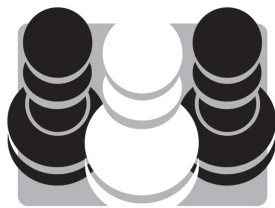


Grandmaster Repertoire

**1.e4 vs
The Sicilian II**

By

Parimarjan Negi



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Series Introduction

Several years ago, Nigel Short once gifted me an opening book with the wry comment, “I expect this doubles your chess library.” While that was a slight exaggeration, it is true that I never depended much on opening books for my theoretical knowledge. This scepticism for written material is often rooted in the fact that the modern openings are so fluid, constantly changing, with variations evolving every week. How can a static book keep pace with ideas that are developed, replaced, and forgotten on a weekly basis?

In this series, I aim to provide a foundation and structure around which you can develop a lifelong repertoire with 1.e4. I hope a good number of my recommendations will withstand the relentless assaults of time, but I am realistic enough to know that many of the bright novelties and variations will eventually wither away. However, even if some of the finer details will eventually have to be revised in the future, I believe that the core selection of recommended lines will remain valid for a long time to come.

There is a process by which I have developed my own repertoire, as laid out in this series. In several critical positions I have discussed the pros and cons of different options, and explained why I eventually chose one over the other. Apart from remembering the moves themselves, I hope you will also absorb something of this process, so that you will be able to find your own ideas to react to whatever new developments may come along.

The selection of recommended systems against Black’s various defences has followed a logical pattern, taking into account the structure of the whole repertoire. Throughout the process, I have aimed for active, fluid positions, sometimes sacrificing material but always remaining fundamentally sound. There are a number of long, forcing lines, which are necessary to justify any suggestion these days, but I have endeavoured to show that even seemingly abstract moves are still based on strategic, human principles. To make the best possible use of this book, I encourage you to pay attention to all such explanations, with the aim of building a framework of interconnected ideas in your own mind.

Parimarjan Negi
New Delhi, July 2014

Preface

It's a little hard to grasp that this is already my third book. In many ways the books have just been a logical continuation of each other; however, the books have been very different from one another, mostly because of the different nature of variations that I have dealt with. So while in the first Sicilian book, I dug deep into well-explored Najdorf variations, this one is more reminiscent of the first book because there are a lot more variations packed together.

In the Dragons, we go for the venerable Yugoslav Attack. It was hard to decide whether to go for the Maroczy Bind or the Yugoslav-style ♘c4 variations against the Accelerated Dragon, but in the end I felt it is more in the spirit of the book to go for ♘c4 variations, even though Black arguably gets more interesting additional options than in the main Dragon.

The choice against the Classical Sicilian was obvious – the Rauzer with ♘g5 is the only line to cause any concerns for Black. Even though the Classical is no longer so popular at the highest levels, it's an intricate web of variations and intersecting move orders, and I have tried my best to bring out the unifying ideas that can help reduce the variations to a few main concepts.

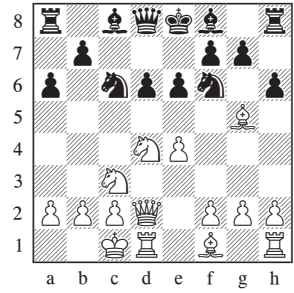
It was much harder to settle on a line against the Sveshnikov. Despite its popularity waning slightly, it is a formidable opening that has withstood many tests. The line I eventually chose is not the most popular, but it's certainly more exciting than the alternatives. Also, I feel it's been under-rated because of computer estimations often hovering around 0.00, even when there are a lot of practical complexities on the board. I was not always able to go deep enough to reach an objective truth, but instead I try to lead you to dynamic and interesting positions which have a lot of scope.

On a broader note, I believe my attitude while analysing the variations has evolved along with the books. Initially, I approached the analysis from the perspective of what I would like as a player – which was to find many different interesting ideas in the challenging lines, but I didn't always try to unify them into a consistent whole. Now, I feel I am able to approach the process more from the perspective of readers – with a primary focus on making the readers comfortable with the ideas underlying the lines, before entering the concrete and dynamic theoretical debates.

Parimarjan Negi
Stanford, October 2015

Chapter 15

Rauzer



7...a6 8.0-0-0 h6

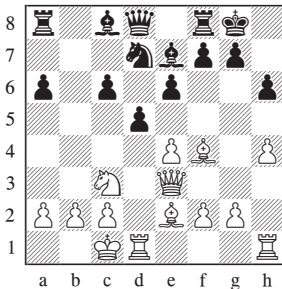
Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♘f6 5.♗c3 ♗c6 6.♕g5 e6
7.♚d2 a6 8.0-0-0 h6 9.♗xc6 bxc6 10.♕f4 d5

11.♚e3

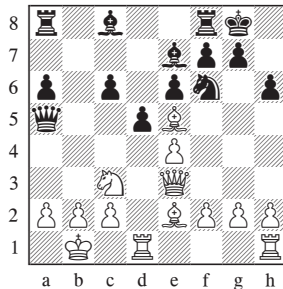
A) 11...♕e7	226
B) 11...♚a5	229
C) 11...♕b4!?	231

A) after 13...♗d7



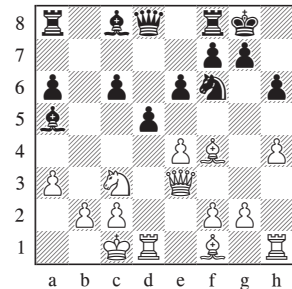
14.♕b1!?:N

B) after 14...0-0



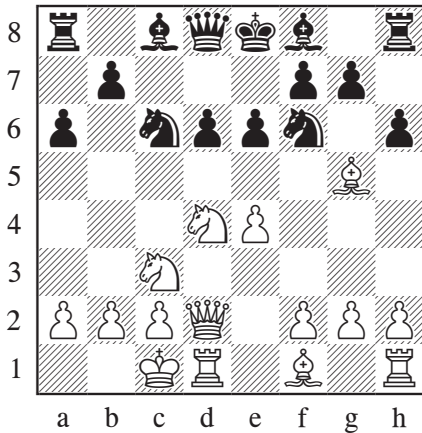
15.exd5!?:N

C) after 13...0-0



14.f3!?:N

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♘f6
5.♗c3 ♗c6 6.♙g5 e6 7.♚d2 a6 8.0-0-0 h6



This used to be an extremely popular set-up. It has been used in thousands of games, but at some point Black began to face serious problems against ♗xc6 and ♙f4. For a while it dropped out of popularity, but it has undergone a resurgence of late, as White has failed to show an advantage in some key games.

9.♗xc6 bxc6 10.♙f4 d5 11.♚e3

Strengthening Black's centre and opening the b-file should not be taken lightly, but I am confident that White can more than make up for these factors with his piece activity and attacking potential.

Black's three main continuations are A) 11...♙e7, B) 11...♚a5 and C) 11...♙b4.

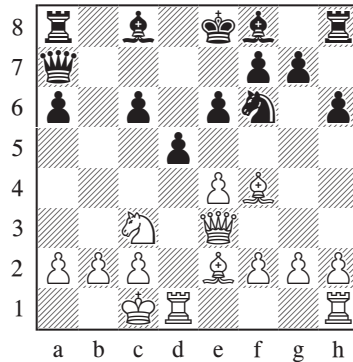
11...♚e7?!

This has been played three times by Chernyshov, and a few other strong players have dabbled with it. The surprising idea is to put the queen on a7, when the white queen might have trouble finding a good square – but actually it's not all that hard to solve this problem.

12.♙e2

Covering the h5-square.

12...♚a7



13.♚g3! d4N

This is the only real chance to justify Black's play.

13...♙d7 14.♙e5 h5 15.♖he1± Ristic – Ivanovic, Vrnjacka Banja 1999.

14.e5! ♗d5 15.♗e4 ♖b8 16.♗b1

White has a fine position, for instance:

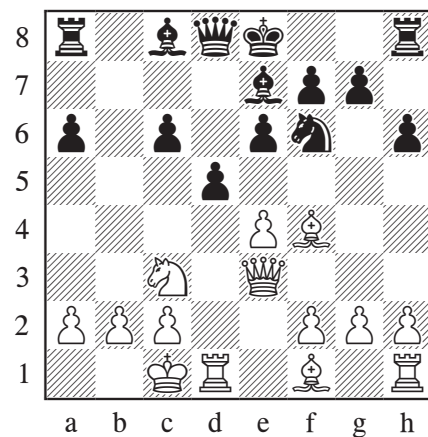
16...♗xf4

Otherwise the bishop can drop neatly back to c1.

17.♚xf4 ♙e7 18.h4±

Intending to activate the rook via h3.

A) 11...♙e7



This is a natural move, but it has almost completely dropped out of popularity these days. Black does not put White under any

pressure, and if he castles he only invites a rapid kingside attack with g2-g4 and so on. Still, a certain degree of accuracy is required to make the most of White's chances.

12. ♖e2 0–0

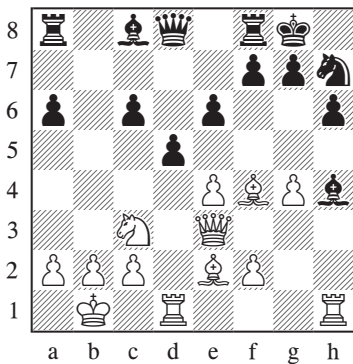
12...♗d7 13.h4 ♖b6? (Black should really settle for 13...0–0 with a transposition to the main line) 14.♖g3± was unpleasant for Black in Khalifman – Xu Jun, Shanghai 2001.

13.h4 ♗d7

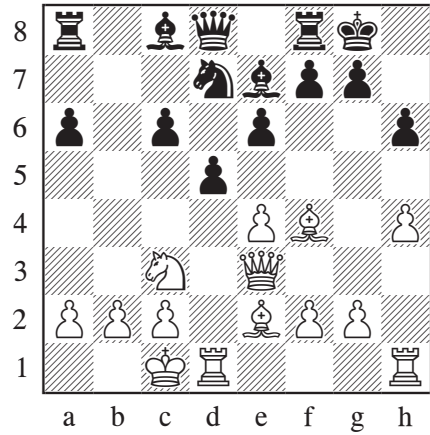
By threatening ...e5, Black manages to prevent an instant g4-g5. However, the availability of attacking ideas such as ♗xh6 makes the position rather scary to play for Black.

13...♖e8 14.g4 ♗d7 15.♖g3 e5 16.♗d2 d4 (16...♗c5 17.g5→) 17.♗a4± White was ready for g4-g5 in Scheider – Malcher, Germany 2014.

13...♗h7 14.g4! ♗xh4 15.♖b1 is extremely risky for Black. One game continued:



15...♗g5 16.♗xg5 ♖xg5 17.f4 ♖e7 18.g5 White was already winning in Edouard – Raetsky, Al Ain 2012.



14.♖b1!±N

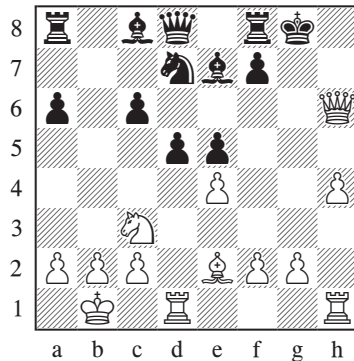
It is too early for 14.g4?, as 14...e5 wins material.

I also considered 14.exd5 exd5 15.♗xh6N gxh6 16.♖xh6, but after 16...♗e5! Black should be able to defend successfully.

The most important thing to realize here is that ...e5 is not actually a threat because of ♗xh6, as shown in the next note. Therefore we can make a useful improving move while waiting to see what Black intends to do.

14...♖b6

14...e5 15.♗xh6! gxh6 16.♖xh6 is dangerous:



16...♙f6 Black defends against an immediate mate, but after 17.exd5 ♘g7 18.♖e3 White has three pawns for a piece, along with the easy plan of advancing his pawns on the kingside.

14...♙b4 15.♘a4 e5 16.♙g5! is another nice detail. 16...♘f6 17.♙xf6 ♖xf6 18.♘b6±

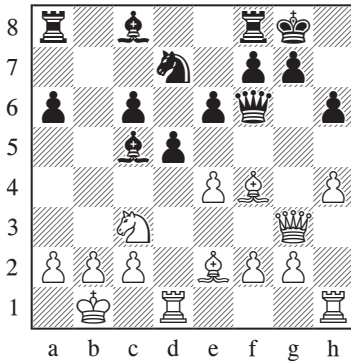
14...♙c5

This is an obvious move to consider, but rather a provocative one.

15.♖g3 ♖f6

15...♗h8 16.♘a4 ♙e7 (16...♙a7 17.♖c3!±)

17.♙c7 ♖e8 18.♖h2± looks dreadfully passive for Black.



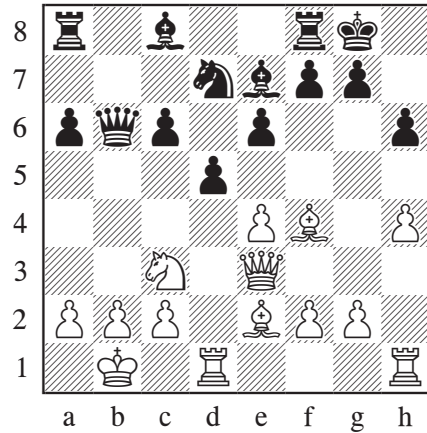
16.e5!

16.f3!? followed by ♙g5 is another possibility, but the text move reduces Black's options.

16...♖g6 17.♖h3!

17.♙g5 f6 18.exf6 ♘xf6 19.♙d3 ♖f7 20.♙xh6 ♘h5 leads to messy complications. The text move is much easier, as Black's queen is left in a bad place. Black will probably have to play ...f5, allowing us to prepare g2-g4 at our convenience.

Exchanging queens seems to be a reasonable idea for Black, but White can continue pressing on the kingside regardless.



15.g4!?

Your choice really depends on how comfortable you are with the exchange sacrifice that this move necessitates.

15.♖xb6 ♘xb6 16.g4

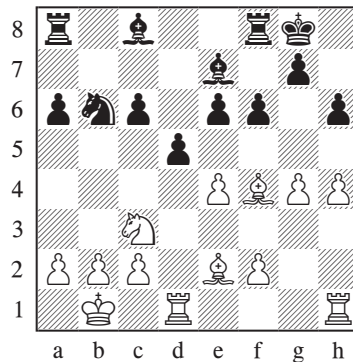
This resembles the next note, but Black has a slightly better version with his knight on b6. At the same time, White still seems to have a smooth game.

16...f6!

Black needs to prevent g4-g5. Now things slow down a bit.

16...♙b4 can be ignored: 17.g5! ♙xc3

18.bxc3 ♘a4 19.♙d3 ♖e8 20.e5±



17.♙e3 ♖b8 18.b3

Intending f2-f4, and the game goes on. It's hard to say if White is really better, but he certainly has a lot of possibilities on the

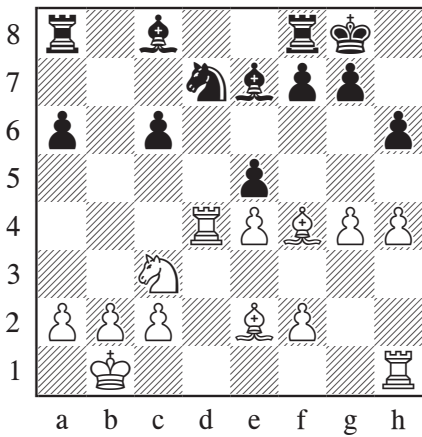
kingside. Black cannot do anything with his fancy pawn centre for now, and the fact that his rook has gone to b8 means he does not have the typical plan of ...a5 and ...♙a6 available.

15...d4

This is the critical test of White's last move, but I am happy with how things turn out.

15...♙xe3 16.♙xe3 gives White an improved version of the previous note. He has a serious threat of g4-g5 and transferring the d1-rook to the kingside, while Black does not have much counterplay in sight. 16...f6 is necessary once again, but after 17.f4 ♙c5 18.♞h3 ♙xe3 19.♞xe3± White keeps a nice edge.

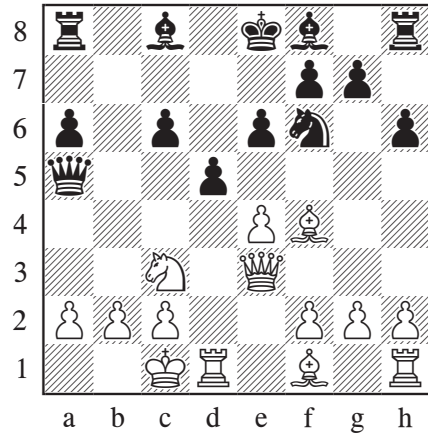
16.♙xd4 ♙xd4 17.♞xd4 e5



18.♞xd7 ♙xd7 19.♙xe5 ♞fe8 20.f3

Having two pawns for the exchange is not always a big deal in itself, but one must also take into account Black's weak pawn structure. White's knight also has good prospects, with ♖a4 and perhaps ♖b2-c4 being attractive possibilities for later in the game. Victory will not come easily, but White can press with little risk.

B) 11...♙a5

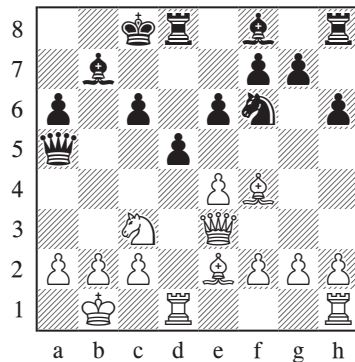


This is a bit more active, but White is well placed to deal with it.

12.♙e2 ♙b4

This seems like the logical follow-up.

12...♙b7 is an unusual and rather dubious idea. 13.♖b1 0–0–0 I once lost to Chernyshov from this position, but it was mostly just because I was a kid.



14.♙g3! looks like a good move, for instance: 14...♙c5 (14...♖d7 15.♙f4±) 15.♙f4 ♙d6 16.e5±

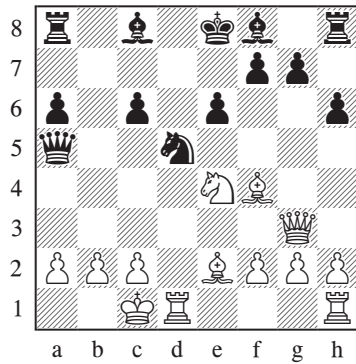
12...dxe4

This has been played quite a few times, but it carries obvious risks.

13. ♖xe4

Simplest, although 13. ♖c4!? is also tempting.
13... ♗d5 14. ♖g3!

14. ♖xd5 cxd5 15. ♗d6† is mentioned as unnecessarily speculative by Wells, but White does not have to resort to this.



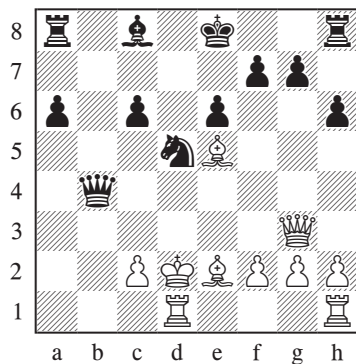
14... ♖xa2 15. ♗d6† ♖xd6 16. ♖xd6

White has excellent compensation and his king is in less danger than it may appear to be.

16... ♖a1† 17. ♗d2 ♖xb2

17... ♖a5† 18. b4±

18. ♖e5 ♖b4†

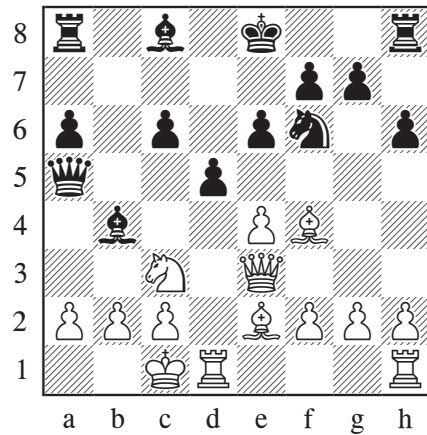


19. ♗c1!N

19.c3 has scored heavily for White, but to me it seems more natural to leave the pawn at home and keep the king safer.

19... ♖g8 20. ♖d2†

It is hard to suggest a defence against White's plan of c2-c4 and ♖hd1.



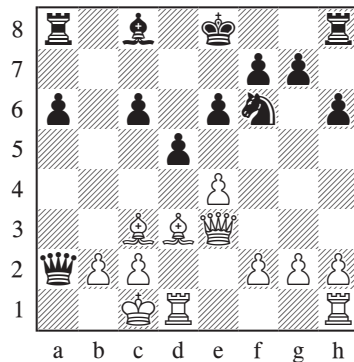
13. ♖e5!

This is a typical resource to contain Black's counterplay.

13... ♖e7

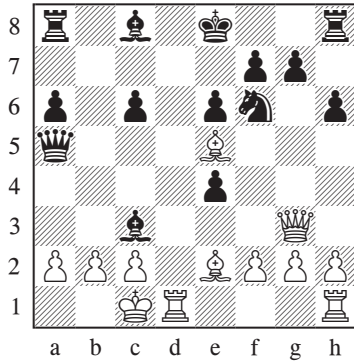
This manoeuvre looks odd to me but it has done alright in practice, so it is worth checking it a bit more deeply.

After 13... ♖xc3 14. ♖xc3 ♖xa2 15. ♖d3→ the mighty dark-squared bishop more than makes up for the missing pawn, and White has amassed a terrific score. Detailed analysis is not necessary, but I will mention one important point:

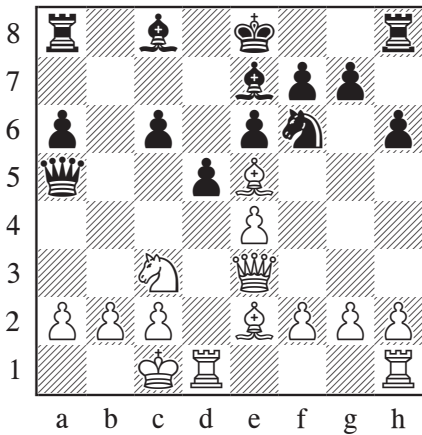


15... dxe4 should be met by 16. ♖g3! (16. ♖xe4 ♗xe4 17. ♖xe4 0-0 is not so bad for Black) 16... exd3 17. ♖xg7 ♖g8 18. ♖xf6 with a vicious attack on the dark squares.

13...dxe4 14.♖g3! ♗xc3 (14...♗b7 15.♗b1N ♗e7 16.♗xf6 gxf6 17.♘xe4 ♖e5 18.♖g7 ♖f8 19.♗f3±; 14...♗e7 also doesn't help much, and 15.♗b1!N leaves Black completely tied down)



15.♗c7! ♗xb2† 16.♗xb2 ♖b4† 17.♗a1 ♘d5 (17...♗d7 18.♗e5±) 18.♖xg7 ♖f8 19.♖d4±
Ponomariov – Bu Xiangzhi, Lausanne 2001.



14.♗b1 0–0 15.exd5!N

15.♖g3 has been played, but clarifying the central structure works well.

15...cxd5

15...exd5 16.g4! ♗c5 (16...♘d7 17.♗xg7) 17.♖g3 gives White good attacking prospects.

16.♗d4!

Preventing Black's idea of ...♗c5 and ...♘d7.

Now White is ready to start rolling with his pawns.

16...♖b8

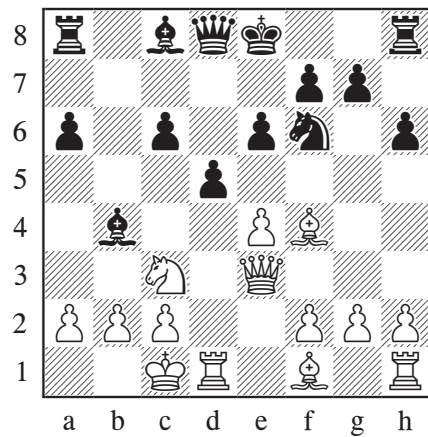
16...♘d7? allows 17.♘d5!.

16...♖c7 17.f4± does not really help Black.

17.h4↑

White is ready to meet ...♗a3 with b2-b3, but it is not so easy for Black to deal with the kingside threats.

C) 11...♗b4!?



This is the most critical move, which has done well for Black in some recent games.

12.a3

12.♗e2 0–0 13.e5 has been played in a lot of games but I was not entirely happy after 13...♘h7!, when ...♖a5 is an annoying threat.

12...♗a5

12...♗xc3 13.♖xc3 ♘xe4 14.♖xg7 ♖f6 15.♖xf6 ♘xf6 16.♗e5 ♗e7 17.g4 favours White, as Wells points out. If Black is thinking of trading his dark-squared bishop for a knight in these lines, then he generally needs to get something big in return.

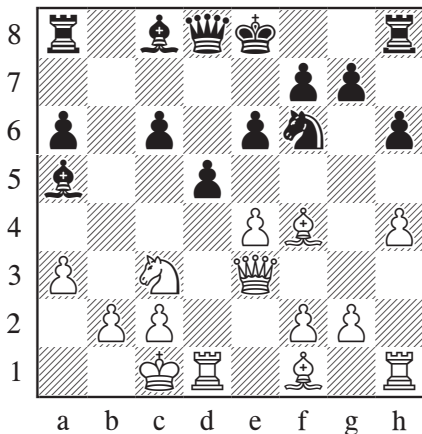
13.h4

13.♔e2 0–0 14.e5 ♘d7 15.♖g3 is a popular continuation which was recommended by Wells, but after 15...♙h8!? (improving over 15...♙c7) 16.♗h3 ♙g8 White has not been able to prove anything.

13.exd5 cxd5 14.♔e2 0–0 15.♖g3 (15.g4 ♜e8 16.g5 ♙xc3 is good for Black) 15...♙xc3 16.♗xc3 ♙d7! has also proven fully reliable for Black in several games.

13.f3!?N is similar to the main line and may transpose after a subsequent h2-h4, but it seems more natural to postpone this idea for another move.

13.g4!? is a rare but interesting move. I spent some time analysing 13...♘xg4 (13...♗b6 14.♗g3↑) 14.♗g3 ♘f6 15.♔e2!N, eventually concluding that White is doing well. However, Black has a better defence in 13...0–0!N, when I could not find any advantage, although the position is certainly interesting to analyse.

**13...0–0 14.f3!?N**

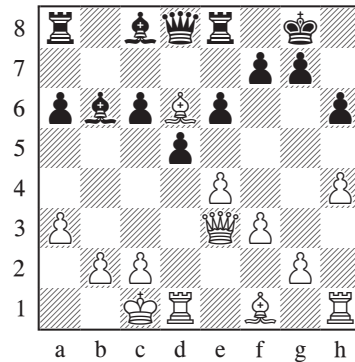
This is my new idea. White safeguards his central pawn and prepares to launch an attack.

14.♔e2?! allows 14...♙xc3 when Black grabs a pawn under pretty safe conditions.

14.e5 ♘d7 has been played a few times, but White has not achieved any advantage.

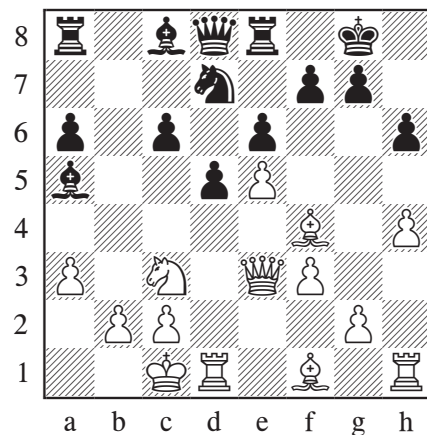
14...♜e8

14...♘d7 can be met by: 15.♙d6!? ♜e8 16.♘a4 ♘b6 (16...♙b7 17.g4 ♙c7 18.♙xc7 ♗xc7 19.g5 h5 20.g6!↑) 17.♘xb6 ♙xb6

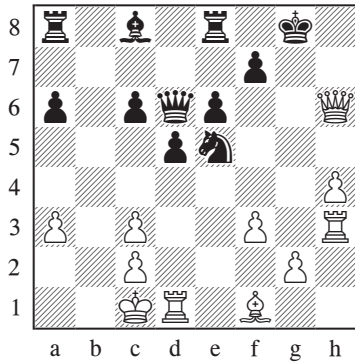


18.♗f4!? ♙e3† (18...♗f6 19.♗xf6 gxf6 20.b3±) 19.♗xc3 ♗xd6 20.f4!↑ Intending g2-g4 with a kingside initiative. (20.g4 is also playable although 20...e5 seems okay for Black.)

The computer insists that the text move is best, but it meets with a spectacular refutation.

15.e5 ♘d7**16.♙xh6! ♗c7**

16...gxf6 17.♖xh6 ♘xc3 18.bxc3 ♗xe5
19.♞h3 ♜d6 (19...♞a7 20.♙d3 f5 21.♞g3†+–)

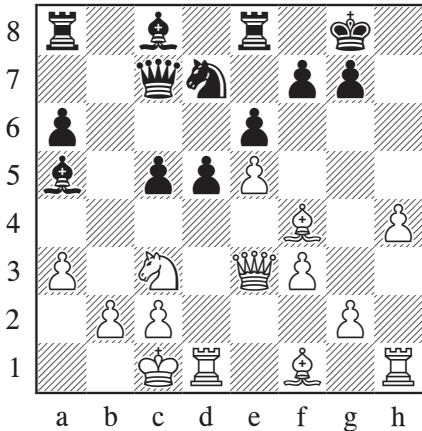


20.♙d4! ♗g6 21.h5 ♜xa3† 22.♙d2 ♜f8
23.hxg6 ♜xh6† 24.♞xh6 fxf6 25.♙d3 Despite the queen exchange, Black will have to remain on the defensive.

17.♙f4

17.♙xg7 ♗xg7 18.♜g5† ♗f8 19.♞h6† ♗e7
20.♜g5† is just a draw.

17...c5



18.h5! d4 19.♜e1 dxc3 20.b3!

It is hard for Black to withstand the slow attack.

20...f6

20...♙b7 21.♙d6! maintains strong pressure.

21.h6 g5

21...♗xe5 also fails to solve Black's problems:
22.hxg7 ♜xg7 23.♙xe5 fxe5 24.♞h4 ♙d8
25.♞g4 ♙g5† 26.♗b1 ♗f7 27.g3!±

22.♞h5!

22.♙xg5 fxf6 23.♜e4 ♜xe5 24.♜g6† ♗f8∞
leaves us without a clear way through.

22...♗f8

22...gxf4 23.♞h4! ♗xe5? 24.♜xf6 wins.

**23.♙xg5 ♜f7 24.♞h4 fxf6 25.♞xg5† ♗h8
26.♜g4±**

Black has avoided a forced loss, but White still has a huge attack.

Conclusion

The system with 7...a6 and 8...h6 is quite an ambitious one, as the critical continuation of 9.♗xc6 bxc6 10.♙f4 d5 sees Black build a proud pawn centre. On the other hand, after 11.♜e3, White's fluid piece play gives Black plenty to think about – especially keeping in mind that the ...h6 move will make short castling a risky endeavour for him.

11...♙e7 is an unpretentious continuation. Black's position is solid enough to withstand a direct assault, but my new idea of 14.♗b1!±N makes it quite hard for him to find a good plan.

11...♜a5 followed by ...♙b4 is more active, but White does well by posting his bishop on e5. Exchanging on c3 is almost always too risky, for Black, as the a2-pawn is not worth the surrender of his dark squares.

Finally, 11...♙b4!? is a tricky option, but I found another interesting new idea in 14.f3!±N. This keeps the centre under control, and prepares to shine the spotlight on Black's kingside which was weakened by ...h6.