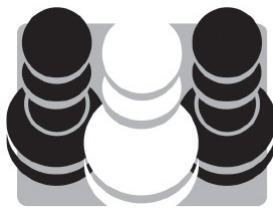


Grandmaster Repertoire 18

The Sicilian Sveshnikov

By

Vassilios Kotronias



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Introduction

Sometimes it is people that inspire us: good people, bad people, strange people and mediocre people. My specialty has been meeting strange people. People with weaknesses; people with great intrinsic merits; people who love life; people who suddenly leave without warning; people who can be loved at one moment and hated the next.

One day I was thinking about the people I've met – specifically, the really strange ones. The more I thought about them, the more I realized that they were like the Sveshnikov Sicilian: free, uncompromising, boldly displaying their strengths, and unashamed of their weaknesses. People who turned their weaknesses into strengths, by making me love them and get lost in them. I suddenly decided that I wanted to write about these people. I wanted to analyse them deeply, to understand them, to master their mentality. I wanted to know why they came, why they left, why they captured so strikingly my whole existence.

I am not a writer of novels, but I think I can understand certain things about this world when I try to. For me chess has life inside it, and chess openings represent living creatures. Some are dull, other have strong colours; some live on the earth, others deep in the sea, and others high in the sky.

The Sveshnikov definitely belongs to a chameleon category. It can be dull and colourful, logical and irrational, systematic and unpredictable at the same time. Its transformations border on the miraculous, and all this happens from a starting point of a fixed structure, of apparent clarity. But the more you dig in, the more you realize that a small spark is all that is needed to put you on a pathway without return.

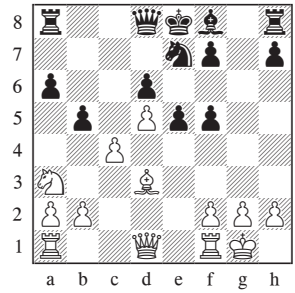
Thus, instead of writing a novel, I ended up writing an opening book about a child of Siberia. The Sveshnikov Sicilian was heavily analysed in the cities of Chelyabinsk and Novosibirsk, by chess pioneers who turned it into a formidable and respected weapon. Nowadays many players are so afraid of meeting it that they resort to sidelines against the Sicilian; even Anand abandoned the Open Sicilian after a single Sveshnikov encounter in his world title match against Gelfand.

I sincerely hope that Evgeny Sveshnikov will forgive me for shedding too much light on the fascinating and mysterious nature of his invention, but I believe his set-up is one that chess players deserve to get acquainted with. It is sound, adventurous, dynamic and brilliant.

Vassilios Kotronias
Athens, July 2014

Chapter 20

12.0-0



14.c4

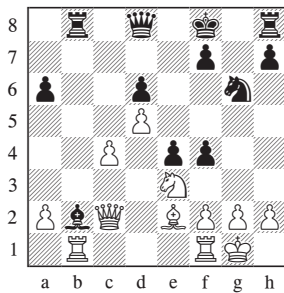
Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 e5 6.♘db5 d6 7.♙g5 a6
 8.♘a3 b5 9.♙xf6 gxf6 10.♘d5 f5 11.♙d3 ♙e6 12.0-0 ♙xd5 13.exd5 ♘e7 14.c4

14...♙g7!?

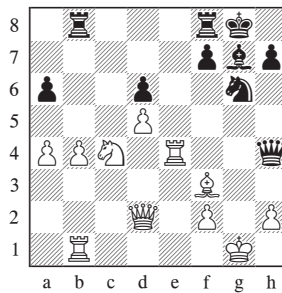
A) 15.♙d2	235
B) 15.♞b1 e4! 16.♙e2 bxc4 17.♘xc4 0-0	238
B1) 18.f4?!	239
B2) 18.♙d2	240
B3) 18.f3!?	240

A) after 22.♙c2!



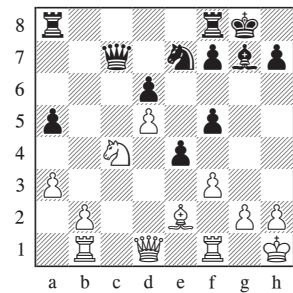
22...♙f6!

B2) note to 20.f4



24...♙h6!!

B3) after 20.♙h1!?



20...♙c5!

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♗f6
 5.♗c3 e5 6.♗db5 d6 7.♙g5 a6 8.♗a3 b5
 9.♙xf6 gxf6 10.♗d5 f5 11.♙d3 ♙e6 12.0-0
 ♙xd5 13.exd5 ♗e7 14.c4

White intends to break up Black's queenside pawns to gain an advantage, but Black obtains considerable counterplay on the other flank.

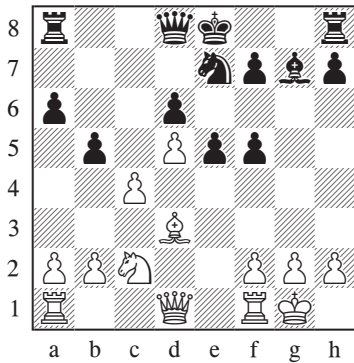
14...♙g7!?

This keeps more options open for Black compared to an immediate ...e4.

White should choose between **A) 15.♖d2** and **B) 15.♗b1**.

15.♖b3!? e4 16.♙e2 b4! 17.♖xb4 ♗b8 transposes to variation A.

15.♗c2?! is another illogical move.



15...e4 16.♙e2 bxc4 17.♙xc4 0-0 Black is simply better.

15.cxb5?!

An unsuccessful exchange sacrifice.

15...e4 16.♙e2 ♙xb2

Relatively best is:

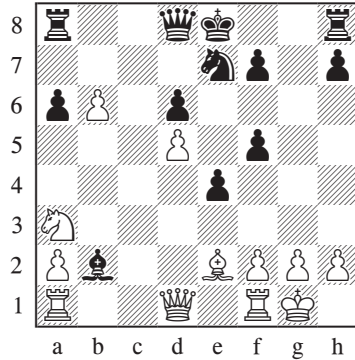
17.b6!?

Trying to preserve a strong passed b-pawn.

Instead, 17.bxa6 0-0 is bad for White.

17.♗c4 ♙xa1 18.♖xa1 0-0 19.b6 ♗xd5
 20.♗d1 ♗f4! 21.♙f1 d5! (21...♖g5?! 22.g3 d5
 23.♗e5↑ and Black was already into trouble in
 Lukinov – Chernenko, St Petersburg 2008)
 22.♗e3 ♖xb6 23.♗xf5 d4! 24.♖c1 e3 25.fxe3

♖f6 26.♗xd4 ♗d5 27.♙d3 ♗ae8 is at least slightly better for Black, as he has beaten off the attack and mobilized all his forces.



17...0-0!?

17...♙xa1 18.♖xa1 0-0 19.♖d4 is not clear.

18.♖b3!?

18.♗c4 ♙xa1 19.♖xa1 ♗xd5 transposes to 17.♗c4 above.

18...♙xa1 19.♗xa1 f4! 20.♗b1

20.b7 ♗b8 21.♙xa6 ♖a5↑

20...♗f5 21.b7 ♗b8 22.♙xa6

22.♖h3 ♖g5

22...♖a5

22...♖g5!? may be even stronger.

23.♙f1 ♗fe8 24.♖h3 ♗g7 25.♗c4 ♖xa2 26.♗b2 ♖a1↑

White seems to be in trouble, despite his proud pawn on b7, as his pieces lack coordination.

A) 15.♖d2

Often considered as the main try, but Black's status in this line seems to be high at the moment.

15...e4 16.♙e2

The dynamic reply.

16...b4!

Black diverts the white queen away from f4, and will obtain sufficient pressure for the temporary loss of a pawn by pressurizing b2.

17.♖xb4

Black now has two options:

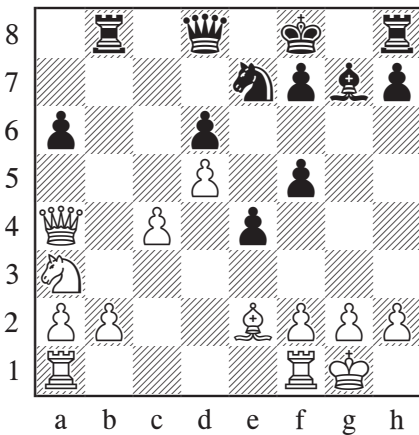
17...♖b8

This direct move, piling up on the vulnerable b2-spot immediately, has been the choice of the super-GMs.

However, the alternative 17...0–0!?, played against me by Sulava, may not be bad either. Black keeps open the option of ...♖b8 and is ready to attack on the kingside. All the traditional manoeuvres are available to him (such as ...♗g6, ...♙e5, and ...♔h8) and may even be combined with the brutal ...f5-f4-f3 advance. I analysed this in detail and found that Black can maintain the balance, but space is limited and one good option is enough.

18.♞a4† ♔f8!

Black forfeits the right to castle but this is not so important here. The king can be redeployed to g7 later, allowing the black rooks to get connected. White's pieces are not well placed to take advantage of Black's uncastled situation, and he has to solve the problem of the pressure on b2.



19.♞ab1

This is the most normal reaction, unpinning and threatening b2-b4. Black is now forced to take on b2.

19.♗c2 is a transposition to our main continuation after 19...♙xb2! (19...♞xb2 20.♞ab1±) 20.♞ab1.

19.b4? ♙xa1 20.♞xa1 ♗g6† is clearly a bad sacrifice. In addition to his material advantage Black will soon have a raging attack.

19.c5 is understandable for White – opening files and freeing the c4-square. However, Black is doing fine. 19...♗xd5 20.♙c4 dxc5 (20...♗f4!?) 21.♞ad1 ♙d4. Now White should bail out to an equal major piece position by: 22.♙xd5 (22.♗c2?! ♗b6 23.♞xa6 ♔g7 24.b4 ♞f6 25.bxc5 ♙xc5 26.♙b3 f4 27.♞a5 ♞bc8† was already suspect for White in Kosteniuk – Mikhalevski, Biel 2002.) 22...♞xd5 23.♗c2 ♔g7 24.♗xd4 cxd4 25.♞xd4 ♞e5=

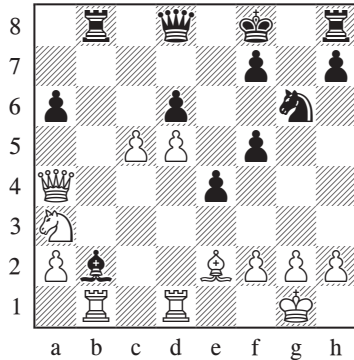
19...♙xb2

The clearest and most principled solution, opening the g-file and preparing (according to circumstance) to connect the rooks by placing the king on g7.

20.♗c2

This maintains the knight, which sets its sights on both b4 and e3 (if ...♗g6 is played).

20.♞fd1 ♗g6 21.c5?! should be answered by:



21...dxc5! 22.♗c4 ♙d4 23.♞xb8 (23.♞c6 ♞c8!†) 23...♞xb8 24.♞d7 f4! 25.d6 ♔g7 26.♞f5 ♞e8†

20.♞c2 ♙e5! 21.♞d2!? (21.♞xb8 ♞xb8 22.♞b1 ♞c8†) 21...h6!∞ doesn't look dangerous for Black either. It should be noted though that 21...♞g8?! 22.♞xb8 ♞xb8 23.♞b1 ♞c7 24.♞h6† ♞g7 25.♞e3!± looks a bit better for White in view of the pending invasion on b6.

20...♗g6!

Played against me by Shirov.

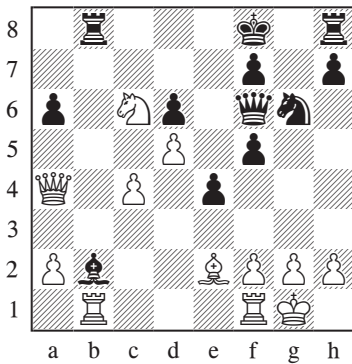
20...♖g7 (keeping f5 protected in anticipation of ♗e3) and 20...♞g8!? are both viable tries too, but again one good option is enough.

21.♗e3

This logical move was supposed to be my improvement over the game Leko – Kramnik below.

21.♗b4 ♖f6 22.♗c6

22.♗xa6!? ♜c8 23.♖b3 ♙d4 (23...♙e5!? 24.♗b8 ♖g7) 24.♗b8 ♗e5 25.♞fd1 ♙c5 26.♗a6 ♞g8 looks like sufficient pressure in return for a pawn.



22...♞e8! 23.f4

Otherwise Black can choose between ...f4 or ...♗f4.

23...♙d4† 24.♗h1 ♖g7 25.♙h5 ♙c5

The position is approximately balanced and was agreed drawn here in Leko – Kramnik, Linares 2003. The truth is that the g6-knight is quite passive, but the passed e-pawn and strong c5-bishop offer Black just about enough compensation in return.

21...f4!

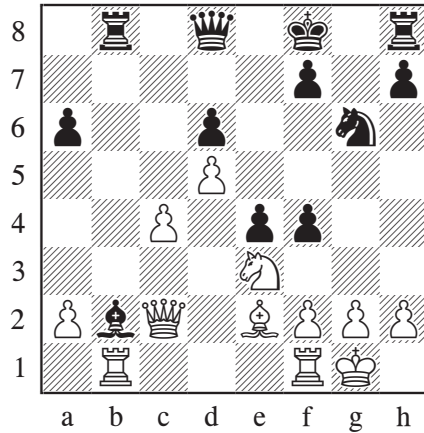
It is thanks to this move that Black manages to equalize.

21...♞g5? is met simply by: 22.♖c2 f4 23.♞xb2 ♞xb2 24.♖xb2 fxe3 25.fxe3 ♖xe3† 26.♗h1 ♖c5 27.♖f6+–

21...♞g8? is also bad in view of 22.♖c2! ♗f4 (22...♗h4 23.g3) 23.g3!± and Black's position is loose.

22.♖c2!

I had considered this move to give White an edge, but Shirov proves otherwise.

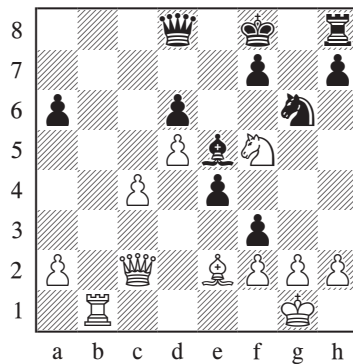


22...♖f6!

With this pawn sacrifice Black solves all his problems. Other moves are inadequate:

22...fxe3? is clearly bad in view of: 23.♞xb2 exf2† 24.♞xf2 ♞xb2 25.♖xb2± White's heavy artillery dominates the board.

22...♙e5? is also questionable. My main line continues 23.♞xb8! ♖xb8 24.♞b1! ♙d8 25.♗f5 f3



26.♙f1! fxg2 27.♙xg2 ♞g8 28.c5! leading to a big advantage for White.

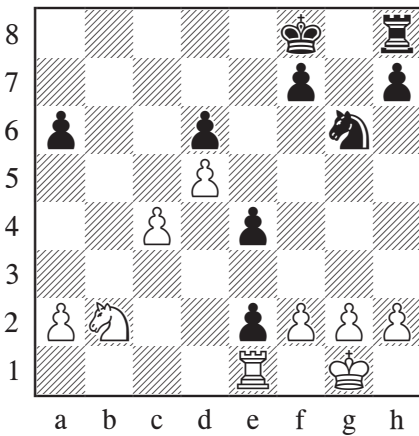
23. ♖d1

The bishop on b2 is doomed, but the pawn push to f3 creates enough counterplay to hold the balance.

23...f3! 24. ♖xb2

24. ♕xf3!? exf3 25. ♖xb2 (25.g3?! ♔g7 26. ♖xb2 ♖xb2 27. ♗xb2 [27. ♘xb2 ♖e8!]) 27... ♗xb2 28. ♘xb2 ♘e5) 25... ♖xb2 26. ♗xb2 ♔g7 27. ♗xf6† ♔xf6 28. ♘e3 ♖b8! 29.gxf3 ♘f4) would have allowed Black good compensation, but is what I should have played to prolong the fight. After the game continuation the draw is trivial.

24... ♖xb2 25. ♗xb2 ♗xb2 26. ♘xb2 fxe2 27. ♖e1



27... ♔g7! 28. ♖xe2 ♖b8 29.f3!
29.g3 f5

29... ♘f4!?

29...exf3 30.gxf3 ♘f4 31. ♖d2±

30. ♖xe4

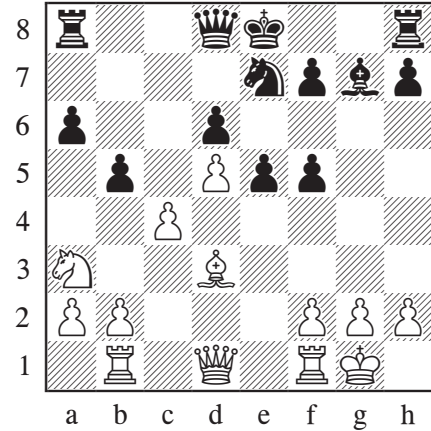
30. ♖c2? e3+

30... ♖xb2 31. ♖xf4 ♖xa2 32. ♖g4†

The extra pawn is of no significance, so a draw was agreed in Kotronias – Shirov, Calvia (ol) 2004.

B) 15. ♖b1

This looks like the most economical way of defending the b2-pawn.

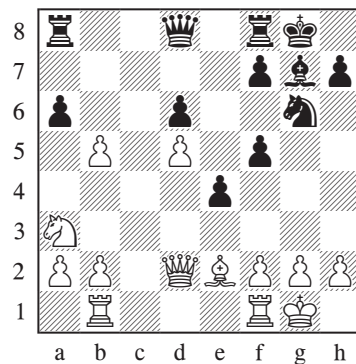


15...e4!

Black must push immediately before White gets a chance to play ♖f1-e1 and ♕f1.

16. ♕e2 bxc4

Also possible is: 16...0-0 17. ♗d2 (17.cxb5 axb5 18. ♕xb5 ♗b6 19. ♗d2 ♗c5 20. ♕c6 ♘xc6 21.dxc6 ♗xc6 was a tiny bit better for Black in Shomoev – Edouard, Moscow 2011.) 17... ♘g6 18.cxb5

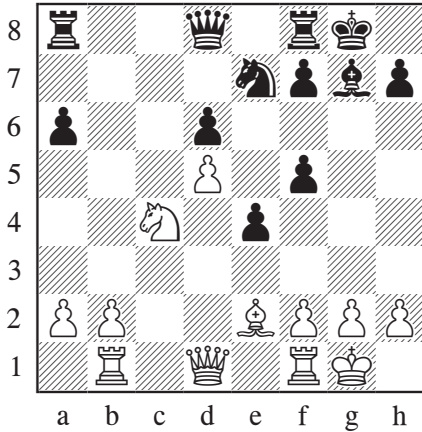


18...f4! 19. ♔h1 axb5 20. ♕xb5 ♗h4 21. ♗e2 f3 22.gxf3 ♕e5 23.f4 ♕xf4 24.f3 f5 25. ♘c4 ♖a7! 26.b4 ♖g7 27.fxe4 fxe4 28. ♖g1 e3, Saenko – Sukhodolsky, corr. 2010.

17. ♘xc4

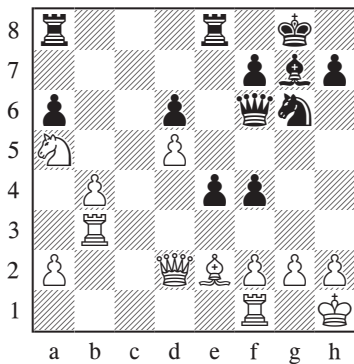
17.♖a4† offers nothing special here, for example 17...♗d7 18.♗xd7† ♔xd7 19.♘xc4 ♘xd5! 20.♟fd1 ♔e6 21.♘xd6 ♟hd8! 22.♘b7 ♟dc8 23.♘a5 ♘b6= and Black is absolutely fine.

17...0-0



We will now look at White's attempts to prevent the ...f4 push: **B1) 18.f4?!**, **B2) 18.♗d2** and **B3) 18.f3?!**.

18.b4 has the two-fold purpose of advancing White's queenside pawns and allowing the rook to join the defence via b3. A logical continuation is: 18...f4 19.♗d2 ♘g6 20.♟b3 ♗f6 21.♘a5 (21.♟h3 ♟fe8 22.♔h1 as in Fleischanderl – H. Ivanov, corr. 2007, is similar.) 21...♟fe8 22.♔h1 This was Copar – Mason, corr. 2007.



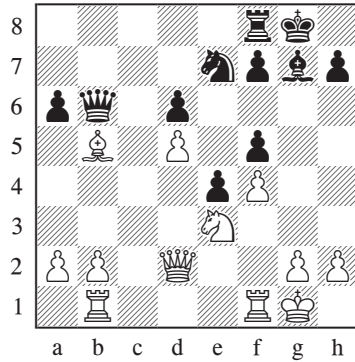
22...♗f5!N 23.♘c6 ♘f6= Intending ...♔h8, with good attacking chances.

B1) 18.f4?!

This doesn't seem to meet the requirements of the position.

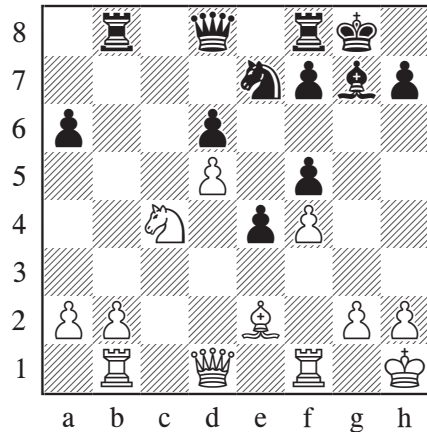
18...♟b8 19.♔h1

19.♗d2?! allowed Black some brilliant tactics in the game Stefansson – Krasenkow, Gausdal 1991. After 19...♟b5! 20.♘e3 ♗b6!! even the best answer 21.♘xb5 would have not saved White from trouble, for example:



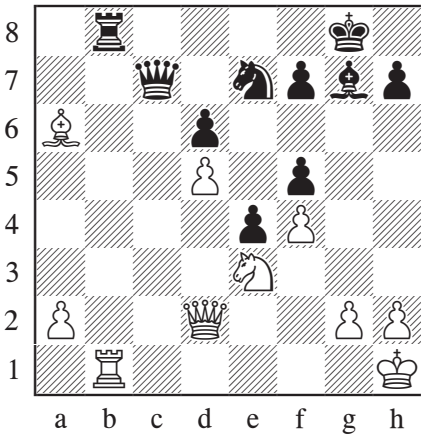
21...♘d4! 22.♟f1 ♘xd5 23.♔h1 ♘xe3 24.♘e2 d5= Black's massive centre must grant him an edge.

19.a4?! has also its defects due to 19...♗c7!F.



19...♟b5 20.♘e3 ♟xb2 21.♟xb2 ♘xb2 22.♗d2 ♘g7 23.♟b1 ♗c7 24.♘xa6 ♟b8!

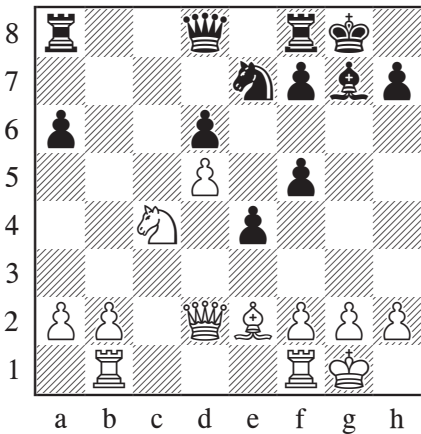
With every exchange the weakness of d5 will become more glaring.



25. ♖c1 ♜a7 26. ♙f1 ♜b2 27. ♜e1 ♜xa2+
 White was on the verge of losing in Ivanchuk – Lautier, Odessa (rapid) 2006.

B2) 18. ♜d2

A better try, refraining from the weakening f2-f4.

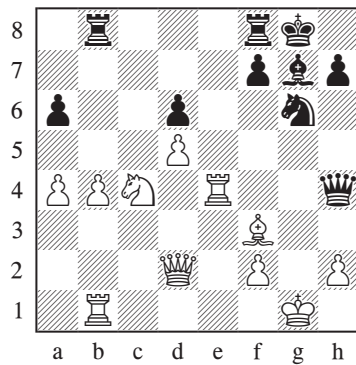


18... ♜b8! 19. a4
 As in Shomoev – Grebionkin, Internet 2004.

19. b4 ♜b5 20. ♘e3 f4 21. ♙xb5 fxe3 22. ♜xe3 axb5 23. ♜xe4 ♘g6↗ reaches an unclear position.

19... ♘g6! 20. f4
 Permitting an equalizing intrusion.

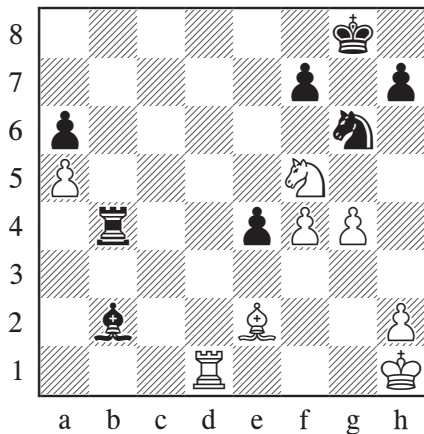
20. b4 f4! 21. ♜fe1 (21. b5 ♜h4→) 21... f3! 22. gxf3 exf3 23. ♙xf3 ♜h4 24. ♜e4



24... ♙h6!! 25. ♜xh4 ♙xd2 26. ♜e4 ♙xb4= with a fully level game.

20... ♜b3! 21. ♙h1 ♜b8! 22. a5 ♜b4! 23. ♜xb4 ♜xb4 24. ♘xd6 ♜d8
 24... ♘e7!?!∞

25. ♘xf5 ♜xd5 26. g4 ♙xb2 27. ♜fd1 ♜xd1† 28. ♜xd1



28... h5! 29. gxh5 ♘xf4 30. ♙xa6 ♜a4 31. ♙b7 ♜xa5 32. ♙xe4=

The result should of course be a draw.

B3) 18. f3!?

Again this is associated with preventing ...f4. A critical moment has arrived, and Black's next move is very instructive:

18... a5!

Intending ...♖a8-c8-c5. This is the only move to equalize here.

18...♖b8?! is the standard way of hitting d5, but it does not work in this particular situation. After 19.♔h1 ♖b5 20.♖c2! Black was under pressure in Efimenko – Moiseenko, Zlatibor 2006.

19.a3!?

After 19.♖d2 Black continues as planned: 19...♖c8 20.fxe4 fxe4 21.♘xa5 ♖c5!∞

The engines suggest 19.♖e1!?, but after: 19...♖c8! 20.♖g3 ♘g6! 21.fxe4 (21.♖xd6 exf3! 22.♖xf3 [22.♖xd8 ♙d4†! 23.♔h1 fxg2† 24.♔xg2 ♖fxd8 25.d6 ♘e5=] 22...♖h4!↔) 21...fxe4 22.♔h1 (22.♖xd6 ♖g5↔) 22...♖c5! 23.♖bd1 f5! 24.♖xd6 ♖xd6 25.♘xd6 ♖c2↔ Black is at least equal.

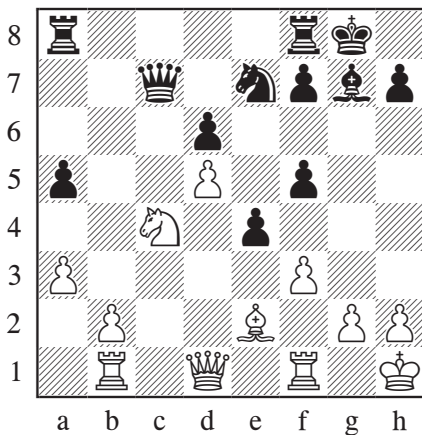
19...♖c7!

I like this move more than 19...a4 20.♖c2 e3 21.f4 ♖c7 Lahno – Tregubov, Gibraltar 2007, where I feel White may be better.

20.♔h1!?

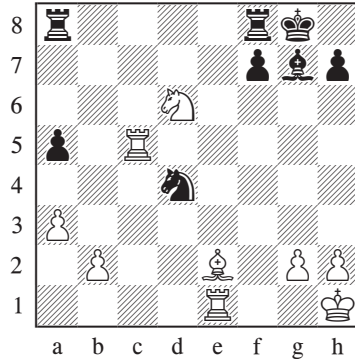
20.b4?! axb4 21.axb4 ♖a2↑ looks suspect for White.

20.♖c2 ♘xd5 21.fxe4 fxe4 22.♖xe4 ♖c5! 23.♔h1 ♖ae8 transposes to our main line.



20...♖c5! 21.♖c2 ♘xd5 22.fxe4 fxe4 23.♖xe4

23.♖f5! does not yield anything in view of: 23...♘e3! 24.♖xc5 ♘xc2 25.♘xd6 ♘d4 26.♙c4 e3! 27.♖e1 (White should probably settle for 27.♘xf7 e2= e.g. 28.♖c7 ♖ab8.) 27...e2 28.♙xe2



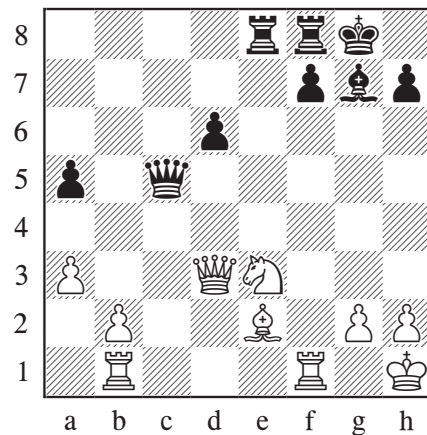
28...♖fd8! 29.♖d5 ♘xe2 30.♖xe2 ♖d7! 31.♘f5! (31.b3? ♖ad8 32.♖ed2 ♔f8†) 31...♖xd5 32.♘e7† ♔f8 33.♘xd5 ♖d8 34.♖d2 (34.♘e3 ♖e8† e.g. 35.♔g1 ♙xb2 36.♖xb2 ♖xe3) 34...♙xb2†

23...♖ae8 24.♖d3

24.♖g4 f5 25.♖f3 a4! 26.♖bd1 ♘e3 27.♘xe3 ♖xe3= is fine for Black.

24...♘e3 25.♘xe3

25.b4 ♖g5! =



25...♖xe3 26.♖d2 ♖d4 27.♖xd4 ♙xd4 28.♙c4 ♔g7 =

A fairly drawish opposite-coloured bishops ending has arisen. This is the blessing or the curse of the Sveshnikov, depending very much on who you are playing!

Conclusion

After the usual sequence 9.♘xf6 gxf6 10.♕d5 f5 11.♘d3 ♕e6 12.0–0 ♘xd5 13.exd5 ♖e7, a most common weapon in White's quest for an advantage has been the enterprising 14.c4, directly attacking Black's weak queenside pawns. Black should respond with the logical and flexible 14...♕g7!?, when my research indicates that he enjoys excellent equalizing chances in both of the main theoretical paths available to White.

The first option is 15.♖d2 e4 16.♕e2 b4! 17.♗xb4 ♞b8 18.♗a4† ♔f8!, when Black forfeits his castling privilege while temporarily losing a pawn, but the powerful activity of his pieces and awkward placement of the white ones make up fully for the inconvenience. My game against Alexei Shirov demonstrated a good way for Black to equalize, which led me to abandon this option as White.

The other main line is 15.♞b1 e4! 16.♕e2 bxc4 17.♕xc4 0–0, at which point 18.f3!? seems like the most principled continuation, trying to slow Black down on the kingside before continuing with queenside play. Black definitely needs to remember the reply 18...a5!, preparing the manoeuvre ...♞c8-c5 in order to put d5 under pressure. Play is rich in positional content, but my analysis indicates that there is nothing special to be feared, and Black remains well within the drawing zone. In the event of 19.a3!? Black does best to attack the weakness with 19...♗c7! 20.♔h1!? ♗c5! when the most logical outcome is an opposite-coloured bishop ending and an almost certain draw.