

opening repertoire

the Grünfeld defence

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About the Author

Nigel Davies is an International Grandmaster and respected coach. He's the author of numerous books and DVDs on the game and is known for the clarity of his explanations.

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Contents

About the Author	3
Bibliography	5
Introduction	7
1 Exchange Variation: 7 ♖f3	11
2 Exchange Variation: Lines with 7 ♙e3 and 8 ♙e3	38
3 Exchange Variation: 7 ♙c4 and Others	58
4 Exchange Variation: White Delays e2-e4	93
5 Russian System: 5 ♖b3 and 5 ♖a4+	110
6 Lines with ♙f4	136
7 Lines with ♙g5	150
8 Closed Variation: White Plays e3	177
9 Miscellaneous Lines	193
10 Fianchetto Lines: White Plays g3	201
11 Anti-Grünfelds	226
12 Queen's Pawn Games	234
13 Flank Opening Guidance	262
Index of Variations	280
Index of Complete Games	285

Introduction

From Black's counterattacking options against 1 d4, the Grünfeld Defence is the most reputable. This can be most easily shown by the galaxy of stars who are playing it, contemporary exponents including Magnus Carlsen, Fabiano Caruana, Ding Lirin, Wesley So, Levon Aronian, Alexander Grischuk, Maxime Vachier Lagrave, Ian Nepomniachtchi, Anish Giri, Peter Svidler, Alexander Morozevich, Boris Gelfand, Vassily Ivanchuk and many others. Going back in time it can also be found in the repertoires of many world champions including Garry Kasparov, Bobby Fischer, Vassily Smyslov, Mikhail Botvinnik and Alexander Alekhine, not to mention the strongest player never to become World Champion, Viktor Korchnoi.

What is the idea behind the Grünfeld? After 1 d4 ♖f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♗c3 it may at first look strange to play 3...d5 because White can create a pawn center with 4 cxd5 ♜xd5 5 e4. Yet this center is then immediately placed under attack with 5...♜xc3 6 bxc3 ♗g7 followed by 7...c5, and Black can intensify this pressure with a subsequent ...♜c6. In other lines Black's g7 bishop also proves to be the most effective minor piece on the board, perhaps in part because White's 2 c4 made the d4-pawn just a tad more vulnerable.

The following famous game was hailed as the "Game of the Century" and provides a good illustration of the Grünfeld's counterattacking nature. Playing Black is the then 13-year-old Bobby Fischer, White was Donald Byrne who had won the US Championship just three years earlier.

Game 1

D.Byrne-R.Fischer

Rosenwald Memorial, New York 1956

1 ♖f3 ♗f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♗c3 ♗g7

Fischer was evidently happy to play a King's Indian Defence, which White could go into after e2-e4 either here or on the next move.

4 d4 0-0 5 ♗f4

Looking for an unusual line against the King's Indian, for example after 5...d6, White could play 6 e3. Fischer takes the opportunity to enter a line of the Grünfeld where White

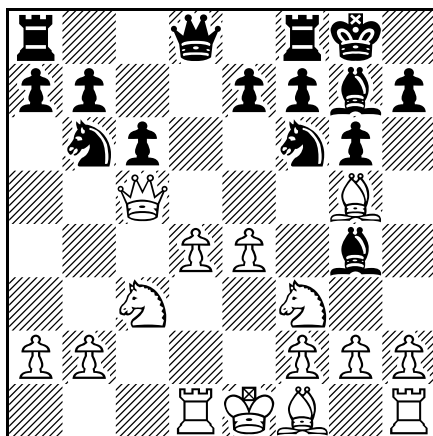
Opening Repertoire: The Grünfeld Defence

has committed himself to e4 .

5...d5 6 b3 dxc4 7 xc4 c6 8 e4 bd7

A sensible move, but not a critical one. Black should play 8...b5! 9 b3 a5 intending ...b5-b4. For example 10 d3 e6 11 d1 c5 12 d5 g4 13 0-0 c4 14 c2 bd7 then sees Black develop in a harmonious and active fashion.

9 d1 b6 10 c5 g4 11 g5 ?



This loss of time has surprisingly serious consequences. After the simple 11 e2 Black would struggle to find active counterplay because of his lack of readily available pawn levers; now the counterplay arrives solely with piece play.

11... a4 !!

A bolt from the blue, exploiting the awkward placement of White's pieces and his uncastled king.

12 a3

Accepting the sacrifice is just good for Black, for example 12 xa4 xe4 13 c1 (or if 13 xe7 then 13... a5 + 14 b4 xa4 15 xe4 fe8 16 e7 xf3 17 gxf3 f8 wins) 13... a5 + 14 c3 (14 d2 xa4 leaves Black a pawn up with an overwhelming position) 14... xf3 15 gxf3 xg5 would see Black recovering the sacrificed material with a winning position.

12... xc3 13 bxc3 xe4 14 xe7 b6

14... d5 was less spectacular but also very strong, for example 15 xf8 xf8 16 b3 xb3 17 axb3 e8 leaves White without any good moves.

15 c4

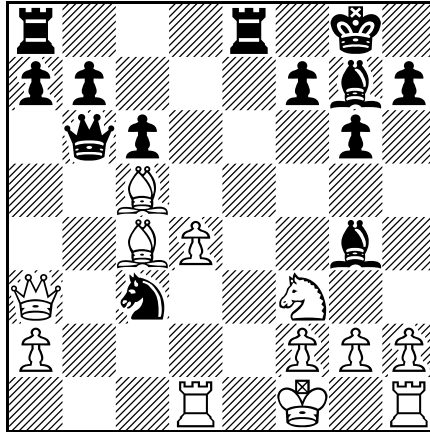
15 xf8 is good for Black after 15... xf8 16 b3 xb3 (16... xc3 !? is also good) 17 axb3 e8 , for example 18 e2 xc3 19 d2 b4 20 f1 b1 21 c2 xf3 22 gxf3 d2 + is crushing.

15... xc3 !

This further sacrifice is overwhelming. 15... xf3 16 gxf3 xc3 17 c5 b5 is also good for Black and does not require a later queen sacrifice.

16 ♖c5

It usually needs cooperation by the loser to create a masterpiece. 16 ♜xc3 would have lost rather prosaically after 16...♞ae8. For example, after 17 ♜e3 there follows 17...♜c7 18 ♖xf8 ♜a5+! 19 ♔e2 ♖xf8, when the queen and pawn will outweigh the two rooks because White's position is disorganised and his king also weak.

16...♞fe8+ 17 ♖f1**17...♕e6!**

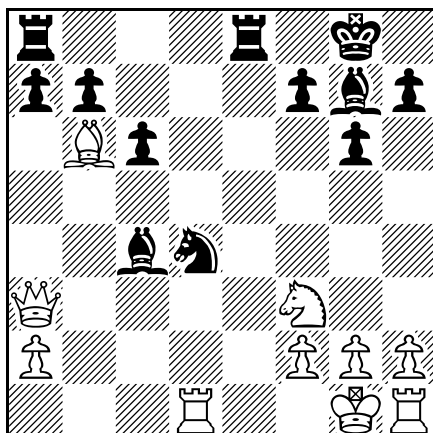
This brilliant queen sacrifice is the only way. 17...♘b5? would have let White off the hook after 18 ♖xf7+! ♔h8 (not 18...♖xf7 because of 19 ♜b3+ ♕e6 20 ♘g5+ etc.) 19 ♖xb6 ♘xa3 20 ♖c5, when suddenly Black is in an endgame with insufficient compensation.

18 ♖xb6

Going down in flames, but other moves do not help. For example, White cannot play 18 ♖xe6 as a well-known smothered mate pattern follows after 18...♜b5+ 19 ♔g1 ♘e2+ 20 ♖f1 ♘g3+ 21 ♔g1 ♜f1+! 22 ♞xf1 ♘e2. Meanwhile 18 ♜xc3 is refuted by 18...♜xc5! 19 dxc5 ♖xc3 20 ♖xe6 ♞xe6 and 18 ♖d3 is just good for Black after 18...♘b5.

18...♖xc4+ 19 ♔g1 ♘e2+ 20 ♖f1 ♘d4+ 21 ♔g1

21 ♞d3 axb6 22 ♜c3 ♘xf3 wins White's queen because 23 ♜xc4 ♞e1 is mate.



21...♞e2+ 22 ♔f1 ♞c3+ 23 ♔g1 axb6

Facing catastrophic material losses White could have saved himself the rest. Perhaps he thought the kid he was playing might mess up.

**24 ♖b4 ♜a4 25 ♖xb6 ♞xd1 26 h3 ♜xa2 27 ♔h2 ♞xf2 28 ♜e1 ♜xe1 29 ♖d8+ ♜f8 30 ♞xe1
♜d5 31 ♞f3 ♞e4 32 ♖b8 b5 33 h4 h5 34 ♞e5 ♔g7 35 ♔g1 ♜c5+ 36 ♔f1 ♞g3+ 37 ♔e1
♜b4+ 38 ♔d1 ♜b3+ 39 ♔c1 ♞e2+ 40 ♔b1 ♞c3+ 41 ♔c1 ♜c2 0-1**

One factor that scares many players away from the Grünfeld is that it has the reputation of being highly theoretical and therefore difficult to learn and maintain. With many of the sharpest lines this is a fair assessment, yet the Grünfeld is fundamentally sound enough to permit Black a wide choice. This is reflected in my recommendations for Black, assuming my target audience to be club level players rather than Grünfeld-toting Grandmasters who are 2700+. I have chosen high quality but low maintenance lines in which the outcome from the opening is a typical Grünfeld middlegame position. By doing so I hope to have simplified the lines and plans sufficiently enough for the reader to be able to remember them.

The way I suggest the reader approaches this book is to read through it quickly the first time to get an overview of the material and how the lines fit together. After this I recommend trying the Grünfeld in some games and then referring back to this book to check your play against what I recommend. As your understanding grows you may want to start adding your own notes and this is where the Everyman Chess ebook format is invaluable – just import the games into your favourite chess database software and add your own notes and any new games or lines that you want to incorporate.

Nigel Davies,
St. Helens, UK
December 2020

Chapter Five

Russian System: 5 ♔b3 and 5 ♔a4+

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 d5 4 ♘f3 ♙g7 5 ♚b3

The so called Russian System with 5 ♚b3 is one of White's traditional weapons against the Grünfeld. By initiating pressure against d5 he almost forces Black to give up the centre with ...dxc4. After 5...dxc4 6 ♚xc4 0-0 7 e4 the recommendation for Black is the equally traditional Smyslov line with 7...♙g4 followed by ...♘fd7, unveiling the Grünfeld bishop on g7 which then targets d4.

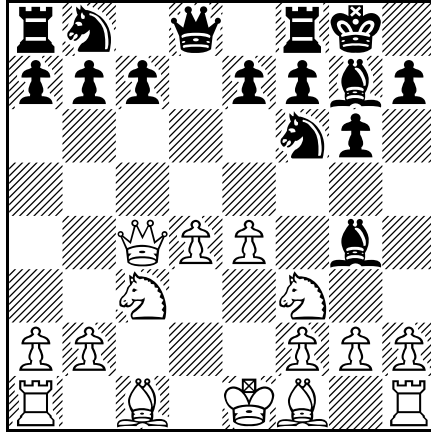
5 ♚a4+ leads to very similar play and can transpose. One independent line is 5...♙d7 6 ♚b3 dxc4 7 ♚xc4 0-0 8 ♙f4 (8 e4 ♙g4 transposes back into the main line with both sides having lost a tempo) 8...c6 9 e4 ♚a5 10 ♙d2 b5 as in Rasmussen-Sutovsky (game 34).

5...dxc4 6 ♚xc4 0-0 7 e4

White has an important alternative in 7 ♙f4 after which the recommended treatment is 7...c6 8 e4 ♚a5 as covered in Radjabov-Morozevich (game 35).

7...♙g4

Smyslov's line, which was one of Black's early methods of combating the Russian System and has retained its good reputation.



8 ♗e3

Question: What happens after 8 ♗e5?

Answer: Black can meet that with 8...♗e6 after which 9 d5 ♗c8 is covered in Zuger-Birnboim (game 36) and 9 ♖b4 ♗fd7 10 ♗xd7 ♗c6 in Kulzinski-Gligoric (game 37). Despite looking superficially attractive, the problem White has is that the knight is not stable on the e5-square.

Question: Is 8 ♗e2 an alternative for White, preventing the doubling of his f-pawns?

Answer: Yes it is, though Black will not normally capture on f3 after 8 ♗e3. The drawback of ♗e2 is that after 8...♗fd7 9 ♗e3 ♗b6 White has to play 10 ♖c5 to defend the d-pawn, which isn't an issue if he plays ♗d1 instead of ♗e2. Visakh-Mareco (game 38) then featured 10...e6 to restrain the further advance of White's d-pawn. This is a plan that will be used throughout the recommended repertoire against 5 ♖b3.

8...♗fd7

Question: That looks like a strange move, what's the idea?

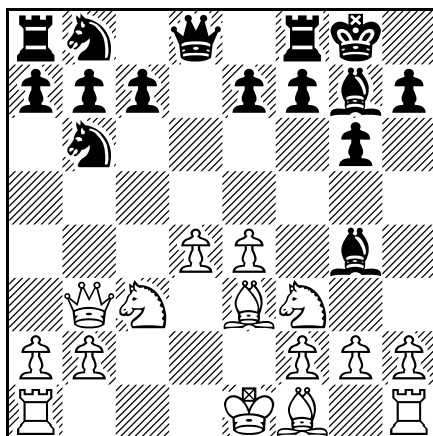
Answer: Black is regrouping the knight to b6 where it will gain time by hitting the queen. Moving the knight from f6 also unveils the bishop on g7 so that it can put pressure on White's d4-pawn.

9 ♖b3

9 ♗d1 ♗b6 will normally transpose back into the main line after 10 ♖b3 e6, but White played 10 ♖c5 in Arakelov-Yandemirov (game 39). Black then gained time on the queen

Opening Repertoire: The Grünfeld Defence

with 10...♘8d7 11 ♖b5 c6 12 ♖b3 and freed his game with 12...e5.
9...♗b6



10 ♖d1

Question: Can White also bring his king to safety with 10 0-0-0?

Answer: Yes that's an alternative worth considering when the recommended formula is again 10...e6 as in Ivanov-Shishkin (game 40). But note that White's king will not be particularly safe on the queenside where it has only two pawns as cover.

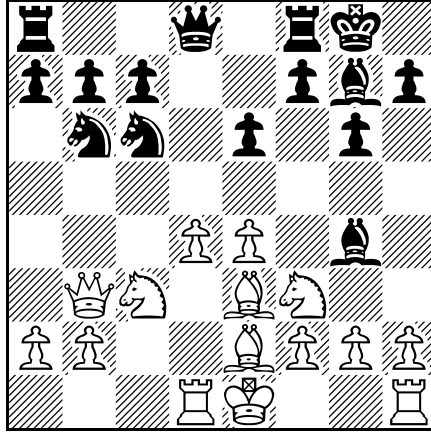
One other alternative for White is 10 a4 after which 10...a5 11 d5 was played in Furman-Timman (game 41) and now Black undermined d5 with 11...e6.

10...e6

Question: What's the point of this? Shouldn't Black be using the time to attack White's center?

Answer: Before playing ...♗b8-c6 Black first restrains White's d-pawn so that he cannot easily play d4-d5.

11 ♙e2 ♘c6



12 e5

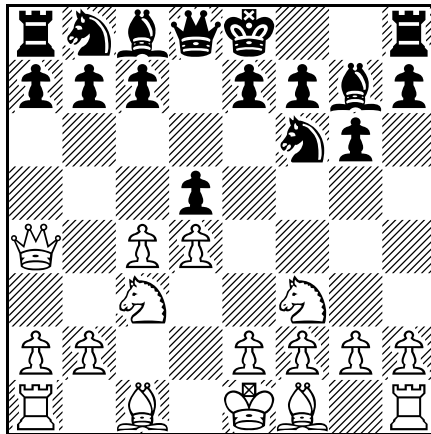
White has a major alternative in 12 ♘g1 after which 12... ♙xe2 13 ♘gxe2 ♚e7 14 0-0 ♜fd8 15 e5 ♜b4 was about equal in Shankland-Rakhmanov (game 42).

12... ♘e7 13 h3 ♙xf3 14 ♙xf3 c6 15 0-0 ♚c7

A game of heavy manoeuvring is in prospect, with Black emerging victorious in Radjabov-Ivanchuk (game 43).

Game 34
A.Rasmussen-E.Sutovsky
 European Team Championship, Porto Carras 2011

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 d5 4 ♘f3 ♙g7 5 ♖a4+



Opening Repertoire: The Grünfeld Defence

This leads to similar play to 5 ♖b3, but with Black having the extra move, 5...♗d7.

5...♗d7 6 ♖b3 dxc4 7 ♖xc4

7 ♖xb7 is strongly met by 7...♗c6, for example 8 ♗f4 ♖b8 9 ♖xc7 ♖xc7 10 ♗xc7 ♖xb2 recovers the pawn with the better game.

7...0-0 8 ♗f4

Giving the game a novel turn. 8 e4 ♗g4 is a direct transposition into the 5 ♖b3 lines considered later.

8...c6 9 e4 ♖a5 10 ♗d2

As in the previous game, White has an alternative here in 10 b4, when it remains to be seen whether Black's extra ...♗c8-d7 will make much difference. I.Sokolov-D.Howell, London 2009 continued 10...♖d8 11 a4 ♗e6 12 ♖d3 and now Black should play 12...a5 (rather than 12...♗a6, as played in the game) 13 b5 ♗h5 14 ♗e3 cxb5 15 axb5 (15 ♗xb5 ♗c6 followed by ...♗b4 gives Black excellent counterplay) 15...♗d7 16 d5 ♖c8 is already better for Black.

10...b5 11 ♖d3

11 ♖b3 b4 undermines the defender of the e4-pawn and after 12 e5 bxc3 13 ♗xc3 ♖c7 14 exf6 exf6 Black gets an excellent position which is very similar to the note to White's 9th move in the next game, Radjabov-Morozevich.

11...b4 12 ♗d1 c5! 13 d5

Making a difficult situation worse as Black's reply is very strong. However, Black stands well after other moves too, for example 13 dxc5 ♖d8 14 ♗e3 ♗e6; or 13 e5 ♗d5 14 dxc5 ♖xc5. Yet either of these would have been better than the move played.

13...e6! 14 ♗e3

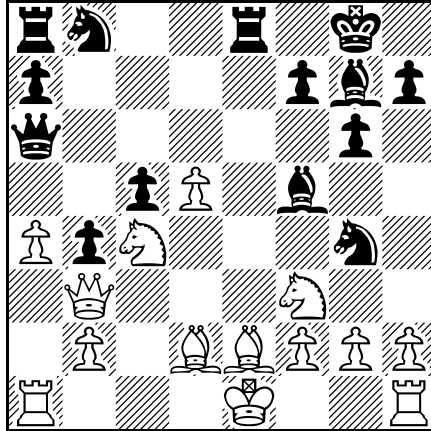
Question: Could White push on with 14 d6 here?

Answer: Black has a strong reply with 14...♗c6 15 e5 ♗g4, when White's centre pawns are in big trouble.

14...exd5 15 exd5 ♖e8 16 ♗e2 ♗g4

16...a6 17 ♗c4 ♗b5 18 ♗e3 ♗xc4 19 ♖xc4 ♗bd7 20 0-0 ♗b6 wins a pawn, for example 21 ♖xc5 ♖xc5 22 ♗xc5 ♗a4 23 ♗e3 ♗xd5 attacks e3 and b2.

17 ♗c4 ♖a6 18 a4 ♗f5 19 ♖b3



With White's king still in the centre, it should be no surprise that something bad now happens.

19...♖xe2+! 20 ♖xe2 ♗d7

This quiet follow-up leaves White without a good move.

21 ♖e1

As an example of White's woes, 21 ♖hc1 is strongly met by 21...♗de5, for example 22 ♗fxe5 ♗xe5 23 ♖d1 ♗d3 24 ♖c2 ♖d8 25 ♖d6 ♗xb2+ 26 ♖xb2 ♖xb2 27 ♗xb2 ♖f1+ 28 ♖e1 ♖xd6+ etc.

21...♖e4 22 h3 ♖xd5 23 hxg4 ♖xc4 24 ♖c2 ♖d3 25 ♖b3 c4! 26 ♖xb4 ♖e6+ 27 ♖e3 ♖b8

Bringing further pieces into the attack with gain of tempo.

28 ♖a5 ♖xb2 29 ♖d1 ♖a3

Threatening 30...♖b4+.

30 ♗d4 ♖xg4 31 ♖g5 ♖b4+ 32 ♖d2 ♖xg5 33 ♖xg5 ♖a5

Threatening mate on b1, and in fact there's not a whole lot White can do about this.

34 ♗b5 a6 35 ♗a3 ♖b3 36 ♖e7 ♖b2 0-1

A dashing game by Sutovsky.

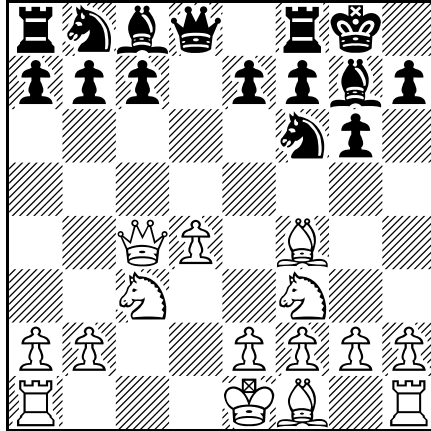
Game 35

T.Radjabov-A.Morozevich

Sportaccord Rapidplay, Beijing 2012

1 d4 ♗f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♗c3 d5 4 ♗f3 ♖g7 5 ♖b3 dxc4 6 ♖xc4 0-0 7 ♖f4

This has become accepted as a serious alternative for White. The approach I will recommend for Black is based on ...c6 and ...b5, gaining counterplay on the queenside.



7...c6 8 e4 ♔a5

Threatening the e4-pawn because of the pin on the knight on c3.

9 b4

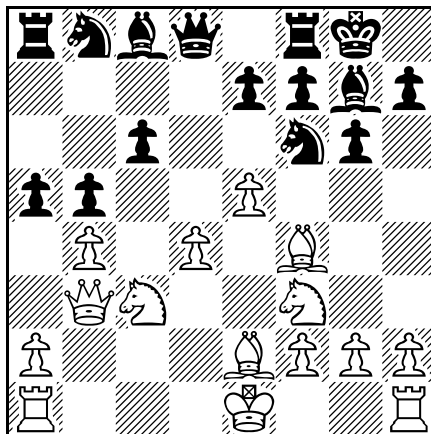
It is certainly tempting to gain time on the queen like this, but pawns cannot move backwards and this leaves White's queenside look quite porous.

White's alternative is the solid looking 9 ♕d2, but then Black can play 9...b5, after which 10 ♖b3 (10 ♖c5 ♖b6 11 ♖xb6 axb6 is also fine for Black, who has counterplay on the a-file) 10...b4 11 ♗a4 (11 e5 bxc3 12 ♕xc3 ♖c7 13 exf6 exf6! is fine for Black, who plans to put a rook on e8 next) 11...♘e4 12 ♕xb4 ♖h5 leaves him with an excellent position as Black has eliminated one of White's centre pawns.

9...♗d8 10 ♕e2 b5 11 ♖b3 a5

Gaining counterplay on the queenside, having first sealed White's b-pawn with 10...b5.

12 e5



After 12 a3 Black gets counterplay with 12...axb4 13 ♖xb4 ♘a6 14 ♖b2 c5, breaking open the h8-a1 diagonal.

12...♘d5

Not bad, but apparently not the best. The silicon servant suggests the amazing 12...♙e6! 13 exf6 ♙xb3 14 fxg7 axb4!! 15 gxf8♖+ ♚xf8 16 0-0 ♙c4! 17 ♙xc4 bxc4 18 ♘e2 ♘d7, when Black's advanced queenside pawns more than compensate him for the sacrificed material.

13 ♘xd5 ♙e6 14 ♖c3

Question: Shouldn't White get a pawn for his knight with 14 ♘xe7+ ?

Answer: If Black plays this way Black will get the b4-pawn after 14...♖xe7 15 ♖c2 axb4, and in doing so gets an excellent game.

14...♙xd5 15 a3 axb4 16 axb4 ♖xa1+ 17 ♖xa1 ♘d7 18 0-0 f6

With ...c6-c5 being unavailable Black relies on a different pawn lever. He already has a slight edge due to his superior pawn structure.

19 exf6 exf6 20 ♖c3 g5 21 ♙e3 ♖e8 22 ♖a1

22 ♙d3 ♘b6 is also better for Black as he has fewer pawn islands and more space. Whether he can then win is another matter entirely.

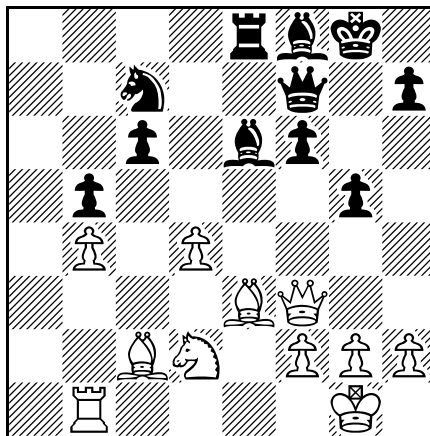
22...♘f8

22...♘b6 might have been better, targeting the c4-square.

23 ♙d1 ♘e6 24 ♙c2 ♙f8 25 ♘d2 ♖e7 26 ♖d3 ♖f7 27 ♖b1?!

Rather than this passive response, White should have considered 27 ♖f5 ♙xb4 28 ♘e4, with play for the pawn. After the move played Black takes control.

27...♘c7 28 ♖f5 ♙e6 29 ♖f3



29...♘d5

The b4-pawn is falling anyway but without White having compensation.

30 ♖e4 g4 31 ♚d1 ♜xb4 32 ♙b3?!

32 ♜c1 was relatively best, but then 32...♜xc2 33 ♚xc2 ♙c4 consolidates the extra pawn.

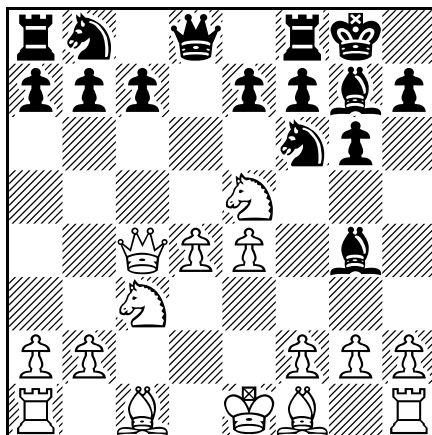
32...♙xb3 33 ♚xg4+ ♙h8 34 d5

Desperation, but there's not much left for White. 34 ♜xf6 is equally forlorn after 34...♚xf6 35 ♜xb3 ♜d5 etc.

34...♙c2 35 ♜xf6 ♜xe3 36 ♜f1 ♜e5 37 ♚f4 ♜f5 0-1

Game 36
B.Zuger-N.Birnboim
 Munich Zonal 1987

1 d4 ♜f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♜c3 d5 4 ♜f3 ♙g7 5 ♚b3 dxc4 6 ♚xc4 0-0 7 e4 ♙g4 8 ♜e5



Question: This looks like a good move, putting the knight on a strong square and gaining time. Why is it not more popular?

Answer: Although this looks obvious and quite good optically, White's knight will prove to be far from stable on the e5-square.

8...♙e6 9 d5

9 ♚b4 will be examined in the next game, Kulzinski-Gligoric.

9...♙c8 10 ♙g5

After the developing move, 10 ♙e2, Black can play our typical 10...e6, for example 11 ♙f4 (11 ♙g5 exd5 12 ♜xd5 c6 13 ♜xf6+ ♙xf6 14 ♙xf6 ♚xf6 is fine for Black) 11...exd5 12 exd5 ♜e8 13 0-0 ♜d6 14 ♚d3 ♜e8 15 ♜c4 ♜a6 16 ♜xd6 cxd6 17 ♜fe1 ♙f5 18 ♚d2 ♜c5 19 ♙b5 (19 ♜ac1 ♚b6 20 ♙e3 ♚b4 1/2-1/2 was B.Kantsler-V.Mikhalevski, Rishon Le Ziyon 1997)

19...♙e1+ 20 ♙e1 ♖b6 21 ♗e3 a6 22 ♗f1 ♗d7 gave Black good counterplay in B.Kantsler-V.Ivanchuk, Panormo 2001.

10...c6 11 dxc6 bxc6

Black could also play 11...♗xc6, when 12 ♗xc6 bxc6 13 ♖xc6 ♖b8 gives Black more than enough for his pawn.

12 ♗e2 ♖a5 13 ♗xf6

13 f4 is strongly met by 13...♗a6!, when play can continue 14 ♗xc6 ♖c7! 15 ♗d5 ♗xd5 16 ♗xe7+ ♗h8 17 ♗xd5 (both 17 ♖xd5 f6 18 ♗h4 ♖xe7 19 ♖xa8 ♖b4+ 20 ♗f1 ♗xe2+ 21 ♗xe2 ♖xb2+ 22 ♗f3 ♖c3+ 23 ♗e2 ♗c6 and 17 ♖xc7 ♗xc7 win for Black) 17...♖xc4 18 ♗xc4 ♗xc4 19 ♗c7 ♗d7 20 ♗xa8 ♙xa8 is good for Black as his active minor pieces are stronger than White's rook and two pawns.

13...♗xf6 14 ♗d3 ♗a6 15 e5

15 ♖xc6 is good for Black after 15...♗b4, for example 16 ♖xa8 ♗xd3+ 17 ♗xd3 ♗xc3+ 18 ♗f1 ♗a6 hits both the queen and White's bishop on d3.

15...♗xe5 16 ♗xe5 ♖xe5 17 0-0 ♖b8 18 ♖xc6 ♖xb2 19 ♗xa6 ♖b6 20 ♖f3 ♙xa6

Black has emerged from the complications with a good extra pawn.

21 ♙fe1 ♖c5 22 ♙ac1 ♖a3 23 ♖f4 ♗e6 24 ♗e4 ♗f5 25 ♙c3?!

Having found himself a pawn down White tries to conjure up chances on the kingside. Unfortunately for him it will not be enough and 25 ♗g3 should have been preferred.

25...♖b2 26 ♖h6

A losing gamble but not much will help him now. 26 ♙ce3 ♙xa2 27 ♗g3 ♗e6 is just hopeless for White.

26...♙xa2 27 ♖h4 ♗xe4 28 ♙h3 h5 29 ♖xe4 ♖xf2+ 30 ♗h1 ♙d8 31 ♙g3 ♖f6

31...♙e2 would have won on the spot.

32 h3 ♙a1 33 ♙xa1 ♖xa1+ 34 ♗h2 ♖f6 35 ♖b7 h4 36 ♙f3 ♖e5+ 37 ♗g1 ♙d1+ 38 ♙f1 ♖e3+ 0-1

Game 37
N.Kulzinski-S.Gligoric
 Yugoslav Championship, Belgrade 1948

1 d4 ♗f6 2 ♗f3 g6 3 c4 ♗g7 4 ♗c3 d5 5 ♖b3 dxc4 6 ♖xc4 0-0 7 e4 ♗g4 8 ♗e5 ♗e6 9 ♖b4