

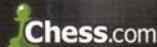
MODERNIZED: THE OPEN SICILIAN

A COMPLETE REPERTOIRE FOR WHITE

IM ZHANIBEK AMANOV
FM KOSTYA KAVUTSKIY



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METROPOLITAN CHESS PUBLISHING

MODERNIZED: THE OPEN SICILIAN

*IM Zhanibek Amanov
FM Kostya Kavutskiy*



METROPOLITAN CHESS PUBLISHING

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To our parents, for their endless support and wisdom

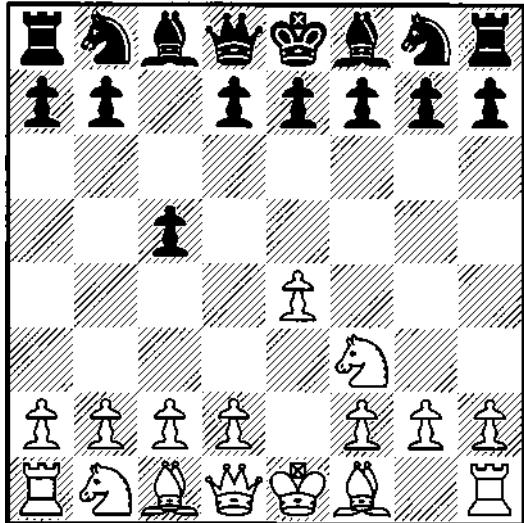
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Symbols

- ! Good move
- !! Excellent move
- ? Bad move
- ?? Blunder
- !? Deserves attention
- ?! Dubious
- # Checkmate
- Forced; the only move
- ≈ Unclear position
- = Equal position
- Slight advantage for White
- ≡ Slight advantage for Black
- ++ Distinct advantage for White
- += Distinct advantage for Black
- +-- White is winning
- + Black is winning
- ^ with the initiative
- with the attack
- ≈≈ insufficient compensation for the material
- ≈≡ sufficient compensation for the material
- † with counterplay
- △ with the idea...
- better is...
- ✗ Novelty
- ⌚ Time pressure

Introduction



1.e4 c5 2.Nf3

The Sicilian Defense is one of the most complex and powerful defenses available to Black, and it duly remains the choice of many top players as their favorite response to **1.e4**. Historically, it has mainly been believed that the critical test of this opening was to attack it directly via the Open Sicilian, which occurs after **1.e4 c5 2.Nf3** followed by **3.d4**, opening up the center. The dynamics of the resulting positions are such that White will get a lead in development while Black will have an extra central pawn. This leads to incredibly sharp middlegames as both sides try to make use of their advantages.

Throughout this book we will attempt to either transform White's lead in development into a devastating kingside attack, or choose a more positional approach, playing for strategic pluses such as having extra space or a healthier pawn structure.

However, our ambitious approach is not without risk; often, the first player to err or lose the thread of the struggle will be quickly punished. It is no surprise that the Sicilian is one of the most popular openings around—it offers Black great potential not just to equalize, but to fight for victory as well! If you feel that you are up to the challenge and interested in pursuing the sharpest way of meeting the Sicilian Defense, then we have written this book for you.

In our humble opinion we believe that the modern philosophy of opening study is to blend the opening and middlegame stages together. Nowadays most professional players make their opening decisions based on the kinds of middlegame positions that they would like to reach. They then study the ins and outs of those middlegames as much (if not more) as the specific moves of each opening.

This is exactly what we believe is the best approach to building an opening repertoire. True mastery of the opening occurs when a player knows the specific theory and understands the future complexities of the structure. After all, what good is it to get a decent position out of the opening if you have no idea what to do with it afterwards?

With this in mind, our main goal in choosing lines to recommend was to reach middlegame positions with well-defined plans for both sides. We then hope to illustrate how to handle a typical middlegame in each variation through the use of instructive games.

The purpose of this book is not only to provide a complete repertoire for the White side of the Open Sicilian, but also to ingrain a number of thematic positional and tactical motifs as well.

After analyzing hundreds of high-level games for this book, we chose only the most instructive to feature, and included many others in variations. Studying each game in depth will definitely broaden your understanding of the Open Sicilian, as well as your understanding of chess as a whole. In addition to providing you with the latest theory, each game also includes a variety of common strategic topics, such as the initiative, positional sacrifices, weak squares, outposts, advantage of the two bishops, pawn storms, opposite side castling—but of course!, positional binds, restriction, and prophylaxis, to name a few. We hope to provide you with meaningful insight as to what it takes to manage the White side of the Open Sicilian successfully.

We'd also like to take this opportunity to manage your expectations. We cannot promise a huge advantage in every line—if that was the case then the Sicilian would certainly not be one of Black's most reliable openings among all levels! The truth is that many of the main lines remain perfectly playable for Black, but that doesn't mean that the well-prepared player shouldn't be optimistic about his or her chances. We have armed you with top notch analysis as well as a repertoire of strategic plans and ideas that you will be able to rely on deep into the middlegame. As is almost always the case, when two players are equally matched in their opening knowledge it will be the player with the better understanding of the ensuing middlegame who will have the upper hand.

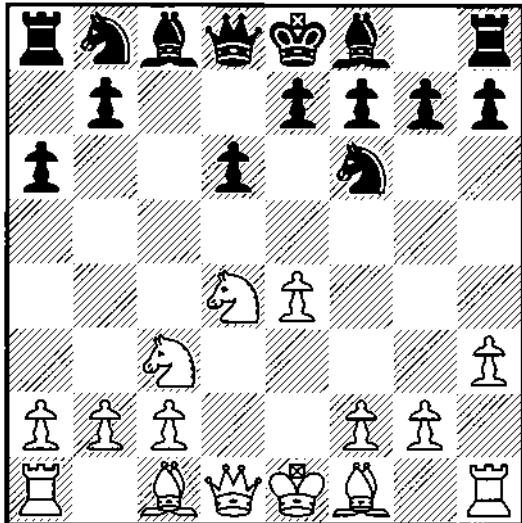
While computers remain a trusted ally in the world of opening analysis, it is important not to rely on the silicon beast too much. We've analyzed and checked each line with the strongest engines available, and while you shouldn't hesitate to verify our analysis, we hope that you'll avoid the novice mistake of depending on the computer's opinion too much.

The ideal way to study this book is to play each move out on a physical chess board—actually moving the pieces with your hand should increase your retention of the material and allow you to absorb more in the long run.

With that, we'd like to wish you the best of luck on your journey and we sincerely thank you for giving us the opportunity to help you improve.

Chapter 1

The Najdorf Variation



1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.h3

To this day, the Najdorf Sicilian remains one of the most popular openings in all of chess, and for good reason. Named after legendary Grandmaster Miguel Najdorf, this combative opening was a favorite choice of none other than Bobby Fischer and Garry Kasparov, as well as countless of other Grandmasters. With that in mind, we've decided to start our courageous journey here.

The **6.h3** variation has been dubbed the Adams Attack, attributed to American master Weaver Adams, who first played the line in the 1940s. 20 years later, Fischer then used it to success in games against Reshevsky, Bolbochan, and even Najdorf himself! Despite this, the variation was not considered as challenging as the more popular **6.Be3** or **6.Bg5** up until just a few years ago, when suddenly many top players started including it in their repertoire.

Nowadays, this line is hotly contested at high levels, and has been used more than once by super-GMs Carlsen, Anand,

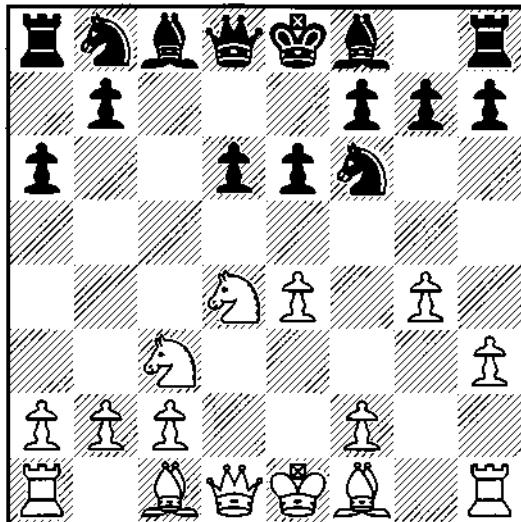
Nakamura, Karjakin, Svidler, and Nepomniachtchi, among others.

In the following chapter we will see White advance g2-g4 and fianchetto the light-squared bishop, which will act as a force to be reckoned with along the long diagonal. Additionally, the g-pawn will also play a vital role in many middlegames, often contributing to a kingside attack.

Chapter 1a will be dedicated to the flexible **6...e6**, Chapter 1b will feature **6...e5**, and Chapter 1c will include all of Black's less popular options, such as **6...Nc6** and **6...g6**, as well as the Scheveningen Variation, which starts with **5...e6**.

Chapter 1a

Najdorf – 6.h3 e6



**1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.h3 e6
7.g4**

We start this chapter with Black's most flexible response to our seemingly innocuous 6th move. This is the move you are most likely to face over the board, as Black's options are still wide open in terms of development.

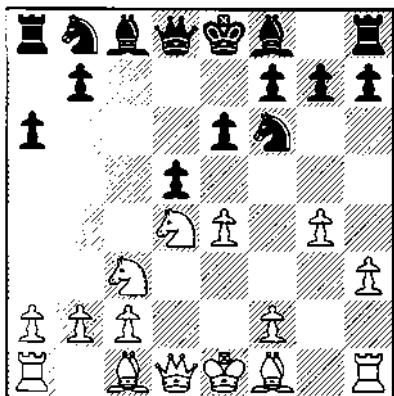
After the natural **7.g4**, Black has mainly chosen between **7...d5**, **7...b5**, **7...Be7**, and **7...h6**. We will cover each of these responses in depth in six instructive games, highlighting dozens of plans and ideas along the way.

One thing to watch out for in this chapter will be the various move order transpositions in certain lines, which can get tricky and will often bear repeating. In our view, the best way to deal with any confusion is to play through each variation on a chess board several times, as this process will help you retain more information.

Game 1

Alekseev – Karjakin
4th FIDE Grand Prix
Nalchik 2009

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4
4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.h3 e6
7.g4 d5

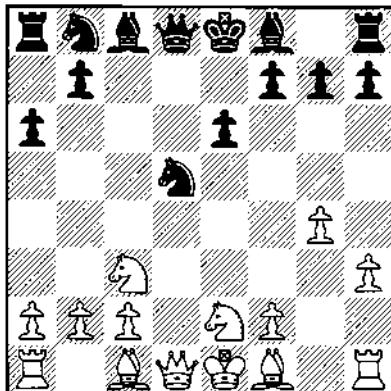


It is logical to start our investigation with this line, as it is a very direct answer to our ambitious plan of 6.h3 and 7.g4. Black moves the d-pawn for the second time in order to create tension in the center and exploit White's kingside expansion.

8.exd5 Nxd5

Now Black threatens Nxc3, and White should avoid the doubled c-pawns unless it comes at the price of Black's dark-squared bishop, which can often be an advantageous trade for us.

9.Nde2



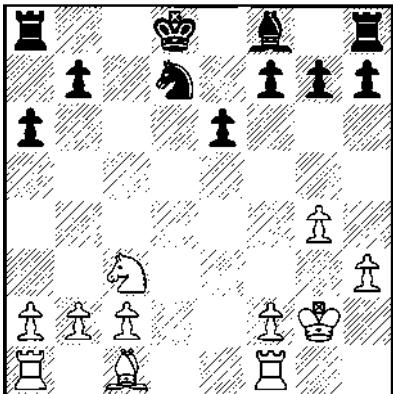
This move has been favored by most major proponents of 6.h3, such as Anand, Nepomniachtchi, and Vachier-Lagrave. White defends the knight and threatens to leave Black with an isolated queen pawn by means of Nxd5.

Less common is 9.Bd2, but it has been played a number of times by strong players. We dislike it since it does not create the threat Nxd5 and allows Black to develop more freely. For instance, 9...b5 seems to be quite reasonable for Black.

9...Bb4

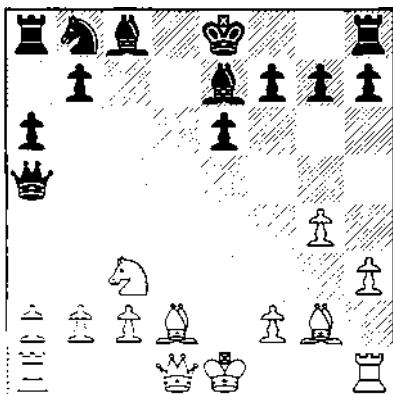
This is by far the most popular and natural move—Black develops, puts more pressure on c3, and prevents Nxd5. Let's take a look at some of Black's lesser attempts for equality:

9...Nxc3?! leads to a slightly worse endgame for Black with no chances of winning, not exactly something a Najdorf player strives for! 10.Qxd8+ Kxd8 11.Nxc3 Bd7. The main attempt to equalize, trying to neutralize White's powerful light-squared bishop. White can fight for the advantage with simple moves: 12.Bg2 Bc6 13.O-O Bxg2 14.Kxg2 Nd7:



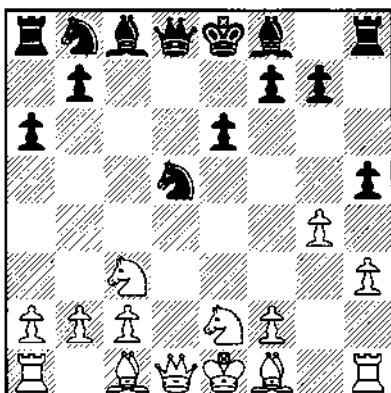
And now 15.Ne4 (*15.Be3!?* is a possibility as well, with the idea 15...Be7 16.Rad1 Kc7 17.f4! Rhd8 18.f5± with annoying pressure along the f-file.) 15...Rc8 16.Rd1 Ke8 17.Be3 Be7 (not 17...Rxc2?! 18.Rac1↑ and White will win the pawn back with interest by the time Black's kingside rook gets into the game.) 18.c3±. White's advantage in development should guarantee play for only two results, Sokolov–Weber, Bad Wiessee 2012.

9...Qa5?! also falls short after 10.Bg2 Nxc3 11.Nxc3 Be7 12.Bd2!



Putting the question to Black's queen. Now Black decided to play 12...Qe5+, suggesting a trade, but White's queenside pressure can be felt in the endgame: 13.Qe2 Qxe2+ 14.Nxe2 Nc6 15.O-O-O±, and White has the more comfortable development with good pressure against the queenside. After 15...Bd7 we have a pleasant choice between 16.Bc3 and 16.Be3, followed by Ng3, Tsereteli–Sebag, Heraklio 2002.

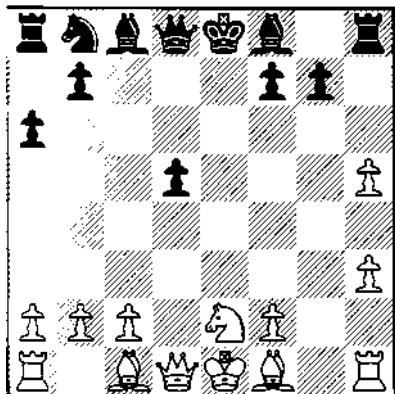
The radical 9...h5!? has been tried by a few GMs, most notably Gelfand:



Black aims to create weaknesses in our kingside and White must react to the threat of taking on g4.

Anand tried 10.g5 Bd6 11.Nxd5 exd5 12.Bg2 O-O 13.O-O $\text{Nf}5$ 14.Qxd5 Be6 15.Qf3 and was able to hold on to his extra pawn, but Anand defended actively and was never in serious danger of losing, Anand-Gelfand, Zürich 2013.

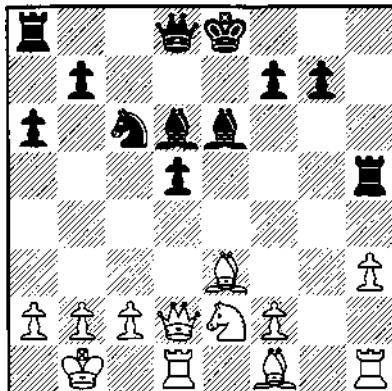
We prefer 10.Nxd5 exd5, and here GM Nepomniachtchi chose 11.g5 and GM Sutovsky chose 11.Nf4, but we recommend the move played by WIM Schut: 11.gxh5!?



Although this move completely spoils White's kingside structure, we will gain some valuable time in the opening while Black spends a tempo recapturing the h-pawn.

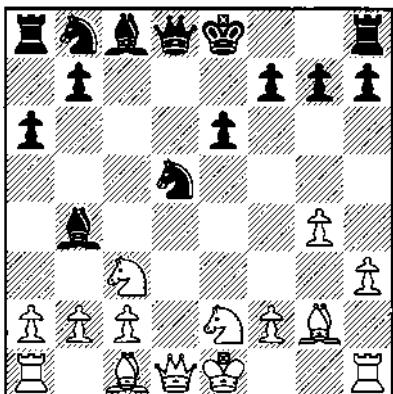
b1) One important line is 11...Bc5 12.Bg2 Rxh5 13.O-O! where White's king can be actively defended: 13...Qh4 (*13...Bxh3 loses to 14.Nf4 Bxg2 15.Rel+! Be4 16.Qxh5+-*) and now 14.Bf4! with the point 14...Bxh3 15.Bg3! Qg5 16.Nf4! Several pieces are hanging, but the complications work out in White's favor: 16...Bxg2 17.Kxg2 Rh6 18.Qxd5+- and it is Black's king who is in serious peril.

b2) If 11...Nc6 then 12.Be3!N Our idea with this move is to quickly play Qd2 and O-O-O, developing harmoniously. It doesn't appear that Black can comfortably equalize. (*12.Bg2 was also pleasant for White in Schut-Ziaziulkina, Warsaw 2013*) 12...Rxh5 13.Qd2 Be6 14.O-O-O Bd6 15.Kb1±



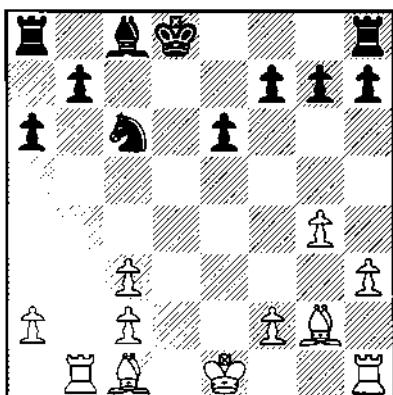
Our next few moves will be Bg2 and either Ng3 or Nf4. White's position is definitely a bit easier to play.

10.Bg2



10...O-O

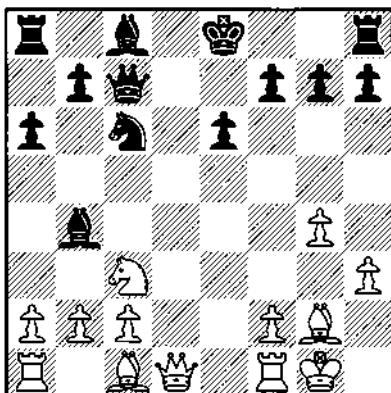
10...Nxc3 leads to a similar endgame, as in the line 9...Nxc3?! on page 11: 11.Qxd8+ Kxd8 12.Nxc3. White will always have pressure against Black's queenside, and this is definitely a position where we don't mind Black taking on c3, for instance 12...Bxc3+ 13.bxc3 Nc6 14.Rb1±.



Our dark-squared bishop is a very strong piece in this position, and Black has serious problems to solve on the queenside.

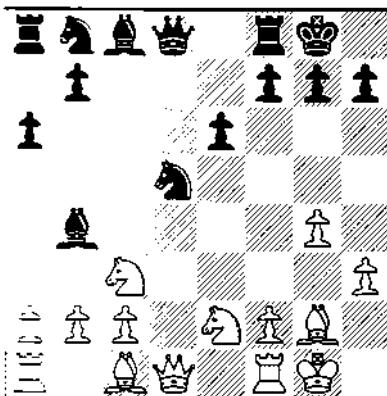
10...Nc6 is a clever attempt to achieve a favorable position, but also

gives White an extra option which we'll happily utilize: 11.O-O Nxc3 12.Nxc3 (*12.Qxd8+ is now not as promising as in other lines because after 12...Nxd8 13.Nxc3 Bxc3 14.bxc3 the b7 pawn is defended and Black can neutralize one of our bishops with 14...Bd7!= followed by Bc6, etc.*) 12...Qc7



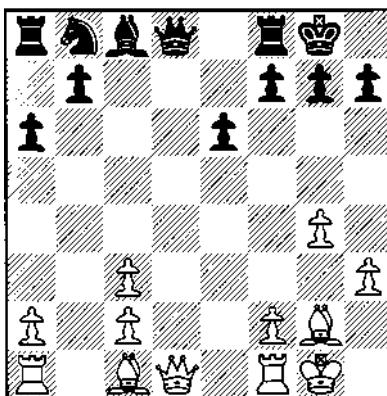
We cover a similar position later in this game, but here Black has played Nc6 instead of O-O, which means that our recommendation of 13.Qd4! on page 18 is no longer an option. Nevertheless, Black's queen does not target the c3-knight, which allows White to play 13.Be3! O-O 14.Na4!±. One of White's pieces is ready to jump into the b6 square, and we also have ideas of playing c2-c3 and Qb3. Black's position is unpleasant to say the least, Bodnaruk–Sazonova, Tyumen 2012.

11.O-O



Now that White has castled, Black is forced to relieve the central tension.
11...Nxc3

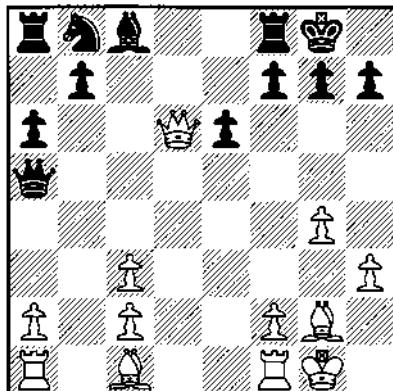
This is the more popular capture, but 11...Bxc3 deserves very serious attention—it's an interesting idea that has recently gained steam. The point is that after 12.Nxc3 Nxc3 we cannot play 13.Qxd8 because of the devious 13...Ne2+, so White is forced to recapture with 13.bxc3 and allow Black to keep queens on the board:



Now Black's queen can target our weaknesses while simultaneously defending the queenside. If White

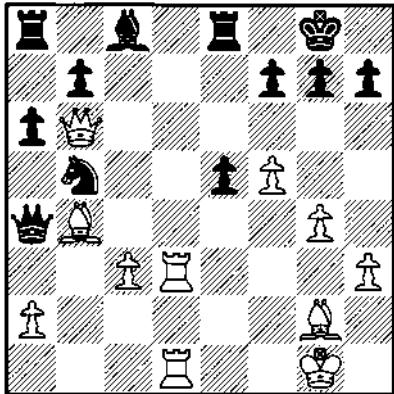
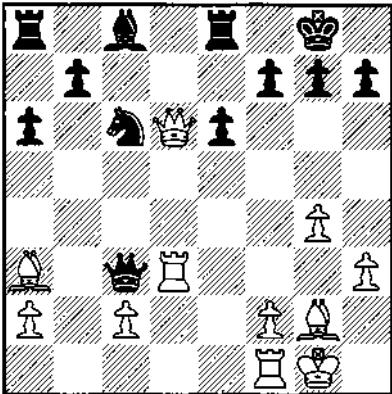
wants to prove an advantage, he will have to do so with very precise play. Black has now played 13...Qa5 discussed here, and 13...Qc7 analyzed on page 17.

It seems that 13...Qa5 is not very fruitful in view of 14.Qd6!



Playing on the dark squares gives White good chances of seizing the initiative. We consider 14...Qxc3 and 14...Nc6.

a) If 14...Qxc3 White can develop his play with 15.Ba3 Re8 16.Rd1†. The development advantage and the power of the two bishops provides full compensation for the pawn. Let's look at a few moves that occurred in a critical game: 16...Nc6 17.Rd3



a1) Now 17...Qxc2?? would be a grave mistake in view of 18.Rc1, and Black is losing at least a full piece: 18...Qa4 (18...Qe2 19.Bf3 Qe5 20.Rxc6+-) 19.Rxc6!+-.

a2) If 17...Qe5 then 18.f4! Despite being down a pawn, White does not fear the exchange of queens! Indeed, the compensation would be fully felt in the endgame as well, as Black's queenside would be impossible to develop.

a21) After 18...Qxd6 19.Bxd6 Bd7 What else? Black must try to organize his forces somehow. 20.Rb1 Nd8 (*not* 20...b5?? 21.Ba3!+- and too many of Black's pieces are hanging) 21.c4!± (avoiding 21.Bxb7 Nxb7 22.Rxb7 Bb5 where Black is surviving) and now White is going to win the b-pawn and hold on to the initiative.

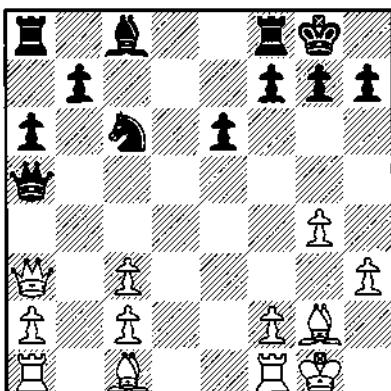
a22) Alternatively, after 18...Qa5 19.Rfd1 White is fully mobilized and Black is unable to finish his development. In the game Deepan Chakravarthy-Zhou, Subic Bay 2009, Black tried 19...e5 20.f5 Nd4, attempting to confuse the issue. Now followed 21.c3 Nb5 22.Bb4 Qa4, and here 23.Qb6!!+- would have led to a quick finish:

White threatens 24.Rd8 as well as Bd5-b3, against which Black has no suitable reply. Instead, White continued with 23.Qd5± retaining his powerful initiative, but later on lost his way.

b) Since grabbing the pawn is too dangerous, Black should try 14...Nc6.

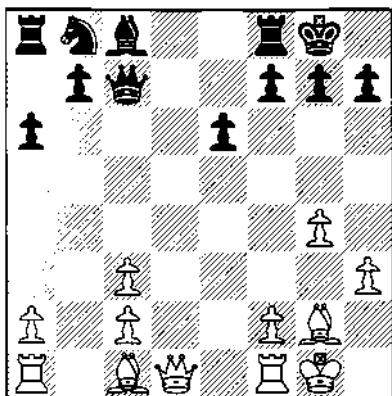
b1) When faced with this line for the first time, Vachier-Lagrange chose the sedate 15.Bxc6, but the weakness of White's kingside guaranteed Black a decent game, Vachier-Lagrange-Gordon, Hinkley Island 2012.

b2) But here comes the second point of our extravagant queen sortie: 15.Qa3!N



Since we know the endgame will be good for White, we force Black's queen to retreat from its active post. *13.Qc7* (after 15...Qe5 16.Be3± Black's queen is actually not very useful on e5, and White can continue the general plan of R_ab1, R_fd1, and Q_c5, with good pressure on the queenside) 16.Qc5 Now White can follow up with natural moves, like R_a1, Ba3 (e3), etc. In case of 16...e5 we have a strong reply in 17.f4!, with the idea f5, restricting Black's bishop: 17...Re8 18.f5 Bd7 19.Ba3±. It is clear that Black has been unable to solve his opening problems.

Lately the most focus has gone to 13...Qc7, keeping the d6 square under control and hoping to develop quickly with Rd8, Nc6, etc.

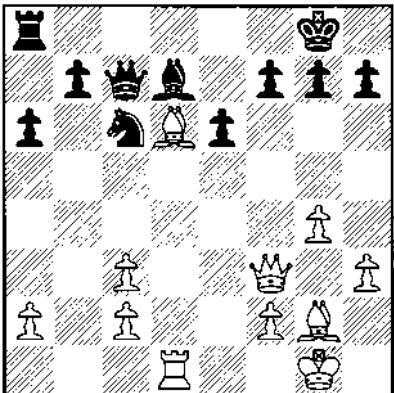


Now White has a few ways to fight for an edge:

a) Vachier-Lagrave chose 14.Qd4 inducing 14...e5, and now followed 15.Qe3 Be6 16.Rb1 Nc6 17.Qb6! This was likely the point of Maxime's play, heading into an endgame where he could play for two results: 17...Qxb6 18.Rxb6, and White's advantage was without doubt after 18...Na5 19.Ba3 Rfd8 20.Bb4±, Vachier-Lagrave-Negi, Leon 2012.

b) In the most recent game to date, Mickey Adams chose 14.Rb1 against none other than Vachier-Lagrave himself! 14...Nc6 (14...Qxc3?! is probably the critical test of White's play, but after 15.Bb2, or first 15.Rb3 followed by Bb2, there will definitely be full compensation for the pawn.) 15.Be3 b5?! A risky attempt to get rid of the weakness on b7, but Adams was not too forgiving and applied pressure immediately with 16.c4! Rd8 (16...bxc4?? would lose quickly to 17.Bb6 Qd7 18.Bc5 Re8 19.Rb6+–) 17.Qe2 b4 18.c3! More pressure! 18...a5 19.a3! More pressure! 19...Bb7 20.Bc5±. White ended up getting connected passers on the queenside, and only through a minor miracle was Black able to survive, Adams-Vachier-Lagrave, Paris/St. Petersburg 2013.

c) Lastly, we can show what appears to be White's most promising continuation: 14.Ba3 Rd8 15.Qf3 Nc6 16.Rfd1 Rxd1+ 17.Rxd1 Bd7 and now a strong and natural improvement can be found in 18.Bd6! (better than 18.Qd3, Deepan Chakravarthy-Suvrajit, Gurgaon 2010)

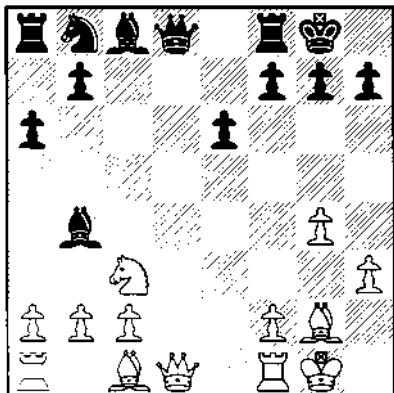


18...Qa5 19.c4!±. The threat of Qb3 is quite difficult to deal with, and 19...Qxa2? loses right away to 20.Qc3 Qa5 21.Qxa5 Nxa5 22.Bc7+–, winning a piece.

In conclusion, after 11...Bxc3 Black is certainly in for a tough defense, if White is able to play actively and make use of his dark-squared bishop.

Let's continue with our game, after 11...Nxc3 on page 15:

12.Nxc3



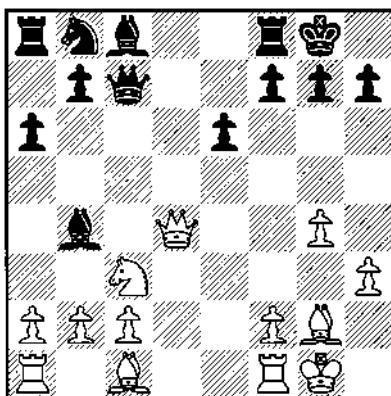
Once again Black has a choice here, this time between allowing a queen trade or avoiding it with 12...Qc7.

12...Nc6??!

Karjakin's move is somewhat dubious, as he allows Alekseev to enter a very favorable endgame.

12...Bxc3 is not nearly as challenging as it was on the previous move, since this time White can quickly trade queens and reach our desired endgame: 13.Qxd8 Rxd8 14.bxc3 Nc6 15.Rb1±. Black's light-squared bishop is an issue once again, and White should be very happy with the result of the opening. Zherebukh–Van Wely, Moscow 2009.

Avoiding the queen trade with 12...Qc7 is definitely the critical test for this line. White has a few options here to complete his development, but we believe the most promising continuation is 13.Qd4!



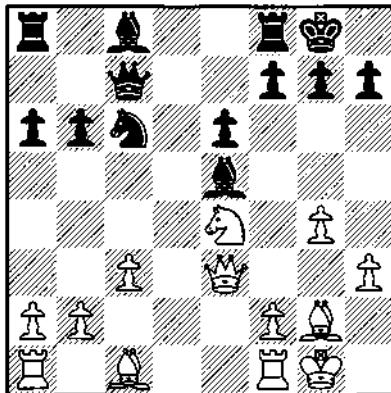
This has been White's main choice as of late and seems to lead to an advantage in all lines. The key here is that White should not fear but rather welcome an exchange of queens, as in most endgames Black will have trouble relieving the queenside pressure.

We look at 13...Bc5 and 13...Bd6 here and a recent try 13...Nc6 on page 20.

First, we should note that 13...Bc5 can be strongly met with 14.Bf4! which proved successful in the following encounter: 14...Bxd4 15.Bxc7 Bd7 Hoping for Bxb7 Ra7, nevertheless White was able to win the pawn after 16.Bd6 Rd8 17.Bxb7 Ra7 18.Bg2±, and the advantage was converted with ease in Eggleston-Barrows, Sunningdale 2011.

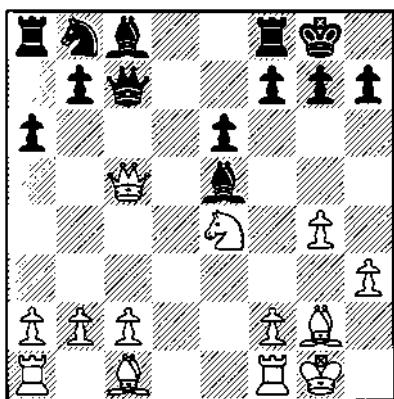
13...Bd6 has been chosen by most players in the past, but White has a few ways of getting an advantage here:

a) 14.Ne4 was shown by GM Howell to deserve serious attention: 14...Be5 15.Qc5!

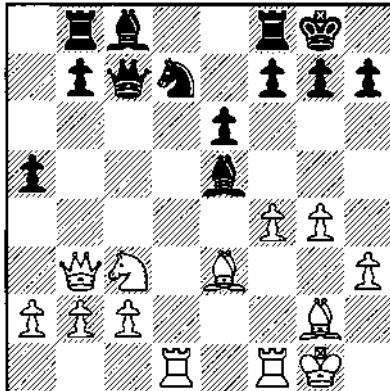
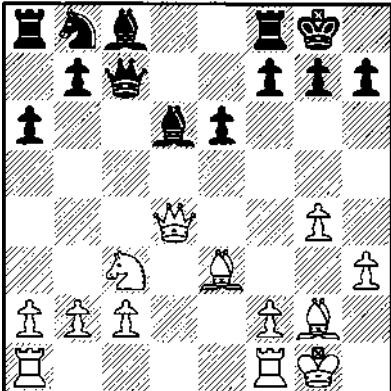


17...g6?! An unfortunate move, but it was hard to deal with the threat of f2-f4 otherwise. Now White could have gained a big advantage with 18.Qh6! (*18.g5↑ was played in Howell-Hanley, North Shields 2012*) 18...Bg7 19.Qh4± with excellent play on the dark squares.

b) 14.Be3 is the more common move, with the idea Rad1 and Qb6, heading for a favorable endgame.



It's important to remember in this line that with a bishop on g2 and a knight on c5—after a queen trade here—Black's queenside will be yours for the taking! 15...Nc6 16.c3! A useful move to restrict Black's minor pieces. 16...b6 17.Qe3

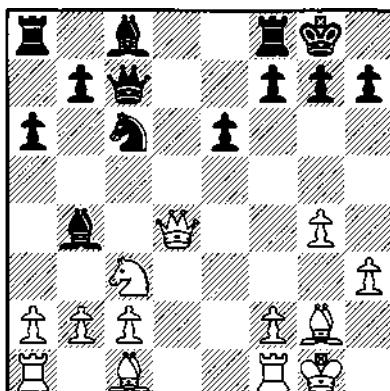


b1) Now 14...Bd7 was clearly insufficient after 15.Rad1 Bh2+ 16.Kh1 Be5 17.Qb6 Bc6, trading the light-squared bishops, but losing control over the d-file: 18.Qxc7 Bxc7 19.f4 Bxg2+ 20.Kxg2 Nc6. And here it is unclear why White rejected the rather simple and direct 21.Rd7! (21.Na4 with a quick draw happened in Espinoza Palomino-Aryan, Sabadell 2013) 21...Rac8 22.Ne4± with a clear edge.

b2) 14...Nd7 also failed to equalize after 15.Rad1 Be5 16.Qb4 Rb8 17.f4! a5. And now it was important to play 18.Qb3! (18.Qa3 b5!∞ allowed Black to muddy the waters in Kapnisis-Banikas, Texnopolis 2011):

Since Bf6 would run into Nb5, Black is forced to capture with 18...Bxc3 19.Qxc3 Qxc3 20.bxc3±, and 21.Rd6 will come next. White's advantage would have been nearly decisive.

One recent try for Black has been 13...Nc6:



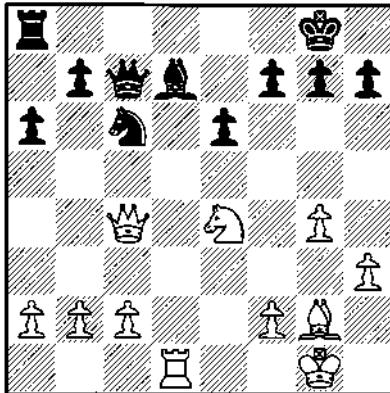
a) At first glance your silicon friend will tell you that after 14.Bxc6 Bxc3 15.Qxc3 bxc6 16.Be3 White has a decent advantage, but this position will nevertheless require a lot of work to convert into a full point. However, if you are a precise, technical player, then by all means, go for it! A high level game continued 16...e5 17.Rae1 f6 18.f4 Be6 19.Bc5 Rf7 20.fxe5 fxe5

b17 Bxf7 22.Rxe5±. Despite the extra pawn White could not prevent Black from getting enough counterplay to secure the draw, in Tukachko-Korobov, Kiev 2013.

b18 But we calmly recommend another move, again from GM Howell: 14.Rd8.

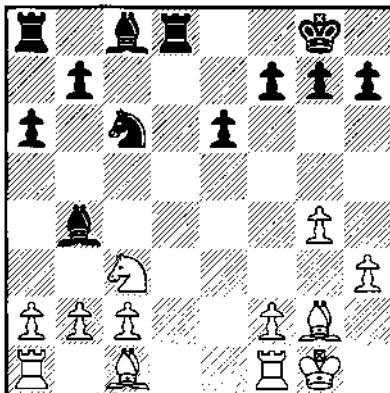
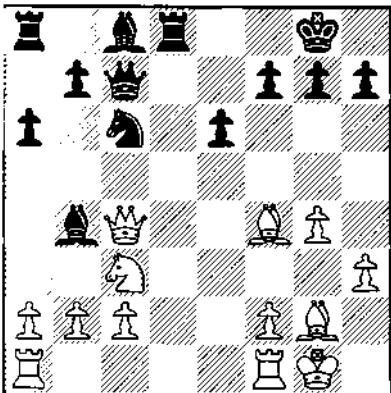
b19 Now Howell's choice was quite good: 15.Be3 Bd7 16.Qb3 Ba5 17.Na4 Rab8 18.Nc5±. Although White ended up losing this game, it is clear that his opening was quite successful, Howell-Kraemer, Germany 2013.

b20 But we believe the strongest move is 15.Bf4!N



Each one of our pieces is stronger than its counterpart!

13.Qxd8 Rxd8



b21 15...e5? 16.Nd5! Qd6 17.Bg5↑ followed by Rad1 is fairly devastating.

b22 After 15...Qa5 16.Rad1 Bd7 17.Ne4± White again has the more active pieces.

b23 15...Bd6 is the safest choice, but no matter what Black does, his queen's bishop will remain passive for quite some time: 16.Bxd6 Rxd6 17.Rad1 Bd7 18.Ne4 Rxd1 19.Rxd1± with a clear advantage:

14.Na4

A good move, with a simple but effective idea of Na4-b6xc8, giving White the two bishops without the cost of doubling the c-pawns.

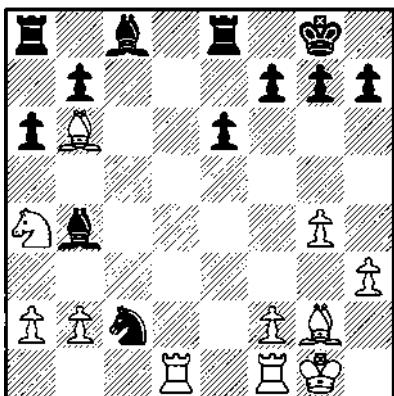
14.Be3?!N is also worth trying, with the idea of playing Bb6 and fighting for control over the d-file.

14...e5

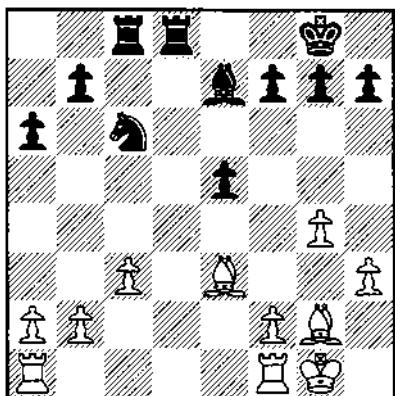
Karjakin accepts a worse but safe position with this move.

The sharp 14...Nd4 was refuted by Chinese GM Li Chao with extremely precise play: 15.Be3! Nxc2

16.Rad1 Re8 17.Bb6! threatening Be4, as well as a2-a3 followed by Rd2:

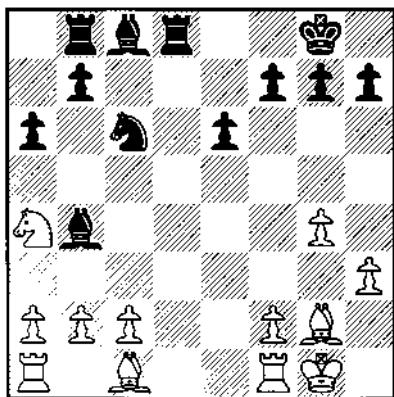


15.c3 Be7 16.Nb6 Rb8 17.Nxc8 Rbxc8 18.Be3±



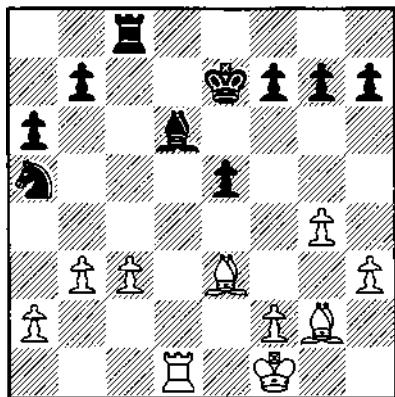
In order to save the knight Black had to play 17...e5 and now came 18.a3 Bf8 19.Bc7! with the threat of Nb6, imprisoning Black's rook. The game continued 19...Be6 20.Nb6 Ra7 21.Bxe5±, Li-Gao Rui, Beijing 2009.

Another try is 14...Rb8 where Li Chao once again demonstrated this endgame's dangers to Black:



With the advantage of the two bishops, this kind of endgame will always be quite pleasant for White, who has no weaknesses and can play for two results. Let's see how GM Alekseev slowly converted the full point against his young and determined opponent.

18...Kf8 19.Rfd1 Rd6 20.Kf1 Na5 21.Rxd6 Bxd6 22.Rd1 Ke7 23.b3!



15.Be3 Bd7 16.Bb6 Rdc8 17.Rfd1 Be8 18.c3 Be7 19.b3!±, and Black was out of useful moves since 19...Ne5 would lose to 20.Ba7!. Li-Ma, Ningbo 2011.

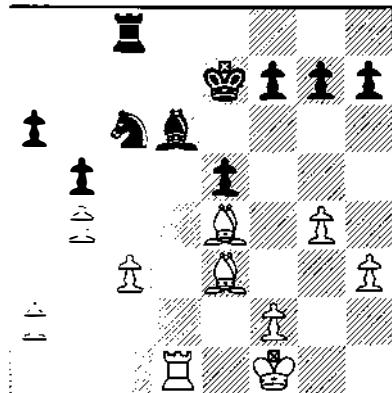
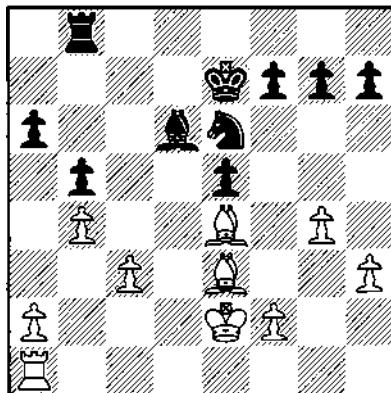
Restricting Black's play, a necessary skill for good endgame technique. Now 23...Rxc3 would lose to 24.Bd2 Rc5 25.b4.

It should be noted that small errors at this stage are often used to lead to steady positional gains.

21...Nc6 24.Be4

It's interesting that a top player like Karjakin could get into such a difficult endgame without making serious mistakes. This leads us to conclude that 12...Nc6 is not a very good move and it's likely to be rarely played in grandmaster practice.

24...h5 25.b4!



Fixing the queenside pawns on the light squares, for which Black has no defender.

White's plan is now to play Ne2-d2 and a2-a4, breaking through in the a-file.

25...Nd8 26.Rc1 Ne6 27.Ke2

27.Bb7?! would be a blunder, since 27...Rb8 28.Bxa6 Nc7+ traps the bishop.

27...Rb8 28.Ra1

Preparing a2-a4, so Karjakin decides to distract the rook:

28...Nf4+ 29.Kd2 Nxh3

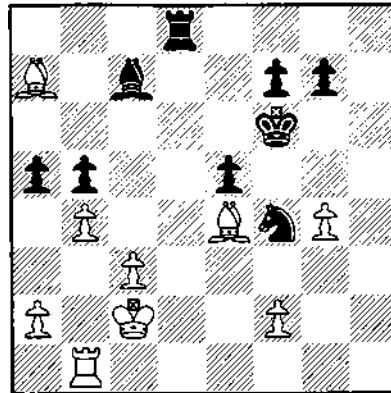
Trading h-pawns delays the opening of the queenside, but not for long.

30.Rh1 Nf4 31.Rxh7 Kf6 32.Kc2

Bc7 33.Ba7 Rd8 34.Rh1!

The rook had nothing to do on h7, so Alekseev smartly returns to his original plan.

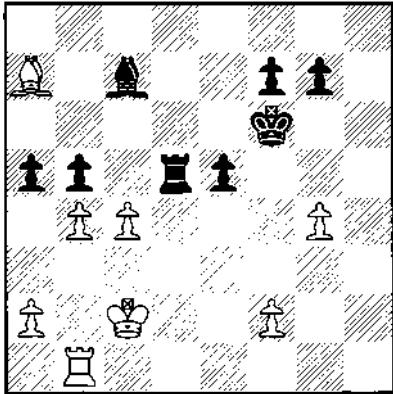
34...a5 35.Rb1!



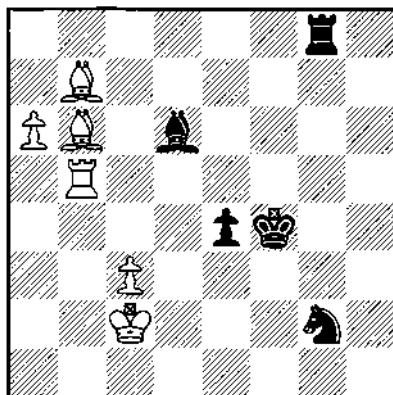
35...axb4

35...a4 allows White to demonstrate the power of the two bishops with 36.Bc6!±.

And 35...Nd5 actually loses to 36.Bxd5 Rxd5 37.c4!



41.Bf2 Bd6 42.a4 Kf4 43.a5 e4
44.fxe4 fxe4 45.Bb6 Rg8 46.a6

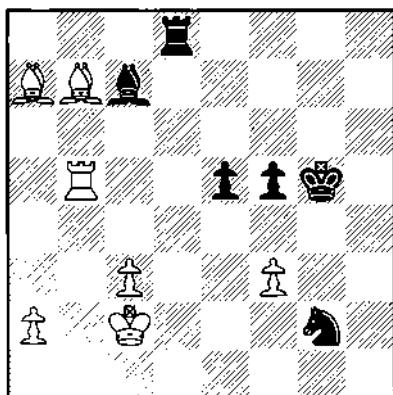


A beautiful breakthrough, one of the key points of placing the rook on b1. After 37...bxc4 38.b5±, Black will have to give up the bishop for White's b-pawn.

36.Rxb4±

The rook is activated and the b-pawn cannot be saved. Alekseev finished the game off flawlessly.

36...Kg5 37.f3 g6 38.Rxb5 f5
39.gxf5 gxf5 40.Bb7 Ng2



An illustrative demonstration of the power of the two bishops. They can support White's pawn while preventing Black's pawn from advancing. The knight is a lovely piece but can only influence one part of the board.

46...e3 47.Kd3 1-0

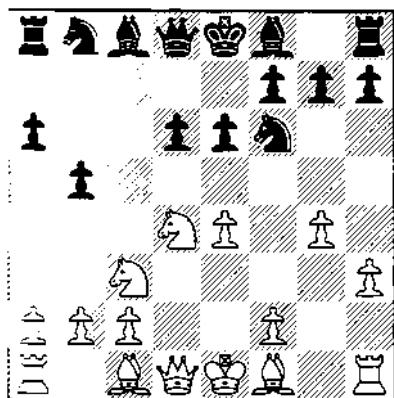
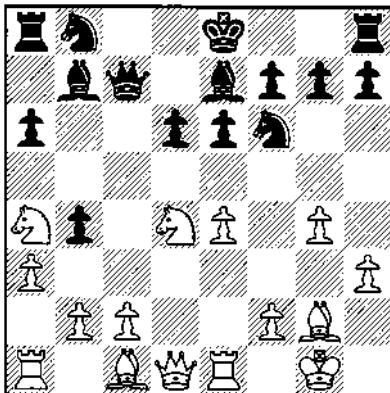
Stopping Black's pawn, and with no answer to White's a-pawn the game was resigned. A great display of endgame technique!

Finally obtaining some counterplay on the kingside, but with an extra pawn and two active bishops White's position is technically winning.

Game 2

Nakamura – Ninov
French League 2008

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4
4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.h3 e6
7.Qe2 b5 8.Bg2, most
times transpose into the main line
9.O-O e5. However, Black has also
played 8...e5, and we will analyze our
way 9.Nde2 in Chapter 1b – 6.h3 e5.
– 8...b5



Certainly a logical move—Black expands on the queenside and plans to fianchetto the light-squared bishop, applying pressure on the e4 pawn.

8.Bg2 Bb7

GM Sandipan once tried 8...Qc7 but got into trouble quickly against GM A. Zhigalko: 9.O-O b4 10.Na4 Bb7 11.Re1 Be7 12.a3!±:

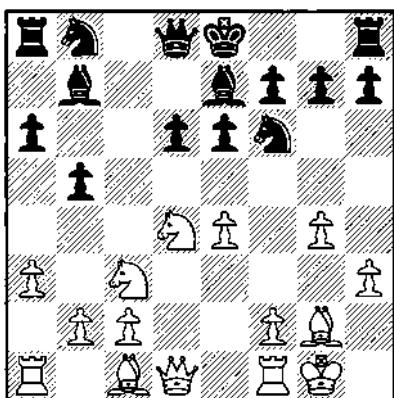
A lovely way to involve the a1-rook into the game. 12...bxa3 13.Rxa3 O-O (13...Nc6 14.Rc3! is quite unpleasant for Black, when White threatens e4-e5.) 14.Rc3 Qa5 15.Rb3 Ra7 16.Nb6±, A. Zhigalko–Sandipan, Moscow 2012. It is quite hard to find a move here for Black, as 16...Nbd7 runs into 17.Nxd7 Nxd7 18.Rxb7! Rxb7 19.Nc6, winning.

9.O-O

Believe it or not, with this move White is already intending to sacrifice a piece!

Players who would like to avoid the complicated piece sacrifice that is featured in this game after 9.O-O should investigate **9.a3**, and although this move is not as ambitious as the main line, it does contain some venom. White's plan will be similar to other lines in this chapter, mainly castling and advancing our kingside pawns.

Here we can show some instructive examples after 9...Be7 10.O-O:



Now that White's bishop is protected, e4-e5 is a very real threat, so Black must react by means of 10...Qc7 or the common retreat 10...Nfd7.

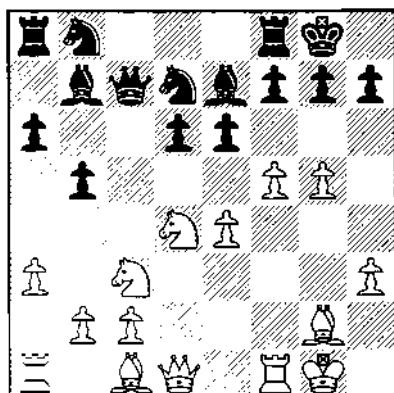
After 10...Qc7 11.f4:

a) 11...O-O?! It is imperative for Black not to castle too early in this line (and many other lines in the Najdorf), as White's attack can catch speed very quickly: 12.g5 Nfd7 13.f5!

f5 square for the knight. Forced is 14...exd4 15.fxe7 Re8 16.Qxd4 Rxe7 17.Bf4 Ne5 18.Rad1 Nbc6. So far so good, now all White needed to do was to take the pawn: 19.Qxd6 (*19.Qf2? Gave away almost all of the advantage in Matras-Balkiewicz, Trzebinia 2002*) 19...Qxd6 20.Rxd6 Nc4 Through a bit of speculation we can only wonder if the first player missed 21.Nd5! in his calculations, which more or less wins: 21...Nxd6 22.Nxe7+ Nxe7 23.Bxd6± and White has a healthy extra pawn and the two bishops.

b) Instead of castling, better is 11...Nc6, for example 12.Be3 Nxd4 13.Qxd4 e5 14.Qd2 exf4 15.Bxf4 Nd7 Although Black has achieved a reasonable position, White can still fight for the advantage with 16.a4! A nice move—before jumping with Nd5 it is better to put the question to Black's queenside. 16...bxa4 17.Rxa4 O-O 18.Kh1 Ne5 19.Nd5 Bxd5 20.exd5±. Black is solid here, but with the two bishops White's position is clearly preferable, Bachmann Schiavo-Zivkovic, Zagreb 2009.

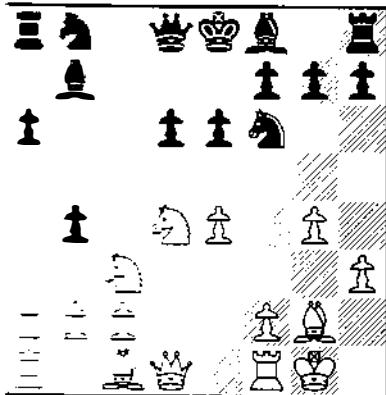
Another common method of meeting the e4-e5 shot is to play 10...Nfd7 and here a relatively recent GM-level game continued 11.f4 O-O?! Once again, playing Nc6 first was more solid. 12.f5 e5 And now at this point White should have cleared the f5 square for his knight by playing 13.f6!+. This thematic pawn sacrifice is almost identical to the one we will see Nepomniachtchi utilize in the next game, and offers White a powerful attack. Instead, Ehlvest-Amanov, Philadelphia 2011 continued 13.Nb3=.



Black is already in a difficult spot. 11...e5 12.Nc5 14.f6+ is crushing) 14.f6 A thematic shot—clearing the

Now White has two serious options:

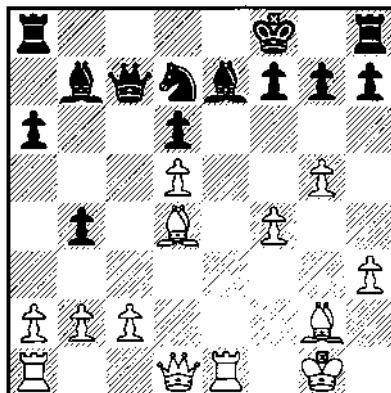
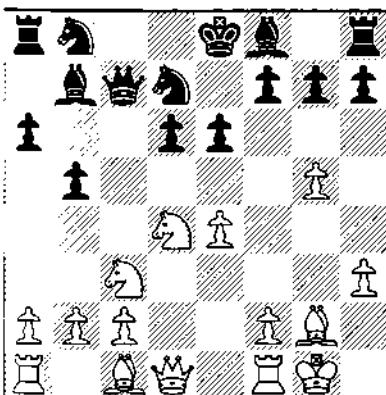
First, let's take a look at the natural 11.f4 Nc6 12.Be3. White has developed normally and will play f4-f5 in the near future. In the only high-level game to reach this position, the young Armenian GM Ter-Sahakyan decided to tempt White and played 12...b4, but the equally young Russian GM Shimanov refused to back down: 13.Nd5!? (13.Nce2 was perhaps more sensible, for example 13...Nxd4 14.Qxd4 a5 15.c3! Black is clearly behind in development. 15...e5 16.Qd2 Be7 17.Rac1!±. White has pressure on both sides of the board, as Ng3-f5 is always a potent attacking idea.) 13...exd5 14.Nxc6 Bxc6 15.exd5 Bb7 16.Re1 Be7 17.Bd4 Kf8∞:



- provocative, almost naive move.
- the e4 pawn is hanging, White
- tactically forced to play Nd5—a
- well-known sacrifice in the
- Sicilian.

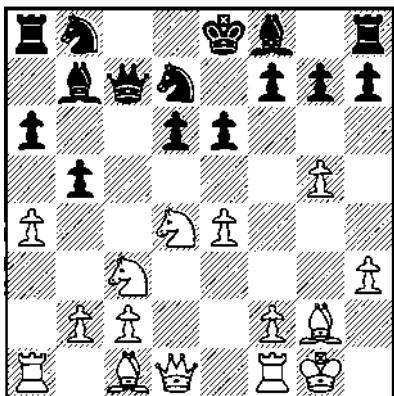
The alternatives 9...Nc6, 9...Be7,
and 9...Nfd7 will be covered in
the next game.

Another option is 9...Qc7 which
has relevance to our main game, as the
sacrifice will be possible in a few
iterations. Strongest is 10.g5! 10.Re1
is a bit more popular, but we believe
advancing the g-pawn right away
is more promising. 10...Nfd7:

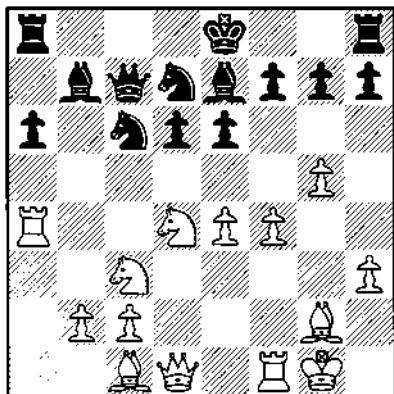


Although this position itself is extremely unclear, what is clear is that for the knight White has gained long term compensation, as Black's king will never be safe, and his rooks are permanently disconnected. After placing the queen on h5 and doubling rooks on the e-file, White eventually managed to break through in Shimanov-Ter-Sahakyan, Mersin 2008.

However, it appears that 11.a4!? is even stronger, as Black is somewhat unprepared to deal with this attack on the queenside.

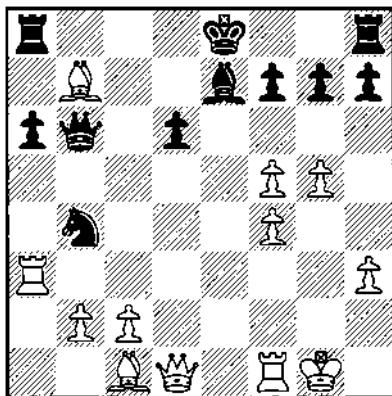


a) The non-confrontational 11...bxa4 almost always promises White a good game, for instance: 12.Rxa4 Be7 13.f4 Nc6:



a1) Worth noting is 14.Nf5!? which was played by GM Zherebukh and lead to success: 14...exf5 15.Nd5 Qd8 16.exf5 The powerful knight on d5, the open e-file, and the mass of kingside pawns make Black's defense very tough. Now followed: 17.Nc6 17.Ra3 Nxd5 18.Bxd5 Nb4?!

The desire to force matters is very understandable, but a solid move like Qc7 or Qd7 would have been a more stubborn defense. 19.Bxb7 Qb6+



20.Kh2 (*Better was 20.Re3! Qxb7 21.Rfe1 Nd5 22.Re4 O-O 23.c4!± Winning the piece back under favorable circumstances.*) 20...Qxb7 21.f6!. Playing with your king in the center is always a challenge, and here Black was unable to survive, Zherebukh–Van Assendelft, Enschede 2010.

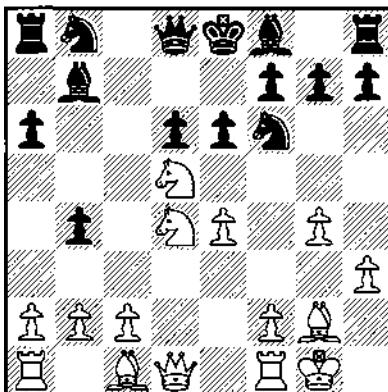
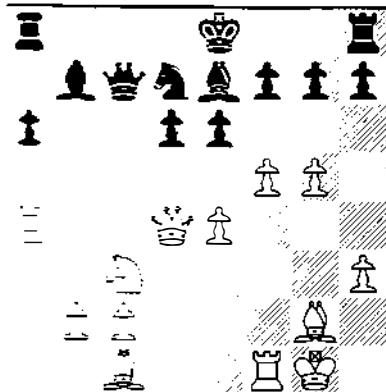
a2) But why sacrifice if you can achieve an attack through simpler means? After 14.f5!N White is doing quite well in all lines:

a21) 14...e5 15.Nd5± followed by f5-f6, is just crushing.

a22) And after 14...Qb6 15.fxe6 fxe6 16.Be3+– Black's position is falling apart.

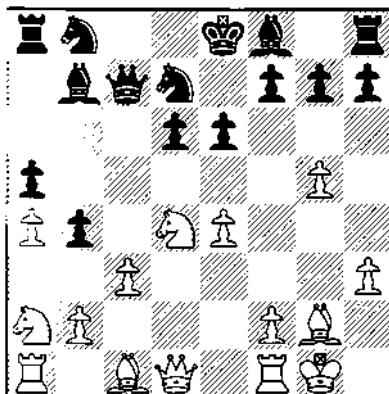
– 5...Nf6 6.Qd2 Nxd4 7.Qxd4:

10.Nd5!?



– 10.Qf2±. And now if Black castles kingside, he will have to deal with f5-f6.

– Perhaps a more likely move is 10...e5? always tends to be a serious possibility in these lines, and can be used by adventurous players.) After 13.c3±:



This sacrifice is certainly principled, as Black is underdeveloped and the open e-file will give White many tactical opportunities. According to our database this idea was first played by Sergey Karjakin, the victim of our previous game! The line was tested heavily in the years 2008-2010, and due to White's overwhelming attacking possibilities it has since fallen out of fashion. Nevertheless, it is important to understand the nature of White's eventual compensation for the piece, as it will improve your overall comprehension of dynamic chess.

10...exd5

Black is obliged to accept the sacrifice.

Seeing our sacrifice rejected with 10...Nbd7 would be a pleasant surprise! We can calmly improve our position with 11.Re1N and Black is in trouble—our knight can never be taken now, and g4-g5 is a serious threat. 11...h6 (11...Be7? 12.Nxe7 Qxe7 13.g5+ followed by Nf5, etc.) White already has a huge advantage. Any reasonable move, for instance f2-f4, will pose big problems for Black,

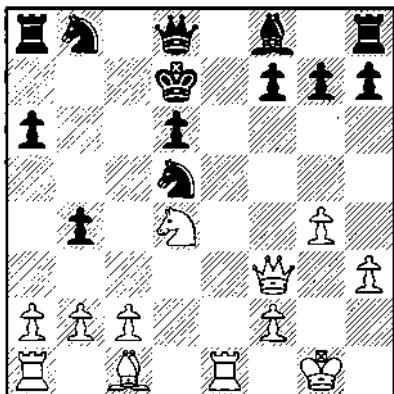
Black's position is highly unpleasant, as taking on c3 brings our knight back into the game, which will certainly hop into b5 and dominate the queenside.

but we'll suggest the common idea 12.a3!±, involving our other rook into the game, which can then harass Black's queenside.

11.exd5 Be7

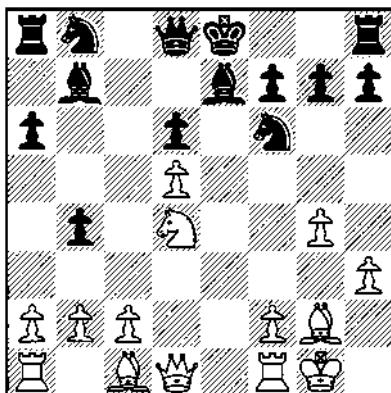
Due to the coming Re1+, this is the only reasonable move for Black.

A nice game finished quickly after 11...Bxd5 12.Re1+ Kd7 13.Bxd5 Nxd5 14.Qf3!



Without this resource Black might have hoped for a better life, but now the game is just over. 14...Qa5 15.Qxf7+ Be7 16.Qf5+ Ke8 17.Rxe7+! 1-0, Souleidis–Reddmann, Hamburg 2009. After 17...Kxe7 18.Bg5+ the scoresheets can be signed.

Back to our game, after 11...Be7:



12.g5

After 12.Nc6 Qc7 13.Nxe7 Kxe7 14.g5 Black can play 14...Nfd7, which would transpose into the main game, but he can also choose between 14...Ng8 or even 14...Ne8, where both moves are quite reasonable.

Therefore we'd rather limit Black's options and start with 12.g5.

12...Nfd7

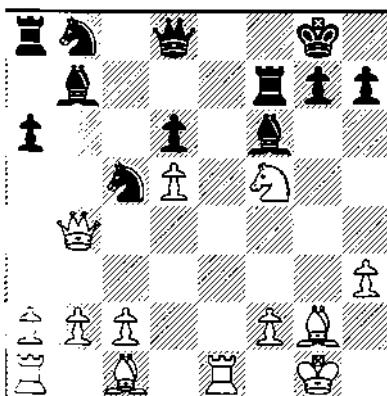
In this case 12...Ng8 makes very little sense after 13.Nf5! g6 (*Not 13...Kf8 14.Qd4!* This double attack on g7 and b4 comes in handy in many lines. 14...f6 15.gxf6 Bxf6 16.Qxb4+ – another common double attack, and now d6 is falling.) 14.Qd4 f6 15.Nxe7 Nxe7 16.gxf6 Nf5 17.Qxb4+–. White already has three pawns for the piece, and the attack rages on with Re1+ next.

13.Nc6

This idea is extremely common in all Nd5-sacrifices, and especially when our bishop is so wonderfully placed on g2!

White also has the option of playing 13.Nf5?! which is a very serious way to continue as well. Let's take a look at a sample line: 13...O-O

14.Qd4 f6 15.Qxb4. Black's king is somewhat safe for the moment, but White has already won two pawns and can still create serious problems due to Black's poor development, for instance 15...Nc5 16.Re1 Rf7 17.gxf6 Bxf6 and now:



15.Nxd6! The start of a beautiful combination. 18...Qxd6 19.Re8+ Rf8 20.Bf4! The point of White's play, forcing 20...Qd7 21.Rxf8+ Kxf8 22.Qxc5+ Kg8 23.c4±. White has three very healthy pawns for the knight and definitely stands better. This was merely a sample line to demonstrate that White's compensation can take many forms—a direct attack is not always necessary.

13...Qc7

The only real try from Black's point of view.

13...Bxc6?! definitely falls short of solving Black's problems: 14.dxc6 Nb6 15.Qd4 Qc7 16.Be3± and White is winning back the piece with interest, Yankovsky–Adelberg, Los Angeles 2011.

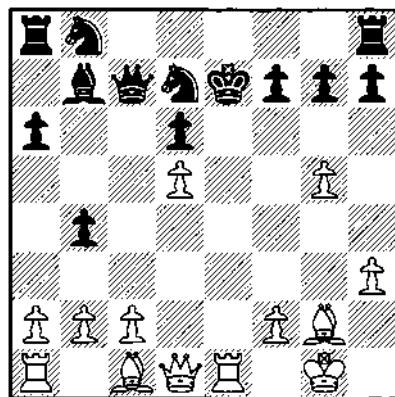
14.Nxe7 Kxe7

Capturing on e7 was clearly the point of White's play, getting rid of the important defender of the dark

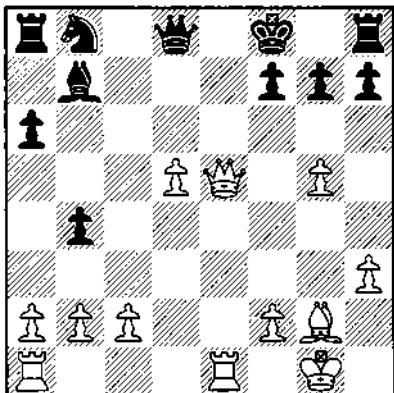
squares and stranding Black's king in the center.

15.Qd4

We believe Nakamura's choice here is somewhat stronger than Karjakin's original intention of 15.Re1+?, giving his opponent a tough choice of where to place his king:

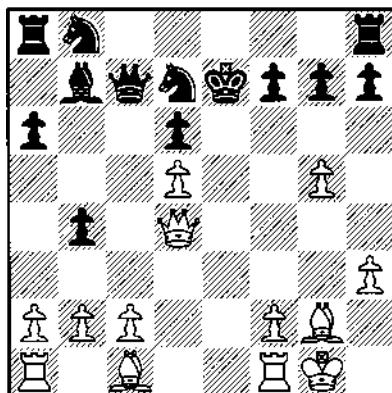


Van Wely was unable to figure out all of the complications and played 15...Kf8?! which was swiftly punished by the unforgiving prodigy. (*The right move was 15...Kd8! which leads to an extremely unclear position, although one that is perfectly playable for White. But there is no harm in studying Karjakin's instructive play.*) 16.Qe2! Qd8 (At this point it was already time to give back the piece with 16...Ne5 17.f4 Nbd7 18.fxe5 Nxe5± where White retains the initiative and holds the better position.) 17.Bf4 Ne5 18.Bxe5 dxe5 19.Qxe5



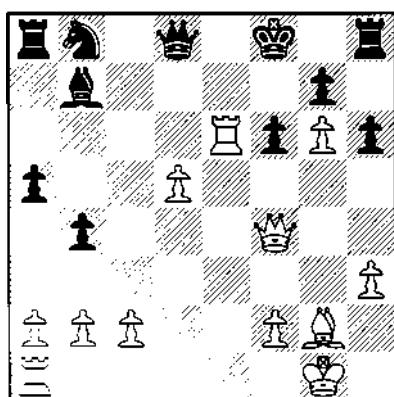
e-file. 22...Bc8 (After 22...Ra6 23.d6+– Black has no defense against threats such as Rae1 and Qe3 with mate on e8, or Qc4 and Re7 with mate on f7. White is really making use of his extra rook here.) 23.Re3 Qb6 24.Rae1 Bd7 25.d6 Ra7 26.Qc4! 1–0, with the unstoppable threats of either Qf7 or Qc8, Karjakin–Van Wely, Nice 2008.

Back to our main game, after White has played **15.Qd4**:



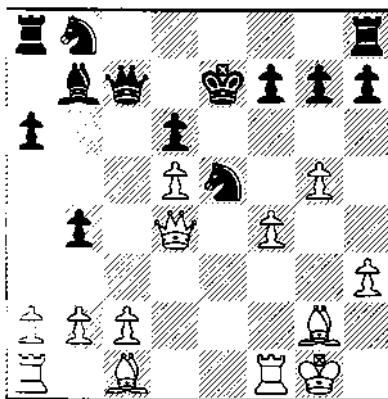
15...Kf8

This has been Black's main way of defending the g7 pawn, although a few other options are worth noting:



Black is more or less helpless against White's incoming pressure along the

Against Peter Svidler one player tried 15...Ne5?!¹, hoping to develop the other knight to d7, but this was quickly refuted with 16.f4!



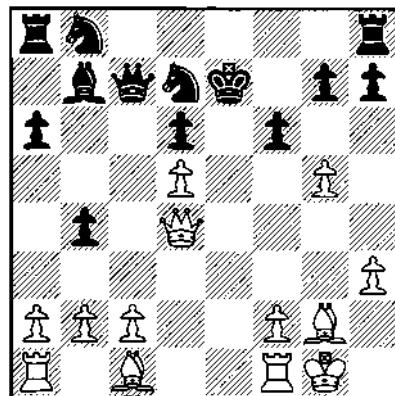
This is usually the best way to get rid of a strong knight on e5!

a) The brave 16...Ng6 can be met with 17.Re1+ (17.Qxg7 is also not bad, when White's attack rages on and Black's king will never find safety.) 17...Kf8 18.f5! Ne7 (18...Ne5 runs into 19.Rxe5! dx5 20.Qxb4+ Ke8 21.d6± winning the material back, with a nearly decisive advantage.) 19.f6! Nf5 20.fxg7+ Nxg7 21.Bf4! Nd7 22.Qxb4 Ne8 23.Re3↑. Stopping Qx5+ and preparing to double the rooks on the e-file. This was only a sample line, but it shows how forceful and effective White's attack can be.

b) Black's intention was 16...Qc4 17.Qe3 Nbd7 18.fxe5 Nxe5, and it seems as though the position has stabilized, but Svidler is relentless and continues the powerful attack: 19.Rf4! Qxc2 20.Bd2. Suddenly Black's king no longer feels secure, as b4 is hanging and the other rook is coming to f1. Also, Rc1 is a very serious threat. The game

continued with 20...Rac8 21.Raf1 Rhf8 22.Bxb4+– and White won, in Svidler–Baker, Bunratty 2009.

Another high level game saw 15...f6, certainly a reasonable move.



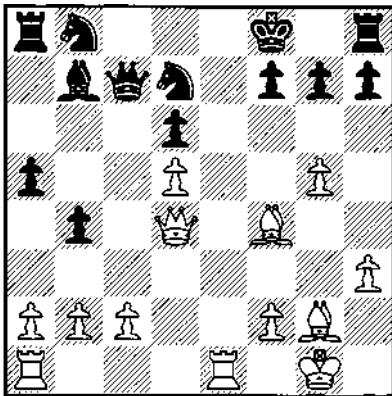
a) The game Parligras–Kurnosov, Bucharest 2008, continued 16.Re1+ Kd8 17.Qxb4 Ne5 18.f4 Nc4 19.b3 Qb6+ 20.Qxb6+ Nxb6 21.Re6±, with a slightly better endgame for White, who will soon win a third pawn and have nice compensation for the piece.

b) But best is 16.Qxb4!N because in some lines we may want to bring our other rook on to e1, for example 16...Ne5 (16...a5?! allows White to develop a strong initiative after 17.Re1+ Kd8 18.Qh4 Na6 19.Bf4 Nac5 20.Re3↑ with the idea Rae1 and Re7, and Black is in a very difficult position.) 17.f4 Nc4 18.Kh2! An improvement over the above game—avoiding the b6 check—since keeping queens on the board obviously favors White. 18...Nd7 19.b3 Ncb6 20.Ba3! Nc5 21.Rae1+ Kd7 22.Qd4↑. White is threatening 23.gxf6, as well as simply solidifying the bind with c2-c4, with well more than full compensation for the piece.

16.Bf4 a5!

Clearly the best move, defending the b4 pawn and preparing to use the a6 square for some much-needed development.

17.Rfe1



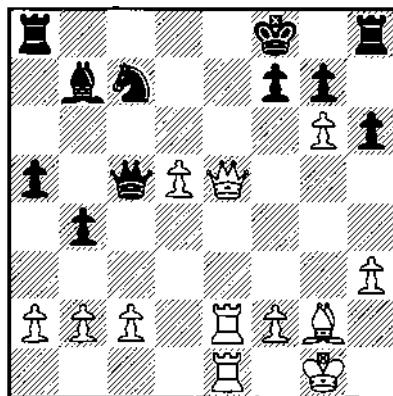
17...Nb6

A reasonable move, but not Black's best try. After this game this position occurred twice more, but both games also ended in White's favor:

The move 17...Ne5? probably did not receive any nominations for Novelty of the Year, as after 18.Rxe5!+– the game was quickly finished, in Baklan–Novita, Biel 2011.

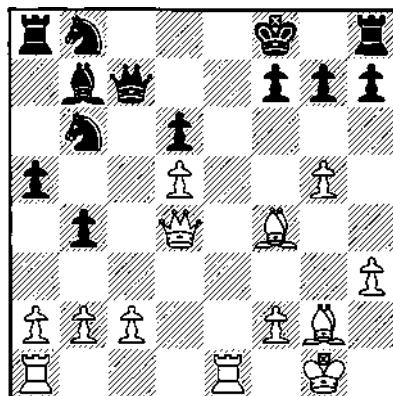
However 17...Na6 was definitely a serious try for equality, although this too ended badly for Black: 18.Re2 Qc5 (18...Qb6 might be an improvement, since now Qe4 can be met with Nac5, but White can even fight for an advantage in the endgame after 19.Rd1!? Qxd4 20.Bxd6+ Kg8 21.Rxd4±. Black's rooks are still disconnected, and the threat of 22.Re7 promises White the initiative.) 19.Qe4 Once again White's pressure on the e-file is nearly overwhelming. 19...Ne5

20.Bxe5 dxe5 21.Qxe5 h6? A losing move, but it was already hard to suggest something good for Black. 22.Rae1 Nc7 23.g6!



Hopefully, you remember this motif from Karjakin–Van Wely on page 32. After 23...fxg6 24.Qf4+ Kg8 25.Re7, Black had to resign in Dembo–Vlcek, Rethymnon 2009.

Back to our game, after 17...Nb6:

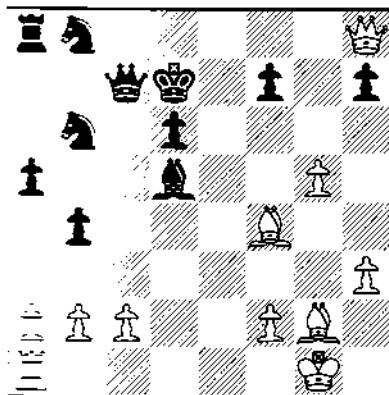


18.Re8+

Although this wasn't White's best move, it is still quite an impressive idea.

Perhaps strongest is 18.a3! threatening to win a pawn and Black's knight to a6. 18...Na6 19.Qxa3+ As we've seen a few times before, doubling on the e-file tends to lead to mate. 19.Re2 Nc5 20.Rae1+. Black can find a way to get back into the game, White's attack is simply too strong. 21.Qe3 is still a very powerful threat.

18...Kxe8 19.Qxg7 Bxd5
Terrible is 19...Rf8?? 20.Re1+ Kd7 21.Qxf8+, and White is mating.
20.Qxh8+ Kd7



21.Re1!?

Nakamura refuses to simplify the position with 21.Bxd5, although White would get a fairly clear advantage after 21...Nxd5 22.Qxh7 Nxf4 23.Qxf7+ Kc8 24.Qxf4+, where the connected kingside pawns are worth more than Black's knight.

21...Nc6 22.Qxh7

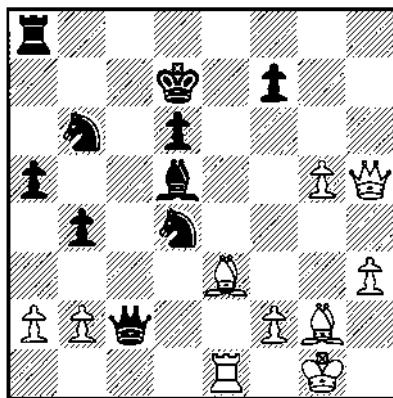
Now although Black's king is still under heavy pressure, Ninov correctly begins to search for active counterplay: 22...Nd4!

Activating not only the knight but also Black's queen, threatening to capture the c2 pawn.

23.Be3 Qxc2

23...Qc4?! was interesting, defending the loose pieces in the center. Most likely the game would continue 24.Bxd5 Nxd5 25.Qxf7+ Kc6 26.Bxd4 Qxd4 27.g6∞, where things are far from simple for either side.

24.Qh5!



After this Black must give back the extra piece, as both knights are left hanging.

24...Bxg2

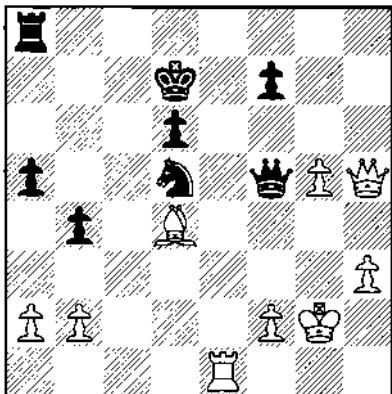
After 24...Qxb2 25.Qg4+ Ne6 26.Bxb6± the position is extremely messy, but White must have the better chances due to having a safer king.

25.Bxd4 Qf5?

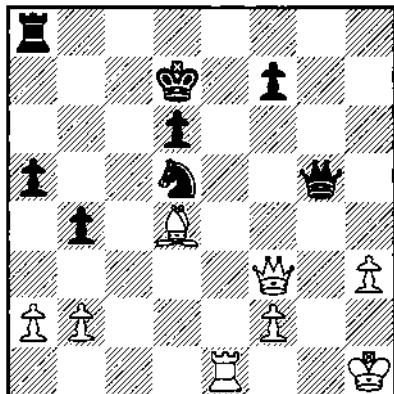
Giving back the wrong piece.

Correct was 25...Bd5! 26.Bxb6∞ and now White's king is also in danger, since the light squares no longer have a defender. Black's chances are probably not worse here.

26.Kxg2 Nd5



28.Kh1+



The situation has become somewhat clearer. White has an extra pawn, but must now deal with Black's threats, for instance 27...Nf4+. However, Hikaru was up to the task and played:

27.Qf3!

With an extra pawn White has no reservations about trading queens, but more importantly this move puts the queen on her best square, where it defends the king and puts pressure on Black's position.

27...Qxg5+

27...Nf4+? would be a blunder, as after 28.Kh2+- White threatens not only Qxa8 and Qb7+, but also Re4, simply winning Black's knight.

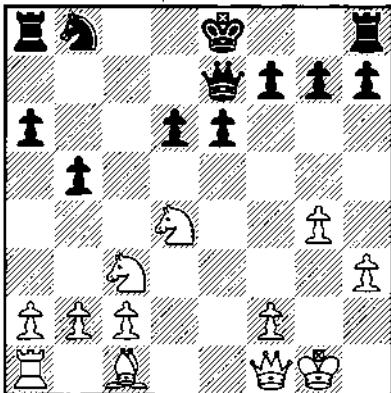
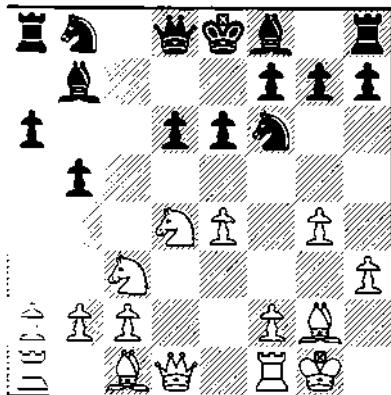
White's advantage is significant, because the bishop controls squares on both flanks whereas Black's knight is unable to find a stable outpost. The rest of the game is given for completion, with the caveat that neither side played ideally in this complex position.

28...Rg8 29.Qxf7+ Kc6 30.Qf3 Kb7 31.Be3 Qe5 32.Rd1 Kc6 33.Re1 Rh8 34.Bd2 Qh5 35.Qxh5 Rxh5 36.Kg2 Kc5 37.Re4 Rf5 38.h4 a4 39.Kg3 Nf6 40.Bxb4+ Kd5 41.Re2 Ne4+ 42.Kg2 Rf8 43.f3 Rg8+ 44.Kh2 Ng3 45.Rg2 Nf1+ 46.Kg1 Ng3 47.Be1 Ne2+ 48.Kf1 Rg2 49.Kxg2 Nc1 50.h5 Ke6 51.Bd2 Nd3 52.b4 axb3 53.axb3 d5 54.b4 d4 55.b5 Kd5 56.f4 1-0

Game 3

Nepomniachtchi – Frolyanov
Russian Team Championships 2011

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4
4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.h3 e6
7.e4 b5 8.Bg2 Bb7 9.O-O



White's two pieces will definitely outplay the rook in this middlegame, Howell–Neverov, Hastings 2010.

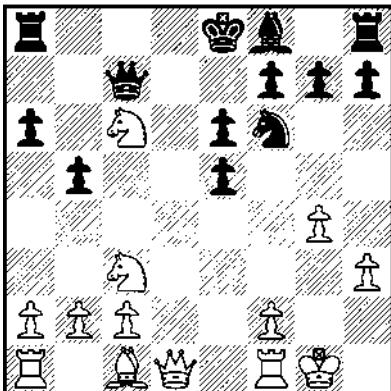
9...Nc6?! also runs into the thematic trick 10.e5! dx5 (or 10...Nxd4 11.Bxb7 dx5 12.Ne4±) 11.Bxc6+ Bxc6 12.Nxc6 Qc7

Now that White has castled and his bishop is protected, Black should be careful to avoid e4-e5 tactics. In the previous game we looked at Black's most critical reply—9...b4, while in this game we will explore the ways White can fight for the initiative if Black simply continues developing.

9...Nfd7

A common retreat seen in Najdorf practice, Black anticipates the g4-g5 advance and proactively transfers the knight, giving it access to useful squares such as e5, c5, and b6. Before heading into the main game, let's see some of Black's other options: we look at 9...Be7? here, the dubious 9...Nc6?! next, and the popular 9...h6 on page 38.

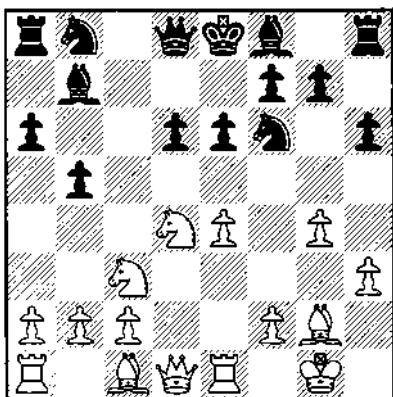
9...Be7? is the type of carelessness we dream of exploiting: 10.e5! Bxg2 11.exf6 Bxf1 12.fxe7 Qxe7 13.Qxf1±:



Fortunately for Black, the knight on c6 is trapped, and will be lost. But this gives White time to increase his advantage in development. The following game proved quite instructive: 13.Qf3 Rc8 14.Nxe5 Qxe5 15.Qb7! The queen infiltrates, and Black is way too far behind in development. 15...Qc7 16.Qxa6 Now Black faces losing everything on the queen-

side, as well as the problems associated with his king being caught in the center. 16...b4 17.Nb5 Qxc2 (after 17...Qc6 18.Qxc6+ Rxc6 19.a3± Black is still behind in development, and White's queenside will mobilize very quickly.) 18.Be3+. The threat of 19.Rac1 is undefendable and decisive, Poetsch-Kvetny, Schwaebisch Gmuend 2012.

The most popular alternative to our main line is the move 9...h6, which prevents the common idea g4-g5. Although it may seem slow to play this way for Black, this move does deserve some merit. Unfortunately for us, e4-e5 does not win a piece since there is no bishop on e7 to capture, but White has still been scoring well with the natural 10.Rel:

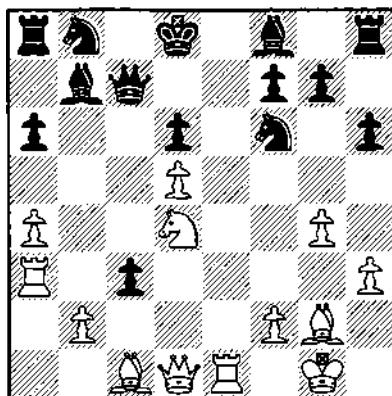


With this move we've protected the e4 pawn and strengthened the possibility of Nd5. Once again Black must be careful here. We look at 10...Nbd7?, 10...Qc7?!, and 10...e5.

10...Nbd7? This move, as well as 10...Be7, once again runs into our favorite trap: 11.e5! Bxg2 (*In case of 11...dxe5 12.Bxb7 exd4 13.Bxa8± Black can take our bishop or our*

knight, but not both at once! Either way White will remain a clear exchange up.) 12.exf6 Bb7 13.fxg7 Bxg7 And now only because of our rook on e1 can we strike the iron: 14.Nf5! Absolutely crushing. 14...Be5 15.Nxd6+ Bxd6 16.Qxd6±, Ganguly-Zhe Quan, Edmonton 2009.

10...Qc7?! defends against e4-e5, but runs into another thematic idea: 11.a4 b4 12.Nd5! This sacrifice will always be interesting if we can force Black's king to d8. In this case it is nearly decisive if you know how to proceed correctly: 12...exd5 13.exd5+ Kd8. Without the h6 pawn in this type of position White can usually play Bg5 followed by c2-c3, opening the c-file with devastating consequences. That is impossible here, but we have another way of including our rook into the game: 14.c3! bxc3 (After 14...Nxd5 15.cxb4+, next is Bd2 and Rc1, and Black is in serious trouble. Now with the d-file open, Nf5 can often be included as well.) 15.Ra3!!

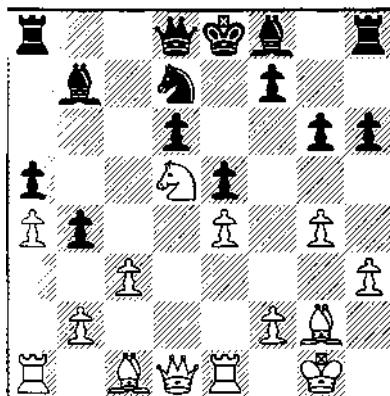


If you get a chance to make this kind of move in your game, it will truly be very, very satisfying. 15...cxb2 (15...c2 16.Qe2! Nbd7 17.Rc3 Qa5

— and Black is completely lost. The c6 pawn is incredibly strong here. White's winning plan will place intolerable pressure along the e-file, for instance 18...Nc5+ 19.Bxe6 Ne6 20.f4!+, and with the threat of Bxf6 and f4-f5 Black's king cannot hope to survive.

At this point we can basically conclude that Black must play the anti-positional move **10...e5**, which prevents White from landing a decisive initiative through the threats e4-e5 and Nd5, but gives away the d5- and f5 squares.

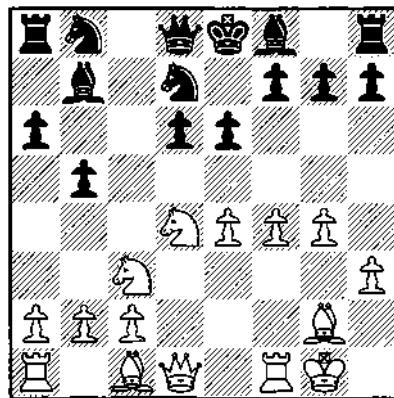
Let's see how these weaknesses were exploited by a relatively "young" Magnus Carlsen against the highly experienced Boris Gelfand: 11.Nf5 g6 12.Ne3 Nbd7 13.a4! We see this idea again and again—before jumping in with Nd5, it is almost always useful to soften up Black's queenside. 13...b4 14.Ncd5 Nxd5 15.Nxd5 a5 Black is still two moves away from castling, so Carlsen looks to use his extra time as productively as possible: 16.c3!



Opening up the queenside to White's advantage. 16...bxc3 17.bxc3 Be7

18.Rb1 Bc6 19.Bf1! A nice move, with the idea of Bb5 to exchange Black's main defender of the queenside. 19...h5 20.Bb5 Bxb5 21.Rxb5±. With the king stuck in the center and White's dominant knight on d5, this position proved too difficult to defend, Carlsen–Gelfand, Nice 2008.

10.f4



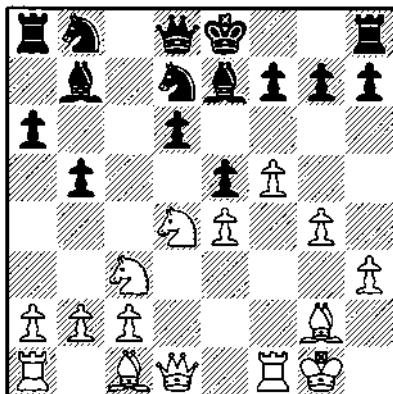
Nepomniachtchi's plan of advancing the f-pawn is quite strong, and will be our enthusiastic recommendation for meeting this setup.

10.Re1 has also been played, with the idea to play a2-a4 next. However we believe advancing the f-pawn is a more direct and powerful plan.

10...Be7 11.f5 e5

Due to the pressure on e6 Black is forced to give up the d5 square.

Now, can you guess White's next move?



12.f6!

A very strong pawn sacrifice, gaining the powerful f5 square for the knight.

The previous game to see this position continued 12.Nde2?! and after 12...h5!?? Black got excellent counterplay in Golizadeh-Zhou, Guangzhou 2010.

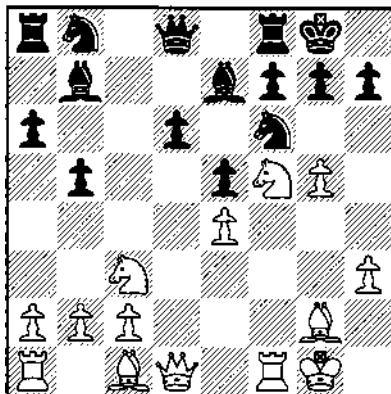
12...Nxf6

Black's next few moves are more or less forced.

After 12...exd4 13.fxe7 Qxe7 14.Qxd4±, apart from attacking on the dark squares, White has ideas of a2-a4 and Nd5 with a superior position.

And 12...Bxf6 does Black no good, as after 13.Nf5 O-O 14.Qxd6± White has regained the pawn and dominates the board.

13.Nf5 O-O 14.g5



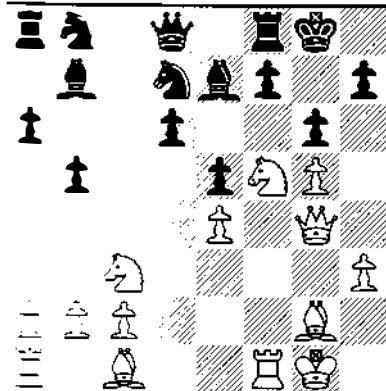
14...Ne8

The right choice. Black defends the g7 square and hopes White's attack won't break through. However, as we'll learn from this game, White's attack develops organically and is practically impossible to defend against over the board.

14...Nfd7 was a natural alternative, but White's attack gains steam very quickly: 15.Qg4! With the threat of Nh6+. Not 15.Nxd6?? Qb6+–+, which is the kind of mistake you make once and then never again.

Now, after 15...Kh8 16.Be3, White's next move is Nd5, and Black is basically lacking any good moves here. 16...b4 17.Nd5 Bxd5 18.exd5 a5 19.Rf2+–. White has a slow but very powerful attacking plan of Be4, Raf1, and Nxe7 followed by Qh5, where Black simply cannot defend both h7 and f7.

sooner or later Black will play 15...g6, as the pressure on the kingside will become un-



Perfectly good for White is now 16.Nh6+, where we can proceed with Be3 and doubling rooks on the e-file.

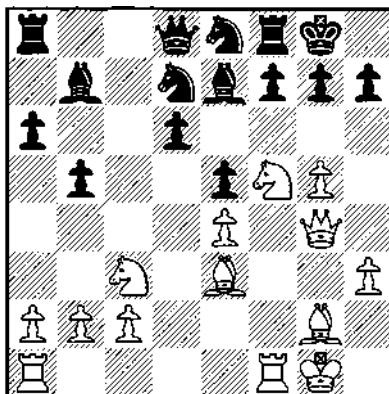
But even more impressive is 16.Be3! as it leads to some very nice variations:

a) 16...gxf5 17.exf5 Bxg2 (Or Qe8 18.Nd5! Bd8 19.g6+- and White's attack breaks through.) 19.Qxg2 Nb6 19.f6±. After taking the e7 pawn White can continue the attack with Rad1 and Ne4.

b) 16...Nc6 17.Nd5 gxf5 18.exf5 Rf5 19.f6+-, winning back the piece with a devastating attack.

c) 16...Kh8 17.Nh6 Qe8 (17...f6 18.Qe6+- is hopeless) 18.Rf2±. The pressure is mounting, and Black's position is about to collapse.

15.Qg4 Nd7 16.Be3



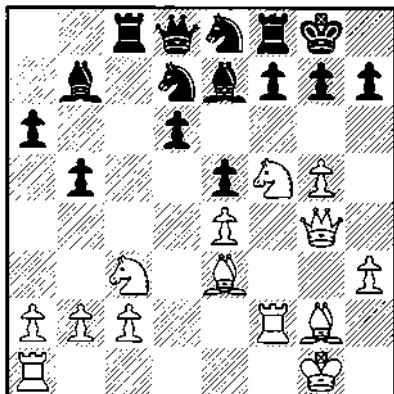
Nepomniachtchi understands that White's compensation is tremendous—he is in no hurry to prove anything and simply develops the rest of his pieces to active squares. Only then will he look to play a combinational knockout.

This is an instructive example for players who might get nervous about playing down material—in such a rich attacking position, all you need to do is place your pieces actively and trust that the position will offer tactical chances in the future.

16...Rc8

What else? Black's position lacks any kind of active counterplay, which is a telltale sign that things are about to go very wrong for the second player.

17.Rf2



Defending c2 and preparing Raf1.
17...d5?!

An understandable reaction from Black, who does not want to wait around and see how White will eventually break through on the kingside. Let's see what other options Black had:

In case of the active **17...Rc4** White can first kick the rook back with **18.Bf1!** and after **18...Rc7**, among other moves there is the simple idea **19.h4→** where Black's position remains very unpleasant.

The typical **17...b4?!** would be too weakening after **18.Nd5 Bxd5 19.exd5→**, where White can proceed normally with h3-h4-h5, Raf1, Be4, etc. but also has an option to play a2-a3 and go after Black's queenside, which now lacks defenders.

Waiting patiently with **17...Nc5** won't help for long, as White will eventually break through. **18.Raf1:**

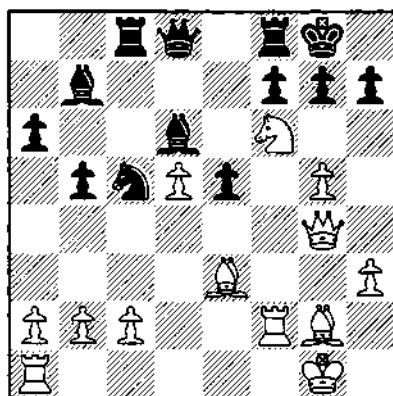
a) Now **18...Ne6** runs into **19.Nh6+ gxh6 20.gxh6+ Kh8 21.Rxf7 Rxf7 22.Rxf7** and White has a winning attack, for instance **22...Nc7 23.Qf5 Qg8 24.Rxe7+-**.

b) And after **18...Rc7 19.h4!–** Black is really struggling here. White's plan of advancing h4-h5 and g5-g6 is quite promising, as well as **20.Nd5** forcing **20...Bxd5 21.e4xd5**, after which the light-squared bishop can join the attack via the e4 square.

18.exd5 Nd6 19.Nxd6 Bxd6 20.Ne4

Black has managed to trade off the menacing knight on f5, but now the second knight comes into play with even greater effect, ready to give a devastating check on f6.

20...Nc5 21.Nf6+!!



A combinational shot like this is extremely natural, but still requires precise calculation to justify. Here we'd recommend developing players to put the book down and try to work out all of the variations. If you're going to aim for a position rich with attacking potential, you should work on improving your combinational vision as well!

23.

The tactical move.

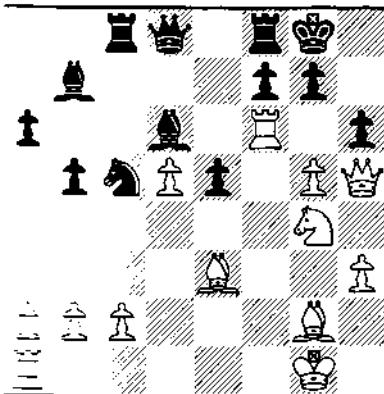
Of course, 21...gxf6 22.gxf6+ just leads to immediate mate.

22.

Otherwise there was no purpose in Nf6—finding this move was really necessary.

23.

Now Black is forced to capture the knight, as after 23...Ng4 Kg8 24.Rf6! mate is inevitable:



23...Rxf6

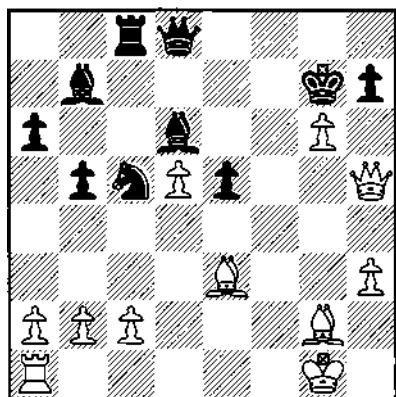
With the threat of Rh6, Black has only one reasonable defense, so we believe that it is very likely that Nepomniachtchi had already calculated until the end of the game!

23...Rg8

Or 23...Qe7 24.Raf1! Kg8 25.b4!+ and the knight cannot move in view of 26.Be4.

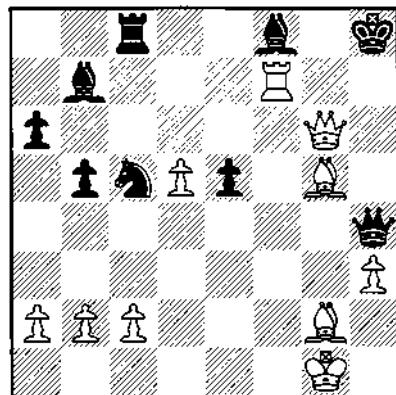
24.Rxf7 Rg7 25.Rxg7 Kxg7

26.g6!



A decisive breakthrough, and the only way to win the game immediately—full points if you spotted this idea while calculating 21.Nf6+!! The game did not last much longer:

26...hxg6 27.Qh6+ Kg8 28.Qxg6+ Kh8 29.Rf1 Bf8 30.Rf7 Qh4 31.Bg5 1-0

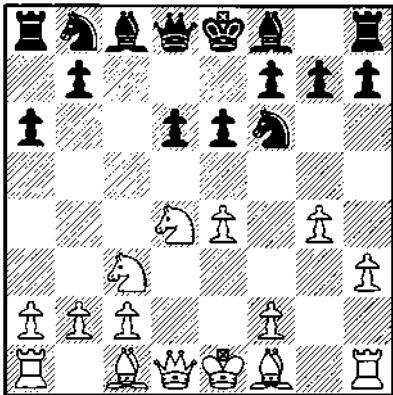


A fantastic attacking effort by GM Ian Nepomniachtchi!

Game 4

Vallejo Pons – Topalov
Leon Masters 25th Rapid 2012

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4
4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.h3 e6
7.g4

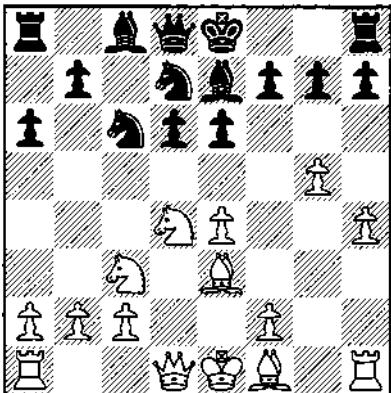


7...Be7

This simple move has become very fashionable among top players recently.

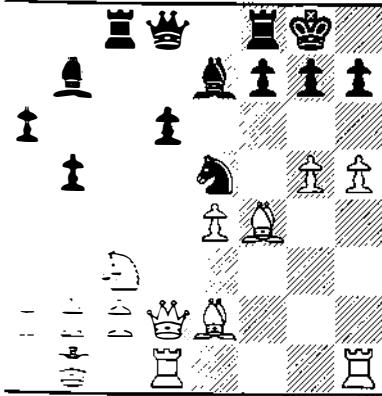
We look at two alternatives, 7...Nc6 here, and 7...Nfd7!? on page 47.

Similar to the bishop move, though less flexible, is 7...Nc6, another natural developing move. 8.Be3 Be7 9.g5 After this move we are going to reach a similar position to that in the main line—The knights in the center will usually be exchanged, and after we place the queen on d4 the advance h3-h4-h5-h6 will become White's main attacking plan. 9...Nd7 10.h4:

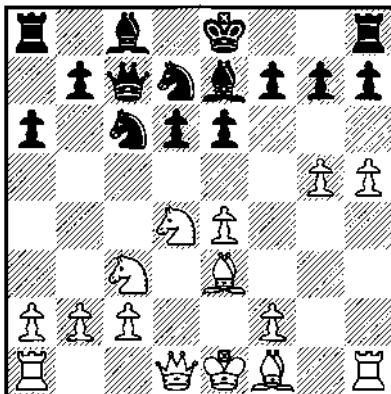


At this point Black normally develops counterplay on the queenside through the moves b7-b5, Bb7, Rc8, Nb6, etc., but first, something must be done about the knight on c6:

a) 10...O-O?! It is a bit too early to castle. As we'll see in the rest of this line, Black's chances lie on developing queenside counterplay as soon as possible. Here we'd like to continue with an instructive game by a young GM Dmitry Andreikin, who is now one of the world's elite: 11.f4 Nxd4 The drawback of this exchange is that White's queen will be well placed on d4, and as we mentioned earlier, the plan of h4-h5-h6 is quite effective. (*Black's other option was Qc7, which we examine in the next line.*) 12.Qxd4 b5 13.O-O-O Bb7 14.h5. Already Black is forced to play 14...e5. Throughout the Najdorf and other Sicilians, we'll see that giving up the d5 square can be a serious concession on Black's part. 15.Qd2 exf4 Also necessary, since allowing f4-f5 would be way too dangerous. 16.Bxf4 Ne5 17.Be2 Rc8 18.Kb1!



Black must concede d5 and play e6-e5.)

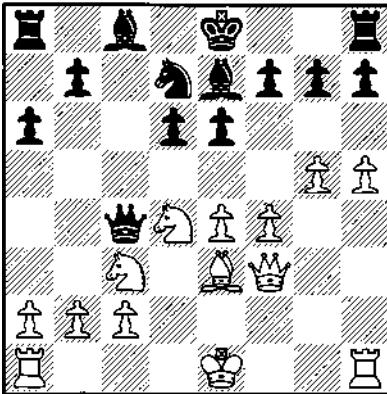
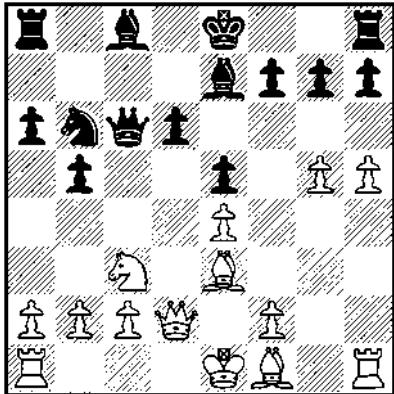


A little king sidestep is somewhat as the quintessential tactic move—limiting Black’s resources by getting off of e4 and away from the c1-h6 diagonal. Whenever in doubt, this will be strong and useful much often than not! 18...Re8 19.Nd5 ~~19...e6~~ 20.Rhf1± was another option, with the plan of rooks on the f-file.) 19...Bxd5 ~~20...Nc4~~ 21.Qc1 Bf8?! An odd and most likely missing White’s resource. (21...Qd7 was needed, ~~but~~ Bg4 for the time being, White would still retain a large advantage after any sensible move like Bd3±.) 22.Bg4! Rc7 23.g6!+, a winning attack—Black’s light-squared bishop was dearly missed, in Andreikin–Lugovoi, St. Petersburg 1905.

The other option is 10...Qc7 defending the knight in order to achieve b7-b5. The most aggressive, probably the best move is 10...b5, utilizing the fact that Black’s queen no longer attacks the pawn. (11.f4 is also a decent plan, for instance 11...b5 12.Nxc6 Qxc6 Qd4 O-O 14.O-O-O Bb7 15.h5→, as in Andreikin’s game above,

There have only been a few games here, but the position is nevertheless similar to other variations in this line.

b1) Now 11...b5 is fairly rare but seems like a logical move. Let’s take a look at a sample line that illustrates White’s late-opening/early middlegame strategy: 12.Nxc6 Qxc6 13.Qd4! As we can see, the idea of playing Qd4 in one move is the main problem with 7...Nc6, as White gains a lot of time for the kingside attack. Since now O-O runs into h5-h6, Black is obliged to play 13...e5 (Somewhat pointless is 13...Ne5 which is easily met with 14.O-O-O± followed by f2-f4.) 14.Qd2. White has achieved a very good position, mainly due to the d5-outpost for the knight. Now logical is 14...Nb6, fighting for control over the d5 square:



b11) 15.f4! exf4 16.Bxf4 O-O 17.O-O-O±. White is threatening h6 and Qd4, which is hard to meet without weakening the entire kingside with f7-f6. An ideal position for White.

b12) White should also consider 15.Bxb6, taking a positional approach to secure d5 for the knight. Incidentally, the idea of exchanging our dark-squared bishop for the purposes of controlling d5 is commonly seen in the Classical Sicilian, as well as the Sveshnikov, of course. 15...Qxb6 16.Nd5 Qd8 17.Rg1±. White's knight is obviously dominating the game—even if Black plays Bb7 and captures on d5, White will be left with a clearly superior position, with ideas such as attacking the light squares in Black's camp with g5-g6, or preparing the f2-f4 break.

b2) 11...Nce5 This move is not too critical since White quickly gets a very strong attack, but the ideas found in our analysis are very thematic and studying them should prove beneficial to your attacking prowess. 12.f4 Nc4 13.Bxc4 Qxc4 14.Qf3!

We've given up the light-squared bishop but gained several tempi in return, and now White's attack on the kingside is already close to breaking through.

b21) 14...O-O?! 15.O-O-O f6 It is hard to assign blame to this move, as White's kingside pawns do appear quite menacing. 16.g6 Capturing on f6 to open the g-file would also lead to a significant advantage. 16...h6 17.f5 Ne5 18.Qh3±. In M. Muzychuk-Bulmaga, Legnica 2013, White took the positional approach of fully cramping Black's position, and came away with a nearly flawless victory.

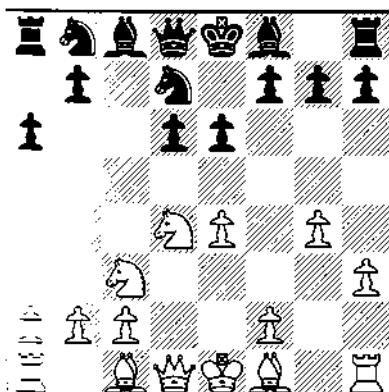
b22) Instead of castling, 14...b5N is probably best, aiming to play b5-b4 with counterplay. 15.a3! This move costs us a tempo but really limits Black's play, since it protects against b5-b4. Now we just want to castle queenside and advance further on the kingside with f4-f5. The following lines should prove instructive:

b221) If 15...b4?! then 16.axb4 Qxb4 17.g6! This break is very strong, since our rook on h1 is protected and because the e6 pawn is undefended. It also comes with a nice point: 17...Qxb2 18.gxf7+ Kxf7 19.Kd2!+-. The threat of Rhb1 poses

the serious problems, and of course Black's kingside is now extremely dangerous.

Better is 15...Bb7, but 16.O-O-O O-O (Or 16...Rc8 and White breaks through 17.f5! Rac8 (After 17...Ne5 18.Bg3– White is nearly winning, the pressure on e6 and threats of f5-f6 or g5-g6 are too difficult to resist. 18.f6 gxf6 19.g6!+–, Black's king isn't surviving for long.)

A few years after our main game below chose the strange-looking move 7...Nfd7!?



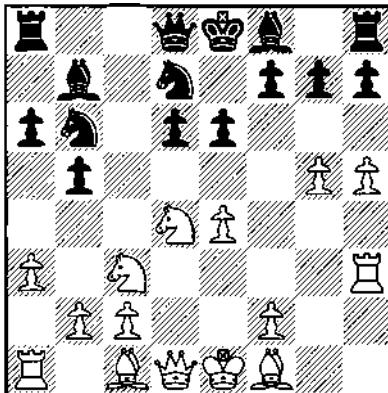
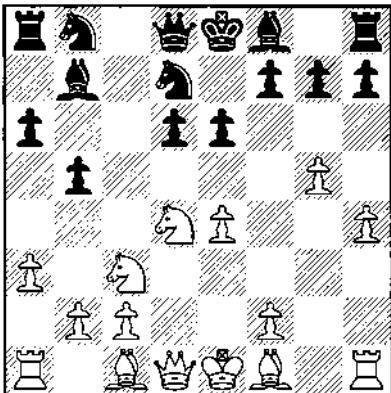
Normally we would ignore such blandishness, but when a player of Topalov's caliber plays it against none other than Anand, in a Candidates Tournament nonetheless, then it is nearly something worth looking into!

And in fact, the idea behind this move is simply devious—the only way we can truly understand the point is to first examine the consequences of the main line 7...Be7, against which we recommend the critical 8.g5. With that in mind, Black anticipates g4-g5 and for the time being delays playing Be7 in favor of first developing the queenside.

So why can't White just play Bg2, with the intention of transposing to the previous game, Nepomniachtchi-Frolyanov, in the line 7.g4 b5? Well, after 8.Bg2 Black would then play 8...Be7, and we are longer able to play 9.g4-g5 since that would simply hang the g-pawn!

Anand did go ahead and play **8.Bg2** which is perfectly sensible, but after 8...Be7 a typical, though more solid, Najdorf for Black was reached. The game continued 9.Be3 Nc6 10.h4 Nde5 11.g5 Bd7 12.Nxc6 Bxc6 13.b3 f5!? and although Black should have been fine from the opening, Anand eventually won an important game on his way to returning to the World Championship, Anand–Topalov, Khanty-Mansiysk 2014.

After some deliberation, we think it's important for White to insist on transposing and play the immediate **8.g5!** Now if Black plays Be7 at any point, we will happily transpose into the main line of this game. 8...b5 (As we mentioned, in case of 8...Be7 White should play h3-h4, which will transpose into the main line.) 9.a3 This is White's response to b7-b5 in the main line, so we'll stick with it here. Another reason not to play Bg2 too early is that we generally want to leave the bishop at home on f1 in this line, as in some cases it will be very important to keep the c4 square under control. 9...Bb7 Now it's finally time to deviate a bit and play 10.h4?N

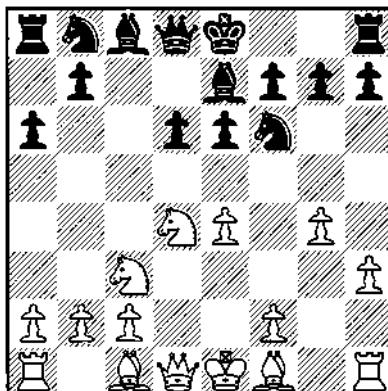


Once again offering to transpose, as if Black plays Be7 we'll play Be3. But in case Black continues to delay developing the kingside, we are also threatening to play h4-h5 and eventually g5-g6, a very common breakthrough if Black's king remains in the center. 10...Nb6 Now Black is looking to bring the other knight in via d7, followed by either Nc5 or Ne5, with good counterplay. (10...Nc6 also transposes to a line covered later on after 11.Nxc6 Bxc6 12.Be3 Be7 13.Qd4 O-O 14.O-O-O. This position will be covered in the variation 11...Nc6 in the main game.) At this point we feel it's time to point out the drawbacks of Black's opening play and start harassing the kingside with 11.h5! N8d7 (11...Be7 is now strongly met with 12.Qg4!↑ and g5-g6 is coming with great effect.) 12.Rh3!↑

Defending the rook, and White is now ready to play g5-g6, after which Black's light squares will be severely weakened.

Black can still fight, but we believe White's chances are superior. This is certainly an important position for the whole line starting with 7...Nfd7. It might be wise to analyze a few moves further over the board, later checking your analysis with a strong computer engine.

Now back to our game, after 7...Be7:



8.g5 Nfd7 9.h4 b5

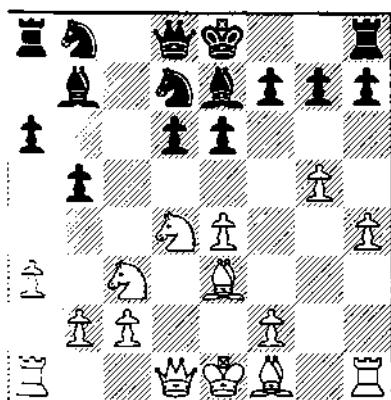
This is more or less the modern bent of the Najdorf—Black takes on the queenside as quickly as possible, since for the meantime $\text{e}8\text{g}\text{e}$ is somewhat safe on e8.

$\text{Nf}6$ 10.Be3 transposes to the diagram on page 44 which appears after 10.h4.

$\text{Bb}7$

This move is necessary in this case after Bb7 the e4 pawn will lack protection, and we are usually able to keep the bishop on f1 for some time. Also, as we've seen in previous lines, Black is sometimes forced to play e6-e5, in which case we will want our c3-knight to be ready to d5 at a moment's notice.

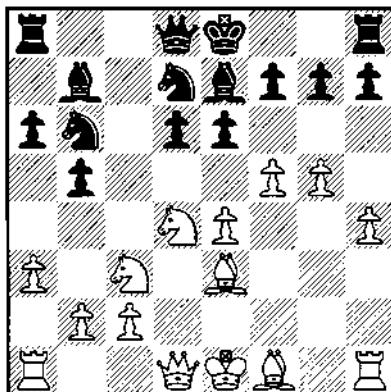
Bb7 11.Be3



11...O-O

Topalov understands the Najdorf as well as anyone, but it's quite telling that after this game almost all subsequent games in this line featured either 11...Nc6 or 11...Nb6. Indeed, it appears that Black should continue to delay castling even further and aim to make progress on the queenside.

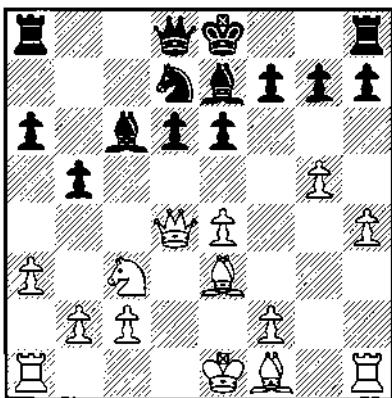
Let's first take a look at 11...Nb6: This is similar to 7...Nfd7—Black first plays Nb6 to develop the other knight to d7, followed by Rc8 and either Nc5 or Ne5. GM Fedorov demonstrated White's best continuation by aggressively going after the e6 pawn with 12.f4! (*Playing standard moves can give Black a comfortable game: 12.Qd2 N8d7 13.O-O-O Ne5 14.f4 Nec4 15.Qe1 Rc8* and Black has achieved everything he could have hoped for, Milman-Molner, Lubbock 2011.) 12...N8d7 (12...Nc6? 13.Nxc6 Bxc6 14.Qd4+– is a common tactical theme when Black delays castling) 13.f5!



It looks risky to attack in the center without first castling, but White's king is perfectly safe for the moment, while Black has some concrete problems to solve regarding the e6 pawn. 13...Nc5 Pretty much the only move. (After 13...e5? 14.Ne6! fxe6 15.Qh5+ Kf8 16.fxe6+– White is winning the piece back with a winning attack to boot.) Now best seems to be 14.fxe6 (although the immediate 14.Qg4↑ led to a fairly crushing defeat in Fedorov-Jaracz, Czechia 2012) 14...fxe6 15.Qg4 Qc8 16.O-O-O and

White's pressure against e6 should win at least a pawn, for example 16...O-O 17.Nxe6! Qxe6 18.Qxe6+ Nxe6 19.Bxb6±.

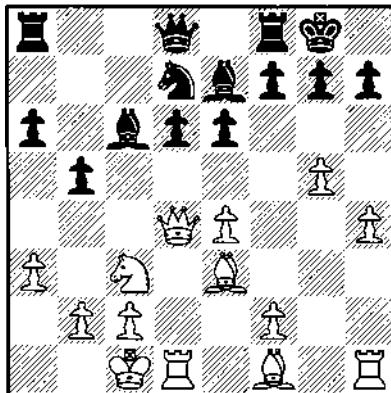
The latest wrinkle in this line is 11...Nc6 which has been favored in recent competition, so we will discuss it at length. Black delays castling but prepares to play Rc8 and b5-b4, getting counterplay. 12.Nxc6! An important move, blocking the c-file before Black has a chance to play Rc8. The point of Black's approach can be seen after 12.Qd2 Rc8 13.O-O-O?! b4! 14.axb4 Nxb4, where Black had already seized the initiative in Hovhannisyan–S. Zhigalko, Martuni 2013. 12...Bxc6 13.Qd4! Another important idea for this line, forcing Black to castle.



a) As we've seen before, 13...e5?! is rarely a good idea, and we simply reply 14.Qd2±, and White's next few moves should be O-O-O, f2-f4, and Nd5, with a better position.

b) Neither does 13...Ne5 solve Black's problems as after 14.O-O-O, f2-f4 is a serious threat, for instance 14...O-O 15.f4 Ng4 16.Bd2 f5 17.Be2 e5 18.Qg1± and Black's position is falling apart!

c) After 13...O-O 14.O-O-O:



Black must decide on how to create adequate counterplay against our king—otherwise we'll freely push our kingside pawns forward and mate his king, or at the very least force serious positional concessions such as e6-e5.

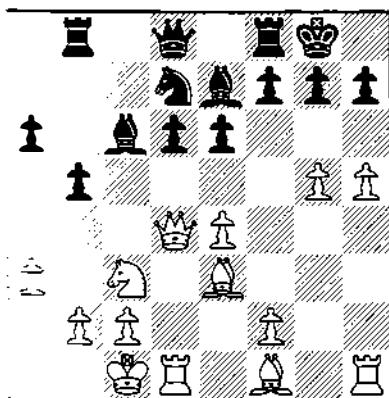
c1) 14...Rc8?! gives White a similar position to the game Andreikin–Lugovoi, which we analyzed previously on page 45. Once again, the advancing h-pawn forces Black to give up the d5 square. 15.Kb1 Bb7 16.f4 Qa5 17.h5 e5 (*17...Rxc3 would be nice for Black if not for 18.Bd2!±*) 18.fxе5 Nxe5 19.h6±. The real strength of this pawn can be felt in the endgame, as it completely paralyzes Black's king, Van Kampen–Kvetny, Basel 2013.

c2) 14...Rb8! A much stronger rook move, threatening the unpleasant a6-a5 and b5-b4. There have only been three games so far that have reached this position, but they were all recent and featured some strong players. Because this is a critical position for the entire line with 7...Be7, we've done some fairly deep analysis:

c21) 15.f4?! turned out to be too slow and allowed Black to execute

defended perfectly: 15...a5! 16.h5 e5
 This is a case where Black tried to give up the e5 square but had enough counterplay on the kingside to even overtake the initiative 18.axb4 axb4 19.Nd5 Bxd5
 Immediate 19...Ra8? was even better 20.Qxd5 exf4 21.Bxf4 Ra8↑
 -Volokitin, Yerevan 2014.

Best is 15.h5!



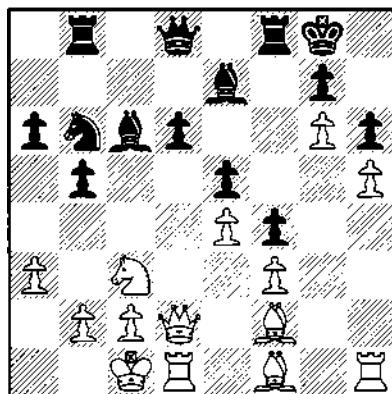
is imperative for White's attack to strike first. Let's look at what Black

c221) 15...Bxg5 has never been played and for good reason. After 16.Rg1 Bxe3+ 17.Qxe3 Qe7 18.Qg3± White regains the pawn with a superior position.

c222) 15...a5 is in the spirit of the axiom that positions with kings castled on opposite sides of the board are pure races, and that both sides must throw their pawns down the board as fast as possible. Fortunately for us, it is Black who must blink first: 16.h6 e5 17.Qd2 g6 18.Nd5! Bxd5 19.Qxd5±. White's two bishops basically guarantee an edge here, as control over the light squares will be a critical factor in this ensuing middlegame. Instead, 19.exd5?! was

not ideal, as the d5 square should be occupied with a piece whenever possible, and a draw was agreed in Bok-Das, Groningen 2012.

c223) 15...e5!? Although so far we've only labeled this move as a "concession", Sandipan came up with a very original idea: 16.Qd2 f5! This move is quite profound, trying to lock up the kingside so that White's counterplay is stunted. 17.f3 (After 17.gxf6 Nxf6 18.f3 a5? White's position is still fine, but it is not clear what to do against Black's obvious counterplay.) 17...f4 18.Bf2 Nb6 This is the point of Sandipan's idea—although some computers will give White a huge advantage here, in reality it is not so simple, as there is no way to make progress on the kingside. 19.g6 h6

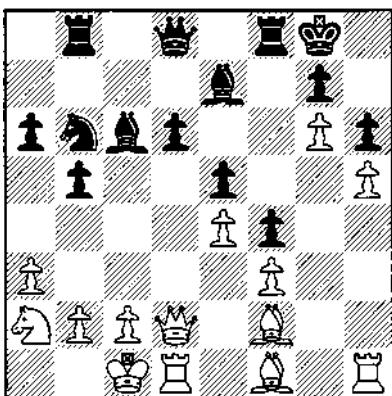


This was perhaps the critical moment of the game.

c2231) White played 20.Kb1 Kh8 21.Bxb6 Qxb6 22.Bh3?! stopping Rc8, but allowing Black loads of counterplay. (22.Nd5! was necessary, as after 22...Bxd5 23.Qxd5± it is only White who can be better here, since our bishop is more useful and in the endgame the g6 pawn can prove to be

a real asset. That said, it is also not clear how White should proceed in converting the advantage into a full point.) 22...b4 23.axb4 Qxb4 24.b3 Qa3 \rightarrow . With the open queenside and closed kingside Black had the better chances and pulled out the victory, in Andreev–Sandipan, Pardubice 2012.

c2232) We'd like to suggest the following improvement: 20.Na2!N



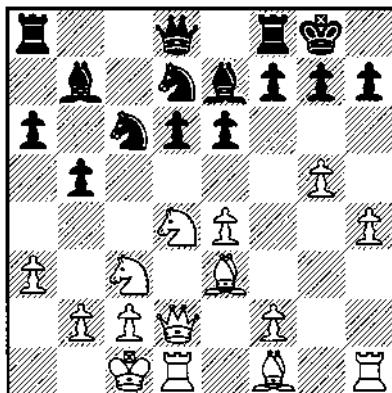
The kingside may be locked up, but White still has a positional advantage on the rest of the board due to Black's passive bishop on e7 and the backward d6 pawn. If White can successfully create a bind on the queenside, it will be very difficult for Black to defend.

The threat behind White's move is Qa5, freezing Black's queenside, and after the follow-up Nb4 Black's position will practically fall apart. 20...Nc4 This is pretty much the only move, trying to complicate the game and open lines on the queenside. *If 20...Kh8 then 21.Qa5! and let's take a look at our dream endgame: 21...Nc4 22.Qxd8 Rfxd8 23.Nb4 Bb7 24.Bxc4 bxc4 25.Nd5±. White's positional advantage is nearly decisive.* 21.Qc3 Kh8 And now

we should try to kill all of Black's counterplay with 22.Bxc4 bxc4 23.Nb4! (After 23.Qxc4 Bb5 \rightarrow Black has fairly decent compensation here. 23...Bb5 24.Nd5±. With such a knight on d5 we believe White can safely play for two results here, playing to put pressure on Black's queenside and along the d-file. Also, should we reach an endgame, the g6 pawn will become incredibly strong, and offer long-term winning chances.

Now, let's get back to our main game, after 11...O-O:

12.Qd2 Nc6 13.O-O-O



This structure is quite typical for the Najdorf in general, making this game very instructive, since Vallejo Pons demonstrates a very straightforward way for White to develop the kingside attack.

13...Nxd4

A typical exchange which opens the c-file for Black, but this was not the only attempt to gain counterplay.

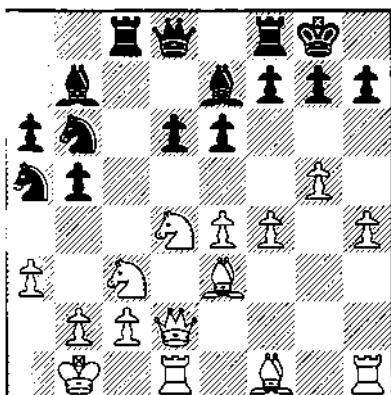
13...b4? loses a pawn to 14.Nxc6 Bxc6 (or 14...bxc3 15.Qxc3±) 15.axb4±.

The immediate 13...Nce5 can be met with 14.f4 Nc4 (or 14...Ng4 \pm and 16.Bh3 next) 15.Bxc4. This structure is very good for White since Black no longer has any counterplay on the c-file, and it is too late to organize something on the kingside. White can continue pushing pawns on the kingside with 16.f5 \pm 17.Qg2 \pm threatening f5-f6, and 17...Kh8 then White can simply play 18.h5, followed by a decisive breakthrough.

13...Rc8?! seems to be Black's best testing try for counterplay. White should sidestep with 14.Kb1! and now Black has a choice of knight moves to get to the c4 square, but in general White shouldn't be afraid of giving up one of his bishops in exchange for the tempi:

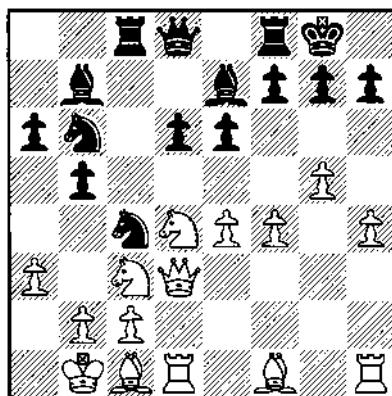
If now 14...Nce5 then 15.h5! Nb6 (the immediate 15...Nc4 just leads to 16.Bxc4 Rxc4 17.g6! \pm which is very good for White.) 16.Qe1! A nice prophylactic move, with the point of Nec4 17.g6 \uparrow and White is already breaking through to Black's king.

Or, 14...Nb6 15.f4 leads to a sharp battle after 15...Na5! Black's most challenging response.



a) After 16.f5 Black is behind, but can play 16...Nac4 17.Qe1 (Avoid 17.Bxc4?! Nxc4 18.Qe1 b4! 19.axb4 d5 20.fxe6 Bxb4 \uparrow as this is definitely not what White wants.) 17...Nxb2?! 18.Kxb2 Qc7 (with the threat of 19...Qxc3+ 20.Qxc3 Na4+) and after 19.f6 ∞ we have some sharp and very unclear complications.

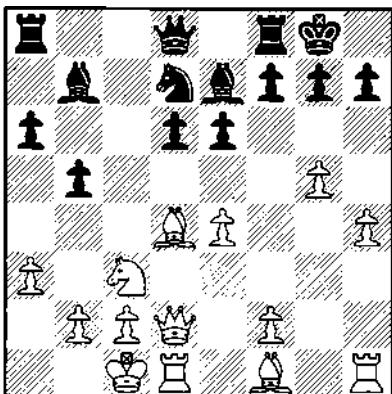
b) Stronger is the prophylactic move 16.Qd3! Nac4 and now 17.Bc1!



b1) The silicon beast tends to want to play 17...d5 in this kind of position, but it takes some time before it understands that after 18.e5 the closed center favors White, for instance 18...Qc7 19.g6! Nxa3+ (19...hxg6 20.h5+- is just a mating attack) 20.bxa3 Qxc3 21.gxf7+ Kxf7 22.Bh3! \pm . The e6 pawn is falling and White is coming out ahead.

b2) 17...Qc7 threatens Nxa3+, but can be answered with 18.Rh3! and believe it or not Black is failing to create any serious counterplay here—White's queenside setup is perfect. Meanwhile, we're just getting started: 18...Na4 19.Nxa4 bxa4 20.f5! \pm . Once again, our kingside pawn storm is too strong.

14.Bxd4



14...Rc8

Topalov aims to play Ne5-c4 and recapture with the rook, keeping the c-file open.

14...Nc5 looks like a harmonious move, but after 15.f3!N It turns out that this knight has no future. (15.Qe3 was not as strong, eventually running into e6-e5, Sutovsky-Swiercz, Plovdiv 2012) 15...Rc8 16.Kb1±. White's next moves are Rg1 and h4-h5, with a kingside breakthrough looming. Black's position looks nice but there is no counterplay to be found! Of course 16...Qa5 will be met with the common trick 17.Nd5!

15.Rg1

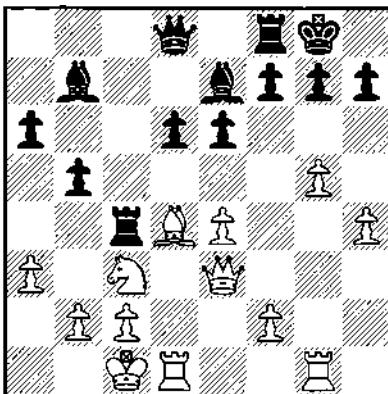
A typical move for this kind of position, getting the rook off the long diagonal and defending the g-pawn so that h4-h5 can eventually be played.

15.f4?! looks very natural but after 15...Nc5 White would really like to put his pawn back on f3, as we saw in the previous variation. Now 16.Bg2 runs into 16...a5!?, which works because of 17.Nxb5?? Nb3+--.

15.Kb1 would definitely be a decent move. For instance 15...Ne5

16.Qe3 Nc4 17.Bxc4 Rxc4 18.f4= with a similar position to that in the game, where White's attack seems to be slightly quicker.

15...Ne5 16.Qe3 Nc4 17.Bxc4 Rxc4



18.f4

The immediate h5 was also an option, but in any case White will need all of his kingside pawns for the attack. It's important to note that Black no longer has Nc5 available to harass the e-pawn.

18...Re8

Considering the course of the game, it is easy at first to claim that this move is an error since Black quickly fell into a passive position, but it was difficult to come up with something better. In all lines it appears that White's attack is very strong.

Perhaps the most practical choice was 18...Qc7?! setting up counterplay on the c-file, but in order to play this move Topalov would have to navigate his way through some tough complications after 19.f5 Rc8 20.f6 (Not 20.g6?! e5 21.Bb6 Rxc3!?, and the thematic exchange sacrifice works well here because Black is likely winning the e4 pawn.)

Perhaps this is the move overlooked, controlling square and threatening (notably, if 20...Bf8 \rightarrow 21.Bxg7 Kxg7 23.h5↑, g5-g6 is quite powerful.) 20.g6 22.h5↑ White's chances are better, but it's not without resources. A red eight remains ahead.

23...Bf8?!

23...Bf8?!

An understandable move but now it really goes downhill from here.

More tenacious was 23...Re6 so that Black could keep the bishop on g7 and protect the kingside. White should continue with 24.Bb4 consolidating the overwhelming positional advantage, and if 24...Qc7 threatening a6-a5, then 25.Qa7!± is strong, putting maximum pressure on Black's position. This queen invasion also occurred in the game.

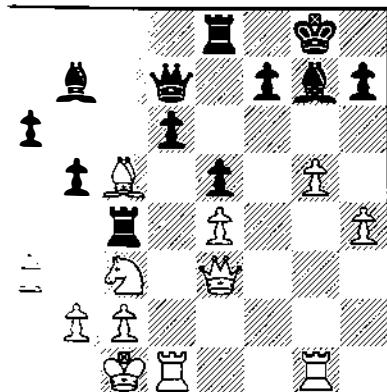
24.h5! Rxc3

Topalov decides to take on c3 before White gets a chance to play Bb4, so that at least White's queenside structure is ruined. Now Black can at least hope to escape into an endgame down an exchange, but with precise play White's advantage should be decisive.

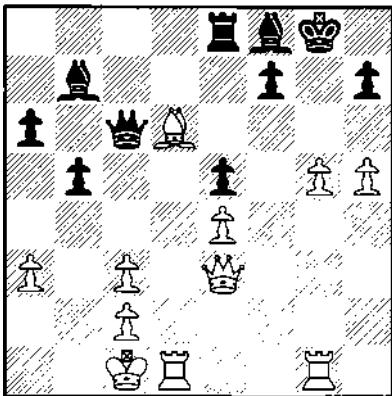
25.bxc3 Re6

Given the passivity of Black's position, Topalov has certainly defended quite well. The rook is well placed on e6, where it defends against g5-g6 breakthroughs.

The danger to Black's king can be seen after 25...Qc6 26.Bxd6!!

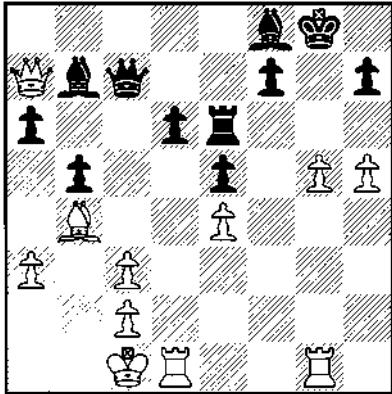


Attacking a second target and stretching Black's defenses. So far Alejo Pons has really played a model game, demonstrating the ideal way to conduct White's attack.



This is basically a deflection sacrifice, luring the dark-squared bishop away from the kingside. 26...Bxd6 27.g6! This kind of sacrifice can almost be made intuitively, since it is clear that the entire kingside is opening up for White's heavy pieces. For instance 27...fxg6 28.hxg6 Bf8 29.gxh7+ Kh8 30.Qg3! and there is no defense: 30...Qh6+ 31.Kb1 Qg7 (or 31...Bg7 32.Rd7+-) 32.Qf3+-.

26.Bb4 Qc7 27.Qa7!



Preventing a6-a5, and stretching Black's defenses even further.

27...Qc8 28.Rdf1

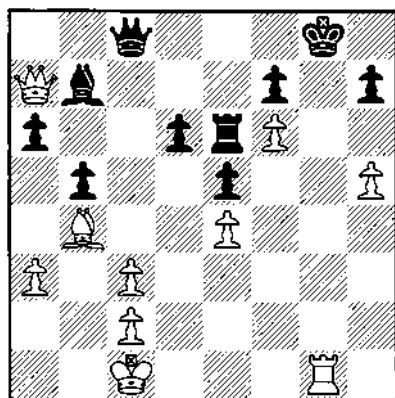
Putting pressure on the f7 pawn, while also setting up White's next move.

28...Be7 29.Rf6!?

Vallejo Pons makes a practical decision, giving back the exchange but launching a devastating attack along the dark squares. Although this game was played under rapid time controls, White's play has been really impressive.

29.Kb2 was an interesting alternative, emphasizing that Black has no good moves to play. If 29...Bxe4 White again wins with the blow 30.Bxd6! with the point 30...Bxd6 31.Qxf7+ Kh8 32.g6!+- with checkmate to follow.

29...Bxf6 30.gxf6+



30...Kf8?

A blunder, but in an already very difficult position.

Necessary was 30...Kh8, but White could increase the pressure after 31.Qe3 Qf8 32.Rd1 Rxf6 33.Qb6!+- winning the d6 pawn, and the e5 pawn soon after. Black's position finally collapses.

11 Qb6!

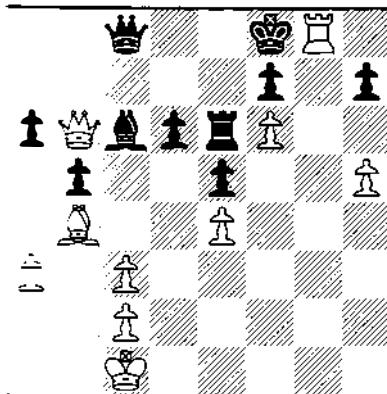
Hitting d6 and luring Black's knight to c6, a very precise route to victory!

11...Bc6

11...Qd7 runs into the same fate
see in the game: 32.Rg8+ Kxg8
Qg1+ Kf8 34.Qg7+ Ke8 35.Qg8

-

12 Rg8+! 1-0



A brilliant finish to a brilliant game!

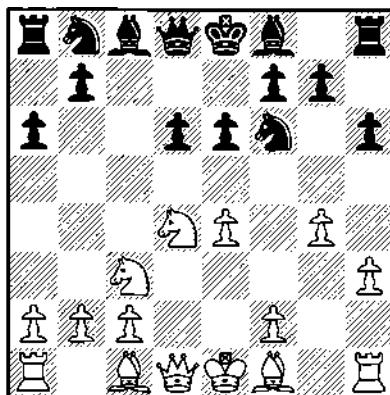
Black resigned in view of
Kxg8 33.Qg1+ Kf8 34.Qg7+
35.Qg8+ Kd7 36.Qxf7+ and
we see the importance of first
moving Black's bishop to c6: 36...Kd8
Bc5++-

Game 5

Nepomniachtchi - Zabotin

Moscow Open 2006

**1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4
4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.h3 e6
7.g4 h6!?**



A controversial decision, of which the consequences are still not totally clear. Black prevents the early advance g4-g5 which is our main recommendation against 7...Be7. But the drawback is also obvious: Black's king will never be comfortable castling kingside, since the h6 pawn would then serve as a target for White's attack.

8.Bg2

Black now has a few different options on how to develop his pieces, but generally the moves Be7, Qc7, Nc6, and O-O will be played in some order. Although there are a few nuances to be aware of, we have decided that White's most promising setup is to play Be3, f2-f4, Qe2, and O-O-O.

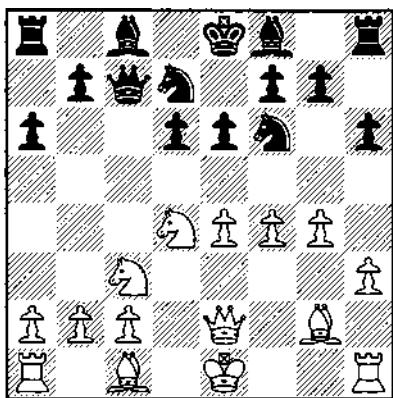
8...Qc7

This is Black's most popular and flexible choice, so we'll use it

as our main line. However, we also take a look at Black's other tries in the position. We cover 8...Nc6 and 8...Nbd7 on this page, with the radical 8...g5!? being discussed on page 59, and finally 8...Be7 on page 60.

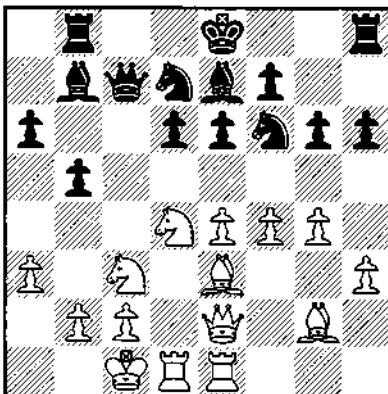
Against 8...Nc6 we have chosen a specific move order, which we cover in the next game on page 67. We will also look at setups involving an early Bd7 there.

8...Nbd7 is rarely played, but doesn't change White's plan: 9.f4 Qc7 10.Qe2:



a) 10...Be7 may transpose to a line below if Black follows up with Nb6-c4—see line a2). We continue with 11.Be3:

a1) One instructive example started with 11...Rb8 12.O-O-O b5 13.Rhe1 A good move, strengthening the potential breakthrough of e4-e5 if Black's king were to stay in the center. 13...Bb7 14.a3! Securing the knight on c3, which defends the queenside and the crucial e4 pawn. 14...g6:



And now:

a11) 15.f5?! e5 16.Nb3 g5 17.Kb1 gave Black a worse but defendable position, Amanov–Matikozyan, Los Angeles 2013.

a12) White should have exercised some restraint and played 15.Kb1! improving the king and forcing Black to find a useful move.

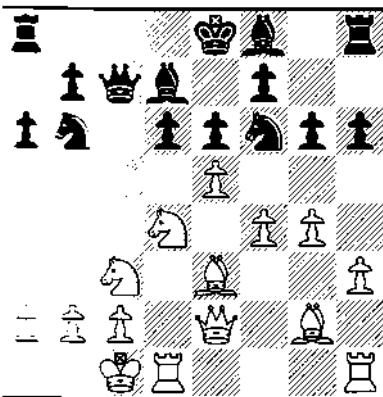
White now threatens 16.e4-e5, since after 16...dxe5 17.fxe5 Nxe5 18.Bf4 Black would not have the saving resource of 18...Nd3+.

In case of the logical 15...Nb6 White can crash through with 16.f5 e5 17.fxg6! exd4 18.Bxd4 fxg6 19.e5+– with a decisive attack against Black's "centralized" king.

a2) After 11...Nb6 12.O-O-O Nc4 13.Kb1!, taking the bishop on e3 does not slow down White's attack at all, as we can still push our pawns forward on the kingside. As we mention below in the line 10...Na5 on page 62, if Black continues developing with 13...Bd7 then White can retreat the bishop to c1 with a great position.

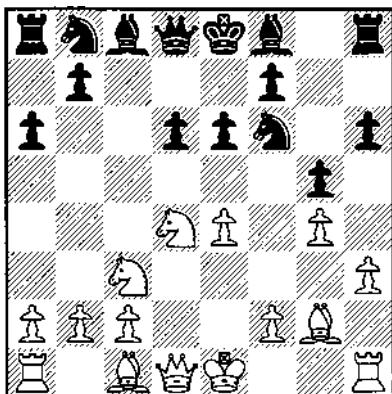
b) In a high-level game GM Berg chose 10...g6?! but this questionable use of a tempo was swiftly punished: 11.Be3 Nb6 (11...Bg7 just doesn't

- ~~...d5~~ for Black after 12.O-O-O
13.h4= when White's attack
(the h-file is fast and promising.)
- 12.O Bd7 13.e5!

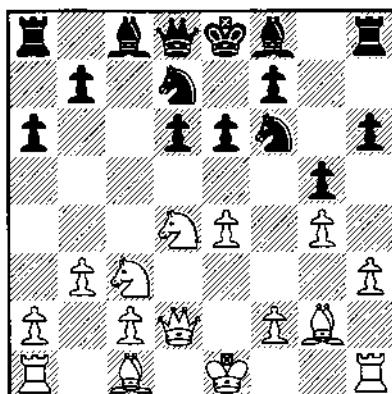


After this strong move it's clear that Black's setup is completely harmonious. 13...dxe5 14.fxe5 Nh7 14...Qxe5 15.Bxb7 Rb8 16.Nc6+– 17.Qf1 Nc4 16.Nd5! Negi–Berg, Singor 2009. After 16...exd5 17.Bd5 White either wins the piece with a huge initiative, or Black chooses to perish immediately after 17...Nxe3 18.Bxf7+ Ke7 19.Qxe3+–.

One radical idea is 8...g5!?



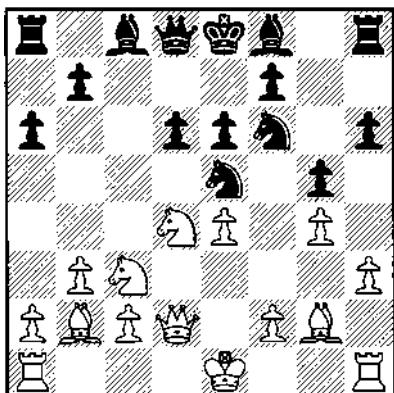
which is actually a lot more sensible than it looks, since it prevents White from playing the usual f2-f4 and secures the e5 square. The main drawback is that the move also crucially weakens the long dark-squared diagonal. We believe White's best plan was demonstrated by Shirov back in 1997: 9.b3! It is only logical to aim our bishop at Black's vulnerable kingside. 9...Nbd7 10.Qd2!



An important nuance, as Bb2 gives Black the option of h6-h5? (V. Popov–Timofeev, St. Petersburg 2012), which we'd rather circumvent.

a) Now 10...h5 can be strongly met with 11.f4! gxf4 (After 11...hxg4 12.fxg5 gxh3 13.Rxh3 Rxh3 14.Bxh3 Nh7 15.Qg2± White's king should be safer on the queenside and the threat of g5-g6 can be quite unpleasant.) 12.g5 Ng8 13.h4! An unusual structure, but White's position is significantly better, since Black is going to have serious problems on the dark squares. For instance 13...e5 14.Nf5 Nb6 15.Bb2!+-. Next is O-O-O, and the d6 pawn will fall.

b) After 10...Ne5 11.Bb2:



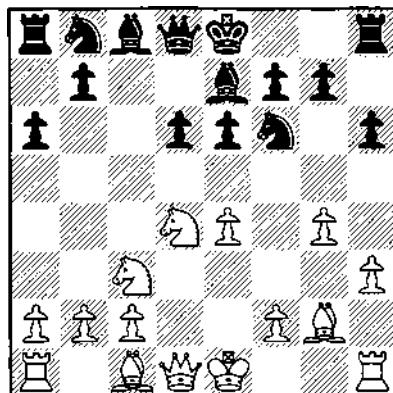
We have transposed back into the main line, which normally occurs after 10.Bb2 Ne5 11.Qd2. Now White's plan is to castle long, open the f-file with f2-f4 and put pressure on Black's position with moves like Rhf1 and the maneuver Nce2-f4-h5. Black's king also goes to the queenside in this line, but first a decision must be made about the light-squared bishop:

b1) 11...b5 Fianchettoing the bishop is a little too loose; White's response is very simple: 12.O-O-O Bb7 13.f4 gxf4 14.Qxf4 Nfd7 15.Kb1 Qc7 16.Rhf1 O-O-O 17.a4!N Taking advantage of the exposed b5 pawn,

and opening up Black's king (17.Nce2 was a standard move but it is stronger to go after the b5 pawn. Predojevic-Volokitin, Vrnjacka Banja 2010) 17...bxa4 (or 17...b4 18.Na2 Qb6 19.Qd2! and Black is forced to give up the b5 square, 19...a5 20.Nb5± 18.Nxa4±. White's king is definitely safer, and we can continue with Nf3 with pressure on the long diagonal and on the f-file. Black's position has too many weaknesses to ever equalize.

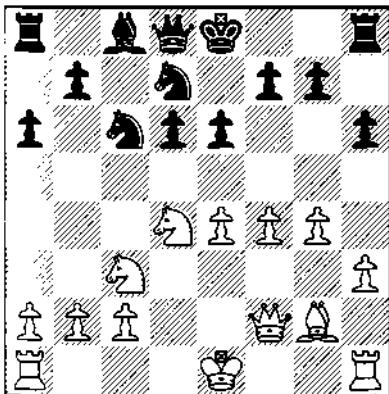
b2) 11...Bd7 is a bit more solid, leaving the pawn on b7. As we mentioned, Shirov demonstrated a very good plan to put pressure on Black's position: 12.O-O-O Qc7 13.f4 gxf4 14.Nce2 Be7 15.Nxf4 O-O-O 16.Kb1 Kb8 17.Rhf1±. White has obvious pressure on the d- and f-files, as well as the a1-h8 diagonal. Shirov continued with the maneuver Nd4-e2-g3-h5, and won a good game, Shirov-Akopian, Groningen 1997.

The move 8...Be7 hopefully brings back fond memories of the previous game, but of course g4-g5 is no longer quite as effective.



Not to worry, we can still set up a potent attacking formation with

9.Be3 Nc6 10.f4. Now if Black plays 10...Qc7 we can reply 11.Qe2, transposing into the main game, or one independent option White should be aware of is 10...Nd7, “threatening” a check on h4. But actually White should not be afraid of exchanging dark-squared bishops, and can proceed calmly with 11.Qd2, preparing to castle queenside. Now after 11...Bh4+ 12.Bf2 Bxf2+ 13.Qxf2:



Our next intention is to play O-O-O, with lots of pressure along the d-file.

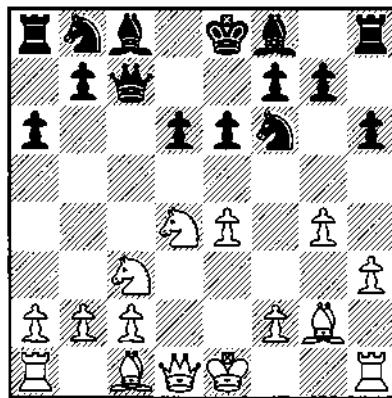
a) If 13...Nxd4?! then 14.Qxd4+ 15.Kf1! and Black is losing a pawn. After 15...O-O 16.Qxd6± White can consolidate easily with moves like Kg1-h2, e4-e5 and Ra1-d1.

b) After 13...O-O 14.O-O-O↑ Black's position seems very fragile without the dark-squared bishop. Our standard plan of h3-h4 and g4-g5 is quite strong.

c) Let's take a look at a game that proves White's advantage: 13...Qb6 14.O-O-O g5 (After 14...Nxd4?! 15.Qxd4 Qxd4 16.Rxd4 Ke7 17.Rhd1± Black is losing the d-pawn.) 15.Rhf1! Forcing Black to capture on f4, leaving a weak pawn on h6. (15.fxg5↑ was played in

Wallace–Mirumian, Linares 1998) 15...gxf4 16.Qxf4 Nce5 (not 16...Nxd4 17.Qxf7+ Kd8 18.Qg7+) 17.Kb1±. The difference in king safety is very apparent—Black's position is quite miserable.

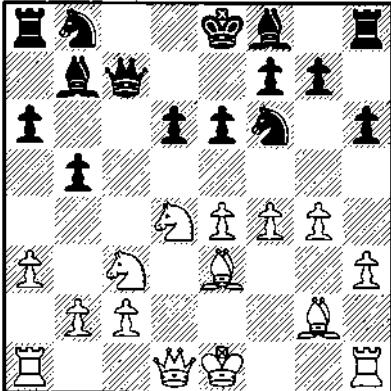
Now back to our game, after 8...Qc7:



9.Be3 Nc6

Black can also play 9...b5 with the point that 10.e4-e5 is safely met with 10...Bb7. Just as in the previous game, White should play 10.a3, securing the position of our knight. After 10...Bb7 11.f4:

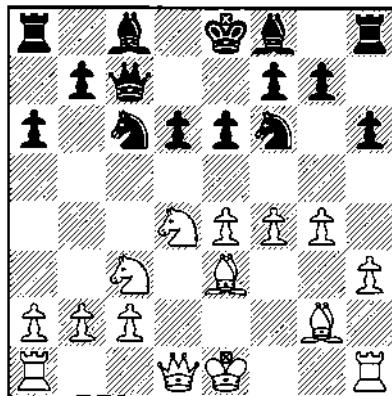
10.f4



There is nothing wrong with sticking to our usual setup of Qe2 and O-O-O. Let's look at a few instructive lines:

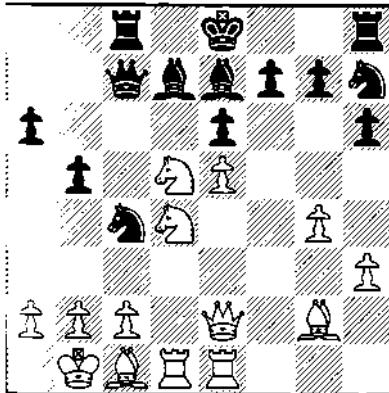
There have only been a few games with **11...Nc6**, but so far the natural **12.Qe2N** has yet to be tried, which offers White good attacking chances. For example: **12...Be7** **13.O-O-O** Now we're ready to play **h3-h4** and **g4-g5** against pretty much anything, with the follow up of **g5-g6**. **13...Na5** (or **13...O-O?!** **14.h4↑** and White's attack is definitely landing first) **14.h4 Nc4** (**14...h5** only delays the inevitable after **15.g5 Ng4 16.Bg1 Nc4 17.Rh3!±** defending against **Nxa3** and threatening **f4-f5** next, which is hard to stop.) **15.g5 Nd7 16.g6!±**. Black's kingside more or less collapses.

After **11...Nbd7** **12.Qe2 Nc5** the best retreat to protect the e4 pawn is **13.Bf2!** (**13.Bd2± Kudrin–Stopa, Philadelphia 2009**) **13...Rc8** **14.O-O-O**. Oddly enough, Black doesn't have any real counterplay here, since the e4 pawn is well protected. After the normal moves **14...Be7** **15.Kb1↑**, we're going to play **h3-h4** and **g4-g5** whether or not Black castles, with a slow but powerful attack.

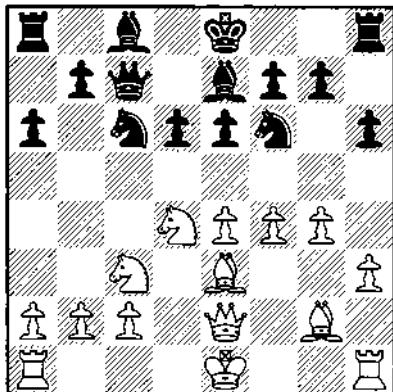


10...Be7

Heading to the active c4 square with **10...Na5** is already known to be quite good for White, who can simply castle queenside and launch a strong attack. **11.Qe2 Nc4 12.O-O-O! Bd7** Grabbing the bishop with **12...Nxe3?!** is quite weak, since it doesn't slow down White's attack one bit, for example **13.Qxe3 Be7 14.Kb1 O-O 15.Bf3!→** followed by **h3-h4** and **g4-g5**. Black is well behind in counterplay because **15...b7-b5** would run into **16.e4-e5!** **13.Kb1 Rc8 14.Bc1** A few games have continued this way, where the following line leads to White's advantage: **14...b5 15.Rhe1 Be7 16.e5!** White is breaking through in the center: **16...dxe5 17.fxe5 Nh7 18.Nd5!!**



11.Qe2



Because of this move, this line was only abandoned by Najdorf players. White practically wins by force. 18...exd5 19.Bxd5 and now:

19...Nf8 20.Qe4! with the powerful threat of e5-e6, and already Black must give the piece back with 20...Nxe5 21.Qxe5 Qxe5 22.Rxe5. Here, White has a nearly decisive endgame advantage, due to piece activity. One precise line is 22...Ng6 23.Rh5! keeping an eye on the b5 pawn and threatening Bb7, winning Black's entire queenside. 23...Rc7 24.Nf5 Bxf5 25.Rxf5 O-O 26.Rdf1± with a beautiful picture of the power of two bishops.

19...O-O 20.e6! The bishop on e7 hangs in most lines, so White is winning the piece back, with interest. After 20...Bh4 (or 20...fxe6 21.Nxe6 Bxe6 22.Bxe6+ Kh8 23.Bxc8+) 21.exd7 Rcd8 22.Rf1+- the game did not last much longer, Naiditsch–Sax, Bad Zwesten 2002.

This is the key position to remember, because it can easily transpose depending on what order Black plays the moves Qc7, Nc6, and Be7. The good news is that White can play Be3, f2-f4, and Qe2 against most lines, with a notable exception that against 8...Nc6 it is imperative to start with 9.f4, which we'll explain in detail in our next game.

11...Nxd4?!

This exchange has been played a number of times, and leads to a solid but clearly worse position for Black. In fact, we believe that in the following game Nepomniachtchi skillfully demonstrates why this line should be considered close to unplayable!

Black should instead play 11...Bd7, which transposes to a position that will be covered in the next game.

12.Bxd4 e5

This move is necessary, since allowing White to play e4-e5 could be devastating.

After 12...O-O?! 13.e5! Nd7 14.O-O-O dx5 15.fxe5 Rb8 16.h4+, the space advantage in the center

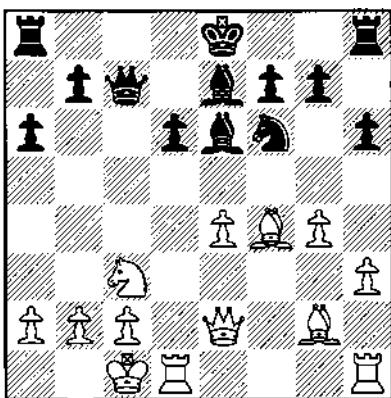
gives White an even more dangerous attack on the flank. Black is way too slow to generate any serious counterplay.

13.Be3 exf4

Generally, if Black plays e5 he must capture on f4, as allowing White's kingside pawns to advance freely is far too dangerous.

13...Be6 14.O-O-O should transpose into the main game, since Black can only hold out on taking on f4 for so long. For example, after 14...Rc8 15.Kb1 O-O?! 16.g5! hxg5 17.fxg5 Nd7 18.h4, White plans Nd5 and h4-h5—he has a full grip on the center and an easy attack on the kingside. In case of 18...Nb6, we have a strong answer in 19.Bh3!±.

14.Bxf4 Be6 15.O-O-O



15...Nd7

This is a common rerouting of the knight in order to control the e5 square.

In a couple of games Black chose 15...O-O but this allows 16.e5!, opening up the center, which is surely advantageous for White's active bishops. And now 16...dxe5 17.Qxe5! 17.Bxe5± was also better for White who clearly has the more

active pieces, in Robson–Urkedal. Tromsoe 2009. 17...Qc8 Or 17...Qxe5 18.Bxe5 Nd7 19.Bg3± with great winning chances, since at the minimum we can play Nd5 next, gaining the two bishops in an open position, Abasheev–Semeniuk. Sochi 2004. 18.g5!? Perhaps not the strongest move, but certainly direct! 18...hxg5 19.Bxg5 Nd7 20.Qg3 Bxg5+ 21.Qxg5±. The open g-file and access to the d5 square gave White a huge advantage in the game Movsesian–Akopian, Yerevan 1996.

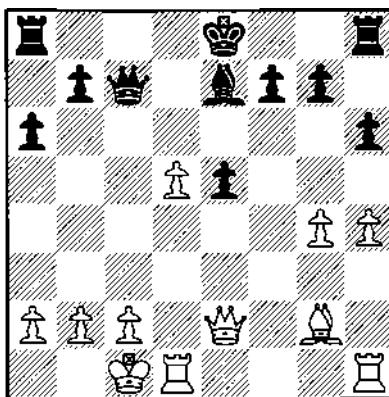
16.Nd5!

Nepomniachtchi correctly evaluates that forcing the following exchanges gives White a very healthy advantage:

16...Bxd5 17.exd5 Ne5

Black must plug the e-file as soon as possible.

18.Bxe5 dxe5 19.h4!±

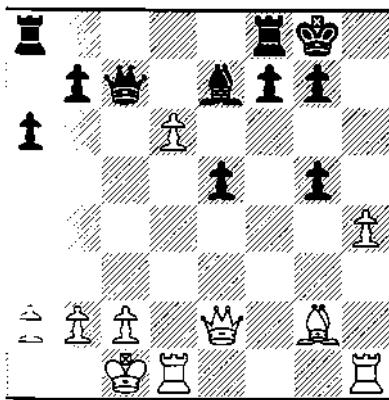


A key move that makes Black's life very difficult. It is well known in middlegame theory that the presence of opposite colored bishops often gives an enormous plus to the attacking side, whose bishop serves as an "extra" attacker. The following

This serves as an instructive example of this concept, as White's c2-squared bishop plays a decisive role in the victory.

19...Bd6

Unfortunately for Black, 19...O-O? is already too dangerous. White can go for the kill with 20.g5! with the result 20...hxg5 21.d6!



Protecting the bishop, so that after 20.Bxd6 22.hxg5 the open h-file reply gives White a mating attack. Due to the threat of Qh5, Black must play 22...g6 and now the simple 23.Qd3!+- ends the game—White threatens both 24.Qxd6 and 24.Qh3.

20.Be4

The perfect square for White's bishop, where it defends c2, blockades the e5 pawn, and controls some squares on the kingside.

20...Qa5

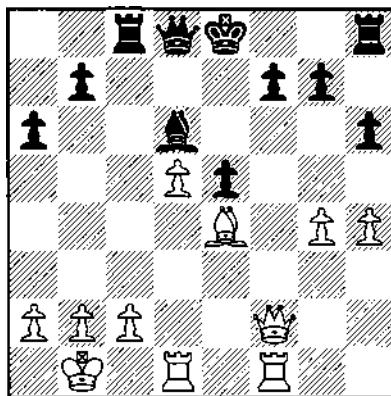
Black's best chance was to castle long with 20...O-O-O and hope to create some kind of fortress, but this is a very difficult task, especially after 21.Rh3! transferring the rook to the queenside. 21...Kb8 22.Rb3±. From here White has the strong plan of Kb1, Rc1, and c2-c4, threatening a potential breakthrough c4-

c5. White could then increase the pressure with Rbc3, a2-a3, and b2-b4! All in all, with zero counterplay Black's position will be difficult to defend and no fun to play.

21.Kb1 Rc8

Black decides to keep the king in the center, hoping to defend along the dark squares and look for counterplay on the queenside.

22.Rhf1 Qd8 23.Qf2

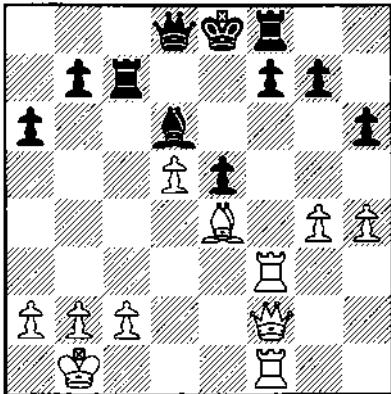


Hitting f7 and enticing Black to castle, but of course that is still much too dangerous.

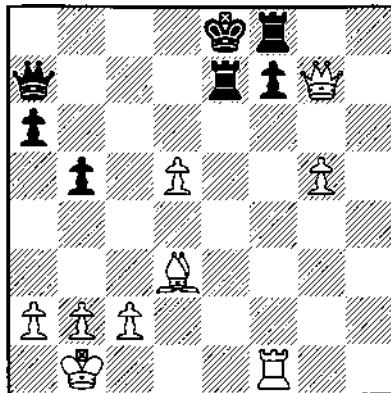
23...Rc7

After 23...O-O there is no reason to hesitate: 24.g5! for if 24...hxg5? (*Better was 24...h5 but now 25.g6! prevents Black from solidifying with g7-g6. 25...fxg6 26.Qg2!+-.* The attack along the light squares is too strong.) then 25.hxg5 Qxg5, and here it's probably not surprising that White has a forced win: 26.Rg1 Qh6 (26...Qe7 27.Rxg7++- is mate in three) 27.Rh1!-. The open h-file spells doom for Black's monarch.

24.Rd3 Rf8 25.Rf3



31...Bxe5 32.Qxe5+ Re7 33.Qxg7+-



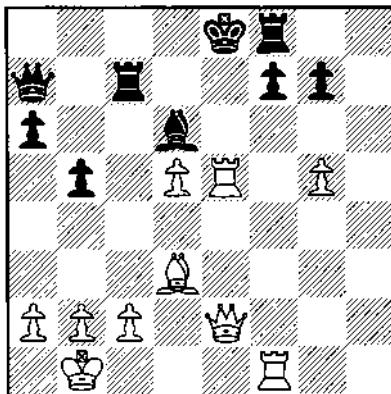
After just 25 moves White's position has been built to the maximum. Now Nepomniachtchi takes his time to improve his position still further and set up a final breakthrough. Sooner or later Black's position will crack.

**25...Qe7 26.Rf5 Rc4 27.Qe2 b5
28.g5 hxg5 29.hxg5 Qa7**

Allowing a winning sacrifice, but there was no longer any move or plan that could have saved Black.

For example, if 29...Rc7 then 30.Rh1+– followed by Rh7.

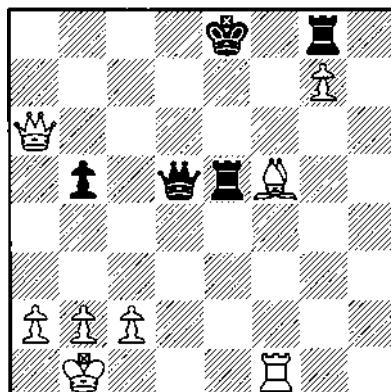
30.Bd3 Rc7 31.Rxe5+!



Sacrificing the exchange to expose Black's king in the center.

White is completely winning, since all of his pieces are participating in the attack while his king is perfectly safe. The game was wrapped up fairly quickly:

**33...Qc5 34.Qf6 Qxd5 35.Qxa6
Re5 36.g6 f5 37.g7 Rg8 38.Bxf5!**



38...Rxf5

38...Rxf5 39.Qc8+ Ke7 40.Qxf5+– is hopeless.

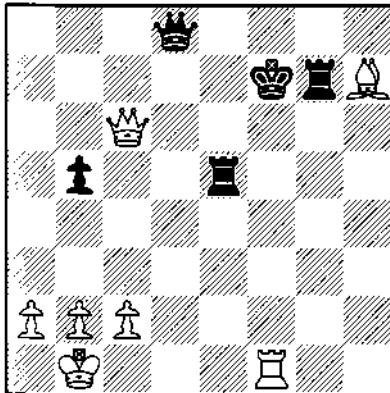
**39.Qc8+ Qd8 40.Qc6+ Kf7
41.Bh7+! 1-0**

Game 6

Kasimdzhanov – Morozevich

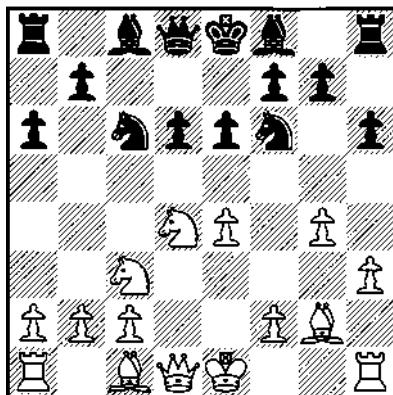
Izmailov Memorial Rapid 2006

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4
4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.h3 e6
7.g4 h6 8.Bg2 Nc6



Black resigned in view of 41.Ke7 Qf6+.

A clean technical effort by Nepomniachtchi—he got a strong positional advantage out of the opening, built up his position without allowing counterplay, and found the decisive sacrifice to break his opponent's defenses.



In the previous game we looked at all of the other reasonable moves here for Black, including Qc7, Be7, Nbd7, and even g5!?. Against Nc6 we believe White's next move should be:

9.f4!

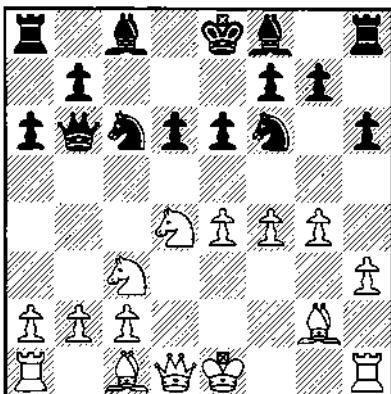
The problem with the standard 9.Be3 is that Black has an extra option to play 9...Ne5 10.Qe2 g5!?, which leads to a very complicated position that scores well for White but is nevertheless tough to understand. You might recall that against 8...g5 we recommended 9.b3, but in this line our bishop is already committed to the e3 square.

9...Bd7

In this game we will focus on lines with the early development of this bishop, since in the previous game we examined all of Black's other options for development. If instead Black plays a move like Be7

or Qc7, then after Be3 we'll have transposed back into a line covered in the previous game.

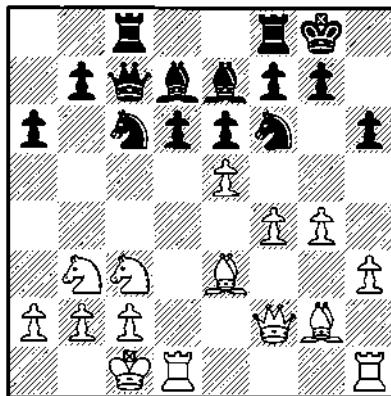
9...Qb6 has been played only a handful of times and resembles the Grivas Sicilian, which is covered much later in this book!



Although it is unlikely that you'll face this specific variation, going over the following lines will deepen your understanding of similar setups and structures: **10.Nb3** This loss of tempo is forced, but we will win it back once we play Qe2 and Be3. We look at two replies by Black:

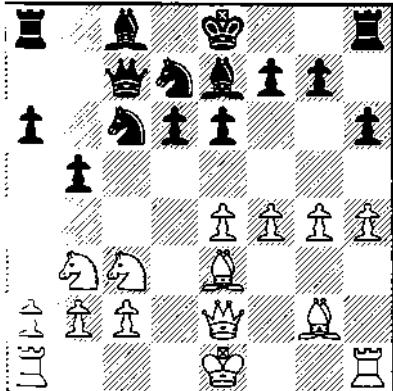
10...Bd7?! This move is not consistent with Qb6, since Black often needs the d7 square for the knight. After 11.Qe2 Rc8 12.Be3 Qc7 White is up a tempo, since the move Nb3 is useful and often played. The best way to take advantage of this is to play 13.Qf2!N preventing Na5 and also threatening Bb6 in many lines, which is quite troublesome for Black. (*And improving on 13.O-O-O Na5! 14.Kb1?—14.Nd2 was better, keeping some advantage—14...Nc4 15.Bd4 e5? with good counterplay, Deepan Chakravarthy-Goudriaan, Dieren 2011.*) 13...Be7 14.O-O-O. Now it is

already hard to find a good move for Black, since 14...O-O? runs into a nasty tactical shot: 15.e5!



Now if 15...dxe5 then 16.g5! hxg5 17.fxg5 Ne8 18.Bb6+– and White wins the bishop on d7. If Black delays castling White can improve his position with Kb1 and Rhei1, after which the e4-e5 break will become unstoppable.

Better is **10...Be7 11.Qe2 Nd7!** An important move for Black to know, as otherwise White's central and kingside pressure will be too strong. **12.h4** Defending against Bh4+, and also preparing our main attacking plan of g4-g5 and then either gxh6 or g5-g6. The good news is that this plan will be effective even if Black's king stays in the center. **12...Qc7 13.Be3** White should usually connect rooks first, before playing g4-g5. **13...b5**

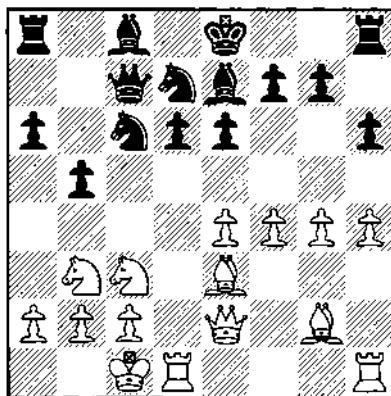


a) In a high-level encounter GM Sjugirov chose 14.Qf2 which is a decent move, preventing both Nb6 and Na5. 14...Bb7 (14...Rb8?! was probably Black's strongest move, simply insisting on Nb6 next, followed Nc4, b5-b4, and a6-a5, with good counterplay.) 15.O-O-O Rc8 16.Kb1 This is one of the main options for Black to get counterplay, but it is so effective here. 17.Nxa5 Qxa5.

Now it was time to play 18.g5!↑, with the idea to play either f4-f5 or e4-e5 next. Black's king is not at all safe on the kingside and will likely have to stay in the center. Perhaps Sjugirov was worried about 18...Rxc3, but after 19.bxc3 Qxc3 20.Bd4! Qb4+ 21.Bb2± none of Black's other pieces are really participating, and White is just a clear exchange up.

Instead, 18.Ne2?! was much too timid, and the game was eventually drawn after a complex struggle, Sjugirov–Timofeev, Moscow 2009.

b) However we believe White's best move was actually 14.O-O-O, as the queen will probably be more useful on e2 than on f2



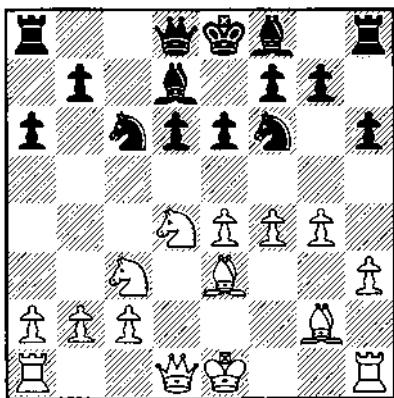
White will surely win the fight for the initiative, as g4-g5 is now ready to be played at a moment's notice. Let's look at two sample lines:

b1) 14...b4?! simply allows White to block off the queenside with 15.Na4 and Black is going to be unable to generate any serious counterplay in time, for example 15...Na5 16.Nxa5 Qxa5 17.b3 Bb7 18.g5 Bc6 19.e5! An idea worth remembering, as Black's position is soon going to fall apart. 19...d5 (not 19...Bxg2? 20.Qxg2 d5 21.gxh6 gxh6 22.f5!+) 20.g6! A thematic push and Black's light squares collapse, for if 20...fxg6?? then 21.Qg4 Bxa4 (21...Nf8 22.Bb6! Qb5 23.Bf1+, trapping the queen, is an important and very pretty point.) 22.Qxg6+ Kd8 23.Qxe6+- With d5 falling, Black's position is completely lost.

b2) 14...Nb6 is probably Black's best attempt for counterplay, and justifies the early retreat Nd7. White should generally meet this plan with 15.Kb1 Nc4 16.Bc1, as our bishop

on this square does an excellent job of safeguarding our king. (16.Bf2 is another possibility, since if Black ever tries to play N6a5, we can strongly place our bishop on the d4 square.) Now Black must find a good plan, while White's next move is likely g4-g5. 16...Bb7 (With our queen on e2 it is fortunate that the move 16...Rb8 doesn't actually come with a threat, since after 17.g5 a5? White has 18.Nxb5! Rxb5 19.Qxc4+...) 17.g5. And now depending on what Black does next, we can choose between f4-f5, g5-g6, or gxh6! 17...N6a5 18.gxh6 gxh6 19.f5!±. Black is pretty much busted here, as there's no way to prevent the kingside from opening up. Also, there is just not enough counterplay as 19...Na3+ 20.bxa3 Qxc3 may look nice, but 21.Bb2 spoils the fun.

Back to our game, after 9...Bd7:
10.Be3

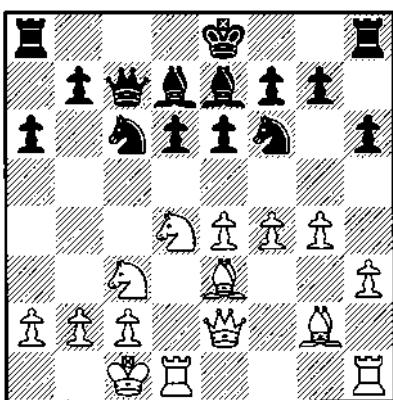


Much as in the previous game, we believe White's most promising attacking setup is to continue with Qe2 and O-O-O.

10...Rc8

One of the trickiest aspects of the Open Sicilian is that certain move orders can make all the difference, which means that a general understanding of a position is not always a substitute for concrete knowledge of certain details and nuances. Morozevich is quite well known for creativity in the opening, and here he demonstrates Black's best move order for this line, avoiding the biggest dangers of White's setup.

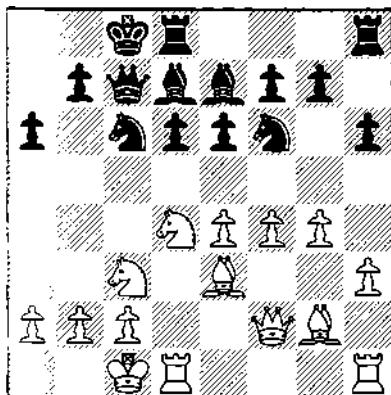
A lesser possibility for Black is 10...Qc7 11.Qe2 Be7, since this allows White to achieve our ideal set-up. Alternatively, 11...Nxd4 12.Bxd4 e5 can be met with 13.Nd5!±, which leads to a pleasant position for White—however this resource is not always available, especially if our c2 pawn is hanging, so players should watch out for this idea of Nxd4 and e6-e5, as it is a common method for Black to try to equalize. We continue with **12.O-O-O**.



Once again White's plan is fairly straightforward in this setup, with our next moves likely being Kb1, Nb3, and either Qf2 or Rhe1. Depending on what Black does,

White should look for possible e4-e5 breaks or advancing h3-h4 and g4-g5 to the kingside.

We look at two possibilities here: 12...O-O-O?! is not a good decision, due to 13.Qf2!±



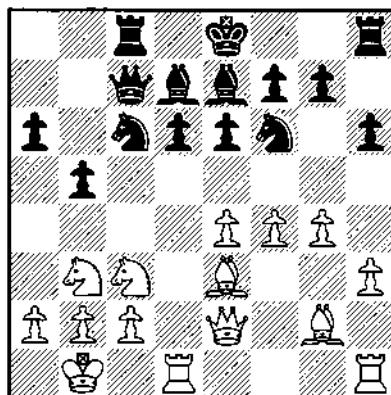
According to our database this position has been reached in eight games, and White has won all eight times! The current threat is Nxc6 followed by Bb6. We'd like to show two miniatures by Shirov to demonstrate the attacking power of White's setup: 13...Rdf8 (13...Na5? lost on the spot: 14.Nxe6! Bxe6 15.Bb6 Qc4 16.Bxa5+, Shirov–Sohl, Dresden 1999) 14.Rhe1 g5. Black had no space and lashed out, but these kinds of moves are often punished without mercy: 15.Nxc6 Bxc6 16.Bb6 Qb8 17.Nd5! Re8?? (or 17...exd5 18.exd5 Bd7 19.Rxe7+) 18.Ba7+, Shirov–Sasikiran, Berlin 2001.

Better is 12...Rc8 13.Kb1:

Now 13...Nxd4 14.Bxd4 e5 seems good for Black since White cannot play Nd5, but 15.Be3 Be6 16.Nd5! leads to a clear edge: 16...Nxd5 17.exd5 Bd7 18.fxe5 dxе5 19.Be4+. White has defended Black's only

potential target, the c2 pawn, and is ready to push h3-h4 and g4-g5, with serious pressure on the kingside.

And after 13...b5 Black threatens b5-b4, where Na4 would lose to Nxd4 and Bxa4. But our reply is 14.Nb3!



Now b4 Na4 would simply be good for White, who can play Nb6 next.

This position is actually tremendous for us, since we've achieved our ideal setup and the shot e4-e5 works in many lines. Let's take a look at Black's most natural tries:

a) 14...Na5? is strongly met with 15.e5!+-.

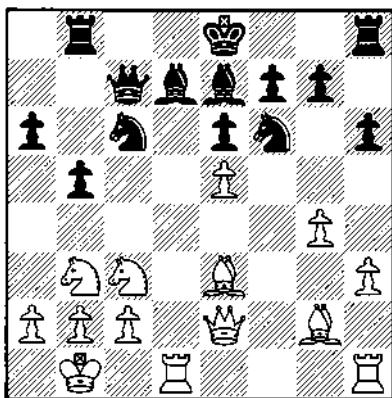
b) After 14...O-O:

b1) Now the natural 15.h4? would be a concrete blunder in this case because of 15...b4 16.Na4 Na5! with the point 17.Nb6 Bb5+. With our pawn back on h3, White would simply win material with Qf2, since both the rook on c8 and knight on a5 would hang. But here our queen is overloaded—it must protect the g4 pawn—and Black is winning.

b2) Correct is 15.Qf2! Previously we highlighted the strength of this move—Bb6 is an important resource in many lines. Once again b5-b4 runs

into Na4-b6 , and $15\ldots\text{Rb8}$ is met with $16.\text{e5! } \text{dxe5}$ (*Or $16\ldots\text{Ne8 } 17.\text{h4}\rightarrow$, and White's central pressure along with the kingside attack is quite strong.*) $17.\text{fxe5 } \text{Nxe5 } 18.\text{Bf4}$, and the pin is clearly very troublesome. If $18\ldots\text{b4}$ then $19.\text{Qg3!}\pm$.

c) $14\ldots\text{Rb8}$ Here one of your humble authors missed the thematic and crushing $15.\text{e5!}$ (*$15.\text{Rhe1}\pm$ Amanov-Sharma, Los Angeles 2013*) $15\ldots\text{dxe5 } 16.\text{fxe5}$ and now:

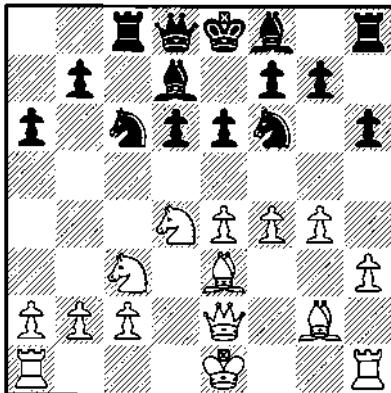


c1) If $16\ldots\text{Nxe5}$ then $17.\text{Bf4}$ and note that White's king is on $b1$, not allowing the potential saving resource of Nd3+ .

c2) If $16\ldots\text{Nh7}$ then $17.\text{Bc5+}$ — trading off the dark-squared bishops, leaving a lot of holes in Black's position.

c3) Finally, after $16\ldots\text{Qxe5 } 17.\text{Rxd7 } \text{Nxd7 } 18.\text{Bxc6+}$ — White has two pieces against a rook and a completely winning position.

11.Qe2



11...b5

Through this move order Black prevents White from achieving his optimal setup. Ideally we'd like to play O-O-O , Kb1 and Nb3 , but there is no way to get there since Black can now disrupt our plans with either b5-b4 or Na5 .

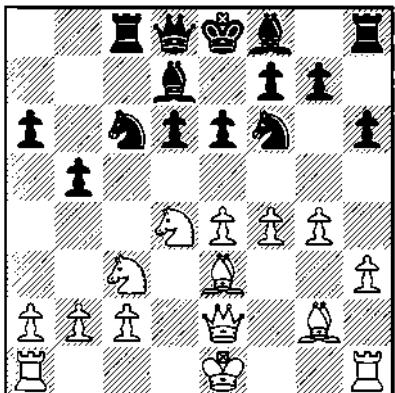
11... Be7 is much weaker, since after $12.\text{O-O-O } \text{b5?}$ White can use the fortunate opposition of our rook against Black's queen and play $13.\text{e5!}\pm$.

After 11... Qc7 the most accurate move is 12.Qf2:

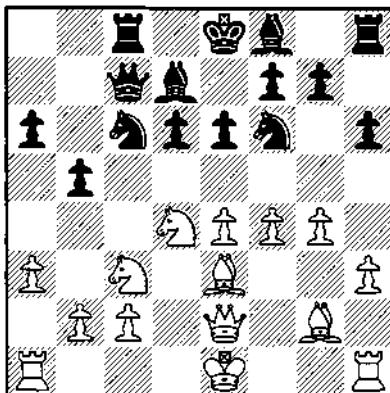
And now 12... Nxd4? is not very good, for after $13.\text{Bxd4 } \text{e5 } 14.\text{Bb6! } \text{Qc4 } 15.\text{O-O-O}$ the Black queen on $c4$ is not so dangerous without the possibility of b5-b4 . In fact Black has very little counterplay here, if any. If 15... Be7 then $16.\text{Kb1}\pm$ and White can next play Rhe1 , eventually followed by fxe5 and Nd5 , with a fantastic position.

And if 12... Be7 then White can choose to transpose into the game with Nb3 , or go for our ideal setup with $13.\text{O-O-O } \text{b5 } 14.\text{Nb3}$ where we are ready to meet $14\ldots\text{b4}$ with $15.\text{Na4!}\pm$, followed by Nb6 , Kb1 , etc.

Back to our game, after **11...b5**:



12...Qc7



12.a3

Once this move is made, it is a lot riskier to castle queenside, since Black can easily open lines with b5-b4.

Let's quickly see why White's other options are less than satisfactory:

If **12.Nb3** then Black has **12...Na5!** Since Black has delayed Qc7 and Be7, White simply didn't have enough time to play Qf2 to prevent this idea.

If **12.O-O-O?** then **12...b4** and White must retreat with Nb1.

Finally, after **12.Qf2 Nxd4 13.Bxd4 b4**, again White's knight lacks a good square to retreat to, since Ne2 is met with Rxc2.

Now Black is ready to play Nxd4 and e5, which combined with the pressure along the c-file, would create enough counterplay to equalize.

13.Nb3

Kasimdzhanov deserves credit for preventing Black from getting counterplay too early.

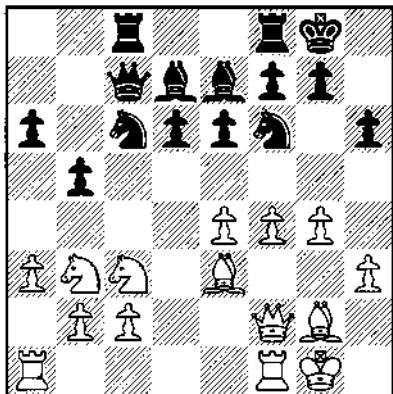
13.O-O-O b4 14.axb4 Nxb4 leads to an unclear position where Black has clearly made progress on the queenside, but White's chances are certainly not worse. This can definitely be tried by aggressive players looking for a sharp battle as soon as possible, although we personally prefer the more subdued approach chosen by Kasimdzhanov.

13.O-O Nxd4 14.Bxd4 e5 15.Be3 Be6= is definitely acceptable for Black, where Nd5 is impossible due to the hanging c2 pawn.

13...Be7

With the moves Qc7 and a3 included, **13...Na5** is less effective, and after **14.Nxa5 Qxa5** White can safely play **15.O-O** where Black must retreat with Qc7, since **15...Be7** runs into **16.e5!±** and White is doing quite well here, to say the least.

14.Qf2 O-O 15.O-O



Kasimdzhanov's decision to castle kingside may look modest at first, but it is probably White's most practical option. In the following game he demonstrates that White's attack, although slower, can still be extremely dangerous.

15.O-O-O was still possible but risky, as again 15...b4 16.axb4 Nxb4 gives Black lots of counter-chances. That said, White can certainly fight for the initiative with 17.g5 hxg5 18.fxg5 Ne8 19.h4, where White must balance continuing the attack with h4-h5 and g5-g6 with defending against Black's potential threats. A sharp fight will undoubtedly ensue!

15...Qb8

Morozevich decides on a somewhat slow plan for counterplay, defending the b5 pawn and preparing a6-a5.

Worth analyzing is the immediate **15...b4 16.axb4 Nxb4**. Now, given time, Black would like to play Bc6 and d5, so it seems that White must press forward right away with **17.g5! hxg5 18.fxg5**:

Now **18...Nh5** is dangerous for Black in view of 19.Bf3 g6 20.Bxh5 gxh5 21.Qg2! threatening an

eventual g5-g6 breaking through to Black's king. 21...d5 (21...Be8 22.Rf6! is not only strong but practically winning for White, with Rh6 coming next.) 22.Nd4↑ and although Black is in trouble, the game is far from over just yet.

After **18...Nh7 19.h4** White is threatening to build up the attack with Nd4 and Bh3, with the idea g5-g6. To create counter-chances Black must play 19...f5, yet after 20.exf5 Rxf5 21.Qd2± White's chances are definitely preferable, since the e6 pawn is now clearly weak.

16.Rad1

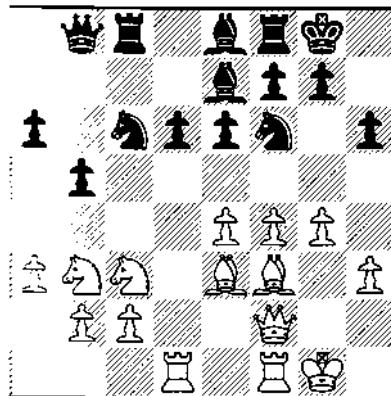
16.Bf3!? Was an interesting alternative, as keeping the rook on the a-file could be useful if Black ever plays the thematic b5-b4 break. White would next play h3-h4 and g4-g5, launching our thematic kingside attack.

16...Be8

A prophylactic move, avoiding any danger to the bishop along the d-file.

16...a5? runs into a trick we've seen before: 17.e5! dxe5 18.g5!± and Black is in deep trouble due to his hanging bishop on d7.

17.Bf3!



The start of a simple but deadly plan. White's idea is to play h3-h4, g4-g5, open up the kingside and checkmate Black's king.

17...a5?!

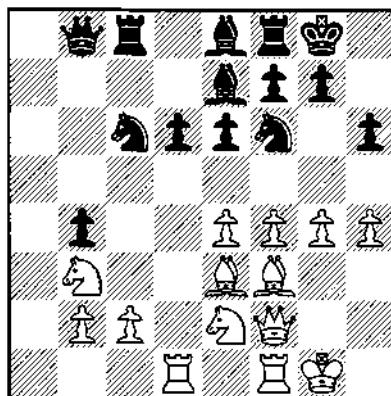
In hindsight this is a questionable move, and perhaps even a serious mistake. The simple explanation is that Black is just too slow to create counterplay here, as White's kingside attack is very strong.

Most likely the best move was 17...b4! and now 18.Na4! Better than 18.axb4 Nxb4. If White could just play h4 here, we would be close to landing a decisive attack, but Black has the strong trick Nxc2 Qxc2 Ba4!, with great counterplay on the queenside. 18...Nd7 Dangerous for Black seems 18...bxa3 19.Nb6 Rd8 20.bxa3!, because there is no obvious answer to White's kingside pawn storm. 19.axb4 Nx b4 20.Rd2∞. The threat of White's kingside pawn storm is still looming, but Black has clearly made progress on the queenside. This was the best chance for Black to counter White's attack.

18.h4

Since Black still hasn't made a threat on the queenside, Kasimdzhanov doesn't slow down.

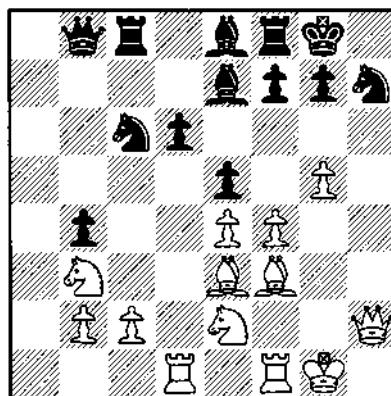
18...b4 19.axb4 axb4 20.Ne2



20...d5

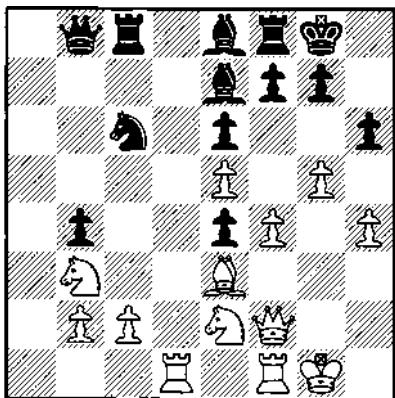
Allowing White to favorably close the center, but it is already late to suggest something else for Black.

The following line illustrates the dangers of White's attack: 20...Nh7 21.g5 hxg5 22.hxg5 e5 23.Qh2!!



23...exf4 24.Kg2!—With an open h-file, always look for the most direct mating possibilities!—24...Bxg5 25.Rh1 Bh6 26.Bxf4+—.

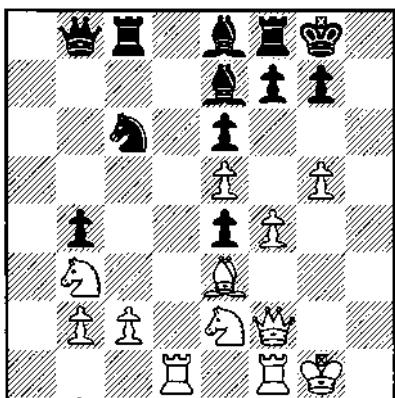
21.e5 Ne4 22.Bxe4 dxe4 23.g5



23...hxg5

Avoiding the exchange of pawns with 23...h5 can be met with 24.Ng3±, where White is capturing the e4 pawn and then landing the knight on d6.

24.hxg5



24...Nxe5

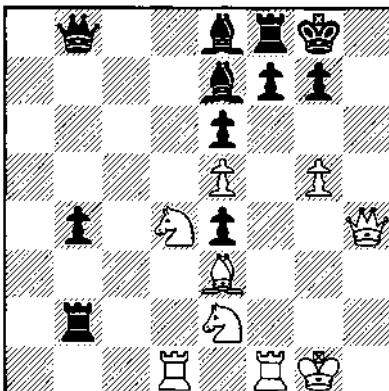
In desperation Morozevich sacrifices a piece, as the threat of Qh4 (h2), Kg2 and Rh1 was otherwise unstoppable. Practically speaking, this was probably Black's only chance to complicate White's task.

White answers 24...Nd8 with 25.Qh2 Rxc2 26.Kf2!+-.

25.fxe5 Rxc2

Now at least Black has some activity and potential threats, but Kasimdzhanov keeps focused on the kingside and accurately continues the attack:

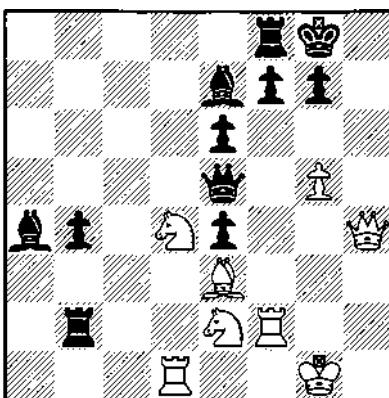
26.Nbd4 Rxb2 27.Qh4!+-



27...Qxe5 28.Rf2!

Simple and strong, threatening Rh2.

28...Ba4



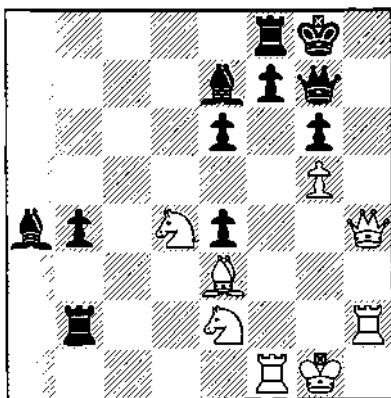
29.Rdf1

Both players were very likely in time trouble here, so we'll have to excuse Kasimdzhanov for taking a slower but steady path to victory.

29.Rh2? would have been quite careless, and a great way to throw away the game: 29...Qxh2+! 30.Qxh2 Exd1= and White's attack has suddenly vanished!

29.Rc1! however, could have ended the game on the spot, because after 29...g6 30.Rh2 Qg7 White has the decisive 31.Nxe6! fxe6 32.Bd4 e5 33.Bxe5+-.

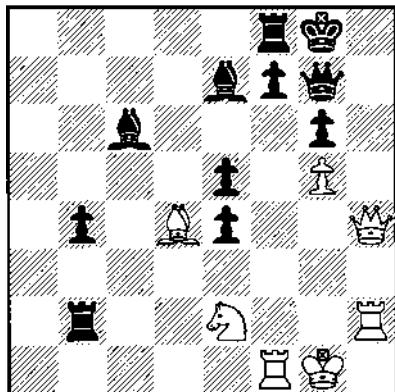
29...g6 30.Rh2 Qg7



31.Nc6!

Yet even with very little time, a strong attacker can find tactics like this very quickly.

31...Bxc6 32.Bd4 e5

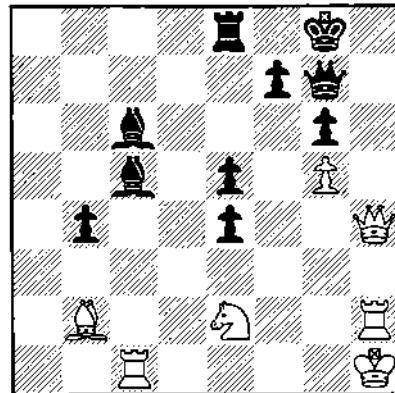


33.Bxb2

With an extra rook and powerful attack, White is of course completely winning.

Also simple was 33.Bxe5 f6 34.Bxb2, since 34...fxg5 is met with 35.Qh8+ and mate to follow.

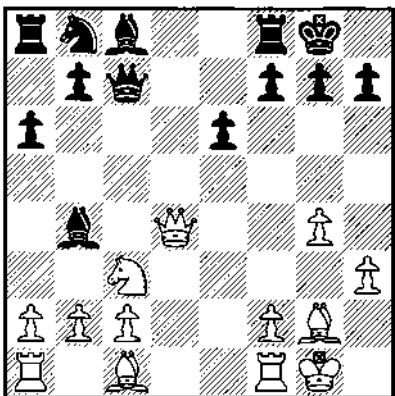
33...Bc5+ 34.Kh1 Re8 35.Rc1



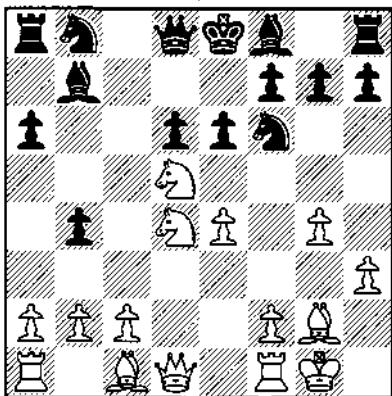
**35...Bd4 36.Nxd4 Bd5 37.Ne2 b3
38.Nc3 Ba8 39.Nxe4 f5 40.gxf6
g5 41.fxg7 gxh4 42.Rxh4 Kxg7
43.Kh2 Kg6 44.Rg1+ 1-0**

Memory Markers

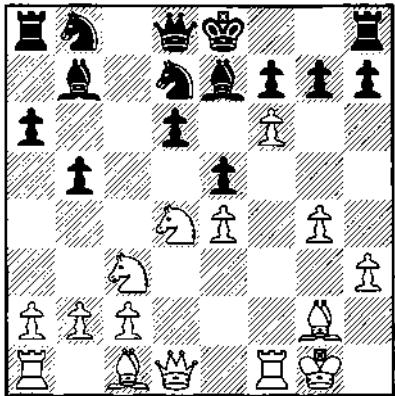
Here are reminders of some of the ideas and motifs in this chapter.



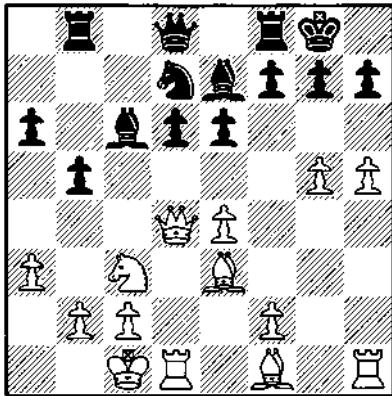
- 1. After 13.Qd1-d4!**. The most active way to fight for an advantage, preparing Bf4 and Ne4 next. See diagram on page 18.



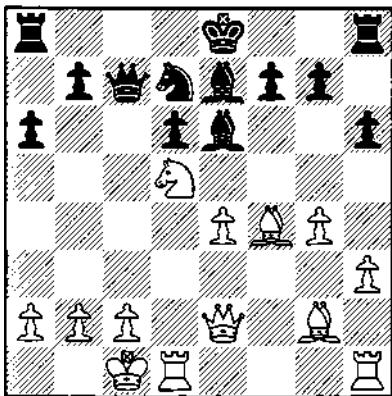
- 2. After 10.Nd5??.** The critical piece sacrifice. See diagram on page 29 in Game 2, Nakamura–Ninov.



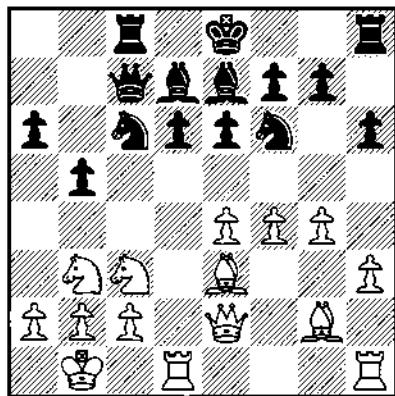
- 3. After 12.f5-f6!**. A powerful pawn sacrifice, clearing the f5 square for White's knight. See the full attack unleashed in Game 3, Nepomniachtchi–Frolyanov, on page 40.



- 4. After 15.h5!**. Threatening h5-h6 and forcing Black to play e6-e5. A critical and thematic position for the Najdorf, see diagram on page 51.



5. After 16.Nd5!. Leading to a sizeable and steady advantage in Game 5, Nepomniachtchi-Zabotin, on page 64.



6. After 14.Nb3!. White has achieved our ideal setup, and the threat of e4-e5 works in many lines. See diagram on page 71.

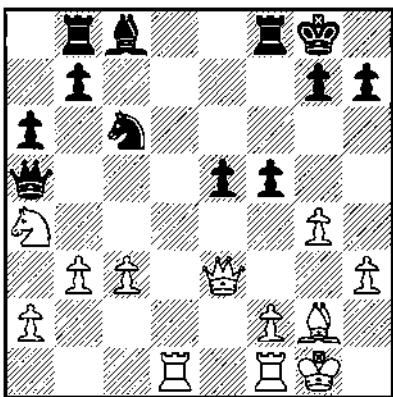
Exercises

White to play!

With these situations from actual games, you, as White, can practice finding some of the breakthroughs, tricks, combinations, and positional opportunities that may appear in our response to the Najdorf Variation.

Solutions to the exercises begin on page 516.

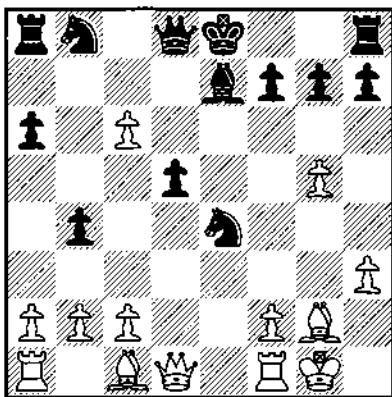
Exercise 1



Kokarev – Dvoiry's
Izhevsk 2011

Black has just played f7-f5, seeking some much-needed counterplay. How should White react?

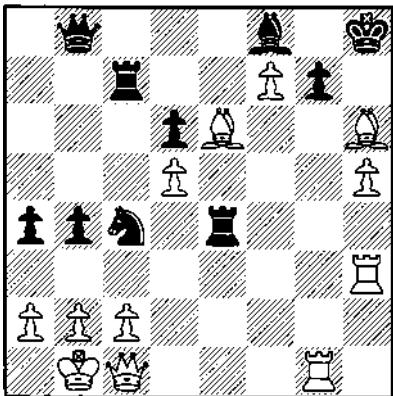
Exercise 2



Aroshidze – Fluvia Poyatos
Barcelona 2012

Black has survived White's opening sacrifice and everything is under control, or is it?

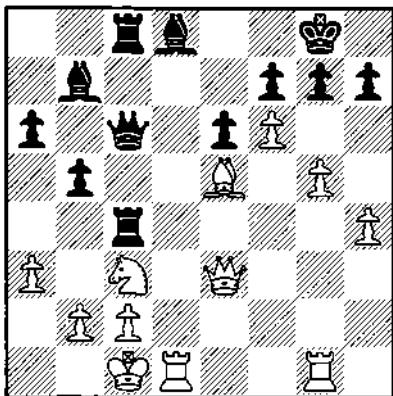
Exercise 3



Andreikin - Lugovoi
Chigorin Memorial 2005

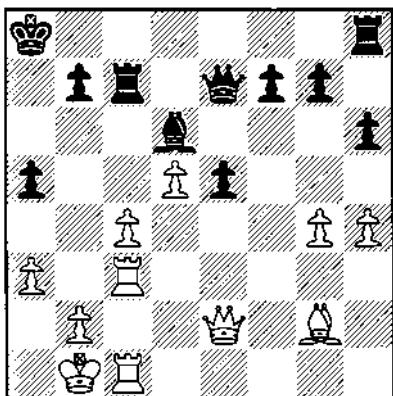
White has a decisive attack, and all that is left is the knockout blow.

Exercise 4



While analyzing Game 4 we came across this position and felt that it was quite instructive. Find White's strongest move.

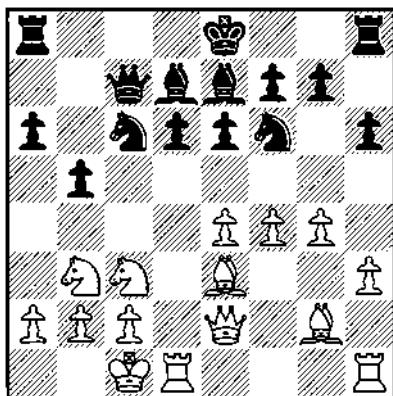
Exercise 5



Nevednichy - Khurtsidze
TUR-chT 2013

White has a serious positional advantage, with more space and a better bishop, but Black is very close to setting up a dark-squared blockade. Can you find a breakthrough?

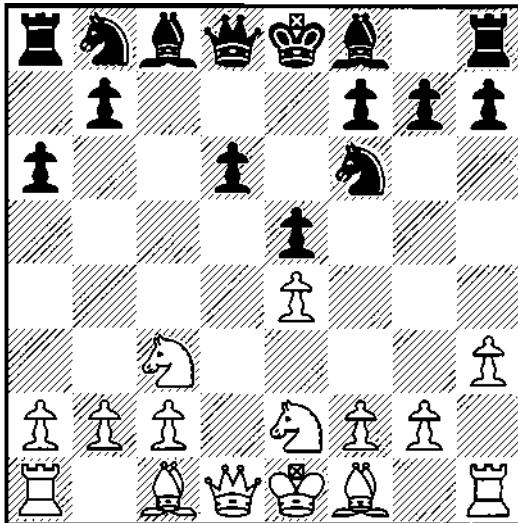
Exercise 6



A typical position for the line 6.h3 e6 7.g4 h6, but Black has misplayed the opening. Can you find the win?

Chapter 1b

Najdorf – 6.h3 e5



**1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.h3 e5
7.Nde2**

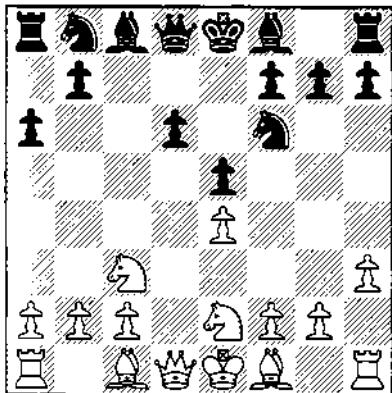
We now cover Black's main possibilities after **6...e5 7.Nde2**, another position you are likely to reach when facing the Najdorf. In this structure White's success will often depend upon whether or not he can utilize the d5 square in the ensuing middlegame. The point of retreating the knight to e2 rather than b3 is that after advancing g2-g4 this knight can find a role in the game via the g3 square. In Game 7 we will explore variations where Black develops naturally, with moves such as Be7, Be6, Nbd7, etc. Then in Game 8 we will cover the sharp **7...Be6** followed by **8...d5**, and in Game 9 we will cover the critical **7...h5**, which has become one of Black's main replies to the 6.h3 system.

Game 7

Svidler – Benitah

Coupe de France, Marseilles 2010

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4
4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.h3 e5
7.Nde2



7...Be7

In this game we will be covering all of Black's flexible, unforcing options after 6.h3 e5 7.Nde2.

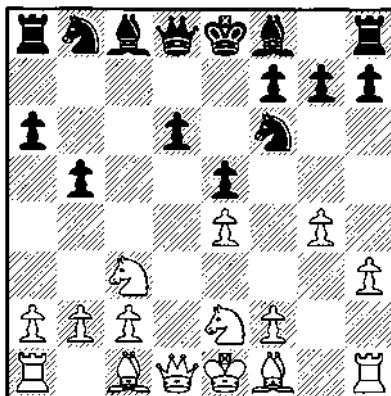
The good news is that there are no tricky, specific move orders that White needs to be aware of, only certain positional nuances that we will cover through the use of several instructive game excerpts.

In the following lines Black has the choice of how to develop the queenside (the knight can go to d7 or c6, the bishop can go to e6 or be fianchettoed on b7), and can delay castling or insert the move h7-h6, which will be useful in certain lines.

White's advantage in this line will often stem from control over the e5 and f5 squares. After g2-g4 and Bg2, a timely Nd5 or Ng3-f5 will often secure a nice positional plus!

We look at 7...b5 here, and 7...Be6 on page 85.

Let's start with the immediate fianchetto: 7...b5. White's play in this line is actually very simple: 8.g4

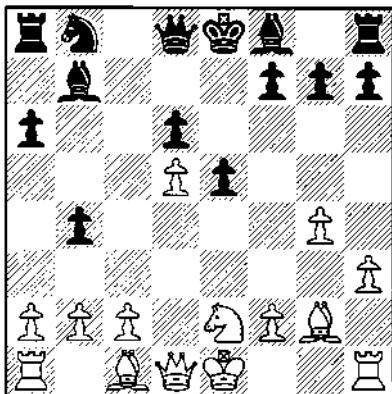


Now the immediate 8...b4 should transpose to 9...b4, since after 9.Nd5 the reply 9...Nxe4? is a blunder, (9...Nxd5 10.exd5 Bb7 11.Bg2 transposes into the first diagram in variation b.) allowing 10.Bg2 Nc5 11.Nf6+ and White wins the exchange.

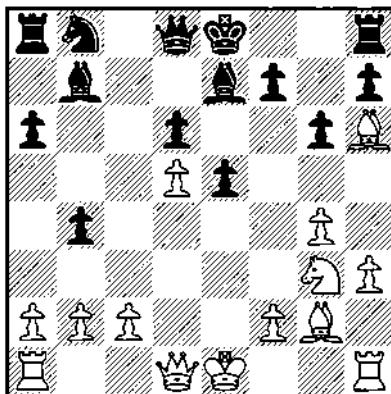
After 8...Bb7 9.Bg2 most games have continued b5-b4, since this is a move that sooner or later Black will have to play.

a) In case of 9...Be7 10.Ng3 O-O (After 10...g6 11.Bh6 Black cannot castle, which isn't exactly devastating, but is a problem that must be solved. The only sensible move now is 11...b4 and 12.Nd5 Nxd5 13.exd5 transposes into the diagram in variation b22.) 11.Nf5 Once again only b5-b4 makes sense—transposing to the next variation—as Nbd7 is impossible due to Nxd6. And after 11...Nc6?! 12.O-O Rc8 White can seize control over the entire board with 13.Nd5±. Also, 13.g5 Ne8 14.h4↑ is not so bad!

b) After 9...b4 10.Nd5 Nxd5 11.exd5



b22) With 12...g6, Black invites in our dark-squared bishop. 13.Bh6



This resulting structure is better for White, and again our plan is very simple—Ng3-f5, O-O, and a2-a3 at some point to gain a majority on the queenside. Let's play through a few excerpts from master games:

b1) One instructive game continued 11...Nd7 12.O-O Be7 13.Ng3 O-O 14.a3 (*14.Nf5± would be perfectly sensible as well.*) 14...bxa3 15.b3!?

g6 16.Bh6 Re8 17.Qc1, Predke-Al Sayed, St. Petersburg 2009, but better was 17.Rxa3± with a pleasant advantage.

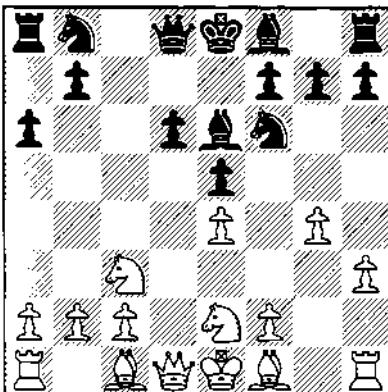
b2) After 11...Be7 12.Ng3 Black faces an unpleasant choice—whether to allow White's knight into f5 or our bishop into h6!:

b21) We can certainly claim an edge after 12...O-O 13.Nf5 Bf6 (*and 13...Nd7 14.a3±*) and now a sharp improvement could be 14.g5! (*better than 14.h4 g6 15.g5↑ in Skovgaard-Carstensen, Bronshoj 2010*) 14...Bxg5 15.Qg4 Bf6 16.Bh6↑, and White is getting the best of it.

Now trading bishops with 13...Bg5 doesn't solve Black's issues after 14.Bxg5 Qxg5 15.Ne4 Qe7 16.Qd2 a5 17.a3!±. White's knight on e4 is a beautiful piece, and Black's queenside is already under serious pressure, in Kupreichik-Muhutdinov, Cetinje 1992.

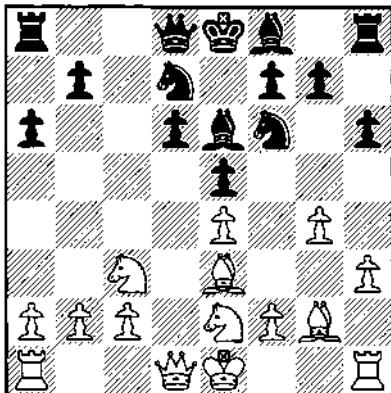
Therefore 13...Nd7 14.a3!? (*Also simple and strong was 14.Qd2 a5 15.O-O± followed by an eventual f2-f4, Kudrin-Fayvinov, Philadelphia 2009.*) 14...bxa3 15.Rxa3. Even with Black's king safely castled, this position would be much better for White, but with the king in the center it's practically winning. 15...Bg5 and here White overlooked the immediate 16.Ne4!+– where Black's only move is to retreat with Be7. Instead, Balogh-Restas, Hungary 2007, continued 16.Bxg5 Qxg5 17.Ne4± and the game was eventually drawn.

Black has also started with
7...Be6 8.g4



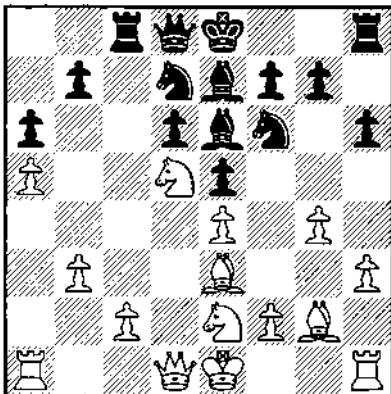
Of course, the move 8...d5 here is a separate story, and will be covered in the next game. Here we'll cover Black's less forcing tries 8...h6 and 8...Nb7.

In a significant number of games Black has chosen to spend a tempo on 8...h6, normally a quite useful move. Without h6 White can often play g4-g5 and h3-h4 against Black's castled king, with a promising attack. Another point is that if our knight lands on f5, Black can sometimes capture Bxf5 followed by d6-d5, without having to worry about g4-g5. Now 9.Bg2 Nbd7 10.Be3

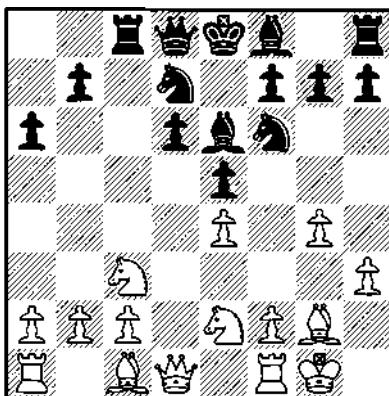


a) Advancing with 10...b5?! 11.O-O Nb6 gives the illusion that Black has made some progress on the queenside, but White has a simple and thematic way to create weaknesses: 12.a4! b4 13.Nd5 and already Black would rather return the b-pawn to b7. Also, after 13...Nbxsd5 14.exd5 Bd7 15.f4!± Black's king is just caught in the center. In case of exf4 Bxf4 White's knight can use the d4 square to hop into c6, with an overwhelming advantage.

b) Better is 10...Nb6 11.b3. This is a standard way of meeting Nb6, often followed with a2-a4-a5. Note, however, that White probably shouldn't make this move in conjunction with an early Ng3, which would leave the c3-knight hanging. Let's follow a game by GM Adhiban, who has quite a few nice games in this line: 11...Be7 12.a4 Rc8 13.a5 Nbd7 14.Nd5!



Black has also completed his queenside development with 8...Nbd7 9.Bg2 Rc8 10.O-O

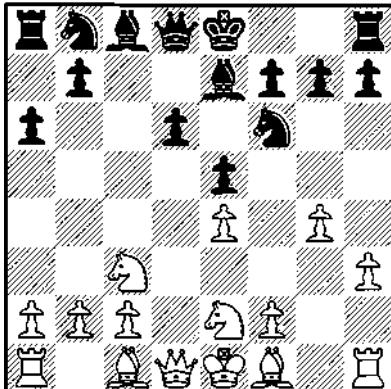


14...Bxd5 (*Black cannot really tolerate the knight on d5 for very long: 14...O-O 15.Ng3± and we're already hard-pressed to find a decent move here for Black, let alone a plan.*) 15.exd5 O-O 16.Ng3 Ne8 And here the simple 17.Qd2! was enough for an advantage. (*17.h4 was a sharp but unnecessary pawn sacrifice in Adhiban–Naroditsky, Leiden 2009.*) Now, trading bishops with 17...Bg5 lands Black in a worse endgame after 18.Bxg5 Qxg5 19.Qxg5 hxg5 20.Kd2±. White will place the knight on e4, followed by opening up the h-file with h3-h4. Black is somewhat passive here.

a) A bit too loose is 10...Nb6 11.b3 d5?!, with Black's king still two moves from castling. Simply 12.exd5 Nbxsd5 13.Bb2 puts Black under a lot of pressure, for instance 13...Nxc3 14.Qxd8+ Rxd8 15.Bxc3± and White wins a pawn.

b) More sensible is 10...Be7. Now GM Sergey Fedorchuk, another well known proponent of 6.h3, chooses a common plan and plays for domination in the center with 11.Ng3 (*11.Be3 Nb6 12.b3± followed by a2-a4-a5 and Nd5 should promise White an edge as well.*) 11...Nb6 12.Re1 O-O 13.Nf5:

8.g4



Now Black cannot give up his light-squared bishop, as after exf5 White would have full control over the light squares. 13... Ne8 Hoping to play Bg5 . Instead, 13... Bxf5 14. exf5 $d5?$ 15. $g5! \pm$ leads to a huge advantage for White.) 14. Nxe7+ Qxe7 15.a4 We will also see Svidler handle the two bishops in the main game. 15... Qc7 16. Re3! Defending the knight, to be able to play b2-b3, while also transferring the rook to the d-file putting pressure on the d6 pawn. 16... Qc6 17. Rd3 Nd7 18.a5 $f6$ 19. Be3 . Black's dark-squared bishop, although passive, had served an important role in defending the backward d6 pawn. Now Black's position goes from worse to strategically lost! 19... Rf7 20. Rd2! Defending c2 to prepare Na4-b6 . 20... Nf8 21. Na4 Ng6 22. $\text{Nb6} \pm$, and White completely dominates the queenside. Black now decided to give up the exchange, since after 22... Rd8 White could slowly push his queenside pawns forward and eventually break through, in Fedorchuk–Aderito, Barbera del Valles 2010.

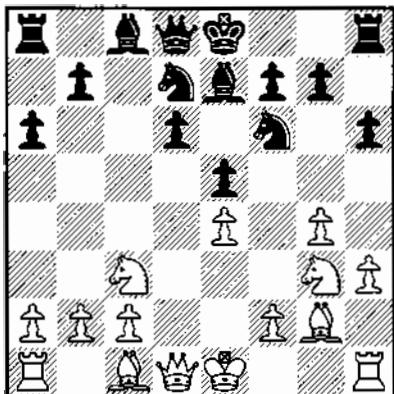
8...Be6

Once again Black has chosen two other natural moves as well, 8... h6 and Carlsen's 8...O-O.

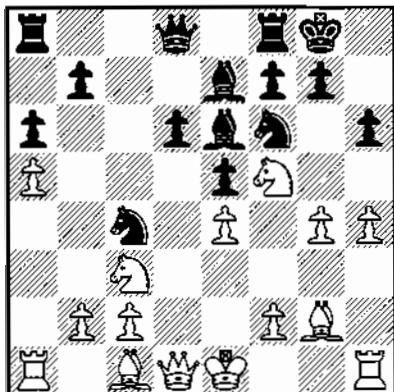
First, we look at 8... h6 9. Bg2 :

a) After 9... Qc7 10. Be3 $b5$ 11. Qd2 Be6 12. Ng3 Nbd7 it looks like Black has played very standard, "Najdorf" type moves, but White's control over the d5 and f5 squares is enough for a sizable advantage. After 13. Nd5! Bxd5 14. exd5 Nb6 15. $\text{b3} \pm$ White has the two bishops, a space advantage, and the f5 square for his knight—meanwhile Black is basically without any real counterplay. Fedorchuk soon castled and successfully pushed c2-c4 through, winning on the queenside, in Fedorchuk–Lorenzo Grande, Navalmoral 2009.

b) Better is 9...Nbd7 10.Ng3

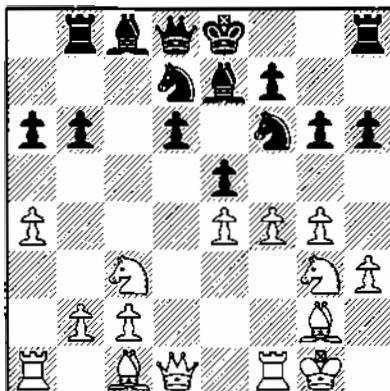


b1) One interesting sample line starts with 10...Nb6 11.a4 (*Not 11.Nf5?! Bxf5 12.exf5 d5, as without the pawn on h6 White would simply win a pawn after g4-g5, but here Black is doing great.*) 11...O-O 12.a5! Nc4 13.Nf5 Be6 14.h4! →



The threat of g4-g5 is actually incredibly strong—Black is in huge trouble! As we can see, the move h7-h6 can sometimes backfire, as it gives a hook for a potential kingside attack.

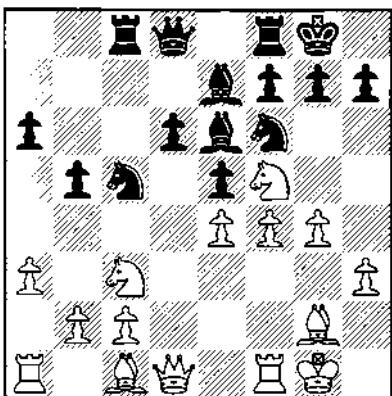
b2) While 10...g6 certainly prevents our knight from coming to f5, the obvious drawback of weakening the h6 pawn can become quite serious. In the following game Black is unable to castle and loses because of it: 11.O-O Rb8 12.a4 b6 13.f4!



A nice way to take advantage of Black's weakened kingside. 13...exf4? (13...Bb7 was a better move, but Black is still in trouble after 14.Nd5 Nxd5 15.exd5 Qc7 16.Ra3!↑) 14.Bxf4 Ne5 15.Nd5 Be6. And now the simplest way to grow the advantage was to play 16.Nxe7 (16.Qd2± was played in Adhiban-Kurukulasuriya, Tabriz 2014.) 16...Qxe7 17.b3±. White has the strong dark-squared bishop and pressure along the f-file. In “compensation” Black has several weak pawns and again, no counterplay.

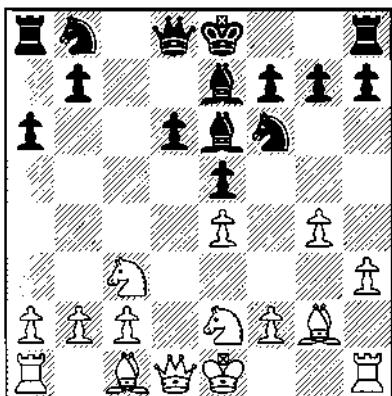
We'd be remiss not to show the game Carlsen played against “The World” back in 2012: 8...O-O 9.Ng3 Nbd7 10.Nf5 (*Perhaps gaining some space on the kingside was a bit more ambitious: 10.g5?! Ne8 11.h4 Nc7 12.Be3 b5 13.Nf5±. White can even consider Qg4 and O-O-O, with a promising kingside attack.*) 10...Nc5 11.Bg2 Be6 12.O-O (Once again, 12.g5

$N \cdot 8$ 13.h4± deserved consideration.)
12...b5 13.a3 Rc8 14.f4!



A logical way to continue, threatening to advance on the kingside with g4-g5, followed by Nxe7+ and f4-f5. After 14...Na4 15.Nxa4 bxa4 16.g5 Nd7 17.Nxe7+ Qxe7 18.f5 Bc4 19.Rf2±, Carlsen ended up winning a complex struggle, although "The World" certainly had their chances! Carlsen–The World, Mexico City 2012.

9.Bg2

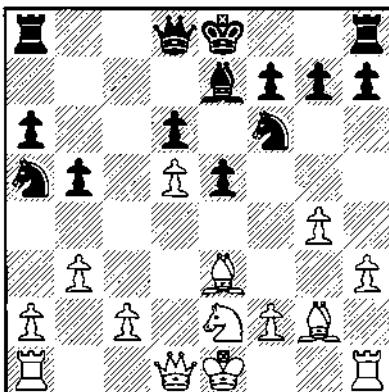


9...Nbd7

We look at three alternatives: 9...h6, 9...Nc6, and 9...O-O.

Here as well Black has chosen to spend a move on 9...h6 and we'll follow another unique example: 10.O-O Nbd7 11.Ng3 g6?! Too weakening! In reality, allowing Nf5 here was definitely the lesser evil. 12.Nd5 h5 Desperation. This only made it easier for White to attack: 13.g5 Nxd5 14.exd5 Bf5 15.f4!± with huge pressure along the f-file, Romanov–Guliyev, Warsaw 2005.

The main drawback of developing the knight with 9...Nc6 is that after an eventual Nd5 Bxd5 exd5 this knight will have to be misplaced, quite a serious concession. 10.Be3 b5 11.Nd5 Bxd5 12.exd5 Na5 13.b3!

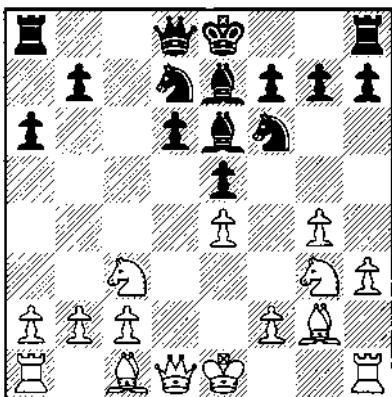


An important idea to remember, sidelining the knight on the queenside where it doesn't help Black's counterplay. 13...Qc7 14.O-O O-O Now an easy improvement over Fressinet's choice would be 15.Ng3!N inducing Black to play g7-g6, weakening the f-file. (Instead, 15.f4± was played in Fressinet–Kosteniuk, Mainz 2008.) 15...g6 16.a4! Another good idea, putting pressure on Black's queenside, for example 16...b4 17.Qd2 Rab8 18.f4! exf4 (After 18...Nd7 19.f5± White's advantage is

indisputable.) 19.Rxf4!. Not only is the b4 pawn hard to protect, the f-file is much more vulnerable with the inclusion of g7-g6.

After **9...O-O** Let's learn from another one of Adhiban's games: 10.Ng3 b5 11.Be3 Nbd7 12.Nf5! Rc8 13.g5 (*13.Nxd6?! would allow Black active play after 13...Rc6 14.Nf5 Bb4=.*) 13...Ne8 14.h4. Once White makes this advance it makes sense to follow up with queenside castling. 14...g6 15.Nxe7+ Qxe7 16.h5→. The pressure along the h-file and an eventual Nd5 gave White a clear advantage in Adhiban–Aguirre Manzo, Kemer 2009.

10.Ng3



10...Nb6

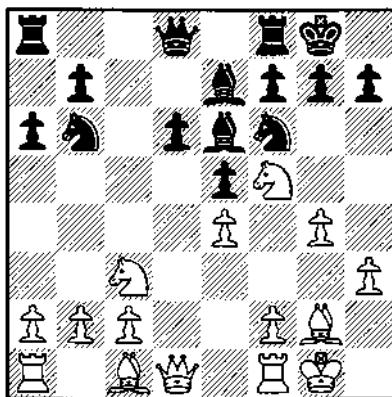
A rapid game between two strong grandmasters quickly entered uncharted waters after 10...g6 11.Bh6 Qb6!? Fearlessly leaving the king in the center and going after the b2 pawn. White should have responded with the simple 12.b3 (*After 12.Qd2?! Qxb2 13.Rb1 Qa3 14.g5 Nh5 15.Nxh5 gxh5 16.O-O∞ Paragua's enterprising sacrifice paid off, but Black certainly could have defended better, in Paragua–Sandipan,*

Beijing 2008.) The game might have continued 12...Rc8 13.Nd5 Bxd5 14.exd5. In this position, Black just doesn't have enough play on the queenside to justify the centralized king. In case of 14...Bf8 15.Be3! Qa5+ 16.Bd2 Qc5 17.c4!±, White is currently threatening g4-g5 and will have a significant advantage after castling.

11.Nf5

It's important not to cross ideas in the opening. Although Black has played an early Nb6, 11.b3?! is rarely a good move once our knight leaves e2, and White would have no good answer to 11...Qc7—for instance, 12.Nce2 d5!→ is disastrous for White.

11...O-O 12.O-O



12...Ne8?!

Benitah, an International Master, chooses a common idea, hoping to trade dark-squared bishops with Bg5, but it was stronger to play for immediate counterplay with **12...Rc8**.

Now, **13.Nxe7+** is not nearly as strong as in the game because White isn't quick enough to play b3 and gain control over the queenside, for example after 13...Qxe7 14.Nd5 (*Not 14.Ne2? d5+ and Black has taken*

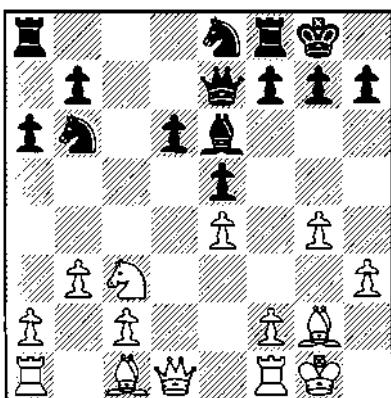
ter the initiative.) 14...Bxd5 15.exd5 $\mathbb{Q}e7\rightarrow$, White just isn't in time to set up a queenside bind, and Black is doing well.

A more recent game continued 13.a4! The best move, threatening $\mathbb{Q}a5$ and $Nd5$. Now Black chose to break with 13...d5?! which is a strong idea—if it works—but in this case it should have been punished. More solid would have been 13...Re8 but White could still get a small advantage after 14.Nxe7+ Qxe7 15.a5 Nc4 16.Nd5 Bxd5 17.exd5±.) 14.Nxe7+ (14.a5?! was strongly met with 14...d4!= in Vandenbussche-Piceu, Belgium 2012.) 14...Qxe7 15.exd5 Rfd8. Perhaps White missed 16.Bg5!± which completely refutes Black's previous play.

13...Nxe7+

Svidler correctly decides to play for a long-term advantage, where White will have the two bishops and more space.

13...Qxe7 14.b3!



The start of a slow but powerful plan, setting up a bind on the queenside.

14.f4 would be a normal move as well, but Svidler decides to first

advance on the queenside before opening up the center.

14...Rc8 15.Ne2

Another drawback of Ne8 is that White can remove his knight from c3 without having to worry about d6-d5.

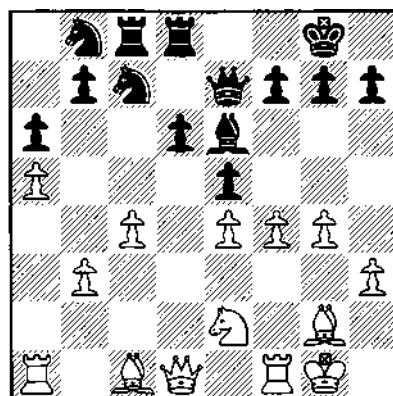
15.Nd5?! Gives Black good chances after 15...Bxd5 16.exd5 f5!→. 15...Nd7 16.a4!

Svidler touches only his pawns in the next few moves, gaining space and illustrating the point that Black is lacking any meaningful counterplay.

16...Nc7 17.a5 Nb8

Black looks for the most solid way to regroup his pieces, but this gives White too much time to consolidate his advantage. Unfortunately, it's already hard to suggest something different, as there is no real way of stopping White's expansion.

18.c4 Rfd8 19.f4!



Now that the queenside is under White's full control, Svidler starts working on the center and the kingside. In principle, it is almost always a good idea to open up the position when you have the advantage of the two bishops.

19...exf4

19...f6 would keep the position relatively closed but allow White to gain too much space after 20.f5 Bf7 21.Nc3±. White's plan now could be Be3 followed by Na4-b6, as well as doubling or even tripling up on the d-file.

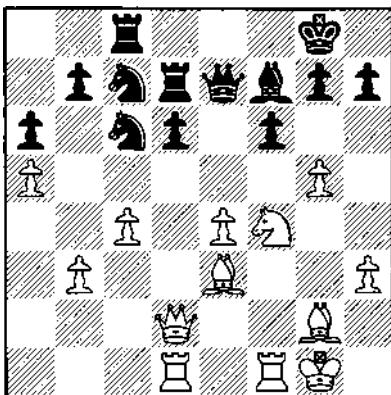
20.Bxf4±

White's advantage is now quite substantial, and Svidler's handling of this middlegame is quite impressive—within a few moves he is able to seize a powerful initiative!

20...Nc6 21.Qd2 Rd7 22.Rad1 Ne8 23.Bg5!

Provoking f7-f6 in order to soften up Black's kingside.

23...f6 24.Be3 Bf7 25.Nf4 Nc7 26.g5!



An original breakthrough, fueled by the power of White's pieces.

26...fxg5 27.Nd5 Nxd5 28.exd5

This is the point—after the coming Bxg5 Black's pieces will be unable to defend the kingside.

28...Nxa5

No better was 28...Ne5 29.Bxg5 Qe8 30.Rde1±. With enormous pressure, Black shouldn't be able to hold for much longer. Next is Bf4, Qc3, doubling rooks on the e-file, etc.

29.Rxf7?!

An interesting combination, winning two pieces for a rook and two pawns.

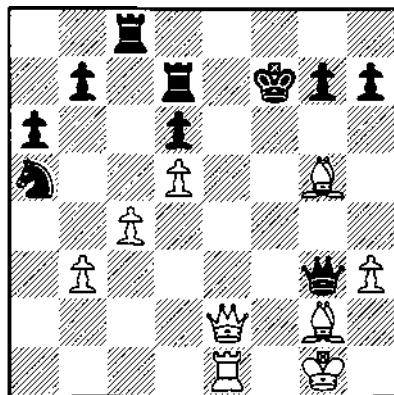
A strong alternative was 29.Rde1†, activating the last piece to the maximum. Black would be hard pressed to survive after the coming Bxg5.

29...Kxf7?

The losing move. Black must have underestimated White's incoming attack.

After 29...Qxf7 30.Qxa5 Black should last longer than what occurred in the game, but most likely the two bishops would eventually outplay the rook.

30.Bxg5 Qe5 31.Re1 Qg3 32.Qe2!



Perhaps Benitah overlooked the power of this move, which wins on the spot. The threat of Qe6+ is quite devastating.

32...Kg6

Or 32...Qxg5 33.Qe6+ Kf8 34.Rf1++-

33.Bd2!

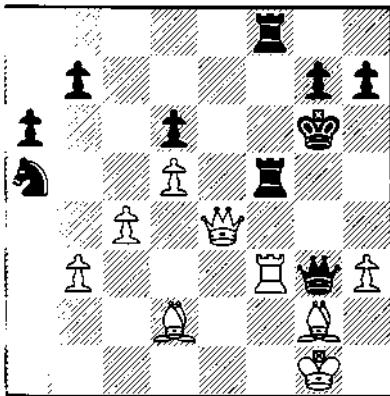
Not the only winning move, but the simplest. Black's king lacks adequate defense.

33...Rf7 34.Qe4+ Rf5 35.Rf1
Rcf8 36.Rf3! 1-0

Game 8

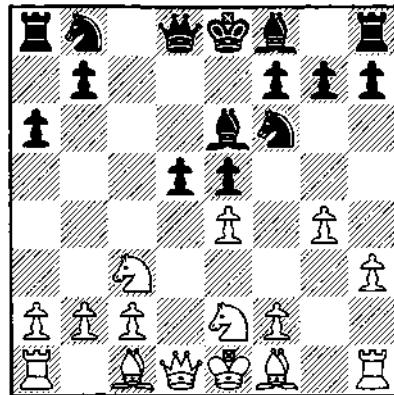
Kamsky – Shankland
2011 U.S. Championship
Playoff 2011

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4
4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.h3 e5
7.Nde2 Be6 8.g4 d5



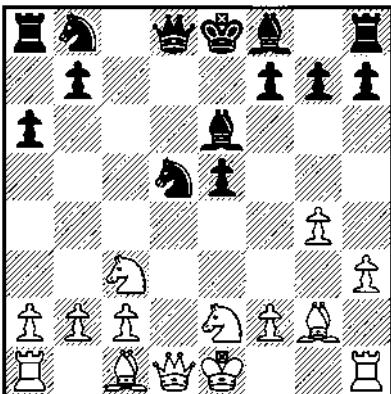
A nice finish! It was very instructive to see Svidler build his advantage from the opening, gain space, and open up the kingside before launching a final attack.

Black resigned, since after 36...Qe5 37.Qg4+ Kf6 38.Qg5+! White wins everything.



A principled approach, similar to the line 6.h3 e6 7.g4 d5—Black counters White's kingside expansion with a break in the center.

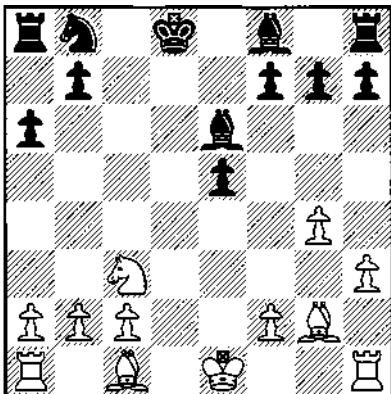
9.exd5 Nxd5 10.Bg2



10...Bb4

Once again this is the critical move, developing the bishop to put pressure on White's knight.

10...Nxc3?! has actually been played more often than the text, but leads to a clearly better endgame for White after 11.Qxd8+ Kxd8 12.Nxc3



Now, apart from threatening Bxb7, White has a very clear plan of Be3 and O-O-O, as well as putting a piece on the d5 square.

Let's look at a few games to understand the position:

12...Nc6 13.Be3 Bb4?! was played in a simul game against Bobby Fischer, and he quickly demonstrated the drawbacks of Black's setup: 14.O-O-O+ Ke7 15.Ne4! Aiming at the c5 square and already posing serious problems for Black to solve. 15...Rhd8 16.a3! Ba5 17.Bc5+ Ke8 18.Nd6++– winning the exchange and the game, Fischer–Sillars/Manter, Cicero 1964.

12...Kc8 13.Bd5?! An interesting idea, exchanging off the bishops to give White full control over the d5 square. (13.Be3± was also possible.) 13...Bxd5 14.Nxd5 Nd7 15.Be3 b6 16.O-O-O±. White followed up with doubling rooks on the d-file and won a clean game, Bachmann Schiavo-Yanayt, Berkeley 2011.

12...Kc7 13.Nd5+ Forcing Black to give up his light-squared bishop. (13.Be3± is again a reasonable option.) 13...Bxd5 14.Bxd5 f6 15.Be3. This endgame is similar to the one featured in Game 1 (Alekseev-Karjakin—see the diagram after 18.Be3 on page 22). White has the advantage of the two bishops and can freely play for two results. Now Smirin–Idrisov, Baku 2011, continued 15...Nc6 16.O-O-O±.

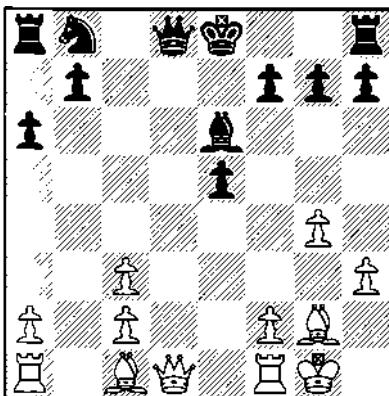
11.O-O

Now, with the threat of Nxd5 renewed, Black must resolve the tension:

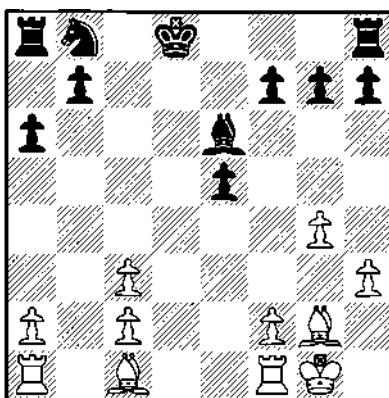
11...Bxc3

11...Nxc3? just loses a pawn after 12.Qxd8+ Kxd8 13.bxc3 Bc5 14.Bxb7±.

12.Nxc3 Nxc3 13.bxc3



Also, 13.Qxd8+ has been tried, and White can certainly play for an advantage here as well. 13...Kxd8 14.bxc3



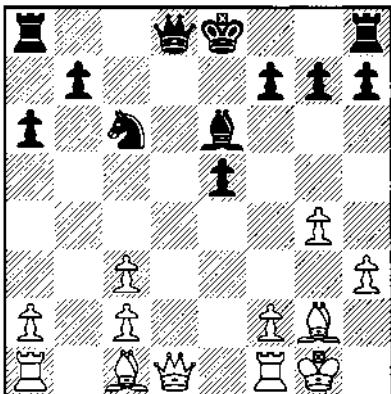
When transitioning into the middlegame we should take note that White's pawn structure is clearly weak, but is fully compensated by the power of the two bishops. The light-squared bishop will put pressure along the long diagonal for the rest of the game, while the dark-squared bishop will control many key squares from its natural perch on a3. With active play White should be able to fight for an edge.

We look at two alternatives, 14...Nc6 and 14..Kc7.

14...**Nc6** 15.f4 f6 16.fxe5 fxe5 17.Be3 Kc7 18.a4!!? with the idea to play Rab1, as well as a4-a5, fixing the b6 square. (*Another option was 18.Rfb1± with the idea of doubling rooks on the b-file.*) 18...b5? A terrible weakening of the long diagonal. It was better to play Raf8 or fight for counterplay with h7-h5. 19.a5 Rac8 20.Rfd1 Rhe8 21.Be4+- with an overwhelming position. White followed up with Bc5 and Rd6 and won easily, in Soltanici–Golichenko, Kiev 2012.

14...**Kc7** 15.f4 f6 16.Be3 Nd7?? The knight is too passive on this square, and now White's pressure against the b7 pawn becomes quite strong. (16...Nc6 17.fxe5 fxe5 18.a4± transposes to Soltanici–Golichenko in the previous note.) 17.Rab1 Rab8 18.fxe5 fxe5 19.Ba7!± winning an exchange, in Saric–Golichenko, Chotowa 2010.

13...Nc6



14.Ba3!

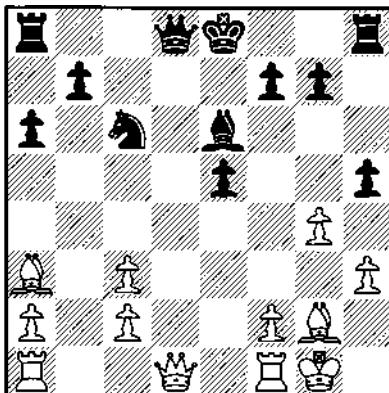
An important move! Black will now have some difficulties in connecting rooks.

In case of 14.Rb1 Black can equalize with 14...Qe7!= preventing Ba3 and preparing to castle next. White won't be able to generate enough compensation for the queenside weaknesses, Pridorozhni-Lovkov, St. Petersburg 2012.

14...Qxd1

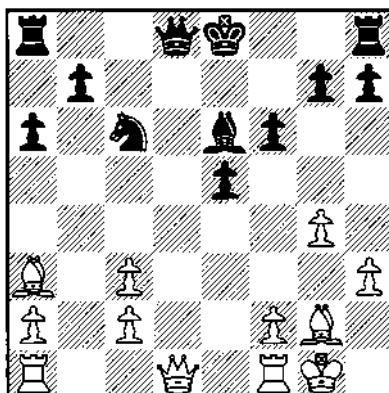
Heading into the endgame has been Black's main choice in this line, although a few other moves do deserve attention:

A common way for Black to get counterplay in this line is **14...h5!?**



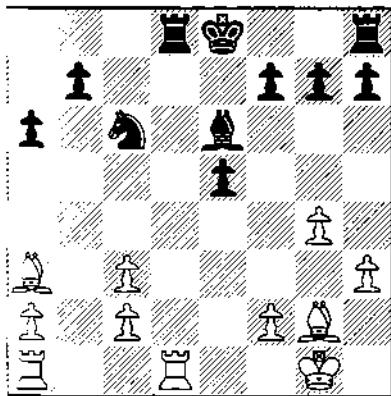
We reply 15.Rb1 Qxd1 (*15...Rb8? runs into a nice trick: 16.Rxb7! Rxb7 17.Bxc6+ Rd7 18.Qd6+-*) 16.Rfxd1 Rd8. The only move, hoping for Rxd8 Nxd8 Bxb7 hxg4, where Black is doing well, but now White can play 17.Rd3!N, a strong positional idea—Black cannot exchange rooks without repairing White's pawn structure, and the threat against b7 is renewed. (*17.Re1?! Rd7= was holdable in Priyadarshan-Vikram, Chennai 2010.*) After 17...Bc8 18.g5!= Black is in a difficult spot.

Also reasonable is **14...f6**, preparing to play Kf7 and Re8:



But White's initiative develops quickly with 15.Rb1 Qc7 16.Bd6 and now strongest is 17.Qd3!± preparing Rfd1, and White has lasting pressure. Another idea is to open the center with f2-f4, as well as cementing the bishop on d6 with b3-c4-c5. (Also possible is 17.Bc5±, Radivojevic-Wagner, Pula 2010.) In case Black is feeling frisky and takes a pawn with 17...Bxa2?!, after 18.Rb6! Be6 19.f4!+– White has created a very powerful attack. One nice line is 19...Rd8 20.fxe5 fxe5 21.Qxh7!+–.

15.Rfxd1 Rd8



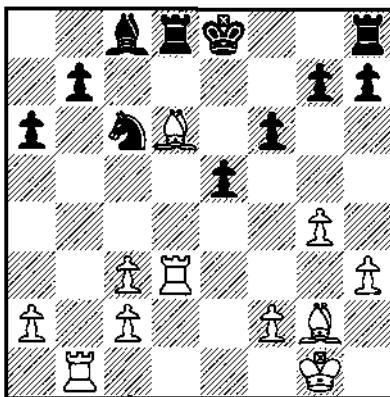
We'll now follow a game from the highest level that this variation—7...Be6 8.g4 d5—has ever reached. GM Gata Kamsky, playing White, demonstrates some terrific endgame play, making use of his two bishops and lead in development to slowly increase his advantage over time. His opponent, GM Sam Shankland, defends well for a while but is unable to successfully deal with the constant pressure.

16.Bd6 f6 17.Rab1 Bc8

17...Rd7? would work with the king on f7, but not here: 18.Bxc6! Bxc6 19.Rb8+ Rd8 20.Rxd8+ Kxd8

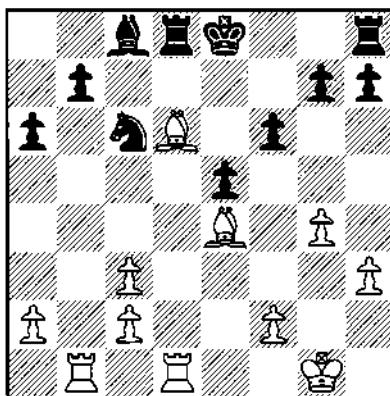
21.Bf8+ Kc8 22.Bxg7±, and White has excellent winning chances as long as he keeps rooks on the board.

18.Rd3



An interesting idea, anticipating Black's next move and preparing to fight for control over the d-file.

Two years after our main game, an improvement for White was played: 18.Be4! stopping h7-h5 counterplay on account of Bg6+.



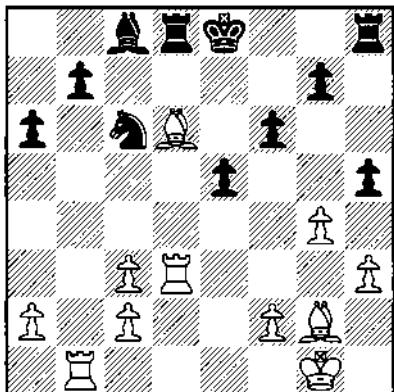
Let's see how White pressed his advantage: 18...Kf7 19.Bd5+ Kg6 20.Bc7! Winning control over the d-file. 20...Rde8 (or 20...Rd7? 21.Be4+ Kf7 22.Rxd7+ Bxd7 23.Rxb7+–)

21.Be4+ Kf7 22.Rd6±. Black suffered for a while and was unable to hold the endgame in Fernandez Romero–Alvarez Fernandez, Seville 2013.

18...Kf7?!

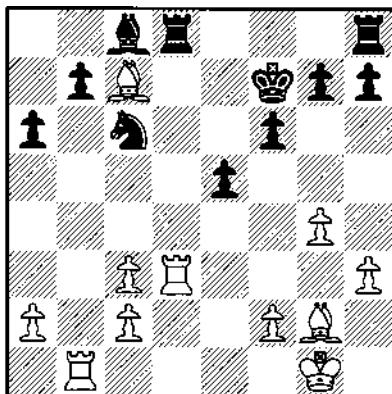
Shankland's desire to finally connect rooks is more than understandable, but this allows White to improve his position considerably.

Instead, Black's best chance to equalize was 18...h5!



For instance, after 19.Be4 Kf7 20.f3 hxg4 21.fxg4 (or 21.hxg4 Rh4! with good counterplay along the h-file), Black would have to find 21...Nd4! simplifying into a drawn endgame, the point being that after 22.cxd4 Rxd6 23.dxe5, Black is just in time to trade enough pawns with 23...Rxd3 24.cxd3 Rxh3=.

19.Bc7!



The point of 18.Rd3, giving Black the unpleasant choice of either ceding the d-file or repairing White's pawn structure.

19...Rxd3

Black helps White undouble the c-pawns, but at least is able to trade a pair of rooks.

19...Rde8 20.Bd5+ Kg6 21.Be4+ Kf7 22.Rd6± actually transposes to Fernandez Romero–Alvarez Fernandez, cited in the variation 18.Be4.

20.cxd3 Re8?!

Too timid, simply not putting up enough resistance.

20...h5 should have been tried, but White could still play for two results after 21.Bd5+ Ke7 22.f3±.

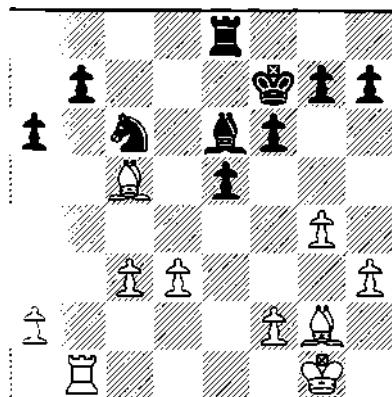
21.Bb6!

Kamsky redirects the bishop to a more useful diagonal.

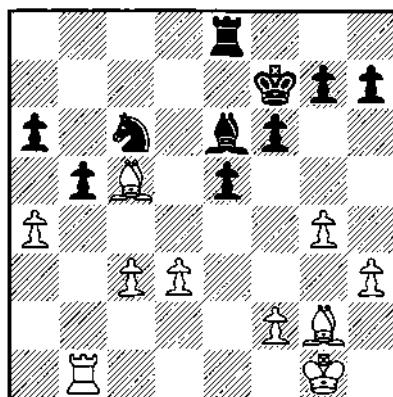
21...Be6?!

Another error, likely connected with a tactical oversight.

22.Bc5



23.a4!



22...b5?

As it so often happens when a player is forced to defend a passive position, they look for any opportunity “free themselves”. But this move is just a serious tactical error—although the immediate 23.Bxc6 is comfortably met with 23...Rc8, White is not forced to capture the knight just yet.

Of course at this point, Black’s other options were uninspiring, to say the least:

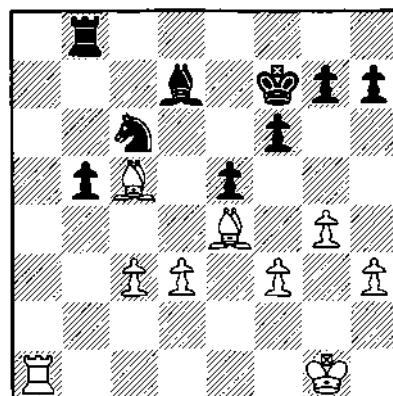
After 22...Bc8 23.Bd5+ Kg6 24.Kg2± White can continue with f2-f3 followed by advancing the h-pawn and slowly squeezing Black.

And if 22...Nd8 then 23.a4!± and Black is just running short of moves here, while White can enjoy the advantage of the two bishops and extra space. But not 23.Bxb7?! Nxb7 24.Rxb7+ Kg6± where despite the extra pawn, the presence of opposite colored bishops makes the task of winning much more difficult.

The tactical refutation to Black’s last move—not 23.Bxc6 Rc8=. Since now 23...bxa4 would lose to 24.Bxc6 Rc8 25.Rb6, Black is forced to continue defending passively.

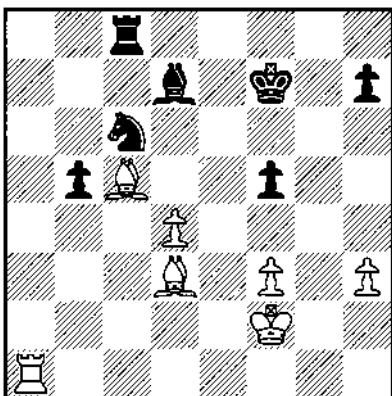
23...Rb8 24.axb5 axb5 25.Ra1!±

Clearly the last few moves have helped White greatly, who can now use the a-file to invade with his rook.
25...Bd7 26.Bd5+ Ke8 27.Be4 Kf7 28.f3



Illustrating the great endgame principle of “Do not hurry!”, Kamsky first brings his king in to the center before advancing any pawns.

**28...Rc8 29.Kf2 g6 30.d4 exd4
31.cxd4 f5 32.gxf5 gxf5 33.Bd3**

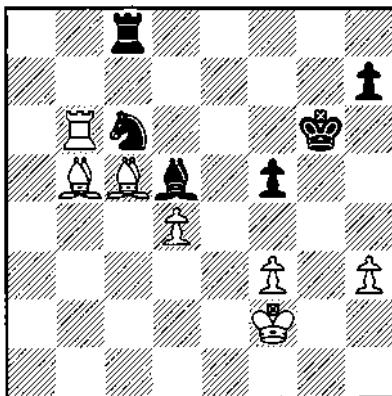


33...Be6

Giving up the weak b-pawn in order to build a blockade, but it is not enough to create any serious drawing chances.

Black could activate the knight with 33...Ne5 34.Be2 Nc4, but after 35.Ra7 Ke8 36.Kg3+– White can bring the king in through f4, and the rest of Black's pieces are too passive.

34.Bxb5 Bd5 35.Ra6 Kg6 36.Rb6



Black's pieces are unable to move, and the position is practically winning for White. Kamsky now

tries to induce Black to weaken the kingside.

36...Kg5 37.Kg3 f4+ 38.Kf2!

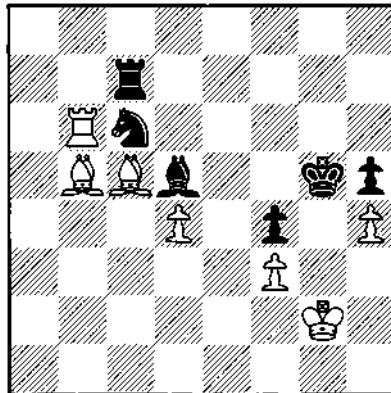
Now that Black has pushed f5-f4, White can play Bd3-e4 at any point to break the blockade on the d-pawn.

38...h5 39.Kg2

Setting up a nice trap...

Already good enough was 39.Bd3+– followed by Be4.

39...Rc7 40.h4+!



40...Kxh4

Allowing a pretty finish, but retreating with the king would not have changed the final outcome.

If 40...Kf6 White can revert to the previously mentioned plan of 41.Bd3+– followed by Be4.

41.Bxc6 Rg7+

The point is seen after 41...Bxc6 42.Rxc6!, and if 42...Rxc6 then 43.Be7+ Rf6 44.Bxf6 mate.

#2.Kf2 1-0

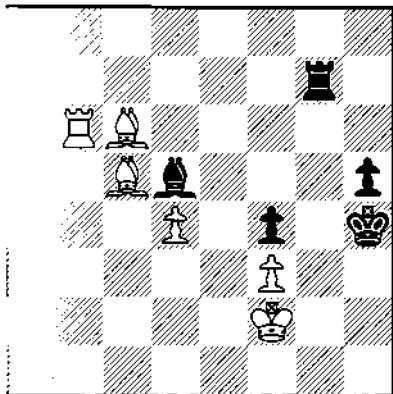
Game 9

Vallejo Pons - Shabalov

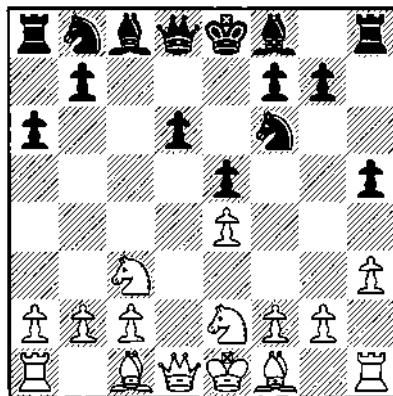
North American Open

Las Vegas 2011

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4
4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.h3 e5
7.Nde2 h5!?



An impressive technical win by Gata Kamsky!



The modern Najdorf! This position has become a major battleground at higher levels for the past few years. It seems extreme to give up the g5 square in order to prevent White from playing g2-g4, but since we've seen how dangerous the kingside attack can become, it is not such a surprise that many players have switched over to this line!

8.Bg5

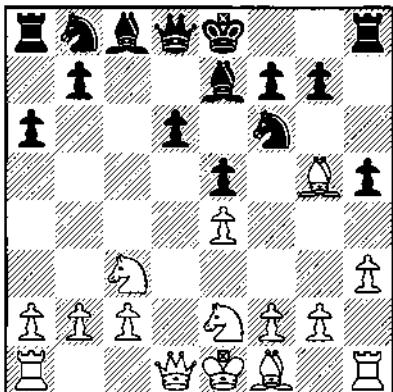
The main line and most principled reply. After all, Black gave up the g5 square!

Now Black has mostly played:

8...Be6

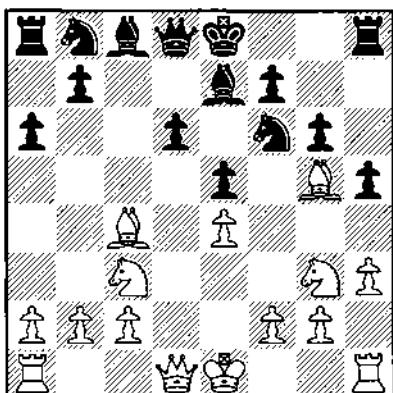
Getting ready to play Nbd7.

A good alternative is 8...Be7



This line is less popular, but not so bad for Black. White will definitely have to work hard to earn an advantage. 9.Ng3. Now Black has chosen between 9...g6 analyzed here, and 9...h4 on page 105.

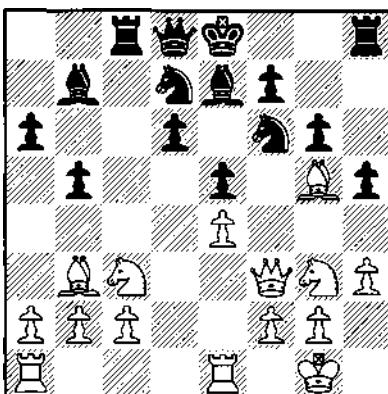
9...g6 10.Bc4



This is the best diagonal for our bishop, maintaining control over the d5 square. Now h5-h4 can be met with Nf1-e3.

a) The immediate 10...b5? is a blunder due to 11.Bxf6 Bxf6 12.Bxf7+! Kxf7 13.Qd5++– picking up the loose rook on a8.

b) In order to fianchetto the bishop Black must start with 10...Nbd7. Now we will follow an instructive game, illustrating some key ideas: 11.O-O b5 12.Bb3 Bb7 13.Re1 A useful move, overprotecting the e4 pawn and preparing the maneuver Ng3-f1-e3. 13...Rc8?! (*Black should have played 13...O-O, and after 14.Qf3± White retains some pressure in the center and the kingside.*) 14.Qf3!

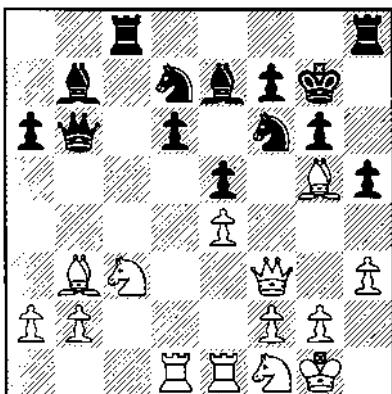


This is often the best spot for the queen in this line, vacating the d1 square for a rook and eyeing the f7 pawn.

b1) Now Black has issues with the kingside, since 14...O-O? runs into 15.Bh6 Re8 16.Nxh5!, winning a very important pawn.

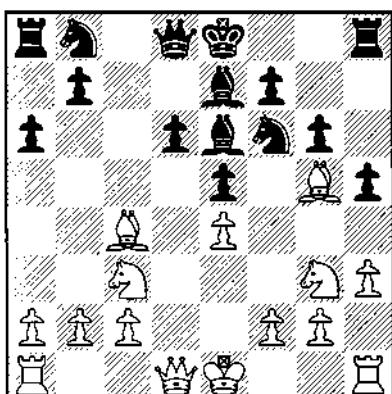
b2) 14...Nc5?! would allow White to secure a long-term advantage with 15.Bxf6 Bxf6 16.Bd5!. After the trade of bishops White will have a perpetually strong knight on d5, the idea for this entire line. 16...Bxd5 17.Nxd5 Bg5 18.Nf1!±. A common maneuver to bring the second knight to e3. Black shouldn't rush to trade off the dark-squared bishop, however, since the f6 square will then become very weak.

b3) After 14...b4 15.Na4 Kf8, Black understandably decides to castle by hand. 16.c3!? An interesting decision, bringing the knight back into the game while Black spends time to secure his king. 16...bxc3 17.Nxc3 Kg7 18.Rad1 Qb6 19.Nf1!

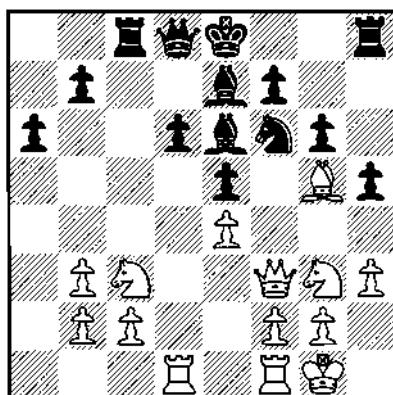


After Ne3-d5 (or Ncd5), the pressure along the f-file will be too great, and White ended up winning after some complications in Sivuk–Raznikov, Petach Tikva 2010.

c) The surprising move 10...Be6 is fairly unexplored but has scored well for Black thus far:



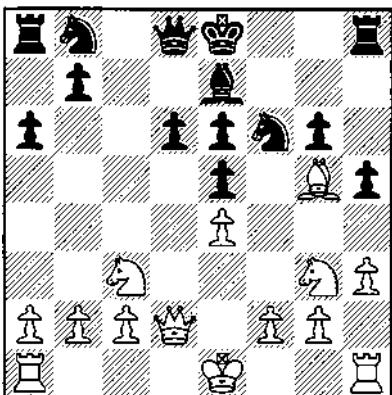
c1) Out of the few games from this position, White has mainly chosen 11.Bb3 Nbd7 12.Qf3 Rc8. We believe White can play for a small advantage here, but not more. Vallejo Pons chose the simple 13.O-O and was able to get a pleasant game: 13...Nc5 14.Rad1 Nxb3. This exchange cannot really be recommended for Black, if only because there was no reason to do it right away. (*An alternative was 14...O-O 15.Rd2± 15.axb3*



c11) Now in case of 15...O-O the game might have continued 16.Rd3 Rc6 17.Rfd1 Ne8 18.Bxe7 Qxe7 19.Nf1, where again White has clear targets on the d-file while Black must stay passive. The tempting 19...f5 can be met with 20.Ne3!± where Black has created too many weaknesses.

c12) After 15...h4 16.Nge2 Nh5 17.Bxe7 Qxe7 18.Qd3 Rc6 19.f4!± the weakness of the h4 pawn was enough for White to have the easier game, in Vallejo Pons–Rytshagov, Istanbul 2000.

c2) We believe 11.Bxe6N fxe6 12.Qd2 is worth a try:

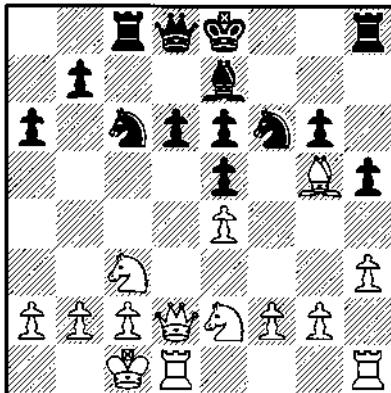


Although Black now has control over the important d5 square, a timely f2-f4-f5 could cause issues on the kingside. Let's take a look at some sample lines:

c21) After 12...Nc6 White can castle on either side:

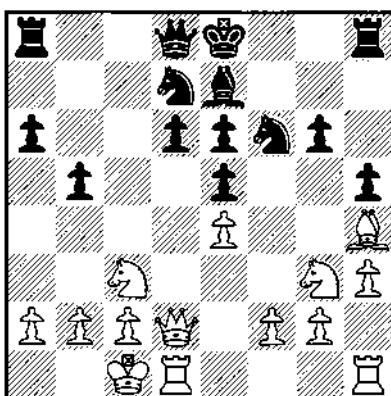
c211) 13.O-O Rc8 14.Rad1 O-O 15.Nge2!? This retreat makes a lot of sense, controlling the d4 square and strengthening the possibility of f2-f4. 15...b5 (*Against 15...Qc7 White can already play 16.f4 since 16...Qb6+ 17.Kh1 Qxb2 18.Rb1 Qa3 19.Rxb7± is almost winning for White.*) 16.a3 Na5 (*better than 16...b4 17.axb4 Nxb4 18.f4±*) 17.Qd3 Nc4 18.Bc1! Threatening to play b2-b3 followed by f4, and in case of 18...Qa5 then the immediate 19.f4↑ is quite strong for White.

c212) A more enterprising approach would be to castle queenside with 13.Nge2 Rc8 14.O-O-O with the threat of Bxf6 and Qxd6:



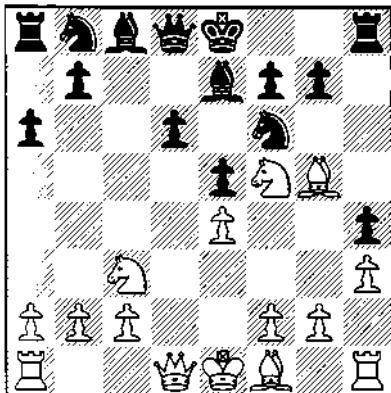
If 14...O-O, then 15.g4! would be very unpleasant to face as Black.

c22) Against 12...Nbd7 we think White can pose certain problems with 13.O-O-O b5 14.Bh4!?

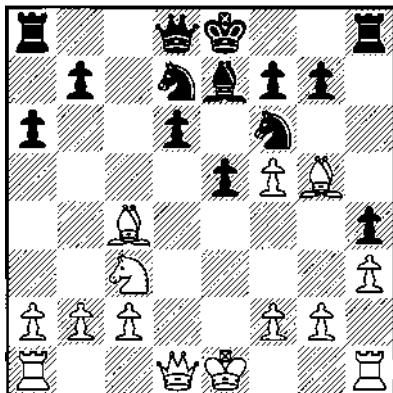


An unusual move to say the least. **B**ut the point is that once Black castles, our queen can become a very unwelcome guest on h6. For example 14...Rc8 15.Kb1 O-O (15...b4 16.Nce2 Qc7 17.f4↑ looks promising for White.) 16.Qh6! Qe8 17.Nge2! not only clearing the way for the g-pawn but also setting up Rd3-g3 in some lines. After 17...b4 18.Na4 Qf7 19.g4+ Black is in serious trouble.

9...h4 10.Nf5!?:



a) 11...Nbd7 12.Bc4



This is essentially a pawn sacrifice, since after **10...Bxf5 11.exf5** White will make no attempts to defend the loose pawn on f5. Instead, we'll aim for long term positional compensation for the pawn in the form of control over the central eight squares. Again, Black has a choice over where to develop the knight. We look at 11...Nbd7 and 11...Nc6.

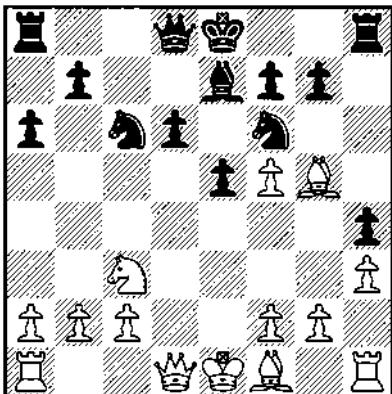
a1) Now 12...b5?! loses a critical tempo: 13.Bb3 Rc8:

a11) After 14.Qe2 which occurred in Drozdowski–Havlikova, Olomouc 2010, Black could have equalized with the move 14...Rh5! where White cannot play 15.Ne4? on account of 15...Nxe4 16.Bxe7 Qa5+! 17.Kf1 Rxf5 18.Qxe4 Rf4 19.Qe3 Kxe7+.

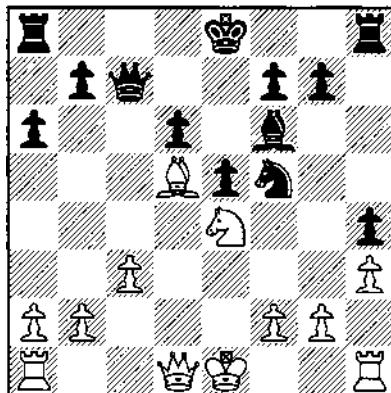
a12) Most accurate would be 14.O-O!. The point of castling is that now 14...Rh5 is strongly met with 15.Ne4!+– and White is winning material. Of course the key is that after 15...Nxe4? 16.Bxe7 there is no Qa5+. Without the resource of Rh8-h5 Black's position is very unpleasant.

a2) 12...Rc8 13.Bb3 Rh5! Not only the best chance to equalize, but to also fight for the initiative. White only has one move to keep the advantage: 14.Qd2! holding everything together, and preparing O-O followed by f2-f4. (14.Bxf6 Nxf6 15.Qd3 Qd7± was already better for Black in Nakar–Huzman, Israel 2013.) 14...Nc5 15.O-O↑. With f2-f4 and Rae1 coming next, Black's king is not very happy to be in the center.

b) 11...Nc6



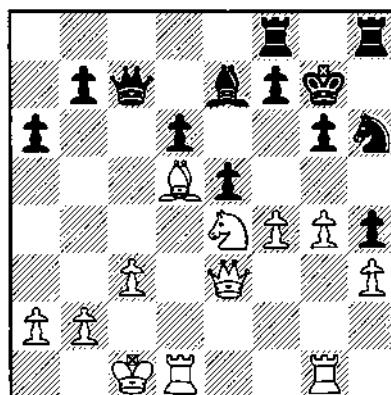
The following game played by English GM David Howell is a masterpiece, fully illustrating the potential of White's position: 12.Bc4 Nd4 13.Bxf6! A common exchange, taking control over the d5 square. 13...Bxf6 14.Bd5 An instructive moment—GM Howell places the bishop on d5, from where it is untouchable and will put pressure on b7 and f7, while he prepares to put his knight on the strong e4 square. 14...Nxf5 15.Ne4 Qc7 16.c3 (16.Nxf6+? would be a grave positional error, since Black's doubled pawns will actually keep the king safe in the center. Furthermore, after 16...gxf6 17.c3 Black can get rid of White's strong bishop with 17...Ne7!±.)



b1) There was already a chance to lose the game on the spot: 16...Ne7? 17.Bxb7!

b2) Or 16...O-O?? 17.Qg4+-.

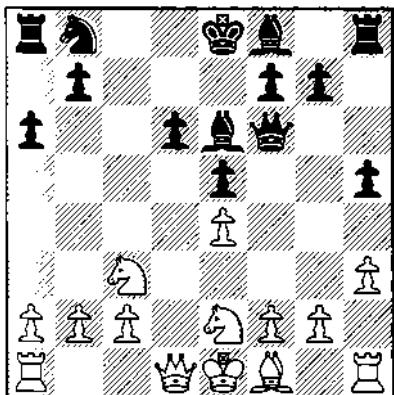
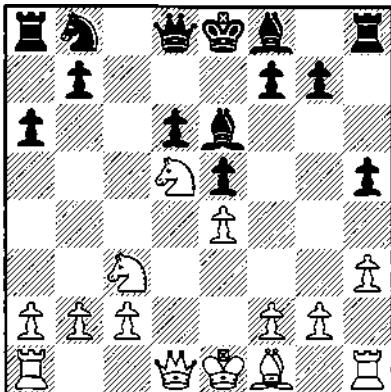
b3) The game continued 16...Be7 17.Qf3 g6 18.O-O-O Howell displays a fine understanding of long-term compensation. He first secures his king before opening lines on the kingside. 18...Kf8 19.g4! Nh6 (*If 19...hxg3 then 20.fxg3± followed by an eventual g3-g4, with strong pressure along the f-file.*) 20.Qe3! Preparing f2-f4, further opening the kingside. 20...Kg7 21.Rhg1 Raf8 22.f4



Now there is little Black can do to prevent White's incoming attack

11...exf4 23.Qd4+ Kh7 24.Nf6+ Bxf6 25.Qxf6 Threatening Rdf1xf4, and Black's pieces are too passive to defend the position. 25...Re8 26.g5! Winning a piece since the f7 pawn is also hanging. 26...Qe7 27.Qxe7 Rxe7 28.gxh6 Kxh6 29.Rde1+- With a bishop for two pawns, Howell had no issues converting, Howell–Van Wely, Amsterdam 2010.

9.Bxf6 Qxf6



After this trade, the resulting positions will resemble the Sveshnikov Variation, where White will try to claim an advantage based on his control over the d5 square. In compensation, Black will have the two bishops and some prospects for active play on the kingside.

10.Nd5 Qd8

Too docile is 10...Bxd5?!. After 11.Qxd5± White has the better bishop and easy play against Black's f-pawn, Paragua–Kyaw, Incheon 2013.

11.Nec3

Theoretically speaking, this line has scored well for Black, and nowadays it seems that many top players are deviating early on, playing 8.g3 or 9.g3, among other options.

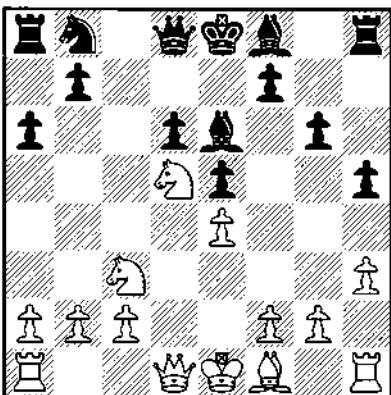
However, despite the line not showing much promise at the higher levels, it still contains some venom. After playing through the following games and variations you will develop a strong understanding of this position, and should be able to reach desirable middlegames from the opening.

11...Nc6

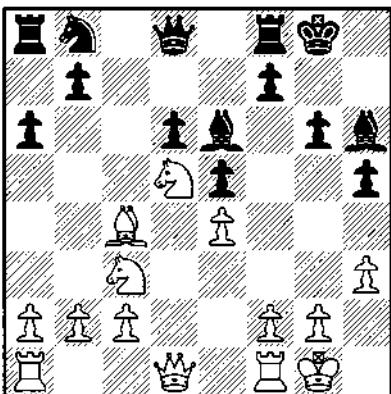
While Black mainly develops his dark-squared bishop to h6, he can choose between placing this knight on c6 or d7.

We look at the solid 11...g6 next and Nakamura's 11...Nd7 on page 109.

In our view Black's most solid continuation is 11...g6

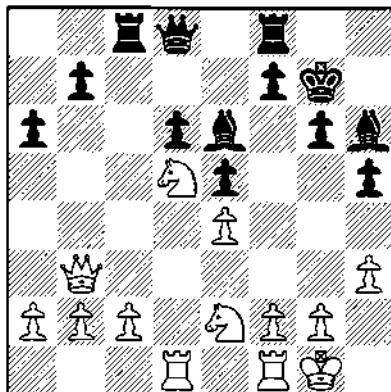


since it is not yet clear where Black's knight will be best placed. 12.Bc4 Bh6 13.O-O (Anand's idea of 13.a4 would make little sense after 13...Nc6! which is one of the advantages of starting with 11...g6.) 13...O-O



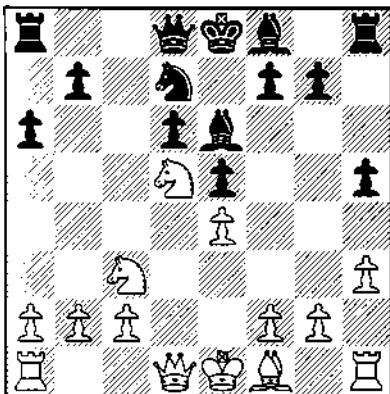
a) Most accurate now would be 14.Qd3, since 14...Nd7 could be met with 15.b4! Rc8 16.Bb3± where White has achieved a nice setup on the queenside, similar to Anand-Nakamura in the next line. White plans a2-a4-a5.

b) Instead, Paragua-Le Quang continued 14.Bb3 Nc6 (14...Nd7= would have been better here, which is why White should start with 14.Qd3.) 15.Qd3 Rc8 16.Rad1 Nd4 17.Ne2! Activating the queen on the queenside, after it recaptures on b3. 17...Nxb3 (After 17...Nxe2+? 18.Qxe2± White has easy play with Rd3, Rfd1, and trading off light-squared bishops for a positional advantage.) 18.Qxb3 Kg7

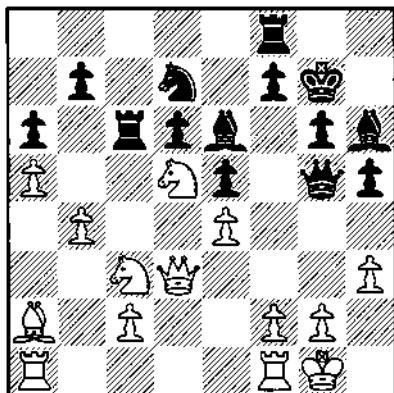


Now to fight for an edge White had to play 19.Nec3!N (19.f4 simply led to trades after 19...Bxf4 20.Nexf4 exf4 21.Qxb7 Rxc2 22.Nxf4 Bxa2=, and the game was soon agreed drawn. Paragua-Le Quang, Manila 2013. 19...Qd7 (If 19...b5 then 20.a4!± and Black's queenside is now a lot easier to attack.) 20.Rd3. Black is fairly solid here with the two bishops and only one weakness, however the position is probably not to everyone's liking. White can continue with a4-a5 and slowly probe with moves like Rfd1, Qb4, Ne3, etc. With accurate play Black should hold the balance, but we'd rather be White.

In one of the most important games for this line, Nakamura chose 11...Nd7 against Anand:



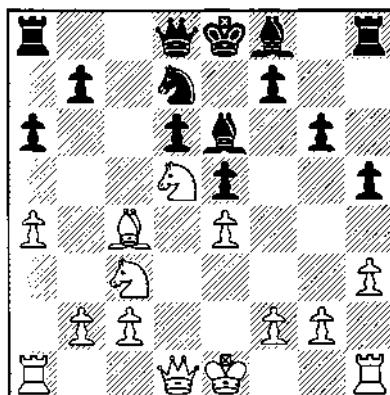
14.a5 Rc8 15.Ba2 O-O 16.O-O Kg7
A useful move typical for this line, Black prophylactically gets the king away from the a2-g8 diagonal.
17.b4! The whole point of White's setup, restricting Black's knight and gaining space on the queenside.
17...Rc6 18.Qd3 Qg5



The benefit of placing the knight on e7 is that the knight can become useful on either c5 or f6, depending on White's setup. **12.Bc4** Just as in the line 8...Be7, this is the best diagonal for our bishop.

We look at 12...g6 here, and 12...Rc8 on page 110.

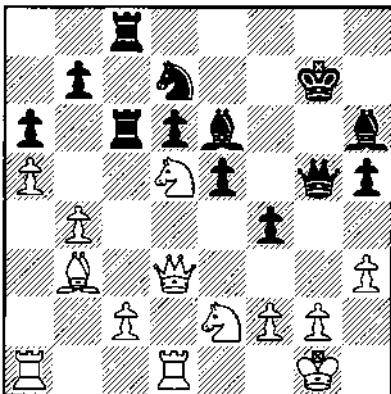
a) 12...g6 13.a4!?



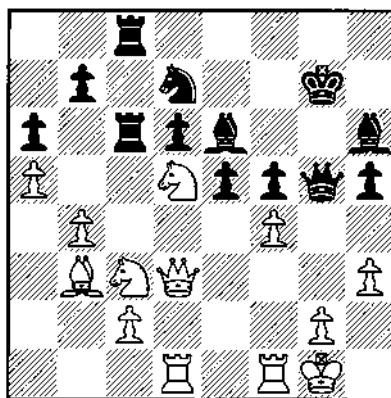
Apart from activating the queen, Nakamura creates a positional threat of Qg5-d2.

a1) 19.Rfd1 Wrong rook! As it turns out, White could have used a rook on f1 to support f2-f4 in the future. The game continued 19...Rfc8 20.Bb3 f5?! (20...Nf6 would have been more solid.) 21.exf5 gxf5 22.Ne2 Threatening the unpleasant f2-f4, which would create serious holes in Black's structure. 22...f4

Anand comes up with a strong plan, and was able to put a lot of pressure on Nakamura. The game continued logically: 13...Bh6

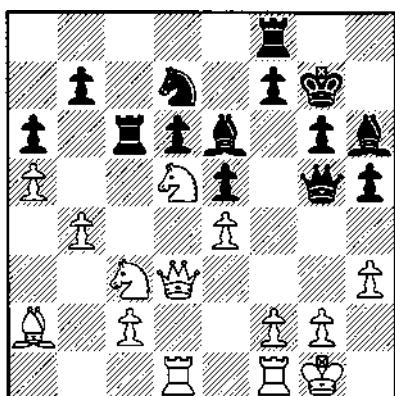


case of 21...Bxf5, White gets a superb positional edge after 22.Ne4 Bxe4 23.Qxe4 Nf6 24.Nxf6 Qxf6 25.Rd3±. With weaknesses on d6 and g6 Black's position is awful. Also, White is currently threatening Rf3.) Now 22.f4!



And here Anand overlooked the powerful 23.Nec3! heading to the newly opened e4 square. (23.Ndxf4?! Led to great complications but allowed Black to equalize, Anand–Nakamura, London 2012.) Nakamura would likely have had to continue 23... Bf5 and after 24.Ne4 Qg6 25.f3± White would have achieved total domination over the light squares.

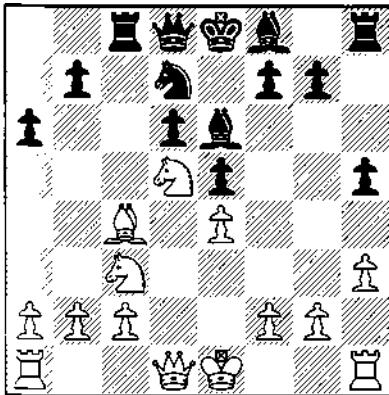
a2) So, in retrospect, 19.Rad1! was the stronger choice, leaving the rook on f1 to support f2-f4:



For instance, 19...Rfc8 20.Bb3 f5?. With a rook on f1 this move is practically suicidal for Black! (Sensible is 20...Nf6 21.Rfe1±.) 21.exf5 gxf5 (In

This counter strike is also featured in the main game, and is simply devastating to Black's structure. 22...exf4 23.Ne2 Ne5 24.Nexf4! A nice tactical point. 24...Bf7 25.Qd4+- and Black's position is probably indefensible since the kingside is weak and dominated by White's knights.

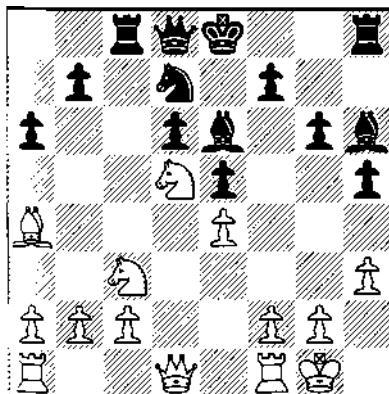
b) In order to avoid Anand's idea of a2-a4-a5, Ba2, and b2-b4, Black should start with 12...Rc8



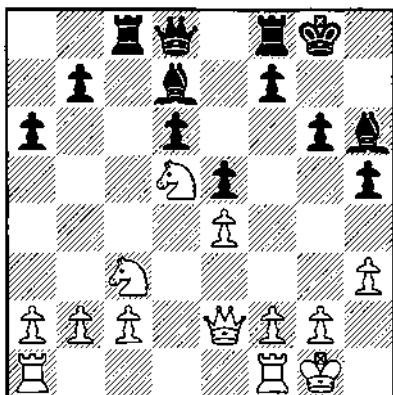
resulting middlegame seems to be somewhat unpleasant for Black: 15...O-O (15...b5?! gives White a very easy target on the queenside, making the lost tempi time well spent! For instance after 16.Bb3 O-O 17.a4!± Black's bishop on h6 isn't necessarily bad here, but it also has nothing to contribute to the queenside. White is going to win at least one pawn.) 16.Bxd7 The point of Ba4, getting rid of Black's most flexible piece. 16...Bxd7 17.Qe2!

Forcing White to spend a tempo on 15.Bb3, but this still gives White some interesting options: 13...g6 14.O-O Bh6:

- b1) Worth investigating is 15.f4!?
- b2) The stem game 15.Qf3 allowed Black to achieve a very harmonious setup: 15...O-O 16.Rd1 Kg7 17.Ne3 15 18.Rd2 Bxb3 19.cxb3 Ne6= and Black was certainly not worse, Bodek-Ciada, Al-Ain UAE 2013.
- b3) But now we suggest 15.Ba4!?

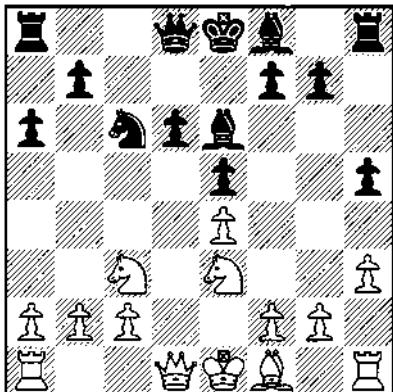


A completely novel approach to this position—spending so much time with the bishop surely breaks a principle or two, but the



The best square for the queen, preparing Rfd1 and keeping an eye on the h5 pawn, making f7-f5 less appealing for Black. 17...Qg5 (After 17...f5?! 18.exf5 Bxf5 19.Ne4± the central blockade pays homage to Nimzowitsch!) 18.Kh1 Be6 (18...f5? now would be a positional blunder in view of 19.Nb6! Rcd8 20.Nxd7 Rxd7 21.Rad1± with our favorite knight against Black's empty bishop.) 19.Rfd1±. White's plan is fairly simple—a2-a4-a5 to fix the b6 square, as well as Rd3 and Rad1 to put pressure on d6. Placing the rook on d3 also makes it more difficult for Black to achieve f7-f5, in view of Rg3.

12.Ne3!

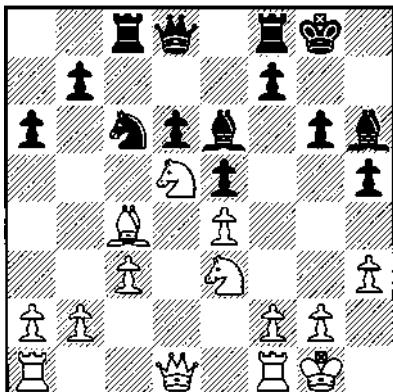


A strong plan! By switching his knights on d5, GM Vallejo Pons will be able to control the important squares c4 and f5. Furthermore, he can play c2-c3, restricting Black's knight on c6.

12...g6 13.Ncd5 Bh6 14.c3

Already, Black would rather have his knight placed on d7, which is further evidenced by GM Shabalov's 16th move!

14...O-O 15.Bc4 Rc8 16.O-O



16...Nb8!

Redeploying the knight to d7 and c5, a wise decision.

16...f5? Would run into a typical trick: 17.Nb6! Bxc4 18.Nexc4+– and the d6 pawn falls.

Trading knights with 16...Ne7 would not solve all of Black's problems, as after 17.Bb3 Nxd5 (*After 17...Bxe3 18.Nxe3 Bxb3 19.Qxb3± Black has no compensation for the backwards d-pawn.*) 18.Nxd5 Kg7 19.Qd3±. White can still apply pressure on the d6 pawn, eventually trade bishops with a move like Ne3, and play against Black's dark-squared bishop.

17.Bb3

Removing the bishop from attack and vacating the c4 square for the knight.

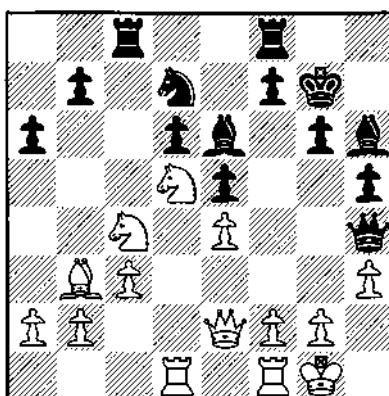
17...Nd7 18.Qe2

Also possible was 18.Qf3 with similar play: 18...Kg7 19.Rad1 Nc5 20.Bc2±.

18...Qh4 19.Rad1 Kg7

Not 19...Qxe4? 20.Ne7+–.

20.Nc4



20...Nc5!

Active defense! Shabalov welcomes 21.Nxd6 since that would offer Black excellent compensation.

Instead, 20...Rc6? would be met with 21.Na5+–.

21.Ncb6

Certainly possible was 21.Nxd6, but it would make Black's life a bit simpler after 21...Rcd8 22.Ne3 (not 22.Nc4 Qxe4 23.Qxe4 Nxe4±) 22...Nxb3 23.axb3 Qe7! 24.Ndc4 Bxe3 25.Qxe3 Qc7=.

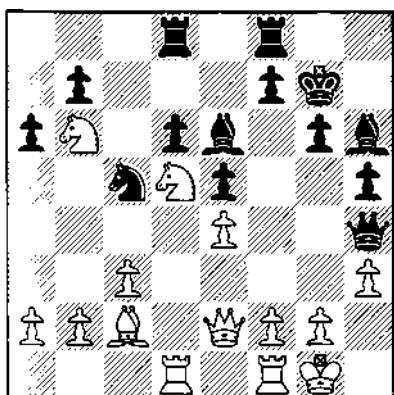
White is pressing, but it would be very hard to make use of the extra pawn in this position.

21...Rcd8?!

The first significant inaccuracy of the game.

Better was 21...Rc6! This rook move seems a bit awkward, but the point is to play Qd8 next, kicking White's knight out of b6. 22.Bc2 Qd8! 23.Nc4 (Also possible is 23.b4 c5 24.Nxd7 Qxd7 25.Qf3= with a playable position.) 23...b5! Another precise move, forcing a series of exchanges: 24.Nce3 Bxe3 25.Qxe3 Rxd5 26.Rxd5 Ne6= and now Black's position certainly seems holdable.

22.Bc2



22...f5

A thematic source of counterplay, but Black's position soon deteriorates.

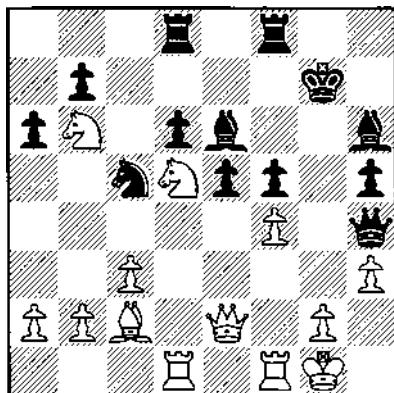
Still, it is hard for Black to stay put in such a position. For example 22...Nd7 23.Nxd7 Rxd7 24.Nb6 Rdd8 25.Bb3±. Once again Black is left with a poor bishop on h6 and a backwards d-pawn.

23.exf5 gxf5?!

Every Russian schoolboy knows to recapture with the g-pawn, but not here! Despite gaining control over the e4 square this allows White to gain a huge positional advantage.

Black had to take with the bishop with 23...Bxf5 but White would retain an edge after most moves, for instance 24.Nc7?!± threatening b2-b4.

24.f4!



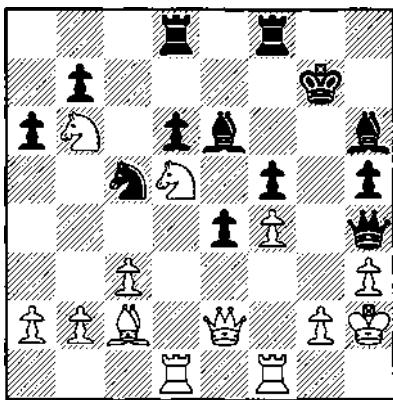
If you're going to retain just one idea from each game, this is it. This strike fixes Black's structure and creates a position more suitable for knights!

24...e4

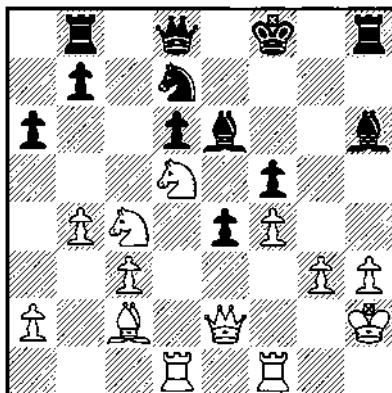
Despite Black's protected passed pawn, White has a full grip on the entire position, thanks to his knights and the f4 pawn.

Not much better was 24...exf4 since White is in no hurry to win back the pawn, but once he does Black's structure will be in shambles. Vallejo Pons would have a pleasant choice of moves here, such as 25.Nc4 with a few threats: 25...Kg8 (not 25...b5? 26.Nxd6!) 26.b4±.

25.Kh2!

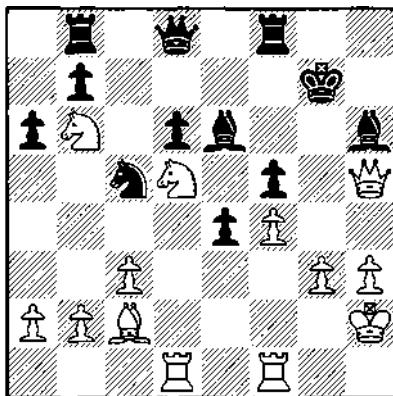


**27...Rh8 28.Qe2 Kf8 29.b4 Nd7
30.Nc4! 1-0**



Fantastic tactical awareness! Suddenly White threatens to trap Black's queen with g2-g3. The h5 pawn is lost.
25...Rb8 26.g3 Qd8 27.Qxh5

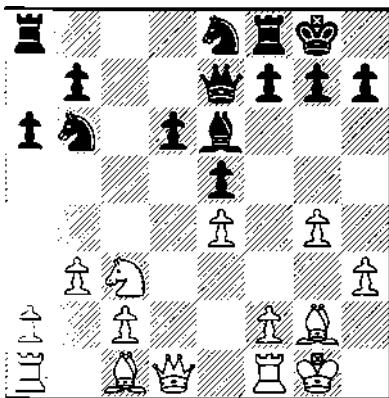
White is winning a second pawn since d6 can no longer be held. Not seeing any prospects, Shabalov decided to throw in the towel.



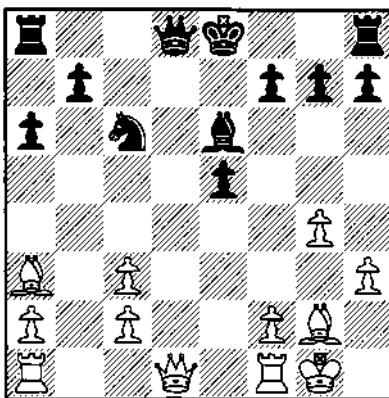
With an extra pawn and the better position, it was not hard for Vallejo Pons to wrap things up. In fact, the game lasted just a few more moves:

Memory Markers

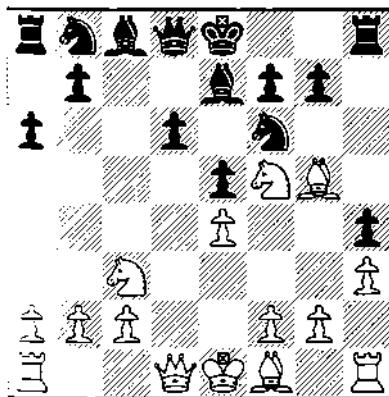
Here are reminders of some of the ideas and motifs in this chapter.



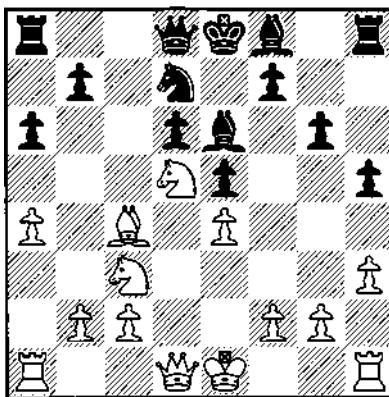
1. After 14.b3!. The start of a slow but powerful plan, setting up a bind on the queenside. See diagram on page 91 in Game 7, Svidler–Benitah.



2. After 14.Ba3!. Fighting for the initiative with the open b-file and strong dark-squared bishop. Text move in Game 8, Kamsky–Shankland on page 96.



3. After 10.Nf5!?. A long-term pawn sacrifice, gaining full control over the central light squares. See diagram on page 105 in the notes to Game 9, Vallejo Pons–Shabalov.



4. After Anand's 13.a4!?. An interesting plan to gain space on the queenside. See diagram on page 109 in the notes to Game 9.

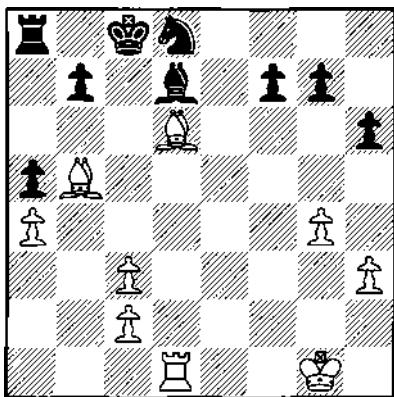
Exercises

White to play!

With these situations from actual games, you can find some ideas and opportunities that may await you, as White, when facing this Najdorf line.

Solutions to the exercises begin on page 519.

Exercise 1

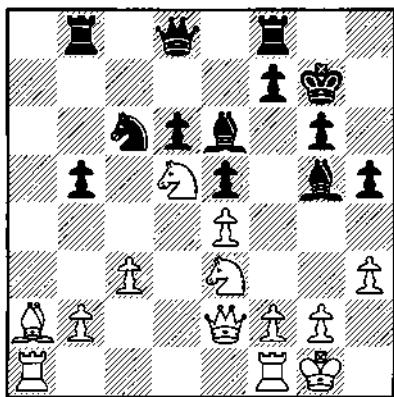


Nolte – Branzuela

5th Penang Open 2013

White has a clear advantage in piece activity—can you capitalize on it?

Exercise 2

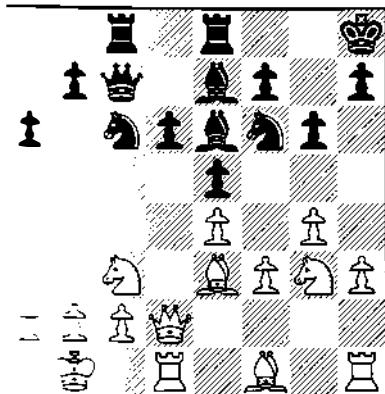


Perez – Harikrishna

Havana 2013

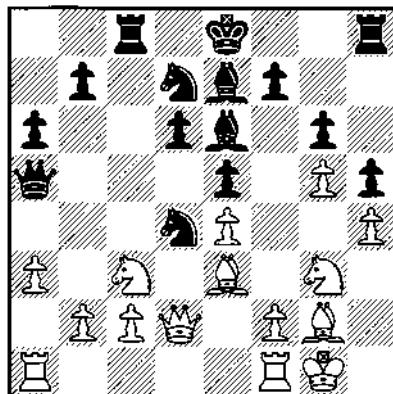
White has a small positional edge. Find a good plan to increase the advantage.

Exercise 3



Yankovsky – Yanayt
American Open, Anaheim 2012

Exercise 4



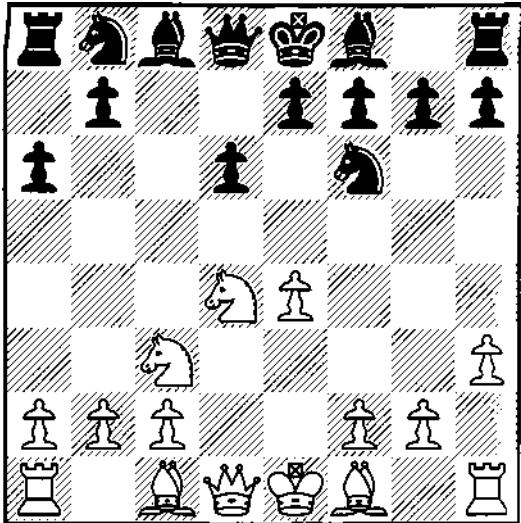
Charbonneau – Espinoza
Dresden Olympiad 2008

* White to play; find the best continuation

White to play; should you win a pawn with Bxd4 or try something else?

Chapter 1c

Najdorf – 6.h3 other



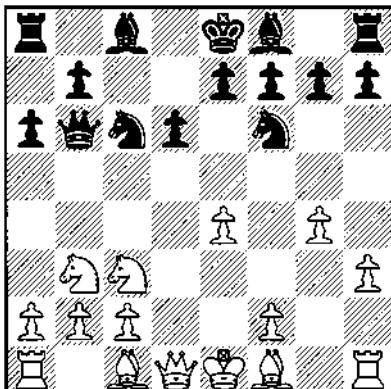
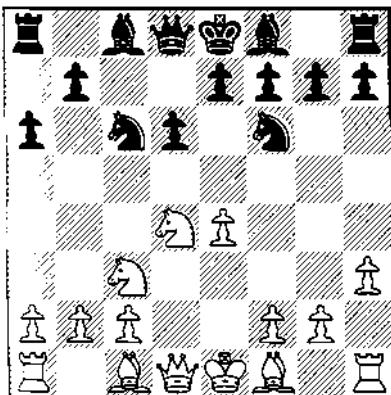
1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.h3

We conclude this first chapter by exploring Black's rarer attempts after **6.h3**. In Game 10, we cover **6...Nc6**, after which **7.g4** gives Black two independent options, **7...Qb6** and **7...Nxd4**, that are both quite playable. In Game 11 we cover **6...g6**, leading to a structure that will resemble the Dragon variation. Lastly, in Game 12 we will take a step back from the Najdorf and cover the Scheveningen Variation, **5...e6** instead of **5...a6**, where our recommendation of **6.g4** will lead to positions that are quite relatable to the rest of the chapter.

Game 10

Gashimov – Delgado Ramirez
Capablanca Memorial
Havana 2007

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4
4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.h3 Nc6



This position can be compared to two separate variations. The first was covered in Game 6, (6.h3 e6 7.g4 h6 8.Bg2 Nc6 9.f4 Qb6 on page 68), where the inclusion of moves Bg2 and h7-h6 gave White a promising attack from the opening.

The second variation is the Grivas Sicilian (1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Qb6, game 40 on page 478), which is covered towards the very end of this book.

In both variations we believe the knight is best placed on b3, although 8.Nde2 is largely unexplored and deserves consideration as well.

After 8...e6 our main recommendation is 9.Be3.

A few recent games have featured 9.g5 Nd7 10.h4 Qc7 11.h5!. White's idea is to follow up with Rh3 and g5-g6. We suggested the same plan in Game 4, in the line 6.h3 e6 7.g4 Nfd7 line b, on page 47. It is worth exploring here, but in this case it is a bit too forcing for our taste—only a very well-prepared player will truly feel comfortable in the resulting complications, as in Giri–Grischuk, Blitz, Norway 2014.

This is one of Black's less explored options, despite the fact that it's of course perfectly sensible to develop the knight to the center. While many games often transpose into other lines of the Najdorf—for example 1.e4 e6, which is covered on page 11—Black has some independent options as well.

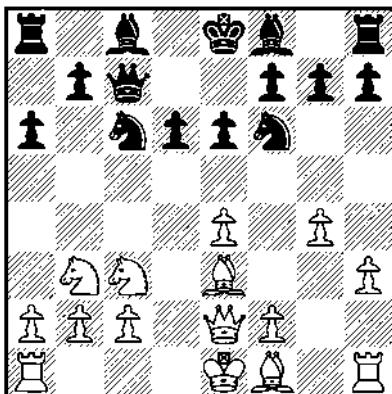
7.g4 Nxd4

This is one of two independent alternatives Black has at his disposal through this move order.

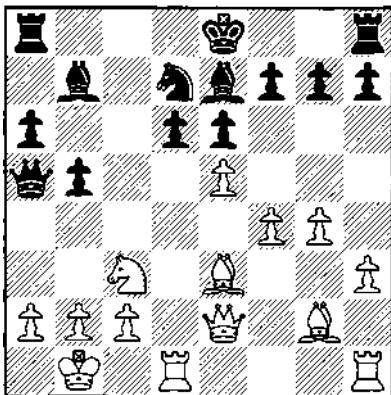
The other option, 7...Qb6, is quickly gaining steam, being mostly championed by Grischuk in a few blitz games. Despite not much testing at the top level it is a fairly serious option for Black, and could certainly be used for its surprise value. 8.Nb3

After 9...Qc7 we look at two interesting possibilities.

Against Grischuk, GM Lenier Dominguez Perez opted for 10.Qe2!?

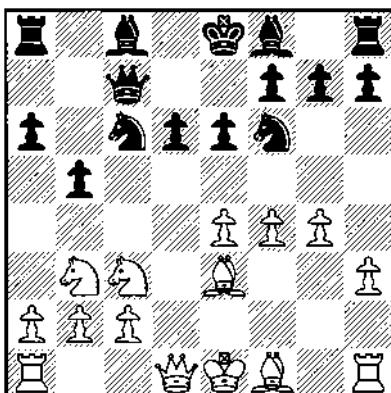


which is generally a good square for the queen in this line—the light-squared bishop will be fianchettoed. Next followed 10...b5 11.f4 Bb7 (*Grischuk probably should have played 11...b4!?* since 12.Na4 Rb8 13.Bg2 Ne7!, with the threat of Bd7, would have been awkward to meet for White.) 12.Bg2 Be7 13.O-O-O Nd7. Now an improvement for White is 14.Kb1! after which White is ready to start advancing his kingside pawns. (14.Qf2 Na5? was satisfactory for Black, Dominguez Perez–Grischuk, Moscow 2009.) In case of 14...Na5 (or 14...Rc8 15.f5!) 15.Nxa5 Qxa5, here we found an aesthetic possibility: 16.e5!

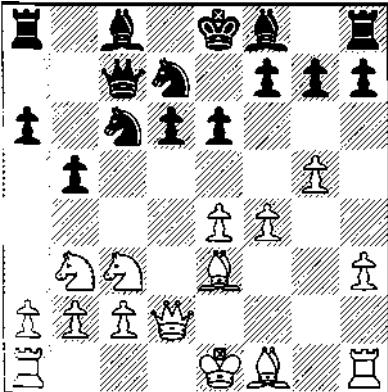


16...d5 17.f5 Black should probably castle in response, but we must mention the critical line 17...b4 18.Nxd5! Bxd5 19.Bxd5 exd5 20.f6!+– with a decisive attack. The center is opening up and Black's king won't find shelter anytime soon.

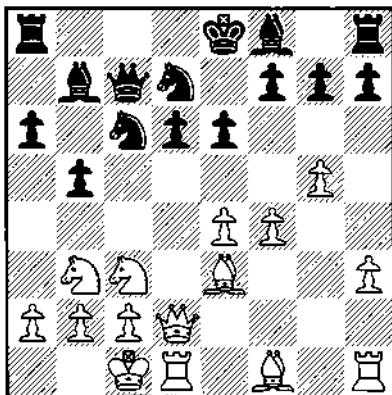
A good alternative to Dominguez's play is 10.f4 b5



11.g5N (11.Bg2 Bb7 12.O-O led to an interesting fight, but White's kingside play was somewhat speculative in Magem Badals–Fluvia Poyatos Lleida 2009.) 11...Nd7 12.Qd2:



b) More challenging is 12...Bb7
13.O-O-O

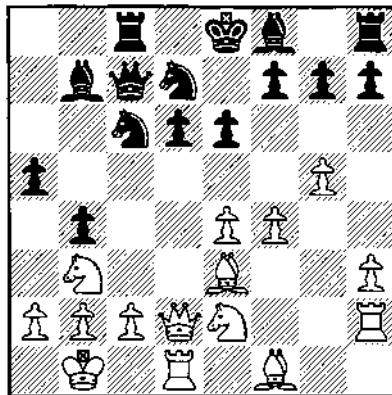


This position is likely dynamically balanced. White should castle long and try to advance on the kingside, while Black should delay castling and focus on generating queenside counterplay.

We hope the following sample games will give you an idea of how to play this position from White's perspective:

a) White should not worry about 12...Nb6 since Black is a bit underdeveloped to initiate a serious attack on the queenside. 13.O-O-O Rb8 (13...Nc4?! 14.Bxc4 \pm 15.Nd4 \pm is a good structure for White—next is f4-f5, fighting for the e5 square.) 14.Qf2! Supporting f4-f5 and vacating the d2 square. 14...Be7 15.a4 Na4 16.Bd2 \pm . Next is Kb1, etc.

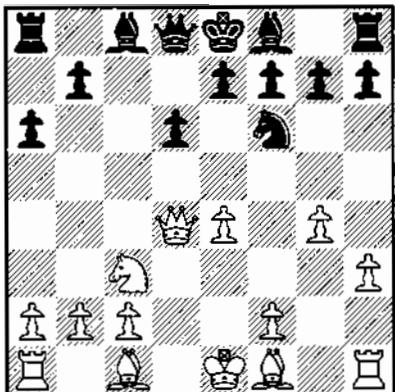
b1) 13...Rc8 14.Kb1 b4 15.Ne2 (*Not 15.Na4?!* Na5 \rightarrow , with good counterplay against the e4 pawn.) 15...a5 (15...Na5 can be comfortably met with 16.Ng3 \pm) Black's pawns look scary, but White has a surprising resource: 16.Rh2!



An important move, defending the c2 pawn in the critical variation: 16...a4 17.Nbd4 Nxd4 18.Nxd4 Bxe4 19.Qxb4! Now we can see the point of lifting the rook, and White is winning the battle on the queenside. 19...d5 20.Qxa4 \pm .

b2) We also looked at 13...Be7 14.h4 Rc8 15.Kb1 b4 16.Ne2 a5. Black's pawns look scary, but with the d4 square under control there is not much danger: 17.Bg2 a4 18.Nbd4 Nxd4 19.Nxd4±. White has strong control over the center and a sizable plus. Next is either Nb5 or f4-f5, and even Qxb4 is possible in some lines as well.

8.Qxd4



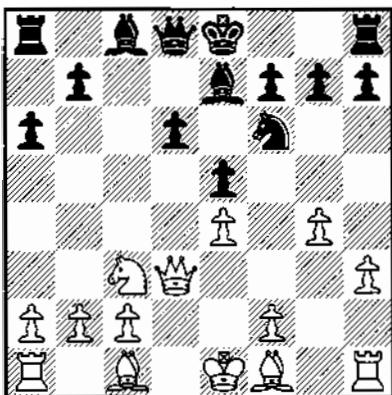
8...e5

Of course, the point of exchanging knights is to gain time for this advance. Otherwise White would have a serious space advantage.

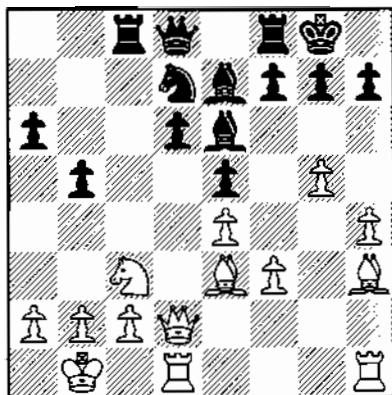
9.Qd3 Be6

The main line and most natural continuation, fighting for control over the d5 square.

The passive 9...Be7?! was masterfully punished by Bobby Fischer:

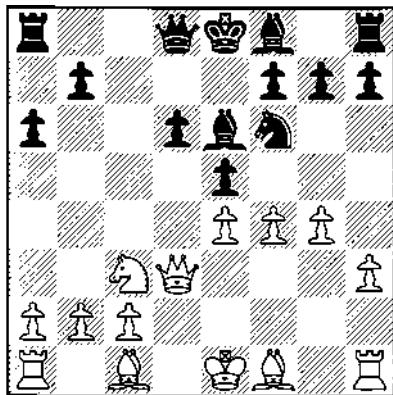


10.g5 Nd7 11.Be3 Nc5 12.Qd2 Be6 13.O-O-O. Now if Black fails to get any queenside counterplay, the d5 square will give White a large positional advantage. 13...O-O (13...b5 could be calmly met with 14.f3) 14.f3. Patient play by Fischer protecting the e4 pawn and setting up Nd5. 14...Rc8 15.Kb1 There's no rush! Black's position is solid but lacks counterplay. Within a few moves Fischer's advantage is nearly decisive: 15...Nd7 16.h4 b5 17.Bh3±



Trading off Black's best piece and securing full control over d5. 17...Bxh3 (*Ignoring the bishop with 17...Qc7 can be answered with 18.h5!+– threatening g5-g6.*) 18.Rxh3 Nb6?! An understandable move, but this made things easier for Fischer: 19.Bxb6 Qxb6 20.Nd5 Qd8 21.f4+–. With such a dominant knight the result was no longer in any doubt, Fischer–Bolbochan, Stockholm Interzonal 1962.

10.f4!

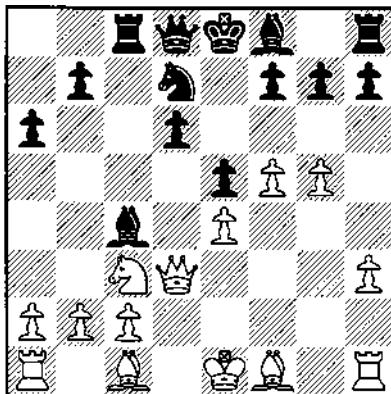


Now Black has a choice between allowing White to gain space with $\mathbb{e}4\text{-}g5$ and $f4\text{-}f5$, or capturing on $f4$ and leaving the $d6$ pawn isolated.

10...exf4

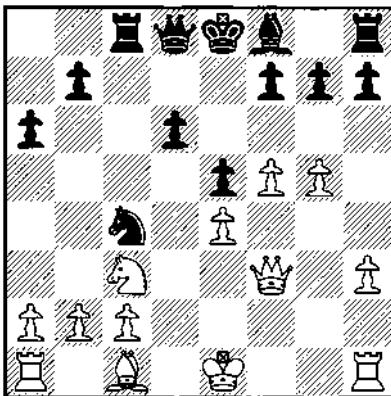
This is the more solid option, leaving Black in a slightly worse but playable position.

A couple of high-level battles have taken place after **10...Rc8 11.g5 Nd7 12.f5 Bc4**



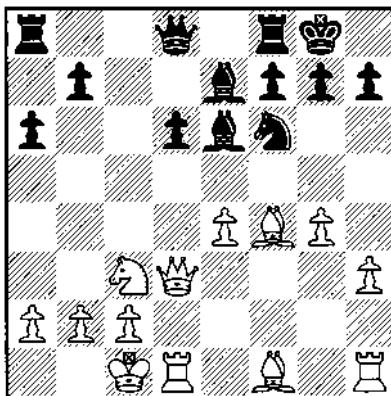
GM Movsesian chose **13.Qg3 b5** and now should have played **14.Bxc4!N** (*14.Bg2?? allowed Black serious counterchances after 14...b4 15.Nd1 d5! 16.exd5 Bc5±, Movsesian–Fedorchuk, Sibenik CRO 2012.*) **14...Rxc4 15.Be3!** Offering the $c2$ pawn, which is poisoned due to White's ensuing initiative along the c -file. For example **15...b4** (*Or 15...Be7 16.Nd5! Rxc2 17.O-O↑ with threats of Rac1 and f5-f6, and Black is in big trouble.*) **16.Nd5 Rxc2** (*16...Rxe4?!* is bad on account of **17.Qf3 Rc4 18.O-O-O↑**. *Black is severely lacking in development.* **18...Be7 19.f6! gxf6 20.Rhf1+–.**) **17.O-O Be7 18.Rac1±.** Now White's initiative is overwhelming, and Black cannot castle due to $f5\text{-}f6$.

Later that year GM Korobov improved with **13.Qf3** which is perhaps even stronger, as the queen supports the powerful $f5\text{-}f6$. **13...Nb6?!** (*13...b5 14.Bxc4 Rxc4 15.Be3↑ is similar to the previous line.*) **14.Bxc4 Nxc4**



Here Korobov decided against 15.f6!, which would have been crushing. (15.b3 Nb6 16.Bd2± was not quite as strong, but still adequate to win vs. Negi, New Delhi 2012.) 15...gx f6 (Not 15...g6 16.b3 Nb6 17.Bb2+–. We've seen passive dark-squared bishops before, but this is too much! Black is basically just lost.) 16.Nd5±. With Black's king permanently stuck in the center, there will be little hope to survive.

11.Bxf4 Be7 12.O-O-O O-O



The kings are castled on opposite sides of the board, but the following effort by the late GM Vugar Gashimov is purely positional, and deserves detailed study. Although

Vugar was mainly known for his brilliant tactical ability, in this game he patiently improves his position with every move and fully limits his opponent's counterplay.

13.Be2

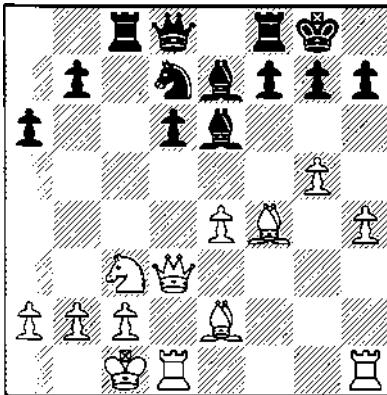
A minor slip. The bishop would have been better placed on g2, supporting the e4 pawn: **13.Bg2!** After connecting rooks White can probably get away with capturing the d6 pawn, for example 13...Qa5 14.a3 Rac8 15.Bxd6! Bxd6 (or 15...Rfd8 16.e5±) 16.Qxd6 Rfd8 17.Qg3± and there's not enough compensation for the pawn, so White is much better.

The immediate **13.Bxd6?!** would give Black unnecessary counterplay after 13...Bxd6 14.Qxd6 Qa5± with threats of Rfd8, Rac8, and Bxa2.

13...Rc8 14.g5 Nd7?!

GM Delgado Ramirez misses his chance. He had to roll the dice with 14...Rxc3! 15.Qxc3 Nxe4 16.Qf3 d5 17.Bd3± and even though White is still better, at least Black would be able to generate some counterplay.

15.h4

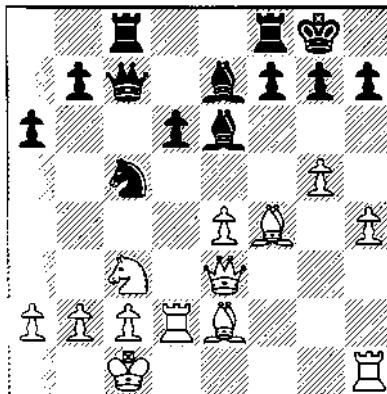


15...**Nc5?!**

The knight ends up being ineffective on this square.

Still, White would still retain a noticeable edge after both 15...Ne5 16.Bxe5 dx5 17.Nd5± and 15...Qa5 16.Nd5 Bxd5 17.Qxd5±.

16.Qe3 Qc7 17.Rd2!



Protecting the c2 pawn and preventing Na4.

Gashimov's next several moves are a master class in prophylaxis, as he carefully prevents all of Black's attempts for counterplay while also improving his position.

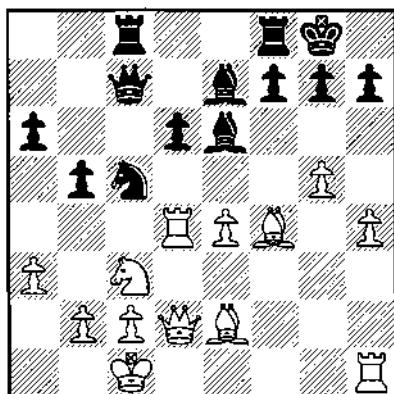
17...**Qa5 18.a3 b5 19.Rd4!**

Stopping b5-b4.

19...**Qc7**

After 19...Na4?! 20.Nxa4 bxa4 21.Rhd1 Rfd8 22.Kb1± White's king is completely safe. Before long Black's weaknesses will become the deciding factor in the game.

20.Qd2!



Defending c2 while applying pressure to the d6 pawn.

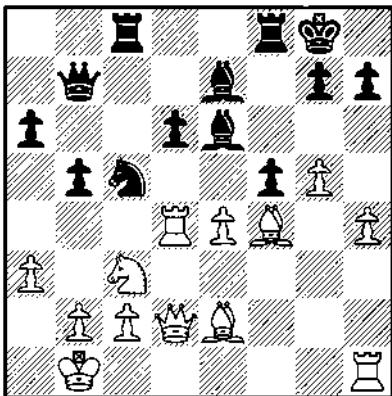
20...**Qb7 21.Kb1**

Again there is no rush for White, so he spends a move to further secure his king's safety.

21...**f5?!**

A good decision from Black's perspective. Otherwise White would pile up on the d6 pawn and eventually break through.

Instead, after 21...Rfd8 22.Rd1 Rc6 23.h5+– Black hasn't any useful moves. White can play h5-h6 next, followed by either e4-e5 or Nd5.

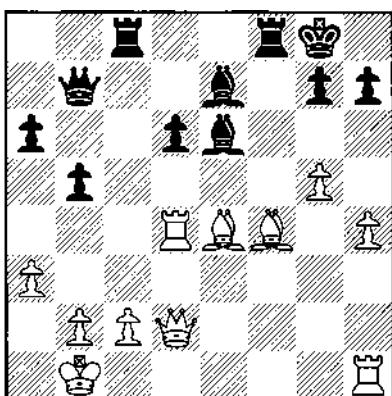


22.Bf3!

The only move to hold the advantage, keeping the center under control.

Of course not 22.gxf6? Bxf6 and White is already under huge pressure: 23.Rxd6? Bxc3 24.bxc3 Nxe4+-.

22...fxe4 23.Nxe4 Nxe4 24.Bxe4



24...d5

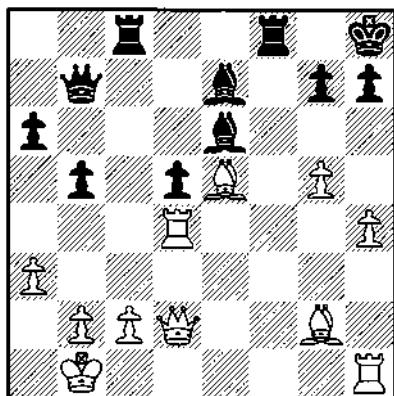
Unfortunately for Black, this move is necessary, as White's potential pressure against the kingside was too strong.

The danger to Black's kingside can be seen by the line 24...Qc7 25.Re1! Bf7 26.Qd3 g6 27.h5!+- and White has a winning attack.

25.Bg2

The pawn was untouchable: 25.Bxd5? Bxd5 26.Rxd5 Rxf4+- and 25.Rxd5? Rxf4 26.Qxf4 Bxd5+-.

25...Kh8 26.Be5

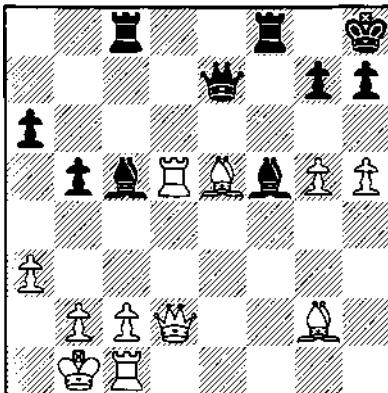


Taking advantage of Black's latest concession. Advancing the h-pawn is the next step of White's plan.

26...Bf5 27.Rc1

Finally, the d-pawn falls!

27...Bc5 28.Rxd5 Qe7 29.h5+-

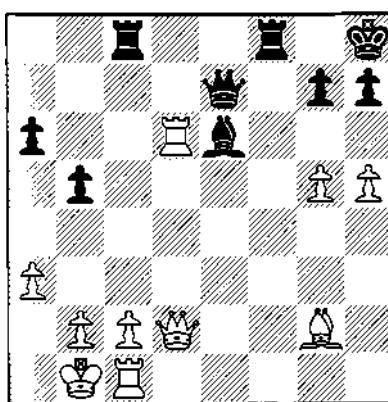


White has the safer king and total central control. All that is left is a bit of precision.

29...Be6 30.Bd6

It is rarely too late to spoil things: 30.h6? Rf2! would turn everything upside down!

30...Bxd6 31.Rxd6



?1...Bf5

Trading pieces with 31...Rcd8 wouldn't prolong the game much longer: 32.Rd1 Rxd6 33.Qxd6 Qxd6 34.Rxd6 Bg8 35.Rxa6+-.

?2.h6 a5 33.Bc6!

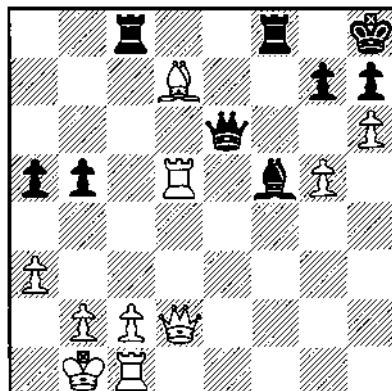
Gashimov continues to play superbly. After trading bishops with Bc6, White will get access to Black's

7th rank, or at least win both of Black's queenside pawns.

33...Qe5 34.Rd5 Qe6

The final mistake, but there were no real saving chances anymore, for example 34...Qe7 35.Bd7 Be4 36.Bxc8 Bxd5 37.Qxd5 Rxc8 38.Qxb5+-.

35.Bd7 1-0



White wins more material and effectively ends the game.

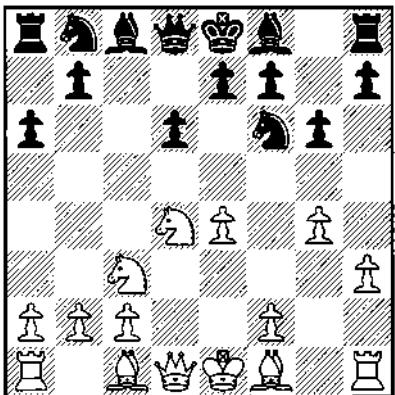
Game 11

Nestorovic – Damljanovic
Skopje Karposh Open 2012

**1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4
4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.h3 g6**

With this move Black opts to fianchetto the dark-squared bishop, aiming for a hybrid Dragon-Najdorf setup. The structure is colloquially known as the “Dragodorf”, since Black is essentially combining the two systems. Although this variation usually occurs from the Dragon move-order—5...g6 followed by 6...a6—Black’s move order also makes sense: White has committed to 6.h3, whereas against the normal 5...g6 White would have likely played 6.Be3.

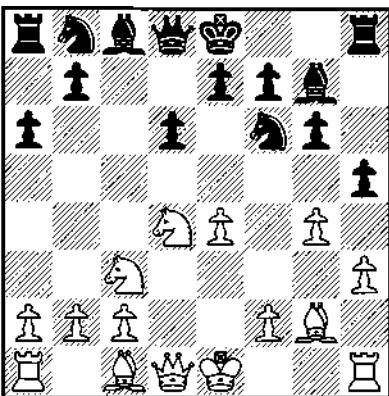
7.g4



Not to worry, this line is actually very pleasant for White, who will often get a comfortable space advantage without having to worry about any serious counterplay.

7...Bg7 8.Bg2 O-O

A common idea for Black to lock up the kingside is 8...h5 but it’s usually not done so early, as it seems to be a bit too committal.

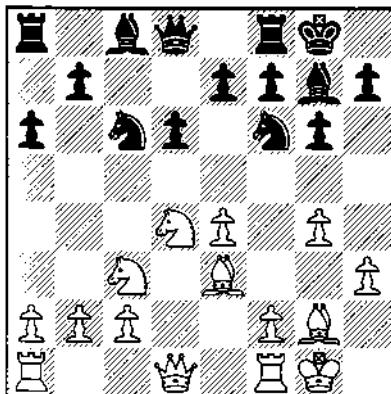


We’ll follow a high-level example to show a good way for White to proceed: 9.g5 Nfd7 10.Be3 Nc6 11.Qd2!. Of course, now it makes more sense to castle queenside with the obvious follow-up of f4-f5. 11...O-O 12.O-O-O Nde5 (*Slightly better for White is 12...Nb6 13.b3 Bd7 14.f4 Rc8 15.Nce2±.*) 13.b3 It is generally dangerous to play b2-b3 with Black’s bishop on g7, but White has a simple idea to trade off the dark-squared bishops: 13...Qa5 14.f4! Nxd4 15.Bxd4 Nc6 16.Bxg7 Kxg7 17.Kb2± with a clear edge for White, who continued with Rhf1 and f4-f5, Navara–Var Wely, Wijk aan Zee 2007.

9.Be3

Another option for White is to first play 9.O-O keeping the bishop on c1 with the idea of meeting 9...Nc6 with 10.Nde2. White’s plan consists of next playing a2-a4, followed by Nd5 and only then Be3. It is a bit slower than our recommended setup, which aims for kingside expansion.

9...Nc6 10.O-O



White has a small but pleasant edge due to Black's queenside weaknesses. Play might continue 15...Qb6 16.b3 Qc5 17.Rfe1 Rad8 18.Re2!± doubling on the e-file. Black's position is clearly worse, Romanov-Pushkarev, Ulan Ude 2009.

b) Against 11...Be6:

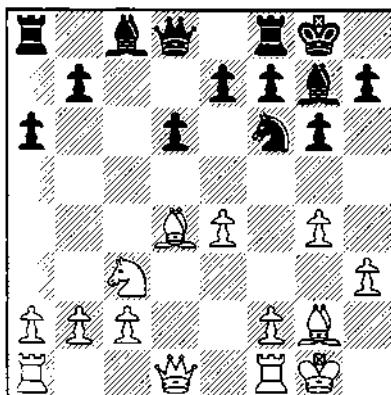
b1) GM Kudrin got a slightly better position after 12.a4 Qa5 13.Re1 Rac8 14.Nd5 Bxd5 15.exd5 Rfe8 16.b3! Nd7 17.Bxg7 Kxg7 18.Re3 Rc7 19.c4±, Kudrin-Di Berardino, Sao Paulo 2009.

b2) Instead, we like 12.f4?!N

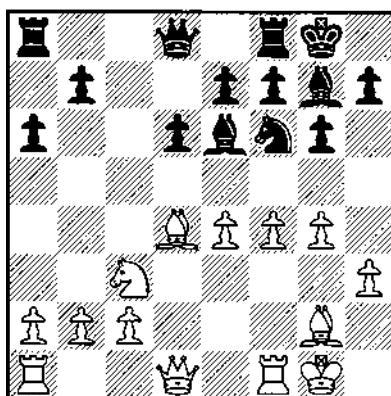
10...Bd7

Black's most common option, although two other moves deserve attention, 10...Nxd4 and 10...Nd7.

Exchanging a pair of knights with 10...Nxd4 11.Bxd4 makes sense because Black has less space, but full equality is not within easy reach:



a) 11...Bd7 with the idea to play Bc6 is strongly answered with 11.e5! dxе5 13.Bxe5, putting pressure on Black's queenside and forcing 13...Bc6 14.Bxc6 bxc6 (*After 14...Qxd1 15.Raxd1 bxc6 16.Rfe1± White's structure is better.*) 15.Qf3.



The point is not to play f4-f5 right away, but to play b3 to prevent Black's standard maneuver Nf6-d7-c5, where f4-f5 would trap Black's bishop when the knight gets to d7.

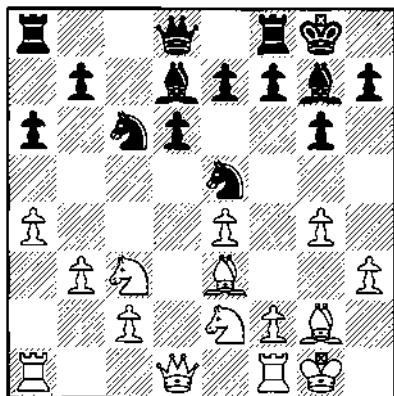
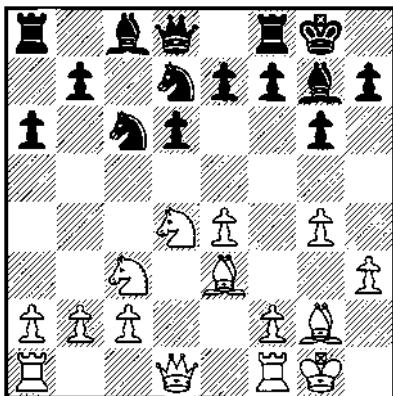
b21) The immediate 12...Nd7 can be met with 13.b3! Bxd4+ 14.Qxd4 and Black is forced to play 14...f6 which is somewhat weakening. (*not 14...Nc5? 15.b4 Nd7 16.f5+-*) After 15.Nd5± White can follow up with c2-c4 and start thinking about a kingside breakthrough.

b22) More solid is 12...Rc8 13.b3 Qa5 14.Ne2 b5 15.c3±. This position is certainly playable for Black, but

White can enjoy a comfortable advantage in space.

Another option for Black is to play 10...Nd7 with the idea to place the knight on either c5 or e5:

(*Black probably should have played 12...Nxd4 13.Bxd4 Nc6! 14.Bxg7 Kxg7 15.Nd5± where Black has less space but also a fairly solid position. White's edge is small.*) 13.Nde2!



a) The simple 11.Qd2 is unexplored, but gives White an easy game. For instance:

a1) If 11...Nc5 then 12.Rad1, threatening Nxc6 and Bxc5, 12...Bd7 13.f4 with a space advantage. 13...Ne6 can be met with 14.Nde2!± and it's clear that Black really needed to trade off a minor piece or two.

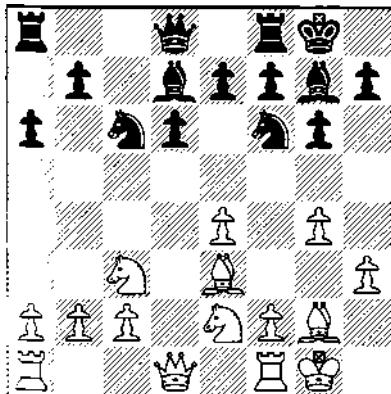
a2) 11...Nde5 12.b3± is similar to the game So–Leon Hoyos in line b, next.

a3) After 11...Nxd4 12.Bxd4 Rb8 13.a4± White has a space advantage typical for this line. Our plan includes trading bishops and playing f2-f4, Rad1, Nd5 etc. Black lacks an active plan here.

b) We'd also like to show a nice game by GM Wesley So, who chose 11.a4, preventing b7-b5 in the future. 11...Nde5 (*11...Nc5? N is worth exploring for Black.*) 12.b3 A typical move for this line, controlling the c4 square. 12...Bd7?! After White's reply this move seems questionable.

Suddenly the knight on e5 has run out of squares, and White threatens f2-f4, winning the piece. 13...f5 Giving the knight a retreat square. 14.exf5 (*14.f4? gives Black the possibility of 14...fxg4! 15.fxе5 gxh3→ with a huge attack against White's king.*) 14...gxh5 15.g5! with the idea f2-f4, locking in Black's light-squared bishop. 15...Ng6 16.f4± and White has a structural advantage. The plan for improvement includes Qd2, Kh2, Nd5, c2-c4, etc. Black's position is highly unpleasant and GM Leon Hoyos was unable to hold. in So–Leon Hoyos, Wijk aan Zee 2009.

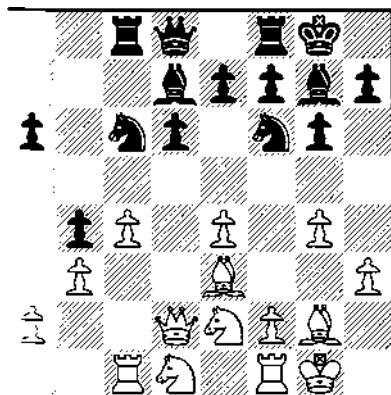
11.Nde2



11...b5

A very natural move for this structure.

Zhanibek demonstrated excellent understanding in the following model effort: 11...Na5 12.b3 Rc8 13.Qd2 b5 14.Rac1! The start of an interesting plan, anticipating his opponent's next few moves: 14...b4 15.Nd1? (15.Nd5± was standard and leads to an advantage.) 15...Nc6 16.a4!



The point of White's play, locking the kingside and securing a full bind in the center. 16...a5 (After 16...bxc3

17.Ndxc3± followed by Rfd1, Nd5, etc. White has a significant advantage.) 17.Nb2 Nb8 18.Nd4 Na6 19.Nd3 Be8 20.f4± with full domination of the first five rows. White went on to win on the kingside, in Amanov-Yankovsky, Los Angeles 2012.

Against 11...Rc8 White's play is very simple after 12.Qd2N, for example:

a) 12...Ne5 13.b3 b5 14.f4 Nc6 15.Rad1±.

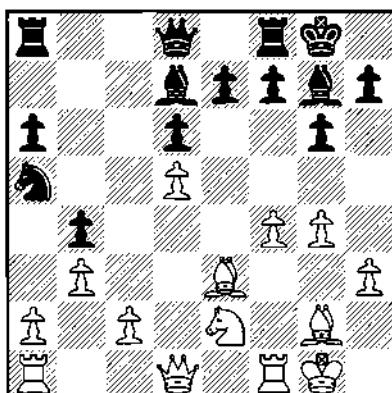
b) 12...b5 13.Rad1 b4 14.Nd5 Nxd5 15.exd5 Ne5 16.b3±. As you can tell, the b-pawn should almost always be pushed to b3. Next is f2-f4.

c) 12...Qa5 13.f4! b5 14.a3± and Black is out of useful moves.

12.b3

The first new move of the game, but a familiar idea by now, taking control of the c4 square. IM Nestorovic's play in the following game is both interesting and instructive. He obtains a nice space advantage from the opening, and through energetic play is able to achieve a decisive advantage.

An interesting idea was tried in a blitz game by Carlsen: 12.f4 b4 13.Nd5 Nxd5 14.exd5 Na5 15.b3!?

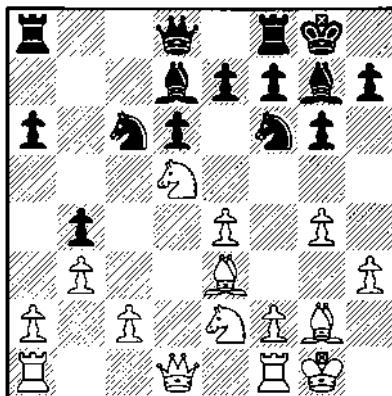


Sacrificing the exchange for control over the dark squares. (15.Bd4 would be the standard move, leading to a small advantage for White after 15...Bxd4+ 16.Qxd4 Rc8 17.Rac1 Bb5 18.Rf2±.) 15...Bxa1 16.Qxa1= with decent compensation for the exchange. Carlsen placed his knight on d4 and pushed f4-f5, achieving a powerful attack, Carlsen-Ponomariov, Moscow 2008.

12...Rb8

Another natural move from Black's perspective, getting the rook off of the long diagonal and supporting the b-pawn.

In case of 12...b4 13.Nd5

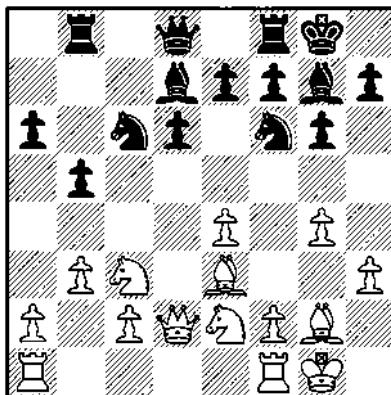


White should achieve a small plus, for instance 13...Nxd5 14.exd5 Na7 15.Bd4±.

Against a solid move like 13...Rb8 White retains a pull with 14.Rc1!± with the idea c2-c4, as in the game Amanov-Yankovsky in the line 11...Na5 on page 181.

And if 13...h5 then 14.g5 Ne8 15.Rc1±, again with the idea c2-c4.

13.Qd2

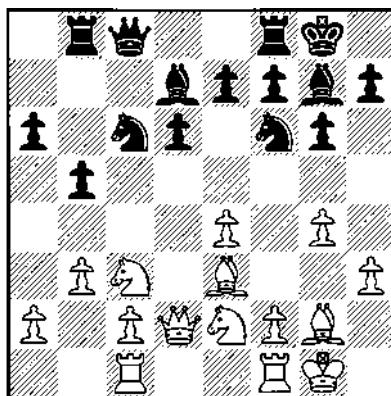


White's play is straightforward: Rad1, Nd5, f2-f4, etc. Despite the harmonious appearance of Black's setup, there aren't very many useful moves available to him.

13...h5

A typical idea from Black's perspective, fixing the pawn structure on the kingside.

13...Qc8!? would be a concrete attempt to pose problems, connected with playing h5. White should respond with 14.Rac1!



One important line is 14...b4:

a) Black's idea can be seen after 15.Nd5 h5 16.g5 Nxd5 17.exd5 Ne5 18.f4 Bxh3! which leads to a draw

by perpetual check: 19.fxe5 Bxg2 20.Kxg2 Qg4+. Now Ng3 would run into h5-h4, so White is forced to repeat with 21.Kh1 Qh3+ 22.Kg1 Qg4+ etc.

b) But after 15.Na4! Qc7 16.c4± White's rook is excellently placed on c1.

And after 14...h5 15.g5 Ne8 16.Kh2± White's space advantage cannot be challenged, and next is f2-f4, etc.

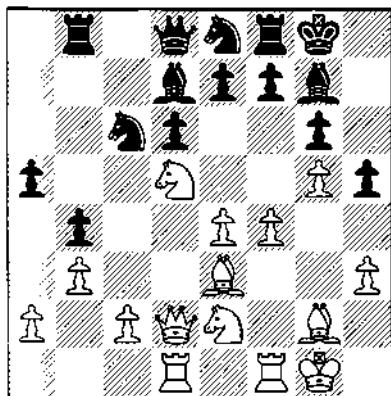
14.g5

The most natural reaction.

14...Ne8 15.Rad1 b4 16.Nd5 a5

Perhaps given a few moves, Black can play a5-a4 and start annoying White on the queenside. Nestorovic realizes he has no time to waste:

17.f4!



A powerful move, connected with an energetic pawn sacrifice.

17...e6

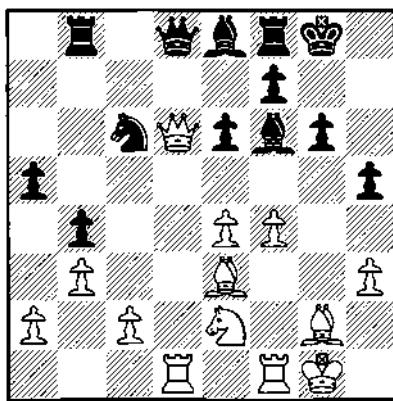
The critical reply, forcing White enter the fray with 18.Nf6+.

There was no way to stop f4-f5, for example 17...Qc8 18.f5! gxf5 19.Nd4! harassing the knight on c6, which must defend the e7 pawn. 19...Bxd4 20.Bxd4 Ng7 21.Bb2 and Black is lost. White's threats include Nf6+ as well as Qe2 and exf5.

18.Nf6+ Bxf6

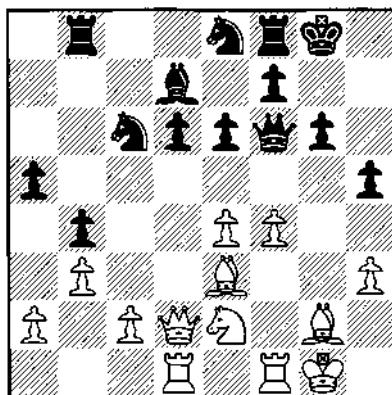
Forced.

Unfortunately for Black, 18...Nxf6 loses material after 19.gxf6 Bxf6 20.Qxd6 Be8



21.e5! The key move, which Nestorovic probably saw prior to playing f2-f4. 21...Be7 22.Qxc6! It's not often you see this kind of tactic, but White wins two pieces for the rook! 22...Qxd1 23.Rxd1 Bxc6 24.Bxc6+-.

19.gxf6 Qxf6



20.f5!

Also good was 20.e5 Qd8 21.exd6±, but White's choice is more ambitious, striving to immediately break open Black's kingside.

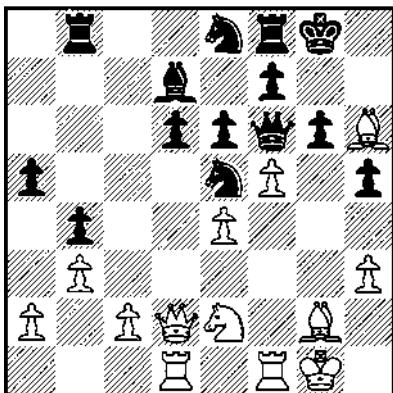
20...Ne5

Giving up the exchange, but making use of the e5 square is certainly logical.

White's direct idea can be seen after 20...exf5 21.exf5 gxf5 22.Bh6 Ng7 23.Qxd6±.

Also quite undesirable is 20...Kh7 21.fxg6+ Qxg6 22.Nf4±.

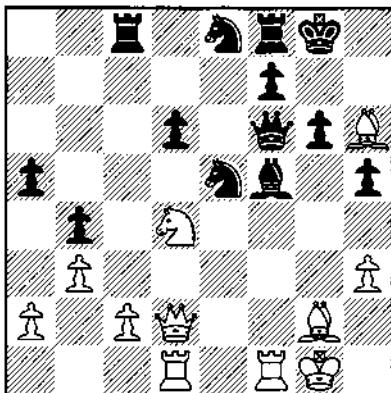
21.Bh6



21...exf5

Not 21...Ng7? 22.Bg5! winning the queen.

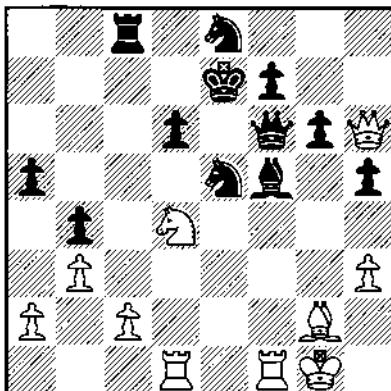
22.exf5 Bxf5 23.Nd4 Rc8



24.Bxf8

Houdini suggests 24.Be4!??+- increasing the pressure before cashing in, but Nestorovic chooses the human solution.

24...Kxf8 25.Qh6+ Ke7



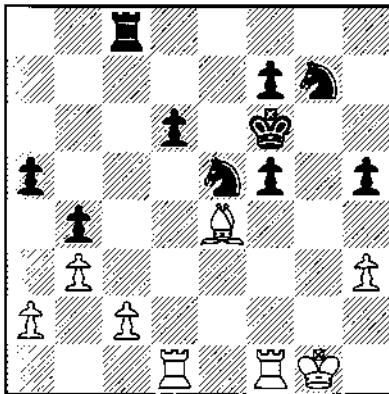
The players were probably approaching time trouble here, which explains some missed opportunities over the next few moves.

26.Be4??!

Stronger was 26.Rd2!±, preparing to double on either the d- or f-files and protecting the c2 pawn to enable Nb5 in some cases. Black's king probably won't survive in the center for long.

26...Ng7?!

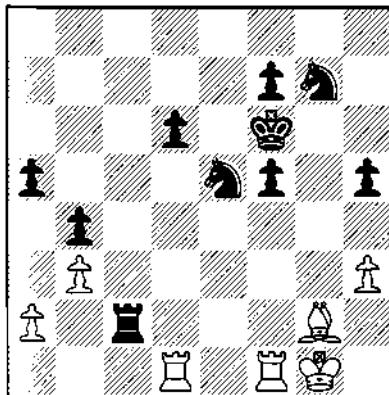
Best was 26...Qg7!, when after 27.Qg5+ f6 28.Nxf5+ gxf5 29.Qxg7+ Nxg7 30.Bd3 Rc5 Black's position is surprisingly quite solid, but from afar this position would have probably appeared much more favorable to White.
27.Nxf5+ gxf5 28.Qxf6+ Kxf6



29.Bg2?!

A fairly simple win was 29.Rxd6+ Ke7 30.Rd5!, and after 30...Ke6 31.Bg2 Rxc2 32.Rxa5± White's exchange is surely being felt now.

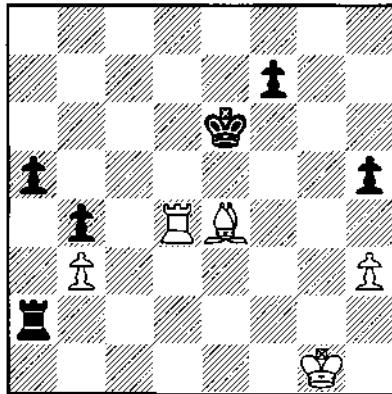
29...Rxc2



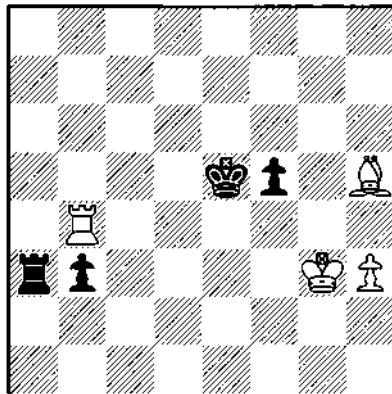
We give the rest of the game for completeness, but it should be noted

that the play of both sides can be improved throughout:

**30.Rxd6+ Ne6 31.Be4 Rxa2
32.Rxf5+ Ke7 33.Ra6 Nd7
34.Ra7 Nd4 35.Rxd7+ Kxd7
36.Rd5+ Ke6 37.Rxd4**



**37...Ke5 38.Rc4 a4 39.bxa4 Rxa4 40.Bc6 Ra1+ 41.Kg2 Ra2+
42.Kg3 Ra3+ 43.Bf3 b3 44.Rb4 f5 45.Bxh5**



**45...Kd5 46.Bf7+ Ke5 47.Bxb3 Ra1 48.Rb5+ Kf6 49.Bc2 Rg1+
50.Kf3 Rf1+ 51.Kg2 Rf4**

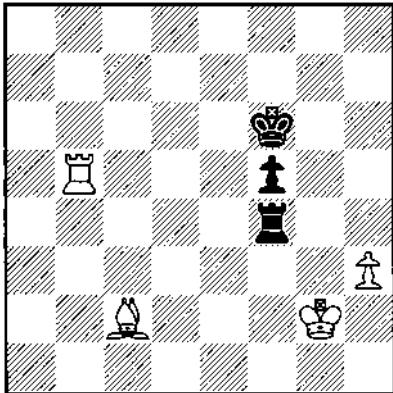
Game 12

Sokolov – Panchenko

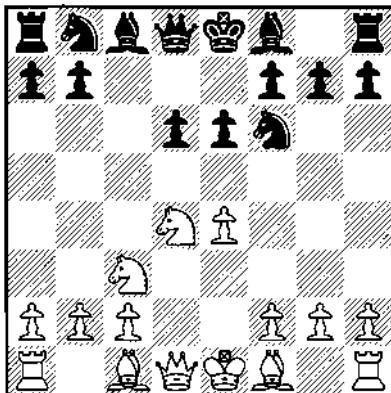
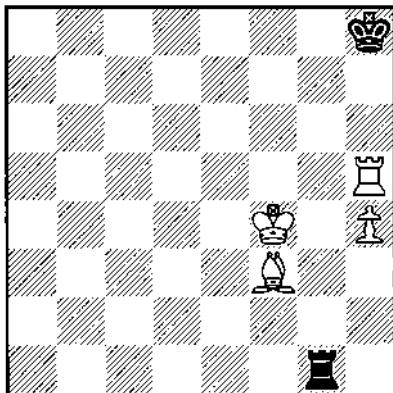
URS Cup

Soviet Union 1984

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4
4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 e6



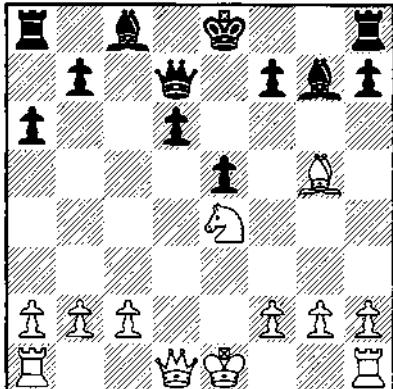
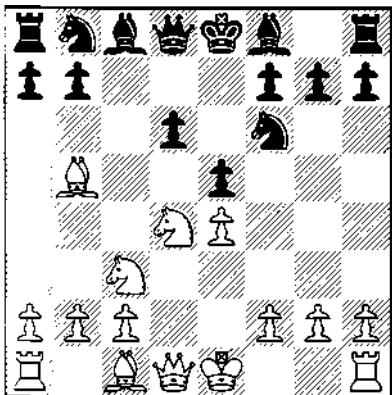
52.Kg3 Rf1 53.Bd3 f4+ 54.Kg4
Rf2 55.Be4 Rf1 56.Bf3 Rg1+
57.Kxf4 Kg7 58.h4 Kh8 59.Rh5+
1-0



This is known as the Scheveningen Variation, characterized by Black's hedgehog-like occupation of the center with pawns on d6 and e6. We've decided to conclude the chapter with this line because various transpositions are possible, and we make use of previously mentioned ideas.

This is a good spot to cover the alternative 5...e5?!. Black decides to play in Najdorf style without the prophylactic 5...a6. It seems as though this dubious line is mainly used as a surprise weapon in blitz rapid competition.

The principled **6.Bb5+!** looks like an easy way to fight for an advantage:



Exploiting the fact that Black hasn't defended the b5 square, the point of the check is to secure f5 for White's knight. Black can choose between **6...Nbd7** discussed here, and **6...Bd7** covered on page 138.

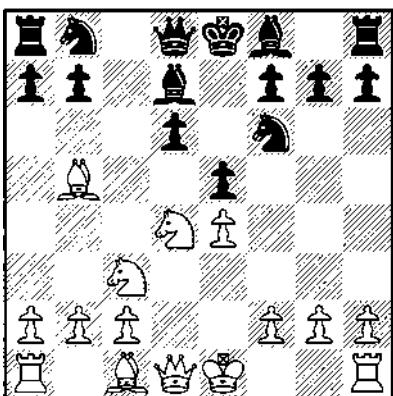
After **6...Nbd7** **7.Nf5** White is threatening Nxd6+, so Black's reply is forced: **7...a6** **8.Bxd7+**. Normally we wouldn't want to give up our light-squared bishop, but since Black is forced to capture with the queen to defend the d6 pawn, White is going to get an advantage in development. **Qxd7** **9.Bg5!** The strongest move, threatening Bxf6, which would seize control over the d5 square. Once again, Black has only one sensible reply: **9...Nxe4** forcing **10.Nxg7+** **Bxg7** **11.Nxe4**

Unfortunately for Black, there is no good way to defend the d6 pawn.

a) **11...d5?** saves the pawn, but runs into other troubles after **12.Nf6+ Bxf6 13.Bxf6**. White's dark-squared bishop is a dangerous piece. **13...O-O** (*After 13...Rg8 14.O-O e4 15.f3!±, the center opens up, which is devastating for Black.*) **14.Qf3 Qf5 15.O-O-O!±** and now Black's central pawns are falling, and his king won't be safe in the endgame.

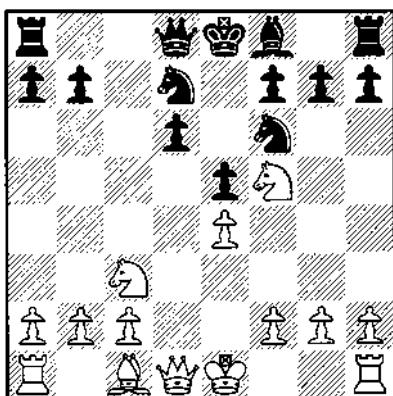
b) Sacrificing the pawn with **11...O-O** is Black's best bet. **12.Qxd6** (*Weaker is 12.Nf6+ Bxf6 13.Bxf6 Qf5 because Black is up a tempo compared to the previous line.*) **12...f6 13.Be3** A young Ian Nepomniachtchi demonstrates the ideal way for White to play this line. Black cannot capture on d6 since after Nxd6 White will just be up a clear pawn. **13...f5 14.O-O-O!** White is happy to exchange the queens, but only on his terms. **14...Qf7 15.Nc3 b5 16.f4!±** and White has an extra pawn and an active position. Black had hardly any compensation here, in Nepomniachtchi–Vernay, Belfort 2005.

6...Bd7 This is more solid, but still doesn't lead to equality:



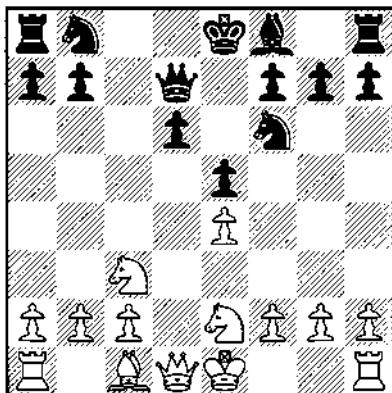
The trade of bishops is strategically good for White, who is left with the better dark-squared bishop. Therefore: **7.Bxd7+**.

a) 7...Nbxd7 gives White a huge positional advantage after 8.Nf5



Now if 8...Nc5 (After 8...Qb6 9.O-O± Black had zero compensation for his bad dark-squared bishop, Short-Potvin, Gatineau 2011.) then 9.Bg5! Of course, fighting for the d5 square. 9...g6 10.Ne3 Bg7 11.Nc4± and White wins the d6 pawn, in Byrne-Broyles, Aspen 1968.

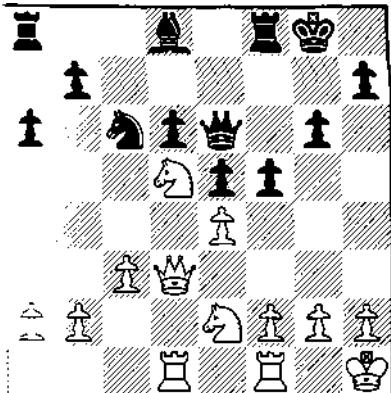
b) A better try is 7...Qxd7 since Nf5 can be answered with Nxe4. Now 8.Nde2 (8.Nf5?! runs into 8...Nxe4! 9.Nxg7+ Bxg7 10.Nxe4 d5= and Black is fine.) reaches this position:



White has a simple strategic plan to control the d5 and f5 squares and play against Black's dark-squared bishop.

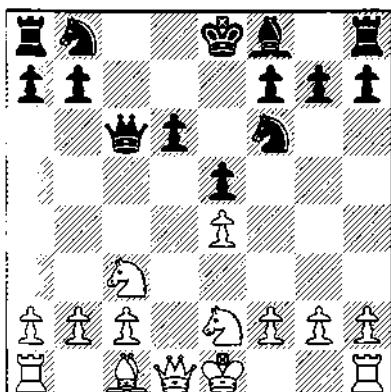
b1) Now, spending a tempo or 8...h6?! is just too slow for Black as White can get an advantage by developing normally with 9.O-O Be7 10.Be3± followed by Ng3, Qd2, Rad1 etc. His control over d5 and f5 is enough for a comfortable edge.

b2) 8...Be7 Here we'll follow a high-quality blitz game between GMs Grischuk and Grachev: 9.Bg5 O-O 10.O-O Qe6 11.Bxf6! Capturing before Black gets a chance to play Nbd7. 11...Bxf6 12.Nd5 Bd8 13.Qc1 Nc6 14.Rad1 a6 15.Kh1 g6 16.c3 f5 A typical advance. If you remember our coverage of the line 6.h3 e5 7.Nde2± (See Game 9, diagram on page 113) you should be able to spot White's best reaction:



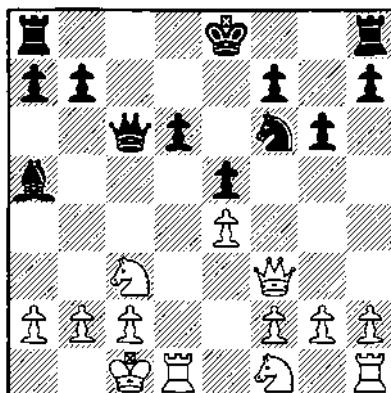
$\dots\text{exf5 gxf5 18.f4!}$ fixing the pawn structure in the center and gaining the d4 square. 18...e4 Now best would have been 19.Qc4!± threatening both e5+ as well as Nd4, leaving White with a good knight and a strategic advantage. Instead, White played 19.Qh3± in Grischuk–Grachev, lichess.com INT 2006.

b3) In another blitz game, Vachier-Lagrave chose 8...Qc6, which seems like the most active possibility, putting pressure on the e4 pawn and clearing the d7 square for Black's knight:



The game continued 9.Ng3 Nbd7 10.Bg5 g6. In general, this position

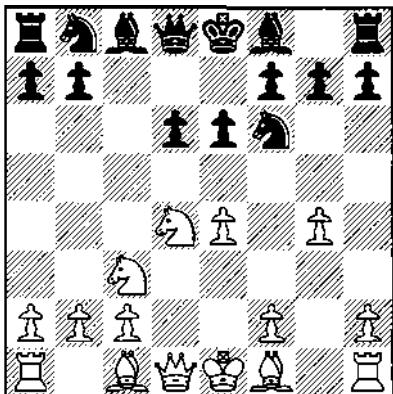
should be better for White due to the backward d6 pawn and passive nature of Black's dark-squared bishop. With 11.Qd3 White prepares to castle queenside and transfer the knight from g3 to f1-e3-d5. 11...Be7 (11...Nc5?! would be a mistake in view of 12.Qf3 Nfd7 13.Bf6! ruining Black's development, and if 13...Nxf6 14.Qxf6 Rg8 then 15.Qh4!± attacking the h7 pawn and threatening Nd5.) 12.Bxf6!? This capture isn't necessary, but White wanted to play Nf1 without having to worry about Nc5. 12...Nxf6 13.Nf1 Bd8 14.O-O-O Ba5 15.Qf3



15...Ke7 Black decides to keep his king in the center and go for counterplay along the c-file. (not 15...Bxc3? 16.Qxf6+) 16.Nd5! Nxd5 17.Rxd5 Rac8. Now best would have been 18.Ne3±, and White's next moves are Kb1, c3, and Rhd1, putting great pressure on the d6 pawn. Instead, White played 18.Qd3± in Inarkiev–Vachier-Lagrave, Warsaw 2010.

Now, back to our game:

6.g4!

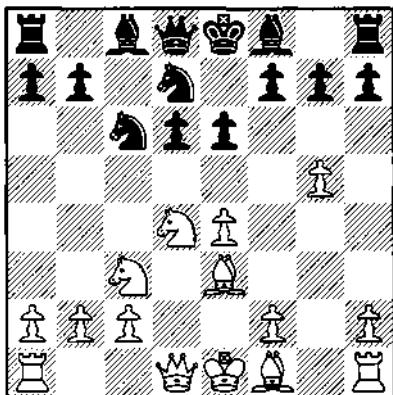


The start of the Keres Attack, named after the famed Estonian GM Paul Keres. Not only is this line considered to be very dangerous for Black, it also falls in line with the rest of our repertoire in this chapter.

6...e5

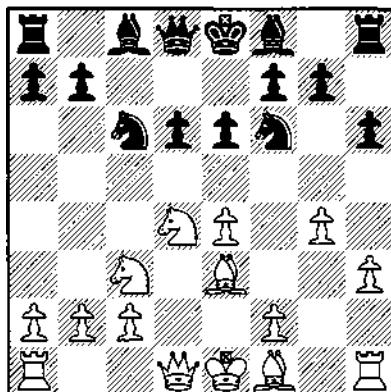
This is a relatively new and independent line. Black loses a tempo, but through concrete means hopes to counter White's hyper aggression on the kingside.

After 6...Nc6 we're going to transpose back into Najdorf territory after 7.g5 Nd7 8.Be3



Here especially, Black has to play a7-a6, as his counterplay is mostly associated with b7-b5. For example 8...Be7 9.h4 O-O 10.f4 a6 11.Qd2 Nxd4 12.Qxd4 and White has saved a tempo by playing h2-h4 in one move, but returned it by making two moves with the queen. After 12...b5 13.O-O-O we've transposed to the game Andreikin–Lugovoi, St. Petersburg 2005, cited on page 45.

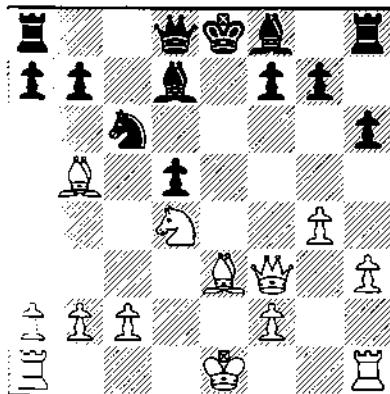
6...h6 is generally considered to be the main line, but for our purposes it's not very critical, since after 7.h3 we are again ready to transpose back into Najdorf territory as soon as Black plays a7-a6, which frequently happens. However, there are a few independent tries that should be covered in case Black avoids playing a7-a6. 7...Nc6 8.Be3



a) Some players have played 8...Bd7 but this doesn't seem to be a very reliable choice for Black. 9.f4 Be7 10.Bg2 Although Black hasn't spent a tempo on a7-a6, his setup is just not active enough to justify the weakening move h7-h6. White can continue either Qe2 or Qd2 followed by O-O-O, or even consider castling short, followed by h3-h4 and g4-g5.

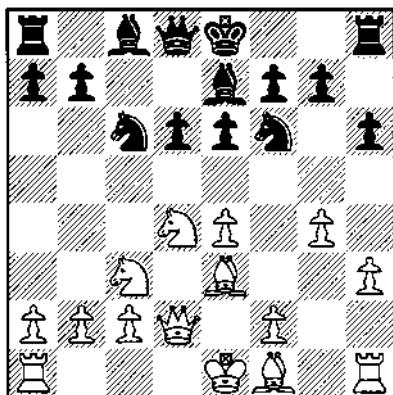
**Game 6: Kasimdzhanov–
Savchenko (see the diagram on page
10.Qd2 is also an aggressive
possibility for White.**

b) 8...d5 definitely looks a bit
strange, but is not terrible by any
means. We like the idea of 9.Bb5
10.exd5! Saddling Black with
an isolated pawn. 10...Nxd5 (After
10...exd5 11.Qe2 Be7 12.O-O-O↑
White's position seems quite strong.
(Feldman–Johnson, Nelson 2007.)
11.Nxd5 exd5 12.Qf3!



The great Paul Keres demonstrated this nice setup all the way back in 1960! 12...a6 13.Be2! Qa5+ And here an improvement is 14.c3±. White is actively developed, and it is doubtful that Black will get enough counterplay to compensate for the weakness of the isolani. Instead, Keres–Marke, Leipzig 1960, continued with 14.Bd2.

c) Black's most flexible move is 8...Be7, and now we like 9.Qd2



It is better to play Qd2 instead of Qe2 because after 9.Qe2 Nxd4 10.Bxd4 e5 11.Be3 Be6=, Black has saved an important tempo by not playing a7-a6, and is ahead compared to Game 5, Nepomniachtchi-Zabotin.

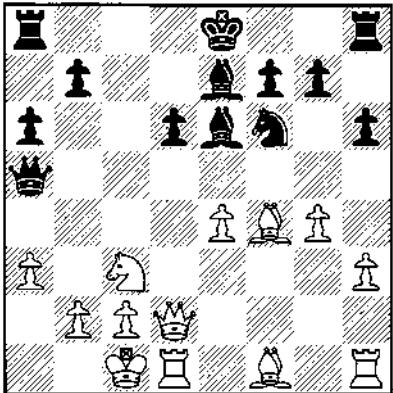
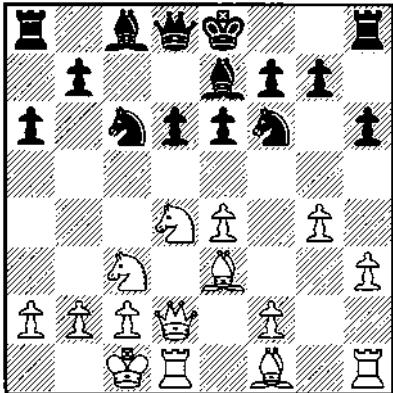
c1) 9...Nxd4 was tried by Ivanchuk back in 1998. 10.Qxd4:

c11) 10...e5?! once again runs into 11.Bb5+ Nd7 12.Qd2±.

c12) After 10...O-O 11.O-O-O e5 12.Qd2 Be6 13.f4±, White's queen is much better placed on d2 than e2. A timely Nd5 should secure White an edge.

c13) 10...Bd7 11.O-O-O Bc6 12.f4 (or 12.Bc4, Anand–Ivanchuk, Frankfurt 1998) 12...Rc8 13.Rg1±.

c2) Transposing back into the Najdorf with 9...a6 is Black's most popular choice. After 10.O-O-O White's next few moves should include f2-f4 and Kb1:



A key difference with the queen on d2 is that instead of h3-h4, White can play Rg1 and g4-g5 to launch the kingside attack. Here are a few examples:

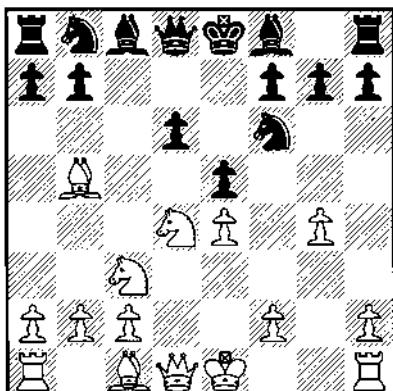
c21) 10...O-O 11.Rg1↑ followed by g4-g5.

c22) 10...Nxd4 11.Qxd4 e5 (Or 11...Bd7 12.f4 Bc6 13.Rg1↑ Kasimdzhanov–Van der Sterren, Germany 2001.) 12.Qd2 Be6 13.f4. Whenever Black plays this way readers should review Game 5, Nepomniachtchi–Zabotin (see diagram on page 64), and Game 10, Gashimov–Delgado Ramirez (see diagram on page 124), for a primer on how to play this kind of structure—an isolated e4 pawn against an isolated d6 pawn. Rogic–Kozul, Austria 2006, continued 13...Qa5 14.a3 exf4 15.Bxf4±

White has several different plans here, such as preparing Nd5 for a favorable moment or pushing h3-h4 and g4-g5.

c23) 10...Bd7 11.f4 Rc8 12.Kb1. As we discussed before, White should focus on limiting Black's counterplay while also strengthening the possibility of either g4-g5 or e4-e5. 12...b5 13.a3! White is doing well. (Also possible is 13.Bd3 Qc7 14.g5↑ Efimenko–Li, Golden Sands 2012.) 13...Qc7 (Or 13...b4 14.axb4 Nxb4 15.Bg2 Qc7 16.Rhf1!± lining the rook up against Black's f7 pawn, and threatening either g4-g5 or e4-e5.) Once again we have 14.Rg1↑, menacing g4-g5.

7.Bb5+



Much as in the line 5...e5, we believe this is the principled reaction, forcing Black to trade light-squared bishops.

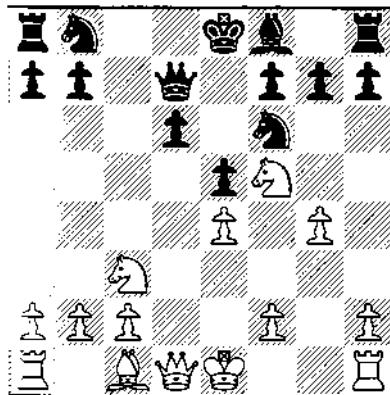
• *Bd7*

7...Nbd7?! has never been played at a high level, simply due to 8.Nf5± 9.Bxd7+ Bxd7 10.Bg5±. White wins control over d5 and secures a positional advantage.

• *Bxd7+ Qxd7*

8...Nbxd7?! 9.Nf5± is bad for Black, who has nothing to show for the backward d-pawn and passive dark-squared bishop.

• *Nf5*



• *h5!*

The justification for Black's play, otherwise White would simply have a good version of the line 5...e5 covered previously on page 3 line b, where Black is already suffering.

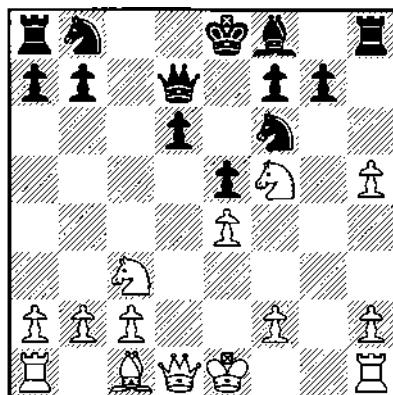
Instead, 9...g6?! is refuted by Bg5! for example 10...Nxg4 Qxg4 gxf5 12.Qf3!±. With threats Nd5 and O-O-O, Black's position is hard to defend.

• *gxh5*

White has tried other moves here as well, including 10.Bg5 and

10.f3, but we believe this is the most promising attempt to gain an advantage.

The tactical point behind Black's play is that 10.g5 runs into the common trick 10...Nxe4 11.Nxg7+ Bxg7 12.Nxe4 d5=, where Black is just fine.

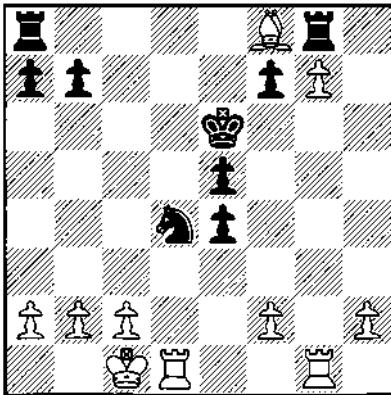
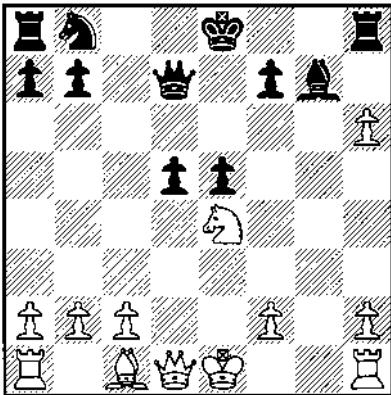


10...*Nxh5*

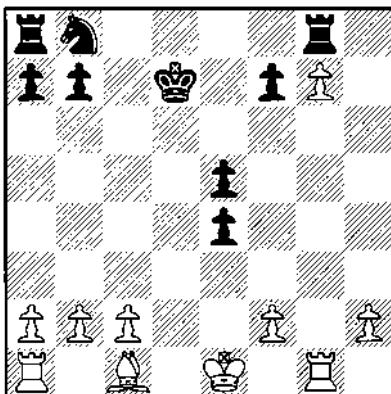
This simple recapture is Black's best move, but let's see why other moves are subpar:

10...Rhxh5?! is bad because of 11.Nd5! embarrassing the rook. After 11...Rh8 12.Nxf6+ gxf6 13.Be3± White's structure is vastly superior, Sevian-Khachiyian, Los Angeles 2012.

10...Nxe4 leads by force to a good endgame for White, but a small amount of knowledge is needed: 11.Nxg7+ Bxg7 12.Nxe4 d5 13.h6!. An important resource, as otherwise Black is fine:



13...dxe4 14.Qxd7+ Kxd7 (*Less challenging is 14...Nxd7 15.hxg7 Rg8 16.Rg1 f5 17.Bd2 Kf7 18.O-O±. White keeps the extra pawn in view of Bc3.*) 15.hxg7 Rg8 16.Rg1. At first glance this endgame looks completely winning for White, who has a very strong extra pawn on g7:



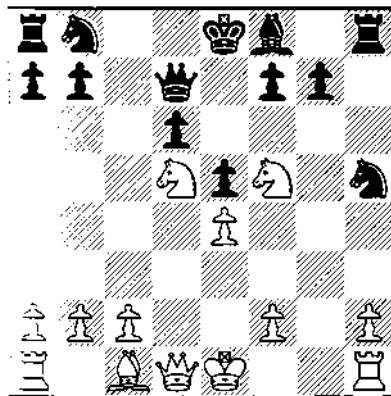
Sooner or later Black will have to sacrifice the exchange on f8, so it is up to White to make sure to activate his rooks and prevent Black's king and knight from becoming too active. 21.Rg4 Kf5 22.Rh4! Threatening Rh8. 22...Rgxf8 23.gxf8Q Rxf8 24.c3N (*After 24.Rh5+, White retained the advantage, but made things trickier for himself and even went on to lose, in Galstian-Timofeev, Artek 2000.*) 24...Nf3 25.Rh7! This endgame is tricky, but with best play White should win. This line seems instructive: 25...Kg6 26.Rh3 f5 27.Rg3+ Kf6 28.Rd6+ Ke7 29.Rgg6+- . White has activated both rooks while keeping Black's king passive, but precise play is still needed to win.

But things are not so simple, as Black's central pawn mass can be a source of good counterplay. With accurate play White should technically convert, so not much more is needed from a opening theory point of view. The somewhat forced line continues even further: 16...Nc6 17.Be3 Ne7 18.O-O-O+ Ke6 19.Bc5! Nf5 20.Bf8 Nd4

11.Nd5!?

If you check your database, you'll find that the main line is the surprising move 11.Bh6. But we aren't fully convinced that it is White's best try. Instead, we like this aggressive jump with the knight, posing some practical problems for Black. It was first played by the creative GM Vitaly Tseshkovsky in 1985.

Compared to other lines in the variation, this variation is relatively unexplored. We will start with Black's most logical move and attempt to cover a full survey of ideas.



...g6

Also making sense is 11...Nc6, getting ready to evacuate Black's king to the queenside. 12.Bg5! This is where we'll develop the bishop in the main line as well. 12...g6 13.Bf6! is a key move, impeding Black's development, although White could also retreat with Ng3. 13...Rh7 + Nfe3 Black seems to be in a bit of danger, but there are a few ways to escape to a slightly worse position: + Bg7 (or 14...Be7 15.Bxe7 Nxe7 + Qf3 O-O-O 17.O-O-O±) 15.Bxg7 + g7 16.Qd3 O-O-O 17.O-O-O±. We

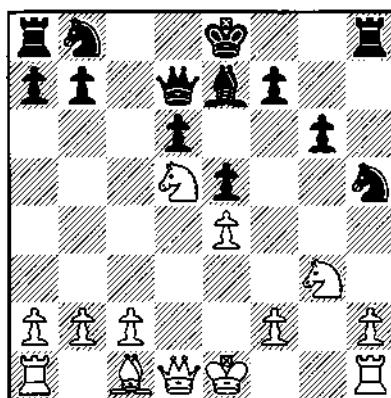
judge this position to be slightly more comfortable for White, whose next moves should be h2-h4, Kb1, c2-c3, Nc4, etc.

12.Ng3

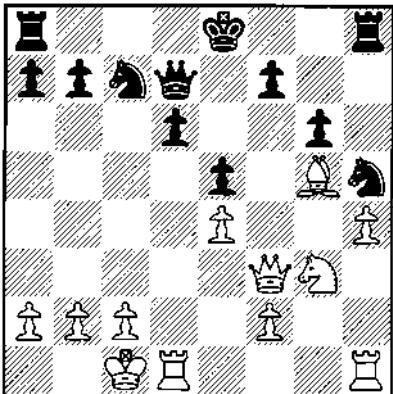
With the threat of Nxh5 and Nf6+. Black must cover the f6 square with his bishop.

12...Bg7

The original choice of players defending this line for Black was 12...Be7

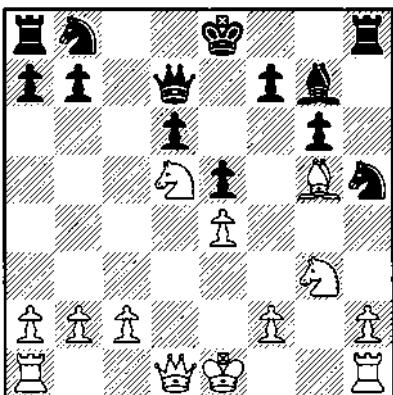


But Tseshkovsky long ago demonstrated how White should proceed: 13.Qf3 Na6 14.h4! Setting up Bg5. 14...Nc7 15.Nxe7 Qxe7 16.Bg5 Qd7 17.O-O-O



If Black could just castle, his position would be playable, but that is easier said than done. 17...Ne6 An empty threat—after Nxg5 hxg5 Black would lose a pawn due to the pin along the h-file. Therefore White should have simply spent a tempo on 18.Kb1! illustrating to Black that he is out of useful moves! (Instead, 18.Qa3 Nxg3 19.fxg3 Nxg5 20.hxg5 Rxh1 21.Rxh1 Ke7 22.Rf1± was Tseshkovsky-Panchenko, Minsk 1985.) Trades would only worsen Black's position: 18...Nxg3 19.fxg3 Nxg5 20.Qf6! A gorgeous intermezzo, preventing Black from castling. 20...Rh5 21.hxg5± and Black is losing at least one pawn.

13.Bg5!



The best square for the bishop, preventing Black from castling. If Black is induced to play f7-f6, that will be a definite positional gain for White. The bishop can also be anchored with the move h2-h4.

13...Nc6

The most natural move, but again we should explore some of Black's other tries:

13...Nxg3?! is weak. After 14.fxg3± White can even castle kingside, with wonderful pressure along the f-file.

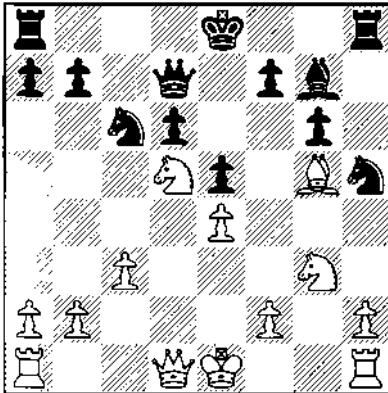
13...Na6 makes sense, with the idea Nc7. Best is 14.Nxh5 Rxh5 15.h4! This move makes Black's life difficult. 15...Nc7 16.Nxc7+ Qxc7 17.Qd3. If Black wants to castle he'll have to play 17...f6, and after 18.Be3 O-O-O 19.O-O-O Kb8 20.Rhg1!± White's position is easily preferable, with targets on d6 and g6 and a much better bishop.

If **13...Nf4** then 14.h4! In some cases White also threatens h4-h5. 14...Nxd5 (14...Nc6 should be met with 15.c3) 15.Qxd5 Nc6 16.c3! A wise move, restricting Black's knight. 16...f6 Again a sad necessity for Black, who cannot play with his king in the center forever. (And after 16...Ne7 17.Qb3!± Black still cannot castle.) 17.Be3 O-O-O 18.O-O-O±. White can next play h4-h5, fighting for the f5 square.

14.Nxh5

This was Sokolov's choice, which will be our recommendation as well.

Another option for White is **14.c3** which has led to an advantage in a few games:

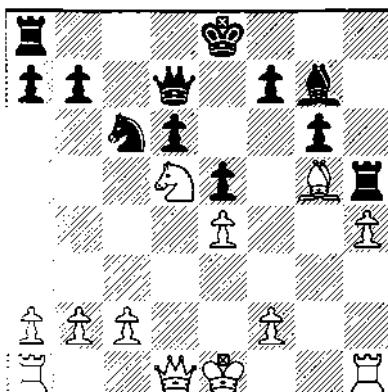


14...Nf4 15.h4 transposes to 13...Nf4.

14...f5?! 15.Nxh5 Rxh5 16.h4±. As you can imagine, Black's king was not very happy in the center. Groszpeter-Sukandar, Kecskemet 2013.

14...Rc8 15.Qe2 A logical move. (*In addition, simple and strong was 15.Nxh5 Rxh5 16.h4±, where White's minor pieces coordinated well.*) 15...Kf8 16.O-O-O Nf4 17.Qd3 Rc6 18.Be3±. Apart from chasing after Black's king, White also has the positional threat of simply playing on the queenside, taking advantage of Black's sidelined kingside forces. Lalic-Pedzich, Gothenburg 1994.

14...Rxh5 15.h4!



We've seen this idea constantly, anchoring the bishop on g5 and making life difficult for Black's king. 15...Rc8

What else? There was no longer a way to get the king castled queenside, so Panchenko decides to play for piece activity.

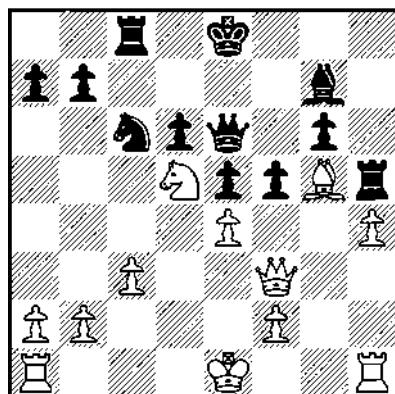
16.c3!

Another common idea for this line, restricting Black's play.

16...Qe6 17.Qf3

White is now ready to castle queenside and work on breaking through to Black's king.

17...f5



A very risky but understandable decision. Black hopes to complicate matters rather than wait around for White to break through.

The game continued:

18.exf5?! Qxf5 19.Rh3

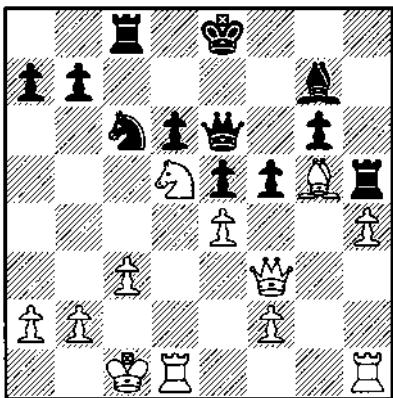
Leading to a favorable endgame for White, but with Black's king stuck in the center it was more dangerous to keep queens on the board.

19...Kd7 20.Rd1 Re8 21.Qxf5+ gxf5 22.Bf6 Bf8 23.Rg3±

Black defended well and the game was soon drawn.

But let's reconsider White's 18th move.

Instead of taking on f5, Sokolov should have remained calm and stuck to his guns with **18.O-O-O!N**

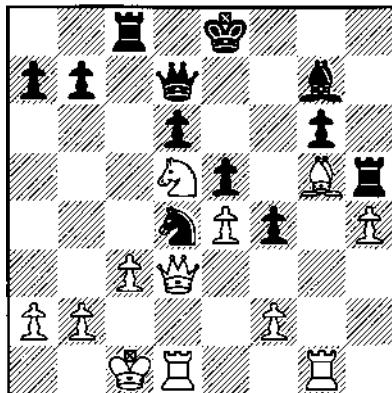


There is no reason to fear the knight coming to d4. White is now able to get his king to safety and connect rooks.

One important line is **18...fxe4** 19.Qxe4 Qf5 20.Qe2!+-. Again, keeping queens on the board is a must. Next is f2-f4, breaking open the central files.

Black loses a pawn after **18...Rh8** 19.exf5 Qxf5, due to 20.Nf6+ Kf7 21.Qxf5 gxf5 22.Rxd6+-.

18...Nd4 It's unclear what exactly White was trying to avoid, but in any case this position is simply tremendous for White, who can pose a lot of problems for Black through natural moves: 19.Qe3 f4 It's in Black's best interests to keep the center closed, so this seems like a logical move. Against other tries White can play Kb1, forcing Black's knight to retreat. 20.Qd3 Qd7 Vacating the e6 square. 21.Rhg1!+-.

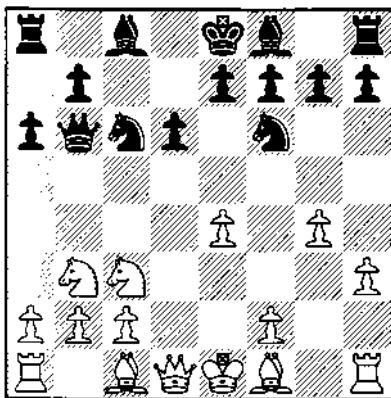


We can stop here because it's become clear that White's advantage is nearly decisive. Black's forces are terribly uncoordinated and the king is unsafe in the center. Moreover, the threats of Ne7 and Bf6 aren't easy to meet.

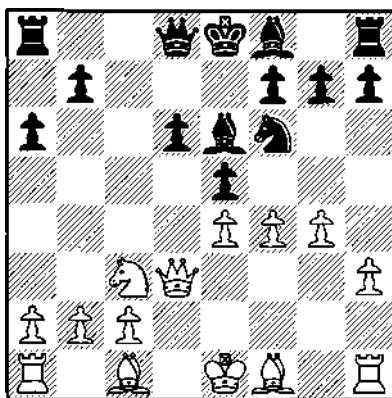
We hope our analysis has given you an idea of how to face the Scheveningen!

Memory Markers

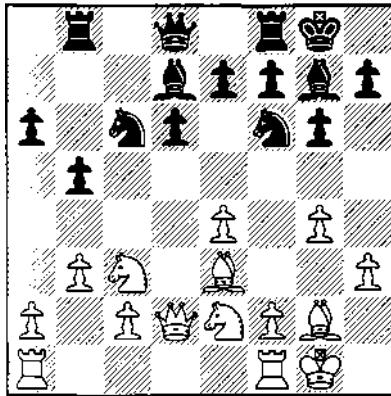
Here are reminders of some of the ideas and motifs in this chapter.



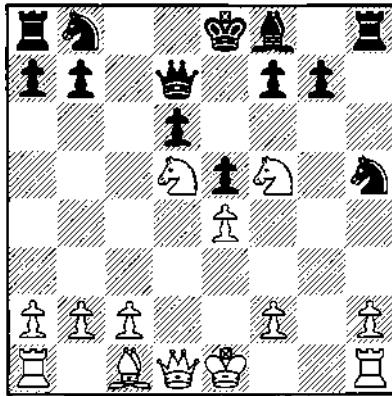
- 1. After 8.Nb3.** The start of a sharp yet unexplored variation. See diagram on page 119, in the notes to Game 10.



- 2. After 10.f4!.** Forcing Black to isolate the d6 pawn, leading to a favorable structure for White. From Game 10, Gashimov–Delgado Ramirez. See diagram on page 123.



- 3. After 13.Qd2.** White has a comfortable space advantage and an easy plan of Rad1, Nd5, and f2-f4. From Game 11, Nestorovic–Damljanovic. See diagram on page 132.



- 4. After 11.Nd5!?.** Our ambitious recommendation in the Scheveningen. From Game 12, Sokolov–Panchenko. See diagram on page 145.

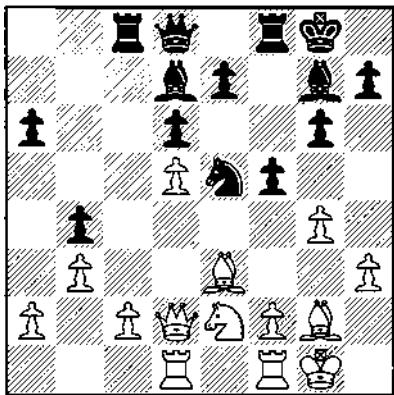
Exercises

White to play!

With these situations from actual games, you can find some ideas and opportunities that may await you, as White against the Najdorf.

Solutions to these exercises begin on page 521.

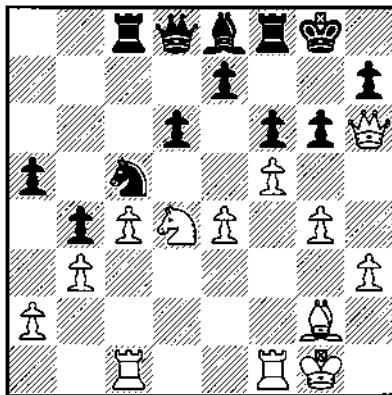
Exercise 1



Game 11
Additional analysis

Black has just played f7-f5. How should White react?

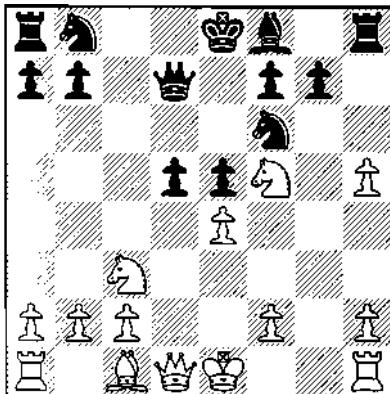
Exercise 2



Amanov – Yankovsky
Los Angeles 2012

White to play; find the best move.

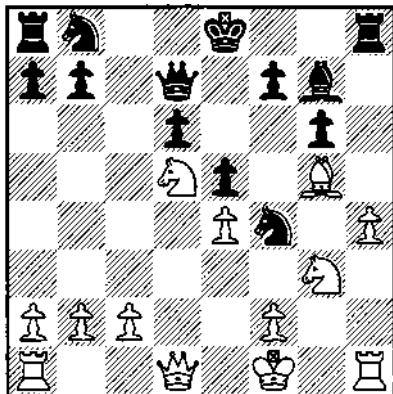
Exercise 3



Volokitin – Shishkin
Romania 2013

Instead of recapturing on h5, Black has just played 10...d5!? Is this an opening revelation or a blunder?

Exercise 4



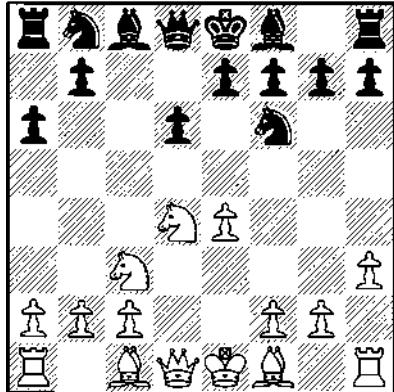
Game 12
Additional analysis

Black has just played 14...Ng2+ 15.Kf1 Nf4, ruining White's plans to castle queenside. What should White do?

Summary:

Chapter 1

The Najdorf Variation



1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.h3

We hope our coverage of **6.h3** has convinced the reader of its terrific value. Although Black has quite a number of responses to choose from, we believe that White's play in each individual line is both rational and sound.

Wherever possible, we have tried to draw parallels between variations so that the ideas and concepts learned in one line can be used in similar structures. For example, the importance of the initiative in positions with opposite side castling, specifically in the lines **6.h3 e6 7.g4 Be7** and **7...h6**.

Secondly, the many benefits of controlling the versatile d5-square

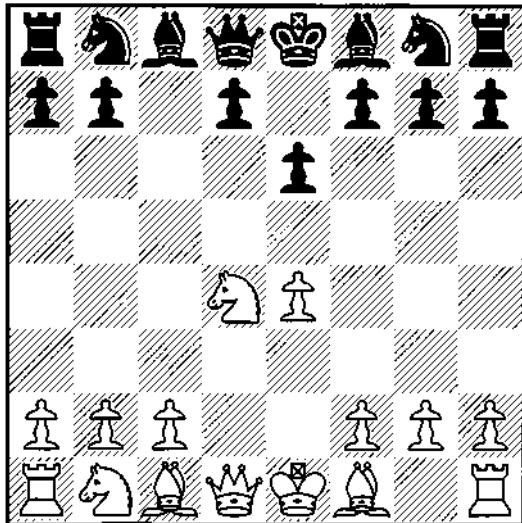
will apply not just for the line **6.h3 e5**, but for other Sicilians as well—the Classical, the Accelerated Dragon, and the Sveshnikov, to name a few. We should also not forget to mention the two lines that can lead to an early endgame—**6.h3 e6 7.g4 d5** and **6.h3 e5 7.Nde2 Be6 8.g4 d5**—they are both worth studying in detail.

In order to retain as much of the complex material as possible, the reader is strongly encouraged to review the games, memory markers, and exercises presented in this chapter within a few weeks' time.

Now, let's continue on to the next chapter!

Chapter 2

Systems with 2...e6



1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4

For our second chapter, we've decided to explore two popular variations that can take place from the diagrammed position. The first and the subject of Chapter 2a, will be **4...a6**, known as the Kan Variation, named after Soviet International Master Ilya Kan. The second system and subject of Chapter 2b, **4...Nc6**, which leads to the Taimanov Variation, named after fellow Soviet IM Mark Taimanov.

Though both openings are quite unique and complex, it is natural to group them together, as transpositions often occur between various lines. In the hopes of building a coherent repertoire, we've decided to recommend the line **6.g3** against all systems.

Oddly enough, while our choice to result in an unbalanced, double-

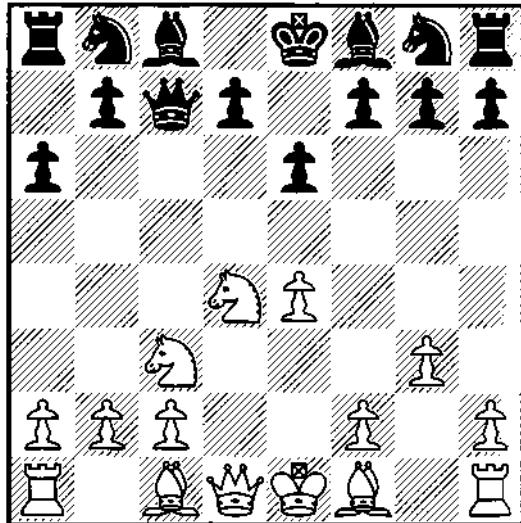
edged middlegame in the Kan, most of the lines within the Taimanov will lead to a positional struggle!

As usual, White's success will frequently be determined by his level of understanding of common themes and motifs in the respective middlegame.

With that, let's begin with the Kan Variation

Chapter 2a

The Kan Variation



1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 a6 5.Nc3 Qc7 6.g3

Like most major Sicilians, the Kan Variation is a reliable choice for Black, as it is theoretically sound and offers good chances for counterplay. In the interest of being forthright, our recommendation against this opening is not considered to be critical by theoretical standards. Instead, the line we've selected will involve White launching a do-or-die kingside attack with the main goal being checkmate. While we believe the attack is both sound and dangerous, it will give Black serious counterchances on the queenside.

With that in mind, it is important to construct the right frame for our approach to this middlegame: White shouldn't necessarily look for an opening advantage *per se*, but rather a playable position where the plans for both sides are clear.

Through the use of several instructive examples, our aim is to show the reader how to properly develop and execute the thematic kingside attack for this variation. Thus, the reader should emerge with a profound understanding and a comfortable feel for White's play in this line.

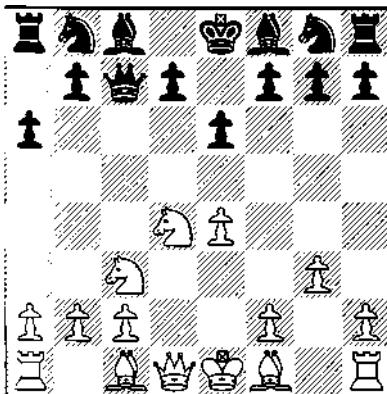
It is this understanding that will then provide an edge in tournament play—being more familiar than your opponent with the typical ideas in a position is a serious advantage that should never be overlooked!

The main line and focus of Game 13 is **5...Qc7**, a flexible move designed to control the e5-square. After **6.g3** we will analyze quite a few instances of White's typical kingside attack. Game 14 will then feature the less common **5...b5**, against which we'll suggest **6.a3**, followed by **7.g3** with the plan of launching the same kingside attack that will be presented in Game 13.

Game 13

Guseinov – Swiercz
EU Championship
Rijeka 2010

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4
4.Nxd4 a6 5.Nc3 Qc7 6.g3



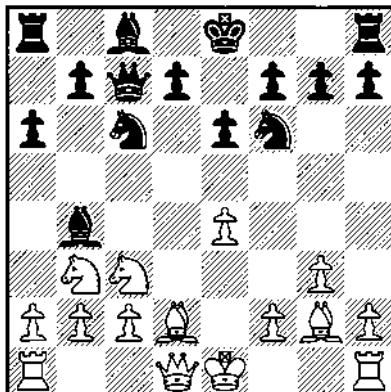
7...Bb4

This is Black's main response to 6.g3, forcing White to make some sort of concession to defend the knight.

6...Nf6 7.Bg2 Nc6 transposes to the Taimanov Variation, which is covered in the next sub-chapter.

6...b5 As well as 5...b5, will be covered in the next game.

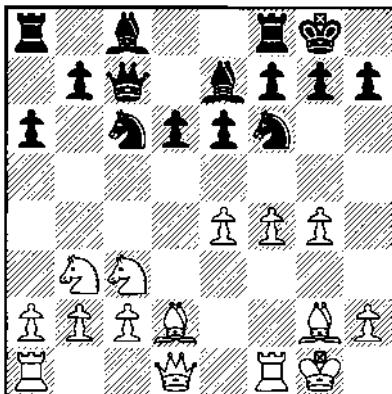
7.Bd2 Nf6 8.Bg2 Nc6 9.Nb3



9...Be7

Black's most flexible choice, delaying castling until after there is some play on the queenside.

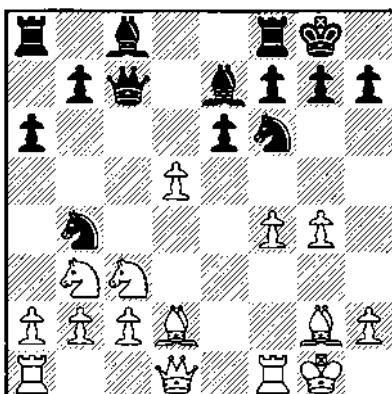
It is important to first understand the kingside attack that White is aiming for. After 9...O-O there are a few instructive games that we can learn from: 10.O-O Be7 Black must retreat before playing d7-d6, as the bishop is needed to defend the kingside. 11.f4 d6 12.g4!



With Black's king already castled, there is no time to waste! White's main plan consists of g4-g5, Rf3-h3, and bringing the queen to the h-file. Depending on how Black defends, the advance f4-f5 may be on our agenda as well. This is an extremely dangerous attack, meaning that one mistake by Black can lead to disaster.

We look at three replies by Black, the central advance **12...d5!**?, the defensive **12...Nd7**, and the queenside advance **12...b5** on page 157.

In 2008 GM Nguyen came up with **12...d5!**? adhering to the principle that an attack on the flank should be met with a central counterstrike. **13.exd5 Nb4**



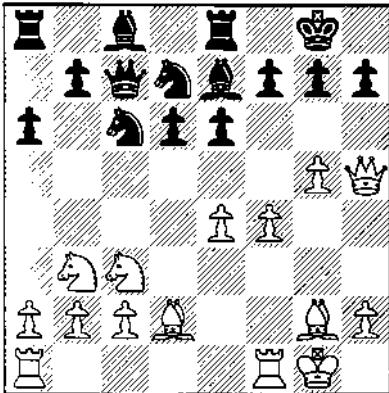
This is the point—now dxet Bxe6 would give Black excellent compensation for the pawn.

a) White could gain a small advantage with 14.d6! returning the pawn under favorable circumstances: 14...Bxd6 15.a3 Nc6 (*Or 15...Nb5? 16.g5 Nxc3 17.Bxc3 Ne8 18.Qd2=*) 16.g5 Ne8 17.Ne4 Be7 18.Bc3= with more space and nice attacking prospects on the kingside.

b) GM Guseinov instead chose 14.g5 and was able to pose some problems for his opponent: 14...Nfxd5 15.f5! Fighting for the initiative. 15...Nxc3 (*or 15...Bc5? 16.Qh5↑*) 16.bxc3 Nd5 17.f6! Energetic play! This pawn ended up playing the decisive role in the game. 17...Bc5+ (*17...gxf6 would lose after the intermezzo 18.Bxd5! exc?*) 19.gxf6+= and White's attack is irresistible in view of Qh5, etc.) 18.Kf1 g6 19.Qe1!↑. Black's defense was difficult and Guseinov went on to win = Guseinov-Nguyen, Moscow 2008.

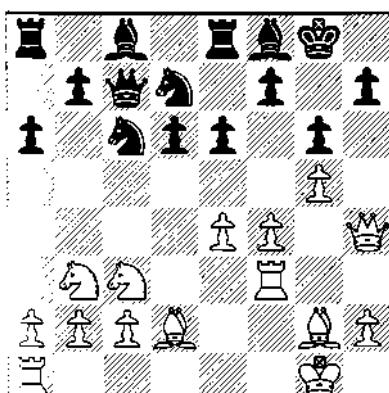
With this concrete approach falling short, let's take a look at some of Black's standard defensive plans.

A natural idea for Black is to play **12...Nd7 13.g5 Re8** trying to establish an impenetrable defense on the kingside. But White can go for the direct attack: **14.Qh5!**



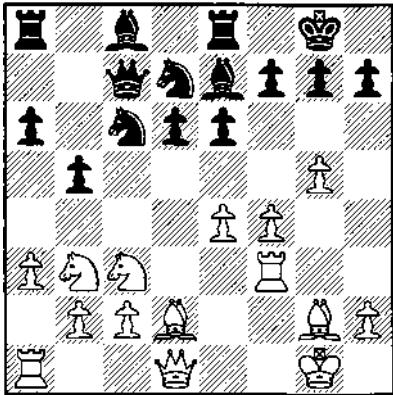
a) Against 14...g6 the precise move is 15.Qh6!N with the idea 15...Bf8 16.Qh4. White has “lost” a tempo, but Black’s bishop would be better placed either on e7 or g7, and will likely need to move. 16...b5 (or 16...Bg7 17.f5↑) 17.a3. This move is almost always necessary to protect the knight on c3. Let’s see a brief sample line: 17...Nb6 18.Rf3 Nc4 19.Rh3 h5 20.gxh6↑. The extra pawn is not so important here—White should look to play Rf1 and break open Black’s king with f4-f5.

b) A few games have continued 14...Bf8 15.Rf3 g6 16.Qh4



16...Bg7. Setting up a nice defense. (16...Be7 would be counterproductive, since after 17.Rh3 h5 White has a nice idea: 18.Bf3! threatening to sacrifice on h5, and 18...Kg7 19.f5± is quite hard to meet.) 17.Rh3 Nf8 Since Black has successfully defended the h-file, White must find another avenue for attack: 18.Rf1! Involving the last piece and potentially threatening f4-f5. (The immediate 18.f5 was a bit too double-edged, Kavutskiy-Sharevich, St. Louis 2012.) 18...Ne7 Now it is time to reassign the queen to the center: 19.Qf2N (19.Nd1 b5?! 20.Ne3→ led to a nice victory, although Black should have played d5 as soon as White’s knight left c3, in Wu-Black, ICC INT 2011.) 19...Bd7 20.Be3 Rac8 21.Bd4±. White is doing well—after the trade of dark-squared bishops he can switch gears and play positionally. Black’s minor pieces are passive, and the d6 pawn may become a serious weakness.

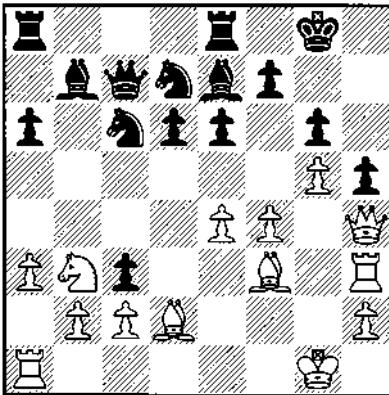
From Black’s perspective, it seems more challenging to go for immediate queenside counterplay with 12...b5 and now we’ll follow a game by another champion of our system, GM Alexei Fedorov: 13.g5 Nd7 14.a3! White’s knight belongs on c3. 14...Re8. Now 15.Qe2 Bb7 16.Be3 would transpose to Guseinov-Swiercz, our main game, but let’s see how Fedorov developed the kingside attack: 15.Rf3 (It was also possible to start with 15.Qh5)



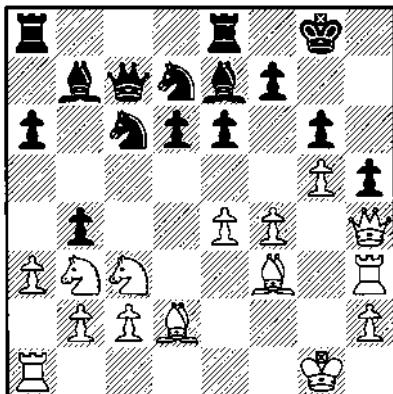
15...Bb7 16.Rh3 g6 17.Qe1 Transferring the queen to the h-file. 17...b4! A sharp continuation, but justified since Black's king is in impending danger. (17...Nb6?! would have been too slow: 18.Qh4 h5 19.Bf3 Kg7 20.f5±.) 18.Qh4 h5 (*In case of 18...Nf8 19.axb4 Nxb4 20.Qf2±, White can always regroup with Qf2, with a plan of Rf1, Nd1-e3, Bc3, and f4-f5.*) 19.Bf3! (*The alternative 19.axb4 Nxb4 20.Qf2 was again possible, also with ideas of Na4 and Rc3, playing for domination of the queenside.*):

21.Bxh5 Nf5!— was the key point that could have easily been missed.) 20... Bf8 21.axb4 Nxb4∞ With an extremely sharp position, but Black is doing well.

b) 19...bxc3?

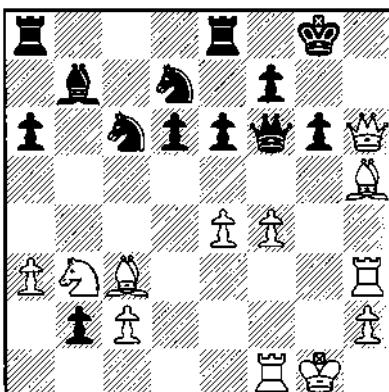


Black either underestimated White's attack or simply felt that this was the critical try, but in any event Fedorov is now able to conduct a beautiful effort: 20.Bxh5! Bxg5 (*Not 20...gxh5 21.Qxh5, and White is mating.*) 21.Qxg5 Qd8 22.Qh6 The queen and rook battery along the h-file spells certain doom for Black's king! 22...cx b2 (or 22...cxd2 23.Bxg6 Qf6 24.Rg3+–) 23.Rf1! Qf6 24.Bc3



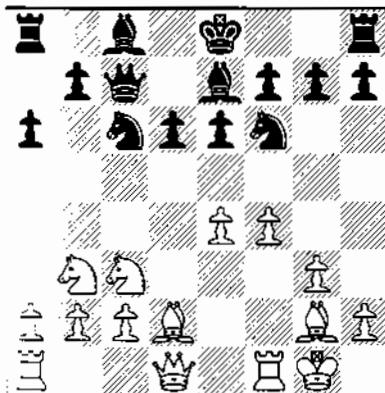
White commits to the attack!

a) There was only one good defense: 19...Qb6+! 20.Kf1 (20.Kg2 Nd4



... very aesthetic how each piece sets up playing a decisive role in the attack. 24...e5 25.fxe5 Qxf1+? The last mistake. (*Black could have gone into the endgame with 25...Qg7 26.Qxg7+ Kg7 27.e6+ Nde5 28.exf7±. Although this is close to winning, the game is by no means over.*) 26.Kxf1 b1Q+ 27.Kf2 Ndx5 28.Be2! The attack along the h-file finally decides! 28...f6 29.Qh8+ 1–0, Fedorov–Khurtsidze, Tiraspol 1998. Black resigned in view of 29...Kf7 30.Rh7+ Ke6 31.Bc4+! 32.Qxf6 mate.

O-O d6 11.f4



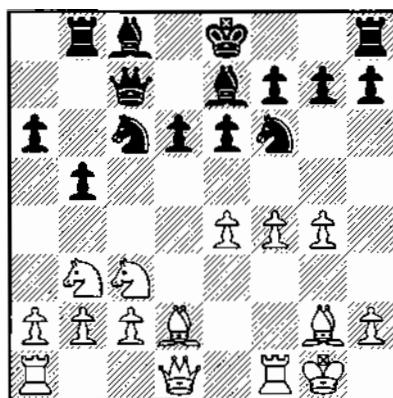
Understanding this position well is a matter of being in touch with a few nuances. For White, it's important to know when to press forward with g3-g4-g5 and f4-f5, and when to play slowly with moves like Qe2, Rad1, and Kh1. For Black, it's about developing queenside interplay and finding the right moment to castle.

...b5

The most common move, threatening b5-b4.

GM Fedorchuk tried the interesting 11...Rb8 which led to an instructive mistake:

12.g4 The logical move, launching White's usual attack on the kingside. **12...b5**:



a) Surprisingly, 13.g5?! was inaccurate since after 13...Nd7 14.a3 Nb6, White isn't in time to play Qe2 and Rad1, the point of which would be to meet Nc4 with Bc1. Instead, there followed 15.f5 Nc4 16.f6 gxf6 17.gxf6 Bf8+ and Black already stood much better, with a safe king in the center and an open g-file for his rook, Forcen Esteban–Fedorchuk, Madrid 2012.

b) Instead, White should have simply played 13.a3, and after 13...Nd7 react with 14.Qe2 Nb6 15.Rad1 with a good setup. The game might continue 15...Bb7 16.g5 Nc4 17.Bc1 O-O 18.f5—or even 18.Rd3?! with the idea Rh3 and Qh5.

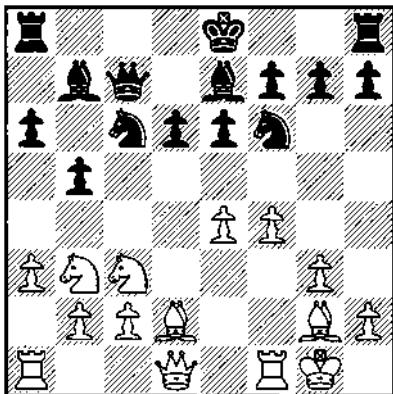
Another plan at White's disposal is to play **12.Qe2** with the idea Rae1, in order to set up the adventurous Nd5 sacrifice. For example 12...b5 13.a3 Nd7 14.Rae1 Nb6?! Not best, but very natural. (14...O-O would also run into 15.Nd5! exd5 16.exd5, and Black should give the piece back with 16...Nce5 17.fxe5 Nxe5 18.Bc3±.) 15.Nd5! exd5 16.exd5 Nd8 17.Bc3=.

White's compensation here and in similar positions is quite tremendous. We have ideas of Nd4-c6, as well as Rf2 (followed by Qe4 and Rfe2). It is very difficult for Black to untangle without losing material.

12.a3

As we've mentioned, spending a tempo on a2-a3 is necessary. Our knight belongs on c3 not only to defend the e4 pawn, but also to be ready to jump into d5 at any moment.

12...Bb7



One of our heroes for this chapter, GM Guseinov, has had several games in this position that we can certainly learn from.

In a few recent games, Guseinov has opted for the immediate

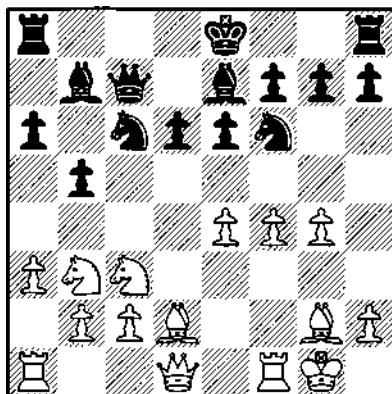
13.g4!

with good results. Let's learn a bit from his other encounters, too:

Guseinov once tried 13.Qe2 with the aforementioned plan of Rae1 and Nd5. 13...Nd7 14.Rae1 O-O! The right moment to castle. (14...Nb6 would have played into White's hands: 15.Nd5! exd5 16.exd5 Na7 17.Ba5! A nice way to pile on the pressure. 17...Nac8 18.f5→ and Black is in

trouble.) 15.g4 (Sometimes 15.Nd5 does work anyway, but here, after 15...exd5 16.exd5 Bf6 17.dxc6 Bxc6= Black is fine.) 15...b4 16.axb4 Nxb4 17.Be3. Of course, the drawback of Qe2 and Rae1 is that these moves don't help White with the kingside attack. After 17...Rfe8 18.g5 d5!?? Black had enough counterplay to equalize in Guseinov–Galego, Kusadasi 2006.

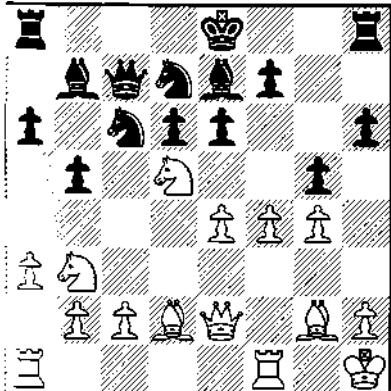
After 13.g4!



13...Nd7

Black's most natural move, transferring the knight to the queenside.

One game saw 13...h6, a controversial decision. While g4-g5 is now harder to achieve, when it does land it could be quite devastating. Of course it's too early to play h2-h4 since Black hasn't castled yet, but Guseinov chose 14.Kh1 Nd7 15.Qe2 and was rewarded by an ambitious decision: 15...g5? In some Sicilians this extravagant idea can be quite strong, but here it meets with a brutal refutation. (Standard would have been 15...Nb6 16.Rad1 Nc4 17.Bc1 O-O 18.Rd3!→ with the idea Rh3 and g4-g5.) 16.Nd5!



Against 14...Nb6 Guseinov chose 15.Rae1, leading to a very unclear position. (15.Rad1!? is our suggested improvement, with the familiar idea of Bc1 and Rd3-h3.) After 15...Bh4 16.Rd1 h6 17.Rf3 Nc4 18.Bc1 Bf6 19.Kh1∞ White eventually broke through on the kingside and won, in Guseinov–Blomqvist, Warsaw 2013.

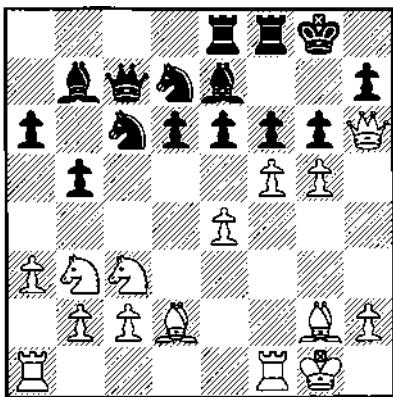
15.g5

Now White's plan should be quite clear: Rf3-h3 and Qh5.

15...Rfe8

Young Polish GM Darius Swiercz chooses the classic Scheveningen multi-purpose rook move, vacating the f8 square for the minor pieces.

Another one of Guseinov's victims chose 15...Rae8 hoping to counterattack with f7-f6. Now followed 16.Qh5 g6 17.Qh6 f6 18.f5!



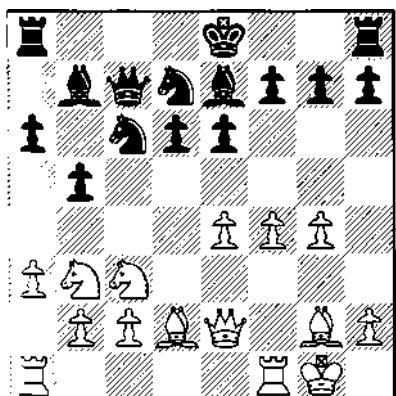
A strong reaction, causing turmoil for Black's king. 18...Nde5 19.fxe6 Nd8 20.Qh3 fxg5 21.Nd5! Bxd5 22.exd5 Qxc2 23.Qc3! Heading to a favorable endgame, thanks to White's powerful e6 pawn. 23...Qxc3 24.Bxc3 Nc4 25.a4±, Guseinov–Schneider, Dubai 2011.

16.Be3!?

An interesting choice, luring Black's knight away from the kingside.

As we mentioned, the knight should be ready to jump to d5 any moment! Black is already tested. 16...exd5 17.exd5 Na7 Bc3 Qc4 (18...Rg8 19.Rae1 Nc8 Na5!+) 19.Rae1!? Even in the bigame Black will have problems along the e-file. 19...Qxe2 20.Rxe2 f6 Na5 Bc8 22.Nc6+– and the game did not last much longer, Guseinov–Poteau, Rhodes 2013.

4.Qe2

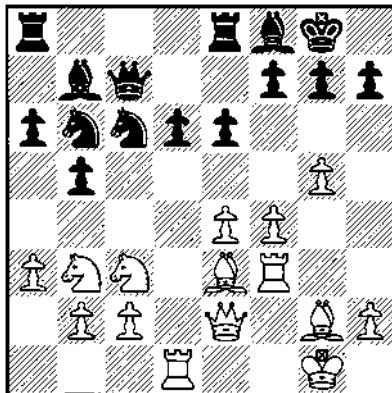


Connecting rooks and preparing to retreat the bishop in case of Nd7-e4.

4...O-O

The natural 16.Rf3 was also worth considering, of course.

16...Nb6 17.Rad1 Bf8 18.Rf3



18...Nc4

In case of 18...b4 19.axb4 Nxb4 White can play on both sides of the board with 20.Rh3 g6 21.Bf1!± preparing Qf2 and even Rd4.

19.Bc1

It seems as though White lost a tempo with Bd2-e3-c1, but now Black is unable to play b5-b4 on account of the hanging knight.

19...g6 20.Rh3 Rad8 21.Kh1!

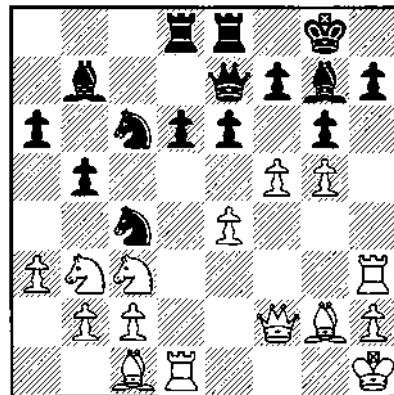
21.Qf2 Qb6= would have spoiled White's fun.

21...Bg7 22.Qf2 Qe7!?

Setting a positional trap of Qh4 h5.

Perhaps it was better to open up the queenside with 22...b4!, for example 23.axb4 Nxb4 24.Qh4 Nxc2. The cost of one mistake in such positions is very high. Here White could throw more fuel on the fire with 25.Nd5!? Bxd5 (or 25...exd5 26.Qxh7+ Kf8 27.f5+-) 26.exd5∞ with a very unbalanced position.

23.f5!



Guseinov opens up more lines of attack, since 23.Qh4 can be met with 23...h5.

23...exf5

Not 23...gxf5? 24.Qh4!→.

24.Nd5! Qe5 25.Qh4!

Black's position has become very difficult.

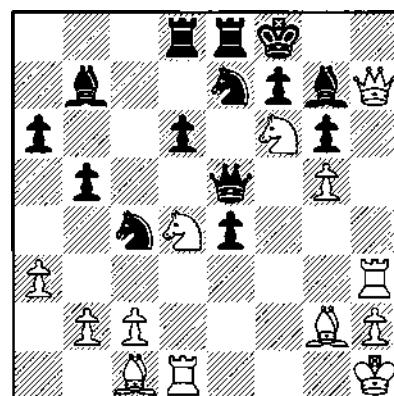
25...fxe4

Not 25...h5? 26.gxh6 Bf8 27.Bg5+-.

26.Nf6+ Kf8

If 26...Bxf6? then 27.Qxh7+ Kf8 28.gxf6 Qxf6 29.Rf1+- is game over.

27.Qxh7 Ne7 28.Nd4!



Involving the knight and preparing b2-b3 and Bb2. Guseinov's play

Swiercz has been absolutely stellar.

16...d5 29.b3 e3

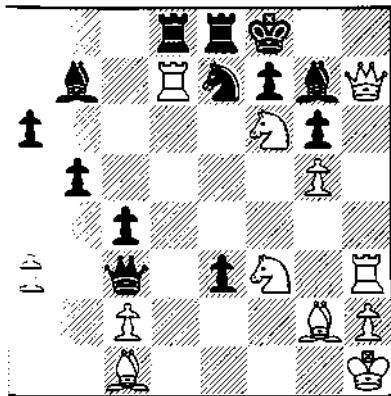
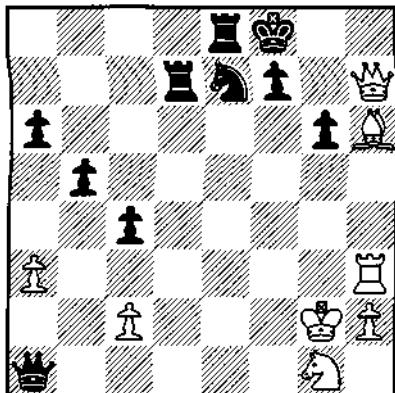
Swiercz fights back, trying to complicate matters as much as possible, but Guseinov is ruthless until the very end.

If instead 29...Nd6, then 30.Bb2+–.

30.Nf3

The simple 30.bxc4 was also winning, but Guseinov has a beautiful finish in mind:

31...Qc3 31.bxc4 dxc4 32.Rd7!



A fantastic finish! Threatening Qg8+ Nxg8 34.Nh7 mate.

32...Bxf6 33.gxf6 Qxf6 34.Bxe3

With the threat of 35.Bh6+ the game is simply over.

34...Qa1+ 35.Ng1 Bxg2+ 36.Kxg2

Rxd7

Or 36...g5 37.Bd4+–.

37.Bh6+ 1–0

Game 14

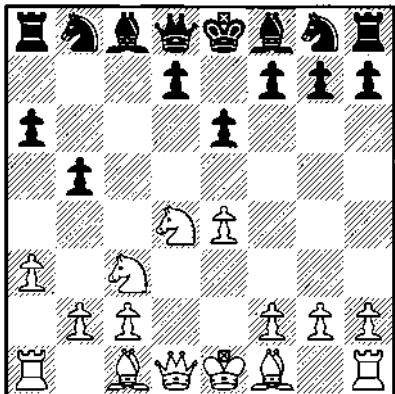
Fedorov – Kveinys
Mikenas Memorial Open
Vilnius 1997

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4
4.Nxd4 a6 5.Nc3 b5

This is a sideline compared to 5...Qc7, but still popular among many grandmasters.

In case Black plays 5...Qc7 6.g3 b5, White can either reply 7.a3 which would transpose to the main game, or simply continue developing with 7.Bg2 which can lead to a favorable version of this line.

6.a3

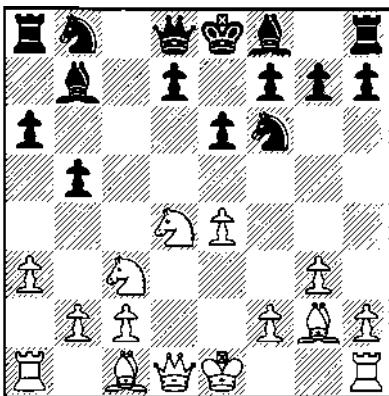


This move is not considered very dangerous for Black from a theoretical point of view. But the point of our repertoire is to suggest lines with clear plans and ideas, so that a player's success can depend on his understanding and execution of his opening strategy.

6...Bb7 7.g3 Nf6

7...Nc6 should lead to similar play as in the main game after 8.Nb3.

8.Bg2



In this game, we will show you how White can still get into a familiar middlegame and launch the same dangerous attack that we saw examples of in the previous game.

8...d6

Black has some flexibility for development, but should be careful to avoid any e4-e5 tricks.

One such example of carelessness is 8...Qc7 9.O-O Be7? Running into an all too familiar shot. (9...Nc6 10.Nb3, followed by f2-f4, transposes to our main game.) 10.e5! With opposing bishops fianchettoed on the h1-a8 diagonal, this trick is always a possibility! 10...Bxg2 11.exf6 Bxf6 12.fxe7 Bc4. Now best was 13.Bf4N (Babula-Forman, Czechia 2002 continued 13.b3.) 13...Qb6 14.b3= Black is up the exchange but in deep trouble, as 14...Bd5 loses to 15.Nxc6 exd5 16.Nf5!+-.

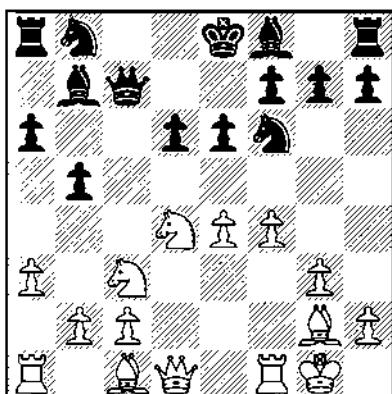
A misguided attempt to stray from the trodden path is 8...b4?!, after 9.axb4 Bxb4 Black threatens to win a pawn, but White can ignore the threat: 10.O-O! Bxc3 11.bxc3 Bxe4 Otherwise, what was the point of giving up the dark-squared bishop? 11...Nxe4? is no better, after 12.Re1 f5 13.Ba3+.) The refutation is quite simple: 12.Bxe4 Nxe4 13.Qg4! with a nice finishing touch: 13...f5 14.Qxg7 Qf6 15.Nxe6!+. Black's position is ruined—15...dxe6 16.Qb7 leads to material losses.

9.O-O Qc7

This move is usually necessary to defend the bishop on b7, as with the bishop on b7 unprotected, 9...Be7? will almost always run into 10.e5±.

9...Nc6? also fails to 10.e5+-.

10.f4

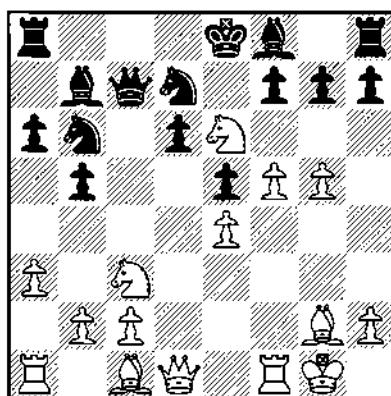


As you can see, White's opening is nearly identical to the previous game—compare this position with the diagram after 12...Bb7 on page 160. What matters is spotting key differences in each middlegame that can affect the concrete details of battle. Once Black is castled, advancing the g-pawn and swinging the heavy pieces over to the h-file

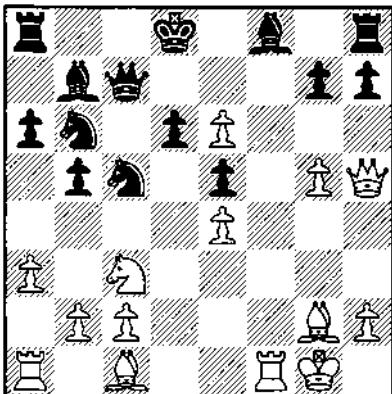
will usually be an effective plan—but sometimes f4-f5-f6 can punish an unsuspecting opponent as well!

10...Nc6

A potential deviation for Black is 10...Nbd7 which led to an interesting battle: 11.g4 (*11.Qe2 would be our recommendation, preparing to develop with Be3 and Rad1 before pushing g3-g4-g5.*) 11...Nb6 12.g5 Nfd7 13.f5. Black is still two moves away from castling, so this advance is perfectly reasonable. (*Once again, 13.Qe2 was an option: 13...Be7 14.Kh1 O-O 15.Rf3→.*) 13...e5 14.Ne6!?



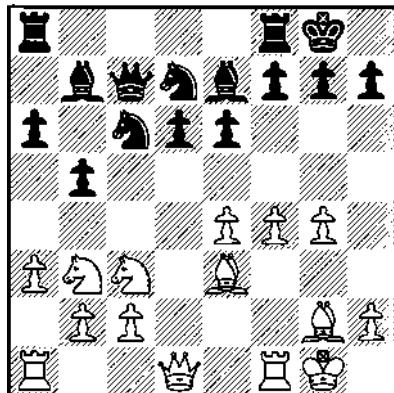
A scary-looking sacrifice and an idea worth remembering! (*14.Nde2 followed by Ng3 is slower but would lead to interesting play.*) 14...fxe6 15.Qh5+ Kd8 16.fxe6 Nc5



Leaving the bishop on c1 was also possible, by playing 12.Qe2 instead.

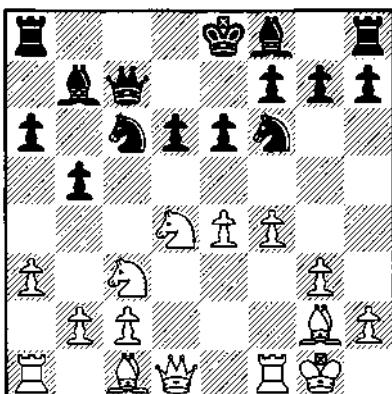
White has the luxury of experimenting with various move orders for launching the attack, depending on what Black plays.

12...O-O 13.g4 Nd7



Black is a few moves away from consolidating, so White needs to act quickly: 17.Qxh7! Leading to a pretty draw by repetition. (17.g6!? would have prolonged the struggle: 17...Be7 18.Qxh7! Re8 19.Qxg7 Nxe6 20.Qh7∞, and Black is scrambling to defend against the g-pawn.) 17...Rxh7 18.Rxf8+ Ke7 19.Rf7+ Kd8 20.Rf8+ Ke7 21.Rf7+ Kd8 (not 21...Kxe6? 22.Rxc7±, and White is up a pawn) 22.Rf8+ ½–½, Balog–Horvath, Budapest 2013.

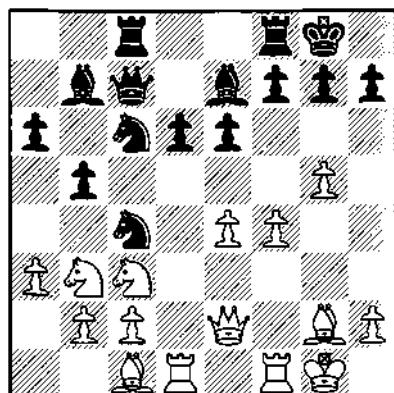
Back to our game, after **10...Nc6**:



11.Nb3 Be7 12.Be3

14.g5?!

In our view, 14.Qe2 was better with the common idea to meet 14...Nb6 with 15.Rad1 Nc4 16.Bc1. White has reached the ideal setup ripe for attacking opportunities 16...Rac8 (16...Bf6 is nicely answered with 17.Rd3!) 17.g5:



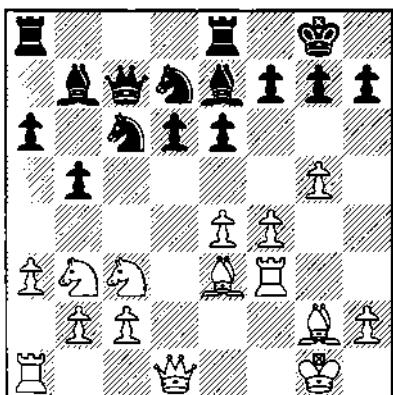
Despite the computer's enthusiasm for Black's position, it is really not very easy for Black to create queenside counterplay without allowing White a dangerous attack. For example, 17...a5 runs into 18.f5! And just to give you a sample line: 18...a4 19.f6! Bd8 (*better is* 19...axb3∞) 20.Qh5!→. All of a sudden White's attack is terrifyingly strong, and after 20...axb3 21.Rd3 White is just mating.

14...Rfe8?!

Missing a good opportunity.

14...Nb6!± followed by Nc4 would have exploited White's mistake, as White is unable to play Rad1 and Bc1 in time.

15.Rf3



The start of White's attack. You should lift this rook calmly and confidently in your own games!

15.Qh5→ was worth considering as well.

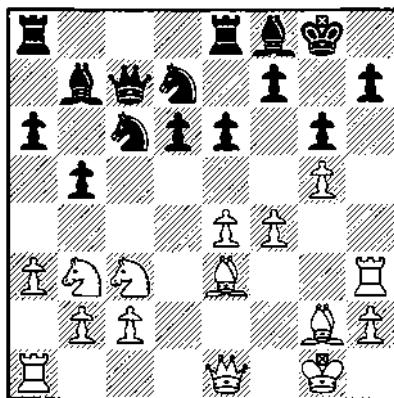
15...Bf8

A common defensive transfer of the bishop.

Another defensive try is 15...Nf8 to which White should respond 16.Rh3. Once again Black's position looks quite harmonious, but it is not easy

to generate counterplay without allowing f4-f5. For instance 16...Na5 (or 16...Rac8 17.Qe1↑ followed by Qh4, Rd1 or f1, and f4-f5) 17.Nxa5 Qxa5 18.f5!—After playing Na5 Black is unable to make use of the e5 square, making this advance quite powerful for White.

16.Rh3 g6 17.Qe1



Heading to the h4 square.

17.Qg4 was also fine, but note that with the game move, White retains the option of playing Qf2 and Rf1, to prepare f4-f5, if appropriate.

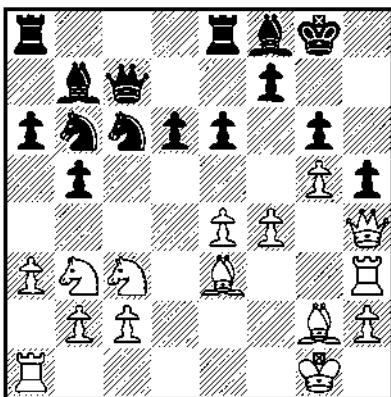
17...Nb6

GM Kveinys decides it is finally time to go for queenside counterplay. However, there is a serious flaw with his defensive setup.

As we saw in a variation of the previous game (see *18.Rf1!* in line b, page 157) after 17...Bg7 18.Qh4 Nf8 it looks as though Black has completely defended the kingside, but now 19.Rf1! and White can start looking for either f4-f5 or e4-e5. 19...Rac8 (19...Ne7 allows 20.Bd4±. Trading the dark-squared bishops favors White, as Black is left with some kingside weaknesses.) 20.Qf2±. It is hard for Black to prevent f4-f5,

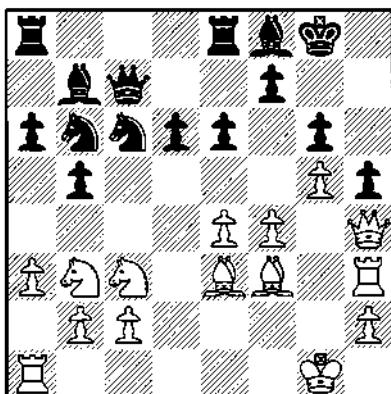
and as soon as his knight moves from c6 White can play Bd4.

18.Qh4 h5



A common defensive resource, hoping to block the h-file. If you'll recall in Game 13 (see the diagram on page 158, after 19.Bf3!), we already showed Fedorov's reaction to this move in his game against Khurtsidze.

19.Bf3!



This idea, to sacrifice the bishop on h5, was made famous by the game Kasparov–Anand, Linares 1994, a game we cover in depth in our chapter on the Classical Sicilian!

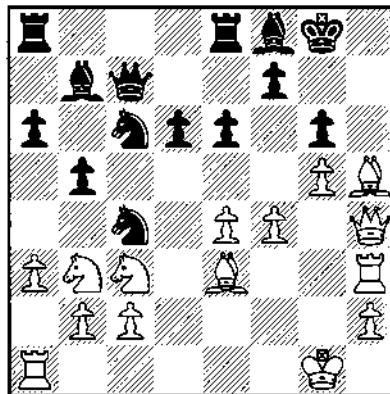
The simple 19.gxh6 *en passant* also leads to White's advantage after 19...Be7 20.Qg3→ followed by f4-f5, but Fedorov decides to go for the brilliancy prize!

19...Nc4

To his credit, Kveinys defends actively, so that if White slips in the attack Black will immediately take over the initiative.

White can assuredly sacrifice after 19...Bg7 as well: 20.Bxh5 gxh5 21.Qxh5 Kf8 22.f5→.

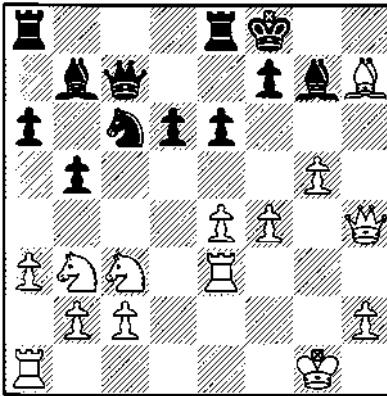
20.Bxh5



20...Nxe3

After 20...Bg7 There is no time to waste: 21.f5! White must break through! 21...exf5 22.Nd5 Qc7 23.Bxg6! It is always fun to explore positions with such dynamic attacks: 23...fxg6 24.exf5 gxf5 25.Qh7+ Kf7 26.Rh6!→.

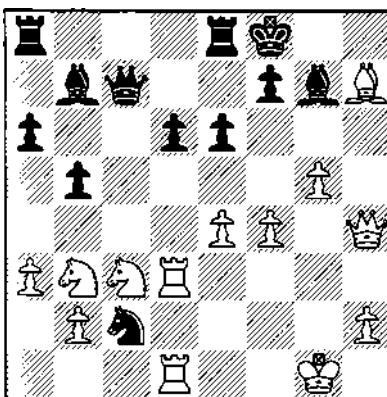
21.Bxg6! Bg7 22.Bh7+ Kf7 23.Rxe3



The dust has somewhat settled, and it is White who is up a pawn.

However, retaining the initiative is still the most important thing.

23...Nd4 24.Rd3 Nxc2 25.Rad1

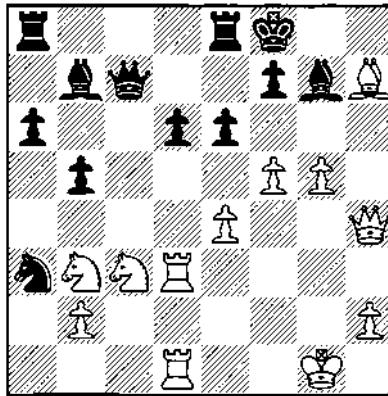


25...Nxa3?!

Winning a pawn but sidelining the knight.

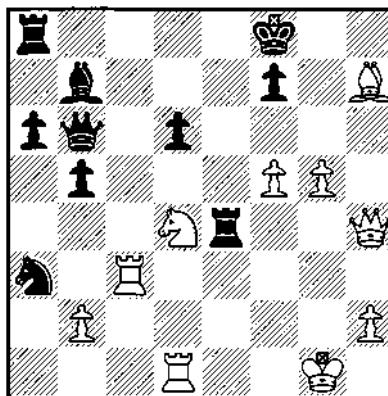
Somewhat better was 25...b4 16.axb4 Nxb4 27.R3d2±, where White would probably play either f4-f5 or g5-g6 next.

26.f5!



A winning decision—White's king is now a bit more vulnerable, but the threat of either f5-f6 or g5-g6 is too strong.

26...exf5 27.exf5 Bxc3 28.Rxc3 Qb6+ 29.Nd4 Re4



30.Qf2

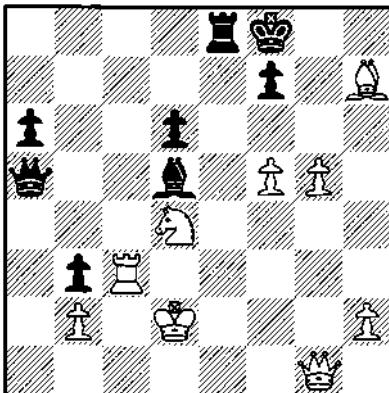
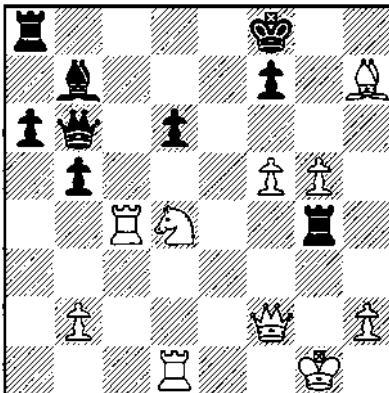
Better was 30.Qh6+ Ke8 31.g6! Rxd4 32.gxf7++– with a mating attack.

30...Nc4 31.Rxc4?!

Giving Black some unnecessary chances.

Again 31.g6 was winning, with the threat of g6-g7+ and f5-f6+.

31...Rg4+!



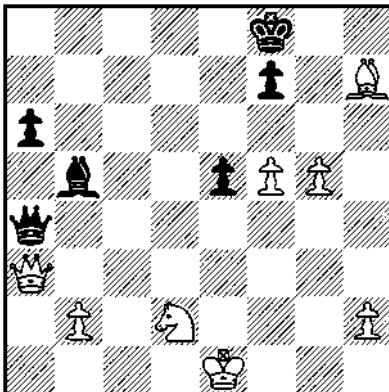
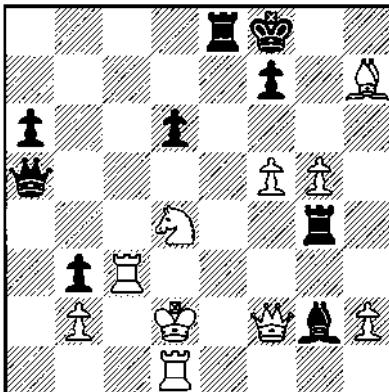
Black is able to get White's king out in the open.

**32.Kf1 Bg2+ 33.Ke2 Re8+
34.Kd2 Qa5+!**

Not 34...bxc4 35.Ne6++–.

35.Rc3 b4 36.Rg3 b3+ 37.Rc3

After the trade of rooks, it's all over—White is just up a clear piece.
**39...Qa2 40.Qc1 Qa4 41.Rd3 Bc4
42.Re3 Re5 43.Qc3 Rc5 44.Nxb3
Rd5+ 45.Ke1 Re5 46.Rxe5 dxe5
47.Nd2 Bb5 48.Qa3+ 1–0**



To Fedorov's credit, he is able to fend off the counterattack successfully and never loses his winning advantage.

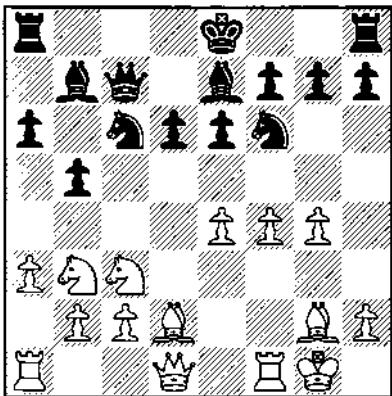
37...Bd5

Black's last chance was 37...Qa4, where White would have had to find the only winning move 38.Ne6+!.

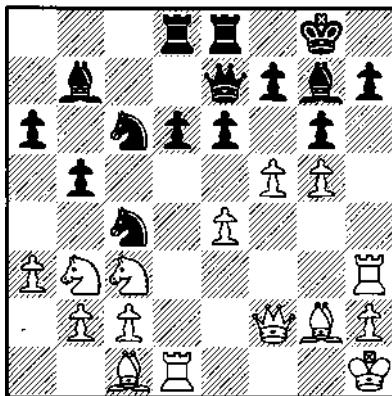
38.Rg1 Rxg1 39.Qxg1+–

Memory Markers

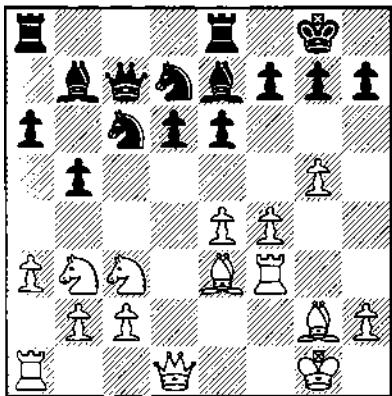
Here are reminders of some of the ideas and motifs in this chapter.



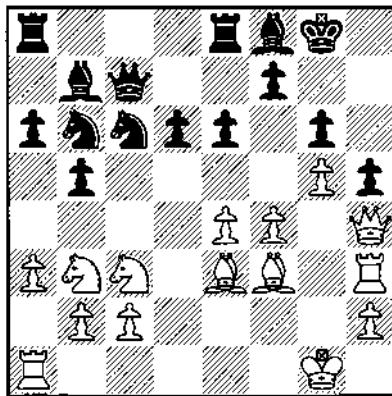
1. After 13.g4!. The start of White's attack. See diagram on page 160.



2. After 23.f5!. Opening more lines of attack. See diagram on page 162.



3. After 15.Rf3. The classic rook lift to h3. See diagram on page 167.



4. After 19.Bf3!. Threatening the powerful sacrifice Bxh5. See diagram on page 168.

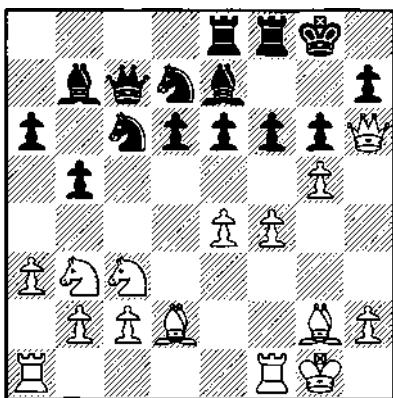
Exercises

White to play!

As White, practice finding the right moves when facing the Kan Variation.

Solutions to these exercises begin on page 523.

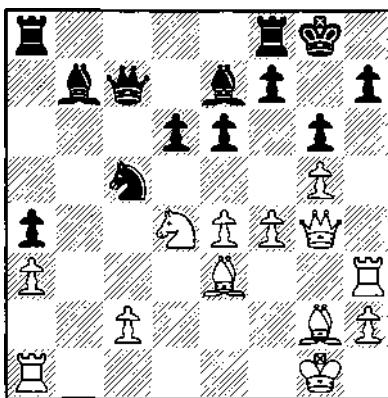
Exercise 1



Guseinov – Schneider
Dubai 2011

Black has just played 17...f6, counter-attacking in the center. How should White respond?

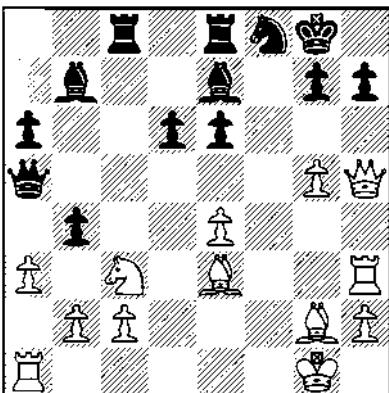
Exercise 2



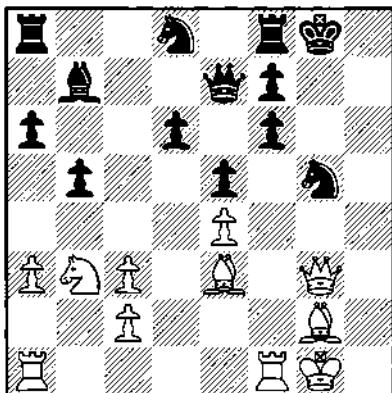
Alekseev – Yemelin
Chepukaitis 2013

White to play; find the strongest continuation.

Exercise 3



Exercise 4



Game 13

Additional Analysis

White to play; how should he continue the attack?

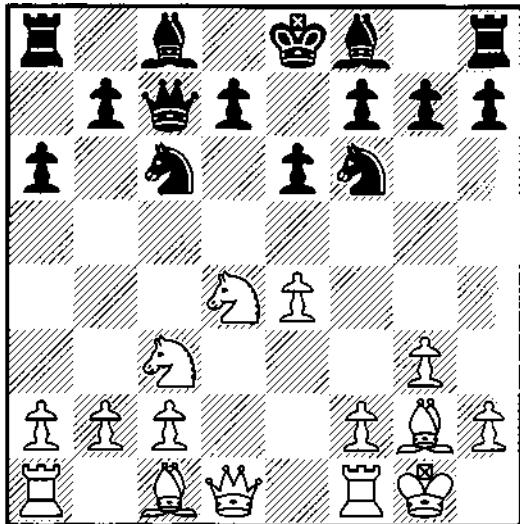
Amanov – Charbonneau

*Spice Cup Open
St. Louis 2012*

White to play; can you include all of your pieces into the attack?

Chapter 2b

The Taimanov Variation



1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nc6 5.Nc3 Qc7 6.g3 a6 7.Bg2 Nf6 8.O-O

Despite the similarities in structure, the Taimanov Sicilian actually leads to a completely different kind of game than the Kan. In the following sub-chapter we will often see White aim for a strategic advantage, such as a healthier pawn structure or control over a key square.

Theoretically speaking, **6.g3** is considered to be quite a dangerous approach to the Taimanov Variation. It has been chosen by many strong Grandmasters, and its repeat users include Adams, Leko, Tiviakov, Navara, and Guisenov, one of our heroes from the previous sub-chapter.

Also, fans of Fischer may recall two famous victories for Bobby in this variation as well: One against Tal in Bled 1961, and the second ten years

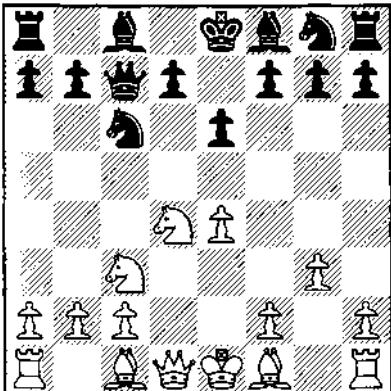
later, in Fischer's historic match with Taimanov himself!

From the diagrammed position above Black has a few different paths to choose from: Game 15 will cover **8...d6**, Game 16 will feature both **8...Nxd4** and **8...Bc5**, and in Game 17 we will look at **8...Be7**. Lastly, in Game 18 we will look at possible transpositions and certain sidelines, as well as the line **5...a6 6.g3 d6**, which can be thought of as a hybrid Kan-Taimanov system.

Game 15

Kavalek - Garcia Gonzales
Buenos Aires Olympiad 1978

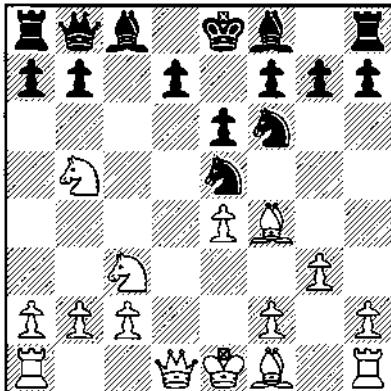
1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4
4.Nxd4 Nc6 5.Nc3 Qc7 6.g3



6...a6

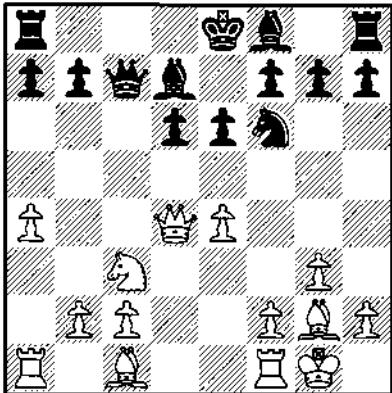
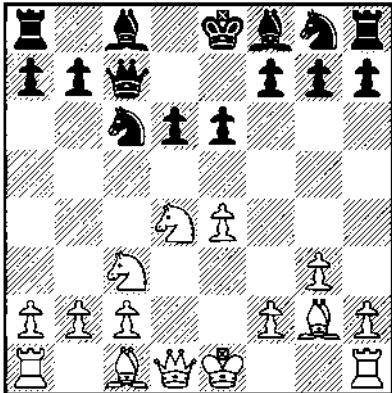
The main line and most flexible move. But before we move on, let's first understand why it is necessary for Black to control the b5 square:

6...Nf6 7.Ndb5! All the way back to 1961 Fischer proved that this line is not very playable for Black: 7...Qb8 8.Bf4 Ne5 (8...e5 is relatively best, but after 9.Bg5 a6 10.Bxf6 gxf6 11.Na3±, this is like a Sveshnikov gone terribly wrong! A. Ivanov-I. Ivanov, USA 1989.)



9.Be2! The key move, threatening Qd4. 9...Bc5 (or 9...a6 10.Qd4 d6 11.O-O-O! axb5 12.Bxe5+– Amanov-Utegaliyev, Pavlodar 2013) 10.Bxe5! Qxe5 11.f4 Qb8 12.e5. This led to one of Fischer's most famous victories: 12...a6 13.exf6 axb5 14.fxg7 Rg8 15.Ne4 Be7 16.Qd4+–, Fischer-Tal, Bled 1961.

After 6...d6 7.Bg2



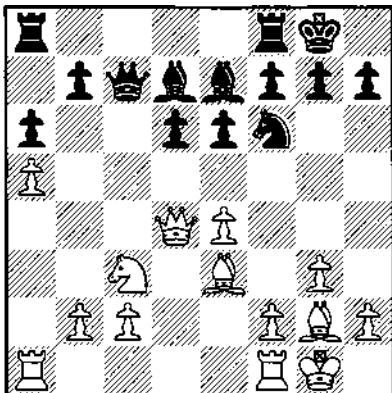
Black's best move is again a7-a6, which would transpose to one of the main lines of the Taimanov, but what if Black continues to omit this move?

a) 7...Bd7?! 8.Ndb5! Qb8 9.Bf4 Alas, the d6 pawn cannot be adequately defended against a quick Ndb5 and Bf4. 9...Ne5 (9...e5 10.Be3±, giving up the d5 square, is a huge concession for Black.) 10.Qd4! a6 11.Nxd6+ Bxd6 12.O-O-O+– and White is winning the piece back and will hold on to the initiative, Sokolov–Ninov, Groningen 1986.

b) 7...Nf6?! is no different: 8.Ndb5 Qb8 (or 8...Qd8 9.Bf4 e5 10.Bg5±) 9.Bf4 Ne5 (Or 9...e5 10.Bg5 a6 11.Bxf6 gxf6 12.Na3±, and with a knight coming to d5, Black is strategically busted, Galic–Zivkovic, Makarska Tucepi 1995.) 10.Qd4! a6 11.O-O-O axb5 12.Bxe5± Dunis–Acher, Gonfreville 2006.

c) The only serious option for Black is 7...Nxd4 8.Qxd4 Bd7, where trading the knights has solved the problem of Ndb5, but has given White good control over the center. 9.O-O Nf6 10.a4!

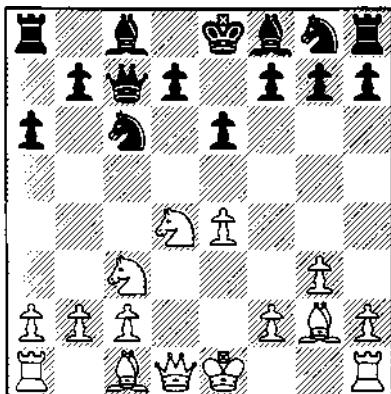
Advancing the a-pawn is a strong plan to squeeze Black on the queenside. GM Nigel Short showcased his positional understanding in the following model effort: 10...a6 Forced, to stop Nb5. (after 10...Be7?! 11.Nb5 Bxb5 12.axb5±, Black is losing the a7 pawn) 11.a5! Taking control of the b6 square, a common idea in the Sicilian. 11...Be7 12.Be3 O-O



13.Qb4! Clearing the way for Bb6 fixing Black's entire position 13...Bc6 14.Bb6 Qb8 (If 14...Qd7 then 15.Rfd1↑, and White can double up on the d-file next and prepare e4-e5. 15.Rfe1. White had full control over

the center, which led to a slower victory, Short–Portisch, Manila 1992. Worth considering though, was 15.e5!N where after 15...Nd7 16.Bxc6 bxc6 17.exd6 Bxd6 18.Qb3±, White is winning the battle on the queen-side and should further increase his advantage with moves like Na4, Rfd1, c2-c4, etc.

7.Bg2

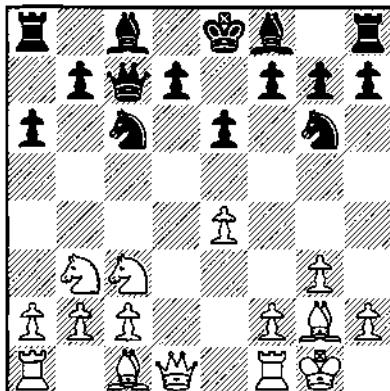


7...Nf6

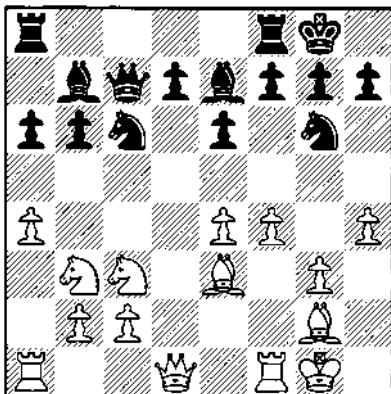
The classic and most popular way to develop in the Taimanov Variation.

A serious alternative is 7...d6 8.O-O Bd7, which will be covered in Game 18.

Worth mentioning is 7...Nge7 with the idea of trading knights and playing Nc6. We have a simple prescription for this line: 8.Nb3! avoiding Black's plan altogether, leaving Black's second knight somewhat awkward. 8...Ng6 White should have no reservations pushing e4-h5 to harass this knight: 9.O-O Also, 9.Qe2?! Be7 10.h4 f6 11.f4! O-O 12.Be3 b5 13.O-O-O± led to White's success in Hracek–Markus, Heraklio (2007.) and now:



a) Usual is 9...Be7, and although not necessary, 10.a4!? is an interesting idea, preventing Black from advancing b7-b5. (*There was nothing wrong with the immediate 10.f4.*) 10...b6 11.f4 Bb7 12.Be3. A unique benefit of playing a2-a4 is that White has the additional plan of Qe2-f2, putting pressure on Black's b6 pawn, which cannot be easily protected with the usual Nf6-d7. 12...O-O 13.h4!



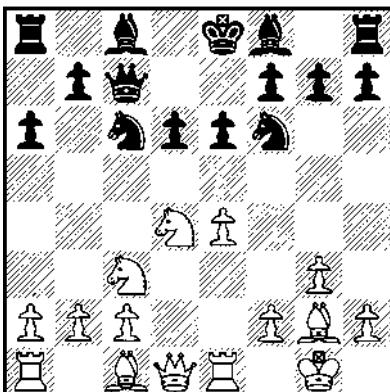
This is the main starting position of the g3-system against the Taimanov Variation. Black has several lines to choose from.

8...d6

A natural move, and one of Black's direct tries for equality.

8...Nxd4 and 8...Bc5 will be analyzed in Game 16, while 8...Be7 will be covered in Game 17.

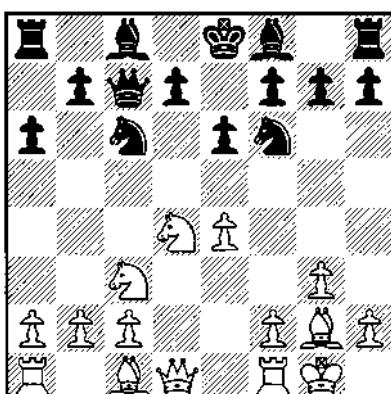
9.Re1!



It is clear that Black's knight is just misplaced. 13...Bf6 14.h5 (*14.e5± was also good.*) 14...Bxc3 15.bxc3 Nge7 16.h6↑. Unsurprisingly, White ended up winning with an attack along the dark squares in Sjugirov–Warszawski, Warsaw 2011.

b) GMs Láznicka and Iturriaga have improvised here with 9...h5, but White has a simple solution in 10.f4!N h4 11.Be3 and Black has no way of bothering White's king any more. After 11...d6, quite strong is 12.Na4!, leading to 12...b5 13.Nb6 Rb8 14.Nxc8 Rxc8 15.a4!± and Black's opening experiment has clearly failed.

8.O-O

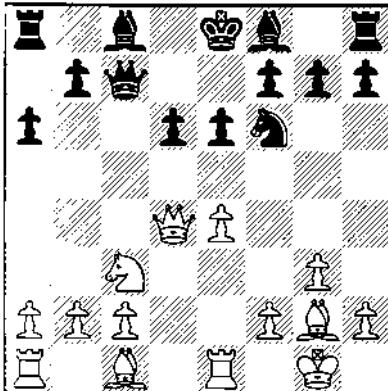


Surprisingly, this move already creates opening problems for Black. White is threatening Nxc6 and e4-e5 9...Bd7

The main line, protecting the c6 square.

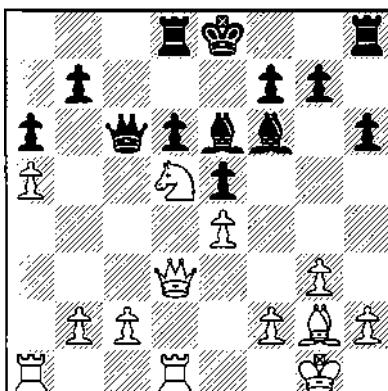
Before proceeding with the main game, let's investigate other tries in the position. We look at four alternatives, the dubious trade 9...Nxd4?!, 9...Rb8 on page 179, the retreat 9...Nd7 on page 181, and finally 9...Be7 on page 182.

Trading the knights with 9...Nxd4?! 10.Qxd4 just gives White better control over the center, leading to an easy advantage:



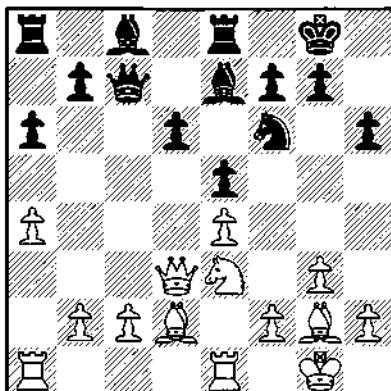
a) After 10...Be7 11.e5! dxe5 12.Rxe5, White's fianchettoed bishop is a powerful piece, applying Catalan-like pressure on the b7 pawn. 12...O-O 13.Bf4 Qd8 (or 13...Bd6 14.Rd1!±) 14.Qxd8!N *Baklan–Roststein, Austria 2009 continued 14.Rd1!±.* 14...Rxd8 15.Ree1±. Black's endgame is very passive. Na4 is coming with unpleasant consequences.

b) After 10...e5 11.Qd3 We'd like to show two instructive fragments:
b1) 11...Be7 12.Bg5! A familiar motif, gaining control over d5. 12...Be6 13.Red1 Rd8 14.a4 h6 15.Bxf6 Bxf6 16.Nd5 Qc6 17.a5!



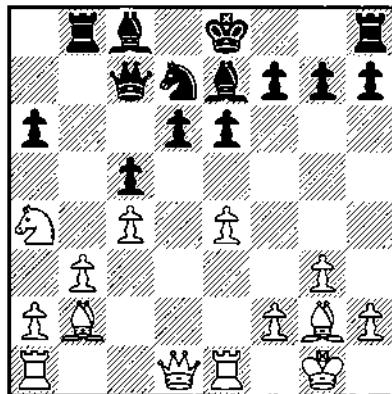
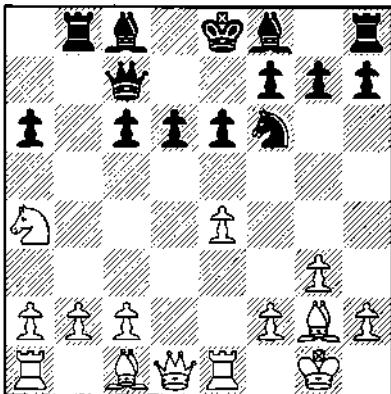
White can now advance his queenside pawns at will. 17...Bxd5 18.Qxd5 Qxd5 19.Rxd5±. With a better bishop and control over the queenside, White will play for two results, Pavlov–Shalimov, Kiev 2009.

b2) 11...h6 12.Nd1! Transferring the knight to e3 from where it will control the important squares c4, d5, f5, and g4. 12...Be7 13.Ne3 O-O 14.Bd2 Re8 15.a4!



A common idea: advancing the a-pawn almost always leads to positional gains in this structure. 15...Be6 16.c4 White is correctly aiming to slowly gain space all over the board. 16...a5 17.f4! Qb6 18.b3 Ng4 19.f5!±, with a huge space advantage. GM Solak eventually won with the inevitable kingside pawn storm, Solak–Andrijevic, Zlatibor 2008.

9...Rb8 is a serious possibility that is similar to the main game. 10.Nxc6 bxc6 11.Na4!?



The point of this odd looking move is to play c2-c4 and b2-b3, with a space advantage.

Here are a few examples of how play might develop:

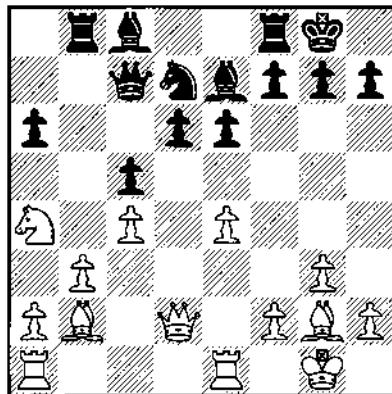
a) Dubious is 11...c5?!. Black should actually wait for White to play c2-c4 before making this move. GM Navara now shows us why: 12.b3! Bd7 13.Nb2! With the pawn on c6, Black could play e6-e5 and Be6 to deal with the knight coming to c4, but now it would be quite bad to give up the e5 square. 13...Bc6 14.Nc4 The knight is simply superb on this square, supporting the e4-e5 break for a future moment. 14...Be7 15.Bb2 e5 A forced concession. 16.f4! Nd7 17.Bc3 Rc8 18.Bh3±, placing full pressure on Black's position and winning a pawn, Navara-Zakhartsov, Pardubice 2009.

b) 11...Be7 12.c4 c5 13.b3 transposes to line c2 after 13...O-O 14.Bb2 Nd7.

c) 11...Nd7 The main move, controlling squares c5 and e5. 12.c4 c5 As we'll learn from the main game, Black often plays this move to keep his structure stable. 13.b3 Be7 14.Bb2

c1) Now 14...Bf6? is a serious blunder. After 15.Bxf6 Nxf6 16.Qd2 Black is unable to defend the d-file. 16...O-O 17.Rad1 Now one nice line: 17...Ne8 18.e5! dx5 19.Qd8 Qxd8 20.Rxd8+-. White is winning the c5 pawn, as well as e5 and probably a6.

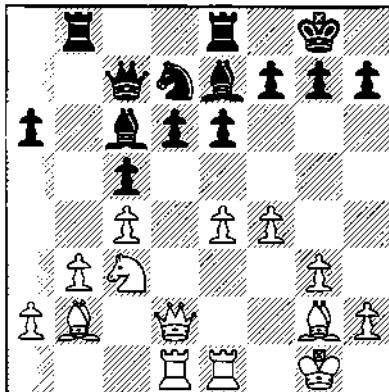
c2) 14...O-O 15.Qd2



In this middlegame, White usually tries to gain more space on the kingside while continuously looking for favorable opportunities to play e4-e5, harming Black's structure. Let's see a few examples how play often develops:

c21) 15...Ne5 16.Rad1 Nc6 17.f4
 Rf5 18.Qf2! A nice idea, threatening e4-e5, undermining Black's c5 pawn. 18...Nb4 19.e5 Bd7 20.exd6 Bxg6 21.Rxd6!? (*The simple 21.Nc3± followed by Ne4 would be a more straightforward way of posing problems for Black.*) 21...Qxd6 22.Nxc5↑ and Black was unable to defend against White's initiative in Tukrovsky-Shen, Los Angeles 2012.

c22) 15...Bb7 16.Rad1 Bc6 17.Nc3 Rfe8 Defending the bishop on e7, a necessity. (17...a5?! ran into 18.Nd5! Bxd5 19.cxd5 e5 20.Bf1± with the control over the light squares, Taimanov-Golizadeh, Sri Lanka 2009.) 18.f4!



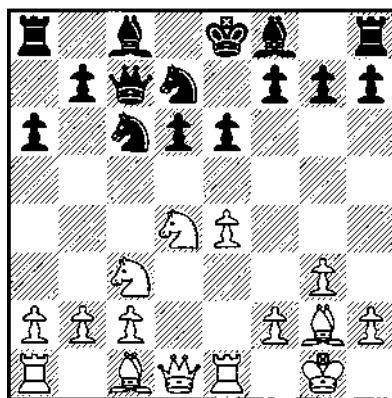
White's space advantage allows us the luxury to try out different plans. One idea is to play g2 and e4-e5, trying to isolate Black's c5 pawn. Another plan is to attack with g3-g4-g5, which should be familiar to anyone who studied our chapter on the Kan Variation!

c221) 18...Rbd8 19.g4!? (19.Qe2 is another option, with the idea e4-e5.) 19...Bb7 20.g5 Nb8 Now best was the immediate 21.f5!± with the idea Rf1 and f5-f6. Instead, Tarjan-

Grefe, California 1973, continued 21.Ne2→.

c222) Another example continued 18...Nb6 19.Ba1 Rbd8 20.Qf2 Rd7 21.g4! Qd8 22.g5 Bf8 23.h4 f6 24.Rd3→, Klimov-Shaposhnikov, St. Petersburg 2002.

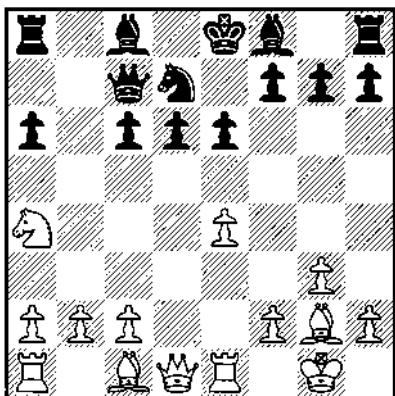
After 9...Nd7 White has several options:



a) 10.Nd5!? This thematic sacrifice has only been tested in one high-level game: 10...exd5 11.Nxc6 bxc6 12.exd5+ Be7 13.Qg4 g6?! (13...Rg8 was necessary, after which 14.Qe2 Ne5 15.f4 Ng4 16.h3 Nf6 17.dxc6∞ gives a highly unclear position.) 14.Qd4! Forcing Black to return the piece. 14...Ne5 15.f4 O-O 16.fxe5 dxe5 and now 17.Qxe5± is better than 17.Qc3± as played in Negi-Grachev, St. Petersburg 2012.

b) A more positional approach is 10.Nce2, preparing to replace the knight on d4 with a second knight, followed by b2-b3 and c2-c4. This led to success for White in Efimenko-Iotov, Rijeka 2010.

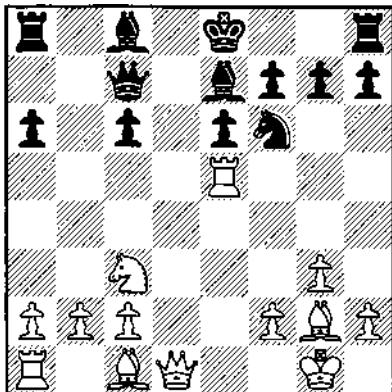
c) Lastly, after 10.Nxc6 bxc6 11.Na4 we should get play similar to the line 9...Rb8, which we just looked at



c1) 11...Be7 12.b3 O-O 13.Bb2 Bb7 14.Qd4! inducing a favorable trade of dark-squared bishops. 14...Bf6 15.Qd2 Rfd8 16.Rad1 Bxb2 17.Nxb2 Nf6 18.Nc4 d5 19.Qa5±. White has better minor pieces and a slightly healthier structure, Rublevsky-Kurnosov, Khanty-Mansiysk 2013.

c2) 11...Bb7 12.c4 c5 We can show one game here with familiar middlegame play: 13.b3 Be7 14.Bb2 O-O 15.Qd2 Ne5 16.f4 Nc6 17.Rad1 Rfd8. And now 18.Qf2!↑ as in the game Yankovsky-Shen, would have been strong, threatening either e4-e5 or f4-f5. Instead, 18.Kh1 delayed conflict for a few more moves, Senff-Iotov, France 2006.

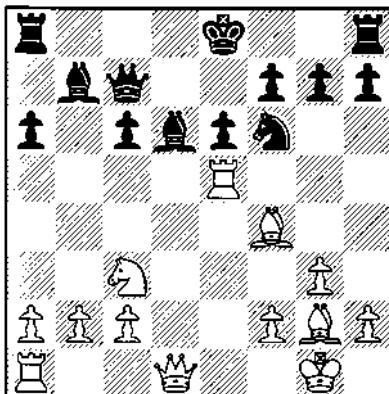
9...Be7 This position can also be reached via the move order 8...Be7 9.Re1 d6. White should now follow up on his threat: 10.Nxc6 bxc6 11.e5! dxе5 12.Rxe5!



The rook cannot be taken because of Bxc6+, but that is not the only concern for Black here. The threat of Bf4 coupled with the pressure of the light-squared bishop gives White an immediate initiative. This line is still being tested in practice, but with good preparation, White is holding the advantage:

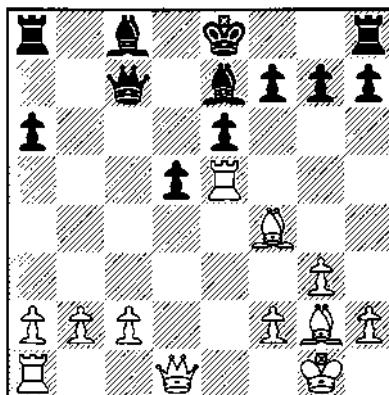
a) 12...Bd6 should be met with 13.Bf4! Bxe5 14.Bxe5 Qxe5 (*Trying to hold on to the exchange with 14...Qd7 just leads to trouble after 15.Bxf6 gxf6 16.Qf3 O-O 17.Ne4!±.*) 15.Bxc6+ Bd7 16.Bxa8±, De Firmian-Rasmussen, Copenhagen 1999.

b) 12...Bb7 13.Bf4 Bd6



14.Rxe6+! Sacrificing the rook for Black's dark-squared bishop is a very typical idea in this line. 14...fxe6 15.Bxd6 Qd7 16.Ba3 Qxd1+ 17.Rxd1 Even in the endgame, White has more than enough compensation for an advantage. 17...Rd8 18.Re1 Kd7 19.Na4!±. Black really has just too many weaknesses to survive, Mamedov–Lin, Gaziantep 2008.

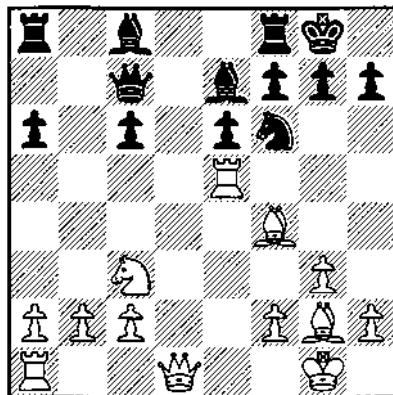
c) Good for White is 12...Nd5 13.Nxd5 cxd5 14.Bf4±, with threats of Rxd5, Rxe6, and also c2-c4. And now:



c1) 14...Bd6 was beautifully met with 15.Qxd5! Bxe5 16.Qxe5 Qxe5 17.Bxe5 Ra7 18.Bxg7 Rg8 19.Bf6±. The bishop and two pawns are definitely worth more than a rook here, Saldano Dayer–Bassan, Buenos Aires 2011.

c2) 14...Qc5 prevents c2-c4. 15.Rc1! Insisting on c2-c4! Black is in serious trouble: 15...Bf6 16.c4! Bxe5 17.Bxe5 O-O 18.cxd5 Qa5 19.Qg4+, Nikolenko–Kachar, Moscow 2000.

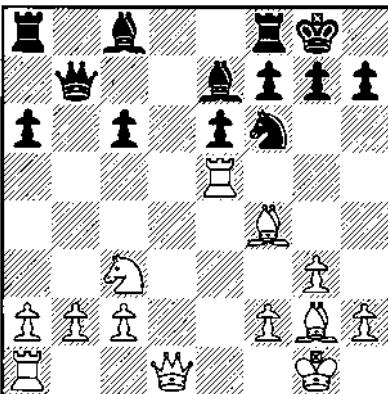
d) 12...O-O 13.Bf4



We think it's apparent by now that White's bishop belongs on f4!

d1) Again, 13...Bd6 runs into 14.Rxe6! Bxf4 (14...Bxe6? 15.Bxd6+-) 15.Rxc6 Qb8 16.gxf4. White's two extra pawns and supremely active pieces are "probably" enough for a winning advantage here. 16...Bg4 (not 16...Qxf4?? 17.Rxf6+-) 17.Qc1+-, Mackic–Cetkovic, Yugoslavia 1994.

d2) Black's best try for equality is 13...Qb7:

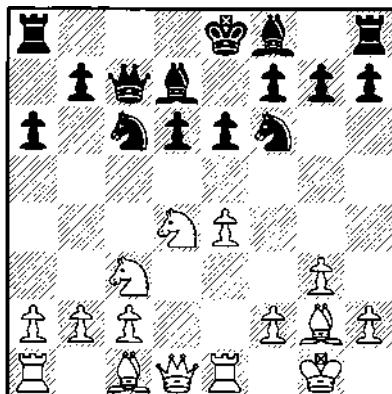


White aims to keep a small positional edge based on putting pressure against Black's weakened queenside.

d21) 14.Re1!? hasn't been tested much but looks promising, with the simple plan of putting the bishop on e5 immediately. 14...Nd5 (or 14...Rd8 15.Qe2 Qxb2? 16.Bxc6 Ra7 17.Qe3±) 15.Be5 Rd8 16.Nxd5 exd5 (if 16...cxd5 then 17.c4±) 17.Qd4 f6 18.Bf4±. White's pieces dominate the center, and Black still has a bit of work to do before equalizing.

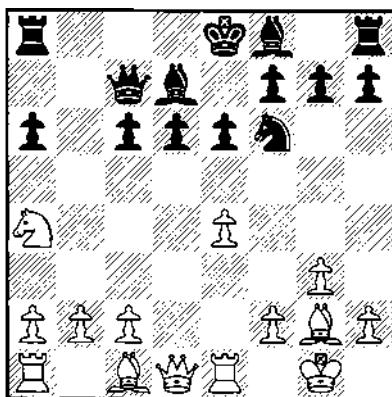
d22) Zhanibek chose 14.b3 and was able to slowly grow his advantage with crisp play: 14...Rd8 15.Qe2 Bd7 16.Rd1 Be8 17.Re3! Doubling the rooks along the d-file. 17...a5 18.Red3 Rxd3 19.Rxd3 Nd5 20.Be5! As we can see, Black's position is just passive with no signs of active play. 20...Nb4 21.Rd2 Rd8 22.Rxd8 Bxd8 23.a3 Nd5 24.Ne4! Heading to either c5 or d6. 24...f6 25.Bb2 Qe7 26.c4 Nc7 27.Qd2±. With control over the d-file and lots of pressure against Black's weaknesses, White went on to win, Amanov–Banawa, Los Angeles 2010.

Back to our game, after 9...Bd7:



10.Nxc6 bxc6

10...Bxc6? is bad due to 11.Nd5!±.
11.Na4!



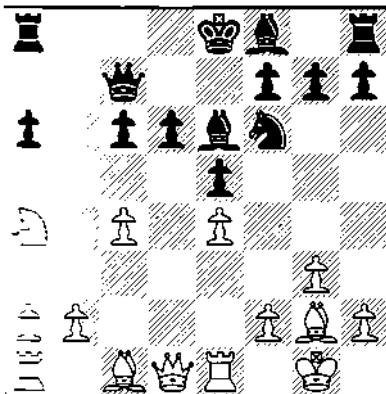
The start of a strong plan: c2-c4 followed by Nc3, restricting Black's center. After that, White will try to build up pressure against the d6 pawn.

11...Rb8

Getting this rook off the long diagonal is necessary if Black wants to play c6-c5, as otherwise White will have e4-e5.

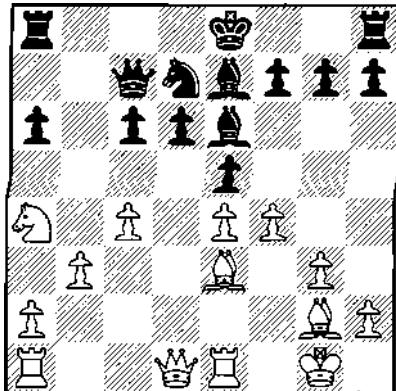
Developing with 11...Be7 allows White to mess with Black's structure: 12.c4 O-O 13.c5! Rad8 (After 13...dxc5 14.Be3 Rfb8 15.Rc1±, once White wins the c5 pawn he will have a decent positional edge.). Now 11...Be3N seems like the best try for advantage. (Sutovsky-Polgar, 2006 Le Ziyon 2006, continued 11...Be3N) 14...dxc5 15.Qc2±. After White captures with Bxc5 he will have better minor pieces and a much better position to play.

GM Wang Hao came up with an interesting 11...e5!? 12.c4 Be6, solving the problem of the light-squared bishop:



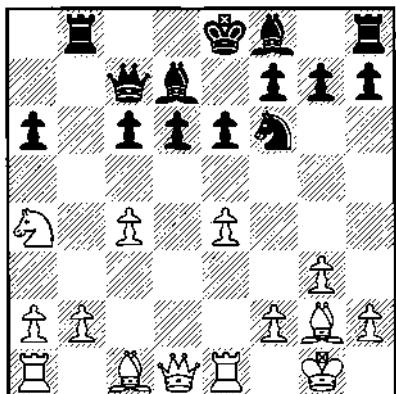
Now 13.c5 doesn't seem so effective because Black's light-squared bishop is quite an active piece. After 13...dxc5 14.Qc2±, Guseinov-Wang Hao, Shamkir 2014, White won the pawn back and got a small structural advantage, but Black was still able to hold.

Instead, we think White should succeed with 13.Be3N Nd7 (not 13.Bxc4?? 14.Nb6+–) 14.b3 Be7 15.f4?!



This seems like the best way to put pressure on Black's structure, forcing him to give up some central control: 15...exf4 16.gxf4 f6 17.Qh5+ (Another idea is 17.Bh3?! Bxh3 18.Qh5+ g6 19.Qxh3 O-O 20.Rad1±, where Black has passive pieces and lots of weaknesses.) 17...Bf7 18.Qf3 O-O 19.Rad1±. This position looks noticeably better for White, who can improve his position with Bh3, Nc3, Kh1, etc. It seems hard for Black to find a constructive plan.

12.c4



12...c5

If 12...Be7 then 13.c5! is unpleasant: 13...dxc5 14.b3!. Once c5

falls, Black will be left with weaknesses on the queenside. 14.Be3 is also a standard way to win back the c-pawn.

13.Nc3

Returning the knight to control the center.

13...Be7 14.Bf4!?

A logical idea, provoking e5 and taking the game to strategic paths.

Another perfectly playable option is 14.b3 Bc6 15.Bb2 O-O 16.f4 with similar play to the line **9...Rb8** on page 179. In fact, play transposes after 16...Rfe8 17.Qd2 Nd7 18.Rad1, reaching the diagram on page 181, in line c22.

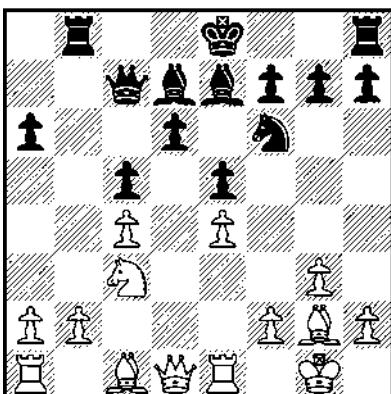
14...e5

Black is forced to make this concession, giving up the d5 square.

14...Rxb2? Loses tactically to 15.e5! dx5 16.Bxe5 Qd8 17.Nb5± and Black must give up an exchange.

Black is clearly worse after **14...O-O** 15.e5 Ne8 16.Qe2 Bc6 17.Rad1±. As soon as Black captures on e5, the c5 and a6 pawns will become hard to defend, Gruenfeld–Quinteros, Thessaloniki 1984.

15.Bc1

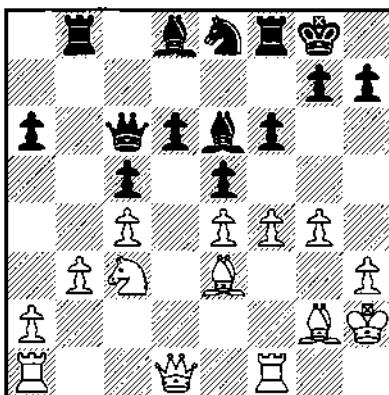


White has lost some time, but provoking e6-e5 was surely worth it. The plan off2-f4 is now quite effective to gain space and put pressure on Black's position.

15...O-O 16.b3

A useful move, rendering Black's rook ineffective.

We can learn from another instructive game in this line: 16.h3!? Slow, but thoughtful. White gains a bit of space while asking the opponent to come up with a constructive plan. 16...Be6 17.b3 Qd7 18.Kh2 Ne8 19.f4. f6 (*If 19...exf4, then 20.Bxf4± with the follow up of Qd2 and Rad1, or even e4-e5, should lead to a clear advantage.*) 20.Be3 Qc6 21.g4 Bd8 22.Rf1



These positions tend to be very difficult to play for Black. White can spend many moves improving his position, while Black must shuffle his pieces without any clear target. 22...Ba5 23.Ne2.Nc7 24.f5 Bf7 25.h4+. Black has no answer to the impending pawn storm, Gruenfeld–Votava, Rishon Le Ziyyon 1992.

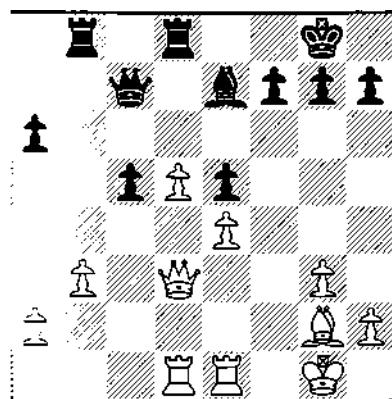
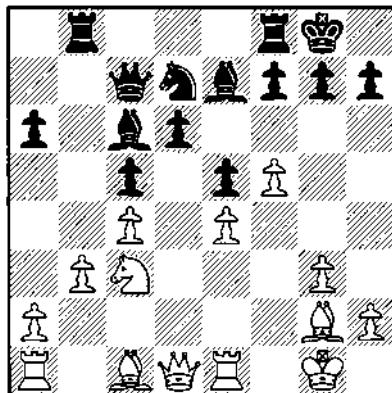
16...Bc6 17.f4

Gaining space and putting pressure on Black's position, a familiar idea.

White could also consider slowly narrowing his position with moves 17.Qd3 or 17.h3±.

17...Nd7?!

Allowing White to gain too much space. In reality, 17...exf4 was not bad. 18.Bxf4 (*More ambitious is 17...e4, but after 18...Nd7 19.Bb2 Black has good piece play with 19...Rfe8, Nf6, and Qb7 all on agenda.*) 18...Nd7 19.Qd3 Ne5 20.e5 dxe5 21.Rad1 Rfd8 22.Nd5± 23.cxd5±



White is definitely to be preferred in this position since Black must defend passively, but winning would still be a serious technical task. Compared to the game, Black's position seems much more holdable, although probably not to every Sicilian player's taste.

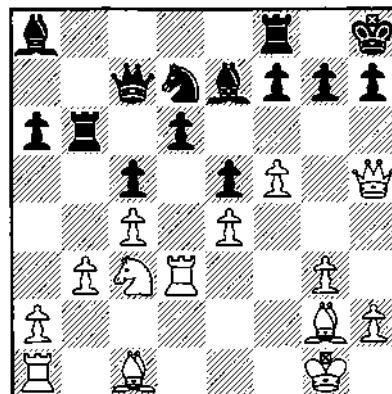
18.f5!

With the d5 square as a potential outpost and more space on the kingside, White has a large strategic advantage. GM Lubomir Kavalek now does a great job of stretching Black's defenses and preparing the eventual kingside pawn storm.

18...Kh8 19.Re3

Before pushing the g-pawn forward, White first applies pressure on the d6 pawn.

19...Rb6 20.Rd3 Ba8 21.Qh5!?



A move full of finesse, posing a serious question to Black—how to deal with the threat of g3-g4 and Rh3?

21...g6?!

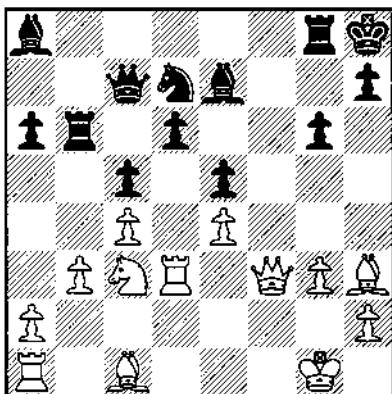
Exactly what White was hoping for! Black's kingside is now considerably weaker and easier to attack.

Better was 21...Nf6, where White can return with 22.Qe2↑, and Black's knight doesn't really want to be on f6, where it will come under attack after g3-g4-g5.

22.Qf3 Rg8 23.fxg6!

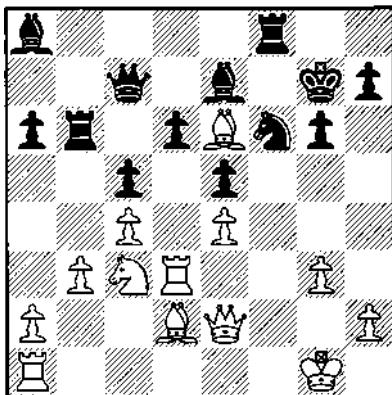
Opening the f-file and weakening the e6 square.

23...fxg6 24.Bh3!±

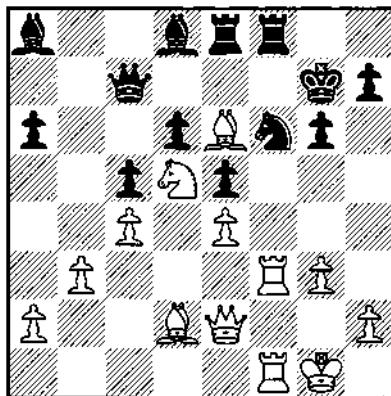


Black's defense has become very difficult, if at all possible.

**24...Rf8 25.Qe2 Kg7 26.Be6 Nf6
27.Bd2**



White's plan now is to transfer the heavy pieces over to the f-file, applying as much pressure as possible.
27...Rbb8 28.Rf1 Rbe8 29.Rdf3 Bd8 30.Nd5!

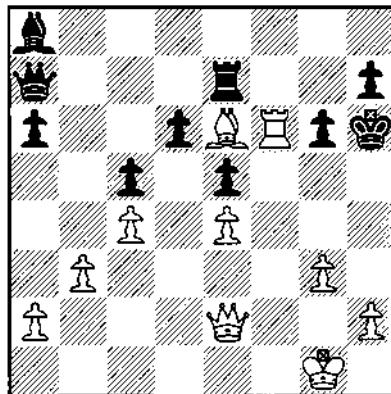


Now if Black takes on d5, White's bishop on e6 will be protected.

30...Qa7 31.Bh3

Perfectly fine, White's advantage is not going anywhere.

Already winning was 31.Bh6+
Kxh6 32.Nxf6 Bxf6 33.Rxf6 Rxf6
34.Rxf6 and Black's king cannot survive, for example 34...Re7:

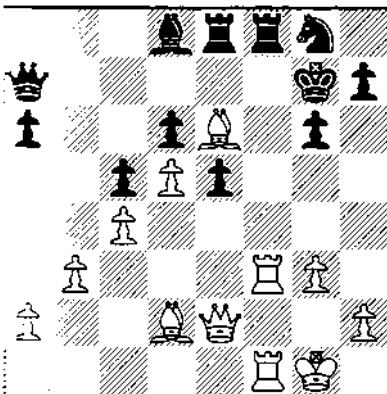


After 35.Rf8!! Rxe6 36.Rg8, Black has to give up his queen to avoid mate.

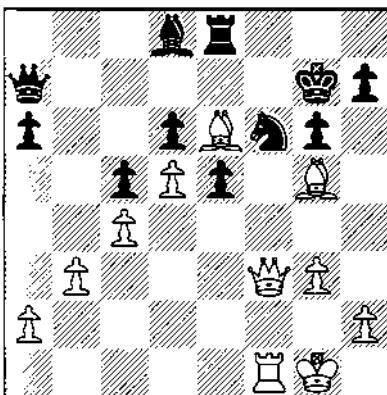
1...Bxd5

It's hard to suggest something better for Black, as the knight on d5 is quite an imposing piece.

Staying put with 31...Bc6 would only delay the inevitable breakthrough. For instance, 32.Qe3! 33.Be6! looks winning, the point being that after 33...Rxf3 34.Qxf3 35.Qf8+ Kh8 36.Rf7 Black again has to give up the queen to avoid mate. 32.exd5 Ng8 33.Be6+-



The bishop returns to its lovely outpost, controlling the key f7 square. A winning breakthrough is not far off. 33...Rxf3 34.Qxf3 Nf6 35.Bg5



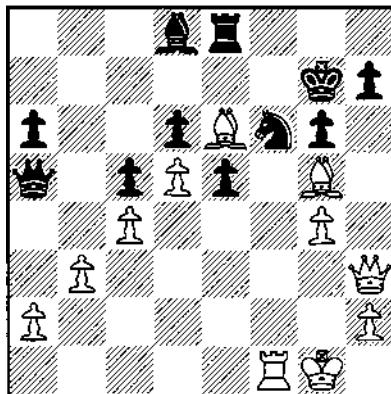
35...Qe7

The natural 35...Rf8 loses to 36.Qe3! Re8 37.g4! with the deadly threat of 38.Bxf6 Bxf6 39.g5, followed by Rf7+ and Qh3.

36.Qe3!

Setting up the same threat as in the previous note, and also preventing Rf8.

36...Qc7 37.g4 Qa5 38.Qh3 1-0



A good time to end the game, as White's attack can no longer be held off.

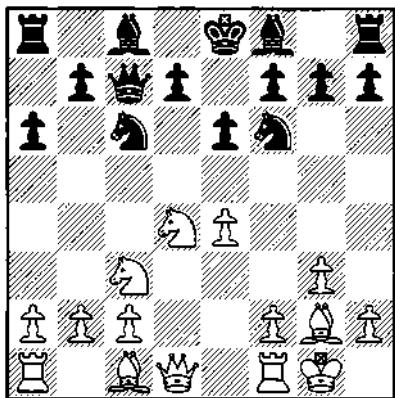
The only reasonable defense to Qh6+ is 38...h5, but this doesn't prolong the game for very long: 39.gxh5 Nxh5 (or 39...gxh5 40.Bxf6+ Bxf6 41.Qg3++- and Black loses the bishop.) 40.Rf7+ Kh8 41.Qe3!+- White's queen will soon appear on h6 to deliver checkmate.

Game 16

Howell – Djukic

European Individual Championship
Plovdiv 2012

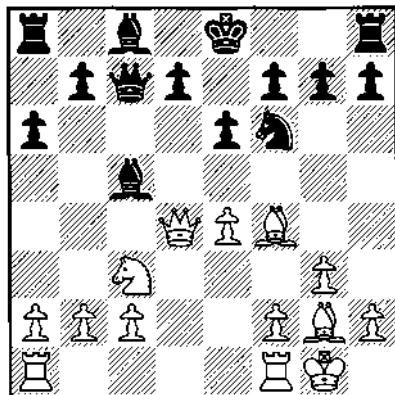
1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4
4.Nxd4 Nc6 5.Nc3 Qc7 6.g3 a6
7.Bg2 Nf6 8.O-O



8...Bc5

Another one of Black's several unique tries in the position, placing the bishop on the a7-g1 diagonal.

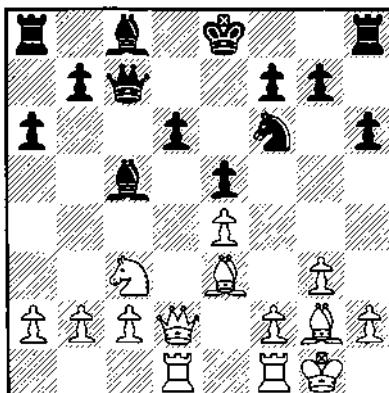
An older main line is 8...Nxd4 9.Qxd4 Bc5, a solid option for Black.
10.Bf4!



An important move, leading to a slightly better position for White. (10.Qd3 is a serious alternative, worth looking into.)

Now, going into the endgame with 10...Bxd4?! 11.Bxc7 is quite dismal for Black. There have been a few games here, with the results favoring White. Black still needs to solve the problem of the light-squared bishop. 11...Bxc3 (After 11...O-O 12.Bd6 Re8 13.e5±, Black is basically paralyzed.) 12.bxc3 d5 13.exd5 Nxd5 14.Be5. In addition to Bxg7, White is also threatening c3-c4 and Rab1. 14...f6 15.c4! fxe5 16.cxd5±. With Rfe1 coming, Black is losing a pawn, Cramling–Gudmundsson. Groningen 1982.

Better is 10...d6 11.Qd2 h6. This move is necessary in order to prevent Bg5. (If Black refrains from h6, White can get a clear edge by inducing e6-e5 and then occupying the d5 square: 11...O-O 12.Rad1 e5 13.Bg5!±. A familiar idea, exchanging the defender of the d5 square, Toth–Sarlo, Mar del Plata 1996.) 12.Rad1 e5 13.Be3

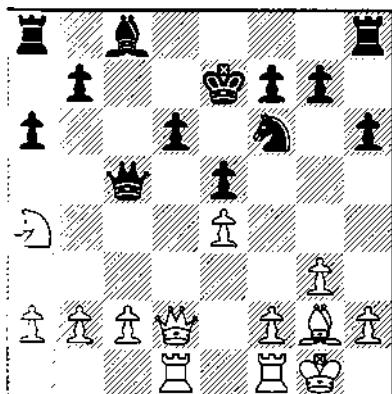


Black has tried several moves in this position—we actually look at five possibilities—but only

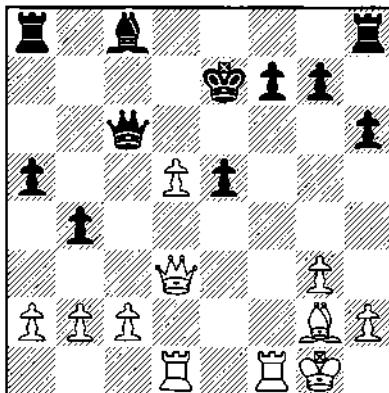
$\text{ne e, } 13\ldots \text{Be6}$, is a serious candidate for equality.

a) First, $13\ldots \text{Bxe3?}$ loses a pawn after $14.\text{fxe3! Be6 (not } 14\ldots \text{Ke7? } \text{Rx}f6+\text{--}) 15.\text{Qxd6}\pm$, Peng–Hegde, Kuala Lumpur 1993.

b) $13\ldots \text{Ke7}$ A strange looking move. Black intends to capture on c5 with the queen, avoiding a structure where White gets a passed pawn at d5, which is the case after Bxc5 dx5 Nd5 . But after $14.\text{Bxc5 Qxc5}$, leaving the king on e7 has its own drawbacks, of course— $15.\text{Na4!}$

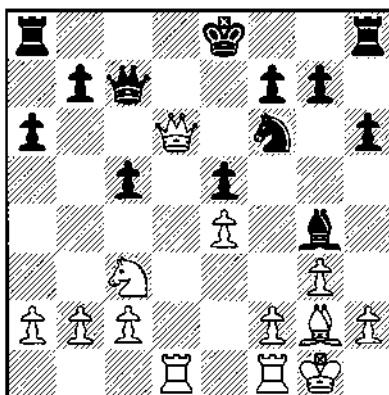


Kicking the queen in order to play f-4 and open the center. $15\ldots \text{Qc6 } 15\ldots \text{Qc7 } 16.\text{f4 a5 } 17.\text{Qd3 b5 } 18.\text{Nc3}\pm$ (Georgiev–Dorobanov, New York 1998 is similar to the next line.) $16.\text{f4!}$ threatening fxe5 and Qb4+ , with devastating consequences, which forces Black's reply: $16\ldots \text{a5 (not } 16\ldots \text{Qxa4?? } 17.\text{Qxd6+ Ke8 } 18.\text{Qd8 mate)}$ $17.\text{fxe5 dx5 } 18.\text{Qd3!}$ threatening Qa3+ and forcing Black to further weaken his position: $18\ldots \text{b5 } 19.\text{Nc3 b4 (19...Qc5+ doesn't change anything—} 20.\text{Kh1 Be6 } 21.\text{Nd5+ Bxd5 exd5 Qd6 } 23.\text{Rde1}\pm$, Gdanski–Sarfman, Polanica Zdroj 1992.) $19.\text{Nd5+ Nxd5 } 21.\text{exd5!}$



Strategically, since Black's king is still in the center, White should keep queens on the board. (*The queen trade* $21.\text{Qxd5}\pm$ was made in Guseinov–Akesson, Cappelle la Grande 2006) $21\ldots \text{Qd6 } 22.\text{Rf2}\pm$. Next, White can advance the c-pawn, combined with threats against the e5 pawn.

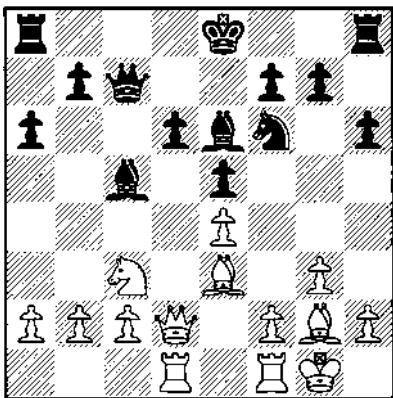
c) $13\ldots \text{Bg4 } 14.\text{Bxc5 dx5 } 15.\text{Qd6!}$ leads to a good endgame for White:



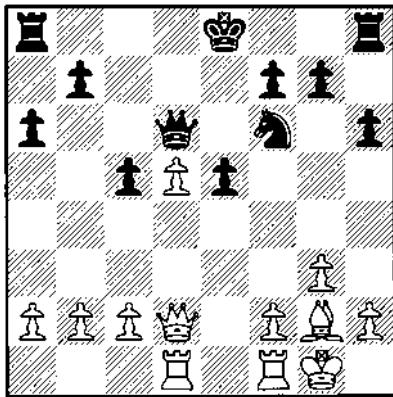
$15\ldots \text{Qxd6}$ (Alekseev–Grachev, Moscow 2008, continued $15\ldots \text{Rc8 } 16.\text{f3 Be6 } 17.\text{f4}\pm$) $16.\text{Rxd6 Be6 } 17.\text{f4 Rd8 } 18.\text{Rb6}\!\uparrow\!\text{!}$ Black doesn't have a good way to defend the b7 pawn, since Rb8 allows Rd1 while Bc8 runs into Nd5, A. Ivanov–Ariel, Seattle 2002.

d) White has answered 13...O-O 14.Bxc5 dxc5 very successfully with 15.Qd6.

e) The main line for Black, theoretically speaking, is 13...Be6



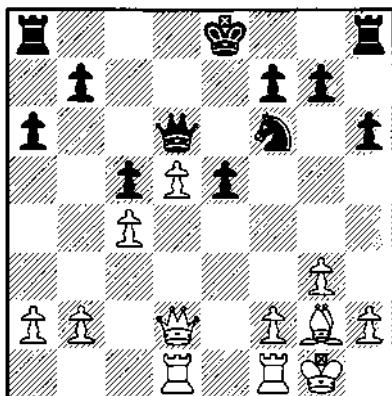
White has only one way to fight for the advantage: 14.Bxc5 dxc5 15.Nd5 Bxd5 16.exd5, and now 16...Qd6 is essential, to prevent d5-d6:



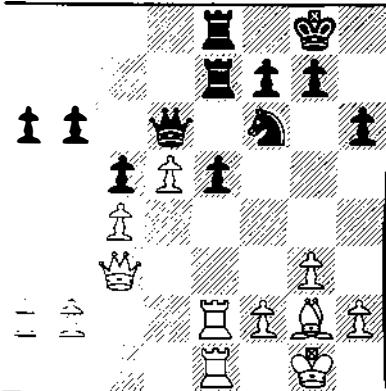
e1) 17.f4 is considered to be the main line, where after 17...O-O 18.fxe5 Qxe5, White sacrifices a pawn with 19.d6!? as otherwise Black can safely block the pawn with Qd6, Rad8, Rfe8 etc. The line continues 19...Qxb2 20.c4 Qxd2 21.Rxd2 Rab8

22.a4. White has enough compensation for the pawn, but no more, as practical results show that Black is holding just fine—even Carlsen himself could not squeeze out a win!—Carlsen—Pelletier, Biel 2006.

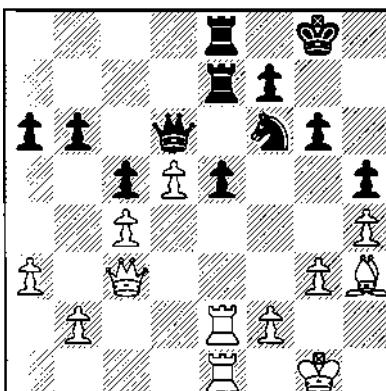
e2) We think 17.c4!? is White's best practical chance for an advantage:



Our plan is two-fold: First, double the rooks on the e-file tying Black's forces to the e5 pawn. Second, advance a2-a3 and b2-b4 opening a second front on the queenside. To illustrate this plan in action, we'd like to present a model game played by Zhanibek: 17...O-O 18.Rfe1 Rfe8 19.Qc3 Re7 20.Re1 Rae8 21.Rde1 b6

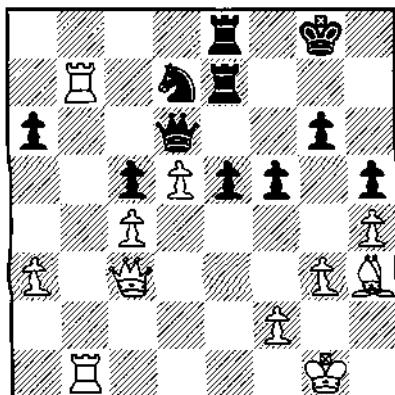


The first step of White's plan, moving the rooks on the e-file, is now complete. 22.a3! Now it's time to create a second weakness. Unfortunately for Black he has no active play whatsoever, and must sit idly by. 22...g6 23.h4 h5 24.Bh3! with the idea of dissuading the knight from going to d7:



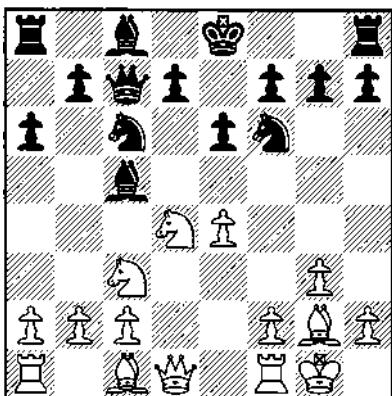
24...Nh7?! An all too typical psychological mistake. Without any counterplay, the defending side often reaches to "do something", even if it means weakening his own position. It was better to sit with Kg7, for example. 25.b4 f5?! Of course this was the point of Black's

previous move, but it was still wiser to return with Nf6 rather than extend the kingside. 26.bxc5 bxc5 27.Rb2!± Switching to the newly opened b-file. 27...Nf6 28.Reb1 Nd7 29.Rb7



Black's forces have remained passive this entire time, but White's army is now ready to infiltrate. 29...e4 30.Qe3! Taking advantage of Black's exposed kingside. 30...Rb8? The final mistake, in an already difficult position. 31.Rxb8+ Nxb8 32.Qg5 (*32.Qh6! was even stronger, with the additional threat of Bxf5.*) 32...Kf7 33.Qh6 Qd8 34.Bxf5!+- White had other wins, but this is the most destructive. 34...gxf5 35.Qxh5+ Kg7 36.Qg5+ Kf7 37.Qxf5+ Kg7 38.Qg5+ Kf7 39.Qf4+ 1–0, Amanov–Cherepov, Saratov 2008. A model effort for this line, proving that White can take the slower approach to win in such positions.

Now back to our main game, after
8...Bc5:

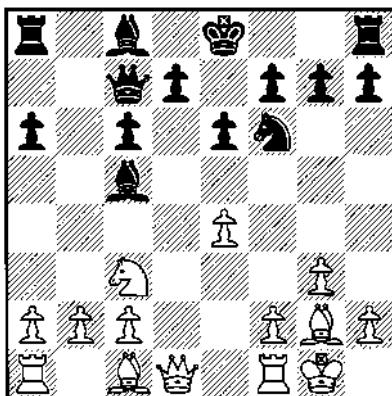


9.Nxc6

The main way for White to fight for an advantage against this line, although 9.Nb3 has been frequently played as well.

9...dxc6

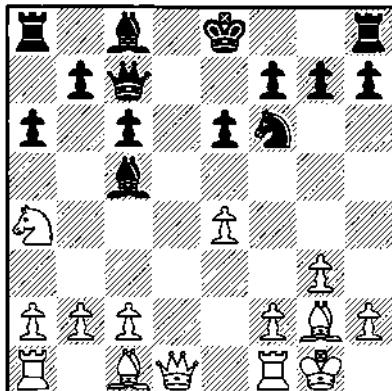
9...bxc6?! leaves Black with an even worse light-squared bishop than in the main game:



10.Na4 Ba7 (10...Be7?! allows 11.e5!, a common trick in this line, leading to White's advantage. 11...Qxe5 12.Nb6 Rb8 13.Bf4 Qxb2 14.Bxb8 Qxb6 15.Bd6±.) 11.c4 with the

threat of c4-c5. 11...d6 12.c5! dxc5 13.Be3. After White wins the pawn back, he will have a clearly superior structure. 13...c4 14.Bxa7 Rxa7 15.Qd4±, Jansa–Handke, Andorra 1998.

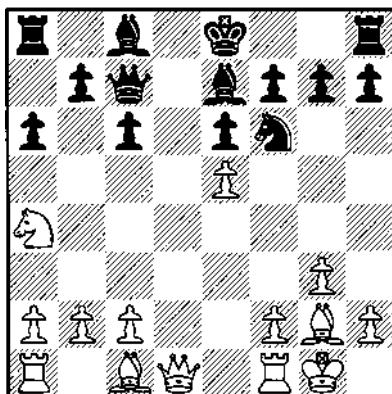
10.Na4!



The same key move as in the previous game, freeing the c-pawn to advance.

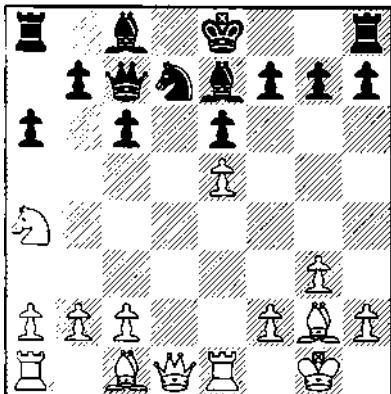
10...Ba7

10...Be7?! once again allows the typical trick: 11.e5!



Now bad are both 11...Qxe5? 12.Nb6 Rb8 13.Bf4+– and 11...Nd5? 12.c4 Nb6 13.Nxb6 Qxb6 14.Qg4±.

Therefore 11...Nd7 12.Re1



a) Now 12...Nxe5? is quite bad due to 13.Bf4, for instance 13...f6 or 13...Bd6 14.Nc5! f6 15.Ne4 Be7 16.Qh5+ g6 17.Qh6± and White has huge compensation for the pawn.) 14.Rxe5! An aesthetic combination. 14...fxe5 15.Qh5+ g6 16.Qxe5 Qxe5 17.Bxe5 O-O 18.Nb6+- . After taking the rook White will be up a full piece.

b) After 12...O-O 13.Bf4± the e5 pawn restricts Black's entire position. White has a strong plan in Na4-c3-e4-d6, Popovic-Gross, Austria 1999.

11.c4

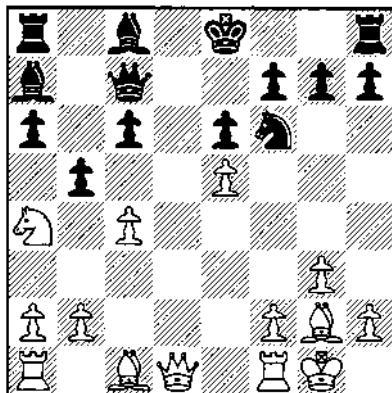
This move comes with a positional threat of c4-c5, shutting down Black's dark-squared bishop and fixing the e-pawn.

11...Nd7

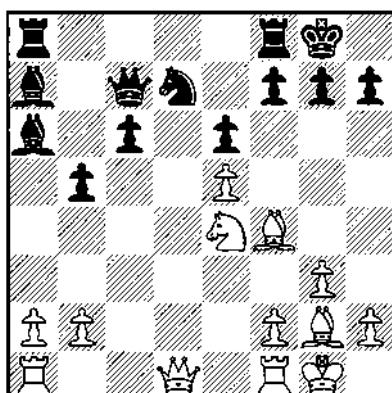
The most popular try, controlling the important squares c5 and e5.

Three other choices are: 11...b5, 11...h5, and 11...e5 on page 197.

In case of 11...b5, 12.e5! is again strong:



Simply put, if you can play e4-e5 in this structure without losing the pawn, it is often a good idea. 12...Nd7 13.cxb5 axb5 14.Nc3. This position is good and fairly easy to play for White, whereas Black must walk a tightrope in order to survive. 14...Ba6 The only move. (not 14...Nxe5 15.Bf4! O-O 16.Nxb5+-) 15.Ne4! O-O 16.Bf4



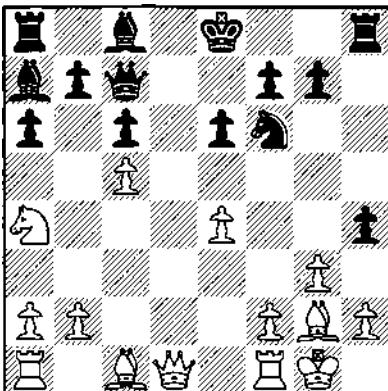
White has a lot of threats such as Nf6+ or just Qh5, which makes Black's position quite shaky.

a) Now 16...b4 allows 17.Nf6+! (17.Re1↑ is also possible) 17...Nxf6 18.exf6 Qa5 (18...e5 19.Qh5! exf4 20.Qg5+-) 19.Qg4 g6 20.Rfd1±, and

White has a huge edge thanks to the pawn on f6.

b) So Black must take the pawn: 16...Nxe5 and now 17.Qc2! Threatening Ng5. 17...f6 18.Nc5 Bc8 19.b4. White clearly has a ton of compensation for the pawn, with extremely active pieces and lots of targets. Let's briefly follow an instructive example: 19...Rd8 20.Rad1 Bxc5?! 21.Bxe5! Bd6 22.Bxd6 Rxd6 23.Rxd6 Qxd6 24.Rd1 Qe7 25.Bxc6±, Kuzmin–Averkin, Moscow 1973.

Also worth mentioning is 11...h5

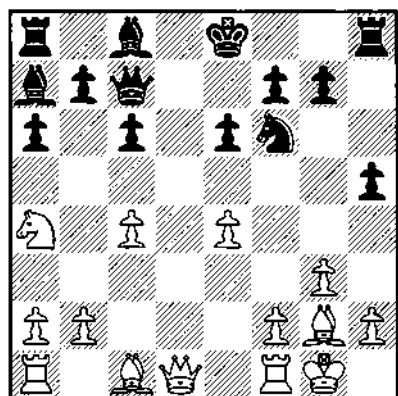


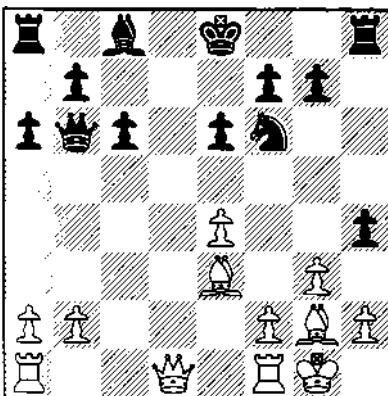
Now White has a couple of alternatives to fight for the initiative:

a) 13.Bg5 hxg3 14.fxg3!N A nice novelty, opening up the f-file. 14...e5 This is the only move, Black must develop his light-squared bishop as soon as possible. 15.Bxf6 (*Worth considering is 15.Rxf6? gxf6 16.Bxf6 Rh6 17.Bg5 Rh7 18.h4↑. Black has no way of making his rooks useful, which means White's compensation is quite good.*) 15...gxf6 16.Rxf6±. Black has some decent compensation, but the position is quite sharp with chances for both sides.

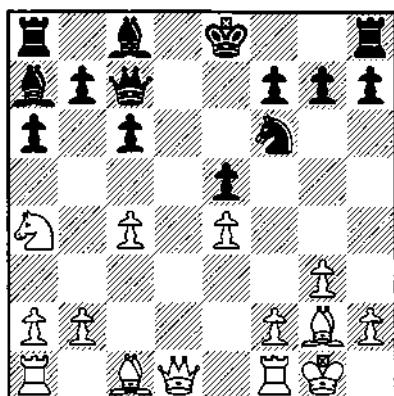
b) 13.Nb6!? A nice pawn sacrifice, playing for an eventual attack on the dark squares. 13...Bxb6 14.cxb6 Qxb6 15.Be3N (*This seems stronger than 15.Bf4, Wedberg–Cramling, Stockholm 2001.*)

This is an older try, which can definitely challenge the unprepared player. 12.c5 This move must be played in order to block Black's bishop. 12...h4





Finally, Russian GM Vitiugov recently has opted for 11...e5

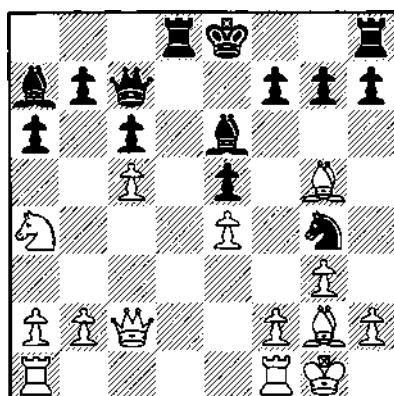


b1) 15...Qxb2 16.Qd6! This queen sortie should bring back warm memories of Game 1 from the Najdorf Variation! 16...Nd7 17.Bg5 f6 18.Qxe6+ Kf8 19.Bc1! Qb4 20.Rd1 Qe7 21.Qb3†. Black is still up a pawn, but his rooks are unconnected and his king is insecure. White can next follow up with Ba3 and look for ways to infiltrate with his heavy pieces.

b2) 15...Qd8 16.Bd4 hxg3 17.hxg3 O-O 18.e5! Nd5 19.Bc5 Re8 20.Qh5±. Next is Rac1, Rfd1, and possibly lifting a rook to the 4th rank and over to h4!

b3) After 15...Qc7 16.Bc5 hxg3 17.hxg3 e5 18.Bd6 Qb6 19.Bxe5± White has an advantage due to the dark-squared bishop and central majority.

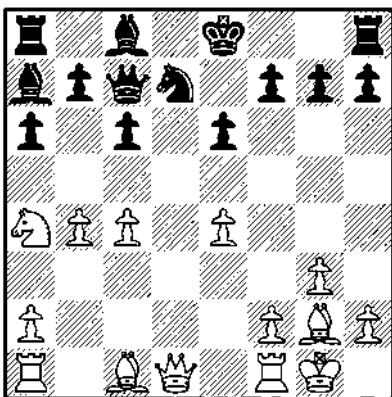
Developing the light-squared bishop, but allowing White to block in Black's other bishop with 12.c5. Now followed 12...Be6 13.Qc2. Although this position is quite solid for Black, it feels more comfortable for White, who has a little bit more space and freer play. 13...Rd8 14.Be3!? An interesting idea, provoking Ng4. 14...Ng4 15.Bg5



15...Rd4 (*White is slightly better after 15...f6 16.Bd2 O-O 17.h3 Nh6 18.Rfd1 Nf7 19.Be3±.*) 16.b3 f6 17.Bc1! h5?! This pawn ends up

being a weakness. 18.h3 Nh6 19.Be3 Rd8 20.Rd1 Nf7 21.Rxd8+ Qxd8 22.f4±. After natural play, White has grown his advantage. The h5 pawn ended up being a liability for Black, Demchenko–Vitiugov, Yekaterinburg 2013.

12.b4!



White insists on c4-c5!

12...a5

One of two logical moves, otherwise White can shut down Black's queenside with c4-c5.

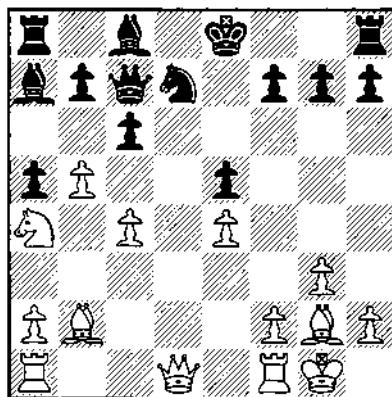
The alternative is 12...b5 13.Nb2 c5?! Breaking the queenside open is principled, but meets a tactical refutation: 14.Qg4! It turns out Black's forces are unable to fight back effectively. White's initiative is huge. 14...Qe5 (not 14...O-O 15.Bh6 Qe5 16.Nd3 Qd4 17.Rad1+-). With threats of Nxc5 and e4-e5, Black is losing material.) 15.Rb1 h5 16.Qe2 cxb4 17.Bf4! Qc5 18.Nd3 Qe7 19.e5! Rb8 20.Nxb4+-, Khukhashvili–Gavasheli, Tbilisi 2002.

13.b5 e5!

The only move, securing the d4 square for Black's bishop.

13...O-O?! would put Black in a passive position: 14.Ba3 Re8 (*better is 14...c5 15.Bb2±*) 15.Bd6 Qd8 16.bxc6 bxc6 17.e5+- and White's position is dominant.

14.Bb2!?



GM David Howell comes up with a strong idea, preventing Bd4 and "allowing" Black to castle.

14.Ba3 is also playable, but after 14...Bd4 15.Qg4 g6 Black is going to play c6-c5 next and should be fine.

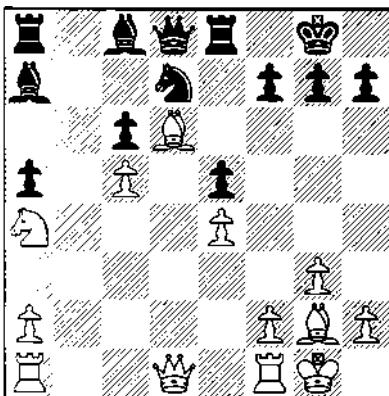
14...O-O 15.Ba3!

By making this move with tempo, Black doesn't have time for Bd4 and c6-c5.

15...Re8

Sacrificing the exchange with 15...Bd4?! is a bold idea, but after 16.Bxf8 Nxf8 (not 16...Bxa1 17.Bd6+-) 17.Rc1± there isn't quite enough compensation for equality, but perhaps it was a better chance than the game continuation.

16.Bd6 Qd8 17.bxc6 bxc6 18.c5!



White's bishop dominates Black's position, while Black's bishop on a7 is shut out of the game. Black must play very precisely to avoid getting a strategically lost position.

18...Ba6 19.Re1 Bb5 20.Rc1 Nf8??

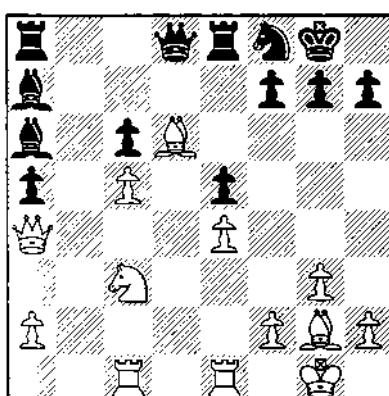
Trying to maneuver the knight to the more active e6 square, but this allows White to regroup with tempo.

Better was 20...Qf6 21.Qc2±.

21.Nc3!

The pressure has been taken off the c5 pawn, which means White can bring his knight back into the game.

21...Ba6 22.Qa4!±



Now White's army is fully mobilized, and Black has little chance of defending all of his weaknesses.

22...Ne6!

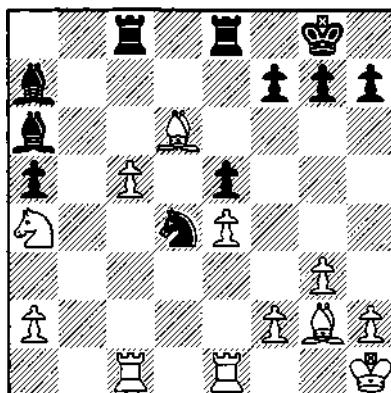
GM Djukic sacrifices the c6 pawn for activity, giving Black some practical chances to survive.

After 22...Rc8 23.Bh3 Ne6 24.Red1+-, Black is paralyzed and will likely lose material soon.

23.Qxc6 Qc8 24.Qxc8

Objectively stronger was 24.Qd5+- with White's next moves being Na4 and Bh3, but Howell probably felt the advantage would be simplest to convert in the endgame.

24...Raxc8 25.Na4 Nd4 26.Kh1!



A useful prophylactic move, getting out of the way of any knight checks.

26...Rc6 27.Bh3!

Again Howell finds the strongest move, threatening Bd7 and forcing Black to exchange pieces.

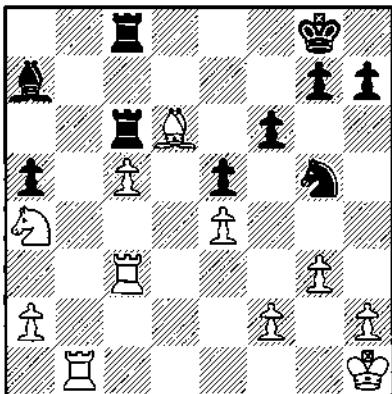
27...Bc8 28.Bxc8 Rexc8 29.Rb1!

Threatening to invade with Rb7.

29...Ne6 30.Rec1 f6 31.Rc3!

31.Rb7?! would give Black unnecessary saving chances after 31...Rxd6 32.Rxa7 Rd2±.

31...Ng5!



Black continues to fight for counterplay.

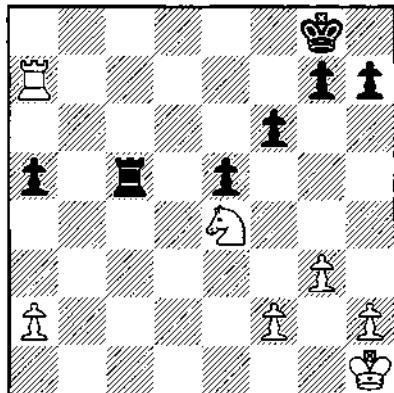
32.Rb7 Nxe4?!

Black's last chance was 32...Bxc5 33.Rxc5 (*After 33.Bxc5 Nxe4 34.Rd3 Nxc5 35.Nxc5 Rxc5 36.Rdd7±, White's control over the 7th means the position would be difficult to hold for Black, but rook endgames tend to have certain drawing resources.*) 33...Nxe4 34.Rxc6 Rxc6 35.Be7 Nxf2+ 36.Kg2±. White should still win after he coordinates his extra piece, but there would still be some work to be done.

33.Rxa7 Nxc3 34.Nxc3 Rxc5

Otherwise, White should easily win material or promote his pawn after Nd5, etc.

35.Bxc5 Rxc5 36.Ne4 1-0



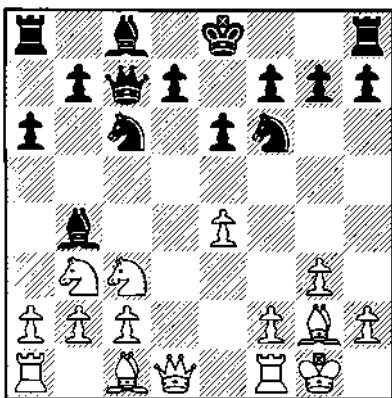
Down a full piece, it was a good time for Black to resign.

Game 17

Guseinov – Kvon
2012 Agzamov Memorial
Tashkent 2012

- 1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4
4.Nxd4 Nc6 5.Nc3 Qc7 6.g3 a6
7.Bg2 Nf6 8.O-O Be7

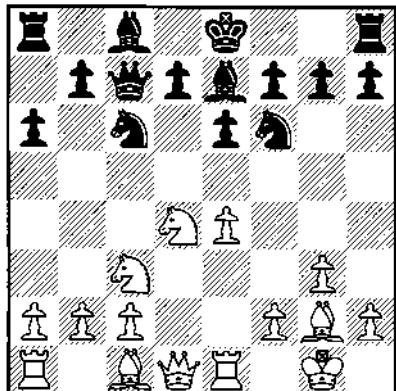
After 8...Bb4, the reply 9.Nb3 is in line with our repertoire:



9...O-O 10.Bd2 transposes to the Kan Variation, but White can also consider the immediate 10.f4.

9...Bxc3?! is risky, as Black leaves himself with weaknesses on the dark squares: 10.bxc3 O-O (or 9...Ne5 11.f4 Nc4 12.e5±) 11.Ba3± and White's bishop lands on d6.

9.Re1



As in Game 15, White threatens to play Nxc6 and e4-e5.

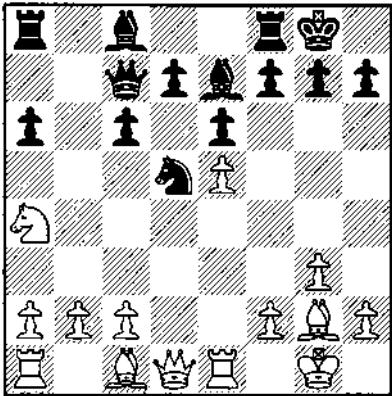
Instead, White can also elect to play 9.Nb3, going for the kingside attack—f2-f4, and g3-g4-g5—that we recommended in the Kan Variation.

9...Nxd4

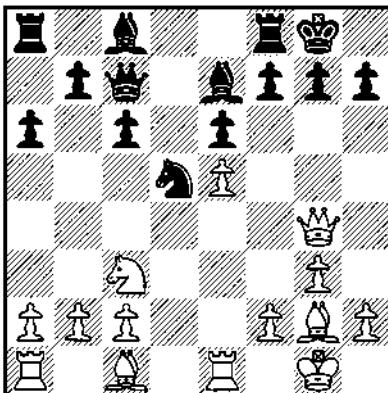
Transposing is 9...d6, but there is another main alternative for Black that White should know about.

After 9...O-O 10.Nxc6, Black is pretty much just fighting for a draw from the opening. This is the right time to exchange—White can immediately follow up with e4-e5. We look at two reasonable recaptures:

After 10...bxc6?! 11.e5 Nd5 we have 12.Na4! with the strong positional threat of c2-c4. White has scored very well here, since Black almost always ends up with a passive light-squared bishop:



a) 11...Nd5 is inaccurate due to 12.Qg4! threatening Bh6:

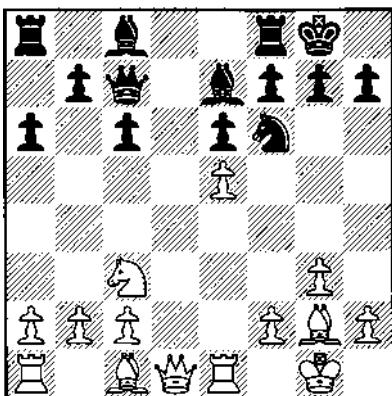


a) 12...f6 13.c4 Nb6 14.Bf4 fxe5 15.Bxe5 d6 16.Nxb6 Qxb6 17.Bd4 Qc7 18.c5±, Degraeve–Milesi, Saint Affrique 2005.

b) 12...Nb6 13.Nxb6 Qxb6 14.b3±, Sanal–Tandogan, 2009.

c) After 12...Rb8 13.b3 f5, the immediate 14.c4!N is good, since Nb4 is met with a2-a3. (*Belov–Bocharov, St. Petersburg 2003, continued 14.Bd2±.*) 14...Nb6 15.Nb2!±. Apart from the passivity of Black's light-squared bishop and knight, White's space advantage is quite significant.

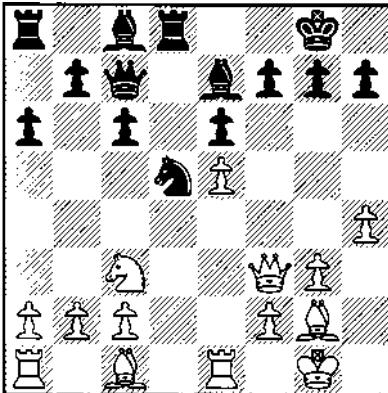
10...dxc6 11.e5 and now:



a1) 12...f5 grants Black some activity, but at the cost of isolating the e6 pawn. 13.exf6 Bxf6 14.Ne4 Bd4 White's structural advantage and piece activity is enough for an edge. 15.c3 Ba7 16.c4! Ne7. And here why not 17.c5!± locking in Black's bishop? Instead, 17.Be3± was played in Lepot–Fomichenko, Naujac 2009.

a2) After 12...Kh8 13.Bg5 Bxg5 14.Qxg5 Nxg5 15.bxc3, White has the superior bishop and more potential to control the d-file, a serious advantage. 15...b5 16.Qe3! Ra7 17.Qc5±, Janosevic–Gliksman. Novi Sad 1972.

b) Black should at least interpose 11...Rd8 gaining temporary control over the d-file. 12.Qf3 Nd5 13.h4! Threatening to trade bishops with Bg5:



And Black has no clear path to equality:

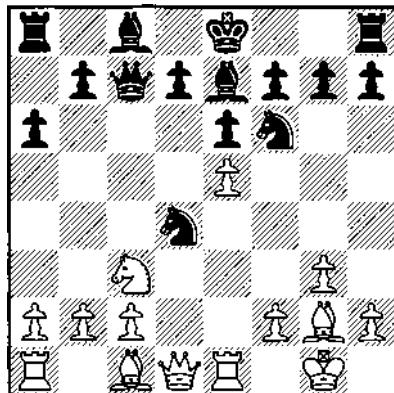
b1) 13...h6?! stops Bg5 but weakens the kingside, which White can immediately exploit, with 14.Qg4 Kh8 15.Qh5 Bf8 16.Ne4↑, Kasimdzhanov–Heissler, Germany 2000.

b2) If 13...b5?! then 14.Bg5! trading the dark-squared bishops and securing control over the d6 square. White's advantage is clear after 14...Bb7 15.Ne4 h6 16.Nd6! Rf8 17.Bxe7 Qxe7 18.Qa3±, Guseinov–Gagunashvili, Tbilisi 2012. The queen will infiltrate through c5 and e5.

b3) Finally: 13...Nxc3 14.Qxc3 Bd7 15.Bg5! Be8 (*Dubious is 15...Bxg5?! 16.hxg5 Be8 17.Be4→, and White now has the extra possibility of attacking along the h-file, Svidler–Landa, Kazan 1995.*) 16.Bxe7 Qxe7 17.Rad1±, Jansa–Poulsen, Oslo 1988. White has a long lasting advantage. This is definitely one

of Black's weaker options in the Taimanov Sicilian.

10.e5!



A move we urge you not to forget! This *zwischenzug* leads to a very serious initiative for White, and practically refutes this line, as long as White is aware of a few important tactics. The following game by a familiar hero, GM Gadir Guseinov, likely sealed the nail in the coffin for 9...Nxd4.

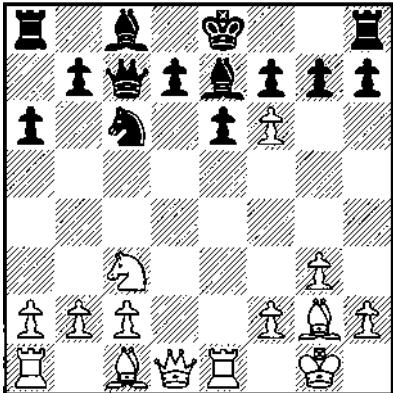
Instead, after 10.Qxd4?! Bc5 11.Bf4 d6 12.Qd2, with White's rook on e1 Black can play 12...Ng4! with tempo 13.Re2 Ne5∞, and probably equalize.

10...Nb5

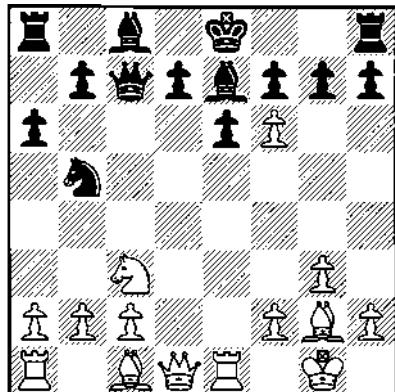
The most testing reply. Black has no way to keep the extra piece.

Other knight moves don't offer any comfort: **10...Nc6 11.exf6**:

11.exf6

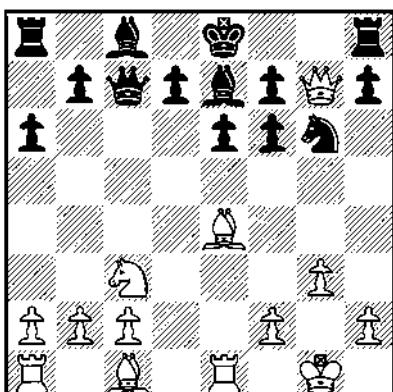


After 11...gxf6 (*not* 11...Bxf6? 12.Nd5 Qd8 13.Be3+ threatening Bb6, and Black can resign) 12.Qg4↑ the threat of Qg7 is winning, for instance 12...Ne5 13.Qg7 Ng6 14.Be4!



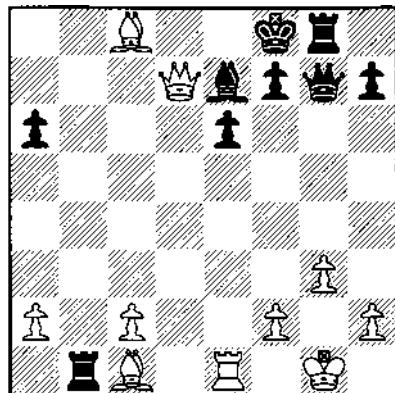
11...gxf6

Another game continued 11...Nxc3 12.fxg7! Rg8 13.bxc3 Qxc3 14.Rb1 Qxg7 15.Bxb7 Rb8, and unfortunately White wasn't able to find the winning idea: 16.Bxc8N (*instead of* 16.Qf3?! Qg4∞, *Masat-Paksa, Hungary 1994*) 16...Rxbl 17.Qxd7+ Kf8



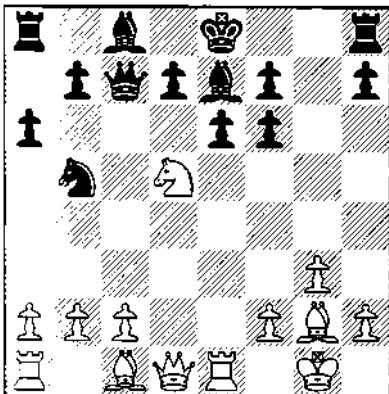
Dueball–Kleinschmidt, Germany 1993. Black has no adequate defense: 14...f5 (*or* 14...Rf8 15.Nd5! exd5 16.Bxg6 hxg6 17.Bh6+–) 15.Bxf5! exf5 16.Rxe7+! Exploring the tactics in this position is quite pleasing. 16...Kxe7 17.Bg5++– and White is mating in a few moves.

Also, 10...Nxc2 11.Qxc2 Nd5 12.Bxd5! exd5 13.Qd1!± with unpleasant threats of Nxd5 and Qg4, Gdanski–Lupkowski, Koszalin 1997.



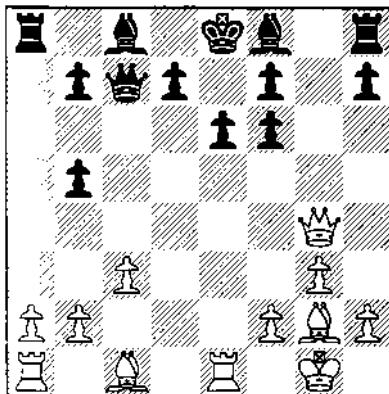
and now 18.Bb7! was the key move threatening Qc8+. 18...Qg6 19.Bh6-Qxh6 20.Rxb1±.

12.Nd5!



This move was first played by IM Oscar De La Riva Aguado—who later became a GM—back in 2000. Whether this idea was known to Guseinov prior to this game or he found it over the board, this sacrifice is quite powerful. White forces the e-file open for certain attacking chances against Black's king.

A safer way to play for the initiative would be 12.Nxb5 axb5 13.Qg4 Bf8 14.c3↑ with more than enough compensation for the pawn:

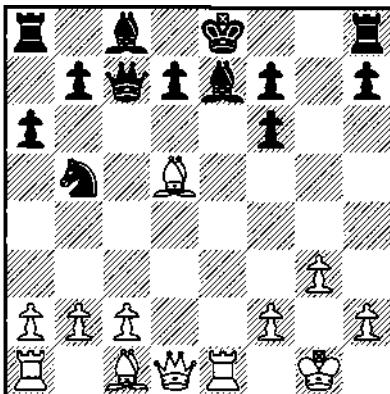


As played in Kindermann–Janssen, Baden-Baden 1985.

12...exd5

Black must take the knight, otherwise he will suffer without any material advantage. For example, if 12...Qd8 then 13.Qg4+–.

13.Bxd5



White's threats include Bxf7+ followed by Qh5, as well as c2-c4 and Bf4. Objectively, Black is already lost.

13...h5

A logical try, stopping the queen from coming to h5.

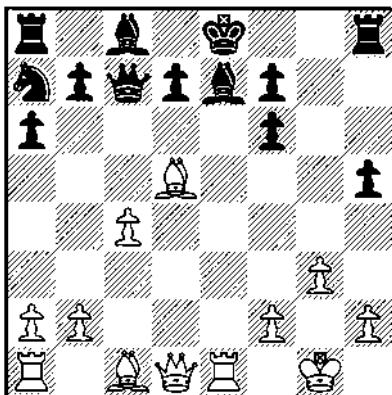
If 13...d6 then 14.c4! Sidelining the knight before going in for the kill with Bxf7+. (*14.a4 would also work*) After 14...Na7 15.Bxf7+ Kxf7 16.Qh5+ Kg8 17.Bh6+–, Black has no good answer to the threats of Qe8+ and Qd5+.

14.c4

De la Riva Aguado originally chose 14.a4 and quickly got a winning position through a series of potent attacking moves: 14...Na7 15.Qd4 d6 16.Qxf6 Rf8. Black would love to play Be6 and castle queenside, a good plan if not for White's tactical resources: 17.Bg5! Be6 18.Qg7! Bxg5 (*Or 18...Nc6 19.Bxe6 fxe6 20.Rxe6+– and Black will have to return the*

piece, down a few pawns.) 19.Rxe6+! Be7 20.Re4 The pressure along the e-file means Black will lose the bishop on e7. 20...O-O-O 21.Rae1 Rde8 (or 21...Rfe8 22.Qxf7++) 22.Rxe7+, De la Riva Aguado–Plaskett, Mondariz 2000.

14...Na7



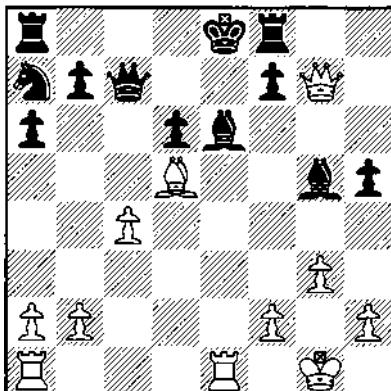
15.Bf4?!

This new idea by Guseinov to go for rapid development seems quite strong, but surprisingly, Black had a saving resource that both players missed.

15.Qd4 with the same idea as in De la Riva Aguado–Plaskett was objectively stronger, as Black has little choice in defense:

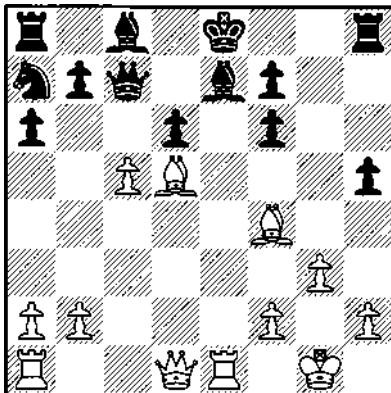
Stopping Qxf6 with **15...Kd8** runs into **16.Rxe7!** Kxe7 **17.Bg5!** Qd6 (or **17...fxg5** **18.Re1++**) **18.c5+-**.

After **15...d6** **16.Qxf6**, there doesn't seem to be a difference as to whether White played a2-a4 or c2-c4, so all of the lines are basically the same: **16...Rf8** **17.Bg5** **Be6** **18.Qg7!** **Bxg5**



19.Rxe6+! What a lovely shot! **19...Be7** (Or **19...Kd7** **20.Qxg5 fxе6** **21.Qg7++-** winning back all of the material, with interest.) **20.Re4** O-O-O **21.Rae1+-** and again Black cannot save the bishop on e7.

15...d6 16.c5

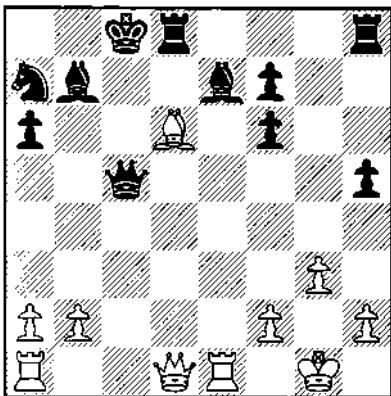


The point of White's play: breaking the center open.

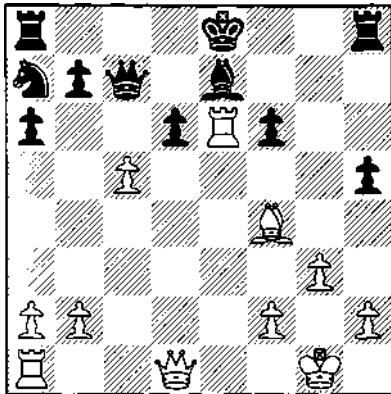
16...Be6?!

Missing the only chance to survive.

The brave 16...Qxc5! was the absolute only move. Perhaps both players overlooked that after 17.Bxb7 Bxb7 18.Bxd6 Black could play 18...O-O-O!, miraculously holding everything and forcing simplifications:



After 19.Bxc5 Rxd1 20.Rexd1 Bxc5 21.Rac1 Nc6 22.Rxc5±, White's advantage is quite minimal.
17.Bxe6 fxe6 18.Rxe6

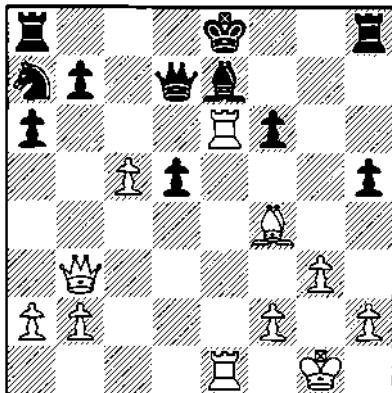


As in previous variations, the pressure along the e-file is too strong, and White is completely winning.

18...Qd7

Or 18...O-O-O 19.cxd6+-.

19.Qb3 d5 20.Rae1+-

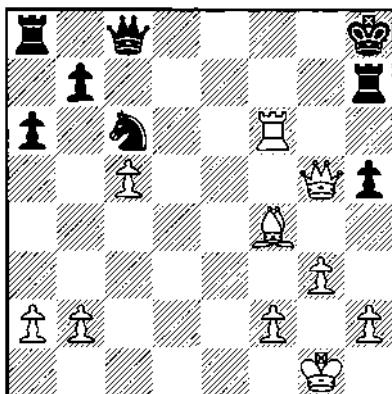


It's only a matter of time before the final combinative breakthrough.

20...Nc6

If 20...Rh7, simplest is 21.Rd6 Qc7 22.Rxd5+-.

21.Rd6 Qc8 22.Qxd5 Kf8 23.Ree6 Rh7 24.Rxf6+ Bxf6 25.Rxf6+ Kg7 26.Qg5+ Kh8

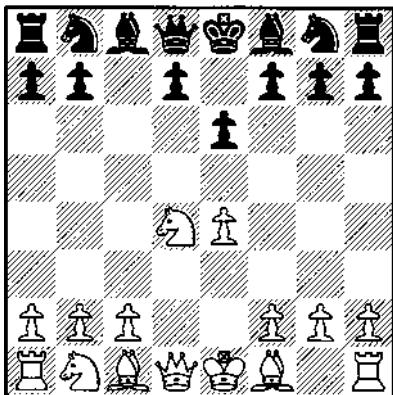


27.Rxc6! 1-0

Game 18

Guseinov – Movsesian
FIDE World Blitz Championship
Dubai 2014

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4
4.Nxd4



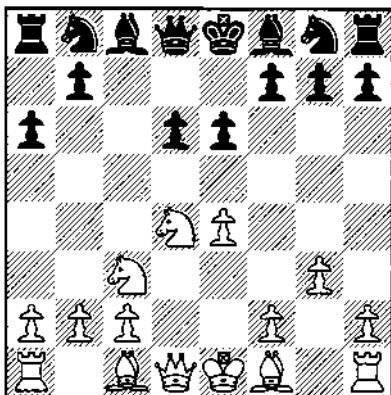
4...Nc6

The point of this game is to cover certain move-orders and transpositions that we haven't yet mentioned throughout Chapter 2, as well as a few unique lines that didn't quite fit in anywhere else thus far.

A repertoire decision must be made after 4...a6 5.Nc3 d6, where Black has opted for a very flexible Scheveningen setup.

With 6.g4, White heads for the Keres Attack covered in Chapter 1c, although here Black has an extra option of 6...Ne7 which has been used by none other than Najdorf aficionados Topalov, Morozевич, and Van Wely. If the reader is interested in playing the Keres Attack against this move-order, this line would be necessary to explore.

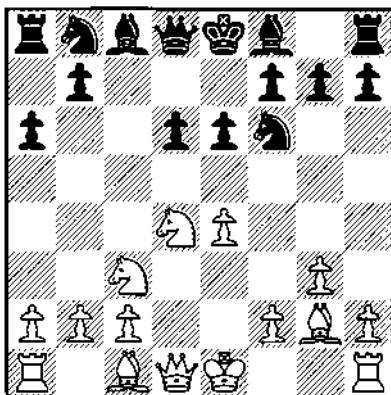
But most reliable for our repertoire would be 6.g3:



Now 6...Nc6 7.Bg2 transposes to our main game.

And 6...b5 7.a3 transposes to Chapter 2a Game 14. However, we can save a tempo with 7.Bg2, because 7...Bb7 8.O-O Nd7 9.Re1 Qc7 10.a4! is quite strong, with the idea 10...b4 11.Na2 a5 12.c3, where after 12...bxc3 13.Nxc3↑ White can quickly develop a dangerous attack, as in Kupreichik–A. Petrosian, Lvov 1988.

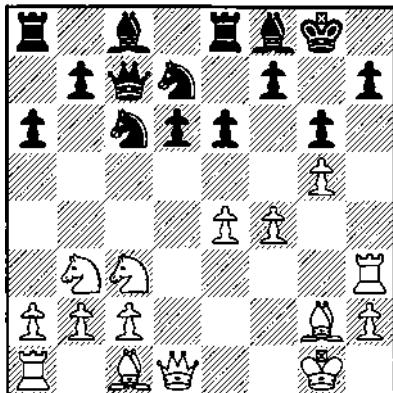
Finally, after 6...Nf6 7.Bg2



Black cannot avoid our recommended kingside attack, regardless of how he chooses to complete development:

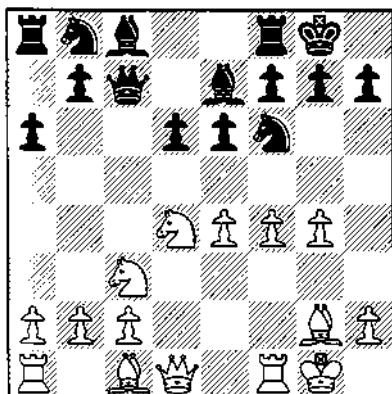
a) Starting with 7...Qc7 should transpose into a variation that we've already covered: 8.O-O Be7 9...Nc6 9.Re1! *transposes to Game 15—see diagram on page 178* 9.f4 Nc6 10.Nb3 b5 (10...O-O 11.g4 *transposes into line b2 on page 210*) 11.a3 Bb7 12.Be3 O-O 13.g4, and now we've transposed into Chapter 2a Game 14, page 166.

b) After 7...Be7 8.O-O O-O 9.f4 Qc7 (*White should usually respond to 7...Nc6 with 10.Nb3 in order to play e3-g4 next.*), there is no reason for White to hesitate, since Black has already castled: 10.g4!



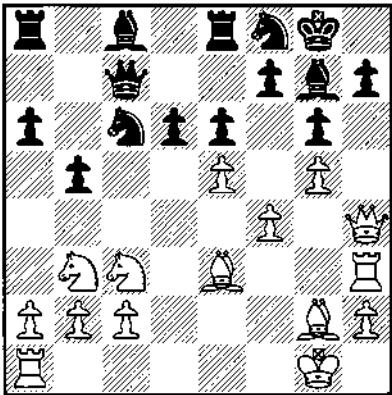
b11) 15.f5!? The direct approach. 15...exf5 16.Nd5 Qd8 17.exf5 Bg7 18.f6 Bf8?! (*Better was 18...Nxg6 19.gxf6 Bxh3 20.Bxh3 Bxf6∞, where White has active minor pieces but Black's kingside is quite solid.*) 19.Be3 Nc5 20.Rh4 Bf5 21.Nd4 Nxd4. Now the right recapture was 22.Bxd4± and White should follow up calmly with c2-c3, Qd2, and Rf1, placing the pieces perfectly before attempting to break through. Instead, 22.Rxd4± was played in Amanov–Ramirez, Los Angeles 2012.

b12) More circumspect would be 15.Qe1 Bg7 16.Be3 b5 17.Qh4 Nf8, and now White has a powerful shot in 18.e5! clearing the long-diagonal and the e4 square for White's knight:



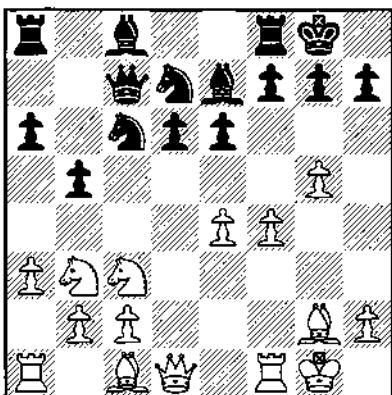
This is a unique position for this chapter, but all of White's standard attacking ideas remain, and so we'll show just a few choice fragments to hammer in the point. We look at 10...Nfd7, 10...Nc6, and 10...Re8:

b1) 10...Nfd7 11.g5 Nc6 12.Nb3 Bg8 13.Rf3 Our beloved rook lift! 13...Bf8 14.Rh3 g6 and now:



After 18...dxe5 19.fxe5 Rb8 20.Ne4↑ White has a powerful initiative, with ideas of Nd6 and Nf6+. It is too risky for Black to capture the e5 pawn.

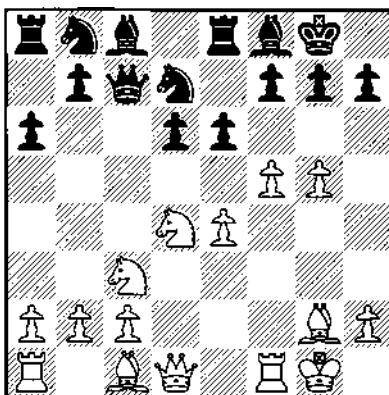
b2) 10...Nc6 11.Nb3 b5 12.g5 Nd7 13.a3



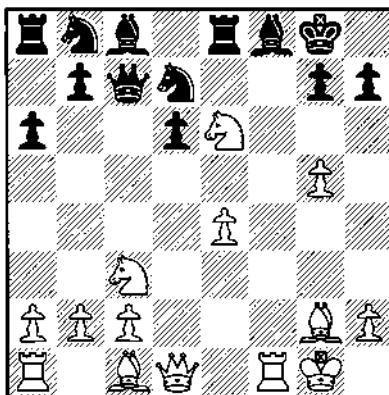
As we've mentioned, it's usually wise to spend a tempo on this move. 13...Bb7 14.Qh5 Rfe8 15.Be3 g6 16.Qh4 Bf8 17.Rf3 Bg7 18.Raf1 f5?! A panicked reaction, which was duly punished. (18...Ne7 was more solid, where White should play 19.Rh3 Nf8 20.Qf2± followed by Bd4, with a small positional plus.) 19.gxf6 Nxf6 (Better was 19...Bxf6 20.Qh3→.) 20.Rh3 Ne7 21.Bd4! A strong addition

to the attack. 21...Nh5 22.Bxg7 Kxg7 23.Bf3+– and White's attack broke through, Padevsky–Neukirch, Varna 1972.

b3) Lastly, another one of GM Guseinov's games: 10...Re8 11.g5 Nfd7 12.f5 Bf8, where he missed a beautiful chance:



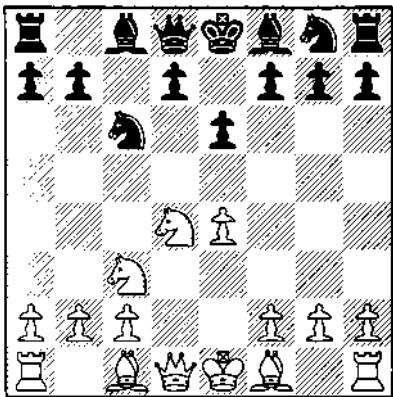
13.fxe6 (13.Qh5↑ was played in Guseinov–Bistic, Dubai 2005.) 13...fxe6 14.Nxe6!!



A very cool sacrifice, based on Black's lack of development. 14...Rxe6 15.Qf3 Re7 16.e5! An important resource, clearing the diagonal, and after 16...dxe5 17.Nd5 Qd8 18.Be3 Nc6

19.Rad1→ White has a decisive initiative, with threats of Nxe7+ followed by Qd5+ and Rf7.

5.Nc3



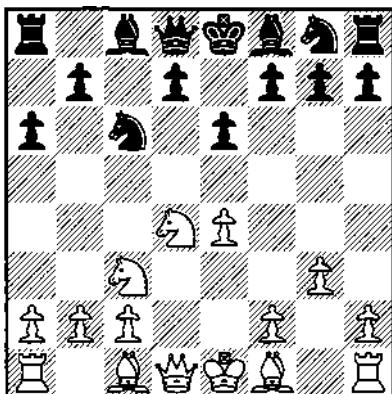
5...a6

As we've mentioned before Black cannot do without this prophylactic move.

5...Qc7 6.g3 transposes to Game 15.

5...d6 6.Bc4 transposes to the Fischer-Sozin Attack in the Classical Sicilian, the subject of Chapter 3, although White can also play 6.g3 where sooner or later Black should play a7-a6, transposing to the Taimanov Variation.

6.g3

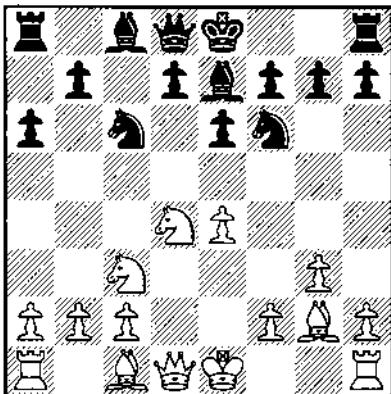


6...d6

The main point of Black's move order is to quickly play Bd7 and avoid some of the more concrete lines in the Taimanov.

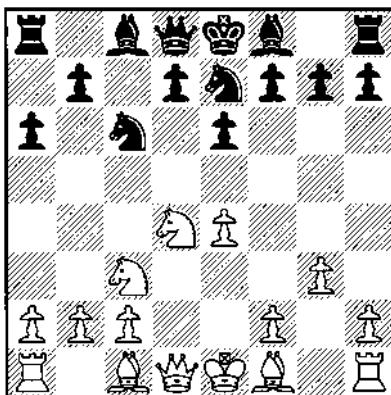
But there are a few minor lines that we should cover first: 6...Nf6, 6...Nge7, and 6...Qc7 on page 213.

Playing 6...Nf6 without Qc7 isn't a very viable option for Black. After 7.Bg2 Be7



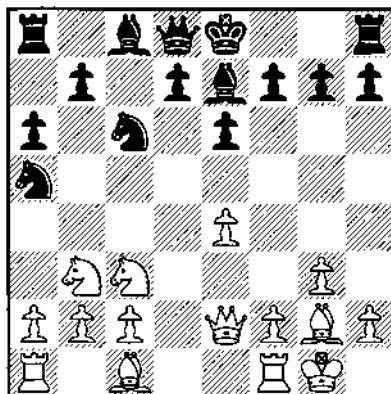
White can get an advantage with 8.Nxc6 (*8.O-O allows Black to transpose into the main lines with Qc7*) 8...dxc6 (*not 8...bxc6?!*) 9.e5 Nd5 10.Ne4! heading for d6. 10...Qc7 11.c4±) 9.Qxd8+ Bxd8 10.e5 (10.Bf4± is also good, with the idea Rd1 and Bd6.) 10...Nd5 11.Ne4±, Onischuk–Yaremko, Rodatychi 2006. Access to the d6 square and more space overall gives White a comfortable edge.

We covered the position after 6...Qc7 7.Bg2 Nge7 in Game 15 on page 177, but it is a bit more flexible for Black to play 6...Nge7 first, with the same idea of Nxd4 and Nc6:



Once again, White should avoid the exchange and play 7.Nb3 followed by developing with Bg2, O-O, Qe2, Be3, and f2-f4. Let's see a few instructive game excerpts:

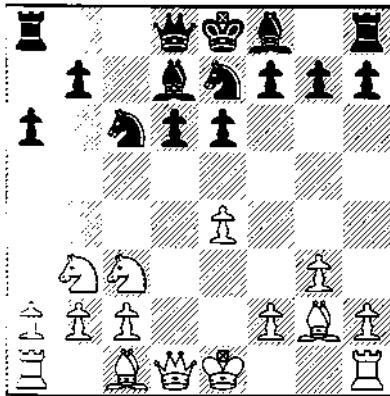
a) Black can insist on trading knights with 7...Na5, but at the cost of valuable time: 8.Bg2 Nec6 9.O-O Be7 10.Qe2!



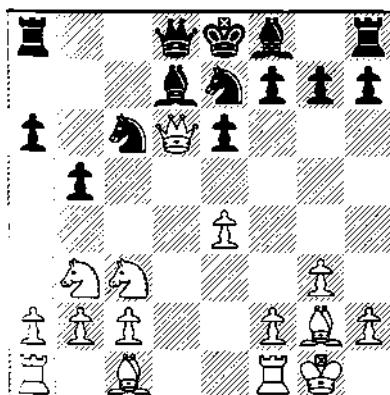
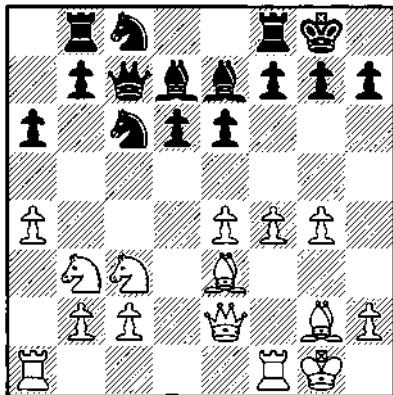
A nice move by GM Guseinov, threatening e4-e5. 10...O-O?! (*Perhaps Black should have played 10...d6 11.Rd1 Qc7, but White has certain pressure after 12.Be3 O-O 13.Na4±.*) 11.e5! White has the obvious plan Ne4-d6, with a strategic advantage. Now followed 11...b5 12.Nxa5 Qxa5 13.Bf4 b4 14.Bxc6 dxc6 15.Ne4 Bb7 16.Qg4!±. Guseinov continued with Rfd1 and Bg5 and won a good game. Guseinov–Novikov, Moscow 2009.

5: Black's main idea in this line is seen after 7...d6 8.Bg2 Bd7!?

a passive position: 13.Nxa5 Qxa5 14.Bd4±, De Firmian-Zapata, Tunis 1985.) 13.f4 Rb8 14.g4!



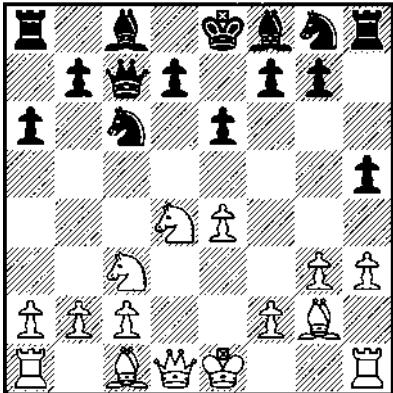
Black is preparing to play Nc8, b5, and Nb6, with interesting interplay on the queenside. 9.O-O Net 9.Qxd6??, as 9...Nd5++ would be embarrassing.) 9...Nc8 (In case of 9...b5 White can get away with 10.Qxd6!



winning three pieces for the queen after ...Nd5 11.exd5 Bxd6 12.dxc6±.) ...a4! Restricting Black's queenside expansion. We'll now follow a game played by Topalov, demonstrating real play from White's perspective. ...Be7 11.Qe2 O-O 12.Be3 Qc7 13...Na5 doesn't save Black from

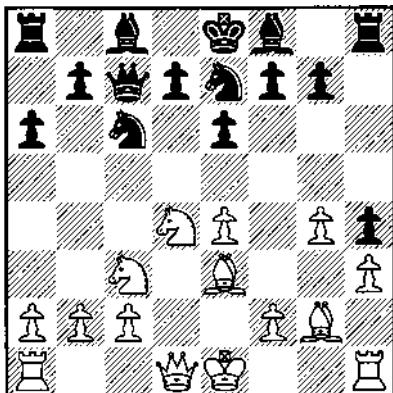
Going for the familiar kingside attack, but of course this wasn't the only plan available for White—another option was the positional Qf2, followed by Rfd1, Rd2, Rad1, etc. 14...Re8 15.g5 Nb4 16.Qf2! Strengthening the power of the f4-f5 advance, and pointing out the drawbacks of Re8. 16...b5 17.axb5 axb5 18.f5 Nxc2. Here Topalov could have gone all-in with 19.g6!+ crashing through to Black's king. Instead, 19.Qxc2 b4 20.g6→ also led to a crushing victory in Topalov-Illescas Cordoba, Alcobendas 1994.

Lastly, after 6...Qc7 7.Bg2, instead of 7...Nf6 Black can surprise White with 7...h5!? aiming to bother White's kingside with h5-h4, as well as a potential Bc5. After some investigation we believe White's best chances lie in 8.h3!



White is ready to meet h5-h4 with g3-g4, coinciding with our general strategic plans of advancing on the kingside. We'll cover the immediate 8...h4, and the more flexible 8...Nf6.

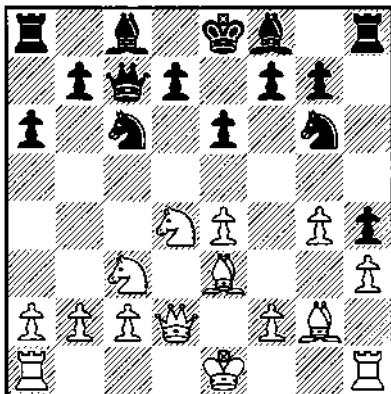
a) After 8...h4 9.g4 Nge7, Black is aiming for interesting play connected with Ne7-g6-e5. (9...Nf6 10.O-O transposes into line b1 in the next variation) We feel White's best chances lie in 10.Be3!N



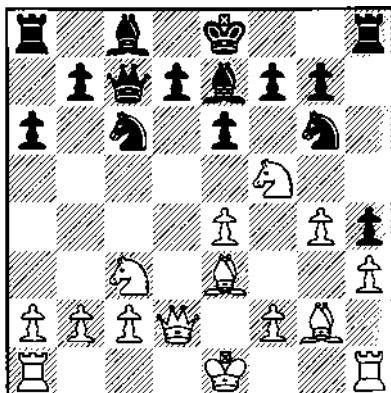
a1) Now 10...Nxd4?! seems natural, but 11.Qxd4 Nc6 12.Qb6! leads to a highly favorable endgame for White: 12...Qxb6 13.Bxb6±. White's next move is O-O-O, with much more space and pressure along the d-file.

a2) 10...Ne5 can be strongly met with 11.Nde2! Nc4 12.Bf4 d6 (*Not 12...e5 13.Bc1± followed by b2-b3, and Black has unwisely given up the d5 square.*) 13.b3 Ne5 14.Be3!±. Next is f2-f4, and it seems that Black has just wasted a lot of time with the knight.

a3) Finally, we look at 10...Ng6 11.Qd2

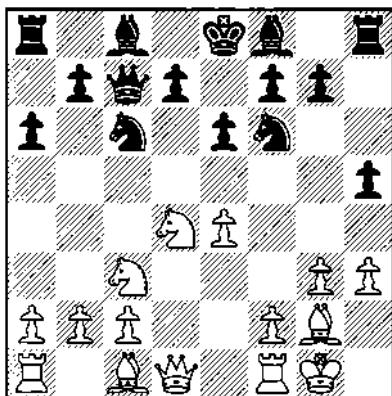


White's plan now includes O-O-C and f2-f4, fighting for the initiative. Against 11...Be7 (after 11...Nge7 12.b3 Bb4 13.Nde2↑ Black has no answer to f2-f4.) we found a nice sacrifice—12.Nf5!



12...exf5 (Refusing to accept the knight with 12...Bf8 only runs into more problems after 13.Nd5! exd5 14.exd5 Nce5 15.d6+–, and after f2-f4 and Qe2, Black faces problems along the e-file.) 13.exf5 Nge5 14.Nd5 Qb8 15.Qe2!+–. White has a powerful initiative, with lots of threats along the e-file, such as f2-f4, Bd4 ideas, etc., for example 15...d6 16.f4 Nd7 17.Bd4.

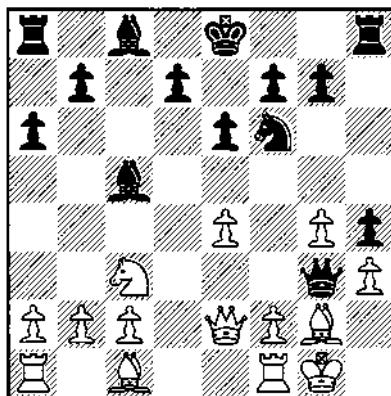
b) 8...Nf6 9.O-O



This position can also occur from the main line Taimanov after 7...Nf6 8.O-O h5 9.h3. There have only been a few relevant games here, so let's take a look at Black's most natural options:

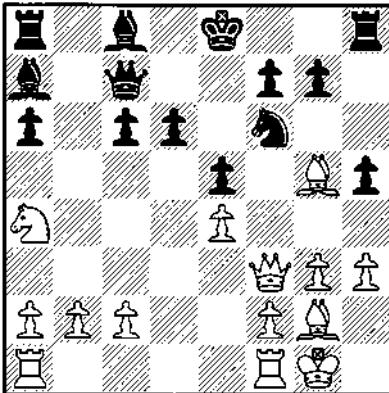
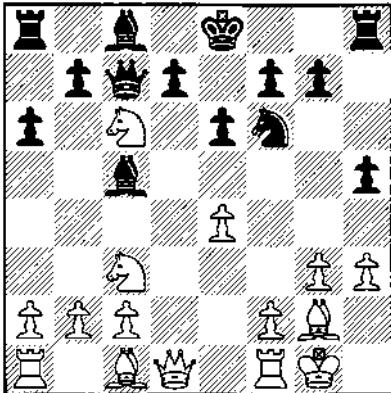
b1) 9...h4 10.g4 Bc5 11.Nb3 Ba7 12.Qe2! Getting ready to trade dark-squared bishops. 12...d6 13.Be3 Bxe3 14.Qxe3±. White definitely has the edge here, as we can target Black's weaknesses on d6 and h4. A plan of Rad1 and f2-f4 makes sense, followed by Qf2.

b2) 9...Nxd4 10.Qxd4 Bc5 11.Qd3 h4 12.g4 Qg3?! Beautiful, but losing! (better is 12...d6 13.Na4±) 13.Qe2!



Threatening e4-e5 and Kh1, trapping Black's queen. 13...Qc7 14.e5 Ng8 15.Bf4 Ne7 16.Ne4+–, Anisimov-Arzenkov, Tomsk 2006.

b3) The current main line is 9...Bc5, and now best is 10.Nxc6!



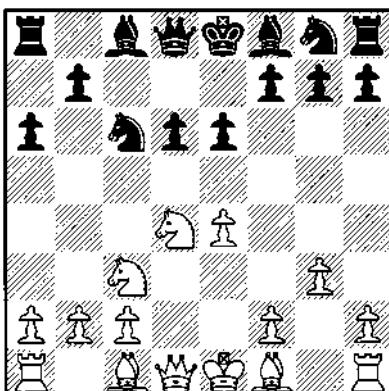
This is a good time to capture, since the normally preferred $dxc6$ runs into $e4-e5!$

b31) If $10...dxc6$ then $11.e5!$ is a strong pawn sacrifice based on White's lead in development. $11...Qxe5$ $12.Bf4$ Black's weakened dark squares will also come into play here. One instructive example continued $12...Qd4$ (After $12...Qf5$, $13.Re1!N$ is best, for instance $13...Be7$ $14.Re5$ $Qh7$ $15.Bg5!$ $O-O$ $16.Na4\pm$ and Black's position is extremely passive.) $13.Qe2$ $Be7!$ The best defense. (After $13...O-O?$ White wins quickly: $14.Rfd1$ $Qb4$ $15.a3$ $Qb6$ $16.Na4+-$ followed by $Nxc5$ and $Bd6.$) $14.Rad1$ $Qc5$ $15.Na5$ $16.b3!$ Setting up a strong maneuver. $16...Nd7$ $17.Nb2$ $Qf5$ $18.Nc4\pm$. With threats of $Nd6+$ and $Be4$, Black was nearly lost in Markidis–Miladinovic, Kavala 2001.

b32) Black should capture with the other pawn, $10...bxc6$, and now we like how GM Negi fought for an advantage in this position: $11.Na4$ $Ba7$ $12.Bf4$ $e5$ $13.Bg5$ $d6$ $14.Qf3!$

Not allowing $Be6$, after which Black would probably be fine. $14...Nd7$ $15.Rad1$ $h4$. And here the natural $16.g4N$ would have given White a small plus. (*The immediate $16.Be3=$ did not lead to much in Negi–Iturriaga Bonelli, Linares 2013.*) White's plan should be to double rooks on the d-file and try to stretch Black's defenses, after $16...Nc5$ $17.Nxc5$ $Bxc5$ $18.Rd2\pm$. Our next moves are $Rfd1$ and $Be3$, and it seems that Black has too many weaknesses to comfortably defend.

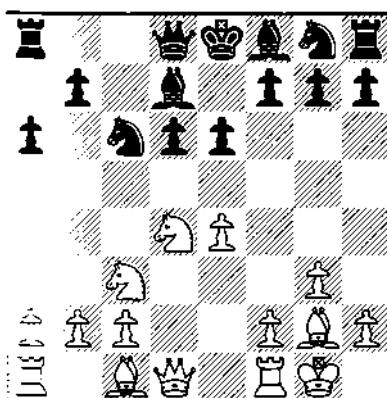
Now back to our game, after $6...d6$:



Bg2 Bd7

In case of 7...Nf6, White can either play 8.O-O which should transpose to the main lines, or exploit Black's play with 8.Nxc6 bxc6 9.Nd5 10.exd6 Bxd6 11.Ne4± with a healthier pawn structure, as in Malisauskas–Musialkiewicz, Bielica Zdroj 2010.

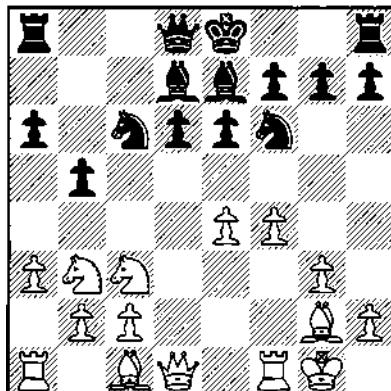
• **O-O**



...Qc7

We have chosen this move as the main line here, since it can also occur from the traditional Taimanov move-order 1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 d5 4.Nxd4 Nc6 5.Nc3 Qc7 6.g3 a6 d6 8.O-O Bd7.

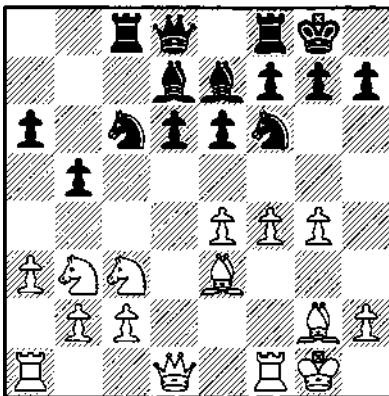
Alternatively, Black has also reached this position without Qc7, but there aren't too many differences. After 8...Nf6 we think White should start the standard kingside attack with 9.Nb3 Be7 10.f4 b5 11.a3



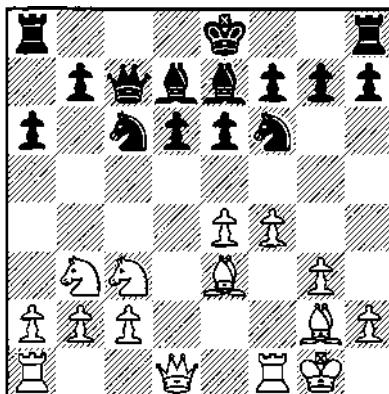
As usual, the right moment for Black to castle is not obvious, as White will quickly launch g3-g4. Let's look at a few examples:

11...O-O 12.g4 a5 13.g5 Ne8 And now 14.h4 would have been more to the point, preparing f4-f5. (*Najer-Láznicka, Plovdiv 2008, continued 14.Be3.*) In case of 14...b4 15.axb4 axb4 16.Rxa8 Qxa8, White has good play after 17.Ne2↑ followed by Be3 and f4-f5. Black lacks serious counterplay.

11...Rc8 12.Be3 O-O 13.g4



9.Nb3 Nf6 10.f4 Be7 11.Be3



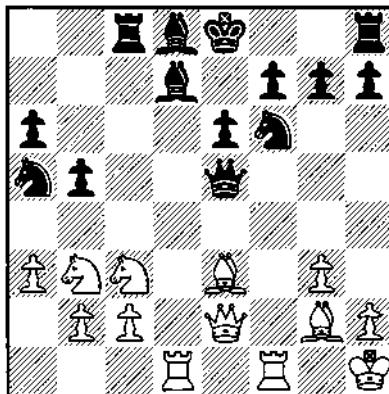
a) After 13...h6 we can see one of the subtleties of keeping the queen on d8, in that 14.h4?! (*14.Qe2 is better, followed by Rad1*) is strongly answered by 14...Nh7! 15.g5 hxg5 16.hxg5 e5!±.

b) GM Kobalia came up with the strange 13...g6?! where in our opinion White should have played it slow with 14.h3! (*Guseinov-Kobalia, Khanty-Mansiysk 2013, continued 14.g5 Nh5 15.Qd2 Re8 16.Rad1 Bf8 17.Qf2 b4 18.Na4±.*) It is hard for Black to play with the kingside so weakened, for example the nonchalant 14...Re8 (*After 14...h5 15.g5 Ne8 16.Qe2± White can put pressure on the d-file and prepare the f4-f5 break.*) runs into trouble: 15.Qe2 Bf8? 16.Qf2!± and Black has no defense to e4-e5!

Since Black has not yet castled, playing g3-g4 too early may backfire for White, as Black often has a strong response in h7-h5.

11...b5

Malakhov-Belov, Krasnoyarsk 2007, continued 11...Rc8 12.Kh1 b5 13.a3 Qb8 14.Qe2 Bd8?! The first step in the wrong direction. 15.Rad1 Na5: 16.e5! As soon as Black plays Nc6-a5, this shot often becomes a serious possibility. 16...dxe5 17.fxe5 Qxe5

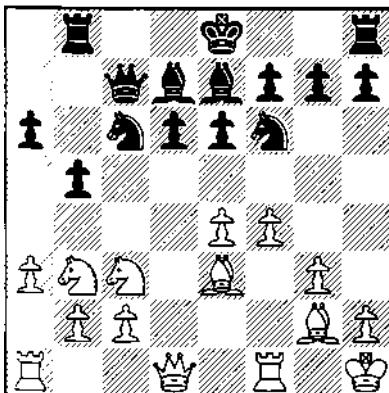


And now the immediate 18.Rxf6 was crushing. (*The game continued with 18.Qd3±.*) 18...gxf6 (or 18...Qxf6

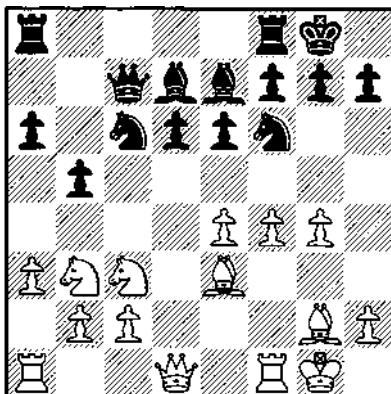
$19.Ne4+-$ and $Nd6+$) 19.Qd2! Black is losing material. 19...O-O 20.Qxd7 $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 21.Qxc8+–.

12.a3 O-O

GM Guseinov has also faced 12...Rb8 a few times and selected 13.Kh1 with good results:



13.g4



Although the following encounter took place in the World Blitz Championships, we've chosen this game as a fitting conclusion to the chapter, to show that even a GM as strong and experienced as Sergei Movsesian can quickly get into serious trouble against White's potent kingside attack.

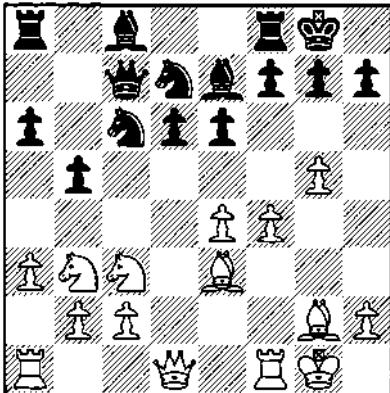
13...Bc8

This retreat is common in the Scheveningen structure, but it seems strange to develop the bishop to d7 only to retreat it several moves later. It is clear that Black should try a different setup when facing this kingside attack.

13...h6 doesn't slow down White's attack one bit, as seen in another one of Guseinov's games: 14.h4 e5 15.f5 h5?! It is easy to criticize this move, but also hard to suggest a good alternative, as g4-g5 was coming and Nh7 would allow Nd5. 16.gxh5 b4 17.Nd5 Nxd5 18.exd5 Na5 19.Nxa5 Qxa5 20.Qg4 Kh8 21.axb4+–, Guseinov–Steel, Khanty-Mansiysk 2010.

14.g5 Nd7

19.Nd1!



15.Rf3

The alternative 15.f5!? also led to good play for White, where Black would have had to find 15...Qd8! ∞ to stave off the immediate attack. If not, both 15...Nde5 16.f6 Bd8 17.Qh5 \rightarrow and 15...Nce5 16.Qh5 g6 17.Qh3 \rightarrow lead to devastating attacks for White.

Also, 15.Qh5 \rightarrow was strong as well.

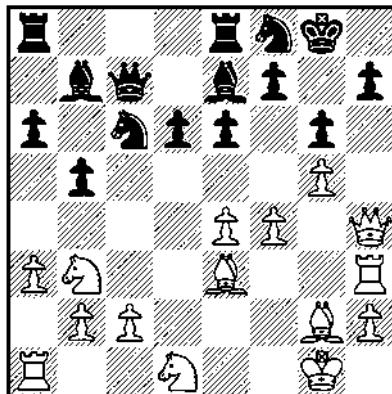
15...Re8?!

Too slow! With precise attacking play, White is practically winning.

Black had to play 15...Nb6, going for Nc4 with counterplay.

16.Rh3 g6 17.Qg4 Bb7 18.Qh4 Nf8

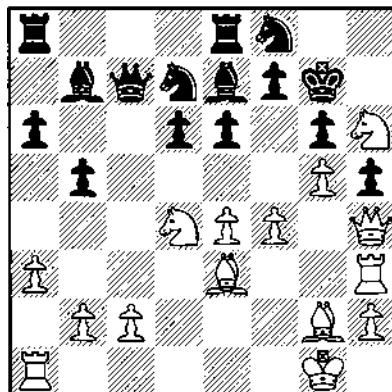
18...h5 Can be met with an idea we've seen before: 19.Bf3! Kg7 20.f5 \pm .



A powerful maneuver—Black is helpless against the plan of Nf2-g4-h6!

19.Qh6 \pm was another option, with the idea f4-f5.

19...Nb8 20.Nf2 Nbd7 21.Ng4 h5 22.Nh6+ Kg7 23.Nd4



Black is helpless against the incoming f4-f5 breakthrough.

23...Nh7

23...f6 can usually be met with 24.f5, and here it is just winning on the spot. Black's king cannot survive for long.

24.f5

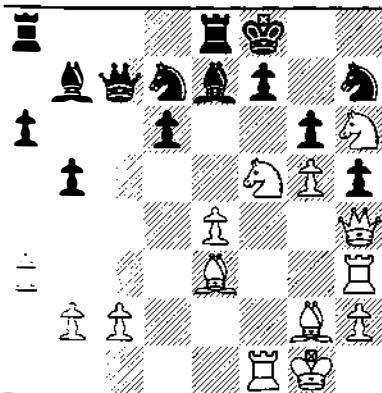
The most natural break, and completely crushing.

The destructive 24.Nxf7! Kxf7 was also winning, but Taimanov's way is simpler.

24...exf5 25.Ndxf5+ Kf8

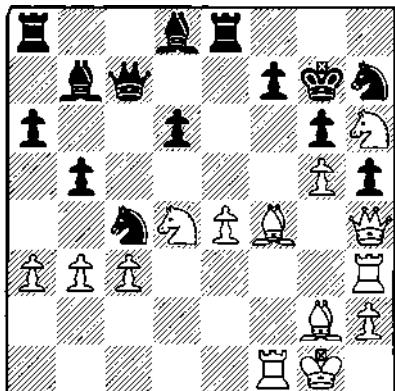
25.gxf5 26.Qxh5+- leads to a mate.

25.Rf1+-

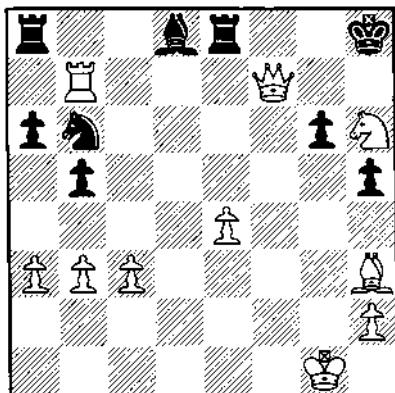


With all of White's pieces perfectly placed, the final onslaught is not far off. Guseinov now goes after the f7 pawn, and the rest of the game (played in blitz) can be enjoyed without any comments:

**26...Ne5 27.Nd4 Bd8 28.c3 Kg7
29.Bf4 Nc4 30.b3**

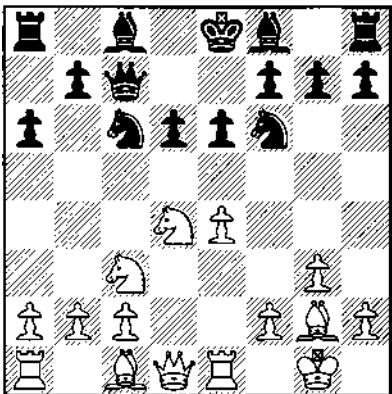


**30...Nb6?? 31.Ndf5+ Kh8
32.Nxd6 Qe7 33.Ndxf7+ Kg7
34.Be5+ Qxe5 35.Nxe5 Rxe5
36.Rf7+ Kh8 37.Rxb7 Nxg5
38.Qf4 Nxh3+ 39.Bxh3 Re8
40.Qf7 1-0**

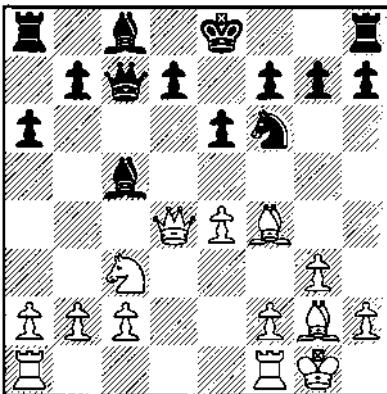


Memory Markers

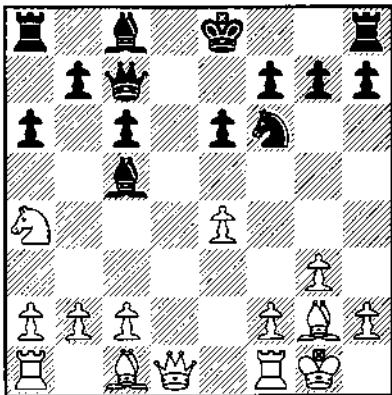
Here are reminders of some of the ideas and motifs in this chapter.



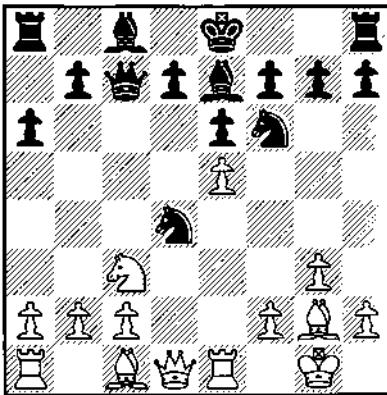
- 1. After 9.Re1!** White threatens Nxc6 and e4-e5. See diagram on page 178, in Game 15 Kavalek–Garcia Gonzales.



- 2. After 10.Bf4!** Counterattacking Black's queen, leading to a slight edge. See diagram on page 190, in the notes to Game 16.



- 3. After 10.Na4!** A common knight leap in the Taimanov, freeing the c-pawn to advance. See Game 16, diagram on page 194.



- 4. After 10.e4-e5!** The start of a powerful central onslaught. See Game 17, diagram on page 203.

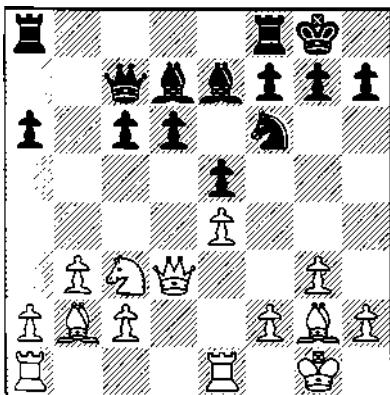
Exercises

White to play!

As White, practice finding the right moves when facing the Taimanov.

Solutions to the exercises begin on page 525.

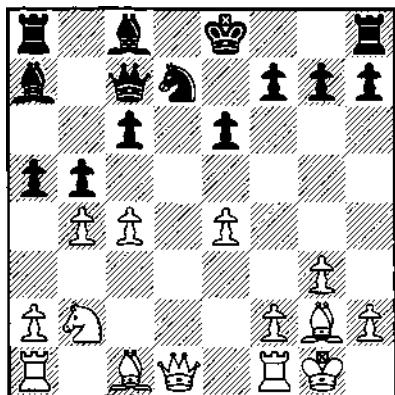
Exercise 1



Mitjans – Granda Zuniga
Spanish 2013

White to play; find a good plan to proceed.

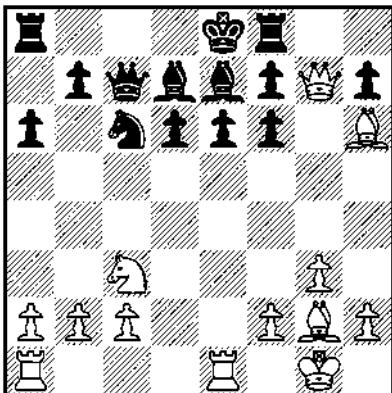
Exercise 2



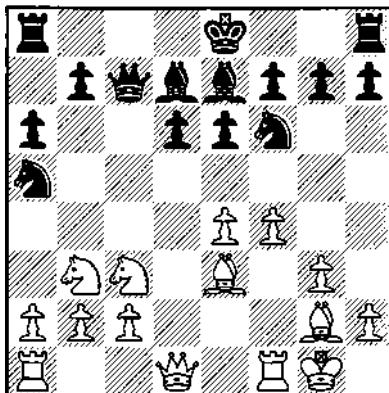
Gurevich – Strohhaeker
Bundesliga 2009

Black has just played a6-a5, breaking the queenside open. How should White react?

Exercise 3



Exercise 4



Game 17
Additional Analysis

White is on the attack, but Black is ready to castle queenside and consolidate. Find the best move.

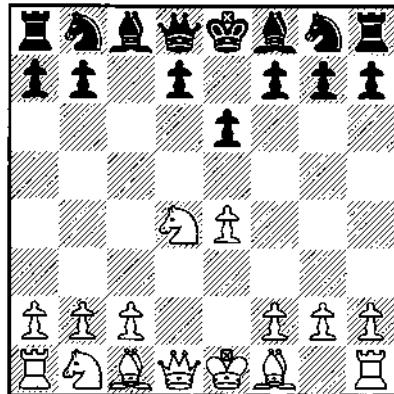
Zvjaginsev – Grachev
60th Russian Championship
Krasnoyarsk 2007

Black has just played Nc6-a5; find the best continuation for White.

Summary:

Chapter 2

Systems with 2...e6



1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4

As this chapter demonstrates, the Afianchietto of the light-squared bishop is a bold way of treating both 2...e6 systems. Against the Kan Variation, our aim was to present a step-by-step blueprint for conducting the kingside attack, and to show the immense potential of White's setup. The reader is highly recommended to analyze deeper, and to explore the vast amount of resources in the complex middlegame.

The use of an engine is helpful, but be wary: the computer will often underestimate White's play, and can fail to realize that the attack is about to crash through. The fix for this is to manually input thematic attacking moves—such as the rook lift Rf3-h3, or the f4-f5 break—even if they aren't suggested as one of the top choices by your engine. In many cases during our own analysis the computer would assess the position at hand as better for Black, but after a natural attacking move was

played the evaluation would suddenly swing heavily in White's favor!

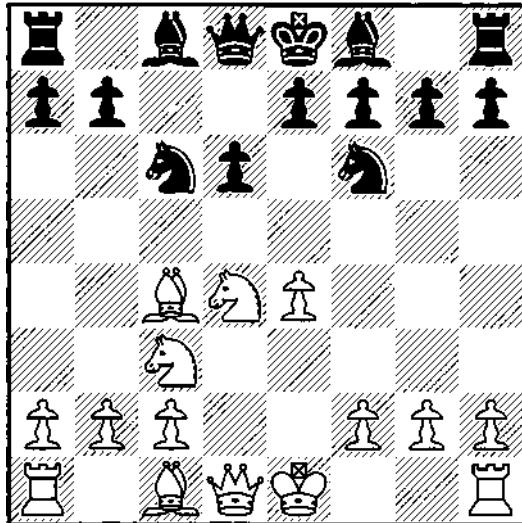
This suggests that the position is overall easier to play for White, as our play is logical and straightforward.

There are quite a few lines within the Taimanov Variation, but for the most part White's play against each of them is quite rational. After 8.O-O in the main line, Black has a wide choice and can choose to allow one of several different structures. In general, we found that White can fight for a small edge in every line, and can hope to increase his advantage in the middlegame with proper positional play.

While a full memorization of the chapter would be excessive, you should at least know the first few moves and general direction of each line. We'd also like to highlight the sideline 7...h5 as needing further study—this move is quickly growing in popularity and may start showing up quite often in tournament practice.

Chapter 3

The Classical Variation



1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 Nc6 6.Bc4

Our third chapter covers the Classical Variation, one of the more solid Sicilians at Black's disposal. Our recommendation of **6.Bc4** is known as the Fischer-Sozin Attack, which was first championed by the Russian master Benjamin Sozin in the 1930s, before later being used with frequent success by Fischer. We're quite happy with our choice, as the more popular Richter-Rauzer Attack (**6.Bg5**) is too theoretically dense for our taste.

We've chosen a line that is guided by middlegame principles and positional understanding. The major point of the Fischer-Sozin Attack is to use the light-squared bishop to tear down upon the a2-g8 diagonal, placing great pressure against the e6 and f7 squares.

After **6...e6**, which will be the subject of Games 19 and 20, White will often castle kingside and advance f2-f4, supporting the light-squared bishop and threatening to

hammer away at Black's structure with the advance f4-f5.

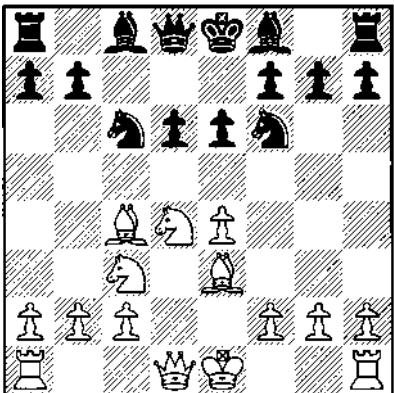
In Games 21 and 22, we will then explore the dynamic **6...Qb6**, which in recent years has become Black's more popular response to our system. Our response, **7.Nb3**, will lead to intriguing middlegames with lots of play for both sides.

Finally, in Game 23 we will take a look at some of Black's less common options, including **6...Bd7** and **6...e5**.

Game 19

Fischer – Cardoso
Match, New York 1957

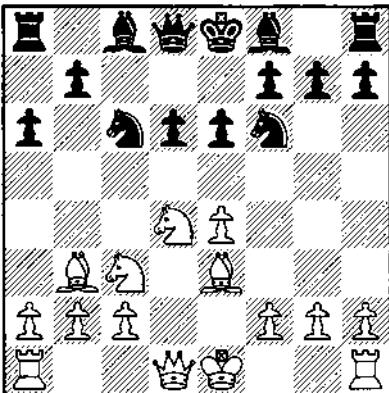
- 1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4
- 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 Nc6 6.Bc4 e6
- 7.Be3



In this game, we will cover all the systems of development when Black plays an early Nc6-a5 with the idea of trading off the light-squared bishop. The second option for Black, simply developing with moves like a6, Qc7, and Be7 (without Na5), will be covered in the next game.

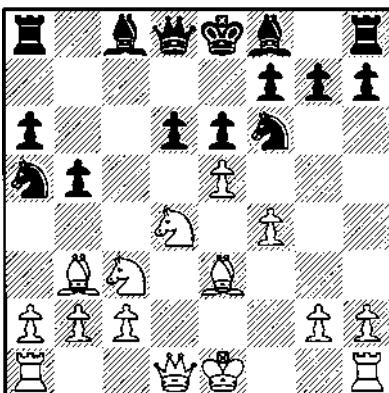
7...Be7

Black mainly develops this bishop first, getting ready to castle, but it also possible to play 7...a6, delaying Be7 for a couple of moves. 8.Bb3

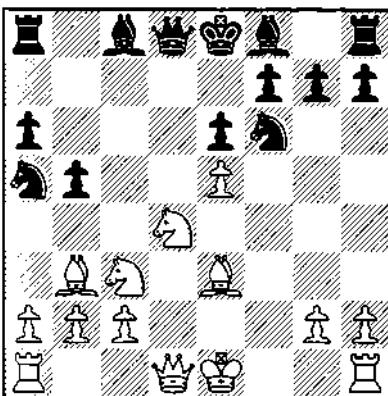


A useful prophylactic move, getting the bishop away from b7-b5 or d6-d5. We look at 8...Na5 here, and 8...Qc7 on page 230.

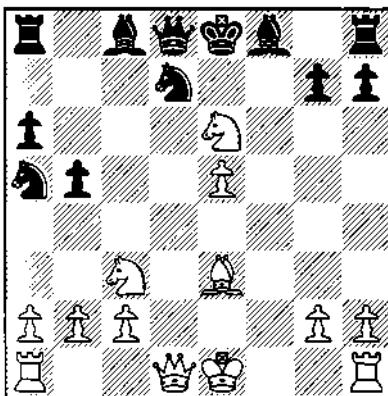
Playing 8...Na5 without Qc7 is very risky. White only needs to know a few ideas to punish Black: 9.f4 b5 10.e5!



White immediately seizes the initiative with this aggressive advance After 10...dxe5 11.fxe5

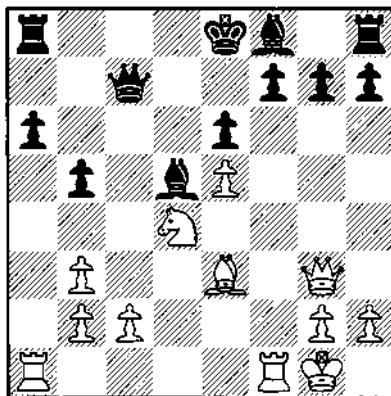


a) 11...Nd7? already allows the devastating sacrifice 12.Bxe6! fxe6 (relatively best is 12...Nxe5 13.Qh5±) 13.Nxe6



Black is simply busted: 13...Qh4+ 14.g3 Qc4 15.Nd5!+-.

b) Forced is 11...Nxb3 12.axb3 Nd5 and now 13.Qf3! is the best way to develop the attack. 13...Bb7 (not 13...Nxe3?! 14.Qxa8 Qd7 15.Ncxb5+-, Ehvest-Smirin, Moscow 1988) 14.O-O Qc7 15.Nxd5 Bxd5 16.Qg3!



Black has serious difficulties castling here, which gives White excellent attacking chances. For instance:

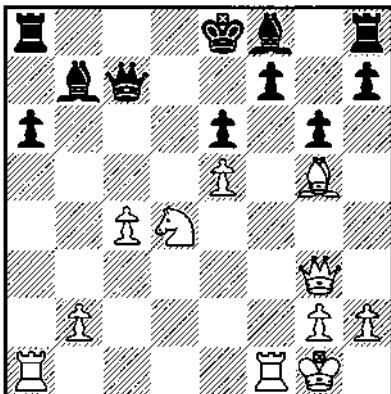
b1) 16...h5 17.c4! Opening the c-file is well worth the cost of a pawn. 17...bxc4 18.bxc4:

b11) 18...Bb7 loses instantly to 19.Nxe6! fxe6 20.Qg6++-.

b12) As does 18...Bxc4? 19.Rac1+-.

b13) After 18...Qxc4 19.Rac1 Qd3 20.Rc7± Black was extremely fortunate to survive, in De Firmian-Gurevich, San Francisco 1987.

b2) 16...g6 is more logical, but here too, White shouldn't hesitate: 17.c4! bxc4 18.bxc4 Bb7 and now we believe 19.Bg5!N poses the most serious problems for Black:



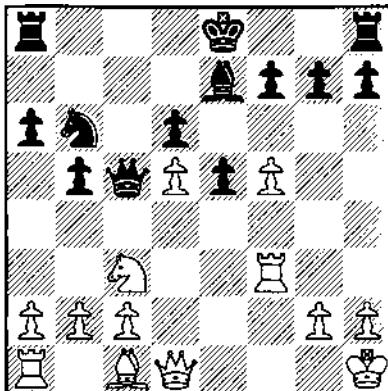
a) First, 10.O-O leads to a slightly different position than 10.f5, but with the same general ideas. 10... $\mathbb{B}e7$ (10... $\mathbb{B}e7$ 11.Qf3 actually transposes to the main game) 11.f5 $e5$. Here we will just show you the line considered critical from a theoretical stance because we found a nice improvement for White: 12.Nde2 $\mathbb{B}b7$ 13.Nd5 $Nxd5$ 14.Bxd5 $Nc4$ 15.Bc1 $Qc5+$ 16.Kh1 $Bxd5$ 17.exd5 $Nb6$ 18.Nc3 $Be7$ 19.Rf3!N

b21) Against 19... $\mathbb{B}g7$, winning is 20.Qa3!+– threatening $Qa4+$.

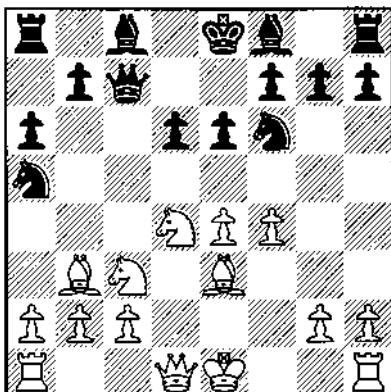
b22) Or 19... $\mathbb{B}c5$ 20.Rad1 $Qb6$ 21.Kh1! $Bxd4$ 22.Qf4 O-O 23.Rxd4+– followed by $Bf6$, with a winning attack.

b23) After 19... $\mathbb{B}e7$ 20.Bxe7 $Qxe7$ 21.Rf6 O-O 22.Raf1→ Black's defense is very difficult, and White can continue with Qf2 and advancing h2-h4-h5.

More solid for Black is 8... $Qc7$ 9.f4 $Na5$

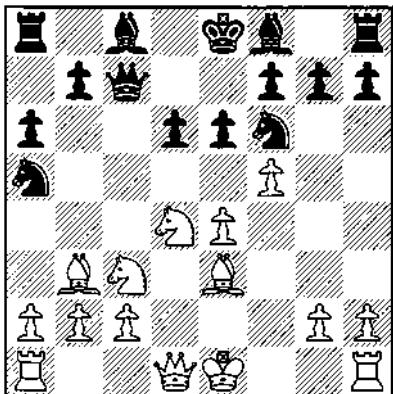


White threatens $Be3$ and $Bxb6$, followed by $Ne4$ with positional domination. But it is also not easy for Black to castle, since White's rook is ready to swing over to g3 or h3. Black should be very careful in this position. Instead, 19.Ne4? gave up the d5 pawn for too little compensation, De Firmian-Salov, New York 1996.



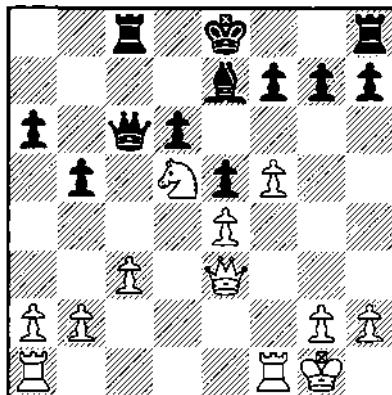
Now e4-e5 is not an option for White, but f4-f5 is quite strong! We now look at 10.O-O and 10.f5!

b) But we prefer the direct 10.f5!:



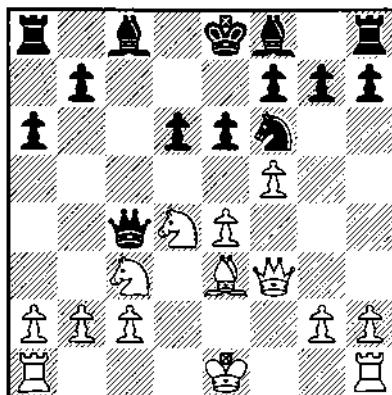
The pressure against e6 is too strong to ignore. Black's options include 10...e5, 10...Nc4, and the best chance 10...Nxb3:

b1) Giving up the d5 square immediately with 10...e5 is probably Black's least combative option. One example should be enough to see why: 11.Nde2 b5 12.Nd5! Forcing favorable exchanges, leaving Black with a passive dark-squared bishop. 12...Nxd5 13.Bxd5 Bb7 14.Bxb7 Qxb7 15.Nc3 Rc8 16.Nd5 Qc6 17.c3. As long as White can prevent any serious counterplay he should enjoy a large strategic advantage. 17...Nc4 18.Qe2 Be7 19.O-O Nxe3?! 20.Qxe3±:



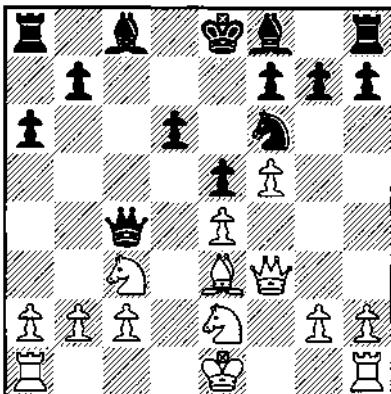
The knight on d5 dominates the poor bishop on e7, a dream position for White, De Firmian–Nilsson, Farum 1993.

b2) Also precarious for Black is 10...Nc4 11.Bxc4 Qxc4 12.Qf3! and now:



b21) White quickly launched a powerful attack after 12...Be7 13.O-O-O O-O 14.g4! Nd7 15.g5 Ne5 16.Qg3 b5 17.f6±, Lupulescu–Raceanu, Eforie Nord 2000.

b22) 12...e5 (12...b5 right now runs into 13.e5) 13.Nde2

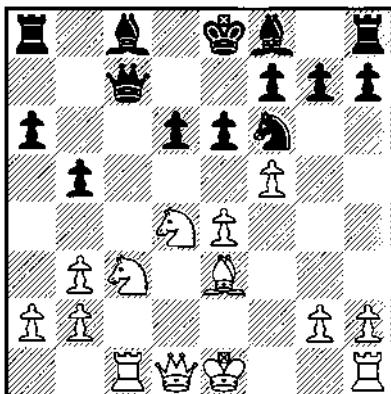


White should next play b2-b3 and Bg5, winning control over d5. For instance 13...b5 (*In case of 13...h6 Black is so far behind in development that White should not hesitate to sacrifice: 14.b3N Qc7 15.Nd5! Nxd5 16.exd5 Qxc2 17.O-O↑ with ideas of Rcl-c7 and Ng3-h5.*) 14.b3 Qc6 15.Bg5 Be7 16.Bxf6 Bxf6 17.Nd5 Bb7 18.O-O-O!? Rc8 19.c3±. With such a solid grip over the center, White's position was very comfortable in Reinderman–Van der Weide, Hoogeveen 1999.

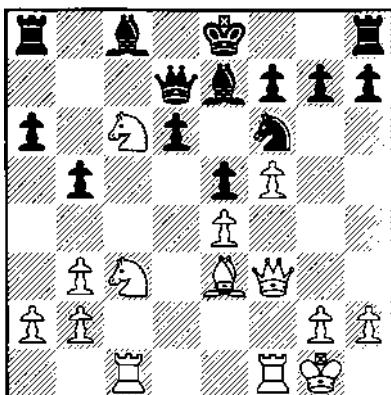
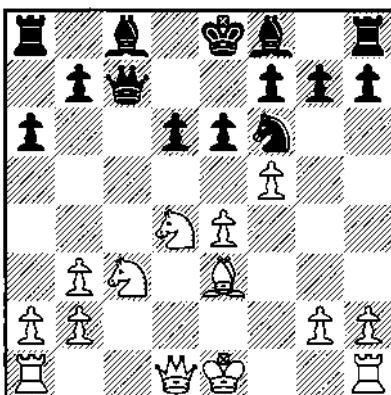
b3) Black's best chance for equality is 10...Nxb3 which should be met with 11.cxb3! and now:

b31) After 11...e5 12.Nde2 b5 13.Rc1 Qb7 White can still get a positional edge through use of the d5 square, for example 14.O-O Bd7 15.Nd5 Nxd5 16.exd5 Rc8 17.Rxc8+ Qxc8 18.Ng3 Be7 19.Qg4±, Nisipeanu–Damljanovic, Gothenburg 2005.

b32) Instead, after 11...b5 12.Rc1 let's take a look at a few instructive middlegames:

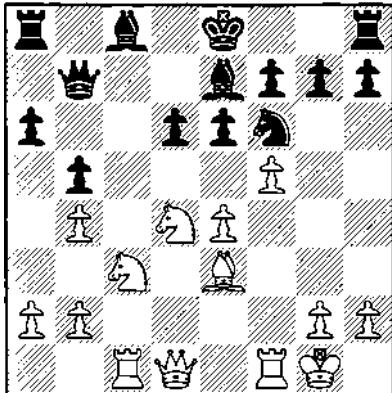


b321) 12...Qd7 13.O-O Be7 14.Qf5?! overlooking a nice trick. (*after 14...O-O White should launch the kingside attack with 15.g4!–15.Nc6!*

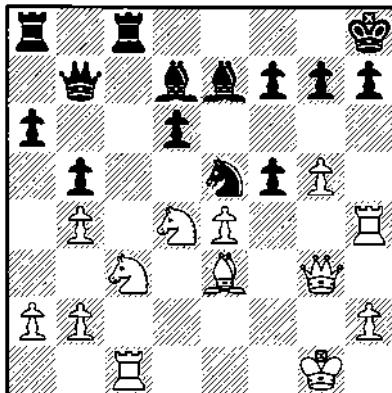


This leads to an edge. (*White missed it too! Amanov-Kacheishvili, Las Vegas 2012, continued 15.Nc2.*) Black must settle for a worse position after 15...Bb7 (not 15...Qxc6? 16.Nd5 Qb7 17.Rc7+) 16.Na5 O-O 17.Nxb7 Qxb7 18.Bg5!± leaving White with a classic good knight vs. bad bishop scenario.

b322) 12...Qb7 13.O-O Be7 14.b4!

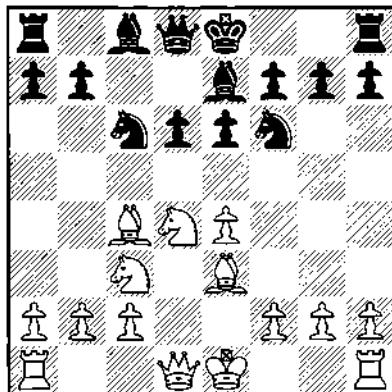


A good move, preventing b5-b4. 14...O-O (14...Nxe4? leads to disaster after 15.Nxe6! fxe6 16.Qh5+ Kd8 17.Nxe4 Qxe4 18.Bb6++) 15.Qf3 Kh8 16.g4! The start of White's thematic kingside attack. The plan is to play g4-g5 followed by transferring the heavy pieces to the h-file. 16...Nd7 17.g5 Ne5 18.Qg3 Bd7 19.Rf4!→. While in Chapter 2 we often lifted the rook via f3, here we can use the fourth rank to decisive effect. The threat of Rh4 and Qh3 is difficult to meet. (*Of course White should avoid 19.f6? gxf6 20.gxf6 Rg8+–*) 19...Rfc8 20.Rh4 exf5:



And here White should have found 21.Qh3! (Although 21.exf5→ also led to a nice attacking victory in Sofronie-Lupulescu, Predeal 2006.) with the point 21...h6 22.Rxh6+ gxh6 23.Qxh6+ Kg8 24.Nd5+–, winning Black's queen and the game.

Back to our game, after 7...Be7:

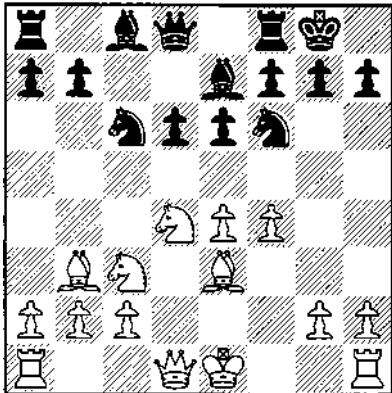


8.Bb3

A necessary prophylactic move so that Black cannot play d6-d5 with tempo.

8...O-O 9.f4!

10.O-O



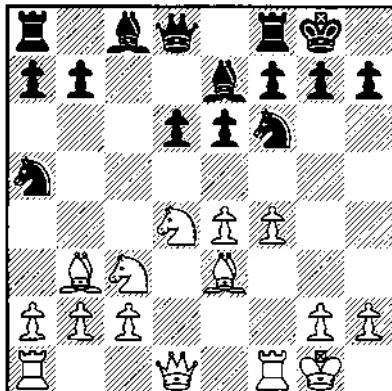
With Fischer's bishop placed so ready for battle on b3, he felt it was necessary to advance the f-pawn as soon as possible in order to hammer away at the a2-g8 diagonal. To put it simply, we also believe this active plan gives White excellent chances of seizing the initiative!

Instead, 9.O-O Leads to a well known position after 9...Bd7 10.f4 Nxd4 11.Bxd4 Bc6 \Rightarrow where Black has enough counterplay to equalize.

9...Na5

A banal reaction to White's attack, seeking to eliminate the powerful bishop on b3. The main drawback to this approach is the loss of time, as White will still be able to launch a very strong kingside attack.

Black's other main moves in this position, 9...Bd7, 9...Nxd4, and 9...a6, will be covered in the next game.



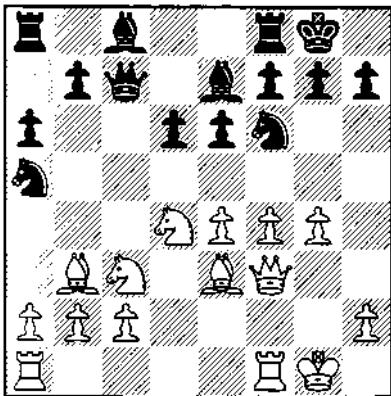
10...Qc7

Black isn't obliged to capture or b3 right away, so this flexible move makes sense.

10...Nxb3 transposes to the game after 11.axb3 a6 12.Qf3 Qc7 13.g4.

The rare sideline 10...b6 doesn't appear to be very healthy for Black. The obvious drawback is that it allows 11.e5! Ne8 And now we'd prefer to transfer White's queen to the kingside with 12.Qf3 (*Although 12.f5! has scored well and poses immediate problems for Black to solve.*) 12...Bb7 13.Qg3 \uparrow Gligoric-Barden, Hastings 1960. White can follow up with Rad1 and in some cases Ndb5. In our opinion Black's position is harder to play, as he must always watch out for f4-f5.

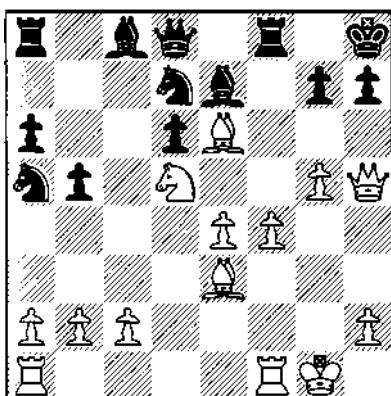
11.Qf3 a6 12.g4!↑



The start of the kingside attack. White plans to play g4-g5 next, followed by f4-f5.

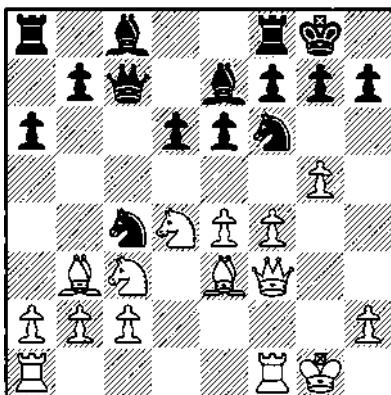
12...Nxb3

In one of the earliest examples of this attack, Black erred with 12...b5?! allowing the great Soviet GM Boleslavsky to execute a nice sacrifice: 13.g5 Nd7 14.Nxe6! fxe6 15.Bxe6+ Kh8 16.Nd5 Qd8 17.Qh5:

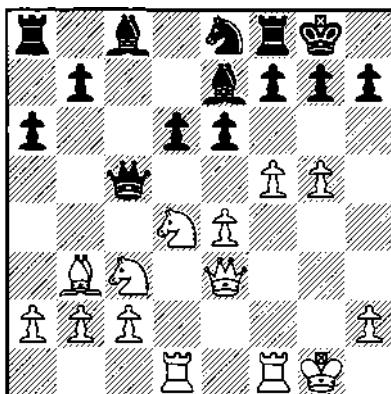


Black is helpless against the threat of f4-f5 and g5-g6. After 17...Nc5 18.Bxc8 Rxc8 19.f5, Black had to play 19...Bxg5+, in Boleslavsky–Aronin, URSS-ch, Moscow 1949.

12...Nc4 has been tried as well, but here too White gets excellent attacking chances after 13.g5:

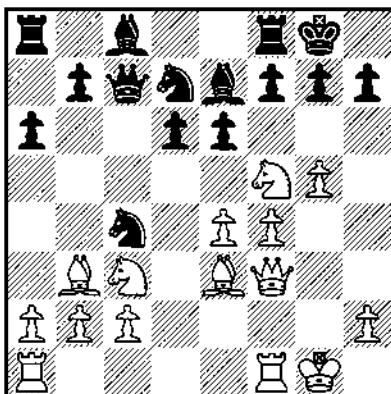


a) 13...Ne8 14.f5! going forward with the attack, the right decision. 14...Nxe3 15.Qxe3 Qc5 16.Rad1!



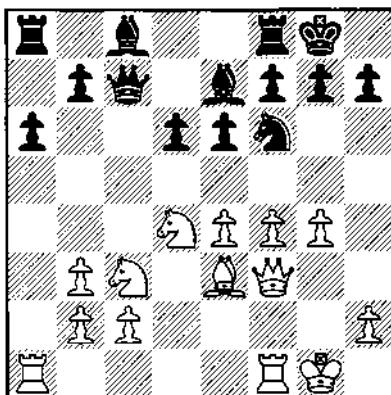
16...b5 (*16...e5 is answered by 17.Nd5!*) And now the straightforward 17.fxe6! was best. (*17.h4→ was a decent move, but gave Black more chances in Danin–Amonatov, Moscow 2008.*) Black cannot defend the f-file after 17...fxe6 (or 17...Bxe6 18.Nd5±) 18.Rxf8+ Bxf8 19.Rf1! Be7 20.Kh1! with Qf2 next, and White is winning.

b) 13...Nd7 allowed the nice shot
14.Nf5!



and after 14...Re8 (14...exf5? is bad in view of 15.Nd5 Qd8 16.Bxc4+–, where the activity of White's pieces is decisive.) 15.Nxe7+ Rxe7. Without the dark-squared bishop Black could not defend the kingside: 16.Bxc4 Qxc4 17.Rad1 Qc7 18.f5±, Golubev-Zahn, Bad Wiessee 1999.

13.axb3

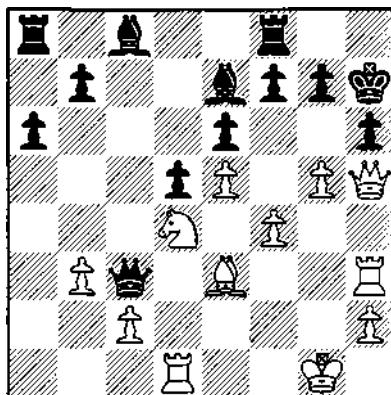


Capturing with the a-pawn is correct here, because the c-file isn't needed for White's kingside attack. Moreover, b7-b5 is prevented for another move.

13...Rb8

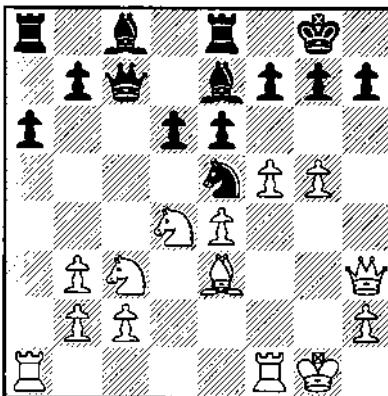
A reasonable move, but Black has tried to defend in various ways, leading to other nice attacking victories:

13...d5 14.e5 Nd7 15.g5! with the simple idea of Qh5 and Rf3-h3 15...Nc5 16.Qh5 Ne4 17.Rf3! Nxc5 18.Rh3 h6 19.bxc3 Qxc3 20.Rd1 Black is helpless against the second wave of White's attack. Things did not last much longer: 20...Kh7



21.f5! (But not 21.gxh6? g6 halting White's attack.) 21...exf5 22.Rg3 Switching to the g-file. 22...Bc5 23.g6+ Kg8 24.Bxh6!+–, Vasiukov-Gurgenidze, URS-ch Kharkov 1967.

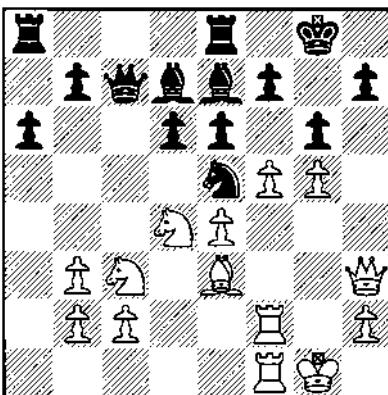
13...Re8 14.g5 Nd7 15.f5 Ne5 16.Qh3



White's main ideas here are f5-f6 and Rf4-h4. 16...g6?! A weakening move, leading to a remarkable game by attacking maestro GM Leonid Yurtaev.

(*16...Bf8 led to a more straightforward victory after 17.Rf4! Bd7 18.Raf1 exf5 19.exf5 Nc6 20.Nd5 Qd8 21.Rh4+ and White soon crashed through in Golubev-Prokhorov, Odessa 2009.*)

17.Rf2! Bd7 18.Raf1:



White threatens Nxe6 f7xe6 f5-f6. 18...Bf8 19.Rf4! This transfer is possible since g5 is no longer under attack. 19...b5 20.Rh4 h5 21.gxh6 Kh7. Black has successfully blocked the h-file, but now followed 22.fxg6+ fxg6 23.Rhf4! GM Yurtaev returns to the

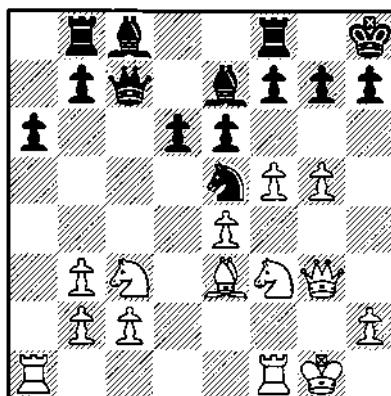
f-file! 23...Bc6 24.Nxe6 Qe7 25.Rf7+! 1–0, Yurtaev–Prasad, Kolkata 1998. The amazing trajectory of the rook rightfully ends with the final blow of the game. Black resigned in view of 25...Nxf7 26.Rxf7+ Qxf7 27.Ng5+.

Now let's see how a young Bobby Fischer executed White's attack:

14.g5 Nd7 15.f5 Ne5 16.Qg3 Kh8

Necessary, because f5-f6 was threatened.

17.Nf3!



Fischer was only 14 at the time of this game, but was already displaying grandmaster-level strength and understanding in his play. With his last move White trades off Black's best defender, leaving the kingside vulnerable for attack.

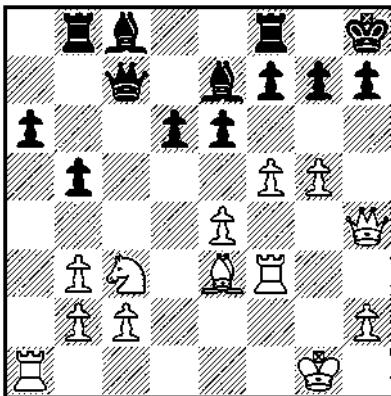
The "standard" 17.Rf4 would also have given White a potent attack.

17...Nxf3+?

A horrendous move. This exchange simply facilitates White's attack, which is now decisive.

Any reasonable move such as 17...Bd7 would have been better, although White's attack is still dangerous after 18.Qh4→.

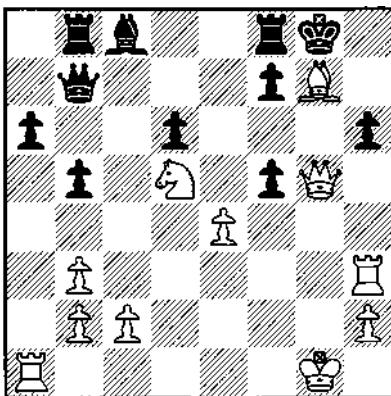
18.Rxf3 b5 19.Qh4!



With the crushing threat of 20.Rh3.

19...exf5 20.exf5?!

The first slip by Fischer. Instead of the immediate recapture, he could have ended the game brilliantly with 20.Nd5! Qb7 21.Rh3 h6 22.Bd4! with the threat of Qxh6+, leading to a spectacular finish that would be hard for anyone to see from afar, including Fischer. 22...Kg8 23.Bxg7 Bxg5 24.Qxg5! is the lovely point of White's play:



If 24...hxg5 then 25.Bf6! with an unstoppable mate on h8.

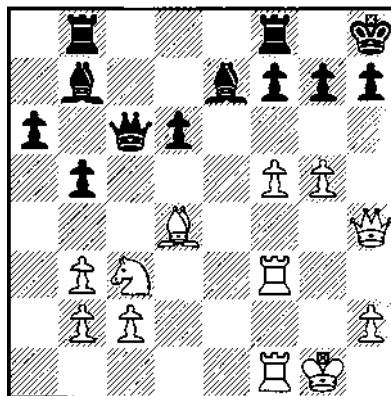
20...Qc6!

Cardoso finds the best chance, aiming for counterplay along the long diagonal.

21.Raf1 Bb7

It is now uncomfortable for White, as Black's queen and bishop battery is very annoying to deal with.

22.Bd4!



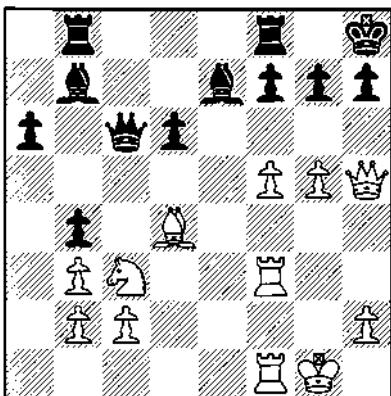
Aiming the bishop at the g7 pawn
22...b4

Giving up the queen wouldn't save Black: 22...Qxf3 23.Rxf3 Bxf3 24.Bxg7+! Kxg7 25.Qh6+ Kh7 26.g6+-.

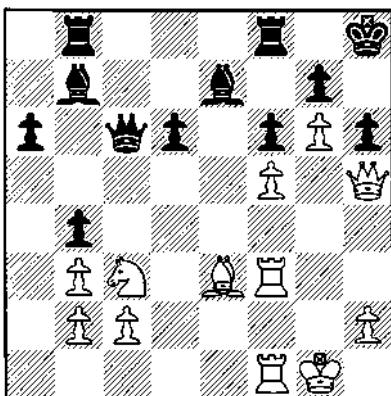
23.Bxg7+?!

While this sacrifice seems very strong, in reality Black had an amazing defensive resource that Cardoso was unable to find.

The only direct win was 23.Qh5! unpinning the g-pawn to advance it:

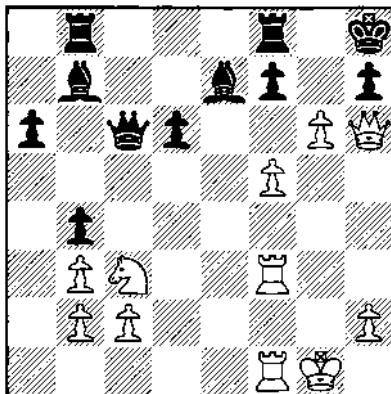


23...f6 (White's idea can be seen after 23...bxc3 24.g6 fxg6 25.fxg6 h6 26.Qxh6+++) 24.g6 h6 25.Be3!



Amazingly, Black has no defense to Bxh6 followed by mate. The last ditch effort is 25...Qxf3 26.Rxf3 Bxf3 27.Qxf3 bxc3, but even here 28.Bxh6! wins the game. 28...gxh6 29.Qe3+--.

23...Kxg7 24.Qh6+ Kh8 25.g6

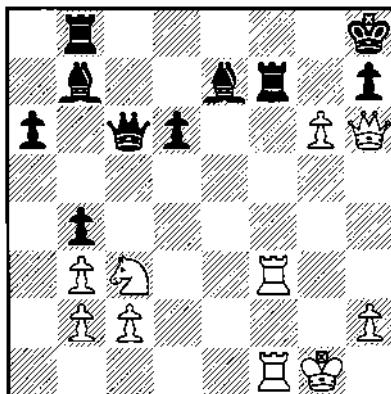


It seems the attack has crashed through, and it's likely that both players believed that White was completely winning, but...

25...Qc5+?

Missing a beautiful defense.

Correct was 25...fxg6 26.fxg6 Rf7!!:



Truly a spectacular move! 27.gxf7 Rf8= and despite having an extra exchange White must be careful not to lose, as Black's battery along the a8-h1 diagonal is very strong.

26.R1f2

Game 20

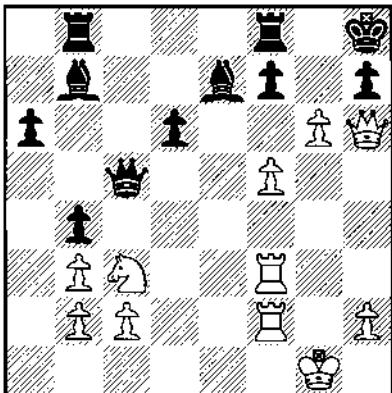
Short – Kasparov

Game 14

PCA World Championship

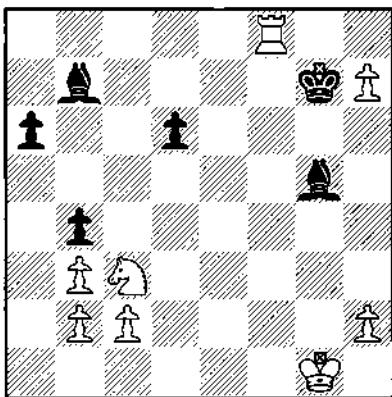
London 1993

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4
4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 Nc6 6.Bc4 e6
7.Be3 Be7 8.Bb3 O-O 9.f4

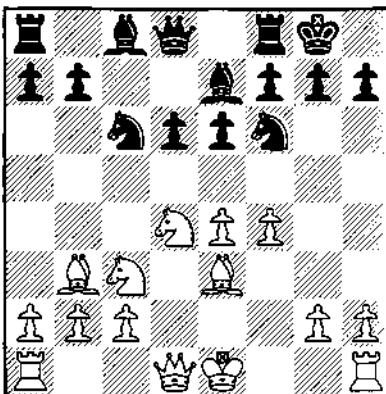


After the missed opportunity, the game is now practically over, and Fischer didn't allow his opponent any more chances to survive.

26...fxg6 27.fxg6 Qg5+ 28.Qxg5 Bxg5 29.Rxf8+ Rxf8 30.Rxf8+ Kg7 31.gxh7 1-0



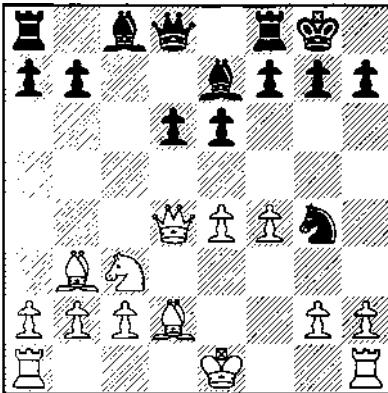
A thrilling game by the young Bobby Fischer!



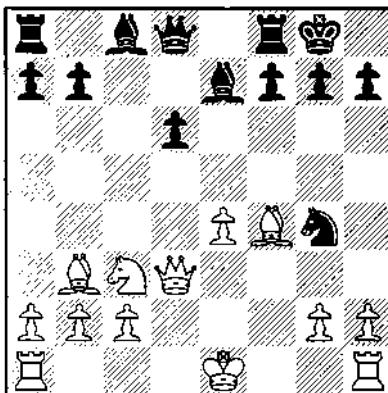
9...a6

A useful move for this position, as in many lines Black would like to play b7-b5. Before proceeding we will cover two important alternatives: 9...Nxd4 and 9...Bd7.

Against 9...Nxd4, instead of the main line 10.Bxd4 we think the untested 10.Qxd4!? is well worth exploring. White's plan is to castle queenside and advance the pawns on the kingside. The critical reply is 10...Ng4, since Black needs to strike back in the center as soon as possible. After 11.Bd2 there isn't any established theory, but in all lines White will at the very least get a playable middlegame:



a) 11...e5 12.Qd3 exf4 13.Bxf4

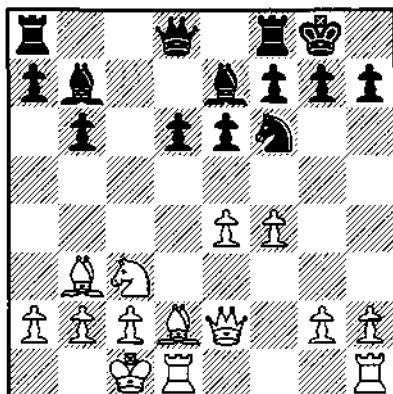


This structure is usually more pleasant for White, who has slightly more space and active pieces. We saw a practical example back in Chapter 1 Game 10, Gashimov-Delgado Ramirez. Ljubojevic-Radulov, Moscow 1977 continued 13...Ne5 (*also possible is 13...Be6 14.h3 Ne5 15.Qe3±*) 14.Qe3±.

b) 11...d5!? A sharp attempt to equalize, but concretely, White gets a good position after 12.exd5 Bf6 13.Qg1 exd5 14.O-O-O d4 15.Nd5!N 15.Ne4 was played in G.Hernandez-Vera Gonzalez-Quevedo, Cienfuegos 1996) 15...Be6, and the forced line

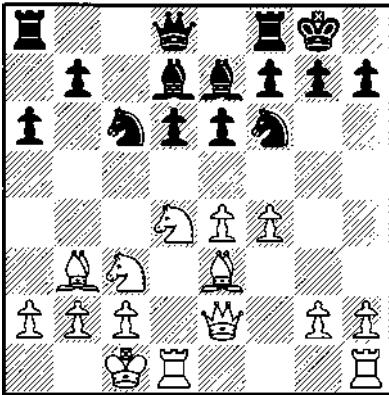
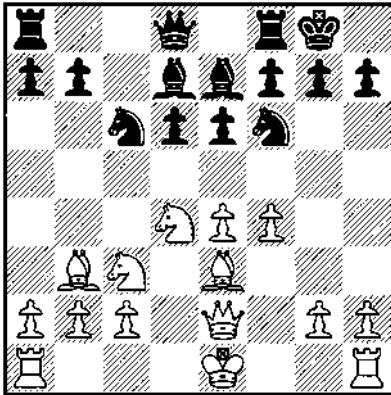
continues: 16.Nxf6+ Qxf6 17.h3 Nh6 18.g4 Bxb3 19.axb3±. A good stopping point. Black has several decent moves, but in all cases White's bishop will be clearly superior to Black's knight, guaranteeing an advantage.

c) Lastly, Black's best chance for equality probably lies in 11...b6!? threatening d6-d5 and Bc5. After 12.Qd3 Bb7 13.Qe2 Nf6 14.O-O-O



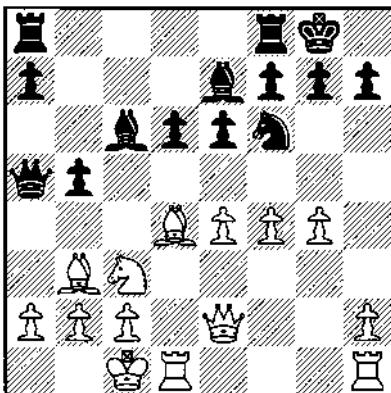
We've reached an interesting position with play for both sides. White should seek to advance f4-f5 as soon as possible, while Black should look for counterplay along the c-file.

The other move is **9...Bd7 10.Qe2!**



White prepares to castle queenside and launch the kingside attack with g2-g4-g5 and f4-f5. Let's look at a few practical examples:

a) 10...Nxd4 11.Bxd4 Bc6
12.O-O-O Qa5 13.g4 b5!

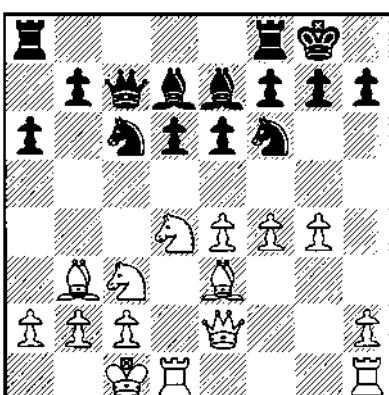


In principle correct, but White's attack should land first: 14.g5 Nd7 15.f5!N A thematic pawn sacrifice. (Vorobiov–Novogrudsky, Moscow 2000, continued 15.Rhg1.) After 15...Bxg5+ 16.Kb1 e5 17.Rhg1! Black is in trouble, for instance 17...Bf6 18.Bf2 b4 19.Qg4! bxc3 20.Rxd6 and the threat of Rxf6 is decisive.

b) 10...a6 11.O-O-O

b1) 11...Na5 12.g4 Ne8 13.g5 Nc7 14.Rhg1 Nb5. Here too, White could have been more direct on the kingside: 15.f5!N (15.Kb1± was played in Ivanov–Ashley, Bermuda 1995.) 15...Nxd4 16.Bxd4 Bxg5+. Black is obliged to accept the pawn; otherwise f5-f6 would be too strong. 17.Kb1 Nxb3 18.axb3. The pressure against g7 forces 18...e5 19.Be3 Bxe5 20.Qxe3 f6 21.Rxd6±.

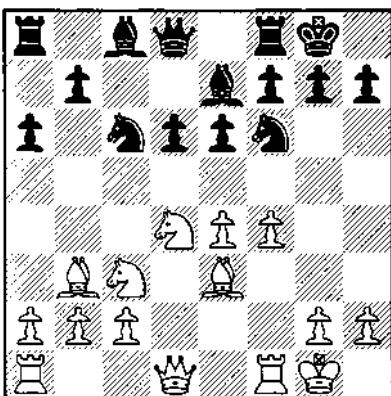
b2) 11...Qc7 12.g4!



Another sacrifice of the g-pawn, although this one is less obvious: 12...Nxd4 13.Rxd4! e5 14.Rd3 Bxg4 15.Qg2 As usual, the open g-file gives White an excellent avenue for

attack. The following example is quite instructive: 15...exf4 16.Bxf4 g6 17.Bh6 Rfe8 18.Rf1! Targeting the f7 pawn. 18...Be6 19.Bxe6 fxe6 20.Qh3! Qd7 21.e5+, Losev–Shilov, Kherson 1990.

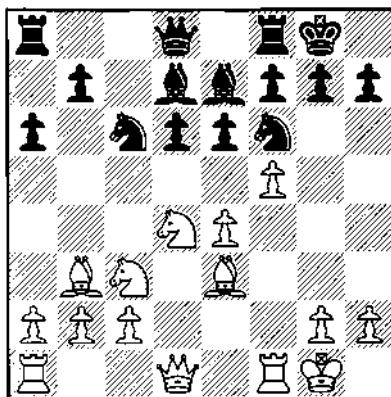
10.O-O



10...Nxd4

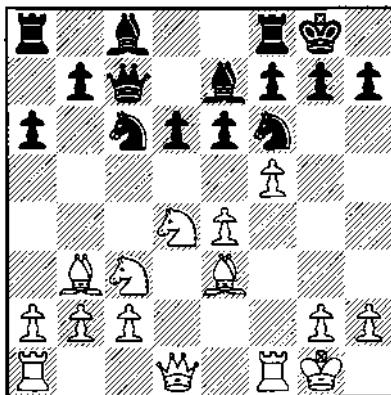
This solid exchange is the only way Black can avoid dealing with the immediate f4-f5. While we looked at 10...Na5 in the previous game, let's see what happens after Black's two other reasonable moves in this position, 10...Bd7 and 10...Qc7.

10...Bd7 11.f5!

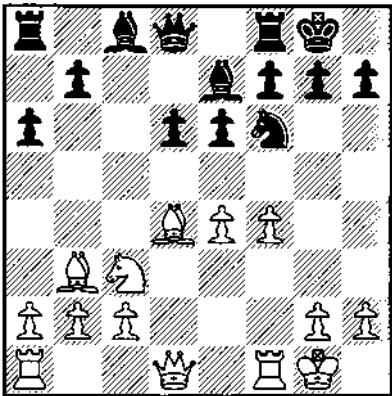
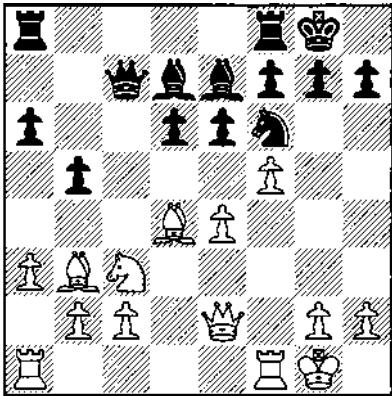


The pressure against the e6 pawn forces Black to make a concession. 11...Nxd4 (11...Qc8?! led to one of Fischer's six victories in his famous match against Larsen: 12.fxe6 Bxe6 13.Nxe6 fxe6 14.Na4!± Fischer–Larsen, Candidates Match, Denver 1971.) 12.Bxd4 e5 13.Be3 Bc6 14.Qf3 b5 15.Bg5 b4 16.Bxf6 Bxf6 17.Nd5±, Berezjuk–Zabystrzan, Czechia 1998.

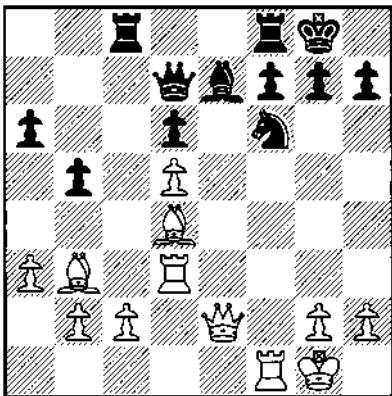
Slightly more flexible is 10...Qc7 but this doesn't change White's plan: 11.f5



11...Nxd4 (Black should trade knights before playing 11...e5?!, as after 12.Nde2 b5 13.Nd5± White's second knight will go to g3 and h5, placing tremendous pressure on Black's king side, in Coll Ortega–Volodin, Balaguer 2011.) 12.Bxd4 b5 13.a3 The knight on c3 must be secured. 13...Bd7 (In case of 13...Rb8, with the idea b5-b4, White should play 14.fxe6 fxe6 15.Qe2 b4 16.axb4 Rxb4 17.Ra4!±, trading off Black's active rook, with a small structural advantage.) 14.Qe2!



White has the positional threat of $f \times e 6$ and $e 4 - e 5$. 14... $R a c 8$ (Or 14... $Q b 7$ 15. $R a d 1 R a c 8$ 16. $f \times e 6 f \times e 6$ 17. $e 5 d \times e 5$ 18. $Q \times e 5 \pm$, Bitansky-Tomic, Aviles 2000.) 15. $R a d 1 Q c 6$ 16. $f \times e 6 B \times e 6$ (not 16... $f \times e 6 ?!$ 17. $N d 5 ! + -$) 17. $N d 5 B \times d 5$ 18. $e \times d 5 Q d 7$ 19. $R d 3 ! \rightarrow$:



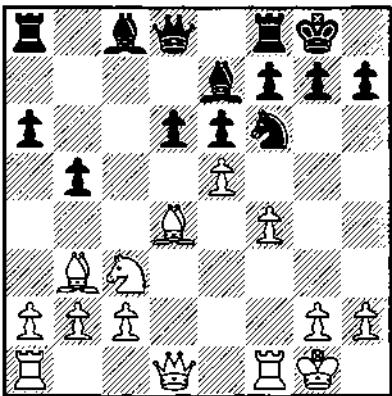
Lifting the rook to the kingside, with an irresistible attack. Schuermans-Docx, Zwijndrecht 2010.

11. $B \times d 4$

11... $b 5$

Now $f 4 - f 5$ is slow, in view of $b 5 - b 4$. White has only one serious try to fight for an advantage:

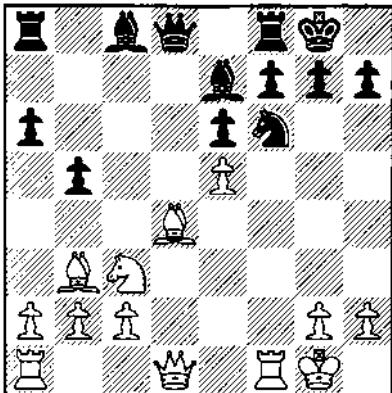
12. $e 5 !$



Otherwise Black will get a very comfortable position after $B b 7$.

Boris Spassky effectively demonstrated this to Fischer after 12. $a 3 ?$ $B b 7$ 13. $Q d 3 a 5 !$ 14. $e 5 d \times e 5$ 15. $f \times e 5 N d 7$ 16. $N x b 5 N c 5 \rightarrow$ with an excellent initiative, Fischer-Spassky, World Championship Match, Reykjavik 1972.

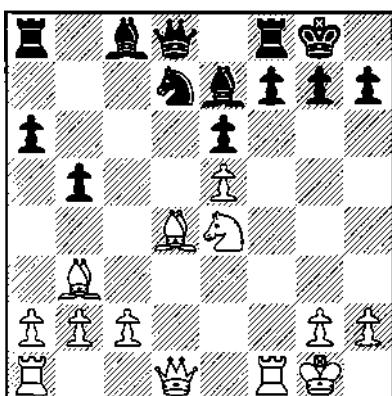
12... $d \times e 5$ 13. $f \times e 5$



13...Nd7

Three years after this game, Kasparov played the rare 13...Ne8, but once again Short was able to get an advantage with natural moves: 14.Ne4 Bb7 15.Qd3 Qc7 16.c3! Solidifying the bishop on d4 and transferring the other bishop to c2. 16...Rd8 17.Bc2 Bxe4 18.Qxe4 g6 19.b4 Ng7 20.g4!± with a large space advantage, Short–Kasparov, Amsterdam 1996. Short later missed his chances to break through, and the game was drawn.

14.Ne4!



An important move in this variation, aiming to play Nd6.

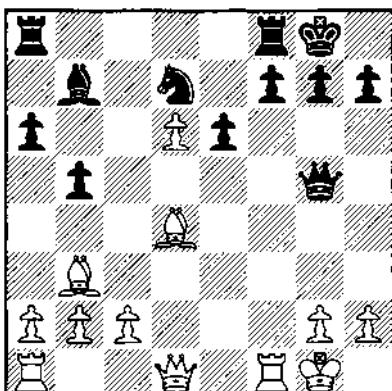
14...Bb7

It would be a huge mistake to play 14...Qc7? as the following game shows: 15.Qh5! Bc5 16.c3 h6 17.Kh1 Be7 18.Rxf7! Nb8 (*or 18...Rxf7 19.Bxe6+–*) 19.Nf6+! and it was already game over. Amanov–Shlegin, Saratov 2008.

15.Nd6

After 15.Qg4 Black simplified with 15...Bxe4 16.Qxe4 Nc5=, winning back one of White's bishops with an equal position. Apicella–Kosten, Paris 1988.

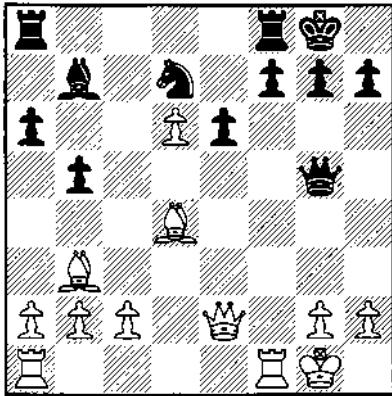
15...Bxd6 16.exd6 Qg5



The main theoretical *tabiya* of this line. White's trumps include the two active bishops and the strong passed pawn on d6. In return, Black has a very solid position and a potentially dangerous central majority. Overall, with precise play White should have the better chances, as it seems like Black is definitely struggling to equalize.

17.Qe2

White has also tried 17.Rf2, but we prefer the natural queen move.



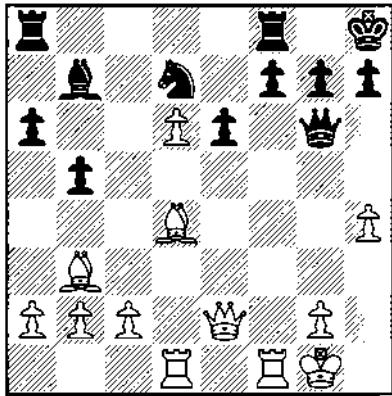
17...e5

Kasparov chooses to mobilizes the kingside majority and force White to choose between Bc3 and Be3.

Let's take a quick look at a few other games in this variation:

17...a5 18.a4! Fixing Black's queenside and gaining the c4 square. 18...b4 19.Bc4 Rac8 20.Bb5 Bc6 21.Rad1!N. A natural improvement, just putting the rook on its best square, with ideas of Rd3-g3. White has the better chances here. Instead, Friedel–Finegold, San Diego 2004, continued with 21.c3.

Judit Polgar opted for **17...Kh8** 18.Rad1 Qg6 getting ready to push the e- and f-pawns. We believe White should now have played 19.h4!?N

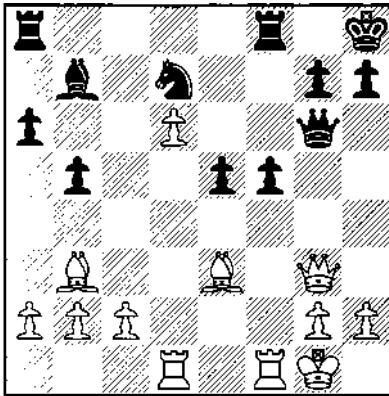


—attempting to torment Black's kingside. (*Instead, Illescas Cordoba–Polgar, Dos Hermanas 1997 continued 19.c4.*) 19...h5 (Or 19...e5 20.h5! Qxd6 21.Bc3 Qb6+ 22.Kh1—where Black is in trouble in view of the threats Rxd7, Bb4, etc.) 20.Rd3 A thematic rook-lift, seizing the initiative, for instance: 20...e5 21.Bc3 Nc5 22.Re3 f6 23.Rg3 Qh7 24.Ba5+ and Black's position is very tough to defend.

18.Bc3

A logical square for the bishop which puts pressure on Black's e5 pawn while also being able to spring to a5 at the right moment.

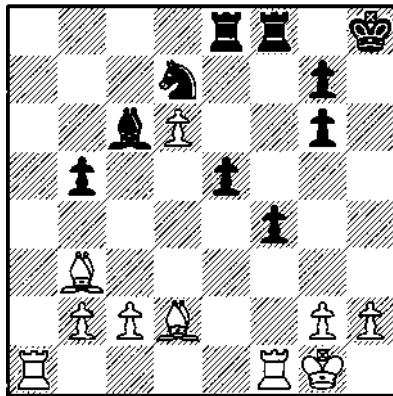
However, **18.Be3** is interesting as well, with a plan of Qf2-g3 that we like very much, for example **18...Qg6** **19.Rad1 Kh8** (**19...Rad8 20.c4 bxc4 21.Bxc4±** is simply good for White) **20.Qf2 f5 21.Qg3!**



After the trade of queens, Black will find it difficult defending the kingside while also keeping White's e6 pawn in check.

White's dream endgame can be seen in the following instructive line: 21...Qxg3 22.hxg3 g6 Defending against Be6 for the moment. 23.Bh6 Rfe8 24.g4! f4 (not 24...fxg4?? 25.Rf7, which wins on the spot.) 25.Rfe1±. The threat of Bf7-e6 will win at least the e5 pawn for White.

The only real-life example continued 21...f4 22.Qxg6 hxg6 and now perhaps 23.Bd2N was needed, to be able to attack the e5 pawn. 23.Bf2 was played in Ghaem Maghami–Wells, Eppingen 2014.) For instance 23...Rae8, otherwise Be6 and Bc3 would crack Black's defense. 24.a4 Bc6 25.axb5 axb5 26.Ra1!±

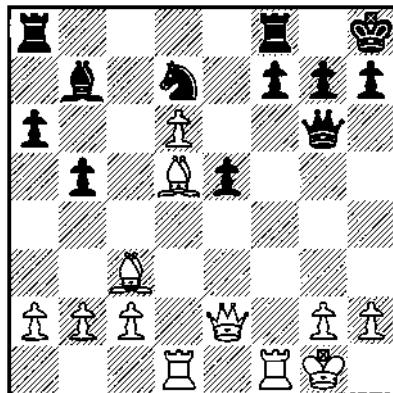


White is clearly on top, with excellent winning chances.

18...Qg6

The start of Black's typical plan, followed by Kh8 and f7-f5.

19.Rad1 Kh8 20.Bd5!?

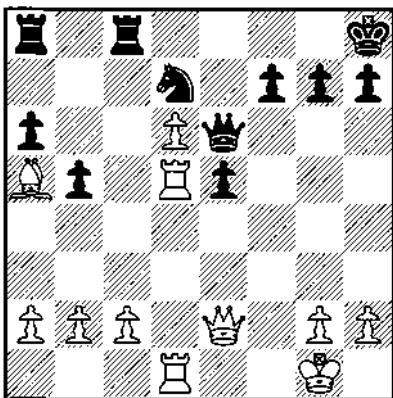


A sensible move. Although White has the two bishops, it is hard to make progress on the queenside without trading off Black's light-squared bishop, which is currently a very powerful minor piece.

20...Bxd5

The sneaky 20...Qxd6?! would run into difficulties after 21.Bxb7 Qb6+ 22.Kh1 Qxb7 23.Bb4!±.

**21.Rxd5 Qe6 22.Rfd1 Rfc8
23.Ba5!**



Now White would like to place his bishop on c7 and create a second passed pawn with b2-b3 and c2-c4.

23...Rc6

Meanwhile, Black would like to blockade White's pawns as much as possible before advancing his majority.

**24.b3 Rac8 25.Bc7 Re8 26.c4
bxc4 27.bxc4 f5 28.h3**

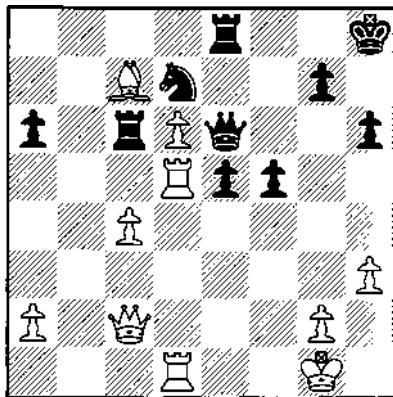
A useful move.

28...h6?!

But this move is less useful for Black!

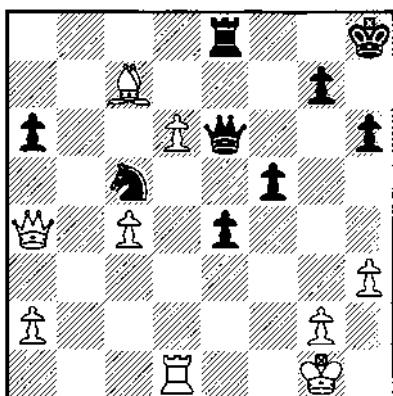
Kasparov should have continued his plan with 28...e4??.

29.Qc2!



A great way to make progress on the queenside, going after the unprotected rook on c6.

29...e4 30.Qa4 Rc5 31.Rxc5 Nxc5



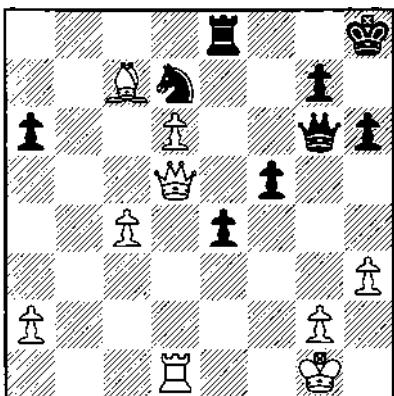
32.Qc6?!

Short misses his chance to put real pressure on Kasparov.

Best was 32.Qa3! Nd3 (n.x 32...Nd7? 33.c5, and White's connected passers will decide 33.Qxa6, and now Black must go for the following forced line: 33...e3 (n.x 33...f4 34.Qb5+- threatening d6-d7 34.Rxd3 e2 35.Ba5 e1Q+ 36.Bxe1 Qxe1+ 37.Kh2 Qe5+ 38.Rg3±, with excellent winning chances for White 32...Nd7 33.Qd5

Instead, 33.Qxa6 looks very dangerous, as Black's pawns simply march forward after 33...f4??.

33...Qg6!

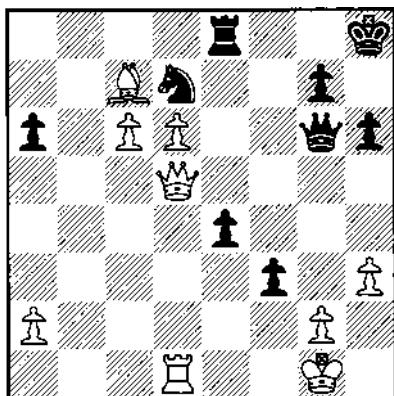


Although e4-e3 was playable, in principle Black has more counter chances with queens on the board.

34.Qd2?!

A somewhat passive move, playing not to lose.

White's last chance was 34.c5! forcing Black to find a series of precise moves: 34...f4! 35.c6 f3:



36.g4 (36.Rd2? would spoil everything after 36...Nf6 37.Qd4 e3 38.d7 exd2 39.dxe8Q+ Nxe8+) 36...Nf6 37.Qf5

Qf7! The final precise move, with the idea 38.d7 Qxa2! and due to the threat of Qg2 mate, White would be forced to give a perpetual check: 39.dxe8Q+ Nxe8 40.Qf8+ Kh7 41.Qf5+ Kh8 42.Qf8+=.

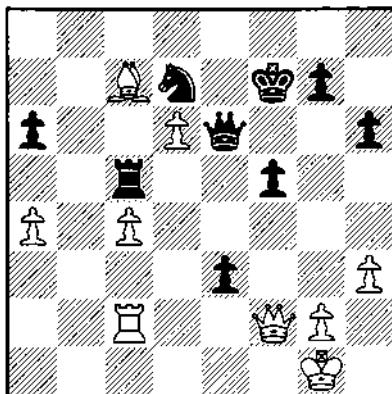
34...Re5!

Now Kasparov takes over the initiative, although it is hard for either side to make progress without allowing the opponent's pawns to advance.

35.Qe3 Qe6 36.Rc1 Rc5 37.Rc2 Kg8

But not 37...Rxc4?. It's never too late to blunder! 38.Qb3 Ne5 39.Rxc4 Nxc4 40.d7 Qxd7 41.Qxc4+-.

38.a4 Kf7 39.Qf2 e3 ½-½



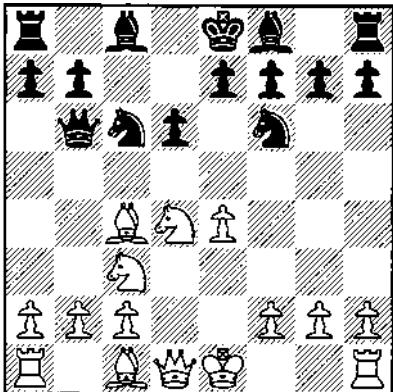
Although Black's position is clearly better now, Kasparov offered a draw to protect his sizable lead in the match.

Game 21

Kasparov – Anand

Linares 1994

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4
4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 Nc6 6.Bc4
Qb6



This early queen sortie is considered a more dynamic response to the Fischer-Sozin attack, forcing White to make a decision regarding the knight on d4.

7.Nb3

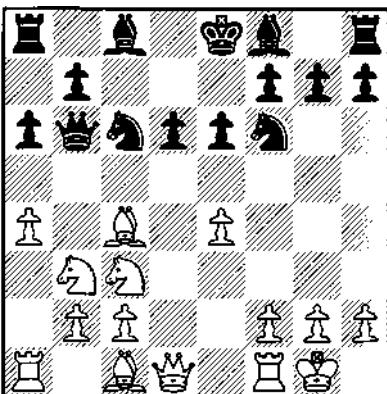
We've chosen to recommend the main line, but White has other options as well, including 7.Nxc6, 7.Ndb5, 7.Nde2, and 7.Be3, the latter with an intended sacrifice of the b2 pawn.

7...e6

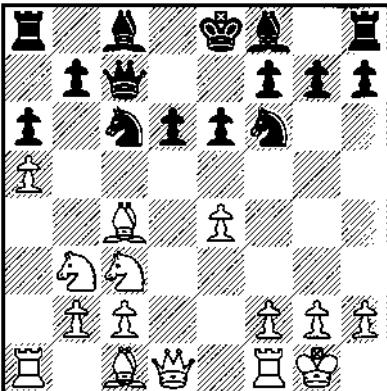
The drawback of 7.Nb3 is that we've taken away the retreat square for our light-squared bishop, which will likely have to instead retreat to e2. Before proceeding with the main line, we should first cover the important sideline 7...a6.

The point of 7...a6 is to avoid the line 7...e6 8.Bf4, which we have duly recommended. However, the issue

with this move order can be seen after 8.O-O e6 9.a4!

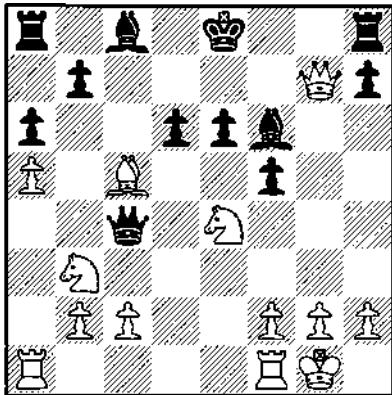
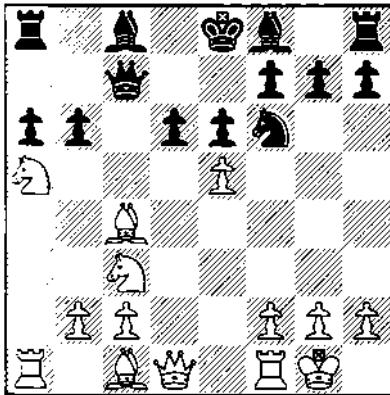


Black is not in time to play Qc7 and b7-b6, which means that White can plant a pawn on a5 and fully restrict Black's queenside. 9...Qc7 10.a5



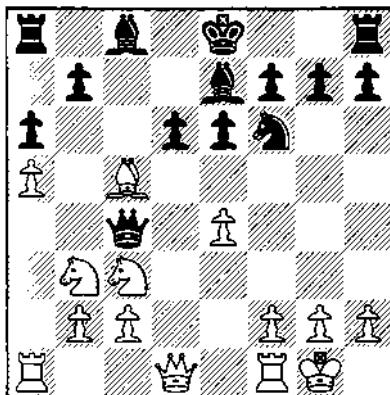
This position is a very good version of the Scheveningen for White, who is going to enjoy much more space after Be3, Be2, and f2-f4. Let's take a look at three ways play can proceed:

The concrete 10...Nxa5? 11.Nxa5 b6 fails to 12.e5!



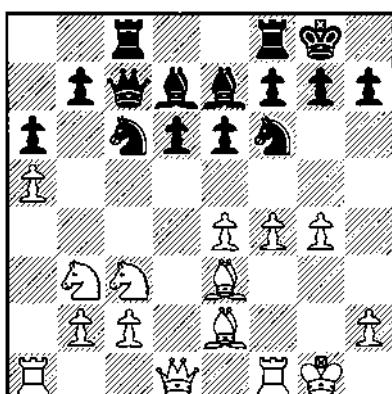
and White is on top: 12...bxa5 12...dxe5 13.Qf3 bxa5 14.Qxa8 Qxc4 15.Na4+—) 13.exf6 Qxc4 14.fxg7 Bxg7 15.Qxd6 Bb7 16.Rxa5±. After Qd6-g3 Black won't have nearly enough compensation, Hennings-Jansa, Linnowitz 1971.

The other concrete attempt for active play, starting with 10...Be7 11.Be3 Ne5 12.Be2 Nc4?! also falls short after 13.Bxc4 Qxc4 14.Bc5!



After 17...Qxf1+ 18.Kxf1 Bxg7 19.Nxd6± White has a winning endgame initiative, Sofieva-Sakhatova, Soviet Union 1986.

It seems that Black should accept a slightly worse middlegame with 10...Bd7 11.Be2 Be7 12.Be3 Rc8 13.f4 O-O and now with good control over the center, White can launch the kingside attack with 14.g4!:

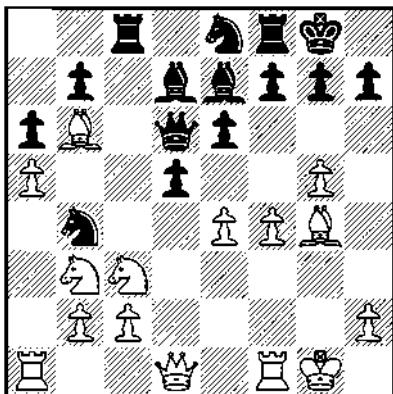


A very nice trick. 14...Nxe4 (14...dxc5 15.Ra4+— beautifully traps the queen.) 15.Qg4! And the tactics work out for White: 15...f5 16.Qxg7 Bf6 17.Nxe4

This position is especially difficult for Black when there is no counterplay on the queenside:

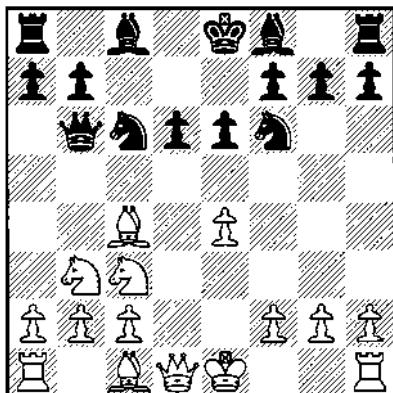
a) After 14...h6, simply 15.h4!N adds fuel to the attack. Instead, 15.Bf3 was played in De Firmian-Aagaard, Copenhagen 2006.

b) 14...Nb4 15.g5 Ne8 16.Bg4!?
 A bold idea by Ivanchuk. (*Also good was 16.Bb6 Qb8 17.Qd2± with a comfortable edge.*) 16...d5!? It's hard to suggest anything else, as otherwise Black is just suffering. 17.Bb6 Qd6



White was winning after 18.exd5 (*Perhaps it was better to keep the tension with 18.Qe2!↑ followed by Rad1, etc.*) 18...exd5 19.Rf2 Bxg4 20.Qxg4 Nc7?! (20...Rc4 was necessary) 21.f5+-, Ivanchuk–Cebalo, Manila 1992.

Back to our game, after 7...e6:



8.Bf4!

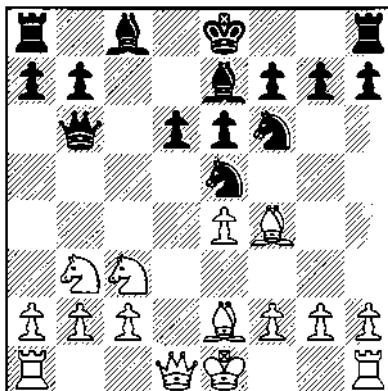
The idea behind this move is to force Black's knight to e5, after which White will soon gain valuable tempi via Be3 and f2-f4.

For comparison, after 8.Be3 Qc7 9.O-O Be7 10.f4 a6 11.a4 b6 12.Be1 O-O 13.Bf3, it will actually be White's turn to move in this position in the main game.

8...Ne5

Black's only sensible move, as 8...Qc7 runs into 9.Nb5.

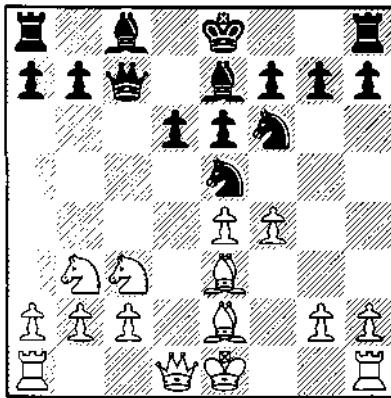
9.Be2 Be7



This natural developing of the bishop is not considered critical for this variation, as White can achieve a favorable version of the Scheveningen.

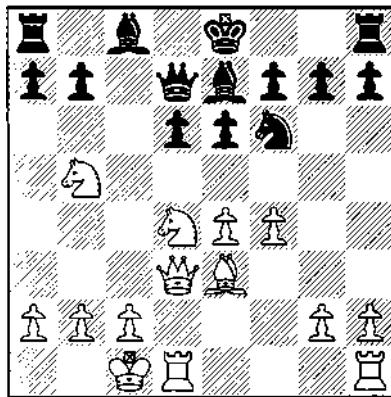
In the next game, 9...Bd7 and 9...a6, which are much more popular at the Grandmaster level, will be the topics of discussion.

10.Be3 Qc7 11.f4



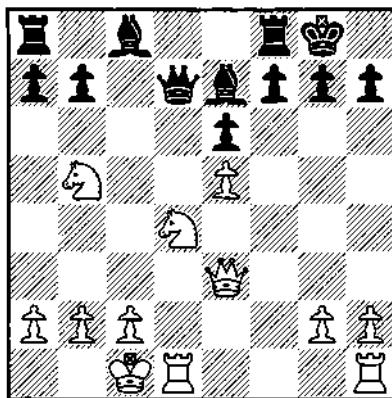
11...**Nc6**

Unfortunately for Black this retreat is the safest continuation, as 11...**Nc4** runs into tactical difficulties. It would be playable if White was forced to capture on c4, but White has the nice resource 12.**Nb5!** with the point 12...**Qc6** 13.**Bxc4** **Qxc4** 14.**Qd3!** and Black's queen must retreat, losing a few tempi. 14...**Qc6** (After 14...**Qxd3** 15.**cxd3±** White wins material in view of the threats **Nc7** and **Bxa7**.) 15.**N3d4** **Qd7** 16.**O-O-O**



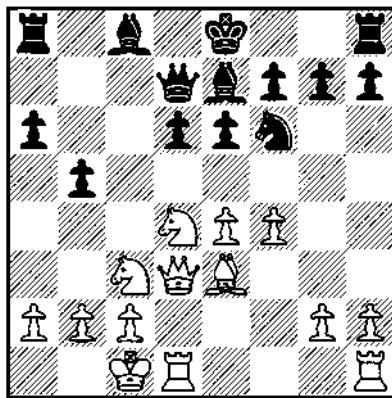
White's advantage in development is quite serious, and should be put to use with a timely e4-e5 advance, for

example 16...**O-O** 17.**e5!** **dxe5** 18.**fxe5** **Ng4** 19.**Qe2** **Nxe3** (*not* 19...**Nxe5?** 20.**Nf3+–**) 20.**Qxe3**

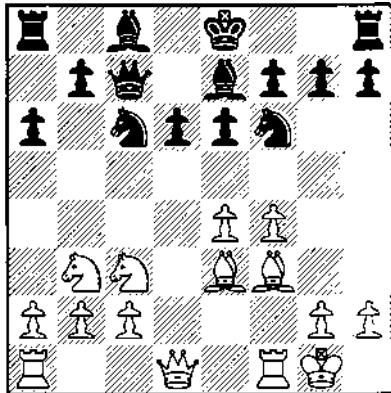
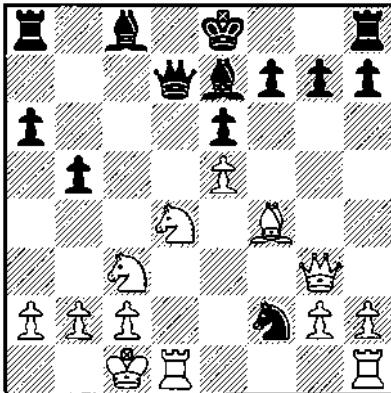


Black has the two bishops, but very poor development. In Rublevsky–Nevednichy, Tivat 1995, White quickly achieved a dominant position after 20...**Bc5** 21.**Qg3** **Bxd4** 22.**Nxd4** **Qa4** 23.**Kb1** **Bd7** 24.**h4↑**.

Later, Black improved with 16...**a6** 17.**Nc3** **b5**



And now the thematic 18.**e5!N** is best. (*Lastin–Lukin, Elista 1995, continued 18.a3?!*) 18...**dxe5** 19.**fxe5** **Ng4** 20.**Bf4!** A strong and perfectly justified exchange sacrifice. 20...**Nf2** 21.**Qg3**



With plenty of hidden tactical resources, the following lines are quite fun to explore: 21...Nxd1 (After 21...Nxh1 22.Qxg7 Rf8 White wins with 23.Ndxb5! Qxd1+ 24.Kxd1 axb5 25.Nxb5±, where Black is simply too uncoordinated.) 22.Rxd1 Qb7 23.Qxg7 Rf8 24.Bg5! Setting up all kinds of trouble for Black's king. 24...Qxg2 25.Ne4! Bxg5+ (25...Qxe4 loses nicely to 26.Bxe7 Kxe7 27.Nc6+! Qxc6 28.Qf6+ Ke8 29.Rd8 mate) After 26.Nxg5 White has a winning attack.

12.Bf3

A nice square for the bishop, from where it discourages Black's advances of d6-d5 and b7-b5.

12...a6 13.O-O

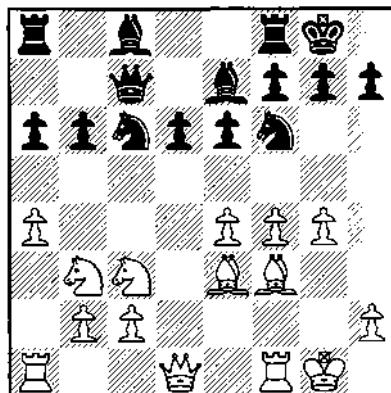
13...O-O

It's too early for 13...b5? in view of 14.e5! dxе5 15.fxe5 Nf6 16.Bxc6! Qxc6 And now a natural improvement is 17.Nd4N (better than 17.Na5, in Asrian-Fominyh, Minsk 1998) 17...Qb7 (or 17...Qc7 18.Rxf7 Kxf7 19.Qf3+±) 18.Qg4+. Black is in huge trouble, as 18...O-O runs into 19.Nxe6+!–.

14.a4

Kasparov rightfully spends a tempo to stop b7-b5, limiting Black's queenside counterplay.

14...b6 15.g4!



The famed start of White's attack. With a plan of g4-g5, Be5-

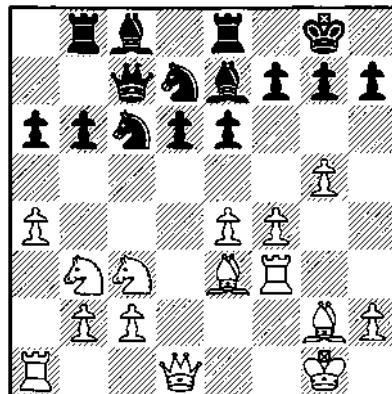
Rf3-h3, and Qh5, the reader can already begin drawing comparisons to the similar kingside attacks we explored in Chapter 2. The difference in the queenside structure does not change the evaluation of this kind of position—White's attack is quite dangerous—but does alter Black's counterplay in the upcoming battle.

15...Rb8

Anand chooses a useful rook move, preparing either Na5 or b7-b5.

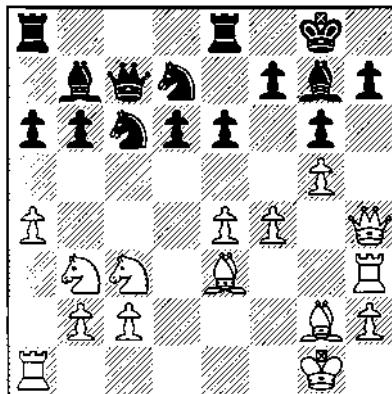
A few games have also continued 15...Bb7 16.g5 Nd7 17.Bg2 Rfe8, after which we believe most promising for White is 18.Qh5, (*18.Rf3 is sensible as well.*) for example 18...Bf8 19.Rf3 g6 20.Qh4 Bg7 21.Rh3

16.g5 Nd7 17.Bg2 Re8 18.Rf3

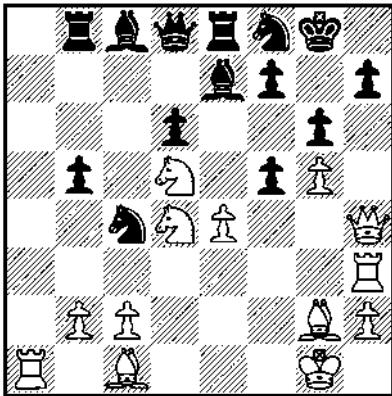


18...Nc5

18...Na5 definitely deserved consideration as well. Play might continue 19.Rh3 Nc4 (19...Nxb3 20.cxb3 doesn't help Black one bit.) 20.Bc1 g6 21.Qe1 Nf8 22.Qh4 b5, and interestingly enough, we've actually transposed to a game that reached this position via the Kan Variation, which continued quite instructively: 23.axb5 axb5 24.f5! Sacrificing a pawn in order to land a knight on d5. 24...exf5 25.Nd5 Qd8 26.Nd4!



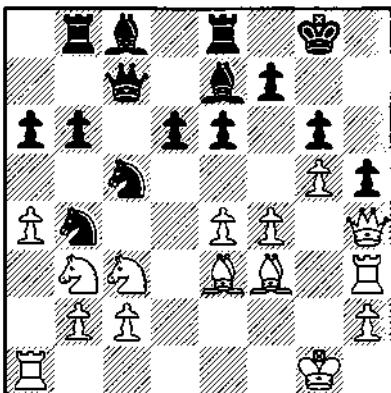
21...h5?! (*more solid was 21...Nf8, although White retains a small plus after 22.Qf2 Nd7 23.Rf1 Ne7 24.Bd4±) 22.gxh6 Bf6 23.h7+ Kh8 24.Qf2±.* Black has staved off immediate disaster, but is still much worse due to the compromised position of his king, Popov–Khairullin, Nojabrsk 2005.



Although Black's play has been natural so far, something has definitely gone wrong, as White's attack crashes through within a few moves.

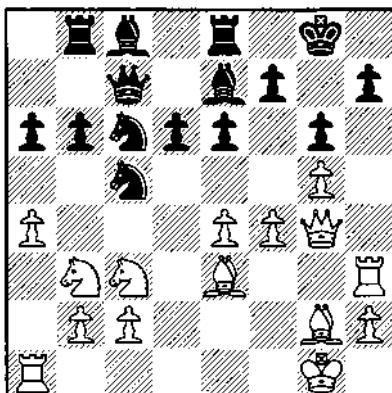
Maybe 20...d5!? would have made things more complicated for White but still, after 21.Qh4 h5 22.Bf3—Black's defense is very tough.

21.Qh4 h5 22.Bf3!



Involving the second knight, with a deadly threat of Nc6. 26...Ne5 (26...fxe4? would lose nicely to 27.Nc6 Qd7 28.Ncxe7+ Rxe7 29.Nf6+ Kg7 30.Qh6+ Kh8 31.Qxf8 mate) Now the simple 27.exf5! would have left White with a decisive attack. (*Less accurate but also winning was 27.Ra7?!, which made things more complicated in Amanov–Wang, Los Angeles 2012*) 27...Bxf5 (or 27...gx f5 28.Ra7+) 28.Nxf5 gx f5 29.Ra7+. With threats of Qh6 and Rxe7, Black is simply defenseless.

19.Rh3 g6 20.Qg4



20...Nb4

A very familiar motif to readers who have already studied Chapter 2. To our knowledge this game was actually the first at the highest level to feature such a menacing sacrifice of the bishop on h5.

22...Bf8

Probably best.

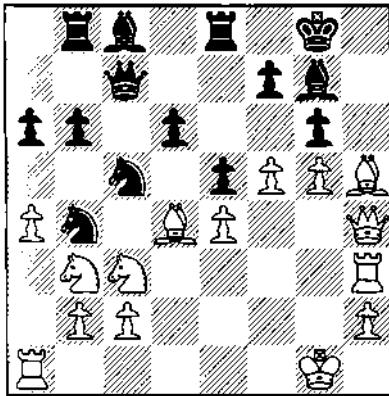
As usual, 22...Kg7 can be met with 23.f5! but not intending to play Nd5, as the square is defended but instead 23...exf5 24.Bd4 followed by Bxh5, which is winning immediately.

23.Bxh5

As promised!

23...gxh5

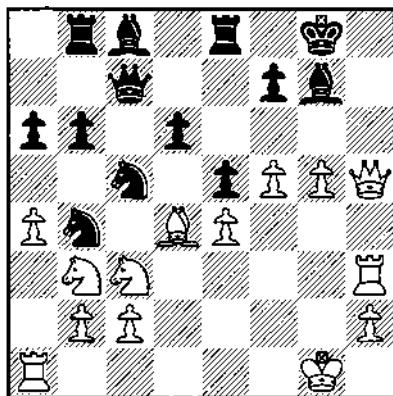
After 23...Bg7 White can also win spectacularly: 24.Bd4 e5 (24...gxh5 25.Bf6!+— is most precise.) 25.f5!!:



25...e5

Much worse is 25...Bxd4+? 26.Nxd4 Kf8 27.g6!+-.

26.f5!

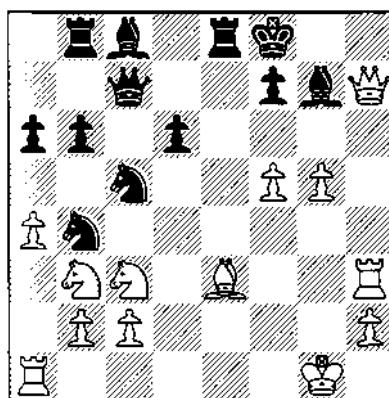


As in the game, the f-pawn becomes one of White's strongest attackers. White is breaking through: 25...exd4 (or 25...gxf5 26.Bxc5 bxc5 27.exf5 Bxf5 28.Rf1+–) 26.Bxg6 fxg6 (26...dxc3 27.Qh7+ Kf8 28.f6+–) 27.Qh7+ Kf8 28.Rf1+–.

24.Qxh5 Bg7 25.Bd4!

Simple and strong, going after Black's only defender of the kingside.

After 25.f5? Black can completely turn the tide with a series of strong counter-sacrifices: 25...exf5 26.Qh7+ Kf8 27.exf5:

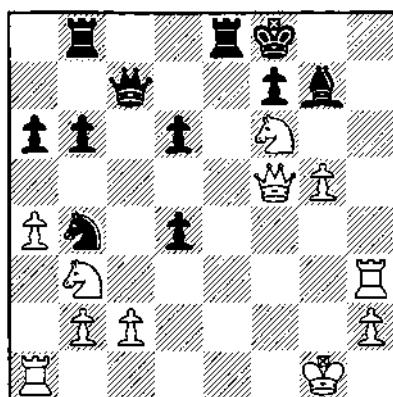


26...Nxe4

No other moves could have saved Black—neither 26...exd4? 27.Qh7+ Kf8 28.f6+– with mate to follow, nor 26...Kf8 27.Bxc5 dxc5 28.Rg3!, preparing f5-f6, 28...f6 29.gxf6 Bxf6 30.Rg8+! Kxg8 31.Qxe8+ Kh7 32.Qg6+–.

27.Qh7+ Kf8 28.Nxe4 Bxf5

29.Qxf5 exd4 30.Nf6!+–



And now after 27...Bxf5! 28.Qxf5 Exe3! 29.Rxe3 Nxb3 30.cxb3 Bd4 White is busted.

White isn't even down material anymore, and the knight on f6 spells doom for Black's king.

30...Qxc2 31.Nxd4!

Kasparov is accurate to the end, seeing that White can earn the full point in the endgame as well.

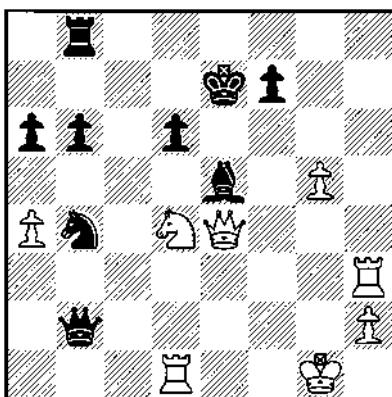
31...Qxb2

After 31...Qxf5 32.Nxf5 Black must give up the exchange—and then probably more material—as 32...Red8 loses in view of 33.Nh7+ Kg8 34.Ne7+ Kh8 35.Nf6++–.

32.Rd1

With such active pieces only a gross blunder can spoil White's chances. The game did not last much longer:

32...Re5 33.Nd7+ Ke7 34.Nxe5 Bxe5 35.Qe4 1–0



Down the exchange and facing a decisive attack, Anand saw no point in continuing the game.

A superb attacking masterpiece by Kasparov!

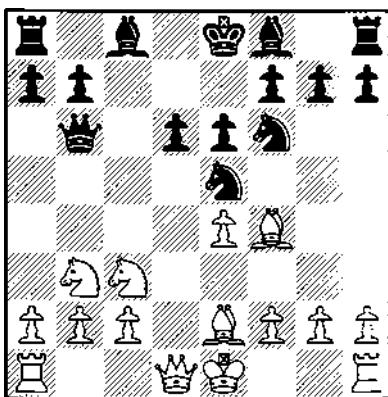
Game 22

Vaibhav – Nijboer

BDO Open

Haarlem 2011

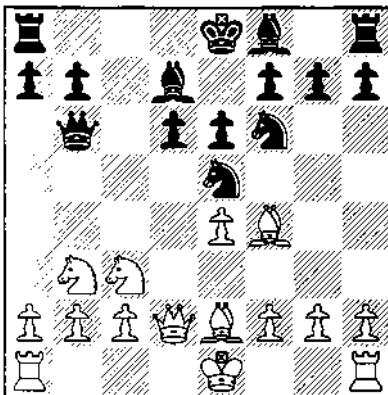
**1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4
4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 Nc6 6.Bc4
Qb6 7.Nb3 e6 8.Bf4 Ne5 9.Be2**



9...a6

The point of this move is ~~to~~ after 10.Bc3 Qc7 11.f4 Black can play 11...Nc4 without having to worry about 12.Nb5, which we saw was an important resource for White in the previous game.

This is also true after 9...Bd7 and these two moves are currently Black's main choice against the 8.Bf4 variation, and can be considered critical for the evaluation of the endgame line. Let's take a look at 10.Qd2, the recommended setup:



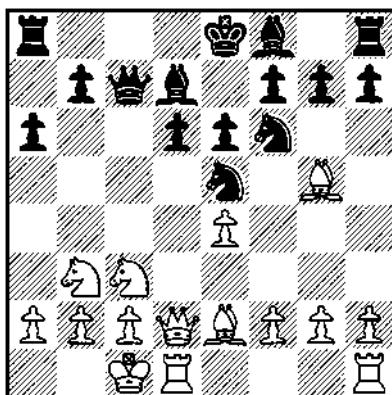
This resembles the English Attack, where White will often castle queenside and continue either f2-f3 and g2-g4-g5, or Be3 (g5) and f2-f4. Meanwhile Black will play Qc7, a7-a6, and b7-b5, opting for counterplay on the queenside. Overall the line is quite tricky, but we have done our best to guide you through the maze of variations.

Once again Black has a choice, this time between 10...a6 discussed here, and 10...Be7 on page 260.

After 10...a6 11.O-O-O:

- a) Now 11...Be7 transposes to line 11...a6, on page 261.
- b) And 11...Qxf2? loses on the spot after 12.Bxe5 dxe5 13.Rhf1 Qb6 14.Rxf6+–.

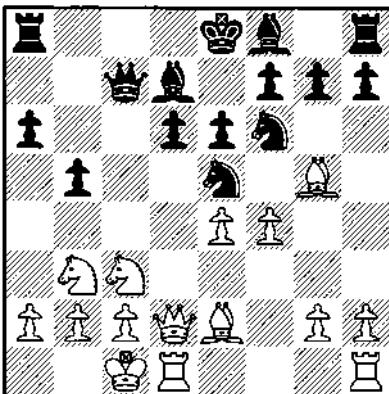
c) After 11...Qc7 a standard move, improving the queen and allowing for b7-b5, best for White is 12.Bg5!:



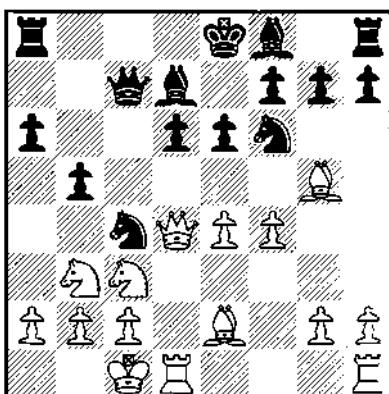
Exploiting the fact that Black has neglected to play Be7. Now 13.f4 is a serious threat.

c1) 12...Be7?! Led to a passive position for Black after 13.f4 Ng6 (13...Nc4? 14.Bxc4 Qxc4 15.e5+– is a thematic trap, based on the vulnerability of Black's bishop on d7.) 14.h4! h5 15.Bf3 O-O-O 16.g3 Kb8 17.Rhe1±, with a huge space advantage for White in Areshchenko-Perunovic, Plovdiv 2008.

c2) Slightly better is 12...b5 where after 13.f4



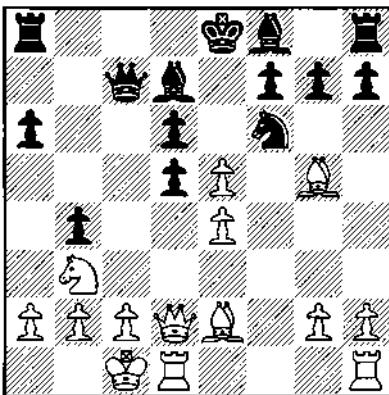
c23) Finally, after 13...Nc6
14.Qd4



Black has a few options, but none of them seem completely satisfactory for the second player:

c21) 13...Neg4 has yet to be tried, since after 14.Bxg4 Nxg4 15.h3 Nf6 16.a3 the position seems difficult for Black, as 16...Be7? runs into 17.e5!+-.

c22) 13...b4 runs into the surprising but familiar shot 14.Nd5! where after 14...exd5 15.fxe5



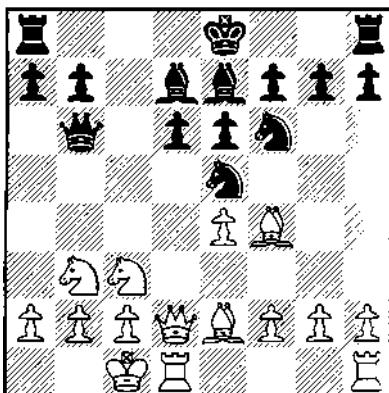
15...dxe5 (on 15...Nxe4 16.Qxd5 Bc6 17.Qa5!± Black is in trouble.) 16.Bxf6 gxf6 17.exd5±, White has a much healthier position, with a plan of Rhf1 and Bd3-f5, etc., Phadke-Zubarev, New Delhi 2010.

Black is unable to generate enough counterplay to justify leaving the king in the center.

c231) The only game to reach this position continued 14...Rc8?! 15.Bxf6 gxf6 16.Qxf6 Rg8 17.Bh5 Re8 18.Rhe1 with a winning initiative in Palac-Kozul, Neum 2008.

c232) Relatively best was 14...Bc7 where after 15.e5! dxe5 16.fxe5 Nc6 17.Bxe7 Nxe7 18.Bxc4 bxc4 19.Nc3 White is winning the c4 pawn.

It is more solid for Black to start with 10...Be7 11.O-O-O

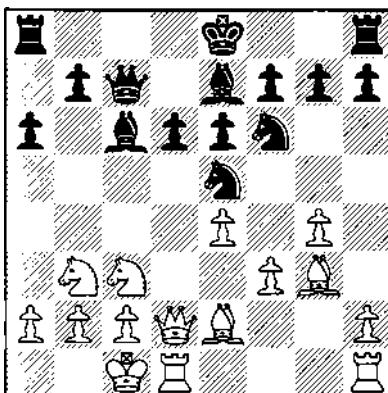


Without much established theory Black has a choice of moves here, but White's play against each is more or less similar:

a) Grabbing the pawn with 11...Qxf2?! is actually playable, but risky: 12.Rhf1 Qxg2 13.Rg1! (*But not 13.Bxe5? dxе5 14.Rxf6 O-O-O! 15.Rf3 Bg5—+ and White can resign.*) 13...Qh3 14.Rxg7↑. In compensation for the pawn White certainly has a lasting initiative—while Black is far from lost just yet, playing with the king in the center cannot be considered a desirable task.

b) Against 11...a6 White can choose between:

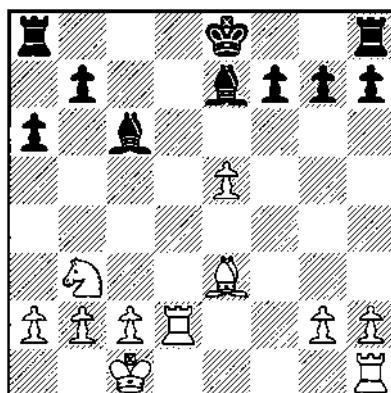
b2) A sharp middlegame—12.g4 Bc6 Black must vacate the d7 square. 12...Nexg4?! is simply good for White in view of 13.Bxg4 Nxg4 14.f3 Nf6 15.Bxd6±) And now we'll give just one sample line: 13.f3 Qc7 14.Bg3!



A thematic idea, allowing White's f-pawn to advance. 14...b5 15.g5 Nfd7 16.f4 Nc4 17.Bxc4 bxc4 18.Nd4 Bb7 19.Rhe1↑. A quick f4-f5 is on the agenda.

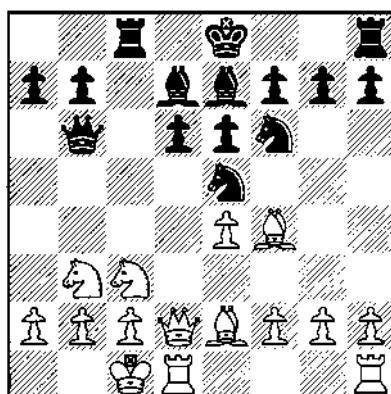
b1) Or a slightly better endgame—12.Be3 Qc7 13.f4 Nc4 14.Bxc4 Qxc4 15.e5! dxе5 16.fxe5 Nd5

17.Nxd5 Qxd5 18.Qxd5 exd5 19.Rxd5 Bc6 20.Rd2±

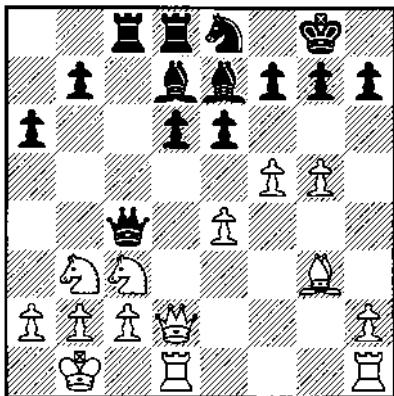


It's hard to believe Black has enough compensation for a full pawn.

c) Another try is 11...Rc8

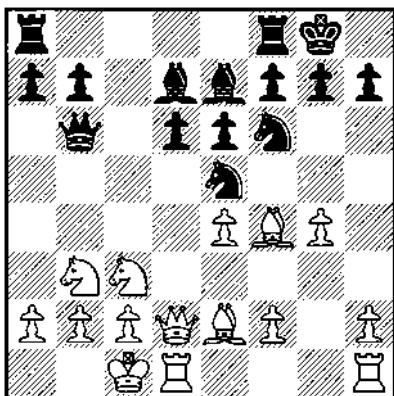


against which GM Fressinet displayed a model effort: 12.f3 O-O 13.g4 Rfd8 14.Kb1! Qc7 15.Bg3 (15.Be3± was also good.) 15...a6 16.g5 Ne8 (16...Nh5 17.f4 Ne4 18.Bxc4 Qxc4 19.f5!↑ is similarly tough for Black.) 17.f4 Nc4 18.Bxc4 Qxc4 19.f5!



White's attack is nearly decisive. Something has clearly gone wrong for Black already. 19...Bf8 (After 19...exf5, best is 20.Na5! Qc7 21.Nd5 Bxg5 22.Qxg5 Qxa5 23.exf5 → with threats of f5-f6, Ne7+, etc.) 20.Rhf1 g6 21.fxg6 fxg6 22.Qf2! Bg7 23.Qf7+ Kh8 24.Qe7+, Fressinet-Kozul, Plovdiv 2008.

d) Most commonly Black has chosen 11...O-O, against which White should try the energetic 12.g4!

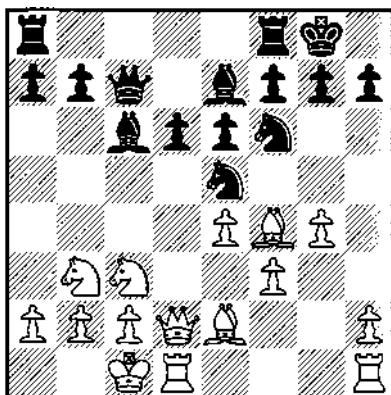


This was originally played by famed attacker GM Viktor Kupreichik.

d1) Kupreichik-Lopushnay, Omsk/Perm 1998 continued 12...Nexg4 13.Bxg4 Nxg4 14.Rhg1

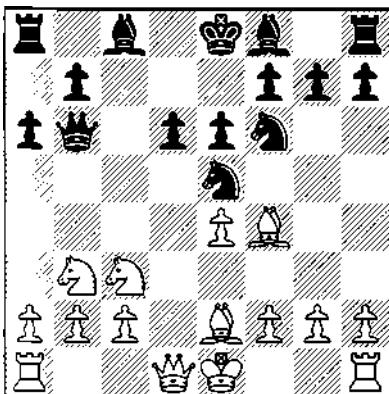
Nf6?! (14...e5 was forced, leading to a worse position after 15.Nd5 Qc5 16.Nxe7+ Qxe7 17.Bg3↑) 15.e5!± and the open g-file gave White a decisive attack.

d2) More solid is 12...Bc6 because White has the easier game here, for example 13.f3 Qc7



14.g5 (also logical is 14.Be3? threatening g4-g5 and f3-f4) 14...Nfc7 15.Nd4 Rfc8 16.h4 Nf8?! Black has to play Nb6, going for queenside counterplay. After 17.Be3 Be8 18.Nc4 19.Bxc4 Qxc4 20.f5 White is well ahead in his attack: 20...Bd8 21.Rg6 22.Nb3 Bc7 23.h5+, Bezemer-Nijboer, Amsterdam 2011.

Now back to our game, after 9...a6:



10.g4!?

An interesting idea, immediately gaining space on the kingside.

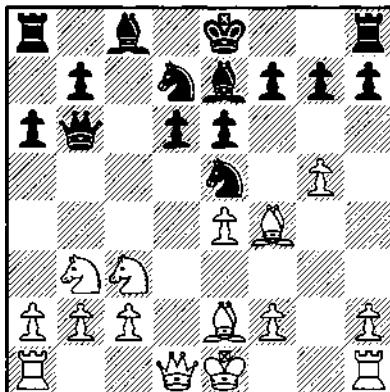
More popular is 10.Be3 which leads to a playable position after 10...Qc7 11.f4 Nc4 12.Bxc4 Qxc4 13.Qf3 with chances for both sides, Nanchuk-Kramnik, Paris 1995.

10...h6

Preventing g4-g5 has been Black's main choice so far, but we should also consider what happens if Black simply continues developing:

Logical is 10...Qc7, preparing Black's queenside play with b7-b5. 11.g5 Nfd7 12.a4!N A new but very natural idea, simply restricting Black's counterplay. (12.Bg3 b5 13.Qd4 h6! was equal in Vaibhav Nijboer, Haarlem 2012) After 12...b6 we definitely like White's chances for an advantage by castling queenside and advancing the h-pawn: 13.Qd4 Bb7 (or 13...Nc5 14.O-O-O Nxb3+ 15.cxb3 Be7 16.h4±) 14.O-O-O Be7 15.h4 O-O 16.h5±.

Another possibility is 10...Be7 11.g5 Nfd7



a) Hillarp Persson-Kristiansen, Helsingør 2012, continued 12.Bg3 Qc7 13.f4 Nc6 (*not* 13...Nc4? 14.Qd4± picking up the g7 pawn) 14.Qd2 b5 15.O-O-O. A good plan for White is to play Rhf1 and f4-f5. 15...b4 16.Na4 Nb6 17.Nxb6 Qxb6 18.h4±. Another good choice was 18.Rhf1± with the alternate plan.

b) The immediate 12.Qd2 is more aggressive, for example 12...Qc7 13.Bg3 O-O 14.f4 Nc4 15.Bxc4 Qxc4 16.f5!? Ne5 17.Bxe5 dx5 18.f6!↑ and Black was unable to fend off the attack in Tseshkovsky-Kharlov, Niksic 1996.

11.Bg3

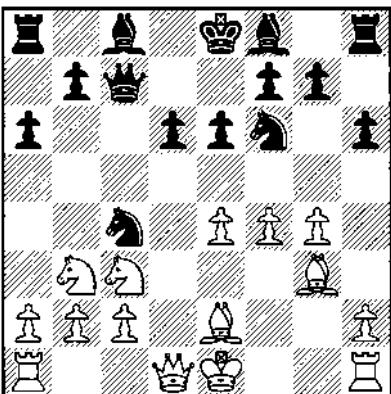
A retreat we've seen throughout this line, preparing f2-f4.

The sharp 11.h4!? is also worth exploring, as in Nepomniachtchi-Evdokimov, Dagomys 2008.

11...g5?!

Possibly improvised over the board, GM Nijboer decides keeping his knight on e5 is worth the cost of weakening his kingside. Although this idea is quite thematic for the Sicilian, it just doesn't quite cut it in this position.

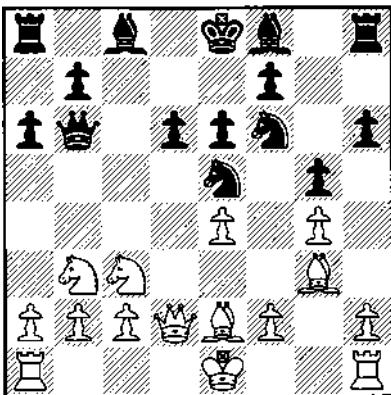
A more solid choice is the common 11...Qc7 12.f4 Nc4



GM Popov won a complicated game after 13.Qd4 b5 14.e5 dxe5 15.fxe5 Nd7 16.Bf3, Popov–Poleshchuk, Minsk 2008, although 16.O-O-O!?? seems like a stronger choice, posing serious problems for Black's king.

But more promising is 13.Bxc4N Qxc4 14.Qf3 where White is ready to castle queenside and use his lead in development, for instance 14...b5 (or 14...d5 15.Nd2! Qc6 16.O-O-O±) 15.O-O-O Bb7 (15...b4? throws away a pawn after 16.Rd4±) 16.Rh1 Rc8 17.Kb1†. White is ready to play g4-g5 and f4-f5, with a strong attack.

12.Qd2!



IM Vaibhav (who became a GM in 2012), proceeds to develop according to plan and offers the g4 pawn ± a long-term sacrifice.

12...Qc7?!

Black rejects the sacrifice in order to play solidly, but this simply gives White a free initiative.

It was certainly more tempting to grab the pawn with 12...Ne5, after which play might continue 13.O-O-O Ne5 14.f4 gxsf4 15.Exf4 Nfd7 16.Rhf1†, where White has fantastic compensation in the form of superior development and pressure against Black's kingside.

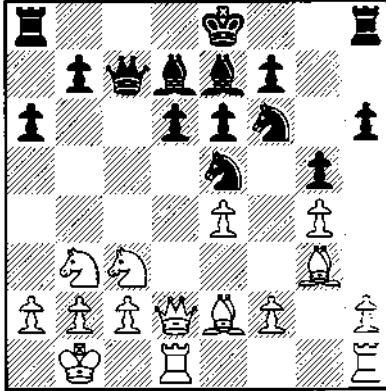
13.O-O-O

White also had a good option in putting immediate pressure on Black's kingside with 13.h4 Rg8 14.f3±, with a clear plus.

13...Be7 14.Kb1

White wisely safeguards his king before opening things up with f2-f4.

14...Bd7



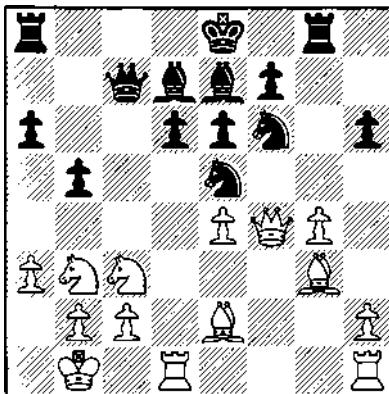
15.f4

A natural way for White to make progress, hoping to make Black's king uncomfortable in the center.

Once again 15.h4 was also possible, and perhaps even stronger.

as after 15...Rg8 16.f3± Black has no obvious counterplay in the position, while White can continue building pressure with maneuvers such as Qe3, Nc1-d3, etc.

15...gxf4 16.Qxf4 b5 17.a3 Rg8



18.Qxh6!

Excellent judgment by Vaibhav, opting to trade pawns and open up Black's kingside even more.

White could also proceed patiently with 18.h3 Rg6 19.Rhf1±.

18...Nfxg4

Of course Black must take this pawn now.

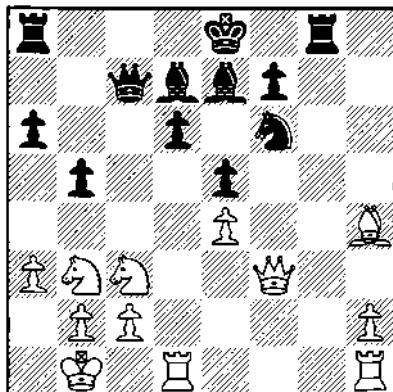
19.Bxg4 Nxg4 20.Qh5 Nf6

21.Qf3 e5

An understandable decision, creating the threat of Bg4.

White answers 21...O-O-O with 22.Bxd6 (or 22.Rhf1±) 22...Bxd6 23.Qxf6 Bc6 24.Rhf1±.

22.Bh4!



White ignores the threat, sacrificing the exchange in order to eliminate the knight on f6.

22...Bg4

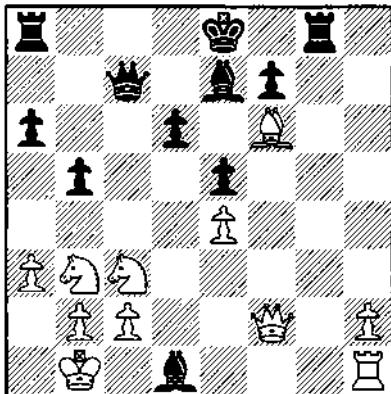
Black must oblige, otherwise Bxf6 and Nd5 is crushing.

23.Qf2??!

A minor slip, allowing a tricky defensive idea that Black ended up overlooking.

More accurate was 23.Qf1! when White retains the advantage after the forced 23...Bxd1 24.Bxf6 Bxc2+ 25.Kxc2 Qc4 Not the only move, but Black should try to escape into the endgame. 26.Bxe7 Qxf1 27.Rxf1 Kxe7 28.Nd5+ Kf8 29.Rf2±. White is clearly better with two strong knights against a rook and pawn.

23...Bxd1 24.Bxf6



24...Bxf6?!

As is often the case, the “automatic” recapture tends to be a critical mistake.

It was crucial to gain an important tempo with 24...Qa7! after which the game would be quite unclear: 25.Qf1 Bxf6 26.Qxf6 Rg6∞ or 26...Bg4∞.

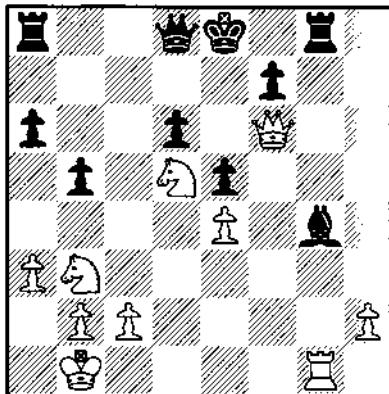
25.Qxf6

Now Black’s problem is that Nd5 will attack the queen, giving White an extra tempo to develop a decisive initiative.

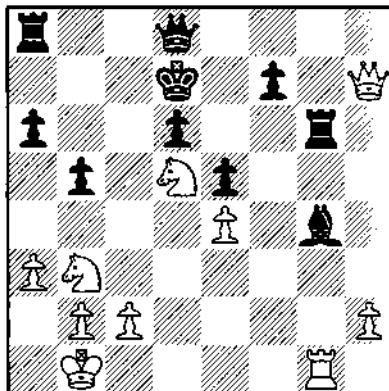
25...Bg4

Safer was 25...Bh5, but nevertheless after 26.Nd5 Qd8 27.Qh6 Bg6 28.Rf1± the threat of Nf6+ is quite powerful, and Black’s king is clearly unsafe.

26.Nd5 Qd8 27.Rg1!



A deadly pin, threatening h2-h3
27...Rg6 28.Qh8+ Kd7 29.Qh7



29...Qf8?!

The final mistake, although it would take a minor miracle for Black to save the game.

The only way to prolong the game was 29...Qg8, but 30.Qh4 Qc5 31.Rxg4 Qxh4 32.Rxh4± should be a technical win for White.

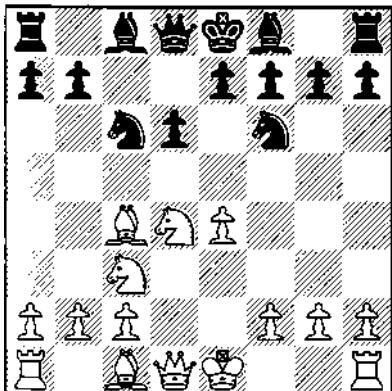
30.Rxg4! 1-0

Black resigned, as 30...Rxg4 31.Qf5+ Ke8 32.Qxg4 leaves White with a material advantage and winning attack.

Game 23

Ivanchuk - El Gindy
Cap d'Agde-B Rapid 1998

- 1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4
4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 Nc6 6.Bc4

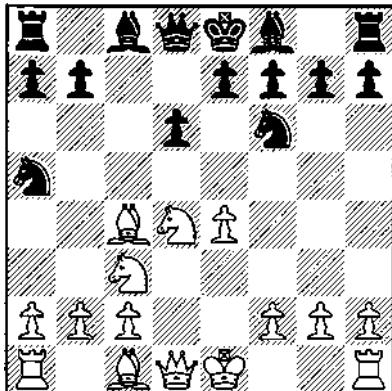


6...e5

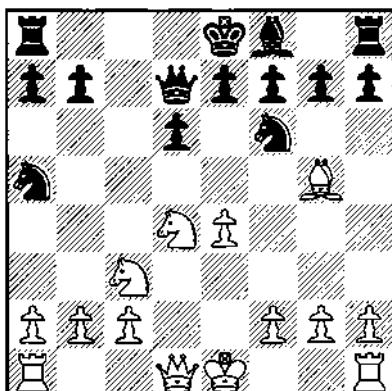
At first glance this move seems anti-positional, giving up the e5 square for no obvious compensation. But in actuality this system is playable for Black, who will usually follow up with Be6, challenging White's control over d5.

But before examining this line—starting on page 275—we'll first explore some of Black's other options, including 6...Na5 here, 6...a6?! on page 268, 6...g6 on page 269, and finally the important 6...Bd7 on page 270:

First, 6...Na5 looks like something a complete novice would play, but it does have a right to exist:

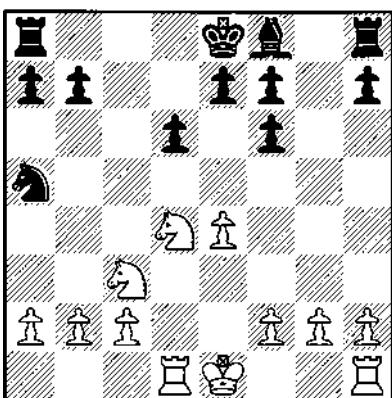


The point is that if White retreats with Bd3 or Be2 then Black can eventually use the knight on a5 after an eventual Bd7 and Rc8. 7.Bb5+ seems to be the principled response. 7...Bd7 8.Bxd7+!? We weren't completely satisfied with Qe2 here, but our move seems to lead to an edge. 8...Qxd7 9.Bg5!, intending to capture on f6, followed by playing against Black's dark-squared bishop:



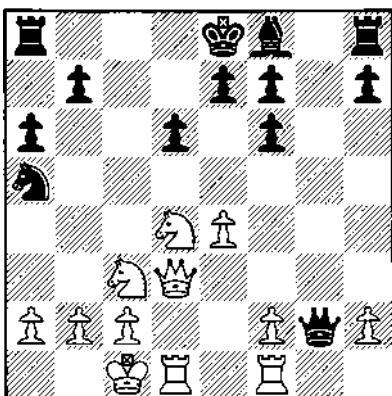
9...Qg4 (After 9...Rc8 10.Bxf6 gxf6 11.Qd3 e6 12.f4 Be7 13.O-O-O± White is doing very well, and should play f4-f5 next.) 10.Bxf6! Offering the g2 pawn, a nice sacrifice.

a) The stem game continued
10...Qxd1+ 11.Rxd1 gxf6



12.Nd5 Rc8 13.c3±, Kaufmann–Danner, Switzerland 2010. Instead, 13.f4!± leaves White comfortably better, who can follow up with b2–b3 and slowly squeeze Black in this endgame.

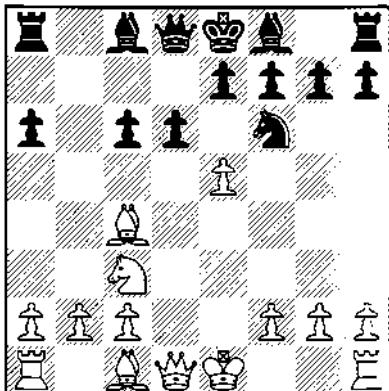
b) Grabbing the pawn leads to a precarious position for Black after
10...Qxg2 11.Rf1 gxf6 12.Qd3 a6
13.O-O-O↑



For just one pawn White has fantastic compensation. As you leave your engine on in this position, its evaluation slowly goes up and up! Indeed, White has a dangerous lead

in development, and can follow ± with moves such as f2–f4, Nf5, Nd5, looking to either trap Black's queen or break through in the center to Black's king.

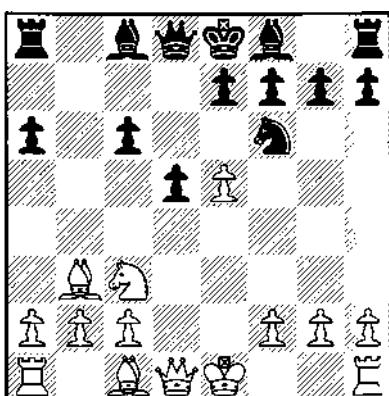
6...a6?! falls into a small trap by 6.Bc4: 7.Nxc6 bxc6 8.e5!



Black is left scrambling to survive

a) Of course 8...dxe5?? 9.Bxf7— Picks up Black's queen.

b) Against 8...d5, strongest ■ 9.Bb3!

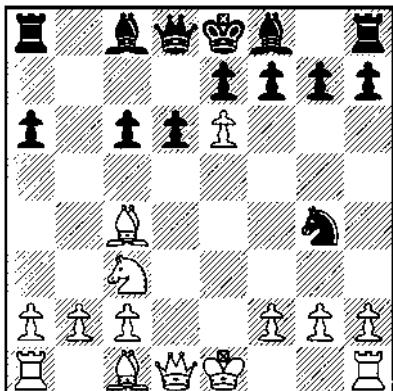


b1) Now Black's best option is ■ retreat with 9...Ng8 10.Be3 e6, and 11.Na4± gives White a nice positional edge.

b2) 9...Nd7 runs into 10.Nxd5! which is simply good for White after 10...Nxe5 11.Bf4 cxd5 12.Bxe5 e6 13.Qh5±.

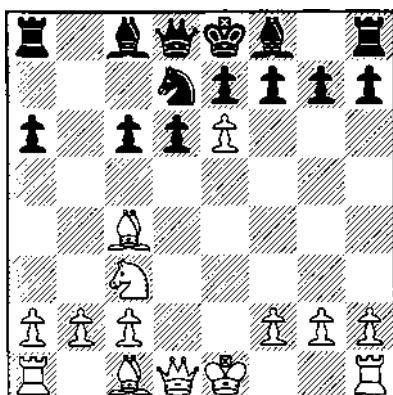
b3) And 9...Ng4 leaves Black without a good response to 10.Ba4!±.

c) If 8...Ng4 then 9.e6! and now:



9...Ne5 (*not* 9...f5?! 10.Qf3!±, Zambrana–Granda Zuniga, Sao Paulo 2003) 10.exf7+ Nxf7 11.Bxf7+ Kxf7 12.Qf3+±, Salov–Masalov, Moscow 1996.

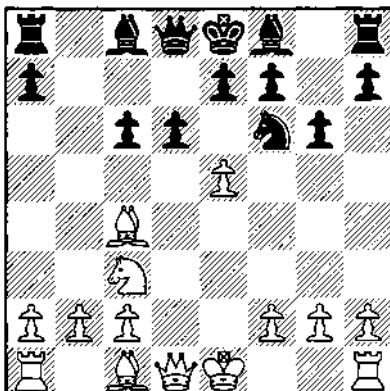
d) Finally, if 8...Nd7 then 9.e6



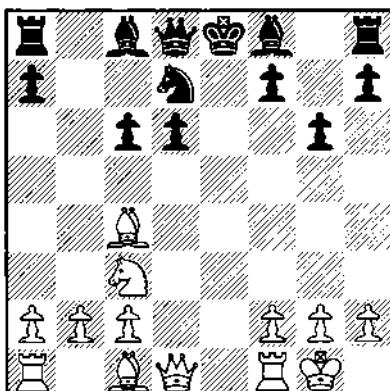
and now 9...fxe6 10.Bxe6 Ne5 11.Bxc8 Qxc8 12.O-O± followed by Bf4, with a healthier structure and

better development in Kryvoruchko–Dancevski, Struga 2012.

6...g6 runs into the same trap of 7.Nxc6 bxc6 8.e5!, but is actually playable for Black thanks to the pawn being on g6:

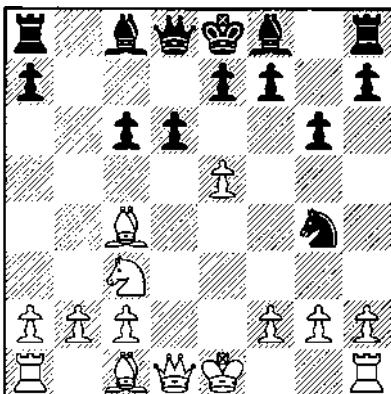


a) 8...Nd7?! gives White an easy game after 9.exd6 exd6 10.O-O



10...Ne5 11.Qe2! Be7 (*or* 11...Qe7 12.Ne4!± followed by Bg5, etc.) 12.Bh6↑ as in Govedarica–Mencinger, Pula 1984.

b) But 8...Ng4 is now not so bad:

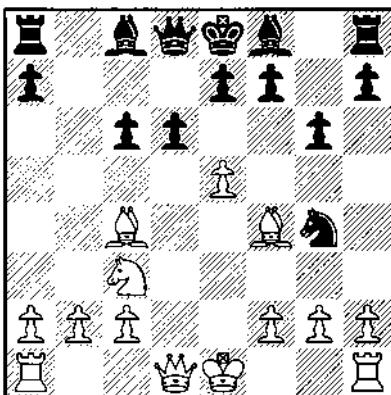


b1) 9.e6 f5! is fine for Black, as 10.Qf3 doesn't simply win a pawn.

Instead, White has two decent other options.

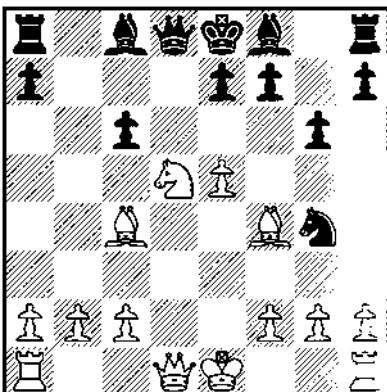
b2) A safe choice is 9.exd6, leading to a small edge after 9...Qxd6 (Or 9...exd6 10.O-O Be7 11.Be2 h5 12.h3 Ne5 13.Be3±. Next is f2-f4, Bf3, with nice pressure, Nestorovic-Simovski, Struga 2009.) 10.Qxd6 exd6 11.Bf4 Be6 12.Bb3±, although White's advantage here is quite minimal, Silva-Sosonko, Luzern 1982.

b3) More ambitious is 9.Bf4?!, which forces Black to walk a tightrope:



b31) 9...Qb6 has been Black's most common choice, but is actually a mistake in view of 10.Qf3! Black is in huge trouble, for instance 10...Bf5 (of course not 10...Qxf2+ 11.Bxf7+! Kxf7 12.Bc1+++) 11.exd6 exd6 12.O-O-O! with a decisive initiative. Black's king is not escaped from the center.

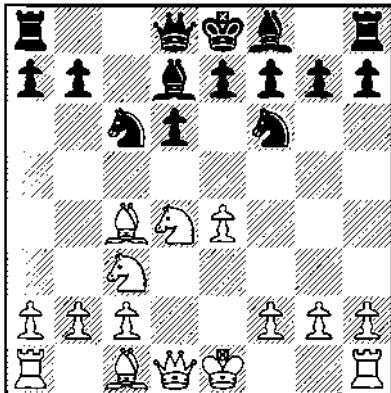
b32) Black must play 9...Nxd5



b321) Here, after 10.Qxf3! 11.Qxd5, White is winning material as forced is 11...Qxd5 12.Bxd5 Fxe5 13.Bc6+ Bd7 14.Bxd7+ Kxd7 15.Qc2+ Kc8 16.Bxb8 Kxb8 17.exf7+, where White has good winning chances.

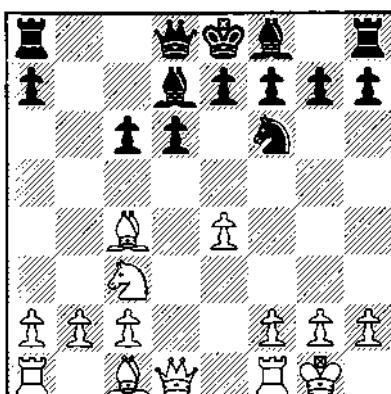
b322) So Black must continue with 10...Bg7!N in order to have a chance of equalizing. Nevertheless White retains a small plus after 11.Nc3 Qb6 12.Qf3 O-O 13.Bb3 Nf6 14.Qg3±, thanks to Black's weakened structure on the queenside.

Actually, quite a serious option for Black is 6...Bd7:



This supports the knight on c6 with the idea of playing g7-g6, transposing into the Dragon Variation. After some investigation we've chosen 7.Nxc6!?, which is fairly rare but does hold quite a bit of venom. (*Fans of the Yugoslav Attack can simply continue 7.Bb3 with the intention of 7...g6 8.f3 Bg7 9.Be3 O-O 10.Qd2, transposing into one of the sharpest lines in the Dragon.* Unfortunately for us, this doesn't fall in line with our suggested repertoire, since we recommend 9.O-O-O instead of 9.Bc4 against the Dragon Variation.)

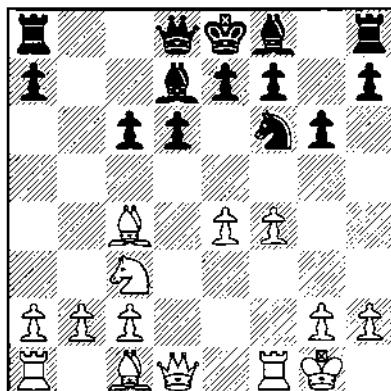
a) After 7...bxc6?! 8.O-O



Black is behind in development, and must make a decision regarding the dark-squared bishop.

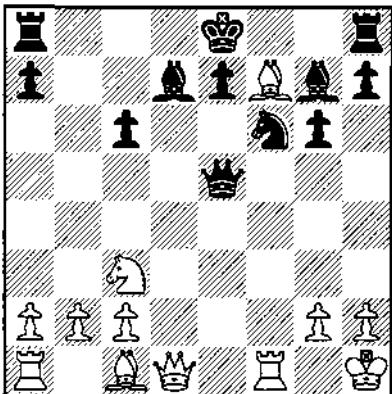
a1) After 8...e6 9.Bf4 (9.f4!?N is also worth trying) 9...e5 10.Bg5 White is clearly for choice here, with better development and potential pressure along the d-file. One example continued 10...h6 11.Bh4 g5 12.Bg3 h5 13.f3 h4 14.Bf2 Be6 15.Bb3±, Y.Wang-Matnadze, Oropesa del Mar 2000. Instead, 15.Bxe6 fxe6 16.h3± would have left Black with a bad structure and an even worse dark-squared bishop.

a2) More common is 8...g6, where after 9.f4!



White is already seizing the initiative, with the threat of e4-e5:

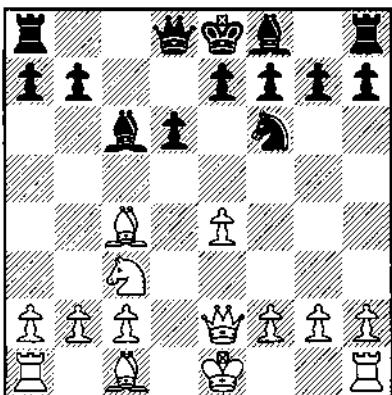
a21) 9...Qa5 10.Kh1 Bg7 11.e5! (White can also consider 11.Qe1↑ 11...dxe5 12.fxe5 Qxe5 13.Bxf7+)



The hidden point behind 11.e5!. After 13...Kxf7 14.Qxd7 Qe6 15.Qxe6+ Kxe6 16.Bf4±, White has fewer weaknesses and the better endgame, Rjabzev–Dreev, St. Petersburg 2010.

a22) 9...Bg7 10.e5 Ng4 11.e6! Black is losing material. 11...Qb6+ 12.Kh1 Bxe6 13.Bxe6 Nf2+ 14.Rxf2 Qxf2 15.Ne4 Qb6 16.Bb3±, Dencsi–Nagy Hegyesi, Hungary 2007.

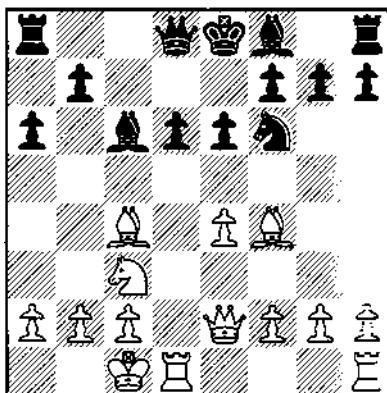
b) Better is 7...Bxc6 8.Qe2



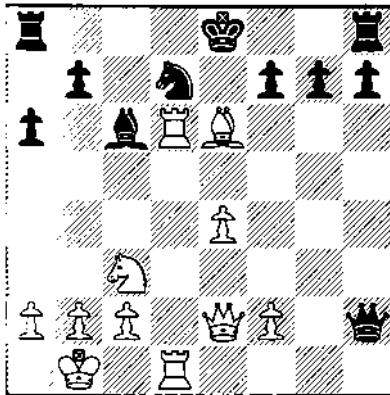
where Black again must choose between 8...e6 and 8...g6:

b1) Against 8...e6 we like straightforward 9.Bf4!, with idea to castle queenside and exerting pressure against d6 pawn. Let's take a look at examples of practical play:

b11) GM Kacheishvili 9...a6?!, which seems a bit slow. 10.O-O-O threatening e4-e5:

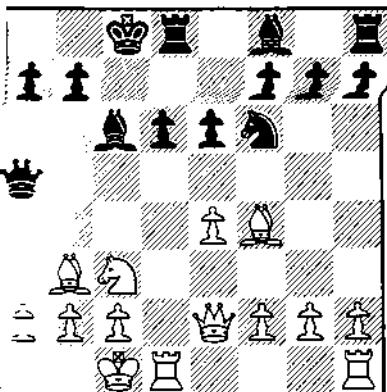


10...Nd7?! (10...Qc7 runs into familiar shot 11.Nd5! Bxd5 12.e5 13.Bg5± followed by a quick f2-e5 with the initiative.) 11.Bxd6 Bxh1 12.Rxd6 Qg5+ 13.Kb1 Qxg2 14.Rxh1 Qxh2. Now White could have played the spectacular 15.Bxe6! (15.Qf3 was played in X.Cheng–Kacheishvili, Chicago 2006):



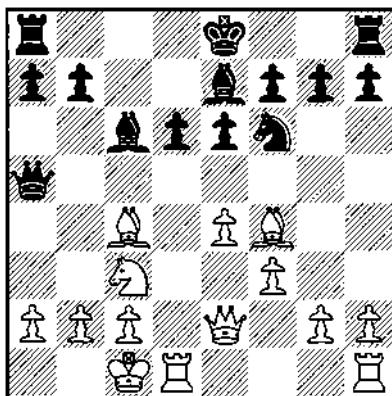
b now 15...fxe6 (*Relatively best is 15...Ne5 16.Bb3 O-O 17.Qe3±*) then 16.Rxe6+ with a decisive attack: 16...Kf8 (or 16...Kd8 17.Qg4+ threatening Rxec6) 17.Qf3+ Kg8 18.Re7 Nf6 19.Ne2!+– with threats such as Qb3+, as well as Nf4-e6.

b12) 9...Qa5 10.O-O-O O-O-O 11.Bb3



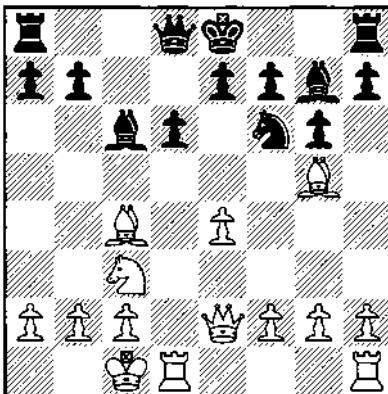
place in Lein–Averbakh, URS-ch 1961, which continued 11...Be7 12.Bb1 Rd7 13.Rd3 Rhd8 14.Rhd1 15.g4 h6 16.h4 Ne8 17.Bg3±, giving a very pleasant advantage in place for White.

b13) Black should probably play the natural 9...Be7 10.O-O-O Qa5 as happened in G.Hernandez–Bologan, Mallorca 2004. Now we believe 11.f3N is White's best try for an advantage:

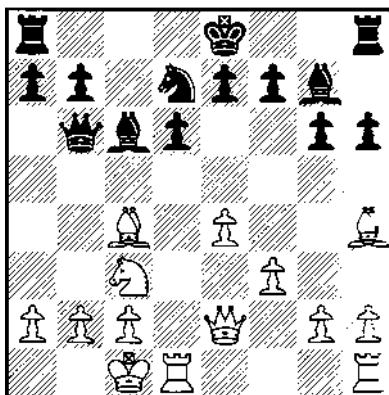


with the typical attacking plan of g2-g4-g5, h2-h4-h5, etc. After 11...Rd8 12.Bd2 Qb6 13.g4± White's position is definitely preferable, as Black lacks any obvious counterplay.

b2) Instead, 8...g6 takes the game into a *Dragon type of position*. Here we'd like to recommend the aggressive 9.Bg5 Bg7 10.O-O-O!?



b22) 10...h6 11.Bh4 Qb6 was ~~in~~ game Todorovic–Malakhov, Bučač 2009, which continued 12.f3 Nd7

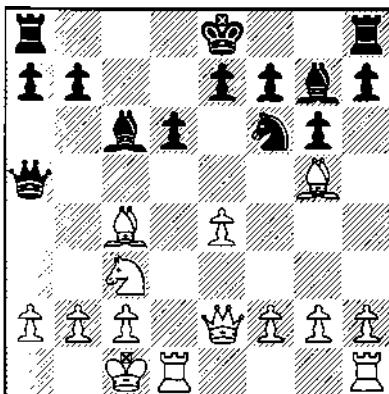


which, interestingly enough, was first played by a very young Judit Polgar back in 1988! This position is very much unexplored, but in general if White is well prepared he should have excellent chances of seizing the initiative:

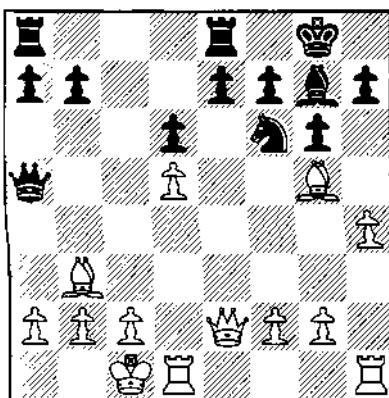
b21) In case of 10...O-O, 11.f4!?, with the idea of Rhei1 and e4-e5, poses some tricky problems for Black to solve. (11.e5 is met nicely by 11...Qa5!) 11...h6?! is bad in view of 12.Bxf6 Bxf6 13.e5 Bg7 14.h4! where Black has great difficulties defending the light squares, for instance 14...h5 15.f5! gxf5 16.e6± is tremendous for White.

13.e5!? An inspired shot. (S~~o~~
was 13.Bf2 Qa5 14.Bd4± ~~in~~
a small plus.) 13...Bxe5 (A~~lso~~
13...dx~~e~~5 14.Kb1!↑ White has great
compensation, with ideas such as
Nd5, etc.) 14.Bxe7 Kxe7 15.f4 Qc5? R~~h~~
e8 was necessary, leaving things
unclear. Now White should have
played 16.Nd5+! Bxd5 17.Rxd5 Qc7
18.Bb3↑ retaining the initiative
indefinitely.

b23) Lastly, after 10...Qa5:



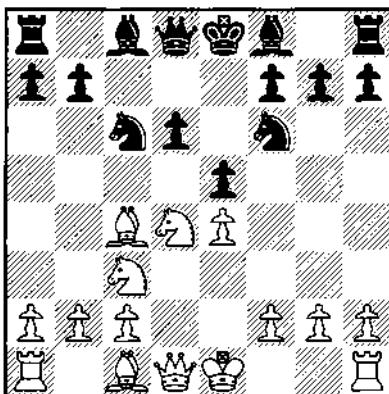
b231) Judit's game developed instructively with 11.Nd5 Bxd5 12.exd5 O-O 13.Bb3 Rfe8 14.h4!



A strong and natural plan. 14...b5 15.h5! Qb6 (After 15...Nhx5?! Judit probably wouldn't hesitate to play 16.Rxh5 gxh5 17.Qxh5→, followed by c2-c3 and Bc2, with an irresistible attack.) 16.hxg6 hxg6 17.Rh4! And White soon achieved a nearly winning position: 17...a5 18.a3 Rac8 19.Be3 Qb7 20.Qd2 a4 21.Ba2 Rc7 22.Rdh1±, J.Polgar–Levitina, Thessaloniki 1988.

b232) Also quite convincing was 11.h4 11...O-O 12.Kb1 Rfc8 13.Bb3 b5 14.h5 b4 15.Nd5 (15.Bxf6 Bxf6 16.Nd5 was even stronger, but White's play can hardly be criticized) 15...Bxd5 16.exd5 e5?! 17.hxg6 hxg6 18.Qf3 Nd7 19.Qh3+, G.Hernandez-Armas, Matanzas 1992.

Back to our game, after 6...e5:



7.Nf5!

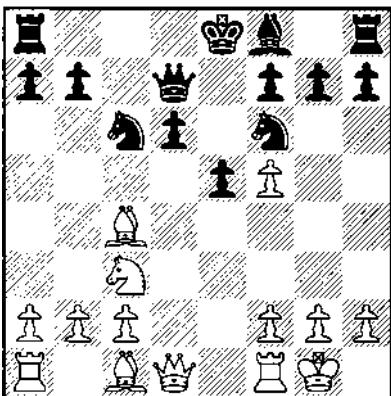
Although this move has not been played as commonly as 7.Nde2 or 7.Nf3, we believe it's White's most ambitious try for an advantage.

7...Be6

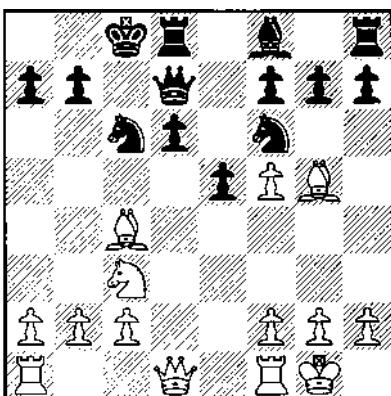
Black's main try, immediately opposing White's powerful light-squared bishop.

7...Nxe4? doesn't work out for Black after 8.Nxg7+ Bxg7 9.Nxe4± with d6 hanging and Bg5 coming next, Zhukov–Vorobiov, Kiev 2004.

In case of 7...Bxf5 8.exf5 Qd7, White should be willing to sacrifice the f5 pawn with 9.O-O!



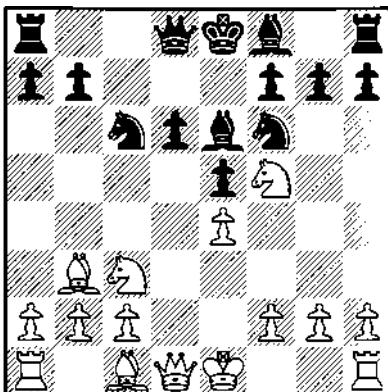
This sacrifice can be classified as long-term, in that White's compensation stems from not any kind of immediate initiative, but from control over the central light squares and the power of the light-squared bishop, which is now unopposed. We will see a nearly identical sacrifice in the main game as well, but let's see how White should proceed after 9...O-O-O (9...Qxf5 10.f4! e4 11.Nd5 Nxd5 12.Bxd5 transposes to the position after 13.Bxd5 on page 278 in our main game.) 10.Bg5!



A thematic idea, gaining control over d5. (Also possible was 10.Nd5 Nxd5 11.Bxd5 Qxf5 12.Be3↑, with

full control over the board a2-c2-c3 and Qb3, followed by pushing a2-a4-a5-a6.) 10...Qxf5 11.Bxf6 Qxf5 12.Nd5 Qf5 13.a4! This a-pawn will play a crucial role in White's attack. Although Black is up a pawn, he has no counterplay and his dark-squared bishop is a mere bystander. 13...Kc7 14.a5 Rc8 15.c3! Controlling the c4-square and preparing Qb3. Black's position is already critical. 15...Qc7 16.Qb3 Be7 17.Rfd1 Bd8 18.Bb5 Kc8 19.a6!+-. The attack along the light-squares quickly broke through. — Milos–Disconzi da Silva, Sao Caetano do Sul 1998.

8.Bb3

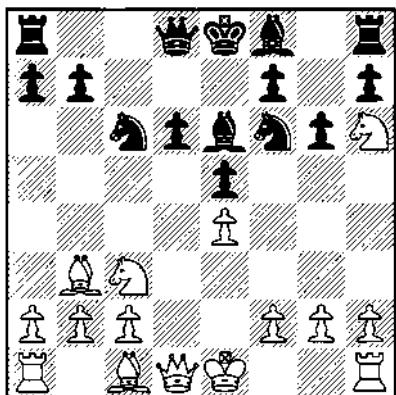


8...Qd7

As in the line 7...Bxf5, with this move Black intends to win a pawn by capturing on f5.

With the bishop on e6 8...Nxe4 is not such a bad move as in the previous line: 9.Bxe6 fxe6 (9...Nxc3?! cannot be recommended in view of 10.Bxf7+ Kxf7 11.bxc3 Qf6 12.Ne3±, where White has easy play with Nd5, O-O, and f2-f4. Ulko–Novikov, Minsk 2008.) 10.Nxg7+ Bxg7 11.Nxe4 d5 12.Qh5+ Kf8 Despite the precarious location of Black's king, White has no way to launch a fierce attack. Nevertheless, after 13.Ng5 Qd7 14.c3 h6 15.Nh3 Qf7 16.Qe2 Kg8 17.O-O Kh7 18.Be3 Rhg8 19.f3± White's position should be preferred, with a nice plan of Nf2-d3. Black's center is strong but immobile, Parligras–Furman, Albena 2010.

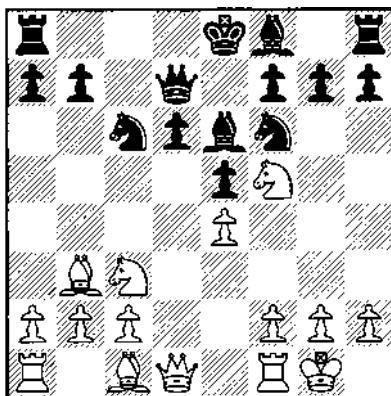
After 8...g6, critical is 9.Nh6!



It is rather strange to land a knight on h6 in the opening, but concretely this move poses Black a lot of difficulties, mainly preventing the right to castle kingside. (9.Ne3 Bh6 is also playable, but relatively safe for Black, Maciejewski–Wojtaszek, Warsaw 2005.) Now White's plan is to play Bg5, O-O, and f2-f4. 9...Nd4 10.Bg5 Be7 (Black can castle after 10...Bxh6 11.Bxh6 Ng4 but is still far away from equality, in view of 12.Bxe6 Nxh6

13.Bb3 O-O 14.h4!→ followed by Qd2, O-O-O, and h4-h5, with a simple yet deadly attack.) 11.O-O!N A natural improvement. (11.f4?! was too early, and clearly refuted by 11...Nxb3 12.axb3 Nh5!→, Schneider–Epishin, Connecticut 2000.) White is ready to play f2-f4 against almost all moves, with huge pressure along the f-file. After 11...Nxb3 12.axb3 Nh5 13.Bxe7 Qxe7 14.g3!± White has ideas of Nb5, Nf5, or even the simple Qd2 and Rad1. Black still cannot castle and if 14...Qg5? White wins with 15.Qxd6! Rd8 16.Qb4 Qxh6 17.Nb5+–.

9.O-O!

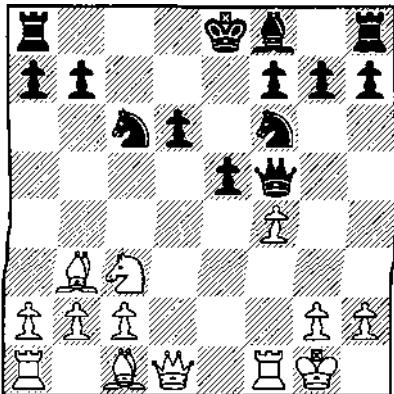


The great Vassily Ivanchuk doesn't mind sacrificing a pawn, especially when getting such rich compensation in return.

9...Bxf5 10.exf5 Qxf5

Declining the pawn with a move like 10...Be7 just leaves Black slightly worse after 11.f4±, where White has the two bishops and good central control, Foygel–Nute, Manchester 1993.

11.f4!



The most dynamic move, striking at the center before Black's king can reach safety.

11...e4!?

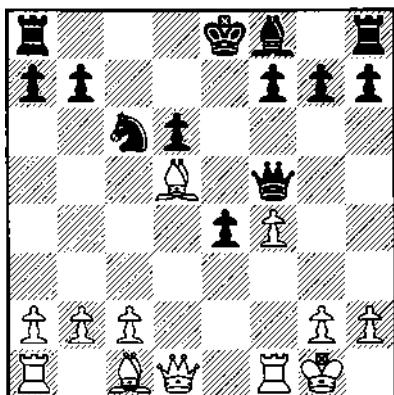
Keeping the e-file closed but overextending the pawn. Ivanchuk now punishes his opponent with energetic play.

11...exf4 was more solid. 12.Bxf4 Qc5+ 13.Kh1 Be7 14.Qf3 O-O 15.Rad1+. Once White wins back the pawn he will be better, but at least Black's king would be safe in this line.

12.Nd5!

Propelling the way for the bishop to come to d5.

12...Nxd5 13.Bxd5



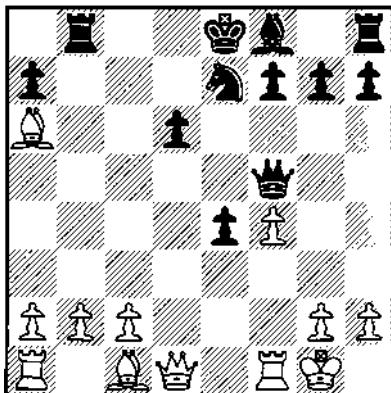
Black's entire position is under pressure. The threat is Re1, picking up the e4 pawn.

13...Ne7

The best defensive try, back the extra pawn but retains some control over the center.

Black's king would not be comfortable on the queenside 13...O-O-O?! 14.Be3± followed by c2-c4, Qa4, and b2-b4.

14.Bxb7 Rb8 15.Ba6



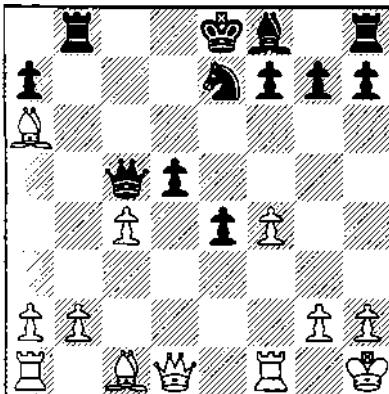
From the looks of things it doesn't seem like White has any kind of initiative, with four pieces on the back rank and a misplaced bishop on a6, but Black's king is still a few moves away from castling, and the threat of c2-c4 and Bb5+ is surprisingly difficult to deal with.

15...Qc5+ 16.Kh1 d5

Now if Black could only castle and defend his center, he would be quite a happy camper, but Ivanchuk has intentions of letting that happen!

In case of 16...Qc6 17.Qe2 Rb8 White has a nice resource in 18.b4=

17.c4!



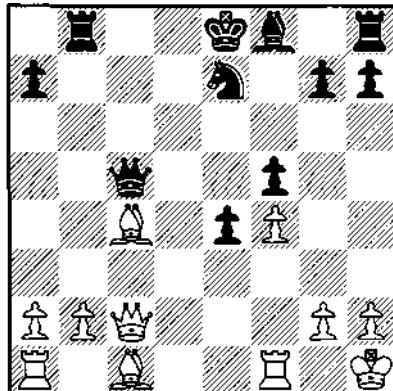
Undermining Black's center. This is the kind of move that a strong player can make based on pure intuition—not much calculation is necessary. When your opponent is far behind in development, you should always look for the most forceful ways of opening up the position.

17...dxc4

17...d4 looks optically pleasing, but such a center cannot be defended with the king still on e8. Strongest for White is 18.Qa4+ Nc6 19.Bb5 Rc8 20.b4! Qd6 21.Bb2+-. Once White's rooks reach the central files, Black will at the very least lose both pawns.

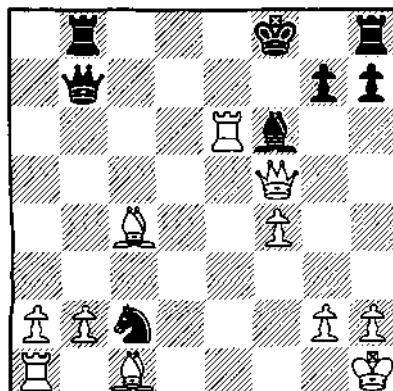
17...f5 was probably the most stubborn, though White has quite a few ways of retaining the initiative and a large advantage, for instance 18.b4 Qxb4 19.cxd5± with ideas of e2-a4 and Ba3, and Black is just one step from quick defeat.

18.Qc2 f5 19.Bxc4±



With Black's king now permanently stuck on e8, White simply needs to mobilize the rest of his forces in order to launch a decisive attack. Impressively enough, Ivanchuk decides to give his queenside pieces a rest and manages to win using only his developed queen, bishop, and rook:

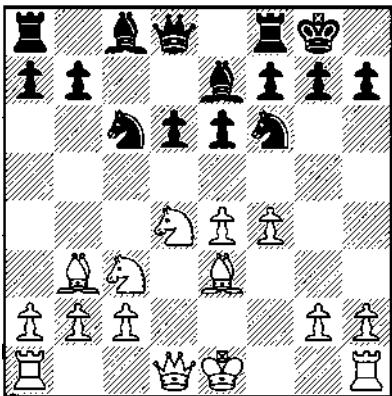
19...Nc6 20.Rd1 Nb4 21.Qa4+ Qc6 22.Qxa7 Qb7 23.Qa5 Be7 24.Qxf5 Bf6 25.Re1 Kf8 26.Rxe4 Nc2 27.Re6! 1-0



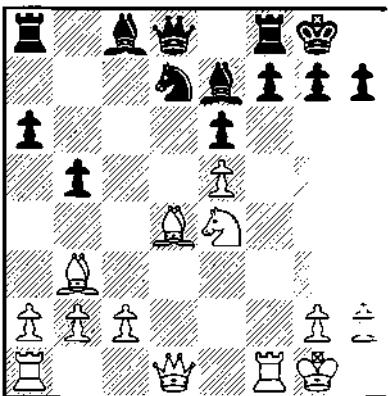
Black resigned, as after 27...Nxal 28.Rxf6+ gxf6 29.Qxf6+ Ke8 30.Qxh8+ White is ahead in material and has a winning attack.

Memory Markers

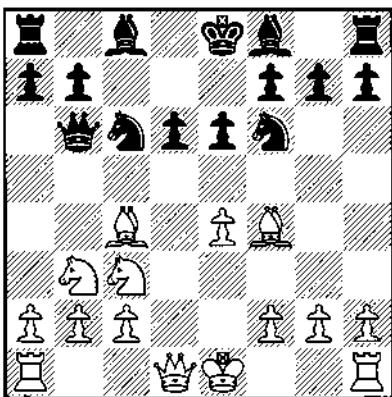
Here are reminders of some of the ideas and motifs in this chapter.



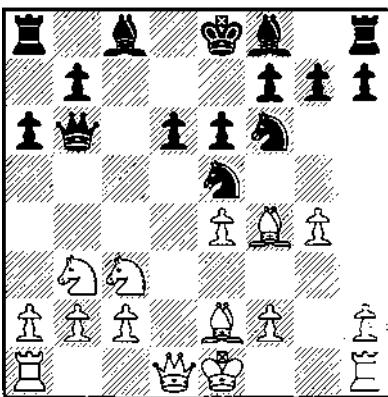
- 1. After 9.f4!.** With the idea f4-f5, hammering away at the a2-g8 diagonal. See diagram on page 234, in Game 19 Fischer–Cardoso.



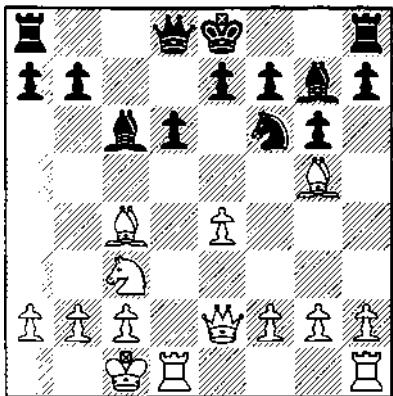
- 2. After 14.Ne4!.** The knight heads to d6, creating a dangerous passed pawn. See diagram on page 245, in Game 20 Short–Kasparov.



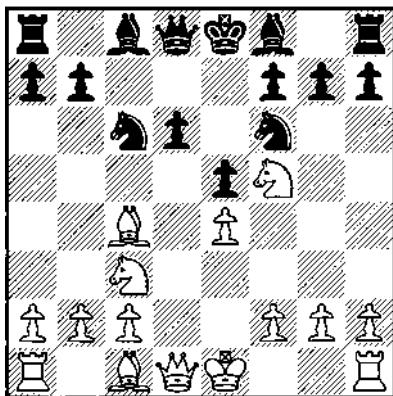
- 3. After 8.Bf4!.** Placing pressure on the d6 pawn, forcing 8...Ne5. See page 252, in Game 21 Kasparov–Anand.



- 4. After 10.g4!?.** A sharp kingside advance. See page 263, in Game 22 Vaibhav–Nijboer.



5. After **10.0-O-O!?**. An aggressive setup, with an eventual attacking plan of h2-h4-h5. See analysis diagram on page 274.



6. After **7.Nf5!**. The most ambitious reply to 6...e5. See page 275, in Game 23 Ivanchuk–El Gindy.

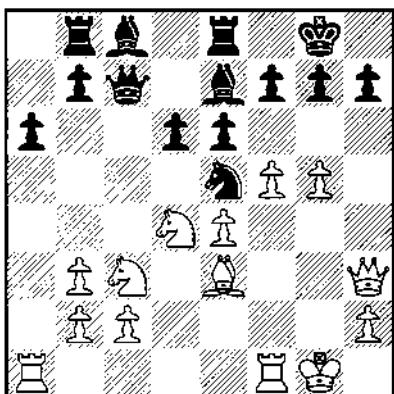
Exercises

White to play!

As White, practice finding the right moves when facing the Classical Variation.

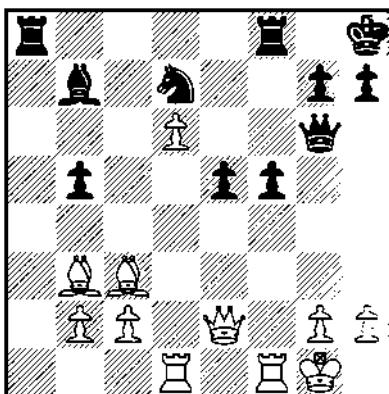
Solutions to the exercises begin on page 527.

Exercise 1



Neumeier – Kreisl
AUT-ch, Jenbach 2009

Exercise 2

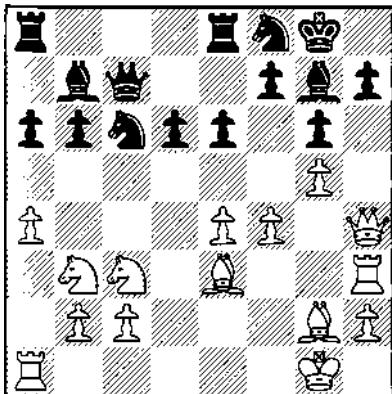


Skorchenko – Zagrebelyn
Krasnodar 2003

White has launched a thematic attack in the style of Fischer. Find the best continuation.

White has the two bishops and a strong passed pawn on d6, but Black has his share of the center and active pieces. How should White proceed?

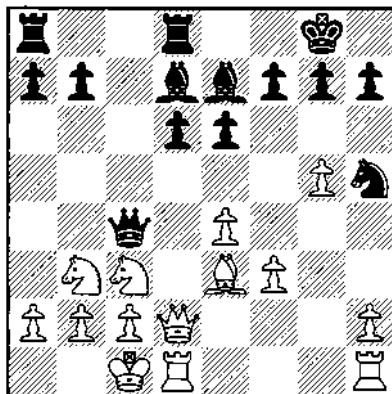
Exercise 3



Kosteniuk - Hou
Beijing 2012

Black has all of the critical kingside squares defended, or does she?

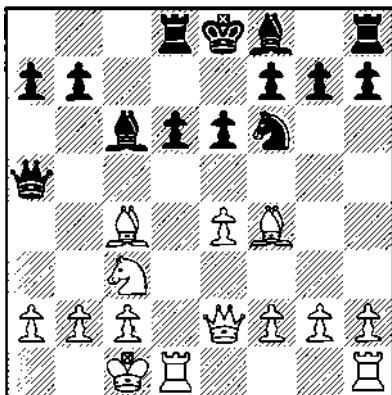
Exercise 4



Nakamura - Edouard
Cap d'Agde 2010

White to play, find the best move.
Hint: consider Black's possibilities too.

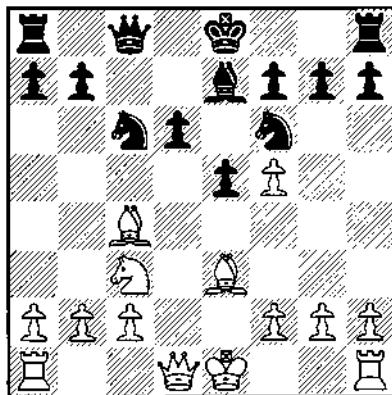
Exercise 5



Kashtanov - Polaninov
St. Petersburg 2001

White to play. Try to make use of your superior development.

Exercise 6



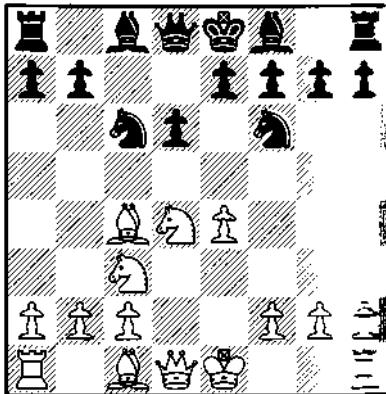
Rehurek - Maximov
CZE-chT, Pardubice 2012

White to play, should you protect the f5 pawn?

Summary:

Chapter 3

The Classical Variation



1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 Nc6 6.Bc4

Overall, **6.Bc4** is an excellent choice against the Classical Sicilian since it offers White a very clear middlegame plan in all lines. It is also somewhat underestimated compared to the sharp Richter-Rauzer Attack (6.Bg5), which requires both sides to know a lot of complex theory.

This chapter is one of the most diverse in the entire book. We saw a whole slew of powerful attacking ideas in Game 19, Fischer–Cardoso and Game 21, Kasparov–Anand. The chapter was also filled with interesting positional concepts, such as allowing the exchange of the light-squared bishop in Game 19 in exchange for time for White’s kingside attack, as well as handling the two bishops and the passed d6 pawn in Game 20, Short–Kasparov. Lastly in Game 22, Ivanchuk’s positional pawn sacrifice after **6.Bc4 e5 7.Nf5!** is a motif well worth remembering.

To remind the reader of a few key points, the main theoretical choice of Game 20 is to play **17.Qe2** rather than 17.Rf2, and then the reader has

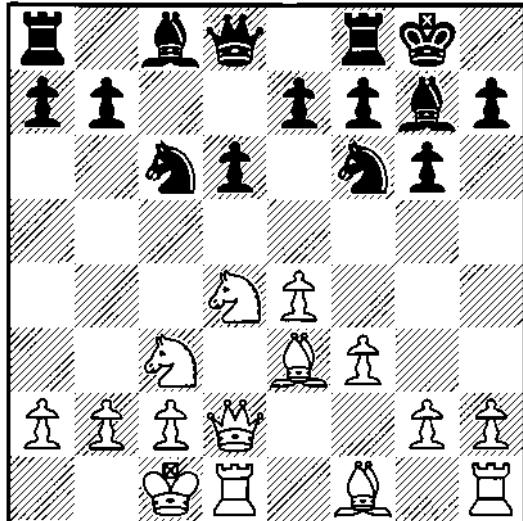
a choice between **18.Bc3**, leading to a sharp middlegame, and **18.Be2**, followed by Qf2-g3, heading into a seemingly favorable endgame for White, as analyzed on page 246.

Furthermore, after **6.Bc4 Qb4 7.Nb3 e6 8.Bf4 Ne5 9.Be2**, it is important to remember that against **9...Be7** (Game 21) White can play **10.Be3 Qc7 11.f4**, since **11...Nc4** is met with **12.Nb5 Qc6 13.Bxc4 Qxc4 14.Qd3**, as we analyze on page 253.

This is in contrast to the lines **9...Bd7** and **9...a6** (Game 22), where the b5 square is controlled, giving Black the c4 square for his knight if necessary. Our respective recommendations of **10.Qd2** and **10.g4!?** lead to a dynamic middlegame that should be studied deeply by both sides.

Chapter 4

The Dragon Variation



**1.e4 c5 1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6
6.Be3 Bg7 7.f3 O-O 8.Qd2 Nc6 9.O-O-O**

We've reached what we expect to be one of the most anticipated chapters in the entire book. The Sicilian Dragon can be labeled as the quintessential double-edged opening, as it invites White to launch a brutal kingside assault while offering Black a fantastic counterattack. Interestingly enough, the Dragon's reputation seems to be a controversial subject matter. Naive **1.e4** players will tell you that it was refuted long ago, while fanatics will say that it is simply winning for Black! Our belief is that it is perfectly playable, having been recently used at high levels by players such as Carlsen, Nakamura, Radjabov, and Gashimov.

The Yugoslav Attack, **6.Be3**, has now been considered for a long time to be the only critical attempt for White to gain an advantage. Our recommendation of **9.O-O-O** should not come as a surprise—in recent years we believe it has surpassed **9.Bc4** as the tactical choice for most top players, as it leads to more manageable positions from White's perspective.

In Game 24 we will cover **9...Bd7**, as well as some of Black's lesser

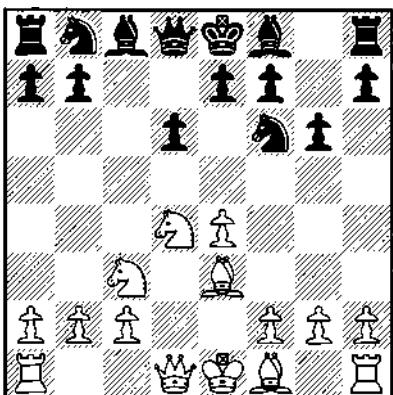
alternatives before the 9th move. Game 25 will then feature the tricky **9...Nxd4**, while in Game 26 we will explore the critical **9...d5**.

Rounding out the chapter will be Game 27, where we analyze the hybrid Dragodorf variation, in which Black plays an early a7-a6, merging the Dragon and Najdorf structures together. This will be one of the sharpest chapters in the entire book, enjoy!

Game 24

Fedorchuk – Stocek
Bundesliga 2006

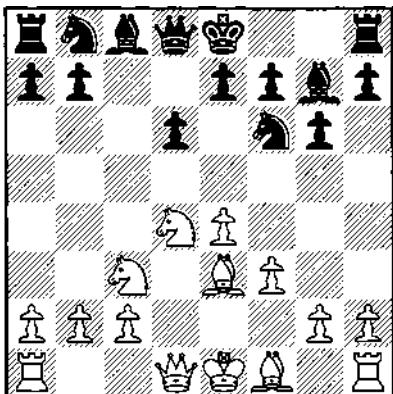
1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4
4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6 6.Be3



6...Bg7

We would be remiss not to mention the well known trap 6...Ng4?? 7.Bb5+ Bd7 8.Qxg4+-.

7.f3



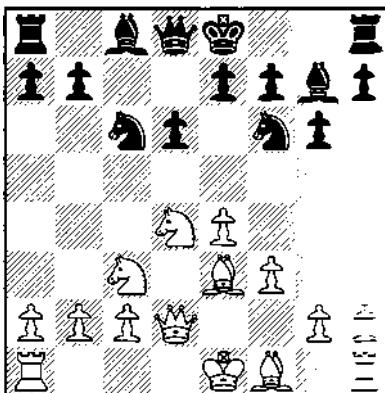
The start of the famed Yugoslav Attack. White protects the e4 pawn and takes control of the g4 square in order to eventually play g2-g4 and

h2-h4, creating a deadly attack on the kingside.

7...O-O

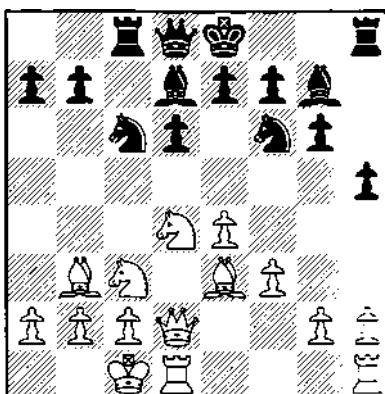
Black generally castles on this move or the next, but it is possible for Black to keep the king in the center for a few extra moves.

After 7...Nc6 8.Qd2



Black has two main ways of delaying castling:

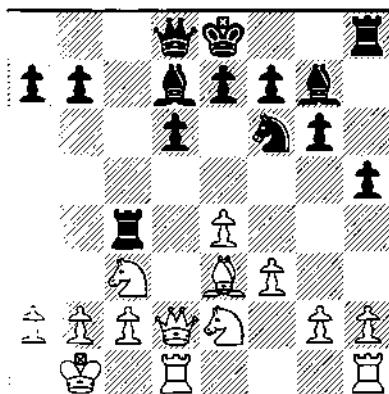
8...h5 is risky, stopping g2-g4 at the cost of weakening the kingside. White should proceed ordinarily: 9.O-O-O Bd7 10.Bc4 Rc8 11.Bb5



Now White can improve his position with Kb1 and Rxe1, opting for

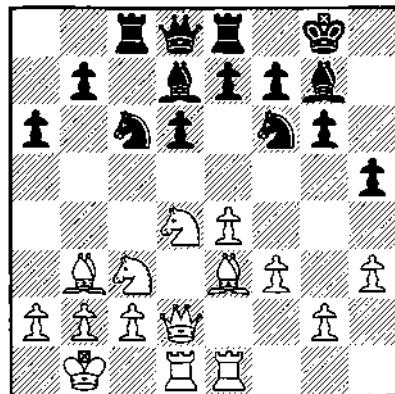
central pressure. Once Black castles, the plan of h2-h3 and g2-g4 will be quite effective. Let's see how play might proceed:

- a) 11...O-O 12.Kb1 Ne5 13.h3! Nc4 14.Bxc4 Rxc4 15.g4→. White is doing well, with a potential follow up of Nde2 and Bh6.
- b) 11...Na5 (or 11...Ne5, which leads to the same position) 12.Kb1 Nc4 13.Bxc4 Rxc4 14.Nde2!



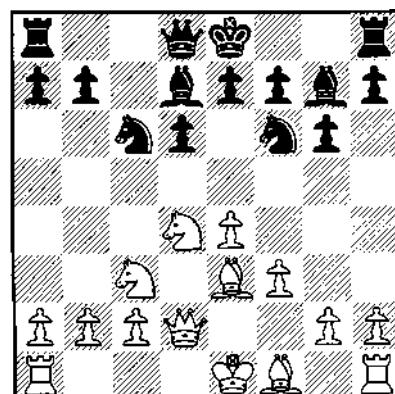
- multi-purpose move, preparing h2-h3 or Bh6 once Black castles. The knight can also become quite useful 11...Nc4 14...b5 15.Bd4 O-O (or 15...b4?! Nd5 e5 17.Nxf6+ Bxf6 18.Bxa7±) 15...A thematic idea, creating problems along the d-file for Black. Ne8 17.exd6 Nxd6 18.Bxg7 Kxg7 Nd5↑, Ibarra Jerez-Almeida Benítez, Mallorca 2004. The natural Rhe1± would also give White a large advantage.

Against 11...a6 GM Macieja demonstrated optimal play from White's perspective: 12.Rhe1 O-O Kb1 Re8 14.h3!



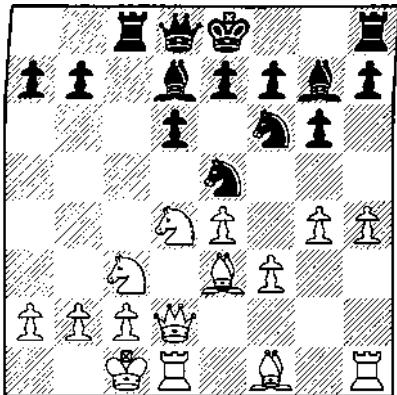
Insisting on the kingside attack, a potent idea. 14...Qa5 15.g4 Ne5 16.Bh6 Bh8 17.f4! Nc4 18.Bxc4 Rxc4 19.Nb3 Qd8 20.e5!+– the culmination of White's play, a decisive central breakthrough leading to large material gains, Macieja-Shabalov, Bermuda 2004.

Black can also initiate typical queenside counterplay with 8...Bd7:



Against this move, White should proceed as usual, again with 9.O-O-O Rc8 10.g4 As we'll see in the main line, it is better to start with g2-g4 rather than h2-h4. 10...Ne5 (10...h5?! gives away too much space after 11.g5 Nh7 12.f4 for instance

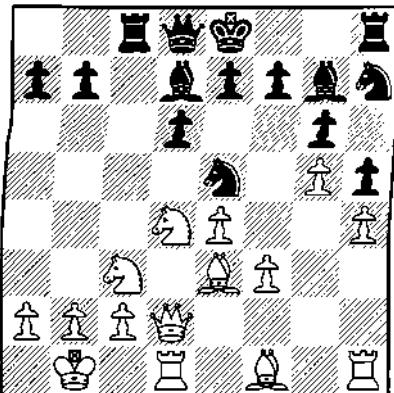
12...O-O 13.Be2 Re8 14.Kb1 Nf8
 15.f5±, Gofshtein–Cebalo, Cannes
 1998.) 11.h4



Now 11...O-O 12.Be2 would transpose to a position covered later on, so let's instead look at Black's alternatives to castling:

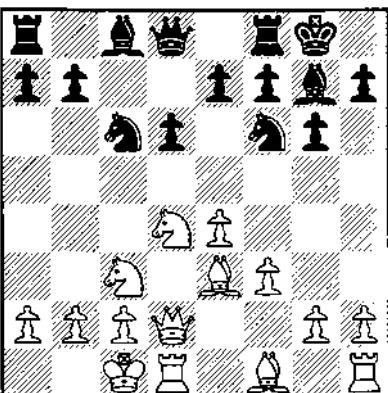
a) 11...Qa5 was tried by Nakamura in a rapid game, which continued 12.Kb1 (*But we'd prefer 12.Be2!± protecting f3 and leaving Black in a difficult spot to deal with h4-h5.*) 12...Rxc3 The only chance, otherwise White would just be ahead. After 13.Qxc3 Qxc3 14.bxc3 Nxf3!?, 15.Nxf3 Bxg4 16.Bb5+ Kf8 17.Nd2±, despite White's extra material, the position is quite complex, Efimenko–Nakamura, Dubai UAE 2014.

b) The only other serious try is 11...h5, as allowing White to play h4-h5 would be quite troublesome. After 12.g5 Nh7 13.Kb1



White has a simple but effective plan of f3-f4-f5, for example 13...O-O (or 13...Nf8 14.f4 Ng4 15.f5±) 14.f5 Ng4 15.f5! (*Also good is 15.Bg1±.* Xie Jun–Tiviakov, Beijing 1997. 15...Nxe3 16.Qxe3 Be5 17.Bh3!+ with a powerful attack along the light-squares, threatening f4xg6 and Ne6. Bezemer–Belezky, Triesen 2013.

8.Qd2 Nc6 9.O-O-O



This is considered to be the modern main line, opting to leave the bishop on f1 for the time being. This will prove beneficial for White in lines where Black plays Ne5-c4, since White can capture on c4 immediately rather than first playing Bc4-b3.

White's future intentions include playing g2-g4, h2-h4-h5, Bh6, and delivering checkmate!

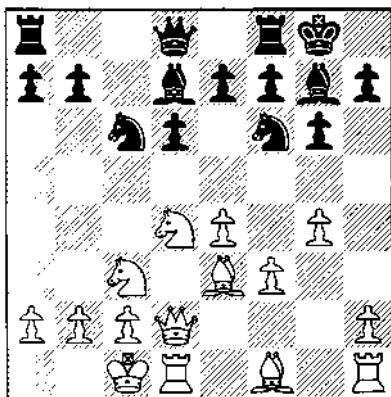
The other main line is 9.Bc4, considered for a long time to be the most critical test of the Dragon. Nowadays it leads to extremely sharp play, with definite chances for both sides.

Considerably less popular is 9.g4!?, but nevertheless it's quite a serious option for White as well.

9...Bd7

Black's most natural move, simply preparing Rc8. In this game we will explore many variations where White goes for the direct kingside attack while Black shoots for aggressive queenside counterplay.

10.g4!



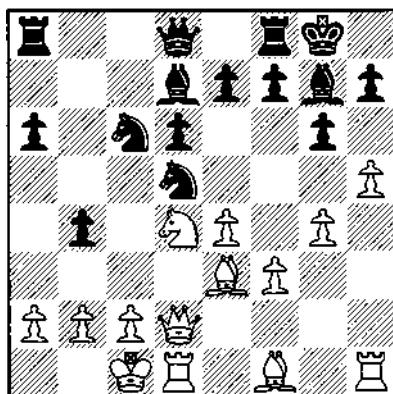
The most precise way to start the kingside pawn storm, since 11.h4 gives Black the extra option of 11...h5.

10...Rc8

Black's plan mainly consists of the moves Rc8, Ne5-c4, and Qa5, which have all been tried in various lines. While it isn't necessary to memorize all of the following variations, there are a few important

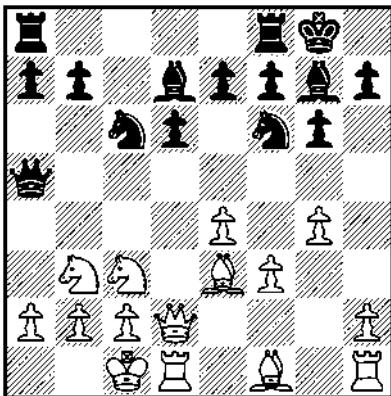
details that we will try to highlight and explain along the way. Let's first look at the dubious tries 10...a6?! and 10...Qa5?!, followed by the serious alternative 10...Ne5 on page 290.

There's a common saying that when Black plays a7-a6 and b7-b5 in the Sicilian Dragon, something has already gone very wrong! In the case of 10...a6?!, this plan is simply too slow, especially since White hasn't spent two tempi on Bc4-b3. The following sample line demonstrates this well: 11.h4 b5 12.h5 b4 13.Nd5 Nxd5



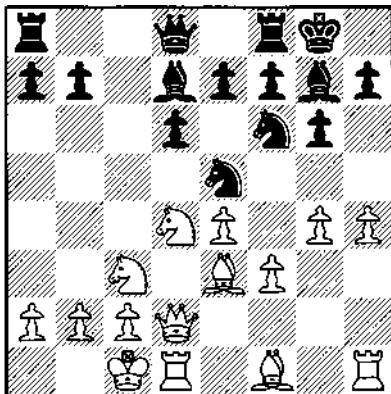
14.Nxc6! Gaining a tempo. 14...Bxc6 15.exd5 Bd7 16.hxg6 fxg6 17.Qh2+– and White's attack is already decisive.

10...Qa5?! is not a good move in view of 11.Nb3!, preventing Black's queen from occupying her best square:



11...Qc7 (not 11...Qb4?? 12.a3+–) In this case 12.g5! already leads to a large advantage: 12...Ne8 (Or 12...Nh5 13.Nd5± followed by Be2 and f3-f4, as in Mogranzini–Hrizza, Cannes 2007.) 13.Nd5 Qd8 14.h4+ with a direct attack along the h-file, Tseshkovsky–Kuligin, Sochi 2006.

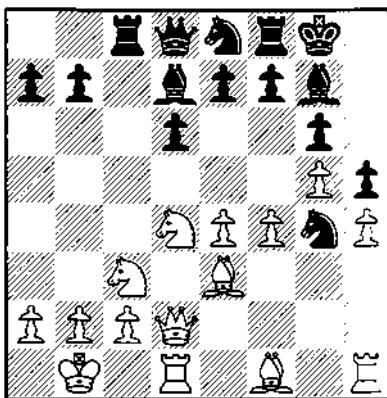
After 10...Ne5 11.h4



The main move in this position is 11...Rc8, transposing to the variation 11...Ne5 in the main line. Instead, we look at three of Black's independent options, 11...h5, 11...b5, and 11...Qa5.

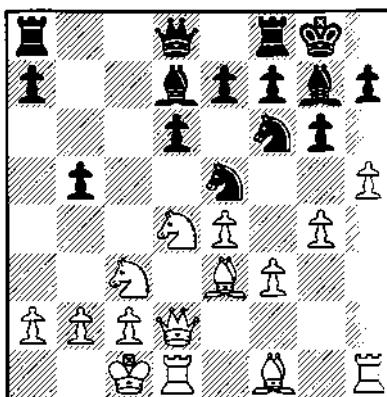
a) Locking up the kingside with 11...h5 avoids immediate mate, but gives up a lot of space. After 12.g5

(12.gxh5 Nxh5 13.Rg1→ is also a good choice, with a plan of opening up the g-file via f3-f4-f5.) 12...Ne8 13.Rg1 Rc8 14.f4 Ng4

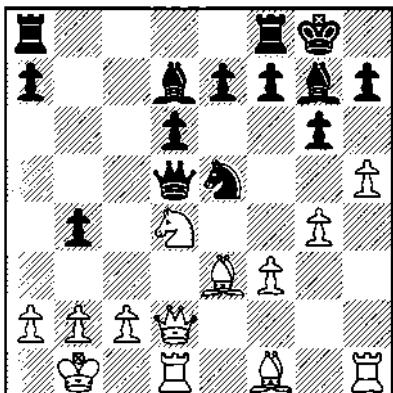


After 15.Bg1±, White was clearly better in Asrian–Evdokimov, Yerevan 2004. But another interesting option was 15.f5!N giving up the bishop for an attack along the light squares for example 15...Nxe3 16.Qxe3 Bxf5 17.Bh3!± with a nice plan of Rg1 and fxg6.

b) The sharp 11...b5 was nicely refuted by GM Bologan back in 1995:

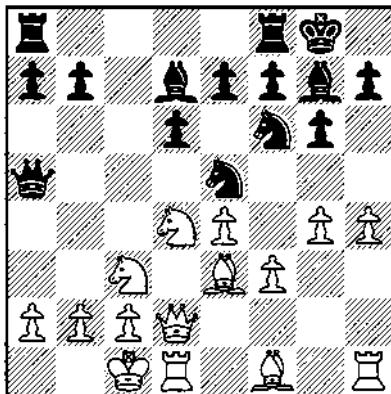


In principle White should usually look for ways to advance the kingside attack rather than grab material on the queenside. 12...b4 13.Nd5! An original and non-obvious pawn sacrifice. 13...Nxd5 14.exd5 Qa5 15.Kb1 Qxd5

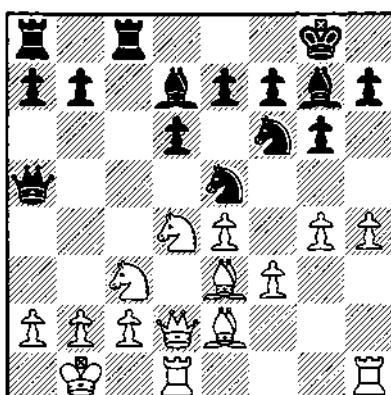


It seems like Black is doing perfectly fine, but in reality White is nearly winning after the opening of the h-file: 16.hxg6 fxg6 (16...hxg6? 17.Nf5!+- just wins on the spot, with the pretty point being 17...Qxd2 18.Nxe7 mate!) 17.Qh2! h6 (Not much better was 17...Kf7 18.Be2 Be6 19.Nxe6 Qxe6 20.Bd4+—, Kovalev–Y. Zhou, Budapest 2013.) 18.Be2 Qf7 19.Bxh6+— and Black's king was simply too vulnerable to survive, Bologan–Fedorov, Elista 1998.

c) Lastly, 11...Qa5



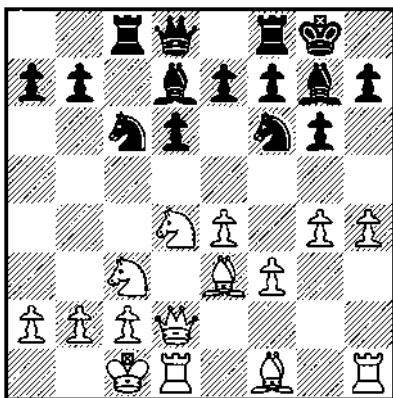
should be met with 12.Kb1 (*In this case 12.Nb3 is not as precise because after 12...Qc7 13.Be2 b5!— Black is doing well.*) 12...Rfc8 13.Be2



The results from this position have overwhelmingly favored White, who not only has a ready-made attack in h4-h5, but also potential tactical opportunities connected with e4-e5 breaks. For example: 13...Nc4 14.Bxc4 Rxc4 15.h5 Rac8 16.Nb3! Qd8 (or 16...Qc7 17.hxg6 fxg6 18.e5! dxe5 19.Nd5+—) 17.hxg6 hxg6 18.e5! A thematic and decisive breakthrough. 18...Nxg4 (18...dxe5 19.g5+— wins

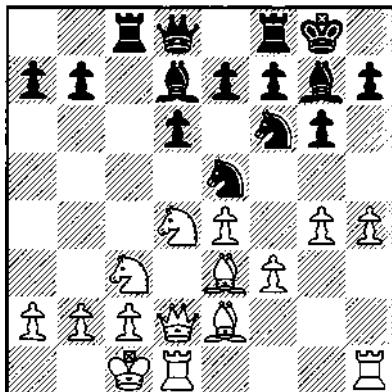
a full piece.) 19.fxg4 Bxg4 20.Qh2 Bxe5 21.Qh7+ Kf8 22.Bd4 Rxd4 23.Rxd4!+– and a young Carlsen had no problems finishing off the attack, Carlsen–Taylor, Budapest 2003.

11.h4



11...h5

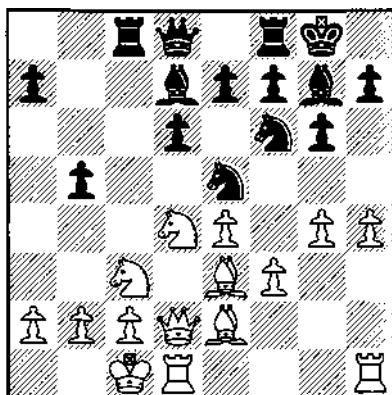
Since Black is behind in the race to the opponent's king, stopping h4-h5 is more or less necessary. However 11...Ne5 is a very important alternative. White has replied with both 12.Kb1 and 12.h5 here, but in our opinion, strongest is 12.Be2!:



An important move to remember. With the bishop on e2, the typical Dragon sacrifices Bxg4 or Nxf3 will never work. We look at three alternatives for Black in this position.

Practically losing is 12...Ne4? 13.Bxc4 Rxc4 14.h5. Next is Bh6 followed by mate along the h-file. Unfortunately for Black, 14...Qa5 is strongly met with 15.Nb3 Qc7 16.e5!+– with the idea 16...dxe5 17.g5, winning a piece, Pokorná-Djeno, Pula 2002.

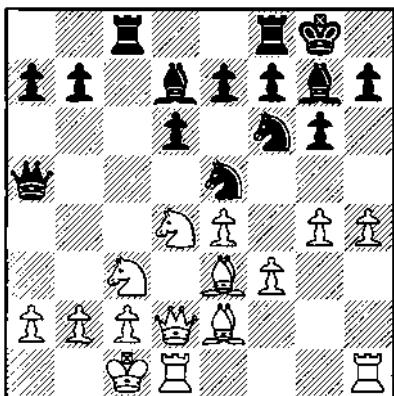
Also not very sound is 12...b5?!



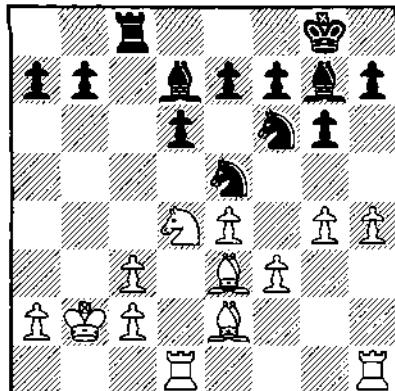
This time, grabbing the pawn with 13.Ncxb5 is perfectly acceptable

since White has everything protected thanks to the bishop on e2. (Still, *there is nothing wrong with the principled 13.h5!?*.) After 14...Nc4 14.Bxc4 Rxc4 15.Qd3 Ra4 16.Nc3 Rb4 17.h5+– White was up a pawn and well ahead in the attack in Short–Saptarshi, Mumbai 2006.

Best is 12...Qa5



White should now play 13.Kb1 13Nb3?! Qc7 14.h5 b5? is quite unclear.) 13...Rxc3 This is really Black's only chance, as White's attack is simply too strong after h4-h5. 14.Qxc3 Unless you're about to deliver mate, it is generally safer to go into the endgame with the doubled pawns. 14...Qxc3 15.bxc3 Rc8 16.Kb2±



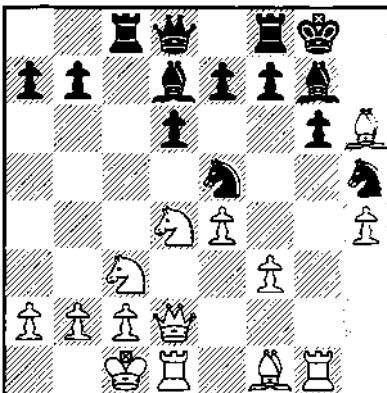
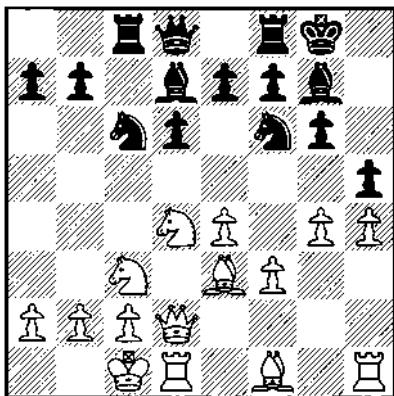
Objectively, White has a clear advantage here, but Black does have certain compensation for the exchange, mainly in the form of having such a solid pawn structure.

a) GM Sutovsky won a model game after 16...Be8 17.h5 Nfd7 18.hxg6 hxg6 19.Bh6 Trading dark-squared bishops would allow White's rooks to infiltrate Black's position through the h-file. 19...Bf6 20.g5! The start of a very deep plan—after doubling rooks on the h-file White will have the nice resource Bf8!, forcing a trade of bishops. 20...Bh8 21.Rh2 Nc4+ 22.Bxc4 Rxc4 23.Rdh1 Be5 24.Rh4 Bg3 25.R4h3 Be5 26.Ne2! Insisting on f3-f4. 26...e6 27.f4 Bh8 28.Bf8! Despite White's plan being so slow, it has turned out to be quite effective. 28...Nxf8 29.Rxh8+ Kg7 30.f5! The final breakthrough. 30...gxsf5 31.exf5 exf5 32.Ng3+– and it was all over, Sutovsky–Hodgson, Oxford 1998.

b) Carlsen faced 16...Nc4+ in another game from his youth, and was able to convert quite cleanly: 17.Bxc4 Rxc4 18.h5 a6 19.hxg6 fxg6 20.Rh4 b5 21.Rd3 a5 22.Nb3 a4 23.Nd2 Rc8 24.Bd4! Setting up a trade of dark-squared bishops, minimizing White's technical task.

24...Be6 25.e5 Nd5 26.exd6 exd6 27.Bxg7 Kxg7 28.a3 Rc6 29.g5+— and Black wasn't able to defend with weaknesses on b5 and d6, Carlsen–Coleman, Chalkidiki 2003.

Back to our main game, after 11...h5:



White threatens to trade bishops and advance the f-pawn, breaking through on the kingside. Black has a few reasonable tries here, but they all fall short when subject to concrete analysis:

14...Nc4 loses in straightforward fashion after 15.Bxc4 Rxc4 16.Bxg7

12.gxh5

An aggressive choice by GM Fedorchuk, opening up the g-file at the cost of weakening his kingside structure.

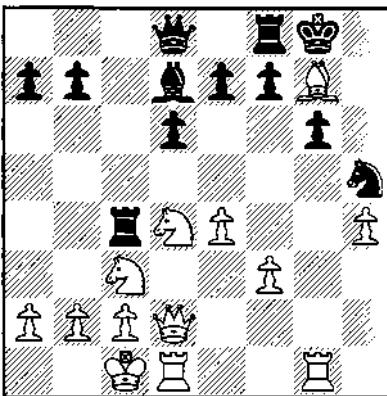
Also playable is 12.g5±, with the plan of f3-f4-f5 and Bh3, but in this case we prefer playing more ambitiously with 12.gxh5.

12...Nxh5 13.Rg1!

With the semi-open g-file White has some very dangerous attacking chances, but of course there is still a long way to go. White should aim to trade dark-squared bishops, though he also has ideas of Nd5, Be2, and f3-f4.

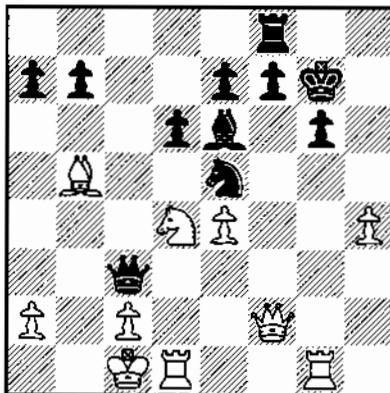
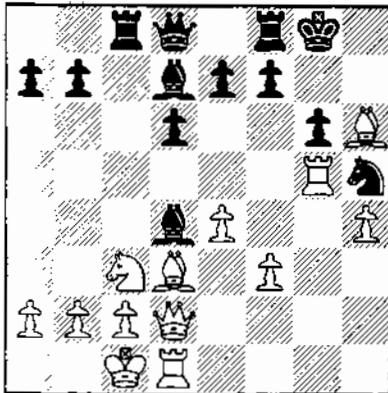
13...Nxd4

Exchanging the minor pieces leaves Black's king quite vulnerable, but the more popular 13...Ne5 runs into serious tactical problems after 14.Bh6!:



16...Kxg7 (or 16...Nxg7 17.h5! Nxh5 18.Qh6+—) 17.Nf5+! Bxf5 18.exf5— and Black is toast after Qd3, Nd5, etc.

14...Nd3+ looks clever, but after 15.Bxd3 Bxd4 16.Rg5! N

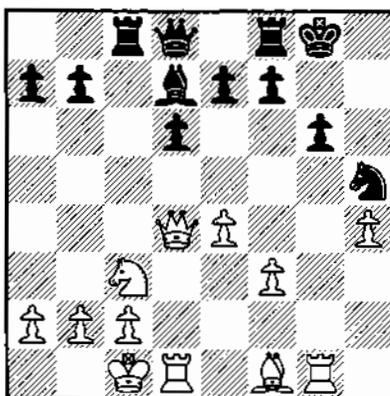
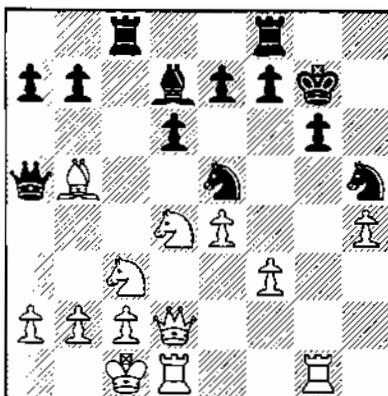


Black is just lost, as after 16...Ng7 17.h5+– White is breaking through.

The critical test of White's play is 14...Qa5, which would hold up if not for 15.Bxg7 Kxg7 16.Bb5!N

Although Black has some decent compensation for the rook, it is really not enough. With accurate play White should win.

14.Bxd4 Bxd4 15.Qxd4



A powerful resource, spotted instantly by the silicon beast. Indeed, White is winning in all lines: 16...Be6 (16...Bxb5?! shows the point of White's play: 17.Nf5+ Kg8 18.Qh6 Rxe8 19.Rg5! with mate to follow: 19...Rxc3 20.Rxh5+) 17.f4 Nxf4! This counter sacrifice is Black's only chance to survive. 18.Qxf4 Rxc3 19.bxc3 Qxc3 20.Qf2±

After the two trades on d4 White clearly stands better, and is only a sacrifice or two away from launching a decisive attack.

15...Be6?!

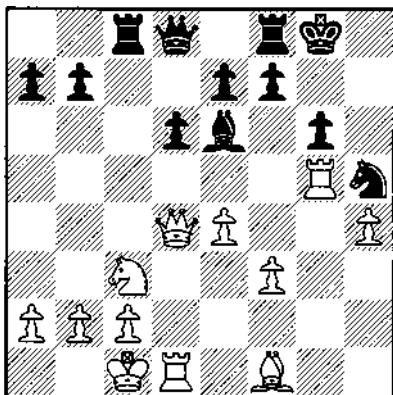
Preventing Bc4, but allowing White's rook to land on g5.

15...Qb6?! would lose a pawn after 16.Qxb6 (or 16.Nd5!) 16...axb6 17.Nd5±.

But **15...Rc5**, preventing Rg5, would have been more stubborn. Of course White is still doing very well

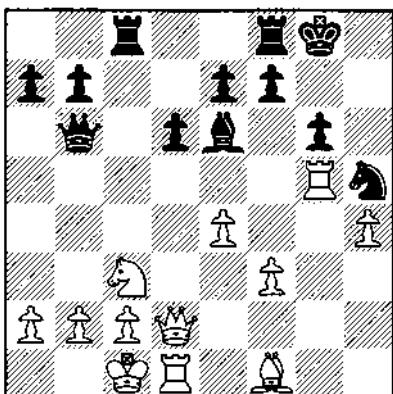
after 16.Bc4 Kh7 17.Kb1±, with ideas of Bd5 and Rg5.

16.Rg5!



A powerful square for White's rook, which can be sacrificed on h5 at any moment.

16...Qb6 17.Qd2



17...Rfd8?

The losing move!

No better was 17...Nf6 18.h5! where 18...Nxh5?! just loses in typical fashion: 19.Rxh5 gxh5 20.Qg5+ Kh8 21.Qxh5+ Kg7 22.Qg5+ Kh8 23.Bd3+-.

The only reasonable try was 17...Rxc3 18.Qxc3 Qf2, hoping to create some confusion in White's

camp, but after 19.e5!± White's technical task is not too difficult.

18.Rb5 Qg1

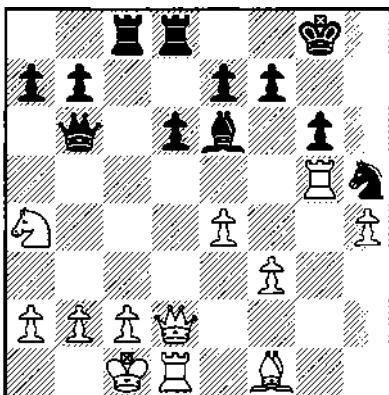
Forced.

After 18...Qc7 19.Rxh5! White is already winning: 19...gxh5 20.Qg5+ Kf8 (or 20...Kh8 21.Bd3+-) 21.Qh5+ Ke8 22.Bb5+-.

19.Rg5

GM Fedorchuk repeats moves searching for a clear win from the previous position.

19...Qb6 20.Na4!



And he finds it!

The problem with 20.Rxh5 is that after 20...gxh5 21.Qg5+ Kf8 22.Qh5+ Ke8 23.Bb5+ Rc6, Black is surviving for the moment.

20...Qc7

Now with the queen on c7, Black cannot block Bb5+ with Rc6, leading White to find:

21.Rxh5!

A thematic combination.

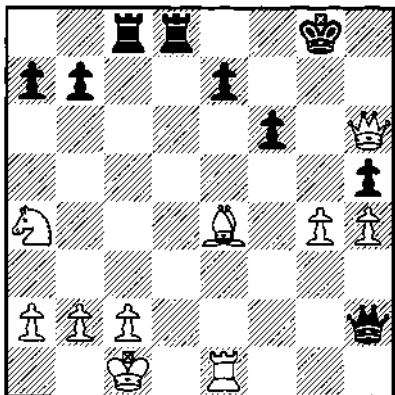
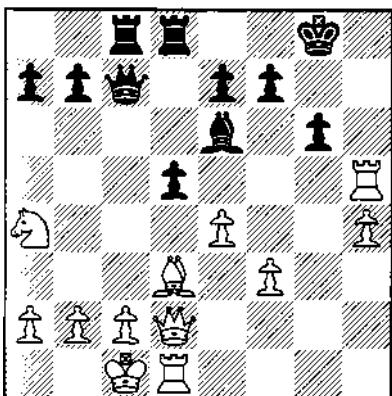
21...d5

The most practical defense forcing White to find a few more precise moves.

After 21...gxh5 22.Qg5+ Kf8 (Once again 22...Kh8 23.Qh6+ Ke8 24.Bd3+- is simply over.) 23.Qh6+

$\text{K}e8$ 24.Bb5+ Qc6 Taking the queen would be nice, but how about forcing mate with 25.Nc5!+-.

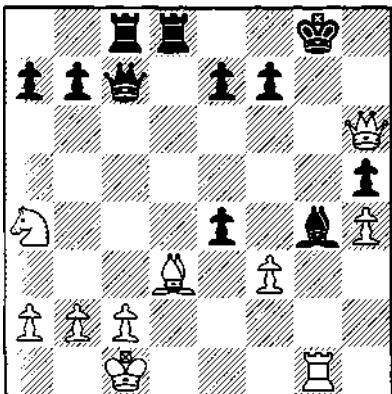
22.Bd3!



The final nail in Black's coffin. Without any reasonable defense, GM Stocek resigned.

Simple and strong, protecting the pawn and freeing White's queen to invade the kingside.

22...dxe4 23.Qh6 gxh5 24.Rg1+ Bg4



25.Bxe4!

Avoiding a small trap, as 25.fxg4?? would have spoiled everything: 25...Rxd3! 26.gxh5+ Rg3--.

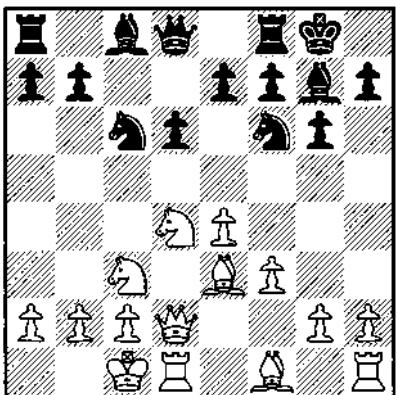
White's threat is now 26.Bh7+, with mate to follow.

25...f6 26.fxg4 Qh2 27.Re1! 1-0

Game 25

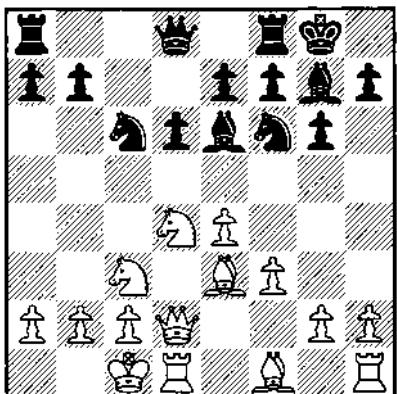
Zufic – Rezan
Zadar Open 2008

- 1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4
- 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6 6.Be3 Bg7
- 7.f3 O-O 8.Qd2 Nc6 9.O-O-O



9...Nxd4

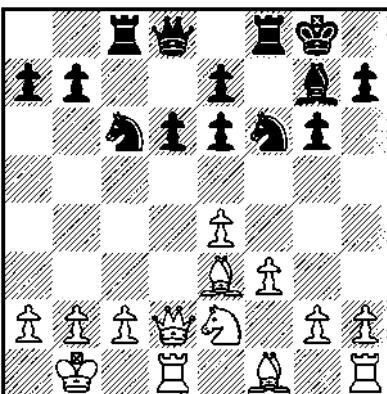
The immediate 9...Be6 is a minor sideline:



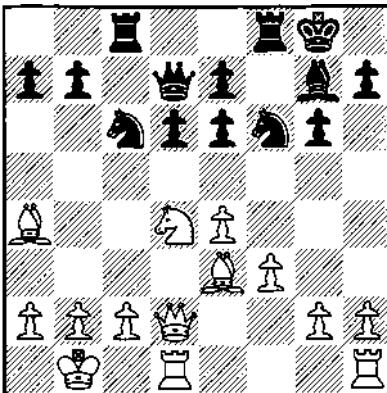
Black hopes White will play either g2-g4 or h2-h4, which would be inaccurate.

After 10.h4?! (or 10.g4), Black can play 10...Nxd4 11.Bxd4 Qa5, saving an important tempo over the main line.

Most precise is 10.Kb1 Rc8 (If 10...Ne5 then 11.Nxe6 fxe6 12.Qe4 Neg4 13.Bg1±. Next is h2-h3 and g2-g4, with a large advantage, Eser-Bakr Jwan, Adana 2006.) 11.Nxe6 (It's not necessary to capture on e6! White can also play in typical fashion with 11.h4→.) 11...fxe6 12.Ne2!



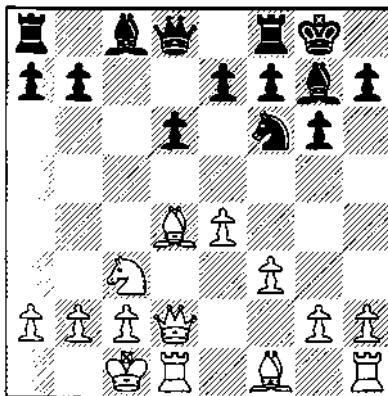
Nicely transferring the knight to either d4 or f4, from where it can put maximum pressure against the e6 pawn. For example 12...Ne5 13.Nd4 Qd7 14.Bb5 Nc6 15.Ba4!±



After $Bb3$ White will have an ideal setup. White can continue with $\mathbb{e}2-g4$, $h2-h4-h5$, etc., To–Parkanyi, Budapest 2010.

Also possible is **10.Nxe6** $fxe6$ $\mathbb{g}2-g3\pm$ with the idea $Bh3$, playing against the e6 pawn.

10.Bxd4



Overall, this line starting with $9\dots Nxd4$ is a bit tricky, and potentially dangerous if White doesn't know what he's doing. On the bright side, if White is familiar with the theory and concrete details of the position, then in our humble opinion this line can be considered practically unplayable from Black's perspective, the reason being that the main line leads—almost by force—to a position we can safely evaluate as winning for White.

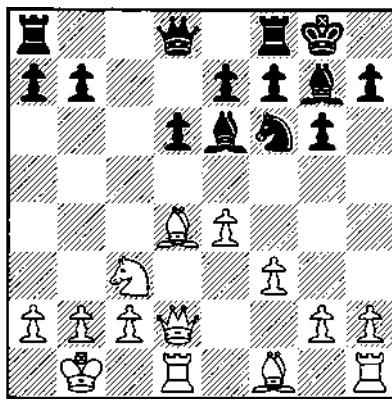
Things won't be exactly easy, but, as always, we will do our best to guide you through this variation as clearly and painlessly as possible.

10...Be6

The main concept of Black's plan is to play $Qa5$, $Rfc8$, and $Rab8$, followed by marching the b-pawn towards White's king. Meanwhile, as the reader might expect, White should lead with the h-pawn, aiming

to create a swift mating attack against Black's king. But first, an essential nuance:

11.Kb1!



The model prophylactic move! By improving his king White forces Black to spend a tempo on $11\dots Qc7$, as the immediate $11\dots Qa5$ would run into the common trick $12.Nd5$.

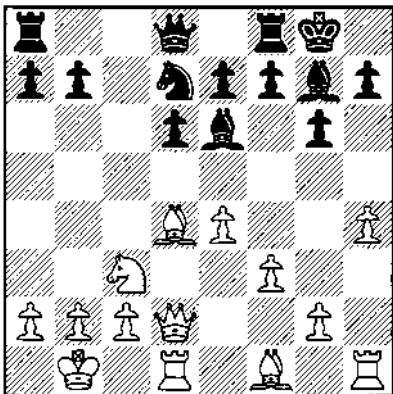
11...Qc7

Now before Black is ready to play $Qa5$ he must first play $Rfc8$. As we'll see in this game, this sole tempo that White gains is of crucial importance!

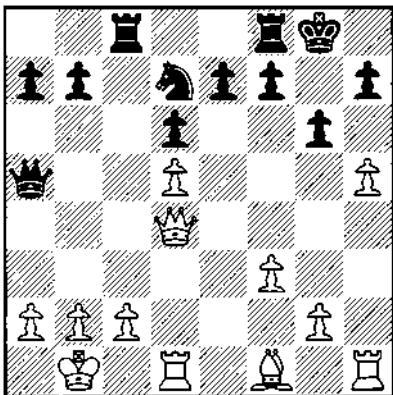
Let's also try to understand why all of Black's other possible plans in this position fail to equalize:

As mentioned, $11\dots Qa5?!$ runs into $12.Nd5!$ threatening to win a pawn thanks to the zwischenzug $Nxe7+$. $12\dots Qd8$ keeps the material but leads to an awful position. (*After 12...Qxd2 13.Nxe7+ Kh8 14.Rxd2 Rfe8 15.Bxf6 Bxf6 16.Nd5± White is just a clear pawn up, Gallagher-Raeber, Neuchatel 1996.*) $13.Nxf6+ exf6 14.h4 d5 15.Bc5\pm$, Anand-Pastor Gomis, Benidorm 2007.)

Trading dark-squared bishops with **11...Nd7** cannot be recommended for Black, due to $12.h4!$:



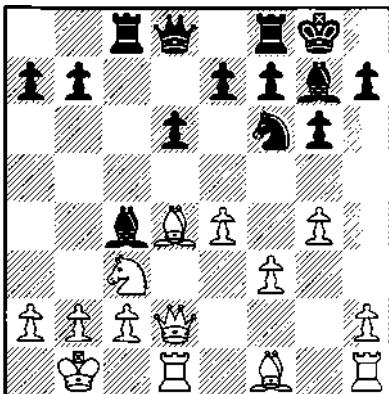
Looks natural and is best. 12...Bxd4 13.Qxd4 Qa5 (*In case of 13...h5 White should prepare g2-g4, simply breaking through on the kingside. For instance, 14.Nd5 Bxd5 15.exd5 Qb6 16.Qd2± followed by g2-g4 is tremendous for White.*) 14.h5 Rac8 (14...g5 was also good for White after 15.Nd5 Rae8 16.h6 Ne5 17.Qe3 f6 18.g3!±, Sjugirov–Ipatov, Kemer 2007.) 15.Nd5! Bxd5 16.exd5



Not only does this exchange open up the e-file and the b1-h7 diagonal for White's use, it also blocks Black's queen from defending the kingside. 16...Nf6 17.hxg6 fxg6 18.g3!±. After Bh3-e6 White was

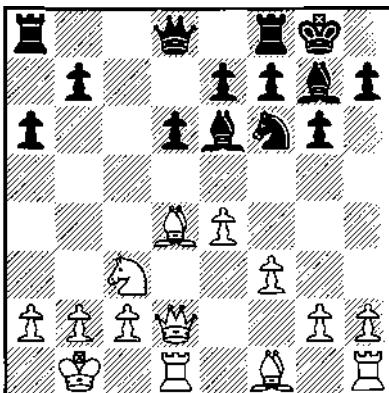
already winning in Khusnutdinov–Shabalov, Moscow 2010.

Trading light-squared bishop with 11...Rc8 12.g4 Bc4 also doesn't help Black achieve much:



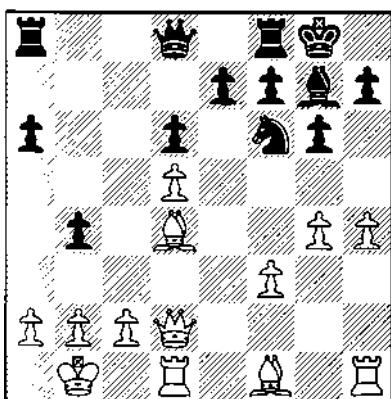
White can proceed as usual: 13.h4 (Or 13.g5 Nh5 14.Bxg7 Nxg7 15.Rc1 Bxf1 16.Rhxf1 Nh5 17.f4±, Asria–Petrosian, Yerevan 2003.) 13...Bxg7 14.Rhxf1 a6 15.h5 b5 16.Rh1+ and the threats of Nd5 and Qh1+ are practically decisive, Pachmar–Golombek, Venice 1950.

Lastly, 11...a6 is just too slow:



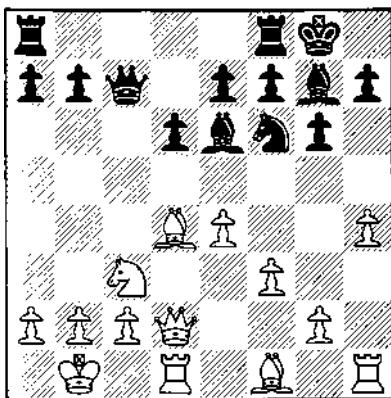
White simply needs to open the h-file and deliver checkmate. For

example 12.g4 b5 13.h4 b4 14.Nd5 Exd5 15.exd5



15...Qc7 (Or 15...Qa5 16.g5! Nh5 17.Bxg7 Kxg7 18.Bh3± followed by Bg4. White can also target the e7 pawn, Middelburg–Afek, Groningen 2001.) 16.h5 Rfc8 17.hxg6 axg6 18.Rh2!+– protecting the c2 pawn and threatening g4-g5. After the trade of bishops, the open h-file should lead to victory for White. Also strong was 18.Bh3± in Palac–Nikolac, Sibenik 2007.

12.h4

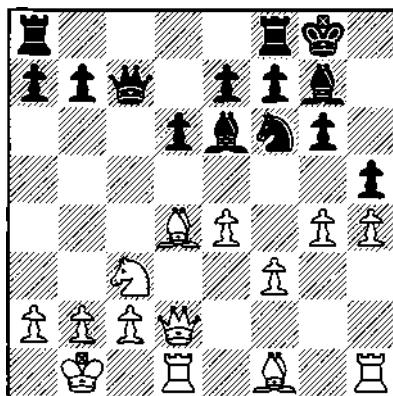


In contrast with the previous game, in this variation we believe

it is more precise to start with the h-pawn.

12...Rfc8

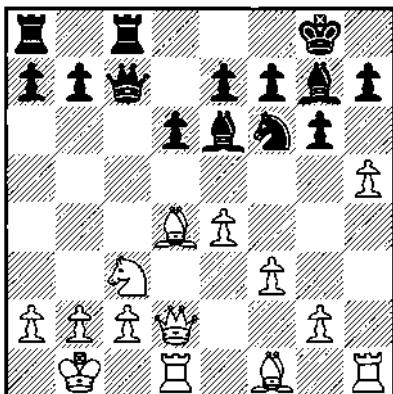
With the bishop on d4, 12...h5?! is extremely risky. White is practically winning by force after 13.g4!:



Black should probably play 13...Rfc8, which leads to 14.gxh5 Nxh5 15.Bxg7 Kxg7 16.Rg1! threatening f4-f5. 16...Qa5 17.Rg5 Rc5 18.Qd4+ f6 19.Nd5!± with a fantastic position for White—the threat is b2-b4.

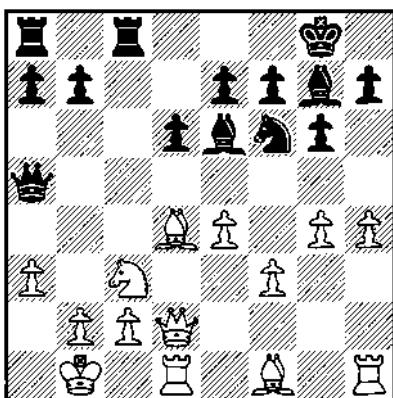
If 13...hxg4 then 14.h5! A well-known attacking motif. The goal is to open up the g- and h-files, not to count pawns! 14...Nxh5 (after 14...gxh5 15.fxg4 Black is busted) 15.Bxg7 Kxg7 (or 15...Nxg7 16.Qh6+–) And now 16.Rxh5 gxh5 17.Qg5+ is a standard way of delivering checkmate—17...Kh7 18.Qxh5+ Kg7 19.Qg5+ Kh7 20.Bd3+–.

13.h5!



Slaying the dragon! This is not a pawn we would advise Black to capture...

In case of 13.g4 Qa5 14.a3:



Black has the extra option of 14...h5!?, which is playable since Black's queen is now defending the fifth rank. (*Play transposes to the main line after 14...Rab8 15.h5 b5 16.h6 Bh8 17.g5 b4 18.Nb5, reaching the diagram on page 305.*) Best for White is probably 15.g5 Ne8 16.f4± as was played in Tseshkovsky-K. Georgiev, Ulcinj 1997, but White can avoid this option altogether—it

is more accurate to start with our game move 13.h5!.

13...Qa5

The only move, creating the potential threat of Rxc3 and Qxa2—

Taking the pawn with 13...gxh5? is hardly sound. We like 14.Qg5? preventing Qa5. A possible follow-up could be Bd3, Ne2-f4, etc.

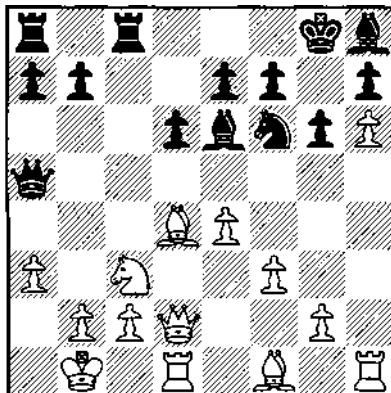
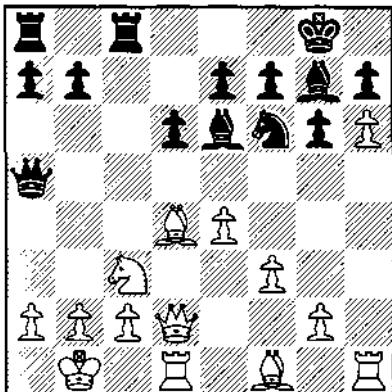
Taking it with 13...Nxh5? is even worse, and has long been known to lose by force: 14.Bxg7 Kxg7 (14...Nhg7 15.Qh6+) 15.g4 Nf5 16.Qh6+ Kg8 17.e5! A thematic motif clearing the b1-h7 diagonal for the bishop. 17...dxe5 18.g5 Nh5 19.Rxh5 gxh5 20.Bd3 White is simply mating: 20...e4 21.Nxe4 Qf4 22.Nf6+! exf 23.Bxh7+ Kh8 24.Bf5++, Evans-Zuckerman, New York 1966.

14.h6!

It should be noted that 14.Nd5 no longer works, as 14...Qxd2 15.Nxe7? Kf8! is now possible, Black being a piece up after 16.Rxd2 Kxe7+.

Many games have also continued 14.hxg6 hxg6 15.a3 yielding good results for White.

After 14.h6!:



A necessary prophylactic move, ruling out Rxc3 completely.

15...Rab8

Continuing with his play, Black threatens b7-b5-b4, which can be devastating if White doesn't react precisely.

Less critical is 15...Nd7, which poses less pressure on White. We'd like to propose 16.Qe3?!N with the idea of capturing on d4 with the rook. (*Previously White has opted for 16.f4 Bxd4 17.Qxd4 Nf6 18.f5!? gxf5 19.Nd5 Bxd5 20.exd5↑ which does seem to pose Black some problems, as in Dolmatov-Vasiukov, URS-ch Vilnius 1980, but can be handled with accurate defense.*) 16...Rab8 (*An important point is that after 16...Bxd4 17.Rxd4 Rc5 18.f4 Rac8 White wins with 19.f5! Rxc3 20.bxc3 Rxc3 21.Rd3+–, and Black is just losing too much material.*) 17.f4 Bxd4 18.Rxd4±. The threat of f4-f5 is hard to meet—Black is in real trouble.

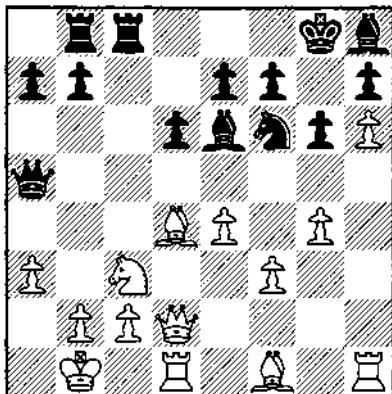
It may seem counterintuitive to lock up the h-file with our 14.h6!, but this pawn will be a constant source of worry for Black's king, especially after the strong follow-up of g2-g4-g5, forcing a trade of dark-squared bishops.

14...Bh8

14...Rxc3 looks a bit scary but White has nothing to fear after 15.Qxc3 Qxa2+ 16.Kc1 Bh8 (16...Rc8 17.Qa3!± forces a very good endgame.) 17.Bd3 Rc8 18.Qb4 (18.Qa3 Qxa3 19.bxa3 a6 20.a4± is good, but White can play for more.) 18...b5 19.g4±, Psakhis-Yurtayev, Riga 1980. Better is 19.Bxb5+– which would leave Black with hardly any compensation for the sacrificed material.

15.a3

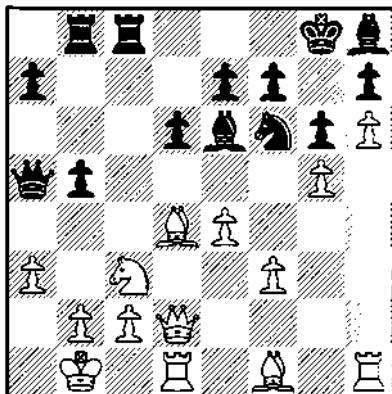
16.g4!



Although this whole variation is razor sharp, there are some positional elements as well. White's entire strategy is centered around neutralizing Black's powerful Dragon bishop. The threat is g4-g5, followed by a trade of dark-squared bishops, which would leave Black's king quite vulnerable.

A more sterile continuation is 16.Bxf6 exf6 (or 16...Bxf6 17.Nd5 Qxd2 18.Nxf6+ exf6 19.Rxd2±, Popovic–Velimirovic, Vrsac 1981.) 17.Nd5 Qxd2 (not 17...Qd8?! 18.g4±, A. Ivanov–Vigorito, New Hampshire 1998.) 18.Rxd2 Kf8 19.g4±, Dolmatov–Halyavskiy, Moscow 2006.

16...b5 17.g5



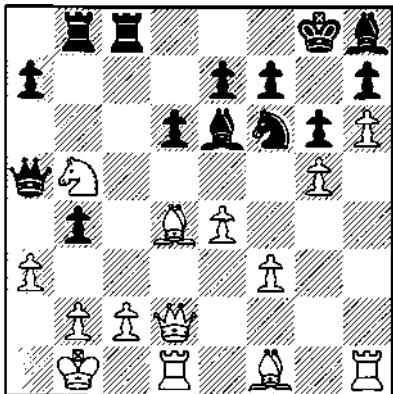
17...b4

As you can see, both sides have engaged in a full blown race to the enemy king. Only now can we fully appreciate the importance of the tempo gained by White's 11.Kb1!

17...Nd7 is again less critical but still must be met with precision from White: 18.Bxh8 Kxh8 19.Qd4–f6 (After 19...Ne5? 20.f4 b4 21.Nb5–White is winning material.) 20.gxf7 Nxf6 21.e5! Softening up Black's position. 21...dxe5 22.Qxe5 Qb6 23.Rh4!± preventing b5-b4 and threatening Rhd4-d6. Black's position is quite shaky.

17...Ne8 suddenly allows 18.Nd5–Qxd2 (or 18...Qd8 19.Bxa7+– Benzag-Olenin, Tula 2007.) 19.Nxe7+ Kf7 20.Rxd2 and White comes out ahead in material: 20...Bxd4 (n... 20...Kxe7 21.Bxh8+–) 21.Nxc8 Bc5 22.b4 Be3 23.Rd3 Bf4 24.Nxa7+– Gochelashvili–Usov, Anapa 2012.

18.Nb5

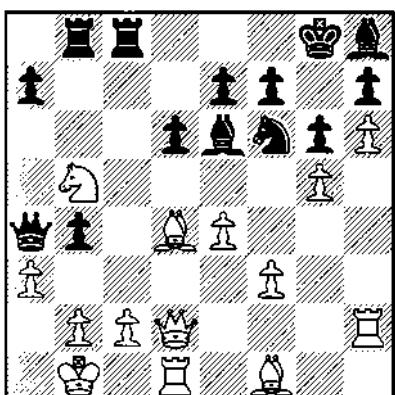


18...Qa4!?

Putting White to the test, threatening bxa3.

Instead, 18...Ne8 should be met with 19.Qxb4!N (19.Bxh8?! Rxb5! 20.Bxb5 Qxb5 21.Qxb4?! Qxb4 22.axb4 Kxh8=, Korreev-Cabrera, Villa de Defontes 2005.) 19...Qxb4 20.axb4. Black has no way of winning the pawn back—20...a6 21.Bxh8 Kxh8 22.Nd4 Rxb4 23.Bxa6±.

19.Rh2!!



The absolute only move, defending everything along the second rank! This is an idea worth remembering, as without it White would simply be lost! But once it is on the board, it is

Black who is in real danger of losing quickly.

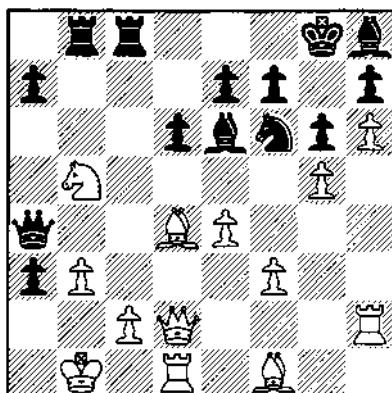
The necessity of Rh2 is shown by the line 19.gxf6? bxa3! 20.b3 Bxb3 21.cxb3 Qxb3+ 22.Ka1 Rc2--.

19...bxa3

The best chance to complicate matters.

19...b3 leaves Black in a miserable situation after 20.c4! Ne8 (or 20...Bxc4 21.Nc3 Qa6 22.gxf6+-) 21.Nc3 Qd7 22.Bxh8 Kxh8 23.Nd5±, where White has absolute control over the position—the h6 pawn is clearly a valuable asset.

20.b3



20...Rxb5

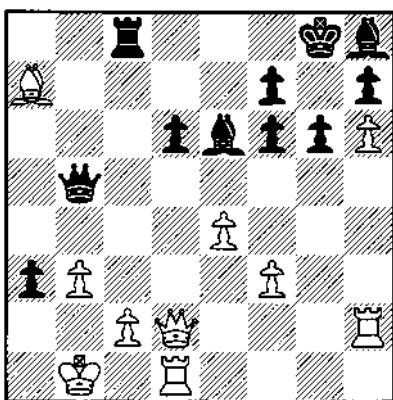
Once again, Black's only chance to reasonably continue the game.

The sacrifice 20...Bxb3 has more bark than bite: 21.cxb3 Qxb3+ 22.Ka1 and Black is out of threats.

Play might continue 22...Ne8 23.Bxh8 Kxh8 24.Rb1 Qxf3 25.Rf2 Qxe4 26.Re1! Qa4 27.Rxf7+-. Black has four pawns for the piece but is just getting mated within the next few moves.

Or 22...Nd7 23.Bxh8 Kxh8 24.Qd4+ f6 25.gxf6 The rook on h2 is simply a brilliant piece! 25...Nxf6

26.Nxd6! e5 27.Qd3 Rc3 28.Qb1+– simplifying into a piece-up endgame.
21.Bxb5 Qxb5 22.gxf6 exf6
23.Bxa7!



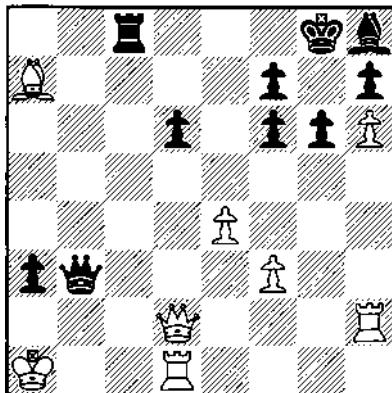
A greedy but important capture, otherwise White's advantage would be minimal.

23...Bxb3?!

Objectively this is not such a good move, though in this game Black is able to confuse White into throwing away the win.

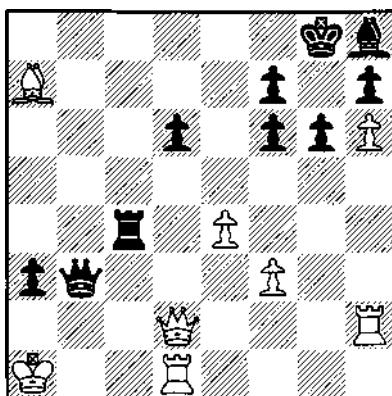
23...f5 24.Bd4+– should be technically won for White, Hoshad-Flying Saucers, playchess.com INT 2006.

24.cxb3 Qxb3+ 25.Ka1+–



White is a full rook up, but as long as the Dragon bishop is alive, Black always has chances, as this game proves!

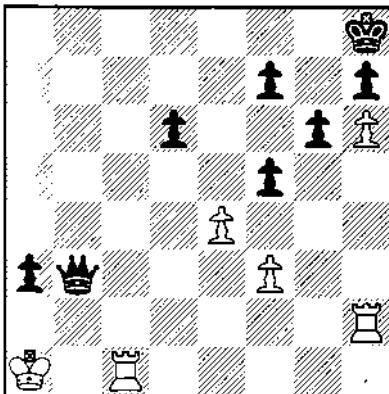
25...Rc4



26.Qxd6?

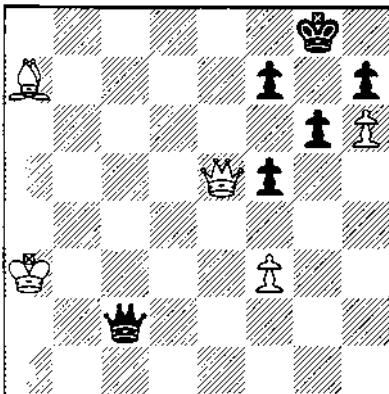
Likely in time-pressure, IM Zufic misses a tricky yet direct win.

Correct was 26.Bd4! Rxd4 27.Qxd4 f5 and now 28.Qxh8+!! We can only speculate that this was the resource White overlooked. 28...Kxh8 29.Rc1+–



And there is no defense to the back-rank mate, for if 29...Qe6 then 30.Rhc2+-.

26...f5+ 27.e5 Bxe5+! 28.Qxe5 Qxd1+ 29.Ka2 Rc2+ 30.Rxc2 Qxc2+ 31.Kxa3 ∞



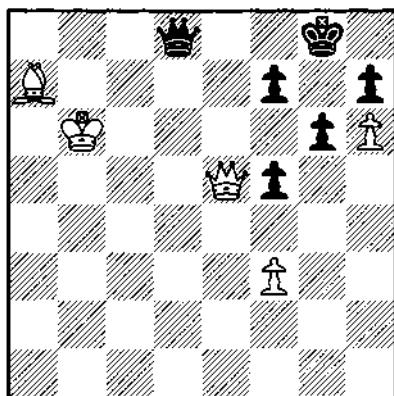
Now that the smoke has cleared, White has an extra bishop and seems to be easily winning due to the immediate threat of mate on g7.

But shielding White's king from all the checks is easier said than done, and the winning task is made even more difficult by the fact that some endgames could be drawn, as Black can quickly trade off all the pawns on the kingside.

While the silicon beast can prove this is a win for White, for a human it was not so easy, and the game was eventually drawn.

In conclusion, as long as White is familiar and comfortable with the plan starting with 11.Kb1 followed by h2-h4-h5-h6 and g2-g4-g5, he should come out on top in the forcing lines that follow. Although Black can stray from the main line by playing an alternative to 11...Qc7, or playing 15...Nd7, none of these options are really satisfactory if White is well prepared to meet them.

31...Qd3+ 32.Kb4 Qd2+ 33.Kb5 Qd7+ 34.Kb6 Qd8+

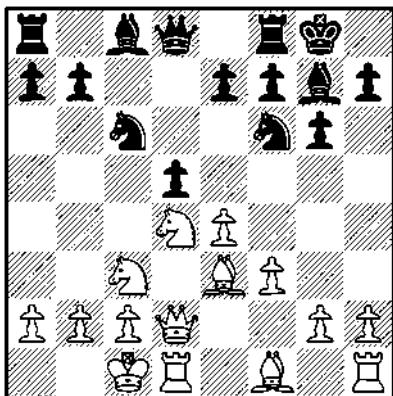


35.Qc7 Qf8 36.Qb8 Qxb8+ 37.Bxb8 f6 38.Kc6 Kf7 39.Kd5 g5 40.Ba7 Kg6 41.Ke6 f4 ½-½

Game 26

Wei Yi – Yankovsky
North American Open 2013

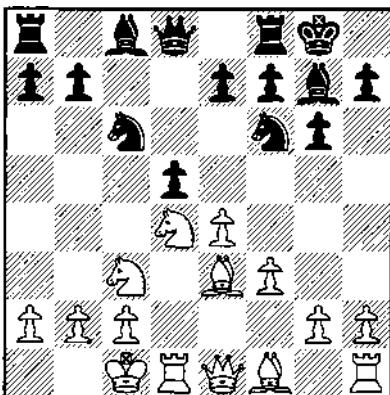
1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4
4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6 6.Be3 Bg7
7.f3 O-O 8.Qd2 Nc6 9.O-O-O d5



This central strike is widely considered to be Black's main response to 9.O-O-O, preempting White's kingside pawn storm. The drawback of this move is that White has a pleasant choice of lines here, and can either sharpen the struggle or play for a nagging positional edge. Moreover, Black won't always be able to attain thematic Dragon counterplay, and must be ready to patiently defend a slightly worse position in some lines, which is not to everyone's taste—especially not a Dragon player!

After some review, we're big fans of:

10.Qe1!?



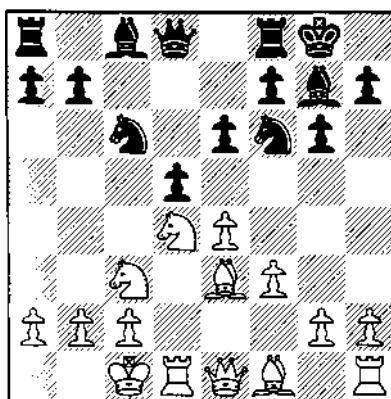
The point of this move is to maintain the tension in the center—10...dxe4 loses instantly to 11.Nxc6, while 10...Nxd4 11.Bxd4 leaves Black under a lot of pressure. Instead, Black has two serious options, the flexible 10...e6 and the forcing 10...e5, the latter of which is currently considered to be the main line.

White's other alternatives include 10.Kb1, 10.Nxc6, and 10.exd5, all of which are serious attempts to fight for an advantage.

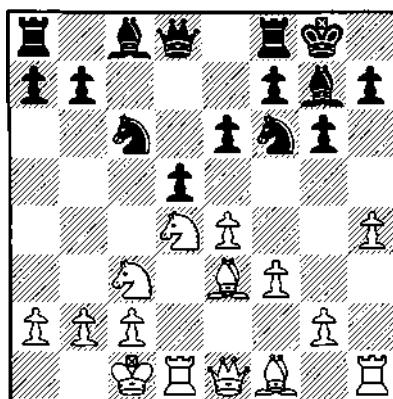
10...e5

Black's most natural move, forcing White to trade on c6 and release the tension in the center.

But let's first cover the flexible
10...e6:



White's most challenging re-
sponse is the direct 11.h4:



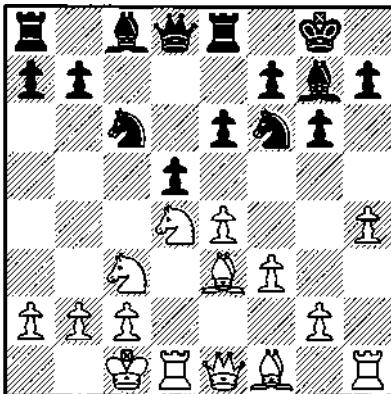
Black has strengthened his center and would like to play either Qc7 or Rg7 next, followed by Rd8.

We consider both 11.g4?! and the much better 11.h4.

11.g4?! would be a good move if not for 11...e5! leading to an improved version for Black of the line 10...e5. Specifically, after 12.Nxc6 bxc6 13.exd5 cxd5 14.Bg5 Bb7! 15.Bc4 d4± as played in Dvoiryš-Tolnai, Balatonbereny 1993, White would like to continue 16.Qxe5, but the problem is that after 16...Nxd5 17.Qf4 Qa5±, 18.fxg4 hangs the rook on h1, and otherwise this line just doesn't work for White.

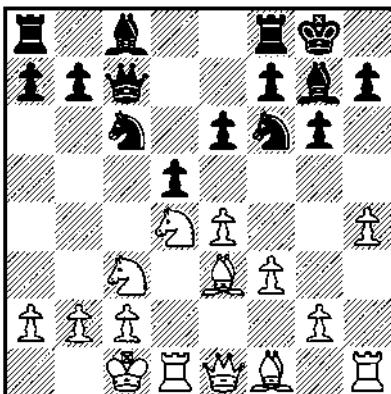
a) Now, 11...Qe7 is unsatisfactory for Black in view of 12.h5! dxе4 (After 12...Nxh5 13.g4 Nxе4 14.Bxd4 Bxd4 15.Rxd4± the open h-file is well worth a pawn in this case.) 13.hxg6 fxg6 14.Nxc6 bxc6 15.Nxe4N Nxе4 16.fxe4±. Next is c2-c4 and Bc4—White is clearly better.

b) In case of 11...Re8



White has a strong response in 12.Bb5!N (12.h5 Nxd4 13.Bxd4 e5→ looks fine for Black.) 12...Bd7 13.Bxc6 Bxc6 (not 13...bxc6? 14.e5+ and Black's knight is trapped.) 14.h5!. White is very close to a decisive attack, for instance 14...e5 (or 14...Nhx5 15.g4 Nf6 16.Bg5→ followed by Qh4, etc.) 15.Nxc6 bxc6 16.exd5 Nxd5 17.hxg6 hxg6 18.Ne4+-. The open h-file and threat of c2-c4 means White is close to the full point.

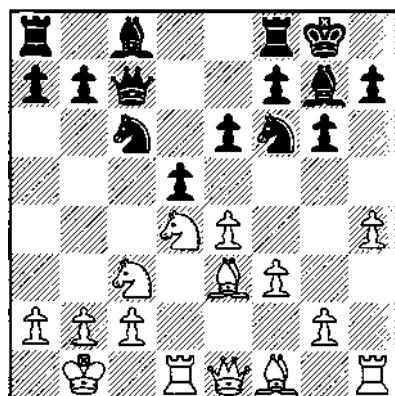
c) Most common is 11...Qc7



and now 12.Kb1!, which has only been played once, is astoundingly strong. (The pawn sacrifice 12.h5 is believed to be critical, but it seems as though

Black is doing fine after 12...Nxd4 13.g4 Nxd4 14.Bxd4 Bxd4 15.Rxa5 Ng3 16.Rh3 Qe5=, where White has good compensation for the pawn, but probably not more than that.)

White is still planning on playing h4-h5, but now the king isn't susceptible to potential checks—this will be an important detail in certain lines.



This position is quite complex and play will be concrete in nature, but it appears that Black has no clear way to equalize. Let's take a look at four lines, 12...dxe4, 12...a6 12...Nxd4, and 12...h5:

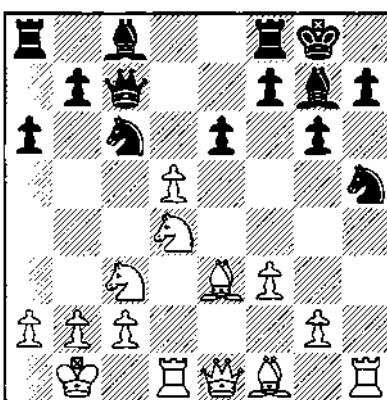
c1) Firstly, 12...dxe4 should be met with 13.Ndb5! (not 13.Nxe4= Weatherly-Kiewra, Philadelphia 2006.) And now:

c11) 13...Qa5 14.h5!→ looks very dangerous for Black.

c12) After 13...Qb8 14.Bc5+ Black is forced to give up the exchange and will remain in a passive position.

c13) If 13...Qe7 then 14.Bf4 threatening Bd6. This time Black should probably give up the exchange, since 14...e5 15.Bg5 Bef 16.Nxe4 Rfd8 17.Be2± leaves White in full control of the position.

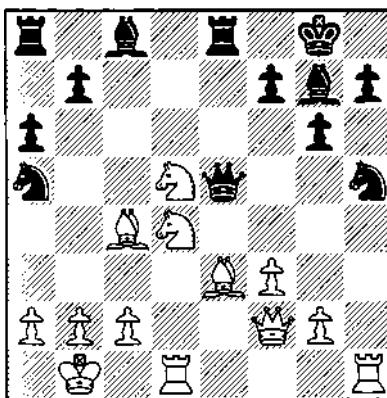
c2) Next, 12...a6 seems like a useful move, but now 13.h5! is even more dangerous with the king on b1. 13...Nxh5 14.exd5!



c21) After 14...exd5 15.Nxd5 Qe5 16.Bc4! Black is in danger of losing a lot of material.

c211) Now 16...Be6 is strongly answered by 17.f4! Nxf4 18.Qh4 Nh5 19.Bf4 Qe4 20.Rhe1+- winning Black's queen.

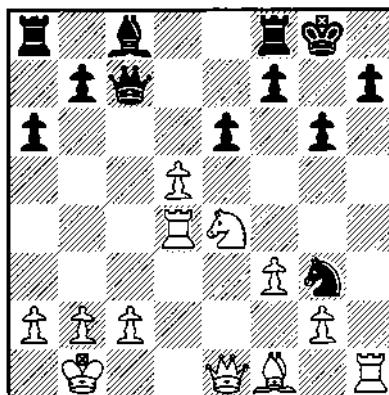
c212) Also bad is 16...Re8 17.Qf2 with the threat of either e2-g4 or Rhei1, depending on what Black plays. 17...Na5 runs into the beautiful shot:



18.Rxh5! Qxh5 19.g4 Qh3 20.Bf1 Qh1 21.Nc7+-. After taking on a8 White can trap Black's queen with Re1 and Bg2.

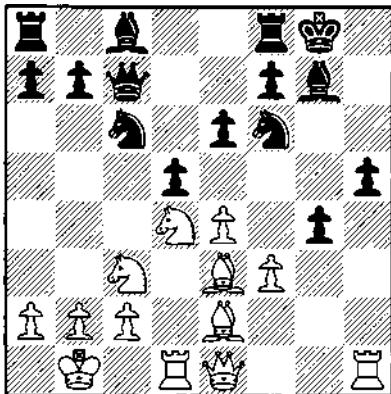
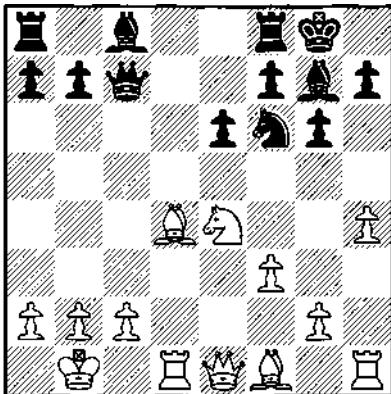
c213) The only way to stay alive is 16...Nxd4 17.Bxd4 Qxe1 18.Rhxel Bxd4 19.Rxd4 b5 20.Bb3±. Black has managed not to lose any material but this endgame is fantastic for White, whose pieces could not be better placed.

c22) More critical is 14...Nxd4 15.Bxd4 Bxd4 16.Rxd4 Ng3 17.Ne4!



With the king still on c1 Black could refute this idea with Qf4+, but here White is nearly winning, for instance 17...Nxh1 (Or 17...Nxe4 18.Qh4 h5 19.fxe4± followed by either Be2 or g2-g4, etc.) 18.d6 Qd8 19.d7!±. After capturing the bishop White will eventually play Qh4, winning the knight on h1 and continuing the attack.

c3) Exchanging with 12...Nxd4 13.Bxd4 dxе4 14.Nxe4 allows Black to avoid immediate capitulation:



But White still has a clear pull:

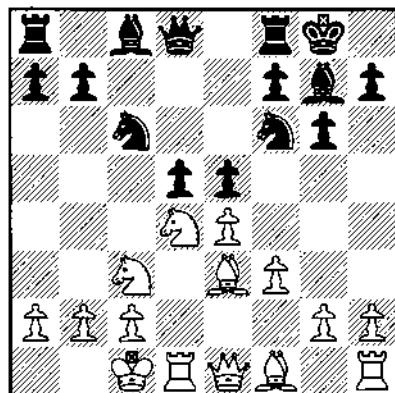
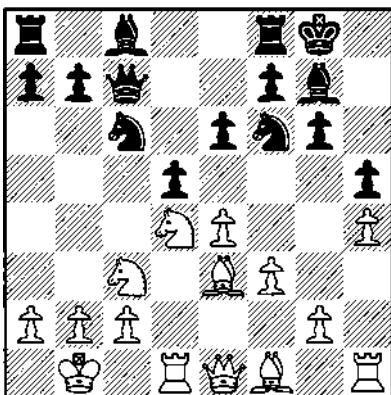
c31) After 14...e5 15.Bc5 Rd8 16.Rxd8+ Qxd8 17.Bc4± it's doubtful that Black will be able to equalize anytime soon.

c32) Or 14...Nxe4 15.Bxg7 Kxg7 16.fxe4 e5 17.h5 h6 18.hxg6 fxg6 19.Rd3†.

c4) Lastly, in case Black panics and plays 12...h5

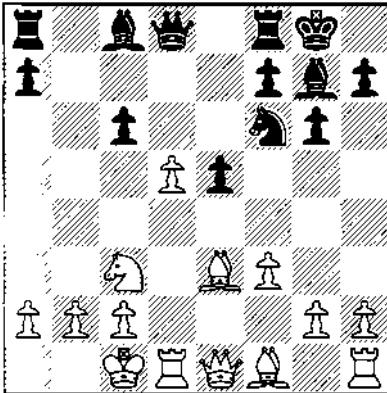
Obviously this position deserves further analysis, but it's clear that the kingside is about to open up, much to Black's dismay. It will take extreme precision for Black to avoid losing within the next several moves.

Now back to our main game, after Black's 10...e5:



11.Nxc6 bxc6 12.exd5

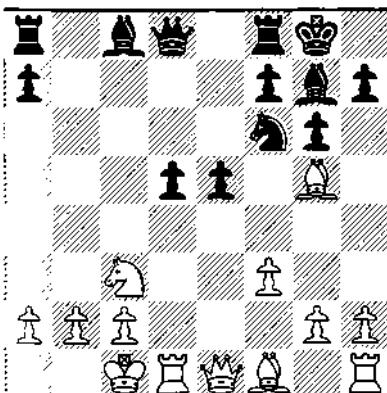
White can launch the thematic breakthrough 13.g4!? (13.Ndb5 Qb8 14.exd5 Nxd5 15.Bf2± also puts Black under pressure.) 13...hxg4 14.h5 gxh5 (14...Nxf5?! makes things too easy for White: 15.fxg4 Ng3 16.Rh3 Nxg1 17.Qh4+–) 15.Be2!†:



12...Nxd5

Recapturing with the knight is more popular and more dynamic than **12...cxd5**, where Black will struggle to maintain the center.

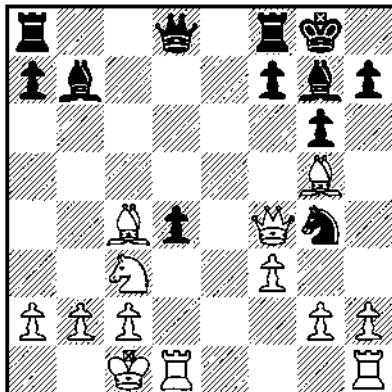
Black's center may look quite menacing, but fortunately for White we have a series of precise moves that lead to an advantage, starting with **13.Bg5!**



Black must now choose between **13...Bb7?!** discussed here, and **13...Be6** analyzed on page 314.

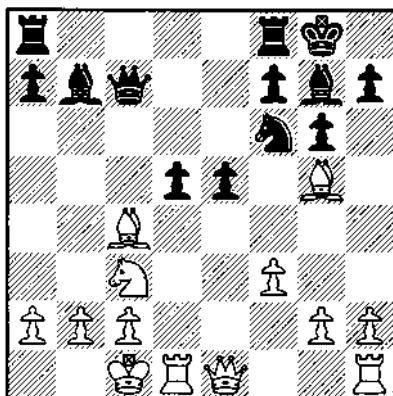
We answer **13...Bb7?!** with **14.Bc4!** Another precise move, otherwise Black would be able to consolidate his center. And now:

a) The tactics work out for White after **14...d4 15.Qxe5! Ng4 16.Qf4!**



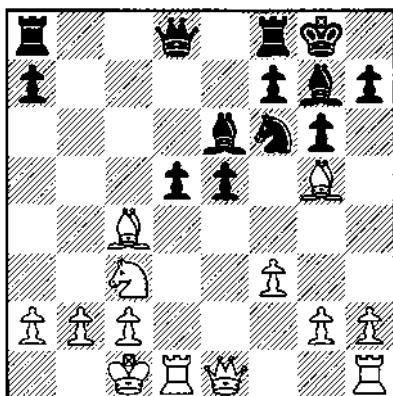
Analyzing the following lines over a physical chess board would not only be helpful, but entertaining as well! **16...Qa5** (or **16...Qb6 17.Na4 Qc6 18.Rxd4!→**) **17.fxg4 Rac8** (After **17...dxc3 18.Rd7! cxb2+ 19.Kb1+**—White's king is actually safe here—meanwhile **Rxf7** followed by **Bf6** is hard to meet.) **18.Bb3 dxc3 19.Be7! cxb2+ 20.Kb1+–** Black must give up the exchange and afterwards will still be tied down to defending the f7 pawn.

b) Instead, after 14...Qc7



White continues 15.Bxf6 Bxf6 (*If 15...dxc4 then 16.Nb5! is a nice finesse: 16...Qc5 17.Bxg7 Kxg7 18.Nd6±. Next is Qc3, followed by Rxe1 or even b2-b4, with a dominant control over the center.*) 16.Bxd5±. It's difficult to believe Black has enough compensation for the lost pawn, Boudre–Rafiee, Bad Zwesten 2002.

More solid is 13...Be6 14.Bc4!

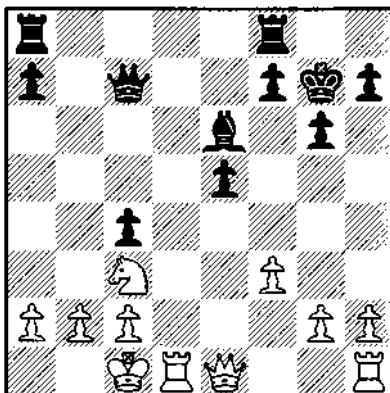


And now:

a) In case of 14...Qb6 15.Bxf6 Bxf6 Black doesn't get quite enough compensation after 16.Bxd5 (*nor after 16.Nxd5 Bxd5 17.Rxd5 e4 18.Rb5 Qc7*

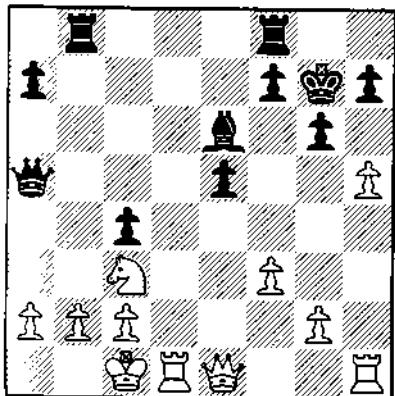
19.Qxe4 Rae8 20.Qd3±) 16...Rab8 17.Bb3 a5 18.Na4! Qb5 19.Kb1 Rfc8 20.Rd6±. White can follow up with either Qe3 or Nc3-e4, and Black's counterplay should slowly fade out.

b) A theoretical *tabiya* is reached after 14...Qc7 15.Bxf6 dxc4 16.Bxg7 Kxg7



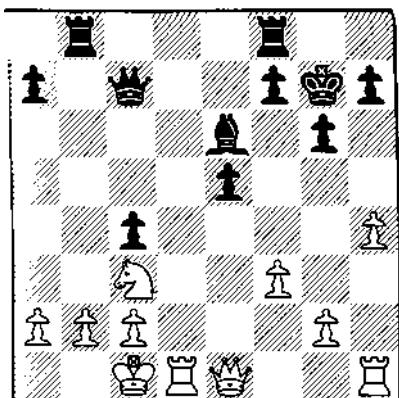
With the exchange of several pieces one might think that Black's position is relatively safe, but this is not the case after 17.h4!? (*Instead, 17.Nd5 is the main theoretical try, leading to an unpleasant position for Black after 17...Bxd5 18.Rxd5 Rfe8 19.Qc3 Kg8 20.Qa5!± as played in Leko–Carlsen, Miskolc 2008, but we believe the text is more ambitious and objectively stronger.*)

b1) Let's examine some of Black's most natural options, starting with 17...Qa5 18.h5 Rab8:



Best is 19.Rd6!N cutting off Black's queen—now Qe3 can't be met with Qf6 . (*Much weaker was 19.hxg6 Qg6 20.Qe3 Rh8 21.Rxh8 Rxh8 Qg4+ , Ponkratov-Dimukhametov, Bereznye Chelny 2008.*) Black is already in serious trouble, for after 19...Rfd8 20.Rxd8 Rxd8 21.Qh4+ ~~Qf6~~ ~~Qf6~~ threats of hxg6, as well ~~Qf6~~ followed by Qf6, with a ~~Qf6~~ attack.

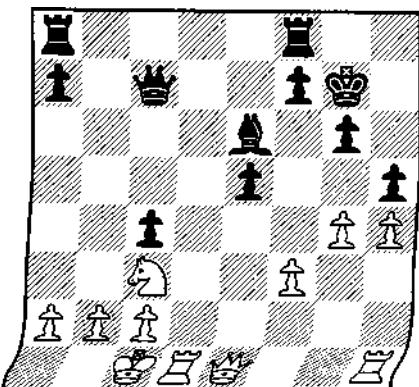
GM Yangyi Yu demonstrated ~~Qf6~~ with a nice victory after 18...Bab8



18.Ne4 (*The immediate 18.h5 was also possible*) 18...f6 19.g4! Now White can choose between attacking

Black's structure with h4-h5-h6 or g4-g5. 19...Rb5 (19...Rfd8 would be nicely met by 20.Qc3!± followed by g4-g5.) 20.h5 g5 21.h6+ Kg8 22.Rd6 Rb6 23.Qa5!+- threatening Rxe6, and Black's position soon collapsed, Y.Yu-Pham, Kazan 2013.

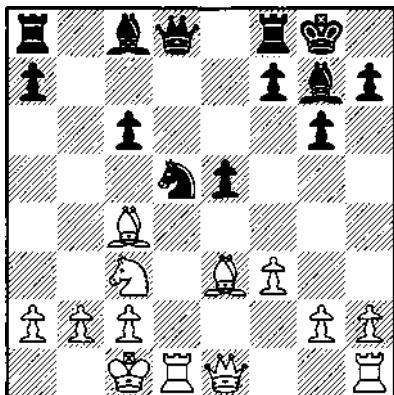
b3) Finally, after 17...h5 the direct 18.g4!N is very strong:



And if 18...hxg4 then 19.h5. While this is a risky way for White to play, it is even riskier for Black, since one misstep could mean getting checkmated on the spot! For instance 19...gxf3?! seems to lose in view of 20.Qh4! Qb6 21.Qg5! preventing Qe3+ and threatening hxg6, winning. Now 21...Bf5 loses quite spectacularly: 22.Nd5 f6 23.Qg3 Qe6 24.hxg6 Bxg6 25.Ne7! Simply opening up the d-file. After 25...Qxe7 26.Rhg1 Qf7 27.Rd7+– it's all over.

Now we return to our main game, after 12...Nxd5:

13.Bc4



The structure that has arisen is quite interesting. By capturing with the knight Black strives for active piece play in the center, while also looking to play f7-f5 and e5-e4 if possible.

Meanwhile, White would like to secure a firm grip over the center and slowly exploit Black's weaknesses on the queenside. The moves Kb1, Ne4, and Bc5 are definitely part of White's plan. At some point advancing on the kingside would also be logical, not necessarily to launch a mating attack but rather to gain space and restrict Black's counterplay.

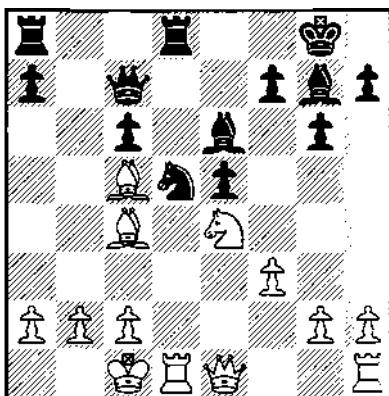
13...Be6

Black defends the knight and puts the bishop on its most natural square.

14.Kb1!

For the majority of this line's existence, the move 14.Ne4 has been played almost exclusively, aiming to setup a positional bind with Bc5, h2-h4, and g2-g4. While that remains a decent attempt of fighting for an opening advantage, in a few games in

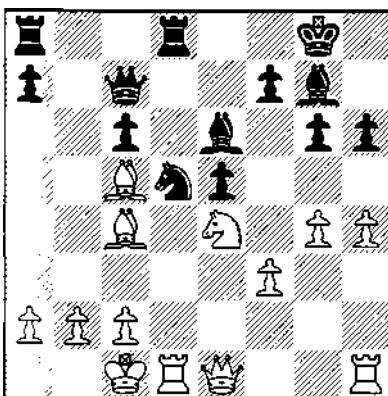
2013 White opted to first secure the location of his king before carrying out this standard plan. This fresh approach to the position seems quite promising, and the king move is the wholehearted recommendation. But first, to provide a brief theoretical overview of the older move, we look at the position after 14...Qc7 15.Bc5 Rfd8



Now White has a choice:

Caruana tried 16.Qh4 and was able to quickly outplay his opponent 16...Qa5?! (*There doesn't seem to be anything wrong with the logic*) 16...h6 17.g4 Nf4= where Black should equalize with reasonable play. Pavlidis-Kapnisis, Athens 2011. 17.Ba3! h6 18.Nc5 Bf5 19.Bb3 g5 20.Qf2 Qb6 21.g4 Bg6 22.Rd2 Nc7 23.Ne4! Qxf2 24.Rxf2±. White's better structure and more active pieces was enough to press for a win Caruana-Mamedov, Plovdiv 2012.

White has also had success with
16.h4 h6 17.g4:

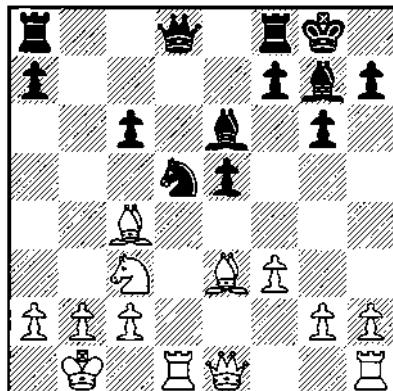


And now:

17...f5?! This is generally too loose if White already has g2-g4 in.
18.gxf5 gxf5 19.Ng3 Qf7 20.Qa5! Kh7
21.Bb3 Bf6 22.Qa6 Qc7 23.Nxf5! Bxf5
24.Bxd5 cxd5 25.Qxf6±, Matsuura-Delgado Ramos, Havana 2008.

17...Nf4 18.Bxe6 Nxe6?!

(15...Rxd1+N 19.Qxd1 Nxe6 20.Be3± is safer for Black.) 19.Bd6 Qb6 20.g5 Ni4?! (20...h5 21.Nf6+ Bxf6 22.gxf6± would be the lesser evil, though White can create threats along the dark squares and open g-file.) 21.h5!→ and White soon had a decisive attack in Erik-Dobias, Trnava 1994.



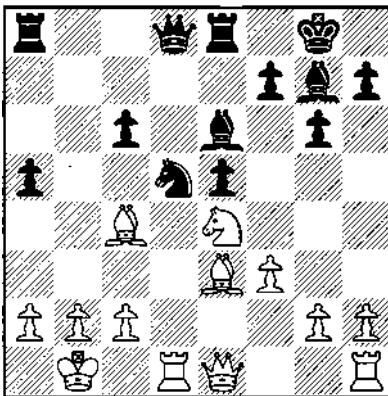
14...Rb8

The main upside of 14.Kb1 is that it delays Black from achieving his optimal setup with Qc7 and Rfd8. Instead, Black has to make a different, less useful move and wait for White to play Ne4.

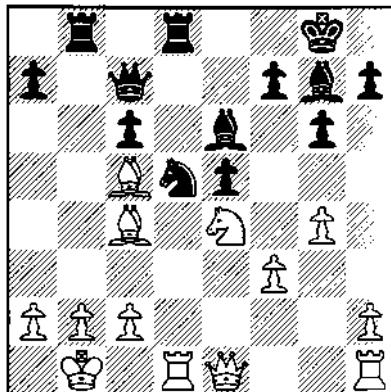
Black simply doesn't get enough for the pawn after 14...Qc7?!! 15.Nxd5 cxd5 16.Bxd5 Rab8 17.b3±.

Exchanging with 14...Nxc3+ 15.Qxc3 allows White to play for only two results—Black can only be worse with the weakened queenside. 15...Qe7 16.Bb3±, Pavlidis-Goumas, Porto Rio 2014. 16.h4N was also a thought.

Another game saw 14...Re8 15.Ne4 a5 (The typical 15...Qc7 16.Bc5 Nf4 17.Bxe6 Nxe6 18.Bd6 Qb6 19.g4± is the kind of position White is aiming for, with a comfortable edge.)



16.Bc5 Rfd8 17.g4



And now:

a) White obtained a clear advantage after 16.h4 h6?! (*Black had to play 16...Qc7 17.Bc5 f5 18.Ng5 e4∞ with unclear consequences.*) 17.Qd2! Kh7 18.h5±, Popilsky-Polzin, Paleochora 2013.

b) White should usually start with 16.g4! to discourage f7-f5, for instance after 16...Qc7 17.Bc5 f5?! 18.gxf5 gxf5 19.Ng5 White is nearly winning, the critical variation being 19...e4 20.fxe4 Nc3+ 21.Qxc3! Bxc3 22.Nxe6+-, and Black is either losing material or just getting mated by White's pieces.

15.Ne4

Black was threatening e5-e4, so White cannot delay this move any longer.

15...Qc7

15...f5?! would be an interesting attempt at sharpening the struggle, although White seems to get the better of it after 16.Ng5 Bc8 17.h4 h6 18.Ne4!±—a typical motif when there's a pin along the d-file.

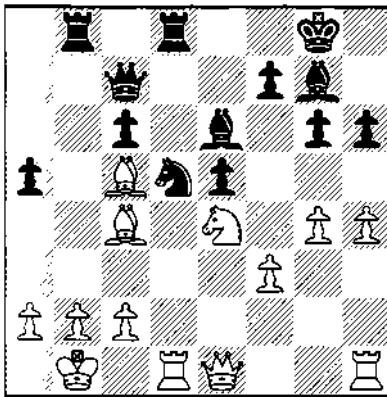
In this game the young Chinese GM Wei Yi is able to squeeze his opponent's position and nurse a small advantage. His last move controls the important f7-f5 advance, which is Black's main source of counterplay.

17...a5

17...Nf4? allows 18.Bxe6 Nxe6 19.Bd6±, winning the exchange.

An earlier game of Wei Yi continued 17...h6 18.h4 (*The prophylactic 18.Bb3± would have been better.*) 18...f5 19.gxf5 gxf5 20.Ng3 Qf7 21.Bb3 Rd7 22.Qa5 Rbc5 23.Rd3 Nf4?! A bad misjudgment (*23...Kh7 would keep things level after 24.Rg1 Nf4 25.Rxd7 Rxd7= where Black has enough central counterplay to compensate for the weakened queenside.*) 24.Qxd8+ Rxd8 25.Rxd8± Kh7 26.Rhd1 Bd5 27.Ra8+- After Rxa7 and Rg1, White should be completely winning, Y.Wei-Gagarin, Chongqing 2013.

18.h4 h6



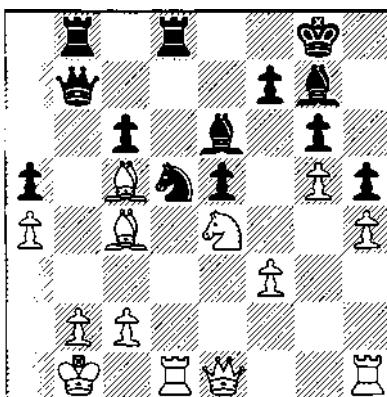
19.g5

A common advance, fixing the f6 square.

19.h5?! would be an error as after 19...f5 20.gxf5 gxf5, White cannot play Ng5 and will soon lose control over the position, since Black's next move will be e5-e4.

However 19.Bb3! might have been more testing, since 19...f5 20.gxf5 xf5 21.Nc3! Nxc3+ (or 21...Kh7 -- Na4 Nf4 23.Qf2±) 22.Qxc3 Bxb3 Bxb3 axb3± is certainly more pleasant for White, who has the safer king and a healthier structure.

19...h5 20.a4 Qb7?!



Black would have had better chances to equalize with 20...Bf8! trading off the problem dark-squared bishop, though after 21.Qf2 White would still retain a small edge.

21.b3

It's clear that White is gearing up for a long, positional struggle.

21...Ra8

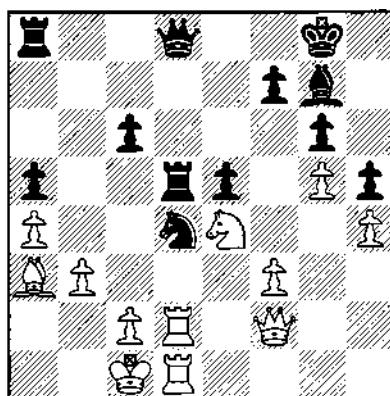
Now 21...Bf8? is just a blunder due to 22.Bxd5 cxd5 23.Nf6+ Kg7 24.Qxe5+-:

22.Kc1 Qc7 23.Qf2 Rd7 24.Rd2 Nf4

Not exactly necessary, but it would be difficult for any player to just sit on the position.

25.Bd6 Qd8 26.Bxe6 Nxe6

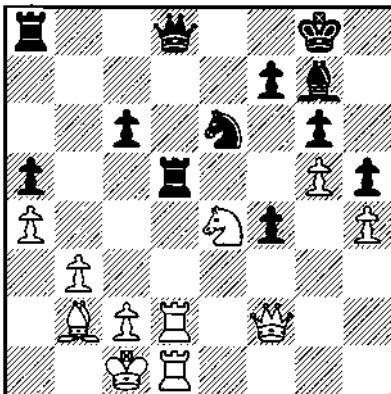
27.Rhd1 Nd4 28.Ba3 Rd5



29.f4

The immediate 29.Nc3! was stronger, forcing the rook to an undefended square. After Rd7 30.f4! Qe8 (not 30...exf4? 31.Bc5+ and the knight on d4 is lost) 31.Ne4 Rad8 32.Re1±, Black is under a lot of pressure.

29...exf4 30.Bb2 Ne6

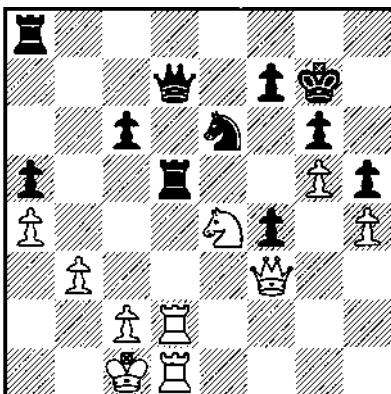


31.Bf6

Again missing the best way to put pressure on Black.

Better was 31.Rxd5 cxd5 32.Nf6+ Bxf6 33.Bxf6 Qd6 34.Qf3±. After winning the d5 pawn, White will have a clear advantage thanks to his powerful bishop.

31...Qd7 32.Bxg7 Kxg7 33.Qf3



The point of White's previous play, threatening Qc3+ and Nf6.

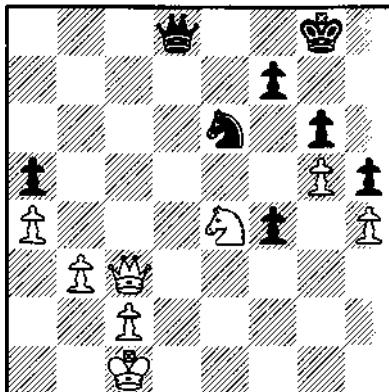
33...Qc7

The only move, preparing to meet Qc3+ with Qe5.

34.Rxd5 cxd5 35.Rxd5 Rd8!

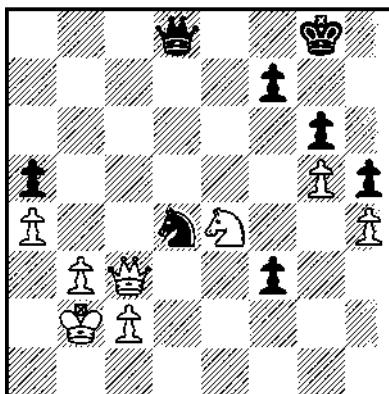
Correctly trading off White's more active rook.

36.Rxd8 Qxd8 37.Qc3+ Kg8



White has definitely let his advantage slip, and now Black is well within the drawing zone.

38.Qe5 f3 39.Qc3 Nd4 40.Kb2

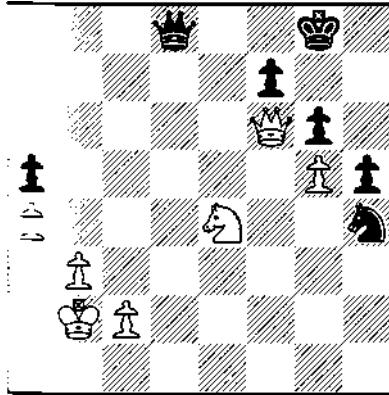


40...Nf5?

Tragically, Black makes a losing blunder on the 40th move.

After 40...Kg7= White would find it difficult to make progress.

41.Qxf3 Nxh4 42.Qf6!

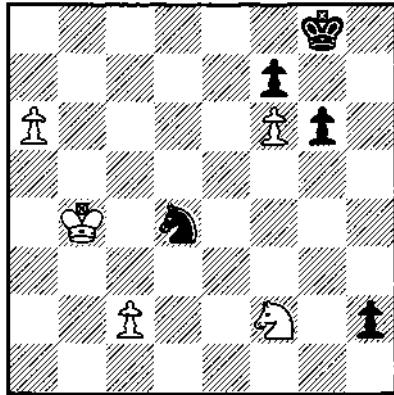


Without the f3 pawn, any knight endgame is simply lost for Black.

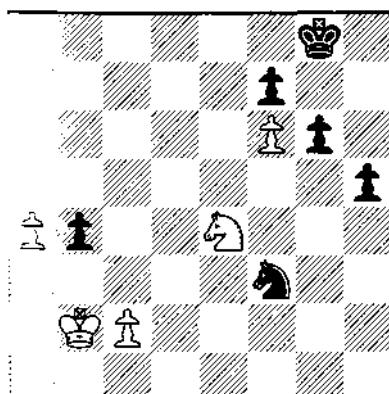
42...Qxf6+

White answers 42...Qc7 with 43.Qc3!, forcing a trade of queens due to the threat of Nf6+. After 43.Qxc3+ 44.Kxc3 Kf8 45.Kc4, White is winning, with his more active king.

43.gxf6 Nf3 44.b4! axb4



Black's knight can deal with the a-pawn, but once the c-pawn joins the action, it will all be over. Meanwhile, Black's king is too far away to support the h-pawn. Realizing the hopelessness of the situation, Black resigned.



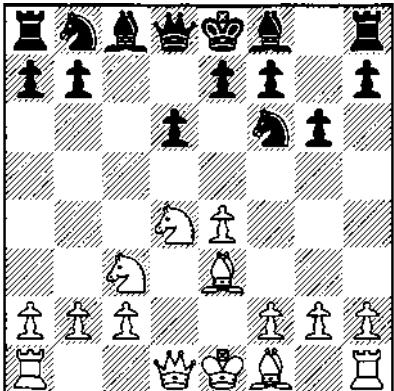
45.Kb3

45.a5+— was also good enough.
**45...h4 46.a5 h3 47.a6 Nd4+
48.Kxb4 h2 49.Nf2 1-0**

Game 27

Motylev – Carlsen
Wijk aan Zee B-Group 2006

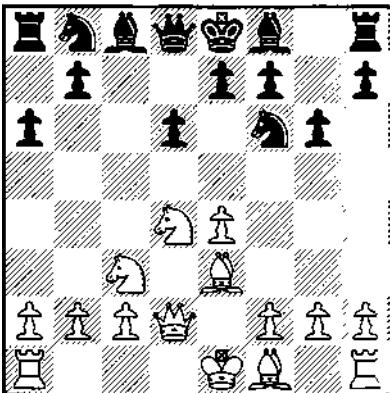
1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4
4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6 6.Be3



6...Bg7

In this game we will explore the hybrid system known as the Dragodorf Variation, which was introduced back in Chapter 1c, though in that case White was already committed to playing 6.h3.

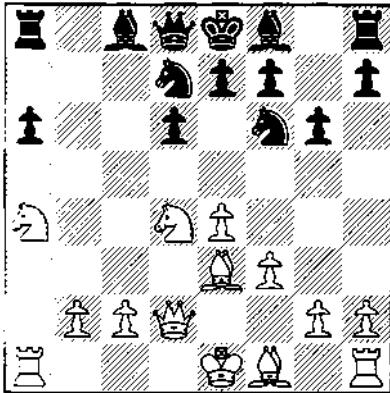
While 6...Bg7 7.f3 a6 is the most common way of reaching this system, we should first take a look at the alternative move order 6...a6. The point is to delay Bg7 and have the option of playing b7-b5 as quickly as possible. If Black does play Bg7 within the next few moves this will transpose into the main game, so here we will only examine Black's independent options. Against this move order we believe 7.Qd2! is most precise:



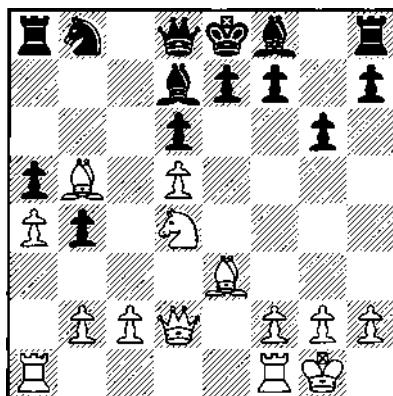
White is preparing to meet b7-b5 with an immediate a2-a4. Let's take a look at Black's three most common continuations:

7...Ng4?! can be met with 8.Bf3 h6 9.Bh4 Bg7 (9...g5 10.Bg3 Bg7 transposes to a well known position in the 6.Be3 Najdorf, except for one "small" detail—it is supposed to be Black's move! White can use his extra tempo to play 11.f3 Ne5 12.O-O-O followed by a quick h2-h4.) 10.f3 Ne5 11.Nd5!N (Stronger than 11.f4 Ne5 12.Bf2±, Odeev–Kojima, Guangzhou 2010.) 11...Nbc6 12.Nxc6 Ne5 13.c3±. White's position is definitely better. After Be2, O-O, and f3-f4 White can launch a kingside attack with f4-f5 or strengthen the center with Bf3 and Rae1.

Also possible is 7...Nbd7 8.f3 b5 9.a4! bxa4 (9...b4 10.Nd5± is good for White) 10.Nxa4

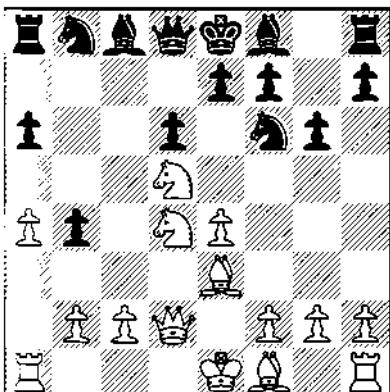


10.exd5 Bb7 (*10...a5?* gives up too many squares: 11.Bb5+ Bd7 12.O-O+



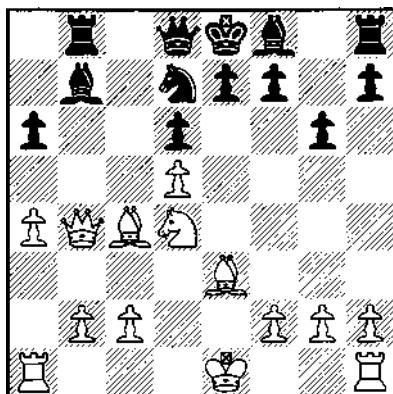
This kind of structure is almost always good for White, who will have more space and can target Black's b-pawn. Let's see how Kasparov transitioned into the middlegame: 11...Bg7 11.Be2 Bb7 12.c4! Preventing e5-d5 and restricting Black's play. 12...O-O 13.O-O Nc5 14.b4!± securing commanding space advantage, Kasparov–K. Georgiev, Sarajevo 2000.

Lastly, the immediate 7...b5 should be met with 8.a4! b4 9.Nd5

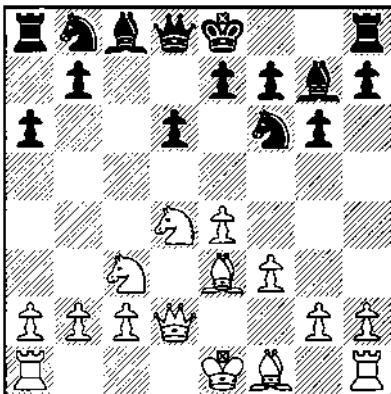


Now we can see the point of playing 7.Qd2—Black has no comfortable way of defending the b4 pawn. 9...Nxd5 10.Nxe4?! 10.Qxb4↑ is nearly lost for Black, as White is threatening Nb5)

White can build up with Rfe1, Bh6, etc.) 11.Bc4! Since a6-a5 is just too weakening, Black is forced to sacrifice the b-pawn. 11...Nd7 12.Qxb4 Rb8



Now Black would have good compensation here if not for a series of precise moves: 13.Nc6! Bxc6 14.Qc3! Bxd5 15.Bxd5 Rg8 (15...Nf6? 16.Bc6+++) 16.Qc4!N This secures a large advantage. (16.O-O± was played in Berg–Nakamura, Southampton 2003.) The point is that 16...e6 is met with 17.Bxe6!+-. 7.f3 a6 8.Qd2



8...Nbd7

Arguably Black's most flexible move. The knight is often developed here in order to play b7-b5. But let's see some of Black's other options as well:

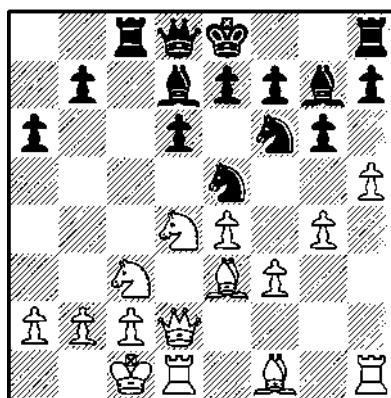
Castling this early with **8...O-O?** simply isn't in the spirit of the Dragodorf, where Black usually keeps his king in the center and first develops queenside counterplay.

a) With **9.O-O-O** White can continue in the same vein as in the Yugoslav Attack, where the plan with a7-a6 and b7-b5 is simply too slow. **9...b5** **10.g4** **Bb7** **11.h4** **h5** Otherwise White would play **h4-h5**, **Bh6**, and deliver mate. **12.gxh5** **Nxh5** **13.Rg1** **Nd7** **14.Nf5!** Not the only way to proceed, but the most forcing. **14...Ne5** (*14...gxh5 leads to a fairly straightforward win after 15.Bh6 Kh7 16.Bxg7 Nxg7 17.Rxg7+ Kxg7 18.Qg5+ Kh7 19.Bh3+- with an irresistible attack.*) **15.Nxg7** **Nxg7** **16.Qf2** **b4** **17.Nd5** **Bxd5** **18.Rxd5±**, Mastrovasilis–Psathas, Porto Carras 2005.

b) Topalov demonstrated a different, but no less effective approach: **9.h4** **h5** **10.O-O-O** **b5** **11.Bh6** **Bb7** **12.g4!** It's already clear that Black is well behind. **12...Nc6**

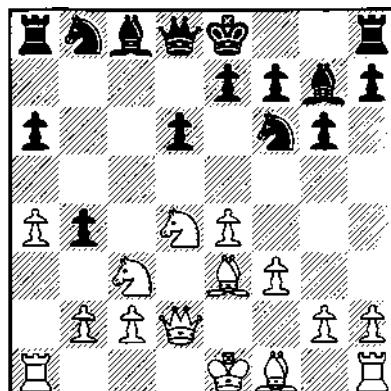
13.Bxg7 **Kxg7** **14.gxh5** **Nxh5** **15.Nf5–Kg8** **16.Qh6+–**, Topalov–Armbruster, Frankfurt 1997.

It's also somewhat strange to play **8...Nc6?!** since Black cannot play b7-b5 without first exchanging on d4. After the natural moves **9.O-O-C** **Bd7** **10.g4** **Rc8** **11.h4** **Ne5** **12.h5–** Black must play with his king in the center, which is difficult:



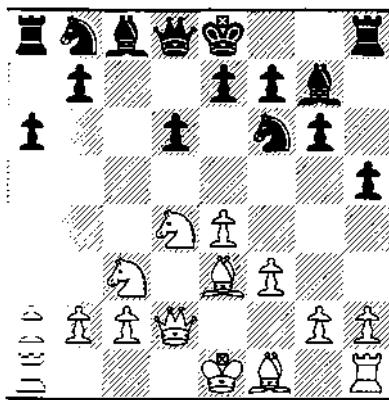
White can continue with **hxg7** followed by moves like **Kb1** and **Be2** eventually preparing **g4-g5** and **Nd5**. Shanava–Mamedov, Kocaeli 2008.

8...b5 should again be met with **9.a4 b4**



and now 10.Na2! (10.Nd5 is no longer as effective with Black's bishop already on g7.) forcing Black to give up the b5 square: 10...a5 11.Bb5+ Nfd7 12.c3 bxc3 13.Nxc3±, Galkin-Kotylev, Novokuznetsk 2008.

Black can also mix it up with ...h5, preventing White from advancing on the kingside:



Take the flexible 9.Be2! potentially preparing h2-h3 and g2-g4.

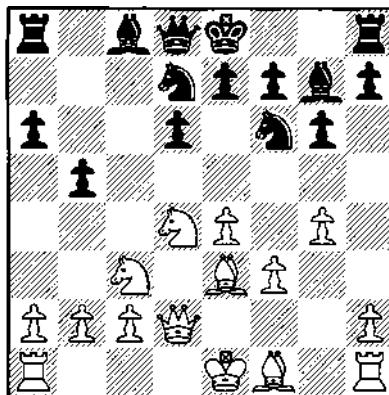
A recent effort continued 9...b5
Also possible was 10.O-O O-O
(planning to play a2-a4 next, getting a structural advantage.)
11.Na2 a5 12.c3 bxc3
Nxc3±. Once again the b5 square gives White more space and control on the queenside, Shankland-Saric, Saint Louis 2014.

White's plan in action can be seen after 9...Nbd7 10.h3 b6 11.O-O-O
12.g4 Rc8 13.g5 Nh7 14.f4 Nc5
Bf3, Sebag-Hamdouchi, Saint-Louis 2014.

9.g4

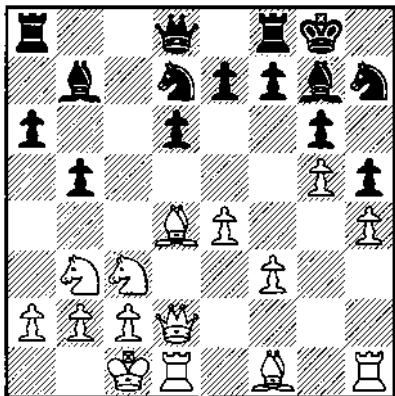
The Yugoslav Attack is also effective against this system, with the main difference being that White doesn't need to castle as early.

9...b5



10.h4

The following plan is also interesting: 10.O-O-O Bb7 11.h4 h5 12.g5 Nh7 13.Nb3?! With the idea of putting the bishop on d4, neutralizing Black's Dragon bishop. 13...O-O 14.Bd4

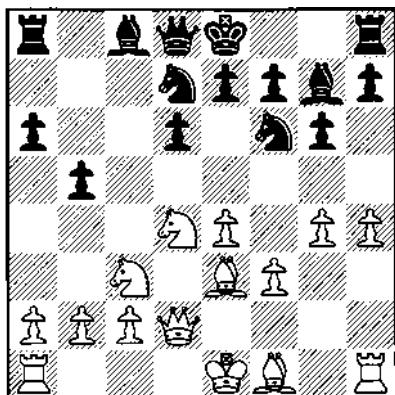


And now:

14...Bxd4 15.Nxd4 Nb6 16.Kb1 Qc7 17.a3 Clearly this method of playing is less sharp than your typical Dragon Sicilian. White should have a small plus based on Black's passive knight on h7. 17...d5 18.exd5 Nxd5 19.Nxd5 Bxd5 20.Qe3 Rfd8 21.Bd3 Nf8 22.Rhe1±, Vorobiov–Amonatov, Moscow 2009.

14...Ne5 15.Qf2±. After Kb1, Be2, and f2-f4, White can slowly increase his space advantage, Smeets–Alahakoon, Istanbul 2012.

Back to our game, after **10.h4**:

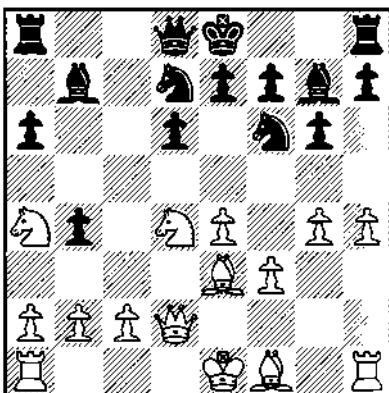


10...h5

Carlsen cedes space in order to prevent h4-h5, but he quickly ends up in a bad position. Let's see what happens if White is allowed to advance on the kingside:

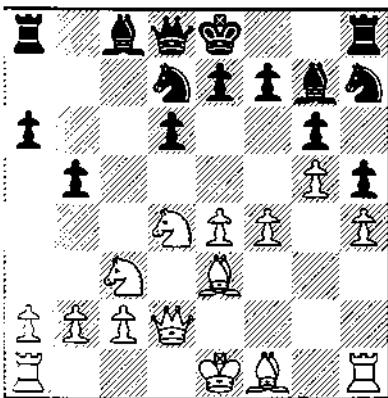
10...Bb7 11.h5 Rg8 Vacating the h8 square as a retreat for the bishop; otherwise White could play h5± and g4-g5. 12.hxg6 hxg6 13.O-O± Rc8 14.g5 Nh5 15.Bh3±. Black's play is hard to justify—White can follow up with Kb1, Nd5, Bg4, etc. V.Akopian–Romero Holmes, Città Mayor 2008.

10...b4 11.Na4 Bb7



12.h5!N (12.Qxb4 Rb8 13.Qd2 d5= gave Black adequate counterplay in Kryvoruchko–Shanava, Olomouc 2006.) Now White is ready to capture the b4 pawn, and if 12...d5?! then 13.hxg6 hxg6 14.Rxh8+ Bxh8 15.e5 is crushing, with the idea 15...Nxe5 16.Qh2++ with a surprising double attack.

11.g5 Nh7 12.f4!



GM Motylev aims to launch an assault on the light squares in Black's kingside.

12...Bb7 13.f5

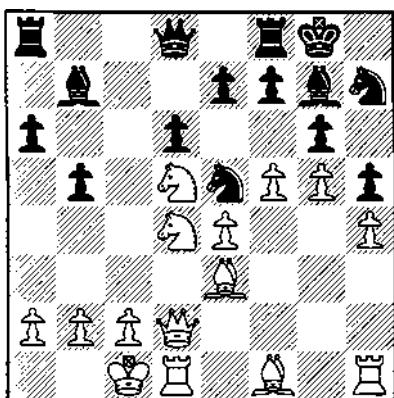
White's plan includes O-O-O, Bh3, and Nd5.

13...Ne5??!

A slight misstep, though Black's position was already quite suspect.

Relatively better was 13...Nhf8 14.O-O-O Be5 15.Bh3± where Black will have to fight on with his king in the center.

14.O-O-O O-O 15.Nd5!+-



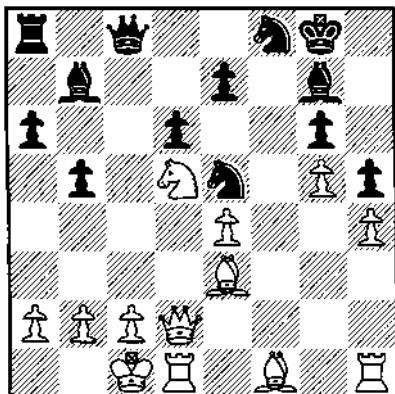
The threat is Nf4, targeting the e6 and g6 squares.

Also good for White was 15.fxg6 fxg6 16.Ne6±, but Motylev plays for more.

15...Bc8

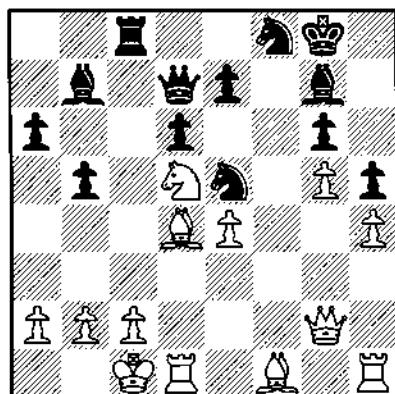
15...Re8 would meet a similar fate: 16.fxg6 fxg6 17.Ne6 Qc8 18.Nec7+-.

16.Nf4 Bb7 17.fxg6 fxg6 18.Nde6 Qc8 19.Nxf8 Nxf8 20.Nd5



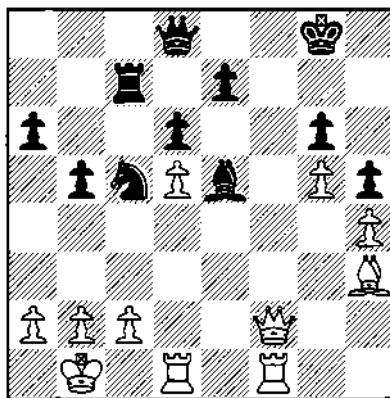
White is simply up the exchange now and has the better position.

20...Qd8 21.Bb6 Qd7 22.Qg2 Rc8 23.Bd4

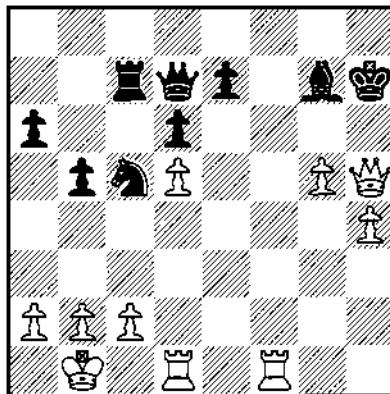


The winning plan is to trade pieces while preventing Black from getting any counterplay. Motylev is able to convert without difficulties.

**23...Qd8 24.Kb1 Ne6 25.Bxe5
Bxe5 26.Qf2 Bxd5 27.exd5 Nc5
28.Bh3 Rc7 29.Rhf1**



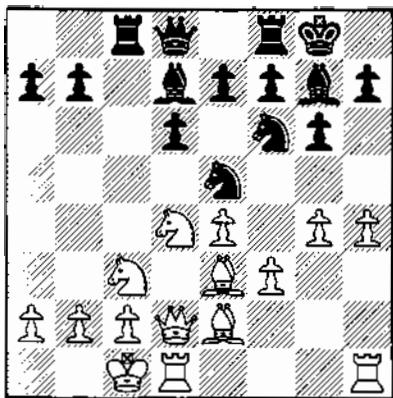
29...Bg7 30.Be6+ Kh7
Or 30...Nxe6 31.Qf7+ Kh7
32.Qxe6+-.
31.Bf7 Qd7 32.Bxg6+! Kxg6
33.Qf7+ Kh7 34.Qxh5+ 1-0



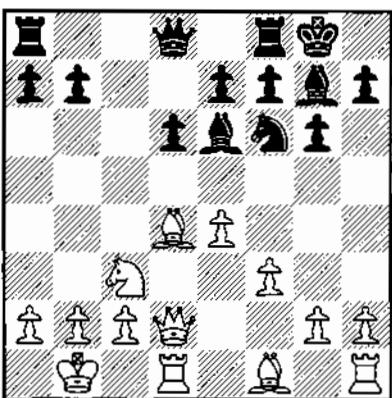
Carlsen resigned in view of
34...Kg8 35.g6.

Memory Markers

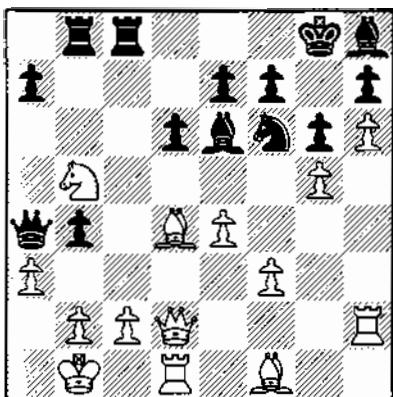
Here are reminders of some of the ideas and motifs in the Dragon Variation.



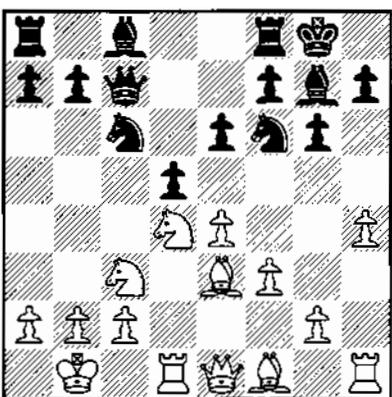
1. After **12.Be2!**. Supporting the kingside pawns, preventing any sacrifices on f3 or g4. See diagram on page 292, note in Fedorchuk–Stocek.



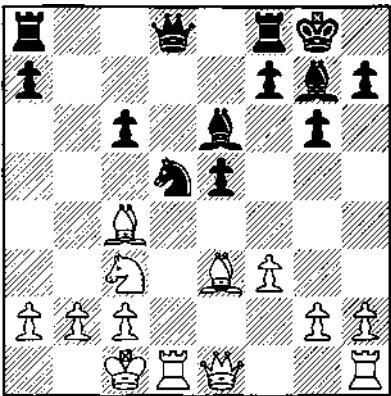
2. After **11.Kb1!**. An important nuance, preventing 11...Qa5 in view of 12.Nd5. See Zufic–Rezan, diagram on page 299.



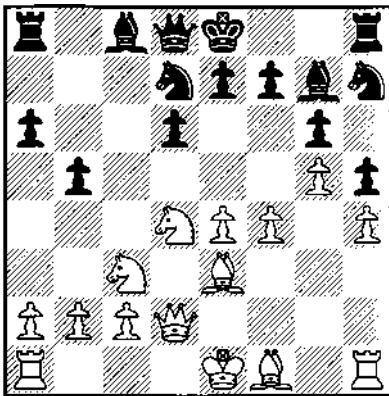
3. After **19.Rh2!!**. The absolute only move and refutation of Black's play. See Zufic–Rezan, diagram on page 305.



4. After **12.Kb1!**. A dangerously fresh idea, preparing to advance h4-h5 next. See diagram on page 310, notes to Wei Yi–Yankovsky.



5. After 13...Be6. White has a choice between 14.Ne4 and 14.Kb1. See Wei Yi–Yankovsky, page 316.



6. After 12.f4!. Launching the kingside assault—the plan of f4-f5, O-O-O, Nd5, and Bh3 is very effective against Black's setup. See diagram on page 327, in Motylev–Carlsen.

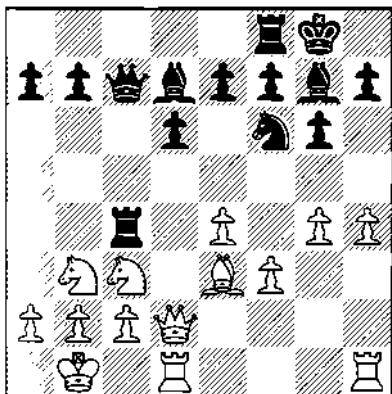
Exercises

White to play!

As White, practice finding the right moves when facing the Dragon.

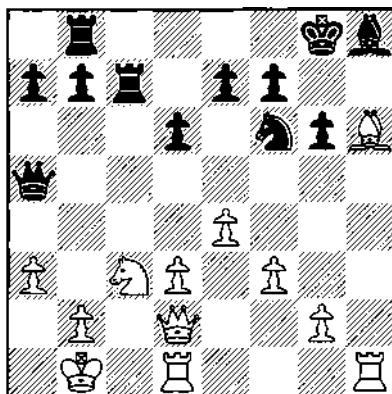
Solutions to the exercises begin on page 530.

Exercise 1



A. Ivanov – Rensch
Las Vegas 2002

Exercise 2

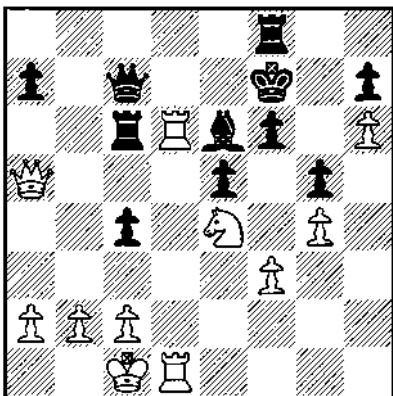


Milov – Kreiling
Frankfurt 2011

White to play and win.

White to play, how can you make use of the open h-file?

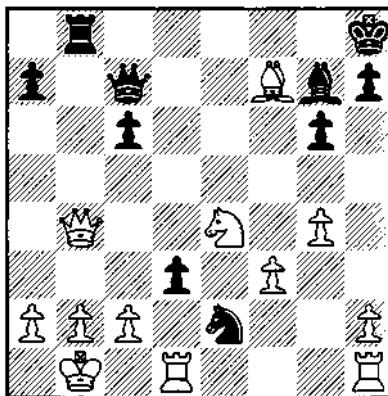
Exercise 3



Yu - Pham
Kazan 2013

White to play and win.

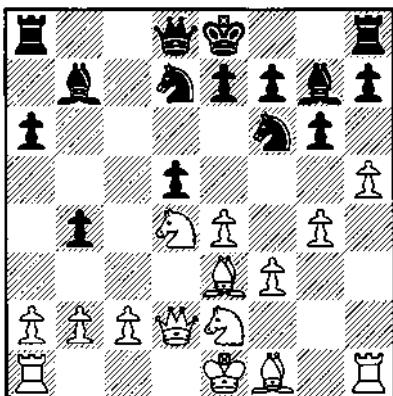
Exercise 4



Svidler - Radjabov
Sochi 2008

White is up a full rook but faces a powerful counterattack. Can you find the most effective solution?

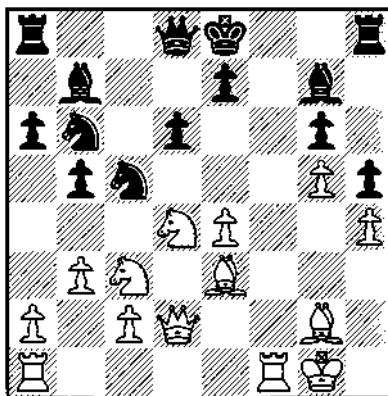
Exercise 5



Bitoon - Shanava
Vung Tau, Vietnam 2008

Black has just played d6-d5, seeking central counterplay. How should White react?

Exercise 6

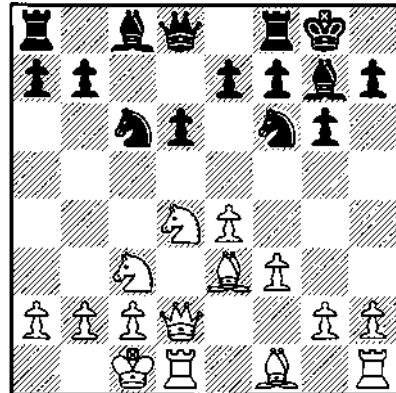


**Priyadharshan -
Zheng Yuan Chua**
Wch U16, Kemer 2009

White to play, how can you exploit the fact that Black's king is stuck in the center?

Summary:

Chapter 4 **The Dragon** **Variation**



**1.e4 c5 1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6
5.Be3 Bg7 7.f3 O-O 8.Qd2 Ne6 9.O-O-O**

I should almost go without saying that reading this chapter once is simply not enough to fully digest all of the material. Every line within the Dragon is sharp and contains lots of tricky resources for both sides, but we hope that we managed to logically guide the reader through the proverbial maze of variations. With deep preparation and understanding White can expect to have some success against this opening.

There were a few takeaways in each game. Against **9...Bd7** (Game 24) it was important to learn the common tactical motif of Nb3 (hitting the queen on a5), and the break e4-e5 using White's pressure along the e-file. It was also crucial to understand how to deal with Black playing h7-h5 as a response to h2-h4 (gxh5 and g4-g5 being the two main options). Of course, being aware of potential Rxc3 sacrifices is necessary as well.

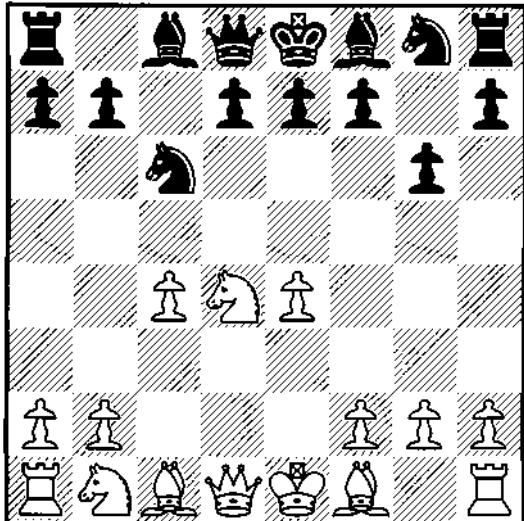
In Game 25 we dissected the vast implications after **9...Nxd4**, exploring the fierce pawn race and tactical resources present with the kings castled on opposite sides of the board. This is one of the few lines in the book

where a direct memorization of certain variations is practically obligatory, as many tricks would be difficult to find while playing over the board.

We then covered the theoretically critical **9...d5** in Game 26, suggesting **10.Qe1**. As you'll recall, Black has two major options in **10...e6** and **10...e5**. After 10...e6 we believe the plan with **11.h4 Qc7** followed by the rare **12.Kb1!** is quite dangerous, especially if White is familiar with a few key variations that we highlighted on page 310. Curiously, **10...e5** leads to a more positional struggle, where we believe that **14.Kb1!**, as in the main game Wei Yi-Yankovsky, is a nice way of fighting for a nagging edge.

Chapter 5

The Accelerated Dragon



1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 g6 5.c4!

The Accelerated Dragon can be considered as a sister opening to the Dragon Variation, as both openings are based on reaping the benefits of the powerful fianchettoed dark-squared bishop. The main difference lies in the move order—by eschewing d7-d6, Black saves a valuable tempo by playing d7-d5 directly in certain variations, hence the title the Accelerated Dragon.

The main drawback to this approach is that White is given the opportunity to play **5.c4**, setting up the well-known Maróczy Bind, named after Hungarian Grandmaster Géza Maróczy. This leads to one of the most strategically interesting pawn structures known to chess, and understanding its many nuances is no simple task. Throughout this opening White will have a space advantage and good squares for all of his pieces,

while Black will have a rock-solid position and potential for counterplay should White misstep.

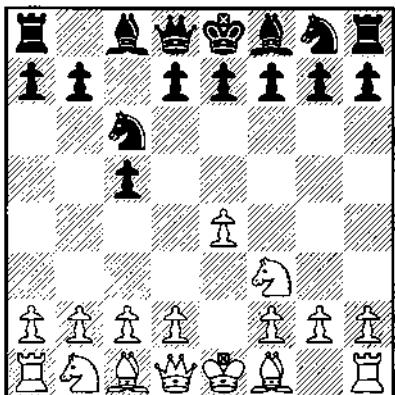
Games 28 and 29 will look at **5...Nf6**, with the idea of playing a quick Nxd4 and forcing White to recapture with the queen. In Game 30 we will then switch over to **5...Bg7**, followed by **6.Bc3 Nf6 7.Nc3 Ng4!?**, an unusual but important sideline. Rounding out the chapter will be Game 31, where we look at the classical main line **7...O-O**.

Game 28

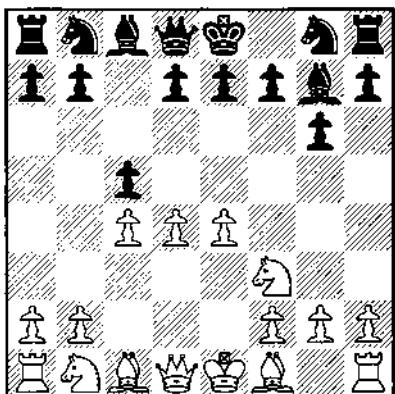
Shankland – Sebenik

47th Biel Open 2014

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6



This is the standard way of entering the Accelerated Dragon, although Black can also start with 2...g6 which offers some independent options to both sides. After 3.d4 Bg7, most consistent with our repertoire is 4.c4, setting up the Maróczy Bind:

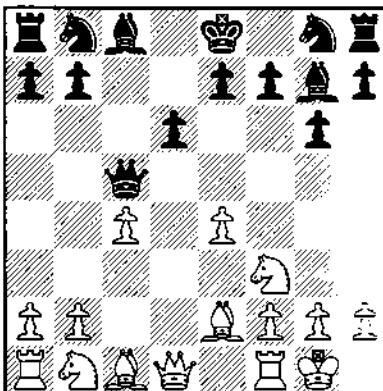


Now if Black wants to avoid transposing into the main lines with 4...cxd4, he can choose between

4...Nc6, 4...Qb6, 4...Qa5+. Finally 4...d6 which is discussed on page 339.

Against 4...Nc6 White should capture on c5: 5.dxc5 Qa5+ 6.b3 Qxc5 7.Nc3 Nf6 8.Be2 O-O. And we very much like the way GM Lu Xiangzhi handled White's position: 9.h3! Qb6 10.Qc2 d6 11.O-O Bf5 12.Be3 Qa5 13.a3! White's play is simple, yet effective. 13...Rfc8 14.Qd8 Qd8 15.Rfd1 Qf8 16.Rab1+, X Lu, Beijing 2012.

Against 4...Qb6 White should also play 5.dxc5, after which 5...Qxc5 6.Be2 d6 7.O-O leads to the same Maróczy structure we will study throughout this chapter:



However, in this case White will gain some time harassing Black's queen. We look at two lines here:

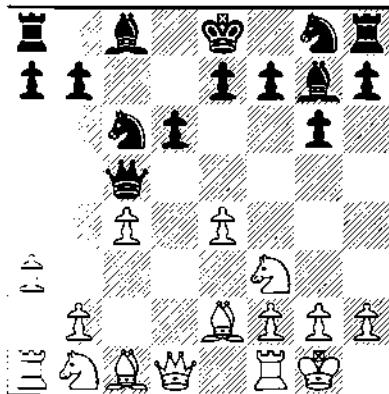
a) 7...Bg4 8.Be3:

a1) 8...Qb4 can be answered strongly with 9.Nc3! where 9...Qa5 simply loses after 10.Nb5 Ne4 11.Rb1 Qxa2 12.e5! dxе5 13.Ra1+ and 14.Rxa6.

a2) 8...Qc8 9.Nc3 Bxc3?! Though dubious, this is the only way to really justify Black's play. 10.bxc3 Nf5 11.c5! A strong sacrifice! 11...dxc5

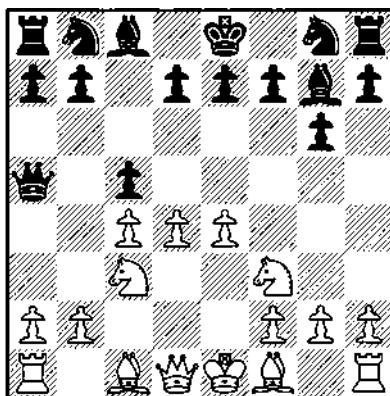
- 5 (Even better was 12.Bh6!↑ bring Black's king in the center.)
- Nfd7 13.Qa4 Bxf3 14.Bxf3 Nc6
- fxe6 16.Bg4±. White had more than enough compensation in the form of piece activity and open files, *Steinfeld-Petrov, Zagreb 2011.*

7...Nc6 8.a3!



- 51) 8...Bg4 transposes into line after 9.Be3 Qa5 10.b4 Qd8 (*not Nxb4?? 11.Bd4+–*) 11.Ra2.
 52) 8...Qb6 9.Ra2! A nifty idea to remember, preparing Be3 and b2-b4, followed by swinging the rook over to d2. For example 9...Bg4 10.Be3 Qd8 11.b4 Nf6 12.Nc3 O-O 13.Rd2 Nd7 14.Qb3 a5 15.h3 Bxf3 16.Bxf3±, with more space and the two bishops to boot. *Kramnik-Topalov, Monte Carlo 1999.*

After 4...Qa5+ 5.Nc3 Black again has a choice:



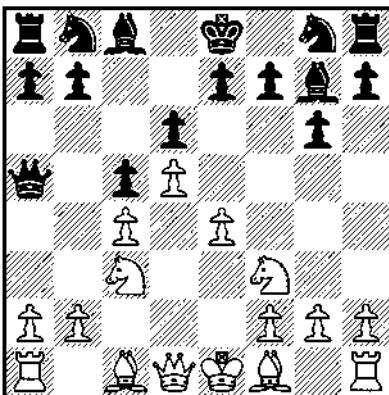
We look at three lines:

a) 5...Nf6 6.Bd3:

a1) 6...Ng4 can be met with 7.Be2 Nc6 8.d5 Nd4 9.Bd2! Black's queen is clearly misplaced on a5. 9...Nxe2 10.Qxe2 d6 11.Nb5 Qb6 12.Bc3±, *Kupchik-Marshall, Lake Hopatcong 1926.*

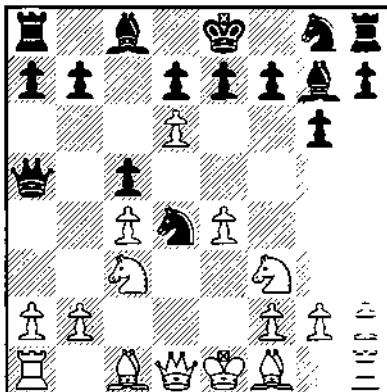
a2) 6...cxd4 7.Nxd4 Nc6 8.Nb3 Qd8 9.O-O O-O 10.Be3. White's pieces are developed differently from that in the main line, but no less effectively. The space advantage is still good enough for a small plus. 10...d6 11.Be2±, with the plan of f2-f3, Qd2, and bringing the rooks to the c- and d-files, *Dominguez Perez-Gonzalez Zamora, Merida 2001.*

b) In case of 5...d6 White should play 6.d5!



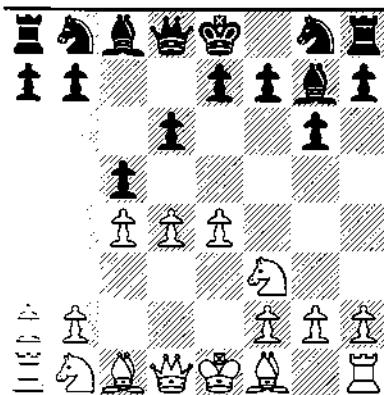
A strong pawn sacrifice. 6...Bxc3+ (or 6...Nf6 7.Bd2±) 7.bxc3 Nf6 (After 7...Qxc3+ 8.Bd2 Qg7 9.Bd3± White has full compensation and a powerful plan in O-O, Bc3, Rfe1, and breaking with e4-e5, Fontaine-Chatalbashev, Val Thorens 2007.) 8.Qc2 Nxe4 9.Bd3 Nf6 10.O-O The open e-file and dark-squared bishop gives White long-term compensation for the pawn. 10...O-O (or 10...Bg4 11.Nh4!± followed by h2-h3, Bg5, and f4-f5, Nielsen-Cicak, Sweden 2011) 11.Bg5 Nbd7 12.Rae1 Re8 13.Re2±. Also possible is 13.Nh4↑, Laznicka-Mochalov, Pardubice 2006.

c) Finally, after 5...Nc6 6.d5 Nd4 we found a fresh new idea in 7.d6!N



Giving up a pawn, for use of d5 square as well as a potential initiative. (7.Bd2 is the usual move which is also playable.) 7...exd6 8.Qxf3+?! 8.Qxf3 Bxc3+ 9.bxc3 10.Bf4+ Black is going to sacrifice along the dark squares.) 8.Bd2! Nf6 (or 8...Ne6 9.Nb5 Qb6 10.Be3 Qc5 11.b4! cxb4 12.Nxd6+↑) 9.Nxd4 10.Nd5 Qd8 11.Bg5! Threatening Qf3, so Black's reply is forced: 11...Qf3 12.Bxf6 Bxf6 13.Nxf6+ Qxf6 14.Qc2 O-O 15.f3±. After O-O-O White will win the d4 pawn and enjoy a fantastic structural advantage.

Playing 4...d6 often leads to a Benoni structure, as White may be compelled to advance d4-d5:



While covering the Benoni is definitely outside the scope of this book, we can show you how games often develop from this position if Black refuses to play cxd4, in which case we would transpose back into the Maróczy Structure. After 5.Nc3 we look at two lines:

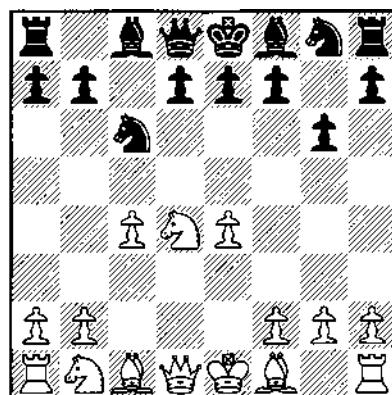
5...Nc6 6.Be3 Bg4 leads to a bad endgame for White after 7.dxc5 8.Qxd8+ Rxd8 9.Bxc5 Bxc3+ 10.bxc3 Nf6 11.Nd4! Nxe4 12.Nxc6 and 13.Bxa7 Nxc3 14.a4±, with the two bishops and strong passed pawn, Aronian–Georgiev, Batumi 2009.

5...Bg4 6.d5 Nf6 7.Be2 O-O 8.O Nbd7 9.h3 Bxf3 10.Bxf3± without having exchanged the rooks, as usually happens in the classical Benoni, Black lacks space and counterplay in this structure, Ding–Tomashevsky, Sochi 2009.

3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 g6

This is the usual starting point of the Accelerated Dragon. By delaying d7-d6, Black is hoping to achieve an improved version of the Dragon Variation, where in some lines d7-d5 can be played in one move, saving an important tempo, for instance if White were to continue in the same fashion as in the Yugoslav Attack. However, there is an important drawback to this variation:

5.c4!



The dreaded Maróczy Bind! Since Black didn't play an early Nf6, White is able to advance the c-pawn before developing with Nc3, earning full control over the d5 square.

5...Nf6

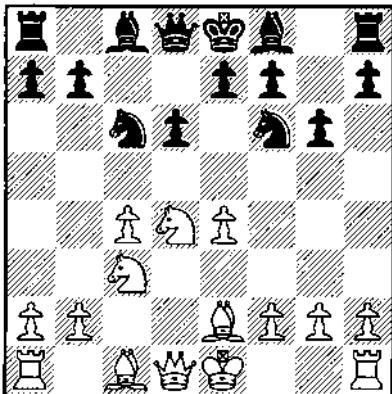
Delaying Bg7 is mainly associated with an early Nxd4, forcing White to recapture with the queen.

5...Bg7 is the other main line and will be covered in Games 30 and 31.

6.Nc3 d6

Also possible is 6...Nxd4 7.Qxd4 d6 (if 7...Bg7?! then 8.e5) 8.Be3 Bg7 9.Be2 transposing to the main game.

7.Be2



This bishop should be developed to e2 in almost all lines in the Maróczy, covering the important g4 square.

7...Nxd4

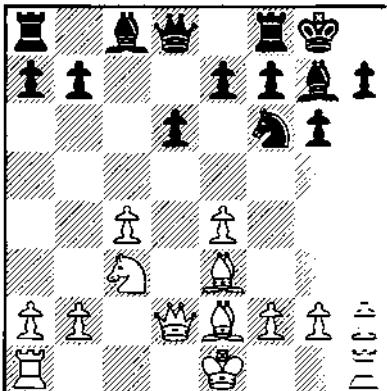
The main point of this exchange is to allow Black to play Be6 in the near future.

7...Bg7 8.Be3 would transpose back into the other main line, covered in Games 30 and 31.

8.Qxd4 Bg7 9.Be3

It is important to play Be3 *before* O-O, because after 9.O-O O-O 10.Be3? Ng4!, White will have to give up his dark-squared bishop, a major concession.

9...O-O 10.Qd2



In this position Black has a choice of moves.

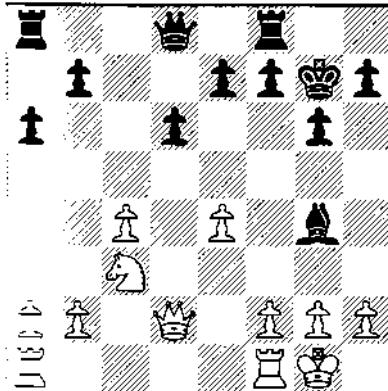
10...Be6

This is Black's most common move, putting pressure on the e-pawn. The plan includes Qa5, Ra7-a6, and striking with b7-b5 if possible.

The modern way of playing this line is 10...a5, and will be presented in the next game.

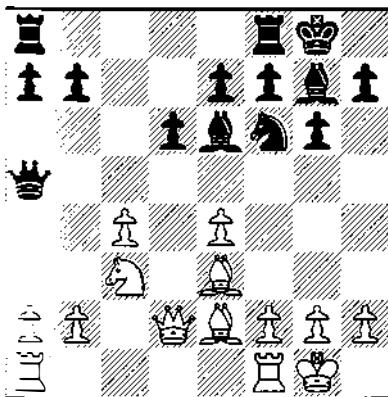
10...Bd7?! leads to 11.O-O ~~b5~~ 12.f3 a5 13.b3 Nd7, a position where White is a tempo up compared to the main line in Game 31.

10...Ng4 forces the trade 11.Bxg4 which is not in Black's best interests, as after 12.Bd4 a6 13.Bxf7 Kxg7 14.O-O, as occurred in Korneev–Saric, Nova Gorica 2004.



White is left with the better minor piece. We will see more examples of this type of middlegame later on in the lines 12...Ng4 and 12...Ng4.

11...O-O Qa5



12.b3!

We believe it is precise to start with this move.

12.Rfc1 allows Black the chance to set up for the endgame after 12...Nxe4? 13.Nxe4 Qxd2 14.Nxd2 Bxb2∞, which may not be to White's liking, Karneev–Leon Hoyos, Deizisau 2008.

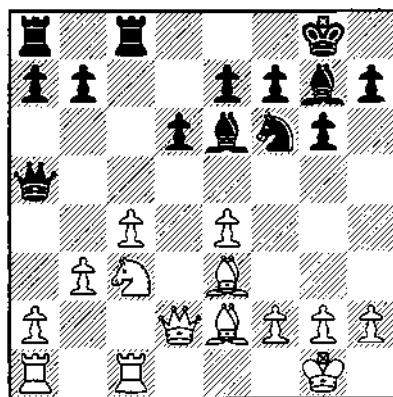
12...Rfc8

The immediate 12...a6 13.Rab1 is premature in view of 14.b4!

(but not 14.cxb5?! axb5 15.Bxb5 Nxe4! 16.Nxe4 Qxb5∞) 14...Qc7 15.cxb5 axb5 16.Bxb5 Ra3 17.Bd4!± and Black is without enough compensation.

12...Ng4 can be comfortably met with 13.Bd4. Normally it's not in White's best interests to trade dark-squared bishops in the Maróczy Bind, but this position is an exception. With the bishop on e6 White can play a quick f2-f4-f5 and develop some pressure. For instance 13...Bxd4 14.Qxd4 Qe5 (Or 14...Qc5 15.Qxc5 dxc5 16.f4!± followed by f4-f5 and Bf3.) 15.Qxe5 Nxe5 16.f4 Nc6 17.f5 Bd7 18.f6!±, weakening the d6 pawn and securing the d5 square as a permanent outpost.

13.Rfc1

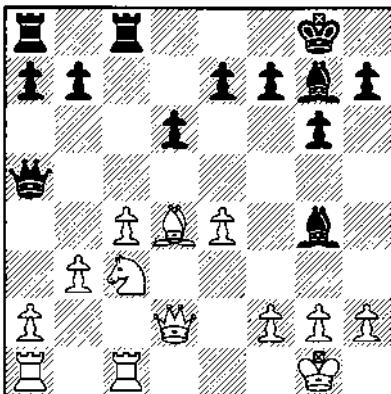


13...a6

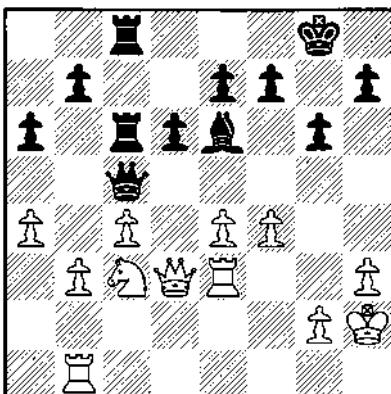
The main plan for Black in this position, preparing to play b7-b5 with counterplay.

13...b5?! fails tactically: 14.cxb5 Rxc3 15.Rxc3 Nxe4. Everything looks great for Black, except 16.Rc8+! wins the queen.

As GM Peter Leko beautifully demonstrated, 13...Ng4 14.Bxg4 Bxg4 15.Bd4! leads to a middlegame that is better for White:



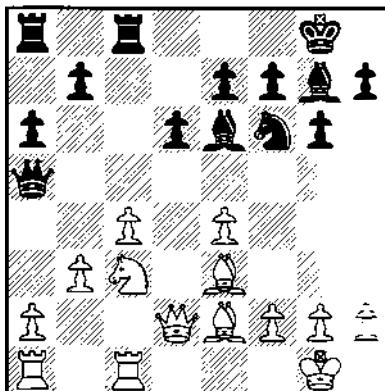
15...Bxd4 16.Qxd4 Be6. With the light-squared bishop Black is unlikely to challenge White's space advantage. 17.Rab1 It is important not to rush with Nd5, but rather to wait for an opportune moment. (17.Nd5?! Bxd5 18.exd5 b5= is fine for Black.) 17...a6 18.a4! First restricting the thematic b7-b5 advance. 18...Rab8 19.Re1! Now Leko switches over to the kingside. 19...Qb4 20.Qd3 (Again 20.Nd5?! Bxd5 21.exd5 b5= would give Black excellent counterplay.) 20...Rc5 21.h3 Rbc8 22.Re3 R5c6 23.Kh2 Qc5 24.f4!



24...Rb6? Strategic suicide, although Black's position was already

quite difficult. 25.Nd5! Far-sighted awareness! 25...Bxd5 26.exd5 With Black's rook stuck on the queenside White quickly runs through on the kingside, Leko–Ivanchuk, Mukachevo 2007.

Back to our game, after 13...c6



14.Rab1!

Removing the rook from the diagonal and setting up b3-b4.

14.f3?! seems like a natural move, but after 14...b5! 15.cxb5 it is already White who is trying to equalize, as Black has various tactical tricks involving either Ne4 or Ng4. Relatively best is 16.Bd3 b4 17.Na4 Nd7 18.Bxg7 Kxg7 happened in Sakaev–Banik-Panormo 2002, and after 19.Rd1 Black could have secured a large advantage with 19...Nc5!+.

14...b5

This direct pawn sacrifice leads to a sharp battle and can be considered critical for this line. But let's take a look at some of Black's other natural tries:

Spending a tempo on 14...Rab8 allows White to consolidate with 15.f3! Now 15...b5? is just bad in view

17...Qf5 17.cxb5 axb5 18.Nxb5±, it's clear why the e4 pawn extra protection, Rowson–Scarborough 1999.

Qb4 is a provocative move, White shouldn't shy away from it and now:

15...Qxa3? 16.Ra1 Qb4 17.Ra4 18.Bd1 and Black faces material losses—relatively best is 18...Nxe4 19.Nxe4 Qb2 20.Qxb2 Bxb2 21.Rb1±.

15...Qa5 16.b4 Qd8 17.c5±, Timo-Kochyev, St. Petersburg 2001.

White retains a small plus after 14...Qd8 15.f3 Nd7 16.Nd5 Bxd5 17.cxd5± and 14...Nd7 15.b4 Qd8 16.Nd5 Bxd5 17.cxd5±, where the light-squared bishop is a valued piece.

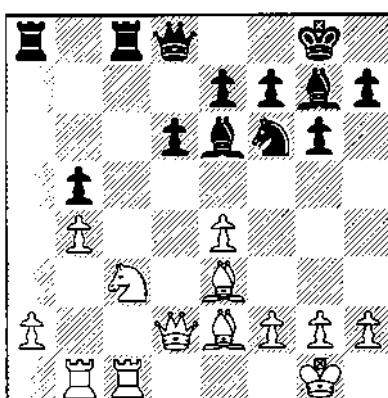
15.b4

15.cxb5?! is seriously inaccurate, after 15...axb5 16.b4 (*losing are* 16.Bxb5?? Rxc3 and 16.Nxb5? 17.Bxd2 Rxa2) 16...Qa3 White cannot play 17.Rb3.

15...Qd8

The only move, since White wins on the spot after 15...Qa3? 16.Rb3, and gets a decisive advantage after 15...Qc7?! 16.cxb5 axb5 17.Bxb5 Ra3 18.Nd5!.

16.cxb5 axb5

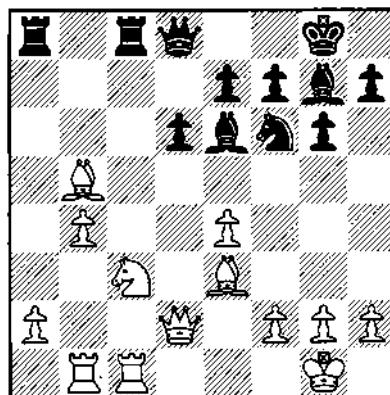


The b5 pawn is up for grabs, though in exchange Black will gain piece activity and play against White's queenside. Theoretically speaking, 17.Bxb5 is considered the critical try for an advantage, but recently GM Shankland opted for the pragmatic

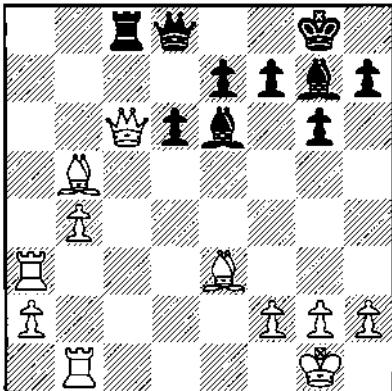
17.f3!?

Securing the e4 pawn, as there's no rush in capturing on b5.

For those interested, 17.Bxb5 leads to complex play:

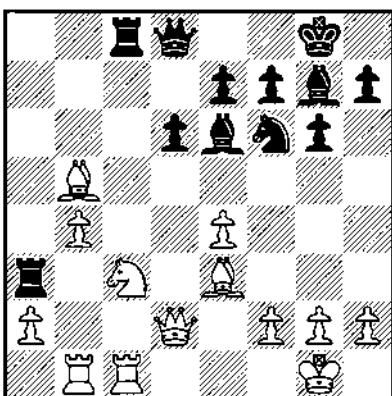


The complications after 17...Rxc3?! work out in White's favor: 18.Qxc3 Nxe4 (Or 18...Nd5 19.exd5! Bxc3 20.dxe6±. White's active pieces and b-pawn outvalue the queen.) 19.Qc6! Nc3 20.Rxc3 Rc8 21.Ra3!:



Exposing the weakness of Black's back rank. 21...Bf5 22.Qxc8 Bxc8 23.Ra8 1-0, A.Ivanov–Paschall, USA 1996.

Stronger is 17...Ra3! threatening Ng4:



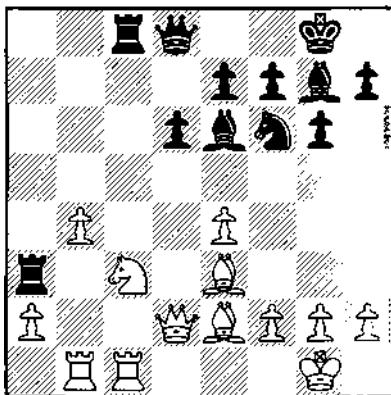
a) The main line continues 18.Nd5 which poses a bit of pressure, though Black can equalize with precise play:

a1) After 18...Rca8 19.Nxf6+ Bxf6 20.Bc4 Bxc4 21.Rxc4 Rxa2 22.Rc2±, White's edge is quite minimal, especially with the reduced material, Safarli–Guseinov, Nakhchivan 2013.

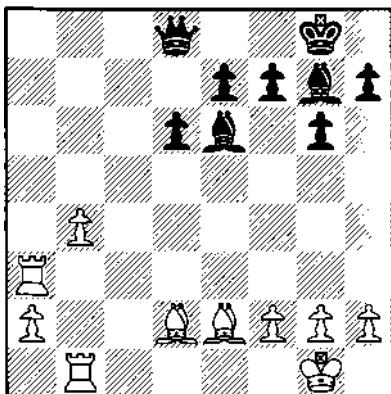
a2) A tougher defense was 18...Rxcl+ 19.Qxc1 Rxa2 20.Nxf6+

Bxf6 21.Bc4 Ra8 22.Bxe6 fxe6 23.Qd7 24.b6±, Dominguez Pérez–Nakamura, Wijk aan Zee 2010.

b) Perhaps more testing 18.Be2N:

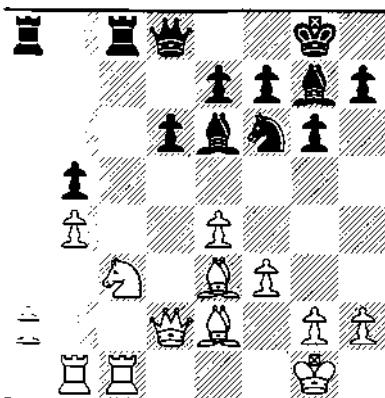


The critical line runs 18...Rcx1 19.Rxc3 Nxe4 (Or 19...Rxa2 20.Rc1 Nxe4 21.Qd3 Rxc2 22.Qxc2±. If Black can contain White's b-pawn he should be fine, but this is easier said than done!) 20.Rxa3 Nxd2 21.Bxd2±



With two rooks versus the queen, three results are still possible, but it seems that White should have the upper hand, as the b-pawn may run very fast.

We resume our main game, after 17...B3!?



• Ra3

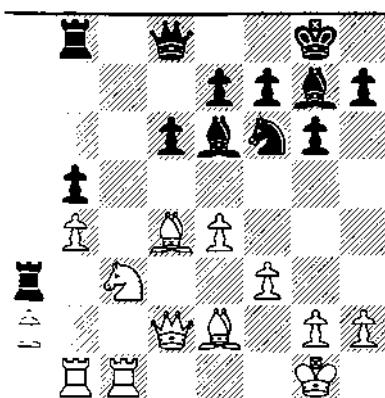
The most sensible move—Black cannot look back now.

After 17...Bc4?! 18.Bxc4 bxc4 White's queenside passers are immensely strong, Zahn–Taggatz, Bremen 1997.

• Nxb5

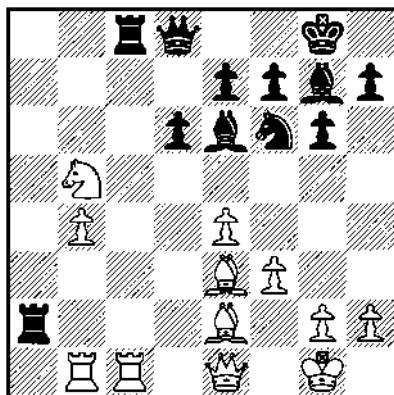
Shankland trades pawns and puts his hopes on promoting the pawn.

Another option for White is 18.d4 securing the knight and preparing Bxb5. After 18...Rb8



White has a pleasant choice between 19.Rc2 keeping everything protected, and 19.Bxb5 Rxc3 20.Rxc3 Rxb5 21.a4 Rb8 22.a5±, where Black's pieces are inactive while White's connected passed pawns are quite strong.

18...Rxa2 19.Qe1



White would like to play Nd4, followed by pushing the b-pawn forward. Black's position is harmonious but lacks any actual counterplay.

19...Nh5?!

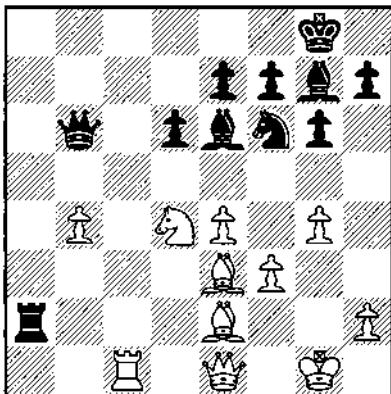
Black provokes a weakness in White's kingside but at the cost of a full tempo.

A previous game continued 19...Ra4, after which White quickly got a winning advantage: 20.Na7 Rc7 21.Nc6 Qa8 22.b5+, Kosztolanczi–Lakos, Ajka 1997.

19...d5 is strongly met with 20.Nd4! where 20...dxe4 21.Nxe6 fxe6 22.fxe4± is very good for White, who threatens Bc4.

Perhaps best is 19...Bd7 against which White retains a plus with the simple 20.Bf1±.

20.g4 Nf6 21.Nd4 Rxc1 22.Rxc1 Qb6



23.Bf2

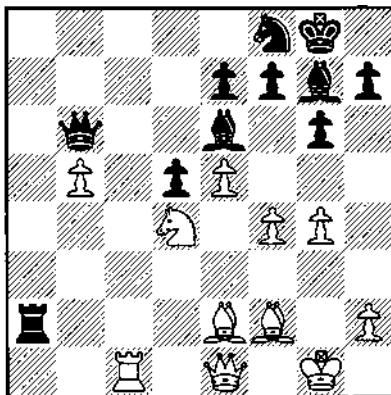
White could also go for 23.Nf5 Qb7 24.Nxg7 Kxg7 25.Ra1! Qa8 26.Bd4± with the two bishops and a strong passed pawn.

23...d5?

The losing move, allowing White to close the center and render Black's minor pieces nearly useless.

The only move was 23...Bd7 after which 24.Nf5± secures a long-term advantage for White.

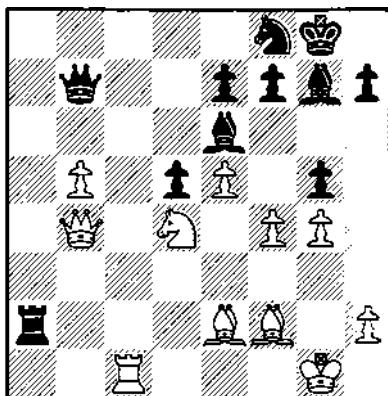
24.e5 Nd7 25.f4 Nf8 26.b5!+-



Shankland's execution of the advantage is flawless, and the game is over within a few moves. White's b-pawn has become unstoppable.

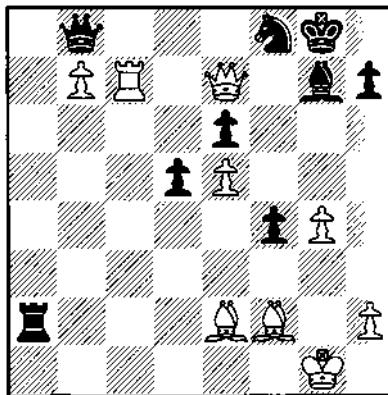
26.f5 was also winning, but it is clear as the text continuation $Qb7$ keeps Black's minor pieces locked out of the game.

26...Qb7 27.Qb4 g5



Black's only chance is counterplay, but White wins by force on the queenside.

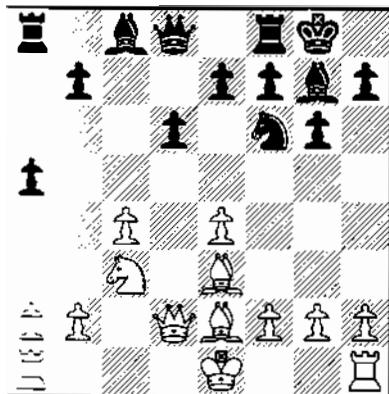
28.b6 gxf4 29.Rc7 Qa8 30.b7 Qb8 31.Nxe6 fxe6 32.Qxe7 1-0



Game 29

Almasi – Macieja
2010 Olympiad
Khanty-Mansiysk 2010

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4
4.Nxd4 g6 5.c4 Nf6 6.Nc3 d6
7.Be2 Nxd4 8.Qxd4 Bg7 9.Be3
O-O 10.Qd2 a5!?



As of late, this move has been played more often by top players than Be6. Black's idea is to play a5-a4 followed by seeking counterplay against the c4 pawn.

Rd1!

Although White has other options, in our opinion this is the most ambitious try for an advantage. The point is to develop actively and stay in the center. The move also goes with a positional threat of 15...Rd1.

Black's idea can be realized 11.O-O a4 12.f3 Qa5 13.Rac1 14.Rfd1 Rfc8, where already the pressure against the c4 pawn is high for direct equality: 15.Nb5 15.b3 axb3 16.axb3 Nd7 \rightleftarrows , (Biblioli-Di Caro, Porto Santo 2007) 15...Nd7 16.Qxa5 Rxa5

17.Nd4 Nc5 18.Kf2 Bd7=, Malakhov–So, Khanty-Mansiysk 2009.

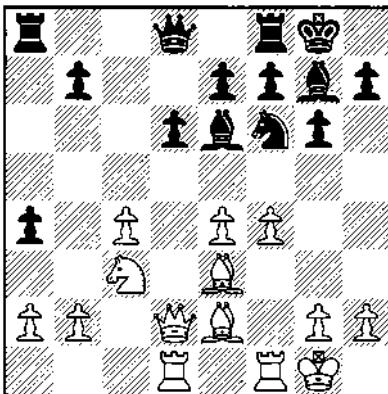
11...Be6

The main move, putting pressure on c4 and connecting the back rank.

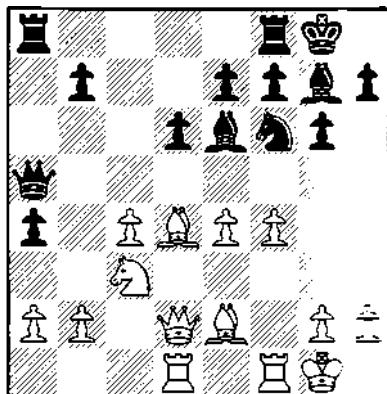
Black can also switch gears and play 11...Bd7, which transposes to the main line in Game 31 after 12.f3 Bc6 13.b3 Nd7 14.O-O Nc5 15.Rb1.

After 11...a4 White should exploit Black's unprotected queen with 12.c5! Qa5 (12...a3 13.b4! Be6 14.Qc2 Qc7 15.O-O dxc5 16.bxc5± is more pleasant for White, who can target the b7 pawn, Khairullin–Pruess, Biel 2012.) 13.cxd6 exd6 14.O-O. The d6 pawn is a serious weakness for which Black does not have enough compensation. 14...a3 15.b3 Be6 16.Bd4 Rac8 17.f3 (Stronger was 17.f4!±, threatening f4-f5 with a powerful initiative.) 17...Rc6 18.Nb5 Qxd2 19.Rxd2 Ra8 20.Rfd1±, Ivanchuk–Topalov, Astana 2012.

12.O-O a4 13.f4!



14.Bd4!



The natural continuation of White's play. Since Black has spent two moves advancing his a-pawn, it is quite principled for White to launch an attack on the kingside. Moreover, the plan of f4-f5 is quite common in lines where Black develops his bishop to e6. White's followup includes moves such as Bd4 and Qe3.

13...Qa5

Most logical, clearing the way for Rfc8.

13...Qc8 was tried once, against which White should respond 14.Qd3 Nd7 15.Bd4N (*Better than 15.Kh1 Nc5=, Filippov-Al Modiahki, Incheon 2013.*) 15...Bxd4+ 16.Qxd4±. The trade of dark-squared bishops leaves Black's king vulnerable to an attack.

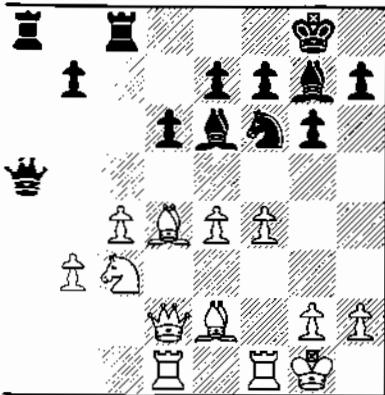
Exerting pressure along the long-diagonal—in some cases and Nd5 will be a strong idea—preparing Qe3.

14...Qb4?!

Black aims to induce weakening the b3 square, but we'll see this turns out to be a waste of a tempo.

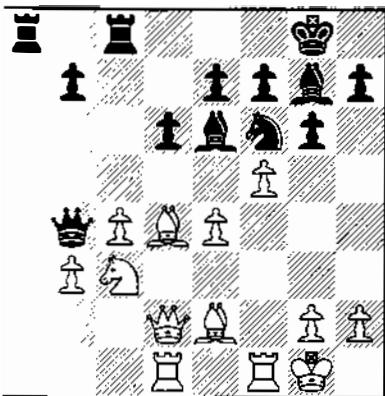
GM Tiviakov once tried 14...Rf8 15.Qd3 Rad8 lining up his rook to discourage White from attacking but 16.f5! should still have been played (instead of 16.Kh1±, G.-T. Tiviakov, Hoogeveen 2010). A... 16...Bd7 17.Qe3 White is ready to launch the kingside attack and threatening Bb6. 17...Qb4 can be met with 18.c5!, for instance 18...cxd4 19.Bxc5 Bh6 20.Qf2 Qxb2 21.Qb6 hxg6 22.Bxe7 Rxe7 23.Qxf6+— a winning threat of Nd5.

The main try thus far has been
 - Rfc8 forcing 15.b3 axb3
 axb3

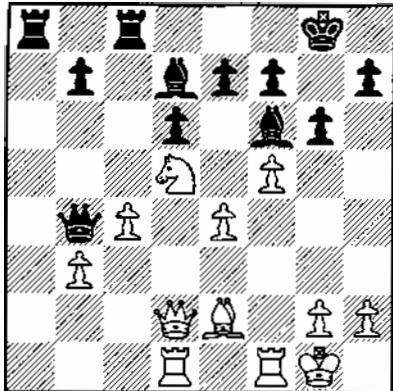


Now:

a) 16...Qb4?! 17.f5!

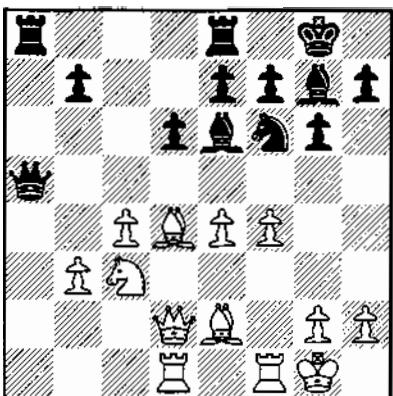


b1) 17...gxf5? led to Black's downfall swiftly after 18.exf5 Bd7
 - Bf3! with a devastating threat Rg3. The game concluded with Kh8 20.Qe3 Rf8? (more stubborn 20...Re8 21.Rg3→) 21.Qxe7 1–0,
 - Talov-Zivanic, Richardson 2011.
 b2) Instead, 17...Bd7 leads to a difficult endgame for Black: 18.Bxf6
 - 19.Nd5



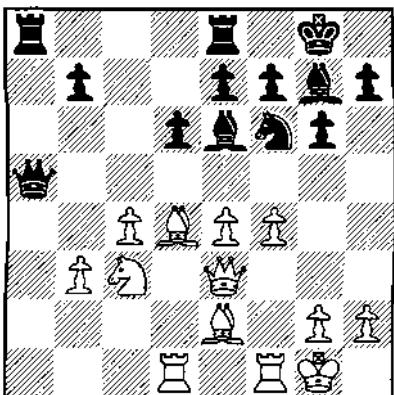
19...Qxd2 (*not* 19...Qxb3? 20.fxg6 hxg6 21.Rxf6 exf6 22.Qh6+–) 20.Nxf6+ exf6 21.Rxd2±, Rodshtein-Cabrera, La Massana 2013.

b) Our own Zhanibek invented 16...Re8!?, a tricky move:



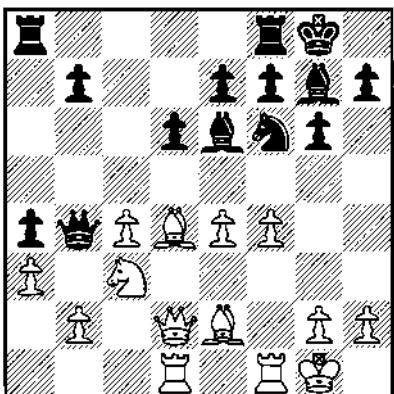
b1) It is played with the idea that the usually strong 17.f5?! falls short for White: 17...Bd7 18.Qe3 (18.Bxf6 Bxf6 19.Nd5 can be met with 19...Be5= where e7 is defended.) 18...Bc6 19.Kh1 Nd7= with good counterplay on the dark squares in Adamson-Amanov, Los Angeles 2011.

b2) However a later game showed that White is doing well after 17.Qe3! threatening e4-e5:



17...Qb4 (17...Ng4 leaves White with the better minor piece after 18.Bxg4 Bxg4 19.Rd3 Bxd4 20.Qxd4 Bd7 21.Nd5±, Zhou-Gundawaa, London 2012.) 18.e5 Nd7 19.f5! gxf5 (or 19...Bxf5 20.Nd5! Qa5 21.Ra1 Qd8 22.Rxa8 Qxa8 23.Nc7±) 20.exd6 exd6 21.Bxg7 Kxg7 22.Nb5 Rec8 23.Nxd6+, Huschenbeth-Gozzoli, Merlimont 2011.

15.a3!

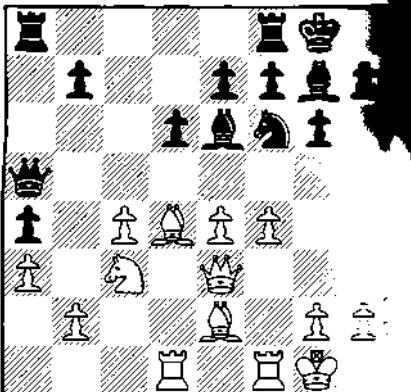


The extra time earned is worth more than the weakening of the pawn structure.

15...Qa5

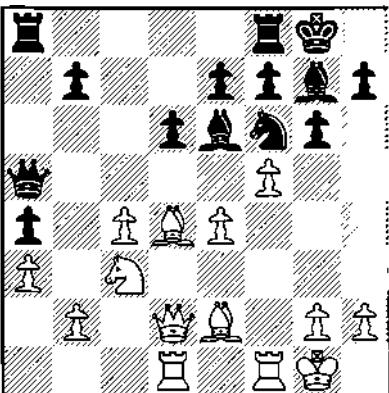
Not 15...Qb3?! 16.Rde1±. The queen is stuck on b3—16...Bxc4 leads to 17.Bd1!. Next is f4-f5 with a plus.

16.Qe3



A useful move for White—from the queen supports e4-e5 and Bb5.

In a later game GM Roiz played 16.f5, which is also logical:



16...Bd7? This move quickly lands Black in trouble. (Black had a go for the endgame after 16...gx5 17.exf5 Bxf5 18.Bxf6 Bxf6 19.Nc7 Qxd2 20.Nxf6+ exf6 21.Rxd2± where White will win the pawn back and

(... a better structure.) 17.c5! Very alert! This break undermines Black's entire position. 17...Bc6 (*not* 17...Exc5?? 18.Bxf6 Bxf6 19.Qxd7+) 18.cxd6 exd6 19.Qf4 Rad8 20.Qh4+ and an irresistible attack, Roiz-Skovic, Caleta 2011.

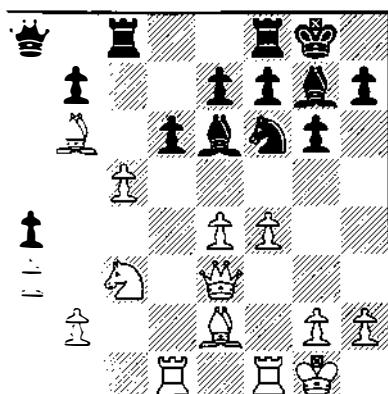
17...Rac8?!

A natural move, but allowing Black's queen to become sidelined.

Instead, 16...Ng4? loses unexpectedly to 17.Bxg4 Bxg4 18.Bxg7 Kxg7 19.Rd5! with the point after 19...Qa7 20.Qxa7 Rxa7 -- Black's bishop will soon get trapped on the kingside by White's pawns.

But 16...Qc7 would have at least kept Black's queen in the game, which White can retain a clear edge with straightforward play: 17.b6 Qc6 18.c5! Ng4 (*or* 18...dxc5 19.Bxg5 Rfe8 20.h3!± stopping Ng4 threatening Bb5.) 19.Bxg4 Bxg4 20.Qe5.

17...Bb6 Qa8 18.c5!



A thematic and strong move. GM Macieja gets rid of his only weakness and opens up the d-file.

18...dxc5

Another option was 18...Rc6 19.cxd6 exd6 20.Bd4± where White is threatening f4-f5, with dangerous pressure against the f6-knight.

19.Bxc5 Rfe8

Black has considerably less space, though everything is protected.

20.Rd2!

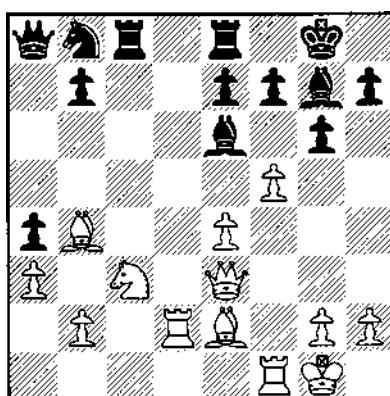
A simple improving move, something that Black is surprisingly without!

20...Nd7

Lacking a good plan, GM Macieja decides to reposition his knight.

A move like 20...b5 could be strongly met with 21.h3!± defending the g4 square and intending Bxb5 next.

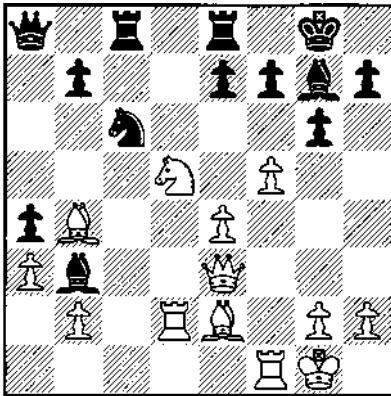
21.Bb4 Nb8 22.f5!



Now that Black's knight has left the kingside, this thematic advance is even more powerful.

22...Bb3 23.Nd5 Nc6

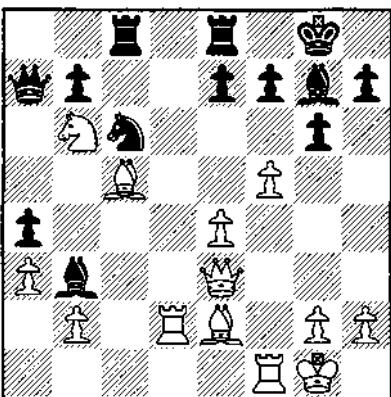
Hopeless was 23...Bxd5 24.exd5+ in view of the coming Bb5.



24.Nb6

24.Bb5! was also winning, intending to meet 24...Nxb4 with 25.fxg6! hxg6 (or 25...Bxd5 26.Bxe8 Rxe8 27.exd5 hxg6 28.Qf4!+-) 26.Bxe8 Rxe8 27.Nc7+-.

24...Qa7 25.Bc5!

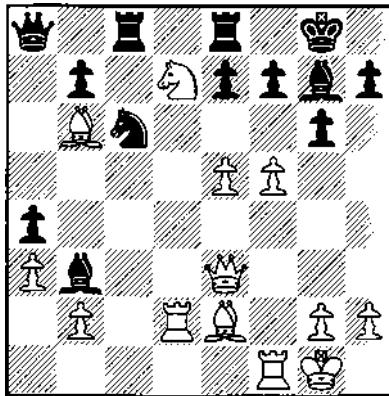


Completely paralyzing all of Black's pieces.

25...Rcd8 26.Nd7 Qa8 27.Bb6 Rc8

27...Rxd7 would offer little relief after 28.Rxd7 Bxb2 29.Bb5±.

28.e5!+-

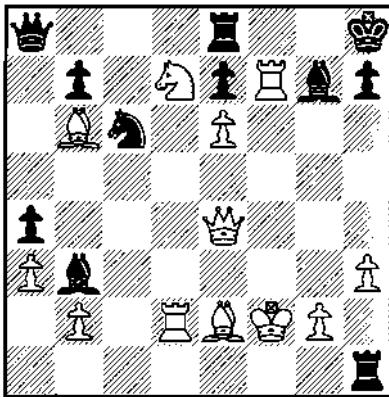


Starting with this move Almasi plays perfectly and performs a swift kill. There is no longer any sort of defense, as Black's pieces are too inactive to deal with White's incoming onslaught.

28...Na5 29.e6 gxf5

Not 29...Nc4 30.exf7+--.

30.Rxf5 Rc1+ 31.Kf2 Nc6 32.Rxf7 Kh8 33.Qe4 Rh1 34.hxg5 1-0

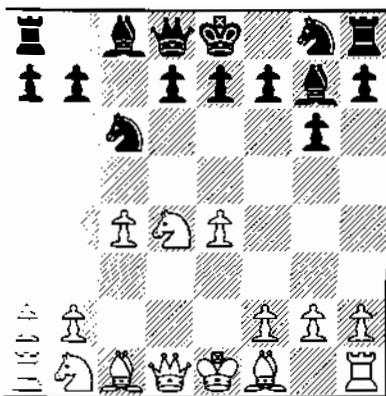


Black resigned in view of the deadly Bd3. After this execution-style of victory by GM Almasi, 10...Nc6 has more or less fallen completely out of fashion.

Game 30

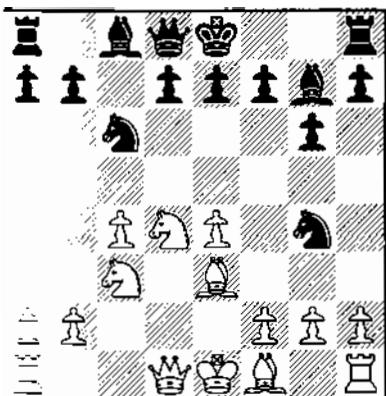
Rodríguez Céspedes –
Hernández Onna
Cuba Championship,
Camagüey 1988

- 1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4
4.Nxd4 g6 5.c4 Bg7



The classical main line. 5...Nf6
is covered in the previous two
chessbooks.

- 6.Be3 Nf6 7.Nc3 Ng4!?



A sharp alternative to the slow,
strategic lines that normally arise
in the Maróczy Bind. Instead of the

usual trade Nc6xd4, Black instead gives up his kingside knight and opens up the dark-squared bishop.

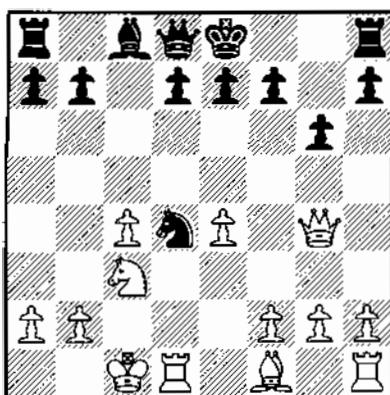
7...O-O leads to the main line and will be covered in Game 31.

- 8.Qxg4

White has no other choice.

- 8...Nxd4

8...Bxd4?! is quite speculative, as Black is left without any kingside defenders. White should proceed energetically with 9.Bxd4 Nxd4 10.O-O-O!



The key move. Black must now choose between retreating or protecting the knight:

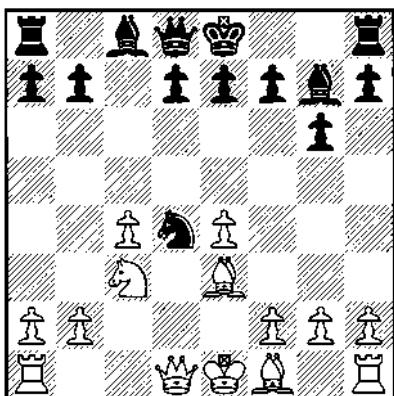
On 10...Ne6?! White should make use of his lead in development, for example 11.Qf4! d6 12.c5! O-O 13.h4!→, Rodshtein–Leniart, Collado Villalba 2010.

Similarly, if 10...Ne6?! then 11.f4!↑, and f4-f5 is coming with great power, Smejkal–Karlik, Bayern 1994.

If Black protects the Knight with 10...e5 then 11.Qg3 d6 12.f4! Very natural and strong. 12...f6 13.f5! Kf7 (13...gx f5? loses instantly to 14.Qg7 Rf8 15.Nd5 with threats of Nc7+, as well as Rxd4 and Be2, Almasi–

Marosi, Hungary 1992.) 14.Ne2!↑ and White soon broke through Black's defenses in Serper–I.Ivanov, Las Vegas 1997.

9.Qd1

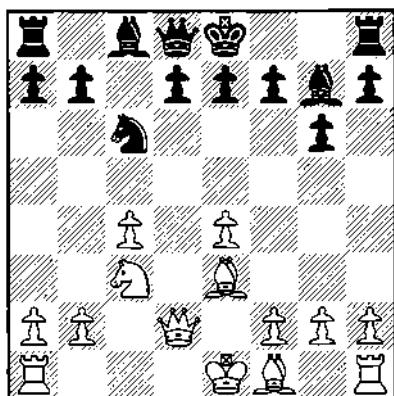


A necessary retreat.

9...Ne6

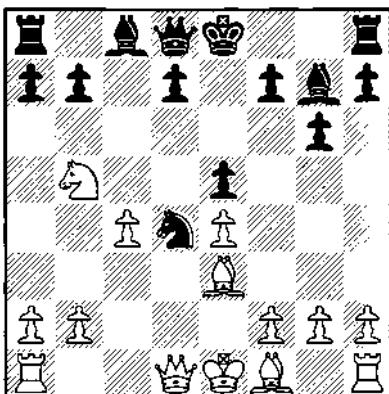
The main move—from e6 the knight controls the c5, d4, f4, and g5 squares.

Although playable, 9...Nc6 poses little challenge to White, as the knight is not effective on c6 in this structure. White can earn a plus by completing his development, for example 10.Qd2

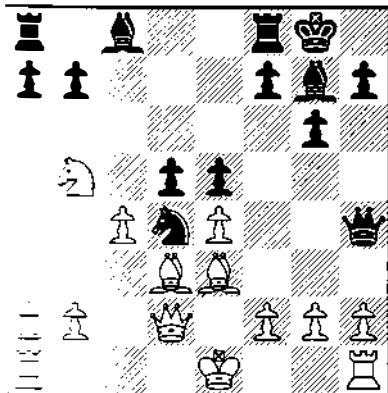


And now 10...d6 (or 10...Qa5 11.Rc1-d6 12.Be2±) 11.Be2 O-O 12.O-O Be7 13.Rac1 Qa5 14.b3± followed by f2-f4-f5. Black lacks significant counterplay, Roiz–Cmilyte, Helsingør 2008.

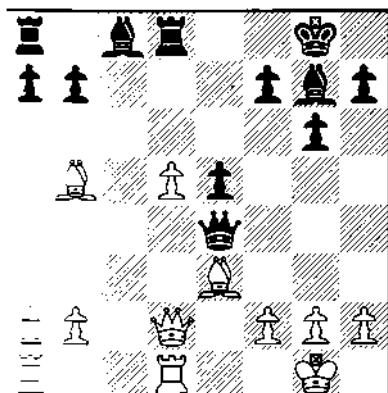
However 9...e5 is quite an important sideline. Black secures his knight in the center at the cost of giving up the d5 square. We believe White should challenge this knight immediately with 10.Nb5!?



10...O-O (10...Nxb5?! gives White a clear edge after 11.cxb5 O-O 12.Bc4-d6 13.O-O Be6 14.Rc1±, with superior dark-squared bishop and pressure against Black's d6 pawn. Tatar Kis–Feher, Hungary 2008.) 11.Qd2 (11.Nxd4?! leads to disaster after 11...exd4 12.Bxd4 Qa5+! 13.Kc1 Re8 14.f3 d5! 15.Bxg7 Rxe4± where White is pretty much busted. Now White is threatening Nxc4 winning a pawn, so Black must react: 11...Qh4!? Otherwise Black may quickly find himself in a passive position. (Instead, 11...Qe7 falls woefully short of equalizing after 12.Bd3 c6 13.O-O Be6 14.Nxd4 exd4 15.Bh5 Bxh6 16.Qxh6±. Black's d4 pawn is terminally weak, Plaskett–Roger Skien 1979.) 12.Bd3 d5!?



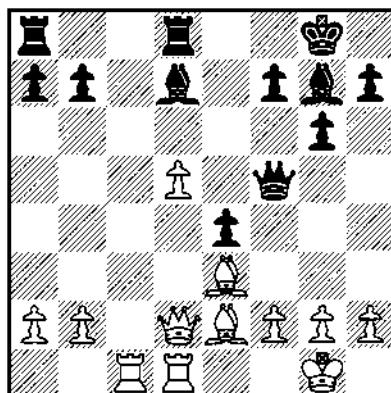
necessary, and quite a tricky one if White is caught unaware. $\text{e}5$ The right capture. ($13.\text{exd}5?!$ answered with $13...\text{Bh}3!$ leading to $\text{Bxd}4 \text{ exd}4 15.\text{gxh}3 \text{ a}6\infty$. Black tremendous compensation for the pawn with threats of $\text{Bh}6$, $\text{Re}8+$, etc., Gufeld-Espig, GER-chT 1994.) Now $\text{Nf}5$ is $\text{Nxb}5 14.\text{Bxb}5 \text{ Qxe}4 15.\text{O-O}$ and $16.\text{Rfd}1$



White has a small lead in development and a potentially strong pawn. Let's see how play might proceed:

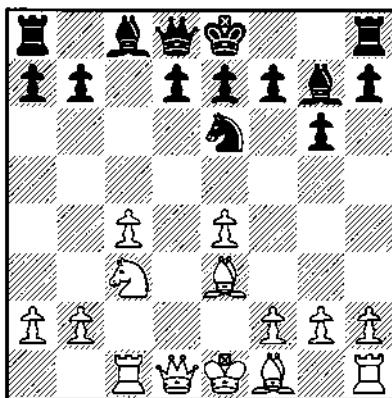
a) $16...\text{Be}6?$ is refuted by $17.\text{f}3! \text{Qf}5$ (not $17...\text{Qxd}5?? 18.\text{Qe}2+-$) $18.\text{Bd}3! \text{Rxd}5 19.\text{Bxf}5 \text{ Rxd}2 20.\text{Rxd}2\pm$, with a technically winning endgame, Mednis-Capece, Reggio Emilia 1973.

b) Better is $16...\text{Qf}5 17.\text{Rac}1 \text{ Bd}7 18.\text{Be}2 \text{ e}4$

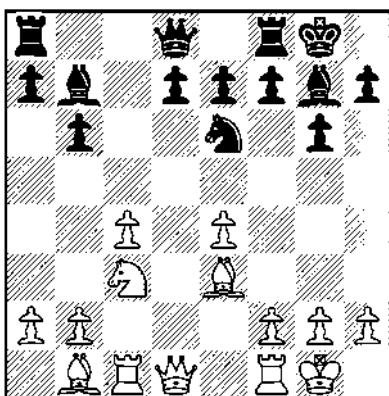


and now $19.\text{h}3!\text{N}$ is a logical improvement. (better than $19.\text{Rc}7 \text{Bc}6=$, Gufeld-Espig, Sukhumi 1972) It is not so easy for Black to find a useful move. White may soon play $\text{Qb}4$ and target Black's queenside. Playing either $\text{a}7-\text{a}6$ or $\text{b}7-\text{b}6$ will allow either $\text{Bb}6$ or $\text{Ba}6$. After $19...\text{h}5 20.\text{d}6\pm$ White has a clearly preferable position.

10.Rc1!



**10...b6 11.Bd3 Bb7 12.O-O O-O
13.Bb1**



White's entire setup starts with this move—next is Bd3, often followed by Bb1. After castling, White should aim to play f4-f5 with a kingside attack.

10...Qa5

Black's most common move, developing the queen before playing b7-b6. Generally speaking, Black's idea in this variation is to control the central dark squares. The moves b7-b6, d7-d6, and even g6-g5 are all very common for the second player.

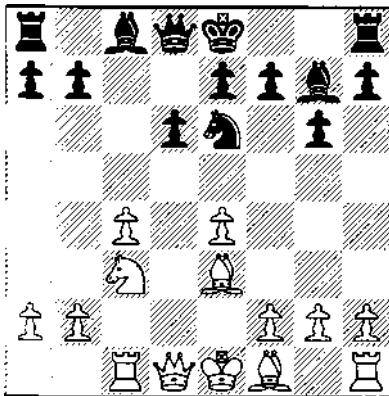
Black can also keep the queen on d8, in which case White should stick to the usual setup with Bd3-b1, O-O, Qd2, and f2-f4-f5. Playing b2-b3 is only necessary if the c4 pawn comes under pressure. Otherwise b2-b4 is stronger, controlling the c5 square.

Let's take a look at a few examples where Black chose to keep the queen on d8:

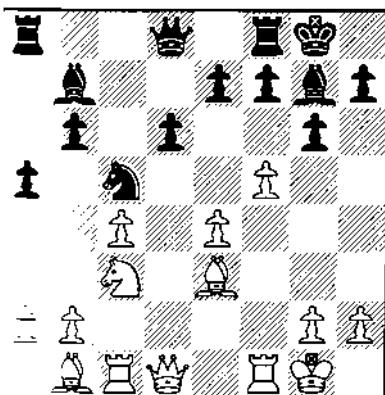
a) The active looking 13...f5 did not lead to much for Black after 14.exf5 gxf5 15.b4 Qe8 16.f4 K \rightarrow 17.Nd5 d6 18.g4!? fxg4 19.Qxg4–Akesson–Ward, Gausdal 1996.

b) Alternatively, 13...Rc8 14.b3 \widehat{B} 15.f4. Simply put, Black lacks enough pressure on the c4 and e4 pawns to deter White from advancing on the kingside. 15...Nc5 16.f5 a6 (16...Bxc3 lost on the spot after 17.Rxc3 Nxe4 18.Bxe4 Bxe4 19.Bh6 Re8 20.Qc4 1–0, Nisipeanu–Todoran, Curtea de Arges 2002.) 17.Nd5 Nd7 18.Q \widehat{B} Bxd5 19.exd5 \pm , Espig–Hernández Onna, Tallinn 1975. The open e-file gives White an excellent game, and Black is still without sufficient counterplay.

Similarly, after 10...d6



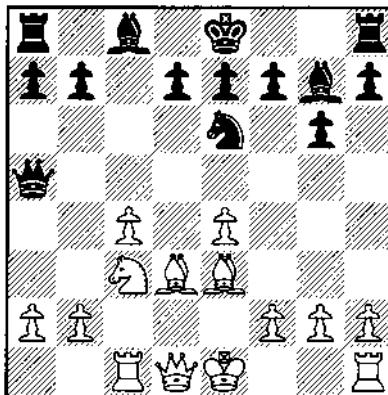
Black is also unlikely to equalize:
11.Bd3 O-O 12.O-O Nc5 (Or
11...Bd7 13.f4 Nc5 14.Bb1 a5 15.f5
16.Qd2± followed by b2-b3,
etc., with a plus.) 13.Bb1 a5 (or
Be6 14.b4! Nd7 15.Nd5±, Vallejo
Perez-Felgaer, Oropesa del Mar 1999)
14.f4 b6 15.f5 Bb7



Now recommend 16.Qd2N. The ideal spot for the queen, which can transfer to f2 if needed or support Bh6. (16.Qg4 was played in Soltis-Glienke, Germany 2000) EoS (Once again 16...Bxc3? fails in view of 17.Qxc3 Nxe4 18.Bxe4 Bxe4

19.Bh6±.) 17.Nd5±, with the ideal attacking formation—next White can double rooks on the f-file and play Bh6.

11.Bd3



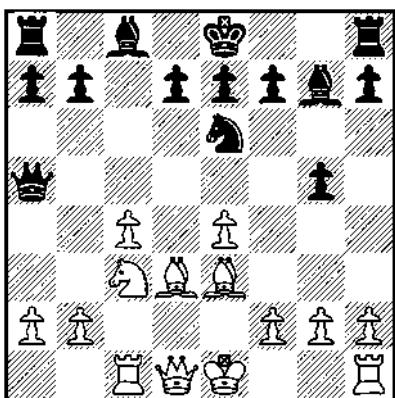
As we've seen before, this bishop belongs on the b1-h7 diagonal, from where it defends the e4 pawn and supports the common advance f2-f4-f5.

11...b6

The most common move, fianchettoing the light-squared bishop, but let's see some of Black's other tries as well. We look at 11...Bxc3+?! , 11...g5, and 11...d6.

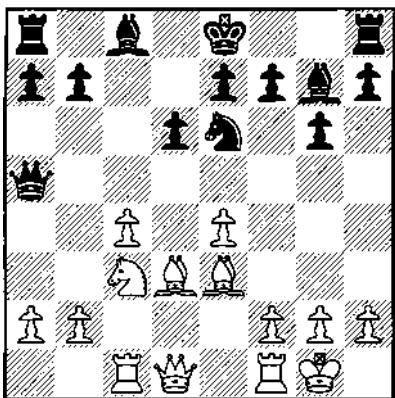
11...Bxc3+?! is not in the spirit of the position and is quite speculative: 12.Rxc3 Qxa2 13.Qc1! with the threat of Ra3. 13...Qa5 14.c5! Cramping Black's position. The following encounter instructively demonstrates White's compensation: 14...O-O 15.O-O Qc7 16.f4! This advance is even more dangerous with the absence of Black's dark-squared bishop. 16...d6 17.f5 Nxc5 18.Bd4 Qd7 19.Qh6 f6 20.Bxc5 dxc5 21.Bc4++, and the clocks were stopped in Sadorra-Halay, Kuala Lumpur 2006.

A frequent idea in this line is 11...g5:



Black is taking control over the f4 square at the cost of weakening the kingside. 12.O-O Qe5?! 13.c5! Restricting both b7-b6 and d7-d6. 13...O-O 14.Nd5 Nf4. This happened in Fedorowicz–Abramovic, New York 1988, and now 15.Qd2 would have given White an enormous advantage, for if 15...Nxd3 then 16.Qxd3+– with the threat of Bd2-c3.

11...d6 is quite sensible, and now play might continue 12.O-O

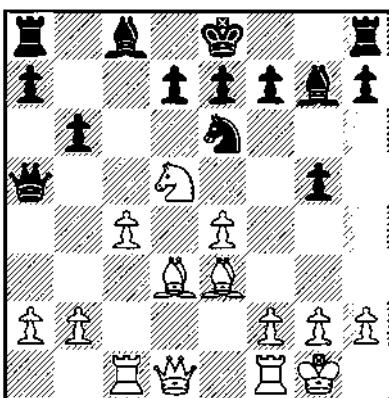


12...Bd7 (12...g5?! is strongly met with 13.Qh5!N, with a powerful initiative.)

13.a3 Bc6 14.Qd2 O-O 15.Bb1 Rf8– 16.f4→, Bu Xiangzhi–Gao Ningbo 2011. White has more space and a ready-made attack with ideas of Nd5, f4-f5, etc.

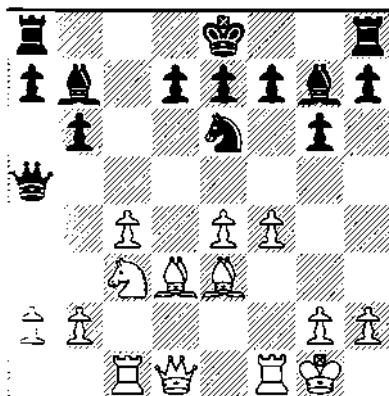
12.O-O Bb7

An important alternative here is 12...g5?! which should be answered with 13.Nd5! offering a pawn for a strong initiative:



13...Bxb2 (*Declining the pawn is at least safe: 13...Bb7 14.a4! threatens to trap Black's queen with b2-b4 14...Bc6 15.b3 h5? 16.Bd2! Qd5 17.Bxg5!+, Razuvayev–Ermenko, Polanica Zdroj 1972.*) 14.Rb1 Bf8– 15.a4! The queen is running out of safe squares, and the threat is Bd2– 15...Ba6 16.Bd2 Qc5 17.Bb4 Qd4 18.Nxe7+–, Flumbort–Zawadzki, Balatonlelle 2002.

13.f4



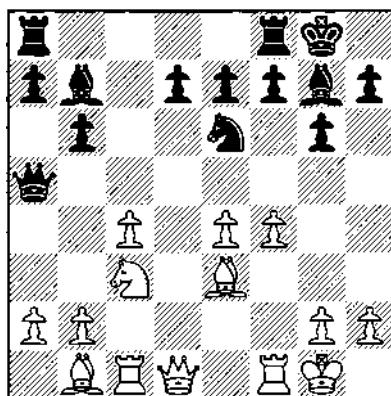
The most natural plan in the position. White now threatens to play 14...f5 in a moment's notice, targeting Black's kingside.

13...O-O

Trading dark-squared bishops with 13...Bd4?! is dubious in view of 14.Bxd4 Nxd4 15.Nd5! Bxd5 15...Nxd5±, where Black has issues with the knight on d4, Stohl-Spancic, Austria 1995.

13...Nc5 14.Bb1 Qb4 should also be met with 15.Nd5!N (15.Qe2 was played in Papp-Finegold, Lubbock 1990) 15...Bxd5 16.Qxd5 O-O 17.b3± with a comfortable edge in space. White can continue with f4-f5, Bg5, and doubling rooks on the f-file.

14.Bb1

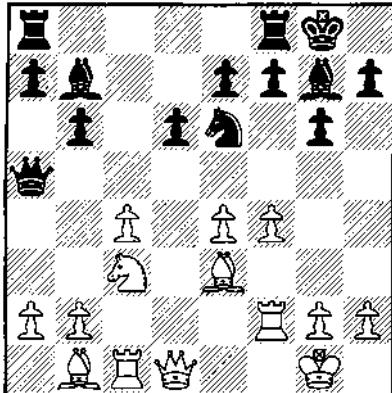


A useful move, White is in no hurry to advance on the kingside.

14...d6

The natural 14...Nc5? actually runs Black's queen into trouble after 15.Bd2! At first the computer suggests 15...Bd4+ (15...Qa6 16.b4 Ne6 17.a4+- was already hopeless for Black in San Segundo Carrillo-Granero Roca, Zaragoza 1998.) 16.Kh1 Qb4, followed by the obnoxious infiltration 17.b3 Qa3 18.Nb5 Qb2 19.Rc2 Qa1 and only here realizes that after 20.Bb4!+- Black's queen is trapped and will be lost within a few moves.

15.Rf2!



A nice move, protecting the b2 pawn and making room for an eventual Rcf1.

15...Rac8 16.Nd5

Also interesting was 16.f5 Nc5 17.Qg4↑ followed by Nd5 and Rcf1, looking for a breakthrough on the kingside—the h-pawn may be eager to join White's attack as well.

16...Bxd5

This exchange is often practically forced.

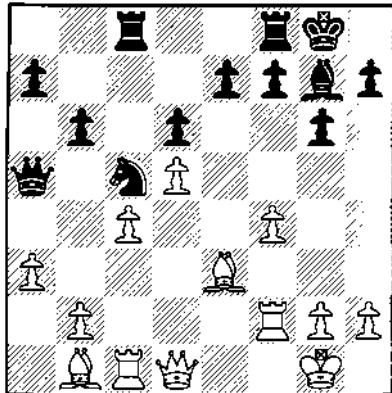
Passively defending with 16...Rfe8 is not a great option, due to 17.f5 Nf8 18.Qf3→ and White is in full control.

17.exd5

The correct recapture, opening up the bishop and keeping a queenside majority.

17.cxd5?! leaves Black with no problems after 17...Rxc1 18.Qxc1 Nc5=.

17...Nc5 18.a3!?



This move doesn't come with a threat, since b2-b4 can be met with Qxa3, and the bishop on e3 is hanging. Still, the move is useful as Black immediately errs in response.

Another option was to initiate matters on the kingside with 18.f5= **18...Na4?**

A huge oversight, allowing White to expand on the queenside.

The only way to equalize was 18...b5!, creating some much-needed counterplay on the queenside. White should continue 19.f5∞, with dynamic chances for both sides, as 19.b4? Qxa3 20.bxc5 Qxe3 is simply winning for Black, who can follow up with Bd4.

19.b4 Qa6 20.Qb3!

The knight on a4 is stranded—White threatens b4-b5 and Bd2.

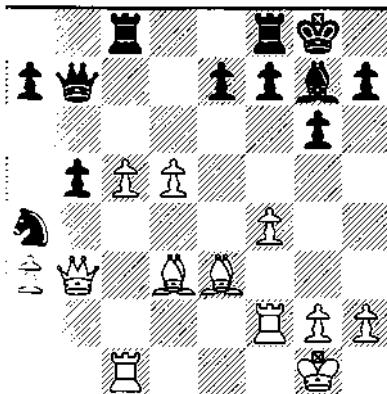
20...b5

The only move to save the knight.

21.Bd3

The direct 21.c5!± was even better.

21...Qb7 22.c5 dxc5 23.bxc5±



White's pieces are placed beautifully to support the powerful e and d-pawns. Black's position is nearly hopeless.

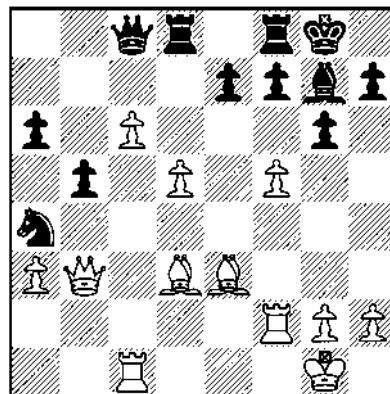
21...a6

Perhaps 23...Nxc5!? was the other practical choice, though after 24.Bxc5 24.Bxc5 (*but not 24...Rxc5? Rxc5 25.Bxc5 Rc8! 26.Bb4 Bf1=*), 24...Bd4 25.Bxd4 Rxc1+, White's two bishops should eventually outplay the rook.

24 f5!

Opening the second front! Now White can combine threats on the kingside with the threat of advancing the e-pawn.

24...Rcd8 25.c6 Qc8



26.Kh1

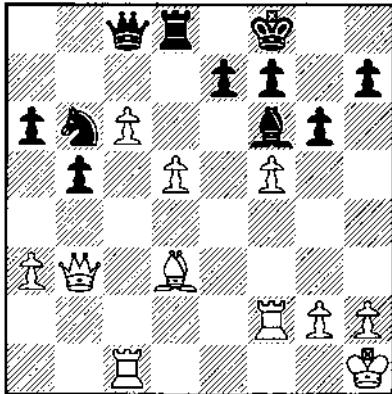
Already winning was 26.fxg6 hxg6 27.Bxg6! fxg6 28.d6+ e6 29.d7++. The pawns are too strong and the knight is still out of play on a4.

26...Bf6 27.Bh6 Nb6!?

Black gives up the exchange in hopes of establishing a blockade on the dark squares.

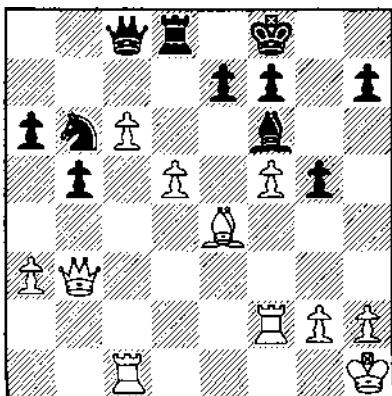
White should win easily after both 27...Bg7 28.Bg5, and 27...Rfe8 28.fxg6 hxg6 29.d6! followed by Bxg6.

28.Bxf8 Kxf8



Though White is up an exchange, it is not so simple to break through Black's defenses. Both players were likely in time-trouble at this point.

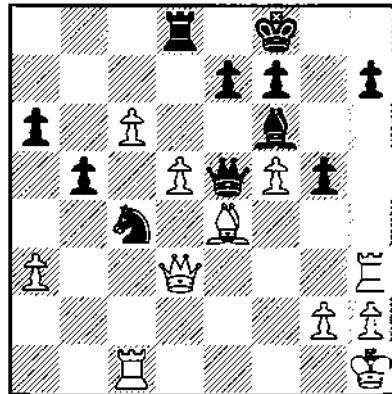
29.Be4 g5



30.Rf3

The direct 30.c7 was winning, thanks to a few precise moves: 30...Rd7 31.Rfc2 Nc4 32.d6! exd6 (or 32...Nxd6 33.Bd5+-) 33.a4 Rxc7 34.axb5 axb5 35.Qxb5+-.

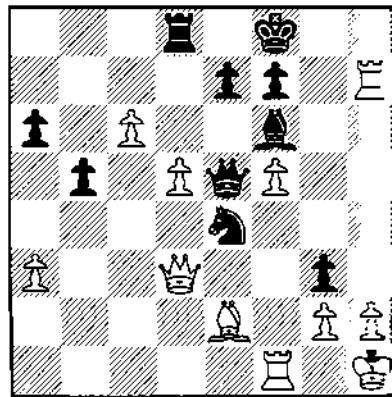
30...Qc7 31.Rh3 Qe5 32.Qd3 Nc4



Black is getting a bit compensation in the form of active piece play.

33.Rxh7 Nd6 34.Bf3 g4 35.Be1

35.Bxg4! was necessary, with the idea 35...Qf4 36.Qd1!+-.
35...Ne4 36.Rf1 g3!

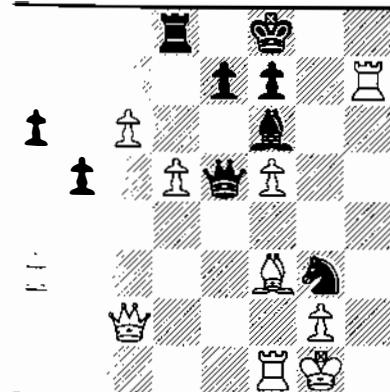


Suddenly Black has some serious counterplay, and White must be careful not to lose!

37.Qc2 Nf2+ 38.Kg1 Ne4

Black could have forced perpetual with 38...Qe3! for instance 39.Bf3 Ng4+ 40.Kh1 Nf2+=.

33... $\mathbb{N}xg3$ 40.Bf3 1-0



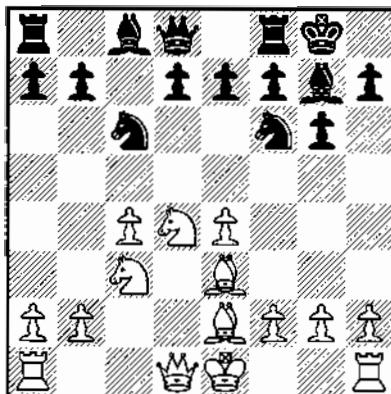
Apparently, Black overstepped time limit here and forfeited the game, though ironically the position is completely unclear. After any sensible move such as $Nxf1$ or $Qe3+$, White would have enough counterplay to hold the balance. Nevertheless, an important takeaway from this game is White's comfortable route to advantage in the middlegame.

Game 31

Carlsen – Lie

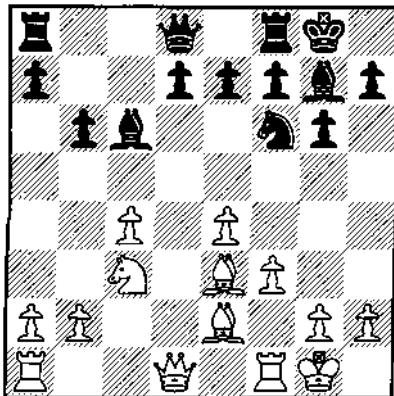
Aker Rapid Challenge, Gjøvik 2009

**1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4
4.Nxd4 g6 5.c4 Bg7 6.Be3 Nf6
7.Nc3 O-O 8.Bc2**

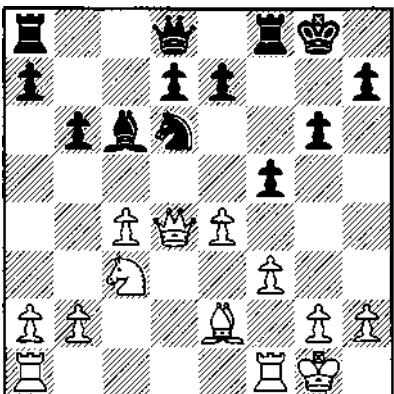


Before continuing with the main line **8...d6**, let's first explore Black's less common—though perfectly playable—options, **8...b6!?** here, and **8...Nxd4** on page 365.

8...b6!? **9.O-O Bb7** In this line Black aims to play in the style of the Hedgehog formation. White can definitely fight for a small advantage with typical 'Maróczy Bind' moves ($f2-f3$, $Qd2$, $Rac1$, $Rfd1$, etc.) but we'd also like to present a second option to our readers: **10.Nxc6!?**. In our opinion this leads to a small but stable edge for White. **10...Bxc6** (*If $10...dxc6$ then $11.e5!$ $Nd7$ $12.f4$ $Qc7$ $13.Qc2\pm$ with a healthy advantage in space, Ninov-Lerch, France 2009. The move $c6-c5$ will always run into $Nd5$, and $e7-e6$ will allow $Ne4-d6$.*) And now after **11.f3** we look at two lines:

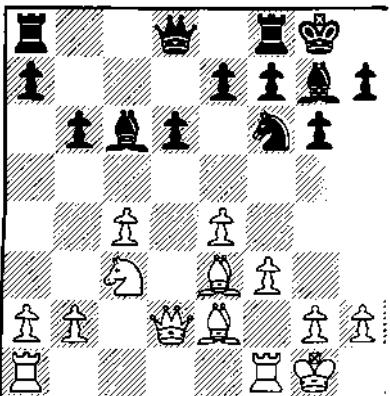


a) GM Baadur Jobava, a specialist of this line, chose 11...Ne8, with the idea of placing the knight on d6 and striking with f7-f5. The game continued 12.Qd2 Nd6 13.Bd4 Bxd4+ 14.Qxd4 f5

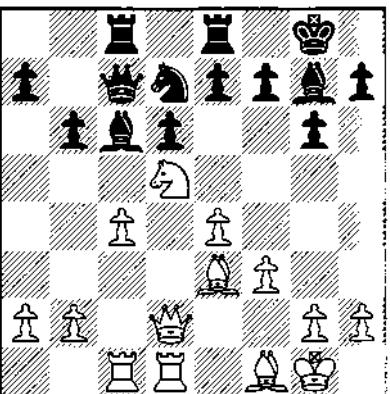


And now 15.b4! would have kept a considerable advantage in White's hands. (Instead, 15.e5 Nf7 16.f4± was only marginally better for White in Nitin-Jobava, Dubai UAE 2012.) After 15...fxe4 16.fxe4 Qc7 17.Rad1± White can continue with either b4-b5, e4-e5, or Nd5 Bxd5 Qxd5+, with pressure against Black's position.

b) Instead, most games have continued 11...d6 12.Qd2



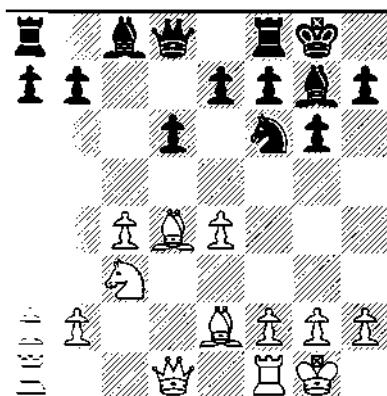
What we have here is a typical Maróczy Bind where Black is simply without any active play—note how the b6 pawn prevents Black's queen from reaching e5. For example, 12...Nd7 (Or 12...Rb8 13.Rac1 Rb8 14.Rc2 b5 15.cxb5 a5 16.a3±, Felgaer-Almeida Quintana, Barcelona 2006.) 13.Rac1 Fd5 14.Rfd1 Re8 15.Bf1 Improving the bishop (sometimes g2-g3 and Bg3 can come into play), and preparing Qf2. 15...Qc7 16.Nd5



16...Qb8 (16...Bxd5? 17.cxd5 Qc7 18.Bb5!± would give White control over the queenside.) 17.Bd2 Kf8 18.Qf2↑, Nyback-Kolb

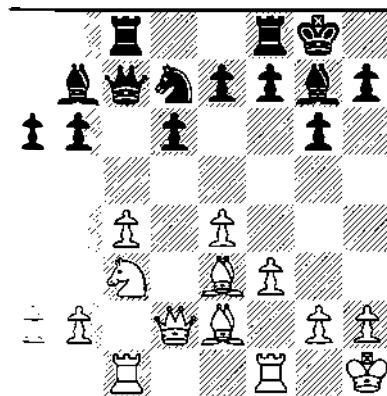
Stockholm 2006. White is clearly better, and threatens Qh4 next.

A small chunk of games have continued 8...Nxd4 9.Bxd4 d6 10.O-O



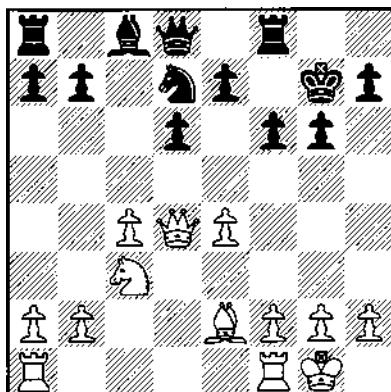
Now Black can transpose into the main line—with Bd7 11.Qd2 Bc6—but there are a few independent options that merit examination, such as 10...b6, Nd7, and 10...Be6:

10...b6 leads to similar variations that we saw in the line 10...Bc6, for example 11.Qd2 Bb7 12.f3 13.Rac1 Nd7 14.Be3 a6 15.Kh1



16.Rc2 An interesting plan, lining up the rooks along the c-file. (Another option was the straightforward 16.Nd5 Qd8 17.Bg5 Re8 18.b4± followed by Rfd1, a2-a3, f3-f4, Bf3, etc.) 16...Ne5 17.Rfc1 e6 18.Na4 Nd7 19.b4±, J.Ye-J.Xie, Taiyuan 2004. This is a more or less classic Hedgehog position.

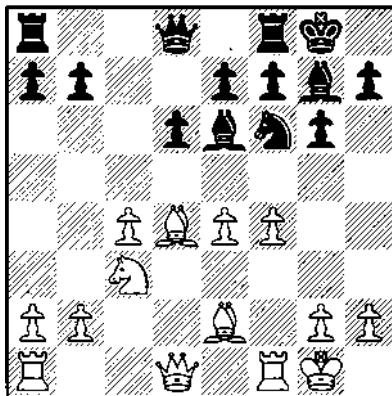
b) The exchange of bishops after 10...Nd7 11.Bxg7 Kxg7 is favorable for White, who can prevent Black from reaching a comfortable position: 12.Qd4+ f6



b1) 13.Rad1 Qb6 14.Qd2 Nc5 15.Nd5 Qd8 16.Qe3! Preparing f2-f4 and e4-e5, breaking open Black's position. 16...e5? Stopping White's plan but at the cost of a pawn. 17.Nc3! Ne6 18Nb5±, Navara-Popov, Aix-les-Bains 2011.

b2) Another instructive game continued 13.Rfd1 a5 14.b3 Nc5 15.Rab1! Starting a fairly common plan of seizing more space—a2-a3 and b3-b4. 15...Be6 16.Qe3 Bf7 17.a3 Nd7 18.b4 axb4 19.axb4 b6 20.Nd5±, Adams-Young, Newark 1995. In case of Bxd5, White will happily recapture cxd5, followed by Bb5-c6, with a firm grip over the queenside.

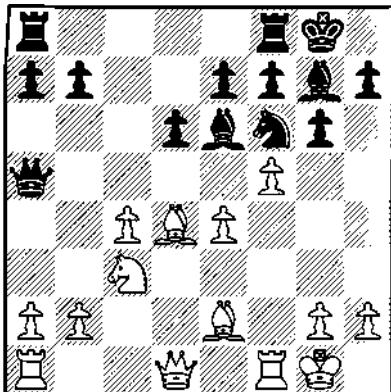
c) Lastly, 10...Be6 is seen most often, with a sensible plan of placing pressure on the c4 pawn. If you'll recall from Game 29, we suggested an energetic approach to dealing with the bishop on e6: 11.f4!



In our view, this aggressive plan is the best way to counter Black's setup. The threat of f4-f5 followed by Qe1-h4 is a potent attacking motif. In response, Black has chosen from three different plans:

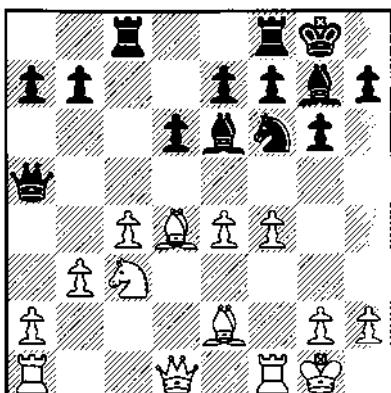
c1) 11...Qc8?! with the idea to trade bishops after 12.b3 Bg4 runs into 13.e5! a powerful thrust, leaving White with all the play after 13...Bxe2 (or 13...dxe5 14.fxe5 Bxe2 15.Qxe2 Nd7 16.Nd5±) 14.Qxe2 Nd7 15.Rad1 Re8 16.exd6 exd6 17.Qf2±, Golod–Mensch, Biel 2010.

c2) Against the immediate 11...Qa5 White can press forward anyway—12.f5!



12...Bd7 (12...gxf5 13.exf5 Bxf5? loses the bishop after 14.b4+) And now 13.a3! Gaining even more space on the queenside. 13...Rfc8 14.b4 Qc5 15.Qe1! Bc6 16.Qh4↑, Rashkovsky–Movsesian, Perm 1971. Next is Ra2 and Nd5.

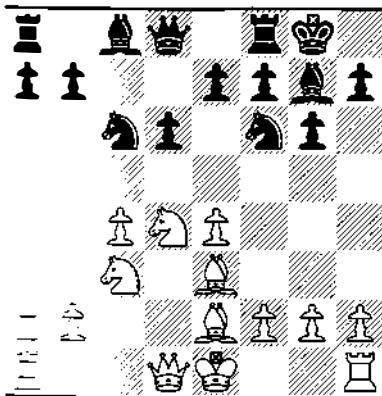
c3) Lastly, 11...Rc8 forces 12.b3 and now 12...Qa5 puts pressure on White's knight:



Nevertheless, this position is still highly favorable for the first player, for example 13.Rc1 (13.f5 is not as effective in view of 13...Bd7 14.Qe1 Ne8! 15.Bxg7 Kxg7 where White has nothing better than 16.Nd5 Qxc1 17.Raxe1± with a small plus.) 13...Ra5

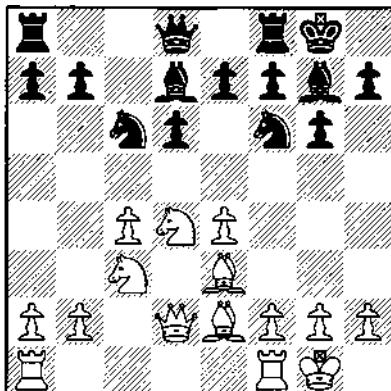
- 14. Kh8 15.Kh1 Ng8?! Much too passive, though after any other move White would continue f4-f5 and end with a large advantage. 16.f5 \pm 17.Nd5!±. Total domination!
- Smet-Kempinski, Deutschland

We return to our main game,
- 5.Be2:
- E6



We finally reached the main line of the Maróczy Bind, a battleground for players of all levels. Throughout this line the play will be straightforward, using general themes such as controlling the center, gaining more prophylaxis, and so on.

9.O-O Bd7 10.Qd2



White has tried other natural moves here as well, including 10.Rc1 and 10.f2-f3, but placing the queen on d2 at once is flexible and considered the main line.

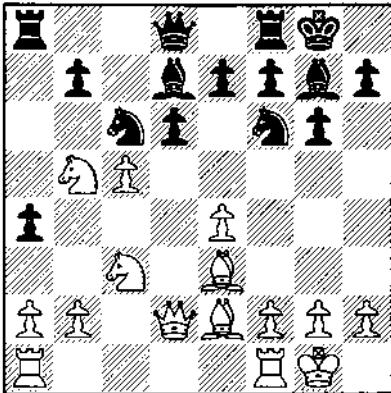
10...Nxd4

The overwhelming main choice, trading knights in order to place the bishop on c6.

Black has also attempted several other ideas, but in most cases White can claim an advantage without doing anything special, as these lines are not very concrete. We look at five alternatives: 10...Qa5?!, 10...a5, 10...a6, 10...Ng4, and 10...Rc8.

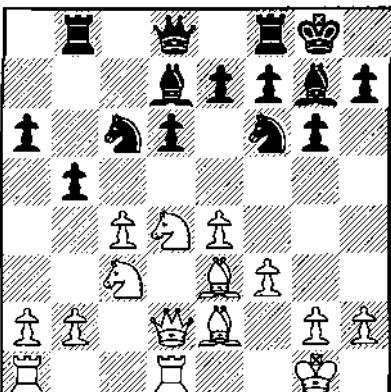
White can embarrass Black's queen after 10...Qa5?! with 11.Nb3, forcing the queen to retreat, since 11...Qb4? loses finely to 12.Qd1!!N threatening a2-a3. After 12...Na5 White must find 13.e5! dx5 14.Bc5+ and the game is already over.

10...a5 is a clever thought, preparing to meet b2-b3 with a5-a4, gaining counterplay along the a-file. As GM Smeets demonstrates, White should quickly make use of the b5 square: 11.Ndb5 a4 12.c5!:



Making full use of White's central presence. 12...Ng4 (*Perhaps 12...dxc5 was the lesser evil, though 13.Bxc5 Bg4 14.Qe3 Bxe2 15.Qxe2± leaves White with a clear edge, and Rfd1 is next.*) 13.Bxg4 Bxg4 14.cxd6 exd6 15.Rac1±, Smeets–Hausrath, Germany 2006. White has fantastic squares for his pieces and an easy target on d6.

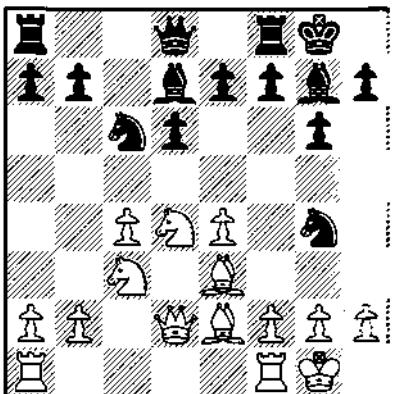
Another plan starts with 10...a6, looking to prepare the b7-b5 advance. This shouldn't concern White too much, for example 11.f3 Rb8 12.Rfd1 b5



13.cxb5 Nxd4 14.Bxd4 axb5 15.a3!
Fixing the b5 pawn. 15...Ne8 (or

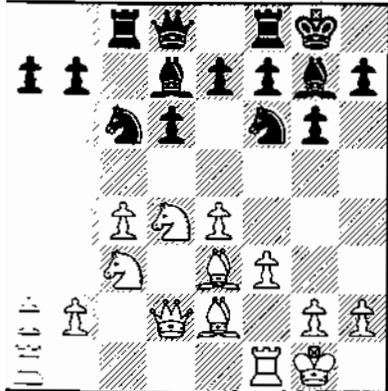
15...b4 16.axb4 Rxb4 17.Bxf6 E= 18.Nd5±) 16.Nd5 Be6 17.Nb4 Q= 18.Rac1±, with full control over the queenside, Steingrimsson–A. Hilversum 2010.

Another try is 10...Ng4:

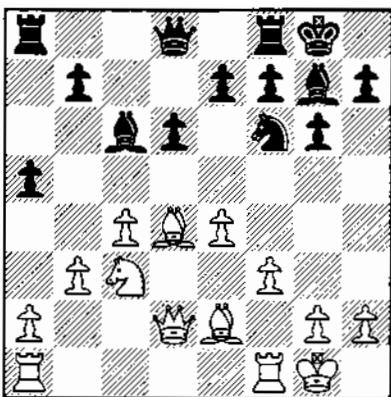


As we saw in the game L. Ivanchuk on page 341 in Game 2, White should have no qualms about giving up the light-squared bishop in this manner: 11.Bxg4 Bxg4 12.f3 E= 13.Rfd1 Rc8 14.b3 Black still lacks space and any kind of active play. 14...a6 15.Rac1 Re8 16.Nd5 N= 17.Bxd4 Bxd4+ 18.Qxd4±, Fridman–Tyomkin, Mallorca 2004. More space and the superior minor piece should satisfy White's goals for this opening.

Lastly, 10...Rc8 is a flexible choice, but we don't see how Black can be happy with such a cramped position. For example 11.f3:

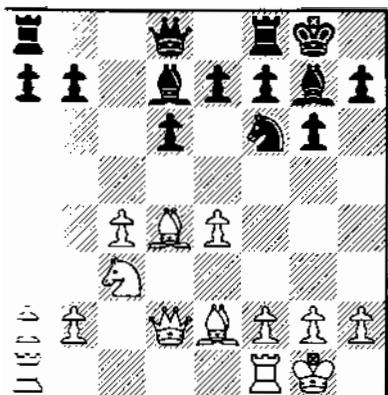


12...Nd7 13.Be3 a5 14.b3
transposes to the main line.
13.b3!



Ne5 (Or 11...a6 12.Rac1 Re8 13.b3! Qa5 14.Nb3 Qh5 15.c5± follow-Dimitrov, Sunny Beach BUL)
14. 12.b3 a6 13.Rac1 Re8 14.Nd5
- If this move is necessary then something has clearly gone wrong
- Black. (If instead 14...Nxd5 then 15.b3±.) 15.Nxf6+ Bxf6 16.Rfd1 Qc7 ± Nc2±, Lalic–Caizzone, Amantea 1999. with pressure along the d-file, Bf3-f4 is a threat as well.

Back to our game, after **10...Nxd4**:
Bxd4



11...Bc6 12.f3 a5
Controlling the b4 square and potentially threatening a5-a4.

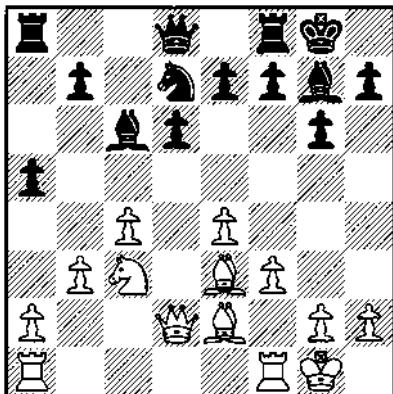
A precise move, planning to answer **A5-a4** with **b3-b4**. White has completed the Maróczy Bind, and the main plan now is to slowly gain space on the queenside through the moves Rab1, Rfc1, a2-a3 and b3-b4. After taking control of c5, White should look for a favorable spot to play Nd5 and then transfer the rooks to the e- and f-files, followed by advancing the f-pawn. Overextending by playing f3-f4 too hastily (especially with the bishop on c6) is something White should avoid. To illustrate all of this we'd like to present an impeccable game by Carlsen, whose methodical style is well-suited for growing White's advantage in this type of middlegame.

13...Nd7

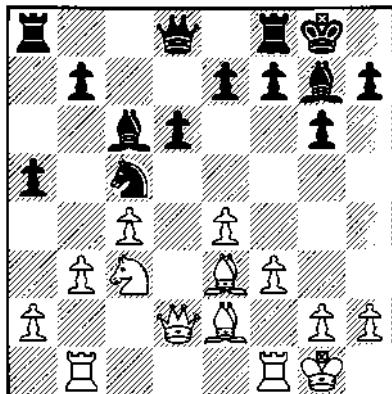
The only logical move, re-routing the knight to c5 and offering a trade of dark squared bishops.

After **13...a4?!** **14.b4±** White has already achieved his main queenside plan of controlling c5.

14.Be3



15.Rab1!



In previous lines, we saw a few examples where White was quite happy to trade dark-squared bishops, as this left Black's king vulnerable. That isn't the case here, so White should avoid the trade and keep the bishop for the time being.

14...Nc5

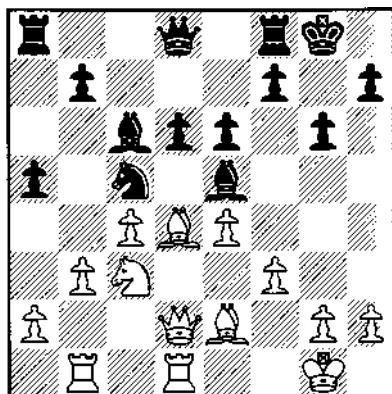
The dynamic-looking 14...f5?! has more bark than bite. White should react sensibly: 15.exf5 gxf5 (or 15...Rxf5 16.f4!N threatening Bg4. 16...Rf8 17.Bg4 Nc5 18.Rad1±) 16.Rac1± followed by Nd5 and Rfe1. Black's advance has simply created weaknesses, Illescas Cordoba-Guidez, France 1991.

The start of White's queenside expansion.

15...Qb6

Activating the queen and preparing Rfc8.

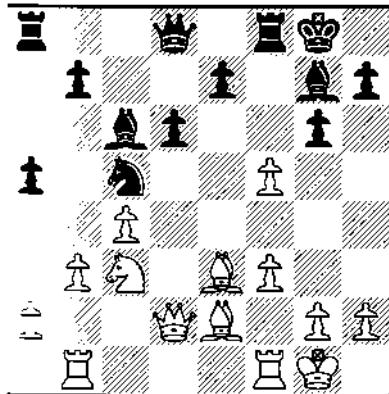
15...e6 has also been seen a significant number of times, taking control over d5. Naturally, White should exploit the weakening of the d6 pawn: 16.Rfd1 Be5 17.Bd4!



The structure has changed—it is now in White's favor to trade dark-squared bishops, as this would leave d6 undefendable. 17...Qe7 18.Bc1 Rfd8 19.Qe3 Bxd4 Black could delay

an exchange, but not for long, as White would next play $Rd2$ and $Rcd1$, followed by $f3-f4$. 20. $Rxd4$ $e5$ 21. $Rd2$ \pm 22. $Rbd1$ $Kg7$ 23. $g3!$ \pm opening the gate for $Bh3$, Topalov–Reinderman, \ddot{A} ak aan Zee 1999. White has a large positional plus— $Nd4$ can always be met with $Ne2$.

In this position, 15... $f5$ is a decent attempt to mix things up, as Black's knight is already on $c5$. Nevertheless, White gets the upper hand with precise play: 16. $exf5$

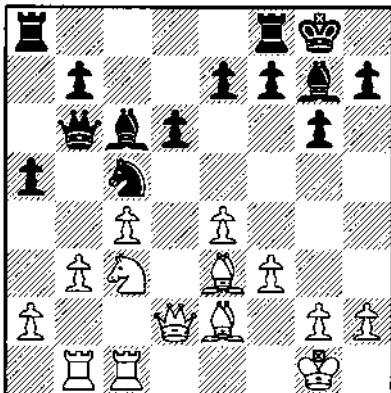


Now:

- 16... $gxf5$?! is quite risky in view of 17. $Nd5!$ $Bxd5$ (or 17... $Rf7$ 18. $Rfd1$! – 19. $Nf4$ $Rd7$ 20. $a3!$ \pm , Ftacnik–Sas, Istanbul 2000) 18. $Qxd5+$ (18. $cxd5!$? \pm) 18... $e6$ 19. $Qd2$ \pm , Sopov–Gelashvili, Golden Sands 2000. White has the two bishops and strong pressure against Black's central pawns.

- 16... $Rxf5$ should again be met with 17. $f4!$ with the idea $Bg4$. 17... $e6$?! (18. $Rbd1!$ \pm was even stronger) 18. $Rf8$ 19. $Bxc5$ $dxc5$ 20. $Bxe6$ + \pm , Leko–Vachier Lagrave, Plovdiv 2005.

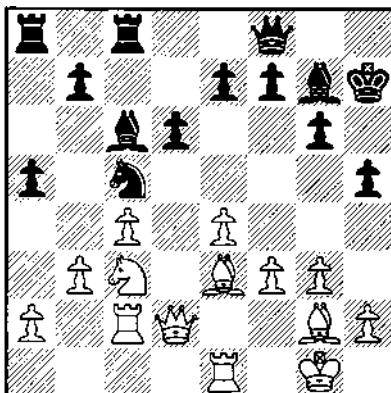
16. $Rfc1$



Simply continuing the plan.

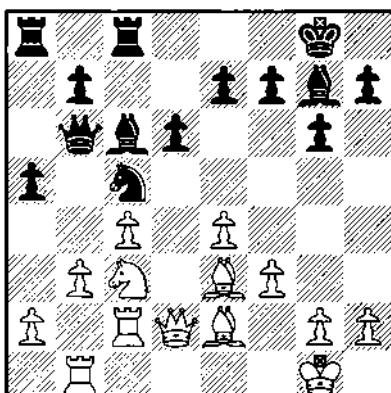
16... $Rfc8$

After 16... $Qb4$, threatening to play $a5-a4$, White has a powerful positional response: 17. $Rc2!$ with the idea $Qc1$ and $a2-a3$. 17... $Rfc8$ (Now 17... $a4$ doesn't work in view of 18. $Nd5!$ $Qxd2$ 19. $Nxe7+$ $Kh8$ 20. $Rxd2$ \pm . With the rook still on $c1$, White would have to play $Bxd2$, after which Black could play $axb3$ and $Ra2$, with lots of counterplay.) 18. $Qc1$ $Qb6$ (Black must retreat, as White was threatening 19. $a3$ $Qb6$ 20. $b4$, winning a piece.) 19. $Bf1$ $h5$. A thematic plan—Black's point is to play $Qd8-f8$, $Kh7$, and $Bh6$, favorably trading dark-squared bishops. Let's see an instructive example played by GM Anish Giri: 20. $g3$ $Kh7$ 21. $Bg2$ $Qd8$ 22. $Qd2$ $Qf8$ 23. $Re1!$:



Strong prophylaxis! 23...f5?! Too weakening. (23...Bh6?! would be answered by 24.Bxh6 Qxh6 25.e5!± putting real pressure on Black's structure.) 24.Bh3! e6 25.exf5 exf5 26.Bg2±, Giri–Bobras, Deutschland 2010. After the transfer Ne2-d4 Giri was able to increase his advantage even further.

17.Rc2!



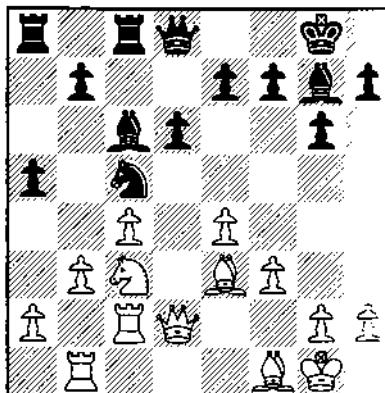
Carlsen is familiar with the nuances of this position. Now Qb4 can always be met with Qc1 and a2-a3, driving the queen back.

17...Qd8

The queen has nothing more to do on b6, so Black switches plans.

Alternatively, Black could start with 17...h5 though White's plan remains the same, for instance 18.Bf1 Kh7 19.Kh1 Qd8 20.g4 transposes to the game.

18.Bf1



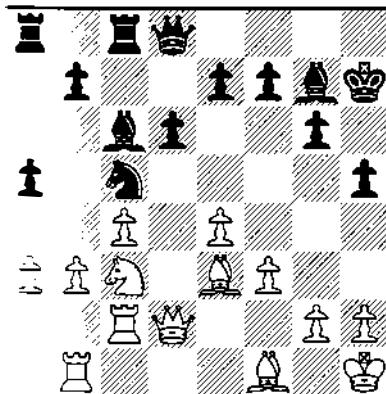
A common retreat. As we've seen, White can often benefit from g1-f1 followed by either Bg2 or Bh3. Other typical moves include Kh1, a2-a3, and of course Nd5 or Ne2-d4.

18...h5

GM Lie chooses a typical plan for this position—he'd like to trade bishops with Qf8, Kh7, and Bh6.

Starting with 18...Qf8 doesn't change much: 19.a3 (also possible is 19.g3!?, Matlakov–Evdokimov, Vladivostok, RUS 2014) 19...h5 20.Kh1 (also good is 20.b4 c4 21.axb4 Na4 22.Nd5±) 20...h4 21.Nd5 Bxd5 22.exd5±, Matlakov–Atabayev, Moscow RUS 2014. White doesn't fear Bh6, as b3-b4 and c4-d5 is coming.

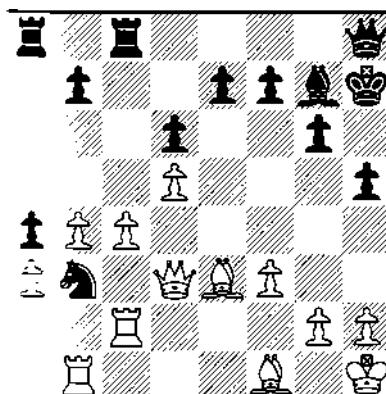
19...a3 Kh7 20.Kh1



Carlsen is taking it slow, which is perfectly acceptable here—the king is better placed on h1.

21.Be5

20...Qf8 transposes to 18...Qf8, where White can play 21.Nd5±, or 21.axb4 22.axb4 Na4 23.Nd5±. 20...Qh8!? should be met with 21.Nd5 Bxd5 22.exd5! (22.Qxd5 was clear in Areshchenko-Savchenko, 2009.) 22...a4 Otherwise Black would be squeezed after b3-b4. 24.Nb3 24.Qd3



White gets an edge after 24...Bd4 and also after 24...Nd4 25.Rd2 Nf5

26.Bf2±) 25.Re2 Bxe3 26.Rxe3 Qf6 27.Rbe1 Rc7 28.Re4!± followed by Qe3 and slowly advancing with f3-f4, h2-h3, Bd3, etc. Black's knight is shut out of the game.

21.b4

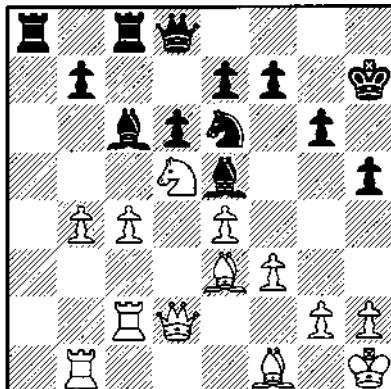
White has improved his position to the max, so it is time for this advance.

21...axb4 22.axb4 Ne6

Keeping the knight in the center.

If 22...Na4 then 23.Nd5 e6 24.Nf4± followed by Nd3.

23.Nd5!



Everything is ideal for White—the center is intact, b3-b4 has been achieved, and the knight has landed on d5. Next is f3-f4-f5, with a kingside attack.

23...Ra3

Playing for some much needed counterplay.

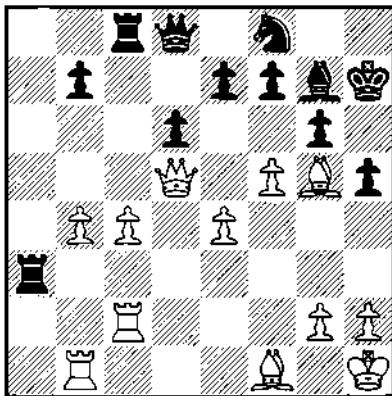
Trading off the bishop does not ease Black's defensive task: 23...Bxd5 24.exd5 Nc7 (or 24...Ng7 25.c5±) 25.f4! Bg7 26.f5!↑, with a powerful initiative, as 26...gxf5 runs into 27.Qd1!±.

24.f4 Bg7 25.f5!

Direct and strong.

25...Nf8 26.Bg5! Bxd5

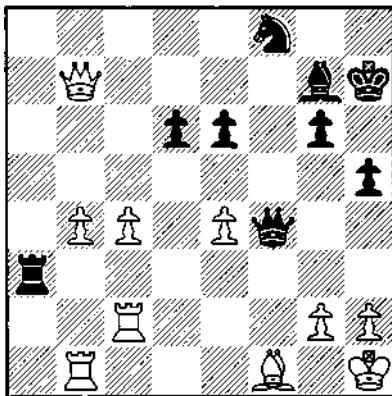
The ugly 26...f6 would have been a bit more stubborn, though after 27.Be3± White is clearly on top.
27.Qxd5!



Threatening both Qxb7 and Qxf7.
27...e6

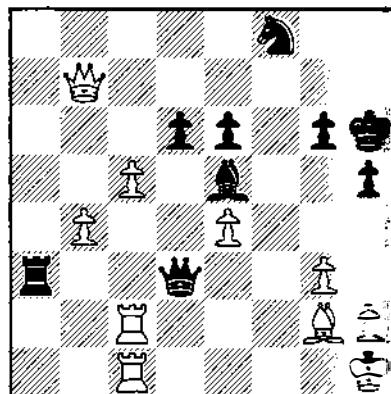
Giving up the exchange for certain practical chances.

**28.fxe6 fxe6 29.Qxb7 Qxg5
 30.Qxc8 Qf4 31.Qb7!+-**

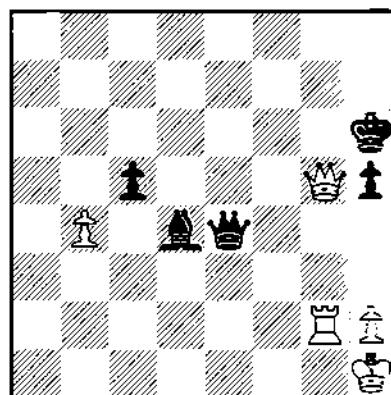


The situation has changed, as it is Black who's now on the offensive. But with a decisive amount of extra material, Carlsen is up to the task and carefully defends against all of his opponent's threats.

**31...Kh6 32.g3 Qf3+ 33.Bg2 ♕
 34.Rbc1 Be5 35.c5!**



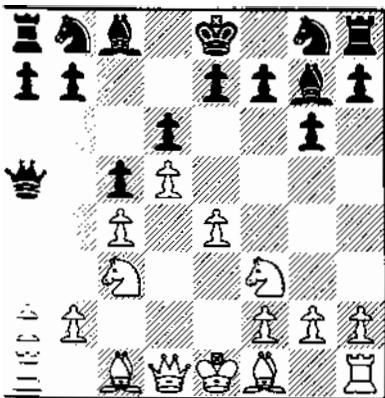
**35...h4 36.gxh4 Qe3 37.Qf7 ♜
 38.h5 gxh5 39.Qxe6+ Nf6 40.BRa1 41.Rxa1 Bxa1 42.Qf5 ♜
 43.Qf1 Nxe4 44.Bxe4 Qxc
 45.Rg2 dxc5 46.Qf8+ ♜
 47.Qg8+ Kh6 48.Qg5+ 1-0**



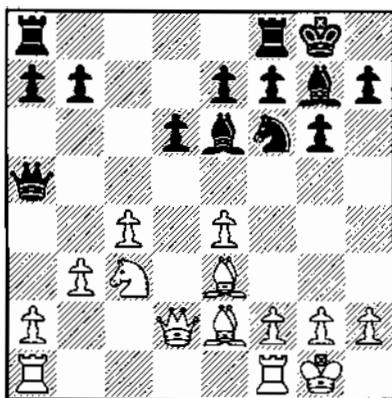
A flawless victory by Carlsen.

Memory Markers

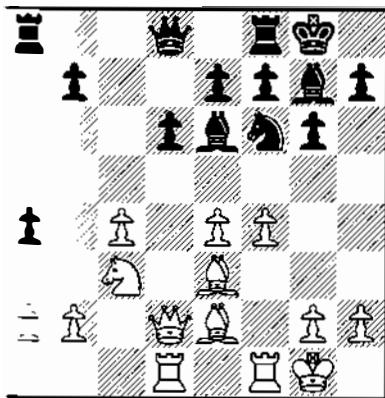
These are reminders of some of the ideas and motifs in this chapter.



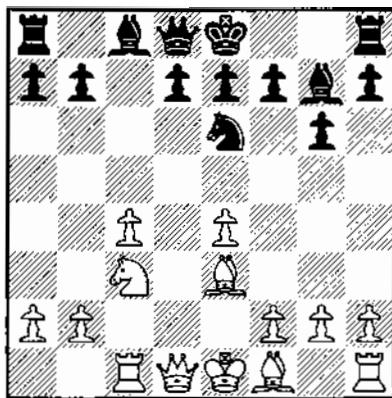
1. After 6.d5!. A strong pawn sacrifice in exchange for extra space and the dark-squared bishop. See diagram on page 338
2. Shankland–Sebenik, notes to
3. $\mathbb{E}6$.



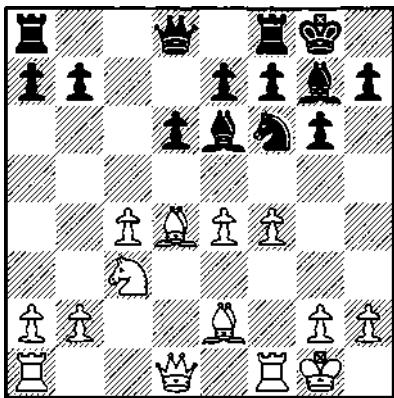
2. After 12.b3!. The precise move. Next is Rfc1, Rab1, and b3-b4. See page 341, game move in Shankland–Sebenik.



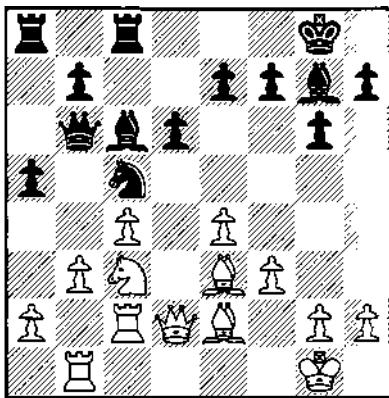
1. After 13.f4!. Initiating play on the kingside, to be followed by $\mathbb{E}4$, Qe3, and f4-f5. See diagram on page 348, in Almási–Macieja.



4. After 10.Rcl1!. White's setup continues with Bd3-b1, O-O, and f2-f4-f5. See diagram on page 356, in Rodríguez Céspedes–Hernández Onna.



5. After 11.f4!. The most ambitious way of dealing with the bishop on e6. See diagram on page 366, notes to 8...Nxd4 in Carlsen–Lie.



6. After 17.Rc2!. An important nuance, preparing to meet Qb4 with Qc1, followed by a2-a3 and b3-b4. See diagram on page 372 in Carlsen–Lie.

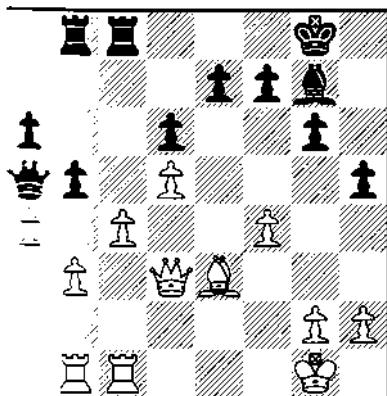
Exercises

White to play!

As White, practice finding the right moves when facing the Accelerated Dragon.

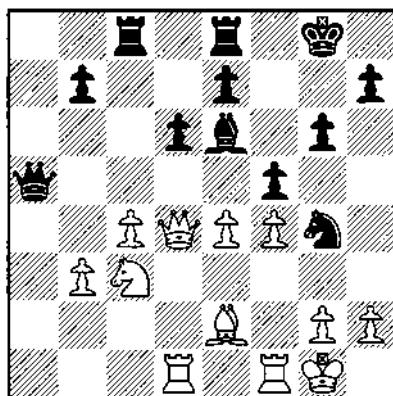
Solutions to the exercises begin on page 533.

Exercise 1



Molner - Li
US Open 2013

Exercise 2

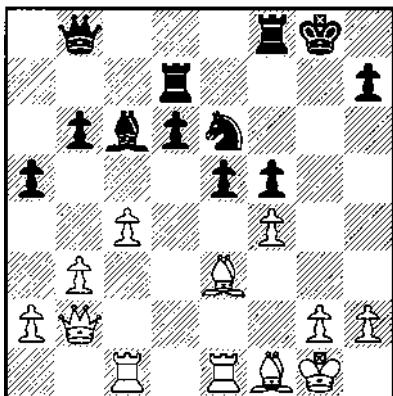


Sean - Hujbert
FSGM, Budapest 2014

White to play, how should you react to Black's last move b7-b5?

White to play, what should you do about the knight on g4?

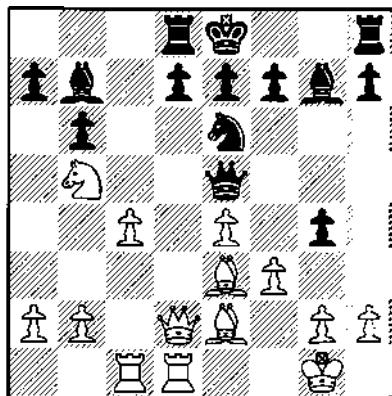
Exercise 3



Amanov – Aliyev
Chicago Open 2012

White to play, how can you activate your two bishops?

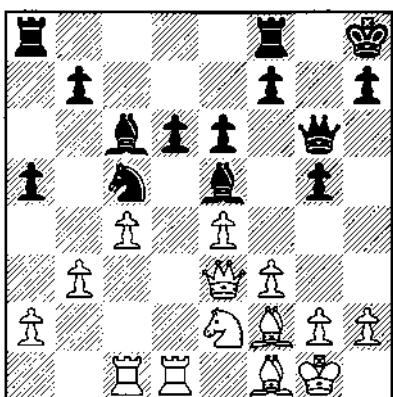
Exercise 4



Kraai – Cozianu
USA 2013

White to play, find the strongest continuation.

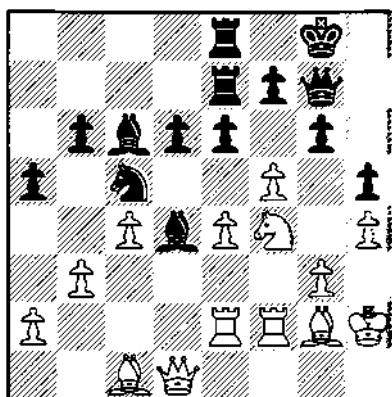
Exercise 5



Granda Zuniga – Gordon
Benasque Open 2013

White to play, how can you put more pressure on Black's position?

Exercise 6

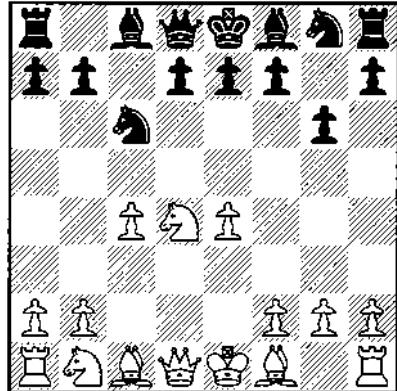


Giri – Brunner
EU-Cup, Eliat 2012

White to play and win.

Summary:

Chapter 5 **The Accelerated Dragon**



1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 g6 5.c4!

Without a doubt, this chapter was one of the most strategically inclined chapters in the entire book. Patiently going through the games and variations will surely improve your positional understanding, as we explored important strategic concepts such as handling a space advantage, controlling squares, making favorable exchanges, and prophylaxis.

For the reader, the most valuable takeaway would be to grasp White's main plans within the Maróczy structure, such as playing a2-a3 and d4 in order to gain space on the kingside. Another key plan is the aggressive kingside advance f2-f4-f5, as you'll recall is usually strong when Black's bishop is on e6, as opposed to when Black's bishop is on e7, in which case we would advise to move the pawn back on f3.

Theoretically speaking, it would be wise to be aware of the extra options available to both sides if Black plays

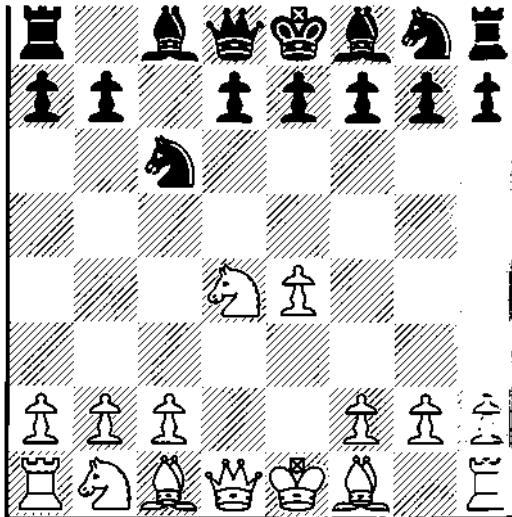
2...g6 3.d4 Bg7, delaying the capture on d4; this line was explored all the way back in Game 28.

As with most openings, practicing the White side of the Maróczy Bind through training games would be extremely helpful, and would go a long way in developing your understanding towards similar structures, such as those in the King's Indian.

Generally, White does hold a long-term static advantage due to the extra space in the center, but this only holds value if White can consistently limit Black's counterplay as much as possible.

Chapter 6

The Sveshnikov & Cousins



1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4

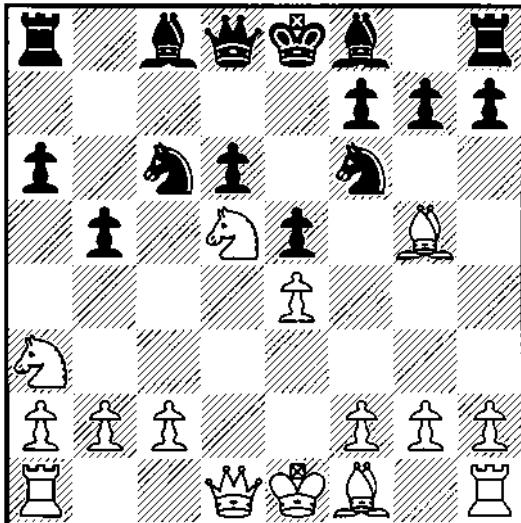
We have one major family of systems left to study: the Sveshnikov, Kalashnikov, and Löwenthal Sicilians. Each of these variations involves Black playing an early e7-e5 without first making the move a7-a6, controlling the d5-square. It is through the use of this square (as well as d5), that White will fight for an advantage against these lines.

Chapter 6a will focus on the Sveshnikov Variation, which takes place after 4...Nf6 5.Nc3 e5. In Chapter 6b we will then move on to the Kalashnikov and Löwenthal Variations, which begin with the immediate 4...e5. Theoretically speaking, the Sveshnikov Sicilian is generally held in higher regard and favored by more Grandmasters, so you can expect to face it a bit more often over the board than the other two variations.

The common pawn structure in all three systems is quite interesting. In each variation, Black will give up the d5-square in exchange for potential dynamic counterplay in the ensuing middlegame. As you may recall, we explored a similar structure back in Chapter 1b, the Najdorf line 6.h3 and 7.Nde2. Especially relevant was Game 9, which explored 7...h5 8.Bg5, leading to a middlegame that would certainly fit in with the following chapter!

Chapter 6a

The Sveshnikov Variation



1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 e5 6.Ndb5
e6 7.Bg5 a6 8.Na3 b5 9.Nd5

The Sveshnikov Variation was famously popularized by Latvian GM Evgeny Sveshnikov, who showed that Black could achieve sufficient dynamic interplay in compensation for giving up the d5 square. Included in the repertoire of most top players who employ the Sicilian, the Sveshnikov is especially popular at higher levels, where the amount of deep and complex play continues to increase.

As a testament to its solidity, GM Boris Gelfand used the Sveshnikov as his main defense against 1.e4 in the 2012 World Championship Match against Viswanathan Anand. After not achieving anything in the main line of White, Anand—and many top players afterward—switched over to the Sveshnikov Variation (1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5) in his efforts to fight for an advantage.

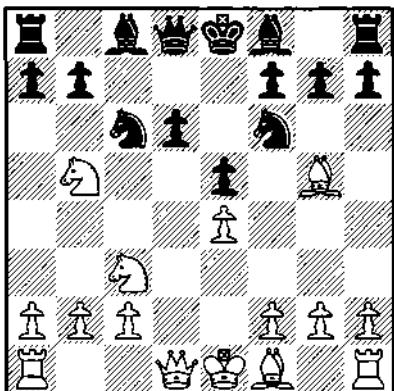
While to this day the Sveshnikov continues to be theoretically rock solid, it doesn't mean that White cannot reach a playable middlegame with clear plans and ideas for both sides. Reaching a comfortable middlegame where White has good play will be our main focus for the following subchapter, as well as instructing the reader on how to effectively handle that middlegame! In Game 32 we will begin with exploring some of Black's less popular lines before moving on to the modern main line in Game 33.

Game 32

Ni – Sulava

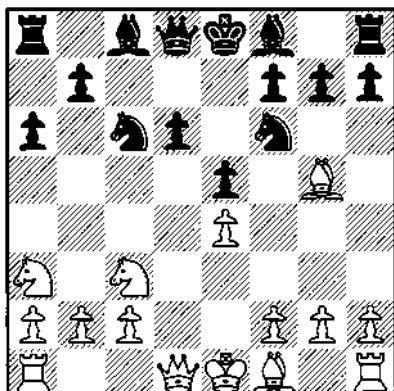
Calvi Balagne Open 2007

- 1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4
- 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 e5 6.Ndb5 d6
- 7.Bg5



As we've seen in other Sicilians, White often trades his dark-squared bishop in order to assume control over d5. In return Black gets the bishop pair, and thus has dynamic chances for counterplay throughout the middlegame.

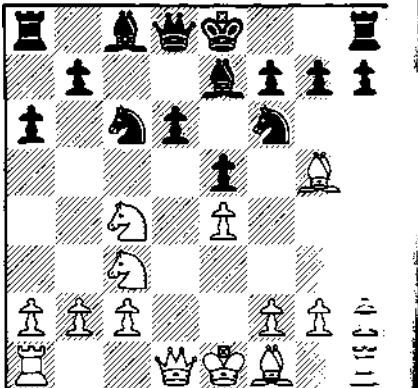
7...a6 8.Na3



8...b5

An important move, restricting the knight on a3. Black has tried simple developing moves, but they fail to make up for giving away the d5 square:

8...Be7?! 9.Nc4!

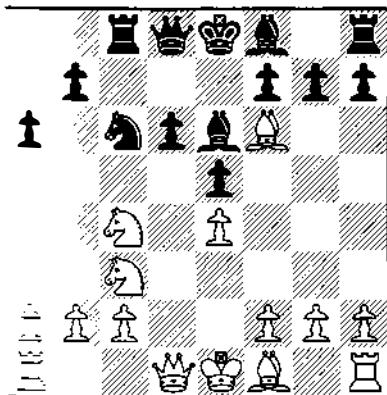


The knight is perfectly placed on d5 and White threatens Bxf6. And ...

a) 9...Be6 10.Bxf6 gxf6 (10...Nxd6+ Kf8 12.Nc4± is a hedge for the extra pawn for White) 11.Ne3±. White has scored nearly 90% from this position. After Ncd5 and c2-c3 White will dominate the entire center.

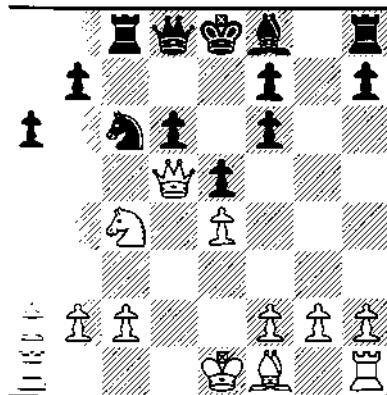
b) After 9...Nd4 10.Bxf6 gxf6 11.Nd5 White's knights coordinate perfectly and Black's knight is about to be kicked out with c2-c3, for example 11...b5 (or 11...c5 12.c3 Nc6 13.Ndb6 Rb8 14.Qxc6+, Areshchenko–Bogdanovich, Moscow 2014) 12.Ncb6 Rb8 13.Nxc8 Pxc8 14.c3 Ne6 15.a4!±, Caruana–Potapov, Budapest 2007. Black's queenside is undefendable.

More playable is 8...Be6, with the idea to meet 9.Nc4 with 9...Rc8. Now after 10.Bxf6



Black has a choice:

- a) 10...gxf6 leads to sharp play
- b) 11.Nd5 Bxd5 12.Qxd5

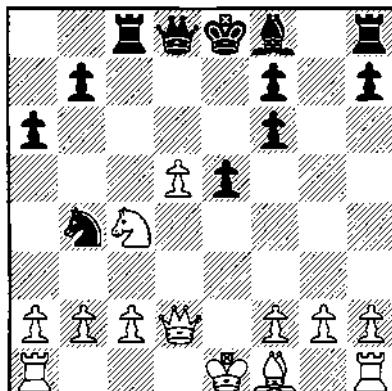


and now:

- a1) 12...Nd4 13.Bd3 b5 (or Qe7 14.Qa5! intending Ne3-d5, or 14...Rxc4 15.Bxc4 Nxc2+ 16.Ke2 White has 17.Rc1!+- with the threat of Bxf7+ and Rc7.) 14.Ne3. White has a comfortable edge here due to his superior structure. A few moves have continued 14...Bh6 15.c3 and 16.fxe3 Ne6 17.O-O Qb6 18.Rxf6

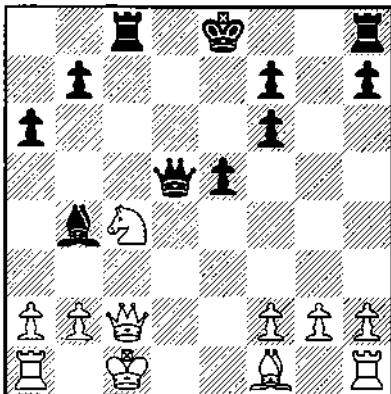
Qxe3+ 19.Kh1 O-O 20.Rf3 Qc5, and now best is to keep the queens on with 21.Qb3± followed by Raf1, with nice pressure against Black's kingside.

a2) 12...Nb4 is complicated, but should be good for White if he knows what he is doing: 13.Qd2 d5 14.exd5



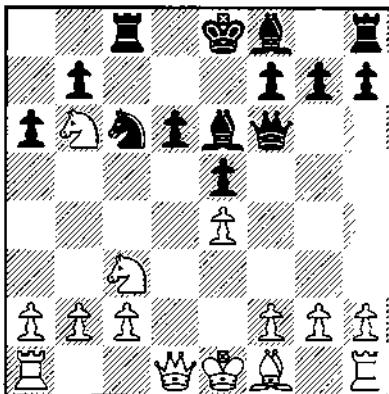
a21) 14...Qxd5 leads to a difficult endgame for Black after 15.Qxd5 Nxd5 16.O-O-O Rd8 (or 16...Nb4 17.c3 Nc6 18.g3±, Mastrovasilis-Chilov, Panormo 2001) 17.Be2 b5 18.Na5 Bh6+ 19.Kb1±, Morales Romero-Vigoa Apecheche, Havana 2011. Black's queenside will probably not survive for long.

a22) The piece sacrifice 14...Nxc2+ looks scary, but is concretely good for White: 15.Qxc2 Bb4+ 16.Kd1 Qxd5+ (after 16...b5 17.Qe4 bxc4 18.Bxc4± White's king will be safe on e2, Zhelnin-Shushpanov, Dresden 2013) 17.Kc1 and now:

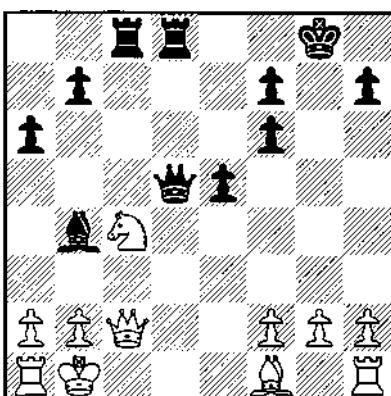


a221) 17...b5? is refuted by 18.a3! leading to a forced line: 18...Be7 19.Nd6+ Kd7 20.Nxc8 Rxc8 21.Bxb5+! Qxb5 22.Rd1+ Bd6 23.Rxd6+++, Berndt–Thiel, GER-chT 1998.

a222) After 17...O-O 18.Kb1 Rfd8

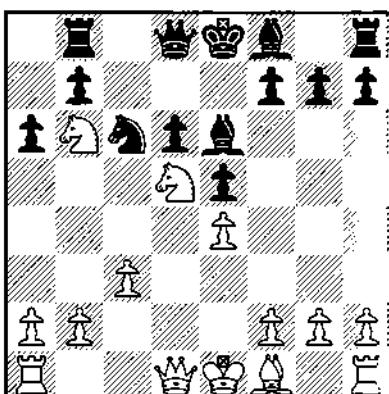


Freezing Black's queenside. 11.Nxd6+?! Bxd6 12.Qxd6 F~~g~~
 13.Qc5 Nd4 14.Bd3 Qg5~~g~~, which is a dream for Black.) 11...Rb8 12.N~~c~~
 Qd8 (forced, since 12...Qg6?! doesn't defend the c7-square, and after 13.Q~~c~~
 Be7 14.Nc7+ Kd8 15.Ncd5 f5 16.fxe4 17.fxe4± Black's king will be uncomfortable for the rest of the game. Krnan–Sohal, Toronto 2011.) 13.c3



It appears that Black has lots of compensation for the knight, but here we found an accurate way for White to consolidate: 19.a4!N planning to play a4-a5 and b2-b3. The immediate 19...b5 is met with 20.axb5 axb5 21.Ne3! Qd7 22.Qe4+ followed by Be2 etc.

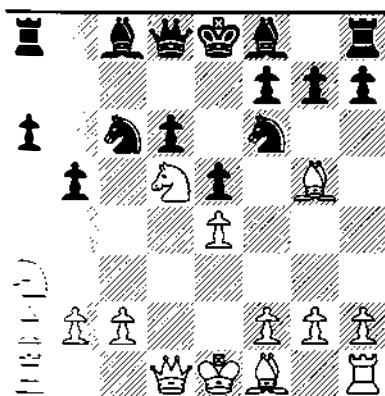
b) Capturing with the queen with 10...Qxf6 is more solid, but allows White to setup a positional bind: 11.Nb6!



White's plan is to keep control over the center and queenside, and to eventually expand with b2-b4, a2-a4-a5, etc. Karpos demonstrated the ideal way to play this position while in his prime 13...Be7 14.Bc4 O-O 15.O-O Bf5

14...Kh8 17.Qe2 g6 The only real available to Black. 18.Kh1 Bh6 19.f5 20.exf5 gxf5 21.f4! (You may *feel this counterthrust from the f5-e5 7.Nde2 h5 line of the Najdorf, game Vallejo Pons-Shabalov—see diagram on page 113.*) 21...Bxd5 22.Nxd5 e4 23.a5±, Karpov-Nunn, London 1982. White controls all of the important squares in the position and can continue by putting pressure on the d6 pawn, as well as organizing a break g2-g4.

• Nd5



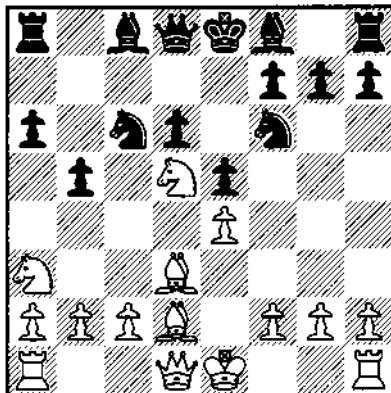
Planting the knight on its mortal outpost.

A major alternative is 9.Bxf6 10.Nd5, which is quite sharp. Exchange for a weakened kingside achieves quick counterplay along f5.

• Be7

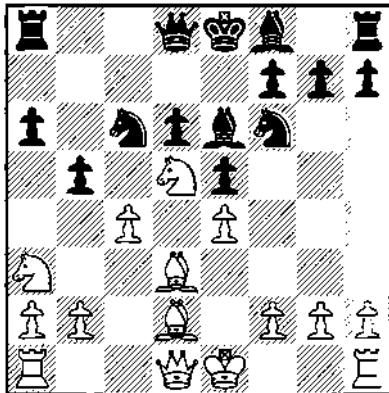
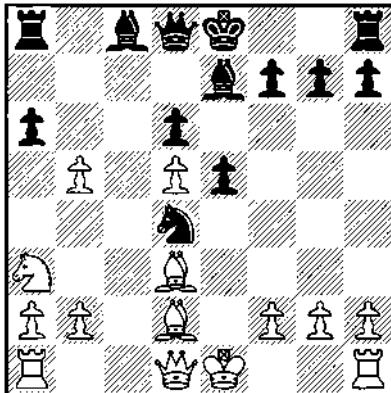
The main line. Black breaks the bind and threatens Nxd5 or Nxe4.

The alternative 9...Qa5+ forces Bd2, and after 10...Qd8 it is up to one to prove that the bishop on d2 is useful. This is usually done with the move 11.Bd3



White's plan is to play c2-c4, getting the knight on a3 into play. In most of these lines Black will have to choose between bxc4, leading to a worse position, or sacrificing the b5 pawn for active play, but without full compensation. We look at three alternatives from this position.

11...Be7 12.c4 Nxd5 After this exchange White can no longer make use of the d5-outpost, but this commits Black to a sacrifice of the b5 pawn. (Or 12...bxc4 13.Nxc4±. In this and in similar positions White enjoys full control over the central light squares. Our next two moves should be O-O and Rc1.) 13.exd5 Nd4 14.cxb5

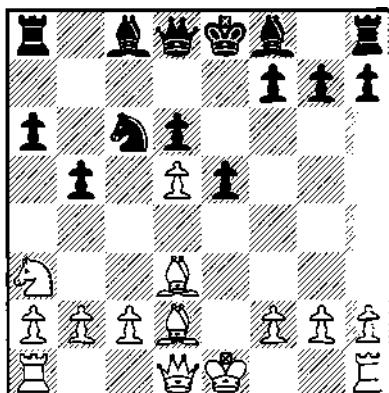


In compensation for the pawn, Black has a strong knight on d4 but this isn't enough. White should castle and play Bc3 or Be3, with the intent of capturing on d4. One master game continued 14...O-O 15.O-O f5 16.Bc3! Threatening to remove Black's powerful knight. 16...Nxb5 17.Nxb5 axb5 18.Bxb5 f4. This occurred in Leviczki-Juracsik, Budapest 2005, and now it was best to secure White's bishop on b5 with 19.a4!, the idea being that after 19...f3 20.g3 Bh3 21.Re1± the bishop can return to f1 if needed. White's queenside passers should eventually be decisive.

Similarly, after 11...Be6?! White should again play 12.c4!, which offers a pawn that Black should probably not accept:

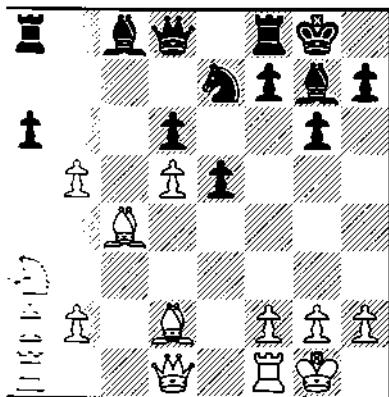
12...bxc4 13.Nxc4 Nxd5 14.exd5 Bxd5 15.Qa4!↑ This pin is deadly. White threatens Ne3 and Rc1. 15... (Or 15...Bxg2 16.Rg1 Bf3 17.Rg3 Bg2 18.Ne3+) 16.Ne3! exd3 17.Nxd3 Vandervoort-Hausrath, Belgian 2008.

The best chance for Black
11...Nxd5 12.exd5



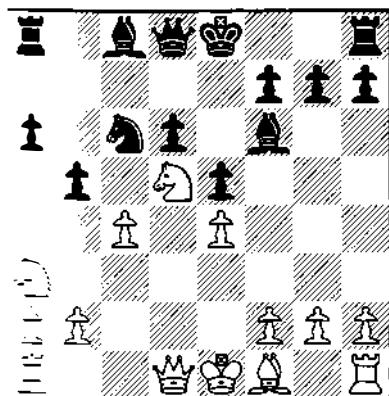
12...Ne7, planning to fianchette the dark-squared bishop. (12...Nf6 13.c3 Nf5 14.Nc2± is pleasant for White, with a2-a4 coming next.) Now 13.c4 g6 Black is forced to give up the b5 pawn. (But not 13...bxc4? 14.Nxc4+- threatening Bc4 and Nb6, Sakelsek-Loidl, Aschersleben 2008)

14.cxb5 Bg7 (14...Nxd5? just after 15.Be4 Bb7 16.Qb3+–) 15.O-O O-O 16.Bc4



It is up to Black to prove that he has enough compensation for the pawn, but so far practical results have shown that this isn't the case: 14...Bg7 (or 16...f5 17.bxa6 Bxa6 18.Bb5 followed by a2-a4 and 19.Qb3 or Qf3) 17.Bg5 f6 18.Be3±, (Rubin–Fishbein, New York 1989). White continued with Qd3 and eventually converted the material advantage.

13xf6 Bxf6 11.c4!



Our enthusiastic recommendation. In recent years most top players have switched over to this move when facing the Sveshnikov, as in the resulting positions White often gets a small edge and can play for two results.

11.c3 is the older main line, controlling the d4-square and planning to proceed Nc2 and a2-a4. **11...Nd4**

This move, along with Black's other alternatives to 11...b4, frequently involves a sacrifice of the b5 pawn. In compensation, Black hopes to get counterplay using his two bishops and the open lines on the queenside.

Before proceeding, let's take a look at Black's other tries, with a simple antidote for each:

11...b4 is the main line, which will be covered in the next game.

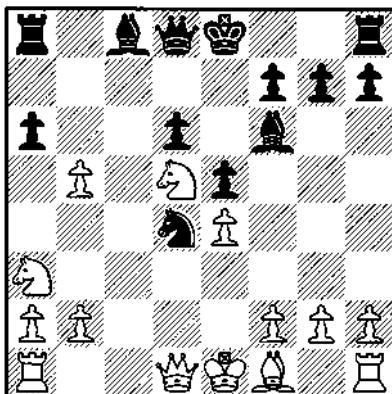
11...O-O 12.cxb5 Nd4 transposes into the line **12...O-O** on the next page.

After **11...Qa5+** 12.Qd2 Qxd2+ (12...b4 13.Nc2 Rb8 14.Nxf6+ gxf6 15.b3± gives White easy play against Black's weakened structure, Jarecki–Jorge, Thessaloniki 1984) 13.Kxd2 Bg5+ 14.Kd1, Black is obliged to sacrifice b5 because of the threat of Nc7+. 14...O-O 15.cxb5 Nd4 16.bxa6 Bxa6 17.Bxa6 Rxa6 18.Nc2±, Matsenko–Van Apeldoorn, Hoogeveen 2010. A tough defense awaits the second player.

And after **11...Bf5** 12.cxb5 Qa5+ (12...Nd4 transposes to the main game) 13.Nc3 Nd4 14.Nc4 Qd8 15.b6± Black can win back the pawn with Be6 and Bxc4, but afterwards White will have the superior bishop and a structural advantage, as in Piorun–Zapolskis, Warsaw 2010.

Lastly, 11...bxc4 12.Nxc4 Nd4 13.Ncb6!↑ poses Black some concrete tactical problems, as White threatens Nxc8 followed by either Qa4+ or Rc1. For instance, 13...Rb8 14.Nxc8 Rxc8 15.Qa4+ Kf8 16.Bxa6±, Krieger-Beck, Bergen 2011.

12.cxb5



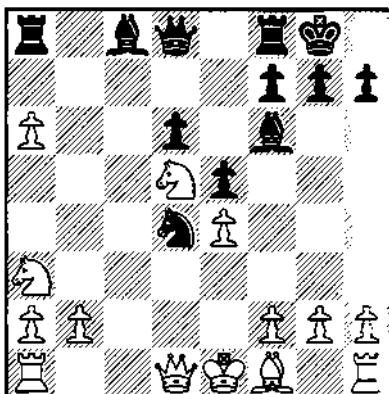
12...Bg5

Activating the bishop on a more useful diagonal.

Of course, Black has other options as well—we look at four:

12...axb5? allows White to activate his second knight, and after 13.Nxb5 O-O (*not* 13...Qa5+? 14.b4+) 14.Nxd4 exd4 15.Bd3±, Belic-Miljkov, Pozarevac 2009, White enjoys a pair of healthy connected passers on the queenside.

After 12...O-O we were able to work out 13.bxa6 (*13.b6± is a safer option, leading to a position similar to the main game.*) and concluded that Black's initiative will soon fade:

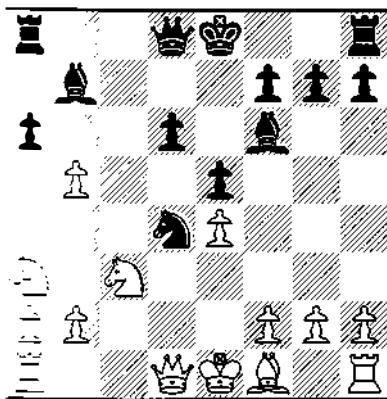


a) After 13...Be6 14.Bc4 Bxf5 15.Bxd5 Qa5+ 16.Kf1 Qxa6+ 17.Nc2 Rac8 18.b3± White can play g2-g3 next and start to realize his material advantage.

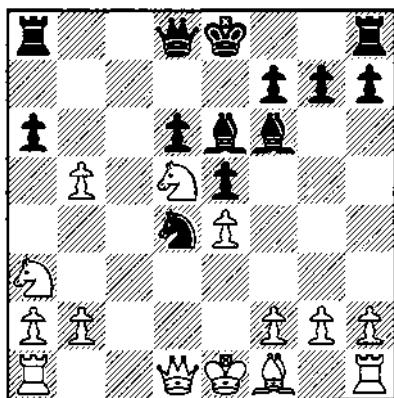
b) The tricky 13...Bxa6 14.Bxf5 Qa5+ would equalize if not 15.b4!N where after 15...Qxa6 16.Bd3 (15...Qxa3 16.Bd3±) 16.Nc2± Black is quickly running out of ideas.

c) Lastly, 13...Bg5 should be answered with the precise 14.Bc4 the point being seen in the critical line 14...Bh6 15.Nc2 Bg4 16.Qd3 E= 17.Nxd4 Qa5+ 18.Nc3 exd4 19.Qxc4 Wan Yunguo-Li Hanbin, Zhongshan 2014. Black's bishop is on h6, so he cannot play a winning Bf6. Instead White is close to having a decisive advantage and should continue Qe= Be2, etc.

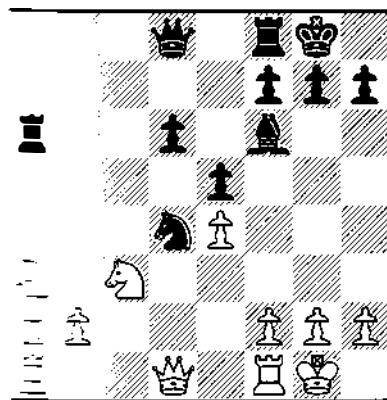
Against 12...Bb7 White has a response in 13.Nc3!



Perhaps most critical is 12...Be6 which has been seen at reasonably high levels:



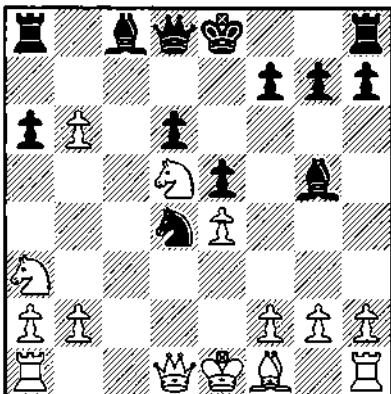
Again to 13...O-O 14.bxa6 Bxa6 perhaps Black should consider Bxa6!? though after 15.Bxa6 16.Nc2!N White should come out well for instance 16...Qa5 17.Rb1 18.Ne3± followed by Nf5, f2-f3, where Black doesn't have enough for the sacrificed exchange.) 15.Bxa6 16.O-O±, Schuh–Fedorovsky, 2008:



13.Bc4 axb5 14.Bxb5+ Kf8! (14...Nxb5 15.Nxb5 Qa5+? again runs into 16.b4!+) 15.Bc4 Qa5+ 16.Qd2 Bd8! (After 16...Qxd2+ 17.Kxd2 Bg5+ 18.Kd3± White was pressing in Nepomniachtchi–Popov, Dagomys 2010.) This position occurred most recently in Kosintseva–A.Muzychuk, Khanty-Mansiysk 2014, where we found a small improvement for White: 17.Ne3!N making a useful move rather than exchanging on a5. After 17...Ke7 (or 17...Qxd2+ 18.Kxd2 Ke7 19.Nac2±) 18.Bd5± the onus is still on Black to demonstrate sufficient compensation for the sacrificed pawn.

Again, the knight on d4 does outweigh the potential strength of one's queenside pawns.

13.b6!

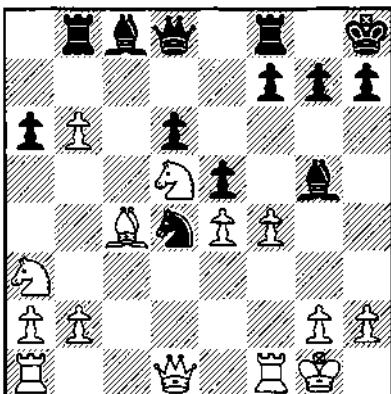


Keeping the pawn alive and threatening Nc7+.

13...O-O 14.Bc4 Bb7

Black reserves the right to capture on d5 and regain the b6 pawn, though White will then be able to use the c4-square for his other knight.

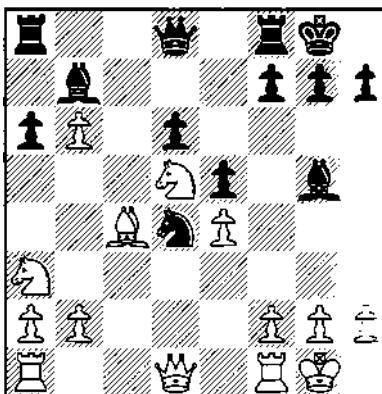
Another one of Ni Hua's games continued instructively: 14...Rb8 15.O-O Kh8 16.f4!



We'll see this ambitious advance used in the main game as well. 16...Bh6 17.f5 Bb7 18.Kh1 Bxd5 19.Bxd5 Rxb6 20.Nc4 Rb5. These moves took place in Ni Hua-Sun Hui, Jiangsu Wuxi

2008, and now 21.f6!N gxf6 22.Qc7+ would have given White a powerful initiative on the kingside.

15.O-O



15...Rc8

Several players have tried putting the rook on b8, but play continues in the same fashion: 15...Rb8 16.f5 (White certainly gets the better middlegame after 16.Nc2!N Nc7 17.Qxc2 Bxd5 18.Bxd5 Qxb6 19.Rb1+ where White has the better bishop and can target the a6 and d6 pawns) 16...Bf6 17.f5 Bg5 18.Kh1 Rb8 Ponkratov-Moiseenko, Moscow 2009. Here, White could have fought for an advantage with 19.Rb1+, a move we'll see in the game as well with the idea to play b2-b4 and Black exchanges on d5.

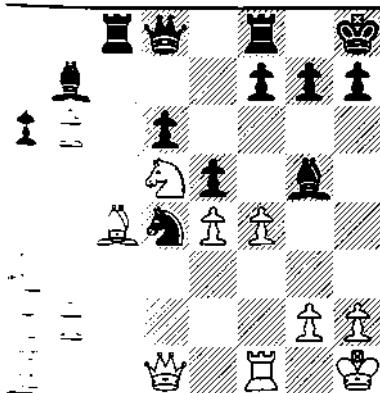
19...Rb1!

Putting the king off the a7-g1 and preparing f2-f4.

20.Rb8

Playing suit—in some cases may wish to seek active play.

Black wins the pawn back with 17.Bxd5 Qxb6 18.Nc4± certainly has the more position.



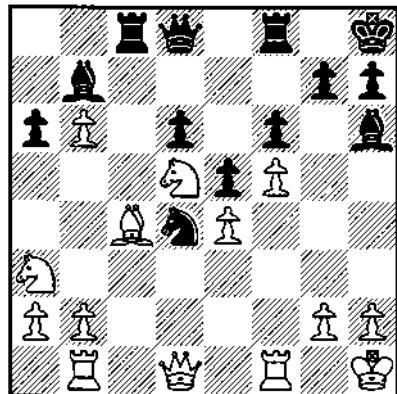
advance gains space on the kingside and furthers White's control over the light squares.

18.f5 f6

Understandably, Black wants to stop White from playing f5-f6.

f5 can be met with 19.Rb1±.

19.Rb1!



A strong move, anticipating the exchange on d5.

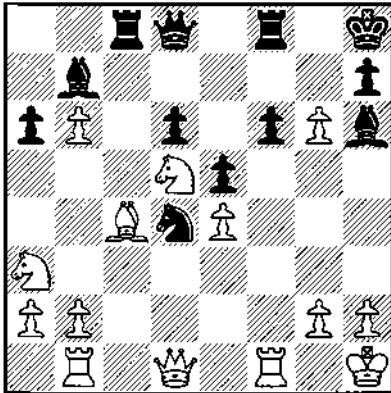
19...g6?!

Rather than falling into a passive position, GM Sulava decides to mix things up, hoping to radically change the character of the position. Practically speaking, this is a good decision, but objectively this move is quite speculative.

Black could try 19...Rb8 20.Qd3 Bxd5 21.Bxd5 Qxb6 22.Nc4 Qc5 23.b4! Rxb4 24.Rxb4 Qxb4 25.Rb1 Qc5 26.g3!± followed by Rb6.

The point of White's 19th move can be seen after 19...Bxd5 20.Bxd5 Qxb6 21.Nc4 Qc5 22.b4! Qc7 23.Qa4, where the a6 pawn has become undefendable, since Black must also keep an eye on d6. The critical line runs 23...Nb5 24.Qxa6 Nc3 25.Nxd6 Rb8 26.Qc4 Qxc4 27.Nxc4 Nxb1 28.Rxb1+-. White's passed pawns should be unstoppable on the queenside.

20.fxg6



20...f5

Black's intention. The idea is to undermine White's knight on d5 and to activate the queen via g5 or h4.

After 20...h_xg6 21.Qd3± Black will have to part ways with the a6 pawn, and if 21...Bxd5 then 22.exd5 would be correct, hitting the g6 pawn as well.

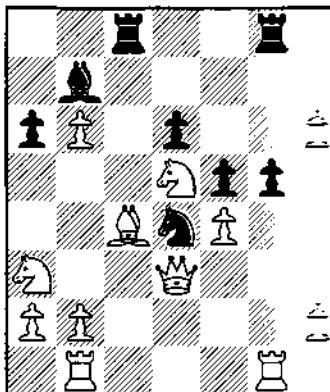
21.Qd3?!

Here we can see the justification for Black's hyper-aggressive play. After this one inaccuracy the position has become unclear.

Nearly winning was **21.Qh5!** (*not* 21.exf5?! Qg5!± with the threat of Rxc4) where 21...Qg5 22.Qxg5 Bxg5 is forced.

Here we can only speculate. Ni Hua underestimated the position after 23.exf5: fxe4∞) 23...Rxc4 (or 23...Nc7 24.Bxf6+ Kxf6 25.Ne6 d5 26.Be2±) picks up the exchange with 25...Bxd5 25.Nxd6+-. White's king and pawns are quite strong, but precise play is still required here.

21...Qh4!±



Suddenly e4 has come under serious fire, and White's position is on the verge of collapse.

22.Rfe1

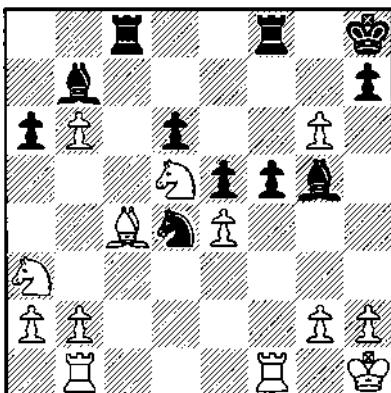
Black's idea was 22.exf5? 23.Nxc4 (23.Qxc4 Rc8+) 24.Nxd6 h_xg6∞, and things would be further from clear.

22...fxe4

After 22...h_xg6↑ White will have a hard time finding a good move.

23.Rxe4 Qf2

Threatening 24...Rxc4 25...Bxd5 26.Qxd5 Qf1+ and mate.

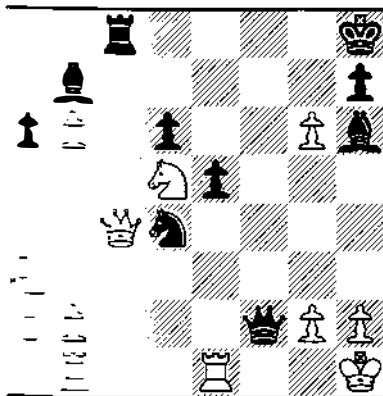


1. ~~24...Rxc4?~~

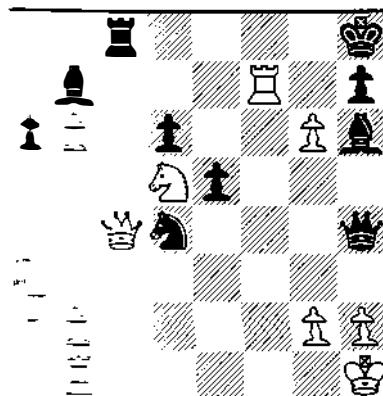
- calculation.

2. He had to return with 24...Qh4,
4. White to repeat moves.

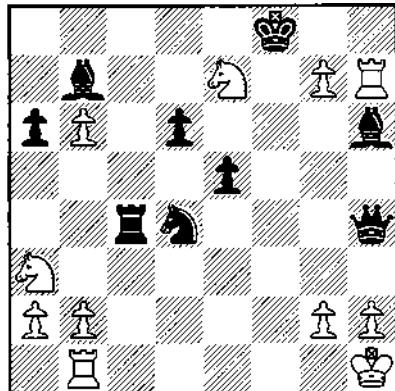
2. ~~24...Rc8~~



White's queen is unable to
protect the knight on d5,
White has a resource of his own...
27. **Qh4 27.Rf7!!**



A beautiful shot, most probably
by Black.
28. **Rxh7+ Kg8 29.Ne7+**
~~29...g5+!~~



The point of White's play, winning
back the queen with a decisive
material advantage.

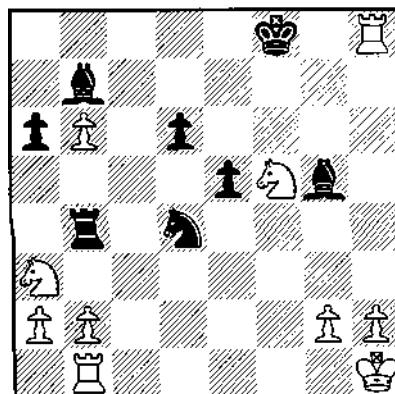
30...**Bxg7 31.Rxh4+-**

Though the position still looks
unclear, White is up an exchange
and should cruise to victory.

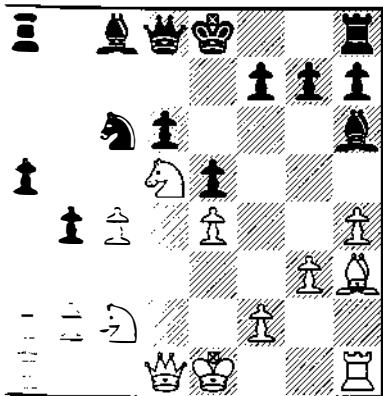
31...**Rb4 32.Nf5! Bf6?!**

The last error. Still, after
32...Rxb6 33.Nxd4 exd4 34.Nc4
White should have few problems
converting his advantage.

33. **Rh6 Bg5 34.Rh8+ 1-0**



Black resigned in view of 34...Kf7
35.Nxd4 exd4 36.Rh7+, winning even
more material.



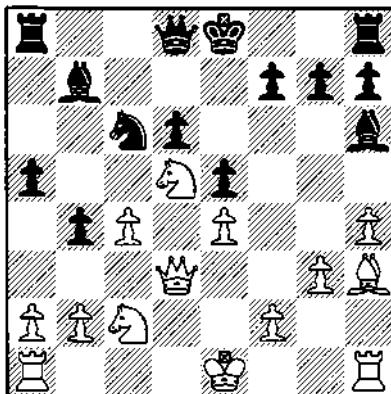
Black has a dangerous positional idea, looking to exchange light-squared bishops. After $15\ldots 0-0$ we believe that White will end up with the superior pair of minor pieces.

Black has played a number of moves here; we look at four possibilities:

$15\ldots 0-0$ 16.Bxc8 Rxc8 17.b3±, Lagrave–Polytech Lille I, 2007. A typical small sacrifice for this line—White can respond with Nce3, playing against Black's weak d6 pawn.

$15\ldots \text{Be}6$ 16.Bxe6 If Black has already castled this capture would be ludicrous, as White loses control over the d5-square, but here $17\ldots \text{fxe}6$ 17.Qh5+ Kf8 18.Nde3 O-O White clearly has the initiative and won convincingly in Vung Tau 2008.

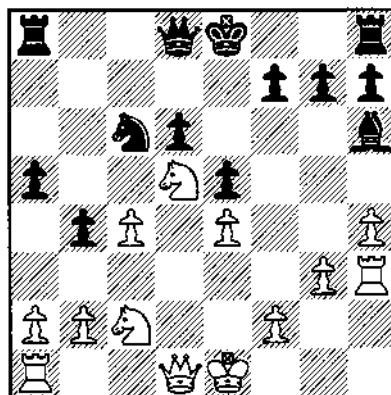
c) $15\ldots \text{Bb}7$ 16.Qd3



c1) $16\ldots \text{Nb}8$?! quickly led to an opening disaster for Black after 17.Nce3 Bxd5? 18.Qxd5! Bxe3 ($18\ldots \text{Ra}6$ 19.Nf5 O-O 20.Rd1+ is hopeless.) 19.Qxa8 Bd4 20.O-O+—Palac–Lenic, Bol CRO 2014.

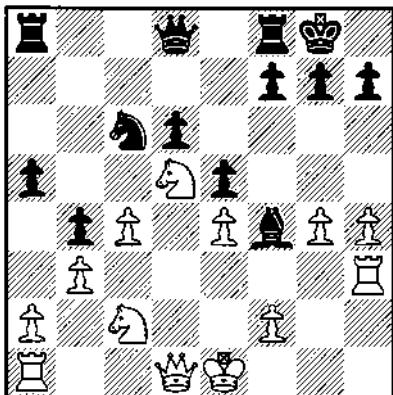
c2) Safer is $16\ldots \text{O-O}$ 17.O-O Ne7 18.Nde3±, Haslinger–Munoz Martin, Seville 2012. Also interesting was 18.a3 Nxd5 19.exd5 bxa3 20.Rxa3± with idea Rfa1 and Qc3.

d) Lastly, after $15\ldots \text{Bxh}3$ 16.Rxh3



White's rook looks clearly misplaced, but the idea of g3-g4 improves White's position a great deal, for instance:

d1) 16...O-O 17.g4!N (*better than 17.Kf1*, Oleksiенко–Kotronias, Moscow 2011) 17...Bf4 18.b3±.

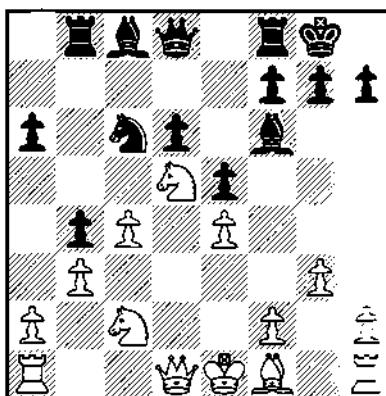


White's structure is beautiful, and he can continue Qf3, Rd1 and Kf1-g2 to improve his position.

d2) Or 16...Ne7 17.g4! Nxd5 18.Qxd5 Bf4 19.a3! bxa3 20.Qc6+ Ke7 21.Rhxa3 Rc8 22.Nb4!±, Ibarra Chami–Tregubov, Merida 2007.

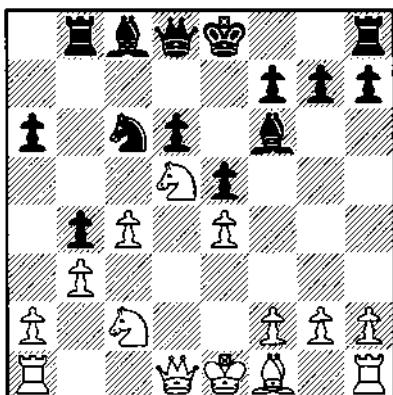
Another serious option is 12...Rb8, also protecting the b4 pawn as well as creating a threat of b4–b3. 13.b3

a) After 13...O-O 14.g3, e^{\pm} resembles the previous line:

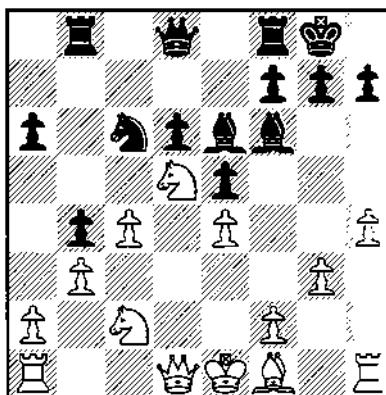


a1) One instructive g^{\pm} continued 14...g6 15.h4 Bg7 l^{\pm} . Qg5?! 17.Qc1! The endgame is m^{\pm} pleasant for White, who can take the d6 pawn at will. 17...Qx g^{\pm} 18.Rxc1 Bh6 19.Rd1±, Lintchevs i Aravindh, Chennai 2012. Next Bh3, leaving Black with a fruit x task of defending.

a2) Other games have continued 14...Be6 15.h4.



Once again, Black must decide between leaving the bishop on f6 or playing Bg5.

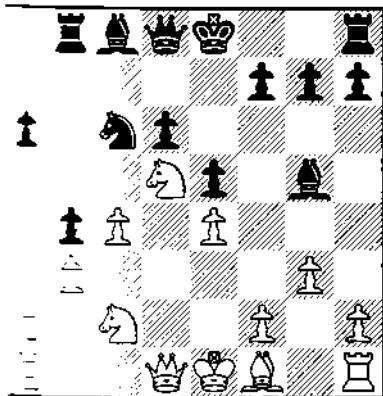


The plan with Bh3 is a move s^{\pm} in this line since White spent tempo on b2–b3, but this pawn m e^{\pm}

nevertheless useful, restricting Black's dark-squared bishop.

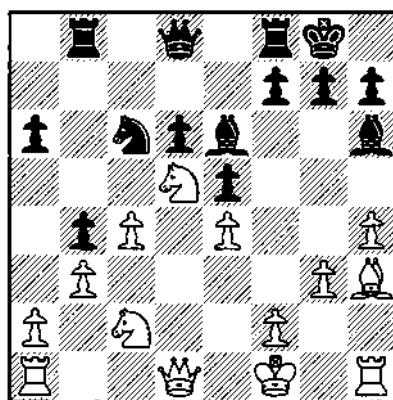
b1) Ali Marandi–Aravindh, Graz 2014, continued 15...a5 16.Bh3?! is too slow in view of 17.Kf1 Qd7 18.Kg2 Bxh3+ 19.g5±) 16...Be7 17.Qd3 Qd7 18... with an ideal setup, as Black has counterplay.

b2) Nepomniachtchi–Krapivin, Moscow 2009, continued 15...Be7 16.Qd7 17.Bg2 Bd8 A common idea is trying to transfer the bishop to f5. 18.O-O Bxd5?!. Black should have played a6-a5, as after the correct 18...exd5! Ne7 20.Nxb4 Ba5 21.a3± White would have been simply a pawn up with little apparent compensation. A bit more active for Black is 14.g3 and now:



14...Be6 should transpose to b1) 14...Bh6 15.Bh3, as 16...Qd7?!! is early—Black should castle king. 14...O-O 17.Kf1 transposes to the diagram. Videnova–Favarel, Moscow 2009, continued 17.Bxe6 Qh5+ Kf8 (if 18...Qf7 then 19.Qxf6 20.Qxh6 Qg6 21.Qe3±) 18... White has the better endgame and a safer king.

b2) 14...O-O 15.h4 Bh6 16.Bh3 Be6 (The alluring 16...Bxh3 17.Rxh3 f5? runs into a common trap: 18.exf5 Rxf5 19.g4! Oops! Black loses material. 19...Rf7 20.g5±.) 17.Kf1!



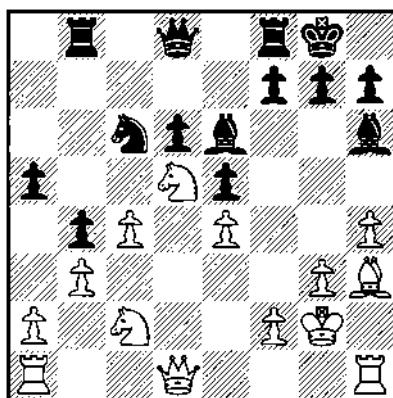
An important position. Instead of capturing on e6, White improves his king. A good plan now is to play Kg2, Qd3, and Rad1, all the while preventing Black from achieving counterplay via the f7-f5 advance. We've found a few improvements over recent games:

b21) The trade 17...Bxd5 18.Qxd5 gives White a small, though nagging edge, for example 18...Ne7 19.Qd3 Qb6 20.Kg2 g6 21.Rad1 Rbd8 22.h5!, Istratescu–Aravindh, Graz 2014. Black's only active idea is to play f7-f5, but this will create a lot of targets for White to attack on the kingside.

b22) After 17...Qd7, strongest is 18.Bf5!N forcibly stopping f7-f5. (A few games have continued 18.Kg2 but we don't trust White's position after 18...Bxh3+ 19.Rxh3 f5 20.exf5 Rxf5±, where Black can triple up on the f-file.) 18...Kh8 A sensible move, threatening g7-g6. (The tactical justification for White's 18th move

is that 18...Bxf5?! 19.exf5 Qxf5? can be met with 20.g4! Qe4 21.f3 Qg6 22.g5±.) And now 19.Qh5!± preventing g7-g6 and threatening moves such as Nce3, g3-g4, with a dangerous initiative.

b23) At the highest levels Black has chosen 17...a5, and now we'll follow two games by GM Alexander Morozevich: 18.Kg2

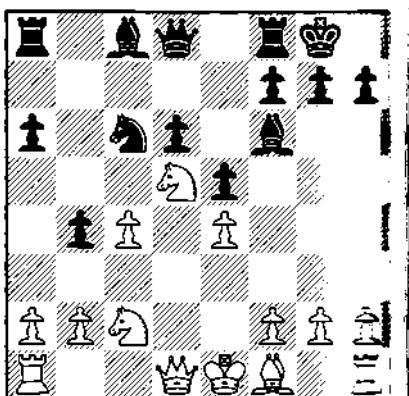


b231) One blitz game now continued 18...Kh8 19.Qd3 Qd7 20.Rad1 Rbd8 21.Qe2! Preparing to double rooks along the d-file. 21...Qa7 22.Rd3 Ne7? Forcing simplifications that are immensely favorable to White. 23.Bxe6 fxe6 24.Nxe7 Qxe7 25.Rhd1±, Morozevich–Jakovenko, Moscow 2006.

b232) An earlier game saw 18...Rb7?! with the idea of swinging the rook over to f7 after an eventual f7-f5. 19.Bf5 Kh8, Morozevich–Leko, San Luis 2005. White should now have played the prophylactic 20.h5!N retaining White's control over the light squares. (If 20.Qd3 the simple 20...g6! would have yielded Black an excellent position, after 21.Bh3 f5 22.Rad1 Rbf7±.) In case of 20...Qg5, after 21.Qd3!± White

can continue with Rad1 followed by Ne1-f3, with the better game.

Returning to our game, 12...O-O:



13.g3

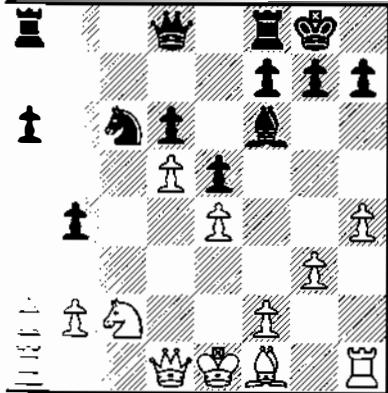
White sticks to the usual h2-h4 and either Bg2 or depending on Black's response.

As we mentioned, 13.Nc3 cannot be played for an advantage as White is underdeveloped. For instance, after 13...Nxb4 14.Nc3 Qb6=, White cannot hold on to the extra pawn, Anand–Radjabov, Bilbao 2008.

13...a5

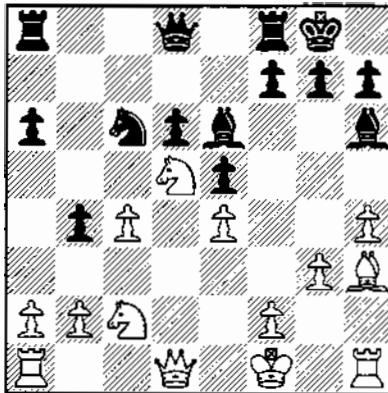
Sooner or later Black will need to support the b4 pawn, so this move is quite logical. Other options include 13...Be6 and 13...Bg5:

The only independent line after 13...Be6 14.h4 is 14...Bxd5? 14...a5 15.Bg2 transposes to the main game, and 14...Rb8 15.b3 transposes to 12...Rb8) 15.cxd5



...~~as~~ exchange on d5 is incorrect as White will be left with the ~~bad~~ bishop and thus the upper ~~part~~. For example: 15...Nd4 (*or 15...Qc5 16.Bd3± and both of Black's pieces are terrible*) 16.Nxd4 17.Bd3 Re8 18.Qa4 a5 19.Rc1±, Gladyshev, St. Petersburg 2006.

...B_g5 is a more serious alternative, activating the bishop on the c1-h6 diagonal.



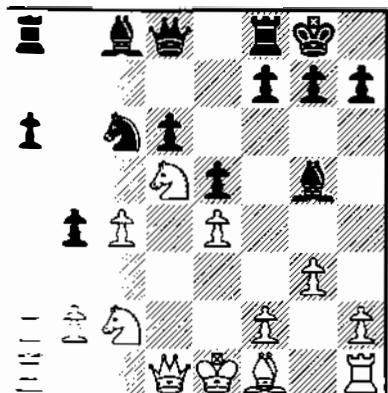
We've reached a position quite similar to those explored in the lines 12...a5 and 12...Rb8.

a) After 16...a5 17.Kg2 White's play is fairly simple: b2-b3, Qd3, Rad1, and Qe2. For example:

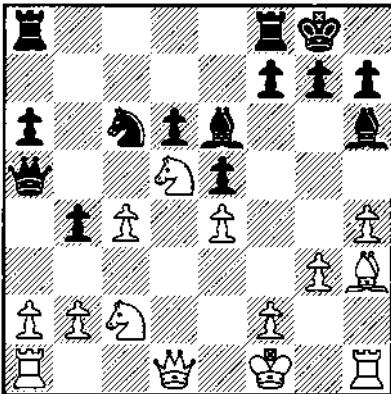
a1) 17...Qb8 18.b3 Qa7 19.Qd3 Kh8 20.Rad1 Rab8 21.Qe2 a4 22.Rd3±, Delchev-Drenchev, Skopje 2012.

a2) Another game, Khairullin-Van Kooten, Hoogeveen 2006, continued 17...Ne7 18.Nxe7+ Qxe7 19.Qd3 Rad8 20.b3 Qb7 21.Bxe6!? leaving White with a good knight against an empty bishop. White got a slight plus after 21...fxe6 22.Rad1 Qb6 23.Rhf1 Rd7 24.Qe2!± followed by Rd3.

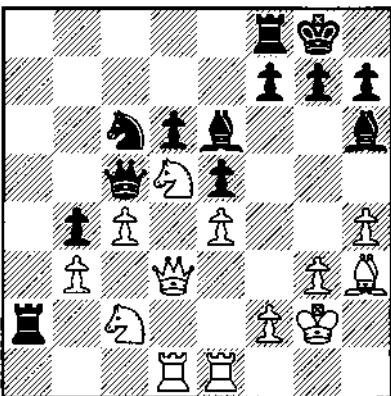
b) Quite recently Shirov faced 16...Qa5, a move designed to activate Black's queen.



... 14.h4 Bh6 15.Bh3 Be6
... 16.b3 Be6 17.Kf1 Qc5
... transposes to 16...Qc5)



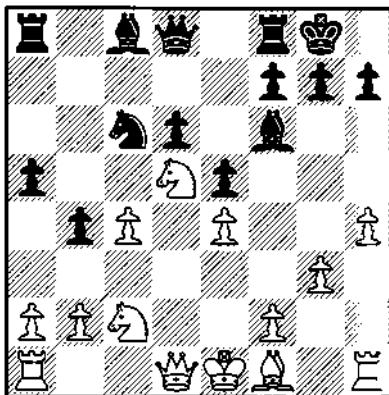
The game progressed 17.Kg2 Qc5 18.b3 Ra7 Stopping Nc7. 19.Qd3 a5 20.Rad1 a4 A natural attempt at counterplay, but as we'll see, this move will backfire. 21.Rhe1 axb3 22.axb3 Ra2



A critical moment—Shirov now chose 23.Re2±, but this move is not as strong, Shirov-Timofeev, Bilbao 2014. Just a few weeks later the correct 23.Ra1! was played. Black must now give up the a-file, and the b4 pawn is a serious weakness. 23...Rb2 (If Black tries to keep the file with 23...Rfa8, then 24.Bxe6 fxe6 25.Nc7± wins a pawn, since 25...Rxa1 is met with 26.Nxe6!).) 24.Reb1 Rxb1

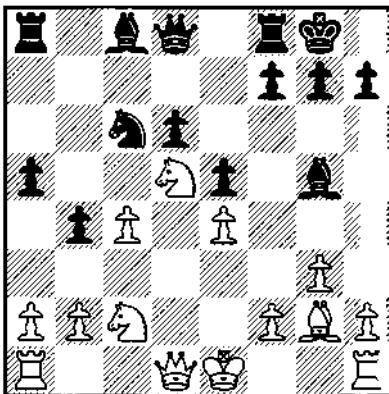
25.Rxb1 Bxd5 26.Qxd5 g6 (26...Ra2 27.Nxb4!+ is another nice point—White's play.) 27.Ra1±, Videnov-Szczepkowska Horowska, Bol CR 2014. White won a nice technical game from this position.

14.h4



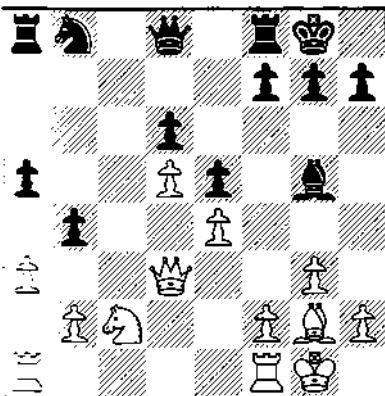
By now this move should come naturally to the reader!

In the 2012 World Championship Match, Anand chose 14.Bg2, allowing Gelfand to activate his dark-square bishop without penalty. 14...Bg5



In previous lines the drawback of playing Bg5 was that White could

play h2-h4 with tempo, followed by Bb3, but with White's bishop already at g2 this is of little concern. Their game continued 15.O-O Be6 16.Qd3 Bxd5!? Giving up the bishop in this fashion can be risky, for if White gets the initiative he'll be able to exploit the presence of opposite colored bishops. On the other hand, if White's play is imprecise, then Black should have no problems equalizing. 17.cxd5 Nf5 18.a3



...i now:

18...Na6 19.axb4 Nxb4 20.Nxb4 axb4 21.h4 Bh6 22.Bh3?!! Qc4! as played in Hou-Ushenina, Sibenik 2013, put a lot more pressure on Black.) 22...Qb6 23.Bd7 b3 24.Bc6 25.Rxa2 bxa2 26.Qa3 Rb8 27.Qxa2, and a draw was agreed in Hou-Gelfand, Moscow 2012.

The engines prefer 18...bxa3!?? things are definitely not easy here for Black either, as White can combine pressure on the queenside with a timely f2-f4 advance. For example 19.Nxa3 20.Nc4 Qc7 was played shortly before the match in Libiszewski-Schenk, Sibenik 2012, where now White could have played 21.Ra3!N

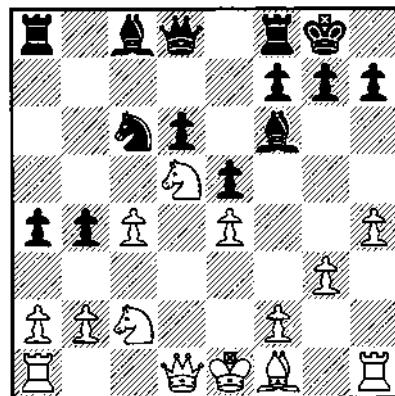
Rfb8 22.Rc3 Nc5 23.Qc2 a4 24.f4↑, seizing the initiative.

14...Be6

The current main line and most sensible move.

14...Rb8 15.b3 Be6 16.Bg2 transposes back to 12...Rb8.

The rare **14...a4!?** was recommended by GM Vassilios Kotronias in the recently released *Grandmaster Repertoire 18 – The Sicilian Sveshnikov*.

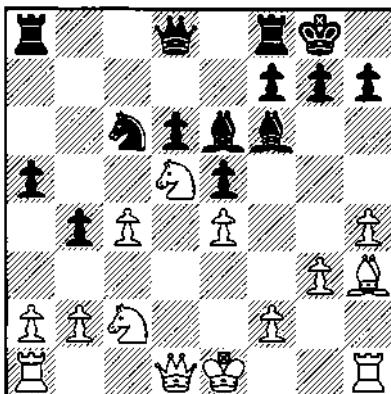


After 15.Bg2N he recommends 15...Be6 16.O-O b3, which is a decent attempt for counterplay, but 17.axb3! is overlooked, with the deep point that after the forced 17...axb3 18.Rxa8 Qxa8 19.Nxf6+ gxf6 20.Ne3 White threatens Nf5, and if 20...Nd4 then 21.f4!↑ gives White a dangerous initiative. The immediate threat is f4-f5, followed by Ng4. Since we're quite far from established theory, we'll leave it to the readers to analyze from here on!

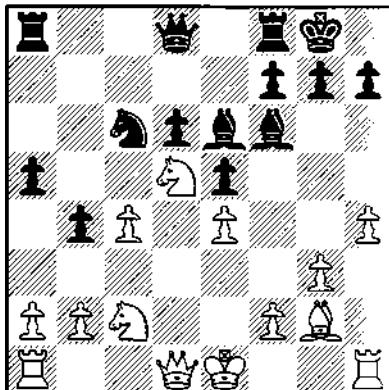
15.Bg2

This natural developing move is less popular than Bh3, though in our view seems like an objectively stronger choice.

Early this year Caruana opted for the more aggressive 15.Bh3, and thus it deserves our attention:



15...Rb8 (*It would be interesting to know what he had in mind against 15...a4!?* which appears to give Black excellent counterplay, as in Nisipeanu–Shirov, Foros 2008, and now 16.Nce3.) 16.Qd3 a4 17.b3 Bxd5 18.cxd5 Na5 (18...Nd4 19.Nxd4 exd4 20.O-O± is clearly better for White, who will control the c-file as Black has no access to the c8-square.) 19.O-O Qe8 20.Ne3 Bd8 21.Nf5±, Caruana–Van Wely, Wijk aan Zee 2014. All of White's pieces stand better, and Caruana went on to win a splendid game.



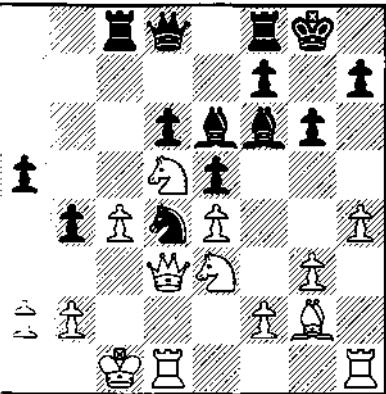
15...Bxd5

The trend as of late is to make the exchange—both here and in other lines—in search of equality. What we get is a middlegame with a closer center and opposite colored bishops. In this game Shirov demonstrates that White can certainly fight for the initiative in this kind of position.

Let's look at a few interesting games where Black kept his light-squared bishop:

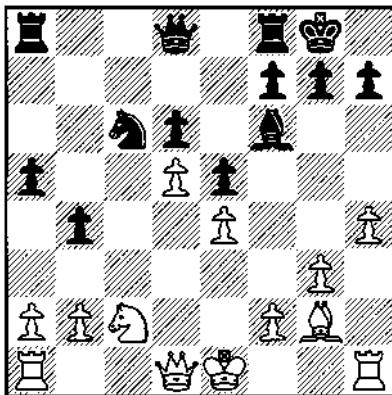
15...Re8 16.Qd3 Rb8 17.Bh3 Switching strategies, challenging Black's light-squared bishop. 17...Be7 18.Kf1 Qc8 19.Kg2. (*The king maneuver was featured in the line 12...Rb8.*) 19...Bd8 20.Rad1 Qc7 21.b3 Bb6 22.Bxe6 fxe6 23.Ne3 Qxb6 24.Rd2 Rbd8 25.Rhc1 Nisipeanu–Spasov, Baile Herculane 2010. White has a structural advantage, and continued Qe3 and transferred his knight to f3.

15...Rc8 16.Nce3 Reinforcing the knight on d5, though at the cost of giving up the d4-square. 16...Nc6 17.Qd3 g6 18.O-O-O!? A bold decision



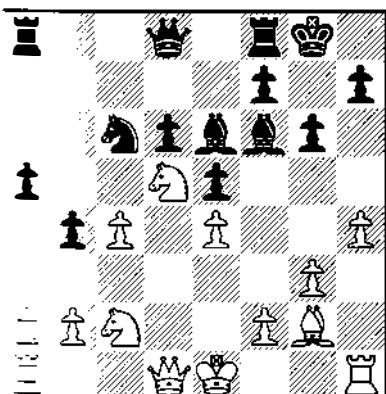
(17.Qxd6?! is reckless—17...Rac8† followed by Rfd8, Nd4, etc.) 17...a4 18.O-O axb3?! Giving away control of the a-file. 19.axb3 Rx a1 20.Qxa1±, Morozevich–Shirov, Moscow 2008.

16.cxd5



After 18...Bg7 19.Kb1 Black has no way of opening up the queenside, so begins taking risky measures on the kingside. 19...f5?! 20.f4 (The immediate 20.h5± was even stronger.) b3 21.a3 Nc2 22.h5→, Bologan–Slepkov, Khanty-Mansiysk 2013. On the kingside blowing up, it is Black's king that's in trouble.

Shirov himself chose 15...g6, aiming to retreat the bishop to g7.



16...g6+ This exchange makes sense in that Black weakened the dark squares around his king. (16.Qd2 Bg7 was another way of handling this position, retaining the option of the queenside.) 16...Qxf6 17.b3

16...Nb8

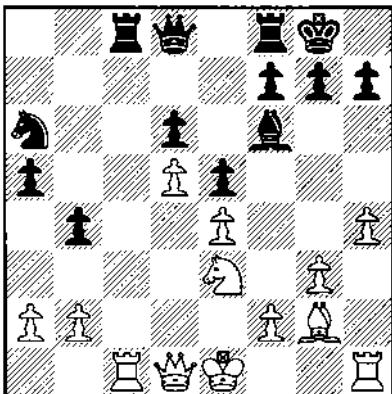
A good choice, practically speaking—Black should keep a pair of knights on the board in order to have better chances for counterplay.

16...Nd4 can be labeled as “groveling for a draw”, as after 17.Bh3!± White is playing for two results.

17.Ne3 Na6 18.Rc1

The position is close to equal, but perfectly playable. White should continue improving his position and try to make use of his extra space.

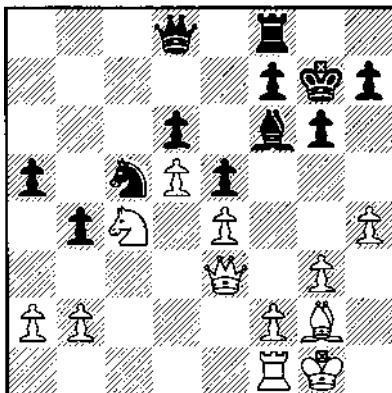
18...Rc8



19.O-O

Another high-level game continued 19.Nc4 Nc5 20.O-O Re8 21.Qe2 Be7 22.Bh3 Ra8 23.Nd2 a4 24.Rc4 Qb6 25.Rfc1 Ra5 26.Kg2±, Svetushkin–Illescas Cordoba, Melilla 2011. White went on to win after exchanging knights with Nf3-e1-d3, followed by dominating the c-file.

**19...Rxc1 20.Qxc1 Nc5 21.Nc4 g6
22.Qe3 Kg7**



23.f4!?

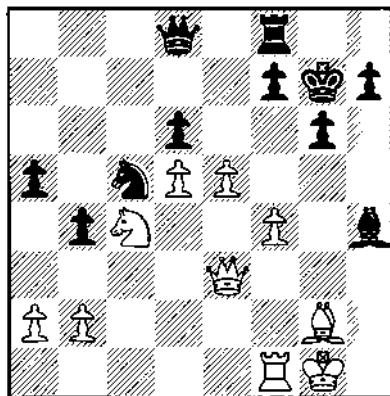
In his trademark style, Shirov livens the play with the sharpest option available.

The simple 23.b3± followed Bh3, Kh2, and only then f2-f4 was a safer way of improving White's position.

23...exf4 24.gxf4 Bxh4

Black has no real choice; he must take the pawn. Otherwise White would be able to play e4-e5 “for free”.

25.e5



25...Be7?!

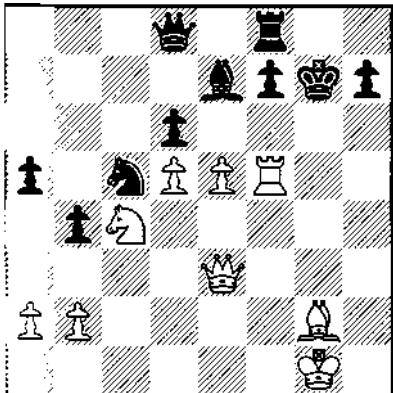
An understandable move, but best.

After 25...Nb7!∞ the position would be quite unclear, though Black is solid.

26.f5! gxf5?!

The ugly 26...f6 was necessary, followed by 27.e6 g5 28.Bf3∞ where White has obvious compensation but is not immediately winning.

27.Rxf5

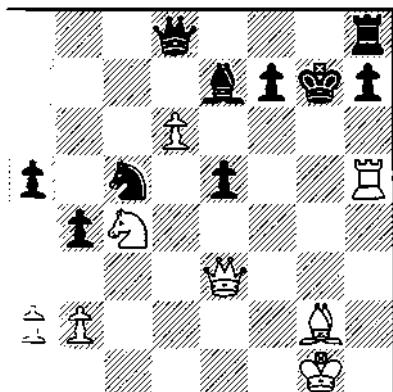


27...dxe5?

A third error in a row, this one decisive.

The only move was 27...Kh8, and the game might continue 28.Rh5 f6 29.Qh3 Rf7 30.e6 Rg7 31.Kh2± with a large advantage for White, who can strengthen his attack with Ne3-f5.

25.Rh5 Rh8 29.d6!+-



A direct tactical shot, winning a rook.

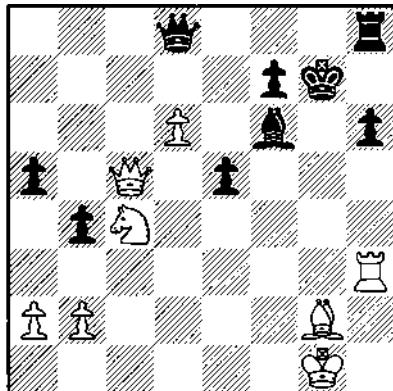
29...h6

After 29...Bxd6 White wins easily
30.Qh6+ Kg8 31.Rg5+.

30.Qxc5

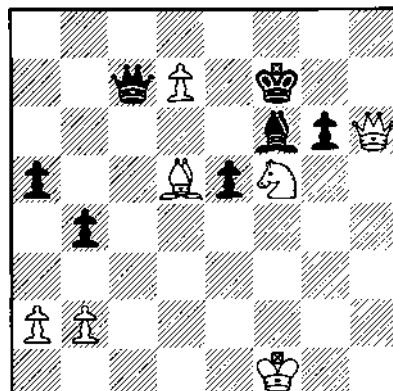
Not 30.dxe7? as 30...Qd1+ picks up the rook on h5.

30...Bf6 31.Rh3



White has an extra knight, a strong d-pawn, and an ongoing attack against Black's king. The rest of the game did not take long:

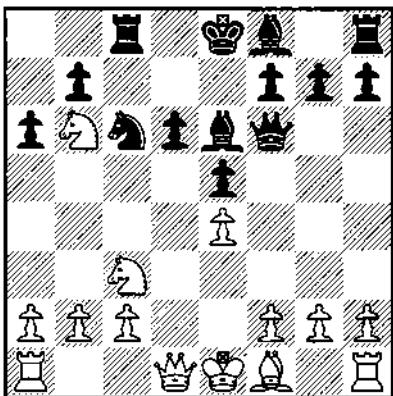
31...Re8 32.Bc6 Rg8 33.Qe3 Kh7+
34.Kf1 Rg5 35.d7 Kg7 36.Nd6
Rg6 37.Nf5+ Kf8 38.Rxh6 Qc7
39.Rxg6 fxg6 40.Qh6+ Kf7
41.Bd5 mate



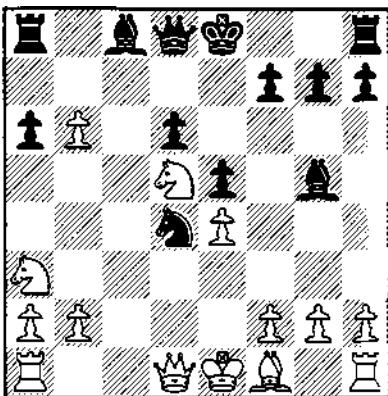
A nice finish!

Memory Markers

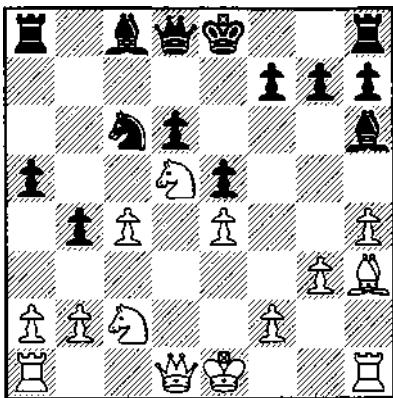
Here are reminders of some of the ideas and motifs in this chapter.



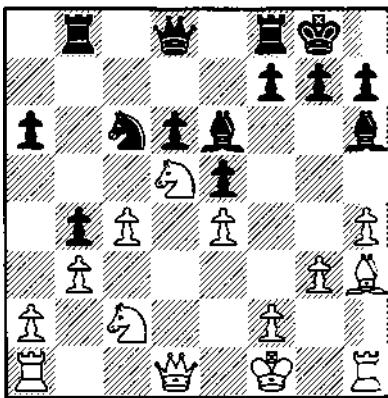
- 1. After 11.Nb6!**. Freezing Black's queenside. See diagram on page 384 in Ni-Sulava, notes to 8...b5.



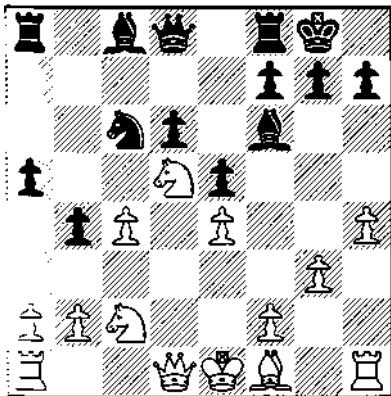
- 2. After 13.b6!**. Keeping the pawn alive and threatening Nc7+. See diagram on page 390 in Ni-Sulava.



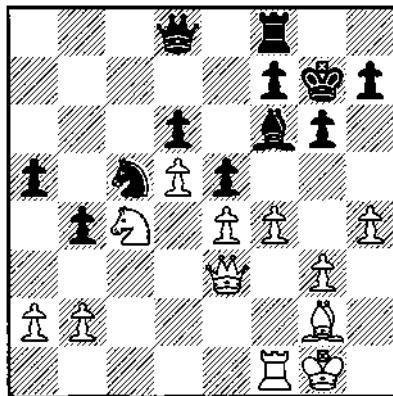
- 3. After 15.Bh3!**. An ambitious positional idea, looking to trade light-squared bishops. See diagram on page 395 in Shirov-Mista, notes to 12.O-O.



- 4. After 17.Kf1!**. Instead of capturing on e6, White improves his king. See diagram on page 397 in Shirov-Mista, notes to 12.O-O.



5. After 14.h4. Restricting Black's dark-squared bishop. See diagram on page 400 in Shirov–Mista.



6. After 23.f4!?. A sharp advance! See page 404, game move in Shirov–Mista.

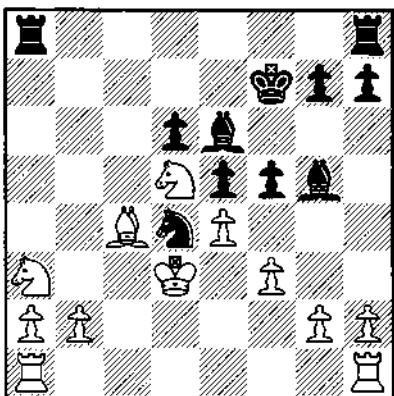
Exercises

White to play!

With these situations from actual games, you can find some ideas ~~and~~ opportunities that may await you, as White, when facing the Sveshnikov.

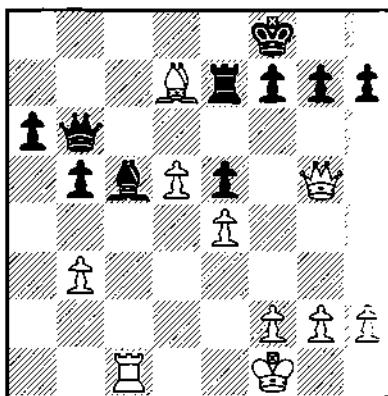
Solutions to the exercises begin on page 536.

Exercise 1



Nepomniachtchi – Popov
RUS-ch 2010

Exercise 2

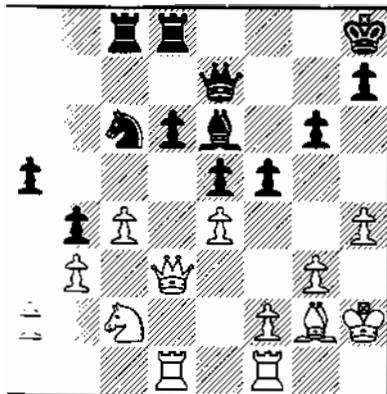


Kadric – Zhou
EU-ch 2012

How can White increase his advantage?

White to play and win.

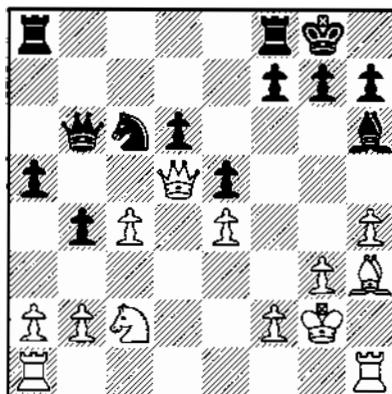
Exercise 3



Nisipeanu – Radjabov
Bazna 2010

Black has just played f7-f5. How should White react?

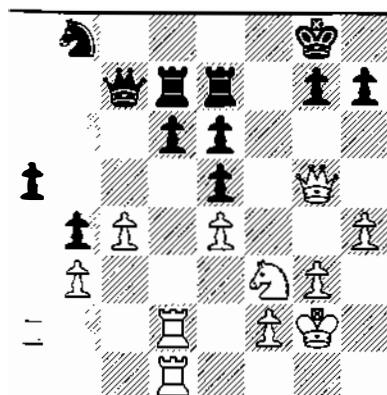
Exercise 4



Morozevich – Bogosavljevic
EU-chT 2013

White to play, can you get away with capturing the d6-pawn?

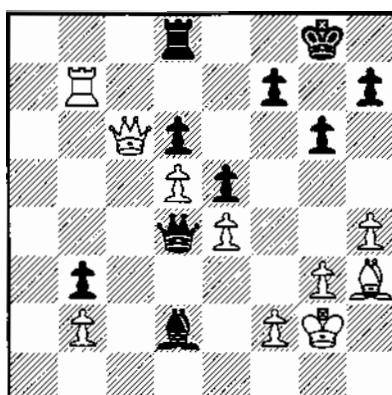
Exercise 5



Nisipeanu – Spasov
ROM-chT 2010

White to play, how can you capitalize on the pressure?

Exercise 6

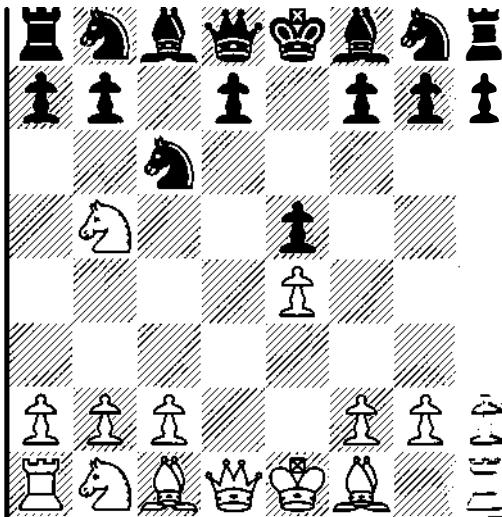


Hou – Ushenina
EU-Cup 2013

White to play and win.

Chapter 6b

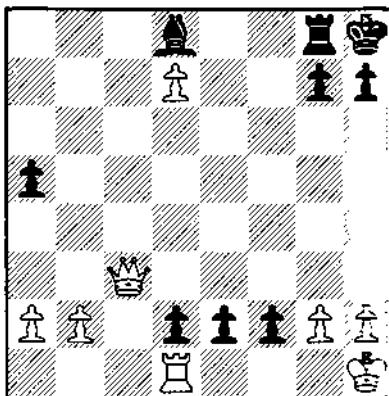
The Kalashnikov and Löwenthal Variations



1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 e5 5.Nb5

From the diagrammed position above, Black has a choice between 5...**a6**, which leads to the Kalashnikov Sicilian, and 5...**a6**, which is known as the Löwenthal Sicilian. While these lines are less common than the Sveshnikov, they are still serious tries for dynamic equality, each filled with their respective theory.

The Kalashnikov Variation (covered in Games 34 and 35) is not very well known, but is quite playable, much thanks to the efforts of super-GM Teimour Radjabov, who has included it in his repertoire for many years. We'd be remiss not to mention one of the earliest known instances of the Kalashnikov in practice: the famous game McDonnell–La Bourdonnais, from Game 16 in their fourth match of 1834, which ended in the following immortal position:



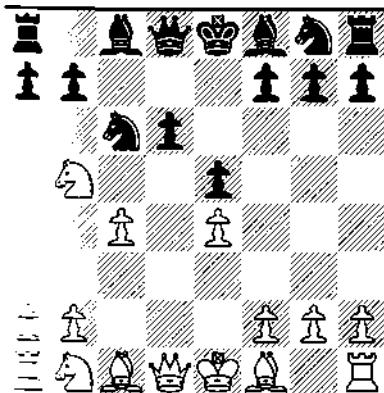
The Löwenthal Variation, named after 19th century Hungarian master Johann Löwenthal, is much rarer than the Kalashnikov but perhaps undervalued—in Game 36 we believe we have found an effective path to a clear advantage for White, deeming the line hardly playable.

Game 34

Leko – Nataf

44th Olympiad, Istanbul 2000

- 1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4
4.Nxd4 e5 5.Nb5 d6 6.c4



We've chosen to seize the opportunity to grab space in the center and establish full control of the all-important d5 square. This system is one of White's most respected options of fighting against the Kalashnikov, and since it resembles the Maróczy Bind, this makes it a good fit for our repertoire. After the more popular 6.N1c3 7.Na3 b5 8.Nd5, apart from 8...Nf6 which transposes into the Kalashnikov Sicilian after 9.Bg5, Black can also choose from 8...Nge7, 8...Be7, and 8...Be7.

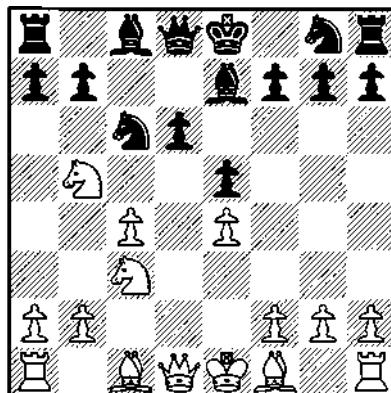
7 Be7

By far the most common and flexible move. The alternatives don't offer anything special for Black and could transpose into one of the main lines of this system:

- 8...Nf6 7.N1c3 a6 8.Na3 Be7
8...Be2 transposes to the main game.

6...a6 7.N5c3 Be6?! allows White to plant his knight on d5. (7...Nf6 8.Be2 Be7 9.Be3 O-O 10.O-O Be6 11.Na3 again transposes to the main game) After 8.Nd5 Nf6 9.Nbc3 Be7 10.Be3 O-O 11.Be2±, it's an ideal setup for White.

After 6...Be6 7.N1c3 a6 8.Na3 Rc8 (8...Be7 9.Be2 transposes to Game 35) most accurate is 9.Be2 Be7 (9...Nd4 10.O-O Be7 11.Be3 transposes to the line 9...Nd4 in Game 35 on page 420) 10.O-O Nf6 (Or 10...Bf5 11.Nc2 Bxc1 12.Rxc1 Nf6 13.Qd3 O-O, transposing to 13...Rc8 in Game 35.) 11.Be3 O-O 12.Rc1, transposing to the main game.
7.N1c3



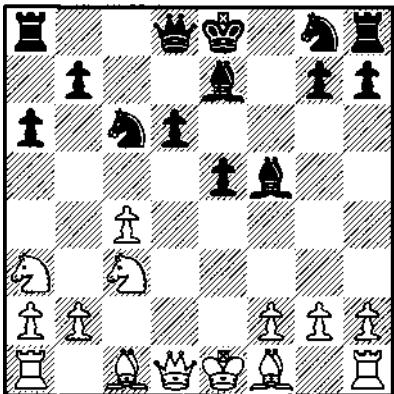
White threatens Nd5, so Black's reply is forced:

7...a6 8.Na3 Nf6

An obviously logical move, and one of the main ways for Black to play in this opening.

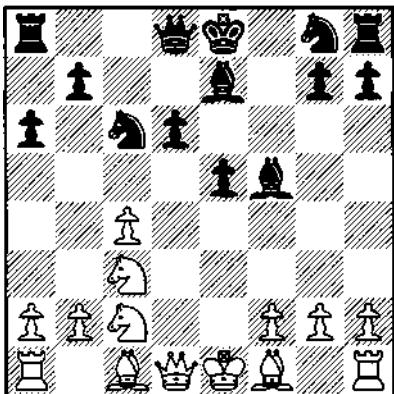
The popular main line **8...Be6** will be explored in the next game.

The sharp **8...f5!?** has been championed mainly by Radjabov in the past decade or so. Black aims to develop his pieces freely at the cost of weakening his position. **9.exf5 Bxf5**.



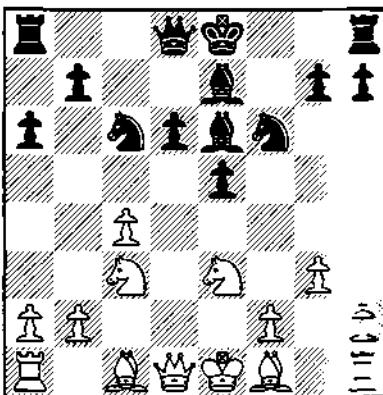
The main line is considered to be 10.Bd3, though we believe that Black has an easier time here. One illustrative game continued 10...Be6 11.O-O Nf6 12.Nc2 Qd7 13.Bg5 O-O 14.Bxf6 gxf6 15.Ne3 f5 16.Ned5 Bd8!?, and Black achieved excellent counterplay in Akopian–Radjabov, Astrakhan 2010.

Interesting is 10.Nc2!?



This is a secondary option, but a few nice games by GM Peter Leko have convinced us of its value. 10...Nf6 11.Ne3 Be6 (After 11...Bg6?! 12.Bd3, retreating with Bf7 is rather pointless, but 12...e4 13.Be2± is strategically dreadful, as Black's minor pieces

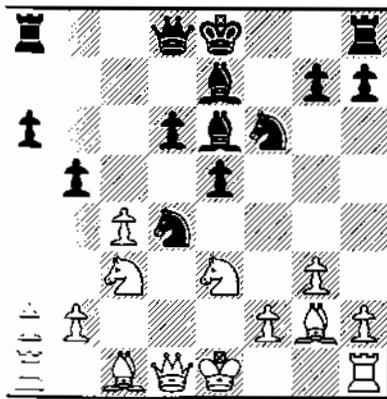
are now stuck defending the pawn.) 12.g3! A harmonious way of developing our light-squared bish



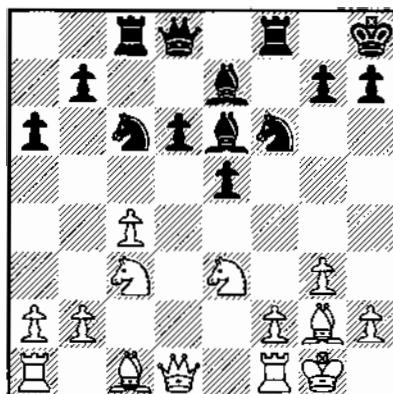
White's next few moves will be Bg2, O-O, and either Ne5 or Ncd5, followed by developing the queen's bishop via b2-b3 or e3. Meanwhile, Black will strive for active piece play in order to maximize for White's control over the central light squares. We've selected a few important games played in this line to serve as instructive examples.

a) 12...Qd7 13.Bg2 Bd8?!, a common transfer of the light-squared bishop is rather dubious in this line: 14.O-O Bb6 15.Ned5 Be3! Completely refuting Black's piece play, exchanging off the bishop that has already made four moves: 16...Bxc3 (After 16...O-O?! 17.Bd3 exd4 18.Nxf6+ Rxf6 19.Nd5! Bb6 20.cxd5± White wins the d4 pawn) 17.Nb6! Qd8 18.bxc3! Rb8, Topalov–Shirov, Monte Carlo 2003. White has a large advantage, and could have continued 19.Qd2± followed by Bb6 with tons of pressure against Black's position.

c) 12...b5!? 13.Bg2 Nd4



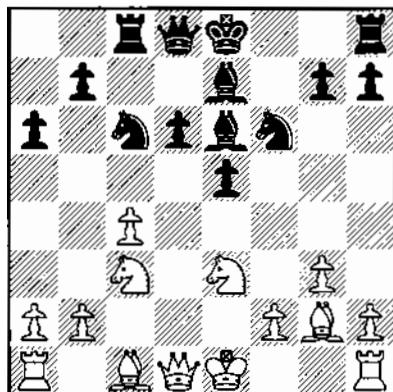
c) After 12...O-O 13.Bg2 Kh8
14.O-O Rc8



This daring sacrifice has been tried many times. Instead of capturing the pawn on a8, which would give Black tremendous counterplay, White will stick to the general plan: 13.b5 axb5 15.Ncd5 (15.Ned5 runs 15...b4! 16.Nxb4 Bb3! 17.Qd3 and White is in trouble.) 15...Rc8 16.O-O 17.b3! Black's knight on c3 is not enough to compensate for the weakened structure. 17...Kh8 after the moves 18.Nxe7 Qxe7 19.Nf5 20.Nxf5 Bxf5 we've ended the game Smirnov–Radjabov, Saint Petersburg 2004, where 21.Rc1!± would have been a noticeable plus. The two bishops are clearly felt here, and the pawn remains a chronic weakness.

Best is 15.Ncd5 (15.b3 b5 16.cxb5 axb5 17.Nxb5?! d5→ is an example of what not to do, Diu-Belous, Vladivostok 2014) 15...b5 16.cxb5 axb5 17.Bd2N Nd4 18.Bc3±.

d) Finally, after 12...Rc8 13.Bg2 we'd like to present two of Leko's games playing White:

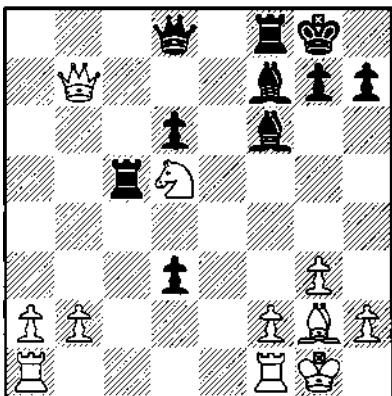


d1) Shirov tried 13...Na5 14.O-O (14.b3! is even stronger, with the idea 14...b5 15.Ned5N bxc4 16.Be3! threatening Bb6. 16...Rb8 17.bxc4 Qd7 18.Qe2±, with a much more active setup and a potential break of c4-c5.)

d11) After 14...O-O 15.Ned5 Nxc4 16.Nxf6+ Bxf6 17.Bxb7 Rc7 18.Bg2 Kh8 19.Nd5!± gaining the two bishops, Leko went on to win a fine technical game, Leko–Shirov, Monte Carlo 2004.

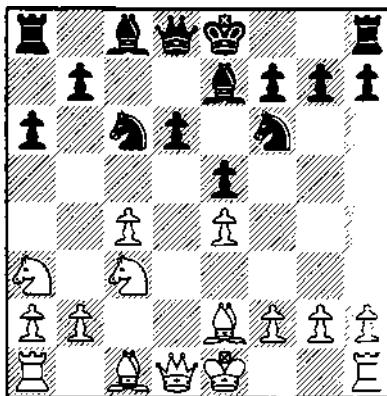
d12) 14...Nxc4 looks a bit better for White after 15.Bxb7 Nxe3 16.Bxe3 Rb8 17.Bc6+ Bd7 18.Bxd7+ Qxd7 19.Bg5±.

d2) Radjabov opted for the more thematic 13...b5 and found himself in a difficult position after just a few moves: 14.cxb5 axb5 15.O-O Nd4 16.Ned5 Nxd5 17.Nxd5 O-O 18.Be3 Bf6?! (18...Nf5 was more solid but after 19.Qd3± White is for choice.) 19.Bxd4 exd4 20.Qe2! Bf7 (20...Bd7 21.Rad1± is miserable for Black.) 21.Qxb5 Rc5 22.Qb7 d3



This took place in Leko–Radjabov, Dortmund 2003, and now 23.b4! Rc2 24.Rad1± would have given White a nearly decisive advantage, as the d-pawn is not long for this world!

9.Be2

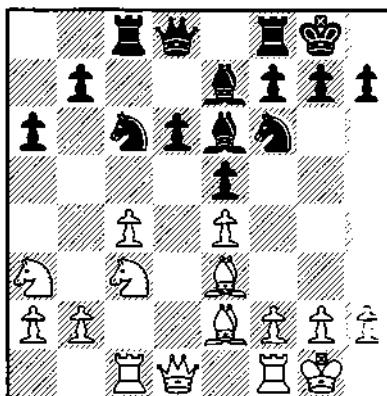


This is preferable to 9.Bd3, ~~as~~ White would like to control the ~~a~~ square.

9...O-O 10.O-O Be6

10...Nd4 11.Be3 transposes to note 9...Nd4 in Game 35, on ~~p~~ 420.

11.Be3 Rc8 12.Rc1



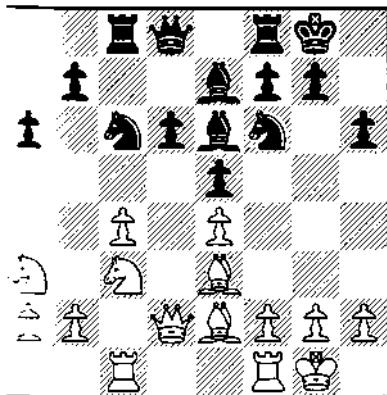
We've reached a common position for this opening. White's ~~tr~~ are clear: he has more space ~~an~~ semi-open d-file. Typical improvements include Qd2, Nc2, Rfd1, ~~an~~ f2-f3.

- **h6**

Essentially a useful waiting move. Black is waiting for Qd2, so that he can play Ng4 and exchange one of White's bishops.

Against 12...Nd7, which has also been seen, we found 13.Nc2?N. This is more accurate than Qd2, since it can now be met with b2-b4. It might now continue 13...Na5 13...f5?! 14.exf5 Bxf5 15.Bg4!± hitting Black's newly weakened squares) 14.b3 b5 15.Nd5! A tactical reaction to Black's plan of Na5 and b7-b5, with the point exc4 16.b4! Nb7 17.Na3 a5 ±. After winning the c-pawn, White's knights will dominate the kingside.

Qd2



Not fearing Ng4, Leko follows his general plan and makes this productive move.

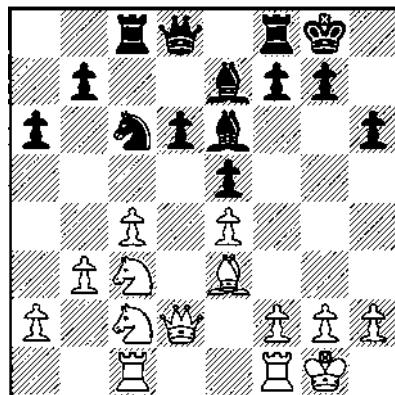
There's nothing wrong with the typical 13.Nc2± as well.

...Ng4

GM Nataf grabs the chance to exchange one of White's bishops—perfectly principled, as Black controls space.

A few games have continued 13...Ne8 14.Rfd1 Bg5, but White is clearly better after 15.Bxg5 Qxg5 16.Qxg5 hxg5 17.Nc2±, Damjanovic-Ivanovic, Podgorica 1996. Black lacks compensation for the weakness of the d6 pawn.

14.Bxg4 Bxg4 15.Nc2 Be6 16.b3±



White is still very much in control over the position—The c4 and e4 pawns create a restrictive bind that makes it difficult for Black to achieve anything active.

16.Nd5± was also possible, but Leko probably wanted to maintain the pressure against d6.

16...f5

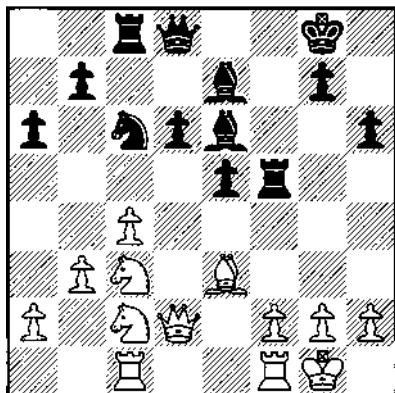
A logical advance, and it is hard to suggest something else, though now White will get to use the e4 square for his knight.

Black would be in for a tough defense after 16...Bg5 17.Rfd1 Bxe3 18.Nxe3 Nd4 19.Ne2 Nxe2+ 20.Qxe2±, where White can pile up on the d-file and slowly torture his opponent.

17. *exf5 Rx f5??*

A bit too enthusiastic.

Necessary was 17...Bxf5, where after 18.Nd5 Bg5 19.Bxg5 Qxg5 20.Qxg5 hxg5 21.Nce3 Bg6± Black's position is unpleasant but certainly defendable.



18. *Rfd1*

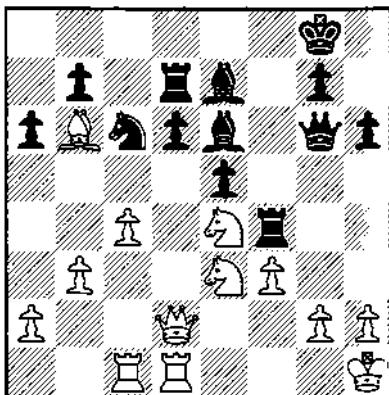
Leko conducts the next phase of the game beautifully, finding the perfect squares for all of his pieces.

Another good option was to play 18.Nd5 with the idea 18...Qe8 19.Nxe7+!? exchanging off Black's passive bishop, but also getting rid of the main defender of the d6 pawn. After 19...Qxe7 20.Bb6 Rf6 21.Ne3±, White is better.

18... *Qe8*

Meanwhile, Black searches for a kingside attack.

19. *Ne4 Rd8 20. Bb6 Rd7 21. Ne3 Rf4 22. f3 Qg6 23. Kh1*



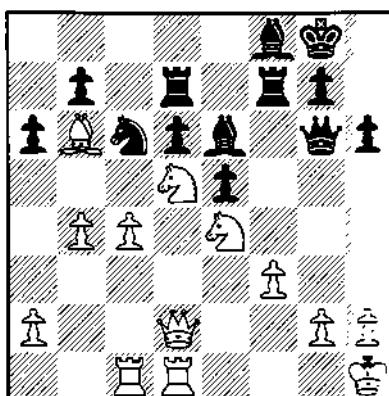
23... *Bf8??*

Passive.

Relatively best was 23...Bf8 24.Nd5 Rf8 (Or 24...Bxb6 25.Ne7 Rd8 26.Qe3± with the idea c4-e5 25.Be3± where Black is clearly winning but surviving.

23...Rh4? would be misguided account of 24.g3! Rh3 (or 24...Rf3 25.Qc2!±) 25.Qg2± and the poor knight is just trapped.

24. *Nd5 Rff7 25. b4*

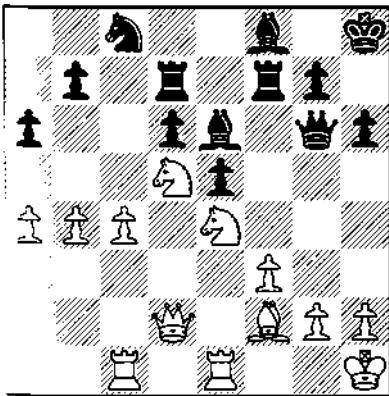


Now that his pieces are perfectly placed, Leko begins to take action on the queenside, grabbing space preparing either b4-b5 or c4-c5.
25... *Ne7 26. Re1 Nc8??*

Black has started to drift.

26...Bf5 \pm would have kept the status quo.

27.Bf2 Kh8 28.a4

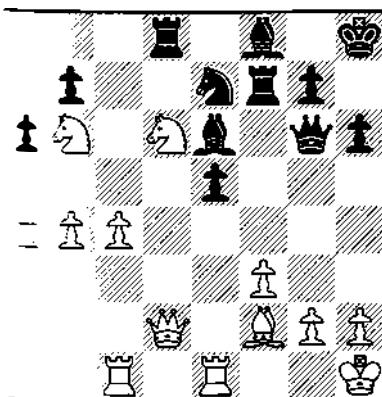


28...Ne7

Losing a pawn, but Black is already in deep water.

In case of 28...Bxd5 29.Qxd5 Ne7 30.Qd2 Ng8 31.b5 \pm , White would win on the queenside.

28Nb6 Rd8 30.Nxd6



This begins the technical phase

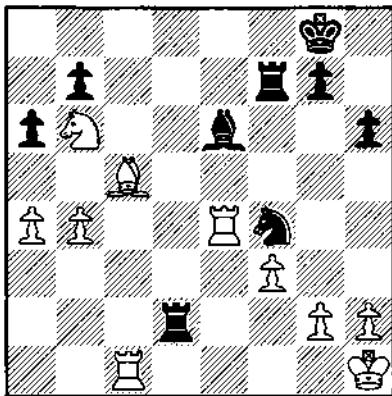
of the game, where Leko tries to turn his extra pawn into a full

material advantage.

28...Bxg3 29.Qxg3 Nf5 30.Qc2!

Forcing a queen trade.

32...Bxd6 33.cxd6 Rxd6 34.Rxe5 Nh4 35.Qxg6 Nxg6 36.Re4 Nf4 37.Bc5 Rd2

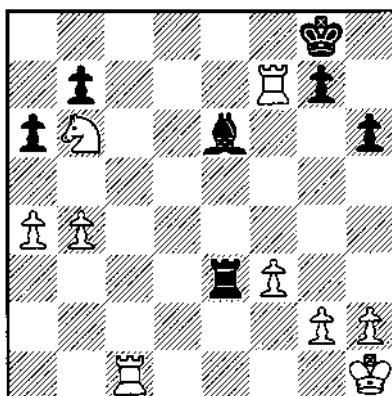


38.Be3?

Spoiling a very well played game!

38.Rf1 \pm was needed, and only then followed by Be3.

38...Re2 39.Rxf4 Rxe3 40.Rxf7



40...Kxf7?

Missing his chance.

After the correct 40...Bxf7! White has no way of defending his queenside pawns, and Black should equalize due to the activity of his rook, for example 41.Rc8+ Kh7 42.Kg1 Rb3=.

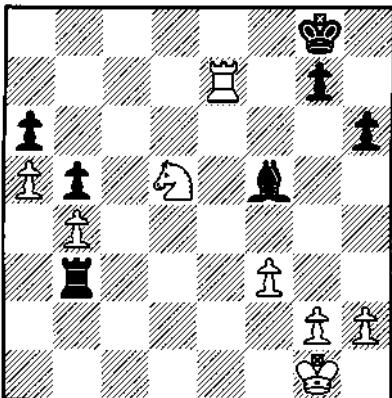
41.Rc7+ Kg8 42.Kg1 Rb3 43.Re7!

This is the difference—White finds a way to defend the b4 pawn.

43...Bf5

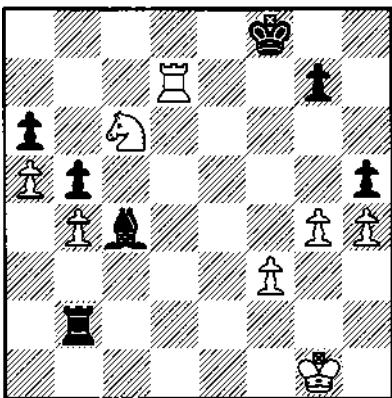
Or 43...Bf7 44.Re4±.

44.Nd5 b5 45.a5+-

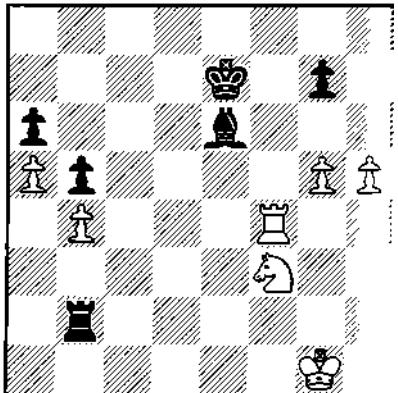


Having finally consolidated his extra pawn, from here on Leko converts cleanly, not giving his opponent any opportunities to save the game.

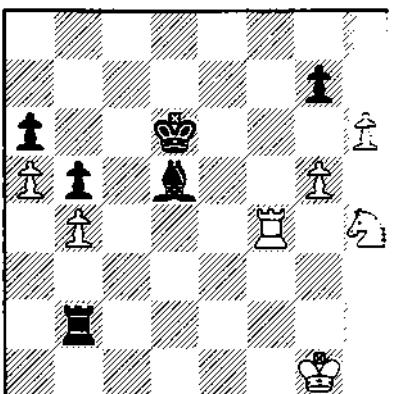
45...Bd3 46.Rd7 Bc4 47.Ne7+ Kf8 48.Nc6 Rb2 49.h4 h5 50.g4



50...hxg4 51.fxg4 Be6 52.Rd4 Rc2 53.Ne5 Ke7 54.h5 Kf6 55.Nf3 Rb2 56.Rf4+ Ke7 57.g5



57...Bd5 58.Nh4 Kd6 59.h6



59...gxh6 60.gxh6 Bg8 61.Nh7 62.Nf8 Ke5 63.Rh4 Rb2+ 64.Kf2 Rb2+ 65.Ke1 Rb1+ 66.Kd2 Rb2+ 67.Kc3 Rc2+ 68.Kb3

Game 35

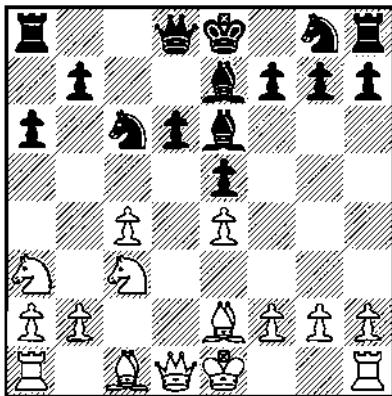
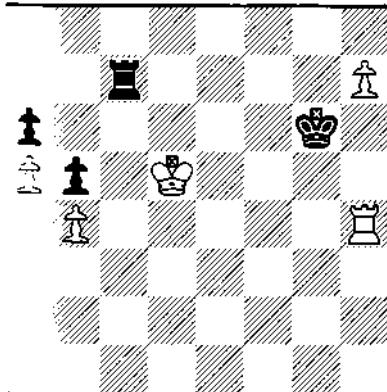
Navara – Moiseenko
French Team Championships
Saint-Quentin 2011

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4
4.Nxd4 e5 5.Nb5 d6 6.c4 Be7
7.N1c3 a6 8.Na3 Be6

The main continuation. In the previous game we looked at both 8...f5 and 8...Nf6.

9.Be2

...Rc7 69.Nxh7 Rxh7 70.Kc3
c6 71.Kd4 Kg6 72.Kd5 Rc7
h7 1-0

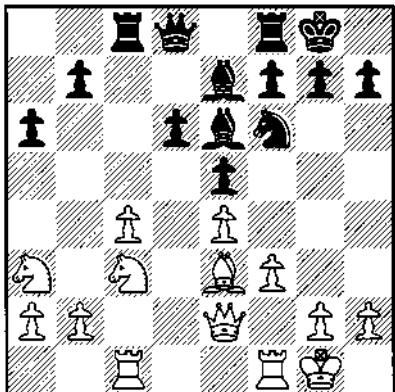


The previous game, Leko–Nataf, demonstrated how to play from White's perspective if Black continues with 9...Nf6. In this game we'll look at two separate ideas, both connected with exchanging a minor piece.

9...Bg5

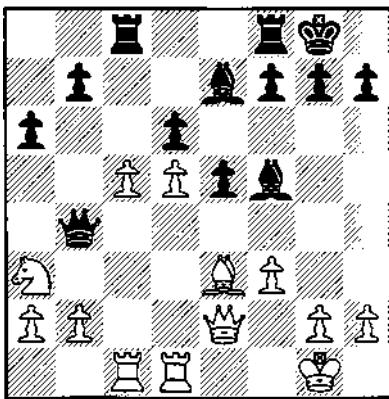
This is considered one of Black's most solid attempts at equalizing in this variation. Exchanging the passive dark-squared bishop gives Black some mobility for the rest of his pieces. At the same time, however, the d6 pawn has become much weaker, as it has lost its most important defender.

Another serious idea is 9...Nd4, opting to eventually capture the bishop on e2. 10.O-O The exchange on e2 should not bother White very much. As we saw in the previous game, White can still make use of his space advantage without the help of the light-squared bishop. 10...Nf6 (10...Rc8 transposes after 11.Be3 Nxe2+ 12.Qxe2 Nf6 13.f3 O-O 14.Rac1) 11.Be3 Nxe2+ 12.Qxe2 O-O 13.f3 The main move, strengthening e4 and controlling the g4 square. 13...Rc8 14.Rac1



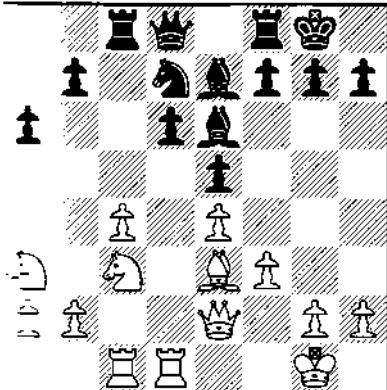
In general, White is looking to strengthen his position with moves like Rfd1 and b2-b3, eventually playing against Black's backward pawn on d6. Meanwhile, Black needs to create counterplay quickly or risk being squeezed for the rest of the game. Let's see a few practical examples:

a) 14...Qa5 15.Rfd1 (White could also try 15.Qd2 setting up Nd5, for instance 15...Rfe8 16.Nd5 Qxf2+ 17.Nxe7+ Rxe7 18.Bxd2± with a slight edge in this endgame.) 15...Qd5 16.Nd5 Nxd5 17.exd5! (17.cxd5 would be preferable only if White could seize control over the c-file.) 17...Bf5 (17...Bd7 was better, though after 18.Rd3 and Rb3, White has some pressure on the queenside.) 18.c5!

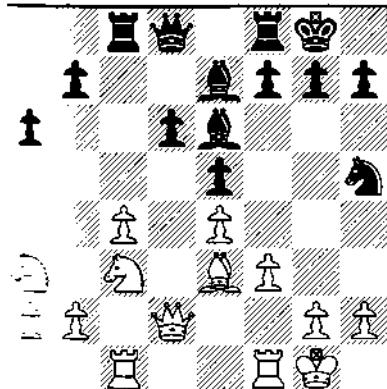


A thematic sacrifice. After 18...d5 19.Nc4 Black's pieces are quite disheveled; the main threat is Rc3-Rd2 19...Rcd8? Now in Hernandez-Gonzalez, Mislata 1996, both players missed 20.d6! Bf6 21.g4 Be6 22.g5—winning a piece.

b) 14...Nd7 15.Rfd1



Rc6?! (*15...f5 16.exf5 Bxf5 Nd5± seems like a healthier option for Black.*) 16.b3 Qa5 Nab1 Without a possible b7-b5, Black's pieces lack purpose. Rfc8 18.Nd5! Qd8 (18...Bxd5 would surrender the queenside.) 19.exd5 R6c7 20.Nc3 Qf8 e2 h6 22.Ncd5 Bxd5 23.Nxd5 ± 24.Qb4±, and White soon broke through in Almasi–Schmittdiel, – any 1995.
Lastly, 14...Nh5 leads to sharp 15.Qd2

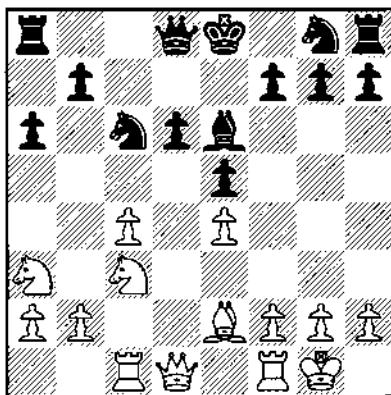


And now:

c1) 15...Bxc4? is a blunder in view of 16.Nxc4 Rxc4 17.Nd5! which took place in Boros–Meszaros, Budapest 2003. Now after 17...Rc6 (or 17...Rxc1 18.Rxc1± followed by Rc7.) 18.Rfd1± White will win the d6 pawn and retain the more active pieces.

c2) In Ivanchuk–Short, Tilburg 1990, Black played the highly aggressive 15...f5?!, after which White should opt for 16.exf5N Rxf5 17.g4 Rg5 18.Kh1 Nf4 19.Rfe1± with a very double-edged position. It's now up to Black to justify his hyper-active play, as White is ready to capture on f4.

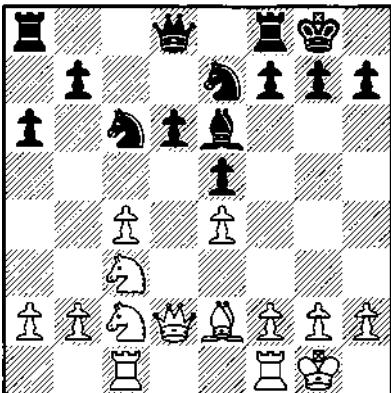
10.O-O Bxc1 11.Rxc1



After the exchange of bishops, White's play should be focused on increasing the pressure along the d-file.

11...Nf6

Black has also tried 11...Nge7 with a future f7-f5 in mind. **12.Nc2 O-O 13.Qd2:**



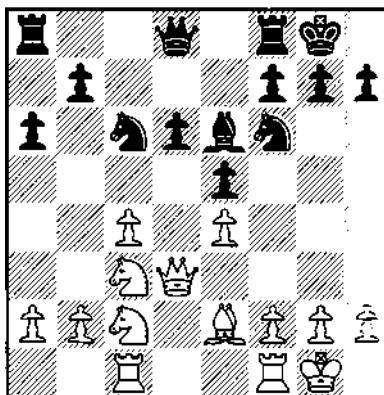
Since the knight is on e7 there is less pressure on e4, which means that White can take more aggressive action on the queenside, mainly with the advance b2-b4-b5. For example:

The immediate 13...Qb6 can be met with 14.Nd5!N Bxd5 (*After 14...Qc5 15.b4 Qa7 16.Nc7 Rad8 17.b5± White is in charge.*) 15.cxd5 Na7 16.a4!± followed by a4-a5 and Ne3-c4, dominating the queenside.

13...Ng6 14.g3 Qb6 15.Nd5 Qa7 16.h4! was seen in Mostertman-Ikonnikov, Netherlands 2013, and is excellent for White since h4-h5 is quite a serious threat. After 16...Bh3 17.Rfd1 f5 18.exf5 Bxf5 (*Or 18...Rxf5 19.Qe3! Raf8 20.Qxa7 Nxa7 21.f3±. White threatens both Kh2 and Nc3-e4.*) 19.Nce3± Black has too many weaknesses to survive.

Lastly, 13...Qd7 is most common and now we very much like how Zapata handled the White side of this middlegame: 14.Rfd1 Rad8 15.f5 16.b5 Nb8 17.Ne3! f4 18.Ne5 Ng6 19.f3 It turns out Black is slow in initiating a kingside attack. White is already threatening to break through with c4-c5. 19...Nc6 20.Bf1 (20.c5! dx5 21.Qe1!+- would win Black's queen.) 20...Kh8 21.dxc5 22.Qf2 g5 23.Nxf4 Qf7 24.Ne5 Qxe6 25.Qxc5+-. Black's position was well beyond saving in Zapata-Hernandez, Cienfuegos 1991.

12.Nc2 O-O 13.Qd3



This is less popular than 13.Qd7 but putting the queen on d3 has the benefit of defending the e4 pawn.

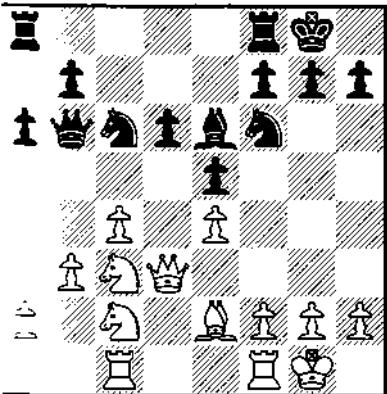
13...Qb6

A natural square for the queen.

Similar is 13...Rc8 14.Rfd1 Rb8 15.b3 Rfd8 16.Qe3±.

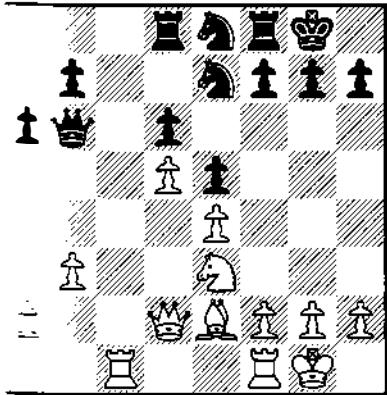
14.b3

14.Qxd6 was tested recently. After 14...Qxb2 15.Qd3 Qb6 16.Qd8 17.Rfd1 Nd7 18.Qa3 Qb8 19.Qa7, Black wasn't much worse. Volokitin-Shirov, Loo RUS 2014



+ Nb4

In a previous game, GM Moiseenko – 14...**Rd8** inviting 15.Nd5 (Rd1± is also a thought, keeping Black's advantage stable.) 15...Bxd5 16.Bxd5 Ne7 17.Ne3. In this new structure White should seek to put pressure on Black's queenside, while Black should try to organize f7-f5. (17...Ne8 in Guliyev–Moiseenko, Warsaw 2007, best was the prophylactic 18.Qd2! which prevents Black achieving f7-f5 favorably:

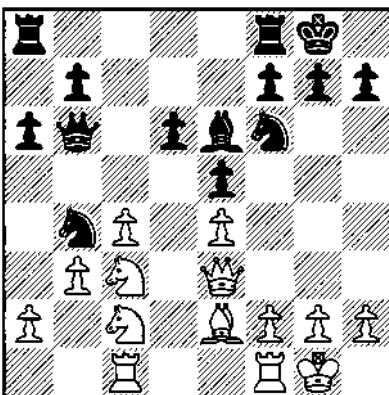


(After 18...f5?! 19.exf5 Nxf5 20.Rxf5 21.Bg4 Rf4 22.Be6+ 23.Qe3!± White's control over the file should bring dividends.)

19.Bd3! Further discouraging f7-f5. 19...f5 20.exf5 Nxf5 (White wins material after 20...gx f5? 21.Nc4 Qd4 22.Qg5++.) 21.Bxf5! gxf5 22.Nc4 Qb5 23.Qg5+ Ng7 24.Ne3±. Black's position is under a lot of pressure.

14...**Rfd8** also lets White change the structure favorably. After 15.Nd5 Bxd5 16.cxd5 Ne7 (Or 16...Nb4 17.Nxb4 Qxb4 18.Rc4 Qb6 19.Rfc1±, Lobzhanidze–Schmittiel, Gerlingen 2007.) 17.Ne3 Rac8 18.Nc4 Qa7 (18...Qc5 runs into 19.b4! Qxb4 20.Rb1 Qc5 21.Rxb7±) 19.a4 b5 20.axb5 axb5 21.Ne3± Black's knights are just too passive, Filippov–Ahmadinia, Teheran 2004.

15.Qe3!



Black's main chances to equalize come from creating counterplay to compensate for the weakness on d6. With that in mind, a trade of queens should favor White, who can then build up his position while limiting Black's activity.

15...Qxe3?!

A questionable decision.

Keeping queens on with 15...Qa5 was more prudent. Then play might proceed 16.Nxb4 Qxb4 17.Rfd1 Rfd8 18.f3 Rac8, where White is still a bit

better but with careful play Black shouldn't have any reason to worry.

16.Nxe3 Nc6

Rerouting the knight towards d4.

17.Ne2!

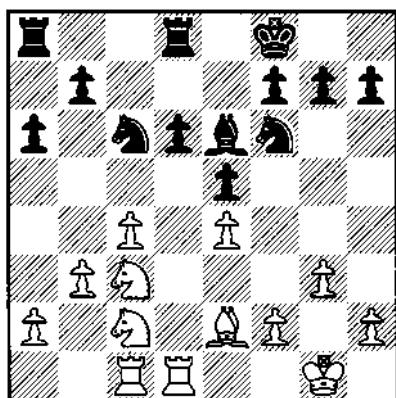
The key to this structure is to think prophylactically. GM Navara aims to restrict Black's pieces as much as possible.

17...Rfd8

Black's goal is to keep d6 protected while looking for opportunities to execute the b7-b5 break.

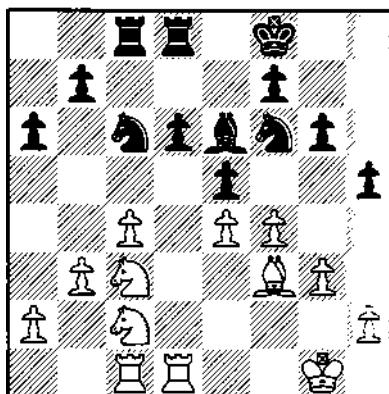
17...Nd4 was playable, though White is still for choice after 18.f3 Nxe2+ 19.Nxe2 b5 20.cxb5 axb5 21.Nc3 Rfc8 22.Nb4±, where Black might suffer having to defend both b5 and d6.

18.Rfd1 Kf8 19.g3!



A good plan—Navara prepares f2-f4 to put more pressure on Black's position.

19...Rac8 20.f4 g6 21.Bf3 h5



22.Rd2

Preparing to double rooks.

Perhaps another prophylactic move like 22.Kf2 would have been stronger, as after 22...Kg7 23.Rd2 the move 23...exf4 doesn't work tactically: (23...b5? also 24.cxb5 axb5 25.Nxb5 26.exd5 e4 27.Rdd1! Rxd5 28.Bf3 with a clear extra pawn.) 24.b5 25.cxb5 Na7 26.b6 Rxc3 27.Ra8, and since the bishop on f3 is protected (Compare this with the line starting with 22...exf4! below) White can play 28.Re1 Rx a7 29.Nc3 with threats of Rxd6 and f4-f5. 22...b5?!

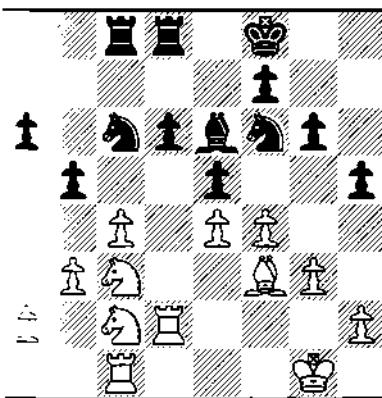
GM Moiseenko senses the danger and realizes that he must strike back. However this wasn't the most precise route of initiating counterplay.

22...Ke7? would run into 23.Rd1 threatening Nd5+ followed by exf4.

Staying put with 22...Nc6 23.Rcd1± would spell misery for Black, as White can now implement Kg2, Ne3 and break through with f4-f5.

The best chance was 22...exf4 with some surprisingly difficult

—plications to follow: 23.gxf4 b5
 —xb5 Na7! The point, counterattacking White's knight on c3. Now White's best chance would be 25.b6!
 —3 26.bxa7 Ra8 (26...Rxf3 loses easily to 27.Nd4! Re3 28.Nxe6+ fxe6
 —Pdc2+— and White will queen the pawn.) 27.f5 Rxf3 28.fxe6 Rxa7∞.
 In best play the game should fizzles into a draw. Because of this line,
 Kf2 was likely a stronger move than the game's 22.Rd2.



21...xb5

The game now becomes very sharp, but Navara is able to sort through the complications better and comes out on top.

Another good option was 23.f5!? which more complications arise: 23...gxf5 24.exf5 Bxf5 Exc6 Bxc2 (25...Rxc6?! 26.Nb4
 —27.Rf2 Be6 28.Rxf6 bxc4
 —xa6± looks winning for White.)
 —e7 Rb8 27.Bxa6 b4! 28.Rdxc2
 —29.Re1!±, preventing Ne4 and securing a plus. Less good is 25.Rxc3 Ra8 30.Bb7 Rxa2∞, which is bad for Black.

21...Na7

The point of Black's play, counterattacking down the c-file.

24.fxe5! Rxc3?!

Missing a stronger move.

Of course not 24...dxe5? 25.Rxd8+ Rxd8 26.bxa6+—.

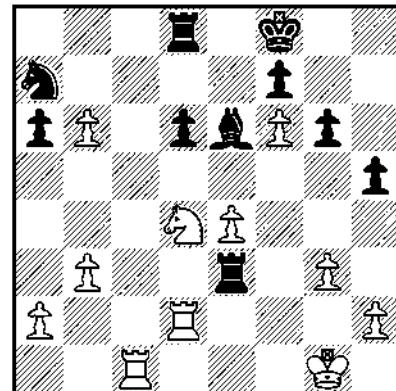
But 24...Nd7! would have kept things unclear, as after 25.Nd4 Nxb5 26.Ndxb5 axb5 27.exd6 Ne5 28.Bg2 Rc6∞ Black has excellent compensation—White's pieces are quite passive.

25.exf6 Rxf3??

The final slip.

Necessary was 25...Nxb5 26.Rf1!±. White is much better, but still far from winning.

26.Nd4 Re3 27.b6!



Remarkably, the b-pawn is turned loose and threatens to queen shortly. Despite the extra piece, Black is unable to deal with this unlikely hero.

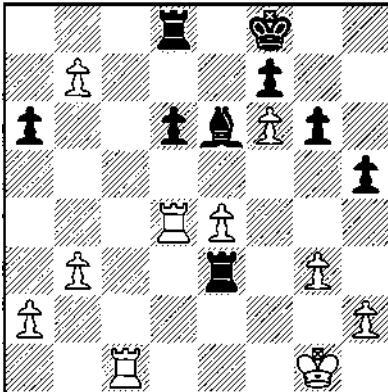
27...Rd7

The key variation is seen after 27...Nb5 28.b7 Nxd4 (Or 28...Bd7 29.Nxb5 axb5 30.Rxd6 Ke8 31.Rc7+— with Rxd7 to follow.) 29.Rxd4

Game 36

Dgebuadze – Glimmerveen
68th Noteboom Memorial
Leiden 2008

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4
4.Nxd4 e5 5.Nb5 a6

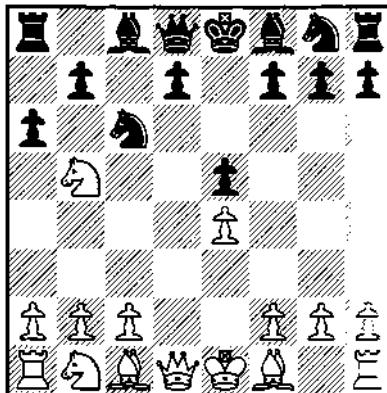


29...Rb8 (or 29...Re2 30.Rxd6!+)–
30.Kf2!+–. Black's rook is trapped!

28.Rdc2!

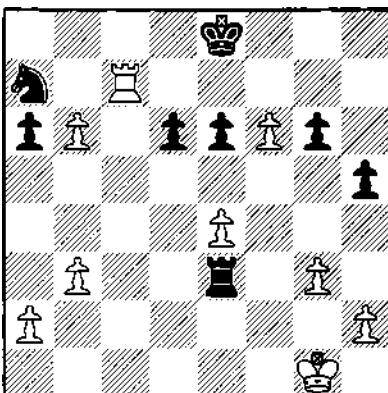
Much stronger than cashing in with bxa7. White threatens mate with Rc8+, as well as Rc7. The game is simply over.

28...Ke8 29.Nxe6 fxe6 30.Rc7 Rxc7 31.Rxc7 1-0

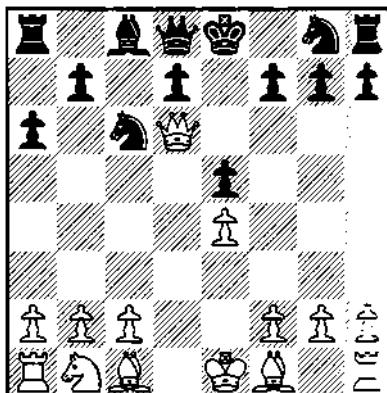


Inviting White's knight into **29.Nxe6**. This move signifies the Löwenthal Sicilian, a relatively rare line compared to other Sicilians.

6.Nd6+ Bxd6 7.Qxd6



A fantastic game by GM Navara!
Moiseenko resigned in view of
31...Nb5 32.Re7+ Kd8 33.b7+–.

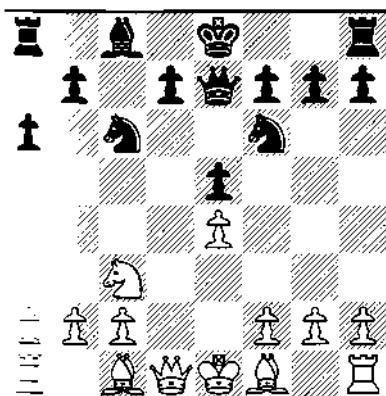


7...Qf6

The point—Black offers queen trade in order to get a

development. While White can certainly trade queens and claim an advantage on account of having the bishops, there are simply more ambitious ways for White to proceed.

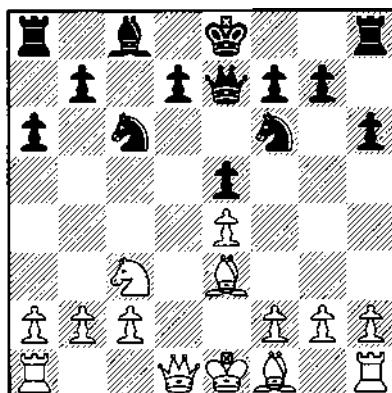
Less active is 7...Qe7. White can continue in the same fashion as in the main line: 8.Qd1 Nf6 After 9.Nc3 Be6, natural and strong 10.f4! exf4 11.Bxf4 O-O-O 12.Bd3 13.O-O±. White is clearly better thanks to his dark-squared bishop, *Sky-D'Arruda*, Buenos Aires 1955. 9.Nc3



This position can also be reached in the move order 7...Nf6 8.Nc3 9.Qd1. Given the chance, White will love to play Bg5 seizing control over the d5 square. Therefore he must choose between allowing a move with 9...d6, or spending a tempo on 9...h6 to prevent it:

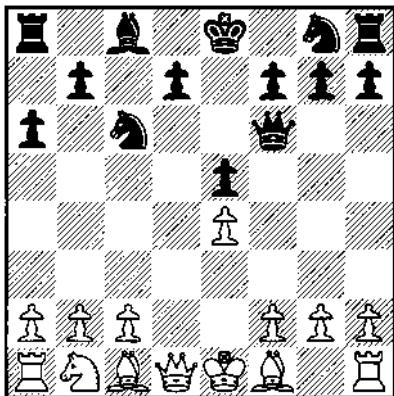
9...d6 10.Bg5! As promised, White takes control over d5. 10...Be6 (*not* 10...h6? 11.Nd5±) 11.Nd5 Bxd5 12.exd5 Nb8 13.Be2. Although Black's position is solid, White has the two bishops and thus a more pleasant game. A future plan could involve bringing the rooks to the center and playing f2-f4, opening up the position. For example 13...Nbd7 14.O-O O-O 15.c4 a5 16.b3 b6 17.Qc2 Ra7 18.Rae1±, *Popovic-Nikolic*, Belgrade 1992. White's setup is perfect, and f2-f4 is coming next.

After 9...h6 White can switch strategies and play 10.Be3 with the plan of Qd2 and castling queenside:



Let's follow an instructive game by GM Svidler: 10...O-O 11.Qd2 b5 12.O-O-O Qe6 13.f3 Ne7 Aiming for Bb7 and d7-d5, but Svidler puts a stop to this immediately: 14.Bc5! Rd8 15.Qd6!±, *Svidler-Maze*, Noyon 2005, completely paralyzing Black's position. After the queens come off, a2-a4 will break open Black's queenside.

8.Qd1!

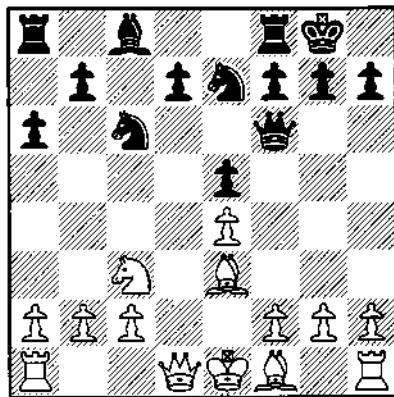


The queen returns home, but stays out of the way of both bishops. We believe this long retreat is the critical test of Black's opening.

8...Qg6

This has been Black's main approach in this variation, placing pressure on the g2 and e4 pawns. The queen also supports the d7-d5 break, which is usually played in conjunction with Nb4 targeting c2.

Developing with 8...Nge7 is uncommon and doesn't generate any counterplay. White should proceed 9.Nc3 O-O 10.Be3

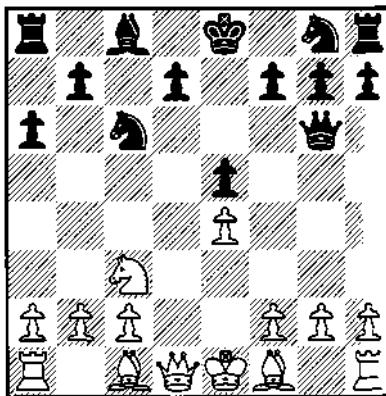


Black has no compensation for giving up his dark-squared bishop. Now play might continue:

10...b5 11.Qd2 b4 12.Nd5 Nxe5 13.Qxd5!N Best, keeping the pressure along the d-file. 13...Rb8 (13...Bb7 14.Qxd7±) 14.O-O-O Bc7 Now Qxd7 is not so wise, but 15.Qc7 secures a large advantage.

Or 10...d6 11.Qd2 Be6 12.O-O-O Rfd8 13.h4! threatening Bg5 and h4-h5. 13...h6 14.Nd5! Qg6 15.f5+. The position resembles an English Attack where Black's queen is sorely misplaced. White's next few moves should be h4-h5, g2-g4, and Kb1. This can then bring a rook to the g-file and quickly demolish Black's kingside.

9.Nc3



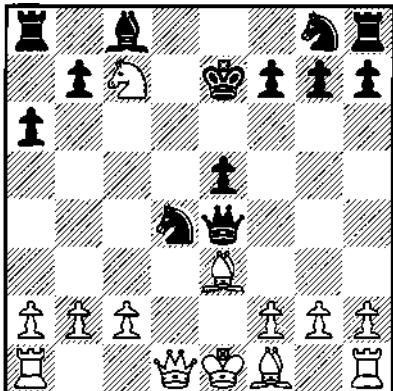
9...Nge7

The logical and best move preparing to strike with d7-d5.

9...Nf6?! can be strongly answered with 10.Qd6! defending the e4 pawn and critically impeding Black's development. Without the right to castle, Black has no choice but to go into an inferior endgame:

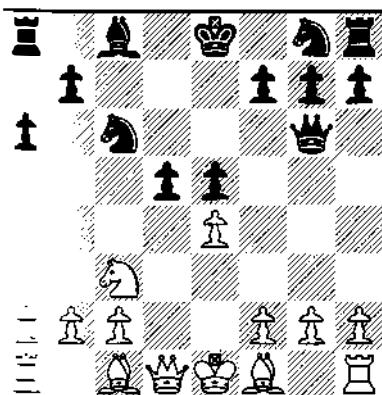
Ng4 11.Qxg6 hxg6. White has many ways of getting an advantage — for instance 12.Nd5 Rb8 13.h3 — 14.f3 Nf6 15.Nxf6+ gxf6 16.Be3± — the two bishops and easy pressure against the d6 pawn.

The immediate **9...d5?!** is relatively suspect, but tricky enough for an unprepared player:

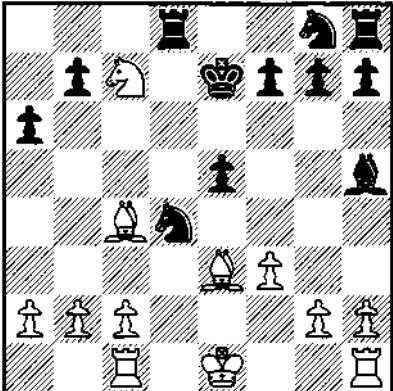


The only move, since Kd8 would self-pin the knight on d4. A key position, with two choices for White.

a) 13.Rc1 is a safe continuation, leading by force to a favorable endgame: 13...Bg4 The only move, as White was threatening both Nxa8 and c2-c3. 14.Qd3 Qxd3 15.Bxd3 Rd8 White has the two bishops, but the stranded knight on c7 is a concern. The simplest route seems to be 16.f3 Bh5 17.Bc4 to retreat the knight via the d5 square:



With the help of the silicon beast, we have we've worked out a practical variation of this line: 10.Nxd5 c5? runs into trouble after Nf4 → 10...Qxe4+ 11.Be3 Nd4 — a point of Black's play, threatening 11...Nb4? falls short in view of Nc7+ Ke7 13.Bd3! since Black's — ends up lost anyway, after Nxd3+ 14.Qxd3 Qxd3 15.cxd3 → 15.Ba7+— 12.Nc7+ Ke7

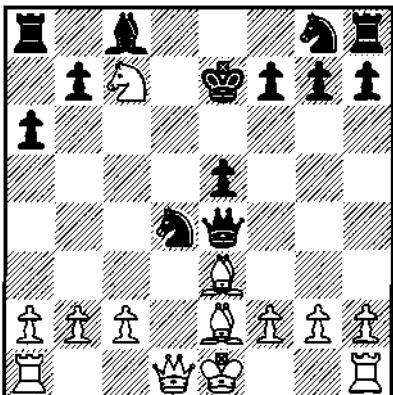


White is better in all lines:

a1) 17...Nf6 18.c3! as in Priebe-Lipinsky, Germany 1998. 18...Nf5 (Or 18...Nxf3+ 19.gxf3 Kd6 20.Nxa6 bxa6 21.Rg1±) 19.Bg5±.

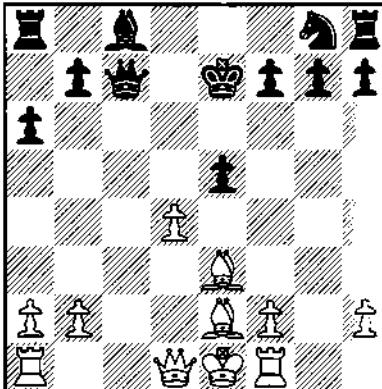
a2) 17...Kd6N 18.Nd5 b5 19.Bxd4 exd4 20.Bb3± followed by Kf2 and Nf4—Black's pawn on d4 will be a definite target.

b) But 13.Be2! is more critical, and our analysis appears to refute Black's play:



b1) 13...Rb8? allows White to castle 14.O-O!↑, where there is suddenly a stark difference in king safety.

b2) Similarly 13...Qxg2?!
White seize the initiative a
14.Rf1 Qc6 15.c3! Qxc7 (15...N
doesn't quite work out after 16.N
Nf4 17.Bxf4 exf4 18.Qb3!± rescue
the knight from the corner c
remaining up the exchange.) 16.cxc-

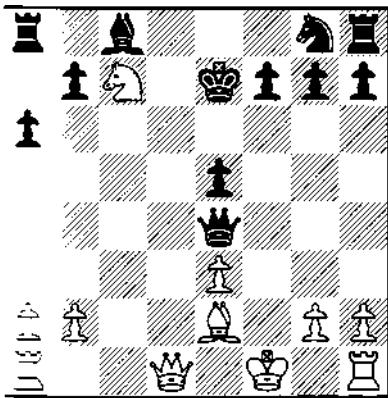


Both kings are stuck in the center but the dark-squared bishop threat of Rc1 gives White much better chances in this complex position:

b21) After 16...e4 17.Rc1 18.d5!+– White's pieces are coming out with great effect.

b22) Or 16...Nf6 17.Rc1 18.dxe5 Qxe5 19.Bc5+ Ke8 20.Nf4 A brilliant move, with the 20...Qe4 21.Rf3!+–, an original rook lift, ending all hopes of survival.

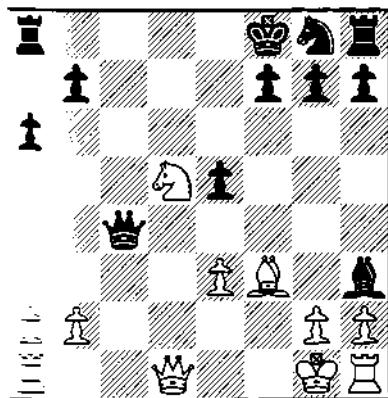
b3) The main line 13...Nxc2+ 14.Kf1 Nxe3+ (14...N
loses on the spot after 15.Bc5+
16.Ne8+ Kg6 17.Bh5+ Kh6 18.Nd6+
15.fxe3



...is now:

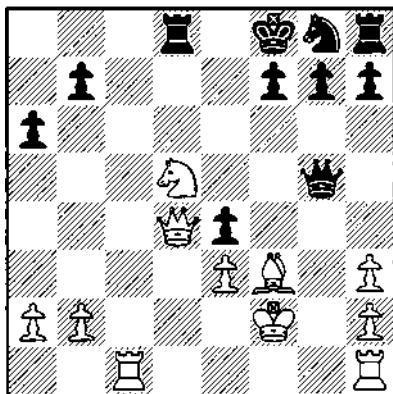
(31) 15...Rb8 16.Qb3!N threatening an annoying check on a3. (Nd5+ let Black's king get away in *Pons-Tarchichi, Paris 2008*) After 16...Be6 17.Nxe6 fxe6 18.Rc1± Black's king is in trouble—next White can play Ke1 and Rf1.

(32) Black's hopes lie in muddling the issue after 15...Bh3, though with care play White should come out top: 16.Nd5+ Kf8 17.Bf3 Qc4+ Kg1! with a double threat of gxh3 Nb6:



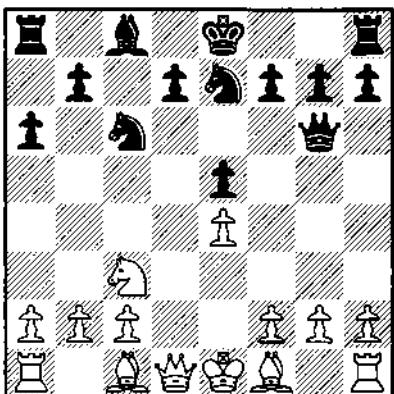
* 15...Rd8 is forced, threatening
** The line now continues 19.Rc1
*** 20.gxh3 e4 21.Qd4! It takes a

few moments for the computer to realize the strength of this move, and now the evaluation starts going up!
21...Qg5+ 22.Kf2

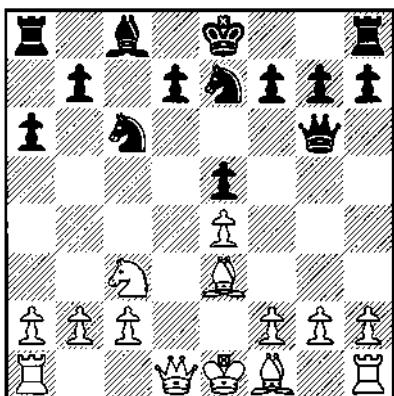


Black can now capture either the bishop or the knight, but White will take over the initiative: 22...exf3 (*Or 22...Qxd5 23.Qxd5 Rxd5 24.Rc8+ Ke7 25.Bxe4±, and the pin along the 8th rank is simply too strong. White is effectively playing with extra pieces, Khanin-Lauda, St. Petersburg 2012.*) 23.Rhg1! Sacrificing the knight for a deadly attack. The g7 pawn is undefendable, as Qh6 loses to Qc5+. 23...Qxd5 24.Qxg7+ Ke7 25.Rc7+ Kd6 (25...Rd7 loses after the accurate 26.Rxd7+ Qxd7 27.Qe5+! Qe6 28.Qxh8 Nf6 29.Qb8!+) 26.Rxf7+–. White's attack is decisive. Though we believe our analysis is convincing, we'd like to encourage the reader to check this entire line in depth, and clear up any potential confusion or doubts about its strength.

We return to our game, after
9...Nge7:



10.Be3!



We believe this simple developing move is much stronger than the prescribed “main line” 10.h4.

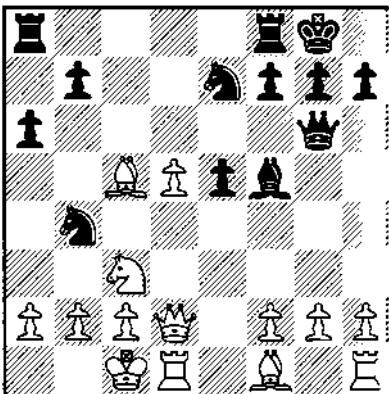
The unnecessary 10.h4 led to 10...h5 11.Rh3 d5 12.Rg3 Bg4! 13.f3 dxе4! 14.fxg4 Rd8 15.Bd2 f5 16.Re3 hxg4, and Black was already winning in Kramnik–Vallejo Pons, Amber Blindfold Rapid, Monte Carlo 2005.

10...d5

This thematic advance is the most commonly played move, and can be labeled as the main motif of the Löwenthal Variation. Fortunately for us, with a few precise moves White can now get a sizeable, nearly winning advantage by force.

If Black instead castles or plays d7-d6, White can continue Qd2, O-O-O, f2-f3, and h2-h4, with similar play to the line 8...Nge7.

Although 10...O-O 11.Qd2 d5? is tricky, it's nothing to worry about if White is aware of the refutation 12.exd5 Nb4 13.O-O-O Bf5 14.Bc5

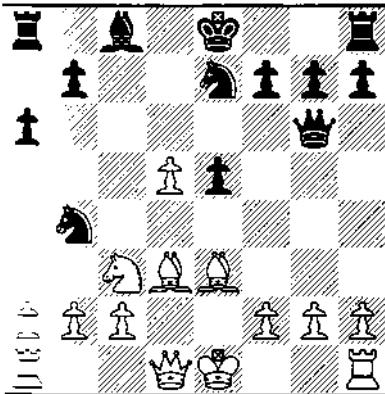


A simple, yet effective double attack 14...Nxa2+ 15.Nxa2 Rfc8 This took place in Grigorov–Gunev, Ruse 1993, but instead of just showing you the winning 16th move, we'll let you solve for it!—see Exercise 5 on page 439.

11.exd5

Facing the complications head-on, this capture is much stronger than 11.Nxd5.

a) ...Nb4 12.Bd3



b) ...Nxd3+

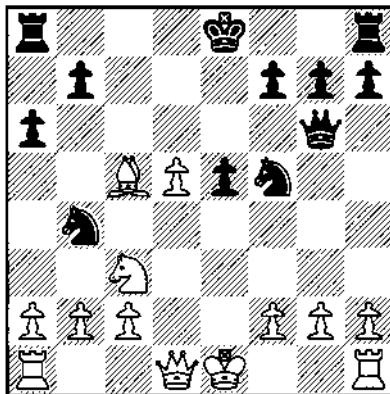
Relatively best.

12...Qxg2? is just bad, as 13.Be4 14.Bc5!↑ poses a lot of problems for Black, Gerasimov–Paushkin, Alimir 2008.

After 12...Bf5 13.Bxf5:

a) 13...Qxf5 14.O-O Nxc2 15.Rc1 16.fxe3 Qg6 is highly advantageous for White—

b) Or 13...Nxf5 14.Bc5!



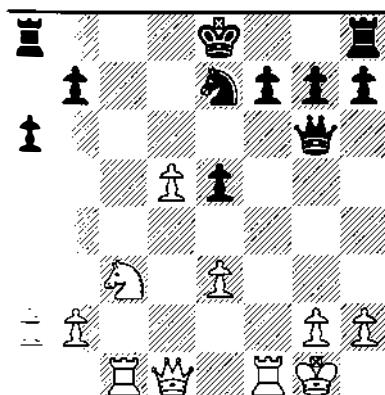
White must be willing to grab material and play with his king in the center, as Black will sacrifice the knight on b4 in some lines. Nevertheless, Black's play is highly unsound, so White should keep calm and emerge with an extra piece:

b1) 14...Nd4 15.Bxb4 Nxc2+ (15...Qxg2 16.Rf1 transposes into the next line) 16.Kd2! Nxb4 17.Qa4+ Nc6 18.dxc6 O-O-O+ 19.Ke1+— with an extra knight.

b2) 14...Qxg2 15.Rf1:

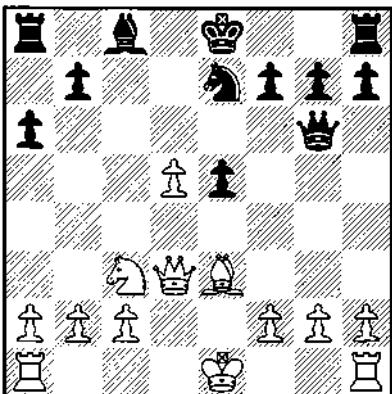
b21) 15...Nd4 16.Bxb4 Nf3+ 17.Ke2 Qg4 The threatened discovered check looks scary, but Black's only concrete threat is Qxb4, so after 18.Ba3 White is just winning, for instance 18...Ng1+ 19.Kd2 Qf4+ 20.Ke1 Nf3+ 21.Ke2 Nd4+ 22.Kd3 O-O-O 23.Qe1+— and Black's attack has run out of steam.

b22) Or 15...a5 16.Qe2! threatening Qb5+ and preparing to castle queenside. 16...O-O-O 17.O-O-O+— White next played Kb1, Qb5, d5-d6 and created a winning attack in Barlov–Streitberg, Prague 1981.



new of 17.d6! Rb8 18.Qb3 Rxd6 Qxb7+—. Black cannot castle without giving up a pawn or two.

13.Qxd3



Offering Black a choice.

13...Bf5

This move wins the sacrificed pawn back, but hands the initiative over to White.

The other try is 13...Qxd3, where after 14.cxd3 White only needs to play d3-d4 in order to emerge with a healthy extra pawn on d5. Moreover, White has some threats connected with either Bc5 or Bb6, as we can see from the following lines:

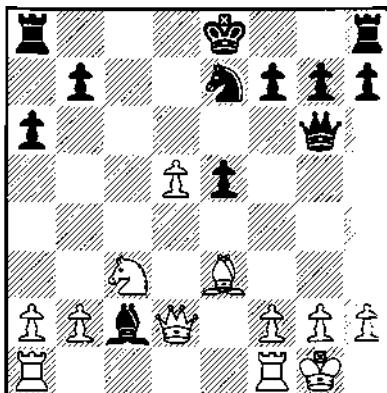
14...b5 15.d6 Nf5 16.Bc5 Bb7
17.O-O Rc8 18.b4 Nx d6 19.Rfe1 Kd7
20.Rxe5±, Kirknel-Zachariassen,
Copenhagen 2012.

14...Bf5 15.Bb6! Bxd3 (or
15...O-O?! 16.Bc5! Rfe8 17.Bxe7 Rxe7
18.d6! Rd7 19.Nd5!± winning an
exchange.) 16.O-O-O Bf5 17.d6! Nc8
(or 17...Nc6 18.Nd5 Rc8 19.Bc7!+
followed by Nb6.) 18.Bc7 Kd7 19.Rhe1
f6 20.Na4±. White has traded in his
extra pawn for superb piece activity
and a powerful passed d-pawn.

14.Qd2 Bxc2

14...Qxg2?! 15.O-O-O↑ is hardly playable for Black. White has too many active trumps, such as the open g-file and strong d-pawn. For example, after 15...O-O 16.Bc5 Rg7 17.Bxe7 Rxe7 18.d6 Rd7 19.Nd5 White was already winning in Janko-Balogh, Slovakia 2001.

15.O-O



We are still within known theory, but the position is tremendously favorable for White. With threats of Bc5, Rfe1, and f2-f4, White's position practically plays itself.

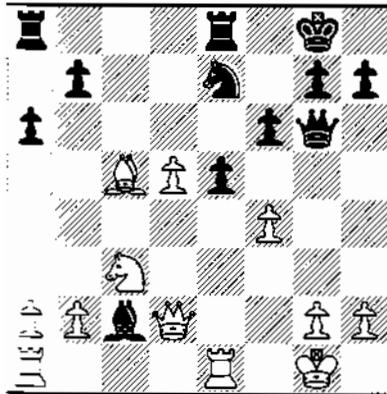
15...O-O

This natural move simply loses by force! It is rather hard to suggest something else for Black:

15...Qd3 16.Rad1! Qxd2 17.Rxd2
Bf5 18.f4! e4 19.d6 Ng6 20.d7!+ Bxg6
21.Nxe4+-+. The threat of Nd6+ and
f4-f5-f6 is just impossible to meet.

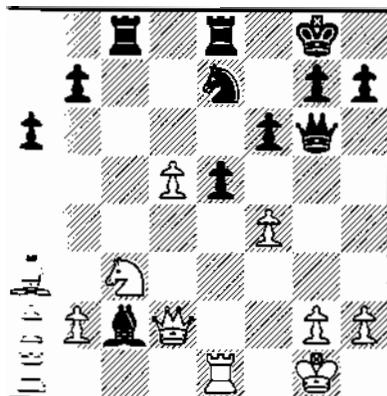
15...Rd8 16.Bc5 Qd3 17.Rad1
(17.Qe1 is also quite strong, followed
by f2-f4.) 17...Qxd2 18.Rxd2 Bf5 19.
e4 20.Rel+- winning the e4 pawn
and retaining the initiative.

16.Bc5 Rfe8 17.Rfe1 f6 18.f4!+-

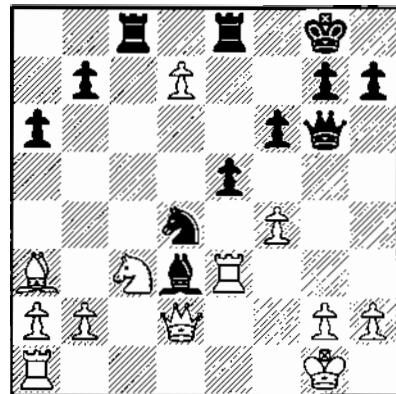


White's central pressure is too strong. The e5 pawn is under siege and d5-d6 is a constant threat.

...Rac8 19.Ba3



20.d6 Nc6 21.d7 Nd4 22.Re3! 1-0



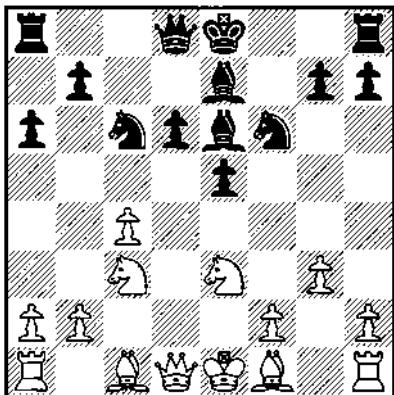
Stopping Nf3+. In view of heavy material losses, Black had seen enough.

Bd3?!

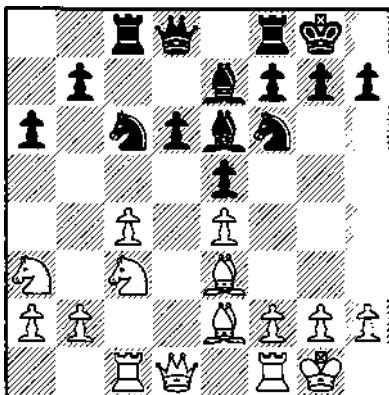
More stubborn was 19...Rcd8 20.Rxe5 fxe5 21.Rxe5 Nc8 22.Rxe8+ 23.d6+– though White should win with such a strong pawn.

Memory Markers

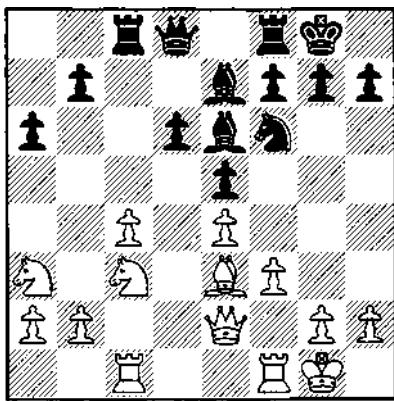
Here are reminders of some of the ideas and motifs in this chapter.



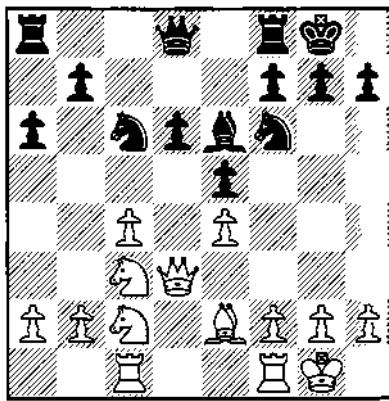
- 1. After 12.g3!.** A harmonious way of developing our light-squared bishop. See diagram on page 412, notes to Game 34, Leko–Nataf.



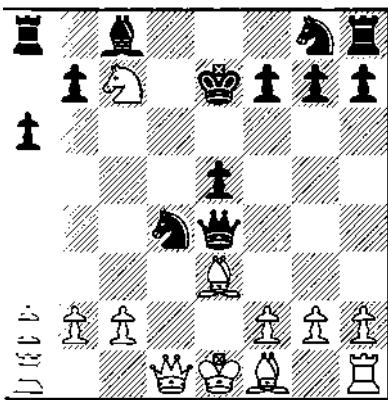
- 2. After 12.Rc1.** A typical position in the Kalashnikov. White has more space and a firm grip over d5. See diagram on page 414, in Game 34, Leko–Nataf.



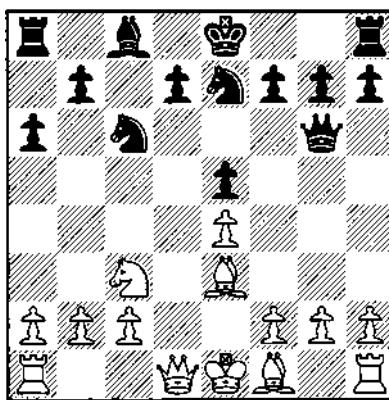
- 3. After 14.Rac1.** A key middle-game position—White has more space and pressure against d6, while Black holds the two bishops. See diagram on page 420.



- 4. After 13.Qd3.** The start of the middlegame, following the exchange of dark-squared bishops. See diagram on page 421, notes to Game 35.



5. After 12...Ke7. A critical position for the entire variation. White must choose between the safe 13.Rc1 and the sharp 13.Be2!. See diagram on page 419, note on 9...d5!? in game 36, Dzebuadze–Glimmerveen.



6. After 10.Be3!. The crucial test of Black's opening. See diagram on page 432, in Game 36, Dzebuadze–Glimmerveen.

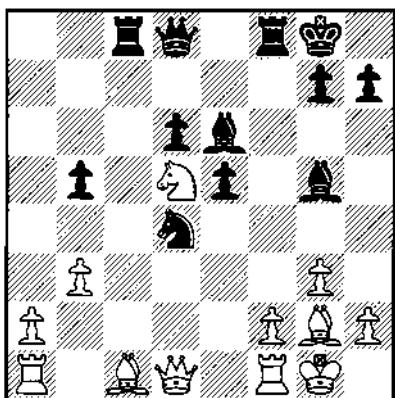
Exercises

White to play!

With these situations from actual games, you can find some ideas ~~and~~ opportunities that may await you, as White, when facing the Kalashnikov ~~or~~ and the Löwenthal variations.

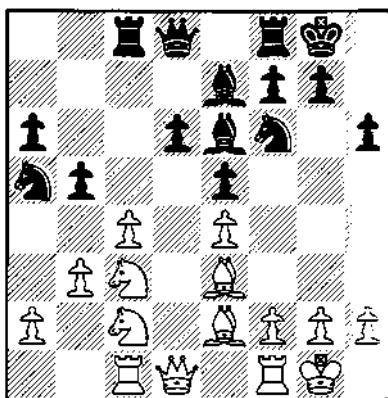
Solutions to the exercises begin on page 539.

Exercise 1



Zawadzka – Nebolsina
Wch U20 Girls, Yerevan 2007

Exercise 2

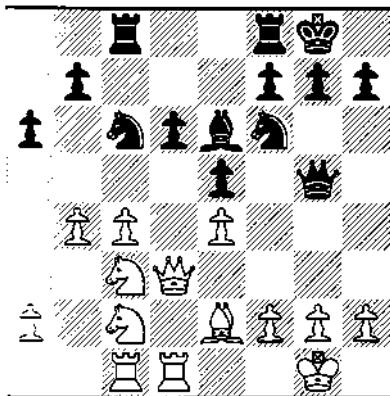


Womacka – Pisk
Germany 2004

White to play; find the strongest move.

Black has just played b7-b5. How should White respond?

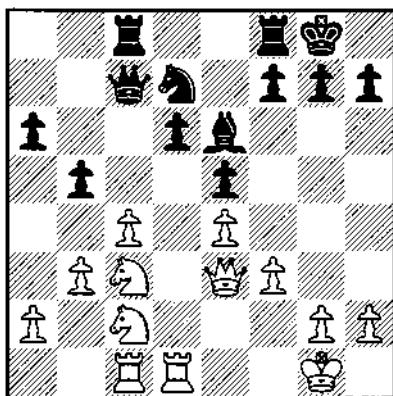
Exercise 3



Svidler – Andreikin
FIDE Candidates 2014

White to play; find the strongest continuation.

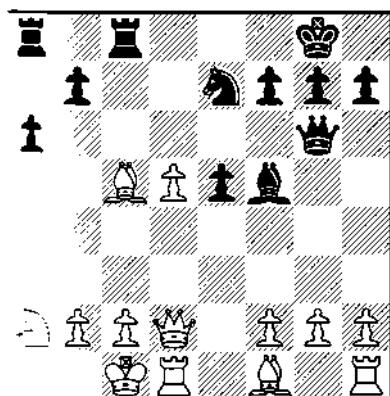
Exercise 4



Motylev – Brodsky
Ciocâltea Memorial, Bucharest 2001

Black has just played the thematic b7-b5. How should White react?

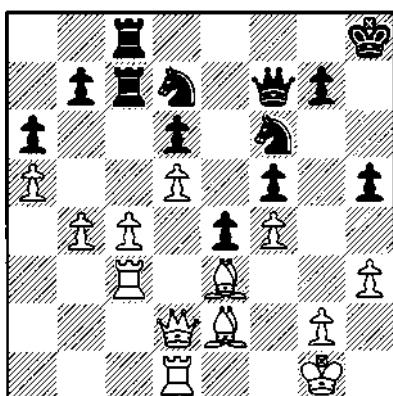
Exercise 5



Grigorov – Gunev
Ruse 1978

White to play and win, can you refute Black's piece sacrifice?

Exercise 6



Nunn – Stepovoj
World Senior 2014

White to play, does the breakthrough c4-c5 work?

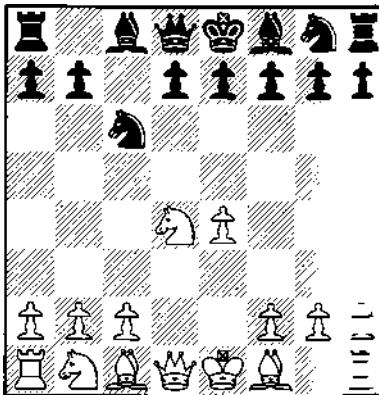
Summary:

Chapter 6

The

Sveshnikov

& Cousins



1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4

In previous chapters we have often explored the value of controlling the d5 square, a versatile outpost for one of White's knights. Controlling this square was a constant positional theme throughout this chapter, and being able to extract use from this square in order to make other positional gains could be the main factor that determines White's success in this unique family of openings.

In the Sveshnikov main line, after **11.c4 b4 12.Nc2 0-0 13.g3 a5**, **b4**, **14.Bg2** and **14.h4** are valid ways of fighting for an advantage, as explored in Game 33. We would urge the reader not to merely glance over Black's alternatives to the main line, covered in Game 32. The theoretical evaluation of the Sveshnikov can be considered as equal, but playable. In most lines White won't always get an advantage, but will get a comfortable middlegame that can be pressed for two results.

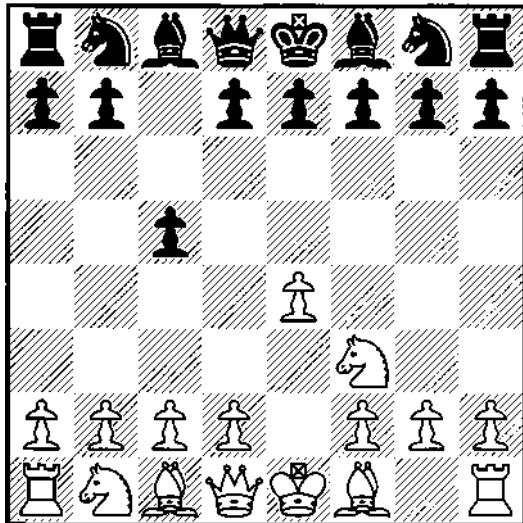
As we have tried to emphasize throughout the book, having a strong understanding of the typical nuances and themes in any given middlegame is often more valuable than achieving a theoretical advantage. That said, the dry nature of the eventual middlegame doesn't satisfy the reader, sharper options do exist, such as **9.Bxf6** instead of **9.Nd5** and **11.c3** instead of **11.c4**.

The fight for advantage is definitely simpler (though still not easy!) against the other two openings covered in this chapter, the Kalashnikov and Löwenthal Sicilians. Even though we believe we found a sizeable plus for White in all lines of the Löenthal Variation, the path to advantage does require study as there were quite a few hidden tactical resources within the text.

Success against the Kalashnikov Variation will likely depend on your understanding of the typical middlegame structure reached after **6.c4**. We should definitely try to feel comfortable with handling the extra space and dealing with Black's two bishops—Game 34, Leko–Nataf and the line **9...Bb7** in Game 35 both featured the exchange of one of White's bishops for Black's knight. Of course the line **8...f5!?** (Game 34) is critical to learn as well.

Chapter 7

Minor Sicilians



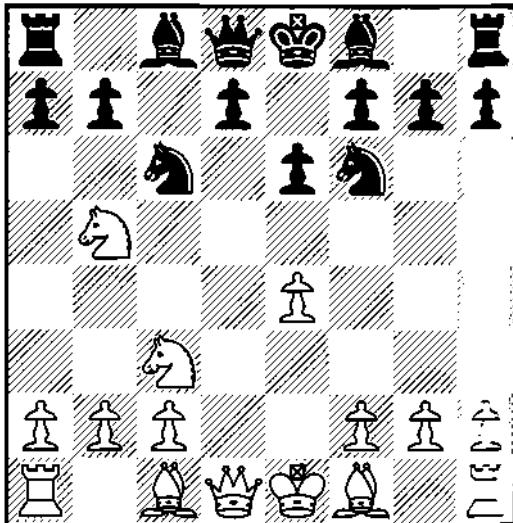
- $\text{e}4 \text{ c}5 \text{ 2.Nf}3$

We've reached the final chapter of our journey, where we will be exploring some of Black's less common systems within the Sicilian Defense. The pros and cons of these lines is quite clear: If White is unfamiliar with a particular variation, he'll be hard-pressed to gain any kind of advantage and may even be caught in some devious trap. On the flip side, if White has studied any of these particular lines in depth, then he should be able to confidently fight for a substantial edge. Now you see, that's where we come in!

Chapter 7a will focus on the Four Knights Variation, which gives Black a few different options that require our attention. Then in Chapter 7b we will look at the truly rare systems that just didn't fit in anywhere else in this book. We're in the home stretch now!

Chapter 7a

The Four Knights Variation



1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 Nc6 6.Ndb5

The Four Knights Variation is quite popular at lower levels since Black to quickly develop his pieces, gain some control over the center, and castles. It is a solid choice for players who just want to reach a playable middlegame without needing to know tons of theory.

At higher levels, however, it is somewhat of a rare guest because White usually get a comfortable edge without too much effort.

That said, the Four Knights Variation is still being played today by masters and Grandmasters alike, which means that it should be taken seriously—that is why our coverage of the line is no less detailed or thoughtful than coverage of other lines in this book. In Game 37 we'll examine the main **6...Bb4**; Game 38 will feature the sharp though suspect **5...Bb4**, and in Game 39 we will cover **6...Bc5**, which is known as the Cobra Variation.

Game 37

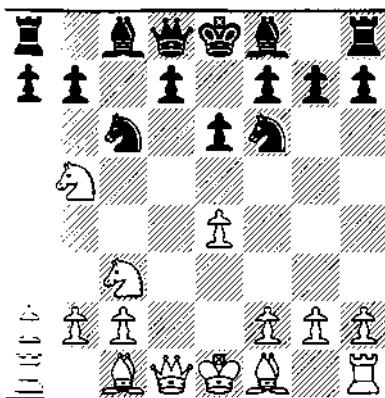
Grischuk - Safarli

40th Olympiad, Istanbul 2012

- 4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4
- Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 Nc6

5...Bb4 will be covered in the next game.

6 Ndb5



The only move to fight for an advantage. White exploits the fact that Black has omitted a7-a6.

7 Bb4

Heading into the main line of the Knights Variation.

7...Bc5 will be covered in Game 2 while 6...d6 7.Bf4! e5 8.Bg5 is a surprising transposition to the Shirov Variation.

7...Bb4!

A key move. White forces Black to respond with his dark-squared bishop.

7...Nd6+ looks tempting, but it's well known that after 7...Ke7! 8.Qe8+ Rxc8 Black gets decent counterplay.

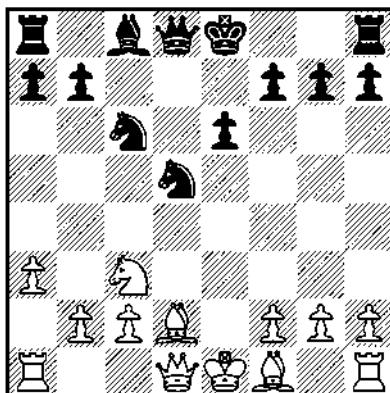
7...Bxc3+ 8.Nxc3 d5

Logical and necessary. After 7...Bb4! the bishop, Black is obliged to fight for the center.

9.exd5 exd5

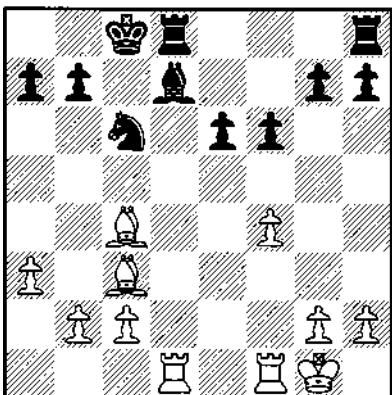
The main choice for Black, accepting an isolated queen pawn for the ensuing middlegame.

Against 9...Nxd5, avoiding the trade on d5 to keep Black's bishop locked in at c8, we've chosen the ambitious 10.Bd2!?



This gives Black the option to go into an endgame after 10...Nxc3, though we wouldn't recommend it. We also consider the more dynamic 10...O-O:

After 10...Nxc3 11.Bxc3 Qxd1+ 12.Rxd1 White has a pleasant edge, thanks to his two bishops. Let's look at two instructive excerpts from Fischer's games: 12...f6 13.f4! Fixing the e6 pawn as a weakness. Next is Bc4, O-O, and Rde1. 13...Bd7 14.Bc4 O-O-O 15.O-O

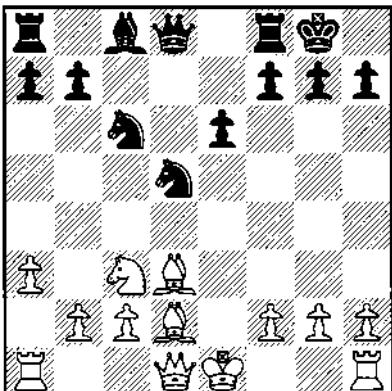


And now:

a) 15...Rhe8 16.Rde1 Re7 17.b4! Once again, the threat of b4-b5 is quite effective. 17...Kc7 18.b5 Nb8 19.Bb4 Ree8 20.Rf3!+— using the third rank to stretch Black's defenses, Fischer-Ornithopoulos, Athens 1968.

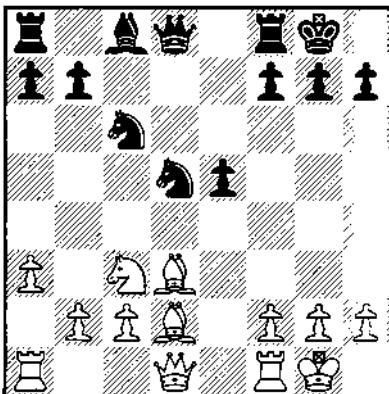
b) Another game saw 15...Kc7 16.Rde1 Rhe8 17.Rf3! A positional rook lift! 17...Bc8 18.Rg3 Re7 19.Rge3 Rd6 20.b4±, menacing b4-b5 and Bb4, Fischer-Addison, New York 1962.

Keeping queens on with 10...O-O is more dynamic. 11.Bd3



11...e5 The only move—Black must get his bishop out. (According to our

database, 11...Ne5? has been played no less than 10 times, and it would be a good move, if not for 12.Bxh7+ juvenile trick. 12...Kxh7 13.Qh5+ Kf7 14.Qxe5±) 12.O-O



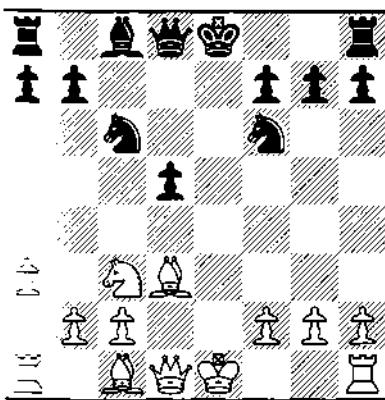
Despite the nice central presence this middlegame is slightly uncomfortable for Black. White's bishops have the potential to make Black's life difficult. For example:

a) 12...f5 13.Bc4! Setting up a nice tactical shot. (13.Qe2 transpose to the next note after 13...Bf5) 13...Be6 14.Nxd5 Bxd5 15.Bg5± a nice simplification tactic. 15...Qe7 16.Bxd5+ Kh8 17.Bxc6 bxc6 18.Qc7+ Unzicker-Mohrlok, Bad Pyrmont 1961. White's middlegame edge has transformed into a structural advantage.

b) 12...Be6 13.Re1 (13.Qe2N is a possible improvement, for instance 13...f5 14.f3 Qb6+ 15.Kh1 The b-pawn is poisoned in view of Nc3 15...Rad8 16.b4±) 13...f5 14.Bf7 While this move seems awfully timid, it actually demonstrates that Black's position is hard to maintain. 14...Kh8 15.Nxd5 Bxd5 16.Bc3 Qe7 Now in Karjakin-Popov, Moscow 2014, White should have played

17... $\text{c}4!$ $\text{a}6$ 18. $\text{Bb}2\pm$ followed by $\text{c}2-\text{c}4$, with a big advantage—the $\text{e}5$ pawn is a serious weakness.

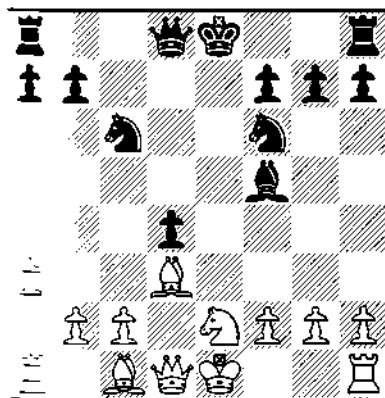
11. $\text{Bd}3$



The best and most natural square for the bishop.

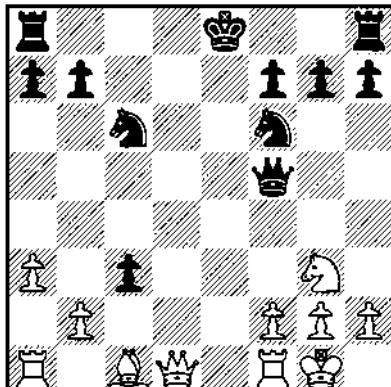
12. O-O

Starting with 10... $\text{d}4$ 11. $\text{Ne}2$ only relevant (11... O-O 12. O-O poses to the main line) if Black follows up with 11... $\text{Bf}5?!$ which is only worth trying:



Both players have played 12. O-O missing that after 12. $\text{Bxf}5!?$ 13. $\text{c}3!$ White is going to seize initiative. 13... $\text{dxc}3$ (13... $\text{Qxf}5$

14. $\text{Nxd}4\pm$ is just an extra pawn for White.) 14. O-O! A nice pawn sacrifice. 14... $\text{Qxf}5$ (Not 14... $\text{cx}b2?!$ 15. $\text{Bxb}2$ $\text{Qxf}5$ 16. $\text{Ng}3\uparrow$ followed by $\text{Rfe}1+$, and Black is in trouble.) and Black is certainly regretting 11... $\text{Bf}5?!$ after White's 15. $\text{Ng}3!$

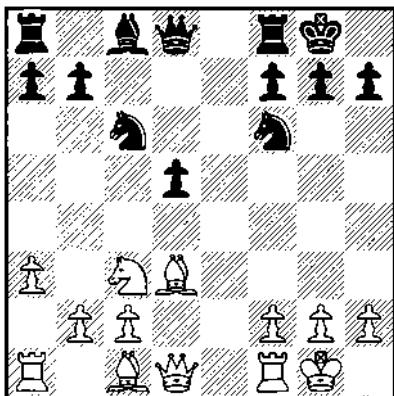


Some examples:

a) 15... $\text{Qd}7$ 16. $\text{Re}1+$ $\text{Ne}7$ 17. $\text{Bg}5!$ A precise move, as Black's king won't find safety in the endgame. 17... $\text{Qxd}1$ 18. $\text{Raxd}1$ $\text{Rd}8$. Now in Yemelin-Kornev, St. Petersburg 1993, White missed a nice combination, so we'll let you find it instead! See Exercise 1 on page 475.

b) Another game saw 15... $\text{Qd}5$ 16. $\text{Re}1+$ $\text{Kf}8$ 17. $\text{Qc}2!$ Avoiding the queen trade. 17... $\text{Rd}8$ 18. $\text{Qxc}3$ $\text{h}6$ 19. $\text{b}4$ $\text{Kg}8$ 20. $\text{Bb}2$ $\text{Kh}7$ 21. $\text{Ne}4$ $\text{Rh}g8$ 22. $\text{Qxf}6!\pm$, Solleveld-Shkapanenko, Esbjerg 2005.

11.O-O



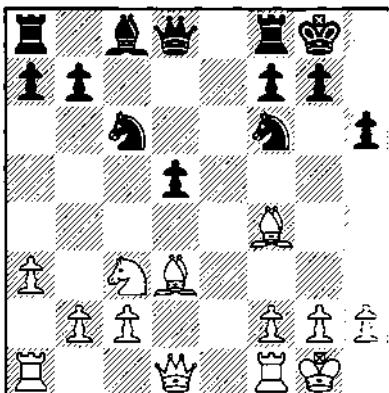
Now the battle lines have been drawn, so to speak. White has the two bishops which have a lot of potential on this open board. In return, Black has free development and controls a large share of the center. The main uncertainty is the isolated pawn on d5. Whether it becomes a weakness or a strength will depend upon the level of play from both sides.

11...d4

The main line. Black limits White's activity and gains the d5 square for his pieces.

The alternatives, 11...h6?! and 11...Bg4?!, give White good chances of immediately seizing the initiative:

11...h6?! is weak in view of 12.Bf4! threatening the annoying Nb5-d6.

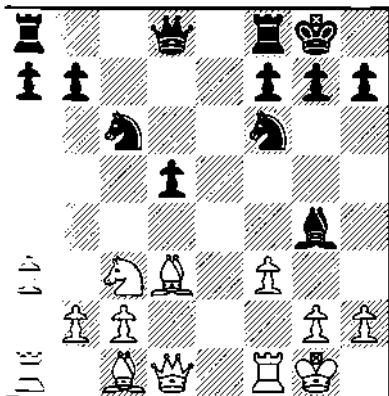


Black is already in danger of becoming seriously worse, for example:

a) 12...a6 13.Re1 d4 14.Ne5 Bf5?! Missing a nice tactical stroke (14...Nxe4 was the lesser evil, now 15.Bxe4± followed by Qf3 - Rad1 with good pressure.) 15.Bd3 Qxc7 16.Nxf6+ gxf6 17.Bxh6 Areshchenko-Kuzmin, Kramatorsk 2003.

b) 12...d4 13.Nb5! This knight is going to be an unwelcome guest on the d6 square. 13...Nd5 14.Bc4 Be6 15.Re1 Qd7 16.Nd6±, Korobov-Segura Ariza, Binissalem 2004. The opening seems to have gone well for White.

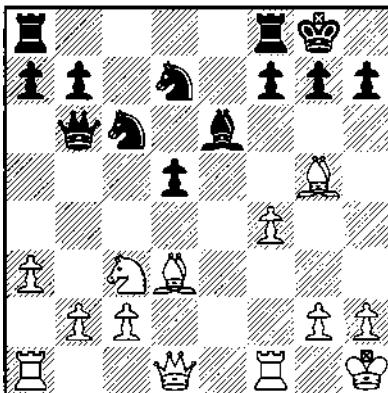
11...Bg4?! has also been seen, forcing 12.f3



no matter where the bishop retreats to, White should play Bg5 placing great pressure on Black's position:

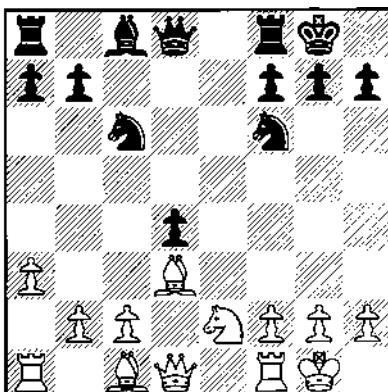
12...Bh5 13.Bg5! Qb6+ (13...Qd6 doesn't work out for Black after 14.Bxf6 Qxf6 15.Nxd5 Qxb2 16.c3!+– Rf2 next, trapping Black's knight) 14.Kh1 Ne4!? (14...Qxb2? is playable in view of 15.Bxf6 gxf6 16.Qb6 17.Nxd5+– followed by 15.Nxe4 dxe4 16.Bxe4 Qxb2+–) A nice spot to trade queens. White's bishops will be an asset in the endgame. 17...Qxb1 18.Rfxb1±, Ernest-Romero Holmes, Logrono 1901

12...Be6 13.Bg5! This pin can be tolerated for so long. Black can bail out with 13...Qb6+ 14.Kh1 and now 15.f4!



A strong advance. 15...f5 16.b4! d4?!, 17.Na4 Qc7 18.Re1 Bd5 19.c4! dxс3 20.Nxc3+–, Jansa-Langner, Lysá nad Labem CZE 2014. The position has opened up and White's pieces are performing superbly.

12.Ne2

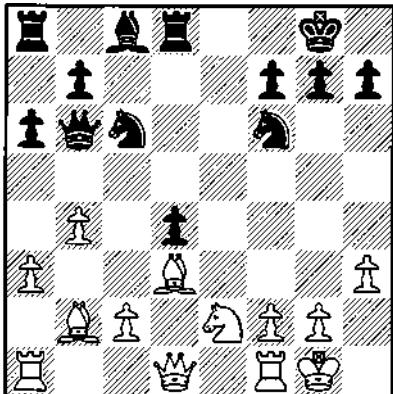


At this point Black has tried quite a number of moves, but the good thing about this variation is that it's not as sharp and forcing as other lines, meaning that an understanding of common ideas and themes is more valuable than a memorization of moves. Generally speaking, White's play should revolve around applying pressure to Black's d4 pawn.

12...Qd5

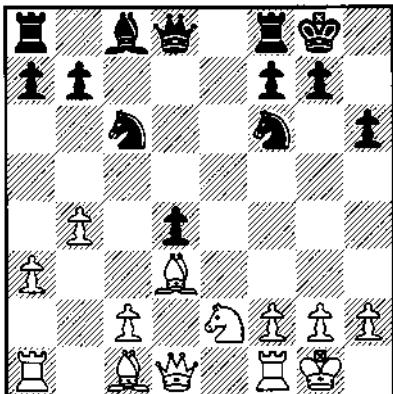
A reasonable move, centralizing Black's queen. Let's take a look at some other tries, and see a few examples of this line in practice:

12...Qb6 13.b4! a6 14.Bb2 Rd8
15.h3!



Simple and strong, taking away g4 from Black's bishop. 15...Be6 16.Re1 Rd6 17.Nf4 Rc8 18.Qf3±, Vorobiov-Rogule, Olomouc 2007. White's pieces are optimally placed.

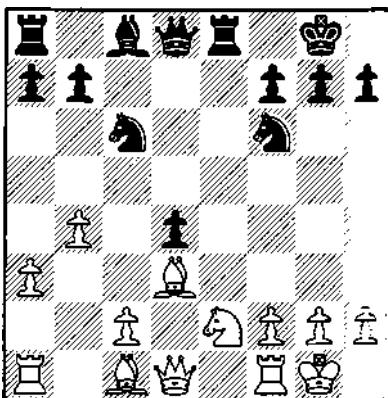
12...h6 13.b4!



13...a6 (or 13...Bg4 14.Bb2 a6 15.Qd2!
threatening Nxd4. 15...Bxe2 16.Bxe2
Qb6 17.Rad1±, Mladenov-Glinz,

Goch 2010) 14.Bb2 Kh8 15.Qd2 threatening Qf4, Guerra Mené-Alcazar Jimenez, Collado Villalba 2010.

12...Re8 13.b4!

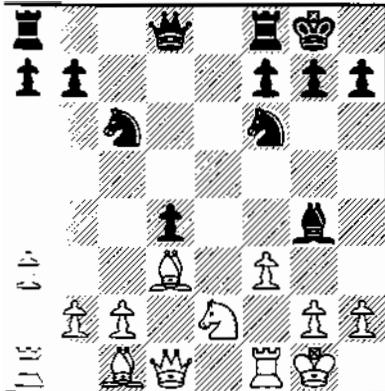


As you may have deduced by now, fianchettoing the dark-squared bishop is quite effective.

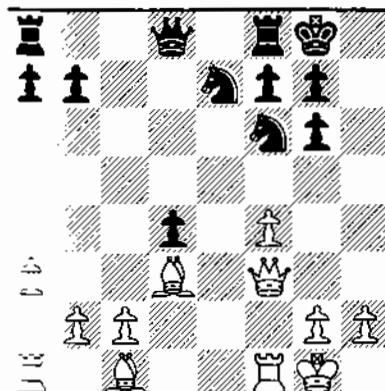
a) 13...Nd5 14.Qd2! Smart, getting ready to meet 14...Bg4 with 15.Bh5 16.Bb2 a6?! Understanding preventing b4-b5, but a bit slow. This game did not last long: 17.Rc1 Kh8 18.Nxd4 Nxd4? 19.Nf5 Nc6 20.Qh6! 1-0, Haslinger-Severij, Seville 2014.

b) 13...Bg4 14.f3 Bh5 15.Bb2 16.Rf2! Prophylactically defending the a7-g1 diagonal, turning Nxd4 into a tangible threat. 16...Bg6 There is no longer a way to keep the d4 pawn. 17.Bxg6 hxg6 18.Nxd4±, Vorobiov-Hasangatin, Pardubice 2007.

Lastly, **12...Bg4** is Black's most common idea, planning to exchange light-squared bishops after Bh5-g6. 13.f3



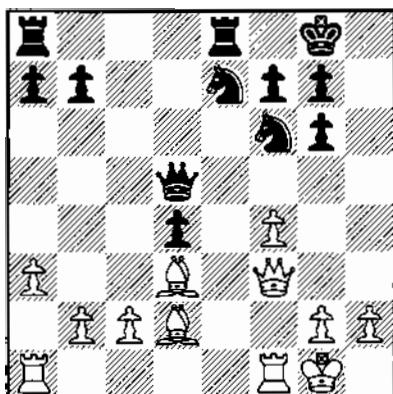
$\mathbb{B}h5$ (After 13... $B\text{e}6$ 14. $Bg5\pm$, next 15. $Rae1$, $Nf4$, etc., Tseshkovsky-Schulz, Sochi 1976.) 14. $Nf4!$ Winning Black's second bishop. 14... $Bg6$ (A top-level game saw 14... $Re8$ 15. $Nxh5$ 16. $f4!$ A thematic advance, activating White's queen. 16... $Nf6$ 17. $Qf3$ 18. $Qh3$ $g6$ 19. $f5!\uparrow$, Topalov-Shuluk, Nanjing 2008.) 15. $Nxg6$ 16. $f4!$ Apart from bringing the queen to f3, this move also threatens 16... $Ne7$ 17. $Qf3$



White's position is more pleasant, as two bishops control both sides of the board. And now:

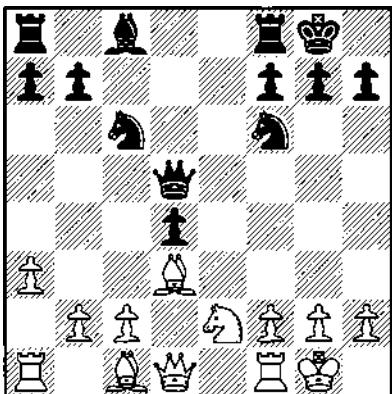
a) 17... $Qb6$ 18. $a4$ Potentially threatening $a4-a5-a6$. (Also interesting is 18. $g4$, gaining space on the kingside. 18... $Rfe8$ 19. $Bd2$ $Qc6$ 20. $h3$ $Qxf3$ 21. $Rxf3\pm$, Filippov-Le Quang, Cebu 2007.) 18... $Nf5$ 19. $Bd2$ $a5?!$ A gross overreaction, allowing White to open up the queenside: 20. $b4!$ $axb4$ 21. $Rfb1$ $Qc6$ 22. $Qxc6$ $bxcc6$ 23. $Bxb4\pm$, Azarov-Perelshteyn, Arlington USA 2014.

b) 17... $Qd5$ 18. $Bd2$ $Rfe8$ was played in Shirov-Antoli Royo, Montcada 2009:

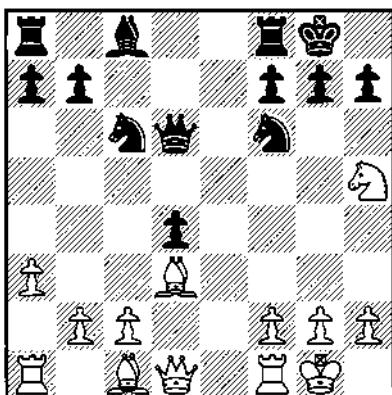


We'd like to suggest 19. $Qxd5$ $Nfxd5$ 20. $Rae1$ $Nf5$ 21. $Rxe8+$ $Rxe8$ 22. $g3$ $Nfe3$ 23. $Re1\pm$ followed by $h2-h3$ and $Kf2$, threatening $c2-c4$ to undermine Black's knight.

Returning to our game, after
12...Qd5:



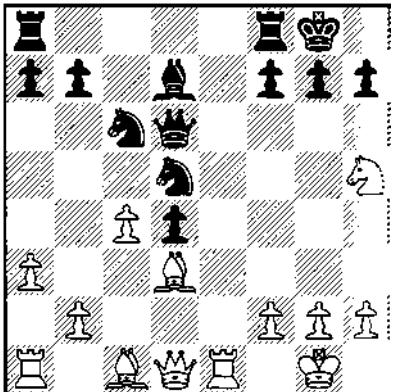
13.Nf4 Qd6 14.Nh5



The main approach, trading off Black's main kingside defender and activating White's queen.

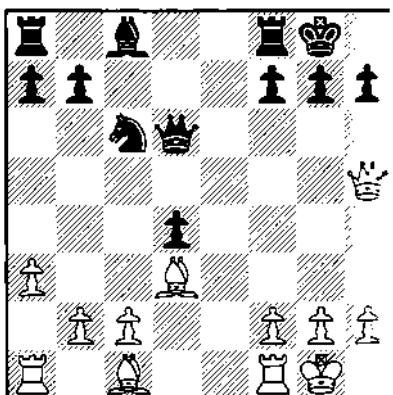
14...Nxf4

Neglecting Black's king with 14...Nd5?! is quite dangerous, especially after 15.Re1! Bd7 16.c4!!



This move acts as a beautiful illustration of White's tactical potential in this position. 16...dxc3 17.Bc4 The first of four direct attacks on the queen, leading to White's victory 17...Qc5 (or 17...Nxf4 18.Bxh7— 18.b4 Qd4 (or 18...Qb6 19.Bxh7— Kxh7 20.Qxd5+— and Qg5.) 19.Bc5 Qh4 (again, if 19...Nxe5 we have 20.Bxh7+—) 20.Re4 Qg5 21.Bxg5— and Black is toast.

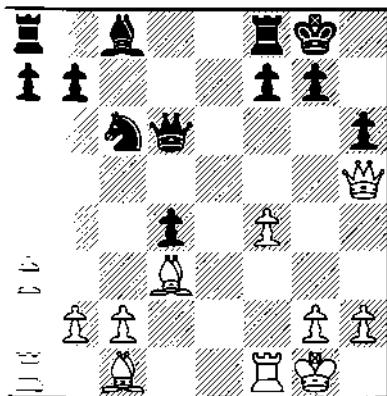
15.Qxh5



15...h6

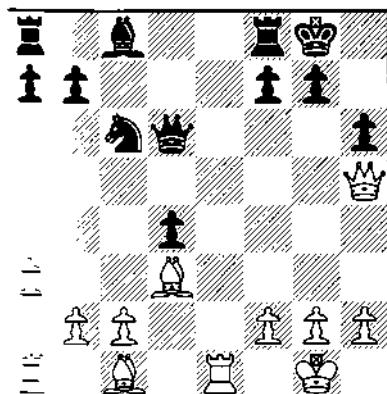
Practice has also seen 15...h6 with the following instructive example: 16.Re1 Be6 17.Qh4! A nice move preparing Bf4. 17...Rae8 18.Bf4

• Bg3 White's dark-squared bishop – nearly a superb piece. 19...Rf6 20.f3 Qf5 21.Rxe8+ Qxe8 22.Bg5±, Parlić-Tufa, Eforie Nord 2009. White showed up with Re1 and h4-h5-h6. $\text{f4}!?$



Grischuk chooses a thematic planning to use his f-pawn to pressure on Black's kingside.

The standard path has always 16.Re1 , which is also good enough for an advantage:



Bd7 (The careless 16...Be6? is the typical sacrifice 17.Bxh6! $\text{Qxh6}+/-$.) 17.Qh4! Rfe8 Qd5 19.f3 Rxe1+ 20.Rxe1 Re8

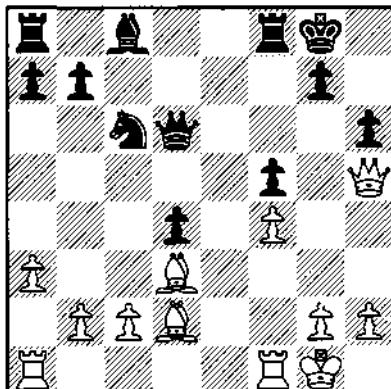
21.Rxe8+ Bxe8 22.Qe1! Bd7 23.Qe4 Qxe4 24.Bxe4± and White continued to press and press in Kurnosov-Temirbaev, Khanty-Mansiysk 2009.

16...f5

Necessary. Black must fight for squares on the kingside.

White's concept can be seen in full force after 16...Bd7 17.f5 Qf6 18.g4!. The key move, preparing to break through with g4-g5 next. 18...Ne5 19.g5! Qd6 (After 19...hxg5 20.Bxg5 Qd6 21.f6+– Black is getting mated on the dark squares.) 20.f6→ with a vicious attack.

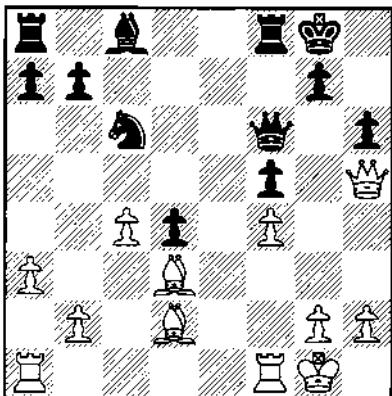
17.Bd2



17...Qf6

Another game between two future Grandmasters continued 17...Bd7 18.Rae1 Qf6 19.b4! a6 20.a4 Kh7 21.b5 axb5 22.axb5 Na7 23.Re5 Rae8 24.Rfe1+–, Zhigalko-Kuljasevic, Oropesa del Mar 1999. Black just couldn't defend with such passive minor pieces.

18.c4!



A thematic way to gain space on the queenside.

Also strong was 18.Rae1± with the simple plan of doubling on the e-file.

18...Be6

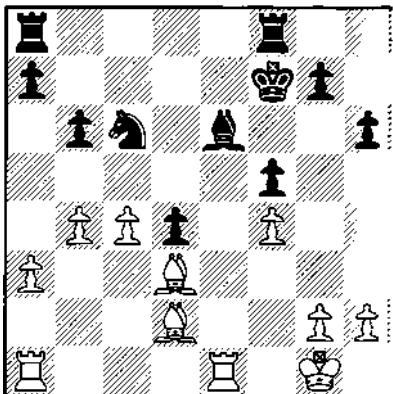
18...dxc3? 19.Bxc3 Qe7 20.Rf3+– is too much to handle for Black.

19.b4 Qf7

GM Safarli seeks refuge in the endgame, but thanks to the two bishops White's advantage will not subside once the queens are off the board.

Staying in the middlegame with 19...Rad8 might lead to 20.Rfe1 Bf7 21.Qf3 Rd7 22.b5! Ne7 23.Ra1± followed by Bb4 and Qh3.

20.Qxf7+ Kxf7 21.Rfe1 b6

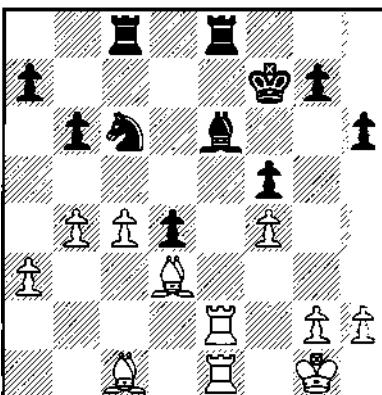


22.Re2

Grischuk keeps it simple, bringing the rooks on the e-file.

Also possible was 22.c5 with the idea 22...bxc5 23.Ra1!±.

22...Rac8 23.Rae1 Rfe8 24.Bc1

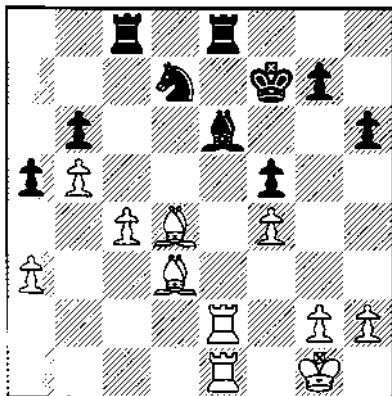


Planning on shuffling the bishops to b2, reminding Black of his f7 weakness.

24...a5 25.b5 Nb8 26.Bb2 Nd7

Of course not 26...Bxg2+ 27.Rxe8+–.

27.Bxd4

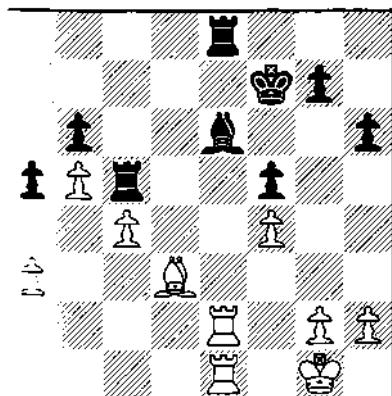


Now that White has won a pawn, the technical phase of the game begins.

27...Nc5 28.Bxc5!

How Grischuk converts the full point is quite instructive—he slowly but surely improves his position until the advantage is decisive.

28...Rxc5



Bb1

More forcing was 29.g4! g6 (After 29...fxg4 30.f5 Bd7 31.Rxe8 Bxe8 32.Rxe6!+– White wins the b6 pawn and with it the game.) 30.Kf2! Black is tactically in zugzwang, as there's

too much pressure against the bishop on e6. 30...Bd7 (or 30...fxg4 31.Bxg6+! Kxg6 32.Rxe6+ Rxe6 33.Rxe6+ Kf7 34.Rc6!–) 31.Rxe8 Bxe8 32.gxf5 gxf5 33.Ke3!–. White's king crosses to d4, followed by Re5, winning.

29...Bd7

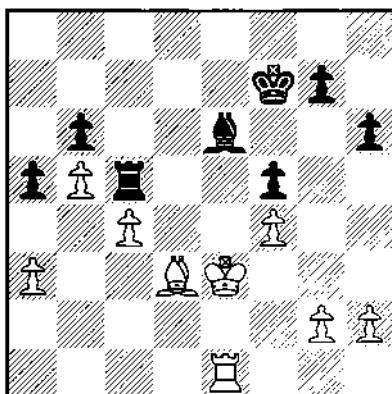
Bailing out of the pin, which is more or less forced.

Of course not 29...Rxc4? 30.Bxf5!+–.

30.Rxe8 Bxe8 31.Kf2!

The c4 pawn is still untouched in view of Ba2, so Grischuk takes this opportunity to centralize his king.

31...Bd7 32.Bd3 Be6 33.Ke3!

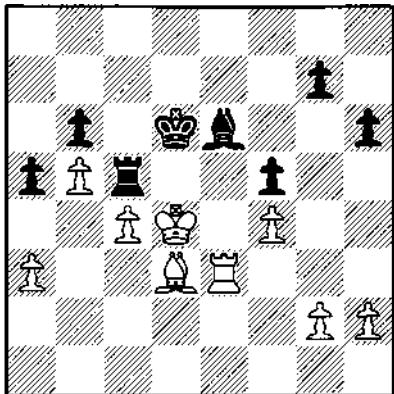


Very alert.

33...Ke7

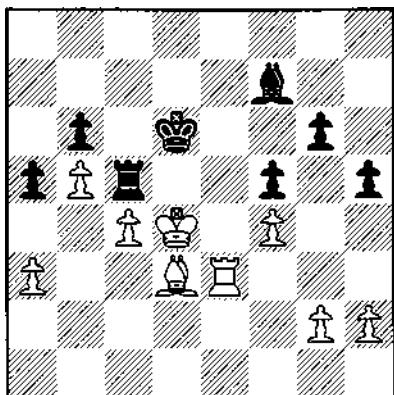
33...Bxc4 loses after 34.Rc1 Bd5 35.Rxc5 bxc5 36.Bxf5 Bxg2 37.Be4!+– and the king and pawn endgame will be hopeless for Black.

34.Kd4 Kd6 35.Re3!



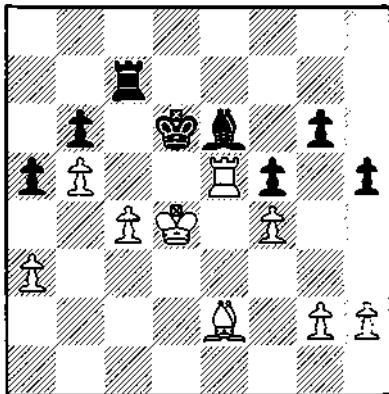
Activating the rook along the third rank.

**35...g6 36.Rg3 Bf7 37.Rh3 h5
38.Re3**



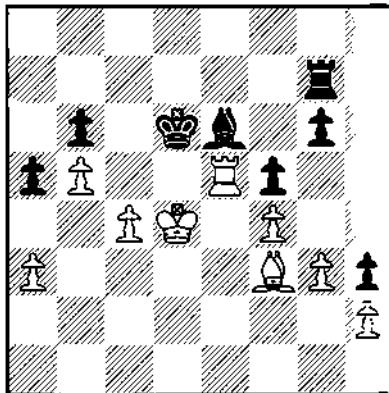
Now that Black's pawns have been fixed on light squares, White's king will always be able to infiltrate via h4. All that's left is organizing the breakthrough c4-c5.

**38...Be6 39.Be2 Rc7 40.Kc3 Ke7
41.Re5 Kd6 42.Kd4**



42...h4

Black cannot trade rooks, as ~~a2~~
42...Rc5 43.Rxc5 bxc5+ 44.Ke3 ~~c3~~
White will put his bishop on f3 ~~h3~~
bring his king to g5, breaking through.
**43.Re3 Re7 44.Bf3 h3 45.g3 Rf7
46.Re5**



46...g5

There's nothing better to suggest for Black.

46...Rc7 47.Bd5 wouldn't extend the game much longer. At 47...Bxd5 48.Rxd5+ Ke6 49.c5 ~~h3~~
White should win with the active king and rook.

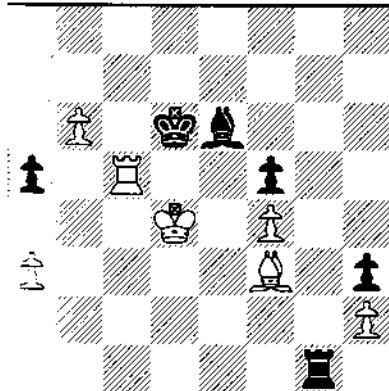
**47.c5+! bxc5+ 48.Rxc5 g5
49.gxf4 Rg1 50.b6! 1-0**

Game 38

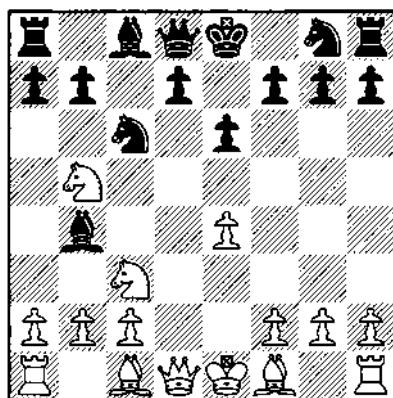
Lalic – Sulava
11th Pula Open 1997

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4
4.Nxd4 Nf6

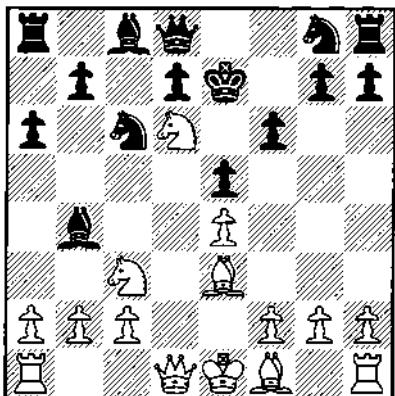
We should quickly note that after
4...Nc6 5.Nc3 Bb4 6.Ndb5



Safarli resigned, as there is no way to stop the b-pawn. White's next moves will be b6-b7 and Rc8. A fine technical victory by Grischuk!



(6.Nxc6 is also a good option) Black's best continuation is to transpose into the Four Knights Variation with Nf6, since 6...a6?! simply isn't very good: 7.Nd6+ Ke7 (7...Bxd6 8.Qxd6 Qe7 9.Qg3± is a woefully inferior version of the Löwenthal Sicilian.) 8.Bf4! e5 9.Bg5+ f6. And here we found 10.Be3!N

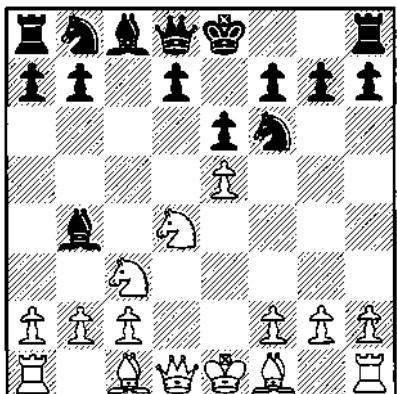


The tactical point is 10...Bxd6 11.Nd5+ Kf8 (or 11...Ke6 12.Bc4+) 12.Nb6, winning back White's piece. If now 12...Bc7, then 13.Nxa8 Ba5+ 14.c3+ followed by b2-b4, rescuing the knight.

5.Nc3 Bb4

This line is tricky, and could be dangerous to face for the unprepared player. Fortunately, with the use of strong engines we can be confident in dealing with Black's daring play.

6.e5!



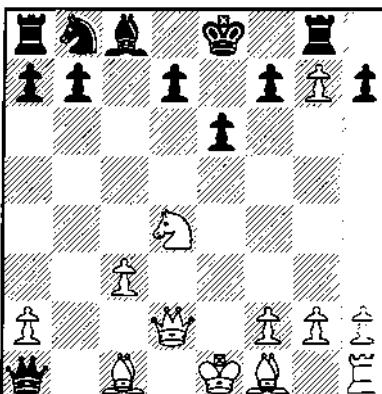
The principled response.

6...Nd5

This is Black's main and best choice. Other options are decidedly favorable for White.

Giving up the dark squares immediately with 6...Bxc3+? cannot be good, 7.bxc3 Nd5 8.Qg4!±, Hansen-Ostersen, Aarhus 1992.

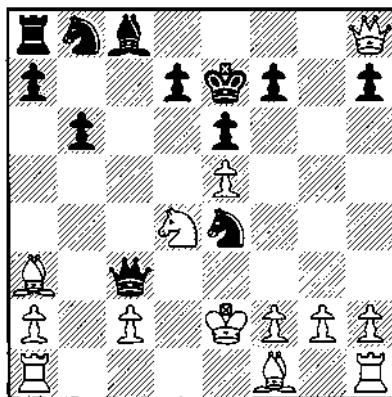
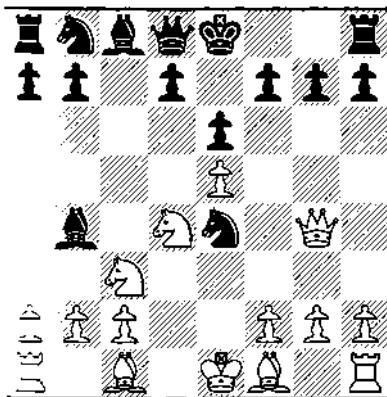
6...Qc7?! meets a direct refutation after 7.exf6! Bxc3+ 8.bxc3 Qxa1 9.Qd2! Qxa1 10.fxg7 Rg8 11.c3!!



The last and crucial move to remember. White threatens Nc3 and Bd3, winning Black's queen. 11...Qb1 12.Bd3 Qb6 13.Ba3+—Though never played before, this move is given an evaluation of +4 by the computer—meaning White is better by about 6 pawns, or in this case, has a completely winning attack. That's good enough for 13.Qh6+—is the move chosen by most humans and should also lead to White's victory, though the computer only assigns it a paltry '+4'.

Lastly, after 6...Ne4 White plays after the g7 pawn with 7.Qg4! amazingly giving up on the queenside:

(Qxf8 13.Bxf8 Kxf8 14.Ke3+– with an extra exchange.) 11.Qxh8+ Ke7 12.Ba3+!

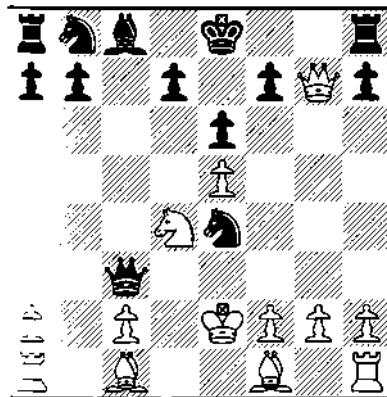


7...Qa5?! looks quite scary, but there is nothing to be worried about: ~~7...Qg7!~~ There's not much to explain—Both sides are attacking, but White's threats are going to cause damage. 8...Bxc3+ (*If 8...Rf8 then 9.Bh6 Nxc3 10.a3! Be7 11.Bd2!+– White is on top.*) 9.bxc3 Qxc3+ Ke2

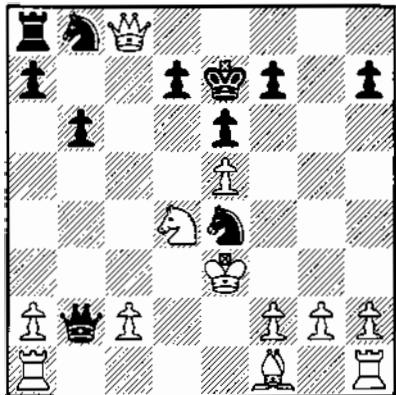
White is winning in all lines:

a) If 12...d6 then 13.Nb3!N, not fearing Black's checks. (*Even better than 13.Nc6+ Qxc6 14.exd6+ Kd7 15.Qb2.*) 13...Qxc2+ 14.Ke3 Qxf2+ (*or 14...Qc3+ 15.Kxe4 Bb7+ 16.Kf4+– 15.Kxe4 Bb7+ 16.Kd3 Ba6+ 17.Kc3 Qe3+ 18.Kc2 Qf2+ 19.Nd2 Qf5+ 20.Kb2!+–.* The checks have run out, and Black is lost.

a2) After 12...Qxa3 13.Qxc8! White is currently up a rook, and Black's queenside is paralyzed. After 13...Qb2, the final precise move is 14.Ke3!



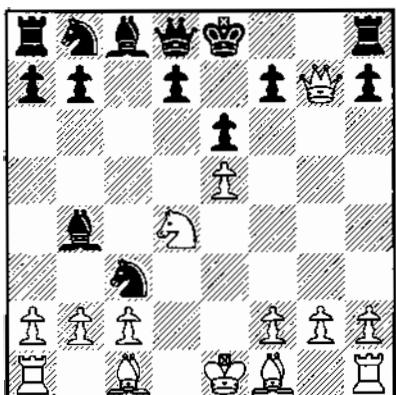
6 A terrifying move to face the board, but not so much if we studied it beforehand! (*If Rf8 then 11.Bh6 Qc5 12.Qxf8+*



13.Kd2 Qxb4+ 14.Kxc2+, once ~~Qxf8+~~
White can force an endgame with extra exchange after ~~Qxf8+.~~) 15...Nf5 The only way for Black to ~~avert~~ severe material losses. 14.cxb4 Nf5
15.Bxg7 Rg8 16.Bf6. Out of the dozen games that have reached this position White has won 80%, mostly thanks to his fantastic dark-squared bishop. For example after 16...Nc6 17.Bd3 h6 18.b5 Nc5 19.Be4± White's bishops were still dominating in Vokarev-Samarskiy-Khanty-Mansiysk 2011.

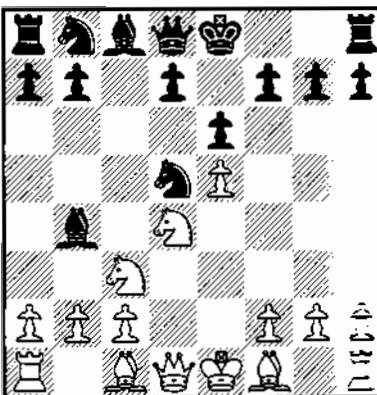
If 14...Qxa1 (or 14...Nxf2 15.Be2! Nxh1 16.Rxh1+— with a healthy extra piece) then 15.Kxe4!— the king can contribute too! White should win with his extra bishop.

b) There's also 7...Nxc3 against which White needs to be aware of the following forced line: 8.Qxg7!



Any discovered check by the knight can be met with c2-c3. 8...Rf8 9.a3! Nb5+ (Or 9...Ba5 10.Bh6 Qe7 11.Nb3!+— winning back the piece, and eventually going up an exchange after Qxf8+.) 10.axb4 Nxd4 11.Bg5 (11.Bh6 Qe7 12.Bd3± is also good for White) 11...Qb6 12.Bh6 Qxb4+ Relatively best. (After 12...Nxc2+)

Now back to our game, 6...Nd5:



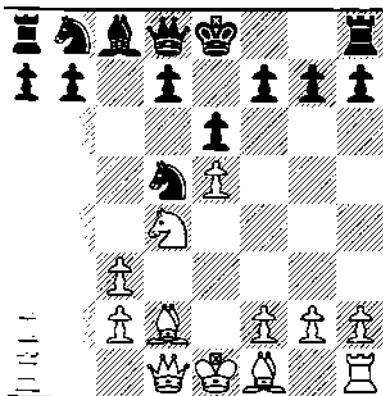
7.Bd2

Forcing Black to exchange or ~~Qxf8+~~
White can also fight for advantage after 7.Qg4 O-O ~~Qxf8+~~, but we believe that 7.Bd2 is clearly more ambitious.

7...Nxc3

Black has mainly chosen to exchange knights, keeping his dark-squared bishop on the board.

Giving up the bishop with 7...Bxc3 appears a bit suspect, even if it does take White's pawns. After all, this isn't the Nimzo-Indian! **8.bxc3**

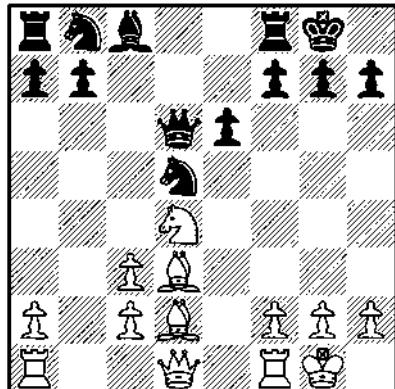


With Bd3 is played, all of White's activity will be aimed at Black's king which is obviously vulnerable. This activity should make up for the structure on the queenside.

Let's look at two tries for Black:

a) ...Qc7?! is quite unimpressive: 9.Bd6 Black must prevent Nb5. 9...Nxc3? 10.Qf3 Nd5 11.Nb5+ (and by Nd6+) 10.c4! Ne7 11.Bd3 (in case of 11...Nbc6 12.Nxc6 Nxc6 Black will have to open up his position to get his bishop out.) 11...Qxd6 13.Nb3 Nbc6 14.O-O 15.Bc3±. White's pawns are only restricting Black's position, his pieces are clearly ready for next is Qf3 and Rad1.

A more solid option is to castle: 9...O 9.Bd3 d6 This move is active from Black's point of view: 10.exd6 Qxd6 11.O-O



Now in order to contain White's initiative, Black would like to play e6-e5 and Nc6, but this is easier said than done:

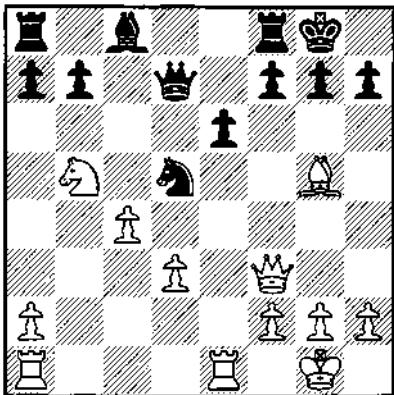
a) Starting with 11...e5 may be a bit too loose in view of 12.Nb5 Qe7?! (*Better was 12...Qc6 where after 13.c4 Nf6 14.Bb4 Re8 15.Re1 e4 16.Bf1* White is threatening Qd6, and may soon pick up the e4 pawn.) 13.Re1 Nc6 14.Nd4! Nf6 15.Qf3 Rd8 16.Rab1±, and White had excellent pressure in Geller-Tseitlin, Moscow 1982.

b) After 11...Nf6 which took place in Li-Yu, Danzhou 2010, instead of the immediate Nb5 we prefer 12.Re1!N. For instance:

b1) After 12...a6?! 13.Bg5! e5 14.Bxf6 Qxf6 15.Qh5! g6 16.Qxe5± White's active pieces are more valuable than his extra doubled pawn.

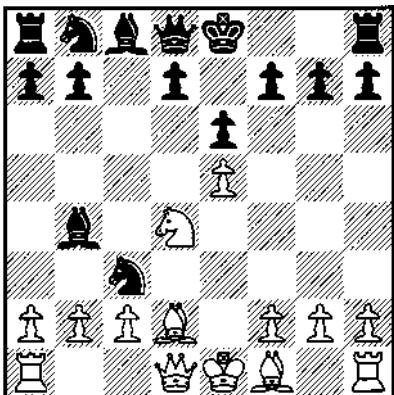
b2) Or 12...Nc6 13.Rb1! Offering a pawn that Black probably shouldn't grab: 13...Nxd4 14.cxd4 Qxd4 15.Rb4! Qc5 16.Qf3→ with threats of Bc3, Qg3, etc.

b3) 12...Nbd7 13.Qf3 Nc5 14.Bg5 Nxd3 15.cxd3 Nd5 16.Nb5 Qd7 17.c4±



Once again White has a clear edge due to the activity of his pieces. When we compare this position to the main line, however, it doesn't seem like such a bad choice for Black!

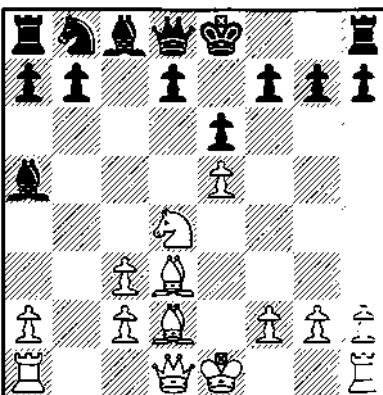
Returning to our game, after 7...Nxc3:



8.bxc3 Be7

This retreat is considered the main line in this variation.

However, Black has also ~~the~~ keeping the bishop on the queen ~~the~~ with 8...Ba5. After 9.Bd3:

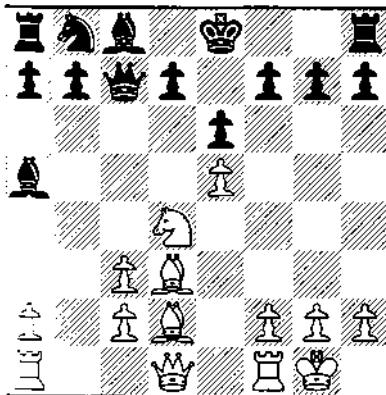


If White is familiar with a ~~the~~ attacking motifs he should ~~the~~ quite confident in this position. ~~we~~ I take you through a few sample ~~the~~

9...Nc6?! is quite risky in view ~~of~~ 10.Qg4! Kf8 (After 10...O-O 11.N~~c~~ dxc6 12.O-O± White's bishops ~~the~~ queen are poised to deliver ~~the~~ soon.) 11.Nxc6 dxc6 12.O-O h5 13.Qe7 14.Rfe1± followed by Re3. ~~the~~ Black shouldn't survive, Kurnos-Daurimbetov, Tashkent 2008.

After 9...d6 10.exd6 Qxd6 11.O-O (11...Nc6 is strongly answered by 12.Qg4!N, the point being that 12...Nxd4 is met with 13.Bf4! Nc6 14.Qxf3 Qc5 15.Rab1!± and White threatens both Rb5 and Bf4 12.Qh5! A nice double attack 12...f5 13.Rfe1↑ White's pieces are excellently placed to exert pressure against e6.

Against 9...Qc7 White is sufficiently developed to sacrifice the e5 pawn: 10.O-O!



and now:

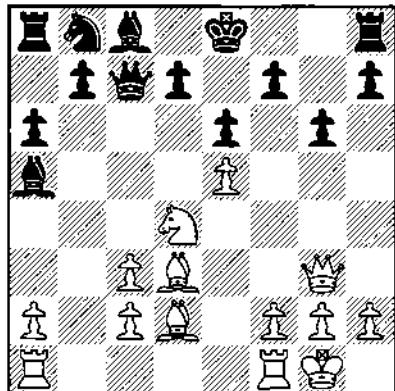
a) 10...Qxe5? can be punished easily, for example 11.Re1 Qc5 12.Qg4 g6 13.Nb3 Qc7 14.Bf4 Qd8 15.Qe5! O-O 16.Qf4+– with threats Bxb8 and Bf6, winning.

b) 10...Nc6 is nicely met with Re1.N and now:

c1) Grabbing the pawn with Nxe5? loses again: 12.Bf4 f6 13.Qh5+ Kf8 14.Bxe5 fxe5 15.Re3 16.Rf3+ Ke7 17.Rf7+ Kd6 18.Rd4!+–.

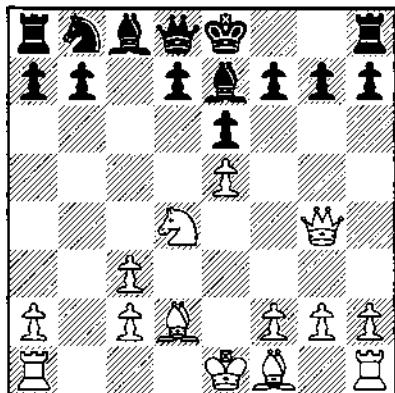
c2) After 11...O-O 12.Nb5! Qd8 13.g5 g6 14.Qh6+–, Black is getting forced one way or the other, either Qf6 or Re3-h3!

Lastly, after 10...a6 11.Qg4 g6, took place in R.Jones–Aagaard, Wijk aan Zee 2004, White should have preferred 12.Qg3N



For instance 12...Nc6 (or 12...Bxc3 13.Bxc3 Qxc3 14.Nxe6! embarrassing the undefended queen on c3) 13.Nxc6 dxc6 14.Rad1±. Black is surely missing his dark-squared bishop on the kingside.

9.Qg4!



A straightforward move, forcing Black to defend the g7 pawn.

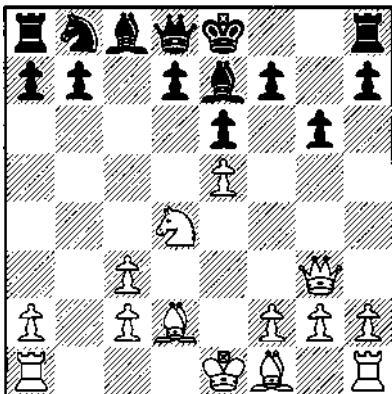
9...O-O?

Though this is the most popular move, it allows White to create a direct and powerful attack.

We consider two other options, 9...g6 and 9...Kf8:

9...g6 is an interesting alternative to castling. Although White has also

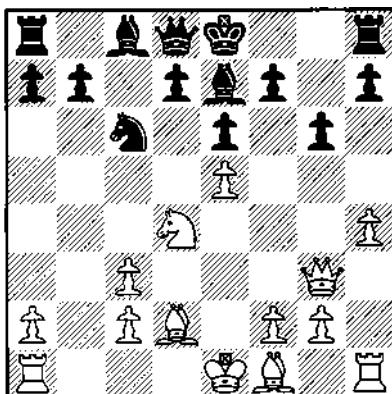
had success with both 10.Bd3 and 10.h4, we believe **10.Qg3!?** is best. We look at three options for Black:



a) 10...d6? is risky in view of 11.Bb5+ Kf8 12.Bh6+ Kg8 13.Rd1! Black's is effectively playing down a rook. 13...d5 14.Be2↑, followed by O-O and c2-c4.

b) 10...a6 is similarly unsound after 11.Bh6!↑ followed by Be2, Rd1, and O-O, where Black will eventually pay the price for leaving his king in the center.

c) Finally, after 10...Nc6 11.h4!,



our general plan is to play h4-h5 and Bd3, placing serious pressure against

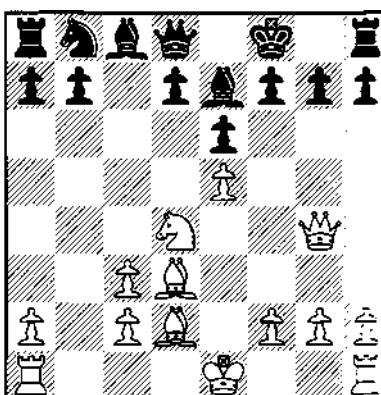
Black's kingside. Nd4-b5-d6 will also come into play. For instance:

c1) After 11...Qa5 12.Nb5!N → 13.Nd6+ Bxd6 14.exd6, White's advantage will last well into the endgame: 14...Qe5+ 15.Qxe5 Nxe5 16 → followed by Bc3 and h4-h5—the pawn makes Black's life very difficult.

c2) Or 11...h5 12.Nb5! → 13.Nd6+ Bxd6 14.exd6± and Black is suffering along the dark squares.

c3) After 11...a6 12.Nxc6 → 13.h5 g5 14.h6!± Black's position is much too shaky to defend.

GM Bojkov faced **9...Kf8** → initiated his attack quite effectively with **10.Bd3**

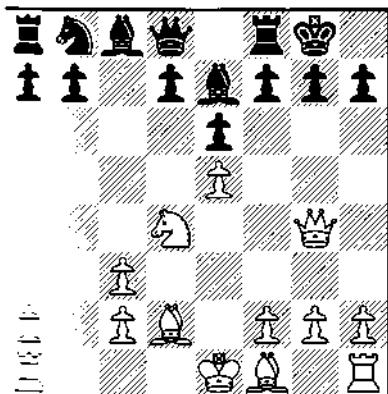


a) 10...h5 11.Qf4 a6 12.h4 → 13.Bg6 Qe8 14.Nf3! Potentially threatening Ng5. (If 14.exd6? → Bf6! would win a piece after e.g. 14...Nc6 (14...d5 15.Ng5 → 16.hxg5 Kg8 17.Bd3 was the last evil for Black, who must deal with c3-c4 next.) 15.exd6 Bf6 16 → e5 17.Qe3+, and White has a winning position already in Bojkov-Guenthner, Pforzheim 2005)

b) After 10...Nc6 11.Nxc6 → 12.O-O Qc7 13.Rfe1 b6 14.Bd3 White can count on an edge →

bring $\text{Rd}1$, followed by moving the $\text{c}2$ -squared bishop and doubling at the d-file via $\text{Rd}6$.

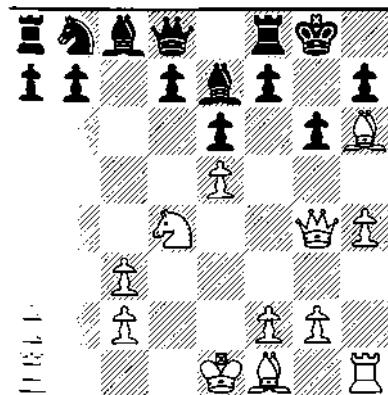
Back to our game, after $9\ldots \text{O-O}$:



$11\ldots \text{d}6?$

At this point $11.\text{Bxf8}$, as in *Masi-Fedorov, Polanica Zdroj*, leads to a position where Black gets some definite compensation for the exchange in the form of dark square control. This is a good option for a player who excels in technical options, but we believe the main line is more convincing:

11!

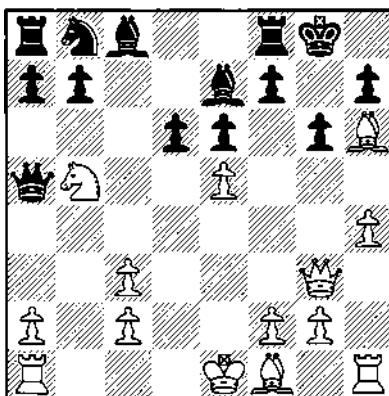


Perhaps the most instructive move of the game. GM Lalic keeps his strong dark-squared bishop and goes for the blunt attack. Naturally, the plan is to play $\text{h}4\text{-h}5$, open the h-file, and give mate.

$11\ldots \text{d}6?$

Black can no longer put up a serious fight after this move.

$11\ldots \text{Qa}5$ was the only chance to put pressure on White. $12.\text{Qg}3 \text{ d}6$ ($12\ldots \text{Nc}6 13.\text{Nxc}6 \text{ bxc}6 14.\text{h}5 \rightarrow$ looks grim for Black.) $13.\text{Nb}5!$



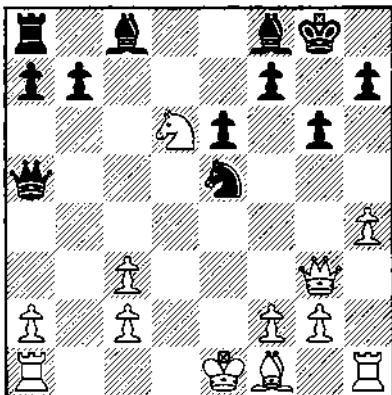
A thematic move. The knight on b5 is a model piece when it comes to combining attack with defense. White is winning in all lines, though it isn't easy, for example:

a) $13\ldots \text{dxe}5 14.\text{Qxe}5 \text{ f}6 15.\text{Qc}7!$ An important resource. $15\ldots \text{Nc}6 16.\text{Qxa}5 \text{ Nxa}5 17.\text{Bxf8} \text{ Kxf8} 18.\text{O-O-O}\pm$ with a technically winning position.

b) $13\ldots \text{Nc}6 14.\text{Bxf8N} \text{ Bxf8} 15.\text{Nxd}6 \text{ Nd}4$ ($15\ldots \text{Nxe}5 16.\text{Rd}1!$ transposes to the next line) $16.\text{O-O-O}!$ A saucy retort, the chess equivalent of fighting fire with fire. $16\ldots \text{Nf}5$ (or $16\ldots \text{Bh}6+ 17.\text{f}4 \text{ Qxe}5 18.\text{Rxd}4+-$) $17.\text{Nxf}5 \text{ Ba}3+ 18.\text{Kd}2 \text{ exf}5 19.\text{Bc}4!+-$. Despite the precarious position of White's king, there is no real

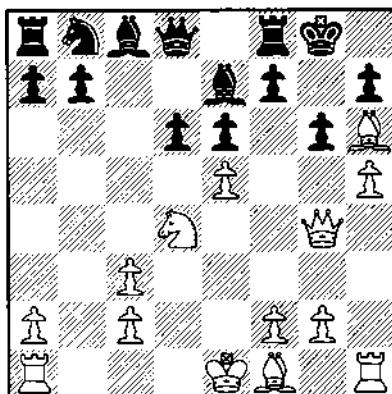
danger just yet, though Black should definitely be worried about the threat of h4-h5.

c) Brodsky–Van Laatum, Groningen 1993, continued 13...Nd7 14.Bxf8 Bxf8 15.Nxd6 Nxe5



And now 16.Rd1!N is the only move to secure a decisive advantage. 16...Bg7 (16...Bd7 is strongly met with 17.f4! Nc6 18.Nxf7+) 17.h5+. The position remains complicated, but is objectively winning for White, who should continue Be2 and can play Rh3 if the c3 pawn needs defense. Eventually, Black's kingside should crumble.

12.h5!



White ignores the threat to e5 pawn, correctly believing in strength of his own attack.

12...Qa5

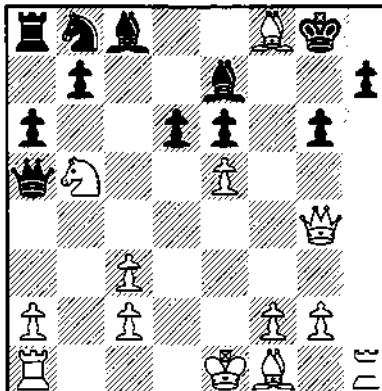
Too little too late.

After 12...dxe5 13.hxg6! Black must recapture, but is busy anyhow. 13...fxg6 (or 13...h5 14.Qh3+!) 14.Bxf8 exd4 (or 14...Exf8 15.Nxe6 Qf6 16.Bc4+) 15.Bxe7 Qxe7 16.Bd3+. White is up the exchange and retains the initiative.

13.Nb5!

White has saved a valuable tempo over the line 11...Qa5, as h4-h5 has been played in place of Qg3.

13...a6 14.hxg6! fxg6 15.Bxf8



15...Bxf8

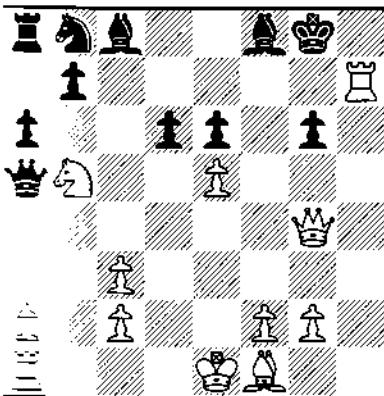
Allowing an abrupt and beautiful finish.

After 15...axb5 White will have a pleasant choice between:

16.Rxh7 Qxc3+ 17.Kd1 Kxh7 (17...Qxa1+ 18.Kd2 Kxh7 19.Bd3+ – game over.) 18.Bd3+ winning Black's queen, Pinkas–Trefny, Czechia 1991.

And **16.Kd2!** N Qd8 (or 16...Bd3+ 17.Rxh7! Kxh7 18.Bd3+) 17.Bd3+ followed by either Bxg6 or Rxh7. Black will lose a decisive amount of material just to avoid mate.

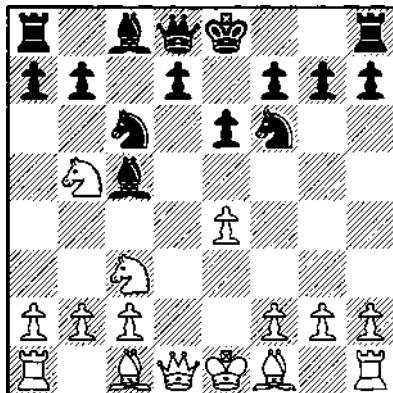
; Rxh7! 1-0



Game 39

Carlsen - Vidonyak
2005 Gausdal Classics 2005

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4
4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 Nc6 6.Ndb5
Bc5



A lovely shot! After 16...Kxh7
Black can only delay mate for
a few moves, for instance 17...Bg7 18.Qxg6+
19.Qe8+ Bf8 20.Bg6+-.

The Cobra Variation of the Four Knights Sicilian.

7.Bf4

In our opinion this is White's most reliable option to fight for a comfortable edge.

7.Nd6+ Ke7 is sharp and not a very practical way to fight for the advantage.

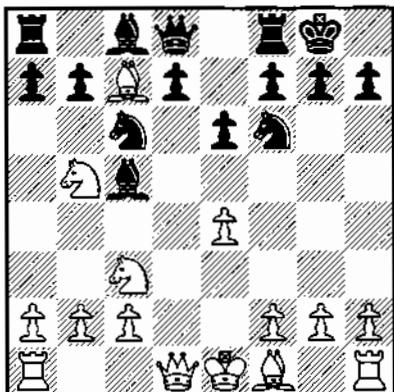
7...O-O

Against 7...e5, taking control over d5 with 8.Bg5 makes sense, but we believe 8.Be3! is best. We look at two replies by Black:

8...d6 9.Bxc5 dxc5 10.Qxd8+ Kxd8
11.O-O-O+ Ke7 12.Nc7! Hopping into d5. 12...Rb8 13.N7d5+ Nxd5
14.Nxd5+ Kf8 15.Ne3±, Dochev-Lindgren, Umel 1997. White has a structural edge, as he can play c2-c3 to control the d4 square.

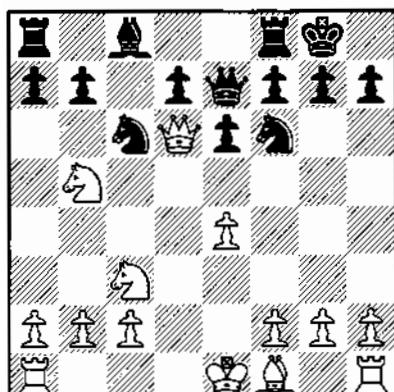
8...Bxe3? is met with the intermezzo 9.Nd6+! Kf8 10.fxe3. White's doubled pawns are actually

an asset, as the open f-file will be conducive to a powerful attack. 10...Ne8 11.Nxe8 Kxe8 12.Bc4+–, Groszpeter–Orso, Berlin 1996. Since Black has lost his castling rights, the position was already beyond saving. **8.Bc7!**



The key move that defines White's strategy. The plan is to trade dark-squared bishops and then exploit the future weak squares d6 and c7.

8...Qe7 9.Bd6 Bxd6 10.Qxd6



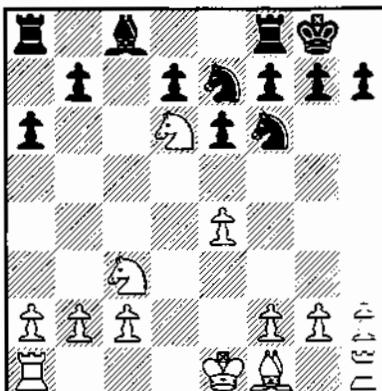
Unfortunately for Black, almost all endgames will be favorable for White, who can use the d6 square for his knight.

10...Ne8

Black allows an endgame, but at least covers the important d6 and c7 squares.

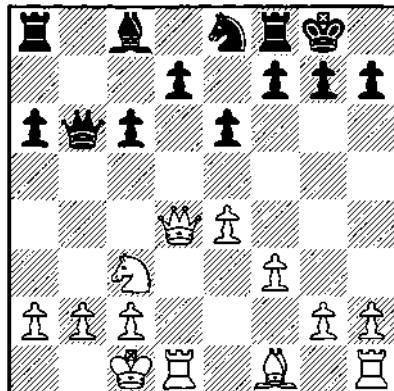
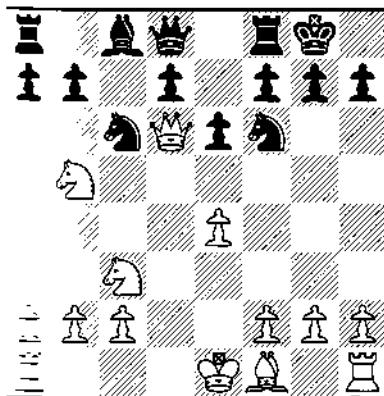
Exchanging immediately **10...Qxd6** 11.Nxd6 illustrates White's advantage in this typical endgame. It is difficult for Black to deal with our intrusive knight. 11...Ne8 (11...a6 is countered by 12.Na4!±, hopping into b6) 12.Nc3 Rxe8 13.Nb5!±, Lorand–Weisz, Budapest 2007. The second knight jumps into d6, and Black is much worse.

10...a6 doesn't alter the evaluation of the endgame: 11.Qxe7 Nxe7 12.Nd6



White will always be better in such a strong knight! 12...Nxe7 (12...Ne8 13.O-O-O Nxd6 14.Rc1 transposes to the main game) 13.O-O-O Rb8 14.f3 Bb7 15.a4 is thematic idea—White provokes the b5-b4, which will open up weaknesses on the queenside. 15...Bb6 16.Nb1 Redeploying the knight to c4. 16...Bc6 17.b3 a5 18.Nd2 Ne8 19.N2c4!±, A.Muzychuk–Porat, Istambul 2012. A dream strategic position for White.

Black's most serious alternative 10...Qd8, keeping queens on the board in search of counterplay on the kingside:



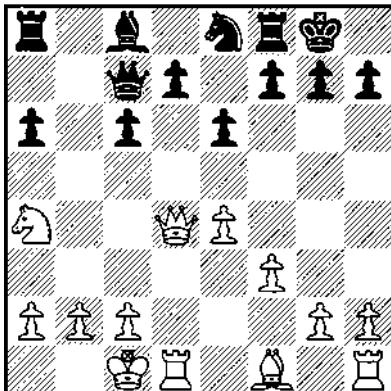
Once again White offers the queen trade, as Black's structure will be easy to put pressure on, in most endgames.

b1) Now 15...c5?! is easily met with 16.Na4! forcing 16...Qa5 17.Nxc5 Qxa2 18.Qa4 Qxa4 19.Nxa4± with a typical plus for this line.

b2) 15...Qxd4 16.Rxd4 e5 (or 16...d5 17.Rb4! N A very precise move, stopping Bb7 and threatening Rb6. 17...Nf6 18.Rb6 c5 19.b3!± freezing Black's pawns, which will soon be lost.) 17.Rb4! Nc7 18.Na4±, Van Delft–Feuerstack, Bargteheide 2007. Either White's knight or rook will make good use of the b6 square.

b3) Black's best chance is 15...Qc7, threatening c6-c5 and Bb7, finally activating the light-squared bishop. Instead of the theoretical reply e4-e5, we think we have a quite logical improvement, preventing c6-c5 with 16.Na4!?

- Ambitious readers should investigate 11.Nc7?! which leads to much sharper play than our recommendation in line b, next.
- A recent game continued 11...Rb8 12.e2 b5 13.e5 b4 14.exf6 bxc3 15.g7 Kxg7 16.b3±, Van Kampen–Sma, Hoogeveen 2012.
- We recommend 11.O-O-O a6 (It is necessary to start with this move, 11...Qb6?! is met with 12.Qg3!±. White's knight will land on d6, see Gaponenko, Germany 2010.) 12...Qb6 Black's only attempt at counterplay, threatening Ne8. 13.c6 bxc6 (Worse is 13...dxc6?! Re8 15.e5! Nd5 16.Ne4± where this bishop is an awful piece.) 14...Ne8 There is nothing better. 15...e5 must get rid of White's active knight. (We liked the following game 15...a5, an attempt to activate the light-squared bishop. 15.Na4! 16.b3 Qxd6 17.Rxd6 Ne8 18.Rd3± Rc3!± and Black couldn't hold –Janssen, Dieren 1996.) 15.Qd4

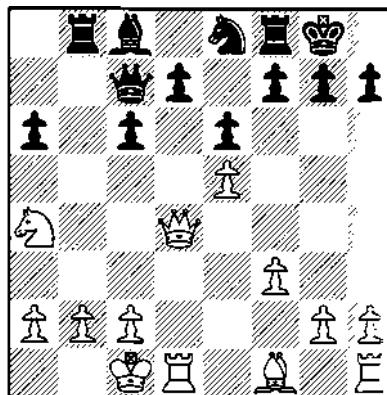


And now:

b31) The first point is that 16...d6 allows 17.Qb6! once again favorably trading queens. After 17...Ra7 18.Qxc7 Rxc7 19.Nb6 Bb7 White has 20.Rd4!± followed by Ra4, winning the a6 pawn.

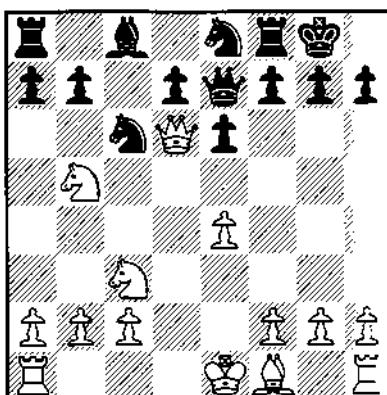
b32) In case of 16...d5 17.e5 f6 (17...a5 doesn't come close to solving all of Black's problems after 18.f4 Ba6 19.Bxa6 Rxa6 20.Rd3!±. White's rook can go to either b3, c3, or even h3 to stretch Black's defenses.) White can hold onto his space advantage via 18.f4 Rb8 (or 18...fxe5 19.fxe5 Rf5 20.Re1!± followed by Bd3 and Nc5) 19.Bd3± and the difference in minor pieces is quite significant.

b33) Finally, after 16...Rb8 White can now play 17.e5! fully cramping Black's position:

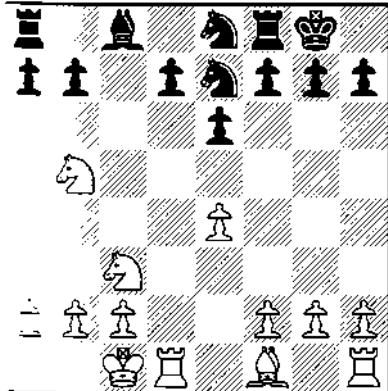


After 17...f6 18.f4 fxe5 19.fxe5 Rf5 20.Re1 d6 21.exd6 Nxd6 22.Bd3 Black has freed his development at the cost of his structure. White has a tremendous positional advantage.

Returning to our game, 10...Ne8:



11.Qxe7 Nxe7 12.O-O-O



$\pm f5$

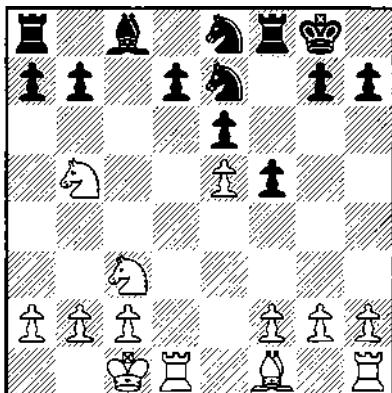
The most popular try. Black likely seeks counterplay by attempting to open the f-file.

Practice has also seen 12...a6?! 13.b6 Nxd6 14.Rxd6 where White would be quite pleased with his future along the d-file. 14...b5 (15...b5 can be met with 15.Bd3! since 15...e4?! 16.Bxe4 Rxf2 17.Bf3!± is good for White, who can win the exchange after either Ne4 or Nd1.) 15.Rd8. This position was reached in Dragaljko-Brochet, Plovdiv 2010, in which the thematic 16.a4! was played and if 16...b4 then 17.Nd1± leading to c4, from where the knight controls the entire queenside.

$\pm Nd6$

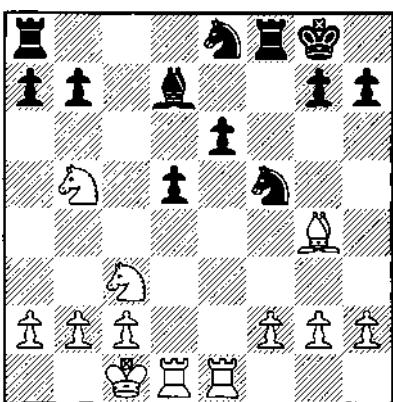
The main response, simplifying to a slightly better endgame for White.

A more ambitious try may be 13.e5!? keeping White's space advantage:



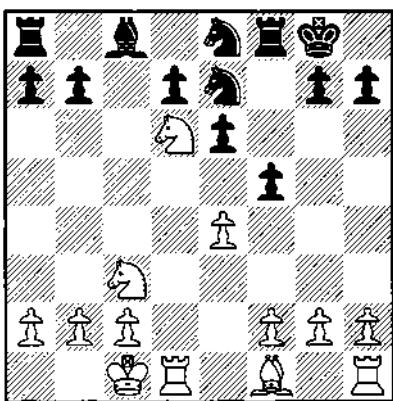
13...Ng6 14.Re1 a6 15.Nd4 (After 15.Nd6?! Nxd6 16.exd6 b5± White's pawn on d6 is more weak than strong.) 15...b5 (15...d6?! 16.exd6 Nxd6 was tried in Aravindh-Bellahcene, Maribor 2012, and should have been punished by 17.h4!N Re8 18.h5 Nf8 19.g3±, where White's pieces are clearly more active.) 16.h4! Bb7 17.h5 Ne7 (17...Nf4 can be strongly met with 18.Rh4! since 18...Nxg2? 19.Bxg2 Bxg2 20.f3+ leaves Black's bishop trapped.) Now in Barua-Bellon Lopez, Catalan Bay 2004, White's play can be improved upon with 18.Nb3!N, eyeing the a5 and c5 squares. For instance, after 18...Rc8?! 19.a4!± Black's queenside is in a lot of trouble.

Another way to leave the charted waters of theory is to play **13.exf5**, for example **13...Nxf5 14.Be2 d5 15.Rhe1 Bd7 16.Bg4!**

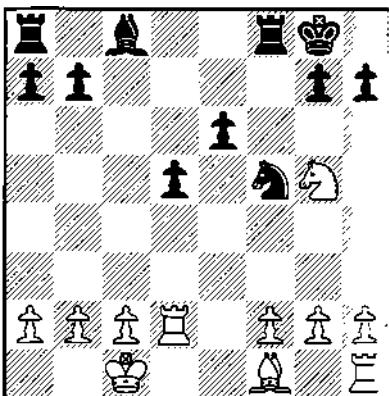


16...a6 17.Nd4 Nxd4 18.Rxd4 Rxf2 19.Nxd5 exd5 20.Bxd7 Nc7, and now in Konijn–Mihopoulos, Golden Sands 2012, White could have put more pressure on Black with **21.c4!±**.

Back to our game, after **13.Nd6**:



13...Nxd6 14.Rxd6 fxe4 15.Nxe4 Nf5 16.Rd2 d5 17.Ng5



A theoretical *tabiya*. We should be content with this position as practice has shown that White is generally playing for two results. Black has a clear weakness on e6 due to a passive light-squared bishop. He objectively should hold with careful defense.

17...b6

One of the main tries for Black

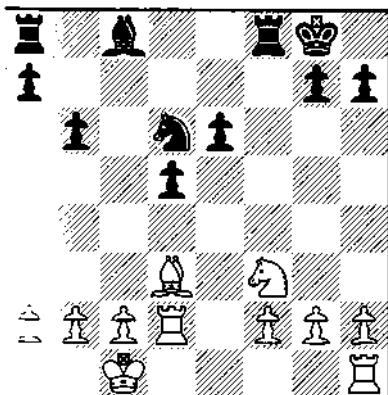
Black's position is no fun to play after **17...Nh4 18.g3 Nf3 19.Ne2 Rxf3 20.Bg2 Rf7 21.f4!±**, where White can continue pressing for many more moves, as in Akopian–Bellon Lopez, Cala Mayor 2008.

Another option is **17...Ne7**, which is also slightly better for White as **18.Bd3 h6 19.Nf3 a6 20.Re1 Nc6 21.c4!±**, Bok–Grachev, London 2011.

18.Nf3!

Carlsen, only 14 years old at the time of this game, is already showing glimpses of his eventual endgame mastery. The knight is rerouted from the seemingly active square e5 to e5, from where it will block Black's pawns.

18...Nd6 19.Bd3



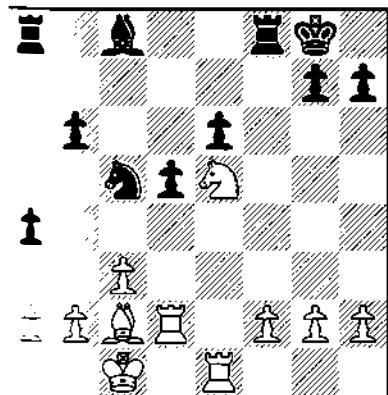
20...Nb7

Sending the knight to c5.

Another instructive game continuation:
19...Bd7 20.Re1 Rae8 21.b3 Bb5?!
Taking bishops but also dooming the
pawn. 22.Bxb5 Nxb5 23.Kb2 Nd6
Nc5 Rf6 25.Rde2+, Le Corre-
acho Collados, Nancy 2014.

20...Nc5 21.Bc2 a5 22.Re1 a4

23.Ne5



White's pieces have been developed optimally. Meanwhile, Black is completely stuck without real counterplay.

24.a3?

Going too far into enemy territory.

24...a3

The immediate 24.b4 was stronger, which Carlsen realizes on the next move.

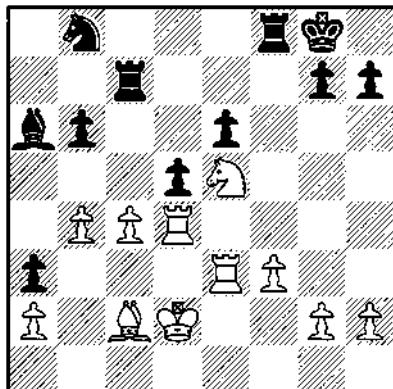
24...Ra7 25.b4! Na6

After 25...Na4 26.Bxa4 Rxa4 27.Kc2± White will soon pick up the a3 pawn.

26.f3 Rc7 27.Re3 Bb7 28.Rd4!±

White's blockade is impressive.
It is clear that Carlsen has studied
Nimzowitsch's *My System!*

28...Nb8 29.Kd2 Ba6 30.c4!



Exchanging the c-pawn for
Black's a-pawn, and activating all of
White's pieces in the process.

30...dxc4

30...Rfc8 leads to an instructive line:
31.Rxa3 Bxc4 32.Nxc4 dxc4
33.Ra8! Tying up Black's forces.
33...b5 34.Kc3 Nc6 35.Rxc8+ Rxc8
36.Rd7+- followed by Be4 and Rb7,
winning.

Relatively best was 30...Bxc4
31.Nxc4 Nc6!, though after 32.Rg4
dxc4 33.Rxc4± White's advantage is
nearly decisive.

31.Rxa3

Now Black's c-pawn will be firmly
blockaded and eventually won.
Carlsen's technique is no less than
stellar.

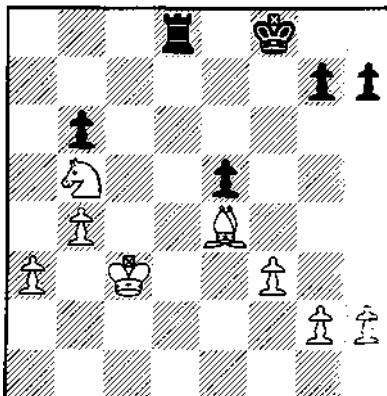
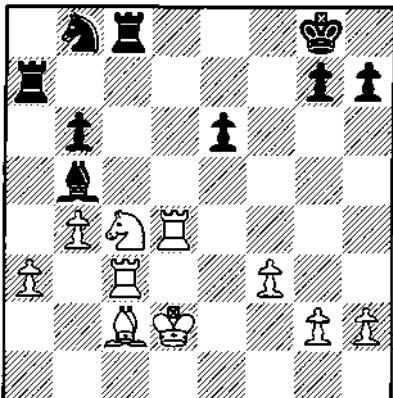
31...Bb5

No better was 31...b5 32.Rd6 Bc8
33.Ra5+-.

32.Rc3 Ra7

The c-pawn can't be held: 32...Rfc8
33.a4 Ba6 34.b5+-.

33.a3 Rc8 34.Nxc4



Since White's two pieces are ~~is~~ superior to the rook, Black resigns.

34...Rac7

The pin is only temporary.

Of course, 34...Bxc4 35.Rdxc4
Rxc4 36.Rxc4 Rxa3 37.Rc8++- is
trivial.

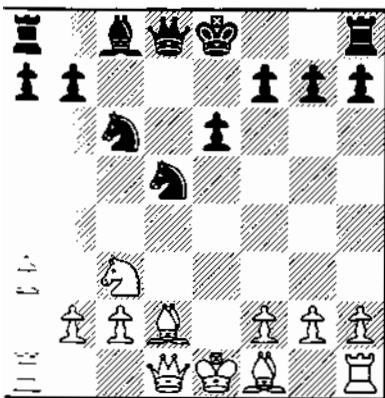
35.Bb3 Kf8 36.Rc2 Nd7

Shortening the finish, though
there was no longer any doubt about
the final outcome.

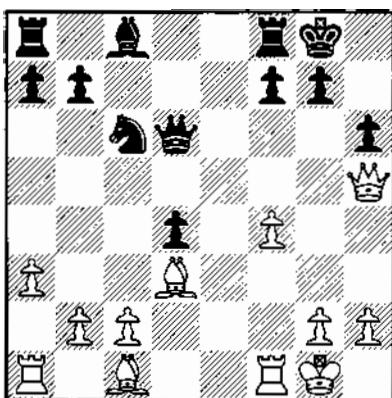
**37.Nd6! Rxc2+ 38.Bxc2 e5
39.Re4 Rd8 40.Nxb5 Nf6+
41.Kc3 Nxe4+ 42.Bxe4 1-0**

Memory Markers

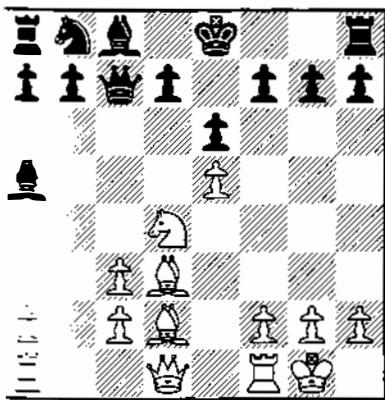
These are reminders of some of the ideas and motifs in this chapter.



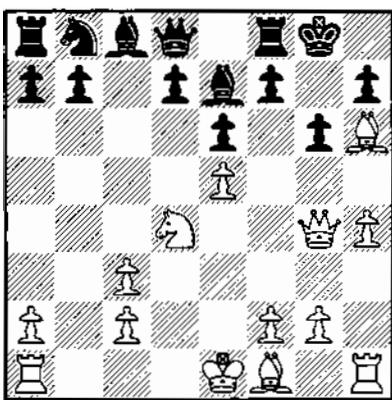
- After **10.Bd2??.** Inviting favorable endgame after Nxc3 11.Bxc3. See diagram on page 443, note on 9...Nxd5 in Grischuk–Safarli.



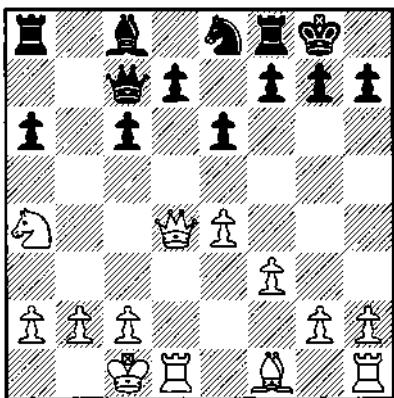
- 2. After 16.f4!?.** Advancing on the kingside, an aggressive plan. See diagram on page 451, Grischuk–Safarli.



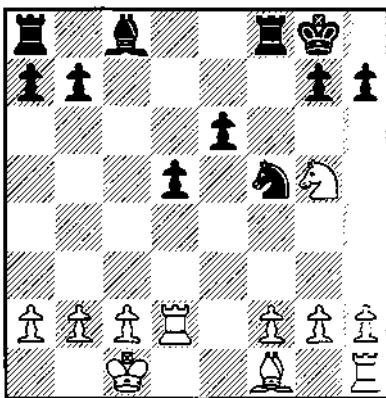
- 3. After 10.O-O!.** Sacrificing the pawn on e5, a pawn that Black probably shouldn't take. See diagram on page 461, notes to Lalic–Sulava.



- 4. After 11.h4!.** Keeping the dark-squared bishop and going for the kingside attack. See diagram on page 463 in Lalic–Sulava.



5. After 16.Na4!? N. Preventing c6-c5 and threatening Qb6. See diagram on page 468, notes to Carlsen–Vidonyak.



6. After 17.Ng5. A theoretical tabiya. White is slightly better due to a healthier pawn structure and more active pieces. See diagram on page 470, Carlsen–Vidonyak.

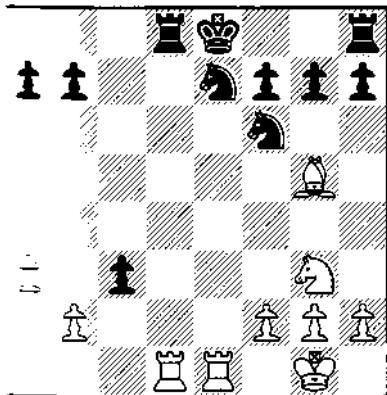
Exercises

White to play!

With these situations from actual games, you can find some ideas and opportunities that may await you, as White, when facing these variations.

Solutions to the exercises begin on page 543.

Exercise 1

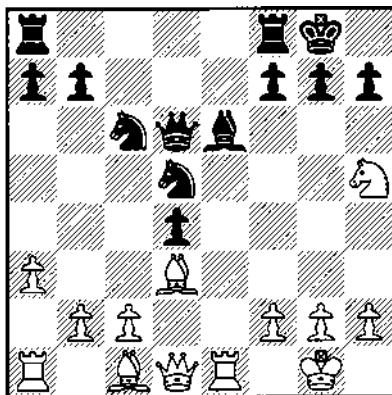


Yemelin – Kornev

St Petersburg qual U18 1993

White to play, find the strongest continuation.

Exercise 2

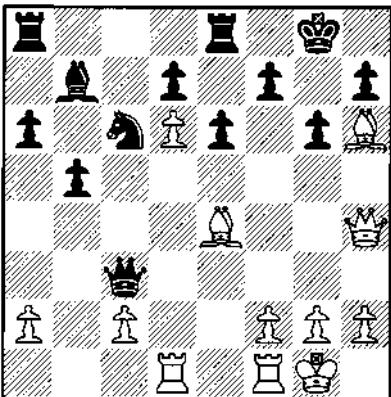


Mekhitarian – Van Riemsdijk

Rio de Janeiro 2007

White to play, find the strongest continuation.

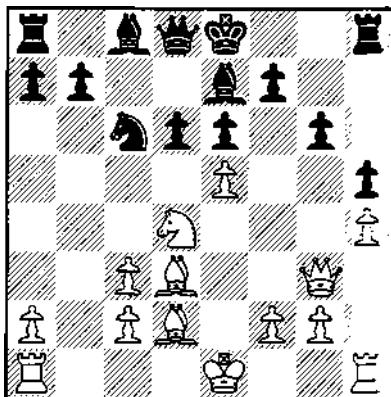
Exercise 3



Novikov – Stepanov
Tula 2010

How can White utilize his dark-square control?

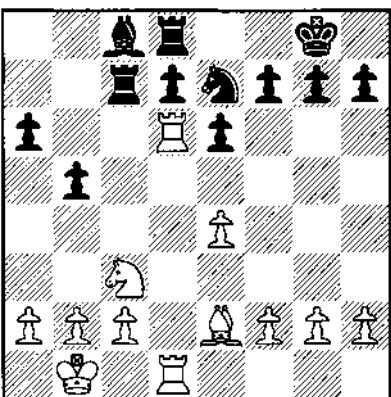
Exercise 4



Nikitenko – Plotkin
World Youth U16 Olympiad 2014

White to play, how should you ~~react~~ to Black's last move, d7-d6?

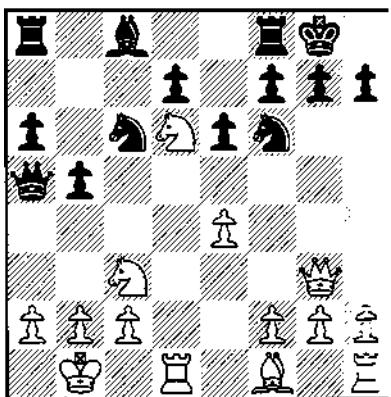
Exercise 5



Lagarde – Abergel
Caen 2011

White to play, can you create more weaknesses in Black's structure?

Exercise 6

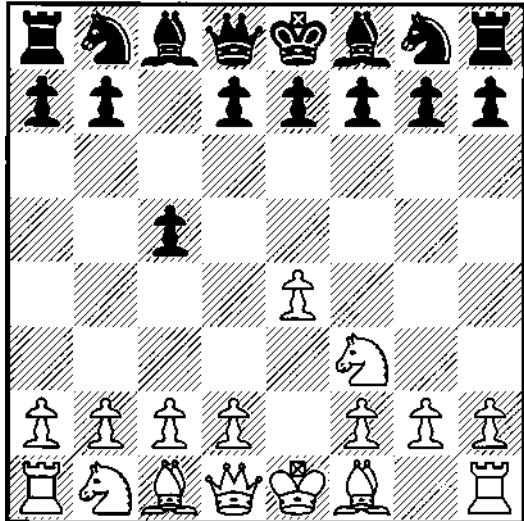


Majdan – Gaponenko
Germany 2010

White to play, find the best move

Chapter 7b

Rare Sicilians



1.e4 c5 2.Nf3

In this final sub-chapter we will explore four unique systems that you will most likely face at some point during your chess career. The most respectable of these is the Grivas Variation, named after Greek GM Efstratios Grivas, which arises after **2...Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Qb6**. This combative line, favored by Judit Polgar, will be the subject of Game 40.

Following that, in Game 41 we will cover the Nimzowitsch-Rubinstein Variation, which starts with **2...Nf6**. Game 42 will then feature **2...b6**, known as the Katalimov Variation, named after Russian IM Boris Katalimov. Lastly, we will conclude the chapter with the O'Kelly Variation, named after Belgian grandmaster Albéric O'Kelly de Galway, which takes place after **2...a6**.

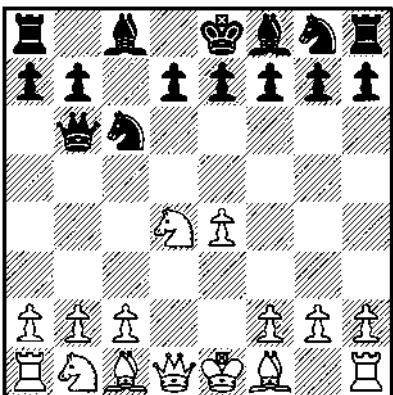
Other than their rarity, these lines don't have much in common with each other but we have done our best in relating potential middlegames with other parts in the book so that the reader may have some frame of reference for understanding each individual structure.

Once again, we'd urge you not to take these systems lightly, as they may pop up one day as an unpleasant surprise!

Game 40

Balogh – Zhang
Aeroft Open 2006

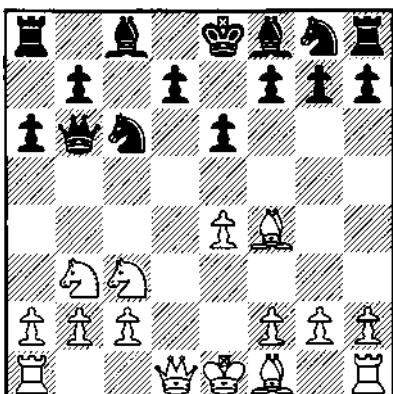
1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4
4.Nxd4 Qb6



This early queen sortie characterizes the Grivas Sicilian—Black quickly displaces White's knight before moving either of his central pawns.

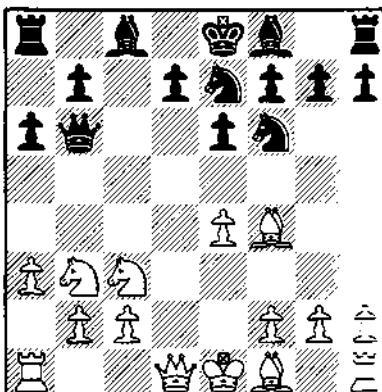
5.Nb3 Nf6

In case of the move-order 5...e6 6.Nc3 a6, White should try 7.Bf4!



The main point is that 7...Bf4 can be met with 8.Qg4! exploiting the knight's absence from f6. 8...Qd5 A serious concession. 9.Qf3± followed by a2-a3, as in Schapotschnikov–Roerig, Bayern 2001, yields a plus

And after 7...Nf6 8.a3! Black must deal with the threat of e4-e5 but cannot play d7-d6. 8...Ne7 9.Qf3 10.Bg5! Be7 10.Bxf6 Bxf6 11.Nd5 Qd5 12.Nd2± is a fantastic 'Sveshnikov for White, Barua–Gofshtein, Darmstadt 2007.)



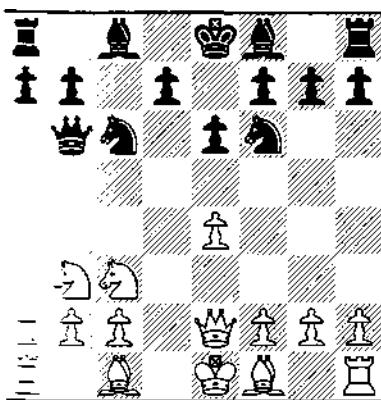
a) Here we like 9.g3!?N d5 10.Qg4 Ng6 10.Be3 Qc7 11.f4 b5 12.Bb7 13.O-O± White can think about advancing e4-e5, or Nd4 followed by f4-f5.) 10.Bg2 dxe4 11.Nxe4 Nc6 12.Bxe4±. White should be able to make use of his better development.

b) White was also better 9.Qd6 Qxd6 10.Bxd6 Nc6 11.Bd5 12.exd5 Nxd5 13.Nxd5 14.O-O-O±, Kokarev–Akopian, Petersburg 2013.

7...e6

8.d6 7.Bc4 e6 8.Bf4 transposes
into Classical Sicilian.

7.Qe2!



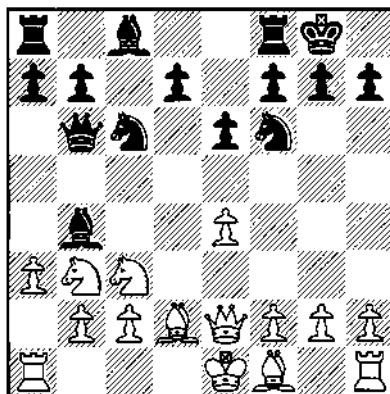
We've chosen one of the sharpest approaches to this line. White's opening plan consists of Be3, O-O-O, 11.g4, often followed by a kingside castling. The resulting middlegame sometimes resemble positions explored in the 6.h3 Najdorf, so a lot of themes and ideas should be familiar to the reader.

Choosing a Scheveningen structure is one of Black's main options in this opening. We look at three alternatives for Black.

7...Qc7 should transpose to a variation covered later on after 8.g4. For instance, 8...h6 (or 8...d6 9.Be3, 9.Qc7 leading to the game) 9.Bg2 a6 10.b6 11.Be3 transposes to the 7...h6 diagram on page 484.

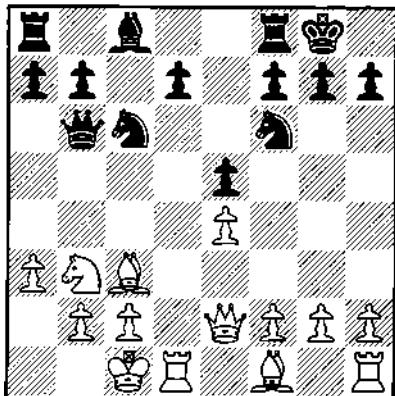
7...a6 allows 8.e5! (White can also try 8.g4, resembling the main line.) 8...Nd5 9.Nxd5 exd5 10.g3!±, Dominguez Perez–Wang Hao, Beijing 2013.

A major alternative is 7...Bb4, which we look at in detail. Black forces White to develop his bishop to d2. 8.Bd2 (Now we can see the point of starting with 7.Qe2, as after 7.Be3 Qc7 8.Qe2 Bb4, White would have to retreat his bishop from e3.) 8...O-O 9.a3! Posing the question to the bishop on b4:



Black has mainly chosen to retreat with 9...Be7 here, which we'll cover on page 481. But first, let's see how White should proceed against 9...Bxc3:

After 9...Bxc3 10.Bxc3 e5 11.O-O-O

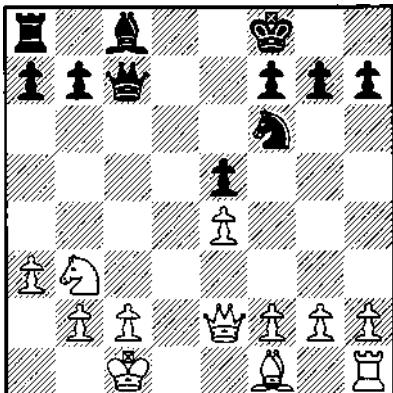
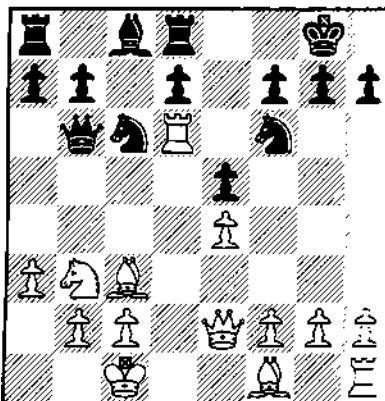


White's main trump is clear—his powerful dark-squared bishop. In order for Black to equalize, he must try to neutralize this bishop by supporting his e5 pawn with d7-d6.

a) The immediate 11...d6 falls short after 12.Rxd6 Nd4 The only try, otherwise Black will just be down a pawn. 13.Bxd4 Qxd6 14.Bc5 Qc7 15.Bxf8 Kxf8

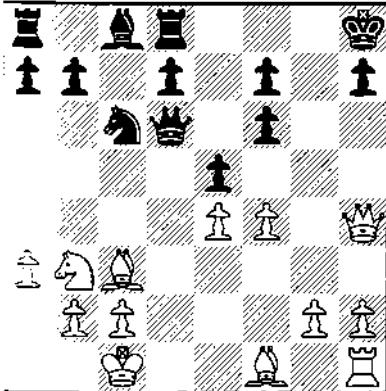
b) 11...Qc7 looks a bit slow in view of 12.g4!, for example: 12...d6 13.Qe3 Nd7 14.Qe3 Nb6 15.f4 exf4 16.Qxe3 Na4 and here in Chebotarev-Shaposhnikov, Tomsk 2006, White shouldn't have shied away from 17.e5! Nxc3 18.exd6 Qb6 19.bxc3. White's king is not that unsafe, and his d6 pawn is quite strong.

c) Lastly, 11...Rd8 would solve a lot of Black's problems if not for 12.Rd7

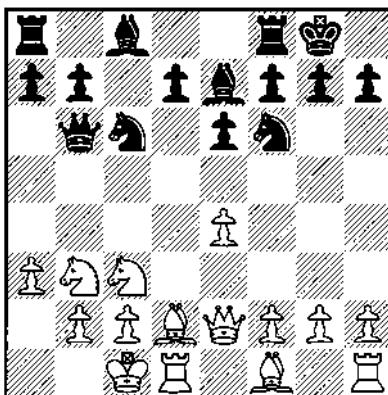


This took place in Ivanov–Yermolinsky, Seattle 2000, and now 16.Qc4!N looks best. 16...Qe7 (After 16...Qxc4 17.Bxc4 Nxe4 18.Re1 Nd6 19.Bd3± White will win a pawn on either e5 or h7.) 17.f3 Be6 18.Qc5±. The trade of queens greatly limits Black's compensation.

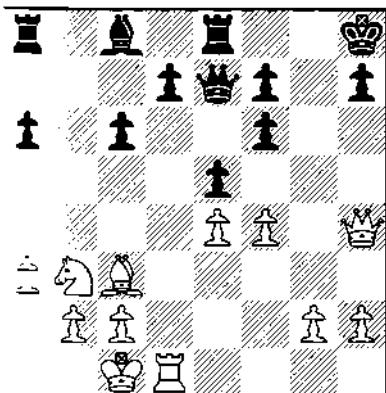
A blunt move! White prevents d7-d6 and prepares a fantastic exchange sacrifice. 12...Qc7 13.Rxf6! gxf6 is compensation for the exchange. White has excellent attacking chances. The impending f2-f4 will place intense pressure along the a1-h8 diagonal. The decisive games in this line continued 14.Qg4+ Kh8 15.Qh4+ Kg8 16.f4!



The retreat 9...Be7 is probably more critical. 10.O-O-O



- :1) 16...Re8 17.Bb5! Adding pressure and preparing Rd1. Qe6 (17...a6 is refuted by 18.Rd1 - 19.Bxc6 bxc6



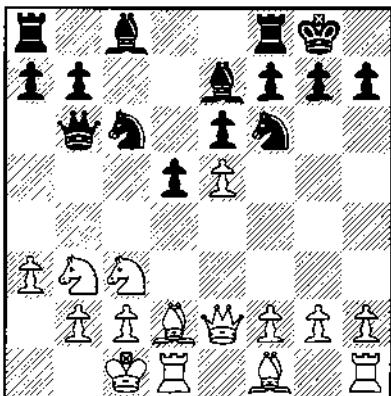
Since White has castled queenside, our plan is to attack on the kingside as quickly as possible.

a) Now 10...d6?! is too slow: 11.g4! a6 12.g5 Nd7 13.h4 Qc7 14.f4 b5 15.Kb1 b4 16.axb4 Nxb4 17.f5↑, Anand–Kramnik, Mainz 2001. White is already prepared to break through with f5-f6.

b) 10...d5 is a necessary central strike. 11.e5 Grabbing space and keeping the center closed. We prefer this to exd5, which gives Black an isolated pawn but also freer development.

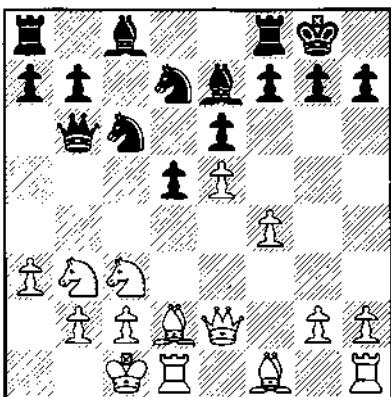
Nd4!+– Beautiful and decisive.)
E11 d6 19.f5 Qe7 20.Bb4!+–.
Black's position was already unholdable in Sax–Farkas, Hungary 2004.

:2) The original brilliancy saw Qe7 17.Bb5! Re8 18.Rd1 threatening Rd3-h3 if nothing else. 18...d6 18...b6 19.Rd5!+– and the e5 pawn 19.Na5!+–. Since Bd7 would lead to Nxb7, Black cannot protect the knight on c6 and his position collapsed in Adams–Knezevic, France 1997.



b1) Now, against 11...Ne8 12.f4 f6, White was better after 13.exf6 (Also 13.Be3 Qc7 14.exf6 Bxf6 15.Nb5 Qb8 16.g3 a6 17.N5d4± Paravyan-Alekseenko, Al-Ain UAE 2013.) 13...Bxf6 14.g3! Preparing to target Black's central pawns with either Bg2 or Bh3. 14...Nd6 15.Kb1 Nc4 16.Qe1 Nxd2+ 17.Qxd2 (Now Bd7 is met with Nxd5.) 17...Ne7 18.Bh3 Bd7 19.Rhe1±, Abasov–Adlane Arab, Sharjah UAE 2014. White threatens both Ne4 and Qe3.

b2) 11...Nd7 seems like a more natural move. 12.f4 The position now resembles a French Defense, due to the closed center:

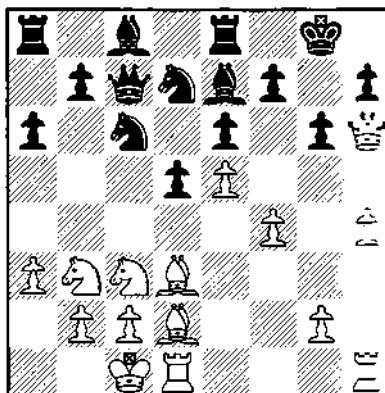


White should target the e-pawn while Black should drum up play against White's king. 12...a6 (After 12...Nc5 13.Nxc5 Qc7 14.Be1?!, allowing for Rd3 in several cases, 14...Bd7 15.h4 Rfc8, Van Den Dieren, Dieren 2010, we'd suggest 16.Rh3↑, followed by h4-h5 and Rg3. with the better chances for White. 13.Qh5! Attempting to induce a weakness.

b21) Now 13...f5 can be strongly answered with 14.g4! N6 15.Qh3+

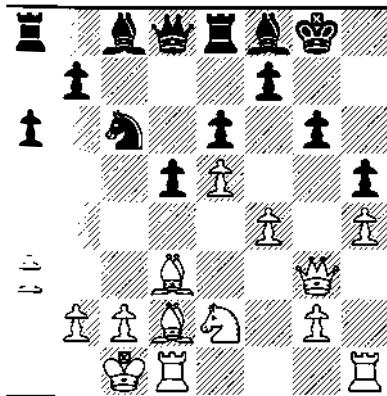
b22) The plan starting with 13...Rd8 is a bit passive, and should be met with 14.Bd3 Nf8 15.Rc1 Qc7 16.Rf3 g6 17.Qh6 b5 18.Ne2 followed by Ned4, g2-g4, and f4-f5 breaking through.

b23) 13...Qc7 The main try, clearing the road for the b-pawn. After 14.Bd3 g6 15.Qh6 Re8 16.h4!



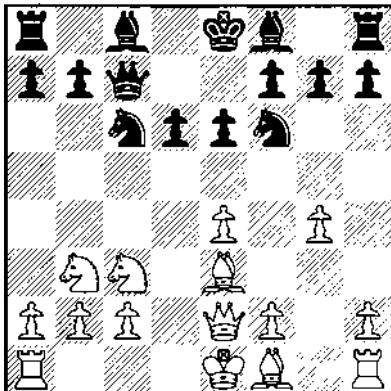
White's attack is clearly fast—the threat is h4-h5, followed by an eventual bishop sacrifice or 16...Qd8! A devious move, preparing to answer h4-h5 with Bf8. The immediate 16...Bf8 17.Qg5 18.h5→ landed Black in trouble. White quickly doubled rooks or h-file in Amonatov–Mueller, Istan-

- 12... 17.Ne2! A standard maneuver
 - this structure, planning to put
 knight on d4. 17...Nc5 (17...Bf8
 17...Qg5 Qxg5 19.hxg5± leaves White
 a huge space advantage)
 - Nxc5 Bxc5 19.Qg5 Bf8 20.Qg3! h5



now in Hracek–Petenyi, Slovakia 2012, White should have played the crushing 21.Qh2!+– with g2-g4 next, tearing apart Black's kingside. 21.Bxg6→ is also quite strong, but unnecessary.

8.Be3 Qc7 9.g4!



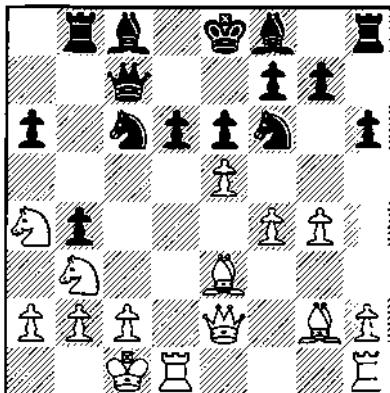
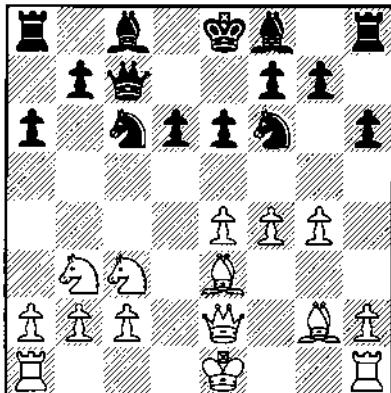
This bold advance resembles the Keres Attack, introduced all the way back in Game 12 of Chapter 1! White's plan should be a familiar one—g4-g5, followed by castling queenside and launching a kingside pawn storm with moves such as f2-f4 and h2-h4. This type of position was explored throughout Chapter 1, specifically in Games 4-6, as well as the line 7...Qb6 in Game 10.

9...a6

The main move—Black goes for immediate counterplay on the queenside.

9...Be7 10.g5 Nd7 11.O-O-O a6 12.f4 b5 13.h4 transposes to the game.

The double-edged **9...h6** should also be considered. Black prevents g4-g5 but weakens the g6 square. In response, White should prepare the further advance of the g-pawn with the moves f2-f4 and h2-h4: 10.f4 a6 11.Bg2



With the bishop on g2, White should always look for tactical shots connected with e4-e5, especially if Black plays b7-b5. Now let's see a few instructive excerpts:

a) On 11...Be7 12.O-O-O:

a1) 12...g6?! was duly punished after 13.Kb1 b5 14.e5! dxe5 15.fxe5 Nd7 16.Ne4! Ncxe5 17.Bf4 Ra7 18.Rhf1 For just one pawn White has tremendous activity, and Black's position hangs by a thread. 18...Qb6 19.Rxd7! Nxd7 20.Be3 Qc7 21.Qf2!+–, and things were more or less over in Korneev–Anastasian, Linares 1996.

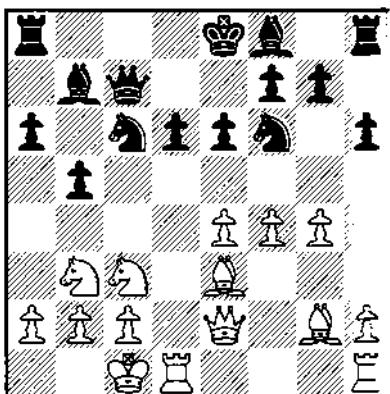
a2) 12...Nd7 13.h4 b5 14.g5 hxg5? A serious mistake. Only White can benefit from the open h-file. 15.hxg5 Rxh1 16.Rxh1 g6 17.Rh8+ Nf8 18.f5!+–, Onischuk–Nyzhnyk, Kharkov 2009.

b) And on 11...b5 12.O-O-O:

b1) After 12...b4 13.Na4 Rb8 we found 14.e5!N

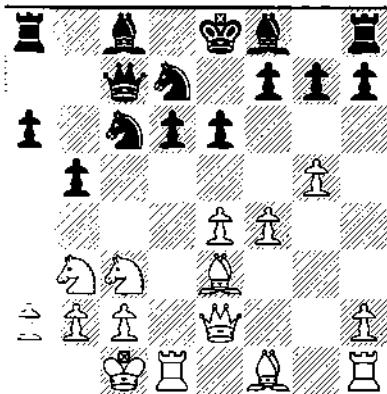
A thematic shot, exploiting weaknesses in Black's position: 14...dxe5 15.Qc4! Bb7 (Or 15...Bc8 16.g5! hxg5 17.fxg5 Nd5 18.Bxe5+ where Black must already start doing somersaults in order to survive.) 16.Bb6 Qc8 17.Rhe1!+ All of White's pieces are involved in the attack, and a decisive breakthrough is not far off.

b2) On 12...Bb7, we have a choice:



b21) 13.h4 Nd7 14.g5 Nb6 15.Qc4! (Breaks like this show how h7-h6 often backfire for Black. 15...fxg6 can be met with 16.Qg4) 15...Nc4 16.Qc4 and White was clearly on top in Siklosi–Polgar, Kecskemet 1992.

b22) Also possible is 13.a3!? where 13...b4 is strongly answered by 14.axb4 Nxb4 15.g5! hxg5 16.fxg5 f5 17.g6! fxg6 18.Nd4±, and e6 falls. 10.g5 Nd7 11.O-O-O b5 12.f4



White has two main plans of attack here: h2-h4-h5 followed by breaking with either g5-g6 or f4-f5, and f4-f5 followed by an assault against the e6 pawn. The f5 break is usually best only when Black plays Bb7, or if the knight on d6 leaves the center (for example Black plays Na5). White should be wary of Black's counterplay, thus should take prophylactic measures, as we'll see in the following real game played by GM Balogh.

12.Be7

A natural move. While the option is fairly unexplored, it is perfectly rational and possible to get a+ for it.

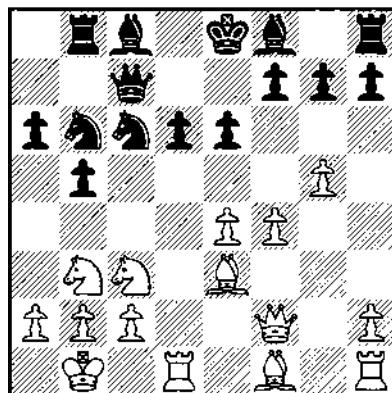
Let's take a look at some of Black's possibilities:

12...b4?! is generally inadvisable for Black, as after 13.Na4 Black's press on the queenside is stunted without control over the b6 square. For instance, after 13...Bb7 14.Qf2! 15.Nb6! Nxb3+ 16.axb3 Nxb6

17.Bxb6 Qd7 18.Bd3!± followed by f4-f5, White holds all the cards.

After **12...Bb7** Black now threatens b5-b4 and Na5, since the e4 pawn is unprotected. Therefore we like 13.a3! limiting Black's play before continuing with f4-f5. 13...Na5 (*Once again, 13...b4 is too slow in view of 14.axb4 Nxb4 15.f5! exf5 16.exf5. Black doesn't have time for Bxh1 due to Bb6+, and after 16...Ne5 17.Bg2 Bxg2 18.Qxg2↑ followed by Rxe1, Black's king is in a lot of danger.*) 14.Nxa5 Qxa5 15.Bh3±. White is ready to play f4-f5, opening up Black's king.

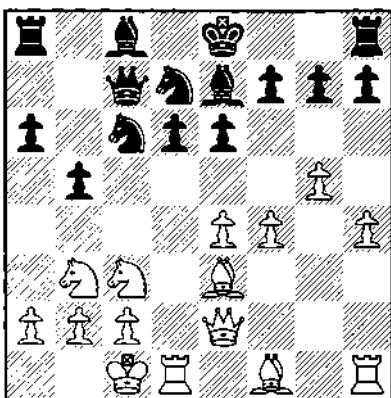
12...Nb6 should typically be met with 13.Qf2! This position is similar to the game continuation, which includes the moves Be7 and h2-h4. 13...Rb8 14.Kb1!



A strong and thematic prophylactic move, vacating the c1 square for the bishop. 14...Bd7?! was tried in Smeets–Fedorchuk, Leiden 2013. (14...Na4 is nicely met with 15.Ne2!± Vuckovic–Chirila, Plovdiv 2008) And now we believe the direct 15.f5!N was best. For instance 15...Ne5 (Or 15...Nc4 16.Bc1 Qb6 17.Qg3±. Next is Bh3 and Ne2-d4/f4, hammering

away at the e6 pawn.) 16.Bc1! Rc8 17.Nd4±, followed by Bh3 and Rhf1, once again applying maximum pressure against e6.

13.h4



Since Black doesn't yet have a threat on the queenside, Balogh makes this useful advance.

13.f5?! would be premature in view of 13...Nce5 14.fxe6 fxe6 15.Bh3 b4! 16.Nb1 (*not* 16.Na4? Qc6!+) 16...Nc5± where Black is no worse.

13...Nb6

Black activates the knight and threatens b5-b4.

14.Qf2!

A multi-purpose move, improving the queen and preparing Ne2.

14...Rb8

The only reasonable move, reinforcing b6 in order to play either Na4 or Nc4.

After both 14...Na4? 15.Nxa4 bxa4 16.Bb6! Qb8 17.Nd2± and 14...Nc4? 15.Bxc4 bxc4 16.Bb6! Qb8 17.Nd2+- White is in full control on the queenside.

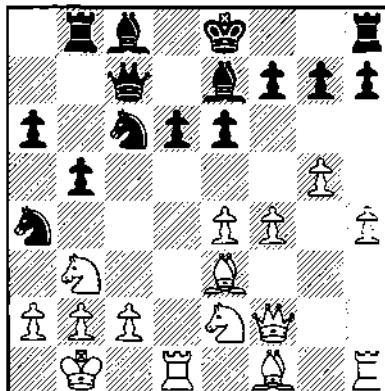
15.Kb1!

More prophylaxis. White vacates c1 for the bishop in case of Nc4.

15...Na4

15...b4?! helps White, 15...Ne2± is a move we might want to play anyway.

15...Nc4 would be met with 16.Bc1 and Black is a bit stuck as 16...Bf5 runs into 17.Nxb5! Rxb5 18.Bxc4—
16.Ne2!



Redeploying the knight on the kingside.

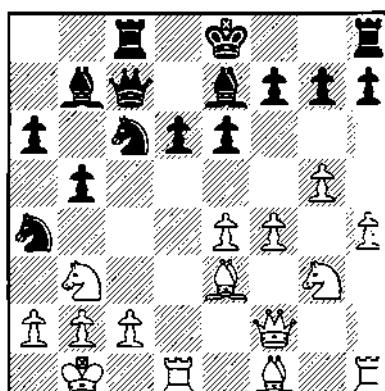
16...Bb7

16...Nb4 can be easily answered with 17.Ng3±.

17.Ng3

Once again, 17.f5? would run into 17...Ne5± with threats of Bxe4 and Nc4.

17...Rc8



1.h5

A sensible plan, threatening Bg2 followed by g5-g6, breaking open the kingside.

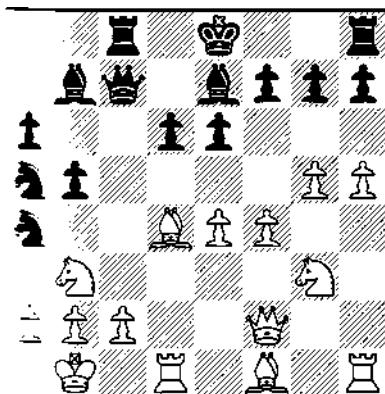
Instead, 18.f5! was definitely worth considering, for example Ne5 19.Bh3 Nc4 20.Bc1↑.

1...Na5?!

Perhaps the decisive error.

Black's best and only chance was 1...h6! with the idea to meet 19.g6 with 19...Bf6, though even here after 20.f5! dx5 21.Ne4↑ the position is highly unclear, but it seems like White has the initiative.

2.Bd4!



Balogh takes advantage of Black's move and beautifully posts his knight on d4, from where it protects and attacks g7.

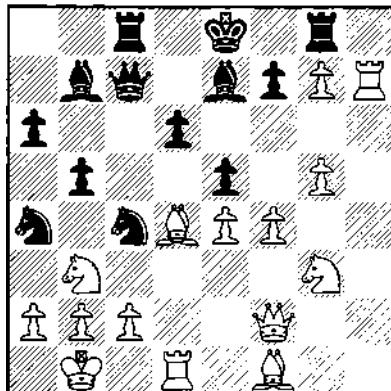
3.Nc4

In case of 19...O-O 20.Nxa5 Qxa5 21.Bc3!↑ White breaks through first, 22.g5-g6 is coming next.

3...h6!

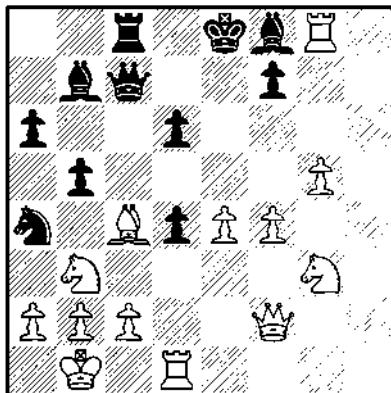
Much stronger than 20.Bxg7. Now Black's kingside simply collapses. The game did not last much longer:

20...e5 21.hxg7 Rg8 22.Rxh7!



22...Rxg7

After 22...exd4 23.Rh8 Kd7 24.Bh3++– Black can resign.
23.Rxg7 exd4 24.Rg8+ Bf8 25.Bxc4! 1-0

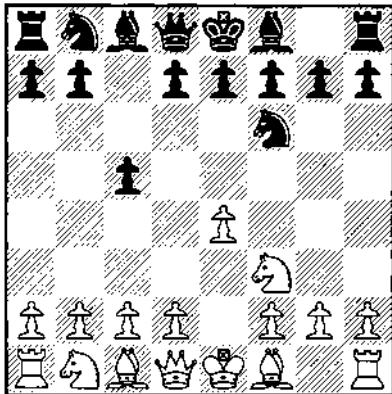


Black threw in the towel in view of 25...bxc4 26.Qxd4 cxb3 27.Qxa4++– with a massive amount of extra material for White, and a crushing attack to boot.

Game 41

Shomoev – Rakhmanov
62nd Russian Higher League 2009

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nf6



Named after two of the great classical players, the Nimzowitsch-Rubinstein variation has good surprise value but not much beyond that. The line can be tricky to face, but nothing to worry about if White is aware of a few key ideas.

3.Nc3

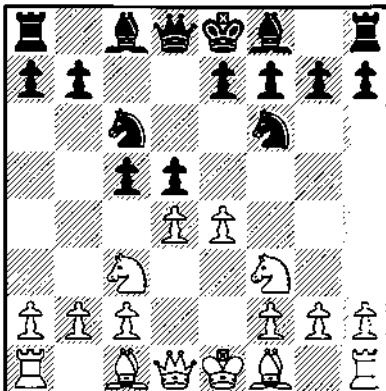
Our choice is a practical one. After this move Black is invited to transpose back into another Sicilian, for example, after 3...d6 4.d4.

White can also try 3.e5 Nd5 4.Nc3 which is quite sharp and interesting.

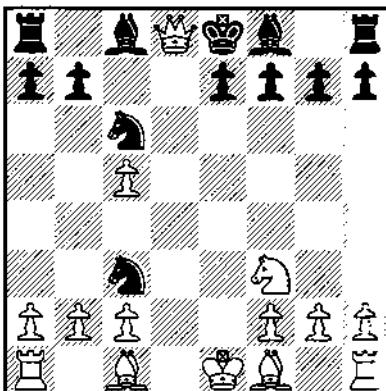
3...d5

The main independent variation. Black aims to equalize in the center. Another try for Black is 3...Nc6

4.d4 d5?! which is a bit offbeat, but nevertheless deserves attention:



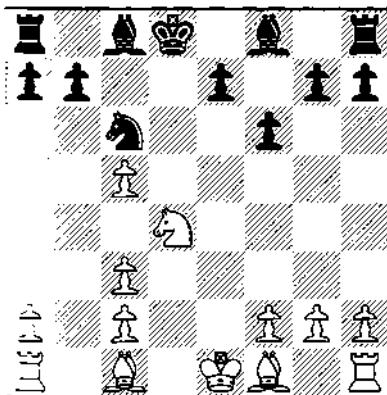
Our suggestion is to play for an $\text{e}2\text{e}4$ in the endgame after 5.exd5 Nxd5 6.dxc5 Nxc3 7.Qxd8+



Now Black chooses between capturing on d8, and after White recaptures on c3, he will have an extra pawn, because it will be tripled! Gaining an advantage will be based upon whether or not White can seize the initiative and pose some pressure against Black's position.

After 7...Kxd8 8.bxc3 Black would like to play e7-e5, place the king on c7, develop the light-squared bishop and fully blockade White's pawns. 8...f6 (8...e5?! runs into 9.Ng5 forcing Black into a passive position)

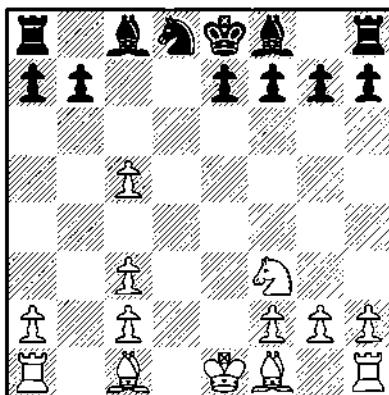
*Ke8 10.Bc4 Nd8 11.Be3 f6
12.Ne4±, Aleshin–Morozov, Riazan
17) 9.Nd4!*



Black's plan is disrupted, since after 9...e5 10.Nxc6+ bxc6 White's pawn is now fixed, but the c5 pawn does a good job of restricting Black's dark-squared bishop. The ensuing encounter was quite instructive: 11.Be3 Be6 12.Ba6! Rb8 13.Be7 (After 13...exf4 14.Bxf4 White wins with the age-old trick - Rb2 15.O-O-O!+-.) 14.O-O Kc7 15.Rfe1 Black's e5 pawn is in trouble 15...Rb2 16.Bd3 g6 17.fxe5 fxe5 18.Bf2! Bf6 19.Bg3 Bxa2 20.Rf1! A fine find. 20...Bg7 21.Rxa2 Rxa2 22.Rf7++–, Nikac–Kotevski, Tivat 1975.

9...Bd7 10.Be3 e5 11.Nb5 a6 12.Nd6 Kc7 took place in Cappelletti–Lalic, Rome 1979. White should have continued with his aggression and played 13.Nf7 Rg8 14.Bc4 Be7 15.O-O±, where the foothold on e5 allows White to increase the pressure against Black's position.

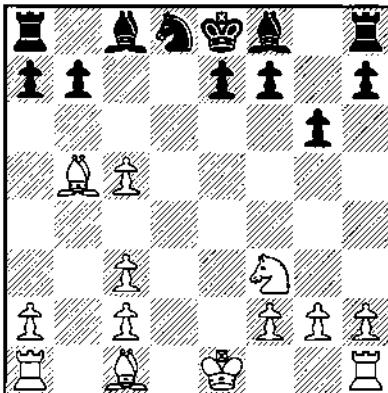
Black has slightly better chances to equalize after 7...Nxd8 8.bxc3



White should not worry about keeping the extra pawn so much, but rather strive to activate his pieces and keep Black on the defensive. Let's see what happens after 8...Bd7, 8...g6, and 8...f6:

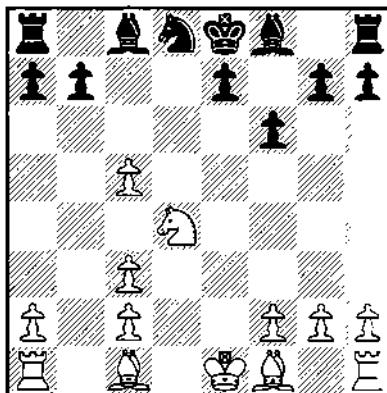
a) 8...Bd7 is nicely met with 9.Ne5! Ba4 10.Rb1 plotting Bb5+ in case of Bxc2. 10...Nc6 (Or 10...f6 11.Rb4! and Black was quickly lost after 11...Bc6 12.Nxc6 bxc6 13.Ba6 e5 14.Be3±, Gabrielian–Kharmunova, Moscow 2007.) 11.Nxc6 (White can also throw in 11.f4 f6 and then take with 12.Nxc6 Bxc6 13.Bb5 Kd7 14.Be3± followed by Kf2 and Rhei1, playing against Black's e-pawn.) 11...Bxc6 12.Bb5 Kd7 13.Ke2 e5 14.Rd1+ Kc7 15.Be3 Black's position is fairly solid, but White's next move will be f2-f4, posing some problems for Black to solve. 15...Be7 16.f4 Rhe8 17.Bxc6 Kxc6 18.fxe5 Bf8 19.Bd4±.

b) Fianchettoing with 8...g6 is perfectly logical, though White will be able to neutralize Black's bishop using the d4 square. 9.Bb5+



9...Nc6 (After 9...Bd7 10.Bxd7+ Kxd7 11.O-O Bg7 12.Rd1+ Kc8 13.Nd4± White's pieces are working, while Black's rooks are unconnected.) 10.Be3 Bg7 11.Nd4 Bd7 12.Rb1! White's rook is utilized well along the b-file in this line. We'll now follow a well played game to demonstrate White's advantage: 12...O-O 13.O-O Rfd8 14.Rfd1 Be8 15.Kf1! Centralizing the king is almost always useful. 15...Kf8 16.Ke2 Rd5?! Black needed to pass with a move like h7-h5, but would still remain worse. 17.Bxc6! bxc6 18.Rb7 Black's bishop on e8 is a nightmare piece. 18...e5 19.Nb3 Rxd1 20.Kxd1 Rd8+ 21.Ke2 Rd7 22.Rb8! Rc7 23.Na5 Ke7 24.Nc4+, Kuzmin–Pribyl, Tallinn 1985. The active rook and use of d6 made this position technically won for White.

c) Just as in the line 7...Kxd8 the move 8...f6 should be met with c1) 9.Nd4!, with the plan to e5 with Nb5:



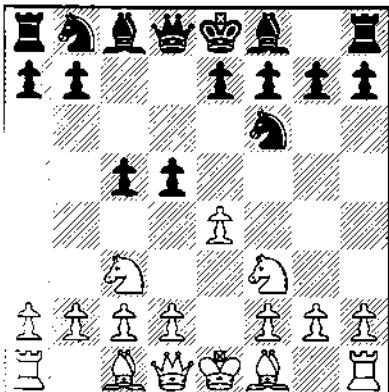
From here Black has chosen between 9...Bd7 and 9...a6.

c1) The point of 9...Bd7 is to quickly play Rc8, e7-e5, and Ne5 collecting the c5 pawn. 10.Be3 (also like 10.Rb1!?) planning to meet 10...Rc8 with 11.c6! bxc6 12.e6 13.Ba6 Rc7 14.Bc4±, with decent pressure.) 10...Rc8 White's path to advantage is narrow, but possible 11.Nb3 e5 12.Be2 Ne6 13.Rc1 Countering the attack against e5 with pressure against b7. 13...Rc7 14.O-O Kf7 15.Rfd1±. White is clearly better, and should look for ideas such as Na5, Bc4, etc.

c2) After 9...a6 White is in trouble to hold on to c5 with 10.Bd3 e5 11.Nc1 Ne6 12.Be3± followed by O-O, Ra8, and Rfd1, Corden–Neckar, East Pyrmont 1969.

c2) Still, 9.Be3 is another decent option, the critical line running 9...e5 10.O-O-O Bd7 11.Nd2 Rc8 12.Nc1 Ne6 13.Rd5 Bc6 14.Nd6+ Bxd6 15.Rxd6 Ke7 16.Bc4±, Vallejo Pons–Afek, France 2003.

Returning to 3...d5:

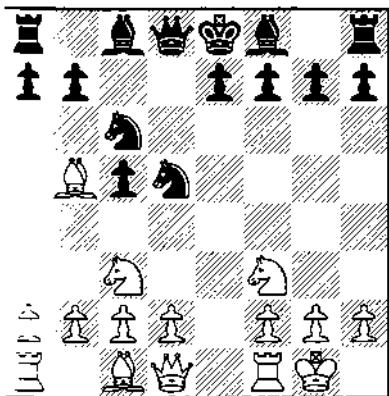


• **exd5 Nxd5 5.Bb5+**

This check promises White at the very least a small yet stable advantage.

• **Bd7**

Blocking with the bishop is the more common response, though ...Nc6 is also playable. After 6.O-O



• We'll look at 6...e6?!, 6...Bg4, and the solid 6...Nxc3:

The natural 6...e6?! can be punished by 7.Nxd5!

A 7...exd5 runs into problems after 8.d4! as Black's king is in danger of being caught in the center.

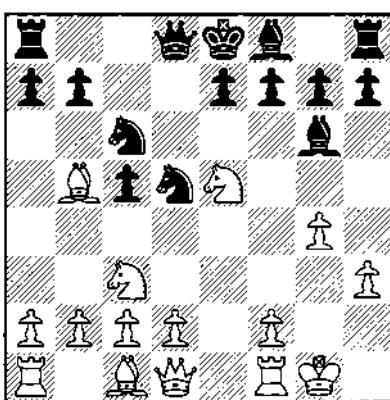
8...Be7 9.dxc5 O-O 10.Be3 and Black cannot hold on to the pawn, as in Kostlivy–Matous, Czechia 1996, since 10...Qa5 can be met with 11.a4! a6 12.Bxc6 bxc6 13.c3±.

b) 7...Qxd5N Here 8.c4! looks quite strong, with the idea 8...Qd6 9.b4!? A wing-style gambit, opening up the long diagonal for White's use. 9...cx b4 10.Bb2 Bd7 11.d4† threatening d4-d5, posing some serious problems for Black to solve.

6...Bg4 might be a bit risky in view of 7.h3:

a) 7...Bxf3 gives White an easy edge after 8.Qxf3 e6 9.b3 Be7 10.Bxc6+ bxc6 11.Bb2 O-O 12.Na4± with a nice structural advantage.

b) After 7...Bh5 8.g4 Bg6 9.Ne5



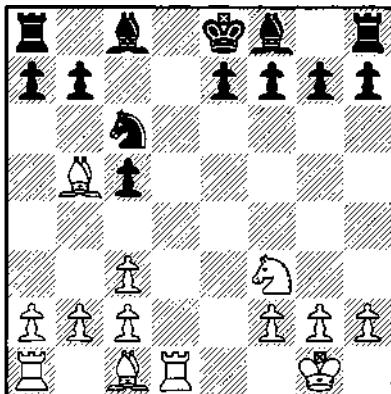
White can pick up the initiative fairly quickly, for instance:

b1) 9...Rc8 10.d3 e6 11.Qe2 Be7 12.f4!±.

b2) Or 9...Qd6?! 10.Re1 e6 11.Nxd5 Qxd5 12.c4 Qd6 13.d4! cxd4 14.Bf4+– and Black is toast.

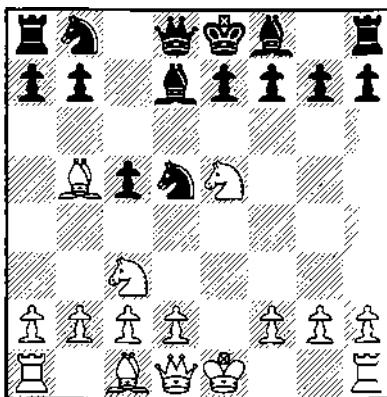
Black's most solid option seems to be 6...Nxc3, and it's a bit surprising to us that no one has yet tried 7.dxc3?N (*Less ambitious* is 7.Bxc6+? bxc6 8.bxc3± hoping to

play against Black's weak c-pawns with d2-d3, c3-c4, Nd2-e4, Be3, etc.)
 7...Qxd1 8.Rxd1



We believe White has good chances of getting the best out of this endgame. The current threat is Ne5. Our analysis runs 8...Bg4 (If 8...f6 9.Be3 e5 then 10.Nd2!↑ heading to either e4, c4, or b3.) 9.Be3 e6 10.Rd2 f6 11.h3 Bxf3 (11...Bh5 12.Rad1 a6 13.Bxc6+ bxc6 14.Rd7± is practically decisive.) 12.gxf3 Rd8 13.Rad1 Rxd2 14.Rxd2±. Black will have a hard time getting his rook into play. A good follow-up plan for White is c3-c4 and Rd3-a3.

6.Ne5!



The key move for the whole line. The main point is that Bxb5 will be met with Qf3, leading to favorable complications.

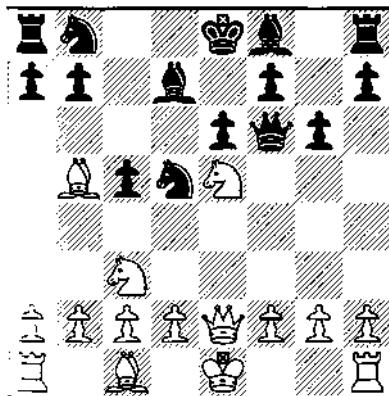
6...Nf6

This can be considered as a solid but passive choice for Black. We should also consider 6...e6 and 6...Bxb5, but 6...Nxc3?? loses on the spot to 7.Qf3!+-.

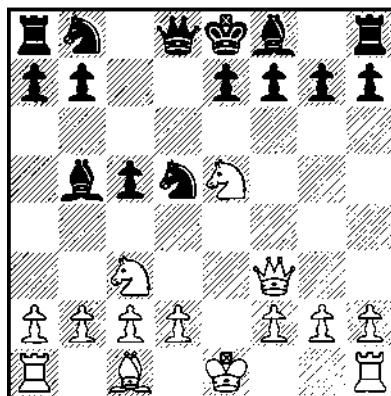
6...e6 is quite rare, but does seem playable. We like 7.Qh5! (Another option is 7.Qf3 Qf6 8.Nxd7 Nc5 9.Bxd7+ Kxd7 10.Qe2! as in Rychka-Korniushin, Vladivostok 2014, but with careful play Black should be able to equalize.)

a) Now 7...Qe7?! definitely falls short of equality, especially after 8.Nxd7 Nxd7 9.O-O N5f6 Nc5 9...Nxc3??! 10.dxc3 a6 11.Bg5! Qe7 12.Rad1+-, Saulin-Filin, Korça 1999.) 10.Qf3 O-O-O 11.Re1±, where Black's king is somewhat unsafe on the queenside.

b) Better is 7...g6N and now 8.Qf3
8...g6 9.Qe2!

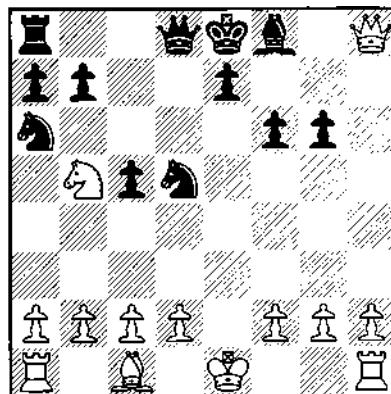


Critical is 6...Bxb5 7.Qf3!
attacking f7 and eyeing b7:

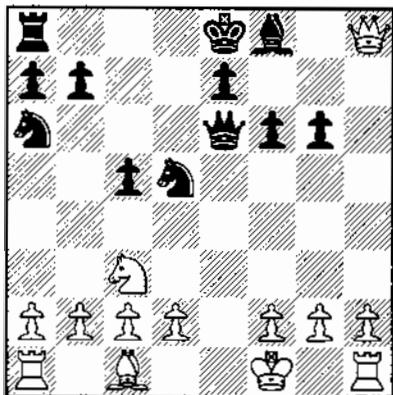


Though White has spent a few tempi with his queen, he has induced g7-g6 and Qf6, making Black's life difficult. For instance, after 9...Nxc3 (or 9...Nb6 10.Nxd7 N8xd7 11.Ne4 Qd8 -±) 10.dxc3 White is likely to gain a lead in development. 10...Bd6 a6 11.Bxd7+ Nxd7 12.Nxd7 -± 13.Qe4↑ followed by Bf4, looks dangerous for Black.) 11.Ng4! -± 12.h4! Threatening Bg5. 12...f6 Bh6±. Black's position is under pressure—next is O-O-O, etc.

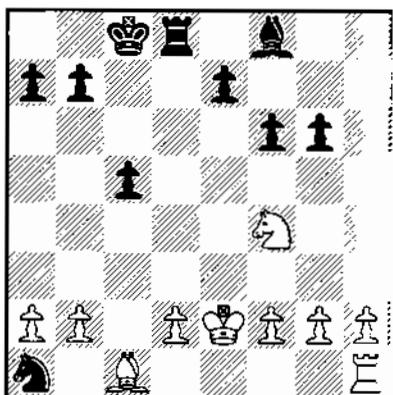
The following line is practically forced: 7...f6 (7...Nf6? 8.Qxb7+) 8.Nxb5 Na6 This move is necessary. (8...fxe5?! 9.Qxd5 Qxd5 10.Nc7+ Kd7 11.Nxd5± is good for White, as Black's doubled e-pawns are weak, Manik-Kudzma, Warsaw 2009) Now Black is offering an exchange, which White must take: 9.Qh5+ g6 10.Nxg6 hxg6 11.Qxh8



11...Qd7! (After 11...Nab4 12.Na3!± White is just a clear exchange up, Sergin-Kotainy, Dresden 2008.) 12.Nc3 Qe6+ 13.Kf1

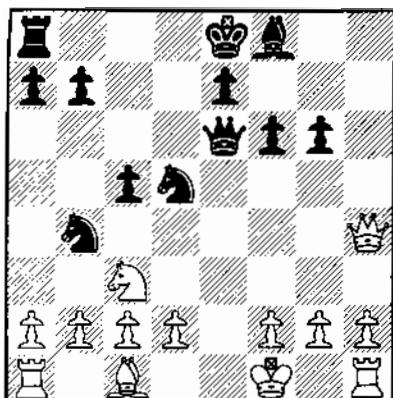


Clearly, Black has some compensation for the exchange, but as we'll see it is not enough. White should get his queen back into play as soon as possible and work on connecting rooks. 13...Nab4 (13...Ndb4 falls short in view of 14.Qh4 O-O-O 15.Qe4! Qf7 16.Qg4+f5 17.Qd1!+—. Slowly, White can unwind with a2-a3 and h2-h4, as in Meissner-Bartsch, Germany 2009.) 14.Qh4!



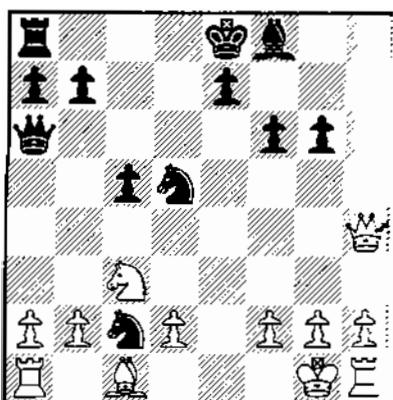
19...g5? A serious blunder; Nc2 was necessary, after which White can take on g6. 20.Ne6 Re8 21.Kd5— and Black's knight was trapped — Saric-Tischbierek, Dresden 2012.

b) 14...Qa6+ 15.Kg1 Nxc2



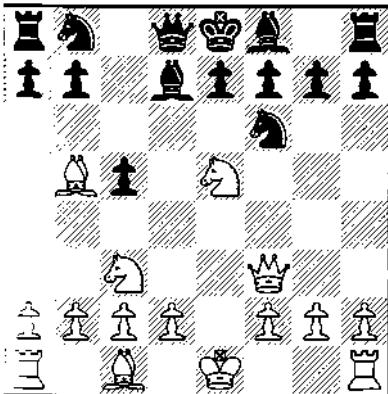
Preventing Nxc2 in view of Qa4+.

a) Now 14...O-O-O?! allowed White to consolidate immediately with 15.Qe4! Qa6+ 16.Qe2 Qxe2+ 17.Kxe2 Nxc2 18.Nxd5! returning the exchange, but securing a very favorable endgame. 18...Nxa1 19.Nf4



16.Nxd5! A much stronger move than Rb1, played in Spraggett-De la Villa Garcia, Dos Hermanas 2006. By giving back the exchange White gets time to consolidate: 16...O-O-O 17.Nf4 Nxal 18.Qg4+f5 (18...Kb8 runs into 19.Ne6! Rc8 20.d4+ threatening Qg3+) 19.Qxg6 Qxg6 20.Nxg6±. With an extra pawn White has a large advantage. One good plan is h2-h4-Kh2 and Re1.

- Qf3!



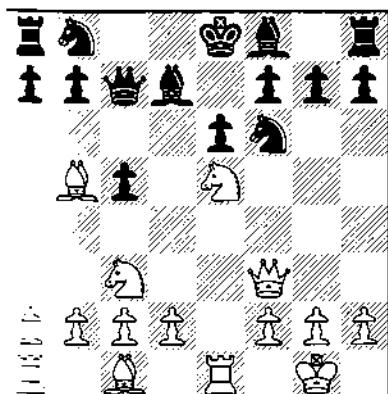
The most ambitious move, forcing Black to defend b7.

- Qc8

Once again, 7...Bxb5? is met with 8.Qxb7+.

The problem with 7...Qc7 is 0-O! The knight is taboo due to 0-O. We look at 8...e6?! and 8...a6:

a) After 8...e6?! 9.Re1! Black experiences some serious tactical problems:

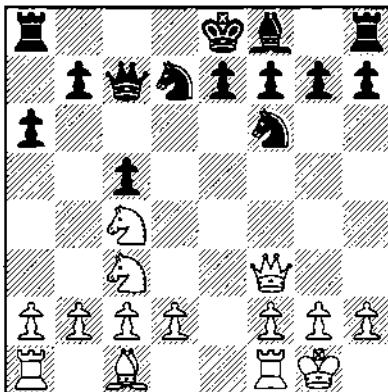


b) 9...Be7? is met with 10.Qg3!
Black cannot castle due to 0-O 11.Nxd7! Qxg3 12.Nxf6+
13.hxg3+- with an extra

a2) Black also gets in trouble after 9...Bxb5 10.Nxb5 Qb6 11.a4! Na6 (Or 11...Nc6 12.Nc4 Qd8 13.Qg3!± and one of White's knights will show up on the d6 square.) 12.a5! The hidden point behind White's last move. 12...Qxb5 13.c4 Qb4 14.b3+- and Black's queen was trapped after Ra4, Zelcic-Jeric, Ljubljana 2001.

a3) Relatively best seems to be 9...Nc6, though after 10.Nxd7 Qxd7 11.Bxc6 Qxc6 12.Qxc6+ bxc6 13.b3± White's healthier structure guarantees a long-lasting advantage.

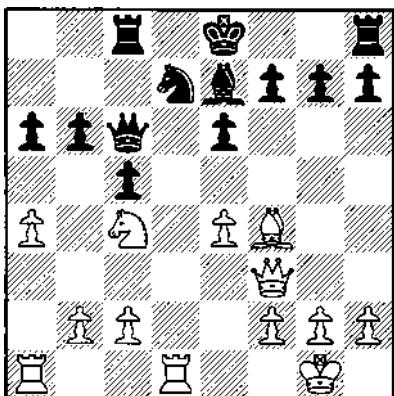
b) In case of 8...a6, after 9.Bxd7+ Nbx7 10.Nc4!↑ White's lead in development is quite serious:



Let's see two decisive examples:

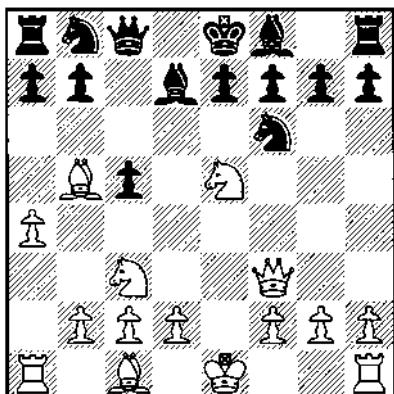
b1) 10...Nb6 11.d3! Nxc4 12.dxc4 e6 13.Bf4 Qc8 14.Rad1 Ra7?! Black was anticipating the threat of Na4, but Be7 was absolutely necessary. Now in Petrushin-Garakjan, Krasnodar 1997, strongest was 15.Nd5!N, a thematic sacrifice to open up the e-file. After 15...exd5 16.Rfe1+ Be7 17.cxd5 Black must give back the piece, as 17...Kf8 loses to 18.d6 Bd8 19.d7! Nxd7 20.Bd6++- and mate in a few.

- b2) 10...Rc8 11.a4! Stopping b7-b5. 11...e6 12.d3 b6 13.Bf4 Qc6 14.Ne4! Nxe4 15.dxe4 Be7 16.Rfd1



Simple and strong—can you guess which piece will land on the d6 square? 16...Nf6 17.Rd6! Bxd6 18.Nxd6+ Ke7 19.e5! Nd7 20.Qh5 Rcf8 21.Qg5++– and White's attack broke through in Kulaots–Sikula, Hungary 2008.

8.a4!



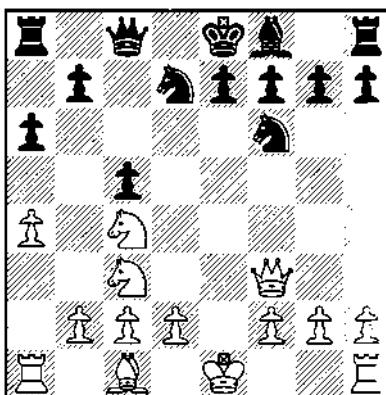
A strong positional move—now capturing on b5 would open up the a-file for White's use. White will also be able to use the a-pawn strategically, as we'll see in this game.

8...a6?!

Black forces the exchange of bishops but weakens the b6 square in the process, an important concession.

After 8...e6 9.d3N Be7 10.O-O O-O 11.Bg5 Black must complete his queenside development: 11...Nf6 (11...a6 12.Bxd7 Nbx d7 13.Nc6+– similar to the game.) 12.Nxc6 Bxc6 13.Bxc6 bxc6 14.Ne4±, but once again White is left with a nice structural advantage.

9.Bxd7+ Nbx d7 10.Nc4!

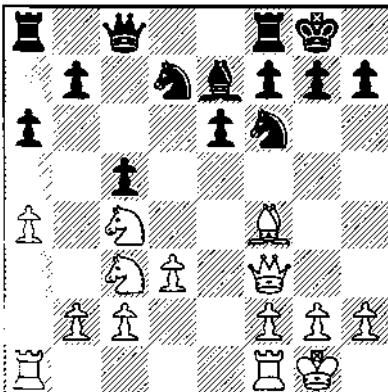


Exchanging knights would certainly favor the defender. Instead, White will use this knight to control the c- and d6 squares.

10...e6

10...g6?! proved too slow after 11.O-O Bg7 12.Re1 Qc7?! 13.Qh5+ Qxb7 14.Nd6++–, Martinez Romero–Tovio, Pamplona 2012.

11.d3 Be7 12.O-O O-O 13.Bf4



We've reached the middlegame, and it is clear that White has won the opening battle. He has more space and lots of pressure against Black's queenside; the position can be improved further with moves like 14.a5 and Rfe1, etc.

13...b6?!

Inviting a nice shot.

Three years later GM Rakhmanov chose **13...Ra7**, in Antoli Royo-Rakhmanov, Figueres 2012, but this could have been answered with 14.a5!± fixing the b6 square and retaining a nice strategic plus.

In another game, after **13...Rd8 + Rfe1 b6?** 15.a5! Black met a similar fate as in the main game: 15.b5 16.Nb6 Nxb6 17.axb6 Rd7 + Nxb5!+–, in Baklan-Golubev, lichess.com 2004.

a5!?

After this thematic break Black is in trouble—the main issue is that the rook on a8 is short on safe squares.

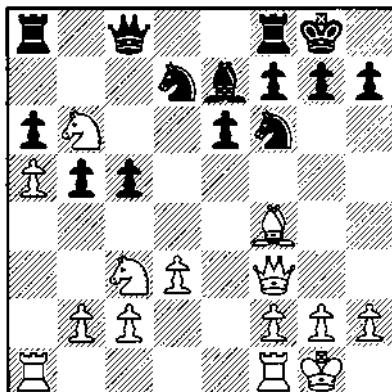
a...b5?!

Making matters worse.

14...Qd8 was necessary, where after 15.axb6 Nxb6 White can get

a clear advantage with any sensible move, such as 16.h3±, and Black's a6 and c5 pawns will remain weak for the rest of the game.

15.Nb6

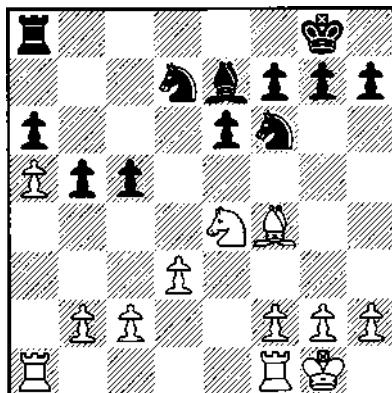


15...Qd8

Black chooses to sacrifice the exchange immediately, but there wasn't much choice anyway.

After 15...Nxb6 16.axb6+– the threat of b6-b7 will net White at least an exchange.

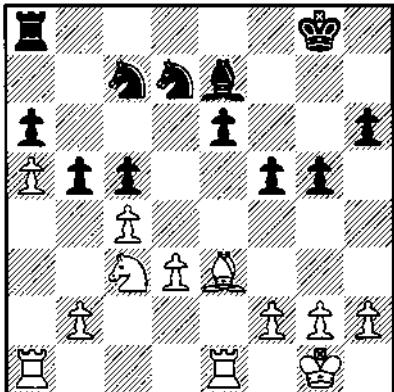
16.Nxa8 Qxa8 17.Qxa8 Rxa8 18.Ne4+–



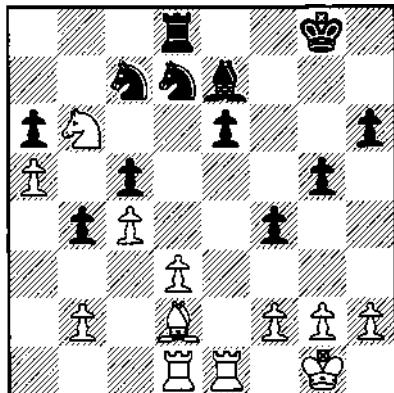
The position is now technically won for White, who only needs to

trade a few pieces and pawns in order to open up lines for his extra exchange. GM Shomoev does a good job of converting his advantage slowly but methodically.

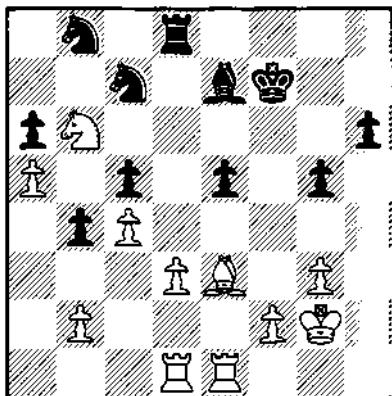
**18...Ne8 19.Rfe1 h6 20.c4 g5
21.Be3 f5 22.Nc3 Nc7**



23.Rad1 b4 24.Na4 f4 25.Bd2 Rf8 26.Nb6 Rd8



27.g3! fxg3 28.hxg3 Kf7 29.Kg2 Nb8 30.Be3 e5



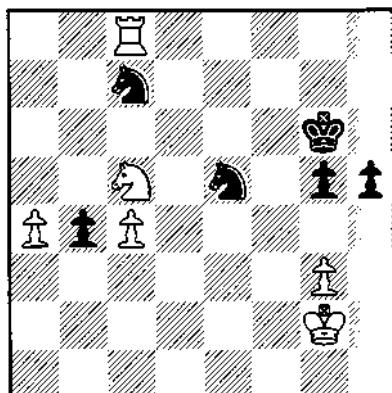
31.f4! Nc6 32.fxe5 Nxa5 33.c4 cxd4 34.Rxd4!

When you're up the exchange : is almost always beneficial to trade off your opponent's lone rook.

34...Rxd4 35.Bxd4 Nc6 36.Bc5 Ke6 37.Na4 Kf5

37...Nxe5 would lose in view of 38.Bd4 Bf6 39.Nc5+ Kf5 (or 39...Kf7 40.Ne4+++) 40.Rf1+ Kg6 41.Rxf6 Kxf6 42.Nd7++-.

38.Bc5 Bxc5 39.Nxc5 Nxe5 40.Rf1+ Kg6 41.b3 h5 42.Rf8+ 43.Rc8 a4 44.bxa4 1-0

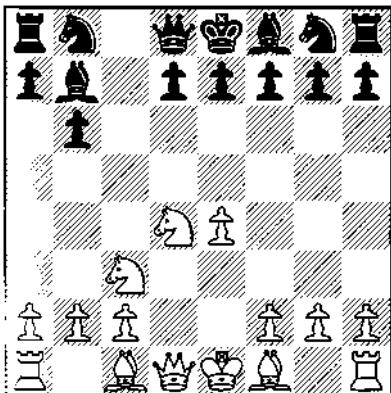


Game 42

Anand – Bacrot

8th Corsica Masters Rapid 2004

- 1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 b6 3.d4 cxd4
- 4.Nxd4 Bb7 5.Nc3

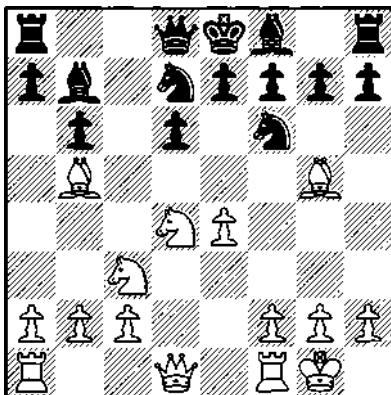


In the Katalimov Variation, it seems as though Black is merely content with fianchettoing the light-squared bishop and remaining flexible in the center. In principle, White should be able to get an advantage just as long as he develops his pieces in some coherent fashion.

5...a6

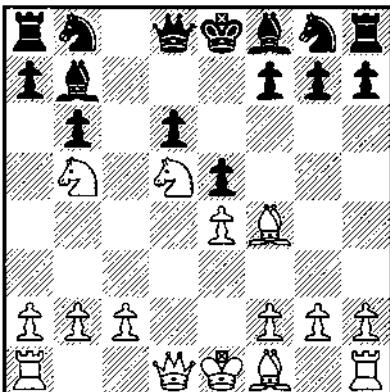
This flexible move, meant to control the b5 square, is Black's most common choice. Almost every other logical move is possible as well, including 5...d6?!, 5...e6?!, 5...Nf6, 5...g6, and 5...Nc6. We've chosen a few highlights to demonstrate instructive play:

5...d6?! puts Black in a tough spot after 6.Bb5+ Nd7 7.O-O Ngf6 8.Bg5!N



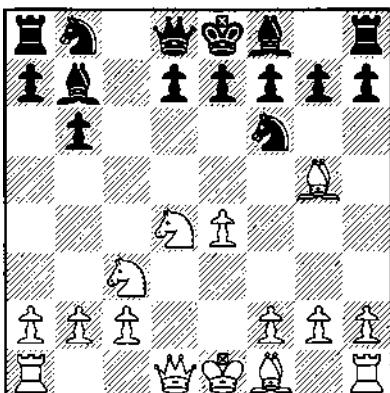
White intends to capture on f6 and ruin Black's structure. 8...a6 (8...Nxe4? 9.Nxe4 Bxe4 10.Qe2 Bb7 11.Nf5+- is crushing for White.) 9.Bxf6 gxf6 10.Nd5! A cute trick, leading to 10...Bxd5 (or 10...axb5 11.Ne6!+) 11.Bxd7+ Qxd7 12.exd5± where White is strategically winning.

5...e6?! can be challenged with 6.Ndb5! threatening Nd6+. 6...d6 7.Bf4 e5 8.Nd5!



A nice illustration of the problem with Black's setup. 8...Na6 (8...exf4 gets Black mated after 9.Nbc7+ Kd7 10.Qg4++) 9.Be3 Be7 10.Bc4 Dominating the central light squares. 10...Nf6 11.Nxf6+ gxf6 12.Qh5 O-O 13.Nc3+ and Black's king was too exposed to survive in Hecht-Velimirovic, Budapest 1973.

Against 5...Nf6 we like 6.Bg5!



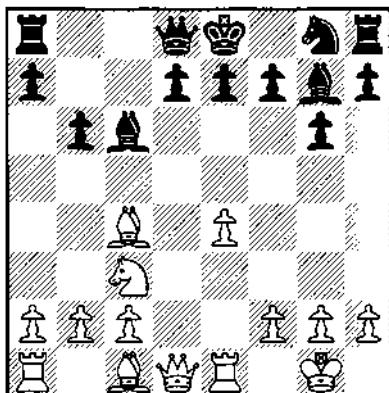
Once again, White would like to exchange on f6 at the right moment in order to ruin Black's structure.

a) 6...Nxe4 gives White a raging initiative after 7.Nxe4 Bxe4 8.Qg4! N Bd5 9.Nb5 f6 10.O-O-O!†.

b) While 6...e6 7.e5 h6 8.Bh4 \pm 9.Bg3 Ne4 10.Nxe4 Bxe4 11.h4! \pm also places a lot of pressure on Black's position, Leitao-Limp, Sao Paulo 2012.

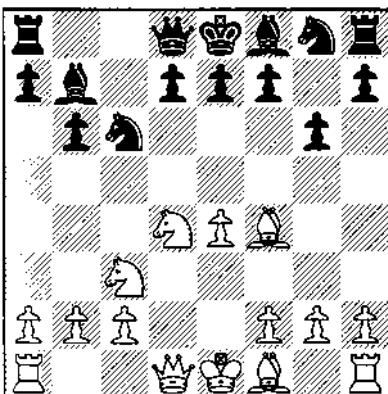
c) And if 6...Nc6 then 7.Nf5 making it difficult for Black to develop. 7...h6 8.Bxf6 gxf6 9.Be2 \pm Too slow; Rc8 was necessary. 10.Bd3 Threatening Bxf7+. 10...Ne5 11.f4 \pm (11...Ng6 is met with 12.Bxg6 fxg6 13.Nh4 Rg8 14.Nxg6! \pm and Qf5 12.fxe5 exf5 13.O-O Qc7 14.Rd1 O-O-O 15.exf6+ and Black was down too many pawns in Psakhis-Dizdarevic, Palma de Mallorca 1955.

5...g6 The double fianchetto 6.Bc4 (If White wants, he can also just develop as in the Yugoslav Attack: 6.Be3 Bg7 7.Qd2 Nf6 \pm Nc6 9.O-O-O \pm where Black had played a Dragon but with b6 castled Bb7, a strange inclusion, Zhigalko-Abdulov, Baku 2014.) 6...Bg7 7.O-O Nc6 8.Nxc6 Bxc6 9.Re1!

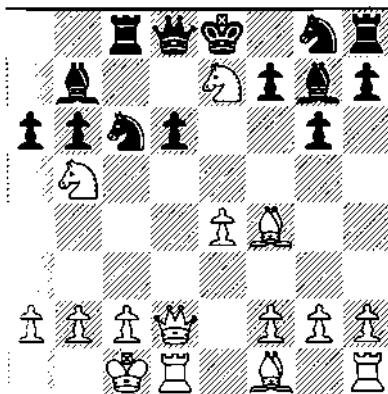


Planning to meet Nf6 with e4 \pm 9...d6 10.Nd5 Nh6? (The lesser evil was 10...Nf6 11.Bg5 \pm where White will capture on f6 and weaken Black's structure.) 11.Bg5 f6 12.Bd2 Badea-Pessi, Predeal 2006. White's position is just superior in every way.

GM Kamsky has twice played 5...Nc6, though he was punished by the unforgiving Karjakin in the following encounter: 6.Bf4! g6



a) 7.Ndb5 Rc8 8.Nd5 d6 9.Qd2
e3 was more accurate, planning to meet 9...a6 10.Nd4 Ne5 with Bxa6! Bxa6 12.Qa4+± winning a pawn.) 9...Bg7? Nearly the losing mistake! Black had to push White's knight back with a7-a6. 10.O-O-O a6 11.Nxe7!

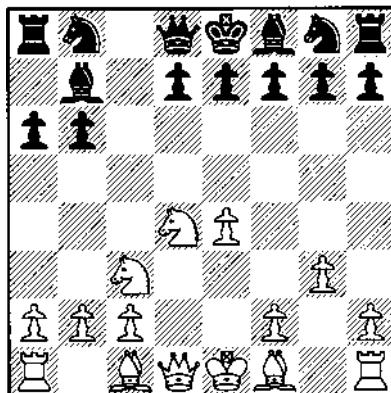


A lovely combination. 11...axb5 (or Ngxe7 12.Nxd6+ Kf8 13.Nxb7+–) Nxc8 Qxc8 13.Bxb5 Nge7 14.Bxd6. White's rook and three pawns is

definitely worth more than Black's two knights! 14...O-O 15.Bxc6 Nxc6 16.Bxf8 Qxf8 17.Qd6 Qa8 18.Kb1 with a decisive material advantage, Karjakin-Kamsky, Beijing 2013. Black could never create any serious counterplay.

b) Perhaps even stronger was 7.Ncb5 d6 8.Nxc6 Bxc6 9.Qd4! Nf6 10.Qc3! inducing 10...Qd7 in order to play 11.Nxd6+! exd6 12.Qxf6 Rg8 13.O-O-O+– with a huge advantage.

6.g3

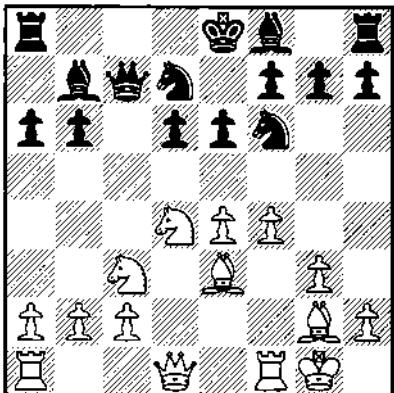


In such a position White has his choice of setups. We like 6.g3 as it leads to an improved version of the 6.g3 Kan, where Black's pawn is sheepishly placed on b6 rather than b5.

Fans of the English Attack can explore 6.Be3 e6 7.Qd2 Qc7 8.f3±.

6...e6

6...d6 7.Bg2 Nd7 8.O-O e6 9.f4 Qc7 10.Be3 transposes to the game.
7.Bg2 Qc7 8.O-O d6 9.f4 Nd7 10.Be3 Ngf6

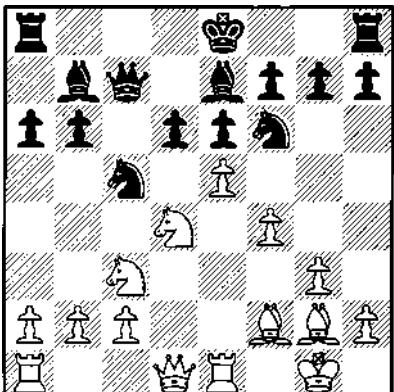


11. *Re1*

We prefer 11.Qe2 keeping the rook on the f-file, but Anand has his own ideas on how to handle White's position.

In accordance with Chapter 2a, we suggest 11.Qe2 Be7 12.g4! launching the familiar kingside attack, for instance 12...Nc5 13.Bd2 b5 14.g5 Nfd7 15.a3 (or 15.b4?! Na4 16.Nxa4 bxa4 17.c3±) 15...O-O 16.Rf3!↑.

11...Be7 12.Bf2 Nc5 13.e5?!



An aggressive decision—Anand develops definite attacking chances, but leaves himself with a potentially weak pawn on e5.

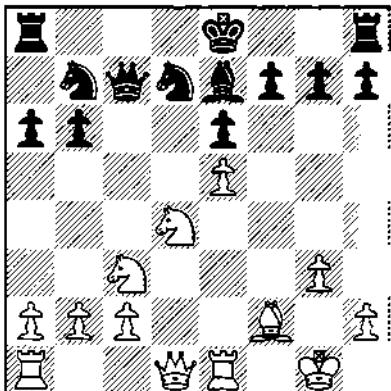
13...dxe5 14.Bxb7?!

14.fxe5 was more accurate 14...Nfd7 (14...Bxg2? 15.exf6 Bxf6 16.Kxg2+– is just an extra piece for White.) 15.Bxb7 Nxb7 (But not 15...Qxb7? 16.b4+–) 16.Qe2 transposes to the game.

14...Nxb7?!

In fact, 14...Qxb7! would solve most of Black's problems after 15.fxe5 Nfd7 16.Nxd5 Qxd5=.

15.fxe5 Nd7



16. *Qg4*

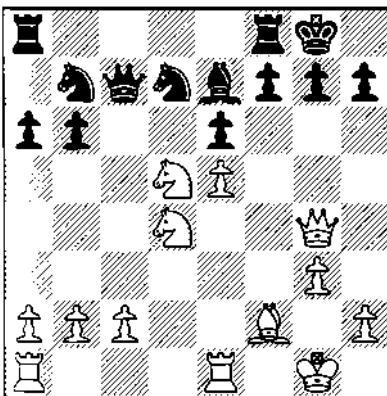
For the moment Black is passive so Anand plays energetically. If Black was given time to consolidate White would have an issue defending the pawn on e5.

Also possible was 16.Nf5?! forcing 16...Bf8 (not 16...exf5? 17.Nd5 Qd7 18.e6 fxe6 19.Rxe6+–) 17.Qf3!↑ where the knight on f5 is untouchable due to Nd5-f6+, with a monstrous attack 16...O-O?

A surprising blunder from someone of Bacrot's level.

Necessary was 16...g6 where after 17.Rad1 Rd8 (17...Nxe5? 18.Qe2 Bd6 19.Ne4+– wins a piece for White) 18.Qe4= White has an active position but Black is solid.

17.Nd5!



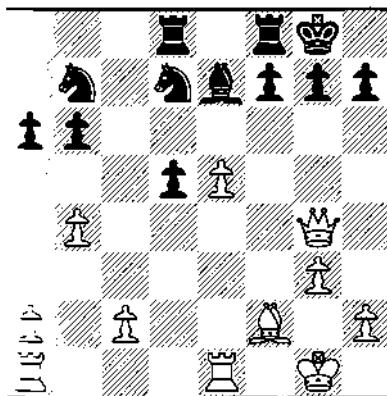
A simple but devastating tactical stroke.

17...Qd8

Bacrot decides to give up the queen, but Black is lost in any case.

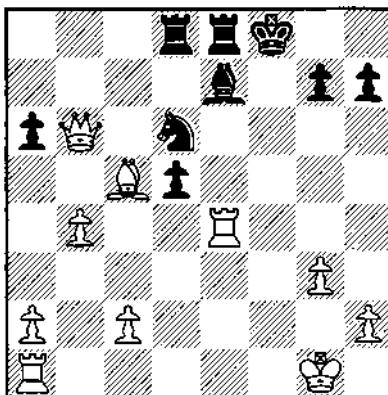
After 17...exd5 18.Nf5 White's attack is lethal: 18...g6 (or 18...Bf6 19.exf6 g6 20.Nh6+ Kh8 21.Re7+) 19.Nxe7+ Kh8 20.Bd4+-.

18.Nc6 exd5 19.Nxd8 Raxd8 20.b4



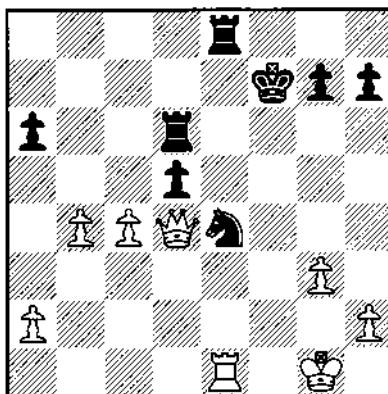
Being a rapid game, Black plays on, but the rest is fairly straightforward:

20...Rfe8 21.e6 Nf6 22.exf7+ Kxf7 23.Qe6+ Kf8 24.Qxb6 Nd6 25.Bc5 Nfe4 26.Rxe4



Giving up a bit of material in order to simplify the position.

26...Nxe4 27.Bxe7+ Kxe7 28.Re1 Rd6 29.Qd4 Kf7 30.c4 1-0



With no chances for any kind of fortress, Black resigned.

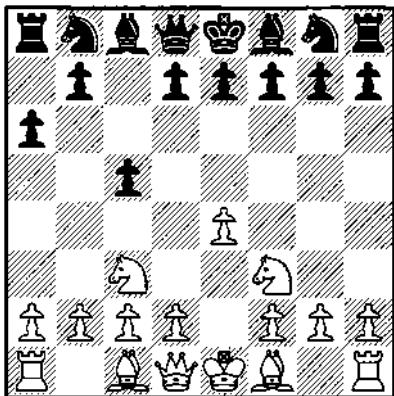
Game 43

So – Jiang
Quebec Open 2012

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 a6

The O'Kelly Variation. Rather than committing in the center, Black makes a useful, flexible move.

3.Nc3



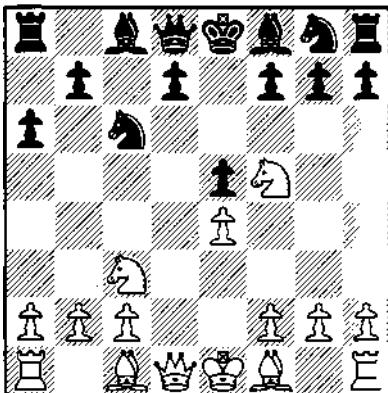
Once again we believe the practical continuation is best—White invites Black to transpose back into another Sicilian. Alternatively, White has also had success with 3.c3, leading to an improved version of the Alapin Sicilian (2.c3), as well as 3.c4, leading to a Maróczy Bind-like structure.

Ironically, the only move that White *shouldn't* play is 3.d4?! since it's well known that after 3...cx_d4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 e5! 6.Nf3 Bb4= Black equalizes comfortably.

3...e6

3...b5 4.d4 transposes to the game in case of 4...e6, or if 4...cx_d4 5.Nxd4 Bb7 6.a3 e6 7.g3 we've reached the Kan Sicilian.

There is one independent line after 3...Nc6 but it's not very good: 4.d4 cx_d4 5.Nxd4 e5 6.Nf5!

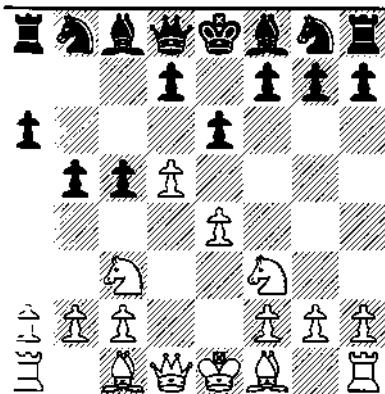


With the knight already on f6, the knight jump normally doesn't work in view of d7-d5. But here, Black must settle for 6...d6 allowing 7.Ne3! Nf6 8.Ne5 where White has a nice grip over the d5 square, an improved Sveshnikov structure. 8...Be6 (or 8...Nx_d5 9.N_x_d5 Ne7 10.Bc4±, Vincenzi–Moretti, Mazara del Vallo 2009) 9.Be3 F_c 10.Nb6! Rb8 11.Be2 Be7 12.O-O C_f 13.a4 Nd7 14.Ncd5 Nx_b6 15.B_x_b Qd7 16.c3±, De Firmian–Rocha, Lisbon 2000. White had a nice game.

4.d4 b5

If Black is intent on avoiding the main line Sicilian, he has this option: leaving the pawn on d4 untouched. In response White should seize the chance to grab space with:

: d5!

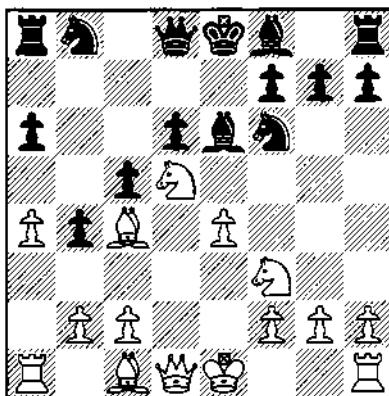


This structure will now resemble a Benoni, but a favorable one for White. Black has committed to developing his light-squared bishop at b7, from where it will often be cast out of the game. The main points for White to remember are: 6...Bxe6 should often be met with Bg5, 7...d6 should usually be met with Nc6, and a2-a4 will almost always be a useful inclusion, fighting for the c4 square.

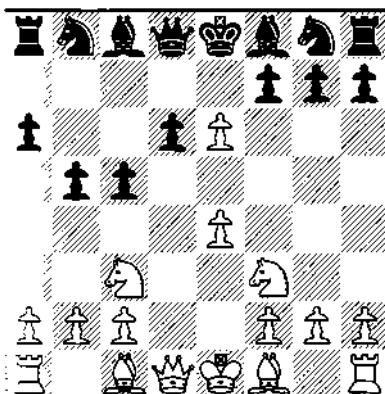
BB7

We believe 5...d6?! should be met with 6.dxe6!N

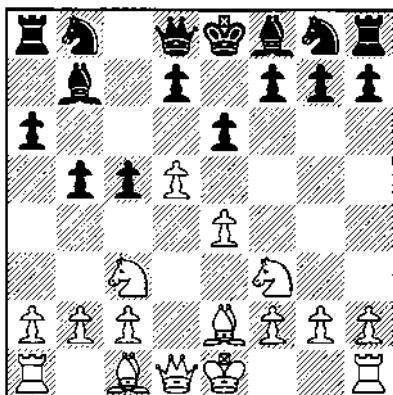
6...Bxe6 (6...fxe6 can be answered with 7.a4! b4 8.Ne2 Nc6 9.Nf4±. The knight is perfectly placed on f4, since e6-e5 will always run into Nd5. White's follow up should be Bc4 and O-O.) 7.a4! As we mentioned, gaining the c4 square is an important strategic goal in this line for White. 7...b4 8.Nd5 Nf6 9.Bc4!



This natural move already poses certain problems for Black, since Ng5 is a tangible threat. 9...Nbd7 (9...Nxe4 10.Qe2 Nf6 11.Ng5+- is crushing.) 10.Ng5 (10.O-O Be7 11.Qd3± is also quite good.) 10...Ne5 11.Nxe6 fxe6 12.Nxf6+ Qxf6 13.Ba2±. Our light-squared bishop is a fantastic piece. Black's knight can only stay on e5 until White castles and plays f2-f4.



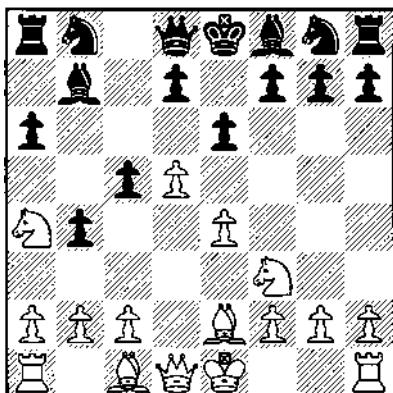
6.Be2



The variation at hand is quite rare, but definitely worth knowing about. White's plan is to simply castle and soften Black's queenside with a2-a4.

6...Nf6

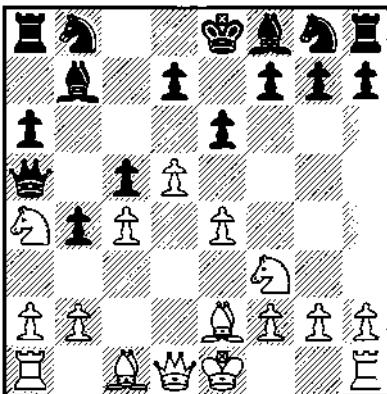
After 6...b4 7.Na4



Our knight looks misplaced, but in reality it's pressuring c5 and can sometimes jump into b6, for instance if White plays Nf3-d2-c4. Furthermore Black has given up the c4 square, an important concession.

From this position, 7...Nf6 runs into trouble after 8.Bg5! threatening e4-e5. 8...h6 (8...d6 9.dxe6 fxe6 10.e5 dxe5 11.Qxd8+ Kxd8 12.Nxe5+ is positionally busted for Black, who has too many weaknesses.) 9.Bxf6! Qxf6 10.O-O exd5 11.exd5 Bd6 12.Bc4 O-O 13.Qd3±. Black's minor pieces are simply stuck on the queenside.

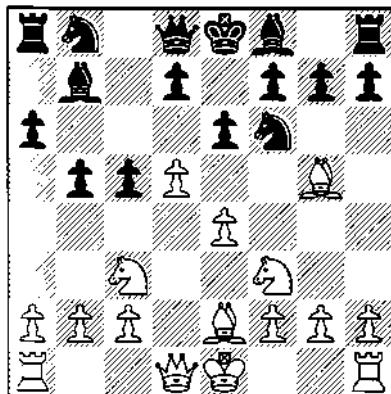
7...Qa5 is nicely met with 8.c4!



a) Now 8...exd5? is bad in view of 9.exd5!N This move just wins! Black's king can't get out of the center in time—White threatens to castle followed by Re1 and Bd3. A possible line could go 9...d6 10.O-O Nf6 11.Ec1 Be7 12.Bd3 Qc7 13.Qe2+ with decisive pressure along the e-file.

b) After 8...bxc3 9.Nxc3 the bad either is 9.bxc3± with idea Rc1 9...exd5 (In case of 9...Nf6 10.O-O Be7, White has 11.d6 Bd8 12.Nd2—Next is Nc4, Be3, Rc1, and White will quickly pick up the c5 pawn.) 10.e5 Nf6 11.O-O d6 12.Re1 Be7 13.Bc4—Black's king was stuck in the center in Blimke–Erenska Barlo, Krynica 1957.

7.Bg5!



A thematic response, threatening $\text{e}4\text{-e}5$.

8.h6

The best move, breaking the pin immediately.

In Paikidze–Baklan, Wroclaw 2010, 7...b4 should have been met with 8.Na4!N Qa5 9.Bxf6 gxf6 10.c3± with a large strategic advantage, as Black's pieces are stuck on the queenside.

• Bxf6

Giving up the bishop in this fashion relieves Black's pressure against d5 and e4.

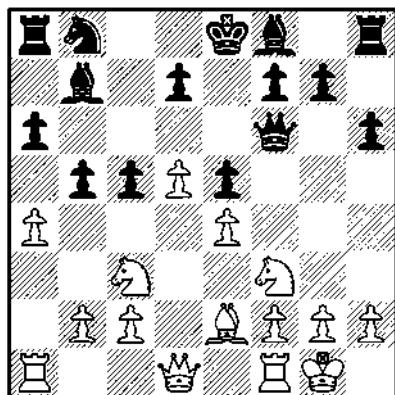
• Qxf6 9.O-O

White is also leading in development, and will break with a2-a4 while Black is trying to castle.

9...e5

The natural 9...d6 could run into 10.e5! dxе5 11.dxe6 Qxe6 12.Nxe5! A nice little trick. 12...Be7 (12...Qxe5 13.Bxb5+ axb5 14.Re1+ – is game over) 13.Re1 O-O 14.Bf3 Bxf3 15.Qxf3 Ra7 16.Rad1±. White's pieces are dominant.

10.a4!



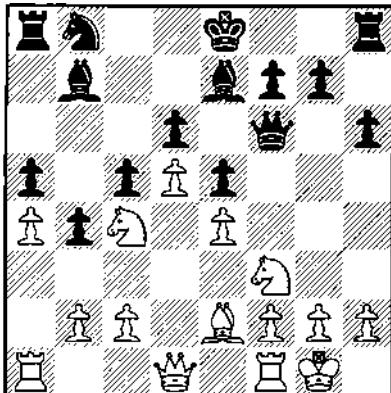
A familiar theme by now. GM Wesley So gains the c4 square for his pieces.

10...b4 11.Nb1 a5?!

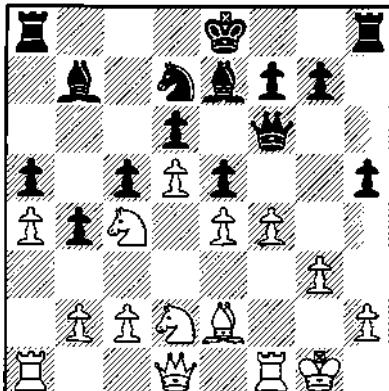
A strange waste of a tempo.

Black needed to regroup with 11...d6 12.Nbd2 Nd7 13.Nc4 Qd8!± defending the queenside, followed by Be7 and O-O, with a passive but solid position.

12.Nbd2 Be7 13.Nc4 d6



16.f4!?



Black's structure looks extremely solid, but the closed center favors White's knights. Moreover, Black's queen is misplaced.

14.g3!

An aggressive plan. So's idea is Nd2 and f2-f4, destroying Black's center.

Another strong continuation was 14.Nb6 Ra7 15.Bb5+ Kf8 16.Ne1!± followed by Nd3 with ideas of c2-c3 and f2-f4.

14...Nd7 15.Nfd2 h5

A useful move, preventing Bg4.

Black wisely avoided 15...O-O 16.Bg4! Bc8 17.Bxd7 Bxd7 18.Nb6 Ra7 19.Nxd7 Rxd7 20.Nc4± with the classic good knight vs. bad bishop situation. White's strategic advantage would be nearly decisive here.

Having completed his development, White tries to break open the center as quickly as possible.

Of course not 16.Bxh5?? Qh6—

Objectively, it was better for White to improve his pieces first, for instance 16.Ne3 g6 17.Bb5! Bc8 18.Ndc4 O-O 19.f4±, where Black is just too passive to put up any kind of effective defense.

16...exf4 17.gxf4 Ba6?!

A step in the wrong direction.

Black needed to get his king out of the center first, before doing anything else: 17...O-O! After 18.Kh1! White threatens Bxh5, but he can still prepare the e4-e5 advance with Bc8, Qf3, Rae1, etc.

18.Kh1!

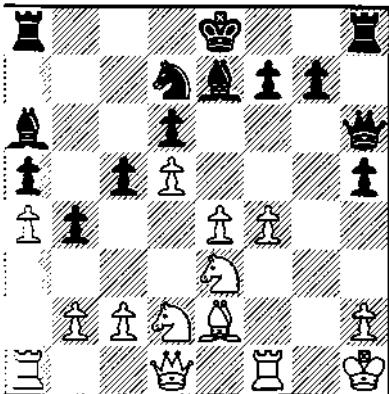
Sometimes the simple prophylactic move is also the strongest!

18...Qh6?!

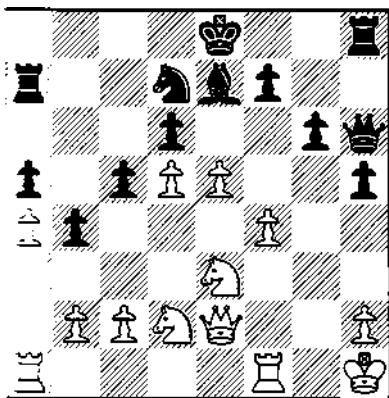
Completely losing the threat of the battle. The h5 pawn was not worth protecting here.

Once again, Black needed to castle and just hope for the best.

19.Ne3!



**20...g6 20.Bxa6 Rxa6 21.Qe2
21...e7 22.e5!**



A thematic breakthrough, justified with a simple tactic.

23.O-O

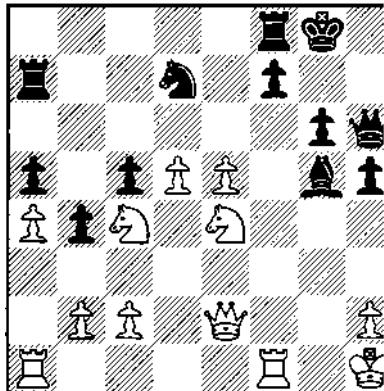
Too late. White's central pawns are greatly increased in strength.

Black is also busted after 23.dxe5 23.fxe5 Nxe5 24.Nf5! gxf5 25.Qxe5+-.

23...Nec4 dxe5 24.fxe5

The threat is e5-e6 and d5-d6!

24...Bg5 25.Ne4

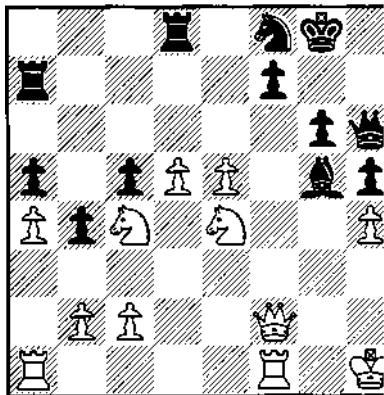


25...Rd8?!

The last error, leaving f7 unguarded.

Relatively best was just sending put with 25...Be7, but a 26.Rad1+ followed by d5-d6 W! should win comfortably.

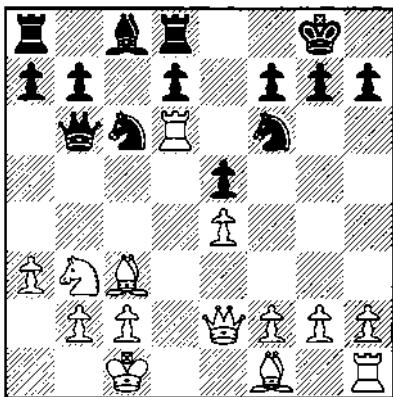
26.Qf2 Nf8 27.h4! 1-0



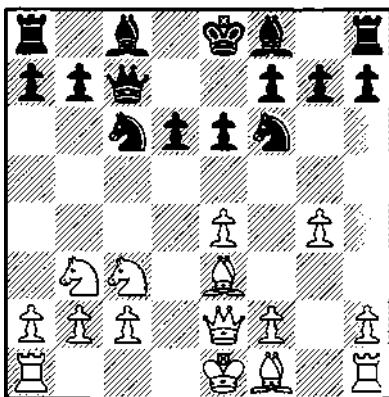
Having no safe square for bishop, Black resigned.

Memory Markers

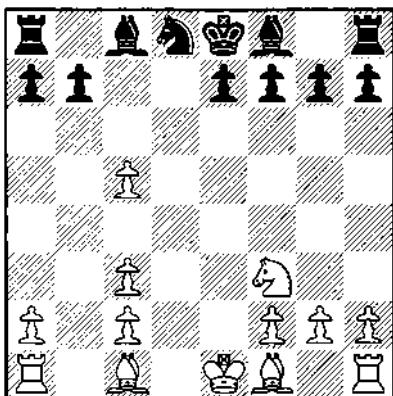
Here are reminders of some of the ideas and motifs in this chapter.



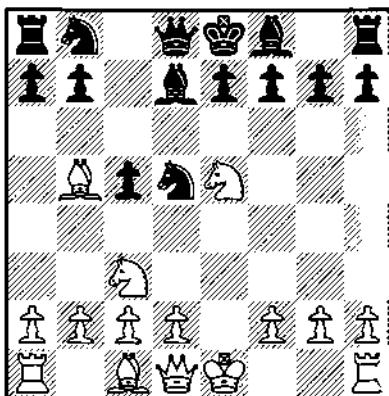
1. After **12.Rd6!!**. Stopping d7-d6 and preparing the powerful sacrifice Rxsf6. See diagram on page 480, notes to 7...Bb4 in Game 40, Balogh-Zhang.



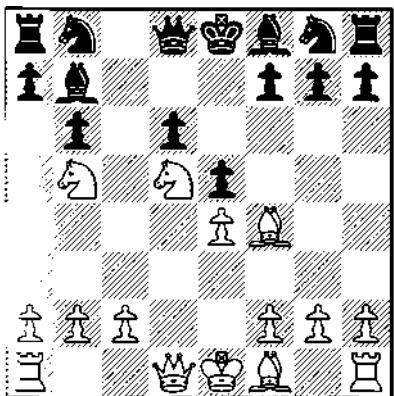
2. After **9.g4!**. An aggressive advance à la the Keres Attack. White plans g4-g5, O-O-O, and launching the kingside pawn-storm. See diagram on page 483



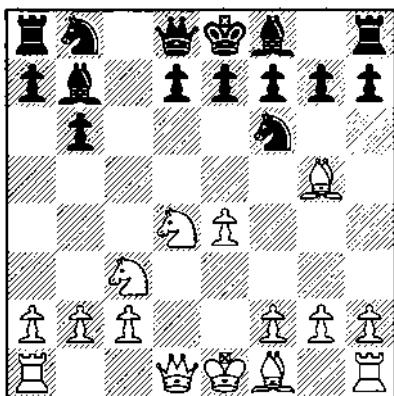
3. After **8.bxc3**. White needs to develop quickly to compensate for the weakness of the tripled c-pawns. See diagram on page 489, notes to 3...Nc6, Game 41.



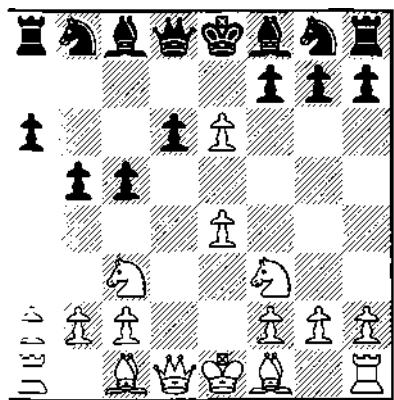
4. After **6.Ne5!**. The key move to remember, planning to meet Bxb5 with Qf3. See diagram on page 492 in Game 41, Shomoev-Rakhmanov.



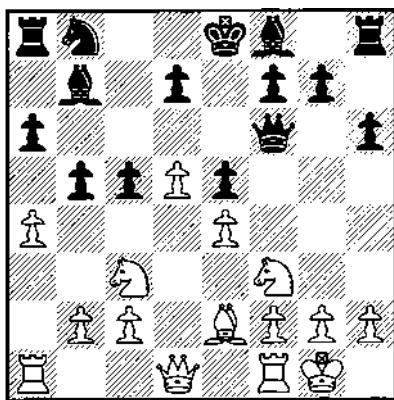
5. After 8.Nd5!. Exploiting the weak squares in Black's camp. See diagram on page 500, notes to 5...e6, Game 42, Anand–Bacrot.



6. After 6.Bg5!. Getting ready to capture on f6 at the right moment, ruining Black's pawn structure. See diagram on page 500, notes to 5...Nf6, Game 42.



7. After 6.dxe6!N. A nice novelty to be followed by a2-a4, weakening Black's light-squares. See diagram on page 505, notes to d6 in Game 43, So–Jiang.



8. After 10.a4!. Putting pressure on Black's queenside and fighting for the c4 square. See diagram on page 507 in Game 43, So–Jiang.

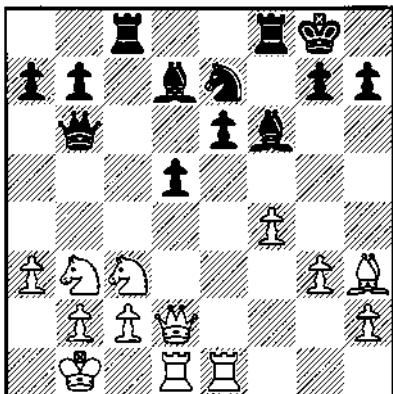
Exercises

White to play!

With these situations from actual games, you can find some ideas and opportunities that may await you, as White, when facing these variations.

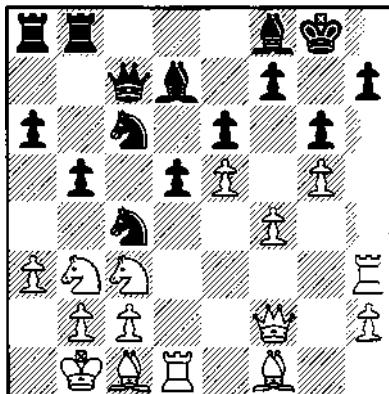
Solutions to the exercises begin on page 546.

Exercise 1



Abasov – Arab
Sharjah Open, UAE 2014

Exercise 2

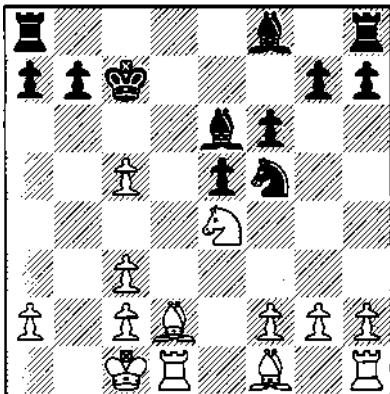


Edouard – Kotanjian
Al Ain, UAE 2012

White to play, find the strongest move.

Can you find the winning combination?

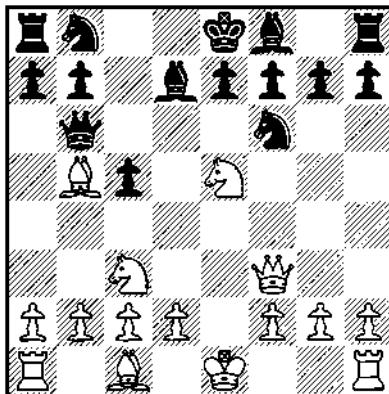
Exercise 3



Vrana – Polasek
TCh-CZE, Prague 2013

White to play. How can you fight for the initiative in this endgame?

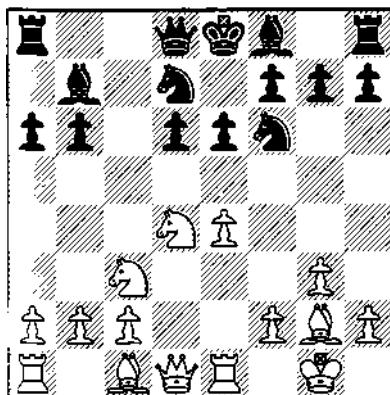
Exercise 4



Ardelean – Moldovan
ROM-chT, Predeal 2006

Black has just played 7...Qb6 instead of the usual 7...Qc8 or 7...Qc7. Can you refute it over the board?

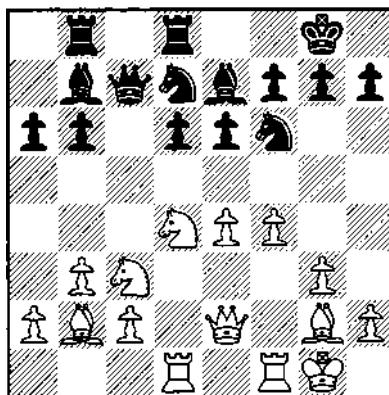
Exercise 5



Cosma – Litinskaya
Warsaw 1996

Can you take advantage of Black's solid opening?

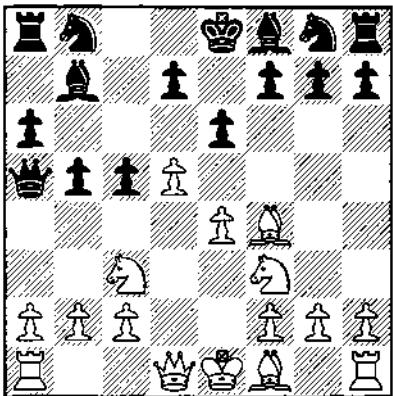
Exercise 6



Berg – Garcia Paolicchi
Olympiad, Istanbul 2012

Find a good plan for White.

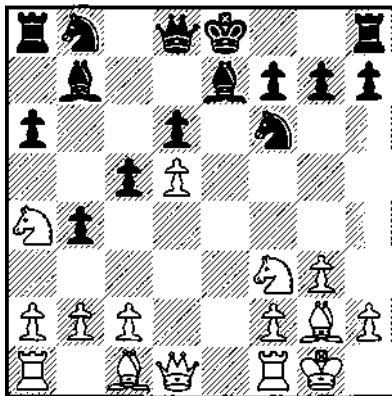
Exercise 7



Shomoev – Roiz
EU-ch, Warsaw 2005

How should White react to the queen on a5?

Exercise 8

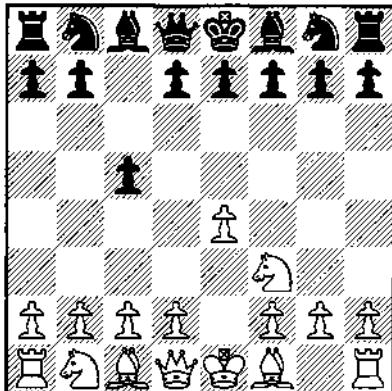


Gabrielian – Shushpanov
Soukhumi Open, RUS 2007

How can White use his small lead in development?

Summary:

Chapter 7 ***Minor Sicilians***



1.e4 c5 2.Nf3

While the lines presented in this chapter are much less frequently played than the major Sicilians, they are definitely not to be underestimated. You can be sure that someone who employs one of these systems will be well versed in their nuances and more familiar with common themes. Fortunately for us, however, these lines are uncommon for a reason, and we have tried to present a practical attempt of gaining an edge as clearly and convincingly as possible against each variation.

To remind the reader of a few important points, the line **7...Bb4** in the Grivas Sicilian (Game 40) offers Black two distinct paths after **8.Bd2 0-0 9.a3**: giving up the bishop with **9...Bxc3** and retreating with **9...Be7**. Against both of these options White must follow a narrow path in order to gain the upper hand, as we presented within the chapter.

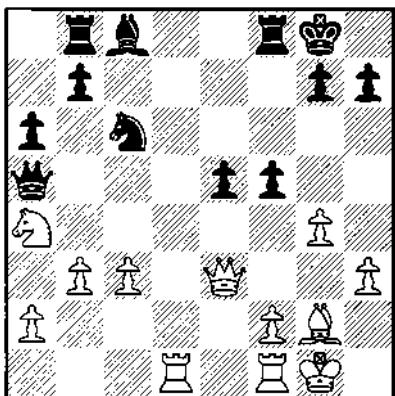
In the Nimzowitsch-Rubinstein Variation (Game 41), the endgame after **1...Nc6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 Nxd5 4.dxc5 Nxc3 5.Qxd8+** is quite complex due to the tripling of White's c-pawns. Here too, White must play precisely out of the opening in order to put real pressure on his opponent. The Katalimov and Kelly Variations are a bit less challenging, but going over them a few times is well really couldn't hurt!

Solutions to the Exercises

Chapter 1: The Najdorf Variation

Chapter 1a: Najdorf – 6.h3 e6

Exercise 1



Kokarev – Dvoiry

Izhevsk 2011

Black has just played f7-f5, seeking some much-needed counterplay. How should White react?

21.Bd5+! Kh8 22.f3!

Restricting Black's development. The bishop on c8 still has no future and Black is much, much worse.

22...Bd7

Not 22...fxg4? 23.fxg4! Bd7 24.Nb6, and White is just winning.

Better was 22...f4 23.Qc5 Qxc5+ 24.Nxc5+- . The difference in piece activity is paramount.

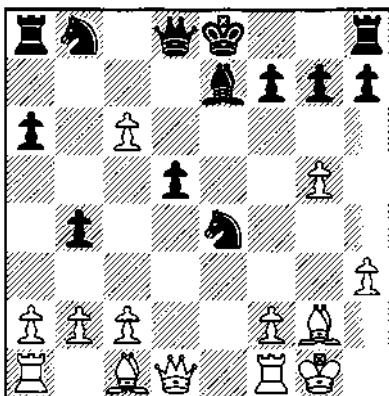
23.Nb6!

Not only embarrassing the bishop, but also Black's queen.

23...Be8 24.b4 Qa3 25.Qc5! Bf7

26.Nd7+- 1-0

Exercise 2



Aroshidze – Fluvia Poyatos

Barcelona 2012

Black has survived White's opening sacrifice and everything is under control, or is it?

15.c7!

Passed pawns must be pushed!

15...Qd7 16.Qxd5!

There are certain factors that give you a hint that a combination like this is possible: the advanced c7 pawn, hanging pieces along the h1-a8 diagonal, and of course the uncastled Black king.

16...Qxd5 17.c8Q+ Bd8 18.Rc1

Winning the piece back, with a decisive advantage.

18...Nd7 19.Bxe4! Rxc8 20.Bxd5-

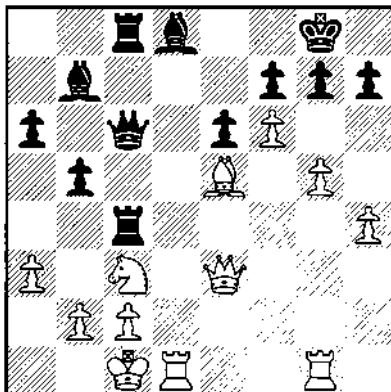
Kf8 21.Bf4+-

With an extra pawn, connected rooks, and the two bishops, White

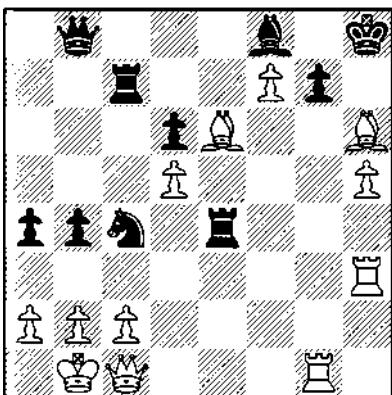
had no problem in realizing his advantage:

21...Be7 22.Re2 Nb6 23.Bb7 Rc4
24.Be3 Rc7 25.Bxa6 Nd5 26.Bd2
f6 27.Rae1 Kf7 28.b3 Rd8 29.Bc4
Kg6 30.gxf6 gxf6 31.Bxd5 Rxd5
32.Rxe7 Rxe7 33.Rxe7 Rxd2
34.Rc7 Rd1+ 35.Kg2 Ra1 36.Rc4
Rxa2 37.Kf3 1-0

Exercise 4



Exercise 3



Andreikin – Lugovoi Chigorin Memorial 2005

White has a decisive attack, and all that is left is the knockout blow.

32.Bxg7+! Bxg7 33.Qh6+! 1-0

With 34.Rg8 to follow, and mate.

While analyzing Game 4 we came across this position and felt that it was quite instructive. Find White's strongest move.

23.g6!!

When you're attacking, you must always look for the most forcing variations. The following lines are by no means easy to calculate, but playing through them will hopefully make your job easier next time.

23.Qd3?! was also quite strong, but full credit only if you managed to see the complete variation: 23...Bb6 24.g6! The only move that wins. 24...hxg6 25.Rxg6 fxg6 26.Qxg6 Be3+ 27.Kb1 Bh6 28.f7+ (28.Rg1+– is also good, with the threat of 29.Qxh6) 28...Kf8 29.Bd6++–.

23...hxg6

After 23...Bb6 24.gxf7+ Kxf7 25.Rxg7+ Kf8 26.Qg3+–, Black's king is getting mated.

If 23...fxg6 then 24.Qd3! Threatening Qxd8+ 24...Bxf6 (or 24...Qb6 25.f7+ Kf8 26.h5+–) 25.Bxf6 gxf6 26.Rxg6+ hxg6 27.Qxg6+ Kf8 28.Qxf6+ Ke8 29.Re1+–. A difficult move to see from afar! Black will have to give up the queen.

24.fxg7 Rxh4

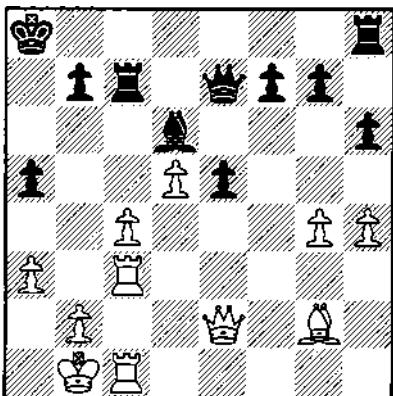
The only move to stop Qh6.

25.Rxd8+! Rxd8 26.Bf6 Rh1

27.Bxd8+- 1-0

heavy piece endgames king safety is the most important factor—by far—and here White is just completely winning
34...Qb5 35.Rc5 Qf1+ 36.Ka5 Rb8 37.Qd5+ Ka7 38.Rxa5+ 1-0

Exercise 5



Nevednichy – Khurtsidze

TUR-chT 2013

White has a serious positional advantage, with more space and a better bishop, but Black is very close to setting up a dark-squared blockade. Can you find a breakthrough?

28.c5!

A forcing, tactical breakthrough, which wins the game on the spot.

28...Rxc5

28...Bxc5 changes nothing in view of 29.d6! Qxd6 30.Qb5+-, and Black is losing at least a piece.

29.Rxc5 Bxc5 30.d6! Bxd6

Or 30...Qxd6 31.Qb5!+, but not 31.Rxc5? Qxc5 32.Qa6+ Qa7!+-.

31.Qa6+ Kb8 32.Bxb7!

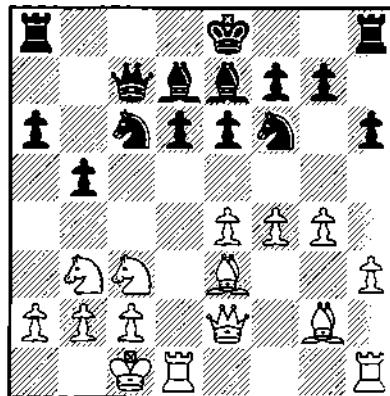
Otherwise White would have given up two pawns for nothing!

32...Qxb7 33.Qxd6+ Ka8

34.Rc6+-

As you've likely heard before, in

Exercise 6



A typical position for the line 6...e6 7.g4 h6, but Black has misplayed the opening. Can you find the win?

14.e5!

Opening up the bishop and the d-file—this idea should win you many games!

14...dxe5 15.fxe5 Qxe5

15...Nh7 16.Nc5 Bc8 17.Qf3+– is just crushing.

16.Rxd7!

Full points, but only if you saw this shot!

16...Kxd7

Or 16...Nxd7 17.Bxc6+–.

17.Rd1+ Kc7

There are many winning moves here, for instance the immediate 18.Qf3, but simplest seems to be:

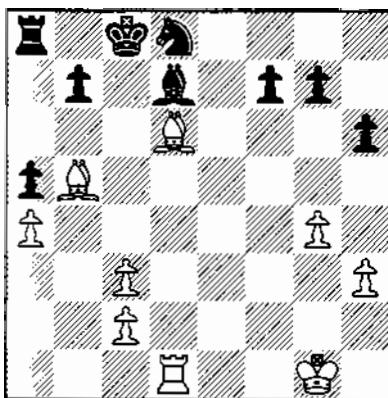
18.Bxc6 Kxc6 19.Qf3+ Nd5

Or 19...Kc7 20.Bf4+–.

20.Nxd5 exd5 21.Na5++– 1-0

and Black is losing the queen.

Exercise 1



Nolte – Branzuela

5th Penang Open 2013

White has a clear advantage in piece activity—can you capitalize on it?

24.Be7! Nc6

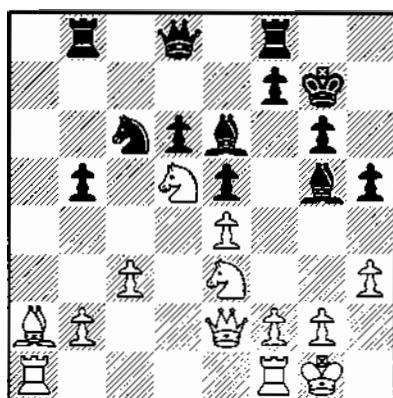
Not 24...Bxb5? 25.Rxd8++–.

25.Bf8!+– g6 26.Bxh6

Now White can create a winning passed pawn along the h-file. The technical conversion was not too difficult:

**26...Kd8 27.Kf2 Ke7 28.Bg5+
29.Bxf6+ Kxf6 30.Rxd7 Ne5
31.Rxb7 Rc8 32.Ke3 Ke6 33.Ke4
Kd6 34.Ra7 Nc4 35.Kd4 Na3
36.Bd3 Ra8 1–0**

Exercise 2



Perez – Harikrishna

Havana 2013

White has a small positional edge. Find a good plan to increase the advantage.

21.Nc2!

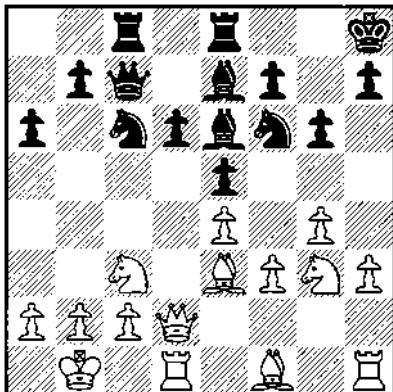
The point of this move is to place a knight on b4 and force some favorable exchanges. After trading off Black's knight and light-squared bishop Black will have a hard time defending both b5 and d6.

Quesada played 21.b4± and after an accurate defense Harikrishna was able to hold.

21...Qd7 22.Ndb4 Nxb4 23.Nxb4±

Next is Rfd1—Black will have a tough time defending this position.

Exercise 3



Yankovsky – Yanayt
American Open, Anaheim 2012

White to play; find the best continuation.

16.g5!

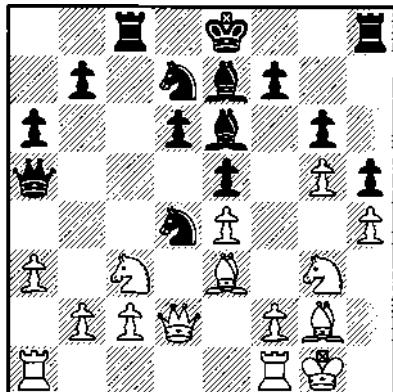
16.h4? would have given Black an excellent chance to strike in the center with 16...d5!—the point being that after 17.exd5 Nxd5 18.Nxd5 Bxd5 19.Qxd5 Red8+ the rook on d1 is lost.

16...Nd7 17.h4

Now White's attack along the h-file is much faster than Black's counterplay. IM Yankovsky executed the rest of the game quite convincingly:

17...Na5 18.h5 Nf8 19.f4 Ne4
20.Bxc4 Bxc4 21.f5 b5 22.Qh2 Qa5 23.hxg6 fxg6 24.fxg6 Bg8 25.Qh6 Ne6 26.gxh7 Bf7 27.g6 Bf8 28.Qh4 Bxg6 29.Qf6+ Bg7 30.Qxg6 1–0

Exercise 4



Charbonneau – Espinoza
Dresden Olympiad 2008

White to play; should you win a pawn with Bxd4 or try something else?

17.f4!

With the powerful threat of thrusting the f-pawn forward.

Taking the pawn with 17.Bxc4 exd4 18.Qxd4 O-O± would allow Black to have some solidity.

17...Nb5

If 17...Qb6 then 18.Rab1±.

18.f5 Bc4 19.b4 Qc7 20.Nd5 Bxd5 21.exd5 O-O

Relatively best was 21...Qc8 22.Be4± where White will have a huge space advantage in the endgame.

22.Bh3! Nc3 23.Rf2 Nb6 24.Bxb6 Qxb6 25.f6

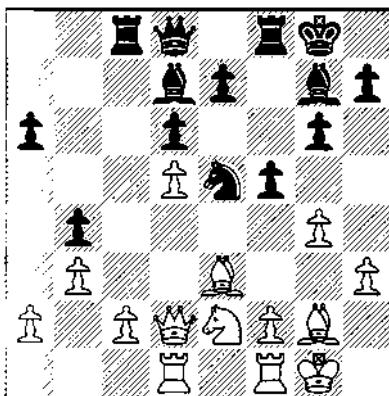
Even stronger was 25.fxg6 fxg6 26.Bxc8 Rxc8 27.Qd3! Kg7 28.Raf1—followed by Kg2, etc.

25...Rc4 26.fxe7 Re8 27.Bf1 Rf4 28.Kg2 Nxd5 29.Rxf4 Nxf4± 30.Kh2 Rxe7 31.c4 Qc6 32.Qe3 d5 33.cxd5 Qc2+ 34.Be2 Rc7 35.Qxe5 Rc4 36.Rf1 Qd2 37.Rf2 Qd4

38.Qxd4 Rxd4 39.Bf3 Kf8 40.Ne4
 Nxd5 41.Rd2 Rxd2+ 42.Nxd2
 Ne3 43.Bxb7 Nc2 44.Bxa6 Nxa3
 ±5.Bd3 Ke7 46.Nb1 1-0

Chapter 1c: Najdorf – 6.h3 other

Exercise 1



Game 11 *Additional analysis*

Black has just played f7-f5. How should White react?

17.f4!

Simple and strong, forcing the knight into passivity.

17...Nf7

17...fxg4? leads to nothing, White up a piece after 18.fxe5 gxh3 19.Rxf8+ Qxf8 20.e6+-.

18.g5

White's space advantage is quite considerable now, as Black's knight is an awful piece.

For fun we continued to analyze:

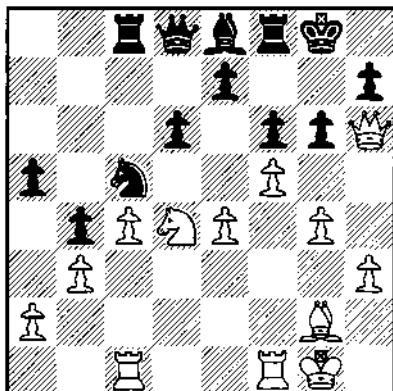
18...Bb5 19.a4!

A very cool idea, the point being:

19...bxa3 20.c4! Bd7 21.Nd4±

After White collects the a3 pawn he will have a tremendous positional advantage.

Exercise 2



Amanov – Yankovsky *Los Angeles 2012*

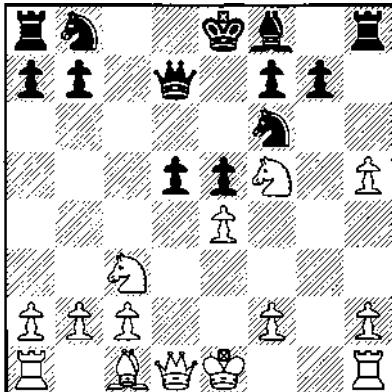
White to play; find the best move.
25.e5! 1-0

Winning on the spot! Black resigned in view of 25...fxe5 26.Bd5+ Bf7 27.fxg6+-.

And if 25...gxf5 then 26.Nxf5 Rf7 27.exf6 exf6 28.Bd5+-.

In case of 25...Bf7, White breaks through impressively with 26.Bd5! 26...g5 27.e6 Be8 28.h4! gxh4 29.g5! fxg5 30.f6!+-.

Exercise 3



Volokitin – Shishkin *Romania 2013*

Instead of recapturing on h5, Black has just played 10...d5!? Is this an opening revelation or a blunder?

11.h6!

It probably didn't take Volokitin long to find this refutation.

11...Nxe4

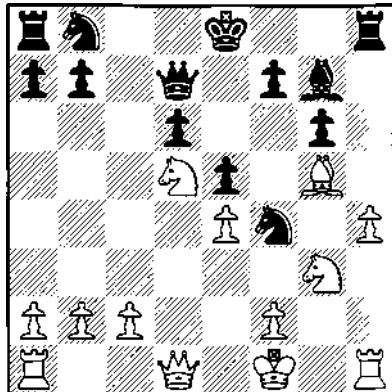
11...gxh6 12.Nxd5 Nxe4
13.Ng3!+– is the key idea, winning a full piece.

12.Nxe4 Qxf5 13.Qxd5

White is simply winning, with threats of hxg7 and Nd6+ as well as Qxb7.

13...Qe6 14.hxg7 Bxg7 15.Qxb7+– O-O 16.Qxa8 Nc6 17.Qb7 Nd4 18.Bc3 Nxc2+ 19.Kd2 Qc4 20.Nc3 Nb4 21.Qe4 Rd8+ 22.Kc1 Nd3+ 23.Kb1 Qe6 1–0

Exercise 4



Game 12 *Additional analysis*

Black has just played 14...Ng1– 15.Kf1 Nf4, ruining White's plans to castle queenside. What should White do?

16.h5!

A nice breakthrough, threatening 17.h5–h6 and 18.Nf6+.

16...Nxd5

The only move.

If 16...Nxh5 then 17.Nxh5 Rxh5 18.Rxh5 gxh5 19.Qxh5+– looks terrible for Black's king.

And after 16...gxh5? 17.Nf5+– is over immediately.

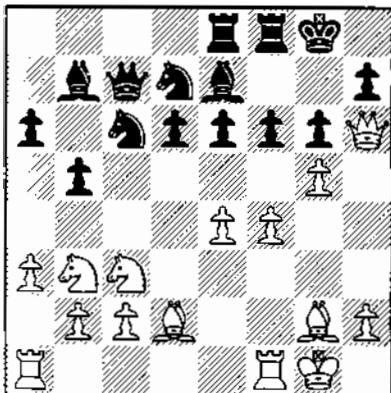
17.Qxd5 Nc6 18.hxg6 Rxh1– 19.Nxh1 fxg6 20.Qg8+ Bf8 21.Qxg6+ Qf7 22.Qxf7+ Kxf7 23.Rd1+

White is a very healthy pawn up.

Chapter 2: Systems with 2...e6

Chapter 2a: The Kan Variation

Exercise 1



Guseinov – Schneider

Dubai 2011

Black has just played 17...f6, counterattacking in the center. How should White respond?

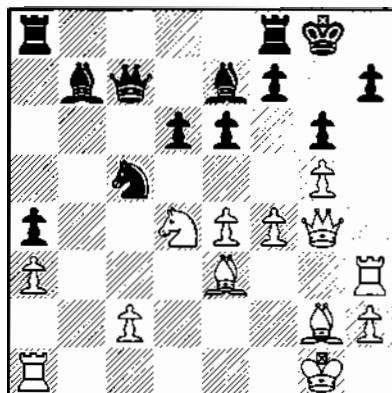
22.f5!

A strong reaction, causing turmoil for Black's king. Now followed:
22...Nde5 23.fxe6 Nd8 20.Qh3
fxg5 21.Nd5! Bxd5 22.exd5 Qxc2
23.Qc3!

Heading to a favorable endgame, thanks to White's protected e6 pawn.
23...Qxc3 24.Bxc3 Nc4 25.a4±

Putting enough pressure on Black's queenside to win a pawn. Guseinov later converted the advantage.

Exercise 2



Alekseev – Yemelin

Chepukaitis 2013

White to play; find the strongest continuation.

22.f5!

Threatening f5-f6 and Qh4.

22...exf5 23.Nxf5!

A nice resource, spelling doom for Black's king.

Instead, Alekseev chose 23.exf5 and was eventually able to break through: 23...Bxg2 24.Kxg2 Rfe8 25.Rf1 Bf8 26.Qh4 h5 27.gxh6 Kh7 28.fxg6+ fxg6 29.Rhf3! Ra7 30.Rxf8 Rxe3 31.Qf6+–.

23...f6

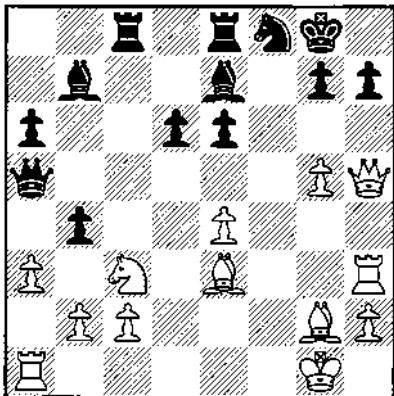
23...gxf5 24.Qxf5 just leads to mate.

If 23...Ne6 then 24.Nh6+ Kg7 25.Rf1!+– with threats of Nxf7 and Qh4, etc.

24.Bd4! gxf5 25.exf5+–

Next is g5-g6, winning.

Exercise 3



Game 13 Additional Analysis

White to play; how should he continue the attack?

21.Nd5!!

A beautiful tactical stroke based on one small detail.

The problem with the immediate 21.Rf1 is that after 21...bx_c3 22.Qf7+ Kh8 23.Bd4, Black can play 23...e5, which isn't an option after 21.Nd5!.

21...exd5?!

Black should not take the knight, but of course this is the critical move.

After both 21...Bxg5 22.Qxg5 exd5 23.Bd4 Qc7 24.exd5±, and 21...g6 22.Qf3 Bxg5 23.Rf1 Bxe3+ 24.Nxe3 Re7 25.Qf6 Rg7 26.Ng4±, White retains the initiative and the advantage.

22.Rf1

The threat of 23.Qf7+ followed by Bd4 is unstoppable, and White is winning in all lines:

22...Bxg5

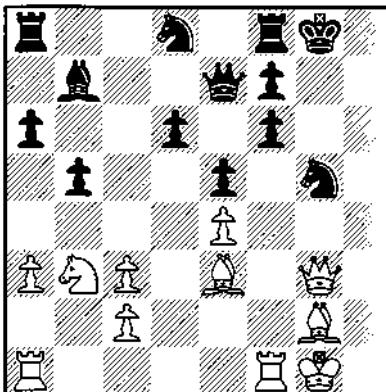
Also losing are 22...Qc7 23.Qf7+ Kh8 24.Bd4 Bf6 25.Rxf6+- and 22...g6 23.Rxf8+ Kxf8 24.Qh6+ Kf7 25.Rf3+ Kg8 26.Bd4+-.

23.Qf7+ Kh8 24.Bd4

Of course, now we can see the point of sacrificing the knight at d5—Black cannot block the diagonal with e6-e5!

24...Ne6 25.Qg6! h6 26.Rf7+-

Exercise 4



Amanov – Charbonneau Spice Cup Open, St. Louis 2012

White to play; can you include all of your pieces into the attack?

23.Nd4!! Nde6

After 23...exd4 24.Bxd4 White's bishop has become a menacing piece: 24...Nde6 25.Bxf6 Qc7 26.Bxg5+-.

24.Nf5!

A knight on f5 typically means checkmate for the castled Black king. White's attack is decisive now: 24...Qc7 25.Qh4 Qxc3 26.Qh6 Threatening Ne7 mate.

26...Nh7

26...Rae8 27.Qxf6+-.

27.Rf3!

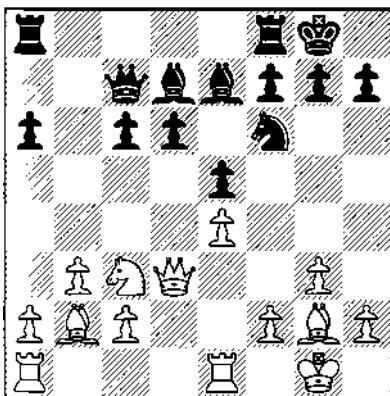
Not the only win, but certainly the most aesthetic!

27...Qxa1+ 28.Kh2 1-0

Mate is unavoidable, for example 28...Bxe4 29.Rg3+ Kh8 30.Bxe4 with the threat of Rh3 or Rg7.

Chapter 2b: The Taimanov Variation

Exercise 1



Mitjans – Granda Zuniga
Spanish 2013

White to play; find a good plan to proceed.

14.Nd1!

The thematic transfer of the knight to e3 is best, from where it will control the squares c4, d5, f5, and g4.
14...a5 15.a4 Be6 16.Ne3± Nd7 17.Rad1 Nc5 18.Qe2 Rfd8 19.Nc4± 20.Ne3 Bf8 21.Ba3 Bf7

And now White could have greatly increased his advantage with:

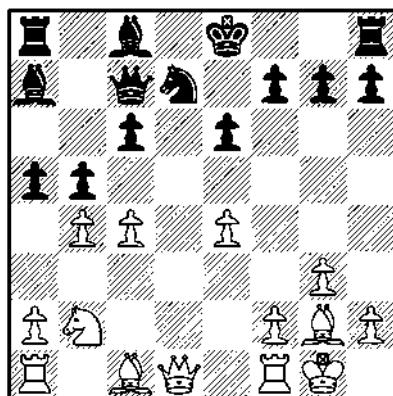
22.Bxc5

Instead, Perez Mitjans–Granda Zuniga, Linares 2013, continued **22.Rd2±**.

22...dxc5 23.Bf1!±

With the idea Qf3 and Bc4, trading the light-squared bishops and leaving White with a very superior knight.

Exercise 2



Gurevich – Strohhaeker
Bundesliga 2009

Black has just played a6-a5, breaking the queenside open. How should White react?

14.cxb5 cxb5 15.Bd2!

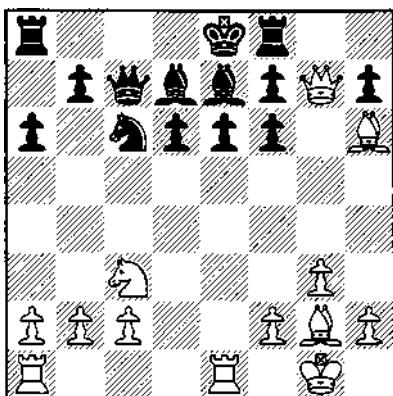
With a nice threat of Rc1, fighting for the initiative.

15...Bd4 16.Rc1 Qa7 17.Nd3 a4 18.e5+–

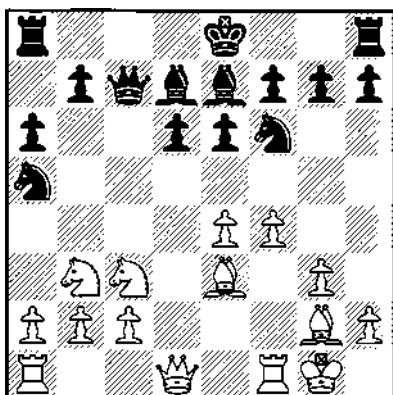
Black is in serious trouble in view of White's piece activity. GM Gurevich continued aggressively and was able to win a nice game:

18...Rb8 19.Re1 O-O 20.Qg4 Kh8 21.Qh4 Re8 22.Bc6 Ba6 23.Re4! Bb6 24.Qh5 Rec8 25.Rf4 f5 26.exf6 Nxf6 27.Qe2 Rf8 28.Nc5 e5 29.Qxe5 Bc7 30.Qe7 Rg8 31.Rxf6 gxf6 32.Bc3 1-0

Exercise 3



Exercise 4



Game 17 *Additional Analysis*

White is on the attack, but Black is ready to castle queenside and consolidate. Find the best move.

15.Nd5!

A simple shot, but it's important to be constantly aware of tactical opportunities!

15...Qa5

The aesthetic point: 15...exd5 16.Qxf8 mate!

16.Nxf6++-

Also 16.Qxh7 O-O-O 17.b4!+-.

Zvjaginsev – Grachev
60th Russian Championship
Krasnoyarsk 2007

Black has just played Nc6-a5. Find the best continuation for White

12.e5!

A thematic shot, taking advantage of Black's temporary loss of control.

12...dxe5

Relatively better was 12...Nc5 13.exf6 Nxe3 14.Qd3 Nxf1 15.fxe7=.

13.fxe5 Nc4

Or 13...Qxe5 14.Bf4+-.

14.exf6 Nxe3 15.Qd4! Nxf1

The difference with the d6 a4 pawns traded is that 15...Nxc4 can now be met with 16.fxg7 Rg8 17.Qf2!+- gaining a tempo by attacking f7.

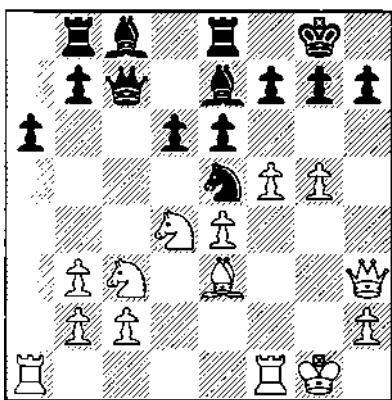
16.fxe7 Nxg3 17.hxg3 Kxe7+-

Material is about equal, but GM Zvjaginsev demonstrates the full power of White's pieces:

18.Rf1 f6 19.Nc5 Rhe8 20.Nxb7 Rab8 21.Re1 Kf8 22.Qc5+ Qxc5= 23.Nxc5 Bc8 24.b3 Re7 25.N3a4 e5 26.Rd1 Bf5 27.Nxa6 Bxc2 28.Rc1 Bxb3 29.N4c5 Bxa2 30.Nxb8 g6 31.Nc6 Re8 32.Ra1 1-0

Chapter 3: The Classical Variation

Exercise 1



Neumeier – Kreisl

AUT-ch, Jenbach 2009

White has launched a thematic attack in the style of Fischer. Find the best continuation.

17.f6!

Direct and strong. 17.Kh1, as played in the game, was unnecessary.

17...Bf8 18.Rf4!

A familiar rook lift, heading to f4. Black is in trouble.

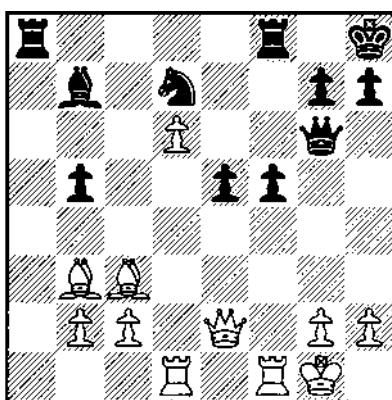
18...g6

If 18...Ng6 then 19.Rf3 b5 (or 19...Ne5 20.Rg3± followed by Qh4, Rg3, etc.) 20.Qh5→.

19.Rh4 h5 20.gxh6 Kh7 21.Nce2 b5 22.Qg3±

White should continue Nf4-h3-g5, with a strong attack.

Exercise 2



Skorchenko – Zagrebely

Krasnodar 2003

White has the two bishops and a strong passed pawn on d6, but Black has his share of the center and active pieces. How should White proceed?

22.Bd5!

Trading off Black's best piece and activating White's rook to target all of Black's pawns.

22...Bxd5 23.Rxd5 f4!

The only chance. Black must seek counterplay against White's king.

24.Kh1?!

Stronger was 24.h3! Rae8 (24...h6 25.Bxe5 Nxe5 26.Qxe5 Rae8 27.Qc3 Re2 28.Rf2+– is the reason White's king can be useful on g1.) 25.Qxb5 f3 26.Rxf3! Rxf3 27.Qxd7 and White is winning, for instance 27...Ref8 28.Qg4+–.

Less clear is 24.Bxe5 Nxe5 25.Qxe5 f3 26.Rd2 Rf5±, though White has good chances.

24...h6 25.Bxe5 b4?

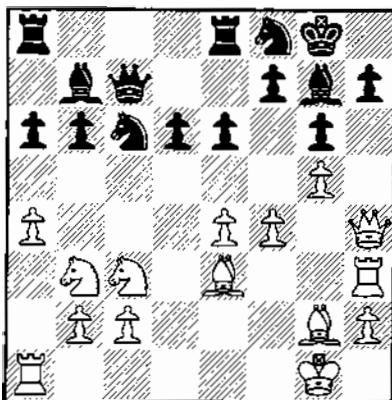
Losing the thread.

Black had to fight for counterplay as soon as possible with 25...Nxe5 26.Qxe5 Rae8 27.Qd4 Re2 28.Rg1 Qf7 \check{c} .

**26.Bd4 Rac8 27.c3 bxc3
28.Bxc3+–**

Now White is just up a clear—and very healthy—extra pawn, and went on to convert.

Exercise 3



Kosteniuk – Hou Beijing 2012

Black has all of the critical king-side squares defended, or does she?

21.f5!

Threatening f5-f6, leaving Black without any good options. 21.Rf1± was also possible, but not nearly as strong as 21.f5!.

21...Bxc3?!

An understandable move, but a losing one!

Perhaps Black could fight on after 21...exf5 22.Nd5 Qd7 23.Nf6+ Bxf6 24.gxf6 h5 25.Rg3+–, though survival is unlikely.

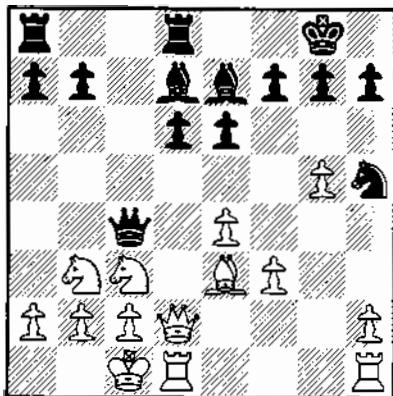
Black had to accept a dead bishop after 21...Ne5 22.f6 Bh8±, and hope for the best.

22.f6! h5 23.Bf3!

And it's all over, White is simply delivering mate after Bxh5.

23...Bxf6 24.gxf6 Ne5 25.Bxh5 Nh7 26.Be2 1–0

Exercise 4



Nakamura – Edouard Cap d'Agde 2010

White to play, find the best move.
Hint: consider Black's possibilities too.

17.Kb1!

A natural prophylactic move which in this case slows down Black's play by quite a bit.

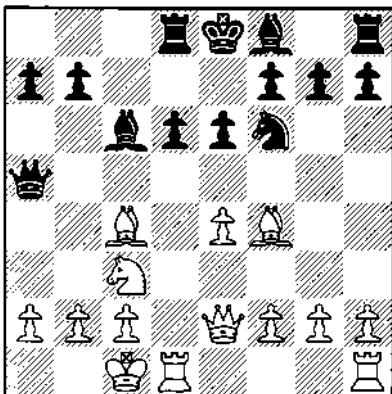
Nakamura played 17.Ne2?! and found himself in a bit of trouble after 17...a5! 18.Kb1 (*In case of 18.Bb6 a4 19.Bxd8 axb3 White is just lost.* 18...a4 19.Nbc1 Be8 20.Ng3 f6±.

17...b5

The point is that after 17...a5– 18.Bb6! is possible, and simply wins a pawn. 18...Rdc8 (*not 18...a4? 19.Bxc6 axb3 20.cxb3+–*) 19.Bxa5± followed by a2-a3 and Bb4.

18.Ne2 b4 19.Ng3 g6 20.Nxh5 gxh5 21.Nc1 a5 22.Nd3± 1–0

Exercise 5



Kashtanov - Polaninov

St. Petersburg 2001

White to play. Try to make use of your superior development.

11.Nd5!

A thematic shot in the Sicilian.

11...Rd7

In case of 11...Bxd5 12.exd5 e5 White can play Bg5 (g3) and f2-f4, or he can calculate a bit and find the immediate knockout: 13.Bb5+ Nd7 14.Bxe5! dxе5 15.Qxe5+ with a winning attack. 15...Be7 16.Qxg7 but not 16.d6? O-O-+ 16...Rf8 or 16...Qxb5 17.Rhe1+-) 17.Rhe1+-.

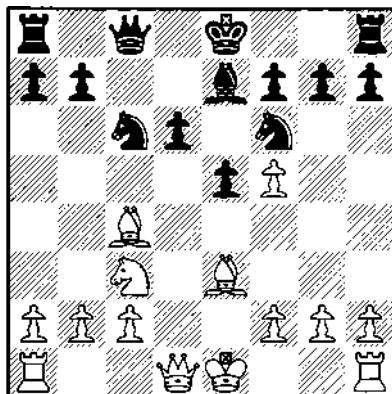
12.Nxf6+ gxf6 13.Kb1

13.Rd3± was played in the game.

13...b5 14.Bb3 b4 15.Rhe1±

White can next target the b4 pawn with Bd2, or play for f2-f4-f5. Black is just suffering with his dreadful structure.

Exercise 6



Rehurek - Maximov

CZE-chT, Pardubice 2012

White to play, should you protect the f5 pawn?

10.O-O!

Full control over the d5 square is definitely worth a pawn.

Black is more than fine after both 10.g4?! Nd4 11.Be2 Qc6 12.O-O Nxe2+ 13.Qxe2 d5= as played, and 10.Qf3?! Nd4 11.Bxd4 Qxc4 12.Qxb7 O-O!↑.

10...Qxf5 11.Nd5 Nxd5 12.Bxd5

White has full compensation, and can definitely play for a small pull.

12...O-O 13.c3 Rad8

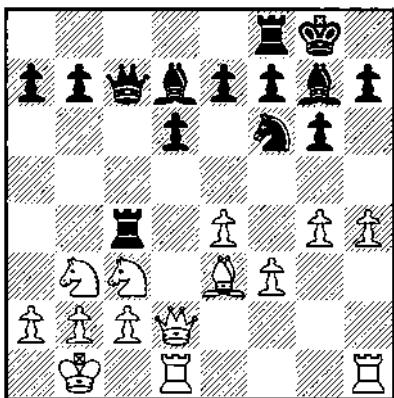
Or 13...Bg5 14.Bxg5 Qxg5 15.Bxc6 bxc6 16.Qxd6±.

14.f4!±

The advantage of the two bishops is certainly apparent here.

Chapter 4: The Dragon Variation

Exercise 1



A. Ivanov – Rensch
Las Vegas 2002

White to play and win.

16.e5!

A thematic shot!

16...Ne8

After 16...dxe5 17.g5 White wins a piece.

17.Nd5 Qd8 18.Bg5

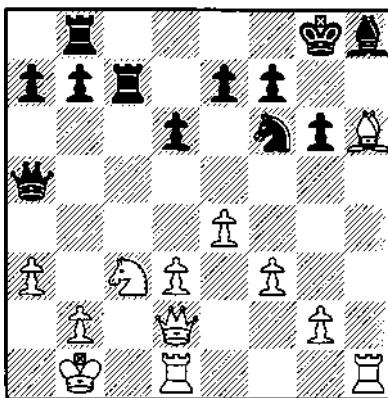
GM Ivanov concludes the game with great energy:

18...f6 19.Nxf6+! Kh8

Or 19...exf6 20.Qd5+ Kh8 21.exf6+– and Qxc4.

20.h5 exf6 21.hxg6 Be6 22.Rxh7+ Kg8 23.Qh2 Qe7 24.Rh1 1-0

Exercise 2



Milov – Kreiling
Frankfurt 2011

White to play, how can you make use of the open h-file?

22.g4!

Controlling the h5 square and preparing Qh2.

22...e6

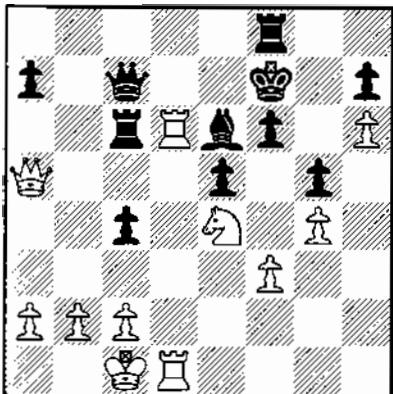
After 22...b5, 23.Bf8!! is a beautiful stroke. 23...Rxf8 24.Rxh8+– Kxh8 25.Rh1+ Kg8 26.Qh6 Nh5 27.gxh5+–. Mate is to follow.

23.Bf4 e5 24.Qh2 Bg7 25.Bh6 Bh8 26.Bd2

26.Bf8!+– was already decisive.

26...Bg7 27.Bh6 Bf8 28.Bxf8 Kxf8 29.Qh8+ Ng8 30.Nd5 Rcc8 31.Rh7 1-0

Exercise 3



Yu – Pham
Kazan 2013

White to play and win.

25.Nxg5+!

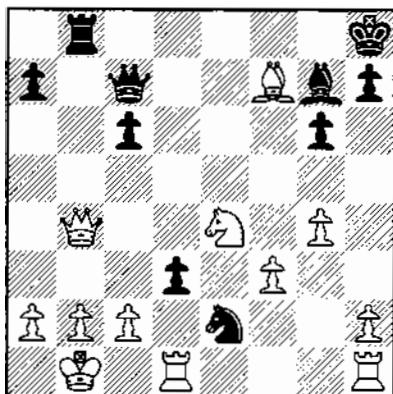
A simple yet effective breakthrough.

25...fxg5 26.Qxe5

The h6 pawn is quite an asset!

26...Qc8 27.Qg7+ Ke8 28.Rd8+ 1-0

Exercise 4



Svidler – Radjabov
Sochi 2008

White is up a full rook but faces a powerful counterattack. Can you find the most effective solution?

23.Qxb8+?!

The right idea, but wrong execution.

White had to sacrifice the queen with 23.Qb3! Rxb3 24.Bxb3 dxc2+ 25.Bxc2 Nd4 26.Rd3± with a nearly decisive advantage, as the knight on e4 is a fantastic piece.

23...Qxb8 24.c3

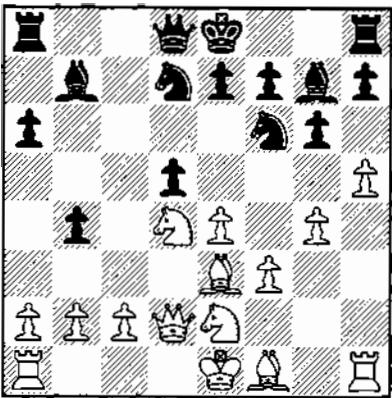
Or 24.Bb3 dxc2+ 25.Kxc2 h5∞.

24...Nxc3+ 25.Nxc3 Bxc3 26.Bb3 Bf6 27.Rxd3

Now White is only slightly better, as Black's queen can create counterplay all over the board. However Svidler still managed to pull out the win:

27...Qe5 28.Rd2 Qe3 29.Rhd1 Qxf3 30.Rd7 Qe4+ 31.Bc2 Qb4 32.Bb3 Qe4+ 33.Ka1 Qg2 34.R1d2 Qxg4 35.a3 a5 36.Rb7 a4 37.Rdd7 Qg1+ 38.Bd1 Qxh2 39.Rdc7 Bd8 40.Rc8 Qd2 41.Bc2 1-0

Exercise 5



Bitoon – Shanava Vung Tau, Vietnam 2008

Black has just played d6-d5, seeking central counterplay. How should White react?

13. h6!

Pushing back Black's bishop.

13...Bf8 14.g5 e5!

After 14...Nh5 15.exd5 Nb6 16.Nf4 Nxf4 17.Bxf4 Nxd5 18.Be5± Black's position is terrible.

15. Nb3?!

White could have seized the initiative with 15.gxf6 exd4 16.Bxd4 dxе4 17.Bh3!±.

15...Nh5?!

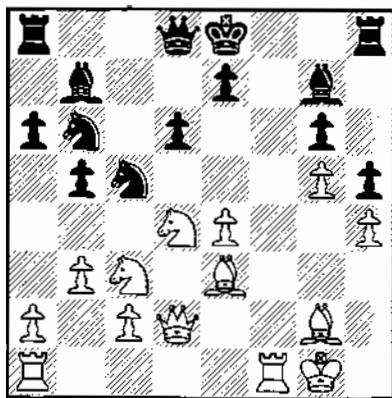
Missing his chance to complicate matters.

Black had to sacrifice the knight with 15...dxе4! 16.gxf6 exf3 17.Ng3 Nxf6± with a very unclear position.

16. exd5±

and White went on to win a wild affair.

Exercise 6



Priyadharshan – Zheng Yuan Chua Wch U16, Kemer 2009

White to play, how can you exploit the fact that Black's king is stuck in the center?

18.e5!?

A direct attempt to win on the spot.

Simpler was 18.Nd5! where either 18...Nxd5 19.exd5 or 18...Bxd5 19.exd5 will be crushing for White after Rae1.

18...Qd7

18...Bxe5 would run into 19.Nc6 Qc7 20.Nxe5 dxе5 21.Qf2!+– with the decisive double threat of Bxc6 and Qf7+.

19. e6

Also good was 19.Bxb7 Qxb7 20.exd6+–, opening up the central files.

19...Qc7 20.Ndxb5?

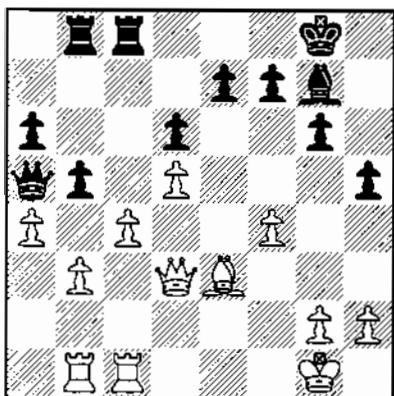
This sacrifice barely falls short. 20.Rf7+– was still winning.

20...axb5 21.Nxb5 Qc8 22.Nxd6-exd6 23.Qxd6 Qxe6 24.Qxe6-Nxe6 25.Bxb7 Bxa1 26.Bxa5-Nxa8 27.Rxa1±

The game was later drawn.

Chapter 5: The Accelerated Dragon

Exercise 1



Molner – Li

US Open 2013

White to play, how should you react to Black's last move b7-b5?

22.axb5 axb5 23.b4!

Creating a very strong passed e-pawn.

23...Qa4 24.c5 dxc5 25.bxc5±

White's central pawns are practically unstoppable.

25...Bf6?!

Black had to push 25...b4 as soon as possible, though White is still clearly ahead.

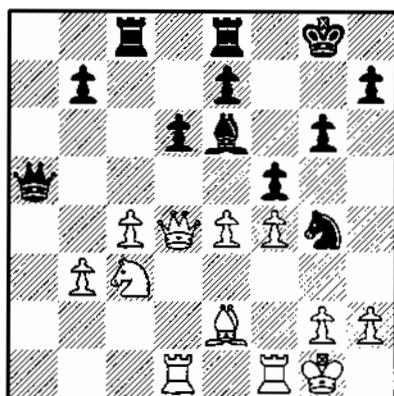
26.c6 b4 27.f5!

Opening a second front on the kingside.

27...Kg7 28.fxg6 fxg6 29.Bd4+–

And White later won.

Exercise 2



Sean – Hujbert

FSGM, Budapest 2014

White to play, what should you do about the knight on g4?

20.Bxg4 21.f5!

This exchange is almost always favorable for White.

20...fxg4 21.f5!

Launching a decisive attack.

21...Bf7

Or 21...gxf5 22.exf5 Bxf5? 23.b4+–.

22.Nb5 Qb4 23.Qe3!?

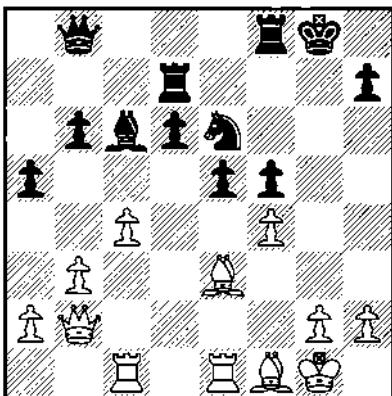
To avoid the trade of queens if Black plays Qc5.

23...gxf5 24.exf5 Qc5 25.Rd4

Kh8 26.Kh1 Ra8 27.Qc3! Qe5

28.Re1 Qf6 29.Nc7 1–0

Exercise 3



Amanov - Aliyev
Chicago Open 2012

White to play, how can you activate your two bishops?

Best was:

24.fxe5 dxe5 25.c5! b5

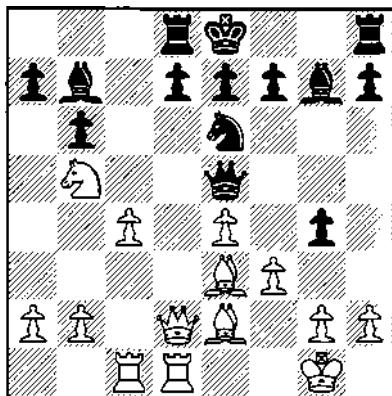
After 25...bxc5 26.Bxc5 Nxc5 27.Rxc5± White wins the e5 pawn.

26.a4!

Fighting for the c4 square. Black's position collapses:

26...bxa4 27.Bc4 Bd5 28.Red1!+-

Exercise 4



Kraai - Cozianu
USA 2013

White to play, find the strongest continuation.

17.f4!

Abusing Black's poor queen.

17...Qxe4 18.Bd3 Qc6 19.Nxa7 Qc7 20.Nb5 Qc6

And now best was:

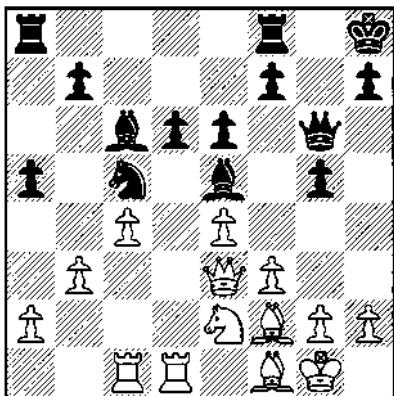
21.c5! bxc5

Or 21...Nxc5 22.b4+-.

22.f5! Nf8 23.Rxc5+-

The threat of Nc7+ is decisive.

Exercise 5



Granda Zuniga – Gordon
Benasque Open 2013

White to play, how can you put more pressure on Black's position?

21.Bg3!

The exchange of dark-squared bishops leaves the d6 pawn undefendable.

21.a3?! is too slow, as after 21...f5 \rightleftarrows Black gets excellent counterplay.

21...Nd7 22.Rxd6!

A powerful exchange sacrifice to win control over the dark squares.

22.Nd4± was also good for a large advantage.

22...Bxd6 23.Bxd6 Rfe8 24.e5

White's bishop is dominant.

24...f6 25.exf6 Qxf6 26.Rd1 e5

27.Ba3!

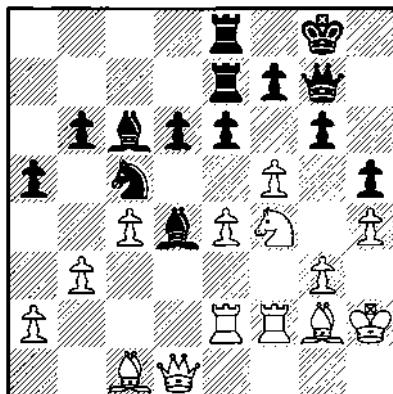
A nice transfer to the long diagonal.

27...e4 28.f4 gxf4 29.Nxf4 Ne5

30.Rd6 Qf5 31.Bb2+-

With so much pressure, the game did not last much longer:

Exercise 6



Giri – Brunner
EU-Cup, Eliat 2012

White to play and win.

Best was

36.f6!

A nice tactic.

Also winning was 36.e5! with the point 36...Bxf2 (or 36...Bxg2 37.f6+-) 37.f6! Qh7 38.Bxc6+- and White is coming out ahead in material.

36...Bxf6

Or 36...Qxf6 37.e5 Bxe5 38.Bxc6+-.

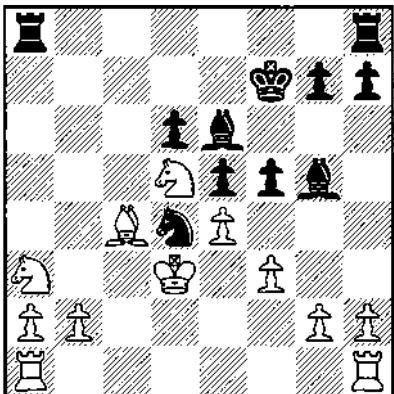
37.Qxd6 Bb7 38.e5+-

Winning a piece.

Chapter 6: The Sveshnikov & Cousins

Chapter 6a: The Sveshnikov Variation

Exercise 1



Nepomniachtchi – Popov
RUS-ch 2010

How can White increase his advantage?

21.Nc2!

Challenging Black's most active piece.

21...Nc6

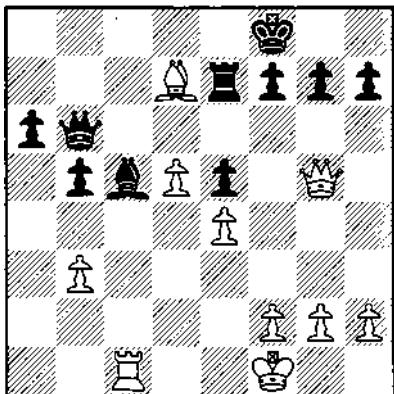
Or 21...Nxc2 22.Kxc2±.

And now:

22.a4±

was possible, and White would have been well on his way to earning the full point. Instead, the game was later drawn.

Exercise 2



Kadric – Zhou
EU-ch 2012

White to play and win.

32.b4!

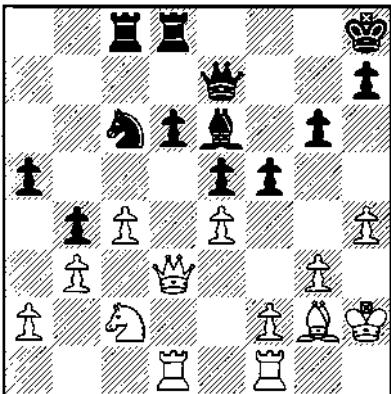
Control over the c-file proves to be the deciding factor.

32...Rxd7

Or 32...Bxb4 33.Rc8++–.

33.bxc5 f6 34.cxb6 fxg5 35.d6 Ke8 36.Rc8+ Kf7 37.Rc7 1-0

Exercise 3



Nisipeanu – Radjabov
Bazna 2010

Black has just played f7-f5. How should White react?

22.exf5 gxf5 23.Bxc6!

Leaving White a superior knight to Black's bishop.

23...Rxc6 24.f4!

Fixing Black's structure, a common positional motif.

24...Rcc8

Instead, 24...e4 25.Qd4+ Kg8 26.Ne3± is a dream blockade for White.

25.Qe3

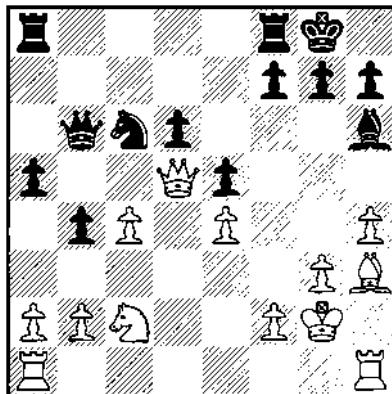
White has a large strategic advantage, based on Black's weakened structure. Nisipeanu went on to convert cleanly:

25...Qg7 26.Rf2 Rd7 27.Nd4! Qg4 28.Rdd2 Re8 29.Nb5 d5 30.Nd6! Red8

Or 30...Rxd6 31.Qxe5++–.

31.Qxe5+ Qg7 32.c5 Qxe5 33.fxe5 Rc7 34.Rc2 d4 35.Rfd2 f4 36.gxf4 d3 37.Rxd3 Bf5 38.Nf7+ Kg7 39.Rg2+ 1-0

Exercise 4



Morozevich – Bogosavljevic
EU-chT 2013

White to play, can you get away with capturing the d6-pawn?

19.Qxd6!

In this instance, yes!

19...Rfd8 20.Bd7 Rac8 21.c5! Qa6

After 21...Qa7 22.Rad1 Rc7 23.Bxc6 Rxd6 24.cxd6 Rc8 (not 24...Rxc6 25.d7+–) 25.Ba4± White has a huge advantage.

22.Rhd1 Qc4 23.Ne1

Stronger was 23.Qd3 Qxc5 24.Qb3 Rb8 25.Rd5 Qb6 26.Rad1+– with intolerable pressure.

23...Qxe4+ 24.Nf3 Nd4 25.Rxd4 exd4 26.Bxc8?!

Unnecessary, though this led to a fascinating endgame. Simpler was 26.c6+–.

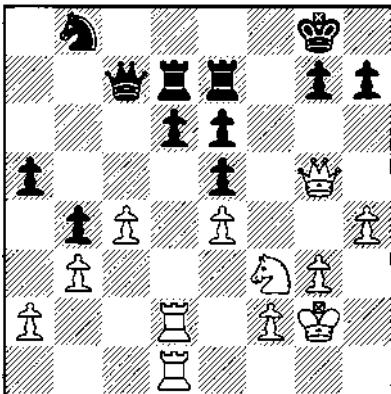
26...Rxd6 27.cxd6 Kf8 28.d7 Ke7 29.Re1 Be3 30.fxe3 dxe3 31.Rc1 f6

32.b3 Qd3 33.g4 Qe2+ 34.Kg3 Qd3?!

The losing mistake. 34...g5!= would have forced a perpetual.

35.Rc4 Kd8 36.Nd4 e2+ 37.Kf2 Qe3+ 38.Kxe3 e1Q+ 39.Ne2 Qxh4 40.Re4 Qg5+ 41.Kf2 Kc7 42.Re8 1-0

Exercise 5



Nisipeanu – Spasov

ROM-chT 2010

White to play, how can you capitalize on the pressure?

30.c5!

A nice breakthrough.

Also strong was 30.Qg4!? threatening Ng5. White gets a dominating position after 30...h6 31.Qg6+– followed by g3-g4-g5.

30...dxc5

If 30...Qxc5 then 31.Rxd6 followed by Qxe5, and if 31...Rxd6 then 32.Qxe7!+–.

31.Rxd7 Rxd7 32.Rxd7 Nxd7

Or 32...Qxd7 33.Qxe5 Na6 34.Ng5+– winning the e6-pawn.

33.Qe7!

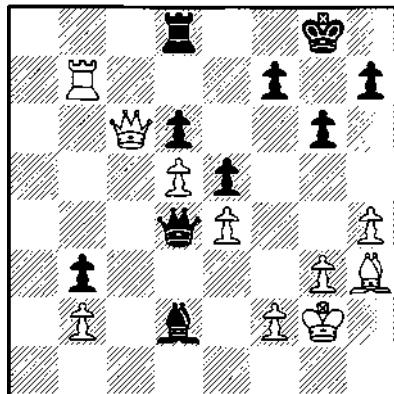
Despite the simplification, the activity of White's queen and knight is crushing.

33...h6 34.Qxe6+ Kh8 35.g4!+–

Opening up the kingside to decisive effect.

**35...c4 36.Qe8+ Kh7 37.g5 hxg5
38.Nxg5+ Kh6 39.Qh8+ Kg6
40.Qe8+ Kh6 41.Ne6 1–0**

Exercise 6



Hou – Ushenina

EU-Cup 2013

White to play and win.

30.Be6!

Illustrating the power of opposite-colored bishops.

30...Qxe4+

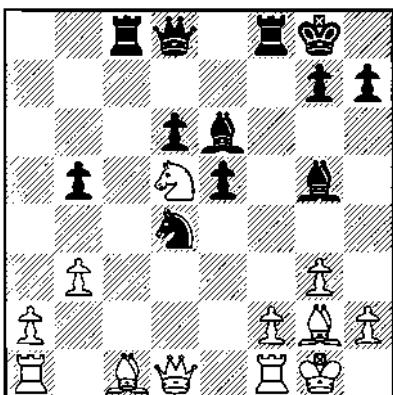
Or 30...fxe6 31.Qc7+–.

31.Kh2 Rf8 32.Rxf7!

No points unless you found this shot as well!

**32...Rxf7 33.Qe8+ Kg7 34.Qxf7–
Kh6 35.Qf8+ Kh5 36.Qe7–
Kh6 37.Qf8+ Kh5 38.Bh3 Qc2
39.Bg4+! Kxg4 40.f3+ Kh5
41.Kh3 1–0**

Exercise 1



Zawadzka – Nebolsina
Wch U20 Girls, Yerevan 2007

White to play; find the strongest move.

19.Be3!

Exchanging on our own terms! A strong positional idea. White threatens f2-f4.

White played 19.f4 and eventually won.

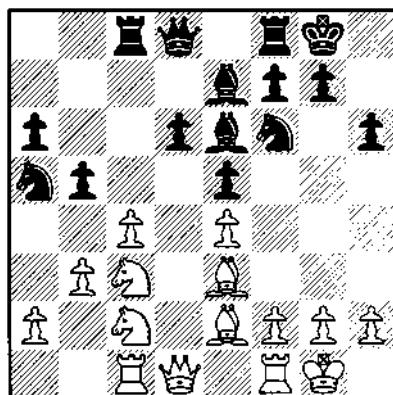
19...Bxe3

Or 19...Nc2 20.Bxg5 Qxg5 21.Nb6 Rb8 22.Qxd6±.

20.fxe3 Rxf1+ 21.Qxf1±

The knight must leave its valued outpost and the b5 pawn is now in trouble.

Exercise 2



Womacka – Pisk
Germany 2004

Black has just played b7-b5. How should White respond?

15.Nd5!

Less clear is 15.Nb4 bxc4.

15...Bxd5

After 15...Nxd5 16.cxd5 Bd7 17.Nb4± Black's queenside is under immense pressure.

16.exd5 bxc4 17.b4!

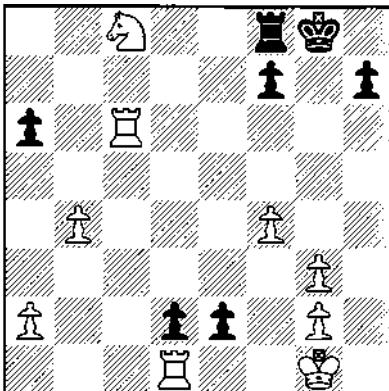
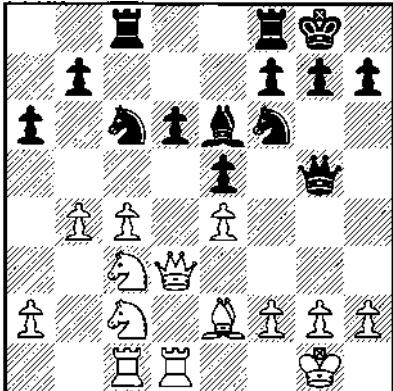
The whole point, fighting for a superior structure.

17...Nb7 18.Na3 a5 19.b5!±

After the c-pawn falls, White will have a clear positional advantage.

Instead, White played 19.Nb5 and the game was later drawn.

Exercise 3



Svidler – Andreikin FIDE Candidates 2014

White to play; find the strongest continuation.

16.Qd2!

Gaining an important tempo.

The immediate 16.b5?! runs into 16...Bxc4! 17.Qxc4 Nd4 where Black is doing well, since 18.Qd3? Rxc3!–+ is game over.

The game continuation was not as strong, but also quite interesting: 16.Nd5 b5 17.Qg3!? Qxg3 (17...Nxe4? falls short after 18.Qxg5 Nxg5 19Nb6 Rb8 20.Rxd6! Rxb6 21.c5 Nd4 22.Rxd4 Rc6 23.Rdd1±) 18.Nxf6+ gxf6 19.hxg3 bxc4? (19...Bxc4 would likely liquidate into a draw, for instance 20.Bxc4 bxc4 21.Rxd6 Rfd8 22.Rxd8+ Rxd8 23.Ne3 Nxb4 24.a3 Nc6 25.Rxc4 Nd4±, where White's advantage is marginal.) 20.f4! f5 21.exf5 Bxf5 22.Ne3 Bd3?! The final error. 23.Bxd3 cxd3 24.Nf5! e4 25.Nxd6 e3 26.Nxc8 d2 27.Rxc6 e2.

These pawns may remind some readers of the famous game McDonnell-La Bourdonnais 1834, which also came from the Kalashnikov Variation! But after 28.Rcc1! Black can only win back one rook. 28...exd1R 29.Rxd1 Rxc8 30.Rxd2 Rc3 31.Rd5 1–0.

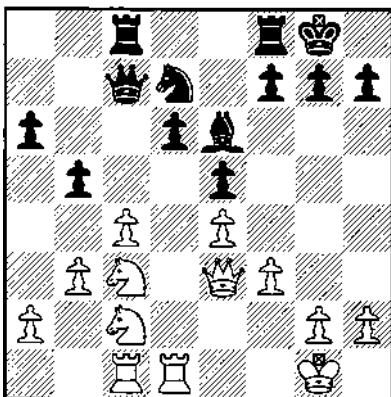
16...Qg6

16...Qxd2 17.Rxd2± is quite pleasant for White, similar to the game Navara–Moiseenko.

17.b5! axb5 18.cxb5 Ne7 19.Bf3 Rfd8 20.Ne3±

White is in full control, and can work on creating an outside passed pawn.

Exercise 4



29...g5 30.Nd3 Rc8 31.h3 Kg7 32.Ndxe5 Nxe5 33.Nxe5 Rc5 34.Nc6 Rcl+ 35.Kh2 Ra1 36.Nd4! Rxa3 37.Nxe6+ fxe6 38.Rxe6+-

The endgame is completely won for White, who has an active rook and king.

38...a5 39.Ra6 a4 40.Kg3 Ra2 41.h4 gxh4+ 42.Kxh4 a3 43.g3 Ra1 44.Kg5 a2 45.Ra7+ Kf8 46.Kf6 Ke8 47.f4 1-0

Exercise 5

Motylev – Brodsky

*Ciocaltea Memorial
Bucharest 2001*

Black has just played the thematic b7-b5. How should White react?

19.Nb4!

Heading for the all-important d5-square.

The immediate 19.Nd5 looks fine for Black after 19...Bxd5 20.cxd5 Qa5!=.

19...bxc4 20.Ncd5 Qd8

Or 20...Bxd5 21.Nxd5 Qd8 22.Qa7!±.

21.Rxc4 Rxc4 22.bxc4

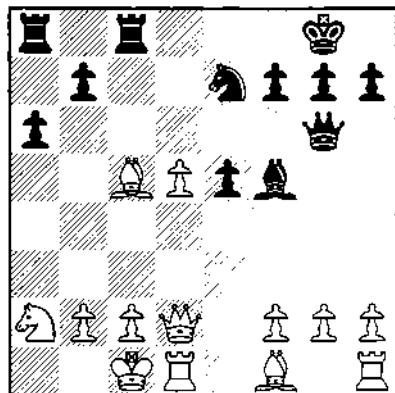
It may not seem like much, but White's knights are in full control over the queenside.

22...Qa5 23.Ne7+! Kh8 24.Nec6 Qc7 25.Qa7!

A favorable queen exchange. The d6 pawn is now doomed.

25...Qxa7+ 26.Nxa7 Ra8 27.Nac6 Bxc4 28.Rxd6± Be6 29.a3!

Black's forces are terribly passive, while the pawns on a6 and e5 are easy targets for White's pieces. GM Motylev shows nice technique in the rest of the game:



Grigorov – Gunev

Ruse 1978

White to play and win, can you refute Black's piece sacrifice?

16.d6!

A cute tactical shot, exploiting the weakness of Black's back rank.

16...Rxc5 17.dxe7

Winning this tempo gives White a chance to cover c2 and emerge with an extra piece.

17...Re8

Of course, the point is 17...Rxc2+ 18.Qxc2 Bxc2 19.Rd8+! and White mates.

18.Nc3 b5 19.Qd6 Qg5+ 20.Rd2

Rcc8 21.g3+-

White soon won thereafter.

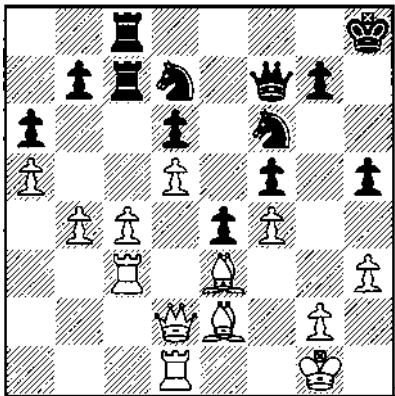
31...Qc8

After 31...Rc8 32.Qxd6 Qxd6 33.Rxd6+- Black will have to give up one of his knights for the a6 pawn.

32.Bxc6 Qxc6 33.Qxd6 Qc3

34.Qd2 Qa3 35.Bd4 1-0

Exercise 6



Nunn – Stepovoj

World Senior 2014

White to play, does the breakthrough c4-c5 work?

26.c5!

Yes! After building up his position to the maximum, GM Nunn plays this thematic break. This structure arose from the Löwenthal Variation, the line 7...Qe7 8.Qd1 Nf6 9.Nc3 d6 10.Bg5 Be6 11.Nd5 Bxd5 12.exd5.

26...Qf8

After 26...dxc5 27.bxc5 (27.d6 Rc6 28.b5 axb5 29.Bxb5+- winning the exchange, is also quite good.) 27...Nxc5 28.d6! Rc6 29.Bxc5 Rxc5 30.Rxc5 Rxc5 31.d7+- Black must give up the knight.

27.c6! bxc6 28.dxc6 Rxc6

29.Rxc6 Rxc6 30.b5 axb5

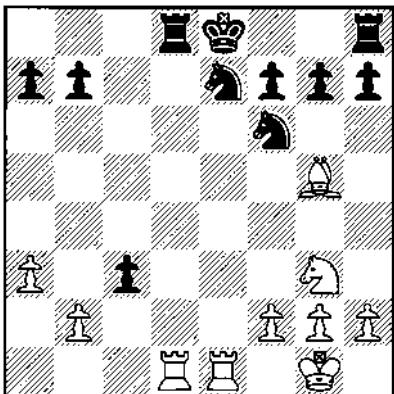
31.Bxb5

The point of White's play—the a-pawn is now unstoppable, as it's supported by White's powerful bishops.

Chapter 7: Minor Sicilians

Chapter 7a: The Four Knights Variation

Exercise 1



Yemelin – Kornev
St. Petersburg qual U18 1993

White to play, find the strongest continuation.

19.Rxe7+!

Of course, spotting this first move is not enough—White has to find quite a few resources in order to make this shot work!

Instead, the game continued 19.bxc3 and was later drawn.

19...Kxe7 20.Nf5+ Ke8

After 20...Ke6 21.Nxg7+ Ke5 22.Re1+ Ne4, the key move is 23.f3! (not 23.Bxd8 cxb2∞) and if 23...Rd4 then 24.bxc3 and White should win.

21.Nxg7+ Kf8

Or 21...Ke7 22.Re1+ Kd7 23.Bxf6+-.

22.Rxd8+ Kxg7 23.Rd6!

Another key resource—without this move, the combination falls short!

But not 23.Rxh8?? cxb2!–+.

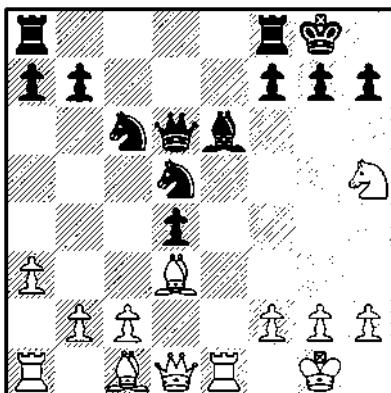
23...Ng4

It's also important to note that 23...Ne4 loses to 24.Bh6+! Kg8 25.Rd8 mate.

24.bxc3+

The combination has yielded just an extra pawn, but it should give White excellent winning chances.

Exercise 2



Mekhitarian – Van Riemsdijk
Rio de Janeiro 2007

White to play, find the strongest continuation.

16.Nxg7!

A decisive sacrifice.

After any normal move such as 16.Qf3, White is clearly better but not immediately winning.

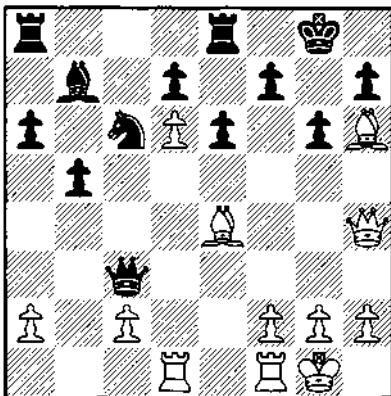
White played 16.Ng3 and the game was later drawn.

16...Kxg7 17.Qh5

Black has no decent way of defending h7.

17...f5 18.Qh6+ Kh8 19.Rxe6+–

Exercise 3



Novikov – Stepanov
Tula 2010

How can White utilize his dark square control?

20.Bg5!

Threatening the devastating Bf6.

20...Kg7 21.Rd3!

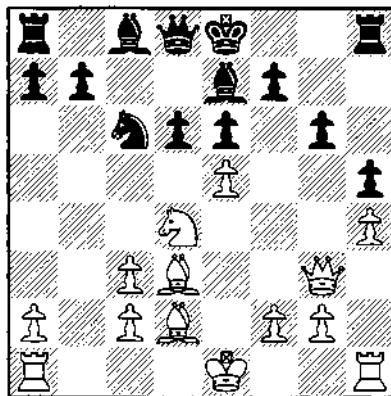
Lifting the rook into the attack.

21...Qe5 22.Re3!

Now, after either Qd4 or Qb2, c2-c3 will be decisive. Black is busted.

22...h5 23.Bxg6 Qc5 24.Bf6+ Kg8 25.Qg3 h4 26.Bh7+ 1-0

Exercise 4



Nikitenko – Plotkin
World Youth U16 Olympiad 2014

White to play, how should you react to Black's last move, d7-d6?

13.Nxc6 bxc6 14.Bxg6!

This kind of sacrifice can almost be played "with the hand", meaning little calculation is required.

14...d5

An objectively better move than taking the bishop, but Black is only delaying resignation for so long.

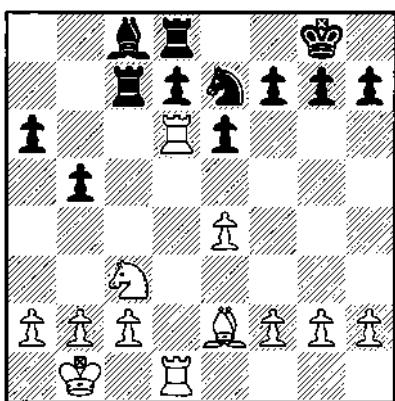
After 14...fxg6, 15.Qxg6+ wins rather straightforwardly: 15...Kd7 (15...Kf8 16.Rh3+- is over immediately.) 16.exd6 Bxd6 17.Qg7+ Be7 18.Qd4+ Kc7 19.Bf4++-. Since Kb7 would run into Rb1+, Black is forced to give up the rook on h8.

Similarly, 14...Rg8 15.Bxf7- is also good for White: 15...Kxf7 16.Qf3+ Ke8 (or 16...Kg7 17.Rh3!+- 17.Qxh5+ Kd7 18.exd6 Bxd6 19.Qf7- Be7 20.Bf4+- followed by Rd1+.

15.Bd3 Kd7 16.c4 Qg8 17.cxd5 exd5 18.Bg5 Ke8 19.Qf4 Be6 20.Rb1 Bxg5 21.hxg5 Qg7 22.Rb7 Kf8 23.g6 Qh6 24.Rxf7+ Kg8 25.Qxh6 1-0

Black resigned, not needing to see 25...Rxh6 26.Re7+-.

Exercise 5



Lagarde - Abergel
Caen 2011

White to play, can you create more weaknesses in Black's structure?

18.a4!

A thematic advance.

18...b4

If 18...bxa4 then 19.Nxa4± followed by Nb6.

19.Na2 a5 20.Bb5!

Not only has White gained the b5 square for his bishop, but after Nc1-b3 the a5 pawn will be a target as well.

20...Kf8 21.Nc1 Bb7 22.f3 Bc6?!

Black was still holding after 22...Nc6 23.Nb3 Ke7, where White might want to try 24.h4±, attempting to induce a weakness on the kingside.

23.Nb3 Bxb5 24.axb5 a4 25.b6!

Black is lost.

25...Rc6 26.Rxd7 Re8

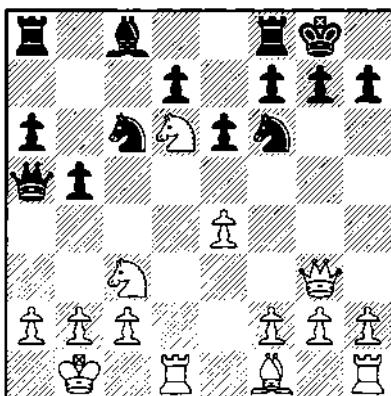
Forced, since 26...Rxd7 27.Rxd7 axb3 allows 28.Rd8 mate.

27.Na5 Rxb6 28.Nc4

The activity of White's pieces is simply decisive.

28...Rc6 29.b3 axb3 30.cxb3 Ra6 31.Rb7 1-0

Exercise 6



Majdan - Gaponenko
Germany 2010

White to play, find the best move.

15.e5!

Fixing the d6 square as an outpost and displacing Black's knight.

15...Nh5

After 15...Ne8 16.Nxe8 Rxe8 17.Ne4!± the second knight hops into either d6 or f6.

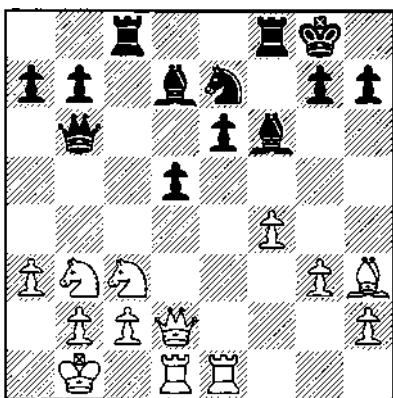
16.Qe3 b4 17.Nc4! Qc7 18.Na4+±

White is positionally crushing. The rest of the game is a nice example of the potential power of the knights:

18...g6 19.g4 Ng7 20.Nc5 f6 21.exf6 Rxf6 22.Ne4 Rf8 23.Ncd6 Rb8 24.Qh6! Ne5 25.Ng5 Rxf2 26.Qxh7+ Kf8 27.Qh8+ Ke7 28.Qxg7+ Nf7 29.Bc4 Bb7 30.Ngxf7 Bxh1 31.Ne5+ Kd8 32.Qh8+ 1-0

Chapter 7b: Rare Sicilians

Exercise 1



Abasov – Arab
Sharjah Open, UAE 2014

White to play, find the strongest move.

20.Ne4!±

Winning one of Black's bishops and increasing the pressure against e6.

20...dxe4

Or 20...g6 21.Nxf6+ Rxf6
22.Nd4±.

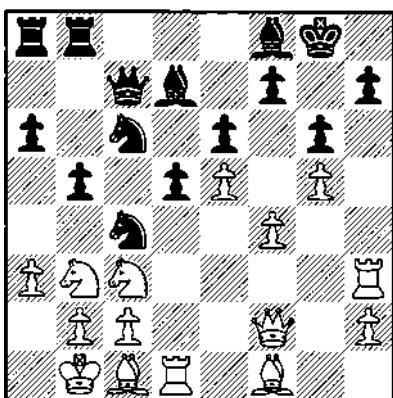
21.Qxd7 Nf5 22.Bxf5 exf5

23.Qxf5 e3
23...Bxb2? 24.Qd5+ Kh8
25.Kxb2+-.

24.Qa5 Qe6 25.Qd5+-

With Black's e3 pawn well blockaded, White easily won the pawn-up endgame.

Exercise 2



Edouard – Kotanjian
Al Ain, UAE 2012

Can you find the winning combination?

21.Rxd5!

A devastating blow, opening up a route for White's knight to reach f6.

21...Ne7

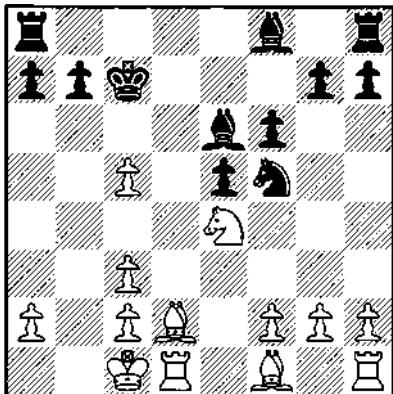
After 21...exd5 22.Nxd5+– Black must give up the queen.

22.Rc5 Qa7 23.Ne4 h5 24.Nf6+ Kg7 25.Qf3 Ng8 26.Rxh5!

With such a knight on f6 any sacrifice should do the trick!

26...gxh5 27.Qxh5 Bxc5 28.Nxc5 Bc6 29.Qh7+ Kf8 30.g6 Nxg6 31.exf6 fxe6 32.Qh8+ Kf7 33.Qg7+ 1-0

Exercise 3



Vrana - Polasek
TCh-CZE, Prague 2013

White to play. How can you fight for the initiative in this endgame?

14.f4!

A thematic idea, isolating the pawn on e5.

**14...h6 15.fxe5 fxe5 16.Be2 b6
17.g4! Nh4 18.c4!**

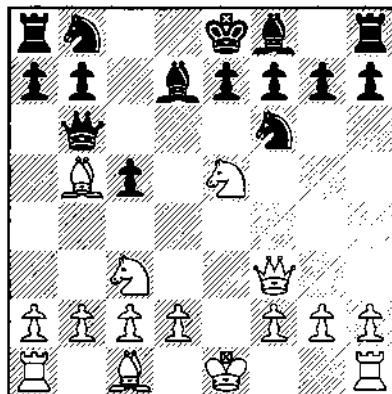
With idea Bc3.

**18...Bd7 19.Rhf1 Re8 20.Bc3
Ng6 21.Nd6+-**

Also strong was 21.cxb6+ axb6 22.c5! bxc5 23.Rf7+- followed by Bb5.

**21...Re6 22.Rf7 Bxd6 23.cxd6+
Kd8 24.c5 bxc5 25.Rxd7+ Kxd7
26.Bb5+ Kc8 27.d7+ Kb7 28.d8Q
Rxd8 29.Rxd8 1-0**

Exercise 4



Ardelean - Moldovan
ROM-chT, Predeal 2006

Black has just played 7...Qb6 instead of the usual 7...Qc8 or 7...Qc7. Can you refute it over the board?

8.Nd5!

An impressive display of minor pieces along the fifth rank.

8...Qd6

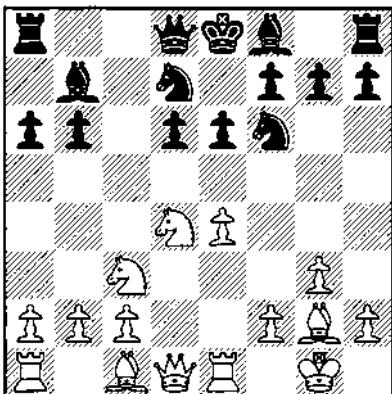
The only move, though already Black is lost.

Also losing are 8...Qxb5 9.Nc7++ and 8...Nxd5 9.Bxd7+ Nxd7 10.Qxf7+ Kd8 11.Qxd5+-.

**9.Nxf6+ gxf6 10.Nxd7 Nxd7
11.Qxb7 Qe6+ 12.Kf1 Rd8
13.Qxa7 Bg7 14.Qxc5 O-O
15.Qc4+-**

The king on f1 is just a mild inconvenience when considering that White has no less than three extra pawns.

Exercise 5



Cosma – Litinskaya
Warsaw 1996

Can you take advantage of Black's timid opening?

10.e5!

This thematic shot is always a possibility when the fianchettoed light-squared bishops oppose each other like this.

10...dxe5

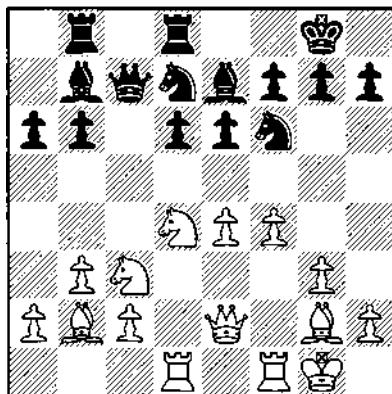
If 10...Bxg2 then 11.exf6 Bb7 12.fxg7 Bxg7 13.Nxe6! This is even stronger than Nf5. 13...fxe6 14.Rxe6+ Kf8 15.Rxd6+-.

11.Bxb7 exd4 12.Bxa8 Qxa8

13.Qxd4+

With an extra exchange.

Exercise 6



Berg – Garcia Paolicchi
Olympiad, Istanbul 2012

Find a good plan for White.

15.g4!

Attack! Our favorite plan on the kingside.

**15...Bf8 16.g5 Ne8 17.Qg4 b5
18.a3 Nc5**

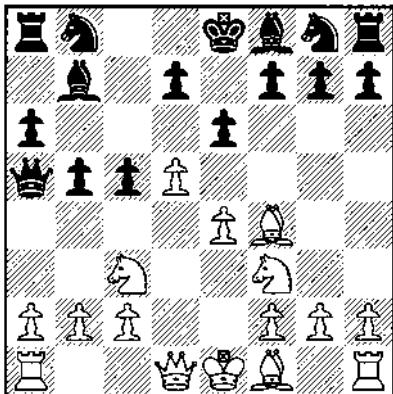
Or 18...e5 19.Nf5↑.

And now best was:

19.f5! e5 20.Nde2→

With a ready made attack after Ng3, Nd5, h2-h4-h5, etc.

Exercise 7



Shomoev – Roiz
EU-ch, Warsaw 2005

How should White react to the queen on a5?

7.Nd2!

Threatening a2-a4 and getting ready to seize the c4-square.

Also interesting is 7.a4 b4 8.Nb1 Nf6 9.Nbd2 exd5 10.exd5 Bxd5 11.Nc4 Qd8 12.Qe2+ Be7 13.Nd6+ Kf8 14.Rd1↑ with some definite compensation for the pawn.

7...Nf6 8.Be2 exd5 9.Nxd5 Nxd5 10.exd5 Bxd5

At least Black gets to snag a pawn, but White's initiative develops quickly.

11.O-O Be6 12.a4! Qb4

And now the simple:

13.Bg3

would have posed Black serious problems.

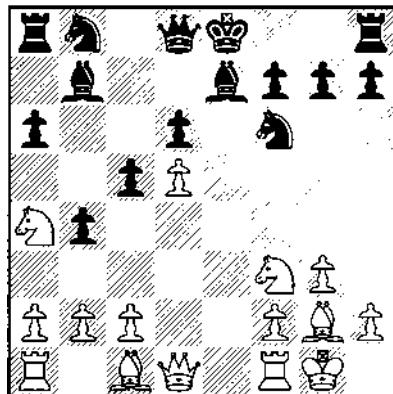
13...bxa4

Or 13...Be7 14.axb5 O-O 15.Bf3 d5 16.c4+–.

14.c3 Qb7 15.Nc4↑

White follows with Bf3, with nearly decisive pressure.

Exercise 8



Gabrielian – Shushpanov
Soukhumi Open, RUS 2007

How can White use his small lead in development?

11.Nh4!

Heading for the f5-square.

11...O-O

11...g6 12.Bh6+– is beyond hopeless, while 11...Bc8 runs into 12.Nxc5! dxc5 13.d6+–.

12.Nf5 Qd7 13.Nxe7+

It wasn't necessary to capture right away, but GM Gabrielian has a concrete idea in mind.

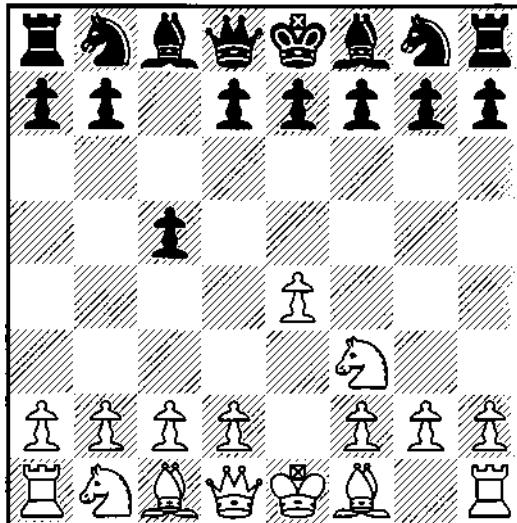
13...Qxe7 14.Nb6!

Getting the knight to c4.

14...Ra7 15.Nc4±

To be followed by Re1 and Bf4—Black's position is terribly passive.

Conclusion



1.e4 c5 2.Nf3

We hope this book was as enjoyable to read as it was to write. Over the process of many months we discovered many wonderful ideas and came away with a better understanding of not only the Sicilian Defense, but of chess itself. Our goal was to provide you, dear reader, with a full repertoire against Black's most combative opening, as well as an arsenal of positional and tactical motifs to boot.

If we could leave you with a few words of advice, we'd stress that in order to truly absorb all of the material covered in this book, one must put it into practice and develop an intuitive feel for the ensuing positions. Being well-prepared is one thing, but being well-experienced is another.

Thus, we cannot recommend enough the practical value of training games. Find someone to play the Black side of a line, and challenge them to a few games to test out your knowledge.

We often feel ready to employ certain openings, but once we get to the board we are surprised by our lack of feeling for the position. Whenever you try a new opening, it is important to first test it out in training in order to build up experience and confidence. One of the best ways of improving is to analyze your own games—find your strengths, weaknesses, and further your chess knowledge!

We sincerely wish you all the best.

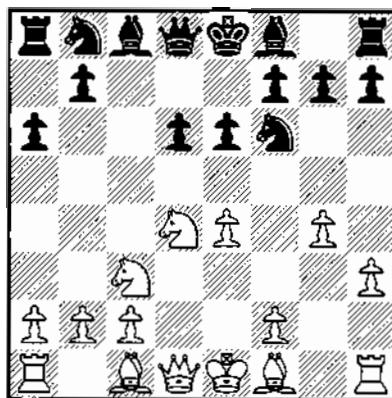
IM Zhanibek Amanov
FM Kostya Kavutskiy

Index of Variations

Chapter 1: The Najdorf Variation

Chapter 1a: Najdorf – 6.h3 e6

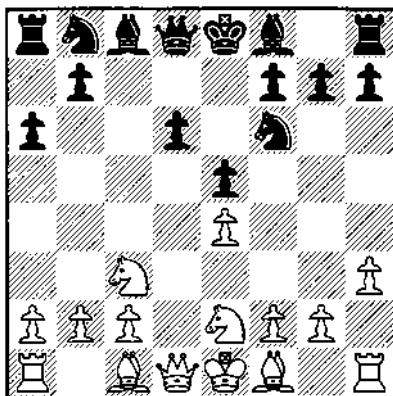
1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.h3 e6 7.g4



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9.f4! Qb6 10.Nb3	68
8.Bg2 other	57

Chapter 1b: Najdorf – 6.h3 e5

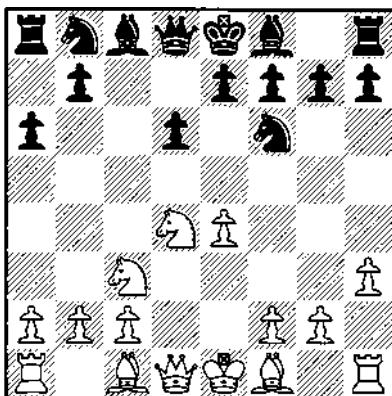
1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.h3 e5 7.Nde2



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Chapter 1c: Najdorf – 6.h3 other

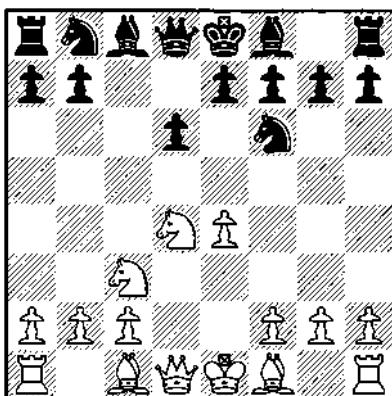
1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.h3



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1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3



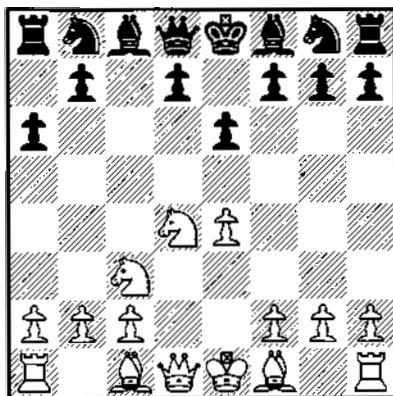
5...e6 6.g4! e5 7.Bb5+ Bd7 8.Bxd7+ Qxd7 9.Nf5	143
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Chapter 2: Systems with 2...e6

Chapter 2a: The Kan Variation

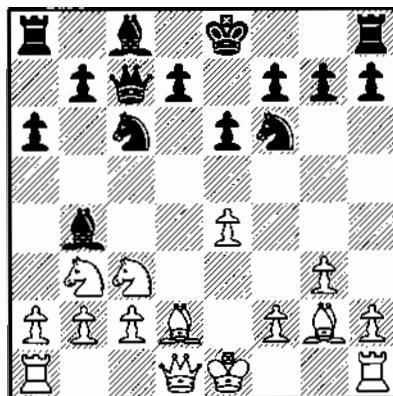
1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 a6 5.Nc3



5...b5 6.a3 Bb7 7.g3 Nf6 8.Bg2

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5...Qc7 6.g3 Bb4 7.Bd2 Nf6 8.Bg2 Nc6 9.Nb3



9...O-O 10.O-O Be7 11.f4 d6 12.g4!

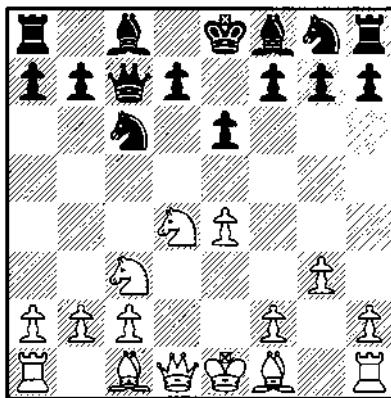
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9...Be7 10.O-O d6 11.f4

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Chapter 2b: The Taimanov Variation

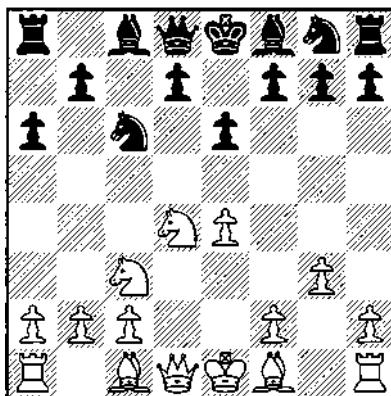
1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nc6 5.Nc3 Qc7 6.g3



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8.O-O Bb4 9.Nb3	201
8.O-O Be7 9.Re1 Nxd4 10.e5!	203
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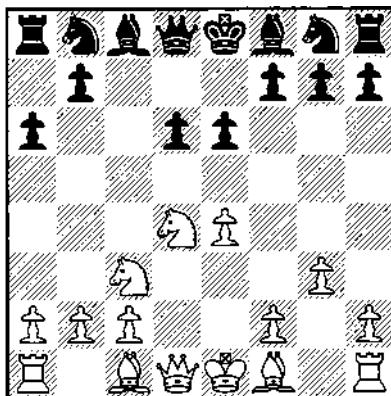
Chapter 2b: The Taimanov Variation (continued)

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nc6 5.Nc3 a6 6.g3



6...d6	7.Bg2	Bd7	8.O-O	Qc7	9.Nb3	Nf6	10.f4	Be7	11.Be3	218
										217
										217
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6...Qc7	7.Bg2	h5!?	8.h3!							

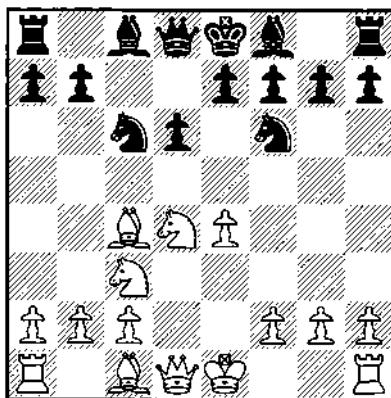
1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 a6 5.Nc3 d6 6.g3



6...b5	7.Bg2									208
6...Nf6	7.Bg2									208

Chapter 3: The Classical Variation

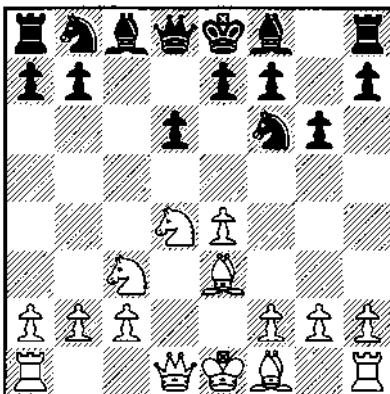
1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 Nc6 6.Bc4



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9.Be2 Bd7 10.Qd2	258
7.Nb3 a6 8.O-O e6 9.a4! Qc7 10.a5	250
6...e5 7.Nf5!	275
6...Na5 7.Bb5+ Bd7 8.Bxd7+!? Qxd7 9.Bg5!	267
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Chapter 4: The Dragon Variation

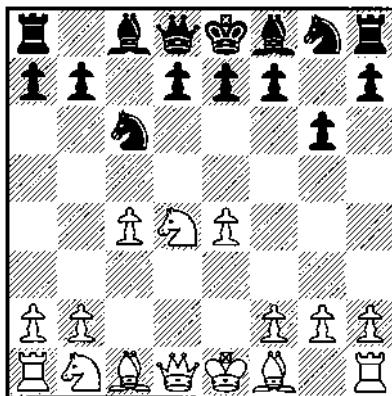
1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6 6.Be3



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11...Nd7 12.h4!	299
11...a6 12.g4	301
11...Qc7 12.h4	301
6...Bg7 7.f3 O-O 8.Qd2 Nc6 9.O-O-O d5 10.Qe1!?	
10...e5 11.Nxc6 bxc6 12.exd5 cxd5 13.Bg5!	313
12.exd5 Nxd5 13.Bc4 Be6 14.Kb1!	316
10...e6 11.h4	309

Chapter 5: The Accelerated Dragon

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 g6 5.c4!



5...Nf6 6.Nc3 d6 7.Be2 Nxd4 8.Qxd4 Bg7 9.Be3 O-O 10.Qd2

10...Be6 11.O-O Qa5 12.b3!	341
10...Bd7?! 11.O-O	340
10...Ng4 11.Bxg4 Bxg4 12.Bd4	340
10...a5!? 11.Rd1!	347

5...Bg7 6.Be3 Nf6 7.Nc3 Ng4!? 8.Qxg4 Bxd4?! 9.Bxd4 Nxd4 10.O-O-O!

8.Qxg4 Nxd4 9.Qd1 Ne6 10.Rc1!	356
9.Qd1 Nc6 10.Qd2	354
9.Qd1 e5 10.Nb5!?	354

7.Nc3 O-O 8.Be2 d6 9.O-O Bd7 10.Qd2

8.Be2 b6!? 9.O-O Bb7 10.Nxc6!?	363
8.Be2 Nxd4 9.Bxd4 d6 10.O-O	365

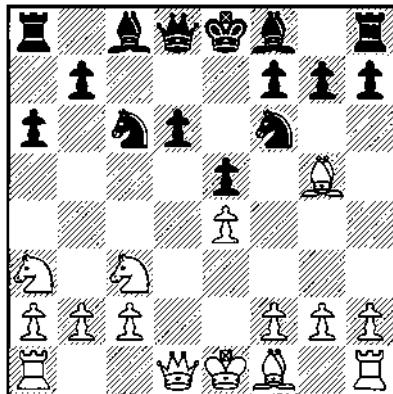
1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 g6 3.d4 Bg7 4.c4

336

Chapter 6: The Sveshnikov & Cousins

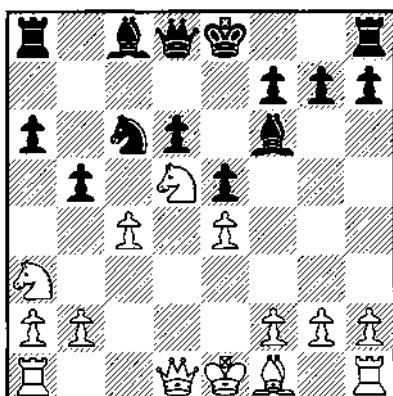
Chapter 6a: The Sveshnikov Variation

**1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 e5 6.Ndb5 d6
7.Bg5 a6 8.Na3**



8...Be7?! 9.Nc4!	382
8...Be6 9.Nc4 Rc8 10.Bxf6	383
8...b5 9.Nd5 Qa5+ 10.Bd2 Qd8 11.Bd3	385

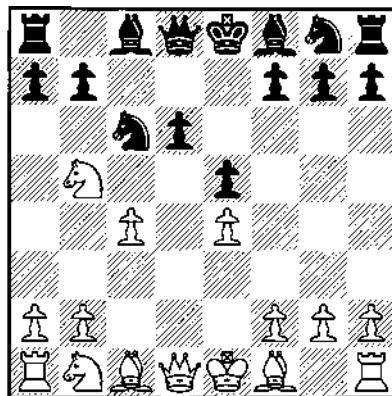
8...b5 9.Nd5 Be7 10.Bxf6 Bxf6 11.c4



11...b4 12.Nc2 O-O 13.g3	398
12.Nc2 a5 13.g3	394
12.Nc2 Rb8 13.b3	396
11...other	387

Chapter 6b: The Kalashnikov and Löwenthal Variation

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 e5 5.Nb5 d6 6.c4

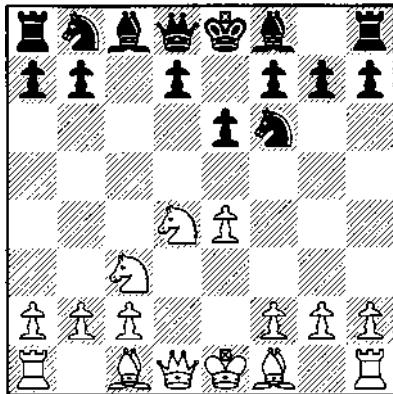


6...a6 7.N5c3 Be6?! 8.Nd5	411
6...Be6 7.N1c3 a6 8.Na3	411
6...Be7 7.N1c3 a6 8.Na3 f5!? 9.exf5 Bxf5	411
8.Na3 Nf6 9.Be2 O-O 10.O-O Be6 11.Be3 Rc8 12.Rc1	414
8.Na3 Be6 9.Be2 Bg5 10.O-O Bxc1 11.Rxc1	421
9.Be2 Nd4 10.O-O	420
1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 e5 5.Nb5 a6 6.Nd6+ Bxd6 7.Qxd6	426

Chapter 7: Minor Sicilians

Chapter 7a: The Four Knights Variation

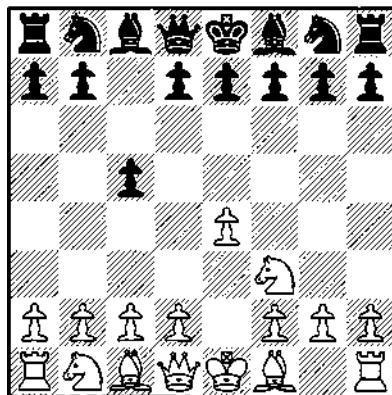
1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3



5...Nc6	445
6.Ndb5 Bb4	443
7.a3! Bxc3+ 8.Nxc3 d5	465
9.exd5 exd5 10.Bd3	
9.exd5 Nxd5 10.Bd2!?	
6.Ndb5 Bc5	
7.Bf4	
5...Bb4	456
6.e5!	
1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nc6	455
5.Nc3 Bb4	
6.Ndb5	

Chapter 7b: Rare Sicilians

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3



2...Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Qb6 5.Nb3 Nf6 6.Nc3 e6 7.Qe2!	479
5.Nb3 e6 6.Nc3 a6 7.Bf4!	478
2...Nf6 3.Nc3 d5 4.exd5 Nxd5 5.Bb5+ Bd7 6.Ne5!	492
5.Bb5+ Nc6 6.O-O	491
3.Nc3 Nc6 4.d4 d5!? 5.exd5 Nxd5 6.dxc5 Nxc3 7.Qxd8+	488
2...b6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Bb7 5.Nc3 a6 6.g3	501
5.Nc3 other	499
2...a6 3.Nc3 e6 4.d4 b5 5.d5! Bb7 6.Be2	506
5.d5! d6?! 6.dxe6!N	505
3.Nc3 Nc6 4.d4 cxd4 5.Nxd4 e5 6.Nf5!	504

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- Chessbase
Mega Database 2014

Engines:

- Houdini 4
Komodo 8
Stockfish 5

IM Zhanibek Amanov of Kazakhstan and FM Kostya Kavutskiy of Los Angeles present a repertoire vs. the Sicilian Defense, one of the most complex and powerful defenses available to Black, and the choice of many top players.



Kostya Kavutskiy

The critical test is to attack it directly with 1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 followed by 3.d4, the Open Sicilian.



Zhanibek Amanov

The dynamics of the resulting positions are such that White will get a lead in development while Black will have an extra central pawn. This leads to very sharp middlegames.

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- The Kan and Taimanov: 6.g3
- The Classical: 6.Bc4
- The Dragon: 9.0-O-O
- The Accelerated Dragon: Maróczy Bind
- The Sveshnikov: 9.Nd5

The purpose of this book is not only to provide a complete repertoire for the White side of the Open Sicilian, but also to ingrain a number of thematic positional and tactical motifs as well.

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