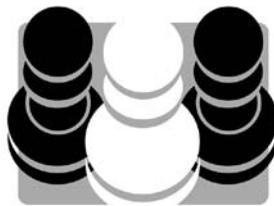


The Cutting Edge

Sicilian Najdorf 6.♘e3

By

Milos Pavlovic



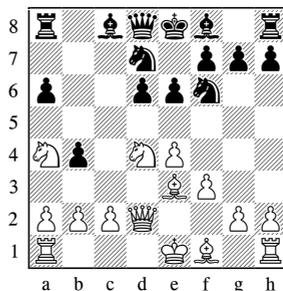
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Contents

Key to symbols used	4
Preface	5
Bibliography	6
Topalov Variation	
1 8.♙d2 b4 9.♘a4 ♘bd7	7
2 8.g4	29
Perenyi Attack	
3 7...e5	41
4 7...h6	67
5 7...h5	83
Main Line	
6 14.a3	87
7 9...♘b6	113
Scheveningen	
8 9...d5 10.♙e2!?	127
6...e5	
9 Positional Line 7.♘f3	133
10 Vallejo Pons Variation	157
11 10...a5	175
12 Topalov Variation 9...h5	193
13 f2-f4-lines	203
Index	213

Chapter 1

Topalov Variation



8. ♖d2 b4 9. ♘a4 ♘bd7

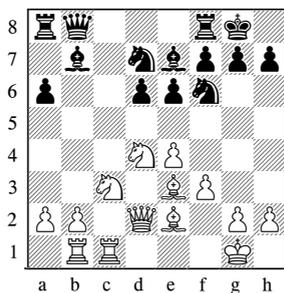
Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2. ♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4. ♘xd4 ♘f6 5. ♘c3 a6 6. ♕e3 e6 7.f3 b5 8. ♖d2

8...b4 9. ♘a4 ♘bd7

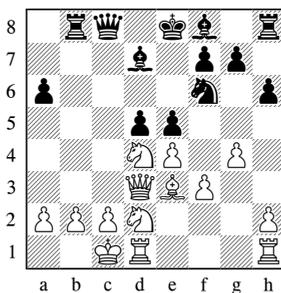
A) 10.c4 bxc3 11. ♘xc3 ♕b7 12. ♕e2 ♕e7 13.0-0 0-0	8
A1) 14. ♖ac1	9
A2) 14. ♖fc1	11
B) 10.0-0-0	12
B1) 10... ♖a5 11.b3 ♕b7	12
B11) 12. ♖b1	13
B12) 12.a3	15
B2) 10...d5	17
C) 10. ♕c4!?	19
D) 10.g4 h6	22
D1) 11.h4	22
D2) 11.0-0-0 ♘e5	23
D21) 12. ♖xb4	24
D22) 12.b3	25

A2) after 15. ♖ab1



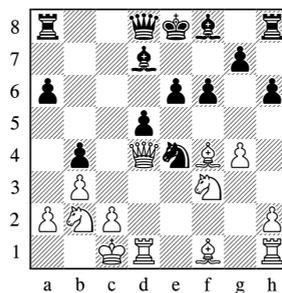
15...d5N

D21) after 19...e5



20.exd5!?:N or 20. ♘f5!?:N

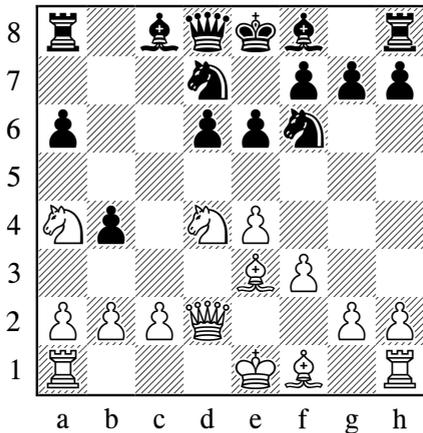
D22) note to 14... ♖c7



17. ♖e1!

This very complicated and modern line can be split into two set-ups, according to whether White plays 8.♖d2 or 8.g4, which we cover respectively in this chapter and the next. But first I would like to say a few words on these systems. They are new and ultra-sharp, and their trademark is that Black hurries to push ...b4, regardless of the potential weakness of the b-pawn after this early excursion. Topalov introduced this idea, and in the past few years it has stood the test of time well. Ahead of us are two highly complicated and interesting chapters.

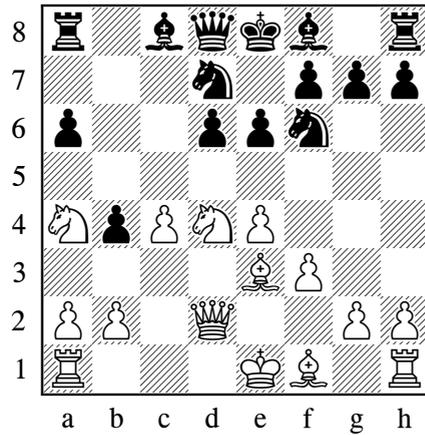
1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6
5.♘c3 a6 6.♙e3 e6 7.f3 b5 8.♚d2 b4 9.♘a4
♘bd7



This set-up was introduced by Topalov, and it is a popular way for Black to play against the English Attack. Black immediately pushes the knight away, hoping that his b-pawn is not really attacked, and indeed it is not. We have a very sharp position.

We have to deal with various alternatives here, some of which are ultra-sharp and some more solid: A) 10.c4, B) 10.0-0-0, C) 10.♙c4, and D) 10.g4.

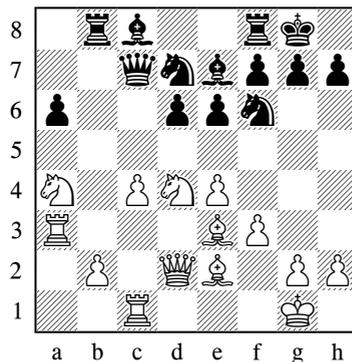
A) 10.c4



This positional approach has been used by Leko, Anand and Morozevich when confronted with Black's idea. After the usual 10...bxc3, White's knight will come back into game, and the queenside majority, together with the open c-file, gives White chances to play for the advantage. On the other hand, it is not easy to prevent the central thrust ...d5, with which Black will open central lines and thus activate his pieces.

10...bxc3

This is not the only move, although it is the most frequently played. The main alternative is 10...♚c7. Although this allows White to keep the c4-e4 pawn structure, the position remains closed and Black has the c5-square for his knight. Play may continue: 11.♙e2 ♖b8 12.0-0 ♙e7 13.a3 bxa3 14.♖xa3 0-0 15.♖c1



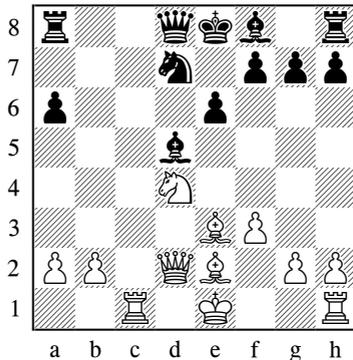
We have a fairly typical hedgehog position. I slightly prefer White here, but nevertheless consider 10... ♖c7 to be a solid and little investigated alternative to our main line.

11. ♘xc3 ♘b7 12. ♙e2 ♙e7

Another significant possibility is Topalov's original idea:

12...d5 13.exd5 ♘xd5 14. ♘xd5 ♙xd5 15. ♖c1!

This is the best move here, and was introduced by Morozevich. It is important for White to immediately occupy the open c-file. In the stem game of the system, Anand played less accurate 15.0–0, and after 15... ♗b8 16. ♘f5 ♖e5 17. ♘g3 ♙b4! Black was fine in Anand – Topalov, Sofia 2006.



15... ♗b8

Again there are other moves:

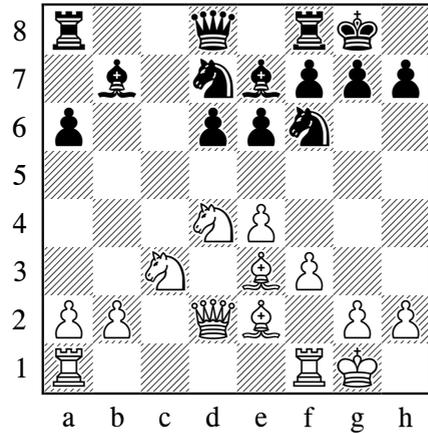
a) 15... ♙d6 16. ♘f5 ♙e5 17.f4 ♖f6 18.0–0 ♗xf5 19.fxe5 ♗g6 20. ♙d3 ♗h5 21. ♗b4 and White had the initiative in Smirnov – Hillarp Persson, Dresden 2007.

b) 15... ♙e7 16. ♘c6 is better for White.

16.a3 ♙d6 17. ♘f5! 0–0 18. ♘xd6 ♗xd6 19.0–0

This position has occurred in two games, Morozevich – Grischuk, Moscow 2006 and Carlsen – R. Jones, Crete 2007, both of which showed that White has an undisputable advantage.

13.0–0 0–0



There are now two major options and I will give them equal attention. White has different ways of bringing his rooks into play: A1) 14. ♖ac1 and A2) 14. ♖fc1.

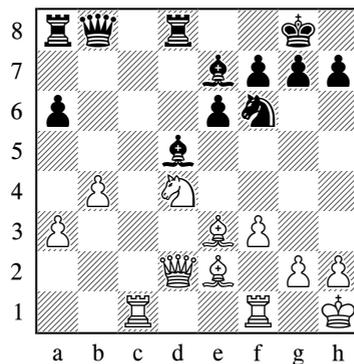
A1) 14. ♖ac1 ♗b8 15. ♖fd1

White has tried several other moves here:

15.a3 ♖d8N

Or 15... ♖c8 16.b4 ♙d8 17. ♖h1 ♘e5 18. ♘b3 ♙c6 and now instead of 19. ♙d1, as played in the game Vasiesiu – Jakovljevic, Obrenovac 2007, White should prefer 19. ♘a5! ♖xa5 20.bxa5 and I believe that the bishop pair, along with control of the dark squares, secures some advantage for White.

16.b4 d5 17.exd5 ♘xd5 18. ♘xd5 ♙xd5 19. ♖h1 ♘f6



This looks good for Black; the pressure along the d-file and centralized pieces is just what Black is aiming for.

15.♖c2

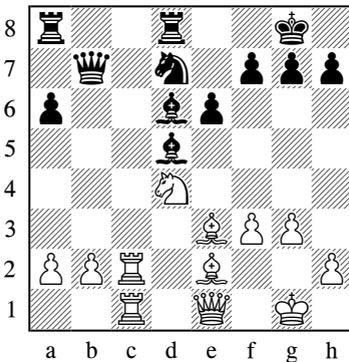
Seemingly preparing to double rooks, although the c1-square may also provide an interesting spot for the white queen.

15...♗d8

The alternative is 15...d5N 16.exd5 ♖xd5 17.♗xd5 ♗xd5, which also looks not bad for Black.

16.♙c1

Another approach would be: 16.♖fc1 d5 17.exd5 ♗xd5 18.♗xd5 ♗xd5 19.♙e1 ♗d6 20.g3 ♙b7



Black has reached his optimal set-up and the position is quite unbalanced, Blehm – Vovsha, USA 2008.

16...♗e5

Not the only move, as I think Black can go for 16...d5, for example: 17.exd5 ♖xd5 18.♗xd5 ♗xd5 19.♗c6 ♗xc6 20.♖xc6 ♗f6 with counterplay.

17.b3 h5 18.h3 ♗g6 19.♗d1 h4

Here as well, Black misses a good opportunity to break in the centre: 19...d5 20.exd5 ♖xd5 21.♗xd5 ♗xd5 22.♗c6 ♗xc6 23.♖xd8† ♗xd8 24.♖xc6 a5 25.f4 ♗e7 26.♖c4 ♗d5 27.♗f2 g6 28.♗f3 ♗b6 Black has reasonable counterplay. This line is not forced, but it clearly shows Black's potential.

20.♗a4 d5 21.♗b6

White obtained some initiative in Fedorov – Gabrielian, Voronezh 2008.

15.b4 d5

Also possible is: 15...♗d8 16.a4 d5 17.exd5 ♗xd5 18.♗xd5 ♗xd5 19.b5 axb5 20.axb5 (or 20.♗xb5 and after 20...♗c5 21.♖a1 a draw was agreed in Korneev – Vera, La Roda 2009) 20...♗d6 21.h3 ♗c5 with counterplay.

16.exd5 ♗xd5 17.♗xd5 ♗xd5 18.a3 ♗d6 19.f4 ♙b7 20.♗f3 ♗f6 21.♗xd5 ♙xd5 22.♗c6 ♖fc8 23.♖f1

The position is unclear.

15...♗d8

Again it is very natural for Black to consider ...d5 here, although I haven't seen it suggested in this particular position:

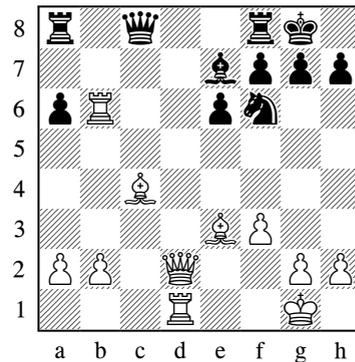
15...d5N 16.exd5 ♖xd5 17.♗xd5 ♗xd5 18.♗c6

18.♗c4 is possible, but after 18...♗b4 19.♙e2 ♗f6 20.♗d5 ♗xd5 21.♗c6 ♙b7 22.♗xb4 ♗xe3! Black equalizes.

18...♗xc6 19.♖xc6 ♗f6 20.♖b6

After 20.♗xa6 ♗d8, Black secures good play.

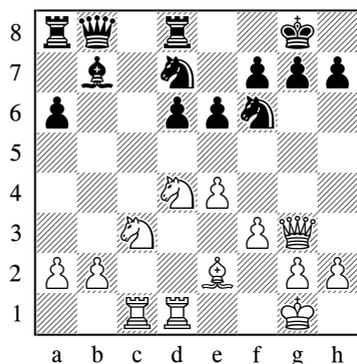
20...♙e8 21.♗c4 ♙c8



Black obtains good counterplay with either ...♗d8 or possibly ...♗c5.

16.♗h1

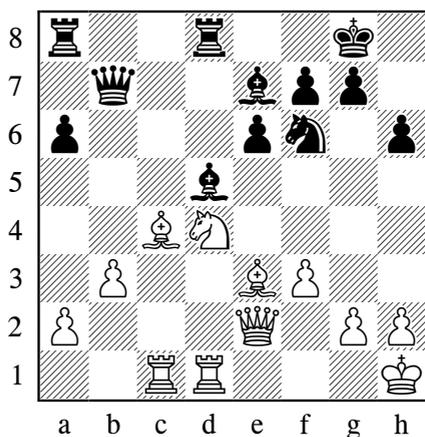
16. ♕f4!? is an interesting move. White aims to restrict Black's ...d5 idea and may follow up with ♘b3-a5 if he is given time. 16... ♘h5!?N (in Firat – Paikidze, Kirishi 2008, Black played 16... ♘e5 and after 17. ♕g3 ♘c6 18. ♘a4 White had some initiative) 17. ♕g3 ♕c6 18. ♘a4 ♖xe5 19. ♕g5 ♕xg5 18. ♖xg5 ♘hf6 19. ♖g3



Now we have a position that is more or less equal, provided Black avoids entering into a worse endgame after: 19...d5?! 20.exd5 ♘d5 21. ♖xb8 ♖dx8 22. ♘xd5 ♕xd5 23.b3 a5 24. ♕b5 ♘f6 25. ♕a4

Another idea that has been played here is 16. ♕f2, and after 16...g6 17. ♖c2 ♖c8 18. ♖a4 d5 19.exd5 ♘b6 20. ♖a5 ♘bxd5, the position was unclear in Brkic – Rezan, Split 2008.

16...d5 17.exd5 ♘xd5 18. ♘xd5 ♕xd5 19. ♕c4 ♘f6 20. ♖e2 ♖b7 21.b3 h6



Black is fine. I will give the rest of the game, so that readers can see some of the methods of playing this type of position.

22. ♕f2 ♖d7 23. ♖c2 ♕xc4 24. ♖xc4 ♖ad8 25. ♖f1 ♖d6 26. ♖c2 ♕f8 27. ♘c6 ♖e8 28.b4 e5 29. ♘a5 ♖b5 30. ♕c5 ♖d5 31. ♕xf8 ♖xf8 32. ♖e1 ♖fd8 33. ♘b3 ♖d1 34. ♖xd1 ♖xd1 35. ♖c8† ♘h7 36. ♖xd1 e4 37.fxe4 ♘g4 38. ♖c5 ♖b8

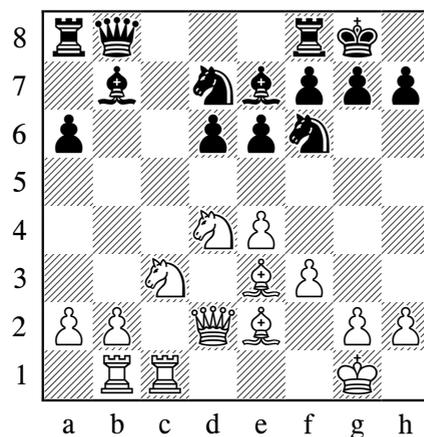
0–1

Leko – Topalov, Morelia/Linares 2008.

A2) 14. ♖fc1

This is a different approach, in which White wants to push his pawns on the queenside.

14... ♖b8 15. ♖ab1



Hurrying to push the pawns without preparation is nothing special. For instance: 15.b4 d5 16.exd5 ♘xd5 17. ♘xd5 ♕xd5 18.a3 ♖d8 with a good game for Black.

15...d5N

Another idea might be 15... ♖d8N, when a logical continuation is: 16.b4 d5 17.b5 axb5 18. ♕xb5 ♖d6 19. ♕f1 ♕a6 Black has decent counterplay.

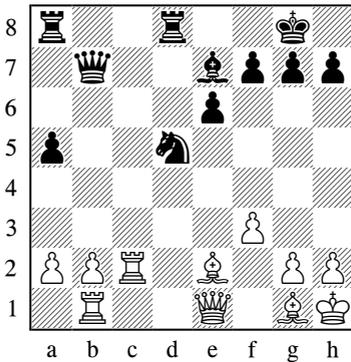
The move Black has tried in practice doesn't look convincing to me: 15...♖c8 16.b4 ♘e5 (16...d5 17.exd5 ♘xd5 18.♘xd5 ♙xd5 19.♖xc8† ♗xc8 20.a4 h6 21.a5 looks to be exactly what White is wishing for) 17.b5 ♘c4 18.♙xc4 ♖xc4 19.bxa6 ♖xa6 20.♗e2 and White is much better, Erenburg – Vovsha, Pawtucket 2008.

16.exd5 ♘xd5 17.♘xd5 ♙xd5 18.♘c6

Attempts like 18.b4 ♙d6 19.♖h1 ♙xh2 20.b5 axb5 21.♙xb5 ♘f6 or 18.♘f5 ♙f6 both look fine for Black.

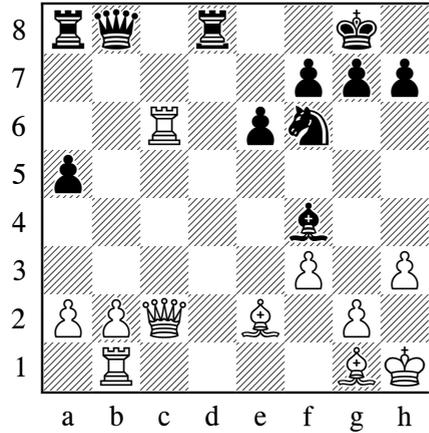
18...♙xc6 19.♖xc6 ♗d8 20.♗c2

The alternative is: 20.♗e1 a5 21.♖h1 ♗b7 22.♖c2 ♘f6 23.♙g1 ♘d5



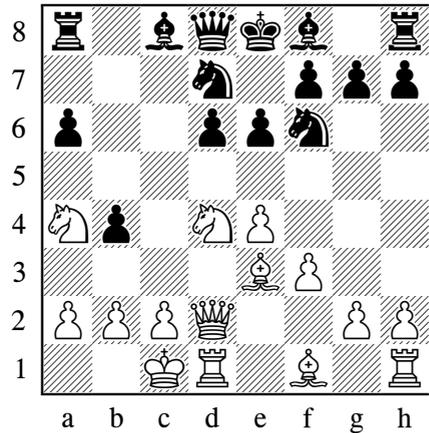
This set-up occurs so often in this line that I must advise readers to pay it particular attention. It should be pointed out that the bishop pair, along with the queenside majority, would be enough for White to win a simple endgame with just two minor pieces on each side. But here, with queens on the board and many weak squares in the white position, as well as the centralized position of the black pieces, matters are much more complicated. The advantage can go to either side.

20...♙d6 21.h3 a5 22.♖h1 ♙f4 23.♙g1 ♘f6



Black has good play. Again we have a similar structure and positioning of the minor pieces.

B) 10.0-0-0



We continue our survey with this extremely sharp continuation. White is simply developing, without worrying overmuch about Black's chances of undermining the knight on a4. The subsequent play will be all about which side is more successful in resolving the current situation of this knight. We will look at two major ideas for Black: **B1) 10...♗a5** and **B2) 10...d5**.

B1) 10...♗a5 11.b3 ♙b7

Now White chooses between the slower **B11) 12.♖b1** and the more direct **B12) 12.a3**.