

opening repertoire

the
Modern Benoni

John Doknjas

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About the Author

John Doknjas is a FIDE Master, who has finished first in the Under 18 2017 Canadian Youth Chess Championships. He has won several strong tournaments in British Columbia, Canada, including the Grand Pacific Open. John is a chess teacher with over five years of experience, and has annotated games for distinguished national chess publications.

Also by the Author:

Opening Repertoire: The Sicilian Najdorf (with Joshua Doknjas)

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Introduction

The Modern Benoni is well known for being a dynamic opening which offers great opportunities to play tactically. However, it's also a rich system embedded with plenty of strategy. Because of its rather unorthodox nature, the Benoni favours the player who has a stronger intuition for the types of positions that can arise. The ability to anticipate what your opponent is doing, as well as being able to react to abrupt changes, are other key attributes which indicate who will be successful.

I've played the Benoni for many years and it's definitely one of my favourite openings. The character of the play is something I really enjoy, and there's also the fact that both players are usually working towards a concrete goal. For example, White often aims to use his central majority, while Black tries to break through on the queenside or play on the dark squares. The Benoni isn't an opening where manoeuvring for the sake of manoeuvring happens often, and if only one player is doing this then it's a sign things have gone wrong for them.

Structure of This Book

The book has nine chapters, and the majority of them focus on one particular system White can play. In a chapter's introduction, I give an overview of what is covered in the games.

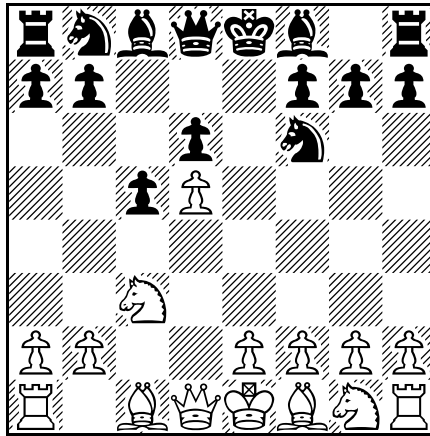
The conclusion at the end of each game goes into some detail outlining the variations discussed. I'll often mention the lines which are more important to review, as well as the main branching points (instances where White can choose between different continuations). A game's conclusion can be used in two ways:

1. It can be read after you finish a game, with the goal of reinforcing some of the ideas.
2. Or, you could read it before going through a game, if you want a map to where the important variations are.

In the games I also give a few questions/exercises. A question often entails general analysis (e.g. finding a plan, explaining a move), while exercises usually involve figuring out what to play. I've tried to pick positions which are instructive, either for understanding theory or just practising how to think in a Benoni middlegame.

Pawns

In the starting position of the Modern Benoni, an unbalanced pawn structure is already present.



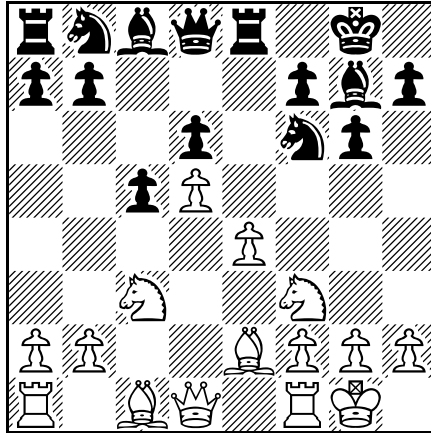
The contrasting pawn majorities provide both sides with clear plans. White's main goal is to break through with e4-e5 under favourable circumstances, such as when his pieces are well coordinated in the centre. Meanwhile, Black would like to push ...b5, controlling more space and placing the b-pawn in striking distance of the c3-knight. If this knight is pushed away, White's control over e4 and d5 will be weakened. Another benefit of having the pawn on b5 is that it could support ...c4, opening up the a7-g1 diagonal and possibly allowing the b8-knight to settle on c5. However, in some instances playing this move could be detrimental, since it hands White control over the d4-square.

Our d6-pawn is an obvious weakness, although it's not so easy for White to go after it (♟f4 would only attack the pawn with one piece). Meanwhile, the d5-pawn isn't weak right now, but it could be if the e-pawn gets eliminated. For example, if White has played e2-e4 and Black challenges the pawn with ...f5, the central pawn chain becomes undermined.

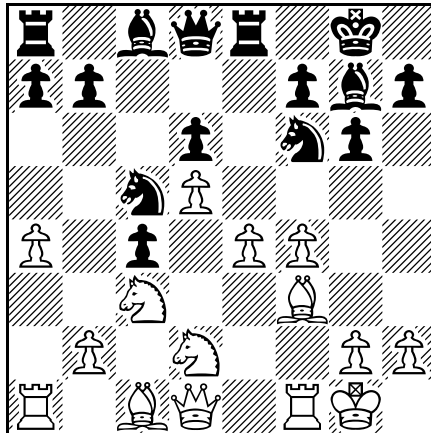
White's Pieces

A good illustration of some of the pieces in the Benoni can be seen in the following diagram:

White's knight on f3 is nicely placed: it fights for the central squares, is ready to help usher through e4-e5, and defends the kingside. Given this, we should try either to exchange it or get it to move off f3. In the above example, Black attacks the e4-pawn with the goal of inducing ♞d2. Not only will the knight be less active here, the c1-bishop also gets blocked in. It would be ideal for White if he could develop this bishop to f4, and then maintain it on the h2-b8 diagonal (e.g. with h2-h3).



The light-squared bishop would protect the e4-pawn if it were on d3, although here it may be vulnerable to moves like ...c4 or ...e5. On e2 the bishop mainly gets in the way of White's pieces, although later on it could come to f3. This will see it guarding the e4-pawn from a safer square, while watching the d1-h5 diagonal.



For example, in the above diagram the bishop protects the e4-pawn and stops any funny business with ...g4. If e5 is pushed, the bishop will defend the d5-pawn and potentially end up exerting control over the h1-a8 diagonal. However, notice how, by being on f3, the d3-square has become vulnerable.

The c3-knight reinforces the centre pawns, and if one of them advances then it could occupy a newly vacant square.

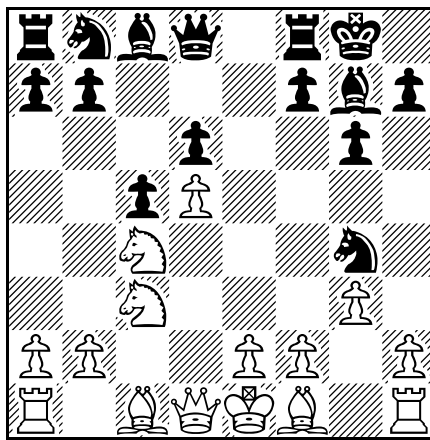
White's major pieces often play some role on the e- and d-files, backing up the central pawns. White's a1-rook could also come to b1, with the goal of starting a minority attack by pushing b2-b4. This targets Black's c5-pawn, and how we react to it depends on the cir-

cumstances. Sometimes opening the c-file with ...cxb4 is good, and in other cases defending solidly with ...b6 is better.

Black's Pieces

Our king's rook finds an easy role on e8, pressuring the e4-pawn (if White has advanced his pawn there) and guarding the e5-square. Also, if necessary Black could use the vacant f8-square to play ...♖f8, defending the d6-pawn.

The f6-knight is also well placed, monitoring e4 and d5. In a sense it's engaged in a struggle with White's c3-knight, as both pieces are fighting for the same squares. However, Black's knight has more mobility since it could easily go to other squares. As an example, take the following position:



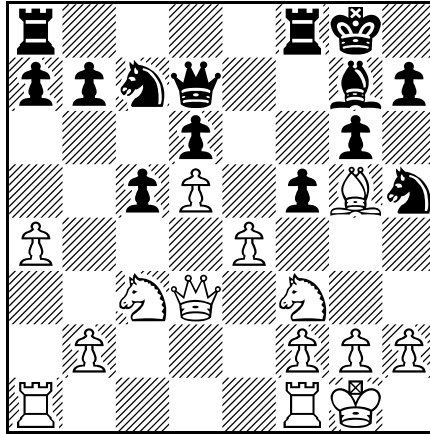
Black has moved his knight to g4, aiming to trade pieces with ...♞e5. Performing this exchange would be especially beneficial here, since on c4 White's knight pressures the d6-pawn.

The "Benoni bishop" on g7 is of course one of Black's best pieces. It supplies defence to the king and is ready to control dark squares on the long diagonal. If the f6-knight moves away then the bishop will pressure White's c3-knight, as well as the queenside in general. This is particularly beneficial if we were attacking there by advancing our pawn majority. In some cases, the bishop could play a more active role by coming to d4 or e5, eyeing White's kingside.

Black's queen can develop in a few different ways. One possibility is staying in the centre with ...♙e7, defending the e5-square. Another option is moving to a5 or c7, perhaps with the intention of supporting ...b5/...c4. Black's a8-rook could also help to achieve these pawn breaks by going to b8 or c8.

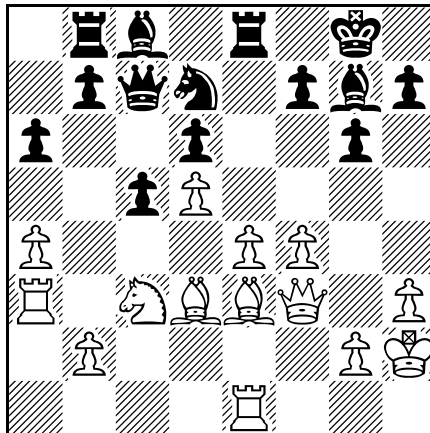
If the b8-knight develops to d7, it will help to fight for the key e5-square. It also reinforces its fellow knight on f6, and is in a position to move to the c5-square if ...c4 is pushed. Developing to a6 is another option, and here the knight typically continues to c7 (unless White has

committed to his a-pawn to a4). A c7-knight helps to prepare ...b5, and it also watches the e6- and d5-squares. This is useful if Black pushes ...f5, as seen in the following position. Even though Black is missing his light-squared bishop, it's safe to weaken the e6-square.



Ways to Prevent or Counter e4-e5

The most direct way to resist an e5 push is by controlling the e5-square.



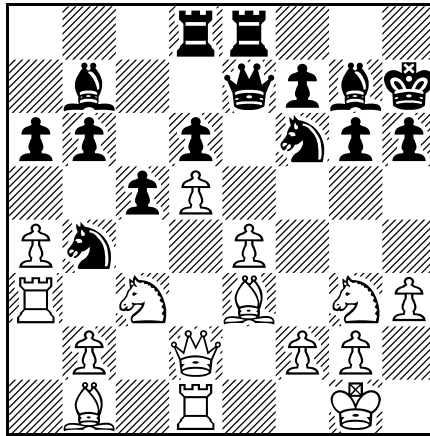
In this position Black has a number of pieces doing just that, ensuring White won't be able to get away with e5 ...dxe5, fxe5. However, something like e5 ...dxe5, f5 is still a possibility. White's idea here is to gain play on the f-file, while using the new pawn on e5 to block in our pieces. If White just played f4-f5 by itself, Black could respond with ...♘e5.

Another idea is e5 ...dxe5, d6, assuming White has given his d-pawn the necessary support. This would attack Black's queen and allow the c3-knight to capitalize on the d5-square.

In the above diagram, these ideas may not be dangerous just yet. However, it's worth-

while to consider how White could follow up after pushing e4-e5.

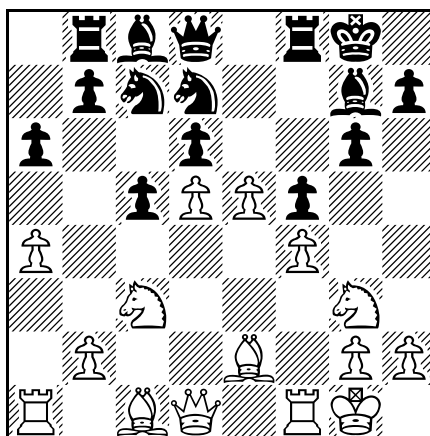
Because of the e4/d5 pawn chain, another way for us to discourage e4-e5 is by pressuring the d5-pawn. Take the following position:



Black has a fair amount of control over e5 here. But in addition to this, he is closely watching the d5-pawn with his knights and b7-bishop. If ...dxe5 happens at some point, the d8-rook will also be involved.

Therefore, even if White manages to push e5, Black will be in a position to win the d5-pawn. Setting up this kind of defence is ideal, since it complicates White's task of breaking through in the centre.

There's also a fairly rare idea which is seen a few times in the book. It looks something like this:

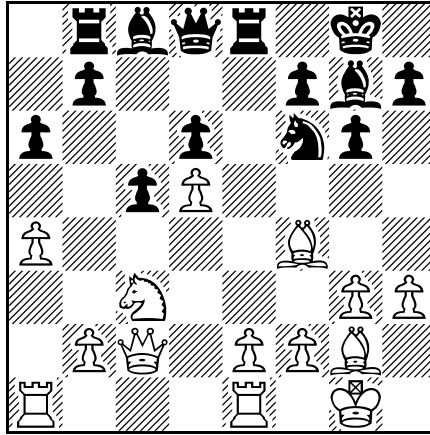


White has just played 14 e5 and Black responded with 14...f5. Now if we capture on e5, White won't be able to follow up with the f4-f5 idea. Of course, White could play 15 e6

here, but in this specific position that's fine and Black replies with 15...♘f6. Now the plan is to continue with ...b5, possibly followed by ...Bb7 at some point, further increasing the pressure on the d5-pawn. Notice how if this pawn falls, the e6-pawn will become very weak.

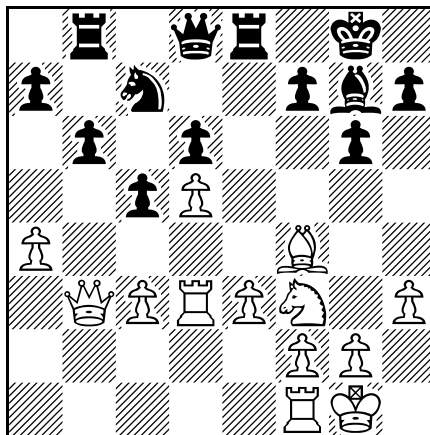
Ways to Prepare ...b5

The most standard method to prepare ...b5 is with ...a6 and ...♖b8. For example, take this diagram from the 10 ♗e1 system of the Fianchetto:



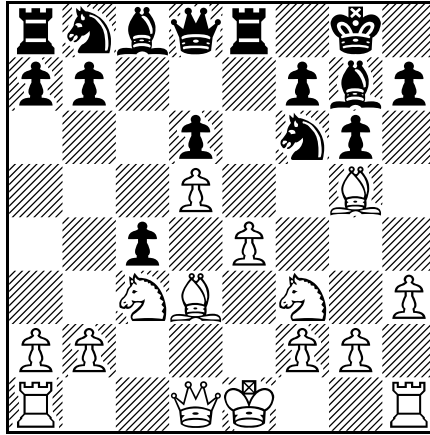
Here White doesn't have the means to resist ...b5, and after 16 a5 b5 17 axb6 ♘h5 18 ♙d2 ♚xb6, Black gains good play on the opened b-file. It's true that White is also pressuring the isolated a6-pawn, but the c8-bishop does a good job of defending it.

As previously mentioned, Black could develop his b8-knight to c7. This is another well-known way to support ...b5.



In this position, the knight gives Black enough force to break through with ...b5. If White plays c3-c4 then Black could respond with ...a6, after which there's no stopping the b-pawn's advance. Another good thing about the c7-knight in these situations is that it may recapture on b5. This will leave it on an active square, and sometimes it could continue to d4. In the above diagram this isn't possible, but if White's c3- and e3-pawns were on b2 and e4, it would be.

Pushing ...c4 can be a good move on its own merits. However, sometimes it may be used as a means of achieving ...b5:



In this position White's bishop is cut off from controlling the b5-square, and after it retreats to c2 Black will follow up with ...b5. Also, notice how the vulnerable e4-pawn helps Black – if White's pieces weren't busy defending it, expanding on the queenside would be more difficult.

In this book I've strived to cover theory in a good amount of detail, while also explaining important concepts and plans. I hope my work not only helps you to improve in the Benoni, but that it also ignites a passion for this complex and fascinating system. Gaining a deep understanding of it comes with an array of benefits, such as a sharper tactical intuition and an increased ability to play all over the board. Perhaps most importantly, this opening can serve as a way to truly enjoy the game, and on that note let's get started.

John Doknjas,
March 2020.

Chapter Two

The Four Pawns and Mikenas Attacks

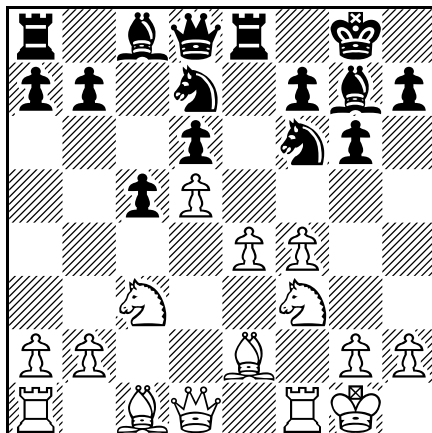
This chapter examines White's other moves after 6 e4, 7 f4 – 8 e5 and 8 ♖f3. These lines aren't as challenging as the Flick Knife Attack and, despite being quite sharp, don't pose a serious threat to the Benoni's theoretical health.

Game 5 covers 8 e5, the Mikenas Attack, and Black should respond with 8...♗fd7. In the main line White sacrifices a pawn in order to prevent Black's king from castling, and then the struggle revolves around White trying to utilize his temporary initiative. On the 12th move Black played a relatively rare approach with 12...♖d8, which I believe is a slightly better choice than the main move 12...♗e8. The rook could prove useful on the d-file, such as for attacking the d5-pawn or moving to d6. In the game, Black gained the upper hand fairly early on and, while White managed to equalize, Black still won in the end.

The rest of the chapter deals with the Four Pawns Attack. Why it's called this may seem confusing, considering White only has three pawns in the centre (on f4, e4, and d5). The name comes from the Four Pawns Attack of the King's Indian Defence, where Black's most popular approach is transposing into the Benoni. A more apt description of the system we're dealing with might be the "Three Pawns Attack", although this is already the name of a line from a different opening.

After 8 ♖f3 0-0, Game 6 considers 9 ♕d3, as well as ways White can push e4-e5 early on after 9 ♕e2 (9 e5 is also briefly looked at, but it gives Black an immediate advantage). In the case of 9 ♕d3, Black can meet it with 9...b5, akin to the 9...b5 variation of the Modern. The obvious difference is that White has a pawn on f4 instead of h3, and this proves to be clearly in Black's favour. Meanwhile, against 9 ♕e2 my recommendation is 9...♗bd7, preparing to play ...♗e8 on the next move. A drawback of this approach is that the knight no longer has the option of developing to a6. However, the upside is that an early e4-e5 push becomes far less serious, as this game demonstrates.

In the position after 10 0-0 ♗e8, White can defend the e4-pawn in two main ways.



The first option is 11 ♖c2, which is the subject of Game 7. This tries to avoid playing ♗d2 and aims to leave the knight actively placed on f3. Black should respond with 11...♗e7, increasing the pressure on the e4-pawn, when White's two main moves are 12 ♗d2 and 12 ♙e1. The former gives Black an advantage after 12...♗b6, and White's position is fairly difficult to play. 12 ♙e1 is stronger, after which I believe Black should capture on e4 with 12...♗xe4. This causes the game to open up a bit and Black must display some accuracy; however, objectively he is doing fine.

Game 8 features the main move 11 ♗d2, and here it's best to continue normally with 11...c4. However, 11...♗b6 is a tricky move which could be used as a surprise weapon. White can get a slight edge with accurate play, but finding the correct moves isn't that easy, while a misstep could lead to Black assuming the initiative with ...h5 and ...♗g4.

After 11...c4, White has a few moves. I've analysed 12 e5, 12 ♙xc4, and 12 a4, but the main continuation is 12 ♖h1. Now in this position I recommend the offbeat 12...b5, instead of 12...♗c5, and it works quite well. The move tends to give Black better chances to seize the initiative and, objectively speaking, is as sound as 12...♗c5. By the way, notice how if ...a6 and a2-a4 were inserted, pushing ...b5 wouldn't be an option.

Game 5
N. Grandelius-E. Hedman
 Swedish Championship, Falun 2012

1 d4 ♗f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 ♗c3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 e4 g6 7 f4 ♙g7 8 e5

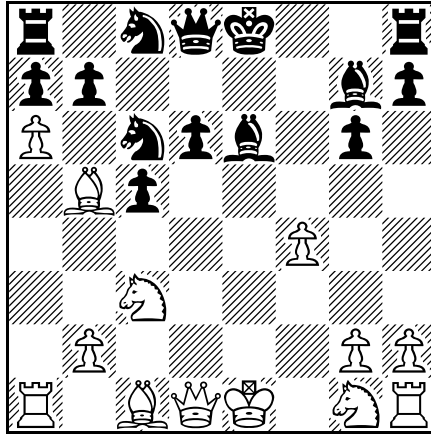
The Mikenas Attack is possibly White's bluntest weapon against the Benoni. However, it's a double-edged sword, and the edge pointing back at White can prove to be sharper.

8...♗fd7 9 ♗e4

Others:

a) 9 ♖b5 is more common, but it has no real independent value since 9...dxe5 10 ♖d6+ transposes to the game (10 d6? ♖a6 leaves White on the verge of losing).

b) 9 e6 fxe6 10 dxe6 ♖b6 11 a4 (11 f5? 0-0! left White in trouble in I.Bozicevic-B.Bozinovic, Velika Gorica 2013) 11...♙xe6 (11...a5!? is also possible but it's much more complicated) 12 a5 ♙c8 13 ♙b5+ ♖c6 14 a6 sacrifices a pawn for a temporary initiative, but with a few accurate moves Black can seize control.



Exercise: What should Black play?

Answer: 14...♙e7 15 ♙e2 (15 ♖f3 0-0 gives Black no problems) 15...♙d8! 16 ♖f3 (16 axb7 ♙xb7 leaves White unable to take on e6 since Black can answer with ...♙e8) 16...♙g4 initiates a queen exchange and brings an end to White's fun.

c) 9 exd6 abandons any plans of attack and settles for simply gaining a passed pawn on d5. However, Black is still doing well positionally for a few reasons:

1. Without the e-pawn, the f4-pawn looks poorly placed on its own. While it does fight for the e5-square, it also blocks in the c1-bishop. The bishop could develop to d2 or e3, but the former square is passive and the latter would leave it vulnerable.

2. Despite being a passer, the d5-pawn is actually quite weak. Black can attack it and also plant a blockader on d6 (such as a knight).

3. Black can capitalize on the key e4-square by putting a rook on e8 and knights on f6 and d6.

After 9...0-0 10 ♖f3 ♖f6 11 ♙e2 (11 ♖b5? a6 12 ♖c7 ♙a7 leaves White's knight trapped) 11...♖e8! (11...♙xd6 tends to be sharper since Black's queen can be attacked) 12 ♙e3 ♖d7 13 0-0 ♖xd6, we have transposed to the game E.Ravelo Gil-W.Puntier Andujar, Caracas 2014. Over the next few moves, it would be ideal if Black could play ...♖f6, ...♙e8, ...b6, and ...♙b7, placing the pieces on nice squares. Also, if the opportunity arises, Black may even push the b-pawn to b5 with the help of ...a6.

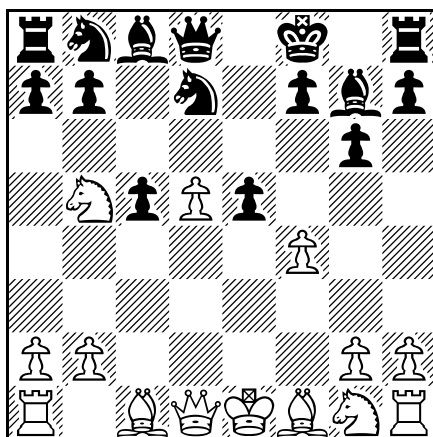
Considering that White lacks a good plan other than protecting his d5-pawn, it's clearly easier to play Black's side of this position.

9...dxe5 10 ♖d6+ ♔e7 11 ♜xc8+

Instead:

a) 11 ♖b5?! anticipates ...♙e8 and intends to meet it in one of two ways. The first is playing d5-d6 followed by ♜c7, forking Black's rooks. However, this isn't dangerous since White cannot get away with spending even more tempi just to win some material. All his other pieces remain undeveloped and Black could easily seize a dangerous initiative. The other idea is to use the e8-rook in order to bring the knight back to d6 with tempo. This could give White some play, although here too White isn't very threatening.

Still, I believe it's best to avoid ...♙e8 and waste no time retreating the king with 11...♙f8!.



B.Brinck Claussen-S.Fedder, Albertslund 1972, continued 12 ♖f3 (12 ♙e2 is also met by 12...e4!) 12...e4 13 ♖g5 ♖f6 14 d6 h6 15 ♖xf7 ♙xf7 16 ♙c4+ ♙f8, and Black had a large advantage.

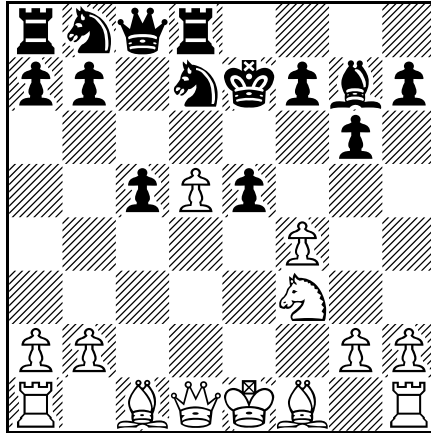
b) 11 fxe5 isn't such a good move since the f-pawn was a potential asset White could have pushed to f5. After 11...♖xe5 12 ♙g5+ (12 ♖xc8+ ♙xc8 13 d6+?! ♙f8 14 ♖f3 ♙e6 gave Black a dominating position in L.Kavalek-J.Trapl, Czech Championship, Prague 1963) 12...f6 13 ♖xc8+ ♙xc8 14 ♙f4 (14 ♙e3 isn't threatening and should be met by 14...♙f7, followed by ...♙e8 and ...♙g8) 14...♙f5! 15 d6+ (15 ♙d2 ♙d8 allows Black's king to reach the kingside safely; he could also propel his b8-knight to d4 via c6) 15...♙d8 16 ♙d2, White is planning to castle long, so Black should play 16...♖bc6!. The point is that 17 0-0-0?! is met by 17...♖b4 18 b3 ♙c8.

11...♙xc8 12 ♖f3

Here 12 d6+?! doesn't make much sense since it pushes Black's king to where it wants to go. White's idea may be to trap the h8-rook in the corner, but this isn't enough to secure full compensation for the pawn. After 12...♙f8 13 ♖f3 e4 14 ♖g5 (14 ♖e5 ♖c6 leaves White

without a good follow-up) 14...h6! 15 ♖xe4 ♜c6 16 ♙d3, the game was agreed drawn in W.Menkhaus-W.Melka, Mecklenburg VP 1996, but Black could have played on with 16...♙d4!, preventing White from castling. Following ...♞g7, Black will be ready to launch an assault along the e-file with his major pieces.

12...♞d8!



Question: What are some of this move's pluses?

Answer: 12...♞d8 has only been chosen around 4% of the time OTB, but I really like it for a few reasons:

1. Black threatens to round up the d5-pawn with ...♜b6. This doesn't give White time to attack effectively with f4-f5.

2. The rook could prove very useful on d6, where it will control the f6-square. If Black plays ...f6 then the pawn will enjoy support, and in some lines Black could even use the rook for direct defence with ...♞f6. Another purpose for the rook being on d6 is to blockade the d5-pawn, which could be important if White's light-squared bishop comes to c4.

3. The move has a fair amount of surprise value and its subtleties aren't immediately obvious.

12...♞e8 is the main move but 13 f5! may give White strong play along the f-file (♜g5, ♙c4, ♞f3, 0-0, etc). The game remains objectively equal but it seems like Black is the one who has to be more careful. Se.Feller-C.Marzolo, Marseilles 2009, continued 13...♞f8 14 ♜g5 e4 15 fxg6 hxg6 16 ♙e2 ♙d4 17 ♞f1 with a messy position.

13 fxe5

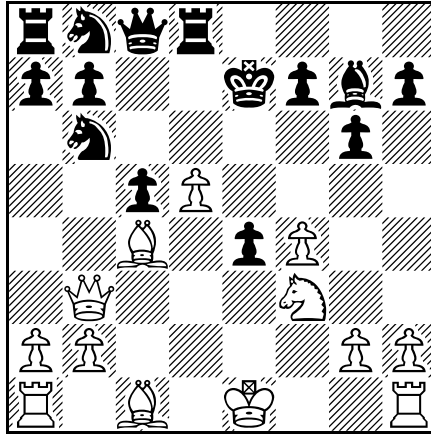
Others:

a) 13 ♙e2?! ♜b6 14 fxe5 ♞xd5 15 ♞b3 ♞f8 16 ♙e3 ♞g8 gives Black an advantage.

b) 13 f5?! was tried in T.Riedener-G.Siddharth, London 2017, and now 13...e4! looks best (the immediate 13...♜b6 is also possible, but in some lines White is able to occupy the e4-

square with a piece), since against the standard 14 ♖g5 (14 d6+ ♕f8 15 ♖g5 ♗e5 is also nice for Black) Black has 14...♗b6!, preparing to take on d5 while simultaneously attacking the f5-pawn. On 15 ♖e2 (15 fxg6 ♗xd5! is winning for Black) 15...♗xf5 16 g4 ♗xd5 17 ♖g2 f5, Black's three extra pawns give him a decisive advantage.

c) 13 ♖c4 ♗b6 14 ♗b3 (14 ♖e2 is also well met by 14...e4!, since after 15 ♗xe4+ ♕f8 16 0-0 ♗f5 17 ♗xf5 gxf5 or 16...♗8d7, Black is about to win the d5-pawn and enjoy a slightly favourable endgame) 14...e4! gave Black the advantage in R.Biolek-T.Dijkhuis, Groningen 2014.



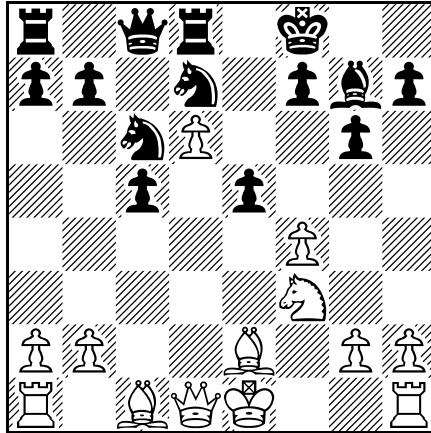
The idea behind ...e4 is that White can only capture the pawn and open the e-file if he spends some tempi. This will give Black enough time to regroup fully, such as with ...♗f8.

d) 13 d6+ ♕f8 and now:

d1) 14 ♖c4 runs into 14...♗b6.

d2) 14 ♖g5 threatens ♗d5, so Black should again defend with 14...♗b6!. Following 15 fxg6 ♗xe5 16 ♗f3 (or 16 ♖d3 ♗xd6) 16...f6! 17 ♖b5 ♗c6 18 0-0 ♕g7, Black's king has sufficient protection and White's d-pawn is on the verge of being captured.

d3) 14 ♖e2 ♗c6 is a fairly precarious position.



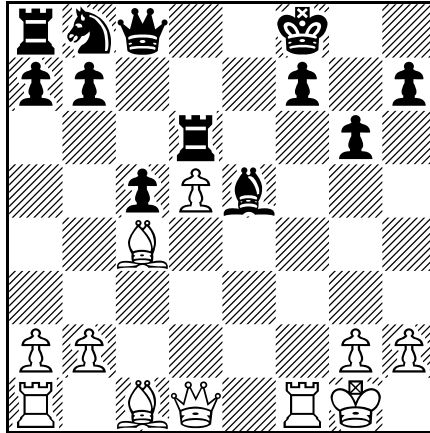
The relationship between the three knights is important to consider. If White's knight moves to g5 then Black's c6-knight could jump to d4. Meanwhile, in the case of White capturing on e5, it would be ideal for Black to end up with a knight on that square (since it would protect the vulnerable f7-pawn). Therefore, since Black's knights are a bit tied up watching the e5-square in anticipation of an exchange, one possible strategy Black could consider is releasing the tension with ...e4.

After 15 ♖g5! (15 0-0 e4! 16 ♗g5 h6 17 ♗xe4 f5 18 ♗c3 ♕d4+ 19 ♖h1 ♗f6 exhausts most of White's attack and the d6-pawn is about to fall) 15...♗d4! 16 0-0 (16 ♗xh7+?! ♖g8 17 ♗g5 wastes too much time and 17...♗b6 sees Black about to capture on d6 again) 16...f5! (16...h6? 17 ♗xf7! gives White a decisive attack) 17 ♗xh7+ (17 ♕e3 is met by 17...h6) 17...♖g8 18 ♗g5 ♗b6 19 fxe5 ♕xe5, Black will soon be a pawn up after capturing on d6. In addition, his queen and knight could find good outposts on c6 and d5 respectively.

13...♗xe5 14 ♕g5+

White tries to take advantage of the e5-knight's position in order to perform a skewer. However, as we will see Black is perfectly fine giving up the exchange.

Instead, 14 ♗xe5 ♕xe5 15 ♕c4 ♖f8 16 0-0 ♗d6! keeps White's c4-bishop out of the game while preparing a few defensive schemes on the kingside.



Question: What are some of the ways Black can defend on the f-file?

Answer:

1. Protecting the f7-pawn with ...♖e8.
2. Playing ...♗f6 in some lines.
3. Playing ...f6 and ...♘d7.

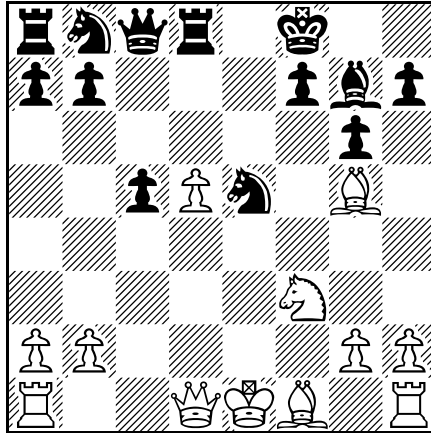
Also, if Black plays ...♘d7 before pushing ...f6, sometimes ...♙d4+ followed by ...♘e5 could be preferred instead. The bishop and knight combo on d4 and e5 can be very strong.

After 17 ♖f3 (17 ♖e1 ♖e8 18 ♖h4 ♙g8 doesn't pose Black with any serious problems) 17...♖e8, White has two main ways to develop his c1-bishop:

a) 18 ♙f4 ♗f6 19 ♖g3 (19 ♙h6+ ♙g8 20 ♖b3 ♘d7 21 d6 ♘b6 sees Black taking care of White's c4-bishop and weathering the storm) 19...♗xf4 20 ♗xf4 ♙xf4 21 ♖xf4 b5! 22 ♙f1 a6 is at least equal for Black. His immediate plan is to develop with ...♘d7, possibly followed by ...♖e5.

b) 18 ♙d2 ♘d7 19 ♗ae1 ♙d4+! (19...♙g8 20 ♙c3 f6 is also possible, with a balanced game; Black is a pawn up but White has some pressure on his centre) 20 ♙e3! (20 ♙h1 runs into 20...♘e5, and Black has a small pull) 20...♗f6 21 ♖h3 ♖e5! is roughly equal.

14...♙f8!



Keeping the g7-bishop open and favouring quick development over saving the rook.

14...f6 is a playable alternative if you prefer not to sacrifice material. A.Bouget-C.Monpeurt, Avoine 2013, continued 15 ♖xe5 fxg5 and now White should have gone for 16 ♗c4! ♕f5 17 ♙d3 ♗xd5 18 ♗e2+ ♕e6 19 ♗xe6+ ♔xe6 20 0-0-0 with very good drawing chances in the endgame.

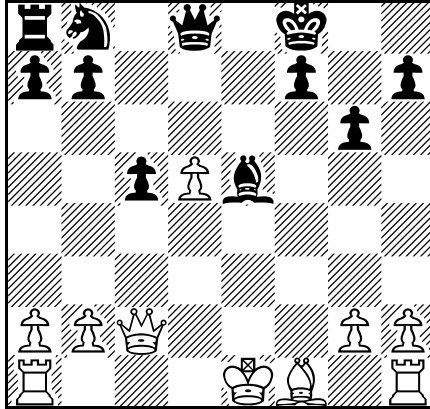
15 ♙xd8

15 ♗xe5 ♙xe5 16 ♙c4 (16 ♙xd8 ♗xd8 transposes to the 16 ♗xe5 in the next note) 16...♗d6! resembles the kind of position we saw in the 14 ♗xe5 variation, except that White's g5-bishop is clearly misplaced. Now Black may continue by playing ...♗d7, ...f6, and ...♙g8. For example, 17 0-0 ♗d7 18 ♗e2 (18 ♗f3 is met by 18...♙d4+ 19 ♙h1 ♗e5) 18...f6 19 ♗ae1 ♙g8 gives Black the upper hand.

15...♗xd8 16 ♙e2

Aiming to get the king to safety as soon as possible, but dropping the b2-pawn. This will give Black a long-term positional advantage.

16 ♗xe5! forces Black to find a few precise moves in order to claim an edge. After 16...♙xe5 17 ♗c2 (17 ♗e2 blocks in the f1-bishop so it's safe to play 17...♗xd5), White is preparing to castle long.

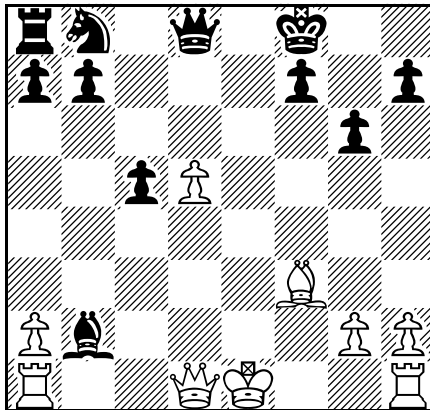


Black's immediate goal is to develop while temporarily keeping White's king in the centre. It's fine if White ultimately manages to castle, so long as Black's pieces are active at that point.

Exercise: Figure out how to delay White from castling.

Answer: 17...♖a5+! (17...♖xd5?! 18 ♘c4 ♗d6 19 ♘xf7! results in equal chances) 18 ♗d2 ♖a4 covers the d1-square. Following 19 ♘d3 ♘d4 20 ♘c2 (20 ♗c2 ♖a5+ 21 ♗d2 ♗b6 transposes) 20...♗b5 21 ♘d3 (21 ♘e4 ♗d7 22 0-0-0 ♗e8 23 ♗he1 ♗e5 also favours Black) 21...♗b6 22 ♘c4 (22 0-0-0? blunders to 22...c4) 22...♗d7 23 0-0-0 ♗e5, Black has the better game. His two minor pieces dominate the centre and White's d5-pawn will lack protection once the c4-bishop moves away. Black may also consider attacking White's king by pushing his c-pawn like a battering ram.

16...♗xf3+ 17 ♘xf3 ♘xb2



18 ♖b1?!

18 0-0! was actually possible since it's taboo for Black to take on a1. However, even with White castled Black still has the advantage after 18...♙d6 (18...♙xa1?! 19 ♖xa1 ♘d7 20 ♖h8+ ♙e7 21 d6+! leads to a perpetual if both sides play accurately) 19 ♖b1 ♙d4+ 20 ♙h1 b6, followed by ...♘d7 and ...♙e5. After the knight either eliminates White's bishop or forces it to move off f3, the d5-pawn will fall.

18...♙c3+

18...♙d4! was slightly more accurate. White isn't able to castle here either, so he will have to play ♙f1, g2-g3, ♙g2 anyway. After 19 ♙f1 ♖a5 20 a4 (20 g3 ♖xa2 is the game except White's king is on f1 instead of g2 – a huge difference since now it can't hide on h3) 20...♖a6+ 21 ♖b5 ♘d7 22 g3 ♖e8 23 ♙g2 ♘b6, Black has a winning position. He will either capture on a4 or transfer his knight to e3/d6 via c4.

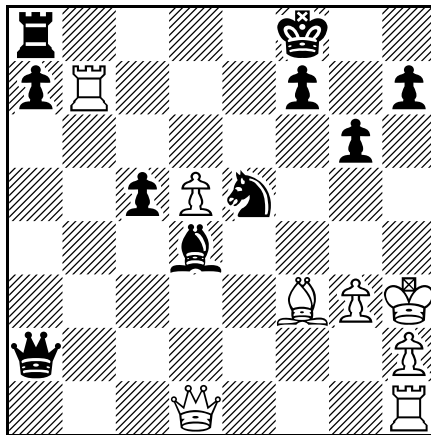
19 ♙f1 ♖a5

19...♘d7 20 g3 b6 21 ♙g2 ♘e5 22 ♖f1 ♙d4 was also possible, employing the familiar set-up with the bishop and knight in the centre.

20 g3 ♙d4?!

Allowing White's king to run to h3. 20...♖xa2 21 ♖b3 ♖xb3 22 ♖xb3 ♙b4 results in an endgame where Black has the better chances.

21 ♙g2! ♖xa2+ 22 ♙h3 ♘d7 23 ♖xb7 ♘e5



For the next phase of the game it's instructive to watch Black's bishop and knight. On d4 the bishop enables Black's main offence (pushing the a-pawn to a1), while on e5 the knight plays defence by protecting the f7-pawn. Also, notice how both pieces are protected themselves.

24 ♖f1 ♖a6 25 ♖b1

25 d6! ♖xd6 26 ♖xf7+ ♙xf7 27 ♙xa8+ ♙g7 seems roughly equal. The more open nature of the position gives White good chances to conduct an attack or at least get a perpetual.

25...♖d6 26 ♙g2 ♙g8 27 ♙e4 a5!

Black finishes the rest of the game with nice technique.

28 ♖b6 ♜f8 29 ♛c1 a4 30 d6 ♛c8+ 31 ♔g2 a3 32 ♙xa8 ♜xa8+ 33 ♙h3 a2 34 ♖b2 ♛c8+ 35 ♙g2 ♛c6+ 36 ♙h3 ♛xd6 37 ♛c2 ♛e6+ 38 ♙g2 ♛c6+ 39 ♙h3 ♛c8+ 40 ♙g2 ♛a8+ 41 ♙h3 a1 ♙ 42 ♖xa1 ♜xa1 43 ♖b1 ♛a6 44 ♛e4 ♛e6+ 45 ♙g2 h5 46 ♜e1 ♙g7 47 ♜e2 ♙g4 48 ♜e1 ♛xe4+ 49 ♖xe4 ♙f6 50 ♜e2 ♙e6 0-1

Summary

As we saw in this game, 12...♖d8 is objectively sound and White is the one who must fight for equality. The two main moves to check are 13 d6+ and 13 fxe5.

13 d6+ typically features White trying to generate some play on the f-file, specifically against the f7-pawn. A few defensive strategies at Black's disposal are:

1. Ensuring he can recapture on e5 with a knight.
2. Pushing ...f5.
3. Pushing ...e4, even at the cost of sacrificing the pawn. This aims to keep the f-file closed, since now White can no longer play f4xe5.

Meanwhile, the game's 13 fxe5 can see White sacrificing a pawn for pressure (14 ♖xe5) or winning the exchange (14 ♙g5+). For 14 ♖xe5, I've outlined Black's main defensive plans in the notes to 16...♖d6. Black is comfortable but if White is accurate he can secure equality. In 14 ♙g5+, Black either wins a second pawn for the exchange or causes White some headache with castling; both cases yield Black a clear advantage.

Game 6 J.Aijala-T.Luukkonen Finnish League 2010

1 d4

The actual move order of the game was 1 c4 g6 2 ♖c3 ♙g7 3 d4 ♖f6 4 e4 0-0 5 f4 d6 6 ♖f3 c5 7 d5 e6 8 ♙e2 exd5 9 cxd5.

1...♖f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 ♖c3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 e4 g6 7 f4 ♙g7 8 ♖f3 0-0 9 ♙e2

Note that 9 e5? dxe5 10 fxe5 ♖g4 11 ♙e2 (11 ♙g5 ♜b6 12 ♛d2 ♖xe5 also gave Black an advantage in N.Povah-J.Howell, British League 1996) 11...♖xe5 leaves Black a pawn up pretty much for free.

Instead, 9 ♙d3 seems like a stronger move visually than ♙e2; however, the bishop on d3 allows Black to play 9...b5!, reaching a favourable version of the Modern variation. Here White has a few options:

a) 10 0-0?! is actually White's most popular move. Black simply gains an overwhelming position after 10...c4 11 ♙c2 b4 12 ♖a4 (12 ♖e2 ♜e8 13 ♖g3 ♜b6+ 14 ♙h1 ♖g4 gave Black a big edge in H.Dorendorf-Ev.Egorov, Augsburg 1995) 12...♜e8 13 ♜e1 (13 e5 dxe5 14 fxe5 ♖xd5 leaves White without compensation for the pawn) 13...♖a6! 14 h3 ♜a5, as seen in N.Oud-D.Stellwagen, Vlissingen 2004. Both ...c3 and ...♙d7 are coming, and White is in serious trouble.