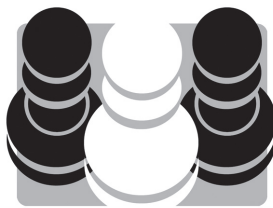


*A Classical Repertoire*

# Playing 1.e4 e5

By

# Nikolaos Ntirlis



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# Foreword by Parimarjan Negi

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These days, the art of chess analysis is completely different from that of playing the game. You have to be creative, diligent, and constantly guide the computer in the direction you want – but often, you let the machine do the heavy lifting. This is in stark contrast to the practical skills possessed by tournament players – indeed, it can often be detrimental to one's own game. Practical players therefore have to be wary about delving too deeply into the art of analysis, and a natural consequence is that their skills and understanding of engines will not be as refined as those of correspondence specialists.

Nikos Ntirlis made his decision to be an analyst early. The first time I met Nikos was at the 2006 Greek Team Championship. I had just become a Grandmaster, while he was an enthusiastic member of the local club. I had never focused too much on opening theory before then, and I was surprised to hear Nikos talk enthusiastically about the intricacies of deep Grünfeld lines that even I wasn't familiar with. Now, almost a decade later, Nikos has improved as a player, but it's as an opening analyst where he has channelled his passion to produce outstanding results. Since he has clearly defined his priorities, he has extensively honed his art of finding and developing ideas using the engine.



In this book, I was particularly impressed by Nikos's direct, dynamic ideas for Black against the various non-Spanish variations. Black players, and books, often give these lines generic, regurgitated treatment. Nikos, on the other hand, provides the ideal, principled solutions to White's various options in the Open Games. One example is the 4.♘g5 variation of the Two Knights Defence. The critical 9.h4! has been giving Black a lot of trouble lately, but Nikos analysed it extensively and came up with the almost unknown 9...♞c7!?, which leads to vibrant play for Black – and might even shut this line down as a try for a White advantage.

Against the Spanish, Nikos has wisely avoided any of the ultra-dynamic set-ups which can flutter in and out of fashion. Instead he advocates the classical Breyer, which has been tried and tested by numerous world champions and other leading players. The arising positions are hard to analyse, as engines tend to lose some of their effectiveness in closed structures. I have often used that to my advantage with White, winning many nice games by strangulating my opponents from positions that were supposedly close to '0.00'. Nikos, being Nikos, has done much more than present a bunch of lines with dry, superficial engine assessments. Instead he has looked more deeply, utilizing high-level correspondence games (including a few of his own) and sophisticated analytical tools to refine his ideas. The result is a bombproof repertoire which is solid enough never to be refuted, yet complex enough to offer plenty of winning chances.

Parimarjan Negi  
Stanford, December 2015





# Introduction

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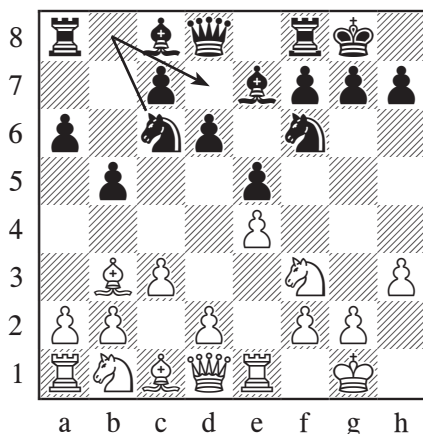
In 2012, the year after my first book (a collaboration with GM Jacob Aagaard on the Tarrasch Defence) was published, I was hired as the openings coach of the Danish national team during the Istanbul Olympiad. I was already a pretty respectable opening analyst back then, but I knew I could improve. I followed the discussions in specialized forums regarding chess software and opening analysis, and noticed that the main contributors were usually strong correspondence players. I therefore made the decision to become one! This made a lot of sense, as I don't have time for over-the-board competitions, and correspondence chess has enabled me to test my abilities as an analyst against the world's best.

## My Personal Story with 1.e4 e5

As I was improving my rating and facing stronger and stronger opposition, I realized that in order to be successful as Black, I needed to play sound but complicated openings, otherwise my winning chances would be close to zero. After a lot of deliberation and experimentation, I concluded that 1.e4 e5 would be an ideal choice. The big problem, of course, is what to do against the Spanish, but I was able to find a solution which satisfied me at once.

## The Breyer System

The cornerstone of any Black repertoire with 1.e4 e5 has to be the chosen defence against the Spanish. In this book, we will follow the traditional main line to reach the following position:  
1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 a6 4.♗a4 ♘f6 5.0-0 ♗e7 6.♖e1 b5 7.♗b3 d6 8.c3 0-0 9.h3



At this point 9...♗b8! introduces the Breyer System, which sees Black reroute his knight to the flexible d7-square. The Breyer has been used by the world's elite for decades, so its soundness is

not in question. In some theoretical lines there is not a single piece or pawn exchange for more than 25 moves, which tells you something about its complexity. The Breyer is the perfect choice for the ambitious, strategically-oriented player who wants to fight for the win with Black. This is proven by the list of our Breyer 'heroes', which includes Smejkal, Spassky, Portisch, Karpov, and Carlsen. I might add that Adams, Leko and Svidler have all employed the Breyer when they have wanted a break from the Marshall.

The Breyer has been tested for several decades at high levels of play, so there was already an abundance of material. The challenge for me was to work on the numerous variations using the software and tools at my disposal, with an especially deep focus on those variations which are currently regarded as theoretically critical.

### **Testing and Refining my Ideas**

At the time of writing I am closing in on the master title at correspondence chess, and I have tested the Breyer (as well as several of the other recommendations in this book) against formidable opponents. I have also had the privilege of working on opening ideas with many strong players, including several grandmasters. I am happy that I have shared my files with these players, who have then come back to me with important feedback, enabling me to refine my analysis. I also work with club players and I have presented some of the material in this book in lectures. This experience has helped me to understand which variations may prove difficult for players to fully grasp, and some of my recommendations have been modified accordingly.

### **Repertoire Choices**

This book is intended to be useful for ambitious correspondence players and grandmasters, while also teaching amateurs how to play 1...e5 without overloading them with useless information. It sounds like an impossible task, and readers will have to judge for themselves how close I came to succeeding, but I am satisfied that I gave my best efforts.

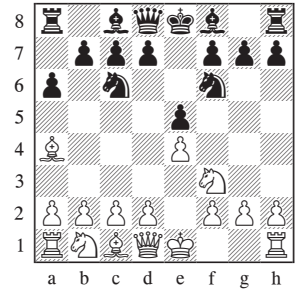
In the chapters that follow, you will find antidotes to all of White's main attempts after 1.e4 e5. All authors write their books in the way they like to read them; I appreciate chess analysis of the highest possible quality, but I also like books with more general instructive and entertainment value as well. This is why I chose a format of complete games, which has the advantage of showing how the play may develop after the opening. Also, a certain characteristic of 1...e5 is that it has been played by all the World Champions and their challengers since the dawn of time, so history has presented us with some incredibly instructive and beautiful games, which deserve to be admired in full. Some of them are classic, famous games, in which modern analysis software can shed new light on the work of previous commentators. In this book you will find new games, old games, correspondence games and even the occasional blitz encounter; if I thought a particular game showed in the best possible way what is happening in a particular variation, I went ahead and included it.



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# Chapter 9

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## On the Road to the Main Line

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 a6 4.♙a4 ♘f6

Spassky's 5.♘c3 page 240

The Worrall System 5.♙e2 page 241  
5.0-0 ♙e7 6.♙e2 Game 38, page 242

Just Before the Main Lines 5.0-0 ♙e7 6.♙e1 b5 7.♙b3 d6 page 246

8.c3 (8.h3 page 246) 8...0-0 page 246

9.a4 Game 39, page 248

9.d4 ♙g4

10.d5 Game 40, page 250

10.♙e3 exd4 11.cxd4 d5! 12.e5 ♘e4

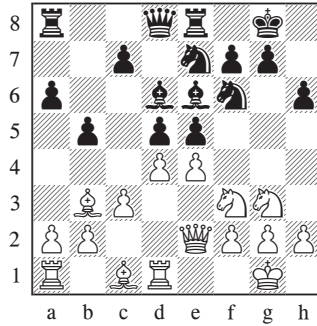
13.♘c3 Game 41, page 255

13.h3 Game 42, page 257

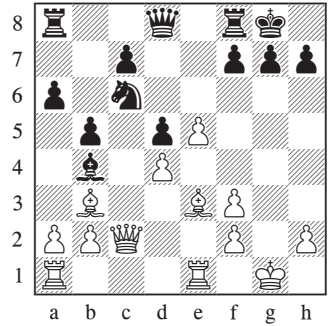
# Diagram Preview

On this page you will find eight diagrams with critical moments from the coming chapter. I recommend that you take up to ten minutes to think about each of them (though much less in some cases). The solutions are found in the following chapter.

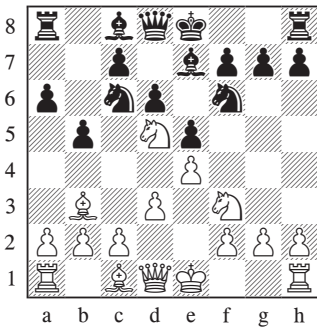
Black is to move unless otherwise indicated.



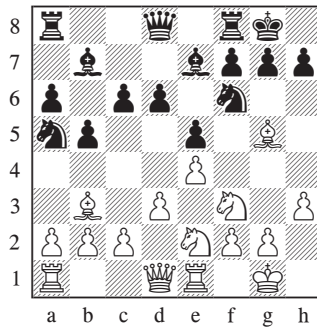
How should Black continue?  
(page 245)



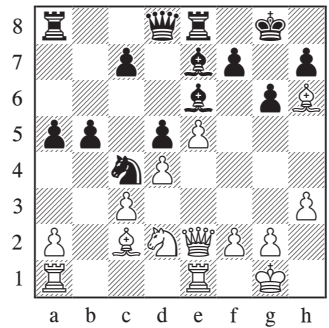
Should Black take the exchange on offer?  
(page 255)



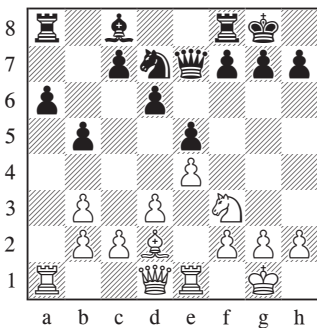
How should Black respond to the advance of the white knight?  
(page 240)



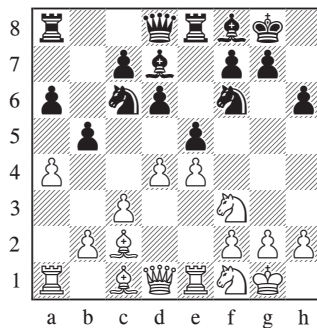
Suggest a plan for Black.  
(page 246)



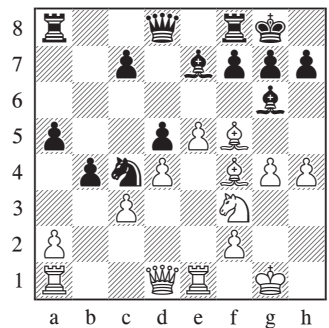
Suggest a plan for Black.  
(page 256)



How can Black gain the initiative?  
(page 241)



Suggest a course of action for Black.  
(page 249)



Suggest a good manoeuvre for Black.  
(page 258)

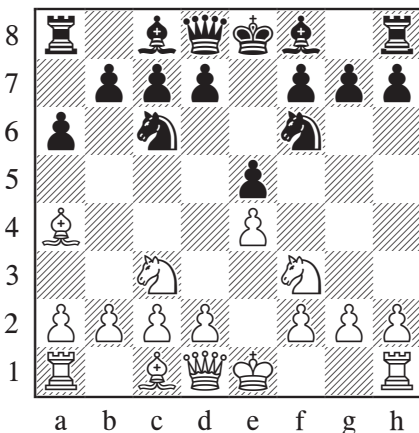
The main line of the Closed Spanish is reached after the opening moves 1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 a6 4.♙a4 ♗f6 5.0–0 ♙e7 6.♞e1 b5 7.♙b3 d6 8.c3 0–0 9.h3, when 9...♗b8 introduces the Breyer System, which will be covered in Chapters 11-13.

The next chapter will give special attention to 5.d3 and 6.d3, the latter being an especially popular move nowadays.

Before then, we will look at the various ways in which White may deviate from the above sequence (except for those which involving exchanging on c6, which were covered in the previous chapter). In this chapter we will examine options like 5.♗c3, 5.♞e2, 6.♞e2, 8.a4 and 9.d4, the last of which is especially important. There are no special positional themes that apply to all the systems in the chapter; you simply have to get to know the pros, cons and specific details of each one. The Spanish has been around for centuries, and many of its sub-systems have gone in and out of fashion. All of the lines examined here have developed their own body of theory and many of them have been tested at the highest levels, so none of them should be taken lightly.

### Spassky's 5.♗c3

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 a6 4.♙a4 ♗f6 5.♗c3



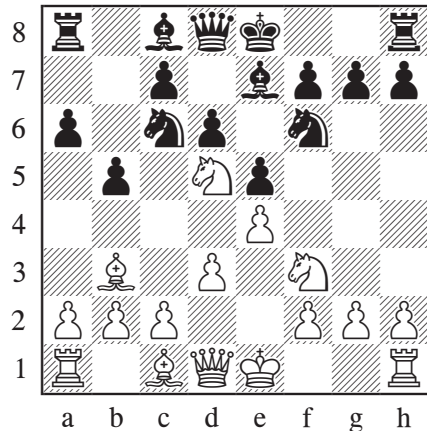
This move does not really warrant a full illustrative game as it is hardly ever played nowadays. Still, it is worth having a quick look at the best way for Black to handle it.

### 5...b5 6.♙b3 ♙e7 7.d3 d6

The main way for White to utilize the knight's position on c3 is to play ♗d5 to eliminate the e7-bishop. However, we can counter by preparing ...♗a5 to eliminate one half of White's bishop pair.

### 8.♗d5

8.a4 b4 9.♗d5 ♗a5 gives Black an even more comfortable version of the main line.



### 8...♗a5!

8...♗xd5?! is not advisable as White plays 9.♙xd5 with tempo, then plays c2-c3 and d3-d4 as in the classic encounter Spassky – Beliavsky, Reykjavik 1988.

### 9.♗xe7 ♞xe7 10.0–0 0–0

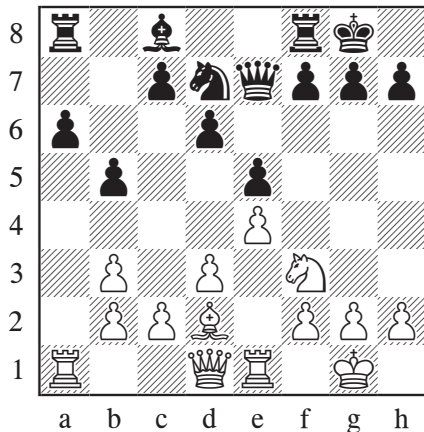
Black is poised to eliminate the b3-bishop, with comfortable equality. We will follow a model game in which he went on to seize the initiative.

### 11.♙d2

11.♙g5 looks more natural, but Black can go for a similar plan with: 11...h6 12.♙h4 ♗xb3 (12...g5 is given by Mikhalevski intending

to reroute the knight to g7 via e8 – another attractive idea which gives Black a good game) 13.axb3 ♖e6!? Intending ...♘d7 and ...f5.

11...♘xb3 12.axb3 ♘d7 13.♞e1



13...♙b7

This final developing move is necessary, as the immediate 13...f5? runs into 14.exf5 ♞xf5 15.♘d4! followed by ♘c6.

14.d4 f5!

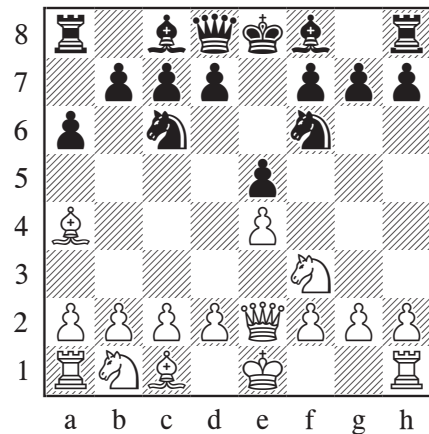
Black obtained the initiative and went on to win in Spassky – Yusupov, Linares 1990. If you remember this simple plan, it becomes pretty easy to deal with the 5.♘c3 variation. If you want more complete coverage of this line from Black's side, Mikhalevski's Open Spanish book is excellent.

### The Worrall System

This refers to set-ups involving an early ♖e2, which may be played either before or after castling. Committing the queen is a slight concession, but White hopes to deploy his rook on the active d1-square later.

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 a6 4.♙a4 ♘f6 5.♖e2

5.0–0 ♙e7 6.♖e2 will be covered in Game 38 below.



5...♙e7!

5...b5 6.♙b3 ♙c5 is perfectly respectable, but the bishop on c5 does not really tie in with the rest of our repertoire; besides, we would have to learn a different set-up against 5.0–0 ♙e7 6.♖e2.

5...b5 6.♙b3 ♙e7 is not bad, but it allows White the extra option of 7.a4.

6.c3

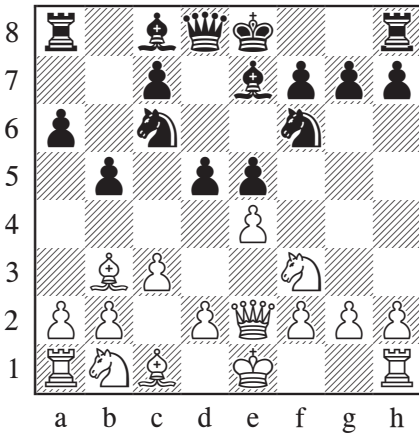
The justification of Black's last move is that 6.♙xc6 dxc6 7.♘e5 ♖d4 sees Black regain the pawn with an easy game.

6...b5 7.♙b3

7.♙c2 is an attempt to exploit the delayed ...b5, but it looks odd to put the bishop on a closed diagonal. 7...d5! is a good response; that being said, 8.d4!? leads to tricky play. A logical continuation is 8...♙g4!? 9.exd5 ♙xf3! 10.♖xf3 ♖xd5 11.♖xd5 ♘xd5 12.dxe5 ♘xe5 13.0–0 0–0 when Black's lead in development and centralized knights offered full compensation for White's bishop pair in Bisguier – Matanovic, Zagreb 1955.

7...d5!

7...0–0 invites a transposition to Game 38 below, but White has the extra option of 8.d4, a favourite line of Tiviakov. The text move does not give him so much freedom.



**8.d3**

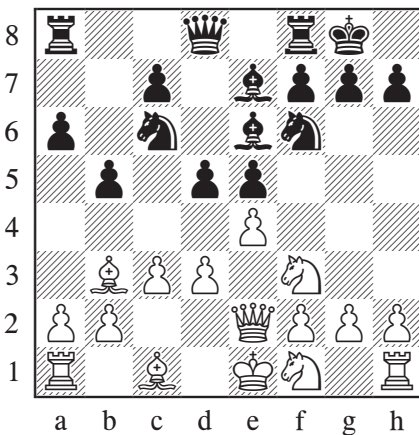
This has been by far the most popular choice.

8.exd5 ♖xd5 9.♗xe5 ♜xe5 10.♙xe5 ♜f6 11.0–0 0–0 12.d4 ♕d6 can be compared with the note to White’s 9th move in the main game below. Black has lost a bit of flexibility, as he was forced to play ...♜f6 instead of ...♕b7, but he still has full compensation for the sacrificed pawn.

**8...0–0 9.♗bd2**

9.0–0 leads straight to Game 38 below, so the question is whether White can exploit the fact that he has not yet castled. Transferring the knight to g3 is the obvious try, but Black is well placed to meet it.

**9...♕e6 10.♜f1**



In Klausch – Schulz, Hamburg 2014, Black could have seized the initiative with:

**10...a5!N 11.♜e3**

11.♜g3 a4 12.♕c2 dxe4 13.dxe4 ♕c4

**11...a4 12.♕c2 d4 13.♜f5 ♕xf5 14.exf5 a3**

White has problems on the dark squares. It is not even clear if the last move is Black’s best, as 14...♙d7 and 14...dxc3 15.bxc3 b4 are also clearly better for him, so take your pick.

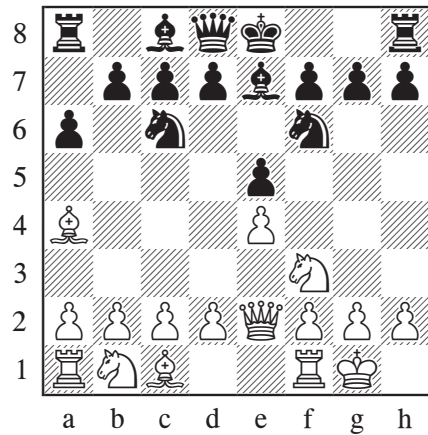
We will now turn our attention to the main line of the Worrall where White castles early.

**GAME 38**

**Judit Polgar – Michael Adams**

Las Palmas 1994

**1.e4 e5 2.♜f3 ♜c6 3.♕b5 a6 4.♕a4 ♜f6 5.0–0 ♕e7 6.♙e2**



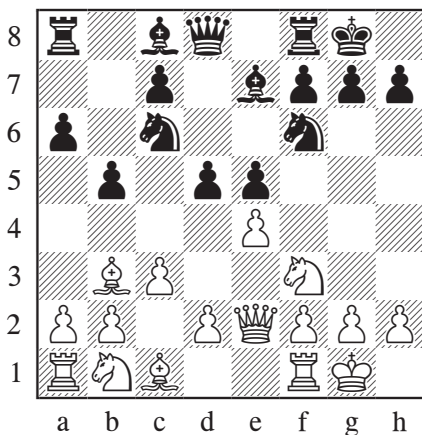
**6...b5!**

Perhaps the exclamation mark is a bit generous, but I want to remind you of why it was worth inserting 3...a6 as soon as the bishop landed on b5. Since 6.♙e2 (as well as 6.♙e1, 6.d3 etc.) defends e4 and thus threatens to capture on c6 and e5, it is useful to have ...b5 available to stop this idea altogether.

Having said that, 6...d6 is also quite a respectable way for Black to play. However, after 7.♙xc6+? bxc6 8.d4 I think White is a bit better. A really nice example continued: 8...exd4 9.♘xd4 ♙d7 10.c4 0–0 11.♘c3 ♜e8 12.h3 ♙f8 13.♞f3 h6 14.♙f4 In Fine – Bernstein, New York 1941, White went on to centralize his rooks and complete the harmonious development of his forces.

### 7.♙b3 0–0 8.c3 d5!

A continuation closer to the spirit of our Breyer main line would have been 8...d6, which was actually my original intention. Now 9.a4 ♙g4! was seen in the beautiful game Fine – Keres, Netherlands 1938, and I had no problem at all in entering the main line with 9.d4 ♙g4!. What I didn't like was the quite clever move order starting with 9.♞d1!, which was recommended by my editor Andrew Greet in *Play the Ruy Lopez*. Black has nothing better than to enter the closed position arising after 9...♘a5 10.♙c2 c5 11.d4 ♞c7 12.d5. This is quite playable for Black, and such positions are covered more fully in Marin's *A Spanish Repertoire for Black*. However, the position is quite far away from the spirit of the Breyer complex, as we always want to be able to challenge the advanced d-pawn with the ...c6 break.



### 9.d3

9.exd5?! has been played in a lot of games, but Black gets an excellent version of the Marshall Attack: 9...♘xd5 10.♘xe5 ♘xe5 11.♞xe5 ♙b7 12.d4 ♞d7 Black intends ...♞ae8 and ...♙d6 with more than enough compensation for the pawn, as has been demonstrated in many practical games.

### 9...♙e6!

If it wasn't for this move I would have found it hard to recommend something against the Worrall that I find completely fine for Black, at least in the practical sense. There are, of course, other respectable ways for Black to play, such as Karpov's 9...d4 or the Kaufmann-recommended 9...♙b7, but both of them allow White to maintain annoying pressure along the a2-g8 diagonal. I would advise you to check Greet's book to see exactly how White can cause problems.

To see the advantages of the text move, it is worth comparing it to the alternative:

### 9...♞e8

This is actually what Adams played in the main game, but I have taken the liberty of changing the move order to show my preferred sequence. Essentially, the drawback of the rook move is that White gets to take advantage of his powerful bishop on b3, whereas my main line strives to neutralize this piece as quickly as possible.

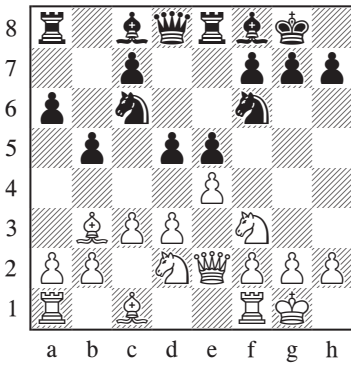
### 10.♘bd2

Greet recommends 10.♞e1!? to maintain the option of meeting ...♙f8 with ♙g5, but I think the text move is trickier.

### 10...♙f8

10...h6 does not work due to 11.exd5 ♘xd5 12.♘xe5 ♘xe5 13.♞xe5 ♙b7 14.♘e4 when Black's compensation is inadequate.

It is also a bad time for 10...♙e6 in view of 11.♘g5 ♙g4 12.♘df3! h6 13.exd5! ♘xd5 14.♞e4!



11.exd5!

11.a3 h6 12.g2 e6 13.d1 was the continuation of Polgar – Adams. I would be happy to reach this position with Black, but I will do so via the bolded move order to rule out the tricky option given in the main line of this note.

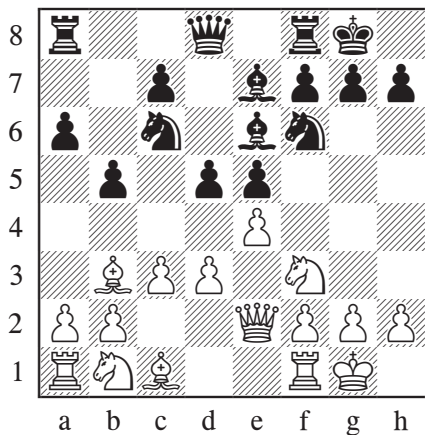
11...xd5

If my opponent captures a central pawn, I would prefer to be able to take it back.

11...a5 is most likely a better move, when White can choose between trying to hold on to his extra pawn or retreating his bishop and playing an interesting middlegame. Maybe it's equal, but I would rather not give my opponent this kind of choice.

12.g5!

This strong move puts Black under some pressure. Now you can see why neutralizing the b3-bishop is my top priority.



10.d1

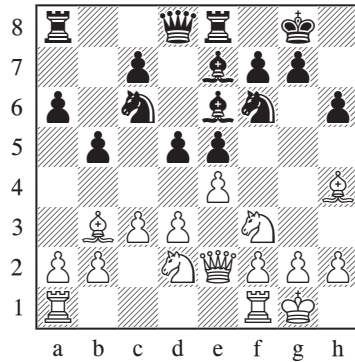
This has been White's most popular choice, and it keeps us on track to reach our target position from Polgar – Adams.

Of course 10.g5 makes little sense as 10...g4 is annoying for White.

It is too early for 10.exd5 xd5 11.xe5 xe5 12.xe5, as Black has excellent compensation after 12...d6 or 12...e8.

Greet points out that 10.bd2 h5!? is irritating for White. Black could also play 10...h6 with a likely transposition to our main line.

Finally, 10.g5 usually only makes sense when Black's bishop has retreated to f8. A strong reply for Black is: 10...e8 11.bd2 h6 12.g4

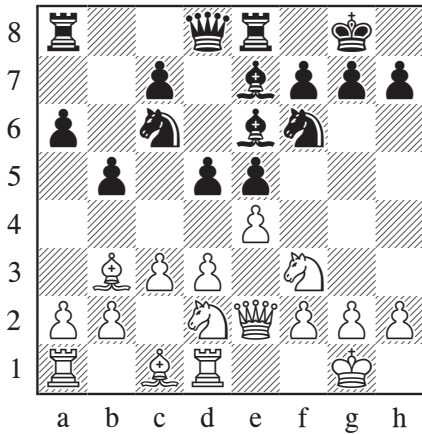


12...h5! Black has an excellent position. A good practical example continued 13.xe7 xe7 14.g3 f6 15.a4 b4 16.a5 b8 17.fb1 d6 and Black went on to win the a5-pawn in Paetz – Hebden, Lausanne 2001.

10...e8 11.bd2

It is important to recognize that this move turns g5 into something of a threat, as ...g4 can be conveniently met by df3. This explains Black's next move.

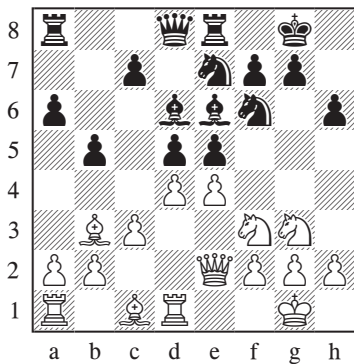




**11...h6! 12.a3**

This is a typical Worrall move, ensuring that the bishop can remain on the a2-g8 diagonal in the event of ...♖a5. However, it is slow and not the most testing move overall.

12.♗f1 was recommended by Greet, and subsequently tested by Adams. 12...♙d6 (Greet gives 12...♙f8 13.♘g3 ♖d7 14.d4! with interesting play; Black's best reply looks to be 14...♙d6 with approximate equality) 13.♘g3 ♗e7! 14.d4 White eventually won in Adams – Gustafsson, Gibraltar (rapid playoff) 2010, but Black's play can be improved with:



14...♙g4! N (This is the most forcing move, although Black can also keep things tense with 14...♗g6! N) 15.h3 ♙xf3 16.♖xf3 exd4 17.♙xh6! ♙xg3 18.♖xg3 ♗g6 19.♙g5 ♗xe4! 20.♙xd8 ♗xg3 21.♙xc7 ♗e2† The tactical

skirmish has resulted in a lively and roughly equal queenless position.

**12...♙f8 13.♙a2**

Finally we have transposed to the main Polgar – Adams game.

**13...♖d7**

Black is absolutely fine, the immediate plan being to bring his second rook into play on d8.

**14.exd5 ♗xd5 15.♗e4**

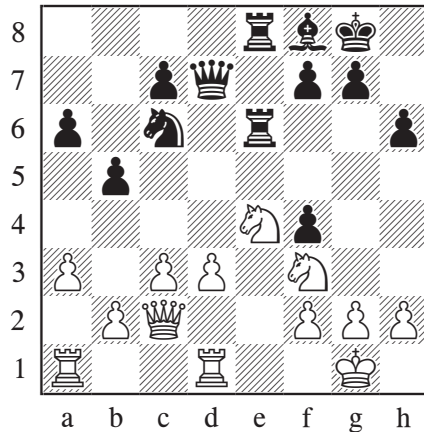
This is a typical plan in the Worrall, but it tends to work better when Black's bishop has gone to b7 rather than e6.

**15...♗f4!**

Polgar was probably hoping to provoke the double-edged ...f5, but Adams' move is much better.

**16.♙xf4 exf4 17.♙xe6 ♖xe6 18.♖c2 ♗ae8**

Black is in control; his excellent pieces more than make up for the slight damage to his pawn structure.



**19.b4 ♗e5**

19...g5! followed by a pawn assault with ...f5 and ...g4 looks gruesome for White.

**20.♗xe5**



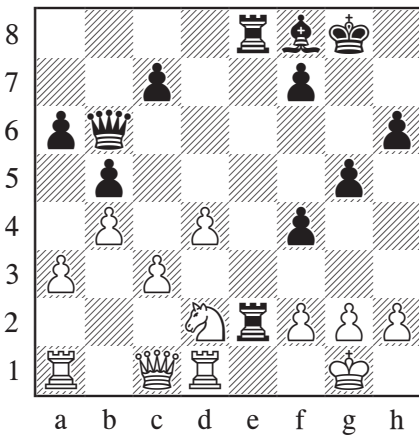
20. ♖d4 is well met by 20... ♗g6! with various attacking ideas.

20... ♗xe5 21. ♖d2

21.c4 is met by 21...f3! and White is in trouble. Polgar tries to avoid this without resorting to the ugly f2-f3.

21... ♖e2! 22. ♖b1 ♖c6 23. ♖c1 ♖b6 24. d4 g5→

Black is dominating, and is ready to play ...g4 followed by breaking through on the kingside after suitable preparation. Polgar tries to create some breathing room but only accelerates Black's attack. Still, in a bad position, every move looks bad with hindsight.

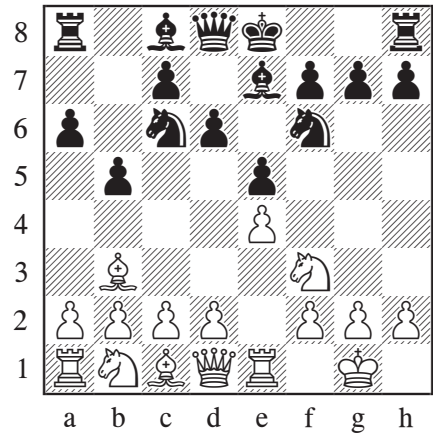


25.h3?! h5 26. ♖b1 ♖f6 27. ♖f1 g4 28.hxg4 hxg4 29. ♖d3 ♗d6 30. ♗d2 f3 31. ♗ad1 ♖h4

White resigned. Adams played excellently, with the exception of his slightly inaccurate move order in the opening. Remember, 9... ♗e6! is the way to go!  
0-1

**Just Before the Main Lines**

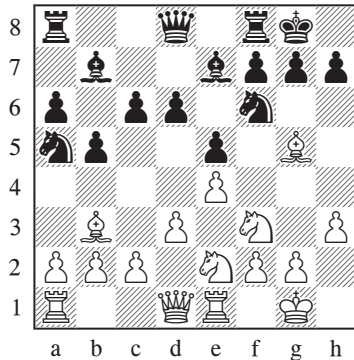
1.e4 e5 2. ♖f3 ♖c6 3. ♗b5 a6 4. ♗a4 ♖f6  
5.0-0 ♗e7 6. ♗e1 b5 7. ♗b3 d6



**8.c3**

Otherwise Black will be able to eliminate the 'Spanish Bishop' with ...♗a5.

8.h3 ♗a5 9. ♖c3 0-0 10.d3 has occurred in quite a number of games over the years, but I will just show one nice example: 10... ♗b7 (10... ♗e8 was played in Korchnoi – Portisch, Belgrade 1970, but the text move is more dynamic) 11. ♗g5 c6 12. ♖e2



12... ♖h5! 13. ♗xe7 ♖xe7 In Fontaine – Sasikiran, Internet (blitz) 2004, Black was ready to take over the initiative with ...♖xb3, ...c5 and ...f5.

**8...0-0 9.d4**

This is one of the most important subvariations before the main line, and we