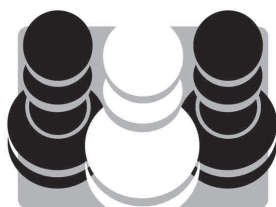


A Combative Repertoire

Playing the Grünfeld

By

Alexey Kovalchuk



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Foreword by GM Nikita Petrov

I first met Alexey at one of the countless junior tournaments in the south of Russia in which we competed. It was immediately obvious to me that he not only had a rare passion for chess, but was also a diligent worker. In fact, one may argue that Alexey's scientific approach to chess is one of the reasons why he is not yet a grandmaster (although he will surely become one). However, his broad opening erudition and positional understanding certainly eclipse those of many strong GMs.

The topic of the book you are holding in your hands does not really require an introduction. The Grünfeld Defence is not only an extremely popular opening at all levels of practical chess, but has also been analysed by many esteemed authors. Still, Alexey's work is unique in the way it combines a state-of-the-art repertoire for Black with emphasis on typical Grünfeld middlegames. By guiding the reader through a number of carefully-chosen games in some of the most important variations, Alexey showcases a variety of key strategic concepts. Obviously, no serious research of such a topical opening can be possible without concrete analysis, and Alexey has presented innumerable novelties which readers may use to their benefit.

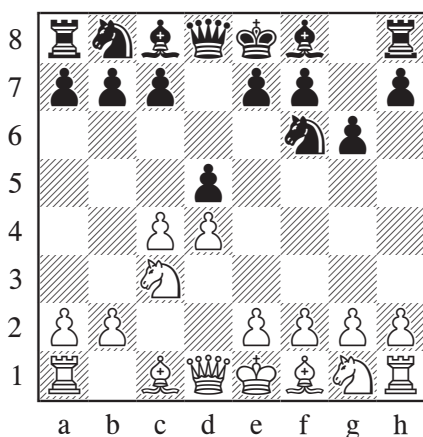
I firmly believe that working on one's openings yields the best results when studying theory is combined with developing a feel for the middlegame positions. This is arguably where the strongest point of Alexey's work is. I am sure the reader will enjoy learning from Alexey, and that a lot of victories in the Grünfeld will be a well-earned reward.

Nikita Petrov
Novorossiysk
February 2020



Introduction

As you are almost certainly aware, the Grünfeld Defence arises after the opening moves **1.d4 ♖f6 2.c4 g6 3.♗c3 d5** (or **3.♗f3 ♘g7 4.♗c3 d5**).



The Grünfeld is a top-class opening which has long featured in the repertoires of World Champions and other elite players. So how did it originate and what makes it such a tough opening for White to deal with? This introduction will answer those questions while offering a glimpse at what is to come in this book.

Early History

The first recorded occurrence of the above position dates back to 1855, when the Indian player Moheschunder Bannerjee played it against Scotland's John Cochrane, in Calcutta. Bannerjee was unsuccessful and Cochrane, a strong attacking player whose **4.♗xf7** gambit against the Petroff still features in modern theory books, won by smothered mate in just 21 moves. Bannerjee is one of the reasons why **1.d4 ♖f6** set-ups where Black refrains from occupying the centre with **1...d5** are collectively known as the Indian Defences.

The database contains no more examples of our theme until 1922, when the following game took place.

Albert Becker – Ernst Grünfeld

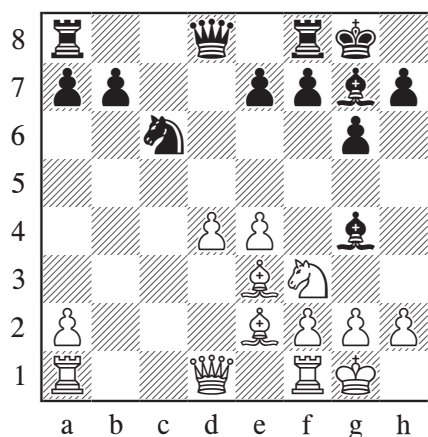
Vienna (4), 19.03.1922

1.d4 ♖f6 2.♗f3 g6 3.c4 ♘g7 4.♗c3 d5

Legend has it Grünfeld was going to play a King's Indian set-up with **4...d6**, but he accidentally carried the pawn two squares ahead! Probably not true, but an amusing story nonetheless.

5.cxd5 ♖xd5 6.e4 ♗xc3 7.bxc3 c5 8.♙e2
0-0 9.0-0 cxd4 10.cxd4 ♗c6 11.♙e3 ♙g4

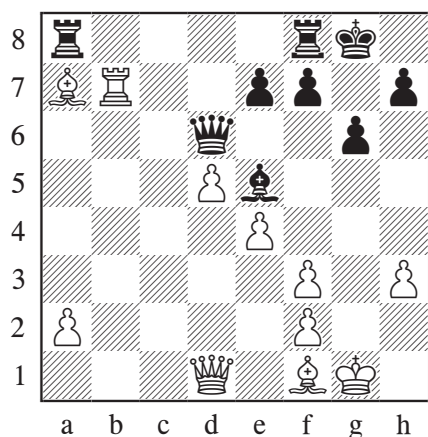
Following the appearance of Alekhine's Defence in 1921, another new opening emerged with familiar ideas: having allowed White to occupy the centre with his pawns, Black attacks them using pieces and pawns. The following year was when Reti first started playing the opening that bears his name (1.♖f3 d5 2.c4), so the early 1920s was truly a golden era for the development of hypermodern opening systems.



12.d5 ♗e5 13.♞b1 ♗xf3† 14.gxf3?! ♙h3
15.♞xb7?

There was no good reason for White to weaken his kingside structure – and certainly not to give up the exchange.

15...♙xf1 16.♙xf1 ♗d6 17.♙xa7 ♙e5 18.h3



18...♞a3?

This squanders most of Black's advantage.

18...♞fc8! would have activated Black's last piece while preventing ♙c4. The a-pawn will soon fall, and Black should have no trouble converting his material advantage.

19.♙e3 ♞fb8 20.♞xb8† ♞xb8 21.♙c4 ♞c3
22.♙b3 ♞c7 23.♗g2 ♙f4 24.♙d4 ♙e5
25.♙e3
½-½

Grünfeld played the same opening three more times in 1922 against strong opponents: he made a solid draw against Sämisch, outplayed and beat Kostic from a level position, and even came back from a worse position against Alekhine, exploiting some errors from the future World Champion to score an impressive victory.

Subsequent Developments

The idea of ceding the centre did not comply with the prevailing chess principles of the early 1920s, and Black's opening was considered risky to say the least. Traditionalists attempted to refute it and in many games Black experienced some kind of problem in the opening, but the Grünfeld Defence was in no hurry to leave the foreground and move to the archive. Thanks to the efforts of Botvinnik, Smyslov, Simagin, Flohr and other leading players and theoreticians, the 1930s saw the Grünfeld enriched with many valuable strategic ideas. As with all openings, the process of discovery has continued over the decades, with new plans, resources and refinements being discovered for both sides.

Why play the Grünfeld?

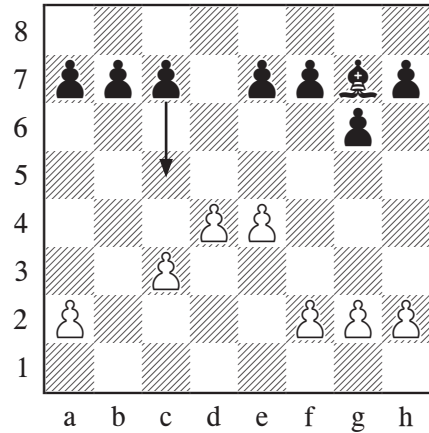
For almost a hundred years now, the Grünfeld has proven its resilience and vitality at the

highest level of competition, with modern engine analysis confirming the absolute correctness and soundness of Black's play. The lack of symmetry in the main variations predetermines a full-blooded battle, and the prospects of a sharp middlegame and/or a double-edged endgame has attracted such virtuosos as Stein, Korchnoi, Fischer and Kasparov to Black's cause. The list of great players who have played the Grünfeld is practically endless; however, among modern grandmasters, Peter Svidler, Alexander Grischuk, Ian Nepomniachtchi and Maxime Vachier-Lagrave (MVL) are perhaps the most prominent of the elite players who specialize in it and whose games are worth studying.

Although strategic principles are important, the Grünfeld gives rise to numerous sharp, forcing variations, many of which have been analysed through to the endgame. Lazy chess players will have a hard time in such a battleground, with either colour. However, the rewards are more than worth the effort: a well-prepared Grünfelder has excellent chances to seize the initiative and win convincingly against weaker players – and against stronger players, you can resist by virtue of the fact that you are playing high-quality, purposeful moves. White's task of finding an opening advantage against the Grünfeld has become increasingly difficult over the years, and the fact that "the Anti-Grünfeld" (typically beginning with 1. $\text{d}4$ $\text{f}6$ 2. $\text{c}4$ $\text{g}6$ 3. $\text{d}c3$) has become a recognised opening already says a lot. Some strong players have reverted to weird ideas including an early $\text{h}2$ - $\text{h}4$ or $\text{g}2$ - $\text{g}4$; but as we will see, a well-prepared Grünfelder should be delighted to encounter such moves.

Strategy

Although the Grünfeld Defence may give rise to different pawn structures, by far the most characteristic of them is shown below:



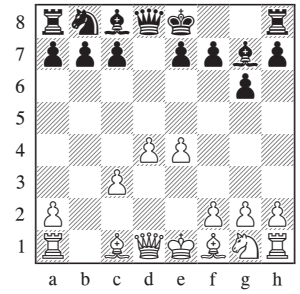
Having allowed the opponent to create a substantial pawn centre, Black will attack it with all his might. The dark-squared bishop eyes the $\text{d}4$ - and $\text{c}3$ -pawns, and $\dots\text{c}5$ will increase the pressure. The $\text{b}8$ -knight often goes to $\text{c}6$, although this will depend on whether or not $\text{d}4$ - $\text{d}5$ is a good reply. If White defends the $\text{d}4$ -point with an early $\text{e}2$ - $\text{f}3$, Black will often pin it with $\dots\text{g}4$. Other possibilities for Black involve $\dots\text{a}5$ to attack $\text{c}3$, and possibly $\dots\text{f}d8$ after castling.

Obviously White has his own resources and there are various ways in which he can develop his pieces and support his centre. In the remainder of this introduction, I will offer a short preview of each of the sixteen chapters that comprise the repertoire I am advocating in this book.

Chapter 1

1.d4 $\text{f}6$ 2.c4 $\text{g}6$ is the starting point for the book. Before we arrive at the Grünfeld proper, the first chapter deals with the popular **3.f3**, preparing $\text{e}2$ - $\text{e}4$ without allowing the characteristic Grünfeld structure after $\dots\text{d}5$ followed by a knight trade on $\text{c}3$.

Chapter 12



Exchange Variation

Variation Index

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♗c3 d5 4.cxd5 ♘xd5 5.e4 ♗xc3 6.bxc3 ♙g7

A) 7.♙a3 ♗d7! 8.♗f3 c5! 9.♖b3! 0-0	333
A1) 10.♙d3	337
A2) 10.♙e2	338
B) 7.♙g5 <i>Game 5</i>	341
C) 7.♖a4†!? ♖d7!	350
C1) 8.♙b5!?	351
C2) 8.♖a3	353
C3) 8.♖b3	354
D) 7.♙b5†!? c6! 8.♙a4 0-0 9.♗e2 b5! 10.♙b3 a5	356
D1) 11.a4	359
D2) 11.0-0 <i>Game 6</i>	360

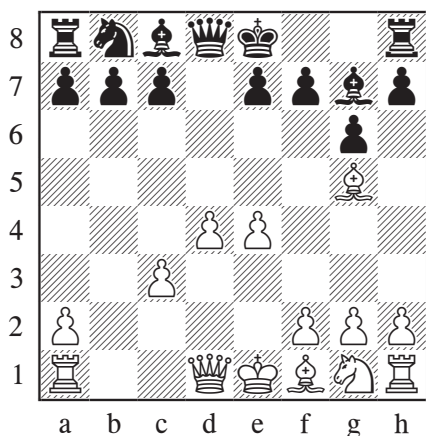
B) 7.♙g5

GAME 5

Reinhard Wegelin – Hans-Joachim Quednau

Email 2013

1.d4 ♖f6 2.c4 g6 3.♗c3 d5 4.cxd5 ♜xd5
5.e4 ♜xc3 6.bxc3 ♙g7 7.♙g5



White develops the bishop actively, with one possible plan being ♗d2 and ♙h6 to remove the Grünfeld bishop. The bishop also pins the e7-pawn, while tying the black queen to its defence. On the other hand, unlike the ♙e3 lines examined in the next chapter, the bishop does not support the d4-pawn.

The present variation is rather young, having first been tested at a high level by Yuri Kruppa, against Ganguly in Dubai 2004. The Ukrainian GM played it in several more games, so it would not be unreasonable to call 7.♙g5 the Kruppa Variation. It has subsequently been used by such grandmasters as Navara, Nakamura, Ponomarev, Korobov, Milov, Krasenkow and Nyback, and is generally a good choice for those who like to avoid mainstream theory and reach an original position relatively early.

7...c5

Black challenges the centre in the usual way.

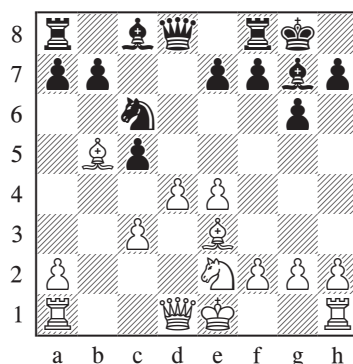
8.♙c1!

Already White needs an ‘only move’ to avoid falling into difficulties. The text move indirectly defends the d4-pawn by tactical means, while also defending the c3-pawn and thus preparing d4-d5, gaining space and avoiding an accident on the d4-square. Other continuations are clearly worse, for instance:

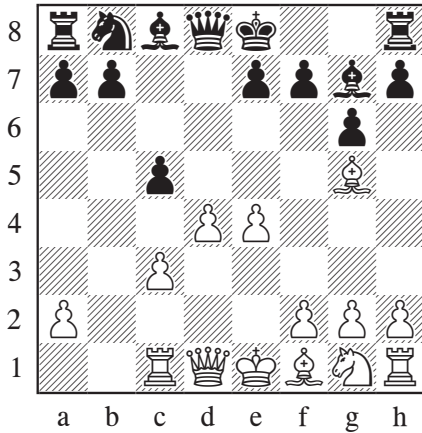
8.♗f3?! ♜c6 gives White nothing better than 9.♙b5, which is covered under the 8.♙b5+?! line below.

8.♗d2? is senseless, and 8...cxd4 9.cxd4 ♗xd4 10.♗xd4 ♙xd4 11.♙c1 ♜c6 12.♙b5 ♙d7 13.♗e2 ♙b6+ left White with no compensation for the missing pawn in Dresher – LeCours, corr. 2013.

8.♙b5+?! has been tried in a few correspondence games but the bishop only interferes with White’s play: 8...♜c6 9.♗e2 (another game continued 9.♗f3 cxd4 10.♗xd4 0–0 11.♙xc6 bxc6 12.♗xc6 ♙xc3+ 13.♗e2 ♗e8 14.♗xe7+ ♗h8 15.♙c1 ♙a6+ when White’s king was in a deplorable situation in Heilala – Lahdenmaeki, corr. 2010) 9...0–0 10.♙e3 White walks headfirst into a simple tactical refutation:



10...♜xd4! 11.cxd4 ♗a5+ 12.♗d2 ♗xb5 13.0–0 cxd4 14.♗xd4 ♗a4+ In M. Brown – A. Johansen, corr. 2013, Black enjoyed a healthy extra pawn as well as two powerful bishops in an open position.

**8...0-0**

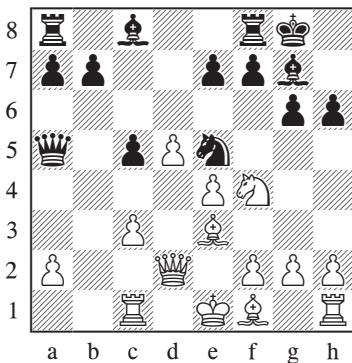
Black should evacuate his king from the centre before undertaking anything active.

The tactical point of White's last move is revealed after 8...cxd4 9.cxd4 ♙xd4?? 10.♞xc8! ♜xc8 11.♞xd4 when White's bishops will easily outwork Black's rook and pawn.

9.♗f3

White develops the knight and defends the d4-pawn, at the cost of allowing a ...♙g4 pin. Two other continuations have been tried:

9.♗e2 seems a strange choice. 9...h6 10.♙e3 ♜a5 11.♞d2 ♖c6 12.d5 ♗e5 13.♗f4 occurred in Unander – Maatman, Vlissingen 2018, when Black missed a nice opportunity:



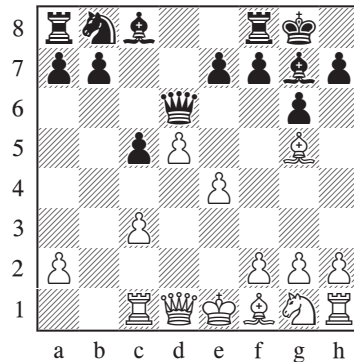
13...f5!N 14.exf5 ♙xf5 15.♙e2 ♞ad8 16.c4 ♜xd2† 17.♙xd2 ♞d6 18.0-0 ♞a6. Black is

well placed to attack the weak pawns on a2 and c4.

White can also relieve the central tension immediately:

9.d5 ♞d6

The most common continuation is 10.♗f3, when 10...♙g4 leads straight to our main line below. However, White also has some independent possibilities:

**10.♙e2!?**

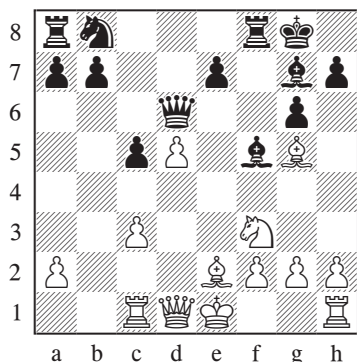
10.♙d3 e6 11.c4 exd5 12.exd5 was played in Kokeza – Nagy, Senta 2013, when Black missed a powerful resource: 12...b5!N 13.♗f3 bxc4 14.♙xc4 ♗d7 15.0-0 ♗b6. White already has to worry about maintaining the balance due to the pressure on the d5-pawn.

10.♞d2 ♗d7 11.♗f3 e6 12.dxe6 ♜xe6 13.♙d3 ♗f6 14.♞e2 ♞e8 15.♗d2 occurred in S. Ernst – Van Kampen, Wijk aan Zee 2013, when a natural and strong continuation would be: 15...♙d7N 16.0-0 ♙c6 17.f3 ♞d7. Black's pieces are well positioned and his ideas include ...♞ad8 and ...♗d5.

The text move is a cunning attempt to prepare ♗f3 without allowing the knight to be pinned to the queen, but Black can exploit the slightly timid nature of the bishop move by striking at the centre:

10...f5! 11.exf5 ♙xf5 12.♗f3

In A. Rasmussen – M. Andersen, Helsingor 2019, Black could have continued the central theme with:



12...e6!N 13.♙c4 b5! 14.♙xb5 exd5 15.0-0 ♖d7∞

Black's pieces are beautifully placed and he certainly does not stand worse.

9...♙g4!

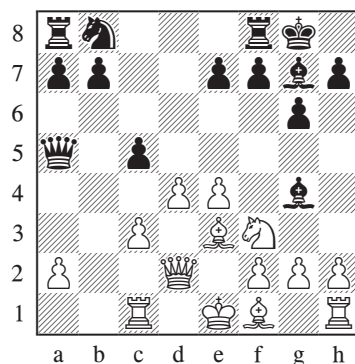
Black increases the pressure on the d4-pawn, virtually forcing White to advance it. On occasion, we can exchange the bishop for the enemy knight in order to better control the central dark squares.

10.d5

Capturing space while safeguarding the central pawn is natural and logical.

10.♙e2? simply led to the loss of a pawn after 10...cxd4 11.cxd4 ♙xf3 12.♙xf3 ♙xd4 13.0-0 ♖c6⚡ in Bjorksten – Sarkar, Las Vegas 2015.

10.♙e3 loses a tempo with the bishop and thus is hardly a way to fight for the advantage. 10...♙a5 11.♙d2 This position was reached in Manush – Abhishek, New Delhi 2007. The position is similar to variation B3 of the next chapter on page 380, but here Black has been given the move ...♙g4 for free! It's not enough for Black to claim an advantage, but it certainly does his position no harm. A good continuation is:



11...♖c6!N 12.d5 ♙ad8 13.♙b2 ♙xf3 14.gxf3 ♖d4 15.♙g2 c4 16.f4 ♖b5 17.e5 f6 18.♙b4 ♙xb4 19.cxb4 fxe5 20.fxe5 ♙xe5 21.♙xc4 ♖d6∞ Black has a good position.

10...♙d6!

The queen has a reputation for being a bad blockader, but here we see an exception to the rule. In this instance, it is useful to take control over the e5- and f4-squares, in preparation for Black's central idea: a blow in the centre with ...f5.

The immediate 10...f5?! is well met by 11.♙b3! ♖h8 12.♖d2↑ when White seizes the initiative, as demonstrated in a number of games.

11.♙e2

White continues developing while avoiding any damage to his kingside structure, so it is hardly surprising that this is the most common move by far. On occasion, White may also have the interesting tactical possibility of e4-e5.

11.♙d2?! allows White's kingside to be weakened: 11...♙xf3 12.gxf3 ♖d7 13.♙e2 f5! 14.0-0 f4 Black threatens to trap the bishop with ...h6, so White has to hit the self-destruct button for his pawn centre: 15.e5 ♖xe5 16.♙xf4 ♖xf3† 17.♙xf3 ♙xf4 18.♙xf4 ♙xf4⚡ In Llupa – Stella, Biella 2015, Black had an extra pawn as well as the more active pieces, especially the rook on f4.

A rare continuation is:

11.h3 ♙xf3 12.♖xf3

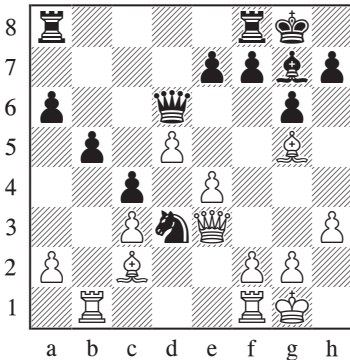
It makes no sense to spoil the pawn structure with 12.gxf3? ♜d7 13.♖d2 as played in Koller – Heigerer, Neumarkt am Wallersee 2016, when the thematic 13...f5!N would have given Black an even better version of the previous note: 14.exf5 ♖xf5 15.♙e2 ♖af8 16.♙e3 c4+ White's position is riddled with pawn weaknesses and Black should be winning with accurate play.

12...♜d7 13.♙b5

I also checked the more relaxed 13.♙e2 f5 14.g3 e6 15.c4 ♜e5 16.♖g2 exd5 17.exd5 ♜f7 18.♙e3 ♙e5 19.0-0 f4↑ when White has a hard time dealing with Black's initiative.

13...♜e5 14.♖e3 c4 15.0-0 a6 16.♙a4 ♜d3 17.♖b1 b5 18.♙c2

Here we can improve on Black's play from Altanoch – Buker, corr. 2012, with a highly thematic move:



18...f5!N

Black has great counterplay. My main line continues:

19.f4 fxe4 20.♖xe4 ♖ad8 21.♙xd3 cxd3 22.♖xd3 ♖xd5 23.♖xd5† ♖xd5 24.♙xe7 ♖c8♯

Black will restore material equality by picking up the pawn on c3. In the resulting endgame, he has some winning chances due to his superior activity and chances to create a passed pawn on the queenside.

Black also has no problems after:

11.♖b3 ♙xf3 12.gxf3 b6

White's two bishops are less significant than his spoiled pawn structure.

13.♙e3

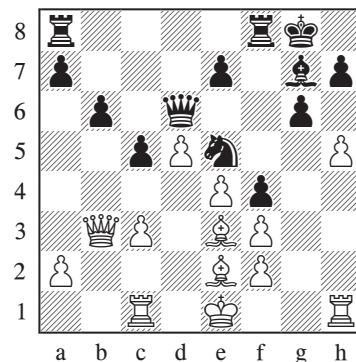
White spends a tempo relocating his exposed bishop to a safer home.

The overoptimistic 13.f4? was played in Sieciechowicz – Shishkin, Baia Sprie 2010, when Black missed a clear refutation of his opponent's mistake: 13...h6!N 14.e5 ♖c7 15.♙h4 ♙xe5! After this combination, White's position falls apart. 16.fxe5 ♖xe5† 17.♙e2 ♖e4!–+ Black regains the piece with a decisive advantage.

An interesting correspondence game continued: 13.h4!? ♜d7 14.♙b5 ♜f6 15.♙f1 ♜h5 16.♖e1 ♖ac8 17.c4 ♖c7 18.♖c2 ♙e5 It is worth paying attention to how Black established control over the f4-square. 19.♙h6 ♖d8 20.a4 ♙f4 21.♖c3 e5 22.♙xf4 ♜xf4♯ Black's unassailable knight was clearly stronger than the enemy bishop in Nyvlt – Gburek, corr. 2012.

13...f5! 14.h4 ♜d7 15.h5 ♜e5 16.♙e2 f4

Again Black has a powerful clamp on the dark squares, although White may try the witty countermeasure:

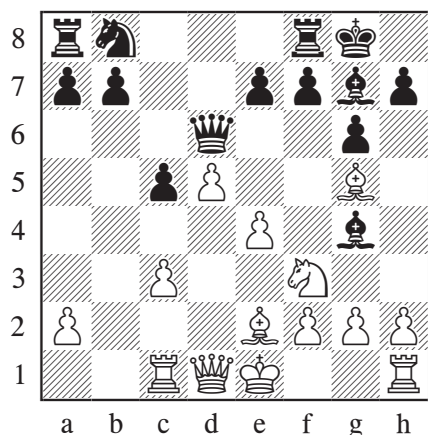


17.♙d4! cxd4 18.cxd4 ♖fc8!

You should not cling to the extra material, but rather activate your pieces.

19.dxe5 ♙xe5 20.♖c2 ♖xc2 21.♖xc2 ♖c5 22.♖xc5 bxc5 23.hxg6 hxg6♯

The resulting endgame was not so simple in Neves – Stone, corr. 2012. Despite the equal material and opposite-coloured bishops, the presence of rooks along with certain positional advantages enable Black to press for a win without risk. Such endgames were masterfully played by Anatoly Karpov.



11...d7!

It is important to establish full control over the e5-square before doing anything rash.

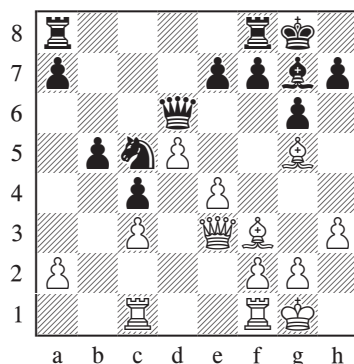
11...f5? was a mistake in Pitterson – Elsness, Khanty-Mansiysk (ol) 2010, in view of the following rebuttal: 12.e5!N ♙xe5 13.♗xe5 ♜xe5 14.f3 f4 15.h4 ♙f5 16.♞d2 e6 17.d6± White threatens to push his d-pawn even further, as well as simply taking on f4.

12.0–0

This is the usual continuation, simply finishing development.

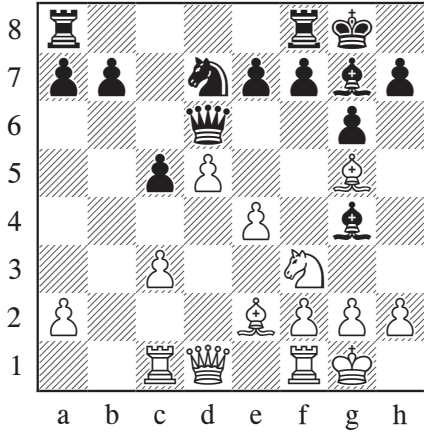
12.♗d2?! is well met by 12...♙e2 13.♞xe2 ♜fe8 when problems are in store for White. A good example continued: 14.♞b5 e6 15.♗c4 ♜c7 16.d6 ♜c8 17.a4 b6 18.a5 a6 19.♞b1 b5 20.♗b6 ♗xb6 21.axb6 ♜d7 22.♞d3 ♜eb8 23.0–0 ♙e5 24.♙e7 ♜xb6 25.♜fd1 a5± Jenkinson – Fenwick, corr. 2008. White has no real compensation for the pawn, as the passer on d6 is firmly blocked.

A few high-level games have continued: 12.h3 ♙xf3 13.♙xf3 b5 14.0–0 (14.c4 was played in Nyback – Svidler, Khanty-Mansiysk 2009, when 14...bxc4!N 15.♜xc4 ♙d4 16.0–0 ♗e5 17.♞a4 f5± would have brought about the collapse of White's pawn centre, forcing him to switch to defence) 14...c4 15.♞d2 ♗c5 16.♞e3 In Jorgensen – P.H. Nielsen, Horsens 2013, it would have been logical to plunge the knight into the heart of White's position:



16...♗d3!N 17.♞b1 a6 18.♜fd1 ♙xc3 19.♙e2 ♜fc8 20.♙xd3 cxd3 21.♞xd3 b4± The transformation has resulted in a slight edge for Black, due to the possibility of creating a distant passed pawn on the queenside.

Finally, strengthening the centre with 12.c4!± is not a bad option, although Black has a few reasonable ways to play against it. 12...e6 (12...f5!? 13.exf5 ♙xf3!? 14.♙xf3 ♙d4 is a dynamic option, but after 15.♙h4 ♗e5 16.♙g3 ♗xf3† 17.gxf3 ♞f6 18.fxg6 hxg6 19.0–0 ♞xf3 20.♞c2 ♜f5 21.♞ce1 the rivals agreed a draw in a balanced position in Koistinen – Muukkonen, corr. 2014) 13.0–0 exd5 14.exd5 ♜fe8 15.♙e1 ♙xf3 16.♙xf3 ♙d4 17.♞b3 ♗e5 18.♙e2 f6 19.♙f4 ♜e7 20.♙f1 ♜ae8 21.♜e2 g5 22.♙g3 f5 23.♙xe5 ♙xe5= The position remained equal in Avotins – Cerrato, corr. 2014.

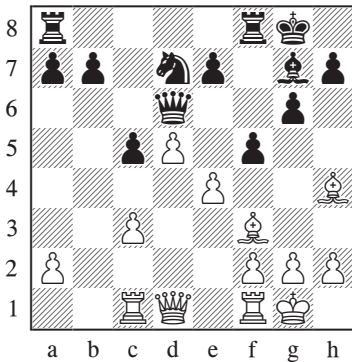
**12...f5!**

Black must undermine the enemy centre before he suffocates from a lack of space.

13.♘h4!

White needs to produce this precise move to avoid falling into a worse position.

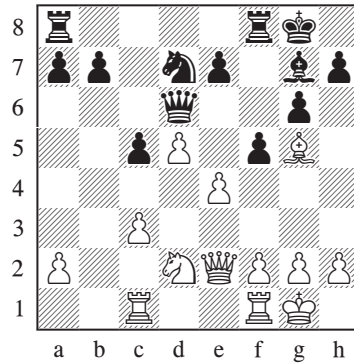
I encountered 13.♘h4?! ♙xf3 14.♙xf3 in 'Witik' – 'Kovalchuk94', Internet (blitz) 2019, when I missed an opportunity to win material:



14...♙h6!N The primary threat is ...g5, trapping the bishop. White has nothing better than 15.exf5 ♙xc1 16.♗xc1 ♘e5 17.♙e2 gxf5♣ when his compensation for the exchange is clearly insufficient.

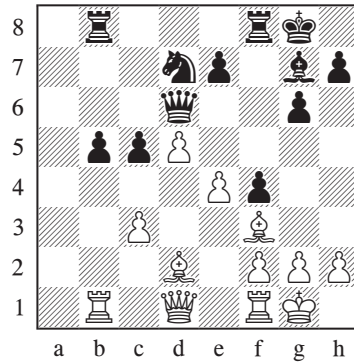
13.♘d2?! also cannot be recommended for White. 13...♙xe2 14.♗xe2 was seen in

Reis – Pawelzik, Bavaria 2016, when Black could have advantageously forced matters with:



14...h6!N 15.♘c4 ♗a6 16.♙xe7 ♘e5! 17.♙xf8 ♗xf8 18.exf5 ♗xf5 19.♗fe1 ♗xc4 20.♗xc4 ♘xc4♣ Black's excellent minor pieces are clearly stronger than White's rook and pawn, especially as the c3- and d5-pawns are weak.

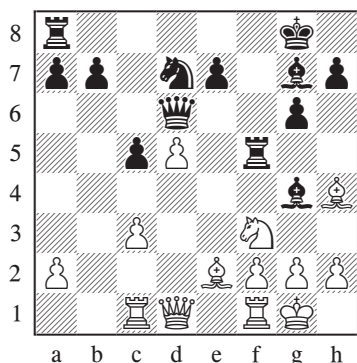
13.♙e3?! allows Black to establish a typical bind on the central dark squares: 13...f4 14.♙d2 ♙xf3 15.♙xf3 a6 16.♗b1 b5 17.a4 ♗ab8 18.axb5 axb5



19.♙g4 ♘e5 20.♙e6† ♖h8 21.♗a1 ♘c4♣ White's position was unpleasant with the bishops unable to show their strength in M. Rudolf – Laghetti, email 2011.

Finally, a simple exchange on f5 gives Black a lot of activity: 13.exf5?! ♗xf5 14.♘h4 (14.♙e3 was played in Cheng – A. Smirnov, Melbourne 2013, when 14...♘e5!N 15.♘xe5 ♙xe2

16. ♖xe2 ♙xe5 17.f4 ♙g7 18.c4 e6 19.dxe6 ♖xe6 would have favoured Black: his pieces are well centralized and ...♞e8 will come next) Now in I. Rivera – Videnova, Tromso (ol) 2014, it would have been good to continue:

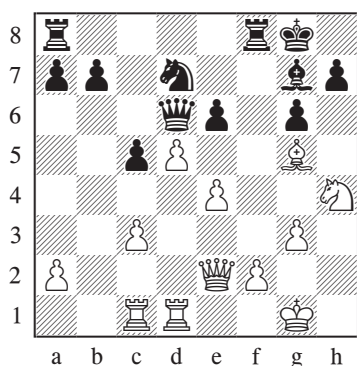


14...♘e5!N 15.♙g3 ♙xf3 16.gxf3 ♞af8 17.c4 ♙h6 18.♞c3 ♙f4 White is under some pressure, as her kingside structure is broken and the light-squared bishop is passive.

13...♙xe2 14.♖xe2 fxe4

This is the only move to have been tested from the present position.

The following alternative looks equally playable: 14...f4!N 15.g3 fxe3 16.hxe3 e6 17.♞fd1



17...exd5

Trading the central pawns is the simplest way to maintain the balance.

Players who yearn for a more complicated

game may prefer 17...♞ae8!? 18.♙f4 ♖e7 19.d6 ♖f6 when White's passed pawn is securely blocked and the position is rather challenging for both sides.

18.♞xd5 ♖e6 19.♞cd1 ♘b6 20.♞d6 ♖c4 21.♖xc4 ♘xc4 22.♞d7 b5 23.♞b7 ♘b6 24.♙e3 ♞fb8 25.♞xb8 ♞xb8 26.♙xc5 ♙xc3=

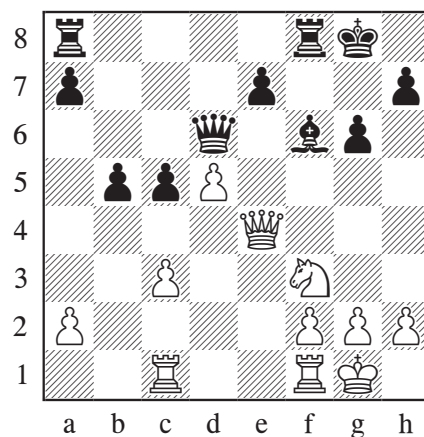
The endgame is equal, although there are enough imbalances to ensure that any result would still be possible over the board.

15.♖xe4 ♘f6 16.♙xf6

White has to exchange his bishop so as not to lose the pawn on d5.

16...♙xf6 17.♘f3 b5

Now White has to reckon with the possibility of further queenside advances, leading to the eventual creation of a distant passed pawn.



18.c4

This move is rather double-edged: White removes his pawn from the firing line of the bishop, but the scope of the bishop increases and the possibility of a passed a- or b-pawn becomes more real.

I also considered 18.a4N a6 19.♞fd1 ♞fc8 20.axb5 axb5 21.h4 b4 22.cxb4 cxb4 23.♞xc8 ♞xc8 24.♞b1 ♙c3 when the passed pawn is certainly an asset, and White needs to play precisely to avoid becoming worse.

18...b4

Black now has an obvious plan of ...a5-a4 before deciding how to advance further.

19.♖ce1 a5 20.g3 a4 21.♗c2 ♗d7

Black anticipates a possible ♖e6 attack, and prepares to transfer the queen to b7 to support ...b3.

Another tempting continuation is:

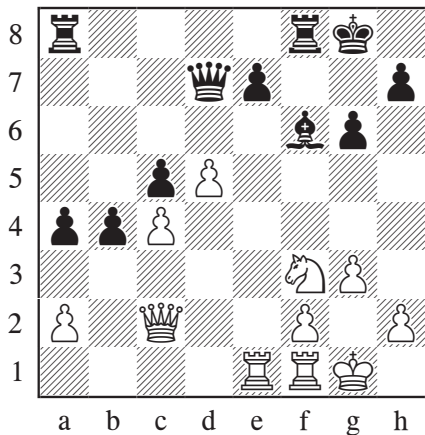
21...♖fb8!? 22.♖e6

Other moves lead to problems for White:

22.♖e3?! ♗d7 23.♘e5 ♗f5+ and White will be hard pressed to stop the queenside pawns. 22.♘d2?! ♗d8 23.♖e6 ♗f8! 24.♔g2 ♙g7 25.♖fe1 ♗f5+ is also difficult for White: if 26.♗xf5 gxf5 27.♖xe7 b3 28.axb3 a3+ the a-pawn cannot be stopped.

22...♗c7 23.♘d2 ♖b6 24.♖fe1 ♖xe6 25.♖xe6 ♗b7 26.♘e4 ♙d4 27.♘g5 ♙f6 28.♘e4 ♙d4 29.♘g5 ♙f6=

Black must settle for a repetition, as 29...b3? allows 30.♖xg6+ with a decisive attack.

**22.♘e5!**

White must create counterplay before the queenside pawns continue their march. The text move prepares any of ♘c6, ♘xg6 or ♘g4.

22.♖e6 is less accurate in view of 22...♗b7 23.♖b1 ♖a6 24.♖e3 ♗c8 25.♘e5 e6+ when White has some problems.

22...♗b7

Black continues his plan and threatens ...b3.

23.♘c6?

Planting the knight on c6 appears tempting but is actually a serious mistake which allows the b-pawn to advance further.

White defended better in an earlier correspondence game:

23.♖e3!? ♙xe5

I also checked 23...♖a6N 24.♖fe1 ♙xe5 (but not 24...♖fa8? due to 25.♘g4→ with danger on the kingside) 25.♖xe5 b3 26.axb3 axb3 27.♗c3 ♗b4 28.♗xb4 cxb4 29.♖xe7 ♖a2 30.f4 ♖c2 31.d6 b2 32.d7 ♖c1 33.♖e8 b1=♗ 34.♖xf8+ ♔xf8 35.d8=♗+ ♔f7 36.♗d5+ ♔g7 37.♖e5+ ♔h6 38.♗g5+ ♔g7= and the game ends with a perpetual check.

24.♖xe5 b3 25.axb3 axb3 26.♗c3 ♖a2 27.♖e3 ♖xf2 28.♖xf2 b2 29.♖xe7 b1=♗+ 30.♖f1 ♗xf1+ 31.♔xf1

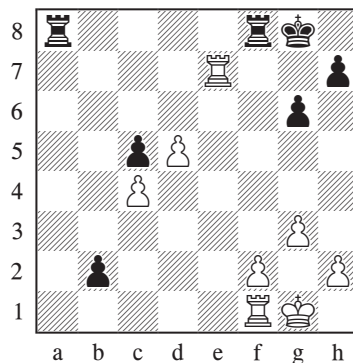
In Koezler – Canovas Pardomingo, corr. 2009, the rivals agreed to a draw. The finish would have been:

31...♗b1+ 32.♖e1 ♗d3+ 33.♔g1 ♗d4+ 34.♖e3 ♗d1+ 35.♖e1 ♗d4+=

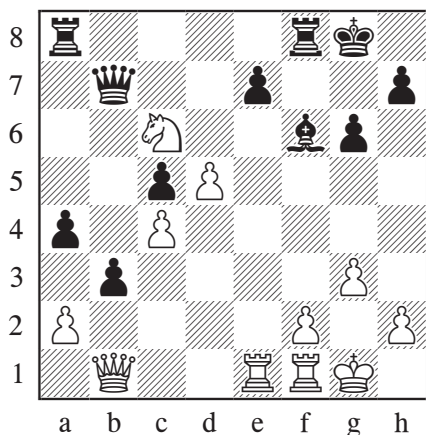
With perpetual check.

23...b3! 24.♗b1

24.axb3 axb3 also leaves White in trouble. A sample continuation is 25.♖e4 b2! and now if 26.♘xe7+ ♗xe7 27.♗xe7 ♙xe7 28.♖xe7 Black wins in beautiful style:



28...♙xf2!!-+



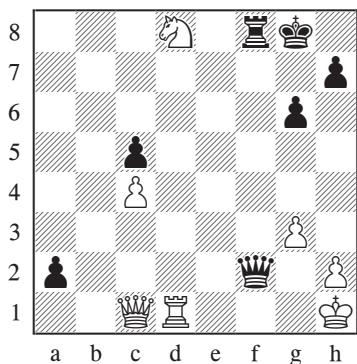
24...e6!!

A great move, sacrificing a pawn to open the e-file. The deeper point is that, once Black has traded a pair of rooks and advanced his pawn to b2, the absence of a pawn on e7 will make it easier for Black to get his queen to f5, breaking White's blockade on b1.

25.♙xe6 ♜ae8 26.♙fe1

This way White at least keeps control over the e-file, but the b2-pawn remains the deciding factor.

The alternative is 26.♙xe8 ♜xe8 27.axb3 ♞xb3 28.♞c1 a3 29.d6 ♞d3 30.♞d1 ♞f3 31.d7 ♞f8 32.d8=♞ ♞xd8 33.♞xd8 ♞xf2† 34.♞h1 a2 when the passed pawn proves to be stronger than a knight:

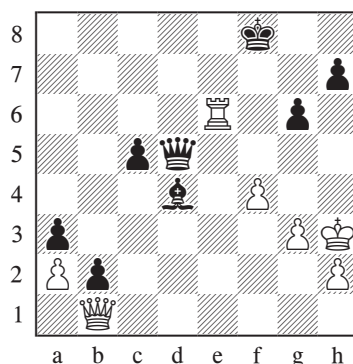


35.♞e6 ♞f3† 36.♞g1 ♞b8-+ White is powerless against the terrible threat of ...♞xd1† followed by ...♞b1, or simply ...♞b1 immediately.

26...♙xe6 27.♙xe6 b2 28.f4 a3 29.♞g2

White has no counterplay and the superiority of the bishop over the knight is evident. White has an extra pawn and a protected passer on d5, but the pawn cannot advance as it must stay defending the knight.

29.♞e5 is a natural try to reactivate the knight, but it does not save the game: 29...♞b4 30.♞d7 ♞d4† 31.♞g2 ♞xc4 32.♞xf8 ♞xd5† 33.♞h3 ♞xf8 The queenside pawns decide matters, for instance:



34.♞e4 c4 35.♞e1 c3 36.♞e8† ♞g7 37.♞e7† ♞h6-+ White has no meaningful threats against the king, while the queenside pawns remain unstoppable.

29...♞f7!

The queen is heading for f5, as discussed previously.

30.♞e4 ♞d8!

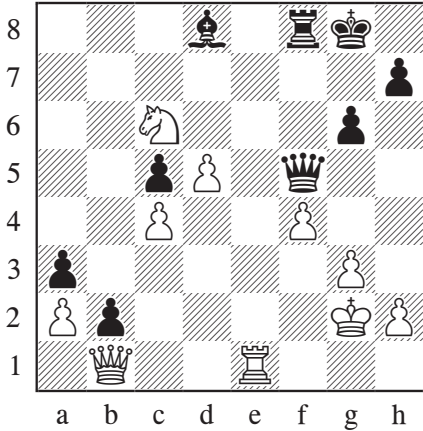
Black continues his plan in the most accurate way, maintaining control of the e7-square in order to prevent a knight fork.

In the event of 30...♞c3? 31.h4 ♞h8 32.♞d3± White still has chances to resist.

31. ♖b1

31. ♘xd8 allows the blunt 31... ♖f5! 32. ♖xf5 gxf5 33. ♖b6 ♖xd8 when White has no counterplay against the b-pawn. For instance, 34. ♕f2 ♖e8 35. d6 ♖d8 36. ♕e3 ♖xd6+ and White can resign.

31... ♖f5 32. ♖e1



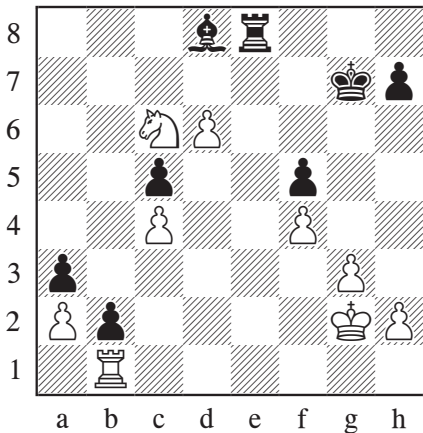
32... ♕g7

Black has time to improve his king.

32... ♖xb1 33. ♖xb1 ♖e8 also wins after accurate play.

33. ♖xf5 gxf5 34. ♖b1 ♖e8 35. d6

The passed pawn is White's last hope, but Black is well placed to deal with it.



35... ♖e6! 36. ♘a7

36. ♘xd8 ♖xd6 37. ♘b7 ♖d2† 38. ♕f3 ♖c2+ leaves White with no answer against ... ♖c1.

36... ♖xd6 37. ♘b5 ♖d2† 38. ♕h3 ♖d3 39. ♘xa3

Equally hopeless is 39. ♖e1 ♕a5 40. ♖b1 ♕b4 41. ♕h4 ♕g6 42. h3 ♖d2+ followed by ... ♖c2-c1.

39... ♖xa3 40. ♖xb2 ♖a4 41. ♖d2 ♕e7 0-1

Abridged Variation Index

The Variation Index in the book is 7 pages long. Below is an abridged version giving just the main variations, not the sub-variations.

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