

Fabiano Caruana

Caruana's Ruy Lopez

A White Repertoire for Club Players

New In Chess 2021

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Preface

My aim with this book is to present a basic repertoire for White in the Ruy Lopez, which covers all of Black's major lines, and to give white players lines which have coherence. As the reader will see, very often we are aiming for similar structures and similar types of positions.

In some cases I offer the reader more than one option. Chess is a rich game and there is no need to limit ourselves to just one opening line which we play for life.

Not everything is covered in the same amount of detail and scrutiny; my main recommendations are naturally given more attention. I wanted to leave the reader with a good sense of the theoretical direction, a good sense of where top players and strong grandmasters are focusing their attention and what recent high-level games have shown. I also wanted to give the reader a repertoire in which they can feel confident.

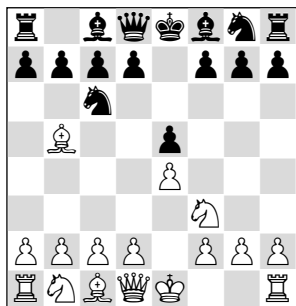
Fabiano Caruana

St Louis, MO, USA, June 2021

Introduction

The Ruy Lopez, or Spanish Game, has long been one of the most popular openings at all levels of chess, from the humble club players all the way up to the World Champions. It offers the first player the best opportunity of gaining an advantage after 1.e4 e5.

The further moves 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 bring us to the starting position of the Ruy Lopez opening.



In this book, Fabiano Caruana, the world's number two player and former World Championship finalist, offers a full repertoire for White in the Ruy Lopez opening. Caruana's Ruy Lopez is a transcription, done by Sean Marsh, of the three-volume ChessBase video the American top grandmaster published in 2019 with the title *Navigating the Ruy Lopez*.

The Ruy Lopez is one of Caruana's favourite openings; the one he has played the most from both sides of the board – making him the ideal author for this book.

The theory of the Ruy Lopez is vast. Caruana has structured the material to cover the main variations in considerable depth and to show potent ways to counter all of Black's options. Additionally, he gives to the reader a general understanding of this extremely popular opening from White's point of view, while showing the extensive range of possibilities for Black.

Caruana's style is, in our opinion, remarkably lucid and instructive. This work is a remarkable feat for an elite player in that the American top grandmaster manages to 'descend to the lower echelons' and explain things in a highly accessible way, making this book suitable for players of all levels. The slightly 'chatty' way of explaining things on video turns out

to work remarkably well in book form, too, although of course some slight changes had to be made here and there.

The theory is ever-expanding, partly because the opening is so old and still extremely popular. It is important to show not just the moves but also the ideas behind them. White's methods of meeting the various defences for Black offer similar structures and similar types of positions, to help the first player absorb the repertoire more efficiently.

In some cases Caruana offers more than one option against a particular defence. Chess is a rich game and it is good for a player's development to investigate and understand more than one way of playing.

Readers will also gain an insight into where the world's top players and Ruy Lopez experts are currently focusing their attention and will learn from a whole range of recent games played at the highest level.

By standing on the shoulders of giants, a player will enjoy great confidence in the repertoire recommended by Caruana.

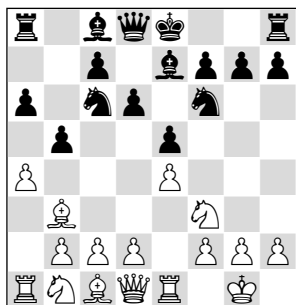
Alkmaar, July 2021

The editors

CHAPTER 2

An Anti-Classical set-up: 3...a6 4. ♖a4 ♘f6 5.0-0 ♙e7 6. ♖e1 b5 7. ♙b3 d6 8.a4

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 a6 4.♙a4 ♘f6 5.0-0 ♙e7 6.♖e1 b5 7.♙b3 d6 8.a4



After the moves 1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 a6 4.♙a4 ♘f6 5.0-0 ♙e7 6.♖e1 b5 7.♙b3 Black has a very fundamental choice. Should he invite the Marshall Attack with 7...0-0 or does he allow the Classical Ruy Lopez with 7...d6 8.c3 0-0 9.h3, with a choice of various systems including the Zaitsev, Chigorin and Breyer?

After 7...d6 White can cut across Black's plans with 8.a4!?. This is a very interesting option I want to recommend against the Classical Variation. The system is consistent with the 8.a4 Anti-Marshall system we have seen already, into which it often transposes. It has similar ideas and avoids a huge body of theory. This has the advantage of taking the game into territory which is more likely to be unfamiliar too Black, compared to, for example, his pet line in the Zaitsev.

8.a4 is a relatively rare line and one which black players are less likely to have seen or studied in depth. I think it is always an interesting concept to try to get one step ahead of your opponent by deviating early on.

Black now has a choice of variations, but the good news for us is that a lot of them will transpose:

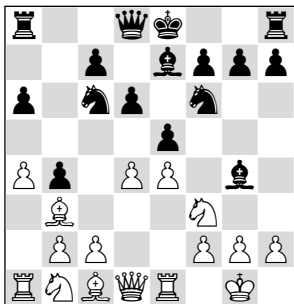
A) 8...♙b7 9.d3 ♘a5 10.♙a2 c5 11.♘bd2 will transpose after 11...0-0 and therefore has no incidental value from our point of view;

B) 8...b4 9.d4 and now if 9...0-0 10.dxe5 we have a direct transposition to the Anti-Marshall lines we have already seen. 9...exd4 10.♘xd4 ♘xd4 11.♙xd4 c5 12.♙d3 is just very good for White. We can exploit the weak c4-square with an advantage.

The only way for Black to avoid the Anti-Marshall is with 8...♙g4. First we will show why this move is no good if Black precedes it with 8...b4 9.d4.

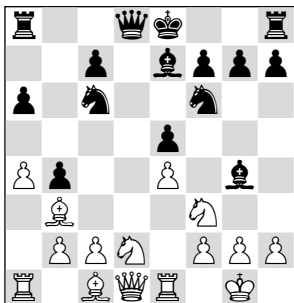
Introduction

8...b4 9.d4 ♖g4 is a bit dubious, compared to transposing to the Anti-Marshall.



The bishop is a little misplaced here:

10.dxe5 dxe5 10...♗xe5 11.♗bd2 0-0 12.h3 ♕h5 13.g4 ♕g6 (13...♗fxg4? 14.♗xe5!) 14.♗xe5 dxe5 15.♖f3 followed by ♗f1, ♗g3 and Black's bishop is trapped out of the game. Our f4-square is not really weak; our bishop defends it and none of Black's pieces can reach it any time soon. Alternatively, after **12...♗xf3+ 13.♗xf3 ♕h5 14.g4 ♕g6 15.e5 dxe5 16.♗xe5** the weakening of the kingside is not significant here. Very often we go into an ending in which g4 is not a weakness at all. **11.♗bd2**



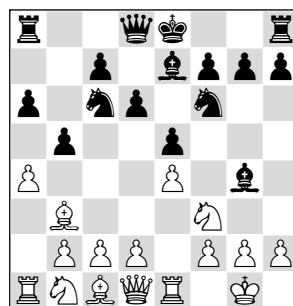
11...0-0 11...♗d4? 12.♗xf7+! ♗xf7 13.♗xe5+ when one nice detail is **13...♗g8 14.♗xg4 ♗xg4 15.c3!** (15.♖xg4 ♗xc2 is good too but risks necessary complications) **15...♗e5 (15...♗xf2 16.♗xf2** and Black is in trouble; if the knight moves we have **17.♖b3+** and **16...♕h4+ 17.g3** is fine for White. It is going to be difficult for Black to exploit the position of our king with his own king stuck on g8, blocking his rook) **16.cxd4 ♖xd4** and White remains a pawn up.

Now we have a position from the Anti-Marshall, where Black is committed to having his bishop on g4.

Basically, if Black tries to get cheeky with his move-order, it's not going to work out for him; he's going to get a bad position.

Black wants an independent move, which doesn't transpose to the Anti-Marshall lines:

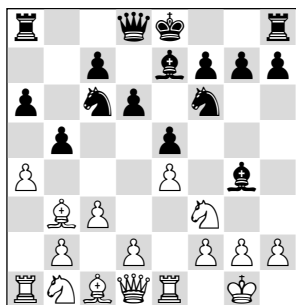
8...♕g4



The only way to do it. This is a dual-purpose move. It deals with the threat of **9.axb5** – because a8 is now defended – and it introduces the threat of **9...♗d4**. If we try to solve

the problem with 9.h3 he plays 9...♜xf3 10. ♞xf3 ♜d4, hitting our queen and bishop, which is rather awkward for us.

9.c3



Our plan is to try and prove that having the bishop on g4 is more of a downside for Black than an advantage. As a general guideline for the Ruy Lopez, Black's bishop is likely to be misplaced on g4 if White hasn't played d2-d4. White retains options of d2-d3 and ♜bd2. The bishop will either have to be exchanged for the knight on f3 after we play h2-h3, leaving us with the bishop pair, or it will have to retreat to h5, when we can kick it back to a passive square with g2-g4.

This is the basic premise for White: we have provoked the bishop to g4 and now we hope he will lose time by having to go back to h5, or he will have to give it up for the knight. This has been the battlefield in a lot of high-level games. A lot of white players navigate here to get their opponents out of the main theory and into a position where he has to be accurate to avoid ending up worse.

Black plays on the queenside

9...♜a5

If 9...b4, then 10.a5, fixing the pawn on a6. This idea should be a part of every white player's arsenal. 10...0-0 11.h3 ♜h5 (11...♜xf3 12. ♞xf3 is much better for White, who has the bishop pair and will follow up with ♜c4, targeting the a-pawn) 12.g4 ♜g6 13.d3. Again, there is nothing to worry about with the apparent weakening of the kingside, as Black has no way to exploit it. We will follow up with ♜bd2, ♜f1 and ♜g3, after which the kingside will no longer look weak.

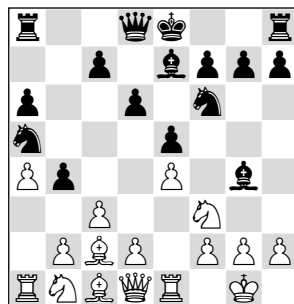
10. ♜c2

10. ♜a2 has two problems. Black can capture on a4 and if we can't recapture the pawn quickly it could become a problem for us. The other problem is that Black can play ...c7-c5 and ...c5-c4, blocking the bishop out of the game.

10...b4

If 10...0-0 11.b4! and Black ends up losing time with his knight.

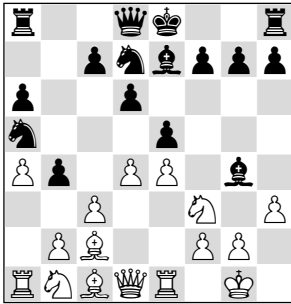
10...c5 11.axb5! (a good time to take, just as Black was getting ready for 11...b4) 11...axb5 12.h3 ♜xf3 13. ♞xf3 0-0 14.d3 with the usual advantage for White.



11.d4

Timed well, because Black has yet to play ...c7-c5.

If 11.cxb4 ♖c6 and the knight has a choice of capturing the b-pawn or moving to d4.

11...♞d7 12.h3

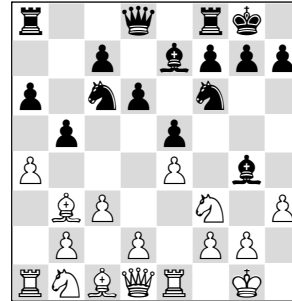
After 12...♙h5, 13.g4 ♙g6 is the typical way for White to proceed, as we have already seen in other lines.

12...♙xf3 13.♖xf3 ♙g5 sees Black trying to prevent White from retaining the bishop pair, but there is a tactical problem: 14.♖g3 ♙xc1 15.♖xg7 and Black is in trouble. For example, 15...♖f6 16.♖xf6 ♞xf6 and White is a pawn up for nothing. After the alternative line 15...♙xb2 16.♖xh8+ ♔e7 17.♖xd8+ ♜xd8 18.♞a2 Black doesn't end up with enough compensation.

We can even play for an advantage without the tactics with 14.d5.

Now we are threatening 15.cxb4 as the knight can no longer go to c6. 14...♙xc1 15.♞xc1 b3 16.♙d3 ♞c5 17.♞d2 is a double-edged position. I can't say for certain that White is better here. Black has a grip on the queenside, but on the other hand his knights are immobile.

Additionally, after 13...♙g5 White can play 14.cxb4 ♞c6 15.dxe5 ♞dxe5 16.♖c3 and suddenly everything comes together for White. b4 is defended and f2-f4 is threatened.

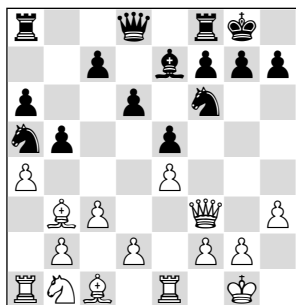
Black castles**9...0-0 10.h3****10...♙xf3**

Given the problems experienced by Black after 10...♙h5, most strong players prefer to give up the bishop right away. It makes a lot of sense, especially as after 10...♙h5 Black ends up having to give up the bishop anyway, one way or another. So why waste a tempo going to h5 and then taking on f3? The immediate capture circumvents the loss of the tempo.

However, all things being equal, this is a huge achievement for White. For instance, after 11.♖xf3 b4 12.a5 I think, in a higher sense, White is already winning in this position. It might sound funny, but the bishop is coming to c4 to target the terrible weakness on a6 and if you had this position played out 1000 times between near-perfect

players – or top chess engines – White would have a huge winning percentage.

11. ♖xf3 ♜a5



This is the most popular line.

12. ♘c2

12. ♘a2?! bxa4 and Black is ready for 13...♜b3, because White is not quite in time to play ♜bd2.

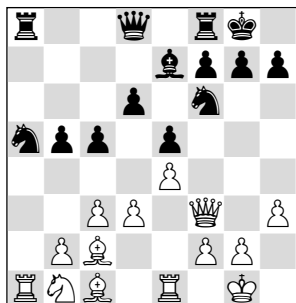
12...c5

12...b4 13.d4! and we get the centre, e.g. 13...c5 14.d5 and the knight on a5 is now really misplaced.

13.axb5

Once again, this capture is timed just as Black is getting ready to play 13...b4.

13...axb5 14.d3



The point is the white a-pawn is no longer shielding Black's knight, which will be half-hanging.

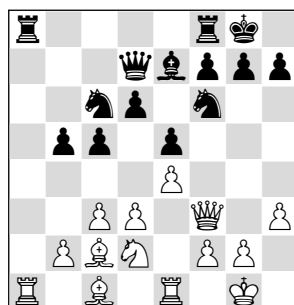
14...♞d7

The game Adams-Romanov, Germany Bundesliga 2015/16, continued with 14...b4 15.♜d2 ♜d7 16.♜f1 ♘g5 17.♜e3 ♜b6. White retained the initiative but the game was drawn in 38 moves.

The text move was played in Dominguez Perez-Adams, Baku 2015. I like this game because as Adams plays this line with both colours his play must be taken very seriously. Also, White gets to show a good idea.

Black's idea is to play 15...♜c6 but if he does it immediately then after 15.♞xa8 ♞xa8 the queen gets rather sidelined. After 14...♞d7 Black can recapture on a8 with the other rook, which is much more harmonious for him. 16.♞d1 is the most accurate for White here. His plan is ♜b1-d2-f1-g3 with good play.

15.♜d2 ♜c6



16. ♞b1!

Players who have studied the Closed Sicilian will recognize this idea. Very often, White plays a2-a4 to stop ...b7-b5, or will allow ...b7-b5 and then play a2-a3. Either way, at some point, an exchange of a-pawns

will happen and there will be the stand-off of the rooks down the a-file, and then White plays ♖b1. Here, it is the same idea. If 16. ♖xa8 ♖xa8 17. ♗f1 then 17... ♖a1 is not then end of the world for White but Black's rook is very annoying there. We don't want to allow all of this counterplay. It is better for us to have two rooks on the board – one to defend b2, just in case; the other for active play.

Now that Black can no longer invade on a1 we are ready for the usual plans with ♗d2-f1-g3-f5. It is not so easy for Black to find the best squares for his pieces to counter this plan.

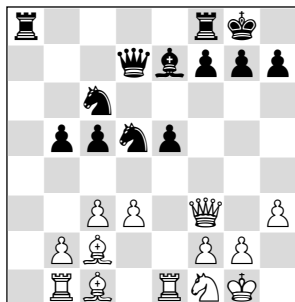
16...d5

The correct approach. He can't waste time and allow White to get everything he wants.

17.exd5 ♗xd5

17... ♖xd5 18. ♗e4 ♗xe4 19.dxe4 is good for White, as is 18. ♖b3 ♖xf3 19. ♗xf3 ♖d6 20. ♖g5 when Black should be rather worried by this endgame.

18. ♗f1



Black has got some of the centre, but once again White's bishops

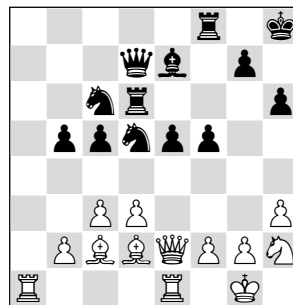
have enormous potential. Here, we can already look at ideas with d3-d4 and following up with ♗e4. The black knights, on light squares, will end up being vulnerable. This just shows how quickly the light-squared bishop, which appears passively placid on c2, can spring to life in these lines, either on b3 or along the b1-h7 diagonal.

18...♗h8 19. ♗d2

I quite like the alternative move, 19. ♗e3. Then if 19... ♗xe3 20. ♗xe3 and I think White's position is more pleasant. First of all, Black has weak pawns on c5 and e5. White can play ♖bd1 and maybe one day d3-d4. ♗c2-b3-d5 is also possible, putting pressure on the light squares, including f7.

As it went, White lost the thread of the game a little bit and ended up going back and forth with his pieces:

19...f5 20. ♖a1 ♖ad8 21. ♖a6 ♖f6
22. ♖aa1 h6 23. ♖h5 ♖df8 24. ♗h2
♖d6 25. ♖e2



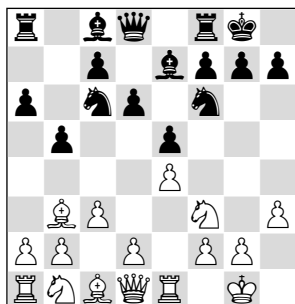
Here the game (Dominguez Perez-Adams, Baku 2015) was drawn, but the position is still fully playable for both sides.

A lot of these lines demonstrate an important balance. Black has a space advantage but White's bishops have great potential. Whenever you gain space, you do it by advancing pawns, but this always leaves weaknesses in your own ranks. Here, for example, the f-pawn can only be defended by a piece, as h6

is loose afterg7-g6. The b-pawn is currently defended by nothing and if it comes under attack then it will have to move and that will leave more weaknesses; c4, for example. It is easy to see how much potential there is for Black to go wrong.

Classical main lines – introduction

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 a6 4.♙a4 ♘f6 5.0-0 ♙e7 6.♞e1 b5 7.♙b3 d6 8.c3 0-0 9.h3



Now we come to the main lines.

The reason I am recommending 8.a4 against the Classical Variation is that it fits in with my Anti-Marshall repertoire. If you are a Ruy Lopez player with white then you should experiment with different lines.

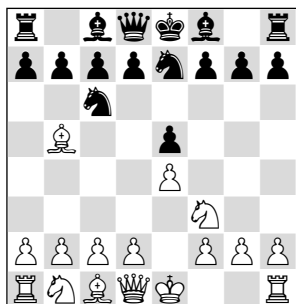
White can also try 9.d4 ♙g4, which is considered to be decent for Black, from a theoretical point of view. I think 9.h3 offers more chess and more chances to play for an advantage.

This position has been the richest battlefield for ideas throughout chess history. Top games with this variation were plentiful in the past, but these days we don't see them too often, as most players head for the Marshall Gambit with black. This is a little bit sad, but it is a sign of modern chess. It is considered that the Classical Variation gives White a little too much play and these days players try to find ways to neutralize White's advantage earlier on.

CHAPTER 13

Cozio Defence: 3...ge7

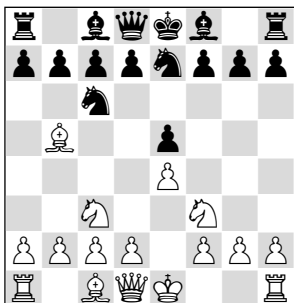
1.e4 e5 2.f3 c6 3.b5 ge7



There are two different ways of playing the Cozio Defence: one with 3...a6 included and one without. They are independent lines.

The version with 3...ge7 was always one of the more popular sidelines and, over time, players as Black became dissatisfied with the positions after 4.c3. Then I saw that Grischuk had started playing it with 3...a6 and it started to become popular. As c3 is not such a problem after 3...a6, this came to be known as the improved Cozio Defence (see the next chapter).

4. ♘c3



This is the move I'm recommending, but there are subtleties here. After 3...a6 4. ♘a4 ♘ge7 I recommend 5.c3. The reason I am not recommending 4.c3 against the original Cozio Defence is first of all because I think 4. ♘c3 is a very satisfactory option and also because there is this move 4...d5! which is a bit different here, so it's not like you can play c2-c3 against both options: 5. ♘xe5 (5.exd5 ♙xd5 and our bishop gets hit) 5...dxe4 and again we are prone to having our pieces hit by ...♙d5. It's not a bad position for White, but it's not what I want. I think 4. ♘c3 is a very good move and I also think it is because of this that people are playing 3...♘ge7 less and less.

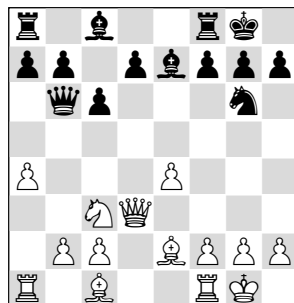
Black has two main ideas, and 4. ♘c3 is a good move in both cases.

4...g6

The traditional move, and this is what Black usually wants to do. There are alternatives here.

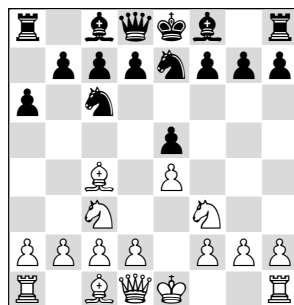
A) 4...♘g6 is a normal move, but White can gain the advantage: 5.d4 exd4 6. ♘xd4 ♘xd4 7. ♙xd4 c6 Black can't develop the king's

bishop normally because of the attack on g7. 8. ♘e2 ♙b6 Black uses the tempo gained by 7...c6 to try and trade the queens. I would say that White should avoid the trade. 9. ♙d3 ♘e7 9...♘c5 10.0-0 and Black risks running into ♘a4 ideas. 10.0-0 0-0 11.a4



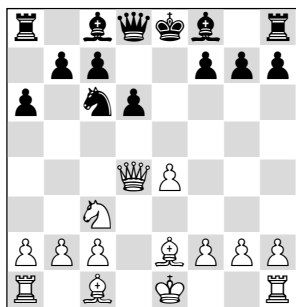
with two ideas. One is to play 12.a5 and the other is to play 12. ♘e3, because after 12... ♙xb2 we will trap the queen with 13. ♙fb1, since she can't escape to a3. If Black doesn't take the pawn we will continue with f2-f4 and even though we can't claim an overwhelming advantage, we do have a certain amount of pressure;

B) Black can also play 4...a6 but we don't have to go back to a4; we can play 5. ♘c4,



when 5...g6 and 5...d6 6.♘g5 are very bad for Black. He has to stop ♘g5 with 5...♘g6 and we follow up with 6.d4 exd4 7.♘xd4 and we have what is, basically, a good Scotch Game. Yes, you could say we lost a tempo on ♗c4, but Black's ...a7-a6 is not so important and in the Scotch the knight does not belong on g6. One of the reasons is that ♘f5 becomes very annoying: 7...♗c5 8.♗e3 8.♘f5 0-0 9.♖h5 is an even more adventurous option. We will play ♗g5, 0-0-0 and one day maybe sacrifice on g7. 8...♘xd4 9.♗xd4 ♗xd4 10.♖xd4 0-0 11.0-0-0 and White has an excellent position, with many different ways of continuing;

C) There is also the move 4...d6, which has been played by Nakamura: 5.d4 exd4 6.♘xd4 a6 7.♗e2 ♘xd4 8.♖xd4 ♘c6 is Nakamura's idea, gaining a tempo on the queen.



9.♖d3 g6 Or 9...♗b4 10.♖d1 g6 11.♗e3 ♗g7 12.♖d2 0-0 and Black's knight will, at some point, have to go back. We can castle on either side; it is all a matter of taste. White has the advantage either way.

10.♗e3 ♗g7 11.0-0-0 and again, we don't have a killing advantage, but it is a very nice edge. Basically, this is a better structure for White than in the Sicilian Dragon, because there is no open c-file for Black to use.

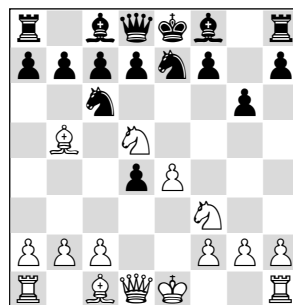
After 4...g6, Black is hoping to develop in a very harmonious way, but we are not going to allow him to do that at all:

5.d4 exd4

Black doesn't want to allow us to play 6.d5. After 5...♗g7 we have another very strong option: 6.dxe5 ♘xe5 7.♘xe5 ♗xe5 8.♗h6 and Black can't castle any more.

Now 6.♘xd4 ♗g7 is probably fine for Black.

6.♘d5



This is a very important move – which just happens to threaten checkmate. It also leads to very forcing play. Black can't play 6...♘xd5 as it leads to the opening up of the position, which he can't handle: 7.exd5 ♖e7+ 8.♗e2 ♗b4 9.0-0 and d4 is falling; ♖e1 is also coming. This is very strong for White.

6...♗g7

This is the main move. Black develops the bishop and stops 7.♘f6 checkmate.

7.♘g5

Now we have a huge threat of 8.♙xc6 and this completely forces Black's hand.

7...h6

The only way to not lose a piece.

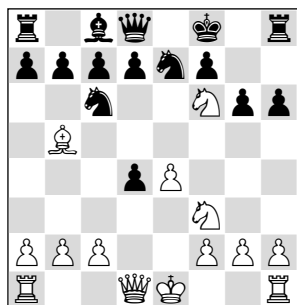
8.♙f6

Don't play the natural 8.♘f6+ as after 8...♗f8 that is not what you want. White is actually losing a piece here.

8...♙xf6

We are forcing Black's hand again because after 8...0-0 9.♙xc6 ♙xf6 10.♘xf6+ ♗g7 11.♖xd4 ♘xc6 12.♘h5+ we have mate next move.

9.♘xf6+ ♗f8



This is a big position in this line. I would say that hundreds of games have been played here. White has spent three moves to get the knight to f6, but Black hasn't done much with the tempi.

It is true however that if Black can safely get his king to g7, kick our knight back and then develop his pieces, then it could turn out that he equalizes.

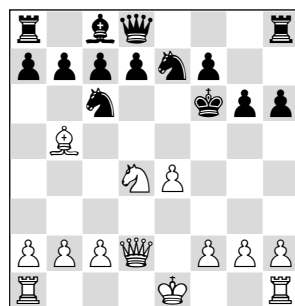
There are a few tactical tricks here and the main one I want to point out is that if you play the natural capturing move 10.♘xd4, then 10...♘f5 happens and this works out well for Black, surprisingly: 11.exf5 (11.♘xc6 ♖xf6) 11...♖xf6 12.♘xc6 dxc6 and suddenly we end up down a pawn.

White can play 10.0-0 here, which is a fine move, but my recommendation here is to play:

10.♖d2

Just waiting to see what Black does. Now Black has many options.

A) The most natural move is 10...♗g7 and now we see the very important point of our queen move: 11.♘xd4 ♗xf6 (of course, Black can capture the knight, and he is temporarily up a piece; 11...♘xd4 12.♖xd4 with the threat of double check and mate; 11...♘f5 is no longer working out for Black; I play 12.♘xf5+ and the check prevents 12...♖xf6 in this line).



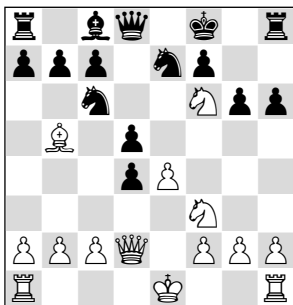
Now we have the strong move 12.♖c3! ♘e5 (if you take, I take back – and I'm going to mate you. There's no way to escape here: 12...♘xd4 13.♖xd4+ ♗e6 14.0-0-0 or even

14.♙c4+ d5 15.exd5+ ♖d7 16.♙b5+ c6 17.dxc6+ ♜c7 18.♚e5+ are both winning for White) 13.f4 and we will win back the knight and castle kingside, attacking the king with tempo, and Black is losing. That is why Black should not be greedy here;

B) It is also important to note that after the tactical 10...♟f5, we just calmly go back with 11.♞d5 and when he moves his knight we will just play 12.♞xd4, or even patiently 12.0-0-0, because the pawn isn't running anywhere. This is a huge advantage for White;

C) 10...d6 doesn't change anything: 11.0-0-0 ♟g7 (11...♟f5 12.♞d5) 12.♞xd4 ♟xf6 13.♚c3 and it's the same story after 13...♞e5 (13...♞xd4 14.♚xd4) 14.f4, with a winning position for White. Strong players with Black have tried two other moves after 10.♚d2:

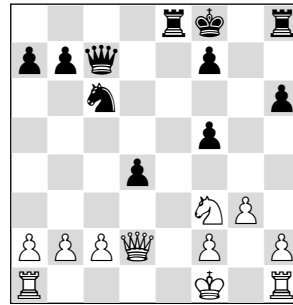
D) 10...d5 is where some of the strongest players have tried to find refuge for Black.



Here, it becomes sharp, because Black has freed his bishop, he has ideas of ...♚d6, trying to kick our knight back, and ...dxe4 of course,

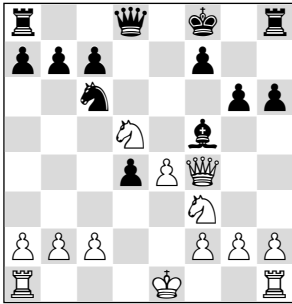
so White has to play concretely as well:

11.♙xc6 ♞xc6 On 11...bxc6 then 12.♚xd4 is very good, recapturing the pawn with threats like 13.♞xd5 and 13.♞d7+. 12.♞xd5 Black needs to play concretely now, because we have our pawn back and we are threatening d4: 12...♙f5 13.exf5 ♚xd5 is OK for Black. A number of strong players, such as Giri and Navara, have played 13.♞xc7 ♚xc7 14.exf5 but unfortunately we can't castle after 14...♚e8+ 15.♙f1 gxf5 16.g3.



However, this popular line has given White lots of success. Black's structure is ruined; a weak pawn on d4, doubled f-pawns, isolated h-pawn. Black can't keep any momentum going because his structure is too much of a problem, but it is still not easy to win this and Black has a lot of activity. Although it's worked out in a lot of games for White, I think that my main recommendation given below is an even better way to play. Readers can, of course, decide which line suits their taste, as both are good options. Here is a sample

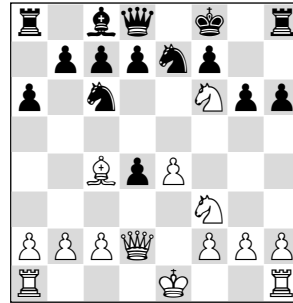
game after 16.g3: 16...♔g7 17.♔g2 ♕e4 18.♖he1 ♜d8 19.♘h4 ♖e5 20.f3 ♜e3 21.♜xe3 dxe3 22.♞xe3 ♞xe3 23.♘xf5+ ♔g6 24.♘e3 ♜d2+ 25.♔f1 ♜xh2 26.♜d1... 1-0 (35) Navara-Stevic, Croatia tt 2014.
My recommendation is 13.♞f4.



Black's hand is completely forced. I am threatening 14.♘xc7, and also 14.0-0-0, when I will pick up the d-pawn. So Black relies on tactics: 13...♙xe4 14.♞xe4 ♞d6 15.♘xc7 If 15.0-0-0 ♜e8 regains the piece. 15...♞xc7 16.0-0-0 If 16.0-0 then 16...♜d8 and I'm not sure we can round up d4 so easily. 16...♜e8 16...♔g7 17.♘xd4 and 16...♜d8 17.♘xd4 give me a pawn for nothing. 17.♞h4 g5 17...♜e2 18.♖he1 ♜xe1 19.♜xe1 takes care of Black's very temporary activity. 18.♞g3 But not 18.♘g5 ♘b4, giving Black far too much counterplay. 18...♞d7 19.♔b1 Protecting our king from any potential danger on the c-file. We can play h2-h4 and Black's structure remains highly problematic. So White has two different ways to play at move 13, depending on whether he wants a more tactical or a more positional game.

E) 10...a6 11.♙c4

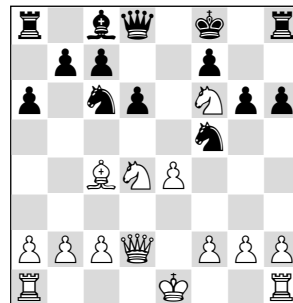
Back when I analysed this line, years ago, I thought 11.♙a4 was the main move, but after rechecking it quite recently I now believe this is correct.



11...♘f5 The alternatives lead to the same ideas we have already seen, for example:

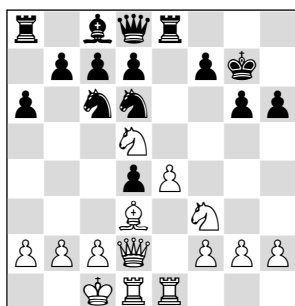
E1) 11...♔g7 12.♘xd4 ♔xf6 13.♞c3 ♘e5 14.f4 ♘xc4 15.♘c6+ and if it's not mate, I'll have the queen;

E2) After 11...d6 12.♘xd4, 12...♘f5 is no longer an issue,



the point being that my bishop is no longer under attack when Black takes back on c6: 13.♘xc6 bxc6 14.exf5 ♞xf6 15.fxg6 is positionally bad for Black, who will end up with a broken structure and the weaker king;

E3) 11...♘g8 12.♘d5 (12.♘xg8 ♔xg8 and at least Black has traded off one of our active pieces) 12...d6 13.♘xd4 ♘f6 14.♘xc6 bxc6 15.♘c3 ♔g7 16.0-0-0 is again in White's favour. **12.♘d5 ♘d6** Black has retained the pawn but the knight is misplaced on d6, where it is blocking in the bishop on c8 and running into e4-e5 in many cases. **13.♙d3 ♔g7** **14.0-0-0 ♚e8** **15.♚he1** Again, e4-e5 is a threat.



Now 15...♘b5 16.a4 ♘ba7 – if Black has to send the knight to a7 then you know that things aren't going well. It is probably simply a very bad position for him.

If he tries something else with 15...f6, hoping to get the knight back to f7, then 16.♚f4 is very nice, with pressure on c7. If 16...♘e5 (16...g5 17.♚g3) then we can just take the pawn with 17.♘xd4. At this point, Black doesn't even have any extra material to compensate for his ruined structure or his locked-in bishop.

Summing up, I just couldn't find a reliable way for Black to play after 12.♚d2. You need to know this ♚c3 idea in most lines and Black just has a dubious position.