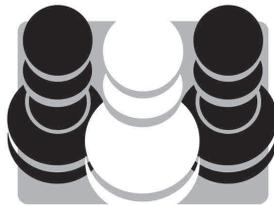


The Italian Renaissance I

Move Orders, Tricks & Alternatives

By

Martyn Kravtsiv



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Preface

Since the very beginning of chess, vast numbers of games have opened with the moves 1.e4 e5. In my chess database, the earliest one to begin this way goes back to 1560 – in that game Ruy Lopez, the man, played the King’s Gambit instead of ‘his’ opening.

I was introduced to the moves of the king’s pawns at the age of six, as soon as I was taught to play chess. Since then I have played hundreds of games starting with 1.e4 e5, and I know from first-hand experience that a question that constantly arises for White is: “What can I do that will perplex my opponent?”

If the attention previously centred on the Ruy Lopez and “Berlin Wall”, the focus has now shifted to the Italian Game and Petroff Defence.

The last World Championship match confirmed the solidity of the Petroff. For that reason, writing a book from White’s viewpoint dealing with 1.e4 e5 was a unique challenge. At first a single book was planned, but in the course of the work it became clear that the quantity of analysis was too great, and so the decision was taken to write two volumes.

The first volume is devoted to the Bishop’s Opening (2.g4) and also to the Petroff Defence – that is, meeting 2.f3 with 2...f6. Thus the reader will note that I will cover two options for White on move 2. This flexibility is one of the benefits of playing in Italian style.

The choice of 2.g4 may come as a surprise, yet the fact is that this move has been relatively little studied, since many players underestimate it. The present volume should do something towards filling the knowledge vacuum that exists in the Bishop’s Opening, as well as demonstrating ideas for White against the Petroff.

The second volume will examine the Italian Game and other variations arising from 1.e4 e5 2.f3 f6 3.g4.

I made the decision to write in Russian, as many of the variations require understanding ideas as well as knowing the precise moves. I felt I could communicate these ideas more clearly in Russian, then the excellent translator John Sugden expressed them in English, for which I thank him.

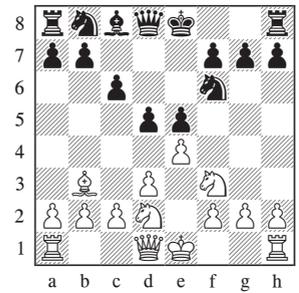
The books are addressed to chessplayers of every level, given that knowing the best moves in the opening will be useful to anyone.

In this book you will find a large number of improvements and innovations. I have honestly included all that I am aware of, without trying to keep any ideas to myself. I must add that I don’t like it when someone deliberately tries to support his own conclusions by making an inaccurate move for the opposing side at the critical moment. Accordingly the present book will be of use to those who play 1...e5 with Black – because you can find improvements and new ideas in it for Black as well as White.

While the book is being prepared for print, I shall carry on looking for new ideas after 1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6. Hence as I write these lines now, I am reminded of the words of Thomas Merton: “Here ends the book, but not the searching.”

Martyn Kravtsiv
June 2020

Chapter 8



5...♖b4† 6.♖d2 ♖xd2† 7.♞bxd2

Variation Index

1.e4 e5 2.♖c4 ♞f6 3.d3 c6 4.♞f3 d5 5.♖b3 ♖b4† 6.♖d2 ♖xd2† 7.♞bxd2

A) 7...♞bd7	159
B) 7...♖g4 8.h3 ♖xf3 9.♞xf3 0-0 10.g4	161
B1) 10...a5	162
B2) 10...♞a6	162
C) 7...a5!	164
C1) 8.a4	165
C11) 8...♞bd7	165
C12) 8...♖g4!? 9.h3 ♖xf3 10.♞xf3 0-0	166
C121) 11.0-0	168
C122) 11.g4!?	168
C2) 8.c3	173
C21) 8...♖g4	173
C22) 8...♞bd7	174

1.e4 e5 2.♙c4 ♗f6 3.d3 c6 4.♗f3 d5 5.♙b3 ♙b4† 6.♙d2 ♙xd2† 7.♗bxd2

This recapture is worth considering as an alternative to the queen recapture we saw in the previous chapter.

We will now examine A) 7...♗bd7, B) 7...♙g4 and C) 7...a5!

A) 7...♗bd7

The omission of ...a7-a5 and a2-a4 before playing this move (later, line C11 will show us ...♗bd7 with the moves ...a5 and a4 added) is not fatal but nonetheless gives White slightly more options.

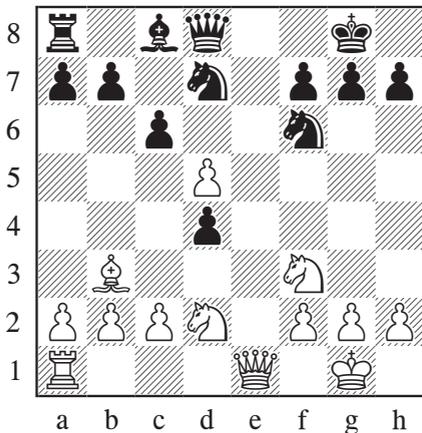
8.0-0 0-0

It's too late for 8...a5?! 9.exd5 cxd5 10.c4!± with a definite plus for White.

9.♙e1

Now the following sequence is standard, and leads to a fascinating position:

9...♙e8 10.d4 exd4 11.exd5 ♙xe1† 12.♙xe1



12...c5!?

This is a rather risky move, although if Black consistently makes the best moves, then he can resist. The alternatives are less testing:

12...cxd5 13.♗xd4± White has a small but stable advantage. A similar position can arise with the inclusion of the moves ...a5 and a4 (that inclusion is probably in Black's favour). Now on 13...a5 White can reply 14.c3.

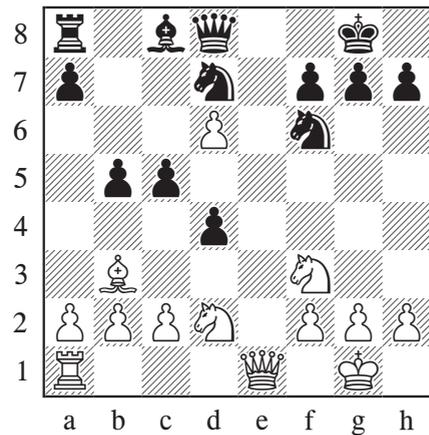
12...♗xd5 13.♙xd5 cxd5 14.♗xd4± In this position, exchanging the b3-bishop for the f6-knight is most likely in White's favour; the d5-pawn would have limited White's bishop.

13.d6!

Instead 13.c4 is a more relaxed continuation with chances of a slight advantage after 13...dxc3?! 14.bxc3 b5 15.c4, but instead after the stronger 13...♗f8 the position is closer to equality.

13...b5

After any other move, Black is clearly worse.



14.♗g5!±N

This novelty leads to entertaining play and also appears to be the best move.

The sacrifice with 14.♙xf7? does not work due to 14...♗xf7 15.♗g5† ♗g6! while on 14.a4 c4 15.♙a2 Black will play 15...a6! 16.♗d4 ♗b6 with an unclear position, as in D. Stojanovic – S. Solomon, Dresden (ol) 2008.

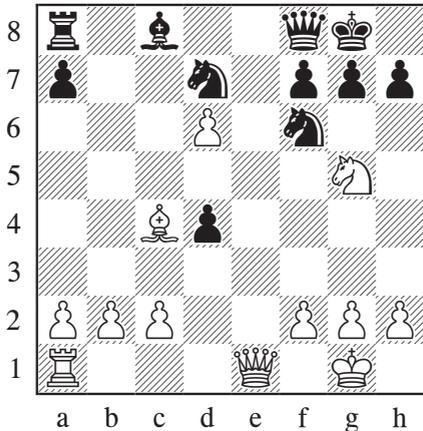
14...c4 15.♘xc4 bxc4 16.♙xc4

White has a strong initiative and will soon have at least three pawns for the piece. Black has to find a number of strong moves, and even after that he is not sure to achieve complete equality.

16...♖f8!

The only move.

Black must avoid 16...♙b7? 17.♙xf7† ♖h8 18.♙e6 when White wins. For example, if 18...♖c8 then 19.♘f7† ♖g8 20.♘e5† ♖h8 21.♖d2, with a decisive advantage.



17.♖e7

This sets more problems than taking on f7 at once, though of course 17.♙xf7† might also transpose.

17...h6

Again, Black must play an only move.

18.♙xf7†

Instead 18.♘f7 can be met by 18...♖xe7 19.dxe7 ♘b6 20.♙b3 and then either 20...♖h7 or even 20...♙d7!? leave Black with no problems; it’s about level.

18...♖h8 19.f4!

The most promising follow-up.

After 19.h4 White does not control the e5-square, so Black can play 19...♙b7 without fearing 20.♘e6, as he could swap queens and then put the knight on e5, equalizing.

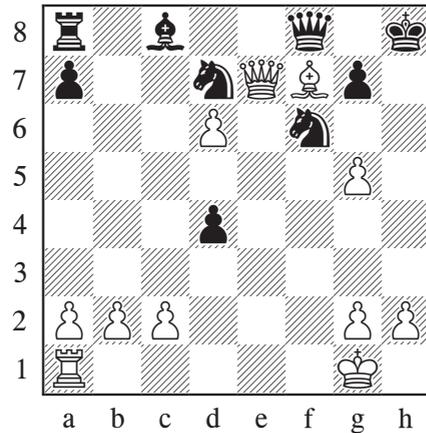
Also not so scary for Black is 19.♘f3, when 19...♙b7 or 19...d3!? may follow.

Unclear is: 19.♘e6 ♖xe7 20.dxe7 ♘e5 21.♘c7∞ Besides 21...♘xf7!? Black can play 21...♙b8 22.e8=♖† ♘xe8 23.♙xe8 ♙f5! with an approximately equal position.

19...hxg5

Less accurate is: 19...♙b7?! 20.♘e6± Now bad is 20...♖xe7?! 21.dxe7 since Black cannot play ...♘e5. And even after the better defence 20...♖c8 21.♙g6 ♖g8 22.♖d1 White keeps the initiative.

20.fxg5



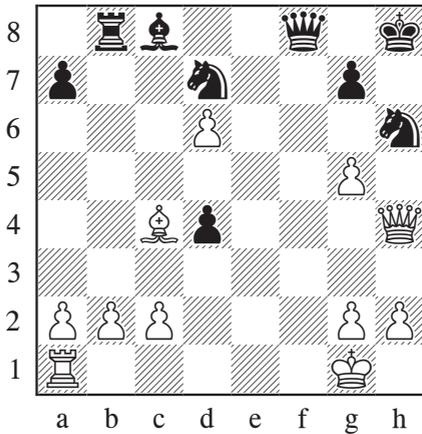
20...♘g8!

The only way! Black is in trouble after 20...♘g4?! 21.♖d1 ♘ge5 22.♙d5 while of course 20...♙b7?! simply fails to 21.gxf6.

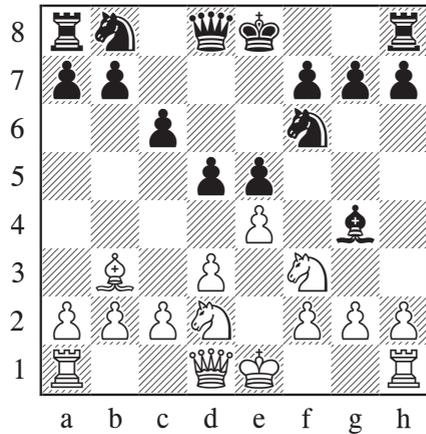
21.♖e4 ♖b8

After 21...♖xf7 22.♖xa8 ♘b6 23.♖f3± the rook and four pawns are more dangerous than three scattered minor pieces.

22.♙h4† ♗h6 23.♙c4



B) 7...♙g4



23...♙b7!

Black has no time to take the d6-pawn.

After 23...♙xd6?! 24.♙e1 ♗e5 25.gxh6 White is winning, but the line is quite complicated: 25...♗xc4 26.♙e8† ♗h7 27.hxg7† ♗xg7 28.♙h8† ♗f7 29.♙h5† ♗g7 30.h4!+ The computer says “+2.5” although to us humans this is not immediately obvious. On 30...♗e3 there can follow 31.♙h8† with the idea after 31...♗f7 to reply 32.h5!, while instead if 30...♙xb2 then 31.♙g5† ♗f7 32.♙xc8 secures a decisive advantage.

Almost as bad is: 23...♙d8?! 24.♙e1 ♗f8 25.♙e7! ♙xd6 26.gxh6± Then 26...gxh6? 27.♙f7 is hopeless. So forced is 26...♙xh6 and then 27.♙xh6† gxh6 28.♙e8 ♗g7 29.♙a6± is a forcing line to win material.

24.gxh6 gxh6 25.♙xd4†

White has four pawns for the piece, but with accurate play Black might make a draw. Nevertheless, White’s side is much more pleasant to play; the game has two plausible results.

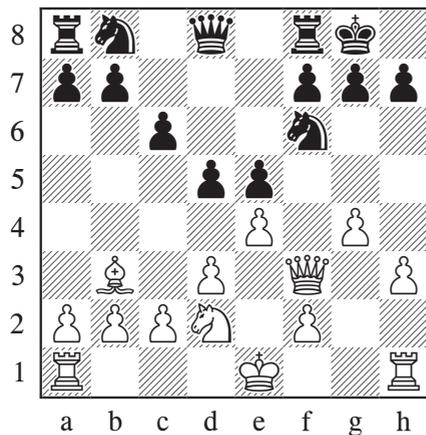
In the first draft of my analysis I gave this move a dubious sign, but it is not quite as bad as I thought. Still, White can expect a slight edge.

8.h3 ♙xf3 9.♙xf3 0–0

After 9...a5 10.a3! it’s hard for Black to do without ...0–0 anyway. For example: 10...dxe4 11.♗xe4 (11.dxe4!?) 11...0–0 12.♗xf6† ♙xf6 13.♙xf6 gxh6 14.0–0± Thanks to his better pawn structure and good bishop, White has a stable advantage; he is likely to follow up with a d4- or f4-break.

10.g4

The most active way of playing the position.



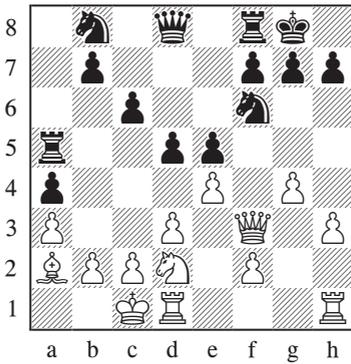
We will consider **B1) 10...a5** and **B2) 10...♖a6**.

B1) 10...a5 11.a3!±

Black has played ...a7-a5 too late, and White now has no need for a2-a4. What makes all the difference is that after ...♖a6 Black doesn't have the important b4-square available. As we shall see in the variations following 7...a5 8.a4, it is this very possibility of ...♖b4 that enables Black to obtain compensation for a material deficit.

11...♖a6

It doesn't help Black to play 11...a4 12.♕a2 ♜a5, as he cannot get at the b2-pawn: 13.0-0-0

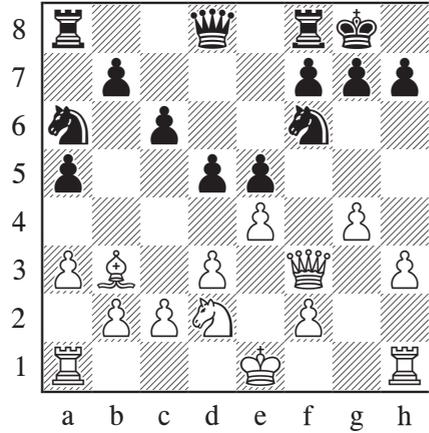


And now let's see two options:

a) 13...♞b5 14.♖c4!± (the simple 14.g5 ♖e8 15.h4 ♜b6 16.♞e3± also preserves a large plus after the exchange of queens) 14...♖bd7 15.g5 ♖e8 16.h4± Black's pieces are too clumsily placed. He gains nothing from 16...♞c7? 17.♖e3 ♜b6 18.exd5+–, as the b2-pawn cannot be taken owing to ♖c4.

b) 13...♖e8 14.h4 ♖c7 15.♞g3 ♖d7 16.♖f3± as in Bajt – Almeida, corr. 2016. Black has no time to create counterplay. In the game there followed 16...♞e8 17.g5 ♞e7 18.d4! dxe4

19.♖d2 ♖e6 20.♖xe4 ♖xd4 21.♔b1, with a decisive advantage thanks to the attack on the kingside.



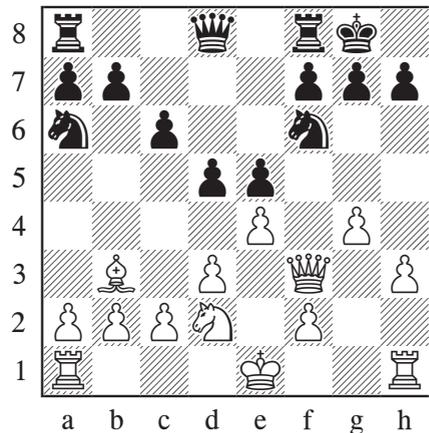
12.g5 dxe4

Or 12...♖d7 13.exd5± with an extra pawn and a big advantage.

13.dxe4 ♖d7 14.h4±

On ...♖ac5 White withdraws with ♕a2. He then castles long and sets about mating the black king.

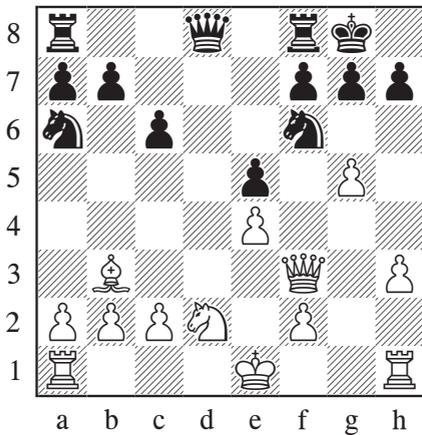
B2) 10...♖a6



11.g5 dxe4 12.dxe4

In the game Dastan – A. Saric, Izmir 2016, White played 12.♞f5 which Black could

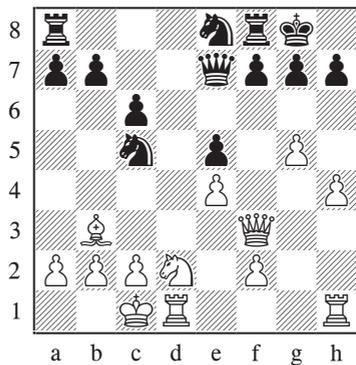
have answered with: 12...♙h5!†N 13.♙xe4 g6 14.♙f3 (14.♙xe5 ♙e8 15.♙c3 ♙xg5∞) 14...♙c5 15.♙xc5 ♙a5†= with a comfortable game for Black.



12...♙d7

The other knight retreat is also worth studying:

12...♙e8 13.h4 ♙c5 14.0–0 ♙e7



Here White can get an advantage in several ways; I will give two small options:

15.♙c4

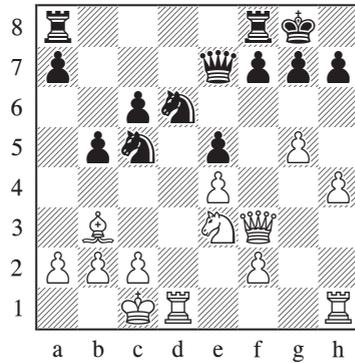
Or: 15.a3!† ♙xb3† 16.♙xb3 ♙d6 17.♙he1± White placed the rook on e1 so that he could play ♙f3 and then push h4-h5.

15...b5 16.♙e3!

Also possible is 16.♙a5 ♙c7 when White also has an edge after, for example, 17.♙e3 ♙xb3† 18.♙xb3 or 17.♙c3!† ♙xe4 18.♙e1,

but in these positions Black has some counterplay.

16...♙d6

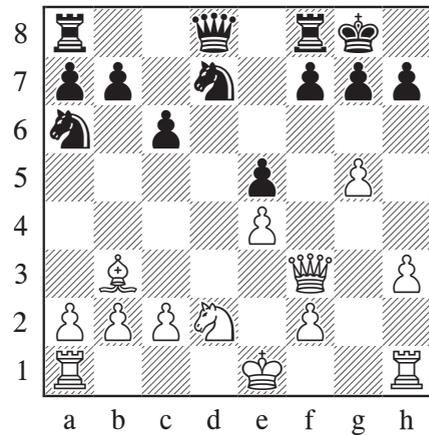


17.♙hg1

Less convincing is 17.♙f5 ♙xf5 18.exf5 e4 (unlike 17.♙hg1 ♙ad8 18.♙f5 here Black has had no reason to put a rook on d8). For example on 19.♙g3 Black can play 19...♙ae8 and ...♙e5.

17...♙ad8 18.♙f5 ♙xf5 19.exf5±

After 19...♙xb3† 20.axb3 ♙b4 21.♙g3 or 19...♙xd1† 20.♙xd1 ♙xb3† 21.axb3 ♙b4 22.♙g3 White has a stable advantage thanks to the initiative on the kingside.



13.h4 ♙ac5 14.0–0

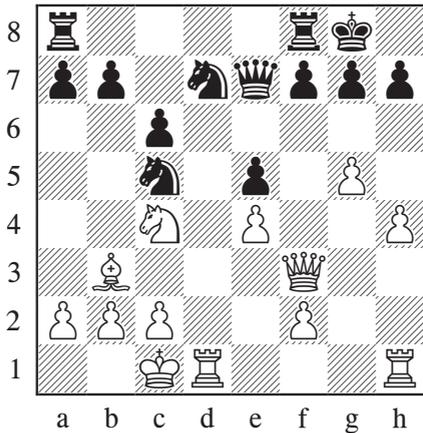
White's play is straightforward and strong.

14...♙e7

Or: 14...a5 15.a3 ♖xb3† 16.♗xb3 ♔e7 17.♞c3 a4 18.♗a5± With a knight on c4 and a sure advantage, for example, 18...♗c5 19.f3 f6 20.gxf6 ♜xf6 21.♗c4.

Maybe it’s better to try 18...♗b6!? although after 19.♗b1 f6 20.f3 Black has a nasty position.

15.♗c4±

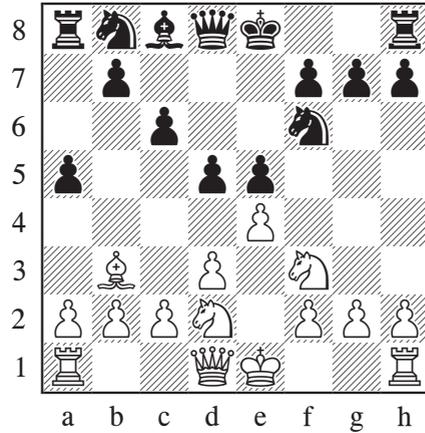


Now unsuccessful for Black is 15...a5 16.♗d6 g6 17.a3, with a big plus.

On 15...♞ad8 White can also play 16.♗d6, with a pleasant position after 16...g6 17.♞d2 or 16...♗b3† 17.axb3 ♗c5 18.♗f5.

Trickier is 15...♞fd8!? to answer 16.♗d6 with 16...♗b3† 17.axb3 ♗f8 18.♗f5 ♞b4! when Black will soon play ...♗e6 and be close to equality. Therefore on 15...♞fd8 White does better to play 16.♗e3! ♗b3† 17.axb3 ♗f8, and White retains an edge after 18.♗f5 or 18.♗b1.

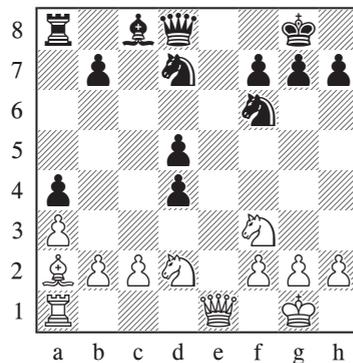
C) 7...a5!



Aiming to induce a2-a4 before Black develops the remaining minor pieces. Of course White can also play 8.a3 or 8.c3, but even so this line is better than the immediate 7...♗bd7 or 7...♗g4.

We will mainly consider C1) 8.a4 and C2) 8.c3.

With 8.a3, White is counting on 8...♗g4. However, after 8...♗bd7 White’s move turns out to have a defect compared with 8.a4: at some point his b2-pawn may be left hanging. I will demonstrate this using the example of Aronian – Caruana, Paris 2018, which went: 8.a3 ♗bd7 (the position after 8...♗g4 9.h3 ♗xf3 10.♞xf3 0–0 11.g4± was examined in variation B above) 9.0–0 a4 10.♗a2 0–0 11.♞e1 ♞e8 12.d4 exd4 13.exd5 ♞xe1† 14.♞xe1 cxd5∞

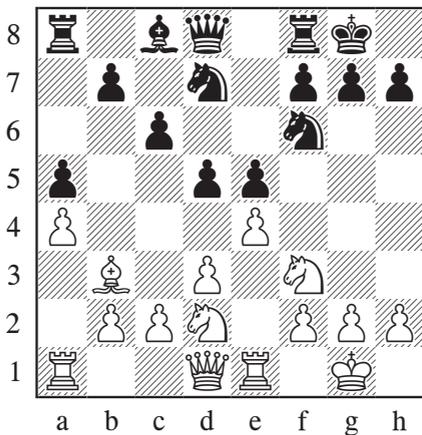


At this point, in contrast to the variations with 8.a4, it isn't so good for White to capture at once on d4, on account of ...♙b6. Here is a sample variation: 15.♗xd4 (after 15.♗f1 ♙b6 16.♙b4 ♙xb4 17.axb4 d3= Black has no problems) 15...♙b6 16.♗f5 ♙xb2 17.♗e7† ♕f8!? 18.♗xd5 With an equal position after 18...♗xd5 19.♙xd5 ♙d4 or 18...♙xa3 19.♙b3 ♙c5.

C1) 8.a4

Now Black has C11) 8...♗bd7 and C12) 8...♙g4!?

C11) 8...♗bd7 9.0-0 0-0 10.♙e1



10...♙e8

Or 10...♙c7 11.d4 exd4 12.exd5, and now:

a) 12...cxd5 13.♗xd4 ♗c5 14.♗f1 gives one of those typical positions with an isolated pawn on d5 and a small plus for White.

b) 12...c5 is weaker: 13.c3! (the game Cornette – Le Roux, Nîmes 2018, went 13.c4 dxc3, but in this case the capture of the c-pawn was by no means obligatory) 13...dxc3 14.bxc3 ♗b6 15.c4± The powerful d5-pawn gives White a considerable advantage.

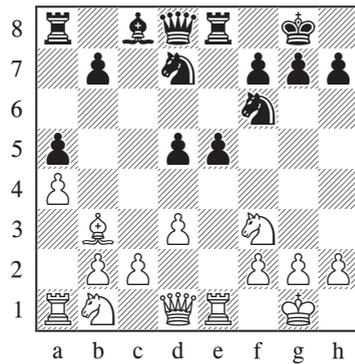
11.d4

An interesting alternative is:

11.exd5!? cxd5

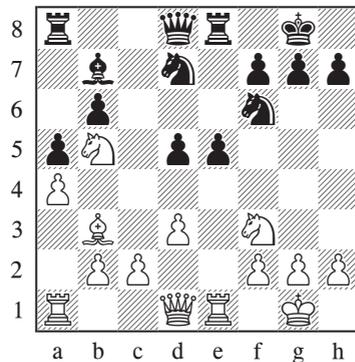
Better than 11...♗xd5 12.d4 exd4 13.♙xe8† ♙xe8 14.♙xd5 cxd5 15.♗f1±; after ♗xd4 the second knight will go to e3, giving White a clear plus.

12.♗b1



The sort of manoeuvre that could be incorporated in a textbook on strategy.

12...b6 13.♗c3 ♙b7 14.♗b5



White has beautifully repositioned his knight on b5 and threatens to go to d6; I have come to the conclusion that Black does better *not* to prevent the following knight manoeuvre.

14...♙c6!?

14...♙b8 15.d4 e4 16.♗d2 gives White a slight edge; he meets 16...♗f8 with 17.f3, while a good answer to 16...♙c6 is 17.c4!

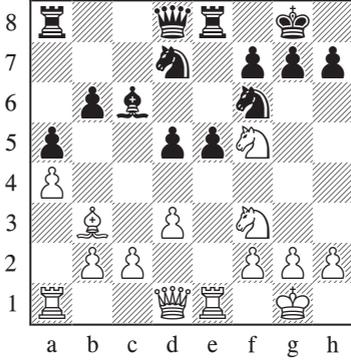
15. ♖d6

After 15.c3 the position is somewhat simplified: 15...♙xb5 16.axb5 ♖c7=

15...♞e7

Not: 15...♞e6? 16.♘xf7±

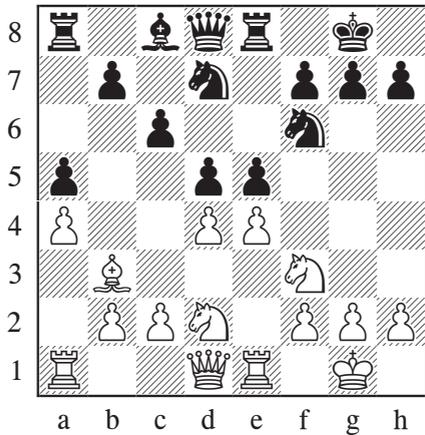
16.♘f5 ♞e8



The knight has made a long journey from d2 via b1 and b5 to f5; the question is whether this gives White any advantage.

17. ♖d2 h6∞

Black covers the g5-square; and although visually White’s pieces are rather better placed, the position remains unclear.



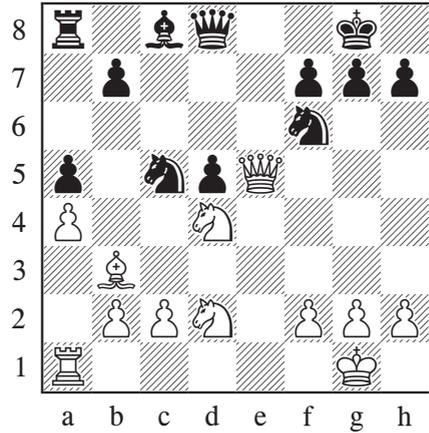
11...exd4 12.exd5 ♞xe1† 13.♖xe1

If 13.♘xe1, then apart from 13...cxd5 Black can very well play 13...c5!?.

13...cxd5

In Variation A (page 159) we saw the same position except with the pawns still on a2 and a7. In that case, the move ...c6-c5 was critical, as d5-d6 could be met by ...b7-b5. In the present position, after 13...c5?! 14.d6! the ...b5-push is impossible, so Black would simply be much worse.

14.♘xd4 ♘c5 15.♞e5



The isolated pawn on d5 gives White a small but stable advantage.

Abridged Variation Index

The Variation Index in the book is 8 pages long. Below is an abridged version giving just the main variations, not the sub-variations.

Part I: Bishop's Opening

Chapter 1

1.e4 e5 2.♘c4

- A) 2...f5?! 14
- B) 2...c6 15
- C) 2...d6 17
- D) 2...♗c6 3.d3 17
 - D1) 3...♗a5?! 18
 - D2) 3...♘c5 18
- E) 2...♗f6 3.d3 d5?! 19

Chapter 2

1.e4 e5 2.♘c4 ♘c5 3.d3 ♗f6 4.♗c3

- A) 4...h6 23
- B) 4...d6 24
- C) 4...c6 25

Chapter 3

1.e4 e5 2.♘c4 ♗f6 3.d3 ♗c6 4.♗c3

- A) 4...♘b4 38
- B) 4...♘c5 45
- C) 4...♗a5 53

Chapter 4

1.e4 e5 2.♘c4 ♗f6 3.d3 c6 4.♗f3

- A) 4...♘e7 61
- B) 4...d5 5.♘b3 ♖c7!? 64

Chapter 5

1.e4 e5 2.♘c4 ♗f6 3.d3 c6 4.♗f3 d5 5.♘b3 ♘d6

- A) 6.exd5!? 79
- B) 6.♗c3 101

Chapter 6

1.e4 e5 2.♘c4 ♗f6 3.d3 c6 4.♗f3 d5 5.♘b3 a5 6.a4 ♘b4† 7.c3 ♘d6 8.exd5

- A) 8...♗xd5 112
- B) 8...cxd5 114

Chapter 7

1.e4 e5 2.♘c4 ♗f6 3.d3 c6 4.♗f3 d5 5.♘b3 ♘b4†

- A) 6.c3 143
- B) 6.♘d2 ♘xd2† 7.♖xd2!? 143

Chapter 8

1.e4 e5 2.♘c4 ♗f6 3.d3 c6 4.♗f3 d5 5.♘b3 ♘b4† 6.♘d2 ♘xd2† 7.♗bxd2

- A) 7...♗bd7 159
- B) 7...♘g4 161
- C) 7...a5! 164

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Chapter 9

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.♗xe5

- A) 3...♞e7?! 184
- B) 3...♗xe4 186

Chapter 10

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.♗xe5 d6 4.♘f3 ♗xe4
5.♗c3 ♗f6 6.d4

- A) 6...g6!? 189
- B) 6...d5 190

Chapter 11

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.♗xe5 d6 4.♘f3 ♗xe4
5.♗c3 ♗f6 6.d4 ♙e7 7.♙d3!? 0-0 8.0-0

- A) 8...d5 193
- B) 8...♞e8 194
- C) 8...♙g4 195
- D) 8...♗c6!? 196

Chapter 12

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.♗xe5 d6 4.♘f3 ♗xe4
5.♗c3 ♗xc3 6.dxc3 ♙e7 7.♙e3 ♗c6 8.♞d2

- A) 8...♙e6 203
- B) 8...♗e5 9.0-0-0 ♗xf3 213

Chapter 13

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.♗xe5 d6 4.♘f3 ♗xe4
5.♗c3 ♗xc3 6.dxc3 ♙e7 7.♙e3 0-0 8.♞d2

- A) 8...♞e8 217
- B) 8...♗c6 217
- C) 8...b6 219

Chapter 14

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.♗xe5 d6 4.♘f3 ♗xe4
5.♗c3 ♗xc3 6.dxc3 ♙e7 7.♙e3 0-0 8.♞d2
♗d7 9.0-0-0 ♗e5 10.♗xe5!? dxe5 11.♙d3

- A) 11...c6 236
- B) 11...♙e6 240

Chapter 15

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.♗xe5 d6 4.♘f3 ♗xe4
5.♗c3 ♗xc3 6.dxc3 ♙e7 7.♙e3 0-0 8.♞d2
♗d7 9.0-0-0 ♗e5 10.♗b1

- A) 10...♞e8 246
- B) 10...♗xf3 247
- C) 10...♙e6!? 251
- D) 10...c6 256

Chapter 16

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.♗xe5 d6 4.♘f3 ♗xe4
5.♗c3 ♗xc3 6.dxc3 ♙e7 7.♙e3 0-0 8.♞d2
♗d7 9.0-0-0 ♗f6 10.♙d3 c5

- A) 11.♗b1 269
- B) 11.♞he1 272

Chapter 17

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.♗xe5 d6 4.♘f3 ♗xe4
5.♗c3 ♗xc3 6.dxc3 ♙e7 7.♙e3 0-0 8.♞d2
♗d7 9.0-0-0 c6

- A) 10.♙d3 285
- B) 10.♗b1 289