

**Grandmaster Repertoire**

**Boris  
Avrukh**

**1.d4**  
**VOLUME ONE**



*Tired of bad positions? Try the main lines!*

QUALITY CHESS

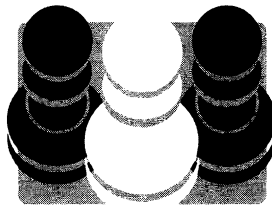


*Grandmaster Repertoire 1*

# **1.d4 - volume one**

By

**Boris Avrukh**



Quality Chess  
[www.qualitychess.co.uk](http://www.qualitychess.co.uk)

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## Grandmaster Repertoire 1 - 1.d4 volume one

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# Publisher's Foreword

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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

## Bibliography

Sakaev and Semkov: *The Queen's Gambit Accepted – 3rd edition*, Chess Stars 2008  
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### Periodicals

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*ChessBase Magazine*  
*Chess Informant*  
*Secrets of Opening Surprises*  
*TWIC*  
*Chess Today*

# Foreword

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By Grandmaster Boris Gelfand

Every chessplayer, from club level to World Champion, comes up against the problem of choosing an opening repertoire. How are you to keep your bearings amid the ocean of information – when hundreds of thousands of games are played worldwide every year, and the standard databases contain millions of them? Where are you to find the compass enabling you to obtain a position that suits your taste?

Should you perhaps do what some renowned specialists advise, and abandon all thoughtful study of the opening phase – or put all your trust in analysis by computer programs?

The readers of this book have hit upon the best way out of the dilemma: the brilliant theoretician and profound analyst Boris Avrukh is sharing his recommendations with them, in all the closed openings. Mikhail Botvinnik and Viktor Korchnoi used to divide chessplayers into those who create opening theory and those who utilize the results of these labours.

Boris Avrukh belongs to the small number in the former category. I have played in the Israeli team together with Boris on several occasions, and could personally observe what encyclopaedic knowledge this exceptional player possesses. Grandmasters of the highest rank have fallen victim to his opening preparation.

I am convinced that this will become a constant reference book for a great many readers.

Boris Gelfand  
World Championship Runner-Up 2007

# Foreword

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## By the Author

Years ago, when people were inquiring about my first move, or even looking at my games, they used to frown, because I always played 1.d4. It was not uncommon to be met with comments such as “Well, of course, this is pretty solid, but...” or “1.e4 will give you more chances to fight for an advantage,” and “Study 1.e4 and your results are sure to improve.”

Time has moved on, and it is not only because I am a grandmaster that these comments have stopped. Over the last few years the trend has changed and players such as Leko, Morozevich, Svidler, Grischuk and Ponomarev, who used to almost exclusively play 1.e4 (except for an occasional 1.♘c3 from Morozevich, of course) are all now relying on 1.d4 more and more for important games.

The most recent indicator of this trend was the match between Kramnik and Anand, where it was expected that Kramnik would rely on 1.d4, but a surprise that Anand, who otherwise exclusively plays 1.e4, also decided to open with the queen’s pawn. Actually you will have to go all the way back to 1995 before you find a World Championship match where 1.e4 won a game!

Alexei Shirov expressed the sentiment behind this slide in his usual ironic tone in *New In Chess Magazine* 5/2008, when he said that 1.d4 was “quite a popular weapon against the Petroff, Marshall and so on.” As White struggles to find an advantage against these defences and the Berlin Wall, many have found that life on the other side is indeed greener.

The reason for this is quite simple. The openings after 1.d4 are for good reason called closed, as it is harder to launch an immediate attack on the opponent when you have not opened up the development of the kingside pieces, as you do when you play 1.e4. Among other things, this leads to less forcing positions. For this reason, it is less likely that the opponent will manage to analyse the opening all the way to a position where there is not much play left, where the draw is close; the opportunity to outplay your opponent is kept alive.

Obviously there are still many 1.e4 games played at the top level, but increasingly 1.e4 is only employed against the more bloodthirsty grandmasters, who will not try to vacuum the pieces off the board from move 1.

So for this reason I am happy to be writing the Quality Chess repertoire book with 1.d4, while I feel a bit sorry for whoever will write the 1.e4 manual!

It was a big decision for me to begin writing an opening book. I have always liked annotating my own games and those of others, but at some level I had bought into the idea that, with the emergence of computers, opening books belong in the past, as it is now easy to get a reasonable overview of the theory of a specific line. Some authors write books that save the reader from doing this job, which is fine, but there are others, Sakaev and Marin spring to mind, who write books that go far beyond general knowledge. It was such a book I wanted to write. However, I do not have the literary skills of Mihail Marin and my way of thinking about chess is more concrete than his beautiful conceptual point of view. What I can do well is analyse, and I have spent the better part of a year analysing the repertoire I will present to the reader. I think it would be almost impossible for the readers to find as many new ideas as I have found in my work for this project. It is my sincere hope that these will be put to use and cause great frustration for those who face them. I have not willingly held anything back, but this experience has shown me that there are always new paths and that the scope for creativity in the opening is far from being exhausted.

Having finished the first volume of what was intended to be only one book, but turned out to be a double volume, I have to admit that I think I have succeeded in creating something special. This book might not flow like a novel, but I am hoping that the chess will be engaging.

As a player, the opening is one of my main strengths, but this does not mean that my memory resembles those of various fictional characters from colourful literature or from chess literature. The mind of a grandmaster is not much different from that of an amateur: the grandmaster has simply learned to apply certain skills, which give him an edge over the amateur. It is natural for the grandmaster to know more about openings than the amateur, just as it is normal for an Israeli to know more about Israel than, say, an American. However, this does not mean that an American cannot outperform an Israeli on a test about Israel. In a test, as in a game of chess, there are usually only twenty to forty questions to answer, and most of the extra knowledge of an Israeli or a grandmaster might be superfluous.

As anyone who has ever had to sit a tough exam will know, you remember the things you have seen recently better, and you remember them better if you have seen them often. For this reason top players will continuously revise their preparation before important games, which, by the way, is one of the reasons for the blunders you see in top tournaments: for the players the games start much earlier than for the audience!

By utilizing the preparation in this book you will be able to eliminate one of the grandmaster's advantages. Only a few players in the world will have better preparation as White. However, the point I am making is far more important than separating fact and fiction: I want to draw the reader's attention to the things that a well-prepared grandmaster does remember. Take the current World Champion, Vishy Anand, as an example. In an important game in the 2005 World Championship in San Luis he introduced a stunning novelty, 23. ♖d2!?, against Michael Adams, which it turned out he had prepared for his matches against Gata Kamsky back in the mid 1990s. When he was asked if he remembered

his analysis, his answer was that he remembered some key points and conclusions, but of course not the analysis. This is still very impressive of course, but Anand's brain does not work differently from the rest of us, even if it seems to be running on a new generation of processors!

What I would like the average reader to take away from this book is the general structure of an opening repertoire, which can be revisited again and again, which will not be refuted, even if it needs a bit of updating over the years. Grandmasters using this repertoire would probably be overjoyed if they could recall just the main lines, but because they work on their openings, they will often find for themselves the moves they have forgotten, because the understanding of the opening lasts longer.

There is another difference between grandmasters and amateurs that I did not consciously think about until I worked on this project. While I often play the Catalan and the Slav, it is very rare that I play against the Tarrasch, the Albin Counter Gambit, or other openings with lesser reputations. For the amateur these minor lines are more the norm than the exception. So while I might spend fifty pages on the main line of the Catalan, this does not mean that this line is three or four times more important than the Tarrasch, just that there are three to four times more topical games with it. For the amateur it is likely that the smaller chapters are more important than the bigger ones and I would ask the reader to think about which chapters he reads, and not just read the book from the first page to the last. This is not a novel and the book's structure is less important than each chapter's structure. And I promise, the villain in black will, if not die, then at least suffer horribly in every chapter!

This book is very detailed for several reasons. First of all, I think about chess in a very concrete way and the book expresses how I think. Secondly, chess is played by moves, and I found it acceptable to explain many of my ideas with moves, which also covers the third reason, which is my already stated limitation as a writer. I hope this level of detail will assist the reader in forming a deeper understanding of the opening, and maybe also leave a few traces of actual knowledge in his mind that can assist him at the board.

Before I explain why I chose the lines I did for this book, I would like to say that it has been an honour for me to cooperate with Quality Chess on this project, especially with Jacob Aagaard, who has helped me a lot with the practical side of writing my first book.

## **The Repertoire**

These two books are essentially based on my own repertoire. I have used more than ninety percent of the lines already, and the remaining ten I plan to use quickly before everyone knows that I have prepared them. The reason there is not a total overlap is a practical one. The theory in the Slav is advancing with such breathtaking speed that it does not make sense to recommend the most critical lines of the Meran or Moscow Gambit. Instead I have chosen an interesting new system with 4.e3, which has only become popular in recent years,

but has already won games at World Championship level.

With some obvious exceptions, the repertoire is based on putting the king's bishop on g2. This will be especially true in the second volume, but is already the case in this book, which spends more space on the Catalan than all the other openings combined.

This is a serious repertoire intended to trouble strong opposition. The lines are threatening enough to force Black to make a concession, but this concession will be minor rather than mate or major loss of material. In modern chess, these minor concessions are often space and exchanging a bishop for a knight, so in many variations you will read versions of "White is a little better because of his space advantage and bishop pair." Generally, the bishop Black surrenders will be the light-squared one.

## **The Catalan**

I introduced the Catalan to my repertoire about 8 years ago and it has brought me a lot of success. First and foremost, I started playing the Catalan because it limits the opponent's choice. There is no need to think about such openings as the Ragozin Defence, the Nimzo and Queen's Indian or the Queen's Gambit Declined. Also, there is something reassuring about playing the same five or six moves in the opening as White against almost everything, without feeling that you are letting go of an advantage; you certainly get the pieces on squares where you know what they are doing.

It is a common misconception that the Catalan is an opening where White is trying to achieve a slight edge and squeeze the life out of his opponent. This is no less true than it is for the Spanish Opening. In both cases Black has the possibility of taking a defensive stand and exchanging his chances of counterplay for the passive hope of equalizing. However, if Black is ready for a fight, so is White! The sharp lines in Chapters 6 and 7 only differ from the sharp lines of, say, the Marshall Attack by being less likely to end in a draw by force.

Besides the move order used in this book, 1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3, the Catalan is also used against the Queen's/Nimzo-Indian set-up after 1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.g3, when 3...d5 4.♘f3 transposes to our book, while 3...c5 leads to Benoni positions and 3...♙b4† to the Bogo-Indian: openings that will be covered in the second volume.

## **The Slav**

As I mentioned, the choice to play 1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.e3 against the Slav was mainly a practical one. But it is also a line that fits in with the rest of the repertoire rather well. White is not seeking an immediate tactical confrontation, but the position is rich in positional ideas and it is quite likely that White will gain the advantage of the two bishops: something I always enjoy.



## The Queen's Gambit

When you play the Catalan you do not have to worry about the Queen's Gambit in the same way, as after 1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 we are right where we want to be. However, there are some sidelines White needs to know about. The most important of these was, to my surprise, the Tarrasch variation. This variation was deemed almost unplayable two decades ago, when Karpov created textbook examples as he outplayed the contender to his World Championship title, Garry Kasparov. However, in the lines with 9.♙g5 c4! I could find no advantage, as explained in Chapter 25. For this reason I chose an idea that was previously unknown to me.

## The Queen's Gambit Accepted

In this line there are two significant ways to play for an advantage. Either White plays the aggressive 3.e4, which I was thinking about employing in this book, or he plays 3.e3 and later on 7.♙b3!, as I eventually decided. The reason for this was that Quality Chess will publish a book by the Danish Grandmaster and well-known theoretician, Lars Schandorff, called *Playing the Queen's Gambit*. Lars will recommend 3.e4 in a repertoire that is based mainly on gaining space. I thought it would be a disappointment for those who decide to purchase both books if we covered the same ground, so I chose 3.e3. This choice was a fortuitous one, as I am very pleased with the lines I ended up covering against this opening, not least because I managed to mate the leading manual for Black, *The Queen's Gambit Accepted*, by the Chess Stars authors Sakaev and Semkov.

## Volume Two

Volume Two should be published in the early spring of 2009. It will cover all the obvious Indian defences, such as the King's Indian, the Gruenfeld, the Benko Gambit and so on. We will also be looking at two lines that could equally well have been in this volume. They arise after 1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.g3, and now both 3...♙b4† and 3...c5 lead to positions which could either be classified under the Catalan, or under the Bogo-Indian and the Benoni. For aesthetic reasons I decided to leave them for the next volume. First of all, they do not arise after 1.d4 d5 and, secondly, I expect this will make the books closer to equal in length. If the latter of these observations will turn out to be true, only time will tell. Now it is time for me to get back to work on the second volume. I wish the reader all the best, and hope that he or she enjoys the book.

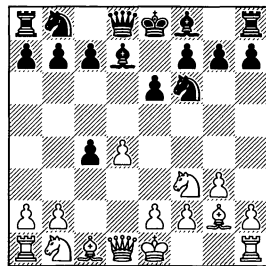
Boris Avrukh

Beersheba, October 28th 2008

# Chapter 1

## The Catalan

4...dxc4 and 5...♗d7



### Variation Index

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♗g2 ♗d7

6.♘e5 ♗c6 7.♘xc6 ♘xc6 8.0-0

A) 8...♗e7

p 15

B) 8...♘d5

p 17

C) 8...♗d7 9.e3 ♖b8 10.♗e2 b5 11.b3 cxb3 12.axb3

p 18

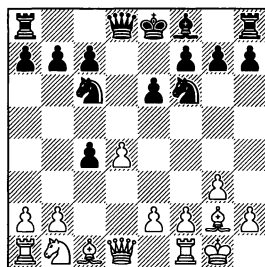
C1) 12...♗b4

p 20

C2) 12...♖b6

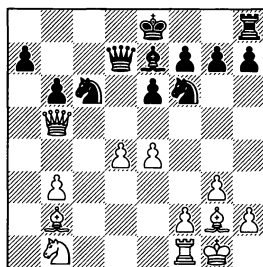
p 20

Main line after 8.0-0



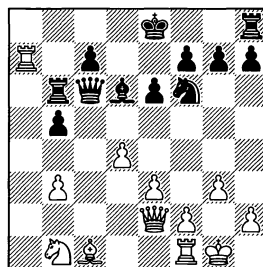
Three options; A, B and C

C1) after 17...♗e7



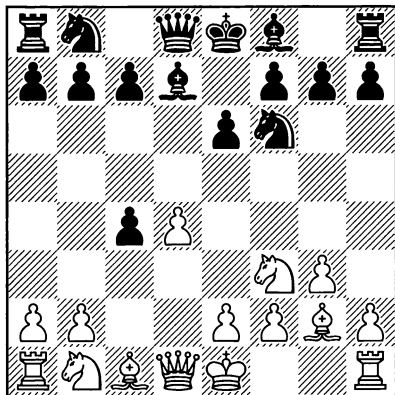
18.♞c1!N

C2) after 14...♗d6



15.♗d2!N

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♟f3 ♟f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2  
♙d7



Recently this has been a rare continuation, but in the late 1980s it was regularly employed by the chess elite. In general Black's idea is to play ...♙c6, but Black can react differently with ...c5 and ...♙c6, or even ...♙b5: everything depends on White's next move.

### 6.♟e5

This move is supposed to be the reason 5...♙d7 went out of fashion. White has tried other options as well, such as 6.♟c2 and 6.♟bd2, but Black was quite OK.

### 6...♙c6

This is a natural reaction.

Putting the other piece on c6 looks rather dubious:

6...♟c6 7.♟xc4

After this Black's light-squared bishop remains passive on d7.

7...♟d5

7...♙b4† 8.♟c3 ♟d5 9.♟d3 (Razuvaev's recommendation in *Chess Informant 57* was 9.0-0 ♟xc3 [Much worse is 9...♙xc3 10.bxc3 ♟xc3 11.♟d3 and White dominates with his pair of bishops, as Black cannot play 11...♟xd4 12.♙e1! ♟dxe2† 13.♙xe2

♟xe2† 14.♟xe2 0-0 15.♙a3 ♙e8 16.♙d1 ♟c8 17.♟a5 c6 18.♟c4!+ with total domination.] 10.bxc3 ♙xc3 11.♙b1 This is worthy of consideration.) 9...♟f6 10.e3 (There is no point in entering into the complications of 10.a3?! ♟xd4 11.axb4 ♟xb4 12.♟b1 ♟bc2† 13.♟f1 ♟xa1 14.♟xa1 ♟b3∞ with mutual chances.) 10...♟g6 11.♙e4 (11.e4 would also lead to an advantage for White) 11...♟h5 Razuvaev – Klovans, Bern 1993, and now simplest would have been 12.0-0 0-0 13.a3 ♙e7 14.♙g2 with a pleasant edge for White.

8.0-0 ♟b6

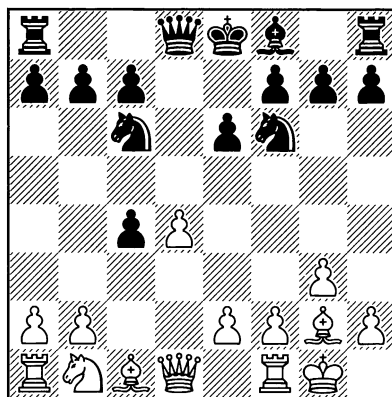
This position occurred in Babik – Husson, Stockerau 1991. I believe almost every knight's move should give White an advantage, but I prefer logical play:

9.♟ba3 ♙e7 10.e3 0-0 11.♙d2

White has stable Catalan pressure.

### 7.♟xc6 ♟xc6 8.0-0

This move is stronger than 8.♟a4 ♟d7 when Black is alright after 9.♟xc4 ♟xd4 10.♙xb7 ♙b8 11.♙g2 ♙b4† as Black's dynamic play fully compensates for his weaknesses on the queenside and White's pair of bishops.



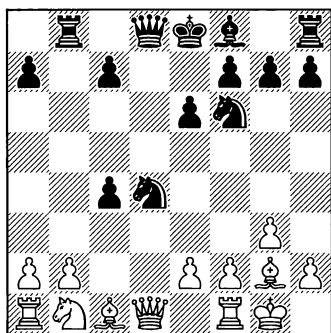
We have reached the first branching point. In this position Black has experimented with A) 8...♙e7 and B) 8...♟d5!?, but the main

line continues to be C) 8...♙d7. In addition to these, we should also have a quick look at:

8...♘d4?!

This has only occurred twice in practice, as Black quickly understood that after:

9.♙xb7 ♖b8 10.♙g2



Black's position is rather dubious.

10...♙d7

10...♙c5 11.♘d2 (11.e3 looks good as well) 11...c3 (after 11...0-0 12.♘xc4 White has a long-term advantage, thanks to his bishop pair and better pawn structure) 12.bxc3 ♘b5 13.♙c2± Black faced serious problems in Gulko – Korchnoi, Amsterdam 1989.

11.e3 ♘f5

11...♘b5 12.♙a4 regains the pawn with an advantage.

12.♙c2 ♙b5 13.♘d2 ♘d6 14.b3 cxb3?

This happened in Tratar – Plesec, Slovenia 1994.

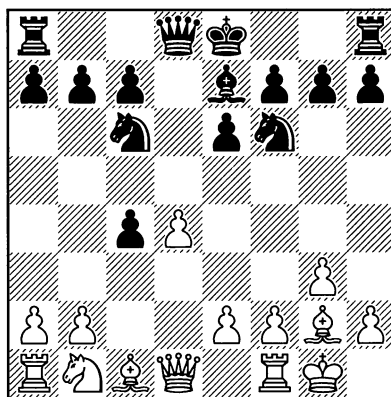
The lesser evil would be 14...♙e7, though White is clearly better after 15.bxc4 ♙a6 16.c5 ♘f5 17.♘b3 0-0 18.♙d1.

White could now grab a decisive advantage with:

15.♙c6† ♘d8 16.axb3

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2 ♙d7 6.♘e5 ♙c6 7.♘xc6 ♘xc6 8.0-0)

A) 8...♙e7



Once again White has a tough choice. Finally I decided to go with a new move.

9.♙a4

9.e3 seemed unclear to me after 9...e5! 10.♙xc6† (the endgame arising after 10.dxe5 ♙xd1 11.♙xd1 ♘xe5 12.♙xb7 ♖b8 13.♙g2 0-0 is fine for Black due to his activity, as in Gyorkos – Farago, Zalakaros 1994) 10...bxc6 11.dxe5 ♙xd1 12.♙xd1 ♘g4 (12...♘d7 13.♙d2! is better for White) 13.f4 ♙c5 with sharp play in Kallai – Anka, Balatonbereny 1995.

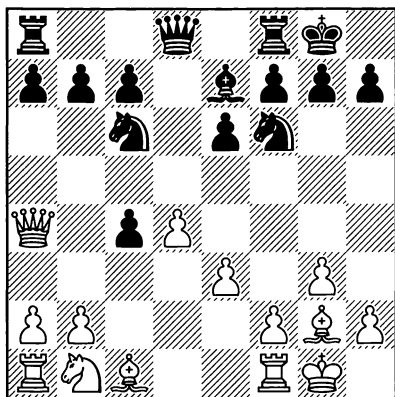
9...0-0

White is comfortably better after 9...♙d7 10.♙d1 0-0 11.♘c3 ♙fd8 12.♙xc4 With an obvious edge, Johnson – Stracy, Dunedin 1999.

Unfortunately Black's try to complicate the game falls short: 10...0-0 (instead of 10...0-0) 11.♘c3 ♘d5 12.♙xc4 ♘b6 13.♙b5! with a nice refutation if Black takes the central pawn: 13...♘d4 14.♙a5 ♘b8 15.e3 ♘e2† 16.♘f1 ♘d5 17.♘d5 ♘xc1 18.♙axc1 exd5 19.♙xd5 ♙d6 20.♙b5 b6 21.♙a6 ♙c8 22.♙xb6† and mate in two.

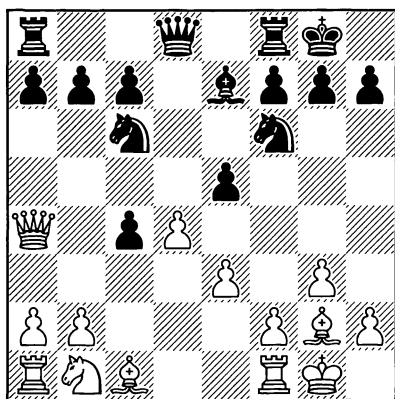
Or 10...♘b4 11.♙xd7† ♘xd7 12.♘a3± regaining the pawn with advantage.

## 10.e3



## 10...e5!N

This move has never occurred in tournament practice, nevertheless it is critical. White is obviously better after 10...d4 11.a3 d5 12.xc4± C. Horvath – Lukacs, Budapest 1994, or 10...a6 11.xc4± J. Horvath – Bokros, Szekszard 1996.



## 11.♞d1!

Other options are worse: 11.dxe5 dxe5 12.xb7 ♞b8 13.g2 ♞d7 with counterplay, or 11.xc6 bxc6 12.dxe5 d4 with mutual chances.

## 11...exd4

After 11...♞c8 12.♞xc4 (There is no point in White giving up his light-squared bishop: 12.xc6?! bxc6 13.dxe5 d4 14.f4 ♞e6 and Black will always have plenty of counterplay against White's king.) 12...exd4 13.exd4 ♞d6 14.d3 White is better, thanks to his strong light-squared bishop.

## 12.♞xc6

Black gets a pretty solid position after 12.♞xc4 d7 13.exd4 d6 14.♞f1 d4! (14...♞f6 15.d3 ♞e7 16.♞e3± is better for White) 15.d3 c6 16.a3 d4d5 17.♞d3 ♞e8 18.♞d2 ♞d7 and Black is close to equality.

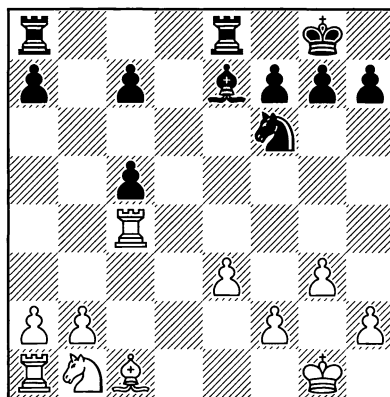
## 12...bxc6 13.♞xd4 ♞e8

White looks better in every line:

13...d7 14.♞xc6 d5 15.♞e4 ♞d6 16.d2 ♞e8 17.♞g2 ♞f6 18.f4 d4 19.d4 ♞g6 20.h3 d6 21.dxf6+ ♞xf6 22.♞xc4± with a healthy extra pawn.

13...♞d6 14.♞xc6 ♞e7 15.d2 and White wins a pawn for nothing.

## 14.♞xc4 c5 15.♞xe8 ♞fxe8



## 16.♞f1

Less clear is 16.d3 ♞ed8 17.b3 d7 with counterplay.

**16...♞ed8 17.♙e2 ♘d7 18.♞c2**

This endgame is quite unpleasant for Black:

**18...♙e5**

18...♙f8 19.♙a3 ♙e6 20.♙c4 with a clear advantage.

**19.♙a3 ♞ab8 20.♙d2**

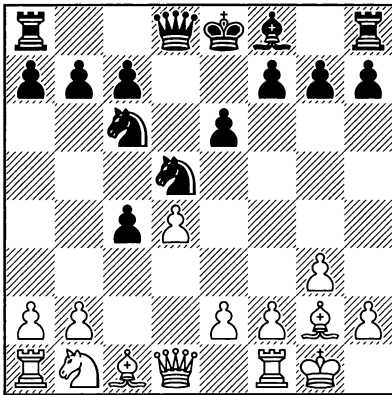
Black is going to suffer for the rest of the game.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♙f3 ♙f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2 ♙d7 6.♙e5 ♙c6 7.♙xc6 ♙xc6 8.0-0)

**B) 8...♙d5!?**

This is a quite playable alternative though it has only occurred twice in tournament practice.

In my opinion White should continue with the same new move as in variation A:

**9.♞a4N**

I cannot see another way to fight successfully for an advantage.

In both games White opted for 9.e3, but after the most natural 9...♙e7 I cannot find anything special for White. (Less accurate is 9...♞b8 as in Konopka – Huber, Marbach 1994, when

White should simply continue 10.♞e2 b5 11.b3 cxb3 12.axb3 with fine compensation.) 10.♞c2 This position happened in Kilgus – Brehovsky, Aschach 2004, and Black could have simply held onto his extra pawn with 10...b5 and if 11.b3 ♙cb4 12.♞e2 c5! Black easily equalizes.

**9...♞d6**

9...♞d7 10.♞xc4 ♙b6 11.♞d3 0-0-0 12.♞f3!± and White's light-squared bishop should secure him an advantage.

9...♙b6 10.♙xc6† bxc6 11.♞xc6† ♞d7 and now White has a pleasant choice between: 12.♞xd7† (and 12.♞f3 ♙e7 13.♙c3 0-0 14.♞d1± and White is slightly better, due to Black's damaged pawn structure on the queenside) 12...♙xd7 13.e4± White's chances are slightly preferable in this endgame, thanks to his better pawn structure.

**10.♞xc4**

10.e3 ♙b6 11.♞c2 e5 leads to double-edged play.

**10...♞b4**

This is the point of Black's idea.

**11.♞xb4**

If 11.♙xd5 exd5 12.♞xd5 ♞xd4 13.♞f3 Black obtains reasonable play with 13...♙b4!.

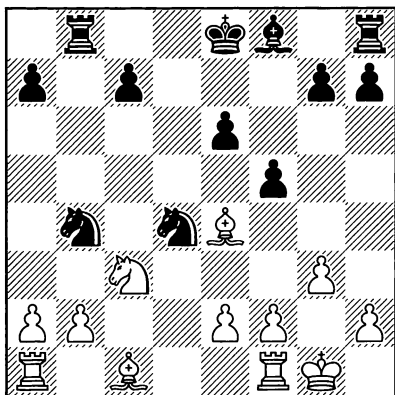
**11...♙dxb4 12.♙c3 ♙xd4**

After 12...♙c2 13.d5! exd5 14.♞b1 (less clear is 14.♙xd5 0-0-0) 14...0-0-0 (Black cannot play 14...d4?! 15.♙b5 0-0-0 16.♙f4 ♙d6 17.♙xd6† cxd6 18.♞fd1 and White will regain the d4-pawn with a clear advantage) 15.♙xd5± White is better thanks to his pair of bishops.

**13.♙xb7 ♞b8 14.♙e4**

14.♙g2 ♙bc2 15.♞b1 ♙b4 with counterplay.

## 14...f5



## 15.♙e3!

Only in this way can White fight for the advantage: 15.♙b1 ♙d6 allows Black good counterplay. And now Black has a choice:

## 15...♜xe2†

This looks like Black's best option.

15...fxe4 16.♙xd4 ♜c6 17.♙e3 ♝xb2 18.♞ab1 White will regain the e4-pawn, keeping an obvious advantage in the endgame due to his better pawn structure.

15...♙c5 16.♙b1! (16.♞ad1 ♜xe2† 17.♜xe2 ♙xe3 is equal) 16...0-0 (White is clearly better after 16...♜d5 17.♜xd5 exd5 18.♙g2! ♝xb2 19.♞d1 ♞b4 20.♙xf5±) 17.♞d1 ♞fd8 18.♙g2 ♜bc6 19.♙d3 and White is better thanks to his bishops.

## 16.♜xe2 fxe4 17.♜c3

Less convincing is 17.♙xa7 ♞b7 18.♙d4 ♙f7.

## 17...♜d5 18.♙d4!

Black comfortably equalizes after 18.♙xa7 ♞xb2 19.♜xe4 ♞b4 followed by 20...♞a4.

## 18...♜f6

Or 18...♞b4 19.♞ad1 c5 20.♙e5 ♜b6 21.b3±.

## 19.♞fe1 ♙b4 20.♞e3!

White has the better prospects.

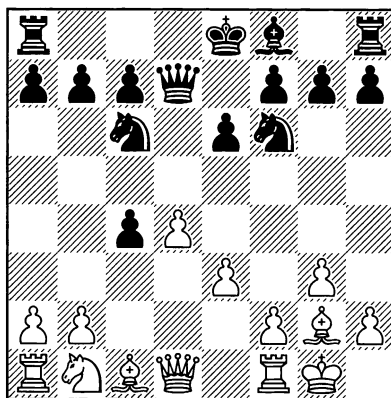
(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♜f3 ♜f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2 ♙d7 6.♜e5 ♙c6 7.♜xc6 ♜xc6 8.0-0)

## C) 8...♞d7

This is Black's main continuation.

## 9.e3

According to the old theory Black equalizes after 9.♜c3 ♜xd4 10.♙xb7 ♞b8 11.♙g2 ♙e7 12.e3 ♜b5 13.♞c2 ♜xc3 14.♞xc3 ♞b5! as in Yusupov – Karpov, Belfort 1988.



## 9...♞b8

Quite principled is

## 9...e5

but White is better after

## 10.dxe5 ♜xe5 11.♙xb7

In my opinion this move order is stronger than 11.♞xd7† ♜fxd7 12.♙xb7 ♞b8 13.♙g2 Skodvin – Tallaksen, Norway 2006, when after 13...♙c5 14.♜c3 0-0 15.♞d1 ♞fd8 Black has reasonable play.

## 11...♞b8 12.♙g2 ♞xd1

If Black continues 12...♙c5 White has

another interesting idea: 13.b3!? 0–0 14.♙b2 ♜fd8 15.♞xd7 ♜fxd7 16.♜d2 cxb3 17.axb3 ♜d3 18.♙c3 and White is clearly better.

13.♞xd1 ♙d6

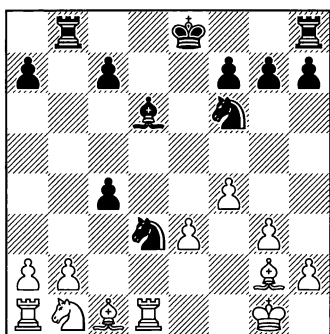
I also analysed 13...♙b4 then White has to play very energetically: 14.f4! ♜d3 15.♜d2 c3 16.bxc3 ♙xc3 17.♞b1 0–0 18.♞xb8 ♞xb8 19.♜e4 ♞b1 20.♜xc3 ♞xc1 21.♞xc1 ♜xc1 22.e4 and this endgame is very dangerous for Black. White's king will quickly move towards the centre, and Black's weak pawns on the queenside are an important factor.

14.f4N

In Cvitan – Vaganian, Neum 2000, White played 14.♜d2 and also achieved an advantage, but the text looks even more convincing:

14...♜d3

14...♜ed7 15.♙f3! (with the idea of 16.e4) 15...♜c5 16.♜d2 and White wins a pawn.



15.♜d2! ♜xb2 16.♙xb2 ♞xb2 17.♜xc4 ♞c2 18.♜xd6† cxd6 19.♞xd6 ♜e7 20.♞a6

With a technically winning position.

9...♜d5

This is not so interesting as on move 8, as Black has wasted time on ...♞d7.

10.♞e2 ♜b6

Certainly Black cannot play 10...b5 11.a4! and White regains the pawn with dividends.

11.♜d2 ♜a5 12.♜f3

Also interesting is 12.♜e4 ♜c6 13.♞d1 ♙e7

14.♙d2 0–0 15.♙c3 followed by ♜d2–c4.

12...♙d6 13.♙d2 ♜c6 14.♙c3 ♜e7

Or 14...0–0 15.♜d2 and White gets back the pawn with a clear advantage, thanks to his powerful light-squared bishop.

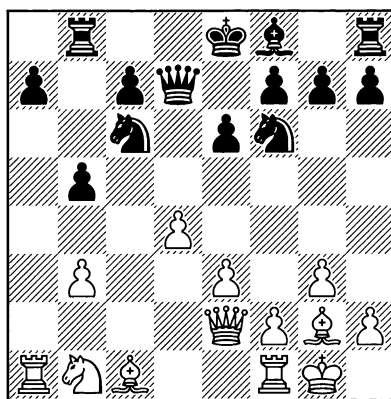
15.e4!

White had powerful compensation for the pawn in Slipak – Adla, Buenos Aires 1990.

**10.♞e2 b5 11.b3 cxb3**

Certainly not 11...♜a5?! which runs into 12.♙d2 b4 13.bxc4 with advantage to White.

**12.axb3**



At this point we have the final branching point of this chapter. Black has two main options: **C1) 12...♙b4** and **C2) 12...♞b6**.

Simply bad is 12...♙e7? 13.♜c3 0–0 (Black can also play 13...b4, but after 14.♞c4! ♜d8 15.♜e2 c6 16.e4 Black is doomed to passive defence) 14.♜xb5 White has regained the pawn, and he maintained a clear positional advantage in Moutousis – Rozentalis, Athens 2007.

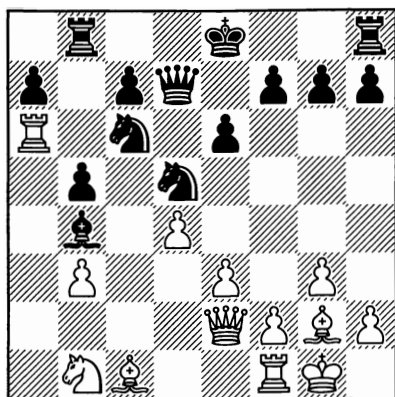
Once again there is 12...♜d5, but this is probably the worst moment for this move, as after 13.♙b2 White is threatening the unpleasant 14.e4 followed by 15.d5 when the



g7-pawn will be under attack. 13...b4 This position occurred in Orlov – Mijailovic, Novi Sad 1989. Now White could have effectively decided the game with 14.♖c4!N ♙e7 15.♖c1 ♜b6 16.e4 ♘c3 (otherwise 17.d5 comes with great effect) 17.♘xc3 bxc3 18.♙xc3 and Black most probably will lose the a7-pawn.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2 ♙d7 6.♘e5 ♙c6 7.♘xc6 ♘xc6 8.0-0 ♖d7 9.e3 ♜b8 10.♖e2 b5 11.b3 cxb3 12.axb3)

C1) 12...♙b4 13.♜a6 ♘d5



In this position I want to play:

#### 14.♙b2!

White has tried to develop his bishop differently with 14.♙d2, but after 14...♙xd2 15.♘xd2 ♜b6 16.♖xb6 (16.♜fa1 0-0 17.♖xb6 cxb6 18.♖xb5 ♜c8 and Black should also be able to hold) 16...cxb6 17.♖xb5 ♘cb4 18.♖xd7† ♘xd7 19.♘c4 ♜b8 Black easily held this slightly worse endgame in Janjgava – Abramovic, New York 1990.

#### 14...♜b6

14...0-0 15.♖c1 ♘a5 16.♖d1 and Black faces serious problems. For example, 16...c6 17.e4 ♘f6 18.♙c3 ♙xc3 19.♘xc3 b4 20.♘a4

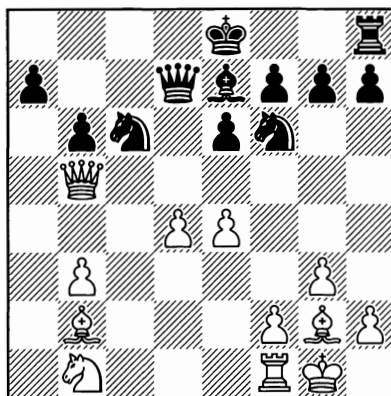
♖c7 21.♖d3!± and Black is helpless against White's idea of 22.♜c5.

#### 15.♜xb6 cxb6?!

The wrong recapture. 15...axb6 was preferable, though White is better after 16.♖xb5 ♘a5 17.♖d3 0-0 18.e4 ♘f6 19.♙d1. Although Black's position looks solid, White has a pleasant edge thanks to his space advantage and bishop pair.

#### 16.e4 ♘f6 17.♖xb5 ♙e7

White was threatening 18.d5. This position occurred in Hofland – Westerman, corr. 1990.



#### 18.♜c1!N

This would have been very strong:

18...♘a5 19.♜c8† ♙d8 20.♖xd7† ♘xd7 21.♜a8! ♘xb3 22.♜xa7† ♙c7 23.d5!±

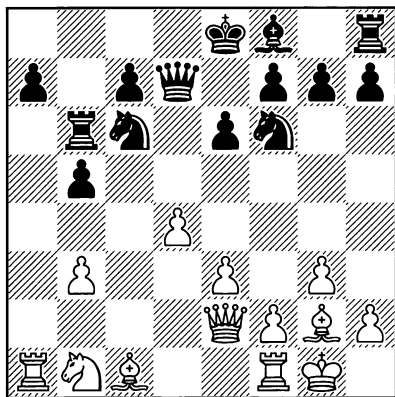
Black faces a serious attack.

(1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.g3 d5 4.♙g2 dxc4 5.♘f3 ♙d7 6.♘e5 ♙c6 7.♘xc6 ♘xc6 8.0-0 ♖d7 9.e3 ♜b8 10.♖e2 b5 11.b3 cxb3 12.axb3)

#### C2) 12...♜b6

This is definitely Black's main choice, although other options have occasionally been tried. In

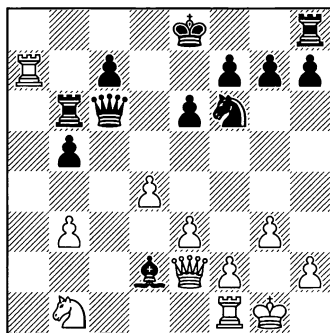
reply to 12...♞b6 I prefer the rather concrete approach of the text to the more popular 13.♙b2, where White definitely keeps good compensation, thanks to his powerful light-squared bishop and the half-open a- and c-files, but Black's defensive resources should not be underestimated.



### 13.♙xc6! ♞xc6 14.♞xa7 ♙d6

Black has two important alternatives at this point:

14...♙b4 15.♙d2 ♙xd2



And now I believe

16.♜xd2!N

is a serious improvement over 16.♞xd2 which was played in both the games where Black played 14...♙b4. Then I dislike White's prospects after 16...♜e4!. Only this move

promises Black decent play (clearly inferior is 16...0-0?! 17.♞c1 ♞f3 18.♞axc7 ♜e4 19.♞e1 and Black does not have compensation for the pawn, Berkes – Savanovic, Vogosca 2007). 17.♞c1 ♜d7! 18.f3 ♜d6 Black successfully defended this position in Krasenkow – Sanchez Guirado, Ponferrada 1991.

16...0-0 17.♜f3 ♜d7

Covering the e5-square. White is clearly better after 17...♞a6 18.♜e5 ♞b6 19.♞xa6 ♞xa6 20.♞c1±.

18.♞fa1 h6 19.b4 ♞b7 20.♞7a2±

White keeps a long-term advantage, thanks to the weakness of Black's c7-pawn.

14...♞a6 15.♞xa6 ♞xa6 16.♙b2 At this point it makes sense to look at a few options:

Not so good is 16...c6?! 17.♞c1 ♙d6 18.♞c2 and Black has difficulties defending his c6-pawn.

16...♞b7

Now White can break through with the nice:

17.♜c3 c6

17...b4?! 18.♜a4 would certainly lead to a strategically difficult position for Black, due to his permanently weak pawn on c7.

18.d5!

Seizing the initiative. For example:

18...exd5

18...♜xd5 19.♜xd5 cxd5 20.♞a1 threatening the unpleasant 21.♙d4 following by 22.♞a7. Black's position is very dangerous.

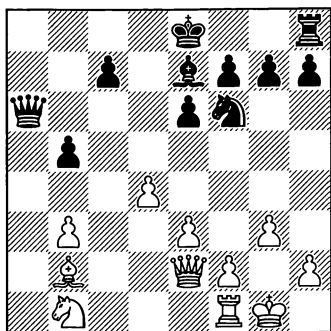
19.e4 ♙e7

Or 19...d4 20.e5 ♜d7 21.♜e4 ♜c5 (otherwise ♜d6† would be very unpleasant) 22.♙xd4 ♜e6 23.♙e3 ♙e7 24.f4 g6 25.♞a1 with a clear advantage.

20.exd5 cxd5 21.♞e1±

Black cannot castle without losing material.

16...♙e7



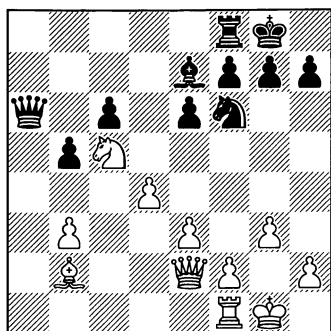
17. Qc3! N

This is my improvement over 17. Rcl ♖b7 18. Qa3 as was played in Krasenkow – Kelecevic, Wattens 1989. In this game Black overlooked a neat defensive idea: 18...0-0 19. ♖xb5 (19. Qxb5 c6 followed by 20... ♖xb3 is just equal) 19... ♖b8!, which would have allowed him to equalize without any serious difficulty.

17... c6 18. Qa4! 0-0

18... Qd7 19. d5 (White can also try another type of position: 19. Qc5 Qxc5 20. dxc5 0-0 21. ♖a1 ♖c8 22. b4 Qd8 23. ♖g4 ♕f8 24. ♔g2 White is playing without risk, but the position looks defensible for Black.) 19...0-0 (if 19... cxd5 20. ♕xg7 ♖g8 21. ♖b2 ♖b7 22. Qc3 b4 23. Qa4 White is clearly better, as his opponent's king is stuck in the centre) 20. dxe6 fxe6 21. Qd1! Qf6 22. ♕xf6 ♖xf6 (of course not 22... ♕xf6? 23. Qc5 ♖c8 24. ♖g4 with a clear advantage) 23. Qc3± White has a pleasant edge with his strong knight on e4.

19. Qc5

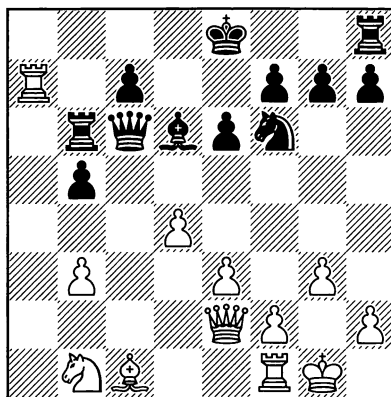


19... ♖b6

Opening lines for White's dark-squared bishop would be dangerous for Black: 19... ♕xc5 20. dxc5±

20. ♖c1±

With a typical Catalan advantage, thanks to Black's weak c6-pawn, as well as the c5-square.



15. ♕d2! N

A natural novelty that poses Black definite problems. White's idea is to seize the initiative along the c-file, while White's dark-squared bishop might be useful on a5.

The only move White has tried in practice is:

15. ♕a3

Here I noticed the following pretty forced line:

15... ♖a6!

After 15... ♕xa3?! White gained a nice edge with 16. Qxa3 0-0 17. ♖c2! ♖xc2 18. Qxc2± in Stohl – Zsu. Polgar, Rimavska Sobota 1991.

16. ♖c1

16. ♖xa6 ♖xa6 17. ♕xd6 cxd6 18. Qc3 ♔e7! should be an easy draw for Black.

16... ♖xc1† 17. ♕xc1 ♖xa7 18. ♖xb5† ♔e7

I think Black should hold this quite easily with two rooks against the queen.

I also tried 15.♔b2 0–0 16.♖c1 ♗d5 17.♗c2 (17.♘d2 ♖c6 and Black is close to equality) 17...♘e4 18.♘c3 ♘xc3 19.♗xc3 f5= but after the exchange of knights, I cannot imagine how White can seize the initiative.

### 15...♖b8

Another line is:

15...0–0 16.♖c1 ♗d5

Too passive is 16...♗d7 17.e4 e5 18.d5± with a clear advantage.

17.♔a5 ♖c6

Here White has an interesting pawn sacrifice at his disposal:

18.♘c3! ♗xb3

Black should accept the challenge as 18...♗f5 19.♖b7! ♔a8 20.♖xb5 ♗g6 21.♔b4± leaves Black a pawn down.

19.♖b1 ♗c4

19...♖xc3?! 20.♖xb3 ♖xb3 21.♔xc7 should be winning for White.

20.♗xc4 ♖xc4

20...bxc4 21.e4! e5 (White wins after 21...♘e8 22.d5 exd5 23.exd5 ♔c5 24.dxc6 ♔xa7 25.♔b4!+–) 22.d5 ♔c5 23.dxc6 ♔xa7 24.♔xc7 The c-pawn decides the issue. The tactical justification is 24...♖c8 25.♔xe5 ♖xc6 26.♔d4!! and White wins.

21.♘xb5 e5

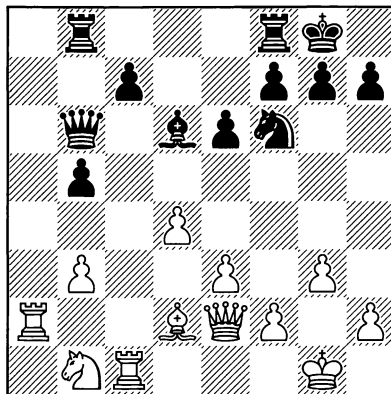
Black obviously loses after 21...♖b8? 22.♘d6 ♖xb1† 23.♙g2 and the weakness of the 8th rank decides.

22.♔xc7 ♔xc7 23.♖xc7 ♖xc7 24.♘xc7 exd4 25.exd4

White has a healthy extra pawn, but Black has some hopes of survival.

### 16.♖c1 ♗b6 17.♖a2 0–0

And now White has two options:



Either White can play 18.♗f3 ♖fc8 19.♗c6± or:

### 18.♔a5 ♗b7 19.♖ac2 ♖fc8 20.♘d2 ♔a8 21.b4±

In both cases White maintains typical Catalan pressure, as Black has failed to achieve the desired ...c7–c5 advance.

### Conclusion:

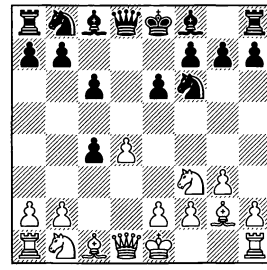
Objectively White's chances are slightly preferable in this line. In the main line my novelty 15.♔d2! is very important and poses Black definite problems. In this 5...♔d7 line it is very hard to imagine how Black could possibly seize the initiative, and this is probably the main reason why this system is out of fashion.



# Chapter 2

## The Catalan

### 4...dxc4 and 5...c6



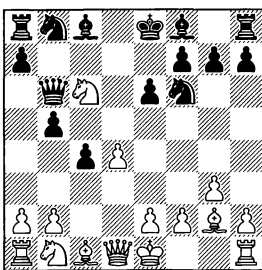
### Variation Index

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.f3 f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.g2 c6

6.fxe5

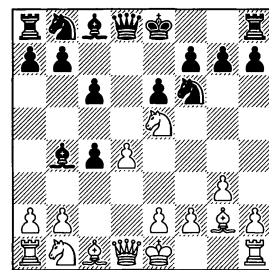
A) 6...b5 7.fxc6 ♖b6 8.fxa5!	p 26
A1) 8...♙xa5†	p 27
A2) 8...f6d5	p 29
B) 6...♙b4† 7.♙d2	p 33
B1) 7...♙e7	p 34
B2) 7...♙xd4	p 35

How to exploit the diagonal?



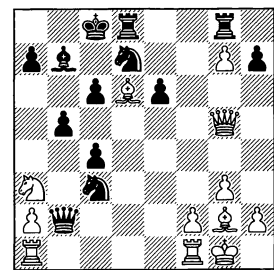
Korchnoi's shocker 8.fxa5!

B) 6...♙b4†



Gambit play 7.♙d2!

B2) Goloschapov's novelty



18.♙ae1!N

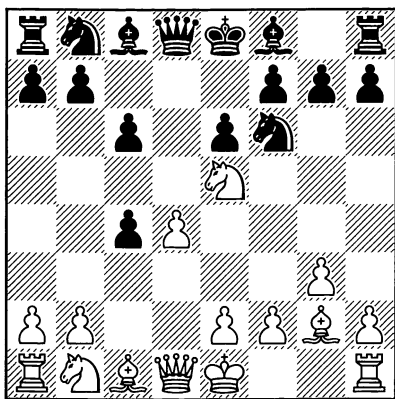
1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2 c6

This is not a particularly popular variation, but it still requires precise play from White. Black's idea is very simple: to support his extra pawn with ...b7-b5.

### 6.♘e5

In my opinion this is the most principled continuation. White is aiming to regain the pawn, and maintain typical Catalan pressure.

There are other options as well, such as 6.0–0 b5 7.♘e5 ♙b7 with a lot of theory, or 6.a4.



In this position we have to look at two major alternatives for Black: **A) 6...b5** and **B) 6...♙b4†**. I would also like to mention two minor options, which deserve a little attention, though not more.

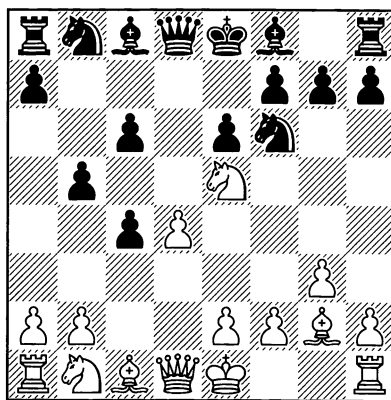
6...♘bd7 7.♘xc4 ♘b6 (Black's idea is to get some play on the queenside after 8.♘xb6 axb6, but certainly White has a different plan) 8.♘e5! c5 9.♙e3 ♘bd5 This is what happened in D'Costa – Richmond, Birmingham 2000. White should have continued 10.dxc5 ♗a5† 11.♙d2 ♗xc5 12.♘a3! with a nice position.

6...♙e7 7.0–0 0–0 8.♘c3 ♘bd7 9.♘xc4 ♘b6 10.♘e5± Once again it is the same idea: White

avoids the knight swap and maintains an undisputed positional edge, thanks to his space advantage and strong Catalan bishop, Raetsky – Lemanczyk, Germany 2001. Raetsky is the author of two books on the Catalan, one in English and one in German, which is why I chose his game. I have 53 games with this position in my database, with players such as Bacrot, Miton, Laznicka and Gleizerov all winning with White. However, the position is not very theoretical, so we will just stop here and say that the position is better for White, and holds few risks for him.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2 c6 6.♘e5)

### A) 6...b5

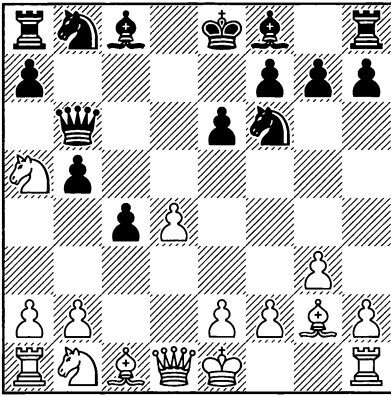


In this position White has a very promising idea at his disposal. If White manages to regain the pawn he would get a very pleasant position with typical Catalan pressure.

### 7.♘xc6

7.a4 would transpose to the 5...b5 line, which will be examined in Chapter 7 on page 99.

7...♗b6 8.♘a5!



This move was first played by Victor Korchnoi in 2004. Even after more than 60 years of playing the Catalan, the closest we have to a superhero in chess still has something new and surprising to add to opening theory. Actually the knight jump to the edge of the board looks extremely strange, as we should not forget that Black can capture it with check! Nevertheless, White has serious threats along the h1-a8 diagonal, and all the tactics look great for him.

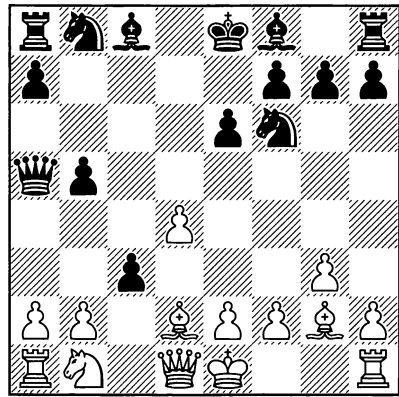
We now have two serious options: **A1) 8...Bxa5†** and **A2) 8...f2d5**.

Just bad is 8...f2b4? 9.f2d2 f2d2† (9...f2xa5 10.f2xa8 f2c6 11.0-0 f2xd2 12.f2xc6† Bxc6 13.Bxd2± and Black has no compensation for the exchange) 10.Bxd2 f2d5 11.f2c3! and Black cannot avoid losing material. For example, 11...f2b7 12.f2xb7 Bxb7 13.f2xd5 exd5 14.Bxe3† f2f8 15.Bg5+.

**(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.f3 f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.f2 c6 6.fxe5 b5 7.fxc6 Bb6 8.fa5!)**

Capturing the knight leads to a forced line, which has never been tested in practice, so you will have to be content with my elaborations on Korchnoi's analysis.

**A1) 8...Bxa5† 9.f2d2 c3**



### 10.bxc3

Less convincing is 10.f2xc3 b4 11.f2xa8 bxc3 12.f2xc3 Bb6.

### 10...f2d5 11.c4 b4 12.cxd5 exd5

Another possibility is to pin the d-pawn, but White also has a very promising position in this case:

12...f2b7 13.0-0 f2xd5

13...exd5 allows tactical solution: 14.Bb3 f2e7 (Black loses the pawn after 14...f2d7 15.a3) 15.f2c3! f2c6 16.f2e3 f2d8 17.Bfc1! (this is even stronger than 17.f2xd5 f2xd4 18.f2xd4 f2xd5 19.f2xd5 Bxd5 20.f2xg7 Bg8 when Black has some chances to survive) 17...0-0 18.f2xd5 White wins the central pawn.

14.e4 f2b7 15.a3! f2e7

Or 15...Bb5 16.axb4 f2xb4 17.f2a3! with a clear advantage.

16.d5!

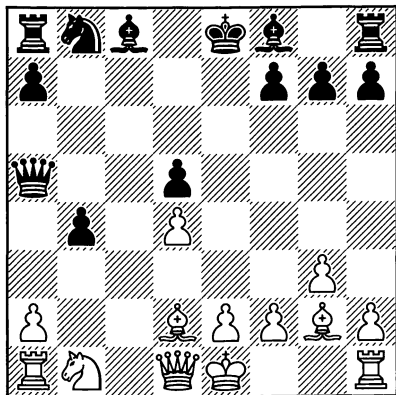
Black faces serious problems: most probably he will lose the b4-pawn, as White is threatening simply Bb3 and then just capturing the pawn.

Let's return to the main line.

White should be better in the long-term thanks to his superior pawn structure, but the



computer claims that White can also strike immediately with the very unexpected:



### 13. d3!

This subtle manoeuvre was suggested to me by my computer. White is only slightly better after more 'human' play:

13. f4 e6 14. d2 e7 15. 0-0 0-0 16. b3 Bb5 17. d5! d7

Black cannot take the pawn with 17...xc5 18. dxc5 Bxc5, as after 19. e4± White regains the pawn with a clear advantage.

18. dxe6 fxe6 19. h3

The pair of bishops gives White a pleasant edge.

### 13... d6

Certainly bad is 13...Bxa3 14. d5 and White wins.

If 13...e7 14. d2 Bb5 15. a3! d6 16. dxb4 dxb4 17. axb4 Bxb4 18. Ba4! White gets exactly the kind of desirable position he was aiming for. 18...Bxa4 19. Bxa4 dxd2± 20. dxd2 e6 21. Bhal±

### 14. d2 Bb5

Otherwise Black gets into deep trouble.

14...e6 15. 0-0 e7

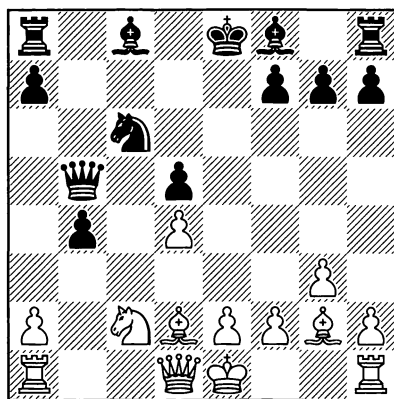
15...Bb5 is met strongly by 16. e4! with the idea 16...e7 17. a4! Ba5 (17...bxa3 loses to 18. exd5 dxd5 19. Bb1+—) 18. de3 and Black unavoidably will lose material.

16. a3 Bb5 17. dxb4 dxb4 18. dxb4 Bxb4 19. axb4 Bxb4 20. Bd3

20. e4 0-0 21. exd5 f5 is certainly better for White, but it seems to me that Black's position is defensible.

20...0-0 21. Bfb1 Bb6 22. Ba6 Bc7 23. Bba1

Black's position is strategically difficult, due to his weak pawns on a7 and d5.



### 15. a4!

A very effective move which forces Black to accept an inferior pawn structure.

15. 0-0 f5! would allow Black to escape to an unclear position.

### 15... bxa3

After 15...Ba5 the central push 16. e4 would come with great effect. 16...d6 (16...e6 17. 0-0 e7 18. de3! is already lost for Black) 17. 0-0 a6 18. Be1 0-0 19. exd5 de7 20. dxb4! A nice touch that secures White's advantage. 20...dxb4 21. d6 dxd2 22. dxe7 ex1 23. exf8 Bf8 24. Bxe1 White still has a healthy extra pawn.

### 16. 0-0!

With the idea of waiting for the f8-bishop to move and only then capturing on a3, winning a tempo compared with the immediate capture on a3.

Clearly worse is 16. ♖xa3 ♙xa3 17. ♖xa3 0–0 and White has some difficulties defending the d4-pawn.

### 16...♙e6

If 16...♙e7 then we play 17. ♖xa3 ♙xa3 18. ♖xa3 and Black cannot take with 18... ♖xd4? in view of 19. ♖a5 followed by 20. ♖xd5 with decisive threats.

### 17. ♖e1

Once again, waiting for the bishop to move.

### 17...♙e7 18. ♖xa3 ♙xa3 19. ♖xa3 0–0

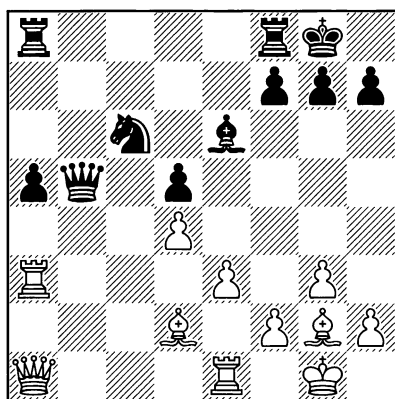
Black still cannot take the central pawn:

19... ♖xd4 20. e4! 0–0

After 20...dxe4 21. ♖xe4 Black is defenceless against White's threats. For example, 21... ♖c6 (or 21... ♖d8 22. ♙a5!) 22. ♖c3 ♖c8 23. ♖g4 0–0 24. ♖xe6 fxe6 25. ♖xe6† ♖h8 26. ♙xc6 with a winning position for White. 21. ♙c3 ♖c6 22. exd5 ♖ad8 23. ♙xg7 ♖xg7 24. ♖a1† ♖g8 25. dxc6

White has a decisive advantage.

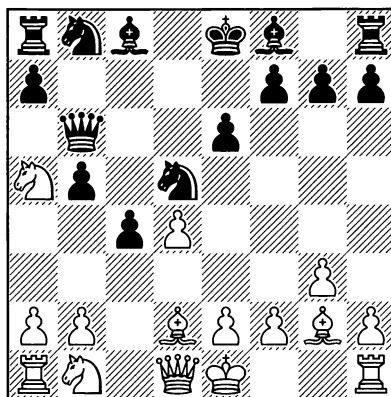
### 20. ♖a1 a5 21. e3



The bishop pair and Black's weak pawns on a5 and d5 give White a clear positional advantage.

(1. d4 d5 2. c4 e6 3. ♖f3 ♖f6 4. g3 dxc4 5. ♙g2 c6 6. ♖e5 b5 7. ♖xc6 ♖b6 8. ♖a5!)

### A2) 8... ♖d5 9. ♙d2



Black now has a wide choice and it is time for us to go a bit deeper. However, I do not want to give the impression that this is a topical theoretical position, so I have decided to keep it as a sideline.

### 9... ♖c6

Black has various alternatives:

### 9... ♖xd4?!

It seems this capture is very risky for Black.

### 10. ♖c3 a6

Other options are much worse:

10... ♖c5 11. 0–0 and Black is helpless against White's simple threat of ♖xd5 followed by ♙e3 and the d5-pawn will fall.

10... ♖d7 11. ♖xb5 ♖c5 12. a4 a6 13. b4! and White wins material.

### 11. 0–0 ♖d7 12. a4 ♖b6

12... b4 runs into 13. ♖xd5 exd5 14. ♖c6 and Black's position collapses.

13. axb5 axb5 14. ♖xb5 ♖c5 15. ♖c3 ♙e7

16. ♖xd5 ♜xd5

16...exd5? 17. ♙e3 and Black loses both his central pawns.

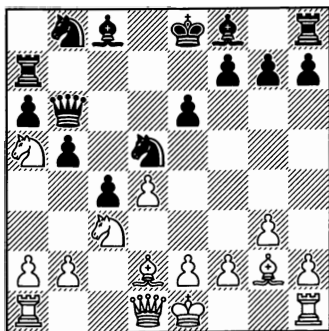
17. ♖c2 ♙a6 18. ♜xc4 0–0 19. b3

White is simply a pawn up.

9...a6

This is a quite logical idea, preparing to remove the rook from the dangerous diagonal.

10. ♜c3 ♙a7



But White can play:

11. ♙xd5

11. ♖xd5 exd5 12. ♙xd5 allows Black the following tactical resource: 12...c3! 13. ♙xc3 b4 14. ♜c4 ♖d8 with unnecessary complications.

11... ♖xa5

After 11...exd5 12. ♖xd5 ♖e6 13. ♖e3 White wins a pawn.

12. ♙g2 ♜d7

12...♙b7 13. e4 ♙e7 14. ♖g4 allows White an obvious initiative.

13. d5 b4

Black cannot play 13...♙b7 14. dxe6 ♜xd2 15. ♖xd2 ♙xg2, as after 16. exf7+ ♖xf7 17. ♜g1 followed by ♖d2-f4xb8, White wins material.

14. dxe6

14. ♖a4 ♖b6 15. ♙e3 ♙c5 16. ♙xc5 ♖xc5 17. ♜e4 ♖b5 Black has a reasonable position.

14...fxe6

14...♜xd2 15. ♖xd2 bxc3 16. exf7+ ♖xf7

17. bxc3 ♙e7 18. ♙d5+ White has an obvious advantage, because of Black's exposed king.

15. ♜e4

15. ♖a4 is less clear after 15... ♖f5.

15... ♙b7 16. ♖c2 ♙d5 17. 0–0 ♜c6 18. ♙e3

White is better positionally, due to Black's weak c4- and e6-pawns.

9...b4 10. ♜xc4 ♖xd4 11. ♖c2

It is difficult for Black to deal with White's initiative.

11... ♖d7

Black cannot play 11...♙a6 12. ♖a4+ ♖d8 13. ♜e3! as White has a clear advantage.

12. ♙e3 ♖g4 13. ♜bd2 ♙e7

13...♙b7 is met strongly by 14. ♜e4! with the unpleasant idea of ♜ed6+. After 14... ♜xe3 15. ♜xe3 ♖g6 16. ♜d1 Black faces serious problems with development.

14. ♙xa7!

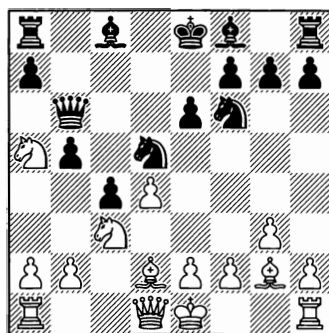
White wins the pawn, as Black cannot take the bishop:

14... ♜xa7 15. ♜d6+! ♙xd6 16. ♖xc8+ ♖e7

17. ♖xh8

This wins for White.

9... ♖d7 10. ♜c3 ♜f6



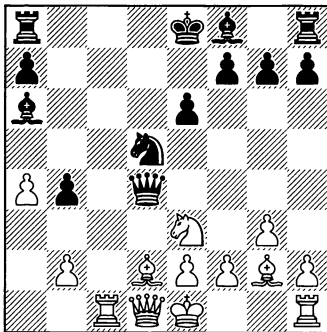
11. a4!

Using the fact that Black cannot play 11...a6 12. axb5 axb5 13. ♖xd5 ♜xd5 14. ♙xd5 exd5 15. ♜xc4! ♜xa1 16. ♜xb6 ♜xd1+ 17. ♜xd1, when he remains a pawn down.

11...b4 12.♟xc4 ♖xd4

This move is stronger than the game continuation: 12...bxc3? 13.♟xb6 cxd2† 14.♖xd2 axb6 15.0-0 when the position is clearly in White's favour as he is able to seize the initiative, while Black will have to develop his pieces. 15...♙a6 (15...♙b4 16.♖c2 0-0 17.e4 ♟e7 18.♖b3 ♙a5 19.♖fc1 and White has a clear advantage, and is also threatening 20.♖a3 with the idea b4) 16.♖fc1 ♟d8 Slugin – Kharlov, St Petersburg (The lesser evil would have been 16...♙b4 17.♖d1 ♙a5! [17...0-0 loses immediately after 18.e4 ♟e7 19.♖b3 ♙a5 20.♖a3! following by b4, trapping the bishop on a5] 18.e4 ♟b4 19.♙f1 ♙xf1 20.♖xf1 0-0 21.f3 ♟fd8 22.♖c4± and Black is doomed to a passive defence.) And here very strong would be: 17.a5! b5 (one of the ideas comes to light after 17...♙b4 18.♖c2 ♙xa5 19.♖xa5! bxa5 20.♖c6† and White is winning) 18.e4 ♙b4 19.♖d3 ♟e7 20.♖c7 0-0 21.♖a7+- and Black is losing the b5-pawn.

13.♟xd5 ♟xd5 14.♖c1 ♙a6 15.♟e3



15...♟d8

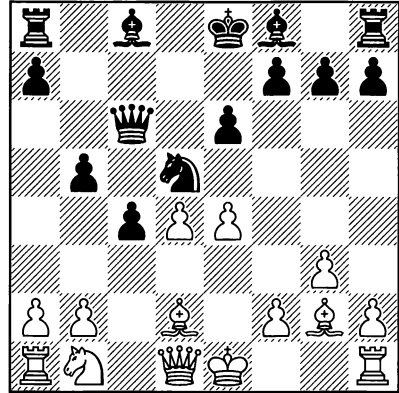
15...♙c5 16.0-0 ♖c8 runs into a fine refutation: 17.♟xd5 exd5 18.♙h3! ♖c7 19.♙f4 ♖e7 20.e3 ♖xd1 21.♖fxd1 and White is winning.

16.♟xd5 exd5 17.b3 ♙e7 18.♙e3 18.♙f4!?

18...♖xd1† 19.♖xd1±

White wins at least a pawn.

10.♟xc6 ♖xc6 11.e4



11...♟b4

Landing the knight on d3 is a tempting idea, but the problem is that Black is unable to achieve his plan as White quickly seizes the initiative. It seems to me that it was better to retreat.

11...♟f6 12.0-0 ♙b7 13.d5 ♖d7

13...♖a6?! 14.♙c3 White is better. For example: 14...♙e7?! 15.d6! ♙xd6 16.e5+-

Despite my belief that 11...♟f6 is an improvement for Black over the main line, I still prefer White in the following line:

14.♙g5 ♙e7

Or 14...exd5 15.♙xf6 (15.exd5 ♙e7 16.♟c3 0-0 17.d6 ♙d8 18.♙xb7 ♖xb7 is quite defensible for Black) 15...gxf6 16.exd5 0-0-0 17.♖d4! Attacking both the a7- and f6-pawns. 17...♙xd5 (17...♙b8 18.♖xf6 ♙c5 does not give Black sufficient compensation: 19.a4 b4 20.♟d2 ♙xd5 21.♙xd5 ♖xd5 22.♖ad1 ♖d4 23.♖c6! and Black loses the c4-pawn, as he cannot play 23...c3 24.♟e4! ♖xd1 25.♟xc5 with inevitable mate.) 18.♙xd5 ♖xd5 19.♖xf6 White is much better because of Black's exposed king.

15.♙xf6!

A clever tactical trick that gives White a promising position.

15...gxg6

The problem for Black is that he cannot recapture with the bishop: 15...♙xf6 16.e5! ♙xe5 (16...♙e7 leaves Black simply a pawn down after 17.dxe6 ♖xd1 18.♙xd1 ♙xg2 19.exf7† ♙xf7 20.♙xg2+) 17.♖h5 ♖c7 18.d6! ♙xd6 19.♖xb5†+- White wins a piece.

16.♗c3

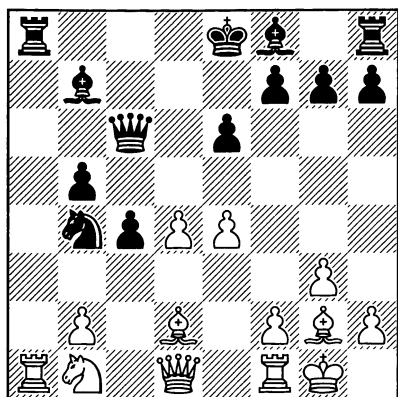
White has the better position.

**12.0-0 ♙b7 13.a4 a6**

This is supposed to be a critical continuation, but it is only critical for Black.

13...♘d3 was played in Korchnoi – Moskalenko, Barcelona 2004. Now White should have played the simple 14.axb5 ♖xb5 15.♙a5! ♖b3 (the b2-pawn is untouchable: 15...♖xb2? 16.♖a4† and White wins) 16.♗c3 with a clear advantage, as suggested by Moskalenko.

**14.axb5 axb5**



**15.d5 ♖b6 16.♙xa8† ♙xa8 17.dxe6 ♖xe6**

After 17...fxe6 18.♙e3 ♖c6 19.♗c3 White is much better and is threatening ♖d1-h5xb5.

**18.♗c3 ♙c5**

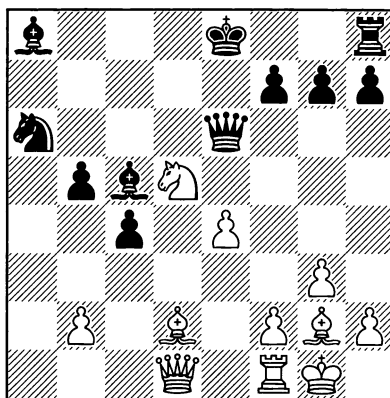
Another line is 18...♖d7 19.♖h5 ♙e7 (Or 19...♘d3 20.♙a1 ♙c6 21.♙h3 ♖b7 22.♙e3, with the idea of ♙a7, 22...g6 23.♖f3 and I do not see how Black can prevent the coming ♙a7.) 20.♖xb5 ♖xb5 21.♘xb5 ♘d3 22.♙c3 and White still has an extra pawn.

**19.♘d5!?**

19.♘xb5 0-0 20.♙xb4 ♙xb4 21.♖a4 also looks strong enough, but maybe Black has some chances for survival, thanks to his bishop pair.

**19...♗a6**

Not a great square, but taking the knight, 19...♘d5 20.exd5 ♖d7 21.♙e1† ♙f8 22.♙c3, looks horrible for Black.



**20.b4! ♙b6**

Other options are:

20...♙d4 21.♙f4 ♙e5 22.♖h5 ♙xf4 23.♘xf4 ♖b6 24.♖e5† with a winning position for White.

20...♙a7 does not work because of 21.♙c3 0-0 22.♖a1 f6 23.♖a5 ♙xd5 24.exd5 ♖b6 25.♖xb6 ♙xb6 26.d6 ♙d8 27.♙c6 ♙xd6 28.♙xb5 ♘c7 29.♙xc4†, winning.

And finally:

20...cxb3 21.♖xb3 ♠c6

21...0-0 22.♖xb5± with a healthy extra pawn.

22.♖c1

22.♖a1 0-0 23.♖xa6?! ♠xd5 24.♖xd5 ♠xf2†

25.♠xf2 ♖xa6 should be drawish.

22...0-0 23.♠e3 ♠xd5

23...♖d6 24.♠xc5 ♠xc5 25.♖b4 ♠xd5

26.exd5 ♖c8 27.♖xb5 and I believe White

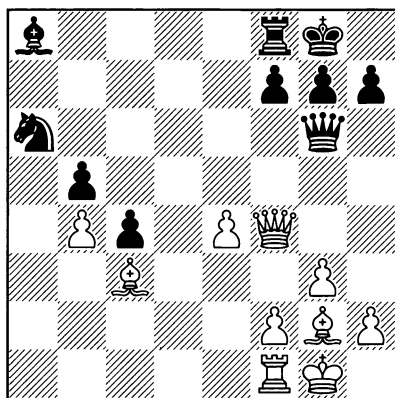
should be able to break through the fortress, as Black is permanently tied to the defence of his knight on c5.

24.exd5 ♖b6 25.♠xc5 ♠xc5 26.♖e3 ♠d7

27.♖xb6 ♠xb6 28.♖b1 ♠c4 29.♖xb5 ♠d6

Admittedly Black has some chances of survival, but it is always a pleasure for White to play a position where he can try to win and runs no risk of losing.

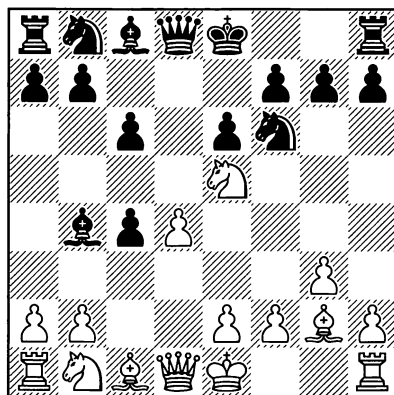
21.♠c3 0-0 22.♠xb6 ♖xb6 23.♖g4 ♖g6  
24.♖f4



White's positional advantage is indisputable. The difference in the quality of the pieces is immense.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♠f3 ♠f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♠g2 c6 6.♠e5)

B) 6...♠b4†



This is the other main line. It is less obvious than 6...b5, but more in line with 4...dxc4 as Black intends to hold onto his extra pawn and, if possible, acquire more 'prisoners'.

7.♠d2!

White sacrifices a second pawn, but in return he gets a very dangerous initiative, thanks to his dark-squared bishop which prevents Black from castling short.

Another line runs 7.♠c3 ♠d5 8.♠d2 b5 with typical Catalan play: Black retains his extra pawn, while White has a lot of play in the centre.

After the text we have reached another branching point. In this position the serious options are not necessarily better than the less serious options. However, the main lines are: B1) 7...♠e7 and B2) 7...♖xd4

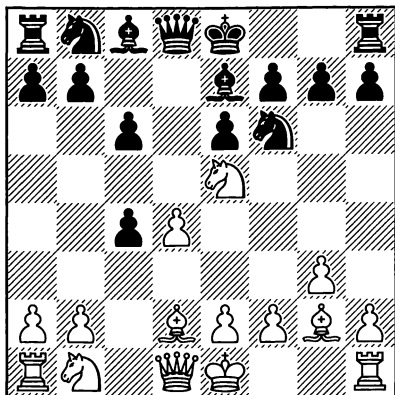
7...♠a6 occurred in E. Atalik – Adly, Wijk aan Zee 2006. I think White now missed the simple 8.♠xb4 ♠xb4 9.0-0 followed by ♠xc4 with a typical Catalan advantage.

Dubious is 7...♠xd2† 8.♖xd2 ♠bd7 9.♠xc4 and, as usual, White has regained the pawn with a clear advantage. 9...0-0 10.0-0 ♖e7 11.♠c3 e5 was played in Gawlikowski –

Weiner, Prague 1955, and now 12.♙fd1 ♜e8 13.e4± would have secured White's advantage.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2 c6 6.♘e5 ♙b4† 7.♙d2)

B1) 7...♙c7



### 8.e3

This is White's best way to defend the d4-pawn. After 8.♙c3 the bishop appears to be rather vulnerable, and Black gets normal play after 8...a5 (the exchange sacrifice 8...b5!? 9.♘xc6 ♘xc6 10.♙xc6† ♙d7 11.♙xa8 ♜xa8 12.0-0 0-0♞ might be an interesting alternative as well) 9.a4 (9.♘xc4 allows the queenside advance 9...b5 10.♘e5 b4 11.♙d2 0-0 and Black is fine) In Stefanova – Kurajica, Benasque 1997, the simple 9...♘d5 gave Black comfortable play after 10.♘xc4 b5 11.axb5 cxb5.

### 8...0-0 9.♘xc4

I have finally come to the conclusion that this is the most promising move for White.

9.0-0N is met strongly by 9...b5 10.a4 b4 11.♘xc4 ♙a6 12.♜b3 ♘d5 when I do not like White's minor pieces on the queenside, while Black will easily deliver the ...c7-c5 advance.

### 9.♘a3

Of course taking the c4-pawn with the second knight is the most desirable idea, but then I noticed a strong idea for Black:

9...♙xa3!N 10.bxa3 b5 11.♙b4

This looks like the point of 9.♘a3. 11.♘xc6 does not work: 11...♘xc6 12.♙xc6 ♜b8 13.♙b4 ♜c7! and Black is simply better.

11.a4 ♘d5 is simply very unclear.

11...♜e8 12.♘xc6 ♘xc6 13.♙xc6 ♙d7! 14.♙xa8 ♜xa8 15.0-0 e5 16.f3 e4 17.f4 ♘d5♞

Black has fantastic compensation for the exchange; his chances are by no means worse.

### 9...c5 10.dxc5 ♙xc5

And now both games continued:

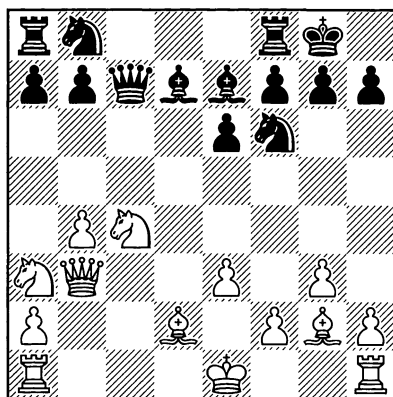
### 11.b4!?

The quiet 11.0-0 is also worthy of consideration. 11...♘c6 12.♘c3 e5 13.♘a4 ♙e7 14.♙xc6 bxc6 15.♘xe5 ♜c7 16.♘c4 ♙h3 17.♜e1± Though Black has compensation for the pawn I would prefer to be White.

### 11...♙e7 12.♜b3

After 12.0-0 Black managed to solve his opening problems in the following encounter: 12...a6 13.♘a5 ♘d5 14.a3 b6 15.♘c4 ♙b7= Rausis – Goloshchapov, Germany 2003.

### 12...♜c7 13.♘ba3 ♙d7



So far we have followed Schwing – Becking, Merzig 1996. Here White should not have castled, but instead continued with:

#### 14.b5!N

Preventing the simplifying idea of ...♙c6, which would equalize the game. It is now hard for Black to get the b8-knight into the game without challenging the b5-pawn, but this also has some disadvantages.

#### 14...a6 15.b6 ♖c8 16.♘a5 ♘c6 17.♘3c4

White has very unpleasant pressure along the h1-a8 diagonal.

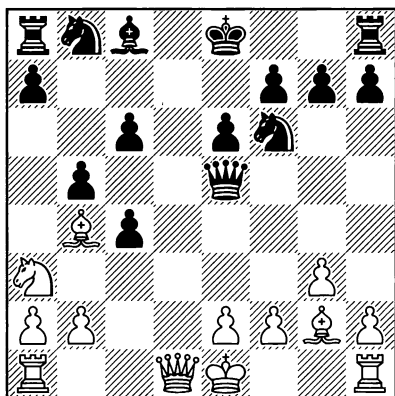
(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2 c6 6.♘e5 ♙b4† 7.♙d2)

B2) 7...♙xd4

The next few moves are forced.

#### 8.♙xb4 ♖xe5 9.♘a3 b5

Definitely the only move. Black once tried 9...♙c7? and lost quickly after 10.♘xc4 c5 11.♙d6! ♙xd6 12.♘xd6† ♘d7 13.♙xc5 ♘c6 14.♙d1 ♘c7 15.♘b5† and Black resigned before getting mated in one with ♙d6 in Yevseev – Paulsen, Norway 1997.



#### 10.♙d6!

This strong idea was employed by the former European Champion Tkachiev in his game against Ukrainian Grandmaster Goloshchapov in 2003. Since then only one more game has been played with this move. Despite White's horrible score (a half point out of two games) I believe this rare move poses Black serious problems.

Previously White had tried mainly 10.f4 ♖c7 (10...♙xb2?? loses to 11.♙b1 ♖xa2 12.♙d6 with inevitable mate) 11.♘b5 cxb5 12.♙xa8 ♙b7 13.♙xb7 ♖xb7, but, as was proven by the latest developments in this line, Black has very good positional compensation for the exchange.

Tkachiev's novelty is the beginning of almost forced play.

#### 10...♙xb2

Black does not have a real alternative to the text:

10...♙f5?! 11.♙d2 Played with the idea of castling long (less convincing is 11.0-0 ♙b7). 11...♙b7 12.♙a5! Another of the ideas of 11.♙d2 – White is threatening ♖c7. 12...♘a6 13.♘b5 ♙d8 (White is winning after 13...♙c8 14.0-0 ♖xb5 15.♖xb5 cxb5 16.♙xb7 ♘d7 17.♙fd1) 14.♘c7† ♘d7 15.♙e5 ♘g4 16.0-0-0† ♘c8 17.♘xa6 ♖xe5 18.♘c5 With a clear advantage for White.

10...♙h5? loses immediately after 11.♙f3 ♖f5 (11...♖g6 12.♘b5+–) 12.g4! ♘xg4 13.♙xb8 0-0 (13...♙xb8 14.♙d6 ♙b6 15.♙d1! with a decisive advantage) 14.♙g3 ♘e5 15.♙g2 and, despite having three pawns for the piece, Black's position is lost.

#### 11.0-0

Now White is threatening 12.♙b1 followed by 13.♘b5 with decisive threats.





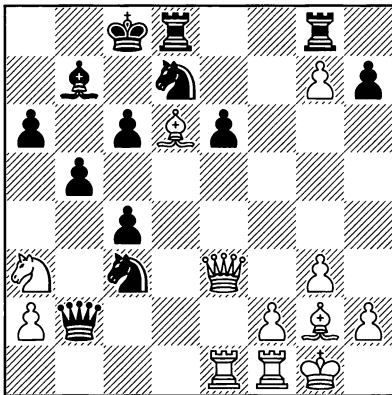
Both games that reached this position continued with 18.♖e3? ♜e2† 19.♙h1 ♖d4, and now:

20.♖xe6 ♜de8 21.♖h6 (21.♙e7? ♖xg7–+) 21...♖xg7† Beliavsky – Pavasovic, Slovenia 2006.

20.♙b4 Apparently the best move. 20...♖xe3 21.fxe3 ♜e5 With double-edged play in Tkachiev – Goloshchapov, Rethymnon 2003. Instead of 21...♜e5, Black could try 21...♖xg7 22.♖ae1 ♜xg3† 23.hxg3 ♖xg3!? which is interesting as well, which seems to indicate that Black has plenty of resources in the position.

After 18.♖ae1!N I have analysed the position in depth. Everything seems to work perfectly for White:

a) 18...a6 19.♖e3!!



With this brilliant idea White's queen penetrates to a7 with great effect, which is probably what Tkachiev wanted to do in his game.

19...♜d5

19...♖xg7 20.♖a7 ♜d5 21.♜xc4! bxc4 22.♖b1 wins on the spot.

20.♖a7 c3 21.♙xd5 cxd5 22.♖b1 ♖e2 23.♖fc1

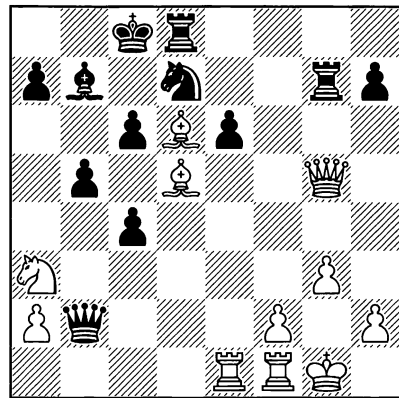
White is winning.

b) 18...♜d5

This looks pretty solid for Black, but White crashes through very quickly with:

19.♙xd5! ♖xg7

19...exd5 runs into 20.♖e7 ♖f6 21.♖xf6 ♜xf6 22.♖c7† ♙b8 23.♙e5 ♜g4 24.♙f4 ♜de8 25.♖f7† ♙a8 26.♜c2 and White's g7-pawn should be a decisive factor.



20.♜xb5!!

This brilliant strike decides the issue, for example:

20...♖xb5

20...cxb5 21.♙xb7† ♙xb7 22.♖xd8 leaves Black a rook down.

21.♖xg7 ♖xd5 22.♙e7 c5 23.f3 ♖e8 24.♖f7 ♖h8 25.♖xe6

With a decisive material advantage.

c) 18...♖xg7 19.♖e3 c5

If 19...♜d5 20.♖xa7 ♖f6 21.♖e2 and I believe Black is strategically lost, as he is completely tied up on the queenside, while White can gradually improve his position

with  $\text{Bfe1}$ ,  $\text{Qh3}$ , or  $\text{Qc2-e3}$ . He can also sacrifice with  $\text{Qxc4}$  followed by  $\text{Bb1}$  at any appropriate moment. (Instead 21.  $\text{Qxc4 bxc4}$  22.  $\text{Bb1 Q7b6}$  23.  $\text{Qc5 Qf4}$  is still defendable for Black.)

**20.  $\text{Qxb7+ Qxb7}$  21.  $\text{Bf3+ Qb6}$  22.  $\text{Bxe6 Bg6}$**

The only move.

**23.  $\text{Bfe1 Qe5}$  24.  $\text{Qxc5+ Qxc5}$  25.  $\text{B6xe5+ Qd5}$  26.  $\text{Bf7}$**

With a decisive advantage.

## Conclusion:

It seems that the whole line is quite promising for White.

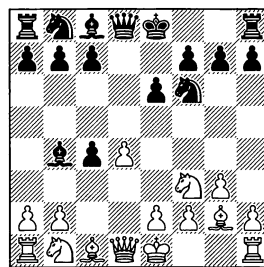
If  $6...b5$  then Korchnoi's idea looks rather convincing, but Black may still have some room for improvement. Do not forget that we can choose  $7.a4$  transposing to the  $5...b5$  line.

The main line with  $6...Qb4+$  leads to very interesting play where White sacrifices two pawns for the initiative. Tkachiev's novelty  $10.Qd6!$  looks very powerful and together with White's improvement on the 18th move it makes Black's position quite dangerous. Certainly Black can try  $7...Qe7$ , which is not so dangerous as  $7...Qxd4$ , but it tends to lead to a pleasant advantage for White.

# Chapter 3

## The Catalan

4...dxc4 and 5...♙b4†



### Variation Index

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2 ♙b4†

6.♙d2

A) 6...♙xd2†

B) 6...c5

C) 6...♙e7

D) 6...a5 7.0-0

D1) 7...♘c6

D2) 7...0-0 8.♙g5

D21) 8...b5

D22) 8...♘c6

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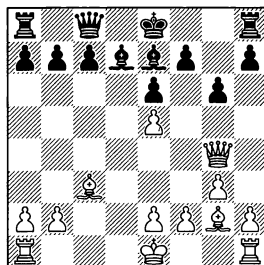
p 45

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p 47

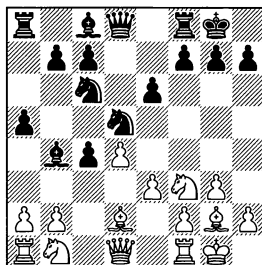
p 48

C) after 13...♙c8



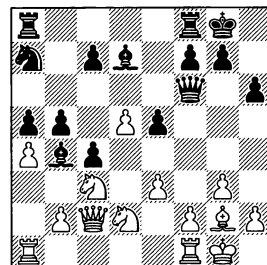
14.♙e4!N

D1) sideline with 8...♘d5



9.♙e2!N

D22) the main line



17.♙fd1!N

**1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♟f3 ♟f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2 ♙b4†**

Basically Black's idea is very simple: he intends to hold onto the c4-pawn for a while and so force White to waste time regaining it.

### 6.♙d2

Black has tried a lot of moves here. We shall look at the four important ones: **A) 6...♙xd2†**, **B) 6...c5**, **C) 6...♙e7**, and **D) 6...a5**.

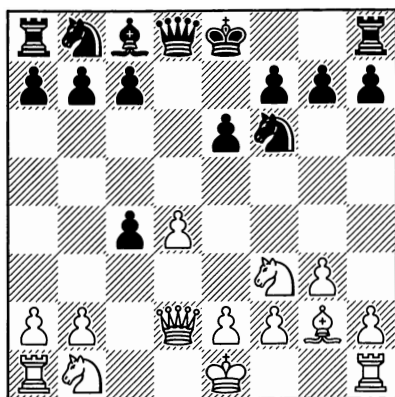
**(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♟f3 ♟f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2 ♙b4† 6.♙d2)**

### A) 6...♙xd2†

A premature move according to the theory books.

### 7.♟xd2!

A very concrete approach. It is difficult to appreciate at first, but White regains the pawn after this recapture, while 7.♟bxd2 b5 leads to unclear play where Black keeps the extra pawn.



### 7...0-0

There is no point in playing by analogy with the Kramnik – Topalov game, as here Black's pawn stands on a7 (instead of a5), and that significantly favours White: 7...c6?! is dubious

because of 8.♟e5, and now 8...b5 does not work because of 9.♟xc6 ♟c7 10.♟a5!, when Black cannot avoid losing material.

In the event of

7...b5

White should react with the clever move:

8.a4!N

After 8.♟g5 a6! (this is much stronger than 8...0-0?! 9.♟xb5 ♙a6 10.♟a4 and White was clearly better in Sosonko – Furman, Wijk aan Zee 1975) 9.♟xg7 ♟g8 10.♟h6 ♙b7 11.0-0 ♟bd7 the position is double-edged.

Also good for White would be 8.♟e5 ♟d5 9.a4 c6 10.axb5 cxb5 11.♟c3±, but 8.a4 is my preference.

The main line goes:

8...c6 9.axb5 cxb5 10.♟c3 ♟b6

Or 10...b4 11.♟b5 ♟d5 12.e4.

11.♟g5!

Now this sortie secures White's advantage.

11...0-0 12.♟xb5 ♙b7 13.0-0

White is clearly better, due to Black's weak pawns on the queenside.

### 8.♟a3 ♟e7

8...c5 9.dxc5 (9.♟xc4!? was a worthy alternative) 9...♟e4 10.♟xd8 ♟xd8 11.♟xc4 ♟c6 12.0-0 ♟xc5 happened in Lopor – Klundt, Bad Wiessee 2000. White should have continued 13.♟fd1 ♙d7 14.♟ac1 with typical Catalan pressure.

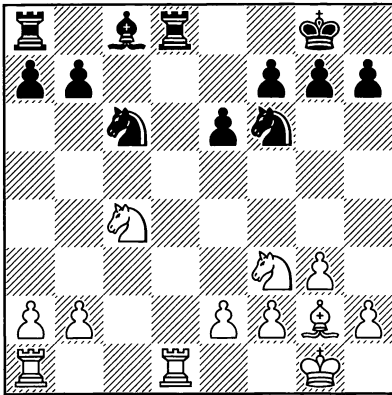
### 9.0-0

9.♟xc4 ♟e4 10.♟c2 ♟b4† 11.♟cd2 ♟xd2 12.♟xd2 is also better for White.

### 9...c5 10.dxc5 ♟d8

10...♟xc5 11.♟ac1 ♟c6 12.♟xc4 ♟d8 13.♟f4 does not bring Black relief either, as White maintains the usual advantage.

**11.♟c3 ♟xc5 12.♟xc4 ♟xc4 13.♟xc4 ♟c6 14.♟fd1±**



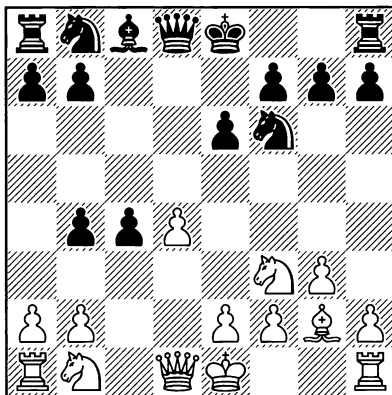
White was clearly better in Kharitonov – Kholmov, Moscow 1998.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2 ♙b4† 6.♙d2)

B) 6...c5

This move is seldom played, probably because Black has a poor score with it.

7.♙xb4 cxb4



8.♘e5

The most principled continuation. White is aiming to regain the pawn and claim a pleasant edge thanks to his better pawn structure.

8...0-0 9.♘xc4

Unclear is 9.0-0 ♘c6!.

9...♘c6 10.e3 e5!?

In my opinion this pawn sacrifice is the critical continuation in this line.

Other options are:

10...♖c7 11.♘bd2 e5 12.d5 ♘a5 13.♘xa5 ♖xa5 14.0-0 and White is positionally better.

10...♖e7 11.♘bd2 ♙d7 12.0-0 ♖fd8 13.♘f3 ♖ac8 14.♖e2± This kind of position is always preferable for White due to his superior pawn structure, Bareev – Balashov, USSR (ch) 1986.

10...a5 11.♘bd2 a4 12.0-0 ♖a6

Black is trying to create some activity on the queenside, but this plan looks artificial.

13.♘f3 ♙d7

This position occurred in Beliavsky – Ljubojevic, Belfort 1988, and now White could have played the simple:

14.♖c1N

Krasenkov recommended the following line in *Chess Informant 45*: 14.♖d2 ♖e7 15.♘fe5 This looks slightly inaccurate to me, as it allows 15...b5 16.♙xc6 ♙xc6 17.♘xc6 ♖xc6 18.♘e5 ♖c7 with counterplay.

14...♖e7 15.♘fe5

Now:

15...b5

is comfortably met by

16.♘d7 ♘d7 17.♘d2 ♘a5 18.♖e2 ♖b8 19.♖c7

with an obvious advantage.

11.d5

The alternatives are very unclear. For example:

11.♙xc6 bxc6 12.dxe5 (12.♘xe5 c5♞ with strong compensation due to White's weak

light squares) 12...♞xd1† 13.♠xd1 ♖g4 14.♠e1 This position was evaluated by Bareev as clearly favourable for White, in fact after 14...f6! Black has reasonable counterplay.

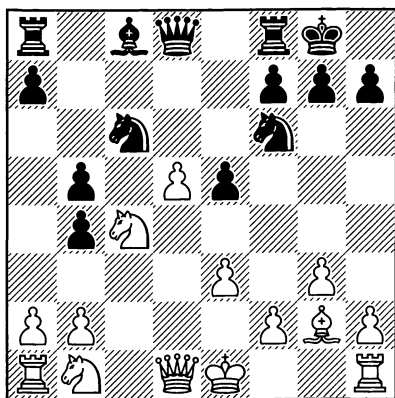
11.♖xe5 ♖xe5 12.dxe5 ♞xd1† 13.♠xd1 ♖g4 14.♠e2 ♖xe5 is very unclear, as White's king is misplaced on e2.

11.dxe5 ♞xd1† 12.♠xd1 ♖g4±

### 11...b5

The point of Black's idea. After 11...♖e7 12.e4 ♖g6 White is better after either 13.a4!? (preventing ...b5) 13...bxa3 14.♖bxa3 ♙d7 15.♞d2 b5 16.♖a5 ♞b6 17.♖c2 or 13.0-0 b5 14.♖e3 ♞d6 15.♖d2 ♙d7 16.♞e2±.

Instead of 12.♖d6? ♙g4! with favourable complications for Black in Cherniaev – T. Kosintseva, Russia 2004, White should have played:



### 12.dxc6!N ♞xd1† 13.♠xd1 bxc4 14.a3!

The endgame looks favourable for White. The following are some approximate lines just to illustrate the themes and possibilities:

### 14...♙g4†

14...♞b8?! 15.axb4 ♞xb4 16.♠c1 ♖g4 17.♞f1 ♖xh2 18.♞d1 ♖g4 19.♞d2± and

despite his extra pawn, Black's position is very dangerous in view of White's passed pawn.

### 15.♠c1

Premature would be 15.f3 ♙e6 16.axb4 ♖d5! and Black is not worse.

### 15...a5 16.♖d2 c3 17.bxc3 bxc3 18.♖c4 e4 19.♞b1!

White is better now. For example:

### 19...♞ac8 20.♖e5

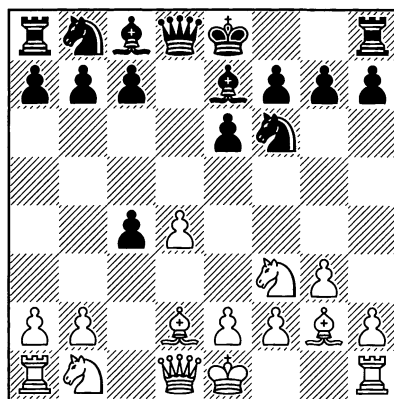
20.♖xa5 ♞fd8±

### 20...♞fd8 21.♞b3!

With an advantage.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♖f3 ♖f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2 ♙b4† 6.♙d2)

### C) 6...♙e7



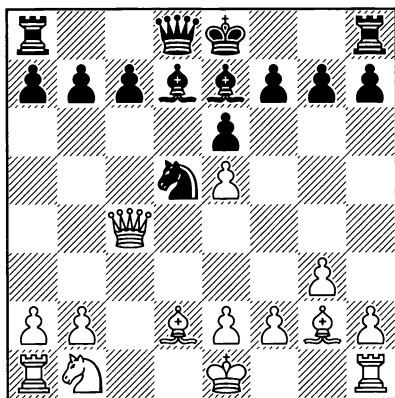
Surprisingly, after this retreat I found no advantage for White in existing theory. However, the sequence ...dxc4 followed by ...♙b4†-e7 looks artificial to me, and I managed to find an improvement.

### 7.♞c2 ♙d7

The ...♙d7-c6 manoeuvre is Black's main idea in this variation.

**8.♘e5 ♘c6**

Nobody has tried 8...♙c6 and indeed after 9.♘xc6 ♘xc6 10.e3! (less convincing is 10.♖xc4 ♘xd4 11.e3 ♘c6 12.♙xc6† bxc6 13.♖xc6† ♘d7) 10...e5. Otherwise after ♖xc4 next, White is simply better, but the text does not work properly either. 11.♖xc4 exd4 12.♙xc6† bxc6 13.♖xc6† ♘d7 14.exd4 White has the advantage.

**9.♖xc4 ♘xe5 10.dxe5 ♘d5****11.♖g4!**

In my opinion this is a very important nuance: before playing ♘c3 White forces Black to weaken the dark squares near his king.

There are two games where White tried 11.♘c3 ♘xc3. Now White has tried both captures, but despite having a very attractive position at first sight, he failed on both occasions to obtain any real advantage:

12.bxc3 c6 13.♖g4 g6 14.♖b1 ♖c7 and Black was pretty solid in Lautier – Bologan, Mallorca 2004.

12.♙xc3 ♖c8 13.0–0–0 0–0 with double-edged play, Yevseev – Mihajlovskij, St Petersburg 2006.

**11...g6**

Certainly Black cannot play 11...0–0?, as after 12.♙h6! he loses the exchange.

**12.♘c3**

At first I was excited about 12.0–0, but then I realized that Black can simply play 12...h5! (my idea was 12...0–0 13.♙h6 ♖e8 14.♘d2 and White has arranged his pieces very well) 13.♖c4 0–0 (the computer likes 13...h4 14.♘c3 c6, following by castling long in many lines) 14.♘c3 ♘xc3 15.♙xc3 ♖c8 Black has an easy plan of ...c5 following by ...♙c6 with good play.

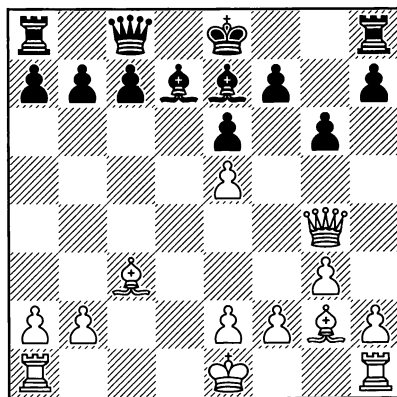
**12...♘xc3**

12...♙c6 13.♖d1! is clearly better for White.

**13.♙xc3 ♖c8**

After 13...c6 14.♙e4! Black has a dilemma about where to go with his king: 14...♖c7 Black prepares to castle long (extremely dangerous would be 14...0–0 15.h4 h5 16.♖f3 followed by g4, with a crushing attack) 15.♖f3! ♖f8 16.0–0 0–0–0 17.b4 and Black's king does not feel safe on the queenside either.

After the text it seems I have managed to find a serious improvement:

**14.♙e4!N**



With the idea of preventing the simplifying manoeuvre ...c5 following by ...♔d7-c6. Black was perfectly OK after 14.0-0 c5 15.a4 ♕c6 in Lemke – Bebersdorf, Bundesliga 1995.

I consider the following is very likely to become the main line:

### 14...c5 15.♖f3 ♜b8 16.h4 0-0

After 16...h5 17.0-0-0 Black's king is forced to stay in the centre, as if he castled short Black would inevitably face a crushing attack.

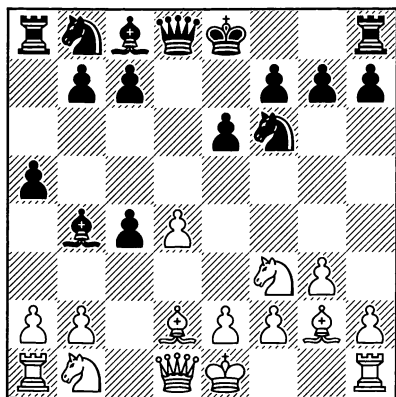
### 17.h5 ♕c6 18.♕xc6 ♖xc6 19.♗xc6 bxc6 20.0-0-0 ♜fd8 21.♔c2

The endgame is clearly favourable for White, thanks to Black's weaknesses on the queenside.

### (1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2 ♙b4† 6.♙d2)

### D) 6...a5

This rare move gained in popularity after the famous first game of the Kramnik – Topalov match.



### 7.0-0

Nowadays the text is White's second option in this position, but I foresee that it might

become White's main option after two recent games: Kramnik – Navara, Prague 2008, and Ivanchuk – Alekseev, Foros 2008.

### 7.♗c2

Recently this has been the most fashionable continuation, but I have a feeling that White lacks ideas here, and the endgame which arose in the first game of the Kramnik – Topalov match looks reliable for Black.

The following line looks pretty forced:

### 7...♕xd2† 8.♗xd2

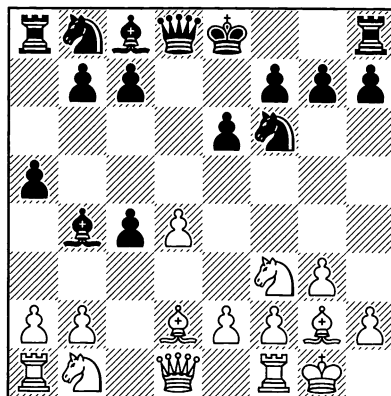
After 8.♘bxd2 b5 9.a4 c6 10.b3 cxb3 11.♘xb3 0-0 12.0-0 White has definite compensation, but not enough to fight for an advantage, as the latest results have shown.

### 8...c6 9.a4

9.♘e5 b5 10.♘xc6 ♗c7 is just equal, as 11.♗g5? fails to 11...♘xc6! 12.♗xg7 ♔e7! 13.♗xh8 ♙b7 14.♗g7 ♘xd4 when Black is much better.

### 9...b5 10.axb5 cxb5 11.♗g5 0-0 12.♗xb5 ♙a6 13.♗a4 ♖b6 14.0-0 ♗xb2 15.♘bd2 ♙b5 16.♘xc4 ♙xa4 17.♘xb2 ♙b5 18.♘e5 ♖a7

The endgame is basically sound for Black, despite White's latest attempts to pose problems.



At this point Black has two options, D1) 7...♘c6 and D2) 7...0-0.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2 ♙b4† 6.♙d2 a5 7.0–0)

### D1) 7...♘c6

This is Black's main alternative to 7...0–0. It would be a serious mistake to play

7...b5?

as after

8.a4 ♙xd2

Or 8...c6 9.axb5 ♙xd2 10.♘fxd2! with a clear advantage. White recaptures with the f3-knight, which allows him to regain the material with dividends.

9.♘fxd2 ♖a7 10.axb5

10.♘a3!? is worthy of consideration.

10...♗xd4 11.♘a3

Now White gains a clear positional advantage:

11...♙b7 12.♙xb7 ♖xb7 13.♘dxc4 ♗c5?

This simply loses, but even after the best continuation 13...♗xd1 14.♗fxd1 a4 15.♘a5 ♖a7 16.♘3c4 White wins the a4-pawn and has a large advantage.

14.♖c1 ♗b4 15.♘d6†!+–

Black lost material in Genov – Kuzev, Bulgaria 1995.

### 8.e3

After 8.♙g5 h6 9.♙xf6 ♗xf6 10.e3 the play would most probably transpose to the main line after 10...0–0, though Black might try the immediate 10...e5!?

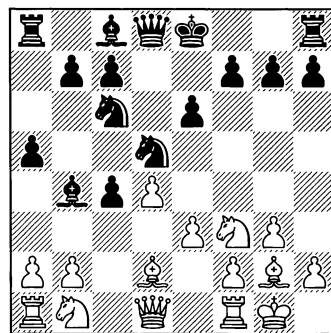
### 8...0–0

Black has other possibilities as well:

8...♖b8 9.♗e2 b5 10.a4 ♙a6 11.♙xb4 axb4 (11...♘b4 12.axb5 ♙xb5 13.♘a3 c6 14.♘xc4 gives White a pleasant edge, thanks to Black's weak pawns on the queenside) 12.♘fd2 ♘d5 13.axb5 ♙xb5 14.♘xc4 0–0 15.♗c2 ♗e7 16.♘bd2± and White obtained a typical Catalan advantage in Clemens – Baklan, Hoogeveen 2004.

### 8...♘d5

This is a typical idea in positions where Black has an extra pawn on c4. Black intends to hold onto the pawn with the help of ...♘b6. And now I believe:



### 9.♗e2!N

is stronger than 9.e4 ♘b6 10.♙g5 f6 11.♙e3 0–0 12.♗e2 a4∞ when Black had good play in Rukavina – Franic, Sibenik 2007.

### 9...♘b6

9...b5 10.a4 ♙a6 11.axb5 ♙xb5 12.b3! and White is better.

### 10.a3

Unclear is 10.♙c3 0–0 11.♘bd2 e5!.

### 10...♙d6

10...♙xd2?! 11.♘bxd2 0–0 12.♘xc4 is clearly better for White.

11.♙c3 0–0 12.♘bd2 ♗e7 13.♘xc4 ♘xc4 14.♗xc4 e5 15.♗fe1!

White has a clear advantage.

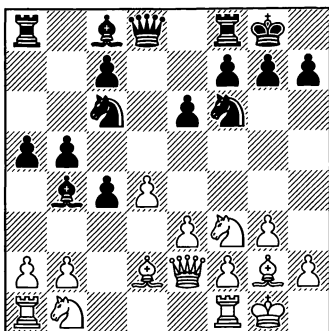
### 9.♗e2!

White's best option. It is very important to protect the e3-pawn in case of the following line: 9.♗c2 e5! 10.♘xe5 ♘xe5 11.dxe5 ♘g4 and White cannot play 12.f4, since the e3-pawn will be not protected.

### 9...e5

This looks very principled.

If 9...b5:



White should react with:

10.a4!N

Winning the exchange is far from clear:

10.♖e5 ♖xe5 11.♗xa8 ♜d3 12.♗g2 c5♗ and Black has interesting compensation, Mikhalchishin – Kupreichik, Tbilisi 1976.

10...bxa4

10...♗a6?! runs into 11.♖e5 ♖xe5 12.axb5! with a large advantage for White.

11.♗xc4 ♗b7 12.♗c1 ♗d5 13.♗xd5 ♜xd5 14.♗xa4

White will enjoy a pleasant edge thanks to Black's weaknesses on the queenside.

10.♖xe5 ♖xe5 11.dxe5 ♜g4 12.f4 ♗f5

After 12...♗d3 13.♗xd3 cxd3 14.♖c3 c6 15.h3 ♜h6 16.♗fd1 White is clearly better, due to Black's weak d3-pawn.

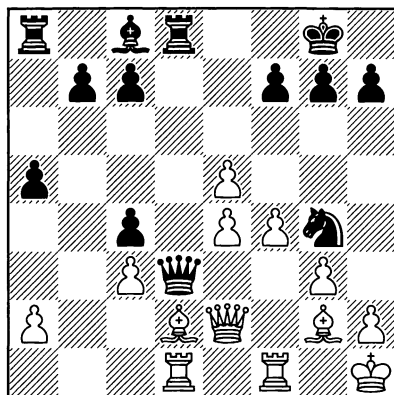
13.e4 ♗d4† 14.♗h1 ♗c8

Tempting would be 14...♗d7 15.♖c3 ♗c5 16.h3 ♗a6, but after 17.♗e1! ♖e3 18.♗f2 ♗d3 19.♗xd3 cxd3 20.♗xe3 ♗xe3 21.♗ad1 White is still a pawn up.

15.♖c3 ♗d8?!

Apparently stronger was 15...♗c5, though after 16.h3 ♖f2† 17.♗h2 ♖d3 18.♗ab1 c6 19.♖a4 ♗a7 20.♗c3 ♗d8 21.b3 White is obviously better.

16.♗ad1 ♗xc3 17.bxc3 ♗d3



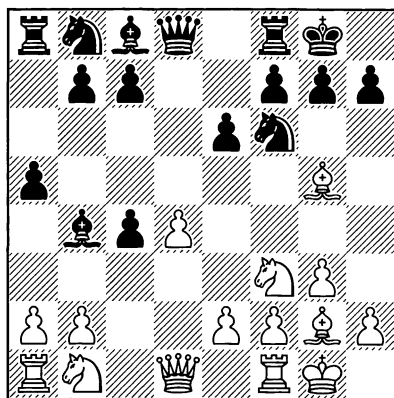
18.♗f3 ♗xe2 19.♗xe2+

White had a clear advantage in Shirov – Korchnoi, Carlsbad 2007.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♖f3 ♖f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♗g2 ♗b4† 6.♗d2 a5 7.0-0)

D2) 7...0-0 8.♗g5

8.♗c2 ♗xd2 9.♖bxd2 b5 10.a4 c6 11.b3 cxb3 12.♖xb3 leads to a previously mentioned line, where White's compensation is enough only for equality.



Black has two main options: D21) 8...b5 and D22) 8...♖c6.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2 ♙b4† 6.♙d2 a5 7.0–0 0–0 8.♙g5)

### D21) 8...b5

If 8...♘bd7 9.♖c2 h6 10.♙xf6 ♘xf6 11.♖xc4 White regains the pawn and had the advantage in Schebler – Tolnai, Berlin 1990.

After the text play continues:

### 9.♘e5

Ivanchuk recently opted for:

9.a4 c6 10.♘c3 ♖b6

Bad is 10...h6? 11.♙xf6 ♖xf6 12.axb5 ♙xc3 13.bxc3 cxb5 14.♖b1! threatening both 15.♖xb5 and 15.♘g5.

11.♙xf6 gxf6 12.axb5 cxb5 13.d5

This was all played in Ivanchuk – Alekseev, Foros 2008. The idea looks very nice, but I fail to see any advantage after the calm:

13...♙b7!

For example:

14.♘d4 ♙xc3 15.bxc3 ♙xd5 16.♙xd5 exd5 17.♘f5 ♘d7

17...♖e6 18.e4 ♘h8 19.♖xd5 would leave White with good compensation, thanks to his strong knight on f5.

18.♖xd5 ♘e5 19.♖fb1 ♖fb8

White may have enough compensation to secure equality, but no more than that.

### 9...♖a6 10.a4 c6

Other moves are clearly worse:

10...bxa4?! 11.♘xc4 ♘bd7 (11...c5 12.dxc5 ♖xd1 13.♖xd1 ♙xc5 14.♘c3 and the endgame arising is highly unpleasant for Black) 12.♘c3 c5 13.♘xa4 and Black was under serious pressure in Kramnik – Navara, Prague 2008.

10...♖d6?! 11.axb5 ♖xd4 12.♖c2± As correctly pointed out by Navara, White is much better as Black's rook is vulnerable on d4.

### 11.♘c3 ♖b6

Another line is:

11...h6 12.♙xf6 gxf6

Here my recommendation would be:

13.♘f3N

In Buhmann – Bartel, Polanica Zdroj 2007, White tried 13.♘g4, but after 13...e5! 14.e3 ♘g7 Black was doing pretty well.

13...♖b6

This is a typical Catalan position: White is a pawn down, but in return he has a lot of play in the centre, while Black's pieces are quite passive on the queenside. Still, Black's defensive resources should not be underestimated.

The following line is an approximation of how play might continue:

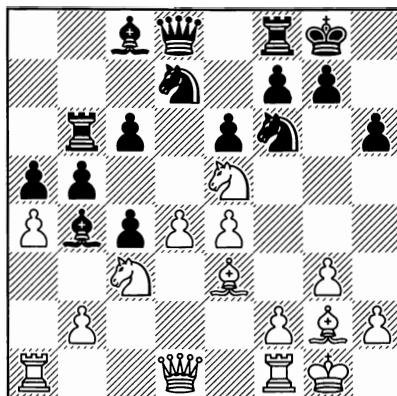
14.♖c2 ♘d7 15.♖ad1 ♖e7 16.♖c1 ♘h7 17.axb5 cxb5 18.d5 ♘c5 19.♘d4 ♙d7 20.♖e3

With obvious compensation.

### 12.e4

12.♘e4!? might also be an interesting alternative.

### 12...h6 13.♙e3 ♘bd7



### 14.f4!

Clearly the best option. Other moves are:

14.♖e2?! ♘xe5! 15.dxe5 ♘d7 16.♙xb6 ♖xb6 17.♖h5 ♘c5 and Black has fantastic compensation for the exchange.

14.♘xd7 ♙xd7 15.d5 ♖b8 does not bring White any dividends.

### 14...♖c7 15.g4!

White has a clear attacking plan of opening up the position on the kingside with the help of g4-g5.

### 15...♘xe5 16.fxe5 ♘h7

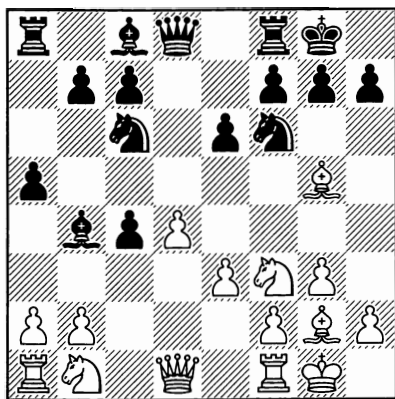
This is Mateuta – Sigalas, Kavala 2005, and now White missed a great opportunity to break through in the centre with:

17.d5! exd5 18.exd5 ♖b8 19.d6 ♖d7 20.axb5 cxb5 21.♘d5

White has the initiative.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2 ♙b4† 6.♙d2 a5 7.0–0 0–0 8.♙g5)

### D22) 8...♘c6 9.e3



### 9...h6

Obviously this is the main move, but Black has tried other options as well:

Dubious is 9...a4?! 10.a3 (even 10.♘bd2 c3

11.bxc3 ♙xc3 12.♖b1 would leave White with good compensation) 10...♙e7. This position occurred in L. Meyer – Aleksandrov, Gistrup 1996. White should have played the simple 11.♘bd2 h6 12.♙xf6 ♙xf6 13.♘xc4 with a pleasant edge.

There is some point in 9...♖a6, removing the rook from the h1-a8 diagonal. In my opinion 10.♖e2! promises White the better prospects (less clear is 10.a3 ♙e7 11.♘bd2 h6 12.♙xf6 ♙xf6 13.♘xc4 b5 14.♘ce5 ♘xe5 15.dxe5 ♙e7∞). 10...h6 (10...b5 11.a4 clearly favours White) 11.♙xf6 ♖xf6 12.a3 ♙d6 13.♘c3 e5 14.d5 ♘e7 15.♖xc4 White is better, as he has a clear plan on the queenside.

### 10.♙xf6 ♖xf6 11.a3

At first my intention was:

### 11.♘bd2N

But then I realized that Black is fine after

11...e5 12.d5 ♘e7 13.♘xc4 Not 13.a3?! ♙xd2 14.♘xd2 ♖d8 15.♘xc4 ♘xd5! 16.♙xd5 ♙e6 17.e4 c6.

### 13...e4 14.♘d4

14.♘fd2 ♖d8 15.♘xe4 ♖a6! is fine for Black.

### 14...♘xd5 15.♙xe4 ♖d8

Black has nothing to worry about.

### 11...♙d6 12.♘c3

I also found a new idea:

### 12.♘fd2N e5 13.d5 ♘e7 14.♘c3

14.♘xc4 b5 15.♘xd6 cxd6= and Black solves his opening problems.

But Black just in time to equalize after:

### 14...♙d7 15.♘xc4 b5! 16.♘xd6

16.♘e4 ♖g6 17.♘xd6 cxd6 18.♘b6 ♙g4!

Actually, this is the point behind Black's idea, when he is definitely fine.

### 16...cxd6 17.♖d3 ♖ab8 18.b4 a4

The position is balanced.

**12...e5**

This is Black's only way to play.

**13.d5 ♖a7!?**

Black is planning to defend his c4-pawn with ...b7-b5.

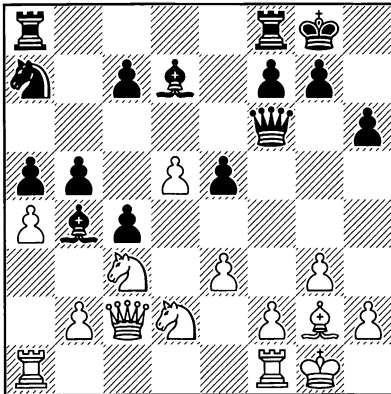
It is very important that in reply to 13...♖e7 White should play 14.♙a4! capturing the c4-pawn with the queen and maintaining an advantage. Instead if 14.♖d2 Black would get play with the previously seen idea of 14...♙d7 15.♖xc4 b5!. This position is actually mentioned in 12.♖fd2 line.

**14.♖d2**

Black is fine after 14.♙a4 b5 15.♙xa5 ♙f5 when White's queen is clearly misplaced on a5.

**14...b5 15.a4 ♙d7 16.♙c2 ♙b4**

This is a good square for Black's dark-squared bishop.

**17.♙fd1!N**

This is my attempt to improve on 17.axb5 ♖xb5 18.♖xb5 (18.♖xc4 ♙xc3 19.bxc3 a4 would lead to double-edged play) 18...♙xb5 19.♖xc4 a4 when Black achieved a draw without any difficulty in Markus – Beliavsky, Turin (ol) 2006.

Premature would be 17.d6?! c6 18.axb5 ♖xb5 19.♖ce4 ♙e6 20.♖xc4 f5! and Black is already better. Instead 17.♙fd1!? keeps the tension on the queenside while making a useful move, which intensifies the potential force of the d5-d6 advance.

I think that Black cannot keep the tension on the queenside and so he should simplify the play with:

**17...bxa4**

We should also examine other moves:

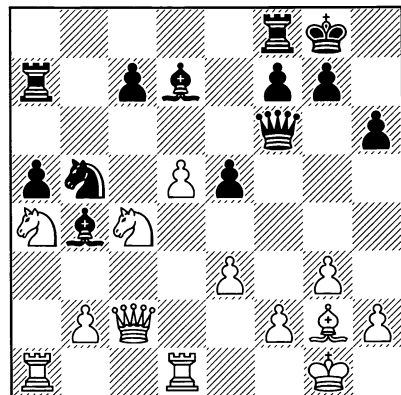
17...♙g6 would be dubious: 18.♙xg6 fxg6 19.d6! ♙ac8 20.♙b7! and White takes over the initiative.

17...♙ab8 is also no use, as after 18.axb5 ♖xb5 19.♖xc4 the a5-pawn is hanging.

17...♙xc3 is risky as 18.♙xc3 bxa4 19.♙xc4 ♙b6 20.♖e4! gives White a clear advantage.

**18.♖xa4**

Instead 18.d6 ♙xc3! is fine for Black.

**18...♖b5 19.♖xc4 ♙a7****20.♖d2!±**

This knight is headed for c5 via e4 or b3. White's plan includes pressure against the a5-

and c7-pawns, while swapping Black's dark-squared bishop would also be favourable for White.

There is no question that Black's position is very solid, but White's chances seem slightly preferable, as Black has a few weaknesses on the queenside.

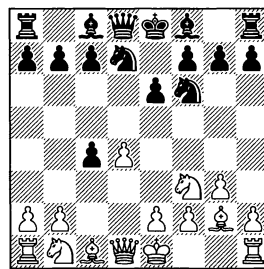
### **Conclusion:**

In summary, I can state that Black's most challenging continuation is 6...a5, while other options are really advantageous for White. There have not, as yet, been enough games with 7.0–0 to draw any definite conclusion, but the fact that it has been employed recently by Kramnik and Ivanchuk says a lot. In my view this is a promising line, while I also recognise that Black's position is quite sound. I expect to see many games in the near future with 7.0–0.

# Chapter 4

## The Catalan

4...dxc4 and 5...♘bd7



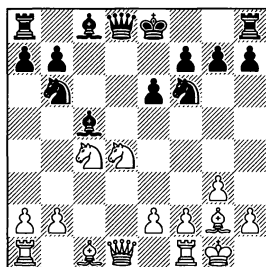
### Variation Index

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2 ♘bd7

6.0-0

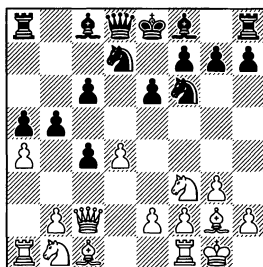
A) 6...c5	p 52
B) 6...c6	p 53
C) 6...a6	p 55
D) 6...♖b8	p 56
E) 6...♙e7	p 57
F) 6...♘b6	p 58

A) after 9...♘b6



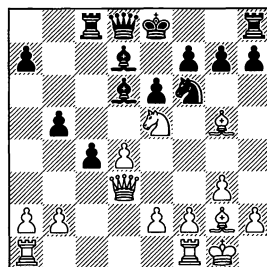
10.♙e3!N

B) sideline with 8...b5



9.♘e5!N

F) after 13...c4



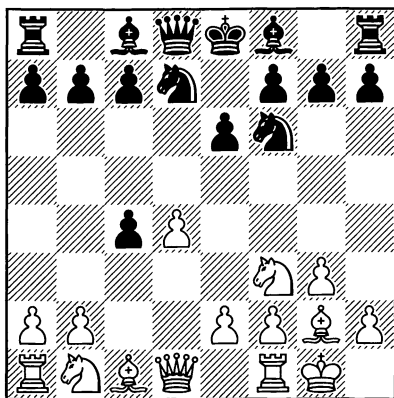
14.♙c2!N



**1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♟f3 ♟f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2 ♟bd7**

Nowadays this continuation is hardly ever seen, but there have been almost 400 games where the text appeared on the board. It was repeatedly used by such strong players as Smyslov, Korchnoi and Huebner, but recently I can remember only one strong player, Lajos Portisch, who has used this move on a few occasions. Black's idea is to temporarily defend the c4-pawn by means ...♟b6, or ...♞b8 followed by ...b5, or even ...a6 and ...b5, depending on White's answer. The hope is that the time White will need to regain the pawn will enable Black to arrange his pieces optimally.

**6.0-0**



This natural continuation is White's best move according to the theory books. This reaches an important crossroads for Black, as he has no fewer than six possible moves at his disposal:

**A) 6...c5, B) 6...c6, C) 6...a6, D) 6...♞b8, E) 6...♙e7 and the main line F) 6...♟b6.**

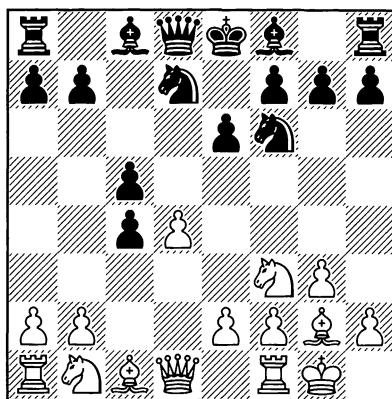
These moves cover a huge range of different motifs such as attacking White's centre, simple development or desperately hanging onto the

c4-pawn. This variety makes it sensible to explain the themes as they arise in the analysis rather than attempt a strategic overview now.

**(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♟f3 ♟f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2 ♟bd7 6.0-0)**

**A) 6...c5**

Striking at White's centre instead of trying to cling on to the c4-pawn.



**7.♟a3**

This seems to me to be the most logical move: White intends to immediately regain the pawn.

An interesting alternative might be 7.♟c3.

**7...cxd4**

After 7...♟b6 8.♟xc4 the play transposes to a position that will be examined in line F covering 6...♟b6.

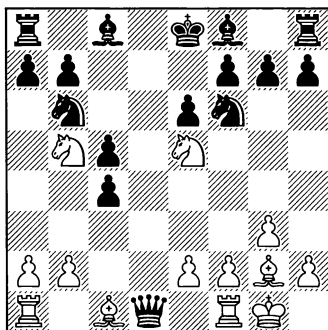
**8.♟e5**

It is very important to note that according to theory this gives White a pleasant edge, but in my opinion things are far from clear after the critical:

**8...♞xd4!**

This has never occurred in tournament practice, but was mentioned by Alburt in *Chess Informant 38*.

9.♟b5 ♖xd1



10.♞xd1

Alburt gives the following line: 10.♟c7† ♜d8 11.♞xd1† ♜xc7 12.♟xf7 wrongly evaluating this position as winning for White due to his ♟f4† threat. It seems to me, that Black gets a clear advantage after 12...e5! 13.♟xh8 ♟e6 and White's knight is trapped on h8.

10...♟fd5

White still has to prove his compensation, as 11.e4 is met strongly by 11...a6.

8.♟xc4 ♟c5

Otherwise White gets a pleasant edge, thanks to his pressure along the h1-a8 diagonal. Here are a few examples:

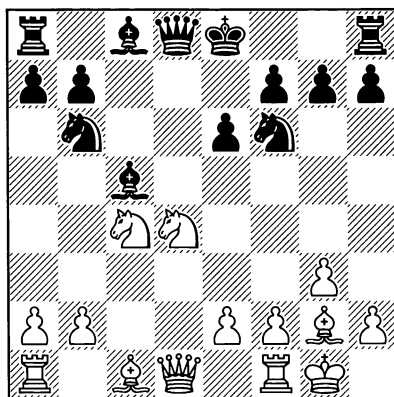
8...♟b6 9.♟xb6 ♖xb6 10.♟xd4 ♟d7 11.♟b3 (preparing ♟e3) 11...♞d8 12.♟e3 ♖a6 This position occurred in Tal – Chernikov, Moscow 1966. And now 13.♞c1 intending to play next ♞c7 would give White a serious initiative due to his development advantage.

8...♟e7 9.♟xd4 0-0 10.♟b5 and White was clearly better in G. Timoschenko – Kholmov, USSR 1982.

9.♟xd4 ♟b6

After 9...0-0 White has the very strong 10.♟b3! ♟e7 11.♟f4 with an obvious advantage, Mchedlishvili – T. Petrosian, Yerevan 2004.

After the text I believe White can improve on existing theory with a strong novelty.



10.♟e3!N

10.♟xb6 ♟xb6 11.♟b5 ♟xf2†! 12.♜xf2 ♖b6† 13.♟d4 e5 14.e3 exd4 15.♖xd4 was played in Tal – Danov, USSR 1972, but now 15...0-0 looks to be probably defendable.

10...0-0 11.♟b3

A worthy alternative might be 11.♞c1!?, as 11...♟g4 is met strongly by 12.♟c6!.

11...♟xe3 12.♟xe3

Maintaining typical pressure on Black's queenside and thus a reasonable plus.

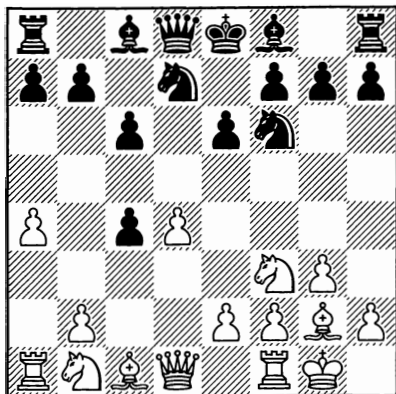
(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♟f3 ♟f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♟g2 ♟bd7 6.0-0)

B) 6...c6

Clearly Black has crude thoughts of ...b7-b5 supporting his extra pawn.

7.a4

Another popular move is 7.♖c2, but the position that arises after the essentially forced 7...b5 8.b3 cxb3 9.♖xc6 ♖b8 10.axb3 ♙b7 11.♖c2 ♜c8 looks acceptable for Black.



### 7...a5

7...♙e7 8.♖c2 0-0 9.♖xc4 (a worthy alternative might be 9.♘a3!?) 9...a5 Black is solidly placed, but I still prefer White's position due to his space advantage. Play might continue as follows: 10.♘c3 ♘d5 11.e4 ♘b4 The weakness of the b4-square allows Black to place his knight perfectly. 12.♙d1 b6 13.♖b3 ♙a6 14.♙e3 ♜c8 This occurred in Kopylov – Renner, Internet 2005, and here I believe White should regroup his pieces accurately with: 15.♙d2 ♖c7 16.♖d1 ♜fd8 17.♜c1± White is ready to start some activity on the kingside.

### 8.♖c2

As always, White can choose a different concept: in this case this would mean playing in gambit-style for compensation and not wasting time regaining the pawn:

8.♘c3 ♙b4 9.e4! 0-0

It is extremely dangerous for Black to take the second pawn: 9...♙xc3 10.bxc3 ♘xe4 11.♖e1! ♘d6 12.♙a3 ♖c7 13.♖d2!± White's queen is heading for f4 increasing the pressure along the a3-f8 diagonal.

White has powerful compensation. 13...0-0 14.♖f4 c5

10.♖c2 ♙e8 11.♙d1 ♖e7 12.e5 ♘d5 13.♘d2 ♘7b6 14.♘ce4

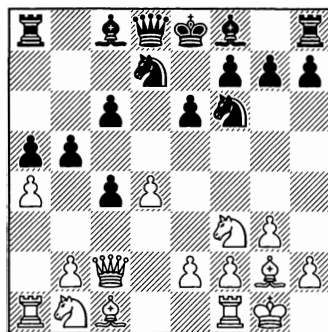
White regained the pawn keeping better chances in Aronian – Portisch, Warsaw 2005.

### 8...♘b6

Black trying to hold onto the c4-pawn is always a critical test:

8...b5

Here I found a very energetic method of playing for White:



### 9.♘e5!N

Black is fine after 9.b3 cxb3 10.♖xc6 ♙a6! and White cannot capture on b5, in view of 11...♖b6 followed by ...b3-b2.

9...♘xe5 10.dxe5 ♘d5 11.axb5 cxb5 12.♘c3 White's development advantage starts to tell, and it is not so easy for Black to deal with all the threats. For example:

12...♖d7

Or 12...♘b4 13.♖d2 ♖xd2 14.♙xd2 ♖b8 15.♙xa5 ♙d7 16.♙d1 ♙e7 17.♙a7 ♙c6 18.♘e4 ♘d5 19.♘d6† ♙xd6 20.exd6 and White's d-pawn should decide the issue.

13.♙d1 ♙b7 14.♙g5

With the idea of:

14...h6

14...b4 15.♘xd5 exd5 16.e4 and White breaks through.

15.e4 ♘b4 16.♙xd7 ♘xc2 17.♙ad1 hxd5

18.♟xb5

The attack is decisive.

9.♟bd2 ♟e7 10.♟xc4 ♟xc4

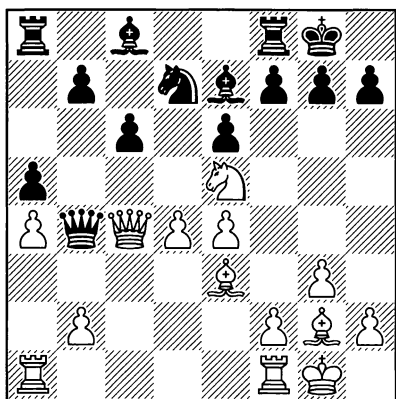
Avoiding trading the knights should in general favour White, as he has an obvious space advantage.

10...♟bd5 11.e4 ♟b4 12.♟e2 b6 13.b3 ♟a6 was Arkhipov – Shovunov, Orel 1997. Now White should have continued mobilizing his pieces with 14.♟d1 0-0 15.♟f4 followed by 16.♟ac1, and White's extra space means he is clearly better.

11.♟xc4 ♟b6

In case of 11...0-0 12.♟d1 ♟d5 as happened in Reefschlaeger – Gamer, Germany 2004, there is no problem for White in swapping queens after 13.♟e5 ♟xc4 14.♟xc4± and the a5-pawn becomes a serious weakness in Black's camp.

12.♟e5 0-0 13.e4 ♟b4 14.♟e3 ♟d7



15.♟xb4 ♟xb4 16.♟d3±

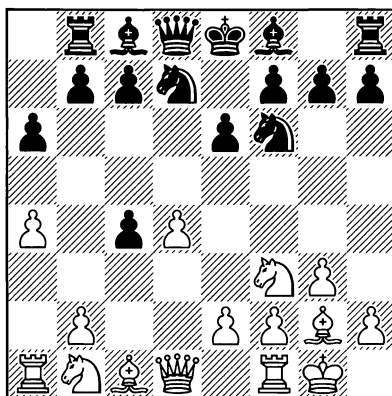
Again Black is kept under serious pressure in the endgame, Timman – Kuijff, Netherlands 1996.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♟f3 ♟f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♟g2 ♟bd7 6.0-0)

C) 6...a6

Naturally this move is another way of preparing the usual ...b5 advance.

7.a4 ♟b8



8.a5!

Black is prevented from reliably defending his pawn with ...b5. It seems to me that White is better in every line:

8...b5

Other moves do not bring Black relief either:

8...♟d6 9.♟bd2 b5 10.axb6 ♟xb6 11.e4 ♟b4 12.♟e5 ♟b7 13.♟dxc4 0-0 14.♟d3! h6 (White is clearly better after 14...c5 15.d5 exd5 16.♟xb6 ♟xb6 17.exd5 ♟fd8 18.♟c4 ♟b5 19.d6±) 15.♟a5! ♟xa5 16.♟xa5± With a large positional advantage, Meins – Proeh, Germany 1998.

8...♟e4 9.♟c2 ♟d6 Now I do not see any point in rushing with 10.♟e5 as happened in both games which reached this position. White can simply play 10.♟a3± regaining the pawn and keeping all his positional plusses.

**9. axb6 cxb6**

Nobody has tried to recapture with the rook: 9...axb6N White should continue 10. dxd2 Bb4 11. Ba4 (11. Bxc2 Bb7 is less clear) 11...dxb6 12. Bxb4 Bxb4 13. dxc4± White wins back the pawn and keeps his positional advantage.

**10. dxf4 Bb7**

Another line is 10...Ba8 11. dfd2! d5 12. dxc4 d7f6 (somewhat better was 12...Bb7, but even in this case White keeps a clear edge after 13. d6d+ Bxd6 14. Bxd6 d7f6 15. Ba3±) 13. Bb3 and in Evdokimov – Burkhanov, Ufa 2004, Black quickly collapsed after 13...a5 14. Bg5 Bb4 15. e4 d7e7 16. e5 d7fd5 17. d7c3. Black cannot avoid losing material

**11. Ba6**

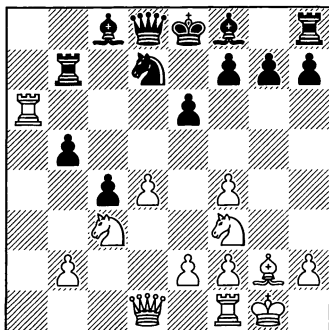
White calmly regains the pawn keeping all the plusses of his position. After 11. d7e5 d7xe5 12. Bxb7 Bxb7 13. dxe5 B7d5!? Black gets reasonable compensation for an exchange.

**11... d5 12. d7c3 B7e7**

In his notes in *Chess Informant 45* Tukmakov recommended

12... d7xf4 13. gxf4 b5

as the lesser evil for Black, but it is difficult to agree with this evaluation:



14. d7e5 d7xe5 15. Ba8!

White's position is very close to winning.

**15... Bb6**

The tricky 15...d7g4 is met strongly by 16. e3! (of course not 16. Bxb7?? B7h4 and Black wins) 16...Bb6 17. B7xg4 with a large advantage.

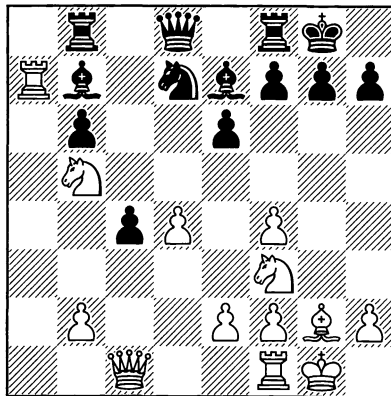
16. dxe5 B7c5 17. B7xd8+ B7xd8 18. B7d1+ B7c7 19. Ba7+ B7b7 20. d7e4!

White's initiative is decisive.

**13. d7b5**

This is even stronger than 13. d7xd5 exd5 14. Ba8 b5±.

**13...0-0 14. B7c1 d7xf4 15. gxf4 B7b8 16. Ba7 B7b7**

**17. B7xc4±**

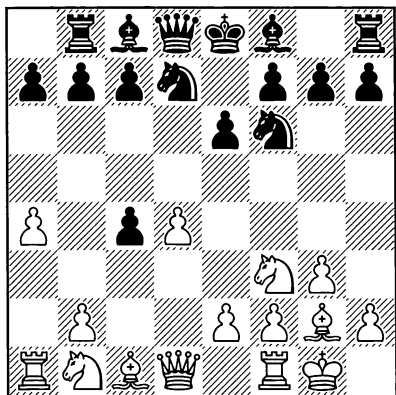
White comfortably won with his extra pawn in Tukmakov – O. Rodriguez, New York 2008.

(1. d4 d5 2. c4 e6 3. d7f3 d7f6 4. g3 dxc4 5. B7g2 d7bd7 6. 0-0)

**D) 6... Bb8**

Yet another way of preparing ...b5: the themes in many of the sections of this chapter naturally have some common features.

**7. a4**

**7...b6**

7...a6 8.a5 would transpose to the 6...a6 variation.

**8.♖fd2 ♗b7**

This is Black's recent attempt to solve his opening problems. Other moves are possible:

8...e5 9.♖xc4 exd4 10.♗xd4 ♗c5 11.♗d3 (11.♗f4 0-0 12.♖c3 ♗b7 13.♗xb7 ♗xb7 14.e4±, threatening 15.e5, also looks quite unpleasant for Black.) 11...0-0 12.♖c3 ♗b7 13.♗xb7 ♗xb7 14.♗f3 ♗a8 15.♗f4 White was clearly better thanks to his better coordination in Kasparov – Korchnoi, London (9) 1983.

8...♗a6 runs into 9.♖c3 when White is threatening the unpleasant 10.♖b5. 9...♖d5!? An interesting try to complicate matters, but everything ends up in White's favour: 10.♖xd5 exd5 11.♗xd5 ♖e5 12.e4 c6 13.♗h5 cxd5 14.♗xe5† ♗e7 15.♗xg7 ♗f6 16.♗g4± Yashelin – Abram, corr. 1987.

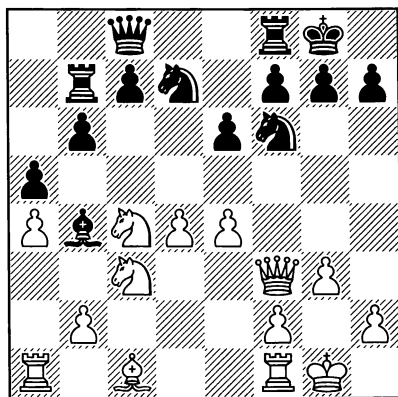
**9.♗xb7 ♗xb7 10.♖xc4**

White has regained the pawn and kept a definite space advantage, so Black is very far from equalizing.

**10...♗b4 11.♗b3!**

The white queen will transfer to f3.

11...a5 12.♗f3 ♗c8 13.♖c3 0-0 14.e4±

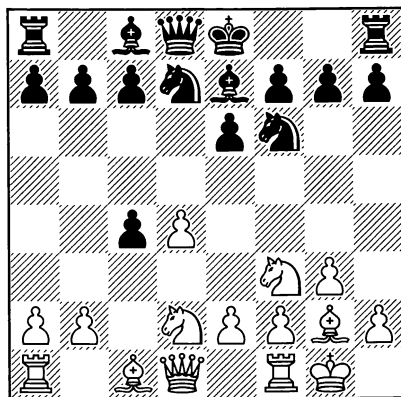


White is obviously better, Khalifman – Portisch, Bazna 2008.

(1.d4 ♖f6 2.c4 e6 3.g3 d5 4.♗g2 dxc4 5.♖f3 ♖bd7 6.0-0)

**E) 6...♗e7**

A more conservative approach than the previous sections.

**7.♖bd2****7...♖b6**

This is more a developing move than a serious

attempt to keep the extra pawn indefinitely: White will collect the c4-pawn easily enough.

7...b5

White is ready for this more greedy approach. He obtains an advantage after:

8.a4 c6 9.axb5 cxb5 10.♖e5 ♜xe5

Black faces serious problems after 10...♜d5 11.♜c6 ♞b6 12.♜xe7 ♜xe7 13.e4 ♜b4 14.b3!±.

11.♙xa8 ♞xd4 12.♜f3 ♜xf3† 13.♙xf3 ♞b6 14.b3! 0-0

The point is that Black cannot play 14...c3 in view of 15.♞d3 b4 16.♙e3 ♙c5 17.♞c4! ♜d7 18.♞fd1 0-0 19.♞xd7 ♙xe3 20.♞c7 ♙xf2† 21.♜g2 and White wins.

15.bxc4 bxc4

So far we have followed Ni Hua – Jakubowski, Oropesa del Mar 1999, and now the easiest would be to play:

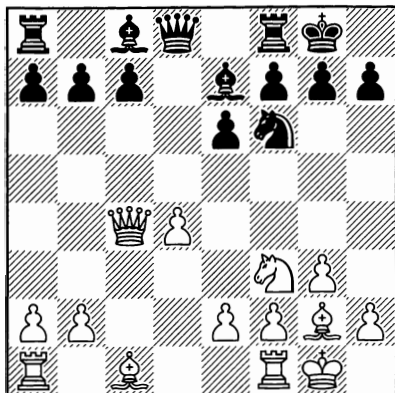
16.♞a4±

Winning one of Black's queenside pawns.

8.♞c2

The text is more accurate than 8.♜xc4 ♜xc4 9.♞a4† which allows Black to activate his light-squared bishop: 9...♙d7 10.♞xc4 ♙c6 with decent play for Black.

8...0-0 9.♜xc4 ♜xc4 10.♞xc4



This position is obviously in White's favour, as Black is far from achieving the typical ...c7-c5 move. I will give just one example of a game between good players to show Black's difficulties.

10...c6

Or 10...a6 11.♞c2 and Black has no time for 11...b5 as it would be strongly met by 12.♜e5.

11.♞c2 ♞b6 12.♙d2 ♙d7 13.♞fc1 ♞ac8 14.b4 ♞fd8 15.♞ab1 ♙e8 16.e4±

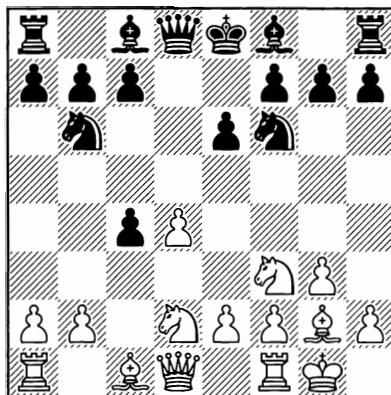
White had a dream position in Smejkal – Unzicker, Amsterdam 1980.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♜f3 ♜f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2 ♜bd7 6.0-0)

F) 6...♜b6

As in the previous line, Black is well aware that the c4-pawn will drop soon enough, despite the b6-knight's efforts.

7.♜bd2



7...c5

This is Black's main option, but other moves have been tried as well:

7...♙e7 8.♞c2 transposes to 6...♙e7, page 57.

7...♙d7

This is the main alternative.

8.a4!

An important move, as Black could have met 8.♞c2 with the annoying 8...♙a4!.

8...♙c6 9.a5 ♖bd7 10.♙xc4 ♙e7 11.♞b3 0–0 12.♙d1 ♞c8?!

This move is just a waste of time and allows White to effortlessly seize the initiative.

Obviously Black should have played 12...♙d5 but White's position still looks very promising. The following is just an illustrative variation: 13.♙fe5 c5 14.♙e3 cxd4 15.♙xd4 ♙xg2 16.♙xg2 ♞c7 17.♞ac1 ♙xe5 18.♙xe5 ♞xa5 19.♞xb7 ♞d5† 20.♞xd5 ♙xd5 21.♙c6 The endgame is very unpleasant for Black.

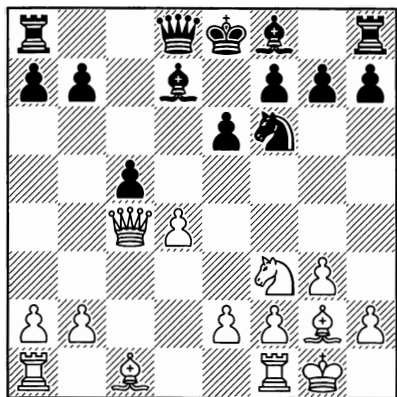
13.♙f4 ♙d5 14.♞ac1

White has a clear advantage, Kiss – P. Horvath, Aggtelek 1997.

8.♙xc4 ♙xc4

8...cxd4 is examined in the 6...c5 line.

9.♞a4† ♙d7 10.♞xc4



Black has a wide choice at this juncture:

10...♞c8

This is our main line, but some other options demand our attention as well.

10...♞b6 11.♙e3

At this point Black probably should go for

11...♞c8

11...♙d5 12.♙e5 This looks very dangerous for Black, as he is clearly behind in development. 12...♙b5 (It is even more risky for Black to open the f-file. 12...♙xe3 13.fxe3 and White won a fine attacking game in Silva – Braakhuis, e-mail 1997: 13...♙b5 14.♞b3 f6 15.♙c6†! ♙xc6 16.♞xe6† ♙e7 17.♞f7† ♙d8 18.♞ad1 c4 19.♙xc4 ♞b4 20.d5 ♙d7 21.d6 ♙f8 22.♞xf6) 13.♞b3 cxd4 14.♙xd4 ♙c5 15.♙xc5 ♞xc5 16.♞ac1 ♞b6 So far the moves come from Carlhammar – Schneider, Stockholm 1987, now White could have won a pawn by means of 17.♙xd5 exd5 18.a4!.

12.♙e5 cxd4 13.♙xd4!

After 13.♞xd4 ♞xd4 14.♙xd4 ♙c5 15.♞fd1 ♙xd4 16.♞xd4 ♞c7! Black has good chances to hold, Wessman – Schneider, Haparanda 1994.

13...♙c5

13...♞xc4 14.♙xb6 ♞b4 leads to a lost position after 15.♙xa7 ♞xb2 16.♞fb1.

14.♙xd7 ♙xd7

Bad is 14...♙xd7? 15.b4! ♞xb4 16.♞xb4 ♙xb4 17.♙xb7 ♞c7 18.♞fc1! with a large advantage for White in Radashkovich – Razuvaev, USSR 1971.

15.♞a4† ♙e7 16.♙c3 ♞he8 17.e3 ♙f8 18.♞fd1±

White has a pleasant edge, thanks to his pair of bishops.

10...b5 11.♞c2 ♞c8 12.dxc5 ♙xc5 13.♞b3 0–0

13...♞b6 14.♙e5 0–0 15.♙g5 just transposes to 13...0–0.

13...♙c6 does not work due to 14.♙e5! ♙xg2 15.♞xb5† ♙e7 16.♙xg2 ♞d5† 17.♙f3 and White remains a pawn up.



14.♟e5 ♖b6 15.♙g5 ♜fd8 16.♜f3 ♙e7  
17.♜fc1

17.♟xd7 ♜xd7 18.♞ac1 is too soft, and Black equalized comfortably after 18...♞cd8 19.♜c6 ♖a5 20.a3 b4 21.♙f4 ♟d5 in Kasparov – Korchnoi, London (5) 1983.

17.♞ac1 would probably be similar.

17...♞xc1† 18.♞xc1 h6?!

Somewhat stronger would be 18...♙e8 19.♜b7 ♖xb7 20.♙xb7 and White is slightly better due to his control of the c-file and Black's weak pawns on the queenside.

19.♙e3 ♖a5 20.♟xd7 ♜xd7 21.♜a8†

With a clear advantage for White in Tratar – Cigan, Murska Sobota 2006.

### 11.♟e5 b5

It would be premature for Black to release the tension in the centre, as can be seen after 11...cxd4 12.♜xd4 ♙c5 13.♜d3±, when White was clearly better in Vukic – Cvetkovic, Umag 1972.

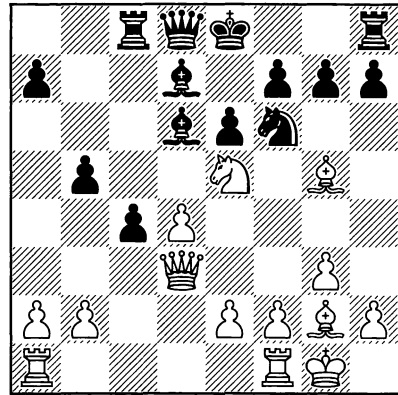
### 12.♜d3 ♙d6

I believe 12...c4 significantly eases White's play. 13.♜c2 (13.♜f3!? is also a very interesting alternative) 13...♟d5 (Or 13...♜b6 14.♞d1 ♙e7 15.a4 a6 Bogdanovski – Raicevic, Pula 1990. Now 16.♙g5! would secure White an advantage.) 14.a4 a6 Alburt – Browne, Taxco (izt) 1985. Now Alburt's recommendation in *Chess Informant 39* looks quite strong: 15.e4 ♟b4 16.♜e2 ♙d6 (16...♟c6 17.♟xc6 ♙xc6 18.d5!±) 17.♜g4!± Black has no comfortable way to defend the g7-pawn.

### 13.♙g5 c4

Sooner or later Black has to make this move, but perhaps it was possible to delay it for one move: 13...0–0 14.♞fd1 (not so dangerous for Black is 14.♟xd7 ♜xd7 15.dxc5 ♙xc5 16.♜xd7 ♟xd7 17.♞ac1 f6 18.♙d2 ♟e5! and despite White's two bishops, Black's activity should be enough for a draw) 14...c4

15.♜c2 ♙e7 16.a4 White's chances are clearly preferable.



### 14.♜c2!N

I believe that this natural move is White's best option. Other moves seem less clear:

14.♜f3 h6! 15.♙xf6 ♜xf6 gives Black decent play.

The only game to reach this position continued: 14.♜e3 h6?! 15.♙xf6 gxf6 16.♟xd7 ♜xd7 17.♞ad1±, Piket – Korchnoi, Dortmund 1994. But after 14...♙e7 I have failed to find anything special for White, as Korchnoi's recommendation of 15.d5 leads to a drawish endgame after 15...♟xd5 16.♙xe7 ♜xe7 17.♜xa7 f6 18.♟xd7 ♜xd7 19.♜xd7† ♟xd7.

### 14...♜c7

I have also considered other moves:

14...h6 15.♙xf6 gxf6 (After 15...♜xf6 16.♟xd7 ♟xd7 17.♞ad1 White has a clear plan of pushing his central pawns: Black's position looks very dangerous.) 16.♟xd7 ♜xd7 17.d5 The opposite-coloured bishops certainly do not make White's initiative any less dangerous.

14...♙e7 15.a4! is very unpleasant for Black, as he cannot play 15...a6 in view of 16.♙b7!.

14...0-0 15.a4 bxa4 (again 15...a6 is strongly met by 16.♗b7!±) 16.♗xf6 gxf6 17.♘xd7 ♖xd7 18.♙xa4 c3 19.bxc3 ♗xc3 20.♙xa7! ♗xc2 21.♗xd7± White retains an extra pawn, though Black has some chances to scrape a draw.

### 15.♗fd1

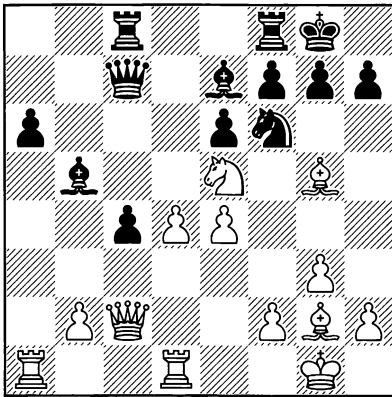
White's choice was pleasant. The simple 15.♗xf6 gxf6 16.♘xd7 ♖xd7 17.d5 0-0 (or 17...♗c5 18.♗fd1 0-0 19.♗d4 with an initiative) 18.♗ad1 ♖e7 19.♗d4 also gives an excellent initiative.

### 15...0-0 16.e4 ♗e7

16...♗e8 17.♗xf6 gxf6 18.♘g4 ♗e7 19.d5 creates a dangerous attack.

### 17.a4 a6 18.axb5 ♗xb5

18...axb5 19.♗f4 ♖b7 20.d5 looks great for White, as all his pieces are in play.



### 19.♗d2!±

The idea is to transfer the dark-squared bishop to c3 and thus maintain a clear positional edge.

### Conclusion:

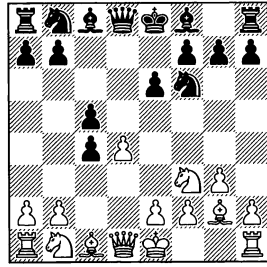
In general there should be a reason why 5...♖bd7 has been out of fashion in recent years. And I believe the reason is simple enough: Black is simply worse in this line, while White enjoys a pleasant Catalan advantage.



# Chapter 5

## The Catalan

### 4...dxc4 and 5...c5



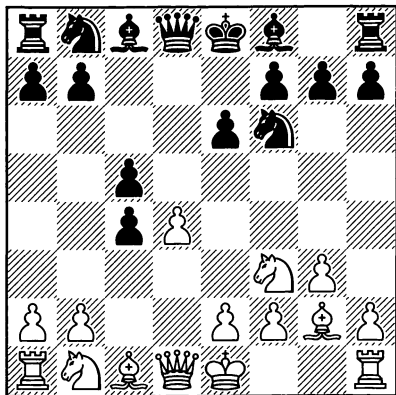
### Variation Index

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.f3 f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.Bg2 c5

6.0-0

A) 6... cxd4 7.fxd4	p 64
A1) 7... fxa6	p 64
A2) 7... fxd5	p 65
A3) 7... Bc5	p 65
A4) 7... Bb6	p 66
A5) 7... a6	p 67
B) 6... fxc6 7.Ba4	p 68
B1) 7... Bc5 8.Bxc4	p 69
B11) 8... Bc8	p 69
B12) 8... cxd4 9.fxd4 Bc8 10.fxc3	p 70
B121) 10... Bb6	p 71
B122) 10... Be7	p 72
B123) 10... fxd4	p 74
B13) 8... b5 9.Bd3	p 76
B131) 9... c4	p 76
B132) 9... Bc8 10.dxc5 Bxc5 11.fxc3	p 78
B1321) 11... 0-0	p 78
B1322) 11... fxb4	p 79
B1323) 11... b4	p 80
B2) 7... cxd4	p 82

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2 c5



This is a popular line for Black and it has recently been played successfully by Michael Adams.

### 6.0–0

In the Catalan it is quite common for White to start by developing pieces while Black is mainly making pawn moves. It is then quite usual for Black to play catch-up and later lose the pawn he has snatched.

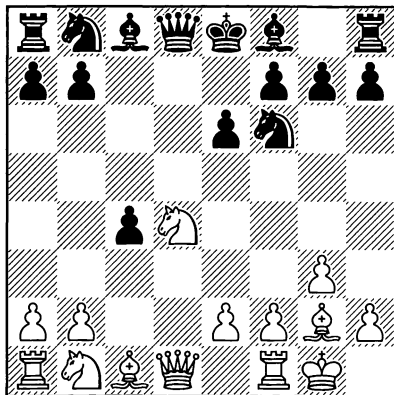
Sometimes Black tries to solve his opening problems by removing the tension in the centre immediately with A) 6...cxd4. But the most popular move in this position, and probably also the soundest strategy for Black, is to start to develop with B) 6...♘c6 and only then consider taking on d4. In this case White will have to start looking at ways to regain the c-pawn.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2 c5 6.0–0)

A) 6...cxd4 7.♘xd4

Another possible move is 7.♝a4†, but we will focus on the most natural move, 7.♘xd4.

Black now has a wide choice of continuations, from which I have decided to look at only the five most natural moves:

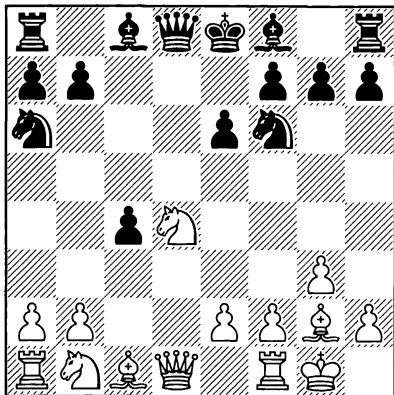


A1) 7...♘a6, A2) 7...♘d5?!, A3) 7...♙c5, A4) 7...♝b6 and A5) 7...a6!?

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2 c5 6.0–0 cxd4 7.♘xd4)

A1) 7...♘a6

This move looks a bit strange to me, as Black is doing nothing against White's pressure along the h1–a8 diagonal. Nevertheless this move was given an exclamation mark in *Chess Informant* 48.



**8.♟b5!N**

This is quite a strong new move. Previously White has tried only 8.♟a3 and 8.♟c3, but failed to obtain anything special in the opening.

**8...♞xd1**

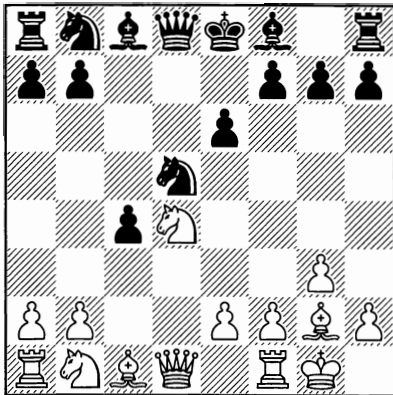
8...♟c7 9.♞xd8† ♟xd8 10.♟5a3!? and White will be clearly better after regaining the pawn on c4.

8...♟d7 9.♟d6† ♟xd6 10.♞xd6 ♟b5 11.♞xd8† ♟xd8 12.♟a3 ♟c6 13.♟xc6† bxc6 14.♟xc4± White has an edge, thanks to Black's damaged pawn structure on the queenside.

9.♞xd1 ♟d5 10.♟1c3 ♟d7 11.♟xd5 ♟xb5 12.♟c3 ♟c6 13.♟xc6† bxc6 14.♞d4 ♟b4 15.♞xc4±

With a pleasant advantage for White.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♟f3 ♟f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♟g2 c5 6.0–0 cxd4 7.♟xd4)

**A2) 7...♟d5?!**

Although this move has been used recently by players of a very high level, it cannot be recommended.

8.♞a4† ♟d7 9.♞xc4 ♟7b6 10.♞b3 ♟d7

After 10...♟c5 Kramnik gives the following line: 11.♞b5† ♟d7 12.♟b3 with advantage to White.

**11.♟c3**

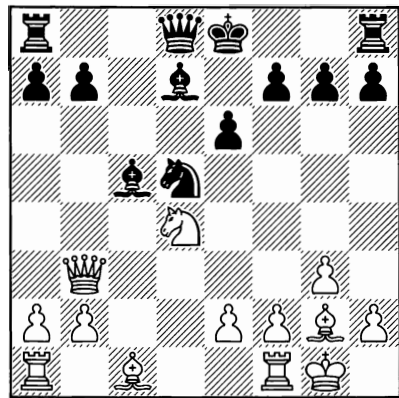
11.e4 might be a worthy alternative.

**11...♟c5**

Or 11...♟xc3 12.♞xc3 ♞c8 13.♞d3 and White's pressure on the h1-a8 diagonal is unpleasant.

**12.♟xd5 ♟xd5**

The other recapture, 12...exd5, gives White a pleasant edge after 13.♟e3±, but after the text White has a neat tactical resource.

**13.♟f5! 0–0**

If 13...exf5 14.♞xd5± Black loses the b7-pawn.

**14.♟xg7!±**

This was played in Kramnik – Naiditsch, Turin (ol) 2006. White is winning a pawn, as 14...♟xg7 is met by 15.♟xd5 followed by 16.♞c3† and 17.♞xc5.

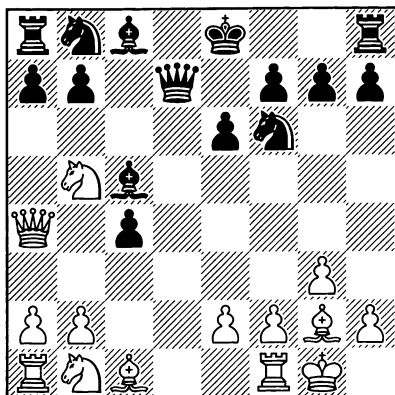
(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♟f3 ♟f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♟g2 c5 6.0–0 cxd4 7.♟xd4)

**A3) 7...♟c5**

This natural looking move leads to an advantage for White.

8. ♖a4† ♜d7 9. ♘b5!

The key move.



9...0-0

9...a6?? is just a blunder in view of 10. ♘c7†, Kiss – Gutdeutsch, Koszeg 1996.

10. ♖xc4 ♜e7 11. ♘5c3!

A very instructive move that does not allow Black to remove the pressure along the h1-a8 diagonal.

In contrast, the natural 11. ♘1c3?! gives Black an opportunity to solve this problem by 11...a6 12. ♘d4 b5 13. ♖d3 ♘b7 with equal play.

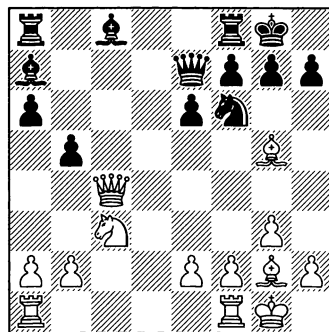
11...a6 12. ♘g5 ♘bd7

Obviously Black has no time for 12...b5? as he would lose material after 13. ♘xf6 gxf6 14. ♖g4†.

13. ♘e4 ♘a7 14. ♘bc3±

White was much better in Polugaevsky – Ljubojevic, Amsterdam 1981.

Once again there is no time for 14...b5 in view of 15. ♘xf6† ♘xf6.



White could decide the game with a brilliant tactical operation: 16. ♖e4!! (16. ♖f4 is only good enough to win a pawn) 16...♖b8 (Black loses an exchange after 16...♘xe4 17. ♘xe7 ♘xc3 18. bxc3+–) 17. ♘d5!! ♖d8 18. ♘xf6† gxf6 19. ♖ad1 ♖e7 20. ♘h6+–

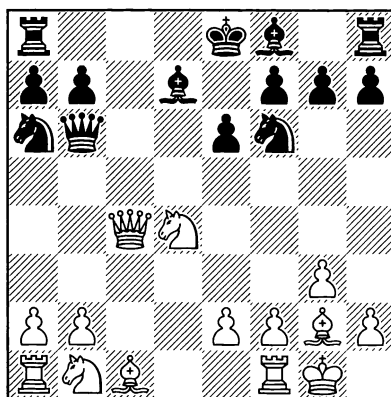
(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3. ♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4 5. ♘g2 c5 6.0-0 cxd4 7. ♘xd4)

A4) 7...♖b6

White's best way to achieve an advantage is to take back the pawn immediately.

8. ♖a4† ♘d7 9. ♖xc4 ♘a6

The key move: Black intends to use the vulnerable position of White's pieces in the centre by means of ...♖c8 and maybe then ...♘c5.



**10. ♖b3!**

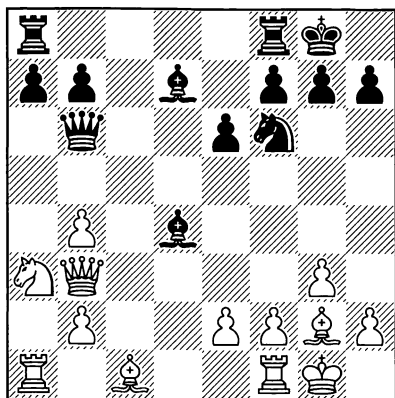
A very strong move that allows White to solve his problems tactically while at the same time grabbing the initiative.

**10... ♜b4**

After 10... ♜c5 11. ♖xb6 axb6 12. ♜c3 the endgame would be very unpleasant for Black due to his weaknesses on the queenside.

**11. a3 ♙c5**

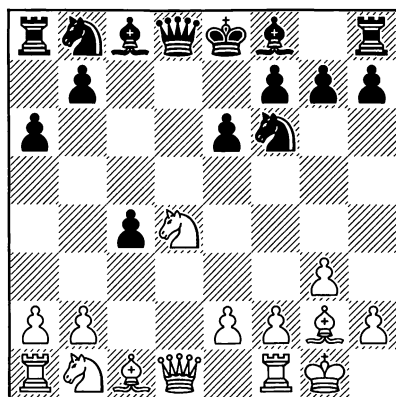
After 11... ♜bd5 12. ♖xb6 axb6 13. e4± White has a pleasant advantage.

**12. axb4 ♙xd4 13. ♜a3 0-0****14. e3!N**

This is a simple improvement over 14. ♜c4 as played in Razuvaev – Murey, London 1983.

**14... ♙c5 15. ♙d2 ♙e7 16. ♜c4 ♖c7 17. ♖fc1±**

White has strong pressure.

**(1. d4 d5 2. c4 e6 3. ♜f3 ♜f6 4. g3 dxc4 5. ♙g2 c5 6. 0-0 cxd4 7. ♜xd4)****A5) 7...a6!?****8. ♜c3!N**

In my opinion this is a very important novelty, as Black gains a perfectly playable position after 8. ♖a4† ♖d7! 9. ♖xc4 b5 10. ♖b3 ♙b7. Black has neutralized the pressure along the h1-a8 diagonal and he has normal play. 11. ♙xb7 ♖xb7 12. a4 b4 13. ♜d2 This occurred in Scheeren – Van der Wiel, Hilversum 1984, and now Black should have played the simple 13... ♜bd7N 14. ♜c4 ♜c5 with an equal game.

**8...e5**

I believe this is the critical test of White's idea. I also analysed two other moves as well, but they are clearly worse:

**8... ♙c5 9. ♖a4† ♖d7 10. ♙e3!**

White regains the pawn in favourable circumstances.

Only not 10. ♜db5 0-0 11. ♖xc4 ♖e7 12. ♜d4 b5! followed by 13... ♙b7 and Black solves his opening problems.

**10... ♖xa4 11. ♜xa4 ♙a7 12. ♖fc1 0-0**

12...e5 13. ♖xc4 0-0 14. ♜c2 and White is clearly better, as his pressure along the h1-a8 diagonal looks very unpleasant.

**13. ♖xc4 ♜d5 14. ♙xd5**

14. ♜f5!? is also an interesting option.

**14...exd5 15. ♖c7±**

White definitely has a nice plus.



8...♙e7 9.♞a4† ♞d7

9...♜bd7 10.♞xc4 ♜b6 11.♞d3 also fails to solve Black's opening problems.

10.♜db5

Once again White should not allow Black to cancel the pressure on the long diagonal by 10.♞xc4 b5 followed by 11...♙b7.

10...0–0

White was threatening ♜c7†.

11.♜d1 ♜d5 12.♙f4

White maintains a clear advantage. For example:

12...♜xc3 13.♜xc3 ♞xa4 14.♜xa4 ♜d7  
15.♞ac1±

9.♜c2

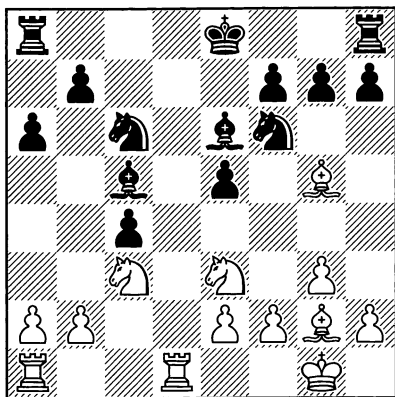
Less convincing is 9.♜f3 ♞xd1 10.♞xd1 ♜c6 11.♙e3 ♙f5.

9...♞xd1 10.♞xd1 ♜c6 11.♙g5 ♙e6  
12.♜e3

I think White chances are slightly preferable in this endgame. The following is just an approximate line:

12...♙c5

12...♙e7 13.♙xf6 gxf6 14.♜cd5±



13.♙xf6

White had a real choice. The alternative is 13.♞ac1 and if Black decides to hold onto his

extra pawn by means of 13...♙xe3 14.♙xe3 ♞d8 (after 14...0–0 15.♜a4! White will regain the pawn in a favourable situation) 15.♙c5 ♞xd1† 16.♞xd1 ♜d7 17.♙a3 ♜d8 18.♜e4± and White has good compensation for the pawn.

13...gxf6 14.♜ed5 0–0–0

Premature would be 14...♙xd5?! 15.♞xd5 ♙d4 16.e3 ♙xc3 17.bxc3 ♜e7 18.♞b1 ♞ab8 19.♞c5 and White's pressure is very unpleasant.

15.♜xf6±

White's position looks more flexible and his knight on f6 rather restricts Black's forces.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♜f3 ♜f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2 c5 6.0–0)

**B) 6...♜c6**

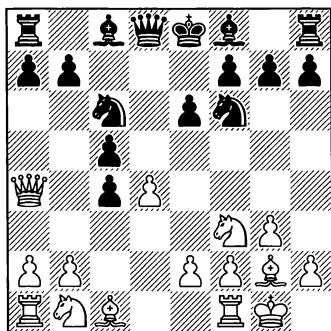
By far Black's most popular answer.

7.♞a4

If we study the theory books, the text is White's most popular option, but recently 7.♜e5 has been played equally often. Certainly 7.dxc5 and 7.♜a3 can also be played.

Now that we have dealt with the less important 6...cxd4 we have reached the first main branching point in this variation. Black has a choice of five possibilities, but only two of these are critical: **B1) 7...♙d7** and the less "heavy" **B2) 7...cxd4**, which requires less knowledge to combat, but where an advantage might be harder to come by.

As I suggested, there are three other moves that I want to consider briefly, even though they are hardly serious options for Black. But for the sake of completeness I have decided to quickly brush aside these lines with a few notes:



7...♖a5 8.♗xc4 cxd4 9.♘xd4 ♘xd4 10.♗xd4 ♗c5

The point behind Black's 7th move.

11.♗c3 ♗b4

After 11...♗xc3 12.♘xc3 the arising endgame is clearly favourable for White, again thanks to the pressure exerted by the Catalan bishop.

12.♗b3 0-0 13.a3 ♗e7

This was played in Machelett – Poschke, Berlin 1993, and now the simple:

14.♘c3

would lead to an obvious advantage for White.

7...♘d7 8.dxc5 ♗xc5 9.♗xc4

Usually this kind of Catalan position without c- and d-pawns is clearly favourable for White.

9...0-0 10.♘c3 a6 11.♗d1 ♗b6 12.♘e4 ♗e7 13.b3 ♘f6 14.♗b2 ♘xe4 15.♗xe4±

White's pressure became very annoying in Bischoff – Sonntag, Germany 1987.

7...♗b6 8.♘a3!

White immediately uses the black queen's position on b6 to win a tempo.

8...cxd4 9.♘xc4 ♗b4

Otherwise 7...♗b6 would be absolutely senseless.

10.♗xb4 ♗xb4 11.a3 ♗e7 12.♗d1 ♘d5

Black is trying somehow to neutralize White's pressure along the h1-a8 diagonal.

13.♘xd4 ♘xd4 14.♗xd4 ♗d7 15.e4

15.♘e3 ♗f6 16.♗d3 was equally strong.

15...♗c5

The lesser evil was 15...♘b6 16.♘d6† ♗xd6 17.♗xd6 ♗c8 18.♗d3±, although White keeps a pleasant edge here as well, thanks to his pair of bishops.

16.♗d2 ♘b6 17.♘a5±

With strong pressure, Nesis – Galdanov, USSR 1975.

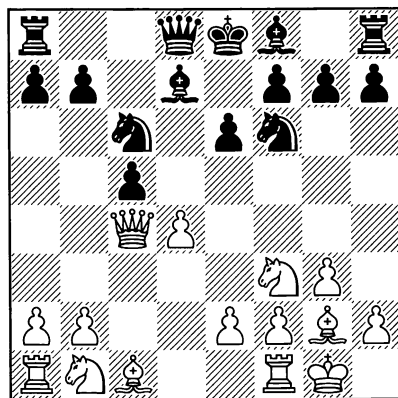
(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♗g2 c5 6.0-0 ♘c6 7.♗a4)

**B1) 7...♗d7**

According to theory this is Black's best choice.

**8.♗xc4**

8.dxc5 ♘a5 9.♗c2 ♗xc5 10.♘e5 ♗c8 is fine for Black according to the theory.



Black can now choose between three possible continuations: **B11) 8...♗c8**, **B12) 8...cxd4** and **B13) 8...b5**. The last option looks to me to be the most ambitious.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♗g2 c5 6.0-0 ♘c6 7.♗a4 ♗d7 8.♗xc4)

**B11) 8...♗c8**

This natural looking move leaves White with a pleasant advantage.

### 9.dxc5 ♖a5

Black could also try:

9...♘a5 10.♗d3

10.♗h4!?

10...♙xc5

10...♗xc5 as in K. Berg – Cu. Hansen, Vejle 1982, looks very suspicious. I believe White should simply develop his pieces with 11.♘c3 ♘d5 12.♙d1 ♘xc3 13.bxc3 when his lead in development starts to tell.

11.♘e5 0–0

White obtains a pleasant edge after 11...♘c6 12.♘d7 ♗xd7 13.♗xd7 ♘xd7 14.♘c3±, Martyn – Payen, Paris 2002.

12.♘c3

12.♘d7 ♘d7 13.♘c3 ♘e5 allows Black some activity in return for White's two bishops.

12...♙e8

Again 12...♙c6 13.♗xd8 ♗fxd8 14.♘xc6 ♘xc6 15.♙f4± gives White a pleasant advantage, thanks to his bishop pair, A. Holst – Taimanov, Stockholm 1999.

13.♗xd8 ♗xd8 14.♙f4±

White's pieces are more active.

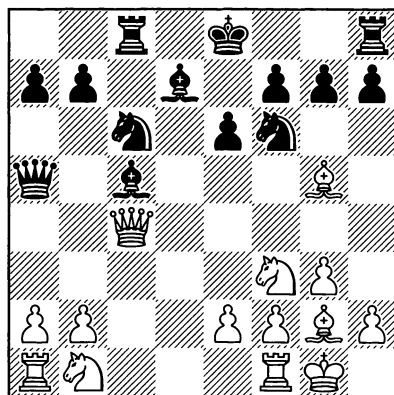
### 10.♙g5

I like this move. It is not White's most popular choice, but in my opinion it is a very logical continuation. White's idea is to develop his knight on d2, leaving the c-file half-open for his rook.

The common alternatives are 10.♙e3 ♘d5 and 10.♘c3.

### 10...♙xc5

10...♗xc5 is answered with 11.♘bd2!?



### 11.♘bd2!?

11.♙xf6 gxf6 led to double-edged play in Godes – Jezek, corr. 1991.

11...♙e7 12.♗fd1 0–0 13.♘b3 ♗c7 14.♗ac1±

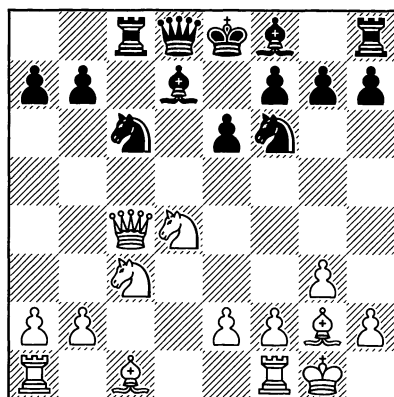
White's chances are slightly better.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2 c5 6.0–0 ♘c6 7.♗a4 ♙d7 8.♗xc4)

### B12) 8...cxd4 9.♘xd4 ♗c8

This looks logical, but White still has a lead in development, which allows him to create some play.

### 10.♘c3



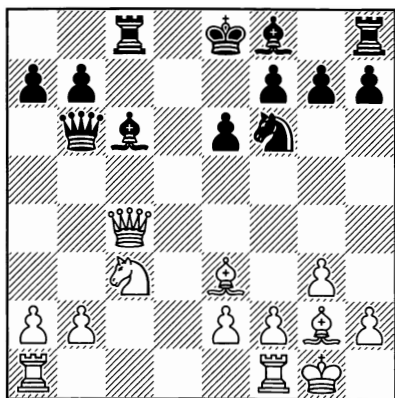
Again Black has a choice of three natural looking moves: **B121) 10...♖b6**, **B122) 10...♙e7** and the main option, **B123) 10...♟xd4**.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♟f3 ♟f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2 c5 6.0-0 ♟c6 7.♖a4 ♙d7 8.♖xc4 cxd4 9.♟xd4 ♖c8 10.♟c3)

### B121) 10...♖b6

Black forces White to take on c6, but once again White's lead in development starts to tell and Black will have to move the queen again almost immediately.

11.♟xc6 ♙xc6 12.♙e3



### 12...♖a5

Looking for the exchange of queens would also not solve all of Black's problems in this position:

12...♖b4 13.♖xb4 ♙xb4 14.♙xa7 ♙xc3

14...♙xg2 would allow White an additional option after 15.♟xg2 ♙xc3 of 16.♖fc1, while 16.bxc3 would just transpose to our main move, 14...♙xc3.

15.bxc3 ♙xg2 16.♟xg2 ♖xc3 17.♖fb1! ♖c7 18.♖b2

Black cannot save the b7-pawn.

18...♟d7

18...♟d7 19.♙b6 ♖c4 20.♙e3 ♖a8 21.♖xb7+ ♟e8 22.a3± with a healthy extra pawn.

18...♟e7 19.♙b6 ♖c4 Markosian – Moiseev, Tula 2001. Again 20.♙e3± just wins the b7-pawn.

19.♖ab1 b6 20.♙xb6 ♟xb6 21.♖xb6±

Ribli – Prandstetter, Warsaw (zt) 1979.

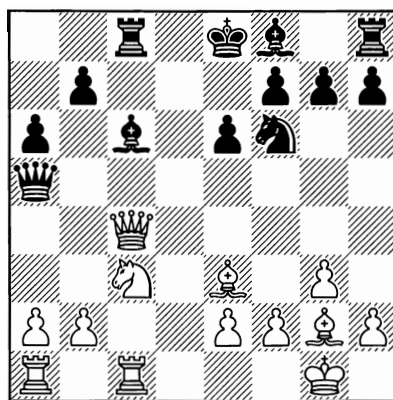
Black certainly cannot take on b2: 12...♖xb2? 13.♖ab1 ♖a3 14.♟b5 ♖a6 15.♖fc1+ and Black is helpless against White's threats, Reilly – Mashian, Munich 1958.

### 13.♖fc1

Creating the unpleasant threat of 14.♟b5.

### 13...a6

Here I found a very unexpected idea.



### 14.♖d4!N

The white queen penetrates to a7 with great effect.

White did not achieve much after 14.♖b3 ♖b4 15.♟a4 ♟d5 in Ibrayev – Soozankar, Dubai 2008.

### 14...♙e7

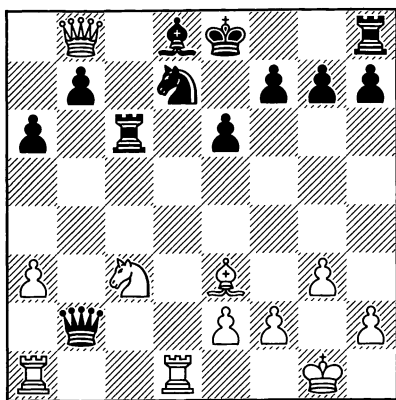
The simplifications after 14...♙c5 15.♖xc5 ♖xc5 16.♙xc5 ♙xg2 17.♟xg2 ♖xc5 18.♟a4 leave White in full control of the c-file.

14...♙xg2 15.♗xg2 ♔e7 is strongly met by 16.♞a7 and Black has no way to defend his b7-pawn, since 16...♞b4 runs into 17.♖d5 and White wins.

15.♞a7 ♞b4 16.♙xc6† ♜xc6 17.a3 ♞xb2

17...♞b3 loses in view of 18.♞a8† ♙d8 19.♞d1 ♖d5 (or 19...♖d7 20.♞d2 and Black is helpless against White doubling the rooks on the d-file) 20.♖xd5 exd5 21.♞d3 ♞xb2 22.♙d4 ♞b5 23.♙xg7 ♜g8 24.♞ad1 with a decisive advantage.

18.♞b8† ♙d8 19.♞d1 ♖d7



20.♞xd7! ♗xd7 21.♞d1† ♗e7 22.♖e4±

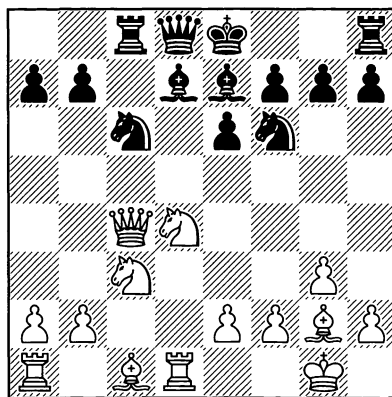
Strategically, White is almost winning as Black's king is highly exposed on e7 and the rook is stuck on h8.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♖f3 ♖f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2 c5 6.0-0 ♖c6 7.♞a4 ♙d7 8.♞xc4 cxd4 9.♖xd4 ♜c8 10.♖c3)

**B122) 10...♙e7**

This is fairly solid for Black, but solid does not necessarily means equalizing.

11.♞d1



11...♖a5

The other options are clearly worse:

11...♞a5 allows White a few tempos to develop an initiative: 12.♖b3 ♞c7 13.♙f4! Weakening the d5-square is a useful first step. 13...e5 14.♙g5 ♙e6 15.♞a4 0-0 16.♙xf6 ♙xf6 17.♖c5 ♞e7 18.♖xe6 ♞xe6 19.♙xc6 ♜xc6 20.♞xa7± White won a pawn in Topalov – Pierrot, Moscow (2) 2001.

11...♞b6 12.♖xc6 ♙xc6 13.♙e3 ♞a5

Black cannot take on b2: 13...♞xb2? 14.♞ab1 ♞a3 Korniushin – Kofanov, Novgorod 1997, and now 15.♖b5 followed by ♖xa7 would decide the game on the spot.

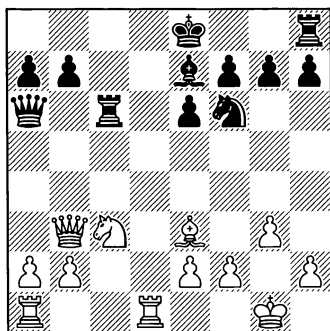
Instead of 14...♞a3, more stubborn was 14...♞c2 15.♙xc6† bxc6 (the point is that Black cannot recapture with the rook: 15...♜xc6? 16.♞xc6† bxc6 17.♞b8† ♙d8 18.♞bxd8† ♗e7 19.♙c5#) 16.♞d2 ♞f5 17.♞b7! and White has a huge advantage.

14.♙xc6† ♜xc6

As we know already, 14...bxc6 leads to a favourable position for White: 15.a3 0-0 16.b4 ♞c7 17.♞ac1 with a nice positional edge.

15.♞b3 ♞a6

Shlykov – Kunitson, Narva 2006. Here White should have played energetically:



### 16.♞d4!N

Creating the unpleasant threat of ♞a4.

16...♞b6 17.♞xb6 axb6

Worse is 17...♞xb6 18.♞c4!, as 18...♞xb2 loses directly to 19.♞c8† ♕d8 20.♞d1 ♜d7 21.♜a4! followed by 22.♜c5.

18.♞ad1 0–0 19.♞a4

The endgame is very unpleasant for Black due to his weak b6- and b7-pawns.

### 12.♞d3 0–0

White has to play very energetically to prevent Black from developing his pieces freely.

### 13.♜db5 ♞b6 14.♙c3 ♙xb5

And now White should of course take with the queen.

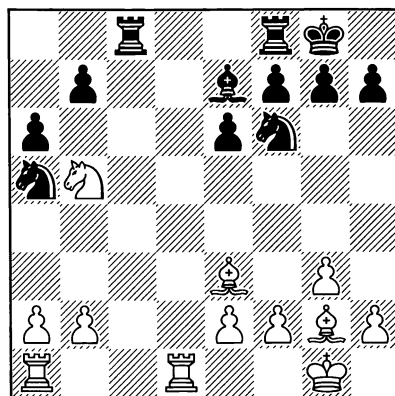
### 15.♞xb5

Aiming to get a comfortable advantage based on the two bishops.

The other recapture, 15.♜xb5, allows 15...♙c5 when Black equalizes comfortably, M.M. Ivanov – K. Lie, Gausdal 1996.

### 15...♞xb5 16.♜xb5 a6

Now I recommend the following improvement:



### 17.♜d4!N

This appears to be a good square for White's knight. White's idea is simply to neutralize Black's activity and to keep his pair of bishops.

### 17.♜a7

This alternative is 'inhuman', but the computers like it.

### 17...♞c2 18.b3!?

Only not 18.♞ac1?! ♞xb2 19.♞d2 ♞xd2 20.♙xd2 b6 and now White has to accept a draw after 21.♙xa5 bxa5 22.♜c6.

Refusing the draw with 21.♜c8 ♙c5 22.♞xc5 bxc5 23.♜e7† ♜h8 24.♙xa5 ♞b8! is rather dangerous for White, as he is in danger of losing his a-pawn.

### 18...♜d5

If 18...♞xe2 19.♙b6 ♙b4 20.a3 ♙c3 21.♞ac1 ♞d2 22.b4 ♜b3 23.♞xd2 ♙xd2 24.♞c7± Black's task to achieve a draw might be very tough.

### 19.♙xd5 exd5 20.♞xd5 ♙f6 21.♞c1 ♞xa2 22.b4 ♜b3 23.♞c7±

White's pieces are much more active.

The game continued 17.♜d6 ♙xd6 18.♞xd6 ♜c4 19.♞d3 ♜xe3 20.♞xe3 ♞c7 and the endgame is easy to hold for Black, Voelzke – Joppien, Kiel 2003.

**17...♟fd8**

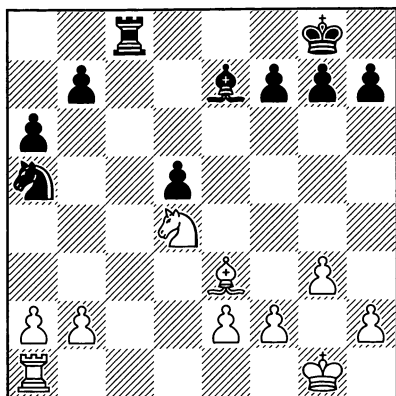
Another line goes 17...♞c4 18.♙f4!. The bishop pair starts to work. 18...♞cd8 19.♙xb7 ♞xb2 20.♞d2! ♞c4 21.♞d3 Now 21...♞b2 would be strongly met by 22.♞c6! ♞xd3 23.♞xe7+ ♞h8 24.exd3 ♞d7 25.♙xa6 ♞xe7 26.♙d6 with a winning endgame.

**18.♞dc1**

I like this calm approach.

**18...♞d5**

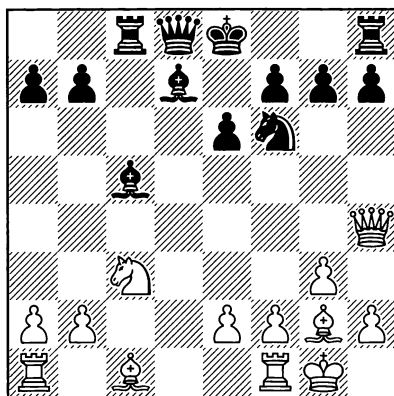
After 18...♞c4 19.♙d2! ♞dxd4 20.♙xa5 White achieves a comfortable edge with his pair of bishops.

**19.♞xc8 ♞xc8 20.♙xd5 exd5****21.b3±**

White is slightly better, as he has easy play against the isolated pawn.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♞f3 ♞f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2 c5 6.0-0 ♞c6 7.♞a4 ♙d7 8.♞xc4 cxd4 9.♞xd4 ♞c8 10.♞c3)

B123) 10...♞xd4 11.♞xd4 ♙c5 12.♞h4

**12...♙c6**

The most natural approach. Other options are:

**12...0-0**

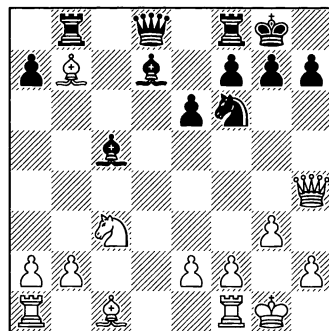
White has to accept the challenge in order to fight for the advantage.

**13.♙xb7**

Black has nothing to worry about after 13.♙g5 h6 14.♙xf6 ♞xf6 15.♞xf6 gxf6 16.♙xb7 ♞b8 17.♙f3 ♞xb2= Rulfs – Markus, Internet 2005.

**13...♞b8**

And now I am fairly sure that White should continue with:

**14.♙f3!N**

14.♙g2 ♞b4 15.e4 was played in Kuljasevic – Bokros, Hengelo 2002, and here 15...♙d4 would give Black fantastic compensation.

14...♖b4 15.♞g5!

Obviously White should refrain from playing e4, as it would leave White's queen cut off from the game, and lose control over the d4-square.

15...♙d4

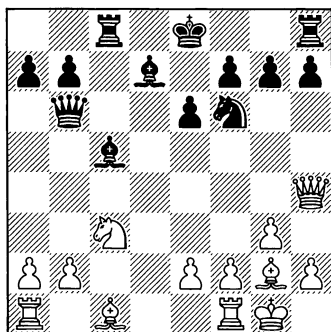
15...♞b6 16.b3± allows White to develop his pieces comfortably.

16.♞d2 ♞c7 17.♞d3

Although Black keeps definite compensation, I think White's chances are preferable.

12...♞b6?!

This is clearly inferior as it allows White to strike with a typical blow:



13.♙h6! gxf6

Black's main problem is that 13...0-0? runs into 14.♙xg7! ♙xg7 15.♞g5† with a winning advantage.

14.♞xf6 ♙d4 15.♞xh6 ♞xb2 16.♙e4±

Black's king is stuck in the centre and faces a dangerous attack, Zigura – Mancini, Massy 1993.

13.♖d1 ♞a5

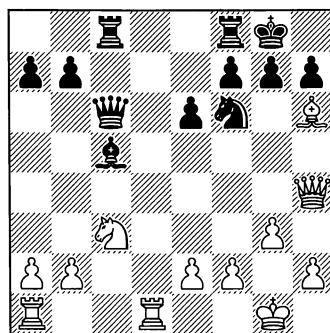
13...♞b6

Once again this allows:

14.♙xc6† ♞xc6

14...♖xc6 15.♙h6! gxf6 16.♞xf6 0-0 17.♙e4 was clearly better for White in Portisch – Radulov, Buenos Aires (ol) 1978.

15.♙h6 0-0



16.♖ac1!N

This move is stronger than 16.♙xg7 ♙xf2† 17.♙xf2 ♞c5† 18.♙g2 ♙xg7± and Black managed to hold the draw in Davies – Gysi, Italy 1995.

16...e5 17.♙a4 b6 18.♙e3±

With a pleasant advantage.

14.♙xc6† ♖xc6 15.♙g5

Now 15.♙h6 is not so strong in view of 15...0-0 16.♙xg7 ♙xf2† 17.♙xf2 ♙xg7 with unclear play, Csom – Peters, Hastings 1978.

15...♙e7 16.♙e4 ♞e5

16...♞f5 17.♙xf6 ♙xf6 18.♙xf6† ♞xf6 just transposes to 16...♞e5.

17.♙xf6† ♙xf6

17...gxf6 18.♙h6! leaves Black's king in the centre.

18.♙xf6 ♞xf6

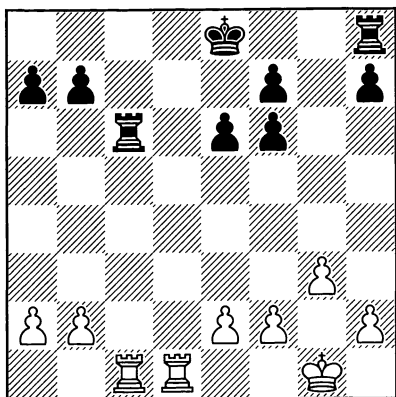
In the event of 18...gxf6 19.♞g4 h5 20.♞g7 ♖f8 21.♖d2 ♙e7 22.♖ad1 ♖c7 23.h4± Black is doomed to a passive defence.

19.♞xf6

Black is absolutely fine after 19.♞b4 ♞e7! 20.♞d4 0-0 21.♞xa7 ♖c2 and a draw was agreed in Olafsson – Ciric, Wijk aan Zee 1969.



19...gxf6 20.♖acl



This innocent looking endgame is in fact quite dangerous for Black.

20...♗e7

20...♖xc1 21.♖xc1 ♗d7 22.♗g2± Black's problem is that 22...♖c8 is impossible, as after the rooks are exchanged White's king would quickly attack the h7-pawn.

21.♖xc6 bxc6 22.♖d4 ♖b8 23.b3 ♖b5 24.♖a4 a5 25.♗g2±

The encounter Lein – P. Littlewood, Hastings 1980, proved that it is not so easy for Black to hold this endgame.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♗f3 ♗f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♗g2 c5 6.0–0 ♗c6 7.♖a4 ♗d7 8.♖xc4)

B13) 8...b5 9.♖d3

After this simple retreat Black can either allow White to take over the centre with **B131) 9...c4** or he can play for quick development with **B132) 9...♖c8**, after which he risks being saddled with a few pawn weaknesses.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♗f3 ♗f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♗g2 c5 6.0–0 ♗c6 7.♖a4 ♗d7 8.♖xc4 b5 9.♖d3)

B131) 9...c4 10.♖c2 ♖c8

This looks like the most logical continuation, as in any case Black should remove his rook from the h1-a8 diagonal.

There have been a few games where Black opted for the more dubious knight lunge:

10...♗b4 11.♖d1 ♗c6

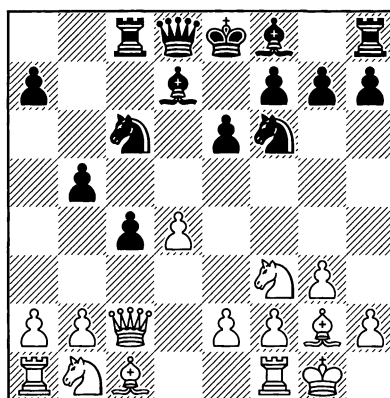
White should reply:

12.a3 ♗a6

12...♗bd5 13.♗e5 ♗b7 14.e4 ♗b6 15.♗c3 a6 16.♗e3 White achieves a very comfortable set-up and his advantage is obvious.

13.♗c3 ♗c7 14.e4±

White had a clear advantage in Stean – Ristic, Smederevska Palanka 1982.



After spending a few hours analysing this variation I came to the conclusion that White should start by developing the bishop.

11.♗g5

After 11.♗c3 Black has the annoying 11...♖b6! when I cannot find any advantage for White. For example: 12.♖d1 ♗e7 13.a3 ♗a5! Play transposes to the game Pe. Schmidt – Kishnev, Munich 1993, where White failed to pose any serious problems for his opponent.

11...♗e7

11...h6 was played in Savchenko – Adly, Cairo 2003, and White reacted with the incredible 12.♔d2?!. Obviously he should have played 12.♔xf6 ♖xf6 13.♞d1 when Black's queen is clearly misplaced on f6. It is important to mention that now Black has no time for 11...♗b6, as White has the unpleasant 12.♔xf6 gxf6 13.♞d1 creating the threat of breaking through in the centre with d4-d5.

## 12.♔c3 0–0

Another option is:

12...b4 13.♔xf6! gxf6

13...♔xf6? 14.♔e4! just loses a pawn.

14.d5 ♔a5

14...bxc3 15.dxc6 ♔xc6 16.♗xc3 is slightly better for White.

15.♔d1

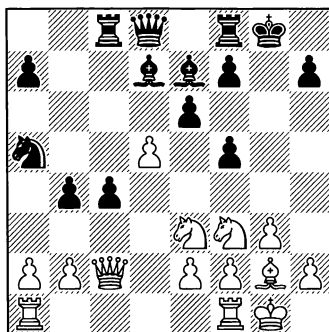
The knight is heading for the e3-square.

15...0–0

15...exd5 gives White excellent compensation after 16.♔e3 ♔e6 17.♞ad1 ♞c5 18.♔h4.

16.♔e3 f5

This position was reached in Vladimirov – Rodriguez Vargas, Logrono 1991. I found the following improvement:



17.♔e5N ♔e8 18.♞ad1

It is too early for 18.♔xf5?! exf5 19.♗xf5 ♔g7 20.♔e4 ♞h8 and Black is better.

18...♗c7 19.♔xf5!

Now this tactic works perfectly.

19...exf5 20.♗xf5 f6

The only defence against White's threat of 21.♔e4.

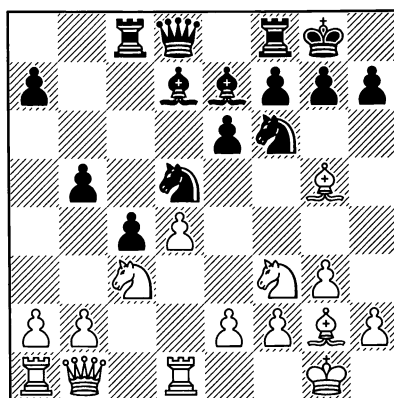
21.d6 ♔xd6 22.♗e6† ♔h8 23.♞xd6 fxe5 24.♗xe5† ♔g8 25.♞fd1+–

Black is helpless against White's threat of 26.♔d5†.

## 13.♞fd1

White has also tried 13.♔xf6 ♔xf6 14.♔xb5 ♗b6 15.♔d6 ♞c7 16.♔xc4 ♔xd4 17.♔xb6 ♔xc2 18.♔xd7 ♞xd7, as in Postny – Marcelin, Montpellier 2008, but Black should have good chances of achieving a draw, despite being a pawn down.

13...♔b4 14.♗b1 ♔bd5



## 15.e4N

I really like White's position after this simple move.

In the game Black equalized comfortably after 15.a3 ♔xc3 16.bxc3 ♔c6= Simic – Velimirovic, Yugoslavia 1984.

15...♔xc3 16.bxc3 h6 17.♔f4

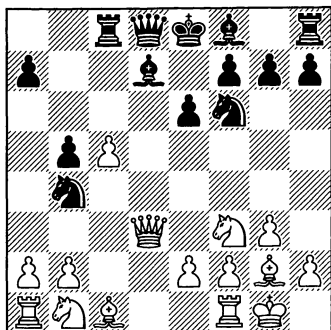
White's chances are better due to his space advantage.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♔f3 ♔f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♔g2 c5 6.0–0 ♔c6 7.♗a4 ♔d7 8.♗xc4 b5 9.♗d3)

**B132) 9...♞c8 10.dxc5 ♙xc5**

Less testing is:

10...♟b4?!



This is strongly met by:

11.♞b3!N

11.♞d1 ♙xc5 was quite playable for Black in Kustar – Feher, Hungary 1996.

11...♙xc5 12.♟c3

Here I examined the following variations:

12...a6

12...♟bd5 13.♟xd5 ♟xd5 14.♟e5 secures a clear advantage for White.

12...0–0 13.♟e5 is also unpleasant for Black.

13.♙g5 ♙c6 14.a3 ♟bd5 15.♟e5 ♙a8

15...♟xc3 runs into 16.♙xc6† ♞xc6 17.♟xc6 ♟xe2† 18.♟g2 ♞a8 19.♙xf6! ♞xc6† 20.♞f3 with a decisive advantage.

16.♞ac1 ♟xc3 17.♞xc3 ♙xg2 18.♟xg2 ♞d5† 19.♞xd5 ♟xd5 20.♞c2!

The pin along the c-file is decisive.

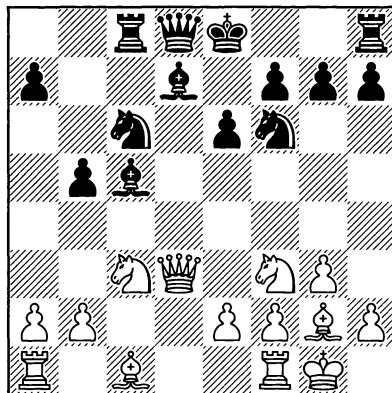
20...f6 21.♙xf6! gxf6 22.♟d3

White remains in charge with his extra pawn.

11.♟c3

At this point Black has tried moving either his knight or his pawn to b4, as well as the natural looking but rather risky option of simply castling: **B1321) 11...0–0, B1322) 11...♟b4 and B1323) 11...b4**. None of them

offers Black equality, but then neither does protecting the b5-pawn:



11...a6 is too slow and allows White a chance to seize the initiative: 12.♙g5 h6 13.♙xf6 gxf6 (unfortunately for Black 13...♞xf6? loses to 14.♟e4 ♞e7 15.♞c3! attacking both the bishop and the g7-pawn) 14.♞ad1 ♙e7 15.♞d2± Black faced serious problems in Badea – Marjanovic, Bucharest 1998.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♟f3 ♟f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2 c5 6.0–0 ♟c6 7.♞a4 ♙d7 8.♞xc4 b5 9.♞d3 ♞c8 10.dxc5 ♙xc5 11.♟c3)

**B1321) 11...0–0**

This looks natural, but White can energetically use the disharmony of Black's pieces with:

12.♙g5 ♟b4 13.♙xf6 gxf6 14.♞d2!

I like the idea of transferring queen to h6; the alternative is 14.♞e4.

14...♙c6

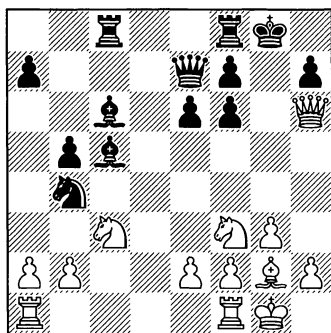
If Black tries to prevent White from playing ♞h6 by means of 14...♟g7 White seizes the initiative in the following instructive way: 15.a3 ♟a6 16.♞ad1± (Also worthy of attention is the positional 16.b4!?, playing against Black's misplaced knight on a6.) 16...♙c6 17.♞f4 ♞c7

18. ♖g4 ♜h8 19. ♖h5± White's advantage is obvious.

### 15. ♖h6 ♜e8

With the idea of chasing the white queen from h6 with ...♙f8.

After 15... ♖e7 White has to play:



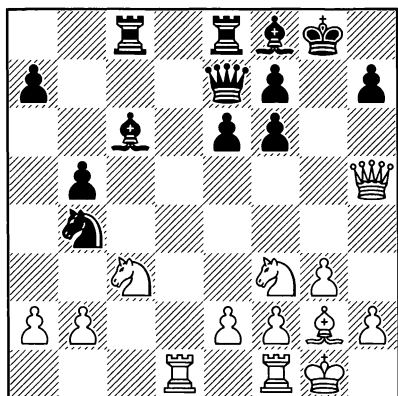
### 16. a3!N

Less accurate is 16. ♖ad1 ♜f8 17. a3 ♜c2! 18. ♖xd8† ♖xd8= and Black was fine in Pribyl – Ivkov, Nice 1974.

16... ♜d5 17. ♜e4 ♙b6 18. ♖ad1 f5 19. ♖xd5! f6 20. ♜xf6† ♖xf6 21. ♖xf6 ♖xf6 22. ♖d2 ♙xf3 23. ♙xf3±

White has an extra pawn, but Black has chances to survive thanks to the opposite-coloured bishops.

### 16. ♖ad1 ♙f8 17. ♖h5 ♖e7



### 18.a3

This obvious move simply leaves White a pawn up.

### 18... ♙xf3

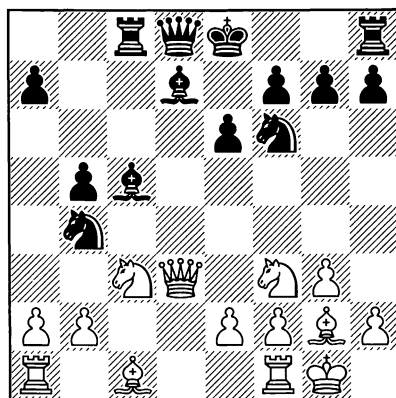
18... ♜d5? runs into the strong 19. ♜d4!+.

### 19. ♙xf3 ♜c6 20. ♜xb5±

With a healthy extra pawn and a clear advantage, Anastasian – Kaidanov, Lucerne 1997.

(1. d4 d5 2. c4 e6 3. ♜f3 ♜f6 4. g3 dxc4 5. ♙g2 c5 6. 0-0 ♜c6 7. ♖a4 ♙d7 8. ♖xc4 b5 9. ♖d3 ♜c8 10. dxc5 ♙xc5 11. ♜c3)

### B1322) 11... ♜b4



### 12. ♖d2!?

After seriously studying this variation I came to the conclusion that the text is stronger than the other natural retreat, 12. ♖d1, which is White's main continuation according to theory. Recently I won an easy game with 12. ♖d1 which continued: 12... ♙c6 13. ♖xd8† ♖xd8 14. ♙g5 ♙e7? (Black should have played 14... h6 15. ♙xf6 gxf6 16. ♖fc1 ♙b6 when his position would be quite defensible, as in Haba – Enders, Chemnitz 1997) 15. a3 ♜a6 16. ♜e5 ♙xg2 17. ♜xg2± Avrukh – Moiseenko, Israel 2008. Black will lose one of his queenside pawns.

However this is not a repertoire based on luck, but a repertoire worthy of a top grandmaster who should rely on the *best* moves.

### 12...♙c6

12...♙bd5 13.♙xd5 ♙xd5 14.♙e5± and White gains the advantage of the two bishops.

### 13.a3 ♖xd2

The only game to reach this position continued 13...♙bd5 14.♙e5! and White had a pleasant edge in Hase – Dodson, corr. 1994.

### 14.♙xd2 ♙a6

14...♙bd5 is problematic for Black in view of the typical 15.♙e5!±.

### 15.b4 ♙b6 16.♞ac1

That Black's knight is misplaced on a6 allows White to develop his initiative.

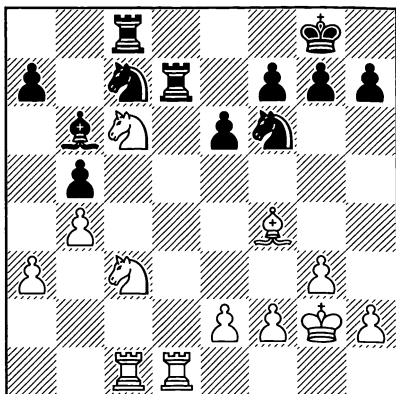
### 16...0-0 17.♙e5 ♙xg2 18.♙xg2 ♞fd8

The alternatives would not change much either: 18...♙c7 19.♙c6!± and 18...♙d4 19.f4 ♙xc3 20.♙xc3±

### 19.♙f4 ♙c7 20.♙c6

When White occupies this vital square it is often a sign that things have gone wrong for Black.

### 20...♞d7 21.♞fd1!



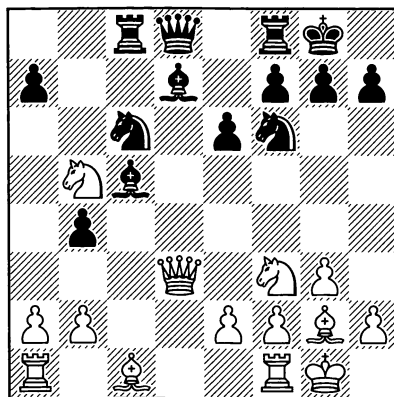
Black's position is difficult.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♙f3 ♙f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2 c5 6.0-0 ♙c6 7.♞a4 ♙d7 8.♞xc4 b5 9.♞d3 ♞c8 10.dxc5 ♙xc5 11.♙c3)

### B1323) 11...b4 12.♙b5

This is much more principled than 12.♙e4.

### 12...0-0



### 13.♙d6!

This is the only move that promises White good chances for an advantage. White's other options are 13.♙f4 and 13.♙e3, but Black has clear paths to equality after both of them.

### 13...♙d4

The beginning of serious complications.

### 13...♞c7

This is quite an interesting move, with a hidden idea behind it.

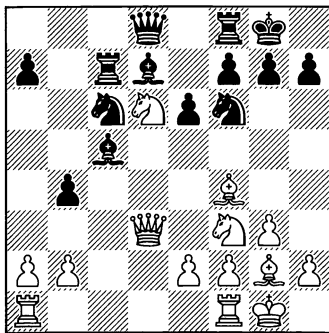
### 14.♙f4

Obviously this is the critical continuation.

14.♙g5 occurred in the only game where this position was reached, Verat – Hartereau, Paris 1991, and in reply Black could have tried the very unexpected 14...♙c8! 15.♙xc8. Probably White has to simplify the position,

as the threat of ...♖d7 is very unpleasant. 15...♙xd3 16.exd3 ♜xc8 17.♞ac1 ♙d6 Black has the d5-square at his disposal, so I believe White's advantage is largely symbolic.

Returning to the text move, 14.♙f4, in *Chess Informant* 87 Stohl provided the following interesting line:



14...♙e7

Just bad is 14...♙d5? in view of 15.♙g5+ – and Black loses material.

15.♙g5 ♙g6 16.♙de4 ♙xe4 17.♙xc7

We shall note an important alternative to this move below.

17...♙xf2 18.♙xg6 ♙g4† 19.♙h1

And here Black should of course take with the h-pawn.

19...hxg6

Stohl gave only 19...fxg6 20.♙xd8±.

20.♙xd8 ♜xd8 21.♙xf7 ♜f8 22.♙f3 ♙f2† 23.♙g2 ♙xf7 24.♞ac1 ♙b6 25.♞xf2 ♙xf2 26.♙xf2 ♜c8 27.♞xc8 ♙xc8

This endgame is supposedly drawish, but in my opinion White can improve on move 17 with the simple 17.♙xe4. The following is an illustrative line: 17...e5 18.♙e3 ♙xe3 19.♙xe3 ♙e7 20.♞ac1 ♞fc8 21.♙d5 ♙e8 22.♞xc7 ♞xc7 23.♞c1± Black's position has the clear drawbacks of weak pawns on the queenside and a misplaced knight on g6.

Certainly Black cannot equalize completely by giving up his dark-squared bishop: 13...♙xd6

14.♙xd6 ♙e7 15.♙f4 White had a definite advantage in Poluljahov – Koniushkov, Novorossiysk 1996.

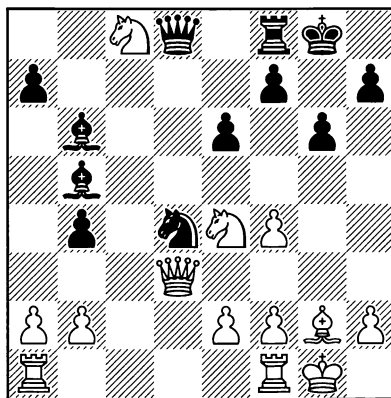
14.♙f4 ♙d5 15.♙g5

This is the point of White's play.

15...g6 16.♙ge4 ♙xf4 17.gxf4 ♙b6!

Worse is 17...♙c6, when 18.♙xc8 ♙b5 19.♙h3 ♙xe2† 20.♙h1 ♙xc8 (losing is 20...♙xf4 21.♙h6 ♙xf1 22.♞xf1) 21.♞ac1± leaves White with a material advantage.

18.♙xc8 ♙b5



19.♙d2!

This is a strong improvement by Stohl. Before White had mainly tried 19.♙h3 with horrible results.

19...♙xc8

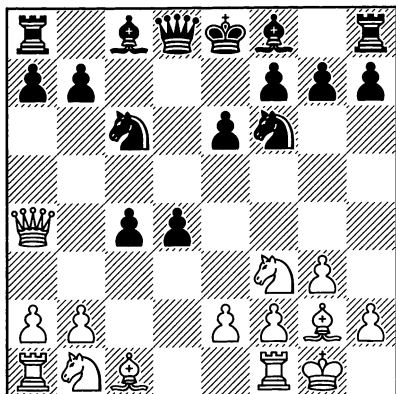
Sokolov refrains from 19...♙xe2† 20.♙h1 ♙xc8 and rightly so, as after 21.♙xb4± Black has no compensation for being an exchange down.

20.e3 ♙xf1 21.♞xf1

This position occurred in Stohl – A. Sokolov, Germany 2003. Even after the best option, 21...♙f5, Black is in trouble: 22.♙xb4± White has an extra pawn.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♟f3 ♟f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2 c5 6.0-0 ♟c6 7.♞a4)

B2) 7...cxd4



In my opinion this is a critical continuation, as almost by force we reach an unbalanced position where Black gives up his queen for a rook and bishop.

8.♟xd4 ♞xd4

Of course not 8...♙d7?! when White plays 9.♟xc6 ♞b6 10.♟d2 ♙xc6 11.♙xc6† ♞xc6 12.♞xc6† bxc6 13.♟xc4± with a pleasant endgame advantage, Rise – Olafsson, corr. 1995.

9.♙xc6† ♙d7 10.♞d1

Without this move White would not have any chance of fighting for the advantage, but it exists and gives White pleasant pressure at little risk.

10...♞xd1†

I do not believe Black will enjoy playing a worse endgame after:

10...♙xc6 11.♞xc6† bxc6 12.♞xd4

Although black players have played this position almost 40 times in my database, it is rather obvious that Black is fighting for a draw. White, on the other hand, enjoys

a risk-free game and can press for a long time. The following is a model game for this endgame:

12...c5 13.♞xc4 ♙e7

This was played by Mamedyarov so it is supposed to be Black's best chance to equalize. Still, I do not think the line can be recommended.

I like White's play in the following encounter a lot:

14.♙f4 0-0 15.♟d2 ♟d7

15...♟d5 16.♟f3 ♞ac8 17.♞ac1 ♞c6

18.♞a4± also leads to a pleasant advantage for White.

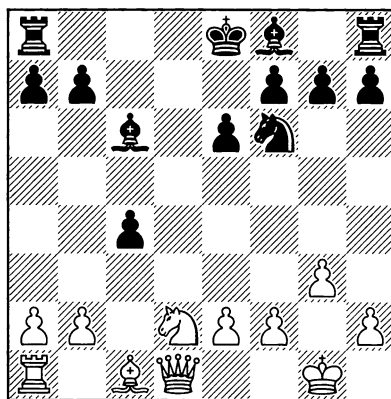
16.♟b3 a5 17.♞d1 ♟b6

This was played in Vladimirov – Ghaem Maghami, Kelamabakkam 2000. Now the most accurate continuation would have been:

18.♞cc1 ♞fc8 19.♟d2±

Transferring the knight to c4, where it puts pressure on the a5-pawn. Black is far from equality.

11.♞xd1 ♙xc6 12.♟d2



12...b5

The alternatives are much worse:

12...c3 13.bxc3 ♞d8

13...0-0-0?! only helps White. 14.♞b3 ♙c5

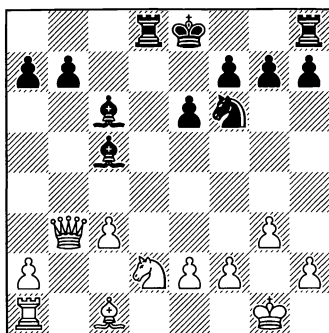
15.♟f3 ♟e4?! 16.♟d4 ♞xd4 17.cxd4 ♙xd4

18.♖b1 ♕xf2† 19.♔f1 White had a decisive advantage in Hjartarson – Hardarson, Neskaupsstadur 1984.

13...♕c5 14.♘b3 ♖d8 15.♗e1 ♕e7 is quite solid for Black as in Nikolaidis – Bojkov, Istanbul 2001, but it does allow White to favourably exchange the dark-squared bishops: 16.♘d4 ♕d5 17.a4 0–0 18.♕a3 ♕xa3 19.♖xa3± I believe this is an improved version for White compared with our main line.

14.♗b3 ♕c5

This position arose in Wood – Micklethwaite, England 1993.



Here I believe White missed a simple idea:

15.♘c4!N

Aiming for a favourable exchange of the dark-squared bishops.

15...♘e4

If 15...♘g4 then White has 16.♕a3! ♕xf2† 17.♔f1 with a winning position.

16.♕e3 ♕xe3 17.♘xe3±

Once again the exchange of the dark-squared bishops favours White.

12...h5 13.♘xc4 h4 14.♕f4!

This line is clearly in White's favour: Black's attack is overoptimistic in Dutch coffeehouse style.

14...hxc3

Or 14...♖d8 15.♗b3 hxc3 16.♕xc3 ♘e4 17.♘e5 ♘xc3 as in Vanheste – Blauert,

Groningen 1989. Now White should have recaptured with 18.fxc3 ♕c5† 19.e3± and next White will eliminate Black's light-squared bishop when the c6-pawn will become a target.

15.♕xc3 ♘e4 16.♘e5 ♘xc3 17.♘xc6 ♘xe2† 18.♗xe2 bxc6 19.♗a6 ♕d6 20.♗xc6† ♔e7 21.♗b7† ♔f6 22.♗f3† ♔e7 23.♗b7† ♔f6 24.♗f3† ♔e7 25.h3±

I believe this should be winning for White, as he has the opportunity to create a passed pawn on the queenside, Fahnenschmidt – Herbrechtsmeier, Germany 1986.

13.a4 ♕e7

Black cannot hold together his pawn structure on the queenside:

13...a6 14.axb5 ♕xb5

Even worse is 14...axb5? 15.♖xa8† ♕xa8 16.♘xc4!+– and White not only regains the pawn, he will soon win the b-pawn.

15.♗c2 ♖c8 16.♖xa6!

Otherwise Black would be OK.

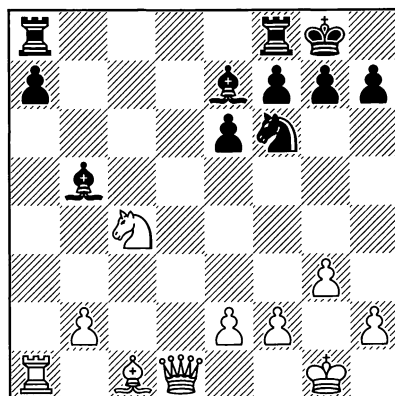
16...♕xa6 17.♗a4† ♘d7 18.♗xa6

White has an almost decisive advantage...

18...♖d8 19.♘xc4 ♕e7 20.♘a5! ♘b8 21.♗b5† ♔f8 22.♕f4+–

Kochyev – Kilpi, Jyvaskyla 1996.

14.axb5 ♕xb5 15.♘xc4 0–0





This line was played extensively in the mid-1980s. The most interesting fact is that Black was doing OK, as White had not managed to prove any advantage. Then, without any particular reason, this queen sacrifice variation dropped out of fashion for a long time. It was only recently that Black started to play it again.

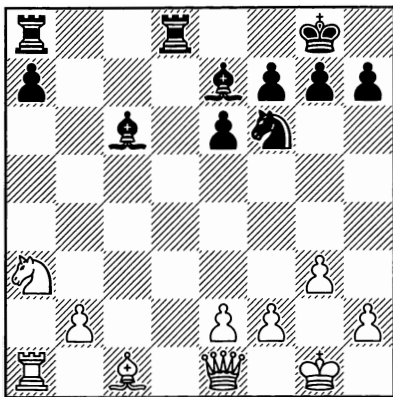
Actually this occurred in my Bundesliga game against the Dutch Grandmaster L'Ami. Of course I had no clue of how to fight for an advantage and so I started to improvise over the board.

### 16. ♖a3!?

This is the fruit of my improvisation. A well-known theoretical line is 16.b3 ♜fd8 17.♞c2 ♜dc8! 18.♙a3 ♙xa3 19.♞xa3 ♜c7 20.♞a5 ♙xc4 21.bxc4 h6 and I do not see any chance for White to win this, as soon Black will trade his a7-pawn for White's c4-pawn. 22.♞a2 ♜ac8 23.♞xa7 ♞xa7 24.♞xa7 ♞xc4= Berggreen – Orseth, Russia 1993.

### 16... ♜fd8 17. ♞e1 ♙c6

Black has reacted very logically.



### 18. ♜f3! ?N

This is my improvement over my game, which continued 18.♙d2 ♞ab8 19.♙f4 ♞xb2 20.♞c1 ♞b3 (this is stronger than 20...♙xa3

21.♞xc6 ♙f8 22.♞xa7 ♞xe2 23.♙g5 when White has some initiative) 21.♞xc6 ♞xa3 22.♞b1 ♙d5 23.♙e5 ♞a2= Avrukh – L'Ami, Germany 2008.

White's idea with 18.f3 is to slowly improve his position (♙g2, e4), at the same time trying to keep more pieces over the board. Certainly it would be favourable for White to reach a position with opposite-coloured bishops, as it would be easy for him to seize the initiative on the kingside. Black's position is pretty solid, but in my opinion his main problem is his lack of play: he just needs to sit and wait for White to do something.

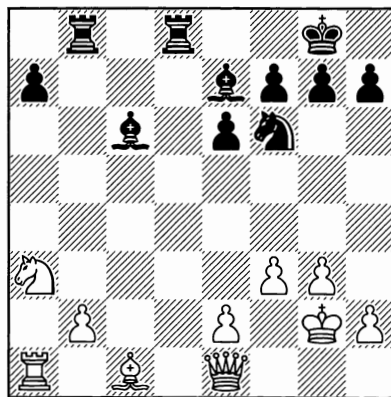
I would like to show you my brief analysis:

### 18... ♞ab8

18... ♙d5 19.♙g2 ♞ab8 20.♙c4 This was a good moment for White's knight to jump. 20...♙b5 21.b3 a6 22.♙a3 ♙f6 23.♞c1±

18...♙c5† 19.♙g2 ♙d5 20.♙d2 Threatening 21.♞c1. 20...♙d4 21.e4 ♙b6 22.♙c3±

### 19. ♙g2



### 19...h6

I also checked the following moves:

19...♖b3 20.♘c4 ♘b5 21.♘a5 ♘b4 22.♗f1 ♘xa5 23.♗xa5 a6 24.♗a3± As I mentioned above, the presence of opposite-coloured bishops improves White's chances of seizing the initiative against Black's king.

19...♖b7 20.♘c4 ♘d5 21.♘e5 ♗c8 22.e4 ♗c2† 23.♙h3 White's king finds a nice home on h3! 23...♘b3 24.♘e3 ♗xb2 25.♘xa7!±.

### 20.♘c4 ♘d5 21.♘e5

After 21.♘e3 Black equalizes with 21...♘b4 22.♗f1 ♘c5 23.♘xd5 ♘xd5 24.♙h3 ♘e3=.

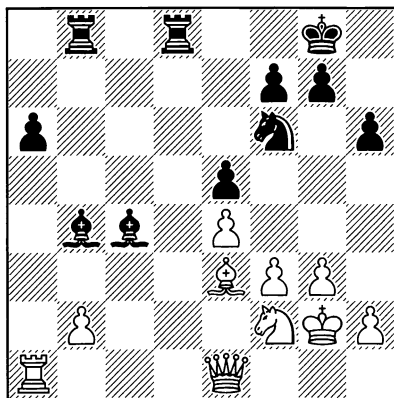
### 21...♘d6 22.♘d3 e5!?

Black is trying to create some counterplay. On the other hand, Black cannot be sure about his chances to survive if we reach a position with pawns on only one side, as the e-pawn might become a serious target.

### 23.e4

White should avoid 23.♗xa7 e4 24.fxe4 ♘xe4† 25.♙f1 ♘g4 when Black would have a lot of play against White's weakened king.

### 23...♘c4 24.♘f2 a6 25.♘e3 ♘b4



### 26.♗b1±

White could also try 26.♗c1 ♗bc8 27.♗g1 ♘d2 28.♘xd2 ♗xd2 29.b4±.

White still has a material advantage, while Black has not even managed to swap the queenside pawns.

### Conclusion:

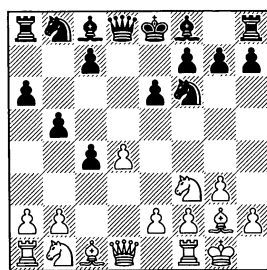
5...c5 has become more and more fashionable recently. After 7.♗a4 Black has a wide choice of lines, but I believe 7...cxd4 (followed by a queen sacrifice) is the critical test for White. Until now White has failed to show any route to an advantage, but I hope that with the help of my new idea White can pose Black definite problems. It almost goes without saying that this idea requires practical testing.



# Chapter 6

## The Catalan

### 4...dxc4, 5...a6 and 6...b5



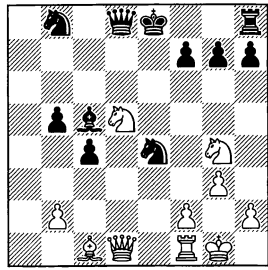
### Variation Index

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2 a6 6.0-0 b5

7.♘e5

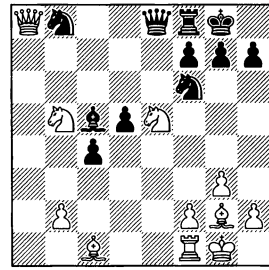
A) 7...c6	p 88
B) 7...♘d5 8.a4 ♙b7 9.e4 ♘f6 10.axb5 axb5 11.♖xa8 ♙xa8	
12.♘c3 c6 13.d5	p 89
B1) 13...cxd5	p 91
B2) 13...♙d6	p 92
B3) 13...exd5	p 93
B4) 13...♙e7 14.dxe6 fxe6 15.♖e2 0-0 16.♙h3	p 94
B41) 16...♙h8	p 95
B42) 16...♖c8	p 96

B1) after 17...♙c5



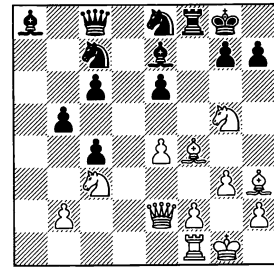
Ghafari's 18.b4!!

B3) after 17...♖e8!



18.♖b7!?N

B42) after 19...♘fe8

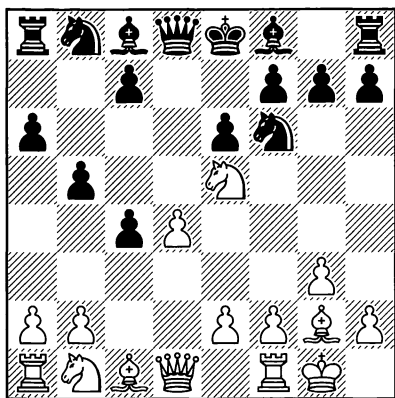


20.♙d1!?N

**1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♟f3 ♟f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2 a6 6.0-0 b5**

This is the most direct way to hold on to the extra pawn and Black's second most important choice in this position. White of course has various options at this point, but it makes most sense to go 'all-in' especially at a time when so many strong chess players have turned to poker. Maybe this is the way to lure some of them back?

**7.♟e5**



This is the first branching position in this variation. Black can play **A) 7...c6**, hoping to get some activity in return for giving the pawn back, or he can play **B) 7...♟d5**, holding on to the pawn. Not surprisingly the second option is the main line. There is however a third option which has occurred a few times in practice, but it makes little sense and is not hard to refute.

**7...♙a7?!**

The problem is:

**8.a4!**

Breaking up Black's pawn structure.

**8...♙b7 9.axb5 ♙xg2 10.♙xg2 ♙d5† 11.♙g1**

Though this is good, I like 11.e4!N even more. 11...♙xb5 (Or 11...♙xe4† 12.f3 ♙b7 13.♙a4 ♟fd7 14.♟c3 ♙d6 15.♟xd7 ♟xd7 16.bxa6 ♙b3 17.♙xb3 cxb3 18.♟b5 ♙a8

19.♙d1+-. Black is helpless against White's idea of picking up the b3-pawn by means of ♙d1-d3xb3.) 12.♟c3 ♙b3 13.♙e2 ♙b4 14.♙e3 ♟bd7 15.♟xc4±

White has a big positional advantage.

**11...♙xb5**

We are following Radashkovich – Manievich, Israel 1976, and now White should have played the simple:

**12.♟c3 ♙b3 13.♙a4±**

Regaining the c4-pawn and maintaining a clear positional advantage.

**(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♟f3 ♟f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2 a6 6.0-0 b5 7.♟e5)**

**A) 7...c6 8.b3!?**

White insists on sacrificing a pawn for positional compensation. 8.♟xc6 ♙b6 is another line, which we will not go into at this point.

**8...cxb3 9.♟xc6 ♙b6 10.♟a5 ♙a7 11.♟xb3**

This is the idea behind White's 8th move.

**11...♙d7**

11...♙e7 does not change the character of the game: 12.e4 0-0 13.♙e3 ♙d7 14.♟1d2 ♙d8 15.a4! bxa4 16.♙xa4± with definite positional pressure, Razuvaev – M. Gurevich, Riga 1985.

11...♙b7?! allows White to seize an early initiative with 12.d5!, creating the threat of 13.♙e3. So Black will have to play 12...♙c7 13.♙e3 ♙a8 14.dxe6 (14.d6!? should be strong as well) 14...fxe6 15.♙xb7 ♙xb7 16.♟d4±, Lingnau – Thesing, Germany 1992.

**12.e4 ♙b7**

Here I believe both 13.♙e1 and 13.♙e2 promise White better chances, but my editor wants me to give a clear recommendation.

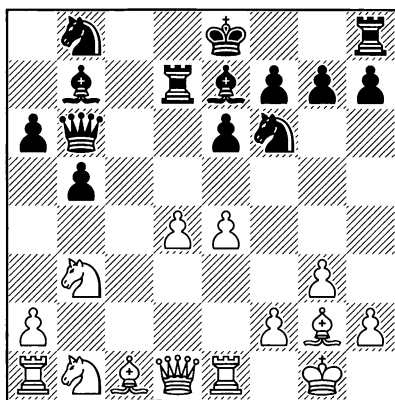
Still, he will not prevent us from having a look at both options...

### 13.♖e1

13.♖e2 ♗e7 14.♗f4 0–0 15.♘1d2 ♗a3 (if 15...♘c6 16.♗e3± White's chances are slightly better due to his obvious space advantage) 16.♗e3 ♖d8 17.♗ab1 ♘c6 18.e5 ♘d5 19.♘e4± White was better in Sosonko – Mednis, Amsterdam 1989.

### 13...♗e7

Most probably Black should have tried the more active 13...♗b4, but even then after 14.♗d2 ♗xd2 15.♘1xd2 0–0 16.a4± White has clear targets on the queenside.



### 14.e5!

This enables White's queen to jump to g4.

### 14...♘d5 15.♖g4

As always this queen sortie is unpleasant for Black, as he cannot castle in view of 16.♗h6 winning the exchange.

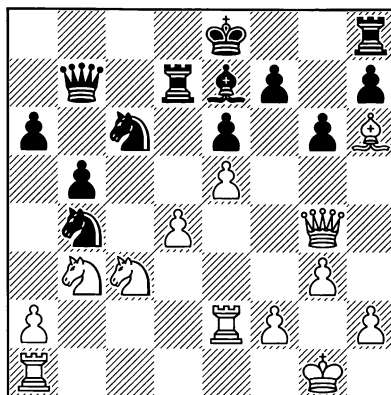
### 15...g6

Or 15...♗f8 16.♗g5 and White is clearly better, just as in the game, but now with Black's king on f8.

### 16.♗h6 ♘b4 17.♗xb7 ♖xb7 18.♖e2

Defending against the annoying ...♘c2.

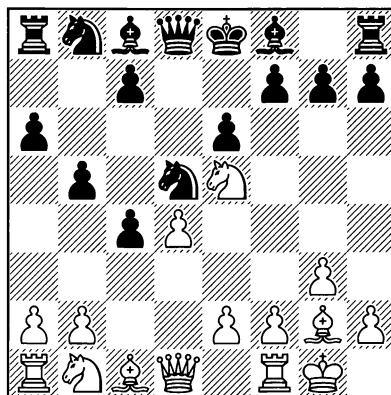
### 18...♘8c6 19.♘c3±



Black's king will be stuck in the centre for a long time and his prospects are grim, Krasenkow – Kohlweyer, Ostend 1990.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♗g2 a6 6.0–0 b5 7.♘e5)

### B) 7...♘d5



This is by far Black's most popular reply.

### 8.a4

Definitely the most ambitious continuation. White's main alternative is 8.♘c3.

### 8...♗b7 9.e4

The text is popular, but there have been even more games where White opted for:

9.b3

But I believe Black has a great positional piece sacrifice at his disposal:

9...c3! 10.axb5 axb5 11.♖xa8 ♕xa8 12.e4 b4!! 13.exd5 ♕xd5

Black easily solves his opening problems. We will consider a recent example:

14.♕xd5 ♖xd5 15.♗d3 ♕d6 16.♘c4 ♘c6 17.♙d1 0-0

Black had no problems at all in Aaberg – Kaidanov, Gibraltar 2007.

9.axb5 axb5 10.♞xa8 ♕xa8 11.e4 ♘f6 is just another move order that transposes to our main line.

### 9...♘f6

This is the black knight's only retreat according to theory. It is very important for Black to control the h5-square, otherwise the queen's sortie to h5 will pose Black definite problems.

I also checked another knight move:

9...♘b4?!N 10.axb5 axb5 11.♞xa8 ♕xa8 12.♗h5! g6

12...♗e7 13.♕g5 g6 14.♗h4 looks even worse for Black.

13.♘g6!

This is the point behind White's 12th move.

13...fxg6 14.♗e5 ♘8c6 15.♗xh8 ♖xd4 16.♗xh7

White has a technically winning position.

**10.axb5 axb5 11.♞xa8 ♕xa8 12.♘c3 c6**

12...b4?

This has occurred in practice only once, but the refutation is quite instructive all the same.

13.♗a4† ♘bd7 14.♘b5 ♕xe4

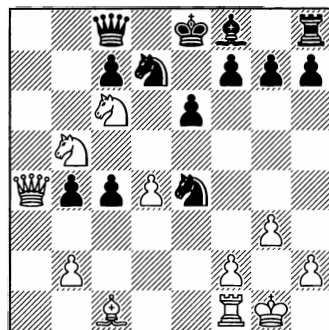
14...♕b7 does not change anything: 15.♗a7 ♗b8 16.♗xb8† ♘xb8 17.♘xc7† ♖e7 18.d5± with a large advantage.

15.♕xe4 ♘xe4 16.♘c6 ♘b6 17.♗a7

White was winning in Cirino – Wingender, e-mail 2001.

However, instead of 16...♘b6, I also examined the following funny line:

16...♗c8



17.♗a8! ♘b6 18.♘xc7† ♘d7 19.♘e5†! ♘xc7

19...♖e7 20.♗a7 is also hopeless.

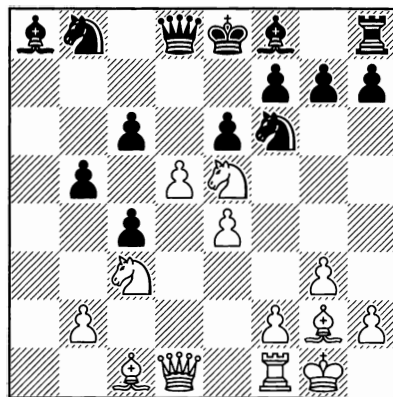
20.♗c6† ♘d8

20...♘b8 allows mate-in-4 after 21.♗xb6†.

21.♗xb6† ♖e8 22.♗b5†+-

### 13.d5!

I have no doubt that this central thrust is the most challenging move. 13.♕g5 is the main alternative, but it does not look effective to me.



Finally we have reached the main branching

position of this line. Black has a choice between four moves. They are **B1) 13...cxd5**, **B2) 13...♙d6**, **B3) 13...exd5** and **B4) 13...♙e7**. Of these the last is by far the main option and will take a good deal of our time, but the others deserve their time in the spotlight as well.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2 a6 6.0–0 b5 7.♘e5 ♘d5 8.a4 ♙b7 9.e4 ♘f6 10.axb5 axb5 11.♞xa8 ♙xa8 12.♘c3 c6 13.d5)

### B1) 13...cxd5 14.exd5

White has no advantage after 14.♘xb5 ♞a5!.

Naturally Black has four possible recaptures in this position, but to save space I will leave it to the reader to find a reply to the capture with the queen. Sorry, you just cannot cover everything! The three other captures are my domain:

### 14...♙xd5

14...exd5 15.♘xb5 ♙c5 transposes to the line that will be examined in line B3, the 13...exd5 variation. This looks to be the best choice in this position.

The third capture is:

14...♘xd5 15.♞h5

15.♘xb5!? also comes into consideration.

15...g6

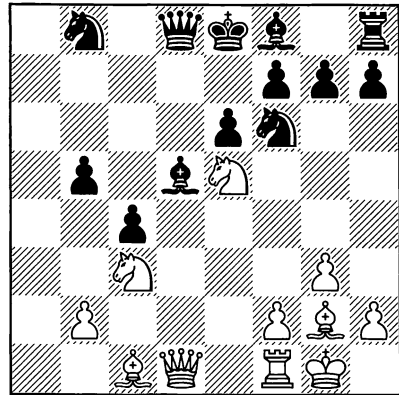
15...♞f6 16.♙xd5 ♙xd5 17.♘xd5 exd5± transposes to the position from the game Kohlweyer – Nisipeanu, Germany (ch) 1997, which is examined below in the note to move 15.

16.♘xg6!

We will see this blow again in the main line.

16...fxg6 17.♞e5 ♘xc3 18.♙xa8 ♘e2† 19.♞xe2 ♞f6 20.♙d2±

White's initiative looks very powerful.



### 15.♙xd5!

White should get a clear edge by playing in this way. Less clear is 15.♘xd5.

### 15...exd5

The other recapture is weaker:

15...♘xd5

This loses control over the h5-square, after which the standard queen lift is very effective:

16.♞h5 g6

If 16...♞f6 17.♘xd5 exd5 18.♞e1 White's initiative is very dangerous. 18...♙e7 (18...♙b4? loses to 19.♘g4†) Now White could have decided the game with the smooth 19.♙g5!N (19.♘xc4? 0–0 led to an equal position in Kohlweyer – Nisipeanu, Germany [ch] 1997) 19...♞f5 (19...♞xg5 20.♞xf7† ♘d8 21.♞xd5† ♘c7 22.♞xb5+– does not help either) 20.♘g6! with a decisive advantage.

17.♘xg6!

As promised, this tactical blow returns.

17...fxg6 18.♞e5 ♘f6

18...♞f6 19.♞xb8† ♘f7 20.♞xb5 would leave White with an extra pawn, as the c4-pawn is falling next.

19.♞xe6† ♞e7

If 19...♙e7 then 20.♞d1 easily decides the game: 20...♘bd7 21.♘xb5+– 20.♞c8† ♘f7 21.♞xb8 b4 22.♘b5±



**16. ♖g4!**

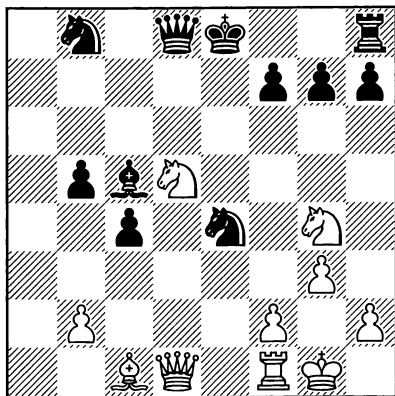
This fine move opens the e-file for White's rook and allows him to use his lead in development.

**16... ♜e4**

I also analysed: 16... ♜e7 17. ♖xf6+ ♜xf6 (17... gxf6 18. ♖xd5 looks hopeless for Black) 18. ♖e1+ ♜f8 (18... ♜e7 loses by force after 19. ♖xd5 ♜c6 20. ♜g5 f6 21. ♜xf6! gxf6 22. ♖h5+ ♜f8 23. ♖e6) 19. ♖xd5 ♜c6 20. ♜e3 ♜e7 (otherwise 21. ♜c5+ is decisive) 21. ♖h5 White has a large advantage.

**17. ♖xd5 ♜c5**

Black takes control over the d4-square, as 17... ♜e7 loses to 18. ♖d4.

**18. b4!!**

Brilliantly played: this advance allows the white queen to enter the game with great effect.

**18... ♜xb3 19. ♖d3 f5**

19... ♖d6 loses to 20. ♖c3, attacking both the bishop on c5 and the g7-pawn.

**20. ♖xb5+ ♖d7 21. ♖e5**

White's advantage proved to be decisive in Ghafari – Skulteti, e-mail 2002.

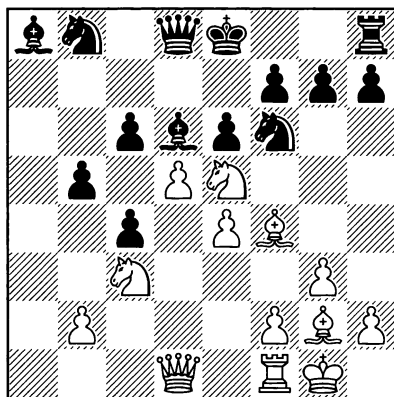
(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3. ♖f3 ♖f6 4.g3 dxc4 5. ♜g2 a6 6.0–0 b5 7. ♖e5 ♖d5 8.a4 ♜b7 9.e4 ♖f6 10.axb5 axb5 11. ♖xa8 ♜xa8 12. ♖c3 c6 13.d5)

**B2) 13... ♜d6**

This looks fairly natural, but with his next move White uses the vulnerable position of Black's bishop on d6 to grab the initiative.

**14. ♜f4**

Less convincing is 14. ♖g4 ♜e7!.

**14... ♜xe5**

There are a few other options we need to take into consideration:

Certainly 14... g5? does not work: 15.dxe6 fxe6 16. ♖xc6!+–

Rather critical is:

14... ♖c7 15. ♖xf7! ♜xf7 16.dxe6+ ♜e7

The e6-pawn is untouchable in view of the basic tactical line 16... ♜xe6 17. ♜h3+ ♜e7 18.e5! ♜xe5 19. ♜xe5 ♖xe5 20. ♖e1 and White wins.

17. ♜xd6+ ♖xd6 18. ♖a1 ♜b7 19. ♖a7 ♖c7 20. ♖c5+ ♜d8

20... ♖d6 runs into the unpleasant 21. ♖g5! and White has too many threats.

21.♖d1† ♘c8 22.♗f5 ♗e7 23.e5 ♘d5 24.♙xd5  
cxd5 25.♘xb5

White's initiative more than compensates for his material disadvantage.

14...exd5 15.exd5 cxd5

Black has no time to castle, 15...0–0, as after 16.♘xc6 ♘xc6 17.dxc6 ♙xf4 18.♗xd8 ♖xd8 19.gxf4 White's passed pawn easily decides the issue.

16.♗a1 ♙xe5

16...♙b7 is nicely refuted by 17.♗a7 ♗c8 18.♘g6! ♙c5 19.♖e1† ♘e4 20.♘xe4 dxe4 21.♙xe4 ♙xa7 22.♙xb7† ♘d8 23.♖d1† ♘e8 24.♙xc8 hxc6 25.♖a1 ♙d4 26.♖a8 and White wins.

17.♙xe5

We have reached the position from our main line with 14...♙xe5.

### 15.♙xe5 exd5N

The text move has never been played, but I consider it to be the critical move, as 15...0–0 leads to a clear advantage for White after simple moves: 16.dxe6 fxe6 (there is no doubt the endgame after 16...♗xd1 17.exf7† ♘xf7 18.♖xd1 is very difficult for Black, due to his poorly placed minor pieces on the queenside) 17.♙d6 ♖e8 18.e5 ♘d5 19.♘e4± White has every chance of deciding the game with a direct attack, Tolstikh – Paramonov, St Petersburg 2002.

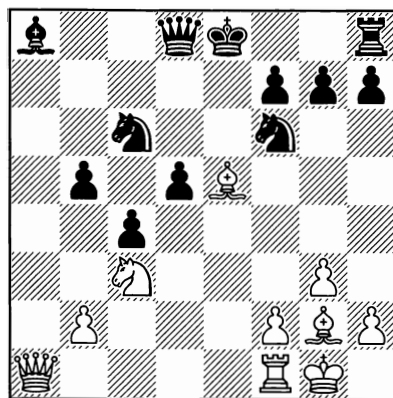
### 16.exd5 cxd5

Probably more stubborn is 16...0–0, but even here after 17.♗a1 ♘bd7 18.♙d6 White is clearly better.

### 17.♗a1

By transposition we have reached a position from a game by Ulibin which continued very nicely with:

17...♘c6



### 18.♙c7!

Only this elegant tactical blow allows White to develop a dangerous initiative.

### 18...♗xc7

18...♗c8 19.♖e1† ♘f8 20.♙d6† ♘g8 21.♘d5 is strategically lost for Black.

### 19.♗xa8† ♘d8

19...♘b8 20.♖e1† ♘d8 21.♘d5 wins for White as well.

### 20.♖e1† ♘f8 21.♗a3† ♘g8 22.♘d5+–

White won in a few moves in Ulibin – Antunes, Cuba 1991.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2 a6 6.0–0 b5 7.♘e5 ♘d5 8.a4 ♙b7 9.e4 ♘f6 10.axb5 axb5 11.♖xa8 ♙xa8 12.♘c3 c6 13.d5)

### B3) 13...exd5 14.exd5 cxd5

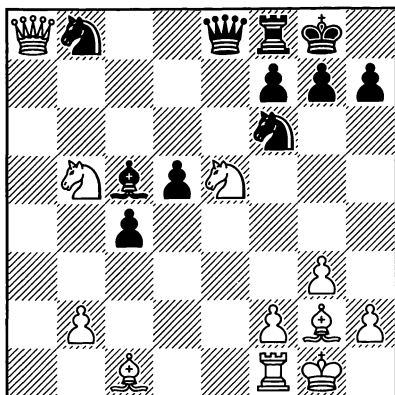
14...♘d5? would be a serious mistake, as it allows 15.♗h5 ♗f6 16.♘xc6!+– and Black's position collapses.

### 15.♘xb5 ♙c5!

This line looks to be the only playable alternative to the main variation with 13...♙e7.

**16. ♖a4**

Black has no reason for concern after 16. ♖xc4 0-0 17. ♗e3 ♖bd7=.

**16...0-0 17. ♖xa8 ♖e8!**

This double attack is the point behind Black's 15th move. There have been only two games where this position arose, and in both of them Black was perfectly OK from a theoretical point of view. This is the reason why I would like to recommend the following improvement:

**18. ♖b7?! N**

White has tried 18. ♖c3 ♖xe5 19. ♗f4 and now instead of 19... ♖h5?! as in V. Mikhalevski – Naiditsch, Heviz 2008, Black should have played 19... ♖e6 20. ♖xd5 ♖bd7 21. ♖xf6 ♖xf6 22. ♖a5 ♗d4 23. ♗e1 ♖b6= when I believe the bishop pair is not so relevant, as Black will be able to swap the queenside pawns.

18. ♗xd5 ♖xb5 19. ♗xc4 ♗xf2† 20. ♗xf2 ♖xe5 was good enough to win in Plauth – Daw, Telechess 1996, but one suspects it should not be enough for more than equality.

**18... ♖xe5 19. ♗f4 ♖e7**

The piece sacrifice hardly works: 19... ♖xb2?! 20. ♗xb8 ♖g4 (or 20... d4 21. ♗e5 ♖g4 22. ♖c6 and White should be winning) 21. ♗d6 ♗xd6

22. ♖xd6 ♖xb7 23. ♖xb7 d4 24. ♗d1 d3 25. ♖d6 ♖e5 26. ♖e4 I believe White should be able to convert his material advantage.

19... ♖e8 20. ♖c7 ♖a4 21. ♖xd5 ♖bd7 22. ♖c3 ♖a5 23. ♗d1± and Black is under serious pressure.

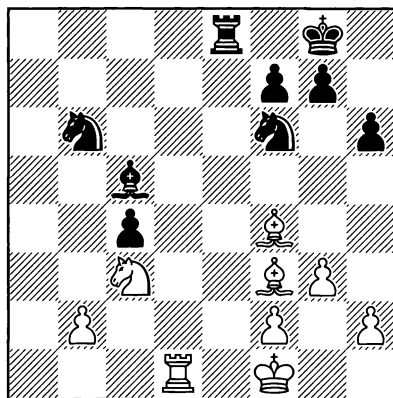
**20. ♗xd5 ♖xb7**

After 20... ♖xd5 21. ♖xd5 Black loses the c4-pawn.

**21. ♗xb7**

Black cannot swap the queenside pawns, so White keeps definite pressure with his pair of bishops.

21... ♖bd7 22. ♗d1 h6 23. ♖f1 ♖b6 24. ♖c3 ♗e8 25. ♗f3±



Black is still far from equality, as White has the advantage of the two bishops and the c4-pawn could become a target in some endgames.

(1. d4 d5 2. c4 e6 3. ♖f3 ♖f6 4. g3 dxc4 5. ♗g2 a6 6. 0-0 b5 7. ♖e5 ♖d5 8. a4 ♗b7 9. e4 ♖f6 10. axb5 axb5 11. ♗xa8 ♗xa8 12. ♖c3 c6 13. d5)

B4) 13... ♗e7

By far the main continuation and the move you are most likely to face in practice.

#### 14.dxe6 fxe6 15.♖e2 0–0

Instead of castling only:

15...♟a6

has also been tried. I believe White has an opportunity to react energetically:

16.♞d1!N

After 16.♞e3 Black has only tried 16...♟c5?! 17.♞d1 ♖c7 18.♟xc4! e5 (in any case it was better to accept the sacrifice with 18...bxc4 19.♖xc4 ♟cd7, though after 20.♖xe6 ♖e5 21.♖b3♞ White has two pawns and a powerful initiative for the piece) 19.b4 ♟cd7 20.♖a2 ♟b7 21.♟a5± and White has a great positional advantage with equal material, J. Horvath – Hoelzl, Budapest 1994.

But Black can improve with the simple 16...0–0 17.♞h3 ♖c8! and get a good version of our main line.

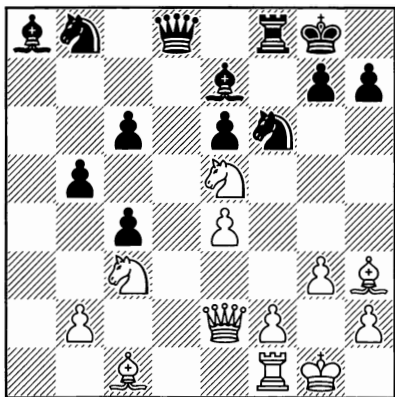
16...♖c8 17.g4!

To tell the truth, I have never come across this idea in this variation before. But it does appear to be very strong in this case. For example:

17...0–0 18.g5 ♟e8 19.♟d7 ♞f7 20.g6! hxc6 21.♟e5

Black has to give up exchange.

#### 16.♞h3



At this progressive point in the chapter, we still have two options to look at. The alternative to protecting the e6-pawn is rather surprisingly to give it up with **B41) 16...♟h8**. As Black is a pawn up, he should consider this, but it appears to make too much of a monster out of White's e-pawn. Therefore **B42) 16...♖c8** continues to be the main line.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♟f3 ♟f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♞g2 a6 6.0–0 b5 7.♟e5 ♟d5 8.a4 ♟b7 9.e4 ♟f6 10.axb5 axb5 11.♞xa8 ♟xa8 12.♟c3 c6 13.d5 ♞e7 14.dxe6 fxe6 15.♖e2 0–0 16.♞h3)

#### B41) 16...♟h8 17.♞xe6

In a recent grandmaster game 17.♞e3 was tested. I believe Black should calmly defend his pawn with 17...♖c8 and not play 17...b4 18.♟b1± as in V. Mikhalevski – Nisipeanu, Heviz 2008.

#### 17...♖e8 18.♞d1

Somehow I do not like 18.♞f5, which was played in Krasenkow – Kaidanov, Gausdal 1991. Black can try things like 18...♟bd7 19.♟xd7 ♟xd7, when he has a clear plan of penetrating with his knight to the d3-square, causing all kinds of mayhem.

#### 18...♟b7

Another move to consider is 18...c5. I think that 19.♞f4 ♟c6 20.♟xc6 ♞xc6 21.♞h3, followed by ♟d5 next, looks advantageous for White, as in the game Glek – Novikov, USSR 1988, though the solid and positional 21.f3, restricting the mobility of Black's minor pieces, is a very serious alternative.

#### 19.♞f4

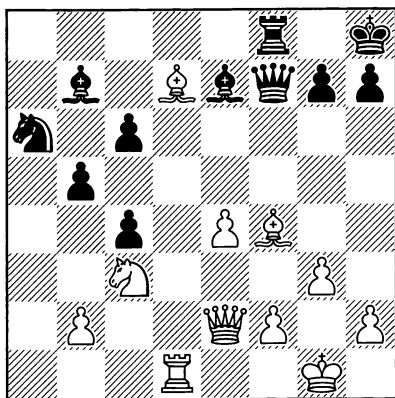
Threatening to play 20.♟f7† as Black's knight will be hanging at the end of such a tactical skirmish.

The slow 19.♙e3 allows Black to exchange his passive bishop with 19...♙c8! 20.♙xc8 ♖xc8 with rather unclear play.

### 19...♘a6 20.♘d7

White prepares the advance of his passed e-pawn in order to make use of this valuable asset.

### 20...♘xd7 21.♙xd7 ♖f7



### 22.e5

22.♙d6?! allows Black to create counterplay: 22...♘c5 23.e5 ♙xd6 24.♙xd6 ♘d3

### 22...♘c5

I tried to improve on Black's play: 22...♖g6N

But White is better anyway:

### 23.♙e3 ♘b4

In the case of 23...♘c5 24.♙xc5! ♙xc5 25.♘e4 ♙e7 26.♘d6 White has a clear edge, thanks to his e-pawn.

24.♙a1! ♙a8 25.♙xa8† ♙xa8 26.e6 ♘d3 27.♖d1!

White's queen is aiming to penetrate via the a-file into Black's camp and it is not easy to stop her.

27...♖f5 28.♖a1 ♖f8 29.♖a6 b4 30.♘a4 c5 31.♙c6 ♙xc6 32.♖xc6

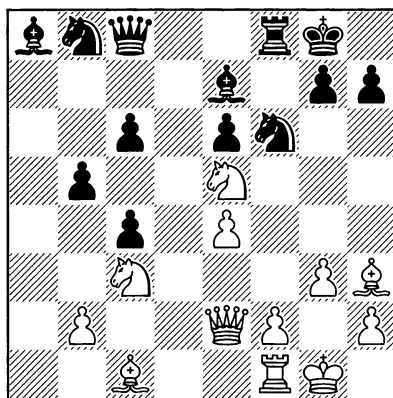
White's chances are clearly preferable.

### 23.e6 ♖g6 24.♙d6±

White's passed pawn decided the game very quickly in Danailov – Maksimovic, Cannes 1990.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2 a6 6.0–0 b5 7.♘e5 ♘d5 8.a4 ♙b7 9.e4 ♘f6 10.axb5 axb5 11.♙xa8 ♙xa8 12.♘c3 c6 13.d5 ♙e7 14.dxe6 fxe6 15.♖e2 0–0 16.♙h3)

### B42) 16...♖c8



### 17.♘f3

This looks to me to be the most logical continuation. First of all, White is threatening to increase the pressure against the e6-pawn with ♘g5. Secondly, the idea of pushing e4-e5 followed by ♘e4 appears in some lines and make a pleasant impression.

According to theory, White has an important alternative in 17.♙d1 but, for the reasons mentioned above, I prefer 17.♘f3.

### 17...♘a6

Played with the idea of defending the pawn with ...♘c7.

It is hard for me to take 17...♖b7 seriously, so I will choose not to comment on it, even though it was once played in a game.

**18. ♖g5**

It is too early for 18.e5?!. At the moment it only helps Black to activate his pieces: 18...♞d5 19.♜e4 c5

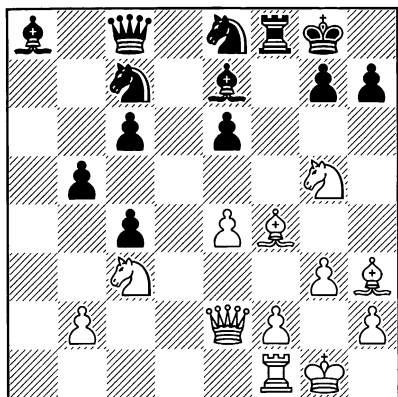
**18...♞c7**

Clearly worse is 18...♞c5? 19.♙e3! ♜h8 20.♙xc5 ♙xc5 21.e5 and White had a winning attack in Haba – Meier, Pardubice 1999.

**19.♙f4 ♜fe8**

Black also cannot solve his problems with the help of 19...h6 20.♙xc7 hxg5 21.e5 g4! (though this is of course much stronger than 21...♞d5 22.♙d6 ♜xc3 23.bxc3 ♜d7 24.♜g4! with a clear advantage to White in Jardorf – Schroll, corr. 1993). After 22.exf6 ♜xf6 23.♙xg4 ♜xc7 24.♙xe6† ♜f8 25.♙g4 c5 26.♞d1 Black is under serious pressure and his king is exposed on f8.

In this theoretical position I offer a quite natural looking improvement.

**20.♞d1!?:N**

White can calmly improve his position step by step, while I cannot see any active moves for Black at all.

The known line is: 20.♜g4 ♜f6!? (two games have continued 20...♜f6 with double-

edged play) 21.♜xe6† ♜xe6 22.♙xe6† ♜xe6 (Zilberstein – Novikov, USSR 1988, saw the inferior 22...♜h8. Why put the king in the corner in the endgame?) 23.♜xe6 ♜c8 24.♜a1 ♜f7 This looks perfectly playable for Black.

Whether or not this is an absolutely accurate evaluation, I feel confident that there is no reason for White to rush towards the endgame just yet.

**20...♙b7**

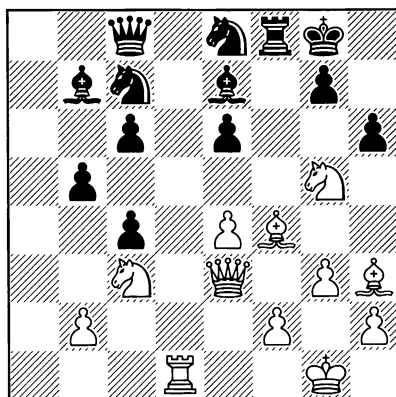
With 20...h6 Black would weaken the g6-square. White would of course be a fool not to take advantage of this with 21.♜f3 ♙c5 22.♜e5 ♜f6 23.♜g6 ♜e8 24.e5 ♜fd5 25.♜e4± when he has a dangerous initiative.

**21.♜e3**

Once again White plays a quiet move. The queen takes control of the g1-a7 diagonal and prepares the move ♙e5, which is useful in some cases.

**21...h6**

Black has almost no useful options, so perhaps he has to play this weakening pawn move.

**22.♜f3 ♜a6**

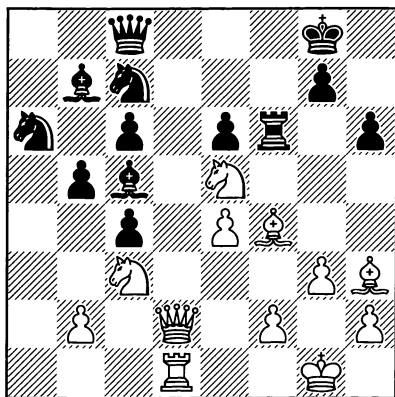
Black cannot put an end to his problems with 22...g5 23.♙e5 ♜a6 (23...c5 runs into

24.♖d5!±) because of 24.♖d4 ♘c5 25.f4 ♖g7 26.f5 ♜e8 27.♙xg7 ♜xg7 28.e5! with a winning attack.

23.♖e5 ♖ec7 24.♖g6 ♙c5 25.♜d2 ♜f6

Now it would be premature to play 26.♜d8†, as after 26...♜xd8 27.♜xd8† ♜h7 28.♖e5 ♜f8! Black is out of danger. Instead White should calmly centralize the knight:

26.♖e5=



White looks to have fantastic compensation for the pawn, thanks to the superior activity of his minor pieces. Whether he can cash in the point depends on the ensuing struggle. There you are on your own; all I can do is give you the best possible starting position for this struggle.

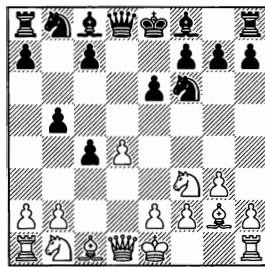
### Conclusion:

The 5...a6 and 6...b5 variation seems to me to be slightly risky for Black, as White obtains very rich play for the sacrificed pawn. I have always had the opinion that it would be too easy if Black could solve his opening problems in such a direct way.

# Chapter 7

## The Catalan

### 4...dxc4 and 5...b5



### Variation Index

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.f3 f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.g2 b5

6.a4 c6 7.axb5 cxb5 8.f6 e5 9.f3 c3

A) 9...f6!?

p 101

B) 9...b4 10.0-0 xc3 11.e4

p 105

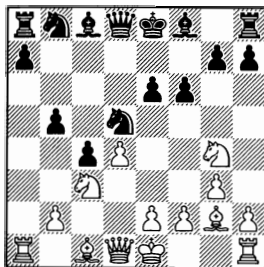
B1) 11...f6

p 106

B2) 11...xb2

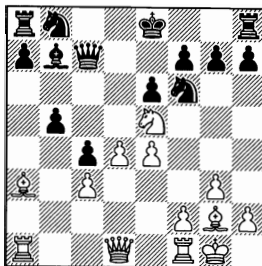
p 107

A) prepared for the worst



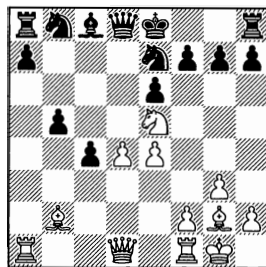
10...b7!N

B1) after 13...c7



14.c1!N

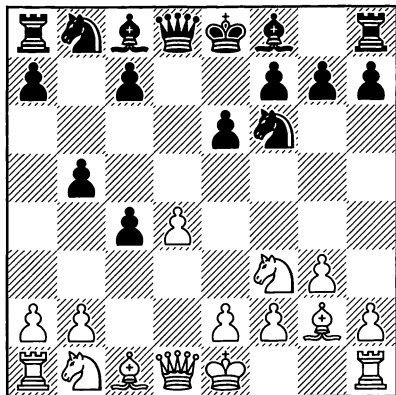
B2) try something new today



13.fxf7!N



1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2 b5



Nothing could be more natural than Black's last move: he defends his extra pawn, planning later to complete development and convert his material advantage.

Of course matters are not that simple and basically the whole variation is known to be quite dangerous for Black: White's advantage in development allows him to seize the initiative in many lines. Recently I have noted that Black has opted for this line infrequently. Strangely enough, in most of the games White has avoided the most principled line and chosen instead rather non-critical variations, playing for long-term compensation. I definitely prefer the main line, where I have done a lot of work. It seems that I have managed to find some interesting ideas, which I would like to share with you.

### 6.a4

In my opinion this is the best move order.

In the case of 6.♘e5 ♘d5 7.a4, instead of 7...c6, which would transpose to the main line, Black gains additional options such as 7...♙b4! or 7...f6.

6.0–0 ♙b7 7.a4 c6 is one of the main theoretical tabiyas.

### 6...c6

Obviously Black cannot play 6...♙b4? due to 7.♙d2 ♙xd2† 8.♘fxd2! c6 9.axb5± with a clear advantage.

### 7.axb5

Once again this is the correct move order. 7.♘e5 allows Black 7...♙b4† (or even 7...♘d5 8.axb5 ♙b4†!N and after 9.♘c3 ♘xc3 10.bxc3 ♙xc3† 11.♙d2 ♖xd4 12.♘f3 ♙xd2† 13.♘xd2 c3 Black should easily hold the position) 8.♘c3 ♘d5, and this leads to a different line from the one I want.

### 7...cxb5

7...♙b4†? 8.♙d2 ♙xd2† 9.♘fxd2±

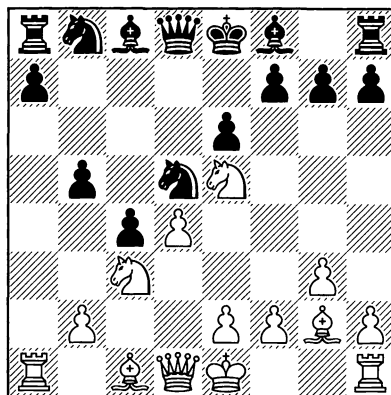
### 8.♘e5 ♘d5

Nobody has tried 8...♙b4† which allows White to choose between two options:

a) 9.♘c3 ♘d5 10.0–0 is just transposing to the main line.

b) 9.♙d2 ♙xd2† 10.♖xd2 ♘d5 11.♘c3 f6 12.♘xb5 (12.♘g4 ♙b7 13.♘xb5 ♖d7! looks perfectly playable for Black) 12...fxe5 13.dxe5 0–0 14.♘d6 ♘b6 with double-edged play.

### 9.♘c3

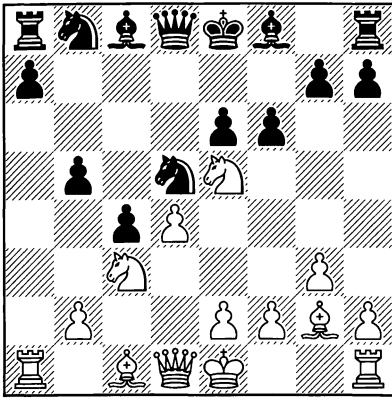


The main theoretical continuation is a developing move, but Black also has a more forcing option. A) 9...f6!? is very interesting, but B) 9...b4 remains the main line.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2 b5 6.a4 c6 7.axb5 cxb5 8.♘e5 ♘d5 9.♘c3)

### A) 9...f6!?

This relatively unexplored continuation may be the main reason why White has recently tried to avoid this critical variation.



### 10.♘g4!?

This move was first suggested by Chekhov in his comments to the Ulibin – Kharlov game below, and later played in two correspondence games, but we will try to go deeper. Basically the text looks quite natural: White maintains the pressure along the h1-a8 diagonal (compare with 10.♘f3), and after the e2-e4 advance the knight will have a nice square on e3. There are also some tactical ideas in some lines. White had previously tried two other continuations:

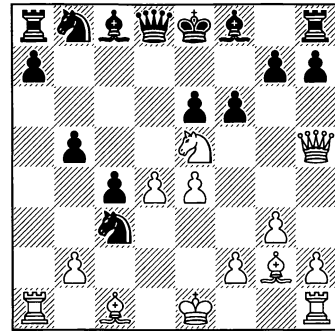
10.♘f3 ♘xc3 11.bxc3 ♙b7 12.0–0 ♙e7 with typical double-edged play in Ulibin – Kharlov, St Petersburg 1993.

Striking in the centre immediately looks very principled:

10.e4 ♘xc3

Just bad is 10...♘b4 as in Leon – Orsini, Brazil 1999, but now White overlooked a simple winning line: 11.♙h5+! g6 12.♘xg6 hxg6 13.♙xh8 ♘c2+ 14.♔f1 ♘xa1 15.e5! with a material advantage and an absolutely winning position.

11.♙h5+



But unfortunately I could not manage to discover where White's advantage lies after the following sequence:

11...g6 12.♘xg6 hxg6 13.♙xh8

13.♙xg6+! ♔d7 14.bxc3 ♙b7 would hardly give White sufficient compensation for the piece, Milovanovic – Raicevic, Pula 1990.

13...♙xd4 14.♙h6

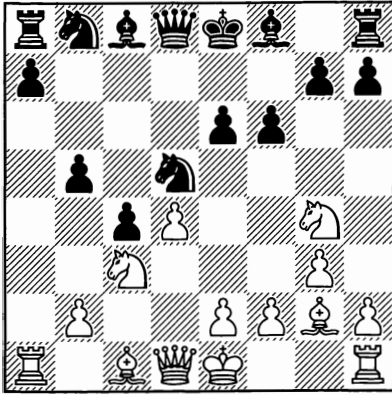
14.♙e3 most probably leads to a draw after 14...♙d3 15.bxc3 ♙xc3+ 16.♔e2 ♙d3+ (less strong is 16...♙b2+ as in Steele – Vaughan, corr. 1988) 17.♔f3 (17.♔e1 ♙c3+ =) 17...♙b7 18.♔g4 ♙xe4 19.♙xe4 ♙xe4+ 20.♔h3 ♙f5+ 21.♔g2 ♙e4+ = as 22.♔g1?! ♘d7 looks rather dangerous for White.

14...♘d7 15.0–0

In Hackel – Rausch, Germany 1996, Black lost the game in a few moves, however after the natural:

15...♘e2+N 16.♔h1 ♙b7

Black is doing fine.

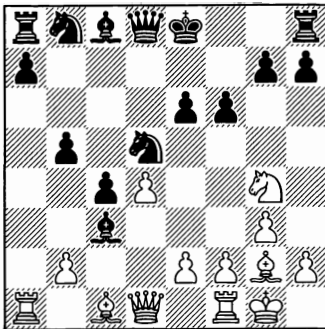


### 10...♙b7!N

Black is lucky to have this tactical trick at his disposal. Other moves are much worse:

10...♙c6 11.0-0 (not so clear is 11.♙xb5 ♖b6) 11...♙b4 12.♙xb5 ♖b6 13.e4 ♙de7 14.♙c3 ♖xd4 15.♖xd4 ♙xd4 16.e5! ♖b8 17.exf6 gxf6 18.♙xf6† ♙f7 19.♙g4† and despite heavy simplifications White keeps a strong initiative.

10...♙b4 11.0-0 ♙xc3



### 12.e4!N

This is definitely more challenging than 12.bxc3 0-0 (Dangerous for Black is 12...♙xc3 13.♖d2 ♙d5 14.e4 followed by 15.e5, and I do not see any reason for Black to allow White to play this. Also after 12...♙c6 13.♙a3 White has compensation, Riley – Van Melis, corr. 1992.) 13.♖c2

♙b7 14.e4 ♙b6 15.♙a3 ♖e8 Black looks pretty solid, though White keeps proper compensation.

12...♙e7

12...♙b6 13.bxc3 ♙b7 14.♙a3 gives White a strong initiative, as Black's king remains uncastled.

We can see White's main idea in the following line: 12...♙xb2 13.♙xb2 ♙b4 14.e5 ♙d5 15.exf6 gxf6 16.♙h6! with a powerful initiative.

13.bxc3 ♙b7

Black cannot allow White to push e4-e5: 13...0-0? 14.e5 ♙d5 15.exf6 gxf6 16.♙h6† ♙h8 17.♙a3 and Black unavoidably loses material.

14.♖b1 a6 15.♙e3 0-0 16.♙a3

White can afford to decline to regain the pawn, especially since after 16.♙xc4 f5 Black gets some play.

16...♖d7 17.d5

Black's position is hard to defend.

10...f5?!

This looks very dubious positionally, Wellner – Ihlenfeld, corr. 1986. I like the look of the following line:

11.e4! ♙xc3

11...fxe4 12.♙xe4 is also dangerous for Black.

12.bxc3 ♙b7

12...fxg4 runs into 13.e5 ♙d7 14.♖xg4! with a large advantage.

13.♙e3 ♖d7 14.0-0

14.exf5 ♙xg2 15.♙xg2 exf5 16.0-0 also looks interesting.

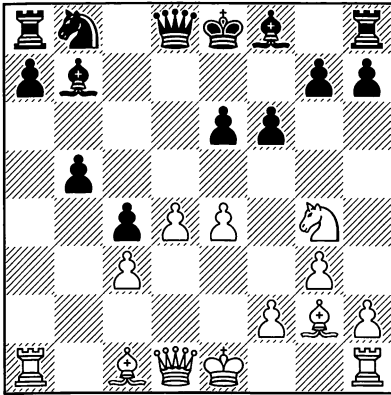
14...fxe4 15.♖b1! a6 16.f3

White has the initiative.

### 11.e4

The justification of Black's idea is that after 11.♙xb5 he can play 11...♖d7! and White cannot play 12.♙a3 in view of 12...h5! with a clear advantage for Black.

## 11...♟xc3 12.bxc3

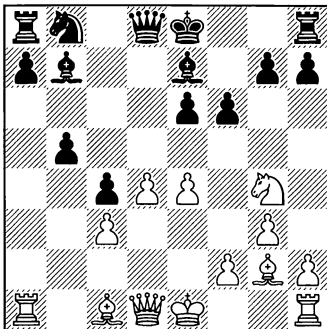


Finally we have reached a branching position of sorts. Black has a few options here, but only one looks reliable.

## 12...♞d6!

Not a natural square for the bishop, but it seems to me to be Black's best bet. The main point is to avoid a trick connected with ♟h6.

## 12...♞e7



## 13.♟h6!

A very unexpected tactical idea. Black's king remains uncastled, and this obviously increases White's compensation. The arising position is very complex and it is almost impossible to give a definite evaluation, but my feeling is that White's chances are better

due to the problems with Black's king. I will give some approximate lines:

## 13...g6

It is dangerous for Black to accept the sacrifice: 13...gxh6 14.♞h5† ♟d7 (14...♟f8? 15.♞xh6† ♟g8 16.♞g4† ♟f7 17.♞g7† ♟e8 18.♞xh8†+–) 15.♞xb5† ♞c6 16.♞xc4 ♞c7 (or 16...a6 17.d5 ♞b5 18.dxe6† ♟e8 19.♞d5±) 17.0–0±

Or 13...a6 14.♞h5† g6 15.♞e2 ♟f8 16.0–0 (a worthy alternative would be 16.h4 with the idea of pushing h5) 16...♟g7 17.d5 and White has the initiative.

## 14.0–0 ♟d7

I believe White now has many tempting ideas, but the main goal should be to achieve the d5-advance at a suitable moment. I prefer the following set-up:

## 15.♞e3 ♟b6

15...♟f8 16.♞h3 f5 17.d5 allows White a serious initiative.

## 16.♞b1!?

I like the idea of making Black's knight vulnerable on b6, thus increasing the power of the d4-d5 advance.

Quite interesting is 16.d5 exd5 17.exd5 ♟xd5 18.♞xa7 with a lot of play for the pawn.

## 16...a6 17.♞d1

White is ready to push d4-d5 next.

## 12...♟d7

This appears to lose an important tempo.

## 13.0–0 ♟b6

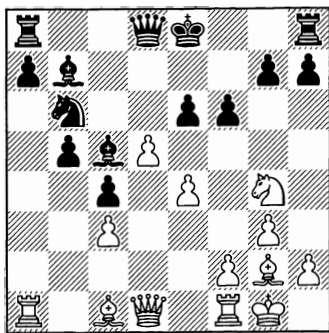
13...♞d6 is met by the elegant 14.♟h6! gxh6 (somewhat better would be 14...a6 but after 15.♞h5† g6 16.♞h4 White has a dangerous initiative, while Black's king is stuck in the centre) 15.♞h5† ♟e7 16.e5 ♞xg2 17.exd6† ♟xd6 18.♟xg2 and Black's position is very dangerous, despite being two pawns up. For example: 18...a6 19.♞e1 ♞e8 20.♞f4† ♟e7 21.♞xh6±

## 14.d5

This uses the fact that Black cannot react with 14...e5 in view of the typical sacrificial idea 15.♟xe5 fxe5 16.♞h5† ♔d7 17.♞xe5 ♞e7 18.♞d4± when it is hard to imagine that Black can successfully oppose White's pawns in the centre.

This looks more ambitious than 14.♞e3 ♞d7 15.♞e1 ♙e7 16.♞h5† g6 17.♞h6 ♙f8 with a defensible position for Black.

14...♙c5



15.♞h6!

It even works here!

15...exd5

15...gxf6 loses to 16.♞h5† ♔d7 17.dxe6† ♔c6 18.♞d1 ♞e8 19.♞f5 with a decisive attack.

16.♞e1 ♔f8

Once again 16...gxf6 loses: 17.exd5† ♔d7 18.♞g4† ♔c7 19.♙f4† ♙d6 20.♞g7† ♞d7 21.♙xd6† ♔xd6 22.♞e6† ♔c7 23.♞e7

17.e5 ♞a4 18.♞f3

With a very dangerous initiative.

13.♞b1

I do not believe White has enough play for the piece after 13.♞h6 gxf6 14.♞h5† ♔e7 15.♞xb5 ♞d7 16.♞h5 ♞c6 17.0-0, although my computer disagrees with me.

13...♞d7

After 13...a6 14.♞e3 (threatening 15.♞xc4) 14...♞d7 15.♞h5†! g6 16.♞h6 ♙f8 17.♞f4

♙e7 18.0-0 0-0 19.d5 White has good compensation for the pawn.

14.0-0 0-0 15.♞e3 ♞a6

If Black tries:

15...a6?!

It runs into some elegant tactics

16.♞xc4! bxc4 17.♞xb7 ♞xb7 18.e5

White is better in all lines:

18...♞b3

Other options are:

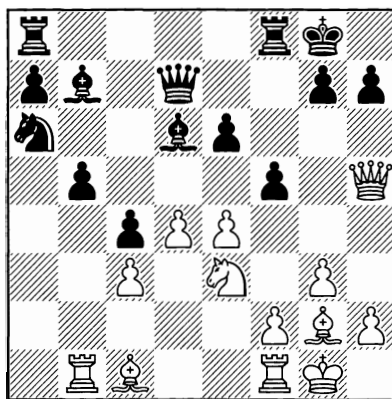
18...♞c6 19.exd6 ♞ac8 (19...♞d7 is met strongly by 20.d5!±) 20.d5 exd5 21.♞xd5† ♞f7 22.♙h3!± White clearly has the upper hand.

18...♞a7 19.exd6 ♞d7 20.♞e2 ♞ae8 21.♞xc4 ♞b6 22.♞a2! and White's pawn mass should decide the game.

19.♙xa8 ♞xd1 20.♞xd1 fxe5 21.d5! ♙c5 22.dxe6 ♞xf2 23.♔h1 ♙e7 24.♙e3

White is much better, thanks to his pair of bishops.

16.♞h5 f5



17.d5!

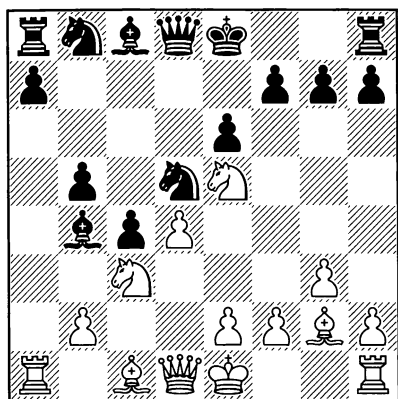
17.♞xc4 bxc4 18.♞xb7 ♞xb7 19.e5 ♞b3 20.♙xa8 ♙xe5! is just unclear.

Finally we have reached a very complicated position, which would require extensive work

to give a definitive evaluation, if it is even possible. I believe this is not so relevant for my opening book. My opinion is that White's chances are preferable and Black should think about equalizing.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2 b5 6.a4 c6 7.axb5 cxb5 8.♘e5 ♘d5 9.♘c3)

B) 9...♙b4



### 10.0-0

10.♙d2N is a new idea and after 10...♙xc3 11.bxc3 0-0 12.0-0 f6 13.♘f3 ♘c6 14.e4 ♘b6 the position is rather double-edged. White has compensation, but beyond this it is hard to make a proper evaluation

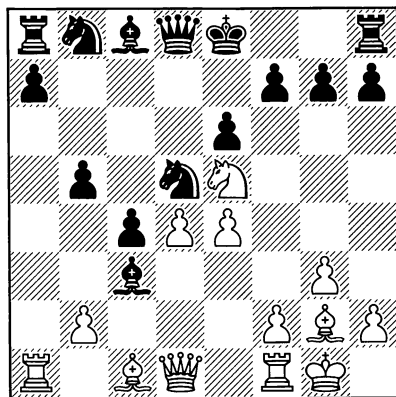
### 10...♙xc3

Just bad is 10...♘xc3? 11.bxc3 ♙xc3 12.♖a3 ♙xd4 13.♘c6 ♘xc6 14.♙xc6† ♙d7 15.♙xa8 and White wins.

### 11.e4

Only once has White tried 11.bxc3, and he did not manage to prove his compensation after 11...♘d7 Gereben – Enklaar, Wijk aan Zee 1972.

We have reached the big branching point in this line.



Our main lines are B1) 11...♘f6 and B2) 11...♙xb2.

Other relevant options are:

### 11...♘f4N

Nobody has tried this strange move and indeed Black's position is dangerous.

### 12.gxf4

Also tempting is 12.bxc3 ♘xc3 13.♙g4! with an initiative.

### 12...♙xd4

Black has no time for 12...♙b4 13.♘xf7! ♘xf7 14.e5 with a decisive advantage for White.

### 13.♘xc4 ♙b7

13...0-0 14.e5 bxc4 15.♙xa8± leaves Black without real compensation for the exchange.

### 14.♘a5 ♙c6 15.♙d2!? ♙b6 16.♙b4 ♙xd1 17.♙fxd1 ♙xa5 18.♙xa5±

Despite the obvious simplifications, White maintains a clear advantage.

### 11...♘e7 12.bxc3 0-0

12...f6? loses simply after 13.♙h5† g6 14.♘xg6! ♘xg6 15.e5 as in Gulko – Mikhailchishin, Volgodosn 1981.

### 13.d5

13.♙a3 ♘d7 14.f4 looks good as well.

### 13...f6 14.♘g4 ♙b7 15.♙a3±

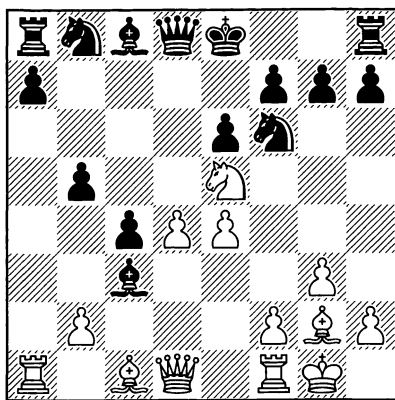
White has seized a dangerous initiative, as correctly pointed out by Oll in *Chess Informant* 37.

Black cannot play 11...♙xd4? 12.♖xd4 ♜b6 13.♘f3! ♜xd4 14.♘xd4 ♘c7 15.e5 ♘d5 16.♘xb5 with a winning position for White.

Also losing is 11...♙b4? 12.exd5 exd5 13.♘xf7! ♘xf7 14.♖h5† and Black resigned in Jokel – Wiesen, Correspondence 1989. At least Black saved some stamps.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2 b5 6.a4 c6 7.axb5 cxb5 8.♘e5 ♘d5 9.♘c3 ♙b4 10.0–0 ♙xc3 11.e4)

B1) 11...♘f6



## 12.bxc3

The absence of the dark-squared bishop makes Black's position very tough to defend.

## 12...♙b7

12...♘bd7 was neatly refuted by 13.♘c6! ♜c7 14.d5 e5 15.♙e3 a6 16.f4 0–0 17.fxe5 ♘xe5 18.♘xe5 ♜xe5 19.♙d4 ♜g5 20.e5 ♘g4 21.e6 with a winning position for White in Kinsman – Bryson, Edinburgh 1996.

12...0–0 13.♙g5!

This is a real problem for Black.

13...h6

13...♘bd7 runs into 14.♘xd7 ♜xd7 15.♙xf6 gxf6 16.♖g4† ♘h8 17.♖f3! ♙b7 18.♖xf6† ♘g8 19.f4± with an obvious advantage and most probably a decisive attack.

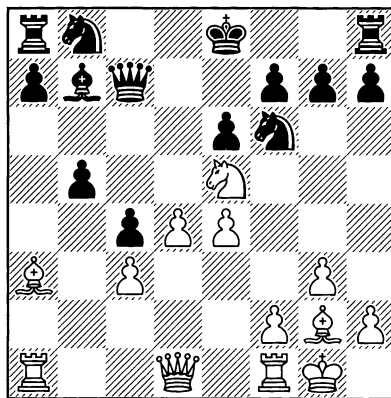
13...♙b7 just loses a piece: 14.♘g4 ♘bd7 15.e5 ♙xg2 16.♘xg2 h5 (16...h6 17.♙h4 does not help) 17.♘e3+–

14.♙xf6 ♜xf6 15.♘xc4 ♙b7 16.♘d6! ♜e7 17.♘xb5+–

White somehow managed to lose this winning position in Nindl – Lautier, Lugano 1986.

## 13.♙a3 ♜c7

This position occurred in Delchev – N. Mitkov, Arnhem 1990. Here I believe White should have played differently.



## 14.♙e1!N

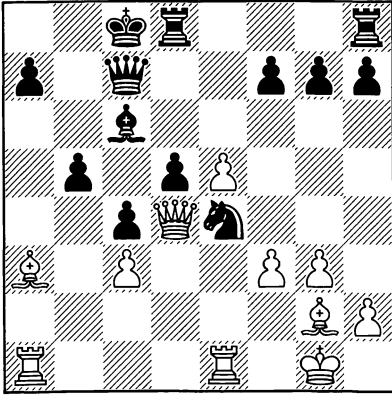
Amusingly, this natural and strong move is a novelty. The young Delchev protected the pawn with his queen, 14.♖e2, which seems far less flexible to me.

Also less convincing is 14.f4 ♘bd7N±.

## 14...♘c6

Or 14...♘bd7 15.♘xd7 ♜xd7 16.♖d2 h6 17.d5±.

15. ♖xc6 ♙xc6 16.d5 0-0-0 17. ♖d4 exd5  
18.e5 ♖e4 19.f3



With a large advantage.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3. ♖f3 ♖f6 4.g3 dxc4 5. ♙g2  
b5 6.a4 c6 7.axb5 cxb5 8. ♖e5 ♖d5 9. ♖c3  
♙b4 10.0-0 ♙xc3 11.e4)

## B2) 11...♙xb2

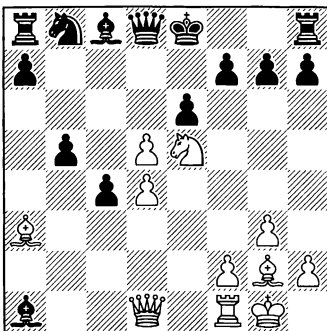
This is by far Black's most popular reply.

## 12.♙xb2

And this is the right way to fight for the advantage.

The alternative is:

12.exd5 ♙xa1 13. ♙a3



This line has scored very well for White, but most of the games were played before the age of silicon. After checking with the computer, it appears that this line is almost a forced draw!

13...a5! 14.dxe6

14. ♖g4 can be refuted in many ways, so I will choose the simplest one: 14... ♖f6!N Other moves are much more complicated. 15. ♙xa1 ♙a6!! A fantastic defensive resource: Black removes his rook from the potentially dangerous diagonal and intends to close the a3-f8 diagonal with the help of ...b4, as his rook is now defended on a6, and then he will castle short. 16. ♙c5 ♖d7+ White has sacrificed too much, Mozny – Bares, corr. 2000.

14...♙xe6 15. ♙xa8

This position is from the game Kengis – Meister, Togliatti 1985, and here the computer indicates the calm:

15...♙c3!N

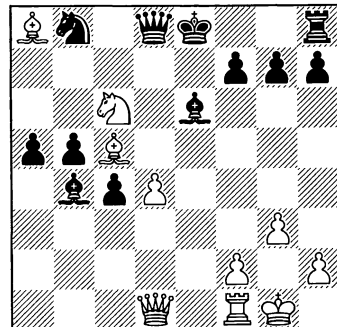
as Black's best option.

16. ♙c5

Of course not 16. ♖c6? ♖d5 17. ♖xb8 ♖xa8 and Black is winning already, Scammon – Voehringer, corr. 1998.

16...♙b4 17. ♖c6

In *Chess Informant 40* Kengis stops here, evaluating the position as winning for White! Actually it is a forced draw and White is the one who escapes by a miracle.





17...♖d5

Many strong players would have disregarded this move subconsciously before Fritz taught us not to be afraid.

18.♟xb4 ♖xa8 19.d5 ♜d7 20.dxe6 ♜xc5  
21.exf7† ♜xf7 22.♞h5† g6 23.♞xc5 ♜c8  
24.♞xb5 axb4 25.♞d7†

With a perpetual check.

12...♜e7

Black has to block the a3-f8 diagonal.

Extremely dangerous for Black is:

12...♜f6 13.♙a3! a5

Or 13...♞c7 14.♞d2!. A multi-purpose move: White's queen is heading for either g5 or b4. 14...♜bd7 15.♜xd7 ♞xd7 16.d5 with a decisive initiative.

14.♞d2!

White has to play quickly: the queen is heading for g5.

14.d5 is met strongly by what we now know is a typical defensive idea: 14...♞a6! followed by ...b4.

14...♙b7

The point is that after 14...h6 White has a nice tactical trick: 15.♙b4! axb4 16.♞xa8 ♙b7 17.♞a7 ♞b6 18.♞xb7! ♞xb7 19.♞xb4 with a clear advantage.

15.♞g5 ♞g8

Black's position is unacceptable after 15...b4 16.♞xg7 ♞f8 17.♙c1 ♙xe4 18.♙h6!+-. 16.d5†

White's initiative is very dangerous with the nice point that after:

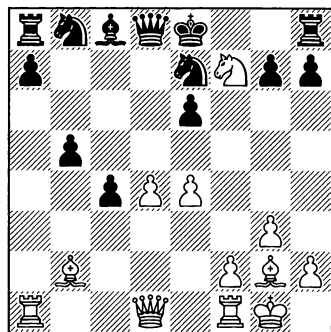
16...b4 17.dxe6 fxe6 18.♜xc4! bxa3 19.♞fd1

White regains the piece with dividends.

13.d5

This looks natural, bringing the dark-squared bishop into the play.

White also has a very interesting sacrifice at his disposal: 13.♜xf7!N



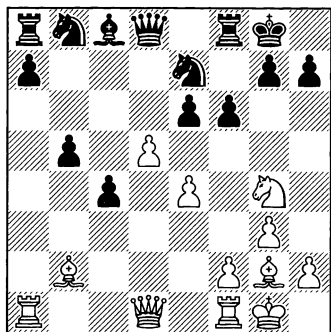
13...♜xf7 14.♞h5† I will leave this interesting position for the reader to study. To help you start, I believe there are two directions in this position: 14...♜g8 15.♞xb5♞ and 14...g6 15.♞xb5 ♙d7 16.♞xc4 ♞b6 17.♞c1♞.

13...0-0

Clearly inferior is:

13...f6 14.♜g4 0-0

14...e5 15.f4 exf4 16.d6 (There is no point in trying to break through with 16.♜xf6† gxf6 17.♙xf6, as after 17...0-0 I do not see anything decisive for him.) 16...♙xg4 (or 16...♜bc6 17.e5! with a decisive offensive) 17.♞xg4 ♞xd6 18.e5 ♞c5† 19.♜h1 c3 20.♙xc3 ♞xc3 21.♞ac1 and White wins.



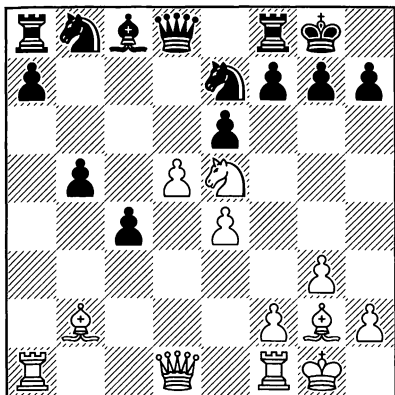
15.e5!

Further opening up the play.

15...fxe5

If 15...f5 White decides the battle elegantly 16.dxe6 ♜bc6 17.♜f6† gxf6 18.exf6!+-. 15...fxe5

16.d6 ♖ec6 17.♗xe5 ♜b7 18.♞g4  
With a winning attack.



#### 14.♞a3

White's bishop switches to another diagonal, attacking Black's knight on e7. At first I was sure that White's bishop might still be useful on the 'big diagonal' and so I was pretty excited about:

14.♗g4

Creating some tactical opportunities, but later on I discovered a cool-headed defence:

14...exd5

The point behind White's move can be seen in the following line: 14...b4? 15.♗f6†! ♜h8 (Black cannot capture the knight: 15...gxf6 16.♞xf6 ♞e8 17.d6 ♗g6 18.e5+ – threatening both ♞xa8 and ♞d2-h6) 16.♞h5 h6 17.d6 ♗ec6 18.e5 and White wins due to the idea of ♞c1xh6.

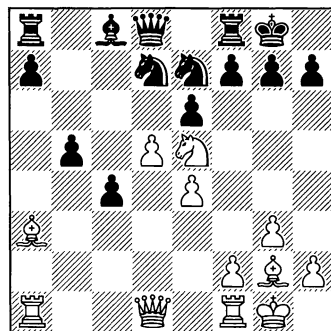
15.exd5 a5!

In the case of 15...♞d6 White easily seizes the initiative: 16.♗e3 ♗f5 17.♞g4! g6 18.♗xf5 ♞xf5 19.♞d4 f6 20.g4 ♞d7 21.♞fe1 a5 22.g5 ♞a6 23.gxf6 ♞xf6 24.♞xf6 ♞axf6 25.♞xf6 ♞xf6 26.♞xa5 with a clear advantage. 16.♞d4 f6 17.d6 ♗ec6 18.♞d5† ♜h8 19.♗e3 ♞a6!

And now I did not manage to find any interesting ideas for White. Maybe the reader will have more luck?

#### 14...f6

This is Black's best option, and was mentioned in *Chess Informant 35*. That game continued: 14...♗d7?



15.♗xf7!

This nice blow quickly decides the game.

15...♞b6

The game continued 15...♗xf7 and White played all the best moves: 16.dxe6† ♗xe6 17.♞h5 g6 18.♞xh7 ♗e5 19.♞ad1 and Black was absolutely lost in Polovodin – Zhelnin, Moscow 1983.

The following also looks quite convincing:

16.dxe6

16.♗h6† g6 17.♞xe7 ♞f7 leaves Black with hopes of survival.

16...♗c5 17.e5 ♞b8

Or 17...♞xe6 18.♗g5+–.

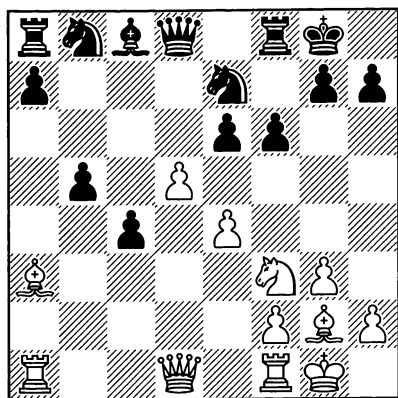
18.♞xc5 ♞xc5 19.♞d6

With a winning advantage.

#### 15.♗f3

This time 15.♗g4 is not so dangerous: 15...e5! and Black holds his own. 16.d6 (White's problem is that 16.f4 is met strongly by 16...b4 17.♞xb4 ♞b6†± followed by 18...♞xb4) 16...♗ec6 17.♞d5† ♞f7 18.♗e3 a6 and Black already seems to be better.

Black is absolutely fine after 15.d6?! ♗ec6 16.♗xc6 ♗xc6 17.d7 ♞xd7 18.♞xf8 ♗xf8 19.e5 ♗xe5 20.♞d6† ♗e8!±.



### 15...d6!

This is the best defensive resource: Black is threatening to block White's dark-squared bishop with ...b4. Other moves are clearly weaker:

15...e8 16.d4 b6 17.e5! dxd5 18.exf6 dxf6 19.dxb5! (19.e8 d8! is unclear) 19...c6 20.d6 d8 21.a4 d5 22.f8 White has a powerful initiative.

15...a6 16.e5! The same idea as the previous variation. 16...dxd5 (or 16...a7 17.d6 b7 18.dxe6 b6 19.e1 fe5 20.c5 xe6 21.g5 winning material) 17.cxf8 xf8 18.d4! Black's position collapses.

15...e5 16.d6 ec6 17.d5+ f7 18.xb5±

### 16.d6 d6

Black's position is quite dangerous after 16...c6 17.d7 b7 18.cxf8 xf8 19.e5!.

### 17.d7 b7 18.cxf8 dxf8

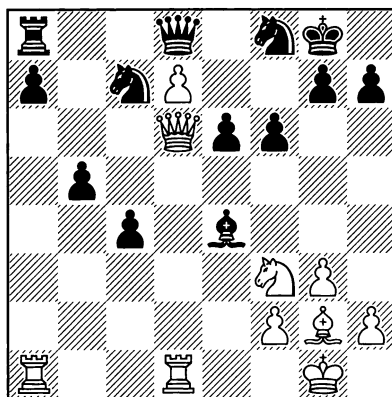
And now we have more or less forced play:

### 19.f8 d7

19...b6 runs into 20.f8 d8 21.e7 (21.xb6 axb6 22.d4 is less convincing)

21...c5 22.d6 xd7 23.xb6 xe7 24.xb5 dxe4 25.xa7 d6 26.d4 dxb5 27.dxb5 xg2 28.xe7 d5 29.d6±. Despite massive exchanges, White's initiative continues.

### 20.f8 d1 xe4



### 21.d4! xg2

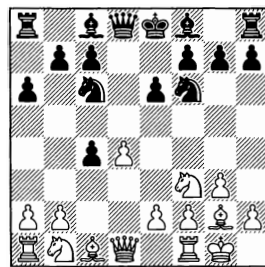
Worse is 21...d5?! 22.cxd5 exd5 23.xd5 dxd5 24.xd5+ h8 25.f5 (threatening 26.e1-e8) 25...dxd7 26.f7 f8 27.xd7 b4 28.xa7 xa7 29.xa7± and with accurate play White is likely to win this endgame.

### 22.d4 xg2±

This unbalanced position is in White's favour, thanks to his strong d-pawn. The best Black can hope for is an endgame an exchange down where he has four pawns against White's three, where Black will be doomed to passive defence.

**Conclusion:** 4...dxc4 5.f3 b5 is a risky line, particularly if White follows my recommendation of 6.a4 c6 7.axb5 cxb5 8.d5 d5 9.d3. Black's best chance is that White will be caught by surprise, as 4...dxc4 and 5...b5 is a rather rare line. If you do your homework, White will have all the fun.

# Chapter 8



## The Catalan

### 4...dxc4, 5...a6 and 6...♘c6

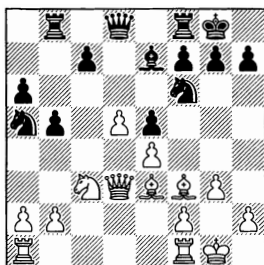
### Variation Index

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2 a6 6.0-0 ♘c6

7.♘c3

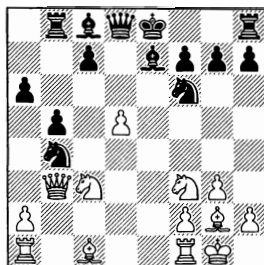
A) 7...♙e7	p 113
B) 7...♘d5	p 114
C) 7...♞b8 8.e4	p 115
C1) 8...b5	p 116
C2) 8...♙e7 9.♞e2	p 119
C21) 9...b5 10.♞d1	p 119
C211) 10...0-0	p 119
C212) 10...♘b4	p 120
C22) 9...♘xd4 10.♘xd4 ♞xd4 11.♞d1	p 123
C221) 11...♞b6	p 123
C222) 11...♞c5 12.e5	p 125
C2221) 12...♘d5	p 126
C2222) 12...♘d7	p 127

A) after 14...♘a5



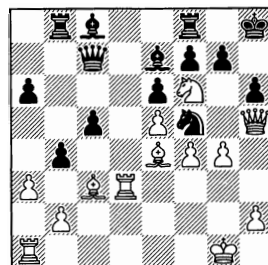
15.a4!N

C1) note to move 9



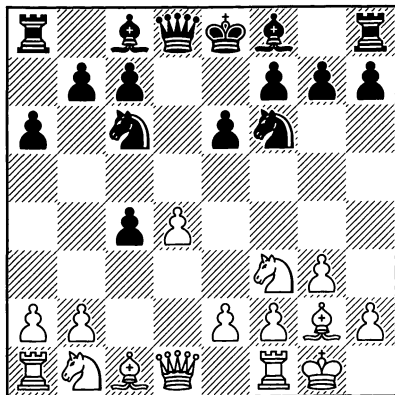
13.♞d1!N

C221) a winning attack



26.♙d2!

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♟f3 ♟f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2  
a6 6.0-0 ♟c6



This is by far Black's most popular move in this position. In my opinion this line is one of the critical tests of the Catalan Opening. Compared with the other main lines of the Catalan, where Black obtains a very solid position, here in most of the variations Black manages to keep his extra pawn, which requires White to play energetically in order to prove his compensation. Certainly there is also another side of this system: Black significantly lags in development, which might allow White a serious initiative if Black commits an inaccuracy.

Overall this makes this line very important for the theory of our opening. Black's last move secures control over several important central squares, and his plan includes preparing the advance ...b7-b5 after one more preparatory move, ...♟b8 or ...♙d7, depending on White's choice.

### 7.♟c3

Recently this move has gained in popularity, although 7.e3 remains White's most popular option. Still it is possible that the shift will continue, as nowadays White is failing to prove any advantage after this timid pawn advance.

This takes us to the first branching position in this line. Black has three options that I want to draw your attention to, and two options I do not. The three prime ideas are **A) 7...♙e7**, **B) 7...♟d5!?** and the main continuation **C) 7...♟b8**. But before we get to those, I have to do my job of eliminating the less important options from your radar:

### 7...♙b4

This logical move is strongly met by:

### 8.♟e5!

Certainly White can play for typical compensation with 8.♟c2 0-0 9.♙d1 but this always leads to double-edged play.

### 8...♟xe5 9.♟a4†!

This is the point behind White's 8th move.

### 9...♟c6

It is dangerous for Black to win a second pawn with 9...♟d7 as after 10.♟xb4 ♟xd4 11.♙e3 White develops a serious initiative with Black's king stuck in the centre.

### 10.♙xc6† bxc6 11.♟xb4 ♟xd4 12.♙e3 ♟e5

I also examined 12...♟d5! 13.♙xd4 (13.♟a4 ♟xe3 14.♟xc6† ♟e7∞) 13...♟xb4 14.♙xg7 ♟g8 15.♙e5 ♟d5 16.♟e4 ♟e7 17.♟ac1±.

White regains the pawn and keeps a pleasant risk-free advantage.

### 13.♟fd1 ♟d5 14.♟c5 ♟d6

This was played in Thuesen – Hyldkrog, Farum 1993.

### 15.♟xc4!N

This was now best and would have secured White a clear edge.

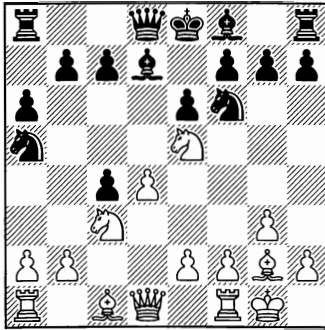
### 7...♙d7

This move is rather dubious in view of:

### 8.♟e5 ♟a5

White is clearly better after 8...♟xe5?! 9.dxe5 ♟g4 10.♟d4±, Ulibin – Panchenko, Cheliabinsk 1993.

The position after 8...♟a5 was on the board in Demarchi – Olivier, Grenoble 2002. Now I think White should play:



like ♟g5 or a3. Black can try to solve his problems tactically, but it seems to fail:

14...♟b6 15.a3! ♟c6 16.♟xd7 ♟xd7

White's f2-pawn is untouchable: 16...♟xf2?

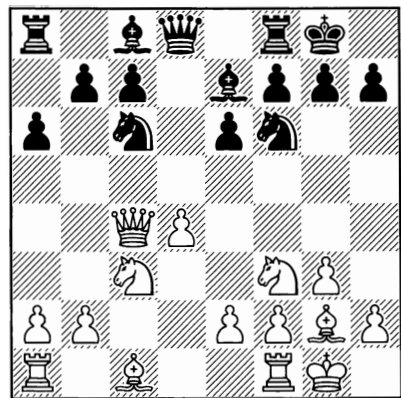
17.♟f1 ♟xd7 18.♟xc6 ♟xc6 19.e3 ♟xe3

20.♟d3 and wins.

17.♟e4±

White will at least gain the advantage of having two bishops.

9.♟xc4



9.♟d2!N

The following line proves that White has an advantage:

9...♟d6 10.e3 0–0 11.♟e2 ♟c6 12.♟xc4

White regains the pawn and maintains a typical Catalan edge, with great pressure down the long diagonal.

12...b5 13.♟a5 ♟xa5 14.♟xa5 ♟b8 15.♟c2 b4 16.♟fc1 ♟e8 17.a3±

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♟f3 ♟f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♟g2 a6 6.0–0 ♟c6 7.♟c3)

A) 7...♟e7 8.♟a4 0–0

Black can achieve the ...b7-b5 advance almost immediately, but that does not solve his opening problems.

8...♟d7 9.♟xc4 b5

Here White should play:

10.♟d3

Instead of 10.♟b3 ♟a5 11.♟c2 c5 12.dxc5 ♟xc5 13.♟g5 ♟c8 14.♟e5 ♟d4! when Black had reasonable play in Avrukh – Gustafsson, Internet 2004.

10...♟b4

10...♟b8 was tried in Aarnes – Egeland, Oslo 2006. White can meet this with simple play: 11.♟d1 0–0 12.♟e5 ♟b4 13.♟d2 And if 13...♟bd5 then 14.e4 ♟xc3 15.♟xc3± with a clear advantage.

11.♟b1 c5 12.dxc5 ♟xc5 13.♟e5 ♟c8 14.♟d1 White has created some unpleasant threats

9...♟b8

An alternative is:

9...♟d5 10.♟d1 b5

10...♟b6 11.♟b3± obviously ensures that White has the better chances, as Black does not have any counterplay in the centre.

11.♟b3

In this position White has a chance to sacrifice his queen, unfortunately it is rather unclear: 11.♟xc6 ♟d7 12.♟b7 ♟b8 13.♟xa6 ♟a8 14.♟xa8 ♟xa8 15.♟e5 ♟c6∞

11...♟b7 12.♟xd5 exd5 13.♟f4 f6 14.♟ac1

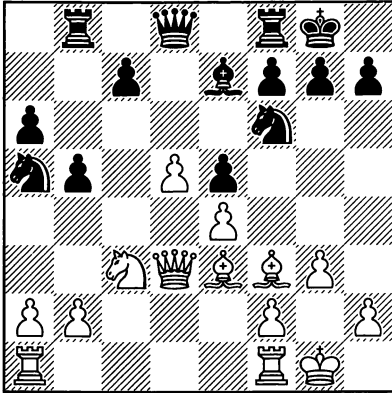
With an obvious advantage for White in Zilberstein – Panchenko, Pardubice 1997.

10.e4

Another typical way to play the position would be 10.♟f4 ♟d5 11.♟fd1.

10...b5 11.♖d3 e5 12.d5 ♘g4 13.♙e3 ♙xf3  
14.♙xf3 ♘a5

In this position as White I would prefer to strike from the side.



15.a4!N

This natural advance creates clear targets in Black's camp.

15.b3 c5 16.♗e2 c4 17.♞ab1 ♙b4 gave Black counterplay in Ulibin – Fedorov, Oviedo 1993.

15...c5 16.axb5 axb5 17.d6 ♘c4 18.♞a6  
♘xd6 19.♙xc5 ♘c8 20.♗xd8 ♞xd8  
21.♙e3±

White has a pleasant edge in this endgame, thanks to his bishop pair and Black's weak pawn on b5.

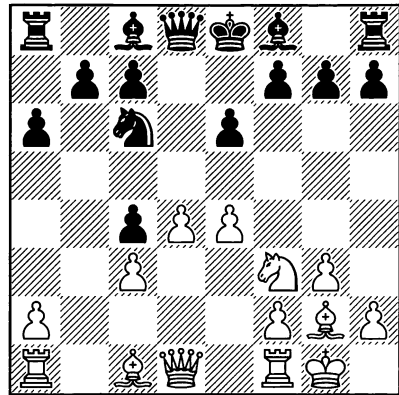
(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2  
a6 6.0–0 ♘c6 7.♘c3)

B) 7...♘d5!?

This knight jump loses some time in order to exchange the knight on c3, but gains some advantages in return. First of all, there will be no problem with space later on, as is often seen for Black in these positions. Secondly, by taking the c3-knight out of the equation the b5-pawn becomes far more stable and the

extra pawn easier to cling on to. The downside is that it takes some time and that the knight can no longer protect the kingside, which in the long-term can become rather exposed as an effect of this.

8.e4 ♘xc3 9.bxc3



9...♙e7

Another option is:

9...b5 10.d5 ♘a5

Black's situation looks extremely risky, as he has violated the main principles of opening play, but I have found it is not so easy to crack Black's position at once. I believe White should just play normally, mobilizing his forces, and the misplaced position of Black's knight on a5 should tell eventually.

11.♙f4 ♙e7

And now:

12.♗c2!N

This seems very promising to me. In general, in positions where Black has an extra pawn on c4 it is important to put a rook on d1 as soon as possible, as it often creates the possibility of a d4-d5 break, which is unpleasant for Black.

12.♘d4 0–0 13.a4 occurred in Lalic – Vera Gonzalez, 2006, and I fail to understand why Black rejected the natural 13...b4!, which would have promised him decent play.

12...exd5 13.♖ad1 ♘b7

Black can return his extra pawn with 13...0–0 14.♖xd5 ♖e8 15.♙xc7 ♖c6, but then White can seize the initiative very quickly: 16.e5 ♘e6 17.♖d6! ♙xd6 18.♗g5 g6 19.♙xd6 ♙f5 20.♖c1 with an advantage.

14.exd5 0–0 15.♖d4

Black's position looks very shaky, the knight being off-side on a5, but rather than claim a slight edge for White, I prefer to call it compensation, which basically means that the position is imbalanced and White has at least enough play for the pawn. Even if there were no advantage (though I believe there is, I find that it is prudent to be moderate in the evaluation) I prefer to say that it is easier to play with the initiative than against it.

10.♖e2

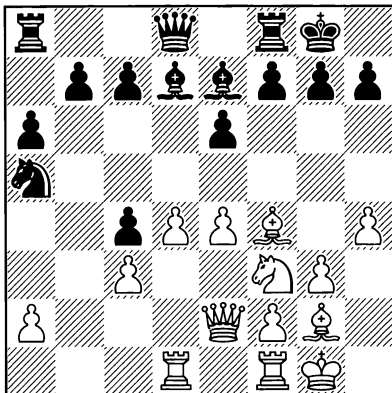
Another plan is 10.e5, but I do not want to commit to any pawn structure this early on.

10...♖a5 11.♙f4N

The only game to reach this position continued 11.♖e5 b5 12.a4 ♘b7 13.axb5 axb5 14.♖b1 c6 and Black was OK in Sultangareev – Timofeev, Russia 2000.

11...0–0 12.♖ad1 ♙d7 13.h4?!

White should not rush with 13.d5 exd5 14.♖e5 ♙e6 15.exd5 ♙f5 16.♖xc4 ♖xc4 17.♖xc4 ♙d6=.



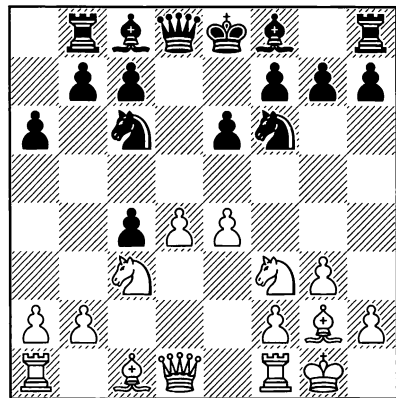
We have a typical position for the Catalan: White is a pawn down, but in return he has a clear space advantage and good attacking prospects on the kingside. Black has to always be ready to meet a d4-d5 advance, and his knight is clearly out of play on the edge of the board. Nevertheless, Black's resources should not be underestimated. I would definitely prefer to be White, but maybe as a Catalan player I am not so objective, because the position is rather double-edged.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♖f3 ♖f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2 a6 6.0–0 ♖c6 7.♖c3)

C) 7...♖b8

This is clearly the main continuation. In my opinion other moves promise White good chances for an advantage.

8.e4



Again Black has an important choice between two main lines. He can protect the pawn with C1) 8...b5 or he can play C2) 8...♙e7 to complete his development. A third option is an attempt to do both, but it achieves none of the benefits of either of the two main lines:

8...♙b4?!



In my opinion this is not a serious option, as Black's position is very dangerous after the following timely thrust:

9.d5!

A powerful advance in the centre. In view of the threat of 10.♖a4 Black is forced to give up his dark-squared bishop.

9...♙xc3

9...exd5 10.exd5 ♙xc3 simply transposes to the next note.

10.bxc3 ♜e7

It is even more dangerous to take the second pawn: 10...exd5 11.exd5 ♜xd5 (or 11...♖xd5 12.♜d4 ♖c5 13.♙e1+ ♙e6 14.♖a4! 0-0 15.♙a3± winning the exchange) 12.♙a3 with powerful compensation.

11.♙a3 ♜xe4

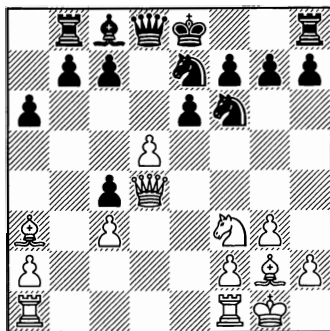
Other option do not bring relief either:

11...exd5 12.exd5 0-0 13.d6±

11...♙d7 12.dxe6 ♙xe6 13.♜d4 ♖d7 14.♖e2 0-0 15.♙ad1±

12.♖d4 ♜f6

White's initiative is very strong after both 12...♖xd5 13.♙xe7 ♜xe7 14.♖xg7± and 12...exd5 13.♖xg7 ♙g8 14.♖xh7 ♙f5 15.♖h6 c5 16.♜h4→.



13.♖a7! ♙d7

13...♜d7 loses to 14.dxe6 fxe6 15.♜d4.

14.dxe6 fxe6

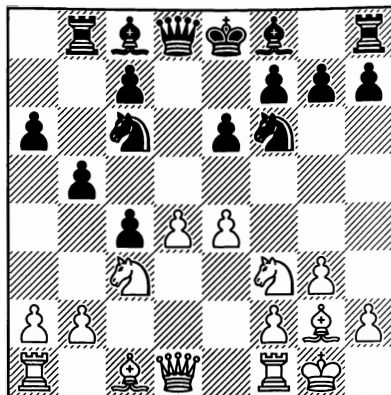
14...♙e6 15.♙ad1 ♜fd5 16.♙xe7 ♜xe7 17.♜e5±

15.♙xe7 ♜xe7 16.♖c5+ ♜e8 17.♙fe1±

It is hard to believe Black can survive with his king in the centre, Nikolaev – Zarubin, Smolensk 2005.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♜f3 ♜f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2 a6 6.0-0 ♜c6 7.♜c3 ♙b8 8.e4)

C1) 8...b5



9.d5

The most ambitious move, but White has an interesting alternative:

9.♖e2!? ♜xd4

Most probably it was safer for Black to play 9...♙e7 10.♙d1 transposing to the 9...b5 line below.

10.♜xd4 ♖xd4 11.♙d1 ♖b6 12.e5 ♜d7 13.♜e4!

Black faced serious difficulties in the following example:

13...♜xe5

13...♙e7 14.♙e3 ♖a5 15.♖g4 also looks pretty unpleasant, as 15...0-0 loses an exchange after 16.♙h6!.

14.♙e3 c5 15.♙f4 ♜d3 16.♙xb8 ♖xb8 17.b3 ♙e7 18.bxc4 bxc4 19.♖c2±

White has the advantage, Miton – Jakovenko, Yerevan 2000.

9...♜b4

There is an alternative:

9...exd5 10.exd5 b4

This has occurred only twice in tournament practice. I believe White should react in the same way as after 9...b4.

11.b3?N

White tried 11.Bf1 e7 12.d5 in Tkachiev – Van Wely, Neum 2000, and now Black could have easily solved his opening problems with 12...b7.

The other move to have been tested was 11.d4, but after 11...d7 12.b3 d3 13.bxc4 bxc4 Black was already better in Zilberstein – V. Mikhalevski, Katowice 1990.

11...e7

Black has various other options:

11...cxb3 12.Wxb3 e7 will be examined via the 9...b4 and 11...exd5 move order.

11...d6 12.bxc4 bxc4 13.Wf2 (it is also worth analysing 13.Bf1 f8 14.d4 and White should have good compensation thanks to Black's king on f8) 13...e7 (much worse is 13...e7 14.d5 f5 15.Wxc4 0-0 16.a3 d6 17.f4! with an advantage) 14.Wxc4 0-0 15.g5 f5 16.Bad1± White has the more pleasant game.

11...fxd5 12.dxd5 Wxd5 13.d4 and 14.a3±

12.bxc4 bxc4 13.d5

This position arose in Kordts – Pontikis, LSS 2006, via a different move order. Black failed to solve his opening problems after the following moves:

13...d7 14.dxc4 f5 15.a3 d3 16.d5

White is clearly better.

**10.b3 cxb3 11.Wxb3 c5**

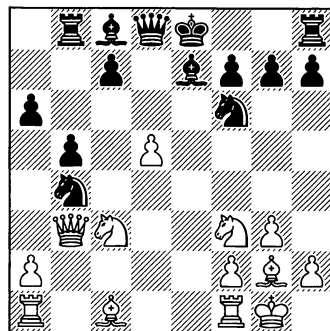
11...exd5 12.exd5

Black's knight on b4 appears to be vulnerable making his set-up risky.

12...d3

The knight escapes from its dangerous place, but White's development advantage will start to tell.

Instead after 12...e7 White can easily improve his play with the logical:



13.Bd1!N White is already threatening 14.a3 (Less convincing was 13.d5 d6 14.a3 xe5 15.b4 d6 16.Bf1 f8, even though White's compensation is beyond any doubt, Bator – Akesson, Hallstahammar 2001) 13...f5 I found the following nice variation that clearly proves Black's difficulties: 14.d4 d3 15.a3 c4 16.Wb1 dxd5 17.dxd5 dxd5 18.dxc6 dxc3 19.dxd8 dxb1 20.dxc6 dxc3 21.Bf1+ and White wins material.

13.g5 e7 14.d4 d7 15.Bad1 d5 16.Wc2

All of this happened in Gorelov – Abramov, USSR 1991. With his next move Black allowed his opponent to develop a strong initiative.

16...0-0 17.dxc6 dxc6 18.dxc6 d6 19.d5±

**12.dxc6 dxc6 13.f4**

I think White should start with the text because after:

13.Bd1 Wb6 14.f4

I discovered the following tactical resource for Black:

14...c5!

14...Bb7 was played in Tukmakov – Hulak, Croatia 1999, and White easily developed a powerful initiative after 15.e5 d7 16.d4!

The point of the text is that after:

15.♙xb8

15.♞b2 ♞b7 16.e5 ♘h5! 17.♙c1 f5 looks rather unclear.

15...♙xf2† 16.♘f1 ♘xb8

White cannot use the vulnerability of Black's pieces.

17.e5 ♘g4 18.♘e4 0-0 19.♞d6 ♞a7

Black has great play.

### 13...♞b7 14.♞fd1

This is not the most popular move, but it is a very natural one, as the second rook might be very useful on the c-file. In my opinion fashion could easily change.

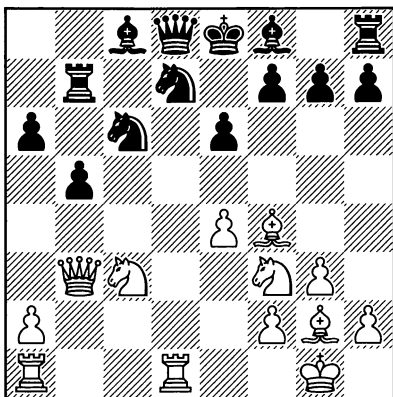
### 14...♘d7

Other moves can hardly be acceptable for Black:

14...♞a5? 15.e5 ♘d7 16.♘e4 ♙e7 17.♞ac1 ♘db8 18.♘d4+– and Black will lose material, Lesiege – Yoos, Richmond 2002.

14...♞d7 15.e5 ♘h5 Black has to make this ugly move. (15...♘d5 is strongly met by 16.♘xd5 ♞xd5 17.♘g5 with a large advantage) 16.♙e3 ♘a5 17.♞c2 ♞c7 18.♞dc1± Black can hardly deal with the twin threats of 19.g4 and 19.♘b5.

After 14...♘d7 I found an interesting novelty:



### 15.♞c2!N

This is of course much stronger than 15.♞ac1, which allows Black to play 15...♘a5 16.♞c2 ♙a3! thus solving all his problems, as in Raetsky – Barsov, Abu Dhabi 2001.

### 15...♙e7

Black gives back his extra pawn, but manages to complete his development. The alternatives are:

15...♙c5 16.e5 ♞c7 17.♘e4 ♘d4 18.♘xd4 ♙xd4 19.♘d6† ♘f8 Now a nice queen sacrifice decides the game. 20.♞xc7! ♞xc7 21.♞xd4 ♘e7 22.♞c1 ♞b8 23.♙d2 Transferring the bishop to b4. 23...♘xe5 24.♙b4 White has a winning position.

15...♘b4 16.♞b2 ♙e7 17.♞ac1 0-0 18.♘e2 Threatening 19.a3. 18...a5 19.a3 ♘a6 20.♘ed4 ♞e8 21.♘c6 ♞b6 22.♘xa5± White has regained the pawn and keeps a clear positional advantage.

### 16.♘xb5 ♞xb5 17.♞xc6 ♙b7

17...♞c5 18.♞a4 ♞a5 19.♞xa5 ♞xa5 20.♞ac1 ♞c5 21.♙e3 ♞xc1 22.♞xc1 leads to the same position, as after 17...♙b7.

17...0-0 18.♙e3 is not a solution either, as White retains the advantage.

### 18.♞c2 ♞c8 19.♞xc8† ♙xc8

Black has managed to swap queens, but the endgame is still clearly better for White. The following is an approximate line:

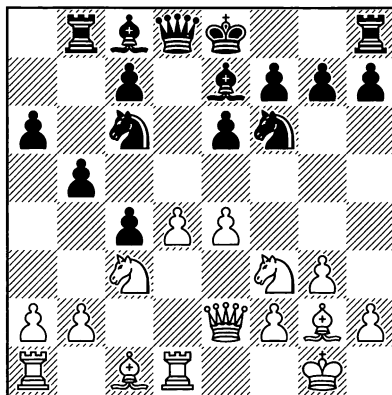
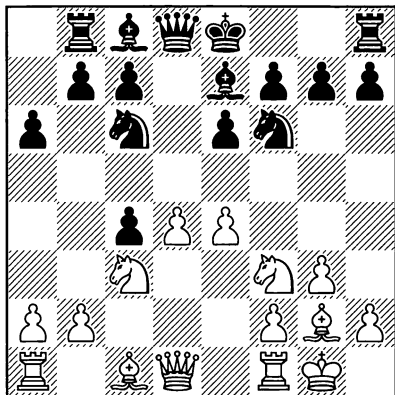
20.♞ac1 ♞c5 21.♙e3 ♞xc1 22.♞xc1 ♙b7 23.♘d2 ♙d8 24.♘c4 ♙c7 25.♙d2 0-0 26.♘a5 ♙xa5 27.♙xa5

White's two bishops give him the advantage. Black will suffer in the endgame, while White can only lose if he insists.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.dxf3 dxf6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2 a6 6.0-0 dxc6 7.dxc3 ♜b8 8.e4)

C2) 8...♙e7

This is the main continuation.



White is ready for the d4-d5 advance. Black can either allow it C211) 10...0-0 or defend against it with C212) 10...dxb4.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.g3 d5 4.♙g2 dxc4 5.dxf3 a6 6.0-0 dxc6 7.dxc3 ♜b8 8.e4 ♙e7 9.♞e2 b5 10.♞d1)

9.♞e2!?

This is connected with the sacrifice of a second pawn and is the most challenging move. It is well known that White can hardly claim an advantage after 9.d5 exd5 10.exd5 dxb4 11.dxe5 ♙f5 12.a3 dxd3 13.dxc4 dxc1 14.♞xc1 0-0. The most recent example continued: 15.♞e1 dxe8!? (a worthy alternative is 15...♙c5) 16.dxe5 dxd6 17.dxe2 ♙f6 18.dxd4 ♞e8 19.f4 g6 20.♞b3 Here a draw was agreed in Markus – Postny, Serbia 2007, as Black's position is very solid.

This is an important crossroads in this variation. Black can continue his strategy with C21) 9...b5 or accept the challenge by taking the second pawn, which will be our main line studied C22) 9...dxd4.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.dxf3 dxf6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2 a6 6.0-0 dxc6 7.dxc3 ♜b8 8.e4 ♙e7 9.♞e2)

C21) 9...b5 10.♞d1

C211) 10...0-0 11.d5 exd5 12.e5 d4

12...dxd7?!

This was neatly refuted in the following encounter:

13.dxd5 dxb4 14.dxd4! ♙b7?

Black loses immediately, but he is in trouble even after more stubborn defences:

14...dxd5 15.dxc6 ♞e8 16.♙xd5 (less clear is 16.dxb8?! dxb4) 16...dxb6 17.♙e4 ♞a8 18.♙e3 White has a big advantage.

14...c5 is strongly met by 15.e6!±

15.dxb4 ♙xg2 16.dxcg2 ♙xb4 17.dxc6+–

followed by 18.dxb4, Haba – Meier, Pardubice 2000.

12...dxb4 would lead to the position that will be examined after 10...dxb4.

13.exf6 ♙xf6

This is one of many positions with three pawns for the piece that can arise in this line.

14.♞e4

I decided to focus on this move, but another playable alternative is 14.♘e4.

#### 14...♙b7

Other options are clearly worse:

14...♙d7 15.♘d5 d3 (or 15...♞e8 16.♞f4) 16.♞f4! with an advantage.

14...♞e8?! 15.♞xe8 ♞xe8 16.♘d5 d3 17.♘xf6† gxf6 18.♙f4±

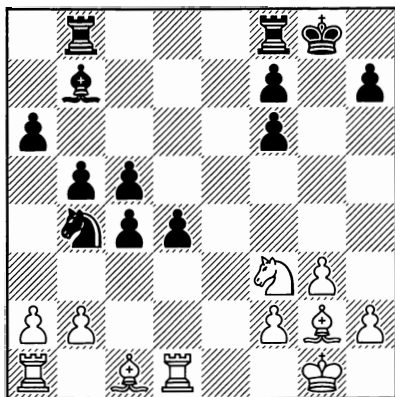
#### 15.♘d5 ♘b4

Black has also tried 15...d3, but White convincingly proved his advantage after 16.♞f5 ♘d4 (more stubborn is 16...♙d4, but after 17.♘g5 g6 18.♞f4 White is better) 17.♘xf6† ♞xf6 18.♘d4 ♞xd4 19.♙e3 ♞xb2 20.♙a7!+- Gleizerov – Demianjuk, Khanty Mansyisk 2007.

#### 16.♘xf6† ♞xf6 17.♞f4

Of course not 17.♞xd4? ♞bd8 18.♞xd8 ♞xd8 19.♙g5 ♞xd1† 20.♞xd1 ♙xf3† as in Iskushnyh – Keosidi, Tomsk 2007.

#### 17...c5 18.♞xf6 gxf6



#### 19.♙f4!N

I believe this to be a significant improvement for White.

One game saw 19.♘e1 ♙xg2 20.♘xg2 ♞fe8 21.♘f4 ♞bd8 and Black had fine compensation in Blechar – Oates, e-mail 2001.

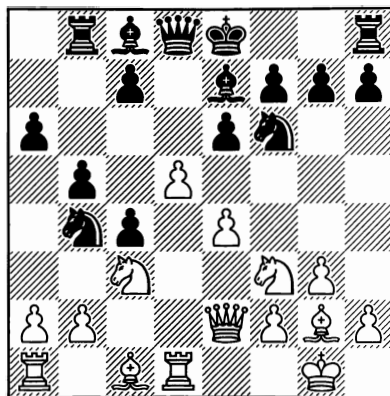
The following line is only approximate, but might be quite useful all the same.

19...♞bd8 20.♙c7 ♞d7 21.♙b6 ♘d3 22.♞xd3! cxd3 23.♙xc5 ♞e8 24.b4±

White is better. Objectively the position after 19.♙f4 requires more investigation, but I feel that White's chances are preferable.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2 a6 6.0-0 ♘c6 7.♘c3 ♞b8 8.e4 ♙e7 9.♞e2 b5 10.♞d1)

#### C212) 10...♘b4 11.d5



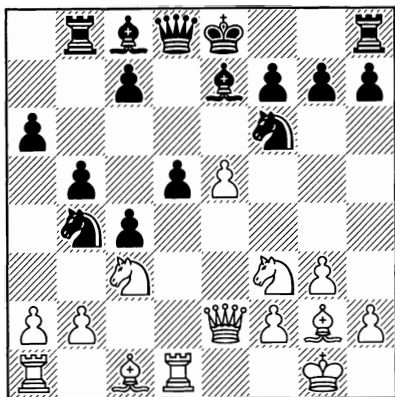
The alternative is 11.♘e1. I have twice opted for this move, but I have finally come to the conclusion that it is too soft for this position. I would like to mention that 11.♘e5 is a clear inaccuracy, as after 11...♘d7! White will have a hard time proving his compensation.

#### 11...exd5

11...♘d3 has been played once, but this allows White to quickly regain the pawn: 12.dxe6 ♙xe6 13.♘e1! (13.♘e5 ♘xe5 14.♞xd8† ♞xd8

is rather unclear) 13...♗g4 (White is better after 13...♝c8 14.♜xd3 cxd3 15.♞xd3 0-0 16.♙f4±) 14.f3 ♗e6 15.♜xd3 cxd3 16.♞xd3 ♙c5† 17.♗e3 ♞e7 This is Gelfand – Karpov, Moscow (blitz) 2008, and here I believe the simple 18.b3 0-0 19.e5 ♜d7 20.f4± would secure White a pleasant advantage.

## 12.e5



## 12...♜g4

The text is Black's recent try to solve his opening problems. Naturally there is an alternative:

12...0-0 13.exf6 ♗xf6

This leads to another of the critical positions in this line. Again Black has three pawns for the piece and intends to advance his d-pawn to d3 in some lines. The position is very complex and definitely requires very deep analysis.

14.♜e1!N

This is my new idea that I had to find. I managed to improve on Black's play in the existing games:

14.♙f4 Black should reply with the active 14...♙f5 (and not 14...♙b7 15.♜e4! ♞e8 16.♜xf6† ♞xf6 17.♗e5± with slightly better chances for White in P.H. Nielsen – Halkias, Warsaw 2005) 15.♗e5 (or 15.♜e5 d4! with good play for Black) 15...♞e8 16.♙xf6 ♞xf6

17.♞d2 c6± Black's chances seem preferable to me.

14.♜e5 ♞e8 (in the game Black immediately committed the error 14...♙b7? 15.a3± and Black faced serious problems in Raetsky – Astrom, Hafnarfjörður 1997) Now after the almost forced 15.♜xd5 ♜d3 16.♜xf6† gxf6 17.♜c6 ♞xe2 18.♜xd8 ♗g4 19.♜c6 ♞be8∞ the position is rather double-edged.

14...♞e8

The only playable alternative seems to me to be 14...d4, but after 15.a3 ♞e8 16.♞f1 ♞xe1 (Or 16...♞e7 17.♜b1! ♜d3 18.♜xd3 cxd3 19.♞xd3 c5 20.♜d2±. Optically Black has still some compensation, due to his pawns in the centre, but now it is only two pawns for the piece and White should be better.) 17.♞xe1 ♜c2 18.♜d5 ♙f5 19.♜xf6† ♞xf6 20.♞e2! With advantage to White.

15.♜e4 ♙f5 16.♜xf6† ♞xf6 17.♞f3

17.♞d2 c5 is not clear.

17...♜c2 18.♜xc2 ♙xc2 19.♞xf6 gxf6 20.♞f1 ♙d3 21.♙xd5 ♙xf1 22.♜xf1 ♞bd8 23.♙f3±

It looks as if White's pair of bishops is stronger than the rook and two pawns.

## 13.h3 ♜h6

13...0-0?! does not work: 14.hxg4 ♙xg4 15.a3! ♜d3 16.♞xd3 cxd3 17.♞xd3 ♙xf3 18.♙xf3 c6 19.♗e3 and White is clearly better.

## 14.♙xh6 gxh6 15.♜e1

An obligatory move: White takes control over the d3-square and at the same time attacks the d5-pawn. Black has nothing to worry about after 15.a3 ♜d3 16.♜d4?! (though 16.♜e1 would probably transpose to the 15.♜e1 line) 16...♙b7 17.♜f5 ♞d7±.

## 15...c6 16.a3 ♜d3 17.♜xd3 cxd3 18.♞xd3

The correct recapture, as White has to free the e2-square for his knight. The arising position is very complex and demands very accurate

play from both sides. White's compensation is obvious, due to Black's damaged pawn structure on the kingside. The main question is whether he can hope for more than equal play. White's plan includes trying to block Black's pawns in the centre by means of b4 and maybe  $\text{d}4$ , and then attempting to organize some kind of pressure on the kingside. So far there have been only two games from this position:

### 18...0-0

Black has a quite tricky alternative:

18... $\text{c}7$

I think White can improve on the game below with the calm:

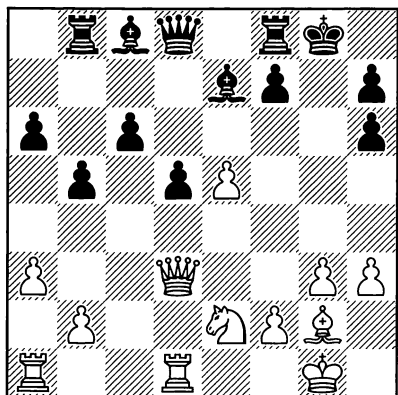
19. $\text{e}1\text{N}$

The game continued: 19. $\text{e}3$   $\text{g}5$  20.f4  $\text{d}8$  A very interesting idea: with his pawn on f4 White lacks attacking ideas on the kingside, such as a knight transfer to h5 via f4 or attacking the h6-pawn on the c1-h6 diagonal, while Black's bishop will be quite useful on b6. White did not manage to create any problems for Black in the following encounter: 21. $\text{h}2$  0-0 22. $\text{e}2$   $\text{b}6$  23. $\text{c}3$   $\text{d}7$  24.b4  $\text{c}8$  A draw was soon agreed in Kordts – Robson, Telechess 2006.

19...0-0 20. $\text{e}2$  b4 21.a4 a5 22. $\text{f}4$   $\text{b}6$  23. $\text{h}5$

White's position looks very promising.

### 19. $\text{e}2$



### 19... $\text{b}6$

This is Gelfand – Riazantsev, Dagomys 2008. Before this game was played, I reached this position in my analysis but I had investigated only:

19... $\text{b}6$  20. $\text{a}c1$

20. $\text{f}4$  might be an interesting alternative.

20... $\text{d}7$  21.b4 a5

21... $\text{g}5$  is comfortably met by 22. $\text{c}2$ .

22. $\text{f}4!$  axb4 23.axb4  $\text{g}5$

Black cannot take the b4-pawn with 23... $\text{xb}4$ , as 24. $\text{xd}5!$  gives White a decisive attack.

24. $\text{c}5$

White has excellent compensation.

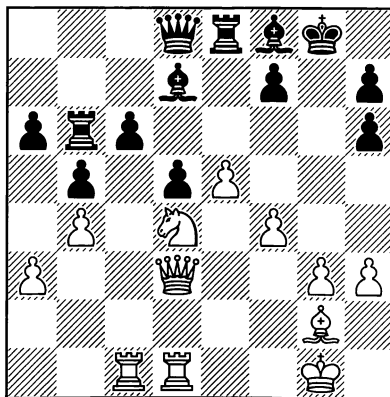
### 20. $\text{a}c1\text{N}$

This is my recommended improvement over 20. $\text{e}3$ , which I believe wastes time.

### 20... $\text{e}8$

20...b4 21.a4 a5 22. $\text{d}4$   $\text{d}7$  23. $\text{f}5$   $\text{xf}5$  24. $\text{xf}5$   $\text{e}8$  25. $\text{g}4$   $\text{h}8$  26. $\text{d}4!$  White has a serious initiative.

21.b4  $\text{d}7$  22. $\text{d}4$   $\text{f}8$  23.f4



White's position looks great, though it will be not be so easy to break through. This is a Catalan dream position. It is easier to play with the initiative.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.f3 f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.g2 a6 6.0-0 c6 7.c3 b8 8.e4 e7 9.e2)

C22) 9...dxd4 10.dxd4 xxd4 11.d1

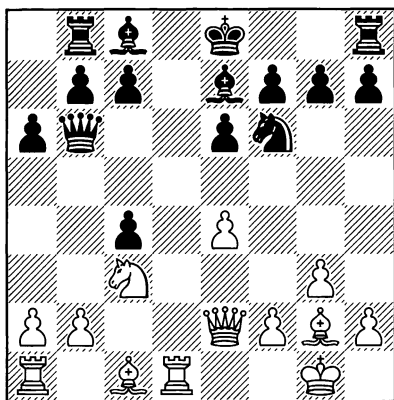
11.e3? is easily refuted by 11...d3 12.e1 c2+ and Black's queen is very annoying on c2.

Once again we have reached an important crossroads. Black obviously needs to retreat his queen, and the a7- and e5-squares are clearly not what Black wants, but both the remaining retreats, C221) 11...b6 and C222) 11...c5, have some merit.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.f3 f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.g2 a6 6.0-0 c6 7.c3 b8 8.e4 e7 9.e2 dxd4 10.dxd4 xxd4 11.d1)

C221) 11...b6

I believe the best option for White here is a new move, but not a very surprising one.



12.xc4!N

This novelty is so simple that it is hard to attach an exclamation mark to it, but it is a very interesting improvement. The main point is that after 12...e5 White is not forced to play 13.e3.

Practice has proved that Black equalizes comfortably after 12.e3 a5 13.xc4 e5! 14.d5 dxd5 15.xxd5 e6 16.xa5 xc4 17.xe5 e6 as in I. Ivanisevic – V. Milov, Cannes (blitz) 2006.

12...0-0

If Black reacts with 12...e5, then after 13.a4 c6 14.xc6+ bxc6 15.e3 White gets very nice compensation and relatively easy play on the queenside against Black's weak pawns.

13.e3

Another idea is 13.e5 d7 14.e2, but it looks like Black is just in time to create counterplay: 14...a5 15.f4 (15.f4 f6! is fine for Black) 15...g5! 16.e3 xe5 Now I did not find anything better for White than forcing a draw after 17.d4 g7 18.ac1 f5 19.xc7 fxe4 20.dxd7 xd7 21.xd7 ffd8 22.c7 ddc8 23.d7 dd8=.

13...a5 14.e5 d7

14...xe5 15.f4 c5 16.xc5 xc5 17.xc7 a8 18.ac1 and White is playing without any risk.

15.f4 b5 16.e2 db6

16...d5 17.d4 dxe4 18.xe4 b7 19.xb7 xb7 20.d7 e8 21.c2 bb8 22.xc7 and Black is doomed to passive defence.

17.a3 c5

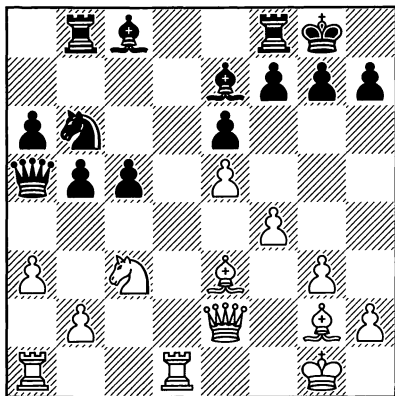
There are other options:

17...a4 18.b4 dxc3 19.d3 dxd1 20.bxa5 dxe3 21.xe3 c5 22.d1! Despite the material balance White is better, as Black has problems coordinating his pieces.

17...b4 18.axb4 xxb4 19.d4 b3 20.e4 Black unexpectedly faces some tactical problems. For example: 20...d7 21.ad1 dxc5



22.♙c2 ♜xb2 23.♞c4! ♞a3 24.f5 White has a serious initiative, despite being two pawns down.



In the diagram position I found a very interesting line:

18.♙d2 ♘c4 19.♘d5 ♞d8 20.♘f6! ♙h8

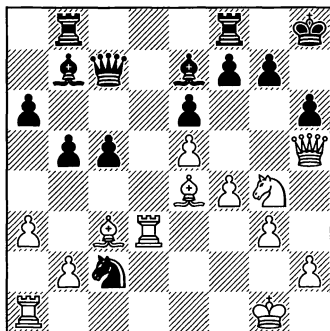
If Black decides to give up his queen with 20...♙xf6 21.♙c3 ♙e7 22.♞xd8 ♞xd8, then I believe White is better after 23.a4!.

21.♙c3 ♞c7 22.♙e4 h6

White can develop his initiative in the following way:

23.♞h5 ♘e3 24.♞d3 ♘f5

A fantastic tactical battle erupts after:  
24...♘c2 25.♘g4 ♙b7



26.♙a5! ♙xe4

The only move.

26...♞xa5 27.♘xh6 leads to mate: 27...♙xe4  
28.♘f5+ ♙g8 29.♘xe7#

27.♙xc7 ♙xd3

Or 27...♙g6 28.♞h3 ♙xd3 29.♙xb8 ♘xa1  
30.♙d6 ♙e8 31.♞g2!±.

28.♘h6 gxh6 29.♙xb8 ♞xb8 30.♞xf7 ♘xa1  
31.♞xe7±

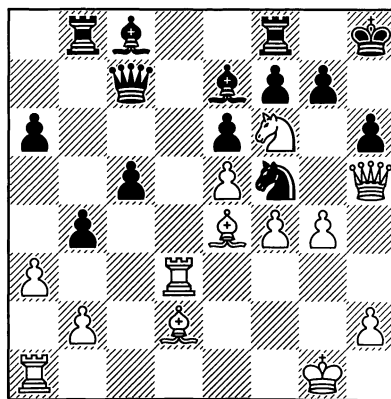
25.g4 b4

25...c4 26.♞h3 creates a winning attack.

26.♙d2!

White's idea is to play ♞h3, gxf5 ...exf5, ♞g5! with an unstoppable mate.

26.gxf5?! would have been premature, as the opening of the 6th rank will allow the black queen to participate in the defence. As a result, 26...exf5 27.♙d2 c4! 28.♞h3 ♙xf6 29.exf6 ♞b6+ 30.♙e3 ♞xf6 is not too clear.



Originally, I wanted to stop here and say that White's attack is dangerous. Certainly what follows was just going to be an approximate line, but it shows White's resources. However, then I picked up a trace of a foreign scent in the air, the scent of mate, and so I decided to analyse the position to the end, even though we are so far away from the novelty on move 12.

**26...bxa3**

26...c4 is less effective now, though it might still be the best option. 27.♞h3 ♜d8 28.gxf5 ♟xf6 29.♞d1 (29.exf6 ♜xf6) 29...exf5 30.exf6 ♜xf6 31.♟d5± and the extra piece certainly counts.

**27.♞axa3!**

This appears to be the most convincing.

27.♞h3 is also very interesting, though very complicated. The main idea is 27...axb2 28.♞b1 ♞b6 29.gxf5 exf5 30.♜g5 ♟xf6 31.exf6 ♞g8 32.♟f2!! simultaneously stepping off the g-file and opening a line for the rook to participate in the attack. 32...♞xf6 33.♟c3+– The absence of the dark-squared bishop is strongly felt.

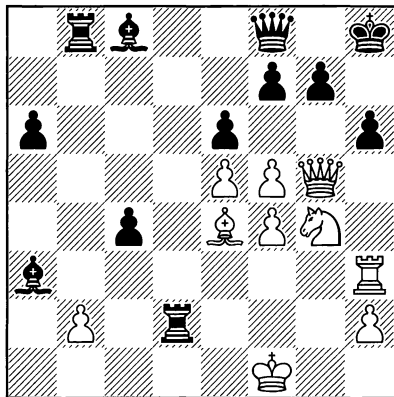
**27...c4**

27...♞xb2 is answered with pure greed: 28.gxf5 ♞b1† 29.♟g2 ♟b7 30.♟h3! This is decisive, as White is simply a piece up and his king is perfectly safe.

**28.♞h3**

The attack on h6 begins!

28...♞d8 29.gxf5 ♟xa3 30.♜g5! ♜c5† 31.♟f1 ♜f8 32.♟g4 ♞xd2

**33.♟xh6!**

33.f6? looks strong, but Black has 33...♞d1†!! 34.♟e2 ♞xb2† 35.♟xd1 ♜d8† winning.

**33...♞b3**

33...gxh6 34.♞xh6† ♜xh6 35.♜xh6† ♟g8 36.f6+–

34.♟xf7† ♟g8 35.♞h8† ♟xf7 36.fxe6† ♟xe6 37.♞xf8 ♟xf8 38.♜f5†+–

The variation is long, but I hope it is convincing.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♟f3 ♟f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♟g2 a6 6.0–0 ♟c6 7.♟c3 ♞b8 8.e4 ♟e7 9.♜e2 ♟xd4 10.♟xd4 ♜xd4 11.♞d1)

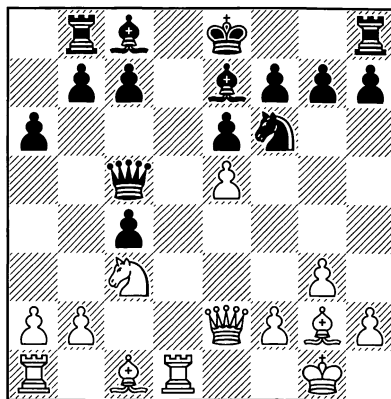
C222) 11...♜c5

This is Black's main retreat according to the theory books.

**12.e5**

The most challenging move.

12.♟e3 ♜a5 13.♜xc4 e5= transposes to a position examined in the 11...♜b6 12.♟e3 line.



We have arrived at our final branching point in this chapter. Black can either play C2221) 12...♟d5 or he can be a bit stingy with C2222) 12...♟d7, keeping his extra pawn. The second

option is clearly recommended, as White would be better if Black returns the pawn.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2 a6 6.0-0 ♘c6 7.♘c3 ♖b8 8.e4 ♙e7 9.♞e2 ♘xd4 10.♘xd4 ♞xd4 11.♞d1 ♞c5 12.e5)

C2221) 12...♘d5

Black gives up his extra material and hopes to equalize comfortably, but with accurate play White can prevent this.

### 13.♘xd5

White achieves nothing with 13.♙xd5 exd5 14.♘xd5 ♙e6 15.♙e3 ♞c6 16.♘xe7 ♖xe7 with even chances.

An interesting alternative is:

13.♘e4 ♞b5 14.♞g4 ♖f8

Other moves seem to be worse.

14...g6 15.♙g5 gives White strong play on the dark squares.

14...0-0 15.♙h6 g6 16.♙xf8 ♖xf8 17.♞e2 ♙d7 18.♞d4 ♞b6 19.♞d2! with White's advantage.

### 15.♙g5

This is the logical follow-up of White's strategy.

15...♙xg5 16.♞xg5

I tried to improve on White's play with 16.♘g5 h6 17.♞h5 g6 18.♞h4, but Black holds after the accurate 18...♞b6! and now a clever line leads to a perpetual check: 19.♞xd5 exd5 20.♙xd5 (20.♘xf7? ♖xf7 21.♙xd5+ ♖e8-+) 20...♞xb2 21.♘h7+ =

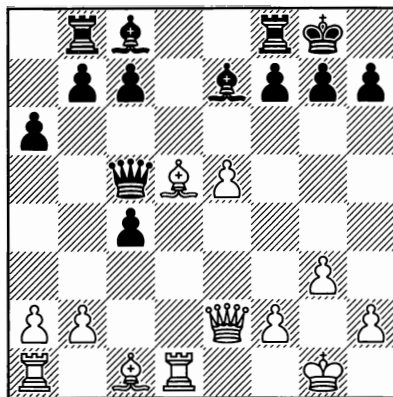
16...♙d7 17.a4?

This was played in Gelfand – Drozdovsky, Odessa 2008.

After this Black could simply take a second pawn with 17...♞xb2 18.♘c5 ♙c6 19.♞ab1 ♞c3, and I do not see any serious ideas for White. However, better was 17.♞d2 with the idea of playing ♞ad1 followed by ♘c3.

### 13...exd5 14.♙xd5 0-0

And again I can offer an improvement:



### 15.♙xc4!N

This improves on 15.♙e3 ♞a5 16.♙a7 ♞a8 17.e6 ♙xe6 18.♙xe6 ♞xa7 19.♞d7 ♙d6= as played in Gelfand – Vallejo Pons, Monaco (blindfold) 2006.

### 15...♙e6

Black has another natural option in 15...♙f5, but White keeps his plus with 16.♙f4 (only not 16.e6 fxe6 17.♙xe6+ ♙xe6 18.♞xe6+ ♖f7 19.♙e3 ♞f5=) 16...♞b6 17.♞ac1 (again threatening 18.e6) 17...♞f8 18.♞xd8+ ♞xd8 19.e6 f6 20.h4±. White is better thanks to his e6-pawn.

### 16.♙xe6 fxe6 17.♞d7 ♖f7

After 17...♞be8 18.♙f4 ♞c6 19.♞ad1± White's rook is very annoying on d7.

### 18.♙f4 ♞d8 19.♞xd8†

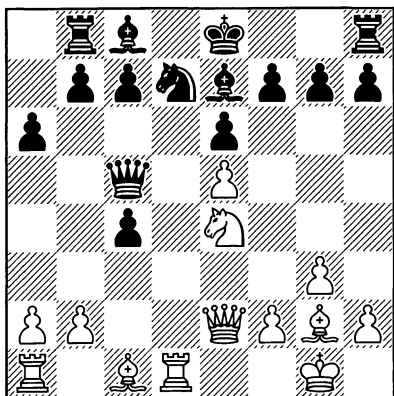
19.♞ad1 ♞xd7 20.♞xd7 is also interesting.

### 19...♙xd8 20.♞c1±

White definitely has pressure.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2 a6 6.0-0 ♘c6 7.♘c3 ♖b8 8.e4 ♙e7 9.♞e2 ♘xd4 10.♘xd4 ♞xd4 11.♞d1 ♞c5 12.e5)

C2222) 12...d7 13.d4

**13...b5**

I believe this is Black's best continuation.

The main point behind White's play can be seen in the following line:

13...xc5 14.f4 a5 15.xc4 e5

And now instead of 16.d2 as in Klinger – Boensch, Lugano 1989, there is a strong novelty:

16.g5!

This was pointed out in one of the *New in Chess Yearbooks*. After this White has a strong initiative.

16...b5

16...f6 17.b4 b6 18.e3 e6 (18...c5 19.xc5 c7 20.fxf6+ gxf6 21.h4+ 19.xb6 xc4 20.xc7 c8 21.xe5+ and Black will lose the b7-pawn.

16...f6 critically weakens the position around Black's king: 17.e3+

17.c2!

Black is in serious trouble.

17...xg5

Or 17...f6 18.e3 c5 19.d6+ xd6 20.xd6 0-0 21.c6+.

18.xg5 h6 19.fxf7 xf7 20.d5+ e7 21.g6+–

13...b4

This runs into an unpleasant attack on the kingside.

14.g4 f8

Or 14...f8 15.b3.

It is clear that White has won the opening battle, and he won a very nice game from this position.

15.a3 b3 16.d2 xb2 17.c3 b6 18.ab1 a7 19.d4 c5 20.d6+! xd6 21.exd6 cxd4 22.xg7 f8 23.e1

Black is helpless against the threat of xe6, therefore he resigned in Thaler – ROW, Internet 2004.

Returning to the main line, White now has a choice:

**14.f4**

Another interesting alternative is the pawn push:

14.a4 a5

Here I tried to improve on theory:

15.xc4

15.d2 b4 16.xc4 xd2 17.xd2 b5

18.c6 0-0 was fine for Black in Kordts – Niessen, Telechess 2006.

15...xe5

15...0-0 16.c2 c6 17.fg5 gives White an interesting initiative.

16.d4 0-0

16...f6 allows the unpleasant 17.a7 d7 18.f4! with an initiative.

17.d2 d5 18.e3 d8 19.c3 d7

Despite his obvious compensation, I do not believe White can claim to have something serious, as he is two pawns down.

**14...0-0 15.ac1 b6 16.g4**

White's initiative looks dangerous, but it seems to me that Black's position is quite playable.

**16...h8**

Black certainly cannot capture on b2:

16...♖xb2? 17.♞b1 ♞c2 18.♜f6† ♕xf6  
(18...♝h8 19.♙e4+–) 19.exf6 ♞g6 20.♞xg6  
hxg6 21.fxg7 ♝xg7 22.♙xc7 ♜d7 23.♙xb8  
♜xb8 24.♙xb7 With a winning position for  
White.

Also bad is 16...♙d7 17.♜f6† ♝h8 18.♞h4!  
with a decisive offensive.

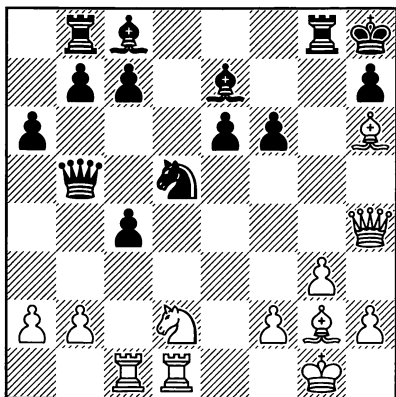
### 17.♙g5 f5!

After 17...♙xg5 18.♜xg5 White develops  
a powerful attack: 18...♝g8 (18...♖xb2?  
loses to 19.♞h5 h6 20.♞b1 ♞a3 21.♜xf7†  
♝g8 22.♜xh6†) 19.♙e4 g6 20.♞h4 h5  
21.♜xf7!+–

### 18.exf6 gxf6 19.♙h6 ♞g8 20.♞h4 ♜d5

20...e5 21.♜xf6 ♙f5 leads to crazy play, but  
is probably better for White. 22.♙h3! ♙xh3  
(worse is 22...e4 23.♞h5 ♞g6 24.a4 ♜xa4  
25.♞d5 ♖xb2 26.♙xf5 ♞xf6 27.♙e3±) 23.♙f8  
♙f5 24.♙xe7 ♞g7 25.♜h5 ♞f7 26.♙f6† ♝g8  
27.♙d8! White has the initiative.

### 21.♜d2!♞



White regains one pawn and maintains  
obvious compensation, due to the weak  
position of Black's king.

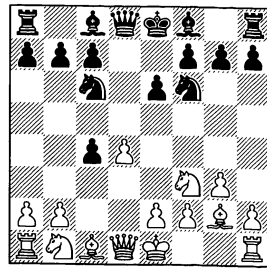
### Conclusion:

As I mentioned above, I believe 7.♜c3!? will  
increase in popularity. It would be unwise  
to claim any certainty in the evaluations, as  
there is great scope for innovations, and with  
every small improvement the evaluation of  
many lines may change. The only guarantee is  
complex and fascinating play.

# Chapter 9

## The Catalan

4...dxc4, 5...♘c6



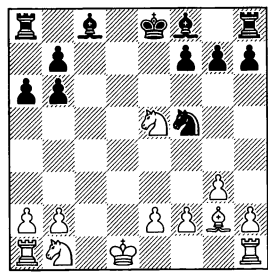
### Variation Index

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2 ♘c6

6.♞a4

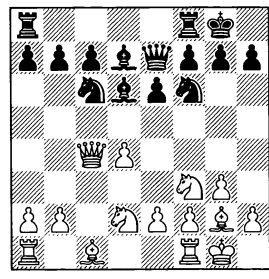
- A) 6...♘d5 7.♞xc4 ♘b6 8.♞b5 p 130
  - A1) 8...♙b4† p 131
  - A2) 8...♙d7 p 132
  - A3) 8...a6 p 133
- B) 6...♙d6 p 135
- C) 6...♙d7 7.♞xc4 ♘a5 8.♞d3 c5 9.0-0 p 137
  - C1) 9...♙c6 p 137
  - C2) 9...♞c8 p 139
- D) 6...♙b4† 7.♙d2 p 140
  - D1) 7...♙d6 p 140
  - D2) 7...♘d5 p 142
    - D21) 8.♞b5 p 142
    - D22) 8.♙xb4 ♘dxb4 9.0-0 ♞b8 10.♘a3 p 143
      - D221) 10...0-0 p 145
      - D222) 10...a6 p 146

A3) after 15...cxb6



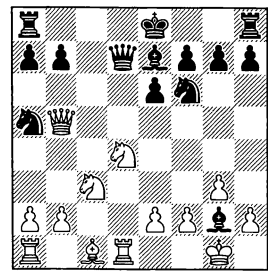
16.♘d2!?:N

B) after 9...♞e7



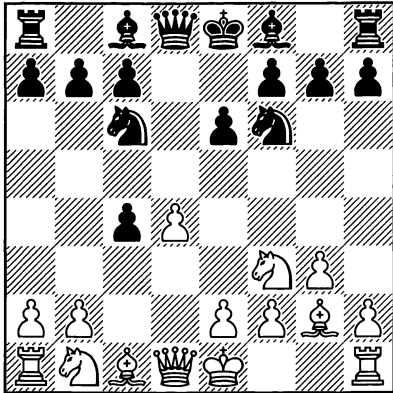
10.♘b3!?:N

C1) note to move 11



14.♞xa5!?:N

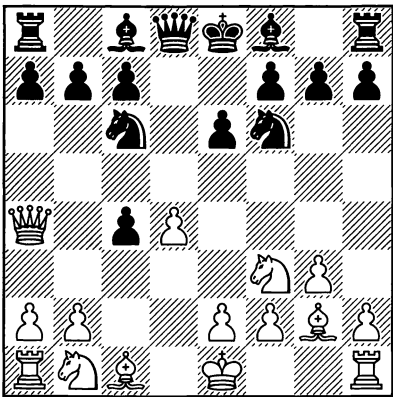
1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2  
5.♘f3 ♘c6



This is not the most fashionable choice against the Catalan, but nevertheless it is quite a popular line.

#### 6.♙a4

I believe this is the most challenging continuation. Basically Black's main idea in this line is to meet 6.0–0 with 6...♖b8 followed by ...b5, and in this case Black does not waste time on a preparatory ...a6 and thus saves a tempo compared with the 5...a6, 6...♘c6 variation.



This is the first branching position in this

variation. Black can choose between four main options:

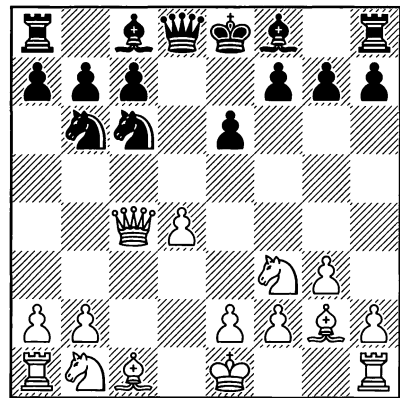
A) 6...♘d5, B) 6...♙d6, C) 6...♙d7 and the big main line with D) 6...♙b4†.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2 ♘c6 6.♙a4)

#### A) 6...♘d5

A very concrete approach: White is forced to take on c4 immediately, and then Black intends to start active play in the centre.

#### 7.♙xc4 ♘b6



#### 8.♙b5!

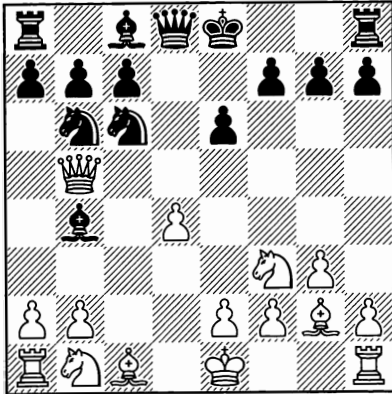
This was Tkachiev's idea and in my opinion it is White's only chance to fight for an opening advantage. The plan behind 8.♙b5 is to provoke Black into playing ...a6, which will make Black's knight vulnerable on b6: this appears to be useful for White in many endgame positions.

After 8.♙d3 e5 Black does not experience any problems according to the latest theory.

Now Black has three possibilities: A1) 8...♙b4† A2) 8...♙d7 and A3) 8...a6.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♟f3 ♟f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2  
 ♜c6 6.♞a4 ♟d5 7.♞xc4 ♟b6 8.♞b5)

A1) 8...♙b4†



### 9.♟c3 ♞d5 10.♞d3

Certainly it is not in White's plan to trade the queens on d5: 10.♞xd5 exd5 11.0-0 ♙g4 with double-edged play.

### 10...e5

This is the idea behind Black's 9th move. If instead 10...♞c4 11.♞xc4 ♟xc4 12.0-0± White enjoys a pleasant endgame.

### 11.0-0

Black would have very good play after 11.dxe5 ♞xd3 12.exd3 ♟a4 (or 12...♙f5 followed by ...0-0-0.)

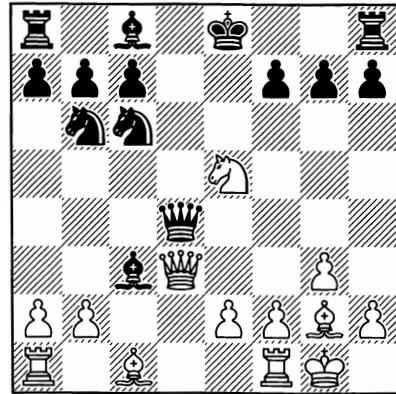
11.e4 ♞c4= is also fine for Black.

### 11...♙xc3 12.♟e5

After 12.bxc3 e4 13.♞e3 f5 Black has a very comfortable position with full control over the light squares.

### 12...♞xd4

Now White has a pleasant choice:



### 13.♙xc6†

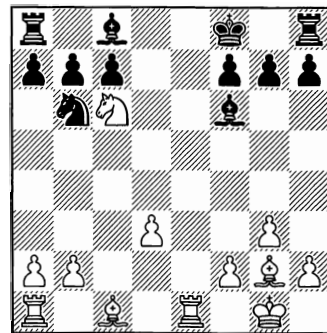
Even more tempting looks:

13.♟xc6 ♞xd3 14.exd3 ♙f6

White keeps a clear edge after: 14...♙d7 15.bxc3 ♙xc6 16.♞e1† ♟d8 (or 16...♟d7 17.♙h3† ♟d8 18.♙e3 ♟d5 19.♙d4± 17.♙xc6 bxc6 18.♙a3±

15.♞e1† ♟f8

Black's problem is that he cannot play 15...♙e6, as after 16.♟a5 0-0 17.♙xb7 ♞ad8 18.♙e4± he has no compensation for the pawn.



Here I found an interesting improvement:

16.♟e5!N

This poses Black definite problems.

16.♟a5 c6 17.♙d2 g5 18.♙c3 This move was Tkachiev's improvement over his own game. (The first time he opted for 18.♟b3 ♟g7 19.♟c5, Tkachiev – Adams, Cannes (rapid)



2001, and now I do not see any reason why Black avoided 19...♙xb2 20.♙ab1 ♘d4 and White will have to fight for a draw.) I believe Black can solve his opening problems with 18...♘g7!N (the game saw: 18...♙xc3 19.bxc3 ♗b8 20.c4 and White had a clear positional advantage in Tkachiev – David, Aubervilliers 2003) A possible line is 19.♗e3 ♗d8 20.♙ae1 ♘d5 21.♙xf6 ♗xf6 22.♗e8 ♙e6 and Black is not worse.

16...c6

Sooner or later Black must play this, as otherwise he cannot develop his queenside.

17.a4!

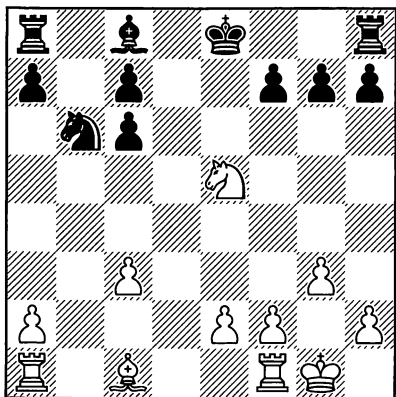
Now it looks like White keeps the initiative everywhere:

17...g5

17...♙xe5 18.♗xe5 f6 19.♗c5 ♗f7 (19...a6 20.a5 ♘d5 21.♙xd5 cxd5 22.♗c7 and despite the opposite-coloured bishops, White's initiative looks dangerous) 20.a5 ♗e8 21.♙d2 ♘d5 22.a6 White has the initiative. 17...a6? runs into 18.♙xc6! bxc6 19.♙e3 winning material.

18.a5 ♘d5 19.a6 ♗g7 20.♙d2 ♗e8 21.d4±  
White keeps annoying pressure.

13...bxc6 14.♗xc3 ♗xc3 15.bxc3



Obviously White cannot claim to have a big advantage, but he enjoys risk-free play. In the

following encounter Black quickly fell into a bad position.

15...♙a4 16.c4 ♙e6 17.♙e3 c5?

This inaccurate move leaves Black's knight out of play, so better was 17...♙c3 18.♗fe1 f6 19.♙d4!±.

18.♗fc1 ♗b8 19.♙d3

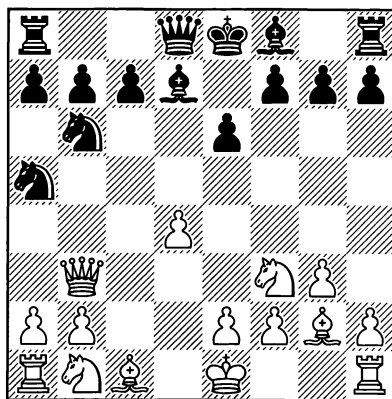
White was clearly better in Roiz – Gofshtein, Israel 2007.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♙f3 ♙f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2 ♙c6 6.♗a4 ♘d5 7.♗xc4 ♙b6 8.♗b5)

A2) 8...♙d7

Black logically chases the queen from b5, but at the same time he removes the pressure against the key d4-pawn and allows White to arrange his pieces comfortably.

9.♗b3 ♙a5



Black tries somehow to justify his set-up and especially the poorly placed light-squared bishop. The modest 9...♙d6 seems to me to be a better option: 10.0–0 0–0 11.♙c3 a5 was Zueger – Ekstroem, Switzerland 2007, and now White should have continued simply with 12.a4 ♗e7 13.♗d1, maintaining a pleasant edge.

**10.♖d3**

The text is White's best option; 10.♖c2 has been tried by yours truly, but it appeared that after 10...♞c8 11.♙d2 ♘ac4 Black solves his opening problems, Avrukh – Naiditsch, Saint Vincent 2005.

**10...c5 11.dxc5**

This is undoubtedly the most principled move, but White is also better after:

11.0–0 ♙c6 12.♞d1 cxd4

If Black develops normally with 12...♞c8 13.♘c3 ♙e7 then White has the annoying 14.♖c2! which creates very unpleasant tension along the d-file.

13.♘xd4 ♙xg2 14.♙xg2 ♘c6

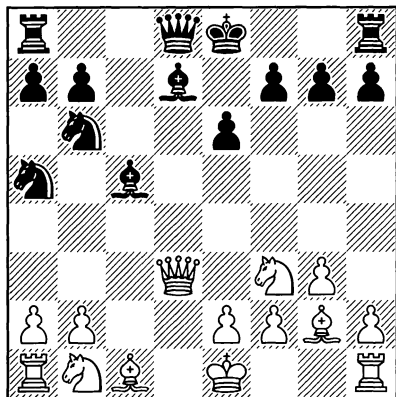
In the game Black lost in a few moves: 14...♖d5?!! 15.e4 ♖d7? 16.♖e2 ♙c5 17.♘f5 Tkachiev – Libiszewski, France (ch) 2006.

15.♘xc6 ♖xd3 16.♞xd3 bxc6 17.♙e3!

The endgame is quite unpleasant for Black, due to his weak pawns on the queenside.

**11...♙xc5**

11...♘d5?! 12.♘c3 ♘b4 13.♖b1± is simply bad for Black, as he cannot regain the pawn in view of 14.a3 and 15.b4.

**12.♖c3!**

This triple attack gives White a clear edge.

**12...♞c8**

Black has no compensation for the pawn after 12...♘d5 13.♖xg7 ♖f6 14.♖xf6 ♘xf6 15.0–0±.

The first time this position occurred was in Kramnik – Naiditsch, Dortmund 2006. Unbelievably, Vladimir did not capture the pawn!

**13.♖xg7**

Probably he was concerned about the following variation:

13...♙f8 14.♖xh8 ♞xc1† 15.♙d2

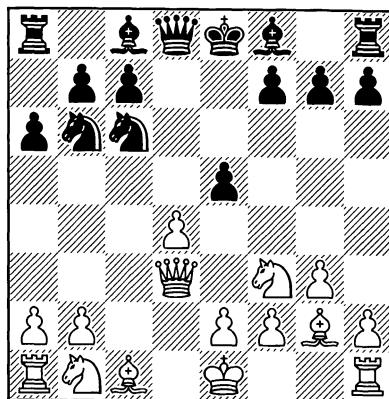
But it is not so difficult to see that White is more or less winning.

15...♞c5 16.♘c3 ♘bc4† 17.♙e1

White had a decisive material advantage in Khenkin – Martinsen, Dresden 2006.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2 ♘c6 6.♖a4 ♘d5 7.♖xc4 ♘b6 8.♖b5)

A3) 8...a6 9.♖d3 e5

**10.♘xe5**

After:

10.♙e3

Black has the very strong:

## 10...♖b4!

The model endgame for this variation arises after 10...exd4 11.♖xd4 ♖xd4 12.♗xd4 ♗xd4 13.♙xd4 ♙b4† 14.♖c3 0-0 15.0-0-0 and here we can see how useful provoking ...a6 is: Black's knight on b6 becomes really vulnerable, and Black cannot play the useful ...c6. Eventually I won a very nice game in Avrukh – Berg, Santa Cruz de la Palma 2005. After the text White has to enter into wild complications.

## 11.♗e4

The only game to reach this position went perfectly... for Black: 11.♗d1 exd4 12.♖xd4 c5 13.♖c2 ♗xd1† 14.♖xd1 ♖xc2 15.♖xc2 ♙f5† 16.♖c1 0-0-0= Romanishin – Aloma Vidal, Calvia 2007.

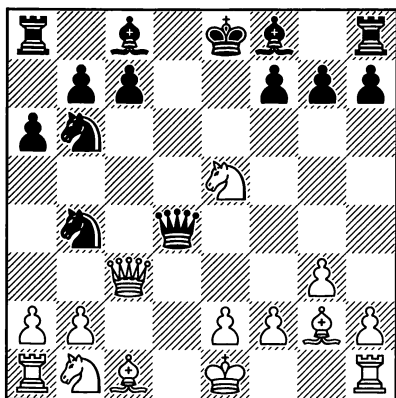
11...♗d5 12.♖xe5 ♖c2! 13.♗xc2 ♗xg2 14.♙f1 ♙h3 15.♖d2 ♙b4 16.0-0-0 ♗d5 17.♙g1 ♗xa2 18.g4 h5

With a very complicated game.

## 10...♖b4

The alternative is clearly worse: 10...♖xd4 11.♙e3 c5 12.♖d2 ♙f5 13.♙e4 ♙xe4 14.♗xe4 ♗d5 15.♙xd4 cxd4 16.0-0 and White has a clear edge.

## 11.♗c3 ♗xd4



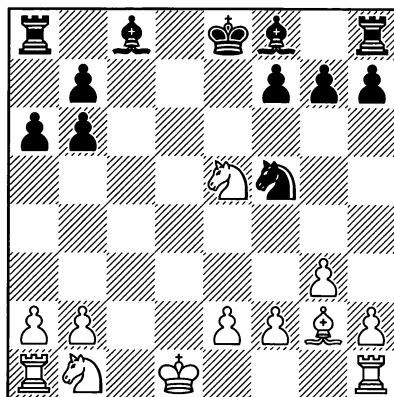
## 12.♗xd4

It is very difficult to evaluate the complications after 12.♗xc7 ♙e6 as played in Ki. Georgiev – Genov, FYROM 2001, but I tend to believe Kramnik, who opted for 12.♗xd4. Instead 12.0-0 ♗xc3 13.♖xc3 ♙d6 14.♖f3 0-0 gives Black a normal position, L'Ami – Naiditsch, Netherlands 2007.

## 12...♖c2† 13.♖d1 ♖xd4 14.♙e3 ♖f5

More or less the same type of position arises after 14...♖b5 15.♙xb6 cxb6 16.♖d2±.

## 15.♙xb6 cxb6



Here I would recommend:

## 16.♖d2!N

In essence, I believe White should be better in the long-term, due to his superior pawn structure. He just needs to gradually consolidate his position, and restrict the activity of Black's dark-squared bishop.

The alternative is 16.♖c3 ♙c5 17.e3 0-0 18.♖e2 ♙e8 19.♖d3. White seems to be better, but Black managed to hold with the help of a brilliant tactical resource: 19...♙b8 20.♙hc1 ♙e6 21.♙d5 ♙d7 22.♖e4 ♙f8 23.♙c7 ♙bd8!! was Kramnik – Naiditsch, Dortmund 2007.

## 16...♙d6

16...♙c5 17.♞d3 0-0? 18.♞xc5 bxc5  
19.♞c1± and Black loses the c5-pawn.

### 17.♞d3 0-0 18.♞c1

Here we can see the advantage of playing the queen's knight to d2 rather than c3: White has an open file for his rook.

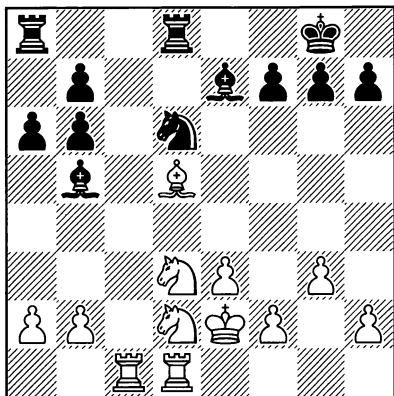
18...♞d8 19.e3 ♙e7 20.♞e2 ♞d6

Preventing ♞c4.

21.♞hd1 ♙d7

This is Black's only active idea.

22.♙d5 ♙b5



### 23.♞b1!

With the idea of chasing Black's light-squared bishop from b5 by means of 24.♞c3.

23...♞ac8

Or 23...♙f6 24.♞c3 ♙xd3† 25.♞xd3 ♞ac8  
26.♙b3 with a pleasant edge.

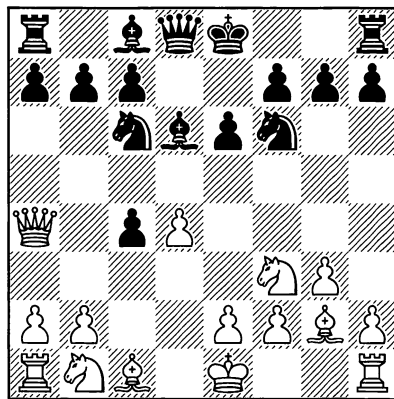
24.♞xc8 ♞xc8 25.♞c3±

Black is doomed to passive defence.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♞f3 ♞f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2  
♞c6 6.♞a4)

B) 6...♙d6

This looks quite natural: Black is simply planning to execute the typical ...e6-e5 break. Nevertheless, I believe the text does not allow Black to solve his opening problems. If Black wants to play this plan then it is better to start with ...♙b4† forcing White to place his bishop on d2, thus avoiding the option of 7.♞bd2.



### 7.♞bd2

I believe this move poses Black definite problems. White's idea is to capture the c4-pawn with the knight, where it will attack Black's dark-squared bishop and control the e5-square.

7.0-0

This is a natural alternative, and also promises White slightly better chances.

7...0-0 8.♞xc4 e5 9.♞c3

Here we can see another point in favour of playing ...♙b4† first: had ...♙b4†, ♙d2 ...♙d6 been played, the text would be impossible, as it would lose a pawn after a double capture on d4 followed by ...♙xg3! when the bishop on d2 would hang after White exchanges on d8.  
9...exd4 10.♞xd4 ♞xd4 11.♞xd4 ♞e7 12.♙f4  
♙xf4 13.♞xf4 c6 14.♞fd1 ♙e6

Here instead of the modest 15.♞d2, as in P.H. Nielsen – V. Milov, Panormo (blitz) 2002, White should have continued:  
15.♞d4 ♞fd8 16.♞ad1 ♞xd4 17.♞xd4±

The queen is perfectly placed on d4, where it secures White's control over the d-file and keeps an eye on the a7-pawn, thus not allowing Black's rook to enter into the play immediately.

### 7...♔d7

Not allowing White to take the c4-pawn with the knight.

After 7...0-0 8.♖xc4 ♔b4† 9.♔d2 ♔xd2† 10.♖cxd2 White had a pleasant edge in Kozlov – Pe. Horvath, Hungary 1996. Black could vary from this line on move 8 with:

### 7...0-0 8.♖xc4 b5

This is interesting, but it is not good enough after precise play:

### 9.♖xb5 ♖b8 10.♖xc6

Black is OK after 10.♖a4 ♖xd4!.

### 10...♔d7 11.♖a6 ♔b5 12.♖a5 ♔xc4 13.a3

If instead 13.♖a4 ♔b4† 14.♔d2 ♖d6 Black has definite compensation.

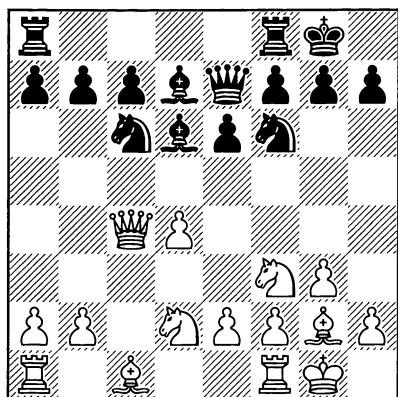
### 13...c5 14.♖xd8 ♖fxd8 15.dxc5 ♔xc5 16.b4 ♔b6 17.♔b2

Black is struggling to prove he has compensation:

### 17...♖g4 18.e3 f6 19.h3 ♖h6 20.♖d4+

J. Horvath – Van der Lijn, Haarlem 1995.

### 8.♖xc4 0-0 9.0-0 ♖e7



This occurred in Tukmakov – V. Milov, Biel 2002, where 10.♖c2 was played. Instead I suggest we step off the trodden path with a more natural continuation:

### 10.♖b3!N

10.a3, with the simple idea of taking control of b4, might also be an interesting alternative. For example, White is ready to meet 10...e5 with 11.d5 and Black's knight does not have a good square.

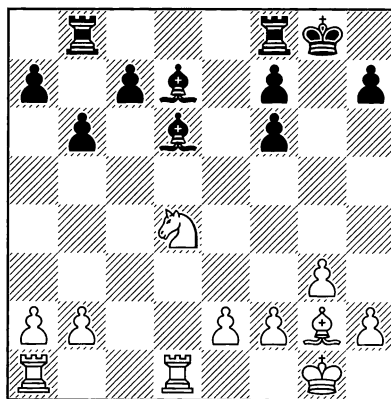
### 10...♖ab8

Defending the b7-pawn and preparing the advance ...e5, which would not work immediately: 10...e5 11.dxe5 ♖xe5 12.♖xe5 ♖xe5 13.♔xb7 ♖ab8 14.♔f3 ♖b4 15.♖c3! and White has an extra pawn.

### 11.♔g5 e5 12.♖fd1 exd4

Or 12...h6 13.♔xf6 ♖xf6 14.d5 ♖e7 15.♖c5 with the advantage.

### 13.♖fxd4 ♖xd4 14.♖xd4 b6 15.♔xf6 ♖xf6 16.♖xf6 gxf6 17.♖d4±



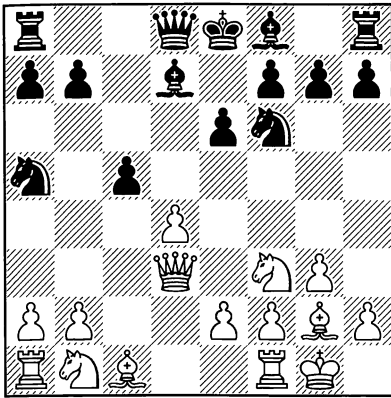
White is slightly better, due to his better pawn structure.

### (1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♖f3 ♖f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♔g2 ♖c6 6.♖a4)

## C) 6...♙d7 7.♞xc4 ♘a5 8.♞d3

This is White's main retreat, but I would like to mention that 8.♞c3 is met strongly by 8...♘d5! 9.♞d3 (certainly White cannot take on a5 in view of 10...♙b4†) 9...c5 with good play for Black.

## 8...c5 9.0–0



This is the main branching point in the 6...♙d7 line. The two main options are C1) 9...♙c6 and C2) 9...♞c8, but other moves also deserve our attention:

9...♞b6 10.♘c3 cxd4 11.♞xd4

11.♘xd4 ♙c5 12.♙e3 ♘g4 is fine for Black.  
11...♞xd4

11...♙c5 12.♞h4 0–0 has occurred in 8(!) games (via different move orders) and none of the White players managed to discover the following nice move: 13.♙h6!N ♘e8 (White was threatening 14.♙xg7 followed by ♞g5†) 14.♘e5 with a large advantage.

12.♘xd4 ♙c5 13.♘b3!? ♘xb3 14.axb3

White has strong pressure.

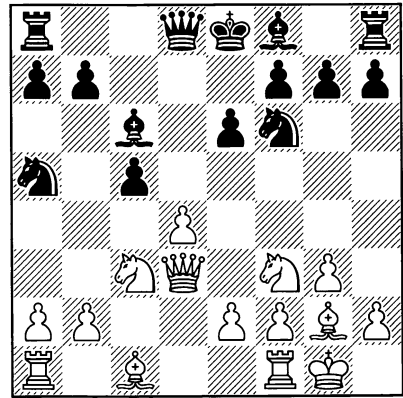
14...♘e7 15.♙f4 ♙c6 16.♙xc6 bxc6 17.♞a6 ♙b6 18.♘a4 ♘d5 19.♞a1 ♞ad8 20.♘xb6 axb6 21.♙e5!±

White was much better in Grabarczyk – Taimanov, Germany 2002.

9...c4 This way of removing the tension in the centre always favours White. The following game is the model example: 10.♞c2 ♙c6 11.♘c3 ♙b4 12.♙g5 0–0 13.♞ad1 h6 14.d5 exd5 15.♙xf6 ♞xf6 16.♘xd5 ♙xd5 17.♞xd5± Black's minor pieces are badly misplaced on the queenside, P.H. Nielsen – Hjartarson, Copenhagen 1996.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2 ♘c6 6.♞a4 ♙d7 7.♞xc4 ♘a5 8.♞d3 c5 9.0–0)

## C1) 9...♙c6 10.♘c3



## 10...♙e7

Black also has the option of releasing the tension in the centre with:

10...cxd4 11.♘xd4 ♙xg2

11...♙c5 12.♞d1 (Marin's recommendation 12.♙e3!? is worthy of consideration) 12...♙xd4 (12...♙xg2 is met strongly by 13.♞b5†! and we will examine this position via the 11...♙xg2 move order.) 13.♞xd4 ♞xd4 14.♞xd4 ♙xg2 15.♘xg2 ♘c6 16.♞d1± White keeps a pleasant edge in this endgame.

12.♘xg2 ♙c5

12...♘c6 is quite solid and now the only chance for White to fight for an opening advantage is 13.♙e3!N as also pointed out by Marin. (After 13.♞b5 Black has the very

strong reply 13...a6!, which allows him to equalize: 14.♟xc6 ♖c7! This is the point of Black's idea. 15.♖c4 ♜c8 Black intends to recapture on c6 with the queen. 16.♙f4 [16.♙g5 ♖xc6† 17.♖xc6† ♜xc6 18.♙xf6 gxf6=] 16...♖xc6† 17.♖xc6† ♜xc6 18.♞ac1 This is Antic – Lazarevic, Niska Banja 1996, and now Black could have equalized easily after 18...♙d6 19.♟a4 ♜xc1 20.♞xc1 ♟e7.) 13...e5 (if 13...♙e7 then 14.♖b5± and Black will be forced to take on c6 with the pawn) 14.♟xc6 ♖xd3 15.exd3 bxc6 16.d4 ♙d6 17.♞ac1 0–0 18.♟a4± White has strong pressure.

13.♖b5† ♟d7 14.♞d1 a6 15.♖d3 ♜c8

Black would not solve his problems after 15...♙e7 16.♙f4 ♜c8, as Black can never castle since the knight on d7 would hang after ♟xe6!. 17.♟f3 ♟c4 18.♟a4 b5 19.b3 ♟cb6 20.♟xb6 ♟xb6 21.♖xd8† ♙xd8 Black has managed to simplify the position, but the endgame appears to be unpleasant for him after 22.e4, Tkachiev – Solozhenkin, France 2000

16.♙g5!

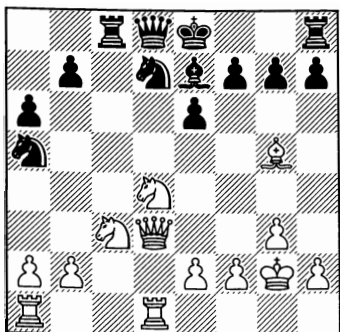
A very nice move, which allows White to create a dangerous initiative.

16...♙e7

Other options do not bring relief either.

For example, the bishop is untouchable: 16...♖xg5 17.♟xe6 ♖e7 18.♟xg7† ♟d8 19.♟d5 with a decisive attack.

16...♟f6 17.♙xf6 gxf6 (17...♖xf6 18.♟e4 ♖xd4 [18...♖e7 loses to 19.♖c3!]) 19.♖xd4 ♙xd4 20.♟d6†+– winning an exchange) 18.♖e4 ♖e7 19.♖g4 White is clearly better.



So far we have followed Kramnik – Topalov, Elista (3) 2006. Now:

17.♟e4!

This would have given White a considerable advantage, as was pointed out by many analysts.

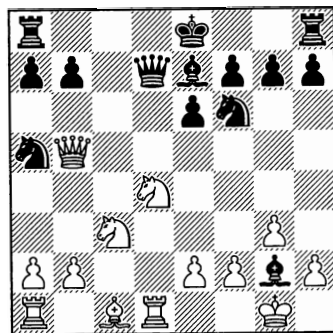
11.♞d1 0–0

Again Black has the option of releasing the tension in the centre:

11...cxd4 12.♟xd4 ♙xg2 13.♖b5†!

Once again this intermediate move helps White to develop an initiative.

13...♖d7



14.♖xa5!N

This is a natural improvement over 14.♟xg2 ♖xb5 15.♟cxb5 0–0 16.♙f4 a6 with roughly equal play, Ilincic – Brkic, Teslic 2006.

14...♙d5 15.♟xd5 ♟xd5

After 15...exd5 16.♙f4 0–0 17.♖b5! White has a stable advantage: Black does not have enough activity to make up for the isolated pawn.

16.e4 ♙b4

16...♟f6 is strongly answered by 17.♙g5± renewing the threat of a discovered attack.

17.♖b5 ♖xb5 18.♟xb5 a6 19.exd5 axb5 20.♙f4

White is obviously better, due to his healthier pawn structure.

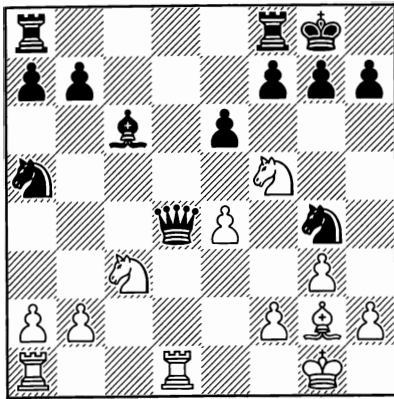
12.e4 cxd4 13.♟xd4 ♖b6 14.♙e3 ♟g4

Black has to play energetically, as after the natural 14...♟fd8 15.♟e2 ♟c7 16.♟ac1± his disharmony on the queenside starts to tell.

### 15.♟f5

15.♟xc6 ♟xc6 16.♟d4 might be an interesting alternative to the text.

15...♟c5 16.♟xc5 ♟xc5 17.♟d4 ♟xd4



### 18.♟xd4±

White has a pleasant endgame advantage, Ribli – Pelletier, Bundesliga 2005.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♟f3 ♟f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♟g2 ♟c6 6.♟a4 ♟d7 7.♟xc4 ♟a5 8.♟d3 c5 9.0-0)

C2) 9...♟c8 10.♟c3 cxd4

Black has also tried:

10...♟c6 11.♟d1 cxd4 12.♟xd4 ♟xg2

Once again the 'typical'

13.♟b5!±N

is very strong. 13.♟xg2 was less convincing in Dizdarevic – Vukovic, Cetinje 1990.

13...♟d7

13...♟d7 14.♟xg2 a6 15.♟h5 (threatening 16.♟xe6) 15...♟f6 16.♟f3 ♟b6 17.♟a4 ♟b4 18.b3 (with the idea 19.♟d2) 18...♟c6 19.♟xc6 ♟xc6 20.♟b2 ♟e7 21.♟ac1±

14.♟xa5 b6 15.♟a6! ♟b7

15...♟b7 also loses the a7-pawn after 16.♟a4± ♟c6 17.♟xc6 ♟xc6 18.♟b5 ♟e7 19.♟e3 0-0 20.♟ac1±.

16.♟xa7 ♟c5 17.♟a4±

White is simply a pawn up.

### 11.♟xd4 ♟c5

This line looks quite solid for Black, but he has another serious option:

11...♟b6

This has worked very well for Black in practice, therefore I offer the following improvement:

12.♟d1!±N

In Karlsson – E. Berg, Stockholm 2007, Black easily solved all his problems after 12.♟g5 ♟e7 13.♟fd1 0-0=.

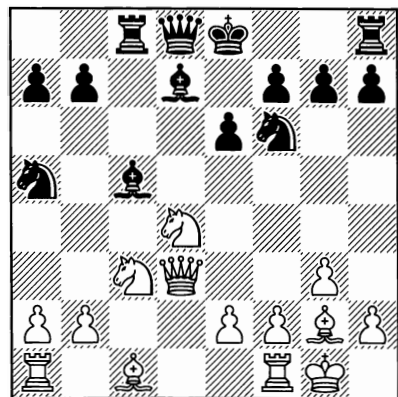
12...♟c5

12...♟c4 is risky for Black: 13.♟e4! ♟xe4 14.♟xe4 ♟d6 15.♟d3 ♟e7 16.♟f4 and White has the initiative.

13.♟e3 0-0 14.♟ab1 e5 15.♟c2

White has the better chances.

In the main line I believe White should continue with a natural completion of his development.



### 12.♟d1N



12.♖b3 ♜xb3 13.axb3 ♙c6 was equal in Gustafsson – Groszpeter, Austria 2005.

### 12...0-0

It appears that this is the moment to look for improvements for Black, but they are not easy to find.

### 13.♙g5

The pin is awkward for Black.

### 13...h6

13...♞b6?! does not work here. White has a strong position after 14.♙xf6 gxf6 15.♖e4 ♜g7 16.♞ab1! when Black has many worries due to the threat of ♜xc5 followed by b4. For example: 16...♙e7 17.♖f5† exf5 18.♞xd7 ♞e6 19.♖c3±

### 14.♙xf6 ♞xf6 15.♖e4 ♞xd4

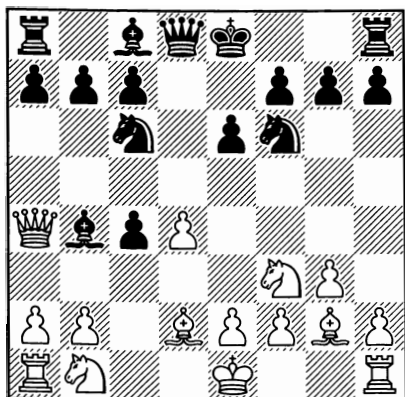
Or 15...♞e7 16.♖b5 ♞fd8 17.♖bd6 ♙xd6 18.♖xd6 ♞c7 19.♞d4 b6 20.b4 e5 21.♞e4 ♙e6 22.♖xf7 ♞xd1† 23.♞xd1 ♙xf7 24.bxa5 bxa5 25.♞b1 with a definite edge for White.

### 16.♞xd4 ♙xd4 17.♞xd4 ♙c6 18.♖d6±

White still has distinct pressure.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♖f3 ♖f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2 ♖c6 6.♞a4)

### D) 6...♙b4† 7.♙d2



Now Black must make a choice: the bishop can either retreat or stand its ground and receive support from the cavalry. The more aggressive approach has not lost its supporters.

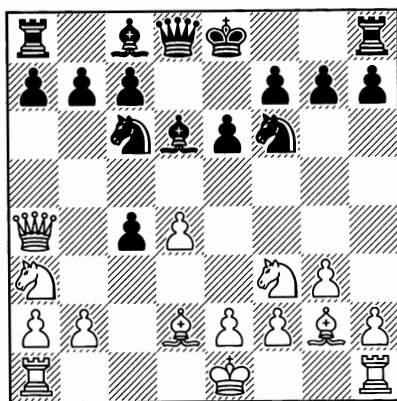
D1) 7...♙d6 and D2) 7...♖d5.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♖f3 ♖f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2 ♖c6 6.♞a4 ♙b4† 7.♙d2)

### D1) 7...♙d6

Somehow this move has never achieved widespread popularity, though it was regularly played by top GMs such as Anand, Kramnik and Beliavsky.

### 8.♖a3!?



There have not been many games with this move, but I believe it is White's most ambitious choice. As always, the idea is to capture the c4-pawn with the knight, which would significantly complicate Black's task in carrying out his main idea: ...e6-e5.

### 8...♙xa3

Black has various alternatives:

8...♖e4 9.♖xc4 ♖xd2 10.♖fxd2

Recapturing with the other knight would

allow Black to achieve his main aim: 10.♟cxd2 0–0 11.0–0 e5 with complicated play.

10...♟d7

10...0–0 11.♟xc6 bxc6 12.0–0 gives White a clear edge.

Now Ribli's suggestion is:

11.e3!?

This seems to be the best way for White to fight for the advantage.

11.♟xd6† cxd6 was rather unclear in Beliavsky – Anand, Dortmund 1998.

11...0–0 12.♟b3 b5

Black can play 12...♟b8 but in this case White can comfortably meet the e5-advance with 13.♟c1 e5 14.d5 ♟e7 15.♟e4, obtaining a pleasant advantage.

13.♟xd6

13.♟e5 looks interesting, but I am not sure about the position that arises after 13...♟xe5. (The point of White's idea is that if Black decides to sacrifice an exchange with 13...♟xe5 14.dxe5 ♟xe5 White plays first 15.♟c3! f6 16.f4 and only then will he take on a8, followed by castling short with a clear advantage.) 14.dxe5 ♟xe5 15.♟xa8 ♟xa8 16.0–0 c5! This looks quite playable for Black.

13...cxd6 14.d5

14.0–0 d5 (Black is worse after 14...♟e7 15.d5!) 15.♟fc1 ♟a5 16.♟d3 ♟c8 Black should hold this.

14...♟e5 15.0–0 ♟c8 16.♟fd1

With slightly better chances for White.

8...♟b8 9.♟xc4 0–0 was played in Beliavsky – I. Farago, Hungary 1998. I believe White should now have played the natural 10.0–0 and after 10...e5 11.dxe5 ♟xe5 12.♟xe5 ♟xe5 13.♟c2! with the idea of ♟c4. Surprisingly, White gets good play after 13...♟e6 14.♟b4 ♟e8 15.♟fd1 ♟c8 16.♟b5 with the initiative.

8...a6?! was recommended by Beliavsky

in *Chess Informant* 73. I believe he simply overlooked the strong 9.♟e5! and White easily obtains a big advantage: 9...♟xe5 10.♟xc6† bxc6 11.dxe5±

**9.♟xa3!**

In my opinion Black was perfectly OK after 9.bxa3 ♟d5! 10.0–0 b5 11.♟d1 ♟b7 in Loetscher – Doettling, Pula 2003.

**9...♟e4**

In both the games that reached this position Black refrained from capturing the second pawn with 9...♟xd4 10.♟xd4 ♟xd4. It is an understandable decision, as after 11.♟d1 White has very strong compensation, thanks to his strong pair of bishops, and of course Black's monarch will probably stay in the centre for a long time.

**10.♟e3 ♟d6**

Who knows, maybe this is the right moment for Black to search for an improvement?

**11.♟c1 ♟xa3**

If 11...0–0 then White can seriously consider 12.♟a4 not allowing Black to double his pawns by taking on a3.

**12.bxa3 ♟d6 13.♟e5 ♟d7**

13...♟xe5 14.dxe5 ♟f5 15.♟c5 is certainly not acceptable for Black.

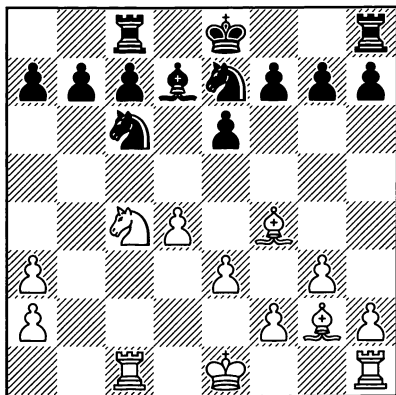
**14.♟xc4**

I prefer this move to 14.0–0 f6 15.♟xc4 ♟f5 16.♟fd1 ♟xe3 17.♟xe3 0–0–0 when Black has a defensible position, Tkachiev – Schenk, Gonfreville 2006.

**14...♟f5 15.♟f4 ♟c8**

Just bad is 15...♟fxd4 16.♟xc7 0–0 17.♟d6± and Black will most likely lose his b7-pawn.

**16.e3 ♟fe7**

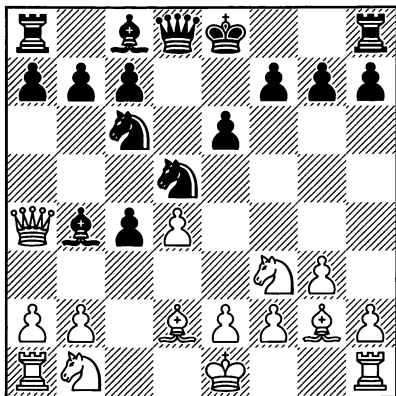


### 17.g4

Keeping the dark-squared bishop alive and retaining a pleasant advantage, Gustafsson – Khenkin, Germany 2005.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.g3 ♘f6 4.♗g2 dxc4 5.♘f3 ♗c6 6.♞a4 ♗b4† 7.♗d2 ♗d5)

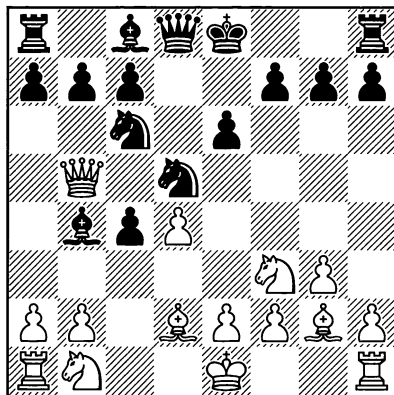
### D2) 7...♗d5



And once again we have a split: **D22) 8.♗xb4** is the critical move and the one I have chosen to recommend after a lot of analysis, but first I want to bring to your attention **D21) 8.♞b5!?**. This interesting pawn sacrifice is also worth a try and may suit some readers better than my main line.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♗f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♗g2 ♗c6 6.♞a4 ♗b4† 7.♗d2 ♗d5)

### D21) 8.♞b5!?



This move is connected with a pawn sacrifice, and I think it is quite an interesting alternative. White does not seek a serious opening advantage, but rather aims for complex play. I would just like to show the critical directions without going deeply into the variations.

### 8...♗xd2†

The other popular option for Black is:

### 8...0–0

This seems to be even more problematic for White, as I fail to see an advantage after:

9.♞xc4 ♗b6 10.♞d3 e5

10...♗xd2† has occurred only once in tournament practice: 11.♗bxd2 e5 was G. De Boer – Su. Polgar, Breda 1996. The critical line should be 12.dxe5 ♞xd3 13.exd3 ♗d8 but Black has other moves as well. 14.d4 ♗xd4 15.♗xd4 ♗xd4 16.♗b3 ♗b4 with complicated play.

### 11.♗xb4

Now 11.dxe5 ♞xd3 12.exd3 ♗d8 is a much better version for Black compared with the inclusion of 10...♗xd2† 11.♗bxd2.

11...♗xb4 12.♞d2 a5!

Black has also tried 12...♗c6 13.dxe5 ♞e7,

but the inclusion of the moves ...a5 and a3 should obviously favour Black.

### 13.a3 ♟c6

Quite risky but maybe possible is: 13...e4 14.axb4 ♟c4 (14...exf3? 15.♙xf3 leaves Black without a pawn and without compensation) 15.♟f4! (this is much stronger than 15.♟c1 exf3 16.♙xf3 ♟xd4 with comfortable equality, Grabliauskas – Benjamin, New York 2000) 15...exf3 16.♙xf3 ♟e7 17.0-0 ♟xb4 18.♟c3 ♟xb2 19.♟d5 ♟d2 Black is holding the position.

### 14.dxe5 ♟e7

Black had equalized in Chabanon – Hausrath, Belgium 2007.

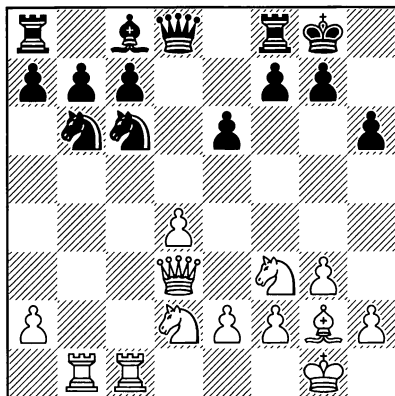
### 9.♟bxd2 c3 10.bxc3 ♟xc3 11.♟d3 ♟d5 12.0-0 0-0

Now the best set-up seems to be:

### 13.♟fcl h6

13...♟ce7 14.♟ab1 h6 15.♟c4 c6 16.♟e5 f6 17.♟d3 and White increased his pressure in Davies – Nickoloff, Toronto 1998.

### 14.♟ab1 ♟b6



### 15.e4

It is always a big question for me whether White should play e2-e4 gaining full control of the centre, or prefer the calm e2-e3 not

blocking his light-squared bishop. In this case 15.e3!? seems quite promising. The following is an illustrative line: 15...♟e8 16.♟e2 ♟e7 (White's idea is to meet 16...e5 with 17.♟xc6! bxc6 18.♟xe5 with good compensation) 17.♟c4 White will continue to put pressure on the queenside.

### 15...♟e7 16.♟b3 ♟d8 17.♟e3

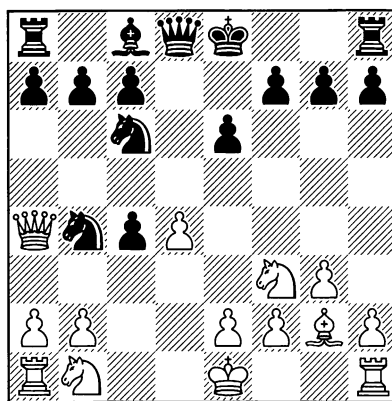
White has typical compensation for this line, Tkachiev – Inkiov, Aubervilliers 2003.

### (1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♟f3 ♟f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2 ♟c6 6.♟a4 ♙b4† 7.♙d2 ♟d5)

### D22) 8.♙xb4

Without any doubt, this is White's main continuation.

### 8...♟dxb4



### 9.0-0

While preparing this book I analysed:

### 9.a3 b5 10.♟xb5 ♟c2†

After looking for some time at:

### 11.♟d2

11.♟f1 ♙d7 also leads nowhere – or even 11...♟b8!?

### 11...♙d7!

This is not the main line, but it is the best move!

12.♟xc2 ♘xd4† 13.♘xd4 ♙xb5 14.♘xb5 ♖b8  
15.♙c6† ♟f8

I finally came to the conclusion that it is probably White who has to be careful here.

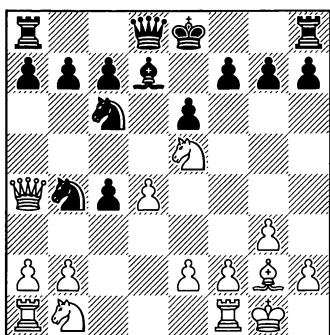
### 9...♖b8

The text is by far Black's most popular reply. However, Black has some natural alternatives which White has to answer precisely in order to achieve an advantage:

9...a6 10.♘e5 0-0 11.♘xc6 ♘xc6 12.♙xc6 bxc6 13.♖xc4 ♖b8 14.b3! This was played in Delchev – G. Timoshenko, Moscow 2001. It is of course a much better version for White compared with the positions that could arise in the main line.

More critical is:

9...♙d7 10.♘e5



And we have a truckload of options to consider:

a) 10...♘d5 has been played only once. I believe White can easily get a serious advantage with 11.♖xc4! ♘xe5 12.dxe5 ♙c6 13.♘c3 0-0 14.♖fd1 ♘b6 15.♖c5 ♘d7 16.♖d4 ♙xg2 17.♟xg2 ♘b6 18.♖e4 ♖c8 19.♖ac1±.

b) 10...0-0 11.♘xc6 ♘xc6 12.♖xc4 e5

This has been employed by Adams.  
13.dxe5 ♘xe5 14.♖d5!

This strong move secures White's advantage.  
14...♖f6

14...♘c6 looks more stubborn, but then White has strong pressure after 15.♘c3 ♖e7 16.♖fd1 ♖fd8 (or 16...♖ad8 17.♖b5! ♖b8 18.♘d5±) 17.♖c4 ♖ac8 18.♘d5 ♖e5 19.♖d2 ♙e6 20.♖ad1±.

15.♖xb7 ♖ab8

15...♙c6 16.♙xc6 ♘xc6 17.♘c3 ♖ab8 18.♖a6! (threatening 19.♘d5 followed by a small combination: 20.♖xc6 and 21.♘e7xc6) 18...♖b6 19.♖c4± White has a healthy extra pawn.

16.♖xa7 ♙c6 17.♘c3 ♙xg2 18.♟xg2 ♖c6†  
19.♟g1 ♖xb2 20.♖ac1±

White is a pawn up, Kobylkin – Nadyrhanov, Krasnodar 2002.

c) 10...♖b8 11.♘xc6 bxc6 (perhaps better is 11...♘xc6, but then after 12.♖xc4 0-0 13.♘c3 White keeps a pleasant Catalan edge) 12.♘a3 0-0 13.♖xa7 White had a clear advantage in Bernard – Baert, Belgium 2004.

d) 10...a5 11.♘xd7 ♖xd7

Now Mikhalevski's move gives White an edge:

12.♘c3! ♖d8

12...♘xd4? 13.♖xd7† ♟xd7 14.♖ad1 c5 15.e3 e5 16.f4!± Mikhalevski.

12...♖xd4?! 13.a3 ♘d5 14.♖fd1 ♖e5 15.♘xd5 exd5 16.♙xd5 0-0 17.♖xc4± is very unpleasant for Black.

12...♘d8 13.♖b5! ♖xb5 14.♘xb5 ♟d7 15.♖fc1 ♘dc6 16.♖xc4± Mikhalevski.

12...0-0 13.a3 ♘d5 14.♖xc4 ♘b6 15.♙xc6 bxc6 16.♖d3 and White is better, thanks to Black's damaged pawn structure.

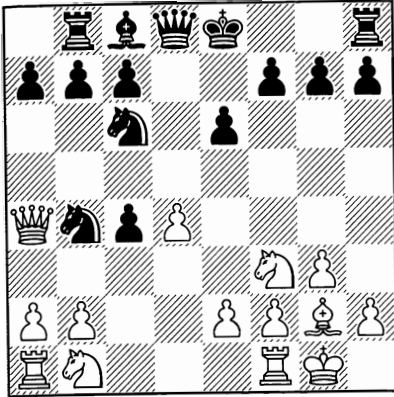
13.♖fd1 0-0 14.a3! ♘xd4!±

Somewhat better is 14...♘d5 15.♖xc4 ♘b6, but White keeps a clear plus after 16.♖c5! ♘xd4 17.♖xa5 ♖e7 18.♖a7! ♘b3 19.♖xd8 ♖xd8 20.♖d1!±, as was correctly pointed out by Mikhalevski in *Chess Informant* 79.

15. ♖xd7 ♜xd7 16. axb4 axb4 17. ♖b5!

White has a winning position, Mikhalevski – Beshukov, Saint Vincent 2000.

e) 10... ♖xe5 11. ♖xb4 ♖c6 12. ♖xc4 0–0 13. ♖c3 ♜f6 14. e3 Once again, with a typical advantage, Makarov – Sinitsin, Koltsovo 2006.



### 10. ♖a3

I decided to focus on this knight move, despite the fact that it is not the most popular move. Before we delve deeply into the analysis of 10. ♖a3, I should probably justify my choice with a quick look at the alternative.

### 10. ♖c3

This is, as I said, far more popular, but the real problem is that Black is fine in the main variation (as far as I can see). It goes:

10...a6 11. ♖e5 0–0 12. ♖xc6 ♜xc6 13. ♙xc6 bxc6 14. ♖xc4 ♜xb2

Another popular move is 14... ♖d6, but maybe it gives White some hopes after 15. ♖e4 ♖d5 16. ♖c2!.

15. ♜ab1 ♜b6 16. ♖c5 h6 17. ♜fd1

17. a4 allows Black an interesting alternative: 17...a5!? with the idea of activating the light-squared bishop on a6.

He can play 17... ♜xb1 which looks reasonable: 18. ♜xb1 ♖d6 19. ♖e4 ♖d5

20. ♖xd5 cxd5 21. ♖c5

17... ♜xb1 18. ♜xb1 ♖d6! 19. ♖e4

19. ♖xd6 cxd6 20. ♜b6 c5 is just a draw.

19... ♖d5 20. ♖xd5 cxd5 21. ♖c5

I believe White has no real chance of squeezing anything from this endgame.

Returning to 10. ♖a3, Black now has two main options:

**D221) 10...0–0 and D222) 10...a6.**

Instead rather passive is 10... ♙d7 11. ♖b5! 0–0 12. ♖xc4 ♜e7 13. e4 and White had everything he needs in this variation: his advantage is not in doubt, Tkachiev – Godena, Cannes 1999.

(1. d4 d5 2. c4 e6 3. ♖f3 ♖f6 4. g3 dxc4 5. ♙g2 ♖c6 6. ♖a4 ♙b4† 7. ♙d2 ♖d5 8. ♙xb4 ♖dxb4 9. 0–0 ♜b8 10. ♖a3)

### D221) 10...0–0

This is an interesting alternative to the main line.

**11. ♖b5 b6 12. ♖xc4 ♙a6**

12...a5 is too slow: White manages to arrange his pieces well after 13. ♖c3 ♙a6 14. ♖c4 ♖d5 15. ♖c1±, Bareev – Aleksandrov, New Delhi 2000.

**13. ♖b5 ♖d5 14. ♖xd5 ♖xd5**

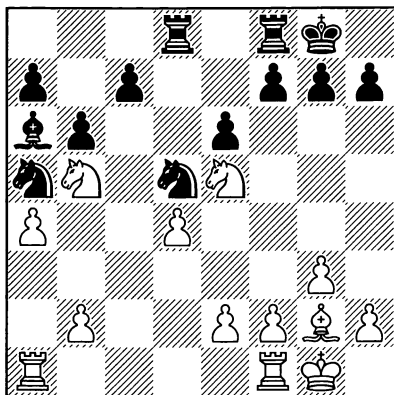
Less challenging is 14...exd5 15. ♖c3 ♖e7, as now White has a pleasant choice between 16. ♜fd1 c5 17. ♜ac1± as in Wojtkiewicz – S. Ivanov, Lubniewice 1995, and 16. a3 ♖bc6 17. b4±.

**15. a4 ♖a5**

Black has also tried 15... ♙b7, Marin – Raceanu, Romania (ch) 2007, and now I believe White should act energetically: 16. ♖e5 ♖xe5 17. dxe5 and White keeps the initiative.

For example: 17...a6 18.♙xd5 ♜xd5 19.♘xc7 ♜c4 20.♝ac1 ♜xe2 21.♞fe1 ♙d3 22.♞c6±

16.♘e5 ♞bd8



17.♘xa7

Otherwise Black has no problems at all: 17.♝ac1 ♘b3 18.♝cd1 ♘b4! 19.e3 c5=

17...♘b3

I also examined 17...♘b4 18.♝ac1 ♝xd4 19.♘b5 ♙xb5 20.axb5± and White's strong light-squared bishop gives him an edge.

18.♘ac6 ♜xe2 19.♝a3 ♜xf1 20.♙xf1 ♘a5 21.♙xd5 exd5

21...♝xd5? would be a serious mistake: 22.♘e7+ ♙h8 23.♘xd5 exd5 24.♝c3 and Black must lose material.

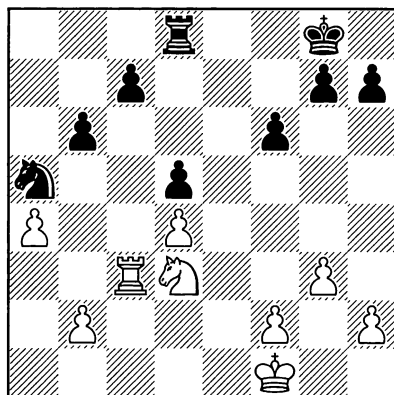
22.♘xd8N

Strangely enough, in this position White once blundered in a correspondence game: 22.b4?? ♘xc6, Ghafari – Aulaskari, corr. 1997.

22...♝xd8 23.♝c3

I do not see any real chances for White in the rook ending that arises after 23.b4 ♘c4 24.♘xc4 dxc4=.

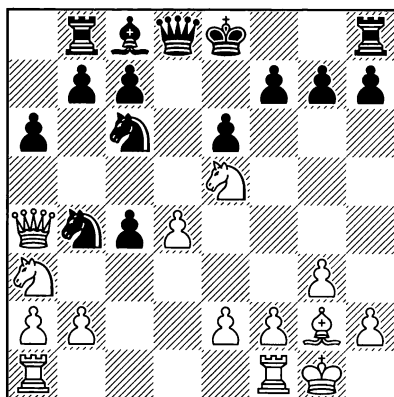
23...f6 24.♘d3±



White has slightly better chances, thanks to his pressure along the c-file and the possibility of eventually creating a passed a-pawn.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2 ♘c6 6.♞a4 ♙b4+ 7.♙d2 ♘d5 8.♙xb4 ♘dxb4 9.0-0 ♝b8 10.♘a3)

D222) 10...a6 11.♘e5



11...0-0

After the alternative: 11...♞xd4 12.♘xc6 ♘xc6 13.♙xc6+ bxc6 14.♞xc6+ White keeps a pleasant advantage:

14...♞d7

Much worse is 14...d7?! 15.♖xc7 ♜c8 16.♗b7! and Black will probably lose a pawn.

15.♖xc4 0–0

Black cannot play 15...♜xb2? in view of 16.♖c3! followed by capturing on g7 with a large advantage.

16.♜fd1 ♖e7 17.♖c3

Vacating the c4-square for the knight.

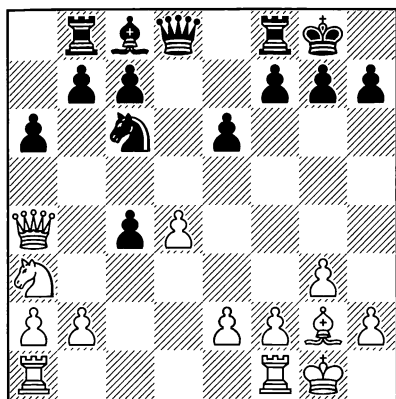
17...♙b7 18.♞c4 ♜fd8

Or 18...♙d5 19.b3±.

19.♜xd8+ ♜xd8 20.♞a5±

Black's permanent weaknesses on the queenside give White an edge, Djoudi – Hnatovsky, Telechess 2006.

12.♞xc6 ♞xc6



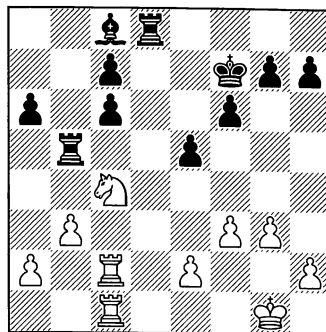
13.♙xc6

I believe White should try this extremely rare continuation. Almost everybody else has opted for the endgame that arises after:

13.♖xc4 ♖xd4 14.♙xc6 ♖xc4 15.♞xc4 bxc6

White has very good compensation for the pawn, due to Black's damaged pawn structure on the queenside and the knight's superiority over the bishop. Nevertheless, these factors should not be enough to force a significant advantage, and I believe Black can hold a draw with precise play.

The model game for this line continued:  
16.b3 ♜b5 17.♜fc1 ♜d8 18.♜c2 e5 19.f3 f6  
20.♜ac1 ♙f7



Black held this very convincingly in Delchev – Atalik, Bled (ol) 2002.

13...bxc6 14.♞xc4 ♖xd4 15.♜fd1 ♖e4

Other squares are not very comfortable for Black's queen:

15...♖c5 16.♜ac1

And if:

16...♖b5

White can simply play:

17.♖xb5 ♜xb5

17...cxb5 18.♞a5 ♙b7 19.♜xc7 ♙d5 20.b3±

This endgame is quite unpleasant for Black.

18.b3

And we reach a position from the 13.♖xc4 line with two(!) extra tempos for White.

15...♖f6?!

This simply does not work.

16.♖xc6 ♙b7 17.♖xc7 ♙d5 18.b3 ♜bc8

19.♖d6 ♙xc4 20.bxc4 ♜xc4 21.♖xa6 ♜fc8

22.a4

White is a healthy pawn up.

16.♜d2

Defending the e2-pawn: sometimes chess is simple.

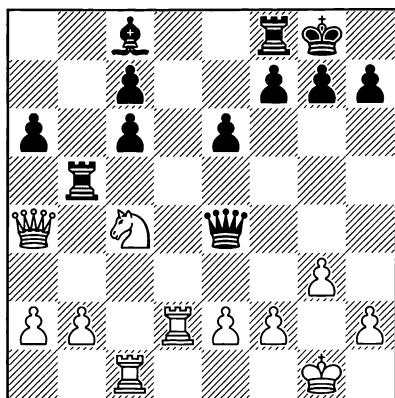
16...♜b5



After 16...♙b7 17.f3 ♖f5 18.♞ad1 ♜b5 19.♜c2 c5 20.b3± White gradually improves his position, while Black's correct plan is unclear.

### 17.♞c1!N

The only game to reach this position continued 17.♜c2 ♜xc2 18.♞xc2 ♞d8 with the same potentially drawish endgame as in the 13.♜xc4 line, Verleur – Gerards, corr. 2002.



The rook move is my improvement over that game. In general, after extensively analysing this variation, I came to the conclusion that it might be useful for White to keep the queens on the board. This should improve his chances of proving the superiority of his knight over Black's bishop. It would be interesting to see if my concept works in tournament practice. Now I would like to show the main lines of my analysis.

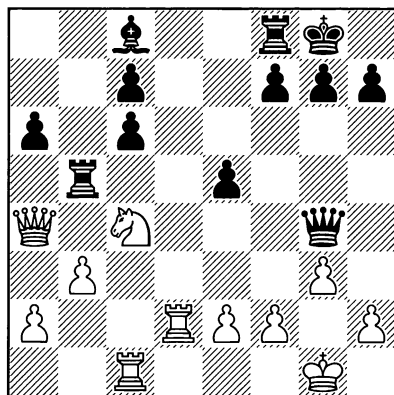
### 17...e5

Another line is 17...f6 18.f3 ♖f5 19.♞e3 ♜e5 20.♙f2 ♙b7 21.b3 and once again White can improve his position step by step, while I do not see any concrete plan for Black.

### 18.b3

Always a useful move. White is ready for ♘b2 at a suitable moment to attack the c6-pawn.

### 18...♞g4



### 19.♞a3

Threatening an unpleasant invasion with 20.♞e7.

### 19...♞e6 20.♞a5 ♙d7

Black faces concrete problems after:  
20...♞d5 21.♞d5 cxd5 22.♞xc7 ♙d7 23.♜c5  
As the logical:  
23...♙b5

runs into the neat:  
24.♞c6 ♞e8 25.♞e7+ ♙h8 26.♞c8!

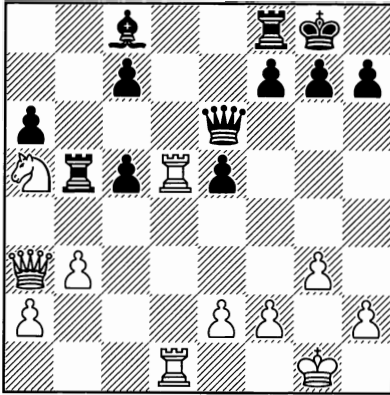
The point: White's knight transfers to d6 with great effect.  
26...♙xe2 27.♞d6 ♜h3 28.♜c1 ♞f8 29.♞xf7+ ♙g8 30.♞xe5 d4 31.♞d7±

It may look as though Black has good compensation for the pawn, but he cannot inflict any real damage and White's extra pawn should decide.

### 21.♞cd1 ♙c8

Another line goes: 21...♞d5 22.e4 ♞xd2 23.♞xd2 Now White intends to strengthen his position with the ♞b7-c5 manoeuvre: 23...f5 24.♞c4 fxe4 25.♜xa6± It is difficult to see what counterplay Black can create on the kingside.

### 22.♞d8 c5 23.♞8d5±



### Conclusion:

The 5...♖c6 system is quite reliable for Black, nevertheless there is no clear route to equality, especially if Black refrains from 6...♗b4†. The system with 6...♗b4† and 7...♖d5 has always been problematic for White, and I managed to find a new concept starting with the rarely played 13.♗xc6. This idea looks promising, but it definitely requires practical tests.

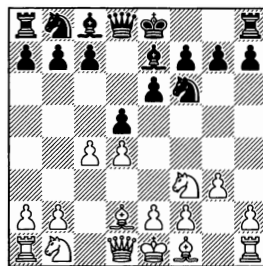
White will regain the pawn, while maintaining his pressure.



# Chapter 10

## The Catalan

4...♖b4† 5.♙d2 ♙e7



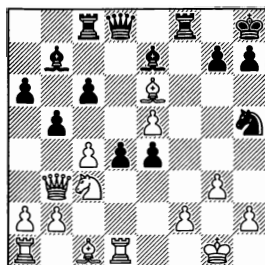
### Variation Index

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 ♖b4† 5.♙d2 ♙e7 [A) 5...♙xd2†-p 152]

B) 5...♙e7 6.♙g2 0-0 7.0-0 [p 153]

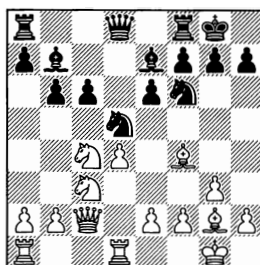
B1) 7...♘bd7	p 154
B2) 7...c6 8.♞c2	p 157
B21) 8...♘bd7	p 157
B22) 8...b6 9.♞d1	p 159
B221) 9...♙b7 10.♙f4 ♘bd7 11.♘c3	p 160
B2211) 11...♞c8	p 161
B2212) 11...dxc4	p 163
B2213) 11...♘h5	p 165
B222) 9...♘bd7 10.♙f4 ♙a6	p 169
B223) 9...♙a6 10.b3 ♘bd7 11.a4	p 172
B2231) 11...♞c8	p 173
B2232) 11...♞c8	p 176
B2233) 11...c5 12.♘a3 ♙b7 13.♞b2	p 177
B22331) 13...♘e4	p 179
B22332) 13...♞c8 14.♞ac1 ♘e4 15.♙e1 ♙f6 16.b4	p 180
B223321) 16...♞c7	p 181
B223322) 16...♙a8	p 182

B2211) a winning novelty



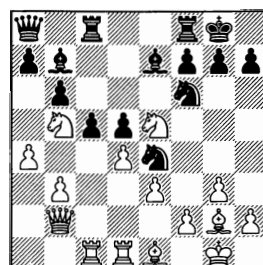
20.♙xc8!N

B2212) note to the 13th move



14.♙c1!N

B2232) a missed opportunity

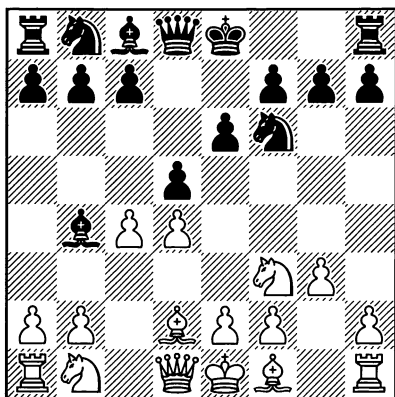


20.♙h3!N

### 1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♟f3 ♟f6 4.g3 ♟b4†

This check is usually met by 5.♟d2, and then 5...♟e7 is considered to be one of the most solid variations for Black against the Catalan set-up. Black's main idea in provoking 5.♟d2 is that the bishop appears to be misplaced on d2, where it takes a square normally used by the queen's knight. This variation generally leads to a closed game with many positional nuances.

#### 5.♟d2



White has two other options at his disposal in 5.♟c3 and 5.♟bd2, but I believe they can hardly pose Black any serious problems in the opening.

For Black there is a bit more of a choice, though it should be said that I do not rate A) 5...♟xd2† very highly. The big move is B) 5...♟e7.

However, there are two minor moves that we should quickly look at.

There is 5...a5 6.♟g2 dxc4, but this transposes to 4...dxc4 5.♟g2 ♟b4† 6.♟d2 a5, which has been examined before on page 44.

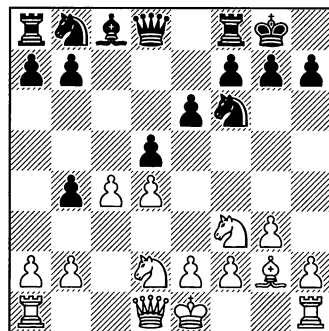
Quite playable for Black is:  
5...c5

I would now recommend:

#### 6.♟xb4

The alternative 6.cxd5 exd5 7.♟g2 0-0 8.0-0 ♟c6 seems to be perfectly acceptable for Black.

#### 6...cxb4 7.♟bd2 0-0 8.♟g2



This position might also arise from the Bogo-Indian variation with 3...♟b4† and 4...c5. I believe Black's set-up with his pawn on d5 is slightly inferior. White has much easier play, for example:

#### 8...♟c6 9.0-0 b6 10.♟c1 ♟b7 11.e3 ♟d6 12.♟a4 ♟fc8 13.♟c2

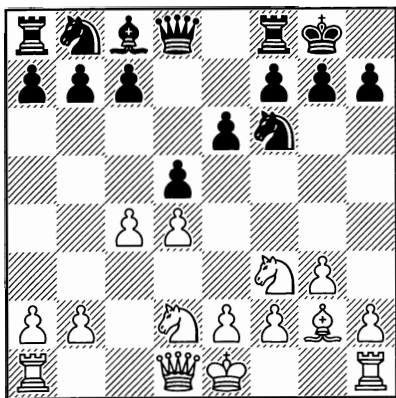
Next will be 14.♟fc1. Black gradually came under serious pressure in Ivanchuk – Gulko, New York 1988.

### (1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♟f3 ♟f6 4.g3 ♟b4† 5.♟d2)

#### A) 5...♟xd2†

I believe this is a slightly inferior version of the general plan of exchanging on d2: if Black wants to swap bishops then it is much better to do so via a different move order: 1.d4 ♟f6 2.c4 e6 3.g3 ♟b4† 4.♟d2 ♟xd2 keeping his pawn structure flexible and if White recaptures with the knight, Black will go for the set-up ...d6, ...♟e7 followed by ...e5.

#### 6.♟bxd2 0-0 7.♟g2



White's space advantage secures a pleasant edge. I have decided to give two examples that clearly show White's typical ideas.

### 7...♙e7 8.0–0 b6

8...♙d8 9.♙c2 ♘c6 This set-up is slightly passive. White has easy play: he just needs to carry out the thematic e2-e4 advance. This most recent example continued: 10.♙ad1 a5 11.♙fe1 ♙d7 12.e4 ♘b4 13.♙b1 dxc4 14.♘xc4 ♙b5 15.♘e3 White had an excellent game in Postny – Radulski, Barcelona 2008.

### 9.♙c1 ♙b7

This is now a good moment for White to remove the tension in the centre, as will be explained in the next note.

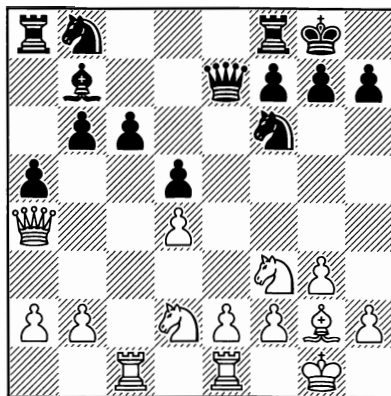
### 10.cxd5 exd5

Black is not ready to recapture with the bishop: 10...♙xd5?! 11.♙e1 (with the idea 12.e4) 11...♘e4 12.♘xe4 ♙xe4 13.♙a4!± and Black has problems developing his knight from b8.

### 11.♙a4 a5?!

More accurate is 11...♘a6, but after 12.e3±, although Black's position is playable, I believe White has a good version of a typical Queen's Indian position.

### 12.♙fe1 c6



### 13.e4!? ♘xe4 14.♘xe4 dxe4 15.♘e5

White's lead in development gives him a dangerous initiative, Salov – I. Sokolov, Amsterdam 1996.

### (1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 ♙b4† 5.♙d2)

### B) 5...♙e7 6.♙g2 0–0 7.0–0

Before we look at the main options, it is relevant to point out that Black can also engage in a slightly odd transposition:

### 7...dxc4

In case you are wondering, then let me make it clear that it is hardly acceptable for Black to take on c4 after performing the bishop two-step dance.

### 8.♙c2 a6 9.♙xc4 b5 10.♙c2 ♙b7

This is a position from the main line, but here it is White to move! The most natural way to take advantage is:

### 11.♙c1 ♙d6

After 11...♘c6 12.e3 we have a theoretical position from the ♘c6-line with an extra tempo for White.

### 12.♙g5 ♘bd7 13.♙xf6!? ♘xf6

After the natural-looking 13...♙xf6 then 14.♘g5! is very strong (not so clear is

14.♖e5 ♖xe5! 15.♙xb7 ♖a7∞) 14...♗xc5  
15.♙xb7 ♖ab8 16.♙c6 ♖f6 17.♖d2± White  
has stopped Black's play connected with the  
...c5 advance, and enjoys a clear advantage.

14.♖bd2 ♖c8 15.♖b3 ♙e4 16.♗c3

White has succeeded in stopping ...c5 and  
his chances are better.

16...♙d5

I also examined 16...♗e7 17.♖c5 (17.♖e5!?  
might be a worthy alternative) 17...♙xc5  
18.♗xc5 ♗xc5 19.♖xc5 ♖d7 20.♖c3 c5  
21.dxc5 ♖xc5 22.♖xc5 ♖xc5 23.♖c1. Even  
after carrying out ...c5, Black has definite  
problems. 23...♖a4 24.b3 ♖b6 25.♖e5  
♙xg2 26.♖xg2 ♖c8 27.♖xc8† ♖xc8 28.♖f3  
f6 29.♖c6 ♖f7 30.♖e4 I am not sure Black  
can hold this endgame.

16...♖d5 17.♗a5 ♖b6 18.♖fd2 ♙xg2  
19.♖xg2± does not bring relief either.

17.♖fd2 ♙xg2 18.♖xg2 b4?

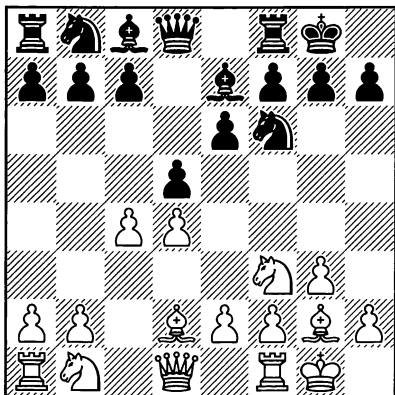
This is a clear positional mistake that makes  
Black's queenside highly vulnerable.

The lesser evil would be 18...c6, though  
White is obviously better after 19.♖f3±.

19.♗c6 e5 20.dxe5 ♙xe5 21.♖c4±

White had a strategically winning position  
in Khalifman – Tissir, Shenyang 2000.

But let us return to the moves that are in the  
spirit of the variation.



At this point there are two suitable ways  
for Black to continue his development. It is  
surprising that **B1) 7...♖bd7** turns out to be  
a bit awkward and that **B2) 7...c6** is the more  
flexible of the two, because it does not expose  
the c6-square to any weakness, even a very  
temporary one.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♖f3 ♖f6 4.g3 ♙b4†  
5.♙d2 ♙e7 6.♙g2 0-0 7.0-0)

**B1) 7...♖bd7 8.♗c2**

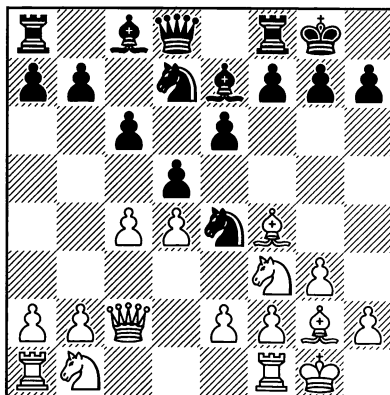
Now Black usually plays 8...c6 transposing to  
the main lines, but there is an independent  
path:

**8...♖e4**

This deserves some attention. Black is trying  
to play in the spirit of the Stonewall.

I do not believe 8...b6 is a serious option.  
9.cxd5! ♖xd5 (After 9...exd5 10.♙f4! c5  
11.♖c3 ♙b7 12.♖fd1 White gets a favourable  
version of the Queen's Indian, as the d5-  
pawn will soon become a serious target.) The  
simplest is 10.e4 ♖b4 11.♙xb4 ♙xb4 12.a3  
♙e7 13.♖c3 ♙b7 14.♖ad1 and White has an  
edge with his extra space.

**9.♙f4 c6**



Surprisingly, I discovered a huge number of games from this position: it even occurred in the 1963 World Championship match between Petrosian and Botvinnik. Black's idea is to play in Stonewall style with ...f5 and often even ...g5.

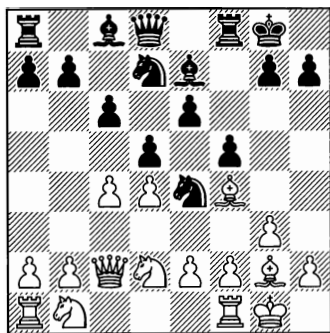
### 10.♘f2

This looks like the best way to fight for an advantage.

At first I was very optimistic about the natural 10.♘c3, but then Black has the strong 10...g5! (after 10...f5 White is just in time to arrange his pieces well: 11.♙ad1 g5 12.♙c1 ♖h8 13.♘e1± Levin – Karpman, Lvov 1988). 11.♙c1 f5 12.b3 ♙f6 13.♙b2 ♗e7 14.e3 ♗g7 Black had a solid position in Rogers – Papaioannou, Agios Nikolaos 1995.

### 10...♘xd2

The alternative is:  
10...f5



White should play:

11.♘xe4! fxe4 12.♘d2

The arising position is clearly favourable for White, thanks to his positional idea of f2-f3, breaking up Black's pawn structure in the centre and thus creating a clear target: the e6-pawn.

12...♙f6

Or 12...♙g5 13.♙xg5 ♗xg5 14.♗c3 ♘f6

15.f3 exf3 16.♘xf3 ♗h5 17.♘e5!± with a clear positional edge because of Black's passive light-squared bishop, Tukmakov – Boric, Pula 2000.

13.♙d6

13.♙ad1!± might be an interesting alternative.

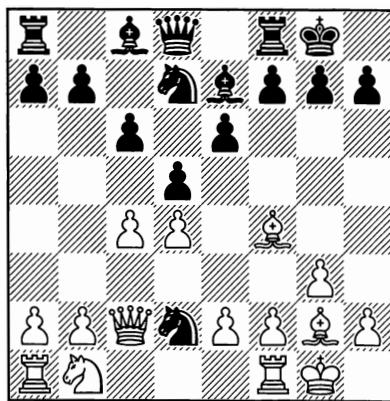
13...♗f7 14.e3 e5

15.f3 was coming next, so Black starts his activity, but White appears to be better prepared for the opening of the position.

15.♗b3 exd4 16.cxd5 cxd5 17.♗xd5 ♘b6

18.♗c5±

White is clearly better, as Black's e4-pawn is falling, Kaidanov – Benjamin, USA (ch) 1993.



### 11.♘xd2

White is ready to carry out the thematic e4-advance with a clear advantage, so Black has to prevent it.

11...g5 12.♙e3 f5 13.f3

And now there have been two games:

### 13...♗f7

The other game continued:

13...♙d6 14.♙f2 ♘f6

Now Black's idea is to play 15...g4, which would prevent White's e4-advance, so White has to rush with:

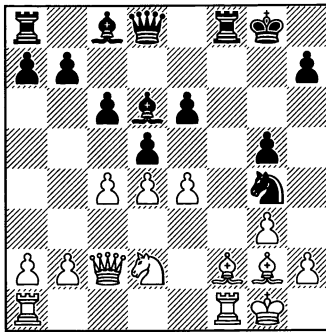


15.e4 fxe4

Black can choose a different type of pawn structure by means of 15...dxe4 16.fxe4 d4g4 17.d4f3 (less convincing is 17.exf5 exf5 18.c5 e7 19.c4+ g7 20.d5 dxf2 21.fxf2 cxd5 22.fxd5 c7 23.d3 f4 with double-edged play) 17...f4 18.e5 e7 19.h3 dxf2 20.fxf2± and White's chances are preferable, due to the passivity of Black's bishops.

16.fxe4 d4g4

This far we have been following a game between two very experienced grandmasters, Tukmakov – Cifuentes Parada, Wijk aan Zee 1992. Now simply:



17.d3!N

This would retain White's advantage, thanks to Black's permanent problem – the passive light-squared bishop.

One possible line runs:

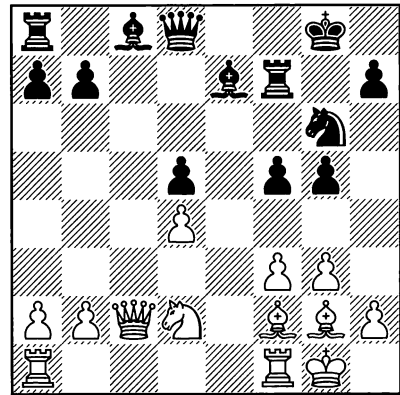
17...g7 18.c2 dxf2 19.fxf2 fxf2 20.fxf2 dxc4 21.d2 b5 22.e5

White will regain the pawn (on c6), and be better due to the weakened position of Black's king.

14.f2 d8 15.e4 d6

This position was reached in Lautier – Bareev, Dortmund 1995. I believe White has an interesting idea at his disposal.

16.exf5 exf5 17.cxd5 cxd5



18.f4!?

This changes the game's character.

18...gxf4 19.c3b3

It seems to me that the change in the position favours White. I will give a plausible continuation:

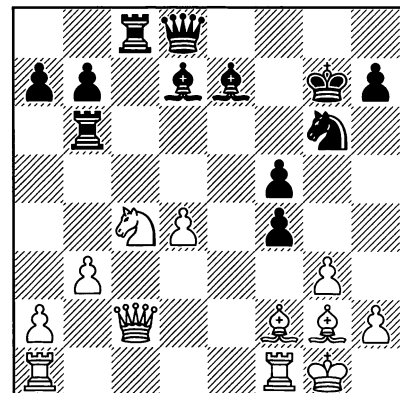
19...f6

Black cannot defend the pawn with 19...e6, as after 20.fae1 d7 21.fxe6! fxe6 22.fxd5 f6 23.fxb7± White still has an extra pawn.

20.fxd5+ g7 21.fg2 f6 22.c2

22.f3 fxb2 23.d4 f6 24.f3 is also quite interesting when the vulnerability of Black's rook offers White good compensation.

22...d7 23.d4 f6 24.b3±

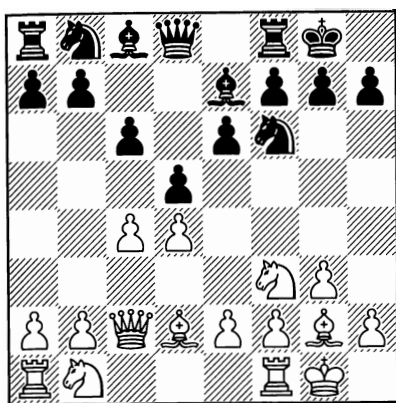


White's chances seem preferable, as Black's king is slightly exposed.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 ♖b4†  
5.♙d2 ♜e7 6.♙g2 0-0 7.0-0)

**B2) 7...c6 8.♞c2**

Another popular option is 8.♙f4, but 8.♞c2 makes good use of the 'extra' tempo and is thus our choice.



Now there are a couple of options. Staying flexible is once again the most popular, but another common move order is **B21) 8...♘bd7**, though **B22) 8...b6** should be considered the main move.

8...♘e4 9.♙f4 ♘d7 just transposes to the line examined before via 7...♘bd7 and 8...♘e4.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 ♖b4†  
5.♙d2 ♜e7 6.♙g2 0-0 7.0-0 c6 8.♞c2)

**B21) 8...♘bd7**

Now I believe White should begin by relocating the bishop to f4:

**9.♙f4**

Another popular move order is 9.♞d1,

but then Black can try 9...♘e4 followed by ...f5 and Black gets a favourable version of his 'Stonewall-type' idea, as White's rook is obviously misplaced on d1.

Black's main move is 9...b6, which we are going to examine via a different move order: 8...b6 and 9...♘bd7. Black also has two other options at his disposal:

**9...a5**

This move recently became quite fashionable after Topalov employed it during his World Championship match against Kramnik in Elista 2006. The second option is:

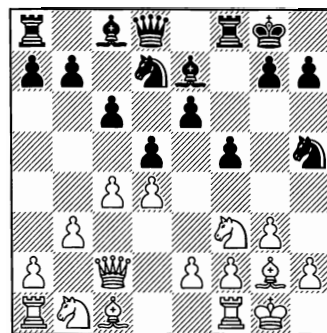
**9...♘h5 10.♙c1**

Strangely enough, White's dark-squared bishop is better placed on c1 than on d2.

**10...f5**

An equally common alternative is 10...♘hf6, but then after 11.♘bd2 the play transposes to a line that has been examined before.

**11.b3**



In general we have a typical Stonewall position with maybe one difference: Black's knight is strangely placed on h5. I have decided not to study this position in depth, as in my opinion White always has a small but quite stable advantage in Stonewall positions and I do not see any improvements for Black here compared with a normal Stonewall.

Also, I believe the probability of facing the line is very low, as if Black wanted to play a Stonewall-type position, he could have done so via a normal Dutch move-order. The only interesting opportunity Black has at his disposal, thanks to his knight on h5, is:

11...g5 12.e3

I also believe there is nothing wrong with White carrying out his main positional idea: the trade of dark-squared bishops by means of 12.♖a3 g4 13.♘e1±.

The text is a subtle move that leads to very complicated play:

12...g4 13.♘e5 ♖xe5 14.dxe5 ♘g7

It still seems to me that White is better after:

15.♘c3 h5 16.♖b2 h4 17.♙ad1 ♖e8 18.f3±

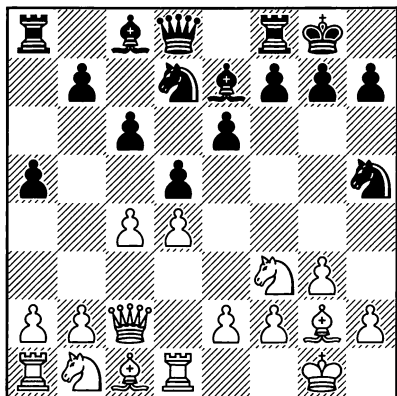
Black was rather passive in Bareev – Balashov, Russia (ch) 1996.

We will follow Kramnik's move:

## 10.♙d1 ♘h5

It is hard to understand the logic behind two moves on different sides of the board, 9...a5 and 10...♘h5, but after Black's next move it will become clear.

## 11.♖c1



## 11...b5

This is a relatively new concept: before playing ...f5 Black intends to clarify the situation on the queenside. For example, if 12.c5 he can successfully play 12...f5 without worrying about his queenside.

Black has also tried 11...♘hf6 12.♘bd2 b5 but White can claim an advantage with 13.c5! as the thematic e2-e4 advance cannot be stopped. 13...♖e8 14.e4 ♘xe4 15.♘xe4 dxe4 16.♖xe4 ♘f6 17.♖c2± In Marin – Pogorelov, Barcelona 1994, White had a typical positional advantage due to Black's problems with the light-squared bishop.

Again 11...f5 12.b3 is slightly better for White.

## 12.♘e5

I believe this is White's only way to fight for an opening advantage. In the event of 12.cxd5 cxd5 13.e4 dxe4 14.♖xe4 ♖b8 Black is fine, as was proved in the game Radjabov – Topalov, Wijk aan Zee 2007, where the Bulgarian Grandmaster improved on his famous game against Kramnik.

## 12...♖b7

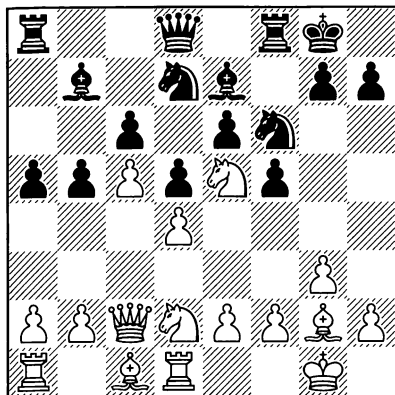
The point behind White's 12th move is that Black has no time for 12...♘xe5 13.dxe5 bxc4?, as after 14.g4± the knight is trapped on h5.

## 13.c5

White has also tried 13.♘xd7 ♖xd7 14.c5 f5 15.♘d2 ♖c7 16.♘f3 ♖f6, Gelfand – Kamsky, Sochi 2008. And here, as was correctly pointed out by the Russian Grandmaster Lysyi, White should have played 17.♖c3, retaining some advantage thanks to the positional idea ♖e3 followed by ♘e5. Nevertheless, I believe it is more promising for White to keep both pairs of knights.

## 13...f5 14.♘d2 ♘hf6

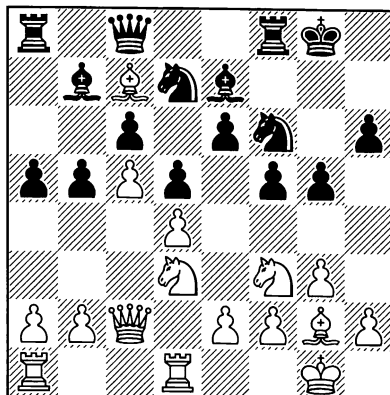
If 14...♗xe5 15.dxe5± White has a clear plan of strengthening his position by transferring his knight to d4. Black's position remains sound but very passive.



18.♙c7

With the following idea:

18...♖c8



15.♗d3

Now is the proper moment to remove the knight from the centre, as Black was threatening to exchange it, followed by ...♗d7.

15...♖e8

Defending against a possible ♗f4 attacking the e6-pawn.

16.♗f3 h6

This is Miroshnichenko – Maciej, Halkidiki 2008. Another type of position would have arisen after 16...♗e4 17.♗fe5 ♗xe5 18.dxe5± and once again we have a position that is more pleasant to play for White, even though Black has a solid set-up.

17.♙f4N

Why not this? Was White concerned about:

17...g5

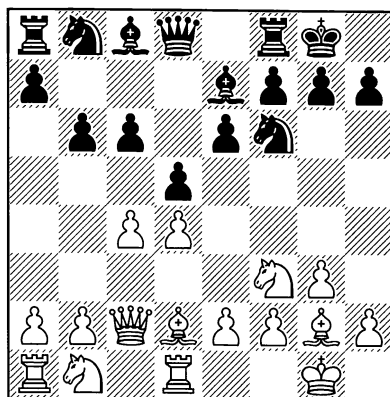
The position after 17...♗e4 18.♗fe5 ♗xe5 19.♙xe5 looks very pleasant for White, as now he can confidently make all the necessary preparations for the e2-e4 advance. But White can calmly play:

19.♙d6! ♙xd6 20.cxd6 ♗e4 21.♗c5 ♗xd6 22.♗xe6 ♖f6 23.♗c5 ♗xc5 24.♖xc5

White has a clear positional advantage. Also 24.dxc5!?, followed by 25.♗d4, might be an interesting alternative.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♗f3 ♗f6 4.g3 ♙b4† 5.♙d2 ♙e7 6.♙g2 0-0 7.0-0 c6 8.♖c2)

B22) 8...b6 9.♙d1



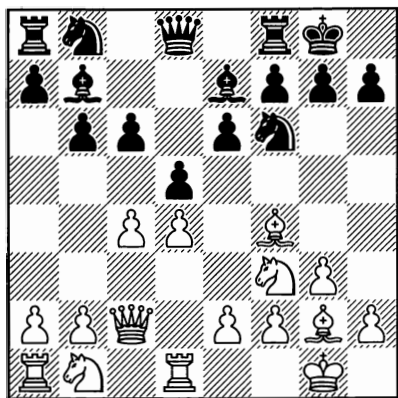
Black should be very careful how he develops

in this position. Lasker said that we should develop knights before bishops, but I am sure he was not talking about this position.

Black can choose between three lines. The first is an independent line, while the second line is more a poor execution of the third line than anything else. Personally, I would prefer the third and more active option, but there is nothing wrong in principle with putting the bishop on b7. The options are: **B221) 9...♗b7**, **B222) 9...♞bd7** and **B223) 9...♞a6**.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♟f3 ♞f6 4.g3 ♞b4†  
5.♞d2 ♞e7 6.♞g2 0-0 7.0-0 c6 8.♞c2 b6  
9.♞d1)

**B221) 9...♞b7 10.♞f4**



**10...♞bd7**

There is also

**10...♞a6**

This has often been played by Tiviakov. Now I like the subtle move:

**11.a3**

This obviously restricts Black's knight.

The point behind Tiviakov's move can be seen in the following line: 11.♞c3 dxc4 12.♞e5 ♞d5 13.♞xc4 ♞xf4 14.gxf4 ♞b4! Now the knight comes into the play with tempo. 15.♞d2 ♞d5 Black had normal play in V. Mikhalevski – Tiviakov, Hoogeveen 2000.

**11...♞c8**

Black is not ready to open up the centre, as was clearly proven in the following encounter: 11...c5?! 12.♞c3 cxd4 13.♞xd4 ♞c8 (the natural 13...♞c8 is strongly answered by 14.cxd5 ♞xd5 15.♞db5!±) 14.cxd5 ♞xd5 15.♞xd5 ♞xd5 16.♞xd5 (16.♞c6± was equally strong) 16...♞xc2 17.♞xc2 exd5 This is V. Mikhalevski – Vasovski, Ohrid 2001, and now White could simply be greedy with 18.♞xd5 ♞f6 19.♞b1 with a safe extra pawn.

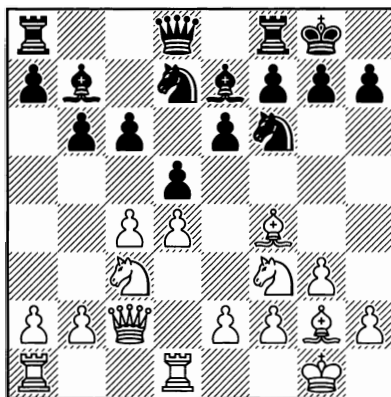
**12.♞c3 dxc4**

In the event of 12...c5 White gets a favourable position with: 13.cxd5 exd5 (13...♞xd5 14.dxc5 ♞xc5 15.e4!± wins material) 14.♞h3 ♞a8 15.♞ac1±

**13.♞e5 ♞d5 14.♞xc4 ♞xf4 15.gxf4 ♞c7 16.e3 ♞d5**

We have reached a position that will be in the note to the 14th move on page 164.

**11.♞c3**



Now Black has three serious options, **B2211) 11...♞c8**, **B2212) 11...dxc4** and **B2213) 11...♞h5**.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♟f3 ♞f6 4.g3 ♞b4†  
5.♞d2 ♞e7 6.♞g2 0-0 7.0-0 c6 8.♞c2 b6  
9.♞d1 ♞b7 10.♞f4 ♞bd7 11.♞c3)

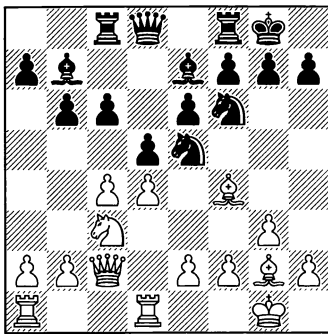
**B2211) 11...♙c8 12.♘e5**

Black is doing fine after 12.b3 c5.

Now we will examine three of Black's options:

**12...♘h5**

Inferior is 12...b5?! 13.♘xd7 (Also 13.c5 ♘xe5 14.♙xe5 ♘g4 15.♙f4 f5 16.b4! a6 [16...a5 is met strongly by 17.a4! and play on the queenside opens in White's favour] 17.a4 ♙a8 18.♙a3 ♙d7 19.♘a2 g5 20.♙c1 and White had a clear positional advantage in Avrukh – Sargissian, Gibraltar 2005) 13...♘xd7 14.c5 e5 15.dxe5 ♘xc5 16.♙e3!± In Razuvaev – Rajkovic, Yugoslavia 1991, White had very easy play with ♙ac1, f4 and so on.

**12...♘xe5****13.dxe5 ♘d7**

This looks very principled, but White has an initiative after:

**14.cxd5 cxd5 15.e4 dxe4**

There is also 15...d4 with the same idea that we will examine with ...♘bd7 and ...♙a6. 16.♙xd4 ♙c5 17.♙dd1 It is important to keep d2 free for the queen. 17...♙b4 (if 17...♙c6 18.♙d2 ♙c7 White has 19.♘d5! exd5 20.exd5 with a decisive advantage) In the game Bugalski – Mallek, Solec Kuj 2003, White now missed the strong 18.♙a4!

♙xc3 19.♙xd7 ♙e8 20.♙d1 ♙c6 21.♙xa7 ♙xb2 22.♙b1 and White is clearly better. For example, 22...♙d8 23.♙g4 ♙d4 24.♙g5! also threatening ♙f6.

16.♙xe4 ♙xe4 17.♙xe4 ♙c7 18.♘b5 ♘c5 19.♙f3 ♙b8 20.b4!

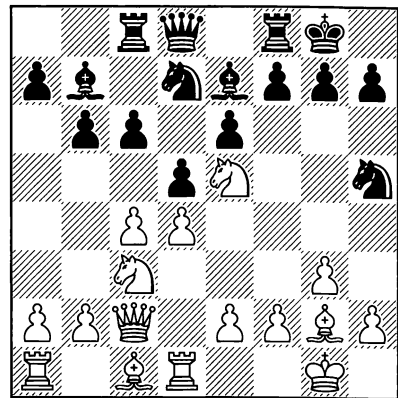
Driving away Black's knight from c5.

20...♘a6 21.♘d6±

White obviously had the initiative in V. Mikhalevski – Vescovi, Sao Paulo 2002

**13.♙c1**

I do not like placing the bishop on e3, as then White has no chance of playing e2-e4. If 13.♙e3 Black usually replies 13...♘hf6 with good results.

**13...f5**

Surprisingly, Black faces concrete problems. After:

**13...♘hf6**

White is ready for:

**14.e4**

Now the play continues:

**14...dxc4 15.♘xc4 b5 16.♘e3 ♙b6**

In general I believe White is better in this position, thanks to his space advantage.

**17.b3 ♙fe8**

Recently Black has tried another set-up, 17...♙f8 18.♙b2 ♘f8, but it appeared to be very passive and White got a clear advantage

in a very convincing way: 19.a4 a6 20.♖e2 ♘g6 21.h4! h6 22.axb5 axb5 (if 22...cxb5 23.h5 ♘f8 24.e5 ♘d6 25.♙e4± White has a clear positional advantage) 23.e5!± Vaganian – Gyimesi, Antwerp 2008.

#### 18.♙b2 ♙f8

This position was reached in Filippov – Kacheishvili, Golden Sands 2000. Now was a suitable moment for:

#### 19.e5 ♘d5 20.♖e2 a6

White is ready for 20...♘xe3?! 21.♖xe3 c5 as in this case after 22.d5! he gets a clear advantage.

#### 21.♖ac1

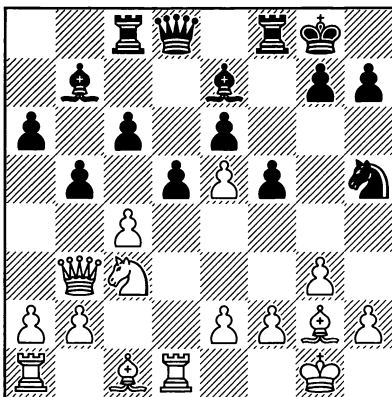
White has a very pleasant position, while Black is unable to carry out the thematic c5-advance.

#### 14.♖a4! ♘xe5 15.dxe5 a6 16.♖b3

Black queenside appears to be vulnerable: White intends to play ♙e3, attacking the b-pawn. Targeting the knight with ♙f3 might also be unpleasant in some cases.

#### 16...b5

And here White has a strong blow:



#### 17.e4!

I found this move as long ago as 2004.

Less convincing is 17.cxd5 cxd5 18.♙e3, Van Wely – Spassky, France 2002.

#### 17...fxe4

The point behind White's idea is that 17...dxc4 is impossible in view of 18.♖xd8 cxb3 19.♖d7! and Black loses one of his bishops.

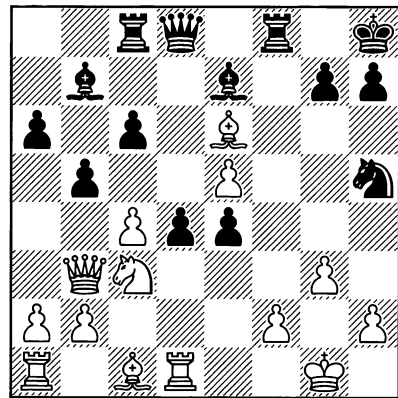
#### 18.♙h3! ♙h8

In the event of 18...♖d7 White crashes through with 19.cxd5 cxd5 20.♘xd5 ♙xd5 21.♖xd5!.

#### 19.♙xc6 d4

This position occurred in Skoberne – Predojevic, Plovdiv 2008.

It is very important that 19...♙c5 does not work due to 20.♘xe4 dxe4 21.♖xd8 ♙xf2† 22.♙g2 ♖cx8 23.♙g4!+.



Here White should have played:

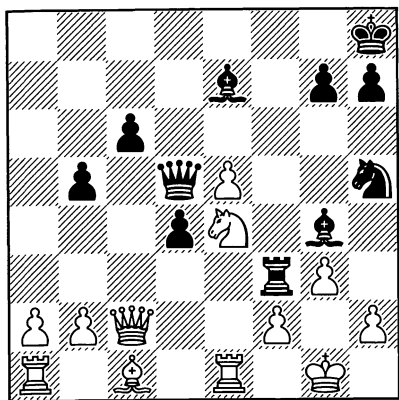
#### 20.♙xc8!N

White should not fear the weakness of his light squares, as Black has no time to exploit it.

#### 20...♙xc8

After 20...♖xc8 21.♖xd4 ♙c5 White simply returns the exchange with 22.♙e3 ♙xd4 23.♙xd4 c5 24.♙e3± with a clear advantage.

21.♘xe4 ♙g4 22.cxb5 axb5 23.♖e1 ♖f3 24.♖c2 ♖d5

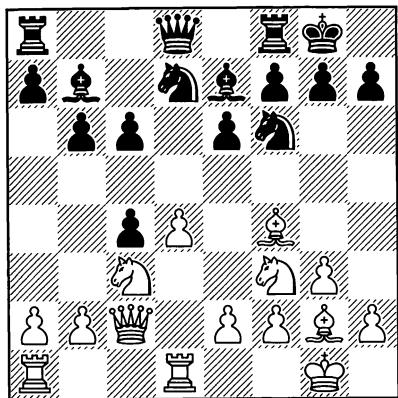


25.♙g5!+–

Black has no compensation for the exchange and pawn.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 ♙b4† 5.♙d2 ♙e7 6.♙g2 0–0 7.0–0 c6 8.♚c2 b6 9.♞d1 ♙b7 10.♙f4 ♘bd7 11.♘c3)

B2212) 11...dxc4



12.♘d2 ♘d5

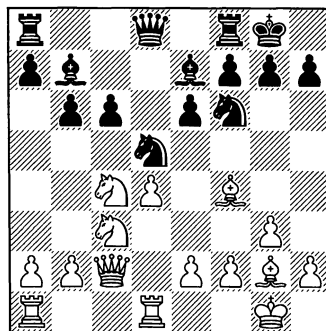
Otherwise there is no point in Black's previous move.

13.♘xc4 ♘xf4

Black has also tried:

13...♘f6

which seems to be somewhat dubious, as it allows White to keep his dark-squared bishop.



It is not so difficult to find the following improvement:

14.♙c1!N

In two games White tried 14.♙g5 h6 15.♙xf6 ♘xf6 16.e4. I believe that after 16...b5 17.♘e3 ♞c8 as in Van Wely – Tiviakov, Gausdal 1992, perhaps White is slightly better, but the position remains double-edged as Black has his own trump – the bishop pair.

After 14.♙c1 I believe White has a pleasant edge. A sample line:

14...c5 15.dxc5 ♙xc5 16.e4 ♘b4 17.♚e2 ♚e7 17...♚c8 runs into the unpleasant 18.♙g5!.

18.a3 ♘c6 19.e5±

Black is clearly worse.

14.gxf4

This is one of the critical positions in this chapter. It is more important to understand this position, rather than learn concrete variations. First of all, it is important to say that the situation is double-edged and both sides have their trumps. White obviously has a space advantage, his pieces are better coordinated and he has plenty of useful moves. Black is solidly placed without any serious weaknesses. Perhaps only the c6-pawn could be a target, but it is easy to defend.



White should not forget about Black's pair of bishop, as if the position opens up they might become significant.

Maybe I am not objective, but I have a feeling that the position is more pleasant for White, as he has a clear plan: first to strengthen his position with e3, ♖ac1, a3, b4 and then, depending on Black's set-up, to decide whether to open the play with f4-f5 or to continue with positional play.

I would like to examine a few typical examples.

Black usually chooses between 14...♖c7 and 14...♟f6.

I do not believe 14...♖c8 has any independent value because after 15.e3 the play will transpose to one of the aforementioned lines, as Black always places his rook on c8 later on.

#### 14...♖c7

Also possible is:

14...♟f6 15.e3

White should be very careful if he decides to move his f-pawn, as it obviously weakens his control over the dark squares. The game P.H. Nielsen – A. Sokolov, Bundesliga 2004, is a good example: 15.♟e5 ♟d5 16.f5?! and Black could have taken over the initiative with 16...♟d6! 17.♟e4 ♟b8.

15...♟d5

Black's knight is very stable and, more importantly, it restricts the influence of White's light-squared bishop.

16.a3 ♖c8 17.b4

Obviously White should always guard against the c6-c5 advance. For example, in the following encounter White did not play so accurately: 17.♟e5 ♟d6 18.♖ac1 c5, and Black equalized easily in J. Horvath – Yegiazarian, Ljubljana 1995.

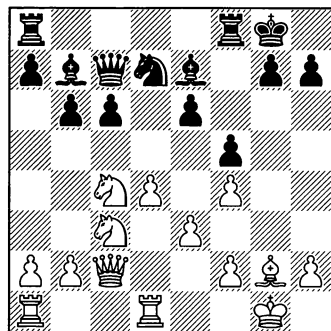
17...♖c7 18.♟e5

Now Black failed to find a reasonable plan and White seized the initiative after:

18...♟d6?! 19.♟e4 ♟e7 20.♖ac1 ♖a8 21.♟g5!  
Van Wely – I. Sokolov, Amsterdam 2001.

#### 15.e3 ♖ac8

Instead, trying to transfer a rook to g6 is positionally dubious: 15...f5!

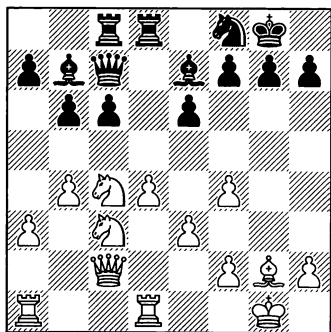


After 16.♟e5! ♟xe5 17.dxe5 Black is doomed to passive defence, due to his weak c6- and e6-pawns.

There is also a plan of transferring Black's knight to the kingside via f8-g6: this has occurred twice in the games of Portisch:

15...♖fd8 16.a3 ♖ac8 17.b4 ♟f8

And here, as I pointed out in *Chess Informant* 82 while commenting on my game against Portisch, this is a suitable moment to play:



18.f5!

18.♙ac1 ♘g6 19.♙h1, as tested in Filippov – Portisch, Warsaw 2005, seems too artificial to me.

18...exf5

White is ready for 18...c5 19.bxc5 bxc5 (also 19...♙xg2 20.♙xg2 bxc5 21.d5 exf5 22.♙xf5 ♘g6 23.♙g1 leads to a clear positional advantage for White, thanks to his strong passed d-pawn) 20.d5 and if 20...♙a6 then White simply plays 21.fxe6 fxe6 (21...♙xc4 runs into 22.exf7† ♙xf7 23.♙a4! and Black's bishop is trapped in the centre of the board) 22.♙a4 ♙xc4 23.♙xc4 ♙e5 24.♘b5! with a large advantage.

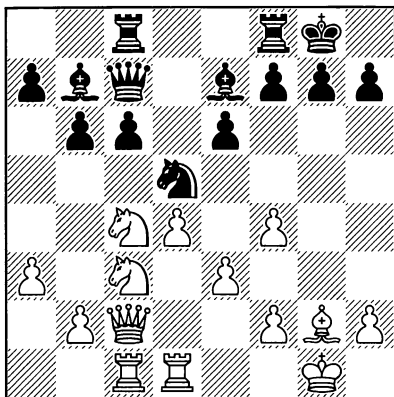
19.♙xf5 ♘g6

Threatening ...♘h4.

20.♙e4! ♙f6 21.♙ac1±

White still has pressure: his likely plan includes f4 followed by ♘e5.

16.♙ac1 ♘f6 17.a3 ♘d5



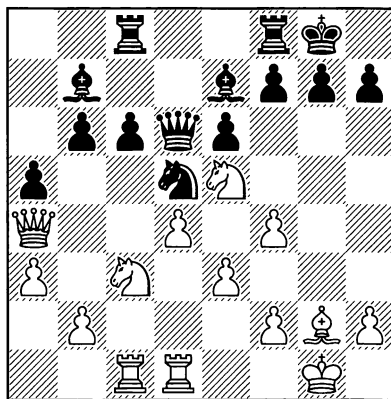
18.♘e5

The play obviously resembles the 14...♘f6 line, but this appears to be an improved version for White, as Black faces concrete problems. For example, White is threatening 19.♘xd5 exd5 20.♙xd5. Black cannot play 18...♙b8 in view of 19.♘d7 winning an exchange, and 18...♙fd8 is also impossible due to 19.♘xd5 exd5 20.♙h3! and Black loses material.

18...♙d6

18...♙d6 19.♙a4! Now White's pressure becomes really annoying. 19...♘xc3 This is obviously a concession. 20.♙xc3 ♙xe5 21.fxe5 f6 22.f4 ♙a8 23.b4± White had a great positional advantage in Lautier – Tiviakov, Mondariz 2000.

19.♘e4 ♙c7 20.♙a4 a5 21.♘c3 ♙d6



22.♙b3! ♙d8 23.♙c2 ♙e7 24.♙dc1±

Black is under serious positional pressure, Laznicka – A. Sokolov, Bundesliga 2008.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 ♙b4† 5.♙d2 ♙e7 6.♙g2 0–0 7.0–0 c6 8.♙c2 b6 9.♙d1 ♙b7 10.♙f4 ♘bd7 11.♘c3)

B2213) 11...♘h5

This is quite a popular move.

12.♙c1 f5

Now this idea is perfectly playable for Black, as he gets a reasonable version of a Stonewall-type position. I believe it is pointless to examine concrete variations here: the key is to understand such positions.

The alternative is:

12...♘hf6 13.b3

Everything is ready for the e4-advance.

13...♞c8 14.e4

Now Black has to make a choice:

a) 14...♘e4 15.♘e4 dxe4 16.♞xe4 Obviously this is slightly better for White, as Black has failed to carry out the thematic ...c5.

b) 14...dxe4

Now it is important to play:

15.♘g5!

Because after 15.♘e4 c5 16.♘xf6† ♕xf6 17.♘g5 ♕xg5 18.♕xb7 ♞c7 19.dxc5 ♕xc1 20.♞axc1 ♞xb7 21.c6 ♞c7 Black should hold the position without any real difficulty.

15...c5

Black has also tried 15...h6 16.♘gxe4 ♘e4 17.♘e4 ♘f6, but White is clearly better after the thematic 18.c5! shutting down Black's light-squared bishop and thus securing an edge, Beliavsky – N. Mitkov, Panormo 2001.

16.dxc5 bxc5

There are other options:

16...♞xc5?! 17.♘gxe4 ♘e4 18.♘e4± is clearly unacceptable for Black.

16...♕xc5 17.♘ce4 ♘e4 18.♕xe4 ♕xe4 19.♞xe4 g6 20.♕b2 ♞xg5 21.♞xd7 White is clearly better, thanks to his control of the d-file and Black's slightly weakened dark squares.

17.♘ce4 ♘e4 18.♕xe4 ♕xe4 19.♞xe4 ♕xg5 20.♕xg5 ♞c7

This was Beliavsky – Ibragimov, Minneapolis 2005, and now 21.♞d3! would have secured control over the d-file, and given a clear advantage.

c) 14...c5

This seems to me to be critical, although Black has usually preferred the other moves. When I had the position in a tournament game I answered with:

15.dxc5

This appeared to be a new move.

Previously White had tried only 15.exd5 exd5 16.♕b2 (after 16.♕f4 we would reach a well known theoretical position which has been played many times) 16...♞c7? (Black immediately went astray; it would be interesting to see White's idea after the correct 16...♞e8.) 17.cxd5 ♘xd5 18.♘xd5 ♕xd5 19.dxc5 ♕xf3 20.♕xf3± White's bishop pair gave him a clear advantage in De Boer – Tisdall, Wijk aan Zee 1997.

15...dxc4

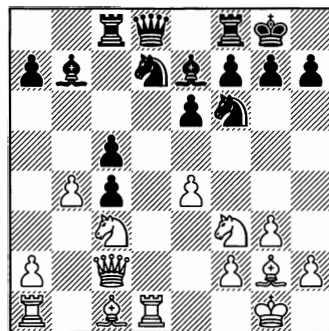
In the event of 15...dxe4 16.♘g5! we reach a favourable position for White, which was already examined after 14...dxe4.

16.b4!

This idea occasionally appears in Queen's Indian structures, and in this case it is the only way to fight for the advantage.

16.e5? does not work: 16...♕xf3! 17.♕xf3 ♘xe5 18.♞xd8 ♘xf3† 19.♔h1 (the point of Black's idea is that White cannot play 19.♔g2?? ♘e1†) 19...♞fxd8 and Black is better.

16...bxc5

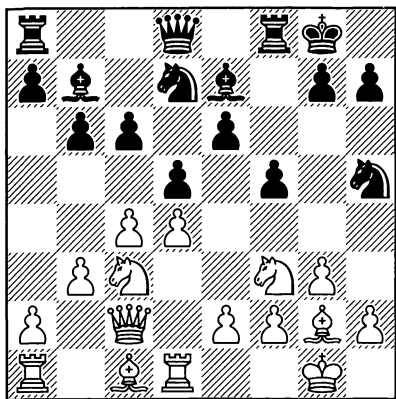


17.b5

Finally we have reached a very interesting position from the game Avrukh – Neverov, Dresden 2007. Apparently White's position is slightly preferable, as he has a clear plan: firstly, regain the pawn (the c4-pawn will

be easy to collect) and then White has good chances of creating a passed pawn on the queenside.

### 13.b3



White needs to rearrange his pieces, as the knight is clearly misplaced on c3 when facing the Stonewall. White's plan could include the following set-up: ♙b2, e3, ♘e2-f4-d3 and finally ♜f5.

### 13...♞c8

Black played more aggressively in the following game: 13...♙d6 14.e3 ♞e7 15.♙b2 g5, but after 16.♘e2 ♞g7 17.♘c1 ♘hf6 18.♘d3 ♘e4 19.♜fe5 White had achieved a desirable set-up. After the clear positional mistake 19...a5? White increased his advantage with 20.♘xd7 ♞xd7 21.c5! ♙c7 22.cxb6 ♙xb6 23.♞ac1±, Miton – Izoria, Yerevan 2000.

It makes no sense to play:

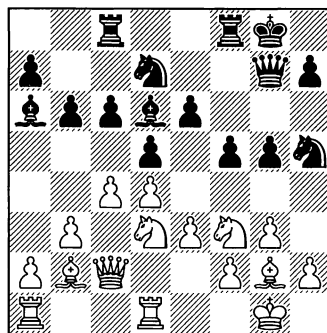
13...♙a6?! 14.♙b2 ♙d6

Obviously 14...dxc4? is never the right idea in a Stonewall, as it completely destroys Black's pawn structure, leaving weaknesses everywhere. White would reply 15.♘d2 regaining the pawn.

15.e3 ♞e7 16.♘e2 g5 17.♘c1

This is an idea to remember: if Black takes control of the f4-square, White can always transfer his knight to d3 via c1.

17...♞ac8 18.♘d3 ♞g7



### 19.a4!

Now it is obvious that Black's light-squared bishop is misplaced on a6: White positional idea of a4-a5 will be quick and very unpleasant.

19...♙b8 20.a5 ♙b7 21.a6 ♙a8 22.b4 dxc4 23.♞xc4

Black had been completely outplayed in the game Bischoff – Stangl, Altensteig 1993.

14.♙b2 ♙d6 15.e3 ♞e7 16.♘e2 ♘hf6 17.♘f4

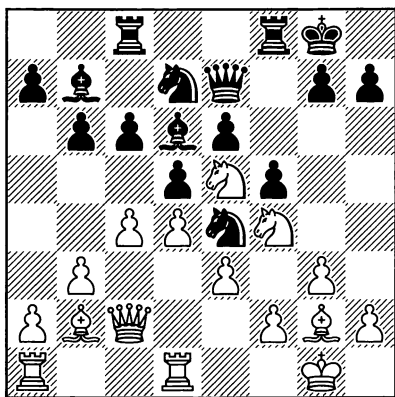
Both sides have played all the "obligatory useful" moves, and now the play becomes more concrete.

### 17...♘e4

17...c5 looks to be a natural move, but after 18.♘g5! Black has to give up his dark-squared bishop: 18...♙xf4 19.exf4 ♘e4 20.♞e2 and White's bishops guarantee a long-term advantage.

### 18.♘e5

The position looks complex, yet somehow in practice White has managed to score 100%, which subtly suggests that it is easier to play for White.



### 18...dxe5

We will also consider 18...g5 and 18...c5:

18...g5 19.dfd3 ♖g7

White starts his thematic play with:

20.a4!

In the following game Black ran into trouble very quickly.

20...dxe5?

Black should probably avoid making this capture.

21.dxe5 ♗e7 22.a5 ♘c5

In the event of 22...b5 23.a6! ♗a8 24.c5 Black is strategically lost, as for the rest of the game he will be playing without his light-squared bishop.

23.axb6 axb6 24.♖a7 ♖a8

This was the game Franco Alonso – Pogorelov, Mondariz 1999. White could have decided the game at once with:

25.♖xb7! ♘xb7 26.cxd5 cxd5 27.♖c6

Followed by ♖xe6† when the d5-pawn is also dropping.

Returning to the main diagram position, perhaps Black should try 18...c5N. In that case White should play 19.f3 ♘ef6 20.♖e2 ♗fd8 21.♘fd3± and his position looks more pleasant, as I believe Black will suffer because of the weak e5-square.

### 19.dxe5 ♗b8 20.a4

Also possible is 20.h4 preventing ...g5, which was White's choice in V. Mikhalevski – Broomfield, Wales 2005. In fact ...g7-g5 is a rather double-edged idea, as it weakens Black's king, so perhaps White should allow Black to play this move.

### 20...g5

In the event of 20...a5 the pin on the a3-f8 diagonal is very unpleasant and after 21.♗a3 ♘c5 22.♖c3 White is clearly better, as pointed out by Marin in *Chess Informant* 61.

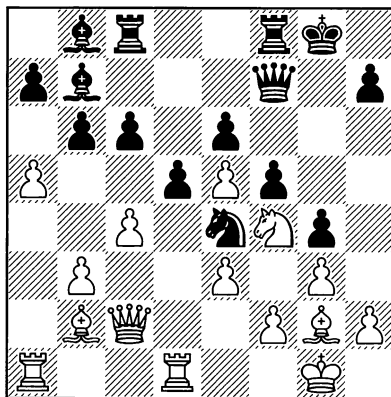
### 21.♘d3 g4

This stops f2-f3, but on the other hand Black weakens the complex of squares near his own king, and allows White's knight a fine outpost on f4.

### 22.♘f4 ♖f7

Black intends to meet 23.h3 with 23...h5.

### 23.a5



White clearly had the initiative in Marin – Pogorelov, Andorra 1994.

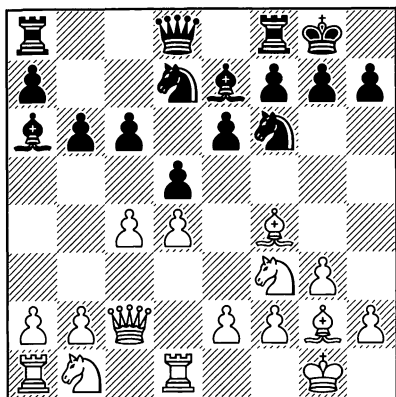
(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 ♗b4† 5.♗d2 ♗e7 6.♗g2 0-0 7.0-0 c6 8.♖c2 b6 9.♗d1)

**B222) 9...♘bd7 10.♙f4 ♙a6**

Black has here tried two moves:

10...♙b7 would obviously transpose to the 9...♙b7 line.

Now White has an important tactical resource:

**11.♘e5!**

Not wasting any time on slow moves such as 11.b3 or 11.♘bd2.

**11...♘xe5**

This is Black's main continuation. We will also examine 11...♙c8 and 11...♙c8:

**11...♙c8**

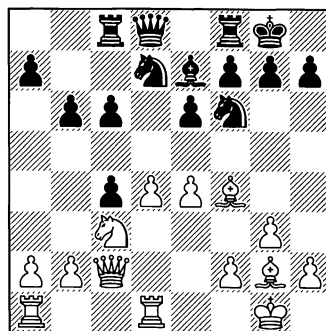
Now the best move is the most flexible one. 12.♘c3

Less convincing is 12.cxd5 cxd5 13.♘c6 ♙b5 14.♘xe7† ♙xe7 15.♘c3 h6 and in Kengis – Kulaots, Liepaya 2004, Black had a reasonable game. The bishop pair is not a dominant factor because the position is closed.

Absolutely unclear is 12.♙a4 ♘b8! and Black has the strong idea of playing b6-b5, Tukmakov – Korotylev, Geneva 2001.

After 12.♘c3, 12...♘xe5 13.dxe5 ♘d7 14.cxd5 cxd5 15.e4 would transpose to our main line of 11...♘xe5.

a) 12...♙xc4 13.♘xc4 dxc4 14.e4



Black has won a pawn, but White has excellent compensation thanks to his pair of bishops. The following game is a good example of how White should play:

14...♙b4 15.a4

White is threatening 16.♘a2 regaining the pawn.

15...a5 16.♘a2 b5 17.♘xb4 axb4 18.b3! cxb3 19.♙xb3 ♙e7 20.axb5 cxb5 21.♙d2 ♙c4 22.♙ab1 ♙fc8

The d4-pawn is taboo: 22...♙xd4? 23.♙xb4 ♙xd1† 24.♙xd1 ♘c5 25.e5 ♘fd7 26.♙a3 ♙c8 27.♙b7+– and Black loses material.

23.♙xb4 ♙e8 24.♙d6!±

The b5-pawn will also be lost, Damljanovic – Abramovic, Pancevo 2006.

b) Just as I was working on this line, there appeared the following idea:

12...♘h5

White has to play:

13.♙c1N

I believe 13.cxd5 is an obvious concession and Black has a fine game after 13...cxd5 14.♙a4 ♘xf4 15.gxf4 ♘b8!, as was proved in Ruck – Almasi, Hungary (ch) 2008.

After 13.♙c1 I assume Black's idea was to continue with:

13...♘hf6

Now Black is already threatening to capture on e5 followed by ...♟d7, therefore White has to react quickly:

14.♟a4

In case of 14.e4 Black simply answers with 14...dxc4 and after 15.♟a4 he has the strong 15...♙b5! 16.♟xb5 cxb5 17.♟xb5 a6 18.♟a4 b5 19.♟c2 ♟xe5 20.dxe5 ♟d7 and White is already worse.

Now Black has two options:

14...♙xc4

The main alternative is 14...♟b8 15.b3 and now 15...b5 may look very promising for Black... 16.♟xb5! But White has this very unexpected piece sacrifice (and not 16.cxb5? cxb5 17.♟xb5 ♟b6 18.♟a3 ♙xe2 and Black has the advantage). 16...cxb5 17.cxb5 ♙b7 18.♟xa7 ♟c7 (If 18...♟c7 19.♙d2 [only not 19.b6? ♟d7 20.♟xd7 ♟xd7 and Black takes over the initiative] 19...♟c8 20.♟dc1 ♙d6 21.a4± and it is difficult to imagine how Black can stop the pawns.) 19.♙f4 ♙d6 20.a4 ♟e4 21.♟dc1 ♟e7 (21...♟c3 is answered by the subtle 22.♟c2 ♟e7 23.♟ac1 with a clear advantage) 22.♙xe4 dxe4 23.a5+— White's pawns look unstoppable.

14...♙b7 is met with 15.♟xa7.

15.♟xc6 b5

15...♟e8 does not work because of 16.b3 b5 17.♟a6 and Black cannot avoid losing material.

16.♟a6

This is obviously the critical continuation.

After 16.♟xc4 bxc4 17.♟xd8 ♟fxd8 Black is by no means worse.

16...♟xc6 17.♟xc6 b4

Clearly in White's favour is 17...♟a5 18.a4! b4 19.♟b5 ♙xe2 20.♟e1 ♙xb5 21.♟xb5±.

18.♟b1

18.b3 ♟b8! is clearly not the right path.

18...♙xe2

Black has a pawn and the better pawn structure in return for being an exchange down, nevertheless it is not enough and I

prefer White's position.

18...♟b6 19.♙f3± would not help either.

19.♟e1 ♟b8

White is also better after 19...♟c8 20.♟xc8 ♟xc8 21.a3± or 19...♟b8 20.♟xe2 (20.♙f4 is good enough as well) 20...♟c8 21.♟xe6! ♟xc6 22.♟xc6 and the two rooks are clearly stronger than Black's queen.

20.♟c2 ♙a6

I do not see any point in provoking a4 with 20...♙b5 21.a4 ♙a6 22.♙e3 ♟b6 23.a5 ♟b7 24.♟c1 and White is better.

21.♙f4

Less clear is 21.♙e3 ♟b6 when 22.♟c1 ♟c8! is double-edged.

21...♟b6 22.♟c1!?

This temporary pawn sacrifice allows White to activate his pieces.

22...♟xd4 23.♙e3 ♟e5 24.♟d2 ♟bd7 25.♟f3 ♟d6

After 25...♟b8 White has the simple and strong 26.♟c7 with the following point: 26...♙d6 27.♟xb8 ♙xb8 28.♙d2! and the b4-pawn is falling.

26.♟a4 ♙c4 27.♟d2!?

White is also better after the natural 27.b3 ♙d3 28.♟c6 ♟b8 29.♟xa7 ♟xa7 30.♙xa7 ♙b5 31.♟c2.

27...♙d3 28.♟xa7 e5 29.♟b3

Black has no compensation for the exchange.

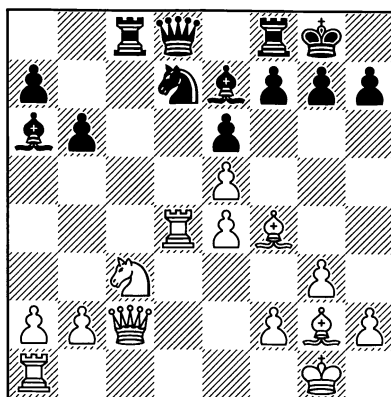
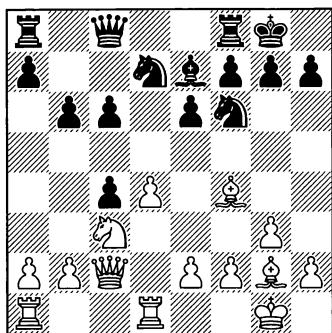
11...♟c8 12.♟c3

Black is fine after 12.cxd5 cxd5 13.♟c6 ♙c5!? 14.♟xc5 bxc5 15.♟e7† ♟h8 16.♟xc8 ♟fxc8=.

12...♙xc4

Black has also tried the thematic 12...♟h5 13.♙e3 ♟hf6 but after 14.♟ac1 ♟xe5 15.dxe5 ♟g4 16.♙f4 ♙xc4 17.h3 ♟h6 18.e4 White has excellent compensation for the pawn, thanks to Black's poor knight on the rim, Sambuev – Smirnov, Russia (ch) 2003.

13.♘xc4 dxc4



14.♘e4

14.e4 b5 is less clear to me. White has compensation, but having two unchallenged bishops is of course a different story.

14...b5 15.♘d6 ♙xd6 16.♙xd6 ♞d8 17.a4

White's strong bishops provide excellent compensation for the pawn, Wojtkiewicz – Zubarev, Moscow 2002.

12.dxe5 ♘d7

Clearly inferior is 12...♘h5?! 13.♙e3 f5 14.cxd5 cxd5 15.♘c3± as Black's knight is badly placed on h5, Tkachiev – Tukmakov, Porec 1998.

13.cxd5 cxd5 14.e4 ♞c8

Just bad is 14...g5? 15.♙e3 ♘xe5 16.exd5 ♞c8 17.♘c3± and Black has no compensation for his weakened king position, Wojtkiewicz – Kustar, Sioux Falls 2000.

15.♘c3 d4

Black sacrifices a pawn, hoping to obtain sufficient compensation based on White's doubled pawns in the centre.

In the event of 15...dxe4 16.♞a4! ♙d3 17.♘xe4 ♘c5 18.♞xa7 Black loses a pawn without any compensation.

16.♞xd4

16...♞c7 17.♞ad1 ♞fd8

17...♘xe5? allows 18.♞a4! ♙b7 19.♞d7+.

18.h4

It is important to prevent Black's idea of g7-g5.

18...♘b8

This is Black's most recent try in this variation.

The alternative is:

18...h6 19.h5 ♘c5

There is also 19...♙c5 20.♞d4d2 ♙e7 and instead of repeating moves with 21.♞d4, as happened in Lastin – Yemelin, Sochi 2004, White can play the useful 21.a3. Then Black must reply 21...♘c5 22.♞xd8† ♞xd8 23.♙f1 and we have more or less the same type of position as in our main line.

20.♙f1

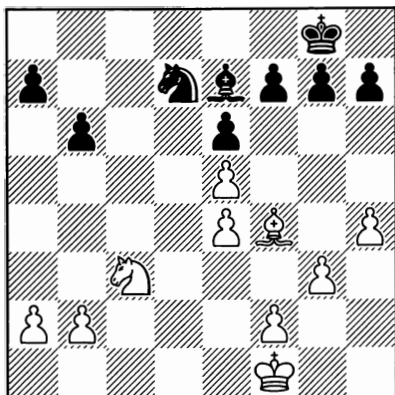
Also quite convincing was 20.♞xd8† ♞xd8 21.♙f1 ♙xf1 22.♙xf1 a6 23.♞xd8† ♞xd8 24.♙e3 ♘d7 25.f4 ♞c7 26.♞d3± and White had a healthy extra pawn in Miton – Berczes, Budapest 2003.

20...♙g5 21.♙xg5 ♞xd4 22.♞xd4 ♙xf1 23.♙f4 ♙a6 24.♞d1 ♞e7 25.♞d6±

White went on to win convincingly in Tkachiev – Jakovenko, Dresden 2007.



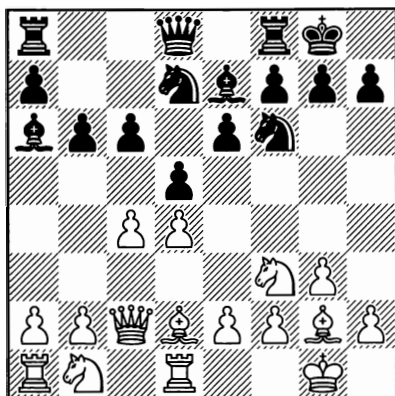
19.♖xd8† ♜xd8 20.♖xd8† ♜xd8 21.♞a4  
♞d7 22.♞xd7 ♜xd7 23.♙f1 ♙xf1 24.♝xf1



Black managed to hold this difficult endgame in Gelfand – Alekseev, Moscow 2008, but a simple headcount should be enough to warn players against repeating this line with Black.

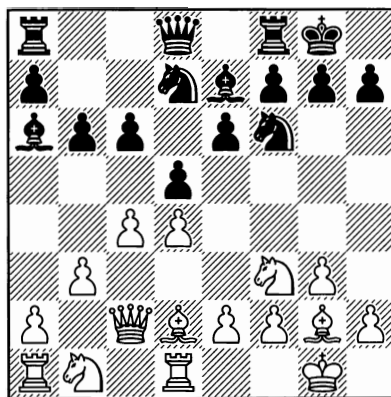
(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 ♙b4†  
5.♙d2 ♙e7 6.♙g2 0-0 7.0-0 c6 8.♞c2 b6  
9.♞d1)

**B223) 9...♙a6**



Recently this has been the most fashionable continuation and in my opinion it is the most critical line.

**10.b3 ♘bd7**



**11.a4!?**

This is not the most popular system against Black's set-up, but it is quite a tricky one.

11.♙f4 is by far White's most popular move in this position, but I predict that 11.a4 will increase in popularity, especially since such great Catalan experts as Kramnik and Gelfand have recently employed it. The main reason why I recommend 11.a4 is that White is trying to justify the position of his dark-squared bishop on d2.

Now we have the options **B2231) 11...♞c8**  
**B2232) 11...♞c8** and **B2233) 11...c5**.

Before we consider these three main options, we should note that Black can try:

**11...♘e4**

The idea to follow up with ...f7-f5 gives the position a Stonewall-look.

**12.♙e1 f5**

12...♞b8 was played in Landa – Fier, Vlissingen 2008, but it seems quite pointless. White has the simple 13.♘bd2 at his disposal, and after 13...f5 then 14.a5 is annoying. Black cannot play 14...b5? in view of 15.cxd5 cxd5 16.♞c6±.

In the case of 12...♞c8 13.a5 b5 14.c5 f5 play transposes to the Kramnik – Leko game that is examined below in the 11...♞c8 line.

**13.a5 ♙f6**

This position was reached in Cvitan – M. Lugovoj, Neum (blitz) 2000, and here I believe White should have played:

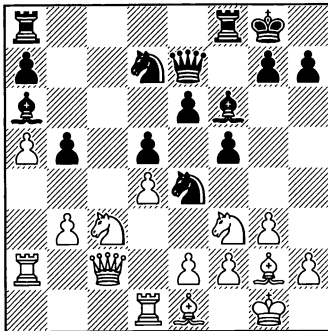
14.♙a2N ♙e7 15.♘c3

Intending to play 16.axb5 axb5 17.♗da1.

15...b5?

This meets an elegant refutation:

16.cxd5 cxd5



17.♘xe4! fxe4 18.♗c6 exf3 19.♙xf3 ♘b6 20.♙g4!±

White regains the piece with a material advantage.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 ♙b4† 5.♙d2 ♙e7 6.♙g2 0–0 7.0–0 c6 8.♗c2 b6 9.♗d1 ♙a6 10.b3 ♘bd7 11.a4)

### B2231) 11...♗c8

This looks natural, as Black intends to support his c5-advance, but the text also makes the light-squared bishop more vulnerable on a6, thus strengthening White's main idea of a4-a5.

### 12.a5

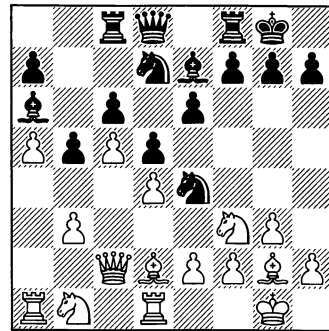
Now Black has to choose between 12...c5 and 12...b5. We shall study both continuations.

### 12...c5

As I just mentioned, there is another path: 12...b5

This leads to a closed game.

13.c5 ♘e4



I was surprised to discover that in 8 out of 9 games White played 14.b4? which in my opinion is a very bad positional decision that deprives White of his main idea of transferring one of his knights to b4. Among the White players there were strong grandmasters such as Razuvaev, Gleizerov, I. Novikov, Shipov and Marin!

14.♙e1

Of course Kramnik will never make a bad positional decision: he keeps b4 free, planning to transfer one of his knights there. It appears that there is only a single game that is relevant for our theory.

Also interesting is Marin's suggestion 14.♘c3!?N, which he analysed in *ChessBase Magazine* 121. Marin analysed four options for Black:

a) 14...f5 15.♘a2 ♘xd2 Practically forced, as Black has no time to regroup his pieces like in the Kramnik – Leko game with 15...♗c7, as White has the strong move 16.♙f4 (also 15...♙f6 16.♘b4 ♙b7 17.a6 is very bad for Black, as we will see below in Kramnik – Leko). 16.♗xd2 ♗c7 17.♗e3 ♗f6 18.♘b4 ♙c8 19.♘d3± Black has a very passive position, nevertheless it will be very difficult for White to break through.

b) 14...b4? loses a pawn without any compensation. 15.♘xe4 dxe4 16.♗xe4 ♘f6 17.♗e5 ♘d5 18.♗e1± Marin.

c) 14...♟xc3?! 15.♙xc3 f5 White had the idea of an e2-e4 advance. 16.♞e1 The thematic manoeuvre. 16...♞f6 17.♞d3 ♞c7 18.♙d2! All as given by Marin: Black's pieces lack space.

d) 14...♞xd2 15.♞xd2 e5 This is the critical line. (If Black plays slowly with 15...♞c7 16.♞a2 ♞cd8 17.♞b4 ♙c8 then White has the annoying 18.♞f4!. Now we have an almost forced line: 18...♞xf4 19.gxf4 ♞b8 20.♞e5 ♙d7 21.♙h3 and the only question is whether White can break through.) This position obviously requires serious homework, but my approximate line runs: 16.♞xe5 ♞xe5 17.dxe5 ♙xc5 18.e4 d4 19.♞e2 d3!? 20.♞f4 ♙d4 21.♞ac1 c5 22.♞xd3 ♞e7 23.b4 c4 24.♞f4 ♙xe5 25.♞d5 ♞e6 26.f4 ♙b8 27.e5± White has definite pressure.

14...f5 15.♞c3 ♞c7

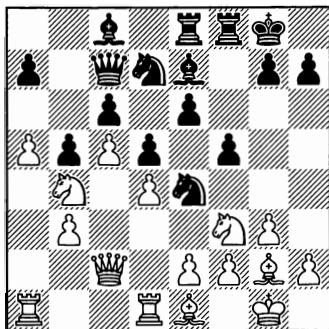
Maybe Black could try exchanging a pair of knights with 15...♞xc3.

16.♞a2! ♞ce8

Vacating the c8-square for the light-squared bishop.

Premature would be 16...e5? 17.♞b4 ♙b7 18.a6 ♙a8 and Black's position is strategically lost, as for the rest of the game he would have to play without the light-squared bishop.

17.♞b4 ♙c8



18.a6!

This is another important move in White's

strategy. White keeps the a5-square for his bishop, not allowing Black to play ...a6 himself.

18...♙f6 19.♞d3 ♞b8

In the event of 19...e5 20.♙a5 ♞b8 21.♞b4 ♙e6 22.e3± Black's pieces are tied to the defence of his c6- and e5-pawns, while ...exd4 would be an obvious concession.

20.♞a2 e5 21.e3 ♙e6 22.♞ac1 ♙fe8 23.♞b4 exd4

White was intending to capture on e5, followed by ♞d4. This position occurred in Kramnik – Leko, Monaco (rapid) 2003. In my opinion White now missed the correct recapture:

24.♞xd4! ♙xd4 25.exd4 f4 26.f3 ♞g5 27.♞d2

White's bishop pair should be an important factor in the long run.

**13.axb6 ♞xb6 14.♞a2**

This is an important move in White's strategy.

Black has no problems after 14.♙a5 ♞b8 15.♞bd2 cxd4! 16.♞xd4 ♙b7=.

**14...♙b7**

There is also:

14...♞b8

but this looks to be an obvious concession.

15.♙a5 ♞d6 16.♞bd2

The tension in the centre obviously favours White, because of the vulnerable position of Black's queen.

16...cxd4

Black cannot play 16...♞c6 17.dxc5 ♞xc5, as he loses material after the simple 18.b4 ♞d6 19.b5 ♞xa5 20.♞xa5 ♙b7 21.♞xa7±.

Releasing the tension in the centre with 16...dxc4 does not solve Black's problems, as was correctly pointed out by Tisdall in his comments to the Marin – Kiselev game. 17.♞xc4 ♙xc4 18.bxc4 ♞c6 (even worse

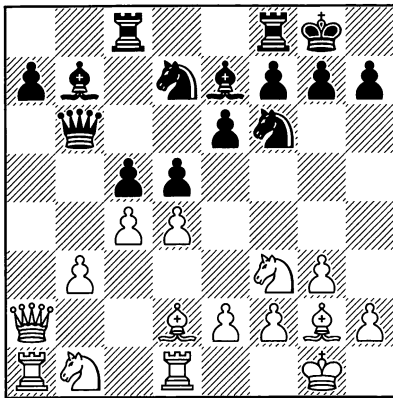
is 18...cxd4 19.♘xd4 ♖a6 [19...♙c5 runs into the unpleasant 20.♙b7! ♜ce8 21.♙a4± and Black is almost paralysed] 20.♘b5 ♘c6 21.♙c7 ♖xa2 22.♜xa2± and Black loses his a-pawn] 19.d5 exd5 20.cxd5 ♘xa5 21.♙xa5 White has a clear positional advantage, thanks to his strong passed d-pawn.

17.♘xd4 ♙d8

Tisdall gives 17...♙c5 18.♙b2 dxc4 as the critical continuation. I believe White should try 19.♘xc4 ♙xc4 20.♜dc1! ♖h5 21.♜xc4 ♜xc4 22.bxc4 with an indisputable advantage due to his bishop pair.

18.cxd5 ♘xd5 19.♘c4

White had the initiative in Marin – Kiselev, Bucharest 1997.



I believe White should rush with:

**15.b4**

After 15.♙a5 ♙d6 16.♘bd2 cxd4! 17.♘xd4 ♙b8= Black has nothing to worry about, Razuvaev – Balashov, USSR (ch) 1983.

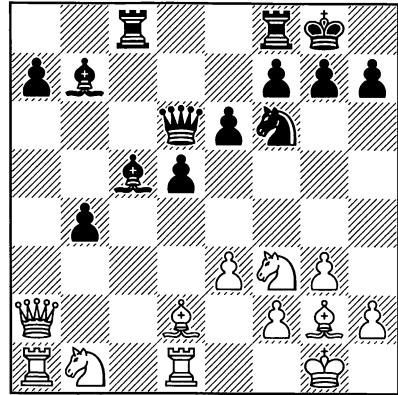
**15...cxb4 16.c5 ♘xc5**

This is critical. Black sacrifices a piece, but gets three pawns in return.

After 16...♙b5 17.e3, with the idea of ♙f1, 17...♙c6 18.♙f1 ♙b8 19.♙b2± White regains the pawn and keeps a stable positional advantage.

**17.dxc5 ♙xc5 18.e3 ♙d6**

This position is from Danielsen – Galdunts, Yerevan (ol) 1996. I believe this is the correct moment to improve on White's play.



**19.♙e1!N**

This move looks very natural to me: White intends to develop his b1-knight via d2. I shall give a few possible continuations:

**19...a5**

It seems that 19...♘e4?! does not work after 20.♘fd2! ♙b6 21.♘xe4 dxe4 22.♘d2 ♙d5 23.♙a4 and White is clearly better.

**20.♘bd2 ♜a8**

I do not believe Black has sufficient compensation for the rook after 20...♙b6 21.♘c4! ♜xc4 22.♙xc4 dxc4 23.♜xd6±.

**21.♘c4 ♙e7**

And now, despite the obvious pin, White can capture on a5.

**22.♘xa5! ♙b6 23.♙b1**

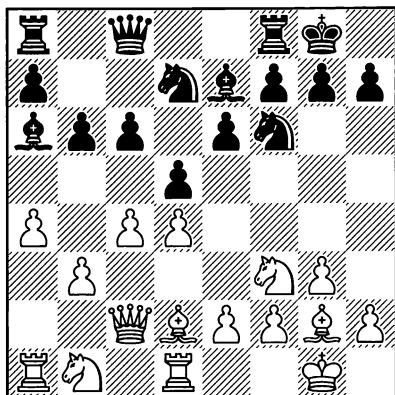
This is the point.

**23...♜xa5 24.♙xb4 ♜c5 25.♘e5 ♙c7 26.♙xc5 ♙xc5 27.♜c1**

White has a clear advantage, as Black has no compensation for the exchange.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 ♙b4†  
5.♙d2 ♙e7 6.♙g2 0-0 7.0-0 c6 8.♞c2 b6  
9.♞d1 ♙a6 10.b3 ♘bd7 11.a4)

B2232) 11...♞c8



This is played with the same idea as 11...♞c8, which is to support the c6-c5 advance. The difference is that in this line Black leaves his rook on a8, anticipating White's plan of a4-a5.

## 12.♘a3

Now that the a6-bishop is defended, 12.a5 is irrational, as Black simply replies 12...c5 with equal play, Bernasek – Polak, Czech Republic 2005.

## 12...c5

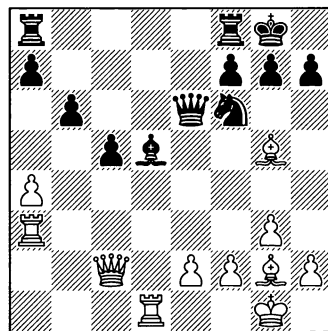
Black also tried:

12...♙xa3

but this move is an obvious concession, as White's two bishops are likely to be a significant force, especially in the long run.

13.♞xa3 c5

Korchnoi analysed the following variation: 13...dxc4 14.bxc4 c5 15.♘e5 ♙b7 16.♘xd7 ♞xd7 17.d5! exd5 18.cxd5 ♙xd5 (18...♘xd5 obviously loses to 19.♞d3 ♞e6 20.♞c4!) 19.♙g5 ♞e6 Now I have an improvement:



20.♞c3! (20.♙xf6 ♙xg2 21.♙xg7 is supposed to be "Just lost" according to Viktor Lvovich, but in fact it is far from clear.) 20...♞c6 21.♞xd5! ♘xd5 22.♞d2 ♞xa4 23.♙xd5 Black is in deep trouble.

Returning to 13...c5, White should continue:

14.a5 ♙b7 15.♙f4

With a pleasant edge.

## 13.♞b2

This is often a good square for White's queen in this line.

## 13...♘e4

In the event of 13...♙b7 14.♞ac1 Black's queen looks badly misplaced on c8.

## 14.♙e1

This is the best square for the dark-squared bishop, as you will see from my comments in the main line.

## 14...♞b7

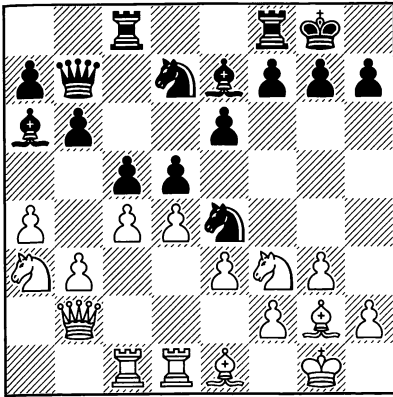
This awkward-looking move in fact contains a healthy idea: Black wants to clear a path for his queenside rook.

## 15.e3

A good positional move, which is thematic for this variation. White strengthens the d4-square before proceeding with concrete action.

During the game I was not sure about the position that arises after 15.b4 cxb4 16.♙xb4 ♙xb4 17.♙xb4 ♙ac8.

15...♙ac8 16.♙ac1



16...♙a8?!

This is too extravagant. Black wants to play ...♙b7, creating unpleasant pressure along the a8-h1 diagonal, but Black has wasted too much time with his queen moves and now White should seize the initiative.

I was expecting 16...♙b8 and I intended to reply 17.♙e5 ♖df6 18.f3 ♖d6 19.cxd5 exd5 20.♙c3 with very complicated play. The following is a possible continuation: 20...♙f5 21.♙e1 cxd4 22.exd4 ♙xc3 23.♙xc3 ♙b4 24.♙c2 ♙xc3 25.♙xc3 ♙c8 26.♙d2 ♖d6 27.♙h3 ♙c7 28.♙e3± White's chances are slightly preferable, because of his strong knight on e5 and the possibility of advancing his kingside pawns.

17.♙e5 ♖df6

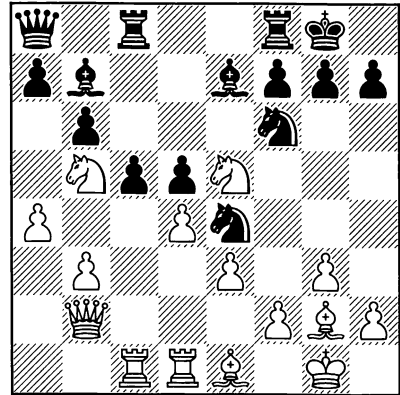
Black cannot play 17...♙fd8? 18.♙xd7 ♙xd7 19.dxc5 as he must remain a pawn down, because 19...♙xc5 only makes matters worse: 20.b4! ♙xa4 21.♙b3 and White wins a piece.

17...♙xe5? 18.dxe5 Black's knight in the

centre appears to be poorly placed (White is threatening 19.f3). 18...f6 19.h4!± Black is in deep trouble.

18.cxd5 exd5 19.♙b5 ♙b7

This position is from my recent game Avrukh – Adams, Spain (team-ch) 2008. At this moment I missed a good opportunity:



20.♙h3!N ♙cd8

After 20...a6 21.♙xc8 ♙xc8 22.♙c3± Black could hardly claim sufficient compensation.

21.dxc5 bxc5

Maybe 21...♙xc5 would be the lesser evil, but after 22.b4 ♙ce4 23.♙d4± White has a great version of an anti-IQP position.

22.♙a5!±

Black has to give up an exchange.

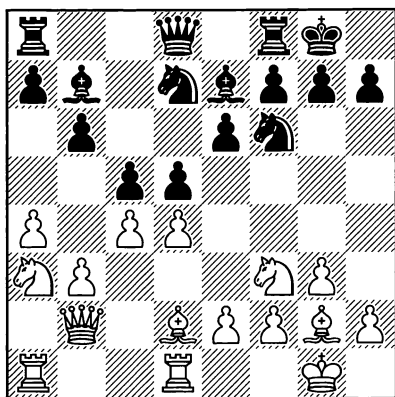
(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♙f3 ♙f6 4.g3 ♙b4† 5.♙d2 ♙e7 6.♙g2 0-0 7.0-0 c6 8.♙c2 b6 9.♙d1 ♙a6 10.b3 ♙bd7 11.a4)

B2233) 11...c5 12.♙a3

Unfortunately White cannot fight for an advantage with 12.♙c3. Black should simply accept the pawn sacrifice with 12...dxc4 13.bxc4 ♙xc4 14.♙e5. White has some

compensation for the pawn, but it is not enough to threaten Black's safety. 14...♔d5! 15.♖xd5 ♖xd5 16.♗c6 ♜e8 17.e4 ♗b4 18.♗xb4 cxb4 White's compensation might be sufficient for equality.

12...♗b7 13.♞b2



This is a thematic multi-purpose move. First of all, the queen defends the a3-knight against a possible ...cxd4 and thus prepares to develop the a1-rook to c1. Secondly, White prepares b3-b4, which would create even more tension in the centre.

Premature would be 13.a5 dxc4! 14.♗xc4 as in Korchnoi – Lerner, Muenster 1996. Now 14...b5! was even stronger than 14...♗e4. For example 14...b5 15.♗ce5 ♗e4 16.♞b2 ♗xe5 17.dxe5 ♗d5 and Black is already slightly better.

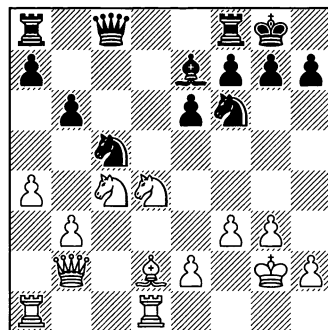
Our main options in this position are **B22331) 13...♗e4** and **B22332) 13...♞c8**, but White should also be prepared for the following line:

13...dxc4 14.♗xc4 cxd4 15.♗xd4 ♗xg2 16.♗xg2 ♗c5

Black has also tried 16...♞c7 and now instead of the strange 17.♞c3 as in Stohl – Lerner, Germany 1999, White should have played 17.f3 and after 17...♗c5 we get more or less

the same position as we will examine after 16...♗c5, while after 17...♞b7 we can play 18.b4! and I do not see how Black is going to prevent White's thematic idea of b4-b5 followed by ♗c6.

17.f3 ♞c8



This position was reached in I. Novikov – Tiviakov, USSR (ch) 1991, and after 18.a5 a draw was agreed. In fact, despite looking very innocent, White has definite pressure. His main plan includes the b4-b5 advance followed by penetrating with his knight to c6. I will give a sample line:

18.e4N ♗d8 19.♗e3 ♞b7 20.a5

20.b4? does not work as it is hit by tricky tactics: 20...♗cxe4! 21.fxe4 ♞xe4† 22.♗g1 e5† and Black regains the piece with dividends.

20...♞ac8

Now 20...♗cxe4? fails to 21.a6! ♞d5 22.♗e2 ♞f5 23.fxe4 ♞xe4† 24.♗g1 ♗g4 25.♗c3+.

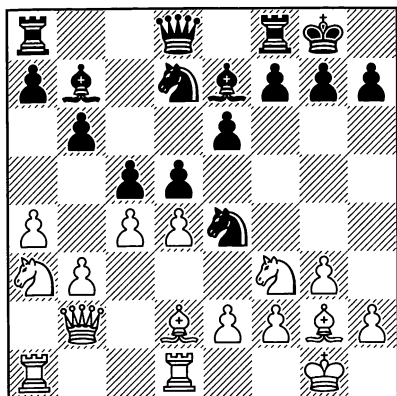
21.♞e2±

There is nothing decisive, but White's pressure looks irritating. For example:

21...b5? 22.a6 ♗xa6 23.♗a5 ♞a8 24.♗xb5± Black is losing the a7-pawn.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♗f3 ♗f6 4.g3 ♗b4† 5.♗d2 ♗e7 6.♗g2 0-0 7.0-0 c6 8.♞c2 b6 9.♞d1 ♗a6 10.b3 ♗bd7 11.a4 c5 12.♗a3 ♗b7 13.♞b2)

## B22331) 13...♘e4



## 14.♙e1

This is definitely the best square for the dark-squared bishop, from which it supports White's play on the queenside with b3-b4 or a4-a5.

Worse is 14.♙f4 ♙f6 and Black is fine, St. Novikov–Jakovenko, Aeroflot Open 2007.

Actually, only two games have been played from this rather important position, which shows just how fresh these positions are.

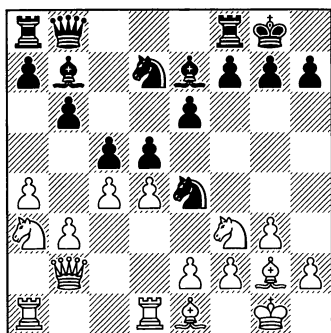
## 14...♙f6

The other game started with:

## 14...♙b8

This was Cvitan – Lerner, Oberwart 1999.

Here I recommend the following improvement:



## 15.♘e5N ♘xe5 16.dxe5 f5

If 16...f6 then White plays 17.f3 ♘g5 18.cxd5 exd5 (18...♙xd5 19.e4 ♙c6 20.♘c4 gives White a pleasant edge) 19.f4! ♘e4 20.♙xe4 dxe4 21.♙c3 ♙e8 22.♘c4 ♙d8 23.exf6 gxf6 24.♘e3± White is positionally better, as his knight is clearly superior to Black's light-squared bishop.

## 17.e3 ♙e8 18.f3

Also worth considering is 18.a5 ♙h5 19.♘b5.

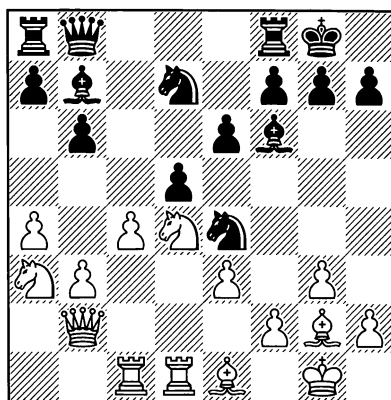
## 18...♘g5 19.h4 ♘f7 20.f4±

White is better because of his space advantage.

## 15.e3

This is another thematic move for this variation. White is strengthening the d4-pawn and preparing to play b4 on the next move, so Black reacted immediately:

## 15...cxd4 16.♘xd4 ♙b8 17.♙ac1



The position looks very complicated and playable for Black, therefore it is very interesting to see how Black ran into trouble without making any serious mistakes.

## 17...♙d8 18.♙b1 a6 19.a5 ♙e7 20.♘ac2 bxa5 21.♙xa5 ♙c8 22.♘b4! ♘ef6 23.cxd5 ♙xb4 24.♙xb4 ♙xd5 25.♙xc8† ♙xc8



**26.e4 ♖b7 27.f3**

White was clearly better due to his bishop pair and space advantage, Piket – Kramnik, Monaco (rapid) 1997.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♟f3 ♟f6 4.g3 ♖b4† 5.♙d2 ♙e7 6.♙g2 0–0 7.0–0 c6 8.♞c2 b6 9.♞d1 ♙a6 10.b3 ♟bd7 11.a4 c5 12.♟a3 ♙b7 13.♞b2)

**B22332) 13...♞c8**

This is the main continuation.

**14.♞ac1**

Again 14.a5?! is premature because of 14...dxc4! 15.♟xc4 b5 16.♟e3 a6 and Black is fine.

**14...♟e4**

Black has also tried to solve his opening problems with:

14...dxc4 15.♟xc4 cxd4

But this appears to be risky, as Black's rook is misplaced on c8, because of White's strong idea of ♟d4-b5-d6.

**16.♟xd4**

In *ChessBase Magazine* 121 Marin recommended 16.♞xd4 as a route to an advantage, but after 16...♙c5 17.♞h4 ♙d5!

I do not see any special problems for Black.

16...♙xg2 17.♟xg2 ♞c7

I also examined 17...♟c5 18.f3 ♞d7, but White still manages to seize the initiative: 19.♟b5 ♞cd8 (after 19...♟d5? 20.e4 ♟d3 21.♞b1 ♟xc1 22.♙xc1! White retains a material advantage) 20.♙c3 ♞b7 (much weaker is 20...♞xd1 21.♞xd1 ♞xd1 22.♟xa7 with a winning position for White) 21.♙d4 (threatening 22.b4 ♟xa4 23.♞b3) 21...a6 22.♟bd6 ♙xd6 23.♙xf6 gxf6 24.♟xd6 ♞e7 25.♞c4 f5 26.♞cd4 White is clearly better.

Now I found a simple improvement over Marin – Feller, Barcelona 2007.

**18.♟b5!N**

In the game White failed to prove his advantage after 18.♙f4.

18...♞b7† 19.f3!? ♞a8

Black loses after 19...a6 20.♟bd6 ♙xd6 21.♟xd6 ♞xc1 22.♟xb7 ♞xd1 23.♞c2 ♙a1 24.♙c1!, followed by ♞b2 and Black's rook is trapped on a1.

**20.♙f4 a6**

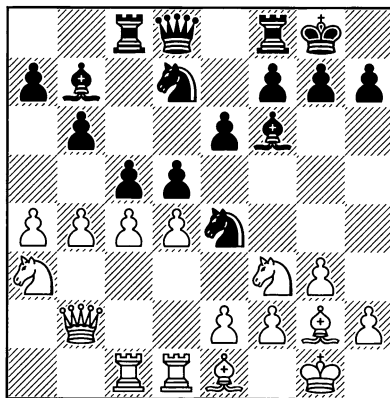
A very interesting line arises after 20...♟d5 21.♙d6! ♙f6 (There is a tricky line: 21...♞xc4 22.♙xc7 ♞xc1 23.♙xf8 ♟e3† 24.♟h3! ♞xf8 25.♞xc1 [25.♞xc1?? allows the unexpected 25...g5! and White is suddenly lost] 25...♟xd1 26.♞xd1 ♟c5 27.♟xa7 White has a healthy extra pawn.) 22.♞d2 ♟c5 23.♙xc5 ♞xc5 24.e4 ♟e7 25.b4 ♞cc8 26.♟bd6 ♞fd8 27.♞e2± With a clear positional advantage for White.

**21.♟bd6 ♞c6 22.e4**

White has a pleasant risk-free advantage.

**15.♙e1**

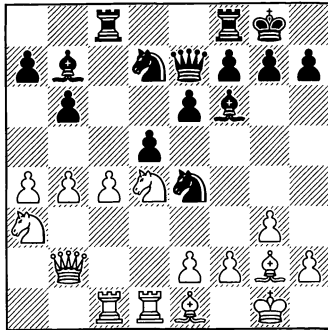
As we already know, this is the best square for our bishop.

**15...♙f6 16.b4**

The beginning of concrete play. We will examine two main lines:

**B223321) 16...♙c7 B223322) 16...♙a8**

Black had previously tried:  
16...cxd4 17.♘xd4 ♙e7



But unexpectedly faced serious problems after:

18.♘ab5! ♘e5

Other moves are even worse: 18...a6 19.♘a7! and White's knight penetrates to c6.

18...dxc4 19.♘xa7 ♙c7 20.♘ab5 ♙cc8 21.♙b1 and Black will lose material.

19.cxd5 ♙xd5 20.♙b1 ♘d6 21.♙xc8 ♘xc8

In the event of 21...♙xc8 22.♙xd5 ♘xb5 23.♘xb5 exd5 24.♙xd5± White remains a pawn up.

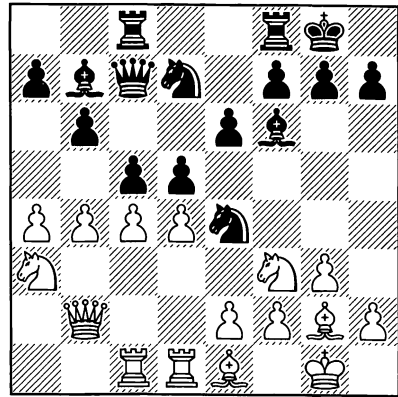
22.♙xd5 exd5 23.♘f5 ♙b7 24.♘c3 ♙d8 25.♙b3±

Black loses his central pawn, Yusupov – Kharitonov, Moscow 1988.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 ♙b4† 5.♙d2 ♙e7 6.♙g2 0–0 7.0–0 c6 8.♙c2 b6 9.♙d1 ♙a6 10.b3 ♘bd7 11.a4 c5 12.♘a3 ♙b7 13.♙b2 ♙c8 14.♙ac1 ♘e4 15.♙e1 ♙f6 16.b4)

**B223321) 16...♙c7**

This is Black's latest try. His idea is to evacuate his queen from the dangerous d-file to b8 and then hopefully to a8.



**17.cxd5!N**

In the game Black easily solved his problems after: 17.bxc5 bxc5 18.♙b1 ♙c6 (18...♘d6!? might be an interesting alternative) 19.♘b5 ♙xb5 20.cxb5 c4 21.♙b4 ♙fe8= Gelfand – Leko, Nice 2008.

**17...♙xd5**

In the event of 17...exd5 18.bxc5 bxc5 19.♘b5 ♙b8 20.♙b1! ♙c6 21.♙a3± White keeps definite pressure.

**18.♙b1**

This is a typical idea after Black recaptures with his bishop on d5.

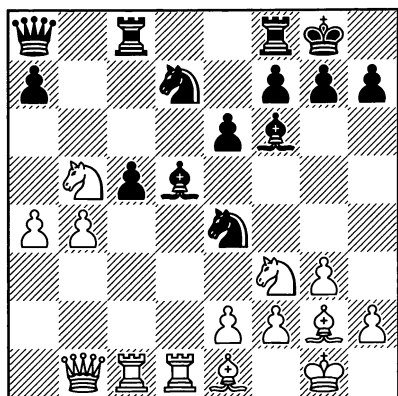
**18...♙c6**

Other retreats are less satisfactory. For example:

18...♙b7 19.bxc5 bxc5 20.♙xb7 ♙xb7 21.♘d2 ♘d6 22.♘b5! and after 22...♘xb5 23.♙xb7 ♙c7 24.axb5 ♙xb7 25.dxc5 ♙xb5 26.♘e4! White's passed pawn should decide the game.

18...♙b8 19.♘h4! (and not 19.dxc5 bxc5 20.b5 ♙a8=) 19...♙b7 20.f3 ♘d6 21.dxc5 bxc5 22.e4±

**19.♘b5 ♙a8 20.dxc5 bxc5**



### 21. ♖d2!

Somehow White keeps some pressure.

### 21... ♖xd2

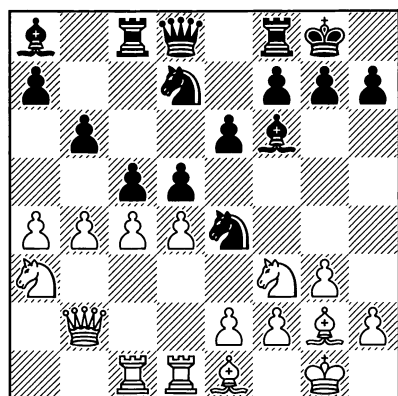
21... ♖xd2 22. hxg3 ♖xg2 23. f3 ♖h3 24. ♖e4 ♖d4† 25. ♖xd4 cxd4 26. ♖xc8 ♖xc8 27. ♖xd4 e5 28. ♖g5 ♖f8 29. ♖d1 ♖e6 30. b5± White will easily create a passed pawn on the queenside.

### 22. ♖xd5 exd5 23. ♖xd2±

Black's central pawns are rather weak.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3. ♖f3 ♖f6 4.g3 ♖b4† 5. ♖d2 ♖e7 6. ♖g2 0-0 7.0-0 c6 8. ♖c2 b6 9. ♖d1 ♖a6 10.b3 ♖bd7 11.a4 c5 12. ♖a3 ♖b7 13. ♖b2 ♖c8 14. ♖ac1 ♖e4 15. ♖e1 ♖f6 16.b4)

B223322) 16... ♖a8



### 17.cxd5!N

In my opinion this is the best way to fight for the advantage. In his article in *ChessBase Magazine* 121 Marin recommended 17. ♖b1, but after 17... ♖e8!∞ I could not find anything interesting for White.

17.e3 appears to be too slow, as it allows Black to favourably release the tension in the centre: 17...cxd4 18.exd4 dxc4 19. ♖e5 ♖g5!∞ with a balanced position in Kramnik – Gelfand, Wijk aan Zee 2008.

### 17...exd5

After the other recapture:

17... ♖xd5 18. ♖b1!

Black's knight is slightly vulnerable on e4.

18...cxd4

There is also 18... ♖d6 19.dxc5 bxc5 20. ♖b5 ♖xb5 21.axb5 and if 21...c4 then after 22.e4 ♖b7 23. ♖d2 c3 24. ♖b3 ♖c7 25. ♖c2± Black is going to lose his c3-pawn.

Or 18... ♖c7 19. ♖e5! ♖xe5 20. ♖xe4 ♖xe4 21. ♖xe4± with a clear advantage.

19. ♖xc8 ♖xc8 20. ♖xd4 ♖xd4

White keeps the initiative after 20... ♖c3 21. ♖xc3 ♖xg2 22. ♖xg2 ♖xc3 23. ♖ab5 ♖c8 24. ♖d6 ♖a8† 25. ♖e4 ♖e5 26. ♖xa8 ♖xa8 27.b5 and Black is still far from equality.

For example: 27... ♖d8 28. ♖c6 ♖d7 29. ♖c1 ♖xd6 30. ♖xe5 g6 31. ♖c8† ♖g7 32. ♖c6±

21. ♖xd4 f5 22.f3 ♖ef6 23.e4 fxe4 24.fxe4±

White is better and, as usual, it is because of his bishop pair.

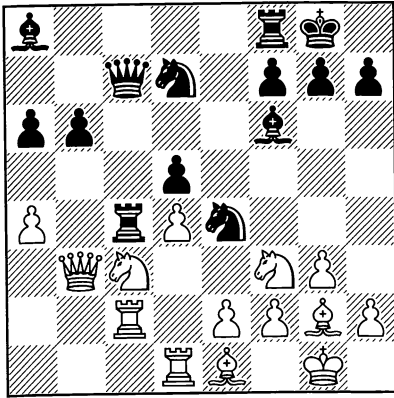
### 18. ♖b5 a6 19. ♖c3

With very complex play, but I have a feeling that Black will need to be very accurate. I will give my brief analysis:

### 19...cxb4

Risky is 19...c4?! 20. ♖xe4 dxe4 21. ♖d2 e3 22. ♖xc4 exf2† 23. ♖xf2 ♖xg2 24. ♖xg2 ♖e7 25. ♖g1! and Black has insufficient compensation for the material deficit.

20.♙xb4 ♞c4 21.♙b3 ♙c7 22.♞c2



### Conclusion:

In general, this variation, which is considered to be one of Black's most solid lines, leads to a very complex game. There are many different move orders for Black, therefore it is very important for White to have a deep understanding of this variation. In my opinion the critical line is 8...b6 followed by 9...♙a6. In my analysis I have introduced a tricky idea for White in 10.b3 and 11.a4. At the moment there is not much material from which to draw any definite conclusions, but I believe this line is worth a try.

I believe White should be better in the long-term, because of his better pawn structure.

22...♞c8 23.♞dc1 ♙b7

Or 23...♞f8 24.e3 ♞e6 25.♙f1±.

24.e3 ♙c6 25.♙h3 b5 26.axb5 axb5 27.♞b1

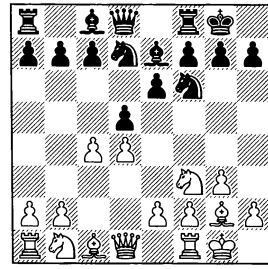
♞xc3 28.♞xc3 ♙a6 29.♞d3±



# Chapter 11

## The Catalan

6...♘bd7



### Variation Index

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 ♙e7 5.♙g2 0-0 6.0-0 ♘bd7

7.♚c2

A) 7...b6

p 187

B) 7...c6 8.♘bd2

p 188

B1) 8...b5?!

p 188

B2) 8...b6 9.e4

p 189

B21) 9...dxe4

p 189

B22) 9...♙b7 10.e5 ♘e8 11.cxd5

p 190

B221) 11...exd5

p 190

B222) 11...cxd5 12.♞e1

p 191

B2221) 12...♙a6

p 193

B2222) 12...♞c8

p 194

B23) 9...♙a6 10.b3 c5 11.exd5 exd5 12.♙b2 ♞c8 13.♞f5

p 196

B231) 13...b5

p 197

B232) 13...cxd4

p 198

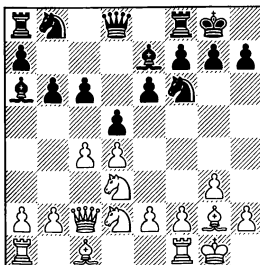
B233) 13...dxc4

p 199

B234) 13...g6

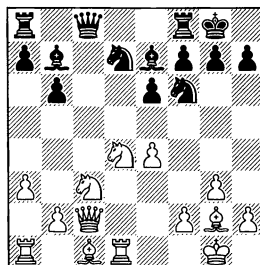
p 200

note to move 6



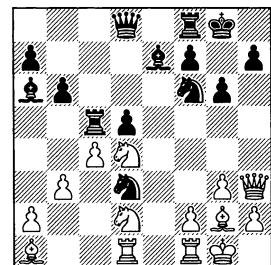
11.♞d1!N

A) after 13...♞c8



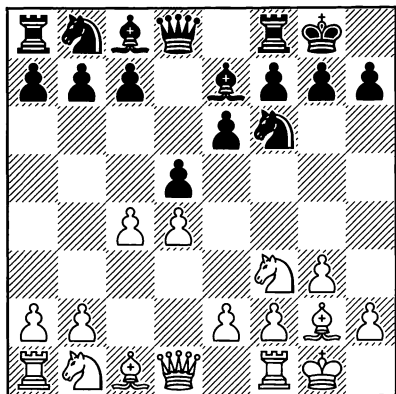
14.♞e2!N

B234) after 17...♞c5



18.♙xd5!N

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♟f3 ♟f6 4.g3 ♙e7 5.♙g2  
0-0 6.0-0



Before switching to the main line of the Catalan, 6...dxc4, I would like to eliminate the following system, which often occurs in tournament practice.

### 6...♟bd7

An alternative is:

6...c6

Usually this is just another move order that transposes to the main 6...♟bd7 system. The only difference might be if Black tries to develop his bishop to a6 before ...♟bd7 has been played.

7.♟c2 b6 8.♟bd2 ♙a6

8...♙b7 9.e4 transposes to our main line.

White cannot play 9.e4 immediately as the c4-pawn would be hanging after a double capture on e4, but he has another strong move at his disposal:

9.♟e5

This is a typical idea in this pawn structure.

9...♟fd7

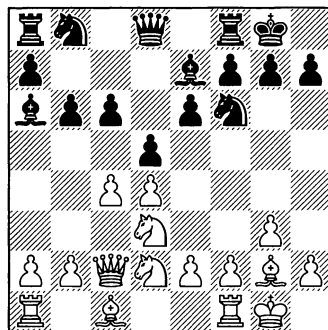
So far no-one has tried 9...dxc4?! and rightly so, as after 10.♟dxc4 White's central pawn is untouchable: 10...♟xd4? 11.♟d1 ♟c5 12.♙e3 and Black's queen is trapped, for example 12...♟b5 13.a4 ♟b4 14.♙d2 ♟c5 15.b4 ♟d4 16.♙e3.

10.♟d3!

Avoiding an exchange of knights is also typical, as White has more space.

10...♟f6

Now White must be precise.



11.♟d1!N

This is the only move to secure White an advantage.

11.e3 was played in Gheorghiu – Radulov, Budapest 1970, and White achieved a clear advantage only because Black missed 11...c5!, which would have given him a reasonable position.

11...♟bd7

Again the d4-pawn is taboo: 11...dxc4 12.♟xc4 ♟xd4? 13.♟de5 with the same position as after 9...dxc4.

12.e4±

White has comfortably achieved his central break.

### 7.♟c2

The first move we will study in depth is A) 7...b6, but in reality B) 7...c6 is by far Black's most popular continuation. Still, to be well prepared we should have a quick look at a few other options:

7...♟e4 does not make much sense after 8.♟c3 ♟xc3 9.♟xc3 ♙f6 10.♟d1 c6 11.♙f4, and White's extra space gave him a pleasant edge in Miroshnichenko – Boons, Leuven 2006.

7...c5 8.cxd5 ♘xd5

8...exd5 9.♘c3± would again be a typical Queen's Indian position, with Black's knight slightly misplaced on d7.

9.♘c3

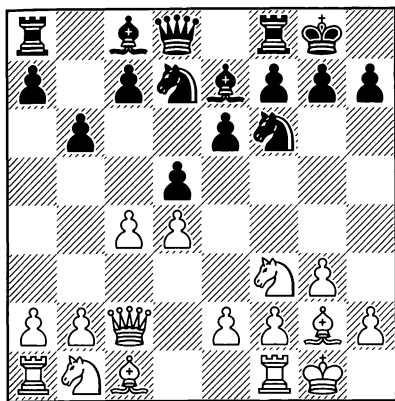
This is the most precise move. White is obviously better, so I will give just one example:

9...♘b4 10.♙b3 cxd4 11.♘xd4 ♙b6? 12.♙e3 ♘c5 13.♙c4!+–

Black suffered an early loss of material in Espig – Moehring, Potsdam 1974.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 ♙e7 5.♙g2 0-0 6.0-0 ♘bd7 7.♙c2)

A) 7...b6



8.cxd5

I think the text is more precise than 8.♘c3 ♙b7 9.cxd5 ♘xd5! 10.♘xd5 exd5 11.♙f4 c5 with double-edged play where the exchange of a pair of knights has helped Black, Plenkovic – Rogic, Zupanja 2008.

8...♘xd5

Obviously 8...exd5 is a natural alternative. 9.♘c3 (White does not achieve anything with 9.♙c6 ♙b8 10.♙f4 ♙b7 11.♙xc7 ♙xc7 12.♙xc7 ♙bc8 13.♙f4 ♙c2 and Black has normal play) 9...♙b7 10.♙f4 We have reached

a typical Queen's Indian position, but perhaps it is a slightly favourable version for White, as Black's knight usually comes into play from a6, leaving the d7-square for his queen. The following is one of the most recent examples: 10...c6 11.♙fd1 ♙e8 12.♘e5 ♘f8 (12...♘h5 was better) 13.e4 ♘e6 14.♙e3± White was a little better in Kunte – Lalith, Mumbai 2008.

9.a3

White should cover the b4-square, as 9.e4 ♘b4 10.♙b3 c5 leads to double-edged play.

9...♙b7 10.e4 ♘5f6 11.♘c3 c5

Otherwise White would have a comfortable advantage.

12.♙d1

A tempting option is:

12.d5 exd5 13.exd5

Now the critical line is to accept the pawn sacrifice:

13...♘xd5

The alternative is clearly weaker: 13...♘e8 14.d6!? (White is spoilt for choice: 14.♙e1 ♘d6 15.♙f4 also gives a clear positional advantage due to the strong d5-pawn) 14...♘xd6 15.♙d1± In A. Gurevich – Michaud, Canada (ch) 2001, White had an improved version of the pawn sacrifice.

14.♘xd5 ♙xd5 15.♙d1 ♙e6 16.♙f4 ♙f6

This position looks rather double-edged. White could try:

17.♘d2

17.♙d2 is also worth considering.

17...♙d4!

Black will have reasonable compensation for the exchange.

12...cxd4 13.♘xd4

It appears that Black has problems with the coordination of his pieces.

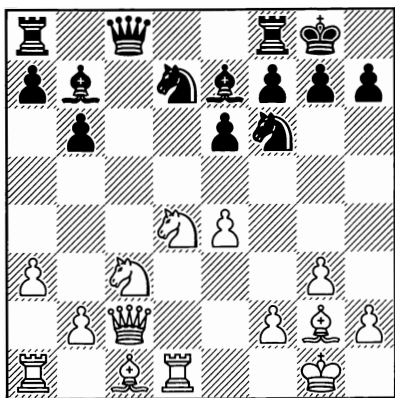
13...♙c8



This move has been played in most of the games. White is also happy after other moves:

If 13...♖c7 then 14.♗e2!N is again unpleasant in view of the threat of 15.e5.

13...♖c8 14.♗e2 ♠c5 has been seen twice in tournament practice and on both occasions White eschewed the obvious and strong 15.e5±.



#### 14.♗e2!N

It is hard for Black to deal with the possibility of e4-e5.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♟f3 ♟f6 4.g3 ♠e7 5.♠g2 0-0 6.0-0 ♟bd7 7.♗c2)

B) 7...c6 8.♟bd2

The way Black has positioned himself, only moves with the b-pawn make sense. So our options are:

B1) 8...b5?! and B2) 8...b6.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♟f3 ♟f6 4.g3 ♠e7 5.♠g2 0-0 6.0-0 ♟bd7 7.♗c2 c6 8.♟bd2)

B1) 8...b5?!

This is premature. In general, this advance is only acceptable if White is unable to reply with a quick e2-e4.

#### 9.c5! a5

Black is not ready to create more tension in the centre:

9...♗c7 10.e4 e5

As White is much better after:

11.exd5 ♟xd5

Or 11...cxd5 12.dxe5 ♟xe5 13.♟b3 ♟xf3† 14.♠xf3 ♟e4, Ibragimov – Marcelin, Linares 2001, and now 15.♠d1 ♠b7 16.♠f4± would give White a clear positional advantage.

12.♠e1 exd4 13.♟xd4 ♠xc5

No better is 13...♟xc5 14.♠xe7! ♗xe7 15.♟xc6 ♗e1† 16.♟f1± and White will gain a material advantage.

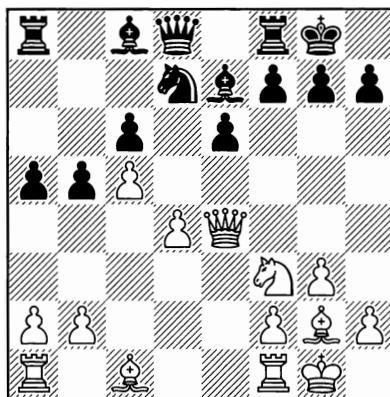
14.♟2b3 ♗b6 15.♟xc5 ♟xc5 16.♟xc6

16.♠d2, followed by 17.♠ac1, might be a very good alternative.

16...♗xc6 17.♠e3 ♠e6 18.♗xc5 ♗xc5 19.♠xc5

White's bishop pair exert strong positional pressure, Petursson – Sorensen, Copenhagen 1981.

10.e4 dxe4 11.♟xe4 ♟xe4 12.♗xe4



The above diagram shows the typical positional advantages for which White should

aim: Black's light-squared bishop is very passive and White has good chances to seize the initiative on the kingside.

We shall look briefly at a recent example:

12...♘f6 13.♙c2

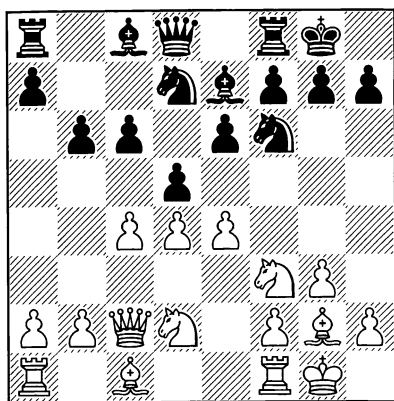
White refrains from 13.♙xc6, as after 13...♙d7 14.♙b6 ♙xb6 15.cxb6 ♖ab8 Black has a reasonable endgame.

13...♘d5 14.♞e1 ♙f6 15.h4 a4 16.a3 ♙c7 17.♙g5

White was clearly better in Khismatullin – Stanojoski, Plovdiv 2008.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 ♙e7 5.♙g2 0-0 6.0-0 ♘bd7 7.♙c2 c6 8.♘bd2)

B2) 8...b6 9.e4

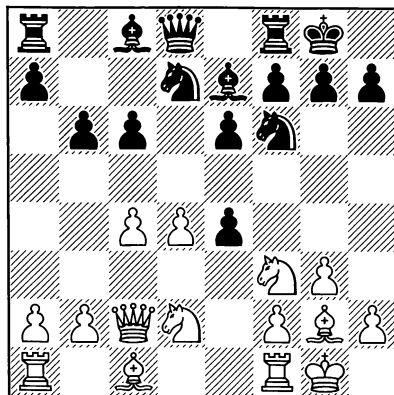


This is the main branching point of our variation and in some ways it would be a decent place to start the chapter, except that would make the previous chapter far too short.

Black now has two natural bishop moves, but there is also a third option, **B21) 9...dxe4**. In my opinion this move is a clear concession, so we will only have a quick look at it before moving on to the main moves: **B22) 9...♙b7** and **B23) 9...♙a6**.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 ♙e7 5.♙g2 0-0 6.0-0 ♘bd7 7.♙c2 c6 8.♘bd2 b6 9.e4)

B21) 9...dxe4



I believe this allows White free and easy play.

10.♘xe4

Black's main problem is that he usually fails to achieve a favourable version of the typical ...c6-c5 break, and is thus condemned to a passive position where Black's light-squared bishop is clearly inferior to White's.

10...♘xe4

10...♙b7 11.♞d1 usually transposes to the same line.

11.♙xe4 ♙b7 12.♞d1 ♙c8

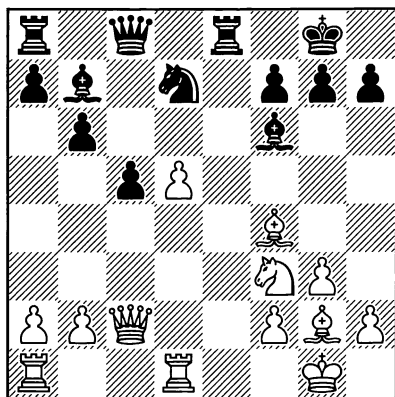
This is the critical line, as Black aims to deliver the ...c5-break which is meant to free his position. However, White can react with sharp play.

If Black continues to play passively then he can easily fall into a positional bind, as the following example shows: 12...♘f6 13.♙c2 ♙c7 14.♙f4 ♙d6 15.♙xd6 ♙xd6 16.c5! ♙c7 17.♘e5± White was clearly better in Likavsky – Lemanczyk, Germany 2007: he has managed

to shut down Black's light-squared bishop, and White also has the very strong idea of  $\text{d}e5\text{-c}4\text{-d}6$ .

13.  $\text{d}f4$  c5 14. d5  $\text{e}8$  15.  $\text{c}2$  exd5 16. cxd5  $\text{f}6$

In this position I like a simple move:



17.  $\text{d}g5$

17. a4!? is also interesting. If you search your database for Yevseev – Lovkov, St Petersburg 2006, you can analyse and make up your own mind.

17...  $\text{d}xg5$

17...  $\text{d}f8$  runs into the strong 18.  $\text{d}e4$  and White's knight will land heavily on d6.

18.  $\text{d}xg5$

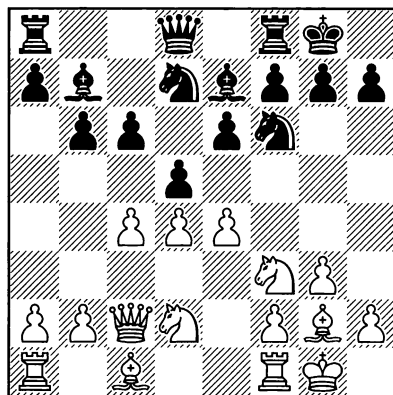
White is obviously better with his strong passed pawn in the centre and two bishops.

18...  $\text{d}f8$  19. a4  $\text{g}4$  20.  $\text{e}3$  a5 21.  $\text{b}3$   $\text{d}7$  22.  $\text{d}f4\pm$

Miroshnichenko – Bojkov, Izmir 2006.

(1. d4 d5 2. c4 e6 3.  $\text{d}f3$   $\text{d}f6$  4. g3  $\text{e}7$  5.  $\text{d}g2$  0–0 6. 0–0  $\text{d}bd7$  7.  $\text{c}2$  c6 8.  $\text{d}bd2$  b6 9. e4  $\text{b}7$  10. e5  $\text{d}e8$  11. cxd5)

B22) 9...  $\text{b}7$



10. e5

I believe White has to play this in order to fight for the advantage.

In the case of 10. b3  $\text{e}8$  11.  $\text{b}2$  c5 12. exd5 exd5 we get a typically tense position for this variation, but compared with the 9...  $\text{a}6$  line, Black's bishop is better placed on b7. According to current theory Black has what in Russian is called "normal play", which simply means that his position is okay.

10...  $\text{d}e8$  11. cxd5

Now in most games Black has recaptured with the c-pawn, but the other recapture also makes sense, so we shall study them both: B221) 11... exd5 and B222) 11... cxd5 are the options.

(1. d4 d5 2. c4 e6 3.  $\text{d}f3$   $\text{d}f6$  4. g3  $\text{e}7$  5.  $\text{d}g2$  0–0 6. 0–0  $\text{d}bd7$  7.  $\text{c}2$  c6 8.  $\text{d}bd2$  b6 9. e4  $\text{b}7$  10. e5  $\text{d}e8$  11. cxd5)

B221) 11... exd5

This is far less popular, but it is still interesting as we have a more fluid pawn structure than in our main line. Black has a clear plan: he wants to transfer his knight to the e6-square and follow up with the ...c5-break. Nevertheless, White's chances should be preferable, as he has enough time to regroup his pieces and

maintain the space advantage the e5-pawn has provided him with. This pawn is the champion of the white position, securing a strong grip on Black's position.

### 12.♙e1 ♘c7 13.♘f1

White's knight is heading for e3 and hopefully next to f5.

### 13...c5

Another option is:

### 13...♘e6 14.♘e3 g6

This prevents White's knight from coming to f5, but on the other hand it weakens the complex of dark squares near Black's king.

### 15.b3

There is another interesting piece arrangement: 15.♘g4 c5 16.♙h6 ♖e8 17.♖ad1± and White has the better chances, Jablanovic – Jovicevic, Vrnjacka Banja 1996.

### 15...♖c8

If Black tries the more active 15...c5 16.♙b2 ♖c8 17.♗d2 cxd4 18.♘xd4 ♘dc5 19.♖ad1 ♘e4 20.♗e2 White still holds the advantage.

### 16.♙b2 ♖e8 17.♗d2 a5

This position occurred in Khetsuriani – Pelletier, Athens 2005, and here instead of 18.a3 I like the modest:

### 18.♖ed1N

And if

### 18...f5 19.exf6

then after

### 19...♘xf6 20.♘e5 ♙d6 21.♖ac1

White maintains a pleasant edge.

### 14.♘e3 ♘e6 15.♘f5 ♖c8

It would be premature for Black to remove the tension in the centre by means of 15...cxd4?! 16.♘3xd4 ♘xd4 17.♘xd4 ♘c5 18.♙e3 as White has a stable positional advantage.

### 16.♗d1 ♖e8

And here I believe White should play the natural:

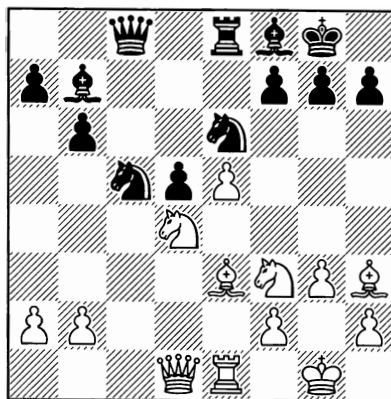
### 17.♙e3

In the game Chachere – Martinovsky, Illinois 1987, White continued 17.♘xe7† ♗xe7 18.♙e3 (18.b3 also deserves serious attention. For example, 18...cxd4 19.♙b2!? and I like White.) and now 18...cxd4! 19.♙xd4 ♘dc5 would have given Black a reasonable game.

### 17...♙f8 18.♖c1

I think White is slightly better, as the following line illustrates:

### 18...cxd4 19.♖xc8 ♗xc8 20.♘5xd4 ♘dc5 21.♙h3±



White's position is more pleasant, as Black has not managed to gain the activity he was hoping for.

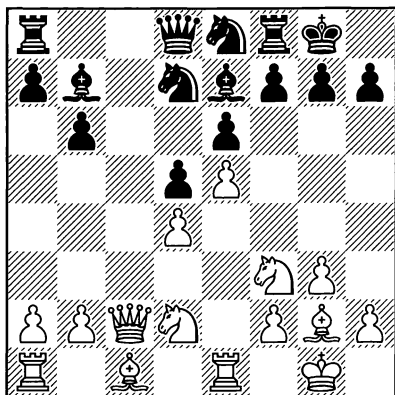
(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 ♙e7 5.♙g2 0-0 6.0-0 ♘bd7 7.♗c2 c6 8.♘bd2 b6 9.e4 ♙b7 10.e5 ♘e8 11.cxd5)

### B222) 11...cxd5

In addition to the solidity of Black's position, I think the idea of winning a tempo with ...♖c8 has attracted black players to this move. Still,

I believe that White should be able to develop an initiative.

## 12.♖e1



White vacates the f1-square for his minor pieces. Depending on the circumstances, he can activate his light-squared bishop with ♗f1-d3, or improve his misplaced knight by ♘d2-f1-e3-g4, perhaps first allowing the dark-squared bishop to go to f4 or g5. White's main idea is to activate his pieces, which later might allow him to build a serious initiative on the kingside. At the same time, Black will not be allowed to become active on the queenside, or to exchange queens, which would significantly ease his defensive task.

We will examine five continuations for Black, three of them only fleetingly, but the two latter ones, **B2221** 12...♙a6 and **B2222** 12...♞c8 will be studied deeply. So first, we have the three minor lines.

12...♘c7 was tested in Tukmakov – Lalic, Tucepi 1996. White was better after 13.♘f1 ♞c8 14.♘e3 a5 15.h4 ♞e8 16.a3±.

Advancing the b-pawn does not make much sense as far as I can see. Still it has been played: 12...b5 13.♘f1 b4 14.h4 White comfortably

develops his play on the kingside. 14...♞c7 15.♞d3 ♞c8 16.♙g5! ♙xg5 17.♘xg5 ♞c2 18.♞b5± White has won a pawn, Baumeegger – Velcheva, Budapest 1997.

More logical is:

12...♞c7 13.♞b3

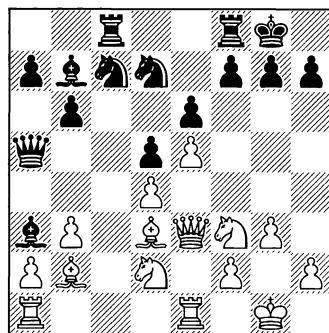
White can use the same idea, but starting with 13.♞a4. Black may reply 13...♞c6 and the best for White would be to play 14.♞b3 switching to the same plan as after 13.♞b3.

13...♞c8 14.♙f1 ♞c2 15.♞e3!

As I mentioned above, it is essential for White to avoid an exchange of queens. White is only marginally better after 15.♞xc2 ♞xc2 16.♙d3 ♞c8 and Black should hold this without any serious difficulties.

15...♞g6

This is probably stronger than 15...♘c7 16.♙d3 ♞a4, as Black's queen appears to be misplaced on the queenside. 17.b3 ♞a5 This is Zakharevich – Geller, Tula 2001, and here instead of 18.a3 I like 18.♙b2. In *Chess Informant 81* Zakharevich gave 18...♙a3 (18...♘b5 19.a3), but White has a strong idea at his disposal:



19.b4! ♙xb4 (19...♞xb4?? loses to 20.♙xa3 ♞xa3 21.♙xh7+ followed by 22.♞xa3) 20.a4! Threatening to trap the queen with ♘b3. 20...b5 21.axb5 ♞b6 22.♞e2!± White's b5-pawn seriously restricts Black's activity on the queenside.

## 16.♙d3 ♖h5

This happened in Larrass – Flemm, e-mail 1988. In my opinion White should continue:

## 17.♘b3N ♘c7 18.♙d2 ♙a6 19.♞ac1

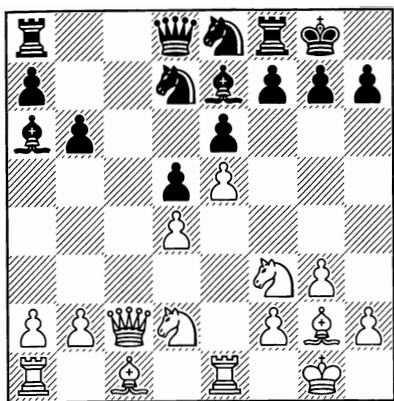
In the case of 19.♙c2 f6! Black has counterplay.

## 19...♙xd3 20.♞xd3 ♖g6 21.♞e2±

White is better, as Black's pieces lack coordination.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 ♙e7 5.♙g2 0-0 6.0-0 ♘bd7 7.♞c2 c6 8.♘bd2 b6 9.e4 ♙b7 10.e5 ♘e8 11.cxd5 cxd5 12.♞e1)

## B2221) 12...♙a6



Black plays this to pre-empt White's idea of redeveloping his light-squared bishop.

## 13.♘f1

This time 13.♙f1 only allows Black to activate his bad knight from e8: 13...♘c7! 14.♙d3 ♙xd3 15.♞xd3 ♞c8 16.♘f1 ♞a6 and Black was fine in Behnke – Lederer, Germany 1986.

## 13...♞c8 14.♞d1

Black's main problem is his passive minor pieces, especially his knights, so he logically tries to improve their positions.

## 14...♘b8

There is also 14...♘c7 when White instructively seizes the initiative on the kingside: 15.h4 h6 Defending against 16.♙g5, but also creating a target for possible sacrifices. 16.h5 ♘b8 17.♘e3 ♘c6 18.♘g4 ♞e8 19.♙xh6! gxf6 20.♞c1 White will continue 21.♞d2, when the attack is very dangerous, Filippov – Frolyanov, Sochi 2005.

## 15.h4 ♘c6

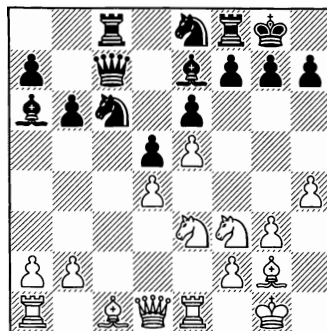
Another option is:

## 15...♞c7 16.♘e3

Certainly White should prevent Black's queen from coming to c2: 16.♘g5 ♞c2 17.♞g4 ♘c6 18.♘e3 ♞g6! White cannot avoid an exchange of queens (after ...h6), as 19.♞d1 is answered by 19...♞d3!.

## 16...♘c6

And here instead of creating additional targets for Black on the queenside with 17.a3 as in Mandekic – Tratar, Zadar 2004, I would recommend:



## 17.♙d2N ♙d3

17...♘b4? is hardly a good idea, as Black loses after 18.♞a4.

## 18.♙c3 ♙e4 19.♙f1

White will play 20.♘d2 chasing Black's bishop from e4 and gaining plenty of space to develop a kingside initiative.

## 16.♙g5

This is quite a tricky move.

### 16...♙xg5

After the natural 16...h6 White has a pleasant choice between 17.♙d2 or 17.♙xe7 ♖xe7 18.♙c1± and White is slightly better, thanks to his space advantage.

After 17.♙d2 White can start thinking about future sacrifices on h6, while Black cannot play 17...♖b4? in view of 18.♖a4! and Black has to give up his light-squared bishop. 18...♙xf1 19.♙xf1± and White has a clear positional advantage.

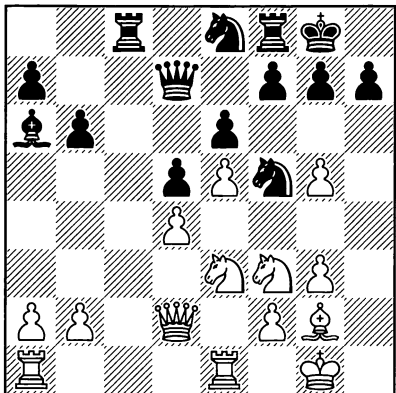
White does not need to worry about 16...♖b4 17.♖e3 h6, as he has a strong move in reserve: 18.a3! ♖c6 (Black cannot play 18...♖d3? 19.♙xe7 ♖xe7 20.♙e2± when the knight is trapped on d3) 19.♙f4 Black has achieved nothing, while White's attack plays itself.

### 17.hxg5

Now White can imagine many possible sacrifices of his knight on the f6-square.

### 17...♖e7 18.♖e3 ♖d7 19.♖d2 ♖f5

A draw was agreed at this point in Filippov – Khenkin, Fuegen 2006, however I would claim that White has a clear positional advantage after:



### 20.♖xf5 N exf5 21.♖b4!

Of course White's main idea is to sacrifice a pawn with e5-e6, gaining a good outpost for his knight on e5, but the simple idea of ♖a3 is also useful in some positions.

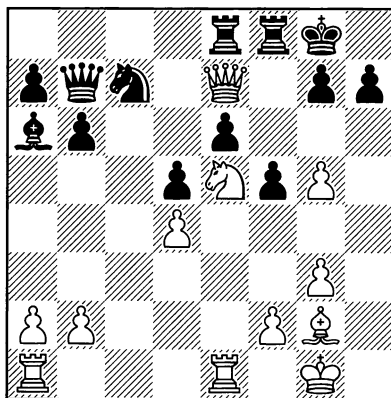
### 21...♖c7

If 21...♙c6 then White makes some preparations and strikes with e5-e6. 22.♖a4 b5 (23.e6 followed by 24.♖e5 was a serious threat) 23.♖a5 ♖c7 24.e6! ♙xe6 25.♙xe6 fxe6 26.♖e5± White has a large positional advantage.

### 22.♖a3 ♖c6

With the idea of putting his queen on b7, defending the bishop and allowing ...♖e6.

### 23.e6! fxe6 24.♖e5 ♖b7 25.♖e7 ♙ce8

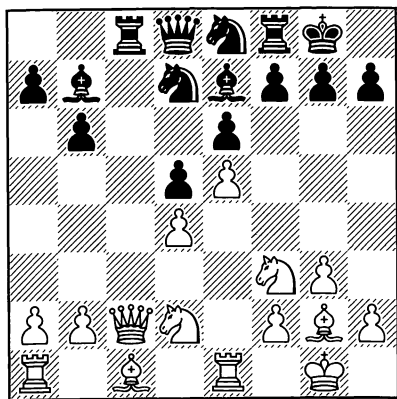


### 26.♖b4±

White's positional compensation looks great, as I can hardly see any active moves for Black.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♖f3 ♖f6 4.g3 ♙e7 5.♙g2 0-0 6.0-0 ♖bd7 7.♖c2 c6 8.♖bd2 b6 9.e4 ♙b7 10.e5 ♖e8 11.cxd5 cxd5 12.♙e1)

B2222) 12...♙c8



Unsurprisingly, this natural move is the main line.

### 13.♞a4

White has another option in 13.♞d3, but in the following encounter Black obtained good counterplay: 13...♜b8 (13...♞c7 14.♙f1 transposes to a position that has already been examined after 12...♞c7) 14.♜f1 ♙a6 15.♞d1 ♜c6 16.♜e3 ♜b4 17.♙f1 ♙xf1 18.♞xf1 f6 – Villamayor – Sandipan, Calcutta 2001.

Once again Black has a wide choice of continuations:

### 13...♙c6

An alternative that looks logical is:

#### 13...♜c7

Black is trying to activate his passive knight and preparing ...♙a6. Now White has a choice:

#### 14.♙f1

The alternative is 14.♜f1 and after 14...b5 15.♞d1 b4 Black quickly ran into the trouble in Izoria – Agrest, Las Vegas 2003: 16.h4 ♜b8 17.♙g5 ♜c6 18.♜e3 f6 19.exf6 gxf6 20.♙h6±

#### 14...a5 15.♙d3

Again, this is a typical idea in this variation: White avoids an exchange of light-squared bishops.

### 15...♙a6 16.♙b1! ♜b5 17.♞b3

White's queen comes back from the queenside to help its army seize the initiative on the kingside.

#### 17...♜b8

I believe Black should have played the modest 17...♞e8 18.♞d3 ♜f8 with a sound position, though I still prefer White.

### 18.♜f1 ♞c4 19.♞d3 g6 20.♙h6±

White has good attacking chances, Avrukh – Filippov, Halkidiki 2002

### 13...a5 14.♙f1

I always prefer to activate the light-squared bishop, but it also appears that after 14.♜f1 ♙a6 15.h4 ♙d3 16.♙g5 h6 17.♙xe7 ♞xe7 18.♞ac1 ♜c7 19.♞e3 ♙b5 20.♞d1 ♜a6 21.♞ec3 ♞xc3 22.♞xc3 ♜db8 23.g4±, despite the simplifications, White has definite pressure, Sargissian – Rivas Pastor, Ubeda 2001.

### 14...♜b8 15.♙d3 ♙a6 16.♙b1

This is Filippov – Portisch, Halkidiki 2002. Once again, it is the same idea of keeping the light-squared bishop alive. The funny thing is that this game was played the day after my game with Filippov (mentioned above in the 13...♜c7 variation), so I can assume that he liked my concept and decided to play this line with opposite colours. It did earn Filippov a very convincing victory:

#### 16...♜c6 17.♜f1

17.a3 was worthy of consideration.

### 17...♙b4 18.♙d2 f5 19.♞d1 ♙e7 20.h4±

White keeps slightly better chances.

13...♞c7 is possible, but White has easy play: 14.♙f1 a6 15.♙d3 ♜b8 16.h4 a5 17.a3 ♙a6 18.♙b1 f6 A logical reaction, as Black clearly lacks space, but now the e6-pawn becomes a permanent weakness. 19.exf6 ♙xf6 20.♜f1 ♞f7 21.♙f4 White was comfortably better in Stefanova – Molchanova, Sochi 2005.

### 14.♞b3



I prefer not to allow Black to activate his bishop. For example, 14.♖d1 ♘b5, though after 15.♙f1 ♙xf1 16.♜xf1 White still has better chances, thanks to his space advantage.

#### 14...b5

Obviously Black tries to get some activity on the queenside.

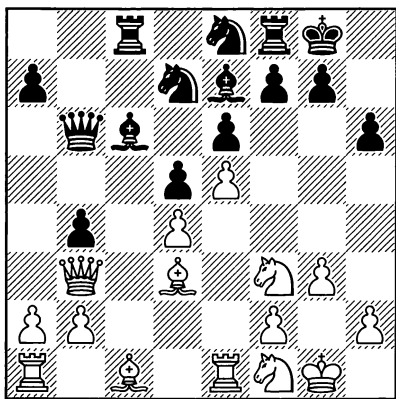
#### 15.♙f1 ♖b6

After 15...b4 I won a very easy game, which continued: 16.♙a6! A smooth intermediate move, which disrupts Black's coordination. 16...♖b8 17.♙d3 ♘b5 18.♙b1 ♖c8 19.♜f1 ♜b6 20.h4 ♖c7 21.♙g5 ♙xg5? (better was 21...♜c4) 22.♜xg5 h6 23.♜h7+– Avrukh – Al Tamimi, Bajada de la Virgen 2005.

#### 16.♙d3 b4 17.♜f1 h6

Preventing an annoying ♙g5. This position arose in Izoria – Nadera, Dubai 2004.

White could continue:



#### 18.♜e3!?

In the game Black gained good counterplay after 18.♙f4 ♘b5 19.♙b1 f5 20.exf6 ♜exf6∞.

The following is a rough line to show what could happen after 18.♜e3:

#### 18...♜c7 19.♙b1

Black was threatening ...♜b5.

#### 19...♖fd8 20.♙d2 a5 21.♜g2!±

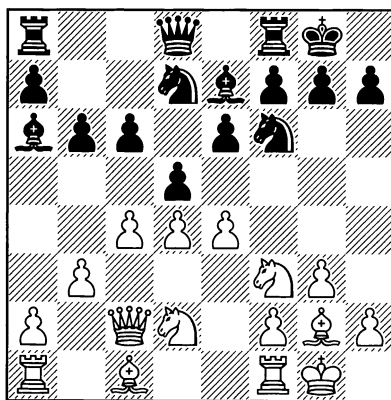
White's chances are preferable, as he has good prospects of developing an initiative on the kingside by means of ♖e3-f4-g4, or ♜f4-h5.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♜f3 ♜f6 4.g3 ♙e7 5.♙g2 0–0 6.0–0 ♜bd7 7.♖c2 c6 8.♜bd2 b6 9.e4)

#### B23) 9...♙a6

Black puts the bishop on this seemingly less logical square, not because of a mouse slip, but because he wants to play ...♖c8 and ...c5 to put pressure on the c4-pawn and point a finger at the queen on c2. Luckily, White moves just about every second time.

#### 10.b3



#### 10...c5

Usually after:

10...♖c8 11.♙b2

play transposes to our main line with 11...c5, but there are a couple of rare moves as well.

I do not really understand the modest 11...♖c7, as after 12.e5!N ♜e8 13.♖fe1 White should be much better, as Black's knight is clearly misplaced on e8.

11...dxe4 12.♜xe4 ♜xe4 13.♖xe4 b5

13...c5 14.♖ad1 clearly favours White, as Black's bishop appears to be misplaced on

a6 and Black hardly wants to capture on d4, as in this case White's knight would reach a great square on c6.

This position is considered to be worse for Black, according to theory based on the following old game:

14.c5 b4 15.♞fd1 ♙b5

Black has managed to activate his light-squared bishop, but White creates other weaknesses in Black's camp with nice play:

16.♞e1! ♜b8 17.a3 bxa3 18.♞xa3 ♜b7 19.♙c1!

This is another strong move: the dark-squared bishop will be more active on the c1-h6 diagonal.

19...♜f6 20.♙g5 ♜d5

If 20...h6 21.♙d2 ♜d5 22.♜e5 Black cannot chase White's knight with ...f6, as it would decisively weaken the g6-square.

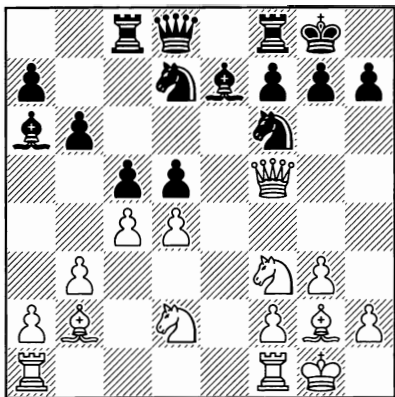
21.♙xe7 ♜xe7 22.♜e5±

White is better because of Black's weak pawns on the queenside, Quinteros – Petrosian, Buenos Aires 1979.

11.exd5 exd5 12.♙b2 ♞c8

In my opinion this is a critical position for this variation.

13.♞f5!?



Having spent many hours analysing this

line, I have come to the conclusion that the text is White's only chance of fighting for the advantage.

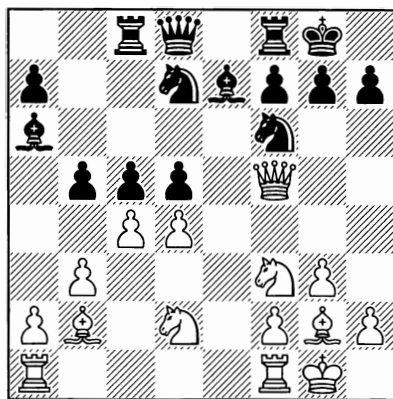
Another popular move is 13.♞fd1, but after 13...cxd4 14.♜xd4 b5! Black is OK according to theory, and I have also failed to find any chances for an advantage. An example of this is the following miniature: 15.♞f5 bxc4 16.bxc4 g6 17.♞g5 dxc4! 18.♜c6 ♞xc6 19.♙xc6 ♞b6 20.♙xd7 ♞xb2 21.♙h3 ♞d8 22.♞a5 c3 23.♜b3 ♞xd1+ 24.♞xd1 ♜e4 0–1, Petrov – Azarov, Sibenik 2005.

So, to prevent something this awful happening to the reader, I tried to discover something new after the text move.

Black has a choice of four moves: **B231) 13...b5**, **B232) 13...cxd4**, **B233) 13...dxc4** and **B234) 13...g6**.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♜f3 ♜f6 4.g3 ♙e7 5.♙g2 0–0 6.0–0 ♜bd7 7.♞c2 c6 8.♜bd2 b6 9.e4 ♙a6 10.b3 c5 11.exd5 exd5 12.♙b2 ♞c8 13.♞f5)

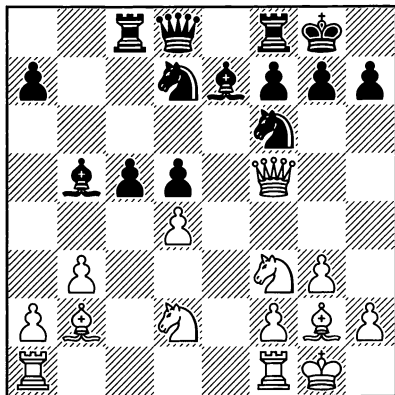
**B231) 13...b5**



This has only appeared once in practice, so it is not a great surprise that it is possible to find an improvement.

**14.cxb5 ♖xb5**

Now I believe White should play:

**15.♖fe1!N**

Obviously this is the best square for the f1-rook, while the second rook will be very useful on the c-file.

Black had a reasonable position after 15.♖fc1 g6 in Lukov – Popov, Sofia 1989.

**15...♞e8 16.♞ac1±**

The intention is to get a favourable position by playing against an isolated pawn after dxc5.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♟f3 ♟f6 4.g3 ♟e7 5.♟g2 0-0 6.0-0 ♟bd7 7.♞c2 c6 8.♟bd2 b6 9.e4 ♟a6 10.b3 c5 11.exd5 exd5 12.♟b2 ♞c8 13.♞f5)

**B232) 13...cxd4 14.♟xd4 ♞e8**

There are other options:

**14...♟b4**

This is premature.

**15.♞fd1 ♞c5?**

And this is already a decisive mistake!

**16.cxd5 ♟b7 17.♟e4+–**

Duckworth – Labrador, Los Angeles 1991.

14...♟c5 15.♞ad1 will probably transpose to our main line after 15...g6 16.♞h3.

**15.♞fd1**

Removing the rook from an unpleasant pin.

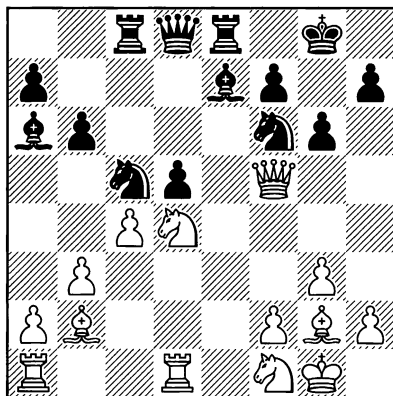
**15...♟c5 16.♟f1!**

A nice idea: White's knight transfers to e3 to strengthen the pressure against the d5-pawn.

**16...g6**

16...♟ce4 17.♟e3 g6 18.♞f3 also looks advantageous for White.

White should now have played:

**17.♞c2!?N**

A surprising retreat, but the position has changed.

17.♞b1 ♞d7 was fine for Black in the game Rhode – Sanner, e-mail 2001.

**17...♟ce4**

Now 17...♞d7 is strongly met by 18.♟e3 and if 18...dxc4? then 19.♟c6 wins.

**18.♟e3 ♟b7 19.♟h3±**

This position, with all its tension in the centre, looks favourable for White.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 ♙e7 5.♙g2 0-0 6.0-0 ♘bd7 7.♖c2 c6 8.♘bd2 b6 9.e4 ♙a6 10.b3 c5 11.exd5 exd5 12.♙b2 ♖c8 13.♖f5)

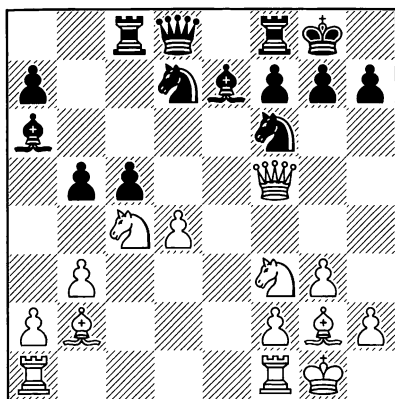
B233) 13...dxc4 14.♘xc4

Black has no problems after 14.bxc4 cxd4 15.♘xd4 g6!.

14...b5

I also examined 14...g6 15.♖h3 b5 16.♘ce5 cxd4 17.♘xd7 ♖xd7 18.♘xd4 b4 19.♖fd1 and White has a definite initiative.

I believe White now has to improve his play by:



15.♘ce5!N

15.♘e3 c4 16.bxc4 bxc4 was fine for Black in Loehr – Spiegel, Germany 2003.

15...c4

In the case of 15...cxd4 16.♖fd1 White is clearly better. For example, 16...g6 (or 16...♘xe5 17.♘xe5 ♙c5 18.b4! ♙b6 19.♘c6±) 17.♖f4 ♙b7 18.♙xd4 with an initiative.

Black's position may look very sound, but White can launch a very unexpected offensive:

16.♘g5!

Creating a few threats, such as 17.♘c6 or 17.♘exf7 ♖xf7 18.♖e6, attacking both the rook and the bishop on a6.

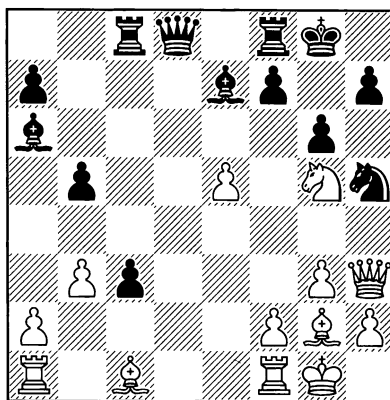
16...c3 17.♙c1 g6

17...b4 loses to 18.♘exf7! followed by 19.♖e6.

18.♖h3 ♘xe5

After 18...♘b6 19.♖e1!± White has too many threats.

19.dxe5 ♘h5



20.♘e6!

This is the point of White's play: otherwise Black would simply be better with his passed pawn on c3.

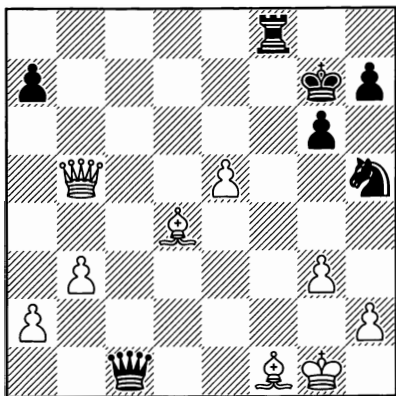
20...fxe6 21.♖xe6† ♔g7 22.♖xa6 ♙c5 23.♖xb5 c2

Black's only chance, but it is not enough.

24.♙b2

And now there is an almost forced line:

24...♖xf2 25.♖xf2 ♖d1† 26.♙f1 ♙xf2† 27.♔xf2 ♖f8† 28.♔g1 ♖xa1 29.♙xa1 c1♖ 30.♙d4±

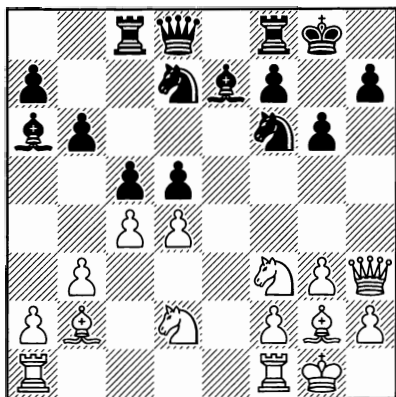


The forcing play ends up clearly in White's favour.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♟f3 ♟f6 4.g3 ♟e7 5.♟g2 0-0 6.0-0 ♟bd7 7.♖c2 c6 8.♟bd2 b6 9.e4 ♟a6 10.b3 c5 11.exd5 exd5 12.♟b2 ♟c8 13.♖f5)

### B234) 13...g6 14.♖h3

In my opinion an interesting alternative is 14.♖f4!?N, which has never occurred in tournament practice.



### 14...cxd4

Black has various interesting options:

14...h5

The idea is to restrict the white queen's activity.

15.♟fe1 cxd4 16.♟xd4 ♟c5 17.♟f5! gxf5

This position arose in Raetsky – Frolov, Smolensk 2000. White can try:

18.♖xf5

18.♟xe7 ♖xe7 19.♖h4 was only enough for a draw.

18...♟h7!

Instead 18...d4 19.♖g5† ♟h7 20.♟xe7 ♖xe7 21.♟xd4 ♟g8 22.♖xf6 ♖xf6 23.♟xf6± gives White a clear edge.

19.♟xd5 ♟f6

Here White can continue his attack with the unexpected:

20.♟e5!?

With a very complex position that requires a lot of analysis.

The strange 14...♟c7 occurred in Gelfand – Sorokin, USSR 1986. I am fairly sure White should continue with the natural 15.♟ad1 with complex play.

14...♟e8 15.♟fd1

I would prefer 15.♟ad1 and if 15...cxd4 16.♟xd4 ♟c5 the play will transpose to 16...♟e8.

15...cxd4 16.♟xd4 ♟c5

White now has no choice:

17.♟f1N

After 17.♟2f3 ♟ce4 18.cxd5 ♖xd5 19.♟d2 ♟c5± Black took over the initiative in C. Horvath – Kiss, Budapest 2007.

17...♟ce4 18.♟e3 ♟c5 19.♖h4

White cannot play 19.cxd5, as it runs into the neat 19...♟xf2! 20.♟xf2 ♟xe3! and Black develops a crushing attack.

19...♟b7

Just bad is 19...♟e7? 20.♟xd5 and Black loses the pawn.

20.♟dc2∞

The position is extremely complicated and requires additional investigation.

**15.♘xd4 ♘c5 16.♙ad1**

Again Black has a choice:

**16...♘d3**

After

**16...♙e8**

I found a new idea:

**17.♘c2!?N**

This looks quite promising, as it immediately threatens Black's central pawn.

Less convincing is 17.♘2f3 ♘ce4 with double-edged play, Kochyev – Shaposhnikov, St Petersburg 1996.

**17...♙b7**

17...♘d3 just loses a pawn without compensation: 18.♙xf6 ♙xf6 19.♙xd5±

Extremely dangerous is 17...dxc4 18.♘xc4 ♘d3 (18...♙c7 runs into 19.♙e5) 19.♘2e3±

It is hard to believe Black can survive with such a pin along the d-file.

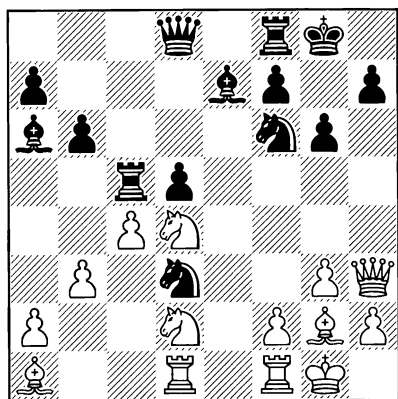
**18.♘e3 d4 19.♙xb7 ♘xb7 20.♘f3 d3****21.♘e1±**

Black loses his central pawn.

16...h5 as in Razuvaev – Lputian, Frunze 1979, should be met with an idea that we already know: 17.♘c2 dxc4 18.♘xc4 ♙e8 19.♘2e3! Black's weaknesses on the kingside will tell.

**17.♙a1 ♙c5**

This happened in the game Raetsky – Filippov, Smolensk 2000. Now Black is threatening 18...♙c8.

**18.♙c8!N**

An easy improvement, which leads to an obvious advantage for White.

In 2002 I prepared the following novelty:

**18.cxd5 ♙c8**

Not 18...♘d5? 19.♘e4+– and Black cannot avoid losing material.

**19.g4**

Until I started working on this book I was pretty sure that White had good chances of an advantage here, but then I discovered the simple:

**19...♘f4 20.♙h6 ♘xg4**

20...♘xg2? 21.♘e4!! was my idea when White does indeed seize the initiative.

**21.♙xf4 ♙d6 22.♙e4 ♙xh2† 23.♙h1 ♙h4**

Black has at least a draw by perpetual, and he can probably hope for more. Fortunately, this is not relevant, as 18.♙c8 is a much better option.

**18...♘d5**

The alternative is:

**18...♙c8 19.♙g2 ♘d5 20.cxd5 ♘e5**

20...♘b4 loses: 21.♘e4 ♙xd5 22.♘c6! ♙xd1 23.♘e7† ♙xe7 24.♘f6† ♙xf6 25.♙xf6.

**21.d6! ♙xd6**

Or 21...♙xd6 22.b4! ♙c7 23.♘e4 and Black is lost.

**22.♘e4 ♙b7 23.b4!+–**

Black will lose material.

**19.♘e4!**

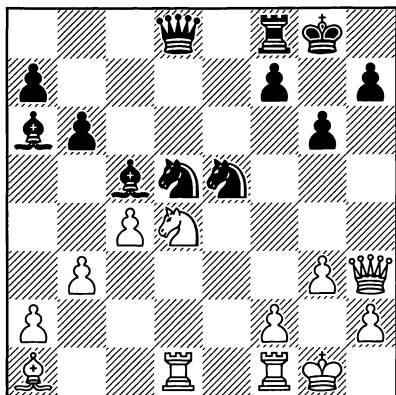
This is the key move of White's idea.

**19...♘e5**

If 19...♙c8 20.♙xc8 ♙xc8 21.♙xd3± White is a safe pawn up.

**20.♘xc5 ♙xc5**

20...bxc5 21.♘f5 ♘f3† 22.♙g2 is hopeless for Black.



### Conclusion:

Essentially the whole line looks quite reliable for Black. 9...♙b7 may be a little passive and White enjoys a pleasant space advantage due to his e5-pawn, but the 9...♙a6 line looks very solid and has always been considered by theory to be acceptable for Black. It is true that in 13.♞f5 I have managed to find a good idea in the line that is Black's main weapon, but there is still a lot of room for improvements.

21.♘f5! ♘f3† 22.♙g2 gxf5 23.♞xd5 ♞g5  
24.♙xf3 ♙b7 25.♞fd1

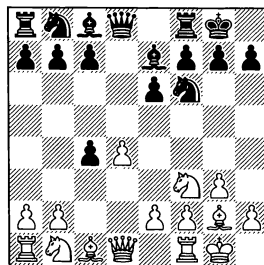
White has a big advantage.

# Chapter 12

## The Catalan

### 6...dxc4

### Variation Index



1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 ♙e7 5.♙g2 0-0 6.0-0 dxc4

7.♙c2

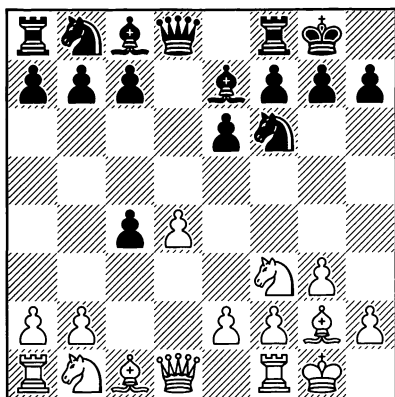
A) 7...c5	p 204
B) 7...♙d7	p 205
C) 7...a6 8.♙xc4 b5 9.♙c2 ♙b7 10.♙d2	p 207
C1) 10...♘c6 11.e3	p 208
C11) 11...♙a7	p 209
C12) 11...♘b4	p 210
C2) 10...♙a7 11.♙c1 ♙e4 12.♙b3	p 212
C21) 12...♙d5	p 213
C22) 12...♘bd7	p 214
C23) 12...♘c6 13.e3 ♙a8 14.♙d1	p 217
C231) 14...♘b8	p 218
C232) 14...b4	p 220
C3) 10...♘bd7 11.♙a5 ♙c8 12.♘bd2	p 222
C31) 12...♘b8	p 223
C32) 12...♙e8	p 225
C4) 10...h6	p 227
C5) 10...♙d6	p 228
C6) 10...♙e4 11.♙c1	p 231
C61) 11...♘bd7	p 231
C62) 11...♙c8 12.♙g5	p 233
C621) 12...♘bd7 13.♙f4	p 234
C6211) 13...♙b7	p 234
C6212) 13...c5	p 235
C622) 12...c5	p 236
C63) 11...♘c6	p 238
C64) 11...c6	p 239
C65) 11...♙b7 12.♙f4	p 240
C651) 12...♘d5	p 240
C652) 12...♙d6	p 242



### 1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♟f3 ♟f6 4.g3 ♟e7

This move, connected with 6...dxc4, is Black's most popular choice against the Catalan opening. The moves are often shuffled around a bit without it making much of a difference.

### 5.♟g2 0-0 6.0-0 dxc4



Needless to say, this line is a permanent battleground for the chess elite. Certainly many games of Anand, Leko and Kramnik spring to mind. Kramnik is such an expert on the Catalan that Chess Stars, the St Petersburg-based publishing house, are basing their opening repertoire series *According to Kramnik* on the Catalan.

### 7.♞c2

By far White's most popular continuation. White's other options, such as 7.♟e5 or 7.♟a3, are hardly dangerous for Black. If one is to believe the latest word of opening theory, then White is really struggling to get any advantage in these lines.

7.♞a4 is another way to regain the pawn. Usually the play transposes to our main line after 7...a6.

Here the main move is 7...a6, which we will return to in due course. Besides this, it is well

known that Black cannot hold the pawn by means of 7...b5?! as it runs into 8.a4. Then Black cannot fulfil the initiated strategy in view of 8...c6 9.axb5 cxb5 10.♟g5!+ and Black cannot avoid material losses.

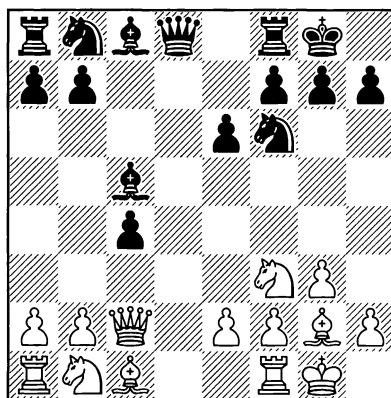
But before switching to the main line, we have to eliminate Black's other options. Basically I believe there are only two that deserve attention: A) 7...c5 and B) 7...♟d7. After we have disposed of them, we can continue with the heavy work after C) 7...a6.

### (1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♟f3 ♟f6 4.g3 ♟e7 5.♟g2 0-0 6.0-0 dxc4 7.♞c2)

#### A) 7...c5

Obviously this is not the way to solve Black's problems, as White keeps unpleasant pressure along the h1-a8 diagonal.

### 8.dxc5 ♟xc5



### 9.♟bd2!

I believe this to be more precise than 9.♞xc4 ♞e7 10.♟c3 a6!, with the idea of playing ...b5 followed by ...♟b7, neutralizing White's pressure.

### 9...♟c6 10.♟xc4 ♞e7

In the case of  
10...♙d7 11.♘ce5

White uses the vulnerable position of Black's bishop on c5 to obtain the bishop pair and thus a pleasant advantage.

11...♙e7 12.♘xd7 ♘xd7 13.♙g5 ♙e8

Probably Black should have tried 13...f6, but after 14.♙d2 ♖ac8 15.♖ac1± the weakening of the e6-pawn and the h3-c8 diagonal should give White additional targets.

14.♖ad1 ♙e7 15.♙f4±

Wojtkiewicz – Voelker, Philadelphia 1999.

### 11.♘fe5

Increasing the pressure along the h1-a8 diagonal.

### 11...♘xe5

White is not afraid of 11...♘d4 12.♙d1 ♖d8 13.♙d2±. Black's pieces are lacking in coordination, whilst White has the simple idea of increasing his pressure by means of ♖c1 and ♘d3.

### 12.♘xe5 ♙c7

In *Chess Informant 91* Mikhalevski gives the following lines:

12...♙d4 13.♙f4 ♘d5 14.♖fd1 ♘xf4 15.gxf4 ♙b6 But here, instead of 16.♖d3, possibly more precise would be 16.♙e4 g6 17.♖ac1 with a clear positional advantage.

12...♙d6 13.♘c4 ♙c7 14.b3! ♖d8 15.♙a3 ♙e8 16.♖fd1± and White is obviously better.

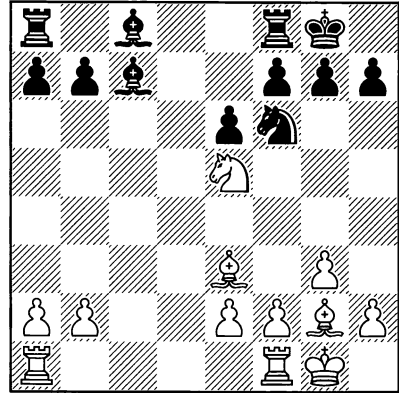
### 13.♙e3 ♙d6

After 13...♙xe5, as played in Mikhalevski – Goletiani, Kapuskasing 2004, White can play 14.♙xc5 ♖e8 15.♖fd1 when he is clearly better with his bishop pair.

### 14.♙xc7 ♙xc7

This position was reached in Sulava – Bauer,

Metz 2000. And now White should play simple chess with:

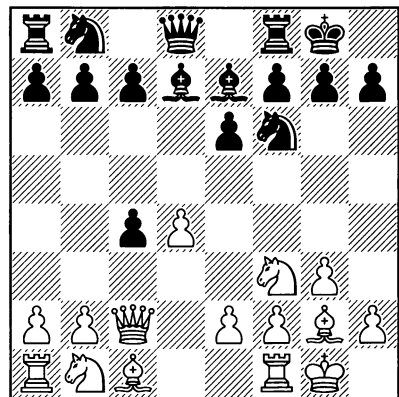


### 15.♙d4N ♘d5 16.♖ac1 f6 17.♘d3

With a clear advantage. Once again the pressure down the long diagonal is poisonous.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 ♙e7 5.♙g2 0-0 6.0-0 dxc4 7.♙c2)

### B) 7...♙d7



This move looks pretty natural. The idea is to put the bishop on c6. However, compared to the line 7...a6 8.a4 ♙d7 (which we are not discussing in this book in any detail), there are a few differences, which we will come back to.

**8. ♖xc4**

8. ♖e5 looks quite promising, but after 8... ♖c6! I did not manage to discover any advantage for White (8... ♖c6 9. ♖xc6 ♖xc6 10. e3± would indeed be better for White) 9. ♖xc6 (or 9. ♖xc4 ♖xe5 10. dxe5 ♖d5∞) 9... ♖xc6 10. ♖xc6 bxc6 11. ♖xc4 ♖d5! and Black is fine, Kiss – Bakos, Fuzesabony 2004.

**8... ♖c6**

Obviously this position resembles the position that arises after 7... a6 8. a4 ♖c6 9. ♖xc4, except we have omitted the ...a6 and a4-moves. This makes the diagram position an improved version for White: the inclusion of ...a6 and a4 would be in Black's favour, due to the weakening of the b4-square, which is significant in many endgame positions.

**9. ♖c3**

This is already a first difference compared with the position where ...a6 and a4 have been played. White can freely play the text, while with the pawns on a6 and a4, Black would comfortably equalize with 9... b5!.

Less convincing is 9. ♖f4 ♖bd7 10. ♖c3 ♖d6!.

**9... a6**

Another line goes:

9... ♖bd7 10. ♖e1

I prefer this calm move to the more popular 10. ♖d3.

10... ♖e4

White was aiming to play 11. e4, establishing full control over the centre.

Worse is 10... ♖b6 11. ♖d3 ♖bd5 12. e4±.

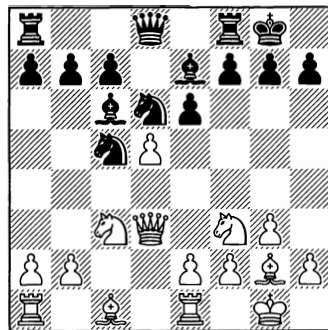
11. d5

The point behind 10. ♖e1. White is aiming to get the two bishops.

At this point it makes sense to look at the two options one by one.

a) 11... ♖d6 12. ♖d3 ♖c5

12... exd5 13. ♖xd5 ♖f6 14. ♖xe7 ♖xe7 15. ♖f4± White has a pleasant edge thanks to his bishop pair, Thomassen–Hagen, Gausdal 2007.



13. ♖d4! N

I like this move, although 13. ♖d1 exd5 14. ♖xd5± was also slightly better for White in Schulz – Muse, Germany 1995.

13... exd5

In the case of 13... ♖b5 14. ♖xb5 ♖xb5 White has the strong move 15. ♖e3! at his disposal. 15... exd5 (15... ♖xd5 runs into 16. ♖b4! ♖c6 17. ♖ed1 ♖e4 18. ♖a3+ and Black unavoidably loses material) 16. ♖b4 a5 17. ♖xb5 c6 18. ♖xc5 ♖xc5 19. ♖xc5 ♖e8 20. ♖d4± I think White's three minor pieces are stronger than Black's queen.

14. ♖xd5

Less clear is 14. ♖xc5 ♖b5 15. ♖xb5 ♖xb5 16. ♖xb5 ♖f6∞.

14... ♖f5 15. ♖xe7 ♖xe7 16. ♖g5! f6 17. ♖c4† ♖h8 18. ♖f4

As so often in the Catalan, White's pair of bishops secures him a pleasant edge.

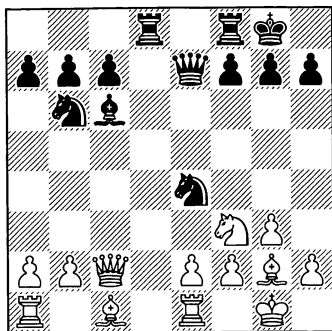
b) 11... exd5 12. ♖xd5 ♖b6

12... ♖df6 does not change much: 13. ♖xe7 ♖xe7 14. ♖f4± Inkiov – Doleschal, Greece 1994.

13. ♖xe7 ♖xe7 14. ♖c2 ♖ad8

This far we have been following Jovanic –

Lazovic, Pula 1999. Here White can improve his play with:



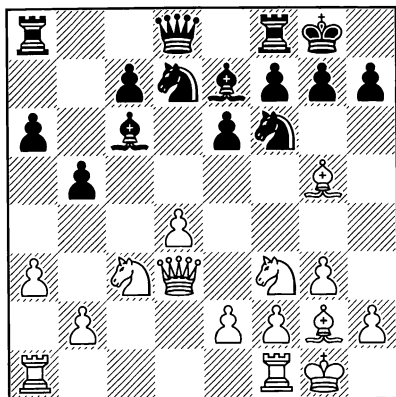
### 15.♙e3!N

A natural move, developing the bishop and taking control over important central squares such as d4 and c5.

### 15...♙d5 16.♞ed1 c6 17.b3±

With a pleasant edge, thanks to White's bishop pair.

### 10.♙g5 b5 11.♞d3 ♘bd7 12.a3!



Another major difference compared with the position with pawns on a4 and a6. White has this multipurpose move, which takes the sting out of ...b4, thus fighting for the e4-square. White also prepares b2-b4, a cramping move that will stop Black's typical idea of a liberating ...c5-break.

### 12...♙b7

The alternative is 12...h6. Now worthy of consideration is 13.♙d2!? but, as far as I know, there is no reason to leave the trodden path with 13.♙xf6 ♘xf6 14.♞ac1 ♙xf3?!. An obvious concession that gives White a big positional advantage. (But even after the best line, 14...b4 15.axb4 ♙xb4 16.♞c4 ♙xc3 17.♞xc3 ♙xf3 18.♙xf3 ♞b8 19.♞c2±, White would enjoy a nice edge thanks to Black's weak pawns on the queenside.) 15.♙xf3± Stefansson – Delgado Ramirez, Havana 2001.

### 13.b4

Needless to say, White is not intending to give Black permission to play ...c7-c5.

### 13...a5

In the case of 13...h6 14.♙xf6 ♘xf6 15.♘e5 ♙xg2 16.♙xg2 ♙d6 17.♘c6! ♞e8 18.♞f3 White has a much better position, Gleizerov – Akhmadeev, Kstovo 1997.

### 14.♞xb5

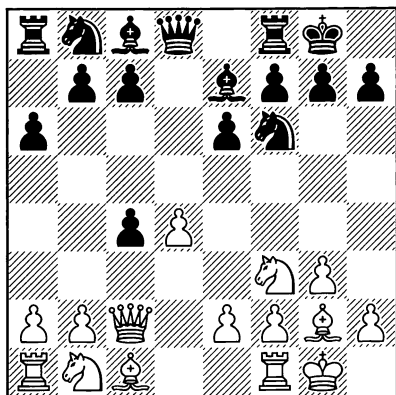
The modest 14.♞ab1 would also give White some advantage, but it would allow some counterplay along the a-file, so this simplifying move is probably better.

### 14...axb4 15.♞xb7 bxc3 16.♞c6 ♞xa3 17.♞xa3 ♙xa3 18.♞xc3 ♙e7 19.♞c6±

Despite the heavy simplifications, White keeps an advantage thanks to his bishop pair and better pawn structure, Wojtkiewicz – Berset, Geneva 1995.

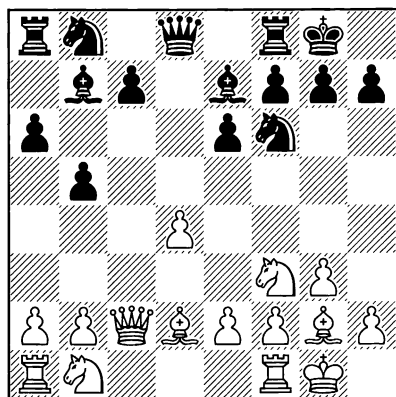
### (1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 ♙e7 5.♙g2 0-0 6.0-0 dxc4 7.♞c2)

### C) 7...a6



This is the main move by a factor 100 sun lotion. There are now two main lines, but since the scare of the millennium bug no one has had the heart to play 8.a4. Anticipating that there is some greater knowledge in the universe that guides all strong players away from this move for a reason, and for more material reasons as well, I too choose to take the pawn back at the first given chance.

8. ♖xc4 b5 9. ♖c2 ♗b7 10. ♗d2



The text move can seem a bit odd to those who have not studied the subtleties of the Catalan. It has been White's most popular option for many years, and not without reason.

First of all, White prevents Black from easily carrying out the thematic ...c5 advance, as he

is ready to meet Black's ...♗bd7 with ♗a5.

Secondly, the quiet bishop move is a slow improvement of the position, awaiting Black's set-up in the most flexible way, without committing to anything.

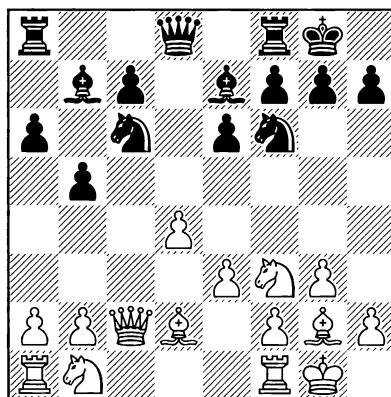
At this point we have our greatest branching point in the whole book. Black has no fewer than six decent moves. They are C1) 10...♗c6, C2) 10...♗a7, C3) 10...♗bd7, C4) 10...h6, C5) 10...♗d6 and the big main move since the old days, C6) 10...♗e4.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♗f3 ♗f6 4.g3 ♗e7 5.♗g2 0-0 6.0-0 dxc4 7.♖c2 a6 8.♖xc4 b5 9.♖c2 ♗b7 10.♗d2)

### C1) 10...♗c6

Not the most popular continuation recently, especially after the game Kramnik – Carlsen, Dortmund 2007, where White achieved a convincing victory.

### 11.e3



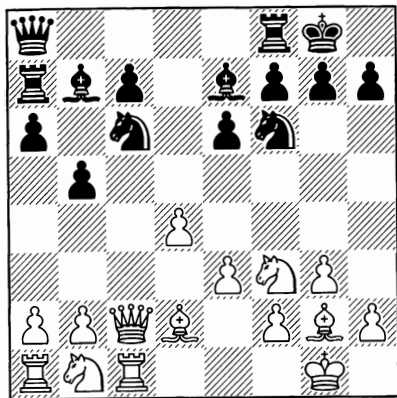
Now knight to b4 is the most natural and popular continuation, but Black has other options as well. The main alternative is C11) 11...♗a7 with C12) 11...♗b4 as by far the main move.

The combination of the two systems does not work properly for Black. The slow 11...♖b8 is in trouble after the simple 12.♘e1 ♘b4 13.♙xb4 ♙xb4 14.♘d3 ♙xg2 15.♙xg2 ♖b7+, as played in Ehlvest – Hjartarson, Reykjavik 1988. White could now play 16.♙g1N ♙d6 17.♘d2 ♖d5 18.♗ac1± seizing the c-file.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 ♙e7 5.♙g2 0-0 6.0-0 dxc4 7.♖c2 a6 8.♖xc4 b5 9.♖c2 ♙b7 10.♙d2 ♘c6 11.e3)

C11) 11...♗a7 12.♗c1 ♖a8

One of the ideas behind playing ...♗a7.



### 13.♘e1

A very direct approach: White transfers his knight to d3 from where it will control the c5-square, helping seize control of the c-file.

### 13...♘b8

If Black plays 13...♘b4 14.♙xb4 ♙xb4 15.♙xb7 ♖xb7 16.♘d3 ♙d6 17.♘d2 ♖d5 18.♖c6± White obtains exactly what he is aiming for, F. Grunberg – Zatoniskih, Eforie 1999.

### 14.♙xb7

Less convincing is 14.♙a5 ♗c8, as in the game Timman – Short, Hilversum (1) 1989.

### 14...♖xb7

14...♖xb7 looks rather strange. After 15.♘d3 ♗c8, Budnikov – Pigusov, St Petersburg 1993, White can gain the advantage in many different ways. I prefer 16.b4 ♘bd7 17.♙e1± followed by 18.♘d2.

### 15.♙a5 c5

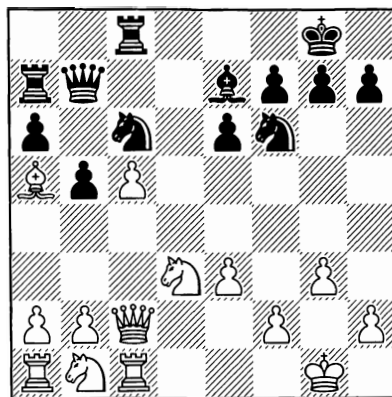
Otherwise Black falls under serious positional pressure, for example: 15...♗c8 16.b4 ♘bd7 17.♘d3 ♙d6 18.♘d2 ♖d5 19.♖c6!± Nemeth – Cvetkovic, Balatonbereny 1986.

### 16.dxc5 ♗c8

Black has some activity for the pawn, but with precise play White keeps all the trumps.

### 17.♘d3 ♘c6

Also after 17...♘fd7 Black failed to get any compensation in the following game: 18.♘d2 ♘c6 19.♘b3 ♘ce5 20.♘xe5 ♘xe5 21.e4 ♘c4 22.a4! ♙f6 23.♙c3± Marin – Amura, Benasque 1997.



### 18.♙c3!N

I believe this to be a very strong and natural improvement over the slightly odd 18.♙b6, which was played in Salov – Rotstein, France 1993.

### 18...♘e4

Another line goes: 18...♖d5 19.♗d2 b4 20.♙d4 f6 and White can play 21.♗f3!, as after 21...e5 he can reply 22.e4 with a clear advantage.

### 19.♗d2 ♖xc3

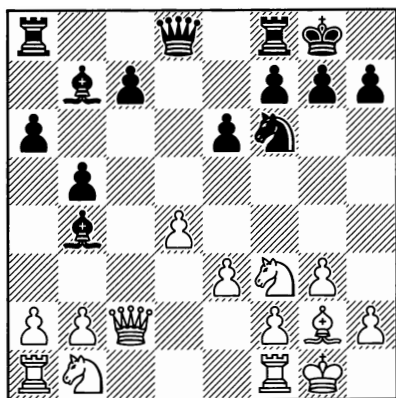
19...♗xc5 20.♗xc5 ♙xc5 21.♙xg7! ♗b4 22.♖c3± and White still has that extra pawn.

### 20.♖xc3 ♖d7 21.♗b3 a5 22.♙d1 a4 23.♗d4 ♙f6 24.♗b4±

White has a healthy extra pawn.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♗f3 ♗f6 4.g3 ♙e7 5.♙g2 0-0 6.0-0 dxc4 7.♖c2 a6 8.♖xc4 b5 9.♖c2 ♙b7 10.♙d2 ♗c6 11.e3)

### C12) 11...♗b4 12.♙xb4 ♙xb4



### 13.a3

13.♖c1 is probably also a serious move. It has been played only once, in P.H. Nielsen – Banusz, Dresden 2007. But to tell the truth, I did not study it seriously as I think 13.a3 offers White more than enough.

### 13...♙d6

An important branching point in the 10...♗c6 line, so we should take the time to look at it carefully. Black has other options for us to study:

13...♙a5?! is a rather questionable move, as Black's bishop will be poorly placed on b6 after giving White a much appreciated tempo. 14.b4 ♙b6 15.♗bd2 a5 16.♗e5 ♙xg2 17.♗xg2 ♖d5† 18.♗g1 with a clear positional advantage for White, Fominyh – C. Vaidya, Chennai 2004.

Equally often played has been:

### 13...♙e7

But recently Black suffered a painful high-level defeat, scaring other players away from this line.

### 14.♗bd2 ♖c8

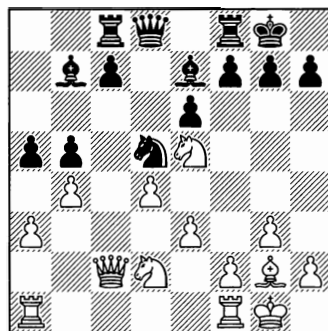
Obviously White prevents the ...c5-idea.

### 15.b4 a5 16.♗e5!

The main drawback of Black's 13th move is he loses control over the e5-square.

### 16...♙xg2

The aforementioned game continued with 16...♗d5?!. "This move looks like a bad over-the-board inspiration rather than the fruit of mistaken home analysis" – Marin. In the game White refuted it outright.



17.♗b3! The b4-pawn is attacked no fewer than three times, but the tactics work perfectly for White. 17...axb4 18.♗a5 ♙a8 19.♗ac6 ♙xc6 20.♗xc6 ♖d7 21.♙xd5 exd5 22.axb4± White has a strategically winning position, and Black will soon lose his b5-pawn, Kramnik – Carlsen, Dortmund 2007.

## 17.♘g2 c6

17...axb4 allows the occupation of the c6-square: 18.♟c6 ♖d7 19.axb4± with a clear positional advantage, Speelman – Cox, Southport 1983.

## 18.♟d3 axb4 19.axb4 ♟d5 20.♖b3±

White has more space and a flexible structure in the centre, Marin – Marciano, Bucharest 1993.

## 14.♟bd2 ♖c8

The most challenging move.

Worse is 14...♖e7 15.♖ac1 ♖fc8 16.e4 e5. As always, this tension in the centre appears to be in White's favour: 17.♙h3 ♖e8 18.♖fe1 ♟d7 19.♙xd7! ♖xd7 20.dxe5 ♙xe5 21.♟xe5 ♖xe5 22.♟b3± Followed by 23.♟c5 with a clear positional edge, Speelman – Johannessen, Roskilde 1998.

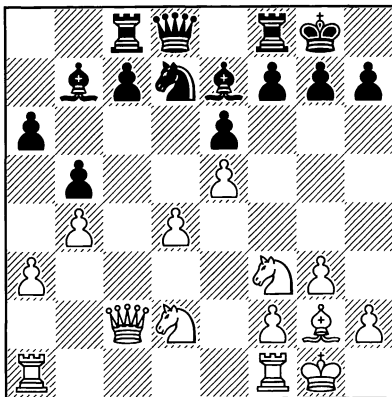
## 15.e4

Now 15.b4 a5! gives Black reasonable play.

## 15...♙e7 16.e5 ♟d7

Nobody has tried 16...♟d5 and indeed after 17.♟b3 White is in control.

## 17.b4



## 17...a5

The most ambitious move, but not the only attempt.

## 17...♙d5

This is Black's latest try in this position.

## 18.♟b3

In this position a draw was agreed in Gustafsson – Baramidze, Altenkirchen 2005. In my opinion, a slightly premature decision, as White keeps better chances.

## 18...♟b6

I also examined: 18...f6 19.exf6 ♙xf6 (19...♖xf6 20.♟fd2 ♟b6 21.♟e4±) 20.♖ad1 and White is better due to Black's weakness on e6.

## 19.♟fd2 ♟c4 20.♖fd1

I did not find anything special for White after 20.♟xc4 bxc4 21.♟a5 ♙xg2 22.♘g2 ♖xd4 23.♟xc4 (23.♖xc4 ♖xc4 24.♟xc4 c5=) 23...c5 24.♖ad1 ♖g4±.

## 20...♙xg2 21.♘g2 ♟xd2

21...♖d5† 22.♘g1 ♟xd2 transposes to 21...♟xd2.

## 22.♖xd2 ♖d5† 23.♘g1 ♖fd8 24.♖c1±

White has a positional advantage, as his knight has much better prospects than Black's bishop. It is important to notice that:

## 24...a5?

does not work in view of

## 25.♟xa5 c5 26.bxc5 ♙xc5 27.♖d3!

and if

## 27...♙xa3 28.♖xc8 ♖xc8 29.♖xc8† ♙f8

## 30.♟c6 ♖d7 31.♖c3

White obtains a winning position.

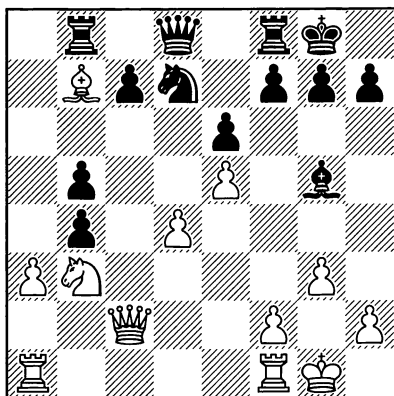
## 18.♟b3! axb4

Another line is 18...♙xf3 19.♙xf3 axb4 20.axb4 ♙xb4 21.♖c6!. The point of White's idea: Black's pieces lack space. 21...♙e7 22.♖a7 (certainly not included in White's plan is allowing Black to play active moves, such as 22.♖xb5 c5) 22...b4 23.♖c1 ♟b6 24.♖b7 ♙g5 25.♖c2± White is dominating, Iskushnyh – Babu, Mumbai 2004.



**19. ♖g5 ♙xg5 20. ♙xb7 ♖b8**

Until now the moves have been more or less forced and we have finally reached a critical position, where I believe I have found an important improvement.

**21. ♙e4!N**

A very concrete approach. White either wins time for ♖a5, or forces Black to weaken his position by means of f5.

I also examined 21. ♙c6N bxa3 22. ♖xa3 ♖b6. I believe Black has to give up the b5-pawn in order to free himself. 23. ♙xb5 ♖d5 and it does not look like White has enough resources to pose Black serious problems, for example: 24. ♙c4 ♙e7 25. ♖a7 ♖b4 26. ♗e4 ♗d7 27. ♖c1 ♖fd8 and although White is slightly better, there is nothing special.

21. ♖a5 c5 22. ♖c6 (22. axb4 cxd4 23. ♖c6 ♗b6 24. ♖xb8 ♖xb8 25. ♙e4 would transpose to the game) 22... ♗b6 23. ♖xb8 ♖xb8 24. ♙e4 cxd4 25. axb4 ♙e7! Black had reasonable compensation in the game Budnikov – Z. Almasi, Budapest 1991.

**21... bxa3**

After 21...f5 White has a pleasant choice between 22. ♙g2, maintaining the threat of ♖a5, and the more positional 22. ♙c6 ♙e7

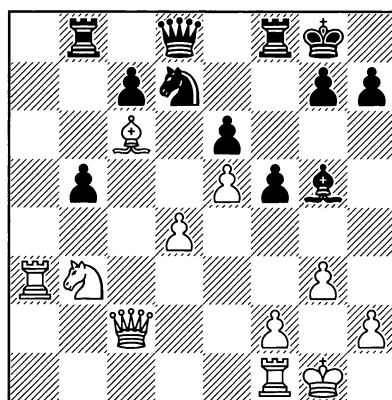
23. axb4 ♙xb4 24. ♖a6 with strong positional compensation.

After 22. ♙g2 play could continue with 22...bxa3 23. ♖xa3 ♖b6 (the idea of getting some play with 23...c5 fails badly after 24. dxc5 ♖xe5 25. ♖d1 ♗c8 26. c6± and White's passed pawn is extremely dangerous) 24. ♗c6 ♗e8 25. ♖a7± with positional pressure.

**22. ♖xa3 f5**

Worse is 22...c5 23. dxc5 ♖xe5 24. ♙xh7† ♖h8 25. ♙e4±. White's c6-pawn is very dangerous.

Just bad is 22...g6 in view of 23. ♖a5!± and White's knight comes to c6 with great effect.

**23. ♙c6**

After provoking ...f5, White has definitely made progress. The e6-pawn might become a serious target in future.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3. ♖f3 ♖f6 4.g3 ♙e7 5. ♙g2 0–0 6.0–0 dxc4 7. ♗c2 a6 8. ♗xc4 b5 9. ♗c2 ♙b7 10. ♙d2)

**C2) 10... ♖a7**

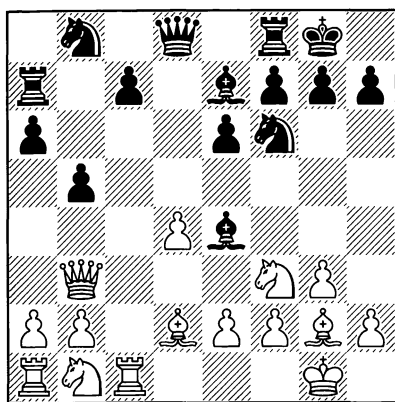
Recently this has been one of the most fashionable answers for Black. Inspired by

Vishy Anand, it has been the choice of many top players. First of all, Black makes a useful move, vacating the a8-square for his queen, from where it will generate some pressure along the a8-h1 diagonal. For example, with his knight on c6 Black has a tactical idea of ...♜xd4 and White's bishop is hanging on g2. Secondly, as we have already talked about, a waiting strategy is quite popular here: White slowly prepares with flexible moves, waiting for Black's knight to move, but White only has a limited number of useful moves at his disposal.

### 11.♞c1

The most challenging move.

### 11...♙e4 12.♞b3



At this point Black has three options, C21) 12...♙d5, C22) 12...♞bd7 and C23) 12...♜c6.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♞f3 ♜f6 4.g3 ♙e7 5.♙g2 0-0 6.0-0 dxc4 7.♞c2 a6 8.♞xc4 b5 9.♞c2 ♙b7 10.♙d2 ♞a7 11.♞c1 ♙e4 12.♞b3)

### C21) 12...♙d5 13.♞e3

A good square for the queen. From here it controls the c5-square, whilst also eyeing the black rook on a7.

### 13...♜g4

The latest trend in this position, but other moves have been played.

A serious blunder would be 13...♜c6?? 14.♞xc6! ♙xc6 15.d5+– and White's queen appears to be very useful on e3, P.H. Nielsen – Landa, Germany 2004.

### 13...♞bd7 14.♙a5 b4

White can try a subtle pawn move:

### 15.a3!?N

Avoiding 15.♞bd2 ♞b8 as in Vladimirov – Koneru, Dubai 2005, which arises via a different move order with 12...♞bd7.

### 15...♞b8

White's idea is to meet 15...bxa3 with 16.b4! taking the c5-square under control. White should not be afraid of 16...a2 17.♜c3 ♞b6 18.♞d3!± and White would regain the pawn with dividends.

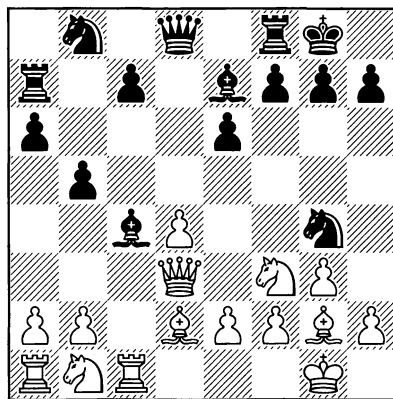
### 16.axb4 ♙xb4 17.♙xb4 ♞xb4 18.♜c3 ♞d8

Using the fact that the b2-pawn is untouchable: 18...♞xb2? 19.♞ab1 ♞a3 20.♜xd5 ♞xe3 21.♜e7+–

### 19.♜xd5 ♜xd5 20.♞d3

White has a pleasant positional advantage.

### 14.♞d3 ♙c4



The point of Black's previous move.

**15.♟xc4 bxc4 16.♞xc4**

White has sacrificed the exchange, but in return he has gained clear positional plusses: his light-squared bishop is very strong and slightly restricts Black's pieces; his pawn structure is compact, while Black has weak pawns on the queenside; finally, Black's pieces lack proper coordination, whilst White's army is harmoniously spread across the board.

**16...♟f6**

Black's knight was clearly misplaced on g4 and White was already threatening 17.d5. I like White's plan in the following example:

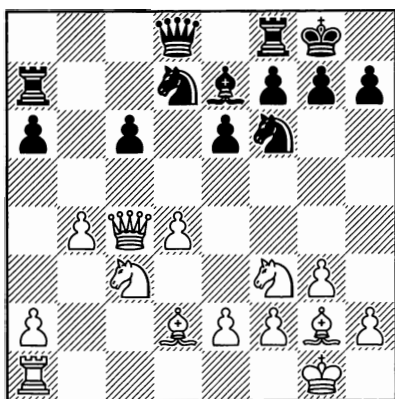
**17.♟c3 ♟bd7 18.b4!**

Preventing the traditional freeing ...c5-move.

**18...c6**

I also checked 18...♟b6 19.♞b3 ♟fd5, where White can even play 20.♟xd5!? ♞xd5 21.♟e5 ♞xb3 (or 21...♞xd4 22.♟c3 ♞d6 23.♟c6 ♞aa8 24.♟d1 ♟d5 25.♞c4!± with a great position for White) 22.axb3 ♟d6 23.♟c6 ♞aa8 24.e4± with a large positional advantage. Black's pieces are almost paralysed.

Here, instead of 19.♟a4 as played in Sakaev – Karjakin, Dagomys 2008, I found a different and hopefully deeper idea.

**19.♟b1!N**

This subtle prophylactic move allows White to retain serious positional pressure. The following lines are not necessarily forced, but they give a good indication of what could be expected.

**19...♟d5**

Another type of position arises after 19...a5 20.b5 cxb5 21.♟xb5 ♞a8 22.♞d3 with nice compensation.

**20.e4 ♟xc3 21.♞xc3 ♞b6 22.♟c1 ♟c8 23.a3±**

Although Black's position is pretty solid, only White can play for a win.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♟f3 ♟f6 4.g3 ♟e7 5.♟g2 0–0 6.0–0 dxc4 7.♞c2 a6 8.♞xc4 b5 9.♞c2 ♟b7 10.♟d2 ♞a7 11.♟c1 ♟e4 12.♞b3)

**C22) 12...♟bd7**

As always, White has to react to the possibility of a liberating ...c5 break.

**13.♟a5 ♞b8**

Black has another decent square for his queen:

**13...♞a8**

This move was introduced by Leko. Black ignores the threat against the c7-pawn and instead takes the long diagonal under firm control. The only way to fight for an advantage is:

**14.♟bd2**

In my opinion Black equalizes after 14.♟xc7 ♟xc7 15.♟xc7 ♞a7 16.♟f4 ♟xf3 17.♟xf3 ♞xd4 18.♟c3 ♟e5!.

14.♟c3 ♟c6 was fine for Black in P.H. Nielsen – Leko, Dortmund 2005.

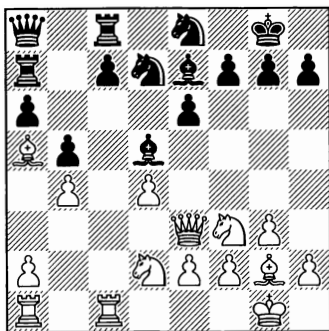
**14...♟d5 15.♞e3**

At this point there are two important ideas to deal with:

Black has tried the interesting:

a) 15...♖c8 16.b4 ♘e8

With the idea to play ...♘d6 followed by ...♘b6, trying to put one of his knights on c4. I found the following interesting improvement:



17.♖c3!?N

At first this might look like the wrong square, but a deep tactical point will be revealed.

17.♖c2 ♘d6 18.♖ac1 ♘b6 was perfectly playable for Black in Sargissian – Aveskulov, Saratov 2006.

It is hard to see, but the rook appears to be better placed on c3 than on c2, in view of the following complications:

17...♘d6 18.♙d3 ♘b6

Probably Black should continue 18...f5, taking control over the e4-square, but also creating a possible target for White's pieces in the e6-pawn. 19.♖ac1 ♘e4 (Another line runs 19...♘b6 20.♙xb6 cxb6 21.♖xc8† ♘xc8 22.♘f1! with the idea of meeting 22...♙xb4 by 23.♘e3 ♘e7 24.♘d5 ♙xd5 [24...exd5 allows White to seize a powerful initiative: 25.♙e3! ♘h8 26.♙e6±] 25.♖c2!♖ and White will have rich play for the pawn.) 20.♖3c2 ♙d6 21.♘f1!± Transferring the knight to e3, thus maintaining positional pressure.

19.e4! ♘xe4

19...♙b7 allows White to seize an initiative after 20.♘e5 f6 21.♖xc7! ♖xc7 22.♙xb6±.

20.♙xb6 ♘xc3

With White's rook on c2, Black would answer ...♘d2 also attacking White's second knight on f3.

21.♙xa7 ♘e4 22.♘e5!

The only way.

22...♘d2 23.♙xd5 exd5 24.♙xd2 f6 25.♘d7 ♙xa7 26.♙e3+–

White has a decisive attack: ♙e6† is coming and Black's rook will hang after a knight move.

b) 15...♙d6

Defending the c7-pawn and at the same time creating the idea of an ...e5-break.

16.♙h3!

A typical idea in this line: White removes his bishop from the h1-a8 diagonal, thus preventing Black's plan of ...e5.

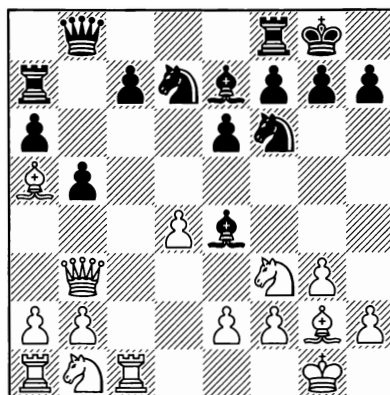
16.♖c2 led to a convincing victory in Conquest – Gomez Esteban, San Sebastian 2006, but Black can simply realize his main idea: 16...e5! 17.dxe5 ♘xe5 18.♘xe5 ♙xg2 19.♘df3 ♙xf3 20.♘xf3 c5= with easy play for Black.

16...♘e4 17.♘xe4

17.♘b3 would allow Black to play 17...f5 and get counterplay on the kingside.

17...♙xe4 18.♘e1 ♘b6 19.♙xb6 cxb6 20.♙g2 ♙xg2 21.♘xg2±

White, or should I say I, achieved a slight edge thanks to my better pawn structure in Avrukh – Quezada, Beersheba 2005.



**14. ♖e3**

It is important for White to begin with this move.

**14. ♘bd2**

This allows Black to achieve the ...c5 break.

**14... ♘a8!**

Black does not need to put his bishop on d5 and leaves this square for his knight.

**15. ♘b4**

The point is that after 15. ♖e3, Black plays 15...c5 16.dxc5 ♘d5! regaining the pawn and obtaining a comfortable game.

15...c5! 16. ♘xc5 ♘xc5 17.dxc5 ♖c8 18. ♖a3 ♖ac7 19.b4 a5! 20. ♖xa5 ♖a7=

Gelfand – Vescovi, Bermuda 2005.

**14... ♘a8**

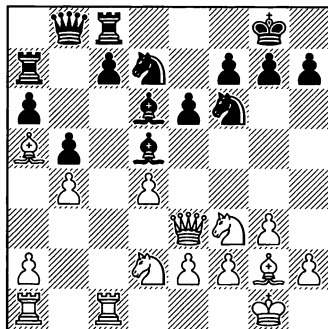
Black has other options:

**14... ♘d5 15. ♘bd2 ♖c8**

15...b4 16. ♘b3 (after 16.a3 as in Vladimirov – Koneru, Dubai 2005, Black can play 16...bxa3 17.bxa3 ♖c8 with good chances to equalize, as White can hardly stop the ...c5-break) 16...♖c8 17. ♘e5 ♘xc5 (17...c5 does not work: 18. ♘xd7 ♖xd7 19.dxc5 ♘xc5 20. ♘xc5 ♖b5 21. ♖c2!± and Black has no compensation for the pawn) 18. ♘xd7 ♘xd7 19. ♘xc5 ♖b5 Black's only chance is to achieve the ...c5-break, otherwise he will face positional pressure. 20. ♖c2 c5?! But unfortunately it does not work. 21.dxc5 ♖xc5 22. ♘xc5 ♘xc5 23. ♖xc5 ♘xc5 24. ♖c1 ♖xa5 25. ♖xc5 ♖d8 26. ♖d4 ♖b8 The play after 20...c5?! was more or less forced, as in the game Johannessen – Tallaksen, Sandnes 2005. At this point White missed an opportunity to win a pawn: 27. ♖c4! ♖b7 (27...a5? loses to 28. ♖xa7) 28. ♖c6 Threatening ♖c4. 28... ♖a8 29.f3 h6 30. ♖c4 ♖b8 31. ♖xa6±

**16.b4 ♘d6**

In this position White can gain an advantage with a typical move:

**17. ♘h3!N**

This both removes the light-squared bishop from the pressure down the a8-h1 diagonal and creates an unpleasant threat of ♘e5.

Black had reasonable play after 17. ♖d3 ♖a8 18. ♘e1 ♘xc2 19. ♘xc2 e5∞ in J. Horvath – Senff, Triesen 2005.

**17... ♘b6**

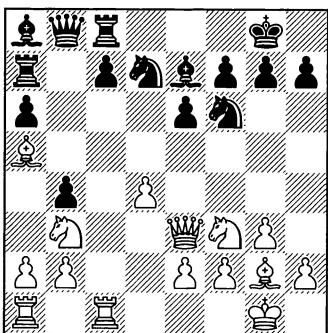
Against 17...c6 White can play simply 18. ♖d3±, threatening to trap the bishop with e4.

**18. ♘e5 ♖b7 19.f3!±**

White has a clear positional advantage, while Black lacks any real counterplay.

**14...b4 15. ♘bd2 ♘a8**

15...♘d5 transposes to the 14...♘d5 line above.

**16. ♘b3 ♖c8****17. ♖c2!**

Again Black faces the same problem: he is not able to play c7-c5.

17...♙e4

17...♞b5? is simply poor. After 18.d5! Black's rook is hanging on a7.

18.♙e5!

This smooth tactic secures White an advantage.

18...♙xg2

18...♙xe5 19.♙xe4 ♙eg4 20.♞d3± is also clearly better for White.

19.♙xd7 ♙xd7 20.♙xg2 ♞b5 21.♞ac1±

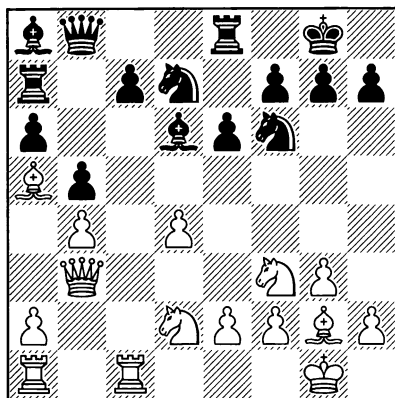
Black had a strategically difficult position in Gelfand – Harikrishna, Bermuda 2005.

### 15.b4 ♙d6 16.♙bd2 ♞e8N

Ftacnik's recommendation. Black's idea is to advance his e-pawn, making it possible to get all of his pieces into play.

Black was under typical pressure after 16...♙b6 17.♞c2 ♙d5 18.♞ac1 ♞b7 19.♙e1! ♙xg2 20.♙xg2 ♙fd5 21.♞b3 f5 22.f3!± in Johannessen – Vaganian, Germany 2005.

17.♞b3!



The idea, which I like very much, is shown on the next move.

17...e5

Probably Black should refrain from playing this now and instead play 17...♙d5. But even then White can stop Black's idea, this time with 18.♞d3 ♞a8 19.♙h3!±, when 19...e5? would be a serious error in view of 20.e4!±.

### 18.♙g5! ♙xg2

18...♞e7 leaves Black with a strategically difficult position after 19.d5 ♙b6 20.e4±. Maybe this is preferable, but it is not a pleasant choice.

### 19.♞xf7† ♙h8 20.♙xg2 h6

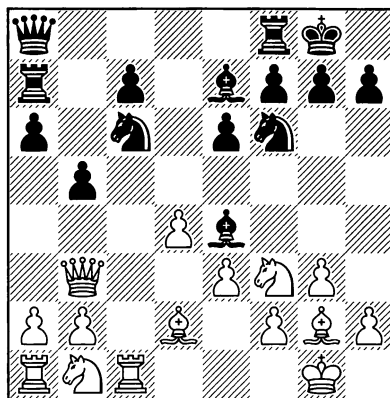
Another line runs 20...exd4 21.♞b3 ♙e5 22.f4 ♞a8† 23.♙g1 ♙c4 24.♙xc4 ♞xe2 25.♞f3! ♞xf3 26.♙xf3 bxc4 27.♙xd4! with one pawn more for White.

### 21.♙gf3 exd4 22.♙xd4

White keeps his extra pawn.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♙f3 ♙f6 4.g3 ♙e7 5.♙g2 0-0 6.0-0 dxc4 7.♞c2 a6 8.♞xc4 b5 9.♞c2 ♙b7 10.♙d2 ♞a7 11.♞c1 ♙e4 12.♞b3)

C23) 12...♙c6 13.e3 ♞a8



### 14.♞d1

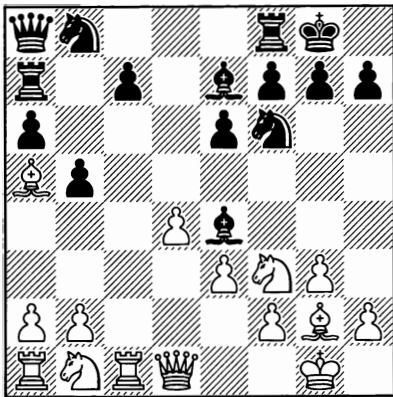
Unfortunately White has to make this awkward-looking move in order to parry Black's tactical threats along the a8-h1 diagonal.

14.♖c3 leaves White with no chances of fighting for an advantage after the following pretty much forced line: 14...♗xd4! 15.exd4 ♙xf3 16.♙xf3 ♜xf3 17.♗xb5 Otherwise White would just be worse. 17...♜xb3 18.axb3 ♜b7 19.♗xc7 ♜xb3 20.♙c3 ♜c8 21.♗xa6 h6! Black will equalize comfortably after playing ...♗e4 or ...♗d5.

At this point Black has tried two ways to get counterplay on the queenside: one based on the ...c5-break with C231) 14...♗b8, and the other is the more active looking C232) 14...b4.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♗f3 ♗f6 4.g3 ♙e7 5.♙g2 0-0 6.0-0 dxc4 7.♜c2 a6 8.♜xc4 b5 9.♜c2 ♙b7 10.♙d2 ♜a7 11.♜c1 ♙e4 12.♜b3 ♗c6 13.e3 ♜a8 14.♜d1)

C231) 14...♗b8 15.♙a5



15...♜c8

Black has two other serious options.

15...♙d6 16.a3 ♗bd7 17.♗bd2 ♙d5 18.♜f1!

This is a thematic idea in this position and was played in Aronian – Karjakin, Wijk aan Zee 2007. White defends his light-squared bishop and appears to be fully armed against the ...e6-e5 advance. I have no doubt that

Levon could have found this idea over the board, but it was much easier for him, as it was played a few days after the heavyweight clash Kramnik – Anand at the same tournament.

18.b4 would allow 18...e5.

18...c5

If 18...e5 then White answers with 19.dxe5 ♗xe5 20.♗xe5 ♙xe5 21.♜c2± and Black cannot play 21...c5 in view of 22.♙b6.

19.dxc5 ♙xc5

Black has managed to carry out the thematic break ...c7-c5 but White retains pressure, thanks to his control of the c-file.

20.♜c2 ♜b7 21.♜ac1 ♙b6 22.♙xb6 ♜xb6 23.♗d4 ♗e5 24.♙xd5 ♗xd5 25.♗d4f3

It is marginal, but in my opinion it would be even stronger to play 25.♗c6 ♗xc6 26.♜xc6 ♜b8 27.♗f3±.

25...♗xf3† 26.♗xf3±

The least of Black's three options is this:

15...♗c6 16.♙e1 ♗b8

White has won an important tempo, vacating the d2-square for his knight. There is no reason to be thinking about repetitions!

17.b4 ♗bd7 18.a4!

It is important for White to keep both d2 and c3 available for his knight.

18...♗d5 19.♗bd2 ♙g6 20.♗b3 ♙e4

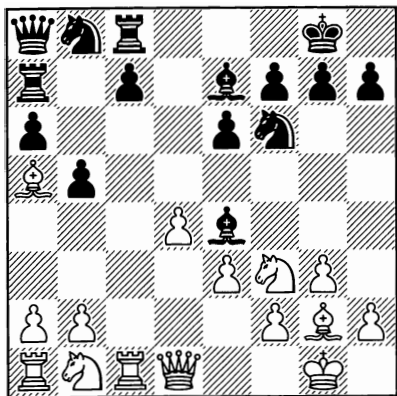
Clearly inferior is the capture on b4: 20...♙xb4 21.♙xb4 ♗xb4 22.♗e5 ♜c8 23.♗xg6 hxg6 24.axb5±

21.axb5 ♙xb4

After 21...axb5 22.♗e5 ♗xe5 (Black loses an exchange after 22...♙xg2 23.♜xa7 ♜xa7 24.♗xd7+–) 23.♙xe4 ♗c4 24.♗a5! White's positional advantage is beyond any doubts.

22.♙xb4 ♗xb4 23.♗bd2!

White was clearly better in Avrukh – Sandipan, Turin (ol) 2006.

**16.a3!**

This is definitely the fruit of excellent homework by Vladimir Kramnik. It is very likely that this is the only move that poses Black real problems.

Black was doing quite all right in this line until this quiet move was played:

16.♘bd2 ♙d5 White is unable to prevent the thematic c5-break, Gelfand – Karjakin, Wijk aan Zee 2006.

It is also too early for 16.♙b6 ♖b7 17.♙c5 ♙xc5 18.dxc5 (18.♖xc5 ♘bd7 19.♖c1 c5 is fine for Black as well) 18...♖a7, and Black equalized comfortably in Ponomarev – Anand, Wijk aan Zee 2007.

**16...♙d6**

16...c5? does not work out well because of 17.♘bd2 ♙d5 18.♙b6± and Black loses a pawn.

**17.♘bd2 ♙d5 18.♖f1**

As I mentioned above, this was the first game where White employed this positional idea. An important point is that White is awaiting the development of the b8-knight before deciding where to put his pieces.

**18...♘bd7**

The drawback to 18...♘c6 is 19.♙c3 ♘e7 20.b4 and Black has no chance of achieving the ...e6-e5 advance.

**19.b4 e5**

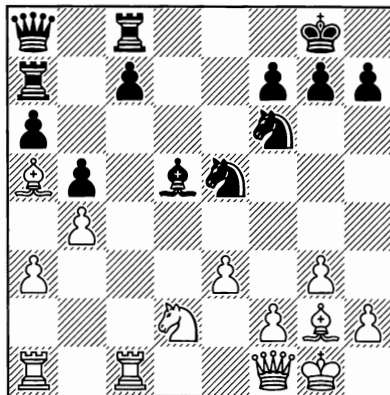
Without this activity White would just double rooks on the c-file, consolidating his advantage.

**20.dxe5 ♙xe5**

White also keeps better chances after the other recapture: 20...♘xe5 21.♘xe5 ♙xe5 22.♖a2! Followed by ♖ac2 when White has the advantage.

**21.♘xe5 ♘xe5**

The endgame after 21...♙xg2 22.♖xg2 ♖xg2† (22...♘xe5? just loses a pawn to 23.♖xa8 ♖axa8 24.♖xc7±) 23.♙xg2 ♘xe5 24.♙b6! ♖b7 25.♙d4 looks very unpleasant for Black. His pawns are fixed on the queenside, while White's pawns are ready to roll.

**22.f3!**

A very deep decision. White avoids the exchange of light-squared bishops and grabs more space in the centre. The black bishop does not turn out to be well-placed on c4.

22...♘c4 23.♘xc4 ♙xc4 24.♖f2 ♖e8 25.e4



White was clearly better in Kramnik – Anand, Wijk aan Zee 2007, and won with accuracy and elegance in the endgame.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♟f3 ♟f6 4.g3 ♟e7 5.♟g2 0–0 6.0–0 dxc4 7.♞c2 a6 8.♞xc4 b5 9.♞c2 ♟b7 10.♟d2 ♞a7 11.♞c1 ♟e4 12.♞b3 ♟c6 13.e3 ♞a8 14.♞d1)

### C232) 14...b4

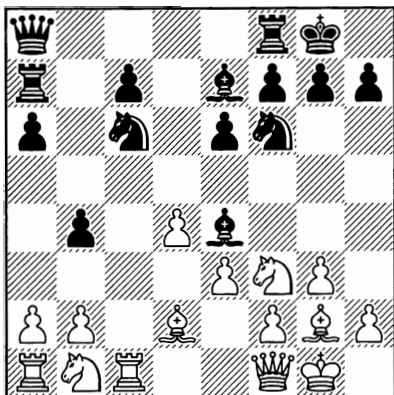
Black started playing like this in 2007. The main idea is to cause White some difficulties with the development of his queenside. The obvious drawback of this move is that it weakens the light squares, a detail that could become important in the long run.

### 15.♞f1

This seems to be the only way to fight for an advantage.

The main alternative is 15.♟e1, but after 15...♟d5 16.♟bd2 ♟b8 17.♟h4 ♟xg2 18.♟xg2 ♟bd7 followed by ...c5, Black had comfortable play in Damljanovic – Efimenko, Zlatibor 2007.

Opening the queenside with 15.a3 proved insufficient to gain an advantage in the following game: 15...♞b8 16.♟e1 a5 17.♟bd2 ♟d5 18.♟f1 bxa3 19.bxa3 a4= Ponomarev – Anand, Leon 2007.



### 15...♟d5

15...♞c8 16.♟e1 ♟d5 would just transpose, but there are some real alternatives.

In the following example Black played rather passively and quickly got into trouble:

15...♟d6 16.♟e1 ♞b8?!

16...♟d5 would have been an improvement, but even here after 17.♟bd2 ♟e7 18.♟e5±, White is better.

17.♟bd2 ♟d5 18.♟g5?! h6 19.♟h3 ♟e7 19...♟xg2 20.♞xg2 ♟a5 21.♞xa8 ♞bxa8 22.♟f4, with the idea of transferring the knight to d3, leads to a very unpleasant position for Black. For example: 22...♟xf4 23.gxf4±

20.f3! ♟c6 21.e4 e5 22.♟f2 ♟b5 23.♞e1±

Avrukh – Greenfeld, Beersheba (rapid) 2007.

A worthy alternative is:

15...♞d8 16.♟e1 a5 17.a3

Possibly not the best move, but then again, Black is well prepared for the opening of the queenside.

17.♟bd2 looks more natural, but after 17...♟d5 18.♞c2 a4 19.♞ac1 ♞a6, as pointed out by Deviatkin, it is hard to find anything special for White.

17...♟d6 18.♟fd2

Levon decides to release the pressure along the h1-a8 diagonal, as it was really restricting White's mobility.

18...♟xg2 19.♞xg2 ♞a6 20.♟c4 ♟d5 21.♟bd2

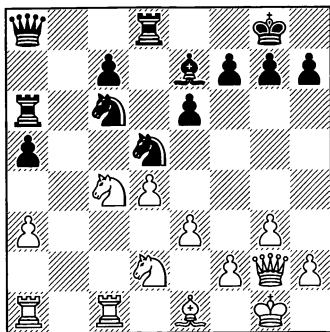
White has managed to regroup his pieces, but Black's position is pretty sound as well. This is the way it is fighting against a sound and solid opening: you have to produce good play to get an advantage against a thoroughly prepared opponent.

21...bxa3 22.bxa3

An interesting alternative might be 22.♟xa3?!N ♞b7 23.♟ac4 a4 24.♟f3. I believe White is slightly better in that case.

22...♙e7

We have followed the game Aronian – Anand, Mainz Rapid (4) 2007, and now I feel that White can improve with:



23.♙e4!?:N

Transferring the queen to c2.

23...a4 24.♙c2 ♖b8 25.♖ab1 h6 26.f3±

White will follow up with 27.♙f2, when his pieces are more harmoniously placed and Black will have to show good defensive play to keep the balance.

16.♙e1 ♖c8

16...♗b8?! would be premature in view of 17.♗e5 with a clear advantage.

17.♗bd2

White can hardly pose Black any problems with 17.♗fd2 ♗a5 18.a3 bxa3 19.♗xa3 ♙xc2 20.♙xc2 c5 21.dxc5 ♖xc5 22.♖xc5 ♙xc5 23.♗ac4 ♗xc4 24.♙xa8† ♖xa8 25.♗xc4 ♗d5 26.♗f1 f5= Berkes – Efimenko, Bundesliga 2007/08.

17...♗a5 18.♗e5 c5

Clearly inferior is 18...♙xc2 19.♙xc2 c5 20.♙xa8 ♖xa8 21.dxc5 ♖xc5 (21...♙xc5 22.♗d3 ♙e7 23.♖xc8† ♖xc8 24.♗b3 ♗xb3 25.axb3± and White wins a pawn) 22.♖xc5 ♙xc5 23.♗d3 ♙d6 24.♗f3 ♖b8 25.♖c1± and White's chances are preferable thanks to his control of the c-file.

19.dxc5 ♙xc5

19...♖xc5 would allow White to take control over the c-file with 20.♖xc5 ♙xc5 21.♖c1, as Black cannot play 21...♖c7? in view of 22.♗d3±, when he would lose either the b4- or the a6-pawn.

20.♗d3 ♙f8

Black can also try to give up his dark-squared bishop with:

20...♖ac7 21.♖xc5 ♖xc5 22.♗xc5 ♖xc5

But White keeps an initiative with accurate play:

23.♙xd5

Black should be able to hold the endgame after 23.e4 ♗xe4 24.♗xe4 ♙xe4 25.♙xb4 ♖b5 26.♙c3 ♙xc3 27.♙xc3 ♙xc3† 28.♗xc6.

23...♖xd5

23...♗xd5 24.a3±

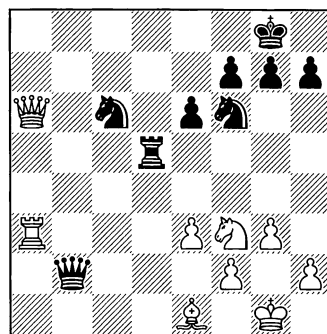
24.a3 bxa3 25.♖xa3

It appears that Black has serious problems with the a6-pawn. And the very natural continuation:

25...♙b7 26.♗f3 ♗c6?

is refuted by brutal means:

27.♙xa6 ♙xb2



28.♖a5!!+–

Black unavoidably loses material due to the weakness of his 8th rank.

21.♙xd5 ♗xd5 22.e4

Driving away Black's knight and grabbing more space in the centre. A much better version for Black would appear after 22.♞xc8 ♞xc8 23.♟f3 ♟c6= as it indeed did in Maksimenko – Lutz, Bundesliga 2007/8.

## 22...♟b6

After the other retreat, 22...♟f6 23.f3 ♞ac7 24.♟f2±, White keeps better chances.

## 23.♞xc8 ♞xc8 24.♟f3 ♞b7

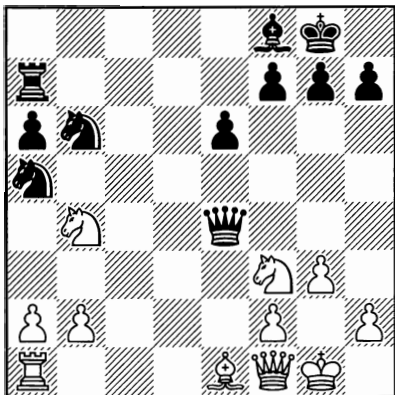
24...♞c4 is an interesting attempt to change the character of the game, suggested by Marin in *ChessBase Magazine* 122. I think White should react calmly with 25.♞e2 (indeed, after 25.♟xb4 ♟xb4 26.♞xc4 ♟axc4 27.♟xb4 ♟xb2 Black should hold this endgame). 25...♞b5 26.♟f1 Attacking the b4-pawn. 26...♟c6 27.♞c1 ♞c7 28.♟d2± White still retains the better chances, thanks to the vulnerability of Black's queenside pawns.

## 25.♟xb4!?

Kramnik decides to create an imbalance in the pawn structure.

A worthy alternative was 25.♞e2± continuing to slowly improve the position.

## 25...♞xc4



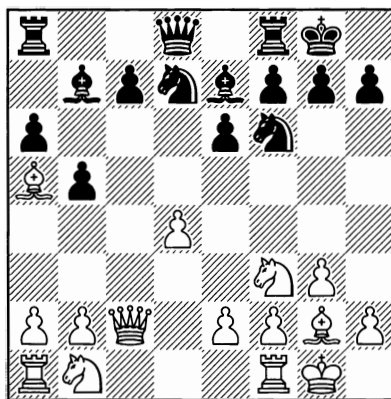
## 26.♞d3! ♞xd3 27.♟xd3 ♟ac4 28.b3 ♟d6 29.♞c1±

His control of the c-file and the opportunity to create a passed pawn on the queenside secures White the better chances. In the game White managed to gradually convert his small advantage into a full point, Kramnik – Leko, Moscow 2007. It is instructive to follow how Kramnik's pieces gradually invaded all the available queenside squares. If you have not seen the game, you should look it up.

## (1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♟f3 ♟f6 4.g3 ♟e7 5.♟g2 0-0 6.0-0 dxc4 7.♞c2 a6 8.♞xc4 b5 9.♞c2 ♟b7 10.♟d2)

## C3) 10...♟bd7 11.♟a5

Now this move is possible, as Black cannot drive the bishop away with ...♟c6.



## 11...♞c8

Black has tried other moves as well, but without much success:

11...♞a7 12.♞c1 ♟e4 transposes to Gelfand – Harikrishna, Bermuda 2005, which has already been examined in the 10...♞a7 line on page 217 in line C22.

## 11...♟d6

This has been played a few times. In general, the tension in the centre which arises after:

12.♘bd2 ♜c8

12...♞c8 13.e4 e5 14.♙h3 ♞e8 15.♞fe1 c5 16.d5± Shipov – Litinskaya, Katowice 1993.

13.e4 e5 14.♞fe1

is clearly in White's favour. Here is a clear example:

14...♞e7

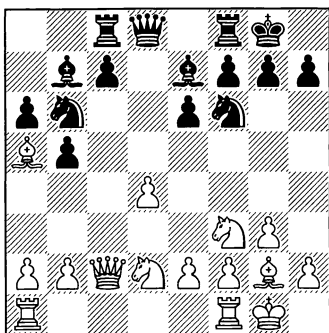
And instead of releasing the tension with 15.dxe5 as in Petursson – Marciano, Reykjavik 1993, White should have played:

15.♙h3N ♞ce8 16.a4!±

when his pressure is deeply annoying.

11...♘b6 12.♘bd2 ♜c8

This has been played frequently in tournament practice. Now the best move is:



13.♞d3!

After the natural 13.b4 Black has an unexpected reply: 13...♙xf3! 14.♘xf3 (14.♙xf3 ♞xd4± is absolutely fine for Black) 14...♘c4 and Black has no problems at all. He will follow up by capturing the bishop on a5 and liberating his position with ...c5, Kevick – Cacko, Slovakia 2000.

13...♘fd5

The point is that Black still cannot free his position with the typical break 13...c5?. White answers with 14.dxc5, and now Black cannot regain the c5-pawn without losing

material: 14...♞xd3 (or 14...♞xc5? 15.♞xd8 ♙xd8 16.♙b4+–) 15.exd3 ♙xc5? 16.b4+– Of course it would have been better to play 15...♘a4, but after 16.b4± White is happy to have a healthy extra pawn.

14.a3 ♞e8

It is too dangerous to play 14...c5 15.dxc5 ♙xc5 (15...♞xc5 loses the exchange after 16.e4 ♘f6 17.♞xd8 ♙xd8 18.♙b4+–) 16.♞ac1±, where Black is under serious pressure.

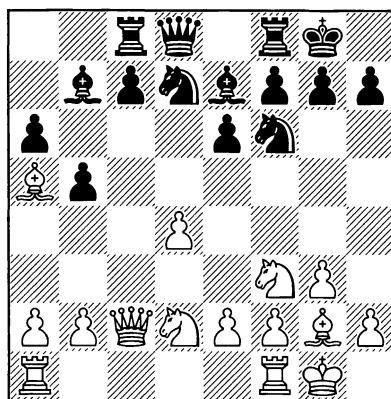
15.♞fc1

15.♞fe1 was also quite good.

15...♘d7 16.e4 ♘b6 17.b4±

White totally dominates the board, Reefsclaeger – Goehring, Germany 1984.

12.♘bd2



Black here has the following options: C31) 12...♘b8 and C32) 12...♞e8, both giving him reasonable chances to equalize, but we will do our best not to let this happen.

(1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.g3 d5 4.♙g2 ♙e7 5.♘f3 0-0 6.0-0 dxc4 7.♞c2 a6 8.♞xc4 b5 9.♞c2 ♙b7 10.♙d2 ♘bd7 11.♙a5 ♞c8 12.♘bd2)

C31) 12...♘b8 13.a3

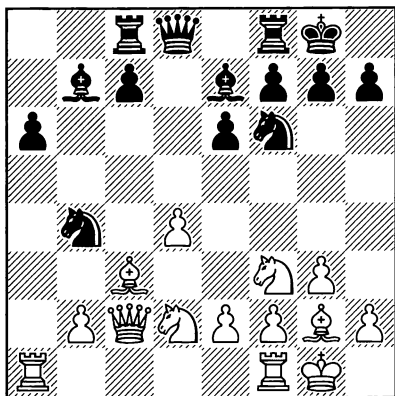
The only way to fight for an advantage.

**13...♖c6 14.♙c3 b4**

Without this move Black's play makes little sense.

**15.axb4**

The tactical 15.♘e5 does not work out so well. 15...♘e5 16.♙xb7 bxc3 17.dxc5 ♖b8 18.exf6 ♙xf6 19.♘e4 ♖xb7 20.bxc3 ♙e7= secures Black equal chances.

**15...♘xb4****16.♞a4**

Black does not have any problems after 16.♞b1 ♞d5! or 16.♞b3 ♖b8!.

**16...♘bd5**

Black has also tried 16...♙c6 17.♞a5 ♖b8 18.♘e5 ♙xg2 19.♙xg2 ♖b5 20.♞a4 c5. Black has achieved his typical break, but somehow here it does not solve all of his problems. After 21.dxc5 ♙xc5 22.♘df3± White still keeps some pressure thanks to his better piece coordination and Black's weak pawn on a6. I. Almasi – Lauber, Gyula 1997.

**17.♙a5**

Again this is the best chance.

17.♘e5 c5 18.♙a5 ♞e8= is perfectly OK for Black.

**17...♞d7**

In the case of 17...♞e8 18.♞c4 c5 19.e4! Black faces concrete problems with his knight; for example 19...♘b4 20.dxc5 ♙xc5 21.♙xb4 ♙xf2+ 22.♖xf2 ♖xc4 23.♘xc4 ♘xe4 24.♖c2 ♞d8 25.♙xf8+.

**18.♘e5 ♞xa4 19.♖xa4 c5**

Again Black has managed to carry out his main idea, the c7-c5 advance, but as shown in the following game, White has prepared well for this and still has definite pressure.

**20.e4 ♘c7 21.dxc5 ♙xc5 22.♖c1**

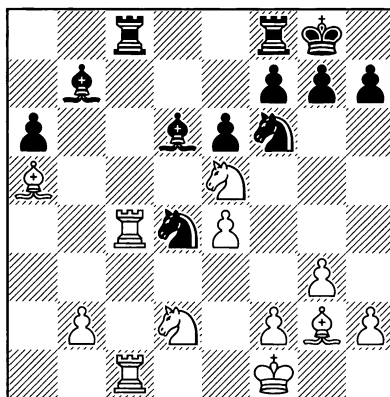
Worthy of consideration was also 22.♘b3 ♙e7 23.f3 ♘b5 24.♙b6.

**22...♘b5 23.♖ac4 ♘d4**

As pointed out by Gelfand in *Chess Informant* 96, 23...♙d4 does not equalize in view of 24.♖xc8 ♖xc8 25.♖xc8+ ♙xc8 26.♘c6!±.

**24.♙f1 ♙d6**

The alternative is 24...♙a7. Gelfand gives the following line: 25.♖xc8 ♖xc8 26.♖xc8+ ♙xc8 27.♘dc4 ♘b5 28.♘c6 ♙c5 29.b4 ♙f8 30.f3±

**25.♙c7!±N**

I really like this move. Black managed to hold the game after 25.♘d3 in Gelfand – Leko, Wijk aan Zee 2006.

My brief analysis goes as follows:

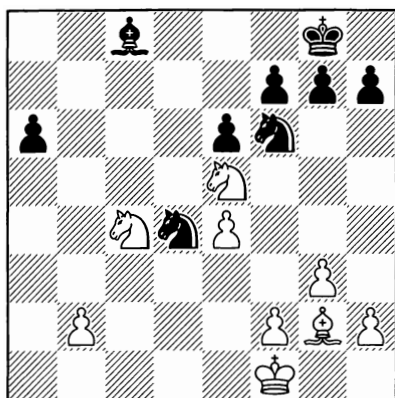
### 25...♙xc7

Clearly worse was 25...♙xe5?! 26.♙xe5 ♖b5 27.f3. White is much better with his pair of bishops.

### 26.♞xc7 ♞xc7

Another move is 26...a5, but after 27.f3 ♞b8 28.♖dc4 ♙a6 29.♞d1 ♞fd8 30.♞a7! Black faces serious problems with his a-pawn.

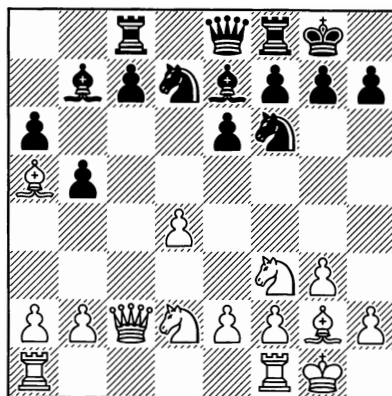
### 27.♞xc7 ♞c8 28.♞xc8† ♙xc8 29.♖dc4±



Despite its innocent look, this endgame is quite dangerous for Black. The weakness of his a6-pawn, the better coordination of the white pieces, and the fact that White's king is likely to approach the centre much more quickly than Black's: these are all drops that can fill White's glass. Objectively White is just a little better, but in reality the pressure is on Black to deliver a great defence.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♖f3 ♖f6 4.g3 ♙e7 5.♙g2 0-0 6.0-0 dxc4 7.♞c2 a6 8.♞xc4 b5 9.♞c2 ♙b7 10.♙d2 ♖bd7 11.♙a5 ♞c8 12.♖bd2)

C32) 12...♞e8



### 13.b4

An obligatory move as Black was threatening 13...c5.

In this position Black has tried a few moves.

### 13...♖d5

#### 13...♙d6

Again this creates some tension in the centre.

#### 14.e4 e5

However, this development usually favours White, so there is no cause for alarm.

#### 15.♞ae1

This is the most natural move.

#### 15...g6

I also analysed 15...♞e7. White should not waste time on slow moves such as 16.a3, but launch immediate action on the kingside with 16.♖h4! g6 (even worse is 16...♞fe8 17.f4 ♙xb4 (17...exd4? loses to 18.e5) 18.♙xb4 ♞xb4 19.dxe5. White is clearly better, for example: 19...♞d4† 20.♖h1 ♖g4 21.♖b3 ♞b6 22.♞e2! ♖h6 23.g4±

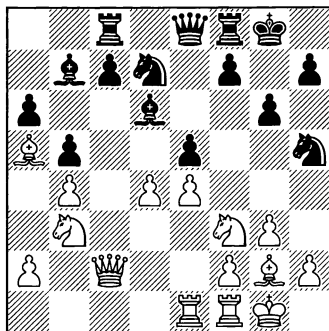
It should be noted that it is of course impossible to play 15...exd4? in view of 16.e5 ♖xe5 17.♖xe5 ♙xg2 18.♖ef3 when Black loses a piece.

#### 16.♖b3 ♖h5

Again Black cannot take on d4: 16...exd4?

17.e5 ♖xf3 18.exf6 ♜e5 19.♞xe5 ♜xe5  
20.♙xf3 ♜xf6 21.♙e4± White is clearly  
better, as Black will lose his d4-pawn.

After the knight has eased the pressure on the white centre, instead of 17.dxe5 which also gave White an advantage in Ivanisevic – Maksimenko, Jahorina 2003, White has a simple but powerful move:



17.♞c5!N ♙xc5 18.bxc5 c6 19.♙h3±

With a big positional advantage. White's bishops completely dominate the black position.

Black can also try the archetypal manoeuvre: 13...♞b8

But in this variation of the theme, White is ready for it.

14.a3

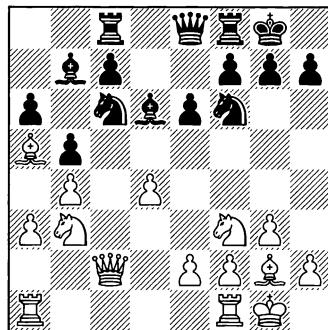
Worse is 14.♞e5 ♙xg2 15.♞xg2 ♞d5 16.a3 f5 and Black gets his kingside counterplay.

14...♞c6 15.♞b3 ♙d6

Black prepares the ...e6-e5 advance.

Certainly 15...♞xa5 significantly eases White's play. After 16.♞xa5 ♙e4 17.♞b2 White has a comfortable advantage. One game continued: 17...♞d7 18.♞ac1 ♙f6 19.♞d2 Defending against the c5-ideas. 19...♞b6 This position was on the board in Piven – Braun, Werfen 1993, and here the natural 20.♞f4 ♙a8 21.♞fd1± with the idea of 22.e4 would have secured White a clear advantage.

I believe that White was better in the games that have been played from the position after 15...♙d6, but I still want to propose an improvement with a rather natural move.



16.♞fd2!N

I think this is the best move. Previously White has played both 16.♞fe1 and 16.♞ac1, which are quite natural as well, but I want to put pressure down the long diagonal and prepare to locate the knights on b3 and a5.

16...e5

Also 16...♞xa5 17.♞xa5 ♙xg2 18.♞xg2 e5 19.dxe5 ♜xe5 20.♞f3 ♜e4 21.♞xe4 ♞xe4 22.♞c6± leaves White with a pleasant positional edge, but maybe this is safer; it is always hard to say without practical examples.

17.dxe5 ♙xe5 18.♞ac1 ♞xa5 19.♞xa5 ♙xg2 20.♞xg2

Here we see the point of White's idea: Black can either allow White to put his knight on c6, which would give a clear positional advantage, or he can try to sacrifice a pawn with:

20...c5 21.bxc5 ♙c7 22.♞db3

But I definitely dispute that this is sufficient compensation. Actually, to me it looks as if White has a healthy extra pawn.

**14.a3 f5**

This position arises most often via a different move order: 10...♙e4 11.♞c1 ♞bd7 12.♙a5

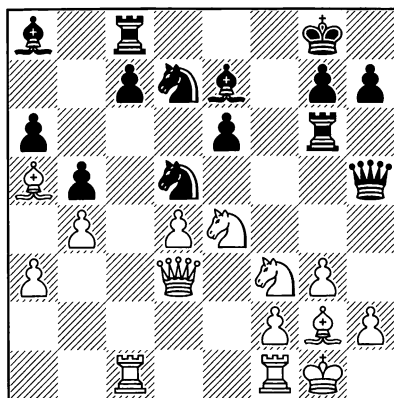
♙c8 13.♘bd2 etc., but there is a small difference, as in that line Black's light-squared bishop will not return to b7, but to the safer square a8.

### 15.e4! fxe4 16.♙xe4

Maiwald is absolutely right to open the centre like this. If the bishop was on a8 this move would be impossible in view of 17...♘f4!. But here it works perfectly for White and helps create weaknesses in the black position.

### 16...♙f6 17.♙ac1 ♙a8 18.♙d3 ♙h5 19.♘e4 ♙g6

This was Maiwald – Winants, Ostend 1991. At this point we can improve on White's play with:



### 20.♙fe1!N

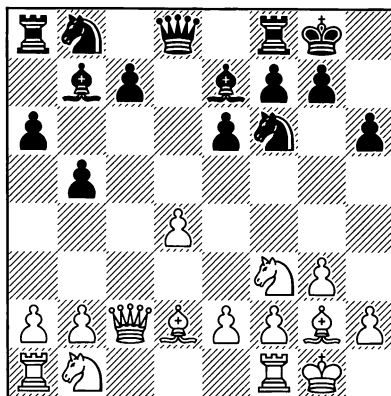
The most natural move in the position: White brings his last piece into play. Very soon the e6-pawn might become a serious target for White's pieces.

### 20...♙f5 21.♘c5 ♙xc5 22.♙xf5 exf5 23.dxc5

White has a clear advantage.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 ♙e7 5.♙g2 0-0 6.0-0 dxc4 7.♙c2 a6 8.♙xc4 b5 9.♙c2 ♙b7 10.♙d2)

### C4) 10...h6



This is maybe the least popular option of the six options. Even so, it has been employed by players of the calibre of Nigel Short and Judit Polgar, yet I can hardly believe that it is the path to equality. The idea is not too hard to work out: Black makes a waiting move to see how White will arrange his pieces, and certainly it might be useful to control the g5-square in some lines, even if White has already decided not to put his bishop there.

### 11.a3!?

I enjoy this (ironic?) move on several levels. Besides the obvious, I think it makes sense for White to behave in the same way as his opponent and effectively say "pass". Also, controlling the b4-square is likely to be essential for the outcome of the opening, as it is included in the fight for the c5-square, while it is not too often that control over the g5-square is that important.

### 11...♙a7

Now play transposes to "Anand's" line with 10...♙a7, but with the inclusion of ...h6 and a3. If we compare with Kramnik – Anand on page 219-220 we will see that the a3-move is a very useful improvement of the white set-up, as was shown in the game below.

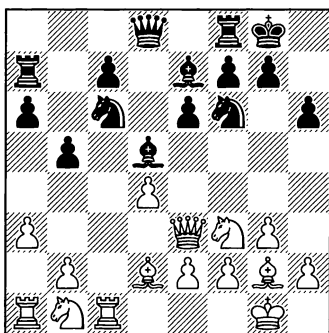


Instead if Black continues his waiting strategy with 11...♔d6, White already has a choice between two good options:

a) 12.b4!?N White usually makes this move with his bishop on a5, but it makes sense here as well. 12...♘bd7 (the alternative is 12...♙e4 13.♖b2 ♘bd7 14.♘c3 ♙c6 15.♗c2± followed by 16.e4) 13.♘c3 ♘b6 14.e4 ♙e7 (Black does not have sufficient compensation for the exchange in the following line: 14...♘c4 15.e5 ♙xf3 16.♙xf3 ♘xd2 17.♗xd2 ♙xe5 18.♖fd1 ♙d6 19.♙xa8 ♗xa8 20.d5!±) 15.♖fd1 ♘c4 16.♙e1± White has the better chances.

b) 12.♙a5 ♘c6 13.♙c3 ♘e7 (maybe 13...a5 was a better option) 14.♘bd2 Now we can see how useful the 11.a3 move was, as this knight move would have been impossible in view of ...b4 trapping the bishop. 14...♘fd5 15.♙a5! ♘c6 16.♘b3 ♖c8 17.e4 ♘b6 18.♙c3± Feller – Sachdev, Lyon 2008.

12.♖c1 ♙e4 13.♗b3 ♙d5 14.♗e3 ♘bd7  
14...♘c6?? is a well-known blunder:

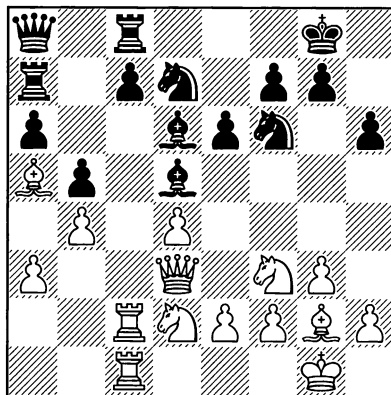


15.♖xc6! ♙xc6 16.d5+–

15.♙a5 ♗b8 16.♘bd2 ♙d6 17.♖c2 ♖e8  
18.♗d3 ♗a8 19.♙ac1 ♖c8

Grischuk gave the following line in *Chess Informant* 93: 19...e5 20.dxe5 ♘xe5 21.♘xe5 ♙xg2 22.♘c6! ♙h3 23.e4 ♖b7 24.f4±

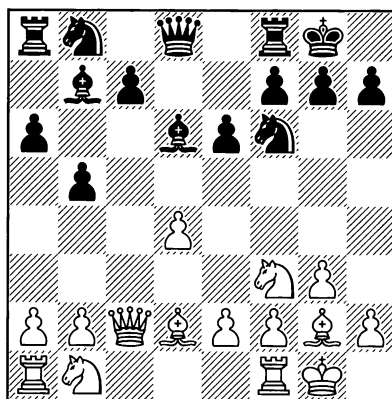
20.b4±



White has achieved the optimal set-up on the queenside, Grischuk – Polgar, Wijk aan Zee 2005.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 ♙e7 5.♙g2 0–0 6.0–0 dxc4 7.♗c2 a6 8.♗xc4 b5 9.♗c2 ♙b7 10.♙d2)

C5) 10...♙d6!?



The latest fashion in this line. The first time this move was played was in the game Spielman – Browne, Wijk aan Zee 1983, then it was undeservedly forgotten for almost 14 years, until it was brought back to life at the

Mexico World Championship by the eventual winner of that event.

With this move Black declares that he wants to see White's next move and only then will he choose the right arrangement of his pieces. In the process he slightly improves his position by vacating the e7-square for his queen, as well as in some lines preparing a quick ...c7-c5 advance by means of ...♖bd7 and ...♙e7. The ...e6-e5 advance is also relevant in some variations.

### 11.♘g5!?

An interesting but rare move for this system. I like it because I have not been successful in finding any other way to fight for an advantage. White has tried more natural moves such as 11.♖d1, 11.♙g5 and 11.♙e1, but so far has failed to pose Black any serious problems.

It is not so easy to discover the drawbacks of Black's last move, but once we try, we do find a few. Firstly, Black is no longer checking up on the d4-pawn, which allows White to move his knight. Secondly, in the case of White playing e2-e4, Black will have to deal with the threat of e4-e5. These are minor details White can try to exploit, and 11.♘g5 assists this. It was played in the absolutely top game Eljanov – Carlsen, Fors 2008. But despite Black's success in that game, I have a feeling that White can still fight for an advantage with the proper improvement, and I think I have such an improvement.

### 11...♙xg2 12.♙xg2 ♖bd7

I also examined 12...e5 13.dxe5 ♙xe5 14.f4 (14.a4 h6 15.♘f3 ♖bd7∞ does not look very dangerous for Black) 14...♙d4 (much worse is 14...♙d6 15.e4 h6 16.♘f3± and White's idea of pushing the central pawn is rather unpleasant) 15.e3 ♙b6 16.e4 h6 17.♘f3± and found White's chances to be preferable.

### 13.e4 e5 14.dxe5

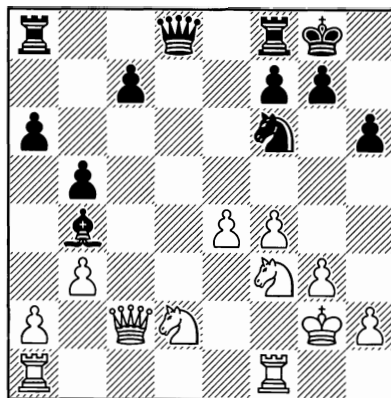
Eljanov correctly avoided 14.f4?! exd4 15.e5 ♙xe5! 16.fxg5 ♖xe5♞. Black has a dangerous initiative and he already has three pawns for a piece.

### 14...♖xe5 15.f4 ♖c4 16.b3

If 16.e5 Black has the riposte 16...h6!. After 17.exf6 hxg5 Black is not worse, and in the case of 17.♘f3 ♖g4 18.♙e1 ♙c5 Black takes over the initiative.

### 16...♖xd2 17.♖xd2 h6 18.♖gf3 ♙b4

In this complex position White has real freedom of choice and I thus believe it to be a good moment for an improvement.



### 19.♙f2!±N

White's main positional idea should be to advance his e-pawn under favourable circumstances. This should help White get more space for his pieces (for example, it creates a nice square for a knight on e4) and develop an initiative on the kingside by means of f4-f5, e4-e5-e6 and similar.

It would be premature for White to advance his central pawn at this moment. White needs to look after the weakness of the e3-square, so he might choose to prepare the advance with some prophylactic play.

The idea behind 19.♙f2 is to put the rook on e2 and thus cover the e3-square. I also like

that White no longer needs to think about a possible capture on d2.

In the game White played 19.♖fd1 ♜e7 20.e5 ♘d5 21.♙f1 ♜ad8 and Black was perfectly OK, Eljanov – Carlsen, Foros 2008. 20.♘e5!? was suggested by Alexander Baburin as a possible improvement in *Chess Today*, but I doubt that this should pose Black any problems, for example: 20...c5 21.♙f1 ♜b7 22.♙f3 ♜ad8 with double-edged play.

Certainly a logical question would be why I do not recommend the more natural move 19.♜ae1. The point is that after 19...c5 20.♜e2 ♜c8 21.e5 ♘d5 22.♘e4 c4 we do not have the important move 23.a3, as we will do after 19.♜f2.

### 19...c5

This looks like the most natural reaction.

I also examined 19...♜e7 20.♜e2 ♜ad8 21.♜c1 and it seems to me that White is able to get the type of position he was aiming for. For example: 21...♙a3 22.♜f1 ♙b4 23.e5 ♘d5 24.♘e4±

### 20.♜e2

White should not hurry with 20.e5 ♘d5 21.♜e2 ♙xd2! 22.♘xd2 ♜b6 and Black has good play.

### 20...♜c8

Other noteworthy options are:

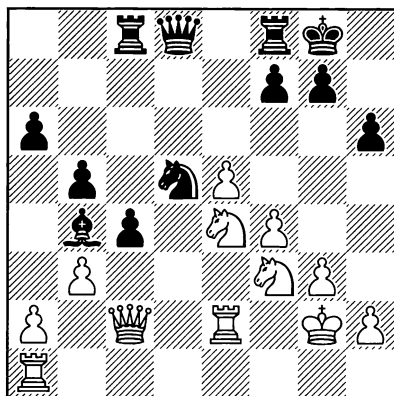
20...♙xd2?! 21.♜xd2 (one of the ideas behind 19.♜f2) 21...♜b6 22.e5 ♘g4 23.♜e1 c4 24.♜de2 ♜b7 25.♜e4!± Black's knight is clearly misplaced on g4.

20...♜e7 21.e5 ♜ad8 22.a3 (less dangerous for Black would be 22.♘e4 ♘xe4 23.♜xe4 ♜e6! followed by ...♜d5) 22...♙xd2 23.♘xd2± White has easier play.

### 21.e5

21.♜d1 ♜e7 22.e5 c4 leads to double-edged play.

### 21...♘d5 22.♘e4 c4



### 23.a3

An important intermediate move that disturbs the coordination of Black's pieces.

After 23.♜d1 Black is just in time to consolidate his position by means of 23...♜d7 24.f5 ♜fd8!∞, when Black is threatening ...♘e3† or ...♘f4†.

### 23...♙c5

Now Black cannot take on c4 with his rook.

### 24.♜d1 ♜d7 25.bxc4 bxc4 26.f5

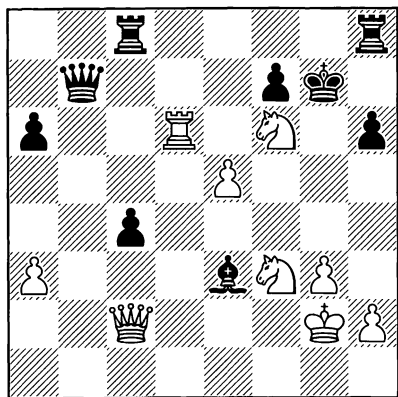
White has good chances of developing an initiative on the kingside. Black will have to watch out for either e5-e6, or f5-f6.

The following line shows the dangers Black is facing:

### 26...♜c6!?

Probably not the best move.

27.f6 ♘e3† 28.♜xe3 ♙xe3 29.♜d6 ♜b7 30.fxg7 ♙xg7 31.♘f6 ♜h8



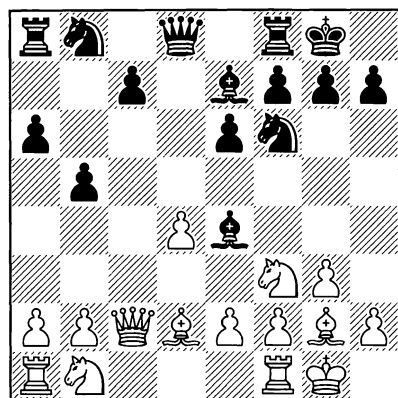
32.♙f5!+-

With a crushing attack.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 ♙e7 5.♙g2 0-0 6.0-0 dxc4 7.♙c2 a6 8.♙xc4 b5 9.♙c2 ♙b7 10.♙d2)

C6) 10...♙e4

This is by far Black's most popular continuation, however there is still plenty of scope for new discoveries. Only one set of pawns has been exchanged, after all.



11.♙c1

The only reasonable square. Black has many options. Our main lines are: C61) 11...♘bd7, C62) 11...♙c8, C63) 11...♘c6, C64) 11...c6

and C65) 11...♙b7

I do not believe that

11...b4

is a serious alternative, as it always weakens the light squares on the queenside. I found the following example of good play by White:

12.♙f4 ♘d5 13.♘bd2 ♘xf4 14.gxf4 ♙d5 15.♙d1 ♘d7 16.♘e5

Until now everything has been quite logical, but Black's next move allows White to seize full control of the position.

16...♙xg2

Stronger was 16...♘xe5 17.dxe5 ♙c8, but even here White has much better prospects with 18.♙xd5 exd5 19.♘f3 ♙d7 20.♙c2 c5 21.f5! securing an advantage.

17.♙xg2 ♙d6 18.♘xd7 ♙xd7 19.e3 ♙b5 20.♙c4!±

Mchedlishvili – Lobzhanidze, Tbilisi 2002.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 ♙e7 5.♙g2 0-0 6.0-0 dxc4 7.♙c2 a6 8.♙xc4 b5 9.♙c2 ♙b7 10.♙d2 ♙e4 11.♙c1)

C61) 11...♘bd7 12.♙a5

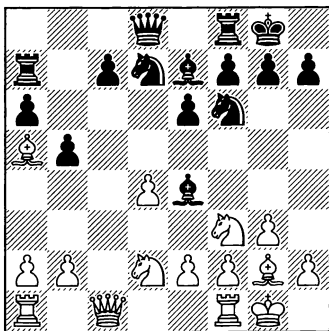
Compared with line C3 (starting with 10...♘bd7) the moves 10...♙e4 11.♙c1 have been included, which leads to some subtle differences.

12...♙c8

The main move. Other moves seem to be clearly worse:

12...♙d6?! 13.♘bd2 ♙b7 14.♙c2! As always it is a good idea to carry out the e4-advance; this is especially strong when Black's bishop is on d6. 14...♙c8 15.e4 e5 Here the simple 16.dxe5 ♘xe5 17.♘xe5 ♙xe5 18.♘b3 ♙d6 19.♙fe1 leaves White with a big advantage, Bischoff – J. Grant, Liverpool 2006.

12...♖a7 13.♘bd2



Black has two alternatives:

The obvious drawback of

13...♗d5

is that White can carry out the e2-e4 advance with a gain of tempo.

14.♖e1 ♘e4

This is somewhat better than 14...♗a8 15.e4! ♗b7 (the central pawn is taboo in view of 15...♘xe4 16.♘xe4 ♗xe4 17.♖xe4! ♗xe4 18.♘e5 ♗xd4 19.♘c6 ♗c5 20.b4 ♗xc1† 21.♖xc1 and White wins) 16.b4 ♗c8 17.♗c2± Black has obviously lost the opening battle, Ribli – Dervishi, Austria 2003.

15.♘xe4 ♗xe4 16.♗e3 ♗a8 17.♖ac1 ♖c8

Or 17...♘b6 18.b3 ♗d5 19.♖ed1 and White is better; Black has failed to find any serious counterplay.

18.♘e5!?

An interesting decision. White could also keep his pressure with quiet moves like 18.a3 or 18.♖ed1.

18..♗xg2 19.♘xd7 ♗d5 20.♘c5±

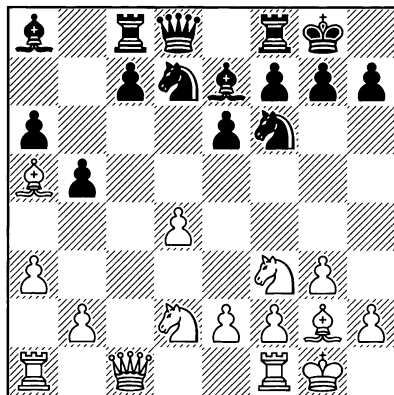
With a positional advantage, Sprenger – Kipper, Bad Zwosten 2003.

13...♗a8 14.♗c2 ♗b8 Stehlik – Kukacka, Czech Republic 1997. Here White should have played the natural 15.b4N, which would have secured him a clear advantage.

13.♘bd2 ♗a8 14.a3

I like this subtle move.

The main line runs 14.♗c2 ♗e8 15.b4 ♘d5 16.a3 f5, but is rather double-edged as far as I can tell.



14...♘b8

After our subtlety Black has tried three different options. One is the text, the two others are:

14...♗e8 15.b4

The point of White's 14th move is that Black has no opportunity to play 15...♘d5 followed by ...f5, as now the b4-pawn is defended.

15...♗d6 16.♖e1 ♘e4

As we already know, 16...e5?! 17.e4 clearly favours White.

17.♖a2

Another of the ideas behind 14.a3: White's rook is heading to c2, increasing the pressure along the c-file.

White has also tried 17.♘xe4 ♗xe4 18.♗e3 after which he won very convincingly in Huzman – Wells, Dresden 2007, but I am not sure about the position that arises after 18...f5.

17...f5 18.♖c2 ♘b6 19.♗a1

The immediate 19.♗xb6!? is also worthy of

consideration. I will give an approximate line: 19...cxb6 20.♖xc8 ♜xc8 21.♜xe4 ♙xe4 22.♞e3 ♞c6 23.♞c1 ♞d5 24.♜e1 ♙xg2 25.♜xg2± Surely with a pawn on b2, White's advantage would be more significant, as here Black might hope for counterplay connected with ...a5. Anyway, I prefer White's chances, as effectively he is playing with an extra pawn.

19...♙d5

Maybe this is the right moment for Black to look for an improvement.

20.♞ec1 ♞d7?!

This allows White to force favourable simplifications.

Obviously better was 20...♞d8 21.♙xb6 cxb6 22.e3, reaching a very complex position, but I would prefer White all the same, as his better pawn structure gives him more freedom in the long-term.

21.♙xb6 cxb6 22.♜e5! ♙xe5 23.dxe5 ♞xc2 24.♞xc2 ♞c8 25.♞c1 ♞xc2 26.♞xc2

White obtained a nice edge in Beliavsky – Kovacs, Hungary 2003.

14...♙d6 15.b4 ♞e7

White is ready for 15...e5, as he can continue with 16.dxe5 ♜xe5 17.♜xe5 ♙xe5 (17...♙xg2 runs into 18.♜xf7! ♞xf7 19.♜xg2 ♞e8 20.♞d1 and Black's activity is insufficient compensation for the pawn) 18.♙xa8 ♞xa8 19.♞a2± and White is in control.

16.♞a2 e5 17.dxe5 ♜xe5

Here White should have played:

18.♜xe5

Instead he played the dubious 18.♞c2?! in D.H. Toth – Lengyel, Hungary 2007. This allowed Black to play the thematic 18...c5, solving all his opening problems.

18...♙xg2

Or 18...♞xe5 19.♙xa8 ♞xa8 20.♜f3 ♞e7 21.♞c2±.

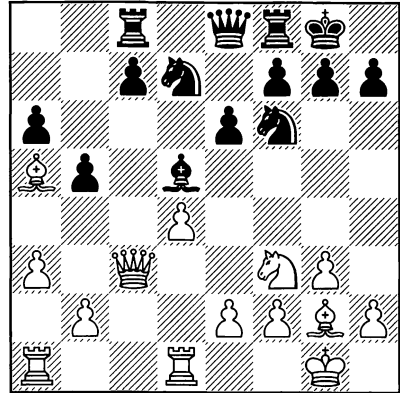
19.♜xg2 ♞xe5 20.♜f3 ♞e4 21.♞c2±

Again White is firmly in control.

15.♞d1 ♞e8

15...♜c6 16.♙c3 a5 17.b3± does not bring any relief from White's pressure.

16.♜b3 ♙d5 17.♜c5 ♙xc5 18.♞xc5 ♜bd7 19.♞c3



19...c5

Black manages to carry out the typical advance, but to achieve this he had to pay a high price by giving up his dark-squared bishop.

20.♞e1

The natural 20.♞ac1 was also rather strong.

20...♞e7 21.♞ac1±

White is better with his pair of bishops, Ivanchuk – Gelfand, Monaco 2004. The fact that such an experienced Catalan player as Gelfand got into trouble with the Black pieces demonstrates the quality of this line.

(1.d4 ♜f6 2.c4 e6 3.g3 d5 4.♙g2 ♙e7 5.♜f3 0-0 6.0-0 dxc4 7.♞c2 a6 8.♞xc4 b5 9.♞c2 ♙b7 10.♙d2 ♙e4 11.♞c1)

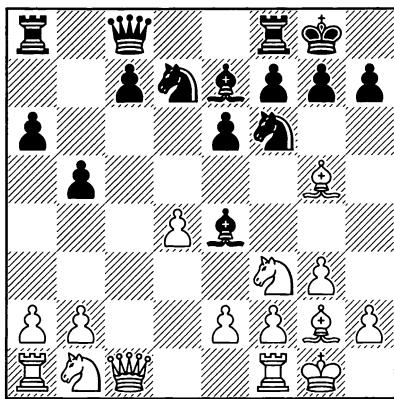
C62) 11...♞c8 12.♙g5

We already have another branching point with C621) 12...♜bd7 and C622) 12...c5.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 ♙e7 5.♙g2 0-0 6.0-0 dxc4 7.♗c2 a6 8.♗xc4 b5 9.♗c2 ♙b7 10.♙d2 ♙e4 11.♗c1 ♗c8 12.♙g5)

C621) 12...♘bd7

This move had recently been very fashionable, that is, until Kramnik came up with an interesting idea.



13.♗f4!?

Here the two main options are: C6211) 13...♙b7 and C6212) 13...c5.

Another logical move would be 13...♗b7, but it appears that Black does not have sufficient space along the h1-a8 diagonal after 14.♘c3. This move takes advantage of the knight's development having been delayed. 14...♙c6 15.e4 b4 16.d5 exd5 17.exd5 ♘xd5 18.♘xd5 ♙xg5 19.♗xb4 ♙xd5 20.♗xb7 ♙xb7 21.♘xg5 ♙xg2 22.♙xg2 Despite the simplifications, White retains a minimal but stable advantage because of Black's queenside weaknesses. It would be very dangerous to give Kramnik such a position.

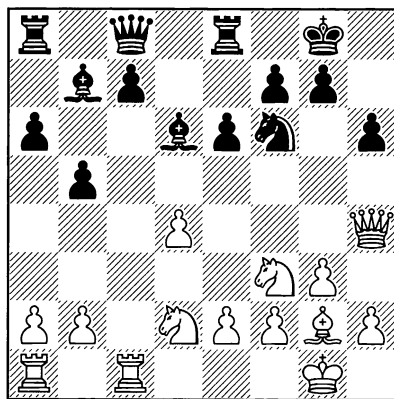
(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 ♙e7 5.♙g2 0-0 6.0-0 dxc4 7.♗c2 a6 8.♗xc4 b5 9.♗c2 ♙b7 10.♙d2 ♙e4 11.♗c1 ♗c8 12.♙g5 ♘bd7 13.♗f4)

C6211) 13...♙b7 14.♗c1 ♙d6 15.♗h4 h6 16.♙xf6 ♘xf6 17.♘bd2

White has managed to prevent the thematic c5-advance, but has also given up his dark-squared bishop. This exchange of advantages makes the position very complex.

17...♗e8

Here I would recommend:



18.♗c2!N

In the game White played more directly with:

18.e4

I do not like this move, as it cuts the queen off from the rest of the board.

18...♘d7

This is the only way, as the alternatives would not solve Black's problems:

18...e5?! 19.dxe5 ♙xe5 20.♘xe5 ♗xe5 21.♗f4 ♗e7 22.♗c5! with a clear positional advantage for White.

18...♙e7 is also premature, as it allows White to regroup his pieces comfortably with: 19.♗f4 ♙d6 20.e5 ♘d5 21.♗g4 ♙e7 22.♘e4± – Marin.

19.♘b3 a5

White was already threatening to play ♘a5.

20.♘c5

While annotating this game for *ChessBase*

*Magazine 120*, Marin recommended 20.a4N bxa4 (20...b4?! is not a serious move. White is clearly better after 21.♘fd2±.) 21.♞xa4, but somehow I do not believe in White's position when the queen is out of play on h4 and he has such a vulnerable queenside. It is not a great surprise that Black has the very strong move 21...♞b8!, threatening 22...♙xe4 as White's knight is hanging on b3. (Marin mentioned only 21...♙b4?!, which just helps White to improve his queen with 22.♞f4 ♞b8 23.♞e3, keeping the better chances.) 22.♘xa5 (22.♞xa5 ♞xa5 23.♘xa5 c5♙ gives Black nice play. And after 22.♘fd2 Black can already play 22...♙b4 23.♞f4 c5♙, taking over the initiative.) 22...c5 White's pieces are so badly coordinated that Black can easily regain a pawn, or even seize the initiative. 23.b3 (Or 23.♞a1 ♙c7! 24.♘b7 ♞xa1 25.♞xa1 ♞xb7 26.♞b1 cxd4 27.♘d4 ♞b4! followed by ...♙b6. Black has wonderful compensation, while the white queen is cut off from the play.) 23...cxd4 (also interesting might be 23...♙e7, or even 23...♙f8) 24.♘d4 (In the case of 24.♘b7 ♞xb7 25.♞xd4 ♙c5 26.♞d2 ♙e7 27.♞f4 ♘c5= Black regains the pawn.) 24...♙e5 25.♘f3 ♙b2 26.♞c2 ♘b6 27.♞a2 ♙f6 28.♞g4 h5 29.♞xh5 ♙xe4♙ With good compensation for the pawn.

20...♙e7 21.♞f4

This position arose in Kramnik – Leko, Mexico City 2007. Here Black could have played better, as was mentioned by many sources:

21...♘xc5 22.dxc5 e5!

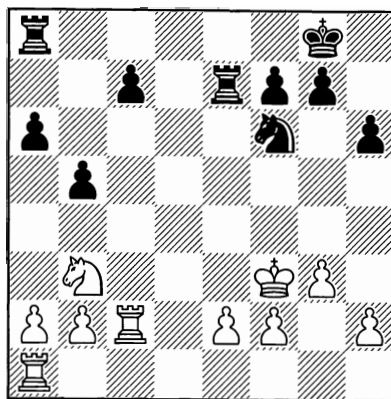
Black is not worse.

### 18...e5

The position after 18...♞d8 19.♞ac1 ♞c8 20.a3 is advantageous for White as well.

The idea behind my new move is revealed in the following line, which has a rather forced nature.

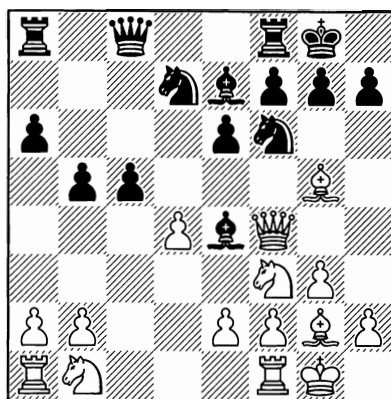
19.dxe5 ♙xe5 20.♘xe5 ♞xe5 21.♞f4 ♞e7 22.♘b3 ♙xg2 23.♘xg2 ♞b7† 24.♞f3 ♞xf3† 25.♘xf3±



White gets a pleasant endgame thanks to Black's weaknesses on the queenside.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 ♙e7 5.♙g2 0-0 6.0-0 dxc4 7.♞c2 a6 8.♞xc4 b5 9.♞c2 ♙b7 10.♙d2 ♙e4 11.♞c1 ♞c8 12.♙g5 ♘bd7 13.♞f4)

C6212) 13...c5

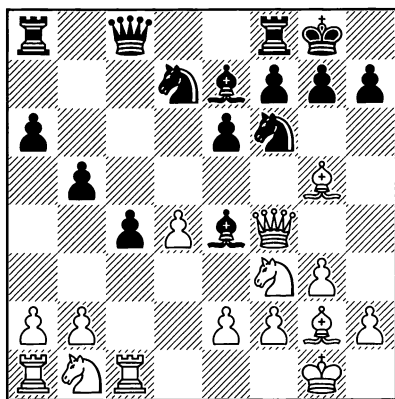


This must be the critical test. Here Marin correctly pointed out the best way for White to fight for an advantage:



**14.♞c1**

The only game where this position has been tested continued with 14.♘bd2 ♙b7 15.dxc5, Maletin – M. Novikov, Miass 2007. Here I do not see anything special after the simple recapture: 15...♞xc5 16.♞fc1 ♞b6 17.♞c7 ♞fc8=

**14...c4****15.b3**

This line was pointed out by Marin; I have only extended the variation.

**15...♙xb1 16.♞axb1 c3 17.♙xf6! ♙xf6**

Worse is 17...♘xf6 18.♘e5 ♘d5 19.♙xd5! exd5 20.♞f3 and White wins a pawn.

**18.♘e5 ♙xe5 19.dxe5 ♞a7 20.♞d4 ♞c7 21.♞c2!**

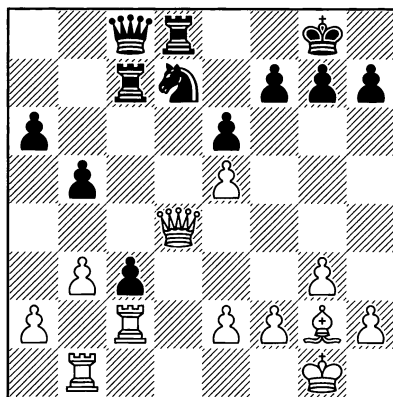
Somehow Black just fails to equalize.

**21...♞d8**

Other moves are:

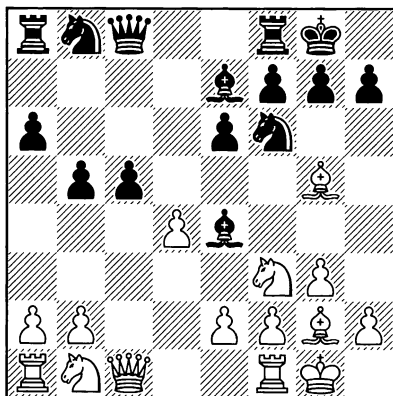
21...a5 which after 22.a3 fails to make a big difference.

21...f6 22.exf6 ♘xf6 23.♞bc1 ♞d8 24.♞b4! White is much better as Black's c3-pawn is about to fall.

**22.♞d1±**

White's chances are better, although it is quite possible that Black can hold this. But there are many of these kind of positions in all kinds of openings. Against 1.e4 you have the Petroff for example, where Black accepts that his 45% average score will not include many wins. We cannot avoid this and should instead win as many of these slightly advantageous positions as possible.

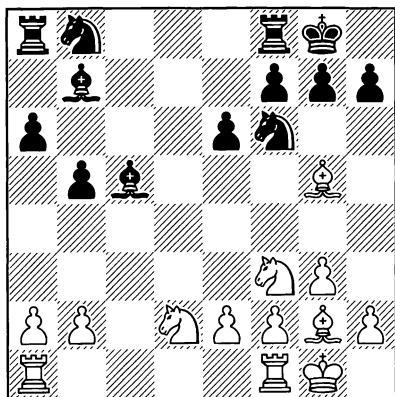
(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 ♙e7 5.♙g2 0-0 6.0-0 dxc4 7.♞c2 a6 8.♞xc4 b5 9.♞c2 ♙b7 10.♙d2 ♙e4 11.♞c1 ♞c8 12.♙g5)

**C622) 12...c5**

This is a sound system for Black, where almost all the games played have ended peacefully. I believe Black's main problem in this line is that he is not aiming to take over the initiative and the most he can ever achieve is a draw.

### 13.♘bd2 ♙b7 14.dxc5 ♖xc5 15.♖xc5 ♙xc5

After having looked at this position again, I decided to go with an old decision.



### 16.♞fc1

I employed this move back in 2006. White mainly plays the more natural 16.♞ac1 or 16.♙xf6. After both of these, Black seems to hold quite confidently. So, I was looking for an improvement. Actually I believe White's second rook might be useful on the a-file supporting the thematic a4-advance. Also in some lines White might want to hold on to the dark-squared bishop.

There have been only two games with this move up till now, and one of them is not so relevant. So I decided to do some analysis, which I will now share with you.

### 16...♙b6

Black has two other options at this point, but no simple way to equalize.

16...♘bd7 17.♘e5!

This tactical move is one of the ideas behind 16.♞fc1.

White does not achieve anything with 17.♙xf6 gxf6 18.♘e5 fxe5 19.♙xb7 ♞a7, where Black should hold easily.

17...♙xg2 18.♙xf6

The point. Black has nothing to worry about after 18.♙xg2 ♙d4=.

18...♘xf6

Another line is: 18...♘xe5 19.♙xe5 ♙b4 The only move. 20.♙xg2 ♙xd2 21.♞c2 (21.♞c6 ♞fc8= is not dangerous for Black) 21...♞fd8 22.♞d1 ♙b4 23.♞d4!± White still keeps better chances thanks to his control over the c-file.

19.♞xc5

I believe in this endgame Black still has to be careful. An approximate line goes:

19...♞ad8 20.♘b3 ♙d5

20...♙a8 21.♞c7 ♞d5 22.♘d3 ♞fd8 23.♞a7!± is already seriously better for White.

21.♘c6 ♞d6 22.♘e7+ ♙h8 23.♞d1 ♘e4 24.♞c7 ♙xb3 25.♞xd6 ♘xd6 26.axb3 ♞a8 27.f3±

Black has to fight hard to achieve a draw.

16...♙d6 17.♙xf6 gxf6 18.♘e1

White can also try 18.♘d4!?N ♙xg2 19.♙xg2 ♘d7 20.♞c6 ♙e5 21.♘f3 ♙xd4 22.♘xd4 ♘e5 23.♞c3± and White has a minimal advantage, thanks to his control over the c-file and better pawn structure.

18...♙xg2 19.♙xg2 ♙b4 20.♘e4

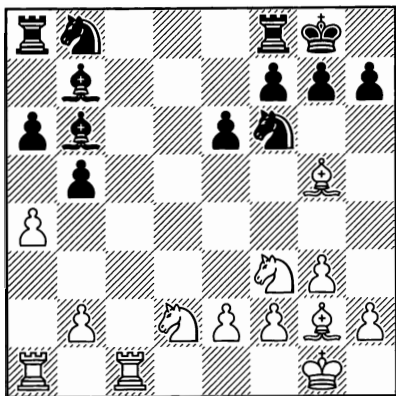
20.♘df3!? ♙xe1 21.♘xe1 ♘d7 22.a4 is also worthy of consideration.

20...♙xe1 21.♞xe1 f5

Here, instead of 22.♘f6+ as I played in the game Avrukh – Jenni, Biel 2006, I should have played 22.♘c5±, retaining definite pressure.

### 17.a4!?N

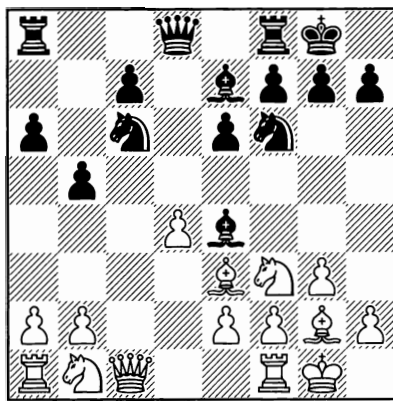
This is my new idea. Less dangerous for Black is 17.♙xf6 gxf6 18.♘e1, and a draw was agreed in Ehlvest – Bruzon, Merida 2006.



(1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.g3 d5 4.♙g2 ♙e7 5.♘f3 0-0 6.0-0 dxc4 7.♚c2 a6 8.♚xc4 b5 9.♚c2 ♙b7 10.♙d2 ♙e4 11.♚c1)

C63) 11...♘c6 12.♙e3

This time White defends the d4-pawn with the bishop, immediately creating the positional threat of 13.♘c3.



17...♘bd7

17...bxa4 would be premature: 18.♘c4 ♘bd7 19.♙xa4± and Black is under pressure.

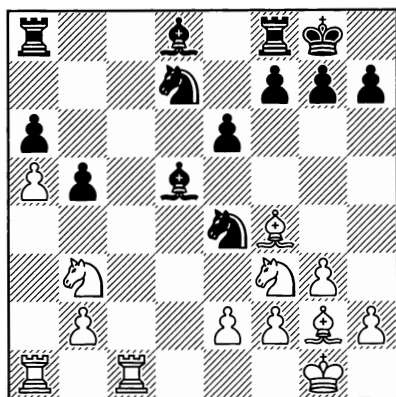
18.a5

One of the ideas behind White's previous move.

18...♙d8 19.♘b3 ♘e4

Another line goes: 19...h6 20.♙f4 ♙e7 21.♘fd4 ♙xg2 22.♙xg2 ♘d5 23.♘c6 ♙f6 24.♙c2±

20.♙f4 ♙d5



21.♘fd2! ♘xd2 22.♙xd5 exd5 23.♙xd2 ♙f6 24.♙c3±

12...♙c8

Usually Black chooses between this normal move and:

12...♘b4 13.♘c3

Much more popular is 13.♘bd2, but Grischuk came up with a new concept that proved successful in the following encounter:

13...♙b7 14.♙d1 ♙c8 15.a3 ♘bd5 16.♘xd5 ♘xd5

In the case of 16...♙xd5 White has the strong riposte 17.♘e5! and the white knight penetrates to c6.

17.♙g5!

An important intermediate move that forces Black to weaken his pawn structure.

17...f6 18.♙d2 a5

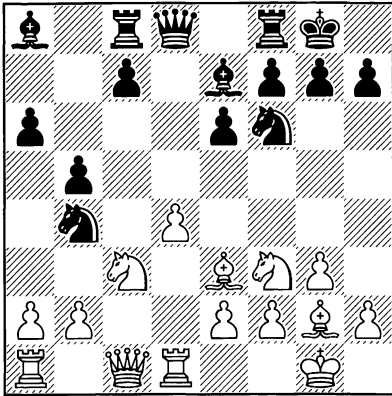
Probably White intended to meet 18...c5 with 19.♙a5! c4 (clearly inferior was 19...cxd4? 20.♙xc8 ♙fxc8 21.♘xd4, when Black starts to feel the weakness of the pawn

on e6: 21...♘f7 22.e4 ♘c7 23.♙ac1 ♘e8 24.♙h3!±) 20.e4 ♘c7 21.♙e3± White's chances are better as his pieces are placed more harmoniously, while Black experiences problems with his misplaced knight on c7. One of the key ideas for White should be to play b3, challenging the c4-pawn.

19.♙c2 ♘b6 20.♙ac1 ♘c4 21.a4! ♘xd2 22.♘xd2 ♙xg2 23.♙xg2 bxa4 24.♙xa4±

White has a pleasant edge, Grischuk – Solomon, Tripoli (1) 2004.

13.♙d1 ♘b4 14.♘c3 ♙a8



15.a4!

The point behind White's strategy.

15...♙xf3

I also checked 15...♘fd5 16.♙d2! c5 17.axb5 axb5 18.dxc5 ♙xc5 19.♙b1. White is clearly better here as Black's pieces in the centre are quite vulnerable.

16.♙xf3 c6 17.♙b1 ♙d7 18.♙f4

White could also have played 18.♙c1 followed by 19.e4.

18...♙fd8

The idea behind White's play was to meet 18...♘fd5 with 19.♙d2.

19.e4±

White has a stable advantage thanks to his strong centre and the two bishops, Panno – Lobron, Lucerne 1985.

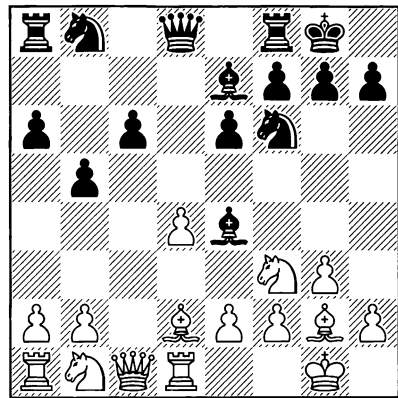
(1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.g3 d5 4.♙g2 ♙e7 5.♘f3 0-0 6.0-0 dxc4 7.♙c2 a6 8.♙xc4 b5 9.♙c2 ♙b7 10.♙d2 ♙e4 11.♙c1)

C64) 11...c6

This strange-looking move is played mainly by Rozentalis. To tell the truth, I have never taken this move seriously, as Black has committed himself to giving up his light-squared bishop, but who knows, maybe I am wrong?

Either way, I decided to go with Nyback's idea and sacrifice the d-pawn.

12.♙d1!?



12...♙xf3

In the case of 12...♘bd7 13.♘c3 ♙d5 14.♙c2 b4 15.♘xd5 cxd5 16.♙f4± White should be better, as his pair of bishops should prove to be important eventually.

13.♙xf3 ♙xd4 14.a4 bxa4

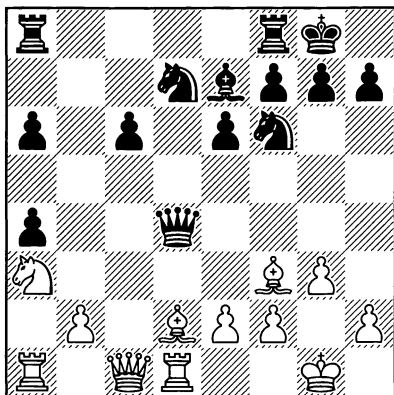
After 14...b4 Nyback gave the following line in *ChessBase Magazine* 123: 15.♙e3 ♙e5 16.♘d2 followed by 17.♘c4 with nice

compensation. I think that this was the better choice for Black.

### 15. ♖a3!?

White decides to improve his knight before regaining the a4-pawn.

### 15... ♖bd7



### 16. ♖c4 ♖e5?

This is a serious mistake that allows White to seize the initiative.

Better was 16... ♖d5 17. ♖xa4, although White's position still looks very promising.

### 17. ♖xe5 ♖xe5 18. ♖f4 ♖c5 19. ♖xc5 ♖xc5 20. ♖xc6

White has a clear advantage in the endgame, Nyback – Rozentalis, Germany 2007.

(1.d4 ♖f6 2.c4 e6 3.g3 d5 4.♖g2 ♖e7 5.♖f3 0-0 6.0-0 dxc4 7.♖c2 a6 8.♖xc4 b5 9.♖c2 ♖b7 10.♖d2 ♖e4 11.♖c1)

### C65) 11... ♖b7

When this move was first played about 20 years ago it was a rather big novelty. Today it is the main line. White can of course return the queen to c2 at least once, just to enquire about his opponent's intentions. But we are

not looking for draws, or engaging in this kind of shadow boxing, so we will get straight down to it.

### 12. ♖f4

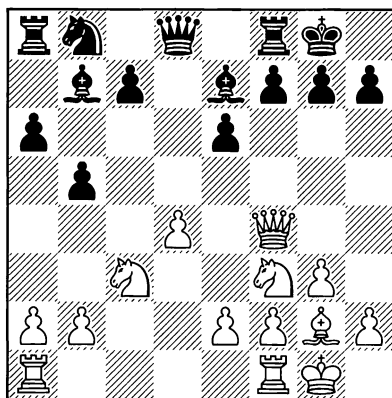
At this point there are two options to consider, C651) 12... ♖d5 and C652) 12... ♖d6.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♖f3 ♖f6 4.g3 ♖e7 5.♖g2 0-0 6.0-0 dxc4 7.♖c2 a6 8.♖xc4 b5 9.♖c2 ♖b7 10.♖d2 ♖e4 11.♖c1 ♖b7 12.♖f4)

### C651) 12... ♖d5

This has been played by such giants as Karpov and Andersson on a few occasions.

### 13. ♖c3 ♖xf4 14. ♖xf4



### 14... ♖d7

Other options are:

### 14...c5 15.dxc5 ♖xc5 16.♖ac1 ♖e7 17.♖fd1

White has finished his development, while Black struggles to develop his knight.

### 17... ♖a7

Black's problem is that 17... ♖c6?! runs into 18. ♖e4 ♖b6 19. ♖d6 ♖c7 20. ♖g5! ♖xd6 21. ♖xd6 h6 22. ♖e4 and White has initiative.

18.a4 b4 19.♘e4 ♙xe4 20.♖xe4 ♜c7 21.e3±

Despite the opposite-coloured bishops, White has the better chances, mainly thanks to how poorly placed Black's minor pieces are, Lastin – M. Novikov, Russia 2004.

14...♖d6 15.♘e5 ♙xg2 16.♙xg2 c5 17.dxc5 ♖xc5 18.♞fd1 ♖a7

It is a very important point that White can meet 18...♙f6 with 19.♘d3 ♖c6† 20.♘e4! ♙xb2 21.♘xb2 f5 22.♞ac1 ♖xe4† 23.♖xe4 fxe4 24.♞c7. The endgame is very difficult for Black due to his weak pawns on e4 and e6.

19.♞ac1 ♖b6 20.♘e4 f6

Black has lost many tempos with his queen, but his position remains pretty sound all the same. Here I like the following way of playing:

21.♘d3 ♞d7 22.♖f3 a5

In the case of 22...♞fd8 White can continue with 23.♘d2 ♞d6 24.♘b3 ♘c6 25.♞d2 with the idea of doubling rooks on the c-file. 25...♘d4 26.♘xd4 ♞xd4 27.♞dc2 White is better thanks to his control over the c-file.

23.♘f4 ♞xd1 24.♞xd1 f5 25.♘c3 ♞c8 26.e4±

With an advantage for White in Ki. Georgiev – Iordachescu, Valjevo 2007.

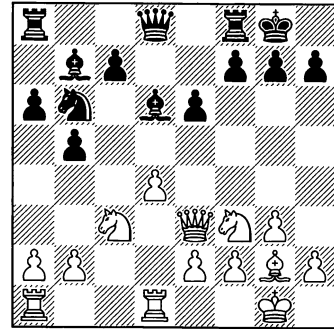
### 15.♞fd1 ♙d6

Transferring Black's queen to a7 with 15...♖b8 looks artificial and indeed White is better after 16.♖e3 ♖a7 (16...c5? would be premature in view of 17.d5!±) 17.♞ac1 ♘f6 18.♘e5 ♙xg2 19.♙xg2 c5 20.dxc5 ♙xc5 21.♖f3 ♞ac8 22.♘e4 ♘xe4 23.♖xe4±. As always, White's knight is much better than Black's dark-squared bishop, Smejkal – Hakki, Bahrain 1990.

### 16.♖e3 ♖e7

An interesting alternative is:

16...♘b6



17.♘e1!N

I believe that only this move is able to cause Black some problems.

After 17.♘e5 ♙xg2 18.♙xg2 f5 the position was rather double-edged in Ivanisevic – Iljin, Plovdiv 2008.

17...♙xg2

17...♘d5 18.♘xd5 exd5 19.♘d3± leaves White with a safe edge, because of his better pawn structure.

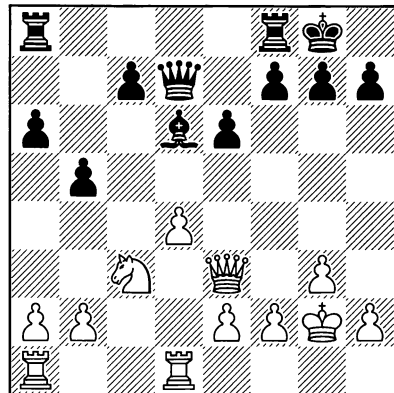
18.♙xg2 ♖e7 19.♘d3

As usual, d3 is the perfect square for the white knight.

19...f5 20.♞ac1

The position looks favourable for White after both 20...b4 21.♘b1 ♘d5 22.♖f3± and 20...f4 21.♖e4 b4 22.♘b1 ♘d5 23.♘d2!±, where White's knight is heading to f3 to secure the kingside.

17.♘e5 ♙xg2 18.♘xd7 ♖xd7 19.♙xg2



Normally White's knight is a better piece than Black's dark-squared bishop, but this position does not fall into that big box. White needs to find an advantage based on other factors: mainly the possibility to make c5 and c6 weak squares.

### 19...f5

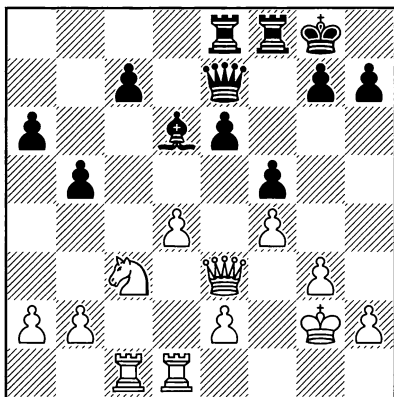
In the event of 19...♖e7 White can even allow himself to swap his knight for Black's bishop to make use of the c-file. The following line illustrates how this might happen: 20.♘e4!? f5 This is certainly a debateable decision. 21.♘xd6 cxd6 22.♞ac1 White retains an edge thanks to Black's vulnerable pawn structure. 22...♞b7† (White is clearly better after 22...♞ac8 23.d5 e5 24.♞c6!±) 23.d5 ♞ae8 24.♞b3 exd5 25.♞c2 ♞c8 26.♞cd2 White had a good advantage in Haba – Malinovsky, Czech Republic 2007.

### 20.♞ac1 ♞ae8 21.f4

Preventing possible counterplay connected with ...f4.

### 21...♞e7

Another game went: 21...♞e7 22.♞f3 b4 23.♘b1 ♞a4 24.♘d2 ♞xa2 25.♘c4 ♞a4 26.♞a1 ♞b5 27.b3 ♞d5 28.♞a5 ♞xf3† 29.♙xf3 ♞a8 30.♞da1 White had a clear positional advantage in Haba – Palo, Bled (ol) 2002.



### 22.♞f3!N

This move is a clear improvement on 22.♘b1?, which is not only frighteningly slow, but also allowed Black to generate counterplay with 22...g5! 23.♘d2 gxf4 24.gxf4 ♞g7† 25.♙h1 ♞h6 in Jaracz – Klovans, Cappelle la Grande 2003.

### 22...♞b8

22...g5 can now be met with the calm 23.e3!, intending to recapture on f4 with the e-pawn and thus open the e-file towards the e6-pawn.

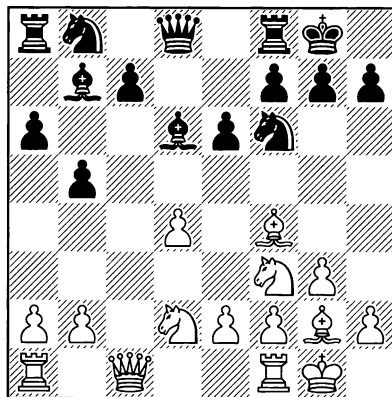
22...c5? also does not improve Black's situation, in view of 23.♞c6!±.

### 23.e4 b4 24.♘e2 fxe4 25.♞xe4±

With a clear positional advantage, as White's pawn chain restricts the dark-squared bishop and so makes it look very passive.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 ♙e7 5.♙g2 0–0 6.0–0 dxc4 7.♞c2 a6 8.♞xc4 b5 9.♞c2 ♙b7 10.♙d2 ♙e4 11.♞c1 ♙b7 12.♙f4)

### C652) 12...♙d6 13.♘bd2



### 13...♘bd7

By far Black's most popular reply. Recently Black has also tried:

13...♘d5 14.♘b3 ♘xf4

In *Chess Informant 101*, Beliavsky considered 14...a5?! to be an interesting alternative to the text, but he overlooked a simple refutation: 15.♙d2! This would lead to a clear advantage for White, for example 15...a4 16.♘a5! ♙c8 17.e4± or 15...♘c6 16.♘c5 with a clear advantage for White.

15.gxf4 ♘d7

Now 15...a5 is more serious. I believe White should try 16.♘c5 ♙d5 17.♞d1 ♞e7 18.e4 ♙c6 19.♘e5 ♙xc5 20.♞xc5 ♞xc5 21.dxc5 ♙e8 22.♙f1!± with some pressure.

At this point I have an idea to improve White's play with:

16.♞d1!?N

There was a need for an improvement as the endgame that arises after 16.e3 ♞c8 17.♞d1 c5 18.dxc5 ♘xc5 19.♘xc5 ♞xc5 20.♞xc5 ♙xc5 21.♞xd8 ♞xd8 22.♘e5 ♙xg2 23.♙xg2 seems to be easily defendable for Black, Aronian – Beliavsky, Crete 2007.

16...♙d5

In the case of 16...♞c8 White can try 17.♘c5 ♙xf3 18.♙xf3 ♙xc5 19.dxc5 ♞e7 20.b4 ♘f6 21.♞e3± retaining some pressure.

17.e3 ♞c8 18.♞c2!?

This is quite interesting, suggesting some ♘g5-ideas.

18...♙xf3

This looks very principled, but surprisingly it leads to an advantage for White.

However, just bad is 18...c5? 19.♘g5!±.

18...f6 19.♘c5 also looks promising for White. For example: 19...♙xc5 20.dxc5 ♙xf3 21.♙xf3 ♞e7 22.b4± followed by 23.a4.

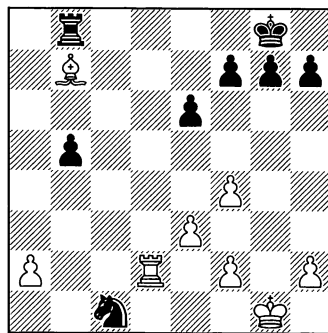
19.♙xf3 c5 20.dxc5 ♘xc5 21.♞ac1! ♘xb3

21...♞e7? loses to 22.♘a5, when the threat of ♘c6 is terminal.

22.♞xc8 ♘xc1 23.♞xa6 ♞f6 24.♞xd6 ♞xb2 25.♞d2 ♞xd2 26.♞xd2 ♞c8

White now gains a clear edge with a study-like manoeuvre:

27.♙b7 ♞b8



28.♙g2!! b4 29.♙f1±

The point is that Black would lose his knight after:

29...b3 30.axb3 ♘xb3 31.♞b2!+–

14.♘b3 ♙d5

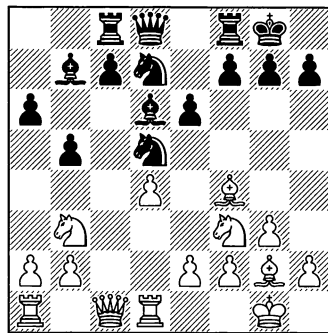
There is also the option for Black to play:

14...♞c8 15.♞d1

Premature is 15.♘c5 ♘xc5 16.dxc5 ♙xf4 17.♞xf4 ♞e7 and Black equalized easily in Gelfand – Svidler, Moscow 2001.

15...♘d5

This has been played only once.



16.♘e5!?N

This new move looks very interesting.

Black easily equalized after 16.♘c5 ♘xc5 17.dxc5 ♙xf4 18.gxf4 ♞f6 in Lubczynski – Dobrowolski, Polanica Zdroj 2007.

The main idea is revealed after the standard moves:

16...♘xf4 17.♞xf4 ♙xg2 18.♙xg2



This position appears to be better for White, both at first glance and after the investigation of a few variations:

18...♖e8

18...f6 leads to a favourable endgame for White after the almost forced line 19.♟c6 ♟xf4 20.♟xd8 ♜fxd8 21.gxf4 ♟b6 22.♟a5!±.

19.♞e3 ♟b6 20.♟d3

White retains the better chances.

### 15.♞d1 ♞e7

Another popular choice is:

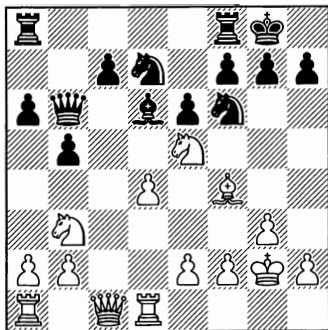
15...♞b8

The idea is to transfer the queen to b6. White should react with:

16.♟e5 ♟xg2 17.♞xg2 ♞b6

After 17...♟xe5 18.♟xe5! ♟xe5 19.dxe5 ♟d5 20.♟c5± White is clearly better.

In this position I found a big improvement with a small move:



18.♞c2!N

I actually discovered this little move four years ago. In my opinion, it poses Black serious problems. White's idea is very simple: he wants to strengthen his position with ♞ac1 followed by ♟c5.

18.♞c6 ♟xe5 19.♞xb6 cxb6 20.dxe5 ♟d5 proved not be good enough to pose Black serious problems in Gelfand – Anand, Monaco (rapid) 2004.

18...a5

I also examined a few other options, of course:

18...♟xe5 19.dxe5 ♟d5 20.e4 Black fails to stabilize his position: 20...♟xf4† 21.gxf4 ♞ad8 22.♞ac1 c5 23.♞d6±

The idea to carry out the thematic ...c5-advance also does not work: 18...♞fc8 19.♞ac1 c5? 20.dxc5 ♟xc5 21.♞xd6+–

19.♞ac1 a4

Another line is 19...♞fd8 20.e4 a4 21.♟c5 ♟xe5 22.dxe5 ♞xc5 23.♞xc5 ♟xc5 24.♞xd8† ♞xd8 25.♞xc5 ♟xe4 26.♞xb5±.

The endgame is, in my opinion, very difficult for Black, due to his weaknesses on the queenside.

20.♟c5

White is clearly better. The point is:

20...♟xc5 21.dxc5 ♞b7† 22.e4 ♟xe5 23.c6! ♞b6 24.♟xe5±

There is also another normal move to consider:

15...♞c8

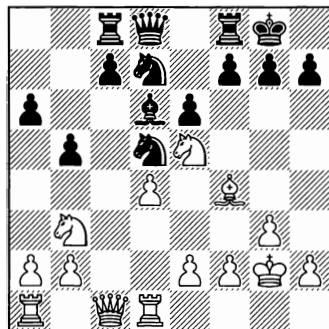
This has been tried twice in practice and gave a good impression in those games. I would recommend that White play:

16.♟e5 ♟xg2 17.♞xg2

Only not 17.♟xd7 ♞xd7 18.♞xg2 ♟d5 with a comfortable position for Black.

17...♟d5

But here, instead of 18.♟c5, which occurred in one game, White should try:



18.♘d3!N

This move leads to the following possibilities:

18...♙xf4†

There is also the following line: 18...♙xf4 19.♙xf4 ♘xf4† 20.♙xf4 ♙e7 This looks like a logical solution for Black, as he is trying to carry out the break ...c7-c5. Surprisingly, White has a strong move in 21.♙f3!, with the idea of meeting 21...c5 with 22.♙b7! c4 23.♙c5 ♖fd8 24.♙xa6± with an extra pawn.

19.gxf4

19.♙xf4?! allows Black to carry out the thematic break:

19...c5 20.dxc5 ♙xc5 21.♙xc5 ♖xc5

and we reach a very complex position.

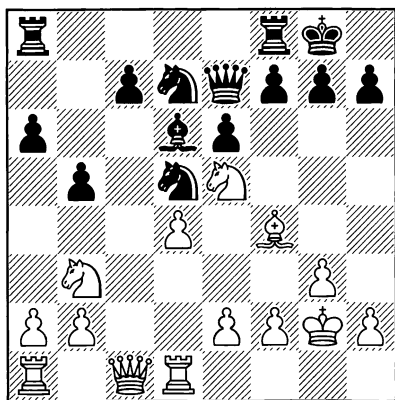
The following continuation of play looks natural:

19...♙h4 20.♙e3 ♙b6 21.♙g3 ♙h5 22.♙f3! ♙g6† 23.♙h1 ♙c4 24.♖g1±

White has a promising position.

16.♙e5 ♙xg2 17.♙xg2 ♙d5

Obviously inferior is 17...♙xe5 18.dxe5 ♙d5 19.♙g5! f6 20.exf6 gxf6 21.♙h6± followed by 22.e4.



18.♙a5!N

This is my improvement. The idea of penetrating with the 'lesser' knight to c6 forces

Black to take action.

I am not offering this improvement lightly, as two of the greatest chess players ever chose to place the e5-knight on c6.

18.♙c6 ♙e8!

It is this move that I fear. It has not been played in any games so far, but it is recommended in the award-winning book on Kramnik's matches, *From London to Elista* by Bareev and Levitov.

The main line was previously considered to be 18...♙xf4† 19.♙xf4 ♙e8 20.♙f3.

This was first placed in the famous game Kasparov – Kramnik, London (15) 2000. The game continued 20...e5 21.dxe5 ♙xe5 22.♙xe5 ♙xe5 23.♖d2± and White had the better position.

I also believe that 20...f5 21.♖ac1 should favour White in the long run, Korchnoi – Hou Yifan, Paks 2007.

But as I failed to see any advantage for White after Bareev and Levitov's recommendation, I moved on. The main line after their move goes:

19.e4 ♙xf4† 20.gxf4 f6

This allows Black's queen to join the attack from the g6- or h5-squares.

Also 20...♙b6! is worthy of consideration, with the idea of playing ...f7-f5 next, and if White plays e4-e5 Black will get a nice square on d5 for the knight.

The most principled continuation seems to be:

21.e5 ♙e7 22.♙xe7† ♙xe7 23.♙xc7

But Black has sufficient compensation after: 23...♙f7!±

With the idea of regaining the pawn by means of ...♙xe5.

After my new idea I have checked the following lines:

18...♙xf4†

After 18...f6 19.♖ec6 ♗xf4† 20.♗xf4 ♗f7 21.♗f3 f5 22.♝ac1± White has a favourable position.

A logical line is:

18...♙xe5 19.dxe5 ♗b4

One problem is that after 19...c5 20.♙g5 ♗e8 (somewhat better is 20...f6, but White keeps a pleasant edge after 21.exf6 ♗5xf6 22.f3±) White can play the simple 21.e4 ♗5b6 22.f4, when Black is almost paralysed. 20.♗d2

Of course not 20.♗c6? ♗e4† and White loses the e2-pawn.

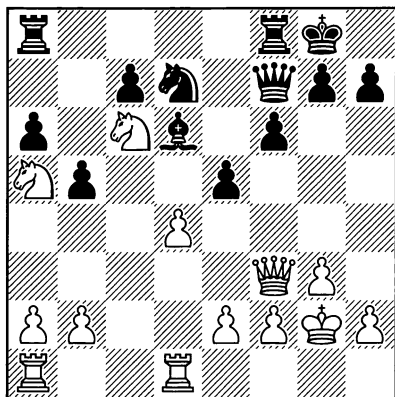
After putting the queen on d2, White keeps the better chances in both cases:

20...♗e4†

20...♗xd2 21.♝xd2 ♗7b6 22.♗c6 f6 23.♝d4 and the endgame is quite unpleasant for Black.

21.f3 ♗xf4† 22.gxf4 ♗g6† 23.♙h1 ♗b6 24.♗c6±

19.♗xf4 f6 20.♗ec6 ♗f7 21.♗f3 e5



22.a4

White's rook is useful on a1 after all.

22...exd4

Clearly worse is 22...♝ae8 23.axb5 axb5 when White has a strong move in 24.♗b7!±.

23.♝xd4 ♗e5 24.♗c3±

White retains a pleasant advantage.

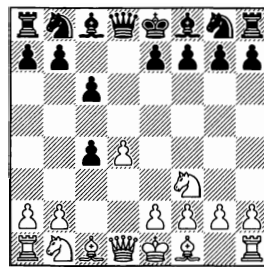
### Conclusion:

This chapter covers the main line of the Catalan so it is natural that there are many critical variations and key points. To single out just one, 11...♙b7 is the main line of the main line, and in its most popular variation, C652, my improvement with 18.♗a5!± is likely to be the scene of future high-level clashes.

# Chapter 13

## The Slav

3...dxc4



### Variation Index

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 dxc4

4.e3

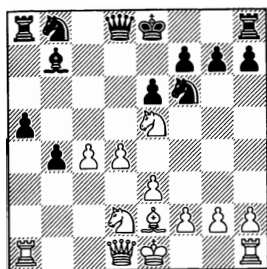
A) 4...b5

p 248

B) 4...♙e6

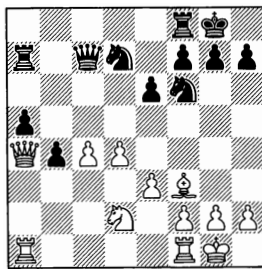
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A) note to the 12th move



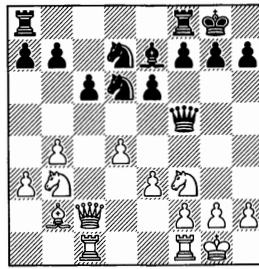
13.♙a4+

A) after 16...♘bxd7



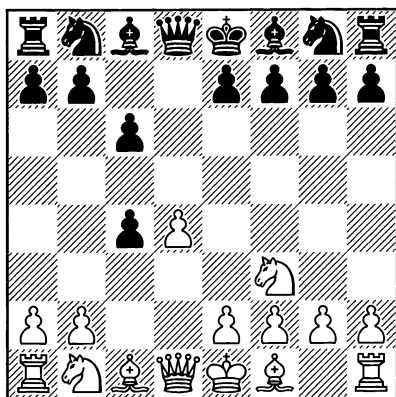
17.♙c6!N

B) after 16...♙f5



17.♘e5!?N

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♟f3 dxc4



This continuation is quite rare, and is mostly used as a surprise weapon.

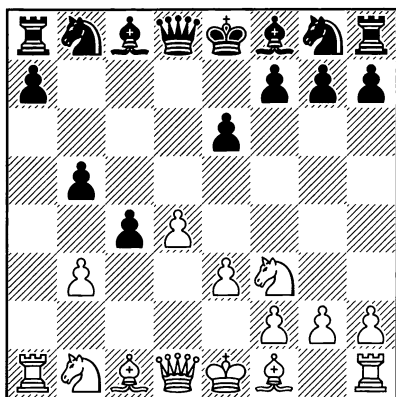
#### 4.e3

Black now has two options: **A) 4...b5** has been considered to be dubious since Shipov's novelty was unleashed, and I have not discovered any convincing attempts to repair it. **B) 4...♞e6** is currently regarded as the serious line.

#### A) 4...b5 5.a4 e6

There are some other moves, but there are no major alternatives for Black.

6.axb5 cxb5 7.b3



7...♞b4†

Black has to trade dark-squared bishops, otherwise his position will become even worse. I will give one example:

7...♟f6?! 8.bxc4 bxc4 9.♞xc4

The pawn structure clearly favours White: the a-pawn is a permanent weakness and even endgame positions are quite difficult for Black.

9...♞e7 10.♟e5! 0–0

10...♞b7 runs into the unpleasant 11.♞b5† ♟bd7 12.♟a4.

11.♟f3 ♟d5 12.♟c3 ♞b4 13.♞d2 ♞b7 14.♟xd5 ♞xd2† 15.♟xd2 ♞xd5

Also 15...exd5 16.♟hb1! is clearly better for White.

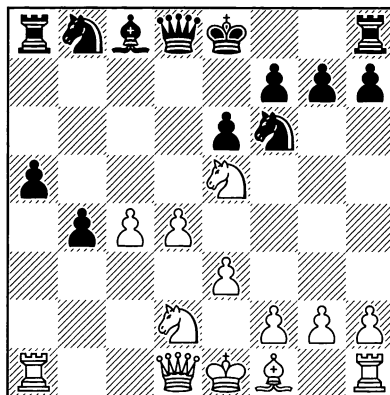
16.♞xd5 exd5 17.♟hb1±

White achieved a clear positional advantage in Kramnik – Huebner, Biel 1993.

8.♞d2 ♞xd2† 9.♟bxd2 a5 10.bxc4 b4

The arising position very much resembles the Noteboom variation, but the absence of dark-squared bishops makes it much more favourable for White, as he has a clear strategic idea of penetrating with one of his knights to d6 after the preparatory c4-c5.

11.♟e5 ♟f6



**12.♙e2!**

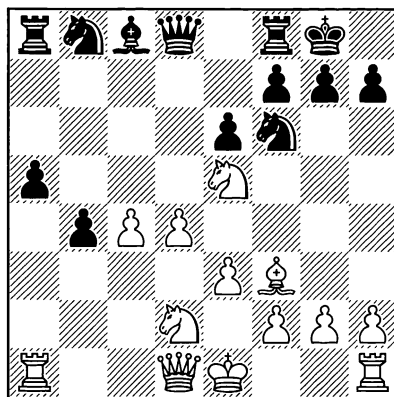
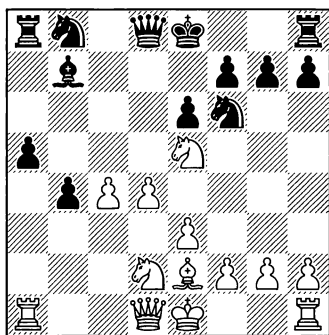
This is the idea of Shipov that I mentioned above. Previously White had developed his bishop to d3, but the text poses far more problems for Black.

**12...0–0**

The natural-looking

**12...♙b7?**

runs into an unpleasant check.

**13...♞a7**

I reckon this is the natural square for the rook. Our other option here also miraculously avoids dropping a rook!

**13...♞a6 14.0–0 ♞c7**

The alternative is 14...♖fd7 15.♖d3 e5 (White is clearly better after 15...♞c7 16.♞a4 with the unpleasant idea of ♞a4-b5) 16.d5 ♞h6. This is a remarkable idea: Black intends to play ...♞h4 and then after h3 to prepare a bishop sacrifice on h3 by moving the knight from d7. For all that, it looks too artificial and does not promise Black sufficient play. 17.g3 A good practical decision: White takes control of the h4-square, thus preventing the black queen's arrival. 17...♙a6 This was played in Berezjuk – Vavra, Ostrava 2002 (17...f5 would have been comfortably met by 18.e4 ♖a6 19.exf5 ♖ac5 20.♖e4 with a clear advantage). Now White should have continued with the natural 18.♞a4 f5 (18...♖b6 19.♞c2± is also clearly better for White) 19.e4 fxe4 20.♙xe4 ♖f6 21.♙g2 e4 22.♖f4 and Black's position collapses.

**15.♞a4 ♖bd7**

Maybe more interesting is 15...♖fd7, though after 16.♖d3 ♖b6 17.♞b5 ♙d7 18.♞c5 ♞d8 19.♞e5 ♖a4 20.♞g3± White is more active, while Black is tied to protecting his queenside pawns.

**16.♖d3! e5****13.♞a4! ♖fd7**

In the event of 13...♖bd7 White plays 14.c5! 0–0 (14...♙d5? loses to 15.♖xd7 ♖xd7 16.e4) 15.c6 ♖b6 16.cxb7 ♖xa4 17.bxa8 ♞xa8 18.♞xa4 ♞xg2 19.♙f3 ♞g5 20.♞xa5, when White's material advantage should easily decide the game.

Returning to 13...♖fd7, in Kaganskiy – Kundin, Tel Aviv 2002, White missed a very strong move:

**14.c5!**

This had already been mentioned by Shipov in *Chess Informant* 71. Black's position is critical:

**14...♞c7 15.♙b5 ♙a6**

15...♙e7?! loses on the spot to 16.c6 ♖xe5 17.cxb7!.

**16.♙xd7! ♖xd7 17.♖e4 ♙e7 18.♖c6! ♙f8 19.♖xa5**

Black loses the b-pawn as well.

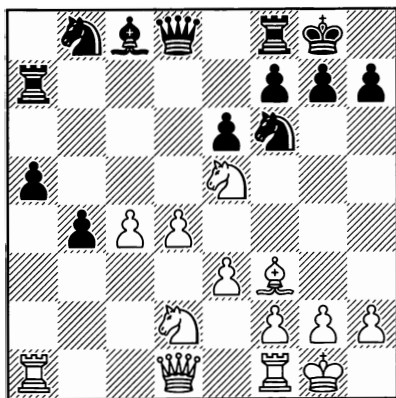
**13.♙f3**

Other options are much worse. For example 16...♙b7? just loses a pawn to 17.♙xb7 ♖xb7 18.♜xb4+– and 16...♜b6 runs into the unpleasant 17.♞b5±.

17.♞b5±

White had obtained a serious advantage due to his much better coordinated forces in Shipov – Popov, Russia 1997.

#### 14.0–0



#### 14...♞c7

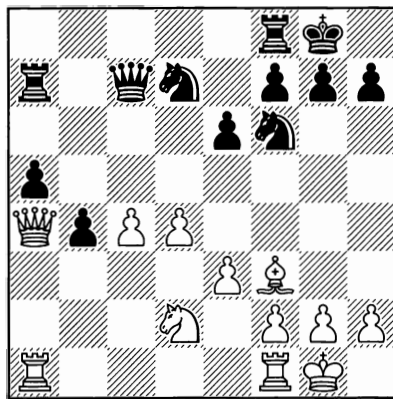
This is barely playable for Black, but the alternatives are even worse:

14...♙b7? 15.♙xb7 ♖xb7 16.♞a4 ♖a7 17.♜b3+– and Black cannot avoid losing material.

14...♜fd7 15.♜d3! ♞c7 (White was threatening 16.♜xb4) 16.♞a4 ♖a6 (16...♜b6 17.♞a2± does not bring relief either, as White is threatening 18.♜xb4) And now 17.♞b5! is very strong, restricting Black's forces on the queenside. Black's position is very difficult, and in the following encounter he collapsed in a few moves: 17...e5? 18.dxe5 ♞a7 19.c5 ♞c7 20.♜c4 White had a decisive advantage in Tregubov – Rabinovich, Halkidiki 2002.

15.♞a4 ♙d7 16.♜xd7 ♜bxd7

Various games have suggested that this position is more or less playable for Black. It is obvious to me that White's chances are much better, because of his strong light-squared bishop, but in fact Black's chances should not be underestimated. He has plenty of counterplay based on his pair of pawns on the queenside. It took me a few hours to discover the right decision.



#### 17.♞c6!N

Previously White has tried 17.c5 and 17.♜b3.

I also examined 17.♞fc1, Riazantsev's recommendation in *Chess Informant 94*, but none of them is really convincing. The text appears to be very strong, as after swapping the queens it will be much easier for White to attack the queenside pawns, and the light-squared bishop will be very effective on the a4–e8 diagonal.

After 17.♞c6 I have failed to discover a reliable defence for Black. Below are some of the lines I analysed:

#### 17...♞xc6

Other options are:

17...♞c8 18.♞xc7 ♞xc7 19.♖a2! a4 20.♖fa1

a3 21.♖b1 ♖a4 22.♗d1!± and the b4-pawn is falling.

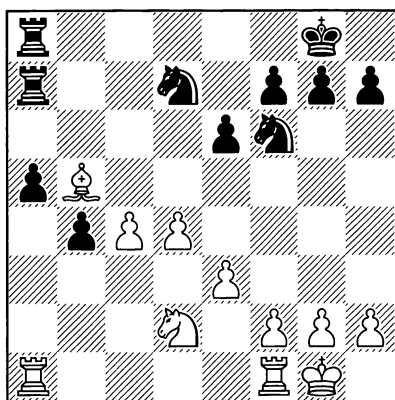
17...♗b8 is met by 18.c5 (threatening 19.♖c4) 18...♘d5 19.♗xd5 ♖c8 20.♗a4 exd5 21.♖fb1±. Black can hardly do anything against the approaching ♘b3xa5.

### 18.♗xc6 ♖c8 19.♗b5

This is the perfect square for White's bishop.

### 19...♖ca8

19...e5 does not help: 20.♖a2 exd4 21.exd4 h6 22.♖fa1 ♖ca8 23.♘b3 and Black loses his a-pawn.



### 20.♖a2!

A manoeuvre that is very simple and yet very strong. White intends to increase his pressure on the a5-pawn by means of ♖fa1 and ♘b3.

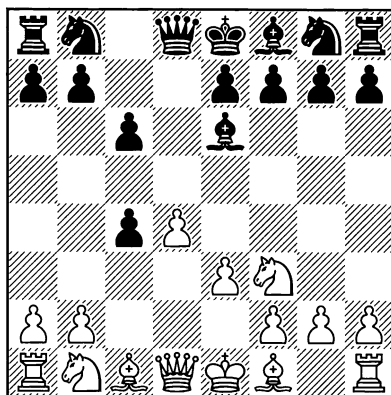
### 20...♘b6

Or 20...a4 21.♗c6! b3 22.♖a3 ♖b8 23.♖xa4+–.

### 21.♖fa1 ♗f8 22.♘b3 a4 23.c5 ♘bd5 24.♖xa4 ♖xa4 25.♖xa4

White should be able to convert his material advantage.

### B) 4...♗e6



This is 'not too bad', according to theory, and it is often used as a surprise weapon. Black's main idea is to temporarily hold on to the c4-pawn, and while White tries to win it back, to obtain good piece play.

### 5.♗c2

This is not the most popular choice, but I like the healthy idea behind it, which is of course to quickly regain the pawn, and to obtain comfortable development with a space advantage. Black has exchanged his d5-pawn, which is the only part of his structure which will usually reach the 5th rank.

5.♘g5? has been played quite a number of times, with 5...♗a5! the only move you have to prepare for if you want to look more deeply into this line.

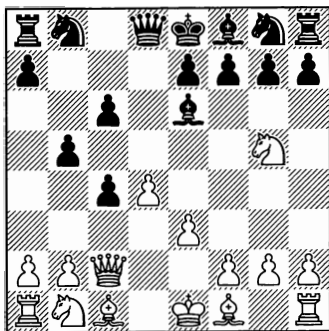
### 5...♘f6

Without any doubt, this is Black's main reply, but Black also has a few other options:

5...♘d7 6.♗xc4 (6.♘g5?? ♗a5!–+) 6...♗xc4 7.♗xc4 b5 8.♗e2 e6 9.0–0 ♘gf6 10.e4 ♗e7 11.♗g5 a6 12.♘c3 0–0 13.♖ac1± This led to a very pleasant position for White in Le Quang Liem – Boros, Gaziantep 2008.



5...b5 allows White to play 6.♘g5:



When we have a wide range of possibilities:

a) 6...♙d5

This is the thematic reaction to ♘g5. I think that now White has to play:

7.e4!N

7.♘h7 ♘f6 8.♘f8 ♙xf8 was messy in Dzhakaev – Skorchenko, Krasnodar 2004.

7...h6 8.♘f3 ♙e6 9.a4 ♘d7

The two other options are:

9...a6 10.axb5 cxb5 11.d5 ♙c8 (11...♙g4 obviously runs into 12.♘e5) 12.♘c3 ♙b7 (the threat was 13.♘xb5) 13.♙e2 ♘f6 14.0–0 White's lead in development is very significant. For example: 14...♘bd7?! 15.e5 ♘xd5 16.e6 with a decisive attack.

9...♘f6 10.axb5 cxb5 11.d5 ♙g4 12.♘c3↑ and Black has problems defending the b5-pawn.

10.axb5 cxb5 11.♘c3 a6 12.h3 ♘b6

Anticipating White's threat of 13.d5, but he can play it anyway.

13.d5 ♙c8

Just bad is 13...♙d7 14.e5 ♙c8 15.e6! with a powerful initiative.

14.♙e2 ♘f6 15.0–0↑

White's advantage in development should tell.

b) After 6...♙c8 White can simply regain the pawn with 7.♘h7!±.

c) 6...♙c8

Now the best choice for White is to take the bishop.

7.♘xe6

Less convincing is 7.a4 ♙d7 8.b3 cxb3 9.♙xb3 e6, and although White has plenty of play for the pawn, the position remains double-edged, Timman – Lalic, Elista (ol) 1998.

7...♙xe6 8.a4 ♘f6

In the event of 8...♘d7 9.♘c3 b4 10.♘e2± or 10.♘b1 White regains the pawn with dividends.

Now in the game Almeida Quintana – Perez, Varadero 2000, White missed a very strong option:

9.♘c3!N ♙d7 10.axb5 cxb5 11.b3 b4 12.♘a4 cxb3 13.♙xb3±

With a clear advantage, as White is threatening both 14.♘b6 and 14.♙xb4.

6.♙xc4 ♙xc4 7.♙xc4 ♙a5↑

This is considered to be the main objection to the 5.♙c2 line.

7...e6

White simply obtains a pleasant position with a space advantage:

8.0–0 ♘bd7 9.♘c3 ♙e7 10.e4 0–0

Black's position may be solid, but White keeps a stable positional advantage.

11.♙d1 ♙c8

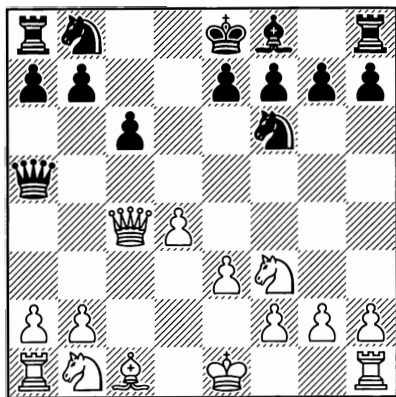
Black tried 11...a5 12.♙f4 ♙b6 in Ris – Ehlvest, Gibraltar 2007. Now the most accurate for White would be 13.♙e2!N ♙a6 14.♙c2 maintaining an edge.

12.♙f4 ♙a5 13.a3 h6 14.h3 ♙fd8

This was Dautov – Z. Varga, Budapest 2004, and here Dautov's recommendation looks good to me:

15.b4! ♙h5 16.♙ab1 ♙g6 17.♙e2 a6 18.♙e1!±

The idea is ♘a4-c5.



### 8.♟bd2!

The best move.

After 8.♟d2 Black executes his main idea and obtains a perfectly playable position: 8...♞a6! 9.♟a3 e6 10.♞xa6 ♟xa6 11.♟c4 ♞c8 12.♟e2 ♟e4 13.♞hc1 ♟e7 14.♟a5 ♞c7 15.a3 f6= Hoi – L.B. Hansen, Denmark 1999.

Also harmless is 8.♟c3 ♞a6 9.♞xa6 ♟xa6 10.0–0 e6=.

### 8...e6

Now 8...♞a6 is comfortably met by 9.b3, when White will favourably recapture with the b-pawn if Black chooses to exchange queens.

### 9.0–0 ♟e7

Now I like the following queenside expansion:

### 10.a3!? 0–0 11.b4 ♞f5 12.♟b3

Preventing any counterplay connected with an ...a5-advance.

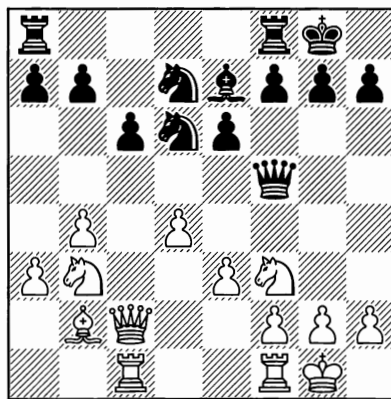
### 12...♟bd7 13.♟b2

As always in the Slav Defence, Black is solidly placed, but in return White is assured of a space advantage. This is a trade-off we have to be prepared to make.

13...♟e4 14.♞ac1 ♟d6 15.♞e2 ♞b5 16.♞c2

Less convincing is: 16.♞xb5 ♟xb5 (16...cxb5? is simply bad as 17.♞c7 ♞fd8 18.♟c5! gives White a clear advantage) 17.♞c2 ♟b6 18.♟c5 Otherwise Black can put his knight to a4. 18...a5 19.♟xb7 axb4 20.axb4 ♟d5 Black gets good counterplay.

### 16...♞f5



So far we have followed Gagunashvili – Zhang Pengxiang, Khanty-Mansyisk (1) 2007. We will diverge now, as this is the right moment to improve on White's play.

### 17.♟e5!?N

I believe White should have other ways to retain his advantage, but it is not so easy:

### 17.♞xf5

At first I thought this was a good line, but in fact Black has a strong reply:

### 17...exf5!

17...♟xf5 18.♞c2 is slightly better for White.

Now after the attractive:

### 18.d5

18.♞fd1 ♟f6 19.♟e5 ♟d5 leads to equal play.

### 18...cxd5 19.♞c7 ♞fd8 20.♟c5

Black has:

20...♖xc5 21.bxc5 ♖c8!

I could not find anything special for White, while Black is planning to play 22...b6.

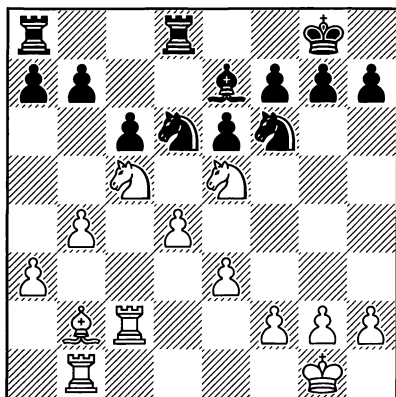
17...♞xc2

After 17...♖b6 18.♞e2!± Black's queen might be misplaced on f5.

18.♞xc2 ♜f d8 19.♖c5 ♖f6

After 19...♖b6 20.♞b1! White also retains a stable advantage.

20.♞b1±



White has a pleasant advantage and at the same time is setting a nice trap, which, for the sake of argument, I have given Black permission to fall into:

20...a5? 21.bxa5 ♞xa5 22.♖xb7! ♖xb7  
23.♖xc6 ♜d7 24.♖xa5 ♖xa5 25.♙c3 ♖c6  
26.a4

The a-pawn should decide the game, but, even so, a rook and two pawns are generally more valuable than two knights.

### Conclusion:

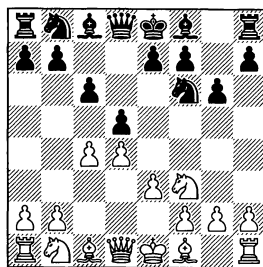
Holding on to the c4-pawn with 4...b5 is quite dangerous for Black. Shipov's novelty 12.♙e2! poses serious problems and the arising positions are hardly acceptable for Black.

On the other hand, 4...♙e6 is a more playable variation. Nevertheless, 5.♞c2 is a good choice for White, which offers an edge that may not be big but is stable.

# Chapter 14

## The Slav

3...♘f6 4.e3 g6



### Variation Index

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.e3 g6

5.♘c3 ♗g7 6.♗e2 0-0 7.0-0

A) 7...dxc4

p 256

B) 7...♗g4

p 260

C) 7...♗e6

p 261

D) 7...a6 8.a4

p 262

D1) 8...dxe4

p 263

D2) 8...♗e6

p 263

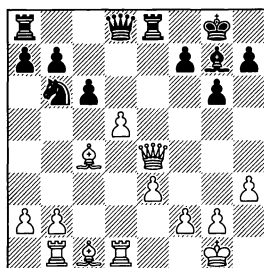
D3) 8...c5

p 264

D4) 8...a5

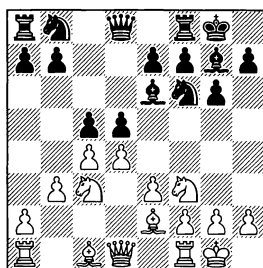
p 264

A) after 15...♗e8



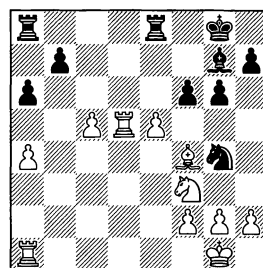
16.♖c2!N

C) after 8...c5



9.dxc5!N

D3) 20...f6



21.e6!N

### 1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♢f3 ♢f6 4.e3 g6

Not the most popular variation of the Slav Defence, but it is quite often seen in tournament practice. The position slightly resembles a Gruenfeld Defence and it sometimes arises from that opening. This line is rarely seen at the highest level: only the Chinese Grandmaster Bu Xiangzhi employs it consistently.

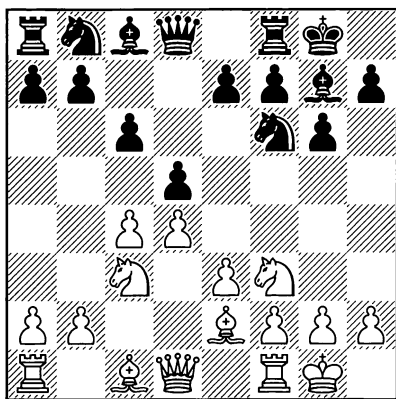
### 5.♢c3

In this variation White cannot gain anything by delaying the development of his queen's knight.

### 5...♙g7 6.♙e2

In my opinion this is the best square for the light-squared bishop. One of the alternatives is 6.♙d3 0-0 7.0-0, but in this case Black gets an extremely solid position after 7...♙g4 8.h3 ♙xf3 9.♚xf3 e6.

### 6...0-0 7.0-0

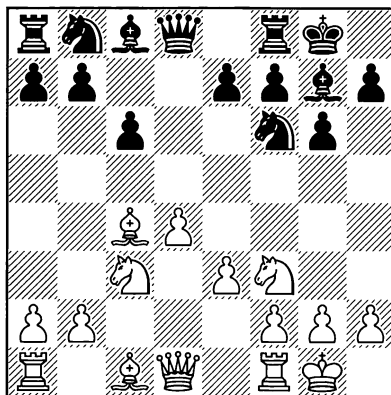


This is the initial position of the variation. Black has a wide choice of continuations, but we will deal only with the four main moves (according to theory). They are:

A) 7...dxc4, B) 7...♙g4, C) 7...♙e6 and the critical move, D) 7...a6, which leads to a hybrid of the Meran and the Gruenfeld.

### (1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♢f3 ♢f6 4.e3 g6 5.♢c3 ♙g7 6.♙e2 0-0 7.0-0)

#### A) 7...dxc4 8.♙xc4



#### 8...♙g4

This line had always been considered Black's main continuation, but recently it has gone completely out of fashion, probably because White is playing almost without risk.

#### 8...♢bd7

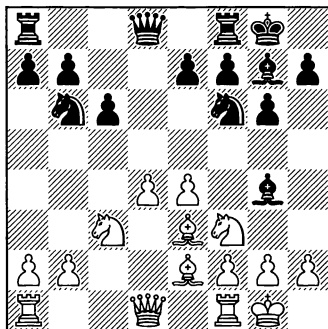
Lately this has been played more often than 8...♙g4, but I do not believe Black can solve his opening problems in this way.

#### 9.e4 ♢b6

The alternative is 9...b5. White's natural reply is 10.♙d3 and now only 10...e5 seems to be interesting, as 10...a6 11.e5 ♢d5 12.♢xd5 cxd5 13.♙e1 ♢b6 14.h3 ♙e6 15.b3± led to a stable advantage for White in Ki. Georgiev – Baramidze, Kusadasi 2006. After 10...e5 11.dxe5 ♢g4 only 12.e6! is good enough to give White an advantage. The line continues: 12...fxe6 13.h3 ♢ge5 14.♢xe5 ♢xe5 15.♙e2 ♙e7 16.f4! (worthy of consideration is 16.♙e3!?) 16...♢c4 17.e5 ♙b7 18.♢e4 c5?! 19.♙c2!± White was clearly better in Minasian – Scerbin, Decin 1996.

#### 10.♙e2 ♙g4 11.♙e3

An interesting alternative might be 11.a4!? a5 12.♙e3.



This position reminds a bit of the Russian variation of the Gruenfeld, only White has made a lot of moves and the knight looks ill-placed on f6.

11...♖fd7

There are two other options I want to mention:

11...♙xf3 12.gxf3! leads to a promising position for White that rather resembles the Gruenfeld opening.

11...♖e8 12.♙e5 ♙xe2 13.♙xe2 ♖d6 This position occurred in Chernikov – Kraidman, Naumburg 2002, and here the most precise would have been 14.a4. It is always useful for White to insert a4 and ...a5, as it makes the position of Black's knight on b6 slightly vulnerable. 14...a5 15.♙ad1 ♙c8 16.♖f3± White has a stable advantage, thanks to his strong centre.

12.♙b3 e5 13.dxe5 ♙xf3 14.♙xf3 ♙xe5

Or 14...♖xe5 15.♙e2 with an obvious advantage.

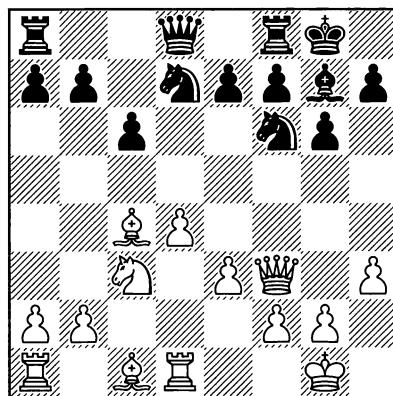
15.♙fd1 ♙e7 16.a4

As I said, this is a thematic idea for this type of position.

16...♖f6 17.a5 ♖c8 18.♙d3±

White was clearly better in Malakhato – Velikov, Elancourt 2004.

9.h3 ♙xf3 10.♙xf3 ♖bd7 11.♙d1



11...e5

Some years ago there was a big theoretical discussion about this position, but now it is a very rare guest in tournament practice.

Other options are:

11...♙a5 does not solve Black's problems. After the natural 12.e4 White is clearly better. Here is one of the most recent examples: 12...b5 13.♙b3 e5 14.dxe5 (14.d5!?) 14...♖xe5 15.♙e2 b4 16.♖a4 with a positional advantage for White in Van Wely – Timman, Wijk aan Zee 2003.

11...♙c7

This also brings no joy.

12.e4 e5 13.d5

White is clearly better.

13...♖b6

In the event of 13...cxd5 14.♙xd5! h6 15.♙e3 a6 16.♙ac1± White's advantage is indisputable, Dreev – Nakamura, Internet 2006.

14.♙b3 cxd5 15.exd5 ♖e8 16.♙e3 ♖d6

After 16...♖c8?! White seizes the initiative with the aid of an elegant pawn sacrifice: 17.d6! ♖cxd6 (17...♖exd6 would not help: 18.♙ac1 ♙e7 19.♖d5 ♙h4 20.♙c7± with a clear advantage) 18.♙ac1 ♙b8 19.♙c5 White was winning in Berczes – Csom, Hungary 2006.

17.♖a1 ♗d7 18.♙c5

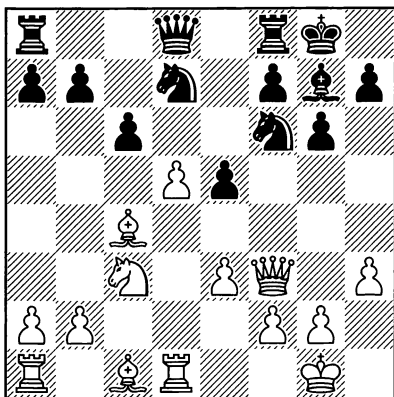
White has the serious threat of 19.♙xd6 followed by 20.♗e4.

18...♗bc8 19.♗e4 ♖e8 20.♙a3 ♗xe4 21.♗xe4 ♗d6 22.♙a4! ♗xe4 23.♙xd7 ♖ed8 24.♖c7±

White was better in Cvitan – Mokry, Polanica Zdroj 1985.

## 12.d5

Obviously the critical continuation.



Now Black's hopes are connected with following pawn sacrifice.

12...e4 13.♗xe4 ♗xe4

The alternative is:

13...♗e5

This is also not enough for equality. The problem is that White will play:

14.♗xf6± ♙xf6 15.♗e2 ♗xc4 16.♗xc4 cxd5 17.♖xd5 ♗b6

Now I believe the strongest move is:

18.♖b5

Instead of 18.♖b1 ♖ac8 19.♗d3 ♖fd8 20.e4 ♖xd5 21.exd5 ♙d4!, which allows Black sufficient counterplay.

18...♗d6 19.e4 ♗d1†

In the event of 19...♖ac8 20.♗b3 Black has no time to create anything and White will develop his bishop next.

20.♗f1 ♗c2

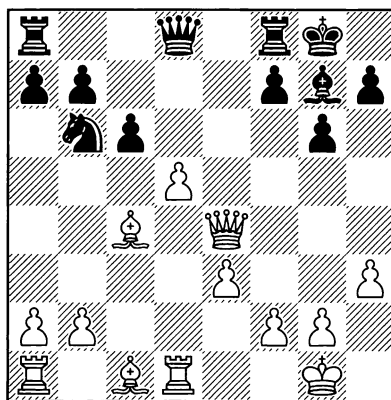
Now, in the game Eliet – De Jager, Antwerp 1996, White should have played:

21.♙h6 ♖fe8 22.♖xb7 ♗xe4 23.♗b5! ♖ad8 24.♙e3±

Securing a clear advantage.

14.♗xe4 ♗b6!

The alternative is 14...♗f6. Kantsler – Haimovich, Israel 2005, continued 15.♗f3 cxd5 16.♙xd5 ♗xd5 17.e4! ♗f6 18.exd5 ♗xf3 19.gxf3 ♖fd8 20.♙g5 ♖d7 21.♖d2 ♖c8 22.♖e1 ♙f8 23.a3. It is maybe not so easy to convert the extra pawn, but Black is doomed to a passive defence. If we were guaranteed such an advantage out of the opening with White, no one would play chess anymore.



15.♖b1!

Perhaps the most important crossroads for White in this variation. I believe the text is the only move to fight for the advantage.

Another option is:

15.♙b3

This is usually considered to be White's first choice. Nevertheless I believe Black has an easy path to equality, which is somehow not appreciated by theory:

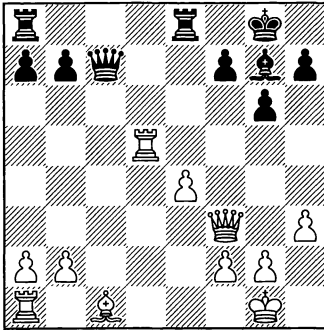
15...cxd5 16.♙xd5 ♖e8

The alternative is 16...♗xd5, but White then has good chances of gaining an advantage

after 17.♟xd5 ♖b6 18.♞d3.  
17.♞f3 ♟xd5 18.♟xd5 ♞c7!

I believe Black is alright. He has nothing to worry about if 19.♞d1 ♟ad8 20.e4 ♟xd5 21.exd5 ♞d7!=.

And there is another problem after:  
19.e4



19...♞e7!N

In both encounters where the diagram position was reached, Black failed to discover this natural move and ran into some trouble.

The main variation of my analysis goes:

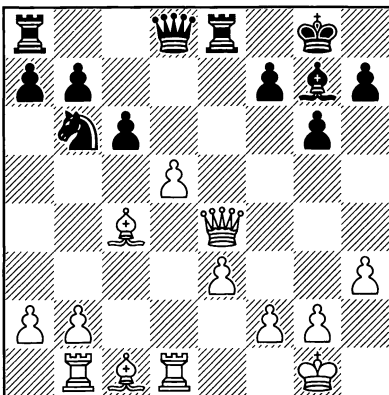
20.♟e3 ♞xe4 21.♞xe4 ♟xe4 22.♟ad1

And now the easiest way to play is probably:

22...♟xb2 23.♟b5 ♟c3 24.♟xb7 ♟b4!

White's advantage is rather symbolic.

15...♟e8



This position is thought to be fine for Black, but in my opinion White can still play for an advantage with a new plan:

16.♞c2!N

In a few games where White opted for:

16.♞d3 cxd5 17.♟b3

17.♟xd5 ♟xd5 18.♞xd5 ♞xd5 19.♟xd5 ♟ed8! was just fine for Black in Vitoux – Kirszenberg, Lyon 2007.

17...♟c8 18.♟d2

And now Black should play the simple:

18...♟c4!N

Instead of 18...♞g5 19.♞b5! with better chances for White, Dokhoian – Samaritani, Aarhus 1991.

19.♟c3 ♟xc3 20.bxc3 ♞e7!

Black has reasonable play, as:

21.♞xd5?

runs into

21...♟ed8!

White's queen does not have a good square.

16...cxd5

The alternatives are not acceptable:

16...♞h4 17.b3 leads to a pretty forced line:  
17...cxd5 18.♟xd5 ♟ac8 19.♞e2 ♟xd5  
20.♟xd5 ♞e4 21.♞d3 ♞xd3 22.♟xd3 ♟ed8  
23.♟xd8† ♟xd8 24.♟b2 ♟d2 25.♟xg7 ♟xg7  
26.a4 White keeps a healthy extra pawn, although Black perhaps retains some chances to escape with a draw, thanks to the activity of his rook.

16...♟xd5? simply does not work, because of  
17.e4 ♟b4 18.♟xf7† ♟xf7 19.♞c4† with a decisive advantage.

17.♟b5

This move is stronger than 17.♟e2 ♟c8 18.♞b3 ♞c7 19.♟g4 ♟cd8 20.♟d2 ♞c4! when it is not clear whether White has any serious chances.



**17...♞c8**

17...♞e7 18.♞b3 is likely to just transpose.

**18.♞b3 ♞e7 19.♙e2**

An important move in White's strategy: the light-squared bishop is heading for f3, but sometimes ♙g4 might be an important option.

**19...♞c7**

After 19...♞c7 White's idea works well: 20.♙g4! f5 21.♙f3 ♞c5 22.♙d2 a5 23.♞d3 ♖c4 24.♙c3 ♖b6 25.♙e1!± with a clear advantage.

**20.♙d2**

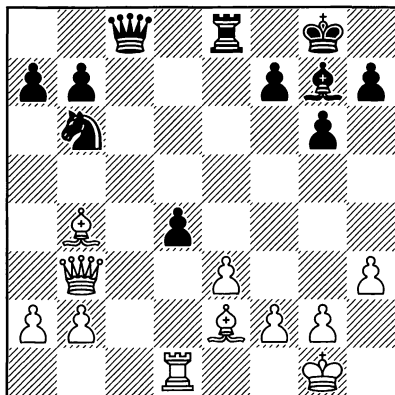
The bishop pair and the weak d5-pawn makes White's edge obvious. It is very important that Black cannot play a break in the centre with:

**20...d4**

Now White can back up his strategy with tactics:

**21.♞bc1 ♞d8 22.♞xc8 ♞xc8**

22...♖xc8 23.♙b4± is also good for White.

**23.♙b4 ♞e8****24.♙g4!±**

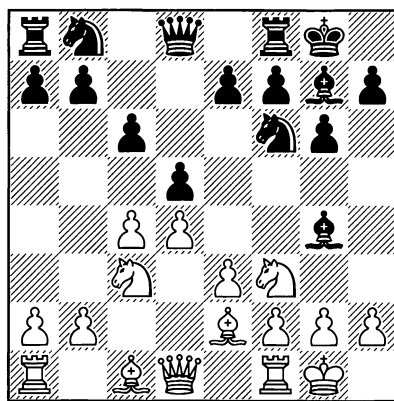
Followed by 25.exd4 with an extra pawn,

which should be enough to win the game.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♖f3 ♖f6 4.e3 g6 5.♖c3 ♙g7 6.♙e2 0-0 7.0-0)

**B) 7...♙g4**

This allows White to obtain a comfortable edge by putting pressure on d5 and b7.

**8.cxd5 cxd5 9.♞b3 b6**

The alternate way to defend the b-pawn is: 9...♙c8 10.♙d2

I believe this quiet move is stronger than 10.♖e5 ♖c6 11.♖xc6 bxc6 12.♙d2 ♞d6!, where Black has succeeded in creating the unpleasant threat of 13...♞b8. After 13.♞a4 ♙d7 14.♞a5 e5 15.dxe5 ♞xe5 16.♞ac1 ♞fe8 the position was double-edged in Yakovich – Cocchi, Saint Vincent 2000.

**10...♖c6 11.♞fc1**

White has easy play on the queenside. I will give one example:

11...♞d6!? 12.a4 ♞d8 13.a5 a6 14.♖a4 ♖e4 15.♙e1 ♞b8 16.♖b6 ♙g4 17.h3 ♙f5 18.♞a4!±

White developed strong pressure on the queenside in Kaidanov – Hasangatin, Moscow 2003.

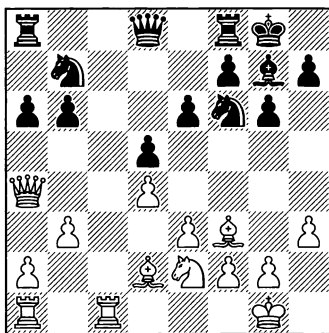
**10.h3 ♙xf3 11.♙xf3**

The pair of bishops secures White a reliable edge. We shall follow one of the recent examples:

**11...e6 12.♙d2 ♘c6 13.♚a4 ♜a5 14.b3 a6 15.♞e2 ♞d7**

The endgame appears to be very unpleasant for Black. He would have to find a big improvement to solve his problems.

Another option is 15...♞b7. In this case I like 16.♟f1!N with the following nice trap:



16...♞e4?! (better is 16...♞d6, although in this case White keeps the pressure on with 17.♙b4±) 17.♙xe4 dxe4 18.♚c6 ♘c5 19.♙a5! Black has no compensation for the pawn after 19...♞d3 20.♙xb6 ♞f6 21.♟f1 ♞f5 22.f3!±.

**16.♞xd7 ♞xd7 17.♟fc1 ♟fc8 18.♞f4**

White's knight transfers to its thematic square of d3, from where it controls e5 perfectly.

**18...♞f6 19.♙e2 g5 20.♞d3 ♞e4 21.♙e1**

White has arranged his pieces ideally and has an obvious advantage. Sargissian – Stellwagen, Paks 2008, ended in a convincing victory for White.

**(1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♞f3 ♞f6 4.e3 g6 5.♞c3 ♙g7 6.♙e2 0-0 7.0-0)**

C) 7...♙e6

A rarely played continuation, but not without its points. Black wants to force White to remove the tension in the centre with cxd5. In this case Black's knight would gain the comfortable c6-square. After some thought, I found a sensible plan of action for White.

### 8.b3

This seems to be the most natural reply. Other moves are not so clear, for example:

8.cxd5 cxd5 9.♞b3 ♞b6, and I did not find anything special for White here.

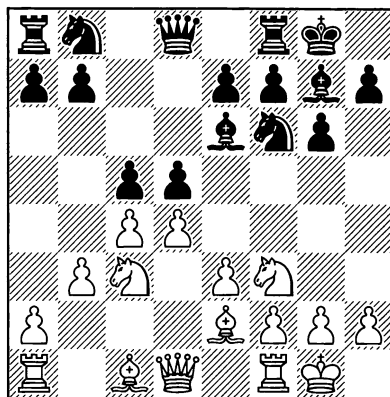
Or 8.♞b3 ♞b6 9.♙d2 ♞bd7 10.cxd5 ♞xb3! 11.axb3 ♙xd5 and Black is pretty solid.

And finally, 8.♞g5 ♙f5 9.♙d2 h6 10.♞f3 ♞bd7 and Black is fine.

### 8...c5

Without this move Black's set-up would look absolutely senseless.

Here I found an interesting idea, which surprisingly has not been employed yet.



### 9.dxc5!N

Strangely enough, after other moves Black has a reasonable game. For example: 9.♙b2 dxc4! 10.bxc4 cxd4 11.exd4 ♙g4 12.h3 ♙xf3 13.♙xf3 ♞c6 14.♞e2 (14.♞a4 ♞d7) 14...♞d7 was

Gruenberg – Meduna, Prague 1989, and 9.♘a3 ♖e4! 10.♘d5 ♙xd5 11.cxd5 cxd4 12.♘xd4 ♘c3 13.♗d3 ♘xe2† 14.♗xe2 ♗xd5 as in H. Danielsen – Pergericht, Manila (ol) 1992.

So, once again I had to find an improvement to be able to fight for an advantage.

### 9...dxc4

The alternatives are:

9...♘a6 10.♘a3 ♗a5

After 10...dxc4 11.♗xd8 ♗fxd8 12.♘d4 Black cannot take on b3 with 12...cxb3 in view of 13.c6! with a decisive advantage.

11.♘a4 dxc4 12.♘d4 ♙d7 13.c6! ♙xc6

After 13...bxc6 14.♙xe7 ♗fe8 15.♙xf6 ♙xf6 16.♙xc4 everything works perfectly for White: 16...c5 17.♗f3 ♖g7 18.♗d5! with a clear advantage.

14.♘xc6 bxc6 15.♗e1! ♗xe1 16.♗axe1±

White will have an advantage in the endgame thanks to his pair of bishops and his better pawn structure.

9...♘c6 is strongly met with 10.♘d4! ♗a5 11.♙b2 ♗xc5. And here the easiest way forward is 12.cxd5 ♙xd5 13.♘d5 ♘xd5 14.♗c1 ♗b6 15.♘xc6 bxc6 16.♙xg7 ♖xg7 17.♗c2 ♗ac8 18.♗fd1± with a pleasant advantage because of Black's weak pawn structure on the queenside.

9...♘e4 10.♘xe4 dxe4

In the case of 10...♙xa1 11.♘eg5! White is clearly better. Black has a tough choice to make: either he has to give up a second pawn, or he will have to allow White to capture on e6, which would start a serious initiative.

11.♗xd8

Less clear is 11.♘d4 ♘a6 12.♘a3 ♗a5 13.♗c1 ♙d7 and Black has some compensation.

11...♗xd8 12.♘d4 ♙xd4

12...♘a6 13.♘a3 ♙xd4 14.exd4 ♗xd4 15.♗fd1 ♗xd1† 16.♗xd1 ♗c8 17.b4 is much better for White.

13.exd4 ♗xd4 14.♙e3 ♗d8

14...♗d7 does not help after 15.♗fd1.

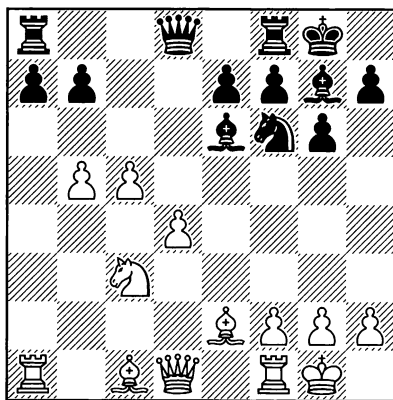
15.f3

Instead 15.♗fd1 ♘c6 might give Black slightly better drawing chances, as in this case at least the rooks are connected.

15...exf3 16.♙xf3 ♘c6 17.♗fd1

White's chances are clearly preferable because of his bishop pair and queenside pawn majority. This should allow him to create a passed pawn, although Black still has some chances to survive.

10.♘d4 cxb3 11.axb3 ♙d7 12.b4 ♘c6 13.b5 ♘xd4 14.exd4 ♙e6



### 15.♗a4!

Despite his solid structure, Black's position is clearly worse, as White can construct an unpleasant bind along the a-file.

15...♘d5 16.♙b2 ♗d7 17.♗d2±

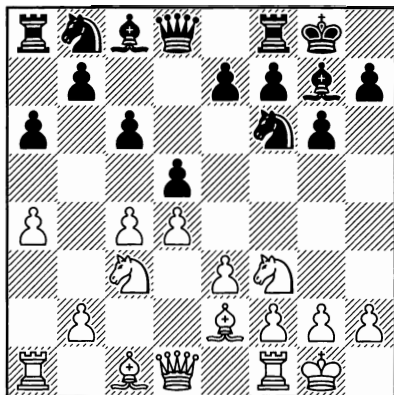
(1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.e3 g6 5.♘c3 ♙g7 6.♙e2 0-0 7.0-0)

### D) 7...a6

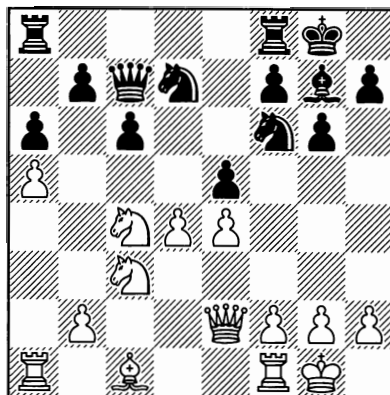
Recently this has been Black's most fashionable move in the position. It was brought to the forefront by Bu Xiangzhi, the only elite player to repeatedly play this line.

**8.a4**

This seems to be the critical continuation.



10.♟e5 ♕xe2 11.♖xe2 ♖c7 12.♟xc4 ♟bd7  
13.e4 e5



In this position many sensible and less sensible moves have been tested in practice. The ones we will look at are:

**D1) 8...dxc4, D2) 8...e6, D3) 8...c5, D4) 8...a5**, but first the following minor line:

8...♟g4 9.♖b3 ♖a7 10.h3 ♟xf3 11.♟xf3 e6 12.a5 This move secures a stable advantage. 12...♟bd7 13.♖d1 ♖c7 14.♟d2± White had an advantage which was maybe not so big, but still quite pleasant, in Pozo Vera – Delgado, Havana 2008.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♟f3 ♟f6 4.e3 g6 5.♟c3 ♟g7 6.♟e2 0–0 7.0–0 a6 8.a4)

**D1) 8...dxc4 9.a5!**

The following encounter is the only game where White has employed the text instead of the more common 9.♟xc4.

**9...♟g4**

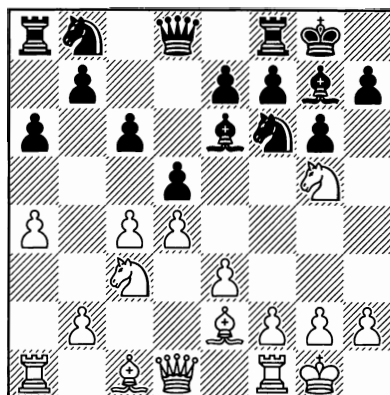
In the event of 9...♟e6 10.e4 White has a very promising position: he will regain the pawn with dividends.

In the game Nakamura – Bu Xiangzhi, Gibraltar 2008, White could have gained a very convincing plus with simple moves.

14.dxe5N ♟xe5 15.♟b6 ♖ad8 16.f4 ♟d3 17.♟e3±

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♟f3 ♟f6 4.e3 g6 5.♟c3 ♟g7 6.♟e2 0–0 7.0–0 a6 8.a4)

**D2) 8...♟e6 9.♟g5**



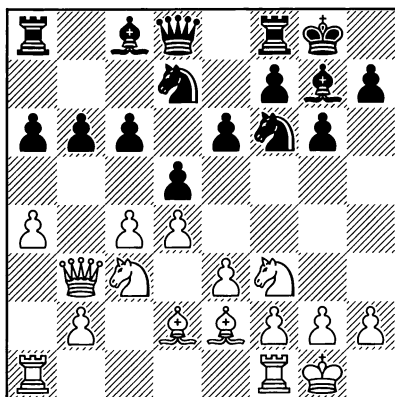
I believe this move works very well for White in this position.

**9...♙c8**

If 9...♙f5 then White continues with 10.♞b3 ♞a7 11.a5 and achieves a pleasant edge.

**10.♞b3**

An interesting alternative might be 10.a5!?

**10...b6 11.♙d2 e6 12.♟f3 ♟bd7****13.cxd5 exd5**

After 13...cxd5 14.♞fc1 ♟e4 15.♙e1 ♙b7 16.♞c2± White would keep niggling pressure on the queenside.

**14.a5 b5 15.♞fd1±**

White had a favourable pawn structure in Gelfand – Kamsky, Elista (2) 2007.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♟f3 ♟f6 4.e3 g6 5.♟c3 ♙g7 6.♙e2 0–0 7.0–0 a6 8.a4)

**D3) 8...c5**

A very important line, since Black's attempt to equalize quickly looks quite logical.

**9.dxc5 dxc4 10.♞xd8 ♞xd8 11.♙xc4 ♟bd7**

Black failed to equalize after 11...♟c6?! 12.e4 ♙g4 13.♟g5 ♞f8 14.h3 ♙d7 15.♙e3± in Khenkin – I. Sokolov, Reykjavik 1994.

**12.♞d1 ♞f8**

Defending the f7-square against any possibility of ♟g5.

**13.e4 ♟xc5 14.e5 ♟g4**

14...♟fd7 runs into the unpleasant move 15.♟d5!.

**15.♙f4 ♙e6 16.♟d5 ♙xd5 17.♙xd5 e6**

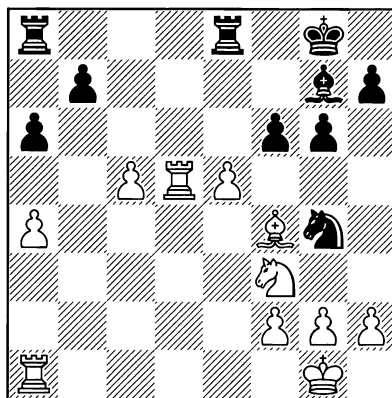
The whole line looks pretty forced; the previous move was definitely necessary, as White was threatening 18.b4.

**18.b4**

This move is very strong all the same.

**18...exd5 19.bxc5 ♞fe8 20.♞xd5 f6**

At this point, in M. Gurevich – Hellsten, Antwerp 1994, White missed a good option.

**21.e6!N ♞xe6 22.♞d7**

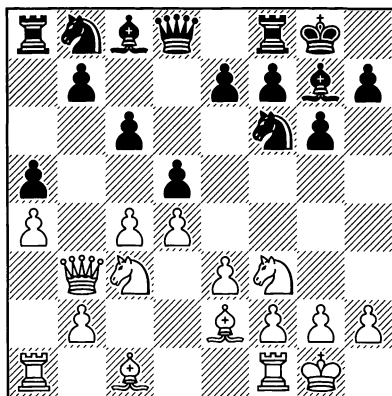
With an advantage.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♟f3 ♟f6 4.e3 g6 5.♟c3 ♙g7 6.♙e2 0–0 7.0–0 a6 8.a4)

**D4) 8...a5**

This is clearly Black's first choice in the position, although we have seen that other moves are playable as well.

## 9.♞b3



## 9...♟a6

The alternative is:

9...e6 10.♞d1 b6

Another option is 10...♟bd7 11.♞c2 ♞c7 12.b3 dxc4! 13.bxc4 e5 14.♟a3 ♞e8 Zilberman – Murey, Ramat Aviv 2000, and here 15.d5N b6 16.♞ab1 would leave White with a good position.

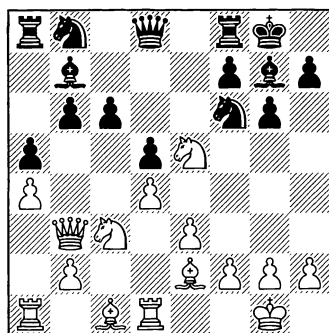
## 11.♟e5N

This is White's best idea to fight for an advantage.

Black had a sound position after 11.♟d2 ♟c6 ♟b7 12.♞ac1 ♟bd7 13.♟e1 ♞e7 in Lauber – Ottstadt, Hamburg 2001.

## 11...♟b7 12.cxd5 exd5

In the event of 12...cxd5 13.♟d2 ♟c6 14.♟xc6 ♟xc6 15.♞ac1± White has definite pressure on the queenside.



## 13.e4!

This is my main idea.

## 13...dxe4

Also 13...♟xe4 14.♟xe4 dxe4 15.♟c4± gives White interesting play.

## 14.♟g5

White will regain the e4-pawn and his initiative, thanks to the vulnerability of Black's queenside pawns.

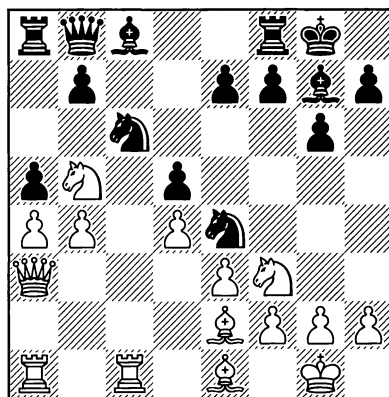
## 10.cxd5 cxd5 11.♟d2 ♟b4 12.♞fc1

Somehow I like this move more than 12.♟e5, which has been played in most of the games in this line. It does not look like White has anything special after 12...♟f5 13.♞ac1 ♟d7 14.♟xd7 ♞xd7 15.♟b5 ♟c6, Peng – Stefanova, Groningen 1998.

## 12...♟c6

A very important point is that 12...♟f5 is met with 13.♟e1. One of the ideas behind White's previous move is that now White can cover the d3-square with ♟e1, not allowing Black to trade knights, as would have been the case after 12.♟e5. 13...♞c8 14.♟b5 ♟c6 15.♟d3 ♟e4 16.♟e1± White has arranged his pieces perfectly and can now slowly build his pressure on the queenside.

## 13.♟e1 ♞d6 14.♟b5 ♞b8 15.♞a3 ♟e4 16.b4



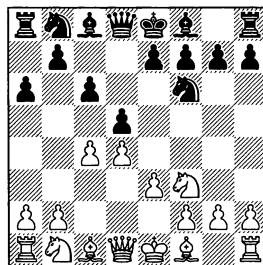
White achieved a comfortable edge in **Conclusion:**  
Kantsler – Krayz, Israel 2005.

4...g6 is rather rare at the top level and White gains an edge without much effort in most of the lines. These two facts are no doubt related. The toughest challenge is probably 7...a6 and 8...a5, line D4, but even here if White chooses 12.♖f1 instead of the more common 12.♗e5 then Black will be unable to equalize.

# Chapter 15

## The Slav

4...a6



### Variation Index

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.f3 f6 4.e3 a6

5.g3

A) 5...e6

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B) 5...b5

p 269

C) 5...g4 6.f3 bd2 e6 7.0-0 f6 8.f3 c2

p 270

C1) 8...g7

p 271

C2) 8...f6 9.b3

p 273

C21) 9...c7

p 273

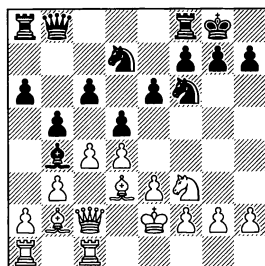
C22) 9...h5

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C23) 9...e7

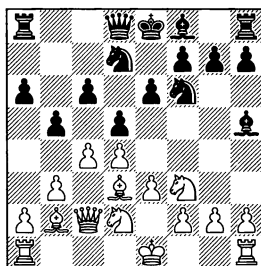
p 277

B) note to the 9th move



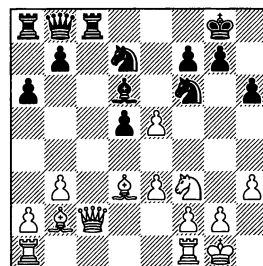
13.f5!N

B) after 9...h5



10.cxd5!N

C22) note to the 12th move



17.h7!N

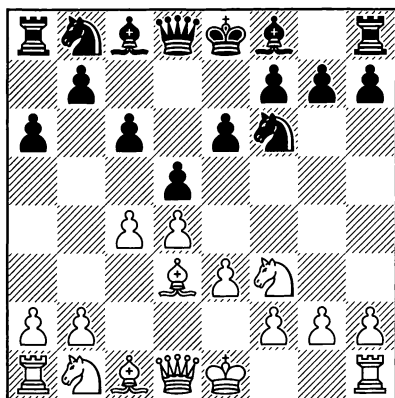


**1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♟f3 ♟f6 4.e3 a6**

In almost every variation of the Slav Defence Black has the option of playing ...a6. In this specific position it is a useful waiting move rather than preparation for ...b5, as this advance seems to me to be a questionable idea without a white knight on c3. White now has a wide choice, but I decided to focus on:

**5.♙d3**

I will examine three options: **A) 5...e6**, **B) 5...b5** and Black's most popular move, **C) 5...g4**.

**(1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♟f3 ♟f6 4.e3 a6 5.♙d3)****A) 5...e6**

This is passive and should always bring a smile to our lips. Compared to the 4.e3 e6 5.♙d3 lines, where Black does not take on c4, it is hard to believe that the move ...a6 is justified. For once this curious move might actually just be a loss of a tempo!

**6.0-0 ♟bd7 7.b3 ♙d6 8.♙b2 0-0 9.♟bd2 c5**

In the event of:  
9...b6

White carries out the standard break in the centre:

10.e4 dxe4 11.♟xe4 ♟xe4 12.♙xe4 ♙b7  
13.♟c2 h6

Black's problem is that the typical 13...f5 14.♙d3 c5 does not work in view of 15.d5!±.

14.c5!±

White was clearly better in Se. Ivanov – G. Johansson, Stockholm 2005. The tactical justification of White's idea is this:

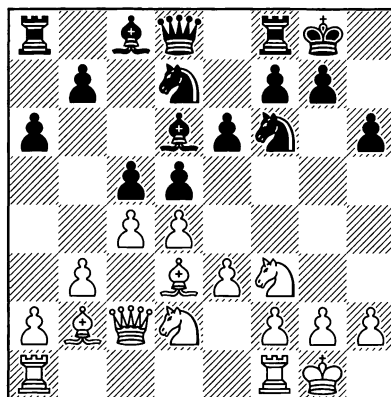
14...bxc5 15.dxc5 ♟xc5 16.♙h7+! ♟h8  
17.♙ad1 f5 18.♙e5 ♟e4 19.♙fe1 c5

19...♟xh7 20.♙xd6±

20.♙xd6 ♟xd6 21.♙xe6 ♙xf3 22.♙dxd6 ♟g5  
23.♙g6 ♙ae8 24.♟c3 ♟e7 25.gxf3 ♟e1+  
26.♟xe1 ♙xe1+ 27.♟g2 ♟xh7 28.♙xa6±

With an extra pawn.

I am fairly sure that White should be better after the text, as Black's play looks artificial. For example, he has moved his c-pawn twice. The following idea looks interesting:

**10.♟c2 h6****11.♙fe1! ♟N cxd4**

If 11...b6 12.e4 dxe4 13.♟xe4 White has the advantage, as his pieces are much better coordinated. Another alternative is:

11...♙e8 12.e4 dxe4 13.♟xe4 ♟xe4 14.♙xe4 ♟f6

And now:

15.dxc5!

This is very strong.

15...♙xc5

The point of White's idea is the line:

15...♜xe4 16.cxd6 ♜xd6 17.♙h7† ♜h8

18.♙d1+– and Black cannot avoid losing his knight.

16.♙f4 ♜c7 17.♙xf6 gxf6 18.♙xf6

With a crushing attack.

## 12.exd4 dxc4

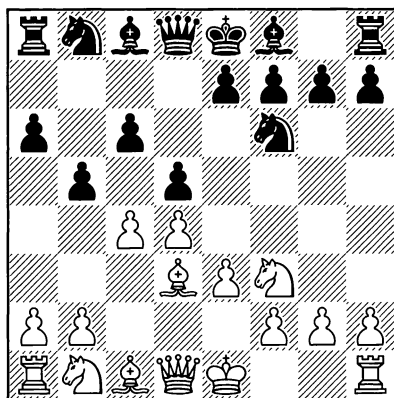
12...b6?! does not work: 13.cxd5! ♜xd5 14.♜c6 ♜c7 (also no help is 14...♜b4 15.♙h7† ♜xh7 16.♜xa8 ♜f6 17.♜e4+ and White is an exchange up) 15.♜xa8 ♙b7 16.♜a7 ♙a8 17.♜xa8† ♙xa8 18.♙xa6 ♜c2 19.♙ab1± In a strange way White is a pawn up.

13.bxc4 b6 14.♜e4 ♙b4 15.♙e3 ♙b7 16.♜xf6† ♜xf6 17.♜e5

White has good chances to seize the initiative on the kingside.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♜f3 ♜f6 4.e3 a6 5.♙d3)

## B) 5...b5



Surprisingly this is played quite often, but in my opinion this advance loses its main point when there is no white knight on c3.

6.b3 ♙g4 7.♜bd2 e6 8.♜c2 ♜bd7 9.♙b2

This position favours White. I will give a few examples:

9...♙h5

The most challenging move, but there are others:

9...♙e7 10.0–0 ♙h5

Premature would be 10...0–0, as it runs into the unpleasant 11.♜e5!±.

Here I like the following plan for White:

11.♙fc1 ♙g6

If 11...0–0 then 12.♜e5.

12.♙xg6 hxg6 13.cxd5 cxd5 14.♜e5!

White's control of the c-file secures his advantage.

14...♜b6 15.♜c6 ♜xc6 16.♙xc6 0–0 17.♙ac1

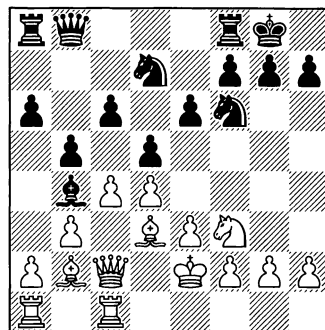
This endgame is unpleasant for Black, Bernasek – Neuman, Brno 2005.

9...♙f3 10.♜xf3

10.gxf3!± might be an interesting alternative.

10...♙b4† 11.♜e2 0–0 12.♙hc1 ♜b8

In the event of 12...dxc4 13.bxc4 ♜b6 White maintains a clear edge with 14.♜e5 ♙c8 15.♜b3!±.



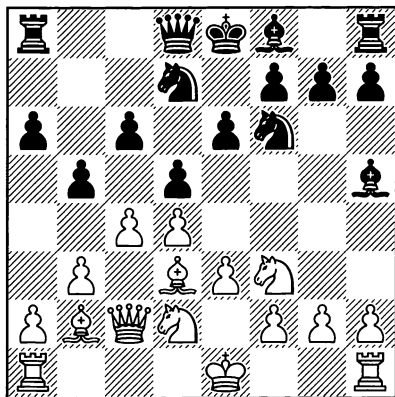
This position was reached in Urban – Spivak, Germany 2004, where I believe White missed a very strong move:

13.♜e5!N ♜b7

After 13...♟xe5 14.dxe5 dxc4 15.bxc4 bxc4 (15...♞d7 16.♙xh7† ♟h8 17.cxb5 axb5 18.♚xc6 ♟xh7 19.♚e4† ♟g8 20.♚xb4 just leaves White a pawn up) 16.♚xc4 ♞d5 17.♙ab1 and Black is losing the c6-pawn. 14.cxb5 cxb5 15.♚c6 ♚xc6 16.♞xc6 ♙d6 17.a4

With a difficult position for Black.

Returning to the main line, I found an interesting idea:



### 10.cxd5?N

In the most recent game 10.c5 was played, but after the precise 10...a5! Black had a reasonable position in Bologan – Postny, Montpellier 2008. For example, 11.0–0 (or if 11.♞e5 Black replies 11...♞xe5 12.dxe5 ♞d7 13.♙d4 f6! with unclear play) 11...♙g6 12.e4 dxe4 13.♞xe4 ♞xe4 14.♙xe4 ♚c7 and Black has a normal game.

### 10...cxd5 11.♙c1

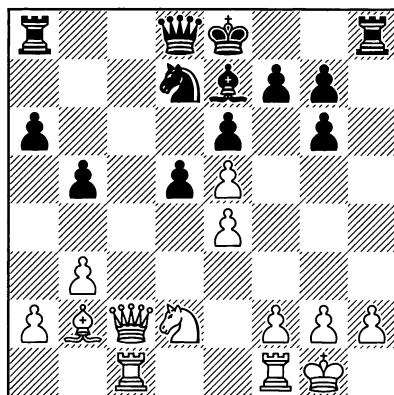
White seizes control of the c-file and maintains his advantage, for example:

### 11...♙g6 12.♞e5 ♞xe5

Or 12...♙xd3 13.♚xd3 ♙d6 14.0–0 0–0 15.♙c6±.

13.dxe5 ♞d7 14.0–0 ♙e7 15.♙xg6 hxg6

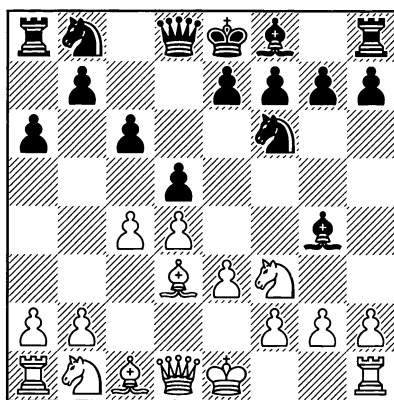
### 16.e4



With an initiative.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♞f3 ♞f6 4.e3 a6 5.♙d3)

C) 5...♙g4



This is Black's most common choice by far in this position.

### 6.♞bd2 e6

Another move order is 6...♞bd7 7.♚c2 (7.0–0 allows 7...e5!? as in Wang Yue – Kazhgaleyev, Doha 2006) 7...e6 8.0–0.

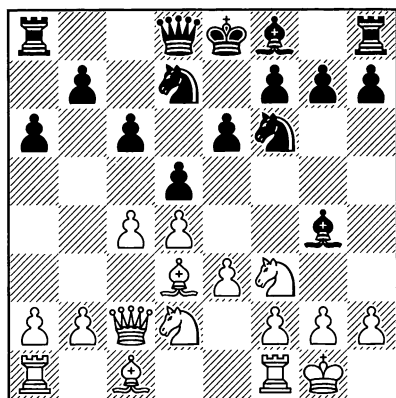
### 7.0–0

7.♚c2 allows Black the following plan:

7...dxc4 8.♖xc4 ♗xf3 9.gxf3 ♜bd7 This has been successfully played by the Chinese Grandmaster Ni Hua. One of his recent games continued: 10.♗d2 ♜d5 11.a3 ♖h4 12.♙e2 ♗e7 13.♙ag1 g6 14.b4 f5 with complicated play, Najer – Ni Hua, Ergun 2006.

### 7...♜bd7 8.♖c2

The most precise move order. In my opinion 8.b3 is a slight inaccuracy after which Black has two good options: 8...♗f5 Black trades light-squared bishops in a favourable situation compared with our main line (8...c5 has also brought good results). 9.♖c2 ♗xd3 10.♖xd3 ♗e7 11.e4 dxe4 12.♜xe4 ♜xe4 13.♖xe4 0–0= Black has a safe position, Korchnoi – Ni Hua, Dagomys 2008.



Usually in this position Black chooses between C1) 8...♗e7 and C2) 8...♗d6, while 8...♗h5 will just transpose to one of these lines, as no independent variations have been seen with it in practice.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♜f3 ♜f6 4.e3 a6 5.♗d3 ♗g4 6.♜bd2 e6 7.0–0 ♜bd7 8.♖c2)

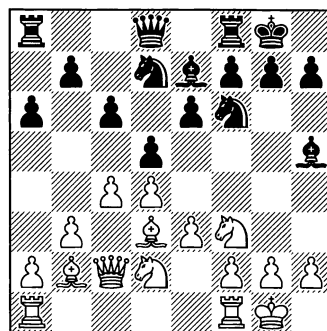
### C1) 8...♗e7 9.b3 ♗h5

This apparent loss of time is more or less forced. The line:

9...0–0

is obviously inferior for Black:

10.♗b2 ♗h5



11.♜e5!

This is White's main idea in this line. The difference from our main line is that the h7-pawn would be hanging with check if Black were to take on e5.

11...♗g6 12.♜xg6 hxg6 13.♜f3

White has a pleasant edge with his pair of bishops. The game continued:

13...♗c8 14.♗fd1

I also find the somewhat inflexible, but also prophylactic 14.c5!?, with the idea of pushing the queenside pawns, quite interesting.

14...c5 15.♖e2 cxd4

This was Dreev – Fontaine, Internet (blitz) 2004. Here the obvious

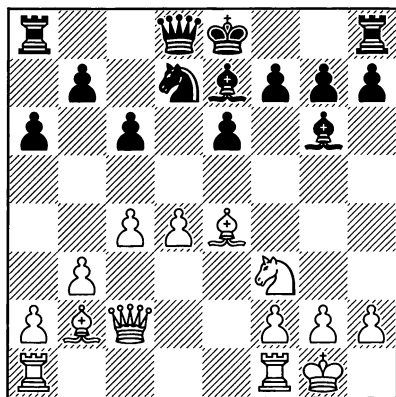
16.exd4N

would secure White's advantage.

### 10.♗b2 ♗g6 11.e4

This is more challenging than 11.♗xg6 hxg6 12.e4 dxe4 13.♜xe4. Now I like the following play for Black: 13...♖a5 14.♜xf6+ ♗xf6 15.♗ad1 ♖f5 It is important that Black has the extra option of castling long here. 16.♖xf5 gxf5 17.♗a3 ♗e7= Chatalbashev – S. Savchenko, Bulgaria 2005.

11...dxe4 12.♜xe4 ♜xe4 13.♗xe4



This is the position both sides have been aiming for. Black is very solid, while White's space advantage is obvious. It is difficult to say if White has the advantage, but this variation is certainly playable for White. Now Black has a choice between swapping the light-squared bishops on e4, or allowing White to trade on g6, changing the pawn structure on the kingside.

### 13...♙xe4

An important alternative is:

13...0-0 14♞fe1

I believe White can also try the same arrangement of his pieces as in the main line:

14.♞ad1 ♞c7 15.♙xg6 hxg6 16.♞d3±

14...♞c7 15.♞ad1 ♞ad8 16.♙c3 ♞fe8  
17.♙xg6

At some point White has to swap bishops.

17...hxg6

Now in the game Gustafsson – Mastrovasilis, Fuerth 2002, White tried the subtle 18.g3 ♙f6 19.♞e3, and now 19...c5! would give Black reasonable play.

In my opinion White should have played:

18.♞d3N ♙f6

18...♙f6 is met comfortably by 19.♞de3 and Black cannot play 19...c5? in view of 20.d5±.

19.♞d2 c5 20.d5 exd5 21.♙xf6

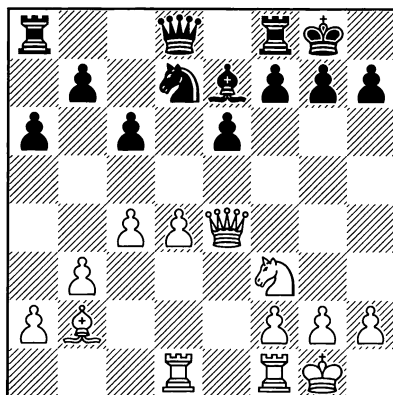
21.cxd5 ♙d6 fine for Black.

21...♙xf6 22.♞xe8† ♞xe8 23.♞xd5±

White has the traditional slight advantage.

### 14.♞xe4 0-0 15.♞ad1

Black has experienced definite problems in recent games.



### 15...♙f6

Black has also tried:

15...♙f6 16.♙a3! ♞e8

If 16...♙e7 then White has the unpleasant idea of 17.♙xe7 ♞xe7 18.d5! and Black is going to suffer.

17.♙d6!

White's bishop transfers to the h2-b8 diagonal, where it will be more active than on b2.

17...♙f8

In the event of 17...♙e7 White would obviously avoid exchanging bishops:

18.♙f4±

18.♙e5 ♞e7 19.♞d3 ♞ad8 20.♞fd1 ♙g6  
21.g3

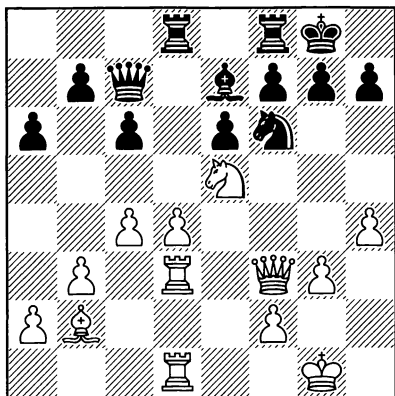
Black's position remains passive; White gradually converted his positional advantage into a fine win in Fridman – Kritz, Bad Woerishofen 2008.

### 16.♞e2 ♞c7 17.♞d3 ♞ad8 18.♞fd1

An interesting option is 18.♙e5 c5 (18...♙d7 19.f4! looks very attractive for White)

19.♖f1 cxd4 20.♗xd4 and White's pieces are more active.

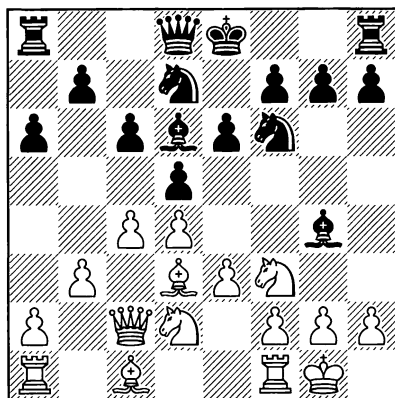
18...♗h5 19.g3 ♖f6 20.♗e5 ♜fe8 21.♞f3 ♜f8 22.h4±



White keeps a pleasant positional advantage, Wang Hao – Kritz, Gibraltar 2008.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♗f3 ♗f6 4.e3 a6 5.♗d3 ♗g4 6.♗bd2 e6 7.0–0 ♗bd7 8.♞c2)

C2) 8...♗d6 9.b3



Now Black has a wide choice of continuations. We will examine the most logical ones, C21) 9...♞c7, C22) 9...♗h5 and C23) 9...♞e7N.

There are two additional moves I just want to mention quite quickly, so no one can accuse me of ignoring them!

9...c5?!

This looks quite suspicious to me. This advance is typical for this structure, but the idea behind it is usually to develop the knight from b8 to c6, while here the knight is already on d7, making c6–c5 look rather senseless. This move has been tested in only one game:

10.♗b2 ♜c8 11.♗e5 ♗h5 12.♞ac1 cxd4

A better try was 12...♗g6, but after 13.f4 White has definite pressure.

13.exd4 ♗g4

If 13...0–0 White plays 14.f4 ♗g6 15.♗xg6 hxg6 16.♞d1! (16.c5 allows some counterplay connected with 16...g5) 16...♗b4 17.♗f3 ♗e4 18.c5 with a pleasant advantage.

14.♗xg4 ♗xg4 15.f4 ♞f6 16.♞ce1

White clearly had the initiative in Chatalbashev – Yordanov, Pernik 2007.

9...0–0 10.♗b2 ♞b8 would just transpose to the 9...♗h5 line after 11.h3 ♗h5, as 11...♗xf3 12.♗xf3 makes little sense, because Black can get this position with his pawn on h6 – see the 9...♗h5 line.

Inferior is 10...♞c7 11.h3 (11.c5 ♗e7 12.b4± is quite interesting as well, Nguyen Huynh – Vo Thanh Ninh, Vietnam 2003) 11...♗h5 (11...♗xf3 12.♗xf3 gives White a pleasant advantage with the pair of bishops) 12.c5 ♗e7 13.♗e5. This position will be examined in the note to Black's 11th move in the 9...♞c7 line just below.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♗f3 ♗f6 4.e3 a6 5.♗d3 ♗g4 6.♗bd2 e6 7.0–0 ♗bd7 8.♞c2 ♗d6 9.b3)

C21) 9...♞c7

This looks fairly natural, but b8 is a more flexible square for the queen (and of course this will be covered in the 9...♗h5 line). A clear drawback of Black's last move is that he might lose control over the e5-square after a possible c4-c5 attacking the bishop, while after ...♖b8 the bishop has c7 available.

### 10.♗b2 ♗h5 11.h3 ♗g6

This is better than:

11...0-0 12.c5 ♗e7 13.♖e5!

As I mentioned above, Black has lost control of the important e5-square, so White has taken the opportunity to seize the initiative:

13...♗h8

Other options do not solve Black's problems either: 13...♗g6 14.♖xg6 hxg6 15.♖f3± and then White has a clear plan of advancing his queenside pawns.

A principled try is 13...♖xe5 14.dxe5 ♖d7 15.♗xh7± ♗h8, but after 16.g4 g6 17.gxh5 ♗xh7 18.♗h1 ♖g8 19.♖g1 ♖xc5 20.♖g4, the position of Black's monarch looks dicey. 14.f4 ♖xe5 15.fxg5 ♖d7 16.♗xh7

White was clearly better in the complications, Dreev – Topalov, New Delhi (4) 2000.

### 12.♗xg6 hxg6 13.e4

Worthy of consideration is 13.♖g5!?N 0-0 14.♖df3 when the knight is annoying on g5, while White keeps all his options open.

### 13...dxe4 14.♖xe4 ♖xe4 15.♖xe4

Again we have a thematic position for this variation.

### 15...♖f6 16.♖c2 ♖a5

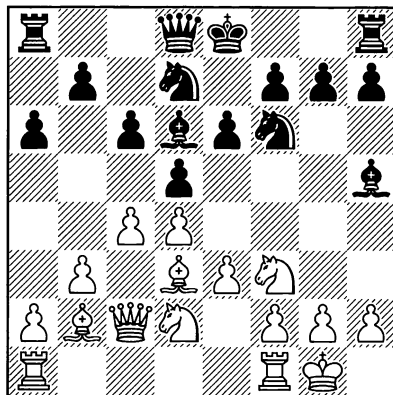
This was Bukal – Rogic, Austria 2001. Now White should play:

### 17.♖e5 0-0 18.♖ad1±

With complicated play that is typical for this variation: Black is very solid but White has a space advantage.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♖f3 ♖f6 4.e3 a6 5.♗d3 ♗g4 6.♖bd2 e6 7.0-0 ♖bd7 8.♖c2 ♗d6 9.b3)

C22) 9...♗h5 10.♗b2



### 10...♖b8

The alternative is:

10...♗g6 11.e4 dxe4 12.♖xe4 ♖xe4 13.♗xe4 ♗xe4 14.♖xe4 0-0 15.♖ad1

This time we have the thematic position except with Black's bishop on d6. Again, I feel that this position is more pleasant to play for White. Here are two examples:

15...♖e8

15...♖f6 16.♖c2 ♖c8 17.♖d3 ♖e8 This position occurred in Ionov – Sumets, Moscow 2006. Now I like the active 18.♖e5 ♖d7 19.♖h3 f5 20.♖d3± when Black has slightly weakened his position with ...f5.

16.♖f1 ♖f8

Probably too passive: it was better to move this knight to f6.

17.♖e3 ♖c8 18.♖e5 ♖c7 19.c5! ♗e7

If 19...♗xe5 20.dxe5 ♖g6 21.♖d6 ♖e7 22.♖d2 ♖d5 23.♖e4 then despite Black's strong knight, White is clearly better and has good chances to seize the initiative on the kingside.

20.♖f3 ♗d8 21.♖c4±

White is clearly better, Chatalbashev – Kritz, Ascona 2007.

**11.h3 0–0**

Once again Black has the option of playing:

11...♗g6

and after:

12.e4 dxe4 13.♖xe4 ♖xe4 14.♗xe4 ♗xe4  
15.♞xe4

We reach our typical position, but here it is obvious that Black's queen is misplaced on b8.

15...0–0

I like White's play in the following example:

16.♞fe1

16.d5 may look promising, but things are not so simple after 16...cxd5 17.cxd5 e5 18.♞f5 ♞e8.

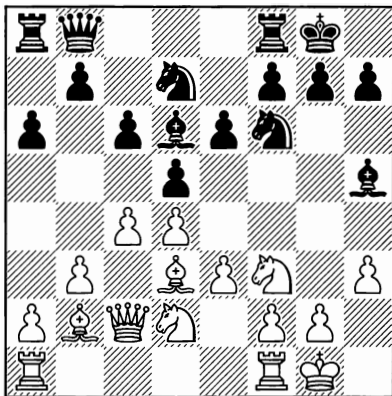
16...♖f6 17.♞c2 ♗e7 18.♞e3 ♞c7 19.♞ae1  
♞ad8 20.♖g5!?

White is threatening to play 21.d5, creating the idea of ♗xf6 and mate on h7, so Black's answer is more or less forced:

20...h6 21.♖f3 ♞fe8 22.♗c3 ♖h7 23.♖e5 ♗f6  
24.♞g3

White had the initiative in Goldin – Huzman, Ashdod 2003.

Now all White's hopes for an advantage are connected with the following idea:

**12.♖g5!**

Black is forced to make a choice: either play 12...♗g6 or 12...h6 13.♖f3. After the latter

Black again has a problem with his light-squared bishop, as White is threatening g4.

**12...♗g6**

The other line is:

12...h6 13.♖g3

Now Black has two options to defend against White's threat of 14.g4.

13...♗xf3

Inferior is: 13...e5?! 14.cxd5 (This is more accurate than 14.dxe5 ♖xe5 15.♖xe5 ♗xe5 16.♗xe5 ♞xe5 17.g4 ♗g6 18.♗xg6 fxg6 19.♞xg6 as in this case Black has chances of compensation, due to the slightly exposed white king.) 14...cxd5 15.dxe5 ♖xe5 16.♖xe5 ♗xe5 (16...♞c8 does not work: 17.♖ec4! dxc4 18.♗f5 and White has an extra pawn) 17.♗xe5 ♞xe5 18.♞ac1 ♞e7 This position was reached in the game Kramnik – Kasparov, Internet (blitz) 2001. Now White could have comfortably grabbed the pawn with 19.g4 ♗g6 20.♗xg6 fxg6 21.♞xg6±.

14.♖xf3

Despite Black's fairly solid results from this position, I believe White's chances are clearly better because of his bishop pair.

14...e5

We will have a look at Black's natural options:

14...♞e8 15.♞fd1 e5 16.dxe5 ♖xe5 17.♗e2 ♞c7 18.cxd5 ♖xd5 19.♖d4 ♞ad8 20.a3 ♗f8 And now in the game Berkes – Movsesian, Calvia 2004, White missed the nice 21.g3! taking control of the f4-square and thus preparing e3–e4. 21...♖g6 (or 21...♞d7 22.e4 ♖f6 23.♗g2 ♖g6 24.f3 and White gradually improves his position) 22.♖f5 ♖ge7 23.♖xe7+ ♞xe7 24.♗f3± White has a pleasant edge, thanks to his bishop pair.

14...♞c7 15.♞ac1 ♞fe8 16.♞fd1 (the immediate 16.c5!? ♗f8 17.b4 is worthy of consideration) 16...♞ac8 17.c5 ♗f8 18.b4 White has a plus. He has a clear plan of advancing his queenside pawns, while Black

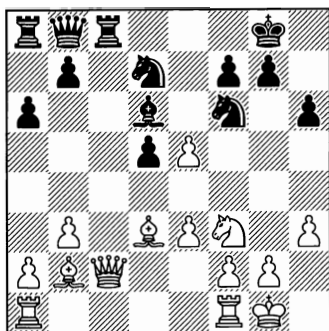


lacks any real play, Dreev – Anand, Moscow (blitz) 2007.

15.cxd5 cxd5 16.dxe5 ♖c8

After the natural 16...♗xe5 17.♗xe5 ♗xe5 18.♖ac1 ♗xb2 19.♖xb2 ♖d6 20.♖c3± White has a good anti-IQP position.

In the diagram position below I found a very unexpected novelty:



17.♗h7!±N

Black had reasonable play after 17.♖d2 ♗xe5 18.♗e2 ♗xf3± 19.♗xf3 ♗h2± 20.♗h1 ♗e5 in the game Wang Yue – Najer, Ergun 2006.

17...♗xh7 18.♖f5

White regains the piece and keeps a clear edge, for example:

18...♗xe5

Or 18...♖d8 19.exd6 ♖xd6 20.♖ac1 ♗hf6 21.♖fd1±.

19.♗xe5 ♗f6 20.♖ad1

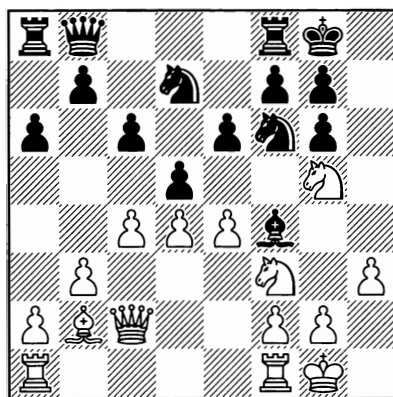
White is clearly better.

Returning to the main line, White should now open the centre with:

13.♗xg6 hxg6 14.e4

White had nothing special after 14.♗df3 b5 15.♖ad1 a5 when Black looked very comfortable in the game Svetushkin – Gupta, Dubai 2005.

14...♗f4 15.♗df3



Now Black has a choice:

15...♗xg5

The alternatives are:

15...dxe4 16.♗xe4 ♖e8

More accurate was 16...♗xe4 17.♖xe4 ♗f6 18.♖e2 ♖c7, though White keeps a pleasant edge after 19.♖fe1 ♗d6 20.♗e5 ♗d7 21.♗d3±.

17.♖fe1 a5 18.♖ad1 ♗xe4 19.♖xe4 ♗d6

This was Kachiani Gersinska – Zimina, Istanbul 2003; Black had to play 19...♗f6 first.

After the text White could have easily seized the initiative with:

20.d5!

For example:

20...♗c5 21.♖ee1 exd5 22.♖xe8± ♖xe8 23.cxd5 ♖c8 24.dxc6 ♖xc6 25.♖c3 ♗e6 26.♖xa5±

15...dxc4

This looks like a serious concession. I cannot find any reason why White refrained from the natural:

16.bxc4

16.♖xc4 was played in Malaniuk – Neelotpal, Alushta 2004.

After 16.bxc4 the following is just an approximate line:

16...♙xg5 17.♘xg5 ♖f4 18.♙c1 ♗c7 19.c5 e5  
20.♙b2 exd4 21.♙xd4±

White has a clear positional advantage.

**16.♘xg5 dxe4 17.♘xe4 ♖f4**

A tougher try was 17...♘xe4 18.♗xe4 ♘f6 although White is slightly better after 19.♗f3 ♗d8 20.♗fe1 b5 21.♙c3±.

**18.♗fe1 ♗fe8 19.♗ad1 ♖f5**

This position occurred in Roos – Drozdovsky, Dresden 2007, now White should have played:

**20.f3!**

I think White is clearly better. I will suggest some lines:

**20...b5**

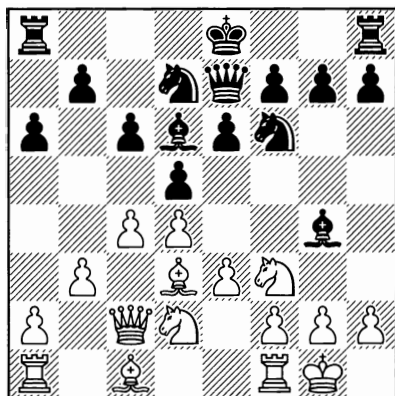
20...♘xe4 21.fxe4 ♗g5 22.♗f2±

**21.♗d2 ♘xe4 22.fxe4 ♖h5 23.♙c1**

White has a good position.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.e3 a6 5.♙d3  
♙g4 6.♘bd2 e6 7.0-0 ♘bd7 8.♗c2 ♙d6  
9.b3)

**C23) 9...♗e7N**



This move has never been tested in practice, but it was recommended and analysed by German grandmaster Leonid Kritz in *ChessBase Magazine* 125. Black's idea is to trade the dark-squared bishops and if he succeeds White will have very few chances to pose any problems.

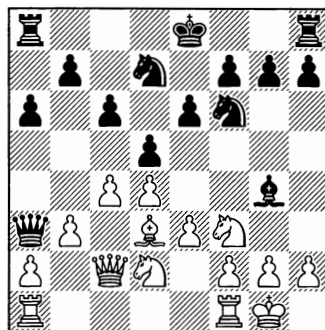
**10.♙b2 ♙xf3**

Before executing his main idea Black first exchanges his light-squared bishop. Indeed after the immediate:

10...♙a3

Black's light-squared bishop appears to be slightly misplaced.

11.♙xa3 ♗xa3



12.cxd5

Also 12.♘e5 ♘xe5 13.dxe5 ♘d7 14.f4 looks quite playable for White.

12...exd5

12...cxd5 13.♗c7 0-0 14.♗fc1! and White is better, thanks to his total control of the c-file. (14.♗xb7 would allow Black some compensation after 14...♗fb8 15.♗c7 ♗c8 16.♗f4 ♙xf3 17.♘xf3 ♗c3±)

13.♘e5

White has good chances of an advantage, for example:

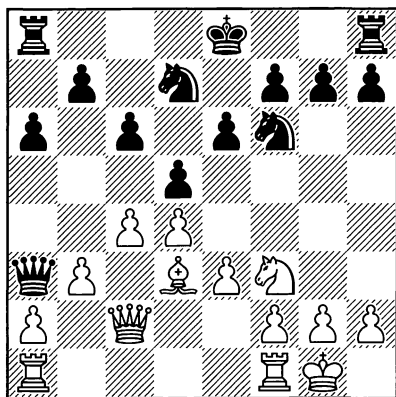
13...♘xe5 14.dxe5 ♘d7 15.h3 ♙h5 16.♙f5!

With interesting play.

**11.♘xf3 ♙a3**

Black continues with his plan.

## 12. ♖xa3 ♜xa3



## 13.b4!

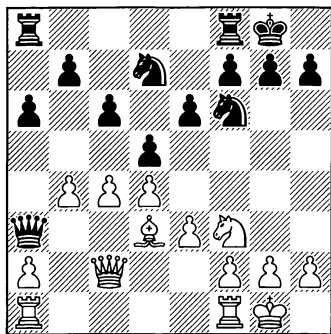
A very concrete approach and White's only chance to fight for the advantage.

## 13...a5!

Black's best reply. Other options are much worse, for example:

If 13... ♜xb4 then White easily develops an initiative with 14. ♖ab1 ♜d6 15. ♖xb7 dxc4 16. ♜xc4 0-0 17. ♖c1 ♜fc8 18.e4 with an obvious advantage.

## 13...0-0



## 14. ♖fb1!

Black starts to experience problems with his queen.

## 14...b5

14...dxc4 15. ♜xc4! (worse is 15. ♖xc4 a5 16.bxa5 ♖a7 and Black has decent play) 15...a5 (or 15... ♖b6 16. ♜c2±) 16. ♖b3 ♜a4 17.bxa5 ♜xc4 18. ♖xc4 ♜fb8 19. ♖ab1± White has an extra pawn.

14...a5? does not work out: 15. ♖b3! ♜a4 16.bxa5 ♖a7 17.cxd5 exd5 18.a6! bxa6 19. ♖c1± with an obvious advantage.

15. ♖b3 ♜a4 16.cxd5 cxd5 17. ♜b2 a5 18.bxa5 ♜xa5 19. ♖xb5

With a healthy extra pawn.

## 13...dxc4 14. ♖xc4 ♖d5

14... ♖b6 15. ♖e2! ♖bd5 (Or 15... ♜xb4 16. ♖ab1 ♜a5 17. ♖b3 ♖fd7 18. ♖fb1± and Black's pieces are paralysed on the queenside. At the very least, White will collect the b7-pawn.) 16. ♖fb1 0-0 (just clearly worse for Black is 16... ♖xb4 17. ♜b2 ♜xb2 18. ♖xb2 a5 19.a3 ♖bd5 20. ♖xb7±) 17. ♖b3 ♜a4 18. ♖ab1 White's positional advantage is unquestionable.

## 15. ♖ab1

Anticipating Black's next move.

## 15... ♖xb4

Also 15... ♖7b6 16. ♖b3 ♜a4 17. ♖e2 does not look very good for Black.

16. ♜c1 ♜xc1 17. ♜fxcl a5 18.a3 b5 19.axb4 bxc4 20.bxa5 ♖xa5 21. ♖xc4±

Black cannot hold the c6-pawn.

## 14.b5

Black has nothing to worry about after 14.bxa5 ♜xa5=.

## 14...dxc4

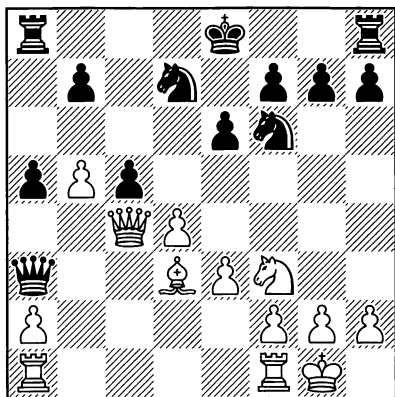
Of course Black cannot play 14...0-0? in view of 15.c5! with a clear positional edge.

## 15. ♜xc4

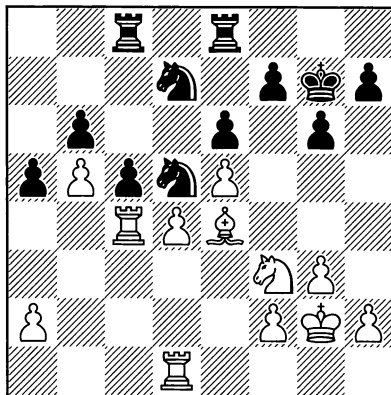
Once again this is White's only chance to fight for the advantage. White achieves nothing after either 15.bxc6 cxd3 16.cxd7† ♖xd7= or

15. ♖xc4 c5 16. e4 ♘b6.

15...c5



23...g6 24. ♖b1 ♔g7 25. e4 ♝c8 26. e5 ♜d5  
27. ♖e4±



White has some pressure.

16. ♝fc1

Now I analysed the following line:

16...♝c8 17. ♝c3 ♜b4 18. ♝b1 ♜xc4 19. ♝xc4  
b6 20. ♝bc1 0-0

The endgame looks very solid for Black, but it is also obvious that only White can play for an advantage. The following line is far from forced, but gives a good indication of White's resources.

21. g3 ♝cd8 22. ♔g2 ♝fe8 23. ♝d1

Defending against a possible 23...e5.

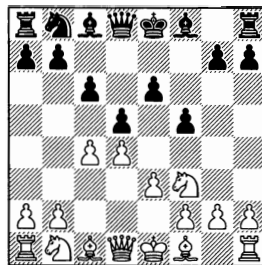
### Conclusion:

4...a6 is considered to be a serious weapon against White's system with 4.e3, nevertheless I believe that 5. ♖d3 is a natural and interesting choice for White, which might cause Black some problems. In this chapter there is no single critical position, but instead a range of positions with a common theme: in most of the lines Black has a very solid position, while White obviously enjoys a space advantage.



# Chapter 16

## The Slav Stonewall



### Variation Index

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.Nf3 e6 4.e3 f5

5.Qd3 Nf6 6.O-O Qd6 7.b3 Re7 8.Qb2 O-O 9.Rc1

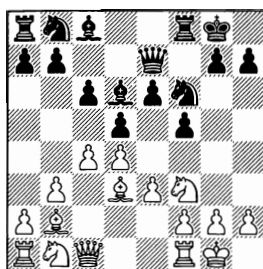
A) 9...Nc4

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B) 9...b6

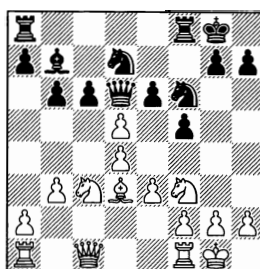
p 284

the main branching point



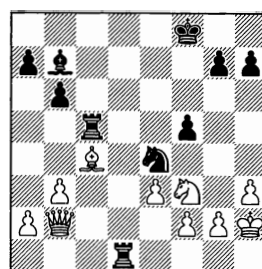
A) 9...Nc4 or B) 9...b6

B) after 13.cxd5!



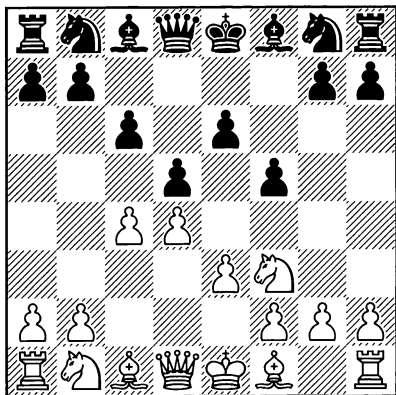
the right moment

B) after 24.Qc4±



Ivanchuk – Nogueiras Santiago

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 e6 4.e3 f5



This move, mixing the Slav with the Stonewall Dutch, is not very popular but it is quite a playable variation for Black. It leads to a very complex middlegame that naturally resembles the Stonewall, characterized by the pawns on c6, d5, e6 and f5. The difference from the Dutch is that there Black tends to play ...d5 only when White has played g3, committing his bishop to g2, when the solid black centre has led grandmasters such as Curt Hansen and Vladimir Kramnik to observe that the g2-bishop is no better than the one on c8. However, in our line the bishop will most certainly go to d3!

5.♙d3 ♘f6

Developing this knight to h6 hardly deserves serious attention, so I will give just one example:

5...♙d6 6.0-0 ♘h6 7.b3 ♗e7 8.♙b2 0-0 9.♗c1

White carries out the same plan as in the main line.

9...♘d7 10.♙a3 ♘f6 11.♙xd6 ♗xd6 12.♘bd2 ♘f7 13.♗b2 ♗e7 14.b4

Now after the exchange of dark-squared bishops, White starts to play on the queenside.

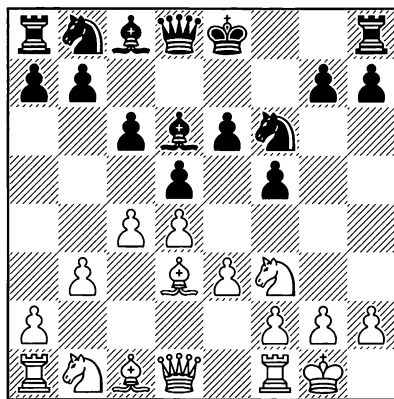
14...g5 15.♘e5 ♘xe5

This knight swap leaves White with a clear advantage.

16.dxe5 ♘g4 17.♙e2 ♘h6 18.f4 g4 19.♗c3 ♙d7 20.♘b3+

Gallego Jimenez – Alonso Martinez, Mondariz 2002.

6.0-0 ♙d6 7.b3



As always in Stonewall pawn structure, White's main positional idea is to swap dark-squared bishops.

7...♗e7

This is Black's main choice according to theory: he prevents an immediate swap of dark-squared bishops and forces White to waste more time executing his main positional idea.

The obvious alternative is:

7...0-0

But in this case White has easy play, for example:

8.♙a3 ♙xa3 9.♘xa3 ♗e7

Black has also tried 9...♘e4 10.♗c1. White's move is useful in many ways: it protects the a3-knight, helps to advance the queenside pawns, moves the queen away from the

potential threat of ... $\text{d}4\text{-c}3$ , and even increases White's control over the f4-square (as Tyomkin mentioned). 10... $\text{d}7$  11.b4 a6 12. $\text{c}2$   $\text{f}6$  13.a4  $\text{h}6$  14.b5± White had a pleasant advantage in Vaganian – Lodhi, Istanbul 2000. White's queenside play is clearly faster than Black's attack.

10. $\text{c}1$  b6 11. $\text{b}2$  a5

Black is trying to prevent the advance of White's b-pawn, but this also makes Black's queenside pawn structure more vulnerable.

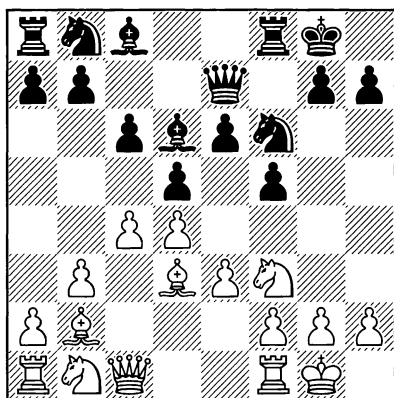
12. $\text{a}c1$   $\text{b}7$  13.cxd5!

White uses the correct moment to release the tension in the centre, as Black cannot recapture with the e-pawn.

13...cxd5 14. $\text{d}e5$   $\text{d}a6$  15. $\text{d}b5$   $\text{f}c8$  16.a3±

White has a stable positional advantage, Golod – Huzman, Beersheba 2006.

8. $\text{b}2$  0-0 9. $\text{c}1$

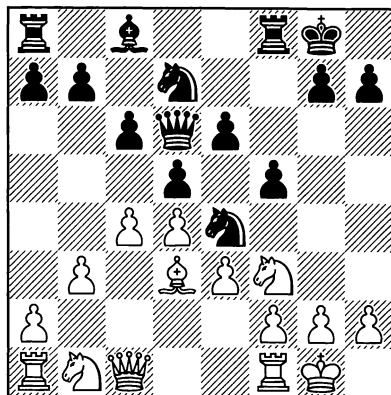


This is the starting position of the whole system. The two lines worth considering at this point are: A) 9... $\text{d}e4$  and B) 9...b6.

9... $\text{d}7$  is hardly a serious option, as after 10. $\text{a}3$   $\text{e}8$  11. $\text{d}6$   $\text{c}d6$  12. $\text{a}3$   $\text{c}a3$  13. $\text{d}a3$  White has a stable advantage. For example: 13... $\text{h}5$  14. $\text{d}g5$   $\text{e}8$  15.f3  $\text{d}bd7$  16. $\text{d}h3$   $\text{f}7$  17. $\text{f}e1$  a6 18. $\text{a}c1$ ± Black is solid, but White has a simple risk-free advantage, Balashov – Iljushin, Elista 2001.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3. $\text{d}f3$  e6 4.e3 f5 5. $\text{d}3$   $\text{d}f6$  6.0-0  $\text{d}6$  7.b3  $\text{e}7$  8. $\text{b}2$  0-0 9. $\text{c}1$ )

A) 9... $\text{d}e4$  10. $\text{a}3$   $\text{d}7$  11. $\text{d}6$   $\text{c}d6$



12. $\text{d}c3$

This is White's best move. If 12. $\text{a}3$  c5 13.dxc5  $\text{d}xc5$  Black has good counterplay, as White's queen is misplaced on a3. One example is enough: 14. $\text{d}1$  b6 15. $\text{e}2$   $\text{b}7$  In this complex position Black's chances are by no means worse, Aronian – Radjabov, Antalya 2004. It can be concluded that Black has solved his opening problems.

12...b6

And now the best plan for White is:

13. $\text{d}e2$

White can also start the same plan with 13. $\text{b}2$ .

13... $\text{b}7$  14. $\text{b}2$

Now the most recent game continued:

14...c5

If instead:

14... $\text{e}7$

White should continue:

15.b4  $\text{f}6$  16. $\text{d}e5$

After 16.cxd5 exd5 17. $\text{d}e5$   $\text{h}6$  18.f3

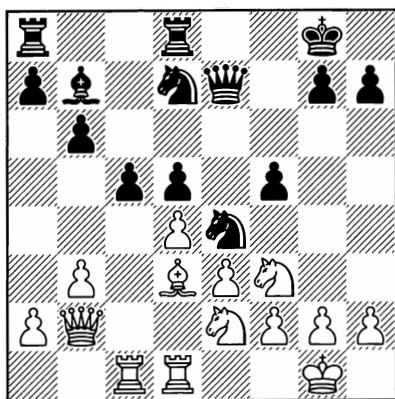


♠d6 19.♠ac1 ♠e8 20.f4 White's position may look quite promising, as in Gonzalez Garcia – Elliott, Turin 2006, but Black can play 20...b5! followed by the manoeuvre ...♠b6-c4.

16...♠h6 17.♠xd7 ♠xd7 18.f3 ♠f6 19.c5±  
White is positionally better.

**15.♠fd1 ♠e7 16.♠ac1 ♠fd8 17.cxd5 exd5**

Obviously 17...♠xd5 leaves Black with a weak e6-pawn and is immediately problematic because of 18.♠f4.



**18.♠g3!**

Slightly weakening the dark squares near Black's king.

**18...g6 19.♠b5 ♠df6**

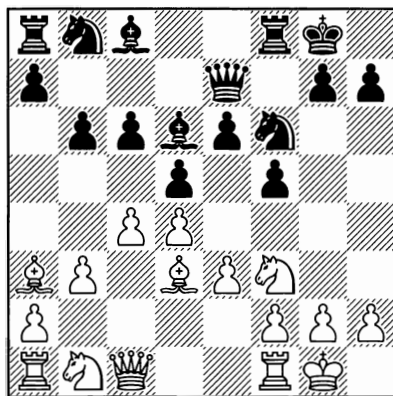
This position was reached in the recent game Moiseenko – Galkin, Greece 2008, and now I believe the right way is:

**20.dxc5 bxc5 21.♠e5±**

White has slightly better chances, because of Black's vulnerable central pawns.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♠f3 e6 4.e3 f5 5.♠d3 ♠f6 6.0-0 ♠d6 7.b3 ♠e7 8.♠b2 0-0 9.♠c1)

**B) 9...b6 10.♠a3**



**10...♠b7**

Other options are:

10...c5

It seems to me that Black is not ready to play a position with vulnerable pawns in the centre

11.cxd5 ♠xd5

After 11...exd5 12.♠c3 ♠a6 13.dxc5 ♠xc5 14.♠xc5 bxc5 15.♠d1 Black faced serious problems in Kasimdzhanov – Slobodjan, Bundesliga 2000.

12.dxc5 bxc5 13.♠c3!

White should play very energetically in order to prove his advantage.

13...♠d7

Other moves would not solve Black's problems either: 13...♠b7 14.♠b5! ♠b4 15.♠e2 and 13...♠b4 14.♠e2! ♠d7 15.♠b5 ♠a6 16.♠d1 ♠ad8 17.♠b2 both give White the better chances, due to Black's slightly weakened pawn structure.

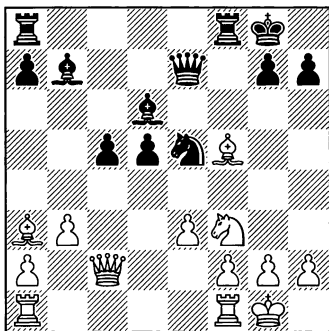
14.♠xd5

A serious alternative could be 14.♠b5 ♠a6 15.♠d1.

14...exd5 15.♠c2 ♠b7?!

Probably better would have been 15...g6 16.♠ac1 ♠b7 17.♠b2 ♠ac8 18.♠fd1±, although avoiding weakening the long diagonal is an understandable decision.

16.♠xf5 ♠e5



17. dxe5! N

It is possible to take a second pawn.

Instead 17. d2 was played in Aleksandrov – Malakhov, Istanbul 2003, and this allowed Black to gain serious compensation after 17...g6 18. h3 a6!.

17... ♖xe5 18. ♙xh7+ ♔h8 19. g3 d4 20. ♗ae1 ♜d5 21. e4 ♜c6

Everything looks nearly forced.

22. ♙g6 ♙xg3 23. hxg3 ♜xg6 24. ♙g2!

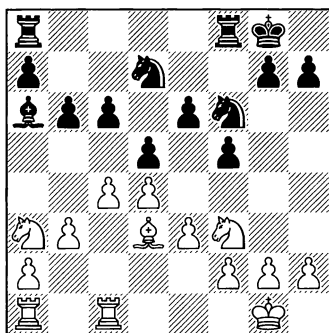
White will neutralize Black's pressure along the h1-a8 diagonal by means of f3, while Black has serious problems with his king and especially the c5-pawn.

10... ♙xa3

As always, this gives White a pleasant edge.

The following is a model example of White's play:

11. ♜xa3 ♜xa3 12. ♖xa3 ♙a6 13. ♗fc1 ♖bd7



14.b4

White continues his strategy. Not so clear would be 14. ♖g5 ♗fe8 15. ♖xe6 ♗xe6 16. cxd5 ♙xd3 17. dxe6 ♖b8∞.

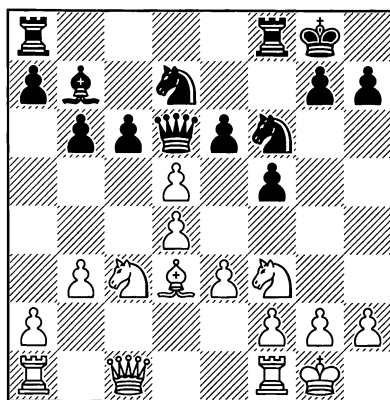
14... ♗fc8 15. b5 cxb5 16. cxd5! ♖xd5 17. ♖xb5 ♖c3 18. a4 ♙xb5 19. axb5 ♗c7 20. ♙f1±

This endgame appeared to be very unpleasant for Black in Malakhov – Gleizerov, Krasnoyarsk 2003.

11. ♙xd6 ♜xd6 12. ♖c3

Again Black is ready to meet 12. ♜a3 with 12...c5 13. cxd5 ♖xd5 14. dxc5 bxc5 with double-edged play, as in Yakovich – Kharlov, Elista 2001.

12... ♖bd7 13. cxd5!



This is the right moment to capture on d5, as was proven by the following encounter.

13... ♖xd5

The following line was given by Ivanchuk in *Chess Informant 100*:

13...cxd5 14. ♖b5 ♜e7 15. ♜c7 ♙a6 16. ♗ac1 ♗fc8 17. ♜d6! ♙f8

This does not solve Black's problems.

However 17... ♜xd6 18. ♗xc8+ ♜f8 19. ♗xf8+ ♙xf8 20. ♗c1 also leaves White clearly better, thanks to his control of the c-file, so probably there is no complete solution to Black's problems.

18. ♖f4 ♘h5 19. ♗g5 ♘hf6 20. ♝xc8 ♞xc8  
 20... ♙xc8 21. ♞c1±  
 21. ♘xa7 ♜a8 22. ♘c6 ♗d6 23. ♘ce5 ♙xd3  
 24. ♘xd3 ♜xa2 25. ♞c1! ♗b8 26. h3±

White still has the advantage.

#### 14. ♞d1

If instead 14.e4 then Black can find good counterplay with 14... ♘xc3 15. ♗xc3 c5 16. ♞fe1 ♖f4!.

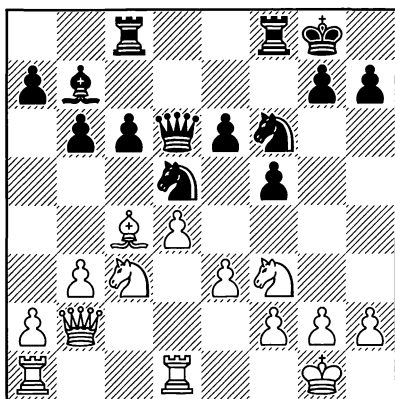
#### 14... ♞ac8

Or 14... c5 15. ♙c4 ♜ad8 16. dxc5 ♘xc5 17. ♗b2± and White has a safe edge.

#### 15. ♙c4 ♘f6

Another option is 15... ♗b4 when Ivanchuk gave the following line: 16. ♘e2 ♖e7 17. ♗b2 c5 18. ♞ac1± White has a slight advantage, because of his better pawn structure.

#### 16. ♗b2



#### 16... ♞fd8

White is ready to meet 16... f4 with the tactical operation 17.e4! ♘xc3 18. ♗xc3 ♘xe4 19. ♗e1! c5 20.d5, with a serious advantage.

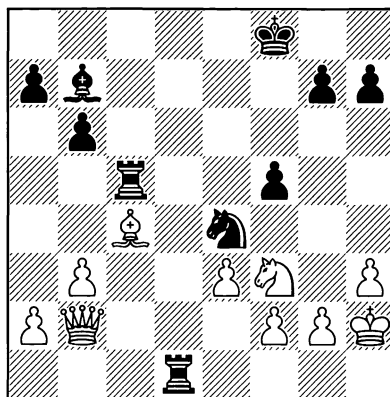
#### 17. h3 ♘xc3 18. ♗xc3 ♘e4 19. ♗b2 c5?

Black makes a big mistake: he should have played 19... ♖e7 20. b4 ♘d6 21. ♙b3±. White would have a stable edge, but the game is truly poor for Black.

#### 20. dxc5 ♖xd1† 21. ♞xd1 ♞xd1† 22. ♔h2 ♞xc5

22... ♘xc5 does not help either. After 23. b4 ♙xf3 24. gxf3 ♘d7 25. ♙xe6† ♔f8 26. ♙xf5 h6 27. f4 White is winning.

#### 23. ♙xe6† ♔f8 24. ♙c4±



Ivanchuk – Nogueiras Santiago, Havana 2007.

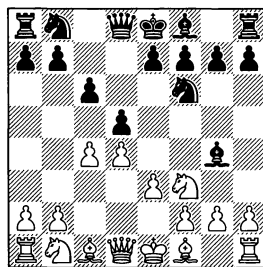
#### Conclusion:

In general, White can expect an edge against the Stonewall Slav, although naturally it requires accurate play. Often the key is correctly timing the capture cxd5. The analysis above should help the reader to find the right moment.

# Chapter 17

## The Slav

4...♗g4



### Variation Index

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.e3 ♗g4

5.♙b3

A) 5...♔c7

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B) 5...♗xf3

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C) 5...♙b6 6.♘c3 e6 7.♘h4

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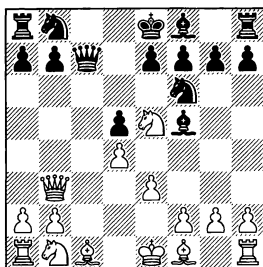
C1) 7...♗h5

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C2) 7...♗e7

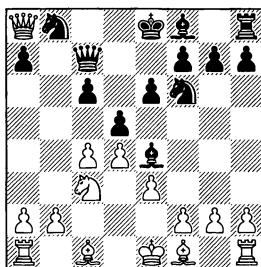
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A) note to the 6th move



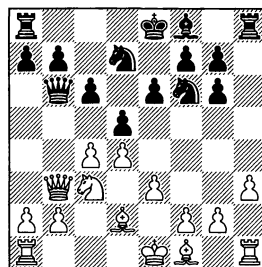
8.♗d2!N

B) note to the 6th move



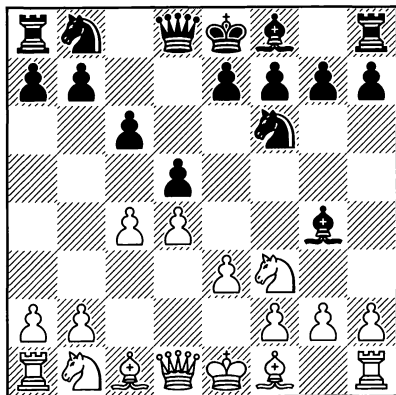
9.♗d2!N

C1) after 10...♘bd7



11.♗e2!N

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♟f3 ♟f6 4.e3 ♟g4



Lately this has been the most fashionable reply among elite players to White's system with 4.e3.

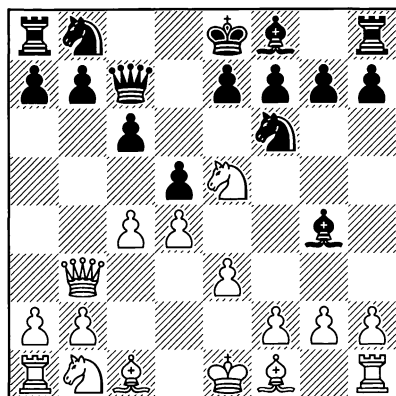
5.♞b3!?

Not the most popular choice, but it caught my interest after the recent game Topalov – Aronian, Bilbao 2008. Usually White opts for 5.h3 or 5.♟c3.

At this point the main lines are: A) 5...♞c7, B) 5...♟xf3?! and C) 5...♞b6, the final option being clearly the critical line.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♟f3 ♟f6 4.e3 ♟g4 5.♞b3)

A) 5...♞c7 6.♟e5



6...♟e6

There are a couple of other moves:

6...♟f5

I do not believe Black can play this.

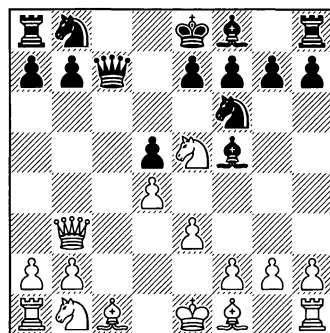
7.cxd5

It is important to take on d5 before Black plays ...e6.

7...cxd5

7...♟xd5 is met strongly by 8.♟c3 e6 9.e4! ♟xc3 10.exf5± and White is clearly better.

Returning to 7...cxd5, in every game White has opted for the natural 8.♟c3, which quite possibly is good enough for an advantage, but I like the idea of playing ♟c1 with tempo:



8.♟d2!? N ♟c6

If 8...♟bd7 then very strong is 9.♟c3 ♟xe5 10.♟b5! with the initiative.

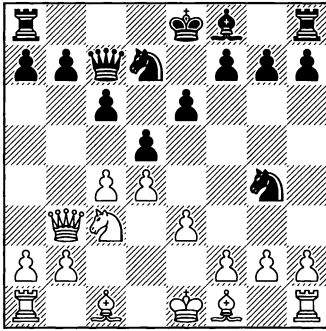
9.♟a3 a6 10.♞c1

Black faces serious problems, for example:

10...g6 11.♞a4 ♟d7 12.♟b5±

6...e6 7.♟xg4 ♟xg4 8.♟c3 ♟d7

The arising position resembles another Slav line: 4.e3 ♟f5 5.♟c3 e6 6.♟h4 ♟g6 7.♟xg6 hxg6. There are two important differences between these positions. Firstly, Black has a better pawn structure after the exchange of the light-squared bishop on g6, as the half-open h-file gives White some headaches. Secondly, Black's queen is slightly misplaced on c7.



Here I like the idea of quickly putting the rook on c1:

9.♙d2! N

The only game played so far from this position saw White playing 9.♙e2.

9...♘gf6

9...♙d6 10.♞c1 is quite unpleasant for Black, as White is already threatening 11.cxd5.

9...♙e7 10.♞c1 and Black cannot play 10...dxc4 11.♙xc4 ♘xh2 because of the clever 12.♙e2 ♘f6 13.d5! exd5 14.♘xd5 ♘xd5 15.♞xd5+- and Black's knight will be trapped on h2.

10.♞c1 ♞b6

10...dxc4 11.♙xc4 allows White to develop his bishop without losing a tempo.

11.♞c2±

White has the better game.

7.♘c3 ♘bd7

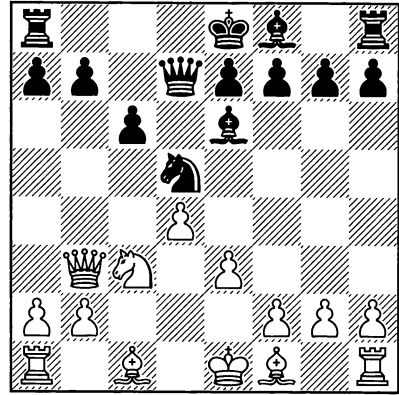
The alternative is 7...dxc4 but it leads to a pleasant position for White: 8.♙xc4 ♙xc4 9.♞xc4 (less clear is 9.♘xc4 e6 10.0-0 b5) 9...e6 10.0-0 ♘bd7 11.♘d7 ♞xd7 12.♞d1± followed by 13.e4.

8.♘xd7

8.♘f3 allows Black to equalize comfortably:

8...dxc4 9.♙xc4 ♙xc4 10.♞xc4 e5=

8...♞xd7 9.cxd5 ♘xd5



10.e4

The only way to fight for the advantage.

Nothing is achieved by 10.♙c4 b5! 11.♙xd5 ♙xd5 12.♘xd5 cxd5, with an equal position.

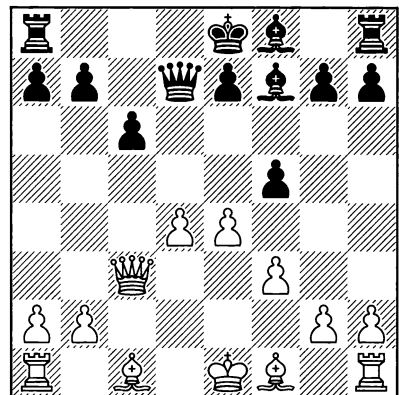
10...♘xc3

Black cannot play 10...♘f6? in view of 11.d5!.

11.♞xc3 f5

Otherwise it is not so clear how Black is going to develop his kingside, as he cannot play 11...g6 in view of 12.d5.

12.f3 ♙f7



Now I believe White should play:

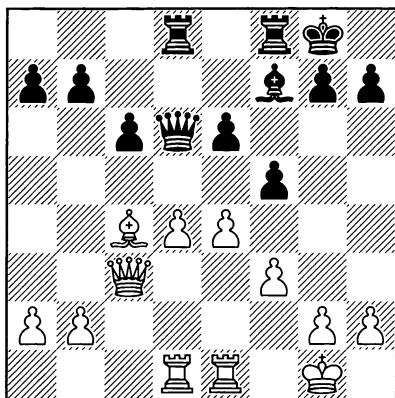
### 13.♙f4N

In the game Krush – Stefanova, Krasnoturinsk 2004, White played 13.♙c4 and won very nicely, but despite this I think White should refrain from exchanging the light-squared bishops, as this significantly eases Black's defensive task. The game continued 13...♙xc4 14.♖xc4 and now the simple 14...e6 15.0-0 ♙e7 would bring Black a very solid position.

### 13...e6 14.♙c4

Now it is clear that White's light-squared bishop is much better than its opponent. The play might continue as follows:

14...♙d6 15.♙xd6 ♖xd6 16.0-0-0 17.♗fe1  
♗ad8 18.♗ad1±

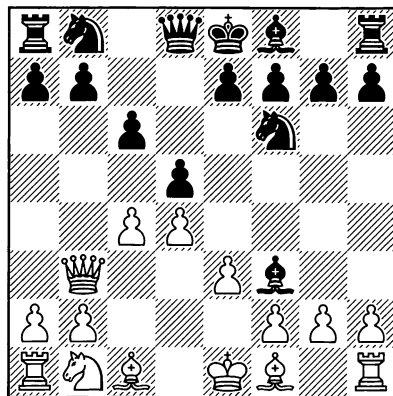


Black has to solve the problem of his light-squared bishop. The following line is an example of a failed attempt:

18...e5 19.♙xf7† ♗xf7 20.dxe5 ♖xd1  
21.♗xd1 ♗xd1† 22.♙f2 fxe4 23.e6 ♗e7  
24.♖e5 ♗e8 25.f4!+-

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.e3 ♙g4 5.♖b3)

B) 5...♙xf3?!



### 6.♖xb7!

Principled and strong. I believe 6.gxf3 is also promising for White, but 6.♖xb7 looks even stronger. Black has two possible replies.

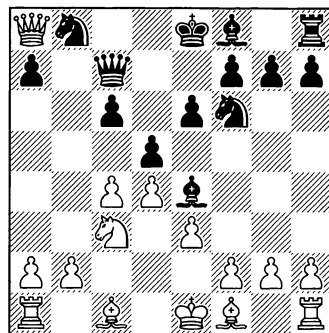
### 6...♙xg2

Black can also try to trap White's queen in the corner:

6...♙e4 7.♖xa8 ♖c7

But this try falls short after:

8.♘c3 e6



### 9.♙d2!N

White's simple idea is to free his queen by taking on d5, followed by ♗c1.

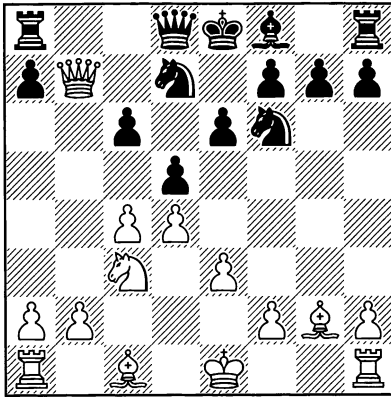
9.c5?!, as happened in Efimov – Giretti, Lodi 2005, is premature. Black has 9...♙xc5! with unnecessary complications. The point is that after 10.dxc5 0-0 White is helpless against 11...♘bd7 trapping the queen.

9...♙e7 10.f3 0–0

If 10...♙g6 White simply continues with his strategy: 11.cxd5 0–0 (after 11...exd5 White has the elegant solution 12.♖b5! cxb5 13.♙xb5† ♕f8 14.♖c1 ♖d8 15.♗xa7 with a winning position) 12.♖c1 ♖xd5 13.♖b5! Once again this works beautifully for White. 13...♗d7 14.♗xa7 cxb5 15.♗xd7 ♖xd7 16.♙xb5 This should be winning for White. 11.fxe4 ♖bd7 12.♗xf8† ♙xf8 13.e5±

White is clearly better, as he has two rooks and a pawn for the queen.

7.♙xg2 ♖bd7 8.♖c3 e6



9.c5!

This is the safest path to an advantage. Instead 9.♗xc6 ♖c8 10.♗a6 ♖xc4 11.♗xa7 ♙b4 12.♙d2 0–0 13.0–0, as played in Korchnoi – Malakhatchko, Warsaw 2002, might allow Black some compensation after 13...♖c7 14.♗a6 ♗b8±.

9...♗c8

If 9...♖c8 White can simply win the a-pawn with 10.♗xa7±.

10.♗xc8† ♖xc8 11.b4

This position is clearly in White's favour, as he has a clear plan of creating a passed pawn on the queenside.

11...♖b8 12.♖b1 ♙e7 13.a4 a6 14.♙f1 ♖a8 15.b5 axb5 16.axb5 0–0

Somewhat better was 16...cxb5, though White's advantage after 17.♙xb5 is beyond question.

17.bxc6 ♖b8 18.♖b7 ♖xc6 19.♙b5

White won a piece and eventually the game in Nestorovic – Stojanovic, Belgrade 2001.

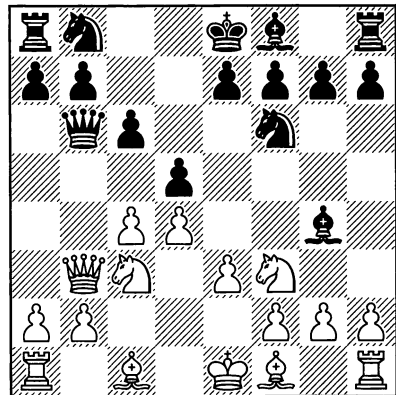
(1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♖f3 ♖f6 4.e3 ♙g4 5.♗b3)

C) 5...♗b6

This move is considered to be Black's best option.

6.♖c3

This rare move will surprise many Slav players, but, as I mentioned above, it is promising enough to have attracted Topalov's attention. White has tried many other moves, but has rarely achieved more than equality.



6...e6

Sometimes Black opts for:

6...♙xf3 7.gxf3 e6

I believe this is a clear concession and gives White a free hand to start his play in the centre.

8.e4 ♗xb3

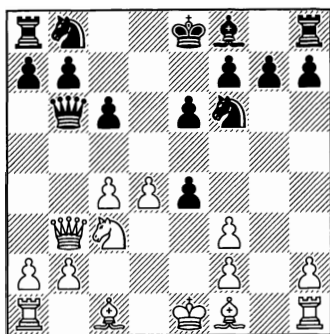


This was suggested by my editor, grandmaster John Shaw. It is quite logical and is the start of a plan to support the d5-pawn. However, I think that I can prove an advantage.

But before we go more deeply into this, I want to look at two other possibly continuations:

a) 8...dxc4 9.♙xc4 (9.♚xc4!? ♖bd7 10.♙e3 might be an interesting alternative) 9...♖bd7 10.♙e3 ♚xb3 11.♙xb3 ♙b4 12.a3 ♙a5 13.♙e2 ♜c8 14.♞hg1± and White has a pleasant edge, thanks to his space advantage and bishop pair, Mateuta – Itkis, Bucharest 2000.

8...dxe4 This position occurred in Nguyen Ngoc Truongson – Ngo Ngoc Quang, Vietnam 2007. Now instead of capturing prematurely on b6, White should have played:



9.fxe4N ♖a6 (if 9...♙b4 10.c5 ♚a5 11.♙d2 0–0 12.♞g1 White has a fine initiative) 10.♙f4! ♚xb3 11.axb3 0–0–0 12.0–0–0± Again, the strong centre and bishop pair make White's chances preferable.

9.axb3 ♖a6 10.♞a4!

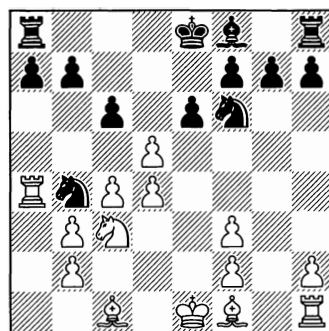
After this precise move White keeps the better chances. My brief analysis runs:

10...♖b4

White was threatening 11.cxd5, so this looks a natural reaction.

11.exd5

Now obviously Black has three options:



11...cxd5

The two others are:

11...♖c2† 12.♙d1 ♖xd4 13.♙e3 The position opens up and Black starts to feel the power of White's bishops. 13...♖xb3 (if 13...♖f5 White can just capture the pawn with 14.♙xa7!±) 14.dxc6 bxc6 15.♙c2 ♖c5 16.♞a5 ♖cd7 (or 16...♖fd7 17.f4, followed by 18.♙g2, does not help Black either) 17.♙g2 ♙b4 18.♞a6 White regains the pawn, keeping definite pressure.

11...exd5 12.c5! The key idea behind White's 10th move: Black's knight becomes vulnerable on b4. 12...a5 13.♖a2 Now White has a clear target in the a5-pawn, so it is essential to trade Black's knight. 13...♖xa2 (The tactical alternative is 13...b5 but White has a strong exchange sacrifice: 14.♖xb4! [14.cxb6 ♖d7 would be quite OK for Black] 14...bxa4 15.♖xc6 axb3 16.♙b5† and White's initiative looks very powerful, as Black has no time to castle.) 14.♞xa2 ♙e7 15.b4 ♙d8 16.♙d2 a4 17.♙d3 (less convincing is 17.♞a3 b5!) 17...0–0 (17...b5 18.cxb6 ♙xb6 19.b5!± and Black is going to lose his a4-pawn) 18.0–0 b5 And now White has a pleasant choice between the simple 19.b3 and 19.cxb6 ♙xb6 20.♙e3± when it is not clear how Black is going to hold his weak pawns on the queenside.

12.c5 ♖c6 13.♙e3

Before pushing the b-pawn White has to defend his central pawn.

13...a6

If 13...a5?! 14.♙b5 ♘d7 15.0–0 Black cannot hold his a-pawn.

14.b4 ♖c8 15.b5 axb5 16.♙xb5 ♘d7

16...♙e7 17.♙a7 is no improvement.

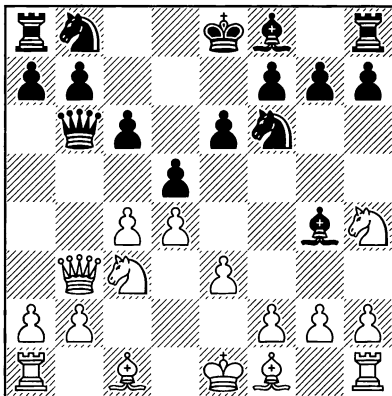
17.0–0 ♙e7 18.♙e2±

White has a pleasant edge, thanks to his pair of bishops and the clear plan of creating a passed pawn on the queenside.

### 7.♘h4!?

This strange-looking move in fact has a healthy idea behind it: White just wants to trade Black's light-squared bishop for his knight and thus gain the usual bishop pair advantage. The funny thing is that there have been a huge number of games in this position with White to move, while I could not find any games, except Topalov – Aronian, with Black to move. This detail should not embarrass us, as with White to move we are simply better, while here I believe we get a playable position with reasonable chances to fight for an advantage.

Instead, absolutely safe for Black is 7.♘e5 ♙f5.



A natural option is 7...♘bd7 8.h3 ♙h5 9.g4 ♙g6. This position will be examined in the notes to C1 below, under the alternative 8...♘bd7.

I do not see any point in Black playing 7...g5 8.h3! gxh4?! (better is 8...♙h5, which we will examine in C1 under 8...g5) 9.hxg4 ♘xg4 10.♖xh4± and Black has only created weaknesses in his own camp.

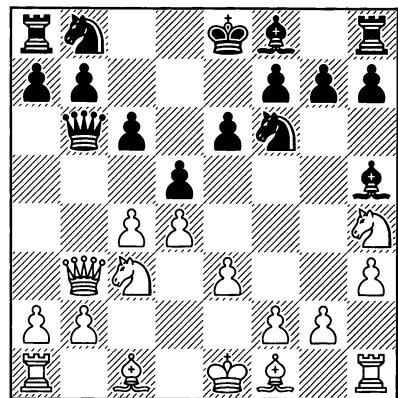
The main tries are C1) 7...♙h5 and C2) 7...♙e7.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.e3 ♙g4 5.♗b3 ♗b6 6.♘c3 e6 7.♘h4)

### C1) 7...♙h5

At first glance a strange move, but actually Black keeps all his options open.

### 8.h3



### 8...♙g6

Once again 8...g5 is slightly inferior: 9.♘f3 ♙xf3 (or 9...h6 10.♘e5 ♘bd7 11.g4±) 10.gxf3 ♘bd7 11.♙d2± Black has weakened his kingside position with ...g5.

A natural alternative is:

8...♘bd7

I suppose White should play:

9.♙d2

In this case the play might continue in the following way:

9...♙e7

The complications after 9...♘e4 10.♘xe4 dxe4 11.g4 ♙e7 12.gxh5 (12.♘g2 ♙g6 13.♘f4 e5 is fine for Black) 12...♙xh4 13.♙g1± end quite favourably for White, as I believe this position is better for him.

If 9...♙d6 then White executes one of his main positional ideas: 10.c5! ♗xb3 11.axb3 ♙c7 12.b4 Black cannot prevent b4-b5. 12...g5 13.♘f3 h6 14.b5 0-0 15.b4± White has the initiative on the queenside.

10.g4 ♙g6 11.♘xg6 hxg6 12.♙g2

I believe this is an important position for this variation, and I predict it will be played at a high level. The following is my brief analysis:

12...g5

After 12...0-0-0 White has a pleasant choice: 13.c5 (or the simple 13.0-0-0±) 13...♗xb3 14.axb3 a6 15.f4± and Black's position looks rather passive.

13.0-0-0 a5

Of course Black has other moves, but it is impossible to cover everything.

14.c5

Just equal is 14.♗xb6 ♘xb6 15.cxd5 cxd5=.

14...♗xb3 15.axb3 b6

If 15...e5 then 16.♙c2, followed by ♖a1, and the a5-pawn might become a serious target.

16.cxb6 ♘xb6 17.♙c2 ♘d7 18.♖a1 ♙b4 19.f3 ♘e8 20.e4 f6 21.♙e3±

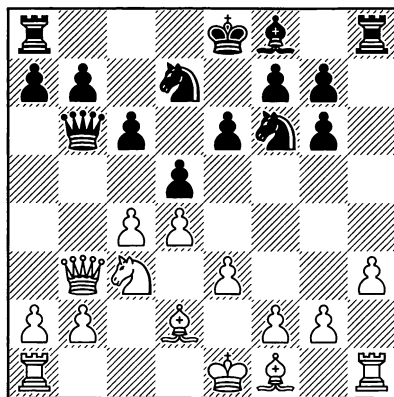
Black may be solid, but I would prefer White with his pair of bishops.

9.♘xg6 hxg6 10.♙d2

10.♗c2 ♘bd7 11.b3 ♖c8 12.♙e2 c5! Black had good counterplay in Bu Xiangzhi – Wang Hao, Beijing (blitz) 2008.

10...♘bd7

Here I recommend the following improvement:



11.♙e2!?!N

I believe White's bishop is more flexible on e2 rather than on d3. The game continued: 11.♙d3 ♙e7 12.0-0-0 a5 13.♙b1 This looks like a slight inaccuracy. (Better was 13.♗xb6 ♘xb6 14.c5 ♘bd7 15.f3, but after 15...b6 16.cxb6 ♘xb6 17.♙b1 ♘d7 18.♖c1 ♘e8, followed by ...♘d6, Black's position is very solid.) 13...♗a6!∞ It is White who has to be careful to avoid being worse, Topalov – Aronian, Bilbao 2008.

11...♙e7

The endgame after 11...♗xb3 12.axb3 ♙b4 13.♙d3 0-0 14.♙e2 will always favour White, thanks to his bishop pair.

12.♗c2!?

The idea is not only to avoid exchanging queens, but also to see which side Black is going to castle. Also in Topalov's spirit would be the interesting alternative 12.0-0-0 a5 13.♙b1.

12...0-0 13.0-0

I believe this position is favourable for White, partly because he has the bishop pair, but especially because Black's queen is slightly misplaced on b6.

I will give a few sample lines:

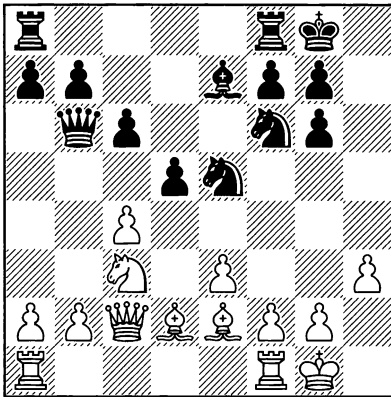
13...e5

Quite thematic is 13...dxc4 14.♙xc4 e5, but then White has a pleasant choice: 15.♘a4 (also 15.dxe5 ♘xe5 16.♙e2 leaves White with a pleasant advantage, thanks to his bishop pair) 15...♙c7 16.♙b3 exd4 17.exd4 ♘b6 18.♘c3 ♘h8 Otherwise it was not clear how to defend against White's idea of ♙xg6. 19.♙fe1 ♙d7 20.♙ad1± White is better, because of the activity of his light-squared bishop.

The inferior 13...♙ac8 allows 14.c5 ♙c7 15.f4! and Black has no play.

Now I like the following idea for White:

14.dxe5 ♘xe5



15.♘a4!

And it seems to me that White keeps an edge in every line, for example:

15...♙a6

Other options are:

15...♙d8 16.cxd5 cxd5 (16...♙xd5 17.f4 ♘ed7 18.♘c3 ♙e6 19.e4± is clearly better for White. Or 16...♘xd5 17.♙fd1± with the idea of pushing e3-e4.) 17.♙fd1 ♙c8 18.♙b3± White has a very good version of an anti-IQP position.

Also 15...♙c7 does not help Black: 16.cxd5 ♘xd5 17.e4 ♘b6 18.♙a5! with an obvious advantage.

16.b3 dxc4 17.bxc4±

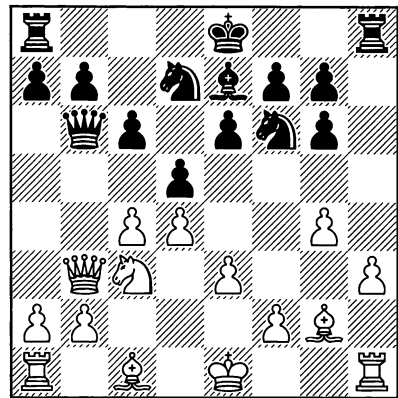
White has the better game, once again thanks to his bishop pair.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.e3 ♙g4 5.♙b3 ♙b6 6.♘c3 e6 7.♘h4)

C2) 7...♙e7

Black tried this move very recently and it only made this book in the nick of time.

8.h3 ♙h5 9.g4 ♙g6 10.♘xg6 hxg6 11.♙g2 ♘bd7



12.g5!?

An interesting idea leading to a complicated struggle. Also possible was the quiet 12.♙d2.

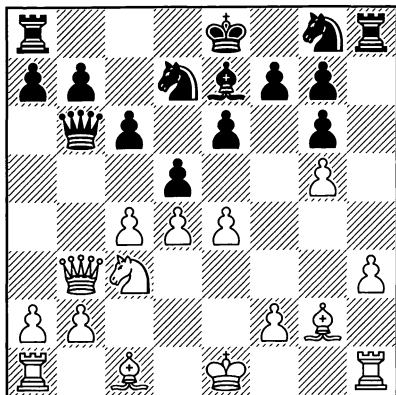
12...♘g8

Despite looking very strange, this move contains a healthy idea: Black intends to transfer his knight to the f5-square, after moving his dark-squared bishop.

The alternative 12...♘h5 13.h4± would leave Black's knight restricted on the edge of the board.

**13.e4!**

White has to react quickly, not allowing Black to comfortably regroup his pieces. For example, if 13.f4 ♖b4 14.♙d2 ♘e7 and Black is not worse, as his knight finds a perfect outpost on f5.

**13...♝xb3**

This move does not solve Black problems. The alternatives are:

13...dxc4 14.♝xc4 0-0-0 15.0-0± White has more space and thus better chances in the middlegame.

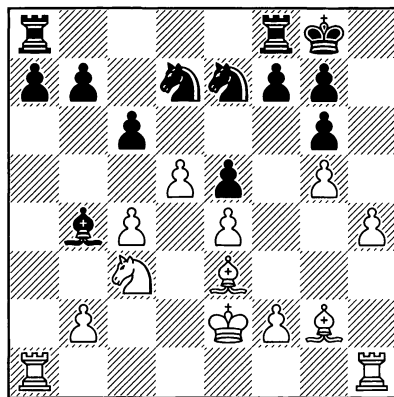
13...dxe4 14.♘xe4 ♙b4† 15.♙e2 ♘e7 16.a3 ♙a5 17.♘d6† ♙f8 18.♝d3 with a favourable position for White.

13...♝xd4 is quite principled, but after 14.♝xb7 ♝b8 15.♝xc6 ♙b4 16.0-0 ♘e7 17.♝a4 ♙xc3 18.♙e3 ♝xc4 19.♝xc4 dxc4 20.bxc3± White's chances seem preferable due to his bishop pair.

**14.axb3 dxc4 15.bxc4 e5 16.d5 ♙b4?!**

Stronger is 16...♘c5 17.♙e3 ♘b3 18.♝d1 ♘d4 19.♙d2±, though even here White's chances are better.

17.♙e2 ♘e7 18.♙e3 0-0 19.h4±



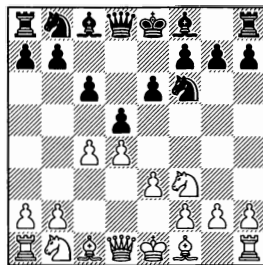
White was clearly better in Wang Yue – Balogh, China 2008.

**Conclusion:**

The critical line in this chapter starts with 5...♝b6 when I suggest following Topalov with 6.♘c3 e6 7.♘h4. There is not much practical material on this line upon which to draw any definite conclusions. At the moment Topalov's idea (with my improvement) looks quite interesting and playable. I expect that this line will develop quickly in the immediate future.

# Chapter 18

## The Slav 4...e6 Meran Style



### Variation Index

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.e3 e6

5.b3 ♘bd7 6.♙b2 b6 7.♙d3 ♙b7 8.0-0

A) 8...♙e7 9.♘c3 0-0 10.♙c2

A1) 10...♙c7

A2) 10...♙c8

B) 8...♙d6 9.♘bd2 0-0 10.♘e5

B1) 10...c5

B2) 10...♙e8

B3) 10...♙e7

p 300

p 301

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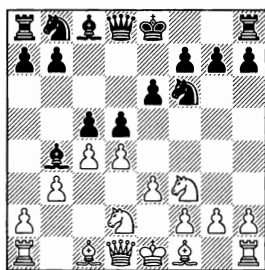
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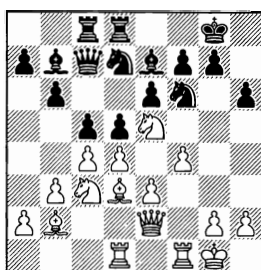
p 304

note to the 5th move



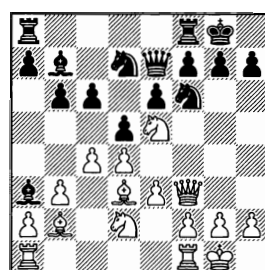
7.dxc5!N

A2) after 14...c5 - Kramnik's suggestion



15.♘b5N

B3) note to the 11th move



12.♙xa3?!N

### 1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.e3 e6

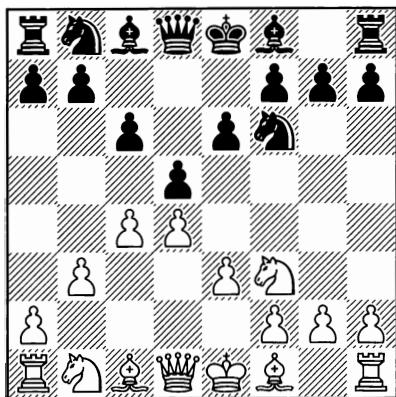
This is a popular continuation. Black does not use the opportunity to develop his light-squared bishop and instead continues in the spirit of the Meran. Of course White can play 5.♘c3 transposing to the normal Meran, but we can also try to benefit by delaying ♘c3: perhaps ♘bd2 will be an interesting option in some lines.

### 5.b3

I have decided to focus on this move, which seems quite promising for White. Other options are:

5.♘bd2 ♘bd7 6.♗d3 ♗d6 7.0-0 0-0 8.e4, but here I believe 8...e5 gives Black an acceptable game.

5.♗d3 is supposed to lead to positions that are similar to those after 5.b3, but here I do not like 5...dxc4!? 6.♗xc4 ♘bd7 7.0-0 ♗d6 and sooner or later White will be forced to play ♘c3 transposing to a normal Meran.



### 5...♘bd7

By far Black's most popular choice. The following are some of the latest examples of the alternatives:

5...♗b4† 6.♘bd2!

This is more in the spirit of our variation. After 6.♗d2 ♗d6 7.♘c3 ♘bd7 8.♗d3 0-0 9.0-0 Black can play 9...a6 and transpose into a well-known line from the variation 1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.e3 a6 5.♘f3 e6 6.b3 ♗b4 etc. Black is not experiencing any serious problems here, according to the latest theory.

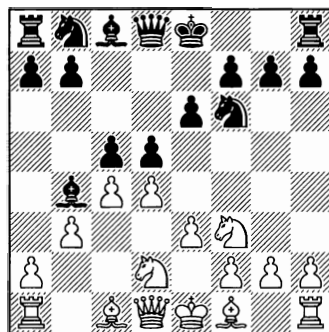
### 6...c5

I believe this is the only way Black can try to justify his previous move.

The alternatives are:

6...♘bd7 7.♗b2 ♘e4 8.a3 (the simple 8.♗d3 is also quite good for White) 8...♗xd2† 9.♘xd2 f5 10.♗e2 0-0 11.0-0 ♗f6 12.f3 ♘xd2 13.♖xd2 White had a pleasant edge in Figura – Hrabusa, Sibenik 2007.

6...0-0 White should react by analogy to our main line with 7.♗b2 c5 8.dxc5!.



### 7.dxc5!N

This is the only way White can challenge the accuracy of the bishop check.

After 7.♗b2 cxd4 8.exd4 b6 9.♗d3 ♗b7 10.0-0 ♘bd7 11.a3 ♗e7 12.♖e2 0-0 13.♖ad1 ♖c7 Black had a normal game in Wang Yue – Beliavsky, Pamplona 2007.

### 7...0-0

I do not see any interesting options for Black. For example, 7...♘e4 can be met calmly with 8.♗b2 0-0 9.a3 ♗xc5 10.cxd5!, obtaining a favourable position.

8.♖b2 ♘c6 9.a3 ♗xc5 10.b4

At this point it is obvious that Black has lost some time with 5...♗b4†.

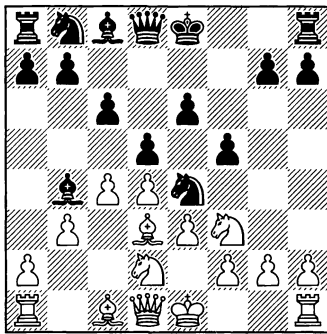
10...♗e7

I found many games with this position, but with Black to move, so we can conclude that we have won a tempo.

11.♗d3

By transposition we have landed on almost holy ground: White was better in Petrosian – Kotkov, USSR (ch) 1946.

5...♗e4 6.♗d3 ♗b4† 7.♗bd2 f5



Setting up a pawn structure that is typical of the Stonewall variation.

8.0–0 0–0 9.a3 ♗c3

The beginning of a strange manoeuvre. More natural is 9...♗d6, although after 10.♗b2 ♗d7 11.b4± White's chances are preferable.

10.♞b1 ♗a5 11.♞c2 ♗d7

This happened in De Verdier – Tikkanen, Ceska Trebova 2008, and now after the natural:

12.b4 ♗c7 13.♗b2

13.b5 c5 is unclear.

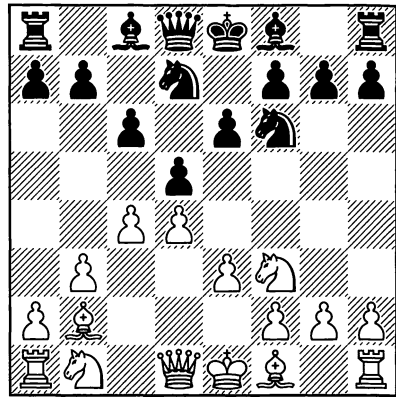
13...♗df6 14.♗b3±

White has an edge, as he has a clear plan on the queenside.

## 6.♗b2

Very often White starts with 6.♗d3, which in practice usually transposes to our main

line. But there is an interesting alternative, 6...♗b4†? 7.♗bd2 ♗c3 8.♞b1 e5, which seems to give Black good chances to equalize. One of the latest games continued 9.dxe5 ♗xe5 10.♗xe5 ♗xe5 11.♞c2 0–0 12.h3 ♗e6 13.0–0 h6 14.♗f3 ♗c7 15.♗b2 ♞e7 and Black was OK in Drozdovsky – Gupta, Dubai 2008.



## 6...b6

This is Black's main set-up. We shall have a quick look at Black's rare continuations:

6...♗e4 7.♗d3 ♗d6 8.0–0 0–0

The alternative is 8...f5, once again choosing a Stonewall set-up. 9.♗a3 Obviously White's main idea in Stonewall-type positions is to exchange the dark-squared bishops. 9...♞e7 10.♗xd6 ♞xd6 Here is a good example of how White should play: 11.♞c2 b6 12.b4! a5 13.c5 ♞c7 14.cxb6 ♞xb6 15.bxa5 ♞xa5 16.♗bd2± White was better in Sargissian – Esen, Dresden 2007.

9.♞c2 f5 10.♗e5

Another usual idea in the Stonewall pawn structure: White blocks the centre and tries to seize the initiative on the queenside.

10...♞f6 11.f4 ♞e7 12.♗c3 ♗df6 13.c5 ♗c7 14.b4 ♗d7 15.a4 a6 16.♞a3

White was better in Kuzubov – Buhmann, Polanica Zdroj 2007.

6...♗d6 7.♗d3 ♞e7 8.♗e5!



A very good move: White prevents any possibility of an ...e5 advance. It also prevents Black from fianchettoing his light-squared bishop.

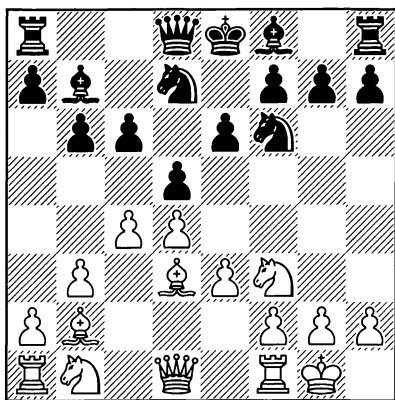
8...♙b4† 9.♘d2 ♘xe5 10.dxe5 ♘d7

In the event of 10...♘e4 11.♙xe4 dxe4 12.0-0 ♙xd2 13.♚xd2 Black would lose the e4-pawn after ♚c2xe4.

11.0-0 f6?! 12.♘f3 ♙a5 13.exf6 ♘xf6 14.♚c2 ♙c7 15.e4±

White had a clear advantage in Parligras – Zhukova, Athens 2008.

7.♙d3 ♙b7 8.0-0



This is the main branching point in this variation. Black has to decide where to develop his dark-squared bishop. The choices are not really surprising: A) 8...♙e7 and B) 8...♙d6.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.e3 e6 5.b3 ♘bd7 6.♙b2 b6 7.♙d3 ♙b7 8.0-0)

A) 8...♙e7

The bishop might look passive on e7, but the idea is to be able to play ...♘xe5 without losing a piece. Nevertheless, I believe White retains the better chances.

9.♘c3

This time we develop our knight to c3. I came to the conclusion that Black is OK after:

9.♘bd2

Here the main line goes:

9...0-0 10.♚e2 c5

And now White has a choice:

11.♙fd1

More aggressive is 11.♙ad1, but then 11...♚c7 12.♘e5 ♙ad8 13.f4 ♘e4 is not at all clear.

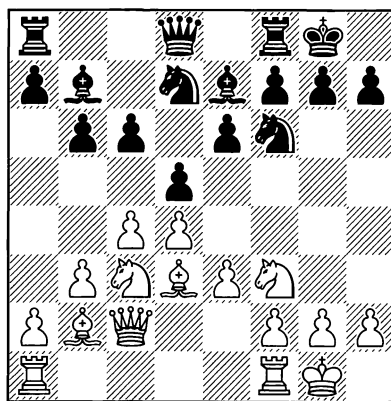
11...♙c8 12.♙ac1

And now:

12...♙c7!

The idea is to switch the black queen to a8, which leads to complicated play.

9...0-0 10.♚c2

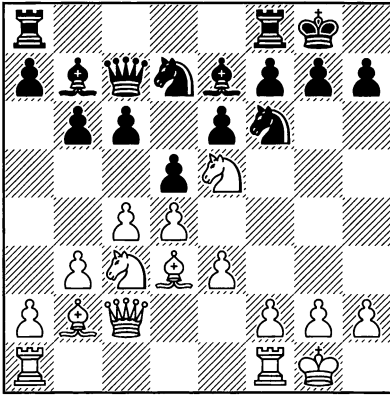


This seems to me to be quite favourable for White. He has a clear plan of strengthening his position with ♙ad1, ♘e5, f4 and so on, while it is not so easy for Black to create serious counterplay.

Black has tried A1) 10...♚c7 and A2) 10...♙c8, but without solving his problems.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.e3 e6 5.b3 ♘bd7 6.♙b2 b6 7.♙d3 ♙b7 8.0-0 ♙e7 9.♘c3 0-0 10.♚c2)

A1) 10...♖c7 11.♘e5



This move works very well tactically, as was proven in the following fine game:

11...♘e5

I believe somewhat better is 11...c5, but White can continue his strategy with 12.f4 ♖ad8 13.♖ad1± when his position looks very active.

12.dxe5 dxc4 13.bxc4 ♘g4

13...♘d7? does not work: 14.♗xh7+ ♖h8 15.f4 g6 16.♗xg6! fxg6 17.♗xg6+– and the idea of ♖f3–h3 is decisive.

14.♗xh7+ ♖h8 15.♗e2 f5

White wins nicely after 15...♖xh7 16.♗xg4 ♗xe5 17.♗h3+ ♖g8 18.♘d5! ♗d6 (or 18...♗g5 19.f4 ♗h4 20.♘e7+ ♗xe7 21.♗xg7! ♖xg7 22.♗g4+ ♖h7 23.♖f3+–) 19.♗e5! ♗d8 20.♘e7+ ♗xe7 21.♗g3 f6 22.♗d6+–.

16.h3 ♖xh7 17.hxg4 ♗xe5

Everything was pretty much forced, and now Sargissian finds an elegant solution:

18.g5! ♖h8 19.♘d5 ♗d6 20.♗e5! ♗d7 21.♘c7

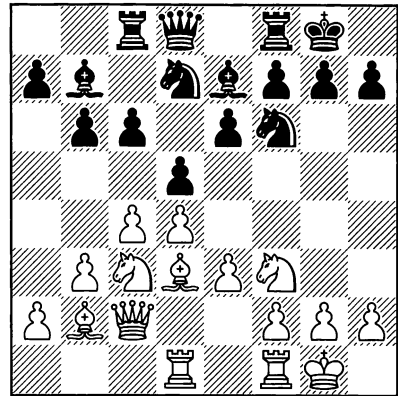
With a decisive advantage, Sargissian – Yegiazarian, Yerevan 2004.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.e3 e6 5.b3 ♘bd7 6.♗b2 b6 7.♗d3 ♗b7 8.0–0 ♗e7 9.♘c3 0–0 10.♗c2)

A2) 10...♗c8

This looks like the most natural reply.

11.♖ad1



11...♗c7

After 11...c5 Kramnik recommended the following line for White in *Chess Informant* 99: 12.cxd5 exd5 (12...cxd4 13.♘xd4 ♗xd5 runs into the strong 14.♗a6 ♗c7 15.♘db5 with a clear advantage) 13.♗f5± With a rather favourable Queen's Indian type of position.

11...h6 is too passive: 12.e4! dxe4 13.♘xe4 ♘xe4 14.♗xe4 Black cannot carry out the thematic c6–c5 and this defines White's advantage. 14...♘f6 15.♗d3 ♗c7 16.c5 ♘d5 17.♘e5 ♘b4 This position was reached in Kveinys – Hole, Oslo 2007, and now 18.♗c4 ♘xd3 19.♗xd3 would secure White a stable advantage due to Black's lazy bishop on b7.

12.♘e5 h6

Once again 12...♘e5? does not work: 13.dxe5 ♘g4 14.♗xh7+ ♖h8 15.♗e2!±.

A better try was 12...♖fd8 13.f4 c5 though after 14.cxd5 exd5 15.♗e2 White's position looks very promising, as he has good attacking chances.

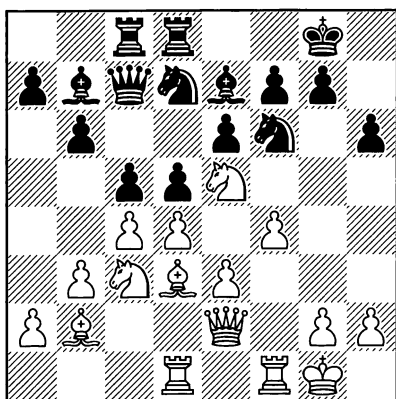
### 13.♗e2

White could also have started with 13.f4.

### 13...♗fd8

In the event of 13...♜xe5 14.dxe5 ♞d7 15.f4 White's prospects on the kingside look excellent.

### 14.f4 c5



This position is from Kramnik – Van Wely, Wijk aan Zee 2007. Kramnik gave the following line as the most precise way to develop an initiative:

### 15.♞b5N

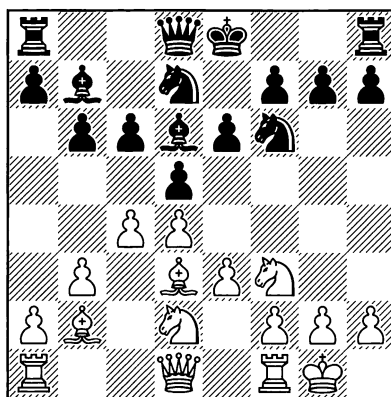
15.f5!? also looks quite promising.

### 15...♗b8 16.f5

White's chances are clearly better.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♞f3 ♞f6 4.e3 e6 5.b3 ♞bd7 6.♞b2 b6 7.♞d3 ♞b7 8.0-0)

B) 8...♞d6 9.♞bd2!



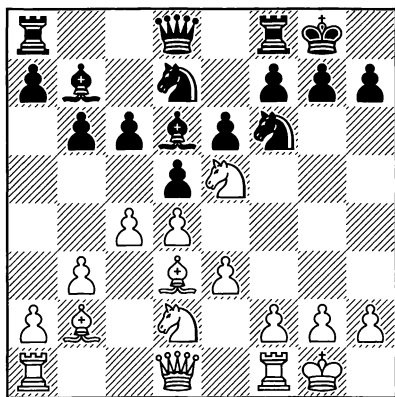
I believe this is White's best option. In this variation it is very important that White remains flexible, exploiting the opportunities that delaying the b1-knight's development have brought. A clear advantage of ♞bd2 compared with ♞c3 is that White does not block the b2-bishop and thus we can play ♞e5 very quickly. It is very difficult to understand why with the bishop on d6 we should play ♞bd2, while if ...♞e7 has been played, then ♞c3 offers more chances of an advantage. My conclusion is that with the bishop on d6 White should hurry to play ♞e5 because the knight is very annoying on e5, as Black is unable to capture it with his knight. While with the bishop on e7, Black always has an option of capturing on e5.

The obvious alternative is 9.♞c3, but with the bishop on d6 Black seems to be OK, though the position remains very complicated.

### 9...0-0 10.♞e5

The point behind White's previous move. White has nothing after 10.e4 dxe4 11.♞xe4 ♞xe4 12.♞xe4 ♞f6 13.♞c2 c5 with comfortable play for Black.

At this point the main moves are: B1) 10...c5, B2) 10...♞e8 and B3) 10...♗e7, though also possible is:



10...♖c7 11.f4 c5 12.♞c1 ♞ad8 13.♞e2 ♞fe8  
14.cxd5 exd5

This position arose in Rustemov – Gagarin, Minsk 2008. It is quite obvious that White's chances are clearly better, due to his strong knight on e5, and now is the right moment to increase the pressure with:

15.♞f3!

White's initiative looks very powerful, for example:

15...♞e4 16.♞h3 ♞df6 17.♞xe4 dxe4

Or 17...♞xe4 18.dxc5! bxc5 19.♞xe4 dxe4  
20.♞h5 h6 21.♞g3 with a decisive attack.

18.♞c4 ♞e7 19.dxc5 ♞xc5 20.♞g4 ♞e8 21.f5

With a powerful offensive.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♞f3 ♞f6 4.e3 e6 5.b3  
♞bd7 6.♞b2 b6 7.♞d3 ♞b7 8.0-0 ♞d6  
9.♞bd2 0-0 10.♞e5)

### B1) 10...c5

This is certainly a principled move.

### 11.cxd5 exd5

Black has also tried:

11...♞xd5 12.♞dc4 ♞xe5

If 12...♞e7 13.♞xd7 ♞xd7 14.♞e5 ♞c7  
15.dxc5 ♞xc5 16.♞g4 White has the  
initiative.

13.dxe5 ♞e7

This was played in Sargissian – Bocharov, Moscow 2007. Now:

14.♞g4

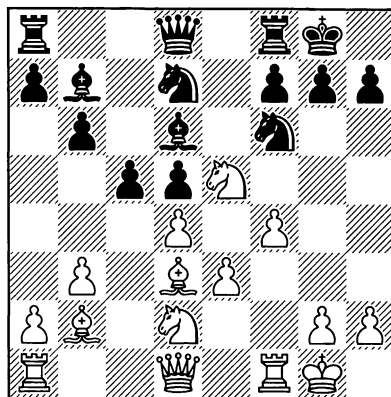
The active move would pose Black serious problems, for example:

14...♞xe3 15.♞xh7† ♞xh7 16.fxe3 ♞g5

17.♞ad1 ♞e7 18.e4 ♞ad8 19.♞d6±

With an obvious advantage.

### 12.f4



### 12...cxd4

If 12...♞e4 White answers with the thematic 13.♞xe4 dxe4 14.♞c4 ♞f6 15.♞e2 ♞e7 16.dxc5 ♞xc5 as in Sadorra – Lim Yee Weng, Kuala Lumpur 2007, and here the simple 17.♞ad1 ♞ad8 18.♞xd8 ♞xd8 19.♞d1 ♞e7 20.♞g4 would give White a clear edge.

### 13.exd4 ♞e4

Black uses the moment before White takes control over the e4-square.

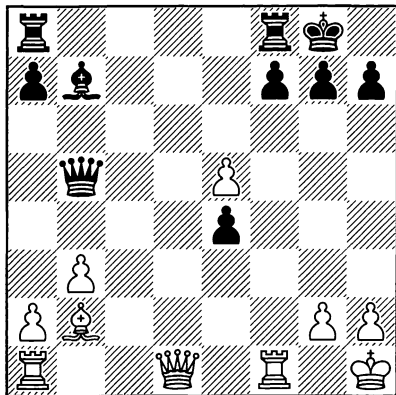
### 14.♞xe4 dxe4 15.♞c4

15.♞b5 ♞f6 is fine for Black.

### 15...b5

Apparently Black should have played 15...♞f6 but after 16.♞e2± White's chances look preferable to me.

16.♙xb5 ♖xe5 17.fxe5 ♙xe5 18.dxe5 ♖b6†  
19.♗h1 ♖xb5



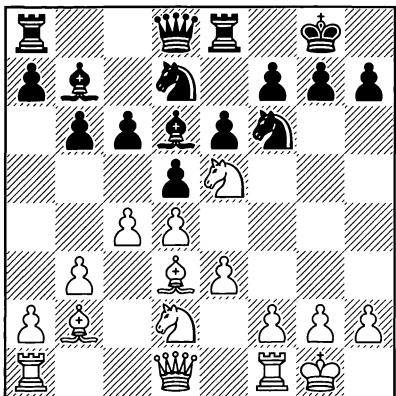
20.♖g4

Despite the opposite-coloured bishops, White's initiative looks dangerous and Black decided he had to give up a pawn.

20...h5 21.♖xh5 ♗ae8 22.a4 ♖d5 23.♗fd1±  
Sargissian – Stellwagen, Wijk aan Zee 2007.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♖f3 ♖f6 4.e3 e6 5.b3  
♖bd7 6.♙b2 b6 7.♙d3 ♙b7 8.0-0 ♙d6  
9.♖bd2 0-0 10.♖e5)

B2) 10...♗e8



11.♖f3 ♖e7 12.♗ad1 ♖f8

This is too passive and gives White a free hand to develop his offensive.

13.♖h3 c5

So far we have followed the game Miles – Arakhamia, Muenster 1993. At this point White could have played the simple:

14.f4!N ♖g6 15.♖df3±

Black's position is very dangerous.

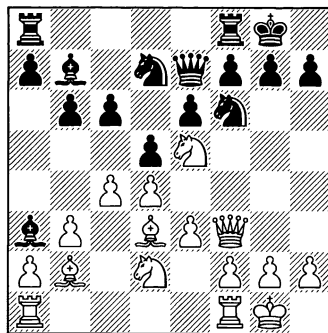
(1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♖f3 ♖f6 4.e3 e6 5.b3  
♖bd7 6.♙b2 b6 7.♙d3 ♙b7 8.0-0 ♙d6  
9.♖bd2 0-0 10.♖e5)

B3) 10...♖e7 11.♖f3 ♗fd8

An interesting alternative is:

11...♙a3

Now I believe White should continue with a new move:



12.♙xa3!?N

Black easily solved his opening problems after 12.♖xd7 ♖xd7 13.♙c3 ♙b4 14.♗fc1 ♙xc3 15.♗xc3 c5= in Granda Zuniga – Grabarczyk, Benasque 2008.

12...♖xa3

Swapping the dark-squared bishops should help Black, but his queen is a little out of play and White has to take this chance to build a kingside attack as quickly as possible.

13. ♖h3 h6

Or 13... ♖ad8 14. f4 g6 15. cxd5 cxd5 16. ♘df3+. White has a simple idea of playing ♘g5 followed by sacrificing on f7 at a suitable moment.

14. f4 ♖ad8 15. g4!

White has a powerful initiative.

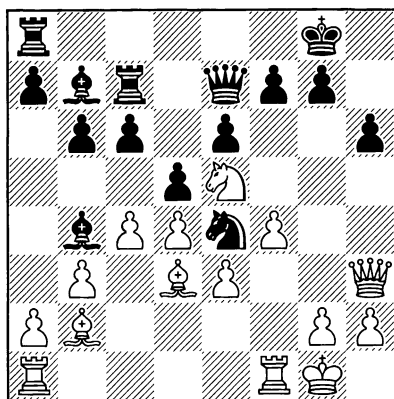
12. ♖h3 h6

Obviously White is better after the passive 12... ♘f8. The following encounter shows how dangerous Black's position can be: 13. ♖ad1 c5 14. cxd5 exd5 15. f4 cxd4 16. exd4 ♖a3 17. ♖a1 ♘e4 18. ♘xe4 dxe4 19. ♖c4 ♖d5 20. f5 ♖b7 21. f6 White had a nasty attack in Riazantsev – Matsenko, Russia 2008.

13. f4 ♖b4?

A seemingly natural attempt to fight for the e4-square, nevertheless it appears to have been convincingly refuted by Vladimir Kramnik. This is probably the proper moment for Black to look for an improvement.

14. ♘df3 ♘e4 15. ♘xd7! ♖xd7 16. ♘e5 ♖c7



17. ♖xe4! dxe4 18. c5!

This forces Black to open the long diagonal for the b2-bishop.

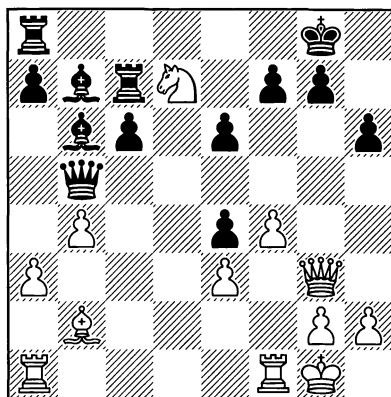
18... bxc5 19. a3 ♖a5 20. dxc5 ♖xc5 21. b4 ♖b5 22. ♖g3! ♖b6

It is hard to give Black good advice, as other moves are hardly satisfactory either:

22... f5 23. ♖ad1! c5 24. ♖g6 ♖d5 25. ♖xd5! exd5 26. ♖e6+ ♘h7 27. ♖xf5+ ♘g8 28. ♖e6+ ♘h7 29. ♖g6+ ♘h8 30. f5!+–

Black is also in trouble after 22... f6 23. ♘g4! ♘h7 24. ♖fb1! ♖b6 25. a4 ♖e2 26. a5+–.

23. ♘d7



White has a winning position, Kramnik – Van Wely, Dortmund 2008.

### Conclusion:

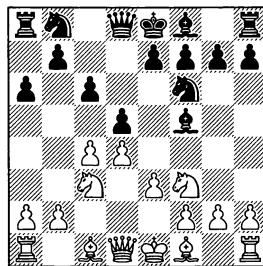
Undoubtedly this line leads to a very complex struggle, but the theoretical discussion seems to be favouring White at the moment. I have no doubt that there is room for Black to find improvements, and I expect to see many interesting games in the immediate future.



# Chapter 19

## The Slav

4...♙f5 and 5...a6



### Variation Index

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.e3 ♕f5 5.♘c3 a6

6.♞b3

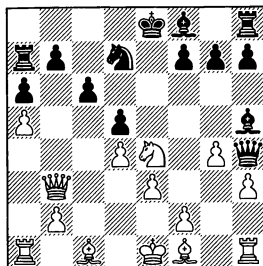
A) 6...♞a7

p 308

B) 6...b5

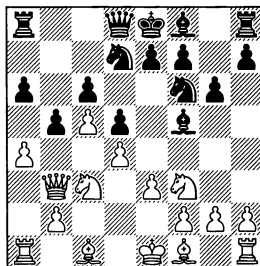
p 311

A) 13...exd5



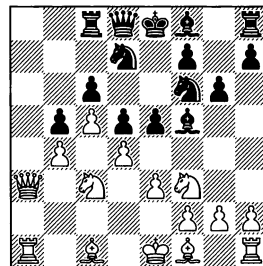
14.gxh5!?N

B) note to the 8th move



9.♘a2!N

B) after 11...axb5



12.♘xb5!



1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♢f3 ♢f6 4.e3 ♟f5 5.♢c3 7.a4!

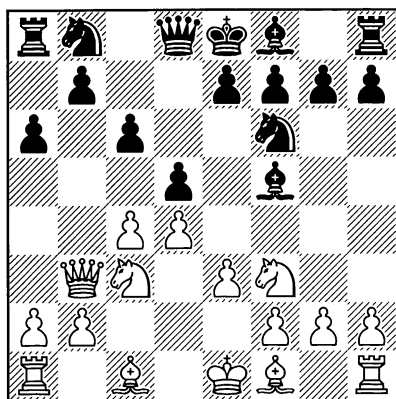
In this position Black sometimes rejects the normal 5...e6 and instead chooses a pawn move on the wing:

### 5...a6

This looks like a hybrid of two systems: the a6-Slav and a normal Slav. Black no doubt hopes to have the best of both worlds, so we must ensure that does not happen. For the moment the f5-bishop is not locked outside its pawn chain by ...e7-e6 so we shall avoid, or perhaps just delay, chasing it with ♢h4.

### 6.♟b3

I believe this is the critical continuation. White tries to use the vulnerability of Black's queenside immediately, attempting to exploit the light-squared bishop's departure from c8.

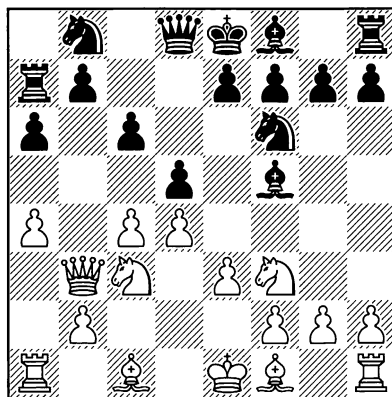


There are two ways to protect the b-pawn that make sense: A) 6...♟a7 and B) 6...b5.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♢f3 ♢f6 4.e3 ♟f5 5.♢c3 a6 6.♟b3)

### A) 6...♟a7

This artificial looking move is played just as often as the advance of the b-pawn.



A logical follow-up. White exploits that Black cannot meet the text with 7...a5, as after 8.cxd5 he would have to recapture with the c-pawn, seriously weakening the b5-square. This means White can advance his pawn to a5.

### 7...e6

If instead:

### 7...h6

Black has no time to defend against White's positional idea:

8.a5 e6 9.♟b6! ♟xb6 10.axb6 ♟a8 11.c5

I believe White has a clear strategic advantage. His main positional idea is to transfer his knight to a5, and then at some point to decide the game with a piece sacrifice on the queenside. I like the following example, where White perfectly executed this concept:

11...♢b7 12.b4 ♟b8

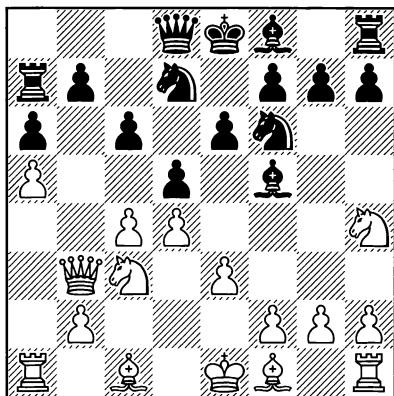
White was threatening the unpleasant 13.b5.

13.♢d2 ♟e7 14.f3 e5 15.♢b3 e4 16.♢a5 ♟d8 17.♢d2 0-0 18.♟e2 ♟e8 19.♢f2 ♟g6 20.♟xa6! bxa6 21.♢xc6 ♟c8 22.♢xd8 ♟exd8 23.♟xa6+—

White won convincingly in Ton That Nhu Tung – Zhou, Kemer 2007.

**8.a5 ♖bd7**

Black is just in time to cover the b6-square, defending against the idea of ♜b6.

**9.♘h4**

This is White's only chance of fighting for an advantage.

**9...♙g4**

The alternative is:

**9...♙e4**

Now in my opinion White should continue with direct play:

**10.f3N**

I do not like either of the alternatives:

10.c5 was the game Flumbort – Erdos, Budapest 2003, and now Black can play 10...h6! 11.♘xe4. Otherwise Black can simply retreat his bishop to h7. 11...♘xe4 12.♘f3 e5 Black is by no means worse.

Also unappealing is 10.cxd5 cxd5! and Black is fine.

Now a likely variation runs as follows:

**10...♙g6**

White is also slightly better after 10...dxc4 11.♙xc4 ♙d5 12.g3±.

**11.♘g6 hxc6 12.g3**

I feel that White is not ready to open the position with the thematic 12.cxd5 cxd5 13.e4, as after 13...dxe4 14.fxe4 ♘h5! Black

has interesting play.

**12...♙d6**

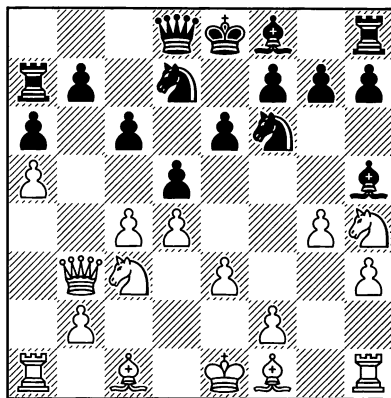
Black would not achieve anything by attacking the a5-pawn: 12...dxc4 13.♙xc4 ♙h5 14.♜a4 ♙d6 15.0–0±

**13.♘f2 0–0**

The tactical idea 13...♙xg3? 14.♘xg3 ♘h5+ 15.♘f2 ♜h4+ 16.♘g1 ♘g3 does not work on account of 17.♜c2! ♘xh1 18.♘xh1±, and White is clearly better.

**14.♙e2 ♙c7 15.♜a3±**

I believe White is slightly better due to his bishop pair, which might become a significant advantage if the position becomes more open.

**10.h3 ♙h5 11.g4**

Now in both games Black answered sharply:

**11...♘e4**

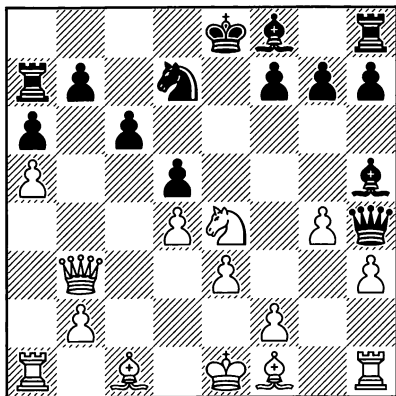
This is very understandable, as after the primitive 11...♙g6 White has the strong push 12.g5!. For example: 12...♘e4 13.♘xg6 hxc6 14.cxd5! cxd5 15.♘xe4 dxe4 16.h4± and the e4-pawn is going to drop.

**12.♘xe4 ♜xh4**

12...dxe4 leads to a favourable situation for White after 13.♘g2 ♙g6 14.♘f4 ♙d6 15.♙d2±.

**13.cxd5 exd5**

I think White has to improve his play at this point.

**14.gxh5!?N**

In both games White continued with 14.♖g3, but I believe Black's position is perfectly playable after 14...♗g6 15.♝g1 ♔d6 16.♙d2 ♜e7 17.♙c3 0–0= as in Van Wely – Strating, Netherlands 2006.

Obviously Black now has two options:

**14...♜xe4**

The alternative is to take with the pawn:

14...dxe4 15.♝g1 ♜xh5 16.♙c4

16.♙d2 looks attractive, but I could not find anything special for White after 16...g6!

17.♝g4 f5 18.♝g2 ♙e7=.

**16...♜f3**

I do not believe that 16...g5?! is a serious option, as after 17.♙e2 ♜g6 18.♙d2= White will have wonderful play for the pawn: he will castle long and have free play on the kingside.

**17.♝g3**

White has to drive the black queen away from the f3-square.

17...♜h1† 18.♙e2 g6

Black cannot play 18...f5? because of 19.♙e6, when 19...g6 loses to 20.♙xd7†!

♙xd7 21.♜f7† ♙e7 22.b3! and the idea of ♙a3 is deadly.

19.♙xf7† ♙d8 20.♜d1

Black's queen is seriously restricting White's forces, so it is essential to trade it.

20...♜xd1† 21.♙xd1 ♙d6 22.f4±

I believe White's chances are preferable, thanks to the bishop pair.

**15.♝g1**

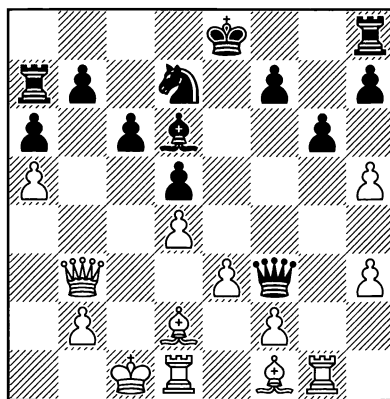
White's position looks quite promising to me. The following is a plausible line I analysed:

**15...g6**

Otherwise it is difficult for Black to develop his kingside.

**16.♙d2 ♙d6 17.0–0–0**

Black's rook is out of play on a7, and it is also important that Black no longer has the option of castling long, while White has good chances to seize the initiative on the kingside. I examined the following line:

**17...♜f3****18.♝e1! ♜xh5**

If 18...0–0 White easily develops an initiative by 19.hxg6 hxg6 20.h4 and it is not easy for Black to deal with White's offensive. For example: 20...♙f6 21.♙e2 ♜xf2 22.h5 ♙g7

23.hxg6 fxg6 24.♖b6! followed by 25.♙d3. White's attack looks decisive.

19.e4 0–0 20.♙e2 ♖h4 21.♙g4

White has plenty of play for the pawn.

21...♗d8 22.e5 ♙e7

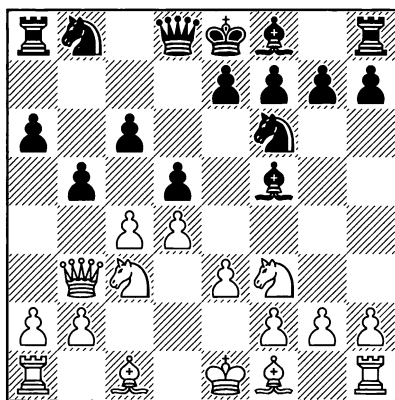
22...♙c7 does not change much: 23.f4 c5 24.♖c2 b6 25.f5 and White has a powerful attack.

23.e6 ♘f8 24.exf7† ♔xf7 25.♖b6!±

Black has a tough choice between putting his active rook on a8, which looks incredibly ugly, or playing 25...♖aa8, giving up his b7-pawn.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.e3 ♙f5 5.♘c3 a6 6.♖b3)

B) 6...b5



7.c5

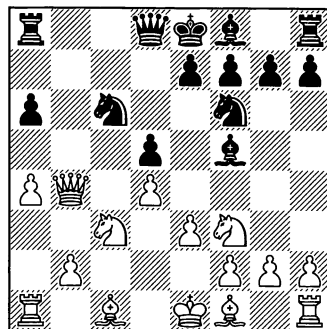
In my opinion after 7.c5 White gets a favourable version of the variation 1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.e3 a6 5.♘f3 b5 6.c5, as 6...♙f5 is a seldom played continuation.

I have to mention the following important line:

7.cxd5 cxd5 8.a4 b4!

The key idea in this line. Otherwise Black

would be clearly worse.  
9.♖xb4 ♘c6



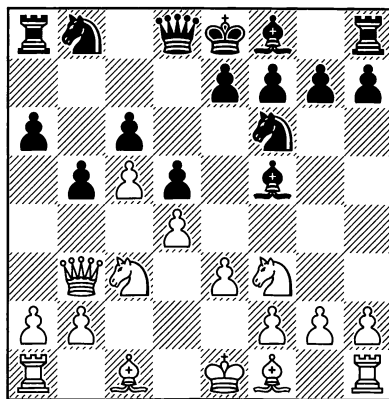
Now I believe White has to enter the complications.

10.♖c5 ♘a5 11.♙xa6! ♖xa6 12.♖b5† ♖c6 13.♘e5

The latest game continued:

13...♙d7 14.♘xd7 ♘xd7 15.♙d2 ♖c8 16.♘xd5 ♘c4 17.♖c1 ♘d6 18.♖xc8 ♖xc8 19.♖a6 ♖xa6 20.♘c7† ♔d8 21.♘xa6

White won this endgame, though I am not sure Black is really worse here, Radziejewicz – Kononenko, Ekaterinburg 2006.



7...♘bd7

By far Black's first choice. Recently Black has also tried:

7...a5

But White had a clear advantage in the following encounter:

8.♟e5!

White is already threatening 9.♟xb5.

8...a4 9.♞d1 ♞a5

Black defends against a possible sacrifice on b5, but allows White to favourably open up the position on the queenside.

10.♙d2 b4 11.♟e2 ♟e4 12.♟g3 ♟xd2  
13.♞xd2 ♙c8 14.♟d3! a3 15.bxa3

This is more accurate than 15.♟xb4 axb2 16.♞b1 e5 17.♞xb2 ♙e7± when Black has some compensation.

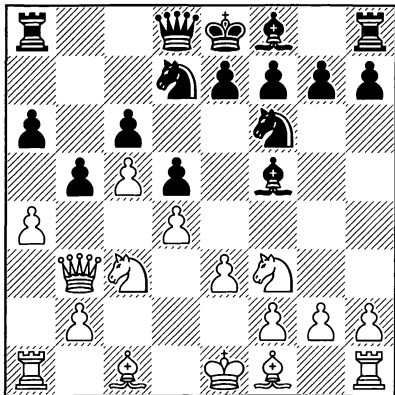
15...bxa3 16.♞xa5 ♞xa5 17.♞b1±

In P.H. Nielsen – Mchedlishvili, Elsinore 2008, White was much better because of the clear weakness of the a3-pawn. Apparently it was very hot in the playing hall that day, and White missed a number of wins that would normally have been within his reach.

### 8.a4

Now Black's queenside becomes vulnerable. White has a number of ideas at his disposal. Firstly, Black must always watch out for a possible sacrifice on b5. Secondly, White can fight for the a-file by means of ♞a3. And finally, ♟a2-b4 is a very important idea that significantly increases White's pressure against Black's structure.

Black has tried several options:

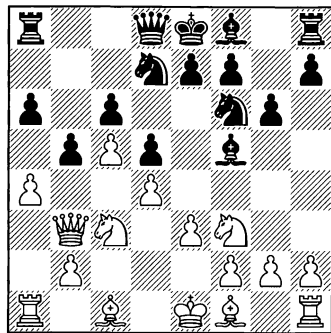


### 8...e5

There are three other moves I would also like to consider:

8...g6

Now I believe White has a strong novelty:



9.♟a2!N

The natural-looking 9.♞a3 is strongly met by 9...b4! 10.♞xb4 ♞b8 11.♞a3 a5 12.♙e2 ♙g7 and I believe Black has very nice compensation, Shinkevich – Airapetian, St Petersburg 2006.

9...♙g7

If 9...♞c8 10.♟b4 a5 White obviously sacrifices a piece with 11.♟xc6! ♞xc6 12.axb5 with a clear advantage.

10.♟b4 ♞c8 11.♞a2!

Increasing the pressure along the a-file.

11...0-0 12.axb5 cxb5

White easily deals with the pawn sacrifice after 12...axb5 13.♞xa8 ♞xa8 14.♞xa8 ♞xa8 15.♟xc6 ♞a1 16.♟xc7+ ♟f8 17.♟xf5 ♟e4 (or 17...gxf5 18.♟d1 ♟e4 19.♟c2 ♟xf2 20.♞g1+) 18.♟d1 ♟xf2+ 19.♟c2 ♟xh1 20.♟xg7 ♟xg7 21.♙xb5 with a decisive advantage. White's queenside pawns will decide the issue.

13.♞a5!±

With a clear positional advantage.

8...♞b8 9.♟a2! Again this manoeuvre is very strong. 9...♞b7 10.♟b4 a5? We already know

how to refute this: 11.♘xc6 ♜xc6 12.axb5±  
Lie – Ramirez, Pula 2007.

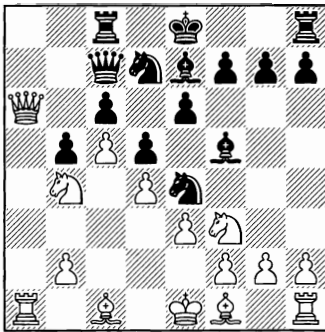
8...e6 9.♞a3

With this move White uses another powerful idea.

After 9.♘a2 ♜c8 10.♘b4 Black can play 10...a5! 11.♘xc6 ♜xc6 12.axb5 ♘xc5!. This is the difference as now White cannot play ♞a3, as in the previous examples, because Black's dark-squared bishop is open. 13.dxc5 ♞xc5∞ with double-edged play.

9...♞c8 10.♘a2 ♘e4 11.axb5 axb5 12.♘b4 ♙e7 13.♞a6 ♜c7?

A clear mistake. Black should have played 13...♘b8 though in this case 14.♞a5 would keep a pleasant advantage due to White's control of the a-file.



14.♘xc6! ♜xc6 15.♞xc6 ♞xc6 16.♞a8† ♙d8 17.♙xb5 ♞c7 18.♘e5 ♘ef6 19.♘c6+–

And White won easily in Sanikidze – Seyhanoglu, Kocaeli 2008.

9.♞a3 ♞c8

If 9...♞b8 White has a pleasant choice between 10.axb5 (or the thematic 10.♘a2) 10...axb5 11.♞a6 ♜c7 12.♞a7 ♞b7 13.♞a5 ♞xa5 14.♞xa5 e4 15.♘d2 ♙e7 16.♞a8† ♙d8 17.♘a2 0–0 18.♘b4 ♞c7 19.♘b3 ♙e7 20.♞a3± and White retains his edge because of his play on the a-file.

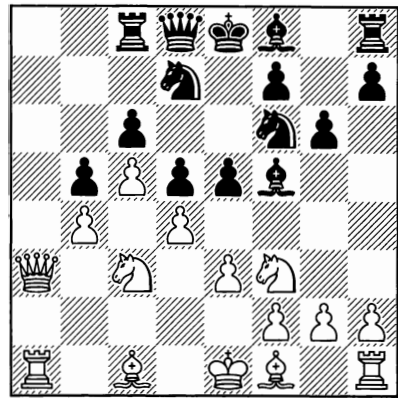
**10.b4!**

This is a concrete decision and very strong in this situation. Black managed to regroup his pieces well after 10.axb5 axb5 11.♞a5 ♞xa5 12.♞xa5 ♙g4 13.♘d2 exd4 14.exd4 ♙e7 15.♙d3 0–0 16.0–0 ♞a8 17.♘b3 ♞fc8= in I. Novikov – A. Ramirez, Dallas 2006.

**10...g6**

And now White executes his idea:

**11.axb5 axb5**



12.♘xb5! cxb5 13.♙xb5 e4 14.♘e5 ♜c7 15.♞a7 ♜b8 16.♞a5 h5 17.0–0 ♙e7 18.♙d2+

White's pawns decided the game in Vallejo Pons – Svidler, Monaco (blindfold rapid) 2006.

### Conclusion:

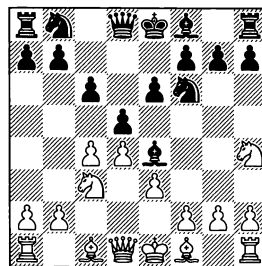
Black's hybrid system is respectable, but I believe White has good chances of an edge. As usual, the vital details are in the analysis, but the general theme is to put pressure on Black's queenside pawn structure.



# Chapter 20

## The Slav

4...♘f5, 6...♘e4



### Variation Index

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.e3 ♙f5 5.♘c3 e6 6.♘h4 ♙e4

7.f3 ♙g6 8.♖b3

A) 8...♖c7 9.♙d2

A1) 9...♙e7

A2) 9...a6

A3) 9...♘bd7 10.cxd5

A31) 10...exd5

A32) 10...♘xd5

B) 8...♖b6 9.♘xg6 hxg6 10.♙d2 ♘bd7 11.g3

B1) 11...♙d6

B2) 11...♙e7

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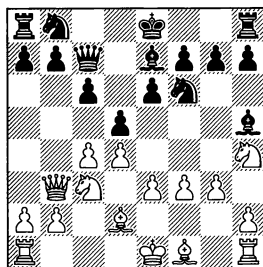
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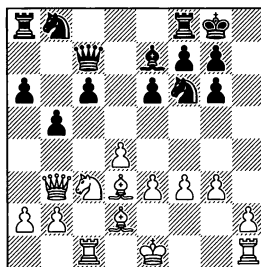
p 327

A1) note to the 10th move



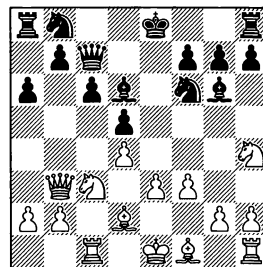
11.0-0-0!N

A1) after 14...a6



15.a4!N

A2) note to the 10th move



12.g4!N



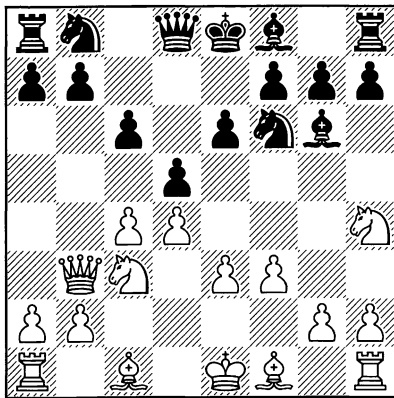
1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♟f3 ♟f6 4.e3 ♟f5 5.♟c3  
e6 6.♟h4

This is White's only chance to fight for an opening advantage. The obvious intention is to exchange his knight for Black's light-squared bishop and then exploit this imbalance.

6...♟e4

Before playing ...♟g6 Black provokes f2-f3, claiming that this is a slight weakening of White's pawn structure.

7.f3 ♟g6 8.♟b3



After this very direct move Black has two sensible ways to defend the b7-pawn:  
A) 8...♟c7 and B) 8...♟b6.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♟f3 ♟f6 4.e3 ♟f5 5.♟c3  
e6 6.♟h4 ♟e4 7.f3 ♟g6 8.♟b3)

A) 8...♟c7 9.♟d2

This is the first branching point in this system. Black has tried the modest A1) 9...♟e7, the somewhat mysterious A2) 9...a6 and the flexible A3) 9...♟bd7.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♟f3 ♟f6 4.e3 ♟f5 5.♟c3  
e6 6.♟h4 ♟e4 7.f3 ♟g6 8.♟b3 ♟c7 9.♟d2)

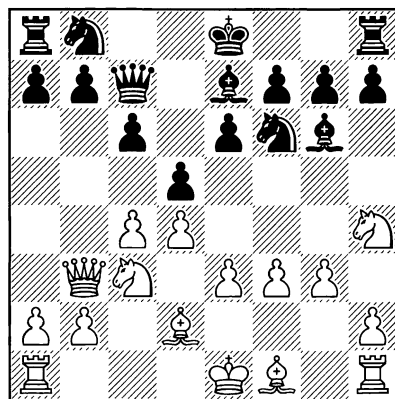
A1) 9...♟e7 10.g3

White has a wide choice, but after analysing this line extensively I have come to the conclusion that only 10.g3 gives White reasonable chances of an advantage. Let us have a brief look at White's other options:

In my opinion 10.cxd5 is not so clear, as after 10...cxd5 Black's knight gains the c6-square. After 11.♟xg6 hxg6 12.0-0-0 ♟c6 13.♟b1 a6 14.♟c1 0-0 the play is double-edged.

After 10.0-0-0 Black has 10...dxc4! 11.♟xc4 b5 12.♟e2. It is now very important for Black that White's light-squared bishop does not have the d3-square. 12...a6 This has been played only once, in S. Ernst – Smeets, Groningen 2003, but it looks quite strong: I did not manage to find any advantage for White here. Black's play is very easy, while White cannot stop the thematic c6-c5 advance.

Finally there is 10.♟xg6 hxg6 11.0-0-0 dxc4 12.♟xc4 b5 13.♟d3 a6 14.♟e4 ♟bd7 15.♟b1 ♟c8, which led to unclear play in Wang Yue – Bu Xiangzhi, Khanty-Mansiysk 2007.



10...0-0

Other options:

10...♟bd7 11.cxd5

Another interesting idea is 11.♖c1 ♜c8 12.cxd5 ♘xd5 13.♘xg6 hxg6 14.♙f2!?. 11...♘xd5 12.♘xg6 hxg6 13.e4 ♘xc3 14.bxc3

Obviously this type of position is favourable for White.

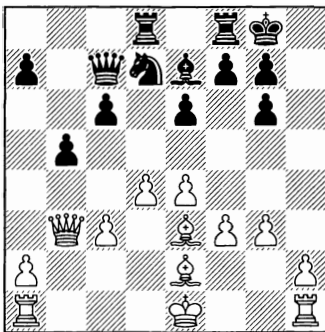
14...♙d8

Black has a tactical opportunity: 14...♙xh2 15.♙xh2 (Black has good compensation for the queen after 15.♙f4 ♗xf4 16.gxf4 ♙h4† 17.♙d1 ♙xh1♞, Karpov – Kamsky, Tal Memorial [blitz] 2008) 15...♗xg3† 16.♙f2 ♙h4 17.0–0–0 ♗xf2 18.♗xb7 ♙b8 (I do not believe 18...♙d8 is better: 19.♗xc6 ♗xf3 20.♙b5 and Black's position is very dangerous because his king is in the centre.) 19.♗xc6 ♗xf3 (if 19...♙b6 White seizes the initiative by means of 20.♗c8† ♙d8 21.a4! with the idea 22.♙b5) 20.♙b5 ♙xb5 21.♗xb5 ♗xe4 22.♗a6! It seems that Black has insufficient compensation for the exchange, Volkov – Guidarelli, Kemer 2007.

Clearly inferior for Black is 14...e5?! 15.f4! exd4 16.cxd4 ♘f6 17.♙g2± and White has a dream position with a strong centre and the bishop pair, Stefansson – Middelburg, Saint Vincent 2005.

15.♙e3 0–0 16.♙e2 b5

This is Khismatullin – Lastin, Dagomys 2008. Here I believe White should have played:



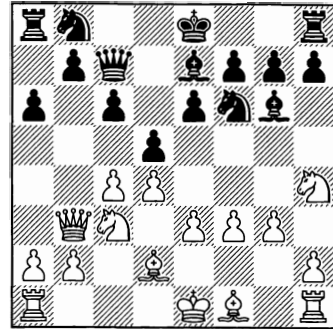
17.♙f2N ♘b6 18.h4!

White has a dangerous kingside initiative.

Black has been successful with:

10...a6

But somehow in both games White avoided playing the natural move:



11.♙c1N

Also quite interesting is 11.c5!?N ♘h5 12.0–0–0 with complicated play.

I examined the following line:

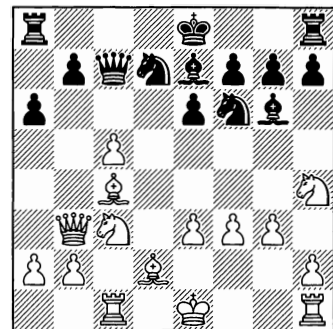
11...dxc4

Black loses a pawn after: 11...♘bd7? 12.cxd5 ♘xd5 13.♘xd5 exd5 14.♗xd5!

12.♙xc4 c5

Or 12...b5 13.♙e2 c5 14.dxc5 ♘bd7 15.♗d1! ♙xc5 16.b4 ♙d6 17.♘e4 ♗b6 18.♘xd6† ♗xd6 19.0–0 0–0 20.e4± with a clear positional advantage for White, thanks to his bishop pair and Black's bad light-squared bishop.

13.dxc5 ♘bd7



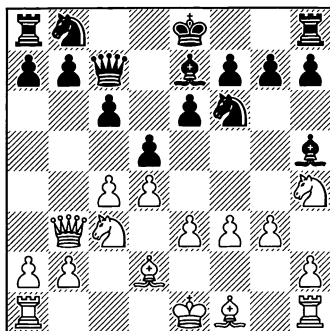
14. ♖xg6 hxg6 15. ♖a4 ♖xc5 16. ♖xc5 ♙xc5  
17. ♗a4† ♗d7

Obviously Black cannot play 17... ♗e7? in view of 18. ♙xe6 ♗xe6 19. ♗c4†+.

18. ♗xd7† ♖xd7 19. ♙e2±

White has a pleasant endgame with his two bishops.

10... ♙h5



11.0–0–0!N

I believe this is the critical move here.

11. ♙e2 g5 12. ♖g2 h6 as in Karpov – Bacrot, Cannes (2) 2000, is hardly enough for an advantage.

Now the main move is:

11...g5

There is also 11... ♖bd7 12.g4 ♙g6. Here I found a surprising idea: 13. ♙e1!? dxc4 14. ♙xc4 ♖d5 15. ♙g3 ♗b6 16. ♗he1± and White's pieces are better coordinated.

12.g4 ♙xg4

Dangerous for Black is 12...gxf4 13.gxf5 ♖xf5 14.cxd5 cxd5 15.e4 ♖f6 16. ♖b1 and White has a strong initiative.

13.fxf4 gxf4 14.g5 ♖e4

14... ♖g4 is easily refuted by 15.cxd5 exd5 16. ♗e1! ♖d7 17. ♙e2 ♖f2 18. ♗hf1 ♖h3 19. ♙g4 ♖xg5 20.e4! with a powerful initiative.

15. ♖xe4 dxe4 16. ♙g2

If 16. ♗gl then 16... ♖d7.

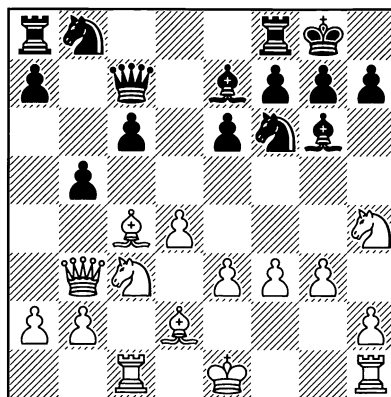
16... ♙xg5 17. ♙xe4 ♖d7 18. ♗a3!

Preventing Black from castling long.

18...f5 19. ♙f3 ♖f6 20. ♖b1

White has good compensation for the pawn.

11. ♗c1 dxc4 12. ♙xc4 b5

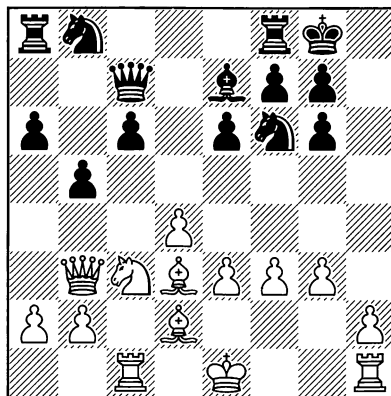


13. ♖xg6

It is important to secure the d3-square for White's bishop.

13...hxf4 14. ♙d3 a6

This position was reached in Bacrot – Magem Badals, France 2008. I think White can improve on his play:



15.a4!N ♖bd7 16. ♖f2 ♗fc8

If 16... ♗fb8 White can play quietly with

17.♙c2 c5 18.axb5 c4 19.b6! ♜xb6 20.♙e2 e5  
21.dxe5 ♞xe5 22.e4±, and claim a positional  
advantage.

### 17.axb5 axb5 18.♙g2

White is prepared for Black's standard pawn  
break.

### 18...b4 19.♜e4 c5 20.♞c2!±

To be followed by ♞hc1. White's chances are  
clearly better: he has the two bishops and the  
b4-pawn seems a bit iffy.

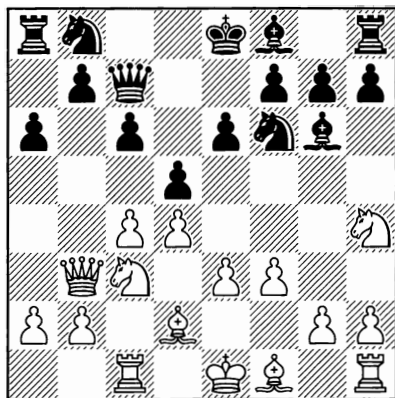
(1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♜f3 ♜f6 4.e3 ♙f5 5.♜c3  
e6 6.♜h4 ♙e4 7.f3 ♙g6 8.♞b3 ♞c7 9.♙d2)

### A2) 9...a6

This has been tried a few times. In my opinion  
this move is more effective if White has already  
castled long.

### 10.♞c1

But now White has this useful move at his  
disposal.



### 10...dxc4

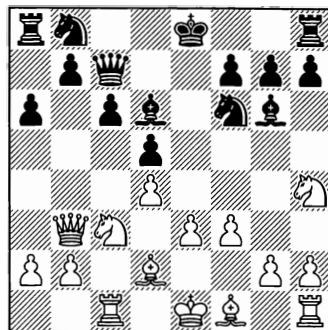
Black has also experimented with:

10...♙d6 11.cxd5 exd5?

This was played in Bu Xiangzhi – Morozevich,  
Yerevan 2008.

Much better was 11...♜xd5 12.♜xd5 (also  
worthy of consideration is 12.♜e4 ♙e7  
13.♜xg6 hxg6 14.♙d3 ♜d7 15.g3± and  
I prefer White's position) 12...exd5 13.g3  
♜d7 14.♙g2± and Black can hardly stop  
White from carrying out the thematic e3-e4  
advance.

In the game White missed a very good  
chance:



### 12.g4!N

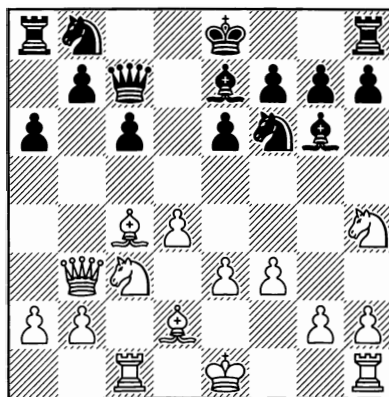
Unexpectedly Black faces serious difficulties  
defending against White's idea of 13.g5  
followed by ♜xd5 or f4. For example:

12...♜bd7 13.g5 ♜h5 14.f4!

White is almost winning.

14.♜xd5 ♞b8 15.♜c3 ♙xh2 16.♜e2± is  
also clearly better for White.

### 11.♙xc4 ♙e7



**12.0-0N**

I believe White should not hurry with the capture on g6, as happened in the following encounter: 12.♖xg6 hxg6 13.f4 ♖bd7 14.0-0 g5 and Black had good counterplay in Kalinitschew – P. Jaracz, Germany 2007.

**12...♖bd7 13.♙e2!**

This is a calm prophylactic move against Black's possible counterplay on the queenside. Less convincing is 13.g3 b5 14.♙e2 c5 15.♖xg6 hxg6 16.dxc5 ♙xc5.

**13...0-0**

I also examined 13...c5 14.♖a4! and the pin along the c-file is highly unpleasant for Black.

13...0-0-0 is risky. For example I discovered the following idea: 14.♖a4 ♖d5 15.♖xg6 hxg6 16.♙xc6! ♙xc6 17.♙c1±

The following line is quite important for understanding this variation:

13...♖d5 14.♖xd5 exd5 15.g3!

White is not forced to capture on g6: he can wait for a more suitable moment.

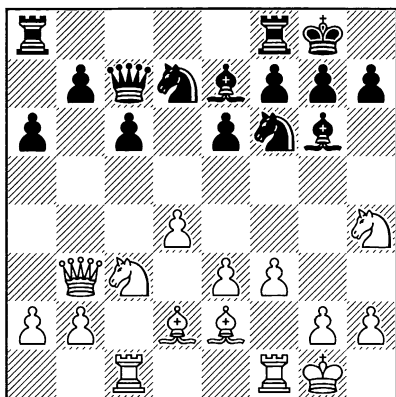
Instead 15.♖xg6 hxg6 16.g3 ♙d6 allows Black definite counterplay.

15...0-0-0 16.♖xg6!

Now this is the right moment.

16...hxg6 17.e4

With an advantage for White.

**14.♖xg6**

Now that Black has castled short, White can easily capture on g6 without fearing any counterplay on the h-file.

**14...hxg6 15.♖e4!**

White's chances are preferable, thanks to his extra space and the bishop pair.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♖f3 ♖f6 4.e3 ♙f5 5.♖c3 e6 6.♖h4 ♙e4 7.f3 ♙g6 8.♙b3 ♙c7 9.♙d2 ♖bd7 10.cxd5

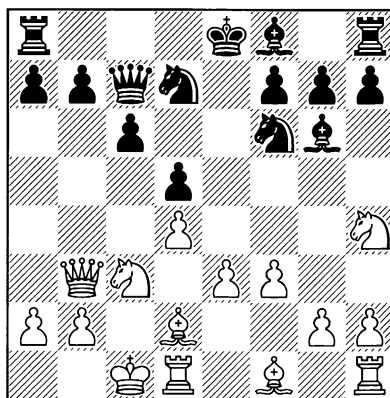
A3) 9...♖bd7 10.cxd5

This is the right moment to release the tension in the centre, since Black cannot recapture with the c-pawn because of, among other moves, 11.♙c1.

Obviously Black has two recaptures, A31) 10...exd5 and A32) 10...♖xd5.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♖f3 ♖f6 4.e3 ♙f5 5.♖c3 e6 6.♖h4 ♙e4 7.f3 ♙g6 8.♙b3 ♙c7 9.♙d2 ♖bd7 10.cxd5)

A31) 10...exd5 11.0-0-0

**11...0-0-0**

This is the critical line. The other options are:

11...a5

This is risky.

12.♖xg6 hxg6 13.e4! ♙b4

The lesser evil would be 13...a4N. Now White could calmly retreat his queen by 14.♙c2 with the idea of meeting 14...a3 with 15.e5! axb2† 16.♙b1 ♖h5 17.♖xd5 ♙c8 18.e6 cxd5 19.exd7† ♙xd7 20.♙b3† with a powerful initiative.

The text was played in Stoczek – Boguslavsky, Germany 2005. Now White could have gained a clear advantage by:

14.e5 ♖h7 15.♙c2!

Threatening both ♖xd5 and e6.

15...0–0–0 16.a3

Black's pawn on a5 is a serious weakness.

11...♙e7 12.♖xg6 hxg6 13.♙b1

This is an important prophylactic move.

The straightforward 13.e4 seems to be unclear after 13...dxe4 14.fxe4, Sargissian – Beliavsky, Istanbul 2003, when Black has to play 14...c5 with complicated play.

The most recent game with the text continued:

13...0–0 14.g4

14.e4 was strong as well.

14...b5 15.♙c1 ♙d6 16.g5 ♖h5 17.e4 dxe4 18.♖xe4 ♙xd4 19.♙xc6±

The play opening up was clearly in White's favour in Sasikiran – Nguyen Anh Dung, Kolkata 2008.

12.e4

Now we have a fairly forced line.

12...dxe4 13.♖xg6 hxg6 14.fxe4 ♖b6 15.♙g5

It is remarkable that this position has occurred three times in the games of Pavel Tregubov. None of his opponents managed to equalize and this line went out of fashion for Black.

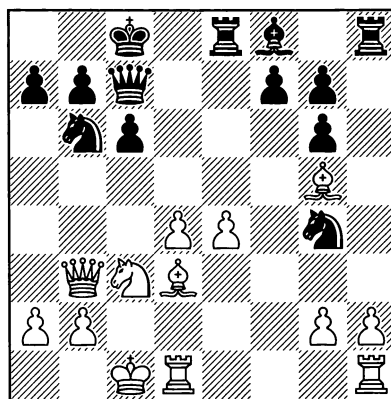
15...♙e8

Just bad is 15...♙xh2? 16.♙xh2 ♙xh2 17.♙xf7 and Black unavoidably loses material.

16.♙d3 ♖g4

Black's only hope is to create tactical chances, as positionally White is clearly better with his strong centre and pair of bishops.

Now I found a very strong idea:



17.♙b1!N

Creating the very unpleasant threat of 18.♖b5.

Instead all the games went 17.♙hf1 f6 18.h3±, and although White always gained an advantage, I think Black can try to improve.

17...♙b8

Black loses after 17...♖f2? 18.♖b5! ♙b8 19.♙xf7.

17...f6

This option looks principled.

18.♖b5 ♙b8 19.e5 fxg5 20.♙xg6

But the arising position seems very dangerous for Black, as his queen is out of play on b8. I will suggest a few lines:

20...♖d8

20...♙e7 21.♙xe8 ♙xe8 22.♙e6† ♖d8 23.♙xg4 cxb5 24.♙c1 ♖c4 25.b3 ♖a3† 26.♖a1 and White is winning, because of

Black's poorly placed queen.

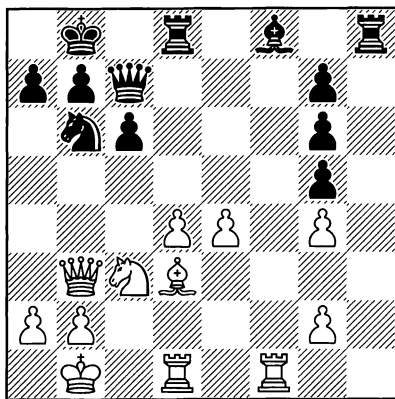
21. ♖f3 ♜e7 22. ♗xg4 cxb5 23. ♗xg5

White has more than sufficient compensation for the piece.

18. ♜f1 f6 19. h3 fxg5

19... ♖h6 20. ♙c1± is clearly better for White.

20. hxg4 ♜d8



21. ♙e2

I believe White's chances are superior because of his better coordinated forces.

21... ♜d7

Covering the f7-square.

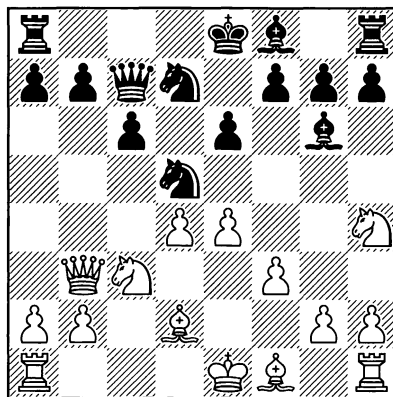
22. ♙f3 ♙e7 23. e5 ♜hd8 24. ♖e2 ♖d5 25. ♙xd5 ♜xd5 26. ♜f7 ♗d7 27. ♜c1±

White is clearly better.

(1. d4 d5 2. c4 c6 3. ♖f3 ♖f6 4. e3 ♙f5 5. ♖c3 e6 6. ♖h4 ♙e4 7. f3 ♙g6 8. ♗b3 ♗c7 9. ♙d2 ♖bd7 10. cxd5)

A32) 10... ♖xd5 11. e4

The alternative is 11. 0-0-0, but it is not so clear, as Black can start some activity on the queenside.



11... ♖5b6

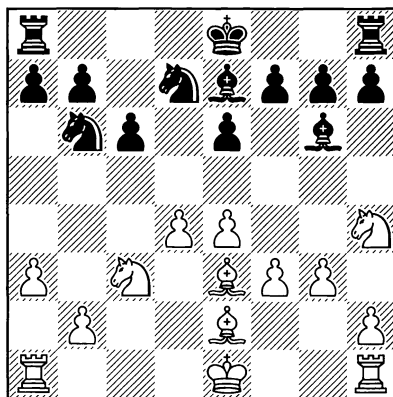
If 11... ♖xc3 12. bxc3 ♙e7 13. ♖xg6 hxg6 14. g3 then we reach a position that has been examined in the 9... ♙e7 10. g3 line. This looks the most natural continuation to me, as White can capture on g6 without worrying about the defence of the h2-pawn.

12. g3 ♙e7 13. ♙e2

I believe White is also slightly better after 13. ♖xg6 hxg6 14. 0-0-0 0-0-0 15. ♖b1 ♖b8 16. ♜c1±. Even 13. 0-0-0!? comes into consideration.

13... ♗d6 14. ♙e3 ♗b4 15. ♗xb4 ♙xb4 16. a3 ♙e7

This position occurred in Bacrot – P. Varga, France 2001. In general White is better, but the most precise continuation would be:



## 17.♟f2 0–0 18.♞xg6 hxg6 19.♞ac1

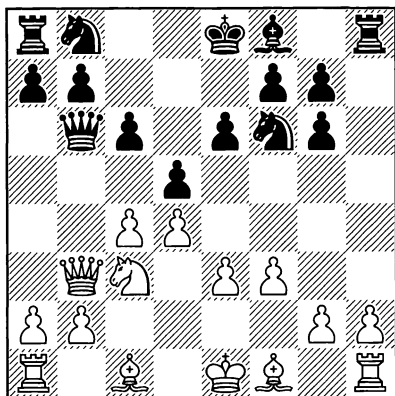
White is obviously better, thanks to his space advantage and pair of bishops.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♞f3 ♞f6 4.e3 ♟f5 5.♞c3 e6 6.♞h4 ♟e4 7.f3 ♟g6 8.♞b3)

## B) 8...♞b6 9.♞xg6

I think this is the right moment to capture the bishop, as Black was threatening 9...♞xb3 10.axb3 ♟c2! attacking the b3-pawn and intending to trap White's knight with 11...g5.

## 9...hxg6



## 10.♟d2

White has achieved good results with the following idea:

10.♟f2 ♞bd7 11.g3

But in my opinion, after the precise:  
11...g5!

Black obtains comfortable play with the idea of playing ...g4 next, using the slightly shaky position of White's king on f2.

12.cxd5

If 12.♟e2 Black has 12...dxc4 13.♞xc4 (or 13.♟xc4 g4! with counterplay) 13...e5 with double-edged play.

12...exd5 13.♟e2 ♟e7 14.♟g2 ♞f8!

Black improves the position of her knight, which will be perfectly placed on e6.

15.e4 ♞xb3 16.axb3 ♞e6 17.♟e3 a6 18.♞ac1 ♞d8

Black has a very solid position. Her plans include ...g6 followed by ...♟e8-f8-g7. White can hardly improve his position, so it is no wonder that a draw was soon agreed in M. Gurevich – Stefanova, Kocaeli 2002

## 10...♞bd7

There is also

10...♟d6

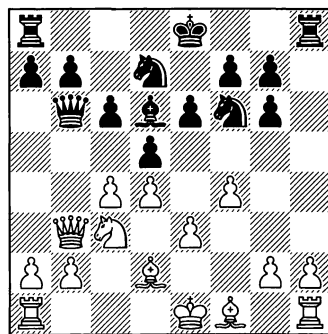
but then White has

11.f4!

which creates the unpleasant positional threat of 12.c5.

11...♞bd7

The best choice would be 11...♞xb3, though after 12.axb3 ♟b4 13.♟d3 ♞bd7 14.♟e2 White has a pleasant endgame. For example, 14...♟e7 (probably Black should have tried 14...♟xc3) 15.♟f3 a6 16.h4± and Black had a very passive position in Campos Moreno – Perez, Banyoles 2002.



12.c5!

A very important positional idea.

12...♞xb3 13.axb3

White will continue with 14.b4, when ...a6 would not stop b5, as the rook is undefended on a8.

13...♟c7



Black has also tried 13...♙e7 14.b4 ♘g4 (or 14...b5?! 15.♘xb5! cxb5 16.♙xb5± Dautov – Hector, Gothenburg 2005) 15.h3! ♙h4† 16.♗e2 ♘f2 17.♙g1 ♘e4 18.♘xe4 dxe4 as in Jiretorn – Bayrak, Dresden 2004. White should continue 19.b5! cxb5 20.♗d1±. After carrying out the b3-b4-b5 advance, White is always better, as it opens a lot of space for the bishop pair.

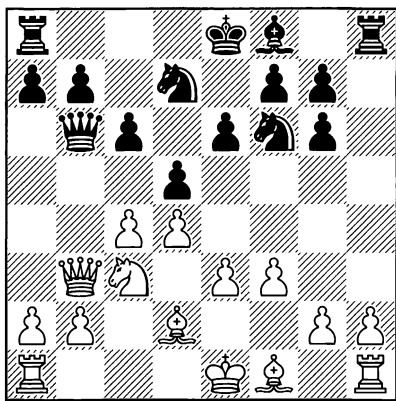
14.b4 b5 15.♙d3

White eschews 15.♘xb5 cxb5 16.♙xb5, though it seems to me that White's chances are better here, due to the threat of 17.♙c6.

15...0–0 16.♗e2 a6 17.♙a3 ♘b8 18.♙ha1

With a very difficult endgame for Black, Istratescu – Baekelant, Avoine 2004.

The position below is an important theoretical crossroads for White. After going deeply into all the recent theory I came to the conclusion that White's best choice is a subtle pawn move.



### 11.g3

A recently fashionable move is:

11.♙c2

But I have failed to discover an advantage for White after the annoying:

11...♙c7!

Here we can see the point behind Black's 6...♙e4: after f2-f3 it is not so easy for White

to defend the h2-pawn. White has had great results after:

12.cxd5 exd5 13.0–0–0 ♙xh2 14.♙xh2 ♙xh2 15.e4

But I can hardly believe White has anything special after, say, the new move:

15...♘b6N

White's usual choice in this position is:

11.0–0–0

But I believe Black has a comfortable endgame after:

11...♙xb3 12.axb3 ♙d6 13.h3 ♘h5!

The point of Black's idea.

14.♙d3

White has to keep the bishop pair.

14...♘g3

Black has managed to restrict White's pawns on the kingside and White hardly has enough resources to fight for the advantage.

15.♙he1 0–0 16.♗b1 a6=

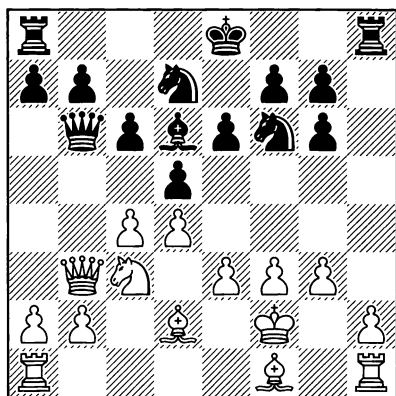
I think Black is out of danger. Cheparinov – Malakhov, Villarrobledo 2007, is a good example of how Black should play.

After 11.g3 Black must choose where he should develop his bishop. The first choice is B1) 11...♙d6, while B2) 11...♙e7 is also considered to be quite reliable.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.e3 ♙f5 5.♘c3 e6 6.♘h4 ♙e4 7.f3 ♙g6 8.♙b3 ♙b6 9.♘xg6 hxg6 10.♙d2 ♘bd7 11.g3)

B1) 11...♙d6 12.♗f2

Here 12.f4 is not as strong as after 10...♙d6, because the g3-move is now pointless. After 12...dxc4 13.♙xc4 0–0–0 Black is going to carry out the thematic c6-c5 and White risks ending up in a worse position. But after the king move White is threatening to play 13.c5 again, as he did after 10...♙d6.



### 12...♞c7

White has a very pleasant endgame after:

12...♞xb3 13.axb3 a6

Defending against White's idea.

14.♞g2

In my opinion this is exactly the endgame position White should aim for. After the queen swap White's king is well-placed on g2, where it can support the advance of the kingside pawns. Certainly Black is very solid, but White's chances are obviously better with his pair of bishops. His main idea is at the right moment to open the position to suit his bishops.

14...0-0

14...0-0-0 was a better choice.

15.g4 b5?

And this is a serious positional mistake.

16.g5 ♞h5 17.c5 ♞c7 18.f4 f5 19.♞e2

Now it is already obvious that White will decide the game with the help of a sacrifice on the queenside.

19...♞f7 20.♞a2 ♞a7 21.♞ha1 ♞fa8 22.♞xb5 cxb5 23.♞xb5+-

White won easily in Ivanchuk – Grabarczyk, Warsaw 2001.

12...g5?!

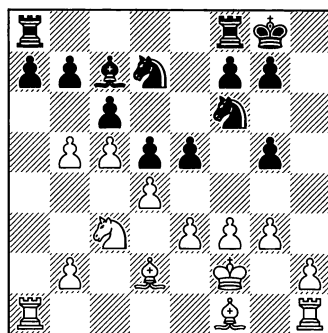
This is less reliable. In this case White easily carries out his main positional idea:

13.c5 ♞xb3 14.axb3 ♞c7 15.b4 0-0

15...a6 does not stop White playing 16.b5±.

16.b5 e5

This position occurred in Arencibia – Ramirez, Santa Clara 2003. White should now have continued his plan with:

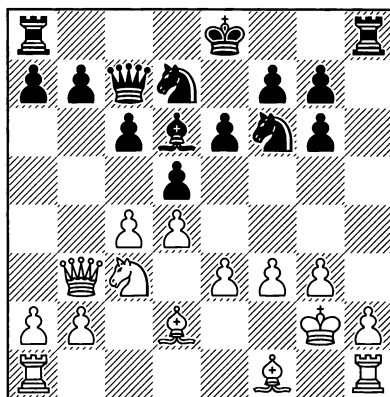


17.bxc6N bxc6 18.b4±

Followed by 19.b5, with a strategically winning position.

### 13.♞g2

13...♞xg3† was threatened. Now we will examine four options for Black.



### 13...♞d8

As this variation is developing rapidly, there are now a number of alternatives even at this point.

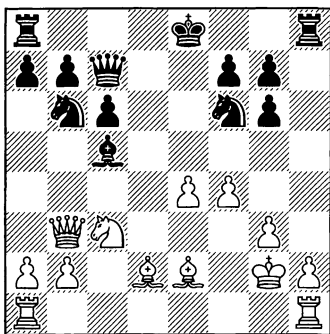
Black has tried to release the tension in the centre by means of:

13...dxc4 14.♙xc4 ♘b6

If 14...0-0 15.♖ac1 e5 16.♗c2, threatening 17.♗xg6, 16...♙h8 17.♙b3 ♖ae8 18.♞he1 a6 19.♗d3± and White maintains a pleasant advantage, thanks to his active light-squared bishop, Hillarp Persson – Hector, Skara 2002.

15.♙e2 e5 16.dxe5 ♙xe5 17.f4 ♙d6 18.e4 ♙c5

This is Kursova – Kononenko, Vladimir 2004. At this point White should have played the precise:



19.h4!N

Preventing Black's idea of ...♗d7 followed by ...♗h3.

19...0-0-0 20.♞hd1 ♙d4 21.♖ac1 ♞hd8 22.♙e1±

White's king is safe, while the bishops are starting to work.

13...0-0

This is not an improvement for Black.

14.cxd5!

This is the right moment to remove the tension in the centre.

14...♙xd5

After 14...exd5 White should calmly continue with 15.♙d3 and White's chances are clearly preferable: he can either carry out the e3-e4 advance, or create attacking

chances by pushing the g- and h-pawns. Premature would be 15.e4?! dxe4 16.fxe4 c5! with counterplay.

15.e4 ♙xc3 16.bxc3

This is very similar to our main line.

13...♙xg3?

This does not work because of:

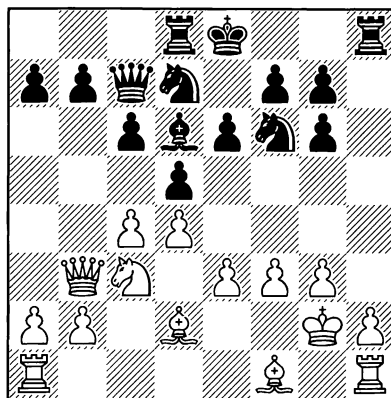
14.cxd5! exd5 15.hxg3 ♞xh1 16.♙xh1 ♗xg3 17.♙g2 0-0-0 18.♙g1

Black does not have enough resources to create something serious.

18...♞h8 19.♙e2 ♗h2† 20.♙f2 ♗h4† 21.♙f1 g5 22.♗a3 g4 23.♙e1

With a decisive advantage, V. Popov – Klimov, St Petersburg 2002.

And now I believe White could have played more strongly:



14.cxd5!N

In the game White played very safely, but still had the upper hand after 14.♙e1 0-0 15.♖c1 ♗b8 16.♙f2 ♖fe8 17.♙e2 ♙f8 18.♞hd1±, Karpov – Anand, Monaco (rapid) 2000.

14...♙xd5

After 14...exd5 White can reply 15.e4 with great effect: 15...dxe4 16.fxe4 ♙b6 17.♙e2 ♙e7 18.♙e3 and White has a dream position for this variation.

**15.e4 ♖xc3 16.bxc3**

The note starting with 13...0–0 leads to this position, with the difference that Black has played ...♗d8 instead of castling.

This is clearly a favourable position for White. He is better with his strong centre and bishop pair.

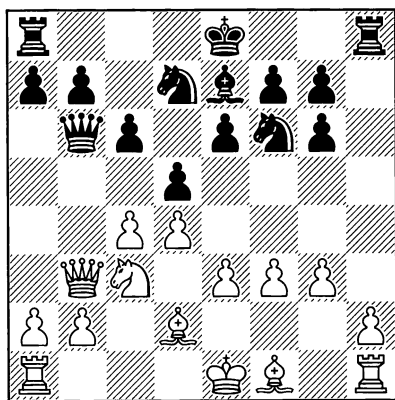
**16...c5 17.♙e2 ♜fc8 18.♜ac1 ♞b6 19.♙e3 cxd4 20.cxd4 ♞xb3 21.axb3±**

Rahman – Sharma, Dhaka 2004.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♖f3 ♖f6 4.e3 ♙f5 5.♖c3 e6 6.♖h4 ♙e4 7.f3 ♙g6 8.♞b3 ♞b6 9.♖xg6 hxg6 10.♙d2 ♖bd7 11.g3)

**B2) 11...♙e7**

I believe White can now try:

**12.0–0-0!N**

A natural decision, as I believe White's king is well placed on the queenside.

White has tried only:

12.♖f2

But again the strong

12...g5!

bothers me a lot.

13.♙e2

The alternative is 13.♖g2 g4 14.f4 (14.fxg4 ♖xg4 15.cxd5 cxd5! gives Black a very solid position) and now Black can easily improve his play with 14...♞c7 (instead of the awkward 14...♖g8? 15.f5! with advantage to White in Lindinger – Hector, Hamburg 2004) and I feel that White's king is shaky. For example, 15.♞c2 dxc4! 16.♙xc4 0–0–0 and Black will play ...c5 at a suitable moment; it seems Black is already better.

13...dxc4! 14.♙xc4 g4 15.f4!?

In my opinion this is a questionable positional decision. White should have played 15.fxg4 ♖xg4† 16.♖g2, but Black equalizes easily: 16...0–0–0 17.♙e2 ♖gf6 18.♞xb6 ♖xb6 19.♜ad1 c5=

In Tratar – Pankov, Plovdiv 2008, Black could now have played the natural:

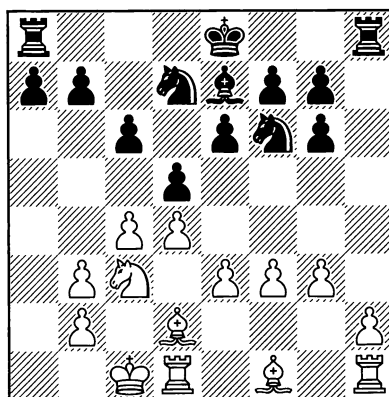
15...0–0–0

White's position looks very suspicious to me.

The following lines show my brief analysis of 12.0–0–0:

**12...♞xb3**

If 12...g5 White can favourably avoid a queen swap with 13.♞c2, while 13...g4 is met comfortably with 14.f4!±.

**13.axb3**

Well, this is not an optimal endgame, like we saw in the earlier game of Ivanchuk, but this endgame *is* an improved version of the 11.0–0–0 line, where Black managed to penetrate with his knight to the g3-square, fixing White's kingside pawns.

### 13...0–0–0

This is obviously better than castling short, as Black's rook is very active on the h-file.

### 14.♖c2

White cannot play 14.♙e2, as after 14...♞h3 Black creates the unpleasant threat of doubling rooks on the h-file.

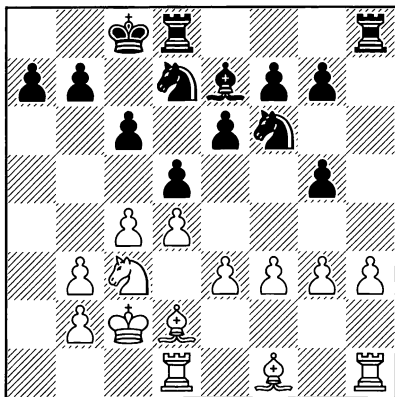
### 14...g5

This is a typical move for this variation: Black gains space on the kingside, and intends to play ...g4.

After 14...e5 White can use the moment to play 15.h4! ♙d6 (the point is that 15...g5 is met strongly by 16.dxe5 ♟xe5 17.♙h3†! with an advantage) 16.g4 ♟b8 17.♙d3± White is slightly better, thanks again to his bishop pair.

### 15.h3

I think this is the best solution for the h-pawn. Black is quite safe after 15.e4 dxe4 16.♟xe4 ♟xe4 17.fxex4 c5! 18.d5 ♟e5=.



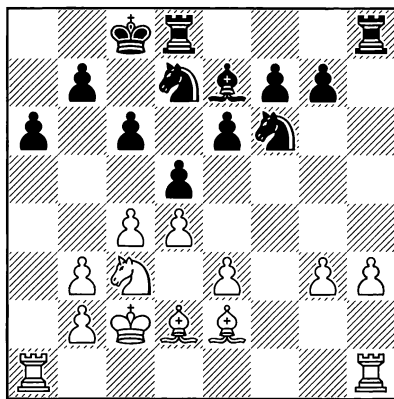
### 15...g4

After 15...♙d6 16.♞g1 e5 the play opens up in White's favour: 17.f4! exd4 18.exd4 gxf4 19.gxf4±

### 16.fxg4

Of course not 16.f4 ♙b4! and Black is absolutely fine, as his knight comes to e4.

### 16...♟xg4 17.♞a1 a6 18.♙e2 ♟gf6



Now 19.c5!? e5 20.♞af1± might be an interesting alternative, but I am not too keen on fixing the pawn structure.

### 19.♞af1±

Although Black's position is quite solid, White's chances are better, as he has a clear plan of pushing his kingside pawns with the support of his pair of bishops.

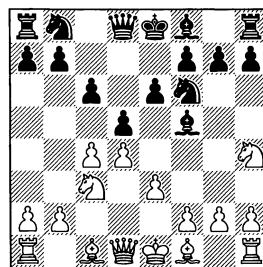
### Conclusion:

Recently 6...♙e4 has increased in popularity, because it leads to more complex play than the old favourite 6...♙g6. In my opinion White has to play very accurately in order to fight for an advantage, therefore I believe my fresh ideas might really help the reader.

# Chapter 21

## The Slav

### 6...♘g4 and 6...♘g6



## Variation Index

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.e3 ♕f5 5.♘c3 e6

6.♘h4

A) 6...♘g4 7.♖b3

A1) 7...♗b6

A2) 7...♗c7

B) 6...♘g6 7.♕e2 ♘bd7 8.0-0

B1) 8...dxc4

B2) 8...♘e4

B3) 8...♘e7

B4) 8...♘d6

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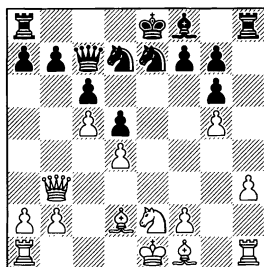
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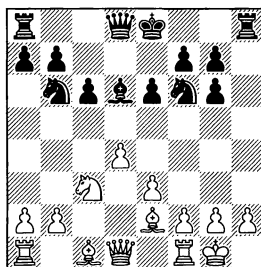
p 338

A1) After 17...♗c7



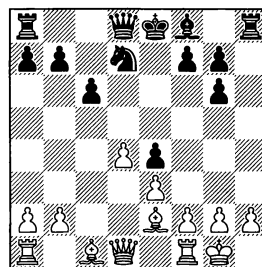
18.h4N

B1) 11...♘d6



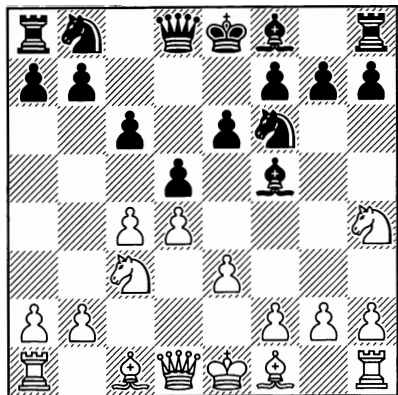
12.h3!N

B2) after 11...dxe4



12.d5!N

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♟f3 ♟f6 4.e3 ♟f5 5.♟c3  
e6 6.♟h4



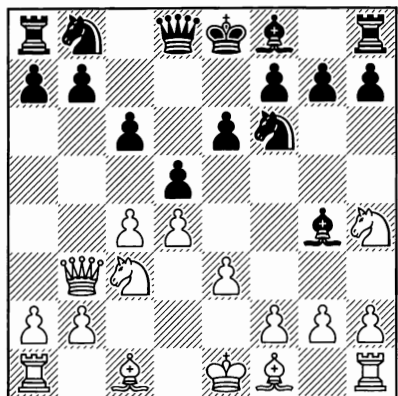
Our main line in this chapter is retreating the bishop to g6, but first we will look at A) 6...♟g4 and only then can we focus on B) 6...♟g6.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♟f3 ♟f6 4.e3 ♟f5 5.♟c3  
e6 6.♟h4)

A) 6...♟g4

Recently this continuation has been rarely played, as it seems to give White good chances for an advantage.

7.♞b3



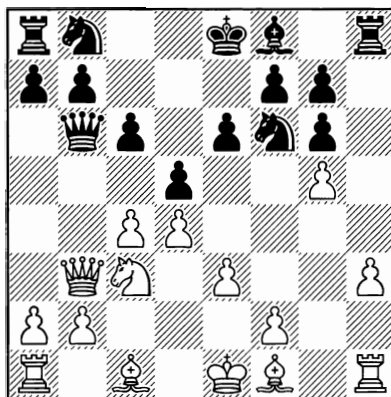
As always Black has two ways of defending b7-pawn, A1) 7...♞b6 and A2) 7...♞c7.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♟f3 ♟f6 4.e3 ♟f5 5.♟c3  
e6 6.♟h4 ♟g4 7.♞b3)

A1) 7...♞b6

This position also arises in my line against 4...♟g4, but with Black to move! Even then, I prefer White. The tempo makes a big difference and allows White to easily seize the initiative.

8.h3 ♟h5 9.g4 ♟g6 10.♟xg6 hxg6 11.g5!



This concrete approach looks very strong. As explained above, we can assume that White has gained more than enough time to make this work.

11...♟g8

The alternative is:

11...♟fd7

And now:

12.♞c2!

This looks to be very strong for White. Black has a serious problem with the coordination of his minor pieces; also his queen appears to be misplaced on b6.

12...♟e7

Black has also tried 12...♞d8 13.f4 dxc4

14.♙xc4 ♘b6. This is Lenic – Hrztica, Trieste 2008, and here the most precise would have been 15.♙e2 followed by ♙d2 and 0–0–0, with a very attractive position for White.

13.f4 ♘a6

So far we are following Iljin – Ferguson, Saint Vincent 2005. Now after the simple:

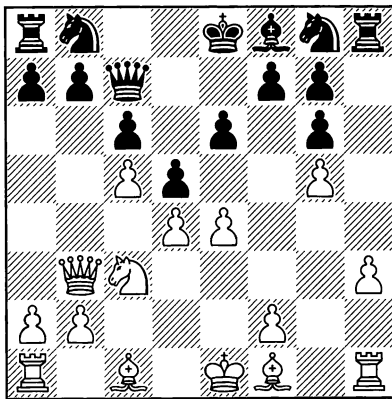
14.c5N ♙c7 15.♙d2±

This would have given White a clear edge, thanks to his space advantage.

12.c5 ♙c7

If 12...♙xb3 13.axb3 Black has no time to oppose White's main strategic idea of b4-b5.

13.e4



The point behind White's previous move. White is playing extremely energetically and it seems to me that Black faces serious problems.

13...♘d7

In this position Black has tried two other moves:

13...♘e7?!

This natural move runs into the strong:

14.♙f4 ♙xf4 15.♙xb7 dxe4 16.♘e2!

The most precise move, which drives away Black's queen from the h2-b8 diagonal.

16...♙f3 17.♙g1

Black is lost, Jovanic – Nikolov, Omis 2004.

13...♙h4 14.exd5 exd5 15.♘e2 ♘a6 16.♙g3 ♙h8

Also after 16...♙e4 17.♙g2 ♙xg3 18.fxg3 ♙e6 19.♙d2± White has a stable endgame advantage.

17.♙f4 ♙a5† 18.♙d2 ♙c7 19.h4! ♘e7

This position was reached in Dreev – Huebner, Essen 2000, and now White has a surprisingly strong plan:

20.♙d3!? ♘f5 21.h5!

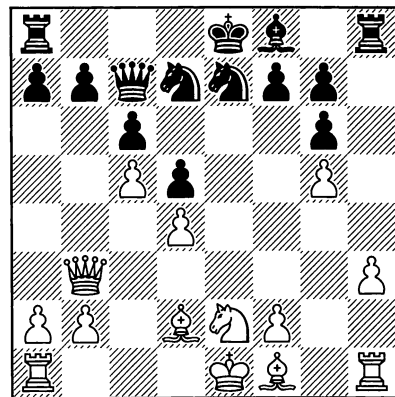
White is clearly better.

14.exd5 exd5 15.♘e2!

Renewing the idea of ♙f4.

15...♘e7 16.♙f4 ♙a5† 17.♙d2 ♙c7

At this point I offer an improvement:



18.h4N

The game we have followed so far is Dizdar – Mueller, Austria 2002, and it continued 18.♙f4 ♙a5† 19.♙d2 ♙c7 20.0–0–0 ♙h4 21.♙f4?! ♙xf4! 22.♙g3 ♘xc5 23.♙xf4 ♙xf4† 24.♘xf4 ♘e4☞ when Black had fine compensation for the exchange.

18...b6



I also analysed 18...♖f5 19.0-0-0 0-0-0 and now after 20.♞a3! Black has serious problems defending the a7-pawn. For example, 20...b6 21.♙f4 ♞b7 22.♘g3 and Black faces an unpleasant initiative.

### 19.♙f4 ♞d8 20.♙h3

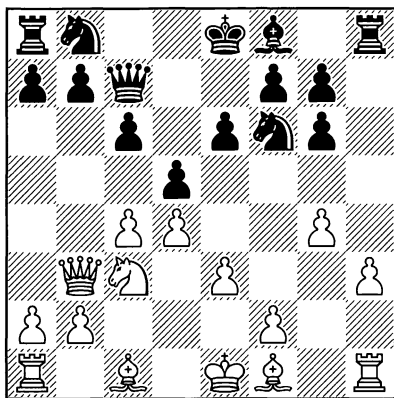
White's bishop pair is very strong and Black is struggling to hang on:

20...bxc5 21.♞b7 ♘f5 22.♙xf5 gxf5  
23.♞xc6±

White's advantage is beyond dispute.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.e3 ♙f5 5.♘c3 e6 6.♘h4 ♙g4 7.♞b3)

A2) 7...♞c7 8.h3 ♙h5 9.g4 ♙g6 10.♘xg6  
hgx6



### 11.♙g2 ♘bd7

And now I like the active:

### 12.g5

This forces Black to make a choice.

### 12...dxc4

The other way is:

### 12...♘h5

But in this case Black's knight is temporarily cut off from play on h5.

13.♙d2 ♘b6 14.cxd5 exd5 15.0-0-0 ♙e7  
16.h4 0-0

If 16...0-0-0 17.♙b1± White's chances are preferable.

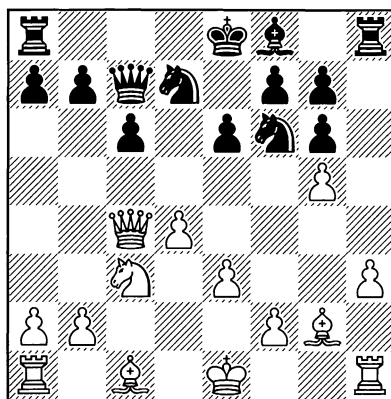
17.♙b1 ♘c4 18.♙c1 b5

This position is from the game Lupu – Bonnet, Paris 2002, and now White should have played:

19.♞c2 ♞d7 20.e4

With the better chances.

### 13.♞xc4



### 13...♘b6

The obvious alternative is:

13...♘d5 14.♙d2 ♙d6

Black has also tried 14...♘xc3 and here of course White should recapture with the pawn, strengthening his pawn structure in the centre. 15.bxc3N (15.♙xc3 ♘b6 16.♞e2 ♘d5 was fine for Black in Savchenko – Yagupov, Ubeda 1998) 15...♙e7 16.f4 0-0-0 17.♙b1 ♘b6 18.♞b3 White's chances are much better thanks to his strong pawn centre and the possibility of developing serious play on the queenside.

15.♙c1

15.♘e4!? comes into serious consideration as well. 15...0-0-0 16.0-0-0 ♙b8 17.♙b1 with better chances for White.

15...♞d8?!

A strange move. Better would have been 15...♖xc3, though in this case White keeps his advantage after 16.bxc3!.

16.♖e4 ♙e7 17.h4 ♖b6 18.b4!±

White is clearly better, thanks to his space advantage and bishop pair, Hillarp Persson – Ziegler, Gothenburg 2000.

14.♖b3 ♖fd5 15.♖e2

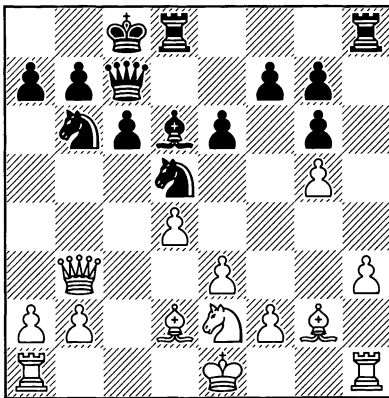
White is not afraid of a check on b4; on the other hand he could easily have started with 15.♙d2.

15...♙d6

It is not entirely clear what Black achieves in the event of 15...♙b4† 16.♖f1.

16.♙d2 0–0–0

If 16...a5 17.a3 a4 18.♖c2 it is dangerous for Black to castle long: 18...0–0–0 19.♙a5 and the previous advance of Black's a-pawn now makes no sense.



17.a4

White seizes the initiative on the queenside.

17...♖b8 18.a5 ♖c8 19.h4 a6?

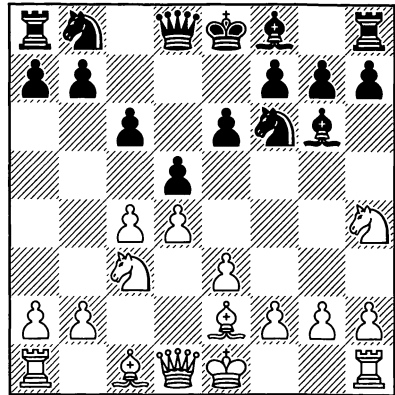
A serious mistake, but Black's position was very unpleasant anyway.

20.e4! ♖f4 21.♙xf4 ♙xf4 22.e5+–

Black lost his bishop, Koneru – Goriachnik, Differdange 2007.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♖f3 ♖f6 4.e3 ♙f5 5.♖c3 e6 6.♖h4)

B) 6...♙g6 7.♙e2



7...♖bd7

Black very rarely opts for any other move in this position, nevertheless we shall have a quick look:

7...dxc4

A relatively new move that has occurred only twice in tournament practice.

8.♖xg6 hxg6 9.♙xc4 ♖bd7

Another line is 9...a6 10.♙e2 c5 11.dxc5

♖xd1† 12.♙xd1 ♙xc5 13.♙f3 ♖c6.

Generally speaking this position, from Lysyj – Volkov, Serpukhov 2007, is exactly what White is aiming to get in this variation: a pleasant risk-free endgame with the two bishops, so I believe after 14.♙d2± White has an excellent game.

10.♙d2 ♖c7

And now I believe White can improve his play with:

11.h3!±N

Black had a normal game after 11.g3 ♖b6

12.♙e2 e5 13.dxe5 ♖xe5 14.♖c2 0–0–0

15.0–0–0 ♖e6= in Khismatullin – Motylev, Novokuznetsk 2008.

11...♟b6 12.♙e2 e5 13.dxe5 ♖xe5 14.♖b3

White's position looks preferable to me, for example:

14...♙c5

Or 14...♙d6 15.a4 ♜b8 16.a5 ♟bd5 17.♟xd5 ♟xd5 18.♙f3± and White has a pleasant edge.

15.0–0–0 0–0 16.g4 a5 17.♖c2 a4 18.a3

White is better.

7...♟e4?!

This move looks premature because of:

8.♟xg6 ♟xc3 9.bxc3 hxg6 10.♖b3

White clearly has the better chances. I will offer an example:

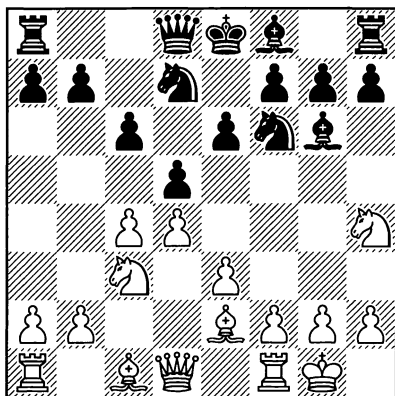
10...♖c7 11.♜b1 b6 12.cxd5 exd5 13.c4 dxc4 14.♙xc4 b5 15.♙e2 ♜xh2 16.♜xh2 ♖xh2

And here, in the game Kveinys – Zilinskas, Panevezys 2008, White missed a good opportunity:

17.♙xb5! N cxb5 18.♖d5 ♖h1† 19.♟d2 ♖h4 20.♖xa8 ♖xf2† 21.♟c3 b4† 22.♟b3±

Black does not have compensation for the exchange.

8.0–0



This is an important crossroads for Black.

He can choose between **B1) 8...dxc4!?**, **B2) 8...♟e4**, **B3) 8...♙e7** and **B4) 8...♙d6**.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♟f3 ♟f6 4.e3 ♙f5 5.♟c3 e6 6.♟h4 ♙g6 7.♙e2 ♟bd7 8.0–0)

**B1) 8...dxc4!?**

This is an interesting idea that was first employed by one of Kramnik's seconds, Alexander Motylev.

9.♟xg6

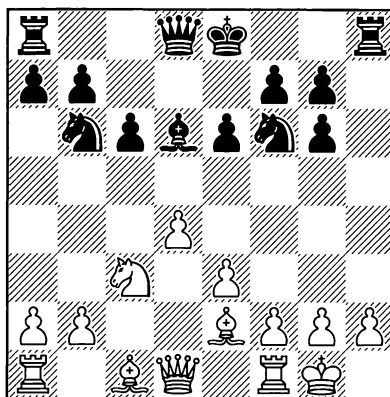
I believe White has to capture on g6, as after 9.♙xc4 Black's bishop has an opportunity to escape, 9...♙h5!, leaving White's knight on the edge of the board. Black would then have very good play.

9...hxg6 10.♙xc4 ♟b6 11.♙e2

This is the best place for the light-squared bishop. White has also tried 11.♙b3, but Black obtained a comfortable game after 11...♙d6 12.g3 e5 in Kuzubov – Wang Hao, Gibraltar 2008.

11...♙d6

Here my suggestion would be:



12.h3!±N

White achieved nothing after 12.g3 e5

(12...♞d7!?, followed by castling long, also comes into consideration) 13.♟f3 0–0 14.a4 exd4 15.exd4 ♞d7 with equality in Iljin – Motylev, Sochi 2007.

### 12...e5 13.a4 0–0

There are a few other moves:

13...e4?! allows White to seize the initiative after 14.♞c2 ♞e7 15.a5 ♖bd5 16.a6!.

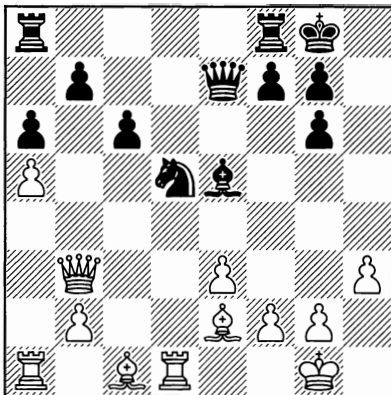
13...exd4 14.♞xd4 ♞e7 15.a5 ♟e5 16.♞d1 ♞d8 17.♞b3 ♖bd5 18.♖xd5 ♖xd5 19.♟d2± leads to the same type of position as in the main line.

13...a5 14.dxe5 ♟xe5 15.♞b3 0–0 16.♞d1 ♞c7 17.♟d2 ♞fd8 18.♟e1± White is slightly better because of his bishops.

### 14.a5 ♖bd5 15.♖xd5 ♖xd5

After 15...cxd5 16.dxe5 ♟xe5 17.♞b3 ♞d7 18.♟d2± White chances are preferable, again thanks to his bishop pair.

### 16.dxe5 ♟xe5 17.♞b3 ♞e7 18.♞d1 a6

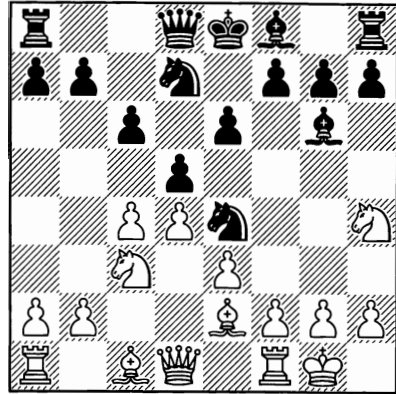


### 19.♟f3 ♞ad8 20.♟d2±

I believe the bishop pair secures White's advantage, though Black's position remains pretty sound.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♖f3 ♖f6 4.e3 ♟f5 5.♖c3 e6 6.♖h4 ♟g6 7.♟e2 ♖bd7 8.0–0)

### B2) 8...♖e4



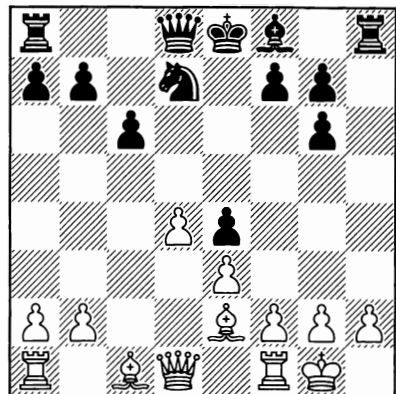
This is the latest brand: the text was introduced by Shirov and has given Black a 100% score (OK, it is just out of 2 games).

### 9.♖xg6

Shirov's game continued 9.g3 ♖d6! with very complicated play, Inarkiev – Shirov, Sochi 2008.

### 9...hxg6 10.cxd5 exd5 11.♖xe4 dxe4

Here I believe the natural move is best:



**12.d5!N**

This allows White to fight for an advantage.

12.h3 was played in the game, but Black had an excellent position after 12...♙d6 13.♙d2 ♘f6 14.♖b3 ♗d7 15.f4 exf3 16.♙xf3 ♙c7 17.♖ac1 0–0 18.♙b4 ♖fe8 in Malakhov – Predojevic, Sibenik 2008.

**12...♗c5**

This strange looking move may in fact be Black's best option.

The alternatives are:

12...♙d6 13.g3 ♘f6 14.dxc6 bxc6 15.♖a4 ♗d7 16.♖d1! White will play ♙f1, depriving Black of his only active idea, which is ...♖h3. Then Black's weak pawns and White's bishop pair should guarantee a clear advantage.

12...♗e5 13.dxc6 ♙d6 14.g3 ♘xc6 (14...bxc6 15.♖a4! f5 16.b3 0–0 17.♙b2±) 15.♖a4 ♖e7 16.♙b5 ♖c8 17.♙d2 0–0 18.♖ac1 and White is better.

**13.dxc6 bxc6 14.h3**

Only this subtle move gives White good chances of an advantage.

14.♗xd8† ♖xd8 and Black's knight has a nice outpost on d3.

14.♖c2 allows 14...♖xh2! 15.♗xh2 ♖h4† 16.♗g1 ♙d6 17.f4. The only way to continue fighting. (17.g3 ♙xg3=) 17...exf3 18.♖xf3 ♖h2† 19.♗f2 ♖h4† 20.g3 ♙xg3† 21.♖xg3 ♗e4† 22.♖xe4† ♖xe4 23.♙d2 0–0–0 This position is too difficult to evaluate.

**14...♙d6 15.b4 ♗d3**

If 15...♙e5 16.♖b1 ♖xd1 17.♖xd1 ♗a4 then it appears that 18...♗c3 is not a strong idea and with the subtle 18.♗f1! f6 (after 18...♗c3

19.♙b2! Black in trouble) 19.♙d2 0–0–0 20.♙e1 ♖xd1 21.♖xd1 ♗c7 22.♖c1! White gains a pleasant edge in the endgame thanks to his bishops.

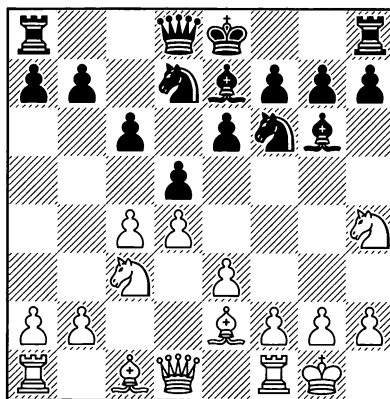
**16.♙xd3 exd3 17.♙b2 0–0**

The other option is clearly worse: 17...♙xb4 18.♖a4 ♗d6 19.a3 ♙c5 20.♙xg7 ♖h5 21.♖e4† ♗d7 22.♙d4 ♙xd4 23.exd4± ♖d5 24.♖xd3 ♖xd4 25.♖a6± In the best case Black is going to lose his c6-pawn.

**18.♖b3±**

Black faces a difficult defence.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♗f3 ♗f6 4.e3 ♙f5 5.♗c3 e6 6.♗h4 ♙g6 7.♙e2 ♗bd7 8.0–0)

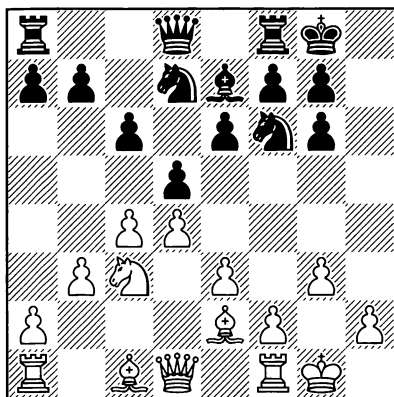
**B3) 8...♙e7****9.g3**

I definitely prefer not to open the h-file while Black still has a rook on h8, though in the following encounter White obtained a comfortable position after: 9.♗xg6 hxg6 10.b3 ♖c7 11.g3 a6 (I believe Black should play 11...0–0–0 trying to use the open h-file) 12.♙b2 0–0 13.♖c1 ♖ac8 14.♗g2 ♖b8 15.f4± Svetushkin – M. Gurevich, Montpellier 2008.

**9...0–0**

Black has also tried 9...♙c7, but after 10.♙d2 ♗e4 11.♗xg6 ♗xc3 12.bxc3 hxcg6 13.♙b3 0-0 14.cxd5 exd5 15.c4 dxc4 16.♙xc4± White had a clear edge in Prakash – Sriram, Kolkata 2008.

### 10.♗xg6 hxg6 11.b3



White's plan is to arrange his pieces comfortably and be ready for the position opening up. White has great statistics from this position and this is one of the reasons Black players often prefer 8...♙d6.

### 11...a6

Black has tried various moves:

11...♙b4 This looks senseless to me, as Black's bishop has nothing to do on b4. 12.♙b2 ♙e7 13.a3 ♙xc3 14.♙xc3± White was obviously better with his pair of bishops in Tkachiev – Willemze, Turkey 2007.

### 11...♙e8 12.♙b2 ♙f8

This is quite a passive set-up that gives White a comfortable edge.

### 13.♙c2 ♙a5 14.a3 dxc4 15.bxc4 e5 16.c5!?

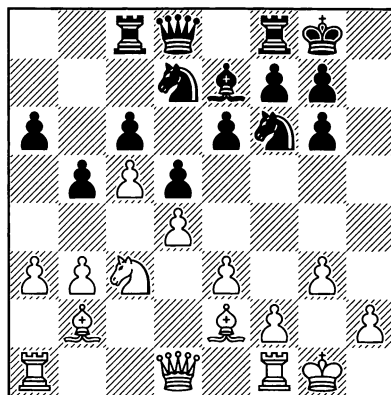
An interesting idea: White is aiming to play ♙c4 and then it is not so clear how Black can defend against the threat of ♙xg6.

### 16...exd4 17.exd4 ♗d5 18.♗xd5 cxd5 19.♙ab1

### ♗f6 20.♙c1

White had a clear positional advantage in Gajewski – Dziuba, Lublin 2008.

### 12.♙b2 ♙c8 13.a3 b5 14.c5



### 14...♙e8

Now White is ready to start his play on the queenside with b4 followed by a4. I believe this kind of position is very important for the understanding of this line, so I decided to check Black's other options:

### 14...e5

White is ready to meet this with:

### 15.dxe5 ♗xe5 16.♗xd5!

Less convincing is 16.♗xb5 axb5 17.♙xe5 ♙xc5.

### 16...♗xd5 17.♙xe5 ♙xc5 18.♙b2

White keeps up the pressure, for example:

### 18...♙e7 19.♙c2 ♙d6 20.♙fd1 ♙e5 21.♙xe5 ♙xe5 22.♙ac1±

### 14...a5

The idea of closing the queenside does not work, as after:

### 15.b4 a4

White has a strong sacrifice:

### 16.♗xb5! cxb5 17.♙xb5

White's three pawns on the queenside look extremely dangerous.

**15.b4 ♖c7**

15...a5 allows White to favourably open up the queenside with 16.a4! axb4 17.♟a2.

**16.a4 e5 17.♙f3**

An interesting concept: White wants to force Black to play ...e5-e4, then White will get easy play on the queenside.

**17...♟f8**

There is another option:

**17...e4**

This looks quite principled.

**18.♙e2**

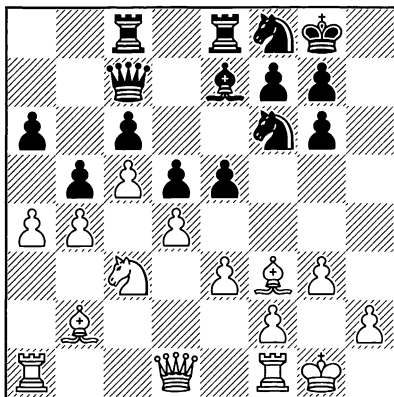
White's bishop is better placed on e2 rather than on g2: 18.♙g2 ♟f8 19.f3 exf3 20.♖xf3 ♙d8 leads to a double-edged position.

**18...♖b8**

If 18...♟f8 White can sacrifice on b5: 19.axb5 axb5 20.♟xb5! cxb5 21.♙xb5 ♖ed8 22.♙e2 ♟e6 23.b5 with an advantage.

19.axb5 axb5 20.♖b3 ♟f8 21.♙a6 ♟e6 22.♖fa1 ♖c8 23.♖d1

Preventing Black's possible counterplay connected with ...♟g5.

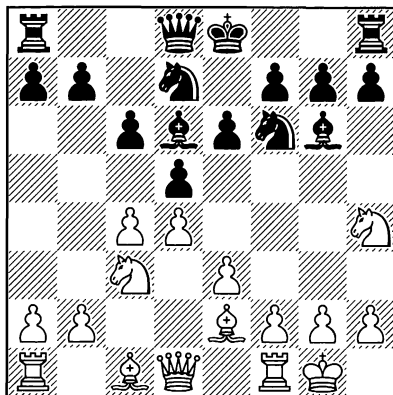
**18.axb5!N**

This move is much stronger than 18.♙g2 ♟d7 19.axb5 axb5 20.♙xd5 cxd5 21.♟xd5 ♖b7 with unclear play in Wang Yue – Nguyen, Beijing 2008.

**18...axb5 19.♟xb5 cxb5 20.dxe5 ♟d7 21.♖xd5 ♟e6 22.♙a6±**

White obviously has the initiative.

**(1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♟f3 ♟f6 4.e3 ♙f5 5.♟c3 e6 6.♟h4 ♙g6 7.♙e2 ♟bd7 8.0-0)**

**B4) 8...♙d6****9.g3**

As usual, waiting for Black to castle short before capturing on g6.

**9...0-0**

This is clearly Black's first choice, but Black has occasionally opted for other moves:

**9...♖e7 10.♖b3 ♖b8**

And here I believe White should play the flexible:

**11.♖d1N**

White has tried 11.♙d2, but this allows 11...♟e4! 12.♟xe4 ♙xe4 13.f3 ♙g6 with unclear play, Vladimirov – Nei, Moscow 1963.

**11...0-0**

11...♙h5 but White has the strong 12.♙xh5 ♟xh5 13.e4! with the advantage.

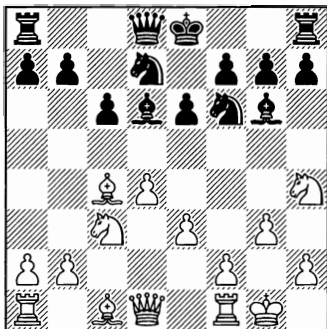
11...♟e4 12.f3 ♟xc3 13.bxc3 0-0 14.♟xg6 hxg6 15.♙d2 leaves White with a pleasant edge.

12.♟xg6 hxg6 13.♞c2

This position will be examined in the main line.

9...dxc4 10.♟xc4

We already know (from 8...dxc4) that Black is fine after 10.♟xg6 hxg6 11.♟xc4 ♟b6 12.♟b3 e5.



At this point it makes sense to split in three.

a) 10...♟b6 11.♟e2 0–0 12.♟xg6 hxg6 13.e4

White starts very energetic play, which is typical of Topalov's style. I would prefer the more positional 13.♞b3! N e5 14.dxe5 ♟xe5 15.a4 ♞c7 16.a5 ♟bd7 17.♟d2 ♞ad8 18.♞fd1± and I believe White has slightly better chances in this kind of position, thanks to his bishop pair.

13...e5 14.f4 exd4 15.♞xd4 ♞e7

This position was reached in Topalov – Kramnik, Elista (playoff rapid 3) 2006, and now, as correctly pointed out by Marin, White should have played:

16.♟e3 ♞ad8 17.e5 ♞fe8 18.♟f2

Although I am not sure about the position that arises after:

18...♟b4 19.♞e3 g5!

b) 10...0–0 11.♟xg6 hxg6

This position occurred in Grachev – Najer, Moscow 2008, and it seems to me White should have played:

12.♞c2

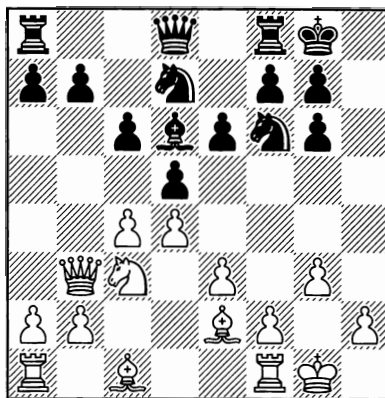
Temporarily preventing Black's idea of playing ...e5.

12...c5 13.dxc5 ♟xc5 14.♞d1 ♞e7 15.♟d2 ♞ac8 16.♞ac1 a6 17.♞b1

I believe this type of position is favourable for White, obviously due to his bishops.

c) 10...♟h5 is met well with 11.f3! N. I think this is the reason why Kramnik refrained from this standard move. The weaker 11.♟e2 ♟xe2 12.♞xe2 c5 looked OK for Black in Likavsky – Cheng, Ottawa 2007.

10.♟xg6 hxg6 11.♞b3!?



Usually White opts for 11.b3, but I find the text quite interesting. There are not so many games, but it looks like White has good chances to fight for the advantage. The idea behind White's last move is to gain time attacking the b7-pawn and to develop his rook to d1, where it will complicate Black's possible advances in the centre.

11...♞b8

The alternatives are:

11...♞b6 12.♞d1

I like this move the most:

Premature would be 12.♞c2 dxc4 13.♟xc4



c5! 14.dxc5 ♖xc5 15.♗e2 ♜e5 and Black has active play.

12...♗xb3

Probably Black should try something else here, as the arising endgame is clearly better for White.

13.axb3 ♜e4 14.f3 ♜xc3 15.bxc3

White's flexible pawn structure gives him a clear edge.

15...a6 16.cxd5 exd5 17.e4 ♜fe8 18.e5 ♗c7 19.f4

With a solid advantage for White in Lysyj – Gundavaa, Novokuznetsk 2008.

11...♗c7 12.♞d1 a6 13.♗c2 dxc4 14.♗xc4 c5 15.dxc5 ♜xc5 16.♗d2

This is the typical position for the whole line. In my opinion, if White manages to arrange his pieces well, avoiding swapping one of his bishops, he has good chances to have persistent pressure.

16...♞ac8 17.♞ac1 ♗b8

I believe the most precise here is:

18.♗b1!?N

18.a4 occurred in Schandorff – Vaznonis, Valby 2008, but I do not like weakening the b4-square.

18...b5 19.♗f1 ♜fd8 20.♜e2!

Creating the idea of ♗a5.

20...♗b6 21.♗g2±

I think White has a not so big but quite stable plus.

12.♞d1 ♗e7

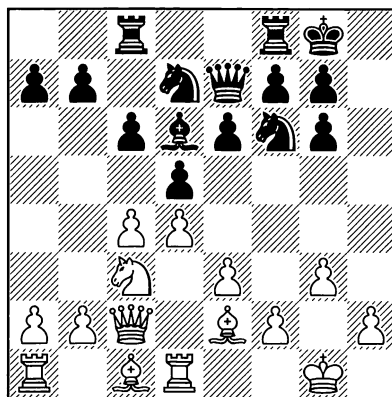
Another option is 12...dxc4 13.♗xc4 ♗e7, as was played in Likavsky – Huzman, Montreal 2007. I think White should have continued: 14.♗d2N e5 15.dxe5 ♜xe5 16.♗a4 a6 (or 16...b5 17.♗c2±) 17.♜e4! ♜xe4 18.♗xe4± White has the traditional two bishops edge.

12...♜e4 does not make much sense, as White can simply play 13.f3 ♜xc3 14.bxc3 ♗c7 15.♝g2 maintaining his advantage.

13.♗c2

White's queen has completed its work on b3 and now takes control of the e4-square, at the same time supporting a possible advance of the e-pawn.

13...♞bc8



14.♗d2!?N

I believe White should not define his central position, but just continue his development.

Premature would be 14.e4, as it allows Black to equalize after 14...♜xe4 15.♜xe4 dxe4 16.♗xe4 ♜f6 17.♗c2 c5=.

Another thematic idea is 14.c5 ♗c7 15.f4, which was played in Lysyj – Ol. Ivanov, Moscow 2008, but after 15...♗a5!, fighting for the e4-square, I do not believe White has anything special.

14...e5

I also examined other options:

14...♜fd8

Now White can carry out one of his main positional ideas in this line:

15.c5!? ♗c7 16.f4 ♗a5

As now he has:

17.♜b1!

Maintaining control over the e4-square.

17...♙xd2 18.♘xd2±

14...dxc4

Probably this is Black's best option.

15.♙xc4 c5 16.dxc5 ♘xc5 17.♖ac1

Only not 17.♘b5 ♙b8 18.♙b4 a6 19.♘c3 ♙d6= and Black will swap the dark-squared bishops next with ...♘ce4.

17...a6 18.♗b1±

We have reached a thematic position for this variation with a slight advantage for White.

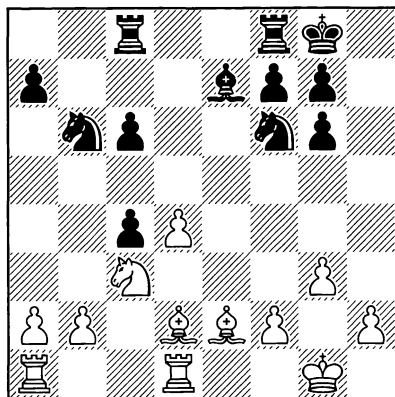
**15.♗b3!**

15.cxd5 cxd5 16.♗b3 exd4 17.♘xd5 ♘xd5  
18.♗xd5 ♙c5 is just equal.

**15...exd4 16.exd4 dxc4**

If 16...♘e4 White has the strong 17.♙f1!  
♘xd2 18.♙xd2 dxc4 19.♗xb7 ♘b6 20.♗a6±  
and Black loses the c4-pawn.

**17.♗xb7 ♘b6 18.♗xe7 ♙xe7**



**19.♙f3 ♖fd8 20.♘e2**

The arising endgame is favourable for White, thanks to the bishop pair and Black's weak c-pawns.

## Conclusion:

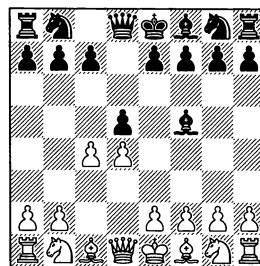
As in many of the lines in this book, White is mainly relying on the two bishops as a method of gaining the upper hand. I think I have found some good ideas, such as 12.h3!?N, 18.axb5!N and 14.♙d2!?, but only practical tests will show if this is sufficient. The positions we find in this chapter are on the cutting edge of the theory of the Slav and will certainly develop in the near future.



# Chapter 22

## Queen's Gambit

2...♗f5



### Variation Index

1.d4 d5 2.c4 ♗f5

3.cxd5 ♗xb1 4.♖a4† c6 5.dxc6! ♘xc6 6.♞xb1

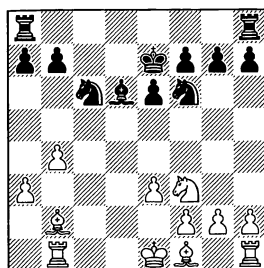
A) 6...♞xd4

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B) 6...e5

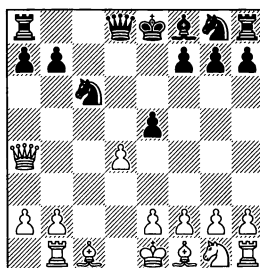
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A) after 12...♘e7



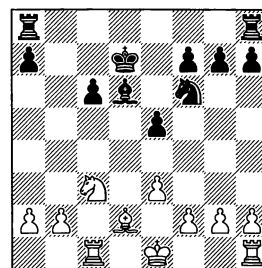
13.g3!?

B) after 6...e5



7.♗d2!

B) after 14.♘c3



a small edge

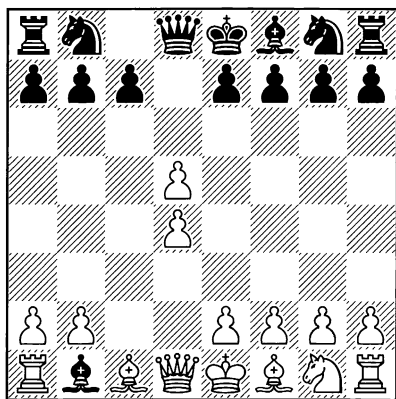
**1.d4 d5 2.c4 ♖f5**

This is certainly not a popular continuation, but White must know how to react to it in order to fight for an opening advantage. Obviously Black's idea is to catch White unprepared; we will be ready.

It should be said that 2...♟f6?! is poor. Here is just one example: 3.cxd5 ♟xd5 (3...♞xd5 4.♟c3 ♞d8 5.♟f3 transposes) 4.♟f3! (4.e4 ♟f6 5.♟c3 e5 would allow Black counterplay) 4...♟f6 5.♟c3 ♟bd7 6.e4 e6 7.♙d3 ♙e7 8.0-0 White controls the centre and has a clear plus. 8...a6 9.♙e1 b6 10.e5 ♟d5 11.♟xd5 exd5 12.♞c2 c5 13. e6 and White was winning in Kasparov – Scamps, Simul 1999.

**3.cxd5**

White's main alternative is 3.♞b3 e5! with extremely complicated play. Black sacrifices one and very often two pawns for the initiative: exactly the kind of position Black hopes to get after choosing 2...♙f5.

**3...♙xb1**

The point of the whole variation.

3...♞xd5? is absolutely worthless after 4.♟c3, followed by e2-e4 winning another tempo, with a great advantage for White.

**4.♞a4†**

White's best continuation.

**4...c6**

Other options are clearly worse:

4...♞d7 5.♞xd7† ♟xd7 6.♙xb1 ♟gf6

Black regains the pawn, but White keeps a clear edge in this endgame, thanks to his space and two bishops.

7.♟f3

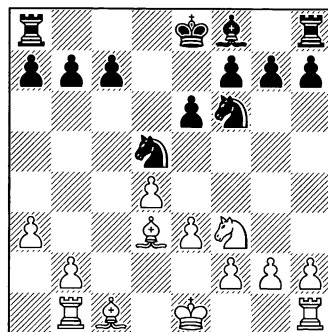
Only one of several options, but in my opinion the most natural one. 7.♙d2 ♟b6 8.f3 deserves serious attention as well.

7...♟b6 8.e3

8.g3!? also comes into consideration.

8...♟bx d5 9.♙d3 e6 10.a3

10.♟e2!? is interesting as well.



This position has occurred twice in tournament practice, and in both cases White achieved a clear advantage:

a) 10...♙e7 11.e4 ♟b6 12.♟e2 ♟fd7 (12...c5 13.dxc5 ♙xc5 14.♙f4 is better for White) 13.♙e3 0-0 14.♙hc1 c6 15.g4! A good positional move: White prevents ...f7-f5, at the same time gaining some space on the kingside. White's chances are clearly better, Drasko – Petrovic, Tivat 1995.

b) 10...c5 11.e4 ♟b6 Lazarev – Brochet, Nice 1999, and here I like 12.dxc5 ♙xc5 13.b4 ♙e7 14.♟e2 0-0 15.♙b2 with a nice advantage.

4...♘d7?! 5.♙xb1 ♘gf6 6.♗b5?!

Probably White has other interesting options.

6...♗b8 7.♘f3 a6 8.♗d3 ♘xd5 9.e4

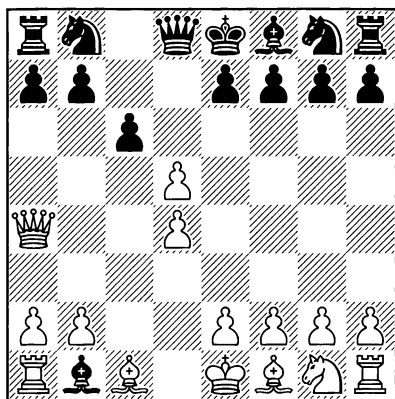
9.♙d2 e6 10.b4 looks very tempting as well.

9...♘5b6

9...♘b4 10.♗b3 e6 11.a3 ♘c6 12.♙e3±

10.b4 e6 11.g3 ♙e7 12.♗c2 0–0 13.♙h3 ♗e8 14.0–0

White has achieved a dream position out of the opening with a strong centre and the two bishops, Dinev – Organdziev, Skopje 2007.



### 5.dxc6!

In my opinion, the most unpleasant choice for Black. White gets a pleasant and stable edge in every line; Black is unable to achieve the main goal of this variation – to complicate the game.

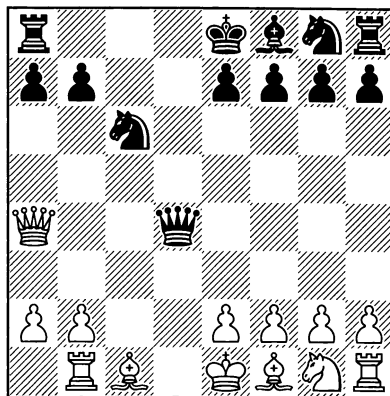
Before working on this book I wanted to play the following line as White: 5.♙xb1 ♗xd5 6.♘f3 ♘d7, but I finally came to the conclusion that things are not so simple there.

### 5...♘xc6 6.♙xb1

And now there is an important crossroads. Black can either play **A) 6...♗xd4** and defend a worse ending, or **B) 6...e5** looking for complications.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 ♙f5 3.cxd5 ♙xb1 4.♗a4† c6 5.dxc6! ♘xc6 6.♙xb1)

### A) 6...♗xd4



### 7.♗xd4 ♘xd4 8.e3

8.♘f3 ♘c2†! 9.♘d1 ♘b4 10.♙d2 e6 11.e3 a6=

### 8...♘c6

8...♘c2?! does not look serious. After 9.♘d1 ♘b4 10.♙b5† ♘c6 11.♙xc6†! bxc6 12.♘f3 ♘f6 13.♙e2 ♗d8 14.♙d2 e6 15.♗hc1 c5 16.♗c4 White is clearly better due to Black's perpetually weak pawns on a7 and c5, Ornstein – Sylejman, Stockholm 1994.

### 9.b4?!

Probably White has other interesting options, but I like the text, which first of all prevents all Black's possible jumps to the b4-square either with his bishop or knight. Secondly, White gains some space on the queenside and restricts the activity of Black's bishop.

### 9...e6 10.a3 ♙d6 11.♘f3

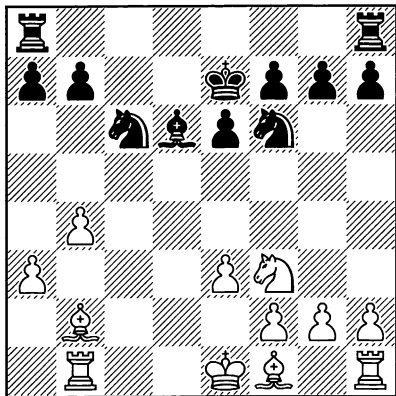
Certainly White should avoid the exchange of dark-squared bishops after 11.♙b2 ♙e5!.

### 11...♘f6

11...♘ge7 12.♙b2 f6 13.♙d3 with an advantage for White.

**12.♙b2 ♖e7**

12...0-0 13.g3 ♜ac8 14.♙g2 ♜d5 15.♙e2 is also better for White, Bodiřoga – Popovic, Sremska Mitrovica 2006.

**13.g3!?**

A very interesting concept. White takes the time to develop his light-squared bishop to a more active position on g2. Obviously White is also better after 13.♙d3 ♜hd8 14.♙e2± as in Izeta Txabarri – Gervasio, France 1999.

**13...♜ac8 14. ♙g2 ♜hd8 15.♙e2±**

This position first occurred in Ehlvest – Rausis, Riga 1995; a few more games have since tested it further. The evaluation is quite clear to me: White has a pleasant long-term advantage where he can play for a win without any risk thanks to his bishop pair and space advantage. Black faces a full game of suffering with a draw as his uninspiring goal.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 ♙f5 3.cxd5 ♙xb1 4.♞a4† c6 5.dxc6! ♜xc6 6.♞xb1)

**B) 6...e5**

This is hoping in the spirit of this variation, as Black is hoping for complications. However, White will eventually be better after handling the situation correctly, returning the pawn, but gaining positional advantages.

**7.♙d2!**

Clearly White's best move, as Black was threatening an unpleasant 7...♙b4†.

**7...♞xd4**

Black can keep the queens on the board as well.

**7...exd4**

But after

**8.g3**

White has a clear advantage because of his strong light-squared bishop.

**8...♙c5**

Dubious is 8...♞d5, when 9.♜f3 ♙c5 (9...b5?! 10.♞b3 [10.♞d1 ♞xa2 11.♙g2 is very good as well] 10...♞xb3 11.axb3 ♙d6 12.♙g2 ♜d8 13.0-0 ♜ge7 14.♞fc1 0-0 15.♞a1 was almost winning for White in Shipov – Shemeakin, Yalta 1995) 10.♙g2 ♜ge7 11.0-0 0-0 12.b4 ♙b6 13.b5 ♜d8 14.♞fd1 is much better for White, due to his strong bishops, A. Hoffman – Sanchez Aller, Sanxenxo 2006.

**9.♙g2 ♜ge7 10.♜h3**

A very nice manoeuvre; the white knight will be placed extremely well on f4.

The natural 10.♜f3 is good too. One example saw: 10...0-0?! (also bad is 10...d3? 11.♜e5! and White wins material, however, better was 10...♙b6) 11.b4 ♙b6 12.b5 ♜b8 13.0-0 and Black soon lost the d4-pawn in Skomorokhin – Beznosikov, Yaroslavl 1995.

**10...0-0**

After 10...d3 11.♞c4! Black is losing a pawn.

**11.♜f4**

The position somewhat resembles the Tarrasch Defence with one huge difference: Black is missing his light-squared bishop. This alone secures White a clear advantage.

It should be said that White has opted more often for 11.0-0, but the evaluation is more or less the same.

**11...♞c8 12.♞c1**

12.0–0 is good as well.

12...♙b4

The exchange of the dark-squared bishops does not bring relief.

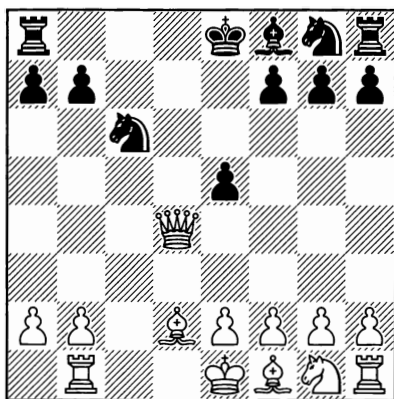
12...♙b6 13.0–0 is positionally clearly better for White.

Several games have been played in this line. At times Black holds, but this does not change the assessment. White has a clear long-term edge and Black has to defend very passively. Even if the result is not a win on every occasion, the prospects for Black are still grim.

13.♙xb4 ♖xb4 14.0–0 ♖bc6 15.♗b5 ♗b6 16.♗xb6 axb6 17.♞c4±

Lehner – Posch, Vienna 1998.

8.♗xd4



8...♖xd4

Or Black can try:

8...exd4

The endgame after this move is even more difficult for Black.

9.g3

White's plan is similar to his play after 7...exd4.

9...♙c5

9...g6 10.♙g2 ♖ge7 was tried in Mikhalevski – Keles, Yerevan 1997. Here White should have continued 11.♖h3 ♙g7 12.♖f4 with a

clear edge thanks to his queenside pressure.

Once again the exchange of dark-squared bishops does not help Black: 9...♙b4 10.♙g2 ♙xd2† 11.♖xd2 ♖f6 12.♖h3 ♗d8 13.♞hc1 ♗d6 14.b4 a6 15.b5 Black soon lost the d4-pawn in Kruppa – Eliet, Cappelle la Grande 2000.

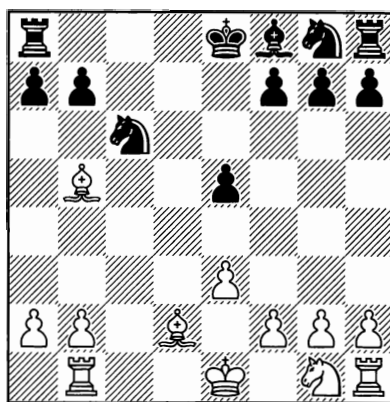
10.♙g2 ♙b6

10...♖ge7 11.♖h3 a5 12.♖f4 with a pleasant advantage in Kaunas – Rausis, Riga 1995.

11.♞c1 ♖ge7 12.♖h3 0–0 13.0–0 ♗ad8 14.♖f4

With an obvious advantage for White in Khovalyng – Sychev, Moscow 2008.

9.e3 ♖c6 10.♙b5



Yet another type of endgame, this time with a black pawn on e5. White's chances are much better thanks to his bishops. One of his main ideas is to destroy Black's pawn structure on the queenside by taking on c6, thus creating clear targets for his positional pressure.

10...♙d6

10...♞c8

Played with the idea of recapturing with the rook in case of ♙xc6, but after:

11.♖f3

Black has to play ...f7–f6, weakening the a2–g8 diagonal.



11... f6

11...♙d6 12.♙c3 (The simple 12.♙e2 also deserves attention: 12...a6 13.♙a4 ♘f6 14.♙bc1 b5 15.♙b3 with a nice two bishops advantage.) 12...f6 Black weakens the a2-g8 diagonal, but there was no other way to defend the e5-pawn. 13.♙e2 ♘ge7 (13...a6 14.♙c4!) 14.♙hd1 ♙d8 15.♘d2 White was much better in Shipov – Radmacher, Berlin 1992.

12.♙e2 ♘h6 13.♙hc1 ♘f7 14.♙c4!

This is even stronger than 14.♙xc6.

14...♙d6 15.♙d5 ♙e7

This position arose in Dreev – Malaniuk, Alushta 1993. Here White should have played:

16.b4!

Starting active play on the queenside with clearly better prospects.

11.♙xc6†

Even without the capture on c6, White's chances are better thanks to the two bishops, as can be seen in the following game: 11.♘f3!? ♘ge7 12.♙e2 a6 13.♙a4 0–0 14.♘g5!? b5 15.♙b3 a5 16.a3 with an edge, Moiseenko – Reprintsev, Alushta 1999.

11...bxc6

Now both knight moves lead to an advantage:

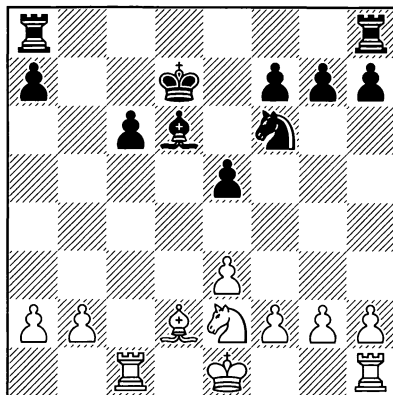
12.♘e2

12.♘f3 ♘e7 13.♙e2 (Shirov's recommendation 13.e4 looks inaccurate, since after 13...c5! Black gains some counterplay with ...♘c6-d4) 13...e4 14.♘d4 ♙d7 15.♙hc1 with the idea ♙c4-a4. White's chances are slightly better.

12...♘f6

White had a clear edge after 12...♘e7 13.♘c3 ♘d5 14.♙e2 ♘xc3† 15.♙xc3 0–0–0 16.♙bc1 when the exchange of knights did not help Black in Wells – Tscharotschkin, Gibraltar 2006.

13.♙c1 ♙d7



14.♘c3±

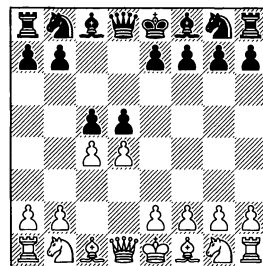
The knight is transferring to a4, where it will be placed perfectly. White has a small, but quite stable, advantage because of Black's weak pawns on the queenside, Finegold – Haskel, Tulsa 2008.

### Conclusion:

White does not have an overwhelming advantage in this variation, but all the positions that arise after 5.dxc6! are very unpleasant for Black, as he has to defend an inferior endgame. Besides being objectively better, White will also have the very pleasant experience of playing for two results in the endgame.

# Chapter 23

## Queen's Gambit



2...c5

### Variation Index

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c5

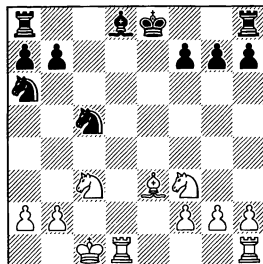
3.cxd5

- A) 3...♘f6
- B) 3...♙xd5

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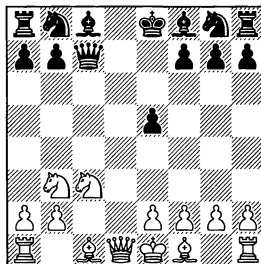
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A) after 13...♘dc5



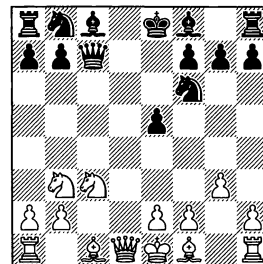
14.♙xc5!

B) note to the 6th move



8.♘b5!N

B) after 8...♙c7



9.♙g5!N

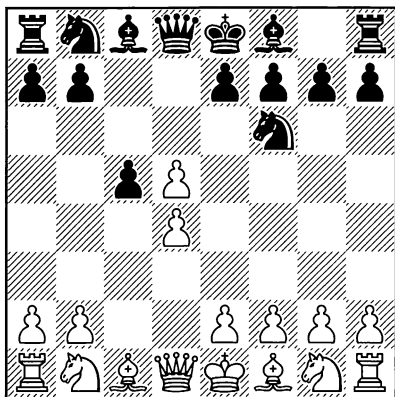
**1.d4 d5 2.c4 c5?!**

Probably the worst opening Black can choose after 1.d4. It has always been considered dubious, and I have not seen any serious attempts to repair and restore this line in recent years. White has very easy play in every line, usually with a serious lead in development. From this wide choice, I have selected a line that makes good sense to me.

**3.cxd5**

3.dxc5?! would not be the best choice. After 3...d4 Black has good play.

Now Black has two main options, as 3...cxd4? is just bad: after 4.♖xd4 Black is simply a pawn down. Thus Black needs to choose between A) 3...♖f6 and B) 3...♗xd5.

**(1.d4 d5 2.c4 c5 3.cxd5)****A) 3...♖f6****4.e4!**

White could instead transfer the game to another theoretical line: 4.♘c3 ♖xd5 5.e4 etc, but the text is much stronger and leads to an obvious advantage.

4.dxc5 ♗xd5 is not clear according to the theory.

**4...♖xe4 5.dxc5 ♖xc5**

Another option for Black that we will have to look at is:

5...♗a5† 6.♙d2 ♖xd2

6...♗xc5? just loses: White plays 7.♗a4† followed by 8.♗xe4.

7.♗xd2 ♗xc5 8.♖a3!

Threatening 9.♗c1.

8...♙d7 9.♗c1 ♗b6 10.♖c4

Black has serious problems with the development of his dark-squared bishop, while White easily seizes the initiative.

10...♗f6

10...♗h6 is met by 11.f4. Of course it is useful for White to keep the queens on the board. 11...♖a6 12.♖e5 ♗d6 This is H. Olafsson – Westerinen, Reykjavik 1997. Here 13.♖gf3 e6 14.♙c4 would have led to a great advantage for White.

11.♖f3 g5 12.♖ce5 ♙h6

This position occurred in Goossens – M. Zaitsev, Belgium 2007. White could now seize a decisive advantage with:

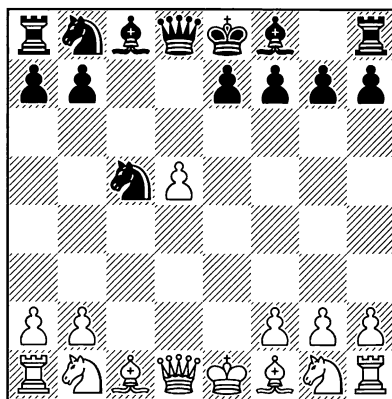
13.♗b4! 0–0 14.♙d3 ♙f5

Or 14...♗d6 15.♗xb7 g4 16.♖xd7 ♖xd7 17.♗c6.

15.♙xf5 ♗xf5 16.0–0 g4 17.♖xg4 ♙xc1

18.♗xc1 ♖a6 19.♖h6† ♖h8 20.♗c3† ♗f6

21.♖e5+–

**6.♖f3!**

White's best move in my opinion. It is very important to discourage Black from playing 6...e5.

6.♖c3 e5! is not so clear.

### 6...e6

6...♙g4 7.♖c3 ♖bd7 8.♙b5 a6 9.♙xd7 ♖xd7 10.0–0 ♖e5 11.♞e1 with a large lead in development.

I was discussing this line with one of my teammates in the Israeli league, Boris Kantsler, and he claimed that:

6...e5?

still works for Black, having once had the position in a game in some rapid tournament in Israel. The tricky idea is to meet:

7.♖xe5

with

7...♞e7

but fortunately White has a very smooth refutation of Black's idea:

8.♙b5+ ♙d7

Black is also lost after 8...♖bd7 9.0–0 ♞xe5 10.♞e1 ♖e4 11.♖c3 f5 12.♖xe4 fxe4 13.♞a4! followed by 14.♞xe4.

9.0–0! ♙xb5

9...♞xe5 loses to a nice line: 10.♞e1 ♖e4 11.♞c2 f5 12.♞c8+, and White regains the material with dividends.

10.♞e1 ♖d8 11.♖c3 ♙e8 12.♖c6+

With a decisive attack.

### 7.♖c3 exd5 8.♞xd5

Despite the queen swap, Black's position remains very passive and without proper coordination between his pieces.

### 8...♙e7

Black has other options:

8...♖c6 9.♞xd8+ ♖xd8 was played in Donner – O'Kelly, Havana 1965. Now the easiest

would be 10.♙e3N ♖de6 11.0–0–0, which offers Black no relief.

8...♞e7?! 9.♙e3 ♖c6 10.♙b5 ♙d7 11.0–0 Black's position looks critical, with his king stuck in the centre, Portisch – Bronstein, Monte Carlo 1969. 11.0–0–0!? is also worth a thought.

8...♞xd5 9.♖xd5 ♖e6

9...♖ba6 10.♙b5+ (10.♖e5!? comes into consideration as well) 10...♙d7 11.♙xd7+ ♖xd7 12.0–0 f6 Freeing the f7-square for the king. 13.♙e3 ♖f7 14.♞fd1 ♙c5 15.♖c7! ♞ad8 16.♖xa6 ♙xe3 17.fxe3 bxa6 18.♞ac1 And with 19.♞c7 coming next, White is winning material, Gleizerov – Westerinen, Stockholm 2000.

10.♙e3!N

This is stronger than 10.♖g5 ♖xg5 11.♙xg5 ♙d6 as played in Wach – Penz, Austria 2002.

10...♖c6 11.♙b5 ♙d7 12.0–0 0–0–0

12...♙d6 13.♞fd1 ♞d8 14.♖f6+ claims an advantage with the bishop pair.

13.♞fd1 ♖b8

13...♙d6 14.♖b6+±

14.♖g5!

White exerts strong pressure on the dark forces.

### 9.♞xd8+ ♙xd8 10.♙e3

White has a clear advantage in every line.

### 10...♖ba6

10...♖e6 11.0–0–0 0–0 was played in the encounter Psakhis – Gershkovich, Ashdod 2004. White has many ways to develop his initiative, but the most logical is 12.♙c4N ♖c6 13.♖e4 ♙c7 14.♖d6±.

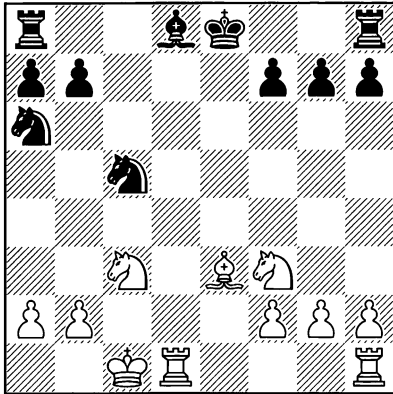
### 11.♙b5+ ♙d7 12.♙xd7+

The text move is much stronger than 12.0–0 ♙xb5 13.♖xb5 0–0 14.♞fd1 ♙f6 15.♞ac1

b6 and Black held this position somehow in Hjelm – Berkell, Sweden 2002.

**12...♖xd7 13.0-0-0 ♖dc5**

13...♖f6 14.♞he1 0-0 15.♙d4! is also clearly better for White.



**14.♙xc5!**

A very good practical decision.

**14...♖xc5 15.♞he1 ♖d6**

15...♙e7 16.♖d4 does not change much.

**16.♖d4 0-0 17.♖xe6 fxe6 18.f3**

White will have a very pleasant advantage with his strong knight on e4 against Black's passive bishop, Gleizerov – Berkell, Sweden 2002.

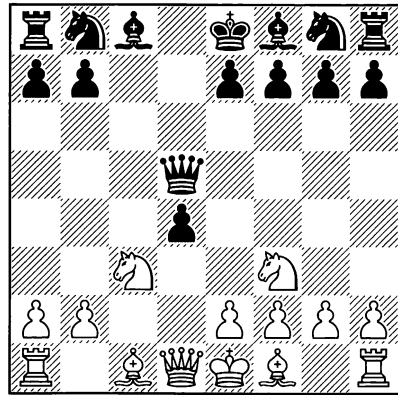
**(1.d4 d5 2.c4 c5 3.cxd5)**

**B) 3...♞xd5 4.♖f3 cxd4**

Much worse is 4...♖c6? 5.♖c3 ♞d8 6.d5! ♖b4 7.a3 ♖a6 8.e4, with an almost decisive advantage, Izeta Txabarri – Martinez Vildosola, Pamplona 2000.

**5.♖c3!**

The key move, without which this line would probably be quite playable for Black.



**5...♞a5**

Another pleasant line for White is the following:

**5...♞d8 6.♞xd4 ♙d7**

The endgame after 6...♞xd4 7.♖xd4 is very difficult for Black. For example: 7...♖f6 (7...a6? 8.♖d5! is already lost for Black!) 8.♖db5 ♖a6 9.g3 It will be impossible for Black to neutralize White's pressure down the h1-a8 diagonal. Also 9.♙f4 e6 10.0-0-0! is quite interesting.

**7.♖e5!**

Not giving Black an opportunity to win the tempo back with 7...♖c6.

**7...♖f6**

After 7...♖c6 8.♞xd7 ♞xd7 9.♖xd7 ♖xd7 10.♙e3 ♞d8 11.0-0-0 ♖c8 12.♞xd8 ♖xd8 13.g3 White has a big advantage thanks to his strong light-squared bishop, Hulak – Manievich, Pula 1994.

**8.♞c4**

Less clear is 8.♖xd7 ♖fxd7 9.g3 ♖c6.

**8...e6 9.g3**

A very interesting alternative would be 9.♙f4 ♖c6 10.♖xd7 ♖xd7 11.0-0-0 ♙b4 12.♖e4 with better chances for White.

**9...♖c6 10.♖xd7 ♞xd7 11.♙g2 ♙e7 12.0-0-0 13.♙f4**

With a pleasant advantage for White in Opocensky – Puc, Vienna 1949.

### 6. ♖xd4 ♜f6

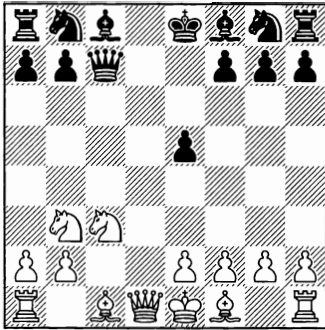
Apparently the most playable line for Black. The alternative is:

6...e5 7. ♜b3

7. ♜db5 would be less clear. We need the gain of tempo.

7...♞c7

Here I found a very strong novelty:



### 8. ♜b5!N

After which White has a strong initiative, as Black's queen does not have a safe square. For example:

8...♞c6

Another line is: 8...♞b6 9.e4 (threatening ♙e3) 9...a6 (9...♜f6 10. ♙e3 ♙b4† 11. ♜d2 ♞d8 12. a3 ♙e7 13. ♜c4±) 10. ♞c2 (less clear is 10. ♙e3 ♙b4† 11. ♜d2 ♞d8) 10...♜c6 (10...♙b4† 11. ♙d2 ♙xd2† 12. ♜xd2 is lost for Black, since 13. ♜c4 is coming) 11. ♙e3 ♙b4† 12. ♜c3 ♞c7 13. 0-0-0 ♙xc3 14. ♞xc3 ♜f6 15. f3 0-0 16. ♙b1 With a pleasant advantage.

9.e3

With the simple idea of ♙d2 followed by ♞c1.

9...a6 10. ♞d5!

The key move, which secures White's advantage.

10...♞xd5

10...♙b4† 11. ♙d2 ♙xd2† 12. ♜xd2 ♞xd5 13. ♜c7† ♙d8 14. ♜xd5 is also unpleasant

for Black with his king stuck in the centre.

11. ♜c7† ♙d8 12. ♜xd5 ♙e6

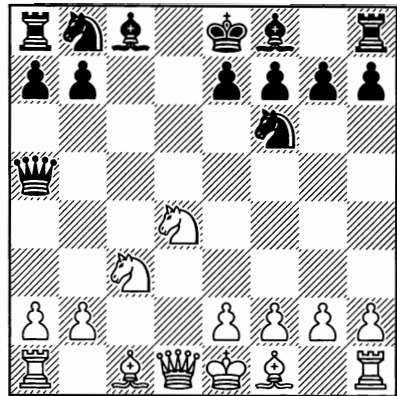
Or 12...♜c6 13. ♙d2 ♙e6 14. ♜b6 ♞b8

15. ♞c1 ♜f6 16. ♙c4 is also better for White.

13. ♜b6 ♞a7 14. ♙d2 ♜c6 15. ♞c1 ♜f6

16. ♙c4

White has an indisputable advantage, as Black's pieces are very badly placed (the rook on a7 and king on d8).



### 7.g3

The most natural way to develop the light-squared bishop.

Other lines are quite acceptable for Black, for example: 7. ♙d2 e5 8. ♜db5 (8. ♜b3 ♞d8 9. ♙g5 ♙e6 10. ♞xd8† ♙xd8 11. 0-0-0† ♜bd7 12. g3 ♜c7=) 8...♜a6 9.e4 ♙c5 10. ♙c4 0-0 11. 0-0 ♞d8 12. ♙g5 ♙e6 with reasonable play for Black.

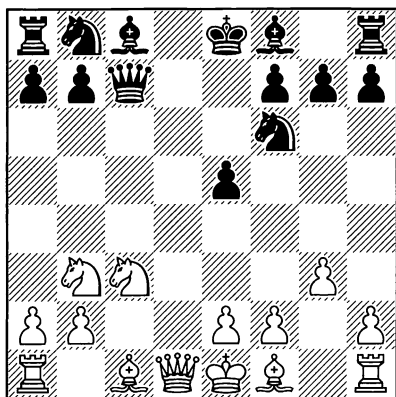
### 7...e5

Black should react very quickly in order to gain some counterplay before White's pressure builds on the queenside.

7...♜e4?! 8. ♙d2 ♜xd2 9. ♞xd2 was Donchenko – Gavrilov, Voronezh 1999, and clearly favours White, as it will be very easy to seize the initiative on the queenside: ♙g2, ♞ac1, ♞fd1 etc.

Also after the natural 7...e6 8.♗g2 ♕e7 9.0-0 0-0 10.♘b3 ♖a6 11.♗e3 White is clearly better.

### 8. ♘b3 ♖c7



### 9. ♗g5!N

A very strong idea and also a novelty. It is very important to prevent Black from closing the c-file with ...♗b4xc3 forcing bxc3. Now White is ready to recapture with the rook maintaining the pressure.

Instead after the natural 9.♗g2 ♗b4 I did not manage to find any serious advantage for White.

Certainly White can play 10.♗d2, but this is passive, and Black gets normal play: 10...0-0 11.♖c1 ♗c6 12.0-0 ♜d8, Nemet – Blum, Bern 1993.

And 10.0-0 is well met with 10...♗xc3! 11.bxc3 0-0∞ and despite White's two bishops, Black's position is quite reliable.

### 9...♗b4

Black cannot play 9...♖c6?! since White has the strong reply 10.♗xf6! gxf6 11.♘d5 with the idea 11...♗b4† 12.♘xb4 ♖xh1 13.♖d6! (threatening 14.♘d5) 13...♗e6 14.♘c5 with a decisive advantage.

### 10. ♖c1

Worse is 10.♗xf6 ♗xc3† (10...gxf6? 11.♖c1±) 11.bxc3 gxf6 (11...♖xc3†? 12.♘d2 gxf6 13.♖c1+–) 12.♖d3 0-0 13.♗g2 ♗e6 14.0-0 ♘d7 with unclear play.

### 10...♘e4

A natural reaction. If 10...♘bd7 11.♗g2 0-0 12.0-0 White has a great version of the Catalan, keeping a clear advantage due to his queenside pressure.

### 11. ♗d2 ♘xd2 12. ♘xd2

Even without the dark-squared bishop, White's pressure is quite serious.

### 12...♘c6 13. ♗g2 ♗e6

If 13...0-0 White should react simply with 14.0-0 (and not 14.♘d5 ♖d6 15.0-0, because Black has a nice trick: 15...♗xd2 16.♖xd2 ♘d4 17.e3 ♗h3! with equality) and probably the game would transpose to the 13...♗e6 line with 14...♗e6 15.a3 (15.♘d5!?).

### 14.a3 ♗e7 15. ♘d5 ♗xd5 16. ♗xd5 0-0 17.0-0 ♜fd8 18.♗xc6 bxc6 19. ♖c2±

With a nice positional advantage.

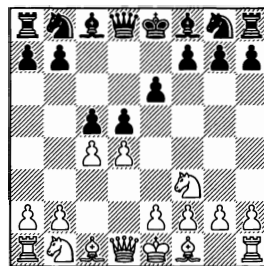
### Conclusion:

The whole variation is quite dangerous for Black: in the 3...♘f6 4.e4! line White has a very stable and risk-free advantage, while Black is almost forced to defend a very unpleasant endgame. 3...♖xd5 is perhaps more playable for Black, but my interesting novelty 9.♗g5! promises White a solid edge. I can hardly imagine any strong players would opt for this variation as Black.

# Chapter 24

## Queen's Gambit

### Tarrasch Defence



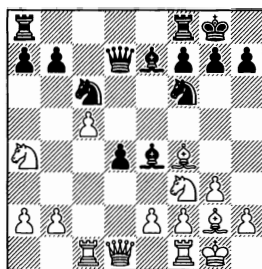
### Variation Index

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.Nf3 c5

4.cxd5 exd5 5.g3 Nc6 6.Bg2 Nf6 7.0-0 Be7 8.Nc3

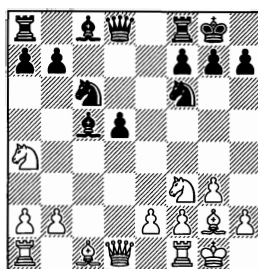
A) 8...Be6	p 357
B) 8...0-0 9.dxc5	p 358
B1) 9...d4	p 360
B2) 9...Bxc5 10.Na4	p 362
B21) 10...Bb6	p 362
B22) 10...Bd6	p 363
B23) 10...Be7 11.Be3	p 364
B231) 11...Ne4	p 365
B232) 11...Bg4	p 367

B1) after 12...Bd7



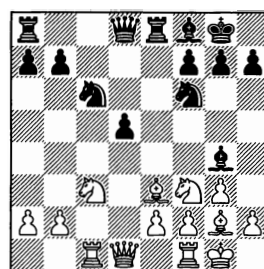
13.Bb3!N

B2) after 10.Na4!?



a fashionable line

B22) after 13...Bf8



14.Ba4!N

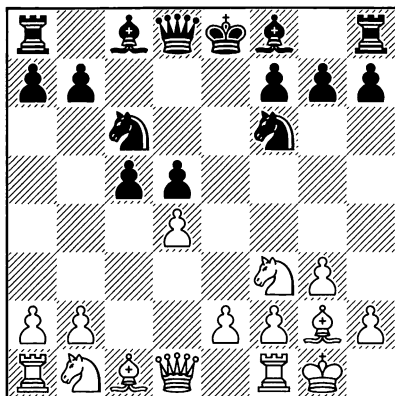


**1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 c5 4.cxd5 exd5**

This is the starting position of the Tarrasch Defence, named after the famous German Grandmaster Siegbert Tarrasch. In the main line Black will be left with an isolated pawn on the d-file, but in return he hopes to get active piece play. This opening is a rare guest at the GM level, especially among the elite players. There are perhaps two strong Grandmasters who use this opening regularly: V. Akopian and T. Petrosian. Also it is important to mention that the Tarrasch Defence was the favourite opening of the 13th World Champion, Garry Kasparov, in his early years. Only the experience of being tortured by Karpov in long endings convinced him that this opening was not to his taste after all.

**5.g3 ♖c6 6.♙g2 ♜f6 7.0-0**

Those who like playing the Catalan with White (such as, I hope, readers of this book) have an opportunity to be more flexible against the Tarrasch by delaying for a few moves the development of the b1-knight. Usually the Tarrasch Defence arises from the move order 1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 c5 and in this case Black has some additional options involving ...c5-c4.

**7...♙e7**

Obviously this is the main continuation.

The other moves are rarely chosen, but Black has tried a few, so we shall have a quick look:

**7...♙g4 8.♜e5 ♙e6**

8...cxd4 is met strongly by 9.♜xg4 ♜xg4 10.e4 ♜f6 11.exd5 ♜xd5 12.♙b3 ♜b6. This was played in the game Rabeler – Stortz, Germany 2004, and here White should have played 13.a4! threatening the unpleasant 14.a5. 13...a5 14.♙g5 ♙e7 (if 14...f6 15.♙e1† ♙e7 16.♙d2 White has powerful compensation for the pawn, because of Black's seriously exposed king) 15.♙xe7 ♜xe7 16.♙b5† ♜d7 17.♙d1± White regains the pawn with a clear advantage.

**9.♜xc6 bxc6 10.dxc5 ♙xc5 11.♙c2 ♙b6 12.♜c3 ♙e7**

White was threatening 13.♜a4.

**13.♙e3 ♙c7 14.♜a4**

White had pressure in Korotylev – Muhren, Wijk aan Zee 2005.

**7...cxd4 8.♜xd4 ♙e7**

8...♙c5?! is not so good, as it allows White to gain some tempos by means of 9.♜xc6 bxc6 10.♙c2 ♙b6 11.♜c3 ♙e7 12.e4 with a clear advantage.

**9.♜c3 0-0**

The point here is that White is not forced to play 10.♙g5, transposing to one of the main variations of the Tarrasch, but instead can play:

**10.b3!**

Achieving a favourable set-up. I will give one example:

**10...♙a5 11.♙b2 ♜xd4 12.♙xd4 ♙e6 13.e3 ♙fd8 14.♙fd1±**

White has a pleasant edge in Cebalo – Espig, Harrachov 1967.

**7...c4**

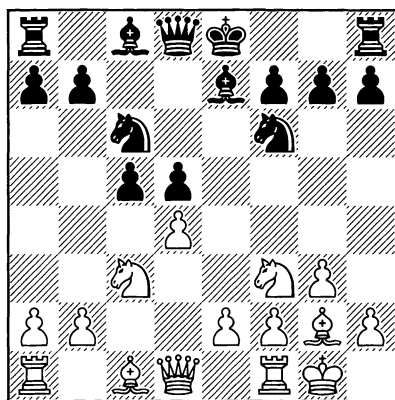
Without a white knight on c3 this idea is senseless. White can simply play:

**8.♜e5**

8.b3 is also worthy of consideration: 8...cxb3 9.♖xb3 with a superior pawn structure. 8...♙d6 9.♗xc6 bxc6 10.b3 cxb3 11.axb3 0-0 12.♙a3±

White favourably trades the dark-squared bishops, retaining a positional advantage due to Black's slightly exposed pawn structure on the queenside.

8.♗c3



This is our first branching point. Only one move is really acceptable, but others are played none the less! **A) 8...♙e6** is no longer seen at the top level as there is a clear refutation. **B) 8...0-0** is the only sensible move, although we should just check one extra option:

8...c4

This is not really playable when White's bishop is not yet on g5.

9.♗e5 0-0 10.♙f4!

White is not obliged to develop his bishop to g5, and it is perfectly placed on f4. White's main idea can be seen in the following line: 10...♙e6 11.♗xc4! dxc4 12.d5 ♗xd5 13.♗xd5

The arising position is favourable for White, as he captures one of Black's bishops, thus obtaining a plus based on having the bishop pair in an open position. For example:

13...♙f6 14.♙c7! ♖d7 15.♗xf6† gxf6 16.♖xd7 ♗xd7 17.♙ad1 ♙e6 18.♙d2 ♙ac8 19.♙d6 ♙fd8 20.♙fd1

With a safe advantage thanks to the bishop pair, Stojanov – Vallin, Mureck 1998.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♗f3 c5 4.cxd5 exd5 5.g3 ♗c6 6.♙g2 ♗f6 7.0-0 ♙e7 8.♗c3)

A) 8...♙e6

Black is in trouble after a nice forced sequence:

9.dxc5 ♙xc5 10.♙g5 0-0

This leads to a well-known endgame that is favourable for White.

Black can also play:

10...♙e7

but then after

11.♗d4 0-0

We get a favourable version of the main Tarrasch variation where Black has played 10...♙e6?! instead of the common 10...h6.

Here I favour:

12.♙c1

12.♗xe6 fxe6 13.♙h3 also looks quite promising for White.

12...♖d7 13.♗a4!?

White was clearly better in both games played from this position:

13...♗e4

13...♙ad8 14.♗c5 ♙xc5 15.♙xc5± Granda Zuniga – Donoso Velasco, Villa Gesell 1994.

14.♙xe7 ♖xe7 15.♗xc6 bxc6 16.♙xc6±

Black failed to find sufficient compensation for the pawn in Sarkar – Salts, Parsippany 2005, which I think is because the compensation is not there.

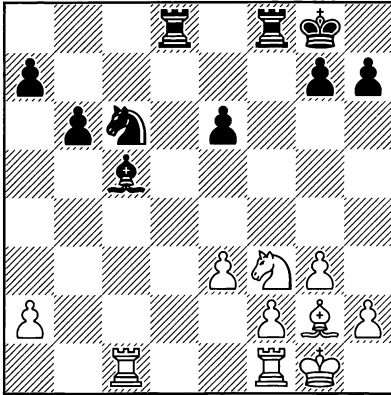
11.♙xf6 ♖xf6

Now we have an almost forced line:

12. ♖xd5 ♜xb2 13. ♘c7 ♜ad8 14. ♜c1 ♜xc1  
15. ♜axc1 b6

15...♟b6 has also been played a number of times, but White continues in the same way and probably has an even better position, as the b7-pawn is a target.

16. ♖xe6 fxe6 17. e3



An important move in our strategy that allows White to take control of the d4-square and to restrict Black's dark-squared bishop. The arising endgame is very unpleasant for Black, due to his slightly weakened pawn structure on the kingside, which makes his e-pawn a clear target in the long run. And maybe the most important factor is the difference between the bishops: Black's bishop is severely restricted by White's pawn structure, while White's can usefully work on both the h1-a8 and h3-c8 diagonals.

I regard the following encounter as a model game:

17...h6 18. ♜c4!

White's rook is heading for the e4-square, where it will attack the e-pawn.

18...♞d6

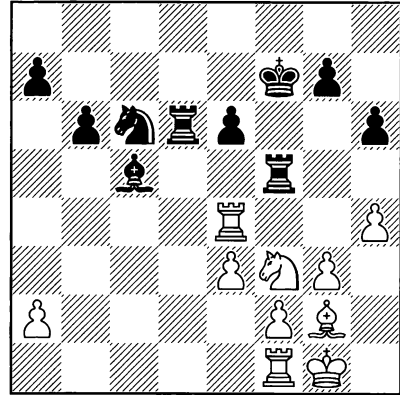
The endgame that arises after 18...♞xf3

19. ♙xf3 ♘e5 20. ♙g4! ♘xc4 21. ♙xe6† ♜f8  
22. ♙xc4 seems to be winning for White.

19. ♜e4 ♜f5 20. h4

White's main idea of improving his position is to advance his kingside pawns.

20...♜f7



21. ♜b1!

White prevents a knight jump to b4.

21...♜fd5 22. ♙f1

Now White's bishop transfers to c4.

22...♜f6

22...♞d1 23. ♜xd1 ♞xd1 24. ♜g2 ♘b4  
25. ♙c4 ♘d5 26. ♙b3!± does not bring relief either.

23. ♜g2 ♞d1 24. ♜xd1 ♞xd1 25. ♙b5

25. ♙c4± was good enough.

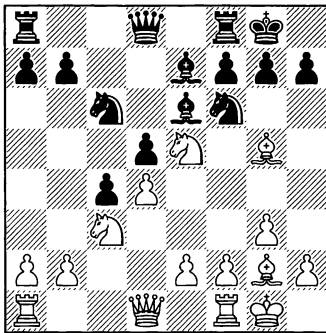
25...♞d6 26. h5 ♜e7 27. ♘h4±

Black could not hold the draw in Savanovic – Kotic, Bar 2003.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 c5 4.cxd5 exd5 5.g3  
♘c6 6.♙g2 ♘f6 7.0-0 ♙e7 8.♘c3

B) 8...0-0

At this point it would be expected that I would suggest the main move 9.♙g5, and this was indeed my intention, but despite my optimism after the main lines with 9...cxd4, where I had chosen one of the several tempting lines, I did not manage to find anything for White after 9...c4 10.♘e5 ♙e6:



One critical line is 11.f4 ♘g4 12.♘xg4 ♙xg4 13.♙xd5 ♙xg5 14.fxg5 ♖xg5 15.♗f4 ♗ad8 16.♗d2 ♙h3 17.e4 ♙e6. The position is unclear and the game eventually ended in a draw in Palac – Guseinov, Dresden 2007. I was not able to find any advantage in this line.

I also investigated the lines after:

11.♘xc6 bxc6 12.b3 ♖a5 13.♗c2 ♗fd8 14.♗fd1 ♗ac8 15.bxc4 dxc4 16.♙xf6

I found nothing after 16.♘e4 ♗f5 either. For example: 17.e3N c5 18.dxc5 ♗xd1† 19.♗xd1 ♗xc5 This seems to me to be OK for Black.

16...♙xf6 17.e3 c5! 18.♘e4

18.d5 ♗xc3 19.♗xc3 ♙xc3 20.♗ac1 ♙b2 21.dxe6 ♙xc1 22.exf7† ♘xf7 23.♗xc1 ♗d2† 18...cxd4 19.♘xf6† gxf6 20.exd4 20.♗xd4 ♗xd4 21.exd4 c3 22.♙e4 f5 23.♙f3 f4=

20...c3

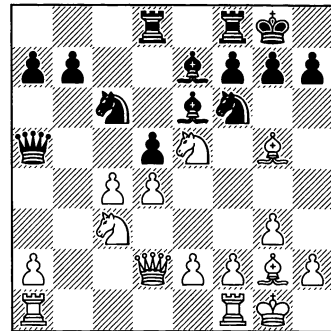
A draw was agreed in Arencibia – Bruzon Bautista, Santa Clara 2005. This is probably the critical line, but I cannot find an advantage.

For some time it was believed that White should play:

11.b3 ♖a5 12.♗d2 ♗ad8 13.bxc4

After 13.♘xc6 bxc6 14.bxc4 dxc4 15.♙xc6 Black equalizes with 15...♙b4 16.♗ac1 ♗b6 17.d5 ♗xd5 18.♙xd5 ♘xd5 19.♙e3 ♗b7 20.♗b1 ♖a8=.

After the text, despite Gelfand winning a great game against Grischuk, it turns out that the position is absolutely equal:



13...♘xd4!!

This is the important novelty after Gelfand's win against Grischuk. The critical line goes:

14.♗xd4 dxc4 15.♗e3 ♙c5 16.♗f4 ♗xc3 17.♙xf6 gxf6 18.♗xf6

Here Black played 18...♙d4 in Malakhatchko – Meinhardt, Paris 2005. He lost, but maybe the position is still OK for him.

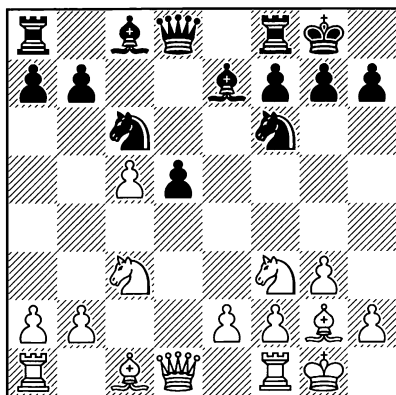
However, it is clear that Black can improve. Either with the complicated 18...♙e7!? 19.♗xe7 ♗xe5 where Black can try to fight for an advantage, which of course involves some risk. Or with the safe:

18...♙d6

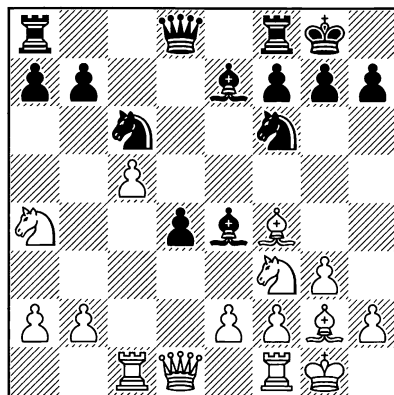
This just forces White to take a draw by perpetual check.

So after a few days of frustration, I decided to shop around for another system, and I must say that I am quite pleased with the deal I was offered...

## 9.dxc5



and Black takes over the initiative.



In this position Black can either play the rare **B1) 9...d4**, trying to create an initiative, or choose the more restrained **B2) 9...Qxc5**.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.Qf3 c5 4.cxd5 exd5 5.g3 Qc6 6.Qg2 Qf6 7.0-0 Qe7 8.Qc3 0-0 9.dxc5)

### B1) 9...d4 10.Qa4 Qf5

A remarkable idea: Black sacrifices a pawn hoping to obtain compensation based on White's knight being poorly placed on a4. Nevertheless, it is hard to believe Black can sacrifice a pawn in this way at such an early stage of the game, as White has done nothing wrong.

### 11.Qf4 Qe4

Black light-squared bishop gets a nice square on e4, as it cannot be challenged by White's knight from c3.

### 12.Qc1

White's best move.

12.Qb3 allows 12...Qd5 and it is very dangerous for White to capture the b7-pawn: 13.Qxb7?! Qxf4 14.gxf4 Bb8 15.Qa6 Qc7

### 12...Qd7

This is the main continuation. The alternatives are:

12...Qd5 is not so good, as White has the strong option: 13.Qd6! Qxd6 14.cxd6 Qxd6 15.Qc5±

### 12...Qd5 13.Qb3!

White has to challenge Black's queen.

### 13...Qh5

Other options:

13...Qxb3 Obviously in the endgame it will be hard for Black to find sufficient compensation. 14.axb3 Bb8 15.Qfd1 Qd5 16.Qd6! A very important tactical resource, as now Black is losing the pride of his position: the d4-pawn. 16...Qxd6 17.cxd6 d3 The best chance (17...Qxd6 allows White's knight to enter the game with great effect: 18.Qc5 with a clear advantage). 18.exd3 This was enough for an advantage in Antic – Todorovic, Yugoslavia 1999, but even stronger was 18.Qc5! dxe2 19.Qd2 Qxf3 20.Qxf3 Qxd6 21.Qxb7 Qd7 22.Qc5± leaving White with an extra pawn.

13...d3 14.Qxd5 (also worth considering is 14.Qc3 Qxb3 15.axb3 Bb8 16.Qe3±) 14...Qxd5 15.exd3 Qxf4 16.gxf4 Qxd3

17.♞fe1 ♞ad8 18.♜e5 ♜xe5 19.♞xe5 ♙f6  
20.♞e3 ♙b5 21.♜c3 ♙c6 22.b4± Black does  
not have sufficient compensation for the  
pawn.

14.♞fd1 ♞ad8

Premature would be 14...d3 15.♞xd3 ♙xd3  
16.exd3 ♜d5 17.♞xb7 ♜xf4 18.gxf4 and  
White has too much for the exchange.

This position was reached in Matveeva –  
Lugovoi, Solin 2005, and now White could  
have simply grabbed the pawn:

15.♞xb7

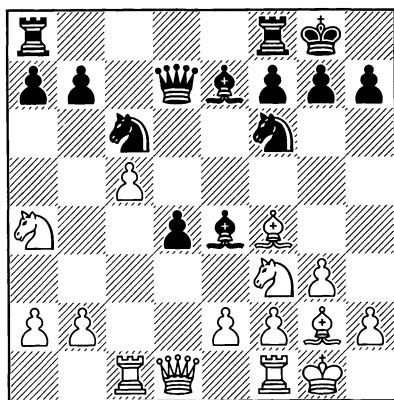
It is important that the thematic:

15...d3

can be met strongly by

16.♜c3 dxe2 17.♞xd8 ♞xd8 18.♜xe4 ♜xe4  
19.♜e1

and White wins.



### 13.♞b3!N

In my opinion this is the critical continuation,  
which poses Black definite problems. After  
having analysed many games in this variation  
I came to the conclusion that White should  
place his rook on d1 as soon as possible.

The text clearly improves on 13.a3 ♞ad8 14.b4  
♜d5 15.♙d2 ♞e6! with good counterplay for  
Black, Georgiev – Todorovic, Topola 2004.

### 13...♞ad8

I also examined: 13...♙d5 14.♞b5 ♜e4 (Black  
cannot play 14...♙xa2? in view of 15.b3 a6  
16.♞d3 ♞e6 17.♜d2± with a clear advantage)  
15.♜xd4! ♜xf2 16.♜xf2 ♙xg2 17.♜xg2 ♞xd4  
18.♜c3 ♙xc5 19.♞xb7 ♞ac8 20.♞fd1 ♞f2†  
21.♜h1 White is simply a pawn up.

### 14.♞fd1 ♙d5

Again White is ready for the tactics: 14...d3  
15.♜c3! ♙xf3 16.♙xf3 ♜d4 17.♞c4 ♜xf3†  
18.exf3±

### 15.♞d3

Now the main line seems to be:

### 15...♙xa2 16.b3 ♞e6

Other moves do not solve Black's problems  
either:

16...♜b4 17.♞c4 ♞xa4 18.bxa4 ♙xc4 19.♞xc4  
♜c6 20.♞b1 and the arising endgame is very  
unpleasant for Black.

16...♜d5 17.♞c2 ♜db4 18.♞b2 ♙f6 19.♙g5!  
and Black can hardly save his bishop on a2.

### 17.♜d2 ♜d5 18.♞a1

I have analysed the following moves:

### 18...♜c3

The alternative is 18...♜db4 19.♞b5 a6  
20.♞xb7 ♞d7 21.♞b6 ♙d8 22.♙xc6 ♙xb6  
23.♙xd7 ♞xd7 24.cxb6 ♞e8 25.♞dc1 and  
White is clearly better, thanks to his passed  
b-pawn.

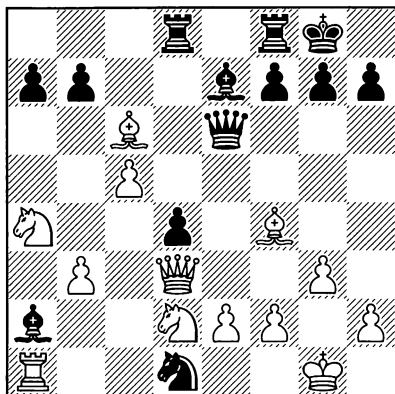
### 19.♙xc6!

Less convincing is 19.♜xc3 dxc3 20.♞xc3  
♙f6.

### 19...♜xd1

In the event of 19...♜xe2† 20.♜f1 ♜xf4  
21.gxf4 ♞xc6 22.♜g1± Black loses his  
bishop.

19...bxc6 20.♖xc3 dxc3 21.♞xc3 ♕f6 is different from before: after 22.♞c2 ♕xa1 23.♞xa1 ♞xd2 24.♞xd2 ♕xb3 25.♞xa7 White has an extra pawn and great winning chances.

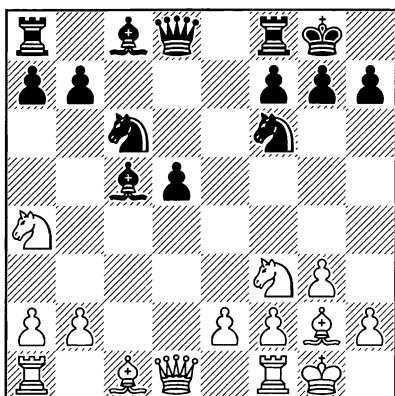


20.♞xd1 ♞xc6 21.♞a1 g5 22.♕d6 ♕xd6 23.cxd6±

White retains a material advantage.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♖f3 c5 4.cxd5 exd5 5.g3 ♖c6 6.♕g2 ♖f6 7.0-0 ♕e7 8.♖c3 0-0 9.dxc5)

B2) 9...♕xc5 10.♖a4!?



Recently this has been a fashionable choice, and I believe it is worth a try, especially

compared to the so-called main line. 10.♕g5 was previously considered to be White's main continuation in this position, but who knows, maybe this will change?

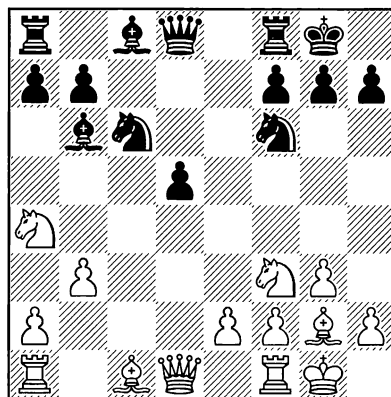
At this point Black has a number of retreats to choose from: B21) 10...♕b6, B22) 10...♕d6 and B23) 10...♕e7.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♖f3 c5 4.cxd5 exd5 5.g3 ♖c6 6.♕g2 ♖f6 7.0-0 ♕e7 8.♖c3 0-0 9.dxc5 ♕xc5 10.♖a4)

B21) 10...♕b6

I do not believe this move will solve Black's opening problems: sooner or later White will capture Black's dark-squared bishop and establish control over the d4-square.

11.b3



11...♕f5

Another way to play is:

11...♞e8 12.♕b2 ♕g4

In the event of 12...♞e7 White carries out his main positional idea: 13.e3 ♕e6 14.♖xb6 axb6 15.♖d4± with a pleasant advantage for White in Hort – Wade, Hastings 1972.

13.h3 ♕f5

If 13...♕h5, as in the game Helis –

Dvorakova, Karvina 2003, White can simply play the natural 14.♙xf6! ♖xf6 15.♗xd5 ♙g6 16.♗b5!± with a clear advantage.

14.♜xb6

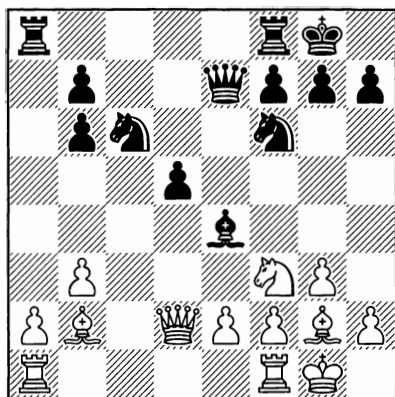
The correct moment to capture on b6.

14...axb6 15.♗d2±

We have more or less the same position as in the 11...♙f5 line, and White's advantage is clear.

12.♙b2 ♙e4 13.♜xb6 axb6 14.♗d2 ♖e7

And now in the game Stein – Keres, Moscow 1966, White should have continued:



15.♗fd1N h6

Otherwise 16.♗g5 might be an unpleasant idea.

16.♗e3 ♜d7 17.♙h3!

This will be followed by 18.♜d4. White retains a pleasant advantage, thanks to his bishop pair and better pawn formation.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♜f3 c5 4.cxd5 exd5 5.g3 ♜c6 6.♙g2 ♜f6 7.0–0 ♙e7 8.♜c3 0–0 9.dxc5 ♙xc5 10.♜a4)

B22) 10...♙d6

Quite a logical retreat, but much less popular than the main 10...♙e7.

11.♙e3

An interesting alternative is 11.b3. One fairly recent example continued: 11...♗e7 (perhaps 11...♗e8 is a better option) 12.♙b2 ♗d8 13.♜d4 ♙d7 14.♗c1 ♜e5 15.♜c3 ♙c5 16.♗d2± White had arranged his pieces well in Dreev – Halkias, Russia 2007.

11...♗e8 12.♗c1 ♙g4

Black has also tried:

12...h6

but here the simple

13.♜d4

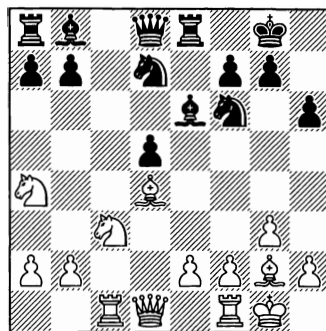
leads to an advantage for White.

13...♜e5

The alternative 13...♜xd4 is not much better, as after 14.♙xd4 ♙g4 15.♜c3 Black starts to experience serious problems with the d5-pawn.

14.♜b5 ♙b8 15.♜bc3 ♙e6 16.♙d4 ♜ed7

This is Djokic – Spasojevic, Arandjelovac 1990. Now White should have played:



17.f4!N ♜b6 18.♜c5

Gaining a huge positional advantage.

13.♜c3

This surprising retreat seems to be White's best bet to fight for an advantage.

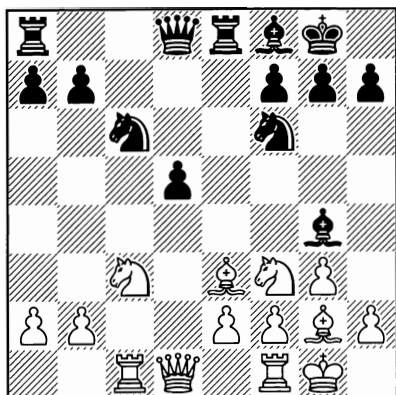
13...♙f8

I also examined other options:



13...♖a5 14.♗b3 ♘b4 15.♞fd1 ♞ad8 16.♜d4!±  
with a pleasant advantage.

13...♙c7 14.h3 ♙e6 15.♜d4 ♙b6 16.♜a4!±  
This probably forces Black into simplifications  
that suit White.



#### 14.♖a4!N

This move looks more logical than 14.♜b5,  
which was played in Halkias – Sigalas, Athens  
1999.

#### 14...♞c8 15.♞fd1

White has arranged his pieces quite well, as  
Black's d5-pawn is under serious pressure. The  
following is an illustrative line:

#### 15...♗d7 16.♜e1! ♙e6 17.♜d3

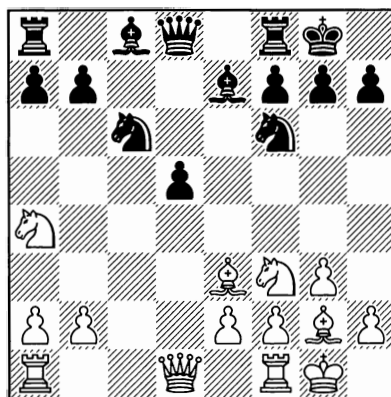
White will continue with 18.♜c5 or 18.♜f4,  
when his chances are much better in either  
case.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♜f3 c5 4.cxd5 exd5  
5.g3 ♜c6 6.♙g2 ♜f6 7.0–0 ♙e7 8.♜c3 0–0  
9.dxc5 ♙xc5 10.♜a4)

#### B23) 10...♙e7

By far Black's most popular retreat.

#### 11.♙e3



This is the initial position of our main  
variation. The whole line looks quite promising  
for White and what I really like about this  
system is that White's play is very easy and  
logical. In general, we have clear rules about  
how to play either side of a position with an  
isolated pawn. In this specific case exchanging  
certain minor pieces would clearly favour  
White. The most desirable exchanges are:  
trading dark-squared bishops and a pair of  
knights (f3 for c6), which would help White  
to establish full control over the d4-square.  
Obviously, the endgame positions are always  
better for the side playing against the isolani.  
On the other hand, Black should strive for  
activity keeping as many pieces as possible on  
the board.

Having said all of this, I should probably  
mention that 11.b3!? is probably an interesting  
alternative!

**B231) 11...♜e4** and **B232) 11...♙g4** are the  
serious moves in this position, but there are  
two additional options we will just peek at.

11...♙e6 is passive and White can execute his  
ideas without any problems: 12.♜d4 ♜xd4  
13.♙xd4 b6 14.♜c3 with a pleasant edge,  
Knuth – Manske, Stargard 1994.

11...♙f5 12.♞c1 ♙e4

Another option is 12...♖c8 and now I think White can easily continue his strategy: 13.♘d4 ♘xd4 (13...♙e4 runs into the unpleasant 14.♙h3!±) 14.♙xd4 ♗xc1 15.♗xc1 ♘e4 16.♘c3±

13.♘c5 ♙xc5 14.♙xc5 ♖e8 15.♗a4 a6 16.♗fd1

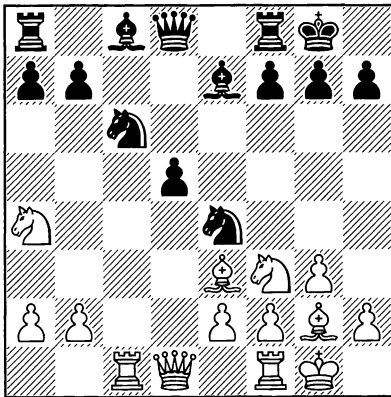
White's chances are clearly preferable, as Black does not have enough activity to compensate for her isolated pawn, Ushenina – Mamedjarova, Chisinau 2005.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 c5 4.cxd5 exd5 5.g3 ♘c6 6.♙g2 ♘f6 7.0-0 ♙e7 8.♘c3 0-0 9.dxc5 ♙xc5 10.♘a4 ♙e7 11.♙e3)

### B231) 11...♘e4

Quite a logical move in this variation, as White has lost control of the e4-square.

12.♖c1



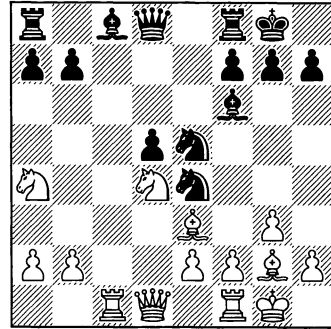
12...♗e8

This move appears to be a little slow and allows White to achieve desirable exchanges, establishing control over the d4-square.

There are a wide range of alternatives, and probably most of them are of equal value:

12...♙f6 13.♘d4 ♘e5

This was played in Chasovnikova – Short, Banyoles 2007. Here White could have posed serious problems after:



14.♘b5!N ♘c6 15.♙f4±

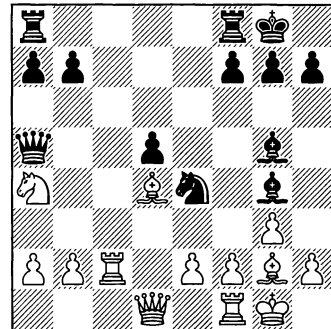
Threatening both 16.♘c7 and 16.f3.

12...♙g4 13.♘d4 ♘xd4 14.♙xd4 ♙g5

Black tries to solve his opening problems tactically.

15.♖c2 ♗a5

Also after 15...♙f5 16.e3± White is slightly better.



16.b3!N

This is a serious improvement over White's play in Hergott – Mihaljevic, Toronto 1993.

16...♙e6 17.f4! ♙h6

Black is also clearly worse after 17...♙e7 18.f5 ♙c8 19.♘c3, or 18...♙d7 19.♙xe4 dxe4 20.♙xg7! and wins material.

18.♖c5 ♕f5 19.♗xe4 ♖xe4 20.♙xe4 dxe4  
21.e3±

Black is in serious trouble, due to his poorly placed bishop on h6.

12...♞a5 13.a3 ♖g4 14.♞e1 ♞fd8 15.♗d4  
♙d7

The lesser evil would be 15...♗xd4 16.♙xd4  
♞ac8 17.♞xc8 ♞xc8 18.♗c3±.

16.♗c3 ♗xc3 17.♞xc3 ♗xd4 18.♙xd4 ♖c6  
19.♞d2±

White has found a very good version of the standard position, playing against the isolated pawn, Artemchuk – Musienko, Kiev 2004.

12...♙e6 13.♗d4

Again the same idea works very well for White.

13...♗xd4 14.♙xd4 ♞a5 15.a3 ♞ac8 16.♗c3  
♗xc3 17.♙xc3 ♞b5

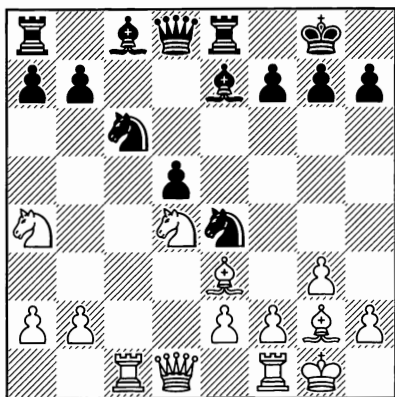
This is Narciso Dublan – Kalod, Badalona 2005.

Now there is the simple:

18.♞d2N h6 19.e3±

This gives White a decent edge.

13.♗d4



13...♙d7

There is also:

13...♙f6

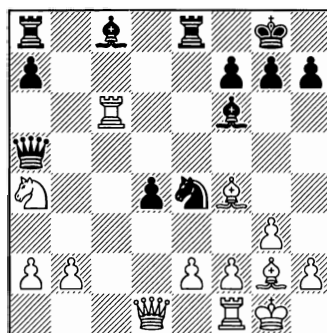
Black fails to solve his opening problems with this temporary pawn sacrifice.

14.♗xc6

Quite good for White is the positional 14.♗c5. For example: 14...♗xd4 15.♙xd4 b6?! 16.♗xe4 dxe4 17.♙xf6 ♞xf6 18.♙xe4! ♞xe4 19.♞d5 and White had a pawn more in Soluch – Michel, Vienna 1950.

14...bxc6 15.♞xc6 ♙d7

Another option is 15...d4 16.♙f4 ♞a5, Iordachescu – Kuzubov, Kusadasi 2006, and now:



Here White had a strong option in 17.♞c7!N, and then 17...g5 18.♙xe4 ♞xe4 19.♞b3 ♙e6 20.♞f3 ♙d5 21.♞c5 wins for White, and 17...♙d8 18.♞c4 ♙f6 19.♗c5! ♙f5 20.a3± gives him a healthy extra pawn.

16.♞c1 ♙xa4 17.♞xa4 ♙xb2 18.♞c2 ♙f6 19.♙d1±

White was much better in Villamayor – Sales, Quezon City 2001, thanks to Black's chronically weak d5-pawn.

13...♗xd4 14.♙xd4 ♙f5 15.♗c3± and White has the desired slight advantage, Chuikov – Bazant, corr. 1996.

14.♗c3 ♗xc3

White has a nice plus after 14...♗xd4 15.♙xd4 ♙c6 16.♞d3±, Zatonskih – Rohonyan, Tulsa 2008.

15.♞xc3 ♙f6

This position occurred in Malakhov – Larino Nieto, Benidorm 2005. Now White could have played better:

### 16.♖c5!

I originally found this idea myself, but then noticed it had already been played in a game.

### 16...♗e7

I had only looked at 16...♘d4 17.♙xd4 ♙e6 18.e3, securing a safe positional advantage.

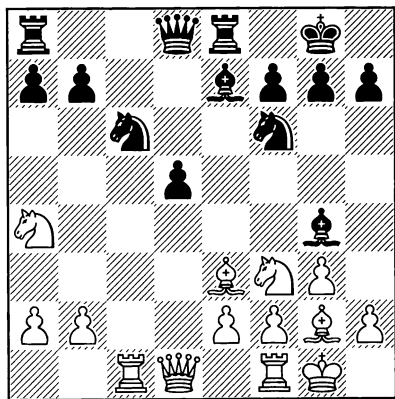
17.♖xd5 ♙xd4 18.♙xd4 ♙e6 19.♙c5 ♗c7  
20.♖d2 ♗a5 21.♙xc6 bxc6 22.b4±

Grebionkin – Kirusha, St Petersburg 2001.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 c5 4.cxd5 exd5  
5.g3 ♘c6 6.♙g2 ♘f6 7.0–0 ♙e7 8.♘c3 0–0  
9.dxc5 ♙xc5 10.♘a4 ♙e7 11.♙e3)

B232) 11...♙g4 12.♖c1 ♖e8

The alternative 12...♗d7 just leads to a transposition after 13.♘c5 ♙xc5 14.♙xc5 ♖fe8.



### 13.♘c5

Other moves hardly promise White anything serious. For example: 13.h3 ♙xf3! 14.♙xf3 ♗d7 15.♙g2 d4 16.♙g5 ♘e4! with equality, Mlynek – Salamon, Austria 2006.

Or 13.♘d4 ♖c8! and Black has activity.

### 13...♙xc5 14.♙xc5

The other recapture 14.♖xc5 runs into 14...♗b6! and Black's pieces look annoyingly active.

### 14...♗d7 15.♖e1!

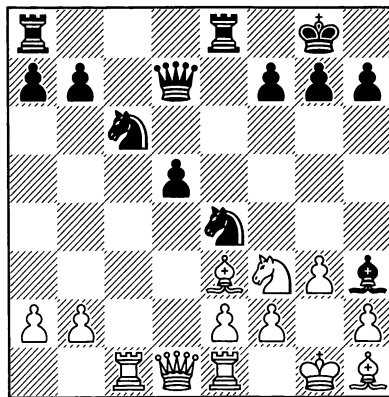
This subtle move allows White to avoid trading light-squared bishops, and also releases the queen from the defence of the e2-pawn.

### 15...♙h3

Another game continued 15...♖ad8 16.♘d4 ♙h3, Dudukin–Voitsekhovsky, Ishevsk 2005. White should now have played 17.♙h1N ♘e4 18.♘xc6 bxc6 19.♗a4± retaining his advantage.

### 16.♙h1 ♘e4 17.♙e3

At first glance it seems that Black has managed to generate definite activity that compensates for his isolated pawn, but in fact White's chances are preferable, because of his bishop pair and total control over d4.



### 17...♖ad8

The tricky 17...♗g4?! does not work: 18.♗xd5 ♘g3 19.hxg3 ♖xe3 and here in the game Stoeckl – Gutdeutsch, Austria 1995, White could have decided the game with

20.♖c4! ♜e6 (20...♜g6 loses to 21.♖h4!)  
 21.♜b5! ♞xe2 22.♞xe2 ♜xe2 23.♜xb7+–

### 18.♟d4

From this moment onwards White stops being happy just having a positional advantage, and gradually takes over the initiative as well.

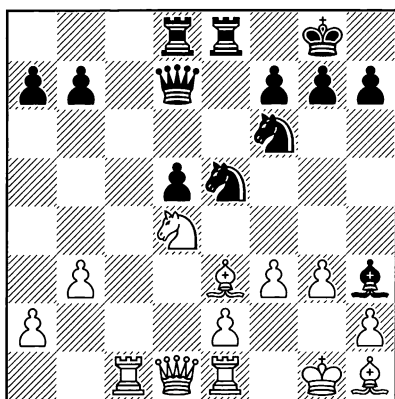
### 18...♟e5 19.f3

This seems to be the most precise move. However, White can certainly also play 19.♟f4 ♜e7 20.♟xe5 ♜xe5 21.e3 with a small but stable advantage, Nogueiras – Pozo, Cuba (ch) 2006.

### 19...♟f6

Black cannot play 19...♟c4? in view of 20.♞xc4! dxc4 21.fxe4+–.

### 20.b3



A good positional move that restricts the activity of Black's knight. Obviously White has a serious advantage, but Black still has some chances, thanks to his activity. In the game Black went downhill in a hurry:

20...♟h5?! 21.♜d2 ♜d6 22.♟f2 f5??  
 23.♜g5+–

Zagorskis–Warszawski, Warsaw 2006.

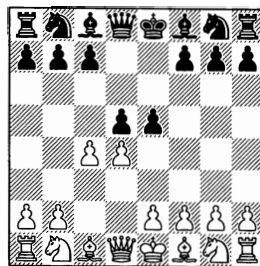
### Conclusion:

The line 9.dxc5 and 10.♟a4 is not very popular, but it seems to me that it is a promising weapon against the Tarrasch Defence. White's play is extremely easy and understandable, while Black has to search for something special to deal with White's strategy. At the moment the ball is definitely in Black's court.

# Chapter 25

## Queen's Gambit

### Albin Counter Gambit



### Variation Index

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e5

3.dxe5 d4 4.♘f3 ♘c6 5.a3

A) 5...♙e6

B) 5...♙f5

C) 5...♙g4

D) 5...♞ge7 6.b4 ♞g6 7.♙b2

D1) 7...♞gxe5

D2) 7...a5

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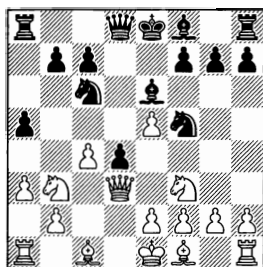
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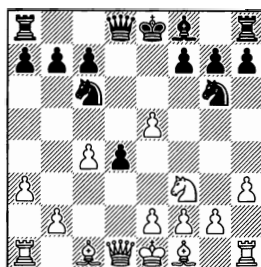
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A) after 8...a5



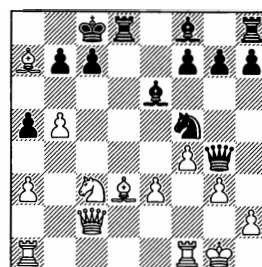
9.♙f4!N

C) note to the 6th move

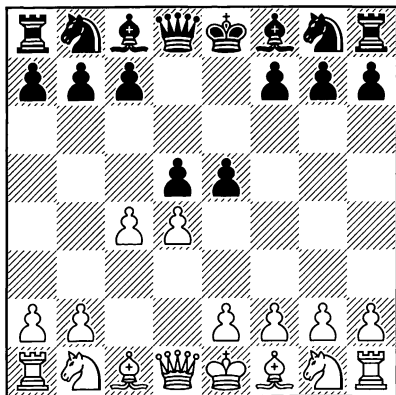


9.♙b3!N

D2) after 18...♙g4



19.♞a4!N

**1.d4 d5 2.c4 e5**

The Albin Counter Gambit was played and popularized by Adolf Albin in the 1890s. It was always considered slightly dubious, however since 2004 it has gained in popularity thanks to the sparkling example of Alexander Morozevich, who managed to discover new resources for Black, often based on regaining the pawn with a knight manoeuvre to g6.

I believe that the reader should not be scared of this gambit. The extra pawn is often lost, but Black will have to make some concessions to regain it.

**3.dxe5 d4**

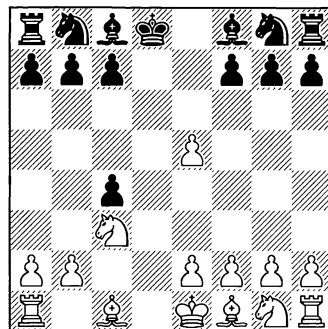
In exchange for the gambit pawn Black gets a central wedge at d4 and gains some chances for an attack (especially in the 5.g3 line). I believe White's main goal should be to return the extra pawn at an appropriate moment in order to gain a positional advantage.

Black has other options on move 3, but they all seem to be weak:

The absolutely senseless 3...♙b4† 4.♙d2 ♙xd2† 5.♙xd2 only helps White to develop his pieces. I will just give a few sample lines: 5...d4 6.♙gf3 ♙c6 (6...c5 7.♙e4! is clearly in

White's favour.) 7.♙b3 Black is already losing the d4-pawn.

3...dxc4 4.♙xd8† ♙xd8 5.♙c3



This endgame is much better for White, as Black's king is badly placed in the centre and White will win a few important tempos (♙g5, 0–0–0) to quickly develop his pieces.

5...♙b4 6.♙g5† ♙e7

6...f6 7.0–0–0† ♙d7 8.exf6 gxf6 (Black's position is very difficult after 8...♙gxf6 9.e4 ♙xc3 10.bxc3 ♙e8 11.f3 b5 12.♙e2 and he will not survive for long) 9.♙h4 ♙xc3 10.bxc3 b5 11.♙f3 c5 This was Sundararajan – Afifi, Cairo 2000, and here White could have developed a decisive attack with: 12.g4 ♙e8 (12...♙b7 13.♙h3 does not change anything: 14.g5 is coming with decisive effect) 13.g5+–

7.0–0–0† ♙e8

So far we are in Amado – Soppe, La Falda 1977. And now very strong was:

8.♙b5N ♙a6 9.e4 ♙e6 10.♙d4

Attacking the c4-pawn. 10.♙f3!? can also be considered.

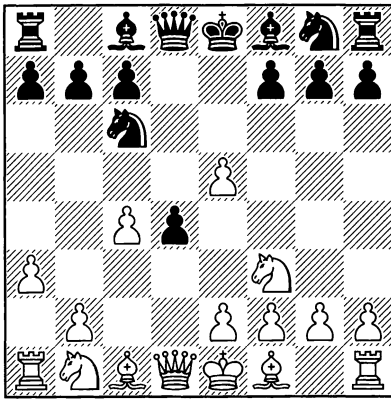
10...♙c5 11.♙e3 ♙xe4 12.♙xe6 fxe6 13.♙d4 ♙c5 14.♙xc4 ♙a6 15.♙g4±

White is threatening both 16.♙xa6, followed by 17.♙xb4, and 18.♙xg7.

5...♖c6 6.♙g5+ ♕e7 7.0-0-0 ♗d7 (Black is losing the pawn after 7...♖e8 8.♙xe7 ♜gxe7 9.♜b5!) 8.♙f4 a6 9.♜f3 b5 10.g3 and Black's position is very difficult, as his pieces are completely lacking in coordination.

5...c6 6.♜f3 (6.e4 b5 7.a4 might be a worthwhile alternative) 6...♜d7 (6...♙e6 is well met by 7.♜g5) 7.e4 b5 8.a4 b4 9.♜a2 ♙a6 and now 10.e6 fxe6 11.♜g5 seems to be a very strong tactic: White has a clear advantage.

#### 4.♜f3 ♜c6 5.a3



According to the old theory books, White's best move is 5.g3 and it gives him a clear edge, but with the appearance of Morozevich's games, where he successfully used 5...♜ge7, White was forced to think about other options on move 5, as things turned out to be not so simple after 5.g3. Therefore in recent years White's other options, 5.♜bd2 and 5.a3, have become more and more fashionable.

In my analysis I decided to focus on 5.a3. Many strong GMs have recently used this continuation, but in fact the game Topalov – Morozevich, Monaco 2005, was my main inspiration. There are two main ideas behind White's move. Firstly, White covers the b4-

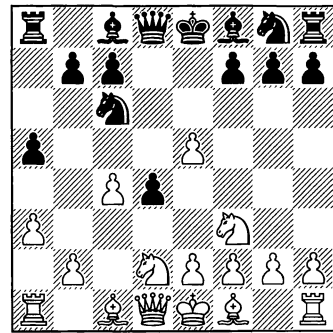
square and will not have to worry about Black's possible resources connected with a check on b4. Secondly, he is ready to play b2-b4, both gaining space on the queenside and planning to attack the d4-pawn with ♙b2, b5 and ♜bd2-b3.

Our four main lines are: **A) 5...♙e6**, **B) 5...♙f5**, **C) 5...♙g4** and **D) 5...♜ge7**, but there are two other options that we should look at briefly first.

#### 5...a5?!

This looks quite natural, but actually Black cannot afford to play such slow moves in this system. Also, in many lines the inclusion of a3 and ...a5 clearly favours White.

#### 6.♜bd2



Now White is already threatening to play 7.♜b3 winning the d4-pawn.

#### 6...♙g4

Black has tried other moves and though he has occasionally been successful, his position looks gloomy.

6...♙e6 7.♜b3 ♜d7 8.e3 It is always useful for White to exchange Black's d4-pawn, which definitely restricts White's forces (also not bad is 8.♜bxd4 0-0-0 9.e3 ♙c5 10.♙e2 ♜xd4 11.exd4 ♙xd4 12.♜xd4 ♜xd4 13.♜xd4 ♙xd4 14.f3 with an extra pawn) 8...dxe3 9.♜xd7+ ♙xd7 10.♙xe3 With a clear advantage.



6...♘ge7 7.♖b3 ♘f5 8.♙g5!N (8.g4 ♖h4 9.♖bxd4?! ♘xf3† 10.♘xf3 ♙xd1† 11.♙xd1 ♙xg4 and Black is not worse, De Rooij – Brandenburg, Netherlands 2006) 8...f6 9.exf6 gxf6 10.♙f4 a4 11.♖bd2 Followed by g3, ♙g2 and 0–0; Black has no compensation for the pawn.

7.h3

White should avoid 7.♖b3?! ♙xf3 8.gxf3 a4 9.♖d2 ♘xe5 with mutual chances.

7...♙xf3

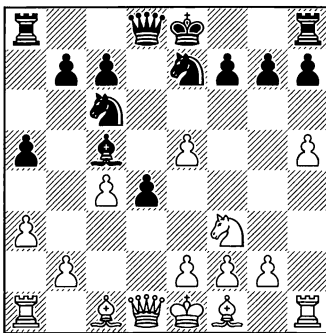
7...♙h5?! 8.♙b3! ♙d7 9.♙b5 This is one more drawback of Black's 5...a5: White's queen gets a great square on b5 when Black's light-squared bishop leaves the h3–c8 diagonal. 9...♙g6 (White was threatening 10 e6! followed by 11.♙xh5) 10.♖b3 The d4-pawn is dying.

8.♘xf3 ♙c5

After playing ...a5, castling long is not on the cards, so Black tries to arrange his pieces differently.

This position was reached in Marshall – Cohn, Hannover 1902. White is clearly better in many different ways, but I prefer the following idea:

9.h4! ♖ge7 10.h5



Preventing plans with ...♖g6; White will play g3 and ♙h3/g2 when his advantage is beyond any doubt.

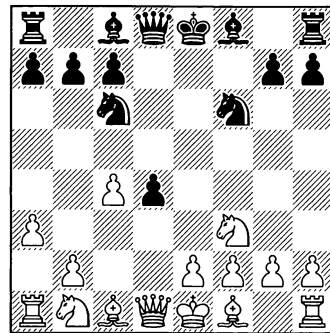
5...f6?! 6.exf6

6.♙f4 g5 is less clear.

6...♘xf6

This does not give Black any compensation for the pawn, as White has no problems with developing his pieces:

6...♙xf6 7.♙g5 ♙g6 8.♖bd2 does not make any sense for Black.



7.e3!

Definitely the easiest way for White. It is important to mention that it is 5.a3 that allows White to play the text, as otherwise he would face an annoying check on b4. White's idea is rather simple: he wants to exchange Black's only trump, the d4-pawn, which is disrupting his development.

7...♙g4 8.♙e2 ♙xf3

8...dxe3 9.♙xd8† ♙xd8 10.♙xe3 ♙e7 11.♖c3 is simply a pawn up for White.

9.♙xf3 ♙d7 10.exd4 ♖xd4 11.♖c3 0–0–0 12.♙e3 ♙c5 13.0–0

White has successfully developed his pieces and has a healthy extra pawn.

13...c6 14.♖d5!

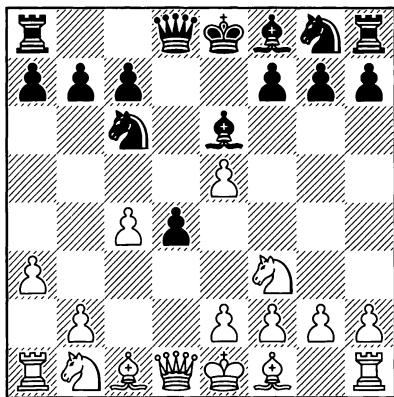
Removing the tension in the centre.

14...♖xf3† 15.♙xf3 ♙xe3 16.♖xe3

With a clear advantage for White.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e5 3.dxe5 d4 4.♖f3 ♖c6 5.a3)

A) 5...♙e6



### 6. d6d2

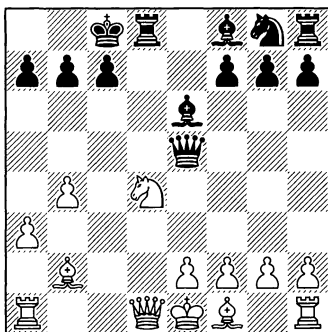
White has an important alternative at his disposal:

6.b4 dxc4 7. d6d2 e6 8. d6b3

8.b5 a5 9. e6 c5 10. bxc6 dxc6 11. Wa4 (11.g3 d6 is also unclear) 11... e5 leads to double-edged play. In this position I found an interesting idea for Black:

8...d3!?

8...Wd5 9. d6bxd4 0–0–0 occurred in the game Cooksey – Lyell, Coulsdon 2007, and here White missed a nice tactical solution: 10. e6b2! with the idea of meeting 10... dxe5 with 11. dxe5 Wxe5



12. d6c6!! dxc1+ 13. e6d1 Wd5 14. e6xd5 dxc5 15. d6xa7+ d7 16. d6b5 and White is simply a pawn up.

9. e6b2

9. exd3 Wd5! is definitely fine for Black.

9. e6b1 dxe2 10. Wxe2 a6 leads to a complicated game.

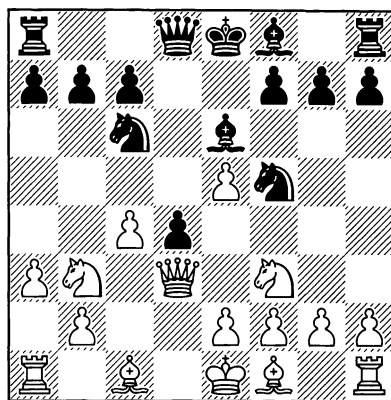
9...dxe2 10. e6xe2 Wxd1+ 11. e6xd1 0–0–0 12. e6c2 d6h6

I do not think White has anything serious in this position.

### 6...d6ge7 7. d6b3 d6f5

7... e6xc4 8. d6bxd4 is clearly preferable for White as you can see from the line 5... e6g4 6. d6bd2 d6ge7 7. h3 e6e6, as the inclusion of h3 is hardly relevant.

### 8. Wd3



The critical position of the 5... e6e6 line. Black has four options, but none of them promises equal play.

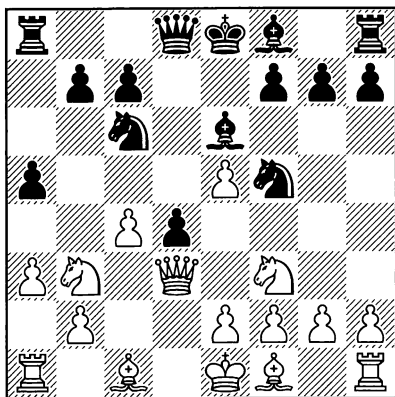
### 8...a5

Definitely the most challenging move, but as said, three other options exist:

Just bad is 8... Wd7? 9.g4! chasing Black's knight away from f5. After 9... d6h6 10.h3 White has a large advantage, Hendriks – Woudt, Hoogeveen 2005.

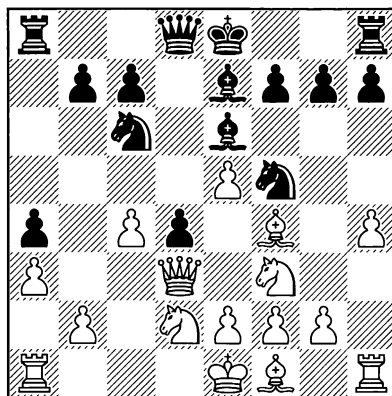
8...h5 9.h4 e6e7 10. e6g5 f6 11. exf6 gxf6 12. e6f4 and White remained a pawn up in Clavierie – Spitz, France 2005.

8...♙e7 9.g3 h5 10.♙h3!? (also quite strong is 10.h4, Benkirane – Poulain, La Fere 2007) 10...♞d7 11.♙g5 ♙xg5 12.♜xg5 ♜xe5 13.♞e4 ♜g4 14.f3 ♜f6 15.♞e5 White wins a pawn back, with an obvious advantage.



after 12.g4 ♜h4 13.♙g3 ♙xg4 14.♜xh4 gxh4 15.♙f4 ♞d7 16.♙g2) 11...♙e7 12.g3 0–0 13.♙g2± I do not see any compensation for the pawn.

**11.h4!**



### 9.♙f4!N

In my opinion this move clearly improves on the following game: 9.g4 ♜h4 10.♜fxd4 a4 11.♜xe6?! (probably the critical line runs 11.♜xc6 ♞xd3 12.exd3 ♜f3† 13.♙e2 ♙xg4 with compensation) 11...fxe6 12.♜d2 ♞xd3 13.exd3 ♜xe5 Black is by no means worse, as he regains the pawn very quickly, Pavlidis – Nabaty, Kemer 2007.

### 9...a4 10.♜bd2

White has a simple arrangement of his pieces: g3, ♙g2/h3 and 0–0, that should secure a clear edge. Black's only chance for counterplay is connected with the ...g5-advance.

Much worse is 10.g4?! ♜h4 11.♜bxd4 ♜xf3† 12.♜xf3 ♞xd3 13.exd3 ♙xg4 14.♙e2 0–0–0 with some compensation.

### 10...♙e7

Played with the idea of continuing 11...g5.

10...h6 11.h4 (after 11.0–0–0 g5 Black regains the pawn, though White seems to be better

Preventing any possible ...g5-advance.

### 11...♜xh4

Otherwise White is clearly better with his extra pawn:

11...h5 12.g3 0–0 13.♙g2 ♞a5 14.0–0 ♞d7 15.♜e4±

11...h6 12.g3 0–0 13.0–0–0! f6 14.exf6 ♙xf6 15.♙h3±

### 12.♜xh4 ♙xh4

After 12...g5 13.♜f5 gxf4 14.♜f3! White has a clear advantage: 14...♞d7 15.♜g7† ♜f8 16.♞xh7 ♜g8 17.♞xh8† ♜xh8 18.♜h5±

### 13.♜f3 ♙e7

Certainly 13...g5 would be a serious mistake, as after 14.♙d2 Black will unavoidably lose a piece after g3.

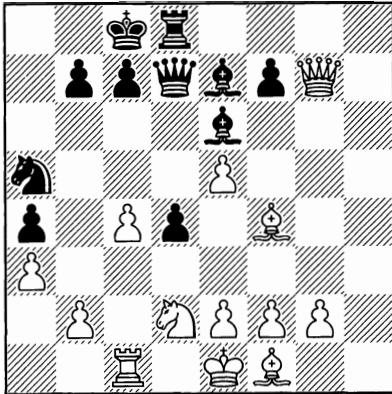
### 14.♞xh7

14.e3!? is also worth considering.

14...♖xh7

14...♖g8 15.e3! gives White a clear advantage.

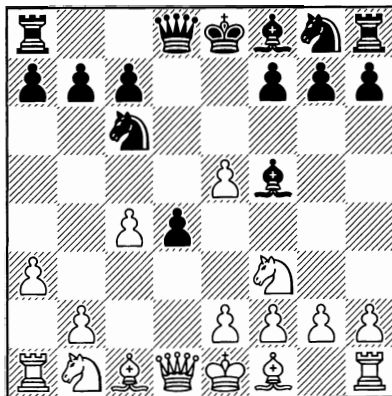
15.♖xh7 ♖d7 16.♖xg7 0-0-0 17.♖c1 ♖a5  
18.♜d2



I do not believe Black has sufficient compensation for the two pawns; thus White is much better.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e5 3.dxe5 d4 4.♜f3 ♜c6  
5.a3)

B) 5...♙f5



A rare move. Black's idea is to play ...♖e7/d7 followed by castling long.

6.e3!

Once again the same method as in the 5...a5 line works perfectly for White.

6...dxe3

6...♙g4 7.♙e2 dxe3 8.♖xd8† ♖xd8 9.♙xe3 ♙xf3 10.♙xf3 ♜xe5 11.♙xb7 ♜xc4 12.♙c6† ♜e7 13.♙xa7 ♜xb2 14.0-0 and White's a-pawn should easily decide the game.

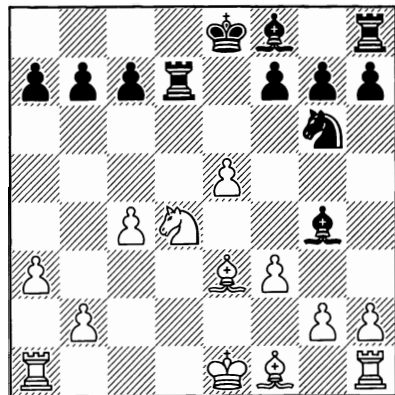
7.♖xd8† ♖xd8 8.♙xe3 ♜g7

8...f6 9.exf6 ♜xf6 10.♜c3 ♜g4 11.♙g5 ♖d7 12.♙e2 leaves White simply a pawn up.

9.♜c3 ♜g6 10.♜b5

Maybe even easier would be: 10.♜d5 ♖d7 (10...♖c8 11.♜d4 ♙e6 was Hendricks – Finegold, Plymouth 1984. Now 12.♜b5!N would leave White a pawn up with a better position: 12...♙xd5 13.cxd5 ♜cxe5 14.♜xa7) 11.0-0-0 ♜gxe5 12.♜xe5 ♜xe5 13.♙xa7! This wins a pawn.

10...♖d7 11.♜fd4 ♜xd4 12.♜xd4 ♙g4  
13.f3



I was really surprised to discover that this position has occurred twice in tournament practice. White is clearly better:

13...♙h5

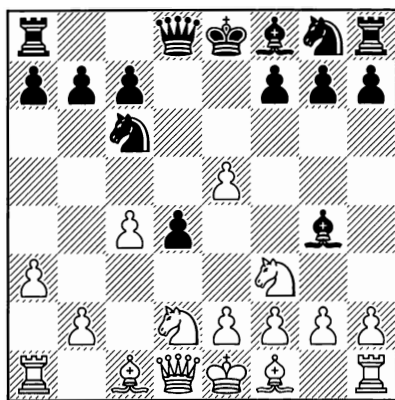
13...♔c5 was Sagalchik – Reprintsev, Roslavl 1989. Here White should have continued with: 14.0–0–0!N 0–0 15.b4 ♕xd4 16.♖xd4 ♖xd4 17.♕xd4 ♖d8 18.♕c3 ♕e6 19.g3 Covering the f4-square. 19...♗e7 20.g4 ♖g6 21.♖g1 ♖f4 22.♗c2 White should convert his extra pawn without much difficulty.

14.g4 ♖xe5 15.gxh5 ♖xd4 16.♕xd4 ♖xf3†  
17.♗f2 ♖xd4 18.♕g2

Black does not have sufficient compensation for the exchange, Gallego Jimenez – Ferron Garcia, Barcelona 2000.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e5 3.dxe5 d4 4.♗f3 ♖c6 5.a3)

C) 5...♕g4 6.♗bd2



In this position Black has mainly aimed straight at the e5-pawn with:

6...♖e7

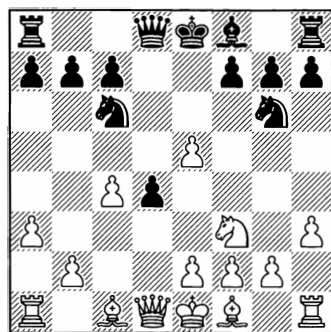
The Morozevich manoeuvre does not work properly in this position:

6...♗ge7 7.h3

And now I think it is best for us to have a further branching in the lines:

a) 7...♕xf3 8.♖xf3 ♖g6

And now I found:



9.♖b3!N

This seems to be very strong.

9...♖b8

Another line is 9...♖d7 10.g3 (I prefer the text, rather than 10.♖xb7 ♖b8 11.♖a6 ♕e7 which gives Black some activity) 10...0–0–0 11.♕g2 ♖f5 12.0–0 ♖xe5 13.♖xe5 ♖xe5 Black regains the pawn, but White's light-squared bishop makes a difference, as it will be very hard for Black to oppose the initiative on the queenside. 14.♕f4 ♖f6 (it is dangerous for Black to play 14...♖xe2 15.♖a4 ♖e6 16.b4 d3 17.♖f1 ♖f6 18.♖ad1 ♗b8 19.♕d5 with a clear advantage) 15.♖ad1 g5 16.♕c1 h6 17.♖a4 ♖e6 18.b4 ♖xc4 19.♖d2!± White will easily seize the initiative along the c-file.

10.e3!

A very important nuance! In many lines Black's pawn on a7 will be under attack.

10...♕e7

Bad is 10...♕c5 in view of 11.♖b5!.

10...♖xe5 11.♖xe5 ♖xe5 12.exd4 ♖xd4 13.♕e3 ♖e4 14.0–0–0 ♕e7 15.♖d4! (15.♕xa7?! ♕g5† 16.♕e3 ♕xe3† 17.♖xe3 ♖xe3† 18.fxe3 ♗e7 and Black has some compensation due to his strong knight) 15...♖c6 16.♖d5 ♖d7 17.♕xa7 ♖a8 18.♕e3 White is simply a pawn up.

11.♕e2 0–0 12.0–0 ♖xe5 13.♖xe5 ♖xe5 14.exd4 ♖xd4 15.♕e3

Once again the a7-pawn is hanging.

15...♖e4 16.♕xa7! ♖xe2 17.♕xb8 ♖xb8

18.♖ae1 ♖h5 19.g4 ♜xg4 20.♗f3!

This grand finale leaves White an exchange up.

b) 7...♙e6 8.♜b3 ♙xc4

There is no point in Black playing 8...♜f5 and we are getting the same position as in the line 5...♙e6 6.♜bd2 ♜ge7 7.♜b3 ♜f5 with White's extra move h3.

9.♜bxd4 ♜xd4 10.♗xd4

10.♜xd4!?N also leads to a position that is in White's advantage, for example: 10...♗d7 11.♗c2 ♗xd4 12.e3 ♗xe5 13.♙xc4 ♜c6 14.♙d2 0–0–0 15.♙c3 and White is clearly better with such a strong pair of bishops.

10...♗xd4 11.♜xd4 ♜g6 12.f4 0–0–0 13.e3 ♙d5 14.♙d2

Black did not have sufficient compensation for the pawn in Alekseev – Korzubov, Minsk 1987.

Black can also try to castle quickly with:

6...♗d7

But White is well placed to advance on the queenside, and the black pieces will soon prove to be misplaced.

7.b4 0–0–0

Or 7...♜ge7 and now easiest would be 8.b5 ♜a5 9.♗a4 b6 10.♙b2 and Black loses the d4-pawn. 10.c5!? comes into consideration as well.

8.♙b2 ♗e6 9.♗b3

9.h3 is also interesting, but the text is strong enough.

9...♙xf3 10.♜xf3 ♜xe5 11.♜xd4 ♗xc4?

This was played in Monin – Czebe, Zalakaros 1991. Now White could have decided the game with: 12.♗h3! ♜b8 13.e4

Black will lose material.

## 7.b4

In my opinion this is White's most ambitious option.

7.h3

This might be a worthy alternative:

7...♙xf3 8.♜xf3 0–0–0 9.♗a4

The only way!

9.g3 ♜xe5 10.♜xe5 ♗xe5 11.♗d3 (11.♙g2 allows the annoying 11...d3) This is less clear, as Black manages to block the h1–a8 diagonal after: 11...f5! 12.♙g2 ♜f6 13.0–0 ♜e4 14.b4 ♙e7 with unclear play in Wiacek – Spitz, e-mail 2004.

9...♜b8 10.♙g5! f6 11.exf6 gxf6 12.♙d2

Black did not manage to prove any compensation for the pawn in Brunner – Henris, Belgium 2005.

7...♜xe5 8.♜xe5 ♗xe5 9.♙b2

9.♗a4† makes little sense in view of 9...♙d7!.

## 9...0–0–0

9...♜f6 and here instead of 10.♜f3, as was played in Segalat – Claudel 1989, White should continue: 10.h3!N ♖h5 (10...♙h5 11.g4 ♙g6 12.♜f3± loses a pawn for nothing) 11.♙g1 ♙e6 12.♙xd4 0–0–0 13.e3 ♗g6 14.♜f3 White is just a healthy pawn up; he has no problems with castling long.

## 10.h3 ♙h5

The two other options are no better:

10...♖h5 11.♗a4 ♜b8 (11...a6 would allow White a decisive attack after 12.b5!) 12.♙xd4! This wins a pawn, as Black cannot capture White's bishop in view of mate on e8.

10...♙f5 11.♜b3 ♜f6

11...♙e4 does not change the evaluation: 12.♙xd4 ♗f5 (threatening ...♙c2) 13.♙a2! ♜f6 14.e3 ♙d6 15.f3! ♙g3† 16.♜d2 ♖h5 17.♜c1 White's king finds a safe place on the queenside; Black has no compensation for the pawn.

12.♙xd4 ♗e4

12...♖f4 13.e3 ♗g5 14.♖f3 ♙e7 15.♙e2 **6.b4**  
and White easily holds his extra pawn.

13.e3 ♙e7 14.♖f3 ♗c2

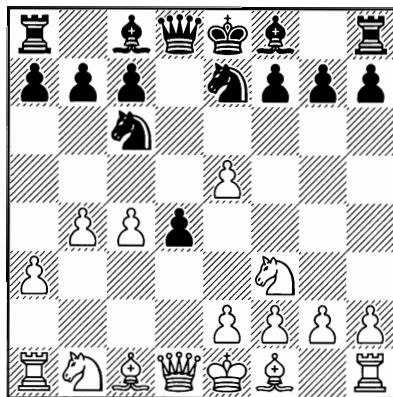
14...♖e6 15.♙e2 ♙e4 16.♖g3 Once again accurate play leaves Black with no compensation.

15.♖c1 ♖xb3 16.♖xf5† ♗b8 17.♖c3 ♖b2 18.♖c2

After the queen exchange White will have a technically winning position.

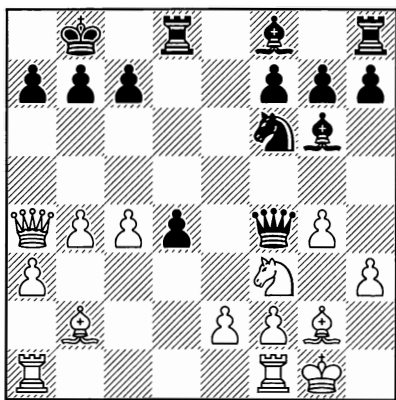
**11.g4 ♙g6 12.♖a4 ♗b8 13.♙g2 ♘f6**

The tactics do not work for Black: 13...♙d3 14.0-0 ♙xe2 15.♖fe1 with a deadly pin.



Finally we have arrived at the game P.H. Nielsen – K. Rasmussen, Silkeborg 2008, via a different move order.

**14.♘f3 ♖f4 15.0-0**



White has a clear edge, as Black is losing his central pawn.

**(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e5 3.dxe5 d4 4.♘f3 ♘c6 5.a3)**

**D) 5...♘ge7**

Definitely the main response to 5.a3.

The most straightforward move and in my opinion a critical one. White has other options such as 6.e3 and 6.♘bd2, but the text seems to me the most promising continuation for White.

**6...♘g6**

The logical follow-up, but not the only option here:

6...♙e6

Nobody has ever tried this move.

7.♙b2 ♙xc4

7...♘g6 would transpose to 7...♙e6, which we will examine below.

Perhaps this is untried for a reason: White is clearly better after:

8.♘bd2 ♙a6

8...♙e6 9.b5 followed by 10.♘xd4 and White remains a pawn up.

9.♘b3 d3

9...♘d5 10.♘bxd4 ♘xd4 11.♘xd4± leaves White with one pawn more.

10.♘c5!?

10.exd3 is certainly good enough as well.

10...dxe2 11.♙xe2 ♙xe2

11...♖xd1† 12.♙xd1 and Black has to give up either his light-squared bishop or the b7-pawn.

12.♙xe2 b6 13.♞d1 ♚c8 14.♜d7!  
White's advantage is indisputable.

6...♙g4

This has twice occurred in tournament practice.

7.♙b2 ♜f5

7...♜g6 transposes to 7...♙g4.

8.♞d3

A very strong manoeuvre: White anticipates Black's idea of ...♙xf3 followed by ...♜xe5, as his knight on f5 will hang. At the same time White's queen transfers to e4, forcing Black to swap his light-squared bishop for White's knight.

8...g6

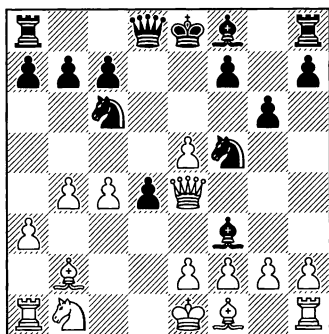
After 8...♞d7 9.♞e4 ♙xf3 10.gxf3 White's light-squared bishop gets a fantastic square on h3. White's advantage is unquestionable.

9.♞e4

In the game Babula – Banikas, Turin 2006, Black managed to obtain interesting compensation after 9.e6 ♙g7 10.exf7† ♜xf7 11.♜bd2 ♞e8. This is one of Nigel Davies' recommendations in *Gambiteer II*, so this is worth looking out for.

9...♙xf3

After 9...h5?! 10.♜bd2! Black loses his central pawn: 10...♙g7 11.b5 ♜a5 12.♜xd4 ♜xd4 13.♞xd4+–



10.exf3!

10.gxf3 ♙g7 11.f4 ♞h4 allows Black

counterplay, but I did not manage to find any reasonable compensation for the pawn after taking with the e-pawn.

10...♙h6

Or 10...♙g7 11.f4 0–0 12.♜d2 ♞e8 13.0–0–0 with a clear advantage.

11.f4 0–0 12.♜d2

12.♙d3!?

12...f6 13.♜f3 fxe5 14.fxe5 ♞e7 15.c5

And next White will play ♙c4† and e6 with a clear advantage.

7.♙b2

We have now reached the final branching point in this chapter. We will have Morozevich's choice as the main option, but taking the pawn back immediately is a worthy alternative. So, our options are: **D1)** 7...♜gxe5 and **D2)** 7...a5.

Besides these, I feel compelled to mention two less serious moves:

7...♙g4 does not work out well for Black. 8.♜xd4 ♜gxe5 (8...♜cxe5 9.♞b3 leaves White a simple pawn up) 9.♜xc6 ♞xd1† 10.♜xd1 ♜xc6 11.♜d2 0–0–0 12.f3 ♙e6 13.e3± White keeps everything under control.

Black has once tried 7...♙e6 8.♜xd4 ♜gxe5, but after the following simple continuation, he has plenty of problems: 9.♜xc6 ♞xd1† 10.♜xd1 fxe6 11.e3 0–0–0† 12.♜e1! Defending the f2-pawn in case of a future ...♜g4. 12...♜g4 13.♙e2± White was almost winning in L'Ami – Kuipers, Leiden 2007.

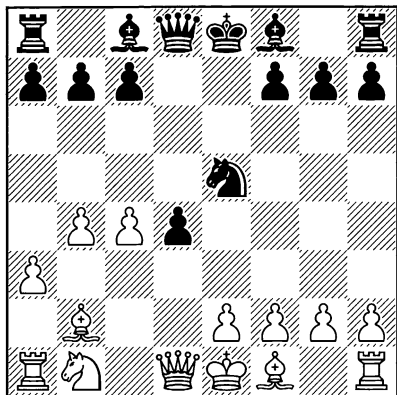
(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e5 3.dxe5 d4 4.♜f3 ♜c6 5.a3 ♜ge7 6.b4 ♜g6 7.♙b2)

**D1)** 7...♜gxe5 8.♜xe5 ♜xe5

When I analysed this variation it was very important for me to understand why Black would want to insert the moves 7...a5 8.b5,



before capturing the pawn on e5. To be honest, my initial conclusion was wrong. After taking a deeper look, my evaluation changed and I came to what I hope is a more accurate understanding of this issue. We will return to this question later in the chapter.



### 9.e3

Another natural continuation is 9.c5. This would be impossible with the inclusion of 7...a5 8.b5, but I believe that Black has a perfectly playable position after 9.c5: 9...♟c6 (less convincing is 9...♟e6?! 10.♟xd4 ♟c4 11.e3 ♟xb2 12.♟xb2 ♟e7 13.♟c3 and Black does not have sufficient compensation for the pawn) 10.♟d2 a5! 11.b5 ♟a7 Black gets counterplay on the queenside.

### 9...♟e6

This is a very important moment for the 7...♟gxe5 line, as White has two options:

### 10.♟xd4

I believe this is White's best choice.

The main alternative is:

### 10.c5

Once again I have to mention that this move would be impossible if Black had inserted 7...a5 8.b5.

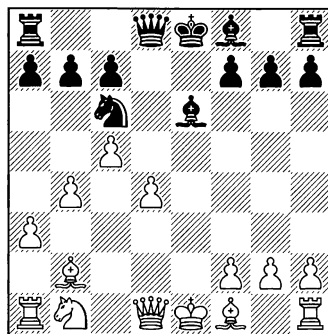
### 10...♟c6

Only not 10...♟h4? 11.♟xd4 ♟g4 12.♟f4 0–0–0 13.♟e2 ♟e7 14.♟g3! and Black did not manage to find any compensation for the pawn in Zarubin – Kanep, St Petersburg 2006.

Also pointless is 10...♟c4? 11.♟xd4± and Black's knight is doing nothing on c4, Laasanen – Lardot, Jyvaskyla 2000.

### 11.exd4

And now I believe Black should continue:



### 11...♟e7!N

The only game where this position was reached continued: 11...♟e7 12.♟e2 0–0–0 13.0–0 ♟f6 Black regains the pawn, but White's pieces are much more active. After 14.♟c3! Black has a few options:

a) 14...♟xd4 Other captures are clearly worse, as can be seen below. 15.♟c1 ♟d8 (Obviously Black might try to swap queens with 15...♟f4, but White is clearly better after 16.♟xf4 ♟xf4 17.♟fd1 ♟e7 18.♟d5 ♟xd5 19.♟xd5 ♟f6 20.♟xf6 ♟xf6 21.♟g4† ♟b8 22.♟e1 and White's pieces are dominating.) This position arose in Zhukova – Didenko, Odessa 2007, and here I believe White should have played 16.♟b5 ♟d4 17.♟e2 ♟xe2† 18.♟xe2 ♟g6 19.♟c3 with unpleasant pressure.

b) 14...♟xd4 15.♟a4! This helps White to seize the initiative. A wonderful variation runs: 15...♟d2 16.♟ab1 ♟f5 17.♟bd1! ♟xb2 18.♟xc6!! ♟d7 (18...♟e7 loses immediately

to the nice 19.♔a6! 19.♖e4 ♜xc3 20.♞xd7! with a crushing attack.

c) 14...♖xd4 15.♖b5 ♖xe2† 16.♞xe2 with a clear advantage for White.

12.b5

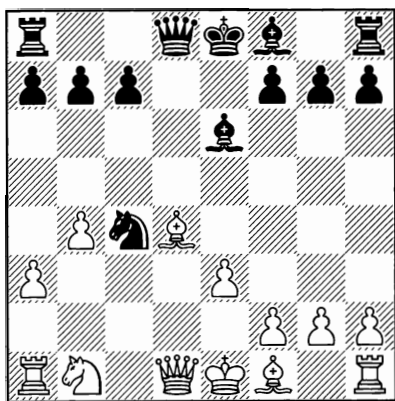
12.♔e2?! ♔f6 and Black regains the pawn with dividends.

12...♖a5 13.♖d2 ♔g5 14.♖e4 ♖b3 15.♞b1 ♔d5=

And Black has plenty of play for the pawn.

### 10...♖xc4

10...♖c6? 11.♔c3 ♞xd1† 12.♙xd1 0–0–0† 13.♖d2 White keeps the extra pawn.



### 11.♞c2

Less challenging is 11.♖d2 ♖xd2 12.♞xd2 ♞d5! and Black has decent play.

### 11...♖d6

Too passive is 11...♖b6, as Black is not fighting against White's dark-squared bishop. White has strong pressure after 12.♖c3 c6 13.♔d3 (13.♞d1 is worth considering) 13...♞c7 14.0–0 0–0–0 15.♞fc1 and the black king may soon be under attack.

### 12.♔d3 ♞d7

12...♞g5?! makes little sense. The b5-pawn is not hanging compared with the main line and White simply continues with: 13.0–0

♖b5 (13...c6 14.f4 looks horrible for Black, as White will push away his opponent's minor pieces with f4–f5 and then e3–e4–e5) 14.♔xb5† ♞xb5 15.♞xc7 ♞c8 16.♞g3 White still has that extra pawn.

### 13.♖c3

This is more tempting than 13.♖d2 ♖f5 14.♖f3.

### 13...♔e7

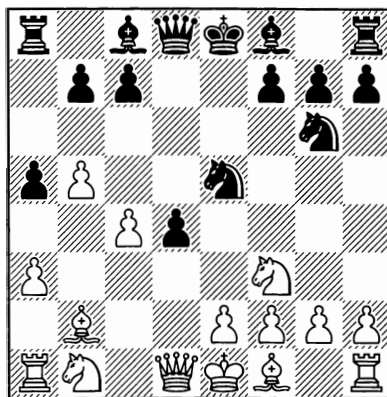
After 13...♖f5 14.0–0–0! Black surprisingly faces a powerful attack: 14...♖xd4 15.exd4 c6 16.d5! ♔xd5 (16...cxd5? 17.♔b5+–) 17.♞he1† ♔e7 (or 17...♔e6 18.♔c4 ♞e7 19.♞b3 with a decisive attack) 18.♔b5! 0–0 19.♖xd5 ♔g5† 20.f4 Black loses material.

14.0–0 ♔f6 15.♔xf6 gxf6 16.♖e4 ♖xe4 17.♔xe4 0–0–0 18.♞ac1±

White has a clear positional advantage.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e5 3.dxe5 d4 4.♖f3 ♖c6 5.a3 ♖ge7 6.b4 ♖g6 7.♔b2)

D2) 7...a5 8.b5 ♖cxe5



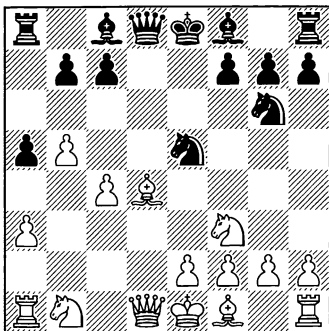
### 9.♖xe5

White has two other serious options, but the text seems to be the best. Black has reasonable play if the queens are swapped:

9. ♖xd4 ♗xd4 10. ♕xd4 ♜xc4 11. e3 ♝d6 12. ♜bd2 ♕d7 13. a4 f6 14. ♕e2 This is Peralta – Perez Candelario, Spain 2006, and here Black should have played: 14... ♜f5 15. ♕c3 ♖b4 16. ♖c1 ♗e7 17. 0–0 c6 with balanced play.

9. ♕xd4

Recently this has been White's favoured path, but there is a problem.



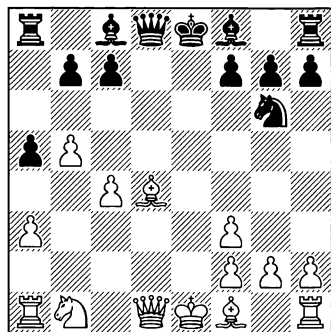
9... ♜xf3†!N

This unexpected pawn sacrifice promises Black interesting compensation for the pawn, though further analysis is required.

In the game White easily gained a big advantage: 9... ♜xc4 10. e3 ♕e6 (Apparently better was 10... ♝d6, but here White keeps a pleasant edge as well: 11. ♜bd2 ♜f5 12. ♕c3 ♕d6 13. ♕e2 [13. h4!?] 13... 0–0 14. 0–0 ♗e7 15. ♗c2± White's pieces are much better coordinated.) 11. ♗c2 ♝d6 12. ♕d3 The best square for White's bishop, where it prevents Black from playing ... ♜f5 and puts additional pressure on the kingside. 12... ♜h4 A desperate attempt to create some play. 13. ♜xh4 ♗xh4 14. 0–0 ♕e7 In Sargissian – Slobodjan, Dresden 2007, White could have taken the pawn: 15. ♗xc7 a4 (Black cannot castle, as he loses a piece after 15... 0–0 16. g3 ♗g5 17. f4+–. Also no use is 15... ♖c8 16. ♗xa5+–) 16. ♜d2 White is simply a pawn up.

10. exf3

10. gxf3?! The obvious drawback of this recapture is that Black's pieces gain the h4-square as an option. 10... ♕e6 11. e3 ♗h4 12. ♜c3 0–0–0 White's position is dangerous, despite the extra pawn.



10... ♗e7†!

I found this point before checking Nigel Davies' recommendations in *Gambiteer II*, and he also suggests exactly this.

Black gets good play for the pawn. For example:

11. ♗e2

11. ♕e2? is problematic: 11... ♜f4 12. g3 ♜g2†! 13. ♜f1 ♕h3 14. ♜g1 0–0–0 and Black is close to winning.

11. ♕e3 ♗e5 12. ♗d4 ♗xd4 13. ♕xd4 ♕f5 followed by 14... 0–0–0 with play for the pawn – Davies.

11... ♗xe2†

Davies suggests 11... ♕e6, but I think the text move is simplest.

12. ♕xe2 ♜f4 13. g3 ♜xe2 14. ♜xe2 ♕e6

Black has great compensation with his pair of bishops.

9... ♜xe5 10. e3

10. ♕xd4 ♜xc4 11. e3 will probably transpose to the main line after 11... ♕e6 12. ♗c2, although Black has the additional option of 11... ♝d6 12. ♕d3 ♜f5 or 12... ♕e7.

10... ♕e6 11. ♕xd4 ♜xc4 12. ♗c2

This is much stronger than 12.♖d2 ♖xd2 13.♗xd2 ♗d5! with decent play for Black, Krivoshey – Lorenzo de la Riva, Balaguer 2006.

## 12...♖d6

Nobody has ever tried 12...♖b6, and indeed Black's knight is poorly placed on b6. White has good chances after 13.♖d2! (less convincing is 13.♙d3 ♙e7 14.0-0 ♙f6 15.♙xf6 ♗xf6 16.♖d2 0-0-0! and Black has some play) and it is very difficult for Black to deal with White's positional pressure: 13...♗d7 (if 13...♙d5 then 14.♖e4! is very strong) 14.♙d3 ♙e7 15.0-0 ♙f6 16.♙xf6 gxf6 17.♖f3 0-0-0 18.♖d4 With a clear positional advantage due to Black's weaknesses on the kingside.

While studying the recent material on the Albin, I found a strange recommendation in Nigel Davies' book *Gambiteer II* in this position.

12...♗d5?!

This seems to be very unnatural, as it gives White two additional tempos, assisting him in seizing the initiative. Still, this is the move Davies' repertoire relies on.

13.♖c3 ♗g5

Davies ends here, which I would be tempted to do as well, if I had to defend Black's position.

14.f4

Logical and strong. We will check the different retreats available for the black queen:

14...♗e7

14...♗g6 15.♙d3 f5 16.0-0 ♗f7 17.♗fc1

A good positional move, with the idea of chasing Black's knight away after ♖e2, thus securing an edge (it is not necessary to enter into the complications after 17.e4 ♖xa3 18.♗f2 ♙c4!). A possible line where Black resists this goes: 17...♖xa3 18.♗e2

♙b4 (18...♖c4 19.♖a4 ♖d6 20.♖c5 ♙d5 21.e4 is good for White, as is 18...♙d8 19.♖a4 ♙b4 20.♖c5 0-0 21.♖xe6 ♗xe6 22.♗xc7 ♗f7 23.♗xf7 ♖xf7 24.♗h5+ ♗g6 25.♗h3 and wins.) 19.♗b2 ♗e7 (19...♖c4 20.♗xb4) 20.♖a4 ♙d8 21.♗c3 White is close to winning.

14...♗g4 15.♙xc4 ♙xc4 16.♗e4+ ♙e7 17.♖f2!± and Black will lose material, as White is threatening both ♗xb7 and ♙xg7 following by ♗xc4.

15.♙xc4

This is much easier than the complications after 15.f5 ♙xf5 16.♗xf5 ♖xe3 17.♗d3 ♖c2+∞.

15...♙xc4 16.♗a4 ♙e6

16...♙d3 17.♙d1 ♙e4 18.0-0 and Black is just lost.

17.0-0

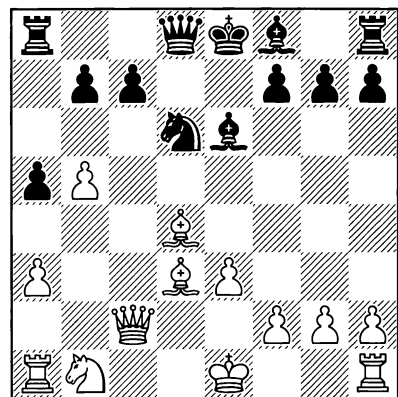
Also 17.b6+ c6 18.f5!, as recommended by my editor Jacob Aagaard, looks great for White, but I like to keep things simple.

White has a huge development advantage and Black cannot defend against this, for example:

17...f5 18.e4 0-0-0 19.♖e2 fxe4 20.♗fc1

White's attack will be decisive.

## 13.♙d3



13...♗g5

Until now all Black's hopes have been connected with this active continuation. But it is also very important to examine Black's other options:

13...♖d7 14.♘c3 ♘f5

Here White has a pleasant choice.

15.♙e5

Also strong is 15.♘e2. For example: 15...♙d6 (15...♘xd4 16.♘xd4 ♙d6 does not bring relief either, after 17.♙e4 ♖b8 18.0-0 g6 19.f4†. Black is under strong pressure all over the board.) 16.0-0 0-0 17.♙b2 White is clearly better, as Black has serious problems with his knight on f5.

15...♙d6 16.♙xd6 ♘xd6 17.0-0 h6 18.♖fd1 0-0 19.♙h7† ♘h8 20.♙e4

Transferring the bishop to a more active square.

20...♗e7 21.♙f3

With a pleasant advantage for White.

13...♙e7 14.♘d2 (A serious inaccuracy would be 14.♙xg7 ♖g8 15.♙e5 ♙f6 and Black takes over the initiative.) 14...♙f6 15.♙xf6 ♗xf6 16.0-0 White is much better, as Black needs to waste a few more tempos before he can castle.

#### 14.f4

Definitely the most ambitious move.

White has tried other moves in practice:

14.0-0 ♘xb5 15.♙xb5†

15.♙b2 ♙d6? (Black should have played 15...0-0-0 16.♖c1 c6 with unclear play) 16.f4± This led to a clear advantage in Peralta – Amura, San Luis 2006.

After 15.♘c3 ♘xd4 16.exd4 ♙d6 White can hardly hope for anything serious, having given up his dark-squared bishop. Black equalized easily after 17.♖ab1 ♗h6 18.g3 0-0 19.♖xb7 ♙xa3 in Gelfand – Kasimdzhanov, Moscow (blitz) 2007.

15...♗xb5 16.♗xc7

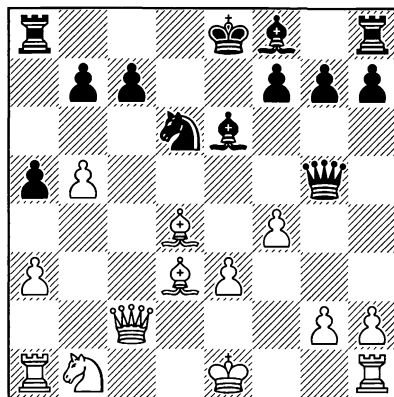
And now instead of the natural 16...♖c8 17.♗g3 when Black experienced serious difficulties with his development in Yakovich – Vorotnikov, Moscow 2007, Black should react calmly with:

16...♗d7! 17.♗g3

17.♖c1 ♖c8 18.♗xc8† ♗xc8 19.♖xc8† ♙xc8 and the endgame is equal.

17...f6

Followed by 18...♙d6 and 19...0-0 and Black has nothing to worry about.



#### 14...♗h4†

A very important alternative is:

14...♗d5

Surprisingly the arising position is very complicated, but I succeeded in working out the best line for White:

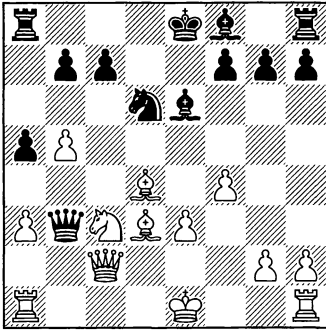
15.♘c3!

After 15.0-0 ♘f5! (15...♘xb5 16.♙xb5† ♗xb5 17.f5 is quite dangerous for Black) 16.♙xf5 ♙xf5 17.♗f2 (17.♗xc7 probably should lead to a draw: 17...♖c8 18.♗xa5 [18.♘c3 ♗xg2† 19.♘xg2 ♖xc7 20.e4 ♖c4! 21.♖fd1 ♙c5 and Black is by no means worse] 18...♖c2 19.♖f2 [White can avoid the draw with 19.♘d2, but it is rather White who has to be careful after 19...b6 20.♗xb6 ♖xd2 21.♗b8† ♘d7 22.♖f2 ♖xf2 23.♘xf2 ♙c5! 24.♗xh8 ♙xd4] 19...♖c1† 20.♖f1 ♖c2 With a draw by repetition.) 17...♗xb5

18. ♖c3 ♜c4 (18... ♜d7!?) 19. ♜fc1 0–0–0= White definitely has compensation for the pawn, but Black's position is not without resources.

15... ♜b3

The point behind 14... ♜d5. White has a wild choice here but the best move is:



16. ♜f2!

Somehow this appears to be the best square for White's queen.

16... ♖f5

16... 0–0–0 17. 0–0 (worse is 17. ♙c2 ♜c4 18. ♜b1 ♖f5 19. ♙b3 ♜d3 20. ♙c2=) 17... ♖xb5 18. ♙xb5 (less clear is 18. ♜ab1 ♜xc3 19. ♙xc3 ♖xc3) 18... ♜xd4 19. exd4 ♜xc3 20. f5 Black just lacks one consolidating move such as ... ♙d6, meanwhile White develops a decisive attack: 20... ♙d5 (20... ♙d7 would lead to the same position) 21. ♜fc1 ♜b3 22. ♜f4 c6 (22... c5 23. ♜e5! looks decisive) 23. ♙xc6 ♙xc6 24. ♜ab1 ♜d5 25. ♜xc6 ♜xc6 26. ♜c1 With a decisive advantage.

17. ♙xf5 ♙xf5 18. e4

18. 0–0 0–0–0 19. e4 is just a transposition.

18... 0–0–0 19. 0–0

Of course not 19. exf5? ♙c5! and Black wins.

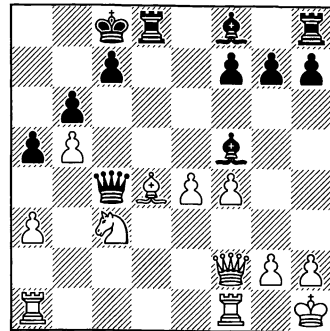
This is the critical position for the evaluation of 14... ♜d5.

19... b6

Threatening 20... ♜xd4 followed by ... ♙c5.

19... ♜c4 20. ♖d5 ♜xd5 (Black is losing after 20... ♜xb5 21. ♖xc7! ♖xc7 22. ♜ab1 ♜a6 23. ♙e5 ♙d6 24. ♜c5 ♖b8 25. ♜b6, and 20... ♙e4 loses to 21. ♖b6 ♖xb6 22. ♜ac1.) 21. exd5 ♜xb5 (21... ♜xd5 22. b6! is hopeless for Black) 22. ♜fc1 ♜xd5 23. ♙e5 ♙d6 24. ♖d1 ♜c5 25. ♙xd6 ♜xf2 ♖xf2 cxd6 27. ♜xd6 This endgame is easily winning for White.

20. ♖h1 ♜c4



21. ♖d5!

This strong move secures White's advantage, as Black is forced to sacrifice an exchange.

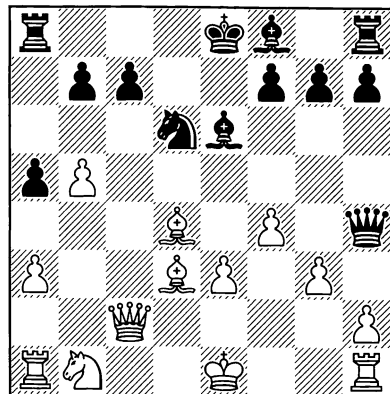
21... ♜xd5 22. exd5 ♜xb5 23. ♜fc1 ♖b7

23... ♖b8 24. a4 ♜xd5 25. ♙xb6! White wins.

24. ♜f3 ♙d6 25. ♙xg7 ♙g8 26. ♙e5+

Black has no compensation for the exchange.

15. g3



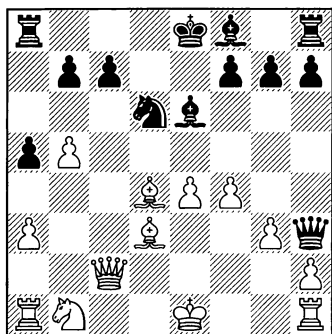
**15...♖h5****15...♗h3**

This move was suggested as an improvement of Black's play by Russian Grandmaster Nikolai Vlassov in his comments to the game Topalov – Morozevich, Monaco 2005. It was later also recommended in Nigel Davies' *Gambiteer II*. Maybe they used the same analysis engine? It seems to be insufficient to resurrect the line, but is probably still the best option.

After some analysis I have determined that in order to fight for the advantage White has to react with ambitious play in the centre:

**16.e4**

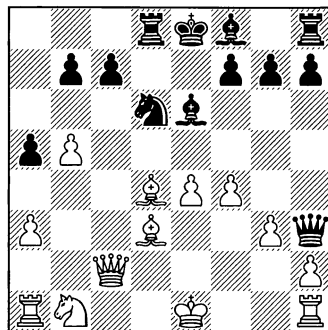
And now I analysed two possibilities, the best of which is:

**16...♞d8**

Threatening ...♜xe4.

The other option is 16...0–0–0, which looks very risky as White has every chance of generating an attack, but the position is very forcing and White has to prove his advantage. 17.♜d2! ♜xb5 (Other moves are: 17...♜xe4? loses to 18.♞c1!, and the slow 17...♗g2 is met by 18.♞g1 ♗xh2 19.b6 c6 20.♗c3 followed by ♗a5 with a strong attack.) 18.♞xb5 ♞xd4 19.♞c1 c5 (Obviously bad is 19...c6? 20.♞xc6 with a crushing attack. 19...♞d6 is closer to playable, but not much: 20.♜f3 ♞b3 21.♗xb3 ♗g2 22.♜xd4 ♗xh1† 23.♞f1 ♗xe4† 24.♜e2 White is

clearly better as Black has only two pawns for the piece.) 20.♜f3 ♞d8 21.♞b1!± White seizes a dangerous initiative, while Black's queen is stuck on h3.

**17.f5**

Only like this!

Unclear is 17.♞f1 ♗h5 18.♞e2 ♗h3 19.♜d2 ♞g4 20.♞xg4 ♗xg4 21.b6 c6.

**17...♜xe4**

Another line is 17...♞c4 18.♜c3 ♞xd3 19.♗xd3 ♞e7 20.♜d5! ♗g2 21.0–0–0 ♞g5† 22.♜b1 0–0 23.f6 ♞fe8 24.h4 with an initiative.

18.fxe6 ♗xe6 19.♞c4 ♗e7 20.♞e3 ♜xg3 21.hxg3 ♗xe3† 22.♗e2 ♞c5 23.♗xe3† ♞xe3 24.♞a2 0–0 25.♞f1 ♞d4 26.♞c2 g6 27.♞f3 ♞g5 28.♞b3±

From a material point of view the position is equal, but I believe this is one of those cases where the minor piece is stronger than three pawns. Black cannot create a passed pawn quickly, while White has clear targets for an assault on the queenside.

**16.♜c3**

16.0–0!? comes into consideration as well.

**16...♜f5 17.0–0 0–0–0!**

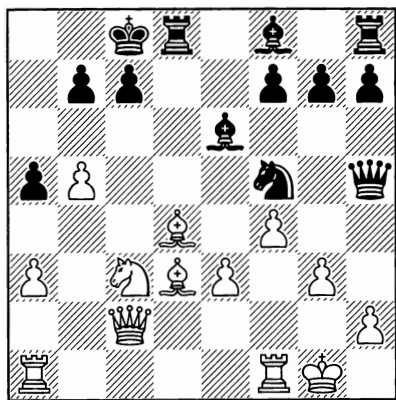
A questionable choice, but the other options are no big deal either:

17...♜xd4 18.exd4 0–0–0 (even worse is

18...♙d6 19.f5 ♙d7 20.♞ae1† ♜f8 21.♞e4 (with a huge advantage) 19.f5 ♙d7 20.♞d5 ♙d6 21.♞xc7! ♜b8 22.b6 White is clearly better with an extra pawn.

17...♙d6 18.♙xf5 ♙xf5 19.e4 ♙h3 20.e5 ♙e7 (Black is losing after 20...♙xf1 21.exd6 ♙h3 22.♞e4† ♙e6 23.dxc7 0–0 24.♞xb7 as the b- and c-pawns easily decide the game.) 21.♞d5 ♙d8 22.♞f2 0–0 23.f5± White is dominating (as pointed out by Vlassov).

17...♙e7 18.♞d5! ♙xd5 19.♙xf5 0–0 20.e4 c5 21.♙e5! (after 21.♙xg7 ♜xg7 22.exd5 ♙f6 the bishop on d4 would help Black to survive being a pawn down – Vlassov) 21...♙e6 22.♙xe6 fxe6 23.♞c4 ♞h6 24.♞ad1 with a strategically winning position.



### 18.♙a7!

This brilliant move allows White to launch a decisive attack.

### 18...♞g4

The point is that 18...b6 is impossible in view of 19.♙xb6! cxb6 20.♞d5† ♙c5 21.♞xb6† with a winning advantage.

### 19.♞a4!N+–

With a decisive attack. Surprisingly in Topalov – Morozevich, Monte Carlo 2005,

White went wrong with 19.♞e4? and eventually lost, though he probably still had an advantage after this mistake.

### Conclusion:

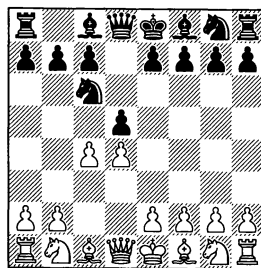
The variation with 5.a3 has become a dangerous weapon against the Albin Counter Gambit. I can hardly see a playable line for Black to replace the main line. According to my analysis, this line currently favours White, nevertheless we should never forget that the arising positions are very complicated and offer both sides room for improvements and over-the-board improvisation.





# Chapter 26

## Queen's Gambit Chigorin Defence



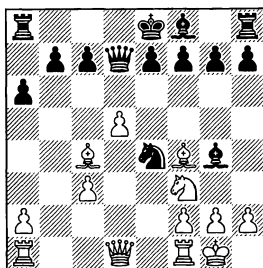
### Variation Index

1.d4 d5 2.c4 ♘c6

3.♘c3

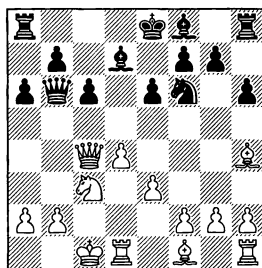
A) 3...e5	p 390
B) 3...♘f6	p 391
C) 3...e6	p 394
D) 3...dxc4 4.♘f3 ♘f6 5.♙g5	p 395
D1) 5...a6	p 396
D2) 5...♘d5	p 398
D3) 5...h6	p 399

D1) after 11...♖d7



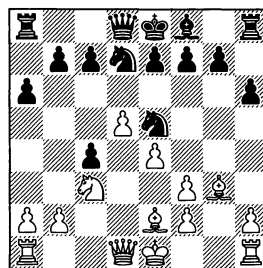
12.♖b1!N

D3) note to the 6th move



13.♙d3!N

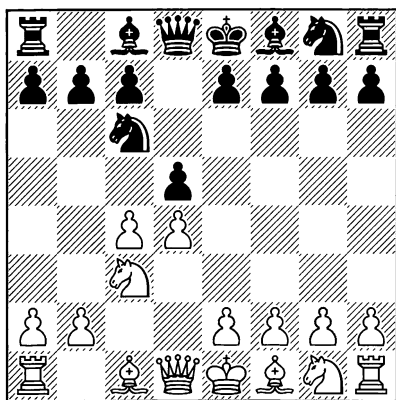
D2) after 11.gxf3



11...g5!N

**1.d4 d5 2.c4 ♘c6**

This opening is named after the famous 19th century Russian grandmaster Mikhail Chigorin. This line violates some classical rules: Black does not support the central pawn on d5, and later on he is willing to exchange a bishop for a knight (usually the c8-bishop for the f3-knight). The peak period of this opening was 1995–1998, mostly thanks to Alexander Morozevich's efforts. Recently it has been less popular, because White has managed to find several ways to achieve an advantage. Now Igor Miladinovic is perhaps the only modern grandmaster who regularly plays the Chigorin Defence. Anyway, in my opinion the Chigorin Defence remains playable and is a very interesting opening. In fact, it might work as a surprise weapon.

**3.♘c3**

The common alternatives are 3.♗f3 and 3.cxd5, but the text seems to be quite interesting. In my opinion Black is experiencing definite problems after 3.♘c3. The four lines we will look at in this chapter do not all have equal value. The first three are actually irrelevant for the continued practice of this line as far as I am concerned. The options are **A) 3...e5**, **B) 3...♗f6**, **C) 3...e6** and the main move **D) 3...dxc4**.

**(1.d4 d5 2.c4 ♘c6 3.♘c3)****A) 3...e5**

This does not solve Black's problems. White has an edge after a forcing line:

**4.cxd5 ♘xd4 5.e3 ♗f5 6.♙b5† ♙d7**

Now White has an annoying queen move.

**7.♙b3! ♘d6**

Black is worse after developing the g8-knight:

**7...♗f6 8.♙xd7† ♘xd7**

8...♙xd7 9.♙xb7 loses a pawn.

**9.♗f3**

9.♙xb7 ♖b8 10.♙c6 ♙b4 promises Black definite compensation.

**9...♗d6**

9...♙d6 10.0–0 (Again 10.♙xb7 leads to unclear play: 10...♖b8 11.♙xa7 [11.♙a6? ♗c5 12.♙e2 e4 allows Black a lot of counterplay] 11...♗c5, with counterplay.) 10...♖b8 11.e4 The most ambitious move (although there is nothing wrong with 11.♙c2 ♗h4 12.♗xh4 ♙xh4 13.e4 0–0 14.♙e3 a6 15.♖ac1 and White is slightly better, as he will have play on the queenside) 11...♗e7 (it looks like the complications after 11...♗d4 12.♗xd4 exd4 13.♗b5 favour White, for example 13...0–0 14.♗xd4 ♗c5 15.♙c2 [only not 15.♙e3?! ♖e8 16.f3 ♙h4 with compensation for Black] 15...♙e7 16.♖e1 ♖be8 17.♗f5 ♙e5 18.g3 with the advantage, since Black cannot capture the e4-pawn in view of 19.♗xd6 cxd6 20.f3) 12.♙e3 White has a pleasant advantage.

**10.e4 ♙e7 11.0–0 0–0 12.♙e3**

Again White's chances are preferable, due to his pressure on the queenside. It is very important that after:

**12...f5 13.exf5 ♖xf5**

White has the strong move:

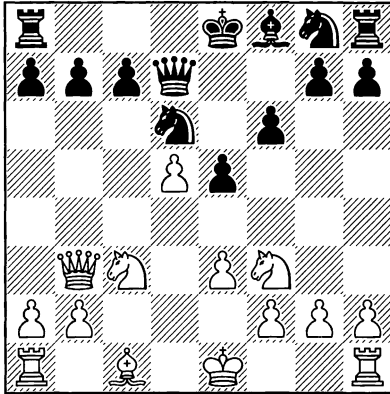
**14.♗e4**

Which secures his positional advantage.

Probably the lesser evil would be 7...b6, but nobody has tried it yet in tournament practice.

### 8.♙xd7† ♚xd7 9.♘f3 f6

Black has to make this ugly move, since 9...e4 10.♘e5! followed by ♚a4† is unacceptable for him.



### 10.e4 g6

Other options are:

### 10...♘e7 11.0-0 g5 12.♘d2

The piece sacrifice 12.♙xg5!? fxg5 13.♘xe5 ♚c8 14.♘f3 comes into consideration.

### 12...♘g6 13.♘c4 ♘h4

This is Jaracz – Nygren, Stockholm 2005.

And here White should have played:

### 14.f3 ♘xc4

14...g4 does not work: 15.fxg4 ♚xg4 16.♘e3 with a large positional advantage.

### 15.♚xc4 ♙d6 16.♙e3

With an advantage for White; Black has achieved nothing on the kingside.

10...g5 11.♙e3 h5 12.♘d2 ♘h6 13.h3 ♘hf7 14.0-0-0 gave a positional advantage in Galyas – Shanmugam, Budapest 2006.

### 11.0-0 ♘h6 12.♘e1 ♘hf7 13.♘d3 b6

14.♘c5 was threatened.

### 14.f4 ♙g7

Of course 14...exf4? is bad due to 15.♘xf4 followed by ♘e6.

### 15.fxe5 fxe5

This was Rustemov – Jenetl, Krasnodar 1998, and now:

### 16.♙e3 0-0 17.♙ac1±

This leaves Black with a solid but very passive position.

### (1.d4 d5 2.c4 ♘c6 3.♘c3)

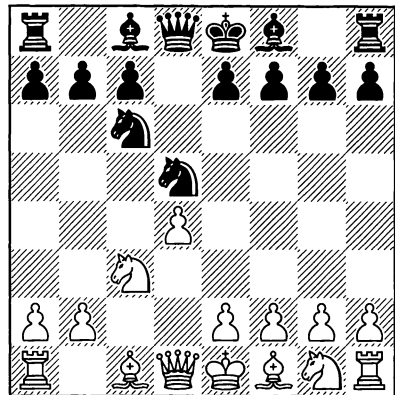
### B) 3...♘f6

This is Black's second-best option according to theory, but recently Black has experienced serious problems here.

### 4.cxd5

Also possible is 4.♘f3 which in many cases transposes to 4.cxd5.

### 4...♘xd5



### 5.♘f3!

The point: Black will not be allowed to play the line 5.e4 ♘xc3 6.bxc3 e5.

### 5...♙f5

There are of course alternatives:

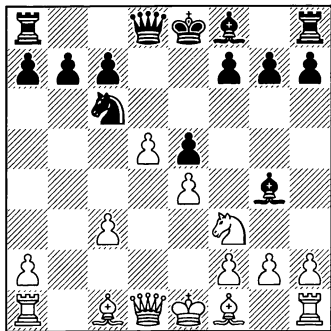
5...♙g4?!

This whole line looks dubious to me.

6.e4 ♘xc3 7.bxc3 e5

Black's position is horrible after 7...e6 8.♖b1 ♖b8 9.♗a4 ♙xf3 10.gxf3 ♗d7 11.♙b5, ZAP! Chess – Rojas Keim, Villa Martelli 2006.

8.d5



8...♙xf3

Black has to make this exchange without being provoked by h2-h3.

After 8...♘e7 I would recommend the natural 9.♖b1 (instead of the theoretical 9.♗a4† ♙d7 10.♗b3 ♘g6 11.♗xb7 ♙c5 when Black gets some activity for the pawn) 9...b6 10.h3 ♙xf3 11.♗xf3 a6 (12.♙b5† was threatened) 12.h4!? ♘c8 (12...h5 13.♗d1 ♘g6 14.g3 ♙c5 15.♙e2+) 13.♗g3 f6 14.♙d3 ♗d7 15.♙e3 White is better.

8...♘b8?! 9.♗a4† ♘d7 (just bad is 9...♙d7? 10.♗b3 and Black loses either the b7- or e5-pawn) 10.♘e5 ♗f6 Some years ago this line was quite popular for Black, but then White found the strong 11.♙e2! which probably refutes Black's idea. Black has tried various lines:

a) 11...b5 12.♗xb5 ♗xe5 13.♙xg4 ♗xe4† 14.♗e2 ♗xe2† 15.♙e2 With a healthy extra pawn, Garcia Palermo – Libeau, Germany 1988.

b) 11...♗xe5 12.♙xg4 0-0-0 (12...♗xc3†

13.♙d2 ♗xa1† 14.♙e2 loses on the spot) 13.0-0 with a decisive advantage, Gyimesi – Patuzzo, Guarapuava 1995.

c) 11...c6 12.dxc6 (after 12.♙xg4 ♘xe5 13.♙e2 ♙c5 14.0-0 0-0 Black has some play for the pawn) 12...♗xe5 And now Dautov's recommendation seems to be strong: 13.♙xg4 (this is stronger than 13.cxd7† ♙xd7 14.♗d4 and White was only slightly better in Rey – Leski, San Francisco 1987) 13...♗xc3† 14.♙e2 ♗xc6 15.♗xc6 bxc6 16.♖b1 ♘f6 17.♙f3 The endgame is very difficult for Black, as he can hardly hold on to his weak pawns on the queenside.

9.♗xf3 ♘a5

Even worse is 9...♘b8 10.♖b1! b6 11.♙b5† ♘d7 12.0-0 ♙d6 13.♗g4 g6 14.f4! and Black resigned in Baburin – Quinn, Kilkenny 2007.

10.♗g3 ♗d6 11.♙e2

Intending to play 12.0-0 followed by 13.f4, with an advantage, as White will seize the initiative on the kingside.

5...e5

This has been tried only once.

6.dxe5

Not 6.e4 ♘xc3 7.bxc3 exd4 8.cxd4 ♙g4 with complicated play.

6...♙b4 7.♙d2

7.a3!?

7...♘xc3 8.bxc3 ♙c5

This might look worth considering, but in the game Black did not manage to prove sufficient compensation for the pawn.

9.♙f4 0-0 10.e3 ♗e7 11.♙e2 ♙g4 12.0-0 h6 12...♖ab8 13.♘d4!

13.♗c2

13.♘d4!?

13...♖fe8 14.♖fd1

White is better, Martys – Spanton, LSS 2006.

6.♗b3 e6

There is a lesser option:

6...♖xc3?! 7.bxc3

This gives White a large advantage. For example:

7...b6

7...♖b8? loses on the spot to 8.d5 ♖a5 9.♖b5† c6 10.dxc6 and Black's bishop on f5 is hanging.

8.e4! ♕xe4 9.♖b5

Suddenly Black loses material, since he has no satisfactory defence against ♖e5.

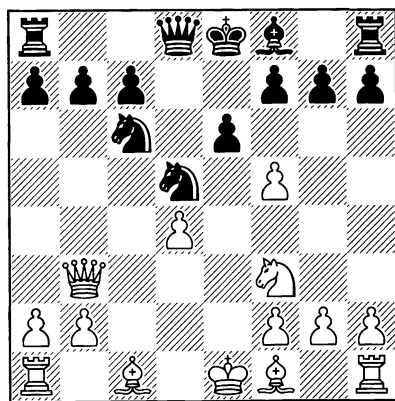
9...f6 10.♖e6 ♖d5 11.♖xd5 ♕xd5 12.c4 ♕xf3 13.gxf3+–

Muhtarov – D. Ilin, Sevastopol 2000.

7.e4

A very concrete and strong decision, which promises White a clear edge.

7...♖xc3 8.exf5 ♖d5



9.♕d2

It is very important for White to cover the b4-square, thus avoiding a possible check.

9.a3!? is an interesting alternative.

But White should not be in a hurry to capture on b7. After 9.♖xb7 ♕b4† 10.♖d1 (10.♕d2?! ♕xd2† 11.♖xd2 ♖de7 12.♕b5 0–0!†) 10...♖de7, with White's king stuck in the centre, Black will get definite compensation.

9...♖d6

I tried to improve Black's play with 9...♖b8 but then White continues logically: 10.fxe6 fxe6 11.♕b5 ♕e7 12.0–0 0–0 13.♖fe1 ♖d6 (13...♖xf3 14.♖xf3 ♖xd4 15.♖d3 c5 16.a4 and Black does not have sufficient compensation for the exchange) 14.♖e4 with a strong positional pressure.

10.♖xb7

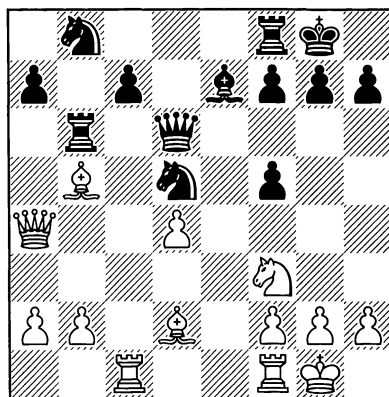
There is no longer any reason to avoid taking the pawn.

10...♖b8 11.♖a6 ♕e7

White is winning after 11...exf5 12.♖c1 ♖e6† 13.♖d1!N (an improvement over 13.♕e2 as played in Sargissian – Miladinovic, Plovdiv 2008) 13...♖b6 14.♖a4 ♖d8 15.♕b5 with the deadly threat of 16.♖e1.

11...♖xb2 loses to 12.♕b5 ♖db4 13.♖c8† ♖e7 14.0–0 and it is impossible for Black to hold this position with his king on e7.

12.♕b5 ♖b6 13.♖a4 0–0 14.♖c1 ♖b8 15.0–0 exf5



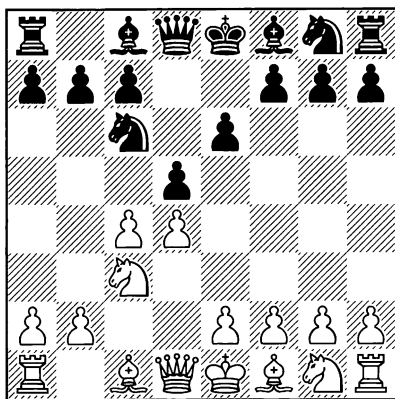
This position arose in Husari – Jamrich, Budapest 1998, and here White should play calmly:

**16.b3?N**

Despite material being equal, Black has not solved his problems. White has a large positional advantage thanks to his pair of bishops and the weak black pawns on the queenside.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 ♖c6 3.♗c3)

C) 3...e6



I am willing to admit this is a legal move, but we reach a Queen's Gambit structure with Black's knight clearly misplaced on c6, as it is in the way of the typical move ...c7-c5.

**4.♗f3 ♖b4**

Another option is:

4...♗f6 5.♖g5 ♖e7

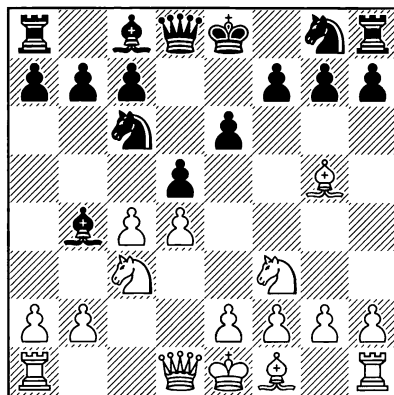
Keeping his dark-squared bishop on e7.

6.e3 0-0 7.♞c1 a6 8.a3

Also possible is 8.♞c2 dxc4 9.♗xc4 b5 10.♗e2 ♗b4 11.♞b1 and Black did not manage to achieve the typical ...c7-c5: 11...♗bd5 12.♗xd5 ♗xd5 13.♗xe7 ♞xe7 14.0-0 with a positional advantage due to the control of the c5-square, Peralta – Martinez Lopez, Lorca 2005.

8...b6 9.cxd5 exd5 10.♗d3 ♖b7 11.b4

It is not clear what Black's knight is doing on c6, Psakhis – Sahovic, Lvov 1984.

**5.♗g5!**

It is certainly very important to develop the dark-squared bishop before playing e3.

**5...♗f6**

Other options are: 5...f6 6.♗f4 ♗ge7 7.e3 with a pleasant edge or 5...♗ge7 6.e3 h6 (6...f6 7.♗f4) 7.♗h4 0-0 8.♞c2 and I do not see any point in Black's set-up, Shariyazdanov – Kovacevic, Solin 2003.

**6.e3 h6**

And now White should calmly react with:

**7.♗xf6**

Since:

7.♗h4 g5 8.♗g3 ♗e4

This seems to be very double-edged after:

9.♗d2

9.♞c2 h5!

9...♗xc3

Accepting the challenge.

Bad is 9...♗xg3?! 10.hxg3 dxc4 11.♗xc4 and Black did not get anything in return for weakening his kingside, Najer – Vokoun, Pardubice 2005.

10.bxc3 ♗xc3 11.♞c1 ♖b4 12.h4 e5!

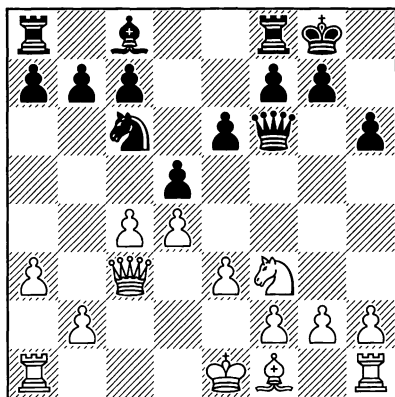
Black's knight on c6 is working!

13.♗xe5 ♗xe5 14.dxe5 c6 15.hxg5 d4

With unclear play, Janosi – Stadler, LSS 2007.

7...♖xf6 8.♗c2 0-0 9.a3 ♕xc3† 10.♗xc3±

White has an improved version of the Ragozin Variation.



Lazarev – Skembris, Estensi 2001.

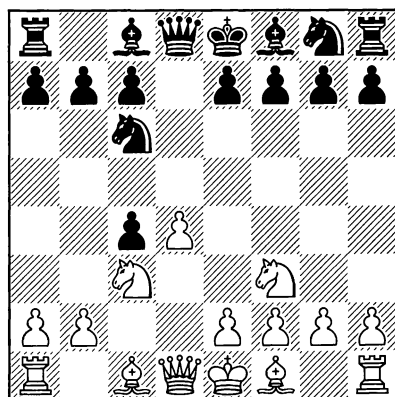
(1.d4 d5 2.c4 ♖c6 3.♖c3)

D) 3...dxc4

This is clearly Black's most popular reply after 3.♖c3.

4.♖f3

Another popular alternative is 4.d5, but I hope we will not need it.



4...♖f6

Definitely the main continuation.

Other options are clearly worse:

4...♕g4?! 5.d5 ♕xf3

5...♖a5 6.♖e5!

6.exf3 ♖e5 7.♕f4

Black's position is critical, for example:

7...♖d7

7...♖d3† 8.♕xd3 cxd3 9.♖b5 loses at once.

7...♖g6 is met by 8.♕xc4! with the idea

8...♖xf4? 9.♕b5† and White wins.

8.♕xc4

White has a large advantage due to his better development, Donner – Keene, London 1971.

4...e5?! 5.d5!

This leads to a clear advantage for White.

5...e4

5...♖b4 6.a3 e4 7.♖g5 ♕e7 8.♖gxe4 and Black remains a pawn down, Bertrem – Schuermans, Belgium 2001.

Now the easiest is:

6.dxc6

Less clear is 6.♖xe4 ♖b4 7.♖c3 c6.

6...♗xd1† 7.♖xd1 exf3 8.exf3 bxc6 9.♕xc4

With clearly better chances for White due to Black's ruined pawn structure on the queenside.

The only playable alternative might be:

4...e6

But after:

5.e4

It is absolutely clear that Black's knight is misplaced on c6, not allowing Black to deliver the typical break with ...c7-c5. White is much better here.

5...♖f6

Unfortunately for Black 5...♖a5? does not work in view of 6.♗a4† c6 7.b4! cxb3 8.axb3 b5 9.♖xb5 and Black's position is collapsing,



Hauchard – Giffard, Montpellier 2000.

6.♟xc4 ♟b4

6...♟e7 7.0–0 0–0 8.♞e1 with a pleasant edge.

7.e5! ♞e4

7...♞d5 8.♟d2 and White has good attacking chances, Kasparov – Paleo Magdaleno, Simultaneous 1991.

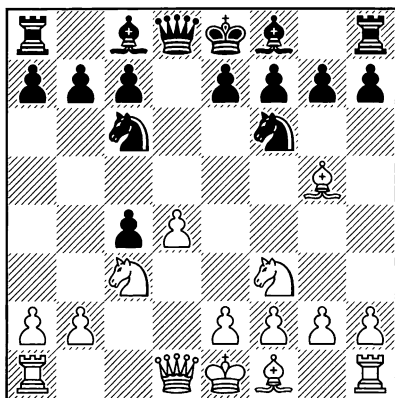
8.♞c2 ♞xc3 9.bxc3

White has a strong centre and good chances to seize the initiative on the kingside, De Souza – Nogueira, Registro 1999.

### 5.♟g5!?

This is not the most common continuation, but in my opinion it is a very interesting one. White simply develops his bishop to an active square before moving the e-pawn. It is also very important that 5...♟g4 does not work here and Black must make some other useful move. There is no doubt that more tests are needed in this variation, but right now the situation looks promising for White.

The main line runs 5.e4 ♟g4 with a lot of theory.



This is the critical point for my recommendation against the Chigorin. You will be 3–4 times more likely to play this position than any of those covered on the previous

pages in this chapter. The main options at this point are: **D1) 5...a6**, **D2) 5...♞d5** and **D3) 5...h6**. The last option is the main move as the inclusion of this and the bishop retreat to h4 gives Black many extra options. However, White is still better in my opinion.

Other moves are:

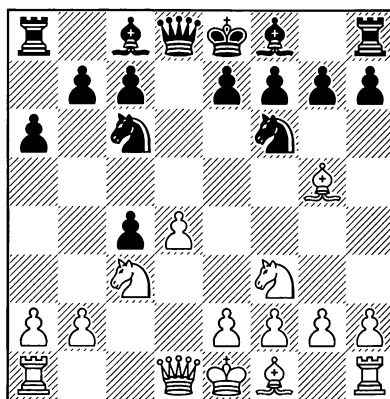
5...e6?! 6.e4 ♟e7 7.♟xc4 0–0 8.0–0 is clearly better for White.

5...♟g4?! 6.d5 ♟xf3 7.exf3 ♞e5 8.♞d4 ♞d3† 9.♟xd3 cxd3 10.0–0–0± with a great lead in development, Iljin – Volovikov, Donetsk 2008.

5...♟f5?! is not really an option, as White plays 6.d5 ♞b8 7.♞d4! and e2–e4 is coming next with great power.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 ♞c6 3.♞c3 dxc4 4.♞f3 ♞f6 5.♟g5)

### D1) 5...a6



### 6.d5

In my opinion 6.e4!N ♟g4 7.d5 ♞e5 8.♟e2, is very interesting by analogy with the main line.

**6...♠a7**

The knight has another option on the edge:

6...♠a5 7.♖a4†!

This seems to be critical.

7.e4 is another possible move.

7...c6 8.b4

The point behind White's last move.

8...cxb3

Another option is: 8...b5 9.♖xa5 ♖xa5 10.bxa5 ♠xd5 11.♠d2 ♠f5?! (better was 11...f6 but I do not believe Black can count on sufficient compensation with only two pawns for the piece) This position was reached in Lukey – Spain, New Zealand (ch) 1992. Here White should have played 12.♠e5 ♖c8 13.g4 and White's light-squared bishop comes to g2 with great effect.

9.axb3 e6 10.♠d2!

The key move, which allows White to win a piece.

10...b6

10...♠xb3? would be hopeless for Black: 11.dxc6 ♠xd2 12.cxb7† ♠d7 13.bxa8 ♖xa8 14.♖xa6 and White is simply an exchange up.

11.b4 ♠xb4

Black could have tried 11...b5 12.♖xa5 ♖xa5 13.bxa5 exd5 but after 14.g3 ♠d6 15.♠g2 0–0 16.0–0 White is clearly better: two pawns for the piece are not enough.

12.♖xb4 exd5 13.e3 c5

This was played in P. Horvath – Antal, Budapest 2003.

14.♖b2!N

A strong new idea, with the powerful idea of playing 15.♠a4 next. For example:

14...♠c6 15.♠a4 ♖b8 16.♠e5! ♠b7 17.♠xc6 ♠xc6 18.♠xa6

And Black has only two pawns for the piece.

**7.e4**

It would be interesting to test the following idea in tournament practice: 7.a4!N restricting

Black's knight on a7. Then 7...c6 8.e4 with complicated play.

**7...♠b5 8.♠xc4!**

In my opinion this pawn sacrifice promises White the best chances of an advantage.

Another interesting possibility is:

8.♖a4

Regaining the pawn.

8...♠d7 9.♖xc4

And now I believe Black should try:

9...h6

9...♠xc3 10.bxc3 was Ivanchuk – Arencibia, Cuba 2005, and Lalic – Quinn, Ireland 2008.

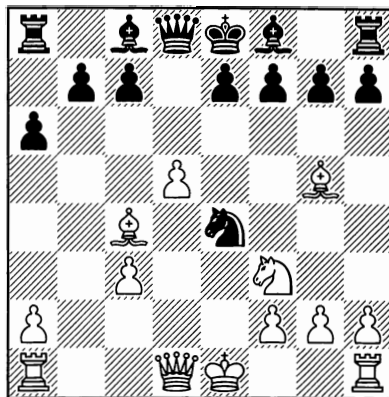
10.♠h4 g5 11.♠g3 ♠g7

This was Campora – Martinez Martin, Madrid 2007, and I would prefer White after the correct:

12.0–0–0.

**8...♠xc3 9.bxc3 ♠xe4**

Even worse is 9...h6 10.♠f4 ♠xe4 11.0–0 and White's bishop is perfectly placed on f4.

**10.0–0**

This is the critical position of the 8.♠c4 line. You do not need to be a GM to understand that White has powerful compensation for a pawn, due to his big lead in development.

**10...♙g4**

A very important variation is:

10...♜xg5 11.♜xg5 h6

Worse is 11...♞d6 12.♜e4 ♞g6 13.♞e1 ♙f5

14.♞a4† ♙d7 15.♞b3 0–0–0 16.♞ab1 b5

17.a4 with a decisive attack.

12.♜e6!

12.♜e4 g6 13.♞d4 ♞h7! followed by

14...♙g7 looks quite solid for Black.

12...♞d6 13.♞f3

White's initiative looks very dangerous.

**11.♙f4!**

Now White keeps his dark-squared bishop and the initiative develops itself.

**11...♞d7**

11...g5 12.♙e5 f6 13.♞e2 fxe5 (13...♜d6 14.♙xf6!) 14.♞xe4 ♙xf3 15.♞xf3 ♞d6

16.♞ab1 And despite the opposite-coloured bishops, White's advantage is obvious, since there is no safe place for Black's king.

The text is Van der Werf – Peek, Leeuwarden 2004. And here I like:

**12.♞b1!N ♜d6**

The point is that after 12...♙xf3 13.♞xb7 ♞d8 14.gxf3 g5 15.♞xa6! decides the game, because ♙b5 is a deadly threat.

**13.♜e5 ♞c8 14.♙d3**

Black's position looks very dangerous without development and with his king stuck in the centre.

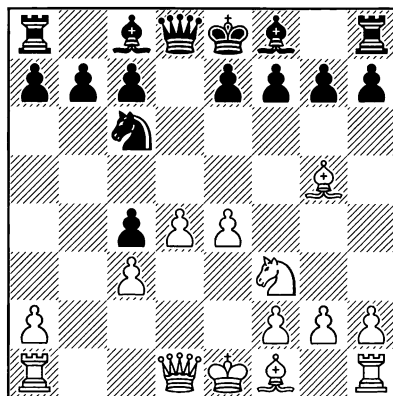
(1.d4 d5 2.c4 ♜c6 3.♜c3 dxc4 4.♜f3 ♜f6 5.♙g5)

**D2) 5...♜d5**

This is a more or less playable alternative.

**6.e4 ♜xc3**

Clearly bad is 6...♜b6? 7.d5 ♜b4 8.♙xc4 ♜xc4 9.♞a4† c6 10.♞xb4 with a huge advantage, Notkin – M. Ivanov, Moscow 1996.

**7.bxc3**

Now Black has a choice:

**7...♜a5**

In my opinion this is the critical move, but two other moves are also interesting.

7...f6 8.♙e3 ♜a5 9.♜d2

Threatening 10.♞h5†! followed by ♞xa5.

9...c6 10.♜xc4 g6 11.♜xa5N

Black had decent play after 11.♞c2 ♙e6 12.♜d2 ♙g7 13.♙e2 0–0 14.0–0 f5 in Gelfand – Miladinovic, Belgrade 1995.

11...♞xa5 12.♞b3 ♞b6

Otherwise the pressure along the a2–g8 diagonal is unpleasant for Black, for example after 12...e6 13.♙c4.

13.♙c4 ♞xb3 14.axb3

White has a very pleasant edge in this endgame due to his strong centre and the access his rook has to the open a-file.

7...g6 8.♙xc4 ♙g7 9.♞d2 ♜a5 10.♙e2 is a good Gruenfeld for White, Vaganian – Fercec, European Club Cup 2006.

**8.♙xc4?N**

I feel that this novelty should be in White's best interests.

Another interesting concept would be to leave Black's knight on a5: 8.♙e2 g6 9.0-0 ♙g7 10.♖a4† c6 11.♗b4 and White has good compensation for the pawn in Catalan spirit.

In the game White reacted unsuccessfully with 8.♘d2 b5 9.♙e2 h6 10.♙h4 c5 11.♘f3 ♙b7 12.♗b1 ♗b6 13.0-0 e6 and Black had the advantage in Di Caro – Miladinovic, Italy 2005.

**8...♘xc4 9.♗a4† c6 10.♗xc4 ♙e6**

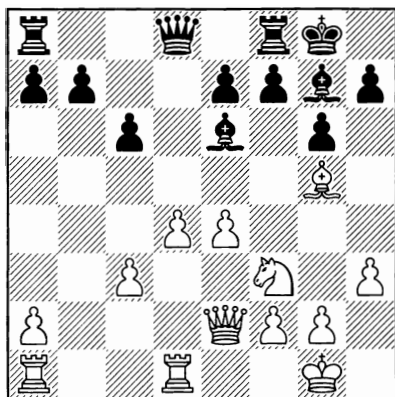
Black cannot play 10...g6? in view of 11.♘e5 ♙e6 12.d5! cxd5 13.♗b5† ♙d7 14.♗xd5 ♙e6 15.♗b5† ♙d7 16.♗xb7 with a winning position.

**11.♗e2 g6**

11...b5 once again runs into 12.d5! cxd5 13.♗xb5† ♗d7 14.♗xd7† ♙xd7 15.exd5 and Black does not have sufficient compensation for the pawn.

**12.0-0 ♙g7 13.♗fd1 0-0**

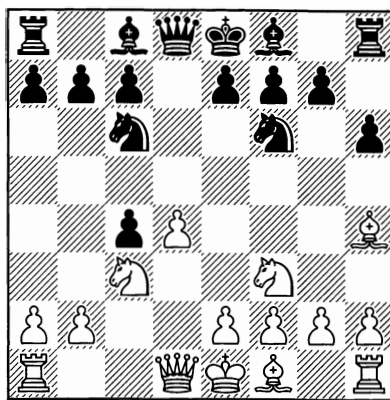
13...b5 is again well met by 14.d5.

**14.h3±****(1.d4 d5 2.c4 ♘c6 3.♘c3 dxc4 4.♘f3 ♘f6 5.♙g5)****D3) 5...h6**

I believe this is the critical continuation, as it could be useful later on for Black to have inserted ...h6 and ♙h4.

**6.♙h4**

Certainly the capture on f6 does not fit in with White's plans: 6.♙xf6 exf6 7.e3 ♙d6 8.♙xc4 0-0 9.0-0 f5 with a perfectly playable position for Black in Ostenstad – Gausel, Oslo 1988.



Once again Black has a choice:

**6...a6**

Slightly dubious is 6...g5 7.♙g3 when the tactical idea 7...g4?! just does not work. White has both 8.d5, and 8.♘e5 with the idea 8...♗xd4? 9.♘b5! and Black was lost in Christiansen – Tarin, USA 1985.

So after:

**6...g5 7.♙g3**

The lesser evil was to play:

**7...♙g7**

When White should continue with:

**8.e3**

8.d5 ♘a5 9.♗a4† c6 10.0-0-0 ♗b6 is not so clear.

8...♙e6 9.h4 g4

9...♘h5 10.♙h2 g4 11.♘d2, followed by 12.♙c4, also promises White the better chances.

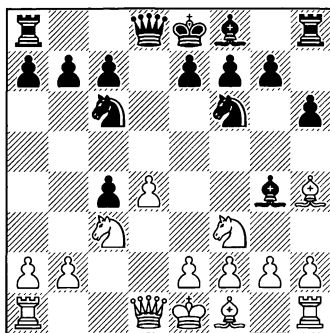
10.♘d2 ♘d5

10...♗d7 11.♙xc4

11.♙e2 h5 12.♘xc4

White has regained the pawn with dividends; it will be too dangerous for Black to castle kingside.

6...♙g4



7.d5 ♙xf3

7...♘a5 is a bit tricky. White should play the simple 8.♘e5 with a clear advantage, due to the poorly placed knight on a5.

It looks as if White could win a piece after 8.♗a4† c6 9.b4 cxb3 10.axb3 but here Black has an unexpected resource: 10...e6! Here we can see the advantage of inserting ...h6 and ♙h4, as White cannot play 11.♙d2 as he could in the line without these moves inserted.

8.exf3

I came to the conclusion that recapturing with the g-pawn was a worthy alternative: 8.gxf3 ♘e5 I examined the following line: 9.♙g3 ♘ed7 10.e4 ♘b6 (Otherwise White will regain the pawn with ♙xc4 and get a clear advantage.) 11.♘b5 (11.a4!?) 11...e5 (11...♙c8? makes no sense: 12.♘xa7 ♙a8 13.♘b5 ♙c8 14.♙h3+–) 12.dxe6 ♙b4†

13.♘e2 0–0 14.♘xc7 ♘h5 15.♘xa8 ♗f6 Trying to complicate matters. 16.♗c1 Defending both the b2-pawn and the f4-square. 16...fxe6 17.♙g2 ♙xa8 18.♙d1 I do not believe that Black has sufficient compensation for the exchange.

8...♘e5 9.f4!

I believe this is White's best bet.

9...♘d3† 10.♙xd3 cxd3 11.♗xd3

White has an enormous advantage in development and it is not surprising that Black quickly collapsed in the following example:

11...c6 12.♙xf6 gxf6 13.0–0–0 ♙c8 14.♗he1 cxd5 15.♘b1 e6 16.♘xd5+–

Dreev – Schweiger, Germany 1998.

6...e6

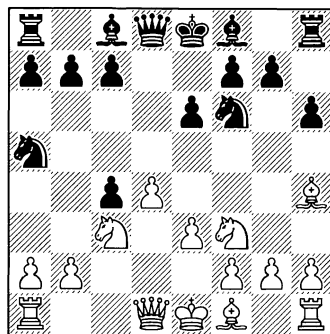
This is definitely a major concession: Black's light-squared bishop remains passive on c8.

7.e3

Certainly not 7.e4 g5 8.♙g3 ♙b4 and Black is fine.

7...♘a5

White has many tempting continuations, but Dreev's move seems best.



8.♘e5

Other line are less clear:

8.♙xf6 ♗xf6 9.♗a4† ♘c6 10.♘e5 ♙d6 is playable for Black.

8.♗a4† c6 9.b4 (a typical idea) 9...g5 (9...cxb3 10.axb3 ♗b6 11.♙xf6 ♙b4

[11...gxf6 12.♖xa5 ♗xa5 13.♞xa5 ♕b4 14.♞c5 with a material advantage] 12.0–0–0 ♕xc3 13.♕xg7 ♞g8 14.♕xh6 this clearly favours White) 10.bxa5 gxh4 11.♕xc4 ♕d6 Once again Black can claim some achievements.

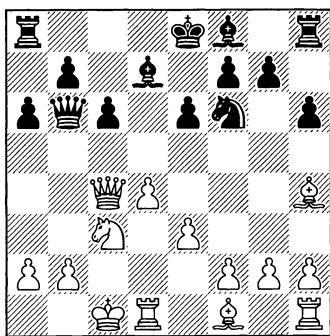
8...a6 9.♖a4†

9.♗xc4 ♗xc4 10.♕xc4 ♕e7 11.0–0 0–0 12.♞c1 is also slightly better for White, since after the typical 12...c5 13.dxc5 ♕xc5 14.♖f3 White keeps annoying pressure.

9...c6 10.♗xc4 ♗xc4 11.♖xc4

Once again Black's main problem is the passive bishop on c8.

11...♖b6 12.0–0–0 ♕d7



This position is from Dreev – Morozevich, Alushta 1994, and here White could have secured his advantage with:

13.♕d3!N ♖a5 14.♖b3 b5 15.♕xf6 gxf6 16.♗e4!

## 7.e4

Another serious option is:

7.d5 ♗a5

Nobody has tried 7...♗a7, but it is still relevant. After 8.e4 b5 9.♕e2 White has rich play for the pawn, but Black of course also has that extra pawn. I prefer White, but nothing is guaranteed.

8.e4

A very important moment. White does not

have an advantage after 8.♖a4† c6 9.b4 cxb3 10.axb3 as Black once again has the tricky 10...e6! 11.b4 (11.e4?! ♖b6 is already better for Black) 11...♗c4 12.dxc6 b5 13.♖b3 ♖b6 with double-edged play.

Here Black has several options, but I will only mention the critical line:

8...c6 9.dxc6 ♖xd1† 10.♞xd1 b5!

At first sight this endgame looks very attractive for White, but I did not manage to find anything special when I investigated the position more closely.

The inferior 10...bxc6 11.♕g3 was indeed slightly better for White in Kovacs – Turzo, Budapest 2006.

11.e5

11.♗d5 ♗xd5 12.exd5 e6! is fine for Black.

11...g5 12.exf6

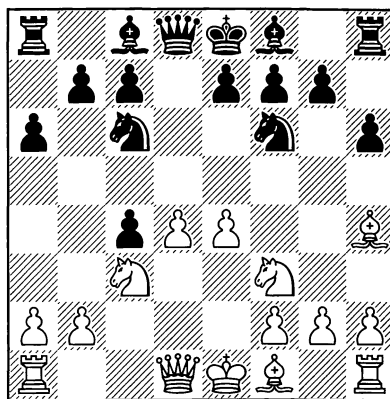
Not 12.♕g3 ♗h5!.

12...gxh4 13.♗d5

Also not 13.a4 bxa4.

13...♞a7

With unclear play.



7...♕g4

The other way is:

7...b5 8.d5

This is probably very dangerous for Black.

8...♗a5

White has a wide choice of attractive continuations, but the most promising

might also be the most direct.

9.e5 g5

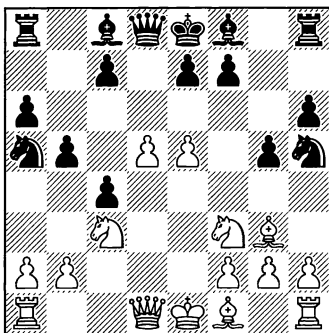
Also critical is: 9...b4 10.♖a4† c6 11.exf6 bxc3 (after 11...exf6 12.♟d1 ♖xd5 13.♜e3 Black does not have any compensation for the piece) 12.b4! A very strong move, leading to an advantage for White. My analysis runs: 12...cxb3 (12...g5 13.♙g3 only helps White) 13.axb3 and now:

a) 13...c2 14.♙d3 c1♖† 15.♙xc1 ♖xd5 16.♙d1 This is just bad for Black, in view of White's enormous advantage in development.

b) 13...exf6 14.dxc6 ♖d5 15.c7†! (clearly worse is 15.♖xa5? ♖e4† 16.♙e2 ♙b4 17.♖a4 c2† 18.♟f1 0-0 and Black has fantastic compensation due to his strong c2-pawn) 15...♜c6 16.♙c4 ♖d7 17.♙g3 c2 (17...♙e7 18.♙d1 c2 19.♙xd7! c1♖† 20.♜e2 wins for White) 18.0-0 ♙e7 19.♙fc1 ♜b4 20.♜d4 White wins the c2-pawn, and his c7-pawn should easily decide the game.

c) 13...♖xd5 14.fxe7 (Less clear is 14.♖xa5 ♖xa5 15.♙xa5 exf6 16.♙d3 ♙b4 17.♙a4 a5 and Black has some play for a piece. He can develop his initiative with 18...♙e6 and 19...0-0-0 on the next moves.) 14...♙xe7 15.♙xe7 ♜xb3 16.♙c4 ♖e4† 17.♟f1 ♙e6 18.♙xb3 ♖xa4 19.♙xa4 ♜xe7 20.♜e2 Black is losing the c3-pawn and White has a big advantage.

10.♙g3 ♜h5



11.e6!

White's initiative looks very powerful, for example:

11...♜xg3

Or 11...♙g7 12.♜e5 ♙xe5 (12...♜xg3 transposes to 11...♜xg3) 13.♖xh5 ♙xc3† 14.bxc3 ♙h7 15.0-0-0 and Black's position is hopeless.

12.♜e5!

A nice move, which secures an advantage.

12...♙g7

12...♖d6 13.♜xf7 ♖b4 14.♖c2! The key move. White protects the b2-pawn, and his queen is ready to penetrate to g6 with decisive effect. 14...♜xh1 15.♖g6 c5 (White was threatening mate in two with 16.♜d6† and 17.♖e8) 16.♜xh8† ♜d8 17.0-0-0 ♜xf2 18.d6! ♜xd1 (18...exd6 19.♜d5 wins) 19.♜f7† ♜e8 20.♜e5† ♜d8 21.♖f7 ♖xb2† 22.♜xd1 White wins.

13.♖f3 f5

13...f6 14.♜f7 ♜xh1 15.♜xd8 ♜xd8 16.g3 does not change much.

14.♜f7 ♜xh1 15.♜xd8 ♜xd8 16.g3

With a material advantage for White.

## 8.d5 ♜e5

Once again it is extremely dangerous to play 8...♜a5 allowing 9.e5 ♜d7 10.e6, again with the idea to answer 10...fxe6 with either 11.h3 or 11.♙e2!?

## 9.♙g3 ♜fd7 10.♙e2 ♙xf3

Clearly worse is:

10...♜xf3† 11.gxf3 ♙h5 12.♙xc4

White has regained the pawn, keeping all his plusses. Here are some possible variations:

12...g5 13.♙e2

13.e5 ♙g7 14.♖e2!? comes into consideration as well.

13...♙g7 14.♖b3 b5

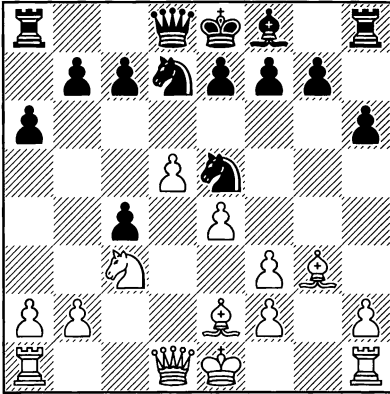
Black is in trouble.

14...♜e5 15.♙xe5! ♙xe5 16.f4 ♙xe2 17.fxe5 ♙f3 18.♙g1±

14...♖b8 15.0-0 b5 16.h4 ♘e5 17.♗b1±  
15.0-0-0 ♘e5 16.h4!

It is not clear what Black will do with his king; White is much better.

### 11.gxf3



Of course Black should react with the most principled move, fighting for the f4-square.

### 11...g5!N

Black had a rough time after he employed a more passive strategy in the following game: 11...g6 12.f4 ♘d3† 13.♙xd3 cxd3 14.♗xd3 ♙g7 15.0-0-0 ♘c5?! (15...0-0 16.e5 is still clearly better for White) 16.♗c4 ♗d6 17.f5 White had an indisputable advantage in Ivanchuk – Chibukhchian, Yerevan 2004.

However, it is the position after moving the g-pawn two steps forward which is important for the assessment of this line, so I decided to analyse this improvement as well.

### 12.f4

Other options are 12.h4 ♙g7 13.♗d2 e6 14.0-0-0 ♘c5 15.♗b1 ♘ed3 where Black is by no means worse, and 12.♙xc4 ♘xc4 13.♗d4 ♘ce5 14.♙xe5 ♘xe5 15.♗xe5 ♗g8, which leads to double-edged play.

### 12...♘g6

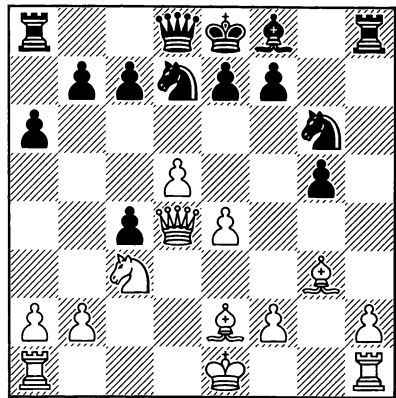
The alternative is 12...gxf4 13.♙xf4, when I considered the following options:

a) 13...b5 14.♗g1 This gives White fantastic compensation. It is not clear how Black is going to develop his pieces.

b) 13...e6 14.dxe6 (14.♗d2!?) 14...fxe6 15.♙h5† ♘e7 16.♙e2 ♙g7 17.♙e3 This also promises White rich play for the pawn.

c) 13...♗g8 14.♗d2 b5 15.0-0-0 Black is a pawn up, but all White's pieces are in play, while it is not clear how Black is going to get his pieces to play together.

### 13.fxg5 hxg5 14.♗d4



### 14...♗g8

It is of course also natural to keep the extra pawn with:

### 14...b5

But this would allow White to open up a second front with:

### 15.a4 ♗h7

15...♗g8 16.axb5 axb5 17.♗xa8 ♗xa8 18.♘xb5 leads to a position which is more or less identical to the one after 15...♗h7.

15...e5 16.dxe6 fxe6 17.axb5 axb5 18.0-0 offers White obvious compensation.



16. axb5 axb5 17. ♖xa8 ♗xa8 18. ♜xb5 ♗a1†  
 18... ♗a5† 19. ♜c3 ♙g7 20. ♗xc4 ♜f4  
 21. 0–0 leaves White with an extra pawn.  
 19. ♜d2!

A very nice sacrifice.

19... ♗xh1 20. ♜xc7† ♜d8 21. ♜e6† ♜e8  
 22. ♗xc4 f6 23. ♗c8† ♜f7 24. ♗xd7

It seems that White has more than sufficient compensation.

24... ♗xe4

24... ♗b1 25. ♗b7!

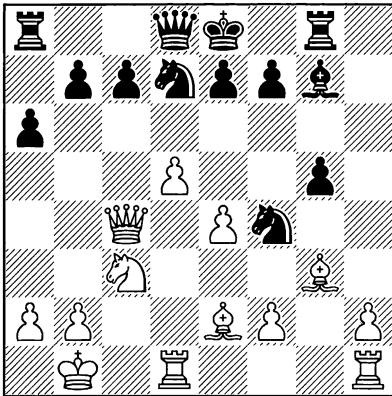
25. ♙d3 ♗b4† 26. ♜c1

With a powerful initiative. All the black minor pieces are out of play.

### 15. ♗xc4 ♙g7 16. 0–0–0

This is much stronger than 16. ♙xc7?! ♜ge5  
 17. ♙xd8 ♜xc4 18. ♙xc4 ♖xd8 when Black  
 would have full compensation thanks to his  
 strong dark-squared bishop.

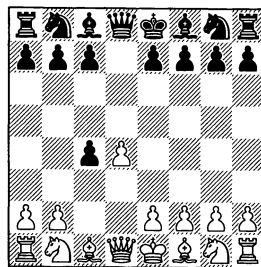
### 16... ♜f4 17. ♜b1±



Black has managed to maintain control of the long diagonal and the e5-square, but still, with all his pieces in the game and Black's king stuck in the centre, I definitely prefer White.

### Conclusion:

There are many sharp, forcing lines in this chapter, so the reader should study the analysis carefully, rather than rely on general principles to suggest a decent move. Obviously the 5. ♙g5 line requires more analysis and tests, but at the moment the situation looks quite promising for White.



### Minor Lines

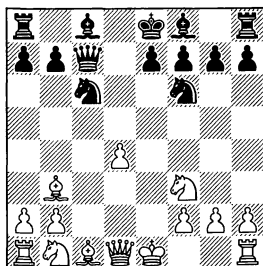
### Variation Index

1.d4 d5 2.c4 dxc4

3.e3

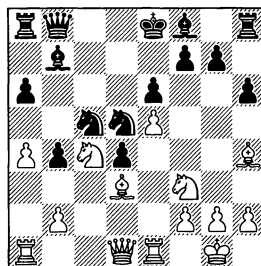
A) 3...♙e6	p 406
B) 3...b5	p 407
C) 3...c5	p 408
D) 3...e5 4.♙xc4 exd4 5.exd4 ♘f6 6.♘f3	p 409
D1) 6...♙b4†	p 409
D2) 6...♙e7	p 411
D3) 6...♙d6	p 414
E) 3...♘f6 4.♙xc4 e6 5.♘f3	p 416
E1) 5...a6 6.0-0 b5	p 416
E2) 5...c5 6.0-0 ♘c6 7.♙e2	p 419
E21) 7...cxd4	p 419
E22) 7...a6 8.♘c3	p 422
E221) 8...b5	p 422
E222) 8...cxd4	p 424

C) note to the 6th move



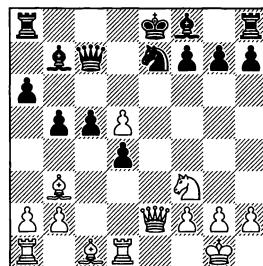
8.d5!

E1) after 15...♘c5



16.♙g3!N

D2) note to the 9th move



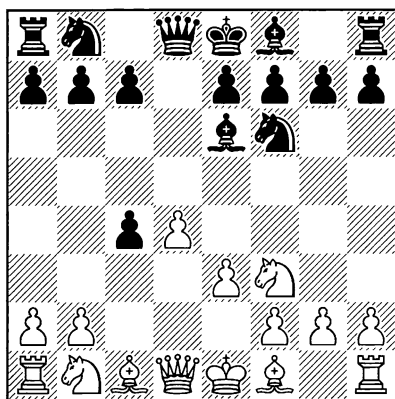
15.♘e5!N

**1.d4 d5 2.c4 dxc4**

It should be mentioned that 2...e6 3.♘f3 dxc4 4.e3 would usually transpose to our main lines, while 4...b5 5.a4 c6 transposes to 3...dxc4 against the Slav, as covered in Chapter 13.

**3.e3**

When I decided to choose the 7.♙b3 variation, the first dilemma I faced was already on move three. An obvious drawback of 3.e3 is that it allows Black an extra option of 3...e5, while 3.♘f3 gives Black an option of the following system: 3...♘f6 4.e3 ♙g4 5.♙xc4 e6. After studying the games of my good friend Artur Kogan, who has recently employed some interesting ideas in this line for Black, I decided to select the more subtle 3.e3.

**(1.d4 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3.e3)****A) 3...♙e6 4.♘f3 ♘f6**

This is a very risky variation for Black. It is better to play 4...c6 and in this case the play would transpose to the Slav Defence.

**5.♘c3 c6 6.♘g5 ♙d5**

The alternative is:

6...♞d7 7.e4 h6

I also looked at 7...b5 8.♙e2 ♙g4 Here I like:

9.f3 (The alternative 9.e5 ♙xe2 10.♞xe2 h6 11.exf6 hxg5 12.♙xg5 ♘a6 seems less clear.) 9...♙h5 10.0–0 White has very nice compensation, as Black's bishop is clearly misplaced on h5.

7...h6 8.♘xe6 ♞xe6 9.e5! ♘bd7

In the event of 9...♘d5?! 10.♙xc4 ♞d7 (10...♘xc3? loses to 11.♞b3! ♘d5 12.♞xb7) 11.0–0 e6 12.♘e4± White is clearly better, Gelfand – Zilberman, Tel Aviv 1999.

9...♘fd7 was the improvement suggested by Glenn Flear in SOS 7. His next two moves make sense: 10.♙e2 ♘b6 11.0–0 ♞d7 But here, rather than mechanically putting the bishop on e3 as suggested by Flear, White can use his lead in development energetically with: 12.a4! with the point that after 12...a5 White can play 13.b3!± regaining the pawn, as 13...cxb3? 14.♞xb3 ♞c7 15.e6 is a complete disaster for Black.

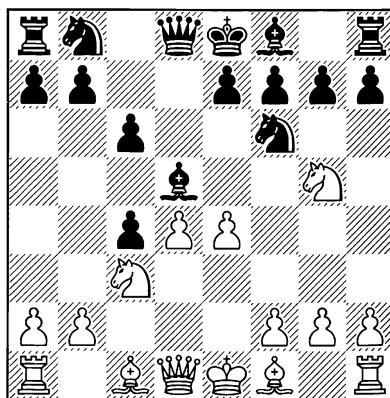
10.♙e2

White can also regain the pawn by means of 10.♞e2 ♘d5 11.♞xc4 ♘b6 12.♞b3±

10...♘d5 11.0–0

White has powerful compensation for the pawn, as Black is clearly behind in development.

7.e4



7...h6 8.exd5 hxg5 9.dxc6 ♘xc6 10.d5 ♘e5

10...♖a5 11.♞a4† ♜d7 12.♙xg5 followed by 0–0–0, gives White a fantastic position.

11.♞d4 ♜fd7 12.♙xg5 f6 13.♙e3 g5 14.♙e2+

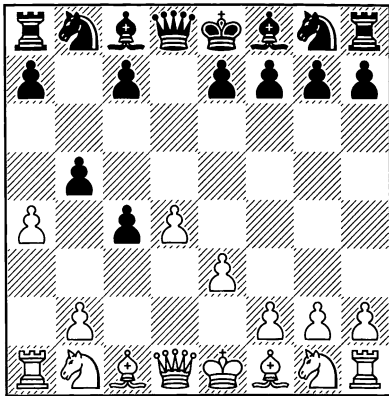
White has a clear positional advantage, Akopian – Kirov, Palma de Mallorca 1989.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3.e3)

### B) 3...b5

A rarely played continuation.

4.a4



4...b4

Of course Black cannot play 4...c6? 5.axb5 cxb5?? 6.♞f3+–.

5.♙xc4 ♜f6 6.♜f3 ♙b7 7.0–0 e6

This is a fairly typical position for this opening, but the inclusion of a4 and ...b4 is clearly in White's favour, as it slightly weakens Black's queenside.

8.♜bd2 ♙e7

Premature would be:

8...♜bd7?!

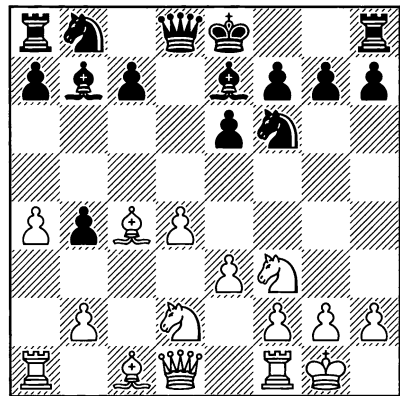
As White has the very strong:

9.e4! ♜b6

It would be very dangerous to take the pawn: 9...♜xe4 10.♜xe4 ♙xe4 11.♞e1 ♙xf3 12.♞xf3 ♙e7 13.d5 0–0 14.dxe6 fxe6 15.♙xe6† ♜h8 16.♞h3 and White has a clear positional advantage.

10.♙b5† c6 11.♙d3 a5 12.♜b3+

White had achieved a perfect arrangement of his pieces in Taimanov – Benedictsson, Reykjavik 1968.



9.a5!

I like this move, as it makes Black's b-pawn more vulnerable.

9...a6

A natural reaction.

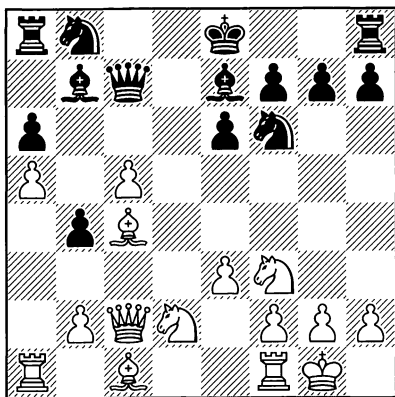
I also examined 9...0–0 10.a6 ♙d5 11.♙d3 c5 12.e4 ♙c6 13.♞e2 cxd4 14.♜b3 and White is better.

10.♞a4† ♞d7 11.♞c2 c5

Worse is 11...0–0 12.e4 c5 13.e5 ♜d5 14.dxc5 ♙xc5 15.♜e4 ♙e7 16.♙g5 ♜c6 17.♞fd1± and White is clearly better.

12.dxc5 ♞c7

This position was reached in Neverov – Maryasin, Dieren 1998, and here I found the following variation:



13. ♖b3! ♗bd7 14. ♙d2 0-0

Black cannot play 14... ♙e4 15. ♙d3 ♙xd3 16. ♗xd3 ♖xc5 17. ♗c4 as he would lose the b4-pawn without compensation.

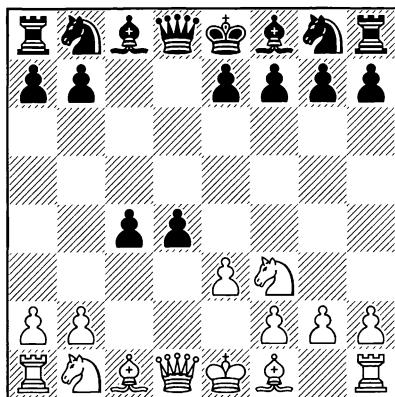
15. ♙xb4 ♙xf3 16. gxf3 ♗b7 17. ♗a4 ♗xf3 18. ♙e2 ♗h3 19. ♙c3 ♗fc8 20. ♙xf6 ♖xf6 21. ♗d1!±

White defends against ideas of ... ♙d6 and maintains a clear edge, thanks to his extra pawn.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3.e3)

C) 3...c5 4. ♖f3 cxd4

If Black chooses a different 4th move, then the play would transpose to a normal QGA.



5. ♙xc4! ♗c7

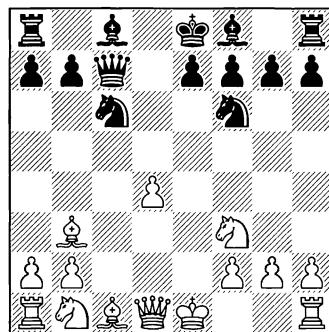
The key idea of this variation. Nevertheless, this looks too artificial and 5... ♖f6 6.exd4 e6 would just transpose to another variation.

6. ♙b3 dxe3

Risky, but the most principled move.

Black can play also: 6... ♖f6 7.exd4 But in this case his queen is clearly misplaced on c7. We will consider a few examples:

a) 7... ♖c6



8.d5!N (this is much stronger than 8.0-0 ♙g4 9. ♖c3, Piceu – Afek, Belgium 2004, when after 9...e6 Black has normal play) 8... ♖e5 9. ♖c3 ♙g4 10.0-0± White's development advantage should tell.

b) 7... ♙g4 This looks in the spirit of this variation. 8.0-0 e6 and here 9.d5!N looks very interesting (9. ♖c3 was played in Kovacevic – Leventic, Sibenik 2008, and here 9... ♖c6 leads to a position that is mentioned in the 7... ♖c6 line). 9...exd5 10. ♖c3 ♙e7 11. ♖xd5 ♖xd5 12. ♗xd5 0-0 (12... ♙e6 runs into 13. ♗d4!) 13. ♖g5 ♙xg5 14. ♗xg5 With a pleasant advantage.

c) 7...e6 8. ♖c3 ♙e7 9.0-0 0-0 10. ♙g5 ♖c6 (Another move is 10...a6 11. ♗c1 ♖c6 12. ♗e2 ♖g4. Black tries to make use of his queen on c7.

13.g3! ♖xg5 14.♜xg5 e5 This position was reached in Liascovich – Scarella, Berazategui 2008. White should have played 15.♜d3 g6 16.f3 ♜f6 17.♜ce4! with a clear edge.) 11.♞c1 ♞d8 12.♞e2 ♞a5 13.d5 exd5 14.♙xf6 ♙xf6 15.♜xd5 ♙f5 16.♜xf6† gxf6 17.♞e3± Haik – Zsu. Polgar, Cannes 1987.

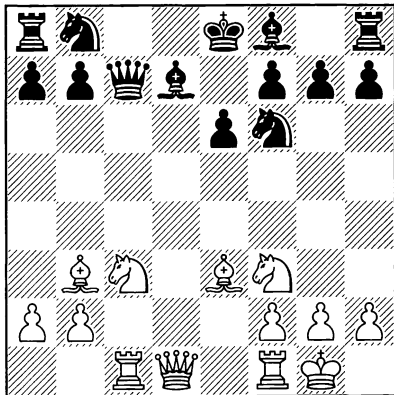
### 7.♙xe3

White has sacrificed a pawn, but in return he has a big lead in development, which makes Black's position very dangerous.

### 7...e6

Black has also tried 7...♜f6. The following is an instructive game: 8.♜c3 a6 9.0–0 ♜c6 10.♞c1 e6 11.♜a4 ♙e7 Black looks pretty solid, but White manages to seize the initiative: 12.♜b6 ♞b8 13.♜d4! 0–0 14.♞f3 ♙d6 15.♜xc6 bxc6 16.♞xc6 ♙b7 17.♞xc7 ♙xf3 18.♞a7 ♞b7 19.♜c4! ♙b8 20.♞xa6 ♙e2 21.♞e1 ♙xc4 22.♙xc4 ♞xb2 23.g3 Black did not manage to hold this endgame, Jianu – Vasilescu, Predeal 2006.

### 8.♜c3 ♙d7 9.0–0 ♜f6 10.♞c1



### 10...♞a5

The alternative is:

10...♜c6 11.♜b5 ♞a5 12.♜d6† ♙xd6 13.♞xd6

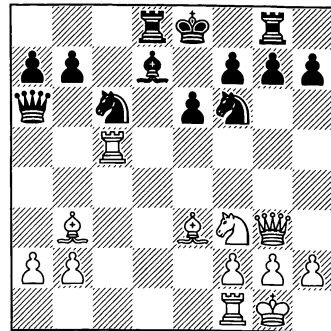
This position looks critical for Black.

### 13...♞d5?

13...♞d5? should lose immediately, but in Berczes – Feher, Zalakarosi 2008, White missed the simple 14.♞c5!N ♞d8 15.♙xd5 exd5 16.♞e1 ♜e7 17.♙d4 with a winning position.

### 14.♞c5 ♞a6 15.♞g3 ♞g8

Black loses the exchange after 15...0–0 16.♙h6 ♜e8 17.♞g5+–.



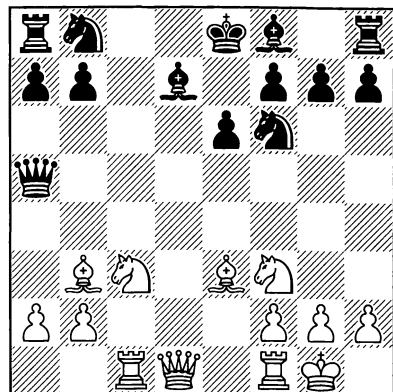
### 16.♞cc1!N

This is the most precise move, though it is obvious that Black's position is difficult anyway.

Less convincing is 16.♜d2 b6 17.♞cc1 ♜e7 and Black defended successfully in Prohaszka – Mihok, Budapest 2008.

16...♜a5 17.♞fd1 ♜xb3 18.axb3 ♜d5 19.♙c5 b6 20.♙a3 ♞b7 21.♜g5!

With a decisive attack.



**11. ♖d2!N**

This looks stronger than 11.a4, as was played in Negi – Ushenina, Wijk aan Zee 2008, where Black could have played 11...♙e7 12.♖b5 ♖a6 13.♗e5 ♙xb5 14.axb5 ♖b4 with an unclear position.

**11...♙e7 12.♖c4 ♖a6 13.♙g5 0-0**

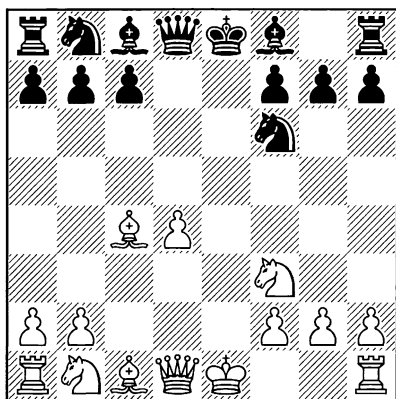
Also 13...♖c6 14.♖d6† ♙xd6 15.♗xd6 ♖a5 16.♗d4! ♖xb3 17.axb3± does not help Black.

**14.♗e4 ♖xe4 15.♙xe7 ♖e8 16.♙h4 ♙c6 17.♖e1±**

It is not clear how Black can defend against 18.f3 followed by 19.♖d6.

**(1.d4 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3.e3)****D) 3...e5**

As I mentioned above, this is an important alternative to 3...♖f6.

**4.♙xc4 exd4 5.exd4 ♖f6 6.♖f3**

The funny thing is that this position might also appear from the Exchange Variation of the French Defence (3.exd5). This is a tabiya for this variation. Black has to choose how to arrange his pieces, and in particular where his dark-squared bishop is going. The

options are: D1) 6...♙b4†, D2) 6...♙e7 and D3) 6...♙d6.

**(1.d4 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3.e3 e5 4.♙xc4 exd4 5.exd4 ♖f6 6.♖f3)****D1) 6...♙b4† 7.♖c3 0-0 8.0-0 ♖c6 9.h3 h6**

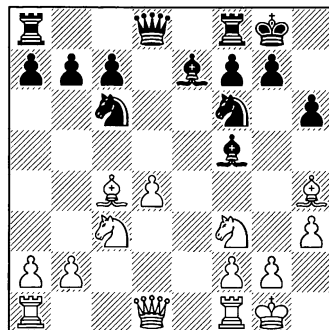
The alternative is:

**9...♙f5 10.♙g5 h6**

In the event of the natural 10...♙e7 White can strike with 11.d5 ♖b8 12.♖e1 h6 13.♙h4 ♖bd7 14.♖d4 ♙g6 15.♙d3 ♙xd3 16.♗xd3 with the initiative, Ibragimov – Zaragatski, Senden 2001.

**11.♙h4 ♙e7**

If 11...g5 Black seriously weakens his king position, which might allow White to create a dangerous initiative: 12.♙g3 ♖e4 13.♖xe4 ♙xe4 14.♖e5 ♖xe5 15.♙xe5 ♙d6 16.♗e2 ♙g6 17.f4† Hoenig–Rovan, e-mail 1999.

**12.d5!N**

I believe this is stronger than 12.♖e1 ♖d7, which looks playable for Black.

**12...♖b8 13.♖d4 ♙h7 14.♖e1 ♖bd7 15.♙d3**

White has a serious initiative, as the d5-pawn is untouchable:

**15...♖xd5!?**

Even worse is 15...♙xd3? 16.♗xd3 ♖xd5 17.♖xd5 ♙xh4 18.♖f5! c6 19.♖de7† ♙xe7 20.♖xe7 ♖f6 21.♗g3 with a decisive advantage.

16.♙xh7† ♖xh7 17.♚c2† ♖h8 18.♙xe7 ♜xe7  
19.♞ad1±

White has a dominant position.

10.♞e1 ♜a5 11.♙d3 ♙e6 12.♙f4 ♜d5  
13.♙d2 ♜c6 14.a3 ♙e7 15.♞c1

Worthy of consideration is 15.♞e2!? ♚d7  
16.♞ad1 ♞ad8 17.♙c2! and White's queen is  
heading for d3.

15...♙f6 16.♞xe6!

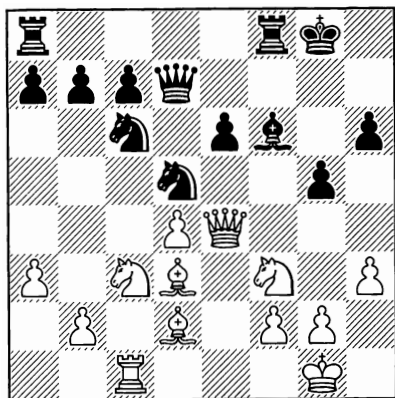
A typical exchange sacrifice that weakens the  
position of the black king.

16...fxe6 17.♞e2 ♚d7

17...♞e8 18.♞e4 ♜f8 19.♜a4 is also quite  
unpleasant for Black.

18.♞e4 g5

This is Onischuk – Nikolic, Khanty-  
Mansiysk 2007, and now:

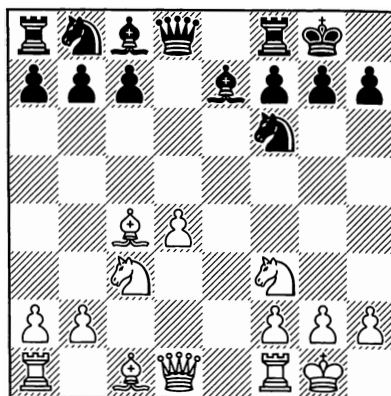


19.♜a4!?N ♜d8 20.h4†

This would have been very strong, giving  
White a dangerous initiative.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3.e3 e5 4.♙xc4 exd4  
5.exd4 ♜f6 6.♜f3)

D2) 6...♙e7 7.0–0 0–0 8.♜c3



8...♜bd7

Black has a few alternatives. Firstly, White  
should not be afraid of:

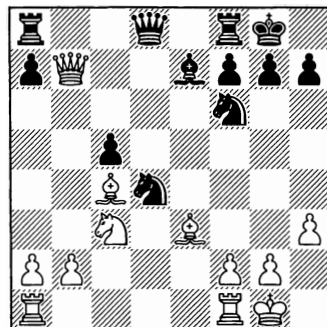
8...♙g4 9.h3 ♙xf3

Theory considers 9...♙h5?! to be quite  
dubious in view of 10.g4 ♙g6 11.♜e5. Here  
is the latest example: 11...♜c6 12.f4 ♜xd4  
13.f5 ♙c5 14.♜g2 and White was already  
winning in Malaniuk – Mielczarski, Koszalin  
2007.

10.♞xf3 ♜c6 11.♙e3 ♜xd4

Otherwise Black would be clearly worse  
because of the missing light-squared bishop.

12.♞xb7 c5



13.b3!?N

This seems to be stronger than 13.♙xd4  
cxd4 14.♞ad1 ♞c8 15.b3 ♞c7 16.♞f3 ♞d7∞  
with unclear play in Zaichik – Karpeshov,  
Volgodonsk 1983.



13...♟b8 14.♟a6

Of course not 14.♟xa7? ♟a8 15.♟b7 ♟b8= and White's queen cannot escape from the corner.

14...♟b6 15.♟ac1 ♟fd8 16.♟fe1±

White has a small but stable advantage thanks to his bishop pair.

8...♞c6

Surprisingly I found many games where this move was played. Nevertheless, I believe if Black decides to develop his knight to c6, it is better to do so with the bishop on d6. I like the following play for White:

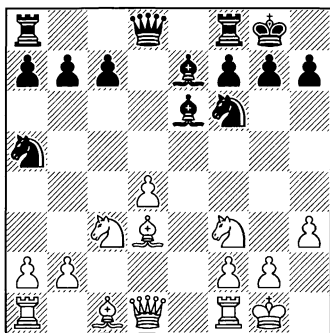
9.h3

It is very useful for White to prevent ...♟g4.

9...♞a5

Black has also tried 9...♟f5, but after 10.♟e1 White has a very flexible position. For example: 10...a6 11.a3 ♟d7?! 12.d5! ♞a5 13.♞e5 ♟d6 14.♟a2± with a clear advantage, Malaniuk – Kwiatkowski, Augustow 2004.

10.♟d3 ♟e6



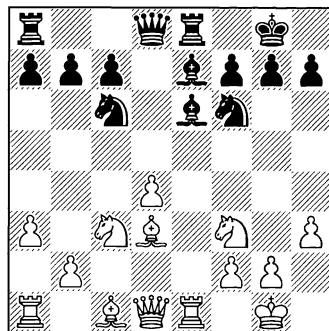
11.♟e1

Obviously this is a very useful move, which also prevents a possible trade of light-squared bishops by means of ...♟c4.

11...♞c6 12.a3 ♟e8

Black has also tried: 12...♟d6 13.♟e3 ♞d5 14.♟c2 ♞h8 (more natural looks 14...h6, but even in this case I prefer White's position after 15.♟ad1±) 15.♟ad1± In this complex

position White's chances are preferable, as he has achieved almost perfect coordination between his pieces, Gelfand – Adams, Wijk aan Zee 1994. (15.♟d2!N also looks quite interesting with the idea of forcing Black to play 15...♞xc3 16.bxc3, which would strengthen White's position in the centre.)



13.♟f4!N

I believe this move improves on 13.♟b5 a6 14.♟xc6 bxc6∞ which was unclear in Volke – Guliyev, Zehlendorf 2008.

13...♞d5 14.♟g3

And now a possible line is:

14...♟d7 15.♟c2 h6 16.♟ad1

Black cannot win the pawn by means of:

16...♞xc3 17.bxc3 ♟xa3

in view of:

18.d5! ♟xd5 19.♟c4

White wins material.

9.♟e1 ♞b6 10.♟b3 c6 11.♟g5 ♞bd5

Obviously the main move, but Black also tried:

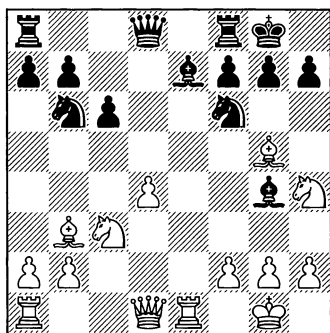
11...♟f5

This is a quite an interesting option, which leads to a complex game that is typical for positions with an isolated pawn.

12.♞h4

I believe this is the best reply.

12...♟g4



13.♞d3N

White cannot play 13.♙xf6?, as was tried in the game Nickoloff – Hebert, Toronto 1990, in view of the simple 13...♙xd1 14.♙xe7 ♞e8! and White is lost.

13...♞e8

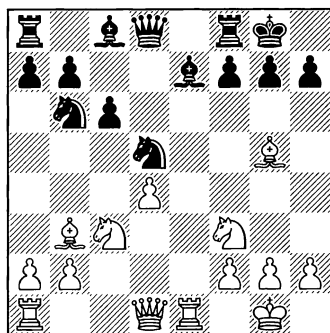
13...♞d7 14.h3 This is simplest (not so clear is 14.♙c2 g6 15.d5 but only if Black finds 15...♙d8! rather than 15...♙bxd5? 16.♙xd5 cxd5 17.♞xe7 ♞xe7 18.♞d4 ♞fe8 19.h3±). 14...♙e6 15.♙xe6 fxe6 16.♙f3± With a pleasant edge, due to Black's weak e6-pawn. 14.h3 ♙d7 15.♙f3 ♙d5 16.♙d2 ♙e6 17.♙e4±

With typically complex play, where I prefer White.

Another try is:

11...♙fd5?

But this is nicely refuted by:



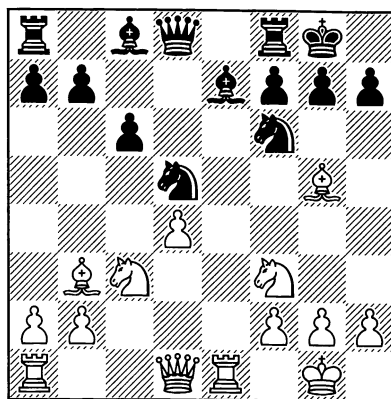
12.♞xe7! ♙xe7 13.♞e2 ♞e8 14.♞e1 ♙f8

14...♙g4 does not help either: 15.♙xe7 ♞d7 16.♙e4! ♞xe7 17.♙f6† gxf6 18.♞xe7± 15.♙e5 ♙bd5

This is Nogueiras – Esquivel, Santa Clara 2004. Now the most precise would be:

16.♞h5 ♙e6 17.♞xh7

With a decisive attack.



12.♙d2!N

I found this new idea in 2004.

White achieves nothing with 12.♙xd5 cxd5 13.♙e5 ♙e6 and Black has a solid position.

12...♙e6 13.♞e2

White intends to double his rooks on the e-file, increasing the pressure against Black's pieces.

13...♞e8

Other options:

13...♙c7 14.♞ae1 Setting a nice trap. 14...♙xb3? (better was 14...♞e8, which transposes to 13...♞e8) 15.♞xe7 ♙e6 16.♙xf6 gxf6 17.♞xc7 ♞xc7 18.♙e4! White's attack appears to be decisive: 18...♙h8 19.♙xf6 ♙f5 20.♞h6 ♙g6 21.♞e5+–

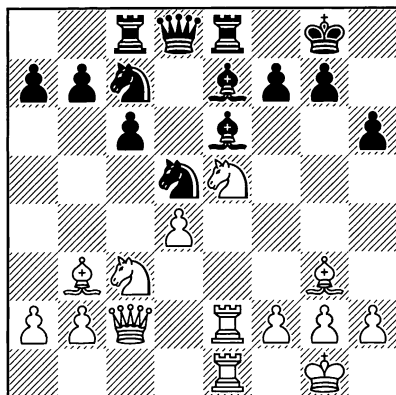
13...♙xc3?! This leads to an unpleasant position. 14.bxc3 ♙xb3 15.axb3 and next ♞ae1.

13...♙g4 is comfortably met by 14.♚d3.

14.♞ae1 ♘c7 15.♞c2 h6 16.♙h4 ♘fd5

In the event of 16...♞c8? the unexpected 17.♞xe6! gives White a strong attack. 17...fxe6 18.♞xe6 ♘cd5 19.♘e5

17.♙g3 ♞c8 18.♘e5±



White is more active.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3.e3 e5 4.♙xc4 exd4 5.exd4 ♘f6 6.♘f3)

D3) 6...♙d6

The most popular choice.

7.0-0

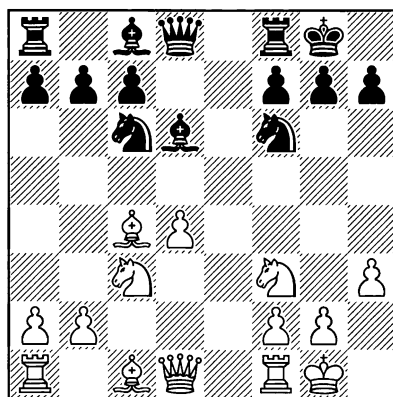
Sometimes White opts for 7.♞e2† ♞e7 8.♞xe7† ♙xe7, but I do not believe White can pose serious problems after an exchange of queens.

7...0-0 8.h3

As always in this variation, it is important to prevent ...♙g4.

I also analysed 8.♙g5 h6 9.♙h4 ♘c6 10.h3 g5 11.♙g3 ♙xg3 12.fxg3, but the arising position seems quite unclear.

8...♘c6 9.♘c3



9...h6

Now it is Black's turn to take care of White's idea of ♙g5. If 9...♙f5 10.♙g5 h6 11.♙h4 g5 12.♙g3 Black has to waste a tempo, as after 12...♙xg3 13.fxg3 his bishop is vulnerable on f5. 12...♙g6 13.♘e5 ♙xe5 This is Renet – Marzolo, Besancon 2006, and now 14.dxe5 ♘h5 15.♙h2 would give White a promising position.

10.♞c2

This important move prevents Black from comfortably developing his bishop to f5.

10...♘b4

The main continuation, but Black has also tried other moves:

10...a6 11.a3

Securing the queen on c2.

11...♙d7 12.♞e1 ♞c8

Black wants to play ...♙f5 with tempo, but misses a nice tactical idea:

13.♙xh6! ♙f5 14.♞d2 gxh6 15.♞xh6 ♘h7 16.♘e4!

White developed a decisive attack in Ulibin – Socko, Stockholm 2000.

10...♘a5 11.♙d3 ♞e8 12.♙d2 ♘c6 13.a3 ♙e6

14.♟fe1 ♖d7 15.♞xe6!?

An interesting positional exchange sacrifice. I think White is also better after 15.♘e4N ♙xh3 16.♘xf6† gxf6 17.♙e4 ♖g4 18.♘h2 ♖g7 19.♙xc6 bxc6 20.♖xc6±.

15...fxe6

It is important that Black cannot recapture with the queen: 15...♖xe6 16.d5! ♘xd5 17.♙h7† ♙h8 18.♙f5 ♘xc3 19.♙xe6 ♘e2† 20.♙f1 ♞xe6 21.♖b3! b6 22.♞e1 ♞ae8 23.♖a4 With a big advantage for White.

16.♞e1 ♘e7 17.♙c4

The light-squared bishop is transferred to b1 in order to create threats along the b1-h7 diagonal.

17...♘ed5 18.♙a2 ♞ad8 19.♙b1=

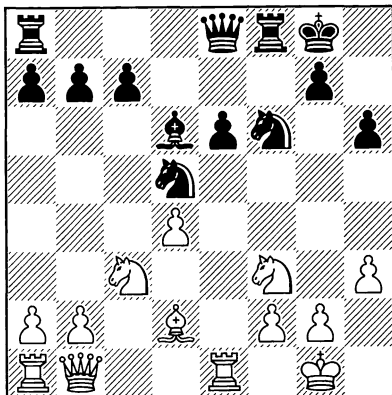
White has interesting compensation, though Black's defensive resources should not be underestimated, Leitao – Bauer, Wijk aan Zee 1999.

11.♖b1 ♙e6 12.♙xe6 fxe6

Despite his weakened pawn structure, Black hopes to create counterplay on the kingside.

13.♞e1 ♖e8 14.♙d2 ♘bd5

If 14...♖f7 White achieves a favourable position after 15.♘e4 ♘bd5 16.♘c5! ♙xc5 17.dxc5 ♘h5 18.♖e4 ♘hf4 19.♙xf4 ♘xf4 20.♘e5±, Glek – Kotenko, Saratov 2006.



15.♞e2N

White failed to achieve anything after 15.♖d3 ♖f7 16.♞e2 ♘h5 17.♘xd5 exd5= in Tkachiev – Golubovic, Pula 2000.

15...♖f7 16.♘e5

I am not sure about the position that arises after 16.♖c2 ♘h5 17.♘xd5 exd5 18.♘e5 ♙xe5 19.dxe5 c6 20.e6 ♖e7∞.

16...♖h5

The point is that after 16...♙xe5 White's queen appears to be useful on b1: 17.dxe5 ♘xc3 18.bxc3 ♘h5 19.♖xb7!±

17.♖d3 ♖f5

White was threatening 18.g4 followed by 19.♘g6.

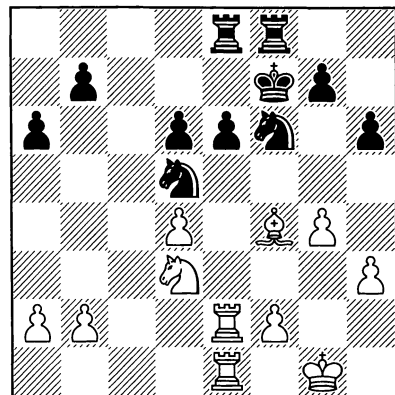
18.g4!?

This is the simplest way.

18...♖xd3 19.♘xd3 ♞ae8 20.♞ae1 ♙f7 21.♘b5±

White has definite pressure in this endgame, for example Black cannot play:

21...a6? 22.♘xd6† cxd6 23.♙f4!



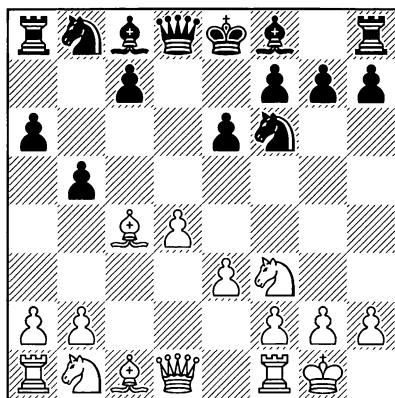
Black will lose one of his pawns.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3.e3)

E) 3...♟f6 4.♟xc4 e6 5.♟f3

The two final lines we shall look at in this chapter are **E1) 5...a6 6.0-0 b5** and **E2) 5...c5 6.0-0 ♟c6**. More standard options from this position will be pursued in the following chapters.

**E1) 5...a6 6.0-0 b5**



Of course this move is not as popular as 6...c5, which would transpose to the main line, but the reader could easily find a huge number of games where 6...b5 has been played.

**7.♟d3!**

The bishop retreats to d3 to keep an eye on the b5-pawn and so lend force to a2-a4.

**7...c5**

I decided to go with the 7...c5 move order, as after 7...♟b7 8.a4 b4 9.♟bd2 c5 (or 9...♟bd7 10.e4 c5 11.e5 ♟d5) 10.e4 cxd4 11.e5 ♟d5 we get the same position that will be examined via 7...c5.

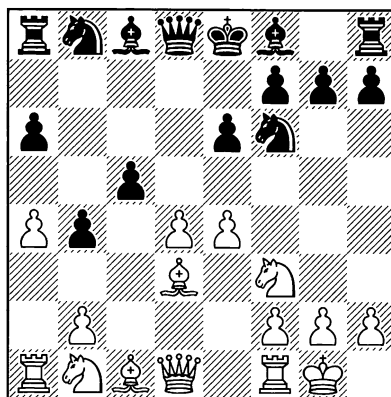
**8.a4**

Provoking b5-b4 is White's key positional idea: this slightly weakens Black's queenside

and in particular wins the c4-square for White.

**8...b4 9.e4**

I believe this is the right move order, as 9.♟bd2 allows extra options such as 9...♟c6, or even 9...♟e7.



**9...♟b7**

Another option is:

**9...cxd4**

But Black's position looks rather dangerous after:

**10.e5 ♟fd7**

An obvious alternative is 10...♟d5 11.♟xd4 when White's queen is ready to jump to g4 at once. The following examples are instructive: 11...♟b7 12.♟g4 ♟c6 (12...♟d7 runs into the strong 13.♟xe6! fxe6 14.♟h5+ ♟e7 15.♟g5+ ♟7f6 16.♟e1 ♟e8 17.♟f3+ and White is clearly better, as he will continue his attack with equal material and Black's king is stuck in the centre, Loeffler – Jonkman, Wijk aan Zee 1996) 13.♟xc6 ♟xc6 14.♟e1 (if 14.♟g5 as in Neven – Halwick, e-mail 1998, Black can solve his problems with 14...♟f6! 15.♟c4 ♟d5! 16.♟xd5 ♟xd5 with normal play) 14...g6 15.♟d2 ♟g7 16.♟c4 0-0 17.♟g5 ♟c7 This position is from N.V. Pedersen – D.V. Pedersen, Koge 2004, and here White could have played 18.♟h4! ♟fb8

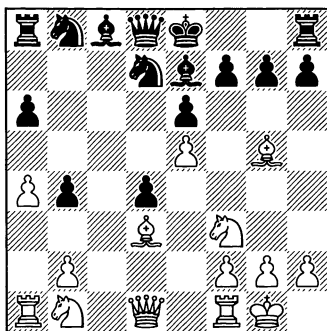
19.b3 with a stable positional advantage.

11.♔g5!

This move poses serious problems. The point is that after:

11...♔e7

As happened in Summerscale – Krush, York 1999, White has the very strong:



12.♔e4!N ♖a7 13.♜xd4 ♘c5 14.♜xc5!

This is better than 14.♜xb4 ♘xe4 15.♔xe7 ♜xe7 16.♜xe4 ♔b7 when Black has reasonable compensation.

14...♔xc5 15.♔xd8 ♘xd8 16.♘bd2

This endgame appears to be very unpleasant for Black, for example:

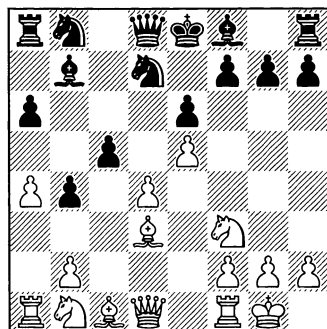
16...♘d7 17.♘b3 ♜c7 18.♜ac1 ♔e7 19.a5!±

### 10.e5 ♘d5

Another option is to retreat the knight to d7, a move that surprisingly has occurred only once in tournament practice.

10...♘fd7

I believe White should continue with:



11.♘bd2N

In the game White immediately went wrong with 11.♘g5?! ♔e7 12.♜h5 g6 13.♜h6 ♘xe5! 14.dxe5 ♜xd3 15.♜g7 ♜f8 16.♘h7 ♘d7 17.♘xf8 ♔xf8 18.♜h8 0–0–0 and Black took over the initiative in Cordova – Arencibia, Santa Clara 2008.

11...cxd4

I also examined 11...♘c6 12.♔e4 (only not 12.♘c4 ♘xd4! and Black is fine) 12...cxd4 13.♘c4 ♜c8 14.♔g5 ♜c7 15.♜c1 All White's pieces are active. 15...♔c5 16.♔f4 ♜b8 (in the event of 16...0–0? the thematic 17.♔h7† is decisive) 17.♜d3 h6 18.♔xc6 ♔xc6 19.♘d4 ♔xa4 20.b3 ♔c6 21.♘xc6 ♜xc6 22.♜fd1 ♜c8 23.♔e3 White has a powerful initiative, as Black's king is stuck in the centre.

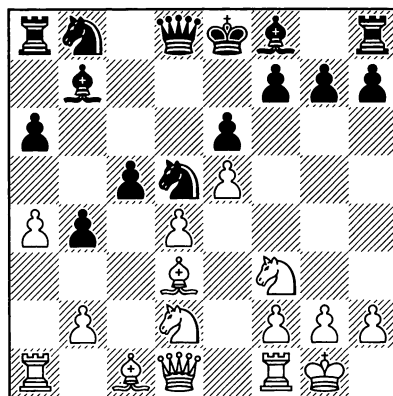
12.♘c4 ♘c6 13.♔g5 ♜b8

13...f6 looks extremely dangerous. 14.♔h4! is very strong, with the following instructive line: 14...♘c5 15.exf6 gxf6 16.♘f5! ♘xe5 17.♘xe5 And White wins neatly after: 17...♘xd3 18.♜h5† ♔e7 19.♜f7† ♔d6 20.♘c4† ♔c5 21.♔xf6 ♜d5 22.♘e3!! dxe3 23.♜c7†+–

14.♔e4 ♘c5 15.♔xc6† ♔xc6 16.♘d4 ♔d5 17.♜c1 ♔xc4 18.♜xc4 ♜xe5 19.♜c1=

White has a great initiative for the pawn.

11.♘bd2



**11...♟d7**

The main continuation in this position. The alternatives are:

11...♟c6 12.♟b3

12.♟c4 cxd4 is not so clear.

12...♟xd4 13.♟fxd4 cxd4

Here White should have played the simple:

14.♟xd4

I analysed the following lines:

14...♟b6N

14...♟e7 is obviously not so good for Black because of 15.♟g4 ♟f8 (15...0–0 is impossible in view of 16.♟h6 and Black loses the exchange) 16.♟d1± and White is clearly better, as Black's king has lost the right to castle, Andersen – Bogoljubow, Bad Nauheim 1935. Incidentally, this game transposed from the Meran variation.

15.♟e3 ♟d5 16.♟f3 ♟d7 17.♟e2!

Thanks to the inclusion of a4 and ...b4 the endgame is quite unpleasant for Black, for example:

17...♟xd1 18.♟fxd1 ♟c5?! 19.♟ac1! ♟xa4 20.♟c7 ♟d5 21.♟a1 ♟xb2 22.♟d4+–

11...h6

This seems to be too slow for such a tense position. Now White carries out a thematic idea:

12.♟e4 ♟d7 13.♟fd2!

The white knight is heading for d6.

13...cxd4 14.♟c4 ♟c5

Better was 14...♟c7, but even so after 15.♟cd6† ♟xd6 16.♟xd6† ♟f8 17.f4 White's compensation is extremely powerful.

15.♟cd6† ♟xd6 16.♟xd6† ♟f8 17.♟c4!

White regains the central pawn, maintaining a clear edge because Black's king is stranded on f8, Delchev – Varga, Croatia 1999.

11...cxd4

White's position seems very promising.

12.♟e4 ♟d7

The alternative is 12...♟c6 13.♟g5 ♟b6 (I also examined 13...♟d7 14.♟e1 h6 15.♟h4 ♟f4 [if 15...g5 16.♟g3 ♟e7 17.♟fd2! White has nice compensation] 16.♟f1 ♟g6 17.♟g3 ♟e7 18.♟d6† ♟xd6 19.exd6 0–0 20.♟xd4± with a clear advantage, thanks to his strong passed pawn) 14.a5 (14.♟e1 would have been interesting as well) 14...♟xa5 This position occurred in Soloviev – Liberzon, Moscow 1964, and White should have played 15.♟xd4 and if 15...h6 then 16.♟a4† ♟c6 17.♟fc1! with a strong initiative.

13.♟g5 ♟b8 14.♟e1

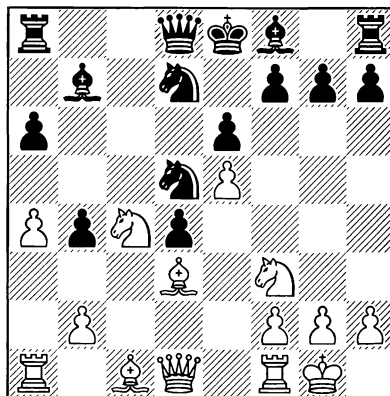
14.a5!? is worthy of consideration.

14...h6 15.♟h4 ♟f4

In the case of 15...♟xe5 16.♟xe5 ♟xe5 17.♟g3 ♟f4 18.♟c1!± Black's position looks critical.

16.♟c1 ♟xd3 17.♟xd3 ♟d5 18.♟xd4 ♟b6 19.♟d6† ♟xd6 20.exd6 0–0 21.♟xb6 ♟xb6 22.♟e7!

The strong d6-pawn gives White a clear edge, Eljanov – Korobkov, Simferopol 2003.

**12.♟c4 cxd4****13.♟g5**

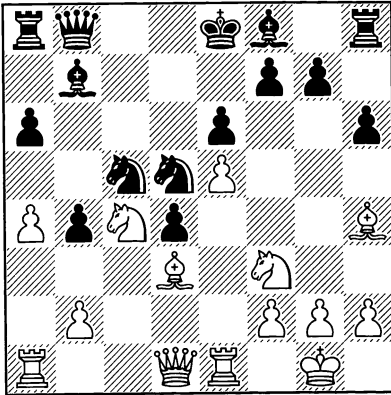
13.♟xd4 ♟c5 14.♟c2 also looks interesting.

**13...♟b8**

In the event of 13...♖c7 14.♞c1 ♘c5 15.♙b1 ♞ White has a promising position.

#### 14.♞e1 h6 15.♙h4 ♘c5

And here in the game Hracek – Potapov, Pardubice 2008, White could have retained his advantage by means of:

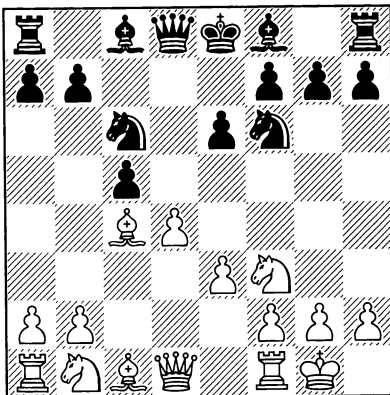


16.♙g3!N ♘xd3 17.♞xd3 ♙e7 18.♘d6† ♙xd6 19.exd6 0–0 20.♘xd4

White's strong d6-pawn secures his advantage.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3.e3 ♘f6 4.♙xc4 e6 5.♘f3)

E2) 5...c5 6.0–0 ♘c6



This is quite a popular alternative to the main line with 6...a6. Black is willing to play against an isolated queen's pawn.

#### 7.♞e2

At this point Black can either play fairly with E21) 7...cxd4 or try to trick White into a bad move order with E22) 7...a6.

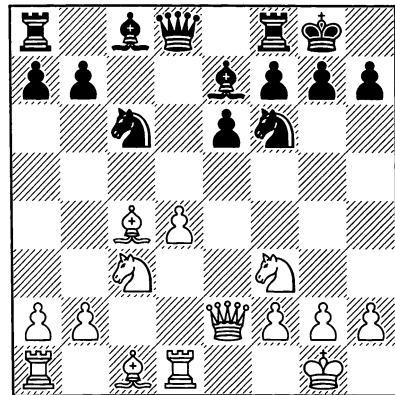
(1.d4 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3.e3 ♘f6 4.♙xc4 e6 5.♘f3 c5 6.0–0 ♘c6 7.♞e2)

E21) 7...cxd4 8.♞d1

8.exd4 would only give Black an extra option of 8...♘xd4 9.♘xd4 ♞xd4, or he can play 8...♙e7 and after 9.♞d1 we transpose to our main line.

8...♙e7 9.exd4 0–0 10.♘c3

An important alternative is 10.a3, but here I fail to see an advantage after 10...b6 11.♘c3 ♙b7 12.d5 exd5 13.♘xd5 ♘xd5 14.♙xd5 ♞e8! as in Peralta – Magem Badals, Castellar del Valles 2003.



10...♘a5

This is Black's main continuation.

The less popular options are:



10...a6

This leads to a typical position with an isolated queen's pawn, which promises very complex play. The following is a recent example:

11.a3 ♖a5 12.♙a2 ♜d5 13.♜e5 ♜xc3 14.bxc3 ♙f6 15.♙d3! b5 16.♙h3 g6 17.♙h6 ♙e8 18.♙f3 ♙a7 19.♙xf6! ♙xf6 20.♜g4!

White had a decisive attack in Berczes – Kuzubov, Gibraltar 2008.

10...♜b4

This seems to be dubious, as it allows White to place his pieces very actively:

11.♜e5 ♜bd5 12.♙g5 ♜xc3 13.bxc3 ♜d5 14.♙d2

It is usually beneficial for the side with the IQP to keep more pieces on the board.

14...♙g5 15.♙b3 ♙xd2 16.♙xd2

Now White is ready to advance his c-pawn.

16...♙f6

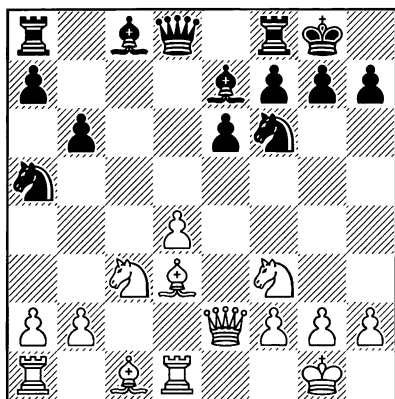
16...♙c7 was a tougher defence.

17.c4 ♜f4 18.♙e3 ♜g6 19.g3

White was better in D. Gurevich – Schwartzman, Kissimmee 1997.

11.♙d3 b6

And now I like the following very unexpected idea:



12.♙e5!?

The queen is heading for the kingside where it will help create threats against Black's king.

More common is 12.♙g5, but it is considered by theory to be harmless.

12...♙d6

In my opinion this is the critical answer. Black has tested other moves:

12...♜c6

This seems inaccurate, as it allows White to execute his idea:

13.♙g3

Already threatening 14.♙h6.

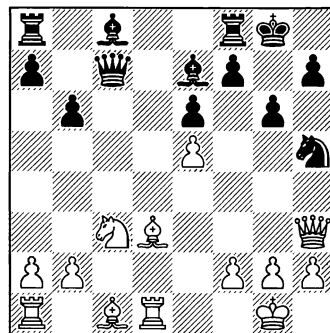
13...♜h5 14.♙h3!

Less convincing is 14.♙g4 ♜f6 15.♙h4 ♜b4 16.♙b1 ♙b7 17.♙g5 g6! as in Atalik – Komarov, Ulcinj 1998.

14...g6 15.♜e5 ♜xe5

Obviously the d4-pawn is untouchable: 15...♜xd4?! 16.♙e4! ♙c7 17.♜xf7! with a large advantage.

16.dxe5 ♙c7



17.g4!

The following encounter ended very convincingly:

17...♜g7 18.♙f4 ♙b7 19.♙ac1 f5 20.gxf5 ♜xf5 21.♜b5 ♙d7 22.♙xf5 ♙xb5 23.♙d7!+-  
Legky – Raetsky, Sautron 2001.

12...♙b7 13.♙g3 g6

Another option is 13...♔h8 14.♚h3!. White's queen is very annoying and now White has another attacking idea in ♕g5. 14...♕xf3 15.♚xf3 ♖c8 16.♕a6! ♜c7 17.♕f4 ♜d7 Now in the game Cosma – Georgiev, Andorra 2000, White missed the following idea: 18.d5! exd5 (just bad for Black is 18...♔xd5 19.♕b5!) 19.♕b5 Black has to give up the exchange, as 19...♜b7 20.♔xd5 gives White a decisive advantage.

14.♕h6 ♜e8 15.♔e5 ♔h5 16.♚e3 ♕f8

This position was reached in Drozdovsky – Bogdanovich, Odessa 2006. White should have played:

17.♜ac1 ♜c8 18.♕xf8 ♜xf8 19.b4 ♔c6 20.♕e4

With serious pressure. Here are some sample lines:

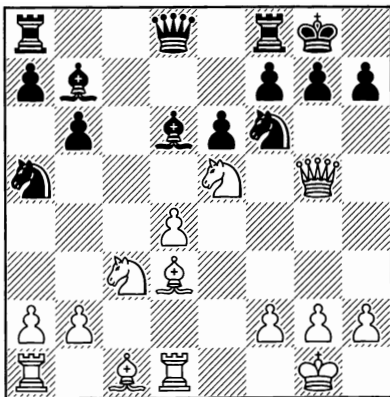
20...♔f6

20...♔g7 21.d5 ♔xe5 22.dxe6 ♚e7 23.♕xb7 ♚xb7 24.♚xe5 ♔xe6 25.♔d5± with a strong attack.

21.b5 ♔xe5 22.dxe5 ♔d5 23.♕xd5 ♕xd5 24.h3!

White is better.

13.♚g5 ♕b7 14.♔e5



14...♔d5

I believe other moves are worse:

14...♔c6 15.♚h4 ♔e7 16.♕g5 ♔g6 was

Chatalbashev – Legky, France 1998, and now the simple 17.♚h3! would have given White a serious initiative.

14...g6 15.♚g3 ♜c8 16.♕h6 ♔h5 Here I like 17.♚e3!?N (instead of 17.♚h3 ♔g7 18.♔e2 ♚e7 with unclear play, Halkias – Lopez Martinez, Oropesa del Mar 1998) 17...♔g7 18.♜ac1 with complex play, but it is obvious that White has the initiative.

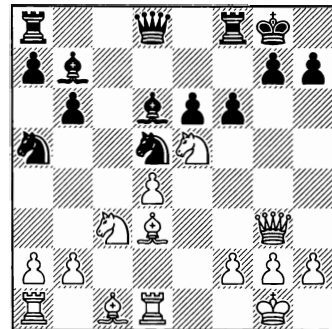
15.♚g3 ♜f5?

This is a typical move for IQP positions. Black almost fully neutralizes White's active play on the kingside, closing the b1-h7 diagonal, but there are obvious positional drawbacks: it weakens the e6-pawn and allows White's knight a nice outpost on e5.

I also analysed:

15...f6

This walks headfirst into a pretty combination.



16.♕xh7! ♔xh7 17.♚h3! ♔g8 18.♚xe6! ♔h7 19.♜d3

And now we have a forcing line:

19...♕xe5 20.dxe5 ♔xc3

After 20...♚c8 21.♚xc8 ♜axc8 22.♔xd5 ♜fd8 23.♜h3! ♔g8 24.♔e3 White keeps his extra pawn.

21.♜h3! ♔g6 22.♚g4! ♔f7 23.e6! ♔g8 24.bxc3 ♜e8 25.♜g3!

Black defends successfully after 25.♔a3 ♖d5  
26.♙g3 ♗g5 27.♗d4 ♙ad8.

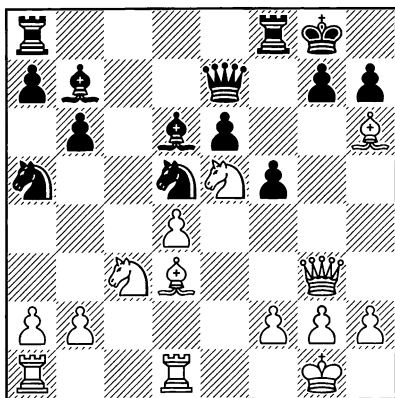
25...♙e7 26.♔a3

With an advantage.

### 16.♔h6

Also interesting is 16.♘b5 ♔b8 17.♔h6  
♗e7 18.♙ac1 a6 19.♘c3 ♘xc3 20.♙xc3 ♔xe5  
21.dxe5 ♙fc8 22.♙xc8† ♙xc8 23.♔f1±.

### 16...♗e7



### 17.♘b5N

I think this is stronger than 17.♔g5 ♗e8  
18.♙e1 ♙c8 with complicated play, Iskusnyh  
– Vaulin, Novgorod 1999.

### 17...♔b8

Black should avoid 17...♔xe5 because of  
18.dxe5 f4 19.♗g4 ♘c6 20.♔g5 ♗d7 21.♗h5!  
with an attack.

### 18.♙ac1 a6 19.♘c3

I prefer White in this undeniably complicated  
position. A possible continuation is:

19...♘xc3 20.♙xc3 ♔xe5 21.dxe5 ♙fc8  
22.♙xc8† ♙xc8 23.♔f1!±

White is better because of his bishop pair.

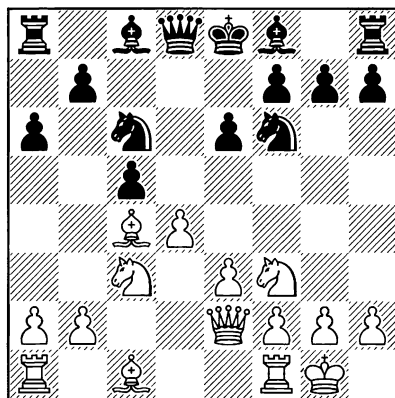
(1.d4 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3.e3 ♘f6 4.♔xc4 e6  
5.♘f3 c5 6.0–0 ♘c6 7.♗e2)

### E22) 7...a6

A tricky move order that tries to lure White into  
a line of the ♗e2 system which is considered to  
be not so dangerous for Black.

### 8.♘c3!

I believe this is the right move. The other  
options such as 8.♙d1, 8.a3 or 8.dxc5 do not  
promise White anything.



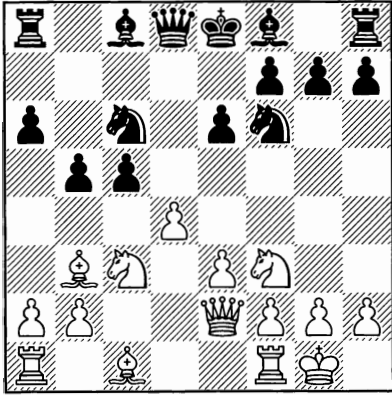
Now Black has two main continuations:  
**E221) 8...b5** and **E222) 8...cxd4**, but we  
should also quickly check the following  
option:

8...♗c7 should be answered by 9.d5 exd5  
10.♘xd5 ♘xd5 11.♔xd5 ♔d6 (if 11...♔e7  
then I recommend 12.♔d2N 0–0 13.♔c3±  
and believe this kind of position is favourable  
for White) 12.♔d2N (this is better than 12.b3  
0–0 13.♔b2 ♘b4! with good play for Black)  
12...0–0 13.♔c3±.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3.e3 ♘f6 4.♔xc4 e6  
5.♘f3 c5 6.0–0 ♘c6 7.♗e2 a6 8.♘c3)

### E221) 8...b5 9.♔b3

Now after 9...cxd4 10.♞d1 the play would transpose to the 8...cxd4 line, so we will check three other options:



### 9...♟a5

The other two lines are:

### 9...♙b7 10.♞d1 ♞c7

This is considered to be quite good line for Black. Other options are:

10...♟a5 11.e4 will be examined via 9...♟a5.

10...c4 This pawn structure usually favours White, and Black's knight is rather misplaced on c6. 11.♙c2 ♟b4 (11...♙e7 12.a3 0–0 13.e4 would give White a pleasant edge, though the position is very complicated) 12.♙b1 ♙e7 13.e4 ♟d3 (or if 13...0–0 14.a3 ♟c6 then White has the strong option 15.d5 exd5 16.e5! with an advantage) 14.♙xd3 cxd3 This is Moskalenko – Sulava, Aosta 1990, and here I prefer 15.♞xd3 b4 16.e5 ♟d5 17.♟e4 when I do not believe Black has sufficient compensation for the pawn.

11.d5 exd5 12.e4!

Less clear is 12.♟xd5 ♟xd5 13.♙xd5 ♙e7 14.a4 bxa4! as in Balinov – Dovzik, Aschach 2005.

12...d4

The alternative is known to be bad: 12...dxe4? 13.♟xe4 ♟xe4 14.♞xe4† ♞e7 15.♞f4 with

a powerful initiative, A. Kotov – O'Kelly, Groningen 1946.

13.♟d5

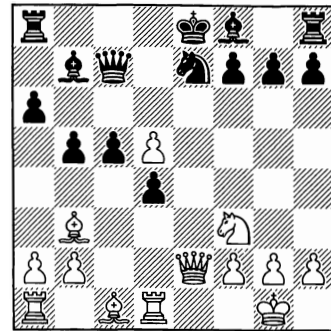
Less convincing is 13.e5 0–0–0!

13...♟xd5

Another option is 13...♞d8 14.♙f4 (14.♟xf6† gxf6 15.♙d5♞ might be an interesting alternative) 14...♞c8 15.a4! bxa4 16.♞xa4 ♙e7 Sherwin – Kramer, New York 1955. Here 17.♟h4!N seems to be very strong. 17...0–0 (after 17...g6 White prevents castling with 18.♙h6!) 18.♟f5 White's initiative looks very powerful.

14.exd5† ♟e7

Here I found a very strong novelty.



15.♟e5!N

With the simple idea of preventing queenside castling. Black's position looks very suspicious with his king still in the centre.

15...c4

15...f6 runs into the spectacular 16.♟f7!.

16.♟xc4 ♙xd5

White has a crushing attack after 16...bxc4 17.♙a4† ♟d8 18.♞xd4+–.

17.♟b6 ♞xb6 18.♙xd5

Black can hardly hold this position.

9...♙e7 10.dxc5 ♙xc5 11.e4

This position looks quite promising for White:

11...♟d7

Other options:

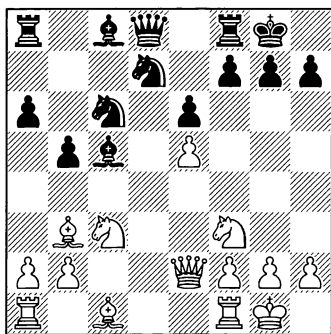
11...♙b7 12.e5 ♘d7 13.♘e4 and White has good attacking chances.

11...b4 is obviously bad: 12.e5 bxc3 13.exf6 gxf6 14.♖c4 ♜b6 15.♝xc3 ♘d4 16.♘xd4 ♙xd4 17.♙a4† ♚e7 18.♙e3 ♙xc3 19.♙xb6 ♙e5 20.♙ad1 and White was clearly better in Euwe – Alekhine, Netherlands (5) 1937.

11...e5?! 12.♙d5! ♘d4 13.♘xd4 ♘xd5 14.♘dxb5! and White remains a pawn up, Delchev – Lazarev, Italy 2000.

11...♝c7 12.e5 ♘d7 13.♙f4 0-0 14.♙ac1 ♙b7 15.♘e4 White had a dream position in Goossens – Van Damme, Antwerp 1998.

12.e5 0-0



13.♙c2!N

A simple move that poses serious problems.  
For example:

13...g6 14.♙h6 ♙e8 15.♙fd1 ♝c7 16.♘e4 ♘cx5 17.♘xc5 ♝xc5 18.♙ac1 ♝c4 19.♙d3 ♝g4 20.♙e4±

With a clear advantage.

10.♙d1 ♙b7 11.e4!N

Strangely enough, this natural move has not been tested in tournament practice. It looks logical, as White is trying to exploit his lead in development.

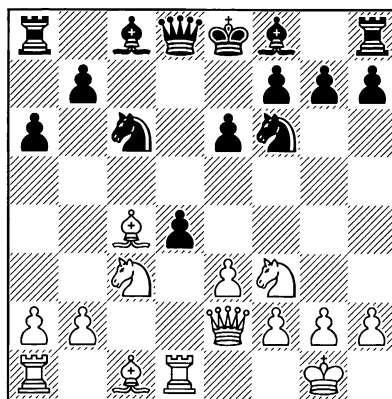
An instructive line is:

11...♘xb3 12.axb3 cxd4 13.♘xd4 ♜b6 14.e5 ♘d5 15.♘xd5 ♙xd5 16.♙e3 ♝b7 17.♝g4

White has an initiative thanks to his better development.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3.e3 ♘f6 4.♙xc4 e6 5.♘f3 c5 6.0-0 ♘c6 7.♝e2 a6 8.♘c3)

E222) 8...cxd4 9.♙d1



9...b5

The alternative is:

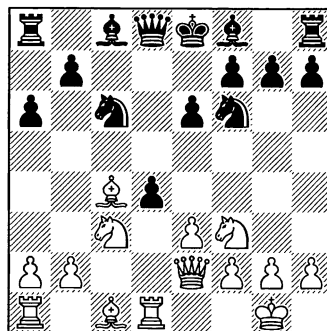
9...♙e7 10.exd4 ♘b4

Other moves allow White to break through in the centre with d4-d5:

10...0-0 11.d5! exd5 12.♘xd5 ♘xd5 13.♙xd5 ♝c7 14.♝e4! with a clear edge, Vidit – Manush, New Delhi 2007.

10...b5? 11.d5! bxc4 12.dxc6 ♝c7 13.♝xc4 e5 14.♘d5 ♘xd5 15.♝xd5 White had a winning position in Szwed – Tomczak, Koszalin 2005.

11.♘e5



I believe White has an improved version of a standard IQP position, as he has good chances of creating an initiative on the kingside.

The following example interested me:

11...0–0 12.a3

More popular is 12.♘b3.

12...♖bd5 13.♗d3 b5 14.♘b3 ♘b7 15.♗g3 ♗e8?

This unnecessarily weakens the f7-square, which was nicely exploited by White:

16.♞f3 g6 17.♖e4

Jobava – Pantsulaia, Tbilisi 2008.

### 10.♘b3 ♘e7

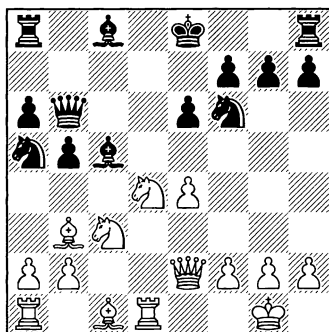
The alternative is risky for Black:

10...♖a5 11.♖xd4 ♞b6

Another line is 11...♞c7 12.e4 ♘b7 as in Yakovich – Savchenko, Maikop 1998, and here even 13.♘xe6!? (13.e5 ♖xb3 14.axb3 ♖d5 is more usual) 13...fxe6 14.e5 ♖d5 15.♖xe6 ♞f7 16.♞g4 ♖xc3 17.bxc3 ♖c4 18.a4 would give White a dangerous initiative.

12.e4 ♘c5

This position was reached N. Pert – Sands, England 2007. And now White could try the straightforward:



13.e5! N

This looks very promising, with a possible variation:

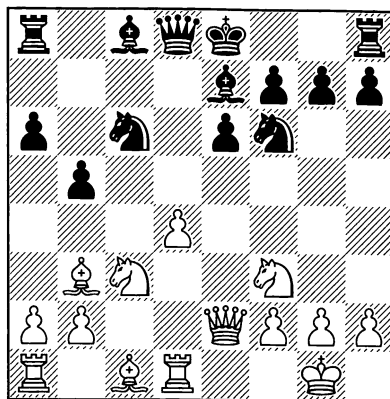
13...♘xd4 14.exf6 ♖xb3 15.axb3 ♘b7

If 15...♘xf6 16.♖d5 ♞c6 17.♖xf6+ gxf6 18.♞g4 ♘b7 19.♘e3 White has great compensation, because Black's king is stuck in the centre. A remarkable line is 19...h5 20.♞g7 ♗h7 21.♞g8+ ♖e7 22.♞g3 h4 23.♞g4 h3 24.f3 and Black is helpless against the coming ♗ac1.

16.fxg7 ♘xg7 17.♘e3 ♞c6 18.♞g4

White clearly has the initiative.

### 11.exd4



### 11...♖a5

This looks principled, as Black wants to establish control over the d5-square.

The alternative:

11...♖b4?!

is bad in view of

12.♖e5! ♖bd5

12...0–0? fails immediately to 13.a3 ♖bd5 14.♖xd5 and Black loses a piece, Panchenko – Lebedev, Moscow 1994.

13.a4

This is of course much stronger than 13.♖c6 ♞d6 14.♖xe7 ♞xe7±, Inarkiev – Anisimov, Cherepovets 2001.

13...b4 14.♖xd5 ♖xd5 15.a5

Black cannot castle in view of 16.♖c6 followed by 17.♘xd5. Meanwhile White's bishop will give a check from a4 on the next

move and Black's king will lose the right to castle: White's advantage is obvious.

### 12.d5!

A remarkable idea that gains the advantage for White.

In the case of 12.♙c2 ♚b7 Black is simply fine.

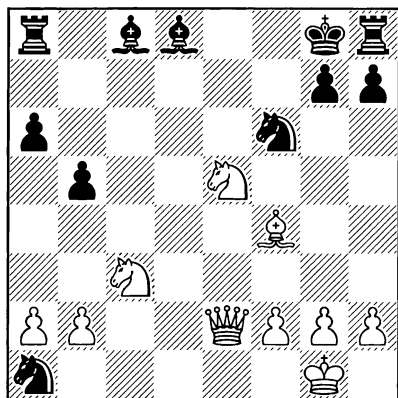
### 12...♜xb3 13.dxe6 13...♜xa1

Other moves are much worse:

13...♞a5? 14.axb3 ♞xa1 15.exf7† ♜xf7  
16.♜e5† ♜g8 17.♙f4 ♞a5 18.♜c6+–

13...♞xd1† 14.♞xd1 ♜xa1 15.♜d5! ♜f8  
(or 15...♜xd5 16.♞xd5 ♞b8 17.exf7† ♜f8  
18.♙g5+–) 16.♜xe7 ♜xe7 17.♙e3 ♜e4  
18.exf7 White was much better in Lazarev –  
Kamber, Zurich 2000.

14.exf7† ♜xf7 15.♜e5† ♜g8 16.♞xd8†  
♙xd8 17.♙f4!±



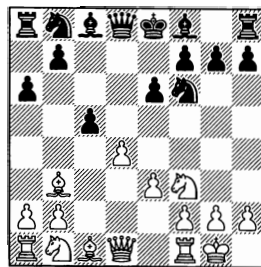
White was better in Khenkin – Gyimesi, Koszalin 1999. He is threatening to win Black's knight on a1.

### Conclusion:

The Queen's Gambit Accepted has a reputation for solidity, but that is in the main lines and this is a chapter of sidelines, so White generally has fine prospects against the lines covered here. The reader should note that the positions in this chapter lead to more open tactical play than is common in much of the rest of this repertoire.

## QGA

### 7.♙b3



## Variation Index

1.d4 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3.e3 ♘f6 4.♙xc4 e6 5.♘f3 c5 6.0-0 a6

7.♙b3

A) 7...♘bd7

p 428

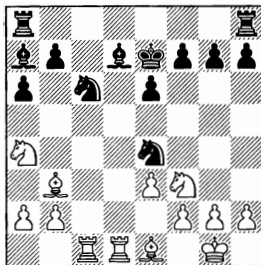
B) 7...♘c6

p 429

C) 7...cxd4

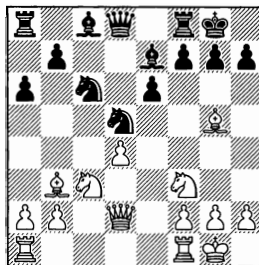
p 432

B) after 14...♘e4



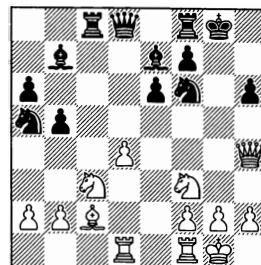
15..♙c2N

C) note to the 11th move



12.♙fe1!N

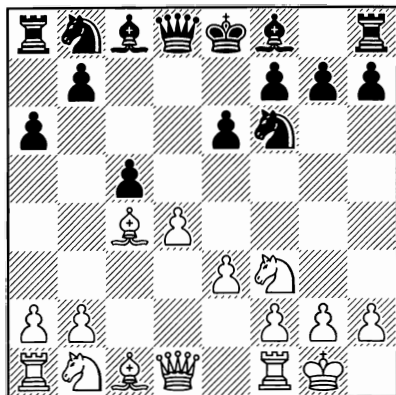
D2) note to the 14th move



17.d5!N



1.d4 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3.e3 ♘f6 4.♗xc4 e6 5.♘f3 c5 6.0-0 a6



### 7.♗b3!

It took decades before the top players understood all the subtleties of this move, and that led to it becoming the main line of the QGA. The point is that both 7.♘c3 and 7.♙e2 are well met with a quick 7...b5 and 8...♗b7, when White is imperfectly prepared for Black's active play on the queenside. After 7.♗b3 White is ready to play a quick a2-a4.

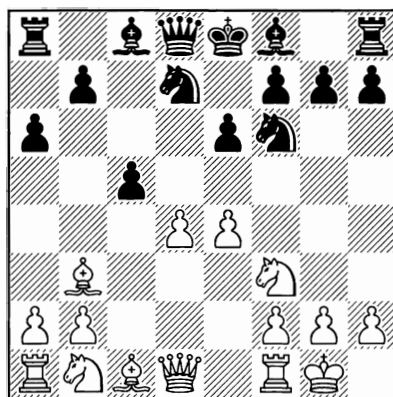
We shall delay looking at 7...b5 until the next chapter. In this chapter we will study the three other main lines, **A) 7...♘bd7**, **B) 7...♘c6** and **C) 7...cxd4**. Line B can easily transpose to line C, if Black takes on d4 on move 8. However, if he does not, then the line has independent importance.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3.e3 ♘f6 4.♗xc4 e6 5.♘f3 c5 6.0-0 a6 7.♗b3)

### A) 7...♘bd7

A fairly typical move for the Queen's Gambit Accepted. Black clearly intends to develop his light-squared bishop to b7, but White has a chance to strike immediately in the centre:

### 8.e4!



### 8...♘xe4

Black has to accept the challenge, as otherwise e4-e5 would cause Black a lot of discomfort. One example will suffice: 8...cxd4?! 9.e5 ♘e4 10.♙xd4 ♘dc5 11.♗c2± Black had serious problems with his knight on e4 in Akshat – Vishal, Mumbai 2008.

### 9.♙e2

9.♙e1 ♘d6 10.d5 achieves little: 10...e5 11.♘xe5 ♘xe5 12.♙xe5† ♗e7 13.♙e1 b6 14.♙e2 ♖a7 15.♗g5 ♗f5 16.♘c3 c4 17.♗c2 ♗xc2 18.♙xc2 0-0= Yermolinsky – Lesiege, North Bay 1994.

### 9...c4

In my opinion this is Black's best move and allows him to obtain a more or less playable position; the other options look very dangerous for him:

9...♘ef6? is just bad in view of 10.d5! and White will regain the pawn with dividends.

### 9...♘df6

This allows White to seize a dangerous initiative, thanks to the vulnerable position of Black's knight on e4.

10.♗c2 ♙d5 11.♙e1 ♘d6 12.♘c3 ♙c6 13.♗e3

White's attack develops smoothly.

13...c4 14.d5! ♖xd5 15.♗xd5 ♜xd5 16.♞ad1  
 ♜c6 17.♗e5 ♜c7 18.♞f3 ♙e7 19.♙a4†

Black can hardly hold this.

9...♗d6 10.d5 e5 11.♗xe5 ♙e7

After 11...♞e7 12.f4 f6 13.♞h5† ♗d8  
 14.♗f3 Black's king is obviously in danger, K.  
 Rasmussen – A.S. Rasmussen, Aalborg 2007.

12.♗xd7 ♜xd7 13.♗c3 b5

Black's problem is that 13...0–0 runs into  
 14.♗a4! ♜c7 15.♗xc5 winning a pawn.

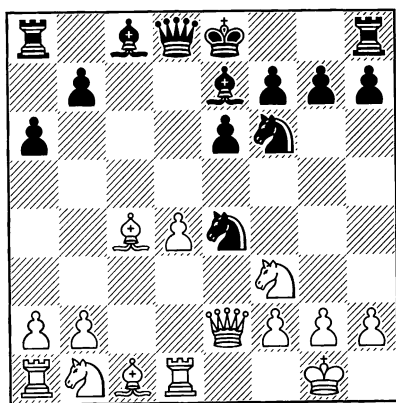
14.♙g5 f6 15.♙f4 0–0 16.♞fe1

White was clearly better in Dautov – Mista,  
 Warsaw 2005.

**10.♙xc4 ♗df6 11.♞d1**

White may have other interesting options,  
 but the text looks strong enough.

**11...♙e7**



**12.d5! ♜b6**

After 12...exd5 13.♙xd5 ♗d6 (Black cannot  
 play 13...♗xd5? 14.♞xe4 ♙e6 15.♗c3+–)  
 14.♗c3 0–0 15.♙f4 Black's position looks  
 critical.

**13.♙e3 ♙c5 14.♙xc5 ♗xc5 15.♗c3 0–0  
 16.♞ac1**

White has a powerful initiative, David –  
 Michiels, Belgium 2005.

**(1.d4 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3.e3 ♗f6 4.♙xc4 e6  
 5.♗f3 c5 6.0–0 a6 7.♙b3)**

**B) 7...♗c6 8.♗c3**

Now Black usually plays 8...cxd4 transposing  
 to our main line, but I will examine his other  
 options:

**8...♙e7**

The other options are:

8...♜c7 9.♞e2

Surprisingly 9.d5 exd5 10.♗xd5 ♗xd5  
 11.♞xd5 ♙e6 12.♞e4 ♞e7! is not so clear,  
 Gavasheli – Sorokina, Batumi 2002.

9...♙e7

After 9...♙d6 10.dxc5 we will reach the same  
 position as after 9...♙e7.

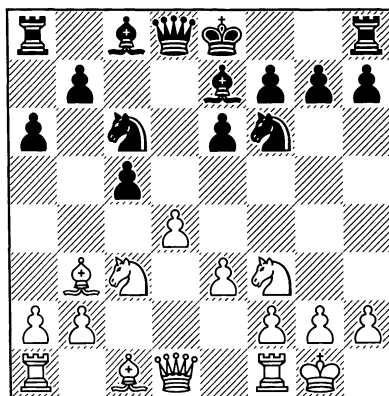
10.dxc5 ♙xc5 11.♙d2 0–0 12.♞ac1

This is logical as now Black's queen looks  
 misplaced on c7. White has the better  
 chances after:

12...♙d6 13.e4±

P.H. Nielsen – Baburin, Gothenburg 2005.

8...b5 9.♞e2, followed by 10.♞d1, is examined  
 via a different move order, 6...♗c6 7.♞e2 a6  
 8.♗c3 b5 9.♙b3, on page 422.



**9.dxc5**

I like this more than 9.♞e2 cxd4 10.♞d1 0-0 11.♟xd4 ♟xd4 12.exd4 when it is not clear that White has an edge.

### 9...♞xd1

9...♟xc5

Now White can secure a clear plus with:

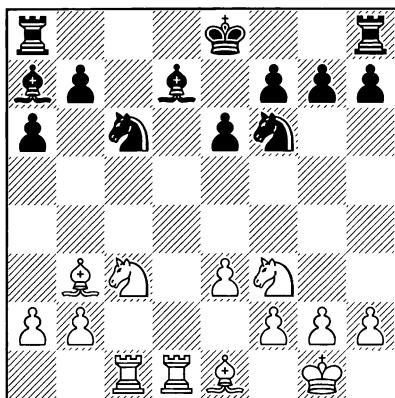
10.♞xd8† ♟xd8 11.e4! ♟d7

11...h6 does not solve Black's problems: 12.e5 ♟d7 13.♟f4 White gets a nice square on e4 for his knight. 13...g5 14.♟g3 g4 This is quite principled, but White gains too much compensation for the pawn because of his clear lead in development. 15.♟d2 ♟dxe5 16.♟de4 ♟e7 17.♞fd1† ♟e8 18.♟a4 White had the initiative in Tregubov – Humeau, Venacu 2006.

12.♞d1 ♟e7 13.♟f4 f6 14.♞ac1 ♟a7 15.♟d6† ♟f7 16.♟e2

Black's position has become critical, Arnold – Coraretti, USA 2007.

10.♞xd1 ♟xc5 11.♟d2 ♟d7 12.♞ac1 ♟a7 13.♟e1



Now White's main goal is to force Black to give up one of his bishops for a knight.

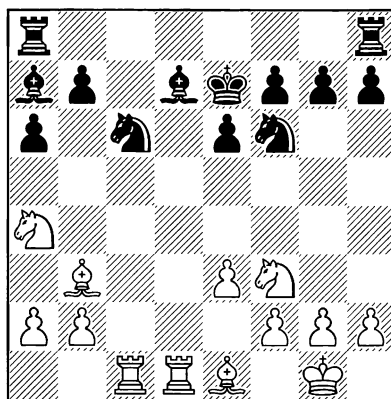
### 13...♟e7

This is clearly Black's main choice, but he has also tried:

13...0-0 14.♟a4 ♞fd8 15.♟c5 ♟xc5 16.♞xc5 This is the position for which White was aiming, because his two bishops will give him a long-lasting advantage. 16...♟e8 17.♞dc1 ♟d7 18.♞5c2 ♟b6 19.h3 h6 20.a3 ♞d3 21.♞c3± White has a pleasant edge, Romanishin – Riccio, Bratto 2000.

### 14.♟a4

With the obvious idea of playing 15.♟c5.



### 14...♟e4

This seems to be the most natural move, preventing White's idea. Let us have a look at the many alternatives:

14...♞hc8 15.♟c5 ♞c7 16.♟xd7 ♞xd7± With a stable edge, thanks to his bishops, Romanishin – Dizdarevic, Solin 2006.

14...♞hb8 15.♟c5 ♟e8

This was tested in Lautier – Flear, France 1999. I recommend the subtle:

16.a3

With the idea of to play ♟a2 and b4. If Black reacts by analogy with the main game with:

16...♟d7

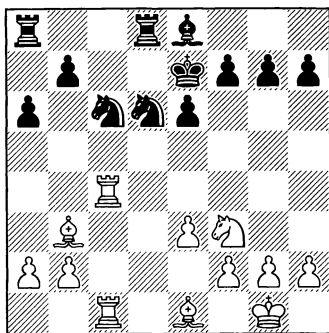
White has

17.♟e4

followed by ♟d6 and capturing Black's light-squared bishop.

14...♖hd8 15.♗c5 ♕xc5 16.♖xc5 ♕e8 17.♖dc1  
♗e4 18.♖5c4 ♗d6

If Black manages to play ...e5 and ...f6, followed by ...♕f7, then White's two bishops would not provide a useful advantage. This is why I believe White should play:



19.♖h4!?!N

19.♖c5 ♗e4 20.♖5c2 e5 21.♕c4 f6 was equal in Moradiabadi – Guliyev, Nancy 2007.

19...h6 20.♗d4 ♖ac8

Clearly worse is 20...♗xd4 21.♖xd4 e5? 22.♖d5 and Black has to give up his central pawn, as ♕b4 is threatened.

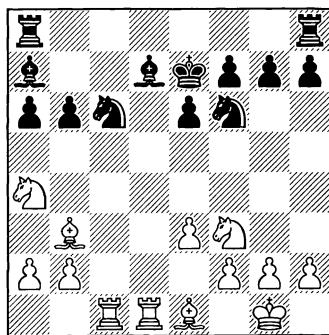
21.♗xc6†

21.♕c3±

21...♕xc6 22.♕a5

White has a stable edge.

14...b6? is refuted by an elegant combination:

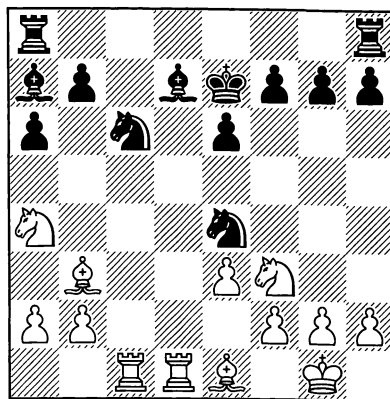


15.♖xd7†!! ♗xd7 16.♗xb6†! ♕xb6 17.♕a4

♗c8 18.♗e5 ♗b8 19.♗xc6†

White had a clear advantage in Karpov – Gulko, Spain 1996.

Now I believe White should play:



15.♕c2N

Keeping Black under unpleasant pressure.

Only 15.♗d2 has been played before, but this new move looks more natural.

15...♗d6 16.♕b1 ♕e8

In the event of 16...♖ac8 17.♗c5 ♕e8 White has an interesting idea in 18.♗g5 h6 19.♗ge4 ♗xe4 20.♗xe4 and White's knight will eventually come to d6 and eliminate Black's light-squared bishop.

17.♗c5 ♖d8 18.a3 f6 19.♗d4 ♗xd4  
20.♖xd4

White's bishops are starting to play.

20...♖c8 21.♕b4 ♕g6

21...a5 22.♖xd6! ♗xd6 23.♗xb7† ♗d7 24.♖d1† ♗c7 25.♗xa5 gives White a material advantage.

22.♕a2 ♖hd8 23.♖dd1 ♕xc5

Again the tactics do not work: 23...a5 24.♕xa5 b6 25.♗xe6 bxa5 26.♗xd8 ♖xd8

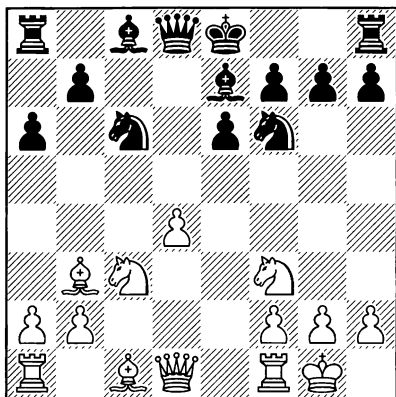
27.♞c7† ♞d7 28.♞xd7† ♞xd7 29.♙b1! and the endgame will be difficult for Black.

## 24.♞xc5

White has achieved his goal: his two bishop give him a stable edge.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3.e3 ♘f6 4.♙xc4 e6 5.♘f3 c5 6.0–0 a6 7.♙b3)

C) 7...cxd4 8.exd4 ♘c6 9.♘c3 ♙e7



White has many set-ups here, but I like the fashionable line just fine, so I will not be too creative.

## 10.♙g5 0–0 11.♞d2 ♘a5

Obviously the main line, but there are two important alternatives:

### 11...b5

This seems inaccurate, as it allows White to play:

### 12.d5

12.♞ad1 ♘a5 would just transpose to our main line.

### 12...♘a5

After 12...exd5 White can grab a strong initiative: 13.♘xd5 ♘xd5 14.♙xd5 ♙xg5 15.♘xg5 ♙f5 This is Jankovic – Stevic, Pula 2007. Now 16.♞fd1 would secure White's

advantage, with the plausible line: 16...♞c8 17.♞f4 ♞f6 18.♘e4 ♙xe4 19.♞xf6 gxf6 20.♙xe4 This endgame is very unpleasant for Black, due to the superiority of White's bishop over Black's knight.

13.dxe6 fxe6 14.♞e2 ♘xb3 15.axb3

White's better pawn structure gives him a pleasant edge.

### 15...♞b8

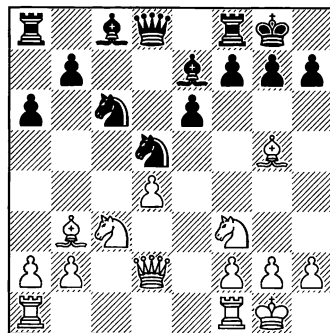
This position was on the board in Leitao – Milos, Sao Paulo 2007, and now White should have played:

16.♞fd1 ♞e8 17.♞ac1

Retaining a pleasant edge.

### 11...♘d5

This fairly solid move is surprisingly not as popular as the others. Here I also have a new idea:



### 12.♞fe1!N

The main reason the improvement is needed is that after 12.♘xd5 exd5 13.♙xe7 ♘xe7 I believe Black should be able to hold this position without any great difficulty, Leko – Karpov, Miskolc (rapid) 2006.

### 12...♙xg5

Another option is 12...♘xc3 13.bxc3 and now: 13...♙xg5 (there is also 13...b5 but then 14.d5 might be interesting with a nice tactical idea: 14...♙xg5 15.♘xg5 h6 [15...exd5 loses to the spectacular 16.♘xf7!] 16.♘xf7! and Black is in deep trouble, for

example 16...♞xf7 17.♞ad1 ♜c7 18.dxc6 ♜xc6 19.♞d8+ ♞f8 20.♞d3, followed by ♙c2) 14.♞xg5 h6 15.♞e4 ♞a5 16.♞f4 b6 17.♞e3 ♞a7 18.♞ae1 ♞xb3 19.axb3 White's position looks very promising.

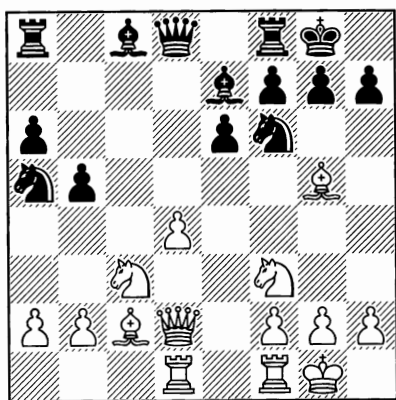
13.♞xg5 ♞ce7 14.♞d3 ♞f6

Another option is 14...♞g6 15.♞xd5 ♞xg5 (15...exd5? surprisingly loses a pawn to 16.♞e5!) 16.♞b6 ♞b8 17.♞e3! ♞b5 18.d5 exd5 19.♞d4!± and White dominates.

15.♞ad1 h6 16.♞ge4 ♞fd5 17.♙c2

White retains his advantage.

12.♙c2 b5 13.♞ad1



13...♙b7

Other options are:

13...♞c4 14.♞f4 ♙b7

After 14...♞a7 15.♞e5 ♞c7 16.♞xc4 bxc4 17.♙xf6 ♙xf6 18.d5 e5 19.♞f3!± White has a nice edge, Kramnik – Anand, Leon 2002.

15.♞h4 h5

Of course this looks risky, but after 15...h6 16.♙xh6 gxh6 17.♞xh6 White's attack is decisive.

After the text I prefer a new move:

16.♞e5N ♞c7 17.♞xc4 ♞xc4 18.♙d3 ♞c7 19.♞e2

Black's weaknesses on the kingside should tell in the long run.

13...b4

This move has been played recently in a high level game, but it seems Black has not solved his opening problems:

14.♞d3 g6 15.d5! exd5

Another option is: 15...bxc3 16.d6 ♙xd6 (16...♞xd6 17.♞xd6 ♙xd6 18.♙xf6 ♙c7 19.♙xc3 leaves Black with an unpleasant endgame) 17.♞xc3 e5 18.♞xe5 ♞b8 19.♞f3 White is clearly better.

16.♞xd5 ♞xd5 17.♞xd5 ♞xd5 18.♞xd5 ♙xg5 19.♞xg5 ♞b7

19...♞c6 20.♙e4 ♞e7 21.♞d6±

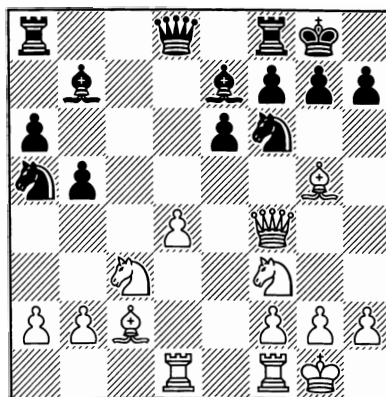
20.♞d4

The endgame looks grim for Black because of his awkward knight on b7, Bacrot – Dominguez, Biel 2008.

14.♞f4

In my opinion this is the critical continuation.

Black has nothing to worry about after 14.d5 exd5! 15.♞f4 ♞h5! 16.♞h4 ♙xg5 17.♞xh5 h6= as pointed out by Sakaev and Semkov in their recent third edition of *The Queen's Gambit Accepted*.



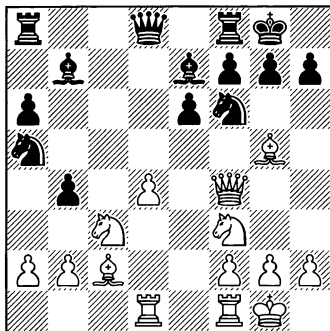
14...g6

Though this move is uncomfortable, it is necessary. Black has to block the b1-h7

diagonal, as otherwise he would face a strong attack, as can be seen in these two examples:

14...b4?

This is the recommendation of Sakaev and Semkov, but they placed too much trust in their analysis engine, because its horizon unfortunately proved to be too short. White has a strong idea in:



15.♖h4! h6

This loses, but other moves do not help either:

15...h5 16.♗e4 and 15...g6 16.d5 are both bad for Black.

16.♗xh6 bxc3 17.♗xg7 ♖xg7 18.♖g5† ♖h8 19.♖h6† ♖g8 20.♗g5

Black resigned in the game Sarkar – Sammour Hasbun, New England 2008, because he is helpless against White's threats. According to my computer, it is mate in 17! The main point is 20...♗d6 21.♗h7† ♖h8 22.♗f5† ♖g8 23.♗d3! with mate to come.

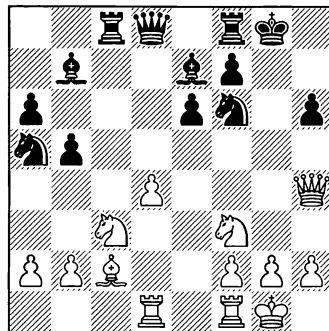
I had found this line myself, and found a different route to the full point in 20.d5 ♗xd5 21.♗d4 with the following nice line: 21...♗e4 22.♗xe4 f5 23.♗xd5 exd5 24.♖e6† ♖g7 25.♗xd5 ♖f6 26.♗xd8 ♖xe6 27.♗xa8 cxb2 28.♗d4 ♗b6 29.♗b1, but of course Sarkar's move is easier.

14...♗c8 15.♖h4 h6

White won very convincingly after 15...g6

16.d5 exd5 (16...♗xd5 loses to 17.♗e4) 17.♖fe1 ♗c4 18.♗d4 h6 19.♗xh6 ♗e4 20.♖h3 ♗c8 21.♖f3 and White's advantage is obvious, Yevseev – Vrublevskaya, St Petersburg 2005.

16.♗xh6 gxh6



17.d5!N

This is another strong improvement, which gives White a powerful attack.

Not so clear was 17.♖xh6 ♗xc3! 18.♖g5† ♖h8 19.bxc3 as in Grigore – Bonte, Galatzi 2007. Here Black should of course have played 19...♗xf3. White certainly has a draw, but I doubt there is anything more than that.

17...♖g7

17...♗c4 18.♖xh6 exd5 19.♗e5 with a decisive attack.

17...♗xc3 18.bxc3 exd5 19.♖xh6 ♖c7 20.♖fe1+–

18.dxe6 ♖c7 19.♗d4 ♗g8 20.♖h5

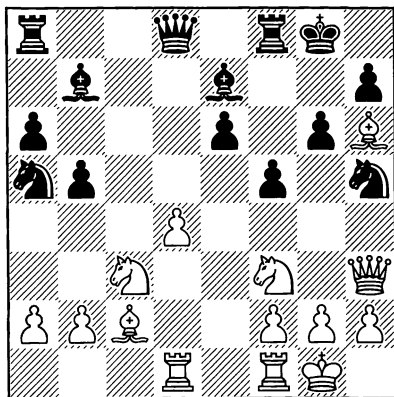
With a powerful attack.

15.♗h6 ♗h5

Black has also tried 15...♗e8 16.♗e5 ♗c4 17.♗xc4 bxc4 18.♗a4 ♗d5 19.♖g3 ♗d6 20.♖h3 ♗e7 21.♗g5 ♗f4 as in Sasikiran – Guliev, ACP 2007. Now White should have played 22.♖h6 ♗xg2 23.♗xf4 ♗xf4 24.♖xf4 ♗xf1 25.♖xf1 with an advantage, as Black cannot stop White's main idea of pushing d4-d5.

**16.♙g4 f5**

16...♘f6 17.♙g3 ♘h5 18.♙h3 ♞e8 19.♘e5 favours White.

**17.♙h3****17...♞e8**

This move was recommended by Huzman in *ChessBase Magazine 81* as a possible improvement over the following game:

**17...♞c8?!**

Black was hoping to get reasonable compensation for the exchange after the natural 18.♙xf8 ♙xf8.

**18.d5!**

This pawn sacrifice is typical for this variation. It gains a lot of space for White's pieces and also blocks Black's light-squared bishop.

**18...b4**

White is also clearly better after 18...exd5 19.♙xf8 ♙xf8 20.♘d4.

**19.dxe6 ♙d6 20.♞fe1!+-**

Tkachiev – Lesiege, New Delhi (1) 2000.

**18.d5 b4**

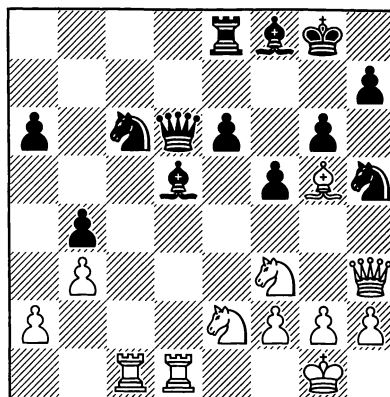
Obviously 18...exd5 runs into 19.♙xf5 when White has a strong initiative.

**19.♘e2**

Less clear is 19.dxe6 ♙c8.

**19...♙xd5 20.♙a4 ♙c7 21.♞c1! ♙d6**

If 21...♙b7 22.♙xe8 ♞xe8 then White can favourably simplify the position: 23.♘f4 ♘xf4 24.♙xf4 with better chances.

**22.♙xe8 ♞xe8 23.♞fd1 ♘c6 24.♙g5 ♙f8 25.b3±**

I do not believe Black has sufficient compensation for the exchange.

**Conclusion:**

The QGA is one of Black's most respectable openings after 1.d4 and it is thus unrealistic to expect to prove an easy advantage in every line. However, at the moment the big theoretical fight is not in this chapter, but instead after 7...b5. The lines in this chapter are generally in White's favour, although line C is a popular line so new ideas are likely.

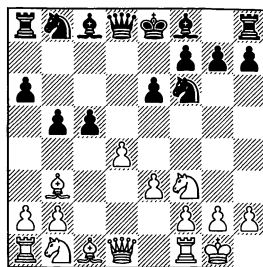




# Chapter 29

## QGA

### 7...b5



## Variation Index

1.d4 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3.e3 ♘f6 4.♙xc4 e6 5.♘f3 c5 6.0-0 a6 7.♙b3 b5

8.a4

A) 8...♙b7

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B) 8...b4 9.e4

p 439

B1) 9...♘xe4?!

p 440

B2) 9...cxd4 10.♘bd2

p 440

B21) 10...♙e7

p 440

B22) 10...♙b7 11.e5

p 442

B221) 11...♘e4

p 422

B222) 11...♘d5

p 443

B223) 11...♘fd7 12.♘c4

p 443

B2231) 12...♘c5

p 444

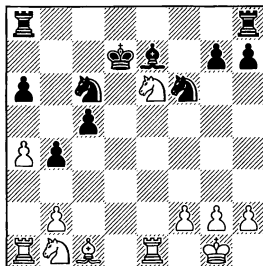
B2232) 12...♘c6

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B3) 9...♙b7

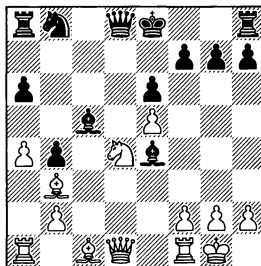
p 447

B1) after 16...♘c6



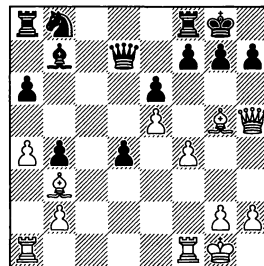
17.♘d2!N

B221) after 13...♙c5



14.♙g4!N

D2) note to the 13th move



17.f5!!N

1.d4 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3.e3 ♘f6 4.♙xc4 e6 5.♘f3 c5 6.0-0 a6 7.♙b3 b5

This is the main line of the QGA with 7.♙b3 at the moment, at least if you believe Sakaev and Semkov. However, I think I have found some nice sharp ideas that should make Black's life very dangerous.

### 8.a4!

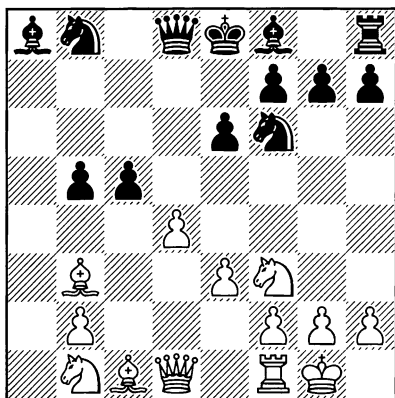
The point behind the bishop retreat: White challenges the black queenside immediately. Now I was surprised to discover that there is an interesting alternative in A) 8...♙b7, although B) 8...b4 remains the main move.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3.e3 ♘f6 4.♙xc4 e6 5.♘f3 c5 6.0-0 a6 7.♙b3 b5 8.a4)

### A) 8...♙b7

This is considered to be dubious according to theory, but in fact it is not so bad.

9.axb5 axb5 10.♖xa8 ♙xa8



I have come to the conclusion that only one move promises White real chances of an advantage:

### 11.dxc5

White tries to quickly exploit the weakness of

Black's b-pawn. The more popular alternatives do not give White anything:

11.♘c3 b4 12.♘b5 ♙e7 13.dxc5 0-0! is OK for Black.

The same is the case for: 11.♗e2 c4! Other moves are much worse. 12.♙c2 ♘bd7 Here Black has normal play after both 13.e4 ♙e7 14.♙g5 0-0 as in E. Berg – Kayser, Dresden 2007, and 13.b3 cxb3 14.♙xb3 b4 15.♘bd2 ♙e7 16.e4 0-0 17.♙b2 ♗b8 as in Kuzubov – Tarlev, Simferopol 2003.

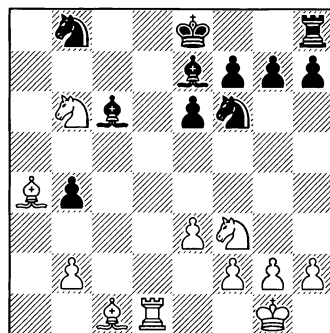
### 11...♙xc5

Other options:

11...♗xd1 12.♗xd1 ♙xc5 13.♘c3 b4 14.♘a4 ♙e7 15.♘b6! ♙b7 16.♙a4† ♙c6

In the game Ionescu – Svetushkin, Bucharest 1999, after a few additional moves a draw was agreed.

Instead White could have played:



17.♙xc6†N ♘xc6 18.♙d2

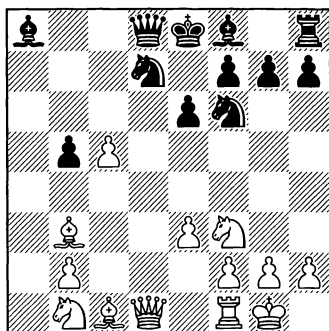
Taking control of the c-file and if:

18...♘e4 19.♗c1 ♘xd2 20.♘xd2 ♘e5 21.♗c8† ♙d8 22.♘dc4 ♘xc4 23.♘xc4

The endgame is quite unpleasant for Black, thanks to the clear superiority of White's knight over Black's bishop, as well as the problems Black has with the permanently weak b4-pawn.

11...♖bd7

Here White of course should play:



12.♖d4N

As after 12.♖e2 ♜b8 13.c6 ♖c5 14.♗c2 ♗xc6 15.♖d4 ♗d7 Black was alright in Kretchetov – Small, Temecula 2006.

12...♖xc5 13.♖xb5 ♖xb3 14.♖xb3 ♗e7

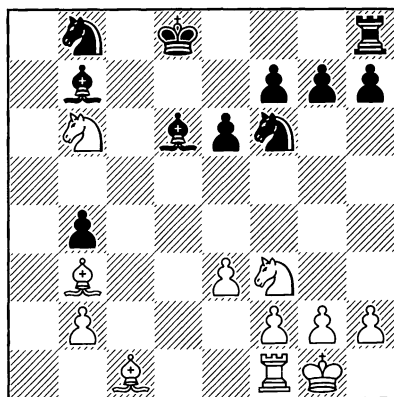
Black has definite compensation for the pawn, nevertheless after:

15.♗d1 ♖b8 16.f3 0–0 17.♖1c3±

He will have to fight hard for the draw.

12.♖c3 b4 13.♖xd8† ♖xd8 14.♖a4 ♗d6 15.♖b6 ♗b7

Somewhat better was 15...♗xf3, although even here after 16.gxf3 ♖e7 17.♗d2 ♖fd7 18.♖c4 ♖c6 19.f4 ♖c5 20.♗d1 ♖e4 21.♗e1±, White enjoys a pleasant endgame with his bishop pair.



16.♖c4 ♗c5

In the event of 16...♗c7 17.♗d2 ♖a6 18.♖ce5 ♖e7 19.♗c4 Black loses the b4-pawn.

17.♖fe5 ♖e7 18.♖d3 ♖a6 19.♖a5 ♗d5?

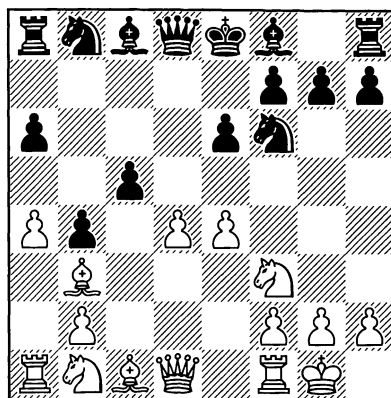
This is a serious mistake. Black should have played 19...♗e4 20.♖xc5 ♖xc5 21.♗d2 ♖b8 22.♗c4, although it would still have been difficult for him to hold this endgame. Once again White can thank his bishops.

20.♗xd5 ♖xd5 21.♗d2

Black is in serious trouble, and in the best case he will lose only the b4-pawn, Kaplun – Ponomarev, Yalta 1995.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3.e3 ♖f6 4.♗xc4 e6 5.♖f3 c5 6.0–0 a6 7.♗b3 b5 8.a4)

B) 8...b4 9.e4



This is the main position for this variation. Black has quite a strong structure, but he has lost time achieving this. Not surprisingly, White's chances lie in an attack and Black needs to show great care in his defence. Our options are the reckless B1) 9...♖xe4?!, the former main line B2) 9...cxd4, and what is emerging as the most popular move, B3) 9...♗b7.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3.e3 ♘f6 4.♙xc4 e6  
5.♘f3 c5 6.0-0 a6 7.♙b3 b5 8.a4 b4 9.e4)

B1) 9...♗xe4?!

This is considered to be dubious and rightly so. White will act with great vigour and gain a solid endgame advantage.

10.d5 ♙e7 11.♞e1 ♗f6 12.dxe6 ♙xe6  
13.♞xd8†

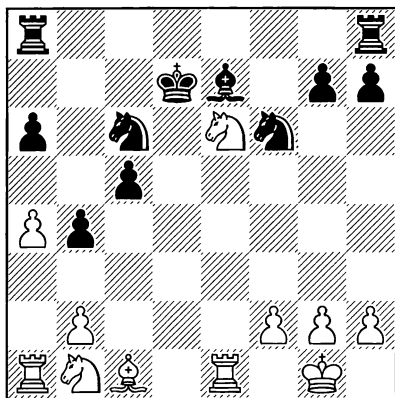
The endgame appears to be difficult for Black.

13...♞xd8

The alternative is 13...♙xd8 14.♗g5! 0-0 15.♗xe6 fxe6 16.♞xe6 ♖h8 and here the most precise is 17.♙f4 ♗bd7 18.♗d2 ♗e8 19.♙e3 ♙f6 20.♗c4 and White's advantage is almost decisive, Erdos – Pilgaard, Budapest 2003.

14.♙xe6 fxe6 15.♗g5 ♖d7 16.♗xe6 ♗c6

Black managed to hold this endgame in Pedersen – Fodor, Budapest 2006, but after the simple:



17.♗d2!N

Black's position is very difficult, with a possible variation being:

17...♗d4 18.♗xd4 cxd4 19.♗c4 ♙c5

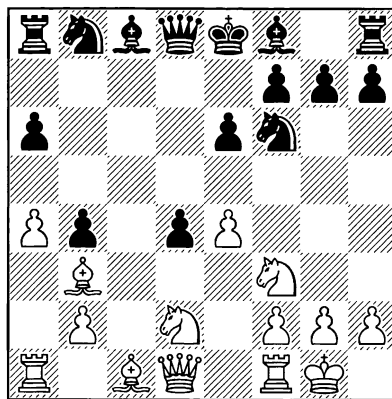
20.♗e5† ♖c7 21.♙f4 ♖b6 22.♗d3±

White will eventually capture the d4-pawn.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3.e3 ♘f6 4.♙xc4 e6  
5.♘f3 c5 6.0-0 a6 7.♙b3 b5 8.a4 b4 9.e4)

B2) 9...cxd4 10.♗bd2

Black seems to be fine after 10.e5 ♗e4!.



Now two ways of developing are popular:  
B21) 10...♙e7 and B22) 10...♙b7.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3.e3 ♘f6 4.♙xc4 e6  
5.♘f3 c5 6.0-0 a6 7.♙b3 b5 8.a4 b4 9.e4  
cxd4 10.♗bd2)

B21) 10...♙e7

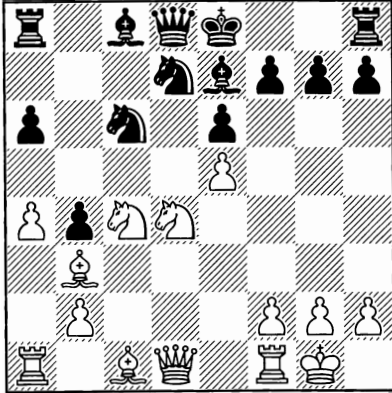
The following line looks quite promising for White.

11.e5 ♗fd7 12.♗c4 ♗c6

12...♗c5 has not found many followers, as after 13.♗xd4 0-0 14.♙c2N (this looks more natural than 14.♙e3 as in Oms Pallisse – Hernandez, Barcelona 2008). White has good attacking prospects. 14...♙b7 15.♞g4 g6 16.♙h6 ♞e8 17.h4 White has the initiative.

**13. ♖xd4**

And now there is an important crossroads for Black. He can capture the e5-pawn with either knight.

**13... ♖xc5**

The other possibility, unsurprisingly, is:

13... ♖dx5 14. ♖xc6 ♖xc6

The alternative looks very risky for Black:

14... ♖xd1 15. ♖xd1 ♖xc6 16. a5! White's bishop comes into the play from a4 with great effect. 16... ♖b7 17. ♖a4 ♖d8 (if instead 17... f6 18. ♖f4± and Black can hardly find a move) 18. ♖xd8± ♖xd8 19. ♖f4 With strong pressure.

15. ♖f3

Another interesting line is 15. ♖e3 0-0 16. ♖f3 ♖b7 17. ♖fd1 ♖c7 18. ♖b6 ♖b8 19. ♖e3± with fine compensation for the pawn, Barsov – Egin, Tashkent 2008.

15... ♖d4

The alternatives are less satisfactory:

15... ♖d5 16. ♖xd5 exd5 17. ♖b6 ♖b8 18. ♖xd5 ♖d4 19. ♖c4 White is clearly better in this endgame.

15... ♖b7 16. ♖d1 ♖c7 17. ♖g4! is also painful. Black cannot castle in view of 17... 0-0 18. ♖f4 e5 19. ♖d7 and White wins.

16. ♖xa8 ♖xb3 17. ♖b6!

If instead 17. ♖b1 0-0 Black has sufficient compensation for the exchange, as White's

pieces lack coordination.

17... 0-0 18. ♖xc8 ♖xa1

In *Chess Informant 94* Izoria claimed that 18... ♖xc8 is a better option. But after 19. ♖xc8 ♖xc8 20. ♖b1 ♖f8 21. ♖e3 Black's task of achieving a draw still looks difficult to me.

19. ♖xe7± ♖xe7 20. ♖xa6 ♖b3 21. ♖e3

21. ♖c4!? comes into serious consideration: 21... ♖xc1 22. ♖xc1± and it is not certain Black can hold.

21... ♖d7

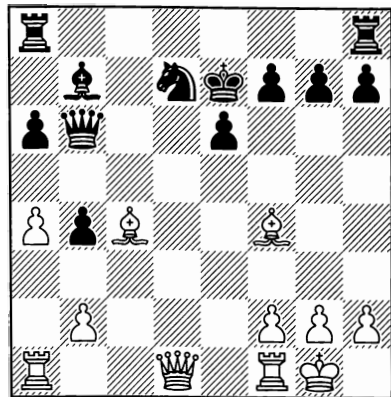
This position occurred in Izoria – Ibragimov, Chicago 2005. At this point White could have posed serious problems with:

22. ♖b5! ♖d6 23. a5

White's passed pawn is very dangerous.

**14. ♖f4 ♖xc4 15. ♖c6 ♖b6**

15... ♖xb2 16. ♖d2 ♖b6 17. ♖xe7 ♖xe7 18. ♖xb2 gives White an enormous initiative for the material deficit.

**16. ♖xe7 ♖xe7 17. ♖xc4 ♖b7**

"I think the correct assessment of this position is that White has good compensation for the pawn. Black's only problem is the centralized position of his king, which in some circumstances could be very helpful" (as Bologan mentioned).

**18. ♖b3**

I like this move more than 18. ♖d2 as was played in Bologan – Rublevsky, Poikovsky 2005. The fact that the text was played later in the same tournament tells its own story.

**18... ♖c5**

Other options:

18... ♖ac8 19. ♗fd1! ♖c5 20. ♖g3 ♖e4 21. ♗h4† f6 Everything looks pretty forced. 22. ♗e3 ♖c6 23. ♗f1! White is threatening f3, followed by ♖b4. 23... g5 24. ♖h6 ♗hf8 25. ♖xh7† ♗f7 26. ♖g6± White is clearly better.

18... ♗hd8 allows White to regain the pawn at once: 19. a5 ♖c6 20. ♖xb4† ♖e8 21. f3 ♖ac8 (Black achieves an improved version of the endgame compared with 21... ♖c5† 22. ♖xc5 ♖xc5 23. ♗fd1! when White is better) 22. ♖ac1 ♖c5† 23. ♖xc5 ♖xc5 24. ♗fd1± White has a pleasant edge in this endgame, thanks to his bishop pair.

**19. ♖e3 ♖c6?!** 

Much better was 19... ♖ac8 20. ♗fd1 ♗hd8 21. a5 ♖c6 22. f3 even though the b4-pawn is a clear target of attack.

**20. f3 ♗hd8 21. ♗fc1 ♖ac8 22. ♖e1! ♖e8 23. ♗g5**

More accurate was 23. ♗e3!.

**23... ♗d4 24. ♗e3 ♗d7 25. ♖xb4**

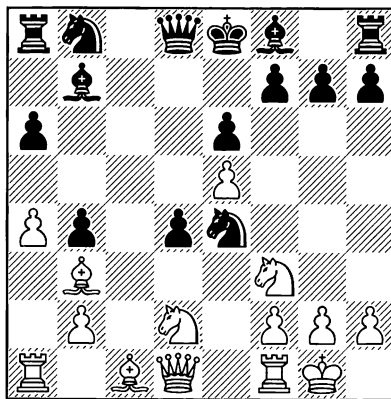
White regained the pawn and was clearly better in Grischuk – Rublevsky, Poikovsky 2005.

(1. d4 d5 2. c4 dxc4 3. e3 ♖f6 4. ♗xc4 e6 5. ♖f3 c5 6. 0–0 a6 7. ♗b3 b5 8. a4 b4 9. e4 cxd4 10. ♖bd2

**B22) 10... ♗b7 11. e5**

Clearly the knight needs to move, but where to? Practice has not come up with a clear answer, even if some options are more favoured than others. B221) 11... ♖e4, B222) 11... ♖d5 and B223) 11... ♖fd7.

(1. d4 d5 2. c4 dxc4 3. e3 ♖f6 4. ♗xc4 e6 5. ♖f3 c5 6. 0–0 a6 7. ♗b3 b5 8. a4 b4 9. e4 cxd4 10. ♖bd2 ♗b7 11. e5)

**B221) 11... ♖e4**

It seems to me that this move fails to solve Black's opening problems

**12. ♖xe4 ♗xe4 13. ♖xd4 ♗c5**

If 13... ♖c6 then 14. ♖xc6!N is a clear improvement over current theory (14. ♗e3 ♖xd4 15. ♗xd4 ♗e7 with equal play in Guseva – Dzhabrailova, Nojabrsk 2005). 14... ♖xd1 15. ♗xd1 ♗xc6 16. ♗e3 Black unexpectedly faces serious problems: 16... ♗e7 17. ♖ac1 ♖c8 18. ♗d4 ♗b7 19. ♖xc8† ♗xc8 20. a5 ♗d7 21. ♗d2± Winning the b4-pawn.

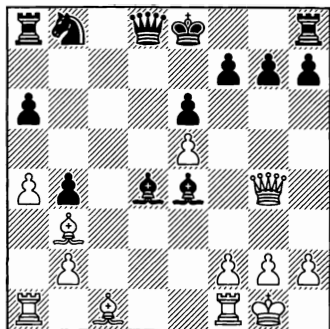
**14. ♖g4!N**

White missed this move in Klimov – Vaulin, Ekaterinburg 2002.

**14... ♖xd4**

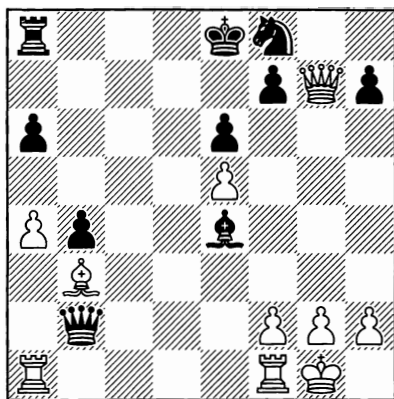
In the case of 14... ♗xd4 White has a fantastic

move, which is probably what Klimov had really missed:



15.♖d1!! ♖b6 (15...♗g6 does not help either: after 16.♗xd4 White seizes a decisive initiative) 16.♗xe4 ♗xf2† 17.♕h1 0–0 18.♗d6 ♖a7 19.♗c2 g6 20.♗h6 With a winning position.

15.♗xg7 ♗f8 16.♗e3 ♖xb2 17.♗xc5 ♖d7 18.♗xf8 ♖xf8



19.♗c4!

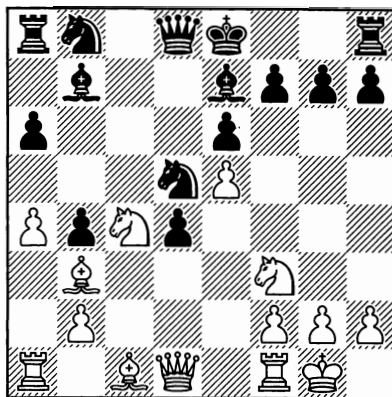
With his king in the centre, Black can hardly hope for any compensation here.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3.e3 ♖f6 4.♗xc4 e6 5.♖f3 c5 6.0–0 a6 7.♗b3 b5 8.a4 b4 9.e4 cxd4 10.♖bd2 ♗b7 11.e5)

B222) 11...♖d5 12.♖c4

This line also seems to be clearly favourable for White. We will follow the most recent example:

12...♗e7



13.♗xd4!

A typical idea: White's queen is heading for g4 which will generate good attacking prospects.

13...♖d7

This is a clear concession.

Better was 13...0–0, although after 14.♗g4 ♖h8 15.♗g5 White has a great position.

14.♗g4 ♖f8

This occurred in Korobov – Adianto, Beijing (rapid) 2008, and here White has a simple and tempting continuation:

15.♗g5!N ♖c5 16.♗xe7† ♖xe7 17.♗c2 b3 18.♗b1

White retains a clear edge.

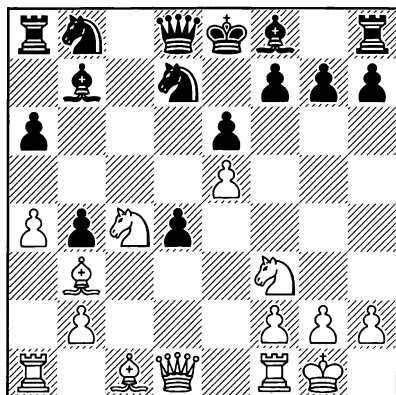
(1.d4 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3.e3 ♖f6 4.♗xc4 e6 5.♖f3 c5 6.0–0 a6 7.♗b3 b5 8.a4 b4 9.e4 cxd4 10.♖bd2 ♗b7 11.e5)

B223) 11...♖fd7



Definitely Black's most respectable choice, but he is still struggling to achieve equality.

12.♖c4



This is one of the most critical positions of the Queen's Gambit Accepted. Here Black has tried mainly **B2231) 12...♖c5** and **B2232) 12...♖c6**, but one other relevant move has been tried in practice.

12...♗e7?!

This is just dubious, as it allows White to carry out one of his main ideas without any difficulties: the transfer of his queen to g4.

13.♖xd4

This looks simplest, though in a recent game Grischuk preferred to capture with the queen: 13.♙xd4 0-0 14.♙g4 ♖h8 15.♗f4 (15.♗c2?) 15...♗d5 16.♗ad1 ♖c6 17.♗xd5! exd5 18.♖e3 and White had excellent attacking chances in Grischuk – Karjakin, Odessa 2008.

13...♖c5 14.♙g4

White is already clearly better.

14...g6 15.♗h6 ♖xb3 16.♖xb3 ♖d7 17.♗ad1

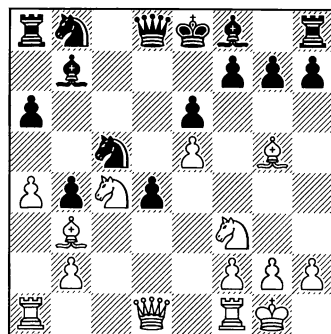
White was dominating in Tkachiev – Sadvakasov, Moscow 2002.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3.e3 ♖f6 4.♗xc4 e6 5.♖f3 c5 6.0-0 a6 7.♗b3 b5 8.a4 b4 9.e4

cx4 10.♖bd2 ♗b7 11.e5 ♖fd7 12.♖c4)

**B2231) 12...♖c5 13.♗g5**

An important move in White's strategy, as Black cannot play 13...♗e7.



13...♙c7

Obviously it is too dangerous to play:

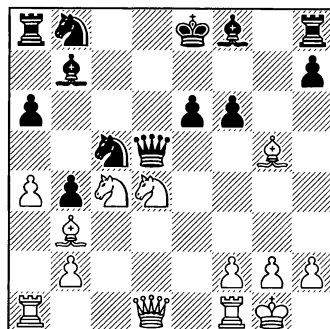
13...f6

This was refuted very convincingly in the following encounter:

14.exf6 gxf6 15.♖xd4! ♙d5

This looks like the most natural defence, but it meets a brilliant refutation. Other moves would not Black either, as was correctly pointed by Gershon in *Chess Informant 80*: 15...fxg5 16.♙h5† ♖d7 17.♖xe6! with a decisive attack.

15...h5 16.♖xe6! ♙xd1 17.♗axd1 fxg5 18.♖xc5 ♗xc5 19.♗fe1† ♖f8 20.♗e5 ♗e7 21.♖d6 and Black is helpless against White's offensive.



16. ♖d6†! ♚xd6 17. ♗h5† ♕d7

17...♕e7 runs into 18. ♖f5†! exf5 19. ♗f7† ♕d8 20. ♖xf6† ♕c8 21. ♖fd1+.

18. ♖xf6 ♖xb3 19. ♖xb3+–

Black is helpless against White's threats, Gershon – Svetushkin, Yerevan 2000.

#### 14. ♖xd4

I believe this is best, as after 14. ♖c1 d3 15. ♖a2 ♖bd7∞ the arising position is very unclear, as Black's d3-pawn bothers White a lot, Dias – Vitor, Barreiro 2006.

#### 14...♖xb3

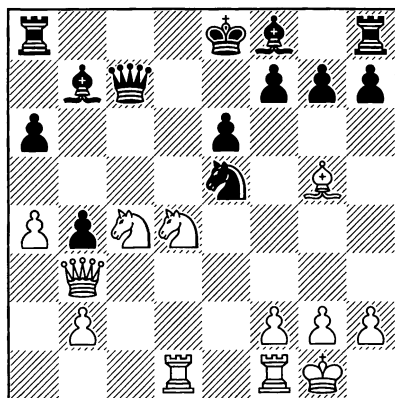
White has a positional advantage after 14...♖c6 15. ♖xc6 ♗xc6 16. f3 h6 17. ♖e3 ♖d8 18. ♗c2 ♖xb3 19. ♗xb3 ♖c5 20. ♖fc1±.

#### 15. ♗xb3 ♖c6

I also examined 15...♖d5 16. ♖ac1 ♖d7 when White has the very strong 17. a5! with the idea 17...♗b7 18. ♗a4! ♖xg2 19. ♖fd1 ♖h3 20. ♖c6+– and White has too many threats.

#### 16. ♖ad1 ♖xe5

And here in the game Kachiani Gersinska – Muhren, Kusadasi 2006, White missed:



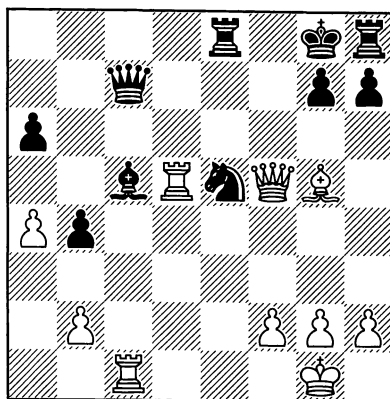
#### 17. ♖e3!N

White's lead in development starts to tell, for example:

#### 17...♖c5

After 17...♖e7 18. ♖xe7 ♗xe7 19. ♖df5 exf5 20. ♖xf5 ♗c5 21. ♖d6† ♕f8 22. ♖xb7 White has a winning position.

18. ♖xe6 fxe6 19. ♗xe6† ♕f8 20. ♖d5 ♖xd5 21. ♖xd5 ♖e8 22. ♗f5† ♕g8 23. ♖c1±



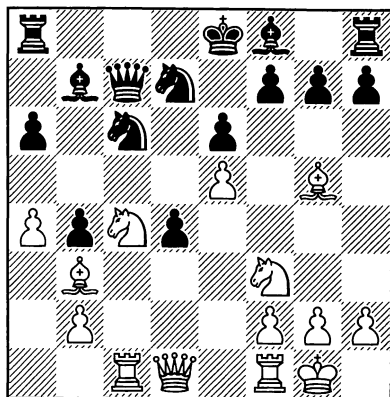
White regains material with dividends.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3.e3 ♖f6 4. ♖xc4 e6 5. ♖f3 c5 6.0–0 a6 7. ♖b3 b5 8.a4 b4 9.e4 cxd4 10. ♖bd2 ♖b7 11.e5 ♖fd7 12. ♖c4)

#### B2232) 12...♖c6

This seems to be the critical continuation.

13. ♖g5 ♗c7 14. ♖c1



**14...♙c5**

The alternative is:

**14...♘c5**

Here I prefer:

**15.♙a2**

This seems to be the most natural and, compared with 15.♙c2, it does not block the c-file. There have been only two games in this position and in both of them Black opted for:

**15...♘e4 16.♙h4 g5 17.♙xg5**

17.♙b1 as in Tregubov – Brynell, Rowy 1999, seems less clear to me. Black can try to complicate matters with 17...♘c3 18.bxc3 gxh4, although his position of course remains very dangerous.

**17...♘xg5 18.♘xg5 0–0–0 19.♖h5 ♕d7**

In the game Bareev – Timman, Sarajevo 1999, White could have achieved a large advantage with the simple:

**20.♘e4 ♖b8 21.♘cd6±****15.♘xd4**

Sometimes White chooses 15.♖e1, playing for compensation, but I believe 15.♘xd4 is the critical move. So far it has given White good results.

**15...0–0****15...♘dx5**

This is an obvious alternative. White won very convincingly in the following game:

**16.♘xe5 ♖xe5 17.♘f3 ♖d6 18.♖c2 ♙a7 19.♖fd1 ♖c7 20.♖e4**

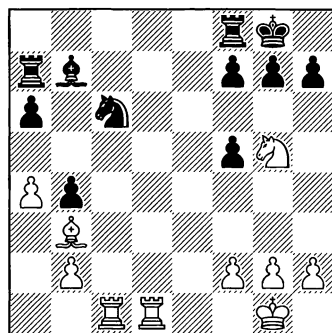
White has a great initiative for the pawn.

**20...0–0 21.♙f4**

21.♙c2 g6 22.♖h4 looks quite promising as well.

**21...♖b6 22.♙e3 ♖a5**

Maybe more chances would be given by 22...♘e7, although White should be favoured: 23.♖e5 ♘g6 24.♙xb6 ♘xe5 25.♘xe5 ♙xb6 26.♘d7 and White wins an exchange.

**23.♘g5 ♖f5 24.♖xf5 exf5 25.♙xa7 ♖xa7****26.♘xf7!**

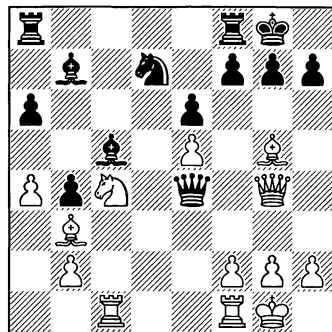
With a decisive advantage, Topalov – Lautier, Monte Carlo 1997.

**16.♘xc6 ♙xc6**

Another option is:

**16...♖xc6 17.♖g4 ♖e4**

As played in I. Farago – Krivec, Nova Gorica 2002. Here I have a new idea:

**18.♖g3N ♙d5**

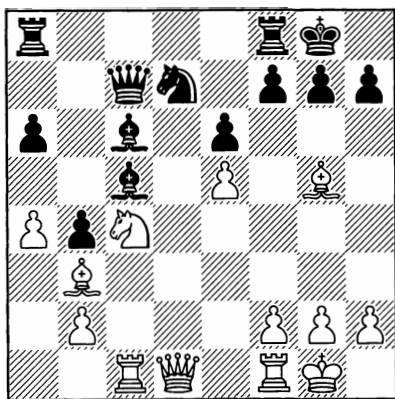
This allows White to play the simple:

**19.♘d6 ♙xd6 20.♙xd5 ♖xd5 21.exd6**

The d6-pawn secures White's advantage, for example:

**21...f6 22.♙h6 ♖f7 23.♖fd1 ♖e5 24.♖xe5 ♘xe5 25.♙e3**

The endgame is difficult for Black, due to his weak queenside pawns.



### 17. Qd6!N

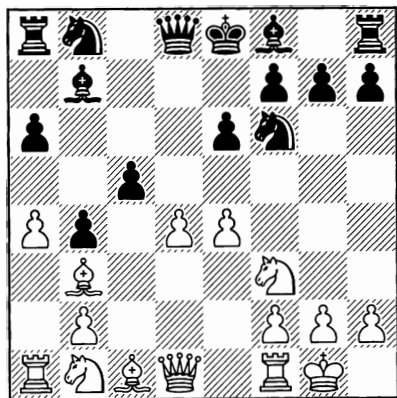
I think this simple move is better than 17. ♖g4 ♜h8 18. ♖g3 ♙d5± as in Zhukova – Danielian, Istanbul 2000.

### 17... ♙xd6 18. exd6 ♖b7 19. ♖g4

White has an obvious advantage.

(1. d4 d5 2. c4 dxc4 3. e3 ♘f6 4. ♙xc4 e6 5. ♘f3 c5 6. 0–0 a6 7. ♙b3 b5 8. a4 b4 9. e4)

### B3) 9... ♙b7



Lately this move has been the most popular, underlining the problems Black has been facing after 9...cxd4. Rather than playing for structure alone, Black is making sure that he does not fall too far behind in development.

### 10. e5 ♘e4

This is the idea behind 9... ♙b7.

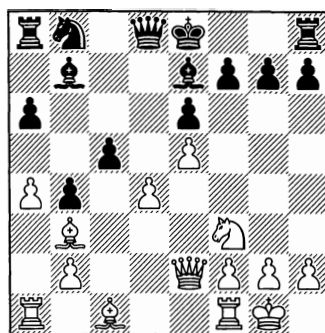
10... ♘fd7 is not really an option, as it allows White to play: 11. d5! ♙xd5 12. ♙xd5 exd5 13. ♖xd5 ♘b6 This is Hillarp Persson – Yakovich, Koge 1997, and here the simplest way forward would be 14. ♖xd8†N ♘xd8 15. a5 ♘bd7 16. ♘bd2 ♘c6 17. ♘c4 with a clear positional advantage.

10... ♘d5 11. ♘bd2 cxd4 12. ♘c4 transposes to line B222 as examined above.

### 11. ♘bd2 ♘xd2

The alternatives are:

11... ♙e7 12. ♘xe4 ♙xe4 13. ♖e2 ♙b7



### 14. ♙d1!N

I believe that this is a serious improvement over 14. dxc5 as played in Shumiakina – Skripchenko, Vrnjacka Banja 1999. At this point 14... ♘d7 would probably give Black reasonable play.

### 14... 0–0

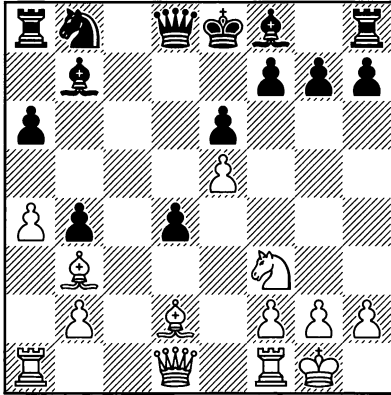
In the event of 14... ♖c7 15. d5 exd5 16. ♙xd5 ♙xd5 17. ♖xd5 0–0 18. ♙g5 ♘c6 19. e6 White's advantage is beyond question.

15. ♙f4 ♖c7 16. d5 ♙xd5 17. ♙xd5 exd5 18. ♖xd5 ♘c6 19. ♖e4

White has a clear advantage.

11...cxd4 transposes to B221 where White is simply better.

### 12. ♖xd2 cxd4



### 13. ♖g5!

This is White's latest try to put pressure on Black's position.

13. ♖g5 ♕e7 14. ♖xe7 ♜xe7 15. ♖xd4 ♖d7 was not entirely clear in Bocharov – Vallejo Pons, Moscow 2007.

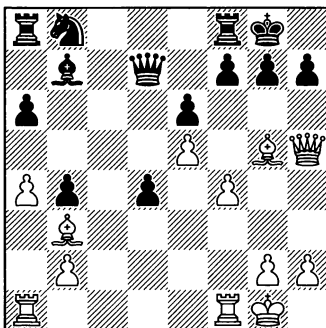
### 13... ♖d7

Black has also tried:

13... ♖e7 14. ♜h5 ♖xg5

Black is in danger after 14...g6 15. ♜h6 ♖f8 16. ♜h3.

15. ♖xg5 ♜d7 16. f4! 0–0



This position was reached in Moiseenko – Kuzubov, Moscow 2008. I have found a great resource that will probably break Black's defence. I am very pleased with it, and in revealing it I can claim the glory!

17. f5!! N exf5

Black has no time for counterplay with 17...d3 because of 18. fxe6 ♜d4† 19. ♜f2 fxe6 20. ♖xe6† ♖h8 21. ♖f5. Here Black is forced to play 21...♜xf2† 22. ♖xf2 ♜xf5† 23. ♖g1 ♖c6 24. ♜g4 ♜xe5 25. ♜d7! when White's material advantage should decide the game.

18. ♜ae1 ♜c6

Other options are:

18... ♖d5 19. ♖f6! with a decisive attack.

18... ♖h8 19. e6 fxe6 20. ♜xe6 ♖c6 21. ♜f4 ♜f7 22. ♜xf7 ♜xf7 23. ♜xc6 and White wins.

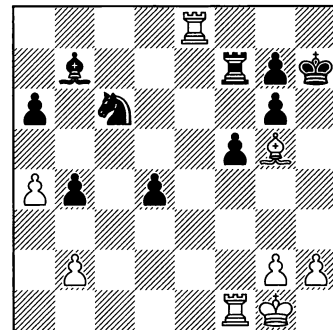
19. ♜f2 ♜g6

Or 19... ♖d7 20. ♖e7 g6 21. ♜g5. Black cannot hold this: White has too many threats, such as 22. e6 or 22. ♜f5.

20. ♜xg6 hxg6 21. e6 ♖c6 22. exf7† ♜xf7 23. ♜fe2!

White wins in style after:

23... ♜af8 24. ♜e8 ♖h7 25. ♖xf7 ♜xf7 26. ♜f1



Black is helpless against ♜f1-f4-h4.

### 14. f4

This is an important improvement over 14. ♜c1 ♖c5 15. ♖c4 h6 16. ♜h5 g6 17. ♜h3 ♖e7 when Black was already better in Dunis – Zhang Pengxiang, Cannes 2005.

14...♘c5

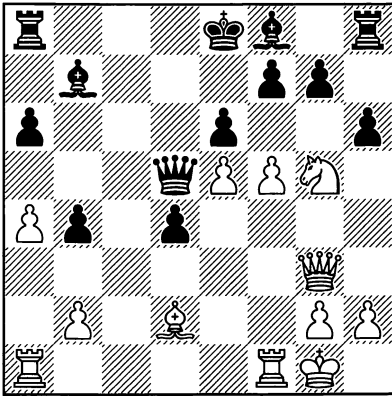
Black's position is very dangerous after 14...♙e7 15.♘xf7! ♕xf7 16.f5.

15.f5 ♘xb3 16.♙xb3 ♖d5 17.♙g3 h6

In the game Wang Hao – Rublevsky, Poikovsky 2008, White missed a great chance to create a powerful attack by sacrificing a piece.

### Conclusion:

7...b5 is one of the main theoretical battlegrounds of the QGA. Black has been living dangerously but holding his own in risky lines. However, after White players are armed with the improvements offered in this chapter, Black will have to find a way to strengthen his defences.



18.fxe6! N hxg5 19.exf7† ♔d7 20.♖ac1 ♙e6  
21.♙xg5

It is hard to believe that Black can resist this attack.

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B) 8...♘d5 p 17

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D221) 10...0–0 p 145

D222) 10...a6 p 146

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1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♟f3 ♟f6 4.g3 ♙b4† 5.♙d2

A) 5...♙xd2† p 152

B) 5...♙e7 6.♙g2 0–0 7.0–0 p 153

B1) 7...♟bd7 p 154

B2) 7...c6 8.♞c2 p 157

B21) 8...♟bd7 p 157

B22) 8...b6 9.♞d1 p 159

B221) 9...♙b7 10.♙f4 ♟bd7 11.♟c3 p 160

B2211) 11...♗c8 p 161  
 B2212) 11...dxc4 p 163  
 B2213) 11...♟h5 p 165  
 B222) 9...♟bd7 10.♙f4 ♙a6 p 169  
 B223) 9...♙a6 10.b3 ♟bd7 11.a4 p 172  
 B2231) 11...♗c8 p 173  
 B2232) 11...♗c8 p 176  
 B2233) 11...c5 12.♟a3 ♙b7 13.♗b2 p 177  
 B22331) 13...♟e4 p 179  
 B22332) 13...♗c8 14.♗ac1 ♟e4 15.♙e1 ♙f6 16.b4 p 180  
 B223321) 16...♗c7 p 181  
 B223322) 16...♙a8 p 182

## Chapter 11

**1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♟f3 ♟f6 4.g3 ♙e7 5.♙g2 0–0 6.0–0 ♟bd7 7.♗c2**

A) 7...b6 p 187

B) 7...c6 8.♟bd2 p 188

B1) 8...b5?! p 188

B2) 8...b6 9.e4 p 189

B21) 9...dxe4 p 189

B22) 9...♙b7 10.e5 ♟e8 11.cxd5 p 190

B221) 11...exd5 p 190

B222) 11...cxd5 12.♗e1 p 191

B2221) 12...♙a6 p 193

B2222) 12...♗c8 p 194

B23) 9...♙a6 10.b3 c5 11.exd5 exd5 12.♙b2 ♗c8 13.♗f5 p 196

B231) 13...b5 p 197

B232) 13...cxd4 p 198

B233) 13...dxc4 p 199

B234) 13...g6 p 200

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**1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♟f3 ♟f6 4.g3 ♙e7 5.♙g2 0–0 6.0–0 dxc4 7.♗c2**

A) 7...c5 p 204

B) 7...♙d7 p 205

C) 7...a6 8.♗xc4 b5 9.♗c2 ♙b7 10.♙d2 p 207

C1) 10...♟c6 11.e3 p 208

C11) 11...♗a7 p 209

C12) 11...♟b4 p 210

C2) 10...♗a7 11.♗c1 ♙e4 12.♗b3 p 212

C21) 12...♙d5 p 213

C22) 12...♟bd7 p 214

C23) 12...♟c6 13.e3 ♗a8 14.♗d1 p 217

C231) 14...♟b8 p 218

- C232) 14...b4 p 220
- C3) 10...♟bd7 11...♙a5 ♚c8 12.♟bd2 p 222
- C31) 12...♟b8 p 223
- C32) 12...♚e8 p 225
- C4) 10...h6 p 227
- C5) 10...♙d6 p 228
- C6) 10...♙e4 11.♚c1 p 231
- C61) 11...♟bd7 p 231
- C62) 11...♚c8 12.♙g5 p 233
- C621) 12...♟bd7 13.♚f4 p 234
- C6211) 13...♙b7 p 234
- C6212) 13...c5 p 235
- C622) 12...c5 p 236
- C63) 11...♟c6 p 238
- C64) 11...c6 p 239
- C65) 11...♙b7 12.♙f4 p 240
- C651) 12...♟d5 p 240
- C652) 12...♙d6 p 242

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### 1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♟f3 dxc4 4.e3

- A) 4...b5 p 248
- B) 4...♙e6 p 251

## Chapter 14

### 1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♟f3 ♟f6 4.e3 g6 5.♟c3 ♙g7 6.♙e2 0–0 7.0–0

- A) 7...dxc4 p 256
- B) 7...♙g4 p 260
- C) 7...♙e6 p 261
- D) 7...a6 8.a4 p 262
- D1) 8...dxe4 p 263
- D2) 8...♙e6 p 263
- D3) 8...c5 p 264
- D4) 8...a5 p 264

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**1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.e3 a6 5.♙d3**

A) 5...e6 p 268

B) 5...b5 p 269

C) 5...♙g4 6.♘bd2 e6 7.0–0 ♘bd7 8.♖c2 p 270

C1) 8...♙e7 p 271

C2) 8...♙d6 9.b3 p 273

C21) 9...♖c7 p 273

C22) 9...♙h5 p 274

C23) 9...♖e7 p 277

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**1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 e6 4.e3 f5 5.♙d3 ♘f6 6.0–0 ♙d6 7.b3 ♖e7 8.♙b2 0–0 9.♖c1**

A) 9...♘e4 p 283

B) 9...b6 p 284

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**1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.e3 ♙g4 5.♖b3**

A) 5...♖c7 p 288

B) 5...♙xf3 p 290

C) 5...♖b6 6.♘c3 e6 7.♘h4 p 291

C1) 7...♙h5 p 293

C2) 7...♙e7 p 295

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**1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.e3 e6 5.b3 ♘bd7 6.♙b2 b6 7.♙d3 ♙b7 8.0–0**

A) 8...♙e7 9.♘c3 0–0 10.♖c2 p 300

A1) 10...♖c7 p 301

A2) 10...♖c8 p 301

B) 8...♙d6 9.♘bd2 0–0 10.♘e5 p 302

B1) 10...c5 p 303

B2) 10...♖e8 p 304

B3) 10...♖e7 p 304

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**1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.e3 ♙f5 5.♘c3 a6 6.♖b3**

A) 6...♖a7 p 308

B) 6...b5 p 311

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1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♟f3 ♟f6 4.e3 ♟f5 5.♟c3 e6 6.♟h4 ♟e4 7.f3 ♟g6 8.♟b3

A) 8...♟c7 9.♟d2 p 316

A1) 9...♟e7 p 316

A2) 9...a6 p 319

A3) 9...♟bd7 10.cxd5 p 320

A31) 10...exd5 p 320

A32) 10...♟xd5 p 322

B) 8...♟b6 9.♟xg6 hxg6 10.♟d2 ♟bd7 11.g3 p 323

B1) 11...♟d6 p 324

B2) 11...♟e7 p 327

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1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♟f3 ♟f6 4.e3 ♟f5 5.♟c3 e6 6.♟h4

A) 6...♟g4 7.♟b3 p 330

A1) 7...♟b6 p 330

A2) 7...♟c7 p 332

B) 6...♟g6 7.♟e2 ♟bd7 8.0-0 p 333

B1) 8...dxc4 p 334

B2) 8...♟e4 p 335

B3) 8...♟e7 p 336

B4) 8...♟d6 p 338

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1.d4 d5 2.c4 ♟f5 3.cxd5 ♟xb1 4.♟a4† c6 5.dxc6! ♟xc6 6.♟xb1

A) 6...♟xd4 p 345

B) 6...e5 p 346

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1.d4 d5 2.c4 c5 3.cxd5

A) 3...♟f6 p 350

B) 3...♟xd5 p 352

## Chapter 24

**1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♟f3 c5 4.cxd5 exd5 5.g3 ♟c6 6.♙g2 ♟f6 7.0-0 ♙e7 8.♟c3**

A) 8...♙e6 p 357

B) 8...0-0 9.dxc5 p 358

B1) 9...d4 p 360

B2) 9...♙xc5 10.♟a4 p 362

B21) 10...♙b6 p 362

B22) 10...♙d6 p 363

B23) 10...♙e7 11.♙e3 p 364

B231) 11...♟e4 p 365

B232) 11...♙g4 p 367

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**1.d4 d5 2.c4 e5 3.dxe5 d4 4.♟f3 ♟c6 5.a3**

A) 5...♙e6 p 372

B) 5...♙f5 p 375

C) 5...♙g4 p 376

D) 5...♟ge7 6.b4 ♟g6 7.♙b2 p 378

D1) 7...♟gxe5 p 379

D2) 7...a5 p 381

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**1.d4 d5 2.c4 ♟c6 3.♟c3**

A) 3...e5 p 390

B) 3...♟f6 p 391

C) 3...e6 p 394

D) 3...dxc4 4.♟f3 ♟f6 5.♙g5 p 395

D1) 5...a6 p 396

D2) 5...♟d5 p 398

D3) 5...h6 p 399

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**1.d4 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3.e3**

A) 3...♙e6 p 406

B) 3...b5 p 407

C) 3...c5 p 408

D) 3...e5 4.♙xc4 exd4 5.exd4 ♟f6 6.♟f3 p 409

D1) 6...♙b4† p 409

D2) 6...♙e7 p 411

D3) 6...♙d6 p 414

E) 3...♟f6 4.♙xc4 e6 5.♟f3 p 416

E1) 5...a6 6.0-0 b5 p 416

- E2) 5...c5 6.0-0 ♖c6 7.♗e2 p 419  
 E21) 7...cxd4 p 419  
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**1.d4 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3.e3 ♖f6 4.♗xc4 e6 5.♖f3 c5 6.0-0 a6 7.♗b3**

- A) 7...♖bd7 p 428  
 B) 7...♖c6 p 429  
 C) 7...cxd4 p 432

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**1.d4 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3.e3 ♖f6 4.♗xc4 e6 5.♖f3 c5 6.0-0 a6 7.♗b3 b5 8.a4**

- A) 8...♗b7 p 438  
 B) 8...b4 9.e4 p 439  
     B1) 9...♖xc4?! p 440  
     B2) 9...cxd4 10.♖bd2 p 440  
         B21) 10...♗e7 p 440  
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