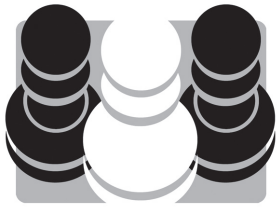
Grandmaster Repertoire

1.e4 vs
The Sicilian III

By

Parimarjan Negi



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Introduction

The variations in this book mostly revolve around the 2...e6 Sicilians. There was a time when systems such as the Kan and Taimanov were considered relative sidelines compared to the mighty Najdorf, but over the years they have grown immensely in popularity. One reason is that they tend not to involve too many long theoretical lines ending in forced draws; I myself have often played the black side of the systems covered in this book for similar reasons.

Despite the relatively non-forcing nature of the Taimanov, Kan and Scheveningen, I have strived to maintain the spirit of the previous two Sicilian volumes by recommending active, aggressive set-ups for White. So, for instance, even though I have enjoyed many successes with the classical ♗e2 line (on both sides of the board!) – a set-up which, by the way, can be used against all three of the aforementioned Sicilian variations – I eventually decided it was not quite right for this repertoire series. One reason is that I feel that some of the slower positional variations often boil down to subjective assessments and individual playing styles, rather than the quality of your opening preparation.

The Taimanov

The Taimanov is solid and reliable, yet also active and flexible, making it one of the most popular Sicilians today. Nevertheless, the theory is still not so well developed in some lines. See, for instance, variation B of Chapter 5, featuring a ...♘xd4 move order which only became popular about three years ago. Since then, it has gained a huge following – yet the line I recommend against it has barely been tested at all, which highlights the vast potential for new discoveries.

Besides this, there are dozens more possible set-ups and sub-variations that Black may choose. Some of them are a little dubious, but proving that is not always an easy task. When studying these first seven chapters, I would advise the reader to check the lines rather carefully, *without* trying to memorize them. One of the difficulties you will face in this section is that lots of the lines look rather similar, and it's easy to get them confused. I have done my best to highlight the differences and explain why I have recommended different moves in different situations, but it's up to the reader to internalize this information.

The Kan (Paulsen)

Against this most flexible of systems I have recommended the traditional main line of 5.♗d3. Generally, the positions are tough to analyse in detail – the flexibility of Black's set-up enables him, in many variations, to deviate at various points of a line without affecting the position or its assessment a great deal. Obviously I have tried to play actively and aggressively where appropriate – but most of the time I have tried to emphasize ideas and plans, and I recommend that the reader does the same.

The Scheveningen

My repertoire choice here is the Keres Attack. This aggressive option is the reason why the Scheveningen is less popular than it used to be – and yet, I was surprised at how difficult it was to find an advantage in many of the lines. Once again, a solid understanding of the main ideas, backed up by some precise knowledge of certain key lines, should serve the reader well.

Various Sidelines

The final four chapters cover an assortment of other Sicilian variations. There are too many for me to generalize about them, but I will say once again that several of them proved to be surprisingly resilient. In general, I have tried to be pragmatic about things: when dealing with a rare line that you may not encounter for several years, it is better to know a simple route to a solid edge than attempt to remember an ultra-complicated attempt at outright refutation. Even then, there are quite a lot of lines to consider, so I would advise you *not* to try and memorize any more than the basic details, and only study these lines in depth if preparing for a specific opponent.

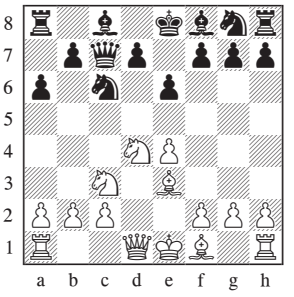
***

This is the fourth book in my 1.e4 series, and it was by far the most difficult for me to write. I think the reason was not so much that I have played these systems as Black, but rather because Black has so many interesting sub-variations available in each of the three main systems. Every one of them seemed to pose unique strategic problems, none of which can be solved by simply switching on the analysis engine. This is in stark contrast to the 6.♗g5 Najdorf, where the variations tend to be much more concrete, or the French and Caro-Kann, where the strategic battles tend to take on similar contours from one line to the next. Despite the challenges, I believe that the finished book contains some of my best work of the entire series, and I hope that the readers will agree.

Parimarjan Negi
Stanford, June 2016

Chapter 3

Taimanov



Various 7th and 8th Moves

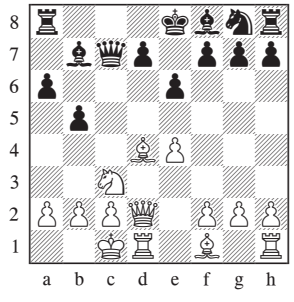
Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘c6 5.♘c3 ♕c7 6.♗e3 a6

7.♕d2

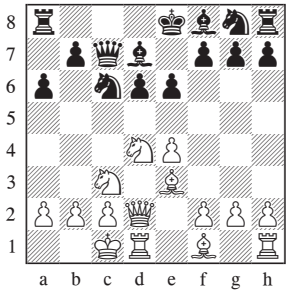
A) 7...♘xd4!? 52
B) 7...d6 53
C) 7...♘f6 8.0–0–0 54
C1) 8...d6 9.♗e2!? ♗e7 10.f4 55
C11) 10...♘d7 59
C12) 10...0–0 60
C2) 8...♘xd4 9.♕xd4! ♘g4 10.♕b6 ♕c6
11.♗d4 e5 12.♗e3 ♗e7 13.♘d5 ♗d8 14.♕b3 63
C21) 14...♘xe3 64
C22) 14...d6!? 65

A) after 9...♗b7



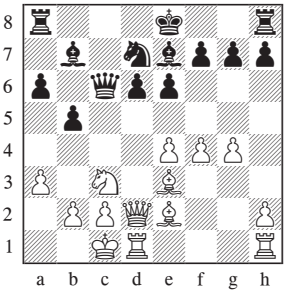
10.e5!?N

B) after 8...♗d7!?



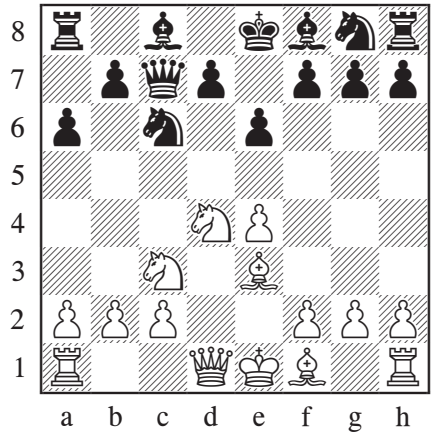
9.g4!N

C11) after 13...♗b7



14.f5!N

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘c6 5.♘c3 ♕c7 6.♗e3 a6



This is Black's most popular and flexible move, whose only drawback is that it fails to develop a piece.

7.♕d2

White develops his queen and prepares to castle. There is no need to commit any of the kingside pawns until Black has defined his set-up more clearly. In this chapter we will analyse **A) 7...♘xd4!?**, **B) 7...d6** and a few sidelines after the most popular **C) 7...♘f6**.

7...♗b4 has no great significance, as after 8.0–0–0 Black's only logical choice is 8...♘f6, leading straight to Chapters 6 and 7. Of course, White could also consider 8.a3!?, so I don't see much point in this move order for Black.

7...b5 has been played in quite a lot of games, but the most likely outcome is a transposition to one of the later chapters after a subsequent ...♘f6, as I don't see how Black can benefit from leaving the knight on g8. For example, after 8.♘xc6 dxc6 (or 8...♕xc6 9.f3) 9.0–0–0 I think Black should try to transpose to Chapter 5 with 9...♘f6 followed by ...♗e7. However, White may be tempted to try for more with 10.♗f4!? or 10.e5!?. In any case, the 7...b5 move order is not something we should be worried about.

A) 7...♘xd4!?

This move makes some sense when compared to the new main line from Chapter 5. In that variation, Black plays 7...♘f6 followed by ...♗e7 and ...b5, keeping the option of a timely ...♘xd4, but allowing us to play a disruptive ♘xc6. This way he deprives us of that possibility, but exchanging on d4 so early has some drawbacks as well; for instance, White should be able to do without f2-f3.

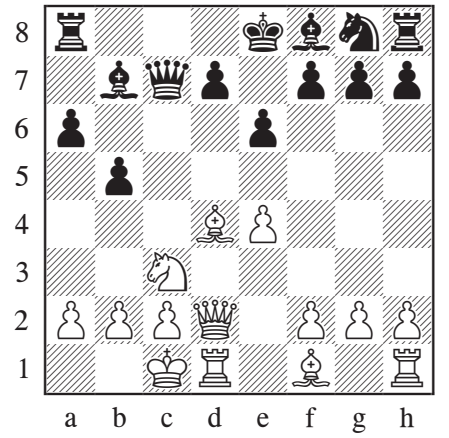
8.♗xd4

8.♕xd4 b5 9.0–0–0 ♗b7 10.f3 ♘f6 11.g4 ♖c8 gives Black his ideal scenario: an improved version of the set-up examined in Chapter 5.

8...b5 9.0–0–0 ♗b7

9...♘e7 10.♔b1 ♘c6 11.♗e3 ♘e5 12.f4 ♘c4 13.♗xc4 ♕xc4 14.♗d4± Short – Pogorelov, Gibraltar 2004.

The present position occurred in Gonzalez Garcia – Ivanisevic, Bled (ol) 2002, and several other games, but so far nobody has tried:



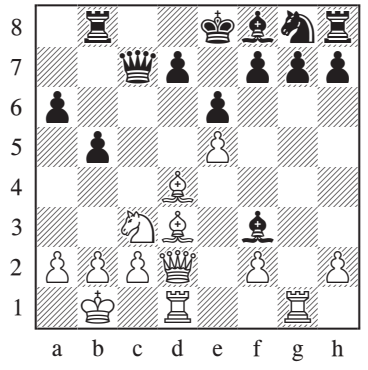
10.e5!?N

An interesting way to challenge Black's unusual move order. Now he will struggle to develop because ...♘e7 will allow ♗xb5!.

10...♘h6

10...♗c6 11.♗d3 ♘e7 12.♖he1±

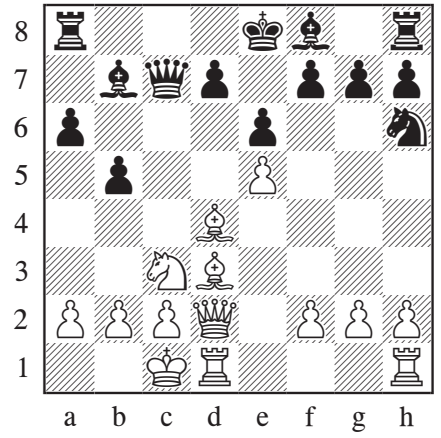
10...♖b8 11.♔b1 ♗c6 is slow, and we can increase our lead in development even further by giving up a bit of material: 12.♗d3! ♗xg2 13.♖hg1 ♗f3



14.♘e4! ♗xd1 15.♕xd1⩲ White is completely dominating.

11.♗d3!?

11.f3 is certainly playable, but I have no qualms about offering the g2-pawn. Black is not forced to take it, but I like White's chances in any case.



11...♗xg2

11...b4 12.♘e2 (12.♘e4 ♘f5!) 12...♗xg2 (12...♗e7 13.♖hg1) 13.♖hg1⩲ is similar to the main line.

11...♖c8 12.♘e4 ♘f5 13.♗c3±

11...♗e7 12.♖hg1 ♘f5 (12...0–0 13.g4↑) 13.♗xf5 exf5 14.♔b1 0–0 15.g4 f4 16.♕xf4±

12.♖hg1 ♗f3 13.♘e2

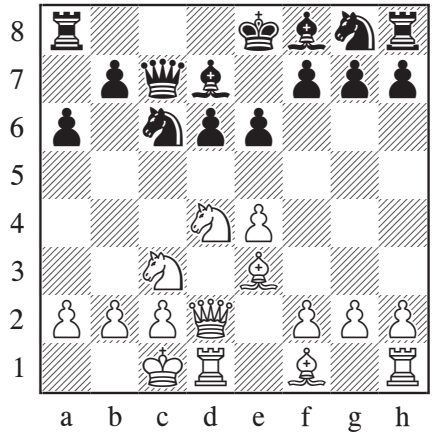
13.♖de1⩲ could also be considered in order to keep the option of ♘e4.

13...g6 14.♕e3⩱

Black's extra pawn will not be of much use in the middlegame. The position remains complicated, but I like White's chances based on his active pieces and the open g-file.

B) 7...d6 8.0–0–0 ♗d7!?

8...♘f6 transposes to variation C1, but we should also consider this rather sophisticated move order. Despite the text move's odd appearance, neither GM Ganguly nor Yu Yangyi managed to achieve anything special against it. By delaying ...♘f6, Black hopes to confuse White's plans – which kingside pawn(s) should we advance, and in what order?



9.g4!N

This has not yet been tried but it seems like the obvious move to me – what better way to exploit Black's delay in putting the knight on f6?

It is worth mentioning the natural alternative: 9.f4 ♘f6!

This can be compared with the later variation C1. Since Black has avoided ...♗e7 here, he is better equipped to meet the plan of ♗e2 and g2-g4, as he can use the spare tempo to do something more productive on the queenside.

10.♗e2 ♖c8

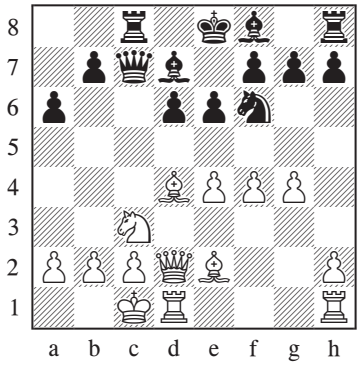
10...b5!? also looks fine and has score well for Black.

11.g4

11.♘b3 is hardly critical, for instance: 11...b5N (11...♘a5 was also okay for Black in Ganguly – Wang Chen, Sharjah 2014) 12.♗f3 b4 13.♘a4 ♘a5 14.♘b6 ♘c4 15.♘xc4 ♕xc4∞

11...♘xd4 12.♗xd4!?N

After 12.♕xd4 d5!? Black was doing fine in Schmaus – Wawra, Sharjah 2014.



12...e5 13.♗e3 ♘xg4 14.♘d5 ♕c6∞

White has some attacking chances for the pawn and this could certainly be analysed more, but it doesn't seem easy for White, despite the impressive knight on d5. Black has some ideas for counterplay such as ...♕a4, and the bishop can be developed to g7 rather than the pointless e7, where it would always be a target.

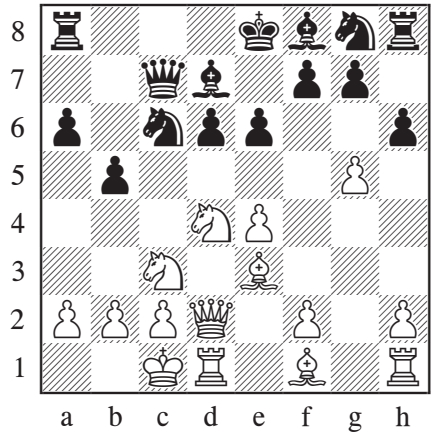
9...b5

9...♘e5 10.g5 (10.h3!? is a good alternative) 10...♘g4 11.♗f4! leaves the knight out of place, and 11...e5? only makes matters worse: 12.♘d5 ♕d8 13.h3 Black has a terrible position.

10.g5 h6

10...♘ge7?? 11.♘dxb5! is a typical trick, and 10...b4 11.♘ce2± does not really help Black either.

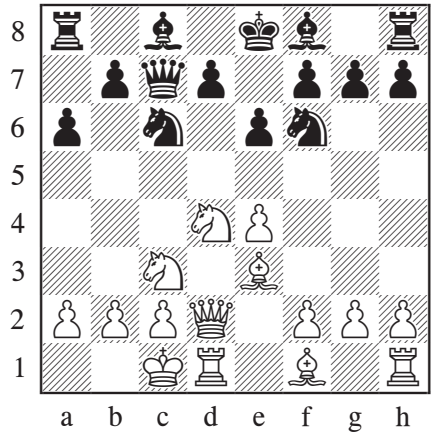
10...♘xd4 11.♕xd4 is also unsatisfactory for Black as the pressure against the d6-pawn makes it hard for him to arrange ...♘e7.



11.g6! fxg6 12.♘xc6 ♕xc6 13.♗d3⩲

Black is behind in development and he is weak on the kingside.

C) 7...♘f6 8.0–0–0



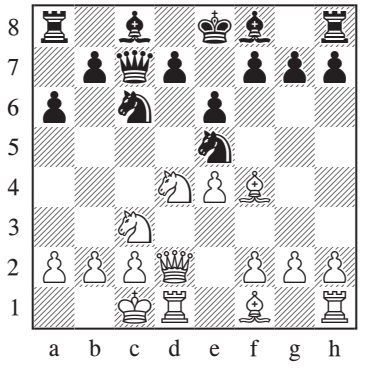
This takes us a step closer to the main lines of the Taimanov English Attack. In this chapter we will consider **C1) 8...d6** and **C2) 8...♘xd4**.

8...b5 is covered in variation A of Chapter 5.

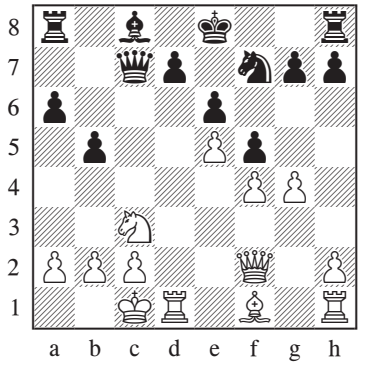
8...♗e7 is an important move which will discussed in Chapters 4 and 5.

8...♗b4 is the traditional main line and can be found in Chapters 6 and 7.

The only other option worth mentioning is:
8...♘g4
We will see a similar idea in variation C2 below, and this is certainly not an improved version for Black.
9.♗f4 ♘ge5
9...e5? is suicidal: 10.♘d5 ♕d8 11.h3 ♘f6 (11...♘xf2 12.♕xf2 exf4 13.♕xf4 d6 14.♗c4± Arizmendi – Collutiis, Saint Vincent 2003) In Meera – Kavitha, Calicut 2003, White could have got a big advantage with 12.♘xf6†N ♕xf6 13.♗g5± followed by ♘f5.

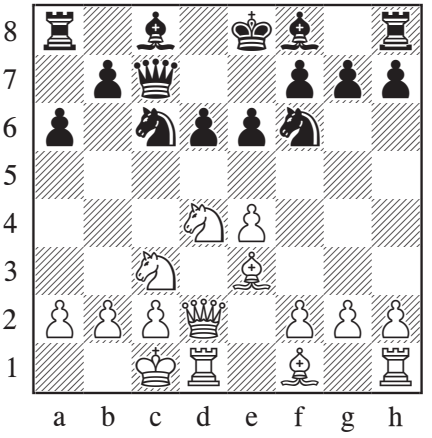


10.♗g3
This gives White easy play. The game could continue in various ways, but the following game was quite logical:
10...♘xd4 11.♕xd4 f6 12.f4 ♗c5 13.♕d2 ♘f7 14.e5 f5 15.♗f2 ♗xf2 16.♕xf2 b5 17.g4!
17.♖g1 ♕a7! was annoying for White in Nepomniachtchi – Macieja, Internet (blitz) 2006.



17...fxg4 18.h3!? ♗b7 19.♗g2 g3 20.♕xg3 b4 21.♘e2±
Grischuk – Needleman, Khanty-Mansiysk 2005.

C1) 8...d6



9.♗e2!?
9.f4 ♗d7! transposes to Ganguly – Wang Chen, as referenced earlier under the 7...d6 move order. Of course it's possible to search for an improvement there, but I would prefer to avoid it altogether.

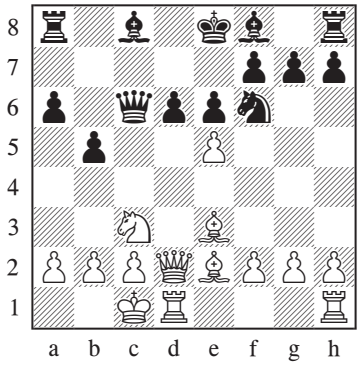
9.f3 is a decent alternative which gives White quite a good version of the English Attack.

However, considering that I have recommended different systems against the Najdorf and Scheveningen variations, I don't think it is worth spending time on a completely different line just to be ready for a relatively unusual transposition by Black.

The text move has hardly ever been played in this position, but it immediately transposes to several other games. I like this move a lot; the ensuing positions are easy for White to play, thanks to the natural attacking ideas of f2-f4, g4-g5, and sacrificial ideas such as ♘f5. The bishop on e2 helps to restrict Black's queenside play, as ...b5 runs into the plan of ♘xc6, e4-e5 and ♗f3. Also, as we will see in several of the variations below, the plan of ...♘xd4 and ...e5 tends not to work well for Black.

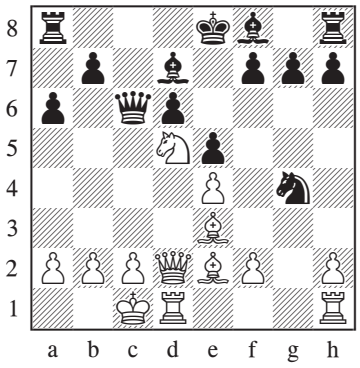
9...♗e7

9...b5? 10.♘xc6 ♕xc6 11.e5! is the simplest version of the aforementioned trick.



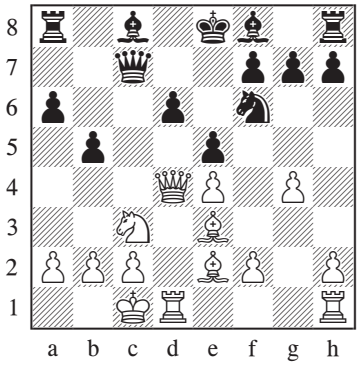
Black can stay in the game with 11...b4, but after 12.♗f3 d5 13.exf6 bxc3 14.♕xc3 (14.♕d4 is also good but the text move is simpler) 14...♕xc3 15.bxc3 ♗a3† 16.♔d2 gxf6 17.c4 White had a considerable advantage in Zanaty – Voros, Hungary 2004.

9...♗d7 10.g4!N is a strong novelty: 10...♘xd4 11.♕xd4 e5 (after 11...♗c6 12.g5 ♘d7 13.f4± it is hard for Black to even continue developing) 12.♕d2 ♘xg4 13.♘d5 ♕c6



14.♖hg1 ♘xe3 15.♕xe3 ♗e6 16.f4⩲ White's huge lead in development provides excellent compensation.

9...♘xd4 10.♕xd4 b5 (10...e5N 11.♕a4† ♗d7 12.♗b5!±) 11.g4 e5 was played in Shirov – Movsesian, Loo 2013. I think the most logical queen retreat is:

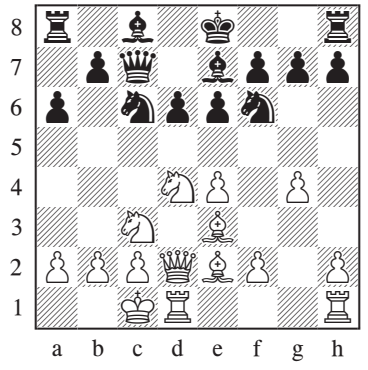


12.♕d3!?N b4 13.♘a4 ♘xg4 The loss of the g-pawn is not something White should ever worry about in these positions, as it costs Black time and opens additional lines for us. 14.♘b6 ♖b8 15.♘d5 ♕c6 16.♔b1⩲

10.f4

This seems like the most consistent continuation, considering that the main point of the 9.♗e2 move order was to avoid 9.f4 ♗d7. White is actually spoilt for choice though, as there is a second promising continuation:

10.g4!?

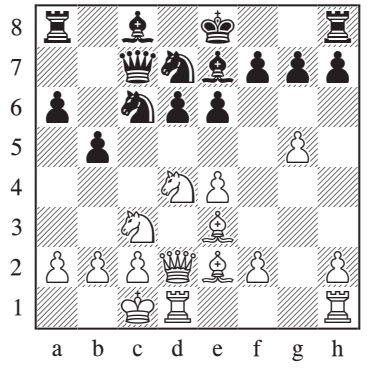


We will see in the main line that White often plays this at some point, so it makes sense to consider it immediately. This way Black gets the extra options of 10...♘e5 and 10...b5, but White has good prospects against both of them.

10...b5

10...♘e5!? 11.♖hg1!? (11.g5 ♘fg4 12.f4 ♘xe3 13.♕xe3 could be an interesting line to check further, but I have some reservations about giving away my dark-squared bishop. At the same time, White is well ahead in development so he might be better here too.) 11...b5!?N (11...♘c4 has been played a few times, but if I was playing Black I would prefer to hold the knight back for a little longer) 12.g5 ♘fd7 13.f4 b4 14.♘a4 ♘c4 15.♗xc4 ♕xc4 16.♔b1±

11.g5 ♘d7



12.♘xc6

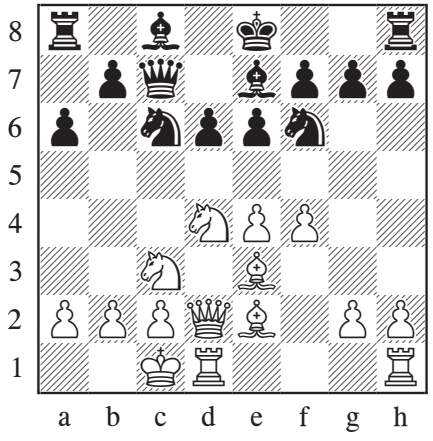
The fun continuation is 12.♘f5!? exf5 13.♘d5 ♕b7 14.exf5, which led to a nice win for White in Sulskis – Izoria, Ohrid 2001, but at this stage the position is highly unclear.

12...♕xc6 13.♕d4!? 0–0 14.h4

It looks like a typical Sicilian middlegame, but I like White's chances as I don't see an easy way for Black to generate queenside counterplay. At the same time, it's not very easy for White to do something crushing on the kingside.

14...♕c5 15.♕d2 ♕c7!?

In Dolganiuc – Petruzzelli, email 2010, White had to resort to the somewhat undesirable 16.a3 to hold up Black's queenside play. He got some advantage though, and later went on to win, so this could certainly be checked further. For now, though, we will return to my main recommendation of 10.f4.

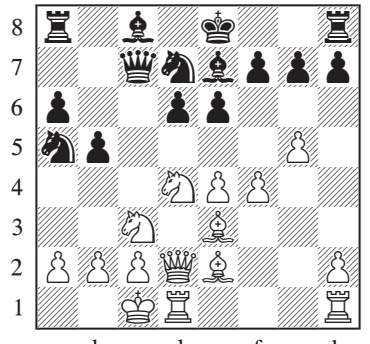


Black has a surprisingly tough life here. If he castles then White will hurl his g- and f-pawns up the kingside, while if Black tries to be too sophisticated he will have to watch out for sacrificial ideas like ♘f5.

The two main continuations are **C11) 10...♘d7** and **C12) 10...0–0**.

10...b5?! runs into 11.e5 dxe5 (11...♘xd4 12.♗xd4±) 12.♘xc6 ♕xc6 13.fxe5 ♘d5 14.♘xd5 exd5 15.♗f3 and White won a pawn in Szumilas – Motak, Legnica 2008.

10...♘a5 11.g4 b5 Black avoids the e4-e5 trick, but allows something else: 12.g5 ♘d7 (12...b4 13.♘cb5!±)



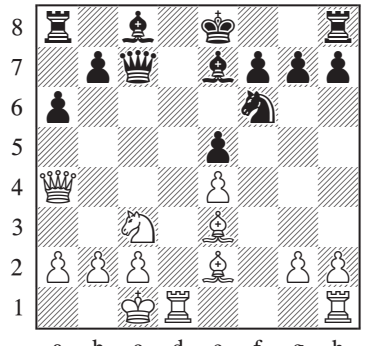
13.♘f5! exf5 14.♘d5 ♕d8 15.exf5 (15.♗d4!N is even stronger, but I want to show that White gets good positional compensation whatever he does) 15...♗b7 16.♘xe7 ♕xe7 17.♖he1 0–0 18.♗g1 ♕d8 19.♕xd6 ♗c6 20.f6↑ White had a strong initiative in Bok – Spoelman, Amsterdam 2014.

10...♘xd4 11.♕xd4 e5

This plan should always be considered, but White is perfectly placed to meet it.

12.fxe5 dxe5 13.♕a4†!

Spoiling Black's plans.



13...♔f8

13...♗d7 runs into: 14.♖xd7! ♘xd7 (14...♕xd7 15.♗b5+–) 15.♘d5 ♕d6 16.♖d1 ♖d8 17.♗g4 0–0 18.♘c3±

13...♕c6N is the least of the evils, but 14.♕xc6† (14.♗b5 is playable but unnecessarily materialistic) 14...bxc6 15.b3± gives White a pleasant endgame edge.

14.♖hf1 ♗d7 15.♕b3 ♖c8 16.♔b1 ♗e6 17.♘d5±

Morozevich – Fier, Khanty-Mansiysk 2011.

A final alternative is:

10...♗d7 11.g4

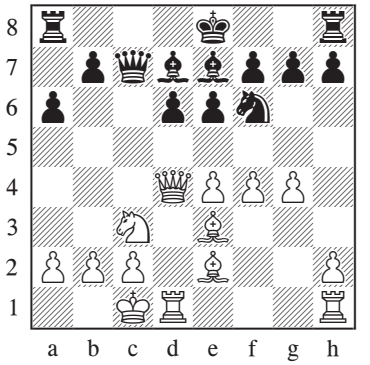
This position has occurred in quite a lot of games but it seems to me that Black is heading for trouble, so I will not spend too much time on it.

11...♘xd4

11...b5 12.g5 b4 13.♘cb5! axb5 14.♘xb5 ♕b8 (14...♕a5 15.♘xd6†+–) 15.gxf6 gxf6 16.♘xd6†+– Valhondo Morales – Royset, Gibraltar 2010.

12.♕xd4!

Best, as the queen guards the e4-pawn while the pressure on g7 forces Black to play ...e5. After 12.♗xd4 ♗c6 Black would gain a tempo by attacking e4 and would thus have time to play ...0–0 and ...♘d7, minimizing his disadvantage.



12...♗c6

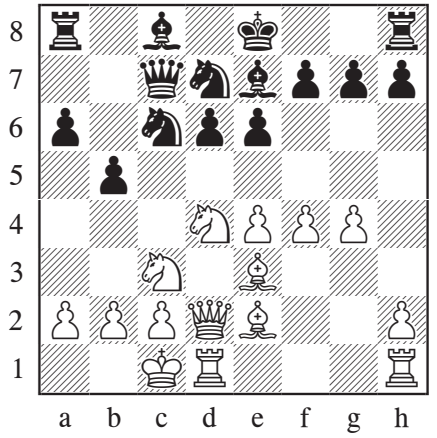
12...e5 is met by 13.♕d2 when taking on g4 looks suicidal, while 13...♗c6 14.♗f3± gives

White a dominating position from which he has scored heavily.

13.g5 e5 14.♕d3 ♘d7 15.f5±

Naiditsch – Grachev, Moscow 2009.

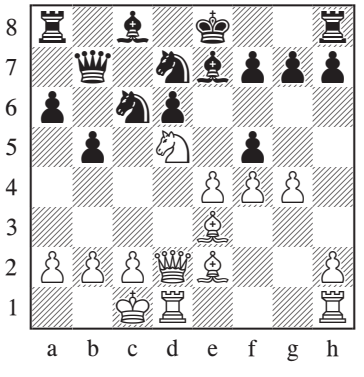
C11) 10...♘d7 11.g4 b5



This is an interesting way for Black to advance his b-pawn without allowing the e4-e5 trick, but White can benefit from not having needed to play g4-g5.

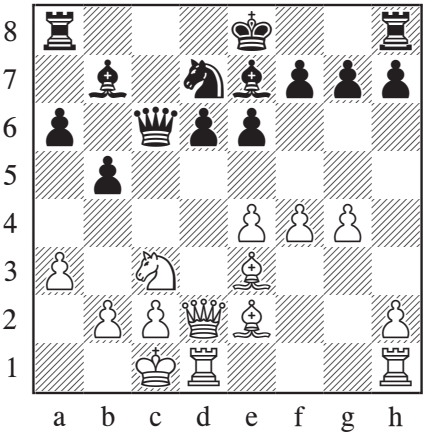
12.♘xc6

12.♘f5!? is not required, but it's tempting all the same: 12...exf5 13.♘d5 ♕b7N (13...♕d8 14.♕c3! [14.gxf5⩱] enabled White to pick up the crucial g7-pawn in Salinnikov – Bocharov, Tomsk 2002)



14.exf5 ♘f6 (14...0–0 15.g5→) 15.♘b6 ♖b8 16.♗f3 0–0 17.g5 ♘e8 18.f6↑

12...♕xc6 13.a3 ♗b7

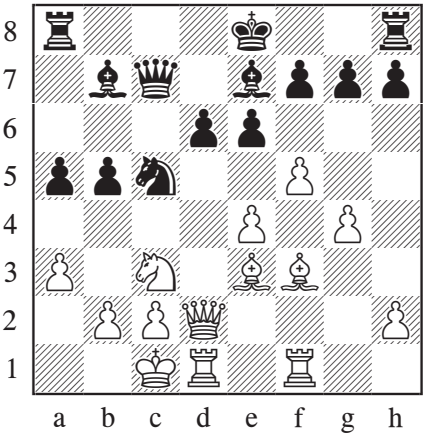


14.f5!N

14.g5 would justify Black's decision to retreat the knight from f6 voluntarily: 14...♘c5 15.♖hf1 ♕c7 16.♗d4 (16.♗f3N a5! is an important resource – compare the main line below) 16...0–0 17.f5 ♘xe4 18.♘xe4 ♗xe4 19.f6 ♖fc8! 20.c3 ♗d8∞ Caruana – Movsesian, Reggio Emilia 2011.

14...♘c5 15.♖hf1 ♕c7 16.♗f3 a5!?

16...0–0 allows 17.g5± with a straightforward attack on the kingside. The text move is a tricky resource, based on the potential fork on b3. However, compared with the note to move 16 in Caruana – Movsesian, the fact that White has played f4-f5 instead of g4-g5 makes a big difference.



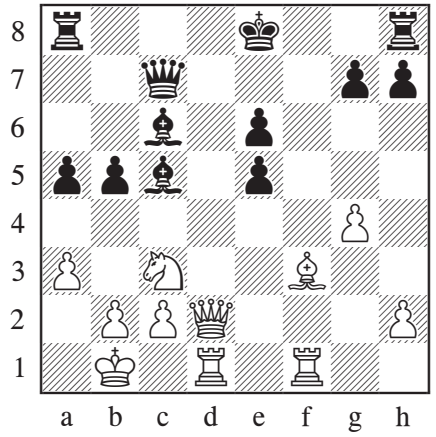
17.♔b1! ♗c6

17...b4? 18.♘b5 is hopeless for Black.

18.e5! dxe5

18...d5 is a good move in the analogous position after 14.g5, but here we have 19.f6! gxf6 20.exf6 ♗f8 21.♕e2 with a huge initiative.

19.♗xc5 ♗xc5 20.fxe6 fxe6

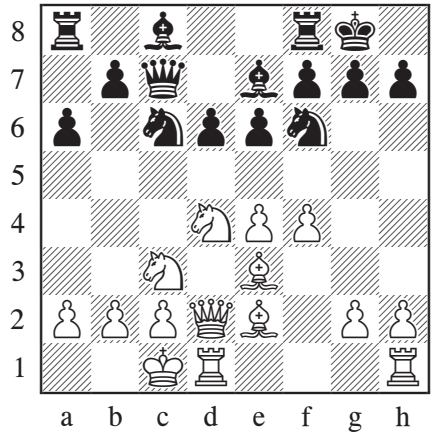


21.♗xc6† ♕xc6 22.♕g5 ♗d4 23.♘e2!

Black's position is collapsing.

C12) 10...0–0

This time Black waits for g4-g5 before playing ...b5, as White will no longer be able to win material on the long diagonal with ♗f3. The obvious drawback of his last move is that it gives us a clear target on the kingside.



11.g4 b5

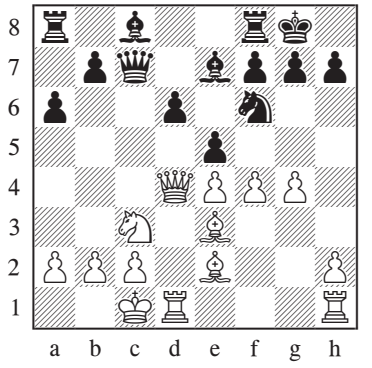
11...d5 has been played a few times, but after 12.exd5 ♘xd5 13.♘xd5 exd5 14.♗f3± Black had no real compensation for the weakness of the d5-pawn in Fossan – Alexandru, Gausdal 1986.

11...♘xd4 12.♕xd4

This has scored heavily, although 12.♗xd4 should also be nice for White.

12...e5

After 12...b5 13.g5 ♘d7 14.f5± Black's counterplay seems far too slow compared to any reputable Sicilian line. The simplest way for White to advance his attack from here will be with ♖hf1 followed by f5-f6.



13.♕d3 exf4

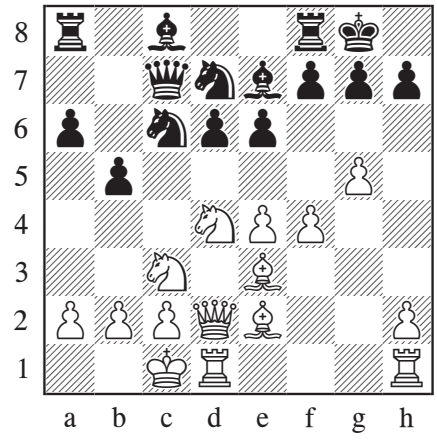
13...♗xg4 14.♗xg4 ♘xg4 15.♘d5 was horrible for Black in Shirov – Ljubojevic, Monte Carlo (blindfold) 1999.

14.♗xf4 ♗e6 15.g5 ♘d7 16.♗xd6 ♗xd6 17.♕xd6 ♕a5 18.h4 ♖ac8 19.♕d4

Black had no real compensation for the pawn in Nijboer – Van Kooten, Groningen 2008.

12.g5 ♘d7

12...♘xd4 makes no difference: White simply chooses his preferred way of recapturing, as discussed at move 13 below, and then meets 13...♘d7 with 14.f5!, transposing immediately.

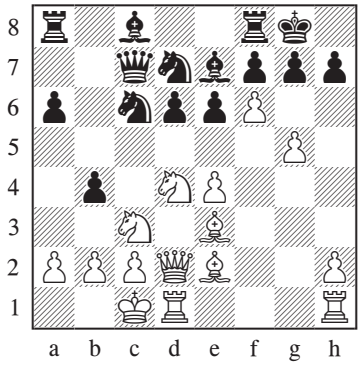


13.f5! ♘xd4

13...♘de5 14.f6± opened the kingside immediately in Veld – Akkerboom, Hengelo 2002.

13...b4 14.f6!

Blasting open the kingside. Surprisingly, Black has achieved a healthy plus score from this position, but White only needs a modest amount of accuracy to obtain a clear advantage.

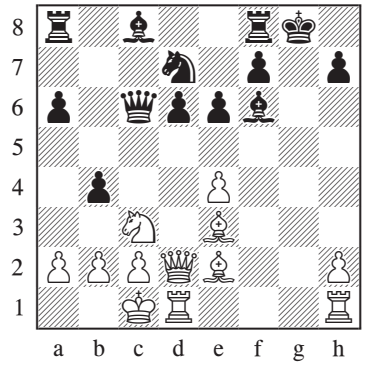


14...gxf6

14...bxc3 15.♕xc3 ♗b7 (15...♘de5 16.fxe7 ♖e8 17.♘xc6 ♘xc6 18.h4 ♖xe7 19.h5± White controls the dark squares and eventually even the d6-pawn will fall.) 16.fxe7 ♖fc8 17.♘xc6 ♗xc6 Konguvel – Thipsay, India 1992. 18.♕b4!?N d5 19.♖hf1±

The text move has been Black's most popular choice, but it leads to serious problems for him.

15.gxf6 ♗xf6 16.♘xc6 ♕xc6



17.♗d4! ♗xd4

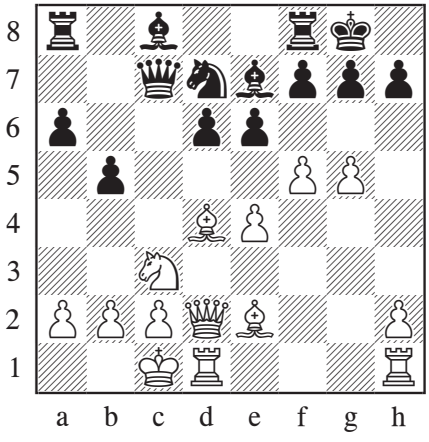
17...bxc3? 18.♖hg1† ♔h8 19.♗xf6† ♘xf6 20.♕h6 leads to a quick mate.

18.♕xd4 ♘e5 19.♕xb4±

White went on to win in a Houdini vs. Houdini game from 2012.

14.♗xd4!?

14.♕xd4 prevents ...b4, and thus can be regarded as the safer way to maintain a better position. 14...♗b7 In Tseitlin – Sturua, Daugavpils 1978, 15.♖hf1!?N would have been the best way to prepare either f5-f6 or fxe6 according to circumstances.



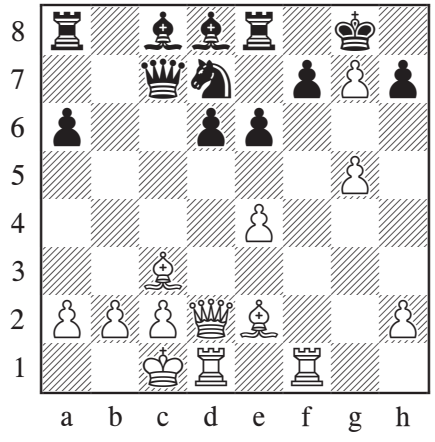
14...b4 15.f6!

This leads to fantastic complications. It is not required of course, as 14.♕xd4 is perfectly adequate, but this way is so much more fun!

15...bxc3 16.♗xc3 ♗d8 17.fxg7 ♖e8 18.♖hf1

If you think this is all the product of modern computer analysis, you will be pleasantly surprised to learn that White's attacking scheme was first played in 1969 by the Latvian GM Klovans, and has been repeated in two subsequent games. I won't analyse the position exhaustively as it's not the most important theoretical variation, but it is worth showing a few lines as there are some spectacular possibilities.

18.♖df1!?N deserves attention as well. The critical continuation is 18...♘e5! (after 18...♘c5? White can exploit the change of rook to break through with 19.g6! fxg6 20.♕h6 ♕e7 21.♖hg1!+–) 19.h4!?⩱ which could be analysed further.

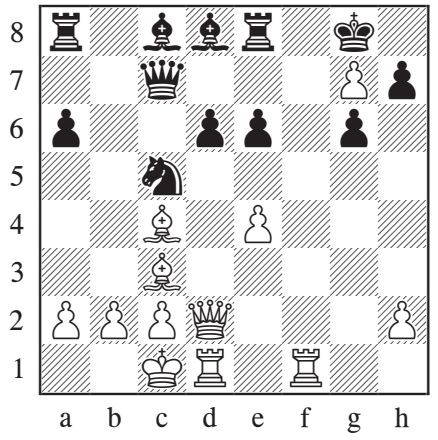


18...♘c5

In the stem game Black erred with 18...♗b7 and was quickly crushed: 19.♗h5 ♖e7 20.g6! f6 21.gxh7† ♔xh7 22.♖g1 1–0 Klovans – Zilberstein, USSR 1969.

19.g6! fxg6 20.♗c4!

20.♕h6? ♕e7! enables Black to defend, either by trading queens with ...♕g5† or by shutting White's bishop out of the game with ...e5.

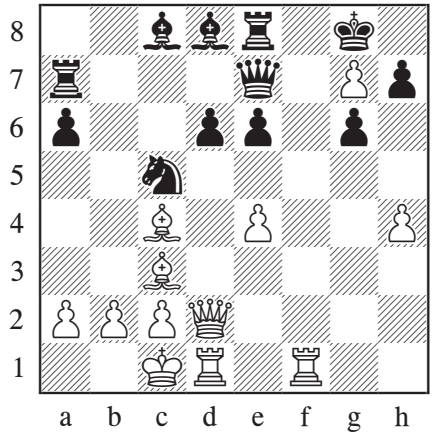


20...♖a7

20...♖b8? allows 21.♕d4! threatening the deadly ♖f8†.

20...♕e7 21.♖f4! is also dangerous, for instance 21...♗b7?! 22.♖df1 and Black has no good defence.

21.h4 ♕e7



22.♖f4!?N

22.♗f6 ♕c7 (22...♕xf6!?N 23.♖xf6 ♗xf6 24.♕xd6 ♘d7 25.♗xe6† ♔xg7 26.♕c6 ♖d8 27.♖f1 Black is barely hanging on, but

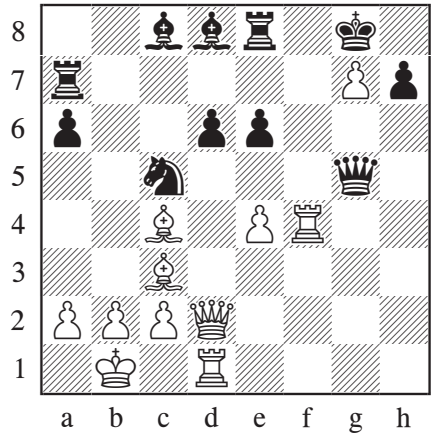
ultimately he seems to survive here too.) 23.♗d4 ♘xe4 24.♕f4 ♘f6 25.♗xf6 ♗xf6 26.♕xf6 ♕xg7 27.♖xd6 ♕xf6 28.♖xf6 ♔g7 29.♖f1 Black managed to hold this slightly worse endgame in Enkalo – Kayser, email 2013.

22.♕d4!?N is also tempting, but after 22...♕xh4 23.♖f8† ♖xf8 24.gxf8=♕† ♔xf8 Black survives.

22...g5

22...♘a4 23.♗d4 ♗b6 24.♗f6 ♕c7 25.b3 maintains White's initiative.

23.hxg5 ♕xg5 24.♔b1

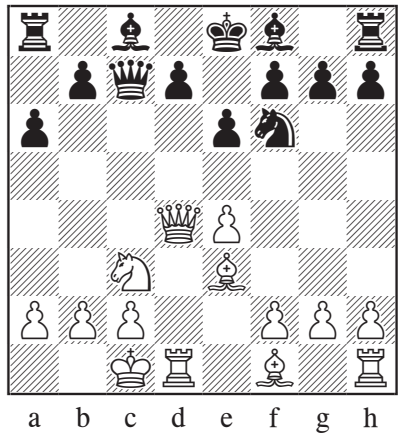


24...♖f7 25.♖xf7 ♔xf7 26.♖f1† ♔g8 27.♕f2 ♕e7 28.♕f5!→

White keeps a dangerous attack. His last move prevents ...♘d7 while setting up various threats such as ♖h1, ♕h5, ♗d4 and so on. Fascinating stuff, although some players would no doubt prefer 14.♕xd4 as an easier route to an advantage.

C2) 8...♘xd4 9.♕xd4!

9.♗xd4 e5 10.♗e3 (10.♗xe5?! ♕xe5 11.f4 is a useful attacking motif to be aware of, but unfortunately Black has 11...♕c5! 12.e5 ♘g4 when the threat of ...♕e3 slows down White's initiative.) 10...♗b4 11.f3 d6 12.a3 ♗xc3 13.♕xc3 ♕xc3 14.bxc3 ♔e7 is pretty solid for Black.



9...♘g4

9...d6 10.♗e2 has been covered via the move order 8...d6 9.♗e2 ♘xd4 10.♕xd4 – see the note to Black's 9th move in variation C1 on page 56.

Black can hardly hope to equalize with 9...e5 10.♕b6 ♕xb6 11.♗xb6 d6. From this position the sophisticated 12.♗c7!? ♔d7 13.♗a5 gave White the better chances in Cabrera – Bellon Lopez, Palma de Mallorca 2009, but the simple 12.f3N ♗e6 13.g4± would also have been perfectly adequate.

10.♕b6

You may also wish to consider:

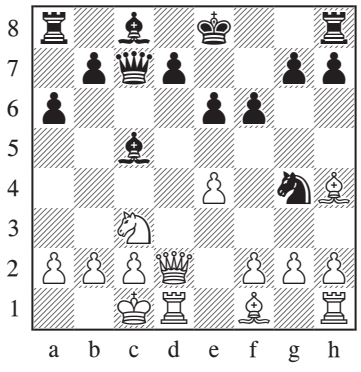
10.♗g5!?

This has some surprise value and leads to much less explored territory. I will not attempt to analyse it in depth, but will mention a few lines to serve as a basis for your further investigation.

10...f6

10...♕c5 11.♕d2 f6 12.♗f4 (12.♗h4!?N) 12...b5 13.♗e2 ♘e5 led to another double-edged middlegame in Navarro Cia – Vila Gazquez, Andorra 2007.

11.♗h4 ♗c5 12.♕d2

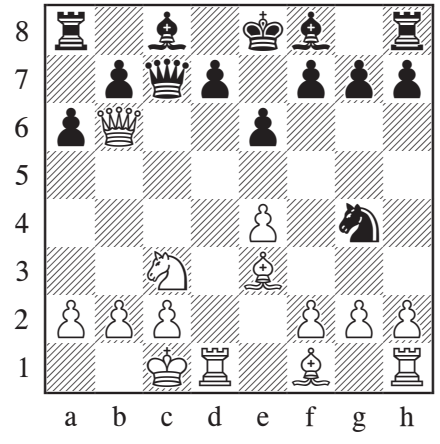


12...0–0!?N

12...b5 was played in M. Popovic – Poluljahov, Cetinje 1996, when 13.♗e2!N ♘e5 14.♗h5† ♔e7 (14...g6 15.♗xf6 0–0 16.♗xe5 ♕xe5 17.♗f3±) 15.♖he1!?↑ would have set up ♘d5† ideas.

13.♗g3

We have reached an interesting position with many possibilities for both sides, but it's hard to say if White is really better.



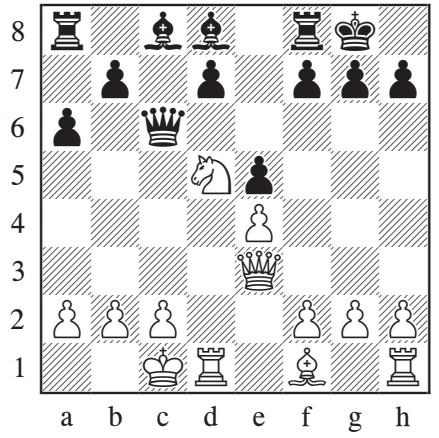
10...♕c6 11.♗d4

11.♕xc6 bxc6 12.♗b6 is a popular alternative, but I prefer to provoke a weakening of Black's structure rather than to strengthen it.

11...e5 12.♗e3 ♗e7 13.♘d5 ♗d8 14.♕b3

14.♕b4!? is possible too, but I don't think we need to resort to anything overly sophisticated. Black may proceed with **C21) 14...♘xe3** or the more stubborn **C22) 14...d6!?**.

C21) 14...♘xe3 15.♕xe3 0–0



This enables us to get a better version of the 14...d6 variation by placing the bishop on d3, rather than e2, after f2-f4.

16.f4!?N

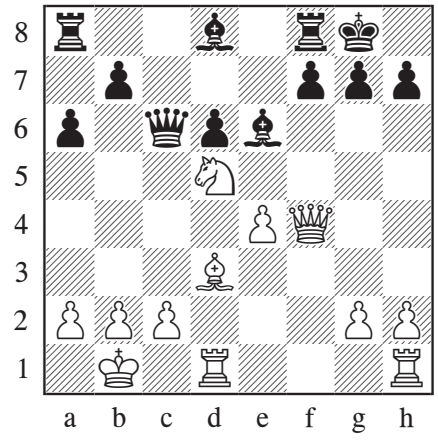
It seems to me that the upcoming structure after ...exf4 is often underestimated from White's point of view. Even though Black's position seems rather solid, White's play is a lot easier, particularly since he has the blunt plan of advancing his pawns on the kingside. The lack of a strong knight on e5 also favours White.

16...exf4 17.♕xf4 d6 18.♔b1!

18.♗d3 ♗e6 19.h4 ♕a4! would be annoying.

18...♗e6 19.♗d3!?

Black cannot put up with the knight on d5 indefinitely, so he will have to exchange it sooner or later. Meanwhile White continues with his kingside expansion to get a rather one-sided game. The following analysis is by no means forced, but it shows how White will keep the better chances after logical play from both sides.



19...♗xd5 20.exd5 ♕d7! 21.h4 ♗f6

The queen had to go to d7 to ensure that White would not be able to play ♕f5 to exploit the bishop on f6.

21...♗b6?! is met by 22.h5± when Black's bishop has nothing to do.

22.h5

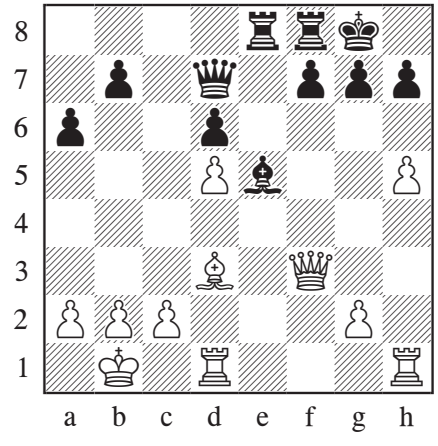
22.♕e4!? g6 23.h5 ♖ae8 24.♕f3 ♗g7 25.g4± also keeps an edge for White.

22...♗e5

22...♖fe8? 23.h6! ♗e5 24.♗xh7†! wins.

23.♕f3 ♖ae8

23...b5 24.♖de1 g6 25.♕e4 ♖ae8 26.♕h4→



24.c3!

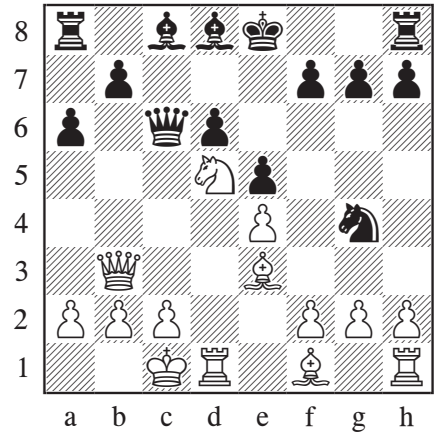
White could equally start with 24.g4, but the exclamation mark is for the concept of preventing Black from playing ...b5-b4, which would fix White's queenside structure and give Black excellent counterattacking chances on the dark squares.

Here is an illustrative line to show what can happen if White elects not to touch his queenside pawns: 24.♖df1 g6 (24...♕a4 25.c3) 25.g4 b5 26.♕h3 (26.g5 a5 27.♖h4 b4 28.♖fh1 ♖e7∞) 26...b4! 27.♕h4 (27.♗xa6 ♕a7) 27...♕a7! With the idea of ...♕d4. 28.g5 a5∞

24...b5 25.g4 g6 26.♕h3

There is no clear breakthrough as yet, but White clearly has the initiative.

C22) 14...d6!?



I believe this to be slightly more accurate, although it does give White a choice between two quite promising lines.

15.f4!?N

This is the simplest continuation, leading to something similar to the previous variation.

We can also consider:

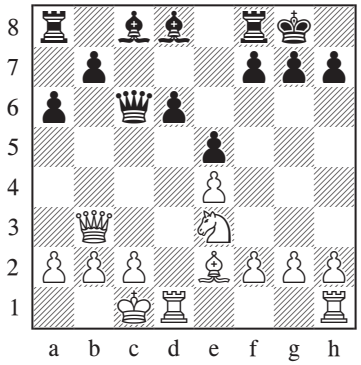
15.♗e2 ♘xe3 16.♘xe3!?

16.♕xe3 followed by f2-f4 is likely to transpose to our main line.

16...0–0

16...♗e6? 17.♗c4±

16...b5 17.♕d3 ♗e7 18.♘d5 (18.f4!?) 18...♗e6 19.f4 exf4 20.♕d4!±



17.♔b1!N

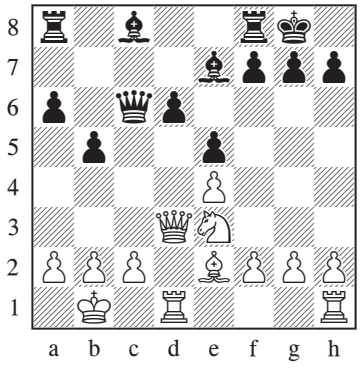
17.♗c4 ♕xe4! 18.♖xd6 ♗e7 19.♖dd1 ♕g6 was level in Inarkiev – Maletin, Moscow 2013.

17...b5

White's idea is: 17...♕xe4 18.♖xd6 ♗e6 19.♗d3!? This looks rather artificial, but after 19...♕c6 (19...♗xb3?! 20.♗xe4±) 20.♖xc6 ♗xb3 21.♖c5 ♗e6 22.♖xe5± it is not so easy for Black to equalize.

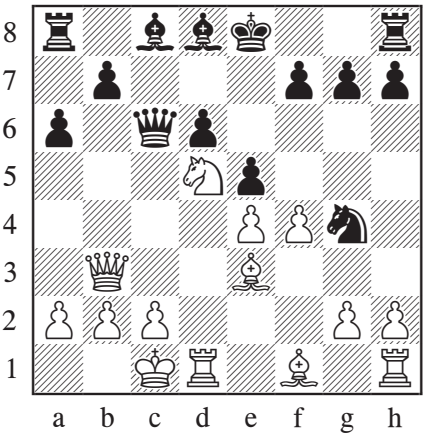
18.♕d3 ♗e7

18...♗b7? 19.♗f3 ♗e7 20.♘f5 wins a pawn.



19.♘d5 ♗d8 20.g3 ♗e6 21.f4

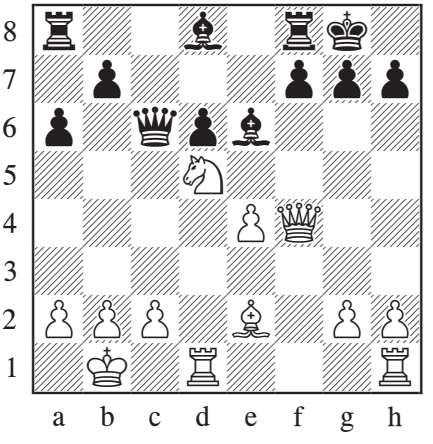
I am not sure how much better White will be in the ...♗xd5 endgames, but at least it will be a one-sided affair.



15...♗e6!

15...♘xe3 16.♕xe3 transposes to the previous variation with 14...♘xe3. By delaying the exchange for one more move, Black forces us to develop the bishop to a slightly worse square.

16.♗e2 ♘xe3 17.♕xe3 exf4 18.♕xf4 0–0 19.♔b1



Although I would have preferred the version with the bishop on d3, in which I could just keep pushing on the kingside as in

variation C21, it is still not easy for Black to equalize. The most likely scenario is that Black will exchange on d5 at some point, leaving White with a long-term edge due to his better bishop. Black may even consider sacrificing his d6-pawn to liberate his bishop, but White will not have much to worry about in either case.

19...♗xd5

19...♖c8 20.c3 doesn't change much. Black can continue to try and play around the knight, but I don't see a convincing plan for him.

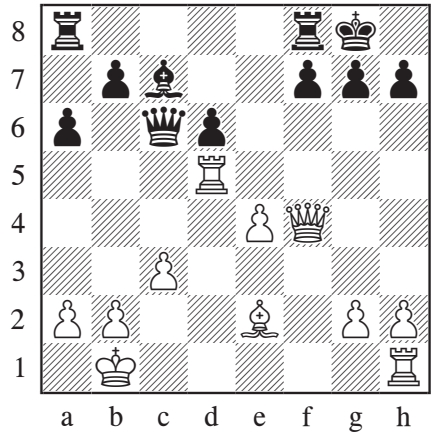
19...f5 20.♗f3± only creates weaknesses in Black's position.

20.♖xd5 ♗c7

20...♗f6 21.♕xd6± and 20...♗e7 21.g4± also favour White.

21.c3!

21.h4 ♖ae8 22.g4 ♖e5 enables Black to relieve the pressure by trading rooks.



21...♖ae8 22.♗d1! ♖e5 23.♗b3±

The bishop is ready to replace the rook on d5, and White keeps a lasting advantage due to his better bishop and pressure against f7.

Conclusion

This chapter dealt with a selection of Black's alternatives on moves 7 and 8.

7...♘xd4!? is not without purpose, but it allows us to save time by omitting f2-f3, leading to a promising lead in development.

We then looked at 7...d6 8.0–0–0 ♗d7!?, when my new idea of 9.g4! gives White great prospects.

7...♘f6 is the main line by far; after the automatic 8.0–0–0 we considered two respectable sidelines.

8...d6 is not a bad move, but 9.♗e2!? ♗e7 10.f4 makes it hard for Black to carry out ...b5, and White generally gets a promising attacking position by ramming the g-pawn up the board.

Finally, 8...♘xd4 9.♕xd4 ♘g4 is an interesting attempt to go after our bishop, but 10.♕b6 ♕c6 11.♗d4 e5 12.♗e3 leaves an inviting hole on d5. After the normal continuation of 12...♗e7 13.♘d5 ♗d8 14.♕b3 Black has a couple of options, but the most important thing to realize is that the structure after f2-f4 and ...exf4 is more problematic for Black than it may first appear. The most likely outcome is some kind of opposite-coloured-bishop scenario where White enjoys some initiative, while Black's prospects for counterplay are limited.