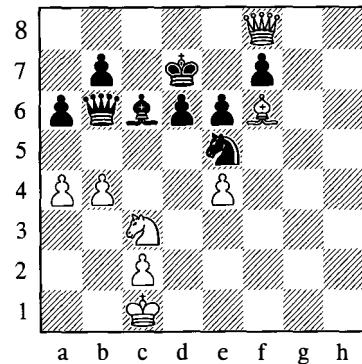
22.♔f6!

This calm move is White's strongest. He certainly gets nowhere with: 22.♗g5? ♜c5†

Slightly more tempting, but still ultimately insufficient, is: 22.♔xd6?! ♜xf1 23.♗g2 (23.♗g5? ♜xd6) 23...♝d2† 24.♗xd2 ♜xd1† 25.♝xd1 ♜b6†

22...♜c5!

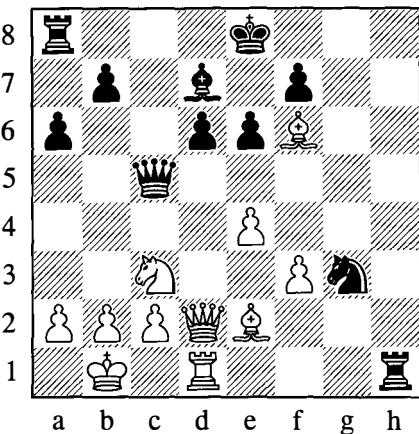
This is much safer than the following continuation, which may nonetheless be just about playable: 22...♝xf1 23.♗g5 ♜d2†! 24.♔c1 ♜xd1† 25.♔xd1 ♜b5 26.♗g8† (26.♔xd2? ♜d7†) 26...♝d7 27.♗xa8 ♜xf3 28.a4 ♜c6! 29.♗f8 ♜e5 30.b4! ♜b6! 31.♔c1!



31...♝d3†!! 32.cxd3 ♜e3† 33.♔c2 ♜f2† 34.♔b3 ♜xf6 35.b5 axb5 36.axb5 ♜f3 37.bxc6† bxc6± White has retained a marginal plus, but it was not enough for victory in Shakarov – Zelinski, corr. 1982.

23.♔e2N

This is the most testing move. 23.♗g2 ♜g1 24.♗d2 was seen in Butze – Namark, corr. 1985, and now Black should have settled for 24...♜c5N, challenging White to come up with something better than a move repetition.



23...♜h3!

23...♜xd1† would be riskier after 24.♔xd1 ♜h5 25.♔h4 (or 25.♔g5) when Black's king remains unsafe and his knight unstable.

24.♔d3 ♜h5 25.♗h6 ♜xf6 26.♗xh3 ♜e7

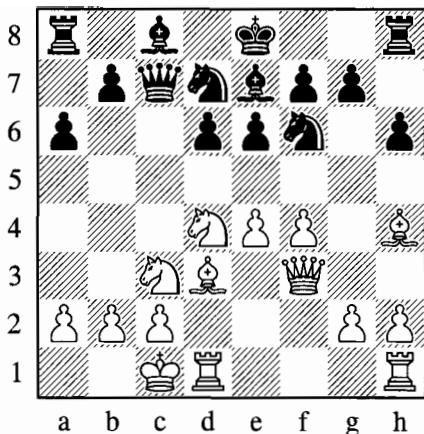
Black has returned his extra material in order to neutralize his opponent's initiative – not an uncommon scenario in the Sicilian. The resulting position should be safe enough for him, as the centralized king is unlikely to cause a problem with so little material remaining on the board.

27.Wh2 Wh5 28.Wf4 Ec8

White's advantage is minimal, if it exists at all.

D2) 11.Qd3

This move is natural, but it allows Black to demonstrate one of the key ideas behind his unusual seventh move.



11...g5!

Black's position is resilient enough to justify this active strike.

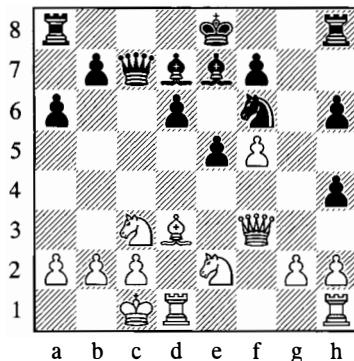
12.fxg5

The central break should not be too dangerous for the defender:

12.e5 gxh4

Those who love to take risks in order to play for a win might consider 12...dxe5?!, when the critical line runs 13.Qxe6 fxe6 14.Qg6† Qd8 15.fxg5 with heavy complications.

13.exf6 Qxf6 14.f5 e5 15.Qde2 Qd7



16.Qe4

Less accurate is 16.Qe4? d5! (This is stronger than 16...Qc6; Black is happy to return the pawn in order to activate his pieces.) 17.Qxf6† Qxf6 18.Wxd5 Qc6 19.Wb3 0-0-0 with some advantage for Black in Parma – Bukic, Belgrade 1978.

16...Qc6 17.Qd5 Qxd5

17...Qxd5 18.Qxd5 Ec8 19.Qc3 b5 20.Qb7 Eb8 21.Qxa6 was a little better for White in Smirin – Gelfand, Belarus 1984.

18.Qxd5 Qg5† 19.Qb1 0-0-0

The chances can be evaluated as approximately equal; White has sufficient compensation for the sacrificed pawn, but not more.

20.Qc3

Not much is changed by 20.Qd3, Semenova – Druzhinina, Serpukhov 2002, 20...Qxd5N 21.Wxd5 Qb8.

20...Qb8 21.Qh1

We have been following the game Stean – Szmanetan, Haifa 1976. At this point Black should probably have played 21...Ec8N or perhaps 21...Ehg8N, hoping for kingside counterplay with a timely ...Qf4.

12...Qe5 13.We2

White has tried the cheeky sacrifice 13.gxf6?!, but this is hardly something that should keep Najdorf players awake at night.

The main alternative to the main line is:

13.Wg3 Eg8

After this move White can hardly hope to keep the extra pawn on g5.

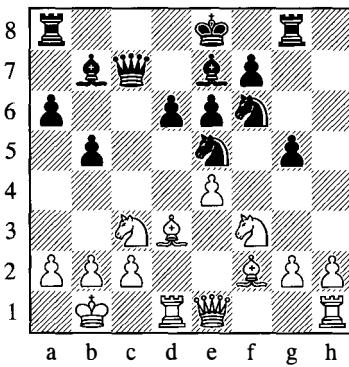
14. $\mathbb{W}e1$

14. $\mathbb{W}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}fg4$ 15. $\mathbb{W}e2$ $hxg5$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ is fine for Black.

White also gains nothing from 14. $g6$ $\mathbb{E}xg6$ 15. $\mathbb{W}h3$ $b5$ 16. $\mathbb{E}hf1$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ Black has developed harmoniously, and can look to the future with confidence thanks to the wonderful knight on e5.

14... $hxg5$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $b5$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}f3$

Here I found an interesting new idea:



17... $\mathbb{Q}xd3?N$

Black is trading one positional plus (the powerful centralized knight on e5) for another (the bishop pair).

Also not bad is 17... $\mathbb{Q}ed7$ 18. $a3$ $\mathbb{E}c8$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 20. $\mathbb{W}f2$, Yemelin – Rublevsky, St Petersburg 1998, and here 20... $\mathbb{Q}xd3N$ 21. $cxd3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ would have been pleasant for Black.

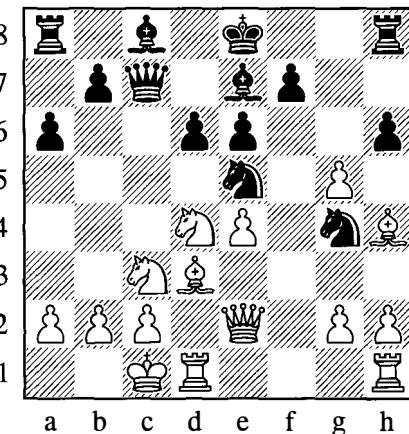
18. $cxd3$ $\mathbb{E}c8$ 19. $\mathbb{E}c1$ $\mathbb{W}a5$

With all pieces developed and few weaknesses, the black king is quite happy to remain in the centre. Black is doing fine in the middlegame, and it almost goes without saying that most endings will favour him thanks to his bishop pair and better pawn structure.

13... $\mathbb{Q}fg4$

Black must take care, since the conflict on the board has begun at a moment when White

is better developed. For example, 13... $\mathbb{Q}fd7?$ quickly becomes painful after 14. $\mathbb{W}h5!$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ (Even worse is 14... $\mathbb{Q}g6?$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $\mathbb{W}a5$ 16. $gxh6$ $\mathbb{W}xh5$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}g7+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xe7+$ $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xh5$ $\mathbb{E}xh6$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}e2+-$) 15. $gxh6$ $\mathbb{Q}cxd3+$ 16. $cxd3$ $\mathbb{W}c5$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}f5!$ $exf5$ 18. $d4$ $\mathbb{W}b6$ This was Kamsky – Polgar, Paris 1992, and now White could have killed the game almost immediately with 19. $\mathbb{Q}d5!N$ $\mathbb{W}c6+$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}h4+-$.



14. $\mathbb{Q}f3$

This is White's most principled attempt to challenge his opponent's bold strategy. The main alternative is:

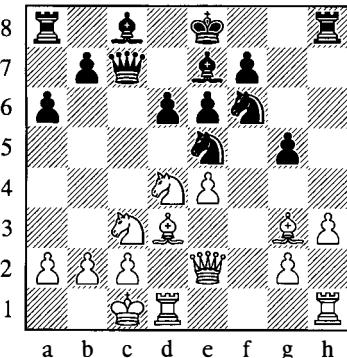
14. $h3$

This is more modest, though not altogether bad.

14... $hxg5$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}g3$

White does best to avoid 15. $hxg4$ $\mathbb{E}xh4$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{E}xh1$ 17. $\mathbb{E}xh1$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}h7$ This was Stripunsky – Wojtkiewicz, Oak Bridge 2000, and now it looks good for Black to play 19... $b5N$ (The game continuation of 19... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ was also fine) 20. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{W}e7$ 21. $\mathbb{E}h6$ $\mathbb{Q}b7\#$ The excellent bishops are sailing Black's ship into favourable waters.

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

16. $\mathbb{Q}b1$

Alternatives do not alter the evaluation much:

16. $\mathbb{Q}hf1$ gives Black a pleasant choice between the solid 16... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ and the more combative 16... $b5!?$.

16. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}h5!$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $b5$ gives Black active prospects on both sides of the board, and the following sacrifice failed to improve White's situation: 18. $\mathbb{Q}xe5!?$ $dxe5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xb5\uparrow$ $axb5$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xb5\uparrow$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $f6$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}d6$ $\mathbb{Q}f4$ Black went on to win the ending in Sadathajafi – Sadvakasov, Dubai 2002.

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

Once again the rare 16... $b5!?$ looks promising.

17. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ 0–0–0 18. $\mathbb{Q}b3$

This position was reached in Szabo – Browne, Amsterdam 1972, and here it looks interesting for Black to try:

18... $\mathbb{Q}h5!?$ N

The game continuation of 18... $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $g4$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}dh8$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}b6$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$ led to an interesting and double-edged position, although White eventually obtained the upper hand.

19. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$

The evaluation is similar after 19... $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}b6$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$.

20. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $b5$

The position is approximately equal, with chances for both sides.

14... $h \times g5!?$

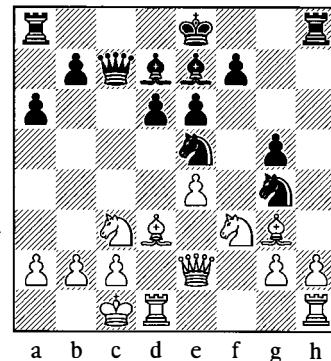
With this enterprising move Black hopes to fight for the initiative with the aid of a pawn sacrifice. It should also be mentioned that a perfectly reasonable alternative exists in the form of 14... $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ followed by ... $h \times g5$, leading to a roughly equal position with level material. I find the main line more interesting though.

15. $\mathbb{Q}xg5$

In a quest to avoid the somewhat clumsy position arising after the text move, White sometimes settles for the humble retreat:

15. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$

15... $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ is also playable, but Black does not need to release the tension just yet.

16. $h3$

16. $\mathbb{Q}df1$ $b5$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ (17. $a3$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 18. $h3$ $\mathbb{Q}e3\uparrow$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ 20. $cxd3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe2\uparrow$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ is not dangerous for Black at all.) 17... $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $dxe5$ Black was already slightly better in Azarov – Amonatov, Voronezh 2007. The doubled e-pawns are in no way weak; on the contrary, they help Black by controlling several important squares, and the move ... $dxe5$ has also increased the scope of his dark-squared bishop.

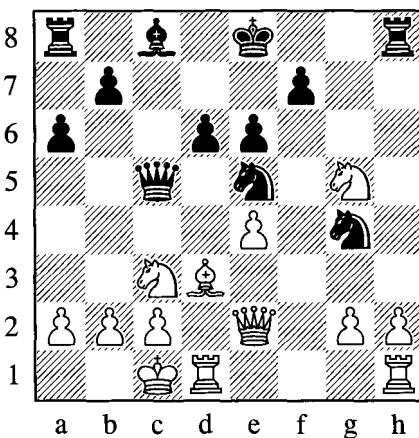
16. $\mathbb{Q}hf1$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ (18... $b5!?$ N looks interesting) 19. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}a5$ gave Black a pleasant and solid position in

Shirov – Ivanchuk, Leon 2008.

16... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $dxe5$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}hf1$
 $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 20.g3 0–0–0

Black eventually lost against his much higher-rated opponent in Ivanchuk – Quan Zhe, Edmonton 2005, but the outcome of the opening was quite satisfactory for him. (You can see from the above note that Ivanchuk was obviously impressed enough with Black's opening to use it himself against a top-class adversary.)

15... $\mathbb{Q}xg5\#$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ $\mathbb{W}c5!$



17. $\mathbb{Q}h3$

In the majority of games White has chosen to prevent the fork on f2. Nevertheless the following alternative is also rather interesting: 17. $\mathbb{Q}f3$??

This exchange sacrifice is not fully sound, but it creates plenty of pitfalls for Black and should be studied closely.

17... $\mathbb{Q}f2$

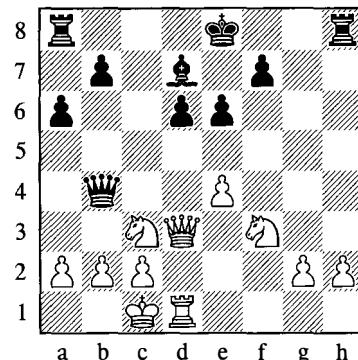
White has two choices here.

a) 18. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}exd3\#$!

18... $\mathbb{W}a7?$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $dxe5$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}b5\#$ transposes to the unfavourable line mentioned in the note to Black's 18th move in note b) below.
19. $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ $\mathbb{Q}xd3\#$ 20. $\mathbb{W}xd3$ $\mathbb{W}b4$
20... $\mathbb{W}c7$?N could also be considered, when

it remains to be seen if White's compensation will be enough.

21. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}d1$



22...0–0–0!N

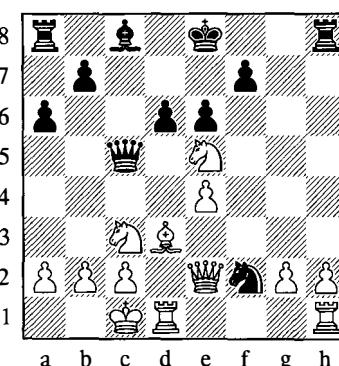
22... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 23.a3 $\mathbb{W}c5$ 24.b4 gave White an ongoing initiative in Lapshun – Mirabile, Philadelphia 2004.

23. $\mathbb{W}xd6$ $\mathbb{W}xd6$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}xd8\#$ $\mathbb{W}xd8!$

25... $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ enables White to activate his king.

In the final position Black's chances are at least equal as his two long-range pieces will work well in the position with pawns on both flanks.

b) 18. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$



18... $\mathbb{Q}xd1!$

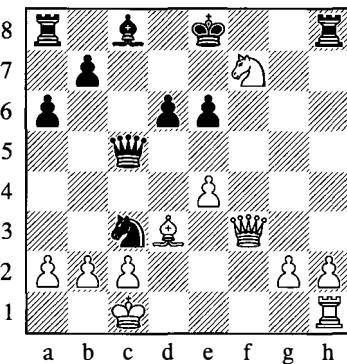
18... $\mathbb{W}d5?$ allows White to embark on a dangerous, possibly even decisive attack with:
19. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{W}a7$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}b5\#$ $axb5$ 21. $\mathbb{W}xb5\#$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$
22. $\mathbb{W}b4\#$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ (22... $\mathbb{Q}e8$ allows 23. $\mathbb{Q}b6\#$)

with a strong attack, for instance: 23... $\mathbb{W}xa2$ 24. $\mathbb{W}d6$ $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ 25. $\mathbb{B}xd1$ $\mathbb{W}a1\#$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{W}a5\#$ 27. b4 and wins – analysis by Rajkovic) 23. $\mathbb{Q}b6!$ $\mathbb{Q}xh1$ 24. $\mathbb{B}f1\#$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 25. $\mathbb{W}e7$, as played in Ristic – Pablo Marin, Tjentiste 1975. I analysed this position in some detail looking for a defence, but was eventually forced to conclude that the second player was fighting an uphill battle to survive.

19. $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3$

There is a second promising line available in the form of: 19... $\mathbb{Q}xb2?$ N 20. $\mathbb{Q}xh8$ (20. $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}e7\#$) 20... $\mathbb{W}xc3$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}b5\#$ axb5 22. $\mathbb{W}xb5\#$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 23. $\mathbb{W}xb2$ $\mathbb{W}c4$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{E}a4$ (24... $\mathbb{E}a5$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}a1$ $\mathbb{E}b5$ 26. $\mathbb{W}g7$ e5 27. $\mathbb{W}g6\#$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}f7\#$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 29. $\mathbb{W}g5\#$) 25. $\mathbb{Q}a1$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}g6$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ e5 28. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ 29. $\mathbb{E}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 30. a3 $\mathbb{Q}e6\#$

20. $\mathbb{W}f3$



20... $\mathbb{E}f8!$

20... $\mathbb{W}h2$ looks less accurate due to 21. $\mathbb{B}f1!$ $\mathbb{Q}xa2\#$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}c3\#$ (22... $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 23. $\mathbb{W}g3\rightarrow$) 23. bxc3 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ when Black is only slightly for choice.

20... $\mathbb{W}h5?$ is definitely not a smart idea:

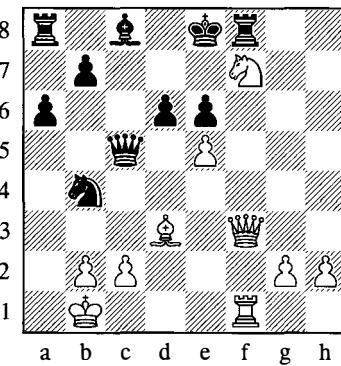
21. $\mathbb{W}f6$ $\mathbb{E}f8$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xd6\#$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 23. $\mathbb{W}g7\#$ 1–0 was the abrupt end of the game Rapoports – Kalnins, corr. 1978.

21. $\mathbb{B}f1$ N

This is a logical attempt to improve White's play.

In the event of 21.e5, Supancic – Tarjan, Maribor 1978, Black wins with 21... $\mathbb{d}xe5\#$ (The game continuation of 21... $\mathbb{Q}xa2\#$? 22. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$ might have led to a reversal of fortunes had White played: 23. $\mathbb{Q}xd6\#$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 24. $\mathbb{W}g4$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 25. $\mathbb{W}g7$ $\mathbb{W}f2$ 26. $\mathbb{E}d1\rightarrow$ 22. $\mathbb{B}f1$ e4! –)

21... $\mathbb{Q}xa2\#$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 23. e5



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

23... $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ 24. $\mathbb{W}xd3$ (24. $\mathbb{Q}xd6\#$ $\mathbb{W}xd6\rightarrow$) 24... $\mathbb{E}xf7$ 25. $\mathbb{W}g6$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 26. $\mathbb{W}xf7\#$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 27. $\mathbb{E}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 28. $\mathbb{E}c3$ gives White decent chances of making a draw.

24. $\mathbb{W}xd6$

24.g4 d5 25.g5 $\mathbb{W}a5$ 26.c3 $\mathbb{W}a2\#$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}xd3\#$ 28. $\mathbb{W}xd3$ $\mathbb{Q}c7\#$

24... $\mathbb{Q}xd3$

24... $\mathbb{W}xd6$ should also be good enough, as long as Black follows up carefully: 25. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 26. c3 (26. $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ $\mathbb{E}xf3$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}e8\#$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 28. $\mathbb{E}xf3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe8$ 29. h4 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 30. $\mathbb{E}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7\#$) 26... $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ $\mathbb{E}xf3$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}e8\#$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 29. $\mathbb{E}xf3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe8$ 30. c4 $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 31. b3 e5 $\#$ The text move seems like a much easier practical choice though.

25. $\mathbb{W}f5$ 26. $\mathbb{W}e2$ $\mathbb{W}f7$ 27. $\mathbb{E}xf7\#$ $\mathbb{E}xf7$ 28. g4 $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 29. d4 $\mathbb{Q}d7\#$

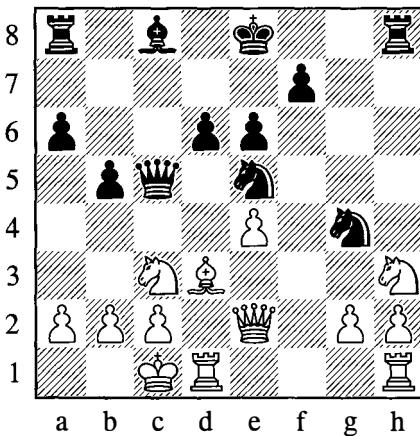
Black will be the strong favourite to win the ending.

To summarize, 17. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ is objectively dubious, but could easily create problems for an

unprepared opponent, so I would urge the reader to treat it with respect.

17...b5!?

This has only been played a few times, but it appears quite promising. The main move has been: 17... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ This also offers Black good compensation thanks to his superior piece coordination. 18. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ (Another game continued 18. $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{E}c8$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}de1$ b5 20. $\mathbb{Q}d1$, Ivkov – Tatai, Imperia 1967, and here it looks good for Black to play 20... $\mathbb{Q}xd3\#N$ 21. $\mathbb{W}xd3$ b4 with pleasant compensation for the pawn.) 18...b5 19. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ b4 20. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}hf2$ $\mathbb{Q}xh2$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{E}ag8$ The black pieces were working in remarkable harmony in Brandenburg – Zhigalko, Hengelo 2005.



18. $\mathbb{Q}b1$

Suggesting a sensible regrouping of the white forces is not an easy task. One encounter continued 18. $\mathbb{Q}df1$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}d1$, Rohde – Boss, Werfen Essen 2002, and here I suggest 19... $\mathbb{Q}e7!N$ 20. $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{E}ag8\#$ with some advantage thanks to the glamorous black pieces.

18... $\mathbb{Q}b7!?$

The bishop would also have been happy on d7, but Black obviously wanted to make full use of his previous move.

19. $\mathbb{Q}de1$ 0–0–0 20.a4!?

White does not want his opponent to have all the fun, and immediately tries to create a weakness. A quiet move like 20.a3 should be met by 20... $\mathbb{Q}b8$ with a pleasant position.

20...bxa4

Black could also have considered 20...b4!N 21. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ 22.cxd3 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ with ongoing compensation.

21. $\mathbb{Q}xa4!$

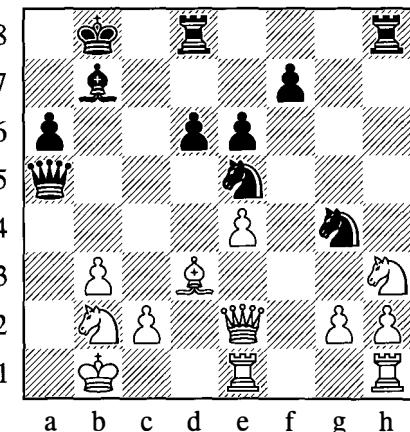
Avoiding the roughly equal position that would have resulted from 21. $\mathbb{Q}xa6$ a3 22. $\mathbb{W}b5$ $\mathbb{W}xb5$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ axb2.

21... $\mathbb{W}a5$ 22.b3

The evaluation would have been similar after 22. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{E}c8$.

22... $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}b2$

We have been following the game Mamedov – Areshchenko, Moscow 2007. At this point my favoured continuation would be:

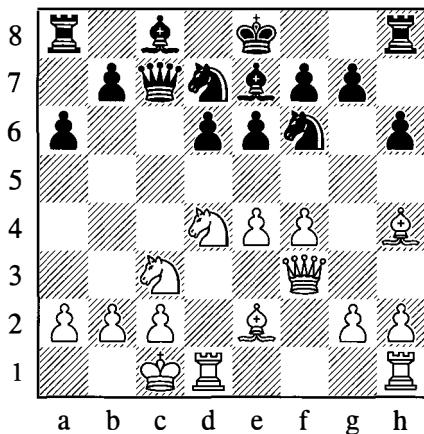


23... $\mathbb{Q}dg8N\bar{\#}$

The knight on h3 remains a serious burden for White.

D3) 11. $\mathbb{Q}e2$

The modest bishop move is generally regarded as the most challenging line for Black to face. White is hoping that the bishop will prove useful in controlling the vital g4- and h5-squares.



11...b5

Several other moves have been tried, including the precautionary 11...♝b8, but I believe the text to be the most promising. At this point White's only dangerous plan involves the advance of the e-pawn. Thus he can choose between the immediate D31) 12.e5 and the preliminary D32) 12.♗xf6.

D31) 12.e5

The common consensus used to be that Black had overstretched himself and could be punished with this immediate act of aggression.

12...♝b7 13.exf6

This is White's most promising idea, giving up his queen for some combination of black pieces. The immediate attempts to blast through with blunt force are unjustified:

13.♗g3?!

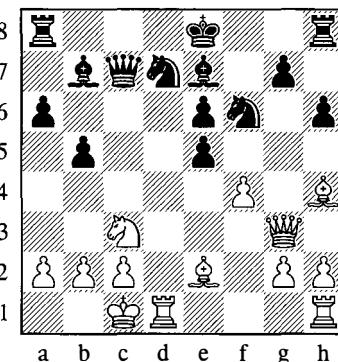
No better is 13.♗h3? dx5 14.♗xe6 fxe6 15.♗xe6 ♜c5 16.♗xe5 ♜c8 17.♗xf6 gxf6 18.♗h5† ♜f8 19.♗b1 ♜e4 when White

had little to show for the piece in Tatai – Costantini, Bratto 2005.

13...dxe5 14.♗xe6

After 14.♗xg7, Skovgaard – Andersson, Grenaa 1973, 14...♝h7N White has to transpose to the main line with 15.♗xe6. White also gets nowhere with 14.f5 0–0–0 15.fxe6 exd4 16.exd7 ♜xd7 17.♗xf6 ♜xf6 18.♗g4 ♜g5† 19.♗b1 f5 20.♗xd4 ♜xd4 21.♗xf5† ♜d7 22.♗d1 ♜d2 and Black easily converted his extra material in Perez Perez – Matanovic, Utrecht 1961.

14...fxe6



15.♗xg7

15.♗g6†?! ♜f8 16.♗g4 exf4 17.♗xf6 ♜xf6 18.♗xe6 ♜e5 White had nothing to show for the piece in Olthof – Deak, Eger 1987.

15...♝h7 16.♗h5†

16.♗g6† ♜f7 17.♗xd7 ♜xd7 18.♗f2 (no better is 18.♗h5 0–0–0 19.♗xf7 ♜xh4) 18...♜f8+ Aghabekian – Huang Qian, Ekaterinburg 2007.

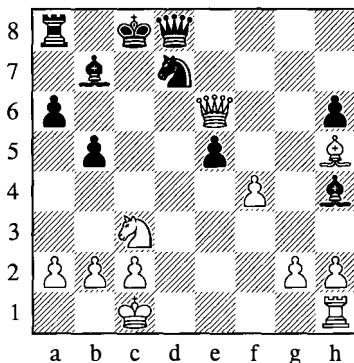
16...♜d8 17.♗g6 ♜c8 18.♗xd7

White's initiative is petering out so he needs to add some oil to the flames. 18.♗xf6 ♜xf6 19.♗he1 e4† is unappealing for him.

18...♜xd7 19.♗xh7 ♜xh4 20.♗g8†

20.♗d1 is convincingly met by 20...b4 21.♗g4 ♜c6 (The defender must be sure to avoid 21...bxc3? 22.♗g8† ♜d8 23.♗xd7! cxb2† 24.♗b1 with barely equal chances.) 22.♗e4 ♜b8†.

20... $\mathbb{W}d8$ 21. $\mathbb{W}xe6$



21... $\mathbb{W}e7!$ N

The exact move is more logical than the eccentric idea 21... $\mathbb{W}f6$?! Sedlak – Ilincic, Budva 2002, when White can keep some chances alive with 22. $\mathbb{W}h3$!N $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 23. $\mathbb{R}d1$ $\mathbb{W}e7\#$.

22. $\mathbb{W}g8\#$

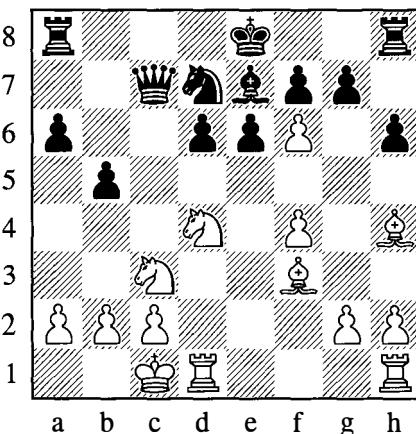
22. $\mathbb{W}xh6$ $\mathbb{W}f6$ 23. $\mathbb{W}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ is a similar story.

22... $\mathbb{W}f8$ 23. $\mathbb{W}xf8\#$ $\mathbb{Q}xf8$ 24. $fxe5$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$

Black should win the ending without too many problems.

13... $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xf3$

I actually reached this position in one of my own games a short while before the book was due to be published, but forgot my analysis!



14...d5

This has not been the highest scoring move, but it may well be best.

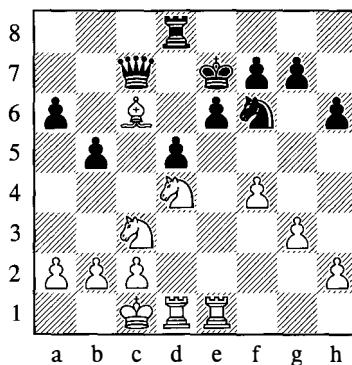
The alternative is:

14... $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{E}c8$?

This leads to fascinating complications, although in view of the improvement at move 17 I would not recommend this move for Black.

The safe alternative is 15... $\mathbb{Q}xf6$. This was my choice in the aforementioned game, as I was struggling to remember all the nuances of the more complicated lines. The game continued:

16. $\mathbb{Q}xa8$ d5 (If I had this position again I would prefer 16...0–0! 17. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ b4 18. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ [or 18. $\mathbb{Q}a4$, Hartston – Williams, Bristol 1968, 18...e5!N 19. $fxe5$ $dxe5$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{E}c8$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}ac5$ e4 22. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ a5 23. $\mathbb{Q}a6$ a4 24. $\mathbb{Q}xc8$ $axb3$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}xb3$ $\mathbb{W}xc8\#$] 18... $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ d5 20. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{W}xf4\#$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ a5 The position remained dynamically balanced in Ozerov – Liebeskind, e-mail 2005.) 17. $\mathbb{Q}c6\#$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 18.g3 $\mathbb{E}d8$ (Slightly more accurate would have been 18...b4 19. $\mathbb{Q}ce2$, Perunovic – Antic, Dimitrovgrad 2003, 19... $\mathbb{E}c8$!N.) 19. $\mathbb{Q}he1$



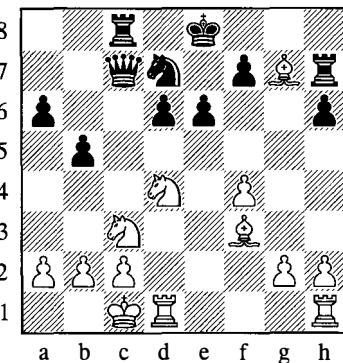
White kept an edge in Van Kampen – Ftacnik, Amsterdam 2010, although it is not so easy for him to make real progress, and I eventually managed to win after my opponent misplayed his position.

16. $\mathbb{Q}xg7$

16.♗h4 is less threatening; 16...b4 17.♕ce2 ♜c4 (17...d5?! looks riskier, as after 18.♖h1 ♜c5 19.f5! White's pieces are becoming dangerously active.) 18.b3 ♜c5 19.♗d2 0–0=

16...♗h7

Here I found a strong new idea for White, which casts a dark shadow over Black's 15th move.



17.f5!!N

Previous games had seen 17.♗h5 ♜c5!. Black must be careful, as the white pieces are very mobile and dangerous. (17...♗xg7? 18.♗xe6 ♜c4 19.♖he1 ♗xg2 20.♗d4!N [White has got too excited with 20.♗xd6? ♜e7 21.♗d4 ♜xe6 and was duly punished in Klavins – Tal, Riga 1959.] 20...♗xh2 21.♗c5† ♜d8 22.♗xc4 ♜xc5 23.♗xc5 ♜xc5 24.♗xf7±) 18.f5! ♗xg7 19.♗xe6 ♜e3† 20.♗b1 This position was reached in Euwe – Tal, corr. 1961, and here Black should have played 20...♗g8N 21.♖he1 ♗xc3 22.bxc3 (22.♗f4?! ♜f8 23.♗xe3 ♗xe3 24.♗xd6 ♜e1† 25.♗d1 ♜e7 26.♗d4 ♜f6† The black rooks will become very active.) 22...♜xc3 23.♗c7† ♜d8 24.♗d5 ♜c5 25.♗xf7 ♗f8 26.♗e6 White narrowly manages to maintain the balance thanks to his well-coordinated pieces in the centre.

17...♗xg7

Black is not helped by 17...e5 18.f6 exd4 19.♗xd4 ♜f8 20.♗e1† ♜e6 21.♗d2!±

18.fxe6 ♜e5

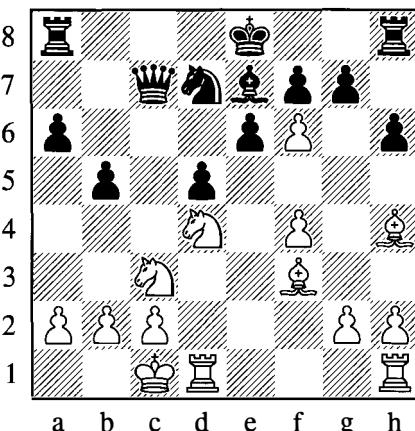
The defender must exercise extreme caution. For instance, 18...♗b6? is swiftly punished after: 19.♖hf1 ♜c5 20.exf7† ♗xf7 21.♗e4 ♜e5 22.♗xd6† ♜xd6 23.♗h5+–

19.♗e4 ♜c5 20.♗d5!

This is stronger than 20.♗f5 fxe6 21.♗xg7† ♜f7 22.♗xe6 ♜xe6 23.♖hf1 ♜e3† 24.♗b1 ♜xc3 25.♗d5† ♜d7 26.bxc3 ♜xc3 when Black escapes to equality.

20...fxe6 21.♗xe6 ♜a7 22.♗xg7† ♜xg7 23.♖hf1

Black is surviving for the moment, but he is certainly under pressure.



15.♗xe6!?

White is keeping the flames of his initiative alive with this spectacular move.

Weak is 15.♗xd5? ♜xf4† (15...♗c8?N and 15...b4?N also look good) 16.♗b1 ♜xh4 17.fxg7 0–0–0 18.gxh8=♗ ♗xh8 19.♗xe6, Hartla – Koczo, Budapest 2009, and now after 19...fxe6N 20.♗xe6 ♜d8† Black should win with careful play.

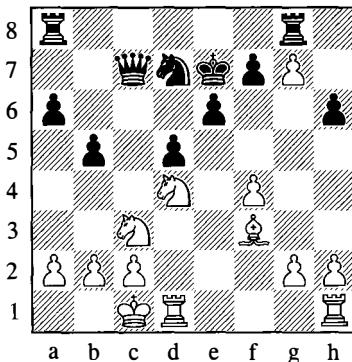
White does have a more serious alternative:

15.fxg7 ♗g8 16.♗xe7

16.♗xd5 b4 will transpose to the note to White's 17th move below after a subsequent exchange on e7.

16... $\mathbb{Q}xe7!$ N

This is more accurate than the immediate 16... $\mathbb{W}xf4\#$, as played in Semer – Kover, corr. 1979.



17. $\mathbb{R}he1!$

White must try to exploit the excellent coordination between his pieces.

17. $\mathbb{R}xd5?$ is refuted by 17... $b4!$ (this is much stronger than 17... $\mathbb{W}xf4\#$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}b1 \mathbb{E}ac8\#$) 18. $\mathbb{Q}c6\#$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xb4 \mathbb{W}xf4\#$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}b1 \mathbb{W}xb4$ 21. $\mathbb{R}xa8 \mathbb{R}b8$ 22.b3 $\mathbb{Q}e5-$ + White ends up overstretched and losing.

17... $\mathbb{W}xf4\#$

It looks a bit too risky to try 17... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 18.f5! $b4$ 19.fxe6 $bxc3$ 20. $\mathbb{R}xd5 \mathbb{W}f4\#$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}b1 \mathbb{W}b8$ 22.b3 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 23.exf7 $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ 24. $\mathbb{R}f1\#$ $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ 25. $\mathbb{R}xf7\#$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 26. $\mathbb{R}xa8 \mathbb{W}xa8$ 27. $\mathbb{R}f6\pm$ The black king is more exposed than his counterpart.

18. $\mathbb{Q}b1 \mathbb{Q}f6$

18... $\mathbb{Q}d6$ puts the king in a more exposed position, and White obtains an edge after 19. $\mathbb{R}xd5!$ $exd5$ 20. $\mathbb{R}xd5 \mathbb{W}xh2$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}f5\#$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}de7\#$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xg8 \mathbb{E}xg8$ 24. $\mathbb{R}e7 \mathbb{E}d8$ 25.a3±.

19. $\mathbb{R}xd5$

Despite the seemingly chaotic situation, position remains dynamically balanced.

19... $\mathbb{W}xh2$

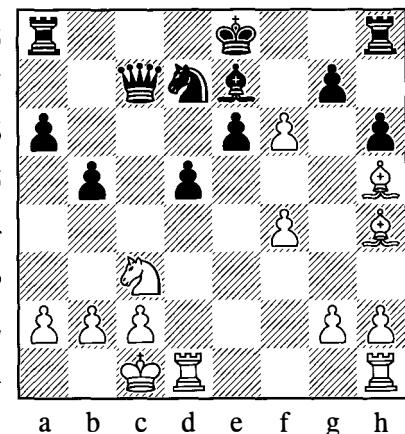
Also reasonable is 19... $\mathbb{Q}xg7$, for instance 20.g3 $\mathbb{W}f6$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xe6\#$ $fxe6$ 22. $\mathbb{R}xe6 \mathbb{W}f8$ 23. $\mathbb{R}xa8 \mathbb{Q}c5$ 24. $\mathbb{R}e5 \mathbb{W}xa8$ 25. $\mathbb{R}xc5 \mathbb{E}d8$ with approximate equality.

20. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$

20. $\mathbb{R}xa8 \mathbb{R}xa8$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xe6 fxe6$ 22. $\mathbb{R}xd7 \mathbb{E}g8$ 23. $\mathbb{R}d6 \mathbb{Q}xg7$ 24. $\mathbb{R}exe6 \mathbb{E}f8$ is also balanced. 20... $fxe6$ 21. $\mathbb{R}xe6\#$ $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ 22. $\mathbb{R}xa8 \mathbb{Q}c5$ 23. $\mathbb{R}e7\#$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 24. $\mathbb{R}d5\#$ $\mathbb{Q}g5$

Chances are about equal, although any result is possible.

15... $fxe6$ 16. $\mathbb{R}h5\#$



16... $g6!$

Black would be playing with fire if he ventured 16... $\mathbb{Q}d8?$ 17. $fxe6\#$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$, Kostov – Minev, Sofia 1960, at which point 18. $\mathbb{R}d4\#$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 19. $\mathbb{R}e1 \mathbb{W}c5$ 20. $\mathbb{R}f2\#$ looks highly unpleasant. The white pieces are concentrated and prepared to strike.

17. $\mathbb{Q}xg6\#$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 18. $fxe6\#$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 19. $\mathbb{R}g3$

Senseless is 19.e8=Q? $\mathbb{R}xe8$ 20. $\mathbb{R}xe8 \mathbb{W}xf4\#$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}b1 \mathbb{R}xe8-$ + Silva – Kover, corr. 1994.

19... $b4!$

In such a wild-looking position, it somehow only seems right to provoke further complications. The following two moves have also been tried:

19... $\mathbb{Q}f6\#$? 20.f5 $\mathbb{W}d7N$ (This looks like the best try. Instead after 20... $\mathbb{W}xe7$ 21. $\mathbb{R}he1 \mathbb{E}hd8$

22.♗xe6 ♜xe6 23.fxe6 ♔xg6 24.♔h4± White was clearly on top in Rothuis – Hachijan, Bussum 2008.) 21.fxe6 (21.e8=♛ ♜hx8 22.♗xe8 ♜xe8 23.♔e5±) 21...♜xe7 22.♗f7 b4 23.♗xd5 ♜xd5 24.♗xd5 ♜hd8 25.♗f5± The black king will not be able to relax for a while.

19...♝c5 should be met by 20.f5!N (Instead after 20.e8=♛ ♜hx8 21.♗xe8 ♜xe8± Black had somewhat better prospects in Tukmakov – Klimenok, Riga 1962.) 20...b4 21.♗e2 (21.fxe6? ♗f6+) 21...e5 22.♗he1 ♜he8 23.♗d4 ♜xe7 (23...exd4? 24.♗f2 ♜d6 25.♗xd4† ♜g8 26.♗e6±) 24.♗e6† ♜xe6 25.fxe6 ♔xg6 26.exd7 e4 27.♔h4 ♜c7 28.♗d2 ♜xd7 29.♗xe4 Black's chances for win are minimal.

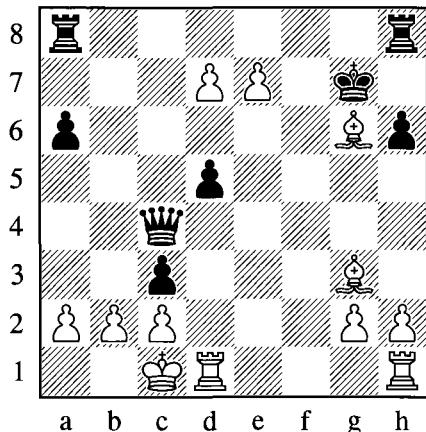
20.f5

The feeble 20.♗e2? runs into 20...♝c4.

20...♝c4!

20...♝c5 transposes to 19...♝c5 above. The text is more challenging, and should give Black chances to fight for the advantage.

21.fxe6 bxc3 22.exd7



22...♔xg6!N

This is an important improvement over the following game: 22...♜xa2 23.♔e5† (23.bxc3? ♜a3†) 23...♚xg6 24.♗xc3 With such

an exposed king Black will have little chance to play for a win, so he decided to take a perpetual with 24...♜a1† 25.♗d2 ♜a4 26.♗xh8 ♜f4† (26...♜xd7 27.♗c3 ♜xe7 28.♗c1=) 27.♗c3 ♜c4† 28.♗d2 ♜f4† 29.♗c3 ♜c4† 30.♗d2 ♜f4† ½–½ Bryson – Pereira, corr. 1987.

23.♗e5

After 23.♗he1 ♜b5 24.e8=♛† ♜hx8 25.dxe8=♛† ♜xe8 26.bxc3 ♜e4± White will have to work hard to stay afloat.

23...cx b2†

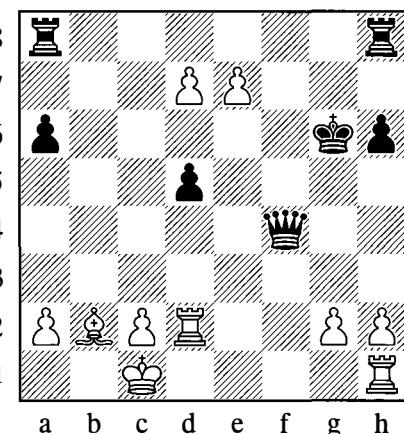
Compared with the Bryson – Pereira game, the main difference is that Black manages to destroy the pawn on b2 rather than the one on a2, thus ensuring that the white king will remain exposed.

24.♗xb2

24.♗b1 does not solve White's problems after 24...♜hd8! 25.exd8=♛ ♜xd8±.

24...♜f4† 25.♗d2

25.♗b1 ♜d6 26.♗xh8 ♜xe7 leads to a similar situation.

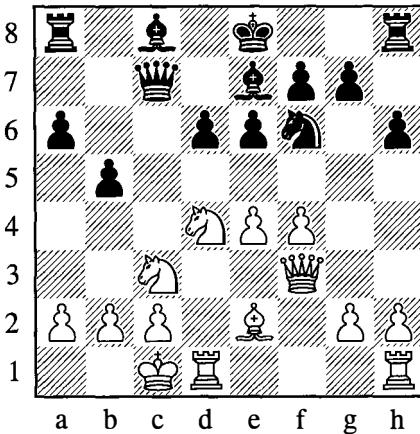


25...♜hd8! 26.exd8=♛ ♜xd8

Black will collect the second of the terrible twins on the seventh rank, while keeping some winning chances in the ending.

D32) 12.♗xf6 ♗xf6

The bishop has to keep protecting the d6-square. 12...♗xf6? can be more or less refuted by 13.e5! intending ♗dxb5.

**13.e5**

The central break tries to punish Black before he gets the chance to complete his development. Slower methods such as 13.a3 ♘b7 14.♗g3 0–0 15.♗f3 ♗d7 would be anything but dangerous for Black.

13...♗b7 14.♗g3

Compared with the previous section, the idea of giving up the queen for three pieces is not really viable here: 14.exf6? ♘xf3 15.♗xf3 d5 16.fxe7 was seen in Del Castilho – Ortiz Suarez, Dalkeith 2005, and now after 16...♗xf4†N 17.♗b1 ♘c8 18.♗hel ♘xc3! 19.bxc3 ♗d7 White will have a tough time fighting for equality.

14...dxe5 15.fxe5

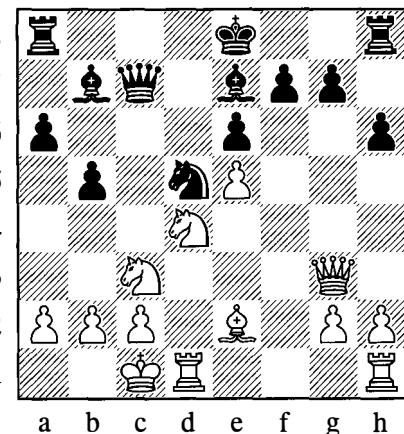
After 15.♗xg7?, Vargic – Rasic, Pula 2000, 15...♗g8N 16.♗xe6 ♘b6 17.♗xh6 ♘xe6 Black is a piece up for very little.

15...♗d5

The alternatives fail to impress:

15...♗d7?! 16.♗xe6! fxe6 17.♗h5† ♘d8 (17...♗f8 18.♗hf1†+–) 18.♗xg7 ♘f8 19.♗g4 Analyses of the games played from this sharp position have failed to unearth a playable continuation. White can advance his attack with excellent chances for success.

Somewhat better, though still not fully satisfactory, is 15...♗e4 16.♗xe6! ♘xc3! (16...fxe6 17.♗g6† ♘f8 18.♗hf1† ♘g8 19.♗xe6†+–) 17.♗xg7† ♘f8 18.♗e6† ♘e8 19.♗xc3 ♘xc3 20.♗c7† ♘f8 21.bxc3 ♘c8 22.♗d5 ♘xd5 23.♗xd5 ♘g8 24.g3 ♘xc3, Gonzalez Melo – Kral, e-mail 2006, 25.♗f1N± Black has reasonable chances to fight for a draw, but his task will not be a pleasant one.

**16.♗xe6!**

White gets nowhere with the simple-minded 16.♗xg7?! ♘g5† 17.♗b1 ♘xc3† 18.bxc3 0–0–0 when Black's chances seem higher, for instance 19.♗hf1 (or 19.h4 ♘dg8 20.♗xe6 ♘e7 21.♗d8† ♘xd8 22.♗xf7 ♘d7 23.♗xd7† ♘xd7 24.♗c5† ♘c6 25.♗xb7 ♘xb7 26.hxg5 ♘xg5†) 19...♘xc3 20.♗d3 ♘b4† 21.♗a1 ♘hf8† White faces an unpleasant fight for equality.

Slightly better, though still not very impressive, is 16.♗xd5 ♘xd5 17.♗xg7, SchwerTEL – Mrkvicka, e-mail 2000, although even here after 17...0–0–0N 18.♗b1 ♘hg8 19.♗xf7

♗xg2 Black's bishop pair gives him promising compensation for the pawn.

16...fxe6 17.♗g6†

17.♗h5†? ♖d8 18.♗xg7?? ♗g5† was embarrassing for White in T. Thomson – M. Bergmann, e-mail 2001.

17...♗d7 18.♗g4

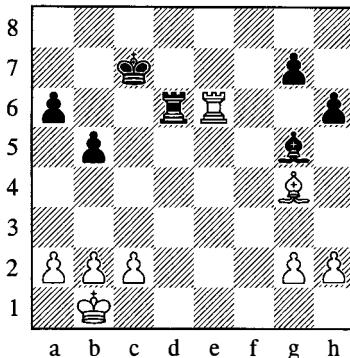
Worse is 18.♗xd5?!, Velasquez Ojeda – Valdes Escobar, Santiago 2007, 18...exd5!N (The game continuation of 18..♗xd5 is less good due to 19.♗g4!N ♘xe5 20.♗xd5† ♘xd5 21.♗d1 ♗g5† 22.♗b1 ♘xd1† 23.♗xd1 ♗f6 24.♗f3 when Black has some problems to solve.) 19.♗g4† ♖d8 White does not have enough for the missing piece.

18...♘xe5 19.♗xd5 ♗g5†!

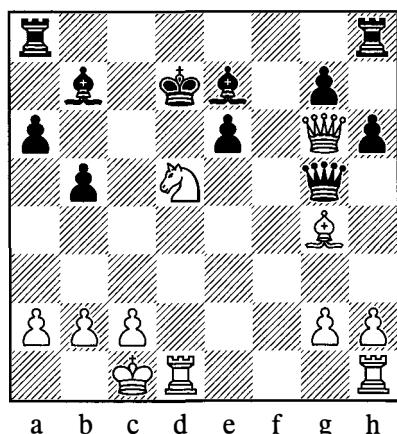
This should enable Black to hold the balance, although in certain lines he will have to find a couple of accurate moves to defend a mildly unpleasant endgame.

19...♗xd5? 20.♗xd5† ♘xd5 21.♗d1 is known to be unpleasant for Black.

20.♗xg5 ♗xg5† 21.♗b1 ♗xd5 22.♗xd5† ♖c7 23.♗e5 (23.♗xe6 ♗ad8 leads to a similar type of endgame.) 23...♗he8 24.♗he1 ♗ad8 25.♗xe6 ♗xe6 26.♗xe6 ♗d6



The presence of rooks on the board can certainly reduce the drawish tendencies of opposite-coloured bishops. Still, with no weaknesses and little material remaining, Black's drawing chances are very high indeed. In the following game White got nowhere and soon accepted the inevitable: 27.♗e4 ♗f6 28.♗f3 ♗d2 29.c3 a5 30.a3 ♗f2 31.♗e2 ♗xe2 32.♗xe2 b4 33.cxb4 ½–½ T. Hansen – Nguyen Huynh Minh, Budapest 2008.



20.♗e3†?!

This has only rarely been seen, but I think it is White's best chance to fight for a meaningful advantage.

The other option is:

20.♗f4† ♖c7 21.♗xe6 ♗xf4†

After 21...♗ad8? 22.♗b1 ♗c8 23.♗xc8† Black was forced to resign in Vuckovic – Marinkovic, Zlatibor 2006.

22.♗b1 ♖b8

White's initiative provides enough compensation for the missing piece, but Black should be able to hold the balance with careful play.

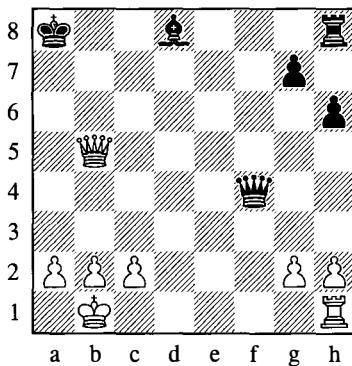
23.♗d7

White is unable to get anywhere with 23.♗hf1 ♗c7 24.♗d7 ♗c8 25.♗xe7 ♗xd7 26.♗xd7 ♗c8†.

23.♗xe7 is also not dangerous after ♘xg4 24.♗d6† ♖a7 (but not 24...♖c8?? 25.♗d3+–) 25.♗c5† ♖b8 with an immediate draw.

23... $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 24. $\mathbb{E}xb7\#$ $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}f3\#$ $\mathbb{Q}a7$
26. $\mathbb{Q}xa8$ $\mathbb{Q}xa8$ 27. $\mathbb{W}xa6\#$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 28. $\mathbb{W}xb5\#$ $\mathbb{Q}a8$

White can take a perpetual if he wishes it, although we should also check to see if he can try for more.



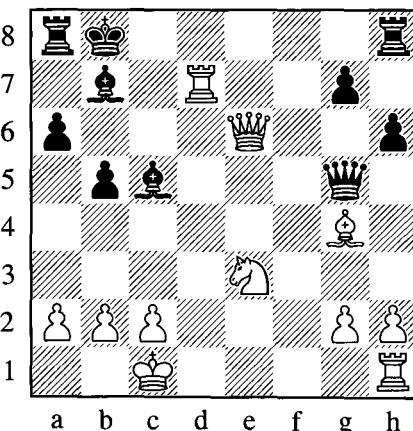
29. $\mathbb{E}d1$ $\mathbb{W}xh2$ 30.a3 $\mathbb{W}b8$ 31. $\mathbb{W}a6\#$ $\mathbb{W}a7$
32. $\mathbb{W}e6$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 33. $\mathbb{E}d7$

We have been following the game Pletanek – Kropik, corr. 1999. Here Black should have played:

33... $\mathbb{W}b6N$

Maintaining the balance.

20... $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 21. $\mathbb{W}xe6$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 22. $\mathbb{E}d7\#$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$



23. $\mathbb{E}xb7\#N$

After 23. $\mathbb{E}e1\#?$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ White was unable to justify his material investment in Malevinsky – Anikaev, USSR 1979.

23... $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ 24. $\mathbb{E}e1$

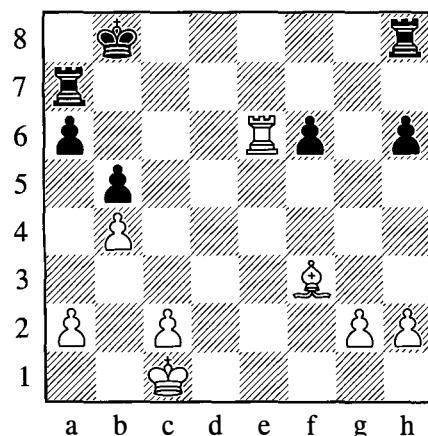
Vasiukov mentioned 24. $\mathbb{Q}f3\#$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 25. $\mathbb{E}e1$, but after 25... $\mathbb{E}a7!$ Black's defences hold firm.

24... $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 25.b4!

Otherwise Black would continue to consolidate with ... $\mathbb{E}a7$, or force simplifications with ... $\mathbb{W}e7$.

25... $\mathbb{Q}xe3\#$ 26. $\mathbb{E}xe3$ $\mathbb{W}f6$ 27. $\mathbb{W}xf6$ $\mathbb{g}xf6$
28. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}a7$ 29. $\mathbb{E}e6$

Black is slightly ahead on material, yet he must exercise great caution as his pieces are passive and several of his pawns are weak. According to my analysis he can more or less force a draw with the following accurate sequence:



29...a5!

29... $\mathbb{E}f8$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ would be rather unpleasant, as White would quickly prepare a queenside attack with a4.

30.a3 axb4 31.axb4 $\mathbb{E}a4!$

This active move forces a concession.

32. $\mathbb{E}b6\#$

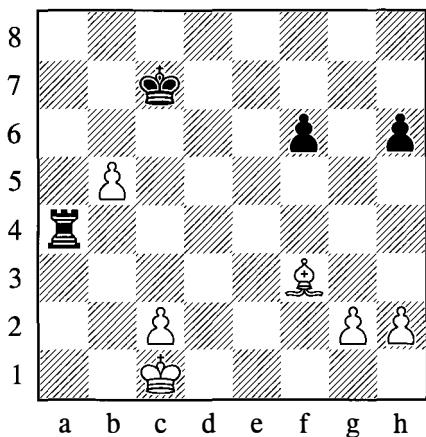
32.c3 $\mathbb{E}a2$ White can hardly hope for an advantage with his king stranded on the first rank.

32...♔a7 33.♖xb5 ♔b8!

This is the point behind Black's previous few moves. It is tremendously useful for Black to force the exchange of rooks.

34.♖xb8 ♔xb8 35.b5

35.c3 ♔a2 would be an easy draw.

35...♔c7

The king will easily blockade the queenside pawns, while the black rook is active enough to prevent the enemy king from penetrating on the opposite flank. The game is almost certain to end in a draw.

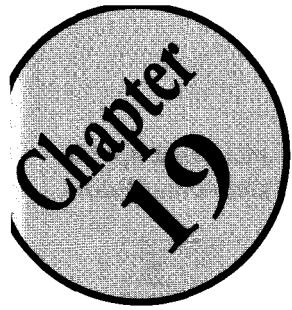
Conclusion

In variations A, B and C we considered three early queen moves after 6.♕g5 e6, none of which were at all troublesome for Black. On the other hand, variation D with 7.f4 can potentially open the gateway to some of the wildest and most dangerous complications in all of chess theory. In the present chapter I recommended a slightly offbeat system based on 7...h6!?, which used to be sneered at, but is presently enjoying a resurgence. The majority of games continue with the natural moves 8.♕h4 ♕e7 9.♕f3 ♕bd7 10.0–0–0 ♕c7, after which White must make an important choice.

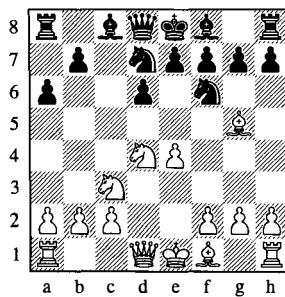
Line D1 with 11.♕g3 poses tricky problems for the second player, especially in the main line where White sacrifices the exchange. Fortunately Black can return the material to neutralize his opponent's initiative and equalize the game.

In variation D2 we saw how the natural developing move 11.♕d3 could be met convincingly by a well-timed ...g5, perhaps in conjunction with a pawn sacrifice which looks eminently playable.

The biggest dangers for the second player have traditionally been thought to lie in variation D3 with 11.♕e2. Fortunately, the relevant games along with my analysis support the conclusion that Black's defences are strong enough to withstand even the sharpest attacking attempts. In the critical variation White can choose between a few different endgames, but in all cases his winning chances are pretty low.



Classic Main Line



Blood Diamond - 6.Bg5 Qbd7

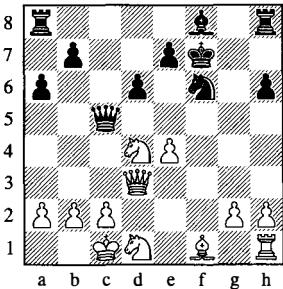
Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.Bf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Qxd4 Bf6 5.Qc3 a6 6.Qg5

6...Qbd7

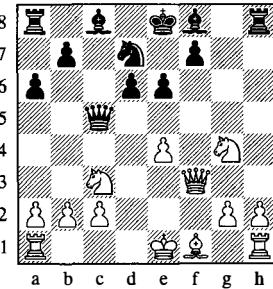
| | |
|--|-----|
| A) 7.Qc4 | 406 |
| B) 7.f4 Wc7! | 409 |
| B1) 8.We2 | 409 |
| B2) 8.Wf3 h6! | 410 |
| B21) 9.Qxf6 | 411 |
| B22) 9.Qh4 g5! 10.fxg5 hxg5 11.Qxg5 Wc5! | 412 |
| B221) 12.Qf5?! | 413 |
| B222) 12.We3 | 415 |
| B223) 12.Qe3! | 417 |

B21) after 15.Qxd1



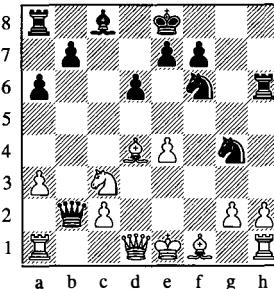
15...Bg7?N

B221) after 15.Qg4



15...b5!N

B223) note to 13.We2

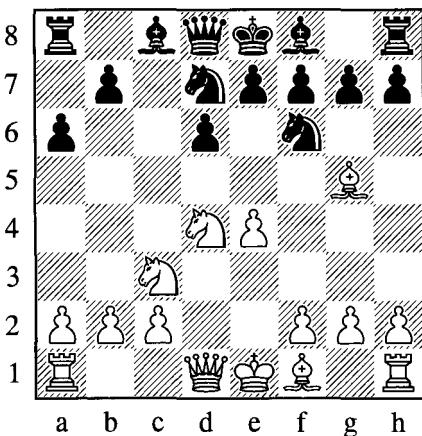


18...Qe3!!N

The system featuring an early ... $\mathbb{Q}bd7$ is truly at the forefront of Najdorf theory. Long considered a dubious sideline, it has been reinvigorated by some new discoveries including an exciting pawn sacrifice which gives Black excellent chances to fight for the initiative. This revolutionary idea was developed by a German amateur named Christoph Tiemann, who shared his analysis with his compatriot, the talented young GM Sebastian Bogner. Both have tested Black's system with success.

Tiemann has kindly shared his analysis with Quality Chess for this book, and his suggestions and improvements have been referenced accordingly.

1.e4 c5 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ d6 3.d4 cxd4 4. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 5. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ a6 6. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}bd7$



From this position the most popular move has been A) 7. $\mathbb{Q}c4$, but in my view the most interesting and critical continuation is B) 7.f4.

Here are a few examples to show how Black may respond to some alternatives:

7. $\mathbb{W}d2$ b5 8. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ (8.f3 $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 9.0–0–0 e6 gave Black a comfortable position in Sychev – Voitsekhovsky, Kaluga 2007.) 8... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 9.0–0 e6 10. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{W}b6?$ (10... $\mathbb{Q}e7=$) 11. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{W}c7$

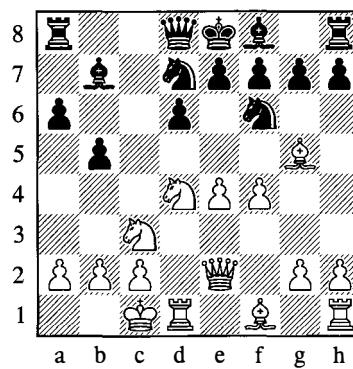
12.f4 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}ae1$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 14.a3 0–0 15. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c5\bar{=}$ Diaz Rodriguez – Vallejo Pons, Palma de Mallorca 2009.

7. $\mathbb{W}e2$ b5 8.0–0–0

8.f4 e5 9. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ was already more comfortable for Black in Brasket – Browne, Lone Pine 1974. (Another promising option is: 9... $\mathbb{W}a5\bar{!}N$ 10.b4! $\mathbb{W}a3$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 12. $\mathbb{W}f3$ $\mathbb{W}b2$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 14.exd5 $\mathbb{W}xc2\bar{=}$)

8... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 9.f4

This was Kuzmin – Vitiugov, Sochi 2007, and here I found an attractive new idea:



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

Making use of the quick development of the queenside.

10.e5

Another option is 10. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 11.e5 $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 12.exf6 (12.bxc3 $\mathbb{Q}e4\bar{=}$) 12... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 13.fxe7 $\mathbb{Q}xe7=$ intending to meet 14. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ with 15...g6! $\bar{=}$.

10... $\mathbb{Q}xc3!$ 11.exf6 gxf6 12.bxc3

12. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{Q}c6\bar{=}$

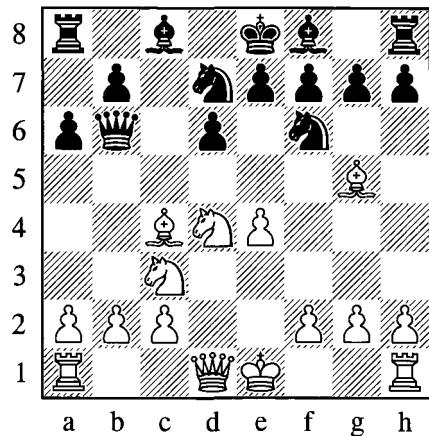
12...fxg5 13. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ e6 14. $\mathbb{Q}xd6\bar{!}$ $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 16. $\mathbb{W}d2$ gxf4

Black is holding his own in this complex position.

A) 7. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{W}b6?$

This might be viewed as a cousin of the infamous Poisoned Pawn variation, although

fortunately it does not demand anywhere near as much theoretical preparation.



8.♗b3

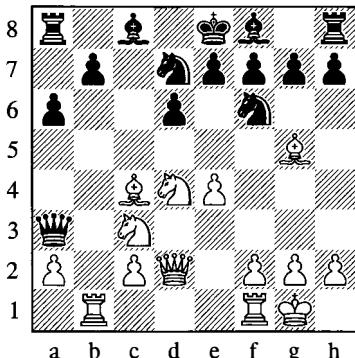
The passive 8.♗b3 can hardly threaten Black. One game continued 8...e6 9.0–0 ♖c7 10.♗e2 b5 11.♗d3 ♗b7 12.f4 ♗e7 13.♗ad1 0–0 14.♔h1 ♗fe8 15.a3 ♗ac8 reaching a typical Sicilian position with chances for both sides, Zawadzka – Guramishvili, Rijeka 2010.

8.♗d2 ♖xb2!

This is the most principled continuation, of course.

8...e6?! is a perfectly playable alternative, but not exactly consistent with the previous move.

9.♗b1 ♖a3 10.0–0



10...e6?!

This is an attempt to fight for an advantage, as opposed to the following game which quickly resulted in a draw: 10...♗a5 11.♗d5! ♖xd2 12.♗c7† ♗d8 13.♗de6† fx6 14.♗xe6† ♗e8 15.♗c7† ♗d8 16.♗e6† ♗e8 ½–½ Luther – Bischoff, Austria 2002.

11.♗b3

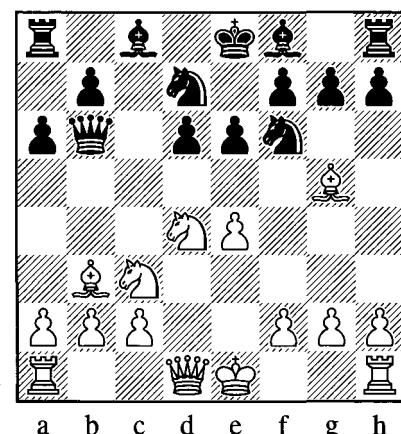
White should certainly avoid 11.f4? ♖c5! 12.♗b3 e5 13.fxe5 dxe5 14.♗e3 exd4 15.♗xd4 ♖xd4†! 16.♗xd4 ♗c5 17.♗xc5 ♗xc5 18.e5 ♗xb3 (18...♗fe4 19.♗xf7† might be good for Black too, but is certainly risky.) 19.exf6 ♗d2 20.fxg7 ♗g8 21.♗d5 ♗xg7 22.♗be1† ♗e6 23.♗c7† ♗e7 24.♗xa8 ♗xf1 25.♗xf1 ♗d7†

11...♗a5†

I do not believe that White has enough for the sacrificed pawn.

8...e6

Black could even consider 8...g6?!, although after 9.0–0 ♗g7 10.♗e1 0–0 11.♗d2 ♗e8 12.♗f3 White was a little better in Zielinski – Nenciulescu, e-mail 2004.



9.♗d2

The plan of long castling must surely be the most challenging approach, as well as the one most in keeping with the overall character of the 6.♗g5 variation.

The alternative is 9.0–0 ♖e7 White has tried a lot of moves here, but I do not consider it productive to examine this position in detail as it is obvious White's set-up should not be too dangerous. 10.♖e3 (A recent game continued 10.a4 ♜c5 11.a5 ♜c7 12.♔a2 h6= Huschenbeth – Berg, Sarajevo 2010.) 10...♜c5 11.f4 ♜c7 12.♗f3 0–0 13.f5 b5 with roughly equal play, Kuklin – Rodriguez Lopez, Budapest 1996.

9...♜e7 10.0–0–0 ♜c5 11.f3

With this move White offers solid support to his e4-pawn and hopes to develop a kingside offensive by advancing his pawns there. He can also consider:

11.♖he1

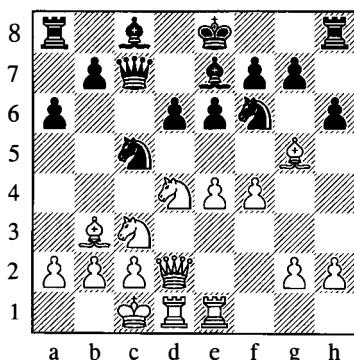
With this move White hopes to blast through the centre.

11...♝c7

Very interesting is 11...h6?!N 12.♖e3 (12.♕xf6 ♜xf6 13.♗f3 ♜e7†) 12...♝c7 (12...♝g4 13.♗f5!) 13.f3 b5 (13...0–0 14.g4 b5 15.h4 ♜fd7 16.g5 ♜xb3† 17.axb3 h5 18.g6) 14.g4 ♜d7?! 15.h4 b4 16.♗ce2 a5 17.g5 hxg5 18.hxg5 ♜h5∞

12.f4 h6

12...b5?! 13.e5! was dangerous in Dimitrov – Rodriguez Lopez, Orense 1994.



13.e5!N

13.♕h4?! allows the standard tactical motif:

13...♝fxe4! 14.♗xe4 ♜xh4 15.♗e3 0–0†

Legaspi – Al Sayed, Olongapo City 2010.

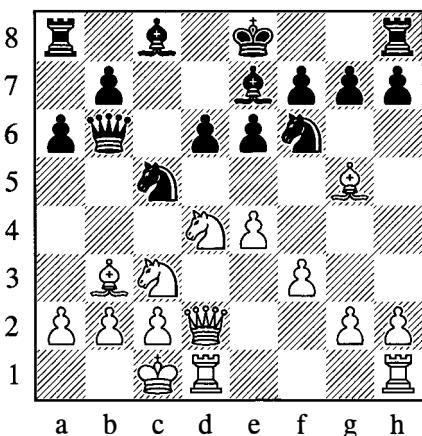
13.♕xf6 ♜xf6 14.♗f3 ♜e7=

13...dxe5 14.fxe5 hxg5 15.exf6 ♜xf6 16.♗d5 ♜d8 17.♗b4 ♜e7 18.♗xe7 ♜xe7 19.♗b1 ♜xb3

Also playable is: 19...a5 20.♗b5† ♜d7 21.♗b6 g6∞

20.♗xb3 0–0

With equal chances.



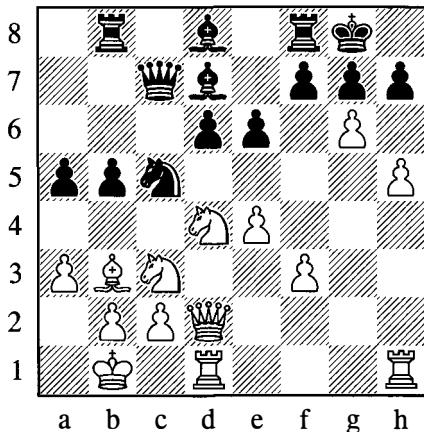
11...♝c7 12.♗b1 0–0 13.g4

Another high-level game continued 13.h4 b5 14.a3?! White was obviously not happy about the need to calculate the consequences of ...b4 on each turn, but the text move allows Black to pry open the queenside. (Better was 14.g4 b4 15.♗a4 ♜b8 16.♗h2 ♜xb3 17.axb3 ♜d7, when Black enough counterplay.) 14...♝b8! 15.h5 (15.g4?) 15...h6 16.♗e3 e5! 17.♗f5 (17.♗de2 ♜xb3 18.cxb3 b4! 19.axb4 ♜e6 20.♗c1 ♜b7 21.g4 d5+) 17...♜xf5 18.exf5 ♜xb3 19.cxb3 b4 with better chances for Black, Naiditsch – Anand, Dortmund 2003.

13...b5 14.a3 ♜b8 15.h4 ♜d7 16.♗xf6 ♜xf6 17.g5 ♜d8!?

The more normal-looking 17...♜e7N was also not bad, for instance 18.h5 a5 19.g6 h6! 20.gxf7† ♜xf7 with reasonable prospects.

18.h5 a5 19.g6



19...♗f6!

19...♗xb3 20.♗xb3 fxg6 21.hxg6 h6
22.♗xa5! was problematic for Black in Shirov – Dominguez Perez, Wijk aan Zee 2010.

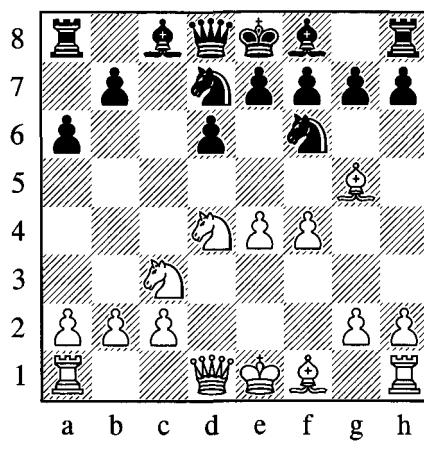
20.gxh7†

The tricky 20.h6?! does not quite work after 20...hxg6! (but not 20...fxg6 21.♗d5!) 21.♗h2 ♜fe8+.

20...♗h8 21.h6 g6∞

Black should be at least equal; his dark-squared bishop is strong and his queenside counterplay is about to become very real.

B) 7.f4



7...♗c7!

Black continues to play in a somewhat unorthodox fashion by delaying ...e6. We will soon see some of the subtle points behind his intriguing move order.

At this point we will analyse two moves.

B1) 8.♗e2 is somewhat unusual, but is at the time of writing the only move to have been tested at 2700 level. However, the big main line is the natural **B2) 8.♗f3**.

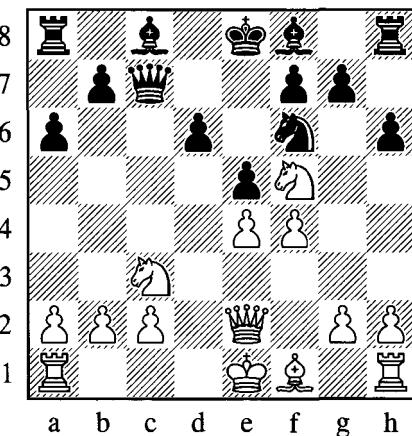
B1) 8.♗e2 e5!

Here we see an immediate benefit of delaying ...e6 – the pawn can aspire to greater ambitions.

9.♗f5 h6 10.♗xf6

10.♗h4 is well met by 10...exf4! 11.♗xf6 ♗xf6 12.0–0–0 g6 13.♗d5 ♗xd5 14.exd5† ♗d8 15.♗d4 ♗g7 16.♗f2 g5 17.h4 ♗c5 18.c3 ♗c7 White already stands worse, and his position quickly deteriorates. 19.hxg5 hxg5 20.♗xh8 ♗xh8 21.♗c2 ♗d7 22.b4 ♗b6 23.♗h7 This was Damjanovic – Saidy, Zagreb 1969, and here Black could have ensured a comfortable victory with 23...♗c8N 24.♗xf7 ♗b8–+.

10...♗xf6



11.♕e3

In the event of 11.♕c4?!, Poetsch – Bogner, Kemer 2009, it looks good for Black to play: 11...♛a5!N 12.0–0–0 ♛e6 13.♗d3 0–0–0† (or even 13...exf4? 14.♗xd6† ♛xd6 15.♗xd6 ♜d8 16.♗xf4 ♜xd1† 17.♗xd1 0–0)

A better alternative is:

11.0–0–0 b5!N

This new idea looks quite promising, although Black can also consider 11...♝xf5 12.exf5 0–0–0 13.♗c4 exf4 14.♗xc7† ♛xc7 15.♗c4 Bok – Kleijn, Venlo 2009, and now 15...♝d7?N 16.♗hf1 d5 17.♗xd5† ♛xd5 18.♗xd5 ♛d6 with equality.

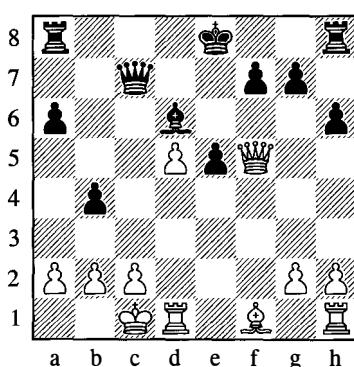
12.♗f3

Or 12.♕e3 exf4 13.♗ed5 ♛xd5 14.♗xd5 ♜d8 15.♗f3 ♛e7 16.h4 ♛e6 17.♗xf4 ♛xd5 18.♗xd5 0–0 19.♗b1 ♛f6 when Black has slightly the easier side of a near-equal position.

12...b4 13.fxe5 dxe5 14.♗d5 ♛xd5 15.♗xd5

15.♗xd5 ♛e6†

15...♛xf5 16.♗xf5 ♛d6



Black should be doing okay here, for instance:

17.♗d3 g6 18.♗f6

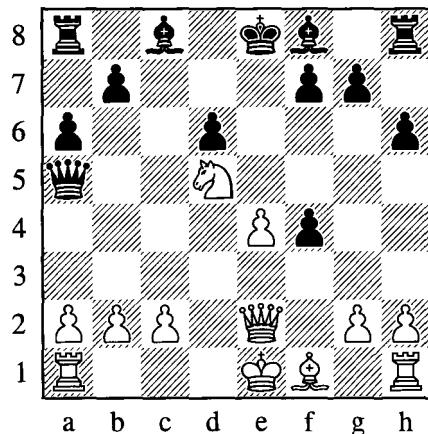
18.♗h3 0–0!

18...0–0 19.h4 h5 20.g4 e4!

The resulting complications are not unfavourable to Black.

11...exf4 12.♗ed5 ♛xd5 13.♗xd5 ♛a5†!

It is important for Black to gain time with this disruptive check.

**14.♗d2**

White also fails to get anywhere with: 14.c3 ♛e6 15.♗xf4 (15.0–0–0 0–0–0 16.♗b1 g5∞) 15...♛e7 16.♗xe6 fxe6 17.♗g4 ♛e5 18.♗c4 ♛d7=

14...♗xd2† 15.♗xd2 ♜b8 16.♗xf4

16.h4? g6 17.♗xf4 ♛g7 18.c3 is also equal.

16...♛e7

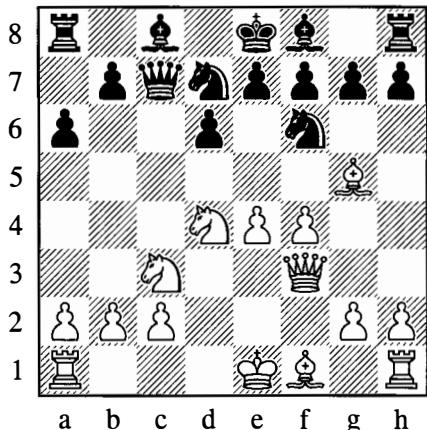
Black has achieved full equality, and the following game never looked like finishing in anything other than a draw.

17.♗c4 ♛g5 18.♗af1 ♛e6 19.♗xe6 fxe6 20.♗d3 ♛xf4 21.♗xf4 ♜f8 22.♗xf8† ♛xf8 23.♗f1† ♛e7 24.♗f3 ♜c8 25.♗g3 ♛f7 26.♗f3† ♛e7 27.♗g3 ♛f7 28.♗f3†

½–½ Radjabov – Ivanchuk, Bazna 2009.

B2) 8.♗f3

This is the usual square for the queen in most lines of the 6.♗g5 variation, so it is hardly surprising that it has been the most popular move by far.



8...h6!

Now it is important to consider both **B21) 9.♗xf6 ♗xf6 10.f5!** and **B22) 9.♗h4.**

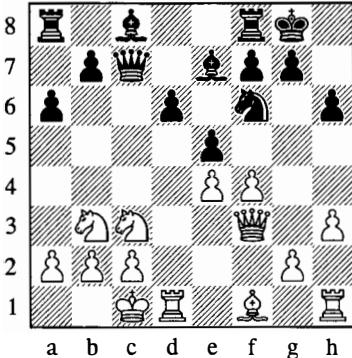
B21) 9.♗xf6 ♗xf6 10.f5!

This is a genuinely threatening option, for which Black should be well-prepared. The following alternative is slower and less dangerous:

10.h3 e5 11.♗b3

No better is: 11.♗de2 b5 12.a3 ♗b7 (Black can also consider 12...♗e7?!N, when he has slightly the more comfortable side of a near-equal position.) 13.♗g3 This position occurred in Avila – Ramsay, Medellin 2009, and here Black could have secured an excellent game with 13...d5!N (Tiemann) 14.exd5 exf4 15.♗ge4 ♗xe4 16.♗xe4 ♗xd5 17.0–0–0 0–0–0.

11...♗e7 12.0–0–0 0–0–0



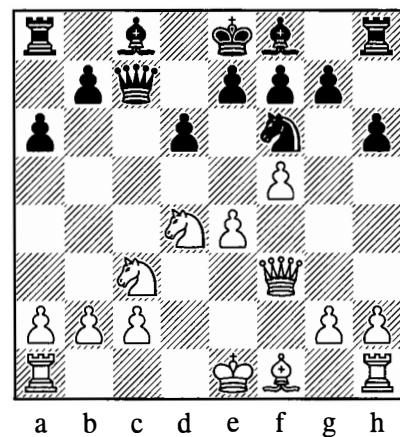
13.g4

White is not helped by 13.f5N b5 14.g4 b4 15.♗d5 ♗xd5 16.♗xd5 a5†.

He might have done better to consider 13.♗d3N, although after 13...b5 14.♗b1 ♗b7∞ Black can look to the future with confidence.

13...exf4! 14.♗b1 ♗e6 15.♗d4 ♗ac8 16.♗f5 ♗xf5 17.exf5 d5†

Black had won the opening battle in Licina – Danner, Aschach 2001.



10...♗c5!

10...g5?!N was suggested by Palliser, but 11.fxg6 fxg6 12.♗d5 ♗xd5 13.exd5 ♗g7 14.0–0–0 ♗d7 15.♗d3 looks unpleasant.

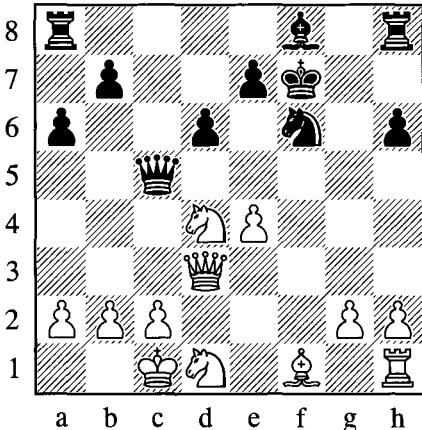
11.0–0–0 g5 12.fxg6!

This is certainly the most principled attacking try. Instead 12.♗b3 ♗e5 13.♗c4 ♗g7 was roughly equal in Neven – Hansen, Calgary 2010. In principle, the position featuring a blocked centre should not be too bad for Black, who can catch up on development and gradually aim to exploit his superiority on the dark squares.

12...♗g4 13.gxf7† ♗xf7 14.♗d3 ♗xd1 15.♗xd1

Up to this point we have been following the recent game Kokarev – Kovalyov, Mumbai

2010. The last few moves have been more or less forced on both sides, but now Black must make an important decision.



15...Bg7!?

This looks more promising than the game continuation of 15...e6, when 16.g3! gave White some initiative.

16.Bb3†

This forcing move must be critical. If White prefers the quieter 16.Be2, then 15...e6! becomes more attractive than on the previous move, as the white bishop has lost some options.

16...d5!

This principled move leads to complications that are not unfavourable to Black.

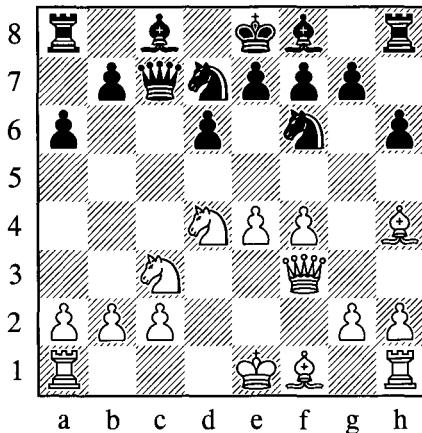
17.Qf5 Qxe4

An equally valid alternative is: 17...Bhc8 18.Qc3 e6 19.Wxb7† Wc7 20.Wxc7† Bxc7 21.Qxg7 Bxg7 22.exd5 Qxd5=

18.Qd3 Qf6 19.Qe1 Bhe8 20.Qh4 Wc7 21.Qg6† Bg8 22.Qxe8 Bxe8

The resulting position holds chances for both sides (analysis by Tiemann).

B22) 9.Qh4



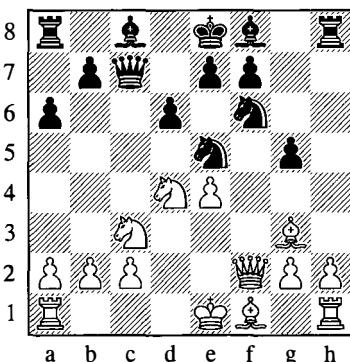
9...g5!

This pawn sacrifice provides the justification for Black's entire set-up. The whole concept is extremely fresh, with practically all the games having been played from 2009 onwards.

10.fxg5 hxg5 11.Qxg5

It is unlikely that White can get anywhere by declining the offer.

11.Qg3 Qe5 12.Qf2



12...Bg4!N

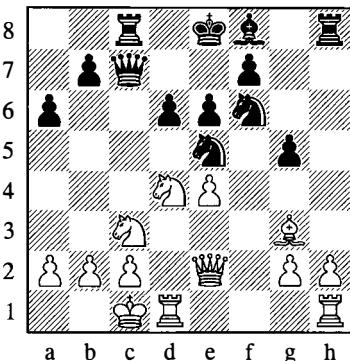
Black wants to exchange light-squared bishops, as the subsequent knight jump to c4 will gain in strength. 12...Wc5 13.0–0–0 Qd7 led to a tense position with mutual chances in Frick – Bogner, Triesen 2010.

13.Qe2

This is the logical way to prepare castling. Instead 13.♗f3 ♗xf3† 14.gxf3 ♗e6 15.0–0–0 ♗g7 16.♗b1 ♘a5 is great for Black.

13...♗xe2 14.♗xe2 e6 15.0–0–0 ♜c8

15...♗c4 16.♗hf1 ♗h5 does not work here, because of 17.♗xf7!! with a huge attack.



16.♗b1

16.♗hf1 ♗h5! also looks good for Black.

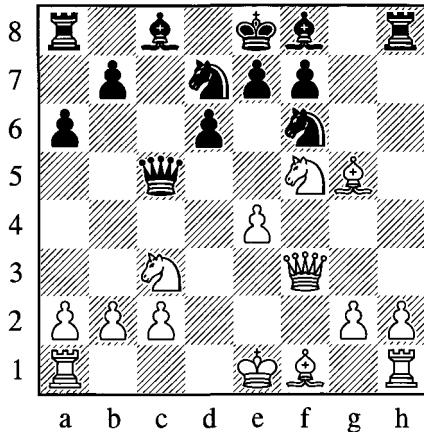
16...♗c4

Black has a promising attack (Tiemann).

11...♘c5!

This is an important resource, as the double attack on d4 and g5 will force some kind of concession. White has three plausible responses: **B221) 12.♗f5?!, B222) 12.♗e3** and finally the critical **B223) 12.♗e3!**.

B221) 12.♗f5?!



This turns out to be rather risky, and is unlikely to attract many followers.

12...e6

This more or less forces White to give up his valuable dark-squared bishop, after which Black will practically be guaranteed healthy and long-lasting positional compensation.

13.♗xf6

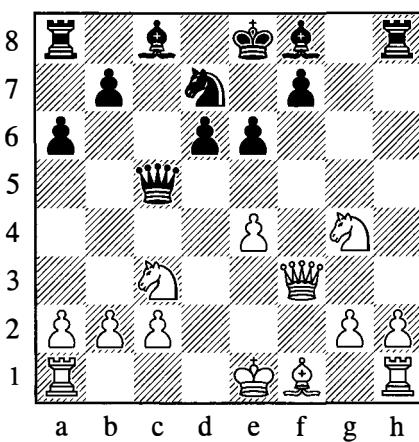
Inadequate is 13.♗e3? ♘b4 14.0–0–0 exf5 15.♗xf5 ♘h5 16.♗f3 ♗e7 when White does not have enough for the piece, and after the further 17.♗e2 ♘e5 18.♗f4 ♗g4 19.♗xg4 ♘c4! Black was already winning in Kanovsky – Navara, Ostrava 2010.

13.♗xd6† ♗xd6 14.♗xf6 ♗xf6 15.♗xf6 ♗g3† transposes to the following note.

13...♗xf6 14.♗e3

Risky is 14.♗xd6† ♗xd6 15.♗xf6 ♗g3† 16.♗e2N (An attempt to improve over 16.hxg3? ♘e3† 17.♗e2 ♘xh1† Namyslo – Bogner, Bad Liebenzell 2010.) 16...♗e5 17.♗g5 b5 with excellent compensation for Black.

14...♗d7 15.♗g4



15...b5!N

This suggestion of Tiemann looks like the most promising course of action, although in a way Black is spoiled for choice as the following alternative is also perfectly adequate:

15... $\mathbb{Q}g7$

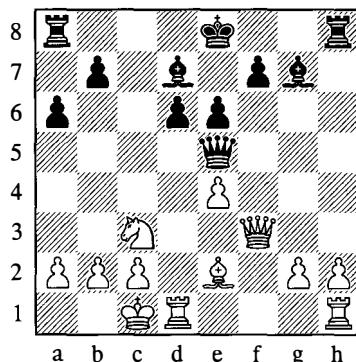
There is even a third playable option in 15... $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{W}xe5$ 17.g3 $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 19.0–0–0 Garnelis – Kleijn, Fermo 2009, 19...0–0–0N with even chances.

16.0–0–0 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{W}xe5$

17... $\mathbb{Q}xe5$?N was also not at all bad.

18. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$

Black has promising compensation, although it would be too much to claim an objective advantage. However, in the one game that reached this position, White went astray.



19. $\mathbb{W}g3?$

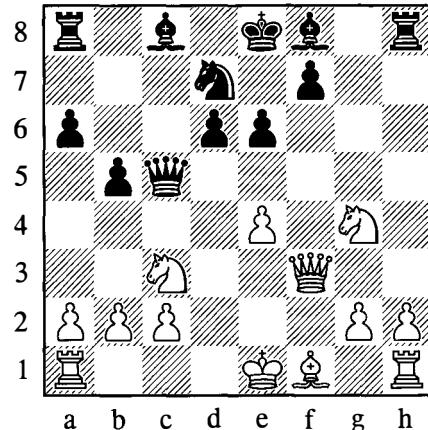
Best play looks to be: 19. $\mathbb{Q}hf1$ N 0–0–0! 20.h3 (20. $\mathbb{W}xf7?$ $\mathbb{W}g5$ † 21. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}df8$ 22.h4 $\mathbb{Q}xh4$ 23. $\mathbb{W}xf8$ † $\mathbb{Q}xf8$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}xf8$ † $\mathbb{Q}c7$ †) 20... $\mathbb{Q}hf8$ ≈

19... $\mathbb{W}xg3$ 20.hxg3 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}f3$

This position was reached in Narmontas – Bogner, Kemer 2009, and here Black should have played:

21... $\mathbb{Q}e5$?N

When White faces a difficult defence in the endgame.



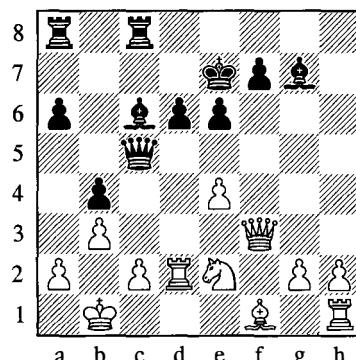
16.e5

This principled move fails to solve White's problems, although it is doubtful that the quieter alternatives can improve his fate.

16.0–0–0 $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}f6$ † (17.a3 $\mathbb{Q}g7$) 17... $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 18. $\mathbb{W}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 19. $\mathbb{W}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 20. $\mathbb{W}xc5$ $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 22.a4 $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}b4$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3$! 24.bxc3 $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ b4†

16. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 17. $\mathbb{W}f4$ (or 17. $\mathbb{Q}f6$ † $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 18. $\mathbb{W}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 19. $\mathbb{W}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ with some initiative for Black) 17... $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 18.0–0–0 $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 19.bxc3 $\mathbb{W}xc3$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}hf1$ 0–0–0 21. $\mathbb{W}xf7$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ †

16. $\mathbb{Q}f6$ † $\mathbb{Q}e7$! 17. $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ (17. $\mathbb{Q}g4$ b4 18. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{W}xc2$) 17... $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 18.0–0–0 $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ b4 20. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}a4$! 21. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}hc8$ 22.b3 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ †



White must worry not only about ... $\mathbb{W}e5$

with decisive threats, but also simply ...a5-a4 with a strong attack.

16...♝b8 17.0-0-0

17.exd6 is strongly met by 17...f5! 18.♗f2 ♜b7 19.♗e2 ♜xd6 20.♗d1 ♜e7 21.♗d3 b4 22.♗b1 e5, when Black's two bishops and mobile central pawns give him fantastic compensation for a mere pawn.

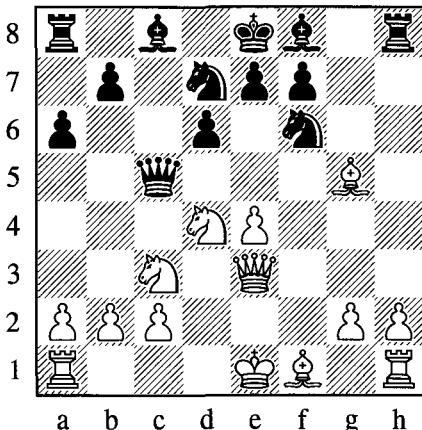
17...♝xe5 18.♗f6†

After 18.♗xe5 ♜xe5† The bishops will become monsters.

18...♝e7 19.♗f4 ♜b7 20.♗fe4 ♜h6 21.♗xh6 ♜xh6 22.♗xc5 dxc5†

White faces a miserable defensive task in this ending. Thanks once again to Christoph Tiemann for sharing his analysis of the new idea of 15...b5.

B222) 12.♗e3



12...♝g4

This appears natural, although Black could also consider 12...♝h7?!N 13.♗h4 ♜hf6!, when I have not been able to find anything better than 14.♗g5 repeating the position.

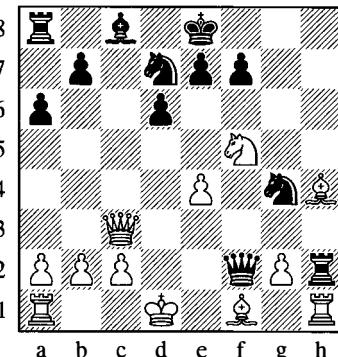
13.♗d2 ♜g7

Black should not allow himself to be

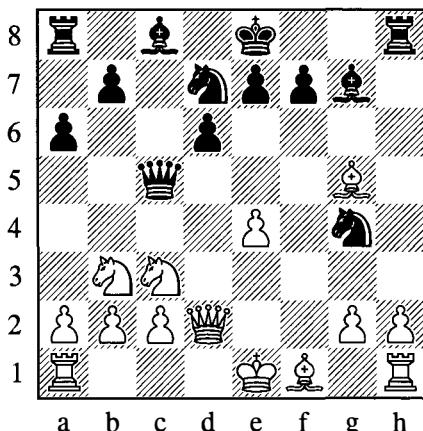
distracted by trifles such as the h2-pawn: 13...♝xh2?! 14.♗d5 looks risky for him.

14.♗b3N

This is the natural way to improve over 14.♗f5? ♜xc3 15.♗xc3? (15.bxc3 ♜df6†) 15...♝f2† 16.♗d1 ♜xh2 17.♗h4



17...♝xh4! 18.♗xh4 (18.♗xh4 ♜xf1† 19.♗e1 ♜f2† 20.♗d2 ♜xg2 21.♗e3 ♜xe4† 22.♗c1 ♜g6→) 18...♝e3† 19.♗c1 ♜xf1 20.♗f5 This position was reached in the game R. Griffiths – D. Eggleston, Torquay 2009, and here 20...♝f8N would have virtually assured Black's victory.



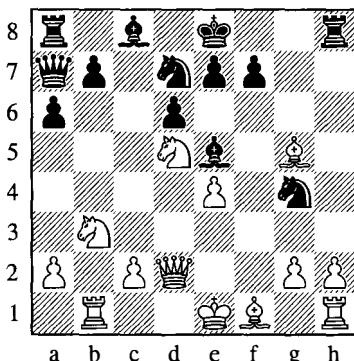
14...♜xc3

It looks sensible to take the opportunity to shatter White's pawns, although Black can also consider a more creative approach with:

14... $\mathbb{W}a7?$! 15. $\mathbb{Q}d5$

This looks critical, although we could also have fun analysing 15. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ b5∞ and 15.h3 b5∞.

15... $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ 16. $\mathbb{E}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$



17. $\mathbb{Q}c7+$

17... $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ is well met by 17...f6!, for instance:

18. $\mathbb{Q}a5$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 19. $\mathbb{W}e2$ $\mathbb{E}h7\#$

17... $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xa8$ $\mathbb{Q}df6!$

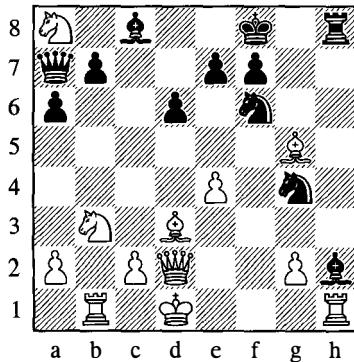
Incredibly, Black does not even have to recapture on a8, and can instead use his pieces to launch an attack without suffering from the absence of the rook.

19. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{E}xh2?$

19... $\mathbb{E}xh2$ 20. $\mathbb{E}xh2$ $\mathbb{Q}g3\#$ would lead to a perpetual, but where's the fun in that?

20. $\mathbb{Q}d1$

After 20. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}g3\#$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ the white king feels distinctly uncomfortable.



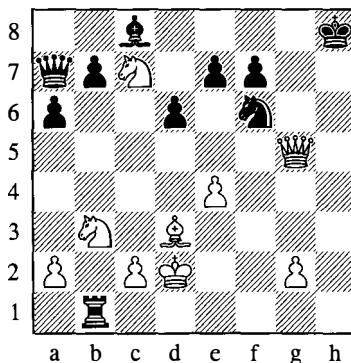
20... $\mathbb{E}h5$

Another possibility is 20... $\mathbb{Q}f2\#$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}xh1$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}h6\#$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}c7\#$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ b6 25. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 26.exd5 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ with unclear play.

21. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6!$?

21... $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 22. $\mathbb{E}xh5$ $\mathbb{W}g1\#$ leads to a draw after 23. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ when neither side can avoid the perpetual.

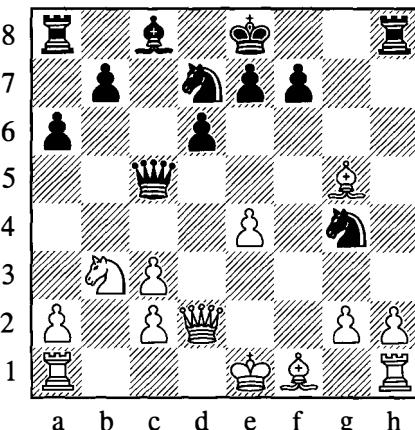
22. $\mathbb{Q}c7$ $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 23. $\mathbb{W}xf4$ $\mathbb{E}xh1\#$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{E}xb1$ 25. $\mathbb{W}h6\#$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 26. $\mathbb{W}g5\#$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$



27. $\mathbb{W}h4\#$!

The queen must check here in order to cover the f2-square, thus ensuring that 27... $\mathbb{Q}h7?$ would now lose to 28.e5. And after all of that excitement, the game finally ends in a draw!

15.bxc3



15...♝e5!?

Palliser mentions 15...♝c7, which also looks playable and should give Black enough compensation.

16.0–0–0 ♗b6

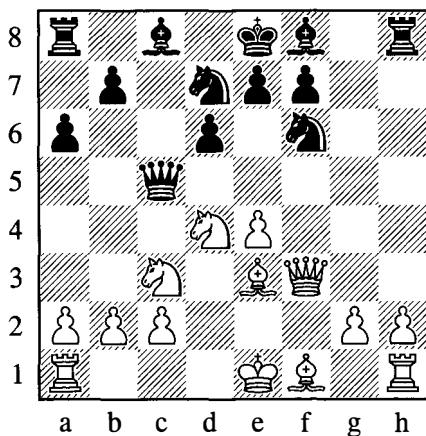
In this complex position I am not sure if White has anything better than:

17.♗f4 ♝f6 18.♗g5 ♘e5

Repeating the position.

B223) 12.♗e3!

Finally we come to White's most natural and challenging response.

**12...♞e5**

Black executes the first of two tempo-gaining knight moves.

13.♝e2

The alternative is riskier.

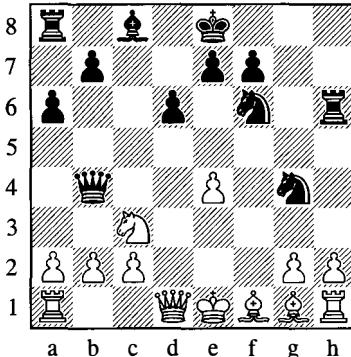
13.♝d1?!

This enables Black to develop promising counterplay as follows:

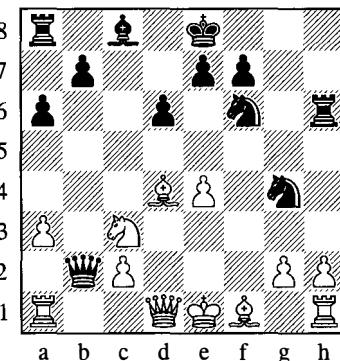
13...♝eg4 14.♗g1 ♜h6! 15.♗f5 ♘b4!

16.♗xh6

16.♗d4? runs into 16...♜xf5! 17.exf5 ♘e3! when White is under pressure.

16...♜xh6**17.♗e2N**

White needs to improve over 17.a3? ♜xb2 18.♗d4 Ahner – Tiemann, Badenweiler 2009, when Black overlooked a stunning idea:



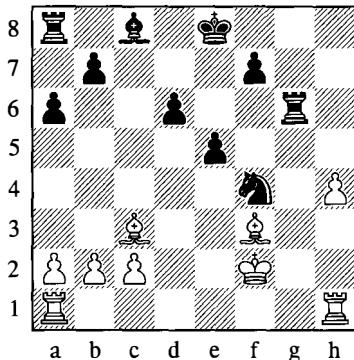
18...♞e3!!N 19.♗xe3 ♘xc3† It was trivial to see that Black could regain the piece, but there is still the small matter of the rook hanging on h6. 20.♗d2 ♘e5! 21.♗xh6 ♘xe4 Despite the extra rook, it turns out that White is under serious pressure: 22.♗e2 (22.♗c1 ♘c3†–; 22.♗b5† axb5 23.0–0 ♘c5†+) 22...♞c3 23.♗d3 ♘xe2 24.♗d2 ♘f5 25.♗e3 ♘d5† (25...♝c8†) 26.♗xe2 ♘xg2† 27.♗f2 ♘g4† 28.♗e3 ♘h3† 29.♗d2 ♘xh6†+

17...♜g6

17...♞xe4 18.a3 ♘xc3 19.axb4 ♘xd1 20.♗xd1 ♘e5 reaches a roughly equal semi-endgame, with chances for both sides.

18.♗d2 ♘xe4 19.♗d4 ♘xd4 20.♗xd4 ♘xc3

21.♕xc3 ♔e3 22.♗f2 ♔xg2 23.h4 ♔f4 24.♗f3 e5



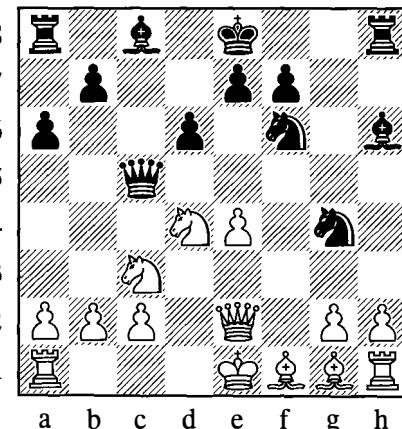
This interesting ending sees Black's central pawns pitted against White's bishop pair and passed h-pawn. Obviously both sides have certain advantages, but I am confident that Black's chances are at least not worse.

13...♔eg4 14.♗g1

14.0–0–0?? ♔xe3 15.♗xe3 ♖h6+–

14...♖h6!

Black does not need to worry about discovered attacks at this moment.



15.g3

15.♗f5?! ♖b4 is awkward, and so far nobody seems to have tried 15.♗db5 ♖c6 16.♗a7 ♖c7 17.♗xc8 ♖xc8 when "unclear" seems like a fair

assessment. Two other moves have been tried in practice:

15.♗b3 should not be dangerous, and after 15...♗c7 16.g3 ♔e5 17.h3 ♔e6 Black was already more comfortable in Pon – Ziaziulkina, Kemer 2009.

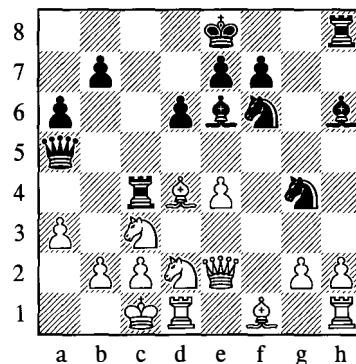
The following game was a brutal demonstration of Black's attacking potential:

15.a3 ♖g5

15...♗a5?N and 15...♗b6?N also deserve attention.

16.♗f3 ♖a5 17.♗d2 ♔e6 18.♗d4 ♖c8
19.0–0–0 ♖c4!

Forcing the exchange of White's valuable dark-squared bishop.



20.♗xf6?

White had to play 20.♗d3N ♔e5 21.♗xe5 ♖xe5 22.♗b1, although he remains clearly worse after 22...♗d4 23.♗e2 ♖d8, as pointed out by Richard Palliser.

20...♗xf6 21.♗b1

21.♗d3 ♖xc3 22.♗xc3 ♖xc3 23.bxc3 ♔xe4 is also hopeless for White.

21...♖xc3 22.bxc3 ♖xa3

Black has a crushing attack, and he finished the game in style:

23.♗c4 ♖xc3 24.♗d3 ♔xe4! 25.♗xe4 ♖b4† 26.♗a2 ♗g7 27.♗d4 ♗xd4 28.♗xd4 ♗h5!

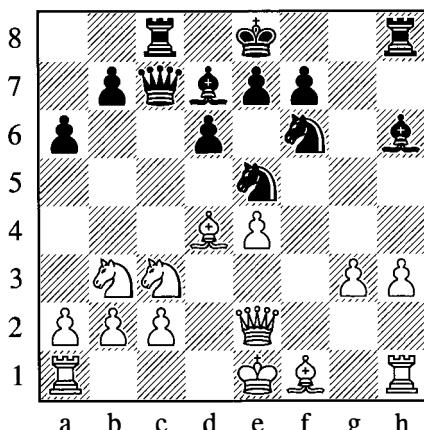
0–1 Harutjunyan – Kokarev, Bhubaneswar 2010.

15...♝e5

This looks better than 15...♝b6?! 16.♗b1 ♜a5, Rasulov – Kleijn, Fermo 2009, at which point 17.♗g2!N would have given White good chances for an advantage as follows: 17...♝g8 18.♗d1 (18.♗f5 only leads to a draw after 18...♝xe4! 19.♗xh6 ♗xc3 20.bxc3 ♜xc3† 21.♗d2 ♜e5† 22.♗d1 ♜xh6 23.♗xh6 ♜g4† 24.♗c1 ♜e1† 25.♗b2 ♜b4†=) 18...♝d7 19.♗f5±

16.h3 ♗d7 17.♗b3 ♜c7 18.♗d4 ♜c8=

Black has more or less completed his development, and his pieces are a picture of harmony. Further practical testing is needed, but I am pretty sure Black is at least not worse. From this position I found one practical encounter, which we will follow for a few more moves.

**19.♗g1 ♜e6**

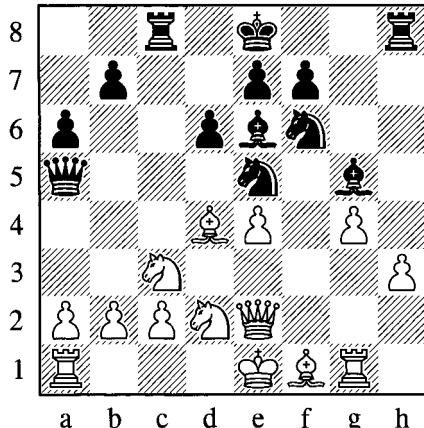
19...b5?N also deserves attention.

20.g4

20.♗g2 b5 21.a3 ♗fd7∞

20...♝g5 21.♗d2 ♜a5!N

After 21...b5 22.a3 ♗fd7 23.0–0–0 ♗b6 24.♗b1 White was consolidating and stood slightly better in Radulski – Raykhman, Cappelle la Grande 2010.

**22.♗b3**

I see nothing better for White than repeating the position. For instance, 22.a3? runs into: 22...♗xd2†! 23.♗xd2 ♜c4 24.♗xe5 ♜xe4†

22...♜c7

With ideas of ...♝c4 and ...♝h4† in the air, White had better settle for half a point.

Conclusion

The modern chess world is characterized by the ever-increasing depth of computer-assisted opening preparation, with some commentators even speculating about the death of our beloved game within the next however many years. In such times, it is all the more refreshing to witness the emergence of a brand new counterattacking concept in what is possibly the most heavily analysed opening system of all: the Najdorf. The paucity of practical examples in certain critical lines prevents us from drawing any firm conclusions about the 6...♝bd7 system, but the results of the available games, combined with some of the original analysis contained within these pages, lead me to evaluate Black's system quite optimistically. If the readers feel the same way, perhaps they will make their own contribution in moulding the development of this new and exciting system.

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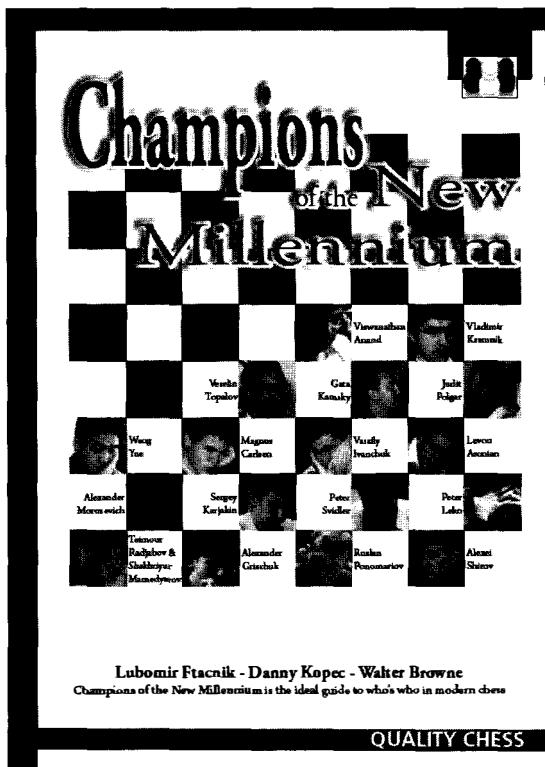
B223) 12.♗e3! 417

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by Lubomir Ftacnik, Danny Kopec and Walter Browne

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Lubomir Ftacnik is a Slovakian Grandmaster and famous chess author.

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Attacking the Spanish - Marshall, Schliemann & Gajewski

By Sabino Brunello

The Spanish opening, 1.e4 e5 2.Qf3 Qc6 3.Qb5, is so respected that many Black players immediately start defending. Brunello shows that Black can engage in a tense fight for the win right from the start. The three gambits considered in this book have all been recently tested by top 10 players.

1.e4 e5 2.Qf3 Qc6 3.Qb5 f5

The **Schliemann**, with its reversed King's Gambit flair, has always been popular with club players, but grandmasters knew it was unsound. Then Teimour Radjabov started playing it successfully against the elite and sparked a revival.

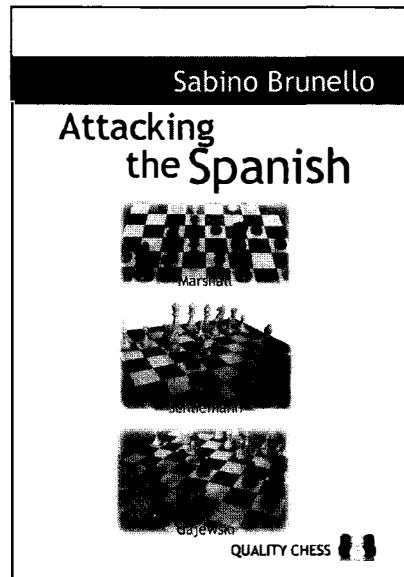
1.e4 e5 2.Qf3 Qc6 3.Qb5 a6 4.Qa4 Qf6
5.0-0 Qe7 6.Qe1 b5 7.Qb3 d6 8.c3 0-0 9.h3 Qa5
10.Qc2 d5

The **Gajewski variation** is brand new. The position after White's tenth move had been reached a thousand times with 10...c5 universally played, when in the summer of 2007 the Polish grandmaster Gajewski revealed that Black has a fascinating gambit at his disposal.

1.e4 e5 2.Qf3 Qc6 3.Qb5 a6 4.Qa4 Qf6
5.0-0 Qe7 6.Qe1 b5 7.Qb3 0-0 8.c3 d5

The **Marshall Attack** is sound and aggressive, so it is no surprise that it is favoured by the world's best. The theory is so complex that an expert guide is required, and Brunello is well suited to the task, having played the Marshall for most of his life.

International Master Sabino Brunello is one of the leaders of the youthful revival in Italian chess. Brunello is still a teenager, but his rating is already 2550 and increasing daily. By the time this book is printed he will probably be a grandmaster.



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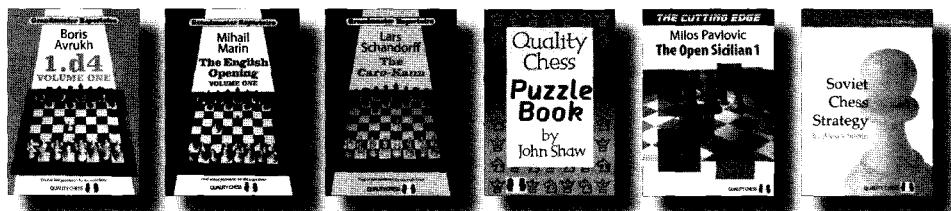
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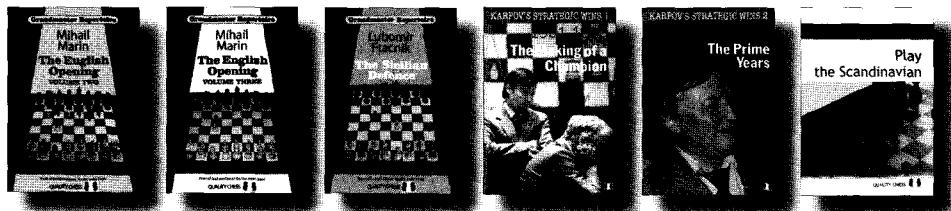
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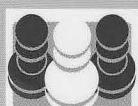
Lubomir Ftacnik is a grandmaster from Slovakia. Despite his numerous international tournament victories, from European Junior Champion in 1977 to winning the World Open in 2008, he is most famous as an opening analyst.

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