

The Modernized Arkhangelsk Variation

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Viktor Erdos

Thinkers Publishing 2022



Key to Symbols

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

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Introduction

Dear Reader,

You are holding the very first book I have ever written! Thanks for your time and attention, and I hope your journey through these pages is going to be at least as exciting as my writing process has been!

It all started during early pandemic time in 2020, when Thinkers Publishing reached out to me asking if I would be interested in writing a book for them. I have always liked sharing my experiences one way or another, so I couldn't resist and grabbed the opportunity.

My love for good and exciting openings – including building nice, harmonious positions I would enjoy playing – dates back to my early career as a kid, therefore the idea of writing an opening book came to me naturally.

Why the Modern Arkhangel'sk Defence (or as we tend to call it for short, “The Ark”)?

My chess journey began in 2007, when I finally understood that the French Defence was no longer my cup of tea. I really enjoyed analyzing the classical positions with my trainer, GM Peter Lukacs, and despite starting out with lines such as the Chigorin arising from 5... ♘e7, in other variations such as the Italian or Scotch I used to like putting my bishop on the active c5-square. During those early days, though, The Ark just felt too distant.

Fast-forwarding to 2013, when I had my peak rating of 2661, and I was asked to play on first board for the Hungarian national team for the first time ever! I thought I was in a need of something fresh against the Ruy Lopez, and I finally felt I was ready for the challenge and started preparing The Ark for that very tournament!

This exciting defence, which is characterized by the moves 1. e4 e5 2. ♘f3

♞c6 3. ♟b5 a6 4. ♟a4 ♞f6 5. 0-0 b5 6. ♟b3 ♟c5, always amazed me. Quite an aggressive setup, Black is aiming to get very dynamic play (even at the cost of some material in many cases) in order to put a lot of pressure on White players as early as possible! No wonder that great, ambitious players such as Anand, Shirov, and Caruana, just to name of a few, like to employ it regularly. The variation also gained some attention at the Carlsen-Karjakin world championship match from 2016.

The Ark has always been considered one of the theoretically-heaviest defences in meeting the Ruy Lopez, though also the most exciting and definitely the most beautiful of all. It requires tactical vision, good calculation and memory, but not just from us – from the White side too. Let's not forget that! I also must say that no good lines are absent of theory, so if we've decided to learn something "finally", I argue that it can very well be an ambitious, double-edged line too! :-)

k

I should also mention that this book is a complete Black repertoire starting from 3. ♟b5 a6, the exchange variation being the first chapter. The publisher and me agreed on offering a full package, one that should prove useful for many years to come!

My aim with the book was to provide you with a lot of insights into this remarkable variation, The Ark, and to entertain the reader with spectacular, resourceful lines to illustrate the ideas. Thus, I must stress that my book should also be interesting for those who just enjoy chess in general, not just for the fans of this line seeking new ideas! Of course, you don't need to memorize everything to be able to play the variation successfully. Longer lines merely tend to be examples of how the game might develop, which help to enhance your understanding.

I hope my book will attract a lot of chess players of all levels and that we will soon see many more new games in this fascinating variation in practice!

Viktor Erdos, 2022

Part I

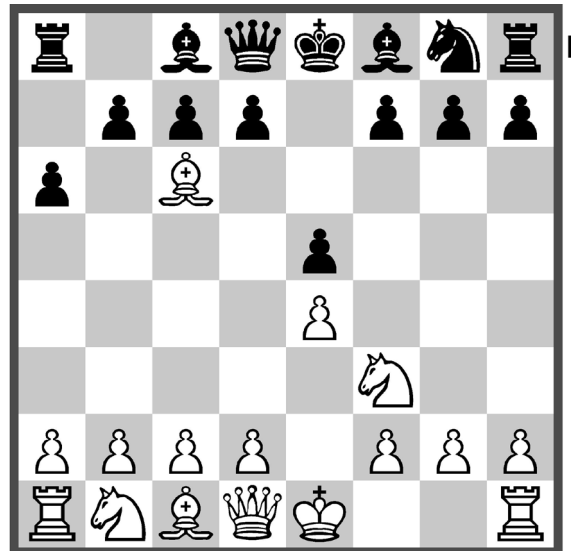
Early Sidelines In the Ruy Lopez



The Exchange Variation

1. e4 e5 2. ♘f3 ♞c6 3. ♙b5 a6

4. ♙xc6



Chapter Guide

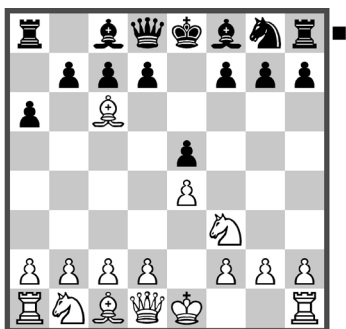
Chapter 1 – The Exchange Variation

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 a6 4.♙xc6 dxc6

a) 5.d4	13
b) 5.0-0 ♙f6 6.h3	15
c) 5.0-0 ♙f6 6.d3	18
d) 5.0-0 ♙f6 6.d4 exd4 7.--	22
e) 5.0-0 ♙f6 6.d4 exd4 7.♙xd4	24
f) 5.0-0 ♙f6 6.d4 exd4 7.♙g5 ♙d6 8.--	25
g) 5.0-0 ♙f6 6.d4 exd4 7.♙g5 ♙d6 8.♘xd4 ♙e7 9.♙e3.....	26
h) 5.0-0 ♙f6 6.d4 exd4 7.♙g5 ♙d6 8.♘xd4 ♙e7 9.♙xe7 ♘xe7 10.--.....	30
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j) 5.0-0 ♙f6 6.d4 exd4 7.♙g5 ♙d6 8.♘xd4 ♙e7 9.♙xe7 ♘xe7 10.♘c3 ♙e7 11.♘b3.....	33
k) 5.0-0 ♙f6 6.d4 exd4 7.♙g5 ♙d6 8.♘xd4 ♙e7 9.♙xe7 ♘xe7 10.♘c3 ♙e7 11.♘de2.....	35

a) 5.d4

1. e4 e5 2. ♘f3 ♘c6 3. ♙b5 a6 4. ♙xc6 among strong players.



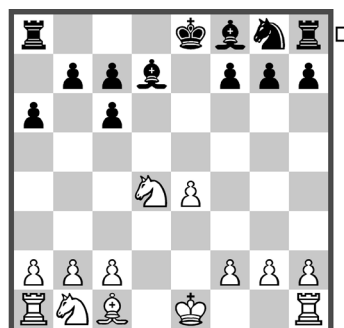
Position after: 4. ♙xc6

Our journey begins with the good old exchange variation. It has always been a popular side line in the Ruy Lopez, and there are still plenty of strong players who employ it on a regular basis: Guseinov, Solak, Naiditsch, and Rozentalis to name just a few. It started off as a purely positional idea - White doubles Black's pawns in the hope of getting a kingside majority later on by opening the position with an early d4 (see 5.d4). However, it turns out that the bishop is at least as valuable as the pawn structure in the arising endgame, so attention turned to 5. 0-0, which quickly became the main line. The game is more intense there – a nice mix of tactical and strategical elements – so it's no wonder it's still played frequently.

4... dxc6 5. d4

This old mainline is no longer played

5... exd4 6. ♙xd4 ♙xd4 7. ♘xd4 ♙d7



Position after: 7... ♙d7

8. ♙e3

8. ♘c3 0-0-0 9. ♙e3 is the other move order.

8... 0-0-0 9. ♘c3

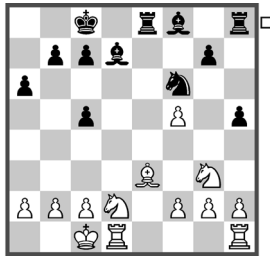
9. ♘d2 This avoids the pin, but the knight is awkward here. 9... c5!?

10. ♘e2 f5!? I am fond of this idea; opening the position should be a sound strategy with the bishop pair on our side. Play might develop in various ways, and I offer you a couple of examples: 11. 0-0-0 [11. exf5 ♘e7!?

12. ♙xc5 ♘xf5 13. ♙xf8 ♙hxf8 14. 0-0-0 ♘h4] 11... ♘f6 12. ♘g3 ♙e8!?

13. exf5 [13. ♘xf5?! ♘xe4] 13... h5!?

(see analysis diagram next page)



Position after: 13... h5!?

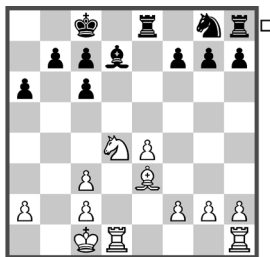
14. ♖he1 [14. h4 ♙d6 15. ♖de1 b6] 14... h4 15. ♘gf1 ♗h5 and Black is at least fine.

9... ♙b4

9... ♘e7 is good too, of course.

10. ♘de2

10. 0-0-0?! is hardly a serious option: 10... ♙xc3 11. bxc3 ♗e8!

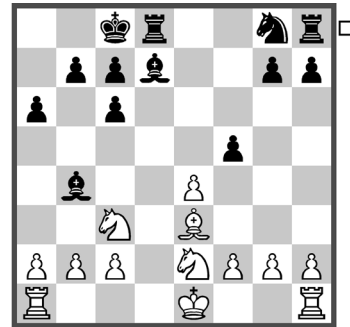


Position after: 11... ♗e8!

12. f3 [12. ♘b3 b6 13. ♙d4 f6 14. f3 c5] 12... c5 [12... f5 is not so clear after 13. ♘xf5! ♙xf5 14. ♙d4] 13. ♘e2 b6

10... f5!?

(see diagram next column)



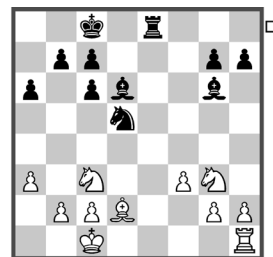
Position after: 10... f5!?

This move was seen in my own practice.

11. e5!

This is best and Black has no more than comfortable equality.

11. 0-0-0 ♘f6 12. exf5 ♙xf5 13. ♖xd8+ ♗xd8 14. a3 ♙d6 A natural idea to keep the bishop pair alive. 15. f3 ♗e8 16. ♙d2 ♙g6 (or the immediate 16... ♘d5.) 17. ♘g3 ♘d5

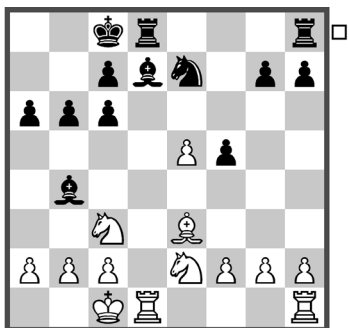


Position after: 17... ♘d5

This would have probably been my best bet for an advantage, with ideas such as: 18. ♘ce4 [18. ♘ge4 [18. ♖e1? drops a pawn. 18... ♗xe1+ 19. ♙xe1 ♘e3] ♘xc3 19. ♘d6+ cxd6 20. bxc3

♖e2 21. ♜g1 ♔d7 18... ♘e5! 19.
♜e1 ♞f4 20. ♘xf4 ♘xf4+

11... ♞e7 12. 0-0-0 b6



Position after: 12... b6

13. h4!?

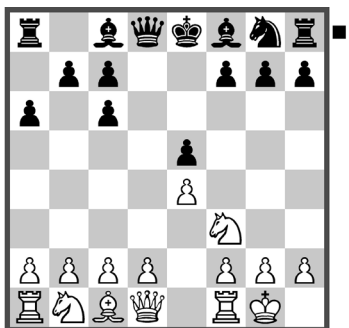
13. a3 ♘xc3 14. ♞xc3 ♞g6 15. f4 [15.
♜he1 c5] 15... c5

13... ♞g6 14. f4 h5!?

I would pick Black here too.

b) 5.0-0 ♔f6 6.h3

1. e4 e5 2. ♞f3 ♞c6 3. ♘b5 a6 4. ♘xc6 5... ♔f6!
dxc6 5. 0-0



Position after: 5. 0-0

There are an extreme number of possible setups for Black here, a lot of which are very sound. I've decided to offer you a modern line as our main choice.

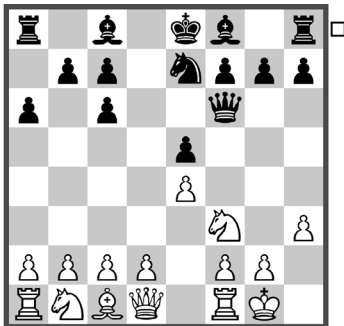
I first learned about this move around 2009. I greatly suffered in a game where I chose 5... ♔d6 in the Hungarian Closed Championship and I thought I should instead opt for a line which is easier to understand. I came across the game Solak – Atalik from 2008 and I was impressed, so I started to dig deeper and liked what I found. Since then, over 10 years already, I have been ready to play the line in a normal game, but I only faced it rapid and blitz chess! Interestingly enough, I showed this line to one of friends and he was able to play it the following month! 😊 The line first appeared back in 1887(!), but apart

from one game from the 70s (which, of course, was played by the ever-creative Romanishin) its true story started with Morozevich in 1994. In 1997, Adams joined the 'club' and he has been actively employing 5...♙f6 ever since. That's a great sign for us to believe in its correctness. In the mid 2000s' the young Carlsen also left some remarks and this setup became just as normal as other moves, such as 5...f6.

6. h3!?

This denies ...♙g4, but it's too slow.

6... ♘e7



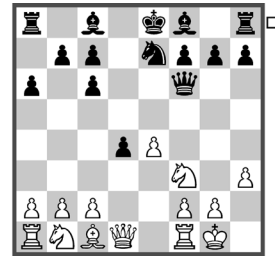
Position after: 6... ♘e7

7. c3

The real idea behind 6.h3 – White is building a center.

A) 7. d3 can be found under 6.d3

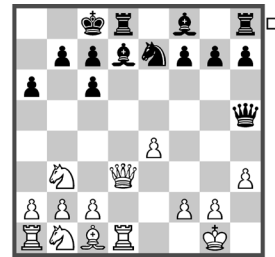
B) 7. d4 Not terribly logical in combination with h3. 7... exd4



Position after: 7... exd4

B1) 8. ♙g5 ♙d6 9. ♙xd4 ♙xd4 10. ♘xd4 ♙d7 is just a favourable version of our main line.

B2) 8. ♘xd4 ♙d7 9. ♘b3 [9. ♘c3 0-0 10. ♙e3 ♘g6 11. f4 ♙c5!↑] 9... ♙g6 10. ♙d3!? A rare idea. 10... 0-0 11. ♚d1 ♙h5!



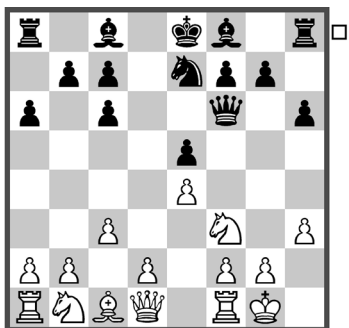
Position after: 11... ♙h5!

This stops ♘c5 and prepares ... ♘g6 with an advantage! 12. g4?! Logical, but it fails to 12... ♙h4 13. ♘c5 ♘g6 14. ♘xd7 h5!?! when Black gets a much better game. 15. ♘b6+ cxb6 16. ♙xd8+ ♙xd8 17. ♚xd8+ ♙xd8 18. ♙e3 ♙c5♣

B3) 8. ♙xd4 ♙xd4 9. ♘xd4 ♙d7 10. ♙e3 c5 is a bit simpler. For example: 11. ♘f3 b6 12. ♚d1 0-0-0 13. ♘e5

♙e6 14. ♖xd8+ ♔xd8 15. ♘c3 f6
16. ♜d1+ ♕c8 and Black is slightly better.

7... h6!



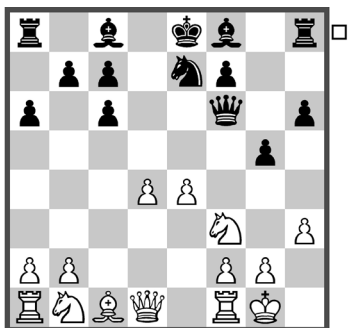
Position after: 7... h6!

A very nice novelty. Black plans to follow with ...g5-g4 so White should act immediately.

8. d4

8. ♘a3 ♙e6 9. d4 ♘g6 10. ♚e2 exd4
11. ♘xd4 [11. cxd4 0-0-0] 11... ♙xa3
12. bxa3 c5

8... exd4 9. cxd4 g5!

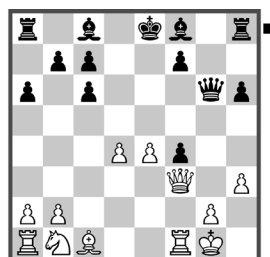


Position after: 9... g5!

10. ♚b3!

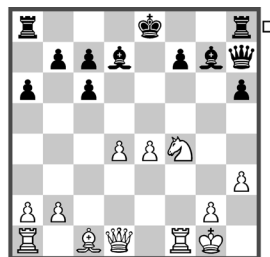
The most testing idea, and Black needs to react properly.

10. ♘e5 ♘g6 11. ♘xg6 [11. ♘c4 ♙e6
12. d5 0-0-0 13. ♘c3 g4!? 14. hxg4 ♚h4
15. ♚f3 h5 16. g5 cxd5 17. exd5 ♚xc4
18. dxe6 ♚xe6 19. ♙e3 ♙g7] 11...
♚xg6 12. ♘c3 [12. f4 might objectively
be the best: 12... gxf4 13. ♚f3!



Position after: 13. ♚f3!

13... ♙g7 14. ♜d1 f5!? 15. e5 ♙e6 16.
♙xf4 0-0-0 17. ♘c3 ♜d7 Black should
be fine, but probably not more than that.]
12... ♙g7 13. f4 [13. d5 ♙d7] 13...
gxf4 14. ♘e2! ♙d7 [14... ♚xe4 is
just around equal. 15. ♙xf4 ♙e6 16.
♙xc7=] 15. ♘xf4 ♚h7!



Position after: 15... ♚h7!

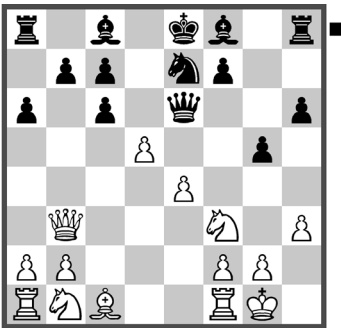
Unusual, but good; White is struggling, e.g. 16. ♖h5 [16. e5 0-0-0 17. ♙e3 c5↑] 16... 0-0-0↑

10... ♙e6!

This is what I like the most about this line – Black can count on a small edge in an endgame too.

10... ♖g8 is playable of course.

11. d5!?



Position after: 11. d5!?

A human approach.

After 11. ♙c2 g4 12. hxg4 ♙xg4 13. ♘e5 ♙g7 14. ♘c3 ♖g8 15. f3 ♙h3 16. ♖f2 0-0-0 Black's initiative is very dangerous.

11... cxd5 12. exd5

12. ♙c3? ♖g8 13. ♙xc7 g4

12... ♙xd5 13. ♙c3

The idea behind the central break.

13... ♖g8 14. ♙xc7 ♙c6

14... g4!? 15. ♘c3 ♙d7 16. ♙xd7+ ♙xd7 17. ♘e4 ♘d5 is possible too.

15. ♙xc6+ ♘xc6 16. ♘c3 ♙e6 17. ♖d1 f5 18. ♙e3 ♙f7

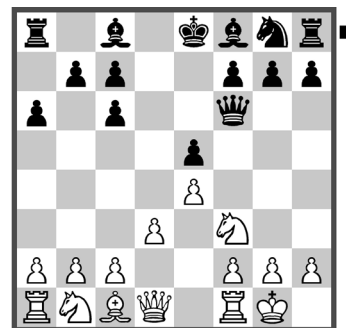
Black is slightly better.

c) 5.0-0 ♙f6 6.d3

1. e4 e5 2. ♘f3 ♘c6 3. ♙b5 a6 4. ♙xc6 dxc6 5. 0-0 ♙f6!? 6. d3

A very safe reaction.

(see diagram opposite column)



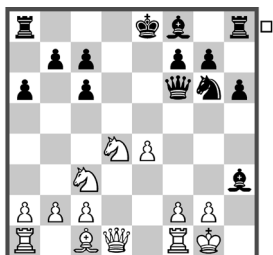
Position after: 6. d3

6... ♖e7!

I like this flexible move.

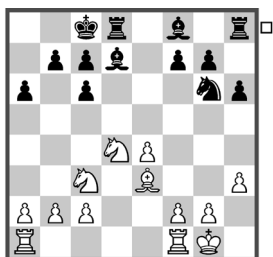
7. ♕g5

A) 7. h3 ♘g6 8. ♗c3 h6! Black wants to keep the queen on her active square. 9. d4 [9. ♕e3 ♕e6 and White lacks a direct plan as 10. d4?! is met by 10... 0-0-0 11. d5?! ♖e7!] 9... exd4 10. ♙xd4 [10. ♗xd4 allows 10... ♕xh3!



Position after: 10... ♕xh3!

11. gxh3 ♜d8 12. e5 ♙h4 13. ♗ce2 c5] 10... ♙xd4 11. ♗xd4 ♕d7 12. ♕e3 0-0-0

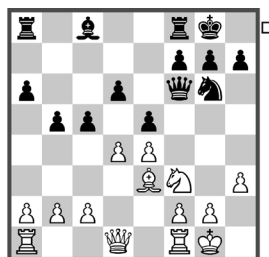


Position after: 12... 0-0-0

We have a typical Exchange Spanish game, which might continue with 13. ♜ad1 ♕b4 [Or 13... ♕d6] 14. ♗de2

♗e5 15. b3 f6! and Black is completely fine, e.g. 16. f3 ♜he8.

B) 7. ♕e3 The very young Carlsen had to face this move. 7... ♗g6 8. ♗bd2 ♕d6 9. h3 0-0 10. ♗c4 b5 11. ♗xd6 cxd6 We could easily stop here and say that the position should be level, however there are some interesting ideas to discover. 12. d4 c5!?



Position after: 12... c5!?

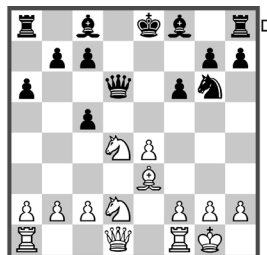
A bit more ambitious, but it's hard to think concretely in a calm position like this one. Fortunately, the computer is not as biased as humans. 13. dxc5 dxc5 14. ♙d5 [14. ♕xc5? would be a grave error: 14... ♜d8 15. ♙c1 ♗f4 with a huge attack.] 14... ♜b8 Black offers a pawn in the hope of creating a bit of imbalance. 15. ♙xc5 ♕b7 16. ♗d2 ♜bc8 17. ♙a7!? ♙e7 18. ♗b3 ♜c7!? 19. ♕c5 ♙g5 20. ♕e3 ♙e7= A repetition is a logical finish.

7... ♙d6!?

7... ♙e6 is an equally legit option.

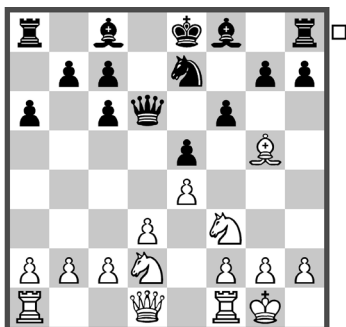
8. ♗bd2

8. ♘a3 I don't like this move, but it's not bad at all. Black has many options, but I will give just one of them. 8... ♞g6 The simplest solution. 9. ♘c4 ♚e6 10. ♙e3 ♙e7 Black is just fine, as it's hard to see what White is playing for. 11. ♞g5 [11. ♚e1 0-0=] 11... ♚g4=



Position after: 11... c5

8... f6!?



Position after: 8... f6!?

The least popular move, but the most interesting.

9. ♘c4

Almost a novelty, though a very natural move.

9. ♙e3 ♞g6 10. d4 exd4!? A novelty. Thanks to the awkward d2-knight, Black can afford to open the position for the bishops while being underdeveloped. 11. ♞xd4 [11. ♞c4? is not good. 11... ♚c5 12. ♚xd4 ♚xd4 13. ♞xd4 c5 14. ♞b3 ♙e6] 11... c5

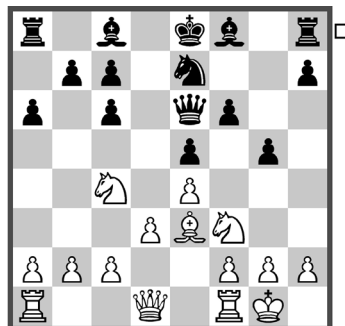
(see analysis diagram next column)

12. ♞e2 [12. ♞f5 ♚c6 13. ♚h5 ♙e6 14. f4 0-0-0 15. ♞g3 ♙f7∞] 12... ♙e6 13. ♞c3 [13. f4 ♞e7! 14. ♞c3 ♞c6! =] 13... ♞e5! [13... 0-0-0 allows 14. f4] 14. ♚e2 0-0-0∞ The position is rich in possibilities.

9... ♚e6 10. ♙e3

10. ♙d2 has been played, but it's just passive.

10... g5!?



Position after: 10... g5!?

I really like this aggressive approach. This may evolve into some extraordinary complications, which I imagine, a player who opted for the solid 6. d3 wouldn't enjoy too much.

10... ♖d7 is perfectly fine here too.

11. b3!?

This move is preparing a strike in the center, which is an old principle to counter wing expansion.

11. ♖fd2 ♗g6 12. ♖h5 ♖d7 doesn't really solve anything.

11... ♗g6 12. d4 b5

A sign of a hyper-modern attitude: Black plays actively, while the king is still in the center. The bishop pair and space advantage sometimes grant you this luxury.

13. ♗a5

13. d5 ♖f7 14. ♗a5 cxd5 15. exd5 ♖b4!?

16. ♗c6 ♖c3↑

13... g4 14. ♗e1 exd4 15. ♖xd4 c5

Black has achieved a very exciting position in return for his brave play.

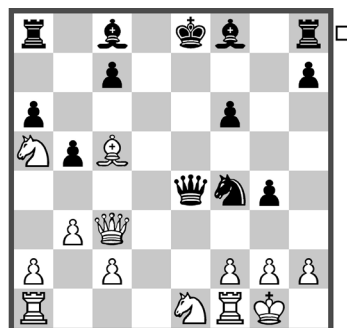
16. ♖c3

This feels like the most principled move.

16. ♖d2 ♖d6∞

16... ♖xe4 17. ♖xc5 ♗f4

(see diagram next column)



Position after: 17... ♗f4

Black is attacking like a madman.

18. ♖xf6

18. ♖h1!? ♗d5 19. ♖d2 ♖xc5 20. ♗d3 ♖e7 21. ♖ae1 ♖f5 22. ♗c6 ♖b7 23. ♗xe7 ♗xe7 24. ♖b4 0-0-0 25. ♖xe7∞ is complicated.

18... ♖xc5

Not the only try, but the most entertaining for sure!

19. ♖xh8+ ♖f7

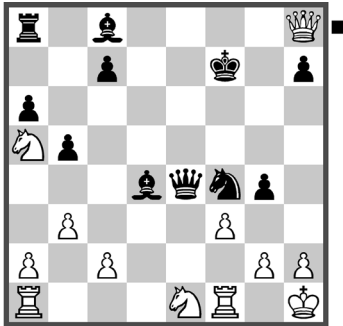
Now White needs to be careful!

20. ♖h1

Best. I will show you two spectacular, lesser, lines which end in our favor – feel free to analyze deeper!

20. ♗c6?! ♖d4! A fun move to make. 21. ♗xd4? [21. ♗d8 was the only move.] 21... ♖b7 22. ♖xa8 ♖xa8 23. c3 c5 24. ♗dc2 ♗xg2 25. f3 gxf3+

20... ♖d4 21. f3!!



Position after: 21. f3!!

This resource saves White.

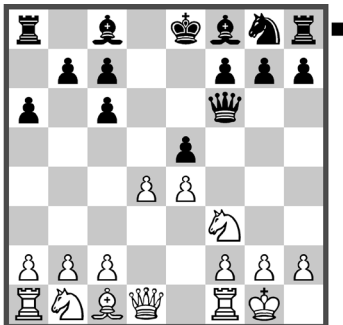
21... gxf3

21... ♖xh8!? is also good for Black. 22. fxe4 ♖xa1 23. ♖xf4+ ♔e8 24. ♖d3 ♖c3 25. ♖c6 a5!☞

22. ♖xf3 ♖xh8 23. ♖g5+ ♔g6 24. ♖xe4 ♖xa1 25. ♖xa1 ♖f5=

d) 5.0-0 ♖f6 6.d4 exd4 7.--

1. e4 e5 2. ♖f3 ♖c6 3. ♖b5 a6 4. ♖xc6 dxc6 5. 0-0 ♖f6!? 6. d4



Position after: 6. d4

8. ♖xd4?! ♖h3!



Position after: 8... ♖h3!

Undoubtedly the main move: White needs to open the position up while Black is behind in development.

6... exd4 7. ♖xd4

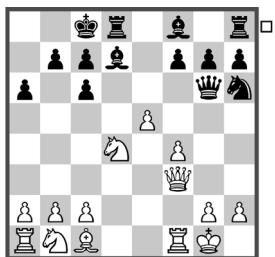
7. e5?! might look tempting, but it just weakens the light squares. 7... ♖g6

9. ♖f3 ♖g4 10. ♖g3 0-0-0 11. c3 ♖e7!? [11... ♖c5 12. ♖e3 ♖e7 was pretty good too, in the ancient game that I mentioned in the introduction: Schallopp – Harmonist, Frankfurt 1887] 12. f3 [12. h3 c5!? 13. ♖xg4+ ♖xg4 14. hxg4 cxd4] 12... ♖d7 13. ♖xg6 ♖xg6 14. f4 c5 15. ♖f3 ♖f5 16. ♖e3 ♖e7 17. ♖bd2 ♖d3 18. ♖f2 ♖hd8

7... ♖d7 8. ♙e3

8. e5? Once again, this push is just poor.

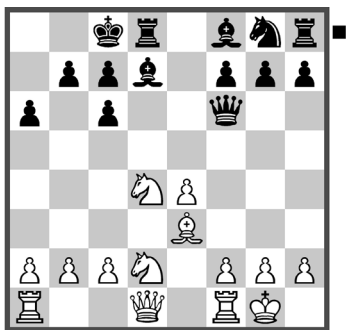
8... ♗g6 9. f4 ♘h6 10. ♖f3 0-0-0!?



Position after: 10... 0-0-0!?

This is more flexible as 11. f5? fails to the simple 11... ♘xf5 12. ♘xf5 ♙xf5 13. ♗xf5+? ♗xf5 14. ♖xf5 ♖d1+ →

8... 0-0-0 9. ♘d2



Position after: 9. ♘d2

9... c5

9... ♘h6!? 10. f3 c5 11. ♘e2 ♗xb2 12. ♖b1 ♗e5 was fine in Reefat – Pavasovic, Calvia (ol) 2004, but taking the pawn involves some risks.

10. ♘4f3 ♗e6!?

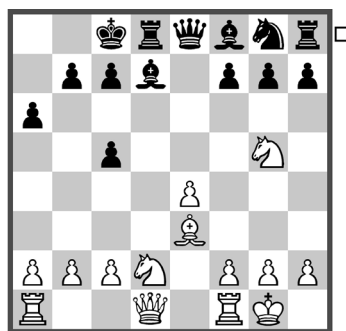
I find this to be a very smart manoeuvre. The queen steps away from the ♙g5 threat and vacates f6 for the knight, from where it will exert pressure on e4.

10... ♗xb2 is again playable, but a bit greedy. 11. ♖b1 ♗xa2 12. c4 ♗a4 13. ♗c1☞

11. ♘g5

After 11. ♖e1 h6 12. ♗e2 ♘f6 Black is very comfortable.

11... ♗e8



Position after: 11... ♗e8

Black looks passively placed here, but actually White is struggling to find targets. The advantage shifts to us quickly, e.g.

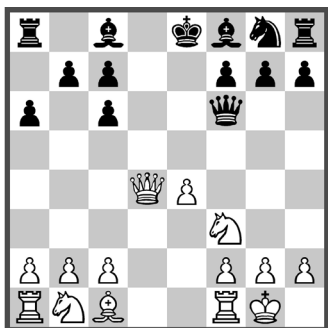
12. ♖e1 h6 13. ♘gf3 ♘f6 14. ♙f4 ♘h5 15. ♙g3

15. ♙e3 g5☞

15... ♘xg3 16. hxg3 g5☞

e) 5.0-0 ♖f6 6.d4 exd4 7.♚xd4

1. e4 e5 2. ♘f3 ♘c6 3. ♙b5 a6 4. ♙xc6 dxc6 5. 0-0 ♚f6!? 6. d4 exd4 7. ♚xd4



Position after: 7. ♚xd4

7... ♙g4!?

I think this move is very interesting, forcing White to calculate lines and make an important decision.

There is nothing wrong with 7... ♚xd4 8. ♘xd4 ♙d7 but White has a simple game here.

8. ♚e5+

Possibly the best.

A) 8. ♘c3 ♙xf3 9. ♚xf6 ♘xf6 10. gxf3 0-0-0 11. ♙e3 ♘h5 Black is playing against the weakened structure. White has little to do here, so we have all the fun, e.g. 12. ♘e2 [12. ♚ad1 ♙d6 13. ♘e2 g6 14. ♚fe1 ♚he8] 12... g6 13. ♘g3 ♘g7! 14. f4 f5 15. exf5 ♘xf5 16. ♘xf5 gxf5

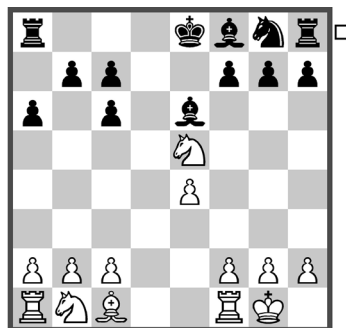
B) 8. ♚xf6 ♘xf6 9. ♘e5 ♙e6 10. ♘c3 ♙b4 11. ♚e1 ♙xc3 12. bxc3 Healey, M (2108) – Howell, D (2639) London 2013 12... 0-0-0 13. ♙g5 h6!? 14. ♙xf6 gxf6 15. ♘d3 f5

C) 8. ♙g5 ♚xd4 9. ♘xd4 c5 10. ♘b3 h6!?

C1) 11. ♙h4 g5 12. f3 [12. ♙g3 0-0-0] 12... ♙e6 13. ♙f2 b6 14. ♚d1 ♙d6 15. ♙g3 0-0-0 16. ♙xd6 cxd6 17. ♘1d2 ♘e7 18. c4 ♘c6

C2) 11. ♙e3 b6 12. a4 0-0-0 13. a5 ♙b7

8... ♚xe5 9. ♘xe5 ♙e6



Position after: 9... ♙e6

10. ♙e3

10. ♚d1 ♘f6 11. ♘c3 ♘d7 12. ♙f4 0-0-0 13. ♚xd7 ♚xd7 14. ♘xd7 ♙xd7 15. ♚d1 ♙e7 should also be fine for us.

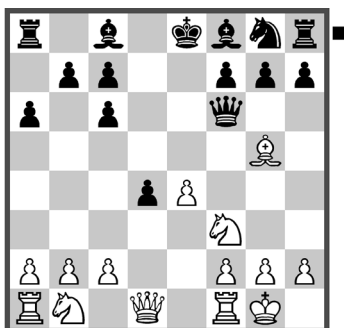
10... 0-0-0 11. ♖d2 ♘f6! 12. ♖ad1 ♘d7 13. ♘d3

13. ♘xd7 ♖xd7

Black has a comfortable position.

f) 5.0-0 ♖f6 6.d4 exd4 7.♗g5 ♕d6 8.--

1. e4 e5 2. ♘f3 ♘c6 3. ♗b5 a6 4. ♗xc6 dxc6 5. 0-0 ♖f6!? 6. d4 exd4 7. ♗g5



Position after: 7. ♗g5

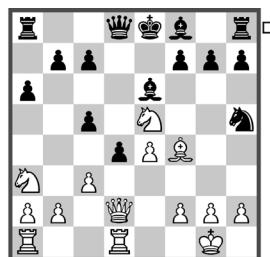
The most ambitious; White wins an additional tempo.

7... ♖d6

The reliable move. 7... ♖g6 is playing with fire.

8. ♖xd4

8. ♖d2? This creative move is doomed to fail. From a practical perspective, Black solved his problems very well after: 8... c5 9. ♗f4 ♖d8 10. c3 ♗g4 11. ♘e5 ♗e6 12. ♘a3 ♘f6 13. ♖fd1 ♘h5!



Position after: 13... ♘h5!

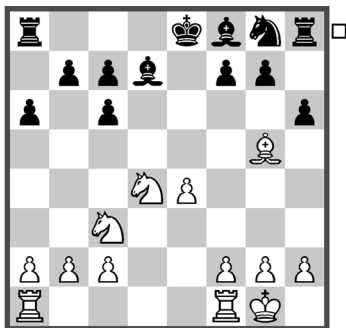
14. ♗g5 f6 15. ♖e2 g6 16. ♗h4 ♘f4 17. ♖f3 g5 18. ♘ec4 ♗h6 An elegant move. 19. ♗g3?! g4+ Larino Nieto – Graf, Sanxenxo 2007.

8... ♖xd4 9. ♘xd4 ♗d7 10. ♘c3

10. ♘d2?! is less logical. A very nice example of how Black should proceed is: 10... f6 11. ♗e3 0-0-0 12. f4 ♘h6 13. h3 ♗b4 14. c3 ♗d6 15. ♖ae1 ♖he8 16. ♘h1 c5 17. ♘4b3 b6 18. ♗g1 ♗c6 19. ♗h2 ♘f7 20. ♖e3 a5+ Black improved slowly but surely and reached a strategically winning position in Denny – Mikhailchishin, Calvia (ol) 2004.

10... h6!?

A new take on this typical position. Twenty years ago 10... f6 or 10... ♘e7 would have been autopilot moves.

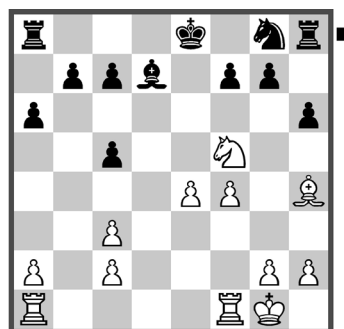


Position after: 10... h6!?

11. ♖h4

11. ♖e3 0-0-0 12. ♖ad1 ♖e8!? 13. ♖d2?! [13. f3 was equal.] and now in Thilakarathne, G (2213) – Dimakiling, O (2405) Ho Chi Minh City 2017, Black should have played 13... ♖b4 14. ♘de2 f5 with some advantage.

11... ♖b4!? 12. f4 ♖xc3 13. bxc3 c5 14. ♘f5?



Position after: 14. ♘f5?

White should have tried 14. ♘f3 f6 15. e5 0-0-0 but Black is slightly better already.

14... ♖xf5 15. exf5 f6! 16. ♖f2 b6

White's bishop is imprisoned and their structure is also in ruins, so Black was much better in Fawzy, A (2470) – Oparin, G (2652) Chess.com INT 2020

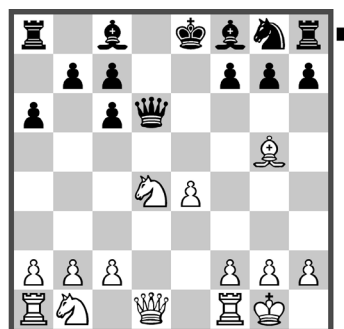
g) 5.0-0 ♖f6 6.d4 exd4 7.♖g5 ♖d6 8.♘xd4 ♖e7 9.♖e3

1. e4 e5 2. ♘f3 ♘c6 3. ♖b5 a6 4. ♖xc6 dxc6 5. 0-0 ♖f6!? 6. d4 exd4 7. ♖g5 ♖d6 8. ♘xd4

(see diagram opposite column)

8... ♖e7

A solid developing move and it's very natural to offer an exchange of White's most active piece.



Position after: 8. ♘xd4

Originally I thought keeping the bishop pair is important and studied 8... ♘d7!?, but after witnessing the Turner – Adams game live I understood that Black can play by simpler means in this line, while also keeping chances to outplay the opponent! Nevertheless, if you, dear reader, get bored with my recommendation, you may want to check this move out too!

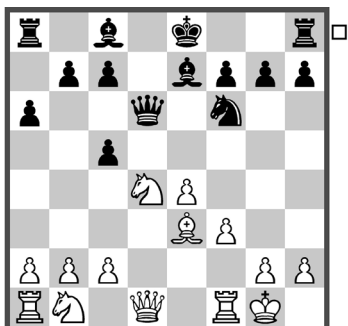
9. ♙e3!?

White's most ambitious setup, which leads to complex middlegame positions. Black has a lot of different options to deal with it.

9... ♘f6

9... ♘h6 10. ♖d2 g5!? was played in the well-known game Meier, G (2648) – Caruana, F (2784) Karlsruhe/ Baden – Baden 2018. [10... c5! 11. ♘b3 ♖xd2 12. ♘1xd2 b6 is also worthy of attention.]

10. f3 c5

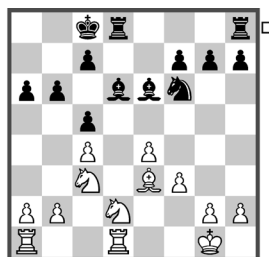


Position after: 10... c5

10... 0-0 has also been played, but I prefer my king on the queenside.

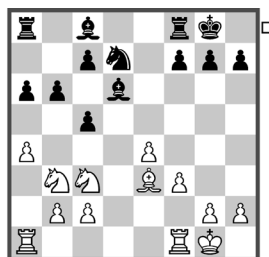
11. ♘e2

11. ♘b3 b6 12. ♘c3 Once again we have plenty of ways to play. [12. c4?! now does play into 12... ♖xd1 13. ♖xd1 ♙e6 14. ♘3d2 0-0-0 15. ♘c3 ♙d6=]



Position after: 15... ♙d6=

] 12... 0-0 Probably the simplest. 13. ♖xd6 [13. ♖e2 a5 14. ♖ad1 ♙a6 15. ♖f2 ♖e6 16. ♖fe1 ♙d6=] 13... ♙xd6 14. a4 [14. f4?! makes little sense to me: 14... ♘g4↑] 14... ♘d7!



Position after: 14... ♘d7!

This looks more pleasing to the eye than 14...a5, which allows 15. ♘b5. 15. f4 [15. a5 b5 16. ♖fd1 f6 17. ♙f2 is possible, but I don't see more than a

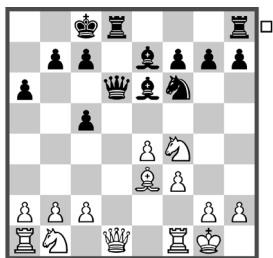
repetition for White. 17... ♖b7 18. ♔g3 ♗e5 19. ♕f2 ♗d7 20. ♔g3 ♗e5=] 15... f6 16. ♗d2 ♖e8 17. ♖fe1 [17. ♗c4 ♕b7!? 18. ♖ad1 ♕xe4 19. ♗xd6 cxd6 20. ♖xd6 ♕xc2 and Black is ok.] 17... ♕b7 18. ♖ad1 ♖ad8 19. ♗c4 ♕f8 Black looks super-solid here.

11... ♕e6

11...b6 has been played, but it's a bit slow here. Now, however, we are ready to castle immediately.

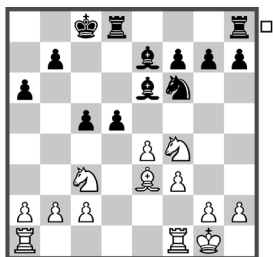
12. ♗bc3

12. ♗f4 0-0-0



Position after: 12... 0-0-0

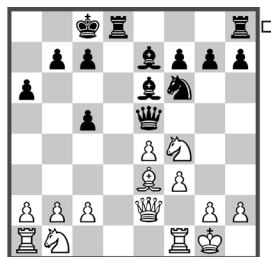
A) 13. ♖xd6 The least exciting way in this variation, as the game peters out to a draw: 13... cxd6 14. ♗c3 d5!



Position after: 14... d5!

15. exd5 ♗xd5 16. ♗fxd5 ♕xd5 17. ♗a4 is a bit more challenging. [17. ♗xd5 ♖xd5= was a dead draw in Naiditsch, Y (2375) – Kosteniuk, A (2551) Germany 2019] 17... ♕f6!? 18. ♕xc5 b5 19. ♗c3 ♖he8 and Black has nice compensation.

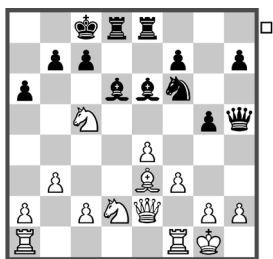
B) 13. ♖e2 ♖e5 I like this active queen move. Now White has the option to repeat moves, but objectively speaking this fact shouldn't scare us. If we are seeking fighting possibilities, there are alternatives to pick from at move nine.



Position after: 13... ♖e5

B1) 14. ♗d3 ♖h5 The only, but decent, square. 15. ♗d2 [15. g4?! is suspicious. This is the type of move we would love to see. 15... ♖h4 Δ 16. ♗xc5 ♕xc5 17. ♕xc5 h5 18. ♕f2 ♖g5 19. h4 ♖e5 20. g5 ♖xb2 should favor Black.] 15... ♖he8 16. b3 g5!?! with the idea of 17. ♗xc5 [17. ♕xc5? ♗xd3 18. ♕xe7 ♖xd2] 17... ♕d6!

(see analysis diagram next page)



Position after: 17... Qd6!

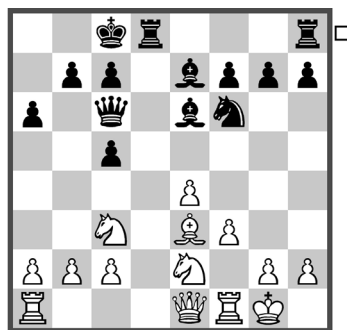
and now 18. h3? would fail to 18... Qxh3! 19. gxh3 Rg8!! 20. Rf2 Only move. 20... Qxc5 21. Qxc5 g4 22. hxg4 Qxc5

B2) 14. Nxe6 Qxe6 White has managed to secure the better structure, but it's not enough to claim an advantage. 15. Nd2 [15. Nc3 Qd6 16. Qf2 Nd7 17. f4 f6 18. Rad1 Qb8=] 15... Rhe8 16. b3!? Securing the c4 spot. [16. Qc4? would walk into our dirty trick: 16... Nd5! 16... Nd7 17. Qc4 Qg6 [17... Qxc4 18. Nxc4 Nb8! 19. Rad1 Nc6= is also sound.] 18. Rad1 Ne5 19. Qe2 Nc6 [19... Qe6=] Black is just fine and planning to meet 20. Nc4 with 20...f5!? or 20...Qe6.

12... 0-0-0 13. Qe1

13. Nf4 allows 13... Qc4 14. Re1 Qb6!? 15. Qc1 g5 when Black gets a lot of play.

13... Qc6!



Position after: 13... Qc6!

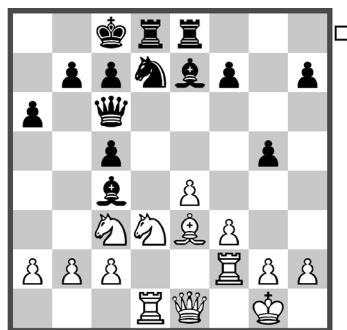
14. Nf4

14. Qf2 is slow. The line 14... Rhg8! 15. Rad1 Rxd1 16. Rxd1 g5 17. Ng3 h5 seems quite concerning for the first player.

14... Qc4 15. Rf2

After 15. Nce2 g5 16. Nd3 Nd7 17. b3 Qe6 18. c4 f5 19. Nc3 Rhe8 Black has a comfortable game.

15... g5 16. Nd3 Nd7 17. Rd1 Rhe8



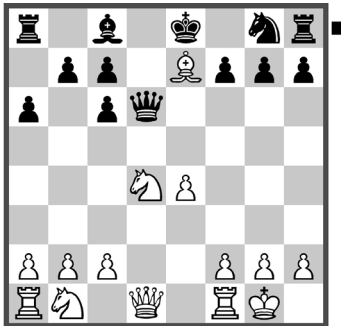
Position after: 17... Rhe8

We have coordinated our pieces correctly and can have optimistic thought about the future. For example:

18. b3 ♖e6 19. ♜e2 c4↑

**h) 5.0-0 ♔f6 6.d4 exd4 7.♖g5 ♔d6 8.♘xd4
♙e7 9.♙xe7 ♘xe7 10.--**

1. e4 e5 2. ♘f3 ♘c6 3. ♙b5 a6 4. ♙xc6
dxc6 5. 0-0 ♔f6!? 6. d4 exd4 7. ♖g5
♔d6 8. ♘xd4 ♙e7 9. ♙xe7



Position after: 9. ♙xe7

9... ♘xe7

The starting position of the main line of the 5... ♔f6 universe. Play tends to be slow and strategic with only a few tactical points. I will be concentrating on general ideas and recurring themes through some important games to give you confidence playing this structure.

10. ♘b3

This allows Black to develop a bit more actively.

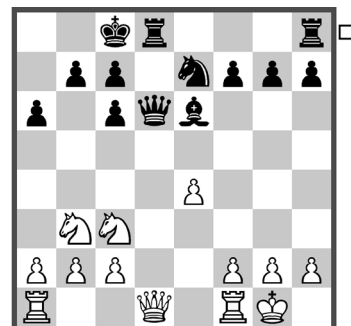
10. ♔d2?! This looks weird to me. 10... c5



Position after: 10... c5

11. ♘b3 [11. ♘e2 is maybe a bit better. 11... ♔xd2 12. ♘xd2 ♙e6 13. ♘f4 0-0-0 14. ♜fd1 ♘c6 15. ♘xe6 fxe6 16. ♘f3 ♜df8!? is just fine for Black.] 11... ♔xd2 12. ♘1xd2 b6 13. ♜ad1 ♙e6 14. f4 0-0-0 Black was comfortable in Sulskis, S (2546) – Ovsejevitch, S (2585) Germany 2015.

10... ♙e6 11. ♘c3 0-0-0



Position after: 11... 0-0-0

12. ♖e2

12. ♖h5 ♘g6 13. ♜ad1 ♖e5 seems good for us.

12... ♖f4!?

12... ♘g6 is normal too.

13. ♜ad1

13. g3?! ♖f6 14. ♜ad1 ♜xd1! 15. ♜xd1 h5 16. ♖e3 b6 and Black is comfortable.

13... g5

Strengthening control over the f4-square.

14. ♘c5

14. ♘d4 ♘g6 15. ♘xc6 bxc6 16. ♖xa6+ ♔b8 17. ♘b5 cxb5 18. ♖xb5+ leads to a draw by repetition.

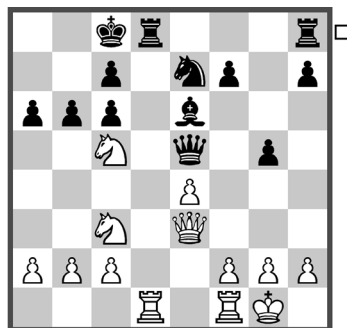
14... ♖e5 15. ♖e3

Critical.

A) 15. ♘d3 ♖d4 16. ♘f4 ♖f6=

B) 15. ♜xd8+ ♜xd8 16. ♘d3 ♖d4 17. ♜d1 ♘g6

15... b6!



Position after: 15... b6!

16. ♘d3

A) 16. ♘xe6 fxe6 This structure even gives us some advantage.

B) 16. ♘xa6? is bad due to 16... ♖a5

16... ♖g7 17. a4

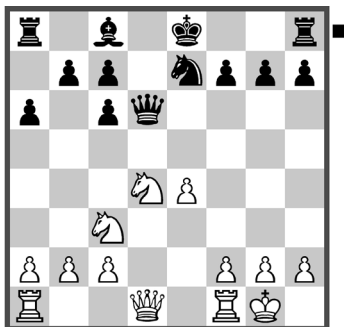
17. e5?! ♘f5 18. ♖e4 ♘d4

17... a5

It looks difficult for White to find real targets in Black's camp.

**i) 5.0-0 ♔f6 6.d4 exd4 7.♘g5 ♔d6 8.♞xd4
♙e7 9.♘xe7 ♞xe7 10.♞c3 ♙e7 11.--**

1. e4 e5 2. ♘f3 ♞c6 3. ♙b5 a6 4. ♘xc6
dxc6 5. 0-0 ♔f6!? 6. d4 exd4 7. ♘g5
♔d6 8. ♞xd4 ♙e7 9. ♘xe7 ♞xe7 10.
♞c3



Position after: 10. ♞c3

Almost exclusively played, and no wonder.

10... ♙d7!

Our king belongs on the queenside.

11. ♜e1?!

This happened in the only (but very recent) game of my mine to reach this opposition. It does not accomplish much as pushing e5 only helps Black to activate his pieces more easily.

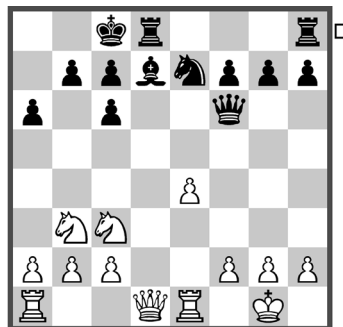
11. ♔d2 c5 12. ♞b3 ♔xd2 13. ♞xd2 0-0-0 14. ♜fd1 ♙e6 15. ♞f1 ♜d4 16. f3 ♜hd8 was slightly better for Black in

Dann, M (2432) – Lobzhanidze, D (2453)
Germany 2013

11... 0-0-0 12. ♞b3

Not 12. e5? ♔g6 13. ♔f3 c5 14. ♞b3
♙g4! 15. ♔e4 ♔xe4 16. ♞xe4 b6 17.
h3 ♙e6⚡ when the e5-pawn is too weak.

12... ♔f6!



Position after: 12... ♔f6!

13. ♔e2 ♞g6 14. ♔e3 ♔b8 15. ♞c5

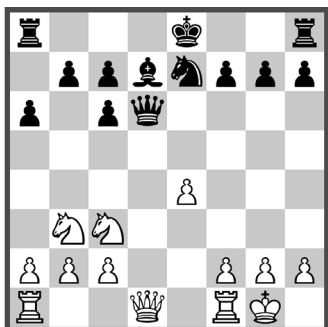
15. ♜ad1 ♙c8 16. ♜xd8 ♜xd8 17.
♜d1 ♜e8!?

15... ♙c8 16. ♜ad1 b6 17. ♞d3 ♜he8

This looks very comfortable for Black.

**j) 5.0-0 ♔f6 6.d4 exd4 7.♘g5 ♔d6 8.♞xd4
♙e7 9.♙xe7 ♞xe7 10.♞c3 ♙e7 11.♞b3**

1. e4 e5 2. ♞f3 ♞c6 3. ♙b5 a6 4. ♙xc6 dxc6 5. 0-0 ♔f6!? 6. d4 exd4 7. ♘g5 ♔d6 8. ♞xd4 ♙e7 9. ♙xe7 ♞xe7 10. ♞c3 ♙d7! 11. ♞b3

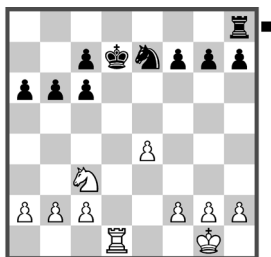


Position after: 11. ♞b3

11... ♔xd1 12. ♙axd1 b6!

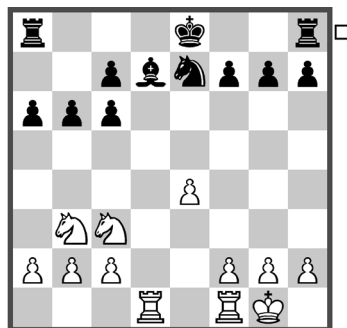
Accurate.

12... 0-0-0 allows 13. ♞c5 b6 14. ♞xd7 ♙xd7 15. ♙xd7 ♔xd7 16. ♙d1+ ±



Position after: 16. ♙d1+

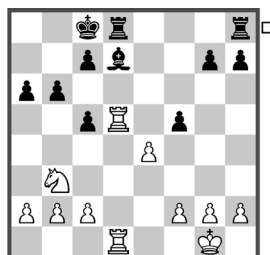
with a small advantage for White.



Position after: 12... b6!

13. f4

A) 13. ♙d2 0-0-0 14. ♙fd1 c5!? 15. ♞d5 [15. ♞c1 f5=] 15... ♞xd5 16. ♙xd5 f5!?

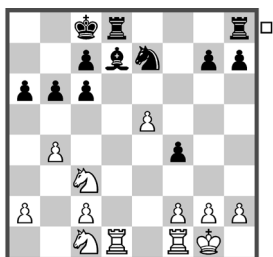


Position after: 16... f5!?

An elegant move, securing half a point. 17. exf5 ♙xf5 18. ♙xd8+ ♙xd8 19. ♙xd8+ ♔xd8 20. c3 ♙e6 and a draw was soon agreed in Leko – Carlsen, Moscow 2007.

B) 13. ♞c1 0-0-0 14. b4 [14. ♞d3 c5=]

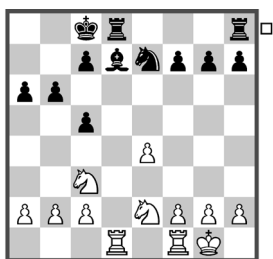
14... f5!? This is a bit more challenging for White, as Black is very comfortably placed everywhere, e.g. [14... ♖e6 15. f3 ♜d6 16. ♔f2 ♜hd8= was also good enough in Naiditsch, A (2685) – Grandelius, N (2525) Stockholm 2010]
15. ♜fe1 [15. e5 f4!



Position after: 15... f4!

16. ♘d3 ♘g6 17. f3 ♗f5] 15... fxe4 16. ♘xe4 ♗f5

C) 13. ♘d4 c5 14. ♘de2 0-0-0



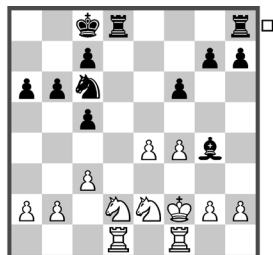
Position after: 14... 0-0-0

15. ♘f4 [15. ♜d2 ♗c6 16. ♜fd1 f5 17. f3 ♜xd2 18. ♜xd2 fxe4 19. fxe4 ♜e8= 0-1 (48) Socko, M (2445) – Kosteniuk, A (2534) Reykjavik 2015] 15... ♘c6 16. ♘cd5 f5 17. exf5 ♗xf5= Muse, D (2404) – Stern, R (2533) Berlin 2015.

13... 0-0-0 14. f5

Gaining some space, but this also gives up control over the e5-square.

14. ♔f2 c5 15. ♘d2 ♗g4 16. ♘e2 ♘c6 17. c3 f6=



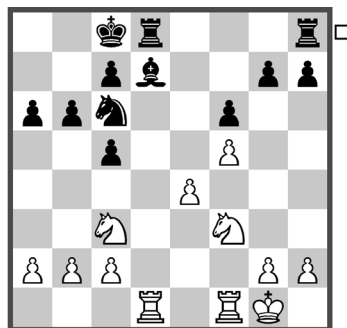
Position after: 17... f6=

Glud – Schandorff, Silkeborg 2008

14... f6

14... c5 15. f6 gxf6 16. ♜xf6 ♗e6 17. ♘d2 ♘g6 is a nice alternative.

15. ♘d4 c5 16. ♘f3 ♘c6



Position after: 16... ♘c6

17. ♔f2

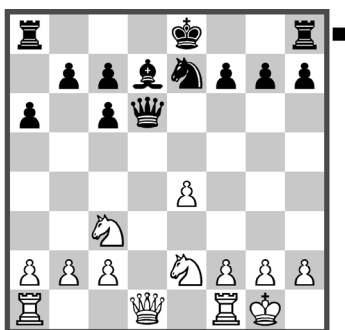
Or 17. ♘d5 ♜de8.

17... ♖de8! 18. ♜fe1 ♘e5 19. ♘xe5
 ♜xe5 20. ♜d3 ♜he8 21. g4 ♙c6 22.
 ♜h3 h6 23. ♜he3 b5 24. ♚f3 h5

Black has played well and reached a comfortable endgame in L'Ami – De Jong, Hilversum 2008.

**k) 5.0-0 ♚f6 6.d4 exd4 7.♙g5 ♚d6 8.♘xd4
 ♙e7 9.♙xe7 ♘xe7 10.♘c3 ♙e7 11.♘de2**

1. e4 e5 2. ♘f3 ♘c6 3. ♙b5 a6 4. ♙xc6
 dxc6 5. 0-0 ♚f6!? 6. d4 exd4 7. ♙g5
 ♚d6 8. ♘xd4 ♙e7 9. ♙xe7 ♘xe7 10.
 ♘c3 ♙d7! 11. ♘de2



Position after: 11. ♘de2

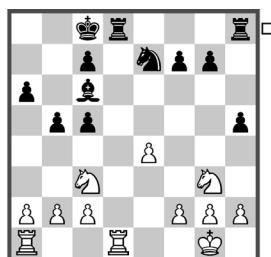
The most active spot for the knight.

11... 0-0-0 12. ♚c1

The most popular move. The queen is heading for the e3-square, from where she operates best.

A) 12. ♚d4 This loses time. 12... ♚xd4
 13. ♘xd4 c5 14. ♘de2 b5!? A very attractive plan: Black does not hesitate but starts an assault immediately. 15. ♜fd1 ♙c6 16. ♘g3 h5!

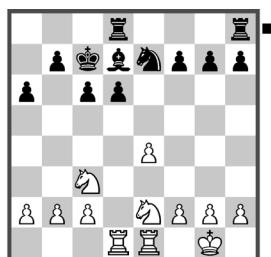
(see analysis diagram next column)



Position after: 16... h5!

17. f3 h4 18. ♘f1 b4 19. ♜xd8+ ♜xd8
 20. ♘d1 h3 21. ♘f2 hxg2 22. ♚xg2 f5
 Meier – Ragger, Vienna 2005, was an impressive display of how to seize the initiative in a seemingly calm position.

B) 12. ♚xd6 A pretty boring continuation, though the equality is clean. 12... cxd6 13. ♜ad1 ♚c7 14. ♜fe1

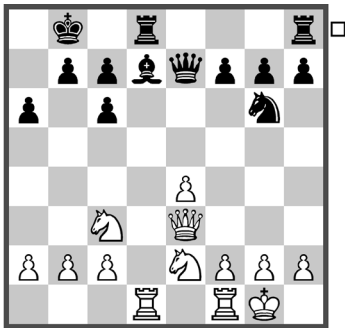


Position after: 14. ♜fe1

h5 Ambitious play. [14... ♜he8 is simpler. 15. f3 ♘g6= was Safarli, E (2593) – Shankland, S (2705) Khanty – Mansiysk

2019 where a draw was soon signed.]
 15. f3 h4 16. ♖d2 ♜h6 17. ♘f4 ♘g6
 18. ♘xg6 ♜xg6 19. ♙f2 ♜e8 20.
 ♜de2 a5 21. a3 ♜ge6 and Black was
 very comfortable in Meier, G (2628) –
 Eljanov, P (2671) Dortmund 2021.

12... ♘g6 13. ♙e3 ♙b8 14. ♜ad1
 ♙e7



Position after: 14... ♙e7

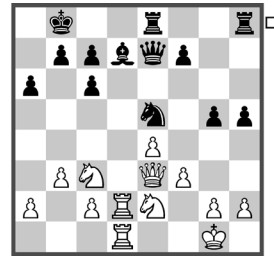
This setup is extremely effective. White lacks targets and Black slowly but surely starts to improve.

15. f4

This move should be played sooner rather than later.

A) 15. ♜d2 ♘e5 16. b3 h5!? [16... ♙c8
 17. ♜fd1 ♜xd2 18. ♜xd2 f6 19. f3 h5
 20. ♜d1 g5 21. ♘c1 ♜e8 22. ♘d3 b6
 23. ♘e2 c5 24. ♘c3 ♙b7 was already
 more than comfortable for Black in Rad-
 jabov – Adams, Baku 2008] 17. ♜fd1 g5
 18. f3 ♜de8!

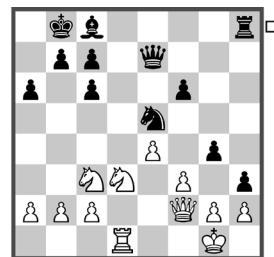
(see analysis diagram next column)



Position after: 18... ♜de8!

would have been an even more effective way to play, it seems. White is struggling, e.g. 19. ♘c1 f5! 20. ♘d3 ♘xd3 21. ♜xd3 ♙c8

B) 15. ♜d4 ♙c8 16. ♜fd1 [16. f4
 ♜xd4 17. ♘xd4 f6 would have been
 the lesser evil.] 16... ♜xd4 17. ♙xd4 f6
 18. f3 White has decided to refrain from
 pushing f4 altogether, but it turns out to
 be a faulty idea. Black's play is really in-
 structive! 18... h5 19. ♙e3 ♘e5 20.
 ♙d4 A clear sign of lacking a plan. 20...
 g5 21. ♘c1 h4 22. ♙f2 g4 23. ♘d3 h3

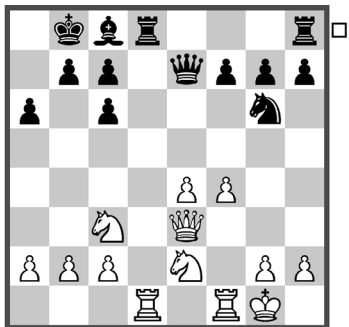


Position after: 23... h3

24. f4 ♘xd3 25. ♜xd3 f5 26. ♙d4 fxe4
 27. ♙xe4 ♙f8! A small, passive-looking
 move and... best, of course. White is
 helpless. 28. ♙e5 hxg2 29. ♜d2 ♜h7
 30. ♜xg2 ♜e7 31. ♙d4 ♜e1+ 32. ♙f2
 ♙e7 33. ♜g3 ♜h1 White had no

chances to save this game 0-1 Turner, M (2521) – Adams, M (2694) Daventry 2020.

15... ♖c8!

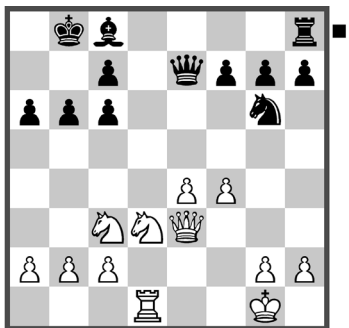


Position after: 15... ♖c8!

16. ♗c1 ♖xd1

16... b6 was maybe a tiny bit better.

17. ♖xd1 b6 18. ♗d3



Position after: 18. ♗d3

18... a5

18... f5 is an alternative idea, to fix the centre right away. 19. ♖e1 [If 19. e5

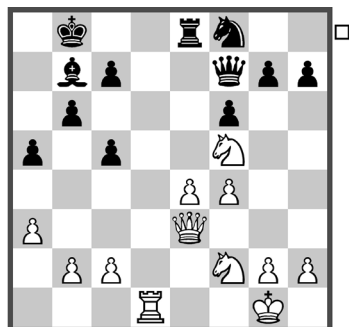
♗e6 planning to push ...c5 and then ...♗b7.]

19... ♖e8 20. ♗f2 ♗f7 21. exf5 ♖xe1+ 22. ♗xe1 ♗xf5 23. g3 ♔b7 and Black's king is safer.

19. ♖e1 ♗a6 20. ♗f2 ♖e8 21. a3 f6

I find this position hilarious. White still has the better structure, normal coordination, and yet is unable to do anything. Meanwhile, Black has ways to improve.

22. ♗e2 ♗b7 23. ♗g3 c5 24. ♗f5 ♗f7 25. ♖d1 ♗f8



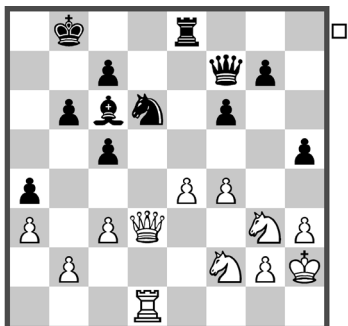
Position after: 25... ♗f8

Black's last piece is searching for a more effective spot...

26. c3 a4 27. h3 ♗e6 28. ♗g3 ♗c6 29. ♖d2 ♗d8!!

...and found one, heading via b7 towards d6-c4 or a5-c4. White is practically lost already, which is just shocking.

30. ♔d3 ♘b7 31. ♚h2 ♞d6 32. ♖d1 h5!



Position after: 32... h5!

The e4 pawn is chronically ill.

33. ♖e1 h4 34. ♞f1 ♚b3

And the b2 pawn too.

35. e5 fxe5 36. fxe5 ♚xb2!

Some finesse in the end.

37. ♖e2 ♚b5!

The point.

38. ♚c2 ♞c4 39. e6 ♞xa3

White resigned, 0-1 Naiditsch, A (2695) – Svidler, P (2735) Karlsruhe/Baden Baden 2019 This game is one of the best positional achievements I have ever seen in the Ruy Lopez and one more reason for us to feel confident choosing this line!