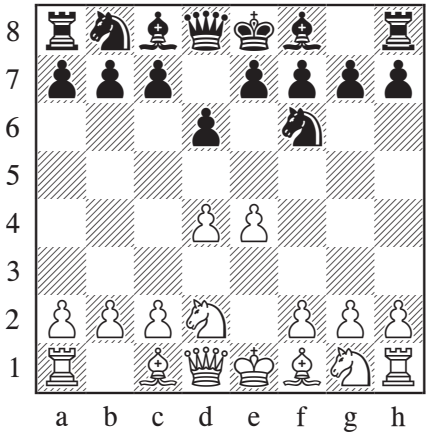
Update to *The Pirc Defence* by Mihail Marin

3.♘d2

1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♘f6 3.♘d2



As hard as I tried to cover all White's minor lines when writing *The Pirc Defence*, this somehow escaped my attention. The move is quite rare and I have faced it just once, but my opponent's play was so unambitious that my only reason for discontent was the final result – a draw.

However, 3.♘d2 is not a bad move, as Black can do no better than transposing to a line of the Modern Defence (for example, 1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♗g7 3.♘f3 d6 4.c3). Tiger Hillarp Persson covers this in *The Modern Tiger* and is more or less justified in calling it the "Lazy Variation", but it is of course right that I should give my own interpretation of these positions.

I should start by saying that by developing the queen's knight so soon, White deprives himself of the active ♗g5, which is typically played in the most ambitious version of the "Lazy" Modern.

It is also worth mentioning that this line can be reached via the move order 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 g6 3.♘bd2 ♗g7 4.e4 and so on.

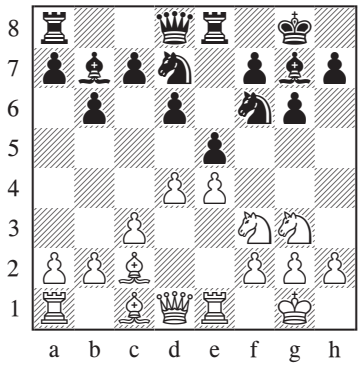
3...e5 4.c3 g6 5.♘gf3

My aforementioned game went:

5.♗d3 ♗g7 6.♘e2 ♘bd7 7.0–0 0–0 8.♗c2

8.f4 exd4 9.cxd4 c5 10.d5 was played in Ynojosa – Constantinou, Torquay 2009, and now most convincing is: 10...c4!N 11.♘xc4 ♘c5 12.♘c3 ♖e8=

8...b6 9.♘f3 ♗b7 10.♘g3 ♖e8 11.♖e1



11...c6!?

I planned to develop in the spirit of the Breyer Variation of the Ruy Lopez, a plan I suggest in the main line too.

11...exd4 12.cxd4 c5 13.d5 ♘g4= and 11...d5= are also satisfactory for Black.

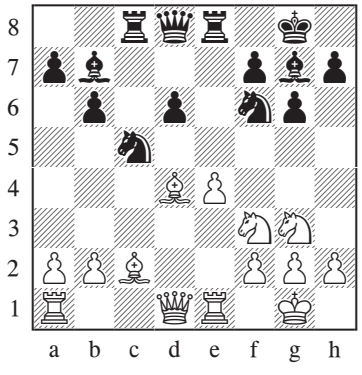
12.♗e3 exd4!?

With the bishop on e3, the immediate counterattack in the centre seemed more appealing.

13.cxd4 c5 14.dxc5

14.d5 ♘g4 is also fine for Black.

14...♘xc5 15.♗d4 ♖c8∓

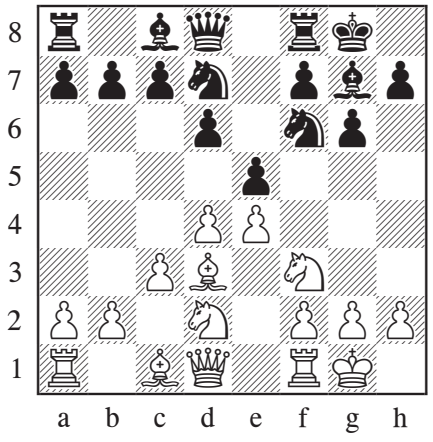


Black had unpleasant pressure on the centre in Godena – Marin, Reggio Emilia 2008.

5...♘bd7

Once again in the spirit of the Breyer Variation. Tiger mainly investigates the plan based on ...♘c6.

6.♗d3 ♗g7 7.0–0 0–0

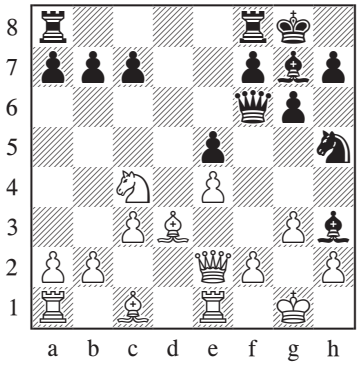


8.♖e1

Taking measures against Black's potential threat of ...d5.

8.a4 is a waste of time, leaving the e4-pawn insufficiently defended: 8...exd4 9.cxd4 c5! 10.d5 Otherwise ...cxd4 followed by ...♘c5 would offer Black a promising initiative. 10...♘g4 11.♘c4 ♘de5 12.♗f4 ♘xc4 13.♗xc4 This position was reached in Jacobson – Currie, Washington 2015, and now 13...♖e8N would force White to sacrifice a pawn in unclear circumstances after, for instance, 14.♕c2 ♕f6.

The exchange on e5 is almost always inoffensive:
8.dxe5 ♘xe5 9.♘xe5 dxe5 10.♘c4 ♘h5 11.g3 ♗h3 12.♖e1 ♕f6 13.♕e2



13...♖ad8?!

Clearing the f8-square for the bishop is the highest priority, so 13...♖fd8!N is more accurate: 14.f3 ♗f8 15.♗c2 ♘g7 16.♘e3 ♘e6=

14.f3 ♖fe8 15.♗e3?

15.♗c2!? ♗f8 16.♘e3 might give White chances for a tiny edge.

15...♖xd3 16.♕xd3 ♕xf3 17.♕c2?

17.♕e2 ♕xe4∓

17.♖e2 ♘f4 18.gxf4 exf4 19.♘d2 ♕g4† 20.♔h1 fxe3∓

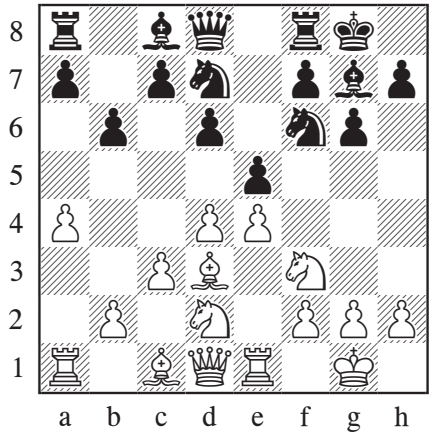
17...b5 18.♘a5 ♘xg3
0–1 Rukavina – G. Mohr, Pula 2000.

8...b6
With the rook on e1, the plan mentioned above does not work out so well: 8...exd4?! 9.cxd4 c5 10.e5! dxe5 11.dxe5 ♘g4 12.♘c4 b5 13.♗g5 ♕c7 14.♗e4 White held the initiative in Knezevic – Planinec, Belgrade 1978.

9.a4
The standard reaction.

9.♘f1 ♗b7 10.♘g3 ♖e8 11.d5 c6 12.c4 ♘c5 13.♗f1 a5 14.b3 b5!?= led to a comfortable version of the Breyer for Black in Miles – Bologan, Wijk aan Zee 1996.

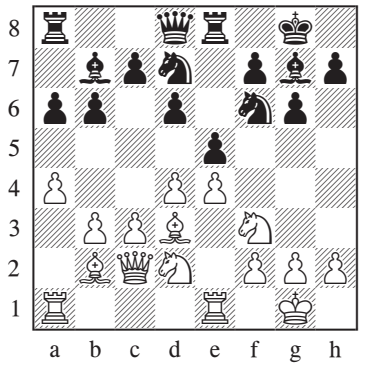
If compared with the similar line in the next note, 9.♘c4 ♗b7N 10.d5 is not dangerous. The fact is that a2-a4 is necessary anyway, while Black can manage without the weakening ...a6 move: 10...♕e7 11.b4 ♖ac8 12.a4 c6 13.dxc6 ♖xc6⇄



9...♗b7!
Black continues to develop, ignoring the queenside threat.

Previously in situations like this I automatically reacted with 9...a6 and now:

a) Black's choice looks logical if White plays a neutral plan:
10.b3
10.b4 ♗b7 11.♕b3 has been played in a few games, and now 11...♖e8N 12.♗b2 d5 is equal.
10...♗b7 11.♗b2 ♖e8 12.♕c2



12...c6

Black can also play the immediate: 12...d5N 13.dxe5 ♘xe5 14.♘xe5 dxe4 15.♘xe4 ♖xe5 16.c4 ♖xe4 17.♗xe4 ♗xe4 18.♖xe4 ♘xe4 19.♗xg7 ♔xg7 20.♕xe4 ♕f6 21.♖d1 ♖d8=

13.♖ad1 ♕c7 14.♗f1 d5

14...♖ad8= is also level.

15.c4 ♘xe4 16.cxd5 ♘xd2 17.♖xd2 exd4 18.♖xe8† ♖xe8 19.dxc6 ♕xc6 20.♕xc6 ♗xc6 21.♗xd4 ♗xf3 22.♗xg7 ♔xg7 23.♖xd7 ♗e2 24.♖d6 ♗xf1 25.♔xf1

½–½ Jianu – Marin, Bucharest (rapid) 2017.

25...♖b8

25...♖e6 26.♖xe6 fxe6 27.♔e2 ♔f6 28.♔d3 ♔e5 29.♔c4 ♔d6 30.♔d4 e5† 31.♔e4 ♔e6=

26.♔e2 ♔f8 27.♖c6 ♔e7 28.♖c7† ♔e6=

Black intends ...♖d8-d6.

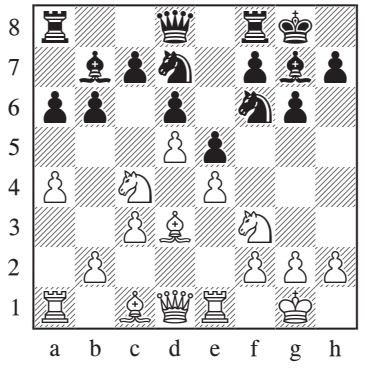
b) But recently I discovered that White can prepare d4-d5 with:

10.♘c4! ♗b7

After 10...♖e8 11.d5± Kulaots – Iordachescu, Medellin 1996, Black's bishop stands in the right place for preparing ...f5, but his rook does not.

10...exd4 11.cxd4 d5 12.exd5 ♘xd5 13.♗g5 ♘7f6 was played in Popilski – Norwood, Andorra 2011, and now 14.♘ce5N ♗b7 15.♖c1± would offer White some pressure, even though I would not be too worried as Black due to the stability of the blockade on the d5-square.

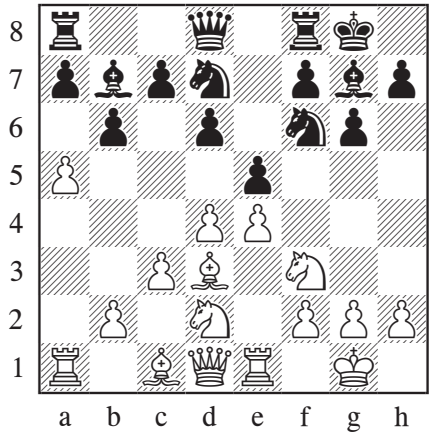
11.d5±



White held the advantage in Mainka – Bezold, Senden 1998. The problem for Black is that with his bishop on b7 he will need some time to prepare ...f5, while if he tries switching to ...c6, White would have ♗c2, b2-b4 and ♗b3. White's main plan remains b2-b4 and a4-a5, and after Black's ...b5, continuing with ♘e3 and c3-c4. I failed to find an entirely satisfactory move order for Black.

10.a5

10.♘c4 allows Black to equalize comfortably: 10...exd4 11.cxd4 ♘xe4 12.♖xe4 (12.♗xe4 ♗xe4 13.♖xe4 d5=) 12...d5 13.♖e1 dxc4 14.♗xc4 ♗xf3 15.♕xf3 ♗xd4 16.♖d1? (16.♗f4 ♕f6=) 16...♘e5 17.♕d5? (17.♕e2? ♘xc4 18.♕xc4 ♗xf2†–+; 17.♕f4 c5∓) 17...♗xf2† 18.♔xf2 ♕f6† 19.♔g1 ♖ad8–+ Matthews – Oates, London (Canada) 1994.



10...♖b8!?N

Neutralizing the threat of a5-a6 and preparing to go on with the normal Breyer plan.

10...a6 has been played in a couple of games and it may be viable, but I prefer to avoid weakening my structure: 11.axb6 (11.d5 Chudinovskih – Shabanov, Moscow 2002, can be met by 11...c6⇄) 11...cxb6 12.d5 ♕c7 13.♘b3 ♘h5 Black was close to equality in Kishnev – Schmaltz, Recklinghausen 1996.

11.axb6

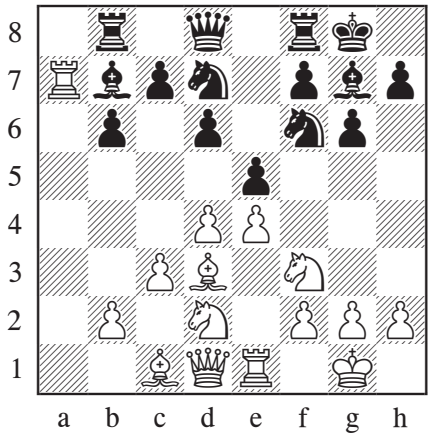
11.♘c4 b5! causes White problems since the a5-square is not available: 12.dxe5 (12.♘cd2 a6∓) 12...bxc4 13.exf6 ♘xf6 14.♗xc4 ♗xe4⇄

11.d5 c6 12.dxc6 (12.axb6 axb6 13.c4 b5! 14.dxc6 ♘c5 15.♗c2 ♗xc6 16.b4 ♘e6∓) 12...♗xc6 13.b4 ♕c7 is at least equal for Black.

11.♘f1 ♖e8 12.♘g3 d5 results in equality.

11...axb6 12.♖a7

12.♘c4 exd4 13.cxd4 ♘xe4! leads to familiar complications, rather favouring Black.



12...♕c8

12...♖a8 unnecessarily allows the exchange sacrifice: 13.♖xb7!? ♕c8 14.♖xb6 cxb6 15.♘c4 ♕c7 16.♘a3±

After the recommended queen move, Black solves his problems by simple means.

13.b4

13.♘f1 ♖a8 14.♖xa8 ♕xa8 15.♘g3 ♖e8 16.d5 (16.♕c2 d5=) 16...c6 17.c4 ♖b8 18.♗e3 b5=

13...♖a8 14.♖xa8 ♕xa8 15.d5

15.♗b2 d5= is also equal.

15...c6 16.c4 ♖b8 17.♗b2 b5=

Black has comfortable equality.

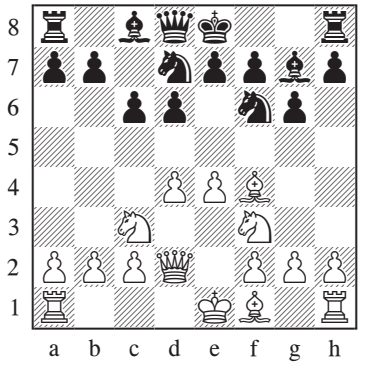
4.♗e3 and 4.♗f4 transpositions

1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♘f6 3.♘c3 g6

No matter how determined I was to catch all the possible transpositions in the 4.♗e3, 4.♗f4 and 4.♗g5 lines, it seems that I overlooked one of them. This update is aimed at solving the problem.

4.♗e3

Another possible way of reaching the critical position below is: 4.♗f4 c6 5.♕d2 ♘bd7 6.♘f3 ♗g7

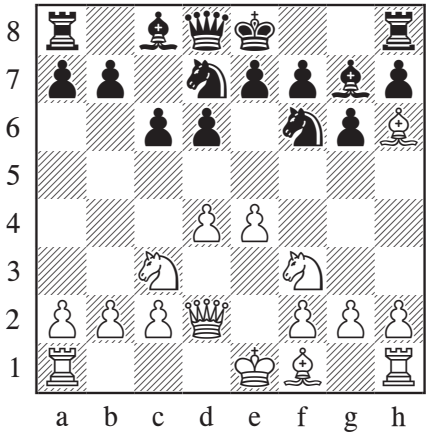


7.♗h6 This move, which transposes to our main line below, was not mentioned on page 329 of Chapter 13.

4...c6 5.♕d2

The position below is actually mentioned on pages 210-211 of Chapter 8 in the line: 5.♘f3 ♗g7 6.♕d2 0–0 7.♗h6 ♘bd7 (I assessed this move as "?!" on page 210, where I recommended 7...b5 as being okay for Black.) 8.♗xg7 ♔xg7 9.e5 dxe5 10.dxe5 ♘g4 11.0–0–0

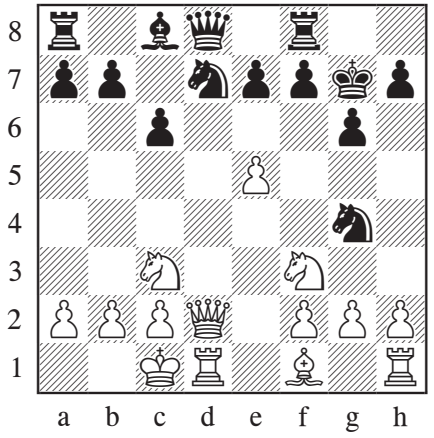
5...♘bd7 6.♘f3 ♗g7 7.♗h6



7...0–0 8.♗xg7

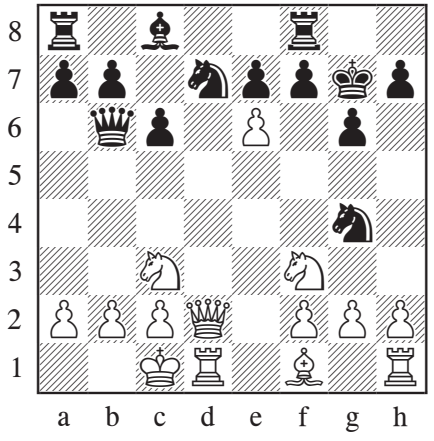
On page 236 of Chapter 10, I failed to give this move, only mentioning 8.0–0–0.

8...♔xg7 9.e5 dxe5 10.dxe5 ♘g4 11.0–0–0



My original conclusion about this position on pages 210-211 was that White had a clear advantage in view of the threat of e5-e6 and his better development. After having my attention drawn to the possible transpositions, I had a closer look at the position and found it entirely viable for Black.

11...♕b6 12.e6



12...♘df6!N

12...fxe6 was played in all three games in my database, but Black does not need the extra pawn, which blocks the development of the c8-bishop – piece activity is more important.

13.exf7

13.h3 leads to a forced tactical sequence: 13...♘xf2 14.♘a4 ♕c7 15.♕xf2 ♕f4† 16.♔b1 ♕xa4 17.exf7 ♗e6 18.a3 ♗xf7 For some reason the engines are optimistic from White's point of view, but after, say 19.♗d3 ♗d5 20.♖he1 ♖ae8, Black is a pawn up and is not facing any concrete threats.

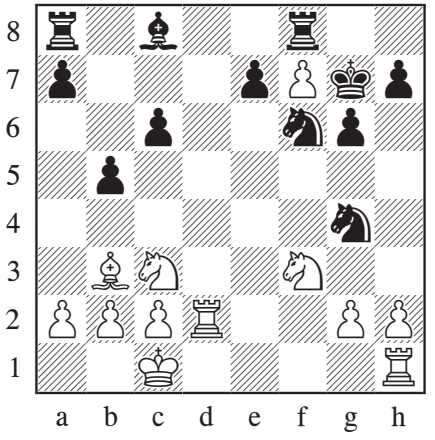
13...♕xf2

13...a5, clearing the a7-square for the queen in order to prepare ...♘xf2 without fearing ♘a4, is interesting, but I failed to find complete equality after: 14.♖g1 ♘xf2 15.♖e1 ♗g4 16.♕d4! Apparently the only challenging move. 16...♕xd4 17.♘xd4±

14.♗c4

White needs to defend the far-advanced pawn.

14...b5 15.♗b3 ♕xd2† 16.♖xd2



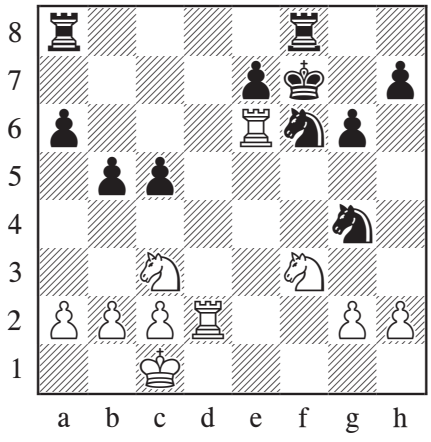
16...a6!

The most consistent move, preparing to harass the bishop with ...c5.

17.♖e1

Another approach is: 17.h3 ♘h6 18.♘g5 c5 19.♗e6 ♘f5 20.♗xc8 ♖fxc8 21.g4 ♘d4 22.♘e2 ♘xe2† 23.♖xe2 h6 24.♘e6† ♔xf7 25.g5 hxg5 26.♘xg5† ♔g8 27.♖xe7 ♖e8= If necessary, Black can use the 8th rank to perpetually chase the rook.

17...c5 18.♗e6 ♗xe6 19.♖xe6 ♔xf7



20.♘g5†

White needs to play energetically in order to try and maintain the initiative.

20.♖de2 ♔g8 21.♖xe7 b4 22.♘a4 ♘d5= is active enough for Black.

20...♔g8 21.h3

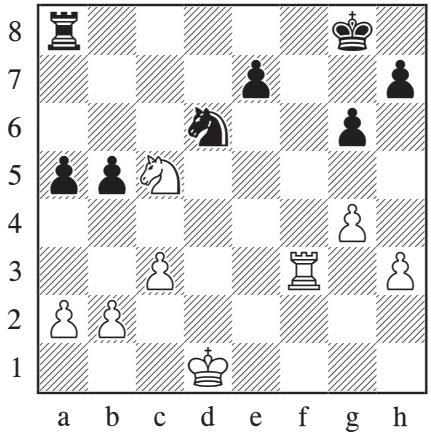
21.♖xe7 ♖fe8= is equal.

21...♘h6 22.g4 ♘f7 23.♘ge4 ♘xe4 24.♘xe4 ♘d6 25.♘xc5 ♖f1† 26.♖d1 ♖xd1† 27.♔xd1 ♔f7 28.♖e3

White seems to keep the more active ending, but Black should solve all his problems with a few accurate moves.

28...a5 29.♖f3† ♔g8 30.c3

Black is solid but needs to activate his rook somehow.



30...h5!?=

This inevitably clears space for Black's pieces and weakens the enemy kingside.

30...♖f8?! 31.♔e2 may lead to a dangerous knight ending.

31.gxh5

31.♘e6 hxg4 32.hxg4 b4⇄ or 31.g5 ♘f5=.

31...gxh5 32.♘e6 b4!?⇄

Black has sufficient counterplay.