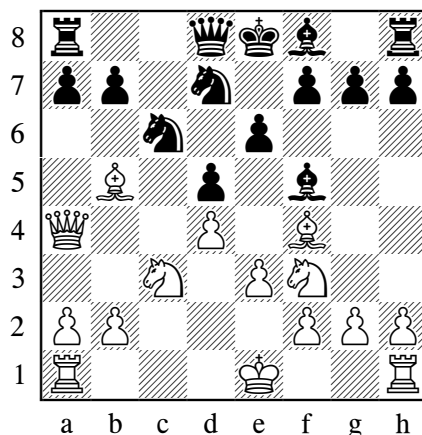


1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.cxd5 cxd5 4.♘c3 ♘f6 5.♙f4 ♘c6 6.e3 ♙f5 7.♘f3 e6 8.♙b5 ♘d7

When my book was published, a few people discovered that in this position I missed a popular option:

C43) 9.♙a4

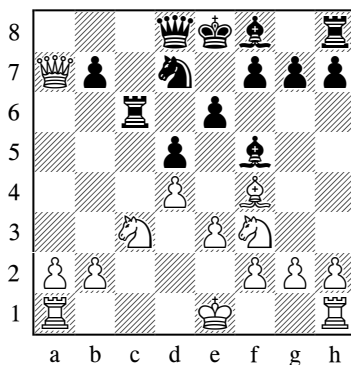


This move doesn't change the evaluation of the line as perfectly playable for Black; however, a bit of concrete knowledge is required.

9...♙c8! 10.0-0

Capturing the a7-pawn is dangerous for White:

10.♙xc6 ♙xc6 11.♙xa7



11...♙d3!

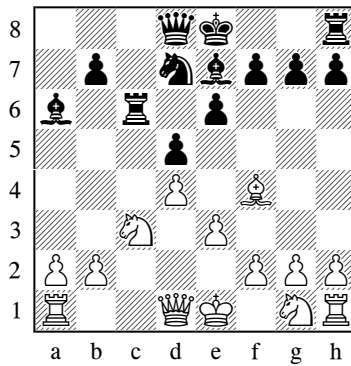
Another good possibility is 11...♙c8 12.♙a5 ♙a6 13.♙c7 ♙xc7 14.♙xc7 ♙b4 Grigorov – V. Milov, Roslavl 1989, and Black will regain the pawn, keeping the better chances.

12.♙a4

Another line is: 12.♙xb7 ♙b6 13.♙a7N (This is obviously stronger than 13.♙c7? ♙xb2 14.♙xd8† ♘xd8 15.a3 ♙c2† Petrovic – Zivkovic, Belgrade 2007.) 13...♙xb2 14.♙d1 ♙c4 15.♙d2 Black is at least equal after 15...♙b4!.

12...♙e7 13.♙d1 ♙a6 14.♘g1

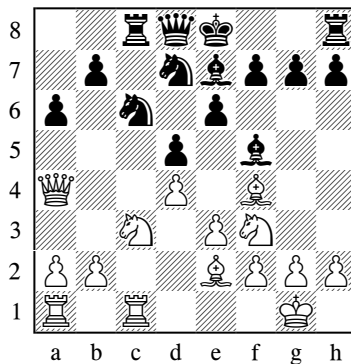
This has occurred in several computer games, but in none of them did Black play the simple:



14...♙b4N 15.♘ge2 ♕xe2 16.♔xe2 ♚a5
 Black has the better game.

10...a6 11.♕xc6

11.♕e2 ♕e7 12.♖fc1 was played in Valov – Kurilov, St Petersburg 2007, and now Black can use the misplaced position of the white queen and play the thematic aggressive idea:



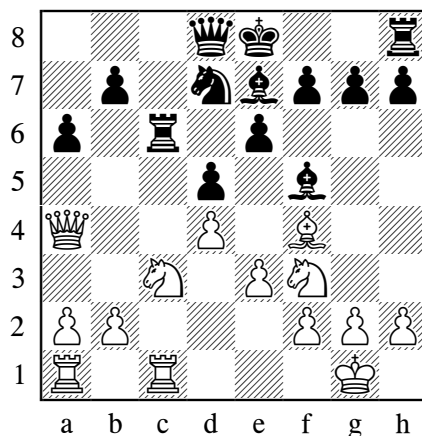
12...g5!N 13.♕g3 h5 This looks dangerous for White.

11...♗xc6 12.♖fc1

White must do something quickly in order to justify giving up his light-squared bishop.

12.♖ac1 allows Black to play: 12...♕d3! 13.♖fe1 (After 13.♖fd1 Regulus – GriffySr, email 2004, Black can play 13...♗c4N 14.♗b3 ♖b4 15.♗a3 ♕c4 and he has no problems.) 13...♕e7 14.♗b3 This was Stolba – Kaplan, Czech Republic 2006, now the solid 14...♗c8N would easily solve any problems.

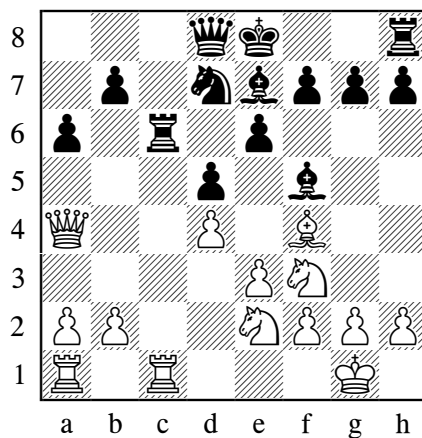
12...♕e7



Now there are two moves to consider: C431) 13.♖e2 and C432) 13.♖d1.

C431) 13.♖e2

White is trying to use his slight lead in development to create some play along the c-file, but Black has a convincing way to hold equality.



13...♗b6 14.♞xc6 bxc6 15.♞c1

Also known is 15.♗b3 but it is rather harmless. For example: 15...f6 16.♞c1 ♗xb3 17.axb3 ♕d3 18.♖c3 Now 18...0-0 was comfortable for Black in Kaminik – Hector, Hamburg 1993, but also plausible was 18...♙f7!? keeping the king a step closer.

15...♕d3! 16.♗d1 ♕xe2

After 16...♕g6, I believe White should settle for a repetition with 17.♗a4 ♕d3 18.♗d1 etc.

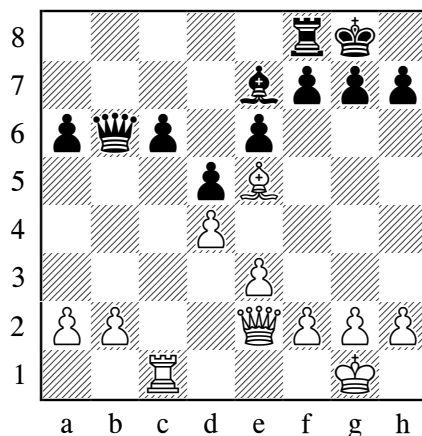
17.♗xc2

Opinions have varied about this position. Sveshnikov claimed an edge for White, while Dvoretsky was sceptical of this view (in the sources mentioned below). I prefer the latter view and think Black will soon be equal.

17...0-0 18.♖e5

Otherwise Black will get in a quick ...c5.

18...♖xc5 19.♗xc5



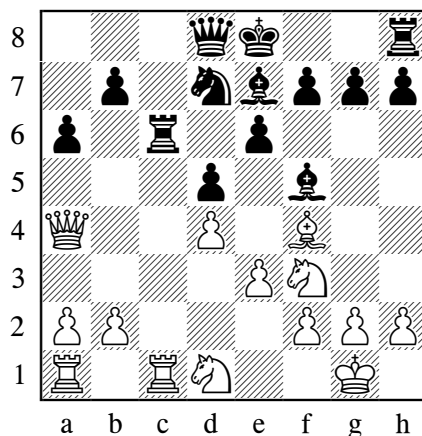
19...♞c8

This is the most accurate move, as played in the model game for this line. This line was also given as equal by Vigorito in *Play the Semi-Slav*.

20.h4 ♖b5 21.♗g4 ♗f8 22.b3 ♖d3

22...c5N looks good as well, though Black equalized easily enough with the text move in Rashkovsky – Dolmatov, Vilnius 1980.

C432) 13.♗d1



This is also an important line.

13...b5 14.♖b3 ♖c8

Vigorito preferred 14...♞c4 which leads to sharp play after, for example, 15.♗d2 ♖a5. His book *Play the Semi-Slav* offers a full page of analysis from this position. Sveshnikov also disapproves of 14...♖c8 giving this move an “?” in the 2002 No. 4 issue of the magazine 64. So we are going against serious analysts.

15.e4

This move is the reason Vigorito preferred to avoid 14...♖c8. Certainly White has some play for the pawn, but Black has good defensive resources, so I believe White is struggling to show full compensation. Let’s see some ideas:

15...♙xe4

In *The Chess Instructor* Mark Dvoretsky preferred:

15...dxe4 16.d5

Or 16.♞xc6 ♜xc6 17.♞c1 and now d5 or a8 are options, of which I prefer 17...♞a8 when I do not believe White has enough compensation.

16...♞c4 17.♘d4 0-0

In Dvoretsky's words, this move is "the most reliable".

18.♘c6 ♙f6 19.♞xc4 bxc4 20.♞xc4 ♘b6

This is Franco – Ihonen, Finland 1990. Dvoretsky stopped here and indeed Black seems better. The game continued:

21.♞c5 ♘xd5 22.♙d6 ♞e8 23.♞c1 ♞b7

Black's extra pawn is the main factor. Overall, it is possible 15...dxe4 is the most reliable option, but I also cover 15...♙xe4 as I want to offer some fresh ideas.

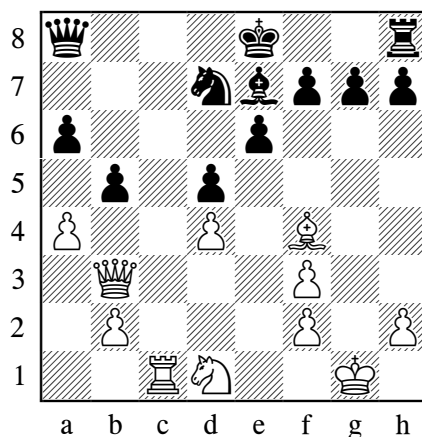
16.♞xc6 ♜xc6 17.♞c1 ♞a8

White's main ideas are clear: control of the c-file and a possible invasion on c7.

18.a4

The standard try.

18...♙xf3 19.gxf3



Dvoretsky assessed this as unclear. This position has been tested a few times with castling or playing 19...b4 Black's usual tries. Instead I suggest:

19...g5!?!N 20.♙g3

20.♙d2 ♞b8 looks comfortable for Black; with no quick invasions on c7, White's compensation feels insufficient.

20...f5

Targeting the g3-bishop.

21.f4

Or 21.♙c7 saves the piece but kills the plan of landing a rook on c7. For example: 21...♞b7 22.♙a5 ♙d6

21...♖g8

One of several interesting moves.

22.♔h1 g4

Burying rather than winning the g3-bishop. Also possible was: 22...b4!?

Now one fun line runs:

23.axb5 ♗b7 24.♞c6 ♔f7 25.♞xa6 ♞b8 26.♞e3 ♘c5!

The complications work out in Black's favour.