

# **The Modernized Sveshnikov**

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# **The Modernized Sveshnikov**

**Robert Ris**

**Thinkers Publishing 2020**





# Key to Symbols

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

# Bibliography

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## Electronic/Periodical

*ChessBase Magazine*, Chessbase  
*Corr Database 2020*, Chessbase  
*Mega Database 2020*, Chessbase  
*New in Chess Yearbooks*, New in Chess



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# Foreword

I have known Señor Ris already for too many years and I know him as an honest and entertaining (yes, this combination is possible!) personality and that's exactly the way this book is written.

That's why I was glad to write the Foreword of this book. At first.

But wait a second, did Robert ask me to write this Foreword as a friend or as an expert?

I am not sure I will like the answer nor will you! ☺ This book is his first real test on openings and I hope he will fare better than our friend Ivan Sokolov after he published his book on the e3-Nimzo and everybody in Wijk aan Zee suddenly started to play the Nimzo against him!

But apart from the fact that he didn't include any of my games, or consult me as an adviser (such arrogance!), his book gives a nice overview of the Sveshnikov.

As a player and as a human being, Robert doesn't back down and as a trainer/writer he ain't no different, so this book will be a nice guide for you to understand the dynamics of the Sveshnikov. Nevertheless, you always have to be critical, not just because it's Robert!

Enjoy your reading and many interesting games.

Loek van Wely, grandmaster, eight-times Dutch champion and former Sveshnikov expert



# Introduction

Dear reader,

Writing an opening book has been on my mind for quite some years and I'm thankful to TP-team for giving me this opportunity. In the first quarter of 2019 I came to an agreement with TP about this project and it took me more than a year to produce the book you are holding in your hands.

I already had quite a lot of experience writing opening articles, starting in January 2009 with ChessVibes Openings and still do regularly write for several other (online) publishers. But that's nothing compared with writing an entire book on one of the most popular and heavily analysed openings. For me the personal challenge was basically whether I would be able to show something new on a topic a lot has been written about in chess literature and frankly, I'm very happy to have accomplished that task.

It must have been somewhere at the beginning of this century, when games started to be broadcast online, that my love for the Sveshnikov was shaped. I got very much inspired by top players like Vladimir Kramnik, Peter Leko, Alexey Shirov, Boris Gelfand and not in the last place my fellow-countryman Loek van Wely (thanks for the foreword!), who all had excellent results and contributed to the development of this opening. At first, you start wondering why Black weakens the d5-square (5...e5) and then step by step you realize the dynamic potential of Black's opening strategy. The ensuing positions contain a lot of imbalances, which makes it a very attractive opening to play for a win at any level.

## Structure of the book

I wish I could describe an opening just in words, but that's not how modern chess works. Every single idea needs to be backed with concrete variations. Conversely, it's also impossible just to study 30-40 moves of theory without having a clue about what you are doing. Hence, I have aimed to find a good balance of verbal explanations without ignoring the hardcore variations you have to know. In case you'll find the analyses a bit too long, don't be discouraged! They have been included mainly to illustrate the thematic ideas and show in which direction the

game develops once the theoretical paths have been left. That's why I have actually decided to cover 39 games in their entirety, rather than cutting off my analysis with an evaluation. I believe that model games help you to understand better an opening, and certainly also the ensuing middle- and endgames.

Compared with most other publications on this opening I have made frequent use of correspondence and engine games. A lot of new resources have been discovered with the aid of powerful machines, and even though in the majority of cases it didn't change the overall assessment, it certainly does give a new impulse. I guess that perfectly fits with the title *The Modernized Sveshnikov!*

## Variations

I have decided to split the book into six parts and would like to elucidate my choices:

1) Dynamic Line 9. ♘xf6 gxf6 10. ♖d5 f5 11. ♘d3 ♘e6

When I started learning the Sveshnikov, 9. ♘xf6 was considered to be posing Black some serious challenges. After 9. ♘xf6 gxf6 10. ♖d5 I had a hard time deciding whether to recommend the Main Line with 10...f5 or Novosibirsk Variation arising from 10...♘g7 11. ♘d3 ♖e7. The latter option currently enjoys some popularity as it was played amongst others by Magnus Carlsen in 2019, but 10...f5 has proven itself still to be a very reliable continuation for Black. Hence, I didn't feel the need to change my original choice. I hope you will enjoy the complicated middlegame battle as much as I do!

2) Dynamic Line without 11. ♘d3

Apart from the Main Line with 11. ♘d3, White has several other interesting options to navigate. In this second part both possible piece sacrifices on b5 have been examined, while most of the games cover the structures with exf5. The general consensus is that Black's bishop pair very well supports the pawn centre and White isn't able to put Black under pressure. Special attention should be paid to Topalov-Carlsen where I'm recommending 16...e4!?, instead of the more common moves 16...♖a7 and 16...♖h8.

### 3) Positional Variation 9. ♘d5 ♙e7 10. ♗xf6 ♗xf6 11.c3 ♘e7

The Positional Variation with 11.c3 is quite a popular choice for White players aiming for a solid position and enjoying the long term advantage of the weakened d5-square. Black has several possible setups based on moves like ...0-0, ...♗b8, ...♙g5 in all sorts of move-orders. My recommendation is 11...♘e7, a line which has always been considered to be somewhat inferior to Black's other options, but in my opinion it's perfectly playable. The system has been played by World Champion Magnus Carlsen and other experts like Krasenkow, Reinderman and Lagarde.

### 4) Positional Variation 9. ♘d5 ♙e7 10. ♗xf6 ♗xf6 11.c4

For quite some time I considered this to be one of the most unpleasant lines to face for Black. Based on early games I had been fearing a lack of counterplay, but the selected games have changed my mind. The d4 square, the weakened dark squares and possible counterplay on both wings ensure sufficient counterplay to compensate for White's firm grip on the d5-square.

### 5) Modern Main Line 7. ♘d5

Since from a theoretical point of view White isn't really getting anywhere in both the dynamic (9. ♗xf6) and the positional Line (9. ♘d5), White players started to look for new ways to tackle the Sveshnikov. At the end of 2018, Vladimir Kramnik employed the early knight jump 7. ♘d5 and it's fair to say that since the World Championship match between Fabiano Caruana and Magnus Carlsen this has become the new Main Line. After 7...♗xd5 8.exd5 Black has to decide whether to retreat the knight to b8 or e7. Although I believe b8 to be positionally more sound, I do very much like the complex dynamic struggle which arises from the knight's transfer to the kingside and believe it offers Black better practical chances to play for a win.

### 6) Early Deviations

It's important to know what to do against the sidelines as well. These sidelines aren't as bad as their reputation, and in fact, if you come unprepared they might cause Black some problems. It makes sense to study them as seriously as the other variations and avoid any unpleasant surprises.

With this piece of work I hope I have succeeded in sharing my love for this opening with you. The mix of beautiful variations, model games, extensive analyses and explanation of key concepts will hopefully inspire you to play with this opening with great success and joy. Have fun!

Robert Ris

Amstelveen, The Netherlands  
June 2020



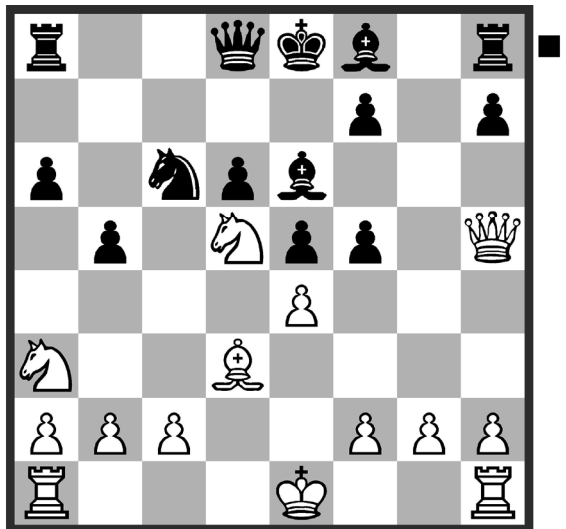
# Part I

**The Dynamic 9.♖xf6  
(with 11.♖d3)**



## 12. ♔h5

1. e4 c5 2. ♘f3 ♘c6 3. d4  
cxd4 4. ♘xd4 ♘f6 5. ♘c3  
e5 6. ♘db5 d6 7. ♙g5 a6  
8. ♘a3 b5 9. ♙xf6 gxf6  
10. ♘d5 f5 11. ♙d3 ♙e6  
12. ♔h5



♁ Kele, Karoly

(2026) which can best be met by 12... ♔a5+

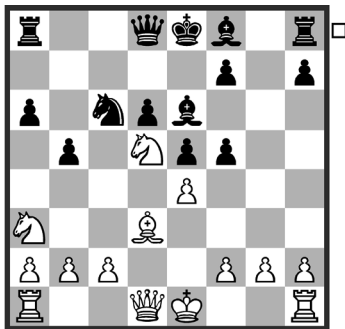
♚ Fritsche, Frank

(2311) 13. ♔f1 [or 13. ♔d2 ♕xd2+ 14. ♔xd2

♁ LSS email 2011

♁h6+ with excellent play] 13... fxe4!

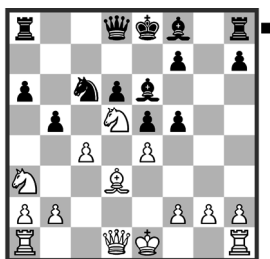
1. e4 c5 2. ♘f3 ♘c6 3. d4 cxd4 4. ♗xd4 ♗f6 5. ♗c3 e5 6. ♗db5 d6 7. ♙g5 a6 8. ♗a3 b5 9. ♙xf6 gxf6 10. ♗d5 f5 11. ♙d3 ♙e6



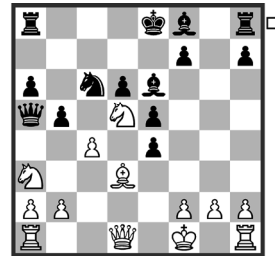
Position after: 11... ♙e6

12. ♔h5

This aggressive move was very popular at the beginning of this century, but Black's next move ensures excellent play for him. Apart from the main continuations 12. 0-0 and 12. c3 White has also tried 12. c4?!

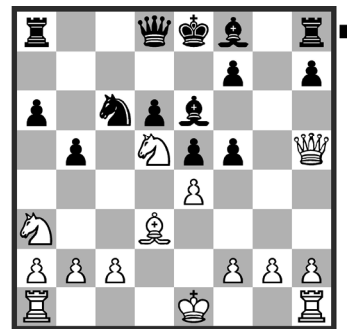


Position after: 12. c4?!



Position after: 13... fxe4!

14. ♙xe4 [Black doesn't have to fear 14. ♗f6+ ♔e7 15. ♗xe4 ♙g7 as White has some coordination problems] 14... ♖c8! with comfortable play for Black.



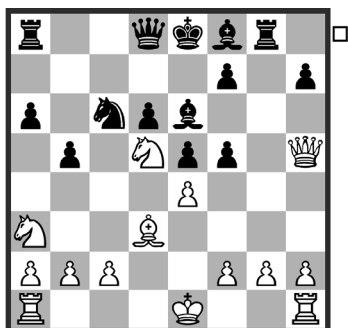
Position after: 12. ♔h5

12... ♖g8!

Compared with 12. 0-0 Black cannot take the knight as the pawn on f5 would be hanging. The major alternative 12... ♙g7?! has disappeared from elite-level play, because White has proven to be very fast generating ac-



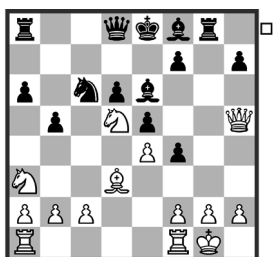
tive play on the queenside with 13. 0-0 f4 14. c4!.



Position after: 12... ♖g8!

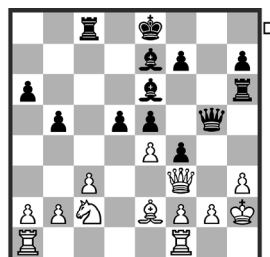
### 13. g3

A) 13. 0-0?! is asking for trouble, since after 13... f4!



Position after: 13... f4!

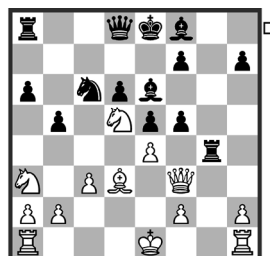
Black starts a very dangerous attack. An illustrative example: 14. h3 [14. ♖xh7? ♖g6! is a typical idea to trap the queen and after 15. ♖h5 ♖h6 16. ♖d1 ♖h4 17. h3 ♗xh3 mate will follow soon] 14... ♖g6 15. c3 ♖c8 (before bringing the queen into play Black covers the fork on c7) 16. ♗e2 ♖h6 17. ♖f3 ♖g5 18. ♔h2 ♗e7 19. ♗xe7 ♗xe7 20. ♗c2 d5!



Position after: 20... d5!

Black had an overwhelming advantage in Onyekwere – Shabalov, Las Vegas 2006. 21. exd5 is met by 21... e4! 22. ♖xe4 ♗xd5 and White needs to give up his queen to avoid mate.

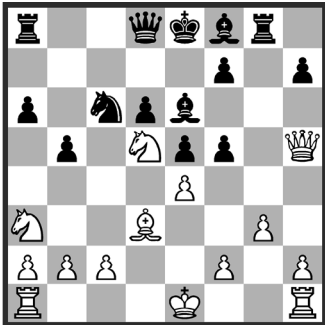
B) 13. c3 ♖xg2! 14. ♖f3 ♖g4



Position after: 14... ♖g4

15. exf5 [15. h3 ♖h4] 15... ♗xd5 16. ♖xd5 ♗e7 17. ♖b7 ♖c8 18. ♖xc8+ [avoiding the exchange of queens with 18. ♖b6?? ♗d5 19. ♖a5 ♗f4 led to a catastrophe for White in Bluvshstein – Gongora Reyes, Havana 2004] 18... ♗xc8 and Black is better, because of White's fragmented pawn structure. 19. ♗c2 ♗b6 20. ♗e3 [20. ♗b4 might be better, though after 20... ♔e7! Black is also in excellent shape] 20... ♖h4 21. ♗g2 ♖h3 22. ♗e2 d5 and

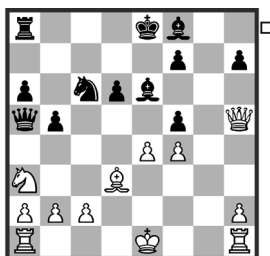
Black started to press White seriously in Talla – Czebe, Slovakia 2001.



Position after: 13. g3

13... ♖g5

A) This is considered to be the main continuation. Another fascinating line starts with 13... ♖g4!? 14. f4 [The only challenging continuation, taking away the pressure on the pawn on e4. Both the alternatives 14. ♘e3 fxe4! 15. ♖xg4 exd3 and 14. ♖xh7 ♘d4! offer Black fantastic dynamic play.] 14... exf4 15. ♘xf4 ♖xf4 [it's also possible to start with 15... ♖a5+] 16. gxf4 ♖a5+!



Position after: 16... ♖a5+!

A1) 17. ♔d1 fxe4 [easier than 17... ♖b4, which has also been played here] 18. ♙xe4 d5 19. ♙f5 ♖b4 20.

♙xe6 ♖d4+ 21. ♔c1 ♖e3+ White does best to repeat moves. He could play on with 22. ♖b1? but after 22... ♖xe6 his pieces are horribly misplaced.

A2) 17. c3 b4 18. ♘b1 ♙g7?! [preventing White from castling with 18... ♖c5!? is objectively better] 19. 0-0 0-0



Position after: 19... 0-0-0

20. ♖xh7? [Too greedy. After a consolidating move like 20. ♖e2! Black's compensation seems insufficient.] 20... ♙f6 21. ♖h6?

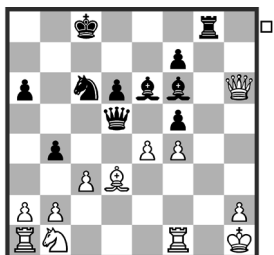


Position after: 21. ♖h6?

A2.1) Tempted by an amazing resource I refrained from playing the more convincing 21... ♖c5+! 22. ♔h1 [White also collapses after 22. ♖f2 ♖g8+ 23. ♔f1 ♖e3] 22...

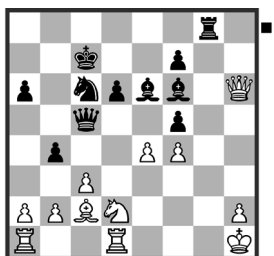
♖e3 23. ♙xa6+ [23. ♖xf6 ♖xd3 and Black wins] 23... ♔c7 24. ♘d2 [24. ♖xf6 ♖xe4+ 25. ♔g1 ♖g8+ leads to mate] 24... bxc3 25. bxc3 ♙xc3 26. ♖ab1 ♖b8 Since White's play has been neutralized, his weakened kingside eventually turns out to be decisive.

**A2.2)** 21... ♖g8+? 22. ♔h1 ♖d5!!



Position after: 22... ♖d5!!

One of those moves you will remember all your life; it also explains how my love for this opening has been shaped. The queen can't be taken, because of mate. 23. ♖d1 ♔c7! 24. ♙c2? [more stubborn is 24. ♖h5 though after 24... fxe4 25. ♖xd5 ♙xd5 26. ♙f1 ♘e7 Black remains clearly on top] 24... ♖c5 25. ♘d2



Position after: 25. ♘d2

And now in Hoeksema – Ris, Dieren 2003 I should have continued with 25... bxc3! [25... ♖f2? was played in the game, but after 26. ♖h3! White is still fighting] 26. ♖xf6 [after 26. bxc3 ♙xc3 White's position falls apart] 26... ♖f2! 27. ♖g1 ♖xg1+ 28. ♖xg1 cxd2 with a decisive advantage for Black.

**B)** Another reliable option is 13... ♘d4 which leads to a dynamically balanced endgame after a pretty much forced sequence of moves: 14. c3 fxe4 15. ♙xe4 ♙g4 16. ♖xh7 ♖g7 17. ♖h6 ♘f3+ 18. ♔e2 ♘g5+ 19. f3 ♘xe4 20. fxg4 ♖c8 21. ♖e3 ♖xg4+ 22. ♖f3 ♖xf3+ 23. ♔xf3 f5 24. ♘c2 ♔f7 25. ♘ce3 ♘f6 This was seen in the game Acs – Van Wely, Plovdiv 2003, among others.

**14. ♖d1**

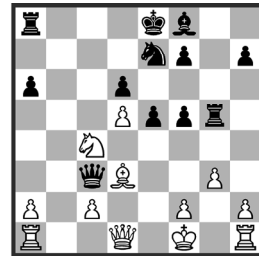
14. ♖xh7? is just bad, in view of 14... ♘d4



Position after: 14... ♘d4

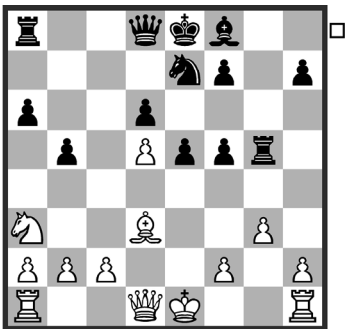
15. 0-0-0 [15. c3 is met by 15... ♘f3+! 16. ♔e2 ♙xd5 17. exd5 e4 which gives Black a decisive advantage, e.g. 18.

♖ac1 ♜g6 19. ♕h3 ♚g5 20. ♞b1  
 ♜h6 21. ♚g2 ♚g4 0-1 Khabarov –  
 Felgaer, Rethymno 2011] 15... ♜g6!  
 16. ♕h4 ♙h6+ 17. ♚b1 ♚xh4 18.  
 gxh4 ♙xd5 19. exd5 ♜g2 And Black  
 converted his huge advantage in Ter  
 Sahakyan – Aravindh, Chennai 2013.



Position after: 19. ♕f1

14... ♙xd5 15. exd5 ♞e7



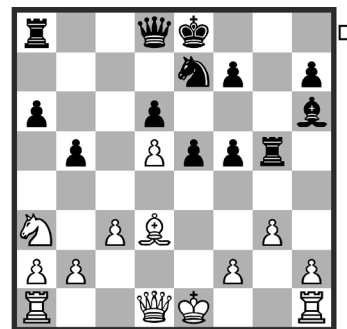
Position after: 15... ♞e7

## 16. c3

The same structure arises from 12. 0-0,  
 which we are going to examine in the  
 next games. Black should be doing all  
 right here as White has spent two  
 tempi with his queen, though in the  
 majority of high-profile games White  
 managed to win. Once I tried this line  
 myself with Black, but also found it  
 practically difficult to decide what to  
 do with the strange-looking rook on g5.  
 However, the position is very concrete  
 and recent correspondence games  
 have shown how Black should proceed  
 in a dynamic style. Another line goes  
 16. ♞xb5 ♚b6 17. ♞a3 ♚xb2 18.  
 ♞c4 ♚c3+ 19. ♚f1

19... e4! [More precise than 19...  
 ♜d8?!, which was actually the move  
 order chosen by Black in the game Pol-  
 gar-Leko. However, after 20. ♜b1! e4  
 White should have played 21. f4!, pre-  
 venting ...f5-f4, with the point that after  
 21... exd3 22. cxd3! White threaten-  
 s to take the rook or give check on  
 a4.] 20. ♙e2 [20. ♞xd6+ ♚d7 21.  
 ♞xf7 ♜g7 22. ♚b1 ♞xd5 23. ♚b7+  
 ♞c7 24. ♜d1 ♚e6! and Black is faring  
 well in these complications] 20... ♜d8  
 21. ♜b1 [21. f4? simply fails to 21...  
 exf3!] 21... f4 22. ♜b3 ♚f6 and Black  
 was clearly better in Polgar – Leko, Bu-  
 dapest 2003.

16... ♙h6



Position after: 16... ♙h6

An active square for the bishop, as on the a1-h8 diagonal there isn't much to do and you don't want to block the g-file for the rook. I quite like to use this particular move order, though it seems that after 16... ♖b6 17. ♘c2 ♙h6 [opening the centre with 17... e4 18. ♙e2 f4?! gives White a stable edge after 19. ♖d2 ♗xd5 20. ♖xf4 ♗e5 21. 0-0 in Grischuk – Krasenkow, Wijk aan Zee 2003] 18. ♙e2

**A)** 18... ♙f8 play just transposes.

**B)** However, bad is 18... f4? which I played once, but underestimated White's response 19. ♖d3! when he gains control over the light squares. 19... ♗g7?! [19... f5 is met by 20. gxf4!] 20. a4! bxa4 21. ♗xa4 ♖xb2 22. 0-0 ♗c8 23. c4 ♖b6 24. ♗fa1 And Black got positionally outplayed on the queenside in Mikkelsen – Ris, Budva 2003.

### 17. ♙e2

**A)** 17. ♘c2 e4 [17... ♙f8 18. ♙e2 ♖b6 again transposes to the main line]

**A1)** 18. ♙e2? runs into 18... f4! 19. gxf4 [19. ♘b4 f3! gave Black a devastating initiative in Van der Weide – Sprenger, Germany 2004] 19... ♗xd5 20. ♖c1 ♘g6 which is simply bad for White.

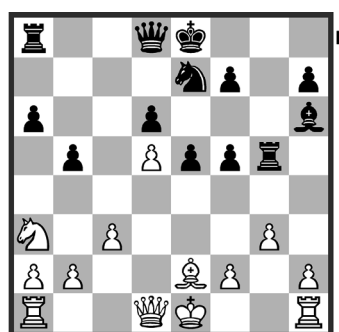
**A2)** 18. ♙f1 f4 19. gxf4 ♗xd5 20. ♖g4



Position after: 20. ♖g4

20... ♖d7 [Black quickly lost control over the position after: 20... ♗f5? 21. ♖h4 ♙xf4? 22. ♙h3 1-0 Bruzon Batista – Felgaer, Buenos Aires 2003] 21. ♖g3 ♖e6 22. ♘e3 ♗c5 23. ♗g1 f5 24. ♖h4 ♙d7 With a complex battle going on Le Page – Moreno Carretero, ICCF 2015.

**B)** Taking into account the dangers White is facing in the next phase, one might consider 17. 0-0 now or even on the next move, but it's clear that Black is in good shape anyway.



Position after: 17. ♙e2

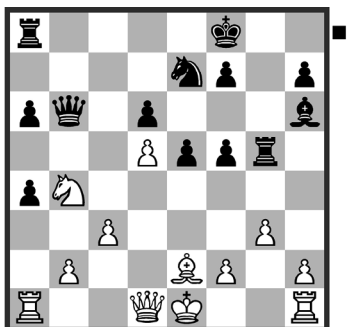
### 17... ♙f8

**A)** I think that Black shouldn't try to challenge the pawn on d5 yet, as his

pieces are not so well coordinated. For instance, 17... ♖c8?! 18. ♘c2 ♖c5 19. a4 ♗xd5 20. ♖b1! and both Black's rooks seem to be misplaced as White opens the queenside.

**B)** A similar plan could be executed by 17... ♖b6 18. ♘c2 ♖b7?! [18... ♙f8! leads to the game] but then again comes the strong 19. a4! ♘xd5 20. axb5 ♘xc3 21. ♙f3 ♘e4 22. 0-0 and White is better.

**18. ♘c2 ♖b6 19. a4 bxa4 20. ♘b4**



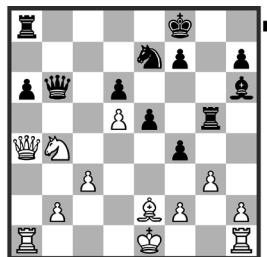
Position after: 20. ♘b4

In case of 20. ♖xa4 ♖xb2 21. 0-0 ♖xc3 after White regains the pawn on a6 Black will just be a healthy pawn up.

**20... e4!**

More accurate than 20... f4 21. ♖xa4 which after 21...e4 comes down to the same thing. Apart from taking on a4, White has several additional options to exploit this move order.

*(see analysis diagram next column)*



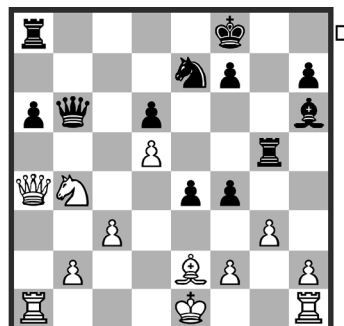
Position after: 21. ♖xa4

Anyway, Leko's next move is an instructive mistake: 21... f3? 22. ♙d3! [22. ♙xf3? ♖f5 was, of course, Leko's idea] 22... ♖g4 23. 0-0 f5 24. ♖d7 ♖xb4?! [24... ♖d8 25. ♖xa6 ♖xf2+ 26. ♙xf2 ♖xd7 27. ♙b5 is much better for White] 25. cxb4 e4 26. ♙b5 and Black didn't have sufficient compensation for the exchange in Acs – Leko, Budapest 2003.

**21. ♖xa4**

White should try to distract Black from his plans by challenging him on the queenside. Also after 21. ♖xa4 f4! Black develops a powerful initiative.

**21... f4!**



Position after: 21... f4!