

Playing the Sveshnikov

By

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Quality Chess
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First edition 2023 by Quality Chess UK Ltd

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PLAYING THE SVESHNIKOV

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Paperback ISBN 978-1-78483-181-3

Hardcover ISBN 978-1-78483-182-0

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Distributed in North and South America by National Book Network

Distributed in Rest of the World by Quality Chess UK Ltd through
Sunrise Handicrafts, ul. Szarugi 59, 21-002 Marysin, Poland

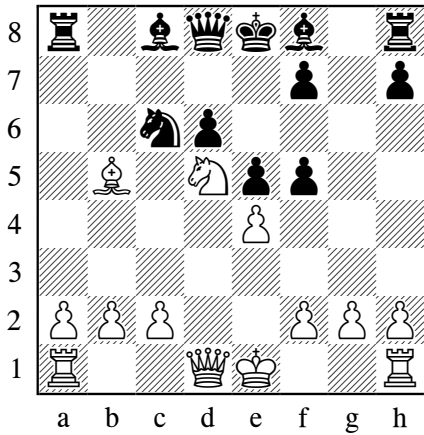
Typeset by Jacob Aagaard
Proofreading by Jeremy Hart
Edited by Andrew Greet & Jacob Aagaard
Cover design by Kallia Kleisarchaki and Adamsondesign.com

Printed in Estonia by Tallinna Raamatutrukikoja LLC

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C) 11.♘xb5 axb5 12.♙xb5



This line became well known after Bronstein played it twice in the late 1970s, although a few other players tried it before him. It subsequently became popular in the eighties. There is an obvious resemblance to the topical 13.♘xb5 variation, as covered in variation B2 of Chapter 3 on page 105, which is a refinement of the present line. You should be happy to meet the present variant, as long as you know the best reply. White will get three pawns and knight on d5 is strong, so it's important to know how to diminish this early initiative. I first analysed this variation in the eighties, by which time my recommended antidote had been discovered. Since then, the whole line has almost entirely disappeared from tournament practice at grandmaster level.

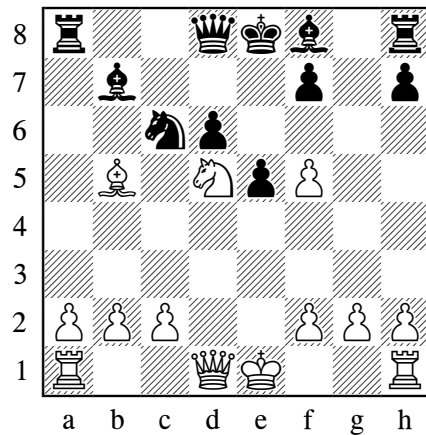
12...♙b7!

The bishop is perfectly placed here, for reasons that will become clear. That's why nowadays White prefers to sacrifice on b5 only after the bishop has committed to e6, as we saw in Chapter 3.

12...♙d7?! has actually been the most popular choice, and there are lots of examples of it from recent years, indicating that many players either forgot or never learned about the best antidote.

After 13.exf5 White has good chances. The position is almost the same as in variation B2 of Chapter 3, except that the moves c2-c3 and ...♙g7 have not been played. Transpositions are possible, but White has some additional possibilities such as a2-a4 followed by ♖a3 and lifting the rook to the kingside.

13.exf5



13...♖a5!?

The possibility of sacrificing an exchange for the initiative makes this an attractive practical choice.

13...♖c8 14.c3 ♙g7 is an engine suggestion which is sensible enough, and has scored well for Black in practice.

13...♙h6!?N is another good option, with 14.♖h5 ♖a5! a key point. If I was playing a correspondence game, I might lean towards one of these engine-approved continuations. However, the text move is fully sound and from a practical perspective I like the idea of returning some material in order to fight for the initiative ourselves.

14.a4

Rushing with the pawn is the natural and best choice.

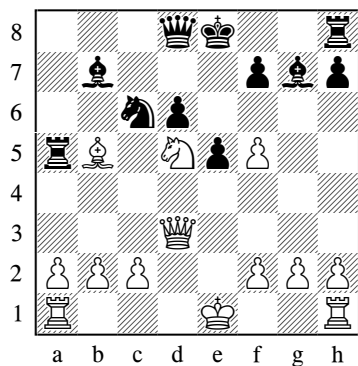
14. ♖e2 is never played, as it places the queen on a vulnerable square. 14... ♗h6 15.b4 0–0! 16.c3 (16.bxa5? ♘d4 17. ♖g4† ♗h8 gives us a crushing attack; 16. ♗xc6? ♗xc6 is also horrible for White.) 16... ♘a7! (16... ♖xb5!? 17. ♖xb5 ♖a8 also looks tempting.) 17.bxa5 ♗xd5 The position is messy, but our active minor pieces should prove more effective than White's rook and pawns.

14. ♖d3

This is more logical than the line above, but it still doesn't solve White's problems.

14... ♗g7

14... ♗h6?! 15.b4! is a bit annoying.



15. ♖c4

15.b4 ♖a8 gave Black somewhat better chances in Droessler – Norchenko, corr. 2013. We may have lost time with the rook, but b2-b4 has destabilized White's position. Also, compared with the analogous lines from Chapter 3, our bishop has a brighter future on b7 than on d7.

After 15.b4, Black can also try: 15... e4!?N 16. ♖xe4† ♗f8 17.bxa5 ♖xa5† 18. ♗d1 ♗xa1 19. ♗xc6 ♗xc6 20. ♖e7† ♗g8 21. ♖g5† ♗f8 is an interesting line which results in a draw, but we can and should play more ambitiously.

15... ♗f8!

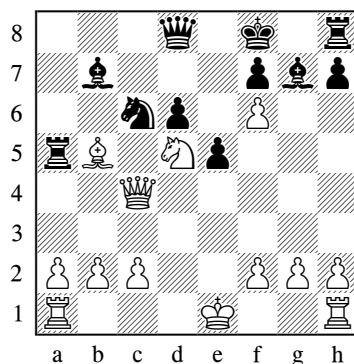
A clever way to defend c6 indirectly.

Black was successful with 15... ♖xb5?! 16. ♖xb5 ♗a8 in Efimov – Eljanov, Ohrid 2001, but White can claim a slight edge at this stage.

16.f6

The queen sacrifice 16. ♗xc6!?N ♖c5 17. ♖xc5 dxc5 18. ♗xb7 does not quite work, because 18... ♖d7! exploits White's poor coordination. After the further 19. ♗a8 ♖a4 20.f6 ♗h6 21. ♖d1 (21. ♗b7 doesn't help in view of 21... ♖b5 [21... ♖e4† is a powerful alternative] 22. ♗c8 ♖c6 when we pick up a piece anyway.) 21... ♖xa8 22.0–0 ♖g8, White does not have enough compensation. Nevertheless, in view of the improvement we are about to see, this may be White's best chance to prolong the game.

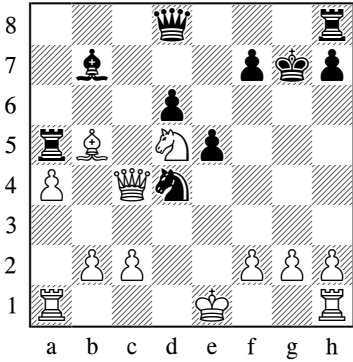
The text move has been played in a couple of correspondence games. Although Black achieved good results, we have a thunderous improvement available.



16... ♗d4!!N

The natural 16... ♗xf6 was played in both games, and after 17. ♗xf6 (17. ♗xc6 ♖c5 also favoured Black in Lindam – Mason, corr. 2003) 17... ♖xf6 18. ♗xc6 ♖c5 Black went on to win in Gonzalez Diaz – Philippe, Paris 2005. The text move is much stronger though.

17.fxg7† ♗xg7 18.a4



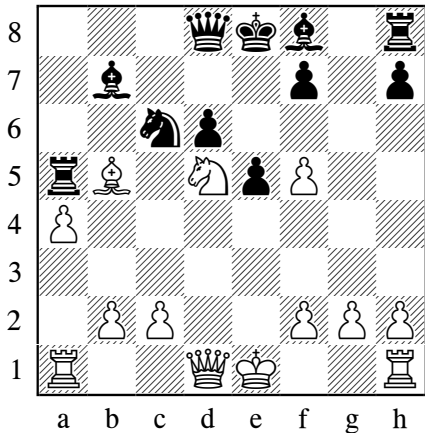
18...♗g5!

Attacking g2 and threatening ...♖c8.

18...♘xb5 19.♘e3 ♘d4 is good enough but the text move is more accurate.

19.♘e3 ♖c8 20.♗d3 ♘xb5

We are clearly winning, with an extra piece and a big lead in development.



14...♖xb5! 15.axb5 ♘d4

The exchange sacrifice was our key idea, eliminating White's strong bishop while activating our own pieces.

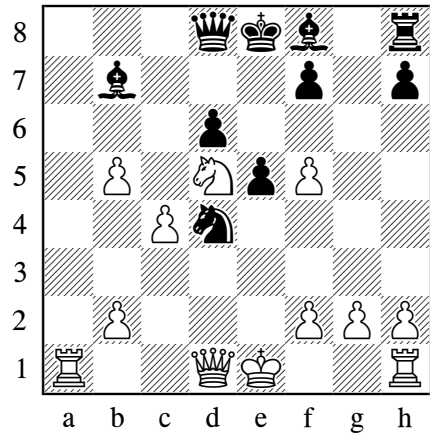
16.c4

This is the only half decent move. Alternatives leave White on the verge of a quick defeat:

16.♘e3? ♙h6! gives White serious problems, for instance: 17.♖a7 (17.0-0? ♖g8 18.f4 ♘xf5! was winning immediately in Heimrath

– Goetz, Zirndorf 1985; 17.c3? ♙xe3 18.fxe3 ♗h4† 19.g3 ♖e4 also left White without a good defence in Staszewski – Tomczak, corr. 1997.) 17...♗b6 White's position was horrible in Kobese – Klaver, Cape Town 2007.

16.c3?! ♙xd5 17.cxd4 and now 17...♗g5!N offers us a clear advantage, although the game continuation of 17...♖g8 was also quite problematic for White in Plantet – Dournes, corr. 1994.

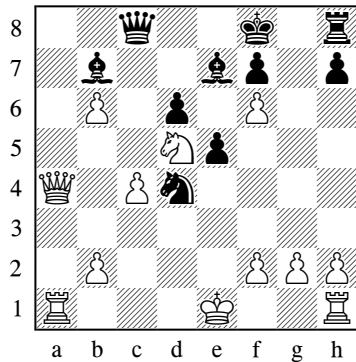


16...♗c8!

Hitting both c4 and f5, as well as threatening ...♙xd5 followed by a fork on c2, all before White can get coordinated.

17.♖a4

White also has problems after: 17.♗a4N ♙e7 18.b6† ♔f8 19.f6



19...♙xf6! 20.♘xf6 ♔e7 21.♘d5† ♕xd5
22.cxd5 ♖g4 The attacking combination of
queen and knight is extremely dangerous.

17...♗xf5 18.0–0 ♖g8

Our pieces are active and White will have to
take care not to be killed on the kingside. For
instance, if White's queen takes a wrong step
then ...♖xg2† could end things quickly.

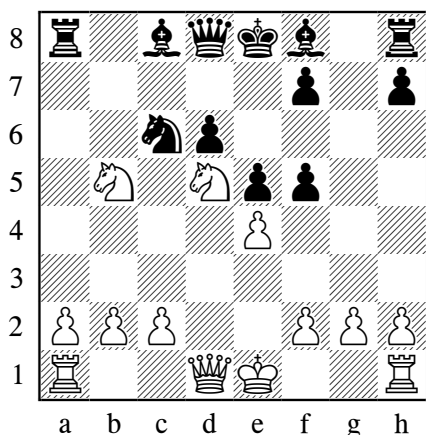
19.f3 ♕h6

Our last piece comes into play, targeting the
dark squares which were weakened by White's
last move.

20.b6 ♘f8!

Black had the initiative and White was
unable to cope with the problems in Droessler
– Troia, corr. 2013.

D) 11.♕xb5 axb5 12.♘xb5



This is a famous piece sacrifice which I
have played myself. It's pure romanticism in a
modern era. Nowadays it's not popular because
various resources have been found for Black,
but it's still important to know some details.

12...♖a5!?

This is far from the most popular
continuation, making it all the more effective
as a practical weapon. The idea has been
known for a long time, at least to me, but it
never really caught on, for reasons that remain
a mystery to me. The idea is to eliminate one of
the enemy knights at a good moment – rather
like the previous variation.

13.♘bc7†

This is White's usual choice.

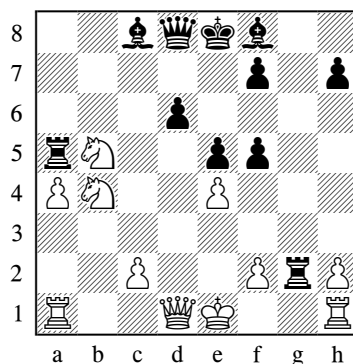
Another possible continuation is:

13.a4!? ♖g8!?N

It's important for us to seek fast counterplay.
14.0–0

This seems the most natural choice.

A sharp alternative is: 14.b4 ♘xb4! 15.♘xb4
♖xg2



An important tactical point – now both
kings are in danger! 16.♔f1 (16.♗f3 ♖g4
17.♘c6 ♗b6 18.♘xa5 ♗xa5† 19.♔f1 ♕d7
gives us a strong initiative for the exchange.)
16...♖g4!? (16...♖xf2† 17.♔xf2 ♗h4† leads
to an immediate draw.) The text move
continues the fight for a little longer, but
the correct outcome is still a draw after
17.♘c6 ♗h4 18.♖a3 ♖f4 19.♖g3 ♖xa4
20.♘d6† ♕xd6 21.♗xd6 ♕a6† 22.♔g2
♖xf2† 23.♔xf2 ♗f4† 24.♔g2 ♗xe4† with
perpetual check.

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 1

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♗c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♗f6 5.♗c3 e5 6.♗db5 d6 7.♙g5 a6 8.♗a3 b5
9.♙xf6 gxf6 10.♗d5 f5 11.♙d3 ♙e6 12.0-0 ♙xd5 13.exd5 ♗e7

- A) 14.♗xb5 13
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- C) 14.♙e1 24
- D) 14.c3 ♙g7 15.♗c2 0-0 28

Chapter 2

1.e4 c5 2.♗f3 ♗c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♗f6 5.♗c3 e5 6.♗db5 d6 7.♙g5 a6 8.♗a3 b5
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Chapter 4

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9.♙xf6 gxf6 10.♗d5 f5 (10...♙g7 11.c3 f5) 11.c3 ♙g7 12.exf5 ♙xf5

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gxf6 10.♗d5 ♙g7 11.♙d3 ♗e7 12.♗xe7 ♙xe7 13.0–0 0–0 14.c4 f5

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