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Introduction

Why another edition of *Play the French*? Over the past two or three years, after all, numerous books on the French Defence have appeared, most of them written by very competent and insightful authors. As is the wont with modern opening works, these books usually centre their recommended variations around an instructive and/or entertaining game, without great depth but with sufficient detail to show the main branches and explain basic ideas. This is absolutely legitimate and is in fact the direction towards which I have gravitated in some of my own works. But it leaves room for a book on the French with fewer generalities and more nitty-gritty chess substance, one in which you have a better chance of finding precisely how your latest adventure with 1...e6 corresponds to a set of moves in the book, whether or not those moves are flawed. *Play the French 4* is first of all a repertoire book, with a wider-than-normal choice of lines; but it is also as a reference work which tries to anticipate as many of your opponents' logical moves as possible.

The repertoire itself is highly flexible, consisting of both mainstream variations and experimental forays. At most key junctures, the reader is offered two or more distinct variations to choose from, providing sound alternatives should some line of play prove unsatisfactory or in need of repair. Of course, a book that tries to cover so many byways will necessarily be dense and in some spots difficult to read. Therefore you may want to skim over chapters before settling in to a closer examination. But I would urge you to pay particular attention to the alternatives I've given to what are (temporarily) the 'main lines'. This both prepares you to meet moves that are likely to be played, but also informs you of key ideas that may not be explicitly described elsewhere. Notice, too, that I've let many subvariations speak for themselves. Not that *Play the French* was ever excessively chatty, but I have often sacrificed verbiage to make room for specifics. I've also devoted much more space to original analysis, with less resort to bare game excerpts.

What's new in this edition? It's been nine years since *Play the French 3*, seemingly a lifetime given the rapidity with which theory changes in such a popular opening. I have therefore updated and re-analysed the great majority of variations, often in depth. I've also presented new solutions. For example, in the Advance Variation (3 e5), apart from changing some fundamental ways of playing 5...♕b6 in the main line, I have added a chapter on 5...♘h6. Versus the Tarrasch (3 ♘d2), I have returned to 3...♘f6, not only on the basis of proven merit but also because very little, if anything, has changed in a fundamental sense in the 3...c5 lines. In the Winawer (3 ♘c3 ♗b4), you will see a new chapter on 6...♕a5

(which I call the 'Portisch-Hook Variation'), and a return to the Winawer Poisoned Pawn in the main 7 ♕g4 line. There are two new chapters on the MacCutcheon Variation (3 ♘c3 ♘f6 4 ♗g5 ♗b4, replacing 4...dxe4), which is an active approach in the spirit of the Winawer; and you'll also find a new main line in the Classical System (3 ♘c3 ♘f6 4 e5).

These variations and similarly new approaches in lesser systems by no means indicate the failure of corresponding solutions from previous editions; on the contrary, most of them are still fully playable. But they do show how wonderfully flexible the French Defence is, and how you needn't despair of it should a particular system fail to satisfy your needs. Finally, in terms of coverage, I have tried to pay deeper and more respectful attention to variations which are not currently in fashion and/or which have a strong following at lower levels of play.

Another change concerns the natural bias in such a book. The 'author-advocate' form is a difficult one; for this volume, at the harsh insistence of computer engines, I've spent more time modifying or rejecting my own previous suggestions than in any book that I've previously written. In the past, moreover, I've made the assumption that the reader will understand how I have tended to choose excerpts to illustrate how Black can do well (hence the use of 'e.g.' or 'for example'). That is still true, but this time I have attempted to be clearer with regard to lines that are truly balanced, not by writing some sort of objective thesis but by indicating when the French player is looking to dig up chances in an equal position, rather than trying to prove any theoretical advantage. In other words, I have tried not to claim too much. In a related way, I've often undertaken to identify who has the easier position to play in a theoretically equal situation.

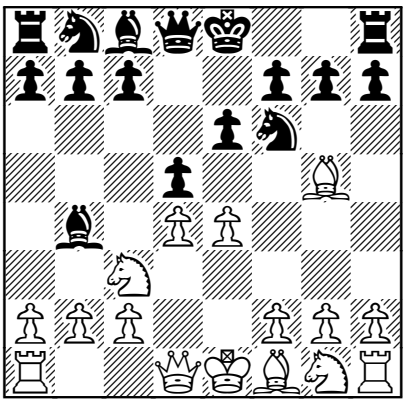
It's difficult these days not to over-rely upon computer engines for analysis, and I've undoubtedly been guilty of this in some cases. But I have also found that engines are capable of systematic bias in certain pawn structures, as well as with some unusual piece configurations. So when you use a computer to analyse the material from this and other books, be a little careful. If you disagree with my or the computer's assessment of a position (or are simply curious), don't just set up the position and let the engine run. Instead, suggest moves for the side you think has a better position than the computer believes. Give the engine a lot of time to respond, and keep playing against the engine with the moves that you think correct, until either you change your assessment or it does. Although the machine will probably prove correct more often than not, you'll be surprised how often it defers to your judgment.

Finally, I want to thank just a few of the many people who have made suggestions or otherwise contributed to this book, in particular John Hartman, Franz Steenbekkers, and Joachim Wintzer. Thanks also to the many contributors to the ChessPublishing Forum, not to mention its columnists Neil McDonald and Goh Wei Ming, and of course the owner and webmaster Tony Kosten. A special nod to Viktor Moskalenko for writing the most inspiring French books in recent years, easily the biggest influence on this edition. The publications *Kaissiber* (Stefan Bücker, editor) and *Secrets of Opening Surprises* (Jeroen Bosch) are remarkable for their contributions to the theory of lesser-known lines. Most importantly, thanks to the insights and hard work of my editor Jonathan Tait.

Chapter Fourteen

MacCutcheon: Introduction

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♘c3 ♘f6 4 ♗g5 ♗b4



This is the MacCutcheon Variation. In the last edition, the solution I gave to 4 ♗g5 was based upon ...dxe4 (i.e. 4...dxe4 5 ♘xe4 ♗e7), which is fine but not in the style of the other systems I have recommended. That is, in the main lines of the main systems of this book, Black has always held the d5 strongpoint until White decided upon e5, setting up a traditional pawn chain. That is also the case with the MacCutcheon. It is considered quite dynamic, and resembles the Winawer Variation in several respects, not the least of which are the doubled pawns White usually incurs when Black captures on c3 and surrenders his bishop pair. Moreover, in White's main line with ♕g4, Black has to defend g7 and choose between active and passive play in so doing. The resulting positions are rich and varied, with the bonus that Black can choose between wide-open play (e.g. lines based upon ...cxd4) and a complex positional struggle (lines with ...c4). Sometimes White can make this decision for him by opening the position with dxc5, a move used much more often here than in the Winawer. In the main line, there are early piece exchanges, but the imbalance of forces and structure keeps the positions extremely complex in spite of such formal simplification. As usual, all this is best shown by examining the variations themselves:

14.1 5 exd5 *365*
14.2 5 ♘e2 *367*
14.3 5 e5 *370*

Others:

(a) Black has the bishop pair and no problems after 5 ♗xf6 ♕xf6 6 e5 ♕d8 intending ...c5, or here 6...♕e7.

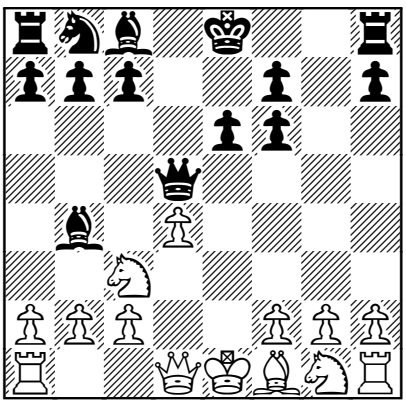
(b) 5 ♗d3 is well answered by 5...dxe4 (or 5...c5) 6 ♗xe4 ♘bd7 (or 6...h6 7 ♗xf6 ♕xf6 8 ♘f3 0-0 9 0-0 ♘d7=) 7 ♘e2 h6 8 ♗xf6 ♘xf6 9 ♗f3 c5= Gipslis-Bronstein, USSR Ch., Baku 1961.

14.1 5 exd5 ♕xd5 6 ♗xf6

Here Black has two satisfactory moves:

14.11 6...gxf6 *365*
14.12 6...♗xc3+ *366*

14.11 6...gxf6

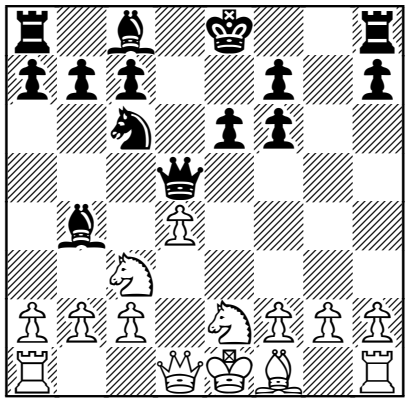


This goes with moves like ...♖g8, ...e5, and/or ...b6 to achieve rapid development.

7 ♘e2

7 ♕d2 ♕a5 (7...♗xc3 8 ♕xc3 ♘c6 9 ♘f3 ♖g8 is also satisfactory) 8 ♘e2 ♘d7 9 a3 ♘b6 has been played often; e.g. 10 ♖d1 ♗e7 11 b4!? (11 ♘f4 ♗d7 12 ♗e2 0-0-0) 11...♕g5 12 f4 ♕h6 (or 12...♕h4+ 13 g3 ♕h5=) 13 ♘c1 (13 ♘b5 ♔d8! intending ...c6/...♔c7) 13...♗d7 14 ♘b3 ♖g8 and Black had an edge in Ramsauer-Behrends, corr Germany 1994.

7...♘c6



8 a3

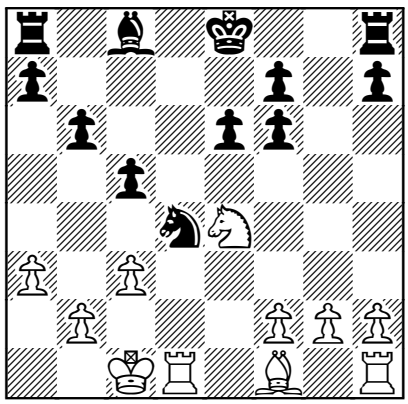
8 ♕d2 ♗xc3 9 ♘xc3 (9 ♕xc3 ♗d7 10 ♕b3 ♕a5+ 11 c3 0-0-0 is more than adequate for Black) 9...♕xd4 10 ♕xd4 ♘xd4 11 0-0-0 c5 12 ♘e4 b6 13 c3 ♘f5 14 g4 ♘h4 15 ♘xf6+ ♔e7 16 g5 h6 17 h4 ♖b8=; compare the main line.

After 8 a3, we enter a lengthy forcing sequence:

8...♗xc3+ 9 ♘xc3 ♕xd4 10 ♕xd4 ♘xd4 11 0-0-0 c5!

11...♘c6 12 ♘b5 ♔e7 13 ♘xc7 ♖b8 14 ♗b5!± with the idea 14...a6? 15 ♘xa6.

12 ♘e4 b6 13 c3



13 ♘xf6+ ♔e7 and ...♗b7 can only favour Black.

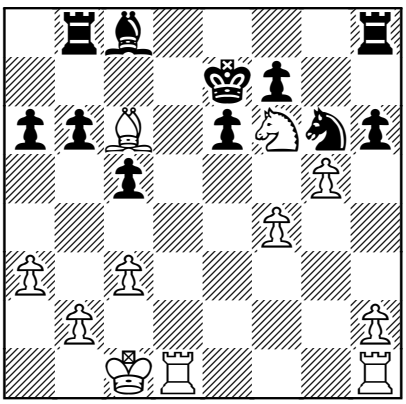
13...♘f5

Black can also play 13...♘b3+ (note that this isn't available after 8 ♕d2 ♗xc3 9 ♘xc3 ♕xd4 etc) 14 ♔c2 ♘a5 15 b4 ♘b7! 16 ♘xf6+ (16 g4 ♔e7) 16...♔e7 17 ♘g4 (or 17 ♘e4 ♗d7) 17...♗d7, which has equalized in several games.

14 g4 ♘h4 15 ♘xf6+ ♔e7 16 g5 h6 17 f4 ♖b8!

With the idea ...♘g6 and in some cases ...hxg5.

18 ♗b5 a6! 19 ♗c6 ♘g6



This position is balanced and offers equal chances.

20 f5!?

20 ♖hf1 is objectively better: 20...hxg5 21 fxg5 ♘e5 22 ♗h1 (22 ♗e4 ♖xh2 23 ♘g8+ ♔e8=) 22...c4 (22...♖xh2 23 ♘g8+ ♔e8 24 ♖fe1) 23 ♖d2 ♗b7 24 ♗xb7 ♖xb7=.

20...exf5 21 ♖he1+ ♗e6 22 ♖d7+ ♔f8

Black has a slight edge, with a more serious advantage if White tries 23 ♖a7? (23 gxh6?! ♘e7; 23 ♗d5! ♗xd7 24 ♘xd7+ ♔g7 25 gxh6+ ♔xh6 26 ♘xb8 ♖xb8 27 ♗xf7 ♘f4∓) 23...hxg5! 24 ♖xe6 fxe6 25 ♘d7+ ♔f7 26 ♘xb8+ ♘e7 27 ♘xa6 g4!.

14.12 6...♗xc3+ 7 bxc3 gxf6

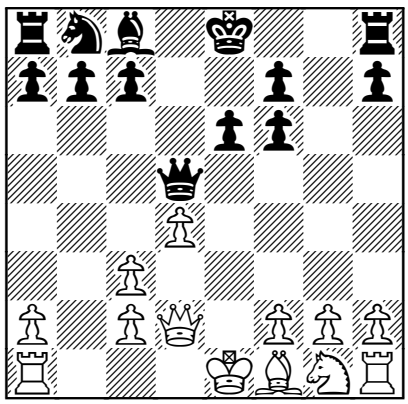
In this line the opponents have weaknesses and open files of about equal worth.

8 ♕d2

Instead:

(a) After 8 ♘f3, Black has some leeway, but he usually fianchettoes; e.g. 8...b6 9 ♗e2 ♗b7 10 0-0 ♖g8 has worked out well in numerous games. Alternatively, 8...♗d7 is interesting, with the idea 9 ♗e2 ♗b5.

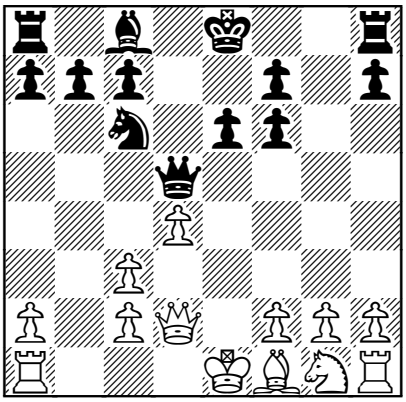
(b) 8 ♕g4 ♕a5 9 ♘e2 ♔e7!? (9...♗d7! is preferable, with the idea 10 ♕g7 ♖f8 11 ♕xf6 ♗c6 followed by ...♘d7, after which White will be well behind in development and has difficulties getting his pieces untangled) 10 ♕e4 (or 10 g3) 10...♗d7 11 ♕xb7 (11 ♕e3! ♗c6 12 ♘f4 intending ♗c4 is better) 11...♘c6 12 ♕b3 ♖ab8 13 ♕c4 ♖b2 with a nice initiative, Brendel-Glek, Swiss Team Ch. 2004.



8...♘c6

Again Black has ideas of ...♖g8, ...e5, and/or ...b6 with rapid development. Alternatively, the natural 8...c5 is often played here, as is 8...♘d7 (9 c4 ♕c6! 10 ♘f3 ♖g8). Finally, 8...♕a5 is a safe choice; e.g. 9 ♗d3 (9 g3 ♕d5!? 10 f3 ♘c6; 9 ♘e2 b6 10 ♕f4?! ♘d7!, Kovalevskaya-Volkov, Togliatti 2003,

with the idea 11 ♕xc7 ♗a6) 9...♗d7 10 ♘e2 ♗c6 11 ♘f4 (11 f3 ♘d7 12 0-0 0-0-0 13 ♗e4, D.King-N.McDonald, British League 2009; and here Wei Ming suggests 13...♗xe4 14 fxe4 ♖dg8 intending to double rooks and attack) 11...e5 12 ♘h5 (12 dxe5 fxe5 13 ♘h5 ♘d7 14 ♗f5 0-0-0 15 ♘f6 ♕c5 16 0-0 ♕e7 17 ♘d5 ♗xd5 18 ♕xd5 ♔b8 19 ♖fe1 f6 intending for the knight to take up permanent residence on c5) 12...♘d7 13 ♗f5 0-0-0 14 c4 (14 ♘xf6? exd4, hitting f5) 14...♕xd2+ 15 ♔xd2 exd4 16 ♘xf6 h5= intending ...♖h6.



9 ♕f4

9 ♘f3 (after 9 ♘e2 e5!? 10 ♕h6 ♔e7 11 dxe5 ♕xe5=, Black's free development compensates for his structure) 9...♖g8 10 ♕d3 ♗d7 11 ♖b1 0-0-0 12 ♕a6!? ♘a5!? 13 ♕xa7 ♗c6∓ intending ...♕xa2 or ...b6.

9...♕a5 10 ♘e2

10 ♔d2 f5 11 ♘f3 ♗d7∓ and ...0-0-0.

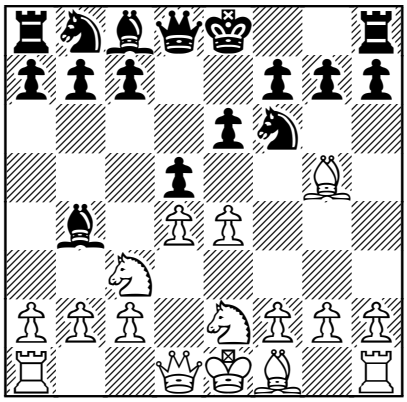
10...♔e7!?

Or 10...f5= intending ...b6.

11 ♕d2

Here 11 ♕d2 (11 ♖d1 ♖d8 12 ♕e4 ♕xa2 13 ♕xh7 e5∓ Feldmann-Canovas Pordomingo, IECG 2003) 11...b6! 12 ♘g3 ♗b7 is equal, since White will have to go through contortions to get castled after ...♖ad8.

14.2 5 ♘e2



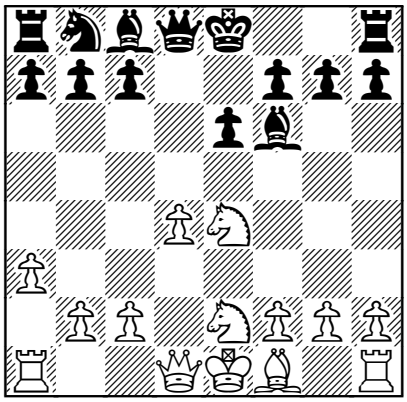
This position, which can also arise from the Winawer line 3 ♘c3 ♗b4 4 ♘e2 ♘f6 (see 7.42) 5 ♗g5, tries for a small positional edge. Black has two good ways to tackle it:

14.21 5...dxe4 *367*
14.22 5...h6 *368*

14.21 5...dxe4 6 a3 ♗e7 7 ♗xf6 ♗xf6

Black can also play 7...gxf6 8 ♘xe4 f5 (8...b6 is possible and theoretically okay, but somewhat passive after 9 g3 ♗b7 10 ♗g2 c6) 9 ♘4c3 ♘d7 10 ♕d2 ♘f6 11 0-0-0 ♕d6=.

8 ♘xe4



8...0-0

Here Black can play solidly with 8...b6, when 9 g3 ♗b7 10 ♗g2 ♘c6 or 10...c6 is playable; or else 8...♘d7, e.g. 9 ♕d2 0-0 10 0-0-0 ♗e7.

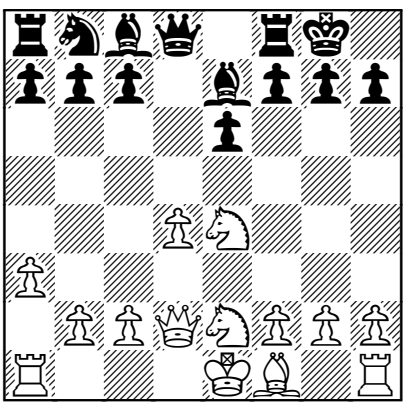
But 8...♘c6 is a more active and direct solution: 9 c3 (9 ♘xf6+ ♕xf6 10 ♕d3 ♗d7 11 g3 e5) 9...0-0 10 ♘2g3 (10 g3 e5 11 d5 ♘a5 with balanced prospects; e.g. 12 ♗g2 ♘c4 13 b3 ♘d6 14 ♘xf6+ ♕xf6=) 10...♗e7 11 ♗c4 ♔h8 12 0-0 f5!? (or 12...e5 13 d5 ♘a5 14 ♗a2 b5!? with the idea 15 d6 cxd6 16 ♗xf7 ♘c4) 13 ♘c5 (13 ♘d2 e5) 13...e5 14 ♘e6 ♗xe6 15 ♗xe6 exd4 16 ♗xf5 dxc3! 17 ♕h5 ♖xf5 18 ♕xf5 cxb2 19 ♖ad1 ♕g8 and the b-pawn is a real threat.

9 ♕d2

9 ♘xf6+?! is well met by 9...♕xf6 10 ♕d2 c5∓.

9...♗e7

9...♗d7 10 0-0-0 ♗c6 is a reasonable alternate set-up.



10 0-0-0?!

This is rather risky because, in spite of his unimpressive development, Black can target White's king. Instead:

(a) 10 ♘2c3?! ♘c6 (or 10...b6 11 ♗e2 ♗b7; e.g. 12 ♗f3? ♘c6 13 ♖d1 e5! 14 dxe5 ♘xe5 15 ♘f6+ ♗xf6 16 ♗xb7 ♕xd2+ 17 ♖xd2 ♖fe8!) 11 0-0-0 f5! 12 ♘g3 e5! 13 ♗c4+ ♔h8∓ has the idea 14 dxe5? ♗g5.

(b) 10 ♕c3 ♘c6 11 0-0-0 f5! 12 ♘d2 (12 ♘c5 ♕d5) 12...♗f6 and it's nearly equal, but Black is for choice.

(c) Probably White should prefer the simple 10 g3!; e.g. 10...♘d7 11 ♗g2 c5= or 11...c6=.

10...♘d7 11 g3

Or 11 ♕c3 b5! and an attack: 12 ♘f4 ♗b7 13 ♘c5 ♗xc5 14 dxc5 ♗c6 with ideas of ...♕g5 or ...♕e7 and ...a5.

11...b5! 12 ♗g2 ♖b8

12...♗b7! intending ...a5 is also strong here; e.g. 13 ♘f6+ ♘xf6 14 ♗xb7 ♖b8 15 ♗g2 b4.

13 d5

Black also stands better after 13 ♘f4 b4 14 axb4 ♗xb4 15 c3 ♗e7.

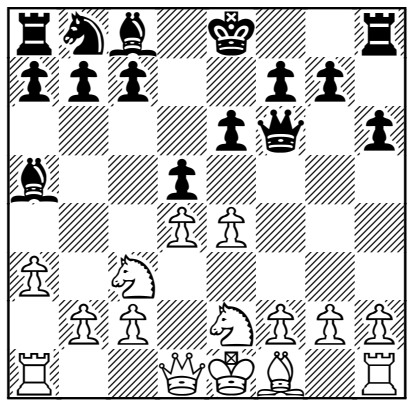
13...e5 14 d6 cxd6 15 ♘xd6 ♘c5 16 ♕d5 ♖b6∓

N.Friedrich-Lputian, Berlin 1989.

14.22 5...h6

Black trades space for the bishop pair.

6 ♗xf6 ♕xf6 7 a3 ♗a5!?

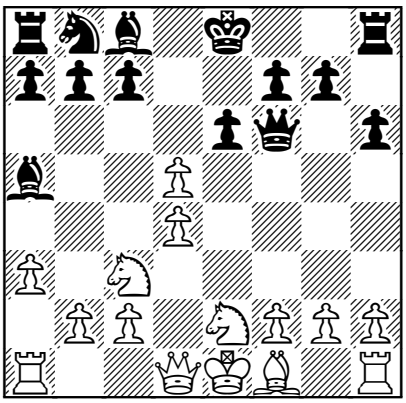


This makes it a gambit, but one for

which Black gets very obvious compensation.

8 exd5

If White decides not to get greedy, 8 b4 ♗b6 9 e5 is probably the most interesting way to proceed: 9...♕e7 (9...♕f5!? 10 ♘g3 ♕f4 and 9...♕g5!? are good options) 10 ♘a4 ♗d7 11 c3 0-0 12 ♘f4 ♗xa4 (12...♗e8 13 g3 f6 14 exf6!? ♕xf6 15 ♖a2?!, Hector-Glek, Copenhagen 1995; and 15...♗xa4 16 ♕xa4 g5 17 ♘d3 ♕f3 18 ♖g1 e5! gives Black the advantage; here 14 ♗h3! fxe5 15 dxe5 ♗f7 16 0-0 ♘d7 is highly unbalanced and hard to assess) 13 ♕xa4 ♘d7 14 ♗d3, R.Jacobs-C.Jones, corr 2000; and the most dynamic course would be 14...a5!? 15 b5 g5 16 ♘h5 f6 17 ♘xf6+ ♘xf6 18 exf6 ♕xf6 19 0-0 e5 with complex equality.

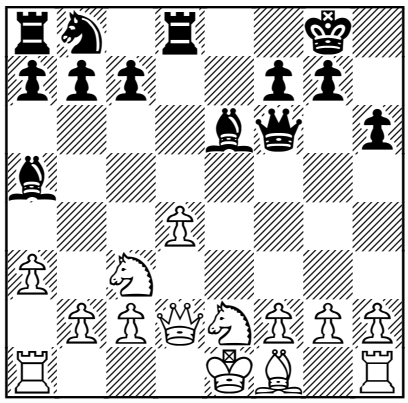


8...0-0!

This is the gambit. Whether or not White accepts, Black scores well from this position.

9 ♕d3

9 ♕d2 ♖d8 10 dxe6!? (10 ♕f4 ♗xc3+ 11 bxc3 ♕e7!, and White still does well to avoid 12 dxe6 ♕xe6! by playing, say, 12 ♕e3 ♖xd5 13 ♘f4, when 13...♖a5!? 14 ♗d3 ♘d7 15 0-0 ♘f6 could follow) 10...♗xe6



11 ♕e3?! (11 0-0-0! ♘c6 12 ♕f4 ♕xf4+ 13 ♘xf4 ♘xd4 is only modestly in Black's favour) 11...♘c6 (11...c5! 12 dxc5 ♘c6 lets Black take a strong initiative, with the idea 13 b4 ♘xb4! 14 axb4 ♗xb4) 12 0-0-0 ♗xc3 13 ♘xc3 ♘xd4 14 ♗d3 c5 15 ♖d2?! (15 ♖he1=) 15...b6!?∓ ½-½ Mamedov-Antic, Kavala 2010.

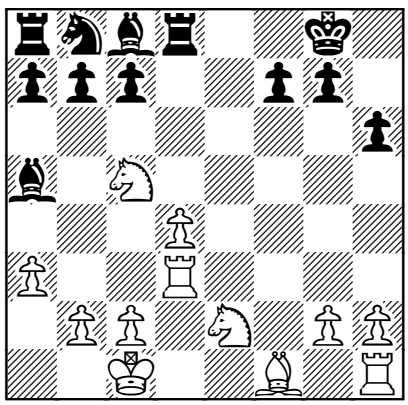
9...♖d8 10 dxe6 ♗xe6

Black has obvious compensation.

11 0-0-0!? ♕xf2 12 ♘e4 ♕f5

Or 12...♕h4 with a minor edge.

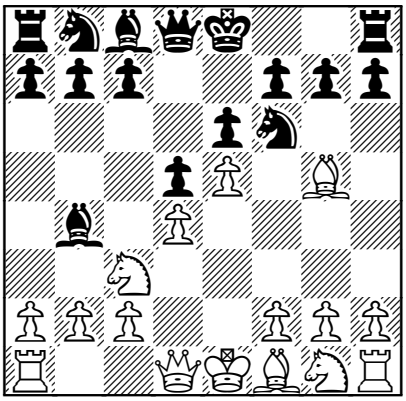
13 ♘c5 ♕xd3 14 ♖xd3 ♗c8



This is called '=' in *ECO*. Unzicker-Piskov, German League 1991, continued 15 g3 ♘d7

16 b4 ♗b6 17 ♗g2 c6 18 ♘f4, when an ambitious continuation is 18...g5!? (18...♘xc5 19 bxc5!? ♗a5 20 d5 ♗f5 21 ♖b3 g5 22 ♘e2 cxd5 23 ♖xb7 is dynamically balanced) 19 ♘h5 a5 20 ♘xd7! (otherwise ...♘xc5 is coming and Black retains the bishop pair) 20...♗xd7 21 ♘f6+ ♔g7 22 ♘xd7 ♖xd7 23 c3 axb4 24 axb4 ♖e7=.

14.3 5 e5



5...h6

White has three main moves here, two covered in this chapter:

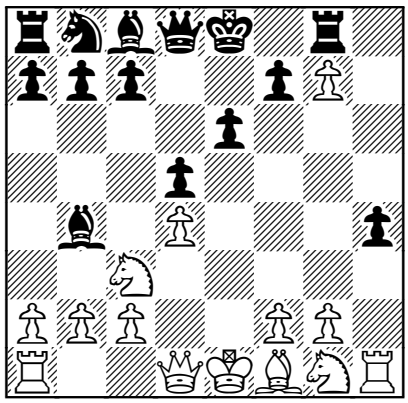
14.31 6 ♗c1 *370*
14.32 6 ♗e3 *376*

The traditional main line 6 ♗d2 is investigated in Chapter 15. One of the things that I noticed in researching the MacCutcheon is that, at several junctures, White's 'irregular' moves were not only satisfactory for him, but sometimes difficult to counter. The following alternatives are better than their reputation (one author for example, gives both 6 ♗xf6 and 6 ♗h4 '?'s, which are total misassessments):

(a) 6 exf6 hxg5 7 fxg7 ♖g8 isn't dangerous if Black takes a bit of care, and his bishop pair and central majority are potential advantages:

(a1) 8 ♕h5 ♕f6 9 0-0-0 (9 ♘e2 ♕xg7 10 0-0-0 ♘c6 11 h4 ♖h8 12 ♕g4 f5∓) 9...♕xg7 10 ♕f3 a6 (10...♘c6 11 ♕e3 ♘e7!=) 11 ♕e3 ♗e7! 12 ♔b1 ♘c6∓. Black has the bishop pair and queenside prospects.

(a2) 8 h4! is the most promising move: 8...gxh4 (8...♘c6 9 h5 ♖xg7 has been played, but I like 9 ♕d3! for White)



and:

(a21) 9 ♕g4 ♕f6 (9...♘c6 10 0-0-0 ♕f6 is also equal) 10 ♘f3 (10 ♖xh4 ♖xg7 11 ♖h8+ ♔d7 and ...♕xd4, when White has compensation but also the burden of proof, since Black stands solidly) 10...♖xg7 11 ♕xh4 ♕xh4 12 ♖xh4 ♘d7 13 g3 ♔e7 14 ♗g2 c5=.

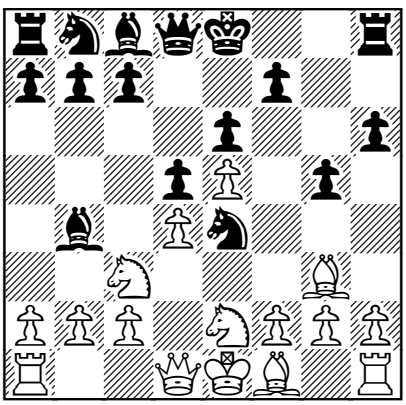
(a22) 9 ♘f3 ♕f6 10 ♖xh4 ♘c6 11 a3!? (11 ♕d3 ♗d7=), Stambulian-Skorchenko, Krasnodar 2002; and 11...♗xc3+! 12 bxc3 ♗d7, e.g. 13 ♕d2 ♕xg7 14 0-0-0 f6 15 ♕h6 ♕xh6+ 16 ♖xh6 ♔f7=.

(a23) 9 ♕h5 ♕f6 10 ♕xh4 (10 ♘f3 ♕xg7 11 ♕xh4 ♘c6 12 0-0-0 ♗d7=; 10 ♖xh4 ♘c6 11 ♗b5 ♗d7 12 ♘f3 0-0-0 13 0-0-0 ♖xg7= Timman-Ree, Wijk aan Zee 1983) 10...♕xg7 11 0-0-0 (11 ♘f3 ♘c6 12 0-0-0 ♗d7 13 ♘b5

♗a5 14 ♗d3 f6!∓) 11...♗d7 (11...♗e7!? – Moskalenko – might lead to 12 ♕h2 ♗d6 13 ♕h3 ♗d7 14 ♕e3 ♗e7!) 12 ♘f3 ♘c6 13 a3 ♗xc3 14 bxc3 f6=.

(b) 6 ♗xf6 is fully playable but harmless because White's centre can come under immediate pressure: 6...gxf6 7 a3 (7 ♘f3 ♘d7 8 ♗e2 c5 9 exf6 ♕xf6 10 0-0 cxd4 11 ♘xd4 0-0=) 7...♗xc3+ 8 bxc3 fxe5 9 dxe5 c5 (9...♕g5!? 10 ♘f3 ♕g7=) 10 ♘f3 ♘c6 11 ♕d2 ♕c7 12 ♕f4 (12 ♕e3 ♕a5 intending ...d4) 12...♕a5! 13 ♕d2 ♕a4 (13...♕c7 repeats; 13...b6, intending ...♗a6, and 13...♗d7 are alternatives) 14 ♗e2 ♖g8 15 0-0! (15 g3 b6 16 0-0 ♗b7) 15...♕e4!? (15...b6 is safe and sound) 16 g3 ♘xe5 17 ♘xe5 ♕xe5 18 ♖fe1 ♗d7 19 ♖ab1 b6 20 a4! ♕f6 21 a5 ♖b8 22 axb6 axb6 with compensation but no more than that for White.

(c) 6 ♗h4 is considerably better than the books generally indicate: 6...g5 7 ♗g3 (here 7 exf6 gxh4 8 ♕f3 ♘d7 will give Black an extra pawn, albeit a weak one, and the bishop pair) 7...♘e4 8 ♘e2 and now Black has nothing that gains an advantage, but a raft of reasonable moves:

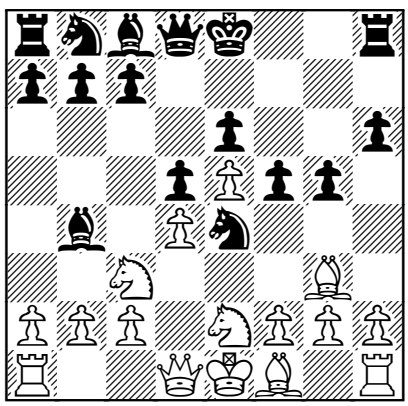


(c1) 8...h5 9 h4 (9 f3 ♘xg3 10 hxg3 ♗d7 with the idea ...♘c6/...♕e7/...0-0-0, or if 11 ♕d3, then 11...♗e7 and ...c5 is double-edged) 9...c5! 10 a3 ♘xg3 11 ♘xg3 ♗xc3+ 12 bxc3 ♕a5 13 ♕d2 g4 with sufficient play; e.g. 14 ♗d3 ♗d7 15 ♖b1 ♗c6, to meet 16 ♕g5 with 16...♕xc3+ 17 ♔f1 ♘d7 18 ♘xh5 ♕xd4 19 ♘f6+ ♔e7 20 ♘xd5+ ♔f8 21 ♕e7+=.

(c2) 8...c5 has been the most common move, with a double-edged game after 9 a3 ♘xc3 (or 9...♗xc3+ 10 ♘xc3 ♕a5, when 11 ♕d3 ♗d7 looks alright, but 11 dxc5 with the idea 11...♘xc3 12 ♕d2 ♕xc5 13 bxc3 might give White a little something) 10 ♘xc3 ♗xc3+ 11 bxc3 ♕a5 12 ♕d2 ♘c6 13 dxc5 ♗d7 14 ♗e2 ♕xc5 15 f4!? gxf4 16 ♗xf4 0-0-0 17 ♗e3 ♕a5 18 ♗d4 ♖hg8=.

(c3) 8...♘d7 9 a3 (9 ♕d3! c5 10 0-0-0±) 9...♘xg3 10 hxg3 ♗e7 11 b4? (11 f4±) 11...a5 12 b5 c5 with good play, Karjakin-Volkov, Panormo 2002.

(c4) 8...f5 has been a popular line at the top levels:

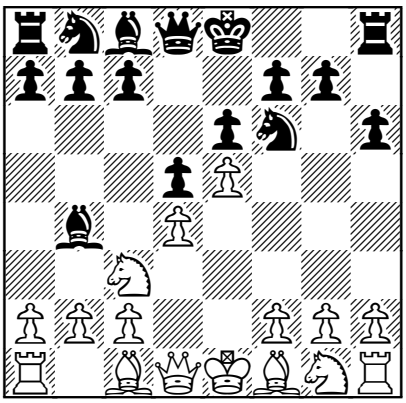


9 f3! (to me, this casts a few doubts upon 8...f5; alternatively: 9 h4 f4 10 ♗h2 c5 11 a3 ♘xc3 12 ♘xc3 ♗xc3+ 13 bxc3 ♕a5, with the idea 14 ♕h5+ ♔d8!=; 9 f4?! h5! 10 fxg5 ♕xg5 11 ♗f4 ♗xc3+ 12 bxc3 ♕g4 13 h3 ♕g7, when White is tied up and faces

problems on his queenside light squares; 9 exf6 ♕xf6 10 a3 and 10...♗a5 is fine, whereas 10...♗xc3+ 11 ♘xc3 ♘xg3 12 hxg3 ♘c6 13 ♗b5?! appeared in two blitz games by Volkov, in which Black played 13...♗d7 and rejected the double attack 13...0-0! 14 ♕d2 ♕xd4 or 14...♘xd4) 9...♘xg3 (9...♘xc3 10 ♘xc3 c5 11 a3 cxd4!? 12 axb4 dxc3 13 bxc3⩲) 10 hxg3 ♘c6 11 a3 ♗f8 12 f4 ♗d7 13 ♕d2⩲.

14.31 6 ♗c1

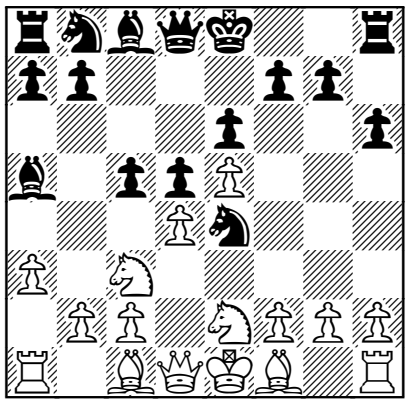
This has been played by many strong grandmasters over the years and deserves more respect than it generally receives.



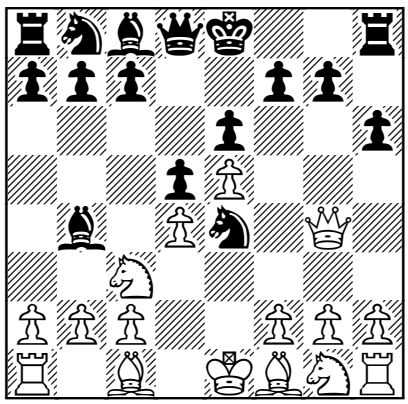
Not only won't White's dark-squared bishop be traded off, it may head for a3 at the right moment, and a queen or rook on the third rank will have a clear view of the queenside (as opposed to after 6 ♗e3). White's main problem is that c3 and d4 are left undefended.

6...♘e4 7 ♕g4

7 ♘e2 c5 8 a3 is well met by 8...♗a5 (a typical retreat; Black will often go to c7 or b6 with central pressure; the alternative 8...♗xc3+ 9 bxc3 ♘c6 10 f3 ♘g5 intending ...♕a5 is also playable, only because White is undeveloped and almost as disorganized as Black!)



9 dxc5 (9 b4 ♘xc3 10 ♘xc3 cxd4 11 ♘b5 ♗c7 12 f4 0-0 13 ♗d3 ♘c6 14 ♘xc7 ♕xc7 15 0-0 f5 16 ♗d2 a6 proved more than adequate for Black in Heidl-B.Lalic, Biel 1989) 9...0-0 10 b4 ♘xc3 11 ♘xc3 ♗c7 12 ♗f4 (12 f4 f6!∓) 12...♘c6 13 ♕h5 f5!? (hitting e5; 13...b6 is an interesting alternative) 14 ♗e2 (14 ♗xh6? ♗xe5 15 ♗d2 b6!∓; 14 ♕e2 g5! 15 ♕h5 ♕e7) 14...♗xe5 15 ♗xe5 ♘xe5 16 0-0 b6! 17 cxb6 axb6 18 f4 ♘d7 and ...♘f6, when White's queenside pawns are vulnerable.



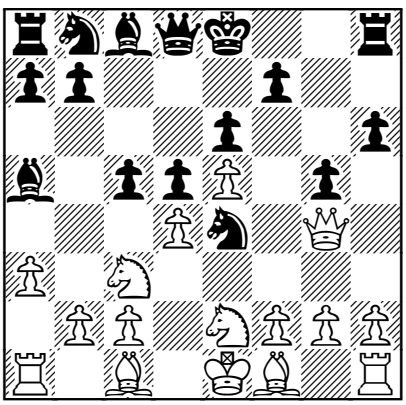
7 ♕g4 is a serious try for advantage;

Black can equalize but has no easy solution or escape from complications. White's chances are apparently as good as they are in the main 6 ♗d2 lines, which have undergone perhaps fifty times as much analysis. To begin with, Black is faced with the same crucial choice about defence of his g-pawn that arises in many MacCutcheon and Winawer variations:

14.311 7...♔f8 *373*
14.312 7...g6 *375*

7...g5!? is rather weakening, but adds dynamism to the position, beginning with the idea of ...h5 and ...g4. Given that Black has to tolerate some rather dull positions after 7...♔f8 and 7...g6, I think this deserves a look:

(a) 8 ♘e2 c5 (8...h5 9 ♕f3 is ineffective; e.g. 9...c5 10 a3 ♗a5 11 b4! cxb4 12 ♘xe4 dxe4 13 ♕xe4 b3+ 14 c3±) 9 a3 ♗a5 and White has two ambitious courses:



(a1) 10 b4!? is a typical attempt to gain the dark squares: 10...♘xc3 11 ♘xc3 cxb4 (11...cxd4 12 ♘b5 ♗c7 resembles a 4 e5 c5 5 a3 ♗a5 Winawer; I suspect that White stands slightly better, as he does after 12 bxa5 dxc3 13 h4 ♖g8) 12 ♘b5 b3+; this is rather chaotic; e.g. 13 ♗d2 (13 c3 ♘c6 14 h4 ♔d7!? with the ideas ...a6 and ...f6, and answering 15 hxg5?! by 15...a6) 13...bxc2! 14 h4! (14 ♘d6+ ♔e7 15 ♕f3 ♗xd2+ 16 ♔xd2 f5 17 ♕h5 ♕g8 with chances for both sides) 14...♕b6!? (14...a6!? 15 ♘d6+ ♔d7 16 hxg5 ♕b6 17 ♖c1 ♕b2 18 ♖xc2 ♕xc2 19 ♗xa5 ♘c6 is also wild and apparently balanced) 15 hxg5 ♗d7 16 ♘d6+ ♔f8 17 ♖c1 ♕b1 18 ♔e2 ♗b5+ 19 ♘xb5 ♕xb5+ 20 ♔e3 ♗xd2+ 21 ♔xd2 ♕a5+ 22 ♔xc2 ♖g8 with even chances.

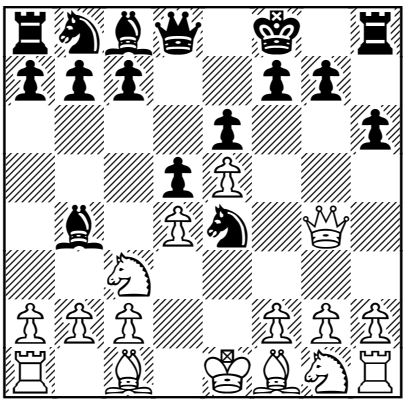
(a2) 10 dxc5 ♕c7 11 ♕f3 (11 b4 can be met by 11...♘xc3 12 ♘xc3 ♕xe5+ 13 ♔d2 ♗c7; e.g. 14 ♘b5 ♕f4+ 15 ♕xf4 ♗xf4+ 16 ♔d3 ♗d7 17 c4 ♗e5 18 ♖b1 a6 19 ♘c3 ♘c6) 11...♘xc3 (11...♘c6!? 12 b4 ♘xb4 13 axb4 ♗xb4 is perhaps too speculative) 12 ♘xc3 ♕xe5+ 13 ♗e2 ♘c6 14 0-0 0-0. This looks quite playable because of Black's good centre and potential pawn expansion, although naturally White has prospects of his own on the kingside.

(b) 8 a3 can be answered by 8...♗a5 9 ♘e2 c5, transposing to 8 ♘e2. An independent line is 8...h5 9 ♕f3 (9 ♕h3!? g4 10 ♕e3 ♗xc3+ 11 bxc3 c5) 9...♗xc3+ 10 bxc3 c5 and:

(b1) 11 ♕e3 ♕a5 12 ♘e2 ♘c6 13 ♗b2 ♘xd4 14 ♘xd4 cxd4 15 ♕xd4 b6 16 f3 ♘c5 17 h4 ♘a4 (17...♗a6) 18 0-0-0 (18 ♗c1 ♗a6!) 18...♗a6! 19 ♗xa6 ♕xa6 20 hxg5 ♖c8=.

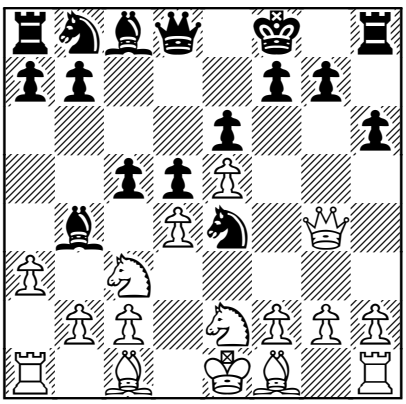
(b2) 11 ♗d3 ♘xc3 12 dxc5 ♘c6 13 ♕e3 (13 ♕f6 ♕xf6 14 exf6 ♘a4 15 ♗xg5 ♘xc5=) 13...♖g8 14 ♘e2 d4 15 ♕d2 ♕d5 and the dissolution of White's centre establishes equality.

14.311 7...♔f8



8 a3

8 ♘e2 is the other natural way to develop: 8...c5 9 a3 (9 f3 cxd4 10 fxe4 dxc3 11 exd5 ♗a5!)



9...♗xc3+ (the solid option; 9...♗a5 transposes to the main line) 10 bxc3 (10 ♘xc3 ♘xc3 11 bxc3 ♕a5 12 ♗d2 ♕a4 is unclear but I think quite playable for Black; compare the Portisch-Hook Variation of Chapter 11) 10...cxd4 11 cxd4 ♘c6 intending ...♕a5 and ...♘e7.

8...♗a5 9 ♘e2

This the thematic reply. 9 ♗d3 is easy to handle: 9...c5 (9...♘xc3 equalizes: 10 ♗d2 ♘a4!? 11 ♗xa5 ♘xb2, when 12 ♗e2 b6 13 ♗c3 ♘a4 14 ♗d2 c5∓ might follow) 10 ♗xe4 cxd4 11 b4 dxc3 12 bxa5 (12 ♗d3 ♗c7 13 f4 a5!∓) 12...dxe4 13 ♕xe4 (13 a4 ♕d5!) 13...♘c6=.

9...c5

9...f5 is the main recommendation, although I think White retains a limited advantage following 10 ♕h3! ♘xc3 11 ♘xc3 c5 12 dxc5 d4 13 b4 dxc3 14 bxa5 ♕xa5 15 ♗e3.

10 dxc5!

10 b4?! ♘xc3 11 ♘xc3 (11 bxa5 ♘xe2 12 ♗xe2 ♘c6 13 c3 ♕xa5 14 ♗d2 h5 15 ♕f4 b6=) 11...cxb4 12 axb4 (12 ♘b5?! b3+ 13 c3?? a6) 12...♗xb4∓.

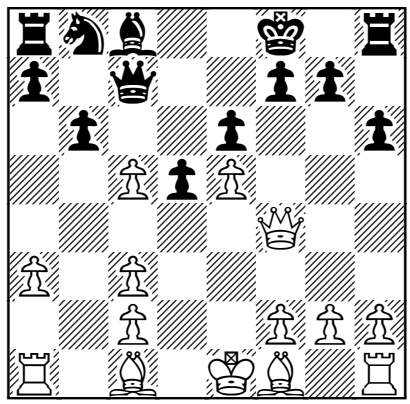
10...♕c7

10...h5 11 ♕h3 d4 12 b4 dxc3 13 ♕e3 (13 bxa5?! ♕d2+! 14 ♗xd2 cxd2+ 15 ♔d1 ♘xf2+∓) 13...♘d2!? 14 ♕xc3 ♘xf1 15 bxa5 ♗d7 16 ♖xf1 ♗b5 with compensation based upon light-square pressure.

11 ♕f4!

The only other way to shore up the centre is 11 f4, when Black targets the weak queenside pawns by 11...♘xc3! 12 ♘xc3 ♗xc3+ 13 bxc3 ♘d7=.

11...♘xc3 12 ♘xc3 ♗xc3+ 13 bxc3 b6!



A standard theme, not only giving the

option of ...bxc5, but preparing ...♗a6 before White's bishops become a force.

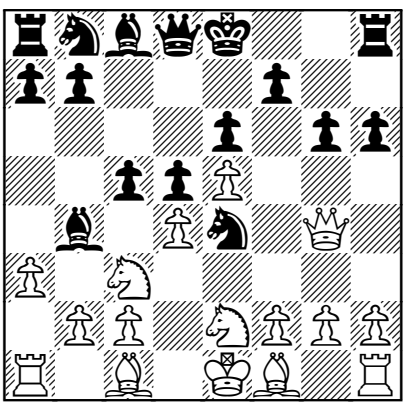
14 c4

On 14 ♖b1, 14...♕xc5! 15 c4 ♗b7 is probably best, intending ...dxc4 or ...♘c6, but even 15...♘c6 16 ♖b5 ♕d4 17 cxd5 ♕xf4 18 ♗xf4 ♘d4 19 ♖b2 exd5 is balanced.

After 14 c4, a sample line would be 14...bxc5 15 cxd5 exd5 16 e6!? (16 ♖b1 ♘c6) 16...♕xf4 17 ♗xf4 fxe6 18 ♗d6+ ♔f7 19 ♖b1 (19 ♗xc5 ♗a6 gives Black the better pawn structure) 19...♘d7 20 ♗b5 a6 21 ♗xd7 ♗xd7 22 ♖b7 ♖hd8 and the opposite-coloured bishops ensure equality; e.g. 23 ♔d2 ♔g6 24 ♗xc5 ♖ab8 25 ♖hb1 ♖xb7 26 ♖xb7 ♗b5.

Thus 7...♔f8 is a completely sound move, whose only drawback involves a lack of winning prospects.

14.312 7...g6 8 ♘e2 c5 9 a3



9...♗a5

A flexible move which keeps many options open. On the other hand, 9...♗xc3+ might be the objectively correct move in this case: 10 bxc3 (10 ♘xc3 ♘xc3 11 bxc3 ♕a5 12 ♗d2 ♕a4 is unbalanced and roughly equal; again, compare the Portisch-Hook Variation of Chapter 11) 10...cxd4 11 cxd4 ♕a5+ 12 c3 ♗d7 13 f3 ♗b5! 14 fxe4 ♗xe2 15 ♕h3 (15 ♔xe2 ♕xc3 wins the rook!; 15 ♕g3 ♗xf1 16 ♖xf1 dxe4 is similar) 15...♗xf1 16 ♖xf1 dxe4 17 ♔f2 ♘d7 18 ♔g1, Rytshagov-D.Anderton, Gausdal 2000. Now 18...♖h7!? wasn't bad, but Black can get right to work on the light squares with 18...♖c8! 19 ♗d2 ♖c7 (19...♕d5=) 20 ♖ae1 ♘b6 21 ♖xe4 (21 ♕h4 ♘c4 22 ♕f6 ♖h7 23 ♗xh6 ♕xc3) 21...♕xa3 22 ♖ef4 ♕a2 23 ♕d3 a6= intending ...♘d5.

10 b4!?

10 dxc5 appears to be White's best try: 10...♘c6 (perhaps 10...♕c7 11 ♕f4 ♗xc3+ 12 ♘xc3 ♘xc3 13 bxc3 ♘d7 14 ♗e3 ♘xc5 is better, but in that case Black's dark-square weaknesses seem more important than White's on the queenside) 11 b4 ♘xe5 12 ♕h3! ♗c7 13 ♘xe4 dxe4 14 ♘c3 a5 15 ♖b1 axb4 16 axb4 ♗d7, Negi-Nepomniachtchi, Wijk aan Zee 2007; and here 17 ♘xe4! ♗c6 18 ♘c3 should result in some advantage for White.

10...♘xc3 11 ♘xc3 cxb4!?

11...cxd4 12 ♘b5 ♗c7 is also equal: 13 ♕xd4 (13 f4 ♗d7 – an idea from the 5 a3 ♗a5 Winawer – 14 ♗b2 ♗xb5 15 ♗xb5+ ♘c6=) 13...♘c6 14 ♘xc7+ ♕xc7 15 ♗b5 ♗d7 16 ♗xc6 ♕xc6=.

12 ♘b5 b3+ 13 c3

Or 13 ♗d2 ♗xd2+ 14 ♔xd2 bxc2 15 ♘d6+ ♔f8 16 ♕f4 f5!.

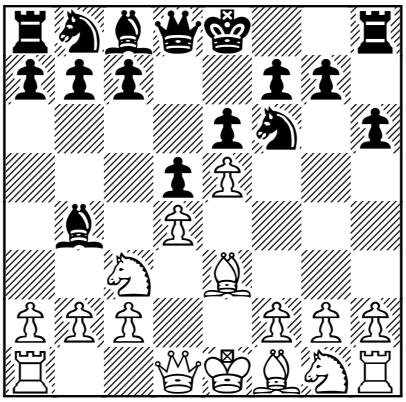
13...a6!?

A touch speculative. 13...0-0 is sound enough.

14 ♘d6+ ♕xd6! 15 exd6 ♗xc3+ 16 ♗d2 ♗xa1

Black has active play in a double-edged position.

14.32 6 ♗e3



A simple move that can lead to extraordinarily complex and rich play. While not as popular as 6 ♗d2, theory on this move has recently expanded dramatically.

6...♘e4 7 ♕g4 g6

This and 7...♔f8 are considered about equally good. I've chosen 7...g6 mainly because of the main line which forces the play somewhat and therefore simplifies matters. 7...♘xc3? is inferior due to 8 ♕xg7 ♖f8 9 ♗d2 (9 a3 ♗a5 10 ♗d2 is also advantageous, although 10...c5 11 bxc3 ♕b6 gives Black some play) 9...♘xa2 10 c3 ♘xc3 11 bxc3 ♗e7 12 ♗xh6±.

8 a3 ♗xc3+ 9 bxc3 c5

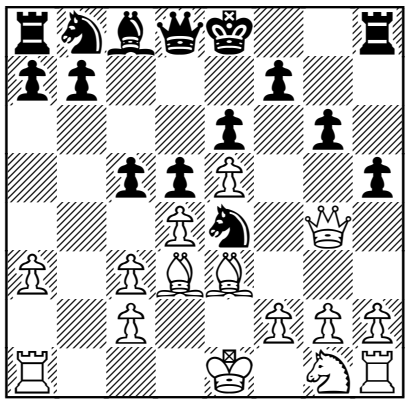
9...♘xc3 10 ♗d3 c5 11 dxc5! ♘c6 is seen as well. Attacking the pawn chain by 9...c5 is not necessarily better, but it's thematic and relatively easy to play.

10 ♗d3

Nothing else makes sense; White must move quickly in the face of ...♕a5 and ...♘c6.

10...h5

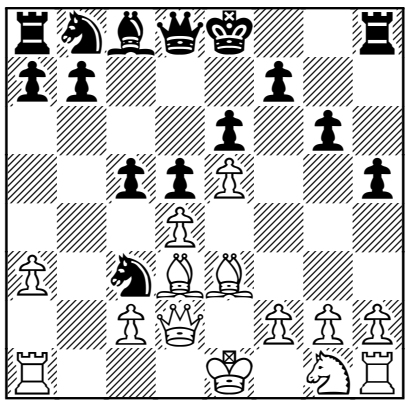
Moskalenko's favourite move, which forces White's queen to commit. We examine:



14.321 11 ♕f3 *377*
14.322 11 ♕f4 *377*

The other two queen moves are a bit easier to handle:

(a) 11 ♕d1 ♘xc3 12 ♕d2



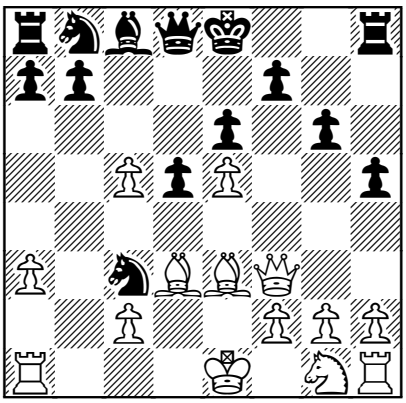
and now:

(a1) Moskalenko analyses 12...cxd4 13 ♗xd4 ♘e4 14 ♗xe4 dxe4 15 ♘e2 (or 15 ♕e3 ♘c6 16 ♗c3 b6 17 ♕xe4 ♗b7 and the opposite-coloured bishops give Black the advantage) 15...♘c6 16 0-0 b6 17 ♖fd1 ♗b7 and White's pawns are vulnerable to ...♕c7, for example; here 17...♗a6! looks better still.

(a2) 12...♘e4 13 ♗xe4 dxe4 14 ♘e2 (14 dxc5 ♕xd2+ 15 ♔xd2 ♗d7 16 ♘e2 h4!? 17 ♖ab1 ♗c6 18 ♘d4 ♖h5 is unclear) 14...♘c6 15 ♖d1 cxd4 16 ♘xd4 ♘xd4 17 ♗xd4, Kanarek-Lortkipanidze, Fermo 2009; and Moskalenko suggests the simple 17...b6 with equality or better.

(b) 11 ♕h3 ♘xc3 12 dxc5 d4! 13 ♗f4 (after 13 ♗d2 ♘d7, Black will win the e- or c-pawn with an easy game) 13...♘d7 (13...g5!? 14 ♗d2 ♕d5!?) 14 ♘e2! ♘xe2 15 ♗xe2 ♕a5+!? 16 c3! ♕xc5 17 ♖c1 d3! 18 ♗xd3 ♘xe5 with unclear prospects.

14.321 11 ♕f3 ♘xc3 12 dxc5



A typical structure from this line. Black goes after White's centre as usual:

12...♘c6 13 ♕f4 d4 14 ♗d2 g5 15 ♕xg5

15 ♕g3 can be met by 15...g4 or 15...h4!? 16 ♕xg5 ♕xg5 17 ♗xg5 ♘xe5 18 ♘f3 ♘xf3+ (18...♖h5!?) 19 gxf3 ♘d5! 20 ♗e4 f6! with counterplay (McDonald).

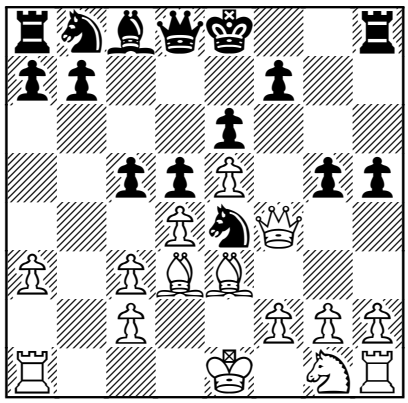
15...♕xg5 16 ♗xg5 ♘xe5 17 ♘f3

17 ♗f6 ♘xd3+ 18 cxd3 ♖g8 19 ♗xd4 ♘d5 (Black's unopposed bishop and open lines for his rooks give him fair chances; 19...♘a4 is another option) 20 g3 ♗d7 21 ♘f3 ♗c6 (21...f6!?) 22 ♘e5 ♘b4 23 ♘xc6 ♘c2+ 24 ♔d2 ♘xa1 25 ♘a5 b6 26 ♖xa1 bxa5 27 ♖b1 ♖g5 with balanced chances, Kosteniuk-Zhukova, Gibraltar 2010.

17...♖g8 18 ♗f6 ♘xd3+ 19 cxd3 ♘d5 20 ♗xd4 ♖xg2∓

Sutovsky-Wang Hao, Poikovsky 2008. With the disappearance of the g2-pawn, White's light squares become more vulnerable.

14.322 11 ♕f4 g5!



12 ♕f3 ♘xc3 13 dxc5

13 ♘e2 clarifies the centre at the cost of time; for example, 13...♘xe2 (13...♘c6 14 ♘xc3 cxd4 15 ♗xd4 ♘xd4 16 ♕e3 is unclear) 14 ♗xe2 cxd4 15 ♗xd4 (Moskalenko cites 15 ♗d2?! ♘c6∓ of Larrat-Delabaca, French Team Ch. 2009) 15...♘c6 16 c3 ♘xd4!? (16...b6; 16...♗d7 17 0-0 ♖c8) 17 cxd4 ♕a5+ 18 ♔f1 h4!? 19 ♕f6 ♖g8 and Black has his share of the play.

13...d4

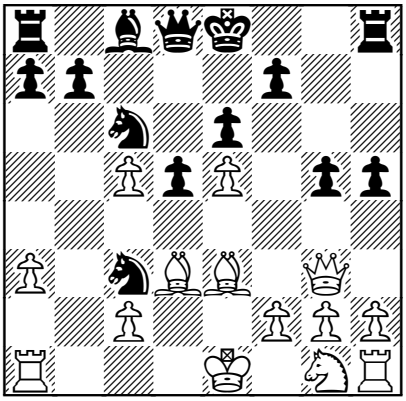
13...♘c6 is a good alternative:

(a) 14 ♕f6 ♕xf6 15 exf6 e5! 16 ♗xg5 (16 ♘e2 ♘xe2 17 ♔xe2 ♗d7 18 ♖hd1 0-0-0=; 16 ♗d2 e4 17 ♗xc3 exd3 18 cxd3 d4 19 ♗b2 ♗f5 20 ♘f3 g4 21 ♘xd4 ♘xd4 22 ♗xd4 0-0-0=) 16...♗d7 (or 16...♗e6=, or 16...h4=)

17 f4 e4 18 ♘e2 ♘xe2 19 ♗xe2 ♘d4=.

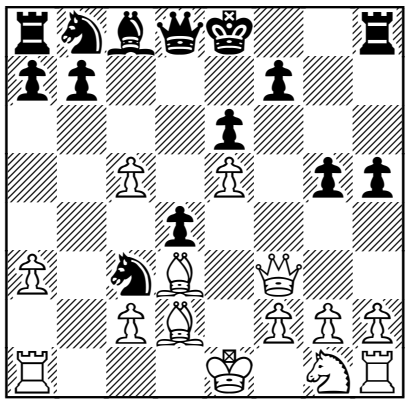
(b) 14 ♗d2!? ♘xe5 15 ♕g3 ♘xd3+ 16 cxd3 d4! 17 ♗xg5 f6 18 ♗d2 ♔f7=.

(c) 14 ♕g3!?



14...♕a5! 15 ♗d2 ♕xc5 16 ♘f3! (16 ♕xg5? ♘e4 17 ♗xe4 ♕d4!∓ - Moskalenko) 16...g4 17 ♘g5 ♕d4! (17...d4?! 18 0–0 ♕xe5 19 ♖ae1!, Hamdouchi-Rivas Pastor, Salou 2011) 18 ♕f4! (18 0–0? ♘e2+! 19 ♗xe2 ♕xd2; 18 ♗e3 ♕xe5 19 ♕xe5 ♘xe5 20 ♗d4 f6! 21 ♗xc3 ♘xd3+ 22 cxd3 e5∓; 18 ♕e3 ♘a4! 19 ♕xd4 ♘xd4 20 h3 ♘c5 21 ♖c1 ♘c6 22 ♗f4 gxh3 23 ♖xh3 ♗d7 with good play) 18...♕xf4 19 ♗xf4 d4 20 h3 ♖g8 21 ♘h7 ♘d5 22 ♗g3 ♗d7 23 hxg4 hxg4 24 ♗e4 0–0–0 25 ♗h4 ♘c3 26 ♗xc6 ♗xc6 27 ♗xd8 ♔xd8 28 ♘f6 ♖g5 29 ♖h5, E.Berg-Tikkanen, Halmstad 2012; and now 29...♖f5!; e.g. 30 ♖xf5 exf5 31 ♔d2! ♗xg2 32 ♔d3 ♗f3 33 ♖e1! (33 ♔xd4 ♘d1!) 33...♔e7 34 ♔xd4 ♘e2+ 35 ♔e3 f4+ 36 ♔d3 g3 37 fxg3 ♘xg3, and I think that Black can draw this rather easily after ...♔e6.

14 ♗d2



14...♗d7

Keeping some play on the board. Here 14...♘c6 has been the main line, and is also satisfactory. Then after 15 ♗xc3! (15 ♕g3 ♕d5 16 ♕xg5 ♕xe5+= Nemcova-Guo Qi, Gaziantep 2008; 15 ♕f6 ♕xf6 16 exf6 ♘a4=) 15...dxc3, Black has full equality but few positive prospects; e.g. 16 ♕e3 (16 ♕f6!? ♕xf6 17 exf6 ♘e5!=) 16...♕d4 17 ♕xd4 ♘xd4 18 ♘e2 (18 ♖b1 ♗d7) 18...♘c6! 19 ♘xc3 ♘xe5 20 h4 g4 21 0-0 ♔e7=.

15 ♗xc3

Moskalenko calls 15 ♕g3 ♗c6 unclear; a sample line would be 16 ♘f3 (16 ♘e2 ♘xe2 17 ♗xe2 ♘d7=) 16...h4 17 ♕g4 h3 18 ♘xd4!? (18 ♘xg5 hxg2 19 ♖g1 ♖g8=) 18...♖h4 19 ♘xe6 ♖xg4 20 ♘xd8 ♔xd8 21 ♗xc3 hxg2 22 ♖g1 ♘d7∓.

15...♗c6 16 ♗e4 dxc3 17 ♖d1 ♕c7

This is also assessed as unclear by Moskalenko. An interesting way for White to proceed is 18 ♗xc6+ (18 ♕f6 ♖g8!∓) 18...♘xc6 19 ♖d6!, although 19...♘xe5 20 ♕f6 ♘g6 21 ♕xg5 ♖d8 is fully equal.