

Grandmaster Repertoire

**Lars
Schandorff
The
Caro-Kann**



Tired of bad positions? Try the main lines!

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Grandmaster Repertoire 7

The Caro-Kann

By

Lars Schandorff

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Publisher's Foreword

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

John Shaw & Jacob Aagaard

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Key to symbols used

±	White is slightly better
∓	Black is slightly better
±	White is better
∓	Black is better
+–	White has a decisive advantage
–+	Black has a decisive advantage
=	equality
≡	with compensation
↔	with counterplay
?	unclear
?	a weak move
??	a blunder
!	a good move
!!	an excellent move
!?	a move worth considering
?!	a move of doubtful value
#	mate

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Introduction

If you play the Caro-Kann when you are young, then what would you play when you are old?

– Bent Larsen

What to do against 1.e4? It is the oldest dilemma in the chess world. The answer my friend is perhaps not blowing in the wind, but still obvious: Play the Caro-Kann!

The Caro-Kann is solid, reliable and – this may come as a surprise to some of you – a great fighting weapon. The latter point may need a little explanation. It is related to the nature of the opening – typically in the Caro-Kann White has extra space and some initiative, but Black's position is completely sound and without weaknesses. White must do something active and he must do it quickly, otherwise Black will catch up in development and gain a fine positional game. That White is forced to act is what creates the early tension.

The reputation of the Caro-Kann was also affected by the attitude of its exponents. Playing Black is not the same as playing dull chess. For decades the Caro-Kann was considered to be unambitious. In this period you could say it kind of attracted the wrong people. Black's primary goal was to equalize completely and kill all the life in the position. This has changed. Nowadays enterprising players such as Topalov, Anand and Ivanchuk regularly use the Caro-Kann and it is not to get a quick handshake!

Throughout the book I recommend entering the sharp mainlines. This is cutting-edge theory, which means that one new move could change the verdict. It is rare that White comes up with such moves though and in general Black is in very good shape. And most importantly: Black's own winning chances increase dramatically by allowing double-edged play.

So in the Classical mainlines (3.♘c3 or 3.♘d2 and 3...dxe4 4.♗xe4 ♕f5) where White castles long we will not imitate him and try to get a draw, but instead follow in the footsteps of the great Danish fighter Bent Larsen and castle short! Often White will burn his bridges in his eagerness to attack – and if we are not mated, then we will win the endgame!

In the Advance Variation we shall meet 3.e5 with the principled 3...♕f5 – sharp and interesting play is all but guaranteed.

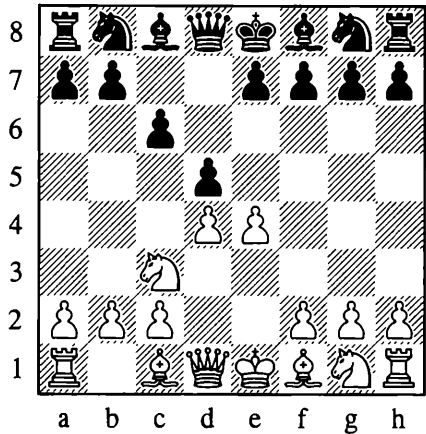
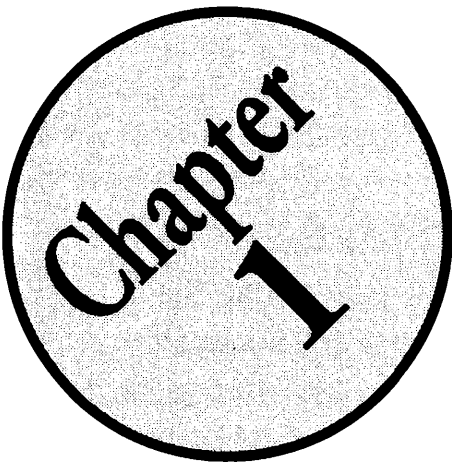
I recommend meeting the Panov Variation, 3.exd5 cxd5 4.c4, with 4...♗f6 5.♘c3 ♘c6. If White chooses 6.♗f3 then we shall equalize in the famous endgame variation. This is the closest we shall come to the old-fashioned dull Caro-Kann, but equal is not the same as drawn – we can still fight

for the win. If White wants to wrestle for an opening advantage he must play 6.♔g5, and that leads to much more interesting play.

All that remains are the minor lines, which are in general unthreatening, but there are some fun lines. For example, the Fantasy Variation, 3.f3, has become trendy, so I have analysed it with especial care.

The modern Caro-Kann is for everyone. Good luck with it.

Lars Schandorff
Copenhagen, April 2010



Classical Variation

Introduction

Variation Index

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3
3...dxe4 4.♘xe4 ♔f5

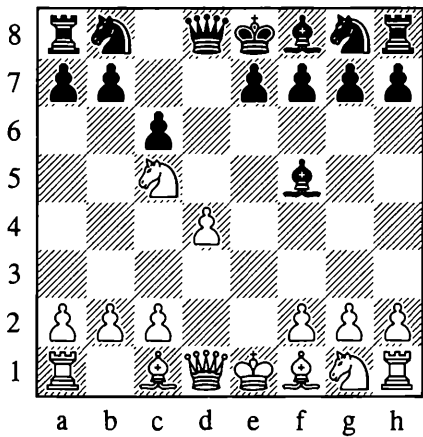
5.♘c5

10

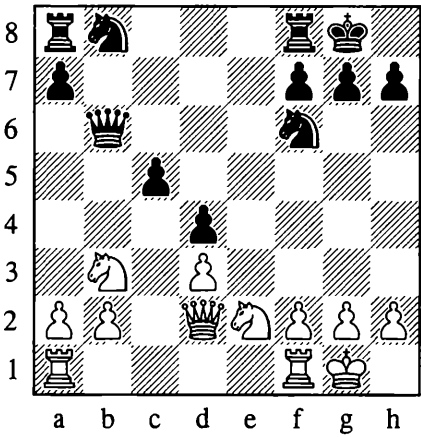
The rare 5.♘c5

14.♚xd2

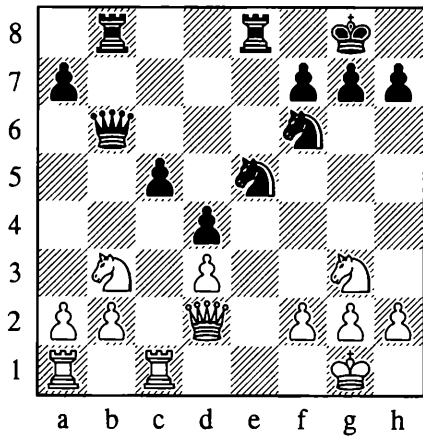
18.♘b3



5...e5!?

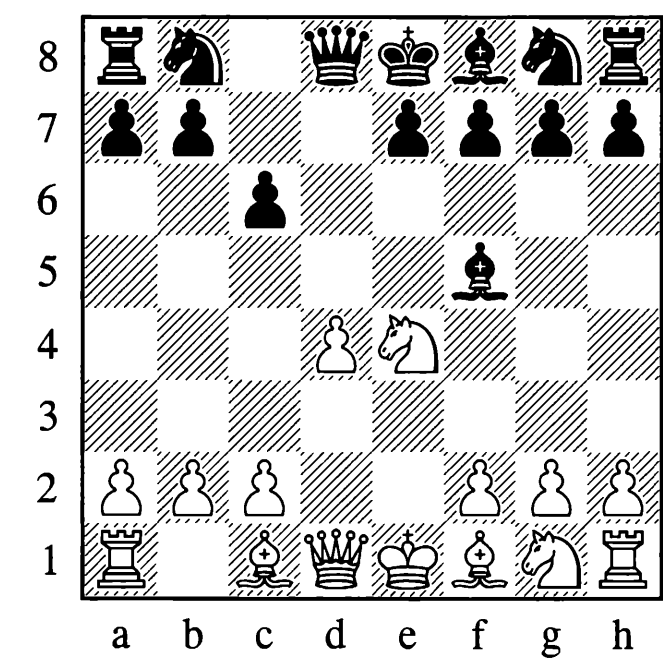


14...a5!N or 14...♘bd7



18...♚bc8

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 dxe4 4.♗xe4 ♕f5



The Classical Caro-Kann and, some will say, the *real* Caro-Kann. Black voluntarily gives up his centre with 3...dxe4 to later bring out his light-squared bishop. This is the key motif of the entire Caro-Kann and we will come across it a number of times throughout this book in all kinds of disguises. Here we can perhaps take a little timeout and ask ourselves if such an operation is worth undertaking. In many other openings the light-squared bishop is a real problem child for Black, most notably in the French Defence after 1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 where it will barely see the light of day for a long time.

So in the Caro-Kann Black tries to solve this issue right from the start. However the means chosen are not completely problem-free. Giving way in the centre gifts White a space advantage and easy piece-play, but practice has shown that this is nicely counterbalanced by the soundness of Black's position. He has no real weaknesses and room enough to manoeuvre with his remaining pieces. Later he may get in a break and be able to fight for the initiative as well.

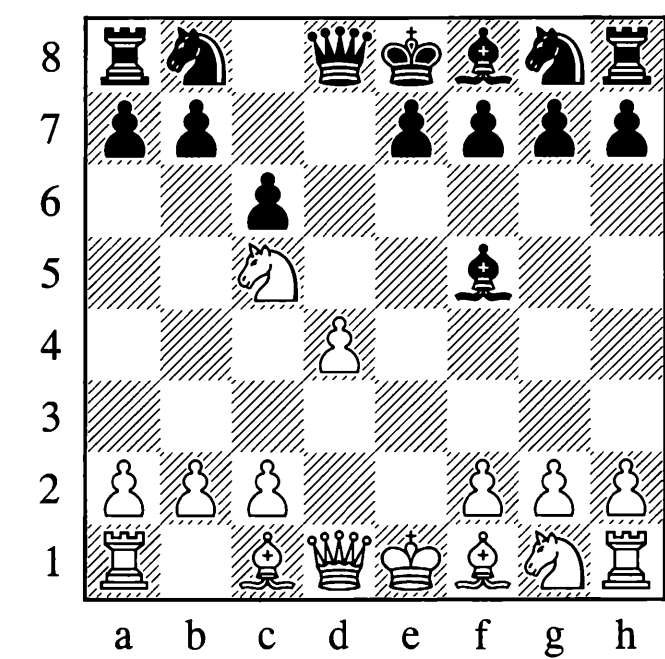
Another potential problem with quickly developing the bishop is that it might become a target. It can be harassed by the white pawns on the kingside. However, in this case experience is also on Black's side, as no clear

path to an advantage for White has yet been found. I hope to be able to prove that Black can also look to the future with confidence.

The rare 5.♘c5 line

After 4...♕f5 the almost automatic response is 5.♗g3 gaining time on the bishop. Unfortunately for White, 5.♕d3 is not possible because it drops the d-pawn. There is an alternative though, and that is the somewhat artificial-looking 5.♘c5, which we will begin our odyssey by examining.

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 dxe4 4.♗xe4 ♕f5 5.♘c5



5...e5!?

A radical attempt to benefit from White's extravagance and solve all Black's problems in one blow.

Solid is 5...b6 6.♗b3 e6 7.♗f3 ♗f6 but then 8.g3 followed by ♕g2 and short castling gives White a slight edge, although nothing dramatic.

6.♗xb7

Retreating with 6.♗b3 makes little sense. After 6...♗d7 Black is already somewhat better.

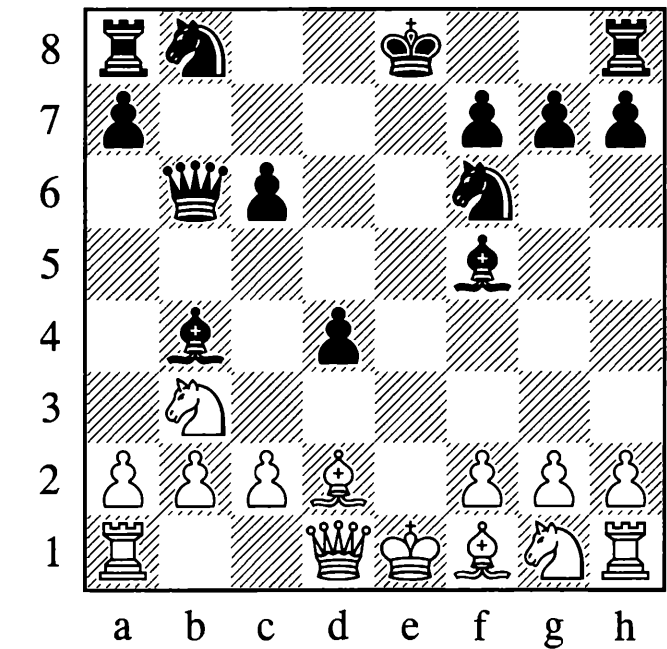
6...♖b6 7.♘c5 exd4

The most natural choice. The other way of regaining the pawn, 7...♙xc5 8.dxc5 ♖xc5, might in fact also be playable. On first sight the position after 9.c3 looks slightly better for White due to his bishop pair. Closer inspection reveals that it is maybe not so simple. Consider something like 9...♘f6 10.♙e3 ♗e7∞ as in Riemens – Hoogendoorn, Netherlands 1994. Black's bishop is very active and his knight can harass the white bishop from d5.

8.♘b3 ♙b4†

Basic chess knowledge: Black exchanges the dark-squared bishop before putting his pawns on dark squares.

9.♙d2 ♘f6



Black certainly has no development problems, and the far-advanced d-pawn can be protected by ...c6-c5, so it can hardly be called a weakness. Not surprisingly, White has had difficulties proving any advantage at all.

10.♙d3

Forcing simplifications. To be thorough, we should have a look at three alternatives:

10.♗e2† ♙e6 11.0-0-0 might be tempting for some, but after 11...♙xd2† 12.♗xd2 c5

13.♗g5 Black has the important tactical resource 13...0-0 14.♗xc5 ♘e4! 15.♗xb6 axb6 and White can't protect f2. Now after 16.♘xd4 Shaposhnikov – Yevseev, St Petersburg 2003, continued 16...♘xf2 17.♘xe6 fxe6 18.♙c4 ♘h1 19.♘h3 ♘a6 20.♙xe6† ♖h8 21.♙xh1 ♘c5 22.♙d5=. However, the zwischenzug 16...♙xa2!N would have been very strong, as f2 will not run away.

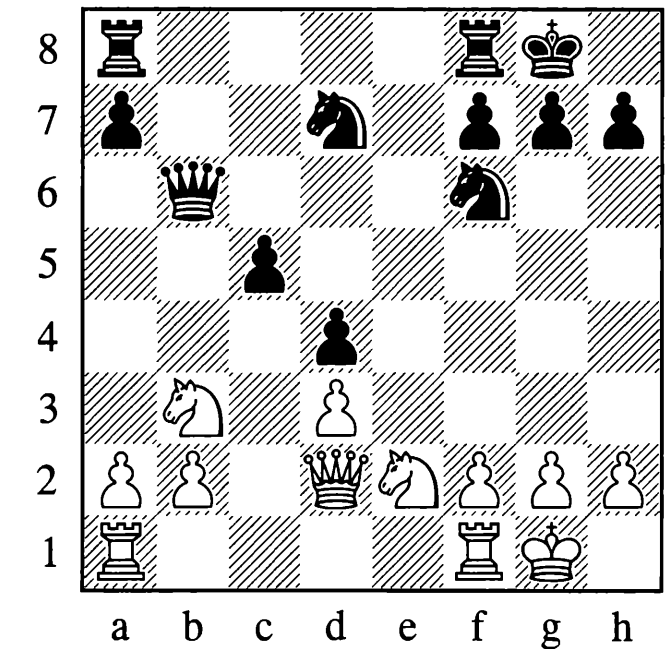
10.♙xb4 ♖xb4† 11.♗d2 ♗xd2† 12.♖xd2 ♘e4† 13.♖e1 c5 14.f3 ♘d6 15.♘xc5 0-0 This gives Black good compensation for the pawn. 16.♙d3 ♙c8 17.♘e4 (not 17.♙xf5 ♘xf5) 17...♙e8 Black wins the pawn back with equality. For example, 18.♖d2 ♙xe4 19.fxe4 ♘xe4† 20.♙xe4 ♙xe4 was agreed drawn in Nikolenko – Yevseev, Dagomys 2009.

10.♘f3 ♙xd2† 11.♗xd2 c5 This shows what White should avoid. 12.♙d3 ♙e6 13.c4 0-0 14.0-0 In Gouret – M. Lamprecht, Budapest 2000, the right path was 14...a5!N when Black has both the initiative and the better position.

10...♙xd3 11.cxd3 0-0 12.♘e2

Not a dream square, but otherwise ...♙e8† would be annoying.

12...c5 13.0-0 ♙xd2 14.♗xd2 ♘bd7



Black is fine. For some reason his score has been very poor from this position and this might have damaged the reputation of this line against 5.♟c5. Let's see the evidence.

15.♟a5

Black's far-advanced d-pawn has left two good squares for the white pieces on c4 and e4; with this move White obviously intends to use one of them. In fact, on the previous move, Black could also consider 14...a5!N, which would obviously cut out the option of 15.♟a5. Instead this could transpose to one of the 15...a5 options I mention below in reply to 15.♞ac1 and 15.♟g3.

In the stem game, many years ago, instead of 15.♟a5 White put pressure on the backward c-pawn. It would soon be revealed if that pawn was the weakest on the board after all.

15.♞ac1 ♞ab8

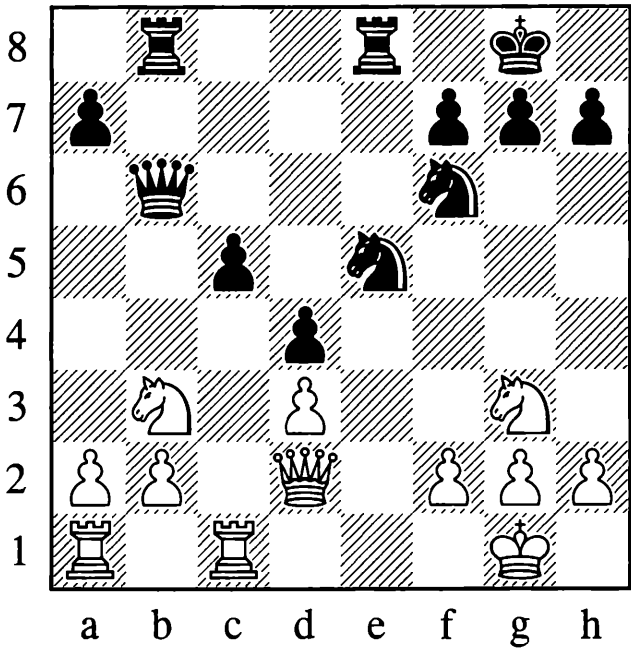
White has his own problems with b2. A fine alternative was 15...a5 16.♞c2 ♞fb8 with good play. For instance, 17.♟xc5 ♟xc5 18.♞xc5 ♞xc5 19.♞xc5 ♞xb2 20.♟xd4 ♞xa2 and the strong passed a-pawn gives Black winning chances.

16.♞c4 ♟g4! 17.♞d1 ♞fe8 18.♟g3 ♟ge5

This black knight is the most active. 19.♞c2 ♞a6 20.♞a5 ♞xa5 21.♟xa5 This is Arnason – Bonin, New York 1986. Black is more than fine after: 21...♞e6N 22.♟b3 g6 23.♟e4 fails to 23...♟xd3.

15.♟g3 as in Nurkiewicz – Kaliszewski, Warsaw 2004, should be met by 15...a5N with some initiative. 16.♞ae1 a4 17.♟c1 g6 20. The white knights are far from their ideal squares and the b2-pawn is rather weak.

15...♞fe8 16.♟g3 ♟e5 17.♞fc1 ♞ab8 18.♟b3



In Felgaer – Jobava, Tripoli 2004, Black had no problems; in fact it is Black for preference. In the game Jobava moved the wrong rook – not the first time in the history of chess that this phenomenon has occurred. He should have played:

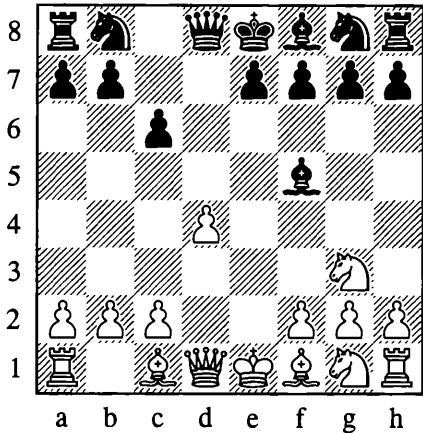
18...♞bc8

The issue with 18...♞ec8, as in the game, was that 18.♟f5 proved annoying. However, 18...♟d5! 19.♞xc5 ♟b4 looks an attractive alternative.

Conclusion

5...e5 is a very strong response to 5.♟c5. Towards the end of the main line the option of 14...a5!N is well worth considering.

This line is one of the rare cases in the Caro-Kann where Black often has a space advantage. The territory may be alien, but it is also pleasant, which may explain why 5.♟g3 is massively more popular, so we should move on...



Classical Variation

Early Deviations

Variation Index

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.Nc3 dxe4 4.Nxe4 Qf5 5.Ng3

5...Qg6

- A) 6.f4

B) 6.Nf3

C) 6.N1e2
- 14

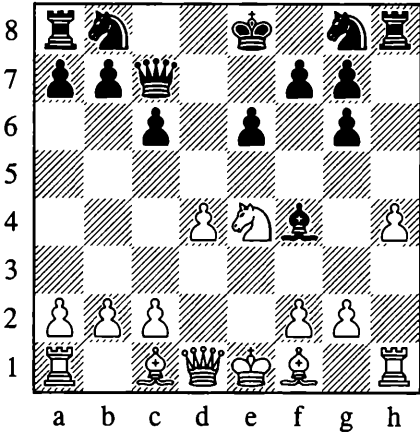
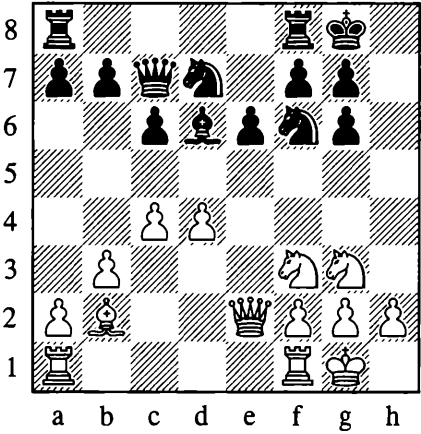
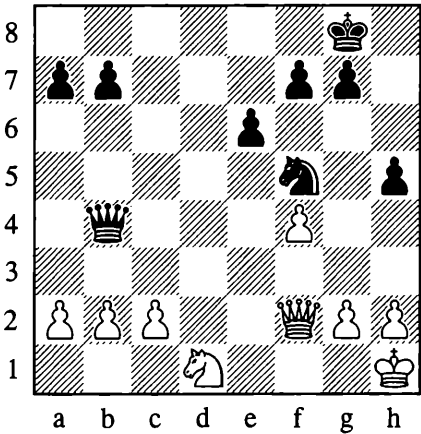
16

17

A) after 25...h5

B) after 13.Qe2

C) after 10...Qf4=



Instructive Capablanca

13...a5

No problems

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 dxe4 4.♘xe4 ♕f5 5.♘g3 ♗g6

The normal starting position of the Classical line. Black has managed to get his light-squared bishop out before the door is closed with ...e6. It is not a simple case of “Mission Accomplished” though. As mentioned before, the bishop is an obvious target on g6 for the white pawns and knights, a factor that determines the further course of the play. Following that line of thinking, the main move is of course 6.h4, which we will cover in great detail in the subsequent chapters. Here we will look at alternatives.

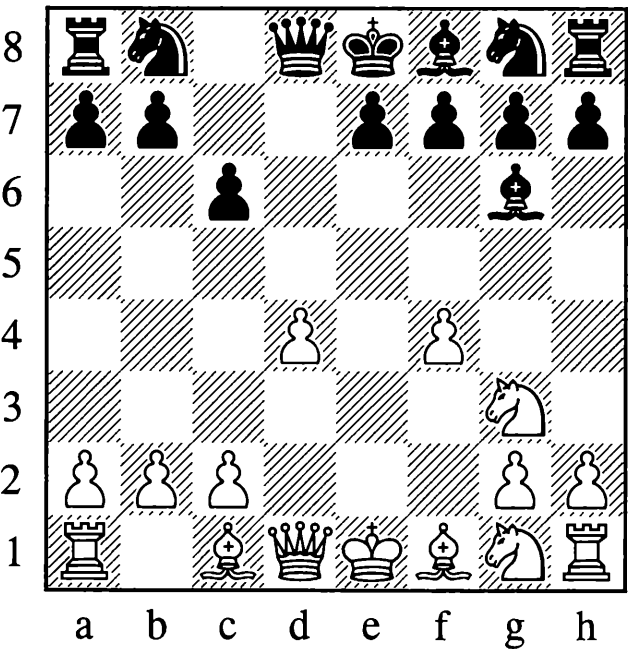
We will consider the quiet B) 6.♘f3 and also work our way through the different set-ups based on a knight manoeuvre to f4, either with or without a bishop on c4. In this chapter the focus is on C) 6.♘1e2; in the next chapter we will examine 6.♗c4.

But first the great Cuban master of positional chess, Capablanca, will demonstrate how the seemingly aggressive A) 6.f4 is most easily dismantled. See the illustrative game.

Marshall – Capablanca

New York 1927

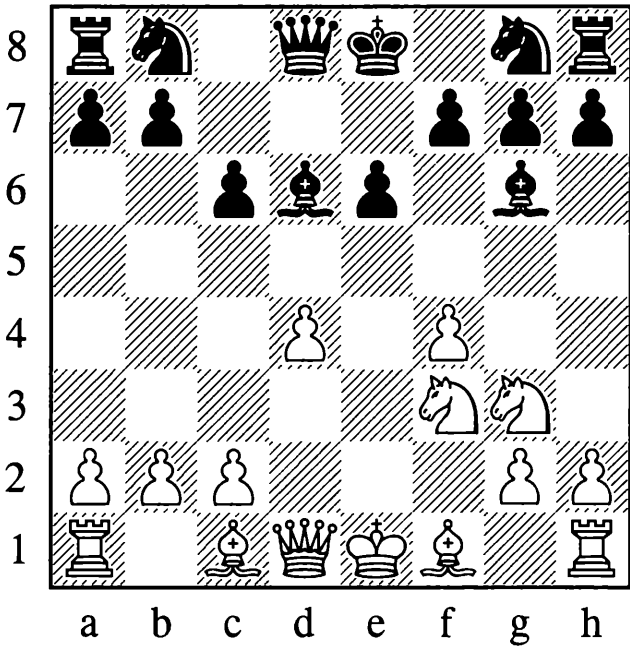
A) 6.f4



Creating the threat of f4-f5 and securing an outpost on e5 for a knight. Still, these aggressive intentions are overshadowed by the move’s obvious anti-positional character. The bishop on c1 is in danger of becoming bad and the light squares are weakened. Furthermore, the pawn on f4 could constitute a long-term weakening of the kingside – a feature that plays a vital part in the present game.

6...e6 7.♘f3 ♗d6

Now Black can always take the knight if it jumps to e5.



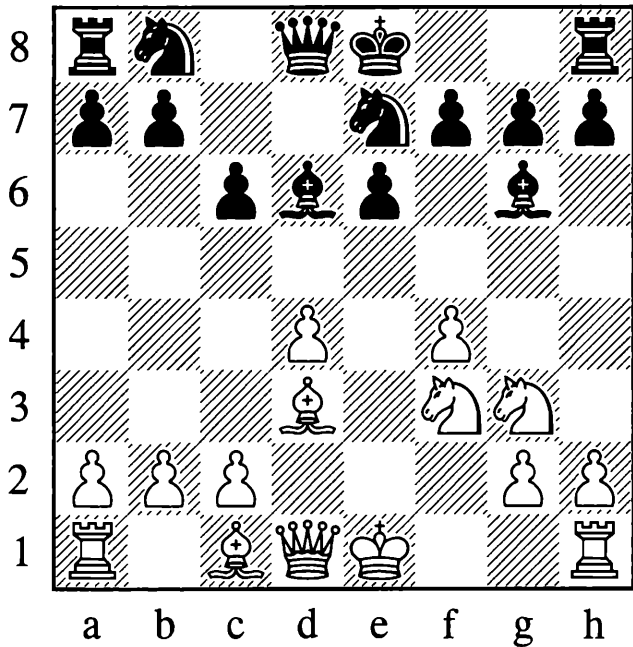
8.♗d3

Exchanging the light-squared bishops is the most straightforward approach. Keeping them on the board is often to Black’s advantage because his is the more active, as the following couple of examples show:

8.♗e2 ♘e7 9.♘e5 ♗xe5 10.fxe5 c5! 11.dxc5 ♔xd1† 12.♗xd1 ♘a6= 13.0–0 (13.♗e3 ♘b4 also regains the pawn) 13...♘xc5 14.♗f3 ♘c6 15.♗xc6† bxc6 16.b3 ♘d7 17.c4 a5 18.♗a3 ♘xe5 19.♗b2 f6 20.♗xe5 fxe5 21.♖ae1 ♖f8 22.♖xe5 ♖xf1† 23.♘xf1 ♔e7 24.♘d2 a4 And Black had some initiative in the ending though it was later drawn, J. Polgar – Khalifman, Las Vegas (2) 1999.

8.♔c4 ♖e7 9.0–0 ♜d7 is extremely solid for Black. 10.♞e5 ♞f6 11.c3 ♞c7 12.♞e2 0–0 13.♔e3 c5 The typical strike at the white centre. 14.dxc5 ♔xc5 15.♔xc5 ♞xc5† 16.♞h1 ♞ad8= Stoltz – Flohr, Bled 1931.

8...♞e7



A key move. From here the knight is very flexible and, as we saw in the Flohr game, maybe it will be the other knight that ends up on f6.

9.0–0 ♜d7 10.♞h1 ♞c7

Capa shows a great feeling for the Caro's subtleties. He refrains from castling for a few moves, first bringing the last pieces into play.

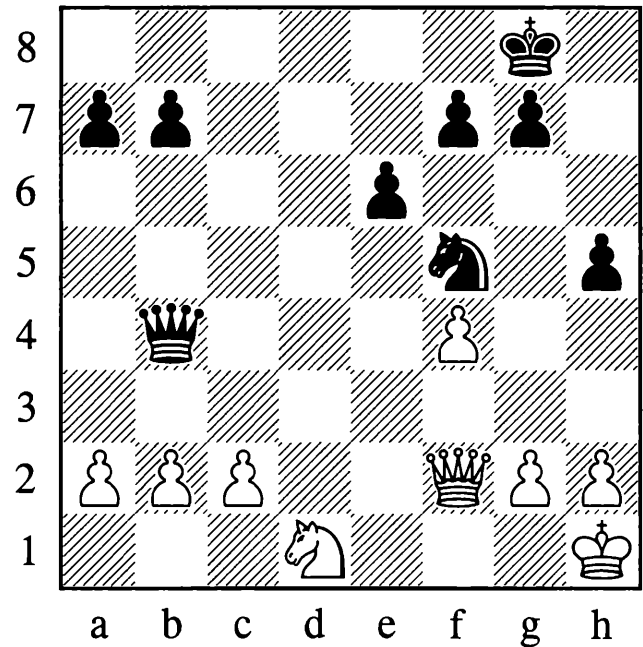
11.♞e5 ♞d8 12.♞e2 ♔xd3 13.♞xd3 0–0

Black has successfully solved all his opening problems and in the next phase he goes for more. The tool he uses is the break with ...c6-c5, opening the position so the effect of White's weakening move f2-f4 will be more strongly felt.

14.♔d2 c5 15.♞e4 ♞f5 16.dxc5 ♞xc5 17.♞dxc5 ♔xc5 18.♔c3 ♔d4

On c3 White's bishop could hardly be called bad anymore, so Black hurries to exchange it.

19.♞ad1 ♔xc3 20.♞xc3 ♞xd1 21.♞xd1 ♞d8 22.♞c3 ♞b6 23.♞d1 ♞xd1† 24.♞xd1 ♞b4 25.♞f2 h5



Very instructive. The simplifications have actually increased Black's advantage. White is tied to the defence of his weak spots while Black can use his activity and freedom to create new threats. Soon he will win material.

26.a3 ♞d6 27.♞c3 ♞d4 28.♞xd4

Giving up a pawn, but 28.♞g1 ♞e3 was no better.

28...♞xd4 29.♞e4 ♞xc2 30.♞d6 ♞e3 31.a4

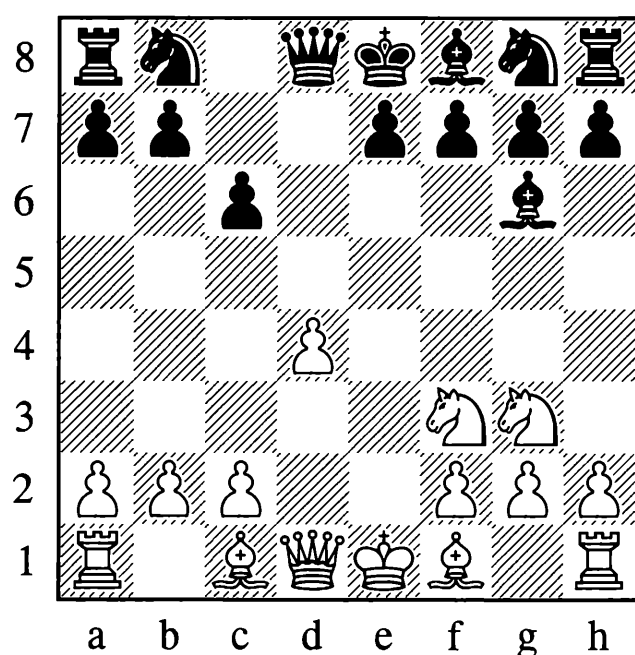
Or 31.♞xb7 ♞c4.

31...♞d5 32.♞xb7 ♞xf4 33.b4 ♞d5 34.b5 ♞c3 35.♞a5 ♞xa4 36.♞c6 ♞f8 37.♞xa7 ♞e7 38.♞c6† ♞d6 39.♞g1 f6 40.♞f2 e5

After some meticulous preparation Black is ready to play ...♞c5 and win the b-pawn. It is over.

41.♞d8 ♞d7 42.♞b7 ♞c7 43.♞a5 ♞c3 44.♞f3 ♞xb5 45.♞e4 ♞d6† 46.♞d5 ♞d7 47.♞c6 ♞c8 48.♞b8† ♞e7 49.♞c6† ♞f7 50.♞d8† ♞e8 0–1

B) 6. ♖f3



This is not very ambitious, but it is a sound developing move and cannot be bad.

6... ♗d7

Preventing ♗e5.

7. ♕d3

Continuing the ultra-solid strategy. Keeping the bishops on is double-edged, but of course also gives more options.

7. ♕e2 e6 8. 0-0 ♗gf6 9. c4 ♕d6 10. b3 0-0 11. ♕b2 ♖c7 Black has managed to develop harmoniously despite his lack of space. 12. ♗h4 ♗ad8 13. ♗xg6 hxg6 14. ♖c2 c5 (the text is simplest, but also interesting is 14... ♕f4!?N 15. ♗ad1 e5) 15. dxc5 ♕xc5= 16. ♗ad1 ♗e5 17. ♗e4 ♗xe4 18. ♖xe4 ♗c6 19. ♕f3 ♖b6 With good play on the dark squares, Fogarasi – Groszpeter, Zalakaros 1999.

7. ♕c4 e6 8. 0-0 ♗gf6 9. ♖e1 ♕e7 10. ♗h4 This is a favourite of the Swiss grandmaster Joe Gallagher. Anyone acquainted with Joe knows that he stopped working on his chess years ago, so this should be seen as an easy way out of theory and not as a serious threat to the whole Caro-Kann concept. 10... ♖c7 11. c3 ♗d5 12. ♗xg6 hxg6 13. ♖f3 White's basic set-up; he

has the bishop pair which is a long-term asset. 13... ♗f6 14. ♕b3 This is Gallagher – Vuckovic, Budva 2009. I think Black should seek his own chances with 14... 0-0-0N. For example, 15. a4 ♕d6 16. a5 a6 17. h3 ♕f4= 18. ♕xd5 ♗xd5 19. ♕xf4 ♖xf4 and the simplifications have solved all Black's problems.

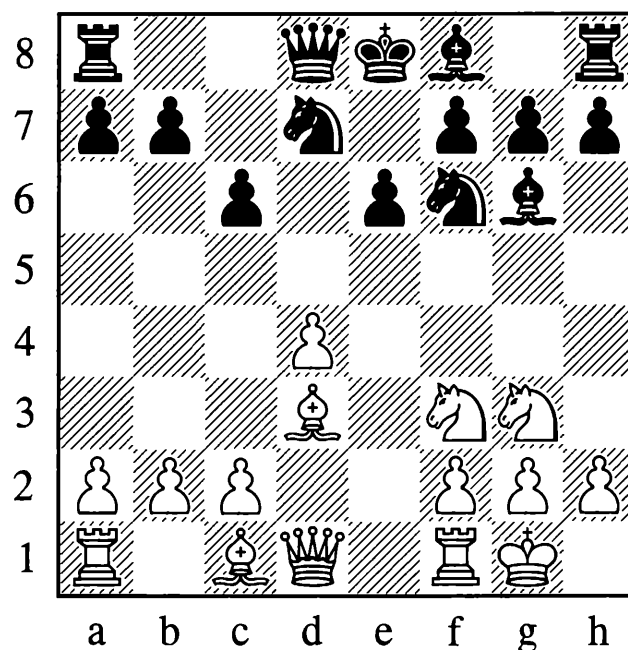
7... e6

There is no reason to take on d3 at once.

8. 0-0

White seems to think in similar terms – there is no reason to take on g6. If he did, maybe Black could make use of the open h-file.

8... ♗gf6



9. b3

Again White chooses the quiet solution; he will fianchetto his bishop and just complete development. The alternative was to play in the centre. Let's see a couple of attempts:

9. ♖e1 ♕d6

Of course it was possible just to go to e7, but Black is not afraid of giving up the bishop pair.

A good fighting recipe is 9... ♖c7 10. c4 0-0-0!? however I think White might have the upper hand after 11. ♕g5.

10.♖f5 ♕xf5 11.♕xf5 0–0 12.♕d3

White gained the bishops, but wasted time.

12...♖c7 13.c3 c5 14.h3 cxd4 15.♖xd4

This is Rabiega – Dautov, Internet 2003, and now just:

15...a6N 16.♖e2 ♖ad8 17.♕c2 h6=

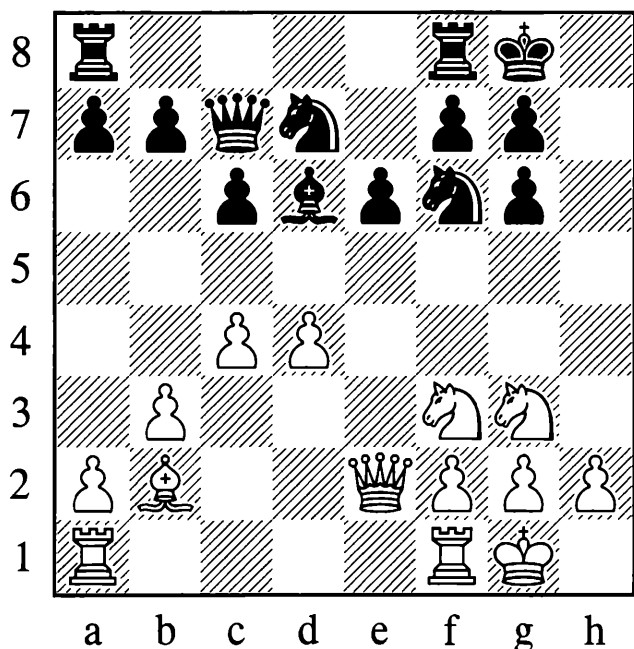
9.c4 ♕d6 10.b3 will most likely transpose to the mainline. Most likely. Not always. The following is an original course of play: 10...0–0 11.♕xg6 hxg6 12.♖d3 ♖e8 13.♖e1 ♕xg3!? Black also feels inspired. 14.fxg3 ♖a5 15.♕f4 c5 16.a3 ♖ed8 17.d5 exd5 18.cxd5 ♖ac8 19.d6 b5∞ In Fernandes – T. Carlsen, corr. 2005, the d6-pawn looked like a mighty force, but in fact it was Black's initiative on the queenside that eventually decided the game.

9...♕d6

The most active square for the bishop.

Just as common and probably just as good is the more restrained 9...♕e7. Here is an example from the chess elite: 10.♕b2 ♖a5 11.c4 0–0 12.♕xg6 hxg6 13.♖c2 ♕a3 14.♖fd1 (or 14.♕c3 ♕b4) 14...♕xb2 15.♖xb2 ♖fe8 16.♖d2 ♖xd2 17.♖xd2 e5 18.dxe5 ♖xe5 19.♖xe5 ♖xe5= Anand – Topalov, Bilbao 2008.

10.♕b2 ♖c7 11.c4 0–0 12.♕xg6 hxg6 13.♖e2



13...a5

A typical way of creating counterplay in these structures without risking anything.

Solid is 13...♖fe8 and the equilibrium is maintained. 14.♖e4 (14.♖e5 c5 or 14.♖ad1 e5 are both nothing) 14...♖xe4 15.♖xe4 ♕e7!? 16.♖ad1 ♖ad8 17.♖fe1 ♖a5 18.a3 ♖f5 In Spassky – Karpov, Leningrad 1974, Black had activated his queen and solved all his problems.

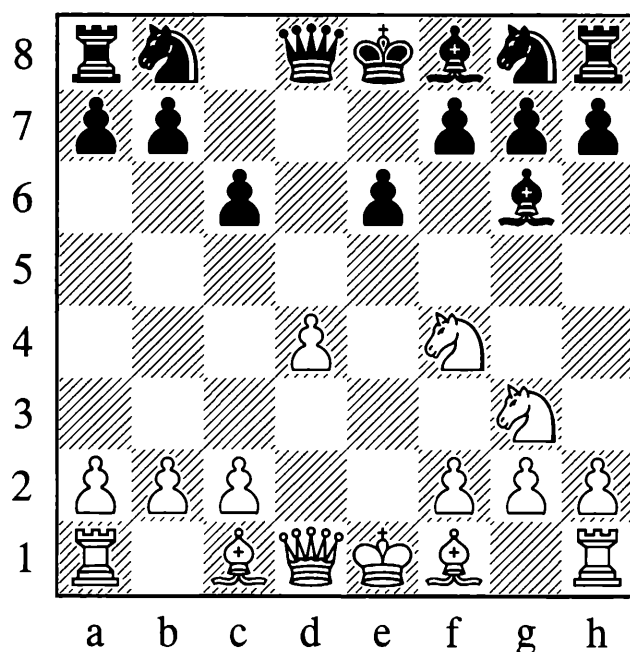
14.♖e4 ♖xe4 15.♖xe4 ♖fe8 16.♖ad1 a4

Black has some initiative on the queenside and no problems, Senff – Schandorff, Germany 2006.

C) 6.♖1e2

Sometimes the knight takes another route, 6.♖h3 e6, but then there is nothing better than 7.♖f4 transposing to the mainline.

6...e6 7.♖f4

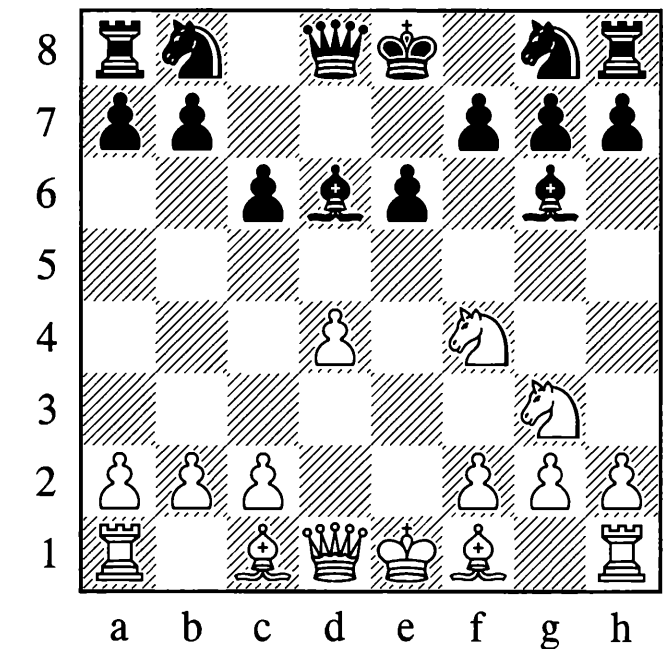


An excellent post for the knight. It can take the bishop on g6 whenever it is appropriate and also flirt with the idea of pushing the h-pawn. The latter is actually a serious threat which has to be attended to.

7...♕d6

This is the standard way to do it. Now 8.h4 can be answered by ...♖c7 hitting the knight.

Interesting is the more experimental 7...♗h4!? which must be described as a radical way of preventing the pawn thrust. It has been played by some very strong players and could be a good surprise weapon. Here is an example: 8.♙e3 ♘f6 9.♗d2 ♙e7 10.♘xg6 hxg6 11.♙g5 ♘e4! 12.♘xe4 ♗xe4† 13.♙e3 ♙g5 14.0–0–0 ♙xe3 15.fxex3 ♘d7 16.♙d3 ♗d5 17.♚b1 0–0–0 18.h3 ♘f6= Azarov – Akopian, Budva 2009.



8.h4

Delaying this plan would not make much sense. A quiet move like 8.c3 just gives Black the extra option of 8...♘f6 9.h4 ♙xf4!? 10.♙xf4 h6 and he keeps his strong bishop.

Of course White could play 8.♘xg6 hxg6 9.♘e4, but he has spent a lot of time which Black can exploit with 9...♘f6, not being afraid of fighting bishops with knights. After 10.♘xd6† (chickening out with 10.♘xf6† can be answered by 10...gxg6!? followed by ...♘d7, ...♗c7 and castling long with good play) 10...♗xd6 11.h3 ♘bd7 Black is far ahead in development and seizes the initiative. 12.c3 0–0–0 13.♙e3 ♘d5 14.♗f3 ♘xe3 15.♗xe3 ♗d5 16.♙e2 e5 17.dxe5 ♗xe5 18.♗xe5

♘xe5 19.♗d1 g5 20.0–0 ♚c7 With a pleasant ending, Fogarasi – Zelcic, Austria 2005.

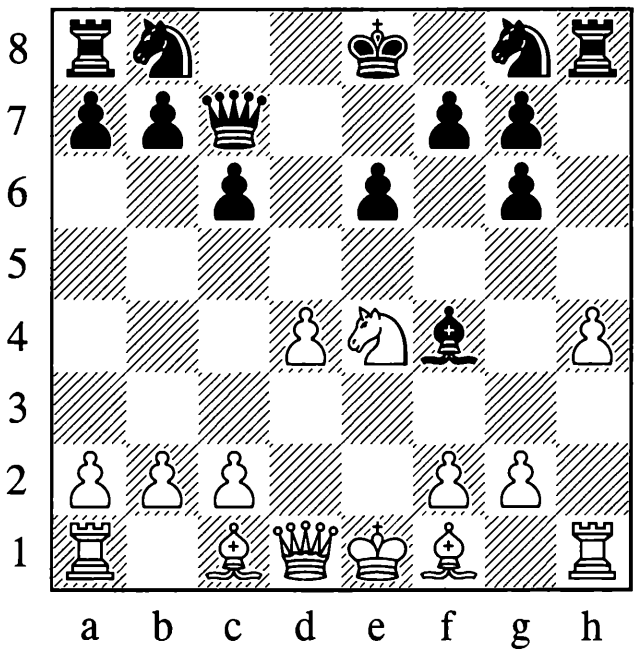
8.♙c4 transposes to the next chapter.

8...♗c7 9.♘xg6

On 9.h5 Black has 9...♙xc2 and if 10.♗g4 ♘e7 11.♗xg7 ♗g8 12.♗h6 ♗g4! and White's offensive is repelled. 13.♘fe2 ♘a6 14.a3 0–0–0 gives a mighty, and likely decisive, initiative.

9...hxg6 10.♘e4 ♙f4=

Exchanging the dark-squared bishops and solving all the problems.



11.g3

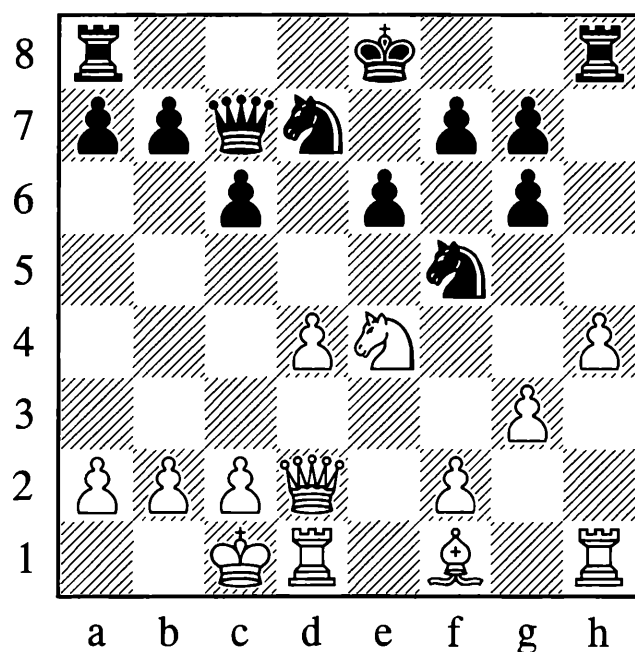
Harmless is 11.♙xf4 ♗xf4 12.♗d3 ♘f6 13.♘g5 ♘bd7 14.g3 ♗f5 15.♙e2 (not 15.♗b3 ♘e4!) 15...♗xd3 16.♙xd3 ♘b6 17.0–0–0 ♚e7= Campora – Magem Badals, Seville 1999.

Or 11.♗f3 ♙xc1 12.♗xc1 ♘d7 and now the tempting 13.♗a3 ♘e7 14.♘d6† backfires after 14...♚f8 15.♙e2 ♘f6 16.♘c4 ♚g8.

11...♙xc1 12.♗xc1 ♘e7

The most flexible. Also fine is ...♘d7 followed by ...♘g6.

13.♗d2 ♘f5 14.0–0–0 ♘d7



The German Caro-Kann expert Khenkin has had this position several times and demonstrated that Black has good prospects.

15. ♖g2

Another Khenkin example: 15. ♖e2 0–0–0 16. ♖he1 ♘f6 17. ♗xf6 gxf6 B. Socko – Khenkin, Koszalin 1997.

And another: 15. ♗b4 ♗b6 16. a3 ♘f6 17. ♖g2 0–0–0 18. ♗xb6 axb6 19. ♘g5 ♖d7 Gradalski – Khenkin, Lubniewice 1998. In all cases Black is fine.

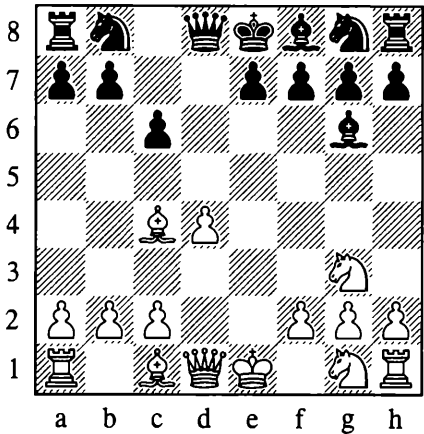
15...0–0–0 16. ♗b4 ♘f6 17. ♖d3 ♗b6 18. ♗xb6 axb6 19. ♖hd1 ♖d7 20. c3 ♔c7

With a balanced ending, Lanzani – Khenkin, San Marino 1998.

Conclusion

Quiet lines are no problem. Often you will face something like 6. ♘f3 in practice. Then just play. That a position is equal is not the same as there being no hope of winning it – dead level does not mean dead. After all, we play the Caro-Kann because we believe we can outplay our opponents.

Chapter 3



Classical Variation

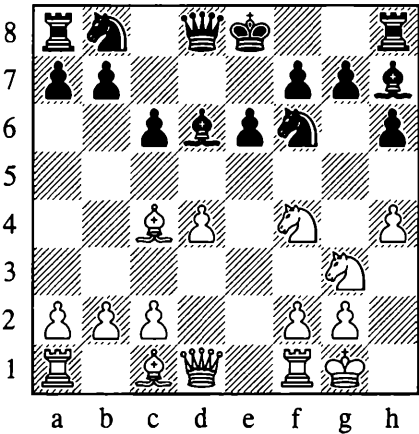
6.♘c4

Variation Index

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 dxe4 4.♘xe4 ♙f5 5.♘g3 ♙g6 6.♙c4
6...e6 7.♘1e2 ♘f6

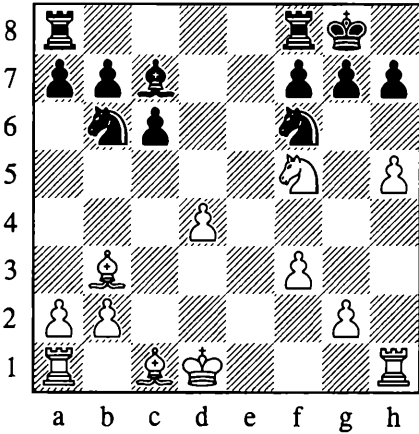
A) 8.0-0	22
B) 8.h4	23
C) 8.♘f4 ♙d6	26
C1) 9.h4	27
C2) 9.c3	28
C3) 9.♙b3	29

Tal – Botvinnik



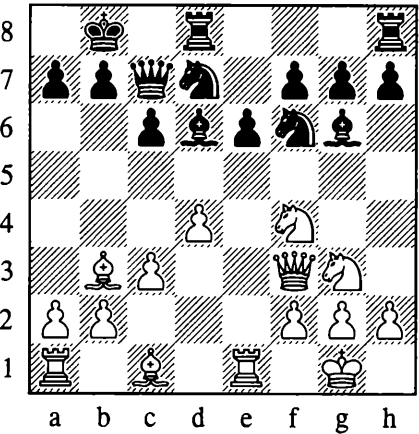
11.♘xe6!?

C1) after 16.♙b3



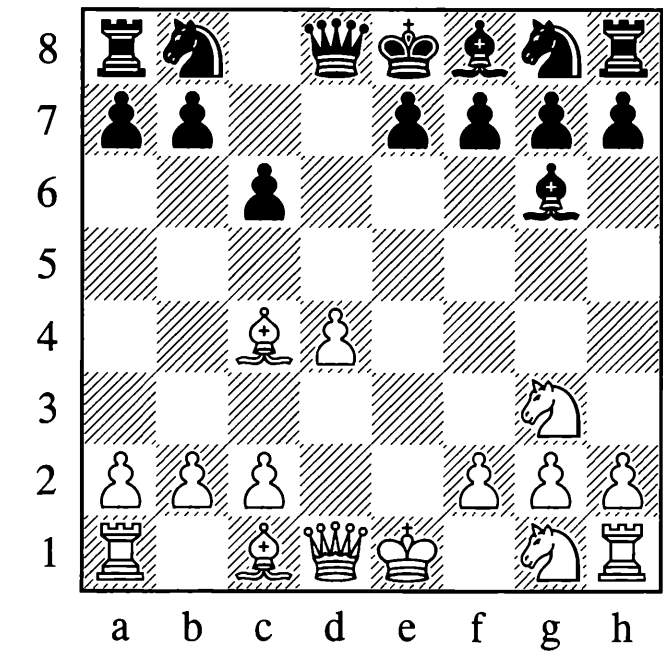
16...♙ae8N

C3) after 13.♙e1



13...e5!?

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 dxe4 4.♘xe4 ♕f5
5.♘g3 ♕g6 6.♖c4

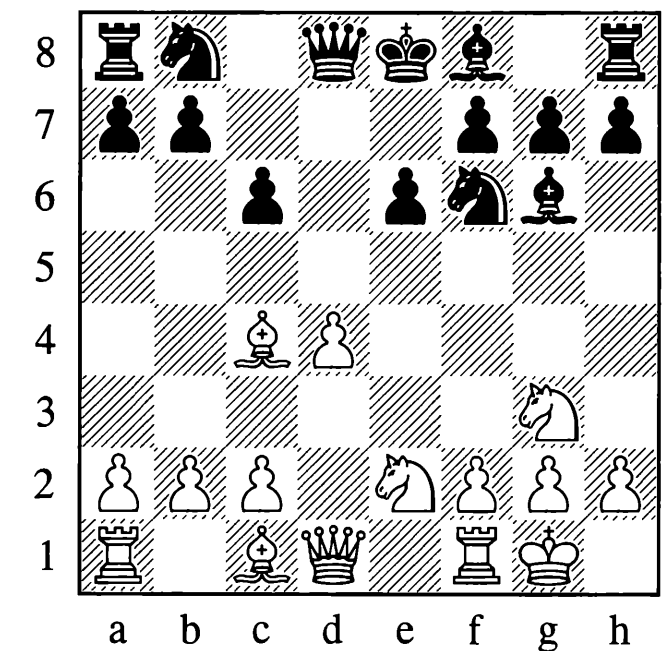


First developing the bishop to c4 before playing the g1-knight to f4 is clearly the more poisonous move order.

6...e6 7.♘1e2 ♘f6

Here White chooses between some very different plans: A) 8.0-0, B) 8.h4 and C) 8.♘f4.

A) 8.0-0



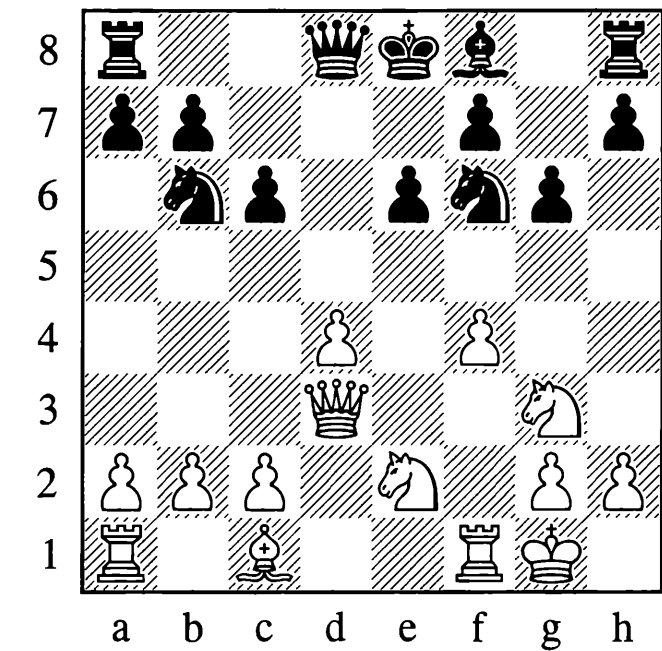
Apparently White is just moving his king to safety, but there is a hidden idea that Black should be aware of – White is ready to launch the f-pawn with f2-f4-f5,

creating a strong initiative. Fortunately a subtle defence has been worked out in great detail.

8...♘bd7 9.f4 ♘b6 10.♖d3

This move may look anti-positional, however after 10.♖b3 Black simply prevents the f4-f5 break with 10...♔d7 and the bishop is actually out of play on b3. So it is better just to exchange it.

10...♖xd3 11.♔xd3 g6



Preventing f4-f5. Also, by consistently putting his pawns on light squares Black renders White's remaining bishop rather bad. So the positional battle looks good for Black. The question is if White can take the initiative before he is squeezed.

12.b3

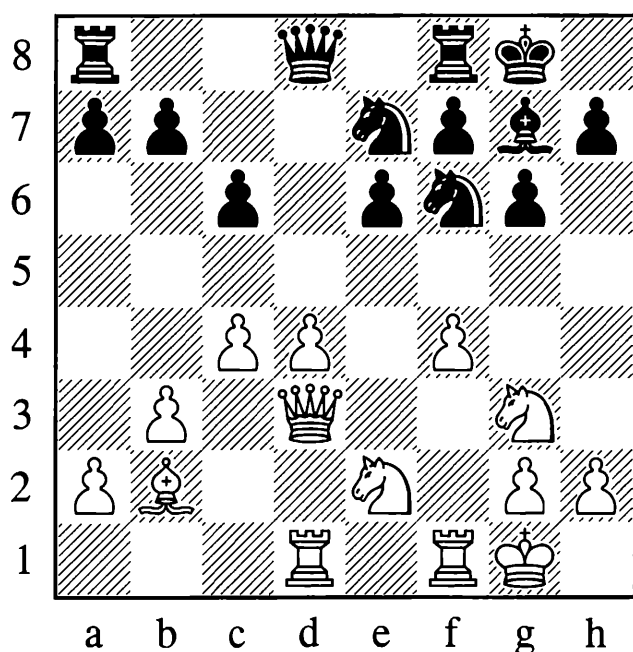
The uncompromising 12.f5!? gxf5 13.♘xf5 exf5 14.♔xf5 solves the problem of the bad bishop, but a piece is a lot to invest. Huerga Leache – Gomez Esteban, Elgoibar 2007, continued 14...♖e7 15.♖g5 ♘bd5 16.♘c3 ♖g8 17.♖ae1 ♖g6. White's pressure is coming to an end. Best is probably 18.♘xd5 ♔xd5 19.♖xe7† ♔xe7 20.♖xf6† ♔f8 with a pawn for the exchange, but of course Black is better and has good winning chances.

12...♘bd5

If 12...♙g7 then 13.f5! now works and after 13...gxf5 14.♘xf5 exf5 15.♘g3! the next knight will appear on f5 with a strong attack. Realizing this, in Rodriguez Vila – Leita, Villa Martelli 2005, Black tried 13...0–0 14.fxe6 fxe6 and after 15.♙a3 ♖e8 16.♗ad1 e5 17.dxe5 ♗xd3 18.♗xd3 ♘g4 he had surprisingly solved all his problems. Instead the simple 15.♙b2± gives White a positional plus. The conclusion? Avoid 12...♙g7.

13.c4 ♘e7 14.♙b2

Or 14.♙a3 ♘f5 15.♙xf8 ♖xf8 16.♘xf5 exf5 17.♘c3 ♖g7 was equal in Rodriguez Vila – Valerga, Vicente Lopez 2004.

14...♙g7 15.♗ad1 0–0

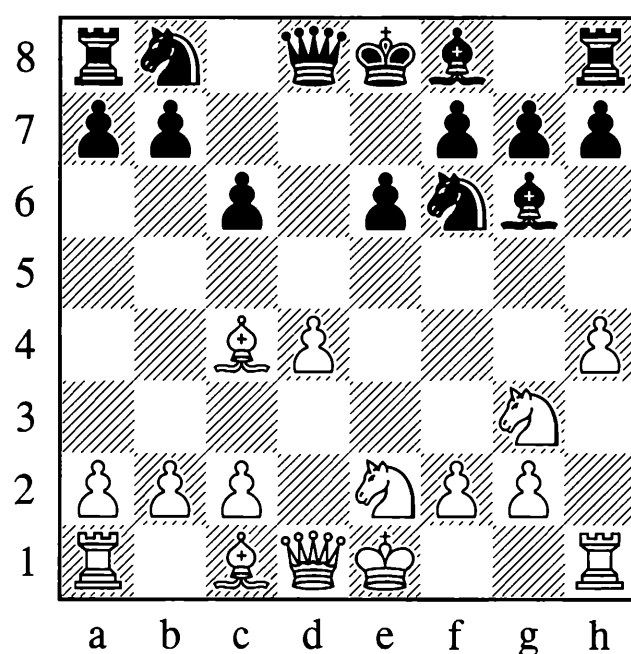
Black has comfortably equalized. White's extra space is not especially useful because he lacks any breaks and, as so often in the Caro-Kann, Black's position is sound and solid. In contrast to his opponent, Black has a concrete plan: put pressure on d4 and force White onto the defensive. This is exactly what happened in the two games I will quote from this position, and Black won them both!

16.♘c3

Or 16.♘e4 ♘xe4 17.♗xe4 ♗a5 18.♗c2 ♗fd8 19.♗d3 ♗d7 20.♙c3 ♗c7 21.♗fd1 ♗ad8 22.♖h1 ♘f5 23.♗b2 h5± Westerinen – K. Rasmussen, Malaga 2003.

16...♗a5 17.a3 ♗ad8 18.b4 ♗c7 19.♗f3 ♗d7 20.♗d2 ♗fd8 21.♗fd1 ♘c8 22.♘ce4 ♘xe4 23.♘xe4 ♘d6 24.♘xd6 ♗xd6±

This is Garcia Fernandez – Magem Badals, Pamplona 2003. Black can try to open the position in various ways, while all White's pieces are busy defending d4.

B) 8.h4

The problem with this move order, compared to first having the knight on f4 and only then pushing the pawn, is of course that Black now has time to safeguard his bishop.

8...h6 9.♘f4 ♙h7

The benefit, seen from White's perspective, is that his pieces look threatening. Sacrifices on e6 are in the air and he can also toy with the idea of playing a knight to h5 and thus attacking g7.

10.c3

Protecting d4 and preparing stuff like ♗e2, with tactical tricks. There are some alternatives.

10.0-0 ♖d6 11.♞e1

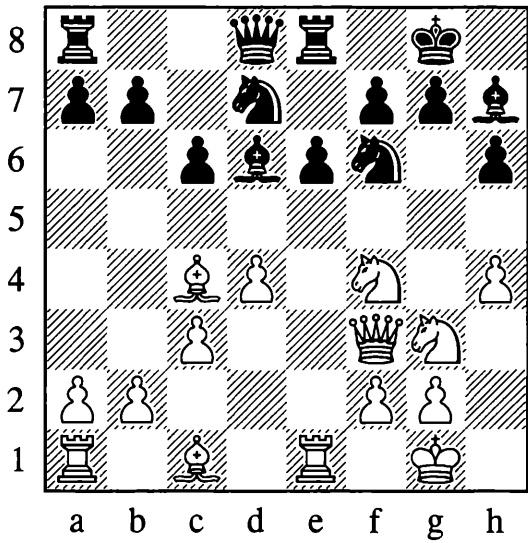
The normal move.

11.♜gh5 0-0 is nothing, so instead Tal tried to shock his opponent – and the rest of the chess world – when he opted for the highly speculative piece sacrifice 11.♜xe6 fxe6 12.♙xe6 in a world championship match against Botvinnik. It looks unpleasant for Black, but cool defence by the Patriarch parried the attack (see the illustrative game for the rest).

11...0-0 12.c3

Or 12.♜gh5 ♞e8.

12...♞e8 13.♞f3 ♜bd7



Black is fully developed and has a good position; it is not clear what the white pawn is doing on h4. Also Black can toy with the possibility of opening up the position with the break ...e6-e5, which is already a promising idea.

10.♞e2

White can try to do without the move c2-c3, as taking on d4 looks too hazardous.

10...♙d6 11.♙e3 ♜bd7 12.♜gh5 ♜xh5 13.♜xh5

This was played in another of the games from the famous Tal – Botvinnik match. If Black just castles White will get a strong attack, but again Botvinnik defended carefully and neutralized the pressure.

13...♞g8! 14.g4

Tal never slowed down, but perhaps 14.0-0-0 ♞c7 15.g3 0-0-0= was a more sensible move order.

14...♞c7 15.g5 ♙g6 16.0-0-0 0-0-0 17.♜g3 hxg5 18.♙xg5 ♙f4† 19.♙xf4 ♞xf4† 20.♞e3 ♞h6!

Refusing to repair White's pawn structure. 21.♙d3 ♙xd3 22.♞xd3 ♜b6 23.♞xh6 gxh6 24.♞f3 f5 25.♞e1 ♙d6 26.c3 ♞g4

Black had the initiative in the ending, Tal – Botvinnik, Moscow (5) 1960.

10...♙d6 11.♜fh5

With a cunning idea. Quiet play would not threaten Black who will just complete his development.

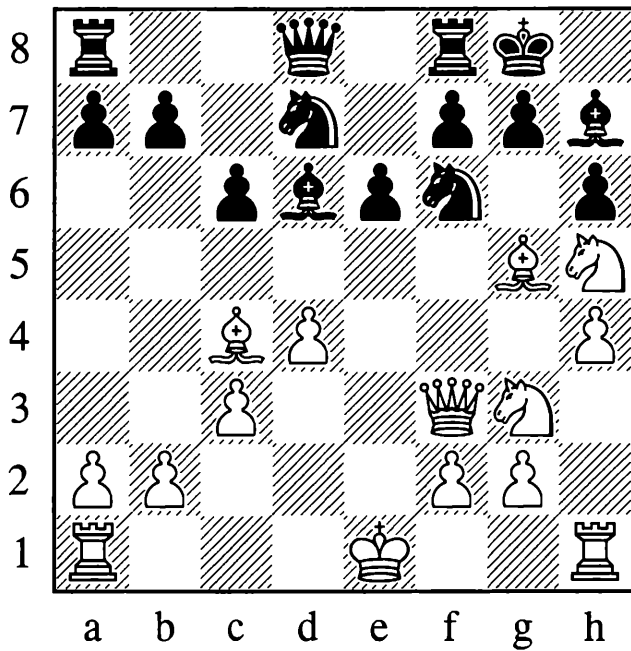
11...0-0

Sufficient. The impact of the great Botvinnik game is seen in the fact that the move 11...♞g8 is frequently played.

12.♙g5

Very sharp. Taking on g5 and opening the h-file is something only a machine would consider. Fortunately we can just develop naturally and defend at the same time.

12...♜bd7 13.♞f3



13...♙e7

Solid and good. If White takes on f6 the simplifications will diminish, or rather completely remove, all the pressure on the black kingside. In the only game so far with 13...♙e7 White tried to keep the pieces on the board.

14.♙e3

This is S. Andriasian – Bulmaga, Chisinau 2005, and now I like:

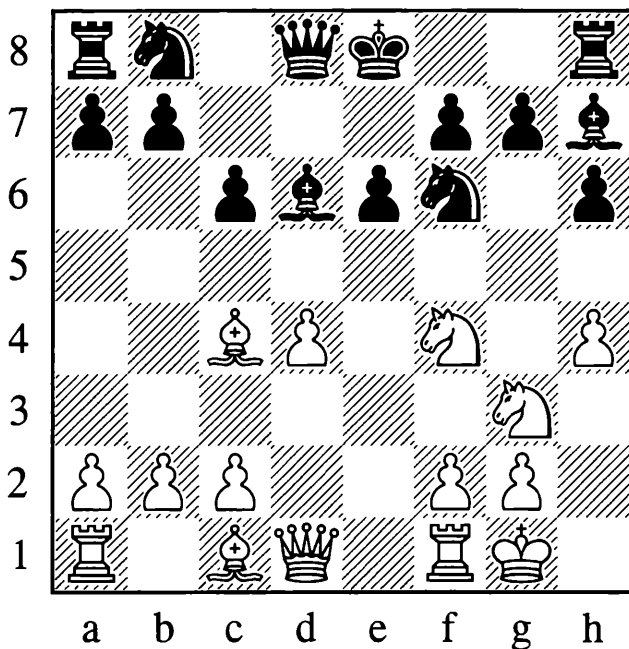
14...a5!N 15.a4 ♖b6 16.♙b3 ♖bd5

White's initiative peters out and she could end up having structural problems with weak pawns on both sides of the board.

Tal – Botvinnik

World Championship, Moscow (9) 1960

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.♖c3 dxe4 4.♖xe4 ♙f5
5.♖g3 ♙g6 6.♖1e2 ♖f6 7.h4 h6 8.♖f4 ♙h7
9.♙c4 e6 10.0–0 ♙d6



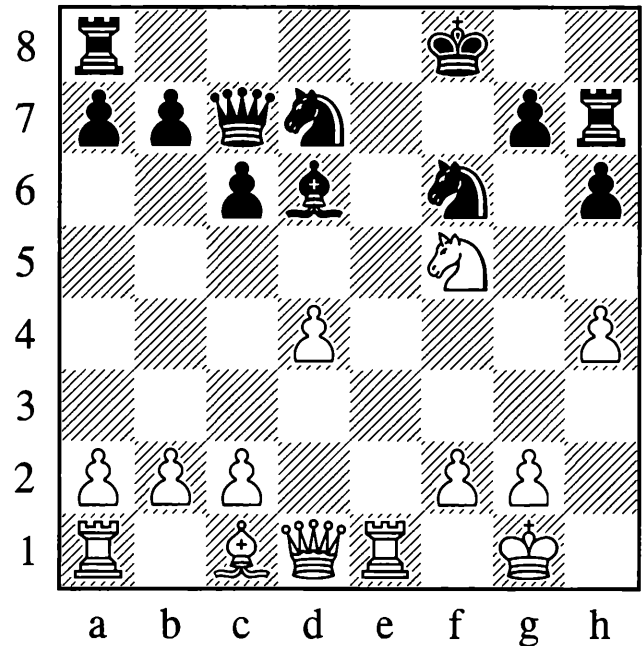
11.♖xe6!? fxe6 12.♙xe6

A very seductive sacrifice. White has two pawns for the knight and the black king is trapped in the centre. Botvinnik had anticipated that the wild attacker and tactician Tal would try something like this and had worked out a defence.

12...♙c7 13.♙e1 ♖bd7

Cool. Black is not afraid of ghosts. White can give a discovered check, but it won't do much harm.

14.♙g8† ♖f8 15.♙xh7 ♙xh7 16.♖f5



16...g6!

16...♙e8 was also possible, but that would be much more complicated. With 16...g6 Black rightly gives up a third pawn to simplify the position and get the h7-rook into the game.

17.♙xh6† ♖g8 18.♖xd6 ♙xd6 19.♙g5 ♙e7 20.♙d3 ♖g7

White's initiative has definitely come to a halt and Black is comfortable. The piece is somewhat stronger than the three pawns because they can hardly move without making new weaknesses.

21.♙g3?!

There was no easy solution, but this is a positional concession. In the endgame White's pawns are damaged goods.

21...♙xe1† 22.♙xe1 ♙xg3 23.fxg3 ♙f8 24.c4 ♖g4

White's pawns are under control and the white king cannot become active. Black is much better.

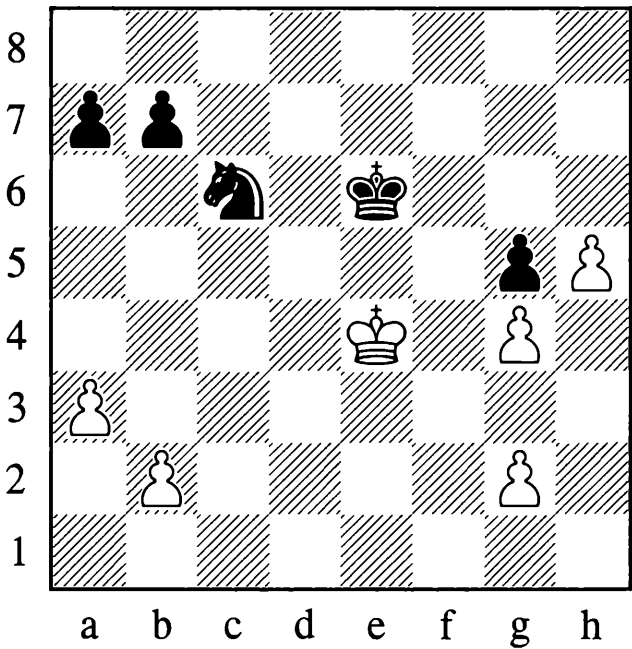
25.d5 cxd5 26.cxd5 ♖df6 27.d6 ♜f7 28.♜c1
♜d7 29.♜c7 ♕f7

The d6-pawn will fall.

30.♙xf6 ♖xf6 31.♕f2 ♕e6 32.♜xd7 ♕xd7
33.♕f3

By exchanging all his remaining pieces, White can at last activate his king. Unfortunately his position is technically lost.

33...♕xd6 34.♕f4 ♕e6 35.g4 ♖d5† 36.♕e4
♖f6† 37.♕f4 ♖d5† 38.♕e4 ♖b4 39.a3 ♖c6
40.h5 g5



It is important that Black keeps a pawn on the kingside. Now it is an easy win.

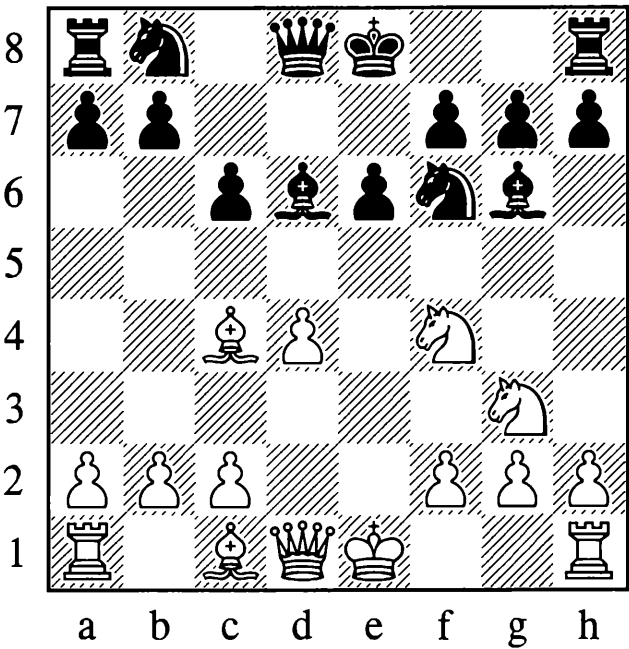
41.h6 ♕f6 42.♕d5 ♕g6 43.♕e6 ♖a5 44.a4
♖b3 45.♕d6 a5 46.♕d5 ♕xh6 47.♕c4 ♖c1
48.♕b5 ♖d3 49.b3 ♖c1 50.♕xa5 ♖xb3†
51.♕b4 ♖c1 52.♕c3 ♕g6 53.♕c2 ♖e2
54.♕d3 ♖c1† 55.♕c2 ♖e2 56.♕d3 ♖f4†
57.♕c4 ♕f6 58.g3 ♖e2
0-1

C) 8.♖f4

The big mainline. Now White can always take the bishop pair if he likes.

8...♙d6

White has a choice.



He can try the thematic C1) 9.h4 or play more intelligently and flexibly with C2) 9.c3 or C3) 9.♙b3. Other moves do not bring much, but of course we should consider what to do if White simply castles. So before we get to the mainlines, here is an example from the famous return match between Tal and Botvinnik.

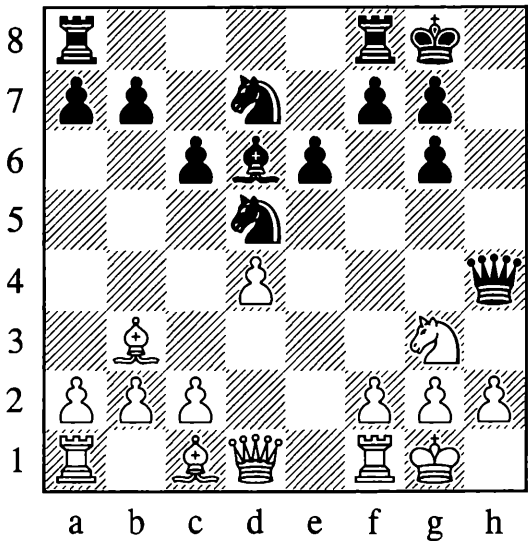
9.0-0 ♖d5

Effectively putting a stop to any sacrificial ideas on e6 and saying “hello” to its colleague on f4, who is reluctant to take on g6 and open the h-file. The standard 9...♜c7 was a different version of the same.

10.♖gh5 0-0

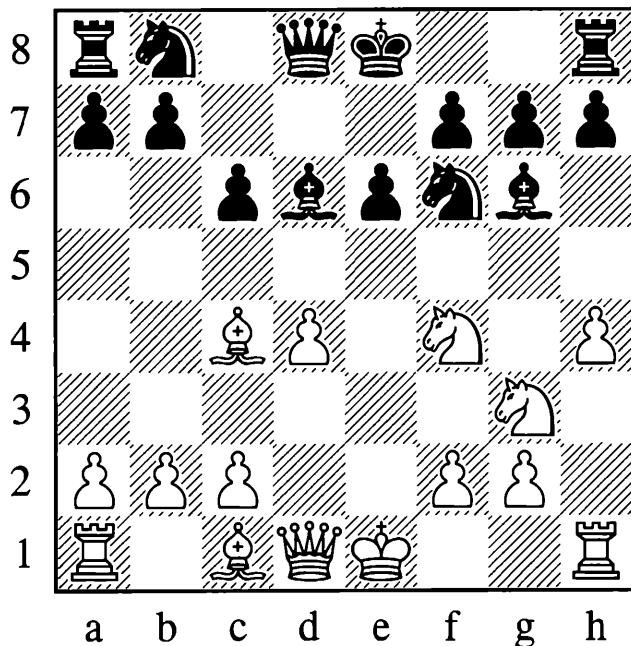
The easiest way to protect g7. The white knights do not accomplish much and White has to resort to taking on g6 sooner or later, thus relieving Black from all the pressure.

11.♙b3 ♖d7 12.♖xg6 hxg6 13.♖g3 ♜h4†



In Tal – Botvinnik, Moscow (2) 1961, Black had good play on the dark squares.

C1) 9.h4



9...♙c7

The authorized antidote.

10.h5

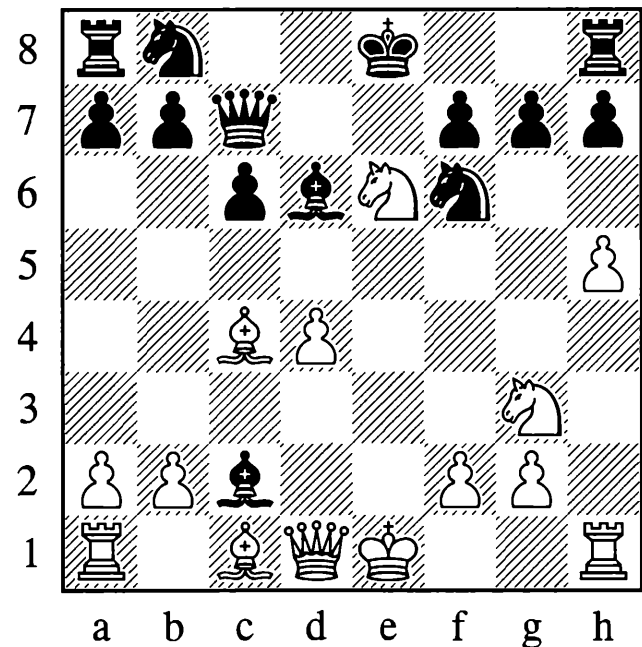
There really is no way back. 10.♘xg6 hxg6 11.♙f3 has been tried in several games but after 11...♘bd7 12.♙g5 c5! Black gets good play. Let's see two examples:

13.dxc5 ♙xc5 14.♙xf6 ♘xf6 15.♙b3 0-0-0 Tiviakov – Dreev, Ubeda 1999. White can't follow Black's lead as 16.0-0-0 ♙xh4! 17.♙xh4 ♙g5† nets a pawn.

Later 13.0-0-0 was tried, though 13...cxd4 14.♙b3 ♘e5 15.♙a4† ♙f8 16.♙b3 a6 17.f4 ♘c4 18.♙xd4 ♙c8± could hardly be called an improvement, as ...b7-b5 is in the air. After 19.♙d3 b5 20.♙b3 ♙c5 Black won the exchange in Baramidze – Gyimesi, Graz 2009.

10...♙xc2 11.♘xe6

The tactical justification. Instead 11.♙xc2 ♙xf4 would just win a pawn.



11...♙xd1

This leads to a balanced ending. In a blitz game I once tried 11...fxe6!?N 12.♙xc2 ♙xg3 13.fxg3 ♙xg3† 14.♙f2 ♙xf2† 15.♙xf2 ♙d7. White has good compensation for the pawn, but knights can be tricky, at least in blitz. After 16.♙f4 ♙f8 17.♙g3? ♘e4† my opponent had to resign.

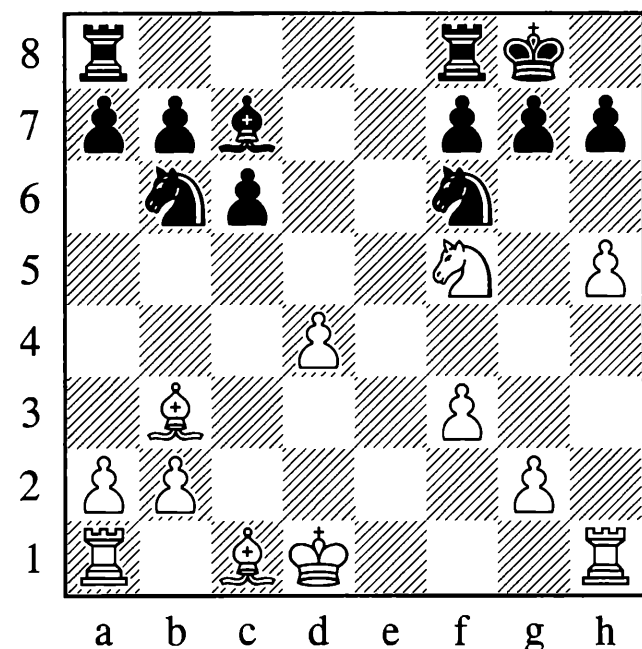
12.♘xc7† ♙xc7 13.♙xd1 0-0 14.♘f5

An excellent square for the knight.

14...♘bd7 15.f3

Or 15.g4 ♘b6 16.♙b3 ♙ae8 17.f3 ♘fd5 18.♙d2 was Palmiotto – Acerbi, corr. 1974, and now 18...g6 would have expelled the strong knight and left Black on top.

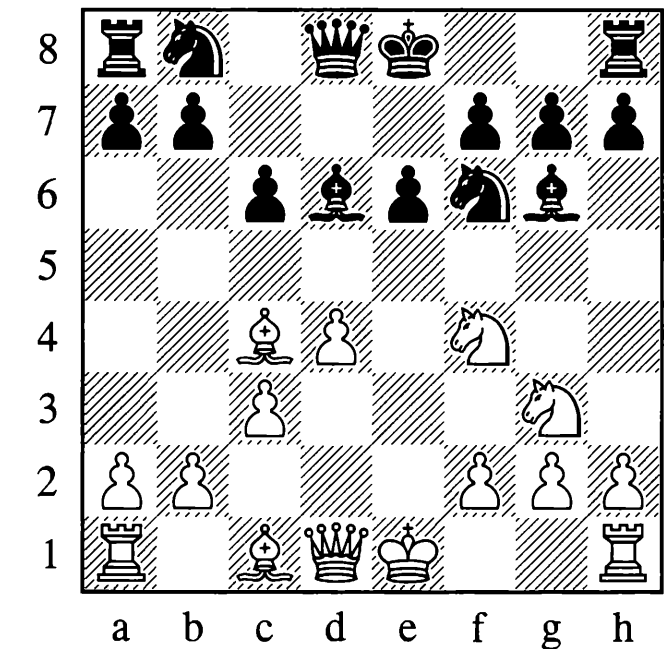
15...♘b6 16.♙b3



16...♖ae8N

16...♘bd5 17.g4 ♜fe8 18.g5 ♘d7 19.♙xd5 cxd5 20.♙d2 ♘f8 21.♞c1 ♘e6 22.♞e1 ♙b6= was Rozentalis – Shengelia, Austria 2007. The rook move is much more flexible though, as maybe it is the other knight that should be on d5. All in all, Black has at least equal prospects.

C2) 9.c3



9...♘bd7

Exactness always pays off. The obvious move was 9...♞c7 when 10.♞f3 is more or less forced, and then 10...♘bd7. By reversing the order we widen Black’s choice. After the immediate 9...♘bd7 White hasn’t anything better than 10.♞f3 anyway, and then maybe we have something other than ...♞c7. Sounds too academic? Sorry, but it is a good example of the little finesses that continually appear in modern opening theory.

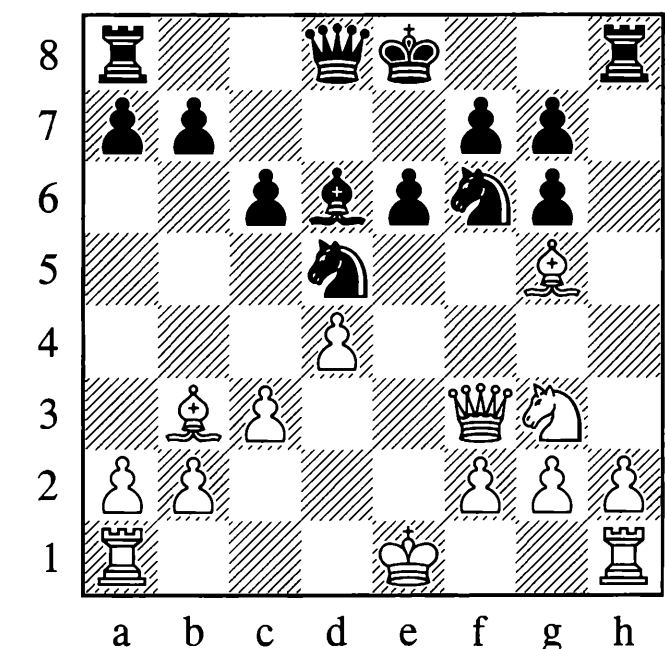
10.♞f3 ♘b6

Proving the point. Arriving at the position this way, the move ...♞c7 isn’t first in line when the candidate moves are listed. The real alternative to 10...♘b6 is the surprising 10...♙xf4!? just giving away the good bishop. Black’s reasoning is that he is bound to lose the bishop pair anyway, because White can always

take on g6, so by exchanging on f4 it will be on Black’s terms. Also, which black bishop is the “good” one when it comes right down to it?

Let’s follow a fairly recent game: 11.♙xf4 ♘d5 12.♙d2 0–0 13.0–0 b5 14.♙b3 a5 15.♞ae1 a4 16.♙d1 I will repeat the question: which of Black’s bishops was the good one? I don’t know, but the one on g6 certainly makes White’s light-squared bishop look a bit silly. 16...♘7f6 17.♙g5 ♞c7 18.♘e2 ♙e4 19.♞h3 ♙f5 20.♞f3 ♙e4 21.♞h3 ♙f5 22.♞f3 ½–½ Efimenko – Iordachescu, Moscow 2007.

11.♙b3 ♘bd5 12.♘xg6 hxg6 13.♙g5



13...♙e7=

A good defensive move; Black breaks the pin and is ready to vary his reaction depending on what White does.

14.♙d2

Probably best. 14.0–0 allows 14...♘h5 15.♙d2 ♙g5 and Black breaks free. Or 14.0–0–0 ♘d7 with the same idea.

14...a5

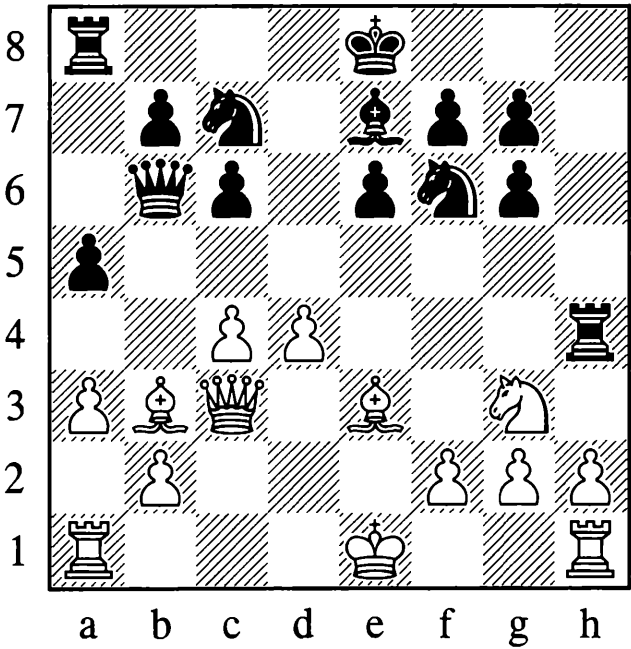
Black takes the initiative on the queenside.

15.a3

Instead Tiviakov – Dorfman, Mondariz 2000, continued: 15.♙c2 ♞b6 16.0–0–0 c5

(interesting is 16...a4 17.a3 ♖b5∞) 17.dxc5 ♖xc5 18.♘e4 ♘xe4 19.♙xe4 ♜d8 20.h3 b5 21.♙xd5 ♖xd5 22.♖xd5 ♜xd5=

15...♖b6 16.c4 ♘c7 17.♖c3 ♜h4 18.♙e3



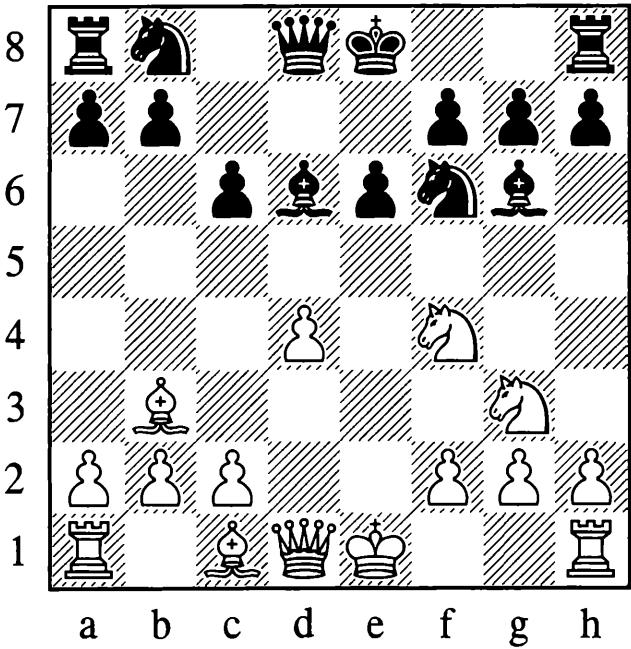
So far this is Rublevsky – Anand, Eupen 1999, and now we can vary:

18...♘g4N

With good counterplay on the dark squares. For instance:

19.h3 ♘xe3 20.fxe3 c5 21.♘e2 ♙f6∞

C3) 9.♙b3



A favourite of the Dutch GM Tiviakov, one of the last believers in the ♙c4-system.

9...♖c7 10.♖f3 ♘bd7

Standard moves by now.

11.0–0 0–0–0!?

The most challenging. Solid and perfectly okay was 11...0–0 12.♘xg6 hxg6 and the bishop pair isn't a big deal. By castling long Black sends a clear message to his opponent – we are not afraid of a fight and are going for the full point. Not quite what you would expect from the Caro-Kann clichés.

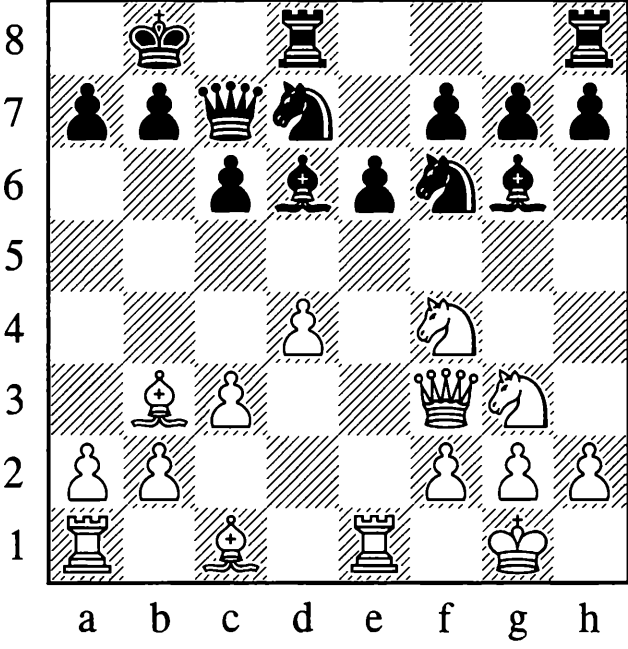
12.c3

Opening the h-file is not without risk. For example, Lahno – Minasian, Moscow 2007, continued 12.♘xg6 hxg6 13.h3 ♜h4∞ 14.♙g5? ♙xg3 15.fxg3 ♜xd4 when Black was a pawn to the good.

12...♙b8

Black improves his king's safety first.

13.♜e1



13...e5!?

But now Black is ready to begin active operations.

14. ♖xg6 fxg6

Unfortunately this capture was forced, but it is no catastrophe; the f-file might come in handy.

15. ♕e3

White has the better pawn structure and the bishops. And Black? Well, at least he has the move.

15... ♖hf8!

Way back in the year 2000 Tiviakov first had this position with White. Then his opponent played 15...h5, which weakened Black's kingside. Tiviakov – Conquest, Mondariz 2000, continued 16.h3 ♖hf8 and now 17. ♕g5N exploits this fact. Navara's novelty uses the semi-open f-file and fights for the initiative.

16. ♖e2 exd4 17. ♕xd4 c5! 18. ♕xf6

Or 18. ♕e3 ♖e5 19. ♖ad1 c4 20. ♕c2 ♖eg4 with good play.

18... ♖xf6

The aggressive approach. [Editor's Note: Interestingly, after this game Navara was less convinced by his own attacking chances. In *Reggio Emilia 2007/2008* he criticized both his 18th and 19th moves. His recommendation was equalizing with 18...gxf6 19. ♖f1 ♖e5 20. ♖e3 c4 21. ♖xc4 ♖xc4.]

Black has the initiative. He will be the first to advance his pawns towards the opponent's king.

19. ♖f1 h5 20. ♕e6 g5 21. ♖ad1 ♖fe8

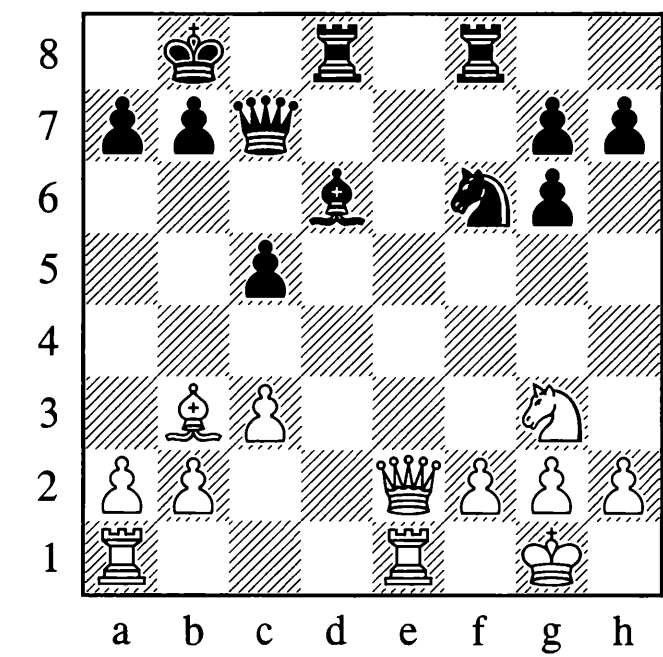
This is Tiviakov – Navara, Reggio Emilia 2008.

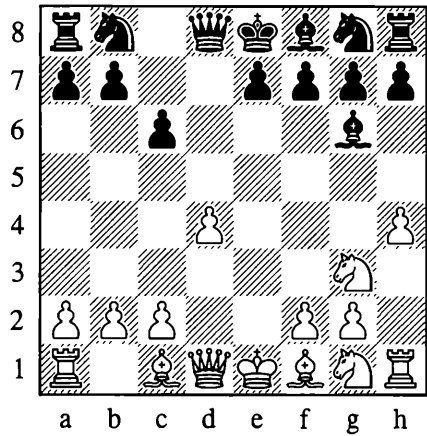
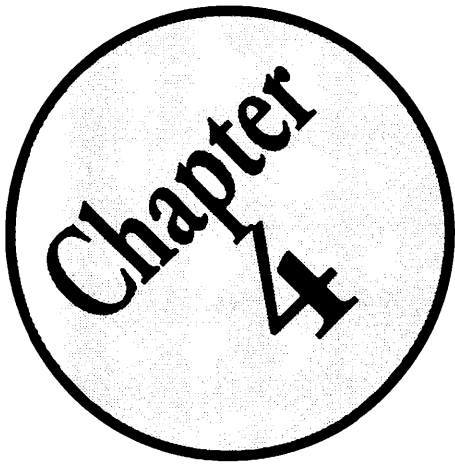
Conclusion

The aggressive 6. ♕c4 variation can be rather tricky to face over the board, but Black has sufficient defences in every line. However there are some important nuances to know by heart. After 6...e6 7. ♖1e2 ♖f6 play divides:

On 8.0-0 ♖bd7 9.f4 ♖b6 10. ♕d3 Black has 10... ♕xd3 11. ♖xd3 g6!.

If 8.h4 then play 8...h6 9. ♖f4 ♕h7, while if 8. ♖f4 Black should reply 8... ♕d6 with the point 9.h4 ♖c7! hitting the knight on f4.





Classical Variation

6.h4

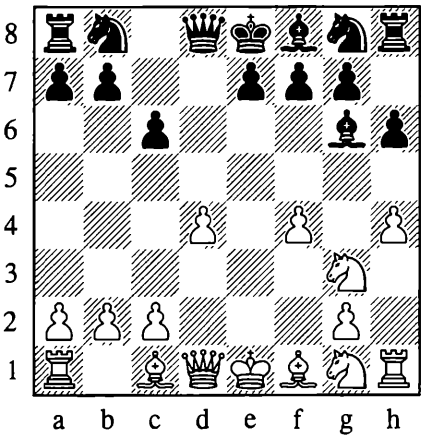
Variation Index

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 dxe4 4.♘xe4 ♕f5 5.♘g3 ♖g6 6.h4

6...h6

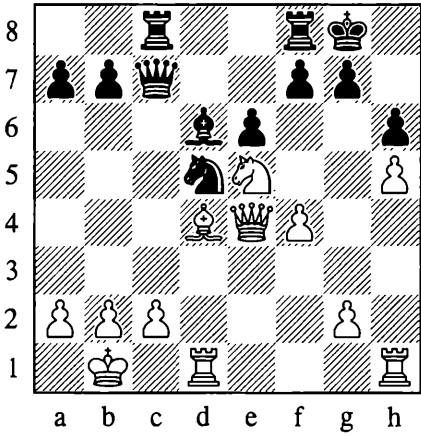
A) 7.f4	32
B) 7.♘f3 ♘d7 8.♖d3	35

A) 7.f4



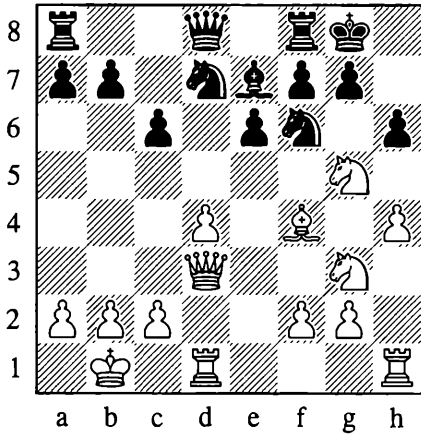
Ugly

A) 21.♔xe4



21...f5!

B) after 13.♘g5!?



13...♔a5

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 dxe4 4.♗xe4 ♕f5
5.♗g3 ♖g6 6.h4

Attacking the bishop and going for a big space advantage on the kingside.

6...h6 7.♗f3

The most precise. The threat of ♗e5 encourages Black to play ...♗d7 when White can throw in the desired h4-h5 and apparently get a good structure on the kingside. Very rarely, White leaves the pawn on h4, at least for a few more moves. One way to do so is to start with the anti-positional 7.f4. That is variation A. The other way is after the almost automatic response:

7...♗d7

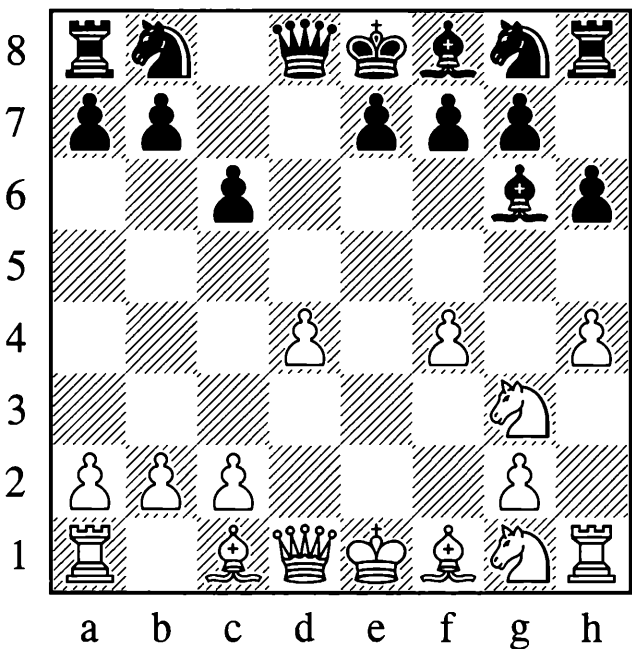
White can continue with the standard plan, except with the pawn still on h4.

8.♕d3 ♕xd3 9.♖xd3

That is variation B.

A deeper and more popular alternative is to transfer the g1-knight to f4 and the bishop to c4. For example 7.♗h3 ♗f6 8.♗f4 ♕h7 9.♕c4 e6, but that just transposes to lines already covered in Chapter 3 on the 6.♕c4 system.

A) 7.f4



It looks ugly. And it is ugly!

7...e6 8.♗f3 ♗d7 9.h5

White plays the usual advance anyway.

He has also tried:

9.♕d3 ♕xd3 10.♖xd3

This is certainly not an improved version.

10...♖c7 11.♗e5

At least this move is consistent.

Instead 11.♕d2 ♗gf6 12.♗e5 c5 equalizes for Black. For example, 13.0-0-0 cxd4 14.♖xd4 ♕c5 15.♖c4 0-0 16.♗xd7 ♗xd7 17.♗e4 ♖fc8 18.g4 ♕e7 19.♖xc7 ♖xc7 20.g5 was Mortensen – Danielsen, Denmark 1994, and now 20...♖ac8N 21.c3 f5!? looks fine.

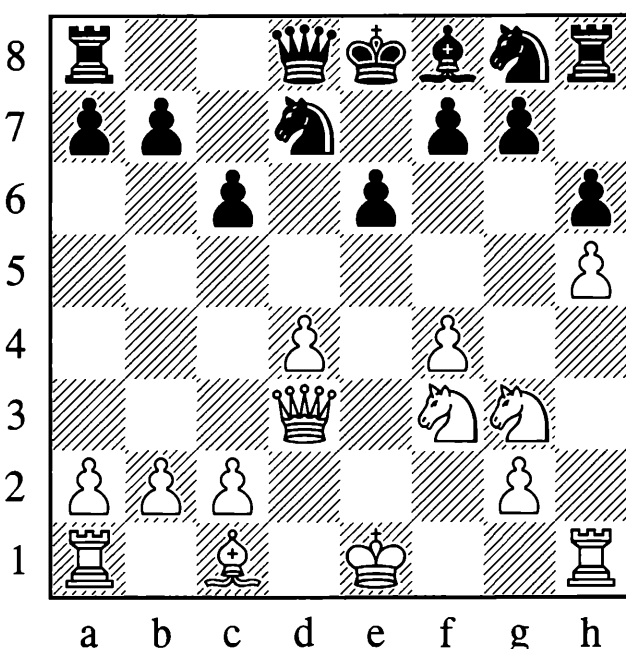
11...♗gf6 12.♕e3 ♕e7 13.0-0-0 ♖d8N

Always a useful move.

14.♗b1 0-0 15.♗e4 c5

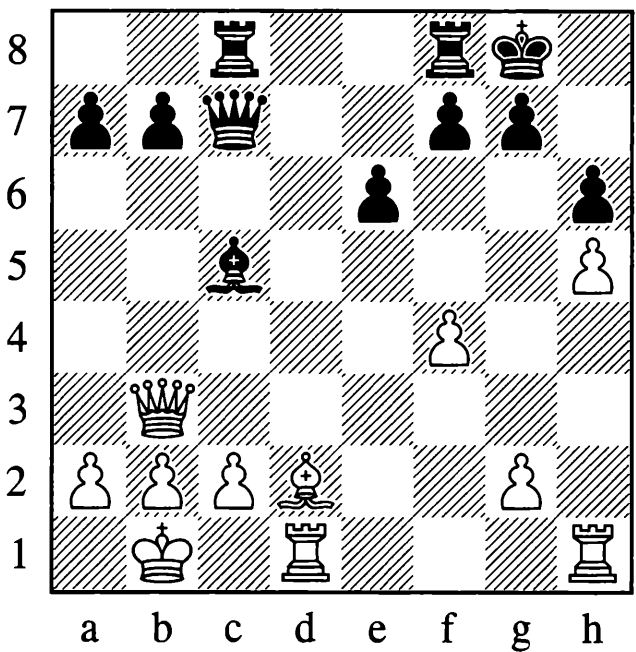
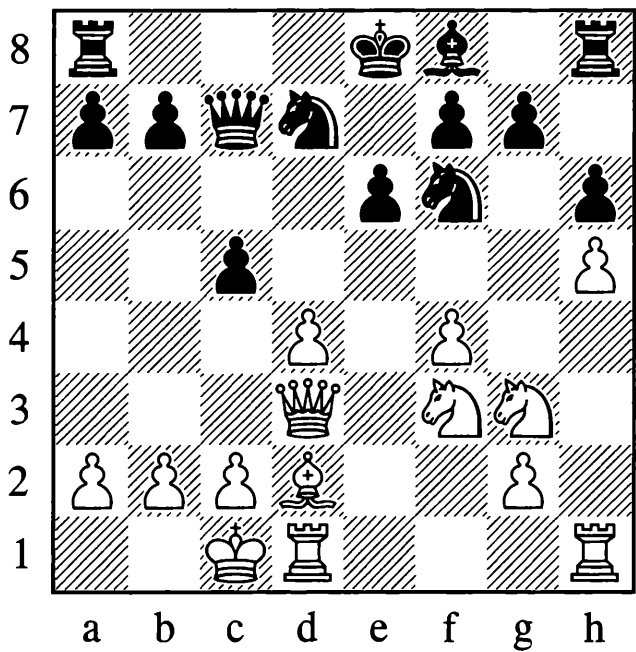
Black has good counterplay.

9...♕h7 10.♕d3 ♕xd3 11.♖xd3



The f4-pawn is, in positional terms, misplaced, but even so it gives the position some character. White has good control over the important outpost on e5 and if he castles long and Black short, then the strange pawn might help with the logical pawnstorm on the kingside.

11...♗gf6 12.♕d2 ♖c7 13.0-0-0 c5



Seeking counterplay in the centre and hoping to get some relief if a few pieces are exchanged.

14.♖e5

14.dxc5 ♖xc5= is nothing for White (see the illustrative game).

14...cxd4 15.♙xd4 ♖c5 16.♙c4

The safest; White is going for the endgame. Instead 16.♙a4 0–0 17.♖xd7 ♖xd7 18.♖e4 ♖e7 is fine for Black who can continue ...♖b6 followed by switching his rooks to the c- and d-files. 19.♙h3 ♖b6 20.♙b3 This is Reefat – Gustafsson, Dresden 2002, and now 20...♖c4N 21.♙c3 ♙ac8 would give Black a strong initiative.

16...♙c8

Maybe Black can get away with taking the bait: 16...♖xe5!N 17.fxex5 ♙xe5 18.♙b5† ♖f8 19.♙he1 ♙c7 And White still needs to break through.

17.♖xd7 ♖xd7 18.♖e4 0–0 19.♖b1 ♖e7 20.♙b3

20.♙xc7 ♙xc7 shouldn't be a big problem, as 21.♖e3 can be answered by 21...f5! 22.♖c3 a6=.

20...♖c5 21.♖xc5 ♖xc5=

A typical illustration of the Caro-Kann logic, which claims that Black maintains the balance by exchanging some pieces. The further course of the game is also highly instructive.

22.g4 ♙fd8 23.g5 ♙c6!

Threatening ...♙xd2.

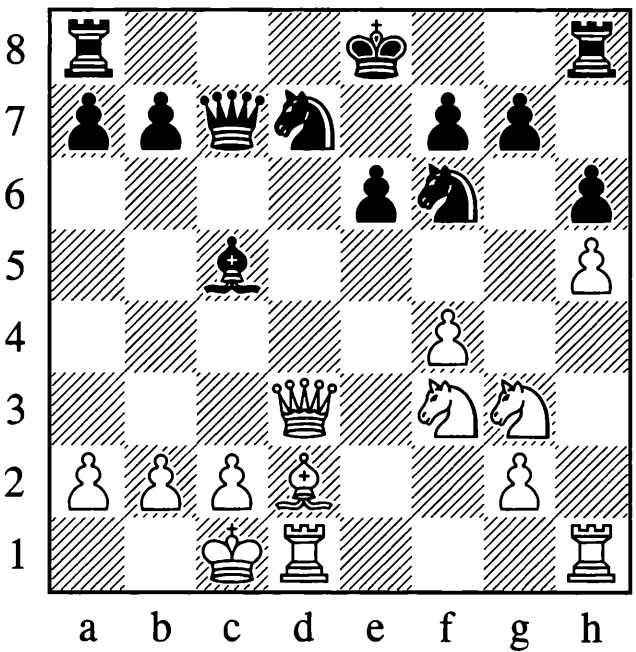
24.♖c1 ♖b6 25.gxh6 gxh6 26.♙he1 ♙c5

And the white pawns on the kingside were already a cause for concern, Almasi – Magem Badals, Moscow (ol) 1994.

Mamedyarov – Topalov

Nice (rapid) 2008

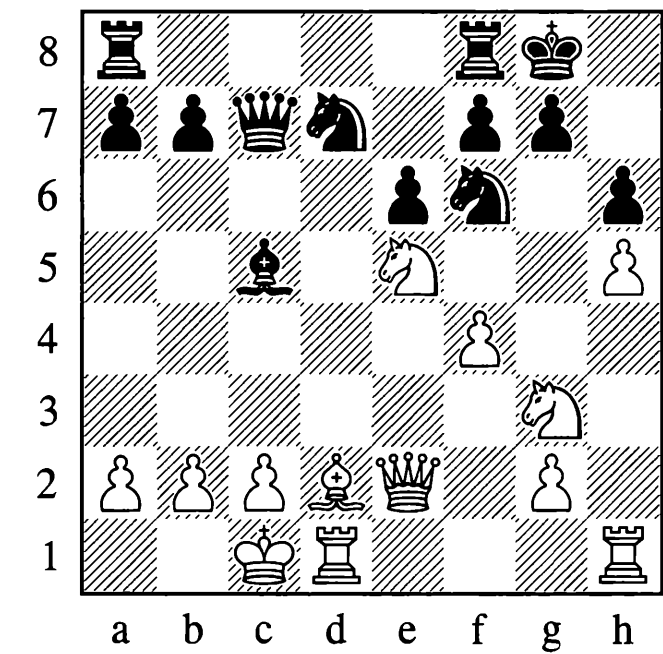
1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.♖d2 dxe4 4.♖xe4 ♖f5 5.♖g3 ♖g6 6.h4 h6 7.f4 e6 8.♖f3 ♖d7 9.h5 ♖h7 10.♖d3 ♖xd3 11.♙xd3 ♖gf6 12.♖d2 ♙c7 13.0–0–0 c5 14.dxc5 ♖xc5



15. ♖e2

A logical follow-up; White prepares ♗e5.
It was also possible to bring the g3-knight back into the game or, rather, exchange it for a proper piece. 15. ♗e4 0–0–0 Usually I advocate castling on the other side, but here going queenside is tempting because of the vulnerable position of the white queen (for all that, 15...0–0 also seems fine). For example, Brustman – Volzhin, Stockholm 2000, continued 16. ♖b1 ♗e5! 17. fxe5 (17. ♖e2 ♗xe4 18. ♖xe4 ♗g4 would win an exchange) 17... ♖xd3 18. cxd3 ♗xe4 19. dxe4 ♖b8 and Black was winning.

15...0–0 16. ♗e5



The knight looks impressive here, but Black just plays around it.

16... ♖ac8 17. ♖b1 ♗d6

With a double threat on c2 and e5; thus the white bishop is lured to the unfortunate c3-square.

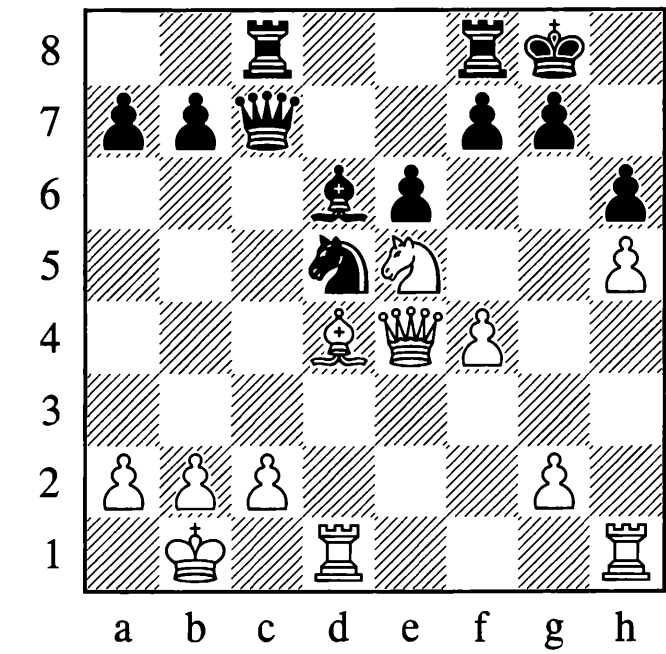
18. ♗c3

It was a rapid game, so we can't blame White for missing the resource 18. ♗a5 ♖xa5 19. ♖xd6, maintaining the balance.

18... ♗b6 19. ♗d4 ♗bd5

White's position is already tricky, and the f4-pawn turns out to be a weakness. White tries to defend it tactically, but misses that his queen will be overworked.

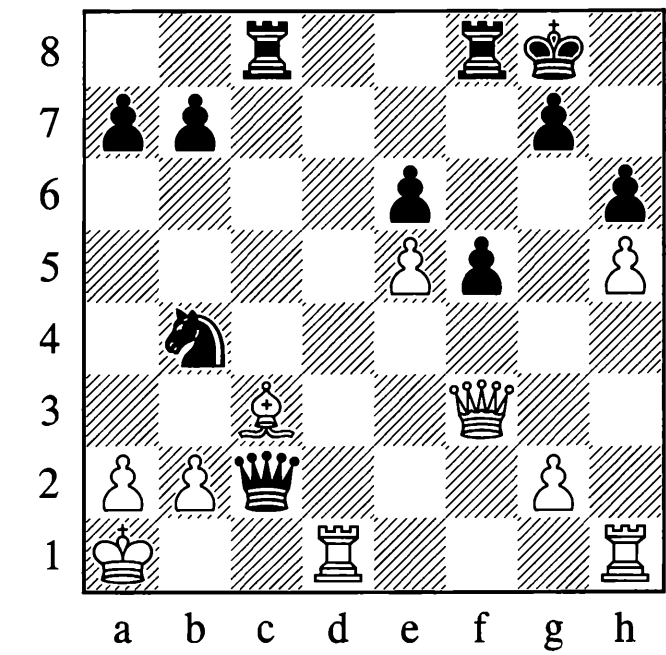
20. ♗e4? ♗xe4 21. ♖xe4



21...f5!

Now the queen cannot protect both f4 and c2.

22. ♖f3 ♖xc2† 23. ♖a1 ♖a4 24. ♖b1 ♖c2† 25. ♖a1 ♗b4 26. ♗c3 ♗xe5 27. fxe5

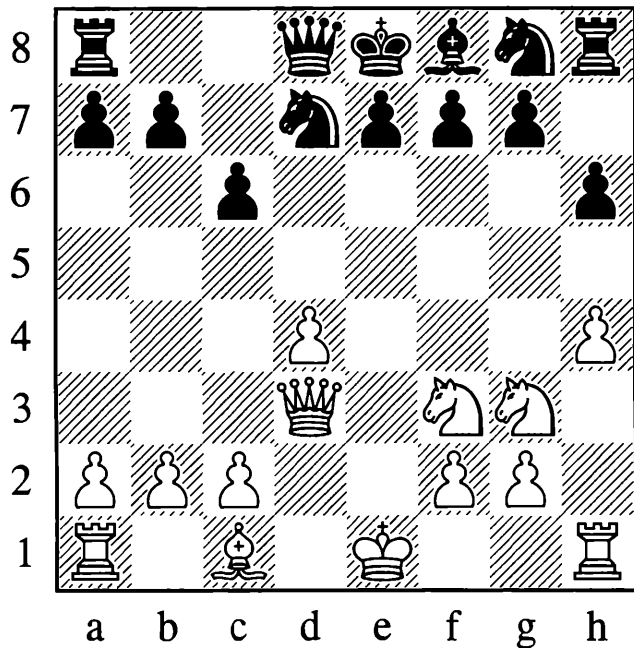


27... ♗xa2! 28. ♖d2

Or 28. ♖xa2 ♖c4 29. ♖d4 ♖a4† 30. ♖b1 ♖xd4 31. ♗xd4 ♖xd4 and Black is two pawns up.

28...♔a4
0–1

B) 7.♘f3 ♘d7 8.♙d3 ♙xd3 9.♚xd3



9...e6 10.♙f4

White always has the choice between this active-looking move and the more modest ♙d2. Let's see a bit more of the latter:

10.♙d2 ♘gf6 11.0–0–0 ♙e7 12.♘e4

If 12.♖b1 then 12...c5 has been known as an instant equalizer since an old Larsen game, which went 13.♙he1 0–0 14.♘e4 ♙c8 15.dxc5 ♘xc5 16.♘xf6† ♙xf6 17.♚xd8 ♙fxd8 18.♙e3 ♙xd1† 19.♙xd1 a6= Hort – Larsen, Buenos Aires 1980.

12...♘xe4 13.♚xe4 ♘f6

Please pay close attention to this method of simplifying; it solves Black's problems in many lines of the classical Caro-Kann.

14.♚e2 ♚d5 15.c4 ♚e4 16.♚xe4 ♘xe4 17.♙e3 ♙d8

Later we will come across this ending again, except with the pawn on h5, which is rather more critical. Here Black has no problems.

18.♙he1 0–0 19.♙e2 f5 20.g3 ♙f6

With a harmonious position, Djukic – Kasimdzhanov, Dresden (ol) 2008.

10...♘gf6

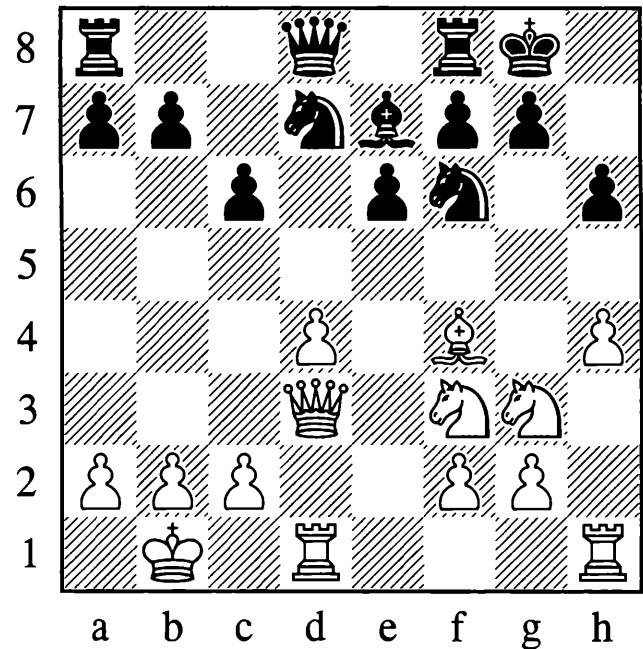
The standard reaction to ♙f4 (in various

lines) is 10...♚a5† 11.♙d2 ♚c7 followed by castling long. But in this book we castle short!

11.0–0–0 ♙e7 12.♖b1

A good prophylactic move; the immediate 12.♘e4 invites 12...♘xe4 13.♚xe4 ♘f6 14.♚e2 ♚d5.

12...0–0



13.♘g5!?

A hardcore way to try to benefit from the pawn still being on h4. Of course if Black takes on g5 White takes back with the pawn with a devastating attack. Fortunately the knight lunge doesn't really threaten anything and Black can continue with his own scheme of development. Quieter tries by White have less impact:

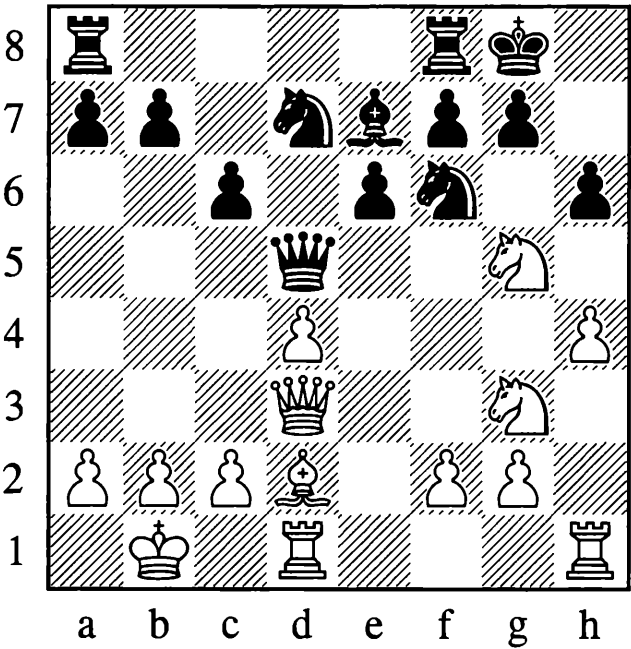
13.♘e4 ♘xe4 14.♚xe4 ♘f6 15.♚e2 ♚d5 This still works. 16.♘e5 ♚e4 17.♙e3 ♘d5=

13.♘e5 ♘xe5 14.♙xe5 ♘g4N A simple antidote. 15.♚e2 ♘xe5 16.dxe5 ♚c7 17.f4 ♙fd8=

13.♚e2 Keeping all the pieces on the board. 13...a5!?N Black pushes the a-pawn and secures good counterplay. We will see more of this refreshing idea later.

13...♔a5 14.♙d2
Or 14.♘5e4 ♜fd8.

14...♔d5



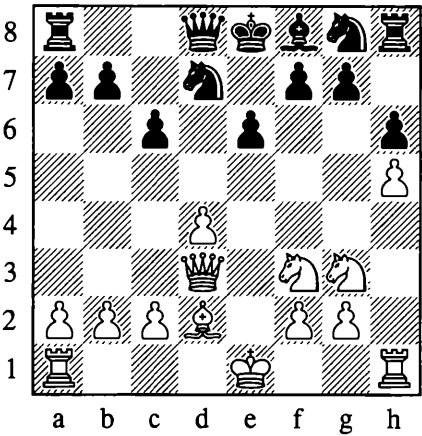
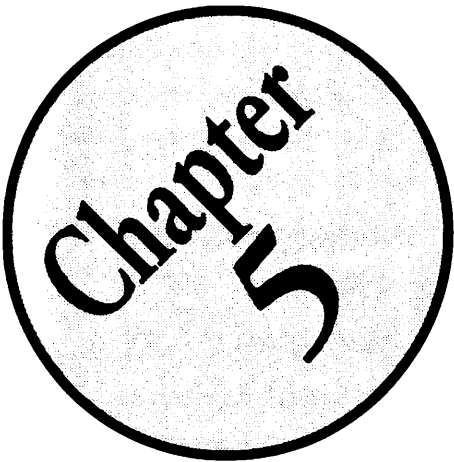
15.♘5e4
Not 15.c4? ♘e5! 16.♔c2 ♘xc4 and Black was a pawn up in J. Polgar – Vallejo Pons, Benidorm (rapid) 2003.

15...♜fd8

The position is balanced; an interesting middlegame is to be expected.

Conclusion

The 7.f4 line secures e5 for the knight, but with 7...e6 8.♘f3 ♘d7 9.h5 ♙h7 10.♙d3 ♙xd3 11.♔xd3 ♘gf6 12.♙d2 ♔c7 13.0–0–0 c5 Black gets fine counterplay and equalizes.
The other line we considered is 7.♘f3 ♘d7 8.♙d3 ♙xd3 9.♔xd3, leaving the h-pawn on h4. Black just finishes his development with a fairly normal, balanced position. Even if a white knight should suddenly appear on g5 Black doesn't need to panic. He is not forced to take it, so he just leaves it there and goes on with his own business.



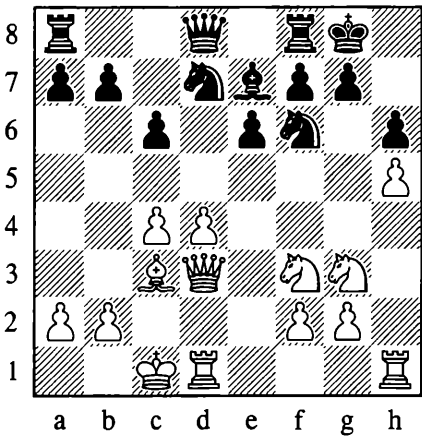
Classical Variation

11.♔d2

Variation Index

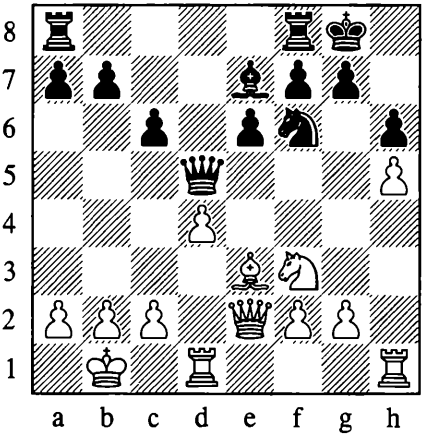
1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 dxe4 4.♘xe4 ♙f5 5.♘g3 ♙g6 6.h4 h6 7.♘f3 ♘d7 8.h5	
8...♙h7 9.♙d3 ♙xd3 10.♚xd3 e6 11.♙d2 ♘gf6 12.0-0-0 ♙e7	
A) 13.♔b1 0-0	39
A1) 14.♘e4	39
A2) 14.♚e2	41
B) 13.♚e2	43
C) 13.♘e4 ♘xe4 14.♚xe4 ♘f6	44
C1) 15.♚e2	45
C2) 15.♚d3	47

note at move 13



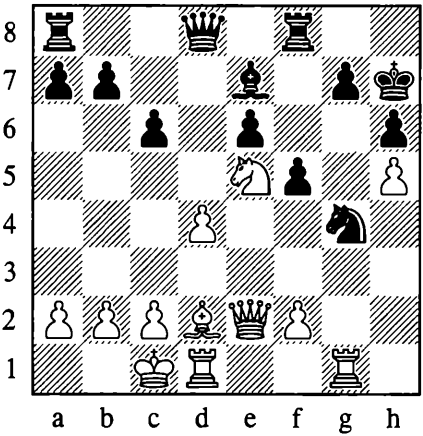
14...b5!

A1) note to 17.♘e5



17...♙d6!?N

C2) after 19.♘e5

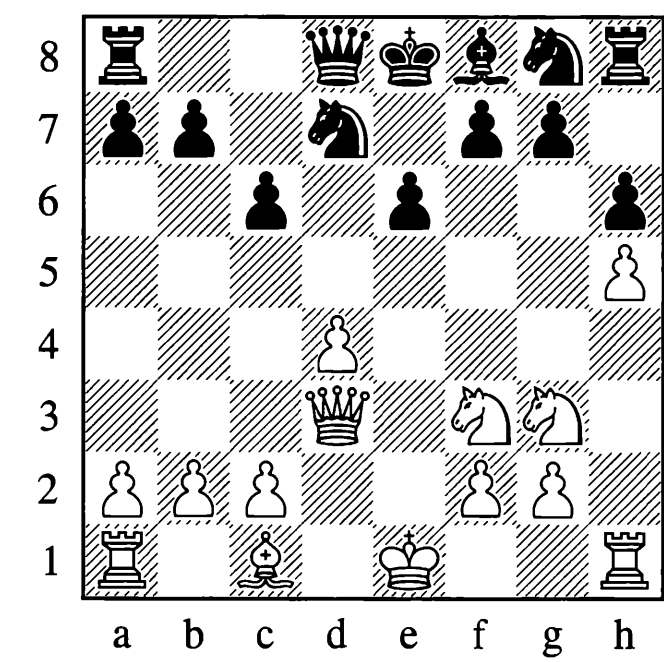


19...♘xe5!N

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 dxe4 4.♘xe4 ♕f5
5.♘g3 ♕g6 6.h4 h6 7.♘f3 ♘d7 8.h5

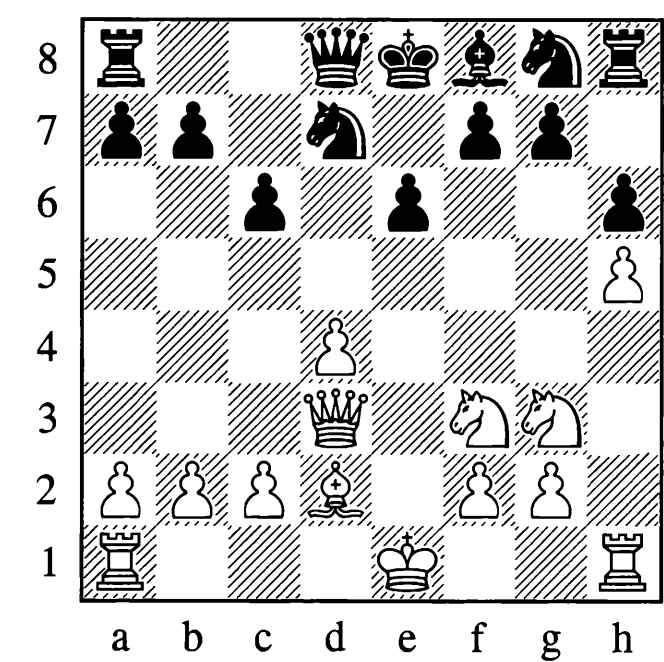
The best move and generally played almost without thinking. White takes as much space on the kingside as he can and at the same time gains a favourable pawn structure. After all, g7 and h6 are left on dark squares and might be a target for White's bishop in an eventual ending.

8...♕h7 9.♕d3 ♕xd3 10.♖xd3 e6



The real starting position of the Classical Caro-Kann. White must make quite an important choice about where to put his remaining bishop – d2 or f4. In both cases the theory has been worked out pretty far and it seems Black is holding his own.

This chapter is about 11.♕d2:

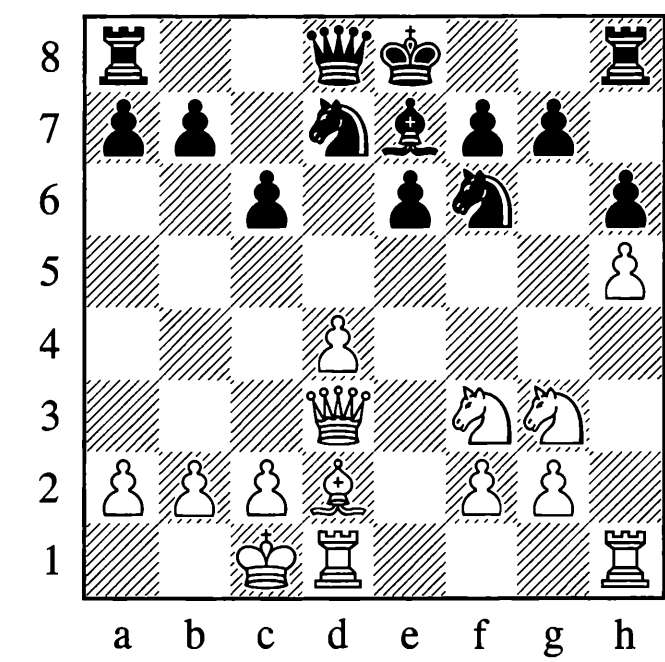


This looks almost too modest. On the positive side, the annoying check on a5 is prevented and the bishop is less exposed here compared to f4.

11...♘gf6 12.0–0–0

The automatic choice. If White wants to avoid castling long he must enter some original territory with something like 12.♖e2 ♕e7 13.c4 0–0 14.♕c3 ♖c7 15.0–0, but it doesn't look too frightening, does it? Here is the only practical example: 15...♗fe8 16.♘e5 c5 17.♘xd7 ♘xd7 18.dxc5 ♘xc5 19.♖g4 In Hieronymus – Luetzen, Germany 1998, Black chose the solid 19...♕f8 with a fairly level position. He could have tried the double-edged 19...♕g5 20.f4 f5! 21.♖f3 ♕h4 with unclear play.

12...♕e7



Variations with 12...♖c7 followed by castling long caused the boring reputation of the entire Caro-Kann. Such lines are valid of course, but they are banned from this work. We will pursue higher goals and keep our fighting spirit intact.

After 12...♕e7 White has three main moves. They are A) 13.♖b1, B) 13.♖e2 and C) 13.♘e4. Occasionally other moves are seen, most notably 13.c4, so let's go a bit further.

13.c4 0–0

Here 13...♖c7 would transpose to the ♔f4 tabiya, but short castling followed by an early ...b7-b5 looks promising. Now we can look at two possibilities, 14.♖b1 and 14.♔c3:

14.♖b1 b5!

A very instructive pawn sacrifice; lines are opened towards the white king and Black gains the excellent outpost on d5 for a knight.

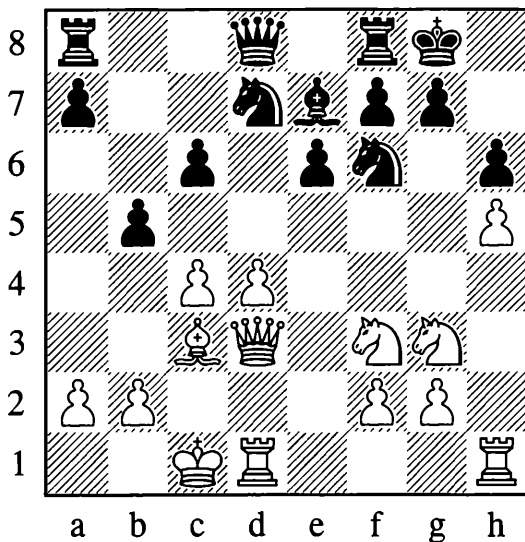
15.cxb5 cxb5 16.♖xb5 a5!?

If 16...♖b8 then perhaps 17.♖a5.

17.♘e5 ♘xe5 18.dxe5 ♘d5 19.♘e2 ♖b8
20.♖c6 ♔a3 21.♔c1 ♖e7

Followed by ...♖fc8 with a strong initiative for the pawn, Ganguly – Jakovenko, Spain 2008.

14.♔c3 b5!



No surprises.

15.♘e5

Or 15.cxb5 cxb5 16.♖xb5 ♘d5 is even better for Black than before.

15...bxc4 16.♖xc4 ♘b6 17.♔a5

17.♖xc6 ♘bd5 is good for Black.

17...♘xc4 18.♔xd8 ♖fxd8 19.♘xc4 ♖d5!

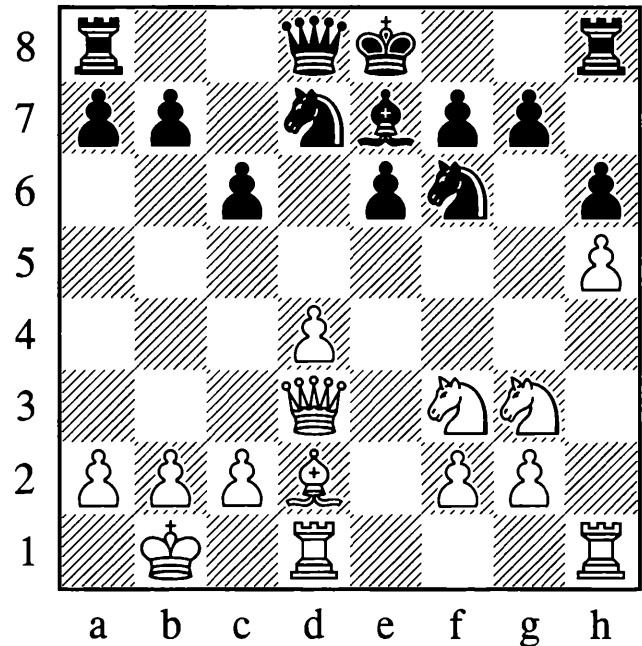
Black has a good ending.

20.♘e3 ♖g5 21.♖h4 ♖b8 22.♖d3 ♖b7 23.♖b3
♖xb3 24.axb3 ♔d6 25.♘ef1 ♖f8

White's pieces are tied up, Wheldon – Lobron, London 1987.

Another move order is 13.♖he1, but it doesn't have any individual significance. After 13...0–0 the only challenging move is 14.♖e2 transposing to line B, which uses the 13.♖e2 order.

A) 13.♖b1

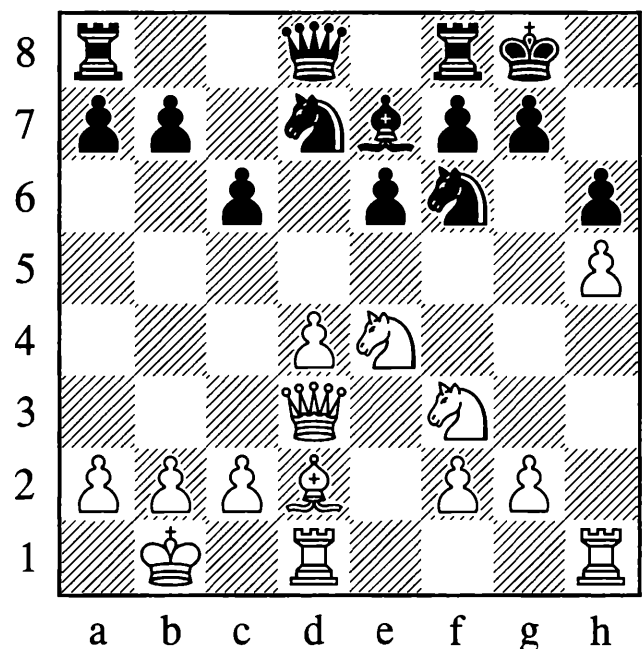


Always a good prophylactic move; the king is better on b1 than c1, no doubt about it. On the other hand, an important feature in chess openings is the speed of development and the ability to quickly create threats. From that perspective, ♖b1 is too slow.

13...0–0

Now White chooses between A1) 14.♘e4 and A2) 14.♖e2.

A1) 14.♘e4



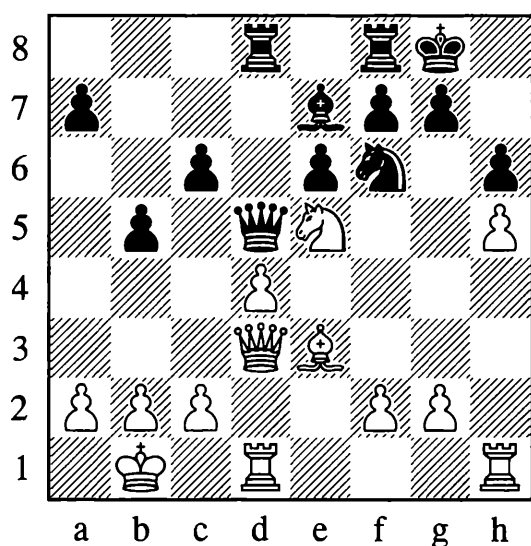
White activates the rather misplaced knight from g3, and prepares the dangerous pawnstorm g2-g4-g5.

14... ♖xe4

A good rule of thumb – when the white knight appears on e4, take it at once. The less tension, the less dangerous the attack with g2-g4 will be.

15. ♙xe4 ♜f6 16. ♙e2

16. ♙d3 is hardly better. Black still answers 16... ♙d5 with good centralization and enough counterplay: 17. ♞e5 ♞ad8 18. ♟e3 b5

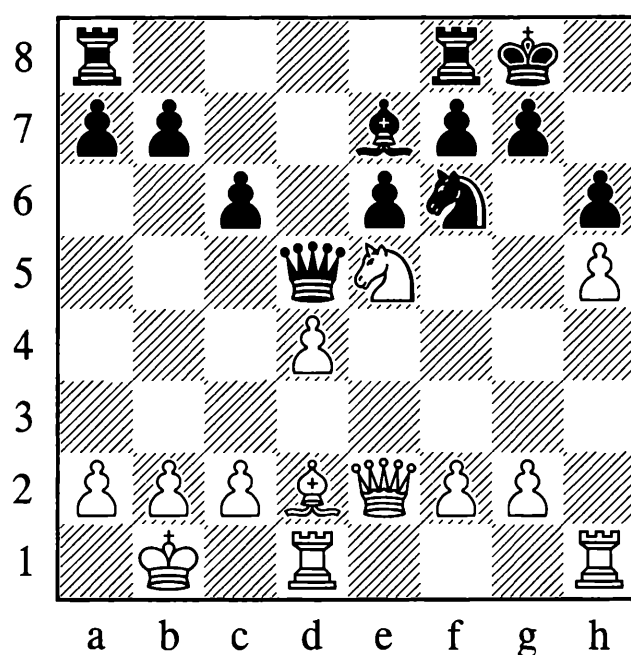


A typical Caro-Kann motif – Black prevents c2-c4 and thereby secures the important d5-square for his own pieces. 19. g4 ♞d7 20. f4 ♞xe5 21. fxe5 c5! Black fights for the initiative. 22. ♙xb5 (or 22. dxc5 ♙xe5) 22... ♙f3!N (instead 22... ♞b8 23. ♙a5 ♙e4 24. ♟c1 cxd4 25. ♙xa7 was good for White in Kobalia – Jobava, Budva [rapid match 1.1] 2009) 23. ♙d3 cxd4 24. ♟xd4 ♙xg4 Black is okay.

16... ♙d5

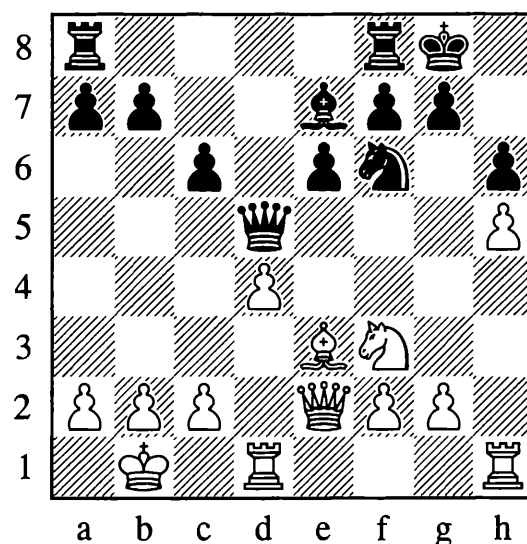
A notable strategic mission. The black queen is on her way to e4, after which either the queens come off and an equal ending arises or the black lady will remain an annoying stranger in the midst of the white army.

17. ♞e5



A good active response. Also possible was 17. g4 but then a reply to 17... ♙e4 must be worked out. Sacrificing the pawn with 18. ♟e3 is tempting, but, let's be honest, after 18... ♞xg4 the compensation is inadequate. 19. ♞d2 ♙f5 20. ♞dg1 ♞xe3 21. fxe3 ♟g5 22. ♞f3 f6 23. e4 ♙f4 24. ♞g2 ♙e3 25. ♙xe3 ♟xe3 And only Black can win, which, after a long struggle, is exactly what he did in Kobalia – Jobava, Budva (rapid - 1.3) 2009.

17. ♟e3 is a bit more sophisticated, but it doesn't threaten anything in particular.



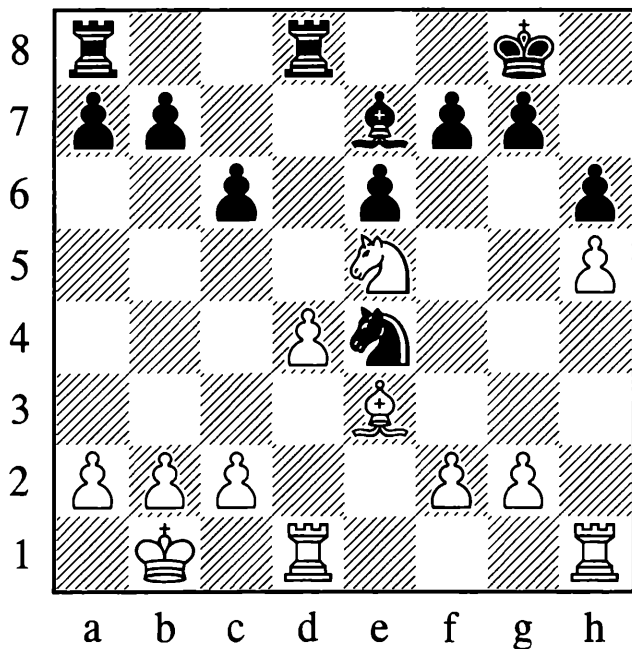
An interesting answer is the new 17... ♟d6!N. For instance, 18. c4 ♙f5† 19. ♟a1 a5 with lots of play.

17.c4 invites Black to fulfil his plan, and is of course nothing to fear. 17...♙e4† 18.♙xe4 ♘xe4 19.♙e3 And now just 19...♙fd8 or maybe even 19...f5!N. We will see more of this idea in a similar position below.

17...♙e4 18.♙xe4 ♘xe4 19.♙e3

Or 19.♙e1 ♙fd8 20.f3 ♘f6 21.♙f2 ♘d7= Nezd – Collier, Gibraltar 2009.

19...♙fd8



The ending is rather equal, but there is enough positional imbalance to ensure there is plenty of play left, especially as the asymmetrical pawn structure will not disappear.

20.g4

Ambitious. White takes more space on the kingside and keeps his pawns on the light squares, fixing the black ones on g7 and h6.

Other moves fail to impress. For example, kicking the knight with 20.f3 is a clear mistake. 20...♘g3! 21.♙h3 ♘f5 22.♙f2 c5 And Black was already on top in Fonseca – Al Tamimi, Bled (ol) 2002.

Or 20.c4 ♙f6 21.♙c2 c5 22.♙he1 ♙ac8 23.b3 b5! and Black took the initiative in Nowak – Sampieri, corr. 2001.

20...c5

Creating counterplay in the centre; the less committal 20...♙ac8 is also fully playable.

21.f3 cxd4

This intermediate move solves all the problems.

22.♙xd4

White must avoid 22.♙xd4? ♙xd4 23.♙xd4 ♘d2†! 24.♙a1 ♙g5 25.♙c3 ♙d8 when ...f7-f6 is threatened. M.A. Mohamed – Grooten, Gibraltar 2006, continued 26.♙xd2 ♙xd2 27.♙b1 ♙f2 28.♙d1 ♙f6† and Black won a pawn.

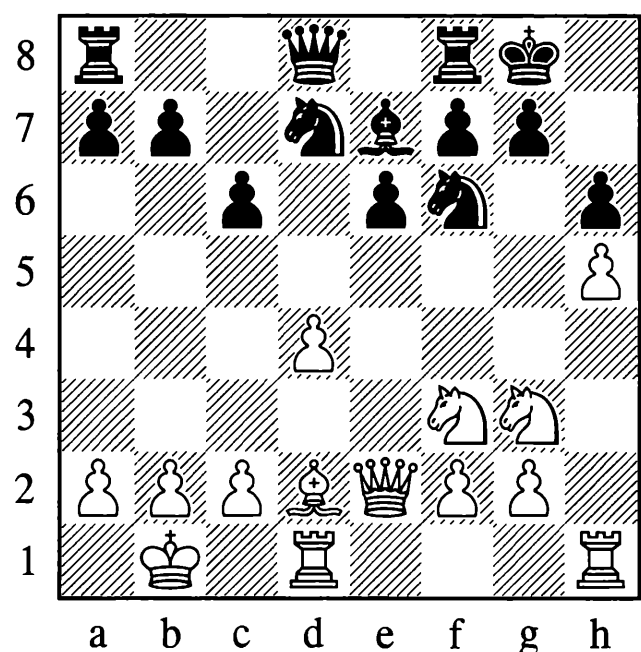
22...♙c5! 23.♙xc5 ♘xc5 24.c3 ♙f8

The simplest. 24...f6 has also been played, but it gives the white knight the g6-square and there is really no need for that.

25.♙c2 ♙e7 26.b4 ♘d7 27.♘xd7 ♙xd7 28.♙xd7† ♙xd7 29.♙d1† ♙e7=

Black had equalized easily in Drei – Belotti, Forli 1988.

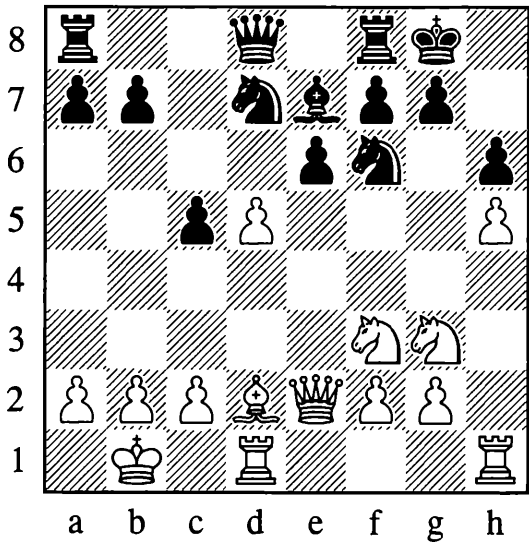
A2) 14.♙e2



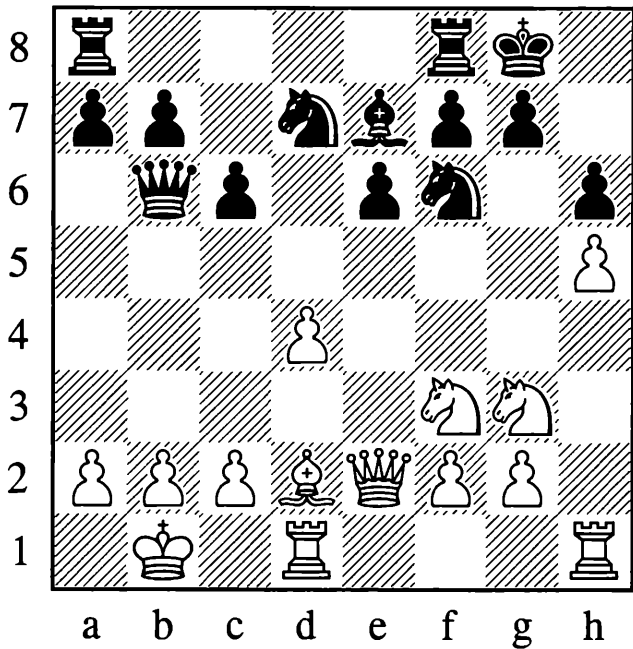
A refined move. White slightly improves the queen's position and apparently plans ♘e5. There is a hidden trap though.

14...♞b6

A strange response, at least to the uninitiated, but the natural 14...c5? runs into Jobava’s spectacular home preparation: 15.d5!



15...exd5 (or 15...♞xd5 16.♞e4 and the g-pawn is coming) 16.♞xh6! gxh6 17.♞f5 ♞e8 18.♞xh6† ♞f8 This is Jobava – Bareev, Rethymnon 2003, and now 19.♞d2 gives White a winning attack.



15.♞e5

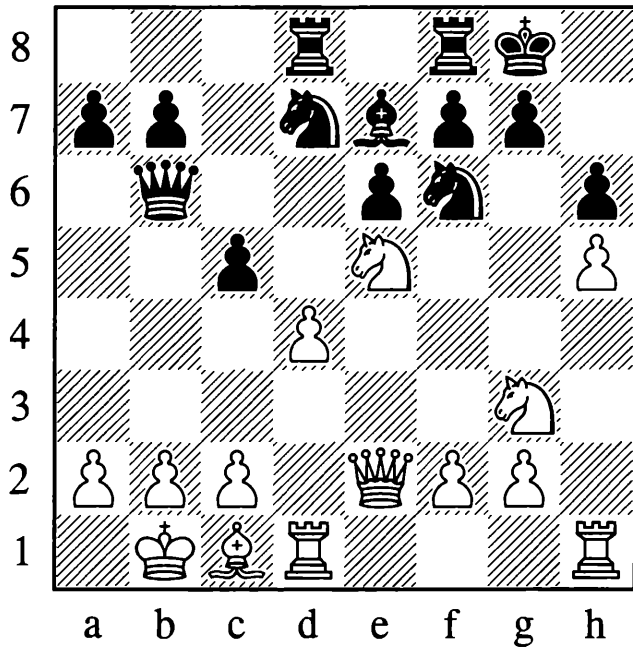
15.c4 can be answered by 15...♞fd8 16.♞e5 c5 which solves all Black’s problems. 17.♞c3 (17.♞xd7 ♞xd7 18.dxc5 ♞xc5 19.♞c3 ♞d4! 20.♞xd4 ♞xd4 21.♞xd4 ♞xd4 22.♞d1 ♞c5 was Hou Yifan – Riazantsev, Moscow 2007. After the simplifications Black is very comfortable. He can play on the queenside while the white pieces are tied to the defence of the h5-pawn.

This is a good illustration of the theory that this pawn is a weakness.) 17...cxd4 18.♞xd4 ♞c5= Exchanges will inevitably happen which will ease Black’s position.

15...♞ad8 16.♞c1!?

This may look artificial, but once again 16.c4 is well met by 16...c5 17.♞c3 cxd4 18.♞xd4 ♞c5=.

16...c5

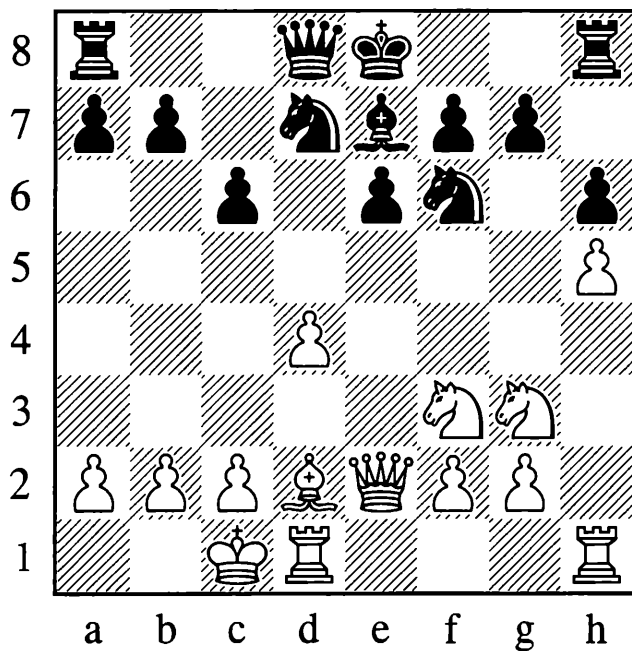


The equalizer. Black could try the somewhat more subtle 16...♞fe8!? which slightly improves Black’s position, but basically just returns the ball into White’s court. Then we can hope that our opponent will be creative... 17.f4 c5 Here it comes. 18.♞xd7 ♞xd7 19.d5 (19.dxc5 was level) 19...exd5 20.♞xd5 ♞f6 21.♞xd8 ♞xd8 22.♞f3 c4† Stellwagen – Doettling, Pulvermuehle 2004. This game was played two rounds after the Stellwagen – Gustafsson game below.

17.♞xd7 ♞xd7 18.dxc5 ♞xc5 19.♞xd7 ♞xd7 20.♞e4 ♞c6 21.♞d1 ♞f6 22.♞xf6† ♞xf6 23.g4 ♞d8=

Stellwagen – Gustafsson, Pulvermuehle 2004. Everything is exchanged, hands are shaken; another day is gone.

B) 13.♔e2



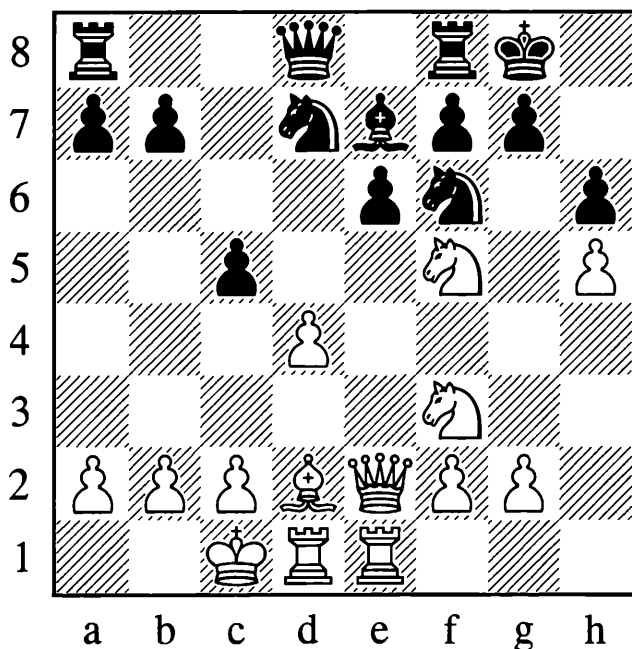
13...c5

The most precise; Black initiates his counter-play before he castles. If instead 13...0–0, apart from the big mainline 14.♘e5, Black should also be wary of the imaginative 14.♘f1!? with the violent attacking plan of g2-g4-g5.

14.♖he1

14.dxc5 ♖c7 is not dangerous.

14...0–0 15.♘f5



This possibility is the result of White doubling on the e-file.

15...♖e8!

A simple solution. Instead 15...exf5 16.♔xe7 ♖c7 17.dxc5 ♖fe8 18.♔d6 ♔xc5 19.♔xc5 ♘xc5 has been played by Anand, but I don't think it is a clear-cut equalizer.

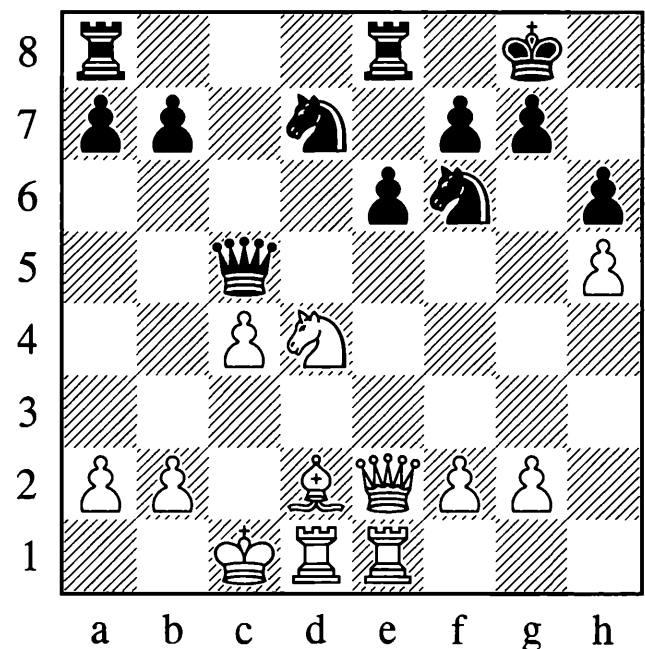
Normal is the sharp 15...cxd4 16.♘3xd4 ♖c5 17.♘xh6† gxh6 18.♖xh6 ♖e8 and now 19.♔f3 or 19.g4 both give White two pawns and strong pressure for the piece. The variation has been tested several times and probably the position is balanced, but maybe it is easier to attack than to defend. Anyway, 15...♖e8 is simpler.

16.♘xe7† ♔xe7 17.c4

A classic anti-Caro-Kann move, taking d5 away from the black knights and preparing ♖c3. The question is – how strong is the bishop? Black's play must ensure that the answer is “not very”.

17.d5 is sharper and looks critical. However, with a few precise moves, Black gets a fully acceptable position. 17...♔d6 18.dxe6 ♖xe6 19.♖e3 ♔c6 was Papp – Zinner, Austria 2008. It is quite annoying for White that h5 is hanging.

17...cxd4 18.♘xd4 ♔c5!



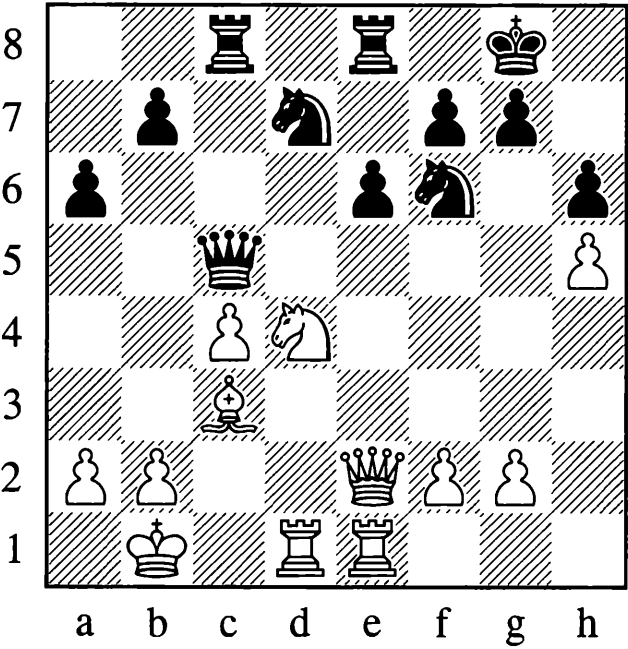
19.♖c3

No better is 19.♘b3 ♔c7.

19...a6

Black strives for harmony. 19...♘b6 was also fine.

20.♚b1 ♖ac8



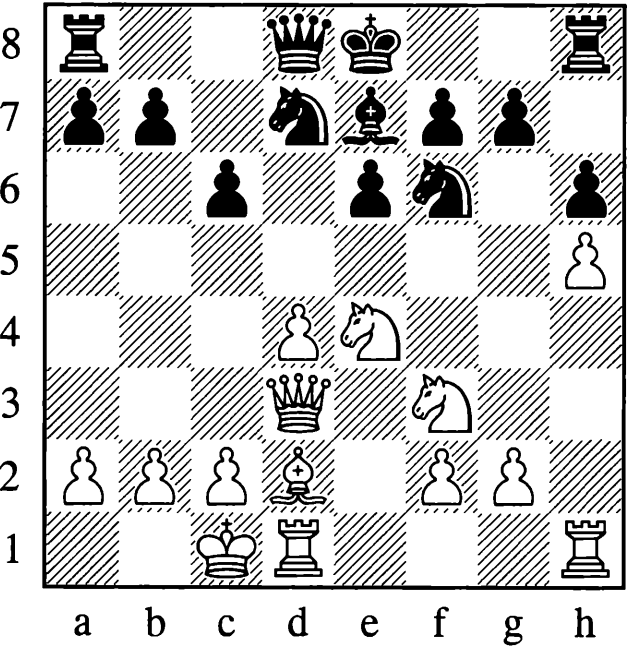
The attack on c4 secures Black good play. In Lonnqvist – Novik, Jyvaskyla 2004, there followed:

21.♙f3 ♙xc4 22.♙xb7

And here Black had a good chance:

22...♘c5N 23.♙b4 ♘ce4♣

C) 13.♘e4



White activates the knight and prepares the typical g2-g4 push, if Black should be careless enough to castle. This is where it gets interesting. Because we want to castle!

13...♘xe4

The most precise move order. 13...0–0 is of course met by 14.g4 with a fierce initiative.

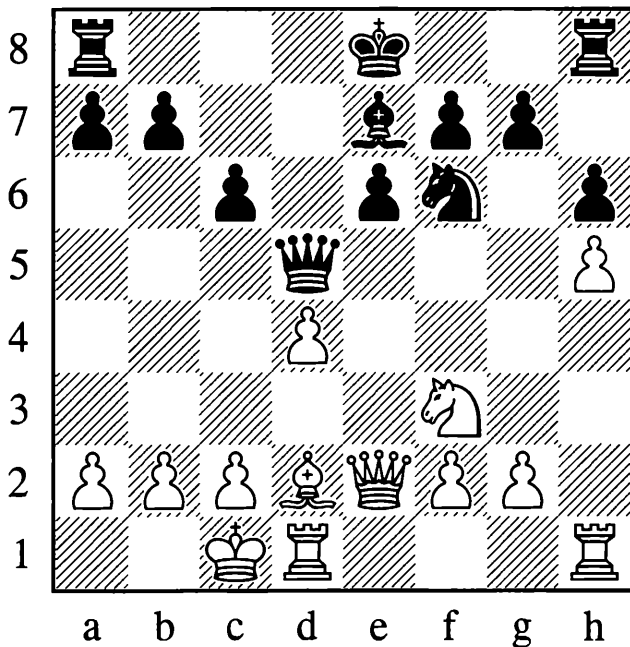
Let's first see what happens if Black takes the pawn. 14...♘xg4 15.♙hg1 f5 and here the Indian rising star Negi launched a very convincing idea: 16.♙c4! fxe4 17.♙xe6† ♖f7 18.♙xg4 exf3 19.♙xg7†! And Black was crushed. 19...♚xg7 20.♙xh6† ♚g8 21.♙g1† ♙g5 22.♙xg5 ♙g7 23.♙xg7† ♚xg7 24.♙xd8† ♚h6 25.♙g5† ♚xh5 26.♙e3 b5 27.♙g7 ♘b6 28.♙f7 ♙g8 29.♙xf3 With an easy win in Negi – Prakash, New Delhi 2009. The only serious try for Black was 16...♙f7N but after 17.♘c3 it is not easy to escape from the grip. The greedy 17...♘xf2 could hold, though it is not to everyone's liking, while the solid 17...♘f8 is strongly met by 18.♘e5 opening the g-file and giving excellent compensation for the pawn. The real problem with all these variations is that Black has no counterplay whatsoever, which means it is extremely unpleasant to defend in practice, though it might hold the balance theoretically.

So after 13...0–0 14.g4 let's examine 14...♘xe4 to gain a better understanding of my recommended move order. After 15.♙xe4 ♘f6 White now has the extra option of playing 16.♙e2 ♙d5 17.g5! simply sacrificing a pawn to speed up the attack. After 17...♙xa2 Shirazi – Savchenko, Cappelle la Grande 2008, continued 18.c3 hxg5 19.♙xg5 ♙a3! 20.h6 ♘e4 and with tricky moves Black had secured dangerous counterplay. However this is rather academic, because White can improve with 18.c4!N hxg5 19.h6 and I have been unable to find a defence for Black.

14.♙xe4 ♘f6

White has two plausible retreats that we shall consider. He can play C1) 15.♙e2 when 15...♙d5 and ...♙e4 is a clean equalizer. But the critical move according to current theory is C2) 15.♙d3.

C1) 15.♙e2 ♙d5!



An important manoeuvre for a Caro-Kann player to know; Black gains a tempo by attacking a2 and is striving for ...♙e4 to exchange queens. Then Black won't be mated and can relax a bit in this fearsome world.

16.c4

16.♙b1 is too feeble. Black can castle and transpose to the 13.♙b1 variation (specifically, line A1), or he can be fresh and take on h5, or just play the standard ...♙e4. All these lines are fine.

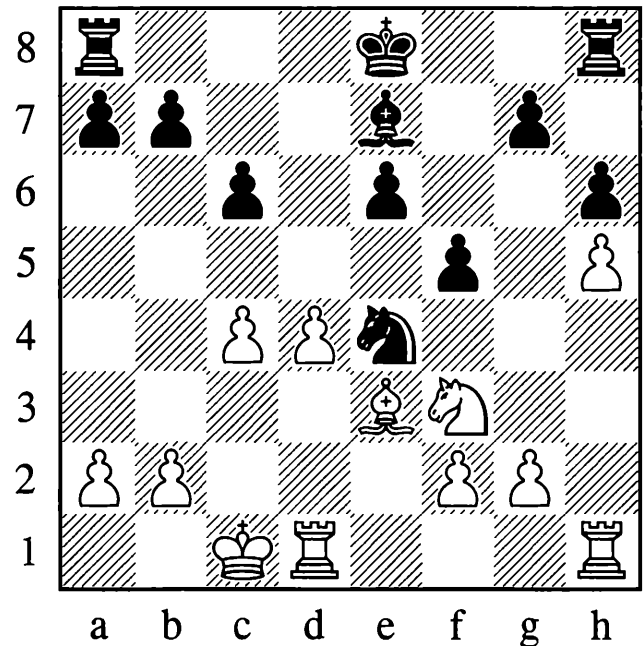
16...♙e4 17.♙xe4

Avoiding the ending is trickier. The natural way to do so is 17.♙e3, but then the black queen is very active compared to when it was on d8 a few moves ago. Black can fight for the initiative with 17...b5!? or, if you prefer a solid option, 17...♘g4 is fine.

17.♙f1 is too extravagant and 17.♙de1 avoids nothing. The latter is just another version of

the usual ending and can hardly be better than the mainline.

17...♘xe4 18.♙e3 f5!?



Black creates some imbalance to generate a position with real winning chances. The normal solid solution is just to castle short and then play a rook to the d-file with a perfectly sound position, albeit one that is hard to nudge out of equilibrium.

Apart from 18...f5, also interesting is 18...♘d6!? when the sudden attack on c4 is a bit unpleasant for White. After 19.b3 Black follows up consistently with 19...b5, placing White in a dilemma:

Giving Black the d5-square with 20.c5 is something that could go wrong in the long run, as in 20...♘e4 21.♙c2 ♘f6 22.♙f4 ♘d5 23.♙e5 f6 24.♙g3 ♙f7 and I prefer Black, Horowska – Gunina, Ningbo 2009.

Whereas 20.♘e5 to support the pawns could in fact leave them rather weak. Black answers 20...bxc4 21.bxc4 ♙f6 and continues to disrupt the harmony in White's position by giving him no time to consolidate. 22.♙f4 0-0 23.♘d7 ♙fd8 24.♘xf6† gxf6 25.♙xh6 ♘xc4 With an unclear position in Tirard – Fontaine, Hyeres 2001. Black's good play on the light squares counterbalances the mighty passed h-pawn.

19.g3

The most frequently played move, but not necessary best, especially considering Black’s ingenious response. White has a range of generally harmless alternatives:

19.♖he1 0–0 or 19.♘d2 ♘xd2 20.♖xd2 ♔f7 are both nothing for White.

19.♔c2 f4 20.♔d3 fxe3 21.♔xe4 exf2 22.♖df1 ♖f8 23.♖xf2 ♙d6 was Anand – Leko, Nice (rapid) 2008. The game is level and was soon agreed drawn.

19.d5 cxd5 20.cxd5 f4! 21.♖d4 exd5 22.♙xf4 0–0 23.♙e3 ♖f5 This is Sulskis – Cheparinov, Novi Sad 2009; Black can’t complain.

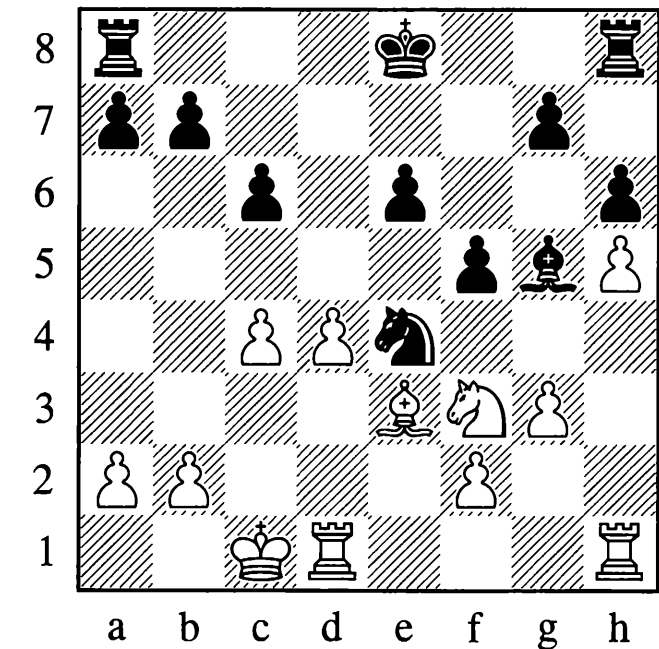
19...♙g5!

With this surprising move Black simultaneously fights for the initiative, space and structure. And it seems to work. See the illustrative game for more.

Calzetta Ruiz – Kovchan

Porto San Giorgio 2009

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.♘d2 dxe4 4.♘xe4 ♙f5 5.♘g3 ♙g6 6.h4 h6 7.♘f3 ♘d7 8.h5 ♙h7 9.♙d3 ♙xd3 10.♖xd3 e6 11.♙d2 ♘gf6 12.0–0–0 ♙e7 13.♘e4 ♘xe4 14.♖xe4 ♘f6 15.♖e2 ♖d5 16.c4 ♖e4 17.♖xe4 ♘xe4 18.♙e3 f5 19.g3 ♙g5!



Giving White some concrete problems to solve. First of all, Black threatens to take on f2 and White is reluctant to take on g5 herself. If she takes with the bishop the black knight is very active and hitting f2. But if she takes with the knight on g5 she risks ending up with bad bishop vs. good knight.

20.♖h2

A couple of other games have also tested this position:

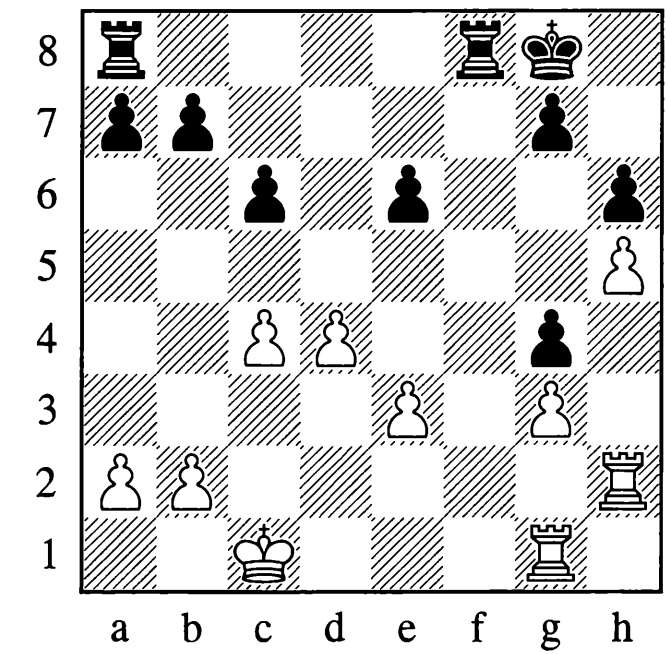
20.♙xg5 hxg5 21.♖h2 ♖d8 Rabeyrin – Dziuba, Pardubice 2008. The ending is level, but with lots of play left (as Black demonstrated by winning comfortably).

20.♖dg1 ♖d8 21.♘xg5 ♘xg5 22.♖d1 ½–½ Rivera Kuzawka – Spassov, Pontevedra 2008. 22...♔f7 was indeed equal, but Black could certainly play on.

20...♙xe3† 21.fxe3 0–0

The pawn structure has transformed, but the game is still balanced.

22.♖g1 ♘f6 23.♘e5 ♘g4! 24.♘xg4 fxe4

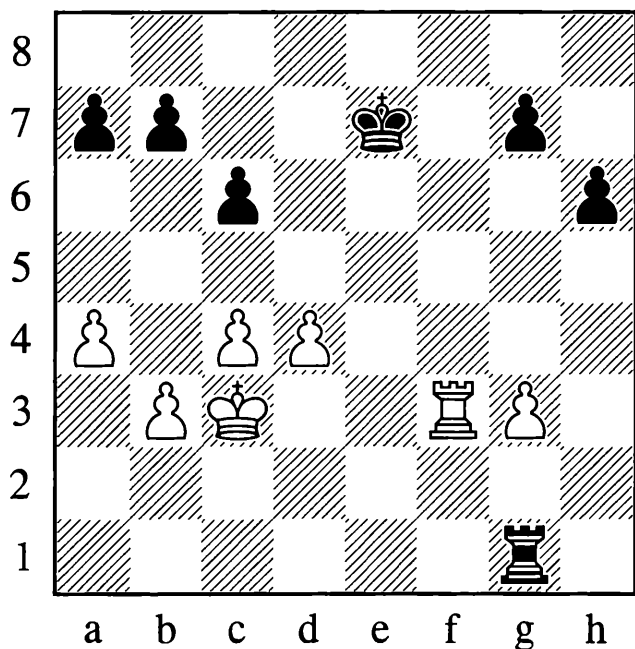


Activity is crucial in rook endings and the possession of the f-file is quite significant.

25.♖h4 ♖f5 26.♖gh1 ♖g5 27.♖f1

So White takes it! However Black immediately generates counterplay.

27...e5 28.♙c2 ♜f8 29.♞xf8† ♙xf8 30.♙d3 exd4 31.exd4 ♜f5 32.♞xg4 ♜xh5 33.a4 ♜h2 34.b3 ♜b2 35.♞f4† ♙e7 36.♙c3 ♜g2 37.♞f3 ♜g1



Black has the active rook and some winning chances.

38.♙d3 a5 39.♙e4 ♙e6 40.♞e3 ♜d1 41.♞e2 h5 42.♙f4† ♙f6 43.♙e4 ♙e6 44.♙f4† ♙d6 45.♙e4 g6 46.♞e3 ♜f1 47.♙d3 g5 48.♙e2 ♜f6 49.♙d3 h4 50.gxh4 gxh4 51.c5†

A drastic decision that ruins White's pawn structure, but the passive 51.♞h3 ♜f4 was also unpleasant.

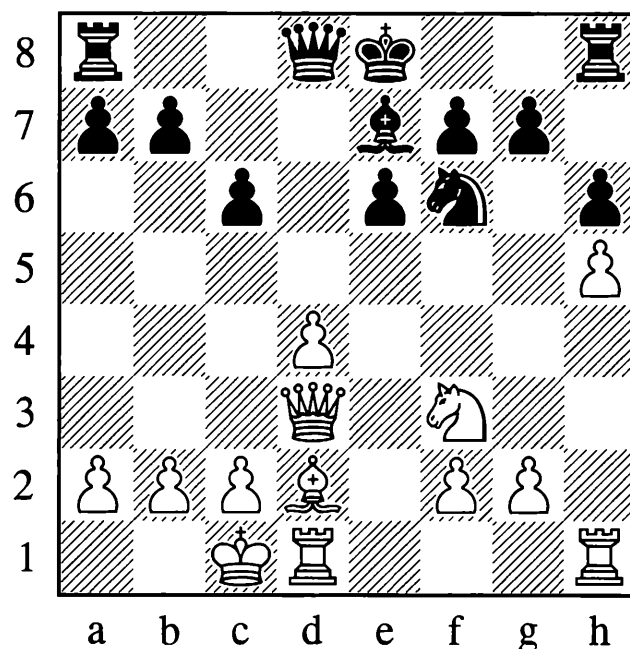
51...♙d7 52.♞h3 ♜f4 53.♙c4 ♙e6 54.b4 axb4 55.♞b3 ♜f7 56.♞h3 ♜h7 57.♙xb4 ♙d5

Black is winning.

58.♙c3 ♙e4 59.♙c4 ♙f4 60.d5 ♙g4 61.♞h1 h3 62.d6 ♙g3 63.♙b4 ♜h5 64.♞d1 h2 65.d7 ♜h8 66.♙a5 ♜d8 67.♙b6 ♜xd7 68.♞xd7 h1=♞ 69.♙xb7 ♞e4 70.♞d6 ♞xa4 71.♞xc6 ♞b5† 72.♙c7 ♙f4 73.♙d6 ♙e4 74.♞b6 ♞e8 75.♞b4† ♙f5 76.♞b6 ♞d8† 77.♙c6 ♙e5 78.♙b5 ♞d3† 79.♙b4 ♞b1† 80.♙c4 ♞a2†

81.♙b4 ♞d2† 82.♙c4 ♞d7 83.♙b4 ♞d2† 84.♙c4 ♞a5 85.♞b3 ♞a4† 86.♞b4 ♞c2† 87.♙b5 ♙d5 88.♙a5 ♙xc5 89.♞b5† ♙c4 90.♞b4† ♙c3 91.♞b6 ♞f5† 92.♙a6 ♞d7 93.♙a5 ♙c4 94.♞c6† ♙d5 95.♞b6 ♙e5 0–1

C2) 15.♞d3



Deep modern chess. This move is specifically directed against Black's ...♞d5-e4 plan, and if instead Black castles kingside then White has the usual pawnstorm.

15...0–0

What the hell. We know White will throw g2-g4 in our face, but then we take it and maybe it is not so clear.

If 15...♞d5 16.c4 ♞e4 then 17.♞b3! is the point. It may not look like a disaster yet, because Black can castle queenside and protect b7.

In fact, the position after 17...0–0–0 18.♞he1 ♞h7 19.♞a4 ♙b8 20.♙e5 ♜hf8 21.♙f4 is completely lost. 21...♙d6 22.♞e3 There is no defence against the attack. To say that the queen on h7 is out of play is almost an understatement. 22...♙a8 23.♙xc6 a6 24.♙xd8 ♙xf4 25.♙xb7 ♞e4 26.♙c5 ♙xe3†

27.fxe3 ♖xe3† 28.♔b1 1–0 Jovanovic – Braun, Rogaska Slatina 2009.

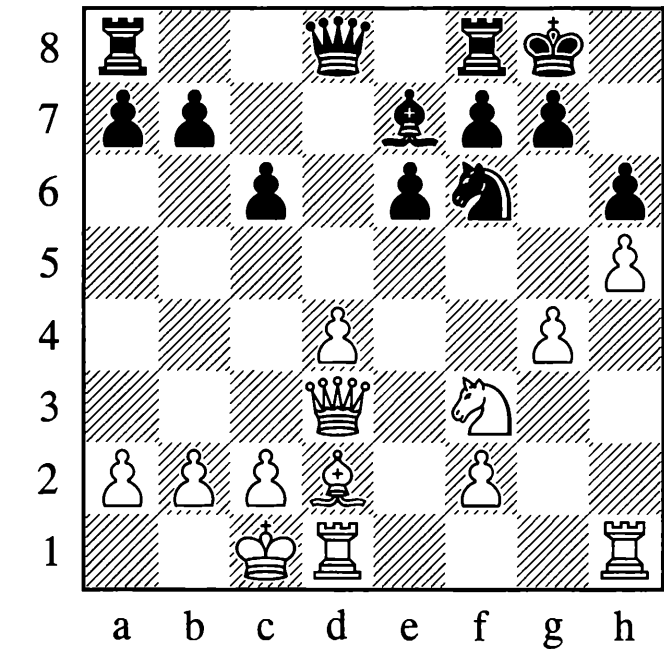
Black has tried to keep the variation alive with 17...b5, but 18.♖he1 ♗f5 19.♘e5 ♜c8 20.f3± gives him all sorts of problems.

Look at the stem game: 20...bxc4? 21.♗b7! ♜d8 22.g4 ♗h7 23.♙a5 ♘d5 24.♙xd8 1–0 Leko – Dreev, Moscow (blitz) 2007.

You should also know that 20...0–0 is refuted by the spectacular 21.♘g6! fxg6 22.♗e5 bxc4. The black queen is trapped so she must attack her sister: 23.♗b7 ♜b8 This is Naranjo Moreno – Panelo, Spain 2009, and now 24.♗xa7!N is the most precise, for instance: 24...♜a8 (please note that 24...♗d3 doesn't help, as after 25.♙xh6 the queen is still a goner) 25.♗b7 ♜fb8 (or 25...♜ab8 26.♗xe7 ♘d5 27.♗xe6† ♗xe6 28.♜xe6) 26.♗xc6 c3 27.♜xf5 cxd2† 28.♔b1 gxf5 29.♗xe6† ♔f8 30.♜xd2 And White should win.

Recently Black has come up with moves such as 15...♘g4 or 15...b5, but I don't fully trust them. Still, they might be worth investigating.

16.g4



The critical move. 16.♔b1 transposes to ♔b1 lines and the seemingly active 16.♘e5 is well met by 16...c5.

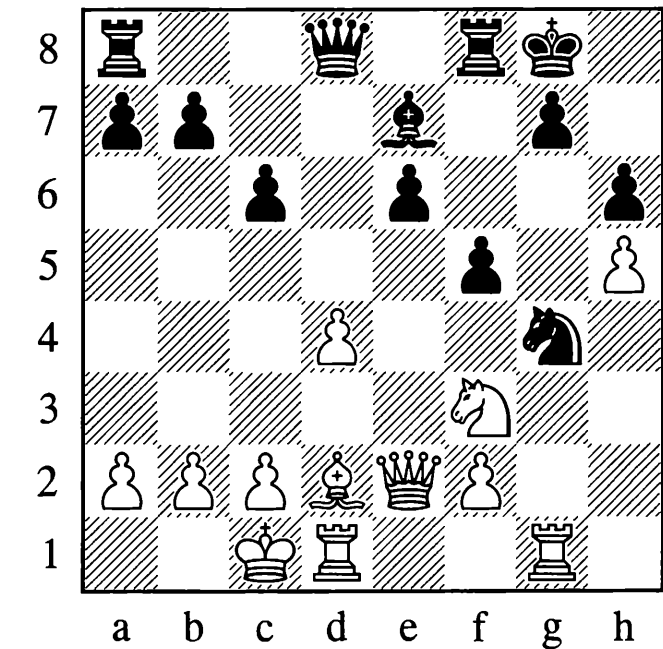
16...♘g4 17.♜hg1

Black can't take on f2 anyway so there is no need to protect it. 17.♗e2 ♔h8! 18.♜hg1 ♘f6 This shows the difference – with the king off the g-file, ♙xh6 is no threat and the open file is probably not enough for White to break through. For example, Saric – Dizdarevic, Pula 2005, continued: 19.♘e5 ♗d5 20.f3?! ♗xa2 21.♙xh6 (desperation) 21...gxh6 22.♗e3 ♘h7 23.♗xh6 ♙f6 24.♘g6† fxg6 25.hxg6 ♗a1† 26.♔d2 ♗a5† 27.c3 ♙g5† 0–1

17...f5

Not 17...♘xf2? as 18.♗e2 ♘xd1 19.♙xh6! is too dangerous and probably just lost. No simple forced win is clear (there are too many possible defensive tries to be sure) but this is not a line Black can trust over-the-board. But for those who enjoy analysing at home, it could be fun.

18.♗e2

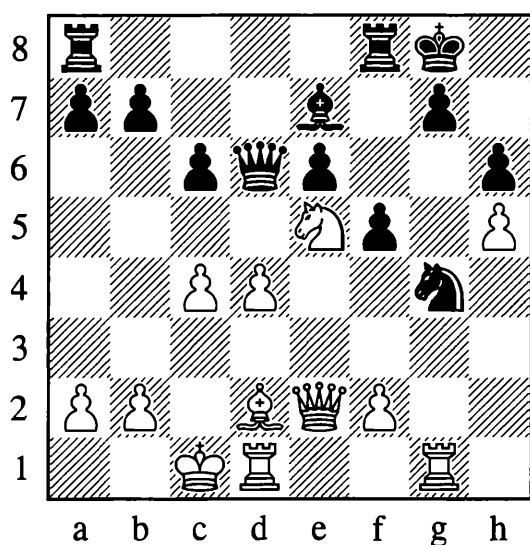


This sharp position is critical for the whole ♙d2 variation. It has been tested in a handful of games and so far White's results have been very encouraging. White definitely has an initiative in return for the pawn, but it may be somewhat surprising to learn that Black is actually balancing on the verge of collapse. To understand why and to work out an

appropriate antidote it is absolutely necessary to delve deeply into this position.

The first thing that springs to mind is that White is threatening to take on e6 with check and regain the pawn. Okay, the pawn can be defended, so if that was all Black had to worry about he would have an easy life. But much more troublesome is White's strategic idea of ♖f3-e5. This will confront the g4-knight that blocks the important g-file, and which is therefore a vital defensive tool. Let's start by looking at some practical examples.

18...♙d5 19.c4 ♙d6 (or 19...♙e4 20.♙xe4 fxe4 21.♙xg4 ♙xf3 22.♙xh6 ♙f8 23.♙xg7!) 20.♖e5!

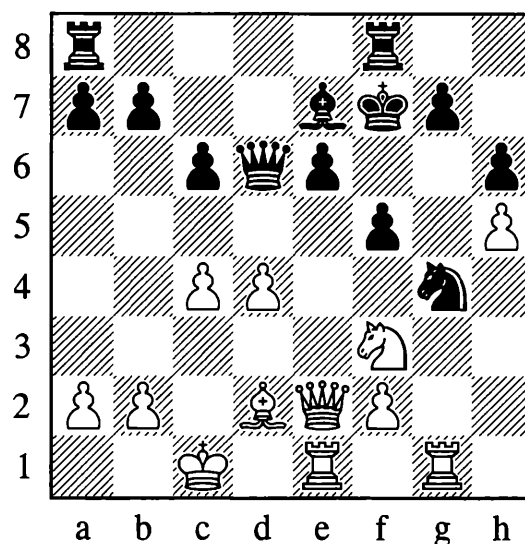


And Black is blown apart. 20...♙xd4 21.♖xg4 fxg4 22.♙xg4 Winning. 22...♙xf2 23.♙xe6† ♙f7 24.♙f4 1–0 Leko – Topalov, Nice (rapid) 2009. This was just a blindfold game, yet it is remarkable that the then World Number 1 couldn't find any way to put up some resistance. The conclusion is clear – 18...♙d5 doesn't work.

18...♙e8 19.♙xe6† ♙f7 Black returns the pawn and hopes to get into an ending. 20.♙xf7† ♙xf7 21.♖e5 It's always this move. It transpires that White's initiative is powerful even without the queens. 21...♖xe5 22.dxe5 ♙c5 This is Negi – David, Evry 2009, and

now 23.e6!N ♙e7 24.♙g6 ♙ae8 25.♙c3± offers good winning chances after either 25...♙xe6 26.♙xg7† or 25...♙xf2 26.♙d7.

18...♖f7 This looks suspicious, doesn't it? 19.♙de1 ♙d5 20.c4 ♙d6



21.♖b1 A human move. (The computer finds 21.♙b4! ♙xb4 22.♙xe6† ♖e8 23.a3 and wins.) 21...♙fe8 22.♙xg4! fxg4 23.♖e5† ♖g8 24.♙xg4 With a strong attack for the exchange, Nithander – Akesson, Sweden 2009. So 18...♖f7 invites trouble.

18...♙c8 19.♖e5 (19.♖e1!?N with the threat of f2-f3 looks even stronger. Later the knight can go to an excellent square on d3.) 19...♖xe5 20.dxe5 f4 21.♙g6 ♙g5 22.♙c4 And Black was in trouble in Szymanowska – S. Kasparov, Koszalin 1999.

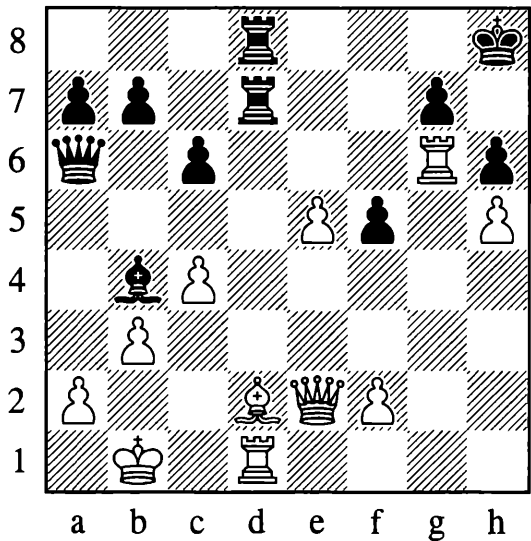
I am pretty sure that Black should return the pawn, so I began to examine a lot of new ways to do so, hoping to find salvation.

18...♙f6N 19.♙xe6† ♖h8 20.♖e5! Black's plan was to prevent this, but it still works. 20...♖xe5 21.dxe5 ♙e8 22.♙xe8†! ♙xe8 23.exf6± Black has a terrible position because 23...gxf6 24.♙g6 wins easily.

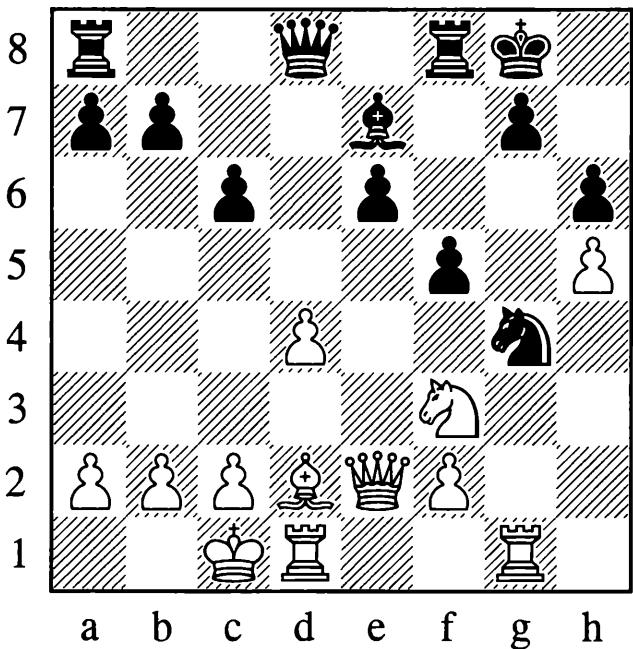
18...♙f7N 19.♙xe6 ♙d5 20.♙xd5 cxd5 is another ending, but again after the standard

21.♘e5± it is White who has all the fun.

18...♔h8N We are closing in on the one true path. 19.♘e5! (19.♙xe6 ♕d6 is okay for Black) 19...♘xe5 20.dxe5 With the usual long-term compensation for the pawn. Fritz's and my mainline goes: 20...♖f7 21.♖g6 ♕d4 22.c3 ♕a4 23.♔b1 ♖d8 (23...♙e4† 24.♙xe4 fxe4 25.♙e3 is not completely satisfactory for Black) 24.c4 ♙f8 25.b3 ♕a6? (better is the passive 25...♙a3 26.♙f4 ♖e8±) 26.♖xe6! ♖fd7 27.♖g6± And the pin on the d-file is useless. 27...♙b4



28.e6 ♖xd2 29.♖xd2 ♖xd2 30.♙xd2! ♙xd2 31.e7 And White wins. Conclusion: 18...♔h8 is the best try so far and probably playable (for example, there was only a slight disadvantage if Black diverged on move 25).



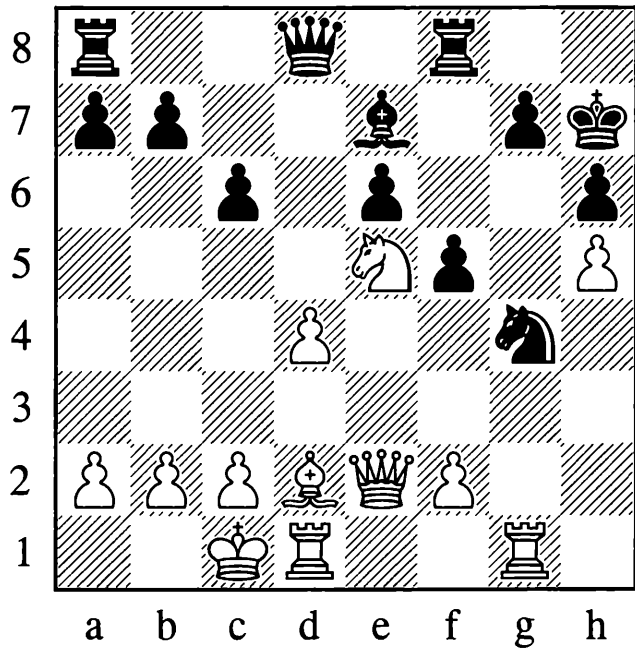
Our understanding is improving all the time and, as I was completing my research, an important game was published which helped me to find the ultimate set-up that saves the day.

18...♔h7!

The perfect square.

19.♘e5

The standard plan. 19.♙xe6 ♕d6 is nothing.



19...♘xe5!N

Less convincing is 19...♙xd4. The problem is not 20.♘xg4 with exchanges and a quick draw: 20...fxg4 21.♙xh6 ♖xf2 22.♖xd4 ♖xe2 23.♖dxg4 ♙c5 24.♖xg7† ♔xh6 25.♖1g6† ♔xh5 26.♖g5† ♔h6 27.♖5g6† ♔h5 ½–½ Jovanovic – Marcelin, Austria 2009.

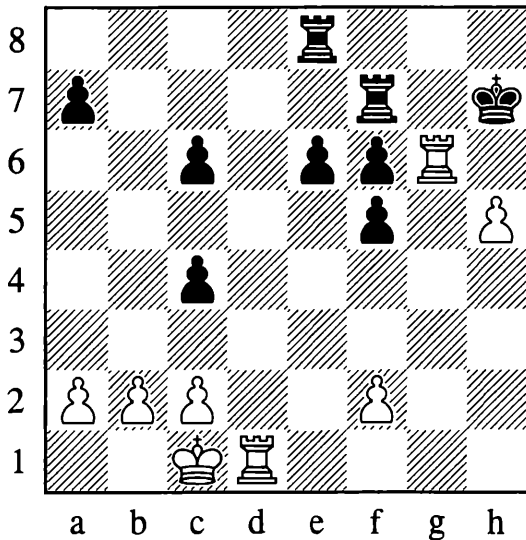
The real test however is 20.♘g6! which leads to highly unclear positions with a material imbalance. For example, 20...♙a3 21.c3 ♕xf2 22.♘xf8† ♖xf8 23.♙xe6 seems logical and might be good for White.

20.dxe5 ♖f7 21.♖g6

Attacking e6 and the same move that worked so well against 18...♔h8. However, with the king on h7 there is a small difference that prevents White from executing the same combination as before.

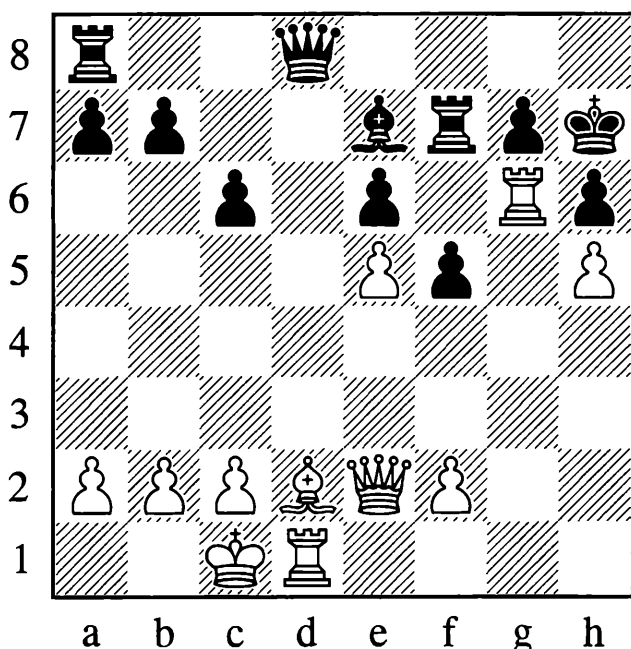
We must consider White's other tries:

21.♙xh6 ♖a5 22.♕c4 ♕xe5 This is safest. (If 22...gxf6 23.♕xe6 ♖af8 24.♖d7 ♕c5 and *maybe* White hasn't more than a draw.) 23.♙f4 (or 23.♖ge1 ♕f6 24.♖xe6 ♕h4 25.♕xh4 ♙xh4=) 23...b5 24.♙xe5 bxc4 25.♖g6 ♖e8 26.♖dg1 ♙f6 27.♙xf6 gxf6 28.♖d1



White has the open files, but Black can challenge the rook on the g-file and gain counterplay: 28...c3! 29.bxc3 ♖g8 30.♖xg8 (or 30.♖dg1 ♖d8) 30...♙xg8 31.♖d6 e5 32.♖xc6 ♙g7 With a likely draw, for instance: 33.c4 ♙h6 34.c5 ♙xh5 35.♖d6 ♙g5 36.c6 ♖c7=

21.♙b4 ♙g5† 22.♙b1 ♖d7 23.♙d6∞ is a positional approach. After 23...♕e8 24.♕c4 f4 it is difficult for White to get any further. For example, 25.♕e4† ♙g8 26.♖h1 ♕f7 with a balanced game.



21...♕d4 22.c3 ♕a4 23.♙b1 ♖d8

With counterplay on the d-file. This was elegantly refuted in the 18...♙h8 line above, but, as I have already emphasized, a small change in the king's position can make a huge difference.

24.c4

Or 24.♖dg1 ♙g5.

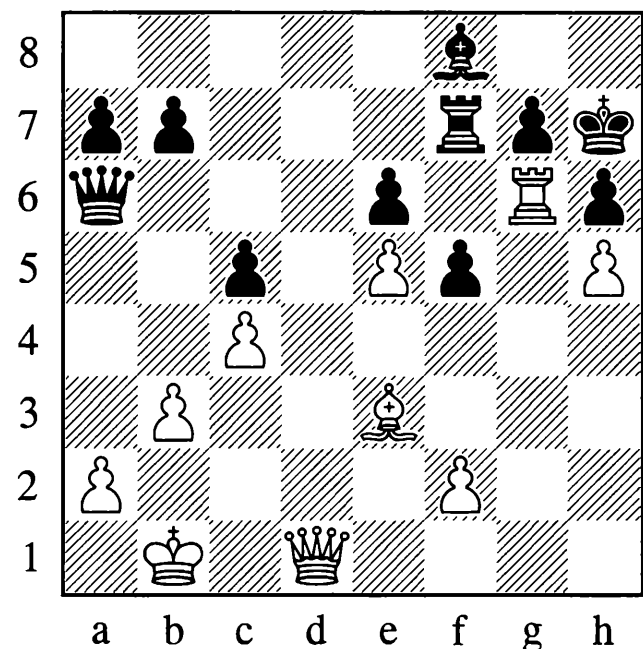
24...♙f8

Protecting g7 and preparing to double rooks.

25.b3 ♕a6 26.♙e3

26.♖xe6 is not as good as before: 26...♖fd7 27.♖g6 ♙b4 28.e6 (or 28.♖xg7† ♖xg7 29.♙xb4 ♖xd1† 30.♕xd1 ♕b6 and Black should be okay) 28...♖xd2 29.♖xg7†! (29.♖xd2 ♖xd2 30.♕xd2 ♙xd2 31.e7 is refuted by 31...♕a3 threatening mate on c1. The pawn doesn't promote with check when the black king is on h7 – that is an important little detail.) 29...♙h8! 30.♖xd2 ♖xd2 31.♕xd2! ♙xd2 32.e7 Now it is with check again! 32...♙xg7 33.e8=♕ And the active queen gives White good drawing chances.

26...♖xd1† 27.♕xd1 c5

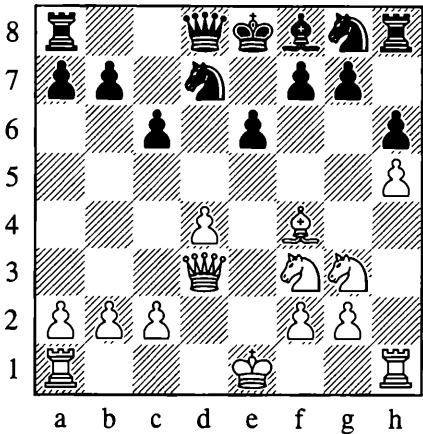
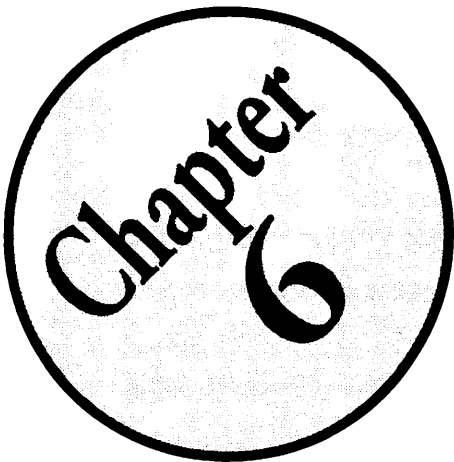


The “offside” queen on a6 suddenly defends the e6-pawn. The limited material makes it hard

for White to threaten anything and so Black’s extra pawn gives him the upper hand, though it won’t be easy to convert his advantage.

Conclusion

11.♔d2 is not as quiet as it looks. After 11...♖gf6 12.0–0–0 ♔e7 it is true that 13.♖b1 0–0 14.♗e4 is rather harmless because of the important idea 14...♗xe4 15.♙xe4 ♗f6 16.♙e2 ♙d5! followed by ...♙e4 with instant equality. Also 13.♙e2 c5 14.♖he1 0–0 15.♗f5 is nothing to worry about after 15...♖e8!. Critical however is 13.♗e4 ♗xe4 14.♙xe4 ♗f6 15.♙d3!, when the usual ...♙d5 plan doesn’t work. Black should instead try 15...0–0 16.g4 ♗xg4 17.♖hg1 f5 18.♙e2 and now 18...♗h7! leads to very complicated play that seems fine for Black.



Classical Variation

11. ♖f4

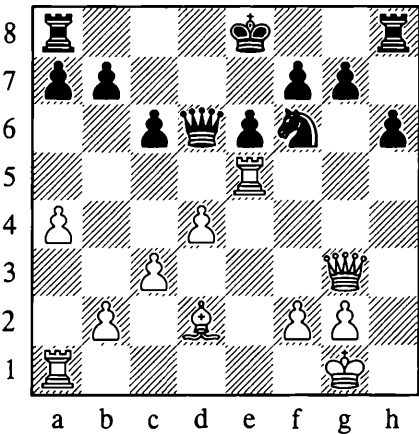
Variation Index

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 dxe4 4.♗xe4 ♕f5 5.♗g3 ♖g6 6.h4 h6 7.♗f3 ♘d7 8.h5 ♕h7
9.♕d3 ♖xd3 10.♙xd3 e6

11. ♖f4 ♙a5†

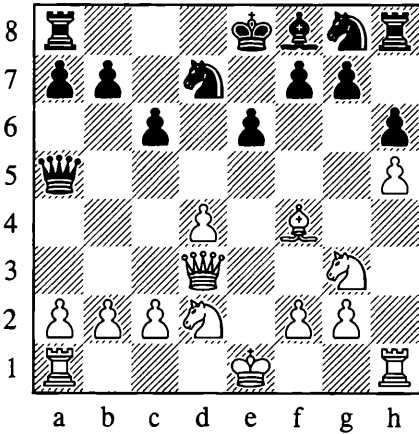
- A) 12.c354
- B) 12.♗d256

A) after 21. ♙g3



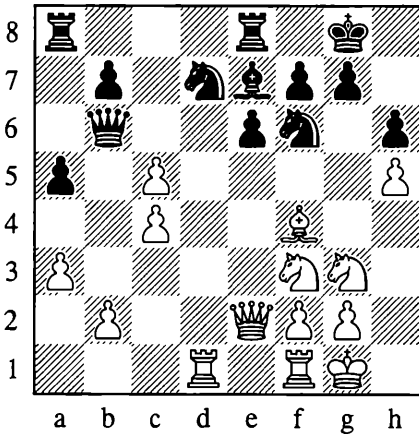
21... ♙g8

B) 12. ♗d2



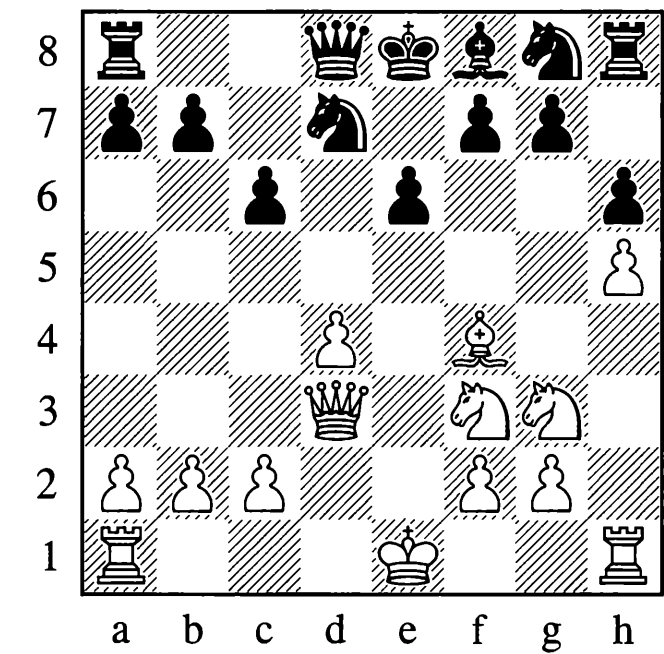
Hector's secret weapon

B) after 19. dxc5



19... ♙xc5N

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 dxe4 4.♗xe4 ♕f5
5.♗g3 ♖g6 6.h4 h6 7.♗f3 ♗d7 8.h5 ♖h7
9.♕d3 ♕xd3 10.♔xd3 e6 11.♕f4



A much more active square for the bishop than d2. Having said that, White’s basic plan is still the same: to castle long and combine positional and aggressive ideas depending on what Black does. With the bishop on a strong post on f4 the possibility of playing an early ♗e5 is probably the most important difference, and this idea can be disruptive for Black. To balance this, there is also a slight drawback with 11.♕f4 – Black can give an annoying check.

11...♔a5†

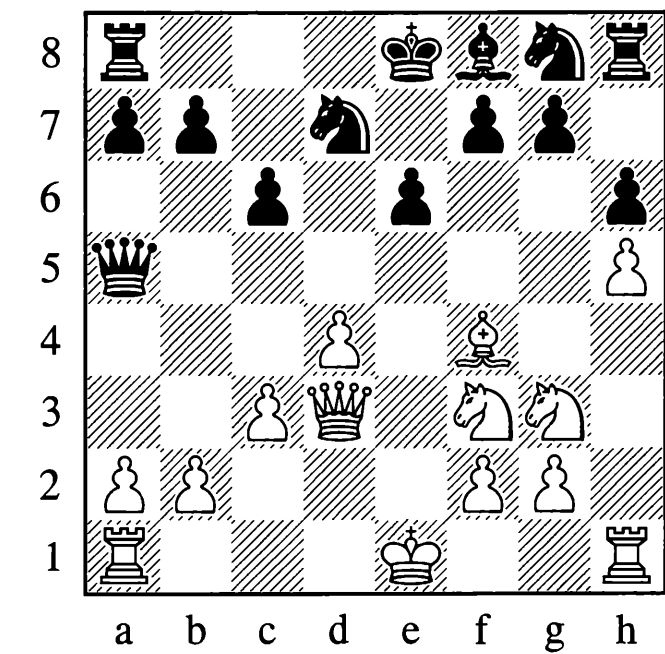
The modern solution and the move that has revived interest in the Caro-Kann. Of course simple development with 11...♗gf6 followed by ...♕e7 and short castling is possible, but Black is a bit more passive than I would like, and it is not so easy to equalize.

After 11...♔a5† White has more immediate problems to solve, the first one being how to parry the check. The main move is to withdraw the bishop to d2, but in this section we will examine the minor lines A) 12.c3 and B) 12.♗d2.

But first of all, we should note that offering an exchange of queens with 12.♔d2 is harmless.

12...♔xd2† (Black could even consider 12...♕b4! 13.c3 ♕e7) 13.♗xd2 ♗b6 14.♗ge4 0–0–0 15.c3 ♗d5 16.♕g3 f5 17.♗c5 ♕xc5 18.dxc5 f4 19.♕h4 ♗df6 20.0–0–0 ♔d5 And with weak pawns all over the board, White had to scramble for compensation with 21.♗c4 in Keijzer – Goebel, corr. 2004, and he probably did have just enough counterplay to hold the balance.

A) 12.c3



White keeps his bishop on the active f4-square. That’s the good thing about this move. The pressure from the black queen makes it difficult to castle long, and White soon runs out of normal moves. Those are the bad things!

12...♗gf6 13.a4!?

A move based on the rather bizarre logic that if you can’t castle long, then why not launch a pawn offensive on that side of the board. White has also tried a bunch of other moves without getting anything. Here is a sample:

13.♗e5 ♗xe5 14.♕xe5 0–0–0 and the threat of ...♔xe5 forces White to lose more time.

13.♔e2 ♕e7 14.♗e5 ♗xe5 15.dxe5 ♗d5 16.♕d2 This is Trylski – Kupryjanczyk, Poznan

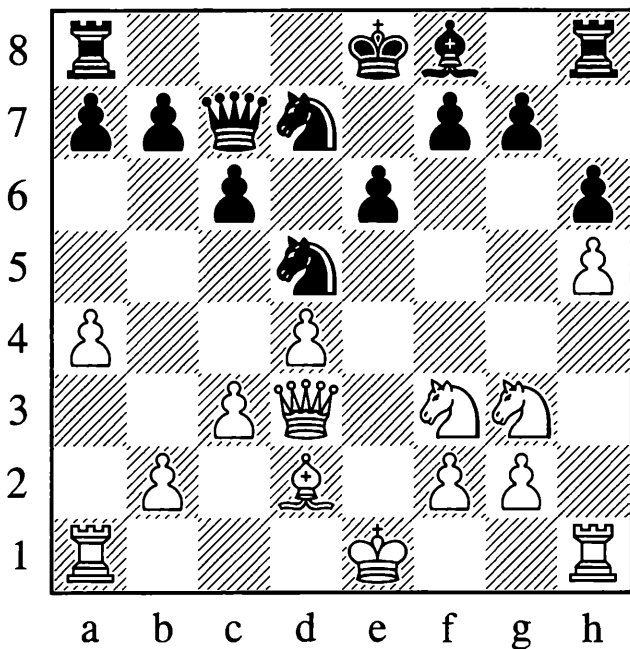
1988, and now 16...♘b6N prevents c3-c4 and solves all Black's opening problems at once.

13.b4 Similar thinking to the mainline, but imprecise in its execution. Black can respond with 13...♙b5 or 13...♙a3, in either case with good play.

13...♘d5

Instead 13...♙e7 14.b4 ♙d8 is solid, albeit rather passive.

14.♙d2 ♙c7



White's pawn on a4 determines his play, at least as far as it tells him what not to do! Castling long is out of the question and the pawn has also left a potential hole on b4 – this hole will become visible if White is compelled to chase the black knight away from d5 with c3-c4.

15.0–0

The normal reaction in an abnormal situation. More original ideas could easily backfire:

After 15.♙h4?! ♙e7 16.♙g4 ♘7f6 it turns out that 17.♙xg7 ♙f8 traps the rook, so White must blushing return with 17.♙h4 when after 17...0–0 Black must be fine.

15.♙f1 Freeing e1 for one rook while leaving the other on h1, hoping to be able to use it in some attacking scheme. In Panchenko – Bronstein, Moscow 1981, Black coolly responded with 15...a5 and steered the game into a positional battle, which quickly turned in his favour: 16.♙e2 ♙e7 17.♘e5?! ♘xe5 18.♙xe5 ♙xe5 19.dxe5 ♘b6

15...♙d6 16.♘e4 ♘5f6

The h5-pawn is about to drop.

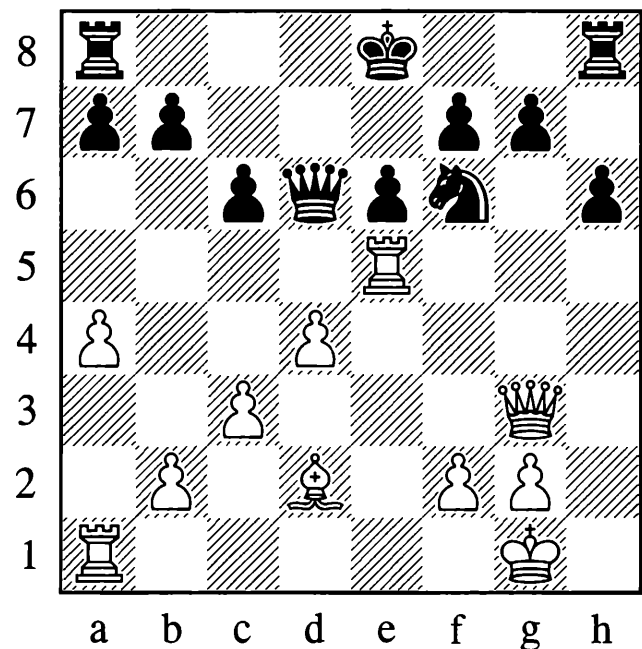
17.♘xd6† ♙xd6 18.♙fe1 ♘xh5

Why not? An extra pawn is always nice to have. We are Caro-Kann players, remember. Not some chaos pilots from the King's Indian.

19.♘e5

Best. Against other moves Black would just withdraw his knight to f6 and ask White what he has for the material.

19...♘xe5 20.♙xe5 ♘f6 21.♙g3



21...♙g8

Cool defence.

22.b4 g5!

Houska proposes 22...0–0–0, but then would follow 23.♙f3 with long-term compensation for the pawn.

23.b5 ♖g6 24.♖ae1 ♔f8

This way Black solves his king’s problems without giving White attacking chances.

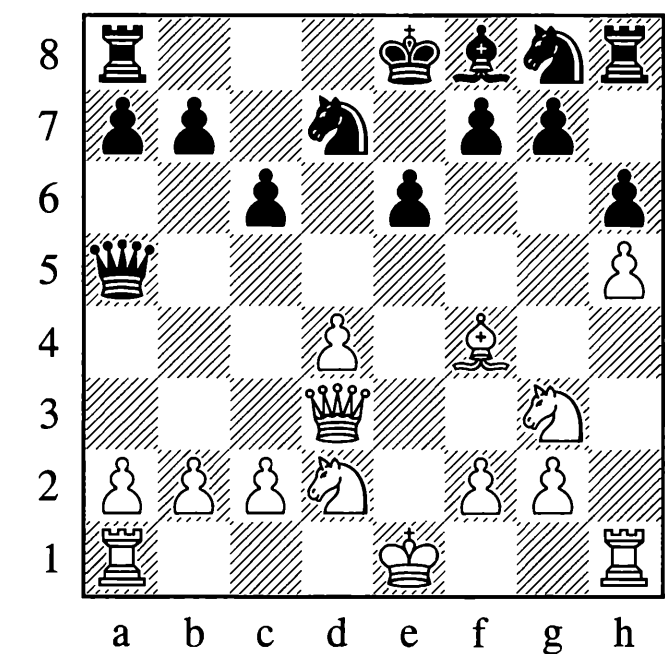
25.bxc6

25.♙xg5 won the pawn back with tactical means. However, the ending after 25...♙xg3 26.♙xg3 ♖xg3 27.fxg3 ♔g7 is fine for Black.

25...♙xc6 26.♙d3 ♔g7

In Wojcik – Pfalz, corr. 2005, White barely had enough for the pawn.

B) 12.♘d2



A specialty of the imaginative Swedish attacker, Jonny Hector, who has scored a fearsome 6/6 with it. However, Hector’s successes should not deceive us about the move’s objective merits – Black should be okay just by making standard moves.

12...♘gf6 13.c4

Preventing ...♘d5.

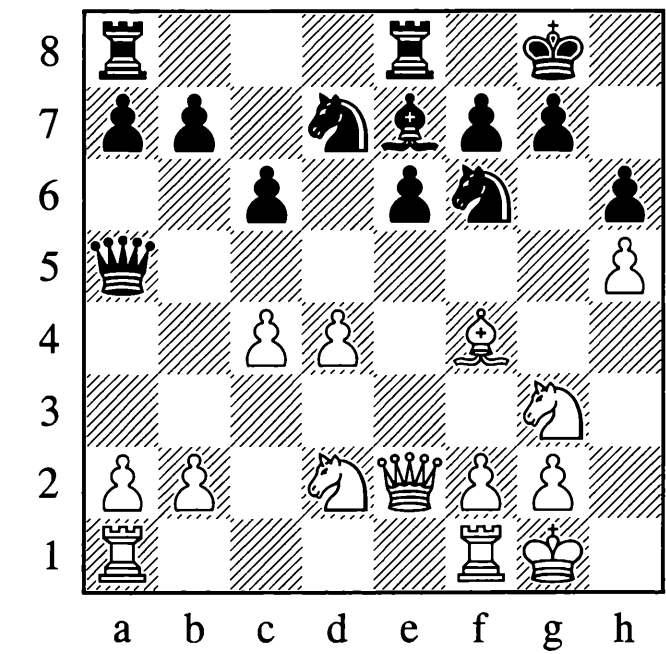
13...♙e7 14.♙e2

Protecting h5 and planning to castle kingside. There is a certain logic behind White’s play; everything seems to fit together, which probably fooled some of the strong players who have had to face this line. Let me

repeat myself: if Black makes normal moves, he can’t be worse.

Probably as a result of similar reasoning, Hector decided to vary with 14.♙f3!? when he played against me in the Danish league in 2009. The game continued 14...0–0 15.0–0 ♖fe8 16.a3 ♙b6 17.♙e3 and now I should have played the simple equalizer 17...c5N 18.dxc5 ♙xc5 19.♙xc5 ♙xc5.

14...0–0 15.0–0 ♖fe8



16.a3

A refinement by the inventor. In the stem game Hector played 16.♙fd1 when Black logically replied 16...b5!? 17.a3 ♖ac8 18.♖ac1 ♙a6 19.♙e5 bxc4 20.♘xc4 c5 with equality, Hector – Iordachescu, Malmo 2005.

16...♙b6

Too passive was 16...♙d8 17.♖ad1 a5 18.♘f3 a4 19.♘e5 ♘f8 when 20.♙f3 ♘8h7 21.♖d3± left White in the driving seat in Hector – Agrest, Helsingor 2009.

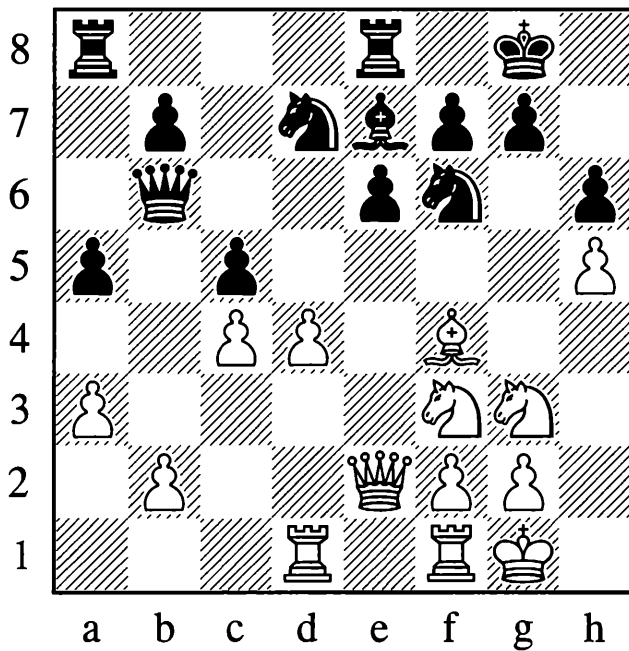
17.♘f3 a5

Holding back b2-b4.

18.♖ad1

After 18.c5 ♙a6 Black gets good play on the light squares.

18...c5=



The typical thrust and, as usual, a clear equalizer.

19.dxc5

So far this is Balogh – Dautov, Warsaw 2005, and now the simplest is:

19...♙xc5N

And Black has no problems.

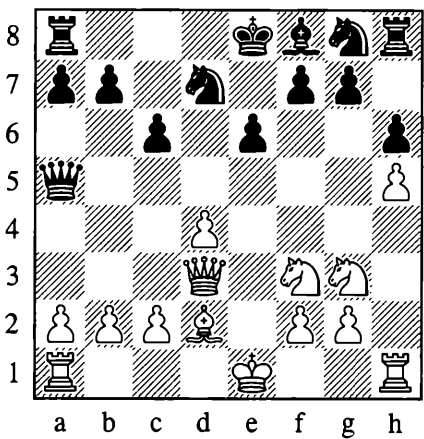
Conclusion

On 11.♘f4 the modern 11...♙a5† encourages White to return the bishop to d2, which we will see in the next sections.

If he instead plays 12.c3 ♘gf6 13.a4!? then after 13...♘d5 Black is fine.

Hector's pet line 12.♘d2 ♘gf6 13.c4 also does not promise White an opening advantage. Black simply plays 13...♙e7 followed by castling short. Often a well-timed ...c6-c5 will equalize completely.

Chapter 7



Classical Variation

12.♔d2

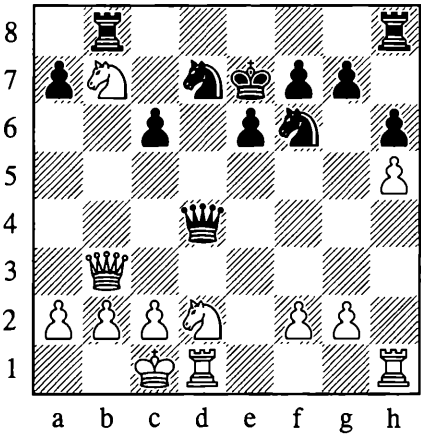
Variation Index

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 dxe4 4.♘xe4 ♕f5 5.♘g3 ♖g6 6.h4 h6 7.♘f3 ♘d7 8.h5 ♕h7
9.♔d3 ♕xd3 10.♙xd3 e6 11.♔f4 ♙a5†

12.♔d2 ♖b4

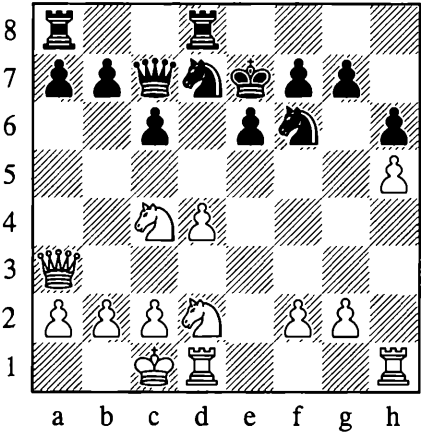
A) 13.♘e4 ♘gf6! 14.♘d6† ♔e7	60
A1) 15.♘xb7	60
A2) 15.♘c4	61
B) 13.c3	63

A1) after 18...♙ab8



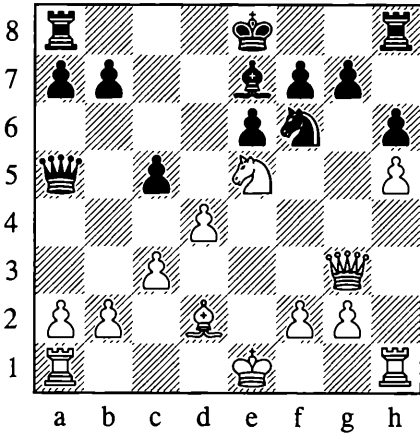
19.♙a3†

A2) 18.♙a3†



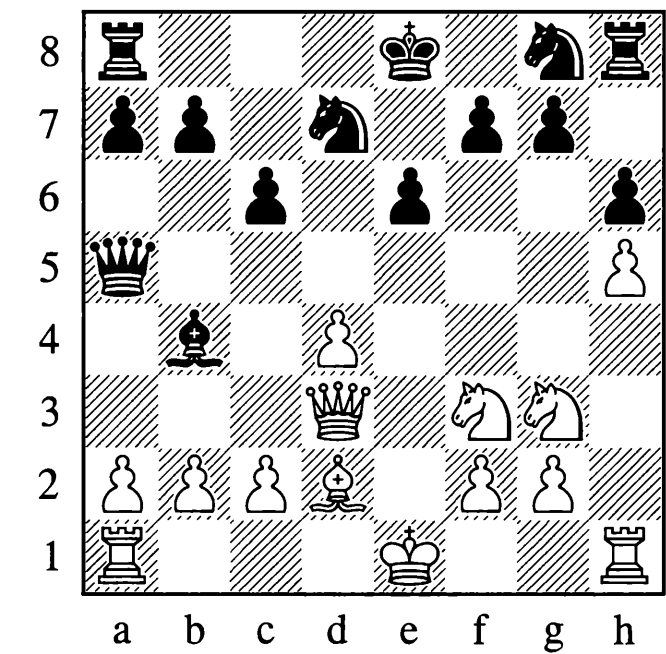
18...c5

B) after 17.♙g3



17...cxd4 18.cxd4 ♙xd2†!

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 dxe4 4.♘xe4 ♕f5
5.♘g3 ♕g6 6.h4 h6 7.♘f3 ♘d7 8.h5 ♕h7
9.♙d3 ♙xd3 10.♚xd3 e6 11.♙f4 ♚a5†
12.♙d2 ♙b4



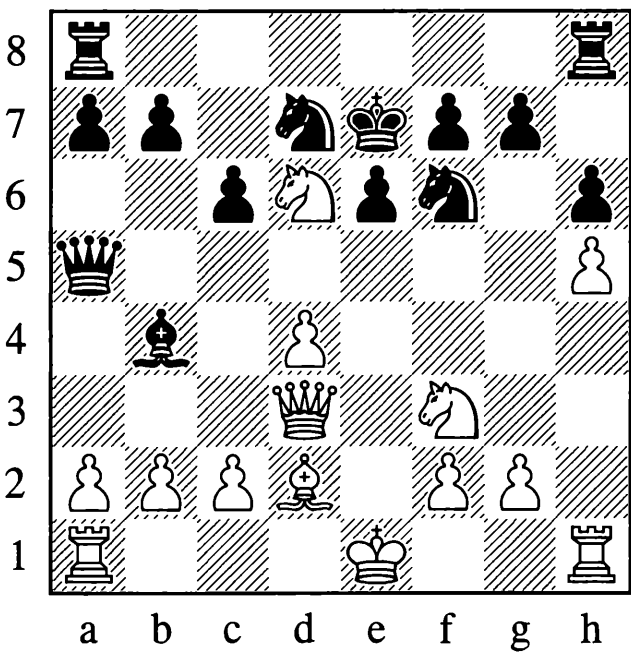
This is the real idea. Black wants to lure White’s c-pawn forward to create a double-edged position with chances for both sides. The old interpretation was 12...♚c7 13.0–0–0 ♘gf6 14.♘e4 0–0–0 transposing to well-trodden paths where Black’s solidity comes at a high price – he has hardly any winning chances. We don’t want to be in that situation. The great thing about this modern 11...♚a5† and 12...♙b4 idea is that most of the time we reach unclear positions with opposite castling.

Now **B)** 13.c3 is almost universally played, but first the tempting **A)** 13.♘e4 looks tricky and deserves a mention.

A) 13.♘e4 ♘gf6!

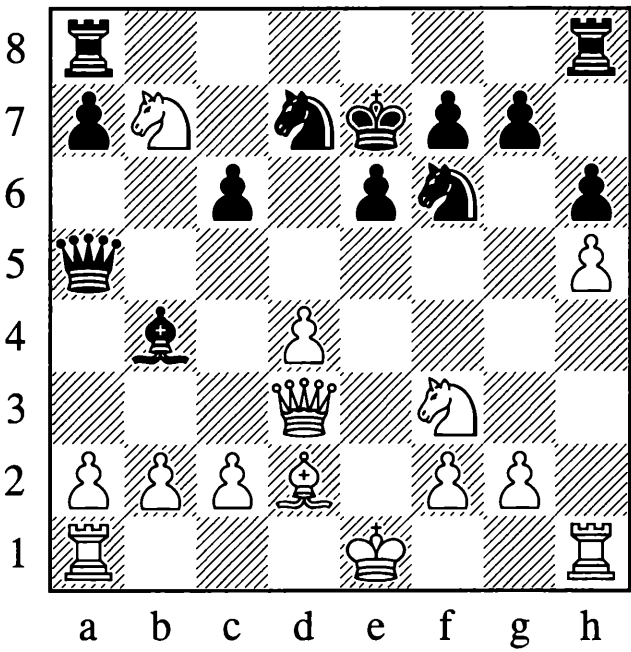
This active move solves all Black’s problems. Black allows the white knight to give a check on d6 and even take the b-pawn with tempo. Okay, Black’s king must remain in the centre for some time, but his rooks are immediately activated and White cannot hold onto his extra material without making huge concessions.

14.♘d6† ♔e7



White now has two moves. **A1)** 15.♘xb7 and **A2)** 15.♘c4.

A1) 15.♘xb7



Critical, but the knight is far from home.

15...♙xd2† 16.♘xd2

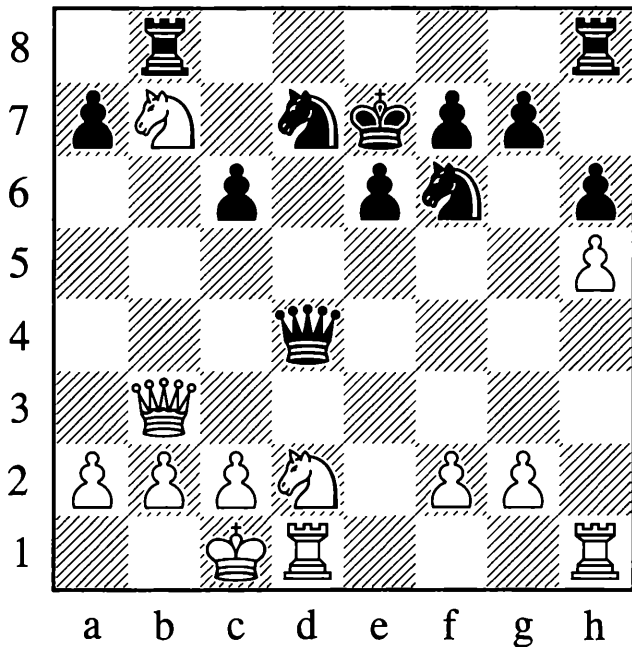
16.♚xd2 ♚b5 highlights the problem of the wandering knight and after 17.♘a5 ♘e4 18.c4 ♚b6 it was lost. Kantsler – Rodshtein, Haifa 2008, continued 19.♘xc6† ♚xc6 20.♚e2 ♘g5 and Black won.

16...♚b4 17.♚b3

Returning the pawn and hoping to take the initiative.

17.♙a3 keeps the extra pawn, but ruins White's pawn structure so it doesn't matter. A. Filippov – Landa, Moscow 2009, continued 17...♙xa3 18.bxa3 ♖ab8 19.♘a5 ♗hc8 20.♘dc4 ♖b5 (eyeing h5) 21.♔d2 ♘xh5 22.♖ab1 ♘hf6 and Black can't complain.

17...♙xd4 18.0–0–0 ♖ab8



The position is extremely tense.

19.♙a3†

19.♘c4? is a mistake. After 19...♙f4† 20.♔b1 ♖xb7 21.♙xb7 ♙xc4 Black had picked up two knights for a rook in Kim – Panarin, Saratov 2006.

19...c5 20.♘a5 ♗hc8

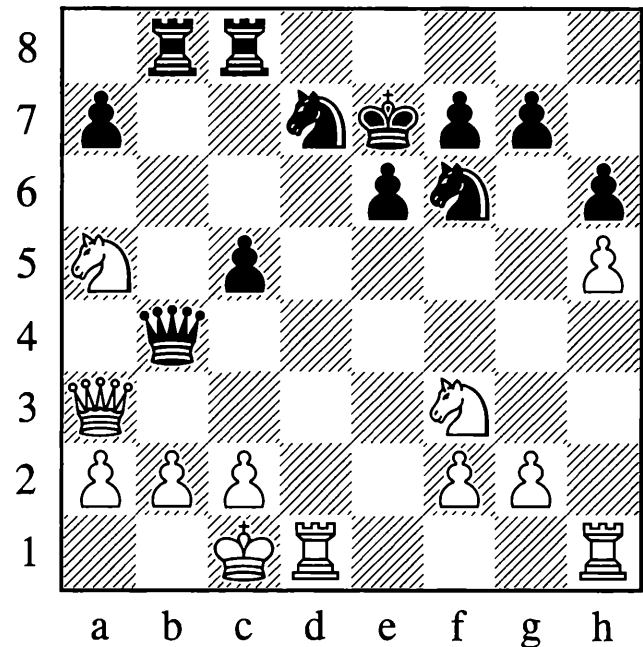
Black parries the fork on c6 and activates his second rook.

21.♘f3

Juggling the knights with 21.♘dc4 is the alternative. 21...♙f4† (on ChessPublishing, IM Vigorito suggested 21...♙xf2, but there is no need to give White this open line, especially considering the opposite-side castling) 22.♔b1 ♘d5! Black is also a knight juggler. 23.♖he1 ♘f8 24.g3 ♙f6 25.♘b3 ♘7b6 26.♘e5 (26.♘xc5 would helpfully open a line for the c8-rook after the automatic 26...♔g8) 26...♔g8

In Harutjunyan – Korobkov, Voronezh 2008, Black's king was safe and he was ready to launch a counterattack with ...c5-c4.

21...♙b4

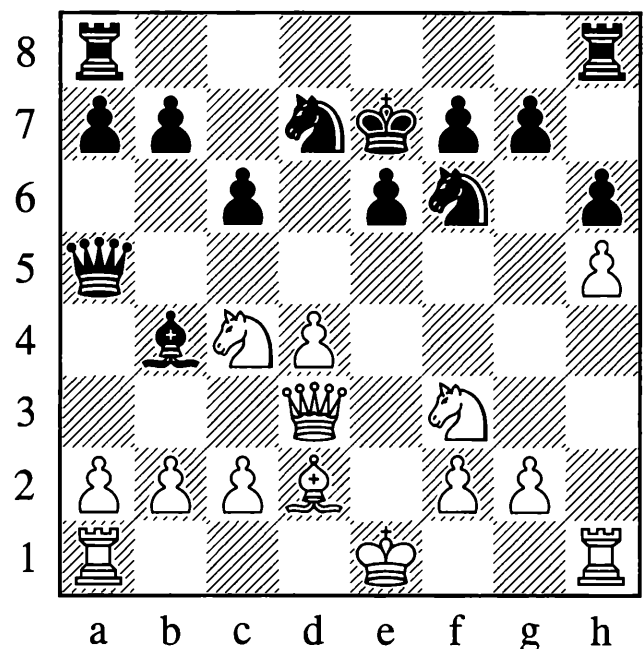


Trapping White's queen. Well, sort of.

22.♙xb4 cxb4 23.♘d4 ♖b6†

Black has a pleasant ending, Chevelevitch – Fridman, Germany (ch) 2008.

A2) 15.♘c4



15...♔xd2† 16.♘fxd2 ♙c7 17.0–0–0

The standard move, but we will briefly check the alternatives:

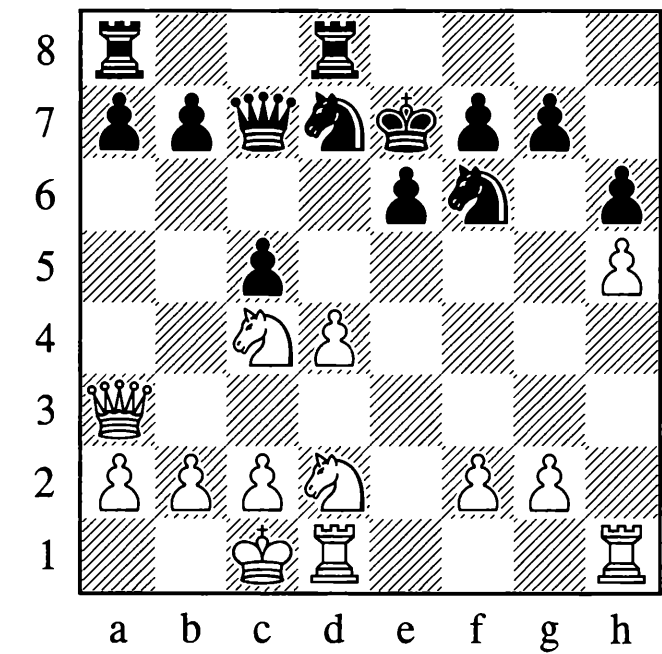
17.♞e4 ♞xe4 (or 17...c5!?) 18.♞xe4 ♞hd8
19.0–0–0 ♞f6 20.♞f3 And now 20...♞f8N
21.♞e5 ♞g8 is level.

17.♞a3† is tempting, but after 17...c5 the
offensive cannot be strengthened. 18.0–0–0
b5 19.dxc5 ♞xc5 20.♞xc5† ♞xc5 21.♞e5
♞ac8= Black had no worries in Dourerassou –
Tkachiev, France 2006.

17...♞hd8 18.♞a3†

18.♞b1 ♞f8 is safe for Black, for instance
19.♞f3 c5= with a transposition to Ekstroem
– Dautov, Switzerland 2004.

18...c5



19.♞b3

White must try to exploit the pin. Nothing
is offered by 19.dxc5 ♞xc5 or 19.♞f3 ♞f8
followed by ...♞g8.

19...b6 20.dxc5 bxc5

A good fighting move that is fully playable.
So far White hasn't come up with anything.

The more solid 20...♞xc5 21.♞xc5 bxc5 22.g3
♞ab8 23.♞f3 ♞d5 was also okay for Black in
Jakovenko – Khenkin, Moscow 2004.

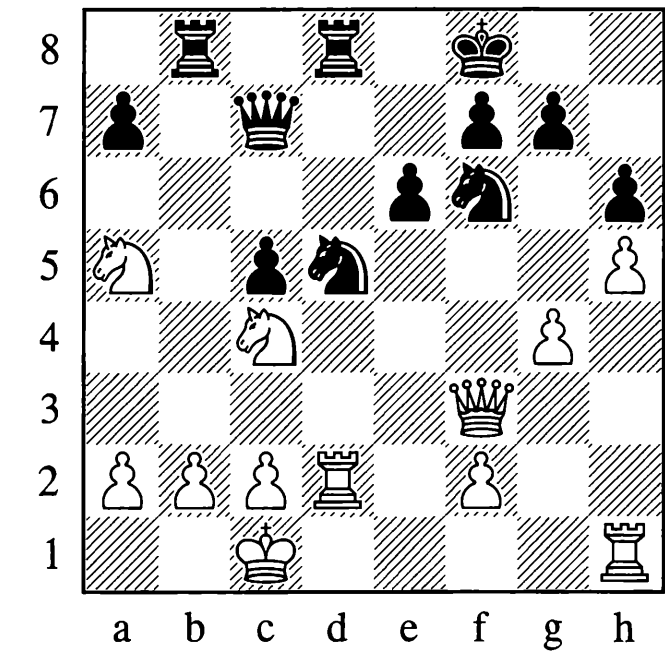
21.♞ba5

21.♞d6 ♞f8 22.♞a5 ♞g8 23.♞d2 ♞b6
24.♞hd1 was played in Petrushin – Lastin,
Voronezh 2005. Here I propose 24...♞bd5N
and Black is fine.

21...♞f8

Always a key move.

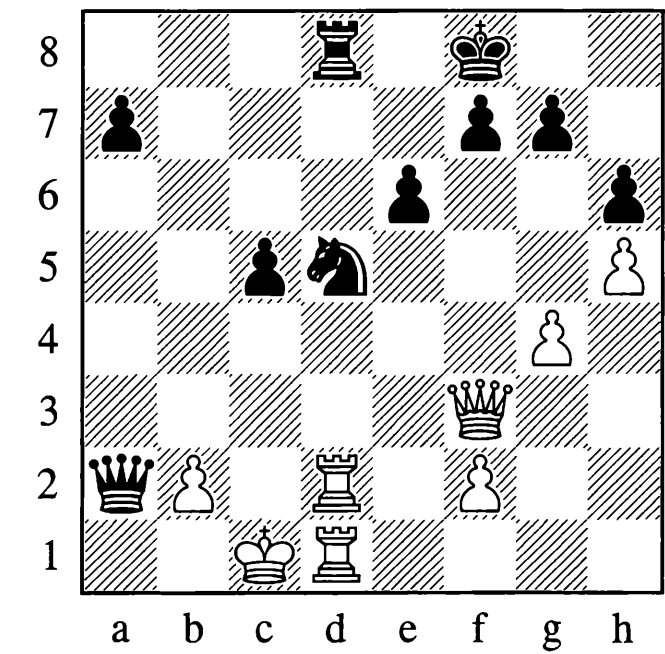
22.♞f3 ♞b6! 23.g4 ♞bd5 24.♞d2 ♞ab8



25.♞hd1 ♞b5 26.c3

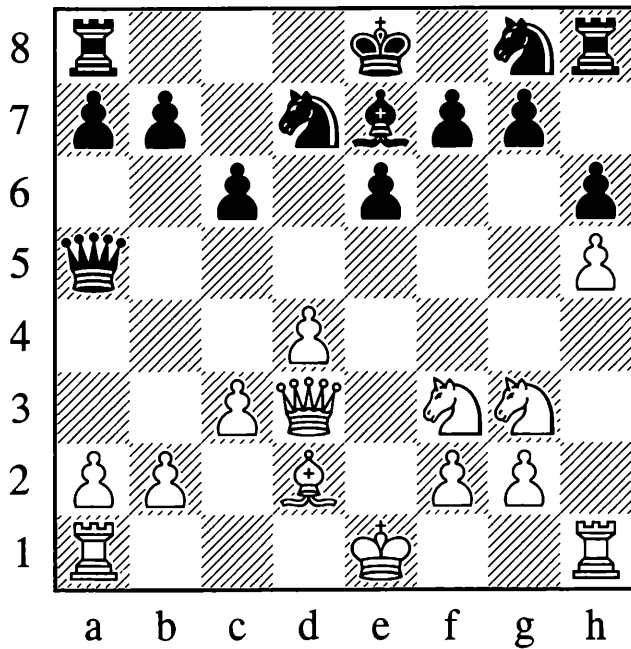
This is Movsesian – Morozevich, Calvia (ol)
2004. Now Black should have continued with
the obvious:

26...♞xa5 27.♞xa5 ♞xa5 28.c4 ♞xa2
29.cxd5 ♞xd5†



With two pawns and a strong attack for the exchange.

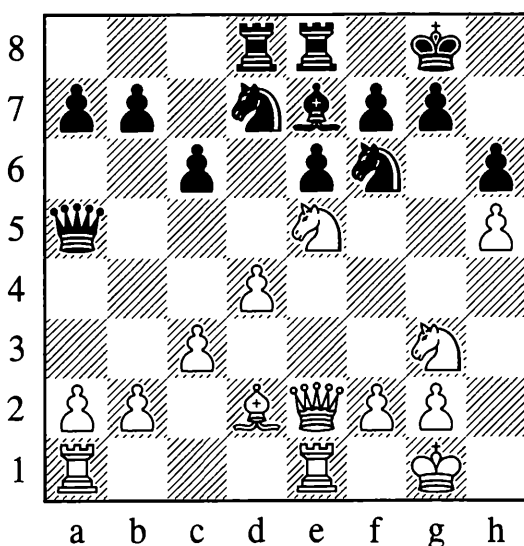
B) 13.c3 ♔e7



Here the main move is the natural 14.c4, winning a tempo on the black queen. That will be covered in great detail in the next section. But first some alternatives:

14.♘e4

Also seen is 14.0–0 ♘gf6 15.♖fe1 0–0 16.♘e5 (16.c4 ♔b4= was Palac – Izoria, Warsaw 2005) 16...♖ad8 17.♗e2 ♖fe8



Black has a typical solid position with no weaknesses. We can follow three practical examples:

18.♖ad1 ♗b5!? 19.♔f4 ♗xe2 20.♖xe2 ♘d5 21.♔c1 ♘xe5 22.♖xe5 ♔d6 23.♖e4 f5 24.♖h4

♔xg3 25.fxg3 ♘f6 In Perpinya Rofes – Gonzalez Vidal, Barbera del Valles 2006, Black had a promising ending.

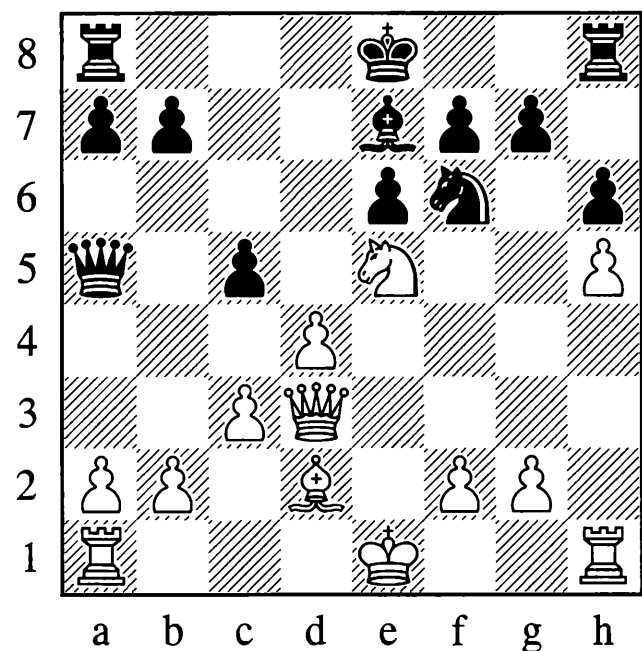
18.b4 was tried in J. Sanchez – Landa, Marseille 2006. Black should probably have played 18...♗a3N with unclear play.

18.a3 ♗c7 19.♖ad1 c5 20.♘xf7? ♔xf7 21.♗xe6† ♔f8 22.♘f5 ♗c6 Easily refuting the attack. 23.♘xg7 ♔xg7 24.♔xh6† ♔xh6 25.♗f7 ♖g8 26.d5 ♗d6 27.♖xe7 ♘e5 28.♗e6 ♗xe6 29.♖xe6 ♘ed7 And Black was winning in Navarro Cia – Peralta, Andorra 2007.

14...♘gf6 15.♘xf6† ♘xf6

Also interesting is 15...gxf6!?. Black will castle long and perhaps use the g-file for his rooks. One example was 16.b4 ♗c7 (16...♗a4!?) 17.a4 0–0–0 18.♗e2 ♖dg8 19.♔f1 f5∞, Hrcek – Akopian, Turin (ol) 2006.

16.♘e5 c5



17.♗g3

Allowing a little combination, but Black had equalized anyway, as the following examples show:

17.dxc5 ♔xc5 18.♔f4 ♗a4 19.♗f3 ♖d8 20.0–0 ♗e4= Ottaviani – R. Alonso, corr. 2006.

17.c4 ♖b6 18.♙c3 cxd4 19.♙xd4 ♙c5
(19...♖a5†!?) 20.0–0–0 0–0= Anurag – Lalith,
New Delhi 2010.

17...cxd4 18.cxd4 ♖xd2†! 19.♙xd2 ♜e4†
20.♙d3 ♜xg3 21.fxg3 ♜d8 22.♞ac1 ♙d6
23.♞he1

This is R. Zelcic – K. Rasmussen, Pula 2007,
and now the simplest was:

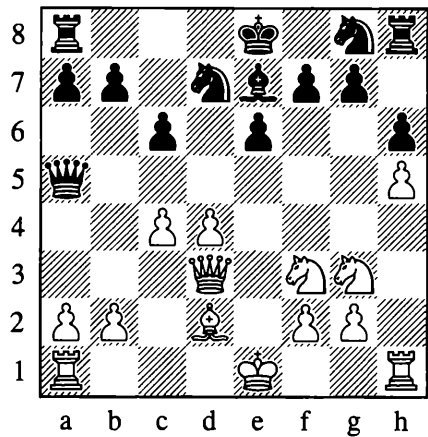
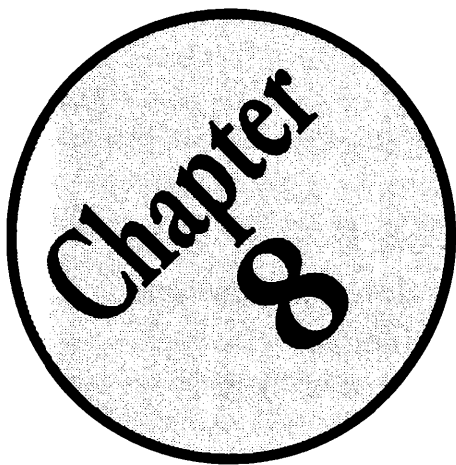
23...♙e7 24.g4 ♜c8=

Conclusion

After 11.♙f4 ♖a5† the most common reply
is 12.♙d2 when Black continues with the
provocative 12...♙b4 trying to lure White into
playing 13.c3.

If he refrains with the tricky 13.♜e4 then the
active 13...♜gf6! is the solution, not fearing
14.♜d6† ♙e7.

If 13.c3 ♙e7 then White cannot expect
much if he doesn't follow up with 14.c4. Both
14.0–0 and 14.♜e4 seem harmless if Black
just develops normally.



Classical Variation

The Main Line 14.c4

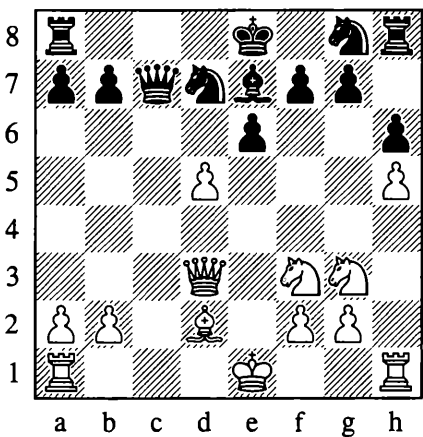
Variation Index

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 dxe4 4.♘xe4 ♕f5 5.♘g3 ♕g6 6.h4 h6 7.♘f3 ♘d7 8.h5 ♕h7
9.♔d3 ♕xd3 10.♙xd3 e6 11.♔f4 ♙a5† 12.♔d2 ♔b4 13.c3 ♔e7

14.c4 ♙c7

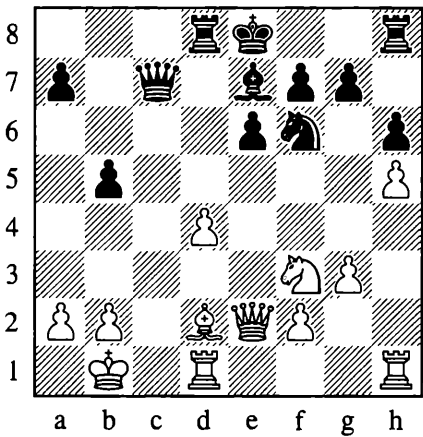
A) 15.♘e4	66
B) 15.0–0	66
C) 15.d5	68
D) 15.0–0–0 ♘gf6	71
D1) 16.♘e4	71
D2) 16.♖he1	73
D3) 16.♖de1	75
D4) 16.♙e2	76
D5) 16.♔c3	76
D6) 16.♔b1 0–0	77
D61) 17.♖he1	79
D62) 17.♘e4	82

C) after 16.cxd5



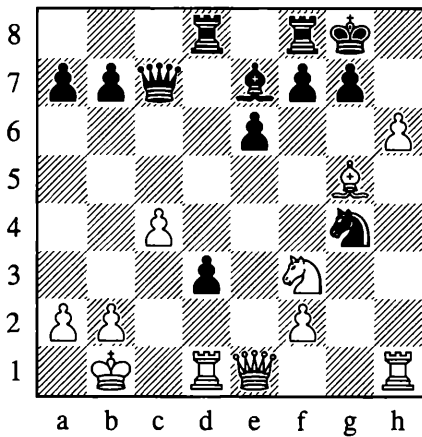
16...♙d6!

D1) 21.♔b1



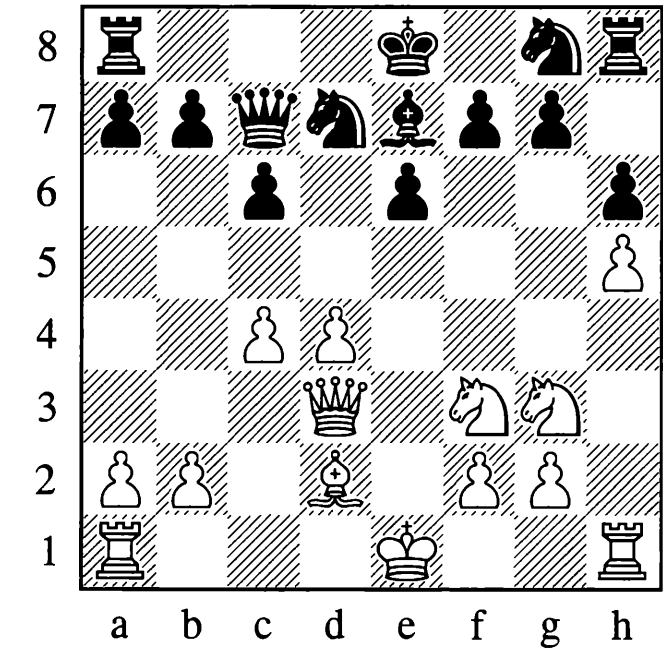
21...♙b7N

D62) 24.h6



24...♔xg5!N

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 dxe4 4.♘xe4 ♕f5
5.♘g3 ♖g6 6.h4 h6 7.♘f3 ♘d7 8.h5 ♖h7
9.♔d3 ♖xd3 10.♙xd3 e6 11.♔f4 ♙a5†
12.♔d2 ♖b4 13.c3 ♔e7 14.c4 ♙c7



After a few detours we are slowly but surely getting there. All that remains is getting past a few more exits: A) 15.♘e4, B) 15.0–0 and C) 15.d5. And then finally we are on the yellow brick road, D) 15.0–0–0.

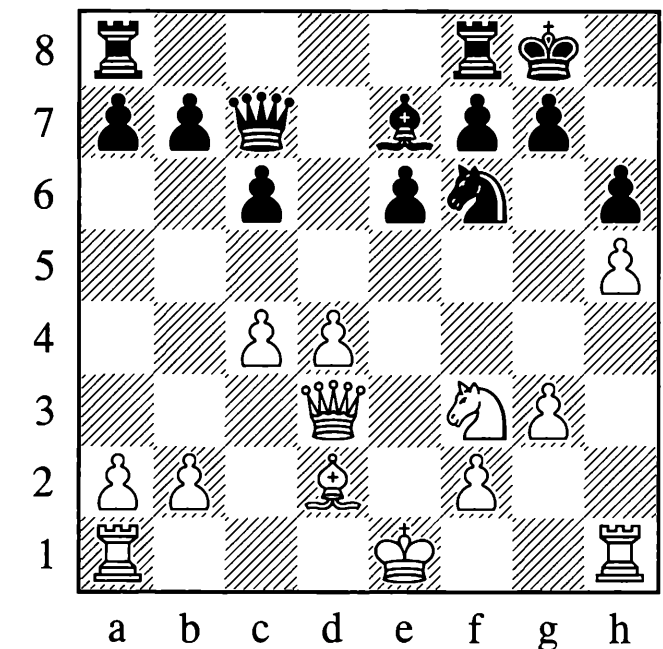
A) 15.♘e4 ♘gf6 16.g3

16.0–0–0 transposes to line D.

16...0–0

16...♘xe4 is good as well.

17.♘xf6† ♘xf6



White hasn't achieved much apart from falling a little behind in development and solving all Black's spatial problems.

18.♙e2

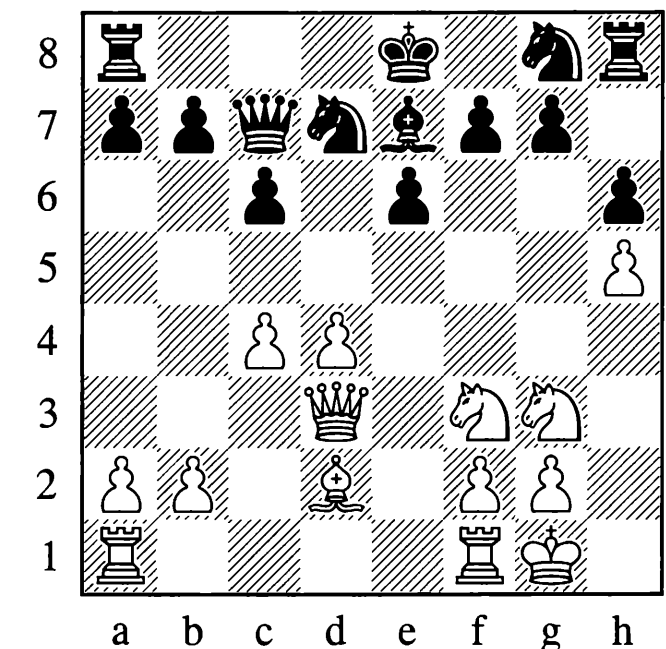
If 18.0–0–0 then 18...b5! exploits the king's location. 19.♘e5 bxc4 20.♙xc4 ♔d6 Playing a rook to the b- or c-file also looks good. Now Soto Paez – Iturrizaga, San Jose 2009, continued 21.f4 c5 22.dxc5 ♔xe5!? 23.fxex5 ♙xe5∞.

18...c5 19.dxc5 ♙xc5 20.♘e5

This is S. Berger – K. Rasmussen, Germany 2005. Now most precise would have been:

20...♙fd8 21.♔c3 ♘d7

B) 15.0–0



Castling to the wrong side. This is quite complicated and of course playable, but come on – it can't be better than castling long!

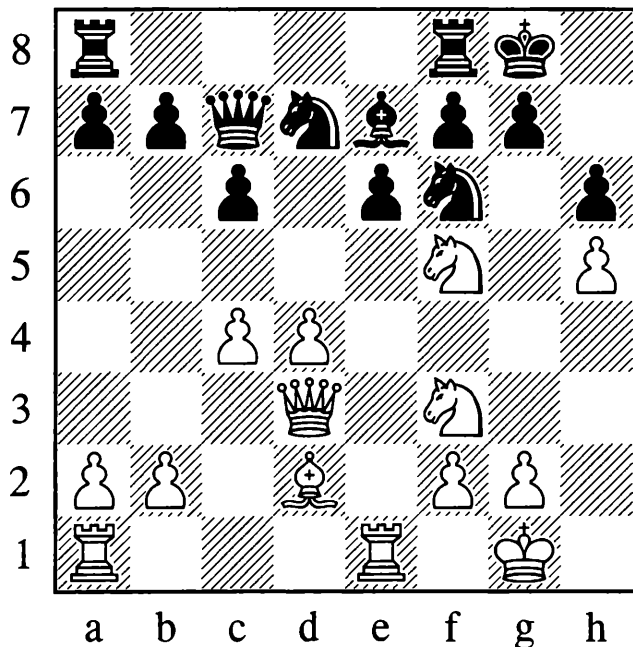
15...♘gf6 16.♙fe1

The most natural. We can have a quick look at a couple of alternatives:

16.d5 cxd5 17.cxd5 ♘xd5 18.♘f5 0–0 fails to give White enough for the pawn, as in Shashikant – Lalith, India 2009.

16.♖e2 0–0 17.♘e5 c5 is just equal. For example, 18.♙xd7 ♖xd7 19.dxc5 ♕xc5 20.♕c3 ♕e7 21.♖ad1 ♖c6 was still level in Baramidze – Dreev, Internet (blitz) 2006.

16...0–0 17.♘f5



An important tactical idea that is frequently seen in the Caro: rook to the e-file followed by a knight to f5.

17...♕d6!

I prefer not to compromise my pawn structure and am therefore reluctant to take on f5, although some strong players have tried it. 17...exf5 18.♖xe7 ♖d8 19.♖e2 ♘e4 seemed pretty solid for Black in Browne – L.B. Hansen, Philadelphia 2006, but I suspect White is more comfortable.

There are other ways to respond to the knight move. We do not need an alternative, but it is useful to understand White's standard tactical ideas:

17...♖fe8 is always a good option when 18.♖xe6!? fxe6 19.♙xg7 is spectacular, but after 19...♕f8 20.♙xe8 ♖xe8 21.♖e1 ♕g7 the piece looks more valuable than the pawns, Jonkman – Kroeze, Netherlands 2006.

17...♕d8 is another way to solve the issue. If White won't sacrifice on h6 then he has to retreat the knight: 18.♙g3 ♖d6!? 19.♖ad1 a5∞ Laurent – Agrest, Metz 2009.

18.♙xd6

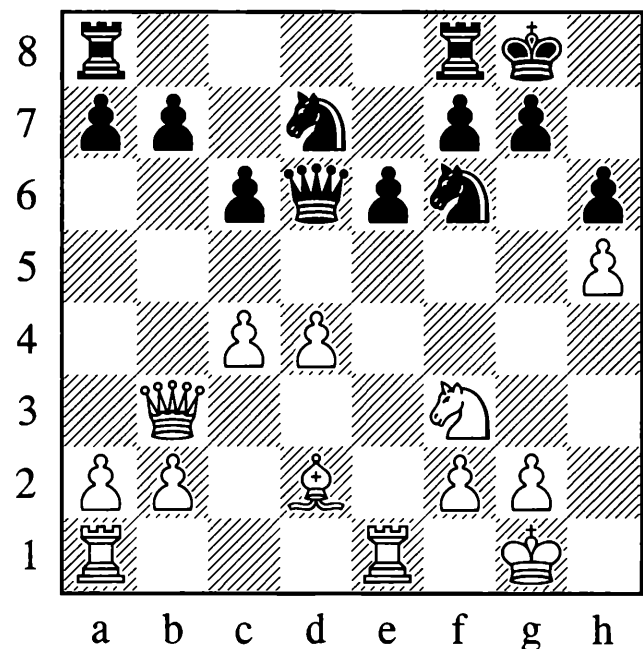
The sacrifice 18.♙xd6† gxf6 19.♕xh6 ♖fe8 should of course be checked, but it doesn't look so scary, as the following two lines illustrate:

20.♙g5 ♕h2† 21.♙h1 ♕f4 This repels the attack. 22.♙xf7 ♙f8 23.♖e5 ♙xh5 24.♖xh5 ♖xf7 25.♖h3 ♕xh6 26.♖xh6 ♖g7† Claridge – Mercadal Benejam, corr. 2006.

White should probably settle for the quiet 20.♖d2 with some compensation after 20...♕f8 21.♕xf8 ♖xf8 22.♖h6.

18...♖xd6 19.♖b3

19.♙e5? is an instructive mistake. After 19...♙xe5 20.♖xe5 ♙g4† the king is not at all well placed on g1, Omarsson – Kjartansson, Reykjavik 2007.



19...a5!?↗

Often it makes sense to push the a-pawn.

Another typical thematic move is the break 19...c5. For instance, 20.♖ad1 ♖fc8 21.♕c3 cxd4 22.♖xd4 ♖c7 23.♖d1 a6 with a rather

unclear position, where that little detail on h5 needs constant observation, Gundavaa – Rodshtein, Puerto Madryn 2009.

20.♖ad1 b5!

Solving all the positional problems in one blow.

21.♘e5

Black’s positional dream is clear after 21.cxb5 ♖fb8 22.a4 cxb5 23.axb5 ♖d5 24.♖xd5 ♘xd5.

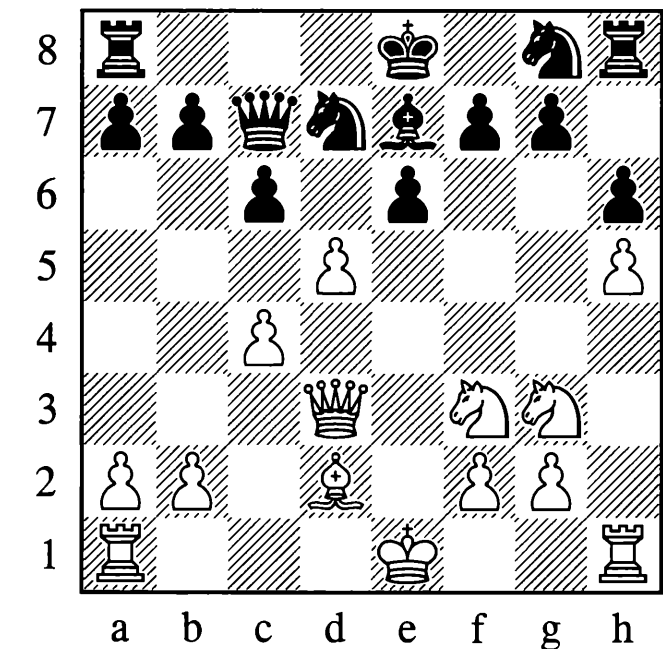
21...bxc4 22.♖xc4 ♖fc8= 23.♖e2

The alternatives 23.♖e3!? ♖d5 or 23.♖c1 c5 both give White nothing.

23...♖d5

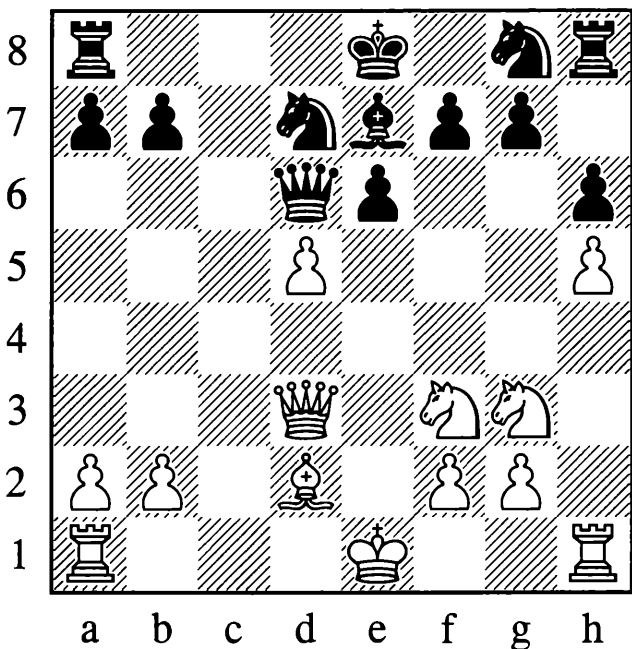
Black was fine in Dominguez – Dreev, Beersheba 2005.

C) 15.d5



A forcing line that peaked in popularity around the time it was proposed in Khalifman’s series of 1.e4 repertoire books. In fact, it leads more or less directly to an ending that is slightly favourable... for Black! Since everybody now knows this, the line has vanished from top-class chess just as quickly as it appeared a few years ago.

15...cxd5 16.cxd5 ♖d6!



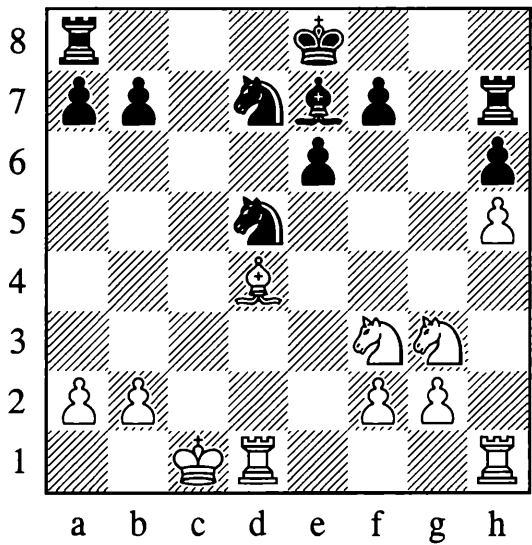
This is the key move that Black needs to know, pinning the d-pawn and planning to continue with ...♘gf6.

17.♖b3

White has tried a host of other moves, but the verdict is similar in all cases.

17.♖b5 ♘gf6 18.dxe6 ♖xe6† 19.♔f1 0–0 20.♖e1 ♖d5 21.♖xd5 ♘xd5 22.♘f5 ♙f6. Shaw – Khenkin, Dresden (ol) 2008.

17.0–0–0 ♘gf6 18.♙c3 ♖xd5 19.♖xd5 ♘xd5 20.♙xg7 ♖h7 21.♙d4



This might seem advantageous for White because of the clumsily placed rook on h7, but in reality Black is fine; the rook will soon

be excellent on the g-file.

21...♘f6 22.♖h4

22.♘e5 ♖g7 is standard and about level, Abergel – Houska, Gibraltar 2007.

22.♙xf6 quickly backfired in Bozinovic – Braun, Plovdiv 2008, after 22...♙xf6 23.♖he1 0–0–0 24.♘e4 ♙h8 25.g3 f5 26.♘c3 ♖c7+.

22...♖g7 23.♙b1 ♖d8 24.♖d2 a6

Black is comfortable.

25.a3 ♖g4 26.♖xg4 ♘xg4 27.♘e4 ♘f4

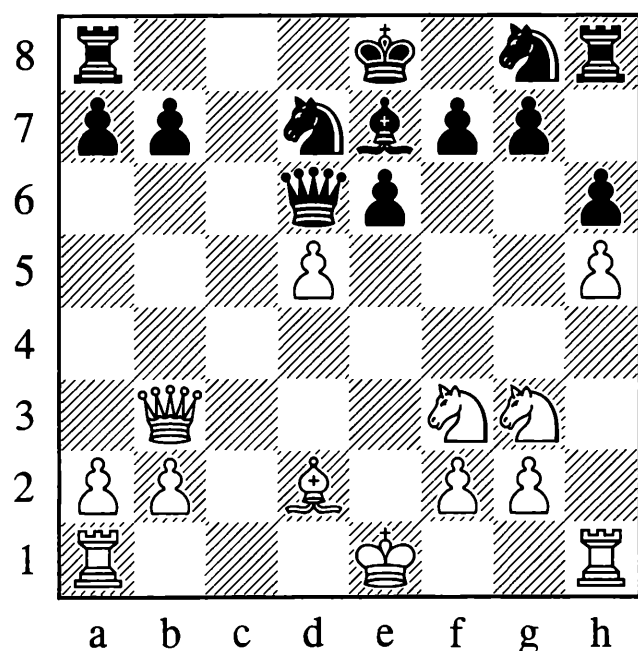
The white kingside is very weak.

28.♖c2 ♘xg2 29.♙b6 ♖d1† 30.♙a2 f5 31.♖c8† ♙f7 32.♘c5 ♙xc5 33.♖c7† ♙e7 34.♙c5 ♖d3 35.♘e1 ♘xe1

0–1 Rodriguez Guerrero – Khenkin, Santa Cruz de la Palma 2005.

17.♙c3 ♘gf6 18.0–0–0 just transposes to 17.0–0–0.

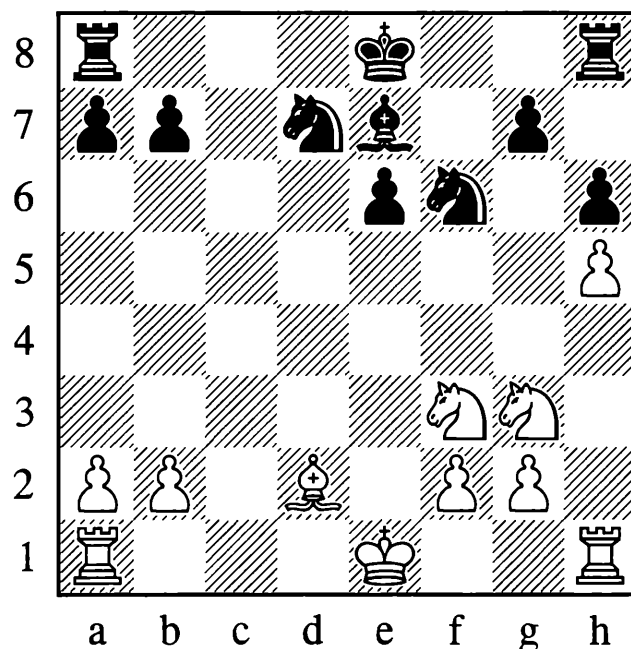
17.♙e2 ♘gf6 18.dxe6 ♙xd3† (or 18...♙xe6†) 19.♙xd3 fxe6 20.♖ac1 ♙d6 21.♘e4 ♘xe4 22.♙xe4 White has an active centralized king. That should be good in an ending? Well yes, but here it is also an object of attack. 22...0–0 23.♙c3? ♘c5† 24.♙d4 ♖f4† 25.♙e3 ♖e4† 26.♙d2 ♙f4† 27.♙c2 ♙xc1 And that was an exchange, Golubev – Ovetchkin, Internet 2006.



17...♘gf6!

Black should never take on d5: 17...♙xd5?! 18.♙xd5 exd5 19.♘f5 White has a strong initiative for the pawn.

18.dxe6 ♙xe6† 19.♙xe6 fxe6



Another deceptive case. White looks to be much better, but in fact the position is roughly balanced, with a tendency to drift in Black's favour. In principle, the e6-pawn is weak, but it is not so easy to attack it, especially as White must look out for the h5-pawn. In the practical games so far, Black has a positive score. Often his pieces become very active – the bishop can go to c5, the knight to g4 or d5.

20.♖c1

White has tried almost everything.

20.♘h4 ♙d6 21.♘g6 ♖g8 22.0–0–0 ♖c8† 23.♙b1 ♙f7 24.♙e3 ♖c6 25.♘e2 ♙c5 ½–½ Sandipan – Riazantsev, Moscow 2005. I also like 20...♙f7N 21.♘g6 ♖hc8 keeping the white king in the centre.

20.♙c3 ♙f7 21.♖d1 ♖hd8 22.0–0 was tested in Somborski – Gyimesi, Neum 2008, when 22...♖ac8N would have been natural.

20.0–0–0 ♙c5 21.♖hf1 ♖c8 22.♙b1 0–0

23.♖c3 ♘d5 24.♖d4 ♘7f6 Black has a harmonious position, and White quickly lost his way in Van Haastert – Fridman, Netherlands 2005: 25.♘e5 ♔h7 26.♘e2 ♖d6 27.♘c3 ♘xh5 28.♘b5 ♖xe5 29.♖xe5 a6 30.♘d6 ♖c7 With a pawn extra.

20.0–0 ♔f7 21.♖ae1 ♖hd8 22.♖e2 ♖d6 23.♘d4 was Nithander – Agrest, Vaxjo 2008, and now the active 23...♘c5N looks promising.

20.♘d4 ♔f7 21.0–0–0 ♘c5 22.♔b1 ♖hd8 23.♘b5 ♘ce4 24.♘xe4 ♘xe4 25.♖e3 a6 26.♘c3 ♘xc3† 27.bxc3 ♖ac8 28.♖d4 ♖d5 Spence – Houska, Hastings 2009.

20...0–0

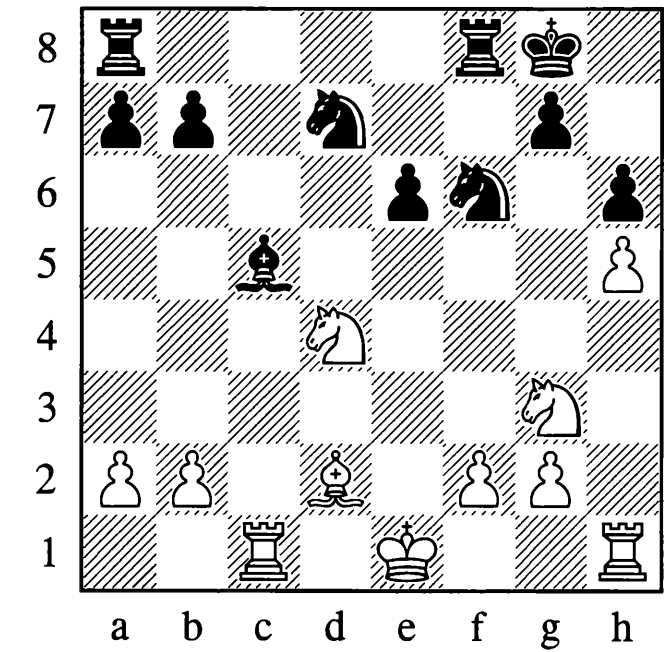
Instead 20...♖d6 21.♘d4 0–0 22.♖h4 ♖xg3 23.fxg3 ♖ac8 worked well for Black in Sigalas – Ovetchkin, Plovdiv 2008, but White should have played 21.♖h4 ♖xg3 22.fxg3 when he might be better.

21.♘d4 ♖c5

Black is fine. See the illustrative game.

Lutz – Landa

France 2005



White can't take on e6 so Black activates his pieces.

22.♖e3 ♘d5 23.0–0 ♘xe3 24.fxe3 ♖b6

Now the pawn structure is symmetrical and e3 is just as weak as e6. Most importantly, the bishop is very strong and that tips the advantage to Black.

25.♔h2 ♘e5 26.♘xe6 ♘g4† 27.♔h3 ♘f2† 28.♔h2 ♖f7!

No draw.

29.♘d4 ♖af8

Black will win the pawn back and have the initiative.

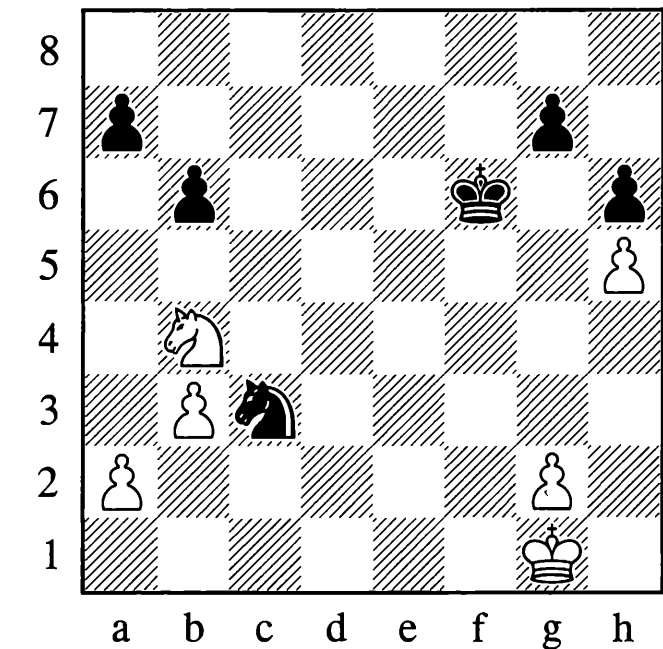
30.♔g1 ♘g4 31.♖xf7 ♖xf7 32.♖c8† ♖f8 33.♖xf8† ♔xf8 34.♘e4

Not 34.♘f1 due to 34...♘xe3 35.♘xe3 ♖xd4.

34...♘xe3 35.♘e6† ♔e7 36.♘6c5 ♘g4 37.♔f1 ♖xc5! 38.♘xc5 b6 39.♘d3 ♔f6

The h5-pawn is weak, so White tries to get counterplay on the other flank.

40.♘b4 ♘e3† 41.♔g1 ♘d1 42.b3 ♘c3



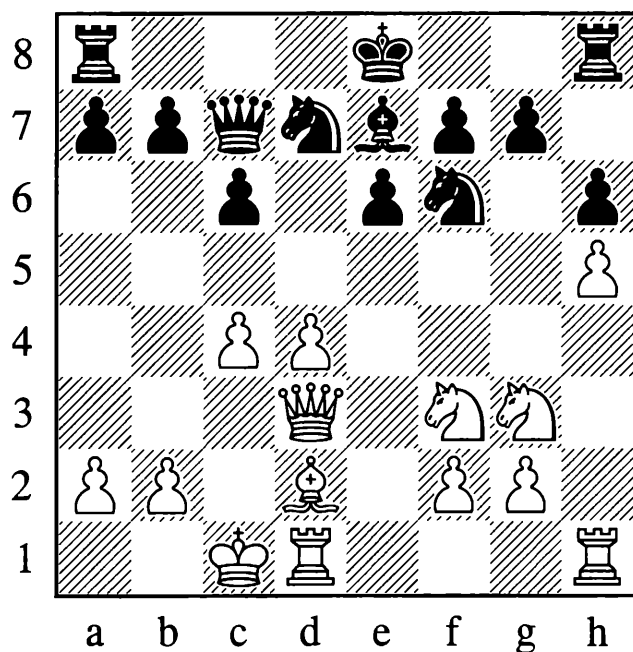
43.a4 ♘e2† 44.♔f2 ♘d4

But even on the queenside it is Black who wins a pawn.

45.♘d5† ♔e6 46.♘f4† ♔f5 47.♘d5 ♘xb3

48. ♖e7† ♔g5 49. ♖c8 ♔xh5 50. ♖xa7 ♖c5
 51. ♖b5 ♖xa4 52. ♔f3 ♔g5 53. g4 ♖c5
 54. ♖d6 ♖e6 55. ♔g3 ♖c7 56. ♖f5 ♔f6
 0–1

D) 15.0–0–0 ♖gf6



This is the important tabyia of the modern Classical Caro-Kann. The effect of the white pawn on c4 is rather noticeable. In general, it means that the white king isn't as safe as it could have been, and more concretely it gives Black the possibility of attacking the white pawn chain by playing ...b7-b5, especially since the white king is standing on the same file as the black queen. Therefore the most common move is the prophylactic 16. ♔b1, but this loses time, and perhaps Black's ...b7-b5 isn't so dangerous, so more direct moves have also hit the scene: D1) 16. ♖e4, D2) 16. ♖he1, D3) 16. ♖de1, D4) 16. ♖e2, D5) 16. ♖c3 and D6) 16. ♔b1.

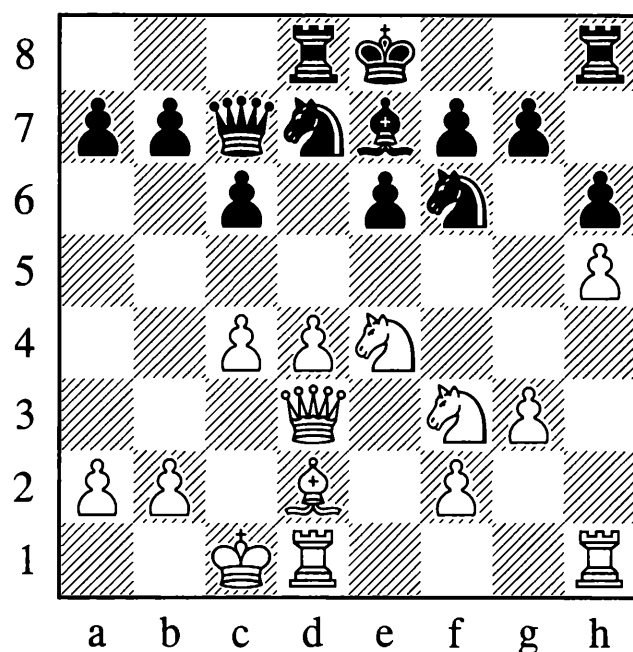
D1) 16. ♖e4

White activates the knight.

16... ♖d8

A subtle response. It was possible to castle, but that invites g2-g4. I have tried 16...b5 myself – that's possible.

17.g3!?



Preparing ♖f4. Instead 17. ♖xf6† ♖xf6 18. ♖c2 0–0= doesn't pose Black any problems. See the illustrative game.

If 17. ♔b1 then 17...0–0 transposes to 16. ♔b1, but it is tempting to play 17...c5 which uses the placement of the rook on d8 in exemplary fashion. Let's see two possibilities.

White has tried 18.d5!? but after 18... ♖xe4N 19. ♖xe4 ♖f6 Black seems better already.

The more positional treatment 18. ♖c3 cxd4 19. ♖xd4 is no problem either. 19...0–0 20.b3 a6 21. ♖e3 b5! 22. ♖xf6† ♖xf6 23.cxb5 axb5 White's open king position is beginning to tell. 24.g4 ♖c8 25. ♖c1 ♖d6 26. ♖hd1 ♖xc1† 27. ♖xc1 ♖d5 28. ♖xf6 ♖e4† 29. ♖c2 ♖xf6 30. ♖xe4 ♖xe4 31. ♖d4? (31. ♖f1 ♖d8 was also no fun for White) 31... ♖c3† 0–1 Carmelle – Dautov, Germany 2005.

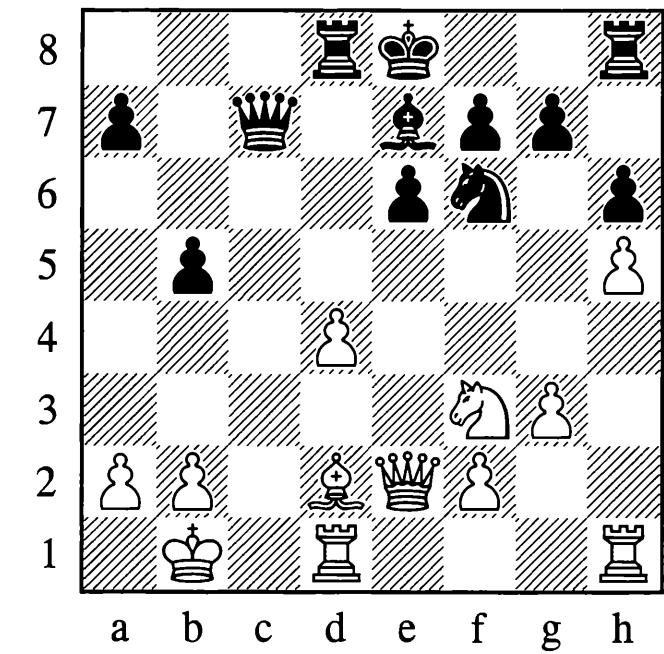
17... ♖xe4

Or 17...b5 at once looks both thematic and good.

18. ♖xe4 ♖f6 19. ♖e2 b5!

This move is a very important strategic element in the lines I recommend.

20.cxb5 cxb5† 21. ♔b1



This was Kaforos – Nikolaidis, Greece 2009. Now Black should have played:

21...♖b7N 22.g4 ♘e4

With a good position. Note that the attempted attack with 23.♙e3 0–0 24.g5 doesn't work: 24...♙xg5 25.♙xg5 ♘xg5 26.♘xg5 hxg5 27.h6 ♙xd4! 28.hxg7 ♙xd1† 29.♙xd1 ♙c8

Bohm – Seirawan

Wijk aan Zee 1980

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.♘d2 dxe4 4.♘xe4 ♙f5 5.♘g3 ♙g6 6.♘f3 ♘d7 7.h4 h6 8.h5 ♙h7 9.♙d3 ♙xd3 10.♖xd3 ♖c7

Notice the move order. Notice it and forget it!

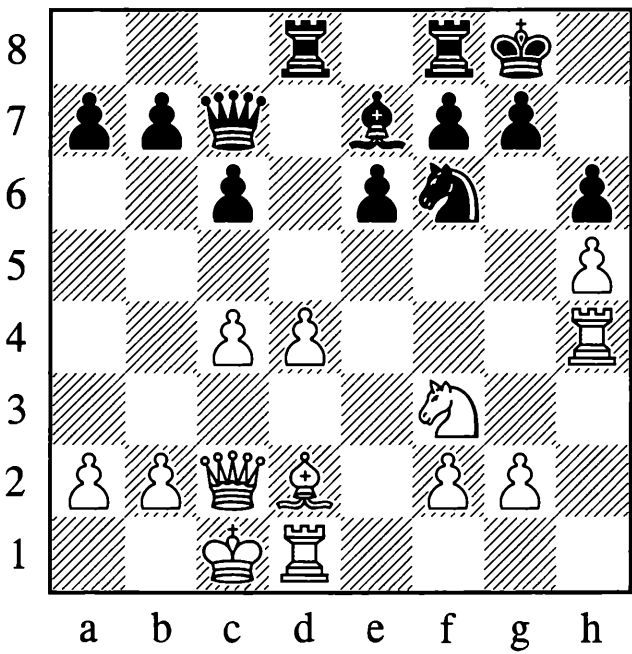
11.c4 ♘gf6 12.♙d2 e6 13.♘e4 ♙e7 14.0–0–0

Suddenly the players find themselves in a book thirty years later.

14...♙d8 15.♘xf6† ♘xf6 16.♖c2 0–0 17.♙h4

White dreams about an attack with g2-g4-g5. It will be nothing more than a dream. In the real world it would have been wiser to continue more positionally and unambitiously,

but then Black would of course have no problems at all.



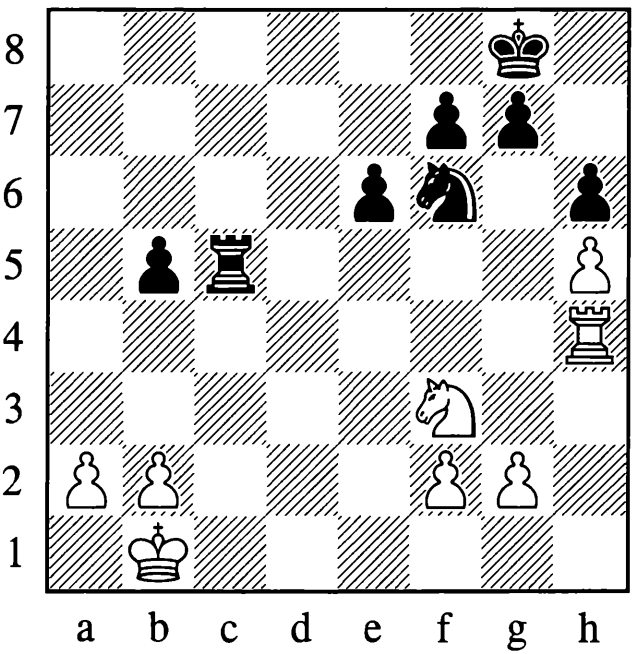
17...c5

A counter in the centre – the classic response to a wing operation.

18.♙e3 a6 19.♘b1 b5

Opening even more lines. Now White tries to simplify before Black seizes the initiative.

20.cxb5 axb5 21.dxc5 ♙xd1† 22.♖xd1 ♙xc5 23.♖c2 ♙c8 24.♙xc5 ♖xc5 25.♖xc5 ♙xc5



However there is a problem that remains in most Classical Caro endings. The h5-pawn!

26.b4 ♖d5

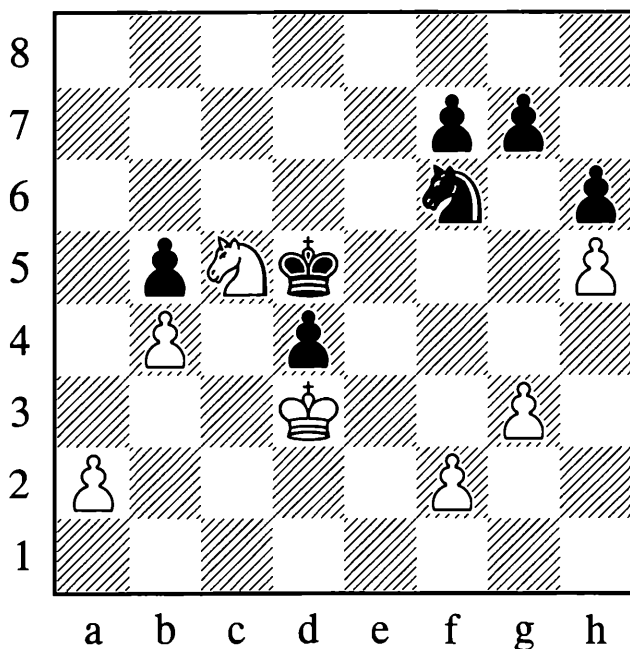
Patience is needed; not 26...♖xh5 27.♖xh5 ♜xh5 28.♜d4.

27.♙b2 e5!

Great judgement from the young American – keeping the white rook out of the game is much more important than taking on h5.

28.♙c3 ♙f8 29.♜d2 ♙e7 30.g3 ♙e6 31.♜e4

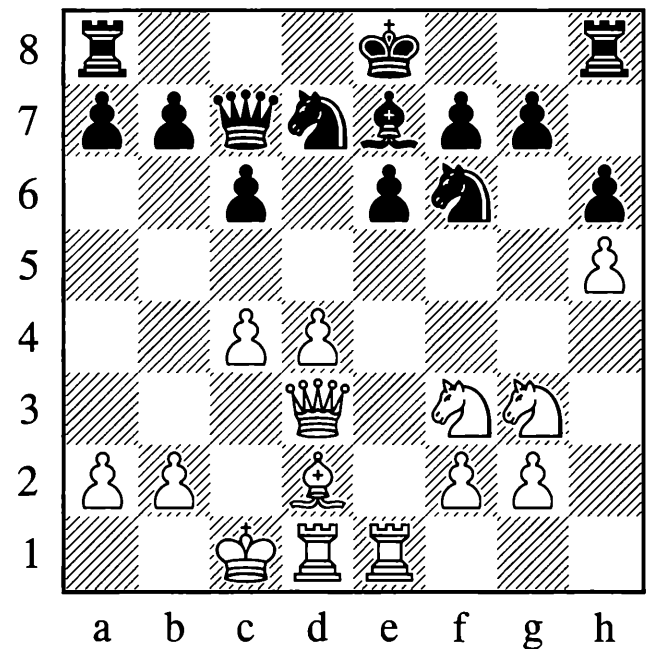
Accelerating the end, but having no active moves must have been frustrating.

31...♖d4 32.♜c5† ♙d5 33.♖xd4† exd4† 34.♙d3**34...♜g4!**

Again refraining from taking on h5; this time 34...♜xh5 was poor due to 35.♜b3.

35.♙e2 ♙c4

Black breaks in. The combination of an active king and knight plus a strong passed pawn is too much for White.

36.a3 ♙c3 37.f3 ♜e5 38.f4 ♜c4 0–1**D2) 16.♖he1****16...b5**

The thematic move. Black has tried 16...♖d8 as well, just like in the previous line, and Topalov has even ventured 16...a5!?

However, the real alternative to the text move is castling, just allowing ♜f5. It seems okay:

16...0–0 17.♜f5 exf5 18.♖xe7 ♙d8

From here the queen will prevent White from playing an annoying ♜h4.

19.♖e2

19.♙a3!? might be trickier.

19...♜e4

White has been unable to prove any advantage, as the following couple of lines show:

After 20.♙e3 ♖e8 21.♙b1 a6 22.♙c1 b5 23.cxb5 axb5 Black was already clearly better in Zimmermann – Van Delft, Dieren 2009.

Probably White should choose 20.♙e3 when Black, for instance, could try the new move 20...♙f6∞.

17.c5

Taking more space and keeping the position closed. The minus is of course that Black gains the d5-square for his knight. Other moves do not promise much:

17.♞e5 0–0 18.♣b1 ♞xe5 19.dxe5 bxc4
20.♞xc4 ♞d5 21.♞c1 ♞fc8= Venkataramanan
– Houska, Liverpool 2008.

17.♣b1 bxc4 18.♞xc4 ♞b8 was B. Vuckovic
– R. Vukic, Vrnjacka Banja 2006, but I think
18...♞d5N 19.♞c1 ♞c8= 20.♞c2 0–0 21.♞ec1
♞b7 is plausible.

17.cxb5 cxb5† 18.♣b1

And now 18...0–0 19.♞f5 ♞fe8 20.♞xe7†
♞xe7 21.♞xb5 ♞b8 22.♞a6 ♞xh5 has been
played a few times, but it is simply better for
White after 23.d5 or 23.♞c1.

Instead Black should definitely play:

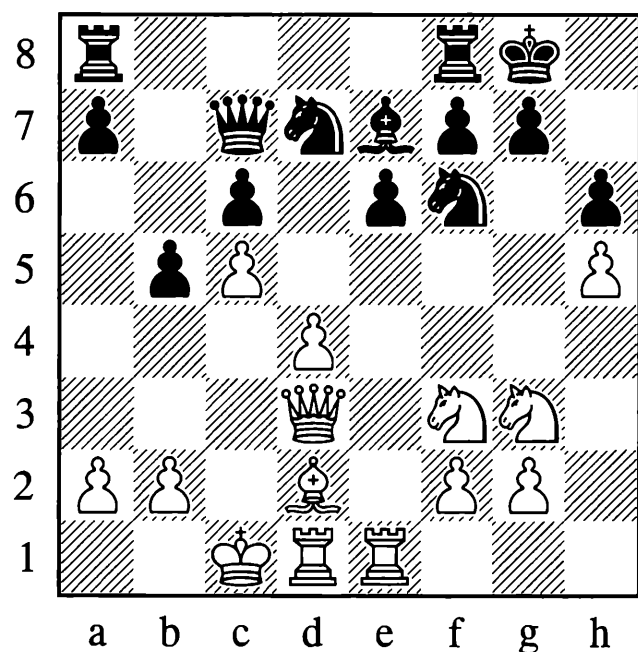
18...♞b7

With a good game, as the following two
lines show:

a) 19.♞h4 ♞f8 was Demianjuk – Malakhatko,
St Petersburg 2009, but why not 19...0–0N
20.♞hf5 ♞d8 and Black is fine, for instance
21.♞d6 ♞b6 22.♞ge4 ♞e7.

b) Or 19.♞c1 and Black should try: 19...0–0N
20.♞f5 ♞fe8 21.♞xe7† (not 21.♞xh6? exf5)
21...♞xe7 22.♞e5 ♞xe5 23.dxe5 ♞d7 24.♞e2
♞d5 And the strong knight saves the day
after something like 25.♞c5 ♞b8 26.♞ec1 b4
27.♞g4 ♞h8.

17...0–0



18.♣b1

A lack of inspiration. If White doesn't know
what to do, he can always make a safety-first
move like this. The question is – what else can
he do?

18.♞f5? In this exact position the pawn on
c5 gives Black a new possibility that actually
refutes the ♞f5-idea. 18...exf5 19.♞xe7 ♞xc5!
Winning a pawn. 20.♞e2 ♞cd7† Leko –
Karpov, Miskolc (rapid match 1) 2006.

18.♞e4 ♞xe4 19.♞xe4 ♞f6 20.♞e2 ♞d7
21.♣b1 ♞d5 22.♞e5 a5 23.g4 ♞d7= was
Fernandez Romero – Peralta, Andorra 2007, but
Black has a strong alternative right at the start
– Houska proposes 18...♞fd8!. I also fancy this
move and Fritz goes crazy with enthusiasm.

a) Firstly, the standard pawn sacrifice 19.g4?!
isn't as good as usual: 19...♞xg4 20.♞g1 f5
21.♞b3 ♞f8 One effect of having the rook on
d8 is that f8 is available for the knight. Black
easily repels the attack.

b) Secondly, if 19.♞xf6† ♞xf6 20.♞e2 then
20...♞g4! instructively prevents White's g2-g4
attacking idea. 21.g3 ♞d5 22.♞f4 ♞d8 23.♞e5
♞xe5 24.♞xe5 ♞f6†

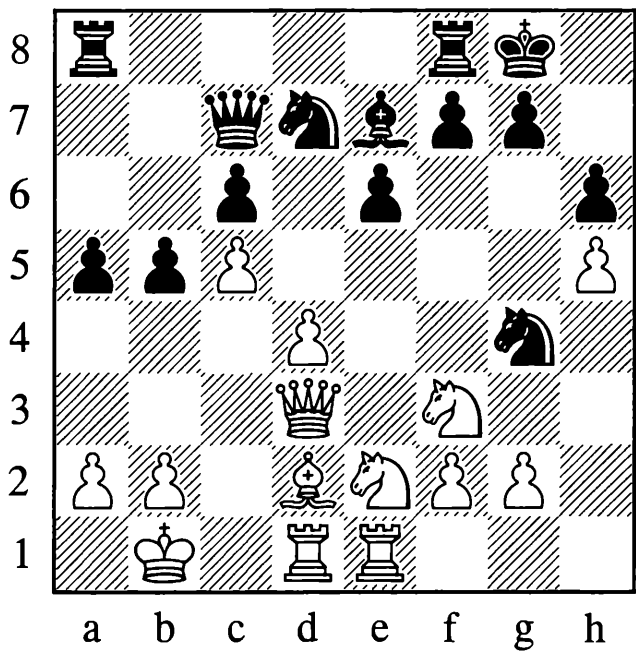
18...a5!

Black begins his own offensive. Of course
18...♞fd8 also makes sense.

19.♞e2

19.♞c2 ♞fe8 20.♞e5 was played in
Michielsen – Braun, Hengelo 2007. Now I
propose 20...♞xe5!?N 21.dxe5 ♞d5 when
the critical line must be 22.♞e4 (22.f4 ♞h4)
22...♞xe5! 23.♞d6 ♞xh5 24.♞xe8 ♞xe8
25.♞xa5 ♞a8 with one pawn and excellent
play for the exchange.

19...♞g4!



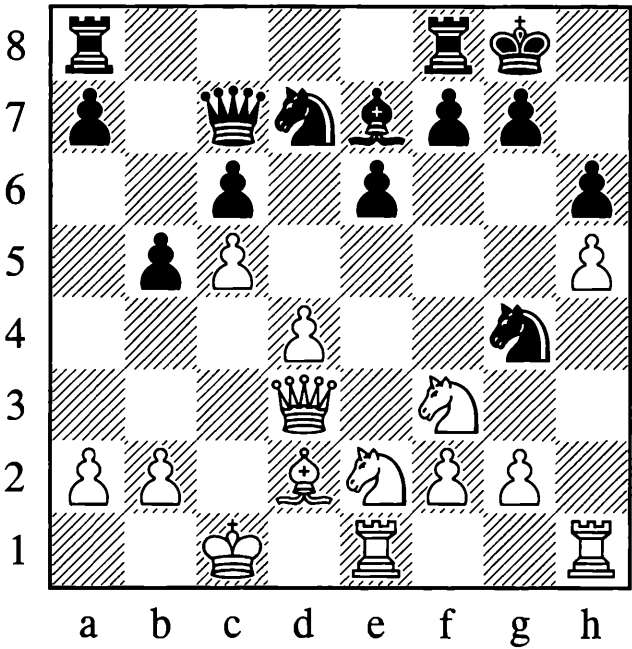
16...b5

Castling – to either side! – also seems okay, but when you have the chance to get in the thematic ...b7-b5 it is tempting to go for it.

17.c5 0–0 18.♘e2

18.♘e4 ♜fd8 19.♞e2 was Sarakauskiene – Thingstad, Tromsø 2007, when 19...a5N is fine. The attack with 20.g4 can be stopped by 20...♘xe4 21.♞xe4 ♘f6 22.♞c2 ♘h7.

18...♘g4!?



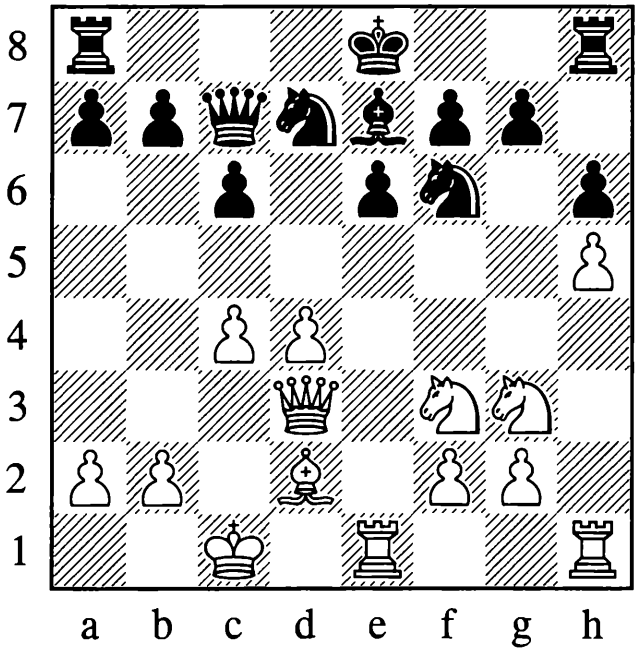
Once again we come across this key move. In general, Black is well advised to prevent the attack associated with g2-g4.

Again we use this nice motif. The knight is really strong on g4, as it attacks f2 and stands in the way of the g2-g4 idea.

20.♞f1 ♜fd8 21.♞c2 b4

This is Stellwagen – Jakovenko, France 2008. Black's initiative on the queenside is slowly but surely evolving; moves like ...a5-a4 and ...b4-b3 are in the air. It doesn't matter if this costs a pawn, as long as lines are opened towards the white king. White's offensive on the kingside has not even started and the knight on g4 will keep it that way. Furthermore, Black also has the option of the central break ...e6-e5. All in all, he has reasons to be cheerful.

D3) 16.♞de1



Check this out: 18...♞fe8 19.g4! e5 20.♞f5 exd4 21.g5 hxg5 22.♞xg5 And it already looked tricky for Black. 22...♘h7 23.♞f4 ♞c8 24.♘exd4 ♘xc5 25.♞c2 ♞f8 26.♞eg1 ♞e4 27.♞e5 f6 28.h6 fxe5 29.hxg7 ♞e7 30.♘xe5 ♞d6 31.f4 ♞xe5 32.fxe5 1–0 Anand – Macieja, Germany 2006. Consider yourself warned.

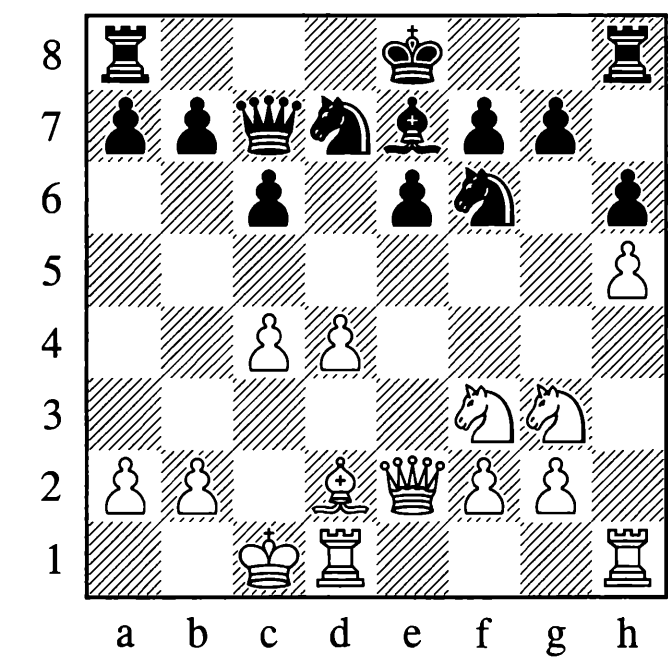
19.♞ef1

Black is also in charge after 19.♞hf1 ♘df6 or 19.♞e3 ♘df6.

19...♞fd8 20.♞c2 a5

Black had an edge in Aveskulov – Korobkov, Kharkov 2007.

D4) 16.♔e2



16...0-0

The immediate 16...b5!? could also be tried.

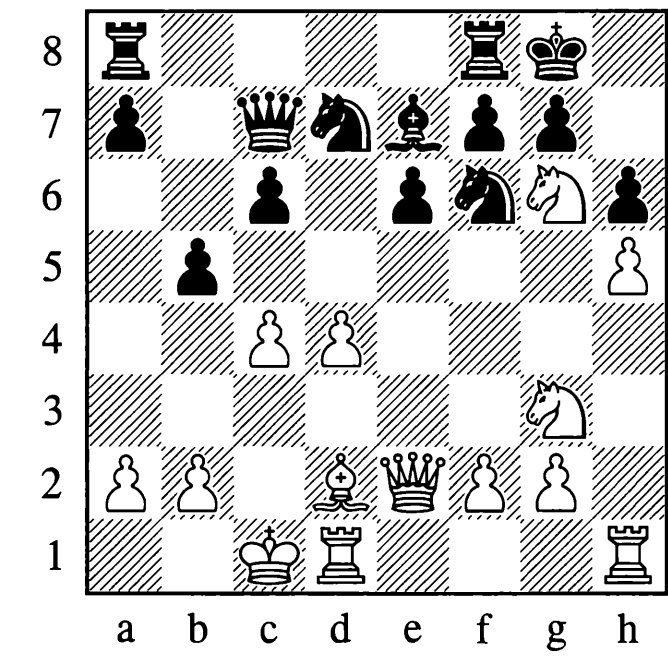
17.♘e5 b5!?N

The most natural choice, but 17...♗fe8 and 17...c5 have also been played.

18.♘g6

Spectacular. 18.♙a5 is another surprising shot, but it is not necessarily correct. 18...♕xa5 Black asks to be shown. 19.♘xc6 ♕xa2 20.♘xe7† ♔h8±

The quiet 18.♙b1 bxc4 is nothing for White.



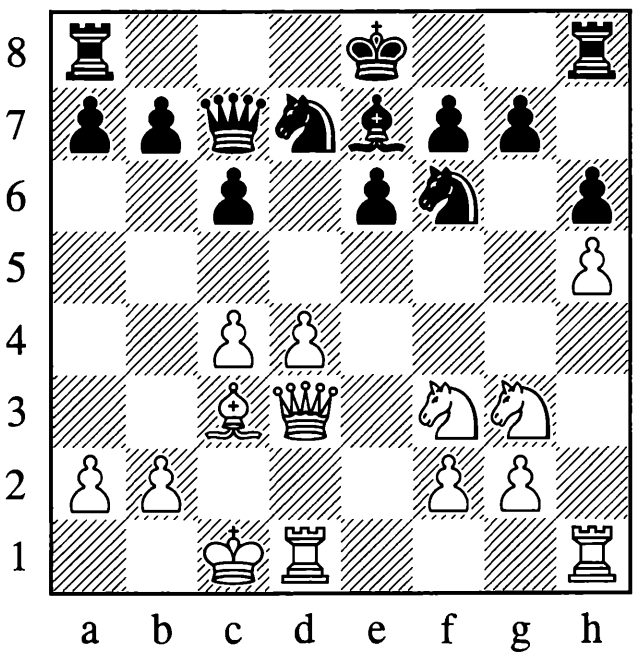
18...♗fe8!

Not 18...fxg6? 19.♕xe6† ♔h8 20.hxg6 with a strong attack, for example after 20...♕d6 21.♗xh6† g7 22.g7† ♔h7 23.gxf8=♘† ♗xf8 24.♗f5† ♔g7 25.♗e1.

19.♘xe7† ♗xe7

Black is fine. He will soon have the important d5-square for his knight.

D5) 16.♙c3



A logical positional move. Black's response is also a kind of classic.

16...b5

As usual, but 16...0-0 17.♘e5 ♗fd8 is also okay.

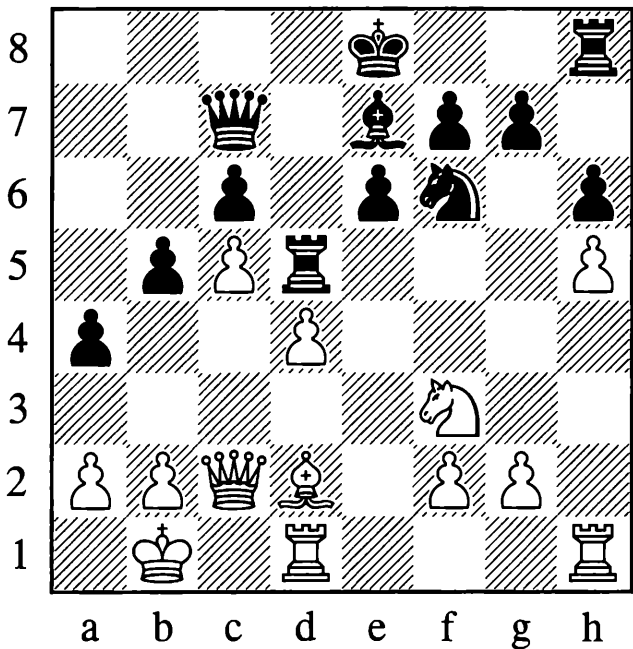
17.c5

Taking the pawn is risky. After 17.cxb5 cxb5 18.♕xb5 0-0 Black's rooks will soon land on the b- and c-files.

17...a5

But this is unpleasant for White as well. A disaster could look like this:

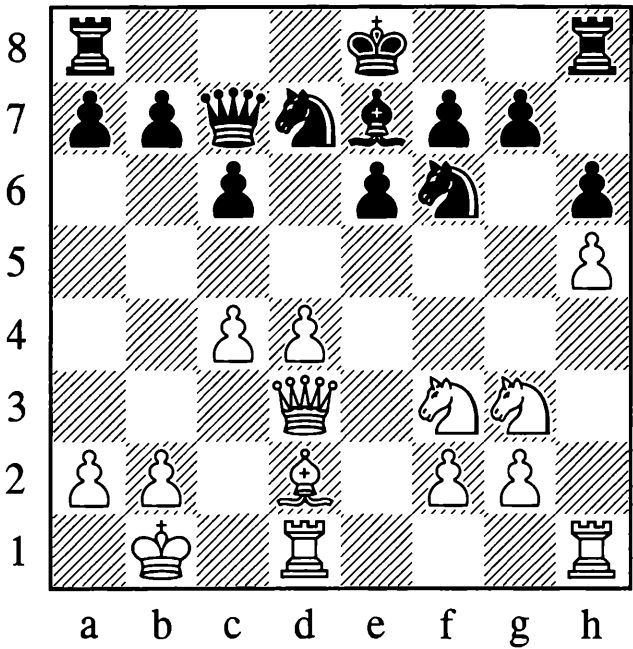
18.♙d2 a4 19.♘e4 ♗d8 20.♘xf6† ♘xf6 21.♕c2 ♗d5 22.♙b1



Now in Dieb Fritz – Kosyrev, Internet 2005, Black took the pawn with 22...Bxh5 23.Bxh5 Nxe5 24.Ne5 and White actually had some compensation. Stronger would have been:

22...Nf4 23.g3 0-0 24.Bf4 Bb7

D6) 16.Bb1

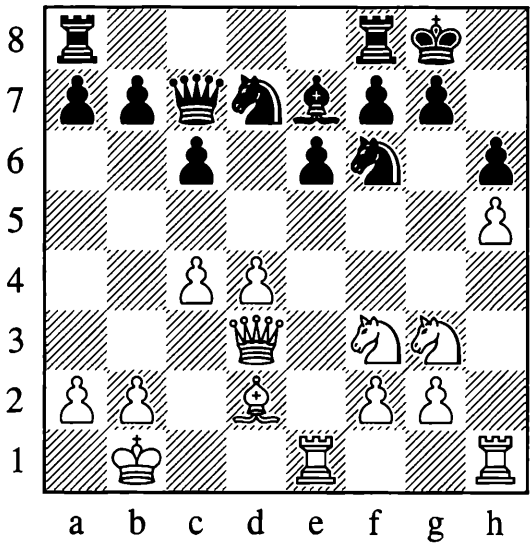


Good natural prophylaxis against Black's ...b7-b5 idea.

16...0-0

Here the two big lines are D61) 17.Bh1 and D62) 17.Ne4, but White has tried a wide range of other moves that I will examine first.

17.Bde1



17...Bfd8

17...b5!? also looks good, as taking the pawn is too dangerous. 18.c5 Bfd8 19.Bc2 a5 with a complicated fight ahead, as in Aagaard – Steingrimsson, Porto Mannu 2007. Black is definitely not worse.

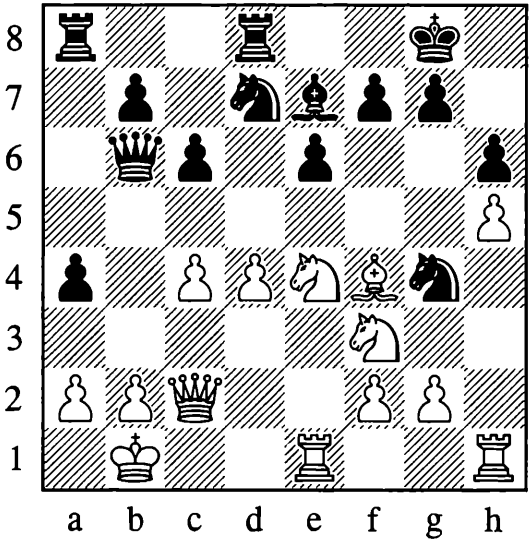
18.Bc2 a5!?

I really like this avant-garde push, just letting White do whatever it is he is doing. Karpov has played 18...Bd6, which of course is also okay.

19.Ne2 Ng4!

Efficiently preventing the imminent threat of g2-g4. Instead 19...a4 20.g4! Nxg4 21.Bhg1 Nd6 22.Bg2, followed by Bg1, shows the typical danger that must be avoided.

20.Bf4 Bb6 21.Nc3 a4 22.Ne4

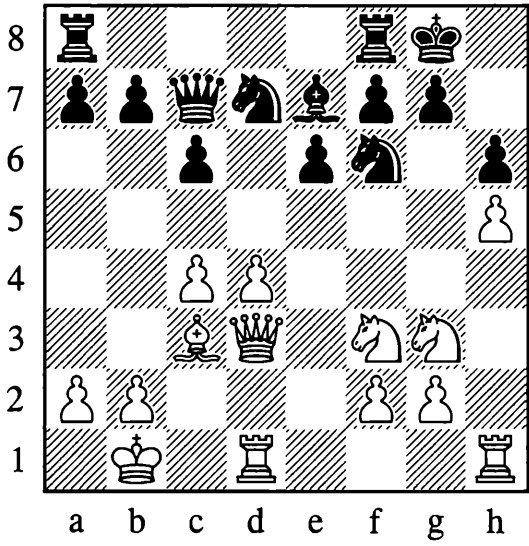


This was Loskutov – Iordachescu, Serpuhov 2008. Here Black had a good chance:

22...a3!N 23.b3 ♖df6

The pawn on a3 will be a thorn in White's side forever.

17.♔c3



17...a5!?

Once again I like this idea, but 17...b5 also looks promising and the quiet 17...♖fd8 can't be a mistake either.

18.♗e5 ♔b4

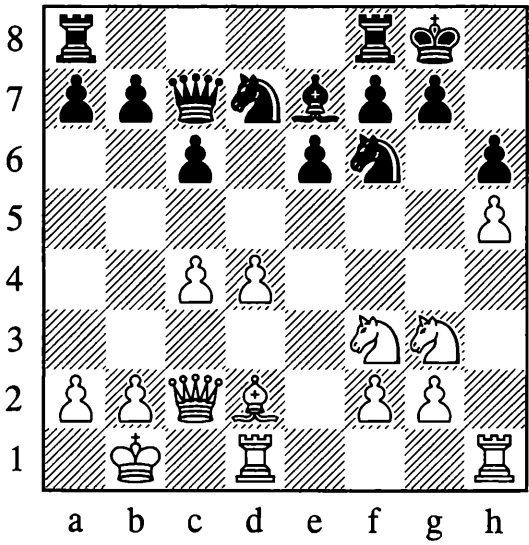
Black benefits from another advantage of the move ...a7-a5, but the flexible 18...♖fd8 would probably have been my choice.

19.f4 ♖fd8 20.♗e4?! ♗xe4 21.♔xe4 ♔xc3 22.bxc3

In Ciuksyte – Purtseladze, Stockholm 2008, White's weakened pawn structure was a problem. Black should continue with something like:

22...a4

17.♔c2



A dangerous new plan developed by the imaginative attacking player Kotronias. First White plays a few safe moves to prevent counterplay. Then he will try at any cost to get in g2-g4 and take the initiative. With 17.♔c2 he effectively stops any ...b7-b5 ideas.

17...a5!?

Of course this was my reaction when faced with this position over-the-board.

Most people react with 17...♖fd8 when 18.♖h4 prevents ...♗g4 and plans ♗e2 followed by g2-g4. Black can respond with the cool 18...♖ac8 planning counterplay with ...c6-c5 or try to be really irritating with 18...♗h7 19.♖h3 ♗hf6.

Also 17...♗g4!? is worth mentioning. 18.♔c1 ♗df6 19.♖h4 ♔d6 20.♗f1 This was Kotronias – Nakamura, Gibraltar 2009. Now Black should have tried 20...c5N 21.♗e3 ♗xe3 22.fxe3 cxd4 23.exd4 ♖fc8 24.b3 b5 25.c5 ♔g3 26.♖h3 a5∞.

18.♖h4

The Kotronias move again. 18.♔c1 a4 or 18.♗e2 ♗g4! both seem satisfactory for Black.

18...a4 19.♗e2 b5!

Forcing White to make a positional concession one way or another.

20.c5

Or 20.cxb5 ♗d5 hitting the rook and preparing to take back on b5.

20...♗d5 21.♖h3 a3

Easier was 21...b4! with the threat of ...b4-b3.

22.b3 ♖fe8 23.g4 e5 24.♖g1

This is S.B. Hansen – Schandorff, Denmark (ch) 2009, and now interesting was:

24...e4!?

The point being:

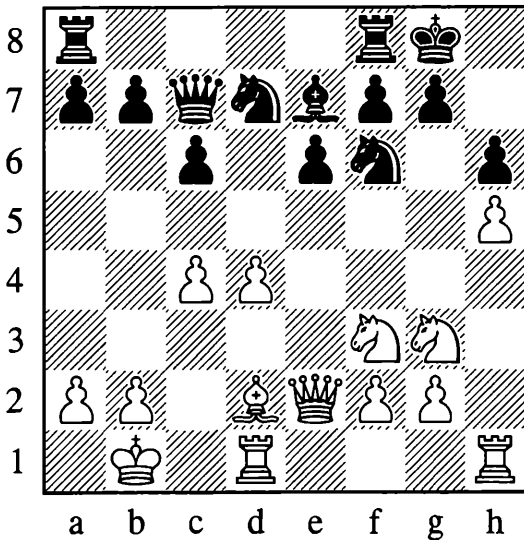
25.♔xe4?

White should try the sacrificial 25.g5!, which is a mess. Of course this makes the improvement on Black's 21st move especially relevant.

25...♙g5 26.♚d3 ♙xd2 27.♘xd2 ♖xe2
28.♚xe2 ♘f4 29.♚f3 ♘h3 30.♚xh3 ♘xc5!

And Black regains the pawn with an advantage, because 31.dxc5? ♚e5 is a splendid illustration of the possibilities created by a black pawn on a3.

17.♚e2



17...♖fe8

The standard reaction, but you should always consider moves like 17...a5 and 17...b5.

18.♘e5

Instead 18.♘e4 ♘xe4 19.♚xe4 c5 solves Black's problems. 20.♙f4 ♘f6 21.♚e3 ♚b6 22.♙e5 This is Anand – Topalov, Nice 2008, and now for instance 22...♖ed8 with a balanced game.

18...b5!?

This is the enterprising move. Solid and good enough for equality is 18...c5 19.♙f4 cxd4 20.♖xd4 ♘xe5 21.♙xe5 ♚c6 22.♘e4 ♘xe4 23.♚xe4 ♚xe4† 24.♖xe4 ♖ad8= as in Browne – Perelshteyn, San Diego 2006.

Also 18...a5!?N might be worth a try.

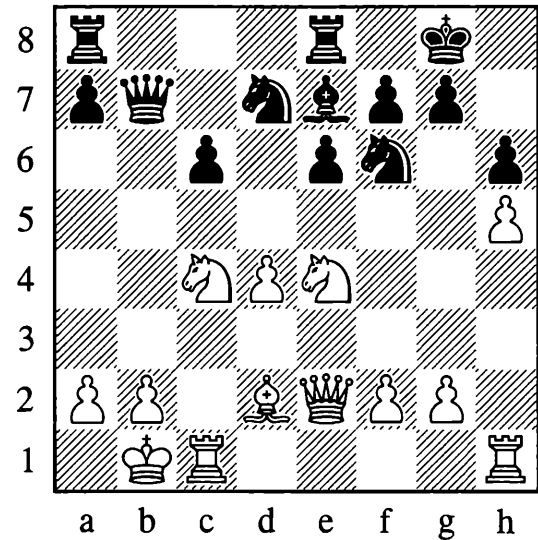
19.♖c1

Risky is 19.cxb5 cxb5 20.♚xb5 ♘xe5 21.dxe5 ♖ab8 22.♚e2 ♙a3 23.♙c1 ♘d5 with great play for the pawn. The following is just a sample variation: 24.♙a1 ♖ec8 25.bxa3 ♘c3 26.♚c2 ♚b7 27.♚b2 ♘xd1 28.♖xd1 ♚c7 29.♚d2 ♖d8 30.♚e1 ♖xd1 31.♚xd1 ♚c3† And mate next move.

19...♚b7 20.♘e4

Nothing is offered by 20.cxb5 cxb5 21.♘c6 ♙d6.

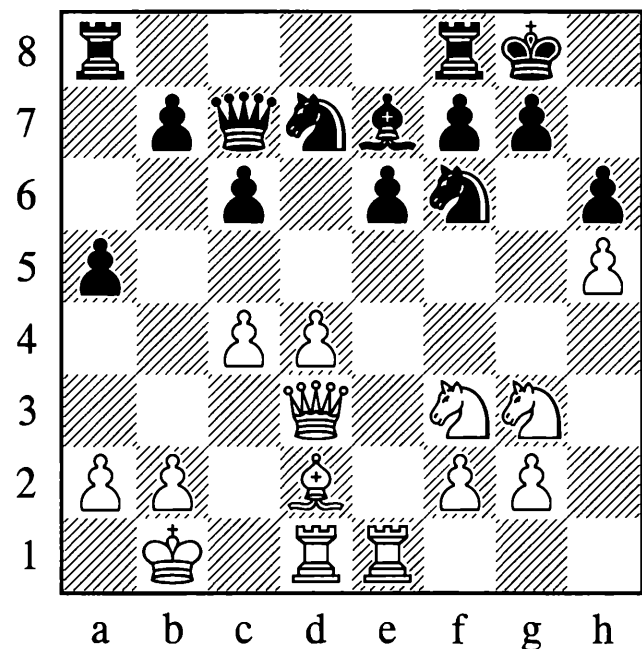
20...bxc4 21.♘xc4



21...♚b5! 22.♘c3 ♚f5† 23.♙a1 c5 24.♘e3 ♚h7 25.d5 ♙f8 26.dxe6 ♖xe6

This is Tologontegin – Lastin, Voronezh 2008. The position is rather unclear but I like Black. The queen manoeuvre, if you want to call it that, to h7 is remarkable. Actually it stands very well there.

D61) 17.♖he1 a5



It's no secret this is my favourite move in these ♙b1 lines. Someone else might fancy 17...b5 or how about a rook to d8.

18.♘e5

White should play actively.

18.♔c1 ♖fd8 19.♚c2 a4 is already comfortable for Black. 20.♘e5 ♘xe5 21.dxe5 ♖xd1 22.♚xd1 ♘d7 23.f4 ♘c5= This was the intro to a modern masterpiece (see the illustrative game for the rest).

18.a3 b5! (18...♖fd8) 19.cxb5 cxb5 20.♖c1 ♚b7 21.♘f5 was Lhoest – Hentzien, France 2003. Now Black could keep positional control with 21...♖fe8 22.♘xe7† ♖xe7=.

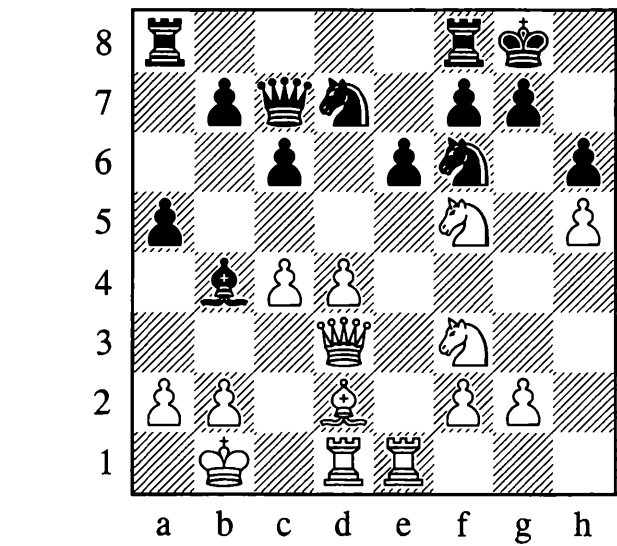
18.♘e4 ♘xe4 (18...a4!?) 19.♚xe4 ♘f6 20.♚e2 ♔b4 A benefit of ...a7-a5. (But just playing 20...a4!? also looks tempting.) Delorme – Spassov, France 2008, continued 21.♘e5 ♖fd8= 22.♘g4?! ♘xg4 23.♚xg4 and now strong is 23...b5!N 24.♔xh6 f5=.

18.♚e2 ♖fd8 (18...♔b4=) 19.♔c1 Kokarev – Rodshtein, Dagomys 2008. Here 19...a4N looks normal with typical play.

18.♘f5N

This is quite tricky, so it should of course be analysed.

18...♔b4



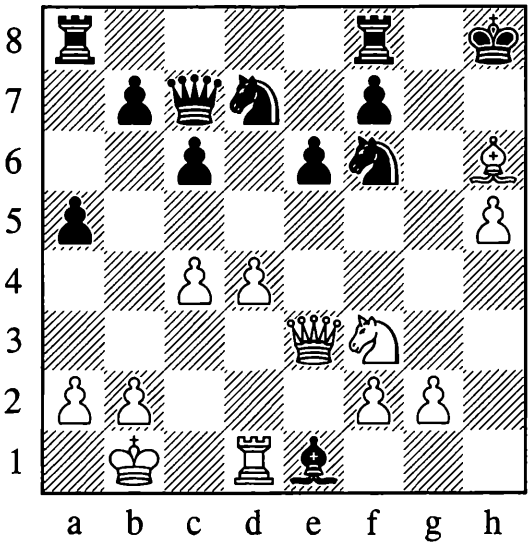
19.♘h6†

White loses after 19.♘xg7 ♔xg7 20.♔xh6† ♔xh6 21.♖xe6 ♖g8.

19...gxf6 20.♔xh6 ♔xe1 21.♚e3

Or if 21.♖xe1 then 21...♔h8 22.♔xf8 ♖xf8. 21...♔h8!

The text is clearer than 21...♘h7 22.♖xe1 ♖fc8 23.g4= when White has a long-term initiative for the rook. It is not so easy for Black to untangle.



22.♔xf8

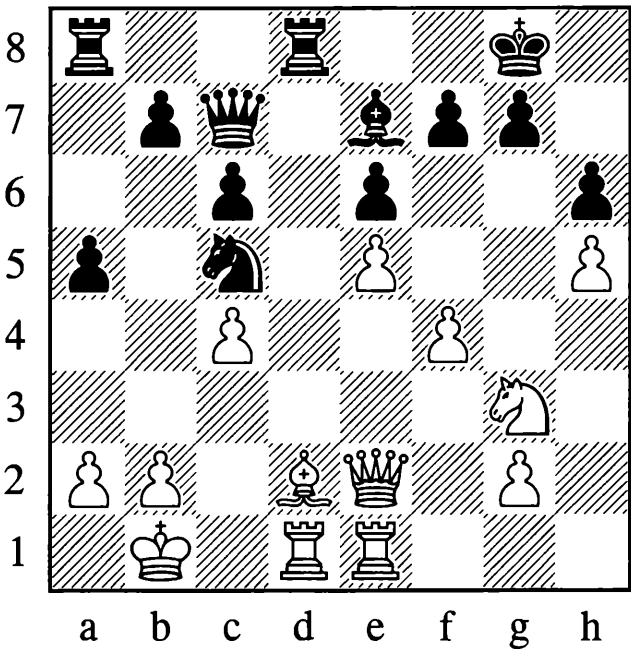
Or 22.♖xe1 ♘g4 23.♚d2 ♖fe8.

22...♖xf8 23.♖xe1 ♖g8 24.♘g5 ♘f8 25.g3 ♘g4 26.♚d2 ♘h7=

18...♘xe5

After 18...♖ad8 19.♚e2 ♔b4= 20.f4 ♖fe8 21.a3 ♔xd2 22.♖xd2 c5 23.♖ed1 cxd4 24.♖xd4 ♘c5 Black had solved all his problems in Karjakin – Topalov, Nice (rapid) 2009.

19.dxe5 ♖fd8 20.♚e2 ♘d7 21.f4 ♘c5



Black is at least equal. The further course of the game is very instructive; White drifts a bit and Black advances his a-pawn to great effect.

22.♙e3 a4 23.♙d4 a3 24.b3 ♚a5 25.♙xc5
 ♙xc5 26.♘e4 ♙b4 27.♞xd8† ♞xd8 28.♞d1
 ♞xd1† 29.♞xd1 ♞b6 30.♞e2 ♞d4

In Svetushkin – Berkes, Germany 2009, White was hopelessly weak on the dark squares.

Leko – Ivanchuk

Morelia/Linares 2008

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 dxe4 4.♘xe4 ♙f5
 5.♘g3 ♙g6 6.h4 h6 7.♘f3 ♘d7 8.h5 ♙h7
 9.♙d3 ♙xd3 10.♞xd3 e6 11.♙f4 ♞a5†
 12.♙d2 ♙b4 13.c3 ♙e7 14.c4 ♞c7 15.0–0–0
 ♘gf6 16.♙b1 0–0 17.♞he1 a5

The idea of simply pushing the a-pawn is a key modern discovery in many lines of the Classical Caro-Kann. Often it goes all the way to a3 to create unpleasant threats against the white king. Even though White can keep the position closed by answering ...a4-a3 with b2-b3 he will constantly be annoyed by the intruder near his king. The weakness of the dark squares is significant and eventually, when the position opens up, the black queen may sneak in and deliver mate on b2!

18.♙c1

White plays it a little too safe.

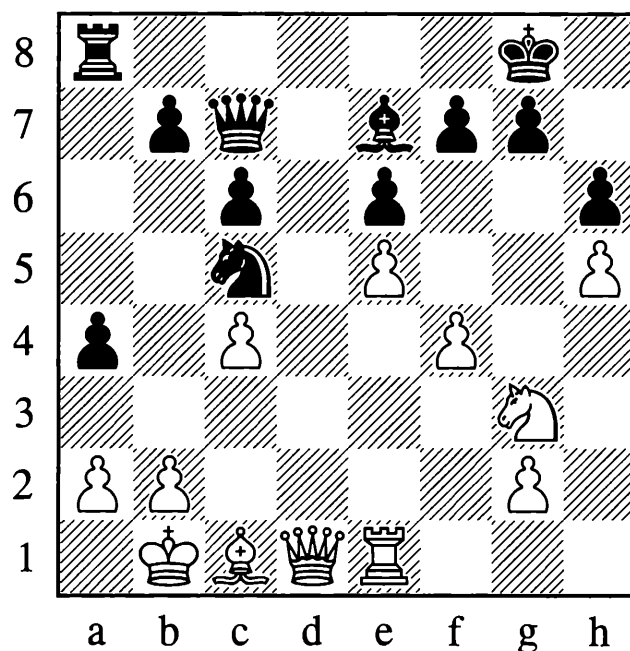
18...♞fd8 19.♞c2 a4

Black already has pleasant play. White could consider stopping the mighty march of the a-pawn with 20.a3. Instead he opts for simplifications, but here too Black is well prepared.

20.♘e5 ♘xe5

The simplest choice, but first flicking in 20...a3 was also interesting.

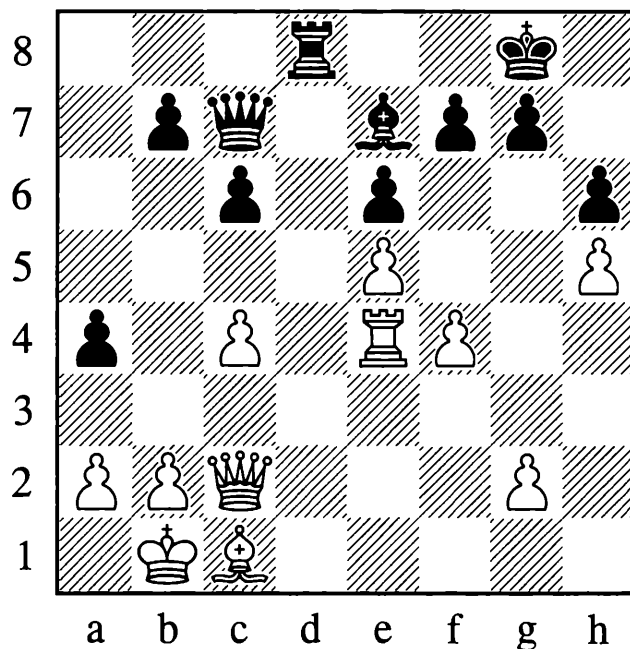
21.dxe5 ♞xd1 22.♞xd1 ♘d7 23.f4 ♘c5



Black is slightly better. Next he will conquer the d-file and try to penetrate with his rook. White has no real counterplay, but, true to his style, Leko will begin to build a fortress.

24.♘e4 ♞d8 25.♞c2 ♘xe4 26.♞xe4

Instead 26.♞xe4 a3 27.b3 ♙b4 would have been thematic. A possible continuation is 28.♞f1 ♞e7 29.g4 ♞h4 30.♞f3 ♞h2 31.♞h1 ♞d3 32.♞xd3 ♞xh1 and Black's queen has penetrated, giving him good winning chances.



26...♞b6! 27.♞xa4

Taking the bait. Safer was 27.♞e1 when Black is comfortable of course, but he still needs to find a way in.

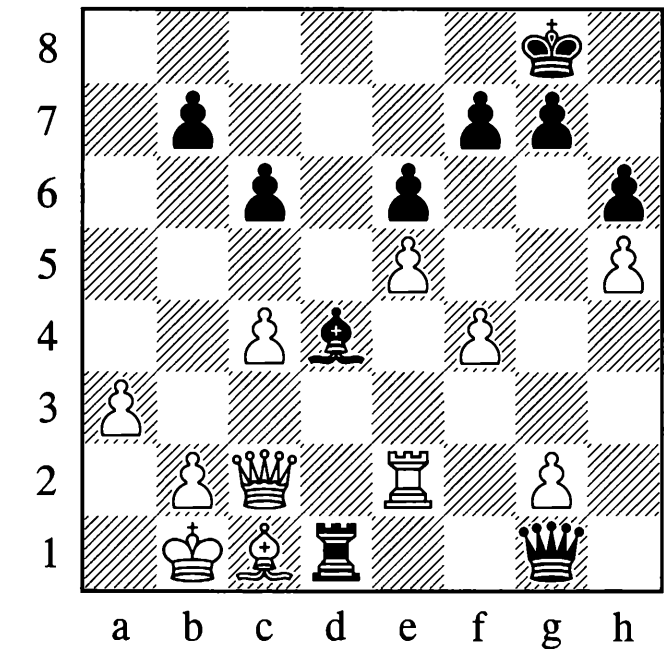
27...♞g1 28.♞c2 ♞d1

The entrance of the heavy pieces is worth much more than the pawn.

29.♖e2 ♜f1 30.a3 ♟c5!

Ivanchuk continues to play for activity. Taking back the pawn with 30...♜xf4 was also fine.

31.♞d2 ♜d1 32.♞c2 ♟d4



White was simultaneously running out of good moves and time on the clock.

33.c5

This looks somewhat desperate, but 33.♞d2 ♜f1 34.g3 c5 was no better. 35.♞d3 ♜e1 Black is threatening ...♟e3 or ...♞f1.

33...♜f1 34.♞d2 ♜xf4

Winning the pawn back. In addition c5 and e5 are terribly weak, so there will soon be some dividends.

35.♞a2 ♜f2 36.♞xf2 ♟xf2 37.g4 ♟xc5

That's a pawn!

38.♟f4 ♞d4 39.♞d2 ♞e4 40.♞a1 ♟d4

Black nicely centralizes his pieces.

41.♞h2 c5

White's pieces are tied to the defence of his

remaining weak pawns and he is helpless against a new black offensive on the queenside.

42.♞a2 b5 43.♞d2 ♞d5† 44.♞b1 b4! 45.a4

Or 45.axb4 cxb4 46.♞xb4 ♞e4† and ...♞xf4.

45...b3

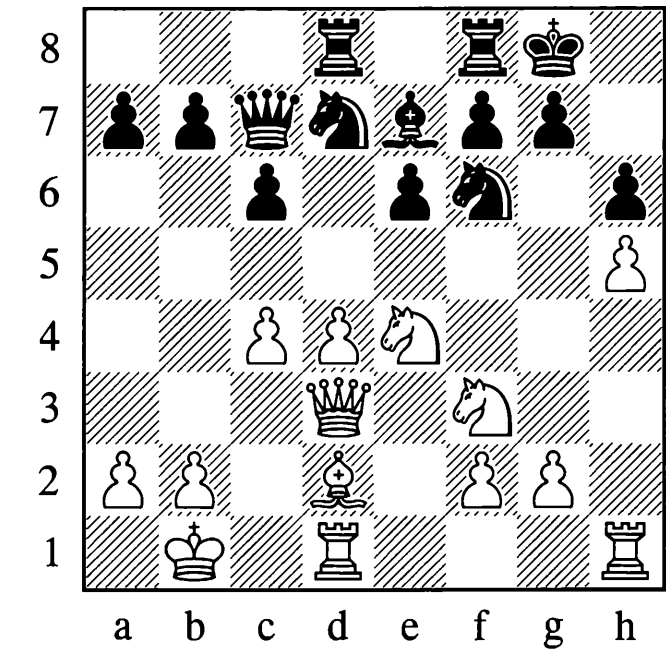
Creating back rank mating threats as well. It is over.

46.♞d3 c4 47.♞e2 ♞h1† 48.♟c1 ♞a8

A powerful conclusion to a remarkable game. If 49.♞xc4 then Black has 49...♞e4† 50.♞a1 ♟xb2† winning the queen.

0-1

D62) 17.♞e4 ♜ad8



Black centralizes the rook and keeps the tension for one more move.

18.♞xf6†

Probably best, but a variety of other moves have been tried.

18.♞e2 ♞xe4 19.♞xe4 ♞f6 20.♞e2 transposes to the mainline.

18.♟c3 b5⇌ 19.♞xf6† ♞xf6 is fine for Black 20.♞e2 (20.cxb5 cxb5 21.♞xb5 looks risky

as always 21...♘e4! 22.♙a5 ♖b8 23.♙xc7 ♖xb5 24.♖df1 ♙a3 25.b3 a5 ♖ Zaragatski – Riazantsev, Hamburg 2005. Black follows up with ...a5-a4 with the initiative. If he can win the pawn back, he is positionally better.) 20...bxc4 21.♘e5 ♘d5 22.♙xc4 ♖b8 23.♖c1 Krupa – Czarnota, Krakow 2008. Now 23...♖fc8N and Black is slightly better;

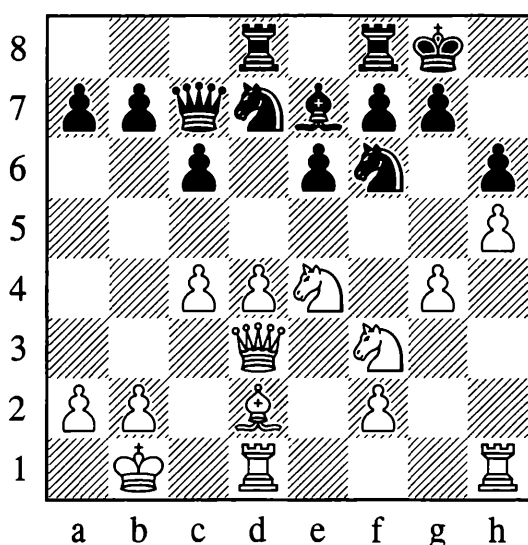
18.♘c3 A very unusual set-up. 18...a6 19.♙e2 c5 (19...b5!?) 20.d5 exd5 21.♙xe7 ♖fe8 22.♘xd5 ♘xd5 23.♙h4 ♘5f6 24.♖he1 ♙c6= Starostits – Kropff, Bled 2002.

18.g3 b5 ♗ 19.♙f4 ♙b7 20.♘xf6† ♘xf6 21.♘e5 c5 22.cxb5 ♖xd4 And Black exited the opening duel with the initiative, Ivanchuk – Anand, Nice 2009.

18.♖dg1?! ♘g4 19.♙e2 c5 ♖ stopped White's fun in Garano – Spassov, Bratto 2008.

18.♙c2 ♘xe4N 19.♙xe4 ♘f6 20.♙e2 transposes to the main line.

18.g4?!



A standard concept, but in this exact position Black is well prepared to meet it. 18...♘xg4 19.♙e2 ♗h8 20.♖dg1 f5 21.♘c3 This was Guliyev – Karpov, Ajaccio 2007. Here Black could strike back with 21...e5!N 22.dxe5 ♖fe8 23.♙f4 ♙f6 24.♙c2 ♘dxe5 25.♙xf5 ♙b6! ♖ with the idea 26.♖xg4 ♘xg4 27.♙xg4 ♙xc3.

18...♘xf6

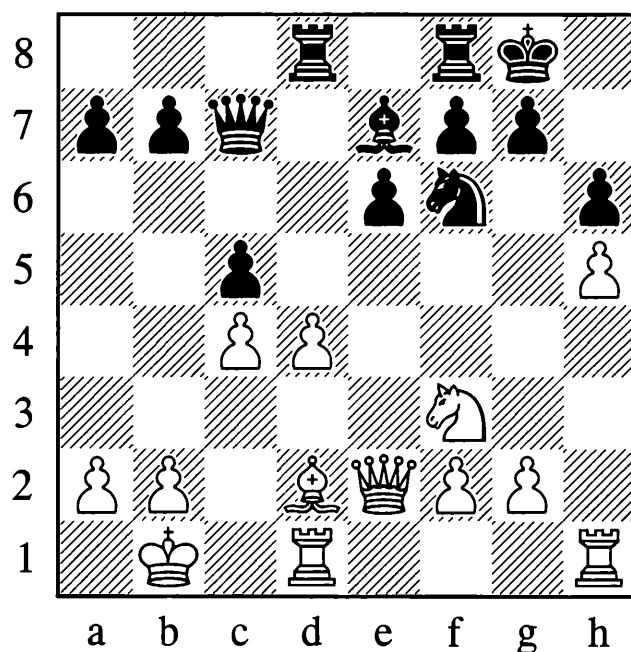
18...♙xf6 could be considered, but in general I don't like putting the bishop there.

19.♙e2

A sensible prelude. Carlsen has played 19.g4 but it seems a bit premature. 19...♘xg4 20.♖hg1 f5 21.♙e2 ♙f6! 22.♙xe6† was Carlsen – Kamsky, Baku 2008. Now 22...♙f7N holds the balance. 23.♙xf5 ♘xf2 24.♖df1 ♙xd4 25.♘xd4 ♖xd4 26.♙c2 ♙e7 27.♙xh6 ♘g4 28.♙c1 ♖xf1 29.♖xf1 ♙e4=

19...c5

19...b5 looks needlessly risky. In our main line we are immediately hitting the centre, while after the advance of the b-pawn, White has time to play 20.g4! with the idea 20...bxc4 21.g5 hxg5 22.h6N and White has attacking chances.



20.g4

This lunge is probably too excitable.

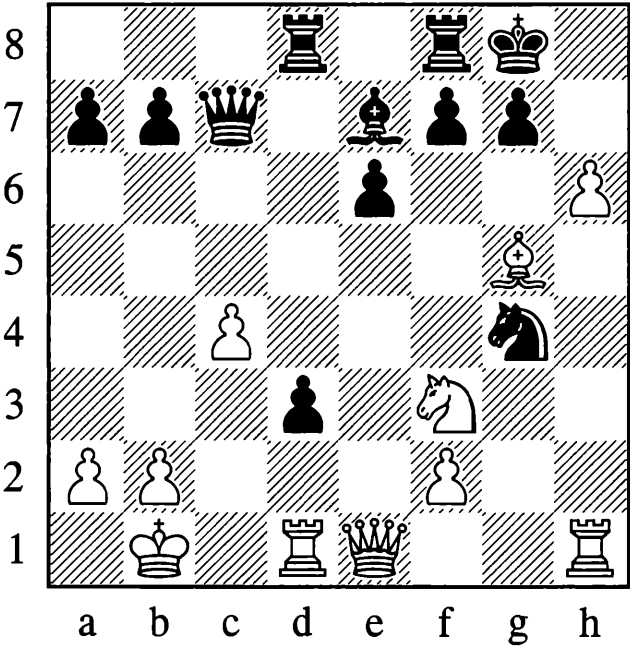
If 20.♙c3 Black has 20...cxd4 21.♙xd4 ♙c5 which is a clear-cut equalizer, as 22.♙xf6 gxf6 is nothing to be afraid of. Or he can even try 20...♙f4!? with interesting play.

20.dxc5 ♙xc5 21.♘e1 ♖d4 22.f3 ♖fd8 23.♘c2 ♖d3 ♖ was extremely unpleasant for White in Reshetnikov – Riazantsev, Moscow 2008.

20...cxd4 21.g5 hxg5 22.♙xg5 d3 23.♚e1

The problem with 23.♞xd3 is 23...♚xc4±.

23...♜g4 24.h6



A draw was agreed in Ponomariov – Motylev, Spain 2008, but Black should have continued.

24...♙xg5!N 25.♜xg5

Or 25.hxg7 ♜xg7 26.♜xg5 ♚e5.

25...♚e5

This covers everything.

26.♚xe5 ♜xe5 27.hxg7 ♜xg7 28.♞hg1 ♜g6 29.♞g3

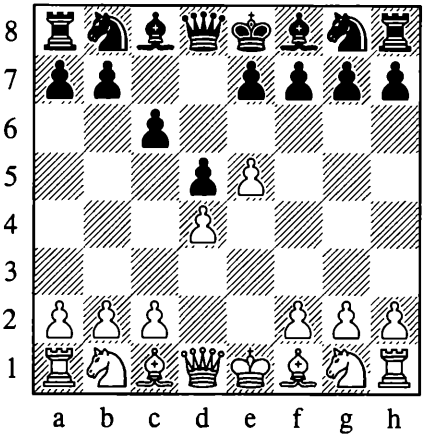
Winning the pawn back. Still after something like:

29...♞h8 30.♞gxd3 ♞xd3 31.♞xd3 ♜e5±

Only Black can play for a win.

Conclusion

After 11.♙f4 ♚a5† 12.♙d2 ♙b4 13.c3 ♙e7 14.c4 ♚c7 the direct move 15.d5 is fended off by 15...cxd5 16.cxd5 ♚d6! when Black is already at least equal. The big mainline is 15.0–0–0 ♜gf6 when Black is ready to throw in ...b7-b5. So 16.♙b1 0–0 and now either 17.♞he1 a5 or 17.♜e4 ♞ad8 with a tense struggle, where Black is not worse.



Advance Variation

Introduction and Minor Lines

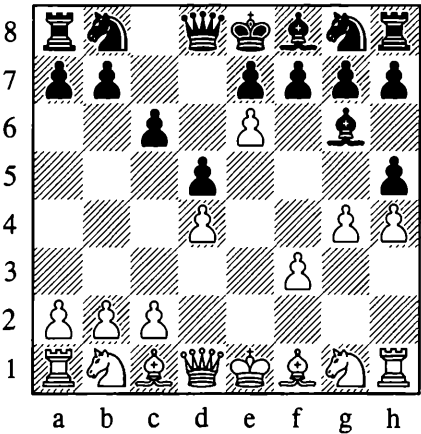
Variation Index

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.e5

3...♗f5

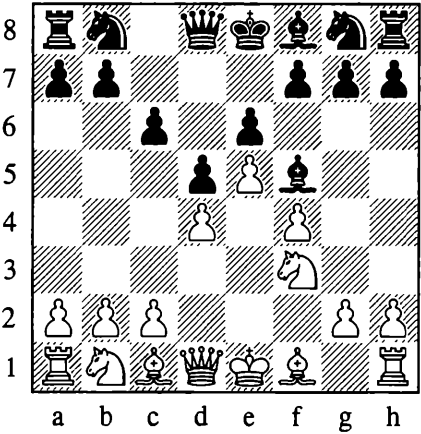
A) 4.g4	87
B) 4.f4	89
C) 4.♗d3	89
D) 4.♘e2	91

Precerutti – Torres, after 7.e6



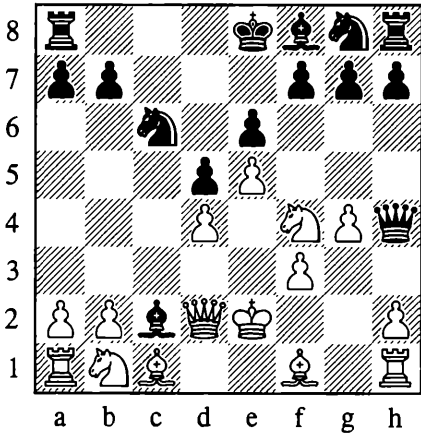
7...♔d6!

B) after 5.♘f3



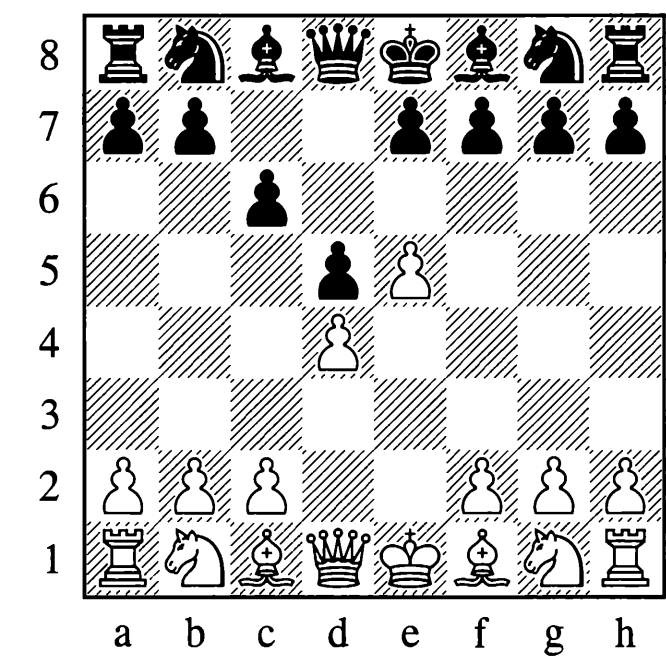
5...h5!?

Litz – Nagel, after 11.♔d2



11...h5!

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.e5

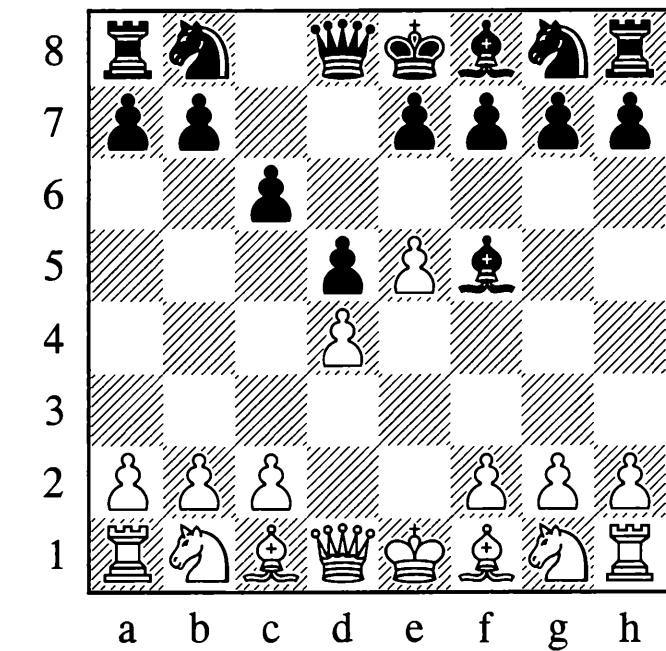


The Advance Variation. Together with the Classical Variation, this is the most demanding line to face in the Caro-Kann and will be a critical battleground for years to come, both in theory and practice. It is undeniably a very important line.

Strategically, it is a distant relative of the 3.e5 lines against the French. White simply takes more space, which is a significant long-term advantage. In the French after 1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.e5 Black usually begins to attack White's centre with 3...c5, following Nimzowitsch's guideline of attacking the base of a pawn chain. Here in the Caro-Kann the move ...c5 also plays a leading role, as it is a natural positional assault on White's centre. It can be played immediately with 3...c5, but can Black get away with such an obvious loss of a tempo so early in the game? Theory is still unresolved on this matter. Anyway, I much prefer the pure Caro-Kann move 3...f5.

3...f5

The light-squared bishop steps outside before the door is closed with ...e7-e6. This is the real difference compared to the French where the problem child is stuck on c8 – and what a difference. It means that Black's position is completely sound.



White has tried a variety of ideas in search of an advantage. In this chapter I will start by checking out some of the minor lines, including direct attempts to play against the f5-bishop with moves such as 4.g4 and 4.f3. The lines covered below are A) 4.g4, B) 4.f4, C) 4.f3 and D) 4.f3.

In the next chapter the focus will be on aggressive play in the centre with 4.c4 and the more sophisticated version, 4.h4 h5 5.c4. Then in Chapter 11 I shift to more positional ideas such as 4.c3, 4.f3, 4.f3 and 4.f3 e6 lines where White avoids the usual 5.f3.

Finally, I will turn to the two main lines of the 3.e5 system.

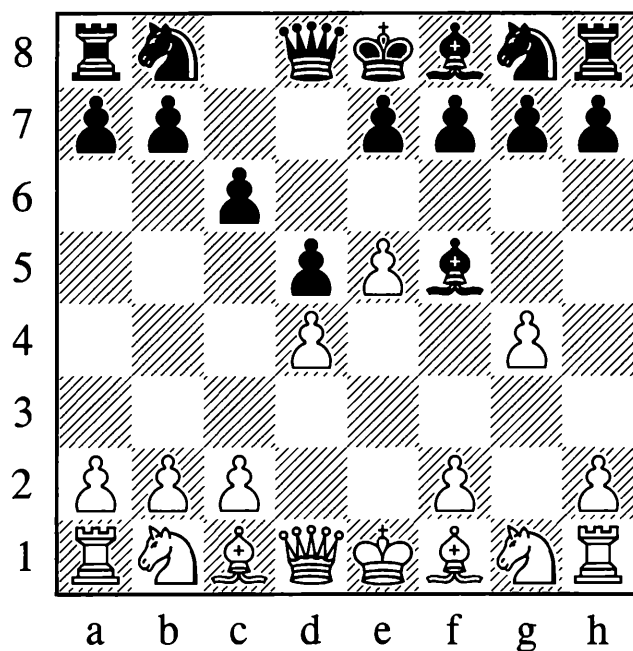
The Short Variation, 4.f3 e6 5.f3, is a fashionable system that is covered in Chapter 12. Here White delays the infighting and first finishes his development. The infighting will come though. Believe me.

Then we have the ultra-sharp Shirov Variation with 4.f3 e6 5.g4!?, where White goes all-in and tries to win by force. That attitude is probably a little overoptimistic – we'll see in Chapter 13.

The Advance Variation is unquestionably a big system – there is a lot to learn. Fortunately

Black's play is very natural and the same key moves appear time and again.

A) 4.g4



Very radical.

4...♙e4

Provoking more weaknesses in the white camp.

5.f3 ♗g6 6.h4

The culmination of White's one-eyed strategy – he is going after the black bishop with everything he's got.

Interpolating 6.♘e2 e6 first doesn't change much. After 7.h4 h5 8.♘f4 ♘e7 9.♘c3 ♖b6 10.♘a4 ♗c7N 11.♙e3 ♘d7 Black is okay.

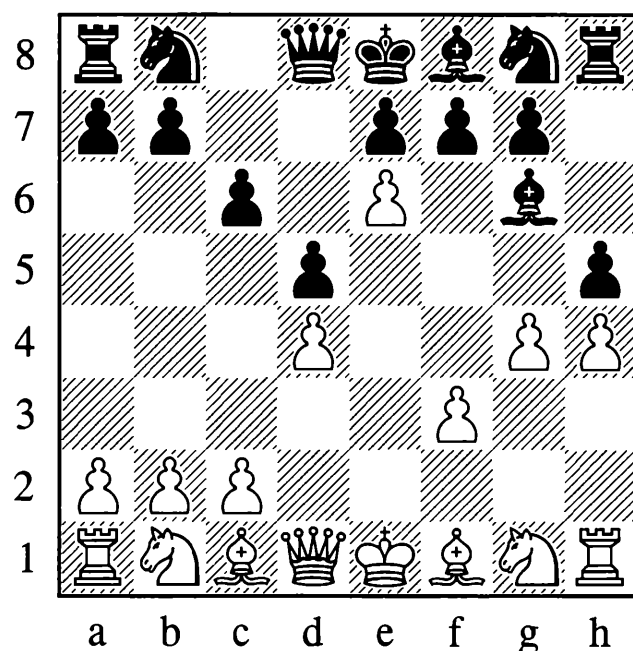
The tricky 6.e6 is worth knowing about. It is best simply to decline the pawn offer with 6...♖d6 7.exf7† ♙xf7 when Black has a good position.

6...h5

In the 3.e5 systems h2-h4 should in general be answered with ...h7-h5, even if this implies a pawn sacrifice. The reason is simply that White shouldn't be given a free hand for his kingside operations. The modest ...h7-h6

invites White to take more space by playing h4-h5 himself. Afterwards he will typically exchange light-squared bishops with ♙d3 and enjoy his superiority on the kingside. In this concrete position even the aforementioned pawn sacrifice e5-e6 works. That is, 6...h6 7.h5 ♙h7 8.e6! fxe6 9.♙d3 with a dangerous initiative.

7.e6



Once again we see this idea. White could hardly afford to close the kingside – the only place where he could dream of attacking.

Both 7.♙d3 ♙xd3 8.♖xd3 e6 and 7.g5 e6 8.♙d3 ♙xd3 9.♖xd3 ♘e7 are positionally comfortable for Black who can look forward to using the excellent f5-square for his knight.

7...♖d6!

And again the same response.

8.exf7† ♙xf7

Black is better. To begin with, a nasty check on g3 is threatened.

9.♘e2 hxg4

Opening up the h8-rook.

10.fxg4 ♘d7

Black will play ...e7-e5 next with a serious initiative. See the illustrative game for more.

Precerutti – Torres

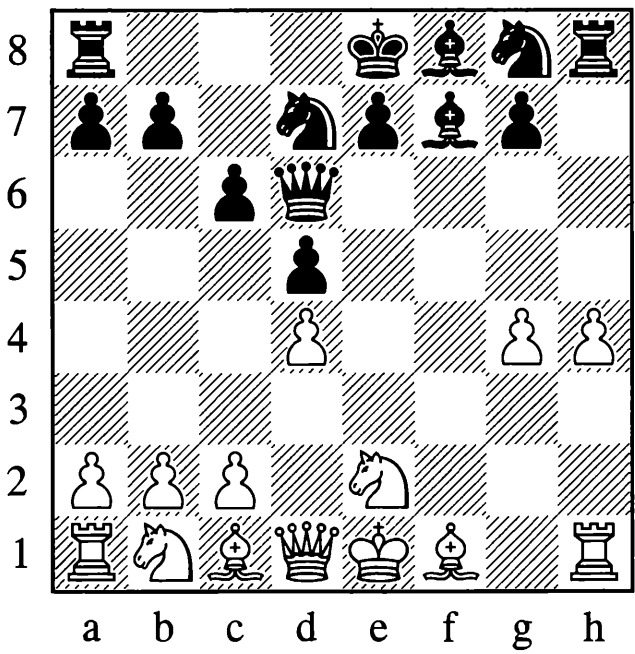
Correspondence 1998

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.e5 ♘f5 4.g4 ♙e4 5.f3 ♙g6 6.h4

In general you should be happy when White starts throwing everything at you in the Caro. Black's position is structurally sound and solid enough to withstand a lot of punishment. When White's initiative runs out, we will take over.

6...h5 7.e6 ♖d6!
The key move.

8.exf7† ♙xf7 9.♗e2 hxc4 10.fxc4 ♗d7



11.c3

White can try 11.♙f4 but it does not stop Black's planned break: 11...e5! And now Radics – Korpas, Hungary 1996, concluded: 12.dxe5 ♗xe5 13.♙xe5 ♖xe5 14.♖d4 ½-½ When you find such a game in your database it is easy to be deceived. Here Black is actually much better in the final position after 14...♖xd4 15.♗xd4 ♙c5†. The bishops are powerful.

11...e5! 12.dxe5 ♗xe5 13.♙f4 ♗f6 14.g5 ♗e4

Maybe 14...♗fg4 was even stronger.

15.♙g2 ♖c5

This allows White to give up both his bishops for the active knights and survive a few more moves. Black could also have played 15...♗c5 when White is more or less forced to play 16.♙xe5 ♖xe5†.

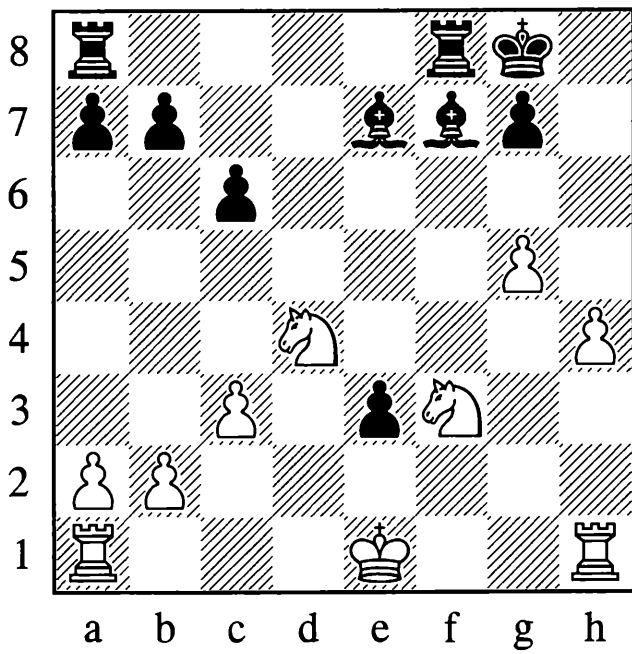
16.♙xe4

16.♖f1 would be met by 16...♙d6.

16...dxe4 17.♙xe5 ♖xe5 18.♖d4 ♖xd4

A good decision; the advantage and the initiative will not disappear just because it is an ending.

19.♗xd4 ♙e7 20.♗d2 e3 21.♗2f3 0-0



22.♙e2

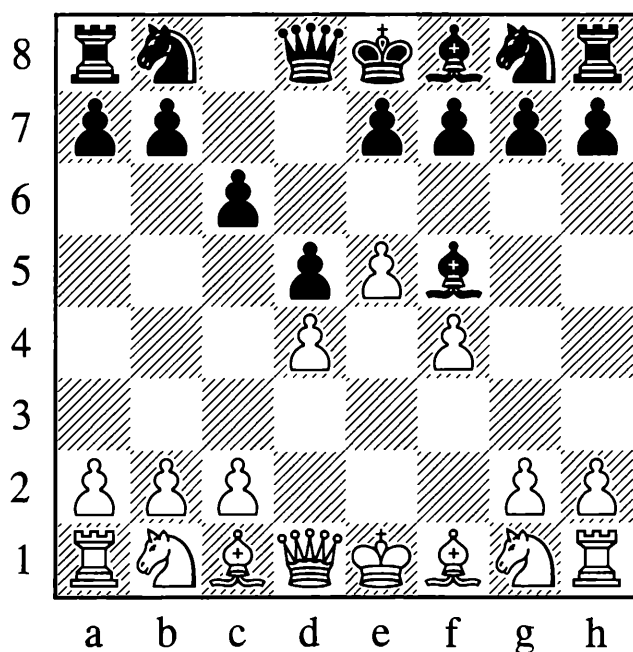
Of if 22.0-0 then 22...♙c4 23.♖fe1 c5 and Black has a winning advantage.

22...♖ae8 23.b3 ♙h5 24.♖hf1 ♖f7

The pin decides. Black will play ...c6-c5 and double rooks.

0-1

B) 4.f4



This looks anti-positional because it weakens the e4-square and puts another pawn on a dark square, which leaves the c1-bishop feeling sad. On the plus side, White overprotects e5 and takes even more space on the kingside.

4...e6 5.♘f3 h5!?

A deep positional concept. The natural 5...c5 6.♙e3 is trickier for Black – if the position opens up then White will have an initiative similar to the Short Variation, which will be examined later.

6.♙e3

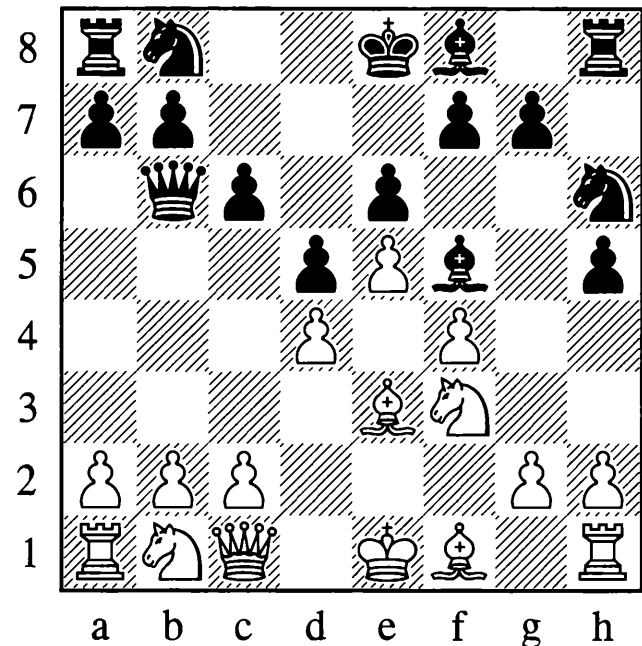
6.♙d3 is a positional misunderstanding. Black just continues his development with 6...♘h6 and is only too happy to exchange light-squared bishops and gain control of f5 for the knight.

6.♙e2 is more normal, but again Black sticks to his plan and plays 6...♘h6 with a fine position. His control over the light squares on the kingside prevents any white offensive on that area of the board. On the queenside Black has the chance to take the initiative with the standard break ...c6-c5 followed by ...♘c6 and ...♙b6, which will put pressure on White's centre.

Let's see a practical example: 7.♘bd2 c5 8.♘b3 ♘c6 9.c3 ♙b6!? 10.♘xc5 ♙xc5 11.dxc5

♙xc5 12.♘d4 So far this is Brenjo – Fontaine, Herceg Novi 2005, and now 12...♙b6 is a possible improvement. After 13.♘xf5 ♘xf5 the knights are very active and 13.♙b3 ♘xd4 14.cxd4 ♙e4+ is also comfortable.

6...♙b6 7.♙c1 ♘h6



By now we should recognise this as a standard move.

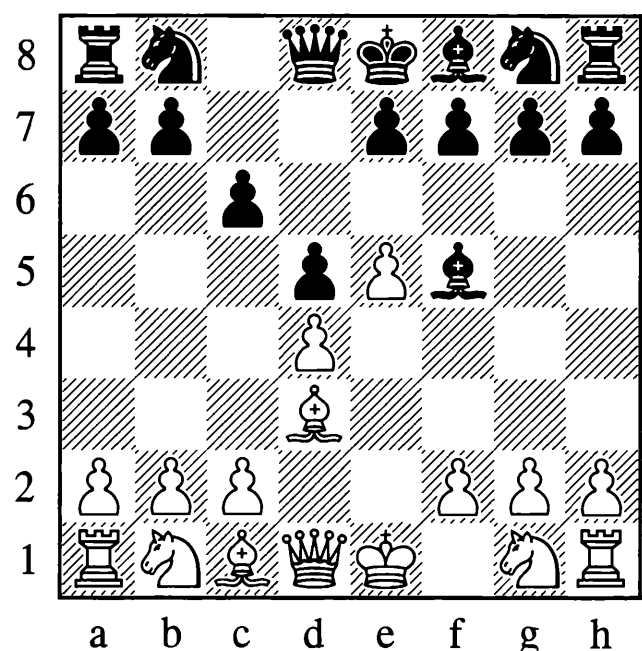
8.c4 ♘d7 9.♘bd2

This was a rapid game, Morozevich – Svidler, Monte Carlo 2005. Here the easiest path was:

9...♙e7N

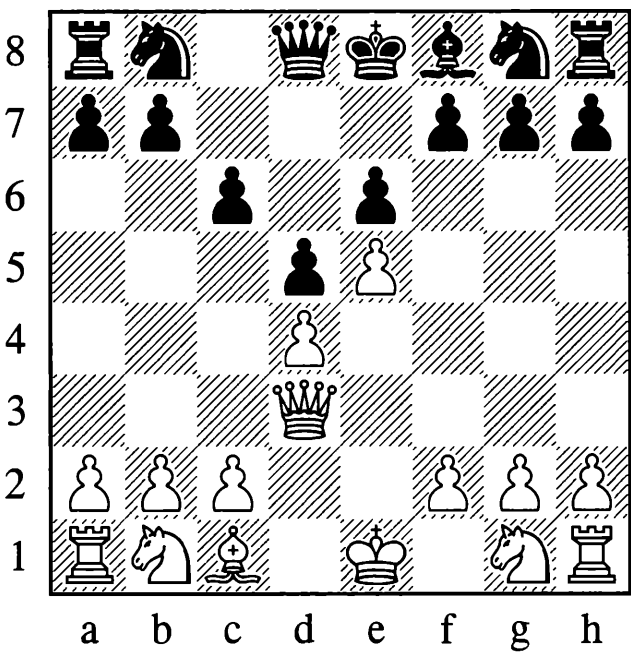
Followed by castling short with good play.

C) 4.♙d3



This is too simple to be good.

4...♙xd3 5.♚xd3 e6



6.♘f3

The natural move, but Black has an instructive manoeuvre that solves all his problems at once. However White has searched in vain for success with other moves:

6.f4 ♘e7 7.♘f3 ♚a5† 8.c3 ♚a6! 9.♚xa6 ♘xa6 with a good ending. White has a bad bishop.

6.♘c3 c5!

Adapting to the circumstances.
Here 6...♚b6 7.♘ge2 ♚a6 would be ineffective after 8.♚h3 when White's queen is better placed than Black's.

7.dxc5 ♙xc5 8.♘f3 ♘c6 9.0-0 a6

Precise, as if instead 9...♘ge7 then 10.♘a4 would be somewhat annoying; now the bishop has a retreat.

10.♙f4

Too tame is 10.♘e2 ♘ge7 11.♙e3 ♙xe3 12.♚xe3 ♘f5 13.♚b3 b5= as in Zednik – Fernandez, corr. 2001.

10...♘ge7 11.♚ad1 0-0 12.a3 ♚c8

With balanced play. In Degraeve – Izeta, Cappelle la Grande 1998, White initiated some tactical complications, but only hurt himself:

13.b4?! ♘g6! 14.bxc5 ♘xf4 15.♚e3 ♚a5 16.♘e2?! ♘g6 17.♘c1 d4! 18.♘xd4 ♚xc5=

6.♘e2 c5 7.c3 ♘c6 8.0-0 ♘ge7

This is similar to the French Defence, except without the bishop on c8 – Black has easy play.

9.♘d2 ♚c8

Keeping the tension, but 9...♚b6 also looks natural.

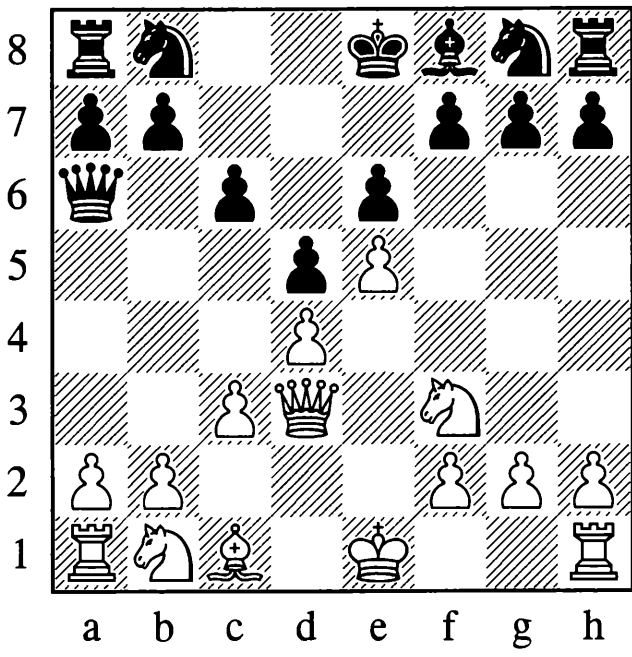
10.♘f3 ♘g6 11.♙e3 a6 12.a3 c4 13.♚d2 ♙e7=

Dubleumortier – Ottenweller, corr. 2005.

6...♚a5† 7.c3

7.♙d2 will be similar.

7...♚a6!



That's the idea. White has a difficult choice – either he exchanges queens and allows Black a comfortable ending, or he withdraws, when it is impossible to castle.

8.♚xa6

The realistic approach, as after 8.♚d1 c5 Black already has a serious initiative. In the following game this was translated into a positional edge: 9.♙e3 cxd4 (keeping the tension with 9...♘e7!? looks even more attractive) 10.cxd4 ♘c6 11.♘c3 ♙b4 12.♙d2 ♘ge7 13.♘e2 0-0 14.0-0 ♚fc8= Ralls – Dyakov, corr. 2003.

8...♟xa6

We can be happy; the worst is over. Although it is objectively equal, the ending can easily tip our way because we have the better bishop.

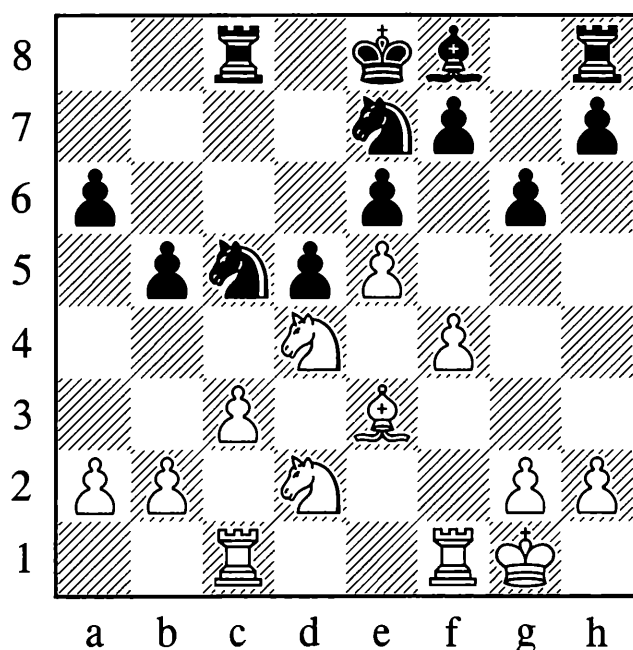
9.0–0 c5 10.♞e3 ♜c8 11.♞bd2 ♞e7 12.dxc5

The right moment. 12.♞ac1 ♞f5 is too easy for Black.

12...♞xc5 13.♞d4

Giving up the bishop with 13.♞xc5 ♞xc5 14.♞d4 is a bit drastic. This is Rautanen – Puuska, Helsinki 1997, and now the simplest is 14...♞c8N followed by ...♞c6.

13...a6 14.f4 g6 15.♞ac1 b5



Black is slightly better. In the only game to reach this position White quickly lost his way and ended up in a static structure with no counterplay at all. It was just a blitz game played online, but it shows a typical plan for Black – put pressure down the c-file and eventually break with ...b5-b4:

16.g4?! h5! 17.g5 ♞c6 18.♞xc6 ♞xc6 19.♞xc5 ♞xc5† 20.♞g2 ♞e3 21.♞c2 ♞e7 22.♞f3 ♞b6 23.♞b3 ♞hc8 24.♞d2 ♞c4† 25.♞e1 a5 26.♞d4 b4 27.♞b5 ♞8c5 28.♞d6 bxc3 29.♞c2 ♞a4

And Black had won a pawn, Sandagsuren – Li Shilong, Internet (blitz) 2004.

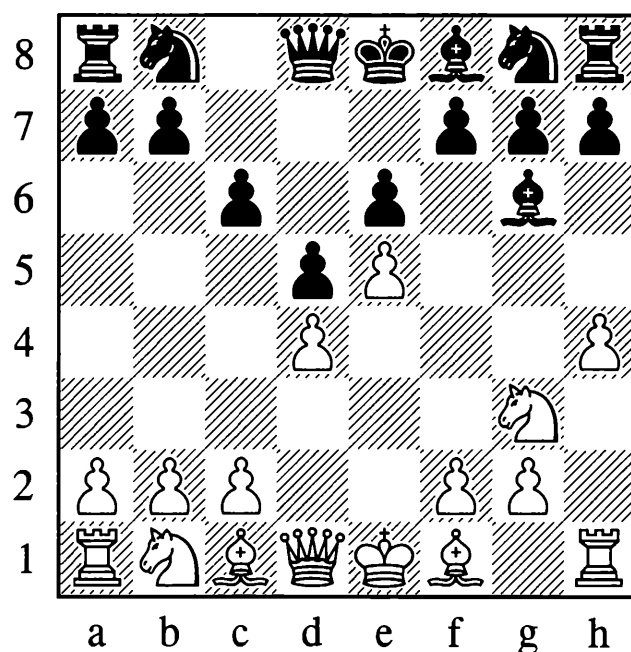
D) 4.♞e2

Another typical way to harass the f5-bishop.

4...e6 5.♞g3

The other route is 5.♞f4, but this is less to the point – see the illustrative game.

5...♞g6 6.h4



And again Black has the dilemma: to play ...h6 or ...h5? As mentioned before, in the Advance Variation with the centre closed, the right answer is generally ...h5 not giving any space away. If White tries to win the pawn then a timely ...c6-c5 will put pressure on d4, which will divert White's attention.

6...h5 7.♞e2

After 7.♞d3 ♞xd3 8.♞xd3 the manoeuvre 8...♞a5† 9.c3 ♞a6 should be well known by now.

7...c5

Thematic; the attack on the white centre balances the attack on h5.

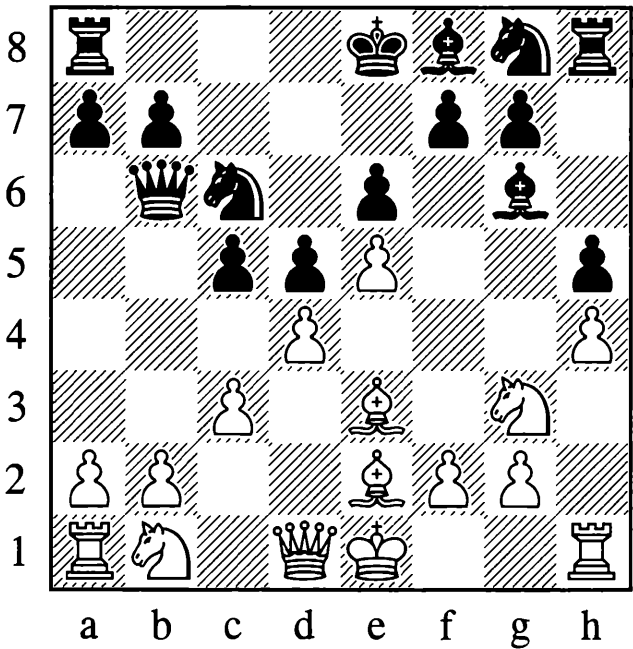
8.c3

Reinforcing the d4-point. It turns out that taking the pawn is nothing for Black to worry about because after 8.♙xh5 ♙xh5 9.♘xh5 g6 Black will win the h4-pawn with a good game.

8.dxc5 ♙xc5 9.♘d2 (again 9.♙xh5 ♙xh5 10.♘xh5 g6 11.♘f4 ♙xh4 and Black is better) 9...♘c6 Now e5 is a problem. 10.♘b3 ♙b6 11.♙xh5 ♘xe5 12.♙xg6 ♘xg6 ♣ Bronstein – Botvinnik, Moscow 1966.

8...♘c6 9.♙e3
Again it is silly to take on h5.

9...♙b6

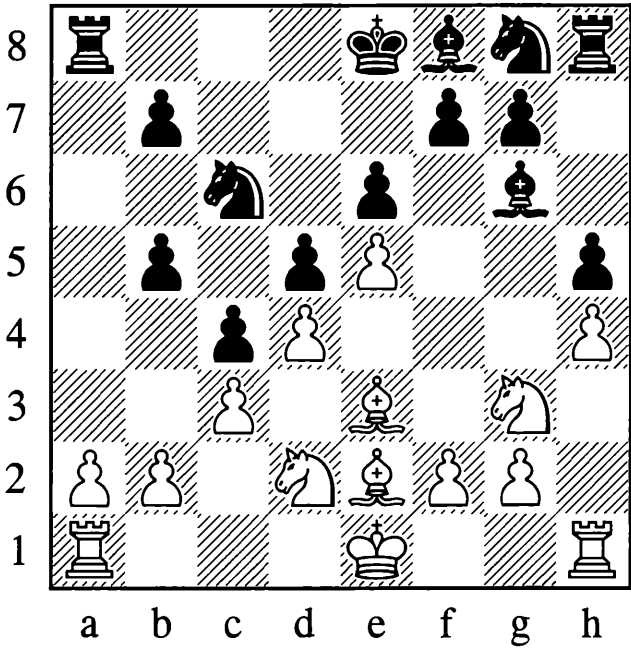


10.♙b3
White must avoid a trap: 10.♙d2? cxd4 11.cxd4 ♙xb1 12.♙xb1 ♙b4 wins the queen.

Spassky once took on c5: 10.dxc5 ♙xb2 11.0–0 0–0 12.♙b3 ♙xb3 13.axb3 a6 ½–½ Spassky – Dzindzichashvili, Tilburg 1978, was an easy day at the office. Later the position was tested in a correspondence game. 14.♙d4 ♙e7 It turns out that the white pawns are too weak; the bishop stares at the h4-pawn. 15.f4 ♙xh4 16.f5 ♙xg3 17.fxg6 fxg6 18.♙f3 h4 And Black won quickly in Guy – Salmon, corr. 1995.

10...c4!
Forcing White to take on b6.

11.♙xb6 axb6 12.♘d2 b5



Black gets in ...b5-b4 with pleasant play.

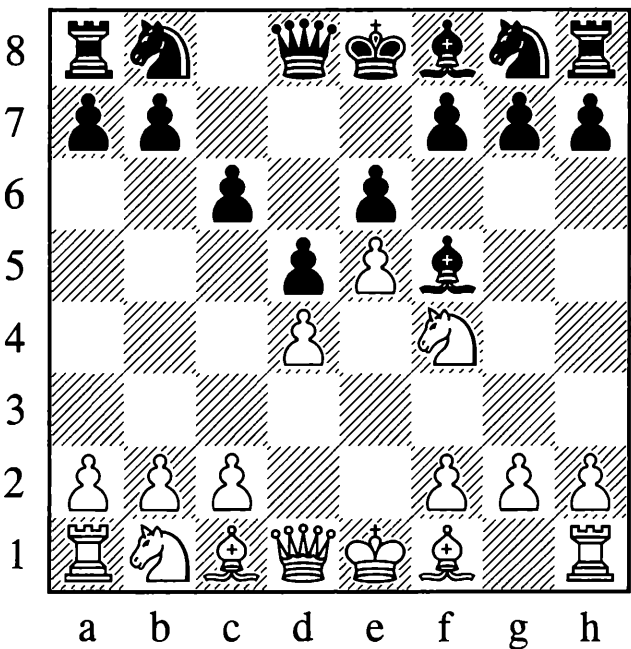
13.a3 b4 14.cxb4 ♘xb4 15.♙c1 ♘d3† 16.♙xd3 ♙xd3 ♣

Fuentes – Pablo Marin, Barbera del Valles 2005.

Litz – Nagel

Correspondence 2006

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.e5 ♙f5 4.♘e2 e6 5.♘f4



Not the most obvious.

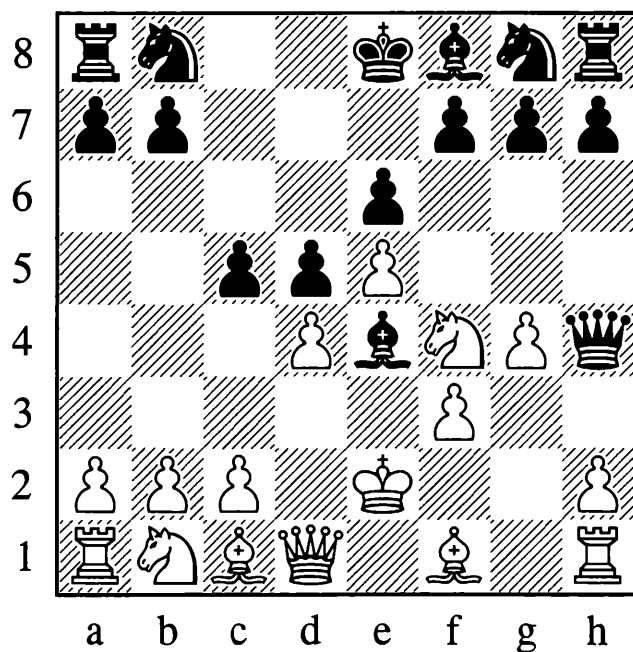
5...c5

The classical counter-strike.

6.g4

This is White's ambitious plan, but it turns out to be too compromising.

6...♙e4 7.f3 ♚h4† 8.♙e2



8...♘c6!

In a rapid game Karpov once played 8...♙g6, which is not so bad, but with aggressive play Black can already take control and refute White's opening idea.

9.c3

If 9.fxe4 ♚xg4† 10.♙e1 ♚h4† 11.♙e2 ♘xd4† and White won't survive. For example, 12.♙d3 dxe4† and Black castles long in reply to both 13.♙c3 and 13.♙xe4 – carnage.

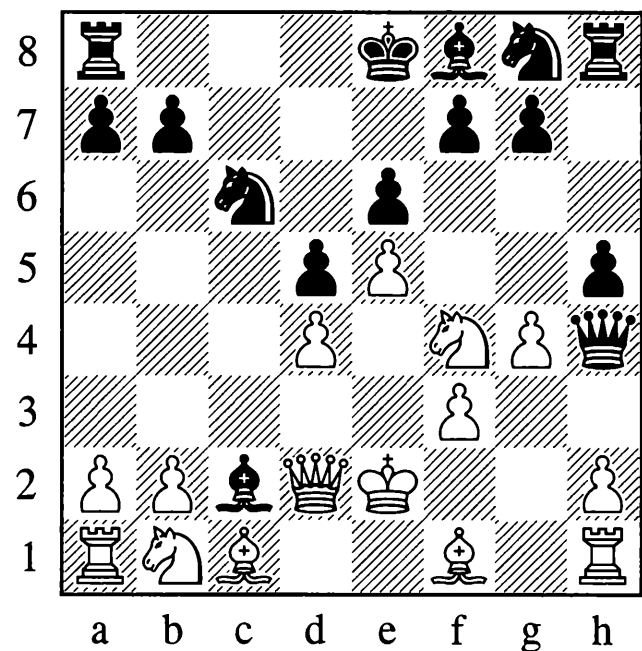
9...cxd4 10.cxd4

Or 10.fxe4 ♚xg4† 11.♙e1 ♚h4†/12.♙e2 dxe4 13.cxd4 0–0–0 also gives Black a powerful attack.

10...♙c2!

A spectacular way to keep the strong Caro-Kann bishop.

11.♚d2 h5!



A direct assault on White's structure.

12.♘g2

Trying to dig out the black queen, as 12.♘xh5 ♜xh5 13.gxh5 ♘xd4† 14.♙e3 ♙c5 is hopeless.

12...♚d8 13.♙f2 ♙xb1 14.♜xb1 hgx4 15.♙b5

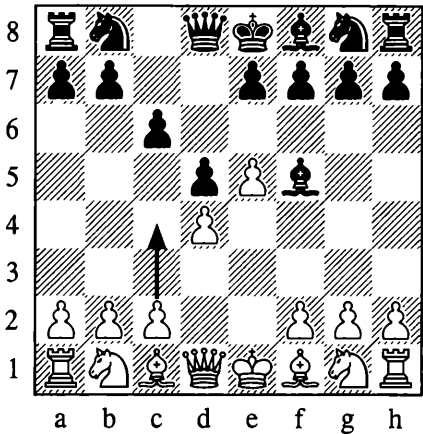
Desperation, but there was nothing good. For example, 15.fgx4 ♚b6 and both d4 and e5 are hanging.

15...gxf3 16.♙xf3 ♚b6 17.♙xc6† bxc6 18.h4 ♘e7

0–1

Conclusion

White has various minor lines after 3.e5 ♙f5 including 4.g4, 4.f4, 4.♙d3 and 4.♘e2. They have a range of ideas, but one thing in common – they are no threat to Black. On the contrary, White tends to stretch his position too far. There are just a few key points to remember. For example, in the 4.g4 line White's tricky attempts with e5-e6 are generally defused by an immediate ...♚d6.



Advance Variation

c4-Lines

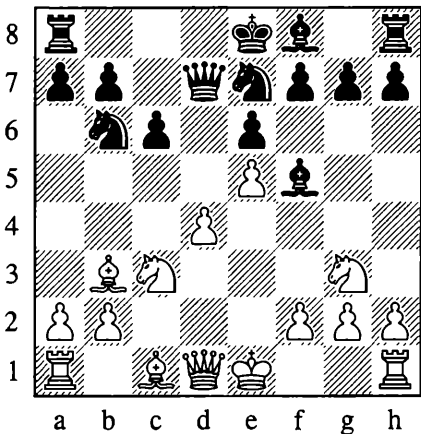
Variation Index

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.e5

3...♔f5

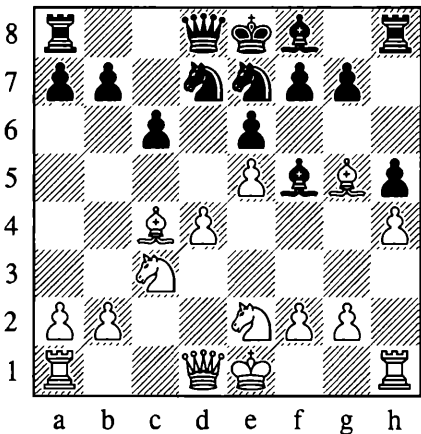
A) 4.c4	96
B) 4.h4 h5 5.c4	98

A) after 9...♔d7



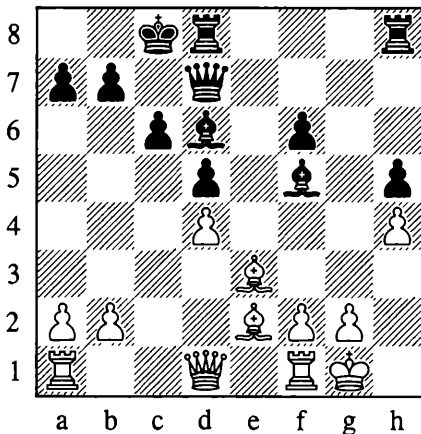
Black controls d5

B) after 9.♘ge2



9...f6!

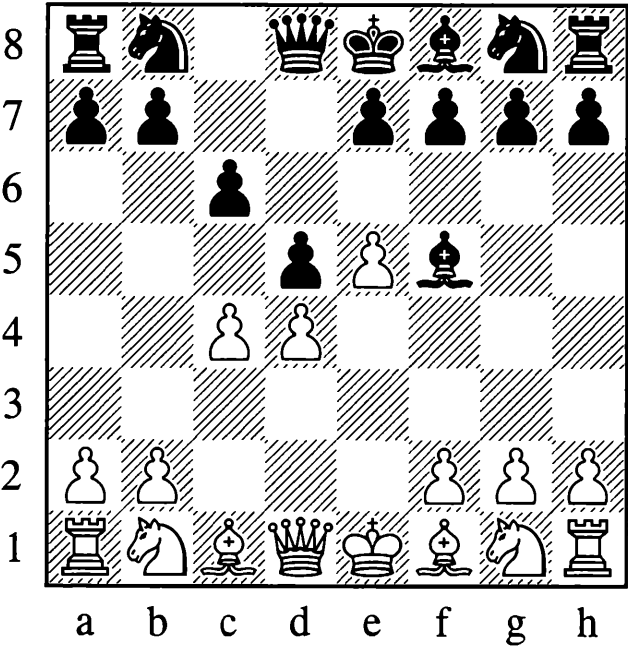
Nunn – Karpov after move 17



The main battle will take place on the kingside

This chapter covers two systems of the Advance Variation, 1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.e5 ♖f5 where White uses the advance c2-c4 – A) 4.c4 and B) 4.h4 h5 5.c4.

A) 4.c4



Attacking the centre, which leads to very complex play. It is a dangerous line... for both sides!

4...e6 5.♟c3 ♞e7

The battle for the key square on d5 has begun. The move ...dxc4 is a crucial part of the plan to gain d5 for a black knight, but the timing of this operation is important. Morozevich has shown that the immediate capture is premature.

5...dxc4 6.♞xc4 ♞d7 7.♞ge2 ♞b6 8.♞b3 ♞e7 9.0-0 ♞d7

After 9...♞ed5 10.♞g3 ♞g6 both 11.f4 and 11.♞ce4 are very promising for White. 10.♞f4!

With the intention of simply taking on d5 if a black knight should appear there.

10...h6 11.♞e3 ♞h7 12.♞c1 ♞ed5 13.♞cxd5 ♞xd5 14.♞xd5 exd5 15.♞d2 ♞e7 16.♞c3 ♞f5 17.♞c2±

Morozevich – Sasikiran, Moscow 2001.

6.♞ge2

An alternative is:

6.a3

This anticipates ...dxc4.

6...♞d7

So of course Black waits!

7.c5

Consistent. It is as if White is saying: You will regret not taking on c4 when you had the chance.

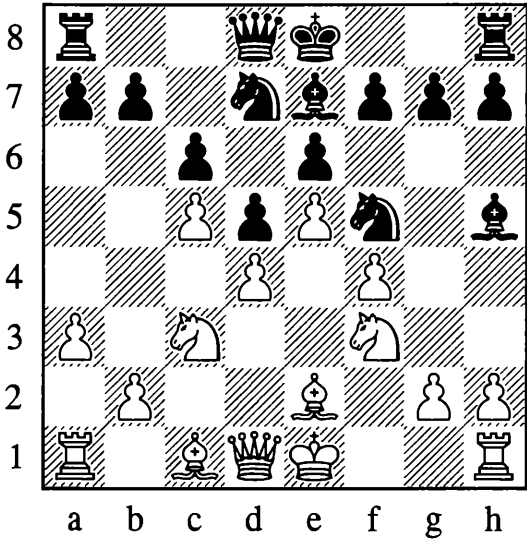
Instead a waiting move such as 7.♞e3 didn't promise anything. On the contrary, after 7...♞b6 8.♞d2 ♞b3! 9.♞ge2 as in N. Hoiberg – Jelling, Denmark 1988, Black could have played 9...♞b6!N 10.♞c1 ♞c2 with good play.

7...♞g6

A flexible move that hands the knight the f5-square.

Striking at the far-advanced white pawn centre with ...f6 or ...b6 was also plausible.

8.f4 ♞f5 9.♞f3 ♞h5 10.♞e2 ♞e7



Setting a little trap that a strong grandmaster falls for:

11.0-0? ♞xf3 12.♞xf3 ♞xd4!

In Luther – Hera, Triesen 2007, Black won a pawn because 13.♞xd4 ♞xc5 drops the queen. Even after the better 11.b4 Black gets a fine position with 11...0-0 12.0-0 a5 13.♞b1 b5.

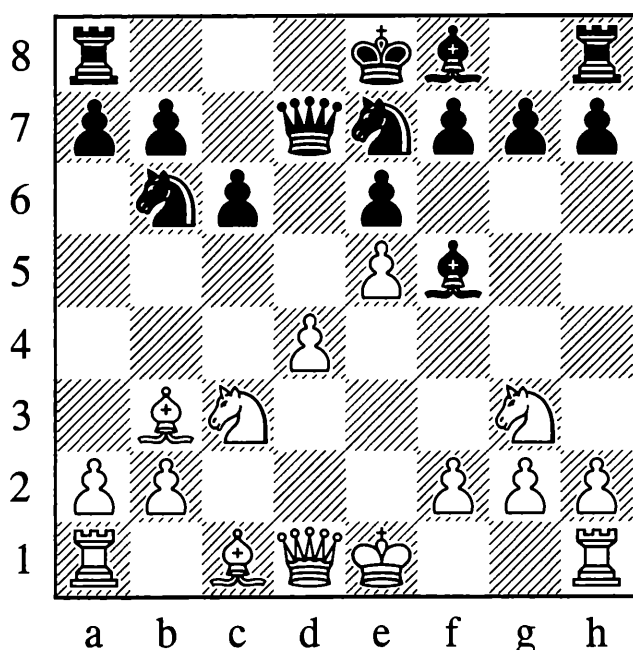
6.♞f3 is not the optimal square for the knight. 6...♞d7 7.♞e2 dxc4 8.♞xc4 ♞b6 And Black enjoys the d5-square. The game J. Nicholson – Z. Medvegy, Cork 2005, illustrates how badly

things can turn out for White: 9.♔e2 ♖ed5 10.0–0 ♔e7 11.a4 a5 12.♖e1? White's rooks prove to be a continuing problem. 12...♖b4! 13.♖f1 ♖c2 14.♖a2 0–0 15.b3 ♖b4 16.♖d2 ♖4d5 17.♔b2 ♖xc3 18.♔xc3 ♖d5 19.♔b2 ♔b4 0–1

6...dxc4 7.♖g3 ♖d7

Protecting the pawn with 7...b5, like in the Slav, is fully viable. 8.a4 b4 9.♖ce4 ♔xe4 10.♖xe4 ♖f5 11.♔e3 ♖d5! 12.♖g3 ♖h4 13.f3 This is D. Mastrovasilis – Svetushkin, Subotica 2008, and now 13...c5!N gives Black good play after either 14.dxc5 ♖xe5 or 14.♖c1 ♖c6 15.♔xc4 ♖xg2† 16.♔e2 ♖d7.

8.♔xc4 ♖b6 9.♔b3 ♖d7



Now the knight is on g3 instead of f4 as it was in the earlier Moro game, and so now it doesn't fight for the key d5-square. Of course this helps Black, but it is not the end of the story. The placement of the knight also gives White some extra interesting options. For instance, the dark-squared bishop can go to g5 and one of the knights can go to e4...

10.0–0 ♔g6

The most flexible, but in fact 10...0–0–0 is also promising. At first this looks like a mistake because of 11.♔g5 pinning the knight

and threatening to take on f5. After the forced 11...♔g6 White can play a knight to e4 and next to d6. However with cool defence Black can relieve the pressure and reach an acceptable position. The first question White must answer is – which knight goes to e4?

12.♖ce4 h6 13.♖d6† ♔b8 14.♔d2 ♖ec8= was P. Larsen – C. Pedersen, Denmark 2004. White can't keep the knight on d6 and must take on c8 – a definite failure. So White must try with the other knight.

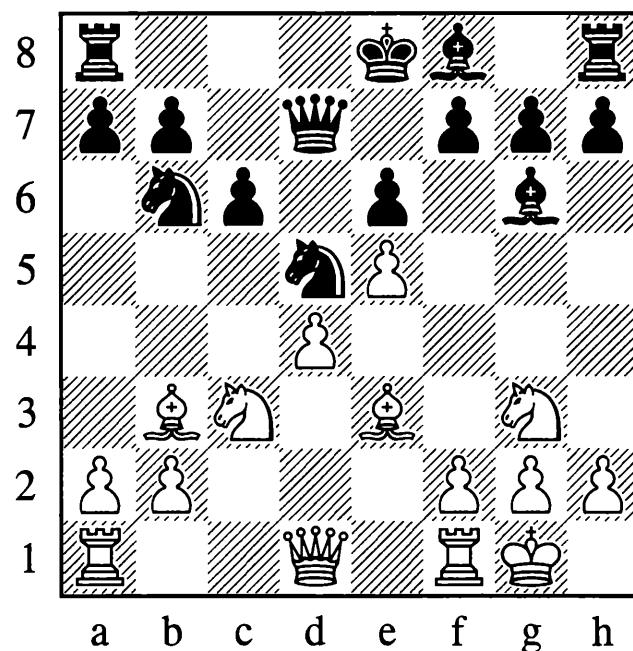
12.♖ge4 h6 13.♖d6† ♔b8 14.♔h4 ♖bc8= 15.♖a4 ♖xd6! 16.exd6 ♖f5 17.♔xd8 ♖xd8 18.♔c2 ♔xd6= Black has a pawn and the bishop pair for the exchange, Zakharov – Turov, Moscow 1994. All in all, this variation looks fine for Black.

11.♔e3

11.♖ce4 ♖f5= is no problem.

An imaginative try was 11.h4 h6 12.h5 ♔h7 13.a4 with aggressive play on both sides of the board, but Black's structure is solid enough. For example, Efimenko – Bareev, Dagomys 2009, continued 13...a5 14.♖g4 ♖f5 15.♖d1 ♖xg3 (15...0–0–0!?∞) 16.♖xg3 ♖g8 17.♔f4 ♔e7 18.♖f3 ♖d5 19.♔g3 ♔f5 20.♖xd5 exd5 21.♖e1 ♖e6=.

11...♖ed5



A typical position for the 4.c4 variation. Black has piece-control over the key d5-square; White, on the other hand, has more space and some attacking chances. Overall, the position seems to be roughly balanced and the games so far have supported this verdict. There is no reason Black should be afraid – he even has a tiny plus score.

12.♔e2

12.♔c1 is inaccurate. Black plays 12...♘xc3 when 13.♔xc3 is forced, because 13.bxc3 loses the exchange after ...♙a3.

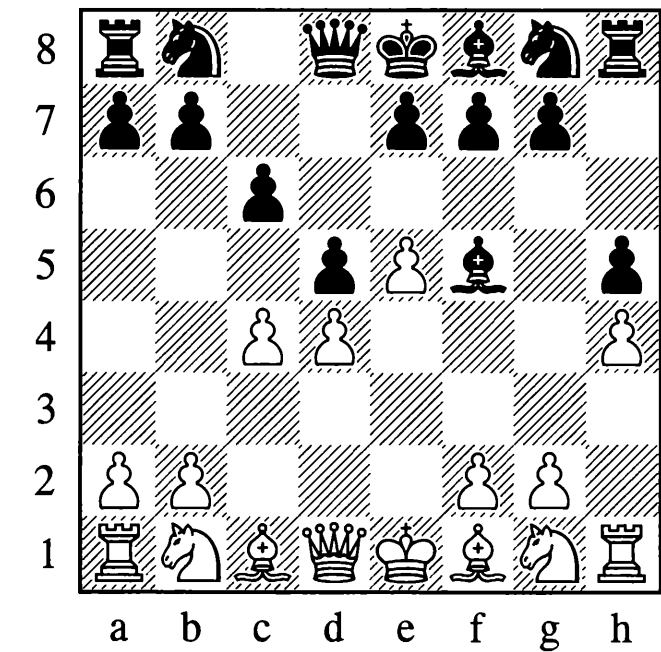
12.♘ce4 also cannot be recommended because of the strong reply 12...h5N.

12...♙e7 13.♔ac1 0–0=

B) 4.h4 h5

The standard reaction, but 4...♔b6!? is also interesting. If 5.g4 then the bishop just steps back with 5...♙d7 and it is not clear whether White’s offensive has brought him important space or just weakened his structure.

5.c4



The inclusion of the moves h4 and ...h5 probably makes this a better version of the

4.c4 variation for White. I say “probably” because in chess there are few absolute truths. Here White gains g5 for the bishop which must count for something. White has also tried to play other 3.e5 lines with h4 and ...h5 thrown in, such as 5.♙d3 or 5.♘e2. However, I think it is only with c2-c4 that it makes sense.

5...e6 6.♘c3

This is the first situation where the difference can be felt. White had the additional possibility:

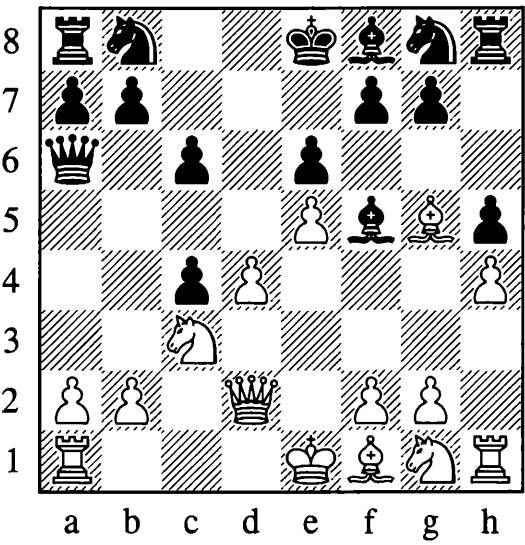
6.♙g5

This has scored quite well, but Black has a sharp way of meeting it:

6...♔b6 7.♔d2 dxc4 8.♘c3

Forced, as 8.♙xc4? ♙xb1 would be embarrassing.

8...♔a6



Black protects the extra pawn with unclear play. Some strong players have tested the position and so far Black has remained unharmed.

9.♘h3

Ambitious, but safer was 9.♘ge2 ♘e7 10.♘g3 ♙d3 11.♙xd3 cxd3 12.♔d1 ♘d7= as in Moroz – Roiz, Cappelle la Grande 2006.

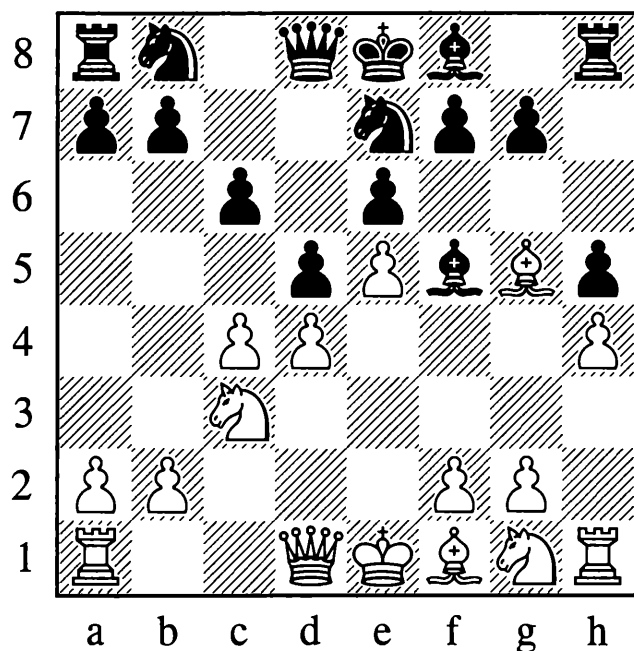
9...♘d7 10.♙e2 ♘e7 11.b3 ♙d3

Once again we see this key move.

12.♙xd3 cxd3 13.0–0 c5! 14.dxc5 ♘c6 15.a4 ♙xc5 16.♘b5 ♔b6 17.♔xd3 ♘cxe5+

White has some initiative, but hardly enough for a whole pawn, Kurnosov – Galkin, Kazan 2005.

6...♖e7 7.♗g5



Immediately using the square on g5, but we should also consider a tricky knight move:

7.♖ge2!? ♖d7

7...dxc4 8.♖g3 ♗g6 9.♗xc4 ♖d7 10.♗g5 ♖b6 11.♗b3 ♗d7 12.0–0 is better for White compared to the similar position from 4.c4 because the annoying bishop on g5 can't be kicked away.

8.♖g3 ♗g6 9.♗g5

This is another popular move order.

9...♗b6 10.♗d2 dxc4 11.♗xc4 0–0–0!

Black is threatening to take on e5 and it turns out that it is not so easy to prevent this.

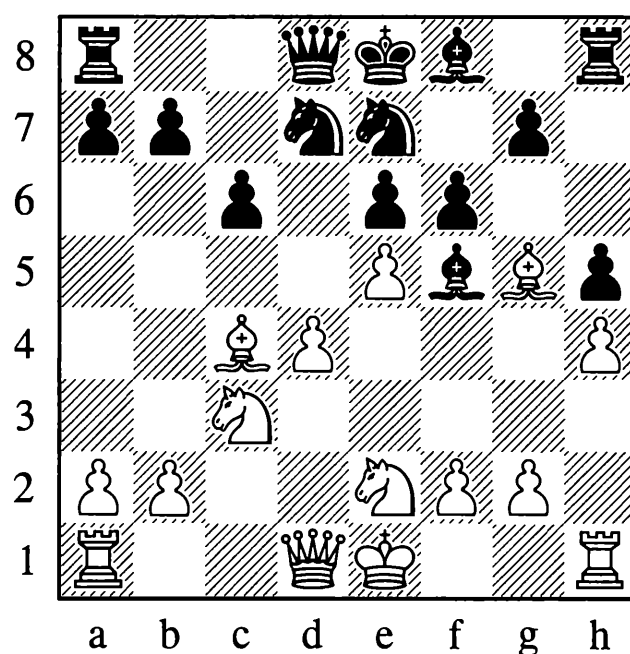
12.♗e3

12.♖a4 ♗c7 13.♖c1 was played in Castellano – K. Schmidt, corr. 1999, when 13...♖b8 14.0–0 f6 seems fine.

12...♗xb2! 13.0–0 ♖b6 14.♗b3 ♖bd5 15.♖xd5 ♖xd5 16.♗f3 ♖d7

And White didn't have enough for the pawn in Gausel – K. Berg, Oslo 1987.

7...dxc4 8.♗xc4 ♖d7 9.♖ge2 f6!



Black adapts to the new situation. It is extremely important to have a flair for the small nuances of the position. It turns out that the bishop on g5 can also be used by Black to gain time to challenge the white centre. Instead the standard 9...♖b6 10.♗b3 is pleasant for White.

10.exf6 gxf6 11.♗e3

White has also tried other bishop retreats.

After 11.♗f4 ♖b6 12.♗b3 ♖bd5 13.0–0 ♗d7 14.♗g3 0–0–0 15.♖c1 ♗h6?! 16.♖b5! the complications favoured White in Kurnosov – Izoria, Moscow 2005. Instead 15...♖c7 looks solid.

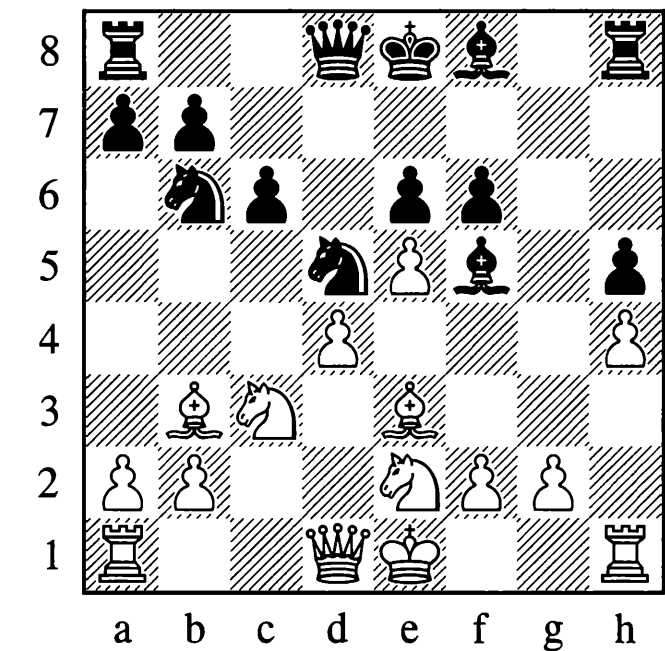
White has even tested the paradoxical 11.♗d2, which places the bishop outside the scope of the black knights. After 11...♖b6 12.♗b3 ♗d7 we have a normal position.

11...♖b6 12.♗b3

Offering a bishop exchange with 12.♗d3 is rather illogical (see the illustrative game).

12...♖ed5

The most natural, but Karpov once tried the other knight, 12...♖bd5, and after 13.♖g3 ♗g4 14.♗d3 ♖f5 he got away with it in Magem Badals – Karpov, Cap d'Agde (rapid) 1996.



13. ♖g3

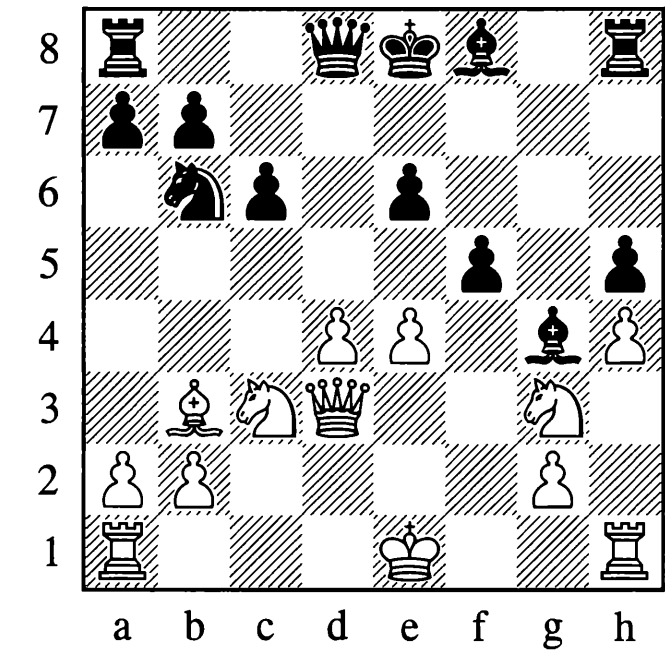
Instead 13. ♖f4 ♗xf4 14. ♕xf4 ♕d6 15. ♕xd6 ♖xd6 16. ♔e2 0-0-0 17. 0-0-0 ♖hg8 gave Black some initiative in Vujic – Perunovic, Senta 2007.

13... ♗xe3 14. fxe3 ♕g4 15. ♔d3 f5

Black has a fine position, as 16. ♕xe6? fails to 16... ♖d6 with a double attack. White could pretend this is a planned piece sac with 17. ♕f7+ ♔xf7 18. ♖xf5, but it does not give enough compensation. For example, 18... ♖g6 19. 0-0 ♔e8 and soon ... ♖g8 will give Black counterplay to go with the extra piece.

16.e4

This was Perunovic – Sundararajan, Dubai 2009. Now I propose:



16... fxe4!N 17. ♖gxe4 ♕g7

With an attack on d4; we can analyse a bit further.

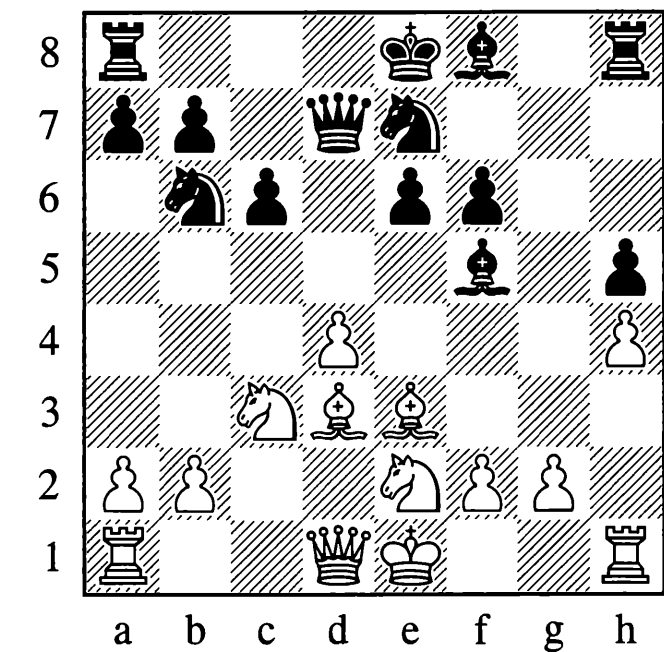
18. ♖c5 ♖h6!? 19. ♖xb7 ♖xd4 20. ♖xd4 ♕xd4

The bishops will be strong in the ending.

Nunn – Karpov

Monte Carlo (rapid) 1995

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.e5 ♕f5 4.h4 h5 5.c4 e6 6. ♖c3 ♖e7 7. ♕g5 dxc4 8. ♕xc4 ♖d7 9. ♖ge2 f6 10. exf6 gxf6 11. ♕e3 ♖b6 12. ♕d3 ♖d7



Black is preparing to castle long with a very good position. Now Nunn realized that exchanging light-squared bishops was maybe not such a great idea.

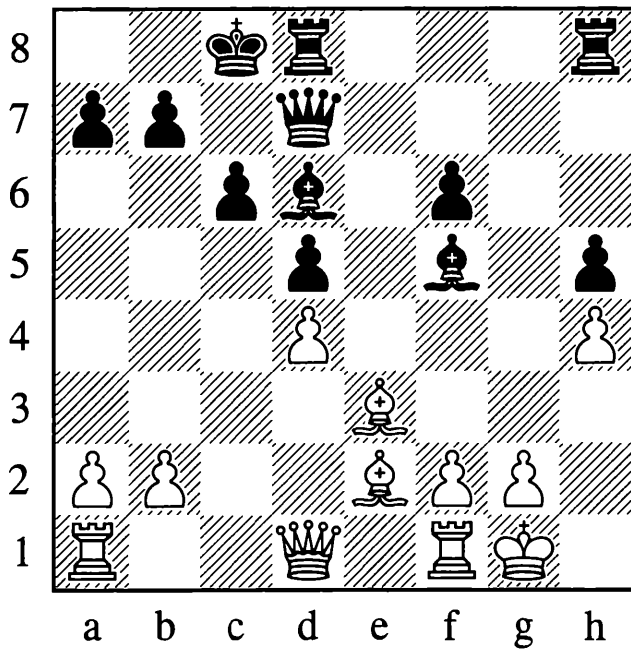
13. ♖f4 0-0-0 14. ♕e2

Losing precious time, as he can never really take on h5 anyway.

14... ♖ed5 15. ♖fxd5 ♖xd5 16. 0-0 ♕d6

16... ♖xe3 17. fxe3 ♕h6 was another excellent way to exploit the bishops.

17. ♖xd5 exd5

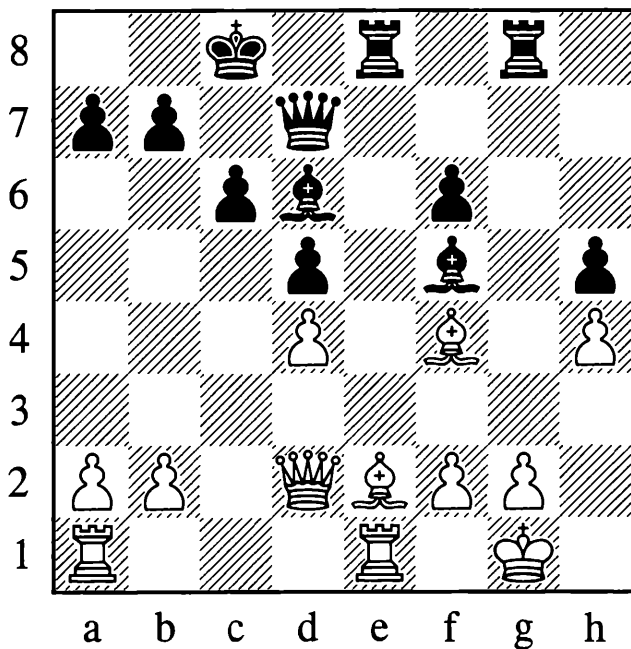


The main battle will take place on the kingside, which is not a pleasant prospect for White as that's also where his king is stuck.

18. ♖d2

18. ♕xh5 just opens another line for Black's attack, so 18... ♖dg8 is a logical reply.

18... ♖de8 19. ♖fe1 ♖hg8 20. ♕f4



20... ♕xf4

Very straightforward play. This was a rapid game, so Karpov just made natural moves to keep his huge positional advantage. However, he could have decided the outcome immediately with the spectacular 20... ♖xg2! 21. ♖xg2 ♕e4† 22. ♖h2 (22.f3 ♖g4†) 22... ♖f5 and wins. For example, 23. ♕g4 ♖xg4 24. ♖xe4

♖xh4† 25. ♖g1 ♖g8† 26. ♖f1 ♖h1† 27. ♖e2 ♖xe4† 28. ♕e3 f5.

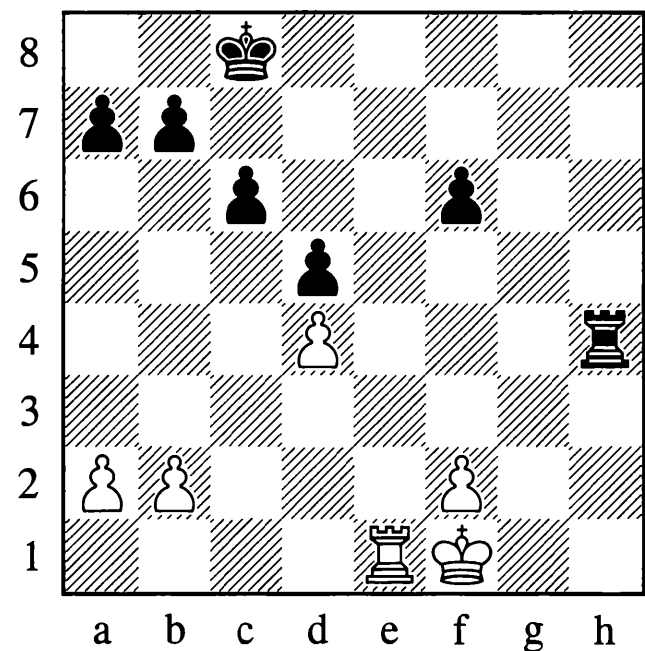
21. ♖xf4 ♖e4 22. ♖h6 ♕h3 23. g3 ♖ge8

The pin on the e-file will be disastrous for White.

24. ♖xh5 ♖f5

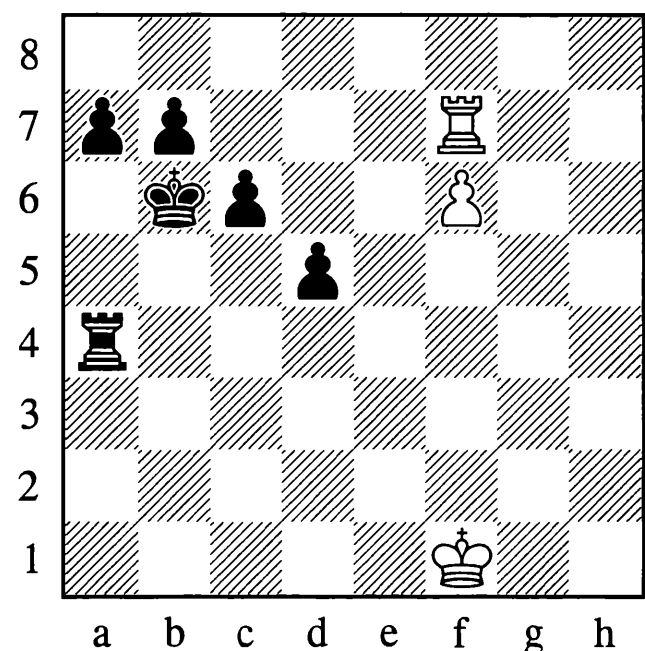
Why not 24... ♖e7 winning a piece?

25. ♖xf5† ♕xf5 26. g4 ♕xg4 27. ♕xg4† ♖xg4† 28. ♖f1 ♖xe1† 29. ♖xe1 ♖xh4



This rook ending is not drawn...

30. ♖e6 f5 31. ♖f6 ♖xd4 32. ♖xf5 ♖d2 33. ♖f8† ♖c7 34. ♖f7† ♖b6 35. f4 ♖xb2 36. f5 ♖xa2 37. f6 ♖a4



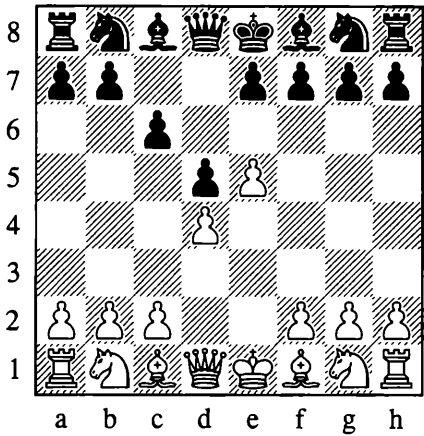
The black rook easily gets back and then the four passed pawns will roll.

38.♔g2 ♖f4 39.♔g3 ♖f1 40.♔g4 a5 41.♔g5
a4 42.♖f8 ♔c5 43.♔g6 b5 44.♖a8 d4 45.f7
d3 46.♖d8 ♔c4 47.♖d6 ♖xf7 48.♔xf7 c5
49.♔e6 a3
0–1

Conclusion

Both the c4-lines (4.c4 and 4.h4 h5 5.c4) lead to complex play, but I would always prefer to have the d5-square for my knight than some speculative initiative. More specifically, in line B after 3.e5 ♕f5 4.h4 h5 5.c4 e6 6.♘c3 ♘e7 7.♕g5 dxc4 8.♕xc4 ♘d7 9.♘ge2 a key move to recall is 9...f6! when, in addition to the usual d5-square, Black can castle long and seize the initiative.

Chapter 11



Advance Variation

Positional Lines

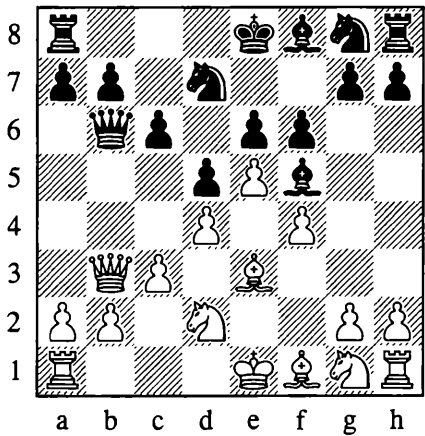
Variation Index

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.e5

3...♙f5

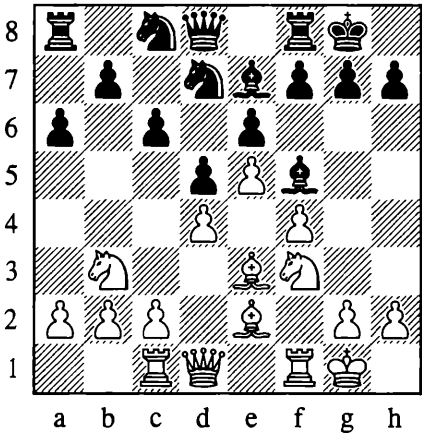
A) 4.c3	104
B) 4.♙e3	106
C) 4.♘d2	108
D) 4.♘f3 e6 5.a3	110

A) after 8.f4



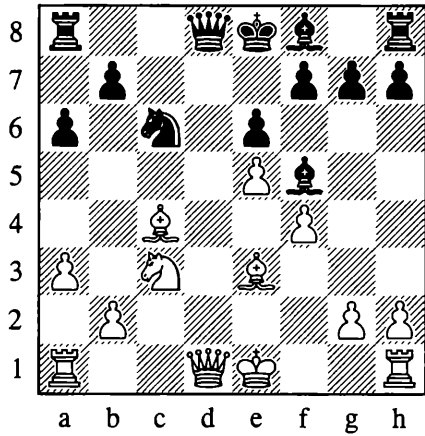
8...g5!

B) 11.♖c1



11...b5!

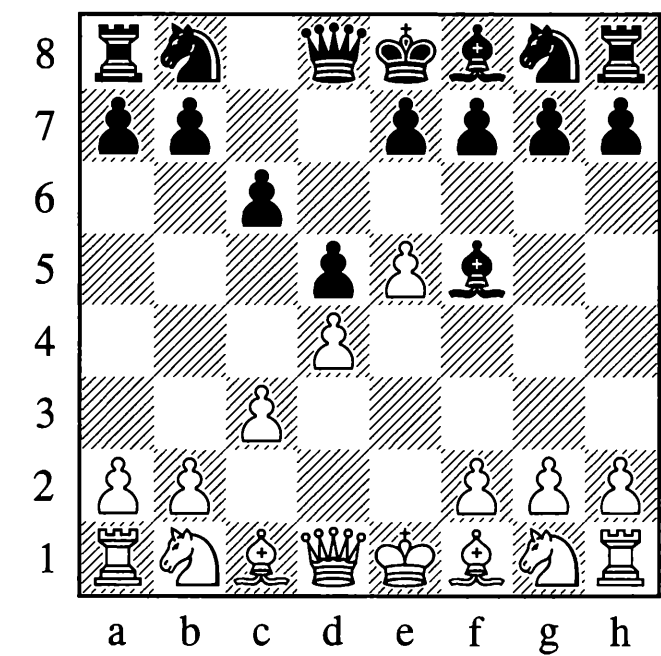
D) after 13.♙e3



13...♞c7!N

In this chapter, after 1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.e5 ♖f5 we shall look at various positional lines White can try instead of the Big Two – the Short and Shirov Variations. The lines we shall look at are A) 4.c3, B) 4.♗e3, C) 4.♘d2 and finally D) 4.♘f3 e6 lines where White avoids transposing to the Short Variation with 5.♗e2 (which is covered in the next chapter).

A) 4.c3



The first of a series of purely positional treatments by White. The pawn chain that guarantees White’s extra space is reinforced, which is White’s primary objective in the opening duel. Later, if this space is maintained, then the initiative can unfold by itself.

4...e6 5.♗e3

This makes it harder for Black to achieve the ...c6-c5 break.

5...♞b6

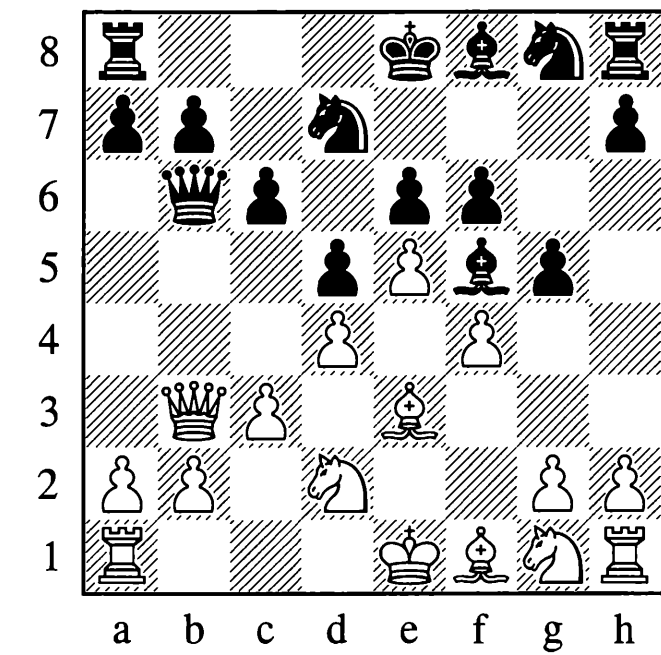
It was also perfectly possible to enter a slower manoeuvring game with 5...♘d7 6.♘d2 ♘e7.

6.♞b3

White doesn’t mind exchanging queens as long as he can maintain his big space advantage. On the other hand, in the Caro it is always a small psychological victory for Black to reach

an endgame and here there is a direct method of generating quick counterplay.

6...♘d7 7.♘d2 f6 8.f4 g5!



Undermining the centre; White can’t keep his grip on the position.

9.♘gf3

Simply developing. If 9.fxg5 then Black has 9...fxe5, and also 9.g3 gxf4 10.gxf4 ♗h6 does not allow White to escape from the pressure.

The only alternative is 9.exf6, but then Black has the very instructive 9...g4! which takes f3 away from the white knight. Next Black will capture on f6 with a good game. The verdict doesn’t change if White plays 10.f7† ♔xf7, as the black king is safe here.

9...gxf4 10.♗xf4 ♗h6!

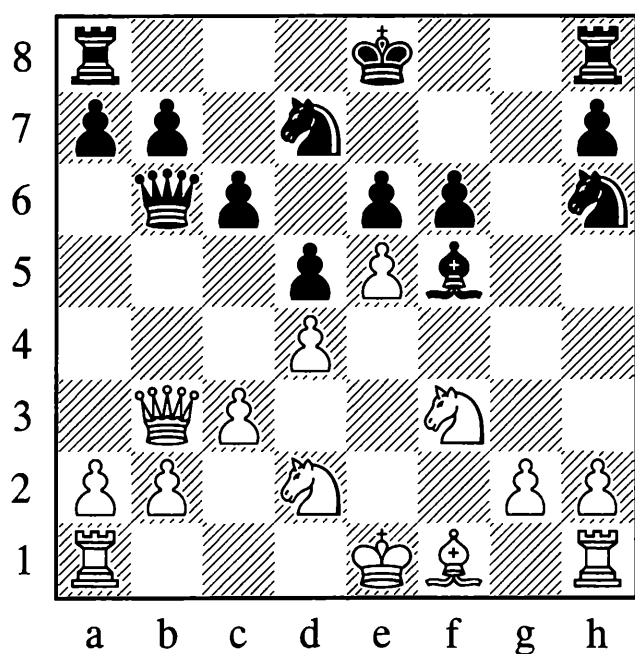
Trying to equalize by exchanging White’s strong bishop.

11.♗xh6

Accepting his fate; it would be dangerous to try to keep the bishop. 11.♞xb6 axb6 12.♗g3 fxe5 13.♘xe5 was Menacher – Prohaszka, Balatonlelle 2005, when 13...♘gf6N is simple and strong. The black bishops are much more active than their white counterparts.

11.♔g3 fxe5 12.♞xe5 ♞gf6 Again it is White who must be careful. 13.♞df3 ♞xe5 14.♔xe5 (Or 14.♞xe5 0–0 15.♔d3 ♔xd3 ½–½ was Rytshagov – Stohl, Istanbul [ol] 2000. Black could even try 14...♔e4!? with an eye on g2.) 14...0–0 15.h3 ♞d7 16.♔d6 ♖f7 17.♞xb6 axb6 18.♔e2 ♔e3½ Sedlak – Ostojic, Stara Pazova 2001.

11...♞xh6



This knight can jump to g4 and try to infiltrate the white camp or just go back to f7 and fight for the important e5-square. Black has no problems. Meanwhile, an interesting equilibrium has developed between the queens. Both sides are reluctant to make the exchange because the opponent could take back with the pawn and gain activity on the a-file. However, sooner or later the exchange is bound to happen.

12.exf6 ♞xf6 13.♔e2

Other moves also fail to seriously threaten Black.

13.h3 ♞f7 14.g4 ♔g6 15.♔e2 0–0= 16.♖g1 ♖fe8 17.h4 e5 18.h5 ♞xb3 19.♞xb3 ♔e4 20.0–0–0 ½–½ Nyvlt – T. Carlsen, corr. 2007. Black could keep playing with 20...♔xf3 21.♔xf3 h6!?

13.♞e5 ♖g8 14.♞df3 ♞hg4 15.♞xg4 ♞xg4 16.h3 ♞f6 17.♞xb6 axb6 18.♞e5 h5½ Smirin – Dreev, Moscow 2002. Black has pressure down the g-file.

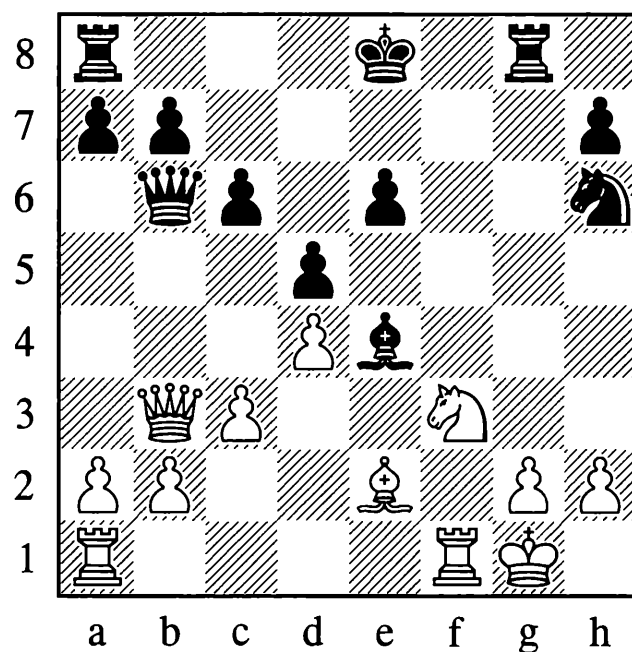
13.0–0–0 ♖g8 14.♖e1 0–0–0 15.♞e5 ♞hg4 16.♞df3 This is L'Ami – Johannessen, Gausdal 2004, and now after 16...♔e4N I prefer Black.

13.♞xb6 axb6 14.h3 (14.♞h4 ♔e7 was nothing in Novikovas – J. Muller, corr. 2002) 14...♞f7 (14...♞e4 is also fine) 15.♔e2 h5 16.♞h4 ♞d6 17.0–0 ♔e7= Black is okay. Now, for example, Goncharov – Napalkov, corr. 2003, continued 18.♔h2 ♖hg8 19.♖f4 ♖g7 20.♞df3 ♔e4 21.♞e5 ♖ag8 and Black's activity on the g-file may even give him an edge.

13...♞e4

The standard solution. Black also had the bolder possibility 13...♞c7!? keeping the queens on the board. After 14.♞e5 ♖g8 15.0–0 0–0–0 Black has good play. Dambrauskas – J. Muller, corr. 2004, continued 16.♖f2 ♞f7 17.♞xf7 ♞xf7 18.a4 ♖g6 19.♞d1 ♞g7 20.♞f1 ♖g8 and the pressure down the g-file gave Black the initiative.

14.♞xe4 ♔xe4 15.0–0 ♖g8



16.g3

Stopping Black’s fun on the g-file and preparing ♖e5.

16...♗f7

So Black prevents ♖e5 – chess logic in its purest form.

17.♗d2 ♕f5 18.♖xb6 axb6 19.♖h5 ♖g6= 20.♖g4

Instead 20.♖xg6 ♖xg6 21.a3 ♔e7 22.♗f3 ♖f6 was still level in D. Marshall – Guilloux, corr. 2004.

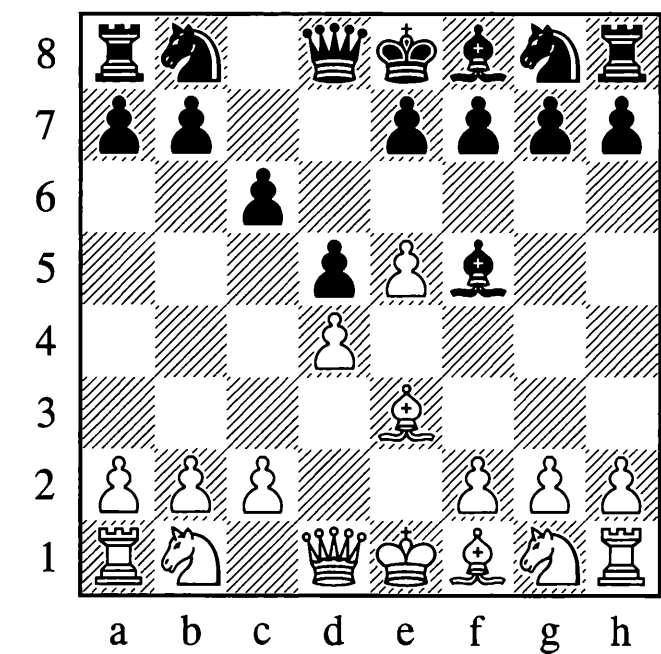
20...♔e7 21.♖fe1 e5!?

Seeking complications; Black avoids the easy and dull equalizer 21...♖e4 22.♗xe4 ♖xg4.

22.dxe5 h5 23.♖h3 h4 24.♖e3 hxg3 25.hxg3 ♗h6 26.a3 ♕f5 27.♖g2 ♖g4 28.♖ae1 ♗f5 29.♖d3 ♖h5 30.♗f1 ♖af8

Black had strong pressure for the pawn in Alekseev – Dreev, Moscow 2004.

B) 4.♖e3



Trying to save a tempo by omitting c2-c3. Instead White will continue ♗d2-b3 controlling the queenside, once again hoping that the space advantage will count in the long run.

4...e6

The most natural, but Anand has had some success with the immediate queen sortie:

4...♖b6!?

Now forced is:

5.♖c1 e6

Next the most popular choice is the double-edged:

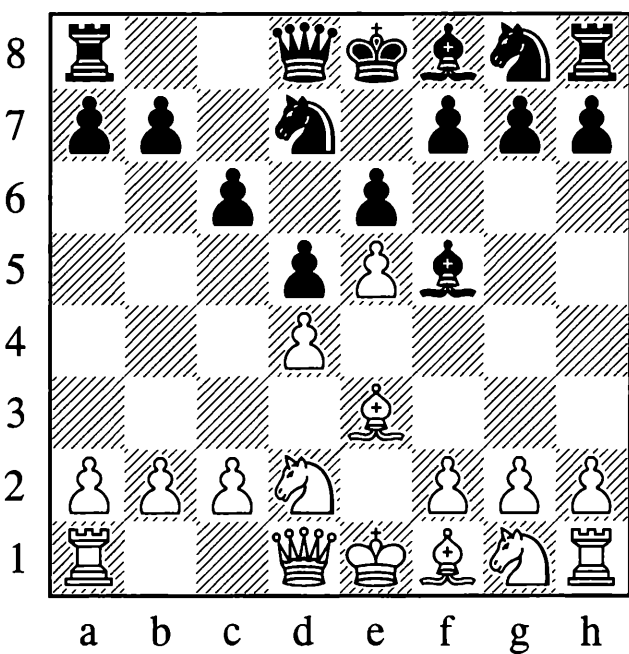
6.c4 dxc4 7.♖xc4

Or 7.♗d2 ♖a5 (pinning the knight) 8.♖xc4 ♗e7 9.♗e2 ♗d7 10.0-0 ♗d5= and Black is fine. Grischuk – Anand, Mainz 2005, continued 11.♗g3 ♖g6 12.h4 h6 13.h5 ♖h7 14.a3 ♖d8 15.♗f3 ♖e7 16.♖d1 ♖c8 and then ...c6-c5 gave Black good counterplay.

7...♗e7 8.♗e2 ♖d8 9.0-0 ♗d7 10.♗g3 ♖g6 11.♗c3 ♗f5∞

This is Shirov – Anand, Monte Carlo (rapid) 2005. The position is reminiscent of the 4.c4 line.

5.♗d2 ♗d7



6.♗b3

The recommended set-up. The position is closed and devoid of infighting, which means that many plans and move orders are possible. The following is a short overview.

6.f4 Putting yet another pawn on a dark square. 6...h5 So Black begins a light-squared strategy.

7.♖gf3 ♖h6 With a complicated fight ahead in which Black's chances are by no means inferior. One practical example is 8.h3 ♕e7 9.♕e2 ♖b6! 10.♖b3 ♕e4+ and Black vacates f5 for the knight, Montano – Khamrakulov, Los Llanos de Aridane 2008.

6.♕e2 f6

Another typical way of creating counterplay. White has various plausible replies:

7.♖gf3

Instead 7.exf6 ♖gxf6 8.g4 ♕g6 9.h4 looks artificial and 9...h5 stops the fun after either 10.g5 ♖g4 11.♕xg4 hxg4 12.♖xg4 ♕f5 with good play for the pawn or 10.gxh5 ♖xh5 11.♖gf3 ♕d6 12.♖g1 ♖f6+ Vachier Lagrave – Wojtaszek, Lausanne 2006.

If 7.f4 then 7...♖b6 is annoying; the bishop is insecure on e3.

7...♖c7 8.♕f4 fxe5 9.dxe5

9.♖xe5 ♕d6= is not a problem.

9...♖e7 10.h4!?

This was Shirov's improvement over the stem game's uninspiring 10.♕g3?! ♖g6 when the e5-pawn was lost for nothing.

10...♖g6 11.♕h2 0–0–0 12.♖g5 ♖dxe5 13.g4

And Shirov once again had managed to set the board on fire, Shirov – Bologan, Ukraine 2006. However after:

13...♕e4N

Black looks absolutely okay, as the following three lines demonstrate:

14.f3 wins a piece and is critical of course, but after 14...♖xh4! Black has too many threats. For example: 15.fxe4 ♕c5 (with the idea ...♖g2+) 16.♖c1 ♖e7 17.♕xe5 ♖xg5 18.♕g3 ♖g2+ 19.♖f1 ♖e3 20.♖xg2 ♖xe2+ 21.♖h3 h5 22.g5 ♖g4+ 23.♖h2 h4 24.♕e5 ♕d4 25.♕xd4 ♖g3#

14.♖xe6 ♖e7 15.♖xe4 ♖xe6 is simply good for Black.

14.0–0 ♖e7 is very unclear, so the following is just a sample line: 15.♕g3 h6 16.♖gxe4 dxe4 17.♖c1 ♖f3+ 18.♖xf3 exf3 19.♕xf3 ♖f6 20.♖e3 ♕c5! 21.♖xc5 ♖xf3 22.♖xa7 ♖f4 And White has to settle for a perpetual check with 23.♖a8+ ♖c7 24.♖a5+.

6.c3 should transpose to the 4.c3 line. There is a little finesse though. After 6...♖b6 White can play 7.b4!? with the point 7...f6 8.♖b3 which has scored quite well, although after 8...♖c7 9.f4 ♖h6 Black is probably okay. With the precise move order 6...f6! 7.f4 ♖b6 we get what we want. Now White is forced to reply 8.♖b3 because 8.b4 allows 8...fxe5 9.fxe5 ♖xe5.

6.♖gf3 ♖e7 7.♕e2 ♖c8!?

This was a new concept in this exact position, but it is known from similar lines. Black uses the few squares he has available to the maximum.

7...♕g6 preparing ...♖f5 is standard, but then 8.♖h4 is a bit annoying.

8.0–0 ♕e7

The pieces get out and Black is okay.

9.♖e1 ♕g6 10.f4 h5 11.♖d3 ♖c7 12.♖c1 a6 13.c4 dxc4 14.♖xc4 ♖cb6 15.♖b3 ♖xc4 16.♖xc4 ♖b6 17.♖b3 ♖d5 18.♕d2 ♖b6 19.♖xb6 ♖xb6+

Black had an edge in Thomassen – Schandorff, Helsingor 2009.

6...♖e7

Also possible is the typical attack on the centre with 6...f6 and then 7.f4 ♖h6 followed by ...♕e7 and castling.

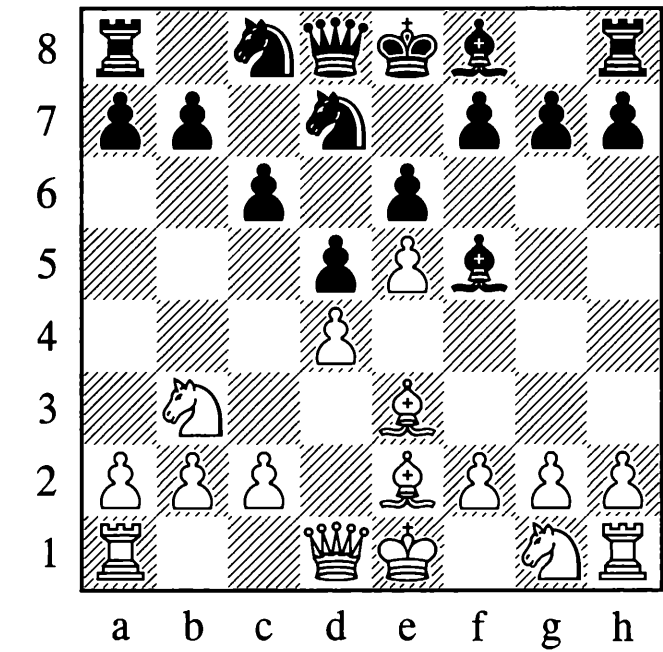
7.♕e2

The most cunning. On 7.f4 Black can react with 7...h5 and use the standard light-square strategy. For example: 8.♖f3 ♕g4 9.h3 ♖f5 10.♕f2 ♕xf3 11.♖xf3 h4 Blocking the kingside. If White later decides to play g2-g3

his pawn structure will be damaged. 12.♔d3 ♔e7 13.0-0 g6 14.c3 ♖f8 15.♗h2 ♖g7 Black had a fine position in Situru – Wu Shaobin, Singapore 2006.

7.♘f3 gives Black a luxury problem. He can choose between pinning the knight with 7...♙g4 or retreating the bishop to g6 followed by the knight jump to f5.

7...♘c8!?



Once you see this idea you can't get it out of your head. It will take a trained psychotherapist to delete it. 7...♙g6 with the idea ...♘f5 is standard and of course is also fully playable.

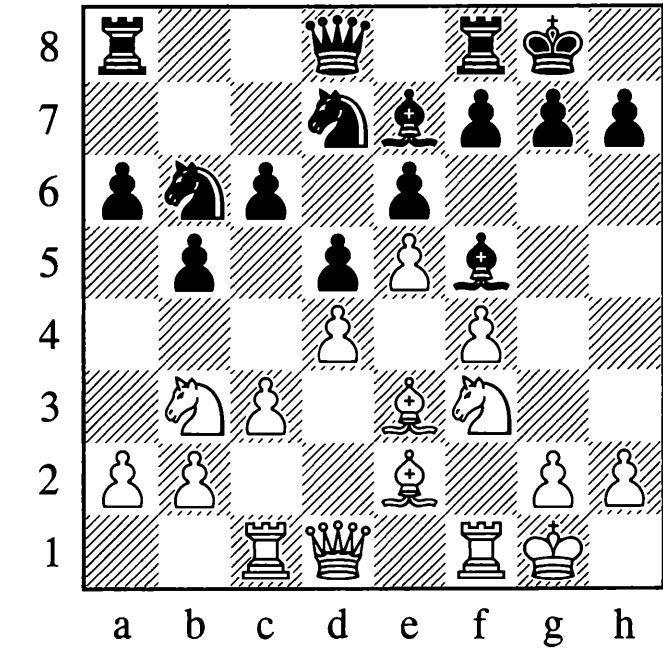
8.f4 ♔e7 9.♘f3 0-0

Black finishes his development with the minimum of fuss and without compromising his position at all. That's the beauty of this simple idea. By temporarily putting the knight on the back rank everything is made possible and Black demonstrates that his lack of space isn't necessarily fatal. There is no practical evidence from this position, but I am sure Black is okay. Well, that's not the whole truth. Black is okay, don't worry, but there has been one game, albeit only a blitz game by me. Since there is nothing else, we will look at a few moves of my blitz effort.

10.0-0 a6!?

10...♘cb6 also looks fine.

11.♙c1 b5! 12.c3 ♘cb6

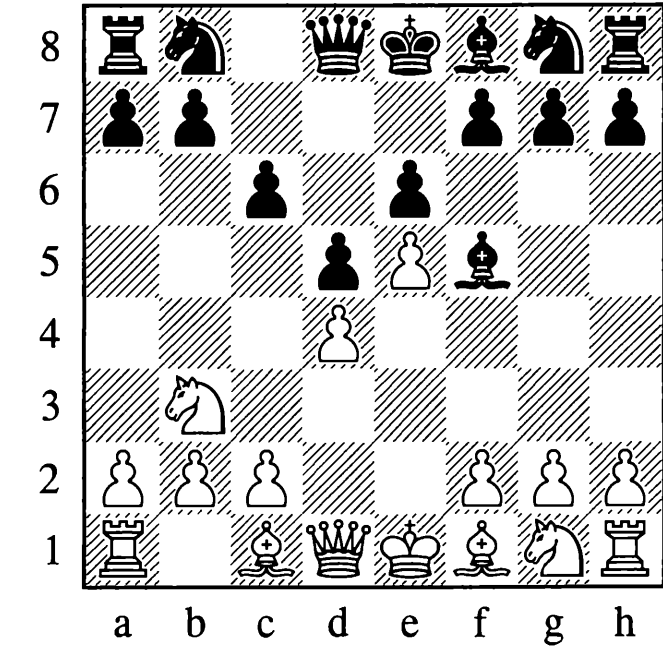


Black is already somewhat better because of my active play on the queenside. If for some strange reason you want to see the rest you can find it at the ICC under the name "Sjandy".

C) 4.♘d2

This is the latest finesse, which is becoming popular with the trendsetting 2700s.

4...e6 5.♘b3



5...♘d7

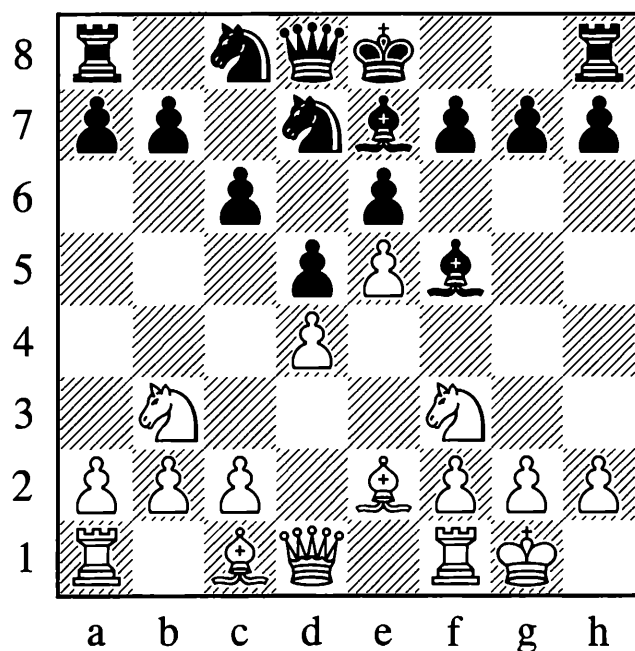
Once again the intention behind White's play has primarily been to prevent Black from executing the liberating ...c6-c5 break. This provokes some players into playing 5...c5 anyway, the point being 6.dxc5 ♙xc5 7.♘xc5 ♚a5† 8.c3 ♚xc5 when the "loss" of the dark-squared bishop isn't that great an issue. Still, White has the bishop pair and some advantage. I prefer simply to continue developing and try to get in ...c6-c5 later on in a more natural way.

6.♘f3

The 4.c3, 4.♙e3 and 4.♘d2 variations overlap all the time. Here 6.♙e3 would send us back to the previous line.

6...♘e7

Or 6...♙g6 7.♙e2 ♘h6!? is an original way of getting the pieces out. However we will stick to my pet line.

7.♙e2 ♘c8 8.0-0 ♙e7

Black has no weaknesses, so it is difficult for White to know exactly where to point his guns. So far he has been unable to force an advantage.

9.a4

9.♘e1 intends to strengthen the centre with f2-f4. 9...♙g6 10.f4 0-0 11.♙e3 ♘cb6 12.♘d2 c5 13.c3 cxd4 14.cxd4 was B. Socko – Narciso Dublan, Plovdiv 2008, and now 14...♙c8N was at least equal for Black.

Instead of 10...0-0 the more original 10...h5!? worked very well in the following game: 11.c3 ♘cb6 12.♘a5 ♚c7 13.b4 c5! Black uses tactical motifs to get in this important break. 14.bxc5 ♘xc5 15.♙b5† ♘bd7 16.♘b3 ♘e4† Yilmazyerli – Prohaszka, Herceg Novi 2008.

9.♙e3 0-0 10.♘fd2 is another way. After 10...f6 11.f4 fxe5 12.dxe5!? c5 13.c3 a6 14.♙g4 ♘a7 15.♙xf5 ♙xf5 16.♙g4 ♘c6 Black was slightly better in Garakov – Ovetchkin, Novokuznetsk 2008.

9.♙d2 looks rather quiet. 9...0-0 10.h3 ♚c7 11.♙d3!? ♙xd3 12.cxd3 But now the game has its own unique character. 12...a5 13.a4 ♙b6∞ Kamsky – Postny, Kallithea 2008, was a mess. Black has the better pawn structure and control over the b4-square, which should compensate for White's extra space.

9...0-0 10.a5

Taking even more space. Instead 10.♙e3 f6↗ 11.a5 ♚c7 12.exf6 was Parligras – Doettling, France 2009, and now 12...♙xf6!?N, keeping an eye on e5, looks fine.

10...a6 11.♙e3

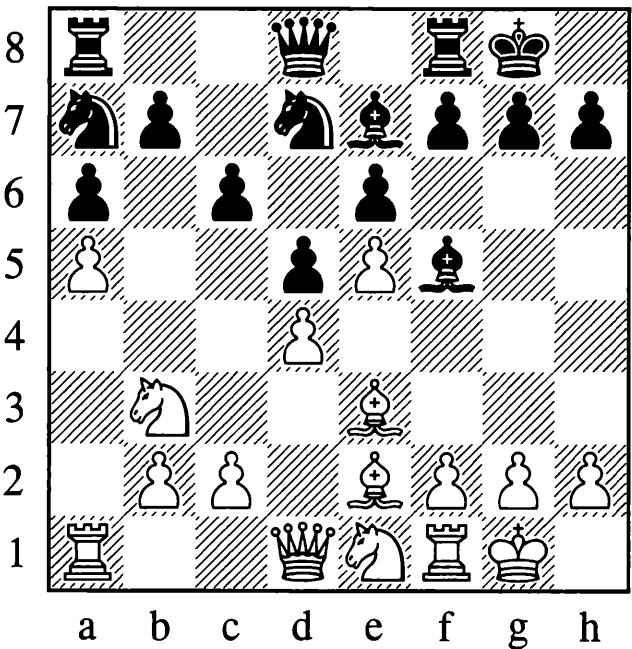
If instead 11.c4 then after 11...dxc4 12.♙xc4 ♘a7 the knight takes an unusual-looking route that is actually quite common in this line. 13.♙e2 ♘b5 14.♙d1 ♘c7 15.♘e1 ♘d5= was Sikula – Levin, Ansfelden 2009. White's 15.♘e1 was maybe not the most threatening in the position. Just before my deadline I had the chance to test this line against the book's typesetter (!) and he opted for the more flexible 15.♘bd2. I didn't like 15...♘d5 16.♘e4

that much, but found 15...b5!? 16.axb6 ♖xb6 17.♗b3 ♖b5 when the active black pieces compensate for the slightly weakened queenside. The game Aagaard – Schandorff, Denmark (ch) 2010, continued 18.♖c4 ♖xc4 19.♗xc4 h6 20.h3 ♔d7 21.♗e3 ♖fb8 22.♖a4 ♖d8 23.♖da1 ♔b7 24.♔e1, and here the simplest was 24...♗c2 25.b3 ♗e4=.

11...♖a7

Also respectable is 11...♔c7 12.c4 dxc4 13.♖bd2 (13.♗xc4 ♖a7) 13...b5 14.axb6 ♖cxb6 15.♖xc4 ♖xc4 16.♗xc4 a5= Svidler – Karpov, Moscow (blitz) 2008.

12.♖e1



This allows a break, but it was difficult to come up with a plan. If White plays c2-c4 Black just takes and plays the knight to b5. Maybe a non-move like 12.h3 was preferable.

12...c5! 13.♖xc5 ♖xc5 14.dxc5 ♖c6

And the knight is back into the game; Black regains the pawn with good play.

15.♖f3 ♗g4 16.♖d4 ♗xe2 17.♖xc6 ♗xd1 18.♖xd8 ♗e2 19.♖fe1 ♖fxd8 20.♖xe2 d4 21.♗d2 ♗xc5

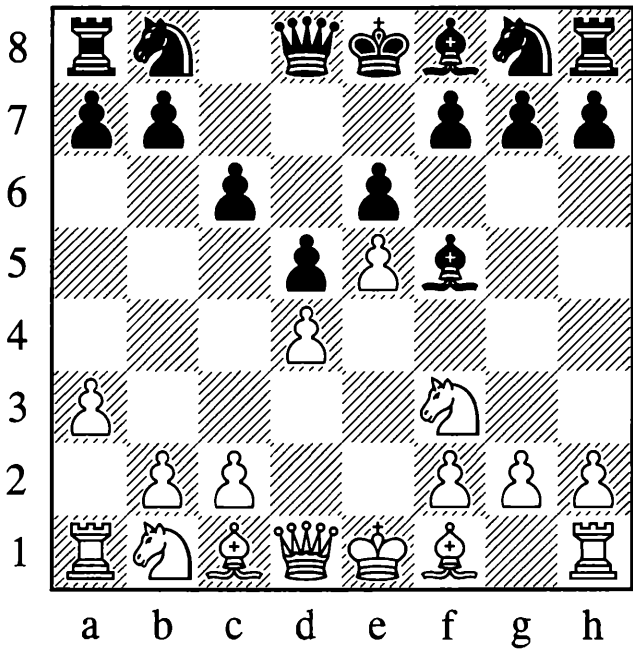
Black had an edge in Galkin – Ivanchuk, Khanty-Mansiysk 2007. Galkin is a

Caro-Kann specialist with Black so his choice of the 4.♖d2 line as White is notable.

D) 4.♖f3 e6

Of course now 5.♗e2 would lead to the Short Variation, which we will look at in the next chapter. But first, we shall have a brief scan of the mass of rare alternatives White can try.

5.a3



A tricky little move that immediately creates a whole new territory to be explored. White has tried a multitude of other seemingly innocent moves.

5.c3 c5 and now 6.a3 cxd4 7.cxd4 ♖e7 8.♗e3 ♖ec6 9.♗d3 ♗xd3 10.♔xd3 ♗e7 11.♖c3 ♖d7 12.0–0 0–0 was level in Short – Gulko, New York 1994, or 6.♗e3 ♔b6 7.♔a4† ♖c6 8.♗b5 a6 9.♗xc6† bxc6 with unclear play.

After the move 5.♗d3 the well-known antidote is 5...♗xd3 6.♔xd3 ♔a5† 7.♗d2 ♔a6 (transposing to page 90 in Chapter 9).

5.♖c3 ♖d7 6.♗e2 ♖e7 7.0–0 ♗g6

5.♗e3 ♖d7 or 5...♔b6 6.♔c1.

5.c4 ♖e7 or maybe 5...♗b4† 6.♖c3 ♖e7.

5.♖bd2 ♖d7

I only give a few moves in the above lines to point in a direction worth investigating. You could go on forever. Create your own! Is 5.a4 playable?!

5...c5 6.c4

This thematic counterattack tears the centre apart.

6...dxc4 7.♗xc4

Not quite good enough is 7.♖c3 ♖c6 8.d5 exd5 9.♖xd5 ♖ge7 10.♗xc4 because of 10...♗e4!N 11.♖xe7 ♗xd1† 12.♖xd1 ♗xe7.

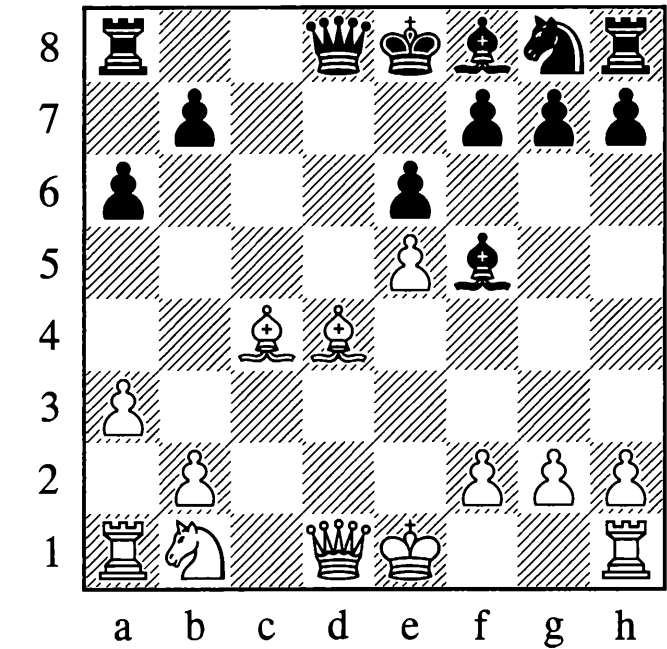
7...♖c6 8.♗e3

8.♖c3 cxd4 9.♖b5 ♗c8N looks silly for White.

8...cxd4

Black can already force the play. Keeping the tension with 8...♖ge7 was of course legal.

9.♖xd4 ♖xd4 10.♗xd4 a6



Black prevents ♗b5†.

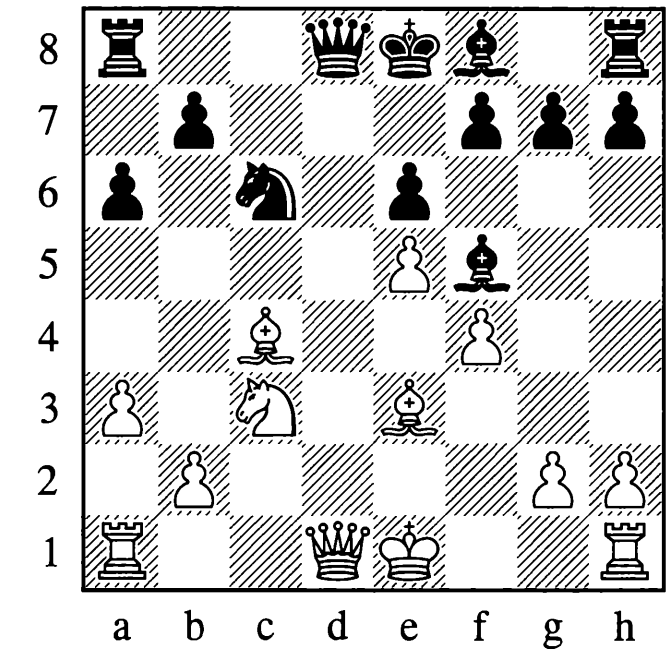
11.♖c3

11.0–0 ♖e7 12.b4 ♗c8 13.♗b3 ♖c6 14.♗b2 was Tazbir – Szczechowicz, Poraj 2003, and now 14...♗e7!N† would have been very good. White’s extra space has left a lot of holes in his position.

11...♖e7 12.f4

On 12.♗e3 I think 12...♗c7! is fine.

12...♖c6 13.♗e3



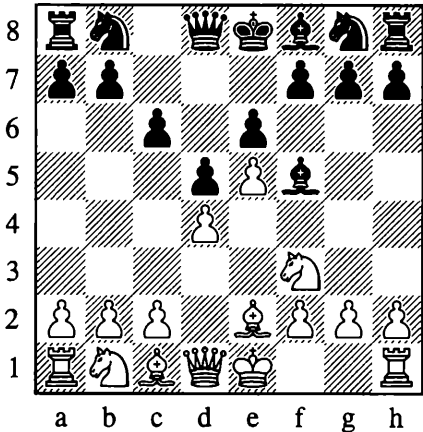
This was Reefat – A. Rasmussen, Gausdal 2001. Now Black could gain active play with:

13...♗c7!N 14.♗e2 g5

Conclusion

If White tries to play a slow manoeuvring game then Black is well prepared. I am especially fond of the elegant regrouping ...♖e7-c8 to make room to play ...♗e7, developing all the minor pieces smoothly. In this chapter, line C with 4.♖d2 is worthy of special attention, as this move has recently been popular with several 2700 players – where the elite leads, the masses follow.

Chapter 12



Advance Variation

Short Variation

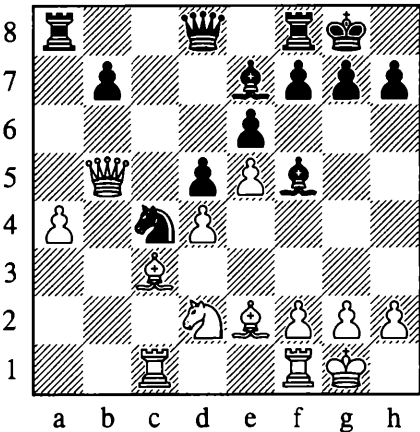
Variation Index

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.e5 ♔f5 4.♘f3 e6 5.♙e2

5...c5

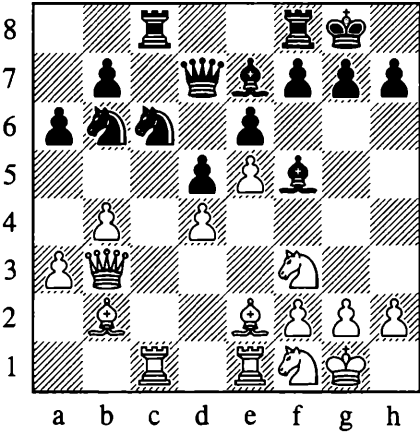
A) 6.0–0 ♘c6 7.c3 cxd4 8.cxd4 ♘ge7	114
A1) 9.b3	115
A2) 9.♙e3	116
A3) 9.a3	117
A4) 9.♘c3	119
B) 6.♙e3 cxd4 7.♘xd4 ♘e7	120
B1) 8.0–0	121
B2) 8.♘d2	123
B3) 8.♙g5	124
B4) 8.c4 ♘bc6 9.♙a4 a6	126
B41) 10.0–0	127
B42) 10.cxd5	128
B43) 10.♘a3	130
B44) 10.♘c3	131

A3) after 14.♙b3



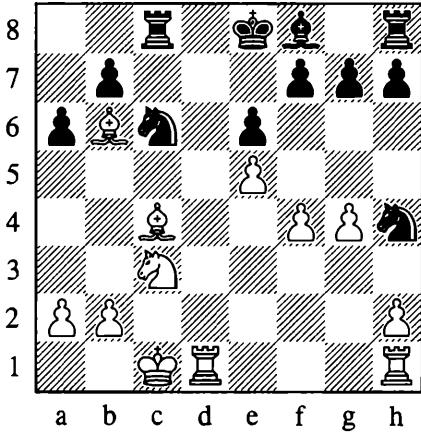
20...♘a3!N

Schakel – Goebel, after 16.♘f1



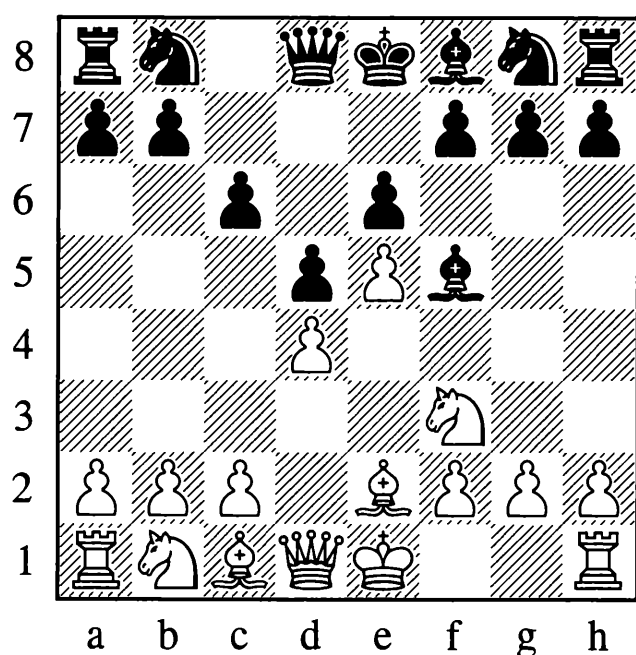
16...♘a7!

B44) after 17.♙xc4



17...g5!

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.e5 ♖f5 4.♘f3 e6 5.♙e2



The positional Short Variation is one of the cornerstones of the whole 3.e5 complex. White calmly completes his development before taking any direct action. He is confident that his space advantage will give him the easier play.

This is a very flexible system that appeals to a variety of White players, ranging from the quiet to the wildest boys in the class. The play can quickly become rather sharp, especially if White answers the thematic move ...c6-c5 with c2-c4, blowing the centre wide open. Just as often, the play will be slow and White will be content to play c2-c3 with a solid structure.

As we saw at the end of the previous chapter, the inventor of this system, British grandmaster Nigel Short, has pushed the subtleties to the limit by experimenting with mysterious moves such as 5.a3. But now it is time to study the main lines.

5...c5

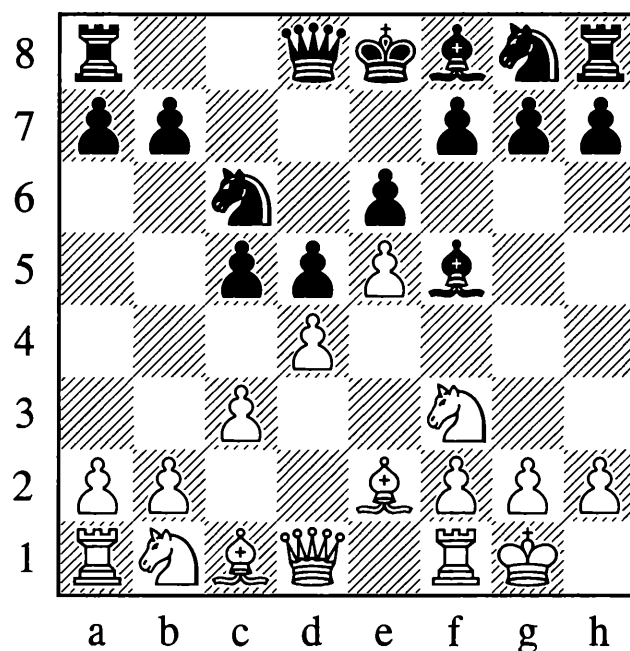
This natural attack on the centre is a direct attempt to solve all Black's problems at once. Instead of forcing the play like this, Black can also calmly accept his fate and try to manoeuvre on the back ranks. After all, the light-squared bishop is outside the pawn chain and with moves like ...♘d7, ...♘e7, ...♙g6, ...♘f5

and ...♙e7 it is possible to prepare castling. Personally, I prefer immediate infighting.

After 5...c5 White usually chooses between A) 6.0-0 and B) 6.♙e3.

The immediate counterattack in the centre with 6.c4 is premature, and after 6...dxc4 7.♙xc4 ♘c6 White already has problems holding his centre together. 8.♙b5 ♘ge7 White has no normal moves, so in Romero Holmes – Magem Badals, Pamplona 1992, he tried the speculative 9.♘a3 a6 10.♘c4 axb5 11.♘d6† ♔d7 12.♘xf7 ♚e8 13.♘xh8 ♘d5 14.dxc5, when 14...♙xc5+ would have been strong. The knight is trapped in the corner.

A) 6.0-0 ♘c6 7.c3



An important position that can also arise after 6.c3 ♘c6 7.0-0. The pawn structure is similar to the Advance French, but here the light-squared bishop is developed outside the pawn chain and Black should have no positional problems. Should! But that's not always the same as the real state of affairs. In modern chess, classical rules are often contradicted by concrete moves.

7...cxd4

Black has tried a great variety of moves here.

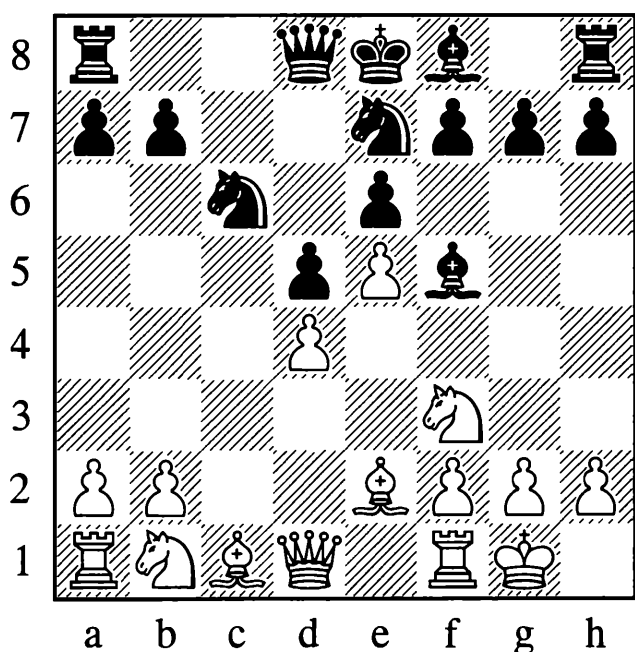
Fixing the centre and then getting on with developing the kingside is the most reliable.

8.cxd4

8.♖xd4 is unusual. Black can continue as if nothing special has happened: 8...♖xd4 9.cxd4 ♖e7 10.♖c3 And here the World Champion came up with: 10...h6 (forestalling 10...♖c6 11.g4! ♖g6 12.f4 which is somewhat uncomfortable) 11.♖b5† There must be alternatives. 11...♖c6 12.♖xc6† bxc6 13.♖e3 ♖e7 14.♖a4 0–0 15.♖c1 ♖a5 16.♖xc6 ♖ac8 17.♖c1 ♖xc6 18.♖xc6 ♖d3 19.♖c1 ♖b5 20.♖c7 ♖xa4 21.♖xe7 ♖xa2= Carlsen – Anand, Nice (rapid) 2009.

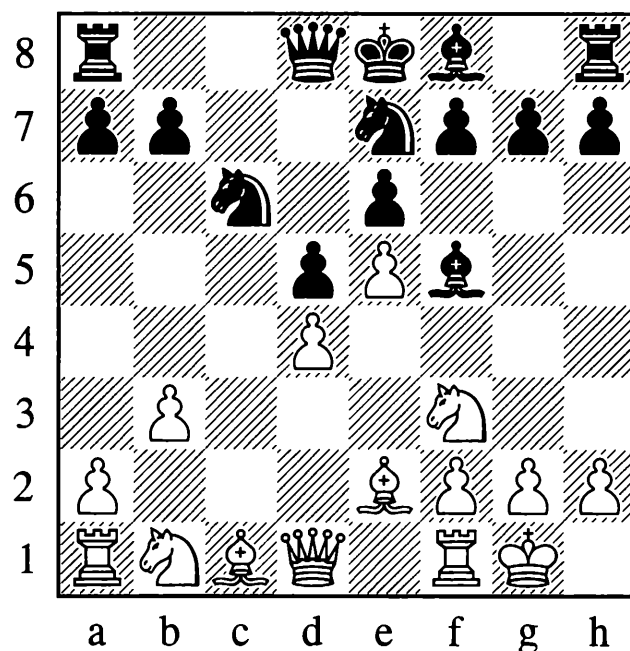
However, after 8.♖xd4 more interesting is 8...♖ge7, which is a move Anand had previously used. 9.♖xf5 ♖xf5 10.♖d3 ♖e7 (Safe and sound. If Black wants to create more problems for both sides he could consider 10...g6!? 11.♖e2 ♖g7∞.) 11.♖e1 d4! 12.a3 dxc3 13.♖xc3 0–0 14.♖f3 ♖h4 15.♖e4 ♖g6 16.f4 ♖b6† 17.♖f1 ♖fd8 Black had no problems in Ivanchuk – Anand, Linares 1999.

8...♖ge7



The real starting position of the 6.0–0 variation. White has four plausible ways to develop: A1) 9.b3, A2) 9.♖e3, A3) 9.a3 and A4) 9.♖c3.

A1) 9.b3



White wants to fianchetto his queen's bishop and thus overprotect the important d4-pawn – a set-up known from the Advance French.

9...♖c8

A clever waiting move; Black takes the open file, expecting White to complete his plan with ♖b2. Instead 9...♖e4 10.♖bd2 ♖f5 11.♖b2 ♖b4 was the stem game Short – Seirawan, Amsterdam 1992, and this method has also withstood the test of time.

10.♖b2 ♖g6

The point. White has loosened his control over f4 and now has to waste more time. Meanwhile Black gets his counterplay organized.

11.g3

Or 11.♖d2 ♖e7 12.♖c3 0–0 is also no problem for Black.

11...f6

This typical break is also standard in the French.

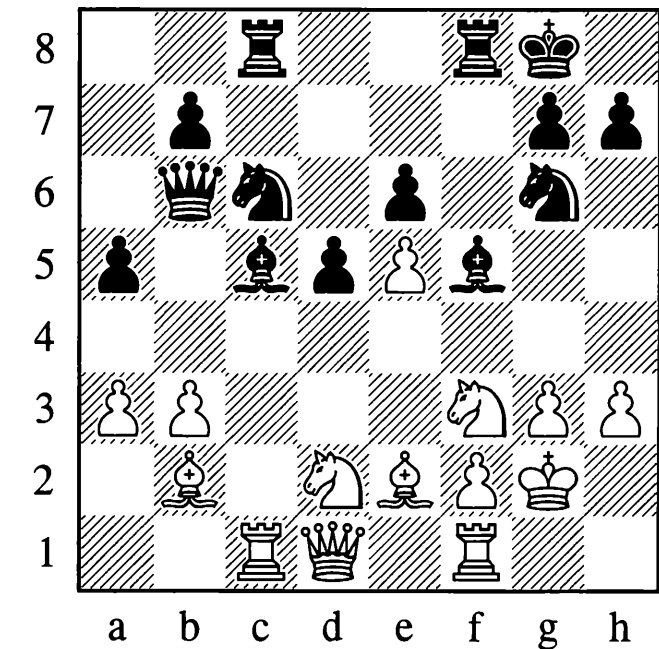
12.♖bd2

The compliant 12.exf6 ♖xf6 is good for Black.

12...♙e7 13.a3 a5

Preventing b3-b4; White is running out of ideas and in the game we are following his position quickly deteriorated.

14.♖c1 0-0 15.♔g2 ♚b6 16.h3 fxe5 17.dxe5 ♙c5



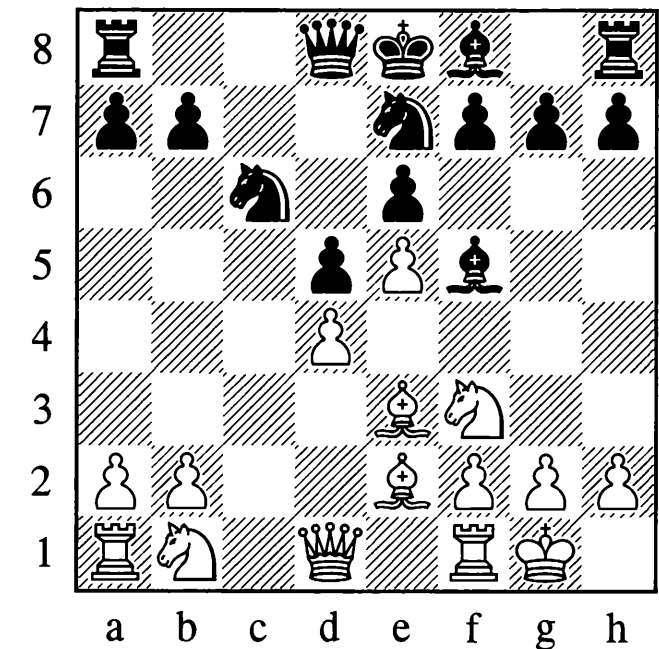
18.a4?!

White had no useful moves and now at least he gets the b5-square. However he gives away the b4-square and that proves to be fatal.

18...♞b4 19.♙b5 ♞d3

Black was already winning in T. Ernst – Gausel, Oslo 1994.

A2) 9.♙e3



Another way of reinforcing the d4-pawn, and as harmless as the first.

9...♙g4

The text is a clear equalizer. Black could play for more with 9...♞c8!?, which is an instructive example of how to solve development issues when short of space. 10.♞bd2 ♙e7 11.♞e1 (probably better is 11.♞b3 when 11...0-0N 12.♖c1 ♞b6 13.♞c5 ♚c7= is natural) 11...0-0 12.f4 ♙g6 Well played; now g2-g4 does not come with tempo and Black can safely answer it with ...f7-f5. 13.♞df3 ♞b6 14.b3 This is Karjakin – Leko, Nice (rapid) 2008, and here the simple 14...♖c8 would give Black somewhat better chances.

Instead of 10.♞bd2 the English inventor of this system chose 10.♞c3, which transposes to line A4 below (which is the 9.♞c3 move order).

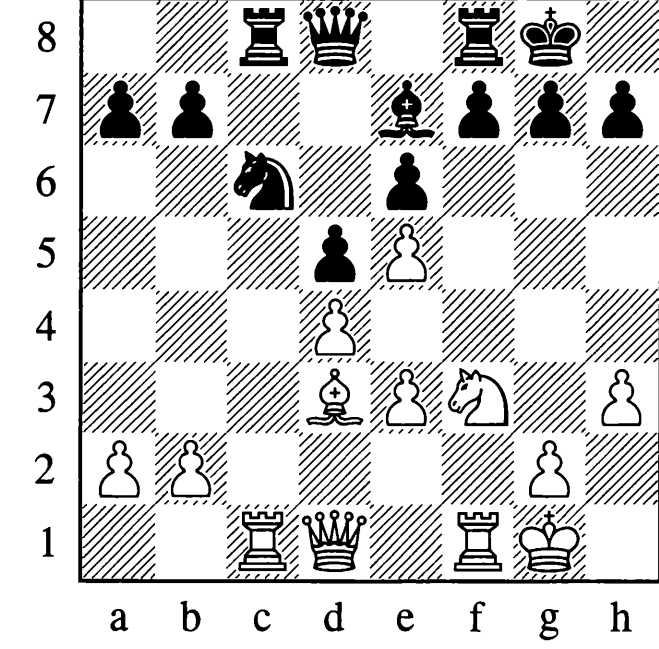
10.♞bd2

If 10.♞c3 then 10...♞f5 11.h3 ♙xf3 12.♙xf3 ♙e7 13.♙g4 ♞xe3 14.fxe3 0-0 is equal.

10...♞f5 11.h3

The standard plan. White could also try to take space on the queenside with 11.a3!? ♙e7 12.b4, but after 12...0-0 13.♞b3 f6! 14.exf6 ♙xf6 Black had excellent counterplay in Sisniega – Campora, Bogota 1991.

11...♙xf3 12.♞xf3 ♙e7 13.♙d3 ♞xe3 14.fxe3 0-0 15.♖c1 ♖c8=

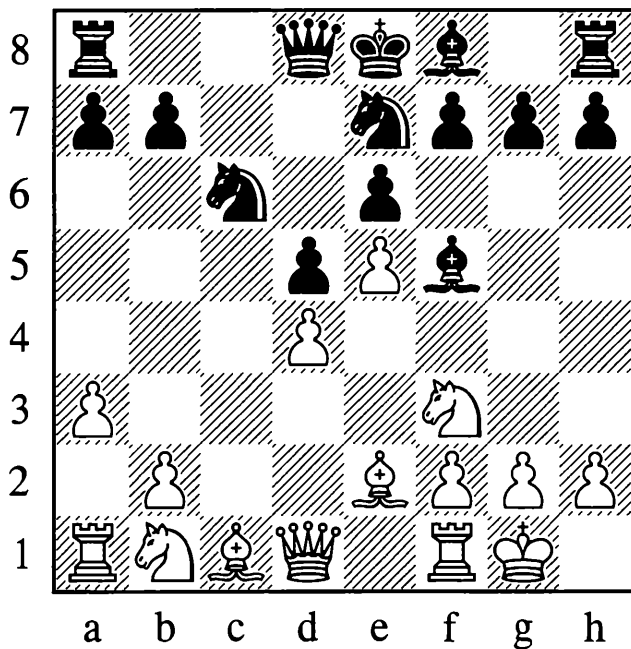


16.♖c3 f5!?

Also fine is 16...♗b4 17.♖b3 ♔e7 18.a3 ♗a5[∞] as in Hirscheider – Haluschka, corr. 2005. The rook is a little offside on b3.

17.exf6 ♗xf6 18.♗b3 ♖f7 19.♗c2 g6 20.♗b5 ♖fc7

A draw was agreed in Maroni – Gill, corr. 2003.

A3) 9.a3

White wants to continue with b2-b4. The question is if he is in fact weakening himself.

9...♘c8

Again we use this subtle manoeuvre, but 9...♗e4 and 9...♗g4 are both also playable.

10.b4

Expanding is consistent, but White has also tried to develop directly with:

10.♗g5 ♗e7 11.♗xe7 ♘8xe7

But this is nothing for White.

12.b4 0–0 13.♘bd2 ♗b6

The most interesting reply.

Instead 13...♖c8 14.♖c1 ♗g4 15.h3 ♗xf3 16.♘xf3 ♘f5 17.♗d2 was somewhat better for White in Yermolinsky – Leko, Madrid 1998. One possible improvement is 14...♗e4!?

14.♘b3 ♗g4

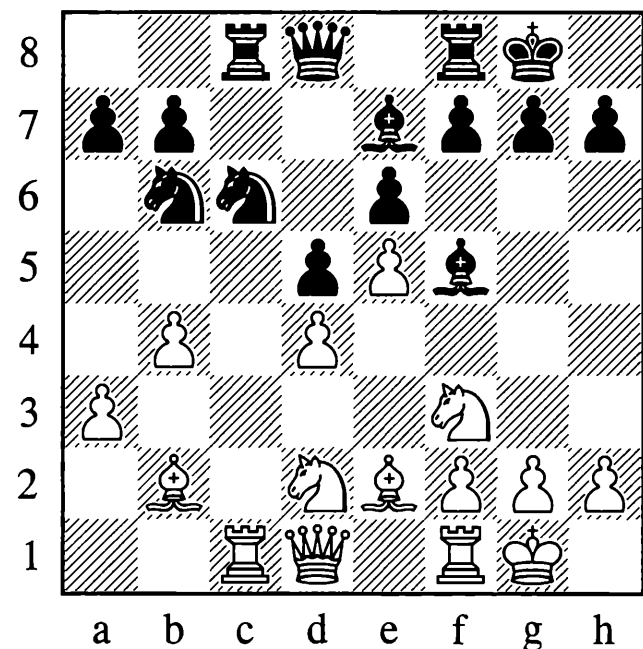
A draw was agreed in Yermolinsky – Khalifman, Rakvere 1993. Not too informative, but fortunately a correspondence game took up the thread a few years later and it turned out that the position was actually promising for Black:

15.♗d3 a5 16.bxa5 ♘xa5 17.♘bd2 ♖fc8 18.♖fb1 ♗a7 19.♖b5 ♖c7 20.h3 ♗f5 21.♗e3 ♘c4⁺

Raschewski – Sprengelmeier, corr. 1997.

For 10.♘c3 see 9.♘c3.

10...♗e7 11.♘bd2 ♘b6 12.♗b2 0–0 13.♖c1 ♖c8



The critical position for the a3+b4 idea, and furthermore a good illustration of some of the positional motifs in the entire 3.e5 Caro-Kann. White has tried all kinds of moves now, but in all cases Black neutralizes White's extra space surprisingly easily.

14.♗b3

We are at a stage where White has various options, but there is nothing for Black to be scared of:

14.♖e1 a5

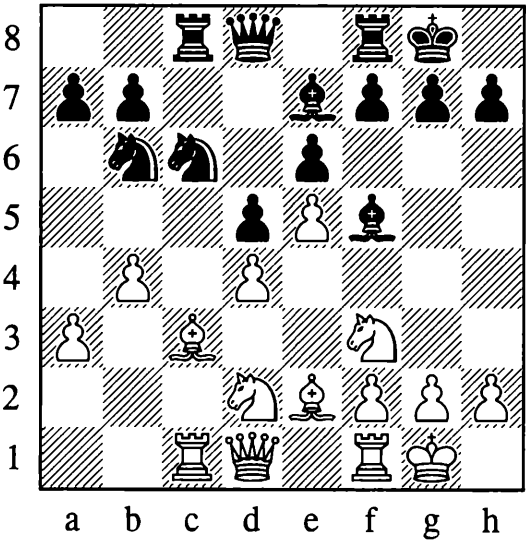
14...♗d7 also makes perfect sense.

15.b5 ♖a7 16.♗f1 ♜xc1 17.♙xc1 a4
Now a3 and b5 are just as weak as a4.
18.♗e3 ♙e4 19.♞d2
Or 19.♗d2 ♙g6.

19...♙xf3
Interesting is the novelty 19...♞d7!?N with the idea 20.♞a5 ♜a8 21.♞xb6? ♗c8 and the queen is trapped.
20.gxf3 f6 21.f4 fxe5 22.fxe5 ♞e8 23.♞d3 ♗c4! 24.♗xc4 dxc4 25.♞h3
Not 25.♞xc4 ♞g6† 26.♗f1 ♙h4+.

25...♞g6†
A draw was agreed in Rohde – Grott, corr. 2004. The continuation could have been:
26.♞g2 ♞xg2† 27.♗xg2 ♗xb5 28.♙xc4 ♗xd4 29.♞d1 ♞d8 30.♙b2 ♙c5
And the ending will indeed be drawn.

14.♙c3
Preparing b4-b5.



14...a6 15.♞b3 ♜a8 16.a4 a5
Black forces the play.
The waiting move 16...h6 is also fine because 17.b5 axb5 18.axb5 is punished by 18...♜a3!±.
17.bxa5 ♗xa5 18.♞b5 ♗bc4 19.♗xc4 ♗xc4 20.♗d2
This is Smirin – De Boer, Wijk aan Zee 1993, and here:
20...♗a3!N 21.♞xb7 ♜b8 22.♞a7 ♜a8
This is a draw at once.

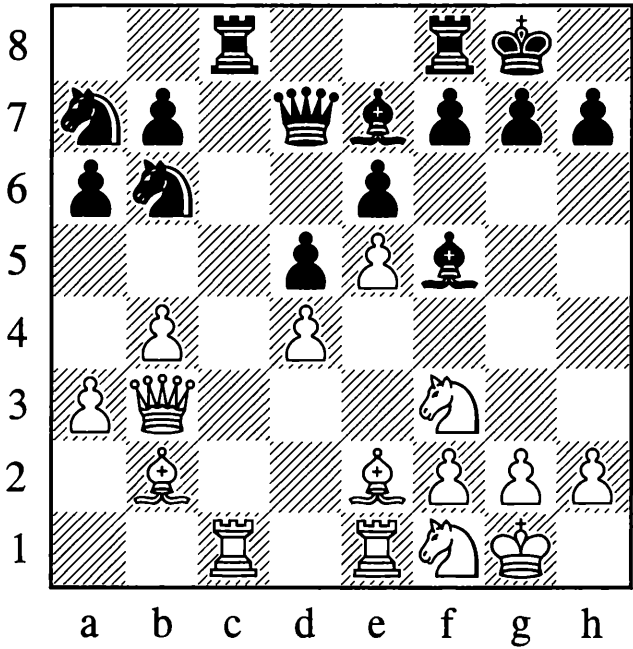
14.♗b3 ♗c4! 15.♙xc4 dxc4 16.♜xc4 ♞d5
gave Black promising play for the pawn in Hamdouchi – Adams, Cap d’Agde 1994.

14...a6 15.♜fe1 ♞d7
Black is absolutely fine. See the illustrative game for the further development of events.

Schakel – Goebel

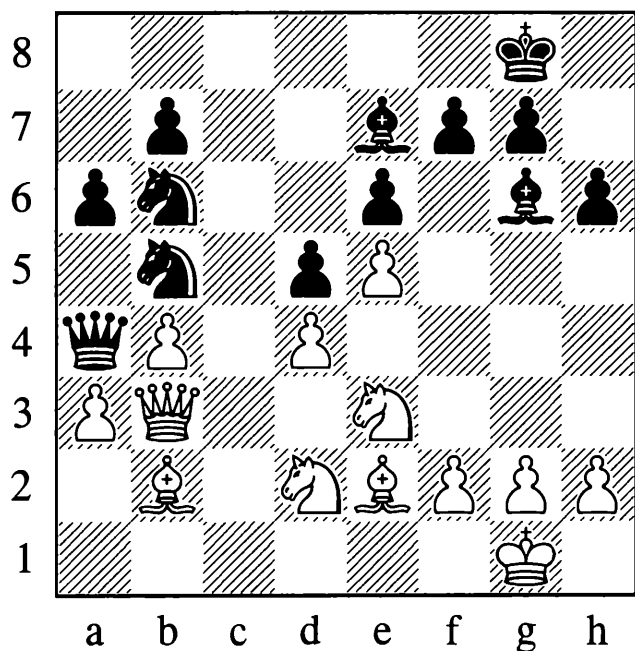
Correspondence 2005

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.e5 ♙f5 4.♗f3 e6 5.♙e2 c5 6.0–0 ♗c6 7.c3 cxd4 8.cxd4 ♗ge7 9.a3 ♗c8
I just love this manoeuvre.
10.b4 ♙e7 11.♗bd2 ♗b6 12.♙b2 0–0 13.♞c1 ♞c8 14.♞b3 a6 15.♜fe1 ♞d7 16.♗f1 ♗a7!



Very instructive. Black’s control over a4 and b5 gives him a small but definite positional advantage on the queenside. After all, White’s expansion with a2-a3 and b2-b4 weakened a bunch of light squares.
17.♗e3 ♙g6 18.♜xc8 ♜xc8 19.♞c1 ♞xc1† 20.♙xc1 ♞c6 21.♙d2 h6
The simplifications have not repaired White’s position. Black has a very comfortable game, but realistically White should be able to hold.

22.♔c3 ♚a4 23.♘d2 ♘b5 24.♙b2

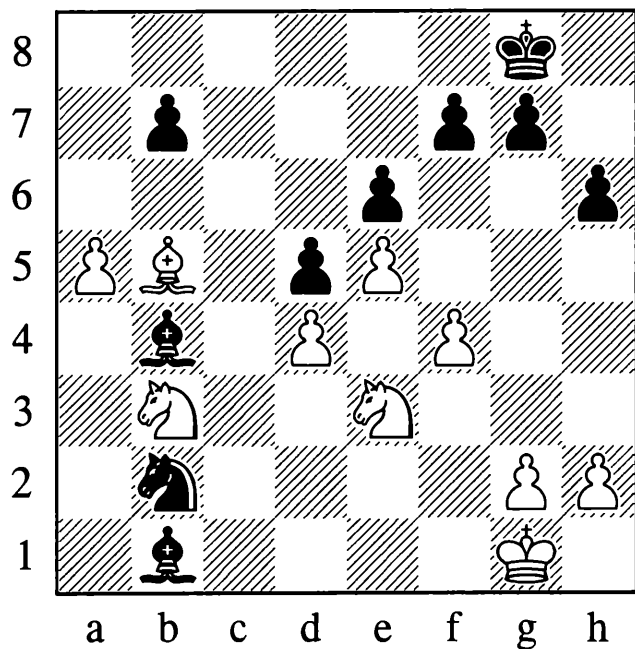


24...a5

Not bad, but I prefer 24...♚xb3 25.♘xb3 ♘a4+.

25.♚xa4 ♘xa4 26.♙xb5 ♘xb2 27.bxa5
♙xa3 28.♘b3 ♙b4 29.f4 ♙b1

Very picturesque.



30.f5

After 30.a6 bxa6 31.♙xa6 ♙c3 the d4-pawn is weak.

30...♙xf5 31.♙e2?

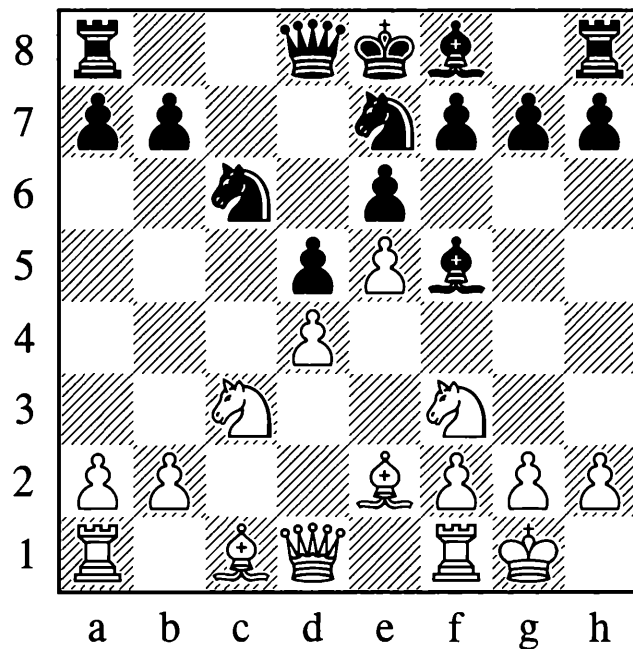
White probably wanted to play 31.♘xf5 exf5 32.♙e2 with good chances to hold, but somehow got it mixed up.

31...♙b1

Now a pawn is just gone.

0–1

A4) 9.♘c3



9...♘c8

The familiar plan by now.

Also possible is:

9...♙g4

This equalizes as usual.

10.♘e1

Also equal is 10.♘h4 ♙xe2 11.♘xe2 ♘g6 12.♘f3 ♙e7.

10...♙xe2 11.♘xe2 ♚b6 12.a3 ♘f5 13.♘f3 ♙e7 14.b4 0–0=

Without the light-squared bishops, Black has a comfortable French structure.

15.♚d3 a6 16.♙d2 h5!?

Black plays on both flanks.

17.h3 h4

Securing the knight on f5.

18.♖ac1 ♚b5

Using the light squares to the maximum.

19.♚xb5 axb5 20.♖c3 ♖a4 21.g4 hxg3 22.fxg3 ♖fa8 23.♙c1 ♙d8 24.♘g2 ♙b6 25.♙d3 ♖4a6 26.g4 ♘fe7 27.h4 ♖c8

A draw was agreed in Tesic – Krajnc, corr. 2004.

10.♙e3

White could play differently, but Black has no worries:

10.♙g5 ♙e7 11.♙xe7 ♘8xe7 is equal.

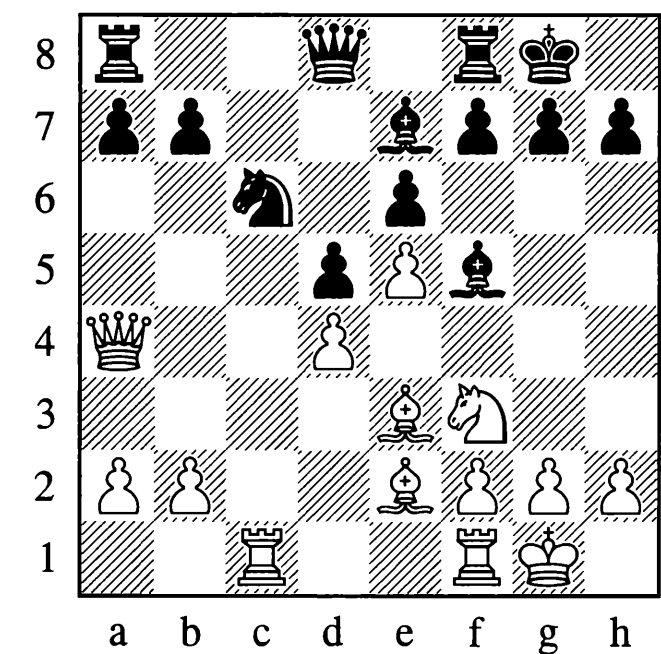
10.a3 ♙e7 11.b4 ♘b6 12.♘a4 ♘xa4 (here Black could stir up some more trouble with 12...♘c4!? with fine play) 13.♙xa4 a6 14.♙e3 0–0 15.♙fc1 ♙d7 16.♙d1 ♙fc8= Wu Wenjin – Liang Chong, Suzhou 2006.

10...♘b6

10...♙e7 is imprecise and allows 11.♘a4 ♘b6 12.♘c5± when in Short – A. Ledger, Birmingham 2002, Black was too eager to get rid of the annoying knight and subsequently was crushed in style: 12...♙xc5? 13.dxc5 ♘d7 14.♘d4! ♘dxe5 15.g4 ♘xd4 16.♙xd4 ♙d3 17.♙xe5 ♙xe2 18.c6! Elegant! 18...♙h4 (or 18...♙xf1 19.♙xg7 ♙f8 20.♙c5+–) 19.f3 bxc6 20.♙g5 ♙h3 21.♙d6 f6 22.♙xe6† ♔f8 23.♙f4 1–0.

I have included the whole game as a warning. It is easy to underestimate the Short Variation; it looks so quiet and innocuous, but in fact it is very dynamic. This has everything to do with the fact that White is ahead in development and quickly mobilizes his entire army.

11.♙c1 ♙e7 12.♘a4 ♘xa4 13.♙xa4 0–0=



Even Anand couldn't get anything here with White.

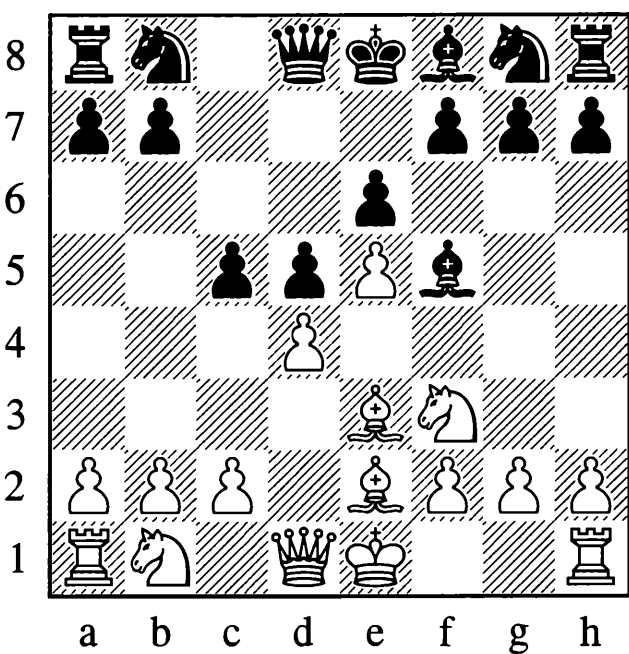
14.♙b5

14.a3 a6 15.b4 b5 16.♙b3 ♙b6 is also nothing.

14...♘b4! 15.a3 ♘d3 16.♙xd3 ♙xd3 17.♙fe1 a5

In Anand – Speelman, Linares 1992, Black was even a little better due to his bishop pair.

B) 6.♙e3



Clearly this is White's most dangerous try. The prospect of c2-c4 is more of a threat than the genteel c2-c3 of the previous section.

6...cxd4

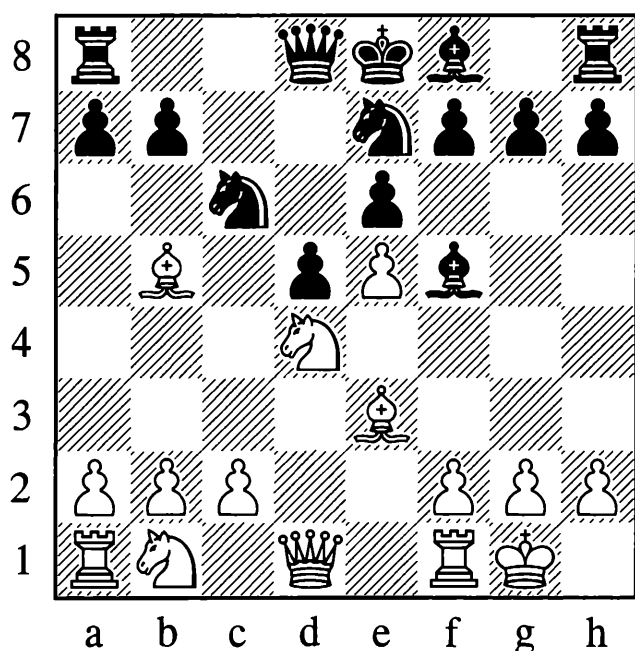
Simplification is probably the right answer in a very tense situation, but Black has also tried sharper stuff such as 6...♙b6.

7.♘xd4 ♘e7

Protecting the bishop and preparing ...♘bc6. White should act quickly if he hopes to benefit from his better development. The natural way to do so is the typical blow in the centre with 8.c4. That is the main continuation, but before that we will examine the other moves B1) 8.0–0, B2) 8.♘d2, B3) 8.♙g5 and only then B4) 8.c4.

But first of all, 8.f4 deserves a brief mention. It is suggested and analysed by Karpov & Podgaets in one of their books on the Caro-Kann. By protecting e5 White intends to keep his space advantage. However the move is not very threatening. 8...♖bc6 (Karpov only looks at 8...♗g6, but that is just a waste of time. Moving the bishop again I mean, but maybe also analysing it in a book!) 9.♖b5 ♖c8 10.0–0 a6 11.♖d4 ♖xd4 12.♗xd4 ♖e7= This has been played a few times. Black continues ...♖c6 followed by ...♗e7 and castling.

B1) 8.0–0 ♖bc6 9.♗b5



This move is well-known from the famous Gelfand – Karpov match in the mid-1990s. White moves the bishop a second time. He can afford such a luxury because he is way ahead in development. By pinning the black knight he prevents the liberating move ...♖xd4 and plans to intensify the pressure with c2-c4 and ♖c3. The alternatives do not promise much:

9.c4 ♖xd4 10.♗xd4 ♖c6 11.cxd5 ♗xd5 12.♗f3 ♗e4= and White might end up with the wrong bishop.

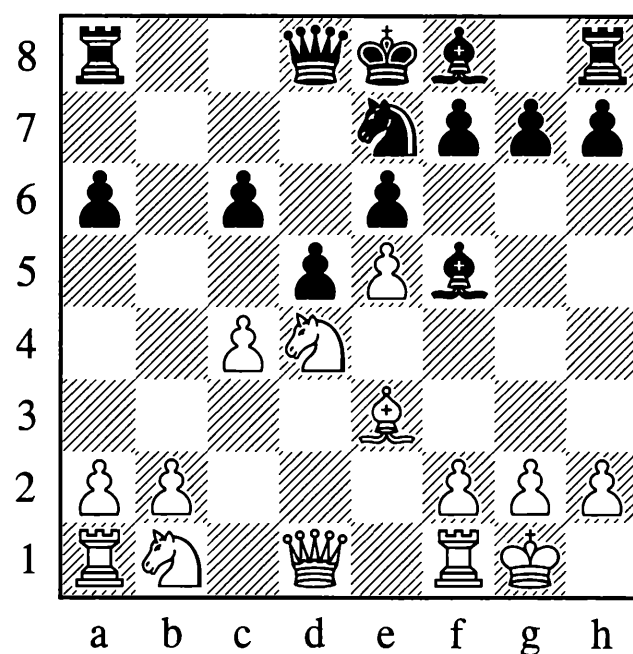
9.f4 ♖xd4 10.♗xd4 ♖c6 11.♗f2 ♗e7= I will quote a blitz game of mine to show how easily such equal positions tip in Black's favour just

by playing normal moves for both sides: 12.c3 0–0 13.♖d2 h6 14.♖b3 ♗c8 15.♖d4 ♖xd4 16.♗xd4 ♗c5 17.♗c1 ♗b6 18.♗d2 ♗c7! 19.♗xc5 ♗xc5† 20.♖h1 b5 21.♗d3 ♗xd3 22.♗xd3 ♗c4 23.♗xc4 ♗xc4†

9...a6

This clarifies the situation.

10.♗xc6† bxc6 11.c4



11...♗d7

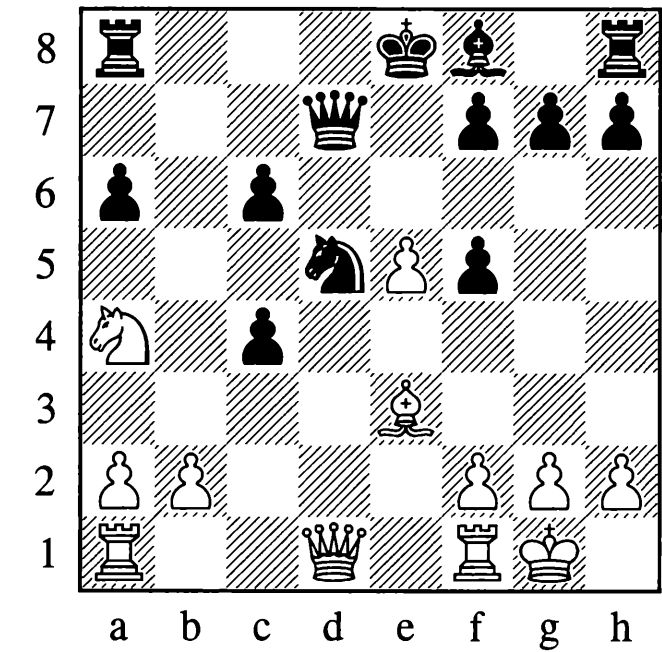
This was Karpov's reaction when confronted with White's concept for the first time.

Also interesting is the immediate 11...dxc4 when Black's pawn structure is not as disastrous as it may appear. A fairly recent correspondence game that was rich in tactical finesses suggests that this is playable: 12.♗a4 (12.♖xf5 ♗xd1 13.♗xd1 ♖xf5 14.♖d2 ♖xe3 15.fxe3 c3 16.bxc3 0–0–0= is nothing) 12...♗d7 13.♗d1 ♗d7 14.♖a3 c5 15.♖db5 ♖d5 16.♖c7†! ♖xc7 17.♗xd7† ♖xd7 18.♖xc4 ♖d5 19.♗xd3 White has won the pawn back, but the strong black knight on d5 keeps the balance. 19...♖c7 20.♗d2 ♗e7 21.♗c1 ♖c6 22.♖f1 h5 23.♖a5† ♖d7 24.♗f3 ♗hf8 25.♗g3 ♗g8 26.♖c4 ♖c6 27.♖a5† ♖d7 28.♖c4 ♖c6 29.♖a5† ½–½ Ponti Lopes – Shutov, corr. 2005.

12.♘c3 dxc4

Black needs some air.

13.♘a4 ♘d5 14.♘xf5 exf5



Black was forced to weaken his pawns even more by White’s strong knight manoeuvre on move 13. But, thank God, it is not as bad as it looks.

Of course White will easily regain the pawn on c4, but then his positional gains will come to a halt. Two scenarios are then typical: either Black will weaken White’s pawns as well by ...♘xe3 or he will keep his strong knight on d5. In the initial game Karpov drew quite comfortably and subsequent tries have not altered the impression that the position is balanced.

15.♙d4

A few snippets from other games will support my assessment:

15.♖c1 ♙e7 16.♖xc4 0–0 17.♗c1 ♗e6 18.♖xc6 ♗xe5= Peng Xiaomin – Liang Chong, Shenyang 1999.

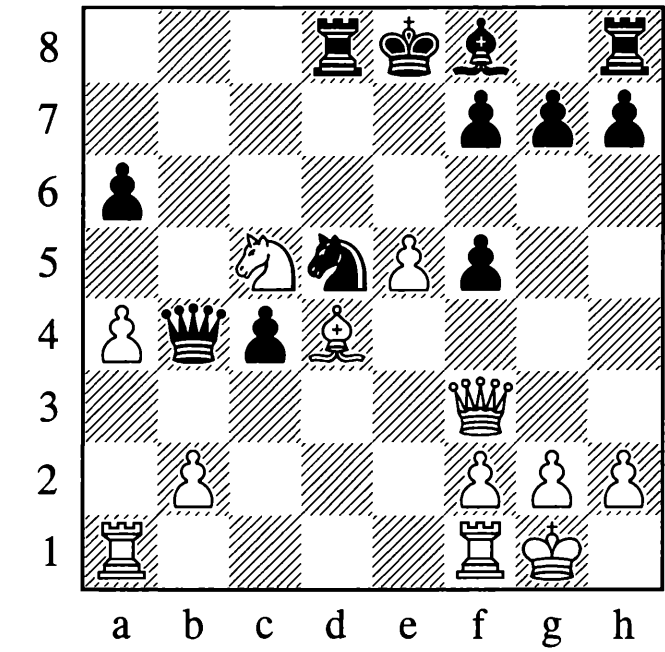
15.♗d4 ♙e7 16.♖ac1 0–0 17.♗xc4 ♘xe3 18.fxe3 ♙g5! 19.♖c3 ♖ad8∞ Sychev – Maes, corr. 1996.

15.♙d2 ♙e7 16.♗c2 0–0 17.♗xc4 ♗e6 18.♖fe1 ♖ab8 19.b3 ♖fd8 20.♘c5 ♙xc5 21.♗xc5 ♖b5 22.♗c2 ♘e7= Skorna – Motyka, corr. 2006.

15...♖d8 16.♗f3 c5! 17.♘xc5 ♗b5

The white knight finds itself in a precarious position.

18.a4 ♗b4



19.e6! ♙xc5 20.♙xg7

20.exf7† ♘xf7 21.♗xf5† ♘g8 22.♗g5! ♖d7 23.♗e5 would win for White, but instead Black plays 20...♘f8! when 21.♖ad1 ♙e7 22.♖fe1 gives White enough compensation for the piece, but no more than that.

20...♖g8 21.exf7† ♘xf7 22.♙c3 ♘xc3

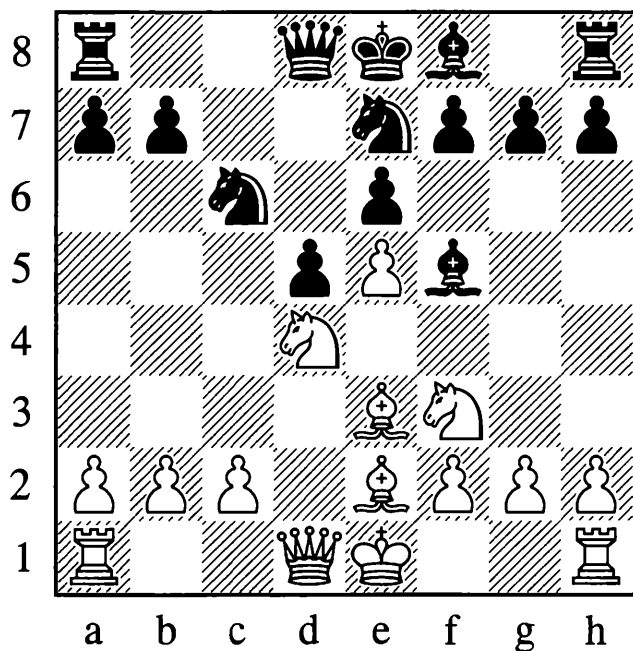
Now it will be a perpetual check. Instead Black could keep the game going with 22...♗b6!? 23.♗xf5† ♘e8 24.♖fe1† ♙e7 25.♗xh7 ♗g6 26.♗xg6† ♖xg6±.

23.♗xf5† ♘g7 24.♗g5† ♘f7 25.♗f5† ♘g7 26.♗g5†

½–½

This is Gelfand – Karpov, Sanghi Nagar (1) 1995.

B2) 8.♘d2 ♘bc6 9.♘2f3



White makes sure he will have a knight on d4. The drawback is that Black just moves his f5-bishop and is ready to give it up for the f3-knight.

9...♗e4

The latest twist. To help our understanding of the position, it is worth seeing what is wrong with the old move.

9...♗g4 10.0–0 ♗xf3 11.♘xf3 has been played in the majority of cases, including one game in the high-profile Topalov – Kamsky match. It has been established that 11...♘f5 12.♗f4 ♗e7 13.♗d3 ♘h4 14.♘xh4 ♗xh4 15.♖g4 is good for White. A recent example 15...g6 16.c4 dxc4 17.♗xc4 h5 18.♖f3 0–0 19.♖ad1 ♖a5 20.♖e4± Volokitin – Ruck, Budva 2009.

This explains Topalov's interesting novelty 11...g6!? which worked well on its debut: 12.c4 ♗g7 13.cxd5 ♘xd5 14.♗c5 ♗f8 15.♖c1 ♖c8 16.♗xf8 ♘d4 17.♖d1 ♘xe2† 18.♖xe2 ♔xf8 19.♖ac1 ♔g7= Kamsky – Topalov, Sofia (6) 2009. Later, a new Russian star showed the right way for White: 12.♗f4 ♗g7 13.♗d3 0–0 14.c3 a6 15.♖e2± Jakovenko – Magem Badals, Clichy 2009. It is difficult for Black to come

up with a plan. In the game White quickly advanced his h-pawn and gained a dangerous kingside initiative.

10.0–0 ♘g6

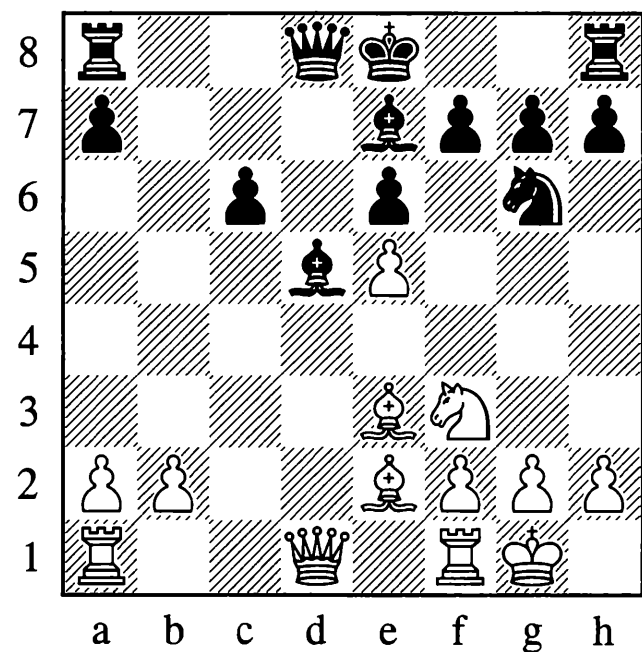
Black delays the capture on f3.

11.c4

Instead 11.♘xc6 bxc6 12.♘d4 forces the pace, but after 12...♘xe5 13.f3 ♗g6 14.f4 ♘d7 15.♘xc6 ♖c7 16.♘d4 ♗c5 17.c3 (or 17.c4 dxc4 18.♗xc4 0–0 19.♖c1 ♖b6) 17...0–0 18.♔h1 ♗e4 Black has no problems, Hracek – Postny, Sibenik 2008.

11.♗b5N is proposed by the computer; 11...♖c7 seems an adequate answer.

11...♗e7 12.♘xc6 bxc6 13.cxd5 ♗xd5!

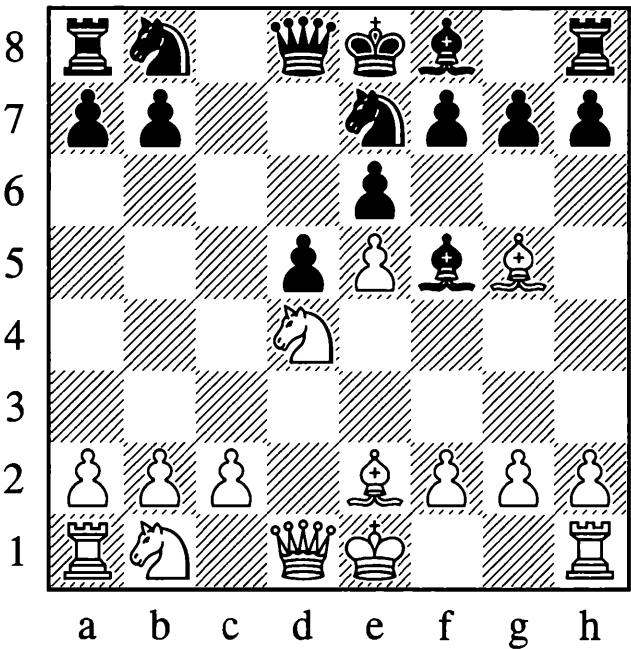


The strong bishop on d5 gives Black the upper hand.

14.g3 0–0 15.♗d4 ♖c7 16.♗c3 ♖fd8 17.♖a4 ♗c5 18.♖ac1 h6 19.♖c2 a5 20.a3 ♗b6 21.♖g4 a4 22.♖e1

This is Karjakin – Anand, Nice (rapid) 2009. Now 22...♗a5± would have been very strong. Black exchanges the important defender on c3, when e5 and b2 are vulnerable.

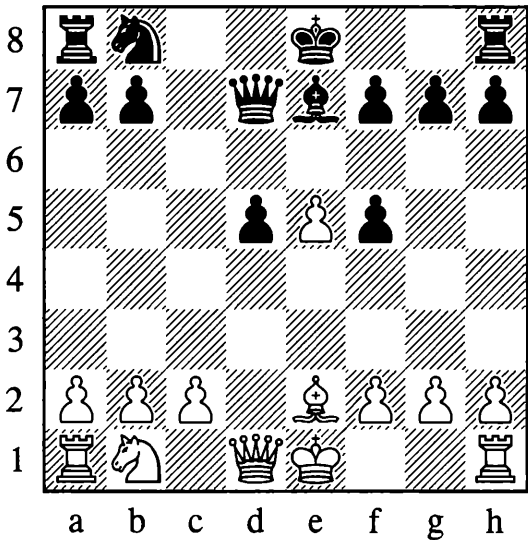
B3) 8.♔g5



This is another example of an early “tempo-loser” that is still full of venom. White pins the knight and threatens to take on f5. The obvious response is to move the queen, but where to?

8...♔a5†

Gaining a tempo with check. The seemingly anti-positional 8...♔d7 is actually a solid and playable alternative. After 9.♔xe7 ♔xe7 10.♔xf5 exf5:



Black’s pawn structure is shattered. A closer inspection reveals that e5 is just as weak as d5 and the opposite-coloured bishops also contribute to making the position level. That has been confirmed in several games. One recent example is: 11.♔d2 (if 11.♔f3 then 11...♔b5! is fine) 11...♔c6 12.♔f3 0–0 13.0–0

♔ad8 14.♔e1 ♔fe8 15.♔d2 ♔c5 16.♔b5 ♔c7 17.♔ad1 ♔b6 18.♔xc6 bxc6 19.c3 g6 20.h4 ♔f8 21.h5 c5= Nijboer – Postny, Spain 2008.

9.♔c3

White has to keep up a high speed as otherwise he has nothing:

9.♔d2 ♔xd2† 10.♔xd2 ♔g6 11.♔b5 ♔d7 is fine for Black. 12.c4 ♔bc6 13.♔f3 ♔e4! 14.♔d1 ♔xf3 15.♔xf3 ♔xe5 16.♔e2 f6 17.♔c1 a6 18.♔c3 ♔c6 19.cxd5† ♔xd5 And White had meagre compensation for the pawn in Morozevich – Galkin, Moscow 1998.

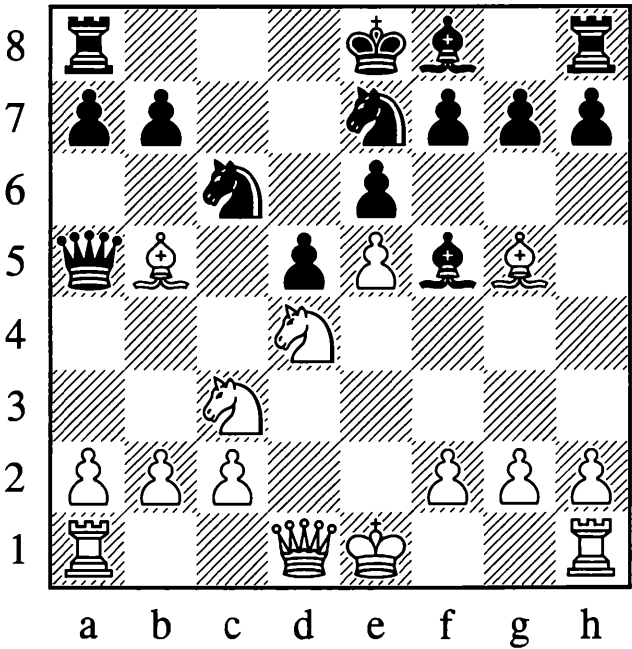
9.c3 looks too innocuous and Black just answers 9...♔bc6.

9...♔bc6

Normal development; we could say that Black is matching White’s pace.

Karpov & Podgaets only examine 9...♔g6, clearly overlooking the sharp 10.b4! when 10...♔xb4 11.♔db5 ♔a5 12.♔d2 ♔d8 13.♔d6† ♔d7 14.♔xb7 ♔c7 15.♔d6± was a disaster for Black in Volokitin – Ruck, Celje 2004. Retreating the queen with 10...♔b6 is no holiday either after 11.♔db5 with a strong initiative.

10.♔b5



Another aggressive bishop move pinning a dark knight, and another loss of tempo. If White continues like this then Black will one day catch up in development!

Very interesting is:

10.♘db5!?

White attempts to exploit the d6-square. This was tested in the French league by two Dutch grandmasters – this truly is globalization.

10...♘g6!

By attacking e5 Black ensures that the white knight won't be stable on d6. On the other hand this move takes away the bishop's last retreat square which means Black has to defend tactically if White tries to harvest with g2-g4.

11.a3

The tactical justification of Black's previous move appears after: 11.g4 ♘e4 12.f3 Seemingly trapping the bishop, but 12...d4! gains a new retreat. 13.♙xd4 ♙xd4 14.♚xd4 ♘c6 Black has good compensation for the pawn, as ...♘c5 is in the air and e5 is weak.

11...♘e7 12.♘xe7 ♙xe7!

Quickly mobilizing his forces.

13.b4

Once again 13.g4 is tempting, but: 13...♘xc2! 14.♚xc2 a6 15.♙d6 ♙gxe5 Now d6 is no longer such a safe place for a white knight. A possible continuation is 16.f4 ♙d4! 17.♚d1 ♙ec6 18.b4 ♙xb4 19.axb4 ♚xa1 and Black will have no material worries.

13...♚d8 14.♙d6 d4 15.♙cb5 ♙gxe5 16.0–0 a6 17.♙xb7 ♚b6 18.♙5d6 ♘g6 19.♙h1 ♚hb8 20.f4 ♙d7 21.♘f3 ♚xb7 22.♙xb7 ♚xb7

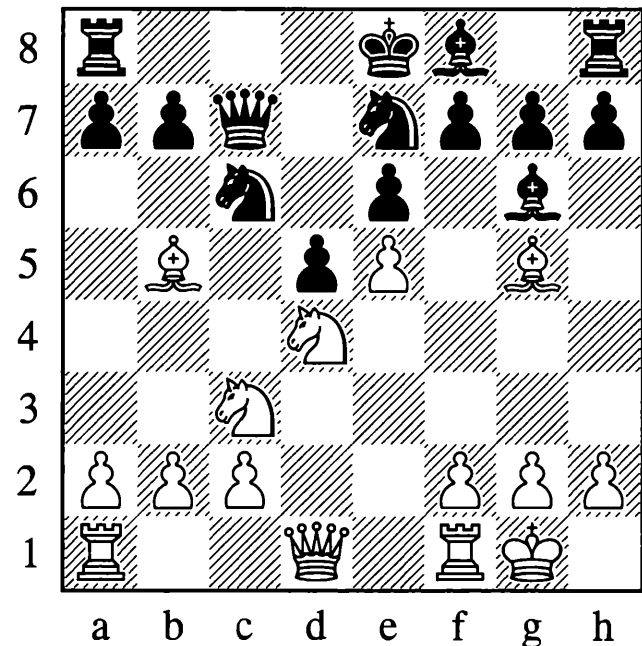
Nijboer – Stellwagen, Chalons en Champagne 2009.

10...♚c7

Natural and compact. In a correspondence game Black played 10...a6 11.♘xe7 axb5 and got away with it: 12.♘xf8 ♙xf8 13.♙xf5 b4!

14.♙e2 exf5 15.0–0 g6 16.♙f4 ♙g7 17.♚e1 d4 18.e6 ♚he8 19.♚d3 ♚e7= 20.h4 ♚ae8 21.h5 g5 22.h6† ♙xh6 23.♚h3† ♙g7 24.♙h5† ♙g6 25.♙f6 A nice try. 25...fxe6 26.♚h5† ½–½ Corbat – Korze, corr. 2007. White took the perpetual as 26.♙xe8 ♚xe8 could go wrong.

11.0–0 ♘g6



Black is solid and flexible at the same time. In practice he has quite easily foiled White's attempts.

12.♚e1

We should also consider a couple of alternatives:

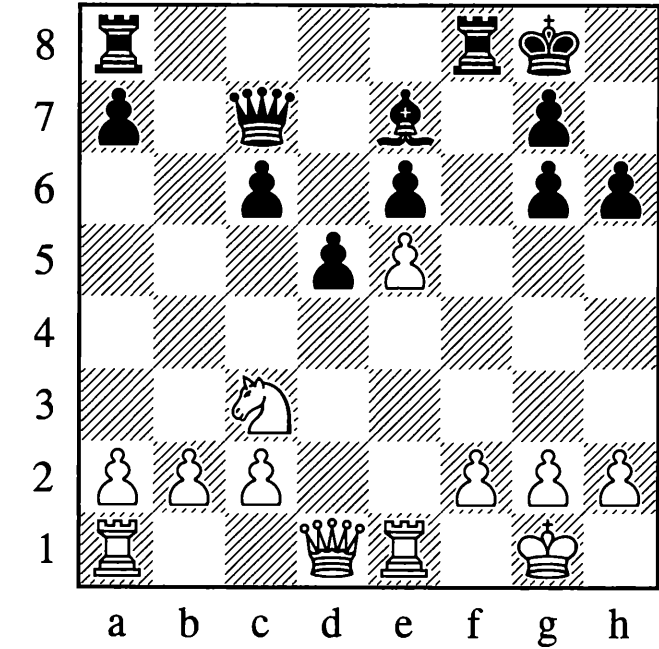
12.♚g4 ♙f5! This immediately solves all Black's problems. In Grayland – Brown, corr. 2008, White decided to go all-in with 13.♙xd5 ♚d7 14.♙xe6 but after 14...fxe6 15.♙f4 ♘f7 16.♚ad1 ♚c7 17.♙d5 exd5 18.♚xf5 ♘e7 19.e6 ♘g6 20.♚g4 0–0–0† he was a piece down.

12.♘a4 a6 (preventing ♙b5) 13.f4 b5 14.♙cxb5 (there was no way back because 14.♘b3 ♚b6 15.♙ce2 ♙f5 just loses) 14...axb5 15.♘xb5 This is Parligras – Holzapfel, Bad Wiessee 2007, and now I like 15...0–0–0!N 16.♙xc6 ♙xc6 17.♘xd8 ♘c5† 18.♙h1 ♚xd8† when Black's pieces are very active.

12...h6 13.♙xe7

If 13.♙h4 then 13...♘f5.

13...♙xe7 14.♘xc6 bxc6 15.♙d3 0-0!
16.♙xg6 fxg6



The open f-file gives Black the initiative.

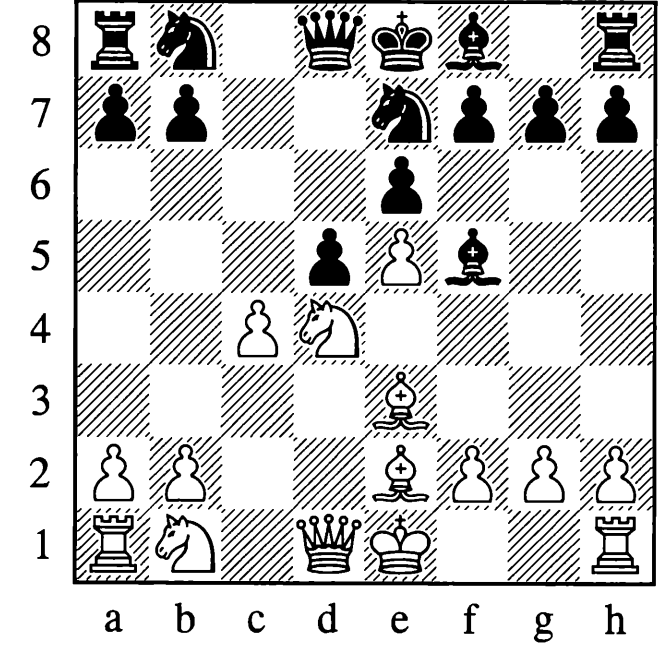
17.♘a4

If 17.♙g4 ♔h7! and 18.♙xe6 backfires after 18...♙c5 19.♙e2 ♙ae8 20.♙g4 ♙xe5+.

17...♙f5 18.♙g4 ♔h7 19.♙e2 ♙af8

Black was clearly better in Raffaele – Cuno, corr. 2002.

B4) 8.c4



The most dangerous. White seeks a confrontation in the centre and relies on his better development. Moves such as ♘c3, ♙a4 and castling to either side can quickly bring all White's pieces into the battle, so Black must step carefully.

8...♘bc6 9.♙a4

The most precise.

9.♘c3

This allows Black to simplify.

9...♘xd4 10.♙xd4 dxc4 11.♙a4+

Black equalizes easily after 11.♙xc4 ♘c6 12.♙b5 ♙e7.

11...♘c6 12.♙d1

White can also try 12.0-0-0 when 12...♙c8?! 13.g4 ♙g6 14.h4 h6 15.f4 ♙e7 16.f5 exf5 17.♘d5 gave White a strong initiative in Amonatov – Shimanov, Moscow 2010. Again 12...♙d3 13.♙xd3 cxd3 14.♙xd3 is the way to proceed and now Black must be precise. Not 14...♙c5? which loses to 15.♙xc5 ♙xd3 16.♙d1 ♙f5 17.♘b5. The right way, as indicated by GM Gawain Jones on ChessPublishing, is 14...♙g5+ when Black is fine, for instance 15.♙b1 ♙e7 followed by castling short.

12.♙f3 causes no problems at all after 12...♙d7.

12...♙d3! 13.♙xd3 cxd3 14.♙xd3

Or 14.♙e3 ♙b4 15.0-0 ♙xc3 16.bxc3 ♙d5+ Xie Jun – Chiburdanidze, Groningen 1997.

14...♙c5

Now this works, and wins material.

15.♘e4

Also no good is 15.♘e2 0-0 16.0-0 ♘xe5.

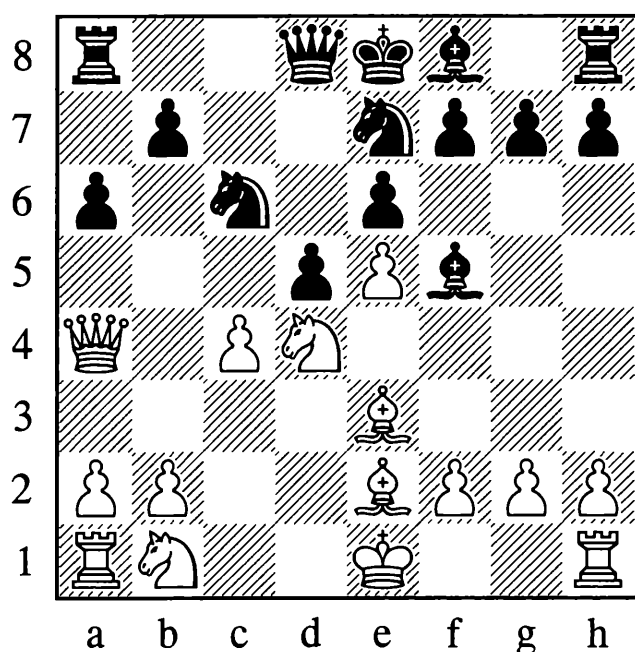
15...♙xd4 16.♘d6+ ♔f8 17.♙xd4 ♘xd4 18.♙xd4 ♙a5+ 19.♙e2

White is searching for compensation for the exchange. This was played by Topalov in a blindfold game against Anand, his rival for the chess crown, in the 2009 edition of the Amber tournament. Anand replied 19...♙e7

and the game was eventually drawn. A few years back an early version of the Fritz program had already shown the right way:
 19...♔g8! 20.h4 h5±

De Vreugt – Comp Fritz SSS, Rotterdam 2000.

9...a6



The most sophisticated move and the modern solution. In the aforementioned Gelfand – Karpov match, Karpov chose 9...dxc4 10.♖a3 ♔a5† 11.♔xa5 ♖xa5 and forced an ending. However with precise play White took the initiative: 12.♖ab5 ♖d5 13.♖xf5 exf5 14.♔d2 a6 (afterwards the move 14...♔b4 was thought to give Black better chances of equality) 15.♖d4 ♔b4 16.♖xf5 0-0 17.♔xb4 ♖xb4 18.0-0 b5 19.f4± In Gelfand – Karpov, Sanghi Nagar (3) 1995, White retained slight but nagging pressure in the endgame and Gelfand went on to win.

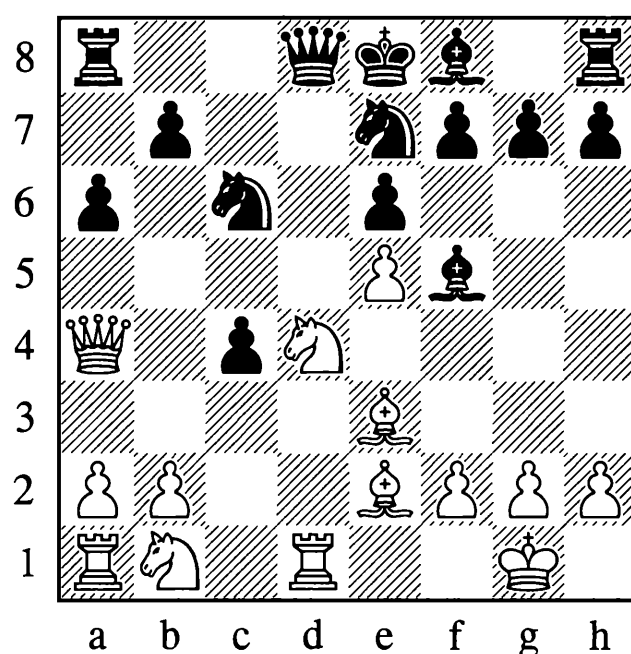
Even the simple 12.♖xc4 ♖xc4 13.♔xc4 gives White serious winning chances: 13...a6 14.f3 (14.♔c1 ♔e4) 14...♖g6 15.♖xf5 ♖xe5 16.♔b3 exf5 17.0-0-0 ♔e7 18.♔d5 ♖c6 19.♔xf5 0-0 20.♔d1 ♔f6 21.♔d7 b5 This is Svidler – Anand, Madrid 1998. Karpov & Podgaets propose 22.♔c5 ♖e5 23.♔dd5 ♔fe8 24.♔d2± when White is happy with his bishop pair.

After 9...a6 White chooses between **B41) 10.0-0**, **B42) 10.cxd5**, and the two most intriguing moves **B43) 10.♖a3** and **B44) 10.♖c3**. They will be examined in turn.

B41) 10.0-0

The least popular move. Getting the king to safety is always a high priority, but in this case it loses momentum. The position demands harder and more concrete action in the centre.

10...dxc4 11.♔d1



At least getting some benefit from having castled.

11.♔f3 is too feeble. A good response is 11...♔d7, but I also like 11...b5 12.♖xc6 bxa4 13.♖xd8 ♔xd8 14.♔d1 f6 15.♔xa4† ♖f7 and Black is absolutely fine.

11...♔d3!

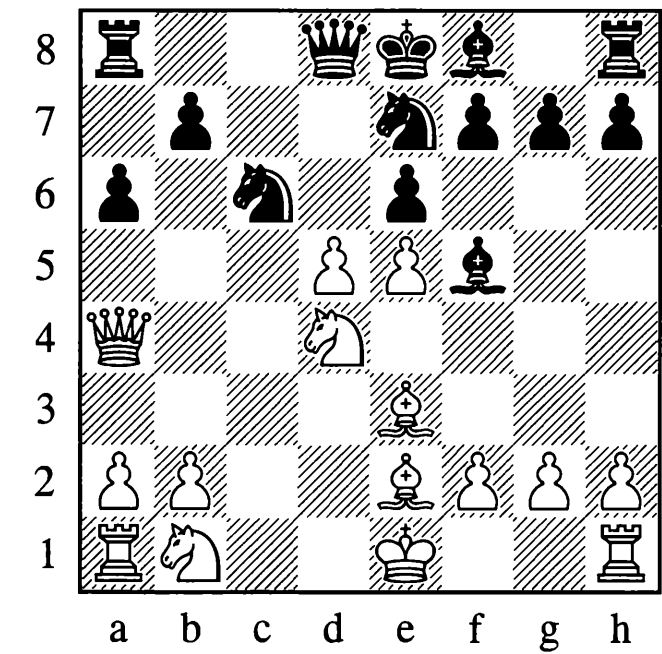
This solves all the problems. If instead 11...♔a5 then 12.♔xc4 could be annoying, when 12...♖xe5 13.♔b3 b5 14.♖d2 is clearly too dangerous because Black is lagging too far behind in development.

12.♔xd3 cxd3 13.♔xd3 ♔a5 14.♔xa5

He must take. 14.♖c3 ♜xa4 15.♖xa4 ♖xe5 16.♜b3 b5 was good for Black in Gorkavij – Lastin, Russia 2009.

14...♖xa5 15.♖d2 ♜c8=
Black has no problems.

B42) 10.cxd5



Very direct.

10...♖xd5

Bad is 10...♜xd5 11.♖c3 ♜a5 12.♖xf5 ♖xf5 13.♜xa5 ♖xa5 14.♙b6 ♖c6 15.f4± when in Svidler – Anand, Moscow 2002, White had positional control.

A much more interesting alternative is the intermediate move:

10...b5!? 11.♖xc6

Or 11.♜d1 ♖xd4 12.♙xd4 ♖xd5 gives Black easy play. 13.♖c3 ♖b4 14.♜c1? The rook thinks it is defending against ...♖c2† but 14...♖c2†! 15.♜xc2 ♙xc2 16.♜xc2 ♜xd4 and Black won in Trygstad – Solozhenkin, Gausdal 2001. Correct was 14.0–0=.

11...♖xc6 12.♜f4 ♖b4 13.0–0! ♖xd5

Not 13...♖c2? as 14.♖c3 ♖xa1 15.♜xa1 gives White overwhelming play for the exchange.

14.♜g3 ♖xe3 15.♜xe3 ♜c8 16.♜d1 ♜c7

17.a4

This is White’s only chance to get anything. 17...♙c5 18.♜g3 0–0 19.axb5 axb5 20.♖c3 ♙b6! 21.♙xb5 ♜fd8

With compensation for the pawn.

22.♙a4 ♜xd1† 23.♜xd1 ♜c4 24.h3 ♜b4 25.♙d7 ♜f8 26.♖d5 exd5 27.♙xf5 ♜xb2 28.♙d7 h5

A draw was agreed in Castillo – Dos Santos, corr. 2003. So all in all, 10...b5!? is enough to hold the balance.

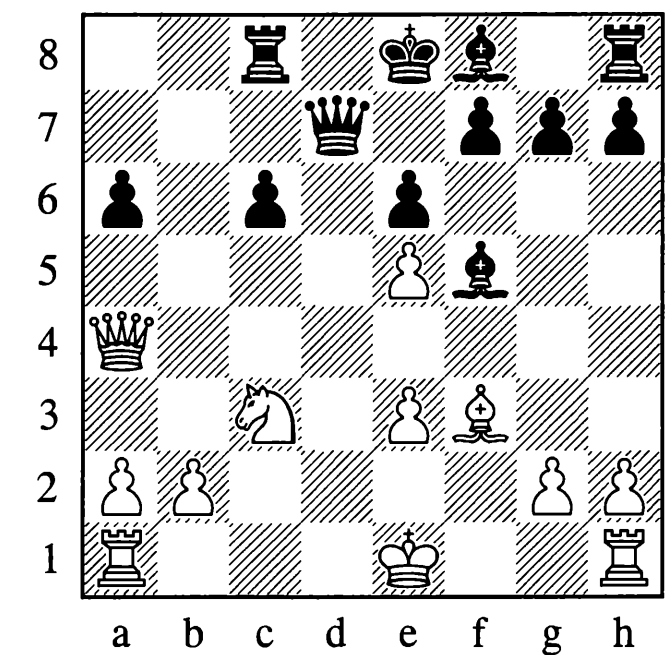
11.♖xc6 ♜d7 12.♖c3 ♖xe3

The text move leads to double-edged play. Duller and safer is 12...♖xc3 13.bxc3 ♜xc6 14.♜xc6† bxc6 and Black should be able to hold after something like 15.0–0 ♙a3. Winning chances however, there are none.

13.fxe3 bxc6

And certainly not 13...♜xc6 14.♙b5.

14.♙f3 ♜c8



15.♜xa6

The critical move; White snatches a pawn.

In the stem game Bologan instead tried to repair his pawn structure with: 15.♖e2 ♙c5 16.♖d4 (not 16.♜c1 ♙xe3 17.♙xc6 ♜xc6 18.♜xc6 ♜d2† 19.♖f1 0–0 and the white king

will soon go under) 16...♙xd4 17.exd4 c5! Black liberates himself. 18.♚xd7† ♔xd7 19.d5 c4 20.0–0–0 ♙d3 With an equal ending. In many variations the e5-pawn will be vulnerable and in fact Black eventually won in Bologan – Bareev, Ekaterinburg 2002.

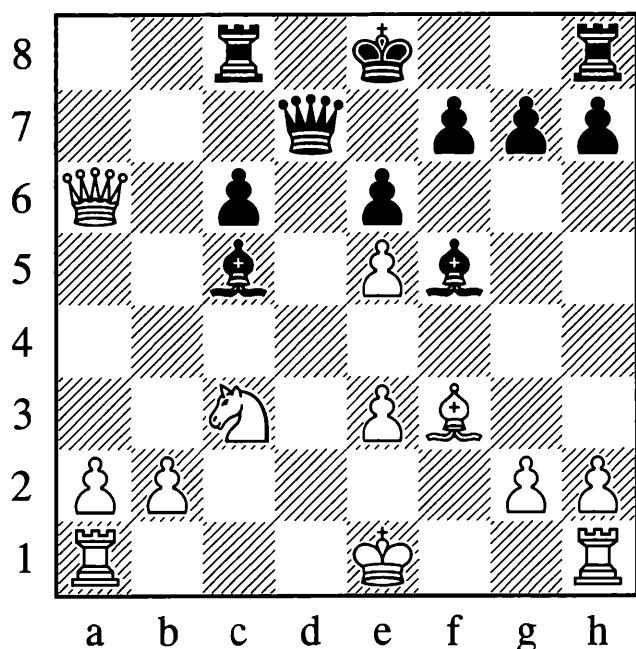
15...♙c5!

White's own pawns aren't that safe either. The position is highly unclear, but the following illustrative game seems to suggest that Black is at least okay.

Tseitlin – Erenburg

Ashdod 2004

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.e5 ♙f5 4.♘f3 e6 5.♙e2 c5 6.♙e3 cxd4 7.♘xd4 ♘e7 8.c4 ♘bc6 9.♚a4 a6 10.cxd5 ♘xd5 11.♘xc6 ♚d7 12.♘c3 ♘xe3 13.fxe3 bxc6 14.♙f3 ♖c8 15.♚xa6 ♙c5



16.♖d1

16.♔f2 ♚d2† 17.♚e2 is a thematic blunder as 17...♙xe3† simply wins.

16...♚c7

The e5-pawn is also weak.

17.♖d6

White follows a suggestion by Lukacs in ChessBase. 17.♔f2 0–0 18.♘a4 ♚xe5 19.♘xc5 ♚xc5 20.♖d2 gave chances to hold.

17...0–0!

Of course not 17...♙xd6 18.exd6 ♚d7 19.♘a4±.

18.♖xc6 ♚b8 19.♖xc8 ♖xc8

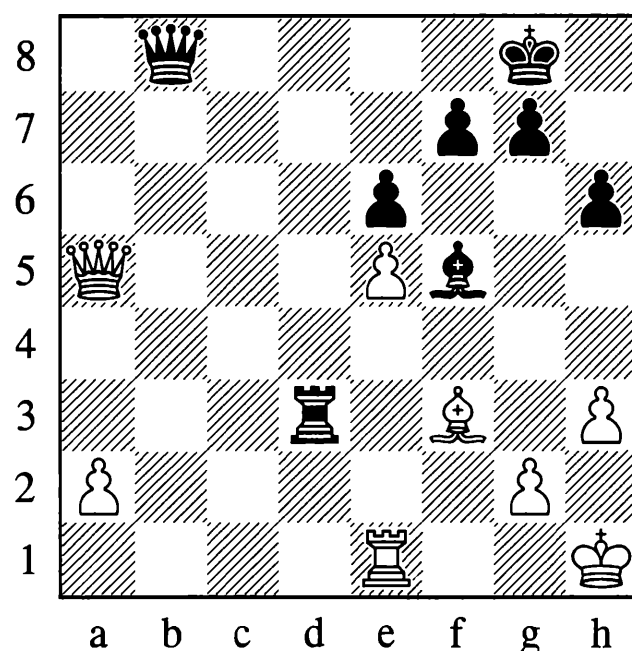
Black is better. White's pawns are hanging everywhere and the dark-squared bishop is powerful and unopposed.

20.0–0 ♙xe3† 21.♔h1 ♙d4 22.♖e1 ♙xc3

Black restores material equality.

There was another way and that was 22...♙xe5. White has 23.♖xe5 but Black counters with 23...♖xc3 and after 24.♖e1 ♖c2 25.b3 g5!? the rook on the seventh rank and his kingside initiative gives Black good winning chances.

23.bxc3 ♖xc3 24.♚a5 ♖d3 25.h3 h6†

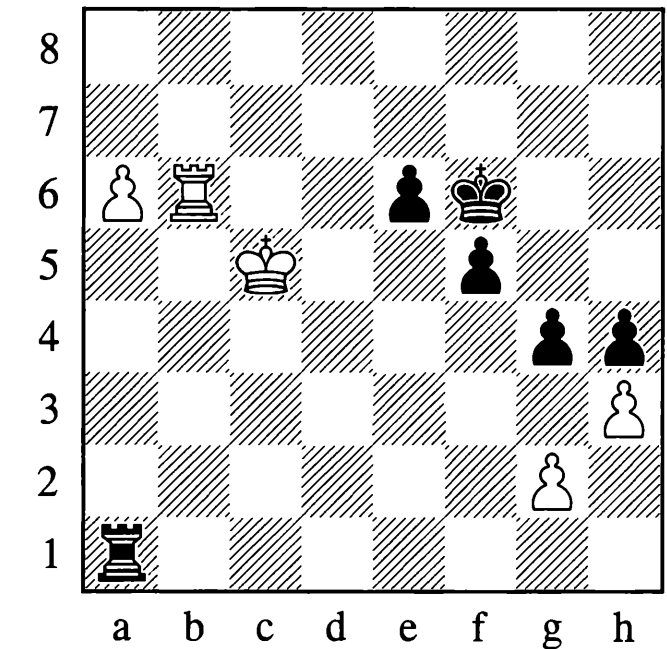


But also here Black has winning chances, as the e5-pawn is weak and the white pieces do not coordinate well.

26.a4 ♚b3 27.♚a8† ♔h7 28.♙e4 ♚c3 29.♙xf5† exf5 30.♖f1 ♚xe5†

Black simply has an extra pawn.

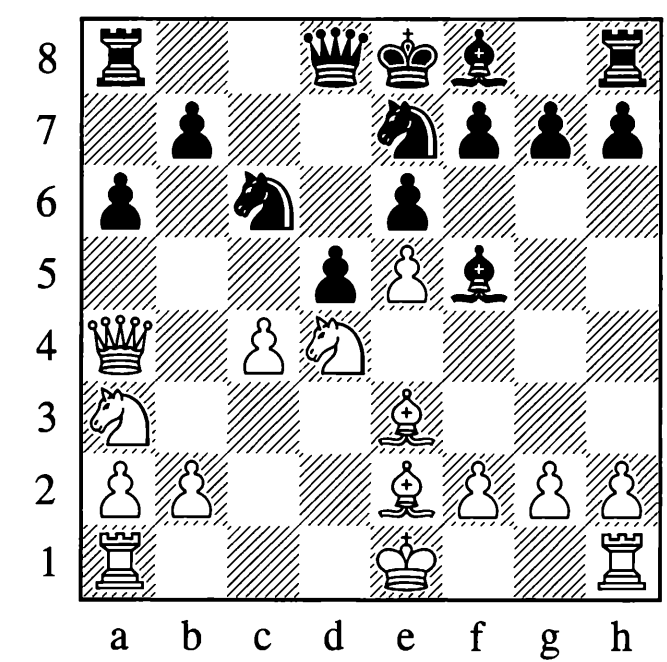
31.♖c8 ♖e6 32.♖xe6 fxe6 33.a5 ♜d6
34.♞b1 ♔g6 35.♞b6 ♜d1† 36.♕h2 ♕f6
37.♕g3 g5 38.♕f3 h5 39.a6 ♞a1 40.♕e3 h4
41.♕d4 g4 42.♕c5



The white king is getting close to helping the a-pawn, but the black pawns are running wild.

42...g3 43.♕b5 f4
0-1

B43) 10.♘a3



An oft-seen idea in the Short Variation. From a3 the knight can go to c4, hoping to land on d6 with devastating effect.

10...♖a5†
Black should not allow himself to be provoked, as 10...dxc4 11.♘xc4 b5 12.♘xb5 axb5 13.♖xb5 is horrible.

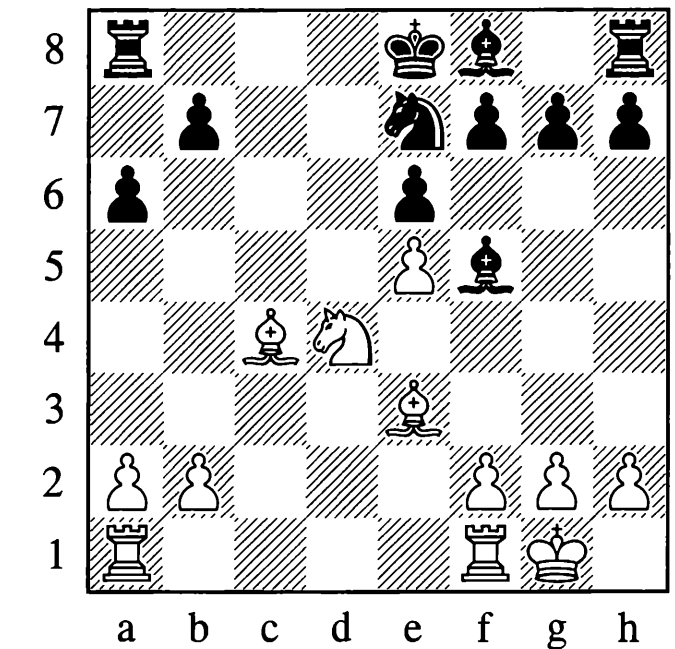
11.♖xa5 ♘xa5 12.0-0

White counts on his better development.

12.cxd5 ♘xd5 13.♘xf5 ♔b4†! This intermediate check solves all the problems (instead 13...exf5 14.♔d2 might be slightly better for White). 14.♔d2 ♔xd2† 15.♕xd2 exf5 Black is fine. 16.♘c4 ♘xc4† 17.♔xc4 0-0-0 And already it is White who should be careful, with his king in the centre, Lautenbach – Gonchigsuren, corr. 2003.

Or 12.♞c1 ♞c8 13.0-0 dxc4 is similar to the main line, and White seems unable to use the slight difference.

12...dxc4 13.♘xc4 ♘xc4 14.♔xc4



This is similar to the ending discussed in the notes to the Gelfand – Karpov game in the introduction to the 8.c4 line. And therefore we know the key move.

14...♔e4!

Transferring the bishop to the battle on the queenside.

15.♖ac1 ♘d5 16.♙e2

White should avoid the exchange as otherwise Black would get a pleasant position with his knight on d5.

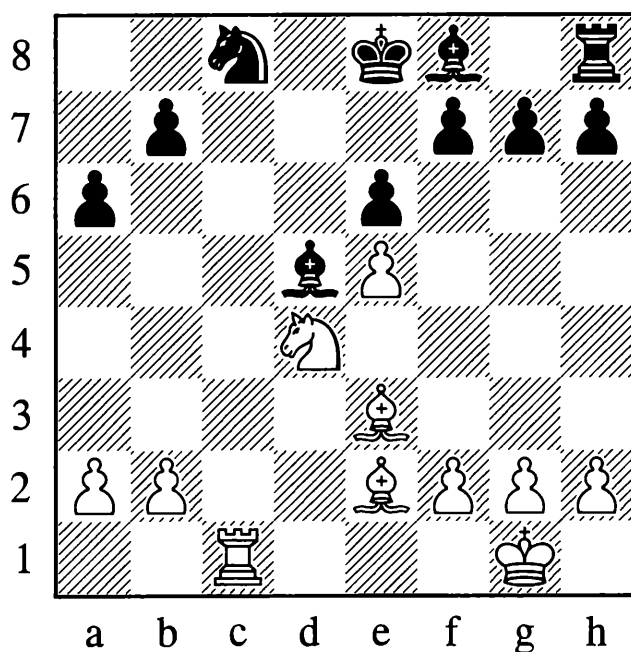
16...♖c8

Black is behind in development and so some accuracy is required. After the rook exchange the position is easy to defend.

17.♖xc8†

Svidler – Epishin, St Petersburg 1997, instead continued 17.f4 ♖xc1 18.♖xc1 ♔d7 19.a3 ♘c6=.

17...♘xc8 18.♖c1



18...♔d7!=

The most precise. After 18...♘e7 19.♙d2! White brilliantly uses his lead in development to gain a serious advantage. 19...♔d7 20.♙a5 ♘c6 21.♘xc6 ♙xc6 22.♖d1† ♙d5 23.♙f3± ♙e7 (if 23...♔c6 then 24.♖c1†) 24.♙xd5 exd5 25.♖xd5† ♔e6 26.♖d2 ♖c8 27.g3 f6 28.exf6 ♙xf6 29.♙b6 ♖c6 30.♙e3 ♖c1† 31.♔g2 b5 32.♔f3 1–0 Frericks – Nittel, corr. 2007.

19.♖d1

Now 19.♙d2 is answered by 19...♙e7.

19...♘e7 20.f4 ♔c7 21.♔f2 ♘c6 22.♘xc6

♙xc6 23.♖c1 ♔d7

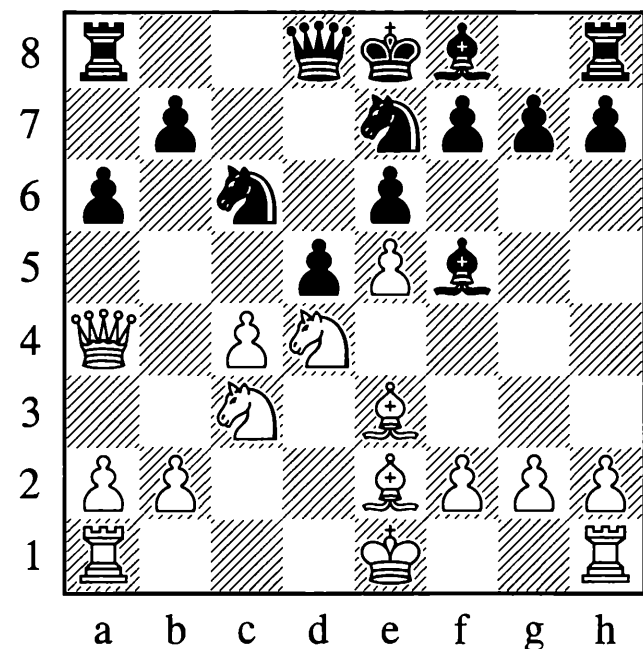
There is no reason to accept a weak pawn after 23...♙e7 24.♙f3.

24.♙h5 g6 25.♖d1† ♔c7 26.♙f3 ♙xf3 27.♔xf3 ♙e7 28.♔e4 ♖d8

½–½

We have followed Moll – Muck, corr. 2007.

B44) 10.♘c3



The mainline.

10...dxc4 11.0–0–0

The pressure along the d-file against the black queen is an important element of White's blooming initiative.

It is possible to create something similar just by moving the rook:

11.♖d1 ♙d3

A typical spanner in the works.

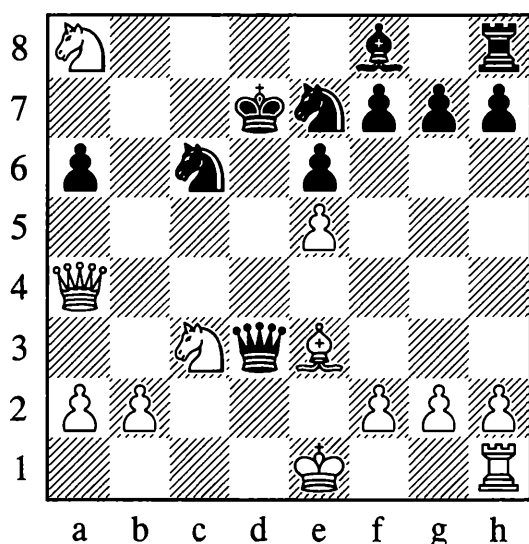
12.♙xd3 cxd3 13.♖xd3 b5

Now White must try:

14.♘dxb5

Svidler has played 14.♖b3 but after my new move 14...♘f5!N White hasn't even the faintest advantage, for instance: 15.0–0 ♘cxd4 16.♙xd4 ♘xd4 17.♖d1 ♙c5 18.♘e4 ♖d5 19.♘xc5 ♖xc5 20.♖xd4 ♖xe5

14...♖xd3 15.♘c7† ♔d7 16.♘xa8



16...d6 17.c4

Keeping the queens on is double-edged: 17.a3 dxe5 18.b3 e7 19.d7 Pott – Norman, corr. 2004, and now 19...h6!?N 20.b7 e6 21.xa6 g6 is a good option. 22.xd3+ dxd3+ 23.e2 dxb2=

17...dxe5 18.xd3+ dxd3+ 19.d2 de5!

Instead in Pott – Siger, corr. 2008, a draw was agreed after 19...dce5 20.d6+ e6, but White might be somewhat better after 21.f4.

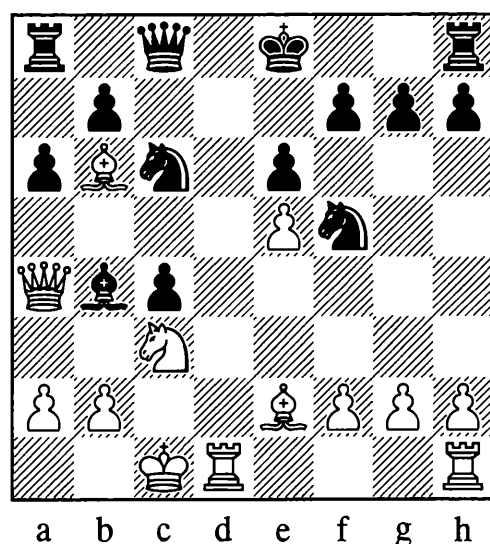
20.d1 e4 21.e2+ e7 22.d6

And now either 22...b8 or 22...d8 both seem fine.

11...a5!?

In this position 11...d3 is not the same. 12.d3 cxd3 13.xd3 a5 (the only move, as if 13...b5? 14.dxb5 xd3 15.d7+ d7 16.dxa8 and d1 next decides the issue) 14.b3! d4 This is Efimenko – Macieja, Plovdiv 2008, and now according to Macieja's analysis for ChessBase the most natural move 15.d2 was also very strong. He gives the convincing line: 15...ded5 16.b1 c8 17.c1 e7 18.a3 dxc3+ 19.xc3 xc3 20.xc3 d6 21.dxc6 xc3 22.bxc3 bxc6 23.b2± And the rook penetrates the black queenside.

Most people try 11...c8 but it is not a walk in the park, as Black quickly comes under serious pressure. Play continues: 12.dxf5 dxf5 13.e6! (tying Black up) 13...e6



This position has occurred a handful of times and I often wondered why White didn't win the queen with d8+. Of course Black gets some compensation, but not enough. Then, finally, a game appeared where White tried the obvious and won in style. 14.d8+ xd8 15.d8 xd8 16.a3 e7 (the alternative is 16...a5 17.f3 d4 18.xc6+ dxc6 but it does not change the verdict) 17.f3 d4 18.xc6+ dxc6 19.d1 0-0 20.xd8 xd8 21.xc4 d4 22.e2 g5+ 23.b1 f4 24.g3 xe5 25.f4 d6 26.h4± This is Caruana – Cossin, Rogaska Slatina 2009. Only White can win such a position and in the end the young Italian star managed to penetrate with his queen and take the point.

Another promising idea is 14.f4 xc3 15.bxc3 0-0 16.f3 dfe7 17.g3 slowly building up. Black had great difficulties escaping from the grip in Predojevic – Harikrishna, Sarajevo 2009. Probably even simpler is 17.xc4±.

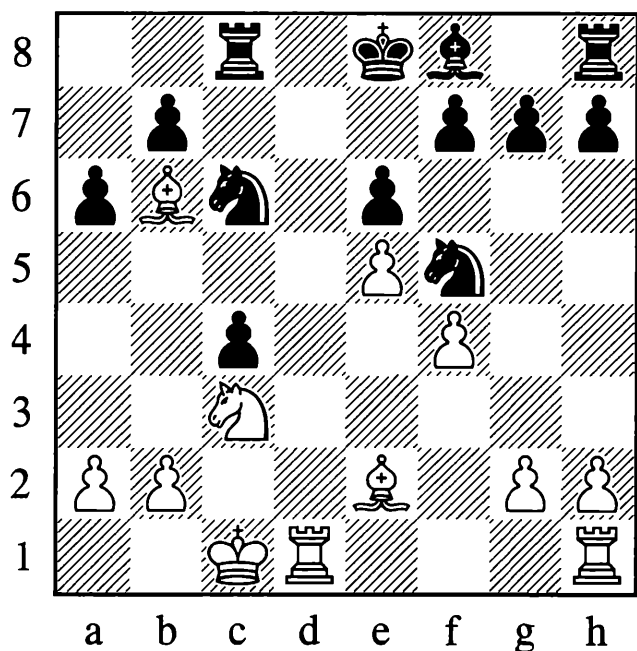
12...xa5

12.dxf5 dxf5 13.xa5 is another way to Rome.

12...dxa5 13.dxf5 dxf5 14.e6

Once again we see this well-known idea of completely tying Black up. Here, though, there is a small but significant difference – the queens have been exchanged.

14...d6 15.f4 c8

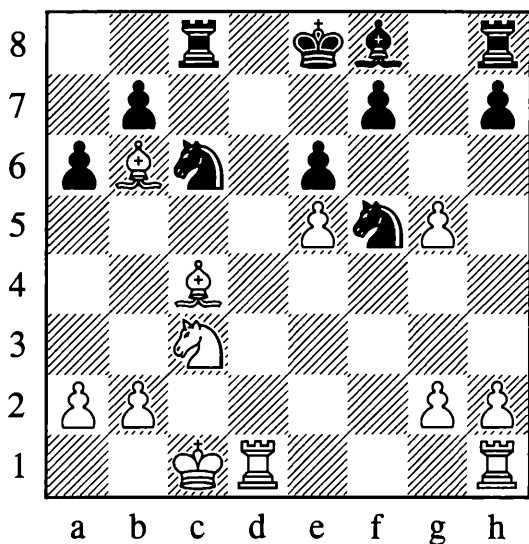


An important position. The first impression is that it is very good for White, who apparently has a clear positional advantage. He can take back the pawn on c4, and harass the only good black piece, the knight on f5, with g2-g4 or just build up the pressure by doubling rooks on the d-file. Having said that, it is vital to remember that things are not always what they seem, and we must guard against judging superficially. And in this particular case Black's only way of creating some counterplay is enough to keep the balance. I am of course speaking about the thrust ...g7-g5.

16.g4

The most direct, but other moves have also been tested:

16.♟xc4 g5 (16...♟b4 is also legal and may transpose to the 17...♟b4 option below) 17.fxg5 (instead 17.g4 ♞h4 transposes to the main line)

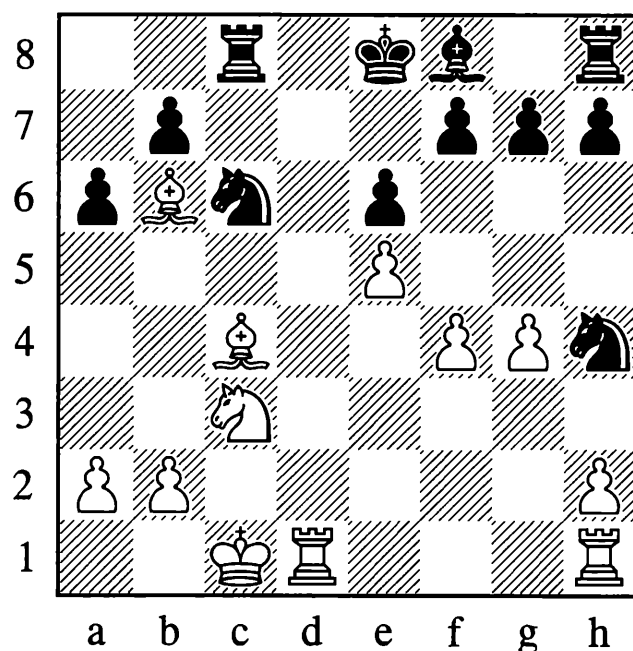


17...♞xe5 18.♟b3 ♟e7 19.h4 h6 20.♞b1 ♟c5 21.♞he1 ♟xb6 22.♞xe5 ♞d4 23.g6 0-0 24.gxf7† ♞xf7 was unclear, but okay for Black in Ganguly – Le Quang Liem, Kolkata 2009.

16.♟f3 ♟e7 17.♞d2 g5 18.g3 gxf4 19.gxf4 ♞h4 20.♟e4 ♞g8 21.♞b1 ♞g4 22.♞f1 ♞g6 23.f5 ♞gxe5 24.fxe6 fxe6 25.♟xh7 ♞d7 26.♟e3 b5 And Black had consolidated his extra pawn, though the bishops gave White decent compensation, Leko – Anand, Miskolc (rapid) 2009.

16.♞d2 ♟e7 17.♟f3 is another path to the above Leko – Anand position.

16...♞h4 17.♟xc4



17...g5!

You probably guessed this move was coming. Chess is easy if you know what to look for, isn't it? However, precision is always demanded: in the following game Black knew what she was looking for, but still got it all messed up. 17...♟e7 18.♟b3 g5 Very thematic, but White has a counter. 19.f5! ♞xe5 20.fxe6 fxe6 21.♟d4 ♞hf3 22.♟xe6 ♞d8 This is Kosteniuk – Ushenina, Nalchik 2008, and now 23.♟xe5 was strong. The opposite-coloured bishops favour White after 23...♞xe5 24.♞xd8† ♞xd8 25.♞d1† with a strong initiative.

For those who want a quieter life, there is 17...♖b4!? as mentioned by John Watson on ChessPublishing. Black has various possibilities depending on how White responds – ...♙xc3, ...g7-g5 or even ... ♙a5 to dig out the annoying bishop on b6. Over-the-board, this is unexplored territory. One sample variation (just to show another way of playing the position) is 18.♞he1 ♙a5 19.♙xa5 ♞xa5 20.♙d3 h5!? and Black is okay – his king may soon find a pleasant home on e7.

Still, my vote goes for the bold 17...g5.

18.fxg5

You wouldn't believe that it is still an option to advance with:

18.f5

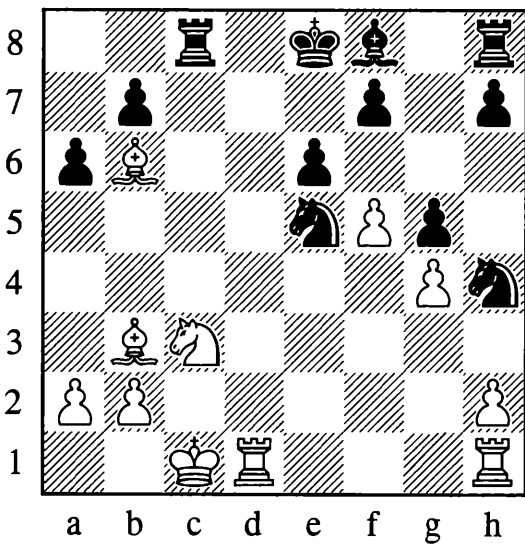
Because after:

18...♞xe5

The bishop is hanging. However, White plays:

19.♙b3

Very unfairly, this gives White good compensation and that is actually quite annoying. To strengthen Black's case, I have come up with a new idea in this critical position:



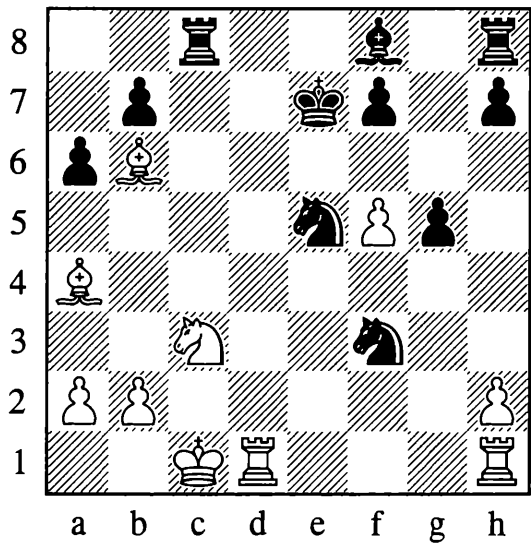
19...exf5!N

19...♙c5 has been tried a couple of times, and it also gives White a wide choice. One of White's forcing options is: 20.♙a4+ ♞e7 21.f6+ ♞xf6 22.♞e4+ ♞g7 23.♞xc5 ♞c4

(This is the first moment since move 19 when Black has a choice. Instead 23...♞xc5† was interesting. For example, after 24.♙xc5 ♞c8 25.♞b1 ♞xc5 26.h3 Black's two pawns offer compensation for the exchange. In general, Black must avoid exchanging rooks, as then his queenside would be vulnerable.) 24.♙a7 b6 25.♞xa6 ♞e3†? (Black had to try 25...♞e5†! 26. ♞b1 ♞a8 when “messy” is the honest verdict. The final result is still to be decided.) 26.♞b1 ♞xd1 27.♞xd1± In Caruana – Arutinian, Croatia 2010, White's three minor pieces were oddly lined up on the a-file, but they are safe and strong.

Returning to 19...exf5, one possibility is:

20.♙a4+ ♞e7 21.gxf5 ♞hf3∞



Now White can win an exchange with:

22.♙d8† ♞xd8 23.f6+ ♞xf6 24.♞xd8

But then Black plays:

24...g4

Although all three results are possible, Black is perhaps beginning to get the upper hand.

Many of the positions in the lines above are reminiscent of the exchange-down endings that Black occasionally reaches in the Sicilian Dragon. Black's kingside pawns roll forward, while White tries to create a passed pawn on the queenside. The game is traditionally decided by a single tempo thirty moves later. Excellent! However, if you are an old-fashioned dull Caro player, then remember that 17...♖b4 avoids this extravaganza.

18...♖xe5 19.♙e2

Conclusion

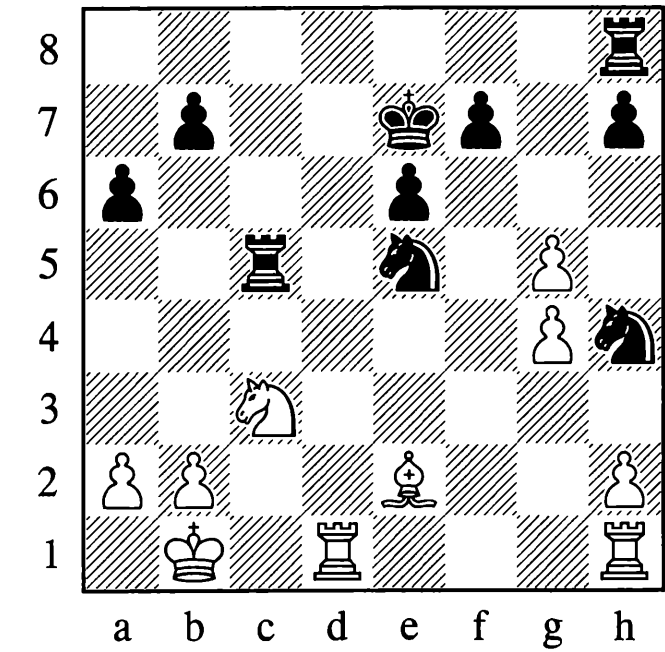
The popular Short Variation is very complicated. So far Black seems to hold in all the critical lines, as his solid structure is not so easy to crack. We answer 5.♙e2 with the active 5...c5 when 6.0-0 ♖c6 7.c3 cxd4 8.cxd4 ♖ge7 is flexible and solid. Often Black then continues with ...♖c8 followed by ...♙e7, ...♖b6 and ...0-0 with a good game.

The mainline is 6.♙e3 cxd4 7.♖xd4 ♖e7. Then 8.0-0 is too quiet to pose any problems. Instead the most dangerous line is 8.c4, when after 8...♖bc6 9.♙a4 a6 10.♖c3 dxc4 11.0-0-0 I think Black should try 11...♙a5!? 12.♙xa5 ♖xa5 13.♖xf5 ♖xf5 14.♙b6 ♖c6 15.f4 ♖c8 with an unclear ending where the possibility of playing ...g7-g5 gives Black enough counterplay.

19...♙c5!

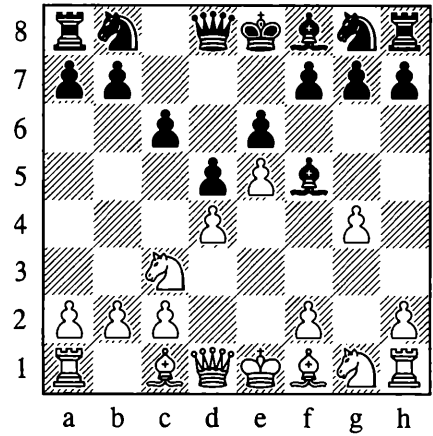
Instead 19...♙e7 hits g5, but after 20.♙d4! ♙xg5† 21.♖b1 ♖hg6 22.h4! the price is *not* right: 22...♙f6 23.♖e4 ♙g7 24.h5+–

20.♙xc5 ♖xc5 21.♖b1 ♖e7=



Black has equal chances in an interestingly asymmetrical position.

Chapter 13



Advance Variation

Shirov Variation

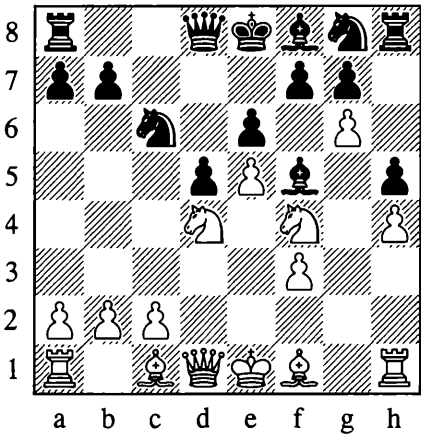
Variation Index

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.e5 ♖f5

4.♘c3 e6 5.g4 ♙g6 6.♘ge2 c5

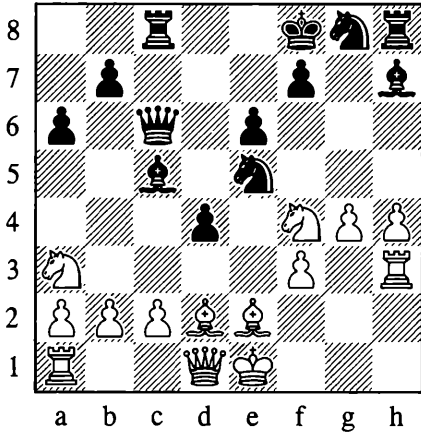
A) 7.h4 h5 8.♘f4 ♙h7 9.♘xh5 ♘c6 10.dxc5 ♙xc5	139
A1) 11.♘xg7†	140
A2) 11.♙b5	141
A3) 11.♙g2	143
B) 7.♙e3 ♘c6 8.dxc5 h5	144
B1) 9.♘f4	145
B2) 9.♘d4	146

A) note to 9.♘xh5



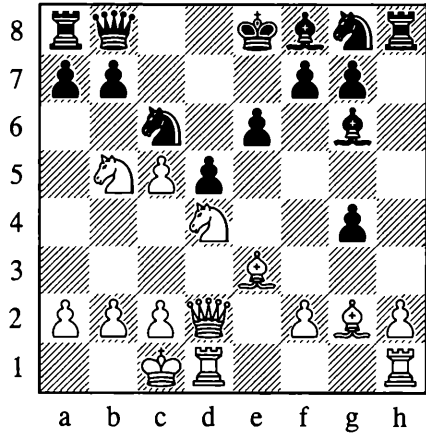
13...♘ge7!N

A1) after 19.♙d2



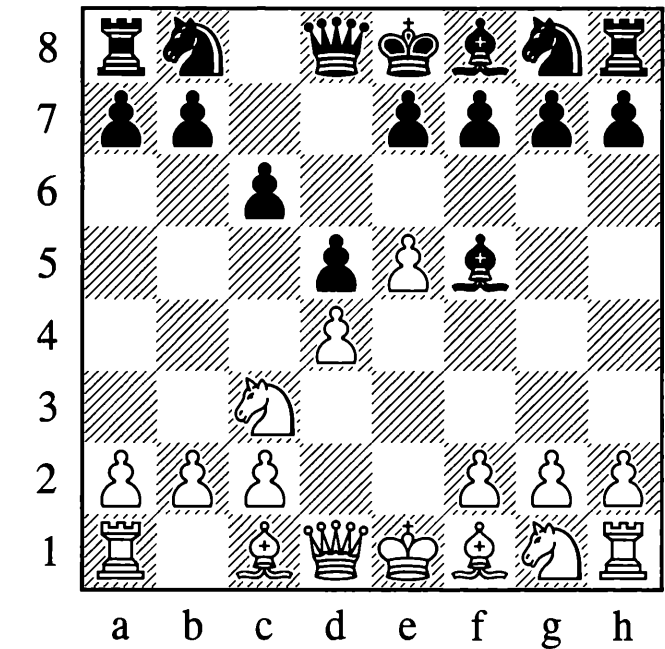
19...♘f6!N

B2) note to 10.f4



13...♘f6!N

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.e5 ♖f5 4.♘c3



The extremely sharp Shirov Variation is by far the wildest and most complex answer to the Caro. Back in the 1980s the Greek theoretician Kotronias wrote the influential book *Beating the Caro-Kann*, where he promoted this dangerous system. White's idea is opportunistic: he waits for Black to play ...e7-e6 and then launches the pawns on the kingside with g2-g4 and h2-h4 harassing the black bishop and developing a serious initiative.

This uncompromising style appealed to attacking players and the tactical wizard Alexei Shirov quickly became the system's leading exponent. I have chosen to name the variation after the Latvian-born genius.

Black has no safe way to avoid the complications, so we might as well welcome them. After all, we play the Caro-Kann to fight! And Black has good reason to enter this variation with confidence, because he has a profound defence available that gives him a good share of the play. White's all-or-nothing approach dramatically increases Black's winning chances!

4...e6 5.g4

Consistent. The anti-positional 5.♙d3 ♙xd3 6.♚xd3 is no threat to Black, who gets a fine game after, for instance, 6...♘d7 7.♘f3 ♘e7

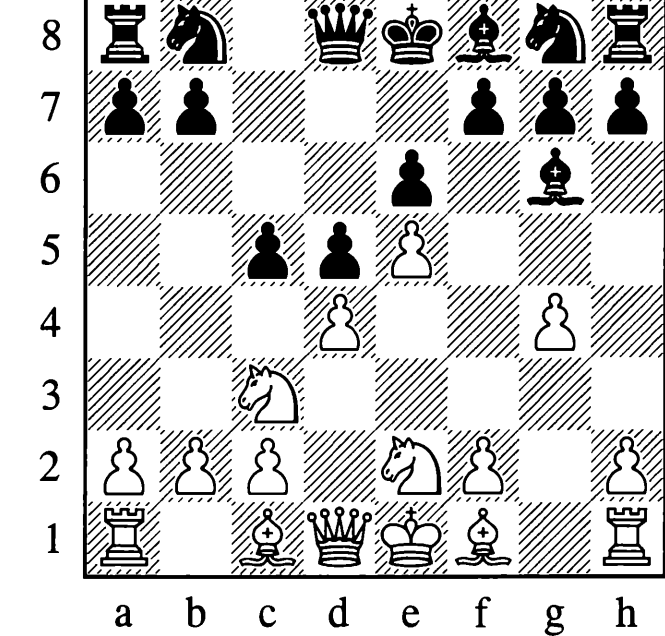
8.0-0 ♘g6 9.♘e2 ♙e7. Black's development is nearly complete and ...c6-c5 is always in the air.

If instead 5.♘f3 then a good waiting move is 5...♘d7 to see what White intends.

5...♙g6 6.♘ge2

White must show some flexibility. The immediate 6.h4 is certainly direct, but it is premature, which Black can highlight with 6...h5! when White loses control of the light squares. A move such as 7.g5 would close the kingside and end all White's aspirations of an offensive there. Furthermore, the black bishop or a knight could use the great square on f5 forever.

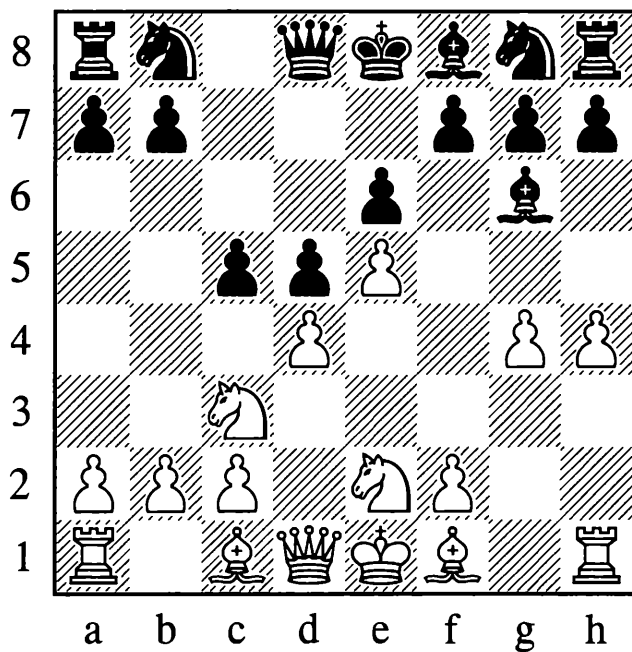
6...c5



Classical chess strategy – a flank operation is countered in the centre. Black has experimented with many other moves, such as 6...f6 or 6...♘e7, but has always come running back to the most logical move 6...c5. If it works it is good! And we will soon find out that it does work.

After 6...c5 the play divides – White can continue his one-eyed strategy with A) 7.h4 or try to play on the whole board with B) 7.♙e3.

A) 7.h4



7...h5

It's all about structure. Black fights not only for the life of his strong bishop but also for the important light squares and the initiative. The move 7...h5 is actually a deep pawn sacrifice.

8.♖f4 ♕h7

The point – the bishop is more important than the pawn. Moves such as 8...♖c6 or 8...cxd4 are playable, but why allow ♖xg6?

9.♖xh5

He must take the bait, as the alternative is unappealing:

9.g5

This surrenders control of the key f5-square. 9...cxd4 10.♖b5 ♕e4 11.f3 ♕f5 12.♖xd4 12.g6 ♖c6 13.♖xd4 was Zhang Pengxiang – Bologan, Poikovsky 2007, when 13...♖ge7!N 14.gxf7† ♖xf7 already places White in some difficulty. Better is 14.♕b5 transposing below.

12...♖e7

And Black is okay, as has been confirmed in several games:

13.♖xf5 ♖xf5 14.♕d3 g6 15.♕xf5 gxf5 is nothing for White because g5-g6 doesn't work:

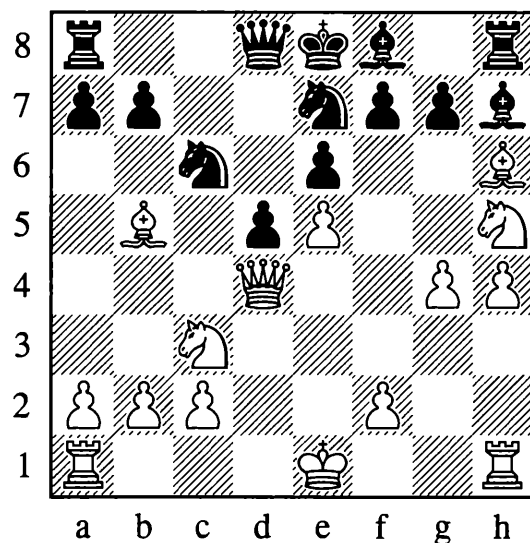
16.g6 ♖c6 17.gxf7† ♖xf7 18.♖d3 ♕e7 In Engstrom – Verneris, Sweden 1998, h4 was dropping.

13.c4 dxc4 14.♕xc4 ♖bc6 15.♕b5 ♖b6 16.♕e3 0–0–0 And it transpires that White wasn't strong enough to deal with opening the centre. 17.♖xf5 ♖xd1† 18.♖xd1 ♖c7 19.♖d6† ♖b8 In David – Fridman, Liverpool 2007, the queen was dominant. Now 20.♖xf7 ♖a5† 21.♖f2 ♖xb5 22.♖xh8 ♖f5 gives Black a winning initiative.

13.♕b5† ♖bc6 14.g6!? The only way forward. 14...♖c7 Cool defending; White cannot maintain the pressure. 15.♕xc6† ♖xc6 16.♖xc6 bxc6 17.gxf7† ♖xf7 18.♖e2 ♕e7 19.♖f1 c5† Kotronias – Arlandi, Yerevan (ol) 1996.

9...♖c6

For a while the main line was the spectacular 9...cxd4 10.♖xd4 ♖c6 11.♕b5 ♖ge7 12.♕h6:



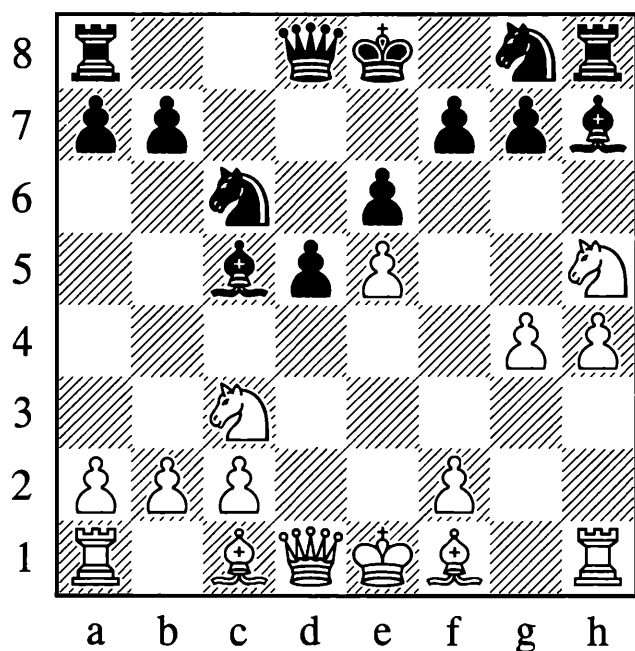
White's play certainly looks threatening, however with a few precise moves Black untangles. 12...♖g8 13.0–0–0 a6 14.♕xc6† ♖xc6 15.♖f4 ♖a5 And even takes over the initiative. Here is a recent example of his potential: 16.♖b1 ♖b4 17.♖d2 ♖c8 18.a3 ♖xc2! 19.♖xc2 ♖xc3 20.bxc3 ♖xc3 21.♖c1 ♖b3† 22.♖b2 ♕xc2† 23.♖a1 ♖d7 Black was winning in Holmstrom – Feldborg, corr. 2005.

Later White switched to 10.♘b5 ♘c6 11.♘xd4 ♘ge7 and now Grischuk's 12.c3 has scored well, although the position remains unclear. I recommend keeping the tension for one more move with 9...♘c6.

10.dxc5

Instead 10.♙b5 cxd4 11.♚xd4 ♘ge7 heads back to the last note (with Black having avoided the possibility of 10.♘b5). Here, instead of 12.♙h6, also possible is 12.♙g5 but 12...a6 13.♙xc6† ♘xc6 14.♚f4 ♚a5 is again very strong. White can hide the king on the other side with 15.0–0, but then Black restores material equality with 15...♙xc2 and has the better prospects. For example, 16.♚fe1 ♙g6 17.♘g3 and now 17...♚b4!N 18.h5 ♙h7 19.♚xb4 ♘xb4† with good play on the light squares.

10...♙xc5

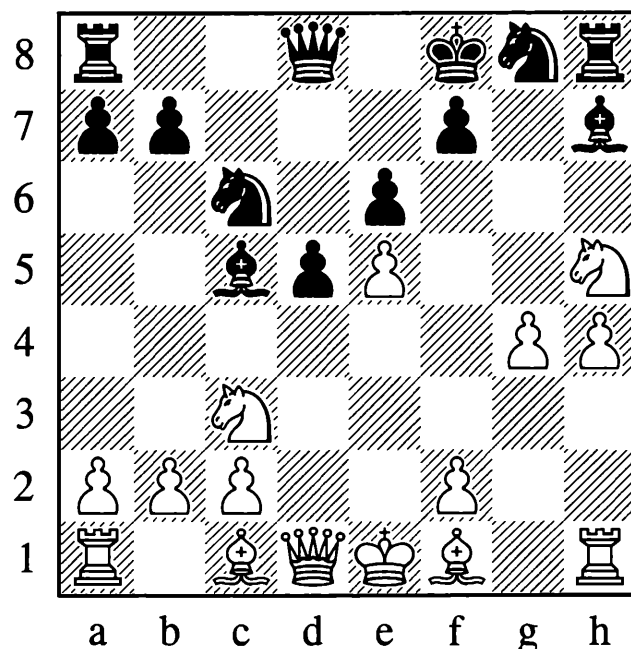


Again we choose the active solution; Black is willing to sacrifice the g7-pawn for quick development. Play now diverges. First we must see what happens after A1) 11.♘xg7†. The most common move is A2) 11.♙b5 but perhaps the most challenging option is the flexible A3) 11.♙g2.

Before all that, there is a minor option to scan and dismiss: 11.♙d3 ♙xd3 12.♚xd3 g6

13.♘g3 ♚xh4 14.♚xh4 ♚xh4 15.♚b5 ♙b6† This was simply bad for White in Nataf – P.H. Nielsen, Esbjerg 2001.

A1) 11.♘xg7† ♘f8 12.♘h5



12...d4

Black takes the initiative.

13.♘b5 ♚d5

Strong centralization. Also fine is: 13...a6 14.♘a3 ♙xa3 15.bxa3 ♚a5† 16.♙d2 ♚xe5† 17.♙e2 ♙xc2! 18.♚xc2 d3 19.♙c3 dxc2 20.♙xe5 ♘xe5 21.♚c1 ♘h6 22.f3 ♚c8 23.♘d2 ♘f5! This saves the day. 24.gxf5 ♚xh5 25.fxe6 ♘g6 26.♚xc2 ♚xc2† 27.♘xc2 fxe6= 28.♚b1 ½–½ Shnyrev – Stankevicius, corr. 2002.

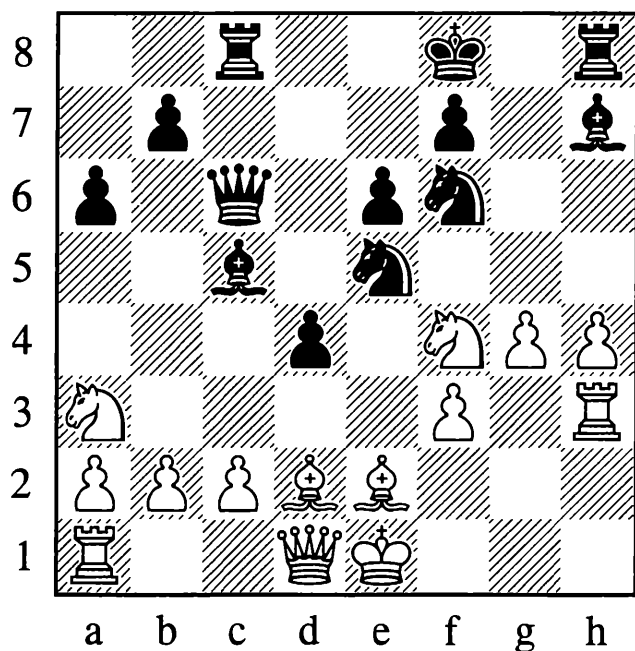
14.♚h3 a6 15.♘a3 ♘xe5

With good play for the pawn. The white pieces are uncoordinated, which is nicely symbolized by the two knights on the rim far from each other. The only practical example from this position continued:

16.♘f4 ♚e4† 17.♙e2 ♚c8 18.f3 ♚c6 19.♙d2

This is Hyldkrog – Napalkov, corr. 2003, and now I like:

19...♘f6!N



Black's pieces are very active and White faces many tactical dangers, as can be seen in the following sample variation.

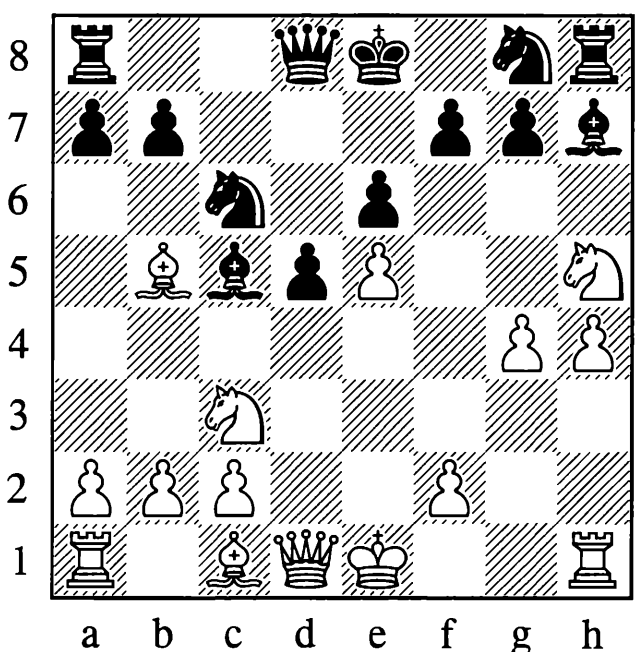
20. ♖c4

20. ♖d3 is safer, but still promising for Black after 20... ♙xd3 21. cxd3 ♘d5. There is a big hole on e3.

20... ♙xc4 21. ♙xc4 ♙e7 22. b3 b5 23. ♙d3 e5! 24. ♙e2 ♙xg4! ♠ 25. fxc4 ♙g2

And Black is winning.

A2) 11. ♙b5



11... ♙c7 12. ♙xc6 ♠

The correct move order. 12. ♙f4? was played in Kobalia – Maciejka, Chalkidiki 2002, and

now 12... d4! ♠ would have exploited the unfortunate position of the bishop on b5.

12... ♙xc6 13. ♙f3 0-0-0

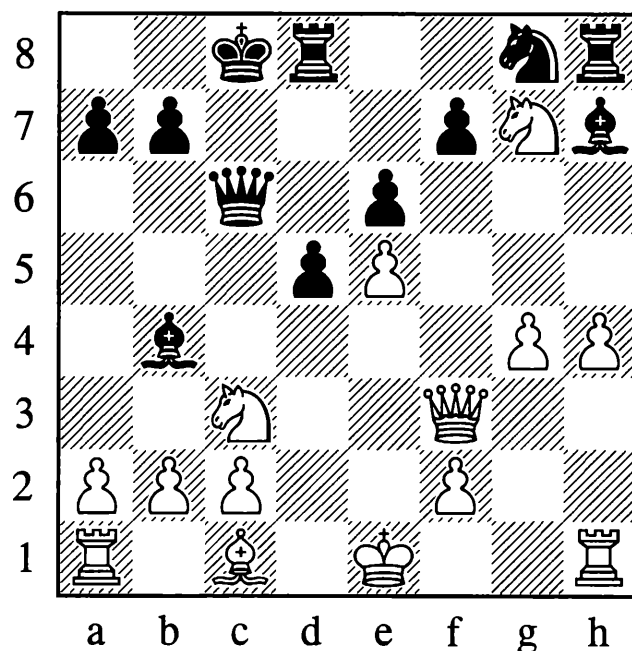
The sharpest. Black is prepared to sacrifice a pawn for quick development. 13... ♙f8 has also been tried, but we would rather not play that.

In the most recent top-level game featuring this line, Cheparinov – Bareev, Amsterdam 2008, Black forced an ending with 13... d4 14. ♙xc6 ♠ bxc6 15. ♙xg7 ♠ ♙f8 16. ♙a4 ♙e7 17. ♙h5 ♙xc2 18. b3 and here he could perhaps have solved his problems with a little tactical finesse: 18... ♙e4! And now 19. ♙h3 ♙f5! or 19. ♙g1 ♙g6.

14. ♙xg7

If 14. ♙g5 then 14... ♙e4! 15. ♙xe4 dxe4 spoils White's fun. 16. ♙h3 (not 16. ♙xf7 ♙h6 17. ♙xh6 ♙hf8 and Black wins) 16... ♙e7 17. ♙e3 f6 18. ♙f4 ♙b4 ♠ 19. c3 ♙c5 20. ♙e2 e3! Black takes over. 21. f3 f5! 22. ♙xe3 fxc4 23. ♙xc5 gxf3 24. ♙f2 ♙xh5 ♠ Michalek – Kregelin, corr. 2007.

14... ♙b4!?



A new try that revitalizes the line; Black pins the knight and threatens ...d5-d4.

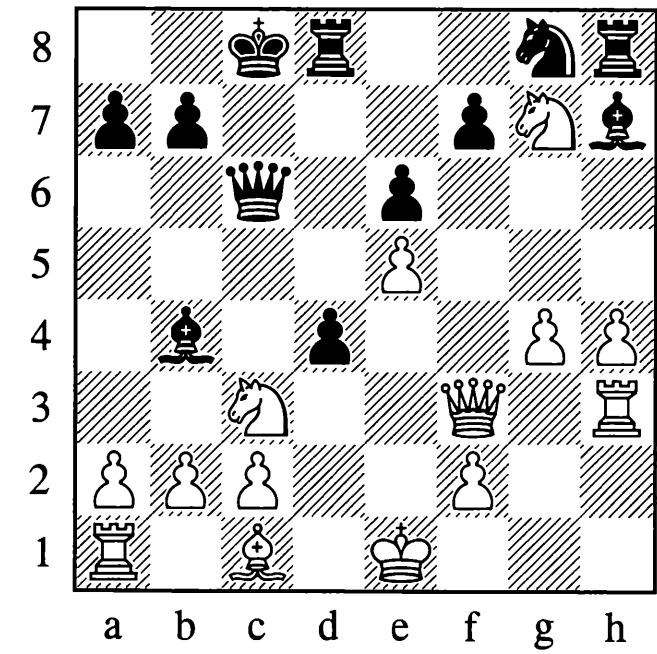
In the stem game Gelfand played 14...d4 15.♞xc6† bxc6 16.♟a4 ♞f8 17.♟h5 ♞xc2 18.b3 ♞d5. This looked fine, but after 19.♞f4 ♞b4† 20.♟e2 d3† 21.♟f3 d2 22.♞ad1! everything was a mess, which is definitely the wrong kind of position to have against Topalov. Black was completely outplayed and, although it is possible to find improvements, the overall impression is that White's big pawn majority on the kingside gives him the better chances. 22...♟e7 23.♟f6 ♞d3† 24.♟e2 ♟d5 25.♞g5 ♞xd1† 26.♞xd1 ♞h3 27.h5 ♞e7 28.♞xd2 ♞xf6 29.♞xf6 ♟f4† 30.♟d1 ♞g8 31.♟c5 ♞xg4 32.♞d8† ♟c7 33.♞d7† ♟b6 34.♞e7 ♟d5 35.♞b7† ♟a5 36.♞xa7† ♟b5 37.♞b7† ♟b6 38.a4† ♟a5 39.♟c2 1-0 Topalov – Gelfand, Dortmund 2002.

For more details about 14...♞b4!? check out the following illustrative game.

J. Anderson – Perevertkin

e-mail 2005

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.e5 ♞f5 4.♟c3 e6 5.g4 ♞g6 6.♟ge2 c5 7.h4 h5 8.♟f4 ♞h7 9.♟xh5 ♟c6 10.dxc5 ♞xc5 11.♞b5 ♞c7 12.♞xc6† ♞xc6 13.♞f3 0-0-0 14.♟xg7 ♞b4 15.♞h3 d4



The point. Now it won't be an ending.

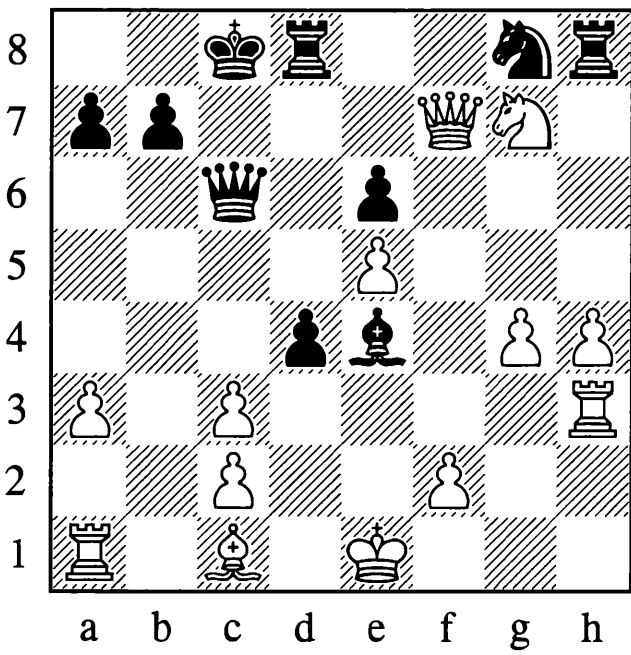
16.a3

I was right. After 16.♞xc6†? bxc6 17.a3 ♞f8 both knights are hanging.

16...♞e4

A spectacular solution. 16...♞f8 is refuted by 17.♞xf7 and 16...♞xf3 17.♞xf3 ♞f8 leads to an unclear ending with three pawns against a piece. After 18.♞xf7 ♞xg7 19.♞xg7 dxc3 20.bxc3 ♞xc2 21.♞g5 it is probably easier to play for White.

17.♞xf7 ♞xc3† 18.bxc3



18...♞xh4! 19.♞xh4 ♞xc3† 20.♟f1 ♞xa1 21.♞f4 ♞d5∞

A very complicated position where the opposite-coloured bishops give Black excellent compensation. In the end his creative play was rewarded.

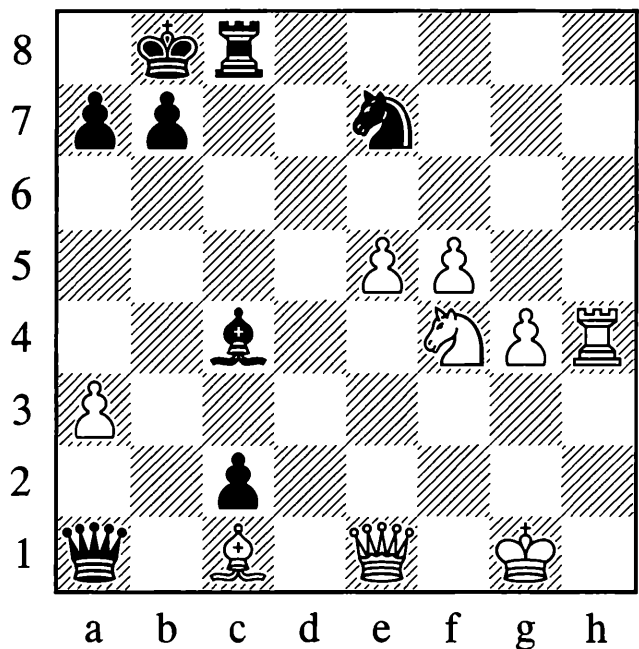
22.♞d2 ♟e7 23.f4 ♟b8 24.f5?

This looks good, but it runs into a hardcore refutation. 24.♞h7 was unclear.

24...♞c8 25.♟xe6 d3!

The pawn cannot be taken.

26.♞e1 ♞c4 27.♟g1 dxc2 28.♟f4



28...♖d8!

The rook comes to d1 and decides the game.

29.♔g2 ♜d1 30.♜h8† ♞g8 31.♞b4 ♞xe5
32.♞xc4 ♞xh8 33.♞h5 ♜xc1 34.♞f4† ♔a8
35.♞xc1 ♞c3

Black has calculated well; the ending is winning.

36.g5

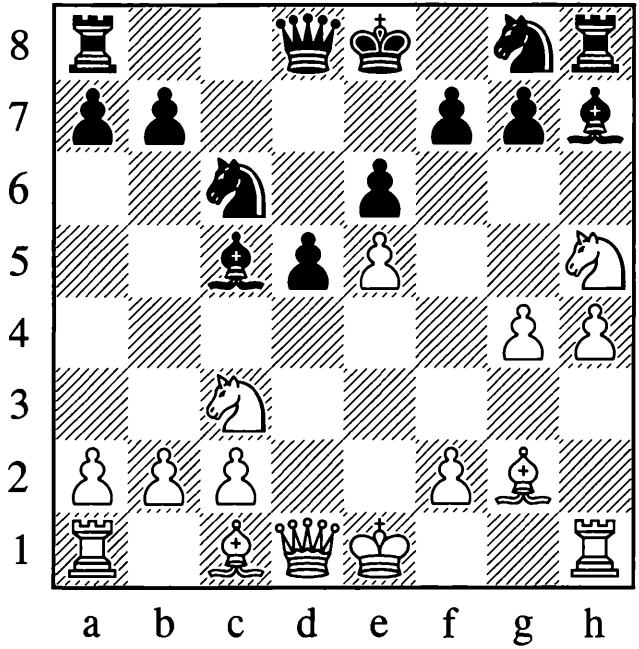
If 36.♞g3 then 36...♞f6 37.g5 ♞g4 is very convincing.

36...♞e7 37.f6 ♞g6 38.f7 ♞c4

White has no moves.

0–1

A3) 11.♔g2



White tries to achieve harmonious piece-play.

11...♔f8

Just protecting the g7-pawn. In the stem game, Grischuk – Bareev, Moscow 2002, the active 11...♞d4 was repelled by 12.♔g5! f6 13.♞xg7† ♔f7 14.exf6 and the complications were favourable for White because the obvious 14...♞xc2† 15.♔f1 ♞xa1 is violently refuted by 16.♞xe6!.

Karpov & Podgaets suggest:

11...♞xe5

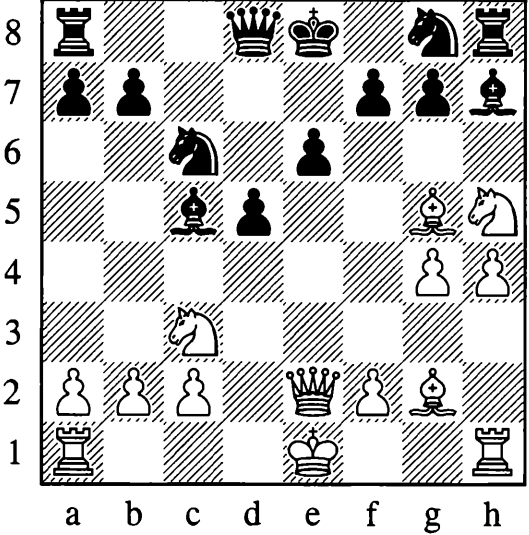
And, although his analysis can be improved somewhat, the move seems to hold. He should have taken into consideration 12.♞xg7† ♔f8 13.♔f4, but probably it is too wild. Both 13...♞c4 or 13...♞g6 must be okay for Black.

After the main move:

12.♞e2

There follows:

12...♞c6 13.♔g5



And now Black gets good play with a strong intermediate move:

13...♞d4! 14.♞xg7† ♔f8 15.♞e5

After 15.♔xd8 ♞xe2 16.♔xe2 ♜xd8 17.♞h5 ♔xc2 Black's bishop pair gives him the edge in the ending. A possible continuation is 18.♜ac1 d4 19.♔xb7 d3† 20.♔f3 ♜b8 and Black is very active.

15...♖d6 16.♗xd6† ♕xd6 17.0-0-0 ♕e5
18.♘h5 ♘xc2

“With approximate equality” – Karpov & Podgaets. Let’s continue a few moves.

19.♙f4
White must challenge the strong bishop.
19...♙xf4† 20.♘xf4 ♜c8

And the advantage is beginning to tip to Black’s side.

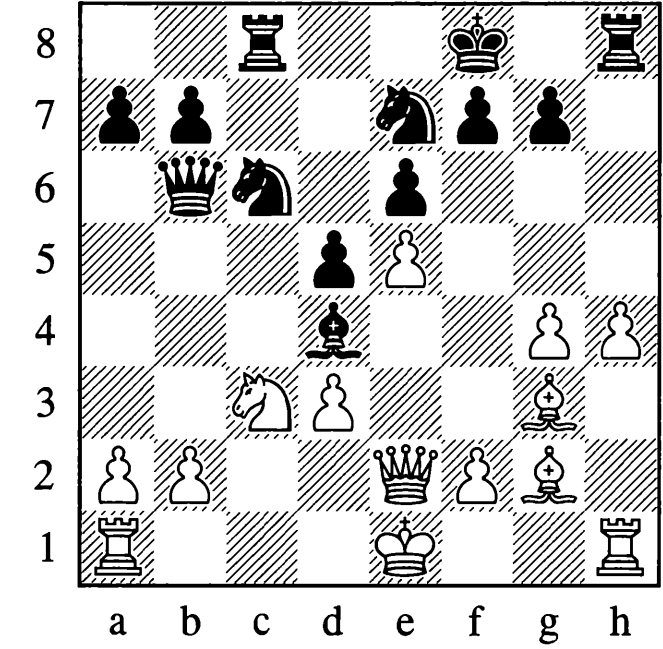
12.♙f4

White also protects his pawn. It was possible to sacrifice it with 12.♙g5!? when Black probably should choose between 12...♗a5 13.0-0 ♕d4 or 12...♗c7 13.0-0 ♘xe5, in either case with unclear play.

12...♜c8 13.♙g3 ♘ge7 14.♘f4

Trying to get the knight back into play.

14...♕d4 15.♗e2 ♖b6 16.♘d3 ♕xd3
17.cxd3

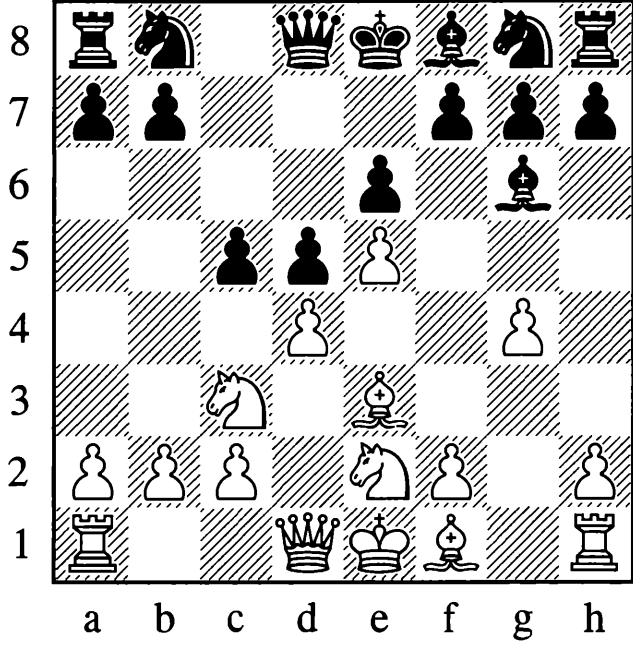


This was Shirov – Topalov, Dresden (ol) 2008. Topalov won the pawn back with a small combination: 17...♕xe5 18.♕xe5 ♘xe5 19.♗xe5 ♗xb2 20.♜b1 ♗xc3† 21.♗xc3 ♜xc3 22.♜xb7 But the active white rook gave White the better chances. Instead Black could have captured e5 with the simple:

17...♘g6! 18.h5 ♘gxe5

With a fine position. On the natural 19.0-0 Black plays 19...g6 and fully benefits from the fact that the rook is still on h8.

B) 7.♙e3



7...♘c6 8.dxc5

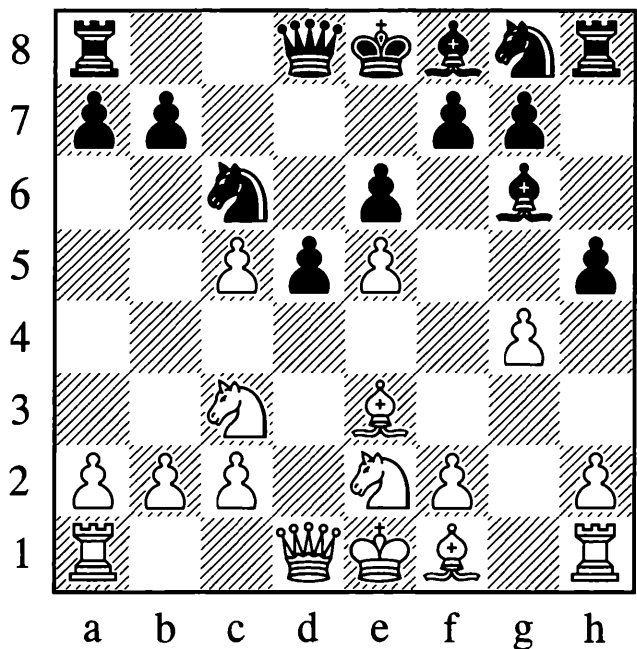
This rather surprising capture is the real point behind 7.♙e3. White keeps up a high speed and is not particularly bothered by ...♘xe5 because he can then put his own knight on d4 when the pawn thrust f2-f4-f5 is in the air and the bishop check on b5 can also prove to be annoying for Black.

On 8.h4 a good answer is 8...h5 as usual.

8.♘f4 tries to get the bishop pair, but weakens d4 so Black just plays 8...cxd4 and now 9.♕xd4 ♕xc2 is a little embarrassing for White.

8.f4 h5 again hits the structure where it hurts the most. White is more or less forced to continue with a somewhat speculative pawn sacrifice, 9.f5 exf5 10.g5, when after 10...cxd4 11.♘d4 ♕b4 12.e6 ♘ge7 Black’s pieces were in the game and he had no problems, Zhang Pengxiang – Palo, Cappelle la Grande 2002.

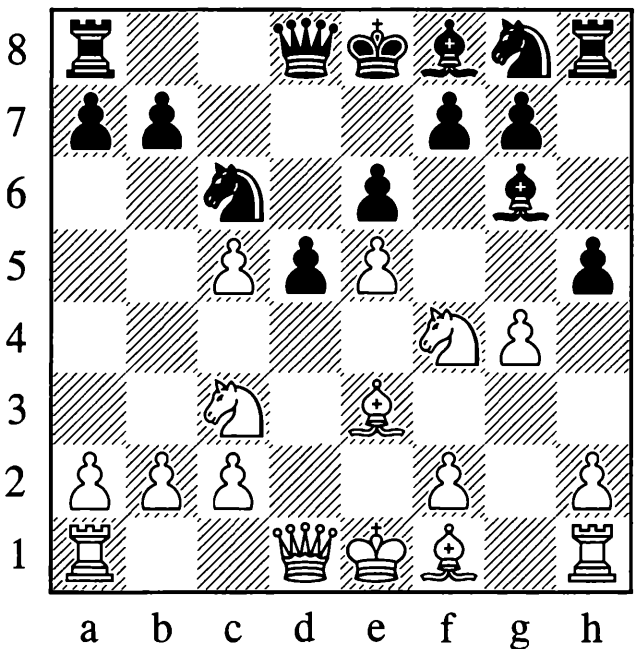
8...h5



Very deep. Again Black ignores potential material gain and instead confronts the unfortunate g4-pawn hoping to inflict long-term weaknesses in the white camp. In a higher sense, it is a fight for the initiative that is taking place on this remote part of the board. Instead 8...dxe5 9.d4 gives White a considerable lead in development and is thus dangerous for Black.

Now after 8...h5 play divides. White should continue his aggressive politics with either **B1) 9.f4** or **B2) 9.d4**. The more humble 9.g5 has been played a few times with success, but I think it is well met by the new move 9...ge7 with a harmonious position and good control of the important f5-square.

B1) 9.f4



9...h7

The same idea as we saw in the 7.h4 line. Black will go to considerable lengths to preserve his light-squared bishop.

There is an important alternative though, which also leads to very sharp play:

9...d4

This obvious advance wins a piece.

10.fxg6 fxg6

This time it is Black's structure which is in ruins, but maybe he can get away with it. Winning lots of material is rather tempting.

11.d3

White can also try: 11.d3 dxe3 12.fxe3 e7 13.d6 The only way to make progress. 13...xd6 14.exd6 This was Eger – Gerecs, corr. 1985, and now Black should have played 14...d7 15.gxh5 exf2 16.fxf2 f6 and h5 drops.

11...f7 12.0-0 dxc3 13.xc3 c7

White has some compensation, but it is difficult to get at the enemy king.

14.c4

14.gxh5 is a new try. After 14...hxh5 15.e2 xe5 16.f4 c8 17.xe5 xe5 the simplifications help Black.

14...xe5 15.d4 f4 16.b1 e8 17.g5!

With messy play.

17...xg5 18.hg1 h4 19.ge1 f6 20.b3 d8

Better was 20...g8.

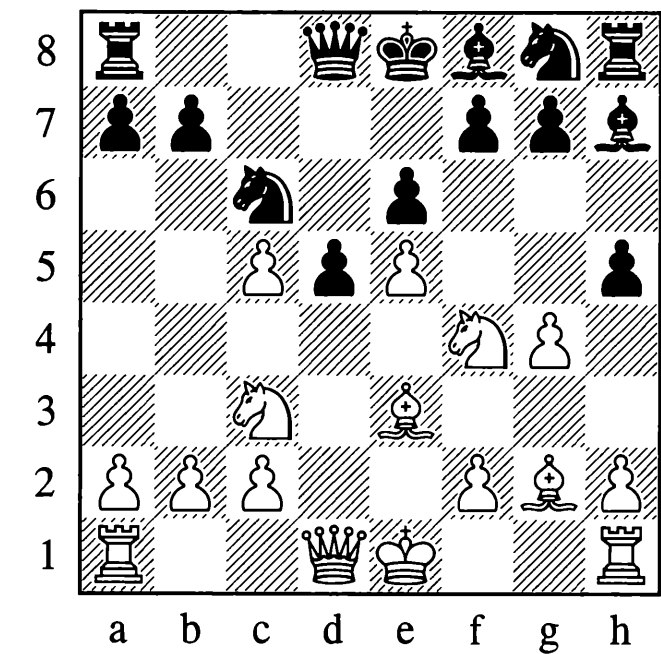
21.e5 g8

This is Shirov – Topalov, Wijk aan Zee 2003, and here 22.a4! looks extremely strong.

Instead of entering this hair-raising line with 14...xe5, Black could consider 14...e8, just covering e6 and preventing any fxe6 ideas. After 15.d6 hxg4 16.xe6 xe6 17.fxe6 e6 18.c4 e7 19.g5 e8 White was running out of ammo in Cheparinov – Devyatkin, Dos Hermanas 2003.

All in all, it seems that 9...d4 is quite good. Of course the positions are rather tricky and Black is under heavy pressure, but he has good chances to defend and later the extra material would count.

10.♔g2



White develops and prevents ...d5-d4. This pawn thrust is the reason White doesn't have time to take on h5.

In another game he tried: 10.♖b5 hxg4 11.♙xg4 ♘h6 12.♙h5 ♙f5 13.♖g1∞ g6 14.♙e2 a6 15.♘d6† ♙xd6 16.exd6 ♙a5† 17.c3?! (better was 17.♙d2 ♙xd2† 18.♙xd2 ♙xc2 but Black is okay in the ending) 17...d4! Now Black takes over. 18.b4 ♙a3 19.♙d2 dxc3 20.♙c1 ♙a4 21.♙g2 ♘xb4 And Black was winning in Naiditsch – Lastin, Moscow 2008.

10.♙b5 is well answered by 10...hxg4.

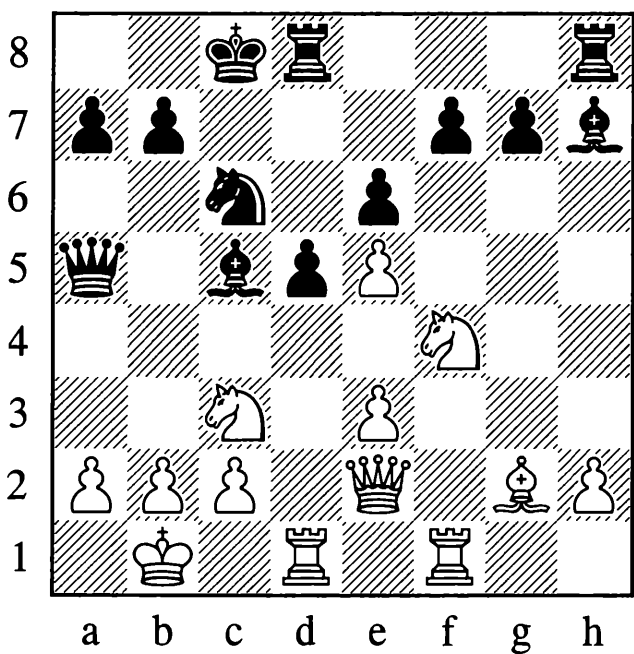
10...hxg4 11.♙xg4 ♘h6

With tempo.

12.♙e2 ♘f5

Black is already comfortable.

13.0–0–0 ♙a5 14.♖b1 ♘xe3 15.fxe3 0–0–0 16.♙hf1 ♙xc5



Black's better pawn structure begins to tell.

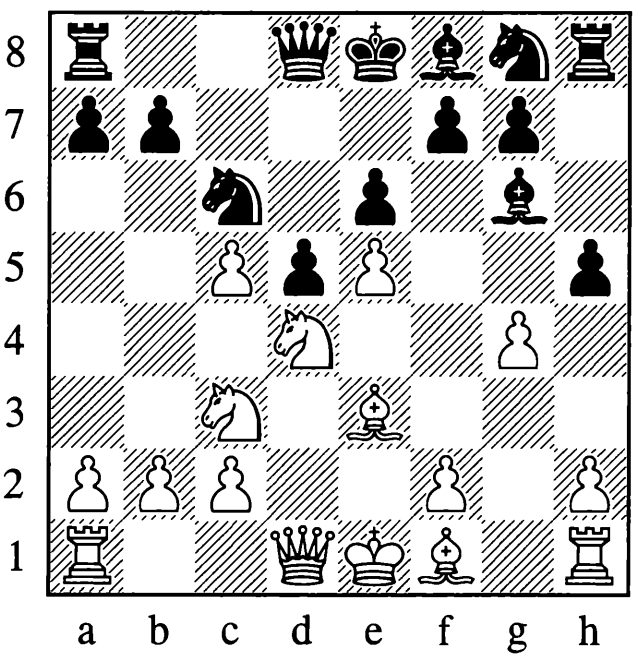
17.♘d3 ♔g6 18.e4

Desperation.

18...d4 19.♘d5 exd5 20.exd5 ♘b4 21.♘xb4 ♙xb4

And White didn't have enough for the piece in Golubev – Ponomariov, Odessa 2008.

B2) 9.♘d4



The strongest continuation.

9...♙c7!?

A new twist that is known from a few correspondence games.

9...hgx4 10.♔b5 is good for White. e.g. 10...♖c8 11.♙xg4 ♗h4 12.♙xh4 ♖xh4 and Black has some compensation because of his better structure, but probably not enough for a pawn.

Black can prevent the bishop move with:

9...a6

This is a popular option that leads to very complicated play.

10.g5

10.♘xc6 bxc6 only helps Black: 11.g5 ♘e7 12.♔h3 ♖b8 13.♙d4 ♔f5 14.♔g2 ♔xc2 15.♙d2 ♔g6 16.♘a4 ♘f5+ Motylev – Anand, Moscow 2002.

10...♘ge7 11.♘a4 ♘xe5 12.♘b6

12.f4 allows 12...♔e4 and the exchange sacrifice 13.fxe5 ♔xh1 14.♘b6 ♖a7 15.c3 ♘c6 16.♘xc6 bxc6 17.♔d3 ♔e7 18.h4 as in Svidler – Macieja, Bermuda 2003, could be questioned by 18...♙c7!N 19.♔d4 ♔g2 and the bishop gets out. 20.♙e2 ♔h3+

12...♖b8 13.c4

13.♔e2 ♘7c6 14.c3 ♙c7 15.b4 secures the gains on the queenside, but with 15...♖d8 16.♙d2 ♘c4 Black gains counterplay: 17.♘xc4 dxc4 18.f4 b6 19.cxb6 ♙xb6 20.a3 e5 21.fxe5 ♘xe5∞ Knoll – Napalkov, corr. 2006.

13...♘7c6 14.cxd5 exd5

This leads to rather unclear play.

In Ottesen – Ricciardi, corr. 2006, Black played 14...♔e4 and after 15.dxc6! ♔xh1 16.♙c2! ♔xc6 17.0-0-0 ♙c7 18.g6! White had a powerful initiative for the exchange.

15.♔e2 ♔e7 16.♘xc6 bxc6 17.♙d4 f6 18.0-0-0 0-0

And it's still unclear.

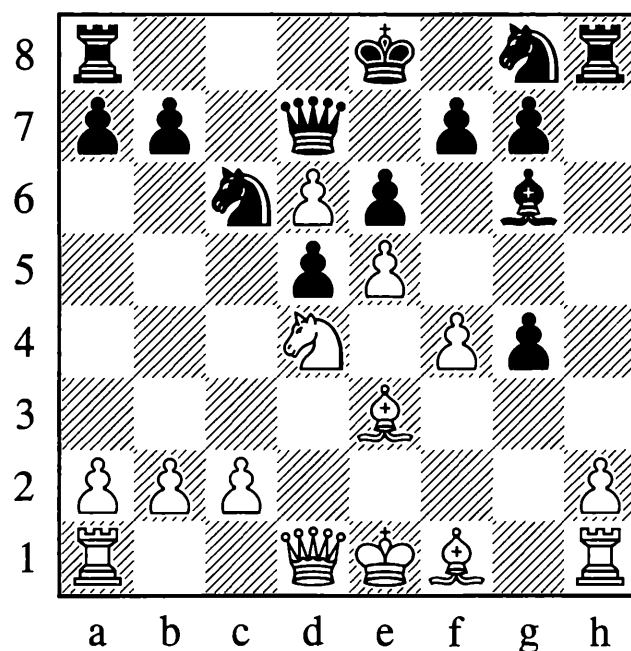
10.f4

Instead 10.♙d2 hxg4 11.♘cb5 ♙xe5 12.0-0-0 ♙b8 13.♔g2 was Chytilek – Mrugala, corr. 2000, and here 13...♘f6!N is simple and strong. 14.♔f4 e5 15.♖he1 ♖h5+

Besides, 10...a6!? is once again interesting.

10.g5N should be considered, but I think 10...♔xc5 is adequate. 11.♘cb5 ♙b6 12.♘xc6 ♔xe3 13.fxe3 bxc6 14.♘d6+ ♘d7 15.♙d4 And now 15...f6 16.gxf6 gxf6 17.0-0-0 ♙xd4 18.exd4 ♘h6 leads to a double-edged ending in which Black's chances are by no means worse.

10...hgx4 11.♘cb5 ♙d7 12.♘d6+ ♔xd6 13.cxd6



White pawn chain f4-e5-d6 looks impressive...

13...♘h6

But in fact Black just plays around it. He has gained the important f5-square for his pieces and in general Black is superior on the light squares.

14.♖g1

White needs to take some precautions. The following is a constructed variation that shows how everything can go wrong for White in just a few moves. 14.♔b5 ♘f5 15.♘xf5 ♔xf5 16.0-0 ♖h3 17.♔f2 0-0-0 18.♔g3 ♖dh8 19.c4 ♙d8! 20.c5 ♖xh2! 21.♔xh2 ♖xh2 22.♘xh2 ♙h4+ 23.♘g2 ♔e4+

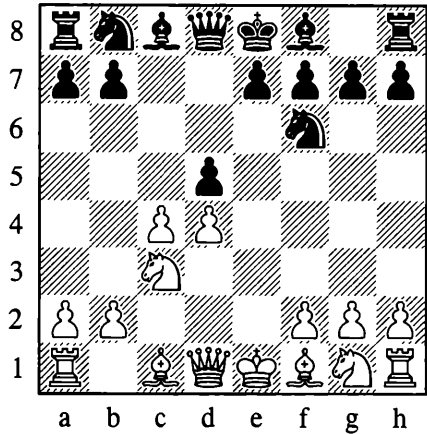
14...♘f5 15.♘xf5 ♔xf5 16.♙d2 f6 17.♔b5 a6 18.♔xc6 ♙xc6=

This is Knoll – Dos Santos, corr. 2007. The position is in balance but far from drawn. The h2-pawn is very weak and Black can also put some pressure down the c-file. On the other hand, the white d-pawn is also a factor.

Conclusion

The Shirov Variation is certainly wild and Black has to know his stuff, but if he does, then White's bridge-burning strategy tends to backfire. Allow me to repeat that point – Black must study and learn all the lines in this chapter. Having a rough idea of what to do is just enough knowledge to get yourself mated.

Chapter 14



Panov Variation

Introduction and Early Deviations

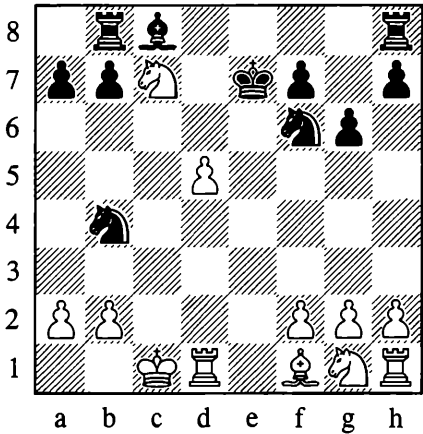
Variation Index

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 cxd5 4.c4 ♘f6 5.♘c3

5...♘c6

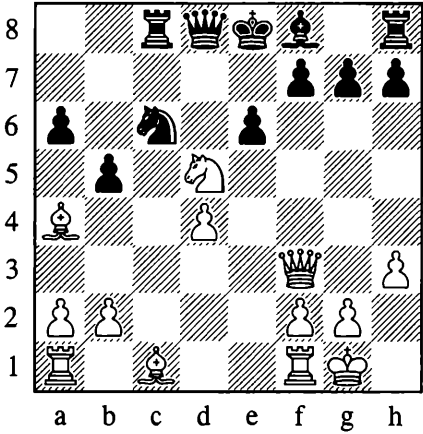
6.cxd5	150
6.c5	151
6.♗f4	151
6.♘f3	152

6.♗f4 after 16.0-0-0



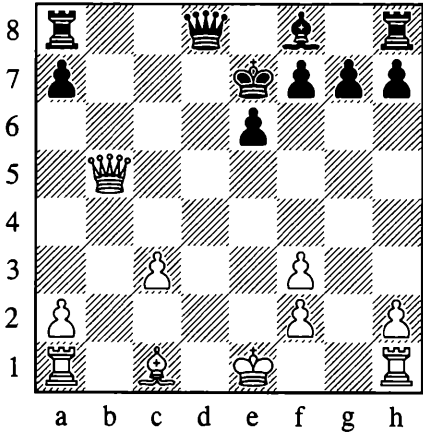
16...♗d8!N

note to 8.♖b3



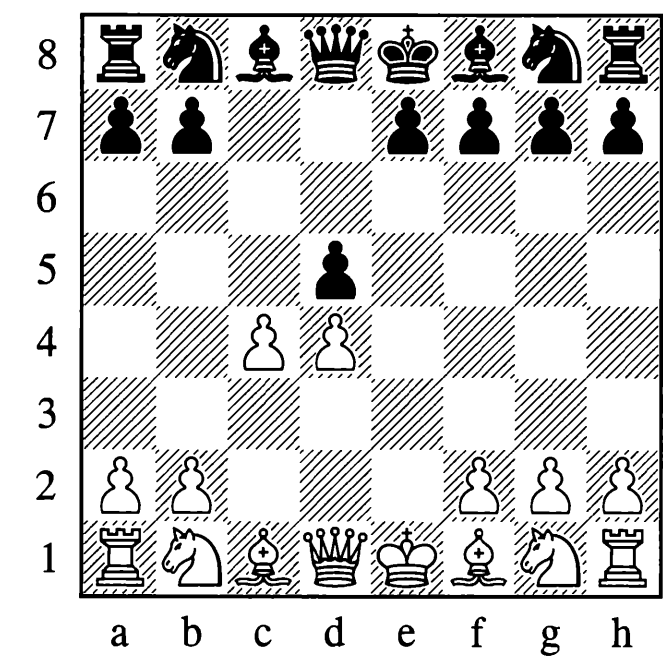
13...♘xd4!N

note to 13...♖d7



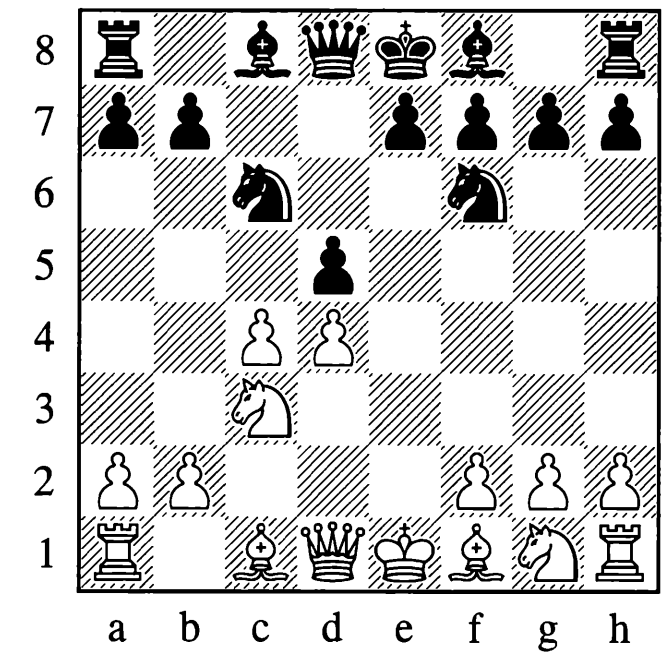
14...♗b8!

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 cxd5 4.c4



The famous Panov Variation has always attracted aggressive players with White, and it is easy to understand why. With an active pawn move, White immediately creates tension in the centre and shows that he values the initiative more highly than mere positional matters, such as the pawn structure. The Panov often leads to double-edged positions where White has an isolated queen's pawn in exchange for fluid piece-play and general activity.

4...♘f6 5.♘c3 ♘c6



This move is responsible for many Panov aficionados giving up their pet line. Black hopes to develop the bishop to an active post on g4, so for now he holds back the e-pawn.

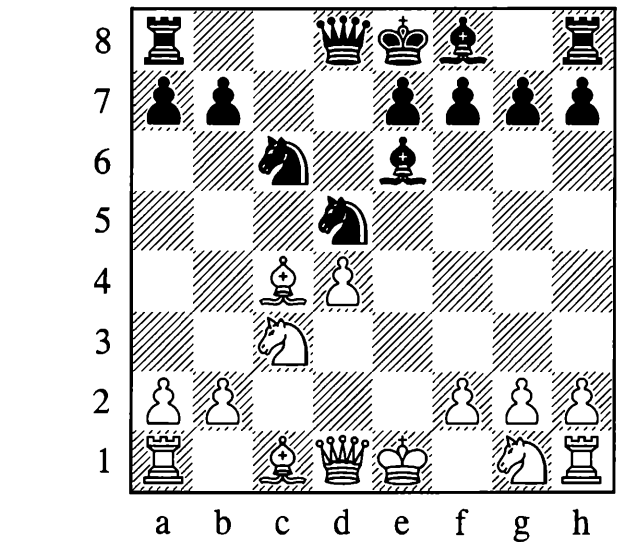
Traditionally, the most popular move has been the solid 5...e6, but then White gets what he wants, which is active piece-play in return for a slight positional defect. Karpov has worked out a Nimzo-Indian plan for Black with ...♗b4 and then fianchettoing the other bishop on b7, but these days this plan has lost some of its earlier appeal.

An interesting sideline is 5...g6, which at first resembles some kind of Grünfeld. First impressions do not always last, and after only a few more moves the position is unique... and somewhat murky from Black's point of view. Still, especially against weaker opponents, this could work well as a surprise weapon. The big advantage of 5...g6 is of course that it leads to complicated positions where Black may have good chances of playing for a win. Realistically, 5...g6 is probably not entirely correct, so White will get even better winning chances!

Back to our repertoire. After 5...♘c6 White primarily plays 6.♘f3 or 6.♗g5, but occasionally you will run into something else, so let's have a look:

6.cxd5 ♘xd5 7.♗c4

Simply attacking the knight.
The other bishop move, 7.♗b5, backfires after 7...♘xc3 8.bxc3 ♔d5! hitting b5 and g2. For example, 9.♗xc6† bxc6!? 10.♘f3 ♗a6 and White is weak on the light squares. 7...♗e6!?



I like this move, but of course 7...e6 or 7...♟b6 also make sense.

8.♟b3

Black was threatening ...♟xc3, and 8.♟b5 g6 9.♟f3 ♟g7 10.♟g5 ♟b6 11.♟xe6 fxe6 gives White problems with the d4-pawn.

8...g6

Black has easy development.

9.♟f3 ♟g7 10.0–0 0–0

Black is fine.

6.c5

A typical space-gaining move in the Panov, but here it seems a bit premature.

6...e5!

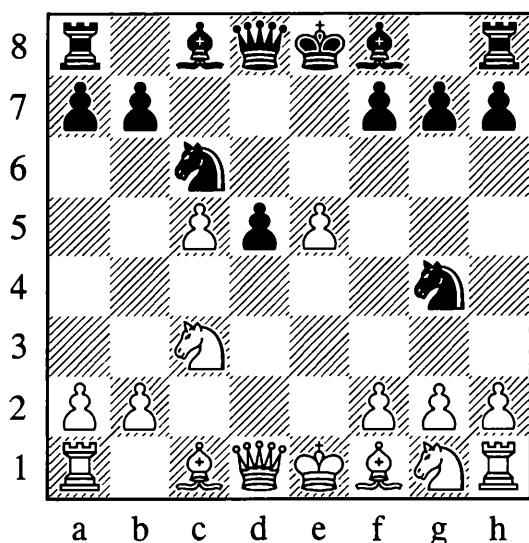
This is a bold attempt to refute 6.c5, so a safe alternative is 6...g6. For example, 7.♟b5 ♟g7 8.♟f3 0–0 9.♟xc6 bxc6 10.♟e5 ♟b7 11.0–0 ♟d7 and Black is already very comfortable. To prevent the freeing break ...e7–e5 White has to seriously weaken his structure. 12.f4 This was Merzliakov – O. Orlov, St Petersburg 2002, and now Black should continue 12...♟c7N 13.♟e3 ♟xe5 14.fxe5 f6 with promising play.

7.dxe5

White should avoid 7.♟b5 as after 7...exd4 8.♟xd4 ♟e7! we transpose to the well-known refutation of the Gunderam Attack (5.c5). For example, 9.♟f3 0–0 10.♟xc6 bxc6 11.0–0 ♟d7! 12.b4 a5±.

7...♟g4

A rare move that was recently successfully used by the strong German GM Fridman.



8.h3

Or 8.♟xd5 ♟e6 9.♟xd8† ♟xd8 10.♟g5 and now instead of 10...♟xc5 as in Barle – Fridman, Croatia 2010, I agree with GM Gawain Jones of ChessPublishing that 10...♟d7! is simple and good. White is struggling to hang on to equality after, for example, 11.♟f3 ♟xc5 12.♟e4 ♟b4† 13.♟d2 ♟xd2† 14.♟exd2 a6 15.♟c4 0–0.

8...♟gxe5 9.♟xd5 ♟e6 10.♟xd8† ♟xd8 11.♟e3 ♟b4 12.♟b5†

And now instead of 12...♟d7 as in S. Stone – Rattay, corr. 2004, Jones suggested 12...♟ec6, but I am not so sure after 13.♟e2. My concern is that Black may only be equal! My preference is:

12...♟e7!

Despite the king's awkward appearance, it turns out the b5-bishop being vulnerable to an ...a7–a6 nudge is more significant. For example:

13.♟e2 a6 14.f4 axb5 15.fxe5 ♟c4† 16.♟f2 ♟c2

Black will regain the pawn and after ...♟xe3 the two bishops will be wonderful.

6.♟f4

This rare move may become more popular, as it was recently used successfully by the Russian star Vitiugov. White wants to answer 6...e6 with 7.c5, securing a space advantage. That doesn't look too alarming. Play may continue 7...♟e7 8.♟b5 0–0 9.♟f3 ♟e4 10.0–0 ♟xc3 11.bxc3 ♟d7 planning ...b7–b6 with an okay position.

6...♟g4 also looks natural. Why not try to get the bishop out? Unfortunately, it's not as simple as that. 7.♟e2 ♟xe2 8.♟gxe2 e6 9.c5 ♟e7 10.0–0 0–0 11.b4N and White has some initiative. For example, 11...♟e4 12.b5 ♟xc3 13.♟xc3 ♟a5 and the knight gets to c4, but Black lacks active play.

Now that we know a little more about White's

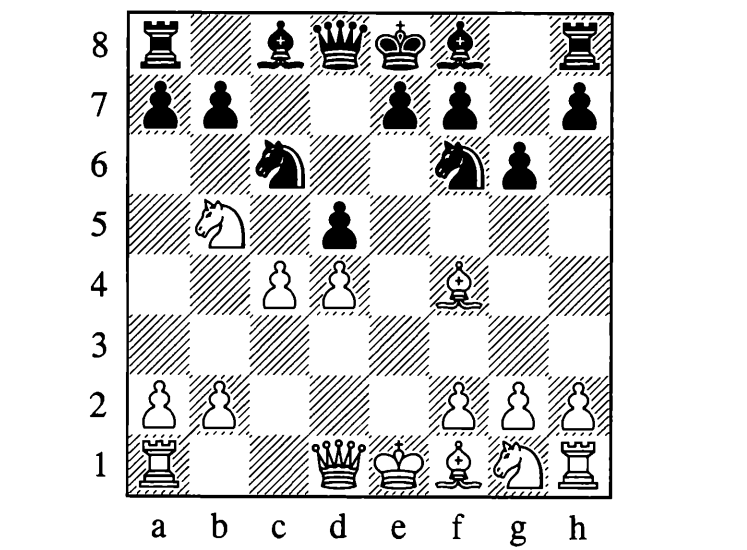
ideas, it should be easier to understand that the critical response to 6.♘f4 is:

6...g6!

Now 7.♘f3 ♘g7 8.c5 0-0 9.♙b5 ♘g4 is nothing for White. Tempting is the sharp:

7.♘b5

But Black has a defence ready:

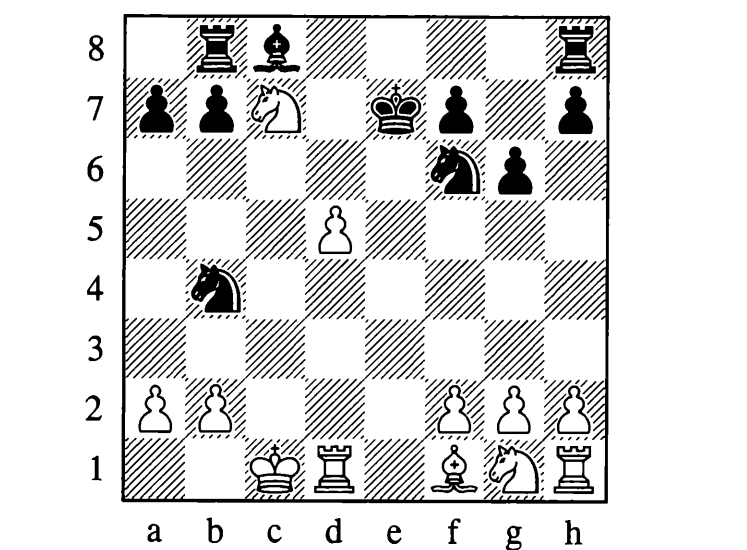


7...e5! 8.dxe5 ♙b4+ 9.♙d2 ♙xd2+ 10.♙xd2 ♘xe5

Restoring the material balance, and Black has already overtaken White in development. The only game so far with this line continued:

11.♙b4 ♘c6 12.♙a3 ♙e7+ 13.♙xe7+ ♔xe7 14.♘c7 ♙b8 15.cxd5 ♘b4 16.0-0-0

This is Schmeltz – Hollstein, Germany 2008, and here Black should have played:



16...♙d8!N 17.a3

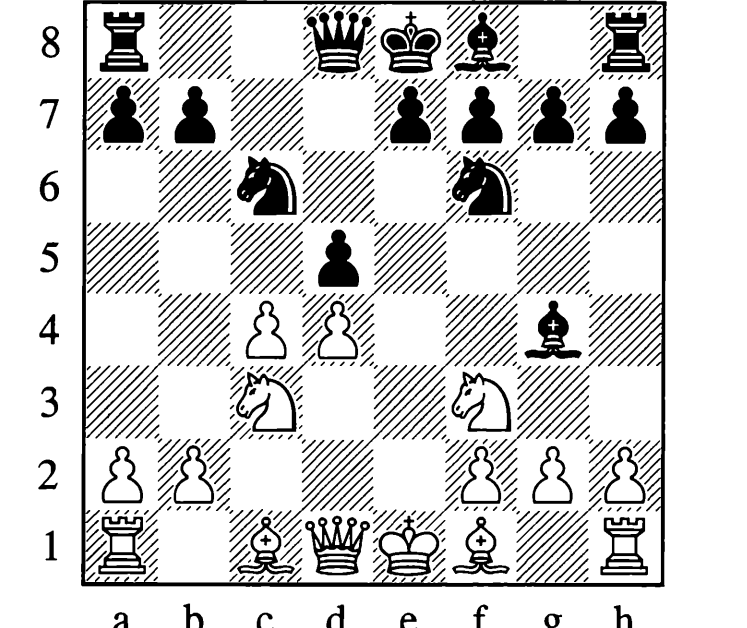
Or 17.♙c4 ♙f5 with the point 18.a3 ♙bc8!. 17...♘bxd5 18.♘xd5+ ♘xd5 19.♙c4 ♙e6

When Black has a great game.

6.♘f3

The modern move 6.♙g5 will be covered in Chapter 16.

6...♙g4



7.cxd5

This is the point of allowing ...♙g4. White tries to exploit that the g4-bishop no longer protects the queenside and introduces a sharp sequence of moves. However, the theory has been worked out a long way and Black holds the balance. In fact, an interesting ending is reached more or less by force. Previously it was considered promising for White, but these days it is known to be completely equal, and in practice some games have even begun to tip in Black's favour.

If White instead plays solidly then Black is very comfortable with the strong bishop on g4.

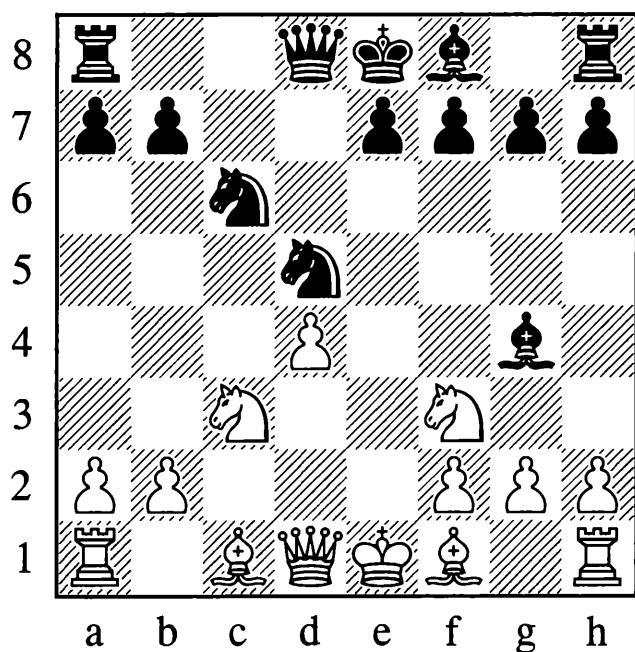
7.♙e2 e6 8.0-0 ♙e7 9.♙e3 dxc4 10.♙xc4 0-0 11.♙e2 ♙c8 12.h3 ♙h5 13.♙b3 In Mohd – Jasem, Abu Dhabi 1995, Black now missed a good opportunity. 13...♙xf3!N 14.♙xf3 ♘xd4 15.♙xd4 ♙xd4 16.♙xb7 ♙c5 17.♙ad1 ♙f4+ And the opposite-coloured bishops give Black some pressure.

7.♙e3 e6 8.c5 ♙e7 9.♙e2 0-0 10.0-0 ♘e4

11.♖c1 and now 11...♔c7N 12.a3 f5+ gives excellent counterplay in the centre.

7.c5 looks too compromising after 7...♙xf3 8.gxf3 g6, but in fact 9.♙e3 ♙g7 10.♔d2 0–0 11.0–0–0 is not so clear. I propose the new move 11...b6N when Black fights for the initiative at once and always has the better structure to fall back on.

7...♘xd5



8.♔b3

Hitting b7 is the tactical justification of White's previous play. It was already too late for White to turn back: just developing his light-squared bishop would be too slow and pose no problems whatsoever.

8.♙e2 e6 9.0–0 ♙b4!?

An active move that disrupts White's plans by attacking the c3-knight.

10.♔b3

Not good enough, but 10.♘xd5 ♔xd5 or 10.♘e4 0–0 gave nothing at all.

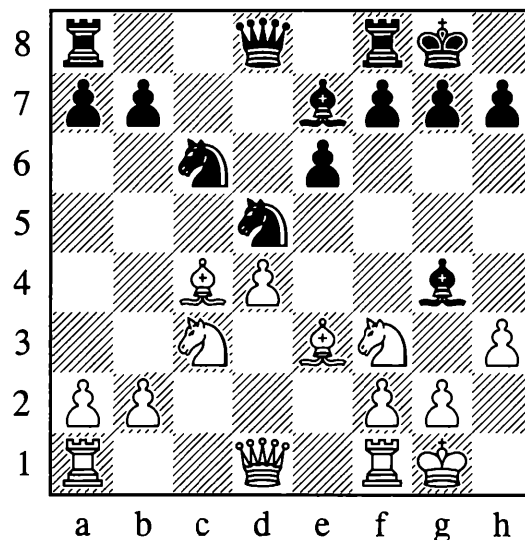
Probably White had to settle for the passive 10.♙d2 but then after 10...0–0 11.a3 ♙e7 Black has a great anti-IQP position.

10...♙xf3 11.♙xf3 ♘xd4 12.♔a4+ b5N 13.♘b5 ♘xf3+ 14.gxf3 0–0+

White's weak kingside will tell.

8.♙c4 e6 9.0–0 ♙e7 10.♙e3 0–0 11.h3?

Better was 11.♙e2 but Black has no worries after something like 11...♖c8.



11...♙xf3!N 12.♔xf3 ♘xe3 13.fxe3 ♘xd4!

This little combination refutes White's play.

14.♔xb7 ♘f5+

For example:

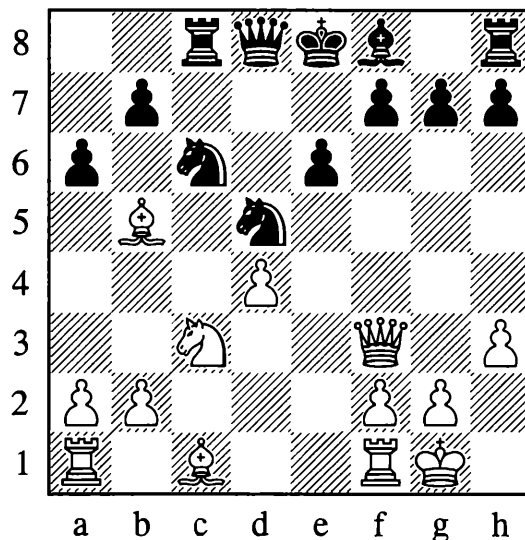
15.♖fd1 ♔b8 16.♖d7 ♙c5

Black is already winning.

8.♙b5 ♖c8 9.h3 ♙xf3

The simplest, but 9...♙h5 is also viable: 10.0–0 e6 11.g4 ♙g6 12.♘e5 ♙d6 13.♘xd5 exd5= 14.♖e1 0–0 15.♙f4?! ♙e4! 16.♙xc6 bxc6 And Black had a promising position in Del Rio Angelis – Gomez Esteban, Ponferrada 1997, because 17.f3 is strongly answered by 17...f6!.

10.♔xf3 e6 11.0–0 a6



Now White has three likely tries:

12.♔xc6† ♖xc6 13.♞xd5 ♞xd5 14.♞xd5 exd5 is a slightly worse ending for White.

12.♞xd5 ♞xd5 13.♞xd5 exd5 14.♔a4 has given White an edge in practice, but why not 12...axb5N with good play.

12.♔a4 b5 13.♞xd5 is Dobrov – Dreev, Moscow (blitz) 2005, and now 13...♞xd4!N 14.♞d1 ♞xd5 leaves Black a pawn up.

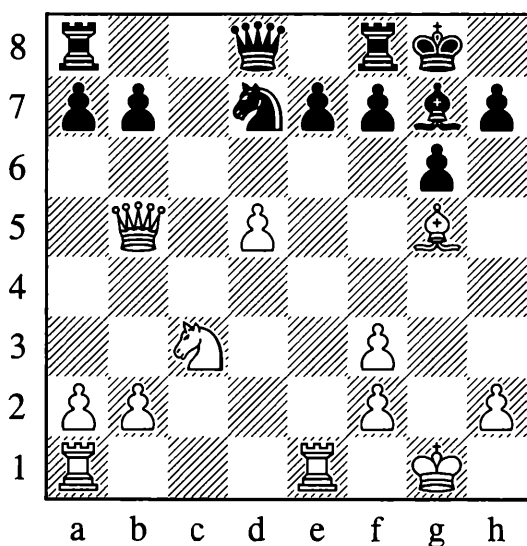
8...♔xf3 9.gxf3

9.♞xb7? ♞db4 10.gxf3 ♖b8 would be embarrassing for the queen.

9...e6

Reliable, solid, correct – Karpov & Podgaets.

9...♞b6?! leads to more complicated play and is sometimes suggested, but it is simply bad. The critical line goes 10.d5 ♞d4 11.♔b5† ♞d7 12.♞a4 ♞xb5 13.♞xb5 g6 14.0–0 ♔g7 15.♖e1 0–0 16.♔g5.



Black has been unable to find a satisfactory defence. For example:

16...♔f6 17.♔xf6 exf6 18.♖ad1 ♞e5 19.♖e3 ♞c8 20.d6± Marin – Fressinet, Sitges 1999.

16...♖e8 allows 17.d6, so that leaves 16...♞e5, which is in fact Houska's rescue attempt in *Play the Caro-Kann*. 17.♖e3 f6 18.♔f4 ♞c8 19.♔g3 ♖f7 20.♖ae1! Keeping up the pressure.

For some reason Houska completely missed this obvious move. 20...♔f8 21.♞b3 ♞d7 22.♞e4 ♞f5 23.♖c3 ♖d8 24.♞g2± Ragger – Salem, Moscow 2009.

10.♞xb7 ♞xd4 11.♔b5† ♞xb5 12.♞c6†

An important zwischenzug that forces the black king to e7.

Instead 12.♞xb5† ♞d7 13.♞xd7† ♞xd7 14.♞xd5 exd5 gives Black a much easier version of the mainline. After 15.♔e3 ♔b4† 16.♞e2 I think the new move 16...♖ac8N 17.♖ac1 a6 already gives him an edge.

12...♞e7 13.♞xb5

13.♞xb5 ♖b8 14.0–0 ♞d7 is good for Black.

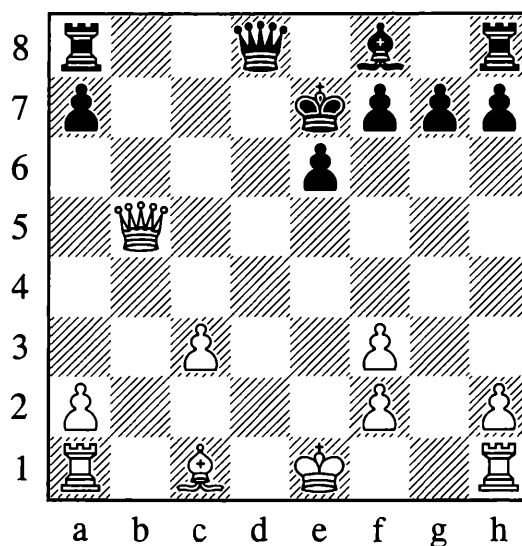
13...♞d7

This is considered most precise. A natural alternative is:

13...♞xc3 14.bxc3

Instead 14.♞c5† ♞d6 15.♞xc3 keeps White's structure intact, but after 15...♞a6! Black has no problems.

The main move 14.bxc3 saddles White with a lot of isolated pawns, but the bishop will be strong on e3 and Black's pawn on a7 turns out to be very difficult to defend.



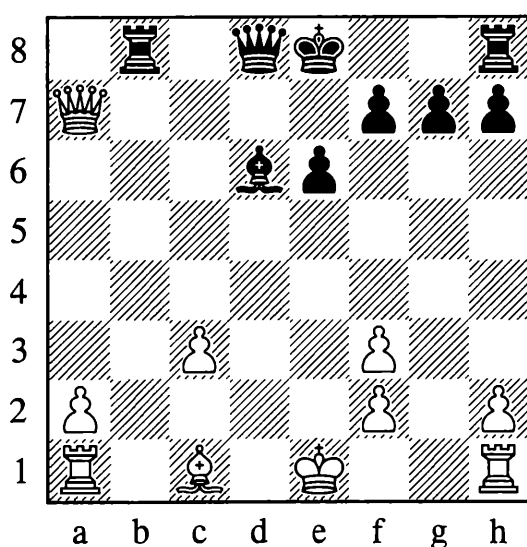
The classic example was provided by Bobby Fischer: 14...♞d7 15.♖b1 ♖d8 16.♔e3

♖xb5 17.♗xb5 ♜d7 18.♔e2 f6 19.♞d1
♞xd1 20.♔xd1 ♔d7 21.♞b8 ♔c6 22.♙xa7
And White was winning, Fischer – Euwe,
Leipzig (ol) 1960. For many years this was
believed to be the ultimate truth about
13...♜xc3. However some correspondence
players recently came up with a remarkable
idea that revitalizes this line.

14...♞b8! 15.♞c5†

The clumsy 15.♙a3†?? loses immediately
to 15...♔f6. For example, 16.♞a4 ♙xa3
17.♞xa3 ♞d3 is terminal.

15...♔e8 16.♞xa7 ♙d6



A fantastic concept. Black has sacrificed a
pawn and lost the right to castle, but it turns
out that even though the white king can still
castle, it cannot find perfect safety. The few
games played so far suggest that Black has fine
compensation. Let's dive in and see:

17.♞g1 ♞f6 18.♞a4† ♔f8 19.♞c6 ♞e5†
20.♙e3 ♞xh2 looks good for Black, yet White
can save a draw with: 21.♞g2! ♞h1† 22.♔e2
♞b2† 23.♔d3 ♞xa1 24.♞c6†

17.♞d4 ♞c7 18.♙e3 ♙e5 19.♞a4† ♔e7†

17.♙e3 ♞f6 18.♞d1 ♞xc3† (18...♞xf3 19.♞g1
♞b2 20.♞a4† ♔e7 21.♞a7†=) 19.♔f1 ♞c7!∞
(19...♞c2 20.♞xd6 ♞b1† 21.♔g2 ♞g6†=)

17.♞a4† ♔e7!?

The text move is the bold choice, but

17...♞d7 18.♞xd7† ♔xd7 is good enough
to equalize after, say, 19.♙e3 ♞hc8, as in
Vatter – Schebler, Germany 2010, where
Black pressed for the win before finally
settling for half a point. The pawn deficit is
clearly temporary.

18.0–0 ♞c7 19.♞d1!

After 19.h3 ♞xc3 White has no knockout
punch. For example, 20.♙f4 e5!? 21.♙xe5?
♙xe5 22.♞ae1 g5–+.

19...♞a8!

Black must be precise. For example:

19...♞xc3 20.♙f4 e5 21.♙e3 ♞hd8
22.♞h4†±

19...♙xh2† 20.♔g2 ♙d6 21.♞xd6+–

20.♞h4† f6 21.a4 ♔f7 22.♙e3 h5∞

17.♙f4 ♞a8 (17...♙xf4! 18.♞a4† ♔e7 19.♞xf4
♞a5 20.0–0 g5 21.♞e4 ♞xc3 22.♞ac1 ♞a5=)
18.♞d4 ♙xf4 19.♞xf4 ♞d3 20.♞e3 ♞c4
21.♞g1 ♞g8 22.a4 ♞xa4 23.♞xa4 ♞xa4 24.♔f1
♞b5† ½–½ McDowall – Jordaan, corr. 2006.

17.0–0 ♞b5!

17...♞h4 is less convincing due to 18.♞d1!
♞xh2† 19.♔f1±.

18.♙e3?

Better is 18.♞a4 ♞a5 (or 18...♞d7 19.♞a8†
♞b8 20.♞a6 ♞c7=) 19.♞d4 ♔e7 20.♞xg7
♙e5 21.♞g5† ♔e8 22.♞g2 ♙xc3 23.a4 ♞b4
24.♞a3 ♞xa4 25.♞xa4 ♞xa4 26.♙h6 ½–½
Hall – Deidun, corr. 2006.

Also level is 18.f4 ♞h4 19.♞a8† ♔e7
20.♞a7† ♔f6 (20...♔e8=) 21.♞d4† ♔e7=.

18...♞h4 19.♞a8†

19.f4 ♙xf4 20.♙xf4 ♞xf4†

19...♞b8 20.♞c6† ♔e7 21.♞fd1

21.f4 ♙xf4†

21...♞xh2† 22.♔f1 ♞hc8–+ 23.♞a4 ♞b2
24.♙d2 ♙c5 25.♙g5† ♔f8

0–1 Peterson – Deidun, corr. 2006.

The lines above are based on just a few games
plus lots of original analysis – it demands

an over-the-board test. In short, 13...♘xc3 14.bxc3 ♖b8! is a daring attempt to kill off the Endgame Variation. Certainly some food for thought...

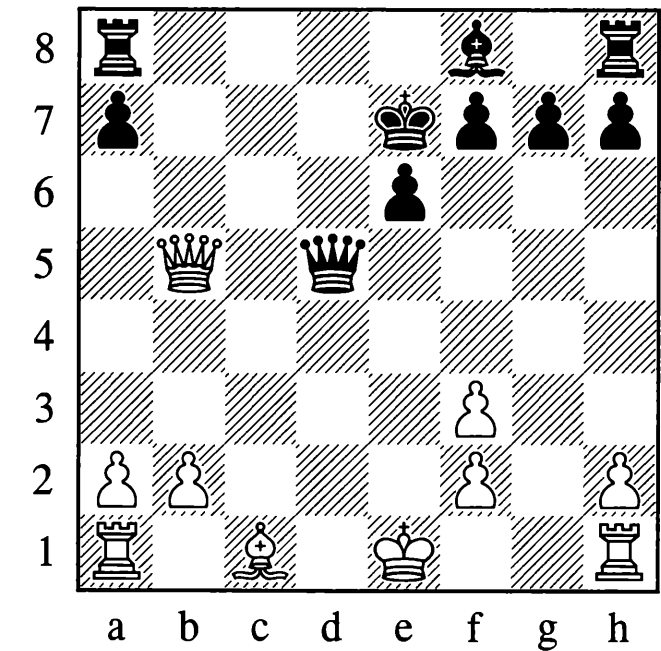
14.♘xd5†

White can try to keep the queens on with 14.♙a5 or 14.♙e2. In both cases Black easily solves his king’s problems with a quick ...f7-f6 and ...♔f7, with a harmonious position.

14.♙a5 ♘xc3 15.♙xc3 (worse is 15.bxc3 f6 16.0–0 ♔f7 17.♙a6 ♕c5⚡ Onischuk – Dreev, Yalta 1995) 15...f6 16.♕e3 ♔f7 17.0–0 ♕e7 In Tseitlin – Kasparov, Daugavpils 1978, a very young future world champion showed that Black was absolutely fine. After a natural continuation such as 18.♖fd1 ♙b7 he could even claim to be slightly better because of his opponent’s weakened pawn structure.

14.♙e2 ♘xc3 (or immediately 14...f6) 15.bxc3 f6 16.0–0 ♔f7 17.♖d1 (Or 17.f4 ♙c6 18.♖e1 ♕c5 19.f5! ♖he8 20.fxe6† ♖xe6 21.♙h5† ♔g8 22.♖xe6 ♙xe6 23.♙xc5 ♙g4† 24.♔f1 ♙d1† 25.♔g2 ♙g4† ½–½ Vajda – Itkis, Tusnad 2004. If Black wants to avoid the draw he could try 17...♕d6.) 17...♙c6 18.♙e4 ♙xe4 19.fxe4 ♕c5 20.♖d7† ♔g6 The strong bishop gave Black the edge in Lanka – Vavra, Germany 2001.

14...♙xd5



Forcing White to exchange queens, which is in the spirit of the variation. Instead Black could give him a second chance to keep them on the board with 14...exd5!?. The problem is that 15.♙e2† ♙e6 16.♕e3 or 15...♔f6 16.♖g1 are both rather promising for White, albeit pretty messy.

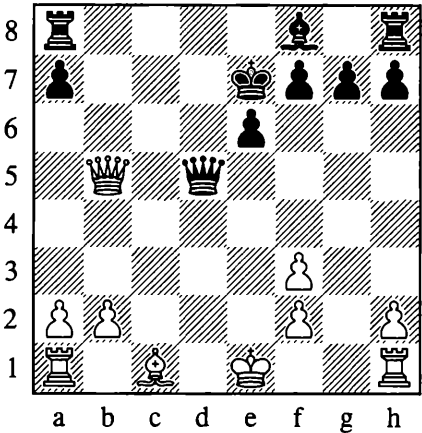
Back to normal. After 14...♙xd5 and the queen exchange on d5 for once in the Panov it is Black who is saddled with an isolated d-pawn. It could be weak and the black king is also not entirely safe in the centre either. There is no question that White has some initiative in the ending. The first question is whether White should interpose ♕g5† to provoke a slight weakness with ...f7-f6 or just take on d5 immediately. To find out, I will examine both lines in great detail in the next chapter.

Conclusion

White’s early deviations are generally harmless with the interesting 6.♕f4 the closest thing to an exception.

Black has no need to avoid the classic endgame (as we shall see in the next chapter) but one fascinating option is 13...♘xc3 14.bxc3 ♖b8!? which is almost unknown, but appears highly promising.

Chapter 15



Panov Variation

The Endgame Line

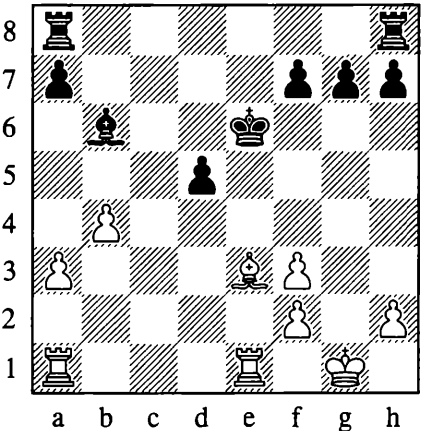
Variation Index

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 cxd5 4.c4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 ♘c6 6.♘f3

6...♙g4 7.cxd5 ♘xd5 8.♙b3 ♙xf3 9.gxf3 e6 10.♙xb7 ♘xd4 11.♙b5† ♘xb5
12.♙c6† ♙e7 13.♙xb5 ♙d7 14.♘xd5† ♙xd5

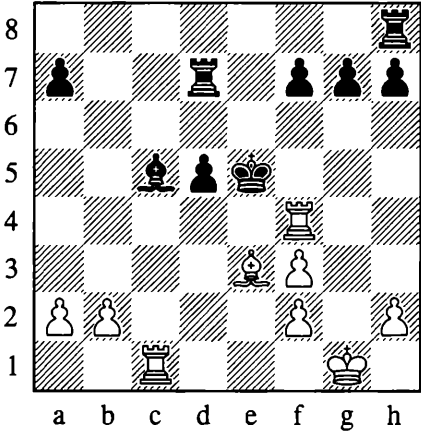
A) 15.♙xd5 exd5	158
A1) 16.0–0	159
A2) 16.♙e3	162
B) 15.♙g5† f6 16.♙xd5 exd5 17.♙e3 ♙e6 18.0–0–0 ♙b4	165
B1) 19.a3	166
B2) 19.♙b1	168

A1) note to 17.♙e1†



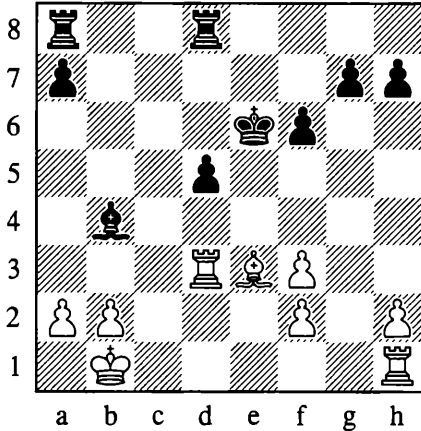
20...♙f5N

P.H. Nielsen – V. Filippov



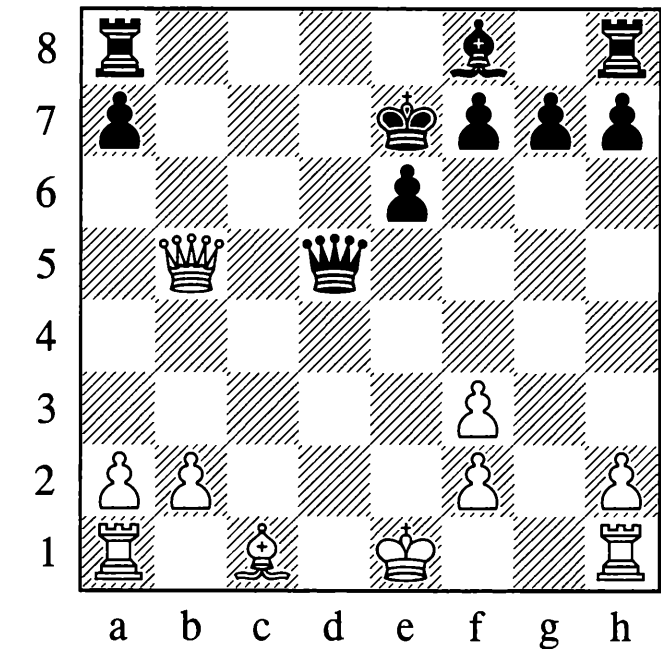
22...♙b6!

B2) 20.♙d3



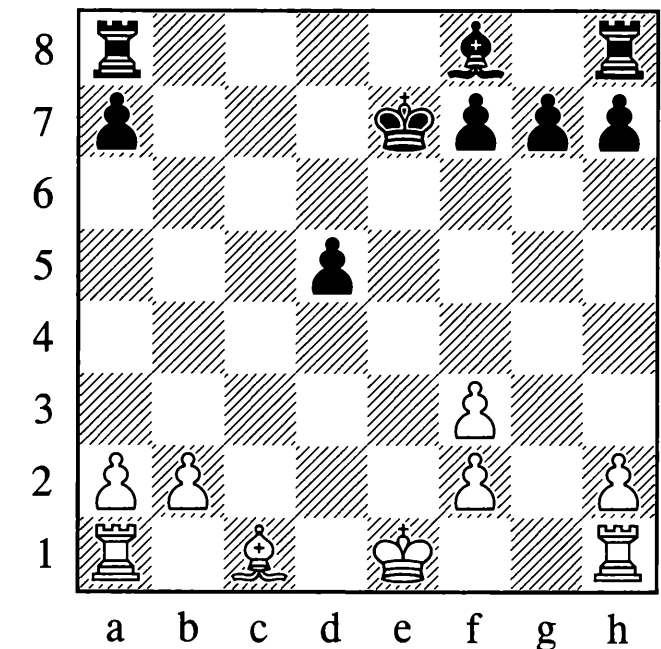
20...a5

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 cxd5 4.c4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 ♘c6 6.♘f3 ♙g4 7.cxd5 ♘xd5 8.♚b3 ♙xf3 9.gxf3 e6 10.♚xb7 ♘xd4 11.♙b5† ♘xb5 12.♚c6† ♔e7 13.♚xb5 ♚d7 14.♘xd5† ♚xd5



The famous Panov ending exists in two slightly different variations: **A) 15.♚xd5** and **B) 15.♙g5† f6 16.♚xd5**. We shall learn the importance of the subtle differences as they arise throughout this chapter.

A) 15.♚xd5 exd5



An interesting ending is reached with much more imbalance than is perhaps appreciated at first sight.

Firstly, White has a potentially strong pawn majority on the queenside. Secondly, Black is saddled with an isolated d-pawn. Thirdly, the black king is forced to wander about in the centre where it can be harassed by the white rooks. Thus White can definitely count on some initiative in the early stages, but this could (and should) fizzle out and then other factors might begin to tell.

From Black’s point of view, the king in the centre could turn out to be an advantage. If it is safe there, then it is the right place to be in an ending. Also, the isolated d-pawn could actually be a strong passed pawn. And finally, White’s pawn structure on the kingside has been damaged beyond repair.

Overall, there is a lot of play in the position. Probably it is equal, but both sides have their plusses and minuses and it is far from being a forced draw.

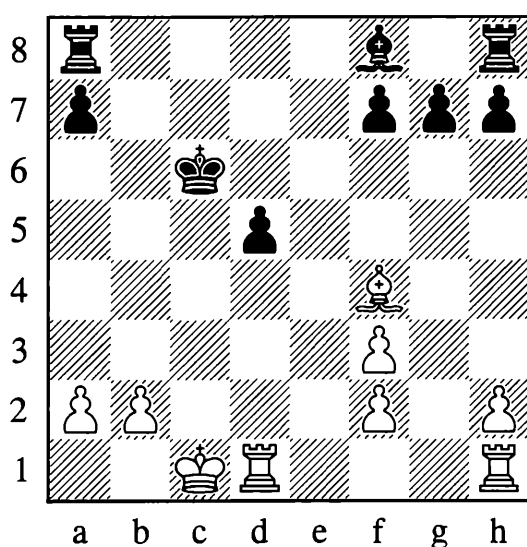
From personal experience, I really know it’s not a dead draw. On a three-hour train trip to the Danish League I helped a team-mate to prepare so he might be able to draw this position fairly easily – with White! It was of course hopeless. Maybe I should have been more suspicious right from the start. My team-mate proudly exclaimed that he was going to play the Panov that day. I knew his opponent would opt for the 5...♘c6 line, so I told him this. “Then I just take on d5,” he said confidently. “Oh, you’re going for the ending?” I replied. “What ending?” he said with a facial expression like he had just heard the stupidest question ever. Well, I showed him a few moves and *voila* there was the ending. Later that day he reached the same position in his game, but unfortunately he didn’t have a clue what to do – except to prematurely offer a draw when his higher-rated opponent was more or less forced to decline. Needless to say, my team-mate lost and we lost this key match 4½–3½. So, sadly, I know it is not just a draw.

There are now two main lines. First we have **A1) 16.0–0** when the rook can use the e-file to harass the black king. Then we shall look at the most natural move, which is **A2) 16.♙e3** followed by castling long. But before all that let's see a few minor alternatives.

16.♙f4 ♔d7!?

An original manoeuvre, but there is also nothing wrong with 16...♙e6 or even 16...♙f6.

17.0–0–0 ♔c6



The point; the king defends d5 and prepares ...♙d6. Now let's see a couple of continuations:

18.♙b1

Or 18.♙d3 ♙d6 19.♙e3 ♙e5 20.♙b1 ♙hd8 21.♙c1† ♙d6 22.f4 ♙f6 23.♙c5 ♙e6= Onischuk – Khenkin, Polanica Zdroj 1999.

18...♙d6 19.♙e3!?

A new try, whereas 19.♙d4 ♙xf4 20.♙xf4 f6= was Rechlis – Huzman, Tel Aviv 1996.

19...♙hb8 20.♙d3 ♙b5 21.♙c1† ♙d7=

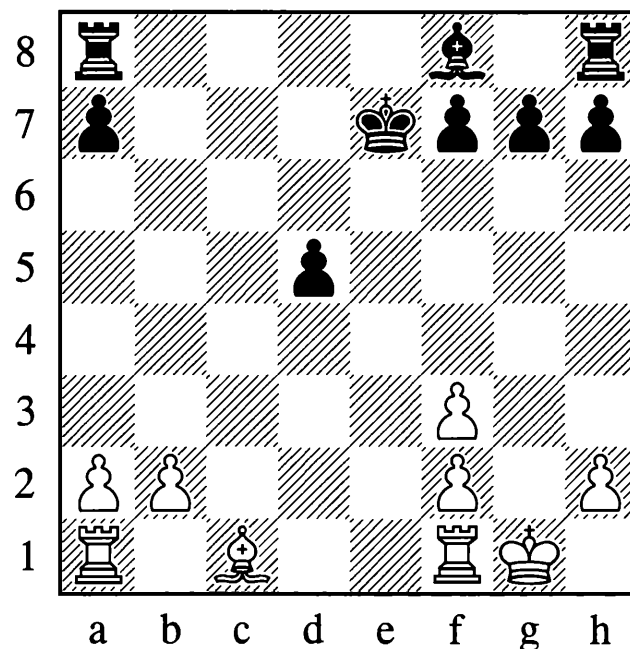
Black is fine.

16.♙g5† The simplest reply is just to play 16...f6 and transpose to line B, because the tempting 16...♙e6 17.0–0–0 ♙b4 18.a3 ♙a5 is of course answered with 19.b4N ♙b6 20.♙he1† with an initiative.

16.♙d2 ♙e6 17.♙c3 This turns out to be the wrong diagonal. 17...♙c5! 18.♙xg7

♙hg8 19.♙c3 ♙g2 20.0–0–0 ♙xf2 Black had good counterplay in Narciso Dublan – D. Mastrovasilis, Kusadasi 2006.

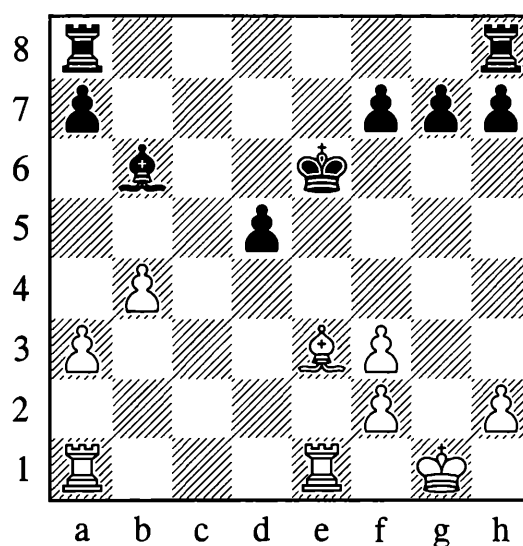
A1) 16.0–0



16...♙e6 17.♙e1†

This is of course White's main idea.

Playable, but not very threatening is 17.♙e3 when Black replies 17...♙b4 and takes control of e1. (17...♙e7 18.♙fe1 ♙f5 19.♙ad1 ♙hd8 is also okay, but it can quickly end in a perpetual: 20.♙d4 ♙f6 21.♙f4† ♙g6 22.♙g4† ♙f5 23.♙f4† ♙g6 24.♙g4† ♙f5 25.♙f4† ½–½ Fritz 5.32 – Adorjan, Budapest 2000.) 18.a3 ♙a5 19.b4 ♙b6 20.♙fe1



And now I propose 20...♙f5N 21.♙ad1 ♙hd8 when Black has no problems.

17...♖f5 18.♗e3

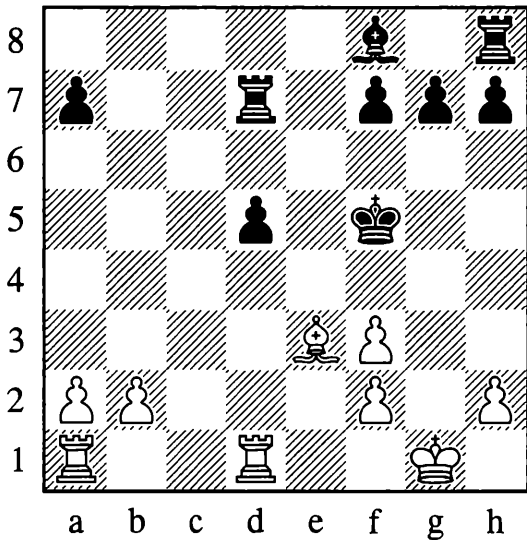
The best square for the bishop.

In practice White often starts with:

18.♖d1

But then after:

18...♖d8 19.♗e3 ♖d7



Black defends all the critical points.

20.♖ac1

20.♖d4 is nothing; see the illustrative game below.

20...♗e7 21.♖d4

The alternative is 21.♖c4!? when Black replies 21...♗f6 22.♖c5 (22.♖f4† ♗e6 is nothing) 22...♖hd8 23.b3 ♗e5 24.♖a5 ♗c3! as in Wahls – Adorjan, Germany 1989. Then 25.♖xa7 d4 26.♖xd7 ♖xd7 gives Black good compensation for the pawn.

21...g5 22.♖a4 ♗f6

And again Black gains counterplay with the passed d-pawn.

23.b4

23.b3 d4 24.♖c5† ♗g6 25.♗d2 ♖e8 26.♗f1 was tried in Reinderman – Khenkin, Antwerp 1993, when 26...d3 looks interesting.

Or 23.♖xa7 ♖xa7 24.♗xa7 ♗xb2 25.♖c5 ♗e6 and it is almost too easy for Black.

23...d4 24.♖a5† ♗g6 25.♗d2 ♖e8 26.♗f1

This is Adams – Dreev, Wijk aan Zee 2002, and now tempting is:

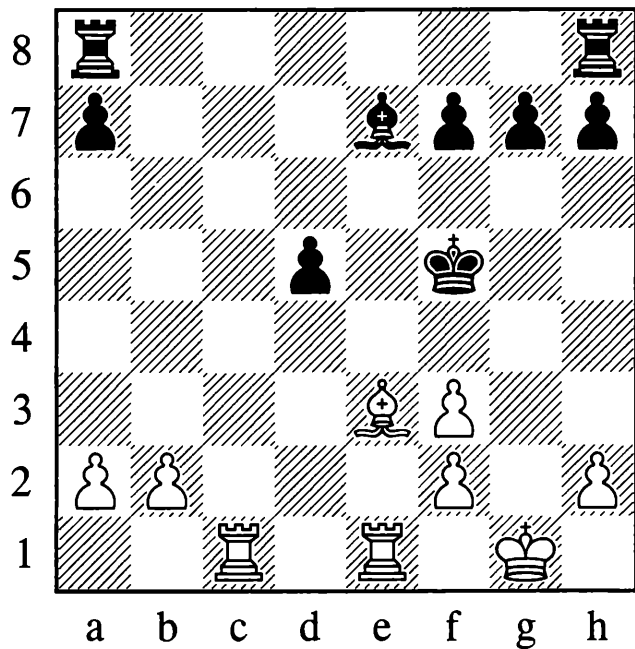
26...♖e6!?N

Black must be better.

18...♗e7

Black has a fine alternative in the annoying 18...♗b4!? forcing White to move his rook with 19.♖ed1. And now instead of 19...♖hd8 20.♖ac1 with some pressure, I think Black should play 19...♗e6 20.♖ac1 ♖hc8 21.♖xc8 ♖xc8 22.a3 ♗d6!N 23.♗xa7 ♗e5 with good compensation. For instance, 24.♖d2 ♖c1† 25.♗g2 ♖a1 26.♗d4 f6 and the d-pawn gives Black the edge.

19.♖ac1



White activates his rook along the c-file. This is the only move that can worry Black. For example, 19.♖ad1 ♖hd8 is nothing.

19...♖hc8!

Black sacrifices a pawn for active piece-play and almost magically turns the d-pawn from a weakness into an asset. Instead the passive 19...♗f6 20.♖c5 ♖hd8 21.b3 gave White long-term pressure in Sermek – Golubovic, Bled 1994.

20.♖xc8 ♖xc8 21.♗xa7 ♗f6 22.♖d1

Here Karpov & Podgaets recommend:

22...♗e6N 23.♗d4 ♗xd4

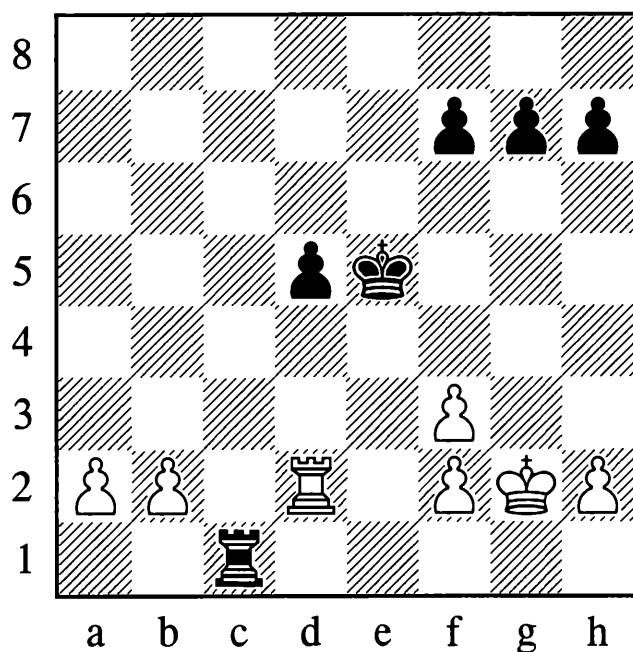
23...♖c2 may look simpler, but White returns the pawn and keeps good winning chances:

24.♙xf6 gxf6 25.a4! ♖xb2 26.♖a1 ♔d6 27.a5
♔c6 28.a6 ♖b8 29.♔f1 ♖a8 30.♔e2 ♔b6
31.♔d3

24.♖xd4 ♔e5 25.♖d2

Karpov & Podgaets do not mention 25.♖b4, but this new idea should be taken seriously. Black can answer with something similar to the main line: 25...♖c1† 26.♔g2 g5!? When I think the position is balanced. A sample line is: 27.a4 d4 28.♖b5† ♔e6 29.♖b3 ♔d5 30.a5 ♔c4 31.♖a3 d3 32.a6 d2 33.a7 d1=♖ 34.a8=♖ ♖f1† 35.♔g3 ♖g1† 36.♔h3 ♖f1† 37.♔g4 ♖g2† 38.♔f5 ♖h3† 39.♔f6 ♖e6† 40.♔g7 ♖g6† 41.♔f8 ♖d6† 42.♔g8 ♖g6† 43.♔h8 ♖f6† 44.♔xh7 ♖g6† 45.♔h8 ♖h6† 46.♔g8 ♖g6† 47.♔f8 ♖d6† 48.♔xf7 ♖d7† 49.♔f6 ♖d6† With a draw!

25...♖c1† 26.♔g2



Black has more than enough compensation. White's two connected passed pawns will not run anywhere and the black pieces are extremely active. In fact only Black can win such a position, however it is difficult to break through, so probably it is only a draw. Karpov gives the following line.

26...g5!?

26...d4 seems easier.

27.f4†

Or 27.a4 d4 28.a5 ♖a1 29.b4 ♔d5 30.♖b2 d3 and the black d-pawn is the most dangerous of the pawns. 31.b5 ♖xa5 32.b6 ♖a8 33.b7 ♖b8 34.f4 g4 35.f3 and it should end in a draw.

27...gxf4 28.♔f3 ♖h1 29.♖e2†

If 29.b4 then 29...♖b1 keeps an eye on the passer.

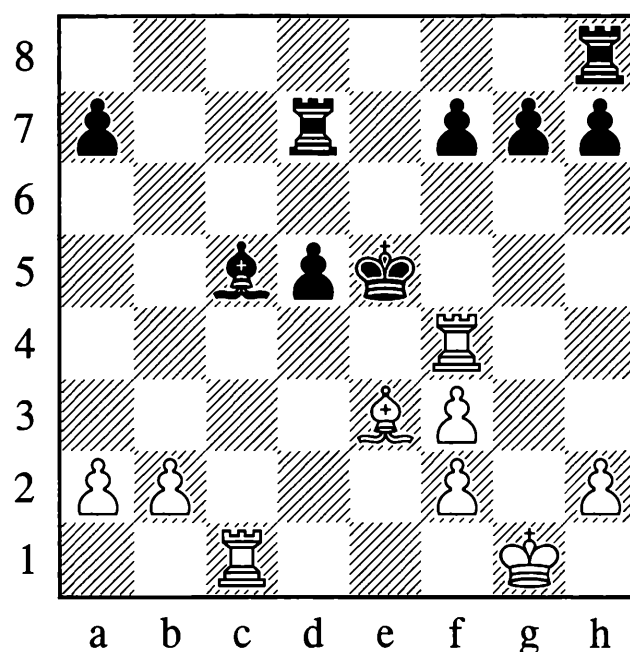
29...♔d6 30.♔xf4 ♖xh2=

The game is level.

P.H. Nielsen – V. Filippov

Gistrup 1996

1.c4 c6 2.e4 d5 3.exd5 cxd5 4.d4 ♘f6 5.♘c3
♘c6 6.♘f3 ♙g4 7.cxd5 ♘xd5 8.♖b3 ♙xf3
9.gxf3 e6 10.♖xb7 ♘xd4 11.♙b5† ♘xb5
12.♖c6† ♔e7 13.♖xb5 ♖d7 14.♘xd5†
♖xd5 15.♖xd5 exd5 16.0–0 ♔e6 17.♖e1†
♔f5 18.♖d1 ♖d8 19.♙e3 ♖d7 20.♖d4 ♙c5
21.♖f4† ♔e5 22.♖c1



22...♙b6!

A winning attempt. Instead 22...♙xe3 23.fxe3 ♖b8 24.b3 ♖bb7= was Adams – Morovic, Leon 1995.

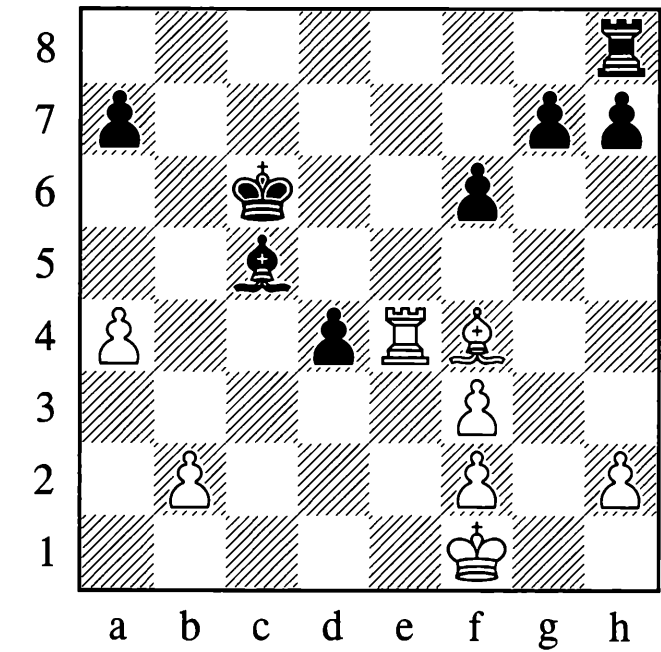
23.♖h4 d4

The d-pawn is clearly an asset.

24.♖e4† ♕f5 25.♞f4† ♕g6 26.♞g4† ♕f6
27.♞f4† ♕e7 28.♞e4† ♕d8 29.♙d2 ♞d5

The king was forced back to escape the checks, but now Black has a comfortable position.

30.a4 ♕d7 31.♞ce1 ♙c5 32.♞e5 ♞xe5
33.♞xe5 ♕d6 34.♙f4 ♕c6 35.♕f1 f6 36.♞e4



36...g5

Stronger was 36...♕d5 37.♕e2 ♕c4! with a very active king and a strong d-pawn.

37.b4

White seeks his chances in a rook ending a pawn down. Objectively, 37.♙g3 was probably better.

37...♙xb4 38.♙e3 dxe3 39.♞xb4 ♞e8

Filippov knows the simple dogma of rook endings: play actively!

40.f4 g4 41.♞b5 ♞e4 42.♞f5 ♞xa4 43.♕e2

43.fxe3 was the obvious move but 43...♞a2 cuts off the king, which is usually disastrous in rook endings. This case is not so clear. In fact, for most of this game White has been forced to choose his best drawing chance from various unpleasant positions.

43...exf2 44.♕xf2 ♞a3 45.♞xf6† ♕b5

46.♞f7 a5 47.f5 ♞f3† 48.♕e1 h5 49.f6 a4
50.♞f8 ♕b4 51.f7 ♕a3 52.♕d2 ♞f6 53.♕c2
h4 54.♕c1 ♞f2 55.♕b1?

Now Black has a clear win; a better try was 55.♕d1.

55...♞b2†

The crude 55...h3! was a winner. Black goes round the houses, but gets there in the end.

56.♕c1 ♞b7 57.♕c2 ♞c7† 58.♕b1?

The king had to step out, for example to d3. These endings are much easier when there is no time pressure and a computer is whirring in the background.

58...♞a7

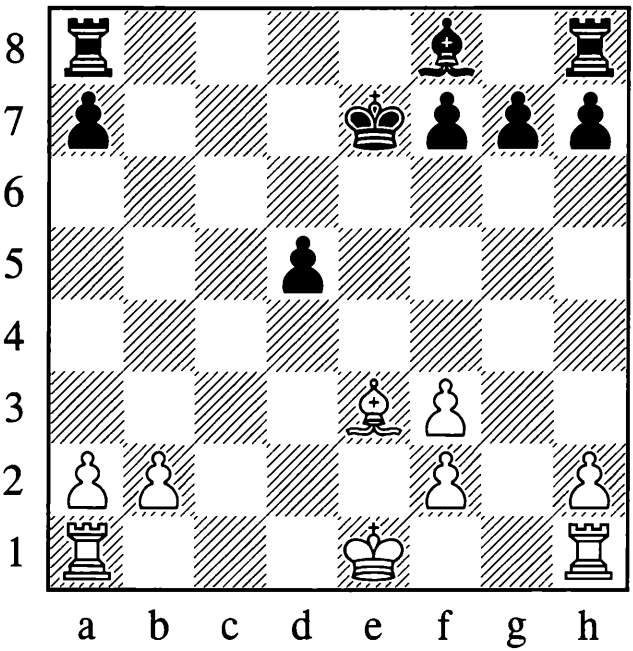
Now 58...h3! was a nasty zugzwang.

59.♞g8 ♞xf7 60.♞xg4 ♞f1† 61.♕c2 ♞f2†
62.♕b1 ♞xh2 63.♞f4 ♞b2† 64.♕a1 h3
65.♞f3† ♞b3 66.♞f2 ♞g3

This game was far from perfect, despite being played between two strong grandmasters. The game illustrates some typical ideas and, perhaps most of all, just how much play is left in a supposedly dry endgame.

0–1

A2) 16.♙e3



White just puts the bishop on its supreme square and remains flexible with the king and the rooks.

16...♔e6 17.0–0–0

So White goes for the standard set-up after all. Many other moves have been tried. Let's check them out:

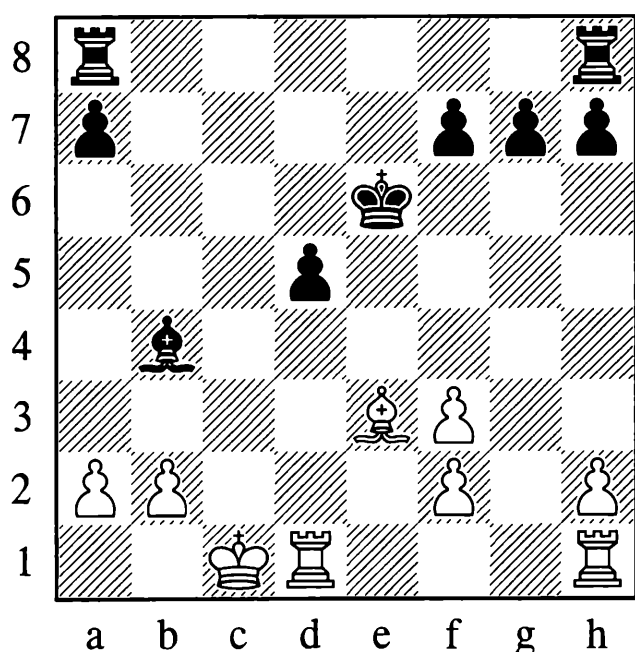
17.0–0 transposes to the previous variation.

17.♔e2 ♕d6 18.♖ac1 ♖hc8 19.h3 ♕e5 with nice centralization. The d-pawn is at least as important as the white majority on the queenside.

17.♖g1 ♕d6 (17...g6!?N) 18.♖xg7 ♕e5 19.♖g4 ♕xb2 20.♖b1 ♖hb8 (20...♕e5!?N 21.♖a4 ♖hd8 is a decent alternative) 21.♔f1 ♕e5 22.♖e1 ♔d6 And Black held in Rogers – Adams, London 1988.

17.♖c1 ♕b4† 18.♔e2 ♖hc8 19.♔d3 a6 (19...a5 has also been played, but it is less flexible) 20.a3 (or 20.♕d4 f6 21.h3 ♕d6 22.♖hg1 g6 23.b3 ♕a3 24.♖ce1† ♔f5+ and Black took over in Rodriguez Melgar – Vera, Zaragoza 1991) 20...♕d6 21.♖he1 ♔f5 22.h3 ♕e5 23.♕d4 f6 Black had no problems in Rajcsanyi – Ju. Horvath, Budapest 1991.

17...♕b4



This standard move controls e1 and opens the back rank for the h8-rook to join the battle with tempo, due to the check on c8.

18.♔b1

White moves the king before ...♖hc8† comes.

The natural 18.a3 is precisely countered with 18...♖hc8† 19.♔b1 ♕c5. There follows 20.♖he1 ♕xe3 21.fxex3 (or 21.♖xe3† ♔d6 22.♖ed3 ♖c5+) 21...♖c4! and Black is fine, as the following two examples show:

After 22.♖d2 ♖b8 23.♖ed1 ♖b5 Black is more active in an equal position, Kalinitschew – Komarov, Novosibirsk 1989.

An instructive line is 22.♖d4 ♖ac8 23.♖ed1 ♖xd4 24.♖xd4 ♖c4+. Now in Dory – Hera, Hungary 2002, White entered a pawn ending, which is always risky. 25.♖xc4? dxc4 26.♔c2 ♔d5 27.♔c3 g5 28.e4† ♔c5 29.e5 h5 30.b4† cxb3 31.♔xb3 ♔d4 32.♔b4 ♔e3 0–1

18.♖hg1 g6 19.♖g4 a5 20.♖gd4 White activates the rook, but doubling rooks on the d-file is no threat. Black easily defends d5 and when White runs out of ideas, he takes over. 20...♖hd8 21.♖4d3 ♖ab8 22.♕d4 f6 23.h3 ♕d6 24.b3 ♕e5+ Bezemer – Landa, Vlissingen 2008.

18.♕d4 f6 is nothing; d4 is not a lucky square for the white bishop.

18.♖d3 transposes to the mainline.

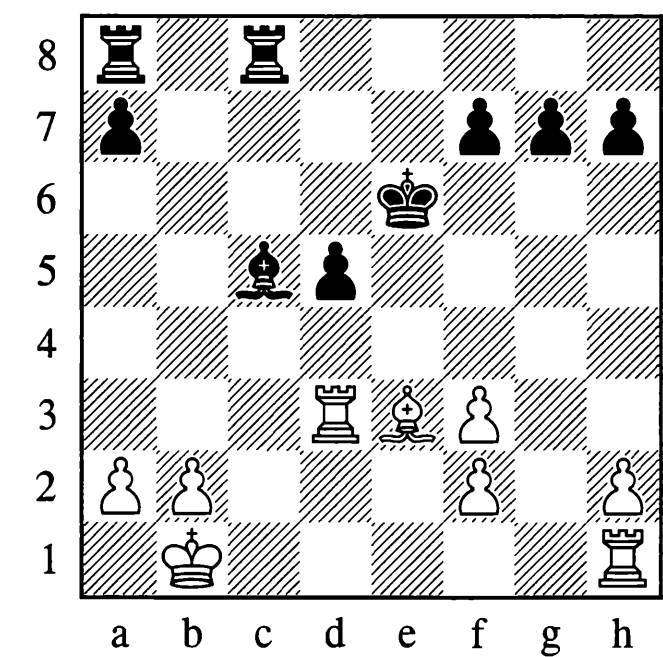
18...♖hc8

18...♖hd8 is also playable, but I like the simplicity of the plan with a rook on the c-file and then ...♕c5 neutralizing everything.

19.♖d3

The most flexible.

19...♔c5



Black has equalized.

20.♖e1

20.♖hd1 ♕xe3 21.fxe3 ♖c5 22.♖b3 ♖ac8 23.♖b7 ♖8c7 24.♖xc7 ♖xc7 25.♖c1 was Loos – Krug, Germany 2004. White is inviting a pawn ending, and with 25...♖c4! Black could return the offer. It is bad to exchange on c4, as we have already seen.

20.♖c1 ♕b6 21.♖g1 ♕xe3 (or 21...g6!? and Black is fine) 22.♖xe3† ♔f6 23.♖g4 ♖c7 24.♖f4† ♔g6 25.♖g4† ♔f6 26.♖f4† ♔g6 27.♖g4† ½–½ Adams – Ponomarev, Sofia 2005. Sofia rules!

20...♕xe3 21.♖dxe3† ♔f6=

See the illustrative game below for full coverage of this interesting rook ending.

Stripunsky – Dreev

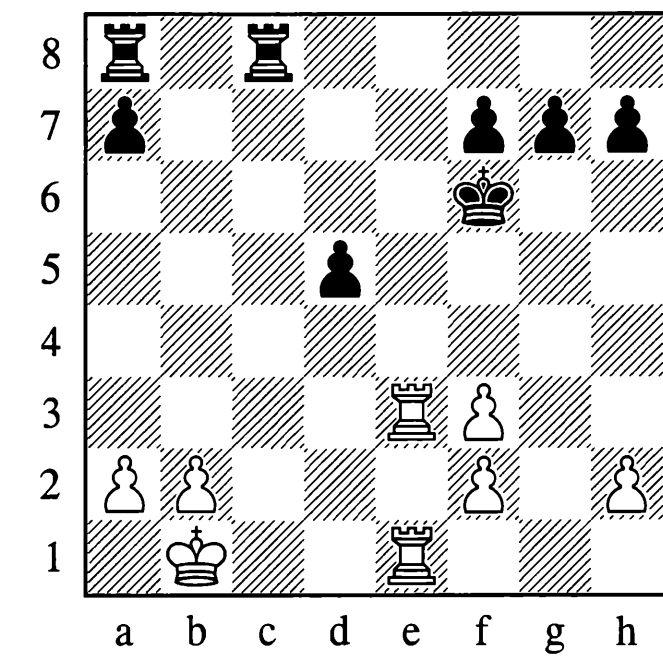
Dos Hermanas (Internet) 2001

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 cxd5 4.c4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 ♘c6 6.♘f3 ♕g4 7.cxd5 ♘xd5 8.♖b3 ♕xf3 9.gxf3 e6 10.♖xb7 ♘xd4 11.♕b5† ♘xb5 12.♖c6† ♔e7 13.♖xb5 ♖d7 14.♘xd5† ♖xd5 15.♖xd5 exd5 16.♕e3 ♔e6 17.0–0–0

♕b4 18.♔b1 ♖hc8 19.♖d3 ♕c5

This manoeuvre is worth learning by heart – please remember ...♖hc8 (with check if White hasn't played ♔b1) followed by ...♕c5.

20.♖e1 ♕xe3 21.♖dxe3† ♔f6



22.♖e7

White activates his rook, which is basic knowledge in rook endings.

22...♖c4

Black does the same.

23.♖d7 ♖f4 24.♖d6† ♔f5 25.♖xd5† ♔g6 26.♖d6† f6 27.♖g1† ♔h6 28.♖d7 g5 29.♖d3 ♖e8

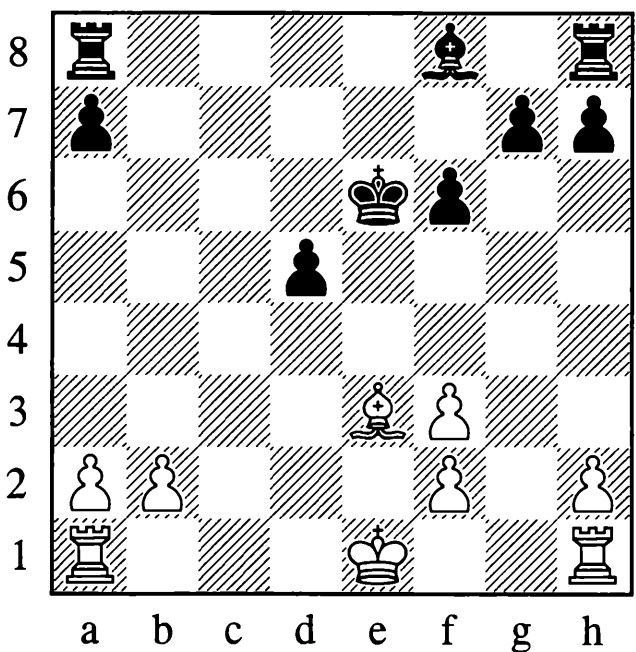
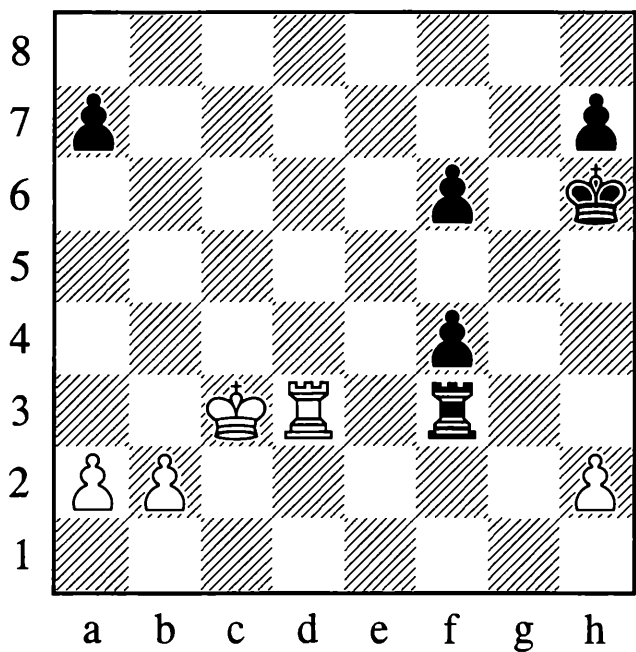
Black has sacrificed a pawn, but his rook is ready to invade on e2 with great play. White decides to return the pawn and simplify.

30.♖g4 ♖e1† 31.♔c2 ♖e2† 32.♔c3 ♖xf2 33.♖xf4 gxf4

Black's pawns are maybe not the most beautiful ever, but they are there. And the active rook gives him an edge.

34.♖d7?! ♖xf3† 35.♖d3?!

Admitting failure is always a mistake! 35.♔d4 should draw.



35...Rf2 36.Rd2 Rf1

Now the f-pawn is really strong.

37.b4 c5 38.c3 c4 39.b5 c3 40.Rb2
Rd1+ 41.c4 c3

And Black wins easily.

42.Rb3+ c2 43.Rb2+ c3

Or 43...Rd2.

44.Rb3+ c2 45.Ra3 f3 46.Ra6 f2 47.Re6+
c2 48.Rd6+ c2 49.Rxf6 f1 R+ 50.Rxf1
Rxf1
0-1

B) 15. g5+ f6 16. Rxd5

We have studied the immediate capture on d5, so now it is time to learn the subtleties of flicking in the bishop check first.

16...exd5 17. e3 c6

At first it does not seem that White has gained anything by interposing the check on g5, but the weakening of the e6-square could be important as an entry point in some rook endings and the pawn on f6 also prevents Black's natural bishop manoeuvre to e7 and f6, where it would be well placed, as we have seen many times already.

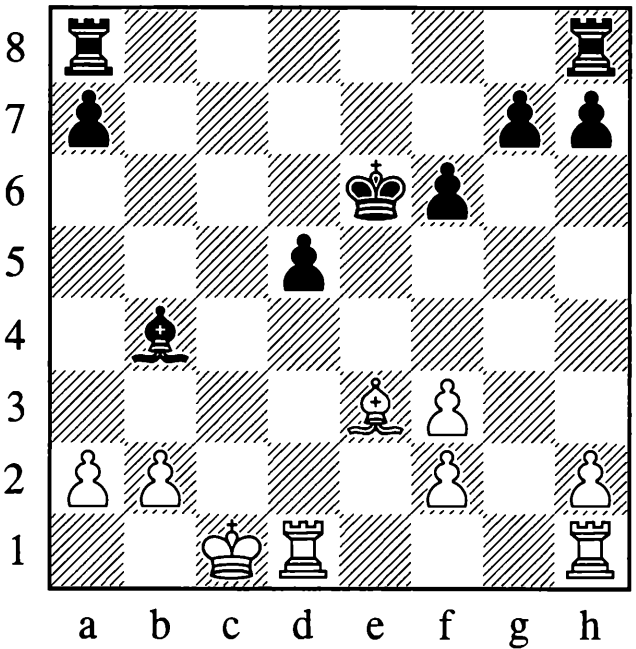
18.0-0-0

18.Rg1 is well met by 18...b4+ 19. e2 g5
20.Rac1 Rhc8= Talla – Bednar, Horni Becva
1993.

18.Rc1 d6 19.Rc6 Rhc8 20.Ra6 d4! 21. f4
c5 22.Rxd6 cxf4 23.Rxd4+ cxf3 24.0-0
Rd8= Black has undeniably activated his king,
Khamrakulov – Nanu, Ortigueira 2005.

18.0-0 is much less threatening than without
the bishop check, because then the e-file would
not be blocked. A good answer is the standard
18...b4.

18...b4



This is almost exclusively played, but also fully viable is 18...♖d8 with the idea of putting the rook on d7, where it covers both weak pawns, a7 and d5. So far in the few games with 18...♖d8, White hasn't been able to prove anything.

19.♖he1 ♘f7 20.♖d4 ♙c5 21.♖a4 d4 22.♙d2
Simacek – Cifka, Czech Republic 2008, and now 22...♖d5♞ looks good.

Or 19.a3 ♖d7 20.♖he1 ♘f7 21.♖d3 ♙e7= Zenker – K. Olsen, corr. 2003.

In general 18...♖d8 leads to less forcing positions where the stronger side has good opportunities to outplay his opponent.

Let's return to the mainline. After 18...♙b4 White should choose between chasing the annoying bishop at once with **B1) 19.a3** or the prophylactic and flexible **B2) 19.♙b1**. Other moves do not give anything. Let me prove it.

19.♖d3

White has also tried 19.♖hg1 g5 20.a3 (or 20.♖g4 a5N 21.a3 ♖hc8† 22.♙b1 ♙c5=) 20...♙d6 21.♖ge1 ♙e5♞. This already looked a bit awkward for White in Gavrikov – Dreev, Biel 1995.

19...♖hd8 20.a3

20.♙b1 transposes to the main variation below.

20...♖ac8† 21.♙b1 ♙c5

Standard by now.

22.♖e1 ♙d6!?

Simpler is 22...♙f7 23.♖ed1 ½–½ Polgar – Leko, San Luis 2005. But maybe Black doesn't want simpler.

23.♖g1

Trying to create some weaknesses in Black's camp.

23...g6 24.♖gd1 ♙e6 25.♖e1 ♙xe3 26.♖dxe3† ♙f5 27.♖e7 ♙f4

Black's active king secures excellent counterplay.

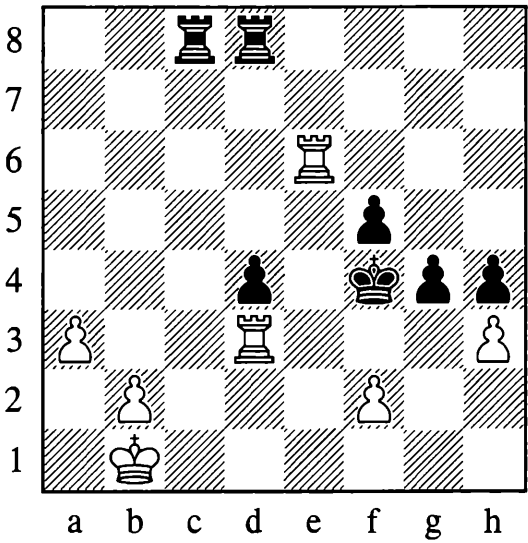
28.♖1e3 a5 29.h3

Or 29.♖xh7 ♖h8.

29...h5 30.♖7e6 ♙g5 31.♖a6 d4 32.f4†

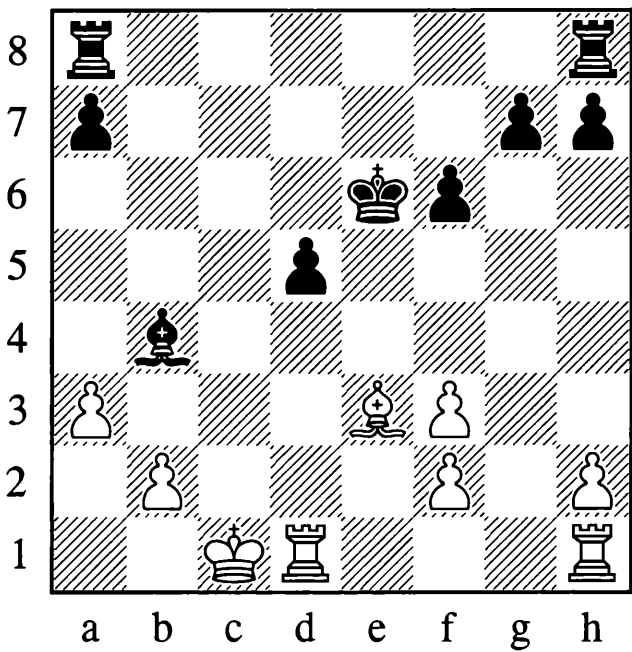
Worse is 32.♖xa5† due to 32...♙h4.

32...♙f5 33.♖xa5† ♙xf4 34.♖d3 ♙e4 35.♖d2 g5 36.♖a6 f5 37.♖e6† ♙f3 38.♖e5 ♙f4 39.♖e6 h4 40.♖d3 g4



Black's initiative on the kingside is very serious. Karpov – Kramnik, Linares 1993

B1) 19.a3



The most popular choice. White kicks the annoying bishop away and gains the e1-square for a rook.

19...♖hc8†

Interesting is 19...♔a5 20.b4 ♕c7 when 21.♖he1 looks crushing for White. Actually Black holds the balance with a little tactical trick: 21...♖hd8! 22.♕b6† (The obvious move. Instead 22.♕c5† ♖f5 is unclear.) 22...♖f7 23.♕xc7 ♖ac8 The point. 24.♗e3 ♖xc7† 25.♖b2 This is Nazzari – Barboza, Uruguay 1987, and now I suggest 25...♖g6 followed by ...♖f5 and Black is definitely not worse.

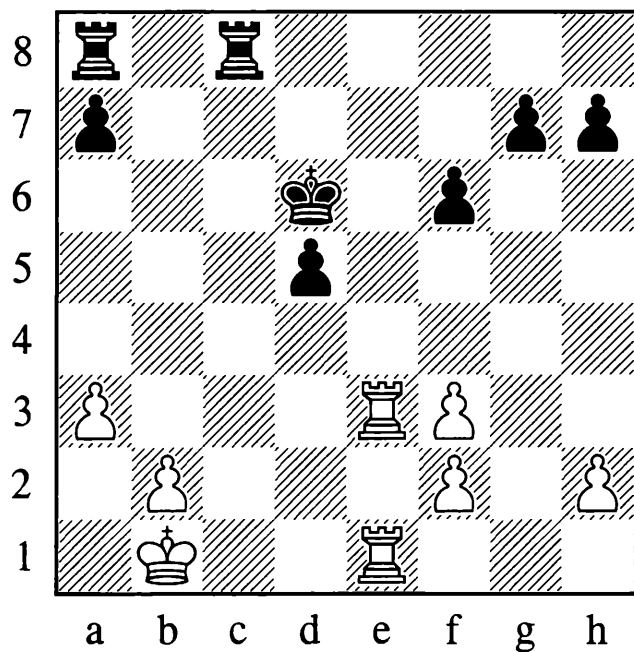
20.♖b1 ♕c5

The authorized way to equalize. The problem for practical players is that it is more or less a forced draw, but theoretically everything is of course fine.

21.♖he1 ♕xe3 22.♖xe3†

22.fxe3 ♖c4 is no problem for Black.

22...♖d6 23.♖de1



White is ready to invade on the exposed e6-square and maybe he will conquer the seventh rank as well.

23...♖c4

The antidote. Black gets active counterplay against White's own weak pawns. Often this leads to a mass slaughter with both sides liquidating the opponent's pawns until a draw is unavoidable.

24.♖e6†

White has a similar option in:

24.♖e7 ♖h4 25.♖1e6†

We can also consider a couple of alternatives:

Antal – Erdos, Sitges 2008, continued: 25.♖c2 ♖xh2 26.♖1e6† ♖c5 27.♖d3 ♖xf2 28.♖c7† ♖b5 29.♖b7† ♖a5 30.♖e3 ♖c2 31.b3 d4† 32.♖xd4 ♖c1 33.♖d3 ♖d8† 34.♖e2 ♖c2† 35.♖e3 ♖c3† 36.♖e2 ♖c2† 37.♖e1 And now 37...♖d3 is a draw at once: 38.♖xg7 ♖xf3 39.♖xh7 ♖xb3 40.♖xa7† ♖b5

25.b4 Threatening mate in one! 25...d4 26.♖xg7 ♖xh2 27.♖g4 ♖d5 28.♖d1 This is Petrov – Sherwood, corr. 2006, and now 28...♖xf2 was the easiest way: 29.♖dxd4† ♖c6 30.♖gf4 ♖e8 31.♖xf6† ♖b5

25...♖c5 26.♖xg7 ♖xh2 27.♖xf6

Take, take, take...

27...♖xf2 28.♖xh7

White has won a pawn, but Black gets good counterplay, and the d-pawn is strong as usual.

28...♖b8 29.♖c7†

29.b4† ♖c4 looks very dangerous for White.

29...♖d4 30.♖c2 ♖xc2 31.♖xc2 a5 32.♖a6 ♖c8† 33.♖d2

Or 33.♖b1 ♖e3.

33...♖b8 34.♖c2 ♖c8† 35.♖d2

½–½ Belikov – Dreev, Moscow 1992.

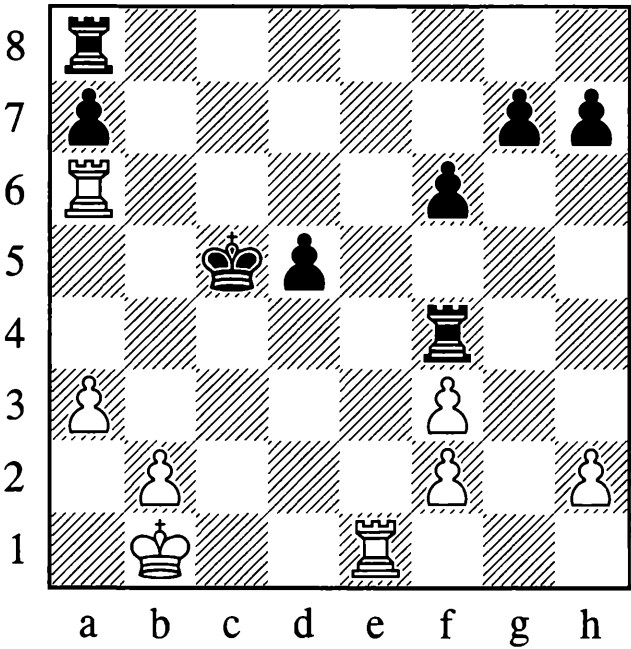
24...♖c5 25.♖a6

Targeting a7 and preparing ♖e7. We can also have a quick scan of a couple of other possibilities:

25.♖c1 ♖xc1† 26.♖xc1 ♖d4 is another fine demonstration of an active king. 27.♖e7 ♖c8† (27...g5!?) 28.♖d2 ♖b8 29.b4 a5 30.bxa5 ♖a8 31.♖xg7 ♖xa5 32.♖xh7 ♖xa3 With a drawn ending in Gulko – Harikrishna, Bled (ol) 2002.

25.b4† ♔b5 26.♞d6 a5 The text move liquidates everything, but instead 26...♔a4!? could have been tried. 27.♞xd5† ♔a4 28.♞xa5† ♞xa5 29.bxa5 ♔xa5 30.♞e7 ♞h4 31.♞xg7 ♞xh2 32.♞f7 ♞xf2 33.♞xf6 h5 34.♞f4 h4 35.♞xh4 ½–½ Ker – Van Delft, Queenstown 2009.

25...♞f4



Black creates counterplay just in time.

26.♞c1† ♔d4 27.♞c3 ♔e5 28.♞e3† ♔f5 29.♞d3 ♔g6 30.♞xd5 ♞h4 31.f4 ♞xf4

A draw was agreed in Egin – Guliev, Moscow 1997. Instead of 31...♞xf4 the computer proposes 31...h5 32.♞g5† ♔h6 33.♞g2 ♞xf4.

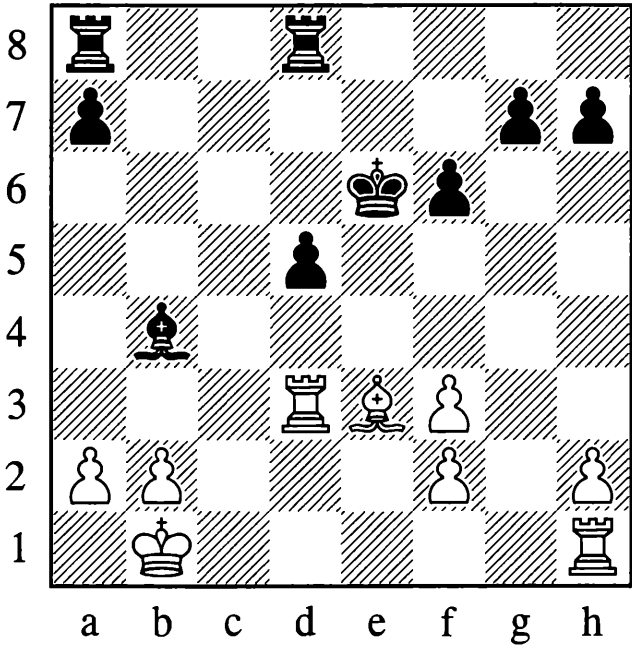
B2) 19.♔b1

Now the standard continuation is:

19...♞hd8 20.♞d3

A very flexible system. The rook is excellent here on d3. Firstly, it makes room for its colleague. The other rook can go to d1 and intensify the pressure on the weak d5-pawn or maybe even stronger will be c1, to infiltrate along the c-file. Secondly, the rook is not stuck on d3. It can go to b3 and perhaps penetrate on the queenside. But despite all its subtleties this move is not enough to gain an advantage.

By the way, 20.♞hg1 ♞d7 21.♞g4 ♞b8 22.♞d3 was played in the previously-mentioned disaster in the Danish League. After 22...♔d6 Black was already better in N. Nielsen – P. Rewitz, Denmark 2009 (perhaps I should have given White's name as N.N.).



20...a5

20...♞d7 21.♞c1 ♞ad8 is solid. After all White cannot use the c-file for much, and he can easily stumble into trouble if he doesn't know what to do (see the illustrative game).

21.a3 ♔f8 22.♞e1

22.♞c1 a4 was similar in Reinderman – Smeets, Netherlands 2007.

22...♔f5 23.♞c1

Dead level is 23.♞ed1 ♔e6 24.♞e1.

23...♞d7 24.♞c6 a4 25.♞b6 g5 26.♞b5 ♔e6

White should concentrate on holding the balance, which he did in the game we are following.

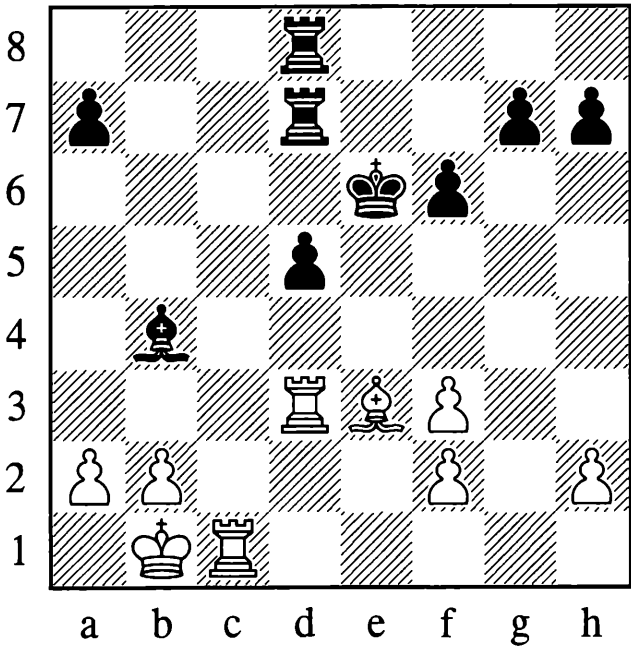
27.♞d4 ♞a6 28.h3 ♔e7 29.♔c2 ♞c7† 30.♔d3 ♔c5 31.♞g4 ♔d6 32.♞d4 ♔c5 33.♞g4 ♔d6 34.♞d4 ♔c5 35.♞g4 ♔d6

A draw was agreed in P.H. Nielsen – Dominguez, Esbjerg 2002.

Borwell – K. Tikkanen

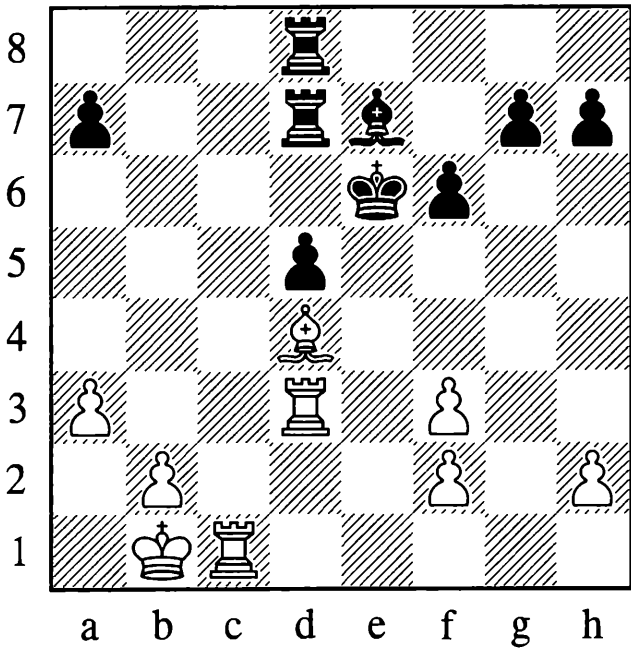
Correspondence 1996

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 cxd5 4.c4 ♘f6 5.♘c3
♘c6 6.♘f3 ♙g4 7.cxd5 ♘xd5 8.♙b3 ♙xf3
9.gxf3 e6 10.♙xb7 ♘xd4 11.♙b5† ♘xb5
12.♙c6† ♙e7 13.♙xb5 ♙d7 14.♘xd5†
♙xd5 15.♙g5† f6 16.♙xd5 exd5 17.♙e3
♙e6 18.0-0-0 ♙b4 19.♙b1 ♙hd8 20.♙d3
♙d7 21.♙c1 ♙ad8



22.a3 ♙e7 23.♙d4?!

Not a particularly good square. 23.♙c6†
♙f5 24.b4 was better, when it is the normal
d-pawn vs. queenside majority theme.



23...♙d6! 24.b4

24.h3 was better, but Black is comfortable.
He can put his king on f5 and bishop on e5.

24...♙xh2 25.♙h1 ♙e5 26.♙xh7 g5 27.♙h1
♙xd4 28.♙xd4 ♙e5 29.♙d3 f5

The advantage has definitely tipped to Black's
side. The d-pawn is strong, the black king is
active and the white pawns on the kingside are
weak.

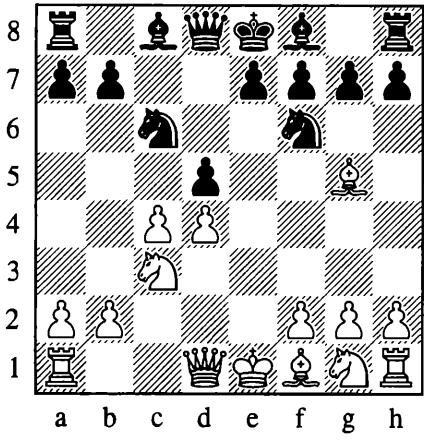
30.♙g1 ♙g7 31.♙e1† ♙f4 32.♙ee3 d4 33.♙e2
♙h7 34.♙ed2 ♙h3 35.♙b2 ♙xf3 36.♙c2?

This loses simply. It was essential to try
36.♙xd4† ♙xd4 37.♙xd4† ♙e5 38.♙d2 f4
39.a4 g4 40.b5 and the question is if Black
wins after 40...g3 41.fxg3 fxg3 42.♙d7. This
is an opening book, so I have only spent a few
minutes on this position. Can White give up
his rook for the black passer and then draw
with his king and pawns? Possibly, but have
fun analysing it yourself!

36...♙c8† 37.♙d1 ♙xd3 38.♙xd3 ♙e4
39.♙d2 ♙c3
0-1

Conclusion

The Panov ending is nothing Black should
especially worry about, but Black should know
the little manoeuvre ...♙b4 followed by ...♙hc8
and ...♙c5 neutralizing everything. Of course
some of the lines are drawish. However, in
general, and rather surprisingly, there is lots of
play in the position and it is realistic to strive
for the full point – with either colour!



Panov Variation

The Sharp 6.♘g5

Variation Index

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 cxd5 4.c4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 ♘c6

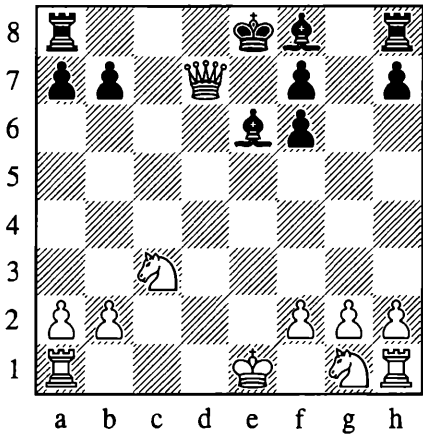
6.♙g5 dxc4

A) 7.♘f3	172
B) 7.d5	174
C) 7.♙xc4	177

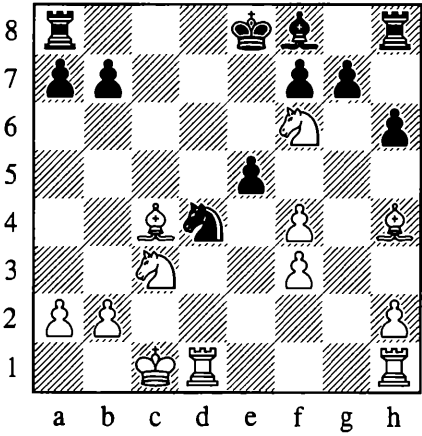
B) note to 8.♙d4

C) note to 11.♘f3

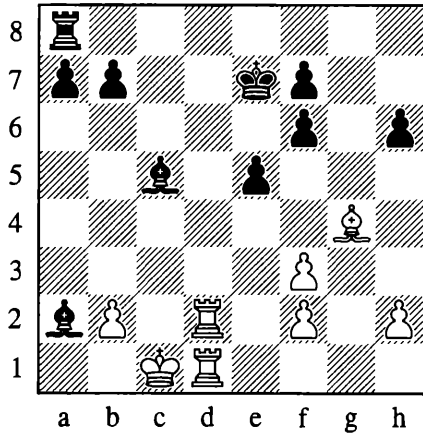
C) after 21.♙g4



14...♙xd7N

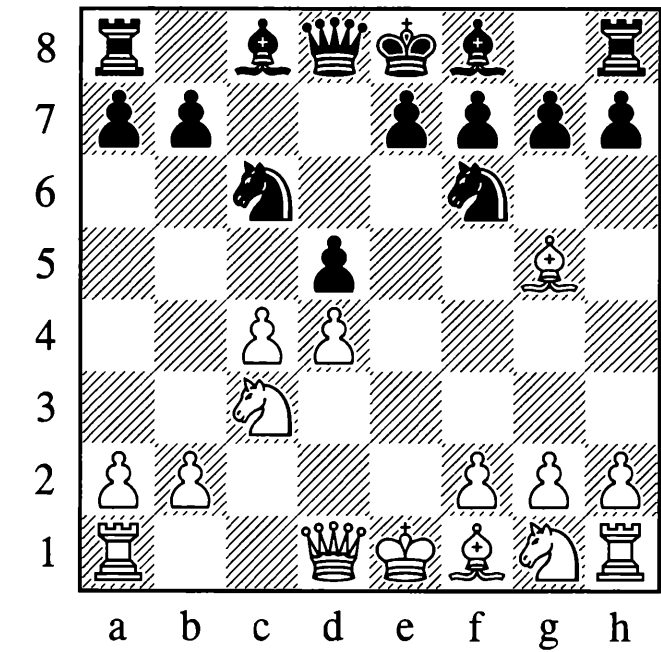


13...♙c8!



21...♙d4+

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 cxd5 4.c4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 ♘c6 6.♙g5



After White ran out of ideas in the Panov ending, many players switched to this direct move, which fits well with the usual Panov idea of quickly grasping the initiative with active developing moves. Unfortunately for White, a reliable method of disarming his plans has also been created here.

6...dxc4

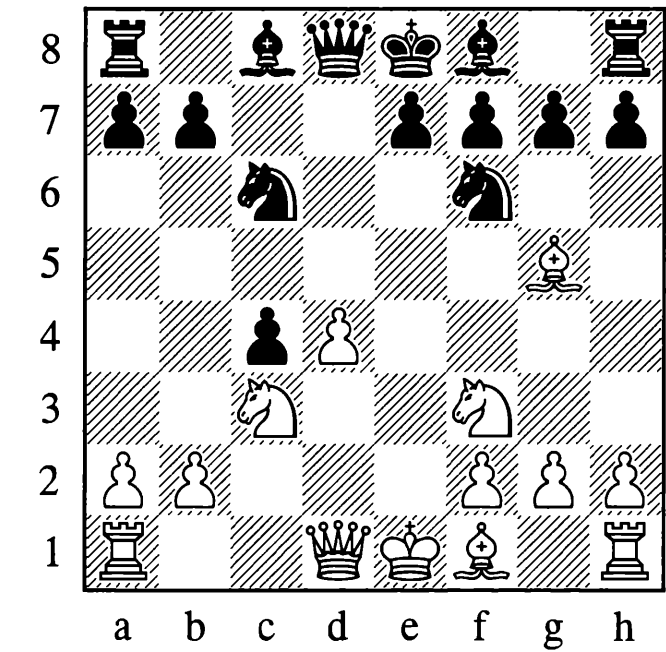
So White gets what he wants – active play with an isolated queen’s pawn? Yeah, that is partly true, but there are some very specific features. The d-pawn is actually hanging! That is rather disturbing.

Black has a solid alternative in 6...e6 when play becomes more positional. White seems to be on top after 7.♘f3 ♙e7 8.c5 0–0 9.♙b5, but with the well-timed 9...♘e4 10.♙xe7 ♘xe7 Black gets his share of the chances. He is ready to oppose the far-advanced white pawns on the queenside with ...b7-b6. Still, I prefer the more direct approach with 6...dxc4.

After 6...dxc4 White has to do something about the hanging d-pawn. He can protect it with A) 7.♘f3, but that is very quiet and not in the spirit of the Panov. Thus it is much more

logical to advance it with the double-edged B) 7.d5 or sacrifice it with the dangerous C) 7.♙xc4. We will of course look at all three variations.

A) 7.♘f3



7...h6

Putting a small but inconvenient question to the bishop.

Instead the active 7...♙g4 backfires after 8.d5, while 7...e6 and then playing quietly against the isolated pawn is legal, but it is not my style. I like to force things when I can.

8.♙xf6

After 8.♙h4 g5 9.♙g3 ♙e6 it is not so easy to regain the pawn.

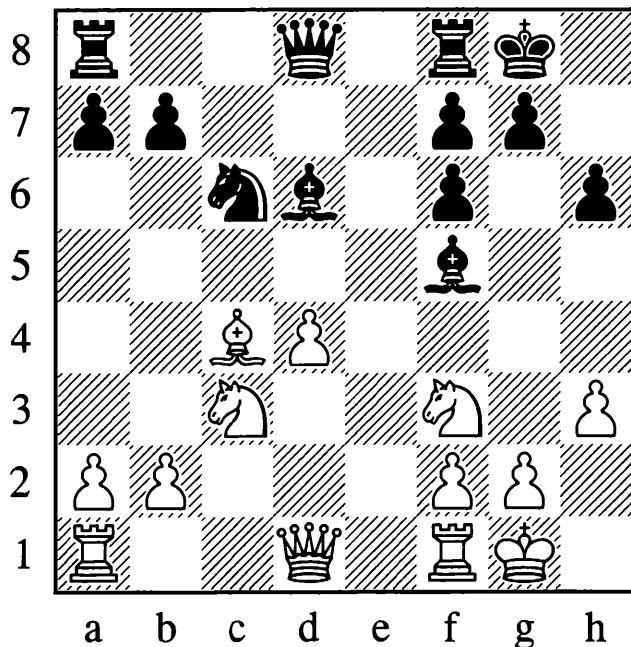
8...exf6

Capturing away from the centre. A master would make this move without thinking. It opens up a line for the dark-squared bishop and gives Black good piece-play. True, it turns White’s d-pawn into a passed pawn, but in this particular situation that is not necessarily an advantage, as the pawn might well become a target. Of course 8...gxf6 9.♙xc4 is simply good for White.

9.♙xc4 ♙d6 10.0–0 0–0 11.h3

Otherwise ...♙g4 might be inconvenient, but now the problem child goes to another great square.

11...♙f5



12.♙d3

The right plan. White is interested in simplifications because some exchanges might increase the power of the d-pawn.

12...♙d7

Black sees no reason to avoid the exchange.

However, it was also interesting to keep the pair of bishops with:

12...♙d7!?

This looks a little passive, but it is not so easy for White to make use of his extra space.

13.a3 ♙e8 14.♙b3

Better than 14.♙e4 ♙e6 15.♙xd6 ♙xd6 when the d-pawn has an uncertain future.

14...♙a5 15.♙a2 ♙c8 16.♙fe1 a6

Well played. Little by little, Black keeps improving his position.

17.♙xe8† ♙xe8 18.♙e1 b5

With fine counterplay. After:

19.♙f5 ♙d7 20.♙h4

In Timofeev – Belov, Dagomys 2009, Black could have given White something to worry about with:

20...♙c4!

Black is *almost* better.

13.♙xf5

Or 13.♙e1 ♙fe8 is equal.

13...♙xf5 14.♙b3

Attacking the weak spot on b7. Instead 14.♙b1 ♙a5 15.♙c2 was Howell – Bitalzadeh, Liverpool 2008, and now 15...♙b6N 16.♙ad1 ♙fe8 would have been fine for Black.

14...♙a5

14...♙d7 is also okay.

15.♙a4

Also level is 15.♙b5 ♙xb5 16.♙xb5 ♙fd8.

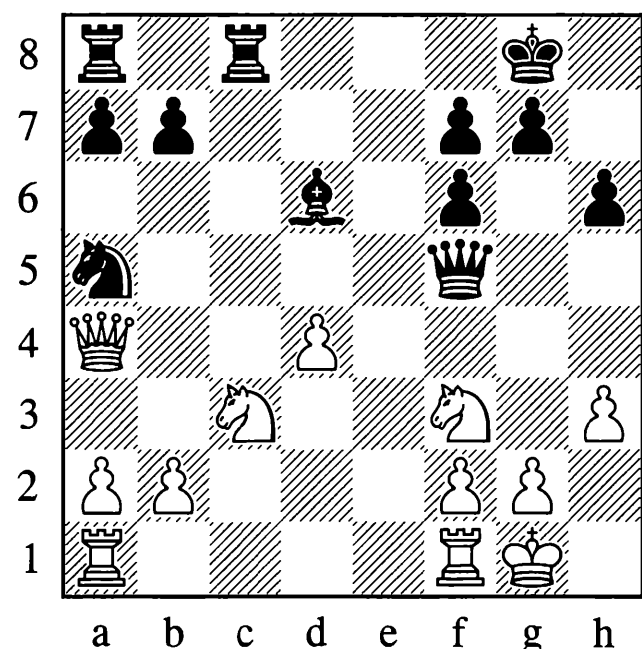
15...♙fc8

Black has equalized. The following game shows that his long-term prospects are actually quite good.

Ivanchuk – Aronian

Nice (rapid) 2009

1.c4 c6 2.e4 d5 3.exd5 cxd5 4.d4 ♙f6 5.♙c3 ♙c6 6.♙g5 dxc4 7.♙xc4 h6 8.♙xf6 exf6 9.♙f3 ♙d6 10.0–0 0–0 11.h3 ♙f5 12.♙d3 ♙d7 13.♙xf5 ♙xf5 14.♙b3 ♙a5 15.♙a4 ♙fc8



16.♟b5

Natural quiet moves give nothing, so White initiates some tactical play. However, Black is well prepared for this.

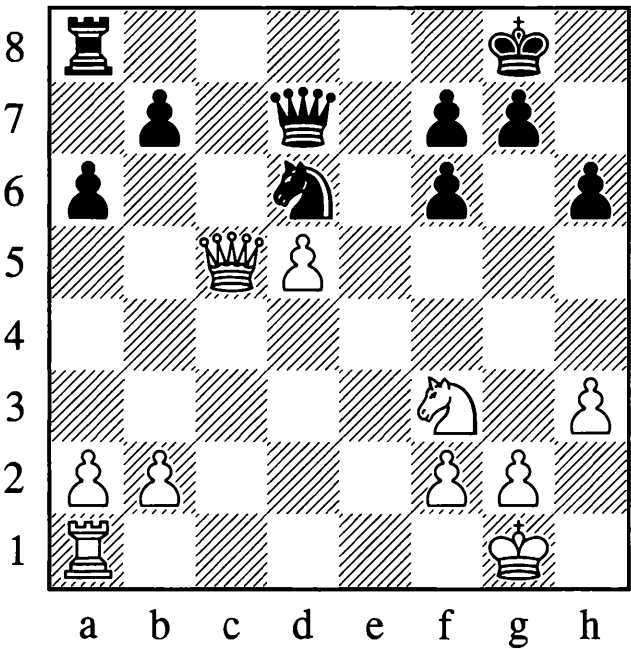
16...♞c4 17.♞fc1

Or 17.b3 a6! 18.bxc4 axb5 19.♞xb5 ♞xb5 20.cxb5 ♞a4 21.♞fb1 ♞c2 and Black wins the pawn back with good play.

17...a6! 18.♞xd6 ♞xd6 19.♞b4 ♞d5

19...♞f4 was also good.

20.♞c5 ♞xc5 21.♞xc5 ♞e6 22.d5 ♞d7



A very instructive position. The d-pawn is effectively blockaded by the knight, which has been known since Nimzowitsch to be the ideal blockading set-up. Black can activate his rook and just play around the far-advanced pawn, which actually turns out to be a weakness. The rest of the game shows great positional play.

23.♞d1 ♞c8 24.♞b4 ♞c4 25.♞b3 ♞a4 26.♞xa4 ♞xa4 27.a3 ♞f8 28.♞f1 ♞e4 29.b3 ♞e7 30.♞d4 ♞d7 31.a4 ♞e8 32.♞c1?!

This loses the pawn at once, but White's position was very uncomfortable anyway after 32.f3 ♞c8.

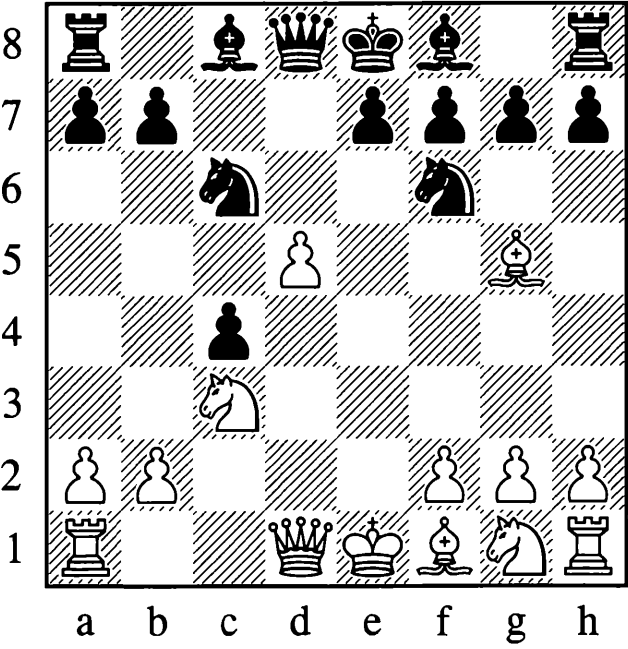
32...♞e5 33.♞c5 ♞e4 34.♞c1 ♞d2† 35.♞g1 ♞xd5

Now b3 falls as well. It is over.

36.♞e2 ♞xb3 37.♞b1 ♞c5 38.a5 ♞c7 39.♞f4 ♞f5

0-1

B) 7.d5



7...♞e5

Staying in the centre is the most reliable. 7...♞a5!? is riskier.

8.♞d4

Keeping up maximum pressure.

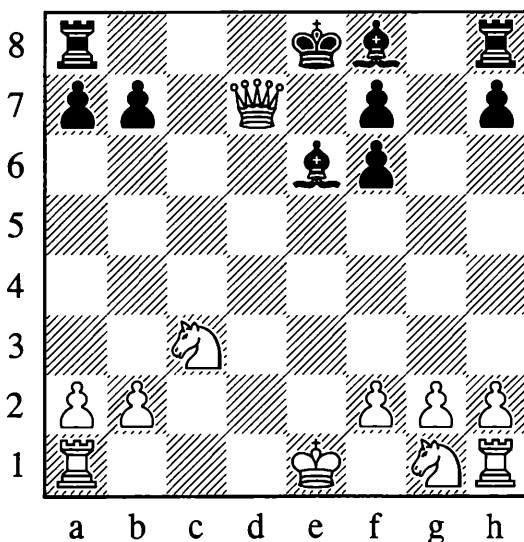
The alternative is 8.♞xc4 ♞xc4 9.♞a4† ♞d7 10.♞xc4. White regains the pawn, but after the precise 10...e6 Black is more than fine in the complications. We will look at three continuations to back up this claim:

11.♞d1 ♞c8 12.♞e2 ♞b4 13.dxe6 fxe6 14.♞d2 0-0 15.♞f3 a6 16.♞e5 ♞xc3 17.bxc3 (or 17.♞xc3 ♞b5) 17...♞a4 18.♞c1 ♞c5 19.0-0 So far this is Filatov – Papin, Sarika 2005, and now 19...♞ad8N 20.♞f3 e5+ looks pleasant.

11.♞f3 exd5 12.♞e2† (or 12.♞xd5 ♞a5† 13.♞c3 ♞e6) 12...♞e6 13.0-0 ♞e7 14.♞d4

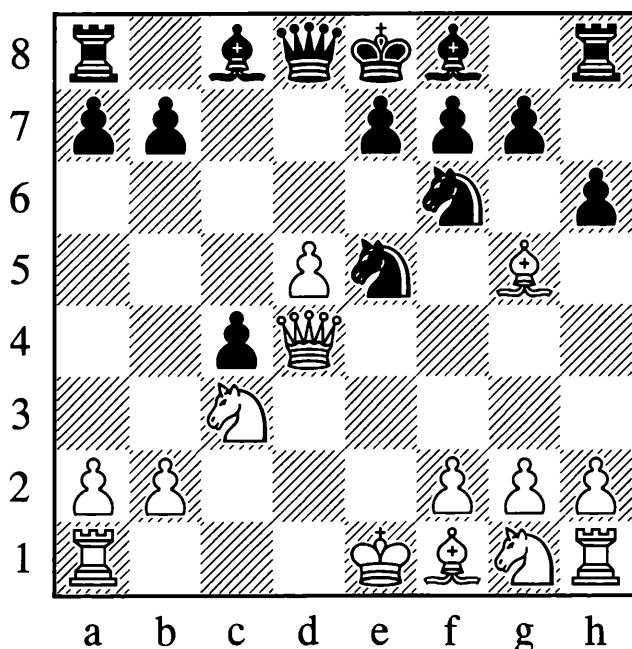
♙d7 15.♖fe1 The pressure down the e-file secures material equality, but Black has no problems after the simplifications. 15...h6 16.♘xe6 fxe6 17.♙xf6 ♙xf6 18.♚xe6† ♚xe6 19.♖xe6† ♜f7 20.♖d6 ♖hd8 21.♖xd8 (or 21.♖xd5 ♖xd5 22.♘xd5 ♙xb2 23.♖b1 ♖c8) 21...♖xd8 22.♖d1 ♜e6 23.♜f1 ♙xc3 24.bxc3 ♖c8 25.♖d3 ♖c4♭ Ghaem Maghami – Ni Hua, Beijing 2008.

11.dxe6 ♙xe6 12.♚b5† ♚d7 Black covers everything. 13.♙xf6 gxf6 14.♚xd7†



And now after 14...♙xd7N 15.♘ge2 0-0-0♭ the bishop pair is a major factor.

8...h6!

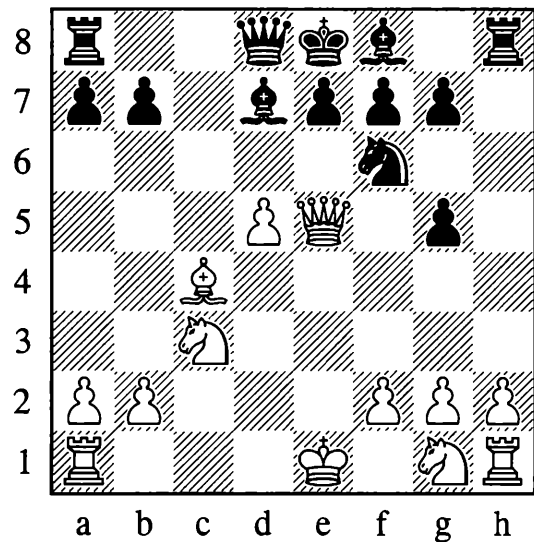


Only this creative move keeps everything together. If 8...♘d3† 9.♙xd3 cxd3 and now

the simple 10.♚xd3± gives great play. White is ahead in development and the d-pawn is really irksome.

9.♙f4

Taking the knight is of course also critical: 9.♚xe5 hxg5 10.♙xc4 ♙d7



Black gets good play on the dark squares. This is an important position, so we shall follow four examples from tournament praxis.

11.♘ge2 ♖c8 12.♙b3 ♚b6 13.♚xg5 ♘g4 14.♚f4 g5 15.♚d4 ♚xd4 16.♘xd4 ♙g7 17.♘de2 b5!? 18.a3 a5 19.h3 ♘e5 20.♜d2 ♖h4 Black has excellent compensation. 21.♖hc1 g4 22.hxg4 ♘xg4 23.f4 ♖h2 24.g3 In Howell – Buhmann, Balatonlelle 2005, Black could have increased his advantage with 24...♙d4 25.♘d1 ♖d8♭ when the black pieces coordinate fantastically and White is beginning to run out of constructive moves.

11.♙b3 g4 12.♖d1 was Guenther – Martin, corr. 2000, and now I suggest 12...♖h5!N 13.♚g3 ♚b8 14.♘ge2 ♚xg3 15.♘xg3 ♖e5† 16.♜d2 g6♭.

11.♘f3 ♚b6 (also fine is 11...g4 12.♘g5 ♖h5∞) 12.0-0 g4 13.♘d4 Trovalet – Martinez, France 2004, and now 13...♖h5!N wins for Black. For example, 14.♚f4 e5! 15.dxe6 ♙d6 16.exd7† ♜f8 and there is nothing better than 17.♘a4

♖c7 18.♟b5 ♙xf4 19.♟xc7 ♙xh2† 20.♞h1 ♙xc7† 21.♞g1 b5 with a piece more.

11.♞xg5 ♖c7 12.♙b3 ♜xh2 13.♜xh2 ♞xh2 14.0–0–0 g6 15.♟f3 ♙h6 16.♟xh2 ♙xg5† 17.♞b1 ♙f4 18.♟f3 ♞f8 A draw was agreed in Kindermann – Balogh, Baden 1999. Black has the better pawn structure and the bishop pair, and should of course have continued.

9.♙h4 ♟g6 10.♙g3 transposes to the next note. Instead 10.♙xf6 exf6 11.♙xc4 ♙d6= is nothing.

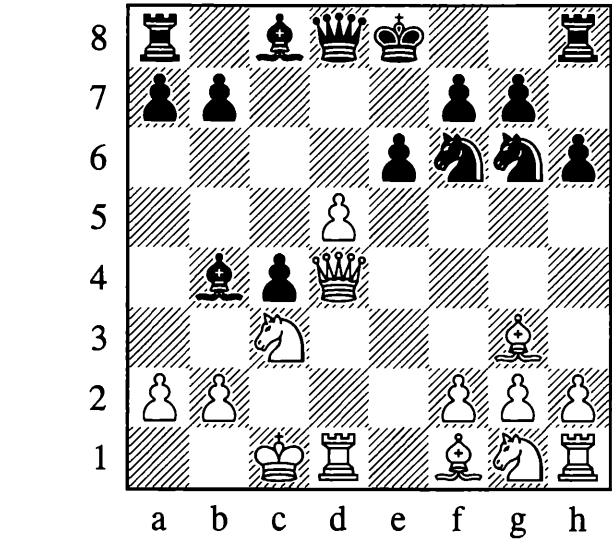
9...♟g6 10.♙xc4

10.♙g3 e6 is very tense, but seems okay for Black. Since the position is complex, we shall look in some detail at three continuations:

11.d6 ♟e7! 12.♞d1 ♟ed5 has been known to be fine for Black since the famous game Anand – Seirawan, Amsterdam 1992. I also like 12...♟f5N 13.♞c5 ♙d7.

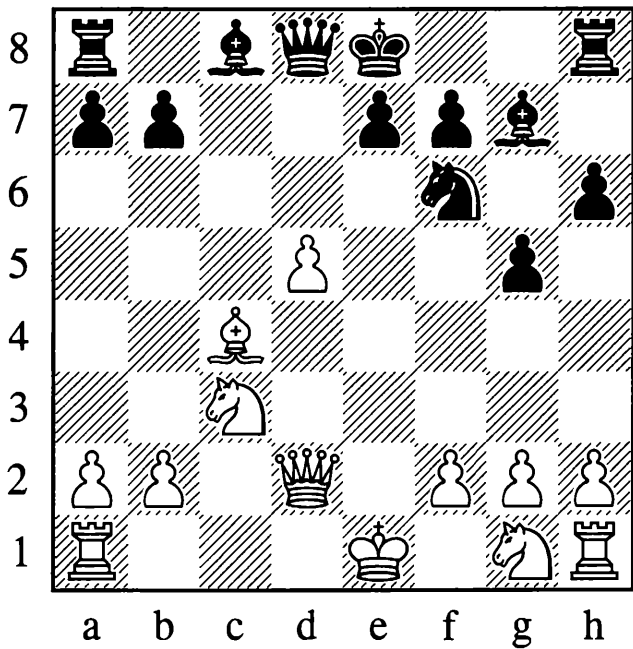
11.♙xc4 exd5 This tends to fizzle out. 12.♙xd5 (12.♟xd5 ♙b4† is a little embarrassing) 12...♟xd5 13.♟xd5 ♙d6= 14.♙xd6 ♞xd6 15.♟e2 0–0 16.0–0 ♟e7 Avotins – Starostits, corr. 2005, was agreed drawn, but of course *you* could play on.

11.0–0–0 The most interesting try. 11...♙b4!N



This new move solves all Black’s problems. 12.♞xc4 ♙xc3 13.dxe6 (or 13.♞xc3 exd5 14.♞e1† ♙e6 with a solid position) 13...♙xb2† 14.♞c2 ♞b6 15.♞b5† The safest choice (instead 15.exf7† ♞f8 16.♙d6† ♟e7 was tempting, but White has not yet won the piece on b2 back, and after 17.♙c5 ♙f5† 18.♙d3 ♞c8! Black defends tactically). 15...♞f8 16.e7†! ♟xe7 17.♞xb6 ♙f5† 18.♞xb2 axb6 19.♟f3 ♙e6 20.a3 ♟e4 Trapping the bishop on g3. White has compensation for the pawn, but no more than that.

10...♟xf4 11.♞xf4 g5 12.♞d2 ♙g7



The strong dark-squared bishop gives Black good play.

13.♟ge2

13.♟f3 0–0 14.0–0 is nothing, as both 14...a6 and 14...♞d6 are fine.

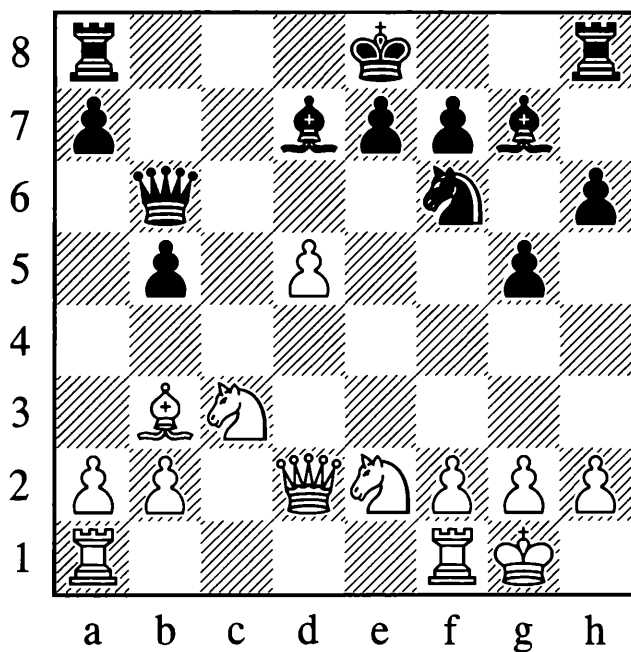
13...♙d7 14.♙b3

Black is also happy after 14.0–0 ♞c8 15.♙b3 0–0.

14...b5

An ambitious idea. Black advances on the queenside, taking his share of the space and revealing that he has his own plans. Natural moves like 14...0–0 or 14...♞b6 were also fine.

15.0–0 ♖b6!N



Black activates the queen and increases his dark-square domination.

In the stem game Bareev continued his pawn-play with 15...b4 16.♘d1 a5, but after 17.♘g3 0–0 18.♘e3 the knights found fresh pastures. 18...e6 19.dxe6 ♙xe6 20.♖e2 ♖b6 21.♘gf5± Safarli – Bareev, Moscow 2009.

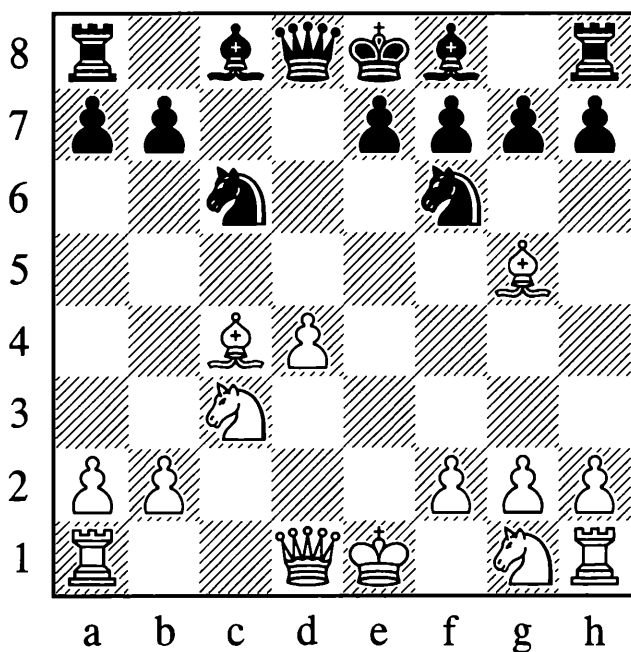
16.♟ac1

A more direct approach with 16.a4 is well answered by 16...b4 17.♘b5 0–0.

16...0–0 17.♘d4 ♟fd8

Black has a pleasant position.

C) 7.♙xc4



7...h6

A speciality of the young Chinese star Wang Yue. Taking on d4 at once is much riskier.

8.♙h4

The consistent choice.

8.♙xf6 exf6 9.♘f3 transposes to line A and is nothing, as we saw there.

8.♙e3 apparently leads to a typical IQP position, but the passive placement of the bishop on e3 renders it pretty harmless. 8...e6 9.♘f3 ♙e7 10.0–0 0–0 11.♟c1 b6 12.a3 ♙b7= 13.♖e2 ♙d6 14.♟fd1 ♘e7 Black starts to regroup and hopes to exchange some pieces to make the game more technical, so White will regret having the isolated pawn. 15.♘e5 ♘fd5 16.♘xd5 ♘xd5 17.♙d2 ♖h4 In Bareev – Wang Yue, Amsterdam 2008, Black was on top.

8.♙f4!?

This interesting new concept was developed by Aronian.

8...e6 9.♘f3 ♙d6 10.♙e5

This is the idea – finding an unusual location for the bishop.

In a later game Radjabov voluntarily lost a tempo with 10.♙e3, hoping that after 10...0–0 11.♖d2 he could maybe sacrifice on h6, but Anand showed it was all in vain. 11...♟e8 12.0–0–0 ♙b4 13.♖d3 ♙xc3 14.♖xc3 ♙d7 15.♘b1 ♟c8 Black had active play in Radjabov – Anand, Nice 2009. 10...0–0 11.♖e2 b6 12.a3 ♙b7 13.♟d1 ♟e8 14.0–0 ♙f8 15.♟fe1 ♘d5

Black is okay.

16.♘xd5 exd5 17.♙a2 ♘a5

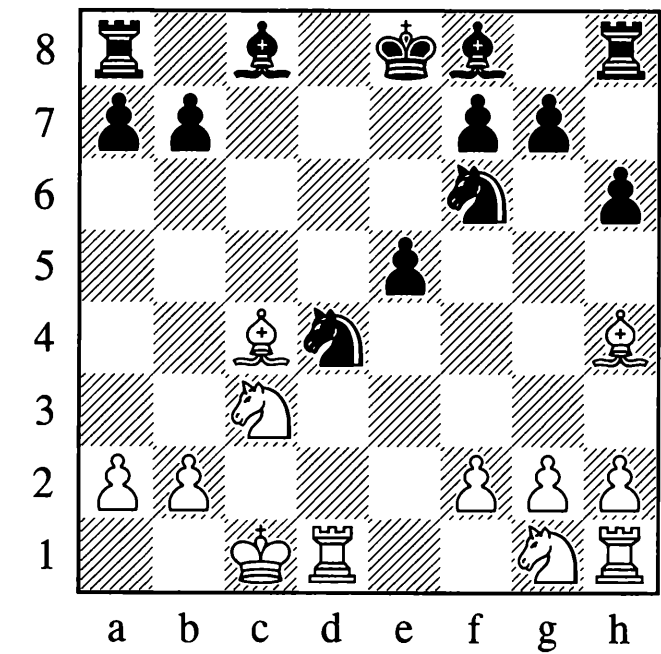
With the idea 18.b4 ♘c4! 19.♙xc4 dxc4 20.♖xc4 ♖d5.

18.♙b1

This is Aronian – Wang Yue, Linares 2009. Now:

18...♖c4 19.♔d3 g6 20.♔b3 ♜c8
The game is equal.

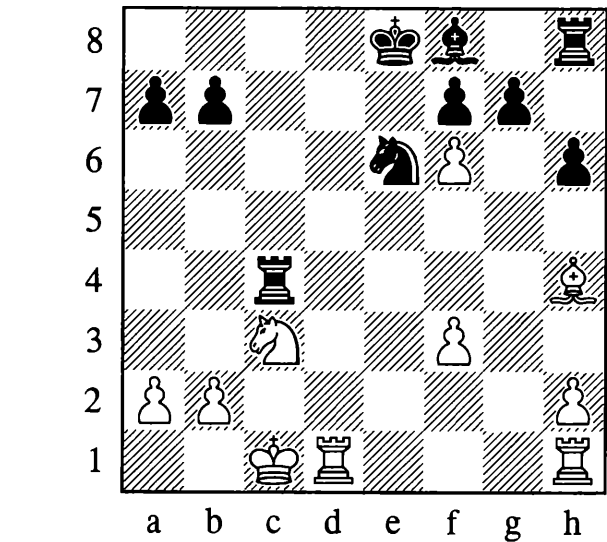
8...♔xd4 9.♔xd4 ♖xd4 10.0-0-0 e5



White is far ahead in development and he can undermine or exchange the knight on d4, thereby opening further lines towards the black king. Still, Black's position is quite resilient and a pawn is a pawn.

11.♖f3

The alternative is 11.f4 ♔g4 12.♖f3. This looks crushing, but closer scrutiny reveals that Black is far from collapsing. 12...♔xf3 (The other capture, 12...♖xf3, is very loose, but a strong tactician might make it work. Personally I don't like it.) 13.gxf3 ♜c8! An important zwischenzug. 14.fxe5 ♜xc4 15.exf6 ♖e6



Here we see a small difference between including ...h7-h6 or not. With the bishop still on g5, in several games White has continued ♜he1, creating some pressure, but now the bishop is threatened by the rook and has to move. 16.♔f2 gxf6 17.♔xa7 ♔b4 18.♜d3 ♜g8= Black activates his second rook on the g-file, with fine counterplay.

11...♖xf3 12.♔xf6

It is essential to interpose this move to weaken Black's structure. After 12.gxf3 ♔e6 13.♔b5† ♖d7 Black easily covers everything.

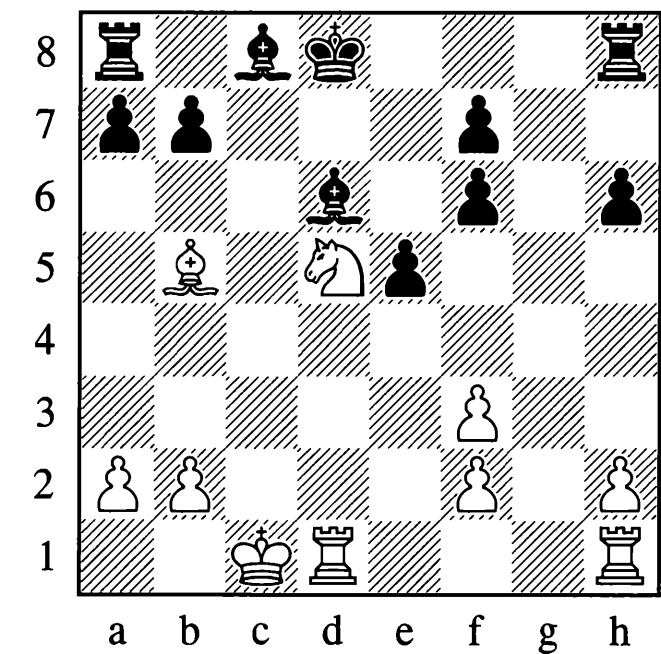
12...gxf6 13.♔b5†

Again White interposes a move before Black's defences are completely ready. On 13.gxf3 both 13...♔e7, when the king gets a square on f8, and 13...♔e6 are fine for Black.

13...♔e7 14.♖d5†

And again!

14...♔d8 15.gxf3 ♔d6



We are following a game between Aronian and Stellwagen. And this is great defending by the young Dutch GM; White cannot use the pressure on the d-file for much. If he moves the knight away from its dominating position on d5 the black king gains safe squares on e7 or c7.

16.♞d2

Hoping that Black cannot escape in time, but White is in for a surprise.

Instead 16.♘xf6 gave nothing: 16...♔e7 17.♘d5† ♕f8!=

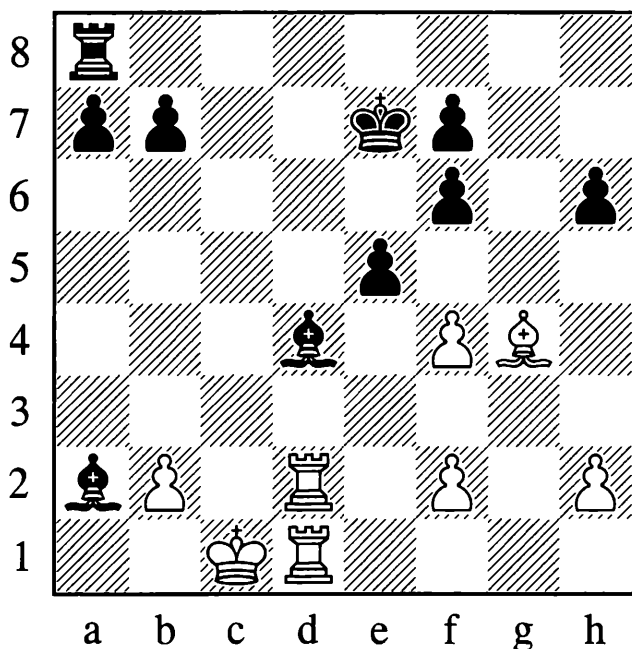
16...♙e6 17.♞hd1 ♙c5! 18.♘b6† ♔e7 19.♘xa8 ♞xa8

Black has a pawn for the exchange, and he can establish a power-tool on d4. White has no advantage; quite the reverse.

20.♙d7?!

White wants to exchange the bishops, but he drops another pawn. 20.♞c2 was correct.

20...♙xa2 21.♙g4 ♙d4† 22.f4



A draw was agreed in Aronian – Stellwagen, Wijk aan Zee 2009. Well, it was the first round of the big Corus tournament and the Dutch debutant gained a quick draw with Black against one of the world's best players, but I guess that if the colours were switched, Aronian would have played on – and probably won.

1/2–1/2

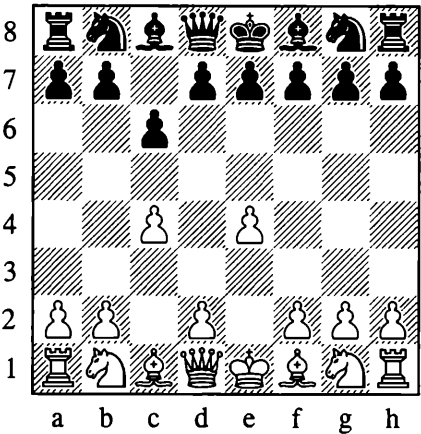
Conclusion

6.♙g5 certainly leads to sharp play, but the complications actually give a well-prepared Black player excellent winning chances! So far, White has been running headfirst into a wall.

After 6.♙g5 dxc4 7.♘f3 Black goes 7...h6 8.♙xf6 exf6 with a solid position.

On the sharp 7.d5 ♘e5 8.♞d4 the intermediate move 8...h6 leads to good play after 9.♞xe5 hxc4 10.♙xc4 ♙d7 or 9.♙f4 ♘g6 10.♙xc4 ♘xf4 11.♞xf4 g5 12.♞d2 ♙g7.

Finally, the pawn sacrifice 7.♙xc4 is once again met by the key move 7...h6. After 8.♙h4 we take the bait with 8...♞xd4 9.♞xd4 ♘xd4 10.0–0–0 e5 and although White has compensation, Black is in no real danger.



Minor Systems

Pseudo-Panov

Variation Index

1.e4 c6 2.c4

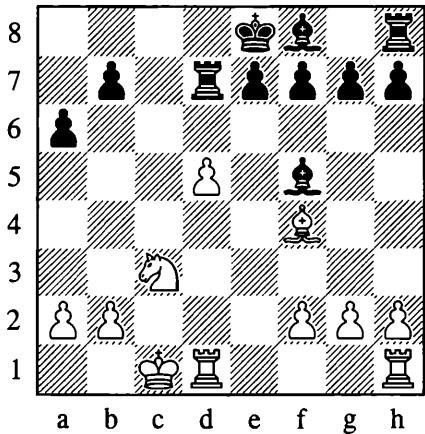
2...d5 3.exd5 cxd5 4.cxd5 ♘f6

A) 5.♙b5†	182
B) 5.♚a4† ♘bd7 6.♘c3 g6 7.♘f3 ♙g7	186
B1) 8.♚b3	188
B2) 8.♙c4	190
C) 5.♘c3	192

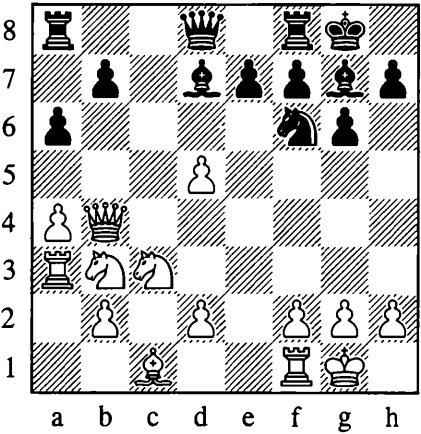
A) after 17.d5

B1) after 16.♚b4

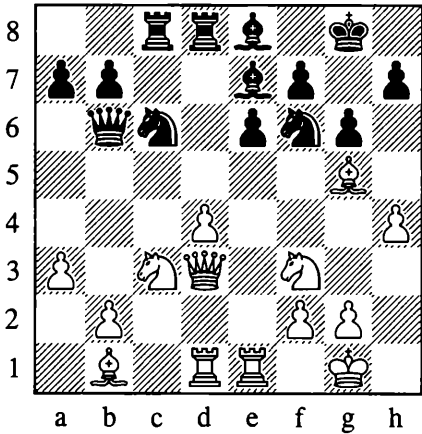
C) after 18.♙b1



17...g5!N

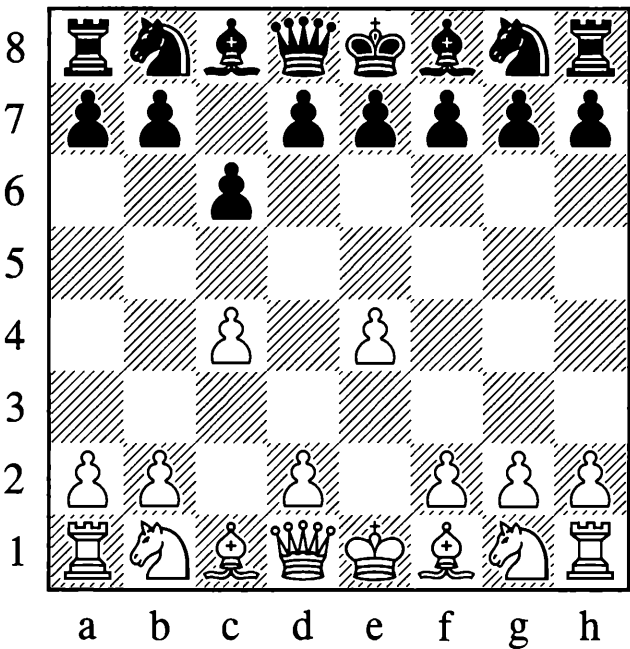


16...♙c8!N



18...♚xb2!N

1.e4 c6 2.c4



A popular way to avoid the big mainlines and still gain active play.

2...d5 3.exd5

Or 3.cxd5 is headed the same way, as after 3...cxd5 White's most sensible move is 4.exd5.

3...cxd5 4.cxd5

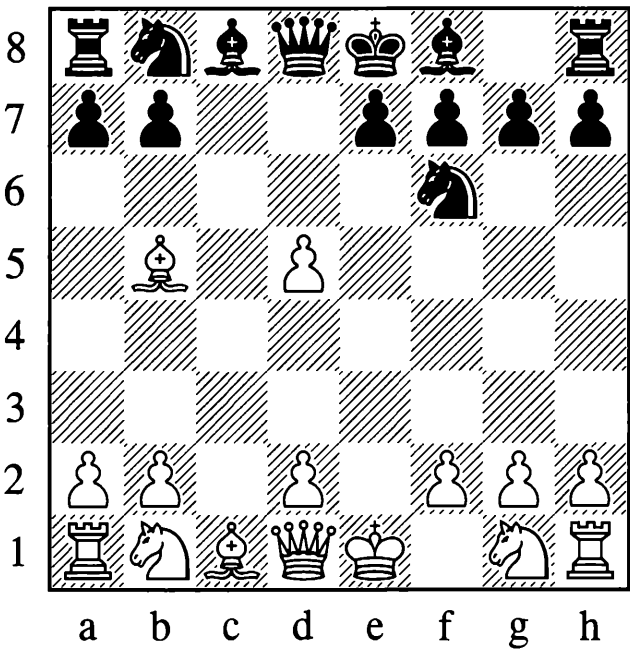
White could of course transpose to the Panov with 4.d4.

4...Nf6

Planning to take back on d5 with the knight. Before Black actually manages this, White can throw a spanner in the works by giving an annoying check with A) 5.Bb5+ or B) 5.Qa4+. Both moves force Black to block the d-file, after which it won't be so easy to regain the pawn. The strategy is a bit naive though. White's early initiative peters out while Black will develop his pieces harmoniously and if he manages to regain the pawn he will simply be positionally superior.

Another alternative for White is just to play C) 5.Nc3 creating typical isolated queen pawn play that is similar to the Panov. Here the move order with 2.c4 gives both sides some extra options.

A) 5.Bb5+



5...Nbd7

5...Bd7 6.Bc4 is weaker. Besides, Black hopes that White will exchange his bishop for the knight.

6.Nc3 a6 7.Qa4

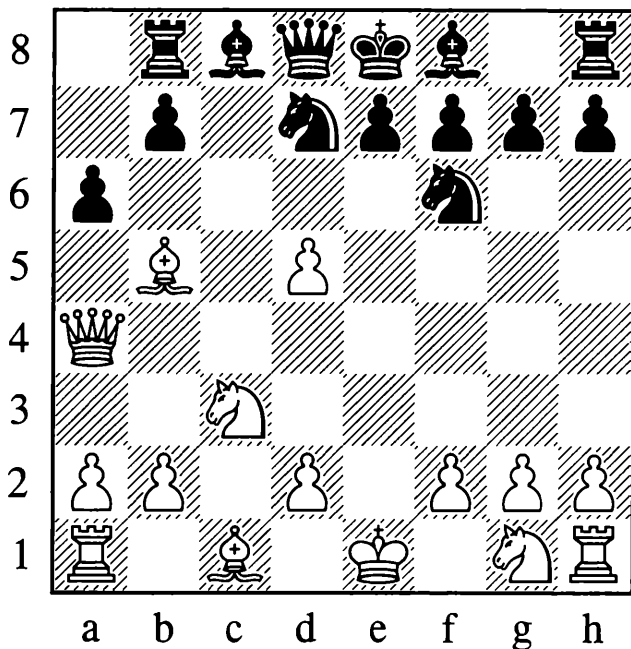
Keeping up the pressure for as long as possible. 7.Bxd7+ Qxd7 is just water on Black's mill. Either he will comfortably regain the pawn or White will have to play 8.Qb3 when his position is rather compromised after the strong 8...Qg4! (see the illustrative game).

Retreating with 7.Be2 is a farewell to all dreams of keeping the extra pawn. 7...b5 Already ...Bb7 and ...b5-b4 are in the air. 8.d4 b4 9.Na4 Nxd5 Black has comfortable play after either 10.Nf3 e6 11.0-0 Bb7 12.Bg5 Be7 13.Bxe7 Qxe7 14.Rc1 0-0+ as in Schneider – Videki, Budapest 2009, or 10.Bf3 Bb7 11.Ne2 e6 12.0-0 Bd6+ which was Delgado Ramirez – Dreev, Mallorca 2004.

Also 7.Ba4 b5 8.Bb3 Bb7 gives Black easy play after, for instance, 9.Nf3 b4 10.Ne2 Bxd5 11.Bxd5 Nxd5.

7.Bc4 b5 will be similar.

7...♖b8



Forcing White to make a decision.

8.♙xd7†

Consistent. 8.♙e2 makes even less sense now that 8...b5 comes with tempo. After 9.♖d4 b4 White's position lacks harmony and the d-pawn is hard to hold.

8...♙xd7

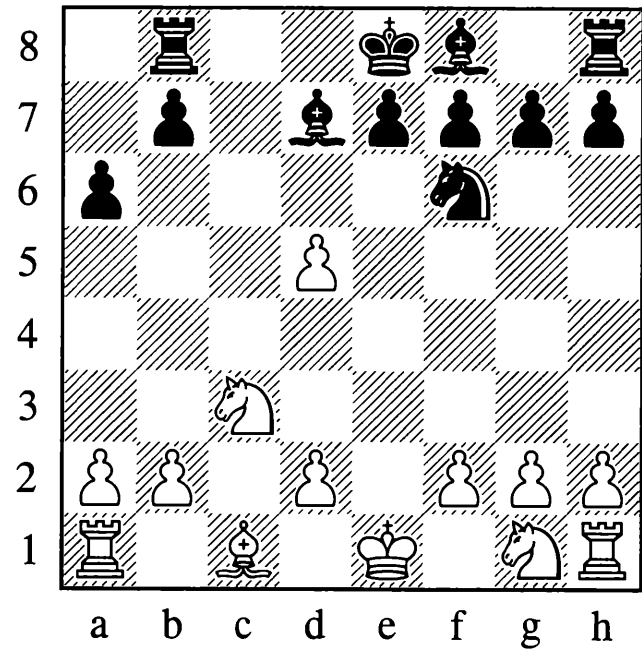
The queen exchange simplifies Black's task. If 8...♙xd7 then White continues 9.♖b3 or 9.♖f4 with active play.

9.♖xd7†

White does best to comply. 9.♖b3 ♖g4! is awkward, as seen in a similar position in the illustrative game, and although 9.♖f4 wins a tempo on the rook there is still the problem of the d-pawn. 9...♖a8 10.♙f3 Seeking quick development. 10...♙xd5 11.♙xd5 ♖xd5 12.0-0 e6 And it is Black for preference with his bishop pair. He can always play ...f7-f6 to cover the important dark squares.

9...♙xd7

The ending is fine for Black. He can win the pawn back more or less by force with simple moves like ...♖d8 and then just moving the bishop.



10.d4

Opening the way for the bishop. White has tested a range of alternatives without really troubling Black. Let's have a look:

White has tried the more artificial:

10.♙ge2

Intending ♙f4 to make Black work a little harder to regain the pawn.

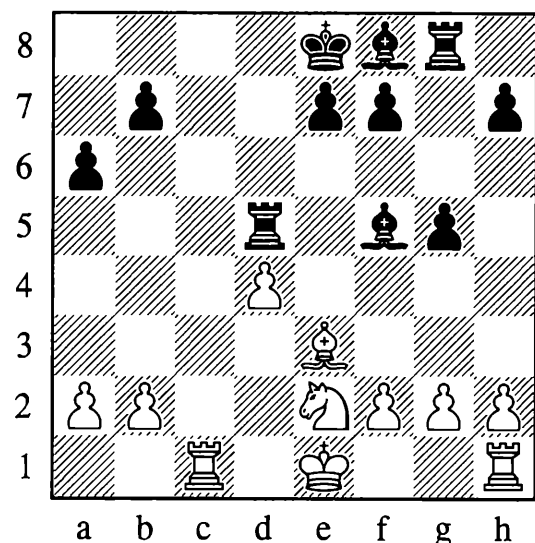
10...♖d8 11.d4 ♙f5 12.♙f4

The natural follow-up, but 12.♙e3 ♙xd5 13.♙xd5 ♖xd5 14.0-0 e6 15.♖fc1 is very active and shouldn't be underestimated. I think 15...♙e7!N 16.♖c8† ♖d8 17.♖ac1 ♙e4 is a good reply.

12...g5 13.♙fe2 ♖g8

Black has been forced to weaken himself, but now he is ready to take on d5. White gets some activity, but Black should easily be able to parry the threats.

14.♙e3 ♙xd5 15.♙xd5 ♖xd5 16.♖c1



Now completely safe is:

16...e6 17.0-0 ♗d3 18.♖c3 ♗xf1 19.♖xd5 exd5 20.♗xf1 ♖d7=

This is Lautier – Illescas, Barcelona 1993. I will conservatively say it's equal, but Black might even be a tad better with his good bishop.

10.♖f3 ♗d8 11.d4 ♗f5 12.♗f4 ♖xd5 13.♖xd5 ♗xd5 14.♗c1 looks tempting, but is nothing after 14...f6!. Perhaps it's less than nothing – when White's activity fades, the black bishops will have their say. 15.♗c7 g5 16.♗e3 ♗d7 17.♗c8† ♖f7 18.0-0 ♗g7 19.♗xh8 ♗xh8 20.♗c1 ♗g7♣ Stavrakakis – Saltaev, Agios Kyrkos 2007.

10.d3 ♗f5 11.♗g5 ♗d8!

Taking the wrong d-pawn with 11...♗xd3 is legal, but after 12.♗d1 ♗c2 13.♗d2 ♗f5 14.♖ge2 White had a lot of space and good development in Dgebuadze – Ruzele, Boeblingen 1997.

12.♗xf6 exf6 13.0-0-0 ♗c5 14.d4 ♗d6 15.♖ge2 ♗c8 16.♖d2 ♖d7 17.♗c1 ♗c4 18.h3 ♗e8 19.g3 h5 20.h4 ♗g4 21.a3 b5 22.♖d3 g5

With active play on both wings. The d-pawns don't do any harm. They are just there.

23.♗ce1 ♗f5† 24.♖d2 b4 25.axb4 ♗xb4 26.♖c1 ♗eb8

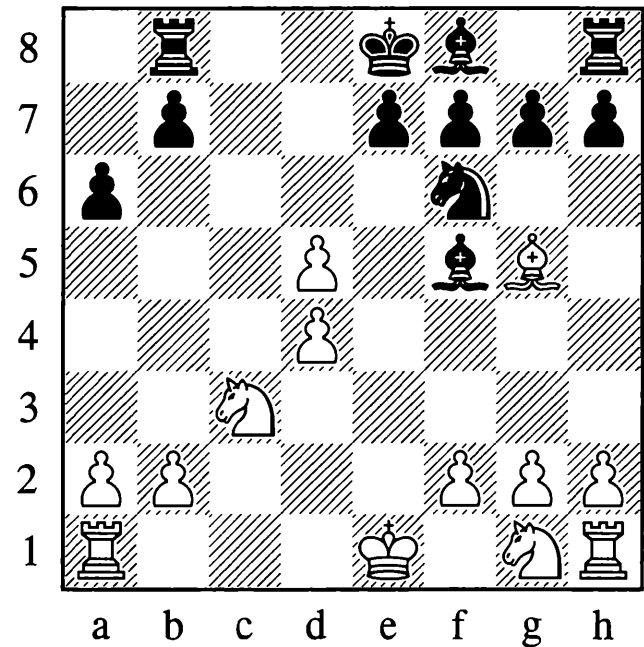
And White's position was beginning to crack in Lerner – Dreev, Rostov on Don 1993.

10...♗f5!?

A subtle move. Another popular way of regrouping is 10...b5 11.a3 ♗c8! with the idea of ...♗b7 and then just winning back the d5-pawn. After 12.♗f4 ♗a8 there is no real way of keeping the pawn, so White may opt for 13.♗e5 ♗b7 14.♗xf6 exf6 15.♖ge2 ♖d7 16.0-0 ♗e7 17.♗ac1 ♗hc8 with nice compensation for the pawn, Magem Badals – Adams, Dos Hermanas 1993. In fact such positions are much easier to play with Black.

Next he puts the rook on c4 and then later he might launch a pawn offensive on the queenside, as we saw Dreev do in such exemplary fashion above.

11.♗g5



11...♖e4

The point. Black avoids the doubled pawns.

12.♗f4 ♗d8 13.♖ge2 ♖f6

With this precise move order Black wins the d5-pawn and retains the bishop pair and the somewhat better pawn structure.

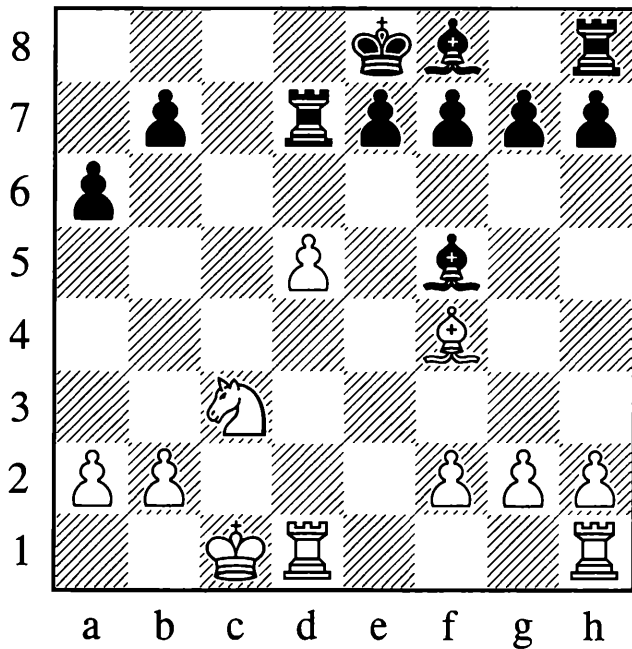
14.0-0-0!?

White needs a lively attempt, as the alternatives are uninspired:

14.0-0 ♖xd5 15.♖xd5 ♗xd5 16.♗fc1 f6 17.♗c7 was Svobodova – Eperjesi, Budapest 1995. And now 17...g5 18.♗e3 ♗d7 protects everything.

14.♖d2 ♖xd5 15.♖xd5 ♗xd5 16.♗hc1 f6♣ was similar in Roeder – Riediger, Uttenreuth 1996.

14...♖xd5 15.♖xd5 ♗xd5 16.♖c3 ♗d7 17.d5



17...g5!N

This new idea improves on 17...g6 18.f3 h5 19.♖hg1 h4 20.g4 hxg3 21.hxg3 ♖h2 22.♙d2 ♙xd2 23.♙xd2 ♙g7 24.♙d1 ♙xc3 and Shushpanov – Ioffe, St Petersburg 1997, was agreed drawn.

18.♙e3

The g5-pawn is not free: 18.♙xg5 ♖g8 19.h4 f6 20.♙e3 ♖xg2+

18...g4+

Black is better due to his bishop pair. A possible continuation is 19.♖he1 ♙g7 20.♙d4 f6! 21.b3 ♙f7 22.♙b2 ♖c8 with good play.

L. Nielsen – Schandorff

Danish Cup (rapid) 2009

1.e4 c6 2.c4 d5 3.exd5 cxd5 4.cxd5 ♘f6 5.♙b5+ ♘bd7 6.♘c3 a6

Querying the bishop's intentions.

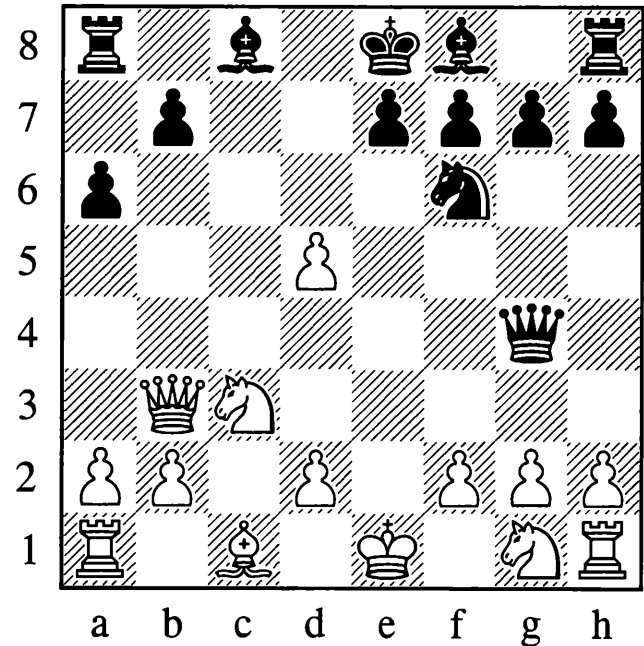
7.♙xd7+

Retreating to e2 would admit that the aggressive opening play was just a bluff. The mainline is 7.♙a4 when 7...♖b8 forces a decision from White anyway. See the theory section above for details.

7...♙xd7 8.♙b3

Clinging to the extra pawn. If the pawn goes then Black would simply be positionally better and have the two bishops as well. However, my next move completely refutes White's set-up.

8...♙g4!



The surprising attack on g2 is not so easy to meet.

9.g3

This severely weakens the light squares, but the alternatives were no better:

On 9.♙f1 the new move 9...e6!N is very promising. If 10.dxe6 ♙xe6 11.♙xb7? then 11...♙d5 12.♘xd5 ♙d1# is the neat justification. White should play 11.♙b6 but then just 11...♙e7 12.♘f3 0-0.

Exchanging queens with 9.♙a4+ is hardly an option because after 9...♙xa4 10.♘xa4 ♘xd5 Black is already clearly better.

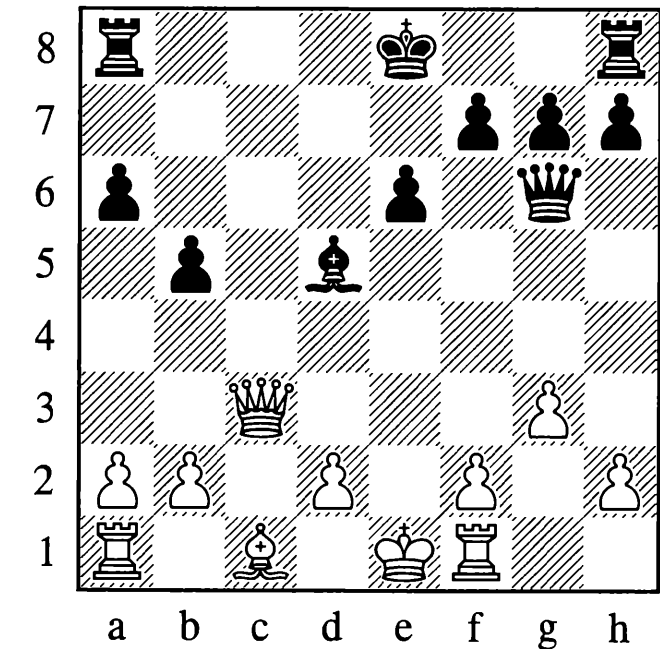
9...b5

Planning ...♙b7 when the d5-pawn will soon drop.

10.♘ge2 ♙f3 11.♖f1 ♙b7+ 12.♘d4 ♙d3 13.♘c6

White is trying to confuse matters, but he can't escape the positional grip.

13...e6! 14.♘b4 ♕xb4 15.♖xb4 ♘xd5 16.♘xd5 ♕xd5 17.♖c3 ♖g6



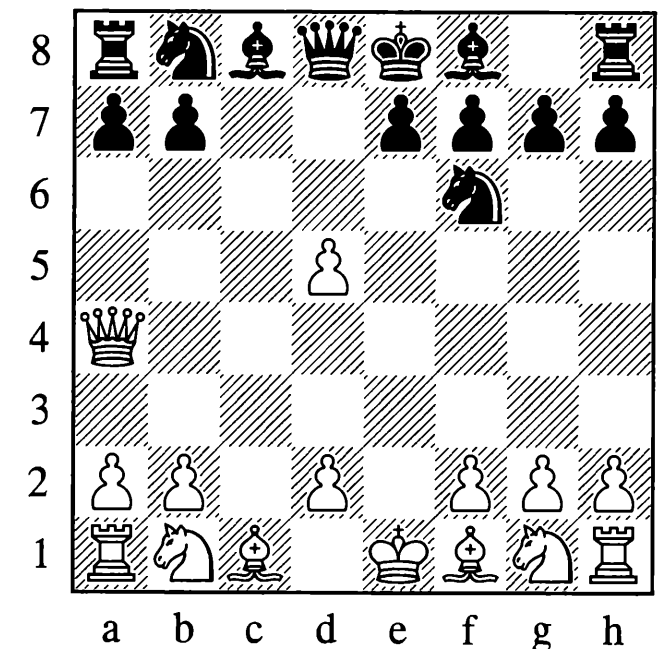
The simplifications haven't helped; White's position is grim.

18.b3 0-0 19.f3 ♜ac8 20.♖e3 ♖f6 21.♞b1 ♞c2

Winning a pawn. In time trouble White misses the main threat.

22.a4 bxa4 23.bxa4 ♕a2 0-1

B) 5.♖a4†



5...♘bd7

Just like after 5.♕b5† this is the best and most flexible. I don't like 5...♕d7 after 6.♖b3 attacking b7.

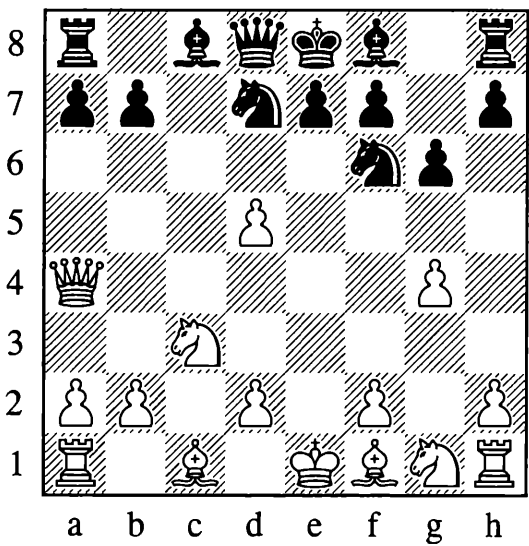
6.♘c3 g6

First Black will finish his development and only then try to win the pawn back. Doing it in the wrong order could lead to a mess.

7.♘f3

A good normal move. Reasonable alternatives like 7.♕c4 or 7.♖b3 will most likely transpose to the mainline. However White has tried a lot of different things here, ranging from the sophisticated to the bizarre. I know you are curious so let's start with the latter.

7.g4!?



A brave and imaginative outburst, but probably too sharp. 7...♕g7 8.g5 ♘h5 9.♘ge2 0-0 10.♘g3 Now after ...♘xg3 White could benefit from the half-open h-file, so: 10...e6! Disregarding material and launching a strong counter-offensive. See the illustrative game for more.

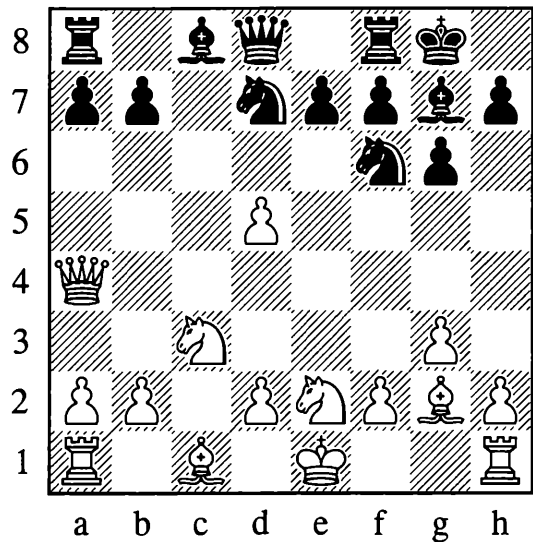
7.h4!?. More of the same extravagance. 7...♕g7 8.h5 ♘h5 9.g4 ♘hf6 10.g5 ♘h5 11.♕e2 0-0 Not fearing ghosts. 12.♕xh5 gxh5 13.♞xh5 ♖b6 Black has good compensation, as 14.♖e4 can safely be answered by 14...♖g6.

In McLaughlin – Briscoe, corr. 2001, White launched 14.d4 when 14...♖xd4N 15.♖c2 f5 16.gxf6 ♗xf6 looks good.

7.g3

This makes sense – White wants to fianchetto the light-squared bishop so it protects d5.

7...♗g7 8.♗g2 0-0 9.♗ge2



Here 9...♗b6 10.♖b3 ♗f5 looks okay for Black, but there is a more inspired solution:

9...e6!

Again we use this typical break, and again it is too dangerous to accept: 10.dxe6?! ♗c5 11.♖d4 ♗d3† 12.♗f1 ♗xe6 13.♗xb7 ♖b8 14.♗f3 ♗g4 15.♖xd8 ♖fxd8 16.♗d1 ♗xc1 17.♖xc1 ♗e5 18.♗g2 ♖xd2 And White's position was falling to pieces, Blahacek – Brezmen, Czech Republic 2007. So:

10.0-0 ♗b6 11.♖b3 ♗fxd5 12.d4 ♗d7

Black is developing smoothly and has no problems.

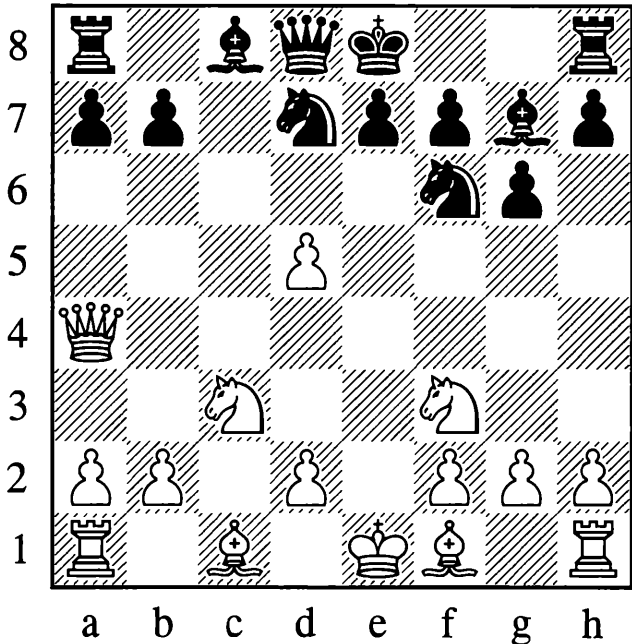
13.♗xd5 exd5 14.♗c3 ♗c6 15.♗f4 ♗c4 16.♖ad1 ♖e8 17.h4 ♖c8

In Bitoon – Paragua, Manila 2008, d4 was weaker than d5 and Black's knight is excellent.

7.d4 ♗g7 8.♖b3 0-0 9.♗g5 ♗b6 10.♗xf6 ♗xf6 11.♗f3 was once played by Larsen against Karpov. Later theory established that the thematic answer 11...e6! once again gives Black good play. 12.dxe6 ♗xe6 is great for

Black, so White should continue more quietly with 12.d6 ♖xd6 13.♗e4 ♖e7 14.♗xf6† ♖xf6, but even here the isolated d-pawn might cause some discomfort. For instance, 15.♗b5 ♖d8 16.0-0 ♗d7 was De Asis Dirceu – Molina, Rio de Janeiro 2002, where Black had developed his last piece and solved all his problems.

7...♗g7



White is at a fork in the road. He can choose between **B1) 8.♖b3** and **B2) 8.♗c4**, both reinforcing the important d5-point. I will go into much more detail in a minute, but first let's enjoy the following miniature.

Mitchell – Mennealy

Correspondence 1997

1.e4 c6 2.c4 d5 3.cxd5 cxd5 4.exd5 ♗f6 5.♖a4† ♗bd7 6.♗c3 g6 7.g4!?

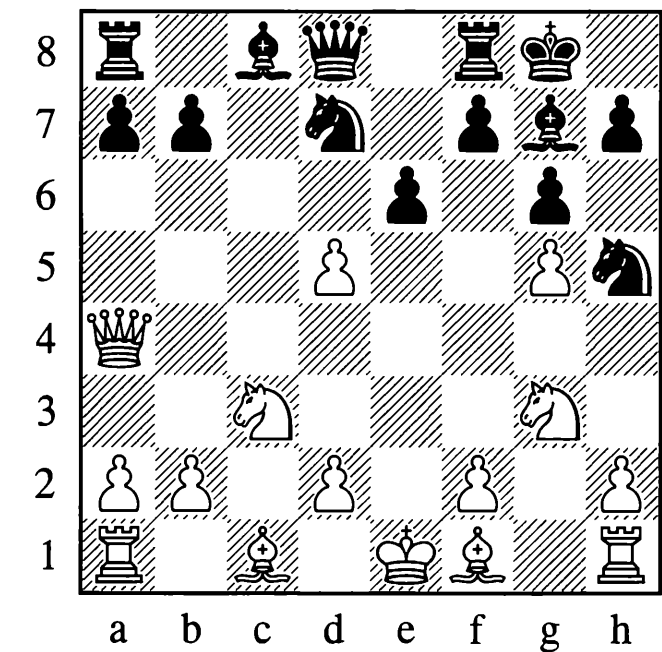
These days White plays g2-g4 in more or less any position, which has clearly been the most spectacular opening development of the new century. However the current position is maybe not the soundest example.

7...♗g7

There is no need to waste time on a move like ...h7-h6. If White wants to continue his

raid, let him. The pawn can never go back, so the holes he creates in his own camp will last forever.

8.g5 ♖h5 9.♗ge2 0–0 10.♗g3 e6!



Fighting for the initiative.

11.♗xh5 gxh5 12.dxe6?!

White is behind in development and with his king stuck in the centre and holes everywhere, he should have kept the position closed.

Also bad was switching the queen to the kingside with 12.♙h4?! when 12...♗e5 13.♙g2 ♗g6! as in V. Gurevich – Rytov, Soviet Union 1966, was already promising for Black, because of 14.♙xh5 ♗f4 15.♙g4 ♗d3† 16.♗f1 exd5 with a strong initiative for the pawn.

12.d4 is the right choice. 12...♗b6 13.♙d1 exd5 14.♙xh5 ♙f5 Black has good positional compensation. For example: 15.♙e3 ♙e8 16.♙b5 ♙e6 17.0–0 ♗c4 18.♙xc4 dxc4 19.d5 ♙g6 20.f4 b5 21.♗xb5? Overlooking the double threat. 21...♙e8 0–1 Korchnoi – Salov, Amsterdam 1991.

12...♗c5 13.♙c4

Being realistic. 13.exf7† ♙xf7 would open more lines and lead to imminent disaster after 14.♙c4 ♙e7† 15.♗d1 ♙e6 when Black’s lead in development is decisive.

13...♗xe6 14.f4

Ugly, but he wanted to protect g5.

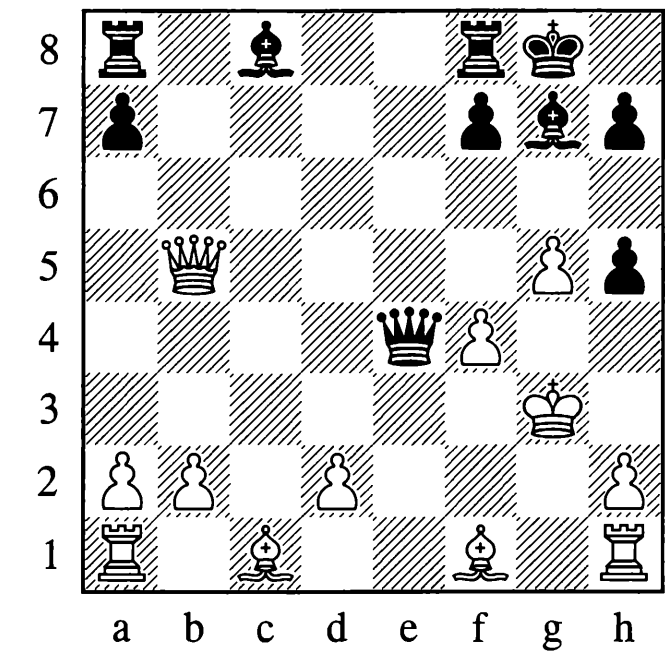
14...♗d4 15.♗f2 b5

A nice combination.

16.♗xb5

If 16.♙c5 then 16...♗b3!.

16...♗xb5 17.♙xb5 ♙d4† 18.♗g3 ♙e4



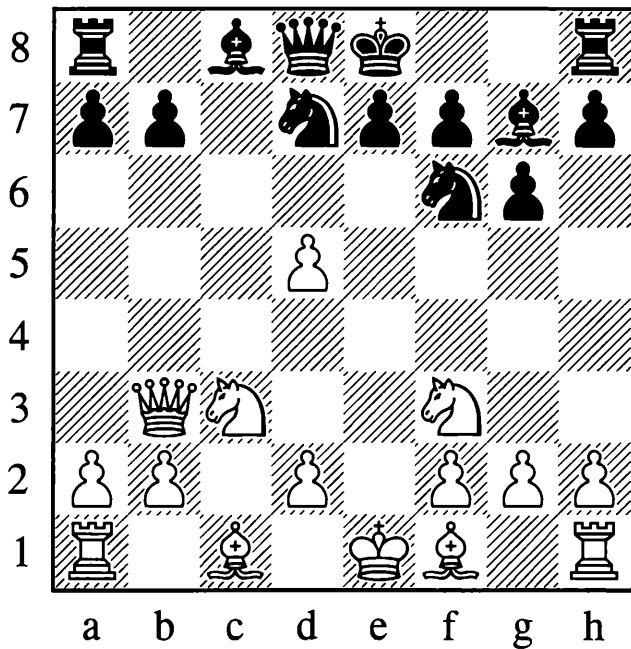
Threatening the rook and also ...h5-h4†. The game is over.

19.♙e2

There were no serious defensive tries: 19.♙g1 h4† or 19.♙g2 h4† 20.♗f2 ♙d4† both also lose.

19...h4† 20.♗f2 ♙xh1 21.♙e3 ♙xh2† 22.♗e1 ♙g4 23.♙e2 ♙fe8 24.♙xg4 ♙g1† 25.♗e2 ♙xg4† 0–1

B1) 8.♙b3

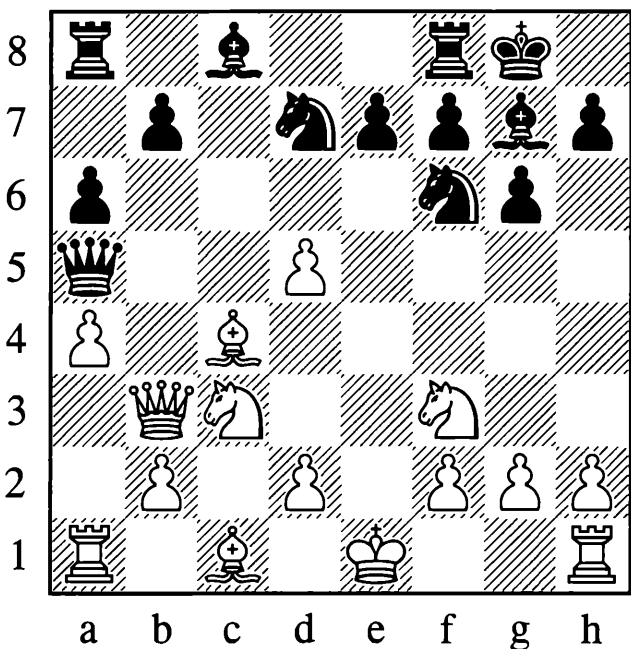


Protecting d5, but moving the queen a second time.

8...a6

The standard reaction, threatening ...b7-b5. Also interesting is 8...0-0 9.♔c4 ♘c5 10.♙a3 ♘ce4 11.0-0 ♘d6 with good positional compensation for the pawn. In the following game White was quickly on the defensive: 12.d3 a6 13.♖e1 ♜b8 14.♘e5 ♘d7 15.♘xd7 ♙xd7 16.♘e4?! b5 17.♘xd6 exd6 18.♙b3 ♙b6 With an active position for Black, which was soon even better. 19.♙e3? b4! 20.♙xb6 bxa3 21.♙c7 axb2 22.♙ab1 ♜bc8 23.♙xd6 ♜fe8+ And the protected passed pawn gave Black all the chances in Schwartzman – Kaidanov, USA (ch) 1997.

9.a4 0-0 10.♙c4 ♙a5



Black has tried a bunch of other moves such as 10...b6 or 10...♘b6, but this is the one! It starts play on the dark squares which is logical as White has put all his efforts so far on the light ones. To begin with ...b7-b5 is threatened, so White is forced to make another strange move.

11.♙a3

Or 11.♙a2 ♘b6 and ...♜d8 next, targeting the d5-pawn.

11...♘b6

11...♘c5 is also possible.

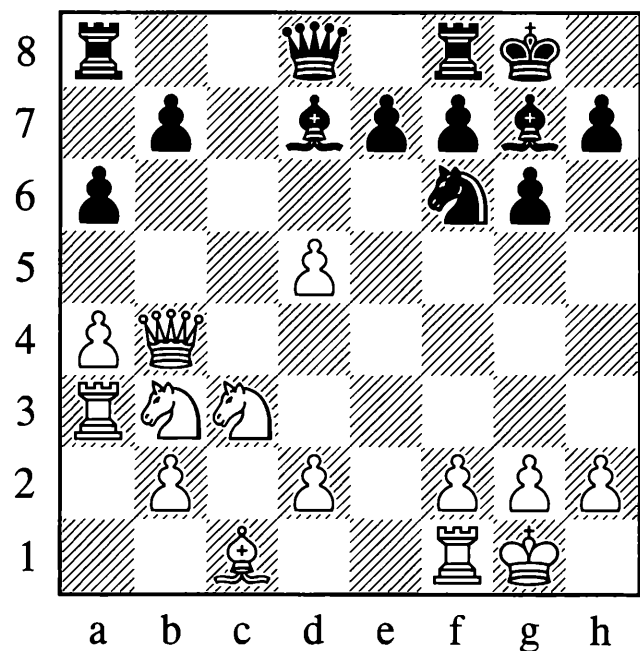
12.0-0 ♘xc4

Going for the bishops, but 12...♜d8 is also fine.

13.♙xc4 ♙f5

Black has good compensation for the pawn and, as usual, if d5 drops he will be clearly better.

14.♘d4 ♙d7 15.♘b3 ♙d8 16.♙b4

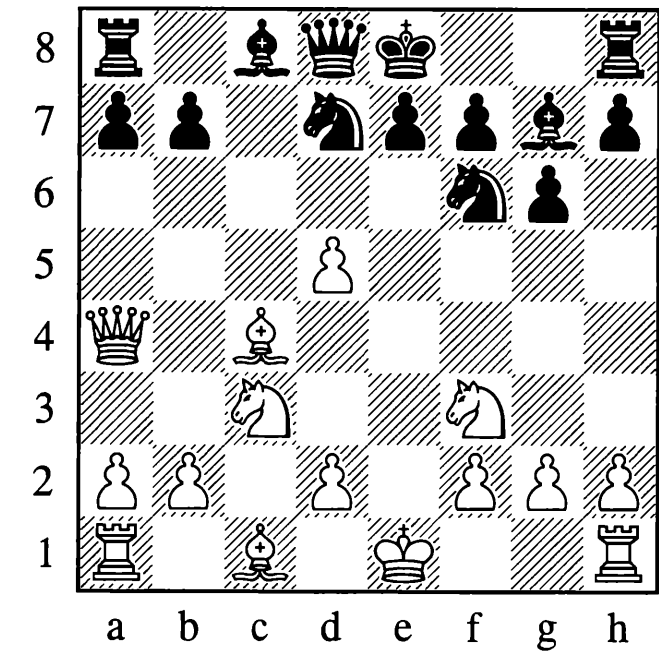


This is Becerra Rivero – Burmakin, Linares 1997. Now Black could gain the upper hand with:

16...♙c8!N

For instance, 17.♖e1 ♘xd5 18.♘xd5 ♙xd5 19.♙xe7 ♗d7 20.♙c5 ♖fe8! 21.♖f1 ♙e4±.

B2) 8.♗c4



More natural than the queen move, but the bishop can also come under attack.

8...a6

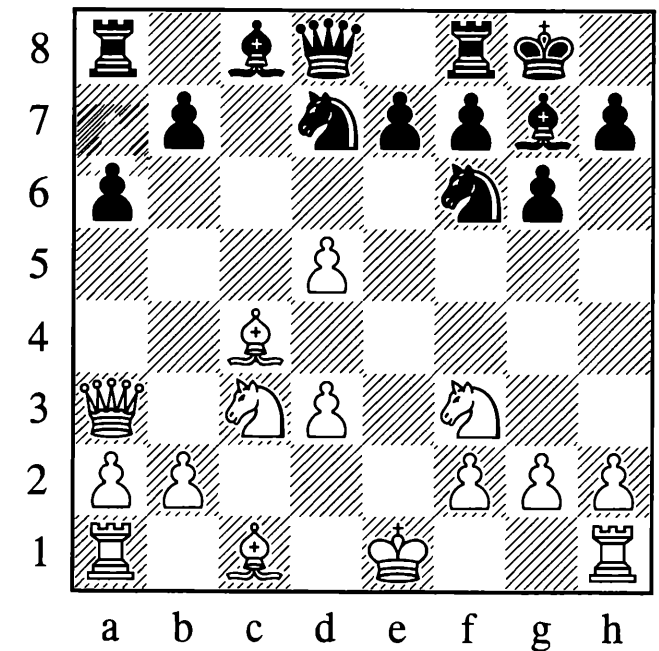
Precise. 8...0-0 allows 9.♙b3.

9.d3 0-0

9...♖b8, threatening ...b7-b5, is interesting, but I recommend just finishing our development.

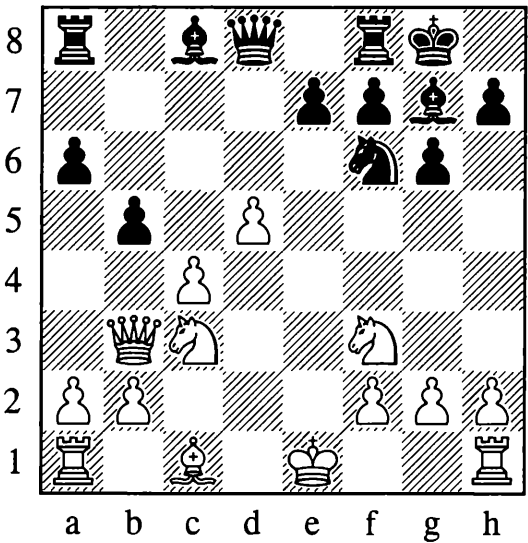
10.♙a3

White needed to be careful: 10.0-0? lost a piece after 10...b5 11.♗xb5 ♘b6!.



10...b6

Once again we just complete development, but there are many other options. One of the more radical is 10...♘b6 11.♙b3 ♘xc4 12.dxc4 b5.



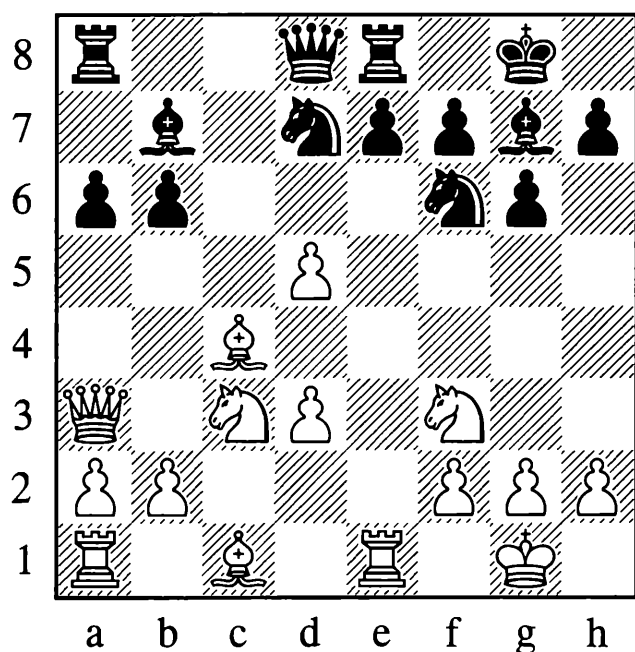
Now White should castle, as 13.cxb5 ♘xd5! 14.♘xd5 ♗e6 or 13.c5 b4 14.♙xb4 ♘xd5 15.♘xd5 ♙xd5 are both excellent for Black. So 13.0-0 bxc4 14.♙xc4 e6 with active play for the pawn.

11.0-0 ♗b7 12.♖e1

The standard move that one makes without thinking. Remarkably, one of the connoisseurs of the black side, Kacheishvili, has played 12.♗f4!? when he was sitting on the other side. His idea was 12...♖c8 13.d6 but after the cool response 13...e6! it began to go downhill for White. 14.♘d2 b5 15.♗b3 ♘c5 16.♘ce4 ♘fxe4 17.♘xe4 ♘xd3± Kacheishvili – Bhat, Berkeley 2008.

Occasionally 12.♗e3 is tried. 12...b5 13.♗b3 ♖e8 14.♙b4 ♘b6 15.♗xb6 ♙xb6 Already White has to search for equality. 16.a4 ♖ed8 17.axb5 ♘xd5! 18.♗xd5 ♗xd5 19.♘g5 (after 19.♙xe7 ♗xf3 20.gxf3 axb5 Black has more than enough for the pawn) 19...h6 20.♘ge4 e6 21.♘xd5 ♖xd5 22.♙e7 ♗xb2 23.♖a2 ♗e5 24.bxa6 ♖xa6± Granda Zuniga – Dominguez, Buenos Aires 2005. Now d3 will fall and it will be Black who is a pawn up for a change!

12...♖e8



13.♘g5

The sharp mainline. More positional continuations have not offered much in practice.

13.♙f4 ♜c8 14.♞ad1 b5 15.♙b3 ♘c5 Black has good play. 16.♙e5 ♘xb3 17.♞xb3 ♘xd5 As usual, if Black wins the pawn back he is better. 18.♙xg7 ♙xg7 19.♘e4 ♘f4 20.d4 ♞d5 21.♞e3 ♞xe4 22.♞xe4 ♙xe4 23.♞xe4 ♘d5= With a nice ending, Najer – Kacheishvili, Philadelphia 2009.

13.♙g5 b5 14.♙b3 ♘b6

Encircling the d-pawn.

15.♞ac1 ♘bxd5

You have probably heard of the expression “the wrong rook” but how about “the wrong knight”? As long as there are humans involved, you can probably always add the word “wrong” to any phrase. Here 15...♘fxd5 was slightly more accurate.

16.♘e4 a5 17.♘c5 ♞b6 18.♘xb7 ♞xb7 19.♙xf6 ♙xf6

A draw was agreed in Sanchez – Fargere, Marseille 2007. Black was out-rated by 150 Elo points, so he was probably happy with the draw. He could have continued though, but perhaps he missed 20.♙xd5 ♞xd5 21.♞c5 ♙xb2!.

13.♙e3 ♜c8 14.♞ac1 b5 15.♙b3 ♘b6 16.♙xb6 ♞xb6

Black is comfortable.

17.♞b4 ♞d8 18.a4 ♘xd5 19.♘xd5 ♞xc1 20.♞xc1 ♙xd5 21.axb5?!

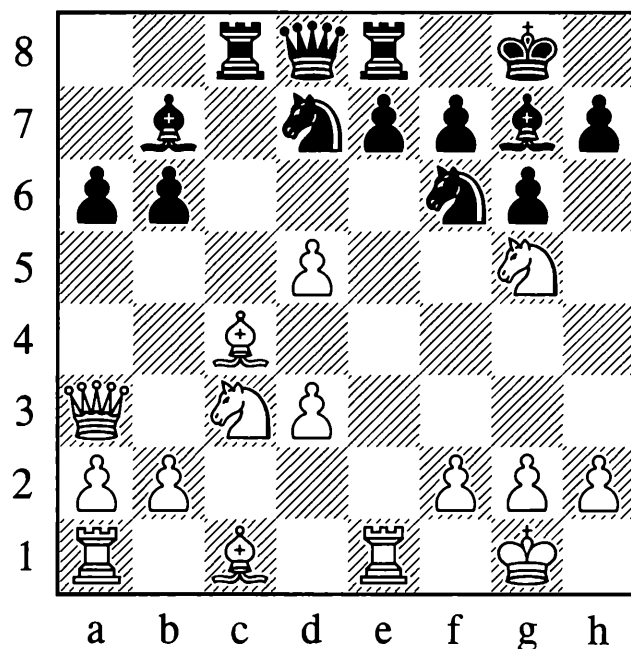
White had better chances to hold after 21.♙xd5 ♞xd5 22.d4.

21...♙xf3! 22.gxf3 e6 23.♞c2 ♙f8 24.♞e4 axb5=

With powerful play on the dark squares, Delabaca – Postny, Paleochora 2008.

Finally we have to consider 13.d6N, but here it is not so dangerous. Black can consider 13...e6, but he can also just take it: 13...exd6 14.♞xe8† ♘xe8 15.♙d5 ♙xd5 16.♘xd5 ♘ef6 17.♙g5 h6 18.♘xf6† ♘xf6 19.♙d2 ♞d7=

13...♞c8!



The key move in the entire 5.♞a4† line. All White's stakes have been placed on the dynamic possibility of playing d5-d6 attacking f7. Now it turns out that Black easily parries the threats.

If instead of the clever 13...♞c8 he had continued naively with 13...b5 14.♙b3 ♘b6 then after 15.d6 e6 16.♘ge4 the complications favour White.

14.d6

Backing down with 14.♙e3 brings no joy either after 14...♘e5! 15.♖ad1 h6 16.♘ge4 ♘xe4 17.♘xe4 ♘xc4 18.dxc4 ♖xc4. In an early game in this line, which was played by one of the Quality Chess editors, Black had a nice positional edge that was instantly transformed into an extra pawn. 19.♔d3 ♔xd5! 20.♔xd5 ♙xd5 21.♖xd5 ♖xe4 was K. Rasmussen – Aagaard, Denmark (ch) 2006. 19.♔d3 was an oversight, but White had little better. For example, if 19.f3 then after 19...f5 20.♘f2 ♔d6! 21.♔d3 ♖ec8 Black was taking over anyway in Antal – Kacheishvili, USA 2009.

14...e6 15.♙f4 b5 16.♙b3

Giving up a piece with 16.♙xe6 fxe6 17.♘xe6 is more dramatic than good: 17...♔b6 18.♔b3 ♘h8 19.♘xg7 ♘xg7 20.♖e7† ♖xe7 21.dxe7 In Snape – Radovanovic, Coulsdon 2007, the simplest solution would have been 21...♘c5 22.♔d1 ♖e8.

16...♘c5 17.♖ad1

The problem with 17.d4?! is of course 17...♘d3.

17...♘h5 18.♙e3 ♘xb3 19.axb3

White must try to hold on to d6 as 19.♔xb3?! ♔xd6 is a positional disaster.

19...f5

Threatening ...f5-f4. White is being pushed back.

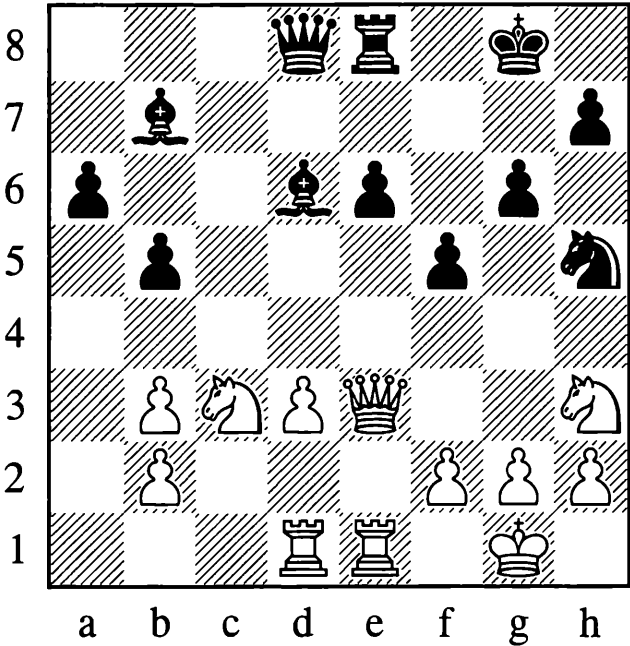
20.♘h3 ♙f8

Black has also tested 20...♔d7. Kadziolka – Erenburg, Warsaw 2005, continued 21.f3 ♙f8 22.♙c5 ♖cd8 23.d4 ♙xd6= 24.b4 ♙b8! 25.♔b3 ♘f6 26.♘f2 ♔c7 27.♖xe6 ♔xh2† 28.♘f1 ♘g7 and the complications favoured Black, because if 29.♙e7 then the exchange sacrifice 29...♘d5! 30.♙xd8 ♖xd8 is very strong. White could improve with 24.♙xd6 ♔xd6 25.♔c5 with a playable position.

21.♙c5 ♖xc5!

Very promising. 21...♖c6 followed by ...♙xd6 was of course also okay.

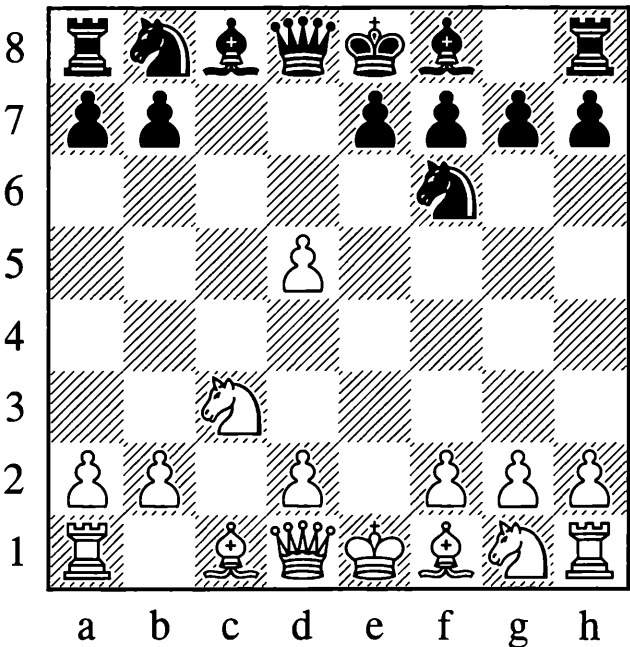
22.♔xc5 ♙xd6 23.♔e3



23...♔c7 24.g3 ♔c6 25.f3 ♔xf3 26.♔xf3 ♙xf3

With a pawn for the exchange and two strong bishops, Black had fine play in B. Socko – Laznicka, Ostrava 2009.

C) 5.♘c3



5...♘d5 6.♘f3

By holding back the d-pawn White limits some of Black's possibilities compared to the

normal Panov Variation. However on the way he also creates some new ones. 6.♘c4 ♖b6 7.♘b3 ♗c6 8.♗f3 transposes to lines below.

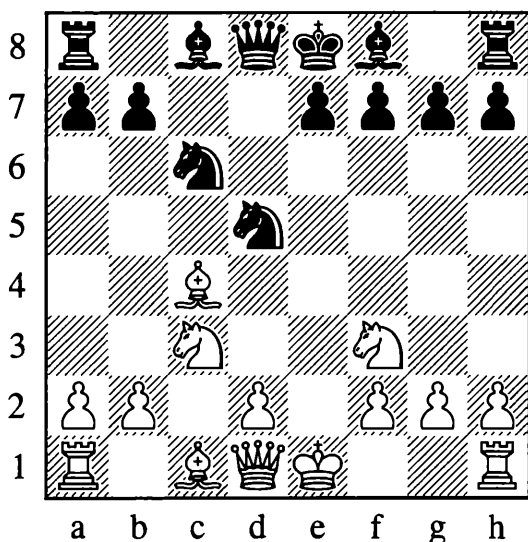
6...♗c6

This is consistent with our anti-Panov repertoire. An interesting option is 6...♗xc3 7.bxc3 g6 when play usually continues 8.d4 ♘g7 9.♘d3 0–0 10.0–0 ♗c6 11.♖e1 and now 11...b6 followed by ...♘b7 gives Black a harmonious position.

7.♘b5

7.d4 is a normal Panov. Apart from the text move, the other independent line is:

7.♘c4



7...♗b6 8.♘b3

8.♘b5 is not very threatening: 8...e6 9.d4 ♘e7 10.0–0 0–0 11.♖e1 ♘d7 12.a3 ♖c8 Black doesn't have a lot of space, but there is just enough room to get the pieces out. 13.♘d3 ♗d5 14.♗xd5 exd5 15.h3 ♘f6= Kazhgaleyev – Dreev, Moscow 2006.

8...♘f5

Black could also fianchetto his dark-squared bishop: 8...g6 9.d4 ♘g7 10.0–0 0–0 11.d5 ♗a5 With a position from the Grünfeld. Usually White continues ♖e1 or ♘g5 with complicated play.

9.d4 e6 10.0–0 ♘e7

Black has the problem child, the light-squared bishop, developed outside the pawn

chain in a typical isolated d-pawn position and has no positional problems.

11.h3

Or 11.♘e3 0–0 12.d5, as White does best to simplify. Spassky – Portisch, Mexico 1980, continued 12...♗xd5 13.♗xd5 exd5 14.♘xd5 ♘f6=.

11...0–0 12.a3

This doesn't do anything to disturb Black.

12...♘f6 13.♘e3 ♖c8

With good play against the isolani.

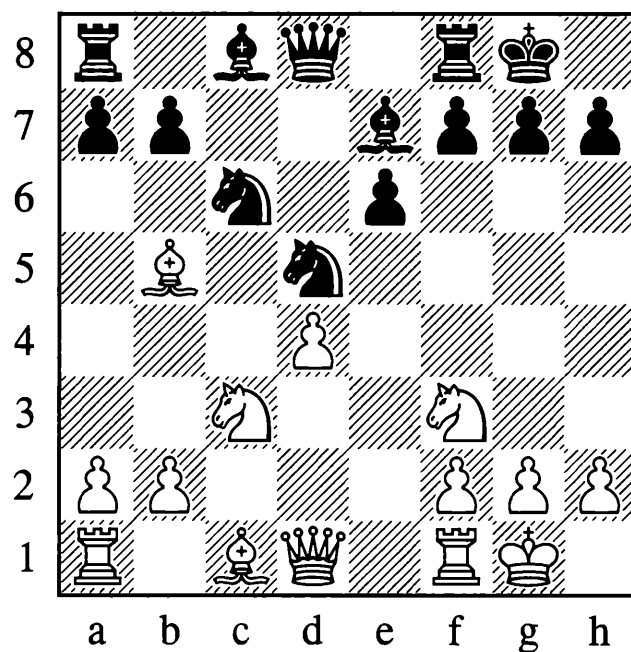
14.♗e2 ♖c7 15.♖fd1 ♖d7 16.♗d2 ♗b8 17.♗a4 ♗xa4 18.♘xa4 ♘e4=

Topalov – Morovic Fernandez, Las Palmas 1993.

7...e6

White is not really threatening to take on c6 because that would just surrender the bishop pair to Black.

8.0–0 ♘e7 9.d4 0–0



A fairly typical IQP position is reached. By using the clever move order with 2.c4 instead of a normal Panov, White has sidestepped the popular lines with ...♘b4 for Black and we didn't get a normal ...♗c6 line either. The only minus from White's point of view is the bishop on b5. If it isn't threatening to take on c6 then it is not optimally placed and

furthermore it can be challenged with ...♘d7. This point ensures that Black can be completely satisfied.

10.♖e1

The other standard IQP set-up with the queen on e2 and the rook on d1 is not very effective here. 10.♙e2 ♘d7 11.♖d1 (Judit Polgar once played 11.a3 in a rapid game, but after 11...♖c8 12.♘d2 ♘f6 13.♞e4 a6! she was already facing some difficulties. 14.♘d3 ♞xd4 15.♞xd4 ♘xd4 16.♞d6 ♘xb2! A strong exchange sacrifice. 17.♖ab1 ♘xa3 18.♞xc8 ♙xc8 19.♘h7† ♞xh7 20.♙d3† ♞g8 21.♙xa3 ♘c6+ J. Polgar – Dreev, Moscow [rapid] 2002.) 11...♖c8 12.♞xd5 exd5 (or 12.♘d2 ♖e8) 12...exd5 13.♞e5 a6 14.♘d3 ♘f6 15.♘f4 g6 16.♘c2 ♖e8 17.♘b3 ♘f5 If anyone is better, it is Black, Milos – Dreev, Moscow 2001.

10...♘d7

Once again I recommend this slightly passive but very natural development. Black has tried nearly every legal move and quite a few of them look playable, but I fancy the simplicity of the ...♘d7 plan.

11.♘d3

As usual 11.♞xd5 exd5 is too simple to promise anything: 12.♘f4 (or 12.♙b3 ♘e6=) 12...♘f6 13.♞e5 ♞xe5 14.dxe5 ♘xb5 15.exf6 ♙xf6 16.♙xd5 ♘c6= Ivanchuk – Topalov, Nanjing 2008.

11.a3 will transpose below.

11...♞f6

Playing against the IQP, but I can suggest a back-up plan:

11...♖c8

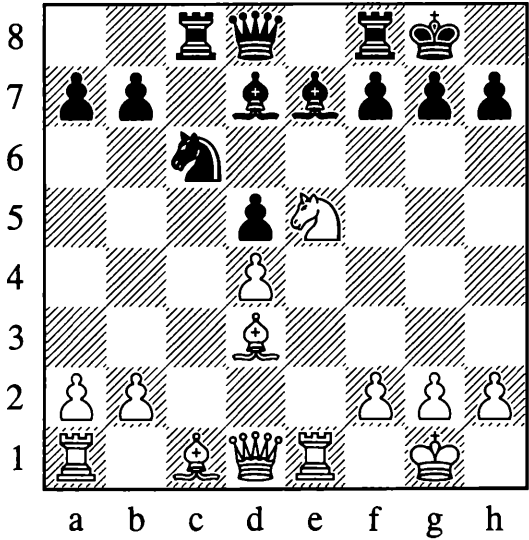
This is also okay and maybe more in the spirit of the opening.

12.♞xd5

12.a3 is an option. If Black doesn't want to

transpose to our mainline with 12...♞f6 he can try 12...♖e8.

12...exd5 13.♞e5



13...♘f6

13...♞xe5 used to be considered a mistake because of 14.♖xe5 ♘e6 15.♙h5 g6 16.♙h6 and there is no good way to parry the threat of ♖h5. However Carlsen suggested the interesting 14...♘d6! 15.♖xd5 ♘c6 16.♖g5 g6 with good compensation for the pawn because of the misplaced white rook.

14.♘f4

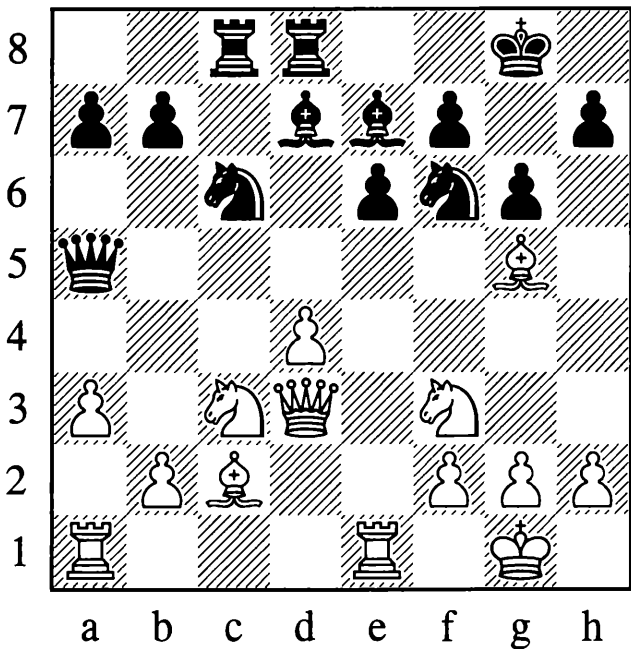
This is Carlsen – Smeets, Wijk aan Zee 2009, and now Black could equalize with:

14...♘e6N

12.a3 ♖c8 13.♘c2

Beginning a typical regrouping.

13...♙a5 14.♘g5 ♖fd8 15.♙d3 g6



An important position. White's direct threats have been parried and, although his active pieces still look quite impressive, Black's position is very solid and he is ready to play ...♙e8 next with harmonious piece-play. The positional idea ...♙e8 is worth noting, because it is a multipurpose move. It protects the weak spot on f7 and at the same time clears the d-file, which puts pressure on the isolated d-pawn.

16.h4

Sharp, but not without risks. White has tried a range of alternatives:

16.♖ad1 ♙e8 17.♞e3?! ♘d5 18.♘xd5 ♖xd5 19.♙xe7 ♘xe7 20.♙b3?! ♘f5 21.♞e2 ♙a4! And Black simplifies while retaining her positional plusses, Goodger – Houska, Hastings 2008. White could improve with 20.♙e4 when anything is possible, so Black has missed her chance. I think the right way is 17...♞b6!.

16.♙b3 ♙e8 17.h4 ♞b6 18.♘a4 ♞c7 19.♖ad1 This is Dalaklis – Haratsidis, Greece 2002, and now 19...♘a5!N 20.♘c5 ♘xb3 21.♞xb3 ♞b6+.

16.b4 ♞c7 17.♘e4 ♘xe4 18.♞xe4 ♙xg5 19.♘g5 ♘e7 and Black is fine. 20.♞h4 h5 21.♘e4 ♘d5 22.♙b3 ♞f4! 23.♞xf4 ♘xf4 24.g3 ♘d3 ½–½ Malmdin – Edwards, Dresden 2006. Play could have continued 25.♞ed1 ♘b2 26.♞d2 ♘c4 27.♞c2 ♘b6 and the bishop will get to c6 with the better chances for Black.

If White wants a fresh direction he could investigate 16.♞ac1!N.

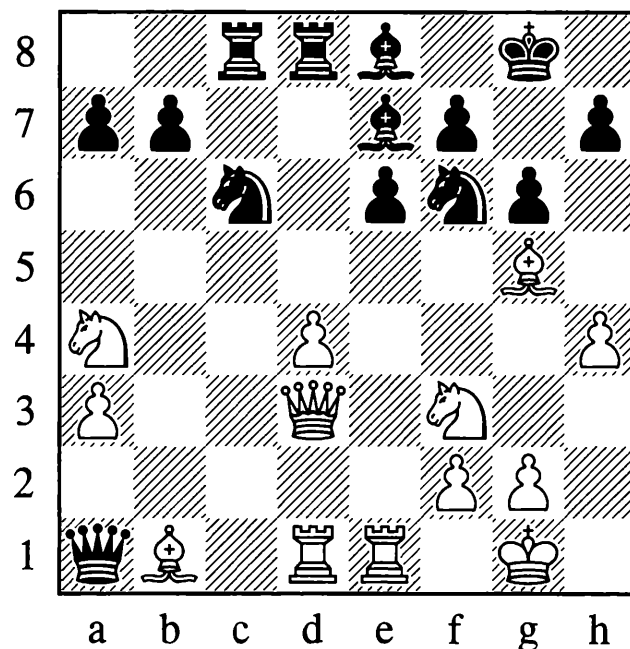
16...♙e8= 17.♖ad1 ♞b6

Attacking b2. White thinks he can defend it tactically and refrains from moves such as b2-b4 or ♘a4.

18.♙b1

So far we have followed Zhang Zhong – Kharitonov, Moscow 2004, but now we can improve:

18...♞xb2!N 19.♘a4 ♞a1



The queen is surprisingly safe here; White does not have enough for the pawn. Play might continue:

20.♙c2 ♞a2 21.♖a1

21.♙xf6 ♙xf6 22.♙b3 ♞xa3 23.♞xe6 is a good try, but it is repelled by 23...♔g7 24.♞xf6 ♘a5! and Black wins.

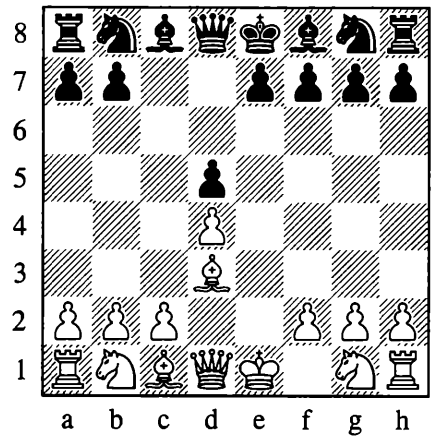
21...♞d5 22.♘c3 ♞a5

And the queen is out again after the little picnic in enemy territory.

Conclusion

The 2.c4 line leads to entertaining play. If White checks with the bishop or the queen then Black blocks with the knight on d7 and can expect to regain the pawn later with a good positional game. In the 5.♘c3 line we see more typical IQP play, where the bishop manoeuvre to e8 is worth remembering.

Chapter 18



Minor Systems

Exchange Variation

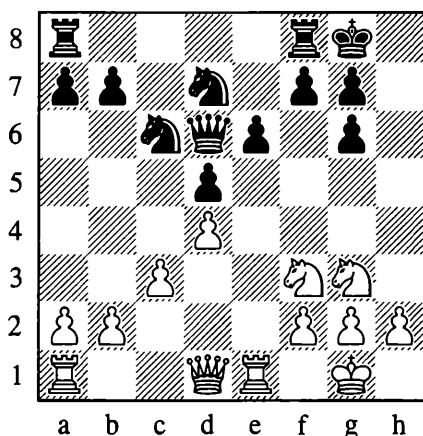
Variation Index

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 cxd5

4.♔d3 ♘c6 5.c3 ♔c7

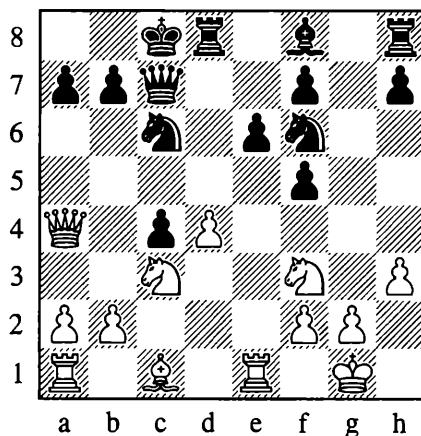
A) 6.f4	198
B) 6.♘d2	199
C) 6.♔g5	200
D) 6.h3	203
E) 6.♘e2	204

B) after 16.♘g3



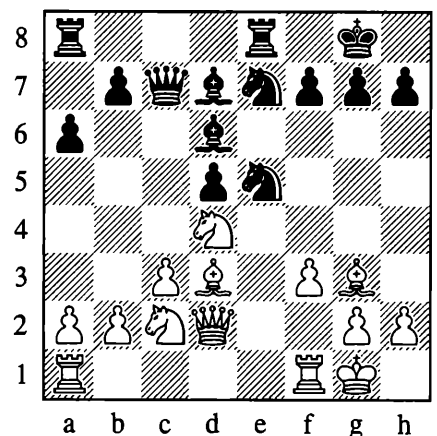
16...b5!

D) after 13.♔a4



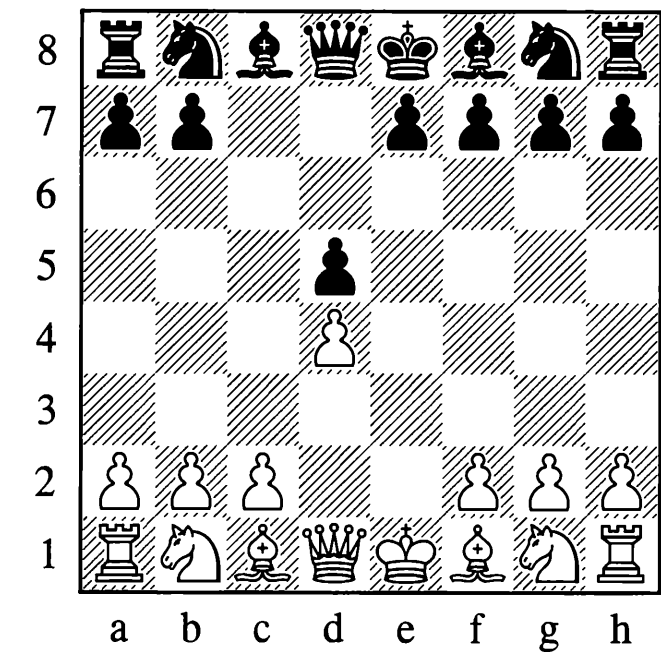
13...a6!N

E) after 15.♔g3



15...♘7c6N

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 cxd5



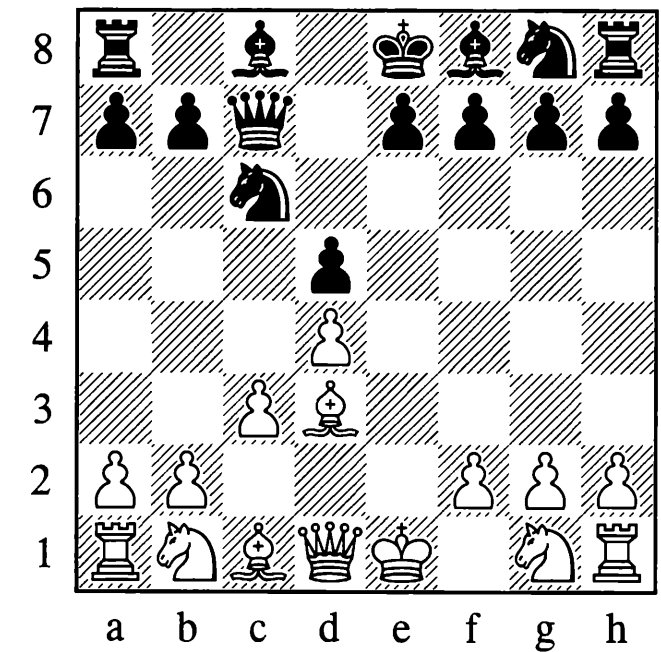
The Exchange Variation. Or at least it will be when White decides to avoid the more threatening Panov Variation by not playing 4.c4.

4.♘d3

White should make it difficult for Black to get his light-squared bishop out and therefore he takes control over f5, exploiting that the queen already covers g4.

A noncommittal move such as 4.♘f3, although not bad objectively, simply makes Black's life too easy. 4...♘c6 5.♘d3 (or 5.♘b5 ♘g4) 5...♘g4 6.c3 e6 7.0-0 ♘d6. In all these variations Black has equality and no problems getting his pieces out.

4...♘c6 5.c3 ♔c7



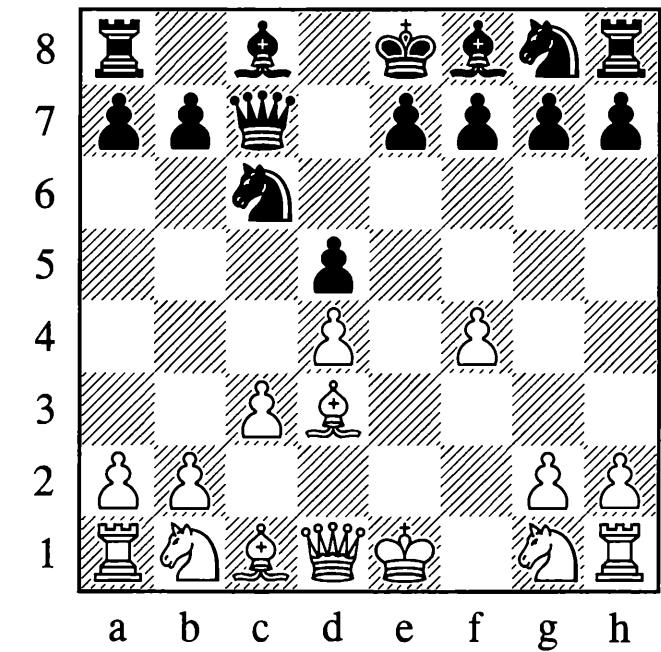
The modern move; Black imitates his opponent and prevents the desired ♘f4.

Now White has tried a lot of moves. We will examine A) 6.f4, B) 6.♘d2, C) 6.♘g5, D) 6.h3 and E) 6.♘e2.

The main positional battle is about the fate of Black's light-squared bishop. Will it get out or be stuck behind an e6-pawn? That's also why an innocuous move such as 6.♘f3 misses the point. Black just answers 6...♘g4 and solves all his problems at once.

Another move that fails to impress is 6.♙b3?. The idea is tempting: White attacks d5 and expects Black will be forced to play ...e7-e6. However a surprise awaits him featuring a typical tactical motif. 6...♘xd4! The c-pawn is pinned. 7.♙xd5 e5+ Black will win more time based on the precarious position of the white queen and gain a serious initiative.

A) 6.f4



A Stonewall-like move. White secures maximum control over the e5-square, hoping to use it as an important outpost. The downside of placing yet another pawn on a dark square is obvious though and easily exploited by a clever manoeuvre.

6...♟h6

Black prepares ...♞f5 in this subtle way.

7.♟f3 ♞f5

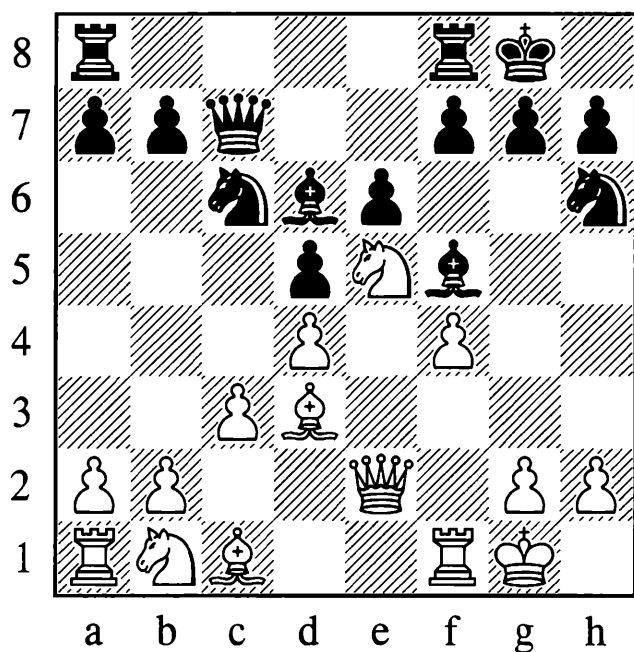
After the bishop exchange Black will have good play on the light squares and White will be left with a potentially bad bishop.

8.0–0

8.♞e2 loses time and after 8...e6 Black is absolutely fine.

8...e6

There is no reason to hurry with the exchange. If White takes on f5 himself the black knight will just get to an excellent square with tempo.

9.♟e5 ♞d6 10.♞e2 0–0

Black is very comfortable. He can always kick the knight away from e5 with ...f7-f6, so White will soon lose his grip on the position.

11.♞e3

Or 11.g4 ♞xd3 12.♟xd3 ♞ae8 is nice for Black. In Uritsky – Mittelman, Israel 1999, he even managed to relocate the offside knight: 13.♞g2 ♟h8 14.♟d2 ♟g8 15.♟f3 ♟f6 16.♞h3 ♟e4

11...♞ae8 12.♟d2 f6 13.♟xc6 bxc6 14.♞ae1 ♟g4!?

And Black started to complicate matters in Rusanov – Shimanov, Peterhof 2007. He is already positionally better and can strive for even more.

B) 6.♟d2

Just aiming for a playable position and accepting that the positional battle can't be won by force.

6...♟f6 7.♟gf3

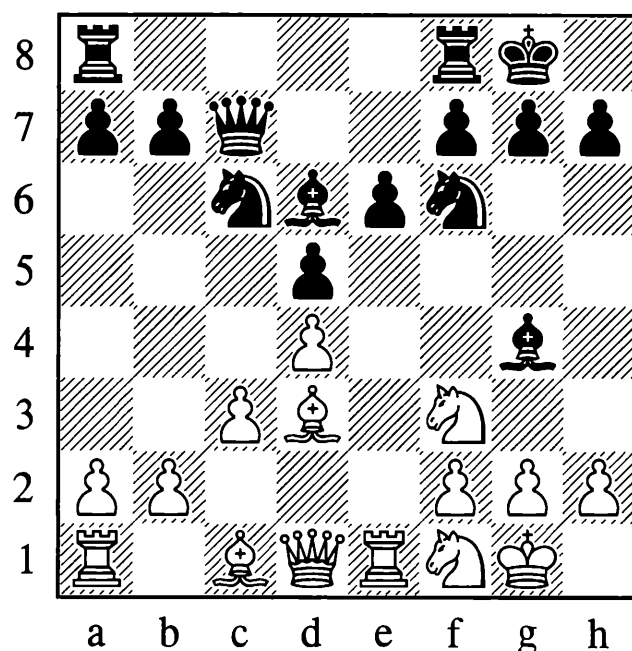
7.h3 allows 7...e5.

7...♞g4

Black has equalized, but it doesn't stop here.

8.0–0 e6 9.♞e1 ♞d6 10.♟f1

This is the right way, as is known from the Queen's Gambit Exchange Variation. White intends ♟g3 and h2-h3 or ♞g5 followed by ♞h4-g3. The immediate 10.h3 is nothing after 10...♞h5.

10...0–0

The standard move. 10...0–0–0! is also playable, but there really is no need for it; just castling short gives a fine position.

11.♙g5

11.♘g3 ♜fe8 12.h3 ♙xf3 13.♚xf3 e5 was good for Black in Markic – Bulic, Makarska 1994.

11...♞d7 12.♙h4

The bishop is on its way to g3 to neutralize the pressure.

12...♙h5

With a similar idea.

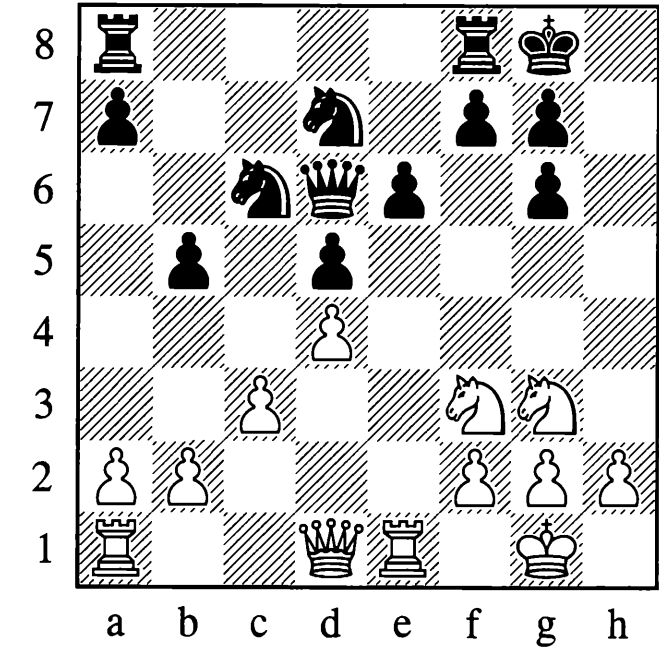
13.♙g3

13.♙xh7†? ♔xh7 14.♘g5† ♔h6 doesn't work.

13...♙g6

Black has completely equalized and even has good long-term prospects because he can launch a minority attack on the queenside. A typical example is:

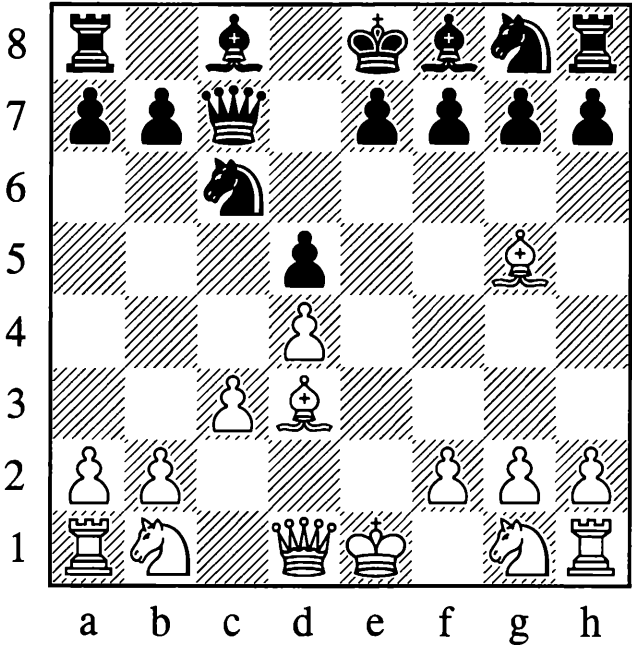
14.♙xg6 hxg6 15.♙xd6 ♚xd6 16.♘g3 b5!



17.a3 a5

This is Gheng – Botezatu, Eforie Nord 1999.

C) 6.♙g5



A good move that demands a strong answer.

6...♞f6

That's it. On closer inspection the threat to take on f6 is just an illusion.

7.♞d2

The proof: 7.♙xf6 gxf6 8.♚f3 e5! This strong idea was proposed by Houska, and it completely turns the tables, as the following two lines show:

After 9.♚xd5 ♙e6 10.♚f3 0–0–0 Black has a near-decisive lead in development.

Taking the other pawn with 9.♚xf6 is no better. 9...♜g8 10.g3 (If 10.dxe5 then Houska wants to play the ending after 10...♚xe5† 11.♚xe5† ♞xe5 12.♙f1 ♙f5 with long-term compensation. However much stronger is 10...♚b6! when it is hard to find a defence for White: 11.♞d2 ♙e7 12.♚f3 ♚xb2 13.♜b1 ♚xc3 14.♙xh7 ♚xe5† 15.♞e2 ♜g7†) 10...♞xd4 11.♞d2 (not 11.cxd4 ♚c1† 12.♙e2 ♚xb2†) 11...♞c6† Black has a great position.

7.h3 prevents ...♙g4 but then 7...♞e4 is awkward to meet.

7...♙g4 8.♞gf3

Now we get standard play that is similar

to the previous line. Instead moving the queen looked silly. Black would just continue ...e7-e6, then ...♙e7 or ...♙d6 and castle.

8...e6 9.0-0

The manoeuvre 9.♙h4 ♙d6 10.♙g3 is only enough for equality: 10...♙h5 11.♙xd6 ♖xd6 12.0-0 0-0 13.♖e1 ♖ab8 14.a4 ♖c7 15.♖b1 a6 16.♗e5 ♖fe8 17.h3 ♙g6 18.♙xg6 hxg6= Illescas – Anand, Linares 1994.

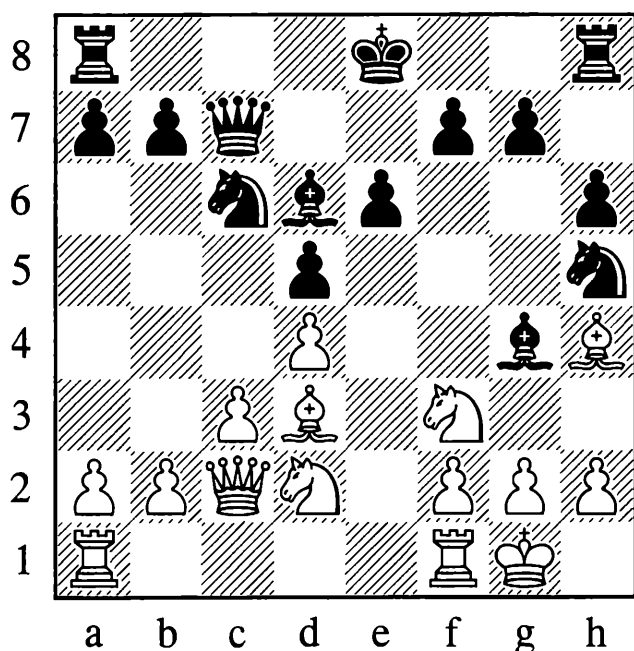
9...♙d6 10.♖c2

Or 10.h3 ♙h5 11.♖e1 ♙g6 12.♗f1 ♙xd3 13.♖xd3 ♗e4 was already pleasant for Black in L. Garcia – Aalderink, corr. 2004.

10...h6

10...♙h5 followed by ...♙g6 was solid, but why not try for more?

11.♙h4 ♗h5!



12.♖fe1 ♗f4 13.♙g3 0-0-0-0?

13...♗xd3 14.♖xd3 ♙xg3 15.hxg3 0-0 was also fine. The bishop can return to f5 and is very strong.

14.♙xf4 ♙xf4 15.h3 ♙xf3 16.♗xf3 g5

Black has the initiative (see the illustrative game).

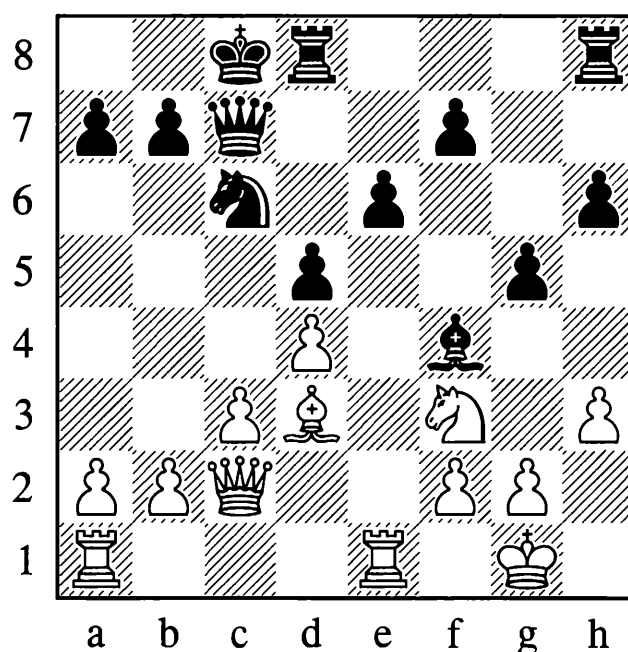
Genocchio – Svetushkin

Italy 2009

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 cxd5 4.♙d3 ♗c6 5.c3 ♖c7 6.♙g5 ♗f6 7.♗d2 ♙g4 8.♗gf3 e6 9.0-0 ♙d6 10.♖c2 h6 11.♙h4 ♗h5 12.♖fe1 ♗f4 13.♙g3 0-0-0

Just like in the similar Queen's Gambit Exchange Variation, castling long is a serious option if you want to have a tense fight, which is exactly what Black gets in this game. Right until the end, the game is extremely complicated. It is not error-free, but I have included it mainly because of the tremendous fight. It is nice to know there are still pioneers out there who are willing to go to extremes to win with Black.

14.♙xf4 ♙xf4 15.h3 ♙xf3 16.♗xf3 g5



17.♖e2 h5

The pawnstorm gives Black the initiative.

18.♗e5 ♙xe5 19.dxe5 g4 20.h4

Opening the h-file with 20.hxg4 hxg4 would be fatal for White. One possible variation is 21.♖xg4 ♗xe5 22.♖g3 ♗xd3 23.♖xd3 ♖h2† 24.♗f1 ♖h1† 25.♗e2 ♖xg2 and wins.

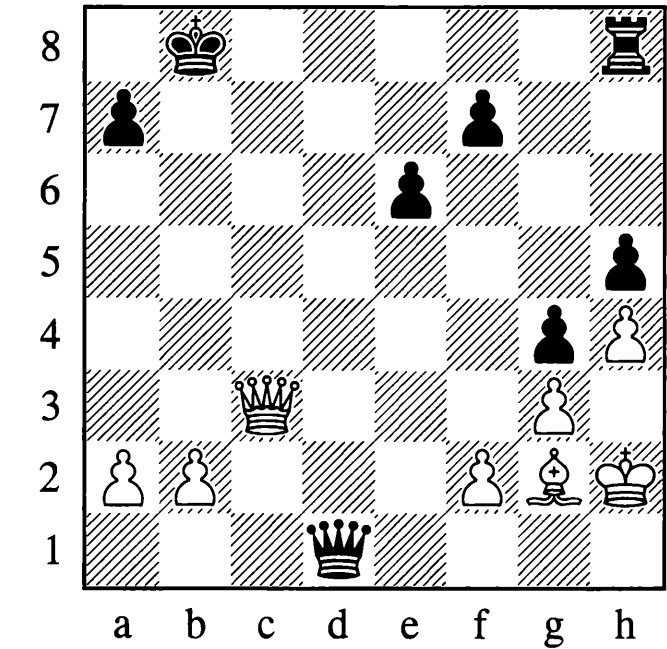
20...♗b8 21.♖e3 ♖e7

21...♖hg8 22.g3 d4! was the way to do it.

22.g3 d4 23.cxd4 ♘xd4 24.♙e4 ♖c7
25.♖c3!

White finds a nice tactical defence, as 25.♖f4 ♖d7 was unpleasant.

25...♖xe5 26.♙xb7! ♘e2† 27.♖xe2 ♖xe2
28.♙g2 ♖d1† 29.♖xd1 ♖xd1† 30.♔h2



30...♖d8?

The precise 30...♖c8! kept the balance, because after 31.♖b4† ♔c7 32.♖b7† ♔d8 33.♖xf7 ♖c1 White is forced to take a perpetual anyway by 34.♖f8† ♔d7 35.♖f7†.

31.♖c6 ♖c8 32.♖a8† ♔c7 33.♖xa7† ♔d6
34.♖xf7

Now White has excellent winning chances with two pawns for the exchange and the black king wandering around in the open air.

34...♖c5 35.♖f4† ♔e7 36.b4 ♖f5 37.♖c7†
♔f6 38.♖c3†

Instead 38.a4! ♖xf2 39.a5 looks decisive.

38...♖e5 39.♖d2 ♔e7 40.♙c6 ♖d8 41.♖h6
♖f8 42.♔g2?

It should have been 42.♖d2 again.

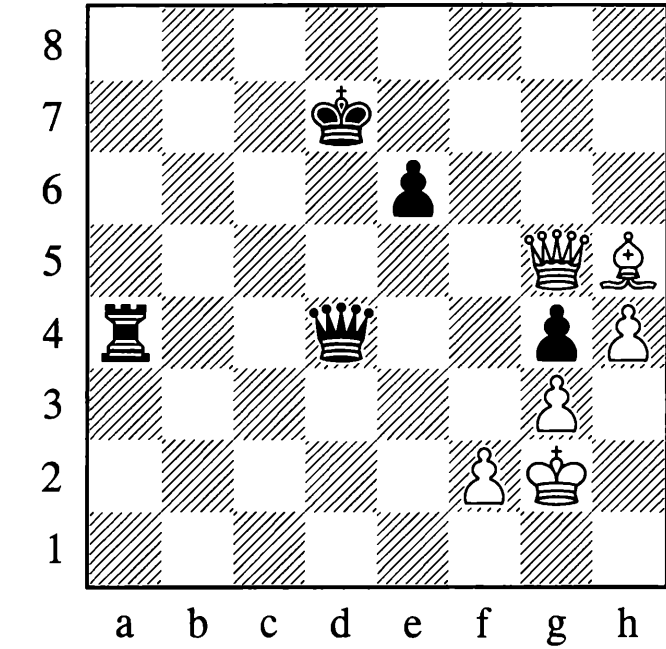
42...♖d4 43.♖e3 ♖xb4

Now Black is slightly better, though a draw is rather likely.

44.♙e4 ♖a5 45.a4 ♖c8 46.♖d4 ♖c3 47.♖b6
♖e5 48.♖b4† ♖c5 49.♖b2 ♖d8 50.♖g7†
♔d6 51.♖f6 ♖b8 52.♖f4† ♖e5 53.♖d2†
♔e7 54.♙c6 ♖c5 55.♙e4

Better was 55.♖d7† ♔f6 56.♙e4.

55...♖b4 56.♖h6 ♖d4 57.♖g5† ♔d7
58.♙g6 ♖xa4 59.♙xh5



59...♖b4

Black could have won at once with 59...♖a2!
60.♖b5† ♔c7 61.♖f1 ♖a1 62.♖e2 ♖d5†
63.f3 ♖a2.

60.♙g6 ♖d5† 61.♖xd5† exd5

Black still has some winning chances with the passed d-pawn.

62.h5 ♔e7 63.h6 ♔f6 64.h7 ♔g7 65.♔f1
♖b6 66.♙c2 ♖e6 67.♙f5 ♖e8 68.♙c2

68.f3 was a more logical choice.

68...♔f6 69.♙b3 ♔e5 70.♔e2 ♔d4† 71.♔d2
♖f8 72.♔e2 ♖h8 73.♙c2 ♔c3 74.♙g6 d4
75.♙e4?

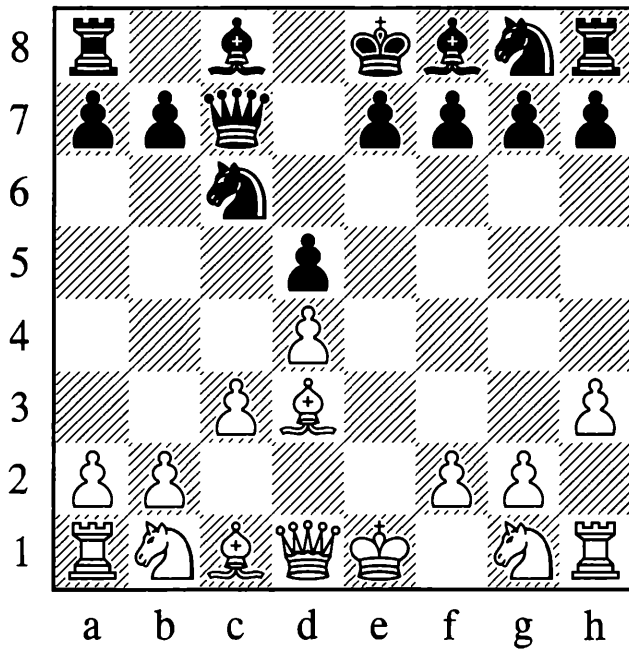
The last chance was 75.f3 gxf3† 76.♔xf3 d3
77.g4 d2 78.♔e2 ♖d8 79.♔d1.

75...d3†! 76.♔d1

Or 76.♙xd3 ♖e8† is easy.

76...♖b8 77.♙b7 d2
0–1

D) 6.h3



Definitely stopping ...♙g4, but Black has other ways to go.

6...♘f6 7.♘f3

7.♘e2 allows 7...e5 with active play. For instance, 8.dxe5 ♘xe5 9.♙f4 ♙d6 10.♙xe5 ♙xe5 11.♘d2 0–0 12.0–0 ♙h2† 13.♙h1 ♙d6 14.♘d4 a6 and the bishop pair gives Black an edge, Krivoborodov – Jobava, Moscow 2008.

7...g6

Planning not only the obvious ...♙g7 and castling short, but also the positionally interesting ...♙f5.

8.0–0 ♙f5

The most intriguing, but 8...♙g7 9.♖e1 0–0 is also fine. White's most active continuation is 10.♙g5 when 10...♙f5 is another version of the same theme. (If Black doesn't like this, he can play a flexible move like 10...♖e8 instead.) 11.♙xf5 gxf5 12.♙c1 ♘e4 13.♙f4 ♙d7 14.♘bd2 ♙h8 15.♘f1 ♖g8 16.♘g3 ♘xg3 17.♙xg3± was Radjabov – Grischuk, Odessa (rapid) 2008. Black can improve with

13...♙b6 14.♘bd2 ♖ac8 with a good game as in Parkanyi – Bodioga, Hungary 2000.

9.♙xf5

The principled try; instead 9.♖e1 ♙xd3 10.♙xd3 ♙g7 would not promise White anything.

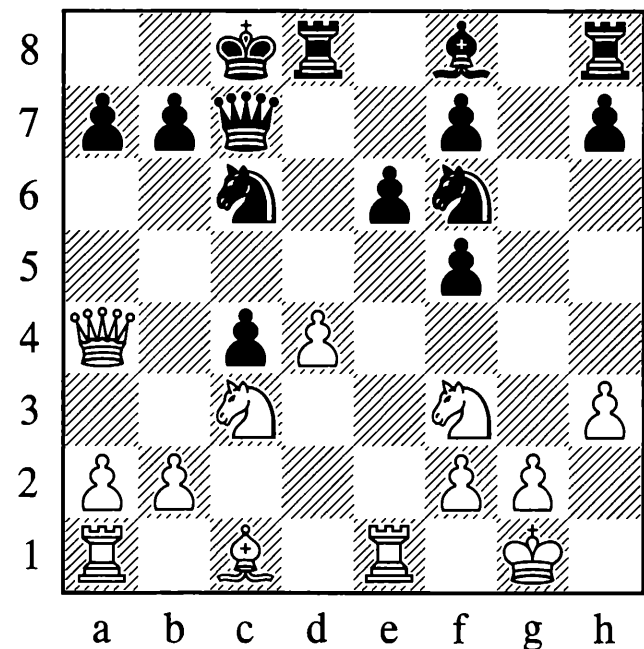
9...gxf5 10.♖e1 e6

An interesting new option is 10...♖g8N.

11.c4!?

A pawn sacrifice for the initiative. Instead 11.♘e5 ♘xe5 12.♙f4 (or 12.dxe5 ♘e4) 12...♘fd7 13.♙xe5 ♘xe5 14.♖xe5 ♙g7 15.♖e1 was Bellini – Doric, Italy 2008. 15...0–0–0!N followed by ...♖hg8 with pressure along the g-file looks promising for Black.

11...dxc4 12.♘c3 0–0–0 13.♙a4



13...a6!N

Black needed a new move, as 13...♘d5 14.♙xc4 ♙b8 15.♙g5 ♙e7 16.♘xd5 ♖xd5 17.♙xe7 ♘xe7 18.♙xc7† ♙xc7 19.♘g5± gave White a strong initiative in the ending in Ehlvest – Harikrishna, Merida 2008.

14.♙g5

If 14.♖d1 then 14...♘b4! and White is in trouble. For instance, 15.♘e5 b5 16.♘xb5

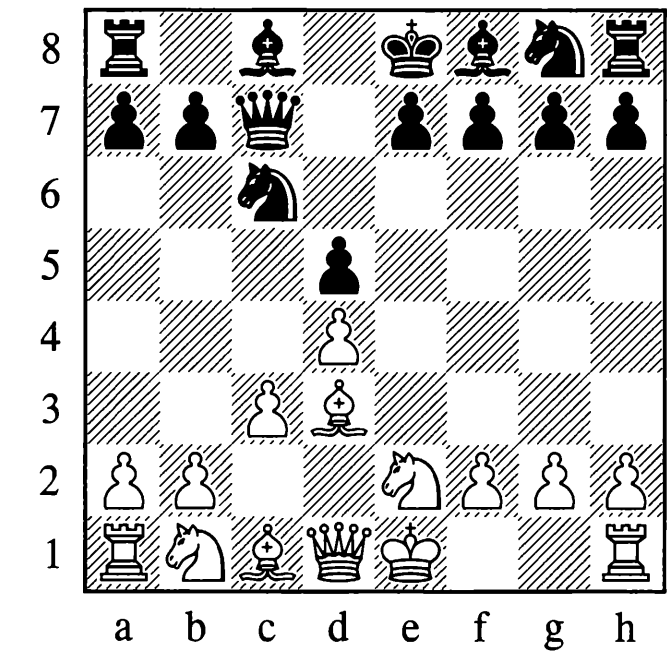
axb5 17. ♖a8† ♜b8 18. ♜xb8† ♔xb8 19. ♘xf7 ♙g7+.

14... ♙e7 15. ♜xc4 ♞hg8

Simply completing development is the most reliable choice, when Black has no problems.

It is tempting to try 15... ♘xd4, but after 16. ♜xc7† ♔xc7 17. ♘e5 the f7-pawn is hard to hold. For example, 17... ♞hf8 18. ♞ac1 ♔b8 19. ♙h6 ♞g8 20. ♔f1 and White will soon regain the pawn and have the sounder structure.

E) 6. ♘e2



Renewing the ♙f4-plan. Black really can't prevent it this time, but now he has the possibility of developing his own bishop.

6... ♙g4 7. f3

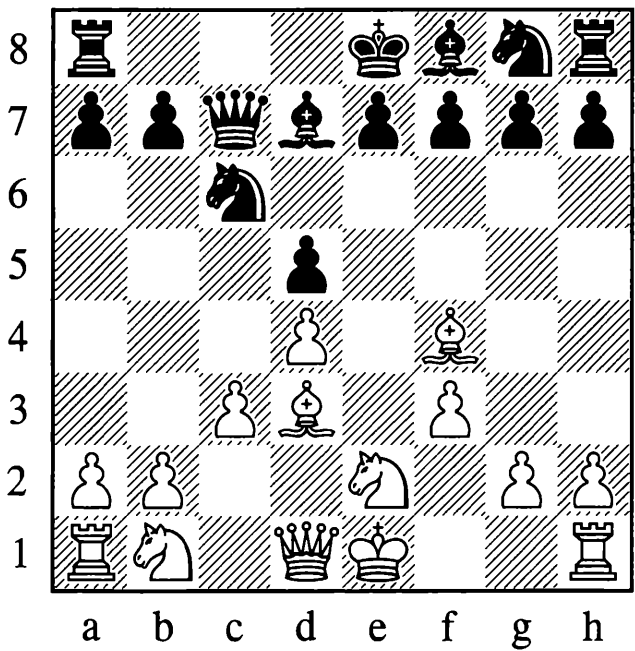
This looks ugly, but it is the only way to get some play. Instead 7. ♙f4 ♜xf4 8. ♘xf4 ♙xd1 9. ♔xd1 e6 10. ♙c2 ♘f6 11. ♘d2 ♙d6 12. ♘d3 0–0+ was Kosov – Ovetchkin, St Petersburg 2006.

Or 7. ♜b3 ♙xe2 8. ♙xe2 ♘xd4 solves all Black's problems. 9. ♜xd5 ♞d8 10. ♙b5† ♘xb5 11. ♜xb5† ♞d7 12. ♙e3 a6 13. ♜a4 ♘f6 14. ♘d2 e6=

7... ♙d7

7... ♙h5 8. ♙f4 ♜d7 is also fully acceptable. The bishop can always drop around to g6 and protect the kingside.

8. ♙f4



The natural follow-up. 8. ♘a3 a6 9. ♘c2 e5 and 8.0–0 e5 are not improvements.

8... e5! 9. dxe5

White achieves nothing by 9. ♙g3 ♙d6.

9... ♘xe5

Black is willing to accept an isolated queen pawn to solve all his development issues. The fact that the white f-pawn is on f3 creates all sorts of tactical motifs that more than compensate for Black's slight positional concession.

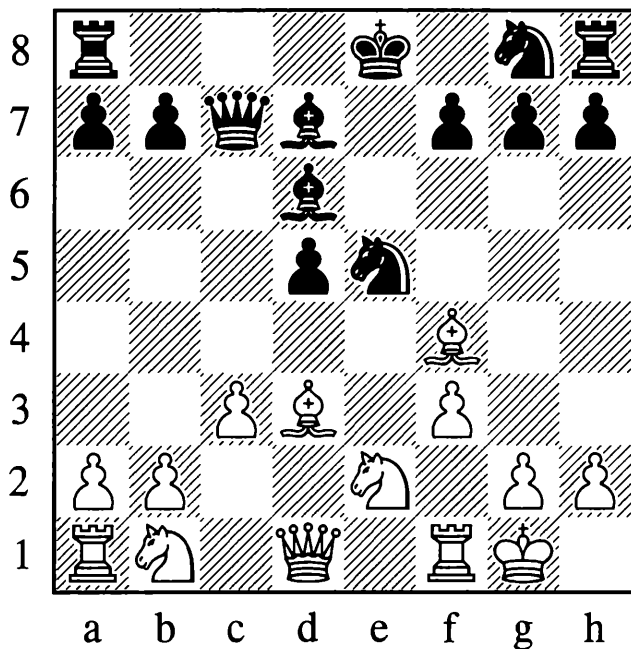
10.0–0

10. ♙xe5 leaves White hopelessly weak on the dark squares. 10... ♜xe5 11.0–0 ♙d6 12. f4 ♜e3† 13. ♔h1 ♘f6+ Kahn – Krueger, Dresden 2008.

10. ♙c2 is a bit more sophisticated. The natural response is 10... ♘f6, but apparently Black can even offer the pawn: 10... ♙d6 11. ♜xd5 ♘f6 12. ♜d4 0–0 13. ♘d2 ♞fe8 14. ♘e4 ♘xe4 15. fxe4 ♞ad8 16.0–0–0 ♙g4 17. ♜f2 ♜c4 ½–½

Van Damme – Julean, corr. 2006. A possible continuation is 18.♙xe5 ♙xe5 19.♖xd8 ♖xd8 20.♚h4 ♚c8 when the strong bishop on e5 gives adequate compensation for the pawn.

10...♙d6



11.♘d4

White has tried a lot of other moves without getting anywhere.

11.♙h1 ♘e7 12.♘a3 a6 13.♘c2 0–0 14.♘ed4 ♖ac8 15.♘e3? ♘xd3 16.♙xd6 ♘xb2! 17.♚b3 ♚xd6 18.♚xb2 b5 Black simply had an extra pawn in Semeniuk – Dreev, St Petersburg 1999.

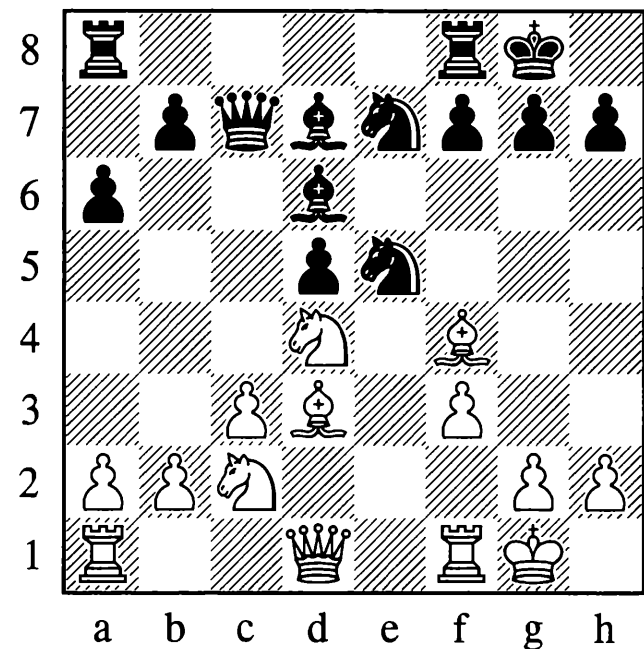
11.♘a3 a6 12.c4!? dxc4 13.♙xe5 ♙xe5 14.♘xc4 ♘f6 (Black might even get away with 14...♙xh2†) 15.♘xe5 ½–½ Ragger – A. Rasmussen, Beijing 2008. 15...♚xe5 16.♖e1 0–0=

11.♖e1 ♘e7 (11...♘f6 also looks fine, but in general I prefer the more flexible e7-square for the knight) 12.♙h1? ♘xd3 13.♙xd6 ♘f2† 14.♙g1 ♘h3†! 15.gxh3 ♚xd6 16.♖e1 White's horrible pawns won't go away, Burtasova – Kornev, Vladimir 2002.

11...♘e7 12.♘a3

In this line White can get in trouble surprisingly quickly. One example is 12.♙c2 f6!? 13.♘d2 g5 14.♙g3 h5 15.♙a4 0–0–0 16.♙xd7† ♚xd7 17.♖xd8 ♖xd8 Brynell – Luther, Plovdiv 2003.

12...a6 13.♘ac2 0–0



14.♚d2

After 14.♖e1 Black can immediately grab the initiative with 14...♖ae8 15.♙g3 f5! 16.♚d2 f4, as in Stella – V. Popov, Biel 2009.

14...♖fe8 15.♙g3 ♘7c6N

The text is more accurate than 15...♚b6 which allows 16.♘e3, when Tompa – Jaracz, Hungary 2006, was agreed drawn.

16.♖fe1

The problem with 16.♘e3? is 16...♘xd4 17.cxd4 ♘xd3 18.♙xd6 ♚xd6 19.♚xd3 ♙b5 and Black seizes an exchange.

16...♚b6

Black is the first to threaten anything.

Conclusion

The Exchange Variation is a strategically demanding line. After 1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 cxd5 4.♙d3 ♘c6 5.c3 ♚c7 White wants to

prevent Black’s light-squared bishop from getting out, but that is easier said than done.

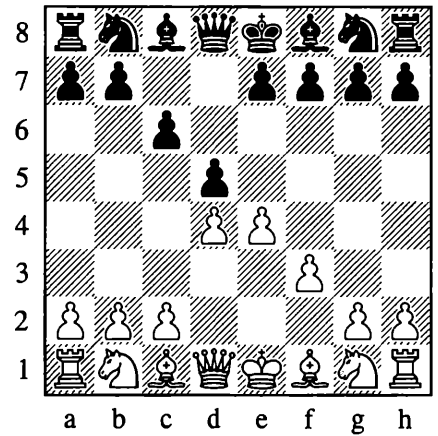
6.f4 is answered by 6...♘h6 7.♘f3 ♕f5, and on 6.♘d2 ♘f6 7.♘gf3 comes 7...♗g4.

The tricky 6.♗g5 is met by 6...♘f6, when 7.♗xf6 gxf6 8.♖f3 e5! is great for Black and 7.♘d2 allows 7...♗g4.

6.h3 stops the bishop move, but then 6...♘f6 7.♘f3 g6 and ...♗f5 next with good play.

The mainline is 6.♘e2 when Black should reply 6...♗g4 7.f3 ♗d7 8.♗f4 e5! 9.dxe5 ♘xe5 with active piece-play.

Chapter 19



Minor Systems

Fantasy Variation

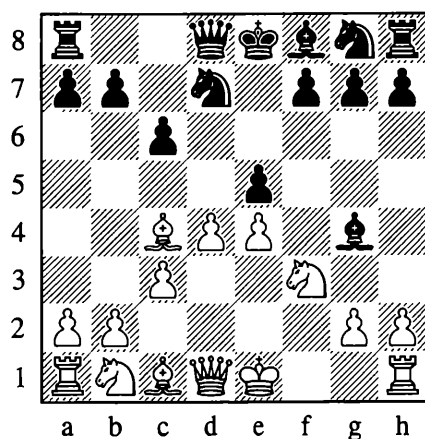
Variation Index

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5

3.f3 dxe4 4.fxe4 e5 5.♘f3 ♙g4 6.♙c4 ♘d7 7.0-0 ♘gf6 8.c3 ♙d6

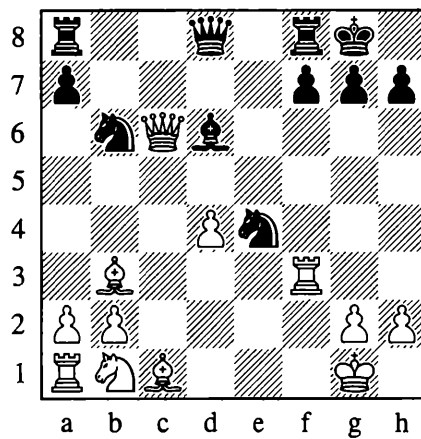
- | | |
|----------|-----|
| A) 9.♙b3 | 210 |
| B) 9.♙e3 | 212 |
| C) 9.♙g5 | 212 |

note to 7.0-0



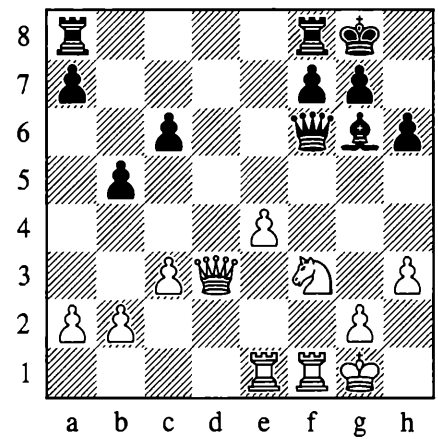
7...♙h5!

Peregudov – Savon



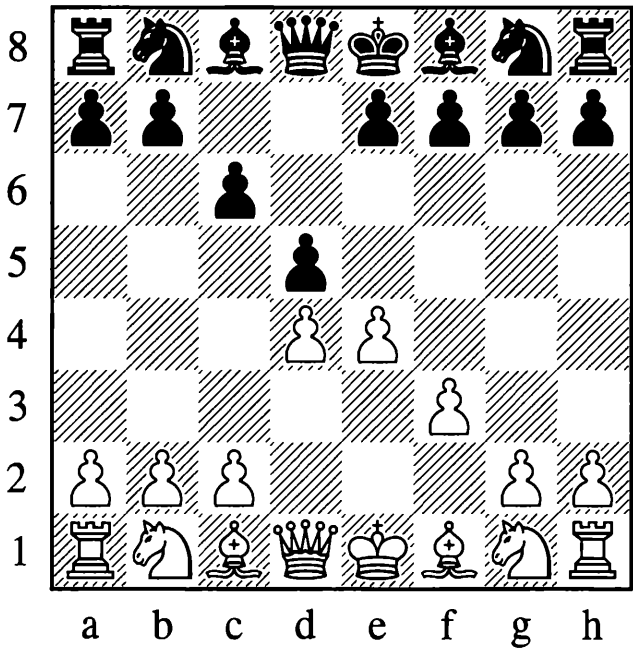
14...♙c8!N

C) after 21.♙xd3



21..a5!N

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.f3



This somewhat bizarre move has gained considerable popularity over the last few years. A good guess is that this is mainly because White has had so many problems proving any advantage in the major variations. The line is called the Fantasy Variation, but let's keep both feet on the ground for a moment. A move like 3.f3 shouldn't scare Black. On the other hand you can't ignore it, as 3.f3 isn't bad at all. Seriously, I am not kidding. White protects e4 with a pawn which means there is a good chance he will retain his two central pawns, and at the same time it won't be easy for Black to develop his light-squared bishop, which is a key element of the Caro-Kann.

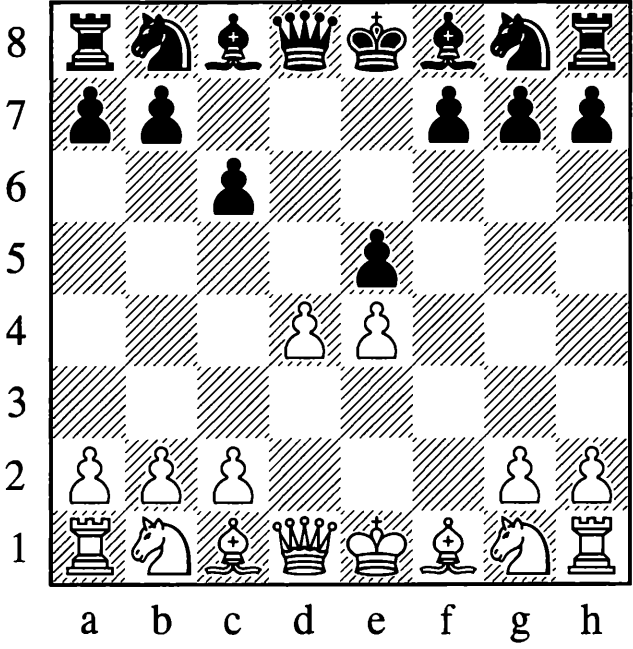
3...dxe4

Accepting the challenge. Black immediately looks for a fight and the play takes on a rather forced nature. This is often a good way to respond to slightly obscure set-ups, but it is not without risk.

A safe alternative is the French-like 3...e6 when play can continue 4.♘c3 ♙b4 5.♙f4 ♘e7 with a complicated and demanding position. Typically there follows 6.♙d3 and now Black solves the problem of his c8-bishop by

6...b6 7.♘ge2 ♙a6 8.♙e3 0-0 9.0-0-0∞ when anything is possible.

4.fxe4 e5



This strike is the justification of 3...dxe4; the positional and tactical elements blend nicely.

5.♘f3

White should play as actively as possible to fight for the initiative. 5.dxe5 was bad for a number of reasons, the clearest being 5...♙h4†.

5...♙g4

A move that is both active and in perfect balance with the position.

The positionally desirable 5...exd4 is far too risky as White answers 6.♙c4 with a strong initiative. The f7-square is weak, especially with 0-0 looming.

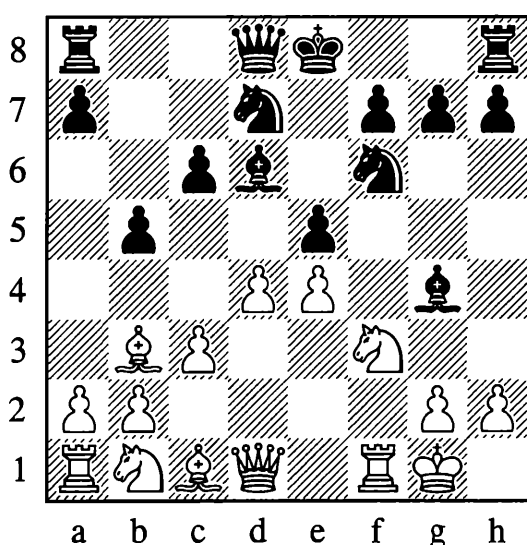
6.♙c4

The most aggressive move and almost exclusively played. Again 6.dxe5 is anti-positional. Black can either play 6...♘d7 immediately or exchange queens first. He will soon regain the pawn with a good position.

Protecting the centre with 6.c3 makes much more sense, but the best it will bring White is a transposition to the next note or to the mainline.

6...♘d7 7.0–0

Again 7.c3 is possible. Black can't transpose to the mainline, because if 7...♘gf6 then 8.♙b3! is awkward to meet. Instead it seems obvious to first throw in 7...b5 8.♙b3 when 8...♘gf6 is safe enough. Play could then continue 9.0–0 ♙d6:



Here White has tried more or less the same moves as we will come across later in the mainline.

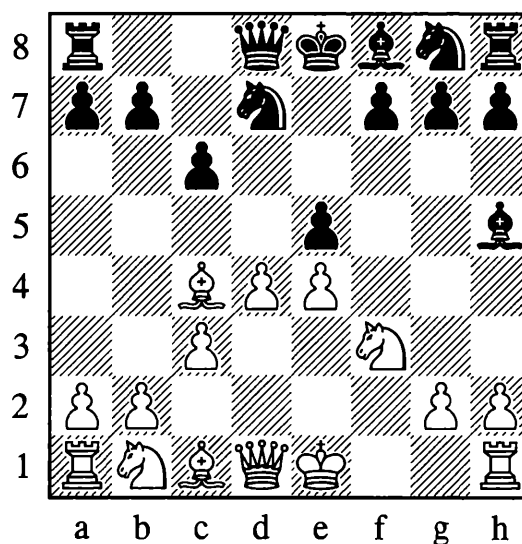
10.♙g5 0–0 11.♘bd2 ♙b6 Out of the pin. 12.♙e1 ♙xf3 13.♘xf3 ♖ae8 With pressure against the white centre. 14.♙c2 exd4 15.cxd4 And now 15...♘xe4! snatched a pawn in Solonkovich – Lenderman, USA 2008. The point being 16.♙xe4 f5.

10.♙e1 0–0 11.♙h4 ♙e7 12.♙g5 ♙xf3 13.gxf3 h6 14.♙e3 c5 15.♖h1 In Libiszewski – Houska, La Roche sur Yon 2007, Black could have taken control of the dark squares with 15...exd4 16.cxd4 cxd4 17.♙xd4 ♙e5+. The tactical try 16.♙xh6 is answered by 16...♘xe4!.

10.♙e3 0–0 11.♘bd2 is examined below.

Apparently all was well. Then, just before the book was finished, a reader of my survey for *ChessBase Magazine* 134 found an interesting improvement for White: 7.c3 b5 8.♙e2! ♘gf6 9.a4! Suddenly the black queenside is somewhat loose, which is quite uncomfortable, especially in connection with White's possibility of playing dxe5 at a convenient moment. The reader's mainline goes 9...a6 10.dxe5 ♘xe4 11.axb5 cxb5 12.♙e3± and White comes out on top. It was not so easy to improve on this line. For instance, 9...b4 10.0–0 ♙d6 11.♘bd2 was not the solution, as we shouldn't just give the white knight the excellent c4-square.

So 7...b5 was not correct. Fortunately, with a precise move order Black stays within well-known territory: 7...♙h5!



8.0–0 (f7 is protected, so 8.♙b3 b5 is nothing) 8...♘gf6 9.♘bd2 (or 9.♙e3 ♙d6) 9...♙d6 10.♙d3 b5 11.a4 a6 Now everything holds together, as b5 and e5 are sufficiently defended. Black gets a pretty normal, balanced game.

7...♘gf6

The arrival of a rook on f1 meant that White was threatening ♙xf7+, but Black's simple development stops this automatically.

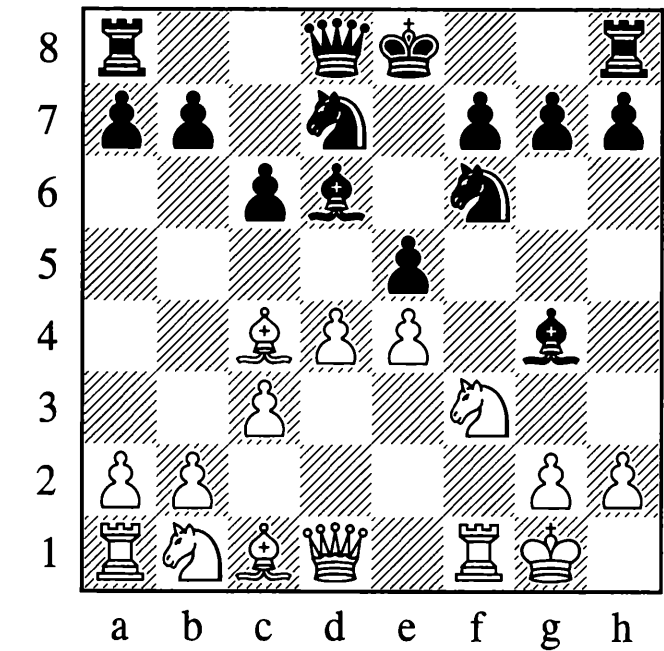
8.c3

Protecting the centre and stabilizing the position. Against most other moves Black

would answer ...exd4 and get a superior pawn structure and a nice square on e5 for a piece.

A little subtlety should be mentioned. On 8.dxe5 Black has the intermediate check 8...♖b6† 9.♔h1 and only then 9...♘xe5 with good play.

8...♙d6



White normally chooses between A) 9.♖b3, B) 9.♙e3 and C) 9.♙g5, but first I will briefly mention a sideline:

9.♖e1!? 0–0 10.♙g5 ♖b6 11.♘bd2 ♜ae8 12.♙d3

So far this is Calzetta – A. Hagesaether, England 2009.

12...♙e6N

This should definitely have been played. It prevents ♘c4 and probably threatens to take on b2.

13.b3

I mean it. On 13.h3 h6 14.♙e3 Black plays 14...♖xb2 and it is not clear what White has for the pawn.

13...h6

Black is fine. Play might continue 14.♙h4 exd4 15.cxd4 ♙b4! 16.♙f2 ♘g4 or 14.♙e3 ♘g4.

A) 9.♖b3

With a double threat on b7 and f7; a good move in a blitz game for sure.

9...0–0 10.♖xb7

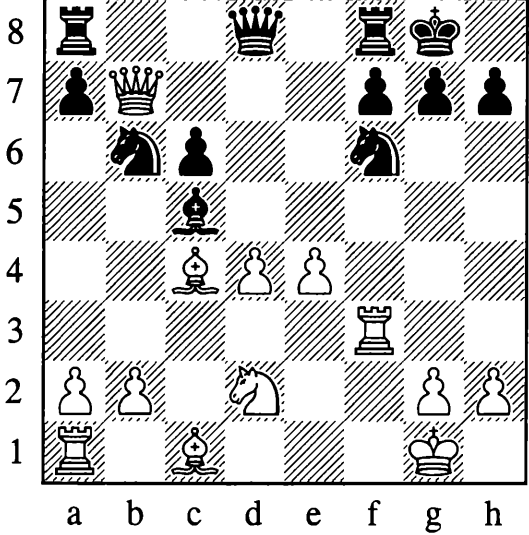
White wins a pawn, true, but he also delivers the initiative to Black on a silver plate.

10...exd4 11.cxd4

11.♖xc6 as in Rodriguez Vila – Limp, Sao Paulo 2006, could be refuted by 11...♘e5!N 12.♘xe5 ♙xe5†.

11...♘b6 12.♙b3

12.♘bd2 is met with the spectacular 12...♙xf3 13.♖xf3 ♙c5!.



Then 14.dxc5 ♖d4† 15.♔h1 ♘xc4 16.♖b4 ♜fd8 17.♘f1 ♖ab8 18.♖e1 ♘xe4† was overwhelming for Black in Sherwood – Mitrovic, corr. 2004.

12.♙d3, just protecting e4, has never been played. Black gets good play with: 12...♙xf3 13.♖xf3 (or 13.gxf3 ♘h5) 13...♘g4! 14.e5 ♙b8 Now d4 hangs and the only sensible way to protect it is 15.♖f4 which is met by 15...♘xe5 16.dxe5 ♖xd3†.

12...♘xe4

With a complicated and rather unclear game, in which Black's chances are in no way inferior.

See the game below.

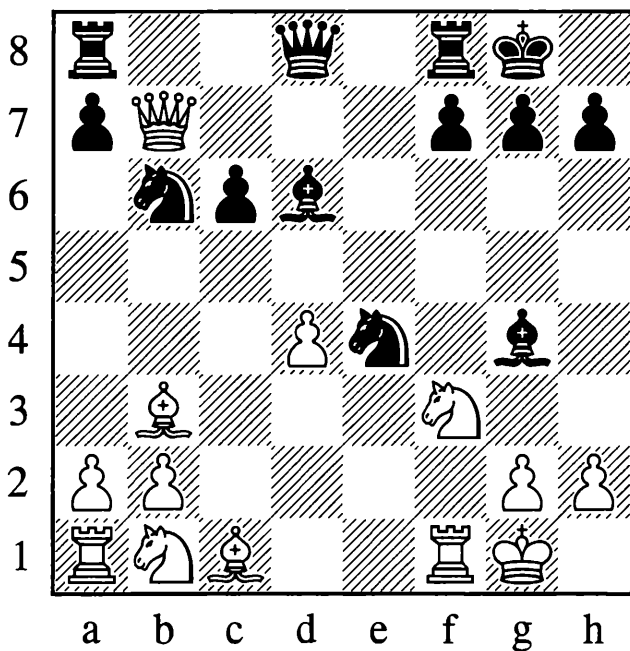
Peregudov – Savon

St Petersburg 1994

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.f3 dxe4 4.fxe4 e5 5.♘f3
6.♙g4 6...♙c4 7.♘d7 7...0-0 8.♘gf6 8...c3 9.♙d6
9...♙b3 10.♙xb7

It is always double-edged to take the notorious b-pawn (which is called the “testament pawn” by Danes, after the story about a rich man who wrote in his will that his heir would only inherit if he promised never to grab the b-pawn). It is the classic dilemma of material versus development. In a normal position you cannot say that one is superior to the other. Which one to choose depends more on the style of the player than on an objective evaluation. What you can say though, is that taking such a pawn is an extremely demanding way to play, which forces you to calculate precisely to navigate the subsequent complications. A small slip will most likely mean a painful defeat.

10...exd4 11.cxd4 ♘b6 12.♙b3 ♘xe4



13.♙xc6?

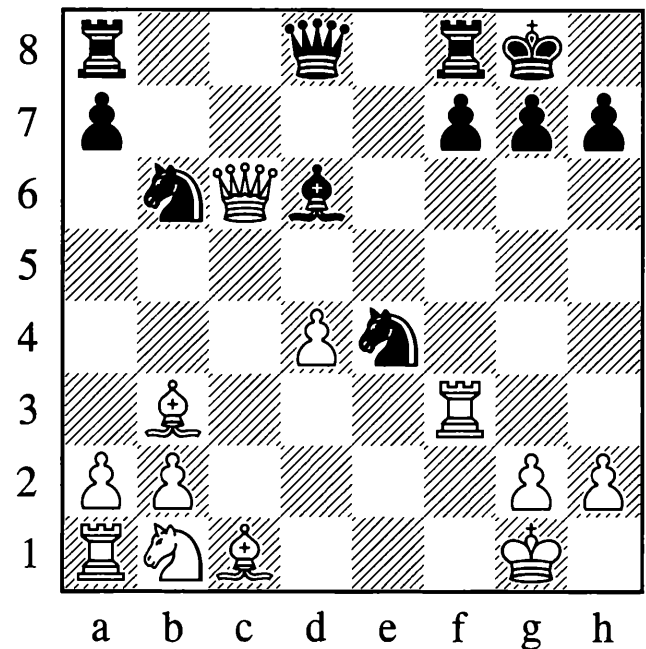
Consistent, but it doesn't work for tactical reasons. The right move is 13.♘c3 when Black probably has to settle for the solid

13...♘xc3 14.bxc3 ♙c8 (on ChessPublishing, GM Volzhin gave 14...♙d7 with a similar conclusion to mine) 15.♙xc8 ♖axc8 with an equal ending.

13...♙xf3!

Removing a key defender.

14.♖xf3



14...♙h4

This works well in the game, but simpler and much stronger is 14...♖c8!N 15.♙xe4 ♖xc1† 16.♙f2 ♙xh2 and White won't be able to hold everything together for long.

15.g3 ♙g4 16.♖f4

A combination made out of despair. Necessary was 16.♘d2, when 16...♘g5 is still highly promising for Black.

16...♙xf4 17.♙xe4

The point. However White didn't calculate far enough.

17...♖ae8 18.♙xf7†

It transpires that the intended 18.♙xf4 is met by 18...♖e1† 19.♙g2 ♙e2† and Black wins after either 20.♙f2 ♙xf2† 21.♙xf2 ♖xc1 or 20.♙h3 ♙h5† 21.♙g2 ♖e2† 22.♙f1 ♖xh2.

was 10...♔c7, but then 11.♕e1 with the idea of ♕h4 is annoying, which Bareev had learned the hard way. 11...b5 12.♙b3 h6 13.♙e3 ♖ae8 14.♕h4 exd4 15.♙xh6!? gxh6 16.cxd4 Followed by e4-e5 with dangerous threats, Timofeev – Bareev, Dagomys 2008. Maybe Black could have saved it, but even the simple 15.cxd4 gives White a pleasant position.

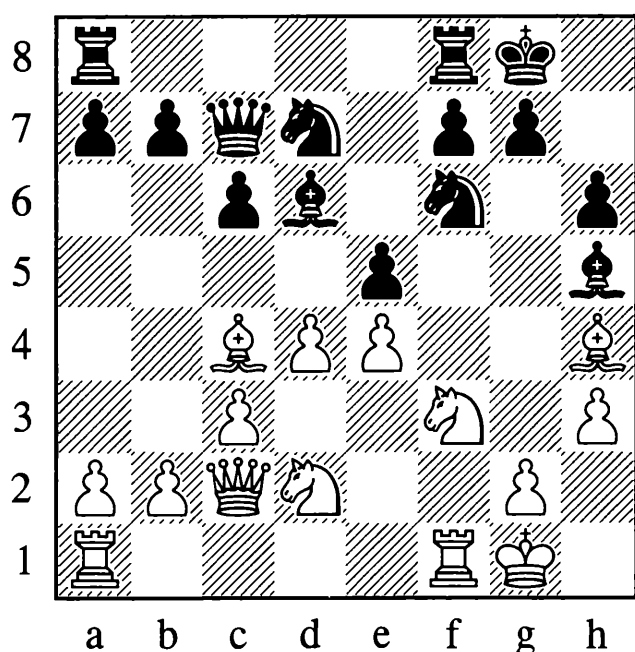
11.♙h4

Now the bishop occupies h4 and the queen manoeuvre loses its vitality.

The alternative was 11.♙e3, but then I think the clever regrouping 11...♙h5 gives Black his share of the play. First of all it threatens ...♘g4, so 12.h3 is to be expected, when 12...♖e8 puts pressure on e4. That was my preparation anyway, but in the European Team Championship my opponent played the slightly more cunning 12.♙h1 giving the bishop a retreat on g1. There followed 12...♖e8 13.♔c2 ♔c7 14.♙g1 b5 15.♙d3 a6 with complicated but balanced play, Borisek – Schandorff, Novi Sad 2009.

11...♔c7 12.h3 ♙h5 13.♔c2

Accepting that there is nothing to do on the kingside.



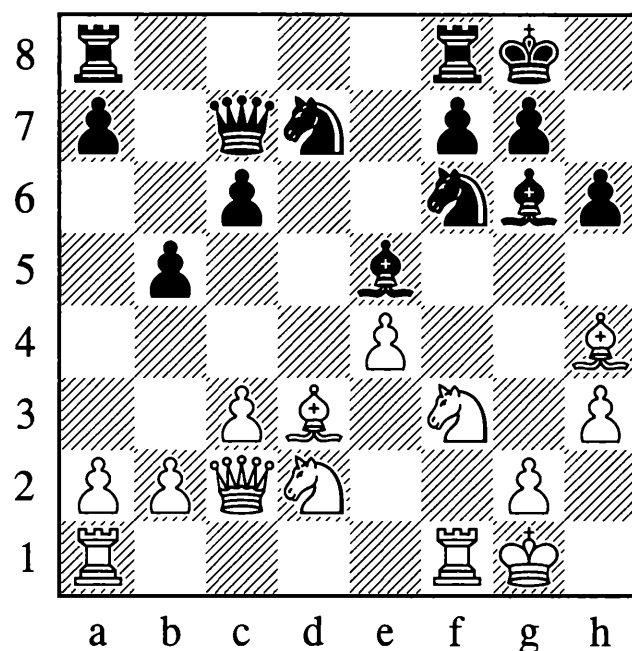
13...♙g6 14.♙d3 b5

A multipurpose move; Black grabs some space on the queenside as well as taking the c4-square away from the white knight.

15.dxe5

Releasing the tension. It was difficult to say what else to do. If 15.a4 then 15...a6 and White has the same dilemma.

15...♙xe5



As usual, if Black controls the e5-square then he has no positional problems.

16.♘xe5 ♕xe5

Black is keen to retain his good pawn structure, but concrete analysis suggests the odd alternative 16...♘xe5!? 17.♙xf6 gxf6∞ is also possible, because 18.♖xf6 drops material to 18...♕d8.

17.♘f3 ♕f4 18.♖ae1 ♘c5 19.♙xf6 ♕xf6 20.b4 ♘xd3 21.♕xd3 a5!N

Instead Zharebikh – Bareev, Moscow 2009, was agreed drawn after 21...♖fe8 22.♖e3 a5.

22.a3 axb4 23.axb4 ♖fe8 24.♘d4 ♕h4

The attack on e4 gives Black the upper hand, for instance:

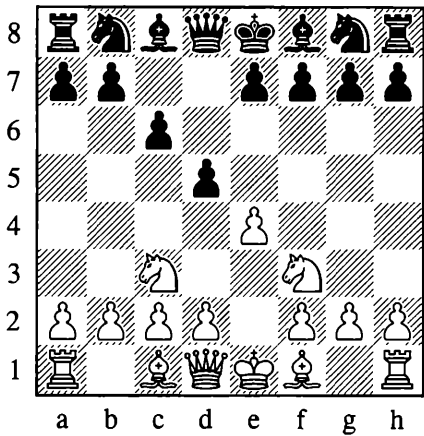
25.♘xc6 ♙xe4 26.♕d7 ♕g3!

Black has an initiative that will secure at least half a point.

Conclusion

Against 3.f3 the line 3...dxe4 4.fxe4 e5 leads to entertaining play where both sides quickly develop their pieces to good squares. There usually follows 5.♘f3 ♗g4 6.♗c4 ♘d7 7.0-0 ♘gf6 8.c3 ♗d6 and now the mainline is 9.♗g5, when Black answers 9...0-0 10.♘bd2 h6!. And now either 11.♗e3 ♗h5 threatening ...♘g4, or 11.♗h4 ♖c7 12.h3 ♗h5 13.♖c2 ♗g6. The resulting middlegame is tense and complicated with Black having his share of the chances.

Beware of the tricky 7.c3 when Black should answer with the accurate 7...♗h5.



Minor Systems

Two Knights Variation

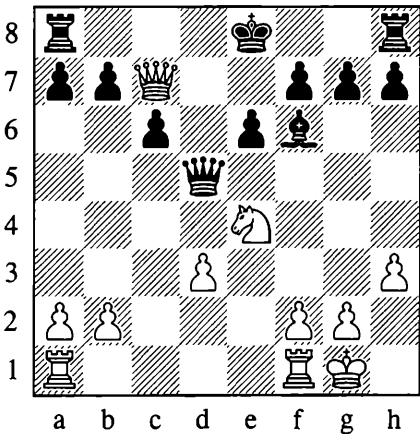
Variation Index

1.e4 c6 2.Nc3 d5 3.Nf3

3...Bg4 4.h3 Bxf3 5.Qxf3 e6

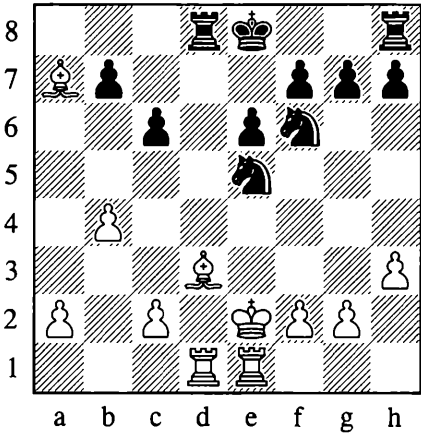
A) 6.Qe2	217
B) 6.g3	218
C) 6.d4	220
D) 6.d3	222

C) note to 10.Bd1



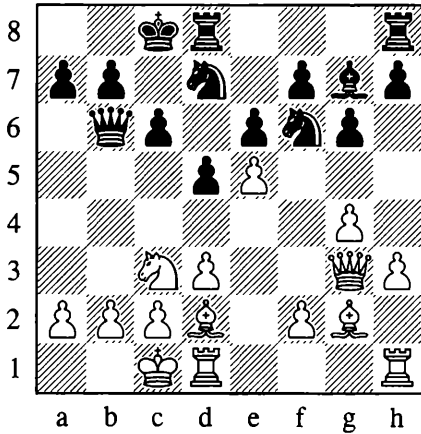
15...Qe5!N

C) after 18.Bhe1



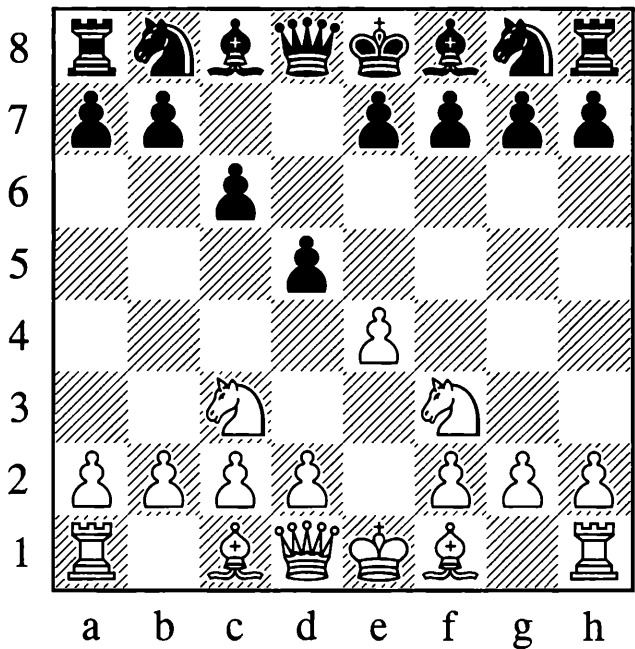
18...Nd5!N

D) after 12.e5



12...Ne8!?N

1.e4 c6 2.♘c3 d5 3.♗f3



The Two Knights Variation. It might appear rather innocent and of no particular independent value, because the obvious response 3...dxe4 4.♗xe4 ♕f5 looks like it should transpose to the Classical mainlines. After 5.♗g3 ♕g6 6.h4 h6 everything is revealed and the little difference turns out to be huge: 7.♗e5! ♕h7 And now comes 8.♖h5! attacking f7 and forcing Black to play the horrible 8...g6. We don't want to see any of that, so we will take a solid approach.

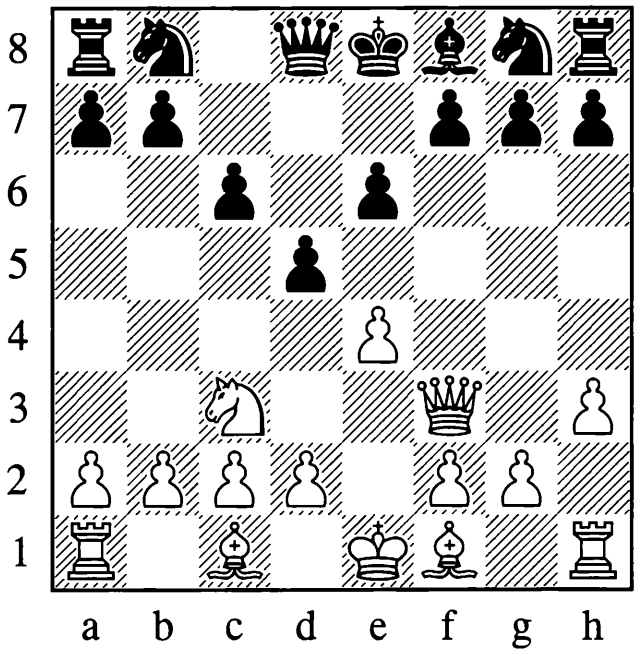
3...♕g4 4.h3 ♕xf3

Unnecessarily risky is 4...♕h5 5.exd5! cxd5 6.♕b5† ♗c6 7.g4 ♕g6 8.♗e5 ♖c8 9.d4 e6 and now both 10.h4 and 10.♖e2 give White a strong initiative.

5.♖xf3

In a World Championship match Tal tried the dubious 5.gxf3?! to confuse Botvinnik. The further moves were 5...e6 6.d4 ♗d7 7.♕f4 ♕b4 8.h4 ♗gf6, Tal – Botvinnik, Moscow (3) 1960. Here White closed the position with 9.e5 when 9...♗h5 10.♕g5 ♖a5 already gave Black the upper hand because of his better pawn structure. According to Botvinnik 9.♖d3 was less clear.

5...e6



The real starting position of the line. Both sides can be happy: White has a pair of bishops; Black has got rid of his light-squared one! The game usually takes a slow positional course, but both sides are very flexible and several different set-ups are possible with the most radical one being if White plays d2-d4 as a pawn sacrifice. The mainlines I will examine are **A) 6.♕e2**, **B) 6.g3**, **C) 6.d4** and **D) 6.d3**. There are a few other lines that are neither this nor that, so let's have a brief look just for starters.

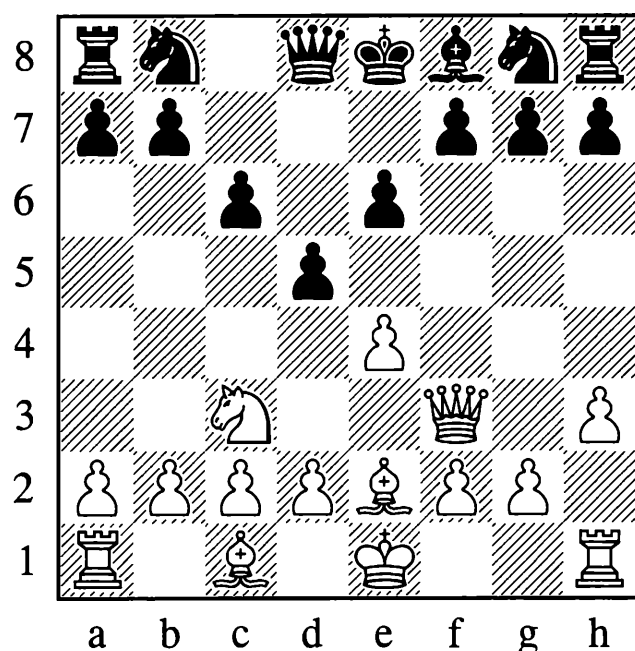
6.♖g3 was played three times by Tkachiev in a blitz match against Karpov in 1995. Karpov responded with three different moves and won every game in style. Just for the record, the three moves were 6...g6, 6...♗d7 and 6...♗f6. Personally I fancy 6...♗f6. It invites White to play 7.e5 ♗fd7 when Black has a good French structure. Good, because the usual problem in the French is a bad bishop on c8, and here it has been exchanged in advance. A possible continuation is 8.f4 g6 9.♕e2 h5 10.0-0 c5 11.d3 ♗c6 12.b3 ♗d4 13.♕d1 ♕e7 14.♖e1 h4 15.♗e2 ♗f5 16.c4 d4+ as in Stinis – Abbasov, Calicut 1998.

6.b3 ♗f6 7.♕b2 has been played by Georgiev, but which one? Actually two! Krum and,

somewhat surprisingly, also Kiril: this is a long way from Main Street. The novelty 7...♔d6 is a good response, for instance 8.0–0–0 0–0 with a great fighting position. Anything can happen.

6.a3 certainly prevents any ...♙b4 ideas, but it looks like a waste of time. That impression grows if you follow the line a bit further: 6...♘f6 7.d3 ♘bd7 8.g4 And now 8...g6 as in the mainline.

A) 6.♙e2



White develops his kingside and prepares to castle. This may look unambitious from a theoretical point of view, but over the board it is a different story. Consider this: White has already gained the bishop pair. Who knows what he will gain next if he just keeps playing it safe.

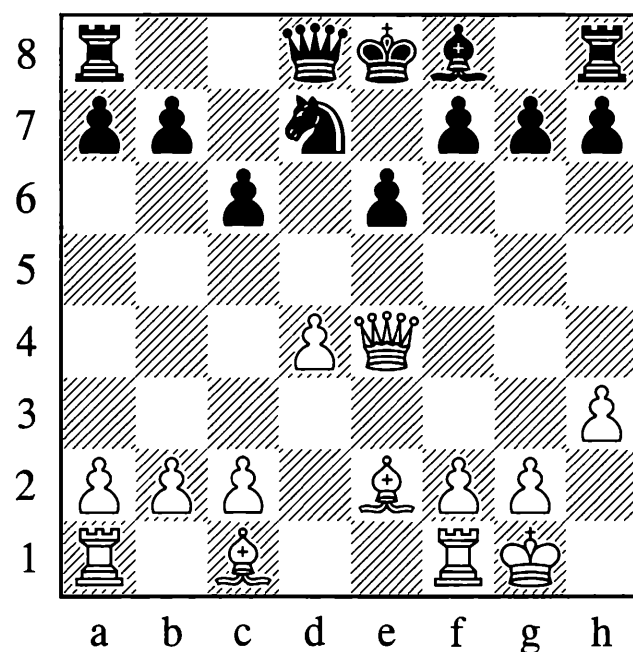
6...♘f6

The combative 6...g6!? is hard to trust. After 7.d4 ♙g7 8.♙e3 White castles long and has most of the fun.

7.0–0 dxe4

Or 7...♘bd7 8.d4 could head the same way.

8.♘xe4 ♘xe4 9.♙xe4 ♘d7 10.d4



A typical Caro-Kann position. White has more space and the bishop pair, which should give him some advantage, shouldn't it? In a classical sense the answer is of course "yes", but in a practical game, based on my experience, I would evaluate the position as equal. Black has the usual very solid structure, without weaknesses and with enough room to finish his development undisturbed. What is even more important is that White has no obvious clear-cut plan to follow in the middlegame. Those are the words. Now let's translate them into some chess moves.

10...♘f6 11.♙d3

The queen has no great squares.

11.♙h4 ♙d6 12.♖d1 h6 13.c4 ♙c7!? Threatening ...♙d6. 14.♙f4 ♙xf4 15.♙xf4 ♙b8 16.♙e5 ♙xe5 17.dxe5 ♘d7 18.f4 a5 19.♘f2 ♙e7 20.♙f3 ♘c5 21.b3 ♖hd8= Larsen – Spelman, London 1986. 18...g5!? could have been a winning try.

11.♙e3 ♙d6 12.c4 0–0 13.b3 ♙e7 14.a3 Otherwise Black plays ...♙a3. 14...e5= 15.♙b2 ♖fe8 16.dxe5 ♙xe5 17.♙xe5 ♙xe5 18.♙xe5 ♖xe5 19.♙f3 ♘f8 Short – Anand, Merida 2001. Maybe Black was even slightly better because of White's weakened pawn structure on the queenside.

11...♔d6

I generally prefer this square to the more restrained ...♔e7.

12.c4

Other tries are:

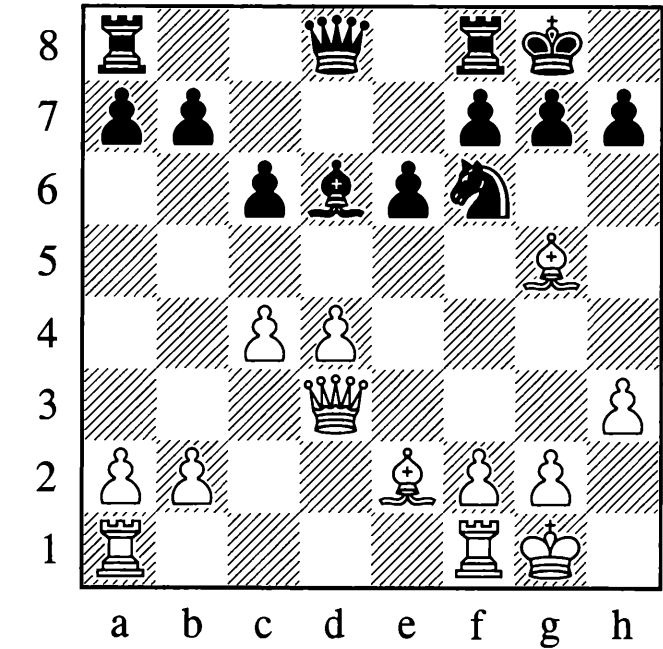
12.♕f3 ♖c7 13.b3 0-0 14.♕b2 ♜ad8 15.♞e2 ♞fe8 16.♞fe1 ♞a5 17.a3 ♞f5 18.♞ad1 h5 19.♞d3 ♞xd3 20.♞xd3 ♕c7= Gligoric – Pirc, Saltsjobaden 1948. In a must-win situation 13...0-0-0!? would suggest itself.

12.♕g5 ♞a5 Exploiting that ♕xf6 is no threat at all. 13.♕h4 ♘d5 14.♕f3 ♘f4 15.♞b3 ♞b6 16.♞xb6 axb6= M. Larsson – Martello, corr. 2006.

12...0-0

It was also possible to prevent the pin with 12...h6, for instance: 13.♕e3 0-0 14.♞fd1 ♞c7 15.♞ac1 ♞fd8 16.♕f3 ♕h2† 17.♚h1 ♕f4= This is always a good plan when your opponent has the bishop pair: exchange one of them! Turebaeva – Vasiljev, Kazan 2008.

13.♕g5

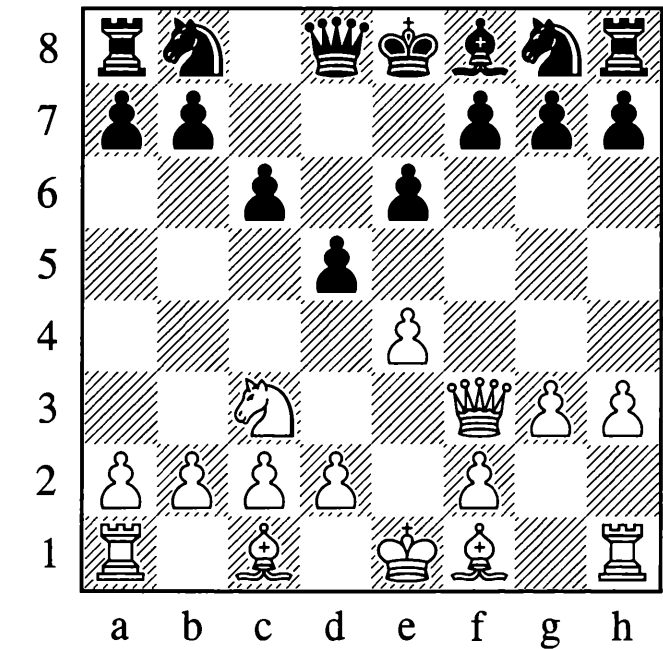


Riazantsev has played 13...♞e8 14.♞ad1 ♕e7 which is a bit passive. Instead it makes sense to confront the bishop and strike in the centre.

13...h6N 14.♕h4 e5 15.♞ad1 ♞e8=

Black has no problems.

B) 6.g3



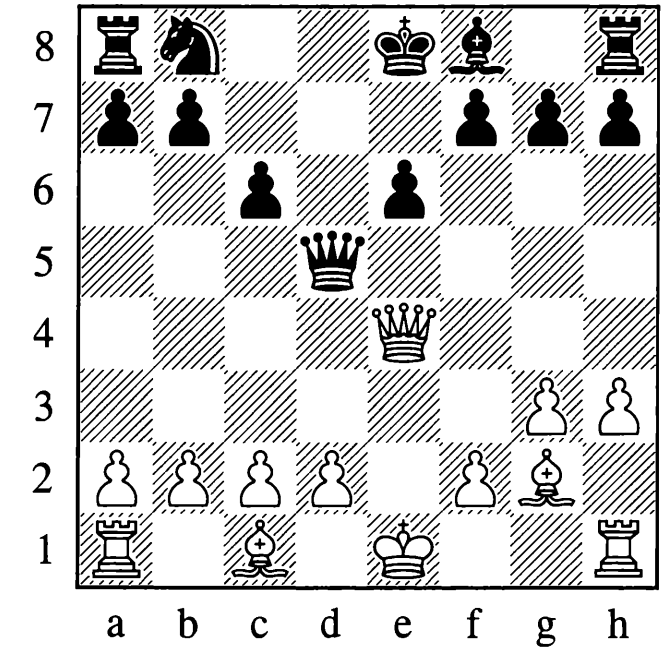
6...♘f6

The most straightforward. Also interesting is the flexible 6...g6!? 7.♕g2 ♕g7 8.0-0 ♘e7 with well-balanced play.

7.♕g2 dxe4

Exploiting White's omission of d2-d3 and equalizing on the spot. Keeping the tension with 7...♘bd7 is also fine and might give more winning chances. Here the dark-squared bishop is often developed to b4 with active play. See the illustrative game for inspiration.

8.♘xe4 ♘xe4 9.♞xe4 ♞d5!



Forcing an endgame – one of the secret aims of the entire Caro-Kann Defence.

10.0–0

At least creating some imbalance. Instead if White takes on d5 then both recaptures are fine.

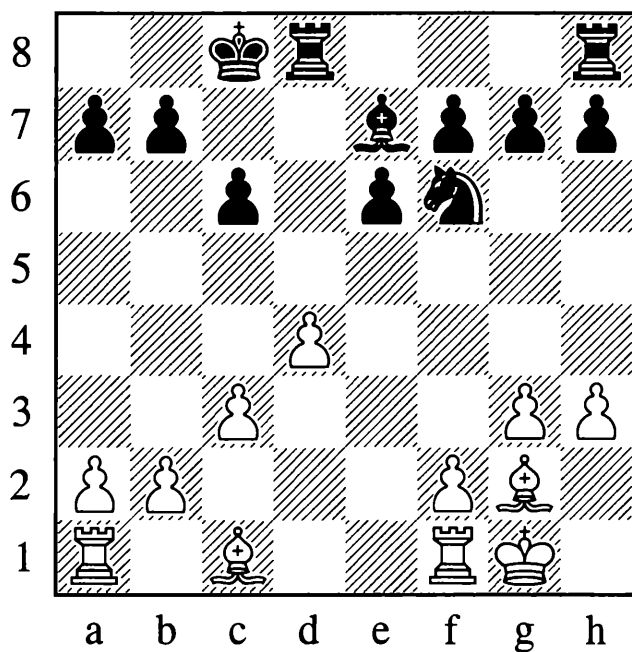
10...♙xe4 11.♙xe4 ♘d7 12.d4

The flank operation 12.b4 0–0–0 13.♖b1 is not threatening. For example, 13...♙e7 14.d3 ♘f6 15.♙f3 ♘d5 16.♙d2 was Chomet – Bologan, Bastia (rapid) 2005, and now, among other options, 16...h6 is equal.

12...♘f6 13.♙g2

13.♙f3 does not make much difference.

13...0–0–0 14.c3 ♙e7



15.♙g5

There is no good place for this bishop. Maybe the modest ♙d2 followed by ♖ad1 and ♙c1 is best. Still, 15.♙d2 h5! 16.♖ad1 ♖d7 17.♙c1 ♘d5 is absolutely fine for Black. The move ...h5-h4 is in the air.

15...h6 16.♙xf6 ♙xf6 17.♖ad1 ♖d6 18.f4 ♖hd8 19.♙f3 ♙c7=

Black had no problems in Kuijpers – Pomar, Malaga 1965.

Liwak – Mista

Poland 2000

1.e4 c6 2.♘c3 d5 3.♘f3

A popular way to avoid big theoretical discussions, but Black shouldn't complain, as he gets a playable position right from the start. Furthermore it is a position he can nurture in almost any direction he feels like.

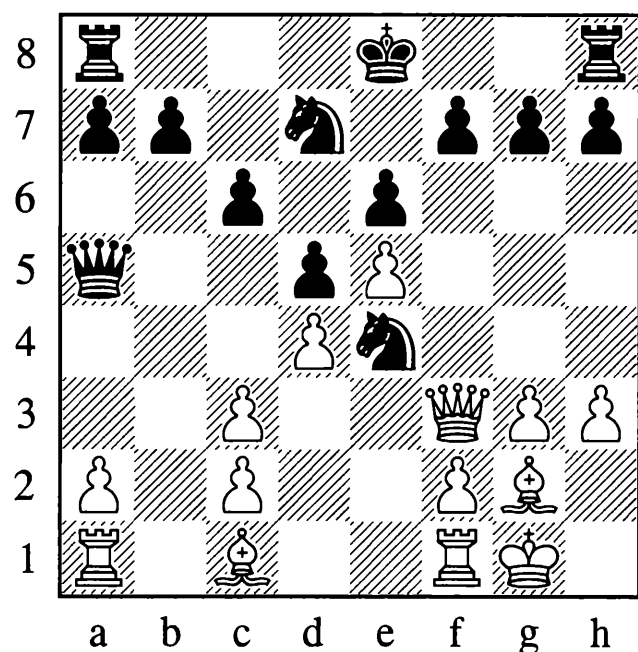
3...♙g4 4.h3 ♙xf3 5.♙xf3 ♘f6 6.g3 e6 7.♙g2 ♘bd7

A flexible move. White also could – and probably should – continue in the same noncommittal style by castling or playing something like d2-d3, but quite understandably he tries to squeeze the maximum out of the position by getting d2-d4 in right away.

8.d4 ♙b4!

Pointing a finger at the drawback of White's strategy, but which finger?

9.e5 ♘e4 10.0–0 ♙xc3 11.bxc3 ♙a5!



Black immediately attacks the weak spot on c3.

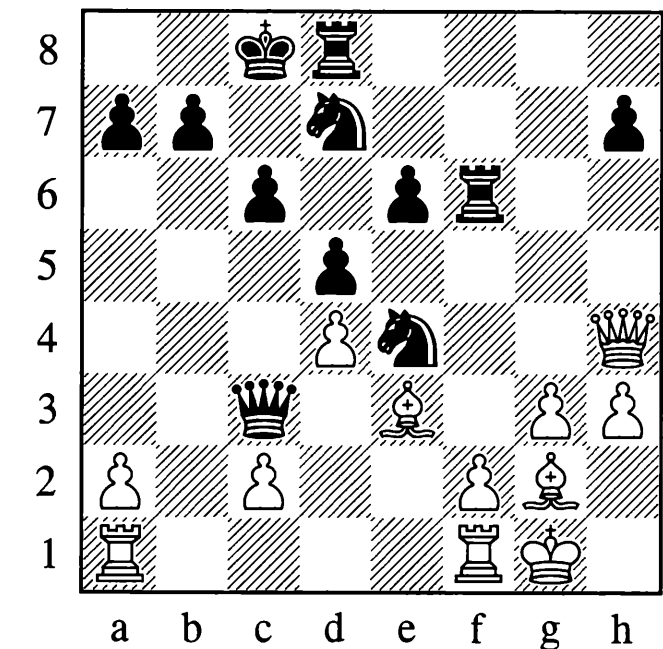
12.♙g4

In a later game between the same two players

White tried to improve with 12.♖b1. However after 12...0-0-0 he once again sought complications and once again was outplayed tactically. After 13.♕xf7?! ♜xc3 14.♖b2 ♜e2† 15.♙h1 ♖hf8 16.♕xg7 ♖xf2! 17.♙f4 ♖xf1† 18.♙xf1 ♕e1 Black was winning in Liwak – Mista, Wisla 2000. The correct path was 13.♖b3∞.

12...♕xc3 13.♕xg7 0-0-0
Black has the initiative.

14.♙e3 ♖hg8 15.♕h6 ♖g6 16.♕f4 f5!
17.exf6 ♖xf6 18.♕h4



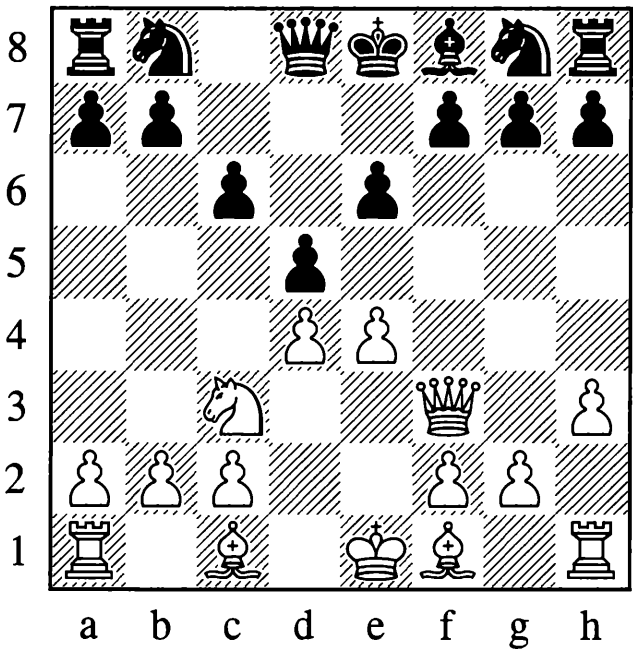
18...♜xg3!
Black decides the issue with a nice combination.

19.♕xg3 ♖g6 20.♕h4 ♖dg8
The point. The pressure down the g-file wins back the material at the very least.

21.♕xh7 ♕xc2
Or 21...♖xg2† 22.♙h1 ♖2g7 23.♕h4 ♜f8 followed by ...♖h7 also looked strong.

22.♙h1 ♜f6 23.♕f7 ♕f5
But this was even better. Black threatens to trap the white queen with ...♖6g7.
0-1

C) 6.d4



Tempting, but what about the d-pawn?

6...dxe4 7.♜xe4
Okay, he intends a genuine pawn sacrifice. Unfortunately for White it won't work as smoothly as planned!

He could still have bailed out with the safe:
7.♕xe4 ♜f6 8.♕h4

The right square.
On 8.♕d3 then 8...♜a6 is possible and after 8.♕e3 ♜bd7 9.♙d2 ♙b4 as in Djuric – Anand, Bastia (rapid) 2000, ...♜d5 was in the air.

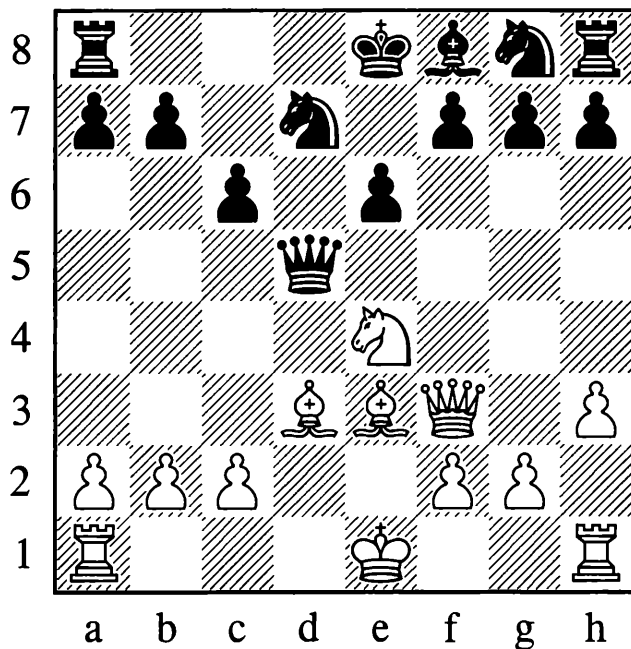
8...♙e7
Or 8...♜d5!? 9.♕xd8† ♜xd8, which leads to an acceptable endgame.

9.♙d3
9.♙g5 ♜d5 is nothing for White.
9...♜bd7 10.0-0 0-0N 11.♖e1 g6
Safest.

12.♙g5 ♖e8
Black has no problems and will follow up with ...♜d5.

7...♕xd4 8.♙d3 ♜d7
Active defence. Black is planning ...♜e5, so White must keep threatening something.

9.♙e3 ♕d5

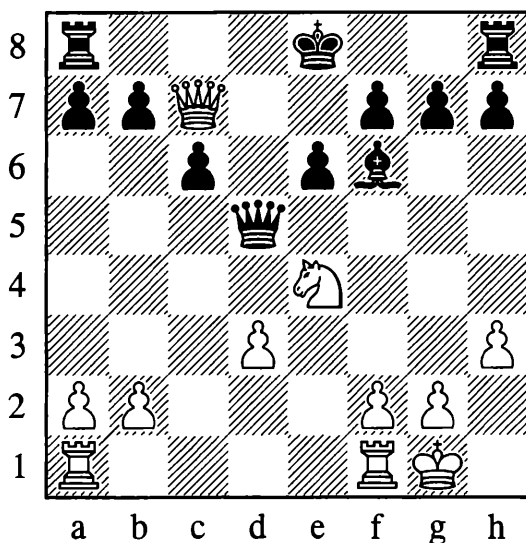


Centralizing the queen; taking another pawn with ...♙xb2 was too risky.

10.♖d1

White has also tried castling (both ways!) but without much success.

10.0–0 ♘e5 11.♙g3 ♘xd3 12.cxd3 ♘f6 13.♙g5 ♙e7 14.♙xf6 ♙xf6 15.♙c7



15...♙d7? Missing a simple tactical blow. 16.♘d6† ♙e7 17.♘f5†! That's it. 17...♙e8 18.♘d6† ♙e7 19.♘f5† ♙e8 ½–½ This was Can – P.H. Nielsen, Dresden (ol) 2008. Instead 15...♙e5!N 16.♙xb7 0–0† was convincing.

10.0–0–0 ♙xa2 Now this pawn is impossible to resist. 11.♙g3 ♘gf6 12.♘xf6† ♘xf6 13.♙c7 ♙a1† 14.♙d2 ♙xb2 15.♙b1 ♘d5! The knight saves the day. 16.♙xb2 ♘xc7 17.♙xb7 ♘d5 18.♙xa7 ♙b4† 19.♙e2 0–0 And White did

not have quite enough for the pawn in Jimenez Alonso – Mercadal Benejam, corr. 1995.

Too slow is 10.♙f4 ♘e5 11.♙xe5 ♙xe5 12.0–0–0 ♙e7 13.♙he1 ♘f6 14.♙b1 0–0–0 15.♘xf6 ♙xf6 16.♙xf6 ♙xf6† with a clear extra pawn, Felgaer – Leitao, Santos (rapid) 2005.

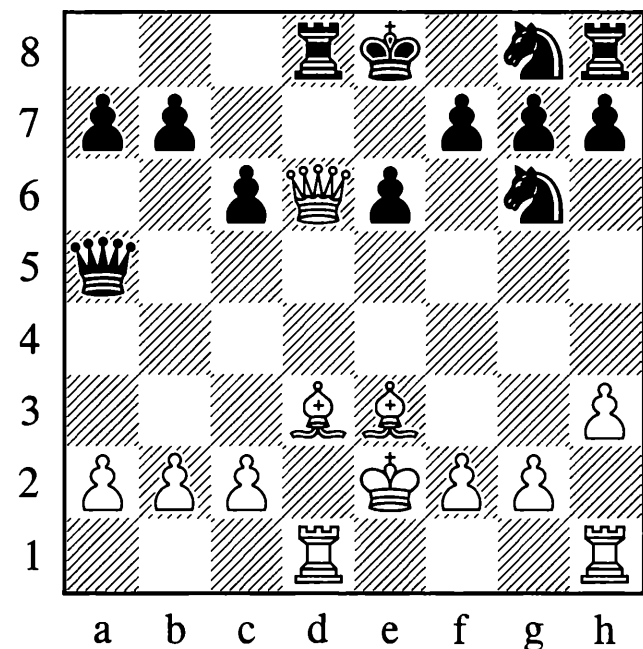
10...♘e5 11.♙f4 ♙a5†!

An important zwischenzug. Instead 11...♘xd3† 12.♙xd3 would give White a dangerous initiative.

12.♙e2

If 12.♙d2 then 12...♘xd3† is good.

12...♘g6 13.♘d6† ♙xd6 14.♙xd6 ♙d8



In the only two games to reach this far, White rushed to create complications. He should consider just returning to g3 with the queen, with some compensation.

15.b4 ♙e5

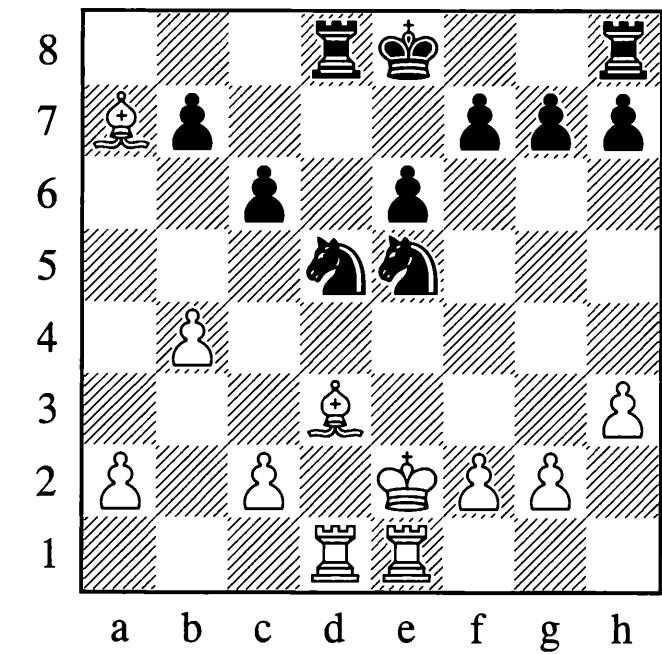
You should value development above material. In the stem game Dreev took another pawn with 15...♙h5† 16.g4 ♙xg4† 17.hxg4 ♙xd6 but White was very active: 18.f4 ♘f6 19.♙f3 b6 20.g5 ♘d7 This is Azarov – Dreev, Panormo 2001, and now 21.♙xg6

♖xd1 22.♙xf7† ♔xf7 23.♖xd1 gives decent compensation for the pawn.

16.♙xe5 ♜xe5 17.♙xa7 ♜f6 18.♖he1

So far we have followed Hayrapetian – Galkin, Kallithea 2008.

18...♜d5!N

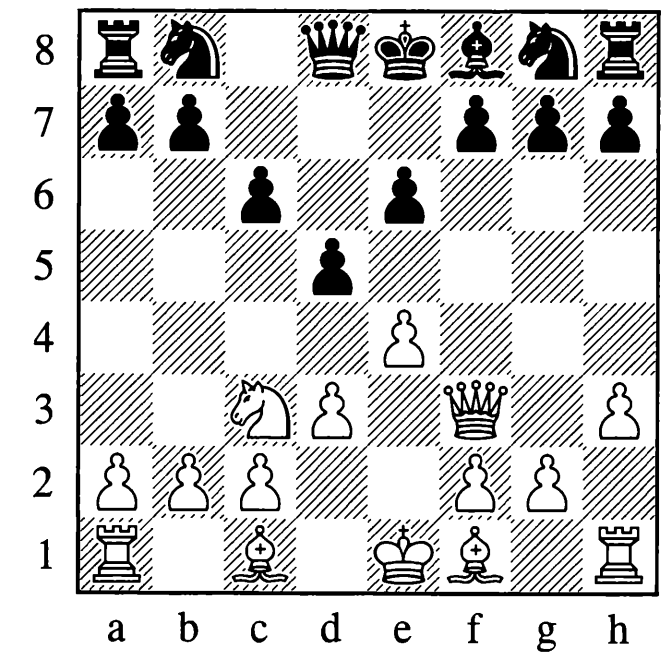


White is in trouble. An illustrative variation runs:

19.♔f1 ♜c3 20.♖d2 ♜c4

Winning an exchange.

D) 6.d3



The main move.

6...♜d7 7.♙d2

White stays flexible. Instead 7.g4 is premature, as shown by 7...♙b4 8.♙d2 d4 9.♜b1 ♖b6 with good play on the dark squares. Also after 7.g3 the move 7...♙b4 would be disruptive. So 7.♙d2 is prophylaxis against this pin.

7...♜gf6

Now 7...♙b4 would backfire, as White has 8.exd5 cxd5 9.♖g4 with a double attack on b4 and g7, forcing the depressing retreat 9...♙f8.

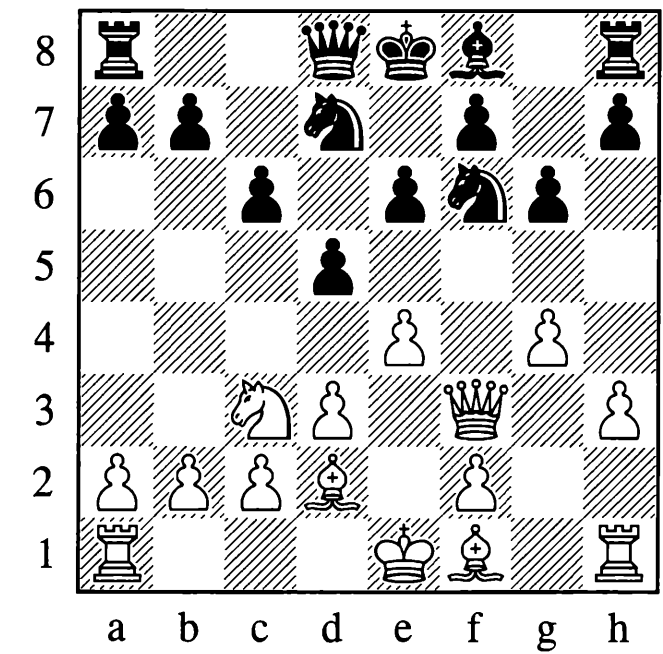
8.g4

White expands according to plan. To some, the move g2-g4 may look weakening, but you can't play chess without taking some risks, and g2-g4 accelerates White's natural offensive on the kingside and creates the threat of g4-g5.

The calmer 8.g3 is simply not threatening enough. For example: 8...♖b6 9.0-0-0 d4 10.♜e2 ♙b4 Again we see this typical and effective dark-square strategy. 11.♙xb4 ♖xb4 12.g4 h6 ♞ Hou – Khurtsidze, Ekaterinburg 2006.

White has another move in 8.0-0-0 but again the antidote is 8...♙b4 with the idea ...d5-d4 and the traditional dark-square policy.

8...g6



A very interesting concept; Black is unwilling to give White a free hand on the kingside. Instead our favourite move 8...♙b4 would be answered with 9.g5 when 9...♘g8 is forced. Okay, that is not the end of the world, as the knight can later go to e7, but White's extra space on the kingside gives him an edge.

9.♙g3

White improves the position of his queen. The first point of 8...g6 is seen after 9.g5 ♘h5 when White's offensive is stopped before it has even started. A horde of other moves have also been tested:

9.♙g2 ♙g7 10.♙e2 d4 11.♘d1 e5 12.f4 exf4 13.♙xf4 This is Balzar – Duer, Germany 2003, and now the simple 13...0-0N is comfortable for Black who can hope to exploit the e5-square.

9.♙g2 White fianchettoes the wrong piece. 9...d4 10.♘e2 ♙b6 11.0-0-0 h6 12.f4 0-0-0 13.♙f2 ♘c5 14.b3 ♘a4! 15.♙b1 ♙b4 16.♙xb4 ♙xb4 In Poljak – Marquardt, corr. 2006, with imaginative and precise play Black had managed to exchange the dark-squared bishops and weaken White's dark squares even more at the same time.

9.0-0-0 ♙g7 10.h4 ♙b6 11.g5 ♘h5 12.♙h3 ♙d4! 13.♙g2 0-0-0 14.f4 dxe4 15.dxe4 ♘c5 And White should tread carefully, Parma – Hort, Sarajevo 1964.

9.exd5 cxd5 10.0-0-0 ♙g7 11.d4 This succeeded quickly after 11...a6? 12.g5! in Frolov – Zimina, St Petersburg 2002, because 12...♘h5 is refuted by 13.♘xd5! exd5 14.♙e1† ♙f8 15.♙b4† ♙g8 16.♙e7+-. Instead 11...0-0∞ looks playable.

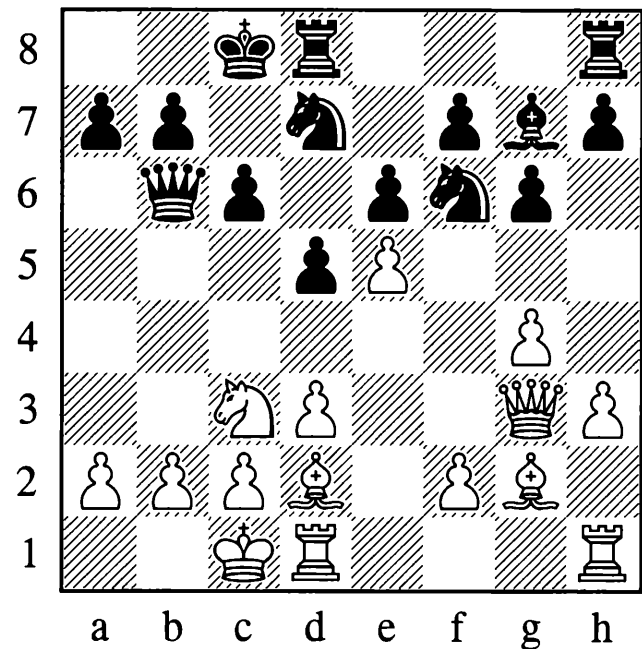
9...♙g7 10.♙g2 ♙b6

The attack on b2 forces White to commit his king, one way or the other.

11.0-0-0

The most natural. Prandstetter has also tried 11.♙b1 when I suggest 11...h5!N 12.g5 h4 13.♙d6 ♘h5.

11...0-0-0 12.e5



12...♘e8!?N

This is my improvement over 12...♘g8 13.f4 ♘e7, which is rather solid. In Prandstetter – Meduna, Prague 1976, White came up with the impressive 14.d4 ♙xd4 15.♙e3 ♙b4 16.♙d4 ♙a5 17.♙a4 ♙c7 18.♙xa7. However after the cool 18...♙b8 19.♙a3 ♘c8 Black defended more or less everything and turned out to be fine.

13.♙g5

This looks strong, but a little surprise awaits White. Safer was 13.f4 f6 14.exf6 ♙xf6 15.♙de1 ♘c7=.

13...♙xe5! 14.♙xd8 ♙xd8 15.♙f3

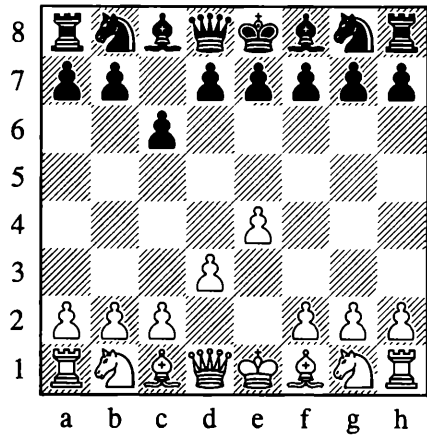
Black has excellent positional compensation, plus a pawn, for the exchange. A promising way to continue is:

15...♙xc3 16.bxc3 ♘d6

Conclusion

The Two Knights Variation leads to playable positions for both sides. With Black we can't ask for more, so we just play. After 2.♘c3 d5 3.♗f3 ♘g4 4.h3 ♘xf3 5.♙xf3 e6 Black is positionally fine. If White plays the sharp 6.d4 we take the pawn, 6...dxe4 7.♗xe4 ♙xd4, and after the further 8.♙d3 ♗d7 9.♙e3 ♙d5 everything looks in good shape. In reply to the more flexible 6.d3 we also stay flexible with 6...♗d7 7.♙d2 ♗gf6 and are ready to answer 8.g4 with 8...g6 followed by ...♙g7.

Chapter 21



Minor Systems

2.d3

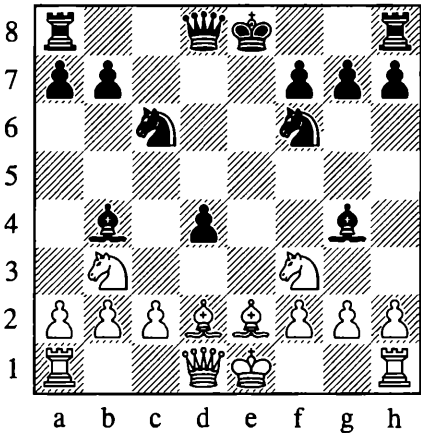
Variation Index

1.e4 c6 2.d3

2...d5 3.♘d2 e5 4.♘gf3 ♙d6

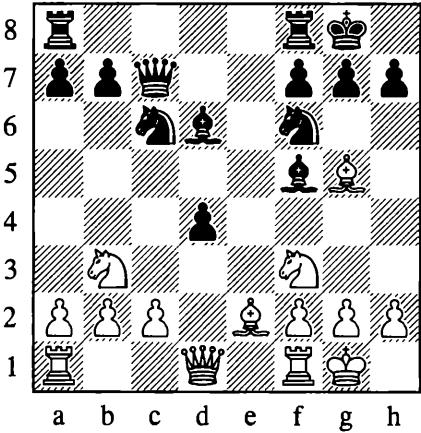
A) 5.d4 exd4 6.exd5 ♘f6! 7.dxc6 ♘xc6	226
A1) 8.♙b5	227
A2) 8.♘b3	228
A3) 8.♙e2	228
B) 5.♙e2	230
C) 5.g3	232

A2) after 10.♙d2



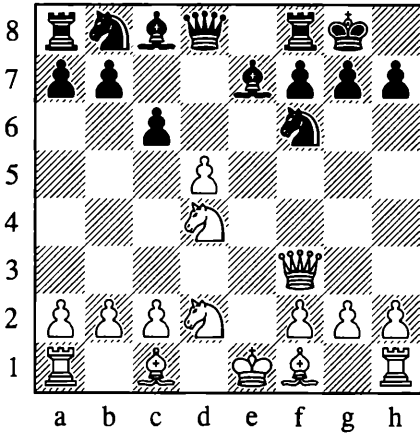
10...♙e7, 10...♙d6!?N or 10...♙xd2†N

A3) after 11.♙g5



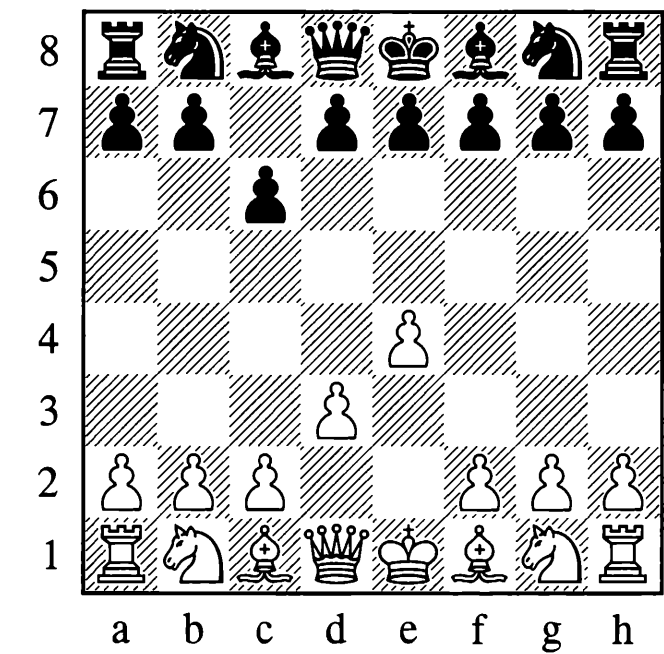
11...♘e4!N

Poobalasingam – Houska



9...♙g4! 10.♙b3 ♙e8!

1.e4 c6 2.d3



An anti-Caro-Kann line that is especially popular among King’s Indian devotees.

2...d5 3.♘d2 e5 4.♘gf3 ♕d6

I like this approach for its simple logic – White refuses to occupy the centre, so we will. This line has been the favourite reply to 2.d3 of Caro-Kann experts such as Karpov, Seirawan and Dreev – we are in good company.

Now there are three mainlines to consider. White has tried to create some early central activity with **A) 5.d4** or **B) 5.♖e2**, but he is not really in a position to initiate complications. The most popular line is **C) 5.g3** followed by ♗g2 with a quiet manoeuvring game in prospect. But before the big moves, let’s have a quick look at a different bishop deployment:

5.♗e2

This is not cutting-edge opening theory and is too modest to pose Black any problems.

5...♘f6 6.0–0 0–0 7.c3 ♖e8 8.♖e1 ♘bd7 9.♖c2

If 9.♗f1 then it is tempting to take some space on the queenside with 9...b5!?

9...a5

Always useful. Another good idea is regrouping the knight with ...♘f8-g6.

10.♘f1

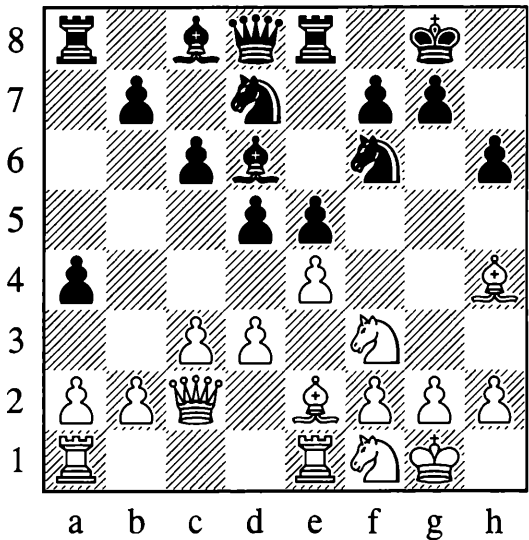
10.a4 ♘c5 is fine for Black.

10...a4!?

An interesting way to seize some more space on the queenside.

10...h6 followed by ...♘f8 and ...♘g6 is standard.

11.♗g5 h6 12.♗h4



12...dxe4 13.dxe4 ♘f8

Planning ...♘g6. Black is simply better.

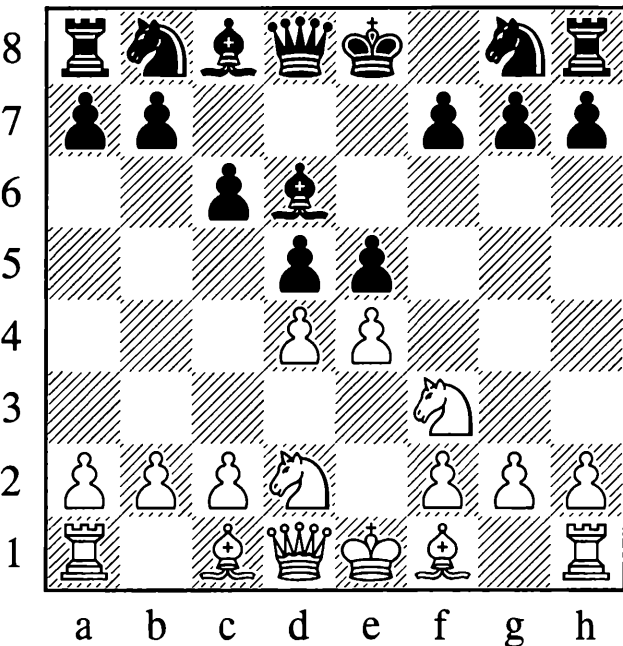
14.♖ed1

Or 14.♘e3 ♘g6 15.♖ad1 ♘xh4 16.♘xh4 ♖c7 17.♘hf5 ♗c5.

14...♘g6 15.♗g3 ♖c7 16.♖d2 ♗c5 17.♖e1 ♗e6

Black had an edge in Chelushkina – A. Maric, Belgrade 2000.

A) 5.d4



At first sight it seems strange to lose a tempo by playing first d2-d3 and then a few moves later d3-d4, especially since Black has only made sound natural moves. The explanation, which we shall see next move, has some positional depth, but, even so, by continuing to select strong active moves Black gains good play.

5...exd4 6.exd5

The point. Now after the normal recapture 6...cxd5 Black is saddled with an isolated d-pawn. That is perfectly playable though. Compared to a French Tarrasch, Black could end up a tempo ahead and should have no problems.

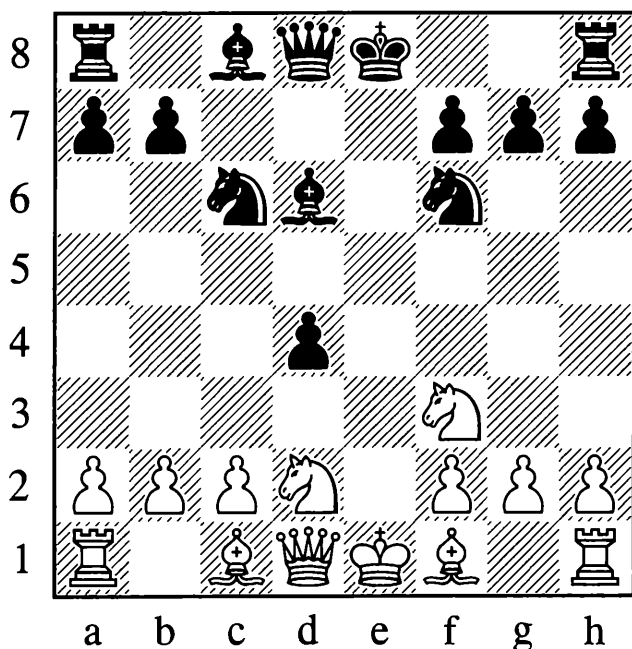
6...♘f6!

But this is even stronger. Why not fight for the initiative at once?

7.dxc6

The only try for an advantage. 7.♘xd4 ♘xd5 is nothing.

7...♘xc6

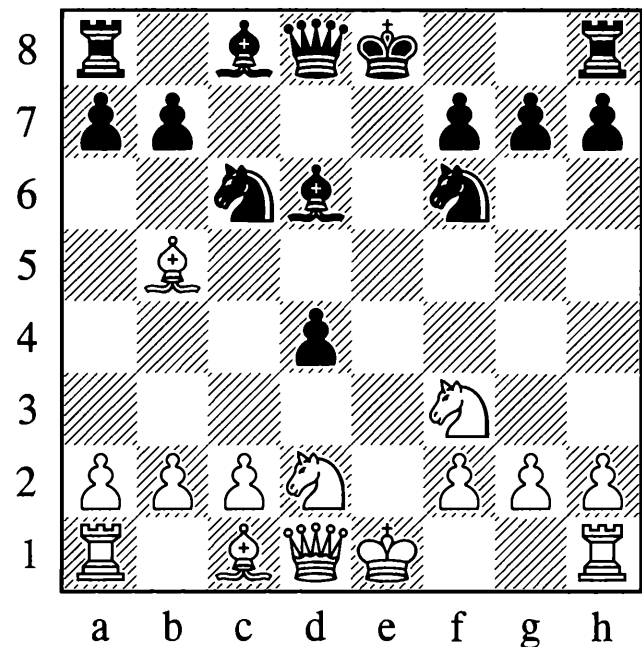


So Black ended up with an isolated d-pawn after all, but here it is a completely different story. On d4 the pawn hampers White and gives Black's pieces a lot of extra

room to develop on active squares. The only minus will be if the pawn should actually be lost!

The play now divides into A1) 8.♗b5, A2) 8.♘b3 and A3) 8.♗e2.

A1) 8.♗b5



White plays a natural developing move, but the threats to the d4-pawn prove to be illusory.

8...0-0 9.0-0 a6!?

This directly shows that White's play is harmless, but Black could choose various other moves such as 9...♖e8 or 9...♗g4.

10.♗xc6 bxc6 11.♘c4

It transpires that 11.♘xd4 ♗xh2† 12.♙xh2 ♖xd4 is just good for Black.

11...c5=

This is Gallegos – Macieja, Internet (blitz) 2004. The d-pawn is safe. So is the extra space and, given the chance to play ...♗c7, Black would have the bishop pair. Thus White should cut his losses and play for a draw with, for example, 12.b4. He is likely to get the draw, so in a must-win situation Black could try one of the move 9 alternatives.

A2) 8.♘b3

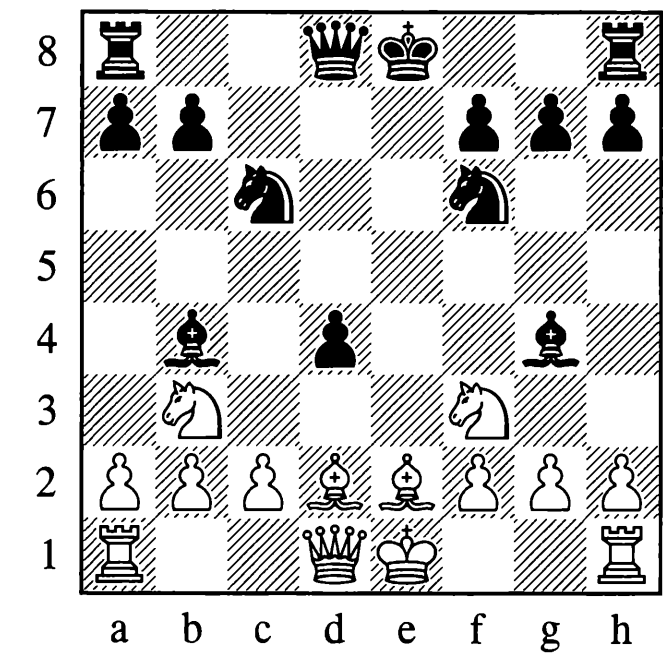
White heads directly for the d-pawn.

8...♙g4

This seems the most accurate move order, challenging White before he can castle.

The issue with 8...0–0 is that after 9.♙e2 ♜e8 10.0–0 we transpose to line A3, except Black has had to play 9...♜e8 instead of the correct 9...♙f5!.

9.♙e2 ♙b4† 10.♙d2

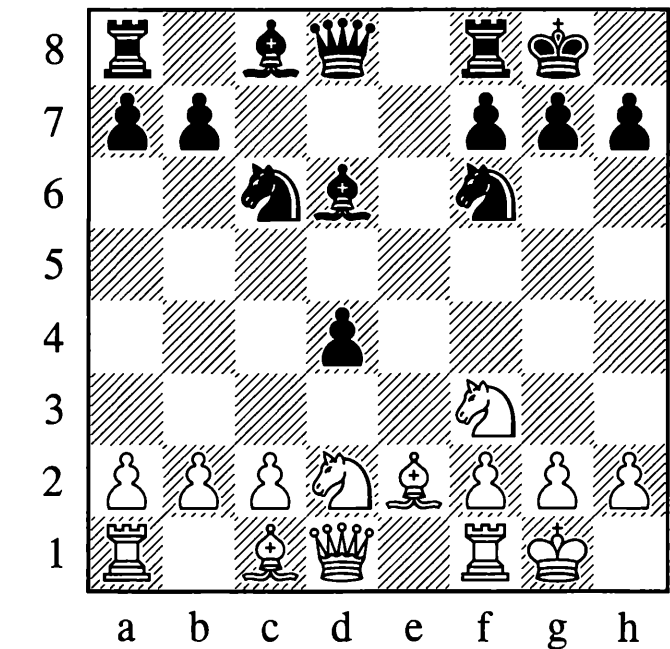


Black is safe and sound. In Hater – Helbig, England 2006, Black was okay after 10...♙e7. Besides, I think that 10...♙d6!?N 11.0–0 0–0–0 and 10...♙xd2†N 11.♙xd2 0–0 12.0–0 ♜e8 13.h3 ♙h5 14.♞fe1 ♙b6 both deserve attention.

A3) 8.♙e2

Simple development leads to the most critical line.

8...0–0 9.0–0



9...♙f5!

Precision is required. Less ambitious is: 9...♜e8 10.♘b3 ♙g4 11.h3 ♙h5 12.♘fxd4 Black may scrounge up some compensation for the mislaid pawn, but he is unlikely to earn more than a draw.

12...♙xe2

In Tiviakov – S. Pedersen, Vlissingen 2003, Black panicked with 12...♜xe2? and it had all gone wrong after 13.♘xe2 ♙e7 14.f3 ♜d8 15.♙e1±.

13.♘xe2 ♙h2†

Black could try 13...♙c7N, but after 14.c3 ♜ad8 15.♘ed4 White is solidly placed.

14.♙xh2 ♙xd1 15.♞xd1 ♜xe2 16.♞d2

In Hou Yifan – E. Danielian, China 2009, Black did not have enough for the pawn. White needs to work a little to untangle, but it helps that the b3-knight covers a1, so Black occupying the back rank will be an irritation rather than a deadly pin.

10.♘b3 ♙c7!

This dynamic approach was developed by Jobava. It makes it easier to be Black.

11.♙g5

The pale 11.a3 was tried in Edeling – Riedel, Vlissingen 2004. Black has a good position and could respond in kind with 11...h6!N. For example: 12.h3 What else? (12.♘bxd4?! ♘xd4

13. ♖xd4 ♕xh2† 14. ♔h1 is always refuted by 14... ♕e4! and Black has a great command of the centre and the kingside.) 12... ♖ad8 And Black is better, based on 13. ♖bxd4 ♖xd4 14. ♖xd4 ♕c5 15. c3 ♗b6 and the activity is important.

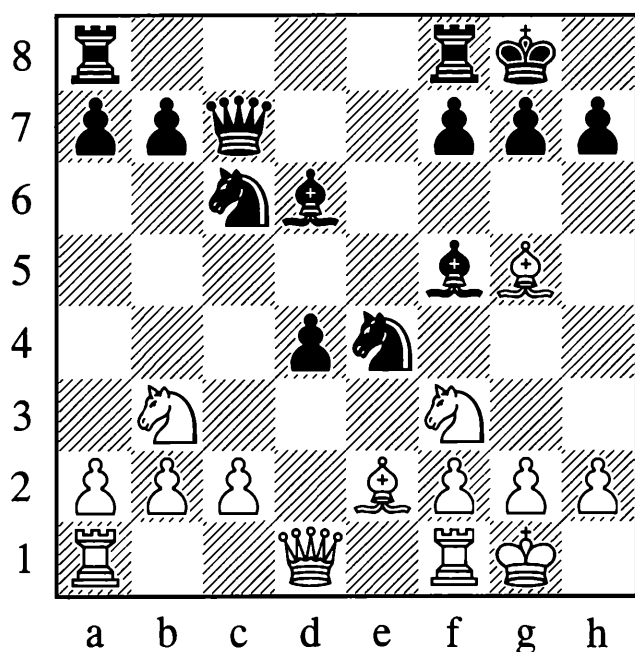
11. ♖bxd4 is not dangerous. 11... ♖xd4 12. ♖xd4 (or 12. ♗xd4 ♕xc2) 12... ♕xh2† 13. ♔h1 ♕e4! and

11.h3! might be White's best try. Black cannot easily defend the d-pawn, but after 11... ♖b4 12. ♕d3 ♖xd3 13. cxd3 ♕g6 14. ♖bxd4 ♗b6 he has enough compensation for equality. Even if White managed to play d3-d4, Black would have excellent play on the light squares.

11... ♖e4!N

This convincing improvement is natural to engine and human alike, but Jobava was probably worried whether or not he would be able to defend his d-pawn. After analysis the conclusion is: Yes!

Safe enough looks 11... ♖ad8 12. ♕xf6 gxf6 13. ♕d3 ♕g6= and eventually the game was drawn in Movsesian – Jobava, Dresden (ol) 2008, but why not look for more.



12. ♕h4

I cannot see a better move.

12. ♕d3 ♖xg5 13. ♖xg5 ♕xh2† 14. ♔h1 ♕f4 is a pawn up for Black: 15. ♕xf5 ♕xg5 16. ♖xd4 ♖ad8 17. ♗h5 g6 18. ♗xg5 ♖xd4 19. ♕d3 ♖xc2

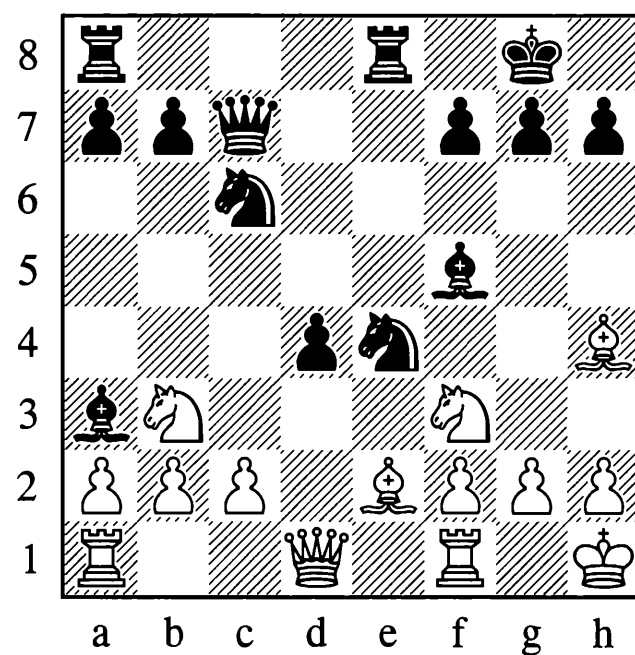
12. ♖bxd4 also does not work: 12... ♖xd4 13. ♖xd4 ♖xg5 14. ♖xf5 ♕xh2† 15. ♔h1 ♕e5 And already it is obvious that Black is better.

12... ♖fe8! 13. ♔h1

It is hard to come up with a move for White, so I am just speculating. Here the idea is to avoid a check in the case of ... ♕xh2.

13. ♖bxd4 still does not work out well: 13... ♖xd4 14. ♖xd4 (14. ♗xd4?? g5!–+) 14... ♕xh2† 15. ♔h1 ♕d7! And White is struggling to justify his play. For example, 16. g3 g5! or 16. ♕f3 ♕f4 17. ♗d3 ♖d2 18. ♖fd1 ♖xf3 19. ♗xf3 ♕e5, in both cases with better play for Black.

13... ♕a3!



Black has this brilliant resource as well.

14. ♗c1 ♕c5! and

Black offers to give up the bishop pair and is definitely better. For example:

15.♘xc5 ♘xc5 16.♞e1

Or 16.♞g5 ♞d7 with the idea of ...♘e4 and ...♘b4 looks good for Black. After the text move Black has a pleasant choice.

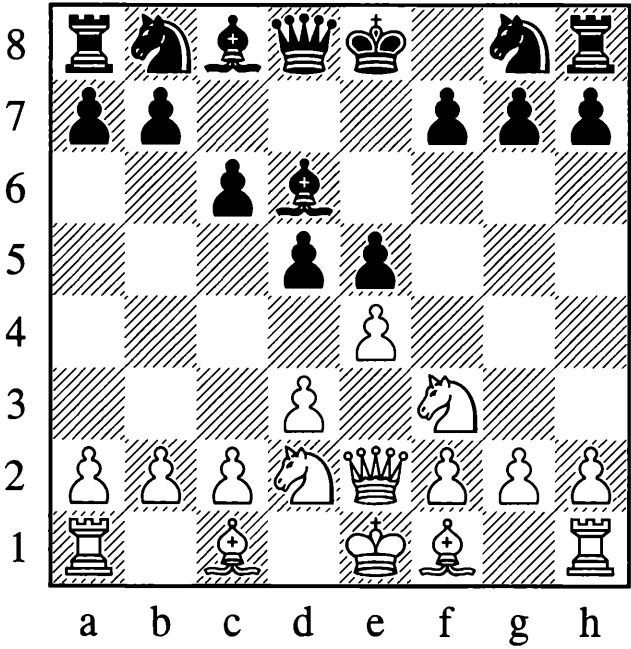
16...♞b6

Or 16...♞d6!? when the queen can go to f6 or g6, as well as support the d-pawn.

17.b3 h6!

And Black can do more or less what he likes. 18.♞f4!? is critical, when Black can try either 18...d3 or 18...♙xc2!? 19.♙c4 ♘e6 20.♞g4 ♖h7 21.♙xe6 ♞xe6 22.♞xe6 fxe6 23.♞xe6 ♙g6 when the d-pawn secures a slight but pleasant advantage.

B) 5.♞e2



White's hope is that Black will respond with 5...♞e7 when 6.d4 would give White a better version of the previous line, but the queen is clumsy on e2, which Black can exploit with energetic play.

5...♘f6! 6.d4

The greedy 6.exd5 cxd5 7.♘xe5 is too risky. 7...0-0 8.d4 ♞e8 9.♘df3 ♘c6 10.♙e3 ♘xe5 11.dxe5 ♙xe5 12.0-0-0 ♙f4 13.h3 ♙xe3† 14.fxe3 This is Sammalvuori – Hermansson,

Gothenburg 2003, and now after the simple 14...♙d7+ the e3-pawn is chronically weak, and e4 is a great outpost for the knight in many variations.

In reply to 6.exd5, apart from the above line, 6...0-0 7.dxc6 ♘xc6 with good play for the pawn is also hard to resist.

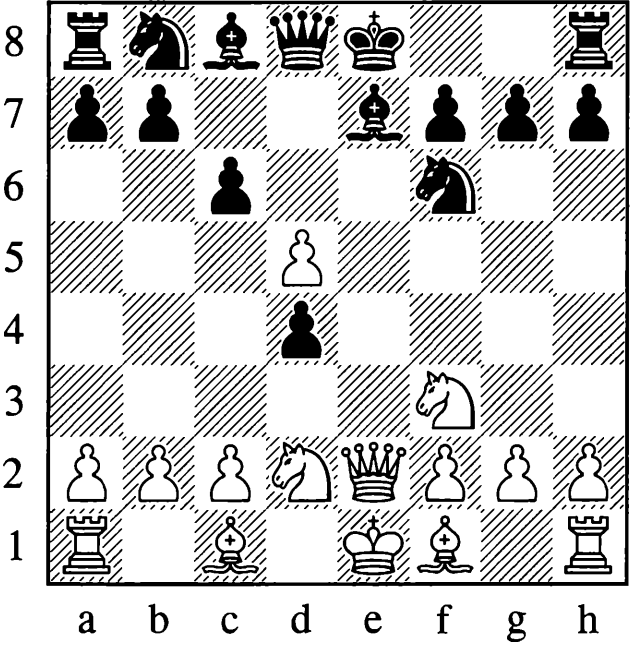
6...exd4

Two of the great Caro-Kann pioneers and connoisseurs, Karpov and Seirawan, have played 6...dxe4 7.♘xe5 ♙f5 which also seems fine, but I like the text move more. Maybe White's queen will not be so happy on e2 if the position is quickly opened up.

7.exd5†

7.e5 0-0 is no good for White.

7...♙e7



White's position is beginning to look awkward. He will have to waste more time to develop the light-squared bishop. In the meantime Black takes over.

8.♘xd4

8.dxc6 ♘xc6 just accelerates Black's development and 8.♘b3 c5 leaves White's d-pawn in danger.

8...0-0!

Black is ahead in development and has comfortable play. He – or she – can always take the pawn back next move if there is nothing better. Sometimes there is. See the illustrative game for more excitement.

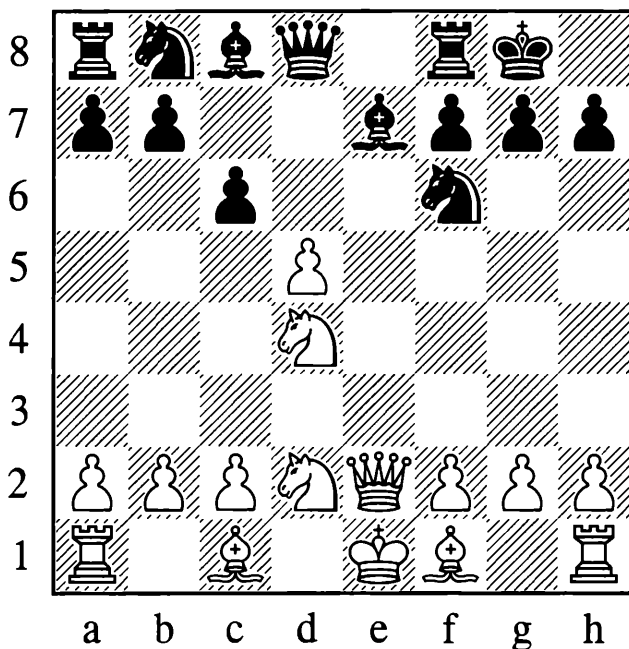
Poobalasingam – Houska

England 2008

1.e4 c6 2.d3 d5 3.♘d2 e5 4.♘gf3 ♕d6 5.♞e2

Not exactly what we understand as natural, quick and undisturbed development of the pieces followed by bringing the king to safety. When you face a move like this, a suspicious attitude is justified.

5...♘f6! 6.d4 exd4 7.exd5† ♕e7 8.♘xd4 0-0



9.♞f3

This is convincingly refuted in the present game. There were no easy solutions though, because Black is ready to take back the pawn on d5 with very comfortable play. For example, 9.♞d1 ♘xd5 10.♘2f3 (or 10.♕e2 ♘f4) 10...♕b4† 11.♕d2 ♞b6 12.♕e2 ♕xd2† 13.♞xd2 ♞xb2 14.0-0 ♘d7 15.♞ab1 ♞c3† and White had paid a pawn to castle, Los – Boersma, Netherlands 1994.

9...♕g4!

Going for everything at once.

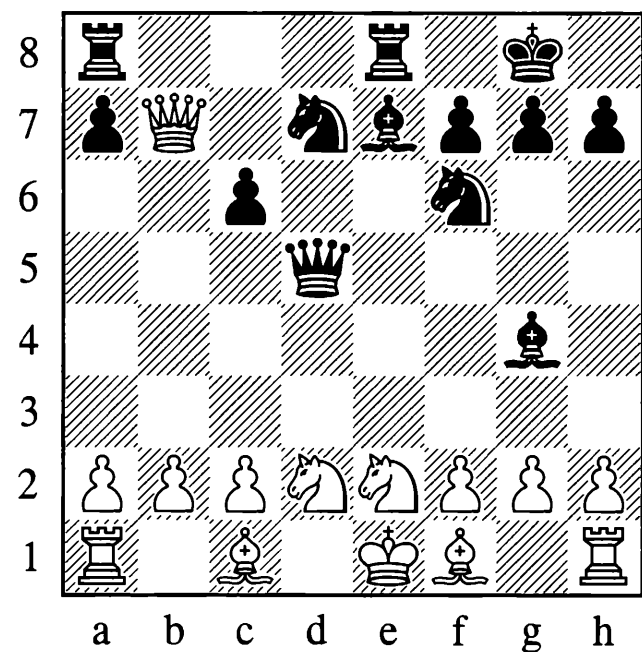
10.♞b3 ♞e8! 11.♞xb7

11.♕e2 ♕c5 wasn't fun either, but the game is just horrible.

11...♞xd5

Now White can't take on a8, because Black just takes on d4 and there is nobody left to defend the white king.

12.♘e2 ♘bd7



Just compare the development. White is completely busted.

13.♞b3

Exchange?

13...♞a5

No thanks!

14.a3

Or 14.f3 ♕e6 15.♞c3 ♕b4 and the attack keeps going.

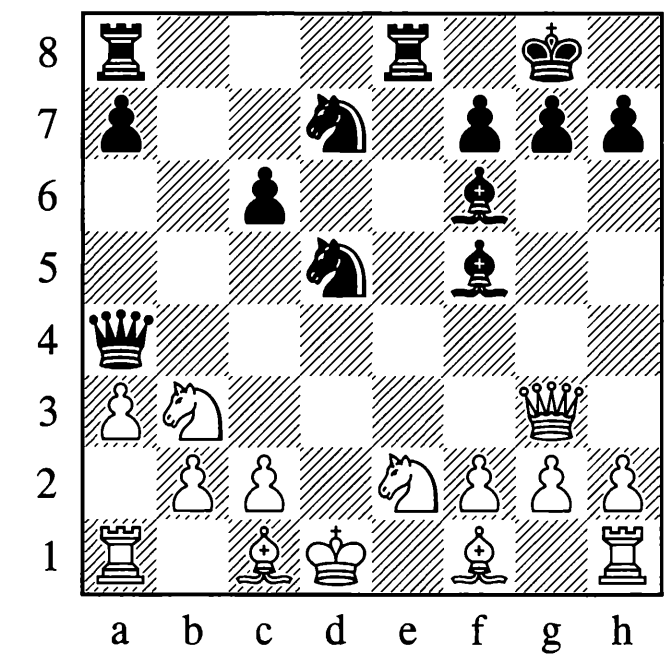
14...♘d5

I like 14...♘e4!.

15.♞g3 ♕f5 16.♘d1

The king won't get far.

16...♙f6 17.♘b3 ♚a4



White is running out of moves and begins to shed material.

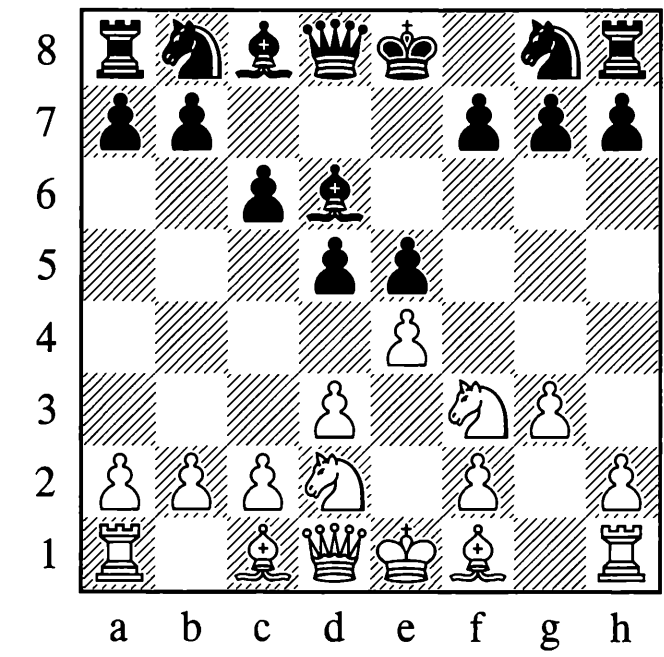
18.♙d2 ♙xb2 19.♖a2 ♙f6 20.h4 ♗ad8 21.♔c1 ♗b8 22.♙g5 ♘b4

In such positions it is easy to create combinations. Just as good was 22...♙xc2.

23.♙xf6 ♘xa2† 24.♔b2 ♘xf6 25.♗f4
Or 25.♔xa2 ♙xc2.

25...♗xf4 26.♘xf4 ♗e1
0–1

C) 5.g3



The standard continuation.

5...♘f6 6.♙g2 0–0 7.0–0

White is arranging his pieces according to a scheme that is well-known from the King's Indian Defence. Here it is not very threatening and avoiding any immediate infighting means that Black can develop the rest of his forces without many worries. The real battle is scheduled for the middlegame.

7...♗e8 8.♗e1

The position is extremely flexible for both sides. Moves such as h2-h3 or c2-c3 will often transpose to the mainline because they are part of the typical scheme. Let's see a few independent paths:

8.b3 a5 9.a3

So that ...a5-a4 can be answered with b3-b4.

Instead 9.♙b2 a4 is already annoying and 9.a4 weakens the dark squares, so after 9...♘a6 Black is probably better.

9...♘bd7 10.♙b2 ♗c7 11.♗e1

Here the Danish Caro-Kann expert Karsten Rasmussen has had success with the simplifying 11...dxe4 when White has two recaptures:

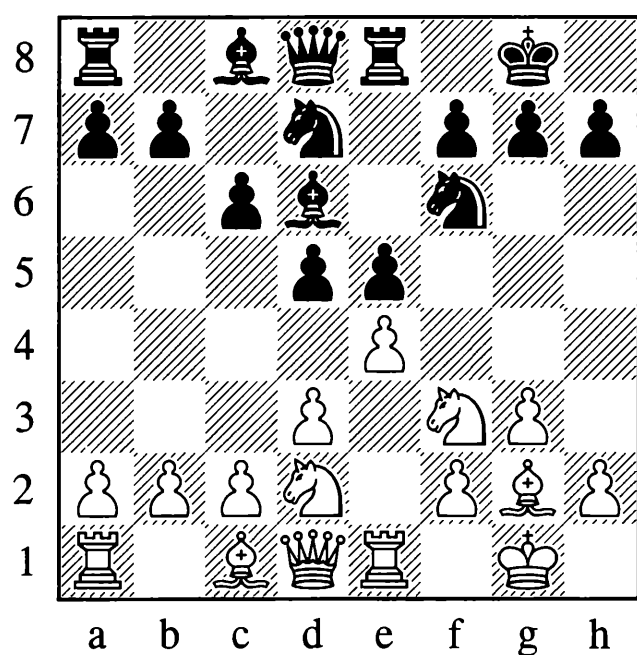
12.♘xe4 ♘xe4 13.dxe4 ♘f6 14.♘d2 ♙e6 15.♗e2 ♙c5 Black has easy play. 16.h3 ♗ad8 17.♘c4 ♙d4! 18.c3 ♙a7 19.♗ad1 b5 20.♘d2 ♘d7 21.b4 ♘b6! 22.♔h2 ♗d7 23.bxa5 ♘a4 24.♙a1 ♗xa5† Pliester – K. Rasmussen, Copenhagen 1985.

12.dxe4 b5 13.♘h4 ♙f8 14.♗f3 ♘c5 15.♘f5 g6! 16.♘e3 ♙g7 17.a4 ♙b7 18.♘ef1 This indicates that something has gone wrong, but it was difficult to find a clear plan for White. 18...♘fd7 19.h4 ♘e6 20.h5 ♘d4 21.♗d1 This is Hickl – K. Rasmussen, Germany 2004, and now 21...♗ed8 was worth a slight edge.

8.♘h4 ♘a6 This is modern chess. A knight move to the rim is answered with a knight move to the rim – poetic justice. However it is deeper and more concrete than that. From a6 the knight can jump to b4, which prevents White from playing the otherwise desirable ♖e1. Allow me to illustrate: 9.f4? exf4 10.gxf4 ♘g4! 11.♖e1 ♘b4 and wins. Therefore best is probably 9.a3 but then 9...♘c5 with excellent play.

8...♘bd7

Developing the bishop actively with 8...♗g4 is also a well-known equalizer. I prefer to leave it on c8 for the moment and keep as many options open as possible to react to what White does. By the way, when I was working on this book I had some success in rapid and blitz games with the interesting 8...a5!? 9.a4 ♘a6. The knight is fine here. It can later go to c5 anyway and it doesn't block the light-squared bishop.



9.c3

Or 9.h3 ♖c7 and Black is well-coordinated and flexible. Play may continue: 10.♘h4 a5!? 11.♘f5 ♗f8 12.♘f1 ♘c5+ 13.g4 dxe4 14.dxe4 Hersvik – Karttunen, Oropesa del Mar 1999, and now maybe 14...♗xf5 15.exf5 ♖ad8 16.♖e2 ♘d5 exploiting the f4-square.

9...♖c7

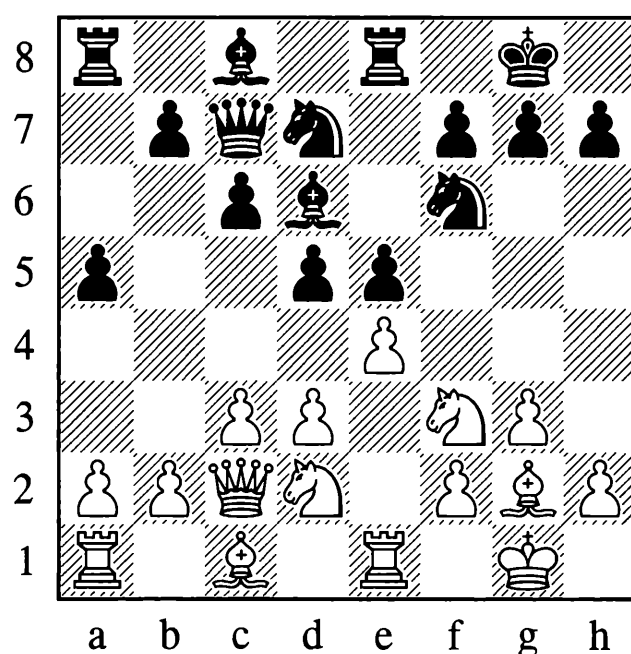
The standard set-up. Karpov has played 9...dxe4 10.dxe4 ♖c7 which also looks fine. I prefer to keep the tension a little longer and see what White does before I decide to take on e4.

10.♖c2

White does the same. Seeking infighting in the centre with 10.d4 can hardly be recommended. 10...dxe4 11.♘xe4 ♘xe4 12.♖xe4 ♘f6 13.♖e1 e4 14.♘d2 ♗f5 15.♘c4 h6 16.♘xd6 ♖xd6 17.♗f4 ♖d7 In Hintikka – Solozhenkin, Jyvaskyla 2001, Black was comfortable despite White's bishop pair. One point being 18.♗e5 ♘d5 19.♗xe4? ♗xe4 20.♖xe4 f6 winning a piece.

If 10.h3 Black can take on e4 with satisfactory play or try the interesting 10...b6!? with the intention of putting the bishop on a6.

10...a5



11.♘f1

White continues to regroup slowly. The alternative was 11.a4 but then 11...b6 with the idea ...♗a6 is good, for instance 12.d4 exd4 13.♘xd4 ♗a6 14.♘4f3?! ♘c5! 15.exd5 ♖xe1+ 16.♘xe1 ♖e8 17.♘df3 cxd5+ Posch – Golubovic, Oberwart 2001.

11...dxe4

Now is a good time to make this exchange. Of course we could also keep the tension with 11...b6 which is a sensible way to develop the remaining pieces.

12.dxe4 ♖c5 13.♗h4

This was Kaulfuss – Goeke, Germany 2006.

13...g6

This simple move looks good.

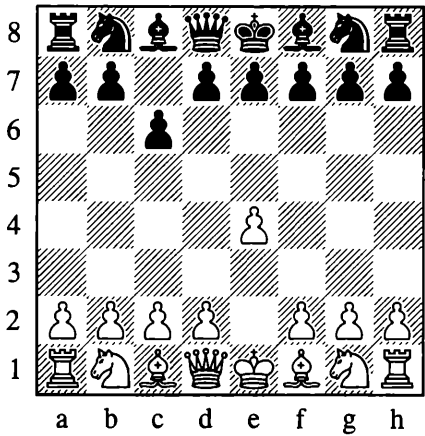
14.♙g5 ♕e7

Black has the more pleasant game.

Conclusion

The 2.d3 variation is not very scary. If White tries to force the events it will most likely backfire, and if he just plays quietly then Black has comfortable equality from the start. Perhaps the only sharp line Black needs to study in this chapter is line A3, 2.d3 d5 3.♗d2 e5 4.♗gf3 ♕d6 5.d4 exd4 6.exd5 ♗f6 7.dxc6 ♗xc6 8.♙e2 0–0 9.0–0 and now Jobava's 9...♙f5! 10.♗b3 ♖c7! when 11.♙g5 is met by the strong novelty 11...♗e4.

Chapter 22



Minor Systems

Rare Lines

Variation Index

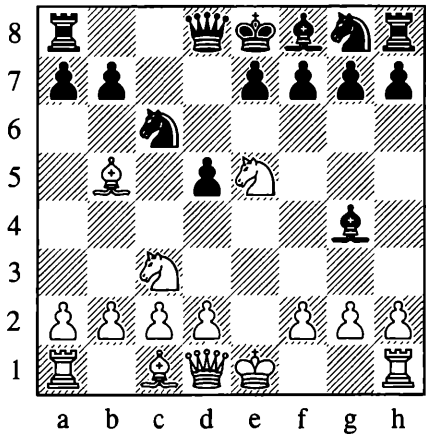
1.e4 c6

A) 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 dxe4 4.f3	236
B) 2.♘e2 d5 3.e5	238
C) 2.♘f3 d5 3.exd5 cxd5 4.♘e5!?	239
D) 2.b3	242
E) 2.f4	243
F) 2.♘c3 d5 3.♚f3!?	244

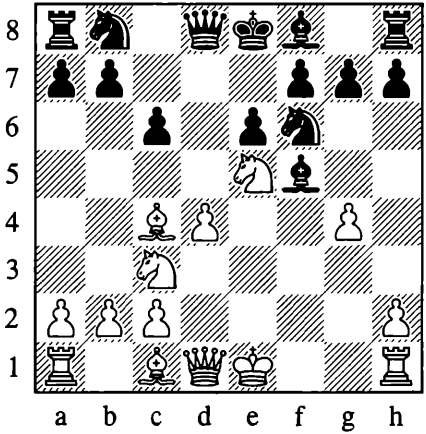
6.♘e5? madness

A) after 8.g4

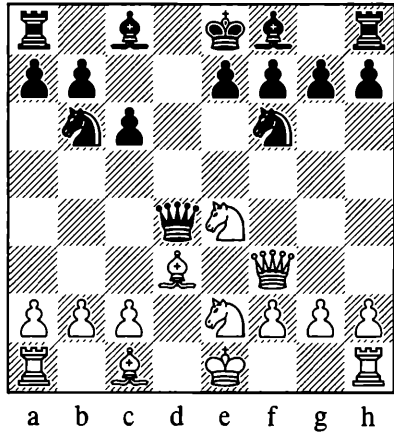
F) after 8.♘e2



6...♙xd1!

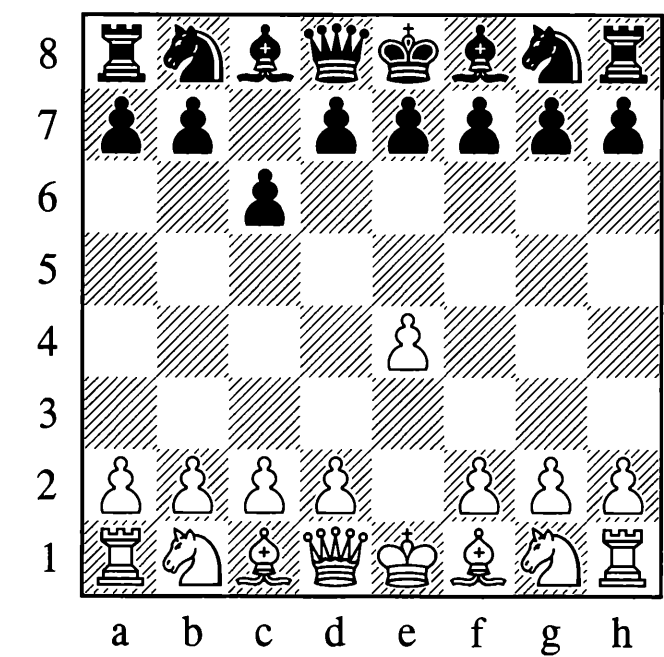


8...♘fd7!?



8...♚d7!

1.e4 c6



Because the move 1...c6 isn't exactly confrontational, White has the chance to be creative right from the start. But he must act quickly – next move the black d-pawn will be on d5 threatening e4.

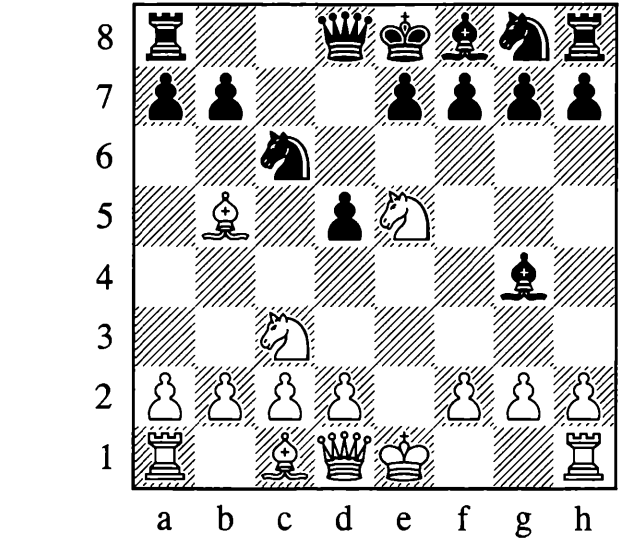
Over the years a range of slightly bizarre set-ups have appeared on the scene and in most cases vanished again. In this chapter they will get their 15 minutes of fame. A) 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 dxe4 4.f3 is more of a Blackmar-Diemer Gambit than a Caro-Kann, but someone could play it against you, so I shall do my duty and cover it. B) 2.♘e2 d5 3.e5 and C) 2.♘f3 d5 3.exd5 cxd5 4.♘e5 are the most respectable of the anti-Caro minor lines. D) 2.b3 and E) 2.f4 don't quite correspond with the positional demands of the situation, while F) 2.♘c3 d5 3.♖f3 looks suspicious, but shouldn't be underestimated.

Before that I will mention a line so rare and weak it does not even merit a capital letter of its own. It is just a cheap trick, but Black must find a few "only" moves before he collects the full point:

2.♘c3 d5 3.♘f3 ♕g4

A sensible Two Knights, but White has a kamikaze sideline.

4.exd5 cxd5 5.♗b5† ♘c6 6.♘e5?



The madness starts. If this landed as a surprise weapon it might just work, but Black should not be intimidated – a direct refutation is available:

6...♕xd1! 7.♘xc6 ♖b6! 8.♘e5†
Or 8.♘xd5 ♖xb5 9.♘c7† ♔d7 10.♘xb5 bxc6 and Black has a free piece.
8...♔d8 9.♘xf7† ♔c8 10.♔xd1 d4!

The excitement is over. Black's last move ensures he will win another piece and have a decisive material advantage. I love that an East German correspondence player has reached this position four times with White and lost every time – it requires boundless optimism to hope that a surprise weapon will work *next* time.

A) 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 dxe4 4.f3

White is determined to lose a pawn. A similar concept is 4.♗c4 when after 4...♘f6 5.f3 exf3 we transpose to the line below. If Black feels like a change there is also 5...b5!?. For example, 6.♗b3 e6 7.fxe4?! b4 8.♘ce2 ♘xe4 9.♘f3 ♗a6 10.0–0 ♗d6 and Black was just a pawn up in Short – Bareev, Sarajevo 2000. White should have played 7.♗g5 but after 7...♘bd7 Black is safe enough.

4...exf3 5.♘xf3

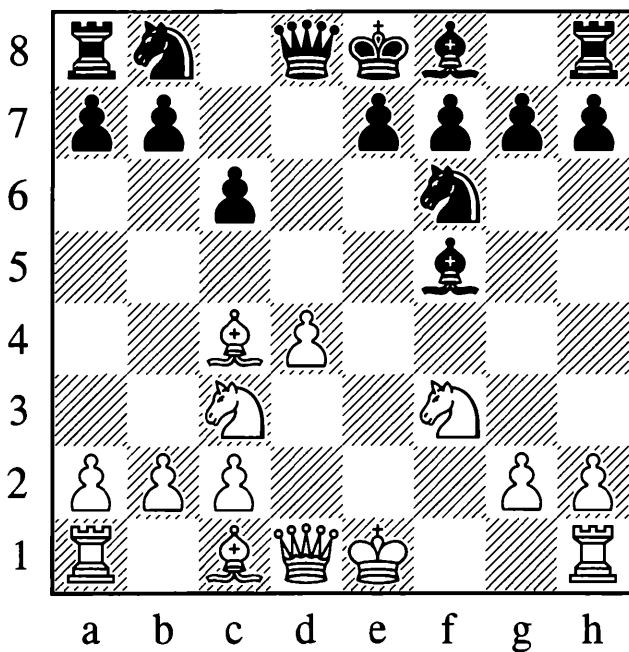
On 5.♖xf3?! Black can play 5...♖xd4 with the idea that 6.♗e3 ♖b4! is very good for him, the point being 7.0–0–0 loses to 7...♗g4.

5...♟f6 6.♞c4

6.♞d3 would allow Black to develop the bishop more actively with 6...♞g4. White does not have a great score or a great position here. One example ran: 7.♞e3 e6 8.0–0 ♞d6 9.♞e1 ♟bd7 10.♞h4 ♞xf3 11.♞xf3 ♞c7 12.♟e2 0–0–0 ♯ Jagadeesh – Stany, Chennai 2008.

6...♞f5

This is Black's most successful line here. 6...b5!? is also interesting, but there is no reason to get carried away.

**7.♟e5**

The only dangerous move as far as I can see. 7.0–0 e6 8.♟e5 ♞g6

Black had to watch out for a ♞xf5 trick, and the tempting 8...♞xc2 is best avoided as 9.♟xf7 ♟xf7 10.♞e2!? is messy and dangerous.

9.♞g5

White has insufficient compensation. Black should play:

9...♟bd7!

When White is struggling; the attack simply does not have enough support.

10.♞e2

Alternatives have been tried, but without success:

10.♟xd7 ♞xd7 ♯ Thomas – Tew, Cardiff 2004.

10.♟xg6 hxg6 11.♞f3 was Pudas – Eriksson, Helsinki 2005, and now simply good is 11...♟b6 ♯.

10...♟xe5!N 11.dxe5 ♞d4 ♯ 12.♟h1 ♞h5! 13.♞e1 ♟d7 ♯

And White loses another pawn with very little to show for it.

7...e6 8.g4

Black's next move would surprise many players.

8...♟fd7!? 9.gxf5

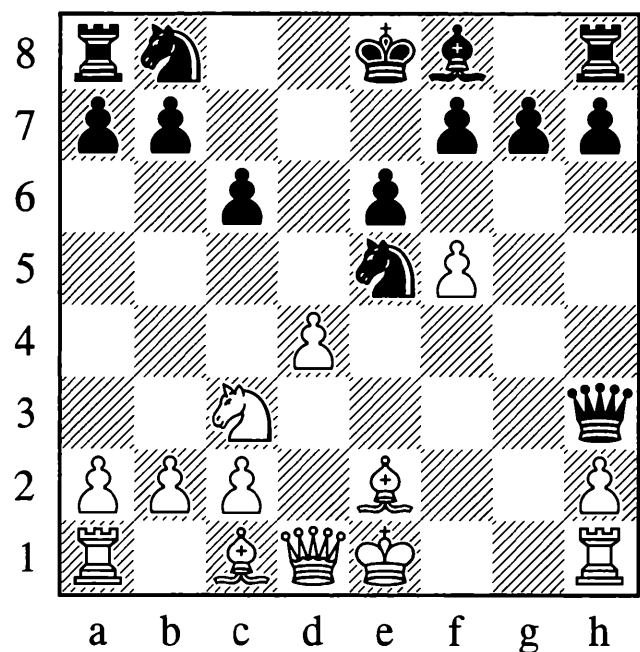
Not 9.0–0? ♟xe5 10.gxf5 ♟xc4–+ Stampovsky – Gil, Czech Republic 2006.

9...♟xe5! 10.♞e2

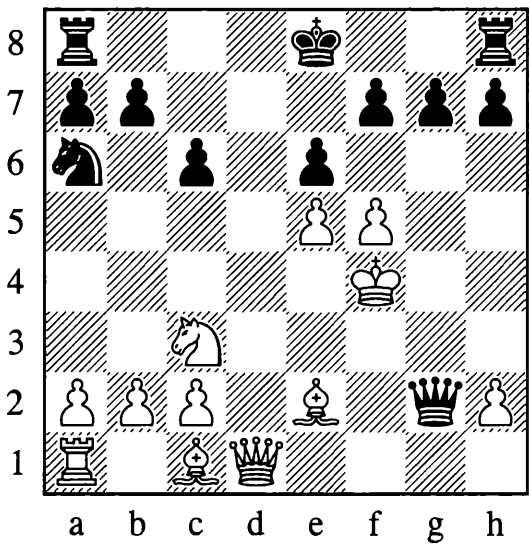
10.dxe5 ♞h4 ♯ just wins.

10...♞h4 ♯ 11.♟f1 ♞h3 ♯ 12.♟e1

Or 12.♟g1 exf5 and maybe there is nothing better than 13.♞f1 ♞g4 ♯ with a pawn more for Black.

**12...♞e7! 13.♞f4!**

13.dxe5? loses to 13...♞g2!! 14.♞f1 ♞h4 ♯ 15.♟d2 ♟a6 planning ...♞d8 with a devastating attack. I intended to stop here, but then spotted the game Zilliox – Maciulewicz, corr. 2000, which continued 16.♟e3 ♞g5 ♯ 17.♞f4 ♞xf4 ♯ 18.♟xf4.

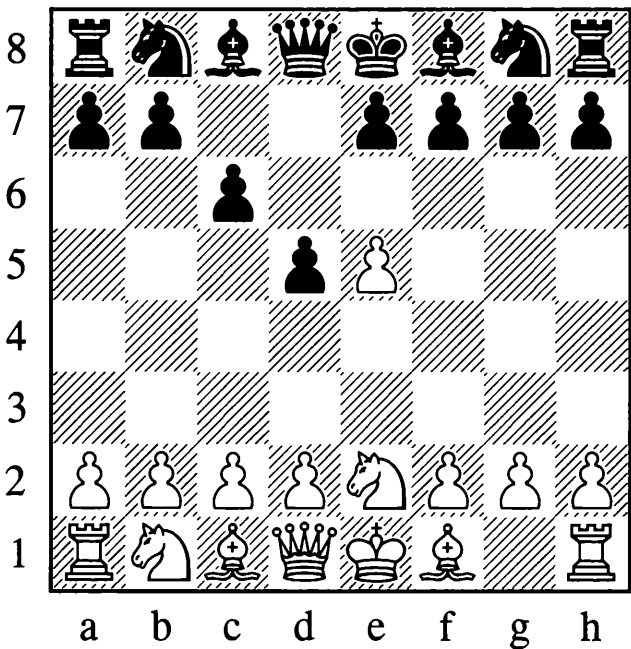


And after 18...Qxh2+ White later made a miraculous escape to a draw. The killer was 18...Qf2+! 19.gf3 Bd8 20.Qe2 Qh4+! 21.gg4 Bd4+.

13...Qed7 14.fxe6 Qxe6

Black is a pawn up and should do well in the middlegame as well. Remember that White can no longer castle!

B) 2.Qe2 d5 3.e5



This tricky line is very popular on the Internet Chess Club.

3...d4!?

Meeting something unusual with something even more peculiar. I like that. And I especially like this line because it's strong!

Black has tried many other set-ups. The big mainline is: 3...c5 4.d4 Qc6 5.c3 cxd4 (The most exact. 5...Qf5 6.dxc5 is risky, but playing a French with 5...e6 is also popular.) 6.cxd4 Qf5 7.Qbc3 e6 And now White can chose between 8.Qg3 and 8.Qe3 in either case with a complicated but rather balanced game.

I have even played 3...h5!? 4.d4 h4 5.Qf4 Qf5, Tischbierek – Schandorff, Germany 2003. Anything can happen.

4.Qg3

It is already impossible to say what is best – no normal moves exist. Here is a summary of the ones tried so far.

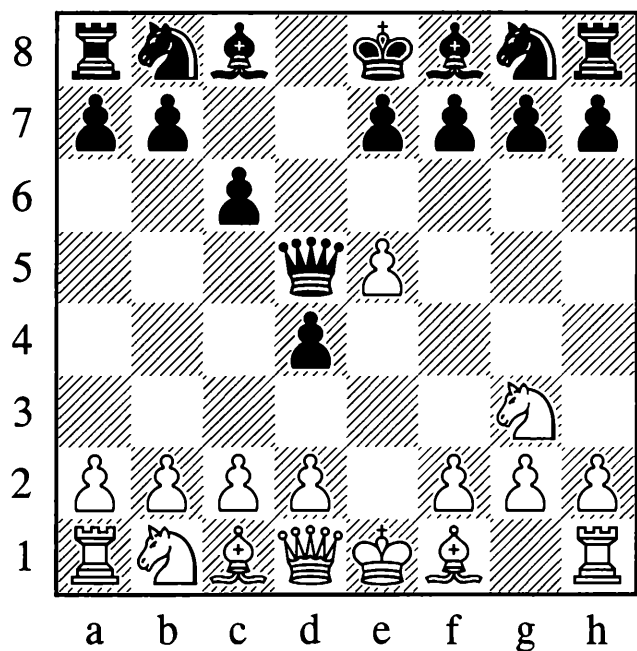
4.b4 f6 (4...Qd5N) 5.f4 fxe5 6.fxe5 Qd5 7.Qb2 c5 8.bxc5 Qc6 9.d3 Qxe5 10.c3 Qxc5 11.cxd4 Qb6 12.Qc3 Qf6 13.Qa3 Qd5 14.Qc4 Qd8 15.Qd2 This was Abergel – Edouard, Cappelle la Grande 2010. Now the new move 15...e6+ would have been excellent.

4.c3 c5 5.f4 Qc6 6.Qg3 g5!? (just developing with 6...Qh6 must also be fine) 7.fxg5 (A mistake. White should settle for the spectacular perpetual check with 7.Qc4 gxf4 8.Qxf7+ Qxf7 9.Qh5+ Qe6 10.Qf5+ Qd5 11.Qe4+ Qe6 12.Qf5+.) 7...Qd5 8.Qe2 Qg7 9.Qe4 Qe6 10.Qb5 Qxe5 11.Qxc6+ bxc6 12.d3 So far this is Niedermaier – Burggraf, Forchheim 2002, and now Black could improve with 12...h6!N 13.Qxd5 cxd5+.

4.d3 c5 5.f4 Qc6 6.g3 Qd5 7.Qg1 Qg4 8.Qg2 Qf3 9.Qec3 dxc3 10.Qxf3 Qd4 0–1 This was a blitz game of mine. Needless to say it could be improved upon, so I am just including it for fun.

4...Qd5

Making immediate use of Black's previous move.



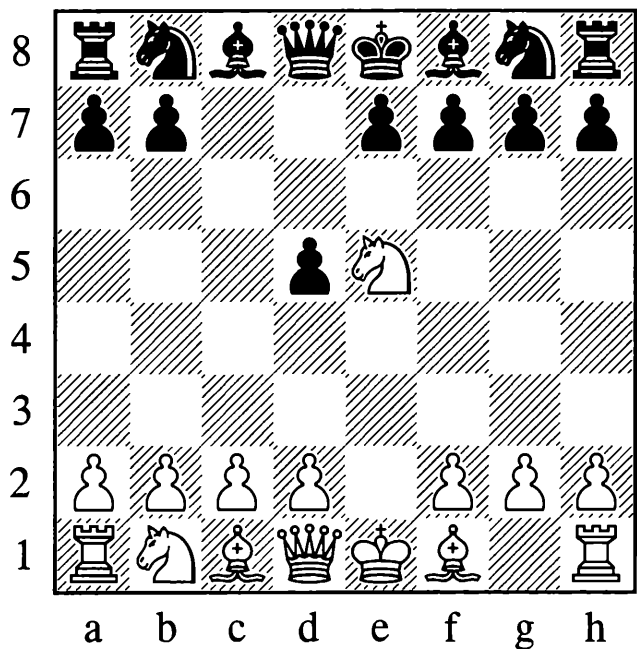
5.f4 g5

A bizarre position to reach after only 5 moves. Who says you can't invent anything new in chess?

6.d3 gxf4 7.♙xf4 ♙h6

Black is fine.

C) 2.♘f3 d5 3.exd5 cxd5 4.♘e5!?



White wants to play a kind of Exchange Variation, where the possibility of ♙b5 gives him some extra positional tools to play with.

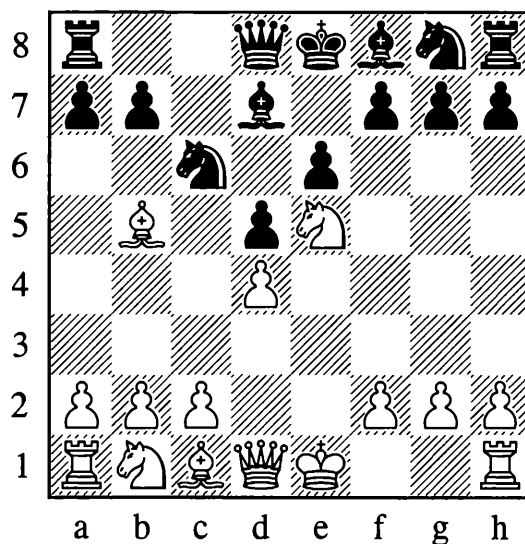
4...♘f6

Black intends to continue with ...g7-g6 and then ...♙g7, but allowing White to execute his plan was tempting as well.

4...♘c6 5.d4 e6 6.♙b5

Also possible is 6.c3 ♘xe5 7.dxe5 ♘e7 8.♘d2 ♘c6 9.♘f3 ♙c7 10.♙f4 ♙e7 11.♙g3 ♙d7 12.♙d3 g5[∞] with typical counterplay, Carlsen – Dreev, Moscow (blitz) 2007. But why not simply play 6...♙d6. If White secures the outpost with 7.f4 he gets a rigid pawn formation. 7...♘h6 8.♙d3 ♙h4† 9.g3 ♙h3 10.♙f1 ♙f5 11.♙g2 ♙f6 12.0–0 13.♙e3 ♙e7 14.♘d2 f6 15.♘g4 ♘f5 16.♙f2 ♙f7 17.♘e3 ♘xe3 18.♙xe3 ♘e7 19.♙e2 ♙d7 And Black was fine in Hacker – Kribben, corr. 2007. White's bishop on e3 isn't impressive.

6...♙d7



7.♙xc6

Or 7.♘xd7 ♙xd7 8.c3 ♙d6 9.♘d2 ♘ge7 10.♘f3 when White has the bishops, but Black has solved all his development problems. The position is balanced. Castling short would now be normal, but in fact in I. Schneider – Gomez Esteban, Austria 2006, Black castled long and won a complicated fight.

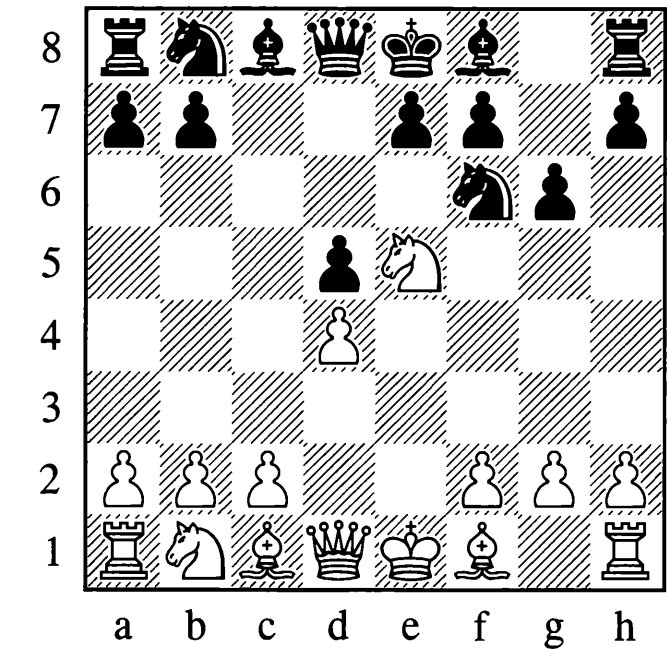
7...♙xc6 8.0–0 ♘f6 9.♙g5 ♙e7 10.♘d2 0–0 11.c3 ♙c8 12.f4 ♘e8 13.♙xe7 ♙xe7 14.♙f3 f6 15.♘d3 ♘d6

Black is fine. The hole on e4 will remain forever, Garcia Jimenez – Topalov, Villarrobledo (rapid) 2008.

5.d4

Or 5.♖b5† ♕d7 6.♘xd7 ♘bxd7 7.0–0 a6 8.♙e2 e6 9.d4 ♖b6 10.c3 ♕d6 11.♘d2 0–0 was about equal in A. Orlov – Gelashvili, Kavala 2008.

5...g6



6.♙b5†

The culmination of White’s opening idea. Refraining from the bishop check might seem illogical, but maybe the bishop is in fact better placed on d3, as the mainline suggests there are serious drawbacks to having it on b5.

6.♙d3 ♙g7 7.0–0 0–0 8.c3 ♘c6 9.♖e2 9.f4 weakens the light squares and could be met by 9...♙f5.
9...♘xe5 9...♘d7!? 10.f4 ♘f6 highlights my point. 11.♙e3 ♙f5 12.♘d2 ♙xd3 13.♖xd3 e6 14.♖ae1 ♖c8 Black is okay despite White being two tempos up, Carlsen – Leko, Miskolc (rapid) 2008.
10.dxe5 ♘d7 11.♙f4 Or 11.f4 ♘c5 12.♙c2 b6 13.♖d1 ½–½ Rendle – A. Ledger, Britain (ch) 2008. Personally I like 12...♖b6 13.♙h1 ♖c6 14.♘d2 b6 15.♖d1 ♙a6 16.♖f3 ♖ac8 and Black is fine.
11...♘c5 12.♙c2 ♘e6 13.♙g3 ♖b6 14.♙b3 d4 15.♘d2 dxc3 16.bxc3 ♘c5 17.♙d5 ♙e6

18.♖ab1 ♖c7 19.♙xe6 ♘xe6 Black had an edge in M.A. Becker – Doettling, Baden-Baden 2007.

6...♘bd7 7.0–0 ♙g7

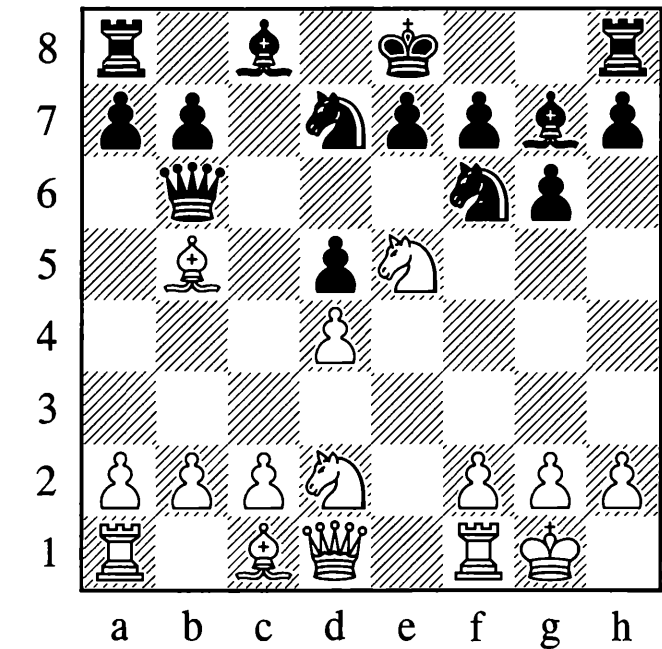
This looks okay for Black.

8.♘d2

The natural move, but there is a problem. The alternatives are:

8.♖e1 0–0 9.♘c3 a6 10.♙f1 e6 11.♘d3 b6 12.♘e2 ♙b7 13.c3 ½–½ Yu Shaoteng – Adianto, Cebu City 2007. The position is balanced, but Black could easily play on with 13...♘e4.
8.c3 0–0 9.f4 ♘e4 10.♙d3 ♘d6 11.♘d2 f6 12.♘xd7 ♖xd7 13.♖e2 b6 14.♘f3 ♙b7 15.♘h4 e6 16.♙e3 ♖ae8 17.♖ae1 ♙c6 Brynell – A. Rasmussen, Copenhagen 2006.

8...♖b6!



Exploiting the unprotected d4-pawn and solving all Black’s opening problems.

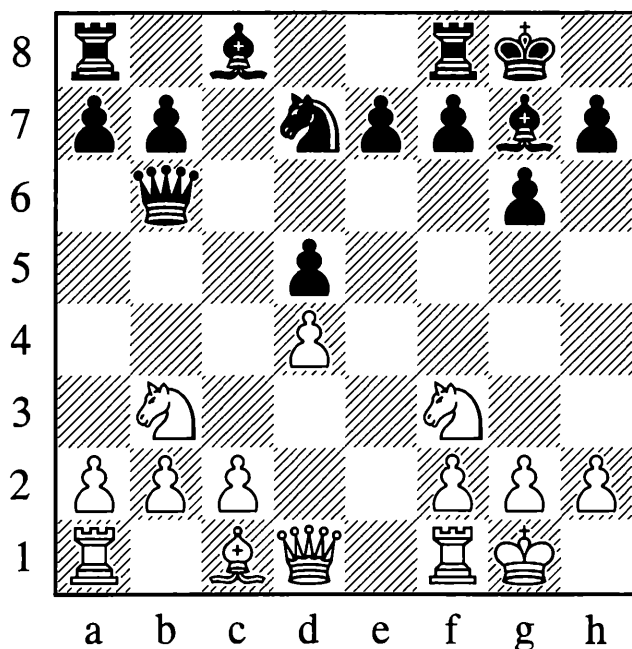
9.♙xd7† ♘xd7 10.♘ef3 0–0†

Black has easy play and the bishop pair. See the illustrative game for the rest.

S.B. Hansen – Fridman

Germany 2008

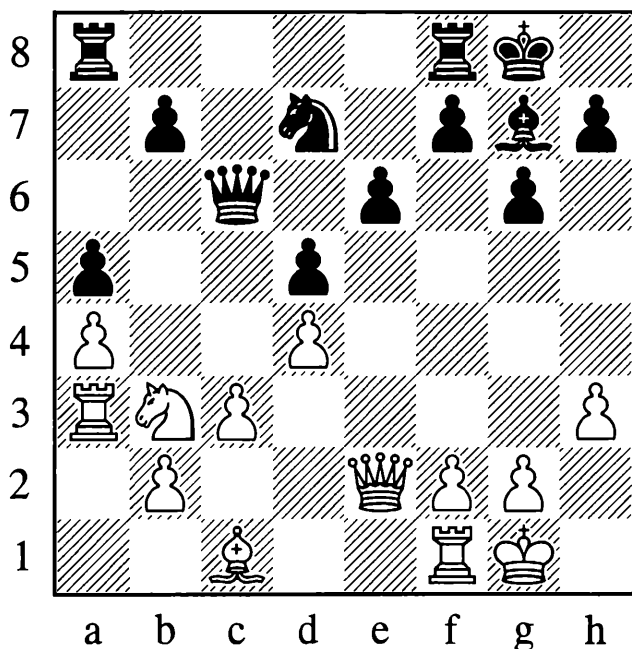
1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 cxd5 4.♘f3 ♘f6
5.♗e5 g6 6.♙b5† ♗bd7 7.0-0 ♙g7 8.♗d2
♚b6 9.♙xd7† ♗xd7 10.♗ef3 0-0 11.♗b3



11...a5! 12.a4 ♗b8 13.c3 ♙g4

Getting the light-squared bishop out is always an important Caro theme. Here it is particularly annoying for White because of the loose knight on b3.

14.♙a3 ♗d7 15.h3 ♙xf3 16.♚xf3 ♚c6
17.♚e2 e6



Black is very comfortable. He has a superior pawn structure and the better bishop.

18.♙f4 ♙fc8 19.♙fa1 ♙f8 20.♙3a2 ♚c4!

Offering to exchange queens, as in the ending Black's plusses will give him the chance to play on and on without fearing anything.

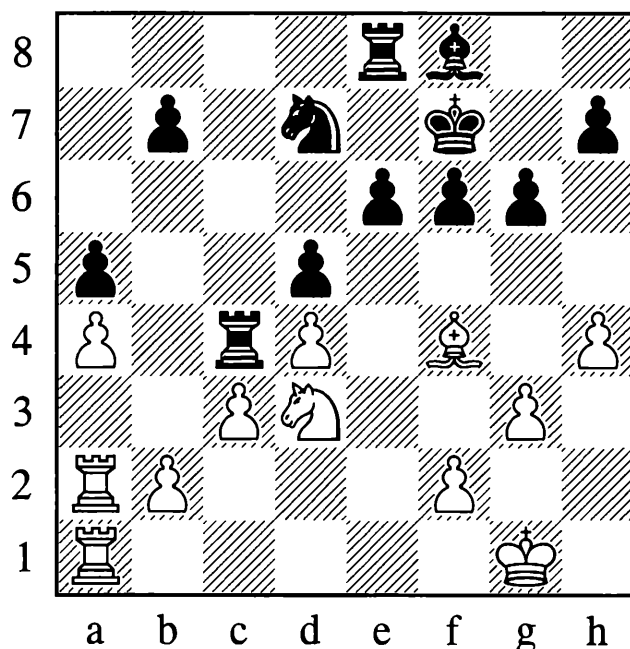
21.♚xc4

Keeping the queens on was in a way desirable, but it turned out that the black one would be extremely active in variations such as 21.♚d1 ♙a6 22.♗d2 ♚d3.

21...♙xc4 22.♗c1 f6

The dynamic possibility of playing ...e6-e5 gives Black the initiative.

23.♗d3 ♗f7 24.h4 ♙e8 25.g3

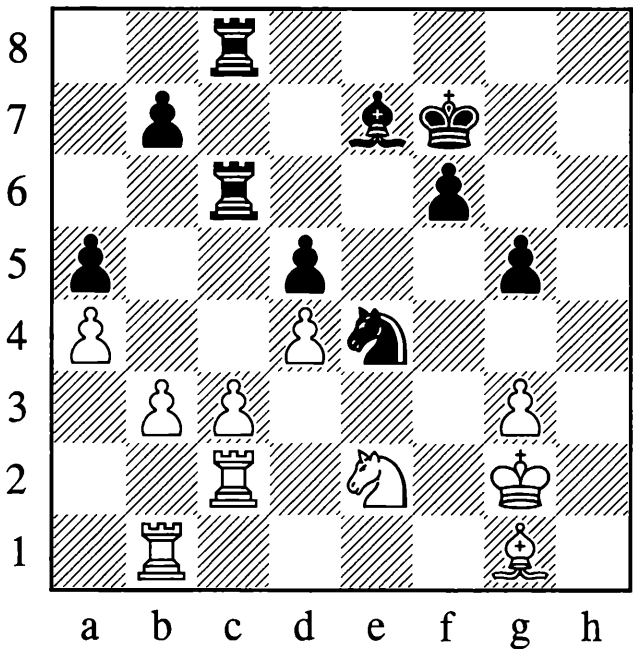


25...e5! 26.♙e3 ♙c6 27.♙d1 e4 28.♗f4 ♗b6
29.♗e2 h6 30.b3 g5 31.hxg5 hxg5 32.♗g2
♗c8 33.♙c2 ♗d6 34.♙dc1 ♙ec8 35.♙d2
♙e7 36.f3

It is understandable that White was sick and tired of having no counterplay. Opening the position like this doesn't help though, and only gives Black extra chances to break the fortress.

36...exf3† 37.♗xf3 ♙b6 38.♙b1 ♗c4 39.♙a2
♙h8 40.♗g2 ♗d6 41.♙e3 ♗e4 42.♙ab2 ♙e6

43.♙g1 ♜c8 44.♜c2 ♜ec6



The weak c-pawn is lost.

45.c4

Or 45.♜bc1 ♙a3 46.♜a1 ♙b4.

45...dxc4 46.d5 cxb3!

The refutation.

47.dxc6 bxc2 48.cxb7 cxb1=♚ 49.bxc8=♚ ♖d2

Suddenly the queens are back on and Black wins with an attack.

50.♚g4 ♚b7† 51.♙f2 ♙c5† 52.♙e1 ♖f3† 53.♙f1 ♚b1† 54.♙g2 ♖e1† 55.♙f1 ♖c2† 0–1

D) 2.b3

This is about as threatening as it looks.

2...d5 3.♙b2

Sacrificing a pawn. After 3.exd5 cxd5 4.♙b2 ♖c6 5.♖f3 ♖f6 Black has at least equalized.

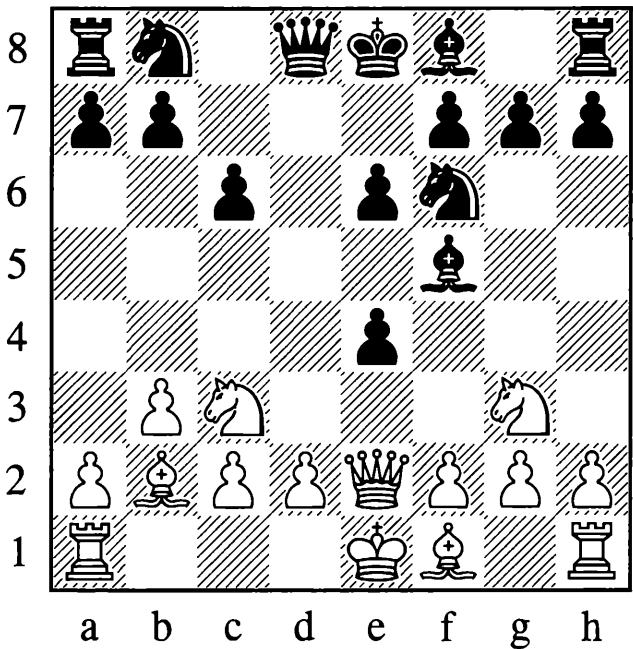
3...dxe4 4.♖c3

Or 4.♖e2 ♙f5 5.♖g3 e6 transposes.

4...♖f6 5.♖ge2 ♙f5

A decent alternative is 5...♖bd7!? 6.♖g3 ♖c5 and it worked well after 7.♚e2 ♙g4 8.f3 exf3 9.gxf3 ♙d7 10.0–0–0 ♖e6 11.♙h3 ♖d4 12.♙xd7† ♚xd7 13.♚f2 0–0–0† in Bokuchava – Gurgenzidze, Soviet Union 1974. Probably White should try 7.b4.

6.♖g3 e6 7.♚e2



7...♙b4!?

Keeping the extra pawn. White can't take on e4 because of the mate on d2. Instead 7...♖bd7 8.♖gxe4 ♙e7 was the choice of Dreev in a blitz game. Black has a solid and flexible position and after 9.0–0–0 a5!? the Russian Caro-Kann expert immediately fought for the initiative. 10.f3 a4 11.♖xa4 0–0 The a-file gives Black excellent compensation, Reprintsev – Dreev, Internet (blitz) 2003.

8.0–0–0 ♙xc3 9.♙xc3

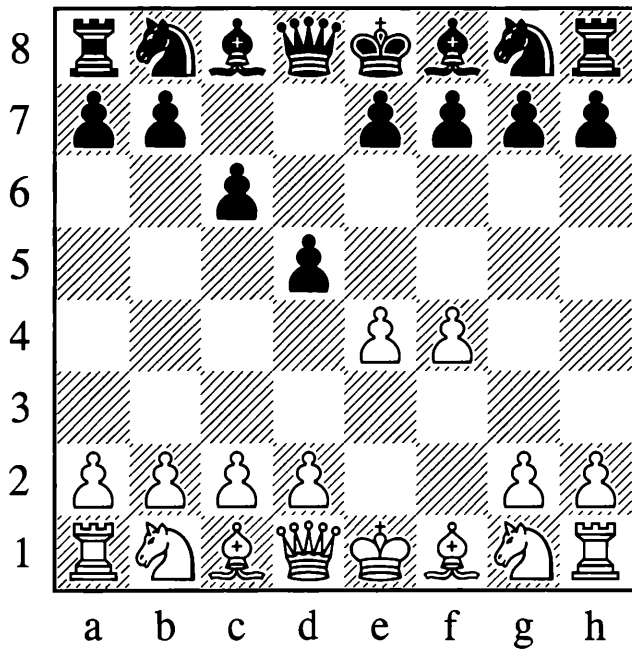
Or 9.dxc3 ♖bd7 10.c4 ♚a5 and White hardly has enough for a pawn, Berlinger – Caressa, corr. 2003.

9...♙g6 10.h4 h5 11.f3 exf3 12.gxf3 ♚c7 13.♖e4 ♖bd7

In G. Horvath – Krizsany, Hungary 1995, White had some compensation for the pawn, but Black is solid and I prefer the material.

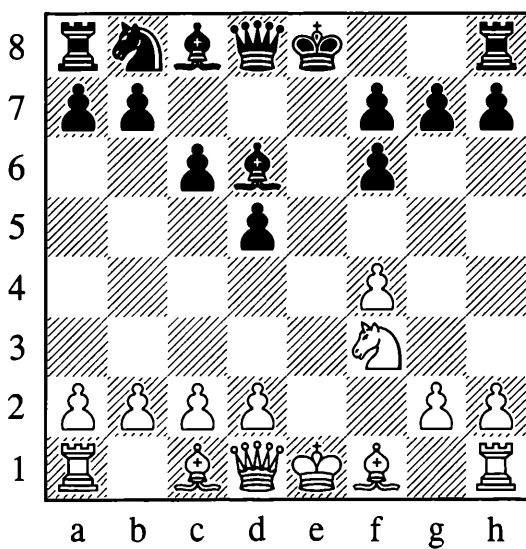
E) 2.f4

Is White trying to play the Grand Prix Attack against the Caro?

2...d5**3.e5**

Closing the position. Sometimes White tries to play more flexibly, but it doesn't fit well with the pawn on f4.

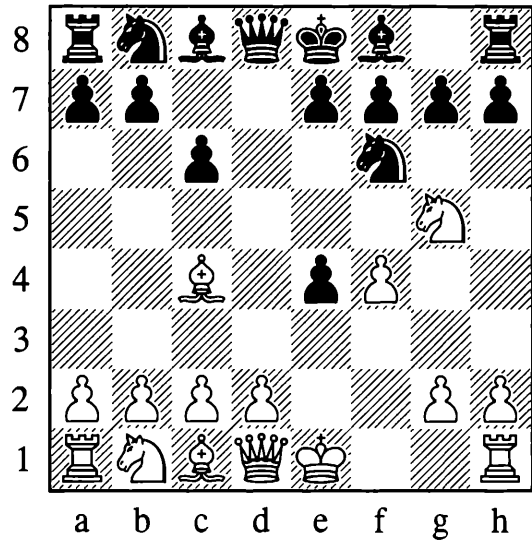
3.♘c3 dxe4 4.♗xe4 ♘f6 5.♗f2 (Or 5.♗xf6† exf6 6.♗f3 ♔d6



7.♞e2† ♞e7 8.♞xe7† ♔xe7 9.d4 ♘a6 10.c3 ♙f5 and Black is fine. In this variation 7.d4 0–0 doesn't alter the evaluation.) 5...g6 6.♗f3 ♙g7 7.g3 ♗g4 8.♗xg4 ♙xg4 9.h3 ♙xf3 10.♞xf3 ♗d7 11.♙g2 ♞b6 Preventing castling. After

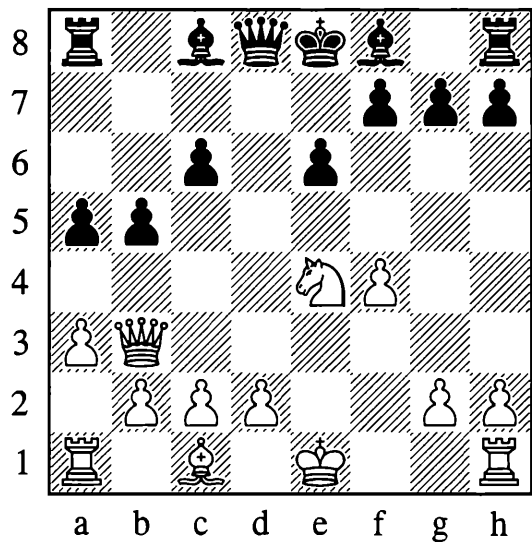
12.♞f2 e5 13.♞xb6 axb6 Black had the initiative in the ending, Rodriguez Guerras – Moskalenko, Barcelona 2005.

3.♗f3 dxe4 4.♗g5 ♗f6 5.♙c4



Now 5...♙g4 may look strong, but beware of 6.♞xg4! ♗xg4 7.♙xf7† ♔d7 8.♙e6† ♔c7 9.♙xg4 when White has a lot of play for the queen. The following miniature is a good example of what might happen. 9...♞d5 10.♗e6† ♔b6 11.d3 ♗d7 12.♙e3† c5 13.♗c3 a6? (13...♞c6 14.d4) 14.♗xd5† 1–0 Krol – Singhal, corr. 2000.

Instead it makes sense to play 5...e6 6.♗c3 b5 7.♙b3 ♗bd7 8.♗gxe4 a5 9.a3 ♗c5 10.♞f3 ♗fxe4 11.♗xe4 ♗xb3 12.♞xb3, as in Krol – Nepustil, corr. 2006.



After 12...♞d5N Black has surely won the opening debate.

3...♙f5 4.♘f3

Instead 4.g4 is too active, too soon and after 4...♙e4 5.♘f3 h5! Black breaks up the white pawn structure.

4...e6 5.d4

There are some alternatives, but Black gets good play in all lines.

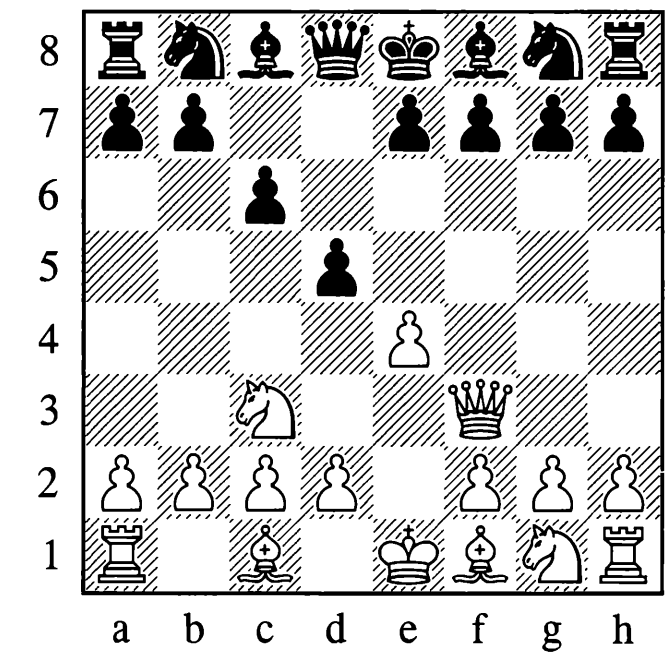
5.♙e2 ♘d7 6.0–0 ♘h6 7.d4 ♙e7 8.♘c3 was Dos Santos – Mesquita, corr. 2006, when Black should have tried 8...♙g4!N securing f5 for the knight with excellent play.

5.g3 ♘h6N 6.♙g2 ♙e7 7.0–0 0–0 with a fine position.

5...h5

Play transposes to a rare line of the Advance Variation (4.f4) that is covered on page 89.

F) 2.♘c3 d5 3.♙f3!?



The book ends with a pretty romantic idea.

3...dxe4

The true Caro-Kann move. Instead 3...♘f6 4.e5 ♘fd7 5.♙g3 e6 keeps the position closed like in the French.

4.♘xe4 ♘f6

4...♘d7 5.d4 ♘df6 is solid and okay, but as we have seen before there is no need to prepare ...♘f6. If White takes on f6 then Black's development speeds up.

5.♙c4

Clearly 5.♘xf6† exf6 is not a problem.

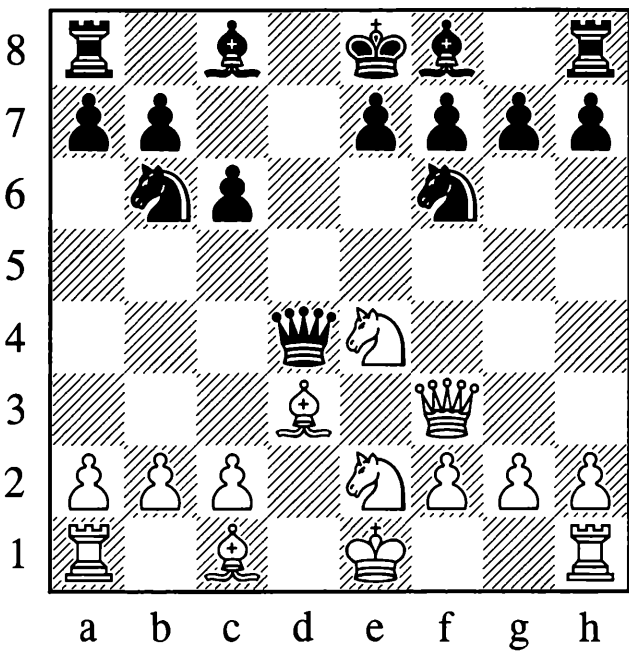
5...♘bd7 6.d4 ♘b6 7.♙d3

Sacrificing a pawn. After 7.♘xf6† gxf6 8.♙b3 ♘xc4 9.♙xc4 ♙g8± White was already missing his light-squared bishop in Le Roy – Riazantsev, France 2009.

7...♙xd4

Of course Black takes it.

8.♘e2



Where should the queen go?

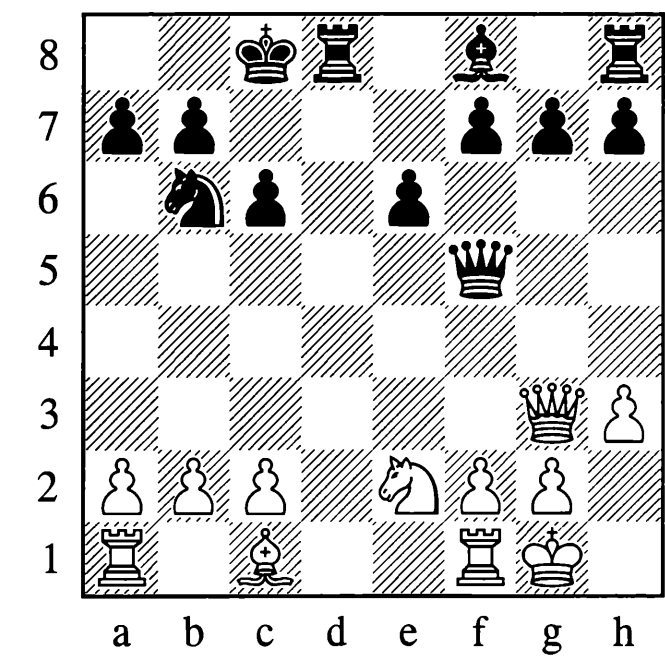
8...♙d7!

Threatening ...♙g4. Instead 8...♙d8 9.0–0= or 8...♙e5 9.0–0 ♘xe4 10.♙xe4 ♙f6 11.♙g3= as in Glaser – Cardozo, corr. 2002, were dangerous.

9.h3 ♘xe4 10.♙xe4

If 10.♙xe4? then 10...f5 11.♙d3 e5 gives Black a raging initiative to go with his extra pawn.

10...♖d5 11.♗h4 ♕f5 12.♕xf5 ♗xf5 13.0-0
e6 14.♗g3 0-0-0



In Willmoth – Dickinson, Birmingham 2001, White did not have anything for the pawn.

Conclusion

Though some of them are entertaining, the minor lines do not give White anything and that is why they are minor lines in the first place.

After 2.♘e2 d5 3.e5 I like 3...d4!?, and 2.♘f3 d5 3.exd5 cxd5 4.♘e5 is no problem either after 4...♘f6 followed by ...g7-g6 and ...♕g7.

2.b3 and 2.f4 are nothing. Finally, the tricky 2.♘c3 d5 3.♗f3 should be met by 3...dxe4 4.♘xe4 ♘f6 with good counterplay.

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