Beat the Flank Openings
Volume 1

The Reti with 1.Nf3 and 2.c4

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Cover Design: Dirk Dewitte

ISBN: 9789493435308
D/2026/31732/17

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All sales or enquiries should be directed to Thinkers Publishing, 9850 Landegem, Belgium.

E-mail: info@thinkerspublishing.com
Website: www.thinkerspublishing.com

First edition 2026 by Thinkers Publishing.
This book is printed on environmentally friendly paper.

Beat the Flank Openings
Volume 1

The Reti with 1.Nf3 and 2.c4

Milos Pavlovic

Thinkers Publishing 2026



Key to Symbols

!	a good move
?	a weak move
!!	an excellent move
??	a blunder
!?	an interesting move
?!	a dubious move
□	only move
N	novelty
⟳	lead in development
⊙	zugzwang
=	equality
∞	unclear position
⩱	with compensation for the sacrificed material
⩲	White stands slightly better
⩱	Black stands slightly better
±	White has a serious advantage
∓	Black has a serious advantage
+−	White has a decisive advantage
−+	Black has a decisive advantage
→	with an attack
↑	with initiative
⇆	with counterplay
Δ	with the idea of
⌓	better is
≤	worse is
+	check
#	mate

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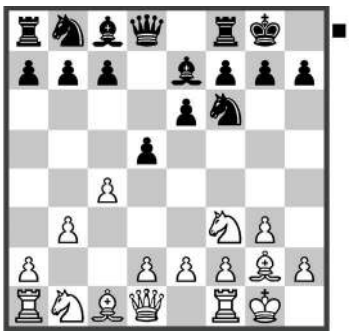
Introduction

English/Reti-type openings received a huge boost in the last decade. With so many players deciding to play flexibly, and at the same time using chess engines for deep analysis, they created completely new ideas in old but less-played – or perhaps better to say less-explored – lines. One of these lines is presented in this book, the double fianchetto Reti, as well as some new versions placing the bishop on b2 and using some combined ideas.

So many grandmasters are now using this method, but not only them – it was always popular among World Champions as well and surely one of the most famous games played with White is the 1987 Kasparov-Karpov 24th game played in Seville, which brought Kasparov – trailing 11-12 – the win necessary to tie the match and thereby retain his world title crown.

Given this background, it is therefore essential for Black to find an antidote, which is not so easy: the theory on the opening is flexible with few concrete lines (compared to most openings) so it is essential to understand the main plans and nuances for both.

I will give here the two main positions from which we start our survey.



Position after: 6. b3

This is the main tabiya. From here I analyzed the main attempts: 6...c5 and 6...b6.

Also very popular is another way of staying flexible:



Position after: 5. e3

Yet another highly interesting idea in which White even has some attacking plans in certain lines.

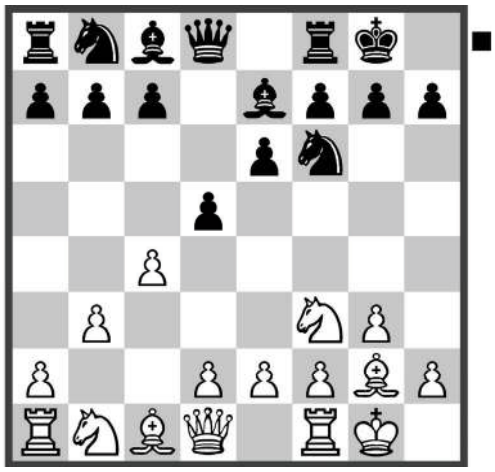
As the reader can perhaps see or will discover, both positions can be reached from various move orders and that is why we need to cover such lines in depth.



1

The Classical Approach

1. ♘f3 ♘f6 2. c4 e6 3. g3 d5 4. ♗g2 ♗e7 5. 0-0 0-0 6. b3



Position after: 6. b3

Chapter Guide

Chapter 1: The Classical Approach

1. ♘f3 ♘f6 2. c4 e6 3. g3 d5 4. ♗g2 ♗e7 5. 0-0 0-0 6. b3 c5!?

a) 7.cxd5 11

a1) 7.cxd5 ♘xd5 8. 0-0 ♘c6 9.d4 cxd4 10.♘xd4 ♘xd4..... 12

a2) 7.cxd5 ♘xd5 8. 0-0 ♘c6 9.d4 cxd4 10.♘xd4 ♗d7 12

b) 7.cxd5 ♘xd5 8. 0-0 ♘c6 9.♘c3 ~ 18

b1) 7.cxd5 ♘xd5 8. 0-0 ♘c6 9.♘c3 ♗f6 22

c) 7.0-0 ♘c6 8.e3 b6 9.♘c3 ♗a6..... 24

c1) 7.0-0 ♘c6 8.e3 b6 9.♘c3 ♗b7..... 25

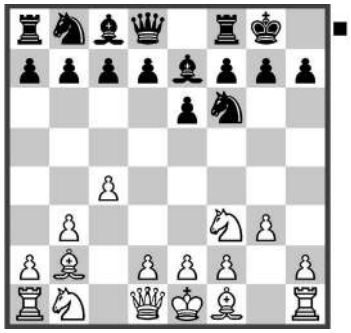
d) 7.0-0 ♘c6 8.e3 d4 9.exd4 cxd4 10.♖e1 ♖e8 11.~..... 33

d1) 7.0-0 ♘c6 8.e3 d4 9.exd4 cxd4 10.♖e1 ♖e8 11.d3 ♗c5 12.~..... 36

d2) 7.0-0 ♘c6 8.e3 d4 9.exd4 cxd4 10.♖e1 ♖e8 11.d3 ♗c5 12.a3..... 39

5...d5 & 6...c5

1. ♘f3 ♘f6 2. c4 e6 3. b3 ♗e7 4. ♗b2 0-0 5. g3

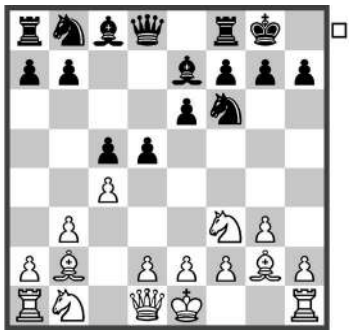


Position after: 5. g3

In chapter three we will investigate a mixture of the Reti and English openings with traditional play against Black's classical approach – the e6/d5 pawn structure, which has gained huge attention due to a rise of many related systems.

Here, however, is the starting point of the pure Reti system, a double fianchetto that has been known for a long time, but which in recent years, especially, received a serious boost in popularity as a reliable and at the same time serious idea to challenge Black. White is playing in a flexible way, keeping all options open, meaning the game can still transpose to regular lines.

5... d5 6. ♗g2 c5



Position after: 6... c5

This is one of two basic main ideas for Black: in the next chapter we will deal with another traditional reaction, 6...b6.

Our idea with 6…c5 is to control the centre in the most direct way, also having in mind the plan of going ...d4, crossing the barrier in order to gain more space and render White's bishop less flexible. We will see some sharp ideas and often the positions will resemble reversed Benoni-type play.

a) 7.cxd5

7. cxd5

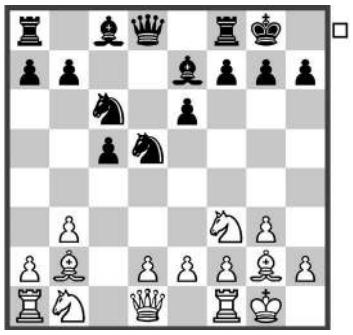
This is a typical reaction, one that has recently been completely modernized and is not without venom. It sees White going for more positional play. In subsequent files we will look at 7.e3, which allow Black to go for the desired ...d4 type of positions.

7... ♘xd5

The main focus in this book will be to take back on d5 with the knight.

7... exd5 is a transposition to the Tarrasch defence.

8. 0-0 ♘c6



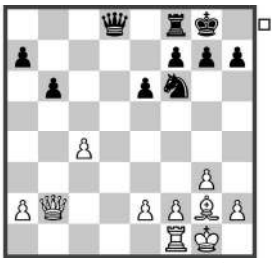
Position after: 8... ♘c6

9.d4 cxd4 10. ♘xd4

9. d4

The modern approach and a very interesting idea: White is quick with his central play and keeps open the option as to where the b1-knight will be developed. It is a very popular line among grandmasters. In a later sub-chapter, we will deal with another idea here: 9.♘c3

Less-played, but an idea that has to be mentioned, is: 9. ♘a3 b6 10. d4 ♗a6 11. ♘c4 [11. dxc5 ♗xc5 12. ♘c4 ♕e7 13. a3 ♖fd8 14. ♕b1 ♖ac8 15. ♖c1] 11... cxd4 12. ♘xd4 ♘xd4 13. ♕xd4 ♗f6 14. ♕d2 ♖c8 15. ♖ac1 ♗xb2 16. ♕xb2 ♗xc4 17. ♖xc4 ♖xc4 18. bxc4 ♘f6



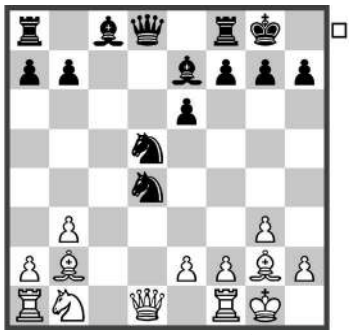
Position after: 18... ♘f6

Black has preferable chances as the knight is stronger than the bishop.

9... cxd4 10. ♘xd4

10...♘xd4

10...♘xd4



Position after: 10... ♘xd4

In the next sub-chapter, we will deal with another topical move: 10...♗d7

11. ♕xd4

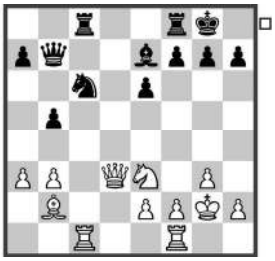
The main approach.

White can deviate with: 11. ♗xd4 ♗d7

A) 12. ♘c3 ♘xc3 13. ♗xc3 ♖c8 14. ♖c1 ♗c6 with equal play.

B) 12. ♗xd5 is an attempt to go for an isolated pawn position; it is interesting but Black probably has sufficient play: 12... exd5 13. ♘c3 ♗h3 14. ♖e1 ♕d7! [14... ♕a5 15. ♕d3 ♖ac8 16. a3 a6?! 17. g4! ♗xg4 18. ♕g3 f5 19. h3 ♗f6 20. ♗xf6 ♖xf6 21. b4 White is close to winning. ½-½ (34) Gabuzyan, H (2553) – Sargissian, G (2616) Yerevan ARM 2025] 15. ♕d2 ♖fe8 16. ♖ad1 ♖ac8 and Black has active play.

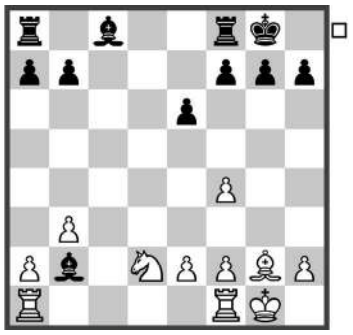
C) 12. ♘d2 ♗c6 13. ♘c4 ♘b4 14. ♗b2 ♖c8 15. a3 ♗xg2 16. ♔xg2 ♘c6 17. ♖c1 b5 18. ♘e3 ♕b6 19. ♕d3 ♕b7



Position after: 19... ♕b7

Black has no problems whatsoever. 0-1 (41) Keymer, V (2730) – Nepomniachtchi, I (2757) London ENG 2025.

11... ♗f6 12. ♕d2 ♘f4 13. gxf4 ♕xd2 14. ♘xd2 ♗xb2



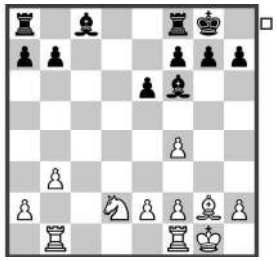
Position after: 14... ♗xb2

We have reached an interesting endgame, one that has been tested over the last few years. Black is counting on the bishop pair while White reckons on queenside pressure and slightly better development.

15. ♖ad1

White goes for the d-file immediately.

An alternative is: 15. ♖ab1 ♗f6

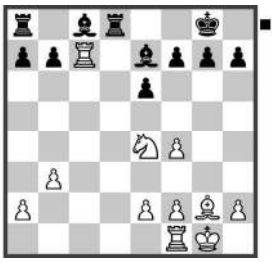


Position after: 15... ♗f6

A) 16. ♖fd1 ♖b8 17. ♘c4 [17. ♘e4 ♗e7 transposes to the 16.♘e4 note below] 17... b6 18. ♘e5 ♗xe5 19. fxe5 ♗a6 20. ♗f3 ♖fd8 21. ♖bc1

♔f8 22. ♖xd8+ ♖xd8 23. ♖c7 ♖d2 and the game is equal.

B) 16. ♖bc1 ♖d8 17. ♘e4 ♗e7 18. ♖c7



Position after: 18. ♖c7

18... ♔f8! This is a much more active idea... [18... ♖d7 19. ♖c2 ♖d8 20. ♖c7 ♖d7 21. ♖c2 ♖d8 22. ♗f3 ♖b8 23. ♖c7 ♖d7 24. ♖fc1 ♖xc7 25. ♖xc7 ♗d8 26. ♖c4 ♗e7 Black is fine as the dark-squared bishop is able to defend all the weak squares. ½-½ (40) Muradli, M (2588) – Deac, B (2696) New York USA 2024] 19. ♖fc1 ♖b8 20. ♗f3 f5 21. ♘g3 ♗d6 Black actually has a chance to seize the initiative.

C) 16. ♘e4 ♗e7 17. ♖fd1 ♖b8 18. ♖bc1 g6 19. ♘c5 [19. ♘d6 ♖d8! 20. ♘b5 ♖xd1+ 21. ♖xd1 a5 22. ♗f3 ♔f8 Black is out of any danger.] 19... ♖d8 20. ♖xd8+ ♗xd8 21. ♖d1 ♗b6 22. b4 ♔f8 23. e3 ♔e7 Black easily equalized. ½-½ (31) Mikhalevski, V (2496) – Sargissian, G (2660) Teplice CZE 2024.

15... ♖b8 16. ♘c4 ♗f6 17. ♘e5

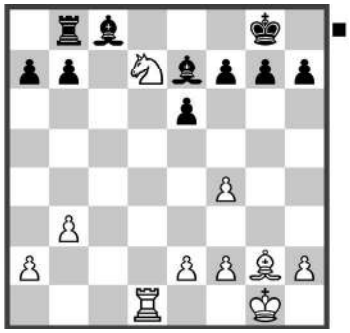
A) 17. ♘d6 b5 18. ♘xc8 ♖fxc8 19. ♖d2 a5 20. ♖fd1 a4 21. e3 g6 22. ♗f1 ♖c3 Black is OK. 1-0 (75) Warmerdam, M (2617) – Nepomniachtchi, I (2758) chess. com INT 2024.

B) 17. ♖d2 ♖d8 18. ♖xd8+ ♗xd8 19. ♖d1 ♗e7 20. ♖d2 ♔f8 21. ♘d6 ♗xd6 22. ♖xd6 ♔e7 23. ♖d2 ♗d7 Black is fine again. ½-½ (47) Novik, M (2399) – Madaminov, M (2488) Tashkent UZB 2024.

17... ♖d8 18. ♖xd8+ ♗xd8 19. ♖d1

19. ♖c1 f6 20. ♘c4 ♗c7 21. e3 ♔f8 22. ♘e5 ♗d6 23. ♘c4 ♗c7 Black can safely put the bishop on e7 as well... [23... ♗e7 24. ♗e4 g6 25. ♔g2 ♔e8 This endgame is OK for Black.] 24. ♗e4 h6 25. ♘e5 ♗d6 26. ♘c4 ♗c7 27. h4 ♔e7 and the ending is OK for Black. 1-0 (46) Artemiev, V (2641) – Kravtsiv, M (2598) chess.com INT 2026.

19... ♗e7 20. ♘d7

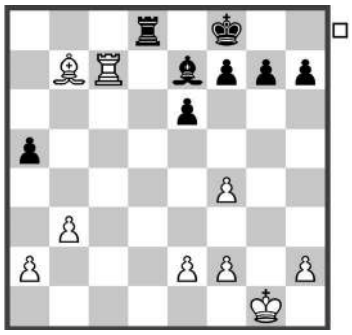


Position after: 20. ♘d7

The critical moment which gives White a material advantage, but we can say it is of purely symbolic importance...

20. ♗f3 f6! 21. ♘d7 ♖a8 22. e3 ♔f7 23. ♗h5+ g6 24. ♗e2 ♔e8 25. ♗b5 ♗xd7 26. ♗xd7+ ♔f7 is just another draw.

20... ♗xd7 21. ♖xd7 ♔f8 22. ♗xb7 ♖d8 23. ♖c7 a5



Position after: 23... a5

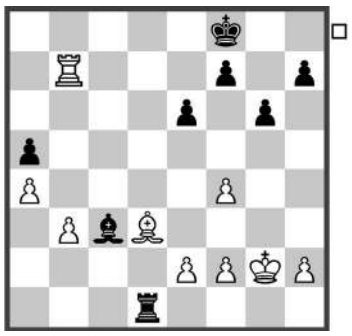
This was played in a couple of grandmaster games and, although Black is a pawn down, the position is just a draw.

24. ♗a6

A) 24. ♗f3 g6 25. ♖a7 ♗b4 26. e3 ♖d2 27. a3 ♗xa3 28. ♖xa5 ♗e7 29. ♔f1 ♖b2 30. ♖b5 ♖b1+ 31. ♔g2 ♖b2 The game lasted for many more moves but White never managed to push a pawn even to b4! ½-½ (91) Grebnev, A (2536) – Sargissian, G (2671) Sochi RUS 2024.

B) 24. ♖c4 ♗b4 25. ♖c2 ♖d2 26. ♖xd2 ♗xd2 27. e3 ♗b4 28. ♔f1 ♔e7 29. ♔e2 ♔d6 30. ♔d3 ♗e1 31. ♔e2 ♗b4 32. ♔d3 ♗e1 33. ♔e2 This is another typical draw; Black exchanged rooks and that is it. ½-½ (33) Ding Liren (2788) – Nepomniachtchi, I (2795) Astana KAZ 2023.

24... ♗d6 25. ♖c4 ♗b4 26. ♔g2 g6 27. ♔f3 ♖d2 28. a4 ♖d1 29. ♖c8+ ♔g7 30. ♗d3 ♖h1 31. ♔g2 ♖d1 32. ♖b8 ♗c3 33. ♖b7 ♔f8

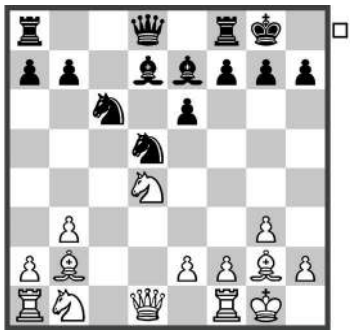


Position after: 33... ♔f8

Yet another game where White didn't manage to achieve anything. ½-½ (46) Yuffa, D (2647) – Wagner, D (2617) Samarkand UZB 2025.

10... ♗d7

This is another approach, which we can describe as being 'less dry' than our previous line. Black develops and plays in a normal manner, retaining chances to play for an advantage as well.



Position after: 10... ♗d7

11. ♘a3

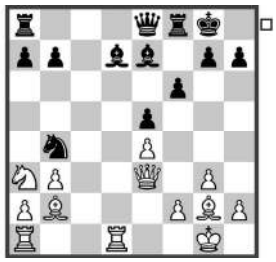
The main idea, heading for the important c4-square. The point of going this way is to keep open the option of recapturing on d4 with the queen if Black decides to exchange knights.

There are a couple of other interesting ideas:

A) 11. ♘d2 ♘xd4 12. ♗xd4 ♗c6 13. ♘c4 ♘b4 was encountered previously.

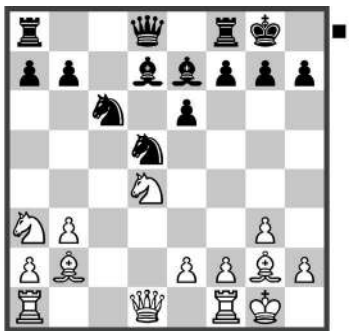
B) 11. ♘c3 ♘xc3 12. ♗xc3 ♖c8 13. ♖c1 [13. ♕d2 ♘xd4 14. ♗xd4 ♗c6= ½-½ (18) Davies, N (2309) – Tischbierek, R (2418) Swidnica POL 2025] 13... ♗a3 14. ♖c2 ♕e7 15. ♖d2 ♘xd4 16. ♖xd4 ♗b5 17. ♕d2 ♗xe2 18. ♖e1 ♗h5 19. ♖d7 ♖fd8 20. ♕d4 ♕g5 21. h4 ♖xd7 22. ♕xd7 ♕d8 23. ♕xd8+ ♖xd8 24. ♗xb7 ♗g6 Black is doing OK. 0-1 (65) Sharifov, M (2259) – Mishra, A (2623) Ciutadella de Menorca ESP 2026.

C) 11. e4 ♘db4 12. a3 [12. ♘a3 ♘xd4 13. ♕xd4 e5 14. ♕e3 f6 15. ♖fd1 ♕e8



Position after: 15... ♕e8

Interesting play that offers Black decent chances; the bishop on b2 is successfully blocked. ½-½ (44) Marjanovic, A (2325) – Cvetkovic, S (2262) Paracin SRB 2018] 12... ♘xd4 13. ♕xd4 [13. ♗xd4 ♘c6 14. ♗b2 ♕c7 15. ♘c3 ♖fd8 and Black is harmoniously developed. 0-1 (34) Moral Garcia, S (2324) – Belov, A (2421) chess.com INT 2024] 13... e5 14. ♕d2 ♘c6 15. ♘c3 ♗c5! Bringing the bishop to d4 is key here. [15... ♘d4 16. ♖ad1 ♗e6 17. ♘d5 is less clear. 0-1 (50) Atakhan, A (2417) – Belov, A (2421) chess.com INT 2024] 16. ♘d5 ♗d4 17. ♔h1 f6 18. f4 ♖c8 and Black is OK.



Position after: 11. ♘a3

11... ♗c5!?

Played only once, but it appears to be a reasonable try because the main point is to find a good square for the queen. Other ideas have been analysed much more but it seems that White manages to create some kind of minimal, but long-term, pressure:

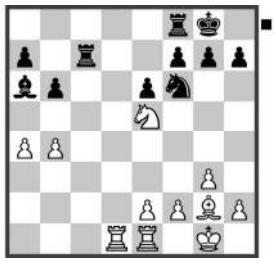
A) 11... ♗f6



Position after: 11... ♗f6

A1) 12. ♕d2 ♘xd4 13. ♗xd4 ♗c6 14. ♖fd1 ♕e7 [14... ♘e7 15. ♗xf6 ♕xd2 16. ♖xd2 gxf6 17. ♗xc6 ♘xc6 18. ♖d7 ♖ab8 19. ♘c4 ♖fd8 20. ♖ad1 gives White a small but lasting edge. ½-½ (41) Artemiev, V (2716) – Nakamura, H (2736) chess24.com INT 2020] 15. ♘c4 ♖ad8 16. ♘a5 ♗b5 17. ♗xf6 ♘xf6 18. ♕e1 b6 Black is OK here.

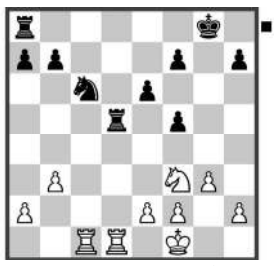
A2) 12. ♘c4 ♘xd4 13. ♗xd4 ♗b5 14. ♖c1 ♖c8 15. a4!? A very interesting attempt that has been deeply analysed... 15... ♗a6 16. ♖e1 b6 17. ♗xf6 ♘xf6 18. ♘e5 ♕xd1 19. ♖cxd1 ♖c7 20. b4!



Position after: 20. b4!

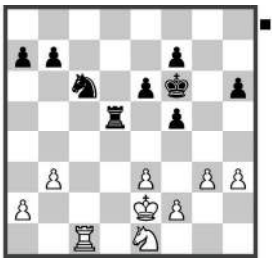
We can clearly see that White again achieves some light pressure. 1-0 (33) So, W (2760) – Giri, A (2764) chess24.com INT 2022.

B) 11... ♘xd4 12. ♕xd4 ♗f6 13. ♕d2 ♗c6 14. ♘c4 ♘e7 15. ♗xf6! What follows is very important type of play in this endgame: White is counting on the doubled pawns on the kingside because they are not so mobile, therefore White has more flexible play. [15. ♖fd1 ♕xd2 16. ♖xd2 ♗xb2 17. ♘xb2 ♖fd8 18. ♖ad1 ♖xd2 19. ♖xd2 ♔f8 20. ♘c4 ♖e8 21. f4 ♗xg2 22. ♔xg2 ♘c6 23. ♔f3 ♔e7 24. e4 f6 We can consider this to be equal. ½-½ (71) Ding Liren (2799) – Nakamura, H (2736) chess.com INT 2021] 15... ♕xd2 16. ♘xd2 gxf6 17. ♖ac1 ♖fd8 18. ♗xc6 ♘xc6 19. ♖fd1 f5 20. ♔f1 ♖d5 21. ♘f3!



Position after: 21. ♘f3!

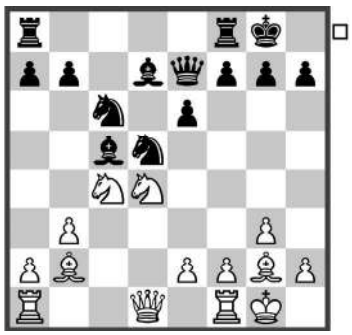
21... ♖ad8 22. ♖xd5 ♖xd5 23. e3 ♔g7 24. ♔e2 The first stage of the game is complete; White has a minimal but steady edge... 24... ♔f6 25. h3 h6 26. ♘e1!



Position after: 26. ♘e1!

One of the key moments in the game: the knight is heading to the attractive d3-square, and that gives Black the momentum to try to create more advantage. 1-0 (68) Mamedyarov, S (2733) – Suleymanli, A (2632) Shusha AZE 2024.

12. ♘c4 ♕e7!



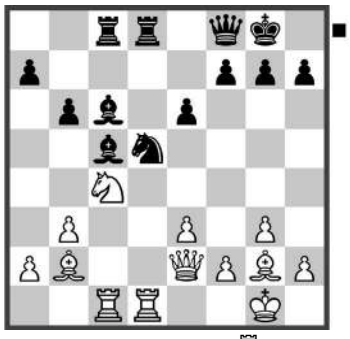
Position after: 12... ♕e7!

Now the rooks enter the game much more easily.

13. ♖c1 ♖fd8 14. e3

14. ♗xd5 exd5 15. ♘xc6 bxc6 16. ♘e5 ♗e8 17. b4 ♗b6 18. ♘xc6 ♗xc6 19. ♖xc6 ♕xb4 with equality.

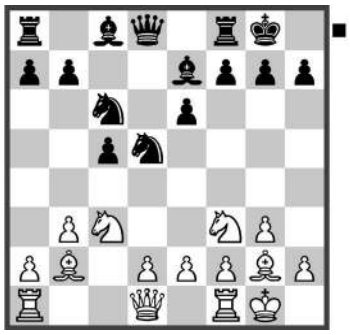
14... ♖ac8 15. ♘xc6 ♗xc6 16. ♕g4 ♕f8 17. ♕e2 b6 18. ♖fd1



Position after: 18. ♖fd1

The position is balanced. ½-½ (18) Ponomariov, R (2636) – Dominguez Perez, L (2732) Ciutadella de Menorca ESP 2026.

9.♘c3 ~



Position after: 9. ♘c3