

opening repertoire

the Ruy Lopez

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About the Author

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Also by the Author:

Opening Repertoire: The Sicilian Najdorf (with John Doknjas)

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Introduction

The Ruy Lopez is one of the most rich and diverse openings. The game can easily lead to a complicated and strategic struggle, or a sharp fighting game, where White aims to attack on the kingside while Black plays for a queenside expansion. The wide variety of interesting positions that can be reached out of the opening greatly contributes to the longevity of the Ruy Lopez. In recent years, many top players such as Fabiano Caruana, Maxime Vachier-Lagrave, and Viswanathan Anand have employed this opening as a major part of their repertoire.

This book is divided into three parts.

Part One

Part One examines the classical systems, including the Zaitsev, the Chigorin, and the Breyer. Over the years, these systems have declined a bit in popularity because White can often obtain some pressure on Black's position, which can be unpleasant to defend in practice. However, the lines are quite complicated strategically and White should pay close attention to the typical ideas and plans for both sides.

Part Two

In Part Two, we'll move on to the fashionable lines: the Berlin, the Open Ruy Lopez, and the Marshall. These lines are frequently seen at the top level because of their solidity and objective strength. Many of the variations are quite concrete as Black often aims to equalize immediately out of the opening. For our repertoire, we'll try to challenge Black by entering complicated and strategic positions. Therefore, I recommend the 4 d3 Anti-Berlin, 9 c3 in the main line of the Open Ruy Lopez, and the 8 a4 Anti-Marshall.

Part Three

Part Three covers Black's sharp tries and sidelines: 5...b5 and 5...c5, ...g6 and ...ge7 systems, the Schliemann, and rare lines. In many of these variations, Black plays for active and rapid development. However, his position is often compromised by either allowing White to take control of the centre or by creating a weakness for White to attack.

How to Get the Most out of This Book

-  I highly encourage readers to pay close attention to the questions and exercises in every game. This is because they can help to understand the instructive moments of the game and some of the important concepts to remember.
-  Play through the games. All of the games I selected for this book feature high-level players, and many of them display useful middlegame ideas that can be applied in similar types of positions.
-  Read the short conclusion at the end of each game as it summarizes the important ideas and variations that were covered.

Acknowledgements

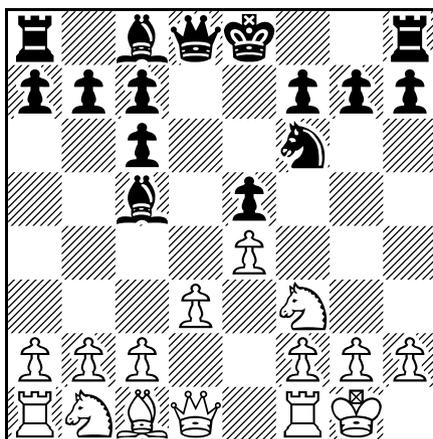
I would like to thank my family for their support and encouragement throughout this project, as well as Byron Jacobs and the team at Everyman Chess for making it possible.

Joshua Doknjas,
Canada,
November 2019

Chapter Four

The Anti-Berlin: 4 d3

The Berlin is one of the most popular choices for Black against the Ruy Lopez at the top level. This is mainly due to its solidity, as it is very difficult for White to play aggressively against this variation. Our repertoire against the Berlin is based on the 4 d3 ♘c5 5 ♘xc6 dxc6 6 0-0 variation. The play here is quite strategic and complicated, where there is lots of scope to outplay the opponent. In many of the variations, White fights for control of the centre with c3 and d4 or on the queenside with a3 and b4.



Game 14 looks at Black's 4th move sidelines after 4 d3: 4...♘e7 and 4...d6. Both of these moves are solid, but a bit passive, and White has good chances for an edge in these lines. In the game, White develops his pieces actively and accurately prevents Black's main ideas. At some point, White loses most of his advantage, but manages to win the game due to Black's weakened kingside.

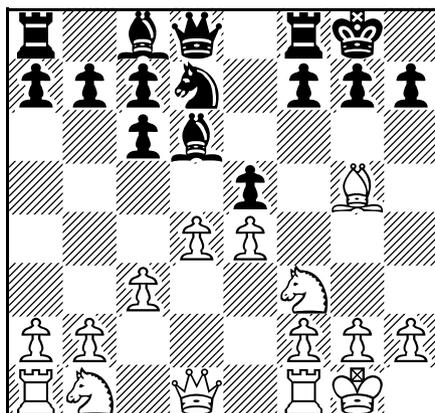
Game 15 covers Black's sidelines in the diagram shown above, namely 6...♙d6 and 6...♘g4. 6...♙d6 is a slightly awkward square for Black's queen, as it would be a problem for Black if

White is able to play Bbd2-c4 . Still, Black's position is pretty solid and White should play accurately to secure an advantage. $6...g4$ was Black's choice in the game and led to very sharp play. The complications favour White, but the positions are rather tricky. White plays the opening very well and obtains a nearly winning position, but blunders late in the game.

Game 16 moves on to the solid $6...d6$ variation. Against this move, we'll see how White can try to put some pressure on Black's queenside with Bbd2-b3-a5 . In the game, White gains a better pawn structure out of the opening and a promising position, but the play quickly becomes very complicated where both sides have their chances.

Game 17 examines the $6...e7$ variation, where Black aims to develop actively with $...g4$ followed by $...d7$. In this game, we'll see how White can continue energetically and put pressure on Black's position. The play can easily become quite sharp, as White often plays $b4$ and $g4$ to gain space and restrict Black's bishops.

Game 18 begins our analysis of the $6...d7$ variation, which we meet by playing $7 c3$ followed by $8 d4$. In this game, we'll look at some of Black's less common tries, where White's strong pawn centre can be very unpleasant for Black to play against. In the game, Black manages to obtain some counterplay with $...f5$, leading to a complicated fight.



Game 19 examines $9...f6$ and $9...e8$, Black's two main options in the diagram shown above. The play is very complicated here, and White generally tries to put pressure on Black's $e5$ -pawn, while Black will either gain space on the queenside, or transfer his pieces towards the kingside. In the game, Black struggles to find a good plan and White plays accurately to obtain a better position and slowly convert his advantage.

Game 14
F. Caruana-A. Naiditsch
GRENKE Classic, Karlsruhe/Baden Baden 2018

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 Nf6 4 d3 d6

Others:

a) 4...♙c5 is the main line and we will analyse it in the next five games of this chapter.

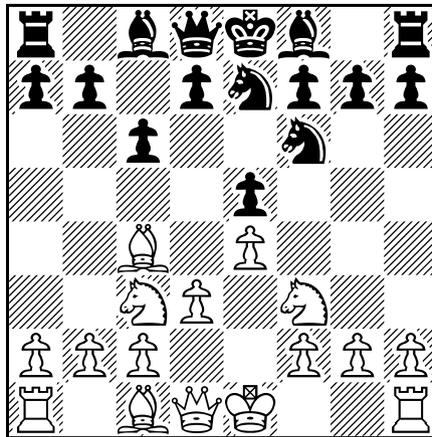
b) 4...♞e7 is a rare idea. Black aims for a solid, but slightly passive set-up with ...c6 and ...d6. 5 ♞c3 (of course not 5 ♞xe5?? c6 6 ♙c4 ♚a5+) and now:

b1) 5...♞g6 6 d4, when Black has:

b11) 6...♙b4 was tried in D.Navara-M.Luch, Czechia 2006, White should play 7 dxe5! ♞xe4 8 ♚d4 ♞xc3 9 bxc3 ♙e7 and here 10 h4! is very strong. If Black plays 10...h5 (10...c6 11 ♙c4 is excellent for White, as h5 is coming next) then White can play 11 e6, intending to meet 11...fxe6 with 12 ♚xg7. This takes advantage of 10...h5, which weakened the g6-knight's protection. Without the inclusion of h4 and ...h5, Black would be winning because of ...♙f6!

b12) 6...exd4 7 ♚xd4! (not 7 ♞xd4? when Black easily gains counterplay against White's centre after 7...c6 8 ♙d3 ♙c5 9 ♙e3 d6 followed by ...0-0 and ...♚e8) 7...a6 8 ♙c4 d6 9 h4! gives Black major problems on the kingside. 9...h5 is met by 10 ♞g5, and one interesting variation is 10...♞e5 11 ♙f4! (the simple 11 ♙e2 also gives White a clear advantage) 11...c5 12 ♚xe5+! dxe5 13 ♙xf7+ ♙e7 14 ♙xe5 and despite being up a queen for a knight and two pawns, Black is completely lost in this position. One of White's ideas is to play ♚d1 followed by ♙xf6 and ♞d5.

b2) 5...c6 6 ♙c4



Now Black has two main options:

b21) 6...♞g6 7 h4! (7 d4?! exd4 8 ♚xd4 is met by 8...b6! followed by ...♙c5, giving Black active play) 7...h5 8 ♞g5 d5 9 exd5 b5 (9...cxd5? is a blunder due to 10 ♞xd5! ♞xd5 11 ♚f3; the game Z.Efimenko-A.Cherniaev, Coventry 2005, continued 11...♙e6 12 ♞xe6 fxe6 13 ♙b5+ ♙e7 14 ♙g5+ ♞f6 15 ♚xb7+ and White was completely winning) 10 ♙b3 cxd5 11 d4! (11 ♞xb5? wins a pawn, but gives Black active play after 11...♙c5 and ...♙g4 will be coming soon) 11...e4 12 ♚e2 a6 13 f3 was excellent for White in B.Socko-M.Luch, Warsaw 2014.

b22) 6...d6 and now:

b221) 7 0-0 h6 was quite solid for Black in I.Saric-S.Fedorchuk, Rio Achaea 2018, play continued 8 d4 ♖c7 9 ♘h4!? (9 h3! looks a bit stronger, and should give White a slight edge) 9...g6? (the active 9...g5! leads to a roughly balanced game) and here White could have played 10 dxe5! dxe5 11 f4 obtaining a clear advantage. For example, 11...♙g7 12 fxe5 ♖xe5 13 ♙e3 followed by ♙d4.

b222) 7 d4! exd4 8 ♖xd4 (8 ♘xd4 was tried in A.Sherwood-T.Rosenhöfer, correspondence 2018, and following 8...♗g6 9 ♙b3 ♙e7 10 0-0 0-0 11 h3 ♗e8 12 ♗e1 ♙f8, Black's position was quite solid, though White was able to put Black under some pressure) 8...♗g6 9 h4 looks similar to some of the variations we saw after 6...♗g6 7 h4, but here Black also has the additional possibility of playing 9...♙g4!? (9...♖b6 10 ♙e3 ♖xd4 11 ♙xd4 ♗g4 12 h5 led to a much better endgame for White in N.Matinian-S.Soyzal, Batumi 2018) Still, White should retain slightly better chances after 10 ♗g5! ♗e5 11 ♙f4 ♖c7 (or 11...h6 12 ♙xe5 hxg5 13 ♙g3) 12 f3 ♗xc4 13 ♖xc4.

c) 4...♙d6 looks like an awkward square for the bishop, but Black's position is still fairly solid. Play may continue 5 c3 a6 6 ♙a4 0-0 7 0-0 ♗e8 and now:

c1) A.Lanc-A.Malashenkov, correspondence 2017, saw 8 h3, but this seems to be slightly inaccurate. After 8...h6 9 ♗e1 ♙f8, 10 d4 was played with the idea of meeting 10...exd4 with 11 e5, but the inclusion of h3 and ...h6 takes the sting out of this plan. This is because White is unable to use the g5-square for his knight after 11...♗d5 12 ♙b3 ♗b6.

c2) Instead, White should play 8 ♗e1!, as here 8...♙f8 9 d4! is quite dangerous for Black. For example, 9...exd4? 10 e5 ♗d5 11 ♙b3 and White is prepared to play ♗g5 next.

5 0-0 ♙d7

Others:

a) 5...g6 6 d4! ♙d7 (6...exd4?! runs into 7 e5!) 7 d5! (7 ♗e1 transposes to 5...♙d7 6 ♗e1 g6, which we will examine below) aims to take advantage of Black's slightly inaccurate move order. Play may continue 7...♗e7 (or 7...♗b8 8 ♖e2 ♙g7 9 ♙xd7+ ♗bxd7 10 c4 a5 11 ♗c3 ♗c5 12 ♗e1 and White had a pleasant position in F.Nepustil-S.Kudela, correspondence 2015) 8 ♙xd7+ ♗xd7 9 c4 ♙g7 10 ♙e3 h6 11 ♗fd2 f5 12 f3 f4 13 ♙f2 g5 14 ♗c3 ♗g6 and in W.So-E.L'Ami, Batumi 2018, and White played the slightly surprising 15 c5!? and obtained good play. But 15 b4! seems best and has the idea of playing c5 next. Black will find it difficult to create a powerful kingside attack without his light-squared bishop.

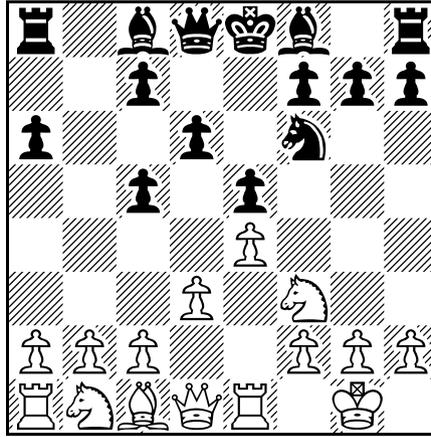
b) Black can obtain the bishop pair with 5...a6 but White will have good play in the centre after 6 ♙xc6+ (not 6 ♙a4?! as Black can play 6...b5 7 ♙b3 ♗a5) 6...bxc6 7 ♗e1 and now Black has:

b1) 7...♙e7 8 d4 exd4 9 ♗xd4 ♙d7 is a solid, but passive set-up. The easiest route to an edge seems to be 10 c4! (10 ♗c3 0-0 11 ♖f3 should also be good for White) 10...0-0 11 ♗c3 ♗e8 12 ♖f3 h6 13 ♙f4 and Black's position is unpleasant.

b2) Black tried 7...♙g4 in S.Karjakin-V.Kramnik, Paris (blitz) 2018, and here I think White should play 8 c3 (instead, the game continued 8 ♗bd2 ♙e7 9 h3 ♙h5 10 ♗f1 ♗d7 and Black had a solid position) 8...♙e7 (8...c5 transposes to 7...c5 8 c3 ♙g4) 9 ♙e3 ♗d7 10 ♗bd2

0-0 11 d4 with a slight edge.

b3) 7...c5!? fights for control of the important d4-square.



8 c3 and now:

b31) 8...e7 9 d4 cxd4 10 cxd4 0-0 11 c3 (the immediate 11 dxe5 dxe5 12 c2 followed by b2 also looks good for White) 11...b7 12 dxe5 dxe5 13 c2 e6 14 g5 gave White a comfortable edge in S.Ventura Monfort-J.Lario Cortés, correspondence 2014;

b32) 8...g4 9 h3 gives Black a choice:

b321) 9...h5?! runs into 10 d4! and if 10...cxd4 (10...d7 is more solid, but White is much better after 11 e3) 11 cxd4 exd4, then White wins after 12 e5 dxe5 13 g4! (this move is why White needs to insert 9 h3 h5 before playing d4) 13...g6 14 xe5 e7 15 c6.

b322) 9...xf3 gives up the bishop pair, but makes it more difficult for White to play d4. Following 10 xf3 e7, White has:

b3221) 11 e3 was tried in Wei Yi-R.Rapport, Tbilisi 2017, but after the interesting manoeuvre 11...b8!? 12 b3 a5 13 d4?! (13 d2! should be preferred, with the idea of meeting 13...a4 with 14 e1) 13...a4! Black had no problems equalizing.

b3222) 11 d2! 0-0 12 c4 a5! Looks best, preventing a5, but White still has a slight edge here. One sample line is 13 a4 d7 14 g4 b6 15 xb6 cxb6 16 f4! and White develops good play on the kingside.

c) 5...e7 is a solid, but slightly passive set-up. Following 6 c3 0-0 7 e1 Black has 3 main moves:

c1) 7...d7 transposes to 5...d7 (our main game).

c2) 7...g4 8 bd2 d7 9 h3 h5 10 f1 a6 was tried in P.Harikrishna-R.Stern, Germany 2016, the game continued 11 a4 c5 12 c2 e6 13 g3 and White was slightly better. But the energetic 13 g4! looks even stronger, for example, 13...g6 14 g3 g5 15 g2! as in S.Ter Sahakyan-M.Bartel, Gjakova 2016, was promising for White. The game saw 15...xf3 16 xf3 g5 and here 17 xg5 xg5 18 h1! would be better for White.

Opening Repertoire: The Ruy Lopez

c3) 7...a6 8 ♖a4 b5 (8...♙e8 9 ♘bd2 b5 transposes to 8...b5 9 ♖c2 ♙e8; while 8...♙g4 9 ♘bd2 ♘d7 is a rather slow plan that should be met energetically: 10 h3 ♙h5 11 ♖c2 ♙h8 12 g4! ♙g6 13 ♘f1 ♘b6 14 ♘g3 d5 15 ♙e2 f6 16 h4! and White had an excellent position in K.Alekseenko-A.Naiditsch, Gibraltar 2019) 9 ♖c2 leads to another split:

c21) 9...♙e8 10 ♘bd2 ♙f8 11 a4 (11 d4 exd4 12 cxd4 ♙g4 leads to unclear play) 11...♙b8 12 ♘f1 h6 13 axb5 axb5 14 d4 exd4 15 ♘xd4! ♙d7 16 ♘g3 ♘e5 17 f4 was unpleasant for Black in M.Zordick-H.Packroff, correspondence 2017.

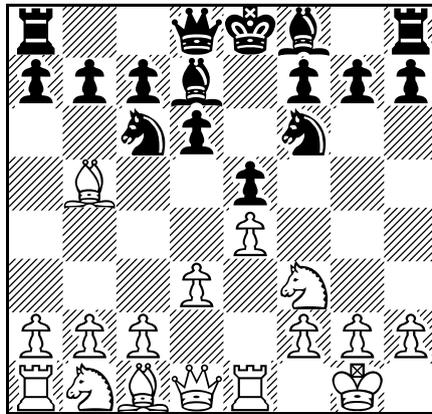
c32) 9...d5 10 ♘bd2 dxe4 (10...d4 11 cxd4! exd4 12 a3 ♘d7 13 ♘b3 was tried in A.Muñoz Pardiño-J.Schwarz, correspondence 2018 – the game continued 13...♘de5 14 ♘xe5 ♘xe5 15 f4 and White obtained a very pleasant advantage; while 10...♙g4?! 11 h3 ♙h5 12 g4! ♙g6 13 ♘h4 d4 14 ♘df3 ♖c5 15 a3 gave White an excellent position in A.Kasyan-L.Pospíšil, correspondence 2016) is probably Black's best choice, but White should have a risk-free slight edge in this line. After 11 dxe4 ♙e6 12 a4, Black has:

c321) 12...b4 13 ♙e2 ♙c8 14 ♘c4 ♘d7 15 a5!? (15 ♘g5! gains the bishop pair and looks pretty good for White) 15...f6?! (15...♙b7! should be preferred, when White is slightly better after 16 ♘e3) 16 ♘e3 gave White good control over the d5 and f5-squares in S.Movsesian-Z.Almasi, Istanbul 2012.

c322) 12...♙b8!? 13 ♙e2 ♙b7 14 b4! gained space on the queenside and made it difficult for Black to find an active plan in R.Hall-V.Iotov, correspondence 2015.

c323) 12...♙c5 13 ♙e2 ♙a7 14 b4! ♘h5 and in F.Caruana-J.Gustafsson, Dortmund 2012, White played 15 ♘f1 and gained an advantage (15 g3!? prevents ...♘f4 and is also better for White).

6 ♙e1!



Question: Why is 6 ♙e1 more accurate than 6 c3 - ?

Answer: Because Black hasn't yet shown where he plans to develop his f8-bishop (to e7 or to g7), so White wants to maintain the possibility of playing c4 in one move. If Black devel-

ops his bishop to e7, White will play c3, as we will see in our main game. If Black tries 6...g6, then we can play 7 d4!, obtaining a fairly good version of a King's Indian pawn structure.

Still, 6 c3 is completely playable. The position after 6...g6 7 ♖e1 ♙g7 8 ♘bd2 0-0 is fairly sound for Black, but White can fight for a small advantage here.

6...♙e7

Or:

a) 6...g6 7 d4! ♙g7 8 d5 ♘e7 9 ♙xd7+ exchanges off Black's light-squared bishop which usually plays a vital role in Black's kingside attack. 9...♘xd7 10 ♙e3 and now:

a1) 10...0-0 11 c4 h6 (11...f5?! is met by 12 ♘g5!) 12 ♘fd2 f5 13 f3 is very similar to the 10...h6 variation.

a2) 10...h6 11 ♘fd2 f5 12 f3 and here we'll look at two high-level games:

a21) 12...h5 13 c4 b6 was tried in S.Sjugirov-P.Ponkratov, Yaroslavl 2018, in order to slow down White's queenside attack. The game continued 14 ♘c3 f4 15 ♙f2 g5 16 b4 ♘f6 17 c5 ♘g6 18 ♖c1 (18 ♖a4+! would have been even more unpleasant for Black) 18...0-0 19 cxd6 cxd6 20 ♘b5 ♖f7 21 ♖c6 and White had excellent queenside play.

a22) 12...♘f6 13 c4 c6!? (13...0-0 14 ♘c3 f4 looks natural in this position, but isn't very effective, as Black doesn't have his light-squared bishop; play may continue 15 ♙f2 g5 16 c5 ♘g6 17 b4 h5 18 ♘c4 and White has excellent queenside play, while it's difficult for Black to do much on the kingside) was played in L.Dominguez Perez-T.Radjabov, Dortmund 2019, the game continued 14 ♘c3 0-0 15 ♖b3 cxd5 16 cxd5 ♖f7 17 ♖ac1 (17 a4 also deserved consideration) 17...fxe4 18 ♘dxe4 and White had a fairly comfortable edge.

b) 6...a6 7 ♙xc6 ♙xc6 8 c4! is a strong move, making it much more difficult for Black to find active play. Black needs to decide where he wants to develop his bishop:

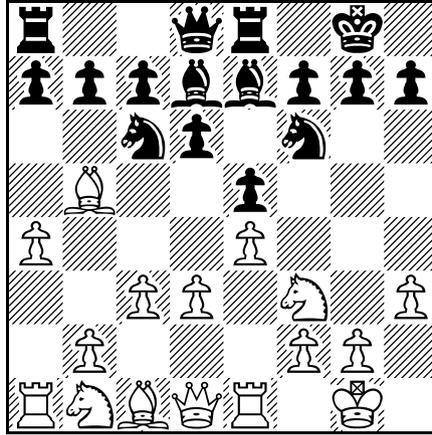
b1) 8...g6 9 ♘c3 ♙g7 10 d4 0-0 (10...exd4 11 ♘xd4 0-0 12 f3 is better for White, as it is very difficult for Black to create play here) 11 dxe5 dxe5 12 ♖c2 was good for White in S.Lobanov-S.Himanshu, Leiden 2018, because he could soon begin a queenside expansion with b4-b5.

b2) 8...♙e7 was tried in I.Dolgov-V.Gorozhantsev, correspondence 2017, the game continued 9 ♘c3 0-0 10 d4 ♖e8 11 ♖c2 exd4 12 ♘xd4 ♙d7 13 ♙f4 and Black's position was very unpleasant.

7 c3 0-0 8 h3

8 ♘bd2 is the main line and White should also be slightly better here.

8...♖e8 9 a4!



Question: What is the purpose of 9 a4 - ?

Answer: 9 a4 gains space on the queenside, while also preventing Black from playing ...a6 and ...b5.

9 ...bd2 is more natural and fully playable as well. Black will likely play 9...e8, preparing ...e7, so White should play 10 a4! and after 10...e7 11 c2 g6 12 d4 c6 13 f1 White has a slight edge.

9...e8

9...a6 10 c4 a5 11 a2 c5 aims to play ...b5, but White can fight back with 12 b4 (12 g5 should also give White an edge) 12...cxb4 13 cxb4 c6 14 d2.

10 g5!

Others are possible:

a) 10 c4!? looks like a good alternative, preventing Black's main idea of 10...e7? as here White wins with 11 b3. 10...h6 is stronger, but White is slightly better after 11 a5 a6 12 bd2 e6 13 xe6 xe6 14 c4!, restricting Black's central play.

b) 10 a5 gaining more space on the queenside also deserves consideration.

10...h6 11 e4 g5 12 g3 e7

12...h5 seems to threaten ...xg3, but White can ignore this by playing 13 bd2! and now:

a) 13...g4? runs into 14 e4! e7 15 xe7 xe7 16 h2! picking up the g4-pawn.

b) 13...f4 is probably best. White should meet this with 14 f1 g7 15 e3 and slowly prepare to play d4.

c) 13...xg3 14 fxg3 and White is prepared to play g4 next, followed by f1-g3. For example, 14...e7 15 xd7 xd7 16 g4 g6 17 f1 with a clearly better position for White.

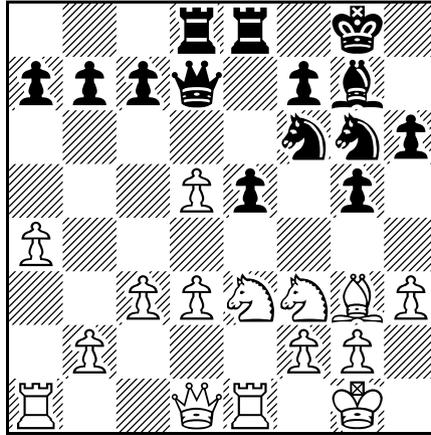
13 xd7 xd7 14 bd2 g6 15 c4 ad8 16 e3 d5

16...c6 preparing ...d5 was more solid. After 17 c2 d5 18 ad1 White will aim to exploit

Black's weak light-squares on the kingside with either ♖f5 or ♖h2-g4.

17 exd5 ♗g7

17...♗xd5 immediately runs into 18 ♗g4!



Exercise: Black is prepared to play ...♗xd5 on his next move and achieve a comfortable game. How can White make things difficult for Black?

Answer: 18 d4!

Challenging Black in the centre and attacking the e5-pawn.

18 c4 c6! is fine for Black, as after 19 dxc6 bxc6 White is unable to defend the d3-pawn.

18...exd4

Or:

a) 18...e4 19 ♗d2 is good for White. Black is unable to play 19...♗xd5?! because of 20 ♗xd5 ♖xd5 21 ♗xc7.

b) 18...♗xd5 19 dxe5 gives White an extra pawn in the endgame arising after 19...♗xe3 20 ♖xd7 ♗xd7 21 ♗xe3.

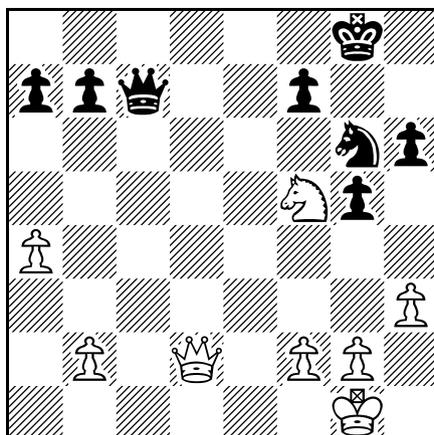
19 cxd4?!

19 ♖xd4! is best, when Black can try:

a) 19...♗xd5 20 ♖xd5 (or 20 ♖xa7) 20...♖xd5 21 ♗xd5 ♗xe1+ 22 ♗xe1 ♗xd5 23 ♗xc7 and Black faces a very difficult defence in this endgame.

b) 19...♗e4 20 ♗e5! (but not 20 ♖xa7?! f5!, and Black gets counterplay) 20...♗xe5 (20...♗xe5 21 ♖xe4 is a safe extra pawn for White) 21 ♗xe5 ♗xe5 22 ♗g4! ♗xd5 23 ♖xe4 and White has a much better position.

19...♗xd5 20 ♗xd5 ♗xe1+ 21 ♖xe1 ♖xd5 22 ♗xc7 ♗c8 23 ♗c1 ♗xd4 24 ♖d2 ♖d7 25 ♗xd4 ♗xc7 26 ♗xc7 ♖xc7 27 ♗f5



The position is close to equal, but the weaknesses around Black's king give him some difficulties in defending.

27...♔h7 28 g3 ♘e5 29 ♖e3 ♗c4?!

29...f6! was stronger, supporting the knight on e5.

30 ♖c3 ♖e5 31 ♗d3 ♗xb2 32 ♖c2 ♖e1+ 33 ♔g2 ♗d1 34 ♖e4 ♖xa4?

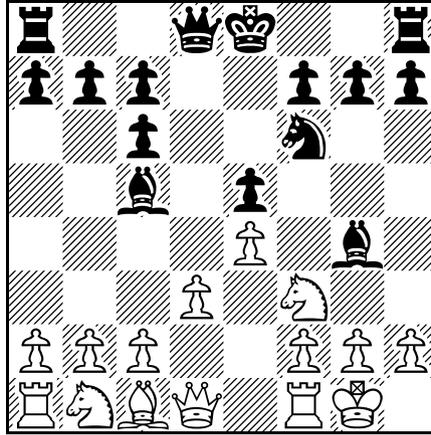
34...♗d7! threatens to play ...♖c6 or ...♗xa4.

35 ♖xb7 ♖a2 36 ♗e3 ♔g7 37 ♖b4 ♖b1 38 g4 ♔g8 39 ♗f5 ♖c2 40 ♖b8+ ♔h7 41 ♖b7 ♔h8 42 ♖e7 1-0

Black's 4th move sidelines in the Berlin give White good chances to obtain a slight edge. In the 4...d6 variation after 5 0-0 ♗d7, it is important to remember the accurate 6 ♖e1!, which allows White to meet 6...g6 with 7 d4! and obtain a good King's Indian structure. In our main game, Black opted for a ...♗e7 set-up, but White was able to put Black under some pressure by gaining space on the queenside (9 a4!) and then preventing Black's main idea of ...♗e7 with 10 ♗g5!

Game 15
P.Leko-D.Navara
 Spanish League 2018

1 e4 e5 2 ♗f3 ♗c6 3 ♖b5 ♗f6 4 d3 ♗c5 5 ♗xc6 dxc6 6 0-0 ♗g4



A very ambitious idea, Black is hoping to develop actively with moves such as ... $\text{d}7$, ... $\text{f}6$, and ... $\text{e}7$. However, this can only be achieved if White plays slowly.

We will look at 6... $\text{d}6$, 6... $\text{d}7$, and 6... $\text{e}7$ later in this chapter.

6... $\text{d}6$ is similar to the more popular 6... $\text{e}7$ variation, but here the queen on d6 can be more easily attacked by $\text{bd}2$ -c4. However, the advantage of 6... $\text{d}6$ is that it puts pressure on White's d3-pawn.

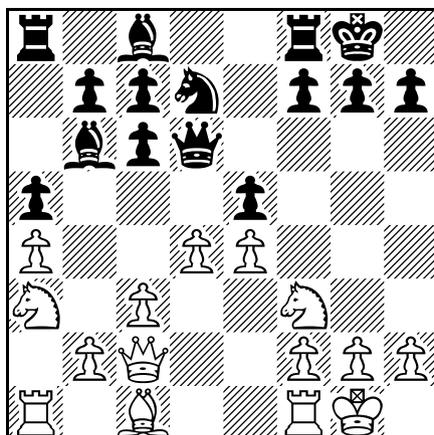
Question: Why can't White play 7 h3 here?

Answer: 7 h3?! is a natural looking move, but one which White should be very careful about playing if Black hasn't castled kingside. Black can play 7... $\text{g}8!$ followed by ... $\text{g}5$, putting White in serious danger. White can try 8 c3 intending to meet 8... $\text{g}5$ with 9 d4, but after 9... $\text{g}4!$ the play becomes very sharp, and it looks quite dangerous for White.

After 7 c3, Black can play:

a) 7... $\text{b}6$ 8 $\text{c}2!$ (8 d4 runs into Black's main idea behind 7... $\text{b}6$: 8... $\text{g}4!$ 9 $\text{bd}2$ $\text{d}7$ and Black should be able to obtain good counterplay against White's centre) protecting the d3-pawn in preparation for $\text{bd}2$. One sample line is 8... $\text{g}4$ 9 $\text{bd}2$ $\text{d}7$ 10 h3 $\text{xf}3$ 11 $\text{xf}3$ 0-0 12 $\text{d}1$ and White has a better position, as he can slowly prepare to play d4 while Black lacks active play.

b) 7...0-0?! was tried in J.Vozda-R.Postl, correspondence 2009, and White obtained an excellent position after 8 d4 $\text{b}6$ 9 a4 a5 10 $\text{c}2$ $\text{d}7$ 11 $\text{a}3!$



Question: What is the point of developing the knight to a3 instead of d2?

Answer: White developed his knight to a3 instead of d2 so that 11...exd4 12 cxd4 ♙xd4? can be met by 13 ♖d1 c5 14 ♗b5! ♚c6 15 ♙f4 with a winning position.

c) 7...♙g4 8 ♗bd2 and now:

c1) 8...♗d7 9 h3 ♙xf3 and in M.Kravtsiv-Z.Almasi, Heraklio 2017, White played 10 ♚xf3, but the more accurate recapture would have been 10 ♗xf3! because the knight can help White to play d4 and expand in the centre. The knight can also put some pressure on Black's kingside, this is seen after 10...0-0 11 ♗h4! (the natural 11 d4 should be slightly better for White, but Black's position is solid) 11...♚e6 (11...g6 weakens the kingside and can be met by 12 ♚c2 ♖fe8 13 ♗f3 followed by gaining space on the queenside with b4 and a4, or ♖d1 and d4) 12 ♗f5 ♖fe8 13 ♚g4 ♙f8 14 ♖d1 (14 f3!? and d4 next also looks good) and White's position is much more pleasant. His main plan is to keep his centre well-supported and play d4 soon.

c2) 8...♚xd3 leads to a better endgame for White after 9 ♗xe5 ♚e2 10 ♗xg4 ♚xg4 11 ♚xg4 ♗xg4 12 ♗b3 and here Black has two options:

c21) 12...♙b6 was seen in A.Manzo-L.Laffranchise, correspondence 2010, but the bishop appeared to be misplaced on b6 after the moves 13 c4! a5 14 c5 ♙a7 15 h3 ♗e5 16 ♗xa5 0-0-0 17 b4 and White obtained a clear advantage.

c22) 12...♙e7 looks stronger, but the endgame is still unpleasant for Black. For example, 13 ♖d1 ♗e5 14 ♙f4 ♗c4 15 ♖ab1 ♖d8 (or 15...♖c8 16 ♗d4) 16 ♗d4 is slightly better for White.

7 h3 ♙h5

7...♙xf3 8 ♚xf3 gives Black two main options:

a) 8...0-0 9 ♗d2 ♖e8 (9...♗d7 10 ♗c4 a5 11 a4 ♖e8 12 ♚g3 ♚e7 13 ♗h1 ♙d6 was M.Rodshtein-B.Bok, Yerevan 2014, and 14 f4! would be quite dangerous for Black) 10 ♗c4

♠d7 11 ♙d2 ♚e6!? (protecting the c6-pawn, so that Black doesn't need to worry about ...b5 ♘a5!; 11...b5 12 ♘a5 and ♘b7 next gives White an edge) 12 g3 was slightly better for White in M.Adams-M.Rodshtein, Tbilisi 2017, but it would be stronger to first play 12 a4! and then after 12...♙g6 13 g3 White can slowly prepare to create play on the kingside.

b) 8...♠d7 9 ♘d2 and now:

b1) 9...♙d6 10 ♘c4 ♚e7 11 ♙g3 f6 and in I.Salgado Lopez-O.Korneev, Linares 2015, White was much better after 12 ♙h1 (the immediate 12 f4! looks very strong as well).

b2) 9...♙f6 10 ♙xf6 leads to a favourable endgame for White. E.Bacrot-L.Fressinet, Pau 2008, saw 10...♘xf6 11 ♘c4 ♠d7 12 ♙d2 and White soon expanded on the queenside with b4 and a4. After this, White prepared to play d4 and took control of the centre, while Black had to defend passively.

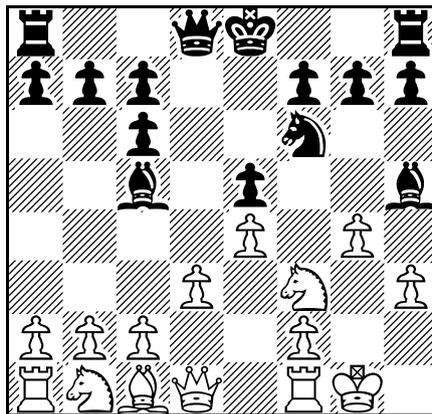
b3) 9...♙e7 10 ♘c4! (10 a4 was played in E.Inarkiev-D.Jakovenko, Khanty-Mansiysk 2013, and should give White a slight edge, but White can delay this move for now) 10...f6 (10...0-0-0?! isn't effective in this position; following 11 ♙d2 f6 12 a3 ♘f8 13 b4 White was far ahead with his attack in I.Salgado Lopez-S.Maze, Haguenu 2013) 11 ♙d2 leads to another split:

b31) 11...0-0 12 ♙g4! (12 a3 followed by b4 was also good for White in M.Kanarek-D.Mastrovasilis, Suwalki 2017) intending to create play on the kingside; for example, 12...♙fe8 13 ♙h2 ♘f8 14 g3 followed by f4.

b32) 11...b6 12 a3 0-0 13 b4 ♙d6 14 ♘e3 ♙h8 15 h4! and White was clearly better in E.Sutovsky-L.Fressinet, Khanty-Mansiysk 2010, as he could slowly increase the pressure on the kingside while Black lacked active play.

b33) 11...♘f8 12 b4 ♙d6 13 a4 ♘e6 14 c3 is much better for White. Black will soon castle kingside and White can play moves like g3 and h4-h5, increasing the pressure on Black's position.

8 g4!



8 ♠bd2 is a simpler approach, avoiding the complications that arise after 8 g4 ♘xg4. However, 8 ♠bd2 allows Black to develop without too many difficulties. Following 8...♠d7

(8...♖e7 actually transposes to the 6...♖e7 variation, which is discussed later in this chapter in Game 17) 9 ♘c4 (9 c3!? is also playable, aiming to later expand in the centre with d4) 9...f6 10 c3 ♙b6 11 ♖e2 leads to a roughly balanced position.

8...♘g4

8...♙g6 9 ♘xe5 ♖e7 10 ♘xg6 hxg6 gives Black the open h-file, but this isn't enough to compensate for the extra pawn White has. After 11 ♔g2! 0-0-0 12 ♘d2, Black can try:

a) 12...♖h7 intending ...♖dh8 is simply met with 13 ♖h1.

b) 12...♘d7 13 ♘f3 ♘e5 (13...f5? runs into 14 ♙g5 ♘f6 15 ♘h4! with a nearly winning position for White) 14 ♙f4 is much better for White.

c) 12...♘h7 13 f4! (13 ♘f3 should be fine for White, but allows unnecessary complications after 13...f5!) is very strong, covering up some of the entry points into White's position (the g5 and e5-squares). 13...f5 is probably Black's most dangerous idea, but White can play 14 ♖f3, when Black is struggling to show any play for the pawn.

9 hxg4 ♙xg4 10 ♙e3

10 ♔g2? looks like a natural way to defend the knight on f3 and was played in K.Alekseenko-L.Babujian, Yerevan 2015, but 10...♖c8! with the threat of ...♙h3 would be very unpleasant for White. 11 ♖h1 is well met by 11...f5.

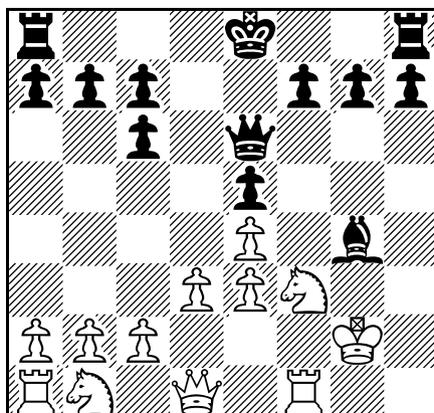
10...♙d6

Black's most popular choice, avoiding the exchange of bishops and supporting the e5-pawn. Others:

a) 10...♖f6! 11 ♔g2! (not 11 ♘bd2? ♙h3) when Black can play:

a1) 11...♙e7?! keeps more pieces on the board, but after 12 ♘bd2 0-0-0 (12...h5 13 ♖g1 g5 14 ♔f1 is perfectly safe for White) 13 ♖g1 White is doing very well.

a2) 11...♙xe3 12 fxe3 ♖e6



Exercise: Find a good plan for White to restrict Black's kingside play and bring the g2-king to safety.

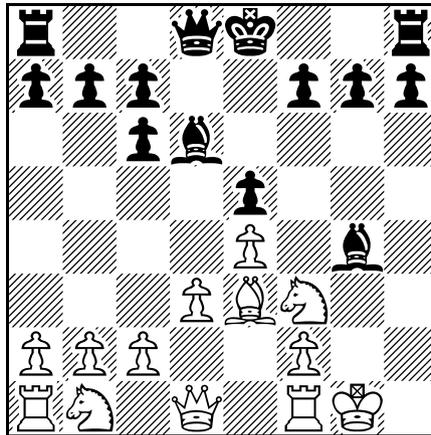
Answer: 13 ♖f2! (13 ♖f2? runs into 13...0-0 followed by ...f5) is an excellent idea and gives White a clear advantage. White's plan is to play ♗c3, ♖h1, and ♕f1-e2. For example, 13...h5 14 ♖h1 0-0-0 15 ♗c3 f6 16 ♕f1 g5 17 ♖e2 and White is much better.

b) 10...♗e7!? 11 ♖g2! (11 ♗bd2 is met by 11...♖c8! followed by ...f5; while 11 ♖h1? appears to be similar to our main game, but the difference is seen in the variation 11...f5 12 ♗g1 h5 13 exf5? and here, because Black has his bishop on e7 instead of d6, he win with 13...e4!, due to the pin on the d-file) and now:

b1) 11...♖c8 threatens ...♗h3 and prepares to activate the queen with ...♖e6. The following line shows how White can obtain a much better position: 12 ♗h1 f5 13 ♖g1! ♖e6 (13...fxe4 14 dxe4 0-0 is met by 15 ♗e1! and White keeps everything under control) 14 exf5 ♖xf5 15 ♗fd2 0-0 16 ♕f1 and Black's best try is 16...♗d1! but after the forcing variation 17 ♗a3 ♗xc2 18 ♗xc2 ♖xd3+ 19 ♖e1 ♖xc2 White can play 20 ♖g4! threatening either ♖e4 or ♖c4+ with a large advantage.

b2) 11...♖d7? runs into 12 ♗xe5 ♗xd1 13 ♗xd7 ♗xc2 14 ♗c3!

b3) 11...f5 forces White to find one accurate move: 12 ♖e1! preparing to play ♗xe5. White has no time to waste, as Black is intending to play ...0-0 and immediately open up the f-file. 12...fxe4 (12...0-0? is now met by 13 ♗xe5; and 12...♗xf3+ 13 ♕xf3 is good for White, Black has no way of exploiting White's temporarily misplaced king) 13 ♗xe5 ♖c8 14 ♗g1 and White has a much better position, for example, 14...♗h3+ 15 ♖h2 ♗d6 16 d4 followed by ♗g3.



Exercise: How should White arrange his pieces in order to best meet ...f5 - ?

Answer: 11 ♖h1!

Preparing to play ♗g1. This makes it more difficult for Black to open up the f-file, because after ...f5 ♗g1, the bishop on g4 will be under attack. Others:

a) 11 ♗bd2?! f5! 12 exf5 0-0 13 ♖e1 ♗xf3 14 ♗xf3 ♗xf5 15 ♖e2 ♖f6 16 ♗h2 e4! gave

Black sufficient compensation in Wei Yi-Xiu Deshun, China 2015.

b) 11 ♖g2 f5! gives Black good play. Compared to the 10...♙e7 variation, here 12 ♜e1?! is ineffective, because after 12...0-0 White is unable to play ♜xe5.

11...f5

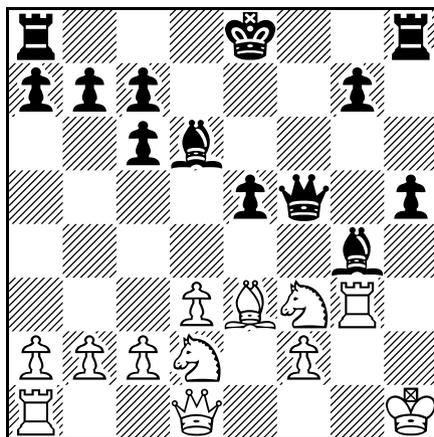
11...♜d7 12 ♖g1 ♙h5! (12...h5 was tried in D.Kokarev-A.Pridorozhni, Khanty-Mansiysk 2015, and White responded very accurately with 13 ♜bd2 0-0-0 14 ♜e1! f6 15 ♜h2 ♙e6 16 ♜c4 and after 16...♙b8, best would have been 17 ♜a5! and Black is under major pressure on the queenside) is one of the most tricky lines for White to deal with in this sharp 8...♜xg4 line. White must begin by covering the h3-square, as Black is threatening ...♜h3. 13 ♖g3! f5! (13...0-0-0?! is not at all dangerous for White after 14 ♜bd2 f5 15 exf5) and only now can White play 14 ♖g5 because Black's queen can no longer move to h3. M.Kuusela-K.Miettinen, correspondence 2014, continued 14...g6 15 exf5 ♜f8 and White was able to obtain an advantage after 16 ♜bd2. But even stronger is 16 ♜xh5! gxh5 17 ♜h4, and one sample line is 17...♜f7 18 ♜f3 ♙e7 19 ♜h3 ♜f6 (or 19...♙xh4 20 ♜xh4 ♜xf5 21 ♜d2) 20 ♜f3 ♜xf5 21 ♜xf5 ♜xf5 22 ♜bd2 and White has a much better endgame, which is quite similar to the one we will see in our main game.

12 ♖g1 h5

12...♜d7 13 exf5 ♜xf5 is met by 14 ♜h4!

13 exf5 ♜f6 14 ♜bd2 ♜xf5 15 ♖g3!

Freeing the g1-square for the queen.



15 ♜h4!? also looks very strong. Play may continue 15...♜f6 16 ♜df3 0-0-0 (16...♜f8 runs into 17 ♜xg4 hxg4 18 ♜g5 followed by ♜xg4) threatens to play ...♜df8 and forces White to play 17 ♙g5. A sample line is 17...♜f7 18 ♙xd8 ♜xd8 19 ♜e2! ♜f8 20 ♜e3 ♙xf3+ (20...♜f6!? is possible to maintain the pressure, but after 21 ♜af1 White is ready to play ♖g2 or ♖g3 next, and Black is struggling to show adequate compensation) 21 ♜xf3 ♜xf3+ 22 ♜xf3 ♜xf3 23 ♜af1 with a close to winning endgame for White.

15...h4

15...0-0-0 16 ♖g1 ♜df8 17 ♘h2 (or 17 ♘g5) is excellent for White.

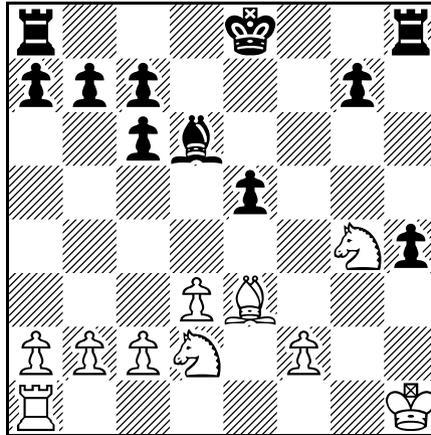
16 ♜xg4!

Giving back some of the material to obtain an endgame where White's two knights will be much more useful than Black's rook and two pawns.

16...♙xg4 17 ♘h2

17 ♘g5 was also possible, for example 17...♙d7 18 ♙e2 0-0-0 19 ♜g1 and White can play ♙g4 next.

17...♙d7 18 ♙g4 ♙xg4 19 ♘xg4



An interesting endgame has arisen where White has two knights for Black's rook and two pawns. Although this should usually be a roughly balanced endgame, this position is close to winning for White. This is mainly because Black is unable to use his rooks effectively, as they lack targets. Meanwhile, White's minor pieces can be placed on the weak squares that Black has, such as e4 and g5.

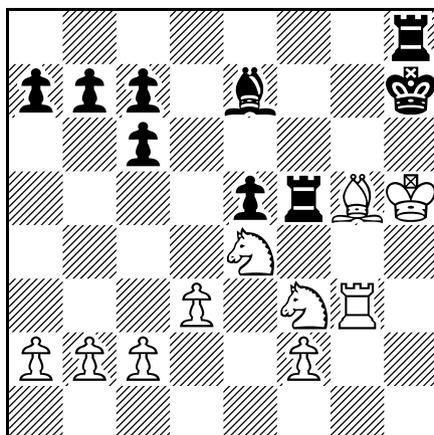
19...♙f7 20 ♜g1 ♜h5 21 ♘h2 ♙e7 22 ♘hf3 ♜f5 23 ♙h2 ♜f8 24 ♙h3

24 ♘g5+ may have been slightly stronger.

24...♙g8 25 ♘h2

25 ♙g4! and ♜h1 next was good as well.

25...♙h7 26 ♘e4 g5 27 ♙xg5 ♜g8 28 ♙xh4 ♜f4+ 29 ♙h5 ♜f5 30 ♙h4 ♜f4+ 31 ♙h5 ♜f5 32 ♜g3 ♜h8 33 ♘f3??



White had played excellently throughout the game to convert his advantage, but here he blunders.

33 ♖h3! is winning for White, for example, 33...♔g7+ 34 ♔g4 ♜xh3 35 ♙xe7 ♜fh5 36 ♜f3 and White's actively placed minor pieces make it impossible for Black to do anything with his rooks.

33...♙xg5 34 ♜xg5 ♜xf3 35 ♜xe5 ♜f7 36 ♔g4 ♔g7 37 f4 ♜h2 38 ♜c5 ♔f8 39 b4 ♔e8 40 f5 ♜g7+ 41 ♔f4 ♜gg2 42 f6 ♔f7 43 ♜e5 ♜f2+ 44 ♜xf2 ½-½

In this game we looked at two of Black's rarer options on move 6, 6...♞d6 and 6...♙g4. 6...♞d6 should be met by 7 c3, aiming to expand in the centre. Black has many different options to choose from, but White retains a more comfortable position against all of them. 6...♙g4 is an interesting variation where Black must decide between playing a solid but worse position after 7 h3 ♙xf3, or if he wants to sacrifice material after 7...♙h5 8 g4. White should have an advantage against both of these lines, but some accuracy is needed in the sharp 7...♙h5 8 g4 variations and the defensive ideas for White should be reviewed carefully.

Game 16
Ding Liren-Ma Qun
Chinese Team Championship 2018

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♙b5 ♘f6 4 d3 ♙c5 5 ♙xc6 dxc6 6 0-0

The actual move order of this game was 6 ♘bd2 ♙e6 7 ♘b3 ♙d6 8 ♘a5 ♜b8 9 0-0 0-0 10 b3 ♞e7 11 a4.

6...♙d6