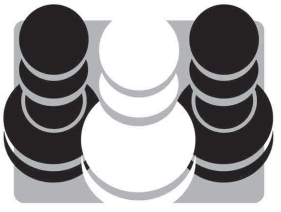
Grandmaster Repertoire

Leningrad Dutch

By

Mihail Marin

To my late mother, who used to tell me:
"Play beautifully, Bobiță!"



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Preface

The magic of the Leningrad Dutch has accompanied my chess career for several decades.

For a relatively short time, about one or two years, this was my main opening against 1.d4 during my teenage years, sometime around 1980. At that age I was not mature enough to understand its strategic subtleties and I soon switched to more natural systems. But I kept following the theoretical developments in the Leningrad Variation, in the 80s and early 90s, and also chose a few "personal heroes". Malaniuk's rigorousness in standard positions was highly instructive, while Beliavsky's fighting spirit added colour to this strategic opening. But my absolute champion was Mikhail Gurevich, whose games gave an impression of fluency, with harmonious connections between the wings and a perfect balance between dynamic and static elements.

Later, as an experienced player, I started using the Leningrad system occasionally in the early 90s, without bothering to study theory more than superficially. I had a feeling that I could find my own way in positions with complex pawn play. The only reason why I did not play it more frequently was the fear that, without thorough study, some of the lines examined in Volume 2 (such as 2.♘c3, 2.♗g5 or even 2.e4, for example) would be problematic. This is why for a long time most of my occasional Dutch games started with 1.d4 d6 or 1.c4 f5.

The following episode helped me to understand my inner feelings about this opening. During an important knockout tournament, I needed a draw with Black against a difficult opponent to qualify for the final. Without hesitation, I chose the Leningrad Dutch and achieved my aim. My friend WIM Angela Dragomirescu asked me why I decided to play such a risky opening. "I always play the Leningrad when I need to win," I replied and after a brief hesitation added, "or if I need to make a draw." We both instantly understood the paradox involved in my answer, and started to laugh. Indeed, no one ever needed to lose!

But then I understood what all this was about. In order to be successful with the Dutch, one needs full focus and determination. The first move is very committal and Black needs to play accurately in order to prove it is useful for the global plan.

When Quality Chess suggested the project that resulted in these two companion volumes, I was pleased by the idea that I would finally have the opportunity to examine this old favourite opening thoroughly, something I had failed to do over the past decades.

My fears regarding the early deviations disappeared, and I became so deeply involved in the world of the Leningrad that in five consecutive tournaments early in 2019 I played 1...f5 in all my

games, except those starting with 1.e4. I actually adopted a similar strategy with White, starting all my games in those tournaments with 1.f4.

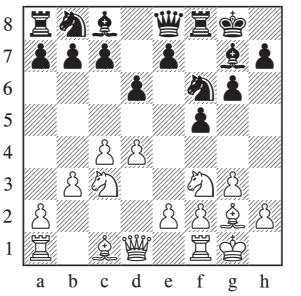
This first volume examines all the important systems involving g2-g3. Many decades of theoretical investigation and over-the-board practice have established these as the main lines against the Dutch.

I am now better prepared to play the Leningrad on a regular basis in the future and I hope that these two volumes will also encourage the reader to do so.

Mihail Marin
Bucharest, March 2021

Chapter 3

7...♕e8



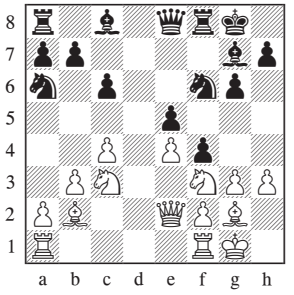
8.b3

Variation Index

1.d4 f5 2.g3 ♘f6 3.♗g2 g6 4.♘f3 ♗g7 5.0–0 0–0 6.c4 d6 7.♘c3 ♕e8 8.b3

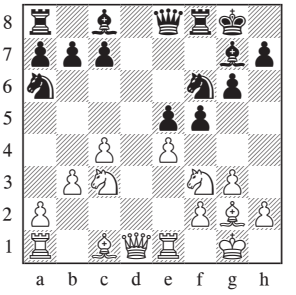
8...♘a6!?

A) note to move 12



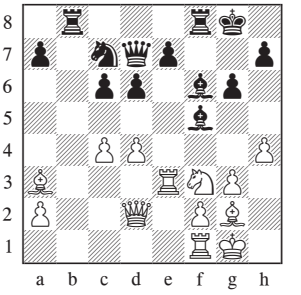
13...♘d7!N

B) note to 11.♗a3!N



11...f4!N

C) after 18.bxc4



18...♖b7!N

1.d4 f5 2.g3 ♘f6 3.♗g2 g6 4.♘f3 ♗g7 5.0–0 0–0 6.c4 d6 7.♘c3 ♕e8 8.b3

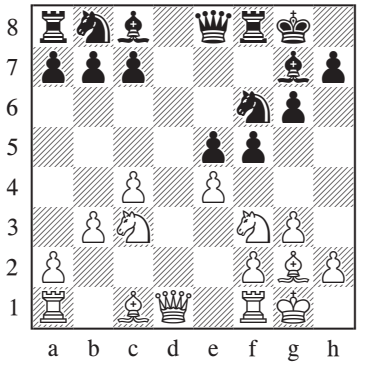
This is the last move we need to cover before we reach the main line of 8.d5, which we shall see in Chapters 4-6.

While working on this book, I eventually learned that this apparently inoffensive move, which does not take any direct measures against Black's ...e7-e5, requires very accurate play from Black. If White's only intention was developing the bishop to b2, things would be simple for Black, but we also have to be ready for ♗a3, which, if played at the right moment, could be unpleasant.

8...♘a6!?

Choosing this move came as a result of a long, and at times painful, process. Before we get to the analysis of my recommended move, I will explain the main reasons for my disappointment about the lines I had tried initially. Of course this is a repertoire book, but I believe that the following "rejected lines" will enhance the reader's understanding of the Leningrad.

The critical move is supposed to be:
8...e5 9.dxe5 dxe5 10.e4



10...♘c6

Black's wish to bring this knight closer to d4 is natural, but now White's knight also gets a stable post on d5.

After going through the lines recommended below, one might ask whether this is a good moment to try to transpose with 10...f4, having avoided the pinning 9.♗a3 as examined in line C. The problem is that White no longer needs to spend a tempo on ♖e1, and can simply win an exchange with 11.♘d5 ♘a6 12.♗a3 ♖f7 13.♘g5 ♖d7 14.♗h3± as 14...♖d8 runs into: 15.♘e7† ♔h8 16.♕xd8! ♕xd8 17.♘f7#

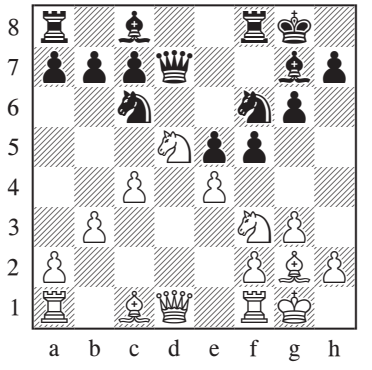
11.♘d5!

The only challenging move.

If 11.♗a3 ♖f7 12.exf5 ♗xf5, possibly followed by ...♖d8, Black's position is preferable already, as their pieces are very active.

11...♕d7

This is held to be Black's most reliable move. While defending the pawn on c7, the queen also establishes contact with the g7-bishop, in view of the probable opening of the long diagonal and a bishop exchange; this move also keeps the d8-square clear for the rook. The obvious drawback of this move is that it blocks the bishop on c8, but until recently White had not been able to question the viability of this plan.



12.exf5 e4 13.♘g5 gxf5

Throughout the decades, White has tried several moves here, leading to entertaining play with mutual chances. Only recently was the most troublesome move played in a couple of games.

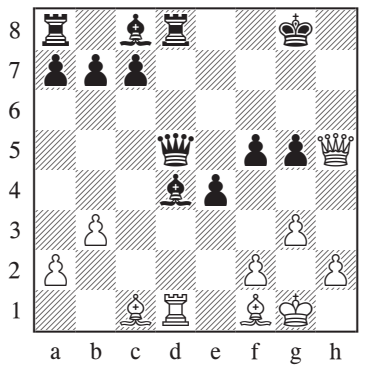
14.♖b1!?

The rook evacuates the exposed diagonal, keeping flexibility with respect to the way White will develop the queen's bishop. In certain cases ♖b2-d2 may also be an issue. Even though this move looks very neutral, it has the merit of taking measures against Black's attempts to break free using forcing variations, and reveals the fact that Black's queenside development is anything but easy to complete.

14...♘xd5

14...h6 only helps White's knight to reach a better square: 15.♘h3 ♘xd5 16.cxd5 ♘b4 17.♗a3 a5 18.♘f4± With perfect control for White.

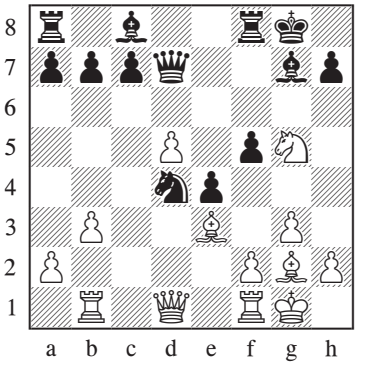
14...♖d8 15.♖b2 ♘xd5 16.cxd5 ♕xd5 The intermediate capture on b2 would weaken the king and increase the strength of ♕d1-h5. 17.♕h5 h6 In the absence of the bishop, this move would not be available. 18.♖d2 ♘d4 19.♖fd1! White keeps increasing the pressure without caring about the knight on g5, which has already contributed to the weakening of the kingside. 19...hxg5 20.♖xd4 ♗xd4 21.♗f1



With Black's king weak and the d4-bishop under an unpleasant pin, Black cannot satisfactorily parry the combined attack of all White's pieces. For instance: 21...b5 (preventing ♗c4) 22.♗e3 c5 23.♗xb5+–

15.cxd5 ♘d4 16.♗e3

Both games went this way, but 16.♗b2N is also worth mentioning: 16...♕xd5 17.♕h5 h6 18.♘xe4 ♕f7 19.♕xf7† ♔xf7 20.♘c5 c6 21.♖fe1± With the better development and structure.



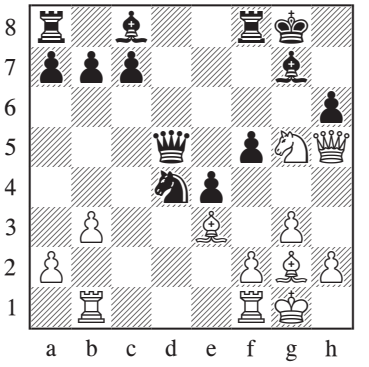
16...♕xd5

The text move is somewhat better than 16...c5 17.♕h5 h6 when in Gupta – Bajarani, Al Ain 2015, White missed 18.♘e6!N ♘xe6 19.dxe6 ♕e8 20.♕h4 ♕xe6 21.♗xc5 ♖e8 22.♖fd1± with a persistent initiative and a lead in development.

17.♕h5

Another way of retaining the initiative is: 17.f3 h6 18.fxe4 ♕e5 19.♘f3 ♘xf3† 20.♕xf3 fxe4 21.♕xe4 ♖xf1† 22.♖xf1 ♕xe4 23.♗xe4 c6 24.♖f4± Black will most likely lose the h6-pawn, but should be able to generate some counterplay with the rook.

17...h6



18.♘xe4 ♕f7 19.♕xf7† ♖xf7

19...♔xf7?! is rather pointless: 20.♘c5 c6 21.♖bd1± With a perfect regrouping and the better structure for White in Peralta – Kholopov, Sitges 2018.

20.♘c3

With the black king's rook active, 20.♘c5 is less effective: 20...♘e2† 21.♔h1 f4 22.gxf4 c6 23.♖bd1 ♗f5 with reasonable compensation for the pawn.

20...♘c2 21.♗d2 c6 22.♘e2±

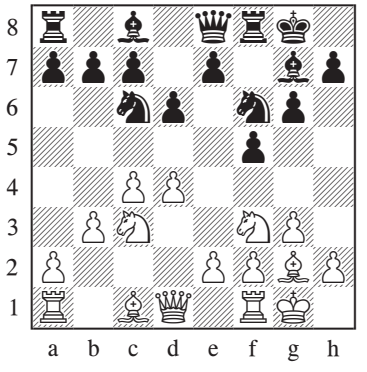
Followed by ♘f4 with very pleasant play.

In this line I have mentioned a few alternatives for White to prove that finding a completely satisfactory defence for Black is far from easy. If there had been just one critical position, it would have made sense to try to fix it.

For quite a long time I was tempted to recommend the following move as our repertoire choice:

8...♘c6

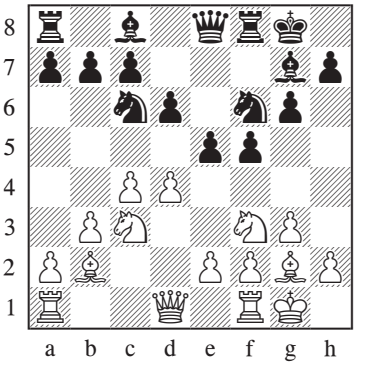
I was close to believing that this was the best way to continue, but at the last moment I noticed an untried idea which ruins the whole system.



9.♗b2

In practice, 9.♗a3 is slightly more popular and achieves far better results, which explains why I dedicated a lot of time to checking it. My main line went 9...♘e4 10.♖c1 ♘xc3 11.♖xc3 and now, instead of the usual 11...f4, I discovered that Black's best is 11...a5!? preparing either ...♘b4 or ...a4, and keeping the kingside break in reserve.

9...e5

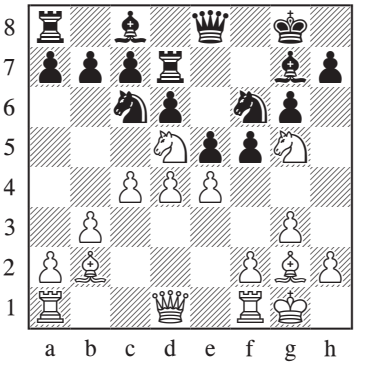


10.♘d5!N

This untested move offers White a clear advantage.

Most of the games continued 10.dxe5 dxe5, with adequate play for Black. The main difference is made by the open d-file. Concretely, it is worth comparing 11.♘d5 ♖f7 12.♘g5 ♖d7 13.e4 h6 with the similar line below with the d-pawns still on the board.

10...♖f7 11.♘g5 ♖d7 12.e4



As in the line starting with 8...e5, a black major piece blocks the c8-bishop's development. Things are in fact even worse now, as the rook on d7 has no prospects at all.

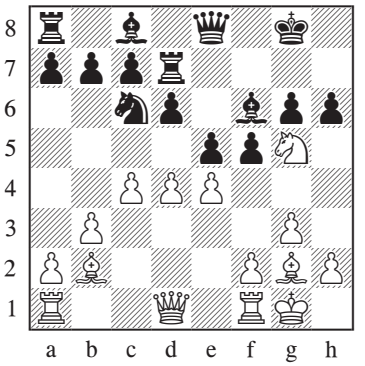
12...h6

There are several ways of releasing the tension, but none of them offers Black an easy life: 12...♘xd4 13.♗xd4 h6 14.♘xf6† ♗xf6 15.♘h3 exd4 16.exf5 gxf5 17.♘f4 As in other lines above, White is better developed and has attacking chances against the weakened black kingside. Black's extra pawn does not count for much.

12...♘xd5 13.cxd5 ♘xd4 leads to similar play: 14.♗xd4 exd4 15.exf5± followed by ♖e1 and/or ♘e6 soon.

If 12...♘xe4 then the best reply is 13.♗xe4! fxe4 14.♘xe4, putting strong pressure on f6. 14...♕d8 15.♕d2 ♖f7 16.dxe5 dxe5 17.f4 ♗f5 18.♘g5± With a strong initiative.

13.♘xf6† ♗xf6



Things would be fine for Black if White did not have:

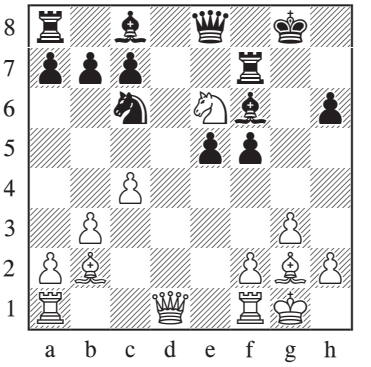
14.♘e6! ♖f7

Defending the bishop in order to avoid a later pin along the long diagonal, but exposing the rook.

If 14...♖e7 then: 15.exf5 gxf5 16.dxe5 dxe5 17.♘f4 ♗g7 18.♘d5±

The knight is not really edible: 14...♕xe6 15.d5± followed by dxc6, exf5 and ♗xc6.

15.exf5 gxf5 16.dxe5 dxe5



Here and in the similar line above, Black could instead have taken on e5 with a piece, but this would yield White a positional advantage without the need to prove any concrete ideas.

17.♗xc6!

With the rook on f7 this works out very well.

17...bxc6

The point is that 17...♕xc6 runs into: 18.♘d8 ♗xd8 19.♕xd8† ♖f8 20.♕h4± With better development and a strong attack with opposite-coloured bishops.

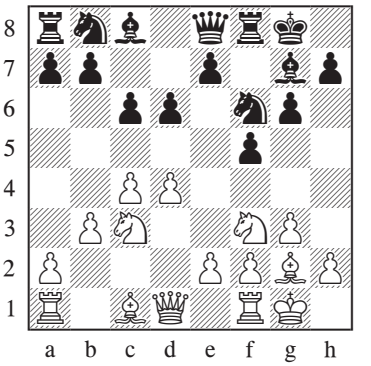
18.♘c5

Black's whole structure is weak and the bishop on c8 is no guarantee of a successful counterattack.

18...f4 19.♕h5 ♗g7 20.♖ae1 ♗f5 21.g4 ♗h7 22.f3±

There is a more flexible move that I considered, before choosing 8...♘a6 as our main continuation, namely:

8...c6



If 9.♗a3 ♘a6 then play would transpose to line C below, but my main worries are connected with:

9.♖e1 e5 10.dxe5 dxe5 11.e4

In line B below we have almost the same position, but with ...♘a6 instead of ...c7-c6. I find the former more useful, as it contributes to development while also ensuring the safety of the c7-square. Continuing the line a few more moves, we can see that Black cannot do without the knight move anyway.

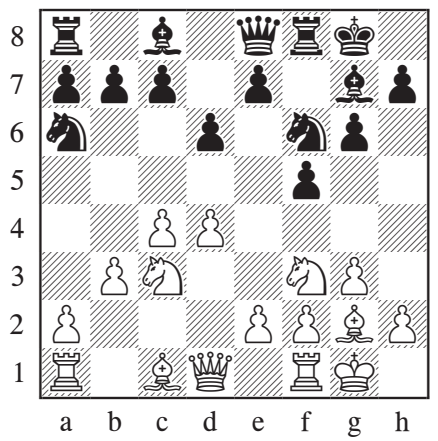
11...f4 12.gxf4 ♘h5

Or if 12...♗g4 13.♗a3 ♖f7 14.h3 and White is clearly better.

13.f5 ♘a6 14.♗a3 ♖f7 15.♘g5 ♖d7 16.♕g4±

Black's planned counterplay has lost its momentum.

After that explanation of why the alternatives were lacking, we will return to my recommended move 8...♘a6:



We will examine **A) 9.♗b2**, **B) 9.♖e1** and **C) 9.♗a3**.

A) 9.♗b2

This neutral move allows Black to display some typical ideas under favourable circumstances.

9...e5 10.dxe5 dxe5 11.e4 f4!

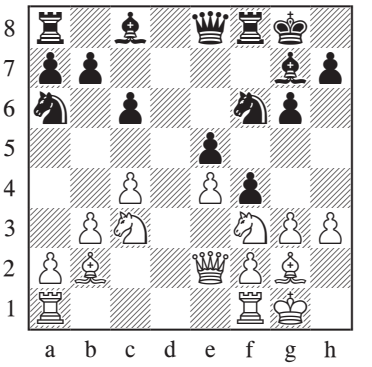
The start of the thematic kingside attack, involving a pawn sacrifice. We will examine **A1) 12.♘d5** and **A2) 12.gxf4**.

Maintaining a neutral policy would allow Black to consolidate the position. For instance: 12.♕e2 c6 13.♖ad1 ♕e7 14.♖fe1 ♘h5 15.a3 ♗g4 16.b4 ♘c7∓ White had no obvious way to free himself from the pressure in Haessler – Ehlvest, Las Vegas 2009.

12.h3

This would waste a tempo and weaken the kingside.

12...c6 13.♕e2



13...♘d7!N

Over-defending e5 in order to prepare ...♘ac5-e6.

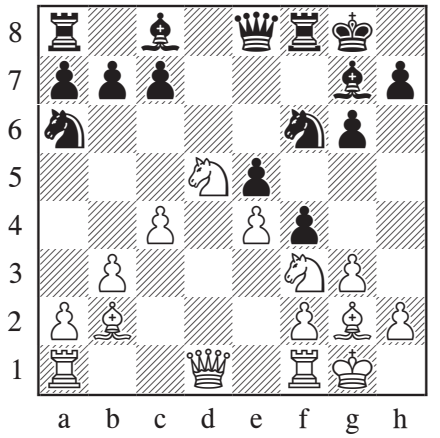
The kingside pawn assault is not too effective: 13...h6 14.♖ad1 g5 15.gxf4 g4? 16.hxg4 ♗xg4 17.f5 ♘h5 18.♕e3± Black did not have enough compensation for the pawn in Batchuluun – Fier, Abu Dhabi 2017. Instead of 15...g4?, 15...gxf4 is better, but White retains the better chances with 16.♘h4± due to Black's lagging development and weaknesses on the light squares.

14.♗a3 ♖f7 15.♘a4 ♘c7=

Black has comfortable play.

We will not examine 12.♗a3 as this would lead to similar play as in line B, but with a tempo less (♖e1) for White.

A1) 12.♘d5



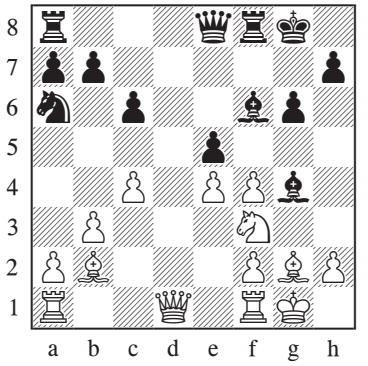
With the knight defending c7, this is not so effective, as Black can immediately attack the intruder.

12...c6 13.♘xf6† ♗xf6 14.gxf4 exf4

Without a white rook on e1, this is an entirely satisfactory answer, as the white e-pawn does not have its natural support.

But the following gambit line is also entirely viable:

14...♗g4!?



15.♕c2?!

White would do better to go all the way: 15.fxe5 ♗xe5 16.♗xe5 ♗xf3 17.♕d4 ♖d8 18.♗d6 ♕f7= With a probable draw by perpetual after ...♗xg2 and ...♕f3†.

15...exf4

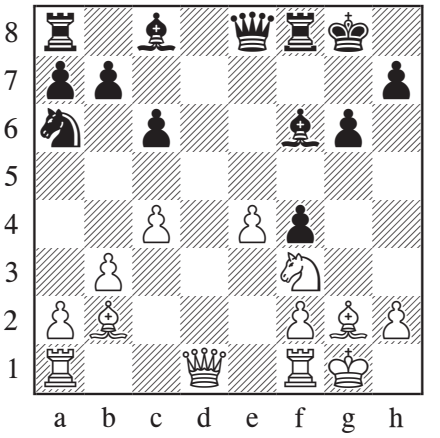
After the queen has developed on a passive square, this recapture is even stronger than in the main line.

16.e5

The text move is somewhat better than 16.♗xf6 ♖xf6 17.♕c3 ♕e7 18.♘e5 when in Karavade – Vovk, Al Ain 2013, Black's strongest continuation was: 18...♗h5 19.f3 ♖d8∓ Black has the better structure and superior coordination, while the g2-bishop is clearly suffering from claustrophobia.

16...♗g7 17.♖fe1 ♕e7∓

Followed by the knight's transfer to e6.



15.♗xf6 ♖xf6 16.♕d4

White tries hard to get some control in the centre.

16...♕e7 17.e5 ♖f8 18.♕d6N

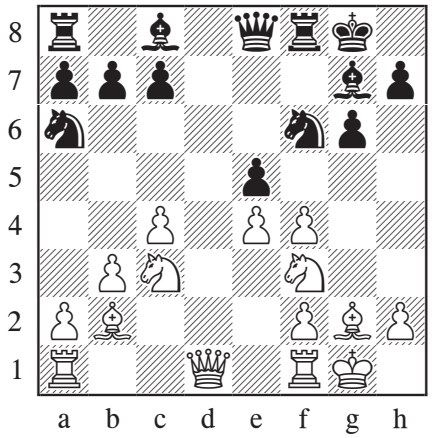
The best chance to keep troubles away.

The line to have been tested in practice is: 18.h3 ♗f5 19.♖ad1 ♘c5 20.b4 ♘d3 21.c5 (21.♖xd3 ♖ad8–+ wins material) 21...♖ad8 22.♕c4† ♕e6 23.♕c3 In Postny – Pruijssers, Belgium 2018, Black could have retained better chances with 23...♖fe8N∓, achieving perfect coordination.

18...♖e8 19.♖fe1 ♗g4 20.♖ad1 ♘c5 21.b4 ♘e6=

With perfect stability for Black.

A2) 12.gxf4



This leads to entertaining play, but does not offer chances of an advantage either.

12...♗g4 13.h3

Continuing the pawn-grabbing is likely to cause White serious problems, as it offers Black the time to invade the weak squares:

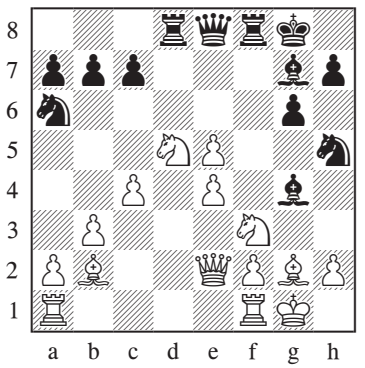
13.fxe5

In Moehring – Mainka, Senden 1999, Black should have played:

13...♖d8N 14.♕e2

Or if 14.♘d5 ♘d7∓ followed by ...♘xe5, with overwhelming play on the dark squares.

14...♘h5 15.♘d5



15...♖xd5!

Eliminating the only defender of the f4-square.

16.exd5 ♘f4 17.♕d2

The only square where the queen is not exposed.

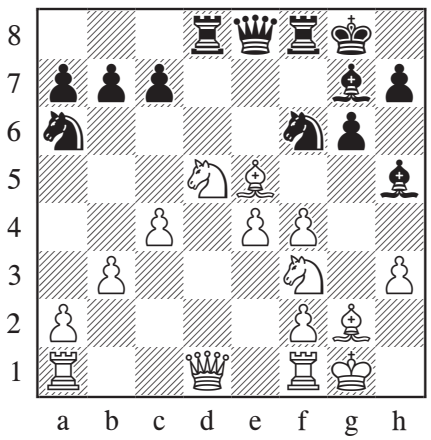
17...♘xg2 18.♘g5 ♘f4∓

Due to the strong knight on f4, White's compact centre does not offer entirely adequate compensation for the piece.

13...♖d8 14.♘d5 ♗h5 15.♗xe5!N

The only move to keep White in the game.

15.fxe5? ♘d7∓ led to a familiar picture in Zult – Riemersma, Amsterdam 2012.



The strategic plot after the last move is clear. White will try to prove that three pawns are stronger than the piece about to be lost on d5, while Black will mainly rely on the weaknesses on f4 and on the dark squares in general to challenge that evaluation.

15...c6 16.♗xf6

Analysis proves that the following optically-impressive move is less accurate:

16.♕d4 ♗xf3!

This is the most precise move order.

If 16...cxd5 17.exd5 ♗xf3 18.♗xf3 ♕d7 19.♔g2 b6 20.♖ad1 ♕f5 21.♖fe1 ♗h6 the chances are roughly equal.

17.♗xf6!

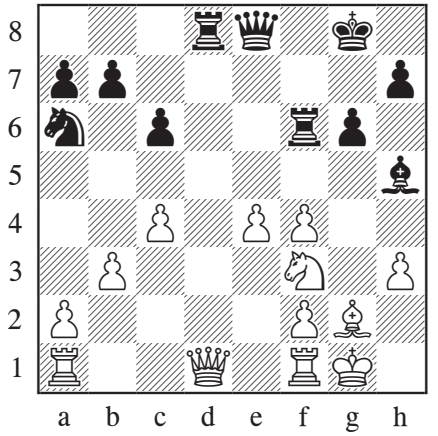
A forced intermediate move, leading to a long mutual grabbing sequence.

The point is that if 17.♗xf3 then Black can deviate from the line above with: 17...♘xd5! 18.cxd5 ♗xe5∓

17...♗xg2 18.♗xg7 ♗xf1 19.♗xf8 ♕xf8 20.♘f6† ♔f7 21.♘d7 ♕g7 22.♘e5† ♔e8 23.♕e3 ♖d3 24.♕e1 ♖xh3 25.♕xf1 ♖h4 26.♖d1 ♘c5∓

Black will retrieve either central pawn, while keeping the safer king position.

16...♗xf6 17.♘xf6† ♖xf6



18.♕c1 ♘c5 19.♘e5

The text move is slightly more ambitious than: 19.♕e3 ♖d3 20.♕xc5 ♗xf3 21.♖ae1 ♖xf4= White's king is weak and the least Black can expect is to regain the pawn on e4.

19...♘e6 20.f5 gxf5 21.♔h2 fxe4 22.♗xe4 ♘f4

Black's perfect coordination, and the strong knight on f4 in particular, offers at least enough compensation for the pawn.

Abridged Variation Index

The Variation Index in the book is 5 pages long. Below is an abridged version giving just the main variations, not the sub-variations.

Chapter 8

1.d4 f5 2.g3 ♘f6 3.♗g2 g6 4.♘f3 ♗g7 5.0–0 0–0

Chapter 9

1.d4 f5 2.g3 ♘f6 3.♗g2 g6 4.c4 ♗g7 5.♘c3 0–0 6.♘h3 e6!?

Chapter 10

1.d4 f5 2.g3 ♘f6 3.♗g2 g6

Chapter 11

1.d4 f5 2.g3 ♘f6 3.♗g2 g6