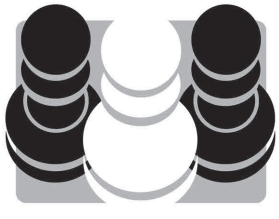
Grandmaster Repertoire 19

Beating Minor Openings

By

Victor Mikhalevski



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Preface

Dear Chess Friend,

I would like to begin by telling you a short story of how this book was born. Some time after my previous work, *Grandmaster Repertoire 13 – The Open Spanish*, was published, I was approached by Quality Chess about writing a repertoire book on the Slav Defence, while my friend Boris Avrukh was considering a book on the Anti-Grünfeld. However, after a discussion between Quality Chess, Boris and myself, we realized it would make much more sense if Boris wrote about the Slav, which is part of his opening repertoire, leaving me to cover the Anti-Grünfeld, which I have faced in many games. The readers have already received Avrukh's great book on the Classical Slav; whereas my Anti-Grünfeld project expanded into the book you are now holding in your hands (or viewing on your electronic device).

The Anti-Grünfeld is a serious subject requiring specialist knowledge, but the Quality Chess team and I agreed that it was too narrow a topic to fill an entire book. The subject matter was therefore widened into a complete repertoire against all "Minor Openings". For the purposes of this book, a "Minor Opening" will be defined as any recognized opening that does not begin with 1.d4 or 1.e4 – notwithstanding the fact that many such openings which begin with 1.c4 or 1.♘f3 are not that minor at all.

In order to satisfy the needs of a wider audience, I ended up covering three different systems against the chameleonic 1.♘f3. Obviously there is my specialist subject of 1...♘f6 2.c4 g6, including the Anti-Grünfeld; but there is also 1...♘f6 2.c4 b6 to satisfy Queen's Indian players; as well as 1...d5 for those who are willing to play the black side of a Queen's Gambit in the event of 2.d4.

Considering the multitude of possible transpositions to other openings (especially 1.d4 openings), it was never going to be possible to cater for every possible repertoire preference. However, with three distinct repertoires against 1.♘f3, I have taken every reasonable step to ensure that the majority of readers will have an option that fits with their existing repertoire. I have endeavoured to consider all logical move orders and have pointed out transpositions whenever I spotted them, which I hope will simplify the reader's task.

I have to admit that when I started working on this project, I had no idea how much time it would require. However, now the process is at an end, I have no doubt that it has been worth the effort. I hope that this book will serve you well for many years to come.

Victor Mikhalevski
Beer-Sheva, August 2016

Contents

Introduction

How does one go about constructing a repertoire against a vast assortment of irregular opening systems? When writing this book, I generally relied on the rule that if White does not occupy the centre with his pawns, then Black should take the opportunity to do so himself. I have therefore chosen to recommend active, space-gaining options for Black, without descending into over-the-top aggressiveness.

The contents of this book have been grouped into five main sections, as summarized below. Before going into details though, I would like to say a little bit about a theme that crops up time and time again in this book.

Reversed Openings

Several parts of the book will see us playing a standard opening with reversed colours and a tempo less. Actually, if we assume that White plays something other than 1.d4 or 1.e4 and Black plays ...d5 and/or ...e5, then White is almost certain to be playing some sort of recognizable Black defence with an extra tempo. Generally I consider this a healthy way to play with Black – although an obvious caveat is that we must avoid extremely sharp variations where the opponent's extra tempo could come with maximum impact. Instead we will play actively but cautiously, with the aim of reaching a position where the extra tempo isn't so relevant. Such positions tend to be objectively equal – but it's a comfortable form of equality for Black, as he will effectively be playing as White, often with a slight space advantage to build upon.

If White plays a reversed opening which allows you to establish an ideal centre with pawns on d5 and e5, then you should almost always take that opportunity. However, it quite often happens that White will allow you to play one of these moves but not the other. For example, in this book I recommend meeting 1.c4 with 1...e5, and 1.f4 with 1...d5. Should a dedicated 1.d4 player feel wary about facing a Sicilian Defence with reversed colours and a tempo less? Will a 1.e4 fan be uneasy playing against the Dutch Defence under the same circumstances? (There are many other examples of a similar theme.)

I actually don't see this as a problem at all. As I mentioned earlier, we will be avoiding any super-sharp variations where White's extra tempo will make a big difference. Instead, Black can simply enjoy the luxury of having a firm foothold in the centre, and he will go on to develop his pieces on natural squares. Even if we have to play a bit more conservatively than we would on the white side of the opening, we should still be able to reach a comfortable position, often with chances to press for a slight advantage. A strong player should possess enough 'chess culture' to handle positions and structures which lie outside of his normal repertoire.

Having dealt with the subject of reversed openings, I will now tell you a bit about the contents of each of the five sections of the book.

Part 1 – Various 1st Moves

This section comprises four chapters, starting with White's weird first moves and building up to the semi-mainstream options of 1.f4, 1.g3 and 1.b3, the last of which remains a relatively common occurrence even at GM level. After 1...e5 2.♗b2 ♘c6 3.e3, I have chosen the solid but

active 3...♘f6 rather than 3...d5 – virtually the only time in the book where I have chosen not to play both ...e5 and ...d5 when given the chance.

Part 2 – 1.c4 e5

This is the biggest section of the book, spanning eight chapters and over 150 pages. As I mentioned earlier, I recommend meeting 1.c4 with 1...e5. We will answer the popular 2.g3 with 2...c6 in order to occupy the centre with ...d5. The other main move is 2.♘c3, when I favour 2...♗b4. Both of these recommendations have been holding up well in recent praxis and analysis, and I found a lot of promising new ideas for Black.

Part 3 – 1.♘f3 d5

1.♘f3 is a nightmare subject from an author's perspective! The problem is that there is no single 'correct' choice against it, as everything depends on your repertoire preferences against other first moves. For example, 1...c5 is a decent move, but only if you are happy to revert to a Sicilian after 2.e4. Besides, 2.c4 would lead to an English Opening where my recommendation of 1...e5 has been avoided.

Anyway, in Chapters 13-18 I have covered 1...d5, which avoids transposing to an unwanted variation of the English while inviting a transposition to a 1.d4 d5 system. The two main options for this book are 2.c4 d4!, gaining space in the centre, and 2.g3, where 2...♗g4! is my preference.

Part 4 – 1.♘f3 ♘f6 and 2...b6

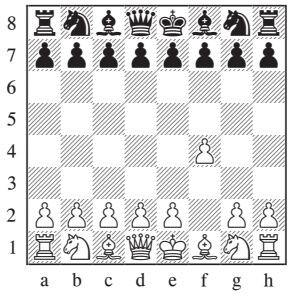
The last two sections of the book are devoted to 1.♘f3 ♘f6, which allows Black to revert to his preferred Indian defence after 2.d4. Chapters 19-22 cover a defensive system with 2...b6 and ...♗b7, which will be suitable for Queen's Indian players. In Chapter 22, our move order allows White to transpose to one of the main lines of the Queen's Indian, which traditionally arises after 1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 b6 4.g3 ♗b7 5.♗g2 ♗e7 6.0–0 0–0. If your current preference in the Queen's Indian is to meet 4.g3 with 4...♗a6 rather than 4...♗b7, then I would suggest learning something about the latter move as well, just in case someone transposes to it by playing d2-d4 at an early stage. It was already a huge challenge to provide three repertoires against 1.♘f3, and trying to cater for all possible repertoire choices within the Queen's Indian would be a step too far.

Part 5 – 1.♘f3 ♘f6 and 2...g6

This section deals with a number of set-ups, but the most theoretically critical by far is the Anti-Grünfeld. I have extensive experience in this domain, and I have provided a lot of ideas which I believe will be of great value to my fellow Grünfeld practitioners. White has several other set-ups that do not involve transposing to mainstream theory with d2-d4. In such cases, I have often recommended playing in the spirit of the Grünfeld with an early ...d5, which may sometimes be supported by ...c6. However, there are other cases where I have opted for a King's Indian set-up with ...d6, where I felt it was more appropriate. Die-hard King's Indian fans may wish to ignore my early ...d5 suggestions and find their own ...d6-based solutions, but I would encourage readers to be flexible in their thinking. A great example is Chapter 24, where I have suggested ...d5 in some places and ...d6 in others, according to what I believe works best against the particular set-up chosen by White.

Chapter 2

Various 1st Moves



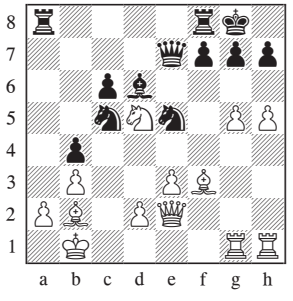
Bird's Opening

Variation Index

1.f4

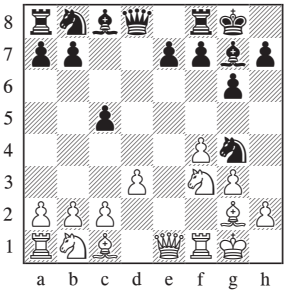
1...d5

B1) after 19.♘xd5!?



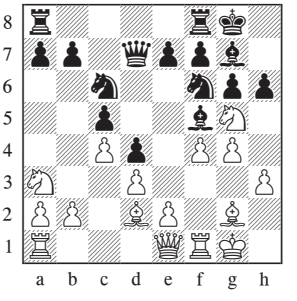
19...♕a7!N

C241) after 10.♗c1



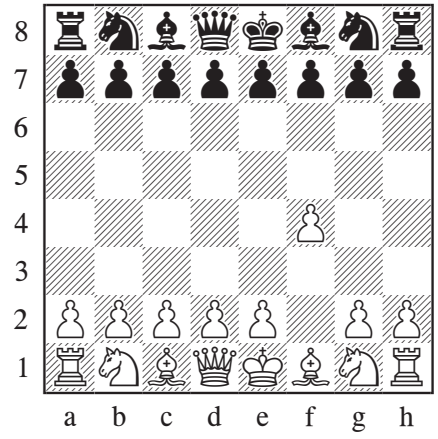
10...h5!N

C242) after 13.g4



13...♗xg4!N

1.f4



This move is named after Henry Bird, an Englishman who popularisized 1.f4 in the 19th century. I must admit that my original intention was to recommend From's Gambit, 1...e5, in an attempt to refute 1.f4 (or at least force White to convert to a King's Gambit!). However, to my surprise I couldn't even find clear equality in any of the lines, and so I had to switch to something more solid.

1...d5

This is the classical reply. Its only drawback is that it gives rise to a reversed Dutch Defence with an extra tempo for White. Nevertheless, Black is certainly not worse, and he has quite good chances to take over the initiative.

We will analyse **A) 2.g3**, **B) 2.b3** and **C) 2.♘f3**, the last of which is the main line by far.

2.c4 d4 3.♘f3 g6 is covered later under the 2.♘f3 move order.

2.e3

White sometimes plays this to avoid 2...♗g4, which is an option against 2.♘f3. It makes no difference to us though.

2...g6 3.c4?!

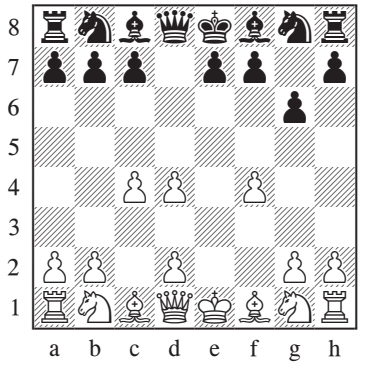
3.♘f3 is better, and is covered later under variation C1; and the same can be said for 3.♗e2 ♗g7 4.♘f3.

3...d4!

The most principled reaction.

4.exd4

Now in Hromadka – Pokorny, Prague 1933, Black should have played:



4...e6!N

I want to recapture on d4 with a knight rather than waste time with the queen. The optimal set-up involves a bishop on g7, with knights on e7 and c6. A likely continuation is:

5.♘f3 ♘e7 6.♘a3 ♘bc6 7.♘c2 ♘f5∓

Black wins back the d-pawn with a clear positional advantage.

A) 2.g3 h5!

This aggressive move looks strong. The same idea can occur in similar positions in the Dutch with colours reversed.

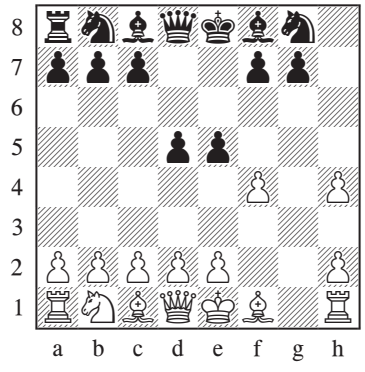
I should mention that Black can also play the simple 2...g6 3.♗g2 ♗g7 4.d3 ♘f6 when White has nothing better than 5.♘f3, transposing to the later variation C12.

3.♘f3

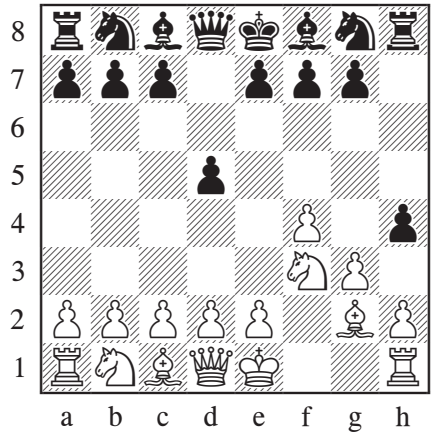
3.♗g2 is unlikely to have any independent value after 3...h4.

3...h4 4.♗g2

4.♘xh4?! allows a powerful positional exchange sacrifice: 4...♖xh4! 5.gxh4 e5 The threat of mate in one causes White a lot of problems.



6.d3 (6.♗g2 ♕xh4† 7.♔f1 ♕xf4† 8.♔g1 ♘f6 9.♕f1 ♕g4 10.♘c3 ♘c6∓ gave Black a huge initiative for the exchange in Komora – Mozes, Szeged 1997) 6...♕xh4† 7.♔d2 ♕xf4† 8.e3 ♕h6 With a pawn for the exchange, plus a strong centre, easy development and a vulnerable king on d2, Black was obviously better in Schuette – Mozes, Berlin 1990.



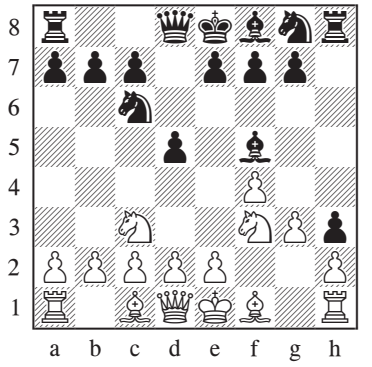
4...♘c6!

The best move, maintaining the tension on the kingside and waiting to see what White does.

5.♘xh4

5.d3 from Dussol – Flear, Saint Affrique 2007, can be met by 5...h3N 6.♗f1 ♘f6 7.e3 ♗f5∓ with slightly better chances for Black.

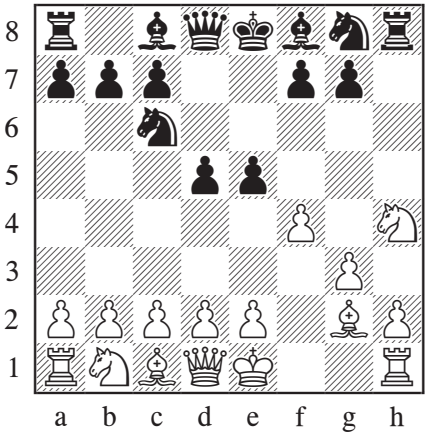
5.♘c3 h3 6.♗f1 ♗f5!? (6...♘f6!? 7.d4 ♗f5 8.e3 e6 9.♗d3 ♗b4 was also better for Black in Crook – E. Tate, Maryland 1989)



7.d3 e6 8.e3 a6! Preventing the ♘b5-d4 manoeuvre. 9.♗e2 ♗c5∓ Once again, Black's chances are to be preferred.

Grabbing the h4-pawn is still dangerous, this time because of:

5...e5!



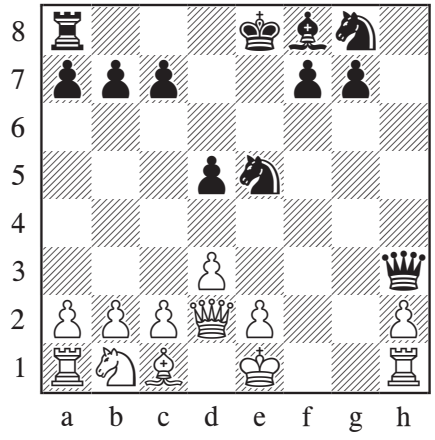
6.fxe5N

6.0–0? exf4 7.e4 ♗c5† soon led to a rout in Weisenburger – Pirrot, Bad Woerishofen 2015.

6...♖xh4! 7.gxh4 ♕xh4† 8.♔f1 ♗h3

Black has a strong initiative and should at least be able to win back the material. For example:

9.d3 ♘xe5 10.♕d2 ♗xg2† 11.♔xg2 ♕g4† 12.♔f1 ♕h3† 13.♔e1

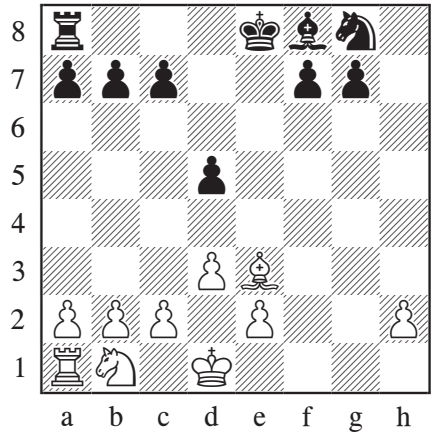


13...♕h4†! 14.♔d1

14.♔f1 ♘g4 15.♕f4 ♗d6∓ is even worse.

14...♘g4 15.♖f1 ♘f2† 16.♖xf2 ♕xf2 17.♕e3† ♕xe3 18.♗xe3

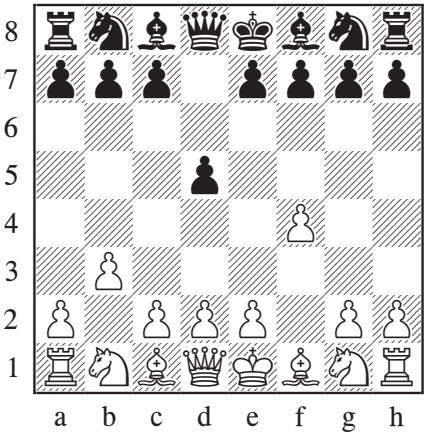
White has avoided the immediate danger to his king, but the weak h-pawn remains a problem for him.



18...♗d6 19.h4 ♘e7∓

With a better endgame for Black.

B) 2.b3



White is going for a mix of Bird's Opening with the Larsen. He wants to take full control over the central e5-square.

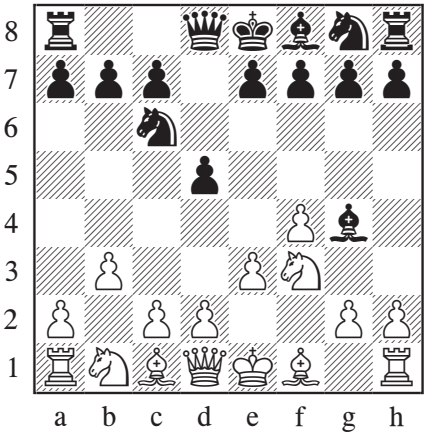
2...♘c6

Black is also determined to fight for the centre. I considered **B1) 3.♘f3** and **B2) 3.♗b2**.

3.e3?! allows 3...e5 when Black is already better.

B1) 3.♘f3 ♗g4 4.e3

4.♗b2 transposes to 4.♘f3 in the notes to variation B2 below.



4...e5! 5.fxe5 ♘xe5 6.♗e2 ♗xf3

This is the most straightforward option.

An interesting alternative is:

6...♘xf3† 7.♗xf3 ♕h4†

This leads to serious complications, although I would say Black is taking the greater risk. In any case, I will present my analysis so that you can make up your own mind.

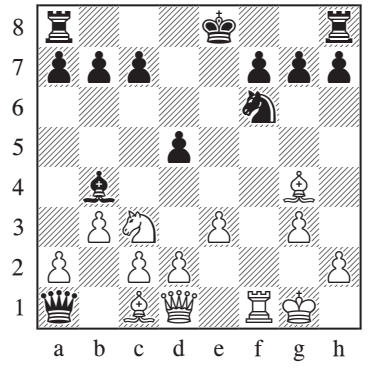
8.g3

8.♔f1? ♘f6∓ Sanchez Piquero – Castro Perez, Gijon 1994.

8...♕f6 9.♗xg4 ♕xa1 10.♘c3

Black has won an exchange but his queen is stranded, so he has to be extremely careful – especially after the following improvement for White:

10...♘f6 11.0–0 ♗b4

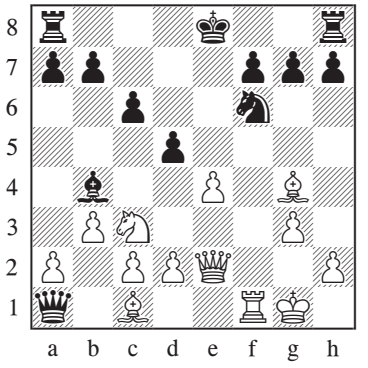


12.♕e2!N

12.♖xf6?! gxf6!N (This novelty is strongest, although 12...♗xc3 13.♖f1 ♗f6∓ was also better for Black in Petro – A. Horvath, Hungary 1995) 13.♘xd5 h5! 14.♘xc7† (14.♗f3? ♗d6–+; 14.♗h3? ♗a3–+ is the idea behind Black's previous move) 14...♔d8 15.♘d5 hxg4 16.♘xb4 ♖c8 and White does not have enough compensation for the two sacrificed exchanges.

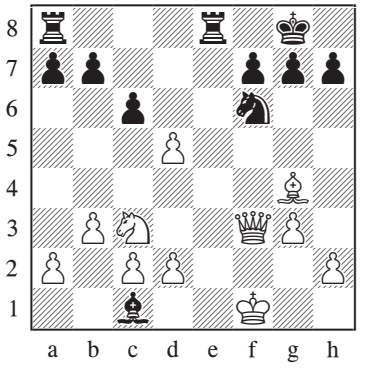
12.♘xd5!?N is interesting, but it only leads to a draw after: 12...♘xd5 13.♕f3 0–0 14.♕xd5 ♕xa2 15.♕xb7 ♕a5 16.♖f5 ♕a1 17.♖f1 ♕a5=.

12...c6 13.e4



13...0–0! 14.♗a3! ♕xf1† 15.♔xf1 ♗xa3 16.exd5 ♖fe8! 17.♕f3 ♗c1!

This clever resource is the only move which enables Black to retain the balance.



18.d3

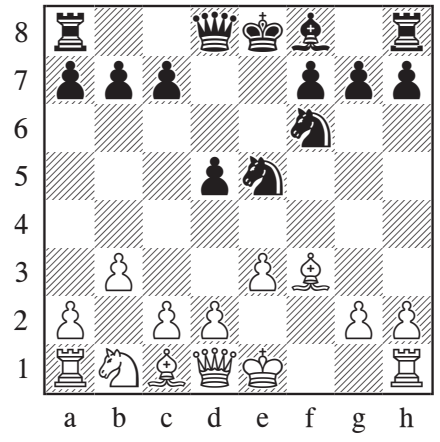
Or 18.dxc6 bxc6 19.d3 ♗d2 20.♘e4 ♘xe4 21.dxe4 ♖ad8 and Black is okay.

18...♗d2 19.♘e4 ♘xg4! 20.♕xg4 f5! 21.♘f6† ♔h8 22.♕xf5 gxf6 23.dxc6 bxc6 24.♕xf6† ♔g8 25.♕xc6

The position remains complicated but approximately balanced.

7.♗xf3 ♘f6

Black simply develops his pieces on natural squares, which seems a much easier approach than the line given in the previous note. We will follow a nice illustrative example.



8.♗b2 ♗d6 9.♘c3 c6 10.♕e2 ♕e7 11.0–0–0 0–0 12.♔b1 b5!

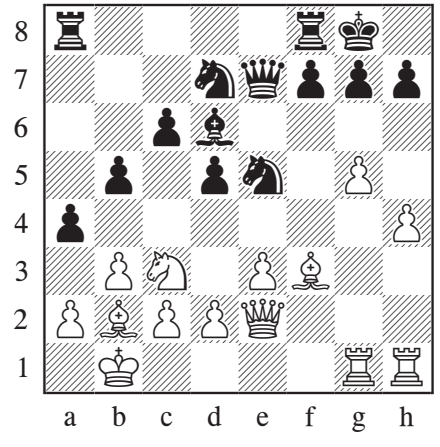
Launching an attack on the queenside. The position is pretty much a diagonal mirror image of the Yugoslav Attack versus the Dragon, but Black has a clear head start in the attacking race.

13.g4 a5 14.g5 ♘fd7 15.h4 a4

Black's attack flows easily.

16.♖dg1?!

This is too slow, but it is hard to offer much advice to White as he simply has a bad position.

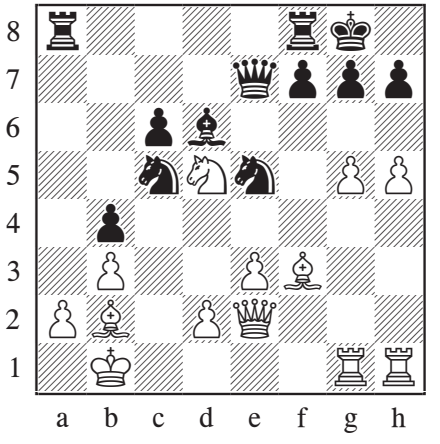


16...axb3 17.cxb3 ♘c5

17...♘b6!? is also good.

18.h5 b4 19.♘xd5!?

This is White's last practical chance. Now in Chernyshov – Svidler, Voronezh (rapid) 2003, Black could have crowned his excellent play up to this point with:



19...♕a7!N 20.♘xb4 ♖fb8

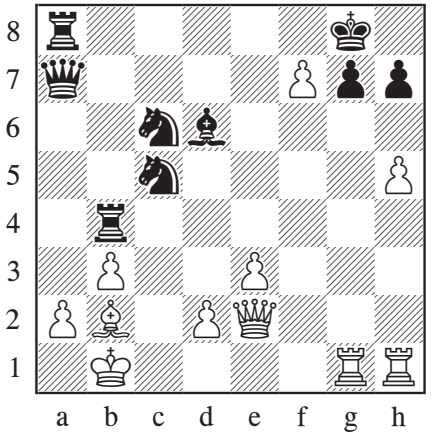
White's only chance is:

21.♗xc6! ♘xc6 22.g6

Perhaps this is what Svidler was worried about, but Black is winning with precise play.

22...♖xb4! 23.gxf7†

23.gxh7† ♔h8 24.♗xg7† ♔xh7 wins easily.



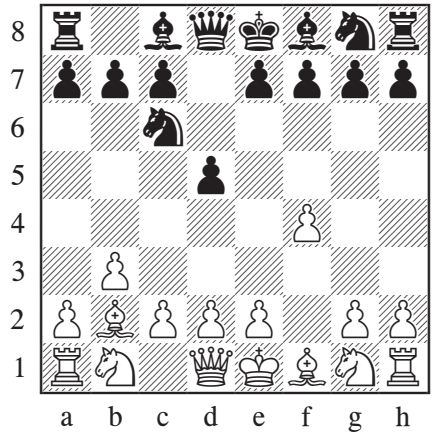
23...♔f8 24.♗xg7† ♔xf7 25.♕f3† ♔e7

But not 25...♔e8?? 26.♕xc6†.

26.♕f6† ♔e8–+

The checks have run out, leaving Black two pieces up and with mating threats of his own.

B2) 3.♗b2



3...♗g4!?

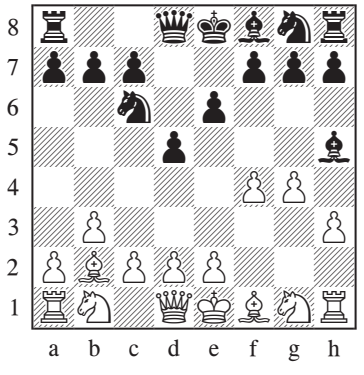
This rare continuation seems to promise Black easy play.

4.g3

4.♘f3 can be answered by 4...♗xf3 5.exf3 ♕d6 6.g3 0–0–0 with a comfortable position for Black, in Sikorova – Sammalvuo, Istanbul 2003.

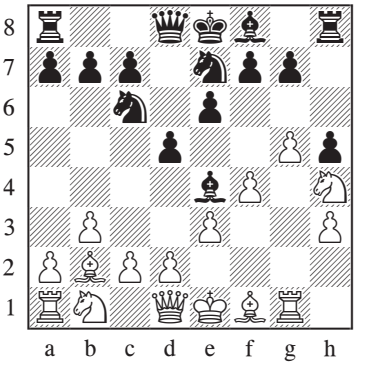
4.h3 ♗h5 5.g4 e6

5...♗g6 is likely to transpose after 6.♘f3 e6. Instead 6.f5? runs into 6...e6! intending 7.e4? (or 7.h4 ♗e7!∓) 7...♕h4† 8.♔e2 exf5 9.exf5 0–0–0!–+ and Black launches a decisive attack.



6.♘f3 ♗g6 7.e3 h5! 8.g5 ♘ge7! 9.♘h4 ♗e4 10.♖g1

Lorincz – P. Petran, Budapest 1996.



10...♘f5!N

This seems like an obvious improvement, leading to a positional edge for Black.

11.♘xf5 ♗xf5∓

4...e5!?

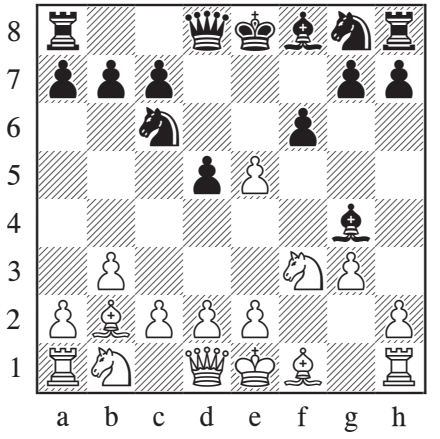
A promising pawn sacrifice.

4...f6!? is a reasonable alternative.

5.fxe5 f6 6.♘f3N

6.♗h3?! occurred in Kupreichik – Yusupov, Yerevan 1982, and now 6...h5!∓N would have given Black a strong initiative, while White experiences problems with development.

The text move is a better try, but I still like Black's prospects after:

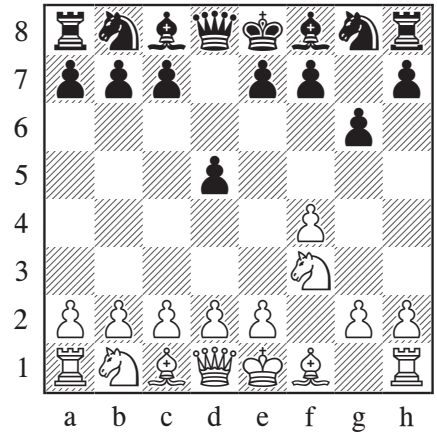


6...♕d7 7.♗g2 0–0–0 8.0–0 h5

With a promising initiative for the sacrificed pawn.

C) 2.♘f3 g6

2...♗g4 is an interesting alternative but I like the classical approach.



Now White must make an important choice, the two main options being **C1) 3.e3** and **C2) 3.g3**.

An unorthodox alternative is:

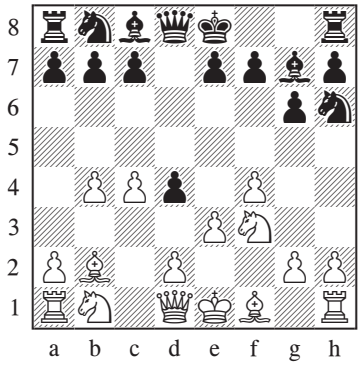
3.c4 d4

The most ambitious reply, although 3...c6 is also fine.

4.b4!?

White is trying to surround and capture the d4-pawn.

4...♗g7 5.♗b2 ♘h6 6.e3



6...e5!

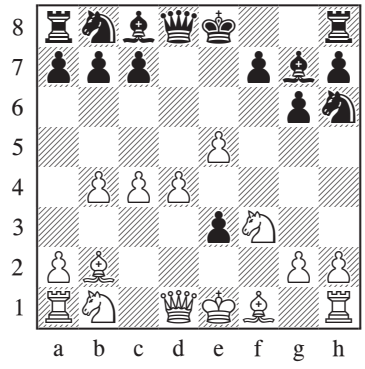
6...c5 7.bxc5 ♘c6 was a reasonable alternative in Vavra – Bazant, Czech Republic 2004, but the text move is more aggressive.

7.fxe5 dxe3 8.d4

8.♗e2 exd2† 9.♘bxd2 0–0 10.0–0 ♘g4 11.♕b3 ♘c6∓

8.dxe3 ♕xd1† 9.♔xd1 ♗e6 10.♘bd2 ♘g4 11.♔e2 ♘d7∓ Black wins back a pawn and obtains better play.

We have been following Zhdanenia – Schulz, email 2012, and here I found a strong idea for Black:



8...g5!N

In the style of From's Gambit.

9.h3

9.♗d3 g4 10.♘g1 f6! Undermining White's centre. 11.♘e2 0–0! and Black is fine.

9...♘f5 10.♖g1 h5!

With the initiative.

C1) 3.e3 ♗g7

Now White's two main options are **C11) 4.d4** and **C12) 4.♗e2**.

4.c4 can be safely met by 4...c6 or 4...♘f6, but there is also the intriguing option of 4...d4!? 5.♘xd4 ♗xd4 6.exd4 ♕xd4 as in Straub – Krafzik, Merano 2001, when the loss of Black's dark-squared bishop is offset by White's damaged pawn structure.