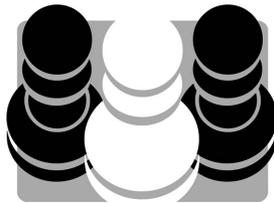


Grandmaster Repertoire

The Dragon 1

By

Gawain Jones



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Contents

Key to symbols used	4
Preface	5
Bibliography	6
Move Order Guide	7
Dragon Themes	9
Soltis Variation	
1 13.♙g5 ♖c5! 14.♚b1	29
2 14.g4	49
3 14th Move Alternatives	72
4 13.♙h6	86
5 13.♚b1	102
6 13th Move Alternatives	128
Topalov Variation	
7 13.♞d5 – The Main Line	142
8 13.h4	168
9 Other 13th Moves	181
Yugoslav Attack	
10 Burnett Variation	196
11 Minor Lines after 10.0–0–0	221
12 10.h4 – Minor Lines	241
13 Early Deviations	250
14 9.g4 without 10.♞xe6	266
15 10.♞xe6	295
Variation Index	314

Preface

From Harry Golombek and B.H. Wood in the 1940s, through to the 1960s with players such as Peter Lee, Bill Hartston, Andrew Whiteley and David Levy, the Dragon has long been popular in the UK. During the Chess Revolution of the 1970s many of England's top players were frequent users, notably Jonathan Mestel, William Watson and our first Grandmaster Tony Miles. More recently Chris Ward, with his infectious *Winning with the Dragon* books, coupled with his coaching at elite youth events, inspired many of England's top talents to become Dragon exponents.

It is therefore no surprise that I have been playing the Dragon from a young age. I've enjoyed the complex battles and being able to attack White straight out of the opening. My quickest win with the Dragon was in 13 moves; how often does that happen in most defences?

Black's kingside fianchetto immediately sets the stage for a double-edged game. On the one hand, the pawn on g6 can become a hook for White's attack along the h-file. This caveman attack can be quite scary, hence Bobby Fischer's quote: "It's just a matter of throwing in a few sacrifices, then checkmate!"

However, it's not at all one-sided as the g7-bishop does a great job fighting for central control and targeting White's queenside. Often the game becomes sharp and White is forced to take risks. If White declines to get involved in the messy positions with opposite-sided castling then Black will generally be comfortable. His pieces coordinate well, his structure is sound and he has great long-term prospects. The only potential weakness in Black's camp is the d5-square, and that can usually be remedied. Having both the initiative and good long-term chances has always appealed to me. We can attack but we don't need to stake everything on it; if White survives the complications then we may still be able to count on a pleasant endgame.

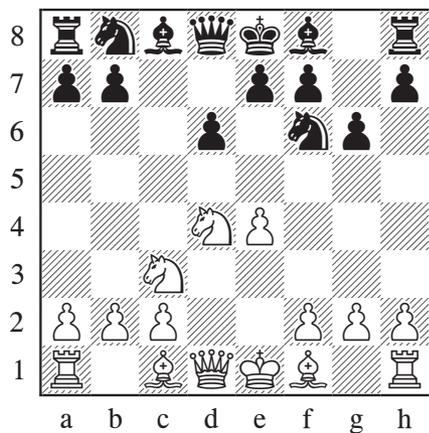
Amateur players often ask me whether the Dragon is still playable at high levels. It's true that a sizeable body of theory has developed, as with every opening in the computer era, but Black is still very much alive and kicking. I have used the Dragon as my main defence throughout my career and, when challenged, most of the elite have opted out of a theoretical duel. In producing this repertoire I have remained as objective and comprehensive as possible, not omitting any line I consider potentially dangerous, no matter how rare it might be. It is inevitable that improvements will be found at some point in the future, but I believe my recommendations will stand up to testing for a long time.

I would like to thank John Shaw for his patience and technical help; Richard Palliser, who has devoted so many hours trying to make my repertoire playable, not least in the Dragon; and my wife Sue, who has supported me and made it possible for me to complete this work. I hope you enjoy reading my book, and that you have fun and success counterattacking with the Dragon!

Gawain Jones
London, July 2015

Move Order Guide

The Dragon is reached after the opening moves: **1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♗f6 5.♗c3 g6**



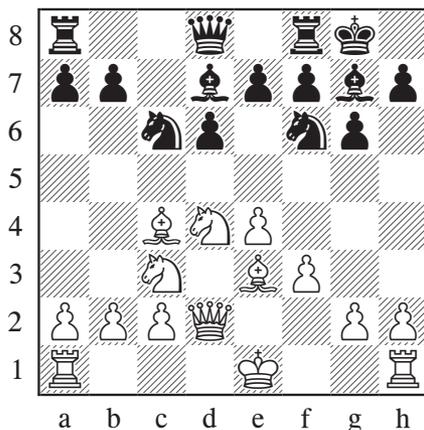
This will be the starting position of our repertoire. There are, of course, a number of ways for White to avoid the Open Sicilian, but to discuss them here would be to stray too far from our main topic, especially when books such as *Experts on the Anti-Sicilian* and Kotronias's forthcoming *Beating the Anti-Sicilians* offer dedicated coverage of these lines.

I will, however, draw your attention to another plausible route to the Dragon, which I have occasionally used in my own praxis: **1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 g6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♗f6 5.♗c3** (5.e5? ♚a5† wins a pawn) **5...d6**

The above move order has the advantage of avoiding 3.♗b5†, which is one of White's most popular anti-Sicilian weapons. However, it also opens up some other possibilities for the first player: 4.♚xd4 is a significant option; 3.c4 angles for a Maroczy Bind; and even 3.h4!? can be considered.

Overall the 2...g6 move order gives White more interesting ways to deviate from the Open Sicilian, so the traditional 2...d6 should be preferred by most players. However, if your repertoire happens to include the Accelerated Dragon (meaning that 3.c4 isn't a worry), and you are facing an opponent who plays both the Open Sicilian and 3.♗b5†, then you may consider 2...g6 to eliminate one of his preferred systems.

Moving on, the primary topic of the first volume is the following main line: **6.♗c3 ♗g7 7.f3 0-0 8.♚d2 ♗c6 9.♗c4 ♗d7**

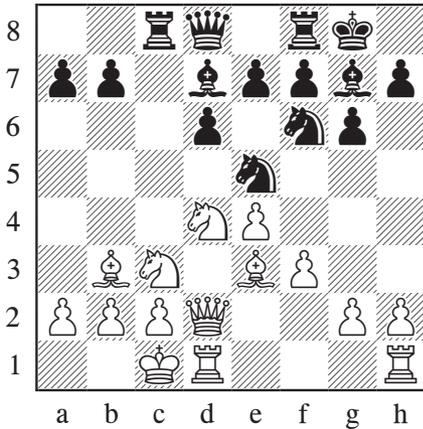


After the most common **10.0-0-0**, I have recommended the Topalov Variation as our main weapon. The tabiya after **10...♞c8 11.♗b3 ♗xd4 12.♗xd4 b5** is discussed in Chapters 7-9. This bypasses the myriad complications of the Soltis Variation, as well as the critical 12.♗b1 variation referred to below.

However, White can obstruct the above plan by altering his move order with **10.h4**. It would be dangerous to allow the pawn to

advance further, so I recommend **10...h5**. Then after **11.0-0-0 ♖c8 12.♗b3 ♜e5** we reach the Soltis Variation, with White having avoided the Topalov Variation.

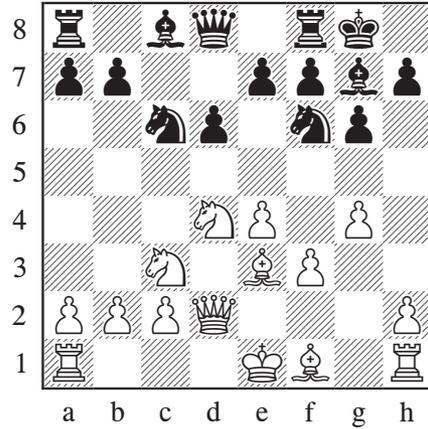
This isn't the end of the world for Black, as he too has avoided certain possibilities. Take the position after **10.0-0-0 ♖c8 11.♗b3 ♜e5**:



From this position, **12.h4 h5** reaches the Soltis Variation. However, the most critical test is reckoned to be **12.♔b1**. Therefore, if White cuts out the Topalov Variation with the 10.h4 move order, he also sacrifices this important option which might have been available had he preferred 10.0-0-0.

Should you wish to play the Soltis Variation as your main choice, rather than the Topalov, I have also included the Burnett Variation in Chapter 10 as an interesting way to challenge **12.♔b1**. This means that, whichever line you choose, you will have a complete repertoire. However, either move order will require you to be ready to play the Soltis Variation. That is why I have covered this first, in Chapters 1-6.

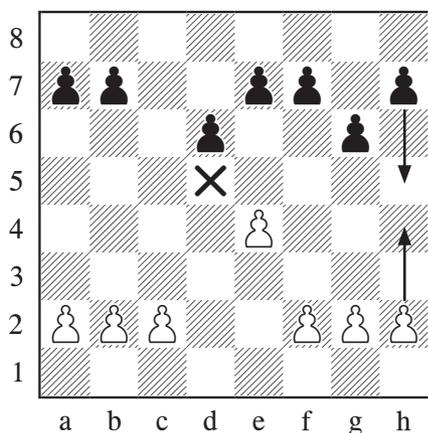
The final two chapters of this first volume are devoted to another important system: **9.g4**



I am recommending the established main line of **9...♗e6**. This generally leads to a healthy game for Black, but you must be ready for a variety of position types, from quiet endgames to double-edged middlegames with unusual pawn structures, as found in the final chapter with **10.♜xe6 fxe6**.

Dragon Themes

Before getting down to the theory, we will examine a number of commonly occurring themes in the Sicilian Dragon. Let's start by considering the pawn structure, as this is what dictates the character of the position.

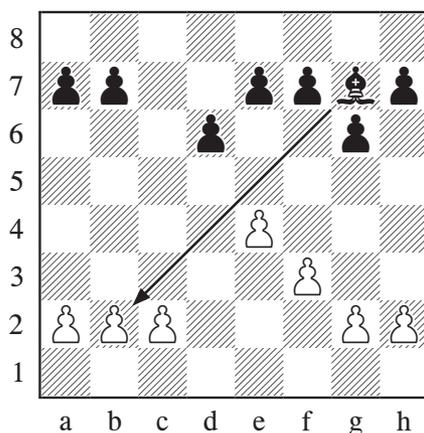


The Dragon is defined by the early deployment of Black's dark-squared bishop to g7. This speeds up Black's kingside development and gives him serious counterattacking chances, but it also has a couple of downsides. Black nearly always castles kingside, so White often tries to exploit the 'hook' on g6 by quickly advancing his h-pawn. Black's other potential problem is the d5-square. After developing his bishop to g7 Black does not really want to move his e-pawn, as the d6-pawn will then be weak. White can try to exploit this by moving the c3-knight to d5. This might be played as an attacking measure, to remove the defensive knight on f6, or it could be for positional gains: if Black elects to exchange knights then White will recapture with his e-pawn, intending to exert pressure along the e-file.

Despite these drawbacks, I believe the advantages of Black's set-up are enough to compensate for the risks. Black develops his dark-squared bishop more actively than in other variations of the Sicilian. The critical lines involve White castling queenside, after which the g7-bishop combines attack and defence, covering the dark squares while pointing at White's king, and the b2-pawn in particular. Black also has an extra central pawn and will generally be happy in the endgame.

I will now present what I consider the most important themes of this opening, with some lightly annotated games to illustrate the most important ideas.

1) The Dragon Bishop

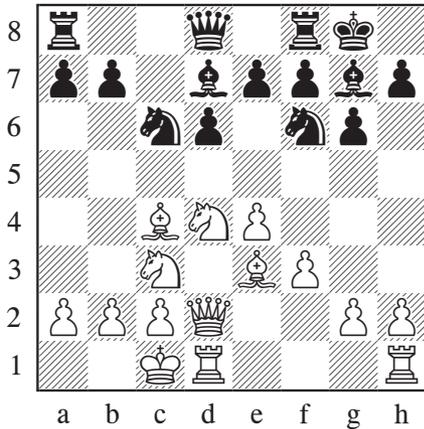


We will start with a couple of games in which White completely underestimates the power of the g7-bishop.

Milenko Lojanica – Gawain Jones

Victoria 2009

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♘f6
5.♗c3 g6 6.♙e3 ♙g7 7.f3 ♗c6 8.♚d2 0-0
9.♙c4 ♙d7 10.0-0-0



10...♙b8!?

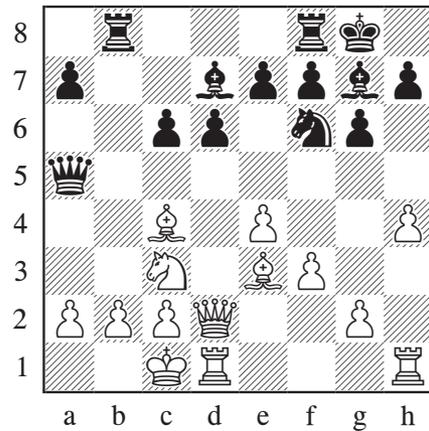
This move introduces the Chinese Dragon, an interesting and relatively new way of fighting against the Yugoslav Attack.

10...♙c8 is how I recommend playing in this book.

11.♗xc6? bxc6

As you will see in variation B3 of Chapter 12 (page 246), this change in the pawn structure gives Black a nice position even when he has spent a tempo putting the rook on c8. Here White is really asking for trouble with the rook already on the b-file.

12.h4 ♚a5



13.♗b1??

My opponent must have been worried about my attack and so decided a queen exchange would be his safest approach. However, the g7-bishop is now allowed into the game.

13...♗xe4!

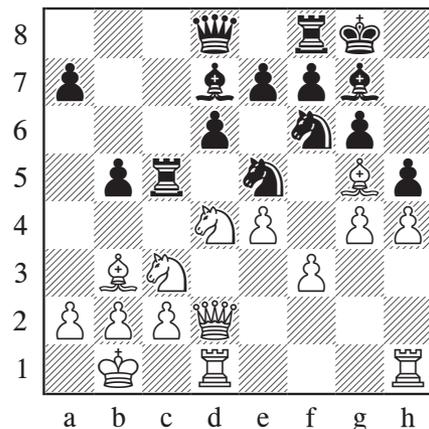
The mate threat on b2 will cost White his queen.

0-1

Ismet Burovic – Peter Schreiner

Zadar 2014

1.e4 c5 2.♗f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♘f6
5.♗c3 g6 6.♙c4 ♙g7 7.♙e3 0-0 8.f3 ♗c6
9.♚d2 ♙d7 10.♙b3 ♙c8 11.h4 h5 12.0-0-0
♗e5 13.♙g5 ♙c5 14.♗b1 b5 15.g4



15...a5

15...hxg4 is my recommendation, as detailed in Chapter 1.

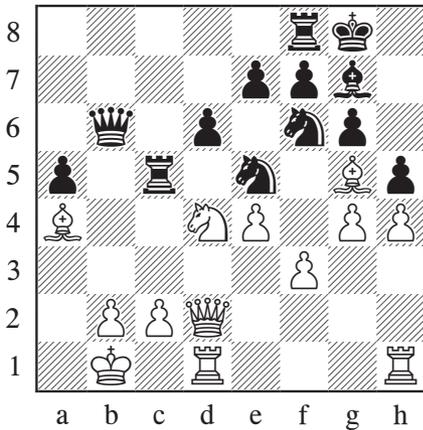
16.a4?

This simply accelerates Black's attack.

16.gxh5 and 16.♙xf6 are both much more critical.

16...bxa4 17.♖xa4 ♗xa4 18.♙xa4 ♜b6!

Black increases the pressure.



19.gxh5 ♖xf3!

We should always be looking out for this blow. Black sacrifices a piece to open up the sleeping g7-bishop.

20.♞e3

White declines the piece.

Instead after 20.♖xf3 ♖xe4 21.♞c1 ♖c3† 22.♙a1 ♖xa4 Black regains the piece and has an extra pawn together with his huge attack.

20...♖xd4 21.♞xd4 ♖g4

White threw in the towel. Indeed, as Chris Ward notes, 22.♞d2 ♞c4 would pick up a rook.

0-1

2) The ...d5 break

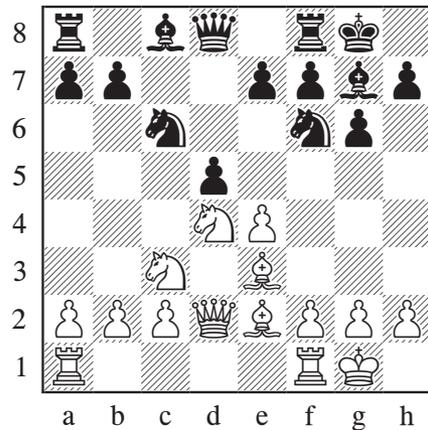
It is often said that if Black manages to counter in the centre with ...d5 in the Sicilian, then he has at least equalized. This is because White's main trump in the Sicilian is his extra space. In the Dragon, the ...d5 break also rids Black of any problems with the d5-square. This will be my recommended approach in many lines, particularly the 9.0-0-0 Yugoslav Attack and Classical Variation, both of which are covered in the second volume.

Aimen Rizouk – Gawain Jones

Hinckley 2012

1.e4 c5 2.♖f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♖xd4 ♖f6 5.♖c3 g6 6.♙e2 ♙g7 7.0-0 ♖c6 8.♙e3 0-0 9.♞d2 d5

Though it is not forced, I think this central break is the critical test of White's slower lines.



10.exd5 ♖xd5 11.♖xc6 bxc6

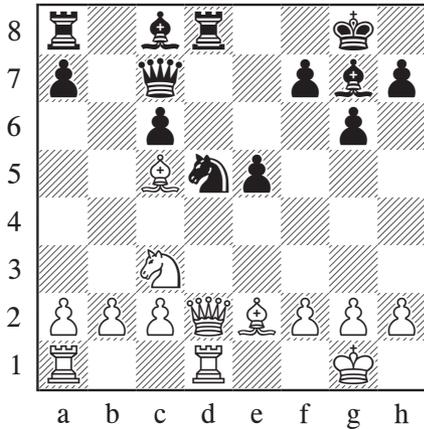
This is a common structure after our central break. Black's queenside pawns are split and White has an outpost on c5, but Black has sufficient counterplay down the b-file and in the centre.

12.♞fd1 ♞c7 13.♙d4

White spends a tempo to try and block in the g7-bishop but it will only be temporary.

13...e5 14.♙c5 ♜d8

This type of position is more usual with the white king on the queenside. His king might look more vulnerable there, but at least then White can try attacking on the kingside.



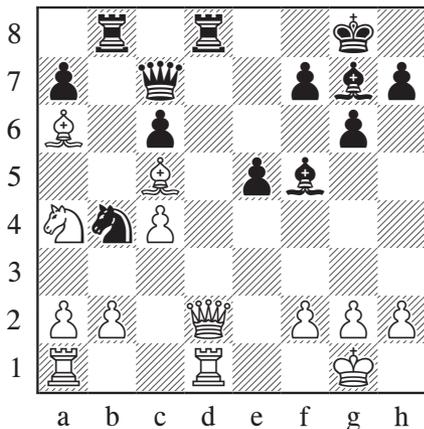
15.♘a4?

My grandmaster opponent has trouble finding a plan. Black's position was already comfortable but now White gets into a lot of trouble.

15...♙f5 16.♙a6 ♜ab8 17.c4?

Going from bad to worse.

17...♘b4

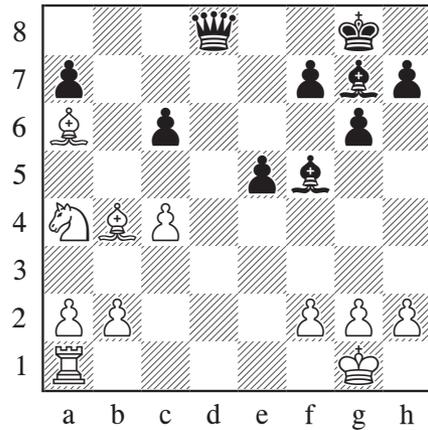


18.♞xd8†

18.♙d6 ♜xd6 19.♞xd6 ♞xd6 20.♞xd6 ♙f8 followed by taking on a6 leaves Black with two huge bishops for the rook.

18...♞xd8 19.♞xd8† ♞xd8 20.♙xb4

Black's material advantage is enough to win slowly, but White's poor coordination and vulnerable kingside make the win easy.



20...♙c2 21.b3 e4 22.♞e1 ♙d4

0-1

3) Exchange sacrifices

If you want to enjoy your time playing the Dragon, you need to get used to sacrificing your rook for a minor piece. This can happen in many forms.

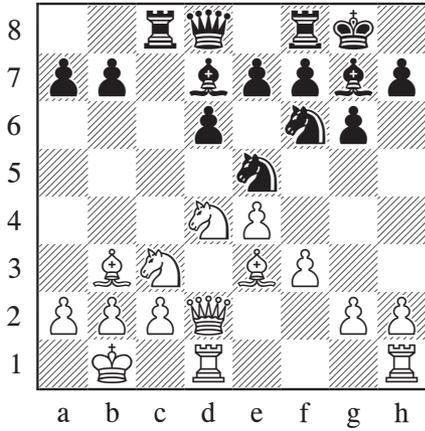
3.1) Sacrifice on c3

This is a common motif throughout the Sicilian and the sacrifice one generally thinks of first. Black damages White's structure and weakens his king's defences. I should point out that in the Burnett Variation (covered in Chapter 10) Black actually sacrifices the rook on c4, but the themes are extremely similar.

Vassily Ivanchuk – Magnus Carlsen

Bilbao 2008

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♘f6
 5.♗c3 g6 6.♙e3 ♙g7 7.f3 ♗c6 8.♚d2 0-0
 9.♙c4 ♙d7 10.0-0-0 ♖c8 11.♙b3 ♘e5
 12.♙b1



12...a6!?

This little pawn move became fashionable a few years ago. I feel it must be too slow to be objectively best, but it's certainly interesting.

Later in the book I will recommend the more established 12...♗c4.

13.♖he1

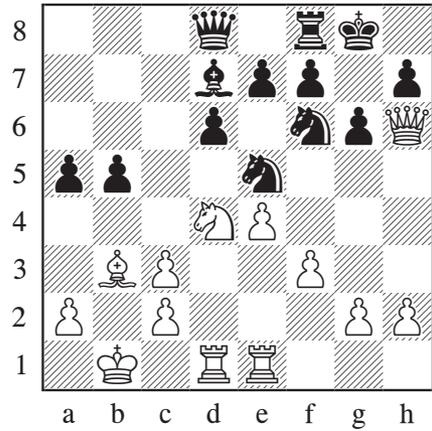
This is a solid move, but 13.h4 must be the critical test. In the Yugoslav Attack every tempo is vital.

13...b5 14.♙h6 ♙xh6 15.♚xh6 ♖xc3!?

The future World Champion cannot resist the thematic sacrifice.

16.bxc3 a5

Black does not even have a pawn for the sacrificed exchange, but White's king will be vulnerable for a long time. The b3-bishop is also short on squares.

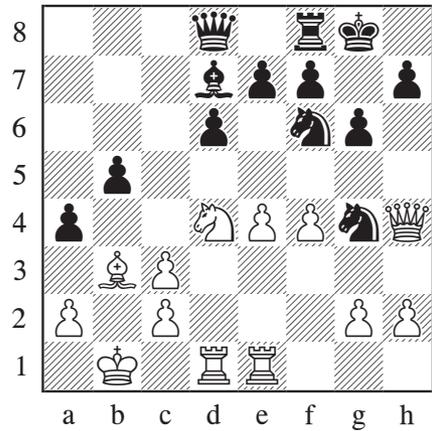


17.f4

Ivanchuk accepts the challenge of an extremely sharp game.

17.a3 ♚c7 18.♚e3 ♖c8 would give Black typical compensation.

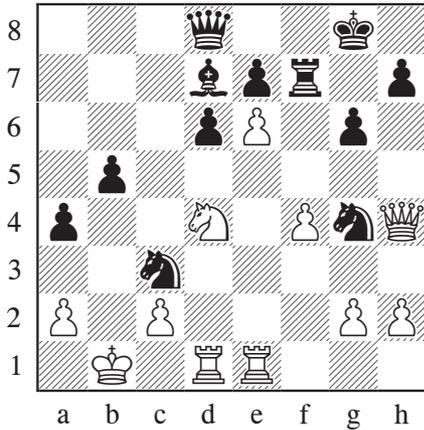
17...♗eg4 18.♚h4 a4



19.♙xf7!?

19.h3 is an alternative approach. 19...axb3 20.♗xb3 (20.cxb3 e5! gives Black good play, as mentioned by Ward.) 20...♗xe4 21.♖xe4 ♗f6 Black has still not managed to pick up any pawns for the exchange but he has much the better structure and long-term pressure on the queenside. Meanwhile White's kingside attack has been halted.

19...♖xf7 20.e5 ♘d5 21.e6 ♘xc3†



22.♔c1

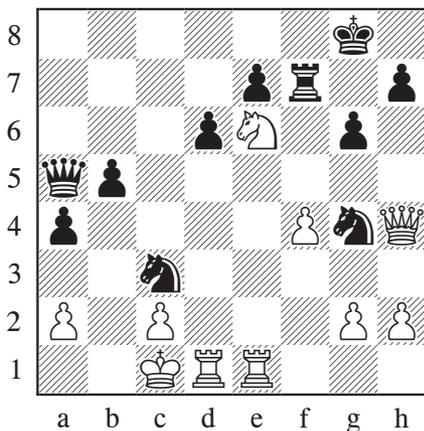
22.♔a1! was the critical test. After 22...♘f6! 23.exf7† ♔xf7 24.♞d3 White has two extra exchanges in return for a pawn, but matters are far from simple. Following 24...♙c8 25.♙g3 b4 White will have to give back one exchange on c3 to slow Black's attack.

22...♙e6

22...♘f6!? was still interesting.

23.♘xe6 ♙a5

Ivanchuk now decides Black's attack is too strong and so forces the draw.



24.♙xg4 ♘xa2† 25.♔b2 ♙c3† 26.♔xa2 ♙xc2† 27.♔a1 ♙c3† 28.♔b1 ♙b3† 29.♔a1 ♙c3†
1/2-1/2

3.2) Sacrifice on g5

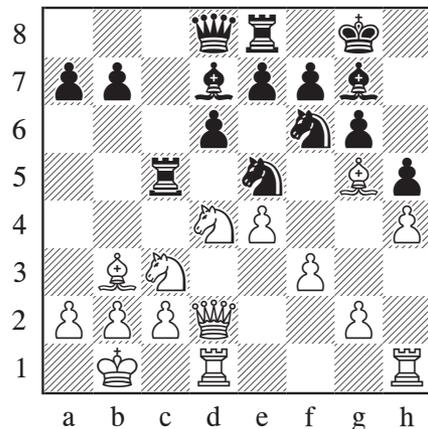
Whereas the sacrifice on c3 is aggressive, the present theme is a defensive idea. The Soltis structures are those with h2-h4 for White and ...h5 for Black. Once those moves have been played, White often puts his bishop on g5 in order to put pressure on the f6-knight and e7-pawn. Black puts his rook on c5 and gets ready to relieve the pressure by taking the bishop, often after White has already sacrificed a couple of pawns to open up lines. The sacrifice deflects White's f-pawn, preventing f4-f5 ideas, and gives Black a strong outpost on e5.

Teimour Radjabov – Magnus Carlsen

Baku 2008

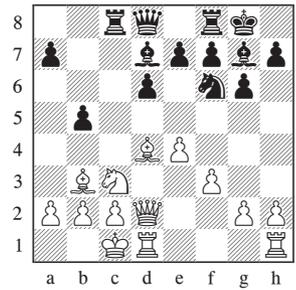
1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 g6 6.♙e3 ♙g7 7.f3 ♘c6 8.♙d2 0-0 9.♙c4 ♙d7 10.♙b3 ♞c8 11.h4 h5 12.0-0-0 ♘e5 13.♙g5 ♞c5 14.♔b1 ♞e8

I actually recommend 14...b5 but the theme illustrated in this game is relevant to our repertoire.



Chapter 9

Topalov Variation



Other 13th Moves

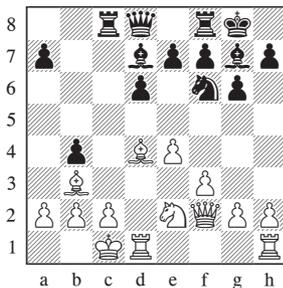
Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♘f6 5.♗c3 g6 6.♙e3 ♙g7 7.f3 0-0 8.♚d2
 ♗c6 9.♙c4 ♙d7 10.0-0-0 ♗xd4 12.♙xd4

12...b5

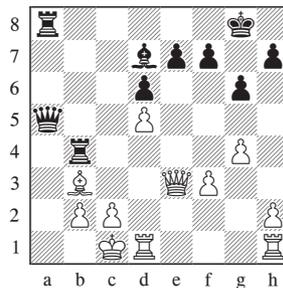
A) 13.g4	182
B) 13.e5 dxe5 14.♙xe5 ♙c6	183
B1) 15.♚e3	184
B2) 15.♚xd8	185
C) 13.a3	186
D) 13.♙xa7 b4	188
D1) 14.♗e2	189
D2) 14.♗d5 ♗xd5 15.exd5 ♚a5	190
D21) 16.♙d4?!	191
D22) 16.♚e3	193

note to move 13



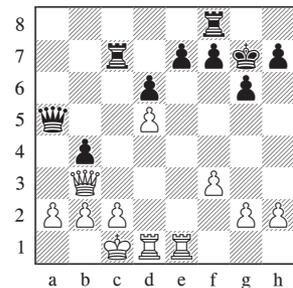
14...♚c7!N

C) after 23.♚e3



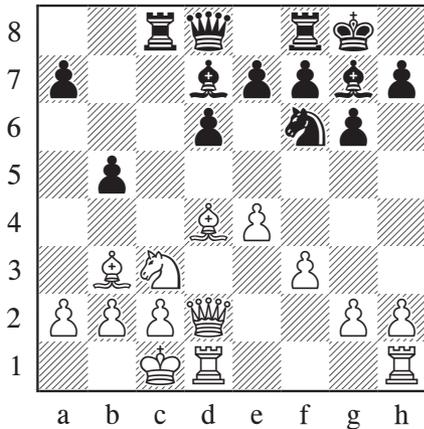
23...♙b5!N

D22) note 20.♙d4



20...♚c5!N

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♘f6
 5.♗c3 g6 6.♙e3 ♙g7 7.f3 0-0 8.♚d2 ♘c6
 9.0-0-0 ♙d7 10.♙c4 ♝c8 11.♙b3 ♗xd4
 12.♙xd4 b5

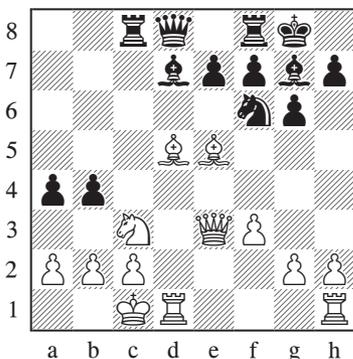


We have spent the last two chapters examining 13.♗d5 and 13.h4. In this chapter we will round up White's remaining options against the Topalov Variation, the four main ones being **A) 13.g4**, **B) 13.e5**, **C) 13.a3** and **D) 13.♙xa7**.

13.♖b1 a5 is likely to transpose to variation C after 14.a3.

Instead 14.a4? bxa4 15.♗xa4 ♙xa4 16.♙xa4 ♝c4♣ is a trap we've seen already, while 14.♗d5? would simply lose material after 14...a4!N.

13.♚e3 a5! It looks like White's last move prevented this but his queen turns out to be unfortunately placed. 14.e5 (14.♙b6N ♙h6!♣) 14...dxe5 15.♙xe5 a4 16.♙d5 b4



White found nothing better than 17.♙xf6 in Gaulupeau – Guerin, Paris 2010, but after the simple 17...♙xf6N 18.♗e4 ♙g7-+ Black's initiative is obviously too strong.

13.♚f2

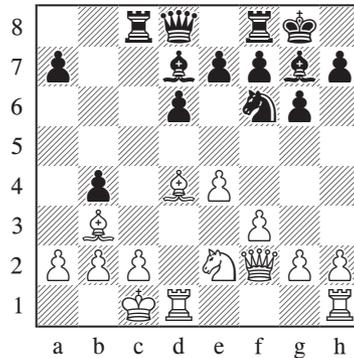
White is lining up pressure on the a7-pawn but it is hard to understand the logic when he could just take it immediately.

13...b4 14.♗e2!?

This is the usual follow-up but now the queen is misplaced.

14.♗d5 ♗xd5 15.♙xg7 ♖xg7 16.exd5 was seen in M. Lopez – A. Martinez, Santa Cruz 2010, and now the normal 16...a5N is pleasant for Black.

Perhaps White should try 14.♙xf6N although 14...bxc3 (both recaptures on f6 are also fine) 15.♙xg7 ♖xg7 16.♚xa7 cxb2♣ 17.♖xb2 ♝a8 18.♚d4♣ f6 offers Black good compensation.



14...♚c7!N

Black will follow up with ...a5, with excellent prospects on the queenside. Note that White cannot grab the a-pawn:

15.♙xa7? ♙e6 16.♝d2 ♙xb3 17.axb3 ♝a8-+

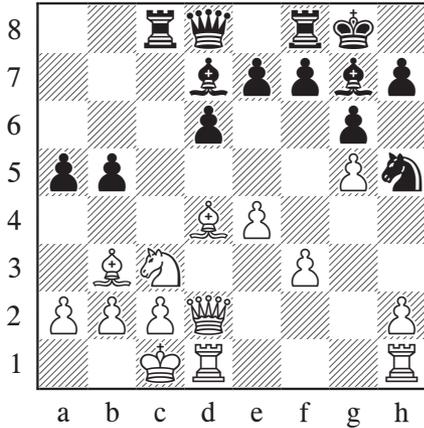
A) 13.g4

This pawn advance never puts any pressure on Black in the Topalov Variation.

13...a5 14.g5

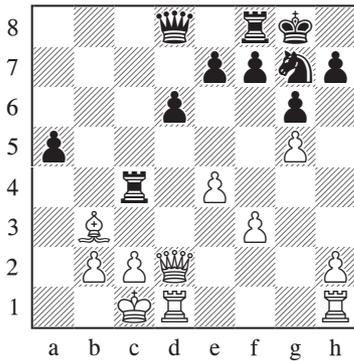
14.a3 b4 gives White an inferior version of variation C of Chapter 8, as g2-g4 is less useful than h2-h4.

14...♖h5



15.♕xg7

Another game continued: 15.a4?! bxa4 16.♖xa4 ♕xa4 17.♕xa4 ♖c4 18.♕xg7 ♖xg7 19.♕b3



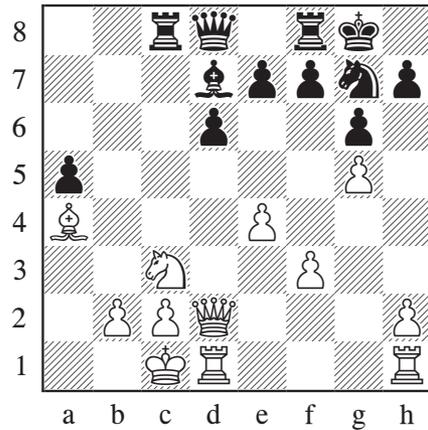
This was Gonzalez Roca – Gashimov, Ourense 2009, another game by the much-missed elite GM. Here I think the most accurate continuation is 19...♖c5N, intending to attack with ...♗b6, ...♖b8 and ...a4. Moreover, if White survives the onslaught then his weak kingside structure may give him problems in a future endgame.

15...♖xg7 16.a4?!

16.a3 should be preferred although Black is still doing well.

16...bxa4 17.♕xa4

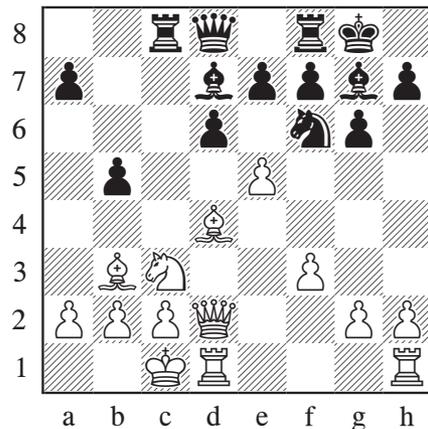
17.♖xa4 was seen in Ahmed Holi Ali – Ankit, Dubai 2013, and now 17...♕xa4N 18.♕xa4 ♗b6 is similar to the Gashimov game above.



17...♖xc3! 18.♕xd7 ♖c5 19.♕a4 ♗b6

Black's queenside initiative was already decisive in Somborski – Roganovic, Sombor 2009.

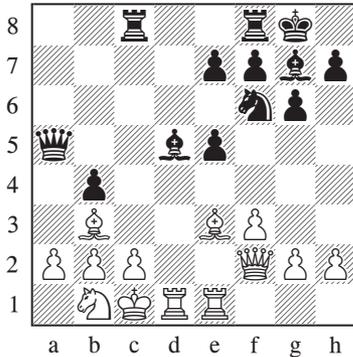
B) 13.e5



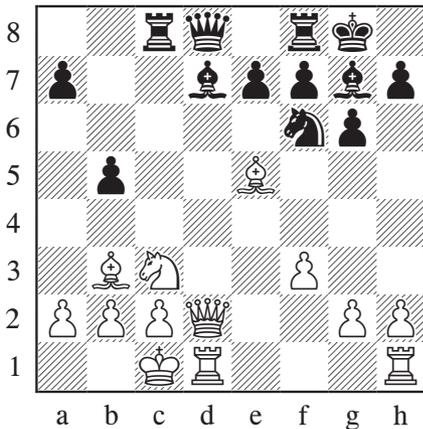
The immediate central break does not put much pressure on Black.

13...dxe5 14.♙xe5

14.♙xa7?! I can see some logic behind first giving the e-pawn and only then capturing on a7, but Black can reopen the long diagonal whenever he wishes. The following game featured logical play on both sides: 14...♖c7 15.♙e3 ♙c6 16.♖e2 ♖a5 17.♗he1 b4 18.♘b1 ♙d5 19.♖f2

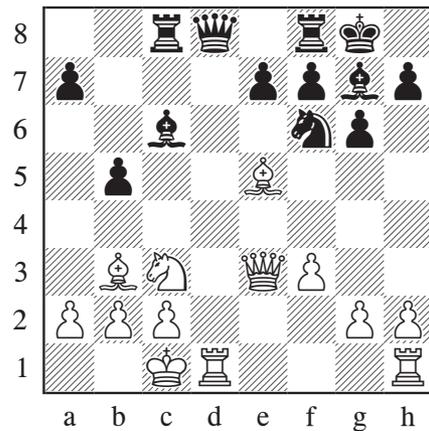


This was Epstein – J. Shahade, Denver 1998, and here 19...♙xb3!N 20.axb3 ♘d5→ would have been crushing, as White's position is terribly passive.

**14...♙c6**

From this position White may try **B1) 15.♖e3** or **B2) 15.♖xd8**. The latter is more prudent, as Black's attack is coming quickly.

15.♖g5 ♖b6 reaches a position where Black has scored 6/6 so far. The following game illustrates the play rather nicely: 16.♙d4 ♖b7 17.h4 a5 18.a3 b4 19.axb4 axb4 20.♘b1 ♖a6 21.h5 ♙a4 22.♙xa4 ♖xa4 23.♗d2 ♗fd8 Black was winning in Esenov – Smerdon, Dresden 2008.

B1) 15.♖e3

Compared with the note above, Black can no longer put the queen on b6, but he still has excellent chances.

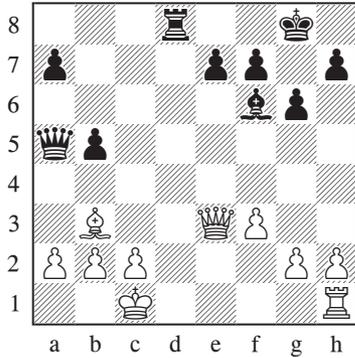
15...♖a5 16.a3

Black has a crushing score against most other moves.

16.♘b1 b4 17.♙xf6 ♙xf6 18.♘d5 ♙xd5 19.♗xd5 ♖c7 20.h4 ♗fd8 has been seen a few times. Black is dominating the opposite-coloured-bishop middlegame, as he can block in the b3-bishop with ...e6 whenever he chooses.

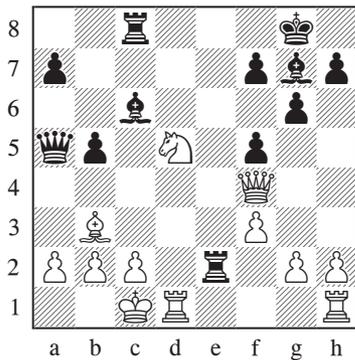
16.h4 b4 17.♙xf6 (17.♘e2 gives Black a pleasant choice between 17...♙a4 as played in Y. Zhao – Perelman, Aurora 2013, and 17...♘g4!N 18.fxg4 ♖xe5) 17...♙xf6 18.♘d5 ♙xd5 19.♗xd5 ♖c7 is similar to the note above.

16.♙xf6?! Even future GMs are not immune to ceding the dark squares! 16...♙xf6 17.♘d5 ♙xd5 18.♞xd5 ♞fd8 19.♞xd8† ♞xd8



20.f4 ♞c7 21.c3 b4 22.♞d1 ♞xd1† 23.♙xh1 bxc3 24.bxc3 ♙xc3† Neiksans – Vocaturo, Balaguer 2010.

16.♙d4 was played against a Dragon expert and White did not last long: 16...♞fe8 17.♙xf6?! exf6 18.♞f4 f5 19.♘d5 ♞e2† It is worth seeing the remaining moves:

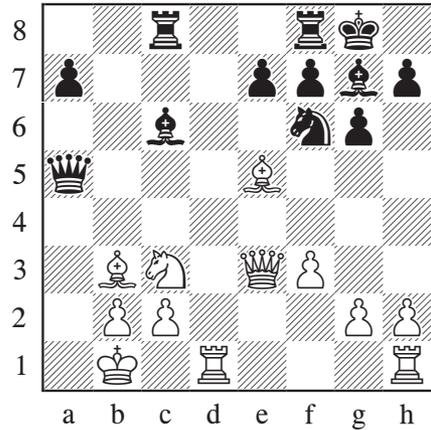


20.g4? ♙xd5 21.♞xd5 ♞exc2†! 22.♙xc2 ♞xa2 23.♞xb5 ♞a1† 24.♙d2 ♞xh1 25.♞g3 ♞d8† 26.♙e2 ♞c1 27.♙d3 ♞e8† 28.♙f2 f4 29.♞g2 ♞e1# Bertholee – Tiviakov, Netherlands 2000.

16...b4 17.axb4 ♞xb4

17...♞a1†N is an easy route to equality if Black wants it: 18.♙d2 ♞xb2 19.♘d5 ♘d5 (19...♘e4†!? 20.♞xe4 ♙xe5∞) 20.♙xb2 ♘xe3 21.♙xg7 ♙xg7 22.♙xe3 With a level ending.

18.♙b1 ♞a5



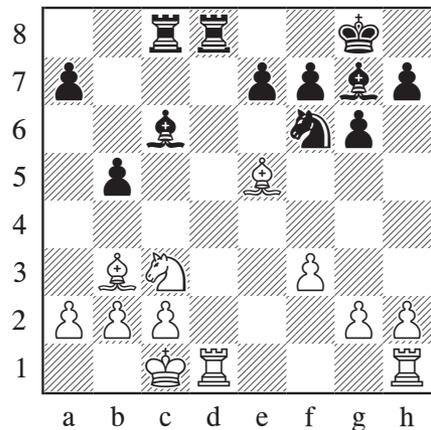
19.♙xf6?

I don't know why so many players are eager to give up the dark-squared bishop in this line. White should prefer something like 19.♞he1N with approximate equality.

19...♙xf6 20.♘d5 ♙xd5 21.♞xd5 ♞c7 22.♞hd1 ♞xh2†

Padilla – Cordova, Lima 2002.

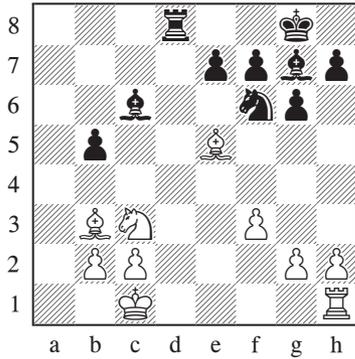
B2) 15.♞xd8 ♞fxd8



16.♞xd8†

White has also tried chipping away at Black's queenside immediately: 16.a4 a6 (This is the simplest reply, although 16...bxa4!? 17.♙xa4

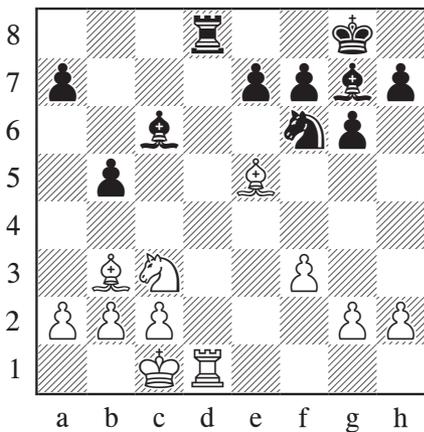
♙xa4 18.♘xa4 ♙h6† 19.♚b1 ♘d5 20.♙d4 ♘e3 is also possible if you would prefer some imbalance in the position; see Baramidze – Polzin, Austria 2006.) 17.♞xb5 axb5 18.♞xd8† ♞xd8



19.♞d1 ♙h6† 20.♚b1 ♞xd1† 21.♘xd1 The endgame is equal, although Aroshidze – Svetushkin, Kusadasi 2006, is a nice example in which Black managed to grind out a win.

16...♞xd8 17.♞d1

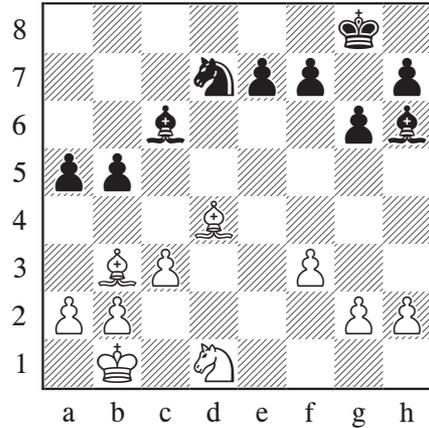
White is simply chopping wood but he has to be careful in the endgame, as Black has the more mobile pawn majority and the b3-bishop might find itself shut out of play.



17...♙h6†! 18.♚b1 ♞xd1† 19.♘xd1 ♘d7 20.♙d4 a5 21.c3 21.c4 b4! favours Black.

White's best seems to be 21.♘c3 e6 22.a4 b4 with balanced play.

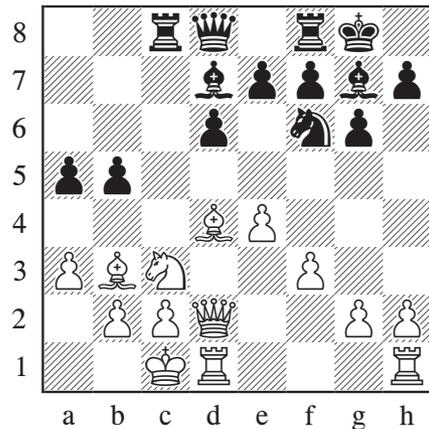
In N. Mamedov – Kudrin, Moscow 2005, Black could have fought for the advantage with:



21...♙f4N 22.h3 a4 23.♙c2 f5!♞

White's pieces are rather passive.

C) 13.a3 a5



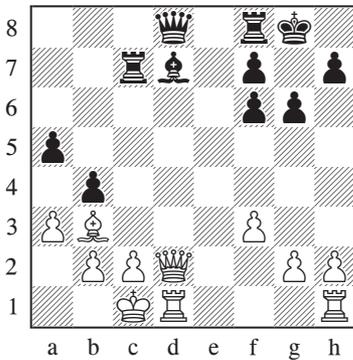
14.♚b1

White adopts a defensive approach, hoping to soak up the pressure and eventually exploit his extra pawn (after ...b4).

14.♘d5 ♘xd5 15.♙xg7 ♚xg7 16.exd5 transposes to variation B of Chapter 7.

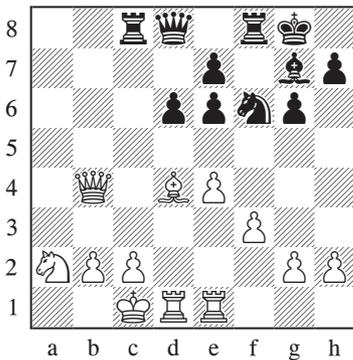
14.h4 leads back to variation C of Chapter 8, although it may well transpose again to variation B22 of Chapter 7 after 14...b4 15.axb4 axb4 16.♘d5 ♘xd5 17.♙xg7 ♖xg7 18.exd5 ♜g8.

14.e5 has a lot of similarities to 13.e5 and likewise should not trouble Black. 14...dxe5 15.♙xe5 Here we don't have to worry about the pressure on the d7-bishop and can just get on with it on the queenside. 15...b4 16.♙xf6 ♙xf6 17.♘e4 ♖c7 18.♘xf6† exf6



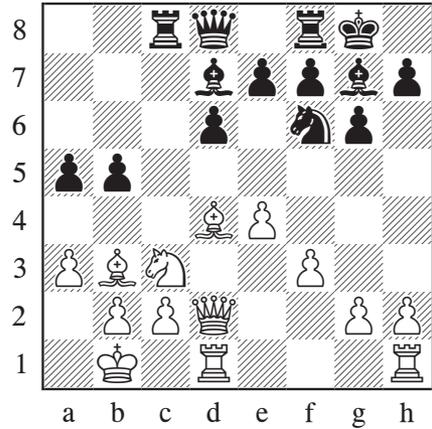
19.a4 ♖c8 20.♖he1 ♙e6 21.♙xe6 fxe6= rated rko – el-shaddai, engine game 2012.

14.♖he1 is a rare approach among humans, but the positions resemble those in the main line (after 14.♜b1). 14...b4 15.axb4 axb4 16.♘a2 ♙e6 17.♙xe6 fxe6 18.♗xb4 Here I like the human approach of:



18...♘d7!?!N 19.♙xg7 (after 19.♗b3 ♘c5

20.♙xc5 ♖xc5 21.♗xe6† ♜h8 White may be two pawns up but Black has a vicious initiative) 19...♜xg7 20.♖e3 ♖b8 21.♗c4 e5 Black has full compensation.

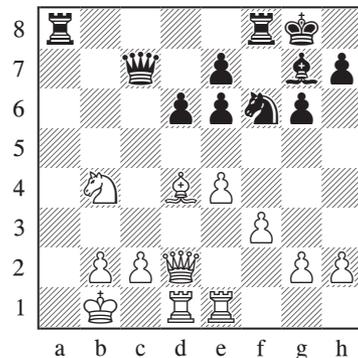


14...b4 15.axb4 axb4 16.♘a2

16.♘d5 does not make any sense here as the b4-pawn isn't dropping. 16...♘xd5 17.♙xg7 ♖xg7 18.exd5 This position could actually be reached via the 13.♘d5 move order, but with White having made the strange decision to play ♜b1 rather than capturing the b4-pawn. Black will get strong play down the a-file. (18.♗xd5?! ♜g8† is even worse for White.)

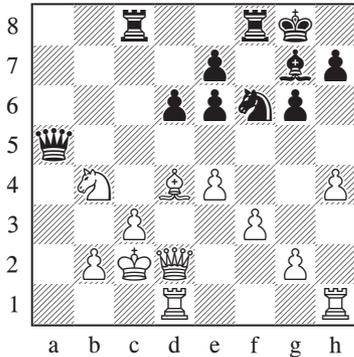
16...♗c7 17.♘xb4

17.♖he1 is one of those curious moves that engines pick up on and play in lots of games, yet it remains almost untouched in tournament play. 17...♙e6 18.♙xe6 fxe6 19.♘xb4 ♖a8 Black has good compensation. One example continued:

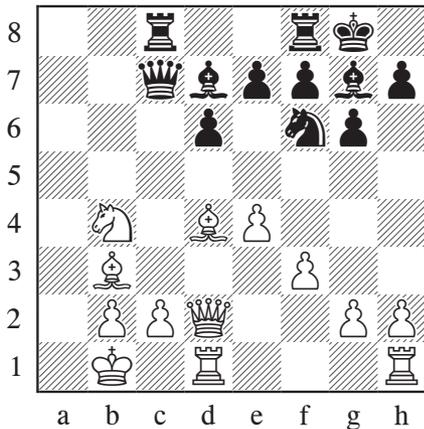


20.c3 ♖d7 21.♙xg7 ♔xg7 22.b3 ♞a5 23.♚b2 ♞fa8 24.♞a1 ♜c5 25.♞xa5 ♞xa5 26.h4 ♞a7 27.♞b1 h6 28.g4 e5= Trembecki – P. Nagy, email 2009.

17.h4 was tried in another correspondence game. Black can proceed with the same plan: 17...♙e6 18.♙xe6 fxe6 19.♞xb4 ♞a8 20.c3 ♞a5 21.♚c2 ♞ac8



22.♚b3 I can't imagine many players being happy having to put their king on such a square! 22...♖d7 23.♙xg7 ♔xg7 24.♞a1 ♞b5= Olofsson – Grigoryev, email 2009.



17...♞a8

Black's queenside play obviously gives him fantastic compensation for the pawn. Finding the right defensive moves in a practical game would be difficult, and even in engine games Black has the upper hand.

18.♖d5?!

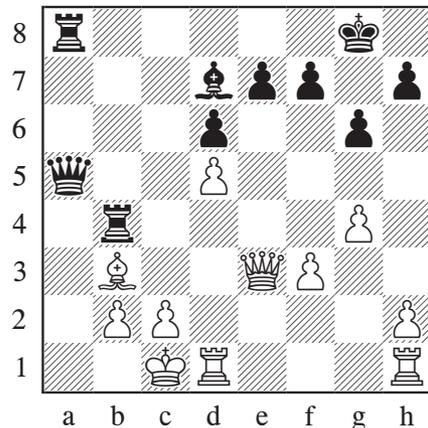
Not the best move, but it was played in both of the over-the-board examples on my database.

18...♖xd5 19.exd5

19.♙xd5 ♙xd4 20.♞xd4 ♞a4 21.♞c3 ♞a7= Hong Xing – Sun Fanghui, China 2013.

19...♙xd4 20.♞xd4 ♞fb8 21.g4 ♞a5 22.♚c1 ♞b4 23.♞e3

In Sulc – K. Saric, Djakovo 2006, Black should not have been in a hurry to check on a1 and take on b2. A stronger move (though by no means the only winning continuation) would have been:



23...♙b5!N

Preventing White's king from fleeing to the kingside. A similar motif can be found earlier on page 154.

D) 13.♙xa7

This can be compared with the lines in Chapter 7 where Black gives up a pawn on the queenside. The structure is slightly different but the general evaluation is the same: Black obtains full compensation.

13...b4