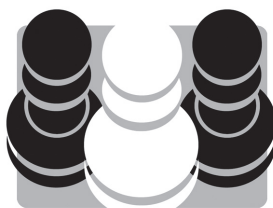*Grandmaster Repertoire 13*

The Open Spanish

By

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Preface

By the Author

My elder brother Sasha, IM Alex Mikhalevski, taught me to play chess when I was 4, just before he started his Soviet Army service. He returned from the army two years later and then I began to train seriously under his guidance. You may be wondering why I have started this Introduction with something unrelated to the Open Spanish? However, it *is* related as I have been playing the Open Spanish ever since I started playing chess and it was my brother who taught me this variation. Curiously enough, he played the French Defence when he joined the army, but returned from it playing the Open Spanish. In the army he had the privilege of being trained by a great theoretician, and in his prime one of the best players in the world, Isaac Boleslavsky. Boleslavsky recommended that he play this system. So it is quite possible I would not be writing this book, nor playing the Open Spanish, were it not for this great man, who died when I had barely learned how the pieces move.

In January 1991 I moved with my family to Israel. Only two months later I played my first tournament there, the Israel Open Championship. I won a decisive last-round game against the famous GM Yehuda Gruenfeld with the help of the Open Spanish, crushing my opponent in good style. It was the first of numerous encounters with Yehuda in this system.

Since my childhood right up to the moment of writing these words, the Open Spanish has served me faithfully and helped me to win many important games, so when Quality Chess asked me to write a book on this opening system I didn't have to think twice. I would also like to add that the book is not only about the Open variation, as it is a repertoire book that starts after 4.♗a4 ♘f6. Therefore all White's side lines, such as 5.d3 and 5.♕e2 and other deviations from 5.0–0, are also covered with no less attention than the Open variation itself.

I hope everyone enjoys the book and if a few of you decide to take up the Open Spanish then I shall consider my mission to be accomplished.

Victor Mikhalevski
Beer-Sheva, December 2012

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**Main Lines – 1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 a6 4.♗a4 ♘f6
5.0–0 ♘xe4 6.d4 b5 7.♗b3 d5 8.dxe5 ♗e6**

5.0–0

6.d4 b5 – Sidelines

Variation Index

C) note to 8.dxe5

C1) after 11.♘d2

C2) after 13.♔f1

9...c5!N

11...♕h4!N

13...♗c6!?N

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 a6 4.♗a4 ♘f6 5.0–0 ♘xe4 6.d4 b5

From this position the main line is of course 7.♗b3, coverage of which will begin in the next chapter. In this chapter we will deal with three rare alternatives: **A) 7.d5**, **B) 7.♖e1** and **C) 7.♘xe5**.

A) 7.d5

This line entered the theory books thanks to the efforts of the strong German player Curt Richter in the 1930s, although Vidmar was the first to introduce it in 1902.

7...bxa4 8.dxc6 d6

Black ensures the integrity of his pawn structure.

9.♖e1

9.c4 has also been tested in practice. Here I like the untested 9...♗f5!N intending to meet 10.♕xa4 with 10...♗e7 11.♖e1 ♘c5 12.♕a5 ♘d3 13.♖d1 ♘xc1 14.♖xc1 ♗e4!∓ when Black's advantage is beyond any doubt.

9...f5!

I like this ambitious move more than the popular 9...♘f6.
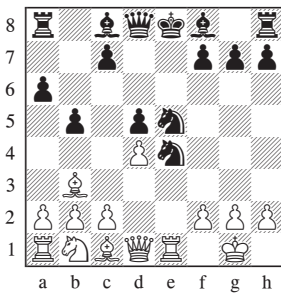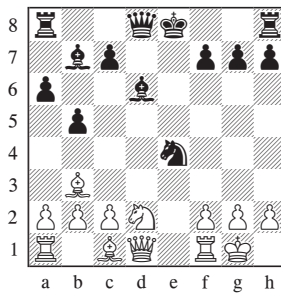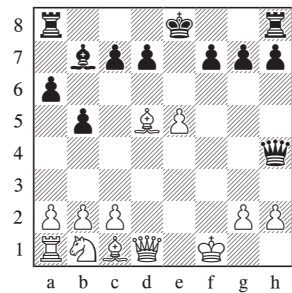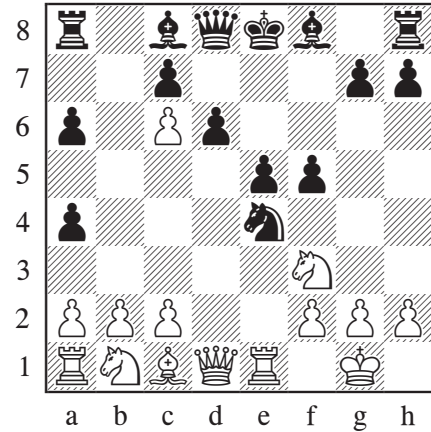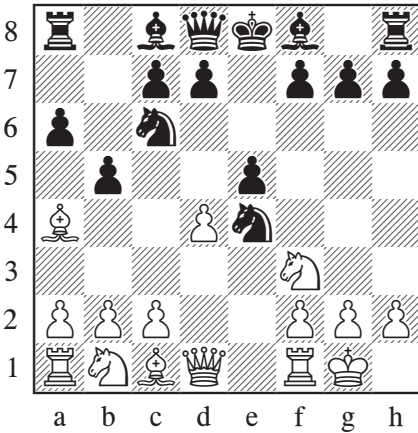
10.c4

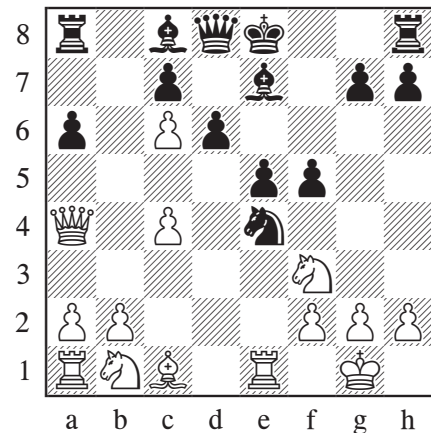Other moves also fail to solve White's problems.

10.♘bd2 ♘c5 11.b4 axb3 12.♘xb3 ♘e6 13.c4 ♗e7 14.♕d5 ♗f6∓ Roethgen – Popp, corr. 1958.

10.♕d5 ♗e7 11.♘c3 ♘c5 (11...♘xc3 12.bxc3 ♗f6) 12.b4 axb3 13.axb3 ♗e6 14.♕d1 0–0 Black's bishop pair and central pawn majority gave him the upper hand in Pinasco – Medveski, e-mail 2000.

I also considered 10.♘fd2N ♘xd2 11.♕xd2 ♗e6 12.♘c3 ♗e7 13.♘d5 0–0∓ and Black is better.

10...♗e7 11.♕xa4

11.♘c3!?N ♘xc3 12.bxc3 0–0 13.♕d5† ♔h8 intending ...♖f6 is also better for Black.

11...0–0 12.♘bd2 ♘c5∓

In Huguet – Demarre, Charbonnieres 1968, Black's strong centre and bishop pair made him the clear favourite.
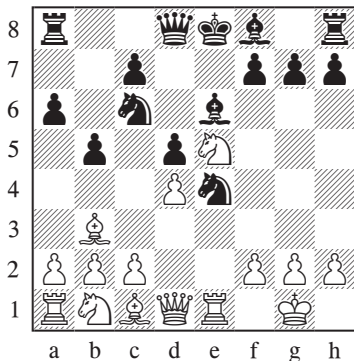
B) 7.♖e1
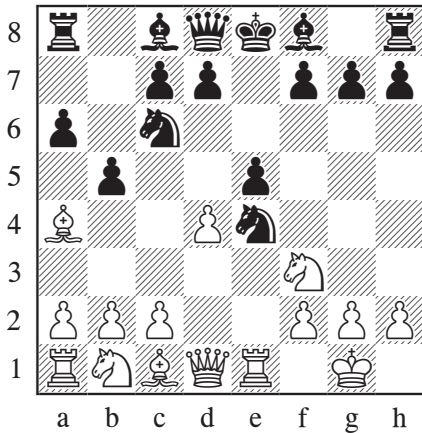
7...bxa4

I believe Black should take the chance to secure the advantage of the bishop pair. Nevertheless there is a perfectly playable alternative:

7...d5 8.♗b3 ♗e6 9.♘xe5?!

White should prefer 9.dxe5 transposing to the rare but interesting 9.♖e1!? variation in the main line of the Open Spanish – see Chapter 11 on page 193.

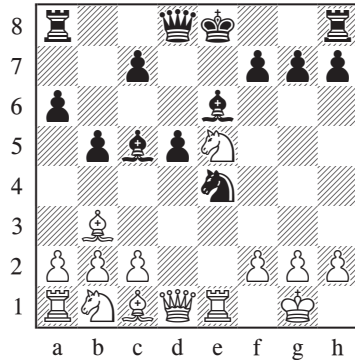The text move meets with a convincing reply.

9...♘xd4! 10.♕xd4

10.♘c3N is another idea, but after 10...♘xb3 11.axb3 ♘xc3 12.bxc3 ♗d6 13.♗f4 0–0 White is a pawn down for not much.

10...♗c5 11.♕d1

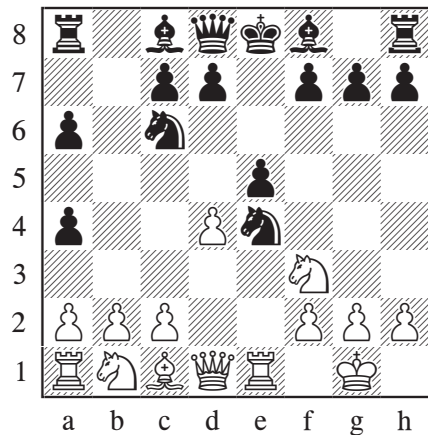This position was reached in Rusu – Ignat, Romania 1994, and here Black should have played:

11...♗xf2†N 12.♔f1

12.♔h1? ♗g3!–+

12...♗xe1 13.♕xe1 0–0

With a rook and two pawns again two minor pieces, plus the safer king and a dominating knight on e4, Black is better.

8.♖xe4

White should stick with the obvious move, as attempts to do without it may easily backfire:

8.d5 ♘xf2! 9.♔xf2 ♗c5† 10.♗e3 ♗xe3†

11.♖xe3 ♘e7 12.♘xe5 (12.♖xe5N d6 13.♖e1 0–0 is no better for White) 12...0–0 Black is a pawn up, Almeida – Maes, corr. 1994.

8.♘xe5N looks clever, but Black has an equally cunning reply: 8...d5! 9.♘xc6 ♕f6 10.f3 ♕xc6
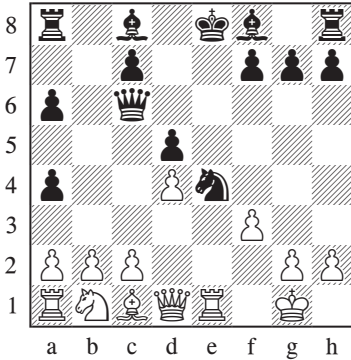
11.c4!? (11.fxe4 dxe4 is also in Black's favour.) 11...♕xc4 12.fxe4 ♗b4 Black completes development and retains an extra pawn.
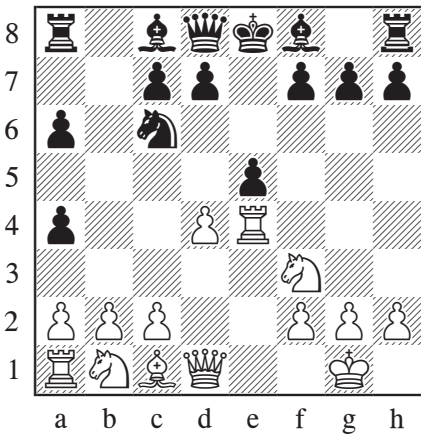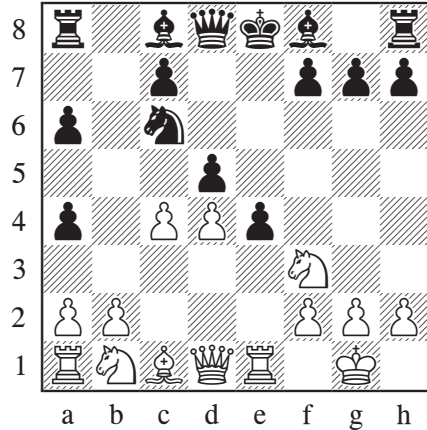

8...d5
Now Black takes the centre with the pawns.

9.♖e1 e4 10.c4!N
White's only chance is to undermine the centre.

The feeble 10.c3 was played in Katz – M. Goldberg, Guilderland 2003, and now after

10...♗d6N (10...♗e7N 11.♘e5 ♘xe5 12.dxe5 ♗f5 is also excellent for Black) 11.♕xa4 ♗d7∓ Black has two bishops and a powerful pawn centre.
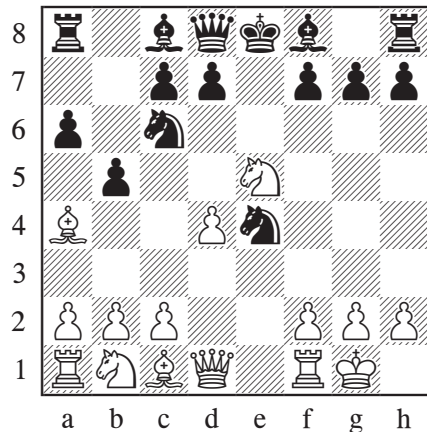

10...♗b4 11.♗d2 a5!?
11...0–0 is enough for equality, but I like the idea of using the isolated a-pawn to make a positive contribution.

12.♕xa4 ♗d7! 13.♕c2 0–0 14.cxd5 exf3 15.dxc6 ♗e6
Despite being a pawn down, Black is at least equal thanks to his safer king and mighty light-squared bishop.

C) 7.♘xe5

This temporarily gives up a piece, but White can regain it soon enough.

7...♘xe5 8.dxe5

Once again the obvious capture is the best.

8.♗b3N has never been tested. The best reply looks to be 8...♘c4! 9.♖e1 d5 10.f3 f5 11.fxe4 dxe4! 12.a4 ♗b7 with an extra pawn for Black.
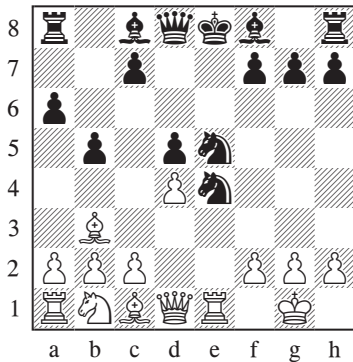
8.♖e1?

This was White's choice is the only game that deviated from 8.dxe5. It is hardly surprising that it has not been repeated, as the move is just bad.

8...d5

8...♗b7!? 9.♗b3 ♕h4! 10.g3 ♕f6† also promises Black a big advantage.

9.♗b3

This was Pelzer – Dimer, Amsterdam 1899, and here Black could have refuted his opponent's play with:

9...c5!N

This wins a piece by force, for example:

10.♗f4

After 10.f3 c4! 11.fxe4 ♘g6! The bishop on b3 is trapped and the game is over.

10...♗g4! 11.♕c1

11.f3 ♘g6! is also hopeless for White.

11...♘g6 12.♗xd5 ♕xd5 13.♘c3 ♕h5 14.♕e3 ♗e7–+

Black retains an extra piece.

After the text move it should be noted that 8...bxa4 9.♕d5 regains the piece and leads to an unclear situation. However, Black has at least two good alternatives, and I will present both **C1) 8...d5** and **C2) 8...♗b7!?** in turn.

C1) 8...d5

From this position play should normally transpose to the 7.♗b3 d5 8.♘xe5 variation, as considered in variation D of the following chapter. In this section we will see what happens if White tries to avoid that path.

9.exd6?!

This independent move only speeds up Black's development. The correct 9.♗b3 reaches the aforementioned variation from the next chapter, coverage of which begins on page 176.

9...♗xd6 10.♗b3 ♗b7 11.♘d2

This position occurred in Borgo – C. Flear, Eupen 1994. Now Black missed a chance to seize the initiative:
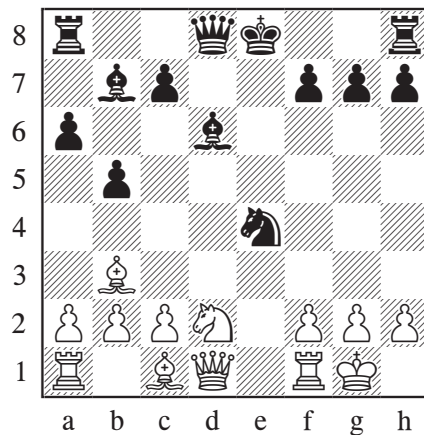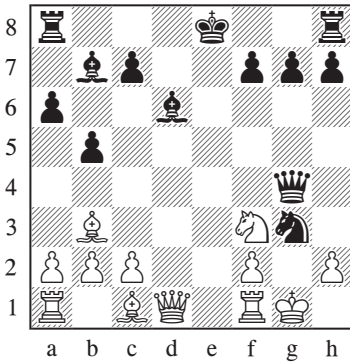

11...♕h4!N 12.h3

12.♘f3 is met by 12...♕h5 with excellent attacking chances.

12.g3

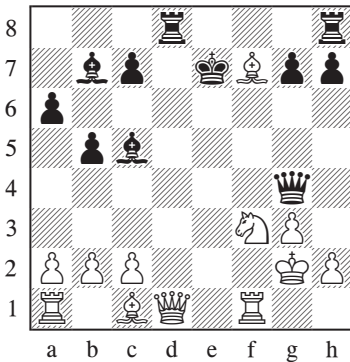Black is well equipped to deal with this move:

12...♘xg3! 13.♘f3! ♕g4!

14.♗xf7†!

14.fxg3 0–0–0! leaves White nothing better than returning the piece: 15.♕d4 ♗xf3 16.♕xg4† ♗xg4 17.♗xf7 ♗h3 18.♖f3 ♗e5! 19.♗g5 ♗xb2∓ Black has a healthy extra pawn.
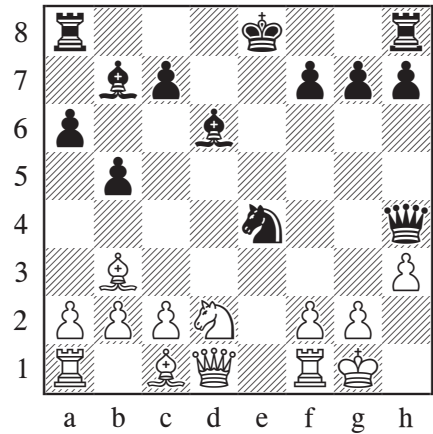
14...♔e7!

And not 14...♔xf7?? 15.♘e5† when White wins.

15.fxg3 ♗c5† 16.♔g2 ♖ad8

17.h3! ♖xd1 18.hxg4 ♖xf1 19.♗g5†! ♔xf7 20.♖xf1 ♖f8!∓

White may have staved off the mating threats, but he still faces a miserable endgame against Black's mighty bishop pair.

12...0–0–0

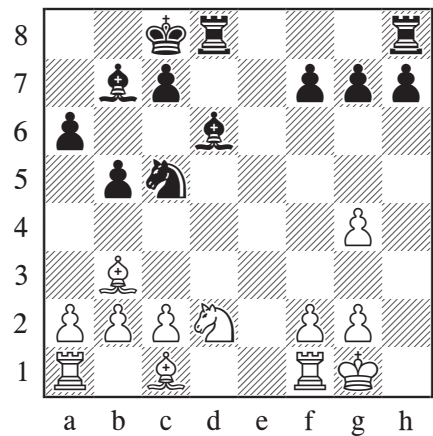Black is obviously better thanks to his development advantage. I conducted some further analysis to see how the game may develop from here.

13.♕g4†

Exchanging queens is an obvious idea, but it does not solve White's problems.

13...♕xg4 14.hxg4 ♘c5!

Intending to secure the advantage of the two bishops. The justification of Black's last move is seen in the following line:


15.♗xf7 ♖df8! 16.b4

After 16.♗b3 h5! 17.g5 h4! followed by ...h3 Black launches a decisive attack along the h-file.

16...♖xf7 17.bxc5 ♗xc5∓

Black has restored material equality and obtained a big advantage thanks to his bishop pair and pressure along the f-file.

C2) 8...♗b7!?

Although there is nothing at all wrong with the previous line, I decided to offer some coverage of this independent alternative, in case the reader does not wish to allow a transposition to the next chapter with 8...d5 9.♗b3.
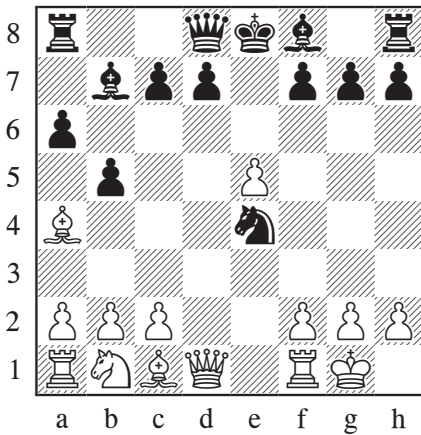
9.♗b3 ♗c5

Black develops actively and takes aim at the f2-pawn. Interestingly, we have now transposed to a separate line of the Spanish, which is normally reached after the following move order: 3...♘f6 4.0–0 ♗c5 5.♘xe5 ♘xe5 6.d4 a6 7.♗a4 b5 8.dxe5 ♘xe4 9.♗b3 ♗b7.

10.♗d5

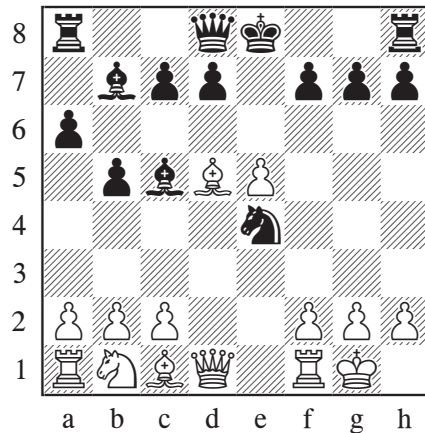This is the most popular continuation, which leads to double-edged positions. Here are two other ideas:

10.♘c3!? should be met by: 10...♘xc3N (Instead 10...♕h4 occurred in Short – Onischuk, Wijk aan Zee 1997, and here White should have played 11.♕f3!N 0–0 12.g3 ♘xc3 13.♕xb7 ♘e2† 14.♔g2 with slightly better

chances.) 11.bxc3 ♕e7 This position has not yet been reached in practice. One sensible move is 12.♕g4, transposing to 10.♕g4 below.

10.♕g4!? should be met by 10...♕e7! when play may continue: 11.♘c3! ♘xc3 12.bxc3 0–0–0 13.♖e1! h5 (13...f6!?N gives roughly equal chances and deserves consideration.)
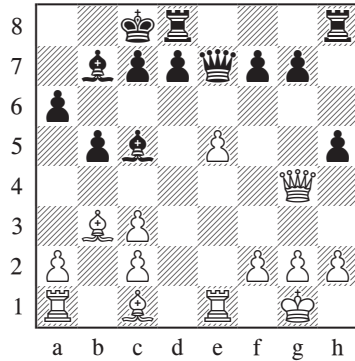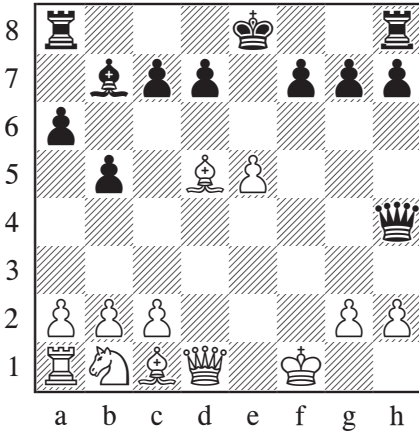

14.♕h3 (14.♕f5N is more accurate although 14...f6! maintains the balance.) This position was reached in Capablanca – Pulvermacher, New York 1907, and here Black should have played 14...f6! with good chances to take over the initiative.
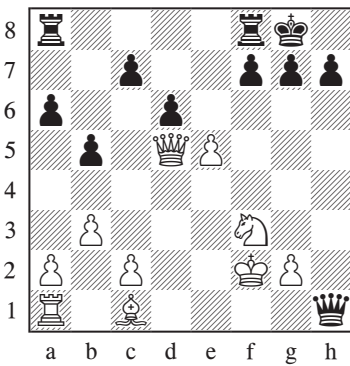

10...♘xf2!?

This exchanging operation has been Black's most popular choice and it seems to be the best.

11.♖xf2 ♗xf2† 12.♔xf2 ♕h4† 13.♔f1

13...♗c6!?N

According to my database, all games have continued with the more obvious 13...♗xd5, which leads to a complicated game with mutual chances: 14.♕xd5 0–0 15.♘d2 ♕xh2 16.♘f3 ♕h1† (16...♕h5!? also leads to a double-edged position.) 17.♔f2 d6 18.b3

18...♕h5! As played in Lovakovic – Oestergaard, e-mail 2002. I believe White's best from here is 19.♗b2N ♖ad8 when the position remains rather unclear.
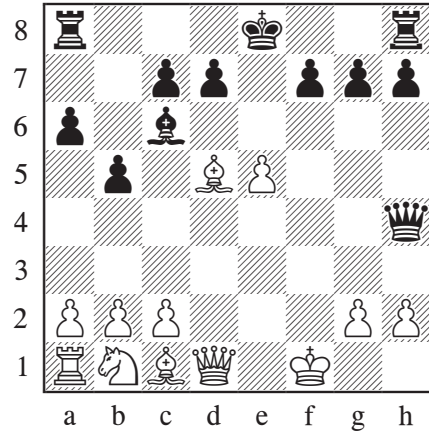
14.♘c3 0–0 15.♔g1 ♖ae8

Compared with the previous note, White's king is safer and the h2-pawn has been preserved. On the other hand, Black is well mobilized and will soon be able to win the e5-pawn.

16.♗xc6 dxc6 17.g3 ♕b4 18.a3 ♕c5† 19.♔g2 ♖xe5 20.♗f4 ♖e7

With the e-file firmly in his hands, Black is at least not worse.

Conclusion

None of the variations examined here have much to offer White other than surprise value. In many lines, if Black plays accurately then the question is not whether he can equalize, but rather if he can claim an advantage at an early stage of the game.